

Ruben Gallegos Biography

Ruben was born and raised in the Espanola Valley in Northern New Mexico to Hipolity and Sarah Gallegos. He is the fifth child in a family of seven children.

Art has always been a way of life for Ruben. As a young boy he remembers watching his mother drawing or working on various craft projects. In elementary school he was called "the artist" by his classmates because he was always drawing or "doodling" as his teachers would say.

In high school Ruben sold sketches of his classmates for \$1 each. Even then he strived for realism and detail. His first major project was sketching Robert Kennedy. The high school annual staff requested that he do this for the yearbook as a tribute to Senator Kennedy, being that he had died that year. He was able to capture a good likeness and was proud of his efforts since the portrait was featured in the yearbook.

After completing high school, Ruben enrolled in a technical vocational school to study Architectural Drafting. It took a year for him to realize that drawing straight lines was not for him. He left to attend Adams State College in Alamosa, Colorado. He later transferred to New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico, which had a much better art department. At that time he studied under renowned artist, Elmer Schooley.

During Ruben's time in college, there were many political and social events which influenced his art. This was the time when the Vietnam War was near the end and minority movements were in progress on college campuses. He used his artistic talent to paint murals and posters for protest marches. Although Ruben is a person of few words, if you study his paintings you can learn to understand him and his feelings about things.

Ruben obtained his Art Education degree in 1975 and started teaching in Northern New Mexico. At this time he devoted his time to his career. There was very little time for further development of his art. After teaching for eight years, he left the profession and moved to Albuquerque.

He then, for the first time in many years devoted his time to developing his art. For the first two years he sold his paintings in art shows and small galleries. Long hours of soul searching and researching the different markets taught him that it was going to be difficult "making it" as an artist.

Although Ruben knew that he had talent, there was no mistaking that the competition was stiff. He knew he needed that one product; but what was it? One Christmas he decided to decorate his booth at an art show with a few egg ornaments. He thought this would be different and cause people to stop by his booth. He had seen egg art before and thus started painting a few simple Mimbres designs on the eggs. To his surprise, within the first few hours of the show, all the egg ornaments sold and people were asking for more. He knew at this time he was on to something.

Back at his home, Ruben brainstormed for new designs. The excitement shown by his patrons caused an unexplainable feeling in him which made him want to create more and more. He soon discovered that he was the only person painting and marketing southwest designed eggs. There are many more now.

Ruben has never considered his art an "Easter egg", but instead a work of art done with much skill and love. It was hard for him to master holding and painting on an egg shell. Many hours of development were to take place. He still feels his art is evolving.

Designs that are often found on Ruben's eggs include Kachinas, Northern New Mexico Churches, Mimbres designs, wildlife, birds, and pottery designs. Ruben says that the most complex design is the painting of DiVinci's "Last Supper" on an ostrich egg; he painted this during the Easter season several years ago and said "now that's an Easter egg!"

Ruben is now incorporating the eggshell with clay in his sculptures. He is best known for his story tellers. Other sculptures include Kosharies, Mudheads, maidens and kivas.

Ruben often finds himself giving an egg to good friends because he says they are "a symbol of life, fertility, and friendship. It is a way of expressing how you feel toward that person."

Since working with eggshell painting, Ruben has found that there are many egg collectors in the world. He presents his work at "Egg Shows" a few times a year as well as marketing his designs at wholesale trade markets. He has won national acclaim for his work and was chosen as the artist to represent New Mexico during the 1996-1997 Egg Exhibit held at the White House in Washington D.C.

Ruben has many talents. He delves into his Hispanic roots by participating in the annual Spanish Market in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He paints retablos and carves bultos (religious icons carved from wood) for the show which is held twice a year during the last weekend in July and the first weekend in December.

Ruben has found that he no longer has to present his work at small art shows since his hard work and persistence is finally being appreciated by buyers who are willing to pay the price for a one-of-a-kind or limited edition "Gallegos" art piece.