

Blind artist follows fruitful visions

By S. Derrickson Moore

Sun-News reporter

LAS CRUCES — George Mendoza, Las Cruces' internationally renowned blind artist, author and athlete, has scored another triumph.

A British company is releasing a new line of textile designs inspired by Mendoza's paintings at the October Houston Quilt Market.

After a rare genetic condition left him legally blind during his teens, Mendoza has gone on to become an author, an athlete in international competitions and an artist who has exhibited at museums and galleries throughout the United States.

His achievements have been celebrated in a PBS documentary about his life, a national traveling exhibit of his art work, a biography and now, a new line of fabrics produced by Westminster Fibers' Free Spirit line.

"The collection will include fabric with George's work and coordinates inspired by the world of imagination George's paintings so beautifully express," said Ketra Oberlander, founder of Art of Possibility Studios, who worked with Mendoza on the project. "We're thrilled to work with George and Westminster to create such a beautiful, inspired and lively collection for Free Spirit. We hope the ebullience the work communicates encourages meaningful self-expression among quilters and home sewing enthusiasts."

At his Las Cruces home and studio, Mendoza is celebrating news that "I'm going international once again" and is delighted about praise for his "hot, exciting quilt designs."

But honors and recognition are nothing new for the dauntless artist who once told a reporter he now believes that "my blindness is actually a blessing. I've run in the Olympics and traveled the world, and it's because of my blindness that I publish the books, do lectures and make films. If I wasn't blind, I might be painting the stuff everyone else does."

When Gov. Bill Richardson declared Aug. 4, 2005, George Mendoza Day in New Mexico, he stated Mendoza "continues to exemplify by his achievements" that "blindness is not the end of the world."

In fact, it was not an end but the beginning or a rich life that has encompassed several successful careers and endeavors.

At age 15, Mendoza was diagnosed with a rare genetic condition called fundus flavimaculatus. His central vision was totally obliterated, leaving him with narrow peripheral vision that is "about 20/400 at best" and is distorted with what he calls "kaleidoscope eyes."

But Mendoza persevered and has won state and national titles in competitions for handicapped athletes and even competed with sighted runners in grueling cross-county marathons over difficult terrain. He was selected by the U.S. Association of Blind Athletes to compete in the 1984 Olympics for the Physically Disabled.

His life was the focus of an ABC after-school special and a PBS Documentary, "Vision of the Soul, The George Mendoza Story." He served as director of the New Mexico State University Disabled

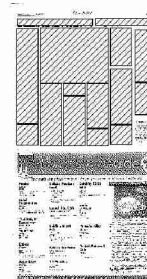
Student Programs and is also a motivational speaker and teaches T'ai Chi. His story was chronicled in "Running Toward the Light, The George Mendoza Story" by William J. Buchanan and Mendoza is a prolific writer himself, authoring "A Vision of Courage" (with James Nathan Post), "The Spirit Man Trilogy," "The Cup of All Good Things," "The Mirrors of Truth" and the recently-completed "The Journey of the Spirit Man."

He has exhibited in galleries and museums locally and throughout the United States. A traveling exhibition, "Vision of the Soul," featured more than 30 of his paintings and toured several U.S. cities.

The New York native has written about a crucial turning point in his life when he met "a little girl named Debbie Bock who was born blind, who had never seen the color green or the shape of a tree ... She asked me a question: 'Can you tell me, what color is the wind?' That question just blew my mind because I was just losing my sight then. She woke up my creative sense by asking me that question."

As anyone who has watched him paint can attest, he has been persistent and creative in finding ways to grow as an artist, creating abstract works that are characterized by vivid colors, evocative images, intricate patterns and a flowing, dramatic composition.

Drawing on imagination and soul power, he's actually managed to "paint the wind" and convey his vivid and personal impressions of the world. To maximize his limited vision, he paints outdoors in the morning when the light



is brightest.

He has developed his own paint mixing techniques and works on large canvases, a small patch at a time. He has credited the support of mom, Cindy Huber, friends and colleagues and the occasional milagros (miracles) that have come his way, in the form of a Chimayo spiritual encounter or a new technology. A few years ago, he began working with Enhanced Vision, a company that makes devices to help the visually impaired. The company's special digital camera helped him to get a clearer overview of his own paintings for the first time, he said.

