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Joshua Franco Is Finally Realizing His Dream of Becoming A Painter

By [Dan Mayfield](#)

Journal Staff Writer

Joshua Franco has known he could be — should be — a professional artist. He just didn't know how to do it.

"I always knew it was there, I just didn't know how to break in," Franco said. "I would visit galleries in Santa Fe and Taos. I could (paint) that. But how do you sell it?"

Franco, not that long ago, hit the Catch 22 that snags so many young artists: He needed to get a show to prove he could sell art. He needed to sell art to prove he deserved a show.

"I remember going up to R.C. Gorman once at a show. I said, 'How do you do this?' " Franco said. "He said, 'Sign your name clearly so people know who did it.' "

Of course there's a lot more to it than that and Franco has spent the last 10 years trying to figure it out. Now, opening Friday, Nov. 21, Franco has finally made it to his first major show, a solo exhibition at Santa Fe's Blue Rain Gallery.

"I moved to New Mexico to become an artist. I managed to get back on track," he said.

Many in Albuquerque know Franco as the former director of Fort 105 in Albuquerque, an art studio collective. But his long-term goal — halted by fits and starts — has always been to be a full-time painter.

Franco and his wife, Colleen, settled on a five-year plan for him to become a professional artist who could quit his day job in 1999. Franco met Colleen in high school in Allentown, Pa., and the two high school sweethearts both realized they had a love of art and adventure. She has always been there to support his singular goal, he said.

"It goes back to when I was 18. I just, for me, I was depressed and angry as a teenager and I got to a point that I didn't know what to do," he said. "I remember going to these nursing homes and seeing people sitting in the same seat all the time and they had a lifetime of regrets."

He didn't know what he wanted to do, but he knew he didn't want to end his life with regrets.

After college, where he studied commercial design and graphic arts, he decided to move. He could move West to be with his mother, who was a crafts artist in Taos, or he could go to New York and try his hand at an advertising career at one of the Madison Avenue firms.

"I knew that I wanted to move to New Mexico," he said. "But I figured I would move to New York City and live that life."

But Colleen stepped in with a plan for an art career, he said.

"Colleen was willing to give me five years," he said.

In 2000, the young couple settled on a starry-eyed plan: "We were going to live off the grid in an Earthship in Taos," Franco said. After two months the plan failed, though they did find their Earthship and give it a go.

The life wasn't as hard as Colleen's commute to Santa Fe for her job, and the toll the commute took on the couple's Volkswagen.

As long as Franco was surrounded by art, he said, he was happy and they moved to Santa Fe.

"From Taos to Santa Fe, the art surrounds you," Franco said.

Then, Colleen got a job in Albuquerque and again her commute brought the couple south. On Sept. 11, 2001, they moved to Albuquerque.

"I didn't come from money, so I figured no matter what it's going to be a struggle," he said. "I worked in galleries, I did construction, and even did coffee demos at Sam's Club — whatever would buy me time. At the same time, I was able to not have a full-time job."

But Albuquerque was more of a struggle than he imagined. Contemporary art, and artists, are harder to find here than in parts north. He ended up finding and renting a studio from Fort 105, an office building that was converted to artists' studios in the late 1990s. Not long after he rented his small studio, he started helping the manager run the studio spaces.

Next thing he knew, he was the manager himself and that full-time job he didn't want found him in 2004.

"When I started to run the gallery I knew I wasn't going to be a painter," he said.

Franco says he paints slowly. His works are detailed, almost obsessively so, and at best he can produce a dozen paintings a year. When he took over Fort 105, he said, he saw his output drop to three paintings a year.

In late 2007, despite becoming the de facto gallerist and manager at Fort 105, he decided to walk away.

"I needed to," he said.

He was seeing his dream of becoming a painter slip away.

And as always, he said, Colleen was there to get him back on track. He took the offer of a solo show at Blue Rain and spent the last 10 months holed up in his living room/studio in the North Valley, working 10 to 18 hours a day on the 12 new paintings for the show. Colleen worked to buy Joshua time.

"You know, you never get what you want, but I'm happy," he said. "(The gallery) sold a piece straight from an ad. I'm getting a lot of response."

"I had to have this show."

WHAT: "New Works by Joshua S. Franco"

WHEN: Friday, Nov. 21-Dec. 15. Artist reception at 5 p.m. Nov. 28. Regular gallery hours are 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays

WHERE: Blue Rain Gallery, 130 Lincoln Ave., Santa Fe. Call (505) 954-9902