

## A Lesson of Humility

**In “Side Effects” Kacper Kowalski marvels at human relations with nature and brings them back to right proportions. With his pictures, we suddenly realize that we are here on Earth just for a moment. And that we are not essential there.**

### Filip Springer

“I use the language of drawing. My focus is on a broadly viewed civilization. I guess that in a sense I still work as an architect,” wrote Kacper Kowalski in the preface to his “Side Effects”. Although he studied architecture in Gdańsk and did work as an architect for a couple of years, he is widely known for his breathtaking aerial pictures. We hear about him almost each year while world’s top photo awards are announced. So far, he has gathered prizes in World Press Photo (2009 and 2014) or Picture of the Year (2012 and 2014). He is also among the most often awarded photographers in Grand Press Photo, Poland’s top press photo contest.

Mr. Kowalski gives his aerial photography the shape of a reportage. The photographer’s perspective, unavailable for most of us, makes it easy to hold us in delight. It could be the end of the story and it is also a trap that Mr. Kowalski deliberately sets for us. You may fall in love in “Side Effects” at first sight. It is a book of esthetically fantastic pictures, composed with an architect’s full precision. Whatever you see, has been perfectly set up, with no space for randomness. This meticulousness deserves even more recognition once you realize these pictures were taken from a tiny and windswept plane that Mr. Kowalski flies with his camera. I imagine the jealousy for this precision from photographers that keep their feet firmly on the ground.

While watching this book, however, you had better get used to this delight and search for something more. It is only then that you could fully appreciate its wisdom and value. After all, “Side Effects” is more than just a composition of brilliant pictures. It is a consistent story on how a human meets nature and how sadly this sometimes ends. You need to read Mr. Kowalski’s pictures carefully as there are visual phrases telling the story of the arrogance and pride we use to transform landscape.

Some of these photos are picturesque and abstract. You can see “pure nature” although according to Mr. Kowalski it does not exist in Poland anymore. There is just a scrap of virgin forest in the east. Everything else has been transformed – directly or not – by humans. Pictures of nature serve only as an introduction to those photos where you see human presence in the landscape more and more clearly. These are the pictures that make you tremble with delight. It is because Mr. Kowalski tracks down the patterns and rules hidden in the landscape. He discovers them in cars on a supermarket’s car park, in coal on a side track, in trees on a roadside lumber, in people on a beach or rubbish on a waste dump. And he puts these pictures together in an intriguing way. On his journey, he finally comes across an “eight” left by bikers’ tires on gravel. This picture is as unpretentious as all others. It is up to you if you see in it just a funny coincidence, a symbol of infinity or a hidden metaphor.

At first sight Mr. Kowalski’s works appear to be a reportage from faraway places. But there are no such places anymore. Everything has been pictured and revealed to us. With this in mind, Mr. Kowalski acts like bold voyagers travelling to distant lands in the olden days. He sets on a journey which is beyond our reach. And with his camera he tells us his story. We are thrilled to listen to him, to see ourselves in his plots and to somehow respond to these unbelievable stories.

Our astonishment seems unlimited. But this is only until we realize that what we see on Mr. Kowalski’s pictures is right next to us. Behind our door, window or fence. These are just side effects of our existence which not that important. The bird’s eye perspective of Mr. Kowalski’s pictures brings us our humility back. “Side Effects” is a lesson of respect to landscape in which we live. All these buildings we erect with such a pain are just insignificant ornaments on the Earth’s surface. This land is not all about us. We are hardly visible from above.

Kacper Kowalski “Side Effects”  
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