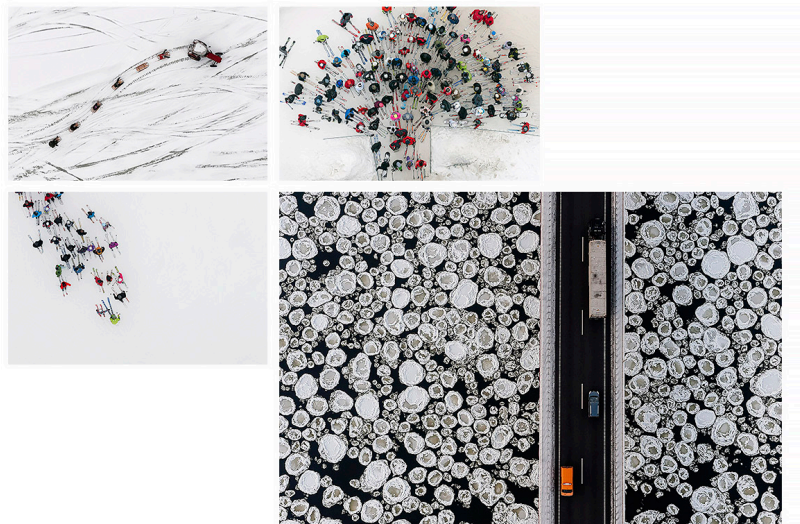


## SE: DEPTH OF WINTER

I like to tire myself out.

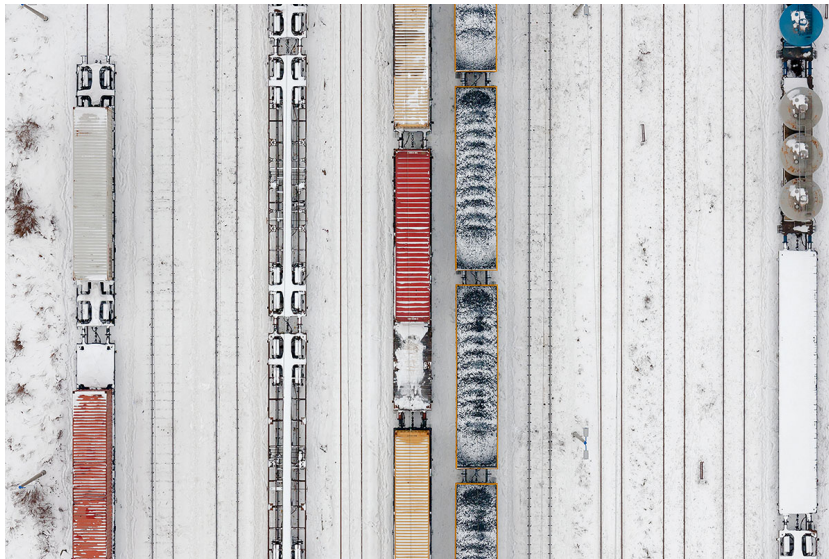
In winter, I add a shovel to my gear. Before I get to the field from which I am about to take off, I clear snow from the side of the road. Then I park, carry the gear, unfold the paraglider, fill up the tank and clear snow from the path I'm going to use for take-off. When I've prepared everything and warmed up the machine, I put on the harness. The vibrations and the sound of the engine help me concentrate. I get up carefully, using the telemark technique, and attach the paraglider. I focus on the wind and the clouds. In my mind, I am already flying. I feel the pulsating air. I wait for the right moment and go.



cover • SE: Depth of Winter • 2019 • KK0269DW99K1

The start begins with the legs. With the first steps, I pull the paraglider over my head. Everything I take with me – the motor, extra fuel and my camera bag – is strapped to my back. I start running as fast as I can and I wait to be lifted off the ground. One more step and the 99-pound gear will become weightless. As long as I don't trip...

Not every start is a success in the changing wind. If I fail the first time, I race to repeat the whole procedure. My goggles fog up and I am already wet. Early start is crucial when days are short and snow melts quickly. When I finally rise into the air, I know I will be freezing. But the sudden sharpening of senses overshadows the discomfort. I can feel the wind in my face; the world becomes clearer. I sense the space with my whole body and would never trade this experience for a helicopter with a heated cabin or an observation tower. Physical exertion i struggle with the elements are an important part of the process. Even on days when the temperature drops to -30°C.



Depth of Winter #08 • SE: Depth of Winter • 2013 • KK0209DW08K1

From the bird's eye perspective, the world looks like a drawing. The whiteness of snow provides contrast to whatever is happening. I'm interested in people. I see them skiing, building bridges and catching fish in a frozen bay. I pursue them, searching for connections and details. Man leaves his tracks everywhere. I want to know where he's headed. I lose him sometimes and let the landscape guide me. I trust my experience and instincts. This is how I reach places that I photograph. I find them in all corners of Poland. Some are self-explanatory, a clear illustration of human behaviour and the state of our civilization. Some require commentary to become a complete story about the modern condition. This was the case with these photos.

