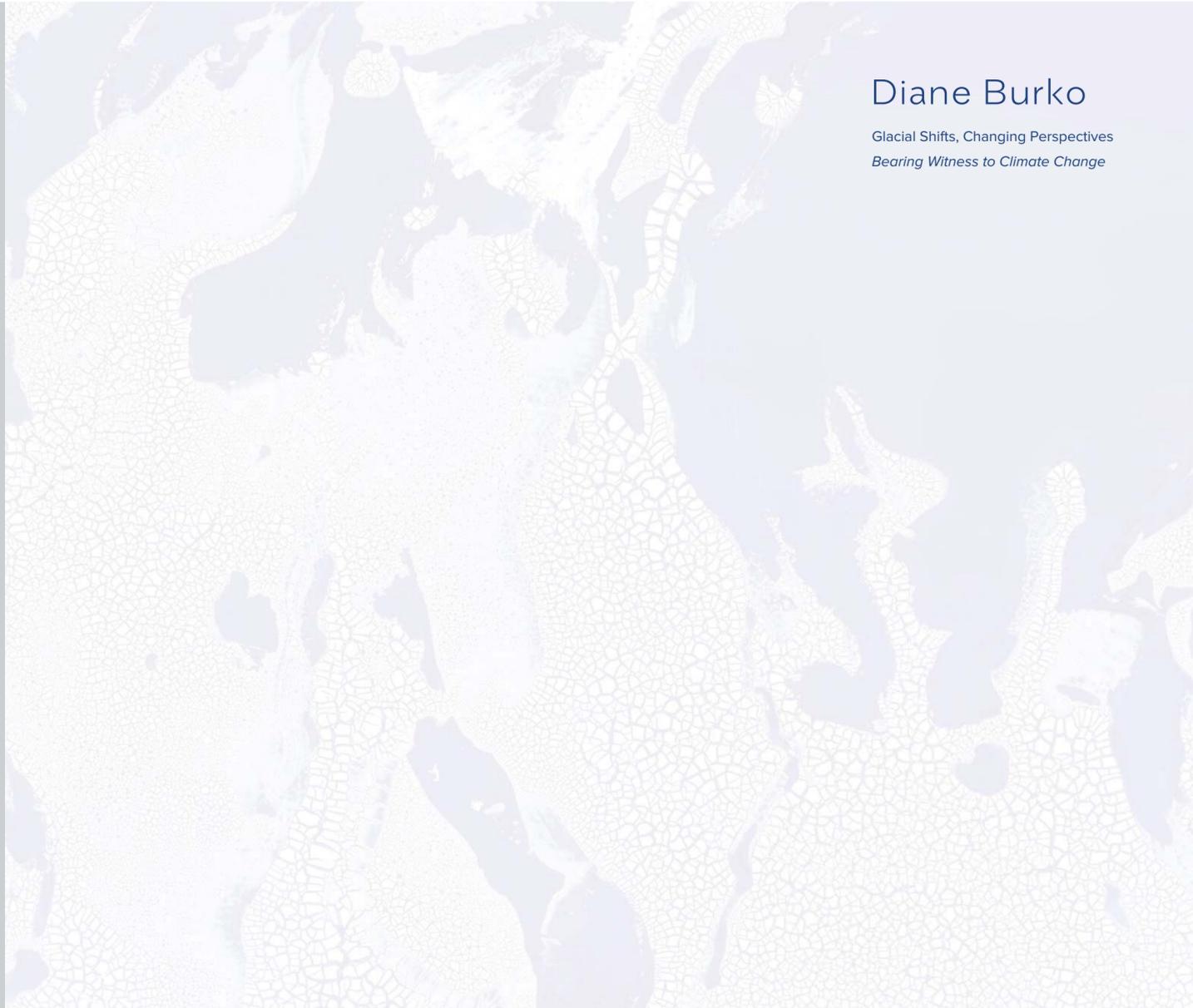
