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"Heading" Out To Nebraska

Texas artist Michael Villarreal didn't know what to do with his life until he started to paint people's heads. Now his mind is blown by the possibilities his future holds out west.

"I'm trying to just live in the moment right now," said the recent Texas State alumnus.

This month Michael Villarreal is heading to the University of Nebraska in Lincoln for a three-year master's program, where he accepted a scholarship and a graduate teaching assistant position for his art.

For Villarreal, 26, the idea of obtaining a master's degree seemed very far-fetched not so long ago.

"It took me a while to realize I wanted to get an education," he said, adding that although

his parents did not graduate from high school, they encouraged him to do what he wanted.

But Villarreal didn't know what he wanted once he graduated from high school. So, he got a job in his hometown of Lockhart, waiting for a wake-up call. That call came when his dad told him to either "get a better job or go to college."

So, Villarreal drew on his high school art class experiences and enrolled at Austin Community College.

But it's when he took steps toward becoming a professional

artist that he enrolled at Texas State, after completing a three-week course through the Kerrville-based Western Art Academy that inspired him to major in painting.

At Texas State, Villarreal was a studio monitor, giving artistic advice to fellow students. "I went in there not realizing how great the program really was," said Villarreal, who credited the faculty and staff of the university's art department for inspiring him to "push [his art] even harder."

The boundaries of Villarreal's future and art continue to be pushed

since he graduated from Texas State and had his work displayed in the Nebraska National Collegiate Juried Art Exhibition.

His work was nominated for a 2014 Hunting Art Prize, and he was chosen for the Navasota Artist in Residence program.

Like any young adventurer heading west, the change of scenery excites him because of the possibilities it holds for artistic inspiration. It's a city looking for pillars like him to help build up its art scene. And he's ready to paint the town...heads.