Many of his paintings are inspired by glimpses of the Southwest. In a description of his painting, "Blind Man Touching the Sun," he writes, "When I moved to New Mexico with Mom, I discovered that I was able to see so much better here that I could get out and do things ... The sun is a very real companion to me. Here, you can always feel the sun when it is up. When I am out under the sky, the sun helps me understand where I am, where I am going, and amazingly, it helps me see."

Books by and about Mendoza are available through regional bookstores and online sources, including Amazon.

com.

For information about his work and art, visit online at www.georgemendoza.com and at www.georgemendoza.com/painter or call him at (575) 522-1074.

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George Mendoza

About George Mendoza

Books, a movie, documentaries and art exhibits have profiled the blind artist, author and athlete

► Mendoza's art inspired a textile collection for Westminster Fibers' Free Spirit line.

► Documentary: "Vision of the Soul, The George Mendoza Story" aired on PBS.

► "Vision of the Soul" national touring exhibit featured 32 Mendoza paintings.

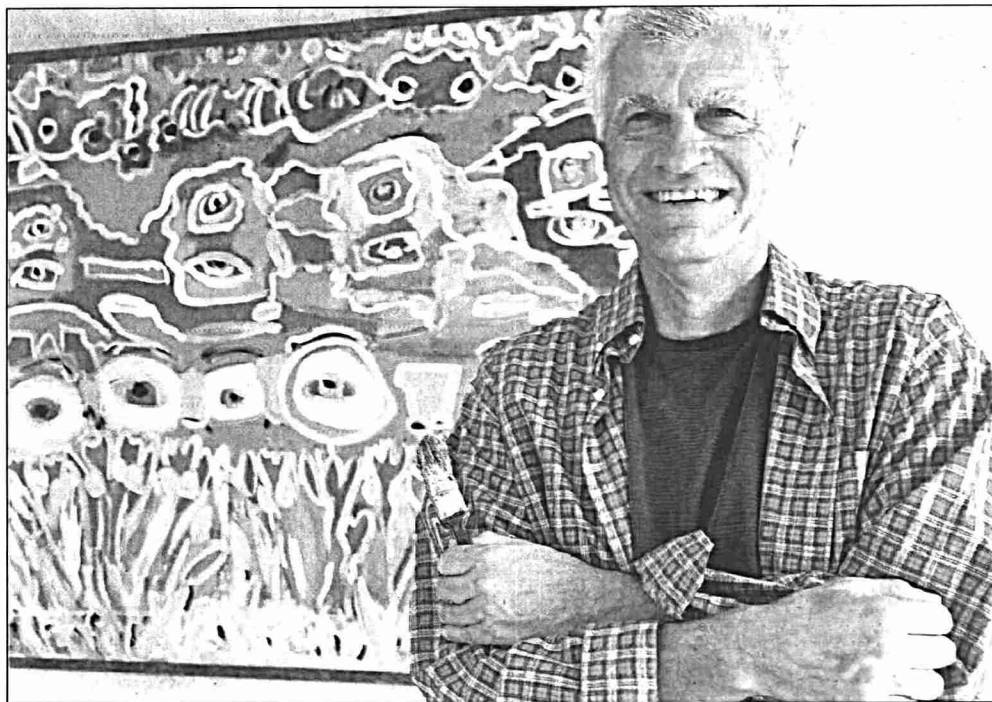
► Biography: "Running Toward the Light, The George Mendoza Story" by William J. Buchanan

► Books by Mendoza: "A Vision of Courage" (with James Nathan Post), "The Spirit Man Trilogy," "The Cup of All Good Things" "The Mirrors of Truth" and "The Journey of the Spirit Man"

► Info on Mendoza's projects: www.georgemendoza.com, www.georgemendoza.com/painter, (575) 522-1074



George Mendoza's artwork, shown here, has inspired a line of textiles produced by a British firm.



Sun-News photo by Norm Dettlaff

Local artist George Mendoza, 54, holds a tool he works with as he stands in front of one of his paintings Friday at his Las Cruces home.