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Gonzalez' Artist-in-Residence exhibition opens at RMAC Friday

[Jason Stewart](#)

Record Staff Writer

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Artist Rigoberto Gonzalez adjusts his painting, "Levanton," Tuesday, in preparation for his month-long exhibit at the Roswell Museum and Art Center. ([Daily Record/Jason Stewart](#)) they provide a venue for exhibition."

Rigo Gonzalez stood next to "Levanton," his life-sized painting of a brutal drug cartel kidnapping. The painting faced the wall, upside-down.

Gonzalez stepped aside and watched closely as his friend, artist Jonathan Pincus, and Ben Brooks, preparator at the Roswell Museum and Art Center, carefully flipped the giant painting and set it softly on the ground to await hanging.

One down, 14 to go.

Gonzalez, a resident in the Roswell Artist-in-Residence program, is preparing for his month-long exhibition at the museum. The exhibit opens Friday at 5:30 p.m. in the Marshall and Winston Gallery with an artist talk, followed by a reception.

"I'm excited to see the response. We paint so that others can see our work."

Resident artists are not under any obligation to exhibit their work, said Program Director Stephen Fleming, though they are welcome to do so.

"We have a beneficial partnership with RMAC. We can provide talented artists, and

From the program's inception in 1967 until 1988, it was formally affiliated with the museum. When the museum came under the auspices of the city of Roswell, the Artist in Residence program became an independent 501(c)(3) organization to avoid violating anti-donation laws.

Fleming said that the program was conceived to allow artists to step out of the mainstream to concentrate on their art. "We like to spur the creative juices. They are freed from a part-time job, teaching requirements or a class load."

Residents live in one of two compounds in northeast Roswell. Fleming and a staff of five operate the program much like a family business. "It's cooperative and collaborative. We have an unconventional family angle, as we are an extended artistic family."

Gonzalez said that he learned about the program when he was in New York City and jumped at the opportunity. "It's great," he said recently in his studio. "We would otherwise spend a lot of energy on paying bills that we get to devote to art."

Gonzalez and his wife, Adina, also an artist, live in a fully-furnished, three-bedroom house at the Cook Road compound. They receive an \$800 monthly stipend for expenses.

The artists form an extended family, though Fleming said that the isolated nature of the compounds leads local residents to the incorrect conclusion that the artists are somehow weird. "They're normal people. It's a quiet and simple existence."

Since the program began, 194 artists have participated. They come to Roswell from all parts of the country and worldwide. Along with Gonzalez, who is originally from Tamaulipas, Mexico, the current residents are: Kelli Vance, from Texas; Renee van der Stelt, from Maryland; Alexandra Kraft, from Arizona; Michael Stillion, from Ohio; Mimi Kato, from Japan; Koi Neng Liew, from Singapore; Petra Soesemann, from Ohio; Linda Mieko Allen, from Massachusetts; and Janell Wicht, from Nebraska.

Fleming was also a resident, in 1986. He took over as program director in 1994. "Our program is run by artists. It covers the whole spectrum, from representational art, like Rigo's, to the avant-garde. We try to be as open-minded about the kinds of art as we can."

At the museum, the exhibit took shape. Brooks said artists typically require three days to set up an exhibit. "They make the best aesthetic choices, especially when it comes to lighting. We provide the space and leave those decisions up to them."

Brooks said that the museum is planning another show featuring work created at the compounds, with a twist. "A Rare Family" will feature the work of other resident artists and their spouses in the Spring River Gallery, though the exact dates have not been set.

"You never know what you're going to get. It is a hodgepodge of personalities."

Gonzalez's paintings have a baroque quality, depicting horrific violence with intense clarity. They tell gripping stories.

"I communicate to the audience. There are others who are communicating the same message through literature and music. I'm doing it through paint."

The paintings of severed heads challenge the viewer to recognize the role U.S. policy plays in Mexican violence. "All the weapons are coming from the U.S. My influence was the Gulf cartel. They used to be special forces officers who were trained in the U.S. Now they are protecting the cartel. It's another case of the U.S. getting involved in a counter-insurgency. It never works.

"A number of people have told me that they knew victims and that my work cut too closely to them."

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