

DIANE BURKO

VAST AND VANISHING

GLACIAL URGENCY

The Time of Diane Burko's Paintings in the Cryosphere

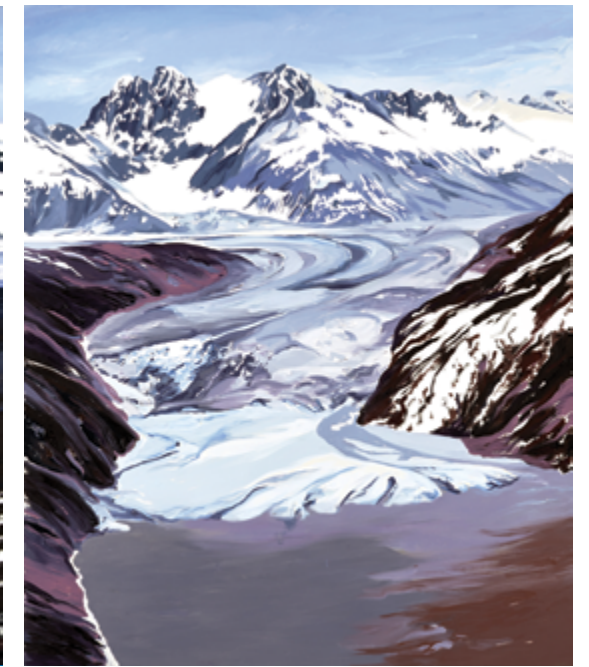
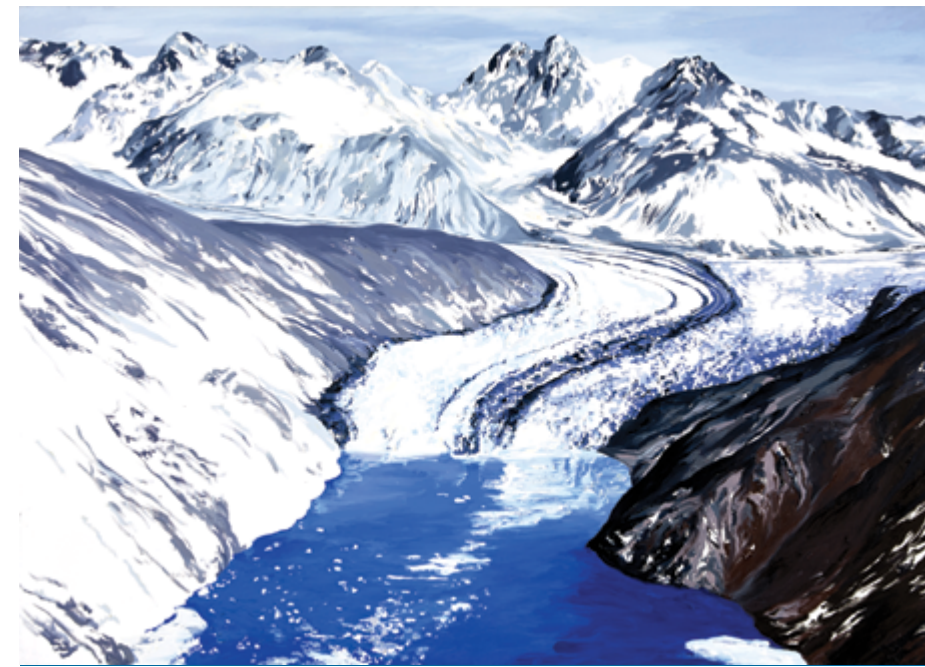
The adjective 'glacial' typically connotes almost imperceptibly slow movement. While glaciers calve dramatically, received opinion also understands them as largely peaceful and gradual in their flow. Diane Burko's arresting images of some of the world's largest glaciers – to which she has made research trips in Alaska, Antarctica, Greenland, Patagonia, and Svalbard – insist that we modify such views to accord with contemporary glaciology in a period of rapid climate change, or, since climate has always been subject to change, what we might more insistently call climate 'disruption.' Moving in her recent practice from a celebration of nature's majesty to an increasingly urgent visual record of the accelerating issues of environmental change as they impact these rivers of ice worldwide, she is especially committed to understanding and incorporating climate science. She uses the venerated technology of painting to claim that the time of glaciers is emphatically now.