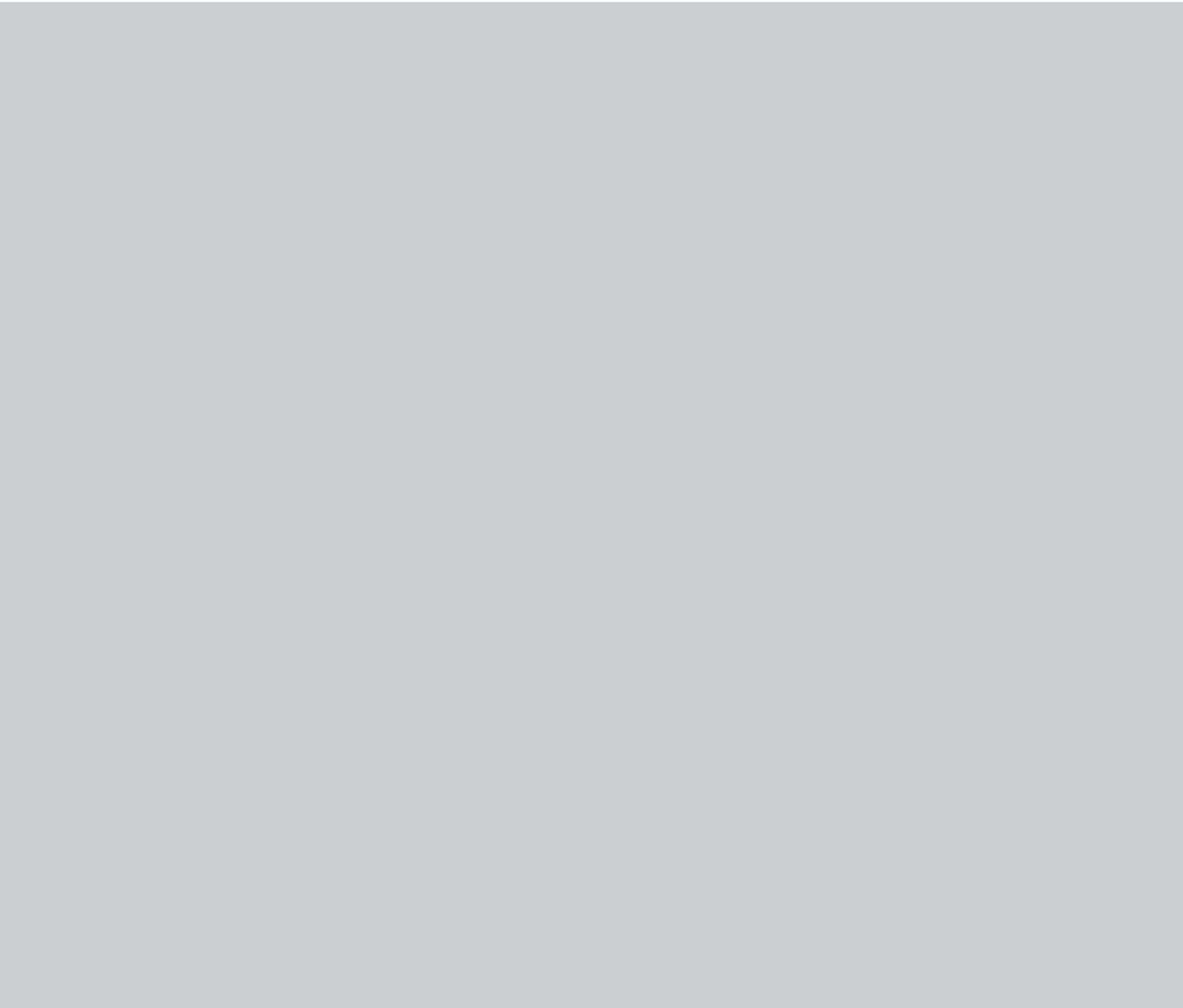


