

**MOSS
ARTS
CENTER**



UNBEARABLE BEAUTY

JAMES BALOG DANIEL BELTRÁ EDWARD BURTYNSKY CHRIS JORDAN STEVE NORTON

Thursday, January 21-Saturday, April 24, 2021
All galleries



UNBEARABLE BEAUTY

Expansive in theme and panoramic in scope, this exhibition presents works of art that are visually engaging, impactful, and even beautiful, while conveying the difficult reality that the consequences of human activity have imperiled the Earth. Featuring large-scale photographic works by three nationally and internationally recognized artists, a stunning film installation of one of the largest arctic glacier calving¹ incidents to date, and an arresting soundscape of birdsongs of species that no longer exist, the exhibition articulates in striking, aesthetic terms the damage inflicted on our ecosystems by human activity.

Population growth and the need for ever-expanding agricultural production, polluting industries, relentless urbanization and energy use, mass consumption, and the proliferating manufacturing of products worldwide are among the root causes of the Earth's predicament today. The consequences are many, ranging from global warming; the degradation and pollution of land, air, and sea; and exponential growth of industrial and commercial waste, to deforestation, along with diminishing habitat and the threat of wildlife extinction. This exhibition presents a visual journey, poignantly bringing into focus a number of these critical issues, the enormity of which is not only ruinous, but difficult for most of us to grasp or fully comprehend.

In the Ruth C. Horton Gallery EDWARD BURTYNSKY

Regarded as one of the world's most accomplished contemporary photographers, Edward Burtynsky is known for his stunning images of industrial projects throughout the world and their effects on the environment. Burtynsky's remarkable photographic depictions of global industrial landscapes explore the sheer scale of human intervention on the Earth's surface and the impact that we as a species are having on our planet. Burtynsky's images portray colossal mines, quarries, dams, factories, and disposal facilities. He also has created major bodies of work about oil and energy production, transportation systems, and water infrastructures. Featured in this exhibition are three of his remarkable photographs that focus on the extraction of metals—mining sites in Arizona, New Mexico, and Ontario, Canada. Beautifully composed and visually captivating, these works, such as *Morenci Mine #2, Clifton, Arizona* (2012), at times border on appealing abstractions while demonstrating how industry can desecrate the landscape. Equally compelling in terms of its composition and coloration is the fourth photograph in the exhibition, a visually intriguing depiction of surface land mining—the disastrous activity to extract phosphate, an essential mineral and key component of industrial farming fertilizer.

¹ The breakup of glacier ice.

ON COVER:

Edward Burtynsky
Nickel Tailings #30; Sudbury, Ontario, 1996
Chromogenic print
48 x 72 inches
© Edward Burtynsky
Courtesy of Howard Greenberg Gallery and Bryce Wolkowitz
Gallery, New York / Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto

◀ Daniel Beltrá
Amazon rainforest burns (#260), 2018
Digital chromogenic dye print
48 x 72 inches
© Daniel Beltrá
Courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago



CHRIS JORDAN

Chris Jordan is a photographic artist whose work in this exhibition explores mass consumption from a sociological and environmental perspective. For most of us the immense scale of global consumption and, by consequence, the waste produced and jettisoned is not readily discernable, and certainly not comprehensible without exposure to shipping ports and industrial yards, Amazon warehouses, or vast dumping sites. In his photographs Jordan translates social and environmental statistics that seem unfathomable into visible terms, visiting landfills and recycling centers to photograph vast piles of discarded products—cell phones, chargers, circuit boards, and other consumer goods. In *Cell Phones Atlanta* (2005), composed with close to 2,000 discarded cell phones, Jordan highlights excessive consumption and the culture of “take, use, then discard,” commenting on the fact that in 2019, for example, 151 million cell phones were jettisoned in the United States. In the large, multi-panel work *Carbon* (2018), Jordan contextualizes global carbon emissions in 2018 by depicting 2.4 million pieces of coal, equal to the estimated number of pounds of carbon dioxide being emitted into the Earth’s atmosphere every second by the burning of fossil fuels. In these and other works in the exhibition, Jordan creates imagery that, while recognizable, nonetheless coalesces into and verges on abstraction in stunning works of art that comment on key social and environmental issues.