Painting is not the expected conveyance for data about climate change. Most of us are not used to coming to an art gallery to learn about glaciers. For a glaciologist, a hiker, or a concerned citizen accessing scientific information on the web, relevant data typically appear as numbers and graphs that interpret a glacier's movement, for example.

Or information is derived from on the spot observation of land that has been exposed by a glacier's withdrawing tongue, as we see in Burko's images of the Columbia Glacier. Or data are provided by photographs of the floating 'ice mélange' that has moved inland up a fjord as a tidewater glacier recedes, as in the *Jakobshavn-Ilulissat Quartet*. In Burko's skilled hands, however, the indissoluble and inevitably anthropomorphizing link between climate and culture (underlined by the nomenclature that gives a glacier a 'tongue' and that names glaciers and icefields after prominent universities, for example) is made evident precisely because she slows down our reception of scientific data with her chosen medium.

Her paintings offer informed climate science *and* they help us to ponder exactly how we typically (and likely unthinkingly) receive such information. They are affective and instructive vehicles that rapidly take viewers to the issues of climate change. At the same time – as "art on the nature of data about nature," in Burko's apt phrase – her work helps us to think through the interactions of climate data and the technologies that gather and deliver them.

Burko deploys several strategies to suggest that human temporal frames are a primary issue in the measurement and comprehension of climate disruption. 'Before/After'

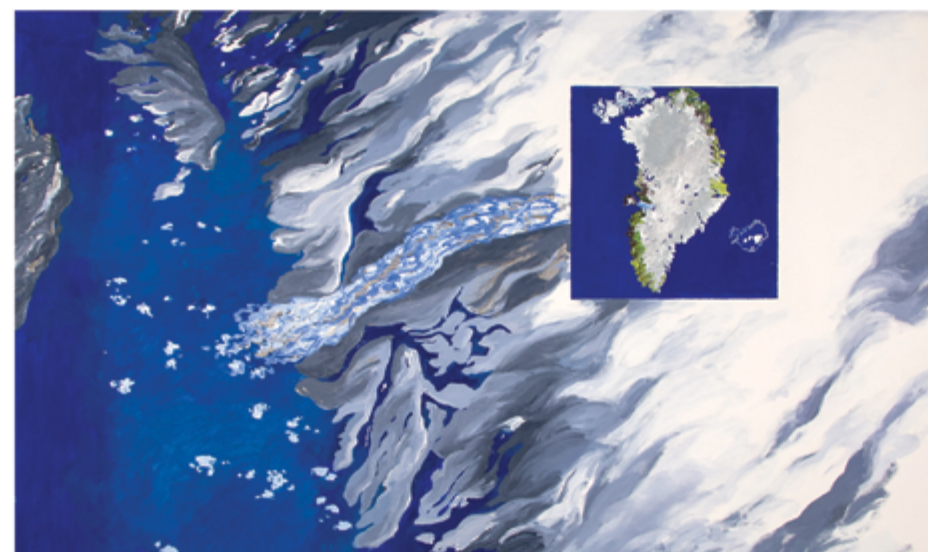


Nunatak Glacier 1938, after Bradford Washburn, oil on canvas, 60 x 84 inches, 2010. (Left)
Nunatak Glacier 2005, after David Arnold, oil on canvas, 60 x 50 inches, 2010. (Right)

