

ARTS & LIVING

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GABRIEL GRANILLO, ARIZONA DAILY SUN

Ulrike Arnold is a German painter who uses stones, dirt and earth from locations around the world to create abstract paintings.

To Ulrike and the earth

Documentary highlights life and painting of Ulrike Arnold

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Sun Staff Reporter

In a small Hogan surrounded by sagebrush and inquisitive jack rabbits, Ulrike Arnold unfurled a thick slab of unstretched canvas covered in ochers, greens and browns. Beneath that, still more canvas, which she peeled back one after the other like massive onion skins—one round and coated in deep black and grey that came spiky and sharp to the touch.

"Meteorite dust," she said. "I love the canvas like this; it is like the skin of the earth."

Arnold's 10 acres or so of surrounding land are one of many "magical places" that double as her studio. Beneath a small-roofed enclosure sit bowls and tables, filled with her painting materials, all of which she digs, scrapes or shaves from the earth: shale, cinders, limestone, salt.

The German artist, whose life



VICTOR VAN KEUREN, COURTESY

Artist Ulrike Arnold chooses from a plethora of natural materials to use as her paint. Arnold is the focus of a documentary called "Dialogue Earth," which takes place in Flagstaff and around the world. The film will be shown at the Museum of Northern Arizona Sunday, Aug. 18.

and work are the focal point of new documentary "Dialogue Earth," spends several months out of the year traveling to some of the most remote places in the world, whereupon she spreads

her canvas, settles into the landscape, forages for her materials and begins to paint—sometimes for three weeks at a time, camping on site if she can; and she's done so for about 40 years now. Though she calls the post-industrial city of Düsseldorf home, Arnold returns to the area around Flagstaff regularly, both to live and create. She chooses the places where she paints with intuition but also intent.

"I go with my feeling to a place, somewhere that is untouched or not destroyed, a feeling where there is no mining and disturbance, to show and catch this beauty—that is my goal," she said.

Arnold paints almost exclusively on site using the materials that directly surround her. In Bisbee, that's copper, malachite and azurite; in Flagstaff, pink sandstone and red volcanic ash, among others. Only the sources that exist naturally come into consideration.

"I want to capture the essence of a place," she said.

She referred to her practice as "going back to our roots," that is, referencing ancient forms of ex-

'Dialogue Earth' at MNA

The Museum of Northern Arizona, 3101 N. Fort Valley Road, will host a screening of the award-winning "Dialogue Earth" followed by a Q&A with artist Ulrike Arnold on Sunday, Aug. 18 at 2 p.m. For more information, call 928-774-5213 or visit musnaz.org

pression like the cave paintings in Lascaux, which brought her to tears as a 21-year-old and spurred her desire to go back to school (at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf) and study art. While the [art] world is bending, buckling and swarming with technology, Arnold references the increasingly distant past—millennia away from now—using materials that have taken thousands of years just to become. The only chemical in the process is the clear acrylic fixative she uses as a binding agent for the paints.

All this and more comes to the fore in "Dialogue Earth," in which

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Ulrike

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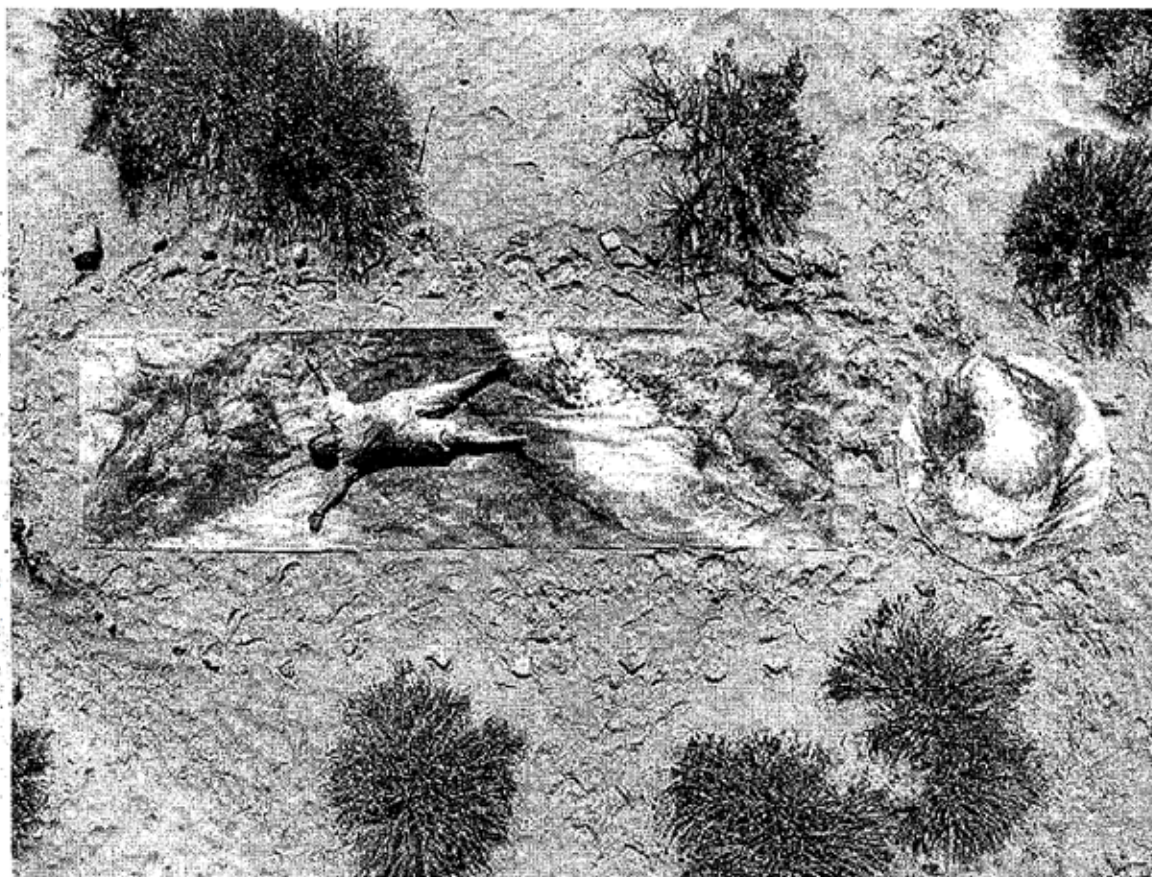
director Hank Levine ("Abandonados," "City of God") chronicles Arnold's life and practice.

