

Exposing Marfa Myths

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It's a three hour drive from the nearest airport, boasts a population of fewer than 2,000 people, and is best known for an art installation that isn't even within the city limits, but for Mexican Summer, the Brooklyn-based record label formerly home to Ariel Pink and Oneohtrix Point Never, Marfa, TX, turned out to be the perfect location for their new boutique music festival, Marfa Myths.

Running from March 13-15, the second-ever edition of the festival features live sets from the best of Mexican Summer's roster, including Iceage, Tamaryn, and Weyes Blood, along with performance, film, and visual art installations by Donald Judd and Grouper's Liz Harris. Smalltown Texas and Danish punk isn't an obvious combination, but for Keith Abrahamsson, co-founder, of Mexican Summer, it was a no-brainer.

"Everything I heard about Marfa seemed in line with the label aesthetic," he said, "We were really attracted to the normalness of it and the close-knit creative community there, as well as working in an intimate setting with passionate people."

Those passionate people are Ballroom Marfa, a non-profit arts foundation who've brought indie luminaries from Laura Marling to Avey Tare to the small Texas city. Abrahamsson had been in contact with Nicki Ittner, Ballroom's Director of Music, for the past few years, working off a mutual desire to start some kind of festival in Marfa. By 2014, their plans came to fruition and Marfa Myths was born.

The first edition, which took place last March, was a very different beast from this year's event. To start with, it only featured five bands, with no art component at all. It was also entirely free.

But that financial feasibility will hardly make a difference to the average festival-goer. The first two days are still free, while performances by Iceage, Grouper, Tamaryn and more will be covered by a blanket \$15 fee. For die-hard fans, \$40 will get you an exclusive 12" recorded by Dev Hynes and Myths alum Connan Mockasin, along with a tote bag and journal produced by contributing and local artists. Compared to similarly-sized festivals such as the Pitchfork-approved Basilica Soundscape, it's pocket change.

Much like Soundscape, Marfa Myths is much more than just a music festival—it's an opportunity to interact with a thriving artistic community. Marfa is home to numerous galleries, along with large-scale installations from artists like Donald Judd, who counted himself as a permanent resident from the mid-'70s until his death in 1994. As well as showing off local talent, the festival encourages what Ittner calls cross-pollination, with artists primarily known for their music displaying otherwise unseen artworks. Some of this year's top picks include Mexican Summer signee Jefre Cantu-Ledesma's sound art and an outdoor mural created by Liz Harris of Grouper, one the festival's artists in residence.

It may not be as big or as crazy as the other Texas festival this March, but Marfa Myths' rural charm looks like it's here to stay.

"It's going to be inherently limited by the population and the infrastructure of the town but we're totally ok with that," Abrahamsson said. "It's part of the appeal, keeping it intimate. The plan is to do something unique and hopefully continue it for many more years."