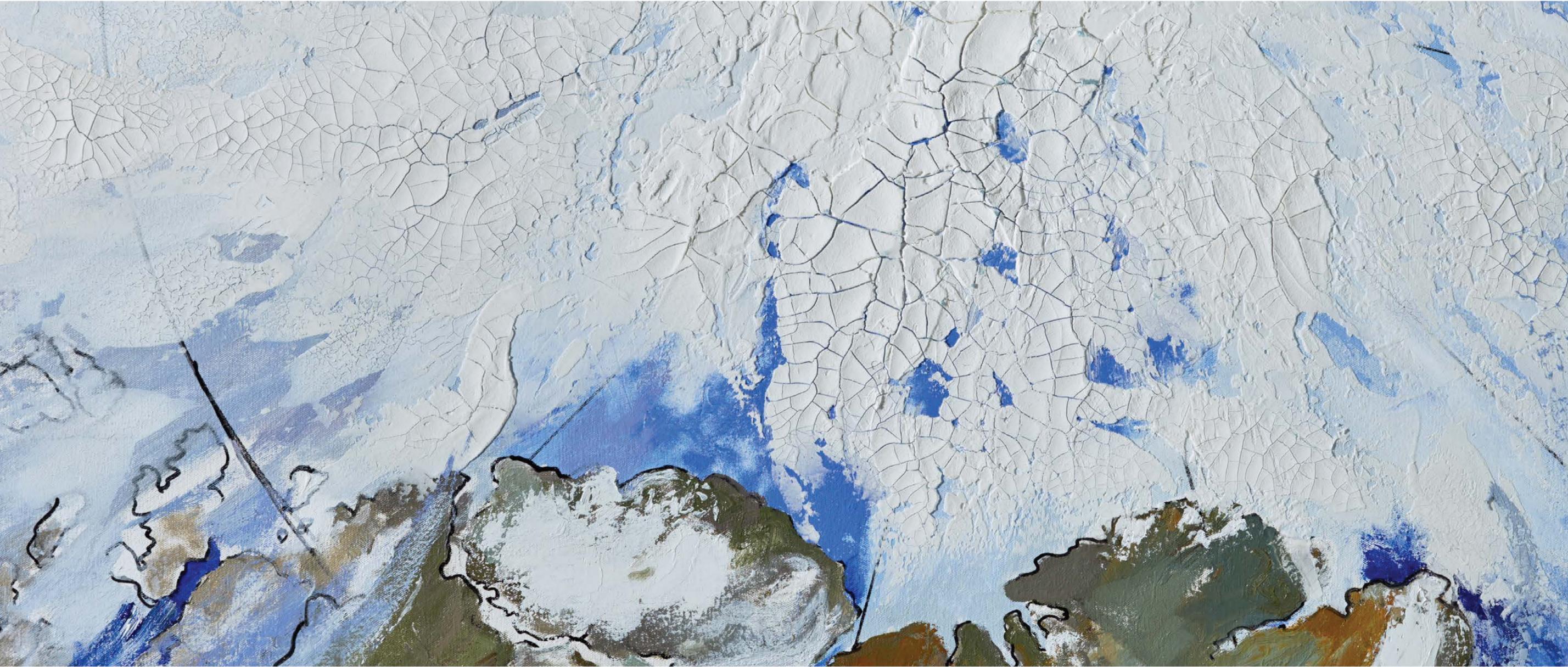
Diane Burko

Glacial Shifts, Changing Perspectives
Bearing Witness to Climate Change



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Curated by Andrea Packard

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May 5—September 30, 2017
Joy Pratt Markham Gallery
Walton Arts Center
Fayetteville, Arkansas



Opposite

Diane Burko on Viedma Glacier, Patagonia,
Argentina, 2015. Photo: Richard Ryan

Previous pages

Arctic Melting, July 2016 (after NASA) (detail), 2016
Oil and mixed media on canvas, 60 x 84 inches



Challenging Perspectives: the Art of Diane Burko

ANDREA PACKARD

Walton Arts Center's Joy Pratt Markham Gallery is pleased to host *Glacial Shifts, Changing Perspectives*, a solo exhibition of photographs, prints and paintings by Diane Burko, one of America's leading artists focusing on the effects of climate change. For more than four decades, she has photographed and painted both intimate landscapes and monumental geological formations that captivate the imagination. Her prolific, varied, and constantly evolving aesthetic evolution challenges outmoded conventions in landscape painting and photography. Blending ambition, tenacity, and conscientious self-analysis, she models creative approaches that address the realities of global warming. Since 2007, she has almost entirely focused on global warming, investigating glacial recession in particular.

Burko began to photograph monumental geological forms in the 1970s. She first flew over the Grand Canyon with noted light artist James Turrell, and since then she has taken thousands of photographs from nature and developed large-scale studio paintings in tandem with her photographic work. In 2000, after more than two decades earning acclaim for her large-scale landscape

paintings, Burko began to document dramatic geological events such as volcanic activity and glacial recession. During the past decade, her practice has shifted to the intersection of art and science, and she has incorporated the visual and statistical documentation of climate change in her imagery. During a 2013 expedition to the Arctic sponsored by Arcticcircle.org and the Independence Foundation, Burko sailed around the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard with 26 other artists and spent four days collaborating with scientists at the Norwegian Polar Institute in Ny-Ålesund and Tromsø. She has also journeyed to key sites throughout the world to conduct research, including the glaciers of Greenland, Iceland, and the ice fields of Argentina and Antarctica. Her works on display in the Joy Pratt Markham Gallery are based on thousands of sketches and photographs taken while hiking or flying in helicopters or small planes. In her studio, she developed her paintings and photographs further by rescaling images and adding multi-media elements, mapping symbols, or graphics. The resulting works and series convey the drama and fast pace of glacial recession.

