

Press release

“Two Homelands / Dwie ojczyzny” — The First Exhibition of Bolesław Augustis in New Zealand

For the first time, the photographs of Bolesław Augustis will be presented in New Zealand — the country where the photographer spent nearly half a century and most of his life. The exhibition “Bolesław Augustis. Two Homelands / Dwie ojczyzny” opens on 27 May 2026 at Gallery 154 on Queen Street in Auckland as part of the Auckland Festival of Photography. The exhibition will remain on view until 14 June 2026.

The project is the result of more than twenty years of work on the photographer’s archive carried out by the Widok Cultural Education Association. Its origins lie in a sensational discovery made in 2004, when approximately 12,000 negatives by Augustis dating from 1935–1938 were found in an old shed in the centre of Białystok. The collection constitutes the largest surviving archive of pre-war photographs of the city and one of the most remarkable examples of twentieth-century Polish street photography.

The Photographer’s Two Homelands

The exhibition features more than 100 photographs — from street scenes of pre-war Białystok to intimate images taken by Augustis after emigrating to New Zealand. Bringing together both worlds of the photographer, the exhibition presents Augustis as an artist, a witness to the twentieth century, and a migrant whose biography stretched between two of the most distant points on the globe.

“What might these semi-private photographs of a migrant from the Old Continent mean to New Zealand audiences?” asks Grzegorz Dąbrowski, curator of the exhibition and caretaker of the collection. “They can be read as the story of a journey: from a world that ceased to exist to a place where everything had to be built anew. Is it a story of fulfilled hope? We do not know. Augustis died before his negatives were rediscovered. The answer is now being written by his descendants, who remained in New Zealand and describe themselves as ‘half Polish, half Kiwi.’”

On 1 June, visitors will have the opportunity to join a guided tour of the exhibition led by the sons of Bolesław Augustis.

New Edition of the „Augustis” Photobook

The exhibition is accompanied by a second, revised and expanded edition of the photobook „Augustis”, originally published in 2010.

The new edition includes previously unpublished information about the photographer’s life, gathered during research visits to New Zealand, as well as four photographs taken by Augustis in the Antipodes. The graphic design of the publication has also been completely updated.

Published in an edition of 500 copies, the 224-page volume presents 100 photographs, primarily documenting pre-war Białystok. The image selection was made by Grzegorz Dąbrowski; graphic design was prepared by Anna Nałęcka-Milach (Tapir Book Design); introductory essays were written by Monika Żmijewska and Wojciech Nowicki; and the historical captions were edited by Andrzej Lechowski. The publication is also available in English.

Who Was Bolesław Augustis?

Bolesław Augustis (also known as Augustowicz, 1912–1995) was born in Novosibirsk into a Polish family. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the family lost their estate and, in 1932, made their way to Poland, eventually settling in Białystok. There, Augustis opened the photographic studio *Polonia Film*.

After the outbreak of the Second World War, he was arrested by the NKVD and deported to a Soviet labour camp. Following the formation of Anders' Army, he left the Soviet Union and travelled the wartime route through Iran, Egypt, and Italy. After the war, he was demobilised in Great Britain.

He chose not to return to communist Poland. In 1949, he emigrated to New Zealand. Together with his wife Maria — one of the so-called “Polish Pahiata children” — he settled in Titirangi near Auckland. Although he no longer worked professionally as a photographer, he continued documenting family life, the Polish diaspora community, and everyday life in New Zealand. As the exhibition curator notes: “One never stops being a photographer.”

Augustis never knew that his pre-war negatives had survived in Białystok. He died in 1995, nine years before their rediscovery.

Organisers and Partners

The project is organised by the Widok Cultural Education Association in cooperation with the Galeria im. Słędzińskich and the Auckland Festival of Photography.

Honorary Patronage

- * Patryk Błaszczak, Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to New Zealand
- * Paul Ballantyne, Ambassador of New Zealand to the Republic of Poland

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Contact

Contact for exhibition curator Grzegorz Dąbrowski:
+48 507 094 174 g.dabrowski@yahoo.com