The film is a series of mesmerizing shots: Arnold on the U.S.-Mexico border or the wilderness of southern Utah. It also touches on her upbringing under her priest father's strict word, while exploring her act of constantly seeking that which is spiritual; it unpacks the cosmos and geologic formations, all the while taking us to so many of the places that have become Arnold's muses — rarely human, always earthen.

Central to the film are also Flagstaff and its characters: The late Helen Running, Arnold's "sweetest friend" since she picked Arnold up from Flagstaff's Pulliam Airport in 1989, geologists and meteor specialists each get their time in the limelight. "Dialogue Earth" highlights the people Arnold meets through her artistic ventures, a motley crew strewn across the film and connected by the bubbling and impassioned Arnold whose eyes, if they aren't darting to the vast skies, are fixated on the ground, always searching for more material, more paint.

"I often go barefoot to feel the earth," she said, jumping up eagerly to demonstrate — her outfit itself was a canvas, white and peppered with the dust and dirt she'd used recently. "We walk over it, we touch the earth, but often don't really see how beautiful it is, how many colors you walk over without being aware."

She often prompts audiences at Broken Arrow Cave in Utah to



VICTOR VAN KEUREN, COURTESY

Painter Ulrike Arnold is the subject of new documentary "Dialogue Earth."

do so with her. The place is one she visits often. It's located on the Amangiri Resort property near Page, Arizona, and owned by the exclusive resort, which has several of her paintings.

Arnold also welcomes people touching her paintings if they ask. Dennis Hopper appears in the documentary, running his hand over a piece he's purchased while explaining to us Arnold's process. Perhaps one of the most captivating moments in the film, however, comes as children from a school for the blind in Santiago

de Chile brush their palms across her paintings. Some smell them. Others lick the salty and sulfurous surface, gathered from the Atacama Desert.

Arnold is all body, many words are substituted by a gesture or a sound, a puff or a whistle to signify verve or excitement, a loud whoosh when she shows how she moved the paintbrush across a particular piece. Scenes in the film show her laying down on the sand where she's working. The pitter patter of rain that fell on a painting is a phenomena

she illustrates by tapping on the table.

The rain and wind and the rats nibbling at the edge of a painting, Arnold said, are the art, weather and animals "collaborating."

"I always say it's a dialogue with the earth; in the moment I am painting I am using the earth, I put the color here and it's a dialogue with me and the paint and the animals and weather."

Arnold had long wanted to paint with the cosmos, too, which she began doing in 2003 by way of a chance meeting with Marvin

Killgore. Killgore, "the cowboy" as Arnold called him, travels the world collecting meteorites, slicing them and saving the shavings. He too is featured prominently in the film.

Arnold compared the moment she met Killgore to a Brother's Grimm fairy tale. In the story a poor girl walks into the forest, stars fall into her lap and there become gold coins.

"In that moment I felt I was in 'Sterntaler,' it's such a beautiful children's story. It's also a symbol for luck, the luck was coming, falling over me. And then I started to make tests here in Flagstaff with the first meteorite paintings. The meteorite, for me is a sign of the cosmos," Arnold said.

At this point Levin directs the documentary to questions of the spiritual, whether in the form of God, as Ulrike's father evokes in his sermons, or science as Lowell Observatory astronomers talk about life in space, or something tied to the universe, magic, spiritual, inexplicable.

Here the documentary introduces the political too, something Arnold said is not necessarily an ingredient to her paintings. Nonetheless, Levin gently guides us in that direction, with scenes at the border and talk of climate change and Donald Trump, which are inseparable from talk of the earth in 2019.

"In the film it comes out our earth is vulnerable, so could say I am an activist. No I not really, but through comes awareness, that we have protect this earth. Everybody to give their part, so I am it in my way. Maybe with of bringing of attention,"