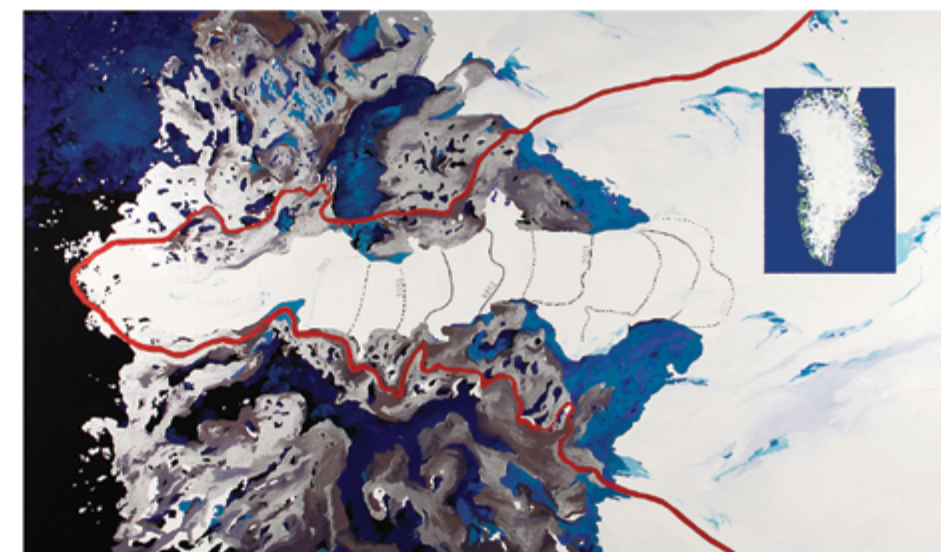
images (a method called 'repeat photography' by glaciologists) graphically capture the change in glaciers over geologically minuscule timespans by putting them in human terms. Burko's large photographic practice includes this approach. Her canvases devoted to the Nunatak Glacier in Alaska, however, are more complex: she works from two photographs of the same locale, one taken by Bradford Washburn in 1938 ('before,' on the left), the other by David Arnold in 2005 ('after,' on the right). The simple binary comparison afforded by this pairing reveals extensive change in the course of the glacier.

Why translate into paint what one can easily see by comparing these photographs on the web? In the art world, one's antennae go up when an artist overtly revisits material originally

presented in one medium in another. This move should engender even more attention when, as here, it involves the re-presentation of scientific data from an expected to an unusual, even foreign, discourse. The source photographs for this double painting record their times with scientific exactness, providing the day, year, hour, and second in both cases. Burko's titles suggest a longer view, citing only the years of the photographs. The paintings take longer to see fully as well as to make physically. They are less instrumental than photos, more thoughtful, even meditative. Yet there is an urgency conveyed by the critical light that a slow medium shines on the now anachronistic, complacent view that glaciers only move gradually. By acknowledging these

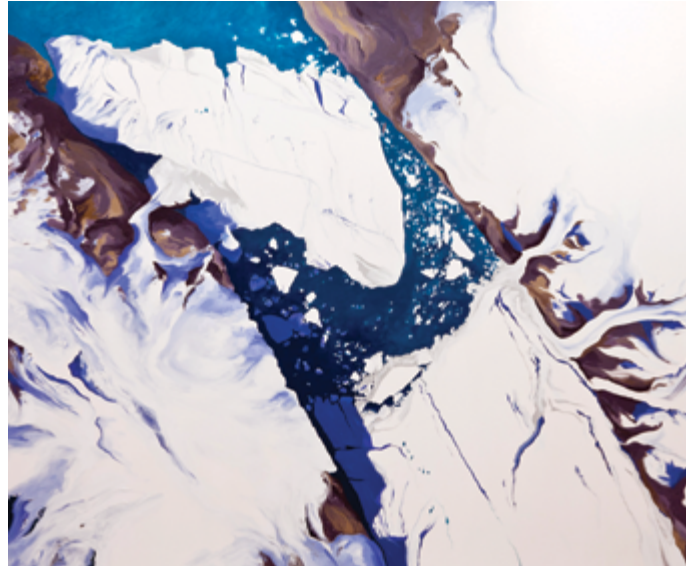


Jakobshavn-Ilulissat Quartet
Oil and flashe paint on canvas, 42 x 228 inches, 2015.



