



the artist's life

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# Heaven and Earth

German artist Ulrike Arnold takes landscape painting to the extreme.

BY KAREN LELAND

THE LANDSCAPE OF Canyon Point in southern Utah is a sweeping desert filled with stratified rock formations that reach up to the sky and deep canyons that reveal mossy brown rivers. Aside from the sandstorms and 110-degree heat, it's the perfect place for German artist Ulrike Arnold to do her work.

Painting outdoors isn't a new idea, but Arnold takes it a step further: She paints *with the outdoors*. Over the past 30 years, she has traveled to five continents—setting up shop in Algeria, Egypt, Madagascar, Tasmania, Greece and India (among other countries) and painting with the elements she finds. “I paint on the spot, with only the colors that

are there,” says Arnold, who has shown her work in more than 90 exhibitions. “Some might say that’s a limitation. What if there’s no blue around? But I capture the essence of a place through the authentic materials and the forms around me.” Using pigments from the earth contained in rock, sand, mud and clay, Arnold crushes them into a fine powder and mixes them with a transparent medium that acts as a binder. The finished product becomes part of her palette.

In June 2009 Arnold was invited to create artwork to adorn the new Amangiri Resort at Canyon Point. “When I started exploring the land, I found a cave near the resort,” Arnold says. “The Anasazi people had lived in that cave and created petroglyphs there 6,000 years ago. I knew that was my place.” So she set up shop and created an outdoor studio at the mouth of the cave, putting up a wooden table that could hold the

6x14-foot canvases she’d be working on. Renting a house a mile away, she worked 10 hours a day for five months, in extreme heat, rain and sandstorms. The result: three large abstract landscapes for the hotel’s public areas and 50 small paintings for each room in the resort.

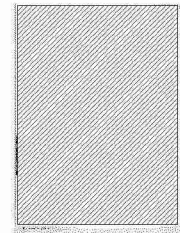
“I want to capture the essence of a place,” Arnold says. “In Utah at Amangiri, it was the rock formations and the color of the earth, the rainstorms and very hot weather that influenced me. I could feel the power of nature there day and night—that was my inspiration.” She says her abstract landscapes aren’t meant to describe a river or a mountain, but to evoke the spirit of the place through free forms. “I think of my work as a view from an airplane, a bird looking down at earth,” Arnold says.

Her fascination with using materials of the earth began when, as a 21-year-old art student, she traveled



**ABOVE:** A selection of earth samples from every continent.

**RIGHT:** Ulrike Arnold paints in Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah.





to southern France to see the famous cave paintings at Lascaux. Several years later, Arnold encountered the red ochre pits at Roussillon in Provence. "That was for me a major enlightenment," she says, "a big bang. That's when I decided to paint with the earth."

If Arnold has spent much of her artistic life looking to the ground for her medium, a chance meeting with an American meteorite expert in Flagstaff, Arizona, recently left her gazing up at the stars for inspiration.

"I met this meteorite expert named Marvin Killgore, who collected meteorites from Argentina and Greenland," Arnold says. "When I told him I painted with the earth, he told me he had some leftover meteorite dust I could use." When Killgore sliced meteorites to prepare them for study under a microscope, small pieces would fall off. He'd been saving the dust but didn't know what to do with it. "Killgore said it was like a miracle meeting me," Arnold says. "Now I'm painting with material from the cosmos as well."

Using the donated dust, Arnold has created a series of silvery and shiny meteorite paintings (see them on her website, [www.ulrikearnold.com](http://www.ulrikearnold.com)). With stones from the earth and stardust from the sky, Arnold is painting a little bit of heaven right here on Earth.

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**ABOVE: Bisbee, Arizona, fullmoonpainting** (1991; earth on canvas, 59x118), by Ulrike Arnold, is in the collection of actor Dennis Hopper.