In the Sherwood Payne Quillen '71 Reception Gallery

STEVE NORTON

Steve Norton is a sound artist, musician, and researcher whose current practice focuses on the gathering of field-recorded sound, which he uses in electroacoustic compositions as well as in improvisational performances. Presented in this exhibition is an exceptionally poignant four-channel sound installation, *Requiem* (2018), created with the recordings of 10 recently extinct bird species and two species of frogs. Norton sourced recorded sound files from the Macaulay Library of the Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology and the Amphibian Foundation in Atlanta, Georgia, pulling excerpts, cleaning the files, making loops, and adding silences to create an extraordinarily beautiful aural composition. The recordings range from the ivory-billed woodpecker, last confirmed seen in 1944, to the Rabbs’ fringe-limbed tree frog, considered extinct since 2016. The sound installation is beautiful, moving, and heart-rending. These animals are extinct and will never be heard in real life again. *Requiem* (2018) is a eulogy to these animals, but also, by association, a sobering reference to the global threats to wildlife and impending extinction of numerous species.

◀ Edward Burtynsky
Phosphor Tailings Pond #4; Near Laketown, Florida, USA, 2012
Chromogenic print
48 x 64 inches
© Edward Burtynsky
Courtesy of Howard Greenberg Gallery and Bryce Wolkowitz
Gallery, New York / Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto

Chris Jordan ▶
Circuit boards, Atlanta, 2004
Archival inkjet print
44 x 64 inches
Courtesy of the artist
© Chris Jordan 2004



In the Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery

DANIEL BELTRÁ

Daniel Beltrá describes himself as a conservation photographer. Beltrá's work over the past two decades has taken him to all seven continents, including several expeditions to the Brazilian Amazon, the Arctic, the Southern Ocean, and the Patagonian ice fields, where he has photographed oil spills, glacier melts, droughts, and the effect of greenhouse gases. Beltrá's sweeping aerial photographs are large—up to four feet high by six feet wide—and panoramic. Taken from approximately 3,000 feet above ground, they bear witness to the shocking scale of environmental degradation currently taking place in our world. Two photographs in the exhibition depict, with a compelling and almost extraordinary beauty, the tragic deforestation of the Amazon forest even as they bring to mind its rapid disappearance, in which more than 150 acres are lost every minute; more than 200,000 acres are burned every day; and 78 million acres are lost every year. The ramifications of this are drastic given that the Amazon's critical role in absorbing carbon dioxide from the Earth's atmosphere is diminishing at an alarming pace, with grave consequences in terms of climate change. Also on view in the exhibition are three arresting images taken during the two months the artist spent photographing the devastating Deepwater Horizon gulf oil spill of 2010, the largest marine oil spill in history that created an oil slick extending over more than 57,500 square miles in the Gulf of Mexico.

JAMES BALOG

The world's melting glaciers—due to rising temperatures caused, for the most part, by unsustainable levels of carbon emissions and other greenhouse gases produced by manufacturing activity, fossil fuel usage, transportation, and deforestation—pose an unprecedented risk to the global environment. Scientists predict that if emissions continue to rise and are not reduced, the Arctic, for example, could be completely devoid of ice in 20 years. The consequences of glacier melt and the resulting rising sea levels are daunting, ranging from the flooding of the world's coastal cities and the displacement of millions of peoples to increased frequency and intensity of hurricanes and typhoons and the destruction of much of the world's fresh water reserves. Balog brings the enormity and significance of these issues into visual focus with his research expeditions that track and film the planet's rapidly disappearing glaciers. Presented in the exhibition is spectacular footage from the acclaimed film *Chasing Ice* (2012), produced and directed by Jeff Orlowski, portraying the historic breakup of the Ilulissat glacier in Western Greenland. This breathtaking calving event lasted for 75 minutes, in which the three-mile-wide terminus of the glacier retreated a full mile. This stunning yet excruciatingly beautiful footage has gone on record as the largest glacier calving event ever captured on film and brings into focus the reality of climate change with an immediate and visceral impact.

With compositions that are extraordinary and at times even beautiful, the works of art in the exhibition convey distressing if not dire realities that are relevant and that impact us all—in a compelling but acute and disquieting dichotomy: unbearable beauty.

Margo Ann Crutchfield
Curator at Large



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

James Balog

American; lives in Denver, Colorado
earthvisioninstitute.org

Photographer and scientist James Balog is the founder of the Earth Vision Institute, an organization dedicated to the research, documentation, and visual representation of climate change and the impact of environmental change on the world. Balog developed the Extreme Ice Survey (EIS) in 2007, a long-term photography that tracks and portrays the planet's rapidly-disappearing glaciers, deploying high resolution time lapse cameras in locations across continents in places that few can visit. Balog has produced several award-winning films, is the author of *ICE: Portraits of Vanishing Glaciers* and seven other books, and is the recipient of many awards, including an honorary doctorate of science from the University of Alberta and the Rose-Walters Prize at Dickinson College for Global Environmental Activism. Balog has exhibited his films and photographs in more than 100 museums and galleries worldwide.