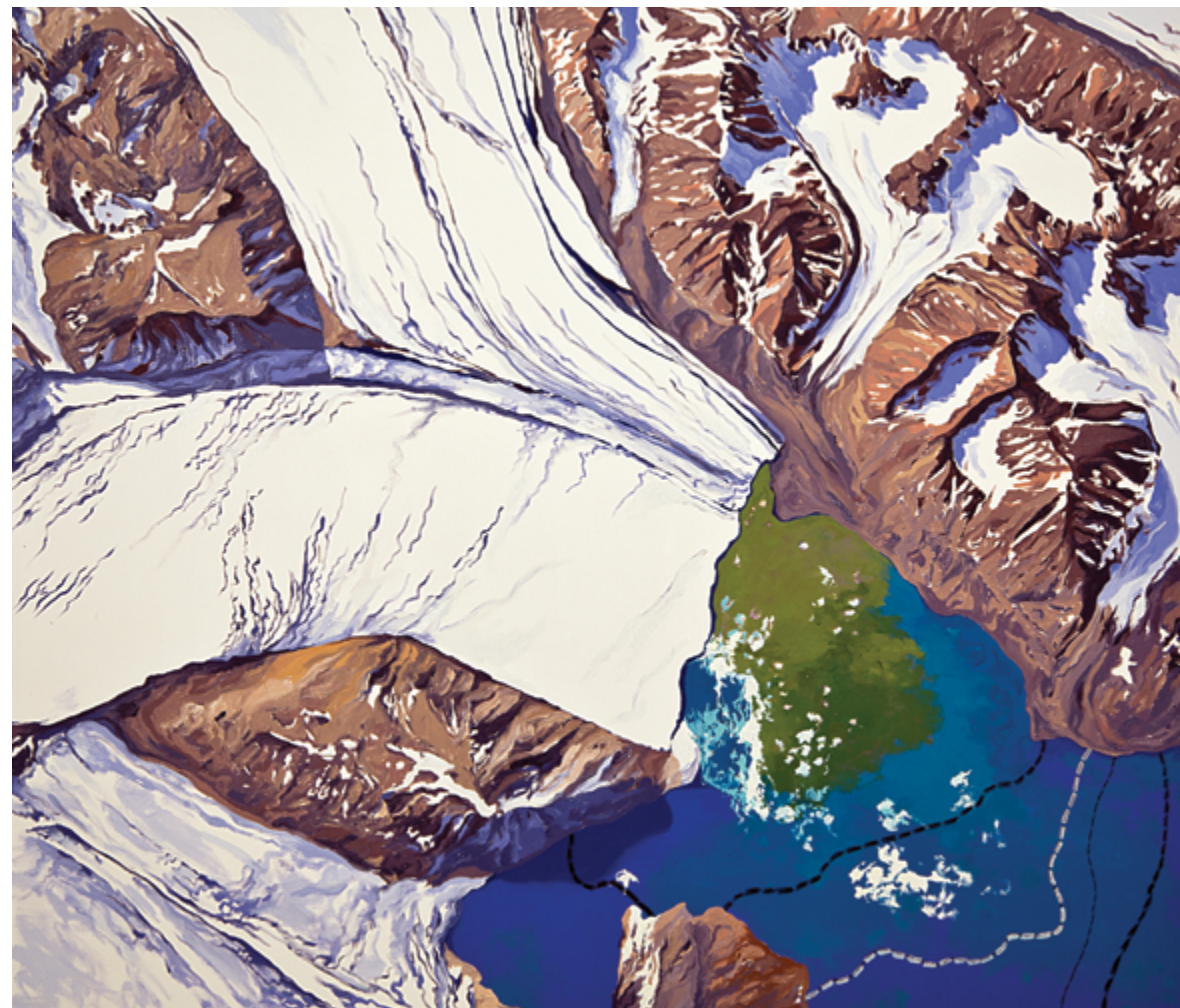
past photographic records simultaneously, Burko registers profoundly that what we see is in our time and that the metamorphosis of glaciers is a concern for the planet's future.

Petermann Calving, August 16, 2010 is a dramatic painting that again provides an alternative way to ponder the time of climate change, the widespread sense that nature is changing in unusual and for us unexpected ways. Based on aerial photographs taken with another authoritative tool deployed by glaciology, NASA satellite images, Burko's canvas shows an increasingly common event in polar regions: the abrupt splitting off of a massive island of ice from a glacier's ice sheet. Neither gradual nor quiescent, these are the 'waterfalls' of rivers of ice. This work, in addition to *Landsat Series, and Ortophoto Kongsfjorden 1869-1990 (after NPI)* – which translates a geometrically corrected, map-like satellite image – again adapt the data markers of scientific technologies for the measurement and imaging of planetary change to a context – art and painting – that is coded for contemplation.



