



those honors, they aren't what drive him. He simply has to share his love of the land through his paintings.

A few months ago, Chávez was preparing for a one-man show that opens May 26 at the Manitou Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico. One of the paintings he was working on and hoping to complete for that event was a 4'-by-8' painting titled *Home of Thunder Mountain*.

"While on a painting expedition to that mountain, which is near the Arizona border, a Navajo came up to watch me paint," Chávez says. "He pointed out an area up high on the mountain that had white dirt

and said it's called Place Where the Lightning Strikes. The medicine man climbs up to that spot where the lightning strikes and gathers the white dirt to use in his healing ceremonies."

As large as that piece is, it's not his largest. About eight years ago Chávez worked for a year to complete *Rock of Ages*, a 7'-by-14' painting of the Grand Canyon that he sold to the Tucson Desert Museum. "The painting was priced at \$230,000, and the frame alone cost me \$23,000," he says. "The museum purchased a total of six paintings that year for its permanent collection in one 'swell

foop.' Then I went out and bought a Mercedes Benz and a new wardrobe and paid all my bills!"

That painting and its accompanying price tag was a thrill for Chávez, who started out selling his paintings for \$250 at street shows. His original life plan was not to be an artist, however; it was to be a classical guitarist. "I was involved in music since I was in the fifth grade," he says. "I played the viola and the cello."

Later, Chávez's mother bought him a guitar, and he went on to study classical guitar and composition at the University of New Mexico. He