Daniel Beltrá

Spanish; lives in Seattle, Washington
edelmangallery.com/artists/artists/a-f/daniel-beltra

With degrees in forestry engineering from the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (1983-1985) and biology from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (1985-1989), Daniel Beltrá is widely respected by both the art and conservation worlds. Beltrá's work has been widely exhibited and published by the most prominent international publications, including the *New Yorker*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, and *El País*, among many others. He is the recipient of numerous prestigious awards, including the 2011 Wildlife Photographer of the Year Award and the 2011 Lucie Award for International Photographer of the Year. Beltrá is a fellow and board member of the prestigious International League of Conservation Photographers.

◀ Daniel Beltrá
Oil Spill 3, 2010
Digital chromogenic dye print
40 x 60 inches
© Daniel Beltrá
Courtesy Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago

Edward Burtynsky

Canadian; lives in Toronto, Ontario
edwardburtynsky.com

Edward Burtynsky was born in 1955 of Ukrainian heritage in St. Catharines, Ontario. Burtynsky received a bachelor of applied arts in photography and media studies from Ryerson University in 1982. His early experience of the General Motors plant in his hometown influenced the development of his work, which has since become internationally renowned. Burtynsky's impressive exhibition and collections record is extensive. His work has been exhibited worldwide and is included in the collections of over 60 major museums around the world, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim in New York, the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, and the Tate Modern in London.

Chris Jordan

American; based in Seattle, Washington
chrisjordan.com

Chris Jordan is an internationally acclaimed photographic artist whose work explores contemporary mass culture from a sociological and issue-based perspective. Jordan's photographic compositions result in works that walk the line between abstraction and representation, beauty and horror, challenging us to look at the landscape of our collective actions and their impact on society and the environment. One of Jordan's most acclaimed works is a film called *ALBATROSS*, a meditation on ocean plastic pollution's devastating effect on the albatross colony on remote Midway Atoll in the Pacific Ocean. Jordan's work reaches an international audience through publications, interviews, and exhibitions.

Steve Norton

American; lives in Orono, Maine
rednotebook.org/music

Steve Norton is a sound artist, musician, and researcher who has composed and/or performed avant-garde jazz, experimental music, and free improvisation in Boston and around the U.S. and Canada for over 30 years. Norton has over 25 recorded releases to his credit and holds a master of fine arts in intermedia from the University of Maine.



WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

James Balog

Clip from *Chasing Ice*, 2012, which filmed the breakup of the Ilulissat glacier in Western Greenland in 2008
An Exposure Labs Film produced by Jeff Orlowski

Video; 4 minutes, 41 seconds

Courtesy of Exposure Labs, the artist, and the Earth Vision Institute

Daniel Beltrá

All works © Daniel Beltrá; courtesy of the artist and Catherine Edelman Gallery, Chicago

Amazon rainforest burns (#260), 2018

Digital chromogenic dye print
48 x 72 inches

Amazon Rondonia deforestation (#261), 2018

Digital chromogenic dye print
48 x 72 inches

Oil Spill 2, 2010

Digital chromogenic dye print
40 x 60 inches

Oil Spill 8, 2010

Digital chromogenic dye print
40 x 60 inches

Oil Spill 15, 2010

Digital chromogenic dye print
40 x 60 inches

Edward Burtynsky

All works © Edward Burtynsky and courtesy of the artist and Howard Greenberg Gallery; Bryce Wolkowitz Gallery, New York; and Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto