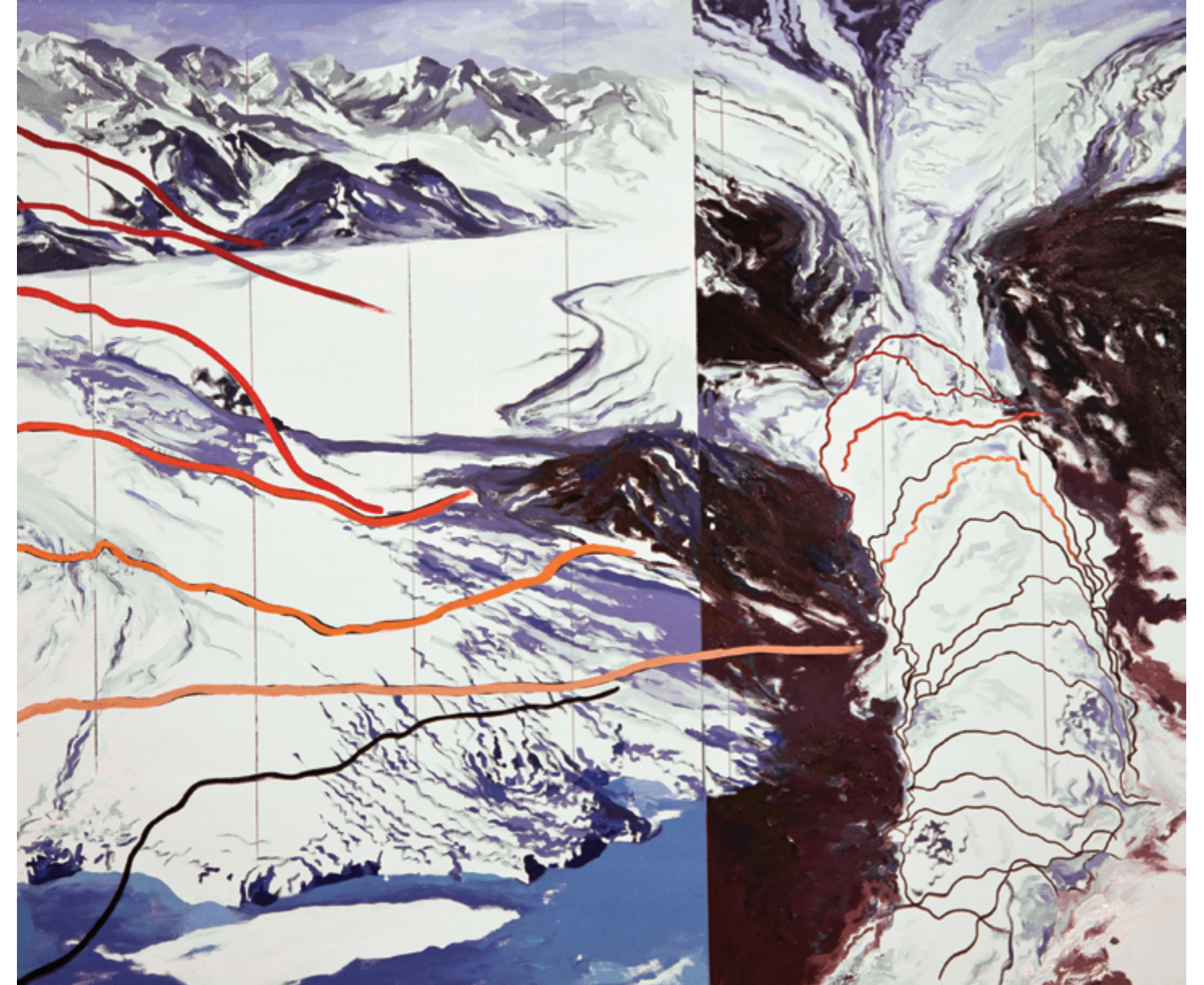
'Communicating climate' – a phrase used by the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich – is a priority for the scientific community, humanists, social scientists, and increasingly, for visual artists. In *Columbia Glacier Lines of Recession, 1980-2005* and *Jakobshavn-Ilulissat Quartet*,

Burko modifies yet another scientific procedure, the use of 'recessional lines' that mark glacial movement over time. Laying these marks over the glaciated landscape, she again creates a potent hybrid of data and aesthetic nuance, a collaboration that we can appreciate because of the relatively prolonged and non-instrumental attention invited



Petermann Calving
August 16, 2010
Oil on canvas
60 x 72 inches
2012 (Top)

Ortophoto Kongsfjorden
1869-1990 (after NPI)
Oil on canvas
52 x 60 inches
2014 (Left)



Columbia Glacier Lines of Recession, 1980-2005, oil on canvas, 51 x 60 inches, 2011.

by painting and the gallery setting. What is ultimately presented by these contours is time. We look back across 25 years of the glacier's diminution via a slow medium, painting, that renews itself in Burko's practice by adopting the scientific language of glaciology.

