

The Damage Done

In his horrifically beautiful images, photographer Daniel Beltrá offers gut-wrenching evidence of a planet in peril.

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Oil Spill #12, by Daniel Beltrá.

Daniel Beltrá has always had an eye for the environment. Growing up in Madrid, he watched nature shows on TV and supported groups such as the World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace. In college he took classes in forestry engineering and biology. But being a news junkie, too, he was just as likely to photograph the aftermath of an ETA bombing as he was a butterfly.

Over time, this Seattle-based artist and photographer melded his interests to become an award-winning chronicler of eco-disasters, issuing graphic alarms to a complacent world. Traveling the globe, he has captured such catastrophes as the decimation of the rain forest and the shrinking of the polar ice caps. In 2010, he covered the *Deepwater Horizon* calamity in the Gulf of Mexico for Greenpeace.

This month, he makes his Chicago debut with a show aptly titled *Spill*, at the Catherine Edelman Gallery. Straddling the realms of documentary and art, Beltrá's aerial shots, taken from aboard a tiny Cessna, are the most seductive.

"In-your-face photojournalism doesn't usually have a long shelf life," notes Beltrá, "but if you manage to show some beauty, people will stop and notice. There is no doubt that these are terrible things I shoot, but at the same time, I feel empowered by what I do. I have a chance to get the story out there. I joke sometimes that I feel as if I have been dropped in the middle of a lake. So I am swimming the best I can and hoping we can all find solutions to what is happening in the world." *Spill is on display March 2-April 28 at the Catherine Edelman Gallery, 300 W. Superior St., 312-266-2350*