

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Friday, September 10, 2004 – Edward J. Sozanski

Depicting wet landscapes born of fire

Iceland's more than 500 active volcanoes and its location just south of the Arctic Circle have produced an unusually stark and rugged landscape, much of it inaccessible by wheeled transport.

Philadelphia painter Diane Burko turned this circumstance into an advantage. She flew over some of the country's most spectacular topography, photographing features that she subsequently turned into striking representations of natural creation.

Unlike her previous work involving volcanoes, the paintings she's showing at the Locks Gallery aren't about fire but mostly about flowing water plunging in cascades of foam over rugged escarpments.

The show includes several small paintings of water-filled craters, but these lack the drama of the more panoramic scenes of melted snow and ice thundering through crevices in dark volcanic rock.

Burko's fluid paint-handling transforms falling water into milky skeins that, especially in *Godafoss #6*, resemble avalanches. In each of the waterfall paintings, the mass of turbulent water at the base of the falls coalesces into dense fields of blinding whiteness.

Water and rock, softened in some pictures by a thin carpet of spring-green, ground-hugging vegetation, are all the artist has to work with. Yet the scenes are further softened by variations in water color that range from turquoise through slate blue to mauve.

Compositionally, Burko's Icelandic landscapes are relatively simple, and their photographic genesis is always apparent. The more one looks at them, though, the more romantic and extraordinary they seem.



Diane Burko, *Godafoss #6*, 2004, oil on canvas, 60 x 96 inches