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Daniel Beltrá's Photographs

BY AMY ON 21 FEBRUARY 2016 IN CHICAGO

Capturing beautiful parts of the world and telling an ecological tale.



Daniel Beltrá, "Greenland 2," 2014. Photo credit: ©Daniel Beltrá / image courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago.

Daniel Beltrá's exhibition, "Ice/Green Lands," at Catherine Edelman Gallery is delightful. Upon entering the gallery, I swiftly transitioned from urban life in Chicago to the stunning, far-off worlds of Greenland and Iceland. The fifteen exhibited works consist of aerial photographs of Greenland and Iceland. They exemplify the natural beauty the world offers, which is why the show grips us. It is also why, as I walked around gawking, I realized the exhibition is particularly relevant today.

Upon entering the gallery you have your pick of images, all of which are equally radiant. The brilliant turquoise water juxtaposed with white snow in "Greenland 2" is striking. The beauty lures me close, though I was unsure what I was looking at initially. Each image is abstract. You do not see sweeping landscapes from a distance, but rather detailed aerial shots. My eye traced the crevices of Iceland's rocky terrain in "Iceland 15," and the snaking icy-blue waterways in "Greenland 10."



Daniel Beltrá, "Iceland 15," 2014. Photo credit: ©Daniel Beltrá / image courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago.

The titles of Beltrá's photographs are not descriptive. Other than knowing the geographical location, Iceland or Greenland, you have little contextual information about the exact site. This ambiguity seems purposeful, though, because it gets you thinking and looking a little longer. Inevitably, you derive at the larger narrative—that is, the ecological concerns governing our world.

Beltrá turns to aerial photography to help "emphasize that the Earth and its resources are finite." It is a conclusion I came to as well. There is a lot of interest in climate change and global warming in art and politics right now, as demonstrated in late 2015 by the Conference of Parties (COP21), a climate change conference. Coinciding with the COP21 in Paris, artist Olafur Eliasson and professor Minik Rosing debuted their "Ice Watch" installation in Paris, which included twelve blocks of ice from Greenland.

Beltrá and Eliasson address the same issue, but they differ in their means. Instead of shocking visitors with melting blocks of ice, Beltrá's photographs take time to uncover. Eventually reality surpasses aesthetic appeal. After studying Beltrá's images, you consider what may happen to the crystal clear water cutting through Iceland's rugged terrain, or the snow that is sadly melting away in Greenland. Once the reality of the situation sets in, the images at once seem to exclaim: "This is what our world is losing. Do something!"

Will the beauty remain? Only time will tell. But Beltrá's show vividly demonstrates what we stand to lose if action is not taken.

"Ice/Green Lands" is on show at Catherine Edelman Gallery until March 5.