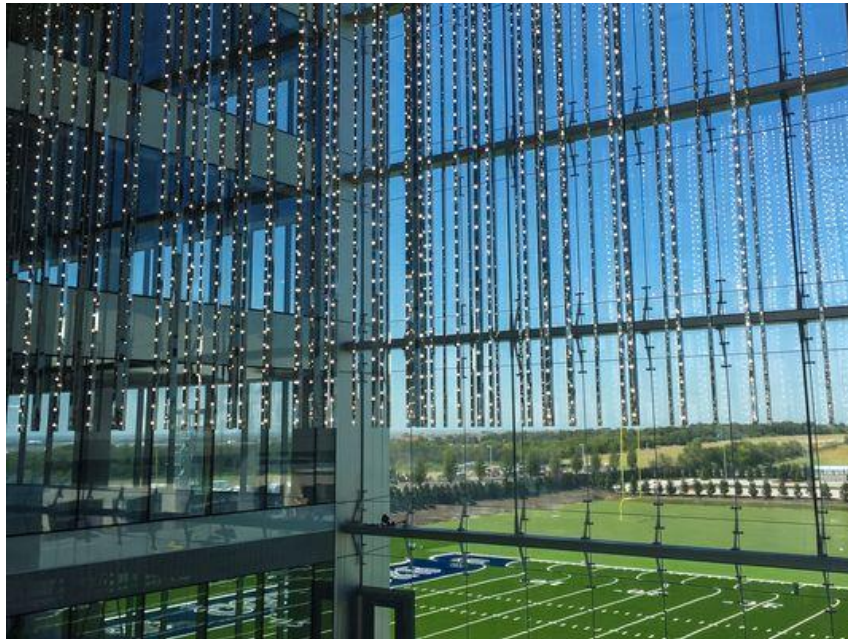


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Visual artist Leo Villareal's art has been showcased and exhibited worldwide.

By Dave Acosta



From the massive LED sculpture that lights the entrance to Dallas Cowboys lavish headquarters in Frisco, Texas, to the spectacular lights which transformed the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge into a tourist attraction in 2013, the former El Pasoan's light-based art has wowed millions of people worldwide.

For his achievements, Villareal was among the recipients of the 2017 Texas Medal of Arts Award last month at the Texas Cultural Trust's signature event in Austin. Other recipients included country singer Kenny Rogers, journalist Scott Pelley and Houston gospel singer Yolanda Adams.

The \$8 million light display designed by former-El Pasoan Leo Villareal, on the west span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay bridge debuted in March 2013.. It was initially contracted as a two-year project ending in 2015, but was reinstalled and re-lit in 2016 on a long-term basis. (Photo: James Ewing/Associated Press)

"It was very thrilling to receive the medal from the governor and realizing that the Texas Cultural Trust really cares about arts education in Texas," Villareal said during a phone interview from his New York studio. "I was very happy to hear that someone cares about creativity and its recognition as a very important part of the Texas economy."

The Texas Medal of Arts Awards are a "sort-of Kennedy Center Honors done Texas style," said Jennifer Ransom Rice, executive director of the nonprofit Texas Cultural Trust that advocates for the arts as an economic driver.

“Leo ... has had a global impact,” Rice said. “The selection committee felt he best represented what visual arts can be in Texas.”

Born in Albuquerque, Villareal grew up in El Paso and Juárez before enrolling in a New England boarding school at the age of 16. He graduated with degrees in art and computer design from Yale and NYU.

Villareal said he still has a lot of family in El Paso and Juárez.

His mother is originally from Marfa, which in recent years has transformed itself into a hub for artists, many from New York. Villareal says he spends a lot of time there and is working on restoring his family home in the West Texas town.



Visual artist Leo Villareal, who grew up in El Paso and Juarez, was a recipient of the Texas Medal of Arts in February. (Photo: Courtesy)

Villareal last summer completed “Volume” in the lobby of the Dallas Cowboys’ recently opened 90-acre corporate offices. It consists 40-foot LED rods with white LED nodes inside. The rods, 160 of them, hang from a seven-story ceiling in the atrium where Jerry Jones and the Cowboys administration work.

“Sky” is an 11-foot wall that features computer-sequenced LED lights behind glass on display at the Albert Armendariz Sr. Federal Courthouse in Downtown El Paso.

“I see a lot of beauty in nature and the desert,” Villareal said. “Some people take it for granted, but it is very special; the ruggedness of nature. It has certainly had an effect on my work and I’m very inspired by it when I go back.”

<http://www.elpasotimes.com/story/entertainment/arts/2017/03/03/el-paso-visual-artist-awarded-texas-medal-arts/98705870/>