



My husband and I, along with his visiting parents, are driving up Hwy. 101 from Northern California into Oregon when suddenly I screech, "Stop! Now!"

They all jump and then a second later, remembering my madness, roll their eyes and realize I must have spotted clay soil on the side of the road. My father-in-law reluctantly pulls over and backs up to the beautiful red-orange clay radiating from the road cut.

I hurry to hoist my seven-month pregnant belly out the car door and lumber up the brushy slope to find the richest specimen, scooping up a few handfuls into a plastic bag. Hustling back to the car, I stash the bag on top of a growing pile of earthen pigment samples that I've already collected up and down the coast.

For more than a decade, my medium of choice was traditional oil painting, which uses turpentine and toxic heavy metal-laden paints. Despite my allergic reactions to solvents and paints, as well as my growing guilt over polluting the earth with fumes and toxic waste, I continued to use it, ignorant of any other option.

Then a few years ago when I learned



Dirty Art

By Leah Fanning Mebane

that it was possible to make my own oil paints from earthen clay and oil, my passion was ignited. I realized that my large abstract paintings, already inspired by the earth in their patterns and colors, could also include nature-based pigments, and the whole process could now become even more aligned with my values.

It took quite a bit of investigative



Googling to find information on this simple and ancient process. I eventually found an artist in New Mexico who made his own paints and who recommended the one and only out-of-print book written on the subject. I also found several websites about eliminating toxins from the painting process.

It turns out that turpentine is relatively recent in the art world. The old masters of the Renaissance didn't use it but simply cleaned brushes and mixed pigments with walnut or flax seed (linseed) oil. This same technique has been used since prehistoric times, going back 15,000 years, except the binder used then was urine, blood, sap, grease or honey.

Over the centuries, from the Egyptians and Etruscans to the ancient Buddhists and medieval monks, earthen pigments have been used as the primary paint. Red, orange, yellow, brown, black, white and sometimes green could always be found in the ground, while blues and purples were more elusive. Each culture used a different technique to achieve blues and purples: prehistoric people used manganese ore, the Egyptians used copper frits, the ancient Chinese ground up malachite and azurite, and the Etruscans ground up lapis lazuli stones.

The basic steps I use to make my own paint are simple. I look for primarily clay soils, avoiding sand or soil with lots of organic matter. The places to find the best colors are along road cuts, quarries (that often reveal strata of several different-colored earths), eroded areas, banks of rivers or streams, and construction sites.

After collecting a few handfuls, I dry the soil in the sun, grind it into a fine powder, mix with walnut oil and ... voila! The key



PHOTOS BY MICHAELA BEGG



to a nice paint, I've discovered, is grinding it into an extra-fine powder using a kitchen flour sifter, a mortar and pestle, and a fine screen.

The benefits of making our own earthen paints are numerous. The most obvious one is that we're no longer poisoning the earth or adding to our own body the burden of unnecessary chemicals and outright toxins. Additionally, we're saving quite a bit of money collecting our own free pigments.

Even better, natural earth pigments are actually far superior to synthetic store-bought paints: they are more permanent (think cave paintings), and they are not affected by sunlight, humidity, temperature or impurities. There is no need for added fillers or stabilizers to increase shelf life, and the colors are more intense due to light bouncing off the irregular surfaces

Continued on page 20



20TH CENTURY FOX

SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF AVATAR

By Jeffrey Armstrong

Paradigm-shifting ideas can germinate for years, even decades, until the time is right for them to manifest.

So when I heard that it took over 20 years for director James Cameron to develop the vision for his recent megablockbuster film *Avatar*, I was not surprised. We do have something in common: I have spent the last 40 years studying the deepest meanings of the word "avatar" and the multilayered teachings associated with it.

Cameron's choice of the word avatar — a key word from the divine stories of ancient India, and my special field of study — inspired the writing of my book, *Spiritual Teachings of the Avatar*. Behind the film and this book — and many undeniable trends unfolding at this time in history — are the will and working of something greater. One can call that will Mother Earth, Gaia or whatever you like, but its existence should be clear to anyone even remotely aware that the human species and the planet we inhabit are at a watershed moment.

