

SE: FLOOD FROM THE SKY

Flood is a cataclysm. It destroys cities, villages, a country's infrastructure. It alters the landscape on a massive scale. In the spring of 2010, as part of a cooperation with the FORUM agency, I flew the paraglider over and around Sandomierz, documenting human struggle with the forces of nature. It resulted in a dramatic feature on destruction brought on by water.



Composition # 08 "Cosmos" • SE: Flood from the sky • 2010 • KK0103FF01K1

In spring 2010 Eastern Europe was flooded. On 19 May 2010 the Vistula River reached its highest level in this region since 1860. It broke its banks in Sandomierz – one of the oldest and most beautiful Polish cities. One hundred square kilometers disappeared under water, 5.000 inhabitants had to be evacuated. Two weeks later a second wave of flooding overwhelmed the region, causing even more damage.

The day that it stopped raining, I began documenting the flood from a bird's-eye view. At first these were mainly news shots – fast and simple to show the range of the catastrophe. During the following days and flights I fell deeper and deeper into an abandoned desert of water. Sometimes I could see people. They were camping on the embankments and watching their belongings or trying to get inside their houses.

When flying motorized paraglider (there were no drones in 2010), it is difficult for me to build a relation with people I photograph. I'm not able to portray their emotions. Flooded houses, tired people – these images move and arouse compassion. But it is neither our kitchen nor our backyard, so we can preserve a distance. I wanted to knock this distance down, to trigger emotions. So I began looking for public places that look similar in every city, places that we can all relate to. Cemeteries, playgrounds, churches – places which appeal to universal values. They create a common denominator amongst viewers.

A month later, during the third flood, the media had lost interest in the flood. And for that reason – to revive the subject and to show that Sandomierz is not only worth visiting, but it also needs these visits – together with the Forum Polish Photographers Agency we organized 'Flood from the sky' – a photo exhibition on the market square of Sandomierz.

In the daytime there were mainly tourists who walked round the exhibition. In the evening the inhabitants came along. The images made them think about the catastrophe again. Emotions become visible. I'm happy the exhibition attracted the media's attention. The circle is complete – photographs of a disaster help to reconstruct a city. The media that first frightened the tourists away, are now inducing them to visit Sandomierz.

KACPER KOWALSKI

🕒 2010-08-11

PROJEKTY

Floods are a recurrent problem in Poland. River management is unregulated; infrastructure, warning systems and legal regulations are lacking. When there are missing development plans, people build houses on flood plains hoping that nothing 'bad' will happen. There is no obligatory insurance. Governmental compensations are spent on reconstruction in exactly the same places that had been flooded. In public awareness the flooding problem concerns other people – not us.

Sandomierz 2010

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.

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