Viedma Landscape, 2015
Archival inkjet print, 40 x 60 inches



Nunatak Glacier 1938, after Bradford Washburn and Nunatak Glacier, 2005, after David Arnold, 2010
Oil on canvas, 60 x 134 inches overall

Opposite
Matterhorn Icon Series IV (detail), 2007
Oil on canvas, 20 x 20 inches

Burko's exhibition features a selection of photographs of the fracturing ice she observed at the Patagonian Viedma Traverse, a series of eight paintings based on the U.S. Geological Survey's historical Landsat images of glacial melt, and a series of six paintings portraying the Matterhorn's icy peak with its increasing degrees of rocky exposure. Her signature large-scale paintings are well-represented by an 11-foot-long diptych that contrasts two images of the Nunatak Glacier in time: the left-hand painting of Nunatak Glacier is based on a 1938 image by Bradford Washburn, whereas the painting on the right is based on David Arnold's 2005 photograph of the same site. Viewed side-by-side, such images offer both a time-lapse record of glacial recession and a composite landscape that requires us to consider nature through the lenses of history and science.

Like the activists discussed by Eleanor Heartney in her February 2014 article in *Art in America*, "Art for the Anthropocene," Burko joins a diverse host of contemporary artists who model outside-the-box thinking, challenge counter-productive myths, and help us confront the dramatic pace of ecological change. Avoiding didacticism, Burko's life-long engagement with nature and her rigorous self-critical process demonstrate what we all need more of: a fearless curiosity about our changing world and the ability to envision it frankly, globally, and from diverse perspectives.

Andrea Packard has directed the List Gallery at Swarthmore College since 1995 and served as curator for Walton Arts Center 2009–2016. The author of more than 25 exhibition catalog essays, she has written about diverse artists including Buzz Spector, José Bedía, William Daley, Lesley Dill, Allison Saar, and Lois Dodd. She has exhibited her own mixed media works in over fifty exhibitions nationally.



Diane Burko: A Broader Perspective

WILLIAM FOX

In 1967, Diane Burko earned admission as a graduate painting student at the University of Pennsylvania as an abstract painter, but she has been documenting mountains and glaciers since the early 1970s. Although she quickly gained recognition for her easel paintings and mural-sized works representing the landscape in the Philadelphia region as well as the dramatic vistas she encountered during her travels, her work has continued to evolve and respond to the realities of climate change. Drawing inspiration from her plein air painting practice, commercial and scientific images, and her own on-site and aerial photographs, her art has come to focus on the



Arctic Melt on July 2016
from NASA Worldview website

dramatic impact of global warming and the international scope of glacial melt. In order to understand her compelling images, it is useful to outline the historical traditions that she builds upon. Both elaborating and challenging the romantic tradition of landscape painting, Burko encourages us to see nature—and to confront climate change—with fresh eyes.

During the late 18th century, industrialization diluted tourism by creating more leisure time and disposable income and by providing steam-powered travel over land and sea. It also created the desire to recuperate from its byproducts of pollution and related illness. Increasingly, tourists escaped to mountain landscapes such as the Lakes District in England, the Swiss Alps, or the mountains and fjords of Norway. By the mid- to late- 1700s in England, picturesque art tours were being conducted on roads originally constructed for commerce; within a hundred years, Europeans were designing and building roads through the Alps, often providing vantage points designated by artists.

The Swiss artist Johann Heinrich Wüest modeled the romantic view of nature as limitless, yet picturesque. His



1775 oil painting of the Rhône Glacier is a commanding work that assumes a scale and influence far beyond its size. Wüest portrays the glacier field sweeping downward and culminating in a heavily crevassed area resting on the valley floor below our vantage point. In the distance, the ice field is brightly lit by the sun, which is otherwise obscured by a towering and menacing mass of clouds. Two distant figures stand on the ice pack, while in the rocky foreground two people observe an artist, who sketches the scene.