Both the film and the book converge on this historical moment, when what we do next could affect positively — or tragically — all life on our planet. Through science and technology, we have grown too powerful to continue the unconscious and at times irresponsible use of our resources and abilities. We are at a crossroads where we must somehow learn to more deeply cooperate with one another and chart a course for the future that includes the safety, dignity and well-being of all living entities. Unless we do so, we risk catastrophic consequences, militarily or environmentally.

As I walked out of my first viewing of *Avatar*, I turned to my wife and said, "It appears that Mr. Cameron has opened Pandora's box office." I'm prone to such puns.

In Greek mythology, a young girl named Pandora is given a box by her father, who cautions her not to open it under any circumstances. Her curiosity, of course, eventually gets the better of her, and she opens the mysterious chest. Out flies

Continued on page 20

WHAT'S INSIDE

JULY/AUGUST 2010 • VOL. 19, NO. 4

EVERYDAY INTENTION 3	LIVING NOW 15-16
Attitude of Gratitude	Hug a Tree • Self Worth • Mindful Eating
NW COMMUNITY NEWS 4	CONSCIOUS MEDIA 21
SPIRITUALITY 6-7	Reader's Choice Books, Music, Films
Sacred Geometry • Love Life Add Up?	COSMIC 22-23
ALTERNATIVE HEALTH 8-10	Starscope • AstroMark • Chits for Answers
Heart Yoga • What is a Healer?	COVER ARTIST Angelina Marino-Heidel 4
• Honey, Help Me Sleep	NW EVENT CALENDAR 11
	NEW RENAISSANCE EVENTS 12-14
	RESOURCE GUIDE 17-19

Hot Picks

Healing Horse Retreats

Weekends all summer
Anamchara Stables in Hillsboro, Ore.



Pathways to Transformation

August 7-8
Common Building in Yachats, Ore.

Enlightening Events — see Calendar on 11

Dirty Art, from page 1

of each pigment particle. Lastly, there are no more off-gassing paintings in my clients' homes.

But the most wonderful benefit I received was the way this process led me into a deeper connection with our natural world, as I spent more and more time outside the studio directly connecting with the origins of my paints. These organic materials married well with the nature-inspired images on each canvas to evoke an aliveness and interconnectedness — because they are alive and encapsulate the cycle of life within them.

I do not miss the “normal” experience, or I should say disconnect, of buying a tube of paint (shipped from another state or country), and arbitrarily squeezing it out without a sense of its direct relationship to my painting process. Instead I start with a walk down a trail, creek bed or road cut. I breathe the fragrance of the forest air, feel both the stillness and the movement of the branches and birds, and soon spot an interesting color. Digging with bare hands to see if it's mostly clay, sand or silt, I scoop up a handful and pause to experience its texture and the organisms in and around it ... before walking on.

This dirt-foraging brings greater energy and life to my painting experience, slowing me down and shifting me into my right brain where I really see what's



around me rather than quickly labeling it and moving on. That stillness and complexity of nature is what I try to capture back in my studio. The flowing of organically circular shapes that emerges on the canvas seems to echo the elemental shapes of nature, from microscopic cells to exploding nebulae in space.

This blending of my work and nature's work gives me greater mental and physical freedom to paint, and allows me the joy of doing no harm to the environment and instead to express my art and passion in a partnership with the earth.

Leah Fanning Mebane lives in the Applegate Valley of Southern Oregon with her husband, Drew and newborn baby, Django. She is represented by galleries in Massachusetts, Wyoming and Oregon, and teaches earth painting out of her studio. Visit www.fanningart.com.



Avatar, from page 1

every manner of pestilence, problem, affliction and misery. Just as it seems all is lost, one last being emerges from the box: luminous, quivering and sensitive — that being is hope.

Seeing *Avatar*, I felt that sort of hope for a sometimes cynical and endangered world. It was the same hope I experienced 40 years earlier when I was initiated into the life-changing wisdom of the avatars by my teachers from India. That hope is actually a lifestyle based on a set of teachings that are the treasure of the best indigenous cultures on our planet.

India and the many noble Aboriginal cultures have been the historical keepers of the secrets of living in greater harmony on the Earth. The word aboriginal means “awareness of the original intention” of life. Undeniably, aspects of that original intention have been skillfully woven into the fabric of the film *Avatar*. By titling his box-office smash *Avatar*, Cameron both borrowed one of the most important spiritual words in the history of India and simultaneously helped give rise to the opportunity to tell its real meaning.



