



GIDEON MENDEL: DROWNING WORLD

Guide for University Educators

Artist Biography

Gideon Mendel is regarded as one of the world's leading contemporary photographers. His intimate style of image making, and long-term commitment to projects has earned international acclaim. Born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1959, he began photographing in the 1980s during the final years of the apartheid with his focus on social issues of HIV/AIDS, both in Africa and globally. Since 2007, Mendel has been working on *Drowning World*, an art and advocacy project about flooding that is his personal response to climate change. This work, with its combination of photography and video has increasingly been seen in a variety of gallery and advocacy contexts. Mendel has won the Eugene Smith Award for Humanistic Photography, six World Press Photo Awards, and most recently, the prestigious Greenpeace Photo Prize. He now resides in London.

Drowning World Project

In 2007, Gideon Mendel visited both the United Kingdom and India during catastrophic flooding. Immediately he was struck by the contrasting impacts of these floods and the shared vulnerability of their victims. Every year since he has visited flood zones around the world, thereby intensifying the conversation created by juxtaposing images from these different floods. Each country added has deepened the narrative impact of the project, highlighting similarities that transcend cultures and time.

Countries (included): India, United Kingdom, Germany, Bangladesh, Brazil, Phillipines, Thailand, Nigeria, and the United States

Submerged Portraits & The Red Cedar River Project

Submerged Portraits are taken within the remains of victims' homes or in submerged landscapes, in the quiet, stillness of once lively environments. These individuals are from different parts of the world and vastly different social, cultural, and economic circumstances, but they are united by their vulnerability. Mendel's portraits are an attempt at capturing the magnitude of climate change.

A monumental undertaking, the *Red Cedar River Project* is the first time Mendel's *Submerged Portraits* have been placed outside of a gallery space; situated within a natural-setting and submerged in water. Emerging from the Red Cedar River, these unsettling photographs visually interrupt our daily lives at MSU and challenge us to consider our communal culpability for their plight.

"These collaborative portraits are at the heart of the project. I travel with my subjects through deep floodwaters to their homes. The subjects strike conventional poses, their environments are disconcertingly abnormal—radically altered—allowing their gazes to challenge the viewer."

—Gideon Mendel on *Drowning World*

The *Red Cedar River Project* was made possible by MSU's Cultural Engagement Council, MSU Infrastructure, Planning, and Facilities, and Sustainability departments. It is a partnership with Water Moves MSU, the year-long university initiative that fosters and celebrates cultural and artistic expression inspired by water.

Artistic Practice

- Mendel uses a Rolleiflex camera, technology introduced in 1929—continued development until 1970—reproductions still made today with digital components
- Mendel uses the older version (his cameras are approximately 50 years old)
 - Through a rigorous process Mendel exposes and develops the film
- He travels with 2-3 cameras on him at any given time in case of water damage



Why does he use a Rolleiflex camera?

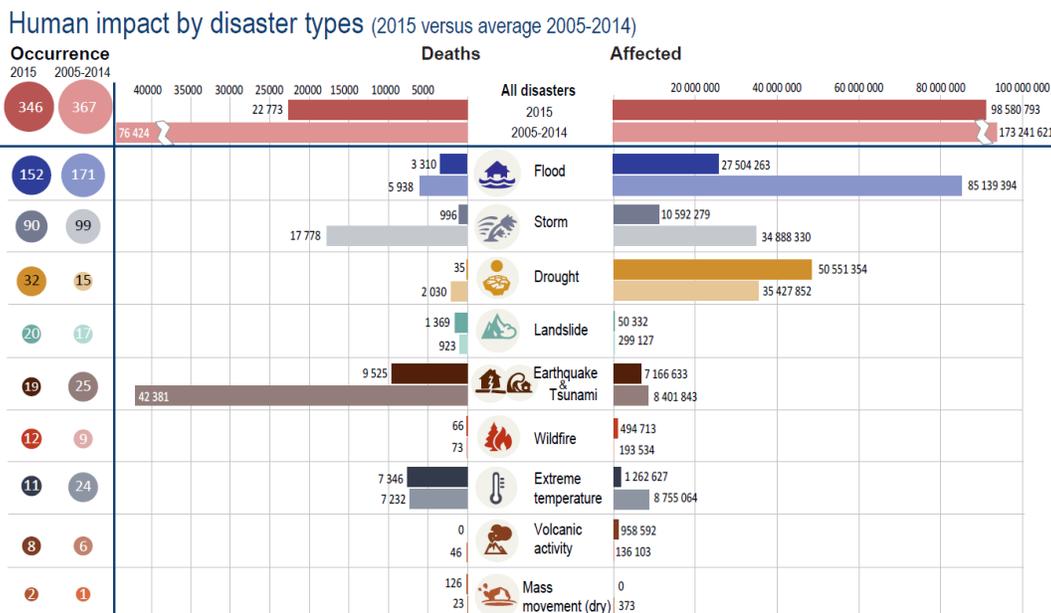


- Artist is able to look directly at subject—looks down into camera view finder held at chest level to focus and then exposes film
 - Standard camera posture—holding camera in front of the eye/face creates a barrier between artist and subject
- Allows him to engage with his subjects in a more intimate way— capturing the face, but more specifically the gaze of the victim meant to connect with the viewer

Climate Change vs. Global Warming

Global warming refers only to the Earth's rising surface temperature, while climate change includes warming and the "side effects" of warming—like melting glaciers, heavier rainstorms, or more frequent drought. Said another way, global warming is one symptom of the much larger problem of human-caused climate change.

--National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) // <https://www.climate.gov>



Source: EM-DAT (25th January 2016) : The OFDA/CREED - International Disaster Database www.emdat.be Université catholique de Louvain Brussels - Belgium

***Note: the type of natural disaster that affects the greatest number of people worldwide is flooding.

Some questions to consider:

- Be aware of your footprint! Consider your daily activities, how do they contribute to changes in the environment?
- Be part of the solution! What is something you do to reduce your impact on the environment?
- Be proactive! In what ways could you use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other platforms) to spread awareness about environmental issues?

Additional Resources

Artist's Website:

<http://gideonmendel.com/submerged-portraits/>

Videos:

The 'Accusing Glance' of Flood Victims—*Atlantic* / Apr 29, 2016

<http://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/480435/gideon-mendel-drowning-world/>

“Disorder Artist Talk – Gideon Mendel with Leo Johnson”—Prix Pictet Disorder on Vimeo

<https://vimeo.com/153099675>

Gideon Mendel's Vimeo Page—includes a selection of his recent videos about his work

<https://vimeo.com/user28954840>

Gideon Mendel on Social Media

Twitter Page:

<https://twitter.com/@gideonmendel>

“Visual Diary” on Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/gideonmendel/>

Additional information about his work

Photograph Magazine Sept./Oct. 2016 Issue—Interview: Gideon Mendel

<http://photographmag.com/issues/septoct-2016/interview/>

Artist Profile on Artists4Climate Change:

<http://www.artists4climate.com/en/artists/gideon-mendel/>

“In Too Deep: Gideon Mendel's Photographs of Global Flooding – In Pictures”—*The Guardian*

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/gallery/2015/nov/13/in-too-deep-gideon-mendels-photographs-of-global-flooding-in-pictures>