



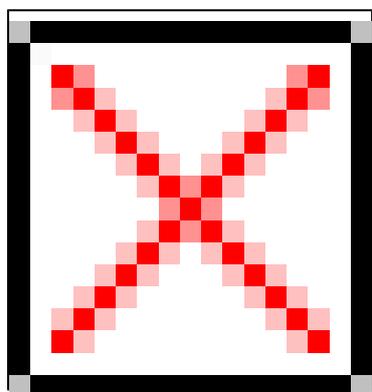
# The Mizielinskis under the microscope

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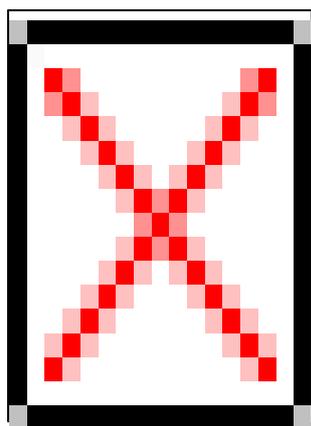
**Aleksandra Mizieliska** and **Daniel Mizieliski** in the spotlight

Non-fiction for children has undergone a transformation in recent years with big, bold illustrated books catching the eye and filling bookshelves. Polish illustrators Aleksandra and Daniel Mizieliski can claim a large part in this, their book **Maps**, an international bestseller, led the way in this new approach to information books. In London recently they talked to **Books for Keeps** about their work and new book **Under Earth, Under Water**.



Now husband and wife, Aleksandra Mizieliska and Daniel Mizieliski have been working together since they met at the Faculty of Graphic Arts at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. They studied under the same tutor Professor Maciej Buszewicz and from early days considered writing for children. Daniel explains: 'Some writers feel that writing for children is somehow a lesser occupation, but in design it is the opposite: every famous Polish designer creates books for children, it's like the best thing you can do. It was obvious to us from the start to try our hand at books.'

They developed four or five non-fiction books, created mock ups and took them to publishers: 'Everyone said 'Oh those books are great but no-one will buy them', remembers Daniel ruefully. Then Polish publisher Dwie Siostry asked them to create a book about architecture 'H.O.U.S.E. an illustrated guide to the world's most astounding homes, and the architects that designed them. Teeming with colour and information, the book was declared Book of the Year 2008 of the Polish Section of IBBY and later published in English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Russian and many other languages including Arabic and Chinese. Suddenly they were a different proposition for publishers: 'Our approach isn't new,' says Daniel, 'In fact it's an old idea, but there weren't any artists doing what we did at the time.'



