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Galleries: Paintings depicting the effects of global warming

By Edith Newhall
For The Inquirer

Global warming, as evidenced by the rapidly vanishing snow on mountains and glaciers, is the subject of Diane Burko's latest series of paintings, "Politics of Snow," at Locks Gallery. It's a theme that seems almost preordained when you consider that Burko has been painting panoramic landscapes since the 1970s.

Burko's early paintings were based on photographs she snipped from the pages of such magazines as National Geographic and Arizona Highways. Her new works borrow from geologists' before-and-after photos of the Matterhorn and of glaciers in Alaska, Montana, and British Antarctica, some shot more than 50 years apart. Her diptych and triptych canvases catch these alarming transformations of the landscape with an accuracy that could not have been effected without early photographic documentation.

At the same time, they also show Burko working more confidently than ever before. The expressionistic handling of her earlier (shown here in 2004) series of volcano paintings - a way of working that was relatively new to her - has become altogether more visceral in this late series.

The paintings don't need a project to validate them; the few single paintings in which it's impossible to gauge loss of snow are as strong as any of the multi-canvas before-and-after works.

In any case, the theme of climate change makes sense for a landscape painter who has revisited her early subjects and found them drastically changed.

Upstairs, Burko is showing a selection of her recent color photographs, large archival ink-jet prints of close-up views of landscapes and water that show the effects of climate and seasonal changes, as well as the occasional human and animal intervention. They're as quiet and meditative as her paintings are dramatic, and attest to Burko's sensitivity to her immediate surroundings.



"Disappearing Series, 2a and 2b," by Diane Burko, part of the "Politics of Snow" exhibit at Locks Gallery.

Locks Gallery, 600 Washington Square South, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. 215-629-1000 or www.locksgallery.com. Through March 13.

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