

George Mendoza

Textile company picks up designs by blind artist

By **S. Derrickson Moore**
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LAS CRUCES — A British company is releasing a new line of textile designs inspired by paintings by George Mendoza, Las Cruces' internationally renowned blind artist.

A rare genetic condition left Mendoza legally blind during his teens, but he 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 work, a biography, and now a line of fabrics produced by Westminster Fibers' Free Spirit line. It will be unveiled in October at the Houston Quilt Market.

"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 artist, who has said he believes that "my blindness is actually a blessing."

"It's because of my blindness that I publish the books, do lectures and make films," he said. "If I wasn't blind, I might be painting the stuff everyone else does."

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

His life was the focus of an ABC after-school special and a PBS Documentary, "Vision of the Soul, The George Mendoza Story." His story was chronicled in "Running Toward the Light, The George Mendoza Story" by William J. Buchanan, and Mendoza is a prolific writer himself.

In a crucial point in his life, 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."

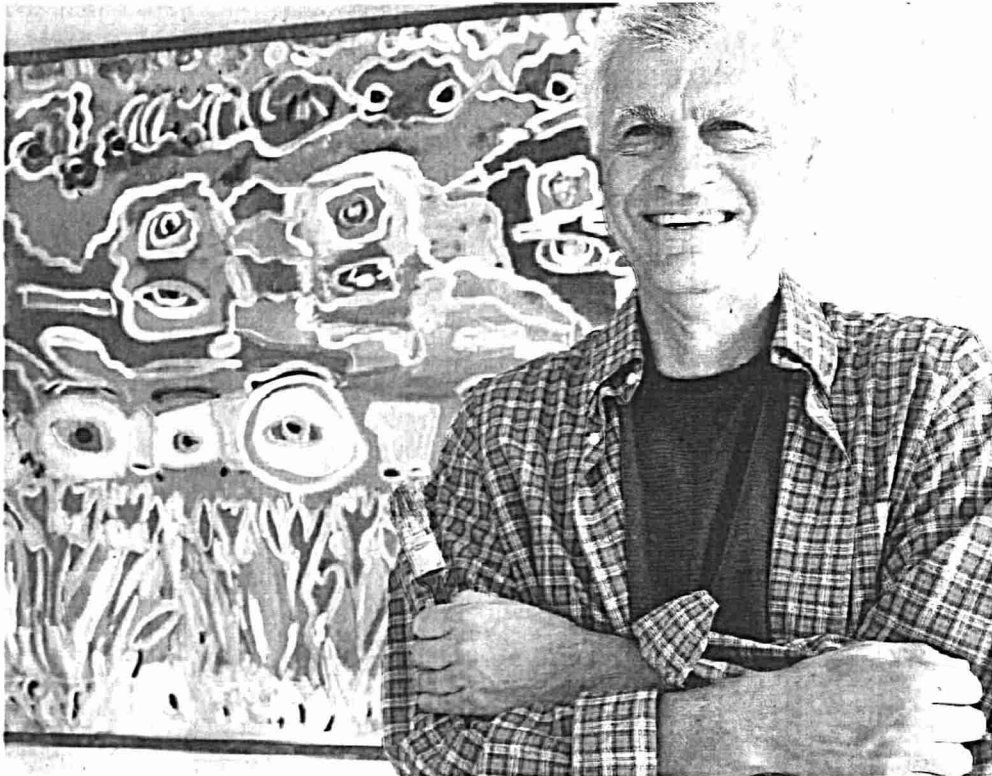
To maximize his limited vision, he paints outdoors in the morning, when the light is brightest. He has developed his own paint-mixing techniques and works on large canvases, a small patch at a time.

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.

For information about his work and art, visit online at www.georgemendoza.com and www.georgemendoza.com/painter.

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Norm Dettlaff / Las Cruces Sun News

George Mendoza, 54, stands in front of one of his paintings at his Las Cruces home. Mendoza is legally blind.