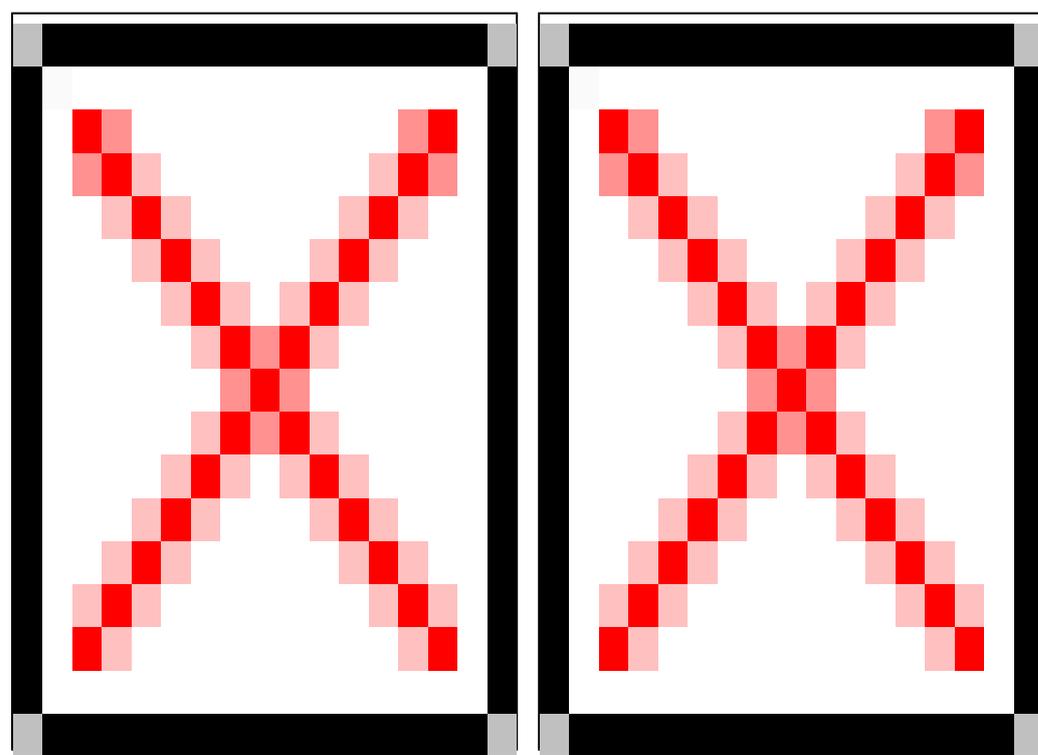
He explains too that the state of the Polish publishing industry at that time was particularly helpful to them: 'When we were kids' (he and Aleksandra were born in 1982) 'Polish publishers were printing at least 2

? 5 million copies of each book; we didn't have a lot of choice but the standard was very high and we all read the same books, knew the same illustrators. The publishing houses were huge and protected. Then came the 90s and capitalism. The old publishers couldn't cope with the free market and collapsed. After ten years of very unimaginative publishing, people were asking for something more and by the early 2000s lots of small publishers were being created. We were lucky enough to graduate at a time when those publishers were beginning to have some success, and were in a position to try new things.?

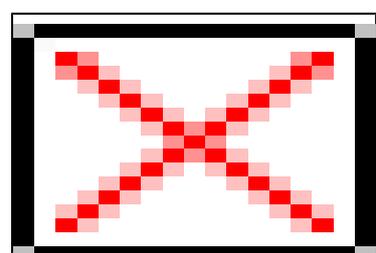
*?we want to do the opposite of google?*

They both write and draw, generally taking a chapter each, though in **Maps**, because of the huge amount of detail to each page, they worked on the spreads together. Their research involves working with many different specialists ?

**Under Earth, Under Water** for example features everything from early submarines to deep-sea life, to sewage purification: ?We're not the experts and that's why the books are so successful: we are working on subjects that are interesting to us and are excited about things that are maybe not so exciting to people who have studied the subjects for years. We don't expect readers to remember everything that we put in the books ? education now shouldn't be based on remembering things because all of us have phones and can google everything any time; we want to do the opposite of googling, not kill curiosity or throw a lots of random information at readers but try to show how things work, concrete for example, which is used everywhere, is super-interesting and by conveying that maybe we will create future engineers, architects and builders.?



?We don't like to think of ourselves as illustrators or that we have a particular style, though of course we do. Instead we always think about how things should look starting with the content ? eg with **Maps** we knew that we wanted 100 images per map, so they'd have to be quite small, the lines would have to be quite thin and the book itself would have to be quite big. We knew we couldn't use paint because it would be unreadable. The form should always be the vehicle for the content?.



?One of the most important things we learned while studying is that the worst thing an illustrator can do is to read the text and then draw the things that are in the text because those two languages are different teachers: if I want to say ?I love you? it would be very hard to do it using images, and even if you try you will probably create some new kind of coded alphabet - like emoji for example. But by using images I can describe how things work or what they look like very, very quickly; if we can describe something through an image ? this is the most important thing a picture book can do.?

**Maps and Under Earth, Under Water** are published by [Big Picture Press](#) [2], hardback, £20 each.

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