

Artist sees the world from soul

■ *Designs of renowned painter will be used in fabric collection*

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In George Mendoza's ironic painting "Wise Tree," images of eyes stare out from a tree of knowledge, while in the background, eyes peer out from a canopy of clouds.

It's ironic, perhaps, because the 54-year-old Las Cruces painter is legally blind, though he's never allowed it to keep him from the light. Since going nearly totally blind at 15, Mendoza has compiled an impressive résumé as a world-class distance runner, Disabled Olympics gold medal winner, author, painter and motivational speaker.

Now his artwork has cast him into the limelight. Three of Mendoza's paintings will be featured as designs in a new fabric collection by Westminster Fibers, a premium wholesale provider of creative, original fabric designs.

The new 100 percent cotton fabric collection will debut in October at the International Quilt Market Show in Houston.

"It's big time," Mendoza said. "It's like winning the lottery."

Art of Possibilities Studios of California, which represents Mendoza and other disabled artists, announced the licensing deal with Westminster Fibers.

Besides being good business for himself, it's good business for blind and disabled artists everywhere seeking financial independence, Mendoza said.

The founder of Art of Possibility Studios and a blind artist herself, Ketra Oberlander, said, "George's richly colored



MENDOZA:
 Las Cruces painter is legally blind

paintings embody optimism and ... the boundless spirit of man's imagination."

"This magnificent fabric collection is sure to inspire retailers, clothing, furniture and bedding manufacturers, as well as home quilters and other designers worldwide," said Joyce Robertson, general manager of Westminster Fibers Lifestyle Fabrics.

At 15 in Long Island, N.Y., where he grew up, Mendoza wasn't feeling much optimism. It seemed the world would be a dark and lonely place after a rare disease caused macular degeneration in his eyes, plunging him into near total darkness.

"The blindness just came out of nowhere," Mendoza said. "My mom told me then that I was going to have to maintain

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one hell of an ego, self confidence and self esteem to compete in the world."

He had already developed those qualities as a promising young star athlete in high school, but then his world began to slip into darkness, and so did his confidence, replaced by depression and even thoughts of suicide.

Then a seemingly innocuous question from a little girl blind since birth shook his sensibilities. The little girl felt a gust of wind go through her hair, and she asked Mendoza, "What color is the wind?"

"My first impulse was to tell her it has no color, but then my imagination started to go and I told her it's like all the colors of a rainbow," he said. "I told her she could use her own imagination to see the colors too."

Soon, Mendoza and his family moved to New Mexico, where Mendoza went to the New Mexico School for the Blind in Alamogordo.

"I sensed a lot of talent there in the midst of a lot of tragedy," he said.

He had another life-



changing encounter when he complained to a priest that he frequently saw annoying “dazzling colors and wavy lines.”

“He told me to paint them,” Mendoza said.

The licensing deal for his art designs represents just one more point of light in a growing arc that includes writing three books, exhibiting his artwork in various galleries and being featured twice in PBS documentaries, first in 1989 in “The George Mendoza Story,” narrated by Robert Duvall, and in 2006, “Vision of the Soul — The George Mendoza Story.”

Mendoza counsels anyone who has become blind or disabled that there are things you can do, and there are things you can't, and it's up to you to discover which.

“I've always been real lucky about finding things I can do, and I'm just going to keep on working hard at living.”



Images of eyes stare out from this George Mendoza painting, “Wise Tree,” one of three paintings to be featured in a new fiber collection.