



Albuquerque via-Santa Fe, via-Taos, via-Allentown artist Joshua S. Franco will exhibit a dozen new works for his first solo show in nearly a decade at Santa Fe's Blue Rain Gallery. Works such as "Dreams That You Dream Really Do Come True" (at left with tin frame by BC Designs) and "Staying on Track" (above) will be on display through December 15. A Blue Rain Gallery reception will be held on November 28 at 5p.

## Adjusting contrasts

Pennsylvania expatriate happily settles in New Mexico and discovers its broad, 'deep blue' skies, and even broader artistic and communal horizons

BY ERIN PENNER

Joshua S. Franco's upcoming exhibition of new work at The Blue Rain Gallery is surrealist and deeply symbolic, introverted and reflective, yet it somehow retains a universality that subtly instills a certain homegrown quality.

Franco grew up far from New Mexico, Pennsylvania to be exact. He has cited his mother's fearless use of color in her own work as an inspiration and a counterpoint to the bleakness he encountered coming of age in Allentown. Along with his wife, Colleen, Franco moved to New Mexico in 2000. At first settling in Taos, then Santa Fe, the pair finally came to live in Albuquerque on September 11, 2001. When asked if the landscape of New Mexico has inspired him in the same way his mother's use of color did, Franco responds that the openness and deep blue of the Southwestern sky and the contrast of the desert and the mountains has really broadened his artistic horizons. Without question, that all too familiar and influential

New Mexican canopy can be found in the work now being showcased at Blue Rain: the very universal butterfly form is set against brilliant blue New Mexican-esque skies, offering vivid, lasting impressions.

But bigger than the sky's influence, it seems, is the fact that since moving to New Mexico, Franco has been surrounded from Taos all the way to Albuquerque by a diverse group of art and artists. Even when he has experienced hiccups in his own career, such as the three recent years he spent running the Downtown Contemporary Art Center (DCAC), where he managed studio tenants, gallery-goers and a good number of local art shows (a time when Franco saw his own painting slow substantially), he says he always received a tremendous amount of support from the art community and feels grateful to Albuquerque.

Franco had already stepped away from running DCAC, now known as Fort 105 Studio (4th and Central), when Santa Fe's Blue Rain Gallery offered him a solo show last year. The art space's directors specified

that Franco proffer all new works. Through the course of 10 months, Franco managed to produce a dozen pieces, all of which will be on display at the Blue Rain show. Nearly half of the exhibit, Franco explained, is comprised of miniatures, which is a testament to the artist's skill and care, considering the phenomenally intricate detail of those pieces. One piece in particular, "Staying on Track" depicts a labyrinth of exotic fruit "entrails" being carried by by three diligent ants against that familiar New Mexican sky.

Much of Franco's work has a very dreamlike quality — a giant canine head commands a World War II-era aircraft while a double rainbow arcs through umbra clouds — that often integrates symbolic and sometimes incongruous imagery. He noted that often the inspiration for such works comes from casually observing everyday articles as mundane as the frames that he uses to mount his canvases. Franco explained that, if he's out and about and a frame catches his eye, he will procure it and hang on to the object until

### EXHIBIT

New Works by  
Joshua S. Franco

Through Dec. 15

RECEPTION:

5p, Fri., Nov. 28

Blue Rain Gallery  
130 Lincoln, Santa Fe,  
505.954.9902

[joshuafrancoart.com](http://joshuafrancoart.com)  
[blueraingallery.com](http://blueraingallery.com)

the right inspiration strikes, sometimes years later.

The Blue Rain exhibit marks Franco's first solo show in nearly eight years. The artist will be on hand to take questions and comments during the November 28 reception.