The movie *Avatar* shines a glaring light on some of the oppression, unchecked greed and injustices we see happening around us today. The movie's message is perhaps most relevant for those profit-only corporate heads who behave as if taking from the world, without concern for the consequences, is their right — and one justified by the earnings garnered for their shareholders. This attitude needs to give way to a caring corporate ethos with heart, balanced somewhere between sustainability and profit.

The movie could also be seen as a call against despotism and dictators of all types whom we see leading undemocratic nation-states all over the world. How can we be serious about being free if we all are not allowed to speak freely?

Another important issue raised by *Avatar* is the meeting of technological science with indigenous science. In other words, how can we advance technologically without going against Mother Nature's vast intelligence? How can we even come to believe in an intelligence that to so many is self-evident? Answers to these big questions are what the hope in Pandora's box is asking us to ponder.

The Meaning of Avatar

Avatar, a Sanskrit word, combines *ava*, meaning “to descend,” and *tara*, “to heal and restore.” The idea is that a divine being, or supreme being, purposely descends to Earth, takes on a body (which appears to us as a person being born), and then fulfills some kind of mission according to the needs of the moment. This is different from reincarnating, which is not a conscious, intentional birth but a result of karma. The avatars come according to their own will.

When the avatars come, their primary purpose is to rescue and heal the Earth at a time when the balance in nature or Mother

Earth is being destroyed. The secondary purpose is to remind us that we also are beings from the transcendental and that transcendental is our true nature. The avatars usually leave us a set of teachings that are essential tools for living a life of integrity for the good of all. The avatars exemplify this message and teach us to do the same.

Love Your Mother

It is commonly understood that indigenous cultures have always viewed the Earth as a great being that is alive in every sense of the definition — and far greater than ourselves. How did they discover this? Put another way, how did we forget this?

As we drive certain plants, animals and resources to extinction, a scene in *Avatar* symbolizes the hopeful epiphany for modern technology when scientist Dr. Grace Augustine finally sees the All Mother Eywa and says, “I can see her, Jake, and she is real.”

What would it look like if science and business — and our own habits — supported a more sustainable planet? Would

Meditate First, Paint Second

By Sally Nelson

Meditation helps to get your creative juices flowing for painting. Here are three quick meditation tips to try before putting brush to canvas.

1. **The breathing process:** Sit or recline in a comfortable, quiet place. Breathe slowly and deeply for five minutes or more. Inhale joy, relaxation and peace. Exhale stress and tension. Focus only on the breath, releasing all mind chatter.
2. **Body mapping and release:** Imagine a peaceful river of healing and relaxing light moving through each part of your body. Be attuned to places of tension or stress. Move this tension energy out of the body space. Observe the color, size, shape and taste of this tension energy, and invite in new energy in sync with your current values, beliefs and goals. Trust your first images about this creative energy.
3. **Envisioning:** Envision yourself in front of your canvas or paper as inspired, joyful and eager to paint from an authentic place, which releases the old tension energy and allows the current energy to come forth easily and judgment free. Invite feelings of gratitude for listening and bringing forth your authentic self in your painting.

Sally Nelson is a hypnotherapist, teacher, meditator and artist who hosts Meta-Painting adult workshops in the Portland area. The next workshop is on July 9-11. Visit www.htmcenter.org.



the economy really collapse from a reduction in fossil-fuel use? What if the same urgency we applied to war or bank bailouts or races to Mars were applied to the manufacturing of renewable-resource technology?

Part of the hope in Pandora's box is that modern science decides to join with the deepest traditions of our ancestors to reimagine our world as a peaceful and sustainable place for the safety and growth of future generations.

The process of sustainability can be deeply enriched through really trying to feel what a relationship with Mother Nature might look like. On this spiritual journey, trying to live more sustainably can be a means of increasing one's consciousness while surrounded by matter.

Listen inward. Listen to all that surrounds you. The tears you cry for the environment, both joy and sadness, are the tears of your original mother. You are feeling her, and she is feeling you — and you both know it. How beautiful is that?

Jeffrey Armstrong, author of *Spiritual Teachings of the Avatar*, is the founder of the Vedic Academy of Science and Arts. Visit www.jeffreyarmstrong.com. Excerpted with permission by Atria Books/Beyond Words at www.beyondword.com.