

## Diane Burko in Princeton

By Andrea Kirsh | May 3, 2011

Diane Burko is interested in landscape on a topographic scale; they are as far as one can get from Durer's Clump of Grass. She's been increasingly attracted to nature at its most extreme: volcanoes and now glaciers. Her exhibition Politics of Snow, seen last winter at Locks Gallery, Philadelphia is on view through May 19, 2011 at the Bernstein Gallery, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University. The gallery specializes in art whose subjects relate to public



Diane Burko 'Twenty Mile Glacier #1: 1938' and 'Twenty Mile Glacier #2: 2005' (2009) oil on canvas, diptych 60 x 180"

policy; it's an ideal venue for Burko's current series, in which she pictures global warming through contrasting images made from photographs documenting international glaciers over periods of time. The large diptychs and polyptychs, which often reach from floor to ceiling, tell a suitably heroic tale of mountain ice, the landscapes it created, and the tragic changes those landscapes reveal. The paintings are monumental, seductive in paint-handling and subject matter, and ultimately grim in the stories they tell.

The exhibition was opened on April 21 with a panel discussion; joining Burko were Adam Maloof, professor of geology at Princeton University and Michael Oppenheimer, professor of geoscience at the Woodrow Wilson School. The artist gave a history of her interests leading up to the glaciers and the question she faced of how to make art out of the topic of glacial melting. She found her visual sources through extensive research and contact



Diane Burko 'Toboggan Glacier #1: 1909' and 'Toboggan Glacier #2: 2000' (2007) oil on canvas, diptych 32 x 100"

with scientists, most of whom were extremely supportive. Geologists made photographic records available and Burko used them to bring her concerns and the scientists' data to audiences well beyond the scientific and environmental communities. Maloof, a lively teacher who looked as though he might be more at home outdoors than in an Ivy League classroom (he wore extravagant, red suspenders with his cargo pants) explained that ice sheets are some of the most important records of climate, recording changes over geological time, in which 20,000 years is but an interval. Oppenheimer warned that we don't have tools to indicate the rate at which ice is melting and whether the situation is merely grave, or catastrophic. Situating himself among the optimists in his field (how else could he continue?), he was obviously burdened by the necessity of making the scientific argument clear to a lay public and political decision-makers.