

WSAC Newsletter

Jewels of the Lost Artist
West Side Art Coalition Newsletter
(Member Profile)



Jose F Rios,
surrounded by his works of art.
His First Solo Show starts:
Tuesday March 6, 2001 - March 17,
2001
at: Gelabert Studios Gallery NYC
255 West 86th St
New York, NY 10024

Child art prodigy. Boozer at age 11. Heroin addict. Homeless. Ex-con. The latest Hollywood saga of the messed-up, doomed artist? Nope, this is the real life story of Jose Rios. Only this story has a happy ending. Today, Jose is clean, supporting himself as a mastercarpenter and painting his way to his first one-man show.

The Rios family moved to New York from Puerto Rico when Jose was two. The youngest of four children, Jose's artistic gifts were quickly recognized. A host of honors, including a city-wide art award, capped his high school graduation and should have launched a brilliant art career. Instead, Jose began a downward spiral that would last for many years.

Jose likes to say the Rios family shares two important traits: killer eyebrows and artistic talent. His father, an artist and inventor, who could be a loving father one minute, was also a demon-plagued alcoholic. At 16, Jose turned his back on his turbulent home life and struck off on his own to earn a living. But childhood experiments with booze and drugs left the teen-ager vulnerable to the temptations of the street and after the death of his father, he was soon fighting demons of his own. The promising young artist became just another homeless junkie.

During the last six years of his life on the street, Jose's inner artist started to resurface in strange ways. He relocated to the Village, made a home out of a cardboard box (where he ate dinner by candlelight), scavenged for discarded junk, arranging it artistically to entice buyers. Then, the bomb dropped. Picked up from time to time for drug abuse, Jose was finally arrested and convicted for dealing. But this is a story with a happy ending, right? In prison, Jose began to draw again doing commissioned portraits of other prisoners' families. He was actually making a living at art! In prison! Why not outside? He knew he'd never go back to the street, drugs, the cardboard box.

Everything Jose does today is geared towards his art. He works as a freelance carpenter to give himself the freedom to paint (often 8-10 hours at a time), he lives in his studio. Best of all, he has reunited with his 23-year-old daughter Jephthahlyn, who not only presented Jose with his first grandson, but also acts as agent, PR contact, good friend.

I asked Jose who his favorite painter is and wasn't surprised when he said Van Gogh. Demons come in many forms. Sadly, Van Gogh's won the ultimate battle. Triumphant, Jose Rios vanquished his.

By Marianne McNamara
Editor of the WSAC - (March 2001)