Death Valley Days

Above: Participants in the 2nd Annual Space Art Workshop (see Mike Carroll's Impressions of Death Valley for key). Photo Copyright by Dr. William K. Hartmann.
Below: Views of Death Valley. Photos Copyright by Mike Carroll.
1. Dr. Wm. K. Hartmann (left) and Pamela Lee discuss space art with Dr. David Morrison at the IAAA show opening at the Fleet Theater. Photo Copyright by Rick Sternbach.


3. Ron Miller painted this view of explorers on Iapetus, one of many pieces done for the upcoming book, Leaving the Cradle. Artwork Copyright by Ron Miller.

4. Don Dixon and Rick Sternbach collaborated on this rendering of the Space Telescope for SCIENCE DIGEST magazine. Art Copyright by Don Dixon and Rick Sternbach.
These are graphic printouts from my program on solar system objects. Figure 1 shows Jupiter, drawn to scale, in the sky of Io. Figure 2 shows the relative apparent sizes of Jupiter (left) and Io as viewed from a distance of 20,000 km from Io.

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Impressions of Death Valley

by

Michael W. Carroll

From the air, Death Valley is an immense kingdom of time. Eons have melted the jagged mountains into graceful alluvial fans. Their crowns tower, as sentinels, above the smooth grey slopes.

A gentle web of yellow wisps over the ocher plains. Grey serpents slither from the rusted cliffs into the ivory salt flats, ending in white rivulets. Steel-blue streams cut through the tortured jumble encrusting the edges of the salt pan.

At the north end of this magnificent valley, the rolling mountains abruptly darken with volcanic ash. Tiny golden dots mark the presence of the desert beings called creosote bushes. They form an irregular pattern across the dark hills and plains. On the shoulder gapes an orange hole. This great wound drapes the flanks of the mountains with its warm sienna blankets, which cascade across the valley floor.

They come from the depths of the earth: umber-grey creatures breaking through the pristine white plain. They sprout antlers, crowns, horns. Their arms branch out to form turrets, spires, arches and caverns. They assume forms reminiscent of a more familiar world...palaces as stunning as the Taj Majal...castles more inspiring than Windsor.

There is a delicacy to these gargoyles of the valley. Razor-sharp transparent petals glow in the orange of sunset. Frosty fibers link white barbs and thorns.

Is this a shadow of things to come? Will we find these ghostly shapes on the surface of a comet, or at the edge of the Triton sea? We find it here, in Death Valley, bearing silent witness to ancient majesty.

As one gazes upon the face of the Funeral Mountains, one gazes through a time portal. Descending the trails of cliffs or craters is a descent through the gates of the eons. How many decades does my foot cover? How many hundred-thousand years do my legs pass on this walkway across the folded layers of rock and ash?
What ancient Bison grazed on this layer of white soil? What nameless prehistoric beast lumbered through this paper-thin line of orange rock? What primeval ocean caressed this dark natural brickwork?

How many eons have passed? How many?

We think about these rugged keepers of time as we explore their canyons and peaks. What massive forces lifted the archaic beach into the towering mountains? How were they bent and folded like taffy? What great artist touched the layers upon layers with delicate green, tan, and pink?

We ponder the questions as we wander over a landscape which will one day take its place next to other thin eddies of rock. Will anyone see our tiny stripe of minerals and wonder the same things?

Just above the great volcanic crater Ubehebe lies a smaller, less impressive crater named, appropriately enough, Little Hebe. As the sun got lower and the wind came up, we took our coats and walked the half-mile trail to the little crater. From its rim we had a better view of the inside of magnificent Ubehebe. We also had an incredible view of the entire valley.

It felt like we were on the top of the world. We watched as the shadows raced across the salt flats far below us. The rusty mountains turned to gold and crimson. The many colors of these mountains cannot be put into words. It is strange how a limited pallet of earth tones can be so varied! No artist could capture the subtle color changes.

We were here to try.

Key to Group Photo:

Front Row, sitting---Jim Hervat, Laurie Ortiz, Pamela Lee, Joel Hagen, Don Dixon, Andrew Chaikin, Rick Sternbach.

Back row, standing---Robert Kline, Don Davis, Jon Lomberg, Mary Zisk, Mavalyon Vicary, Larry Ortiz, David Campbell, Paul Hudson, Mike Carroll, Kim Poor, Ron Miller, Bill Hartmann.
1. Time Check by Larry Ortiz depicts an explorer on Mars amid towering rock forms. Artwork Copyright by Larry Ortiz.

2. Maralyn Vicary sketches from a vantage point under the folded and jutting rocks of Death Valley. Photo Copyright by Dr. Wm. Hartmann.

3. Don Dixon, Rick Sternbach, Andy Chaikin, Joel Hagen, and Paul Hudson are caught by the camera at Dante’s View. Copyright Wm. Hartmann.

4. Andy Chaikin “explores” Mars hill in Rick Sternbach's mock spacesuit. the nickname "Mars Hill" refers to an area that had rocks similar in appearance to those seen on Mars. Photo Copyright by Rick Sternbach.
1. Aerial view of Ubehebe Crater and "Little Hebe". Photo by Mike Carroll

2. Jupiter and Io by Mike Carroll, based on Ubehebe Crater. Artwork Copyright by Mike Carroll.

3. Mike Carroll at Ubehebe. Photo Copyright by Dr. William K. Hartmann.

4. Devil's Golf Course. Photo Copyright by Rick Sternbach