Phosphor Tailings Pond #4, Near Laketown, Florida, USA, 2012

Chromogenic print
48 x 64 inches

Tyrone Mine #3; Silver City, New Mexico, USA, 2012

Chromogenic print
48 x 64 inches

Morenci Mine #2; Clifton, Arizona, USA, 2012

Chromogenic print
48 x 64 inches

Nickel Tailings #30; Sudbury, Ontario, 1996

Chromogenic print
48 x 72 inches

Chris Jordan

All works © Chris Jordan; courtesy of the artist

Carbon, 2018

Four panels, each 96 x 40 inches
96 x 180 inches total

Cell phone #2 Atlanta, 2004

Archival inkjet print
44 x 90 inches

Circuit boards #2, New Orleans, 2005

Archival inkjet print
44 x 57 inches

Mixed Recycling, Seattle, 2004

Archival inkjet print
40 x 51 inches

Steve Norton

Requiem, in memoriam twelve recently extinct species, 2018

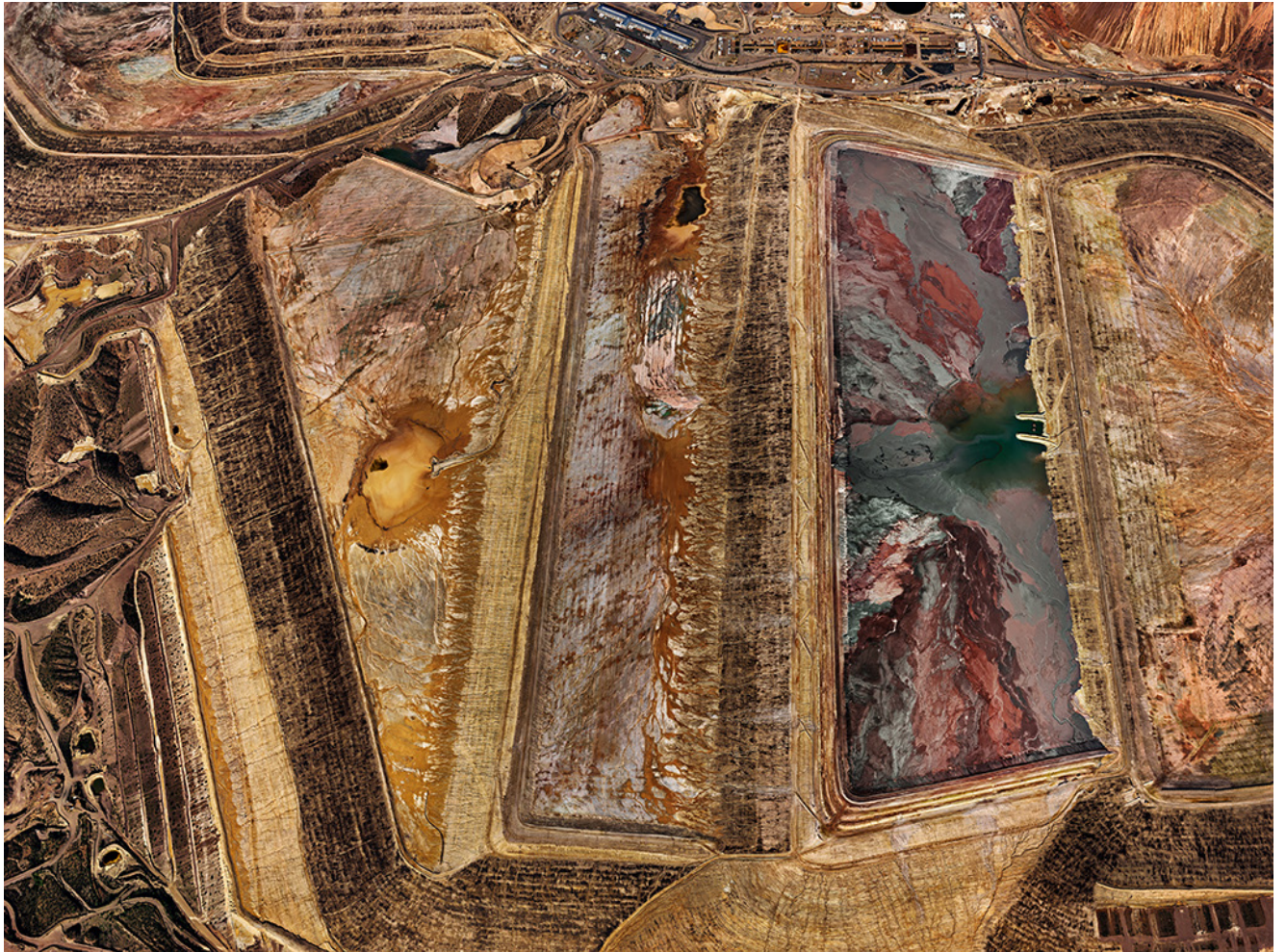
Four-channel audio installation
Courtesy of the artist

◀ Still from the film *Chasing Ice* (2012)
Jeff Orlowski, producer and director
An Exposure Labs film of the historic breakup at the Ilulissat glacier in Western Greenland documenting one of James Balog's research expeditions tracking the planet's disappearing glaciers
Courtesy of Exposure Labs, the artist, and the Earth Vision Institute

ON BACK COVER:

Edward Burtynsky
Morenci Mine #2; Clifton, Arizona, USA, 2012
Chromogenic print
48 x 64 inches

© Edward Burtynsky
Courtesy of Howard Greenberg Gallery and Bryce Wolkowitz Gallery, New York / Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto



RELATED EXHIBITION

Towards a Better Future

Thursday, January 28-Saturday, April 10, 2021
Francis T. Eck Exhibition Corridor

This exhibition features a sequence of installations that highlight several research and sustainability initiatives at Virginia Tech to address some of the ecological and environmental challenges of our era, while delineating possible individual and collective solutions.

Gallery Hours

Wednesday-Friday, 10 AM-5 PM

Saturday, 10 AM-4 PM

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