In 1958, a state agricultural farm (PGR) was formed in the village of Grądy-Woniecko. It consisted of 1500 hectares (3700 acres) of meadows, pastures and idle patches, which had all belonged to local farmers and were taken away from them through land reform modeled on the one Stalin carried out in the USSR. The state farm was to provide jobs and bring prosperity to the villagers. Like the majority of such enterprises, it went bankrupt in the 1990s, after the fall of communism in Poland. Locals were left with no jobs or prospects. In 1999, on the other end of the village, a minimum security prison was set up in an old workers' hostel. The buildings of the state farm have fallen into ruin and the grounds have been overgrown by Sosnowsky's hogweed (*Heracleum sosnowskyi*), a perennial flowering plant brought to Central Europe from the Caucasus in the 1950s, again by a Stalin's decree. It was to be farmed and used as silage for farm animals, as it grows quickly and spreads easily. The hogweed went out of control and spread across the Baltic states, Belarus and Ukraine. It is highly toxic for humans and causes severe burns. The plant is very hard to eradicate and until this day, it is called "Stalin's revenge". Today, over the ruins and the hostile thicket, a stork has weaved its nest on one of the remaining walls.

The Białowieża Forest is one of the last and largest remaining parts of the primeval forest in Europe. It has been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and an EU Natura 2000 Special Area of Conservation. In 2017, under a pretext of fighting an outbreak of the spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*), the Polish government approved massive logging of the forest. Thousands of people protested day and night, claiming that the logging is illegal and senseless. Reports were confusing. The government-controlled media aired programs about the necessity of logging, the need to stop the beetle invasion and the dangers that infected trees posed for tourists. But most of all, they claimed that Białowieża is not a primeval forest and regular forest economy required that timber be saved.

Protesting ecologists were portrayed as eco-terrorists. They argued that a primeval forest must be protected in its entirety and that it will overcome the beetle outbreak on its own, as it is just another natural process and humans should not stand in the way of the ecosystem's self-regulation. The logging was deemed exploitative, as it included cutting down ancient beech and oak trees, which the spruce bark beetle does not invade.

I flew over the Białowieża Forest to see for myself how the struggle with the pest proceeds and to take a closer look at the forest's character. Another subject that was on everyone's lips were the wild boar. I tracked them outside of Gdynia.

# KACPER KOWALSKI

🕒 2010-11-03

PROJEKTY

Forest planting after logging in the Strzebielino division, the Pomeranian voivodship, December 2018. The upper part of the picture shows wild boar dens (dark spots in the copse). The animals stay in hiding during the day and seek food at night. Polish Hunting Association estimated the number of wild boar in June 2018 at 229,000 animals. By the end of November 168,000 of them were killed. By the end of January 2019 most of them, if not all, were to be eliminated. It was predicted that a total of 210,000 animals would be killed. The Association temporarily permitted the killing of pregnant sows and piglets (the decision was later withdrawn after a public outcry). The hunters were rewarded financially for each eliminated animal. The hunting campaign was supposed to protect domestic pigs against ASFV, a fast-spreading virus, potentially lethal for pigs and boar, but harmless for humans. Politicians remained immune to the voices of scientists, who argued that even total extermination of the wild boar population would not solve the problem. A better approach would be for farmers and hunters to pay extra attention to their hygiene and change footwear after coming back from the field or forest and before entering pigpens. The pigs have no direct contact with wild boar; it is humans who carry the virus between the two species. Wild boar play an important role in the forest's ecosystem. Feeding on various pest animals, rooting in the forest cover, they help to keep the forest in good condition. But their fate seems sealed in Poland. 2019 is an election year. The culling resulted in a massive public protest welcome by the government. We empathize with boar, because they are free, their bodies belong to them and they raise their young on their own. At the same time, we are indifferent to the fate of domestic pigs, which spend their life in small cages, don't own their bodies and have their young taken away from them soon after birth. We don't care about the suffering of sows and piglets separated from each other. We treat them as objects. The number of pigs in Poland totals ca. 12 million.

Coal storage in Jaworzno (southern Poland). 65.8 million tonnes of black coal and 61 million tonnes of lignite have been extracted in Poland in 2017. At the end of 2018 Poland hosted the COP24 climate summit (24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). Polish authorities found it proper to engage JSW, one of the largest coke producers in Europe, to sponsor the event.

The series was - as part of the Side Effects project - awarded the [World Press Photo 2015](#) second prize in the long-term projects category, and was included in the photo book „Side Effects” published in 2014.