Diane Burko's work is dedicated to the future of the planet. She continues to undertake field trips to glaciated regions and to do research in archives at the Norwegian Polar Institute in Tromsø, INSTAAR in Colorado, and the Australian Antarctic Division in Hobart. Just as her paintings powerfully link climate data with aesthetic contemplation, so too they offer a bridge from past views on glaciers to a near future that may or may not include these phenomena.

– *Mark A. Cheetham, 2018*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark A. Cheetham is a professor of art history at the University of Toronto. Author of eight books and numerous articles on topics ranging from Immanuel Kant and Art History to abstract art to Postmodernism, he is a Guggenheim Fellow and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. Cheetham's current research focuses on ecological art and on the uses of analogy in art history. His book *Landscape into Eco Art: Articulations of Nature since the '60s* was published in early 2018.

Daine Burko: Vast and Vanishing

March 8 – April 21, 2018

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1945, Diane Burko received a BS in painting and art history from Skidmore College and an MFA (1969) from the Graduate School of Fine Arts of the University of Pennsylvania. Burko is professor emeritus of the Community College of Philadelphia where she taught (1969-2000). She has also been a visiting professor or lecturer at varied institutions including at Princeton University, Arizona State University and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. She is an affiliate of The Institute of Alpine and Arctic Research (INSTAAR), having led a seminar at their headquarters and interacted with their research scientists in Boulder CO in 2014. She has been invited to speak at conferences such as the Geological Society of America, the American Geophysical Union, The Atlantic Council, the International Cryosphere Conference in Wellington NZ and Arctic Circle Assembly Conference in Reykjavik.

There have been more than 40 solo exhibitions and over 100 painting and photography exhibitions of Burko's work in galleries and museums throughout the country. Winner of two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships and two Pennsylvania Arts Council awards, Burko has had a six-month residency in Giverny, France sponsored by the Lila Acheson Wallace Foundation, and a 5-week residency at the Rockefeller Study and Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy. She was awarded a \$200,000 Public Art commission by the Redevelopment Authority of Philadelphia and the Marriott Hotel in 1996. In 2000 she received a \$50,000 Leeway Award to support her Volcano project. In 2011, she was given the Women's Caucus for Art/College Art Association Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2013 The Independence Foundation of Philadelphia generously supported her residency in the Arctic Circle. Distinguished critics have written about Burko's work including Robert Rosenblum, Lawrence Alloway, John Perreault, Judith Stein and David Bourdon. Burko is represented in numerous collections including the Art Institute of Chicago; Denver Art Museum; the Hood Museum of Art, NH; the James A. Michener Art Museum, PA; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; The Philadelphia Museum of Art; The Tucson Museum of Art, AZ; the National Academy of the Sciences, Washington D. C; the Woodmere Art Museum and the Zimmerli Art Museum, New Brunswick, NJ.

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

Environmental artist Diane Burko has been documenting glacial recession as part of her practice that intersects art and science around the urgent issue of climate change. In this exhibition we focus on works that capture the inexhaustible dichotomies found in extreme frozen environments: monumental and intimate, luminous and somber, expansive and confined. Visually they capture the inescapable tension of this landscape, but also become a metaphor for the climate issues they chronicle and the current political discourse that exists around them.

- *Mary Salvante, Curator*

Rowan University Art Gallery Director

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are honored that Ms. Burko has accepted our invitation to exhibit at RUAG. We would also like to thank Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University and Cindy Veloric for the loan of works included in the exhibition. Special thanks to Mark A. Cheetham for his very sensitive and insightful essay, and a world of thanks to Jillian Schley for the design of this publication.

CATALOG FRONT

From the Landsat Series

Eagle Glacier Juneau 1982-2005 (Top left)

Antarctic Peninsula (Top right)

Patagonian Ice Field (Bottom left)

Scott Antarctic Expedition (Bottom right)

Oil and flashe paint on canvas, 20 x 20 inches ea., 2015.

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