

Abstract Artist Takes Flight >>>

Though you might mistake her for a stuntwoman, fearless photographer Diane Burko soars above nature's most spectacular landscapes for artistic inspiration.



Diane Burko never imagined that a successful career in the art world would involve hanging out of airplanes. Yet, the Bucks County based artist has spent countless hours soaring above the earth and just below the clouds to capture an image that would inspire her next work.

Though known primarily as one of the country's foremost landscape painters—capturing the world's majestic peaks, valleys, coastlines and deserts—she is rarely without a camera in hand. "If I'm only going to a place for a week or a day, the only way I can take visual notes is by recording it on film," says Burko, who never imagined her photographs would be worth more than the inspiration they provided.

"Then I started to look at them," she admits. "I really got into it after 9/11. I just couldn't paint. I would go into my studio, sit in the dark and look at thousands of slides, reviewing everything. A theme emerged that was about the shadow and the airplane." As a result, a collection of stirring photographs was developed and *The Shadow Under the Shadow*, a small book featuring the poetry of Toby Olsen, was created.

These vivid images aren't captured from the window seat of a commercial 747. To get the best photos of the most out of the way places, Burko hires private pilots to obtain her bird's eye view. "I was fortunate to receive grants to help with the costs," says Burko. It was such a grant from Philadelphia's Leeway Foundation that enabled her shoot high above Hawaii, and later over Iceland, resulting in some of her most dramatic works—images of volcanoes.

"I'd hang out of the plane," she says, laughing. "The door was off and when we were flying over the lava you could literally feel the heat."

A city girl growing up in Brooklyn, Diane Burko knew more about the workings of the subway system than the tributaries of a river. "Being outdoors excited me, because of the open space," she says. Her interest in art developed abstract roots "because of the generation I come from," she admits. "I think I found the landscape a way to still hold on (to those roots) and still deal with color and shape and areas of color, but have a the tension of describing something that deals with three dimensional space."

Her recent interest in photography has enabled her to take her abstract view to a new level. "It's nothing to do with the materiality of the surface, because it's flat. But, I can deal with other issues I don't in painting," says Burko. "I like actually dealing with the sharp realism you get in photography, but keeping it as abstract as well."

When she's not hanging out of planes, manipulating images in Photoshop or painting abstract landscapes, Burko admits to a more hands-on passion. "I like to get my hands dirty and work in the ground," she says. Her country home in Bucks County affords her three acres of landscape to sculpt and reshape to her specifications. Though she claims it as her getaway from work, it's easy to imagine visiting Diane Burko's outdoor gallery of abstract natural landscapes in the not to distant future.

Images from Burko's volcanic tour can be seen in her exhibit *Flow* at the James A. Michener Art Museum, Doylestown, PA until October 15. A second exhibit at the Philadelphia International Airport's Terminal F begins in November and will be on display for six months. For more information, visit: www.dianeburko.com. **S**



FORSYTHIA BY DIANE BURKO