The painting follows the conventions of eighteenth-century landscape paintings: dark rocks frame the sides, and figures in the foreground act as surrogates for the viewer, separating us from the icefield and its potential

dangers. Wüest provides us with an elevated and distant vantage point and presents his subjects as travelers who are enjoying nature at leisure. It is a scheme that allows us to safely distance ourselves from what Lord Byron, when visiting an alpine glacier on September 23, 1818, called a “frozen hurricane.” Like Wüest, artists such as J. M. W. Turner, Caspar David Friedrich, and Hudson River School artists such as Fredric Edwin Church have portrayed nature as limitless and abundant, dwarfing human presence.

Burko’s *Matterhorn Series* calls such romanticism into question by providing an array of images that do not let us approach as closely or inhabit as safe a vantage point. Whereas in 1775 Wüest could witness the Rhone glacier reaching the valley floor, and in 1870 the glacier was accessible to travelers on the Grand Tour who stayed in a hotel built at its foot, the ice has retreated more than 4,250 feet during the past 120 years. Currently, the terminus of the glacier now consists of a tourist grotto carved three hundred feet into the blue ice. White tarps insulate parts of the glacier, reflecting sunlight in order to keep the ice from disappearing before the end of tourist season. Industrialization, which made global tourism possible, has also subverted the very landscapes it brought within reach. Burko’s *Matterhorn Series* confronts us with such realities, critiques the picturesque, and moves beyond a touristic mindset. Her successive views of glacial recession encourage us to think about the contingency of our vantage point at any given time. And they bring to mind the fact that glaciers worldwide provide water for billions of people and their shrinkage in the Himalaya, for example, is already increasing geopolitical tensions among China, India, Pakistan, and southeast Asia.

Heinrich Wüest, *Rhonegletscher*, c. 1775
Oil on canvas, 49.5 x 39.25 inches
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Grandes Jorasses, at Marguerite, 1976
Acrylic on canvas, 64 x 108 inches

At the beginning of her career, Burko's paintings of mountains demonstrated a more wholehearted allegiance to the romantic landscape tradition. Her painting of Rongbuk Glacier on the north side of Mt. Everest (1975) and her images of arêtes and couloirs of Mt. Blanc and the Grand Jorasses (1976) reflect her love of natural beauty and fascination with vast geological formations.

Such early works also reflect her interest in abstraction and use of photographic sources, affinities that tend to emphasize flatness and pattern contradict the atmospheric recession we associate with 19th century painting. Two signature trips altered the course of Burko's work. Following her use of published photo-

graphs in the early 1970s, she flew the Grand Canyon with artist James Turrell, who piloted her over one of the planet's monumental geological features. Aerial vantage points allowed Burko to further abstract the world—to lose even the horizon as a reference feature—and encouraged her to begin taking her own photographs for reference material. In 2011, when a visit to Glacier National Park allowed her to witness how 150 glaciers had been reduced to 25, she realized that she could no longer limit herself to reflecting the beauty of the world. She continues to spend much of her time traveling, but she often accompanies scientists to visit field camps, glaciers, and icefields where climate change is readily apparent. Her paintings still respond to the abstract

beauty of the scenery, but they focus on the data of climate change and propose a different view of the sublime. The dangers implied by these pictures do not consist of a potential avalanche or storm beyond human control so much as the immanence of climate change—a disaster of our own making.

Like Fredric Edwin Church, who incorporated discoveries by early naturalists into his grand touristic vistas, Burko incorporates lessons drawn from ecology, geology, and other scientific disciplines. Her *Landsat Series* takes inspiration from satellite images that are part of the U.S. Geological Survey. Through incorporating information not only from personal photographs but also from historical and scientific sources, she alerts us to the need to see art and nature from varied perspectives. Her multiple

images and global purview do not promise potential refuge so much as varied lenses that provide increased engagement and critical analysis. Portraying how scenic climaxes of the world are changing—and even disappearing—with the advent of global warming, Burko calls us to action for the health of the planet.

William L. Fox serves as the Director of the Center for Art + Environment at the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno. He has published fifteen collections of poetry and eleven nonfiction books about the relationships among art, cognition, and landscape. In 2001-02 he spent two-and-a-half months in the Antarctic with the National Science Foundation in the Antarctic Visiting Artists and Writers Program. He has also worked as a team member of the NASA Houghton-Mars Project, and has been a visiting scholar at the Lannan Foundation, the Getty Research Institute, the Clark Institute, the Australian National University, and the National Museum of Australia.



Diane Burko in her Philadelphia studio,
October 2016. Photos: Nadine Rovner