

Jose Robledo, talented Rancho artist, dies of heart attack

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by Greg Waskul, Rancho Los Amigos Foundation



Jose Robledo untapped an artistic ability after he was stricken with Limb-Girdle muscular dystrophy. He died April 3 of a heart attack. Photos by Greg Waskul

DOWNEY – Jose Eduardo Robledo, an internationally renowned artist and a member of the Mouth and Foot Painter’s Association, died April 3 of a heart attack near his home in California City, Calif. He was 39.

Jose was a former patient of Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center and a member of the hospital’s renowned Art of Rancho program. In addition to gracing the cover of the Art of Rancho book in 2008, Jose’s work appeared in galleries and publications throughout the world.

“Jose was a strong but humble man, who overcame incredible odds to succeed as an artist, as a family member, and as a father,” said fellow Rancho artist and friend Ruben Rios. “He set ambitious goals, and in the end he achieved his dreams.”

“Jose was a brilliant artist, and a truly remarkable human being,” said Rancho Chief Executive Officer Jorge Orozco. “In addition to his limitless artistic vision, Jose served as a mentor to our young artists. He will be missed by the many people whose lives he touched at Rancho and in the community.”

Jose was born on July 15, 1971 at Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center. He attended elementary and middle school in the local area before going to high school in Porterville. In 1994, Jose enrolled in the Conservation Corps in San Bernardino and became a crew leader a year later in Lake Tahoe.

After moving to Colorado to pursue a career as a mining engineer, he began to experience

weakness throughout his body. He moved back to Los Angeles and was diagnosed with Limb-Girdle muscular dystrophy, a debilitating disease that typically strikes adolescents and young adults.

After Jose's initial diagnosis, the disease progressed rapidly to the point where he couldn't eat and was bedridden. He quickly lost the ability to breathe on his own and in 1999 he was told he had only months to live.

After extensive, lifesaving treatment at Suburban Medical Center in Paramount, he came to Rancho for rehabilitation.

"When I was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, I was both angry and scared," Jose said in 2006. "I began using a pencil and pad to 'draw' my feelings, then began painting. I achieved a major goal by being accepted into the Mouth and Foot Painting Artists. I hope that my life can inspire my children and others to never give up."

"He always hoped to make a difference in people's lives," said his sister Sandra Robledo. "He fought his disease until the end, becoming a great artist whose work inspired people throughout the world."

"His goal in life was make sure that he left a legacy, which was created by both his paintings and the strength he showed as he continued to excel in to life no matter what happened to him," she added. "He was always a fighter, a very kind and loving brother, and an extraordinary man. We hope to continue with the legacy of his paintings and be able to display his beautiful artworks."

Over a decade of involvement, Jose became one of the leaders of the Art of Rancho program. "Jose was a spectacular artist, but he was also an outstanding person and a wonderful friend, who loved his children and his family, loved his work, and set an example of creativity and integrity for all of us," Ruben said.

Jose also served as a mentor to young Rancho artist Deisy Mendez, who was recently accepted into the Mouth and Foot Painting Artists. "He was very proud of Deisy's accomplishments, and very humble about the significant role he played in her success," Ruben added.

Jose's inspirational story was frequently told in newspapers throughout Southern California. He received many awards and accolades, including the Javier Gutierrez Youth Award from the Long Beach Centro Community Hispanic Association.

"God gave him a talent that was never exposed at an early age," Sandra said. "But it emerged when he needed it, and gave him courage to continue with life and be able to help support his three kids through his paintings. We love him and he will always be a precious memory to us."

Private memorial services for Jose were held in Los Angeles and Commerce, Calif. He is survived by his children Liberty, Joshua and Deborah Robledo; his mother Maria Nolasco; sisters Sandra Robledo and Verence Casillas; and eight nephews and nieces.

Donations to support Jose's children may be made to the Rancho Los Amigos Foundation, P.O. Box 2370, Downey, CA 90242.