

## MARFA MYTHS, A DIARY, PART I: ARRIVING TO SUZANNE CIANI, AND HELADO NEGRO

I watched the sun rise over West Texas in handcuffs.

By César Velasco – April 20, 2018

Scenes from the Marfa Myths Festival Saturday and Sunday



Well, I made it. Strange to think only a couple hours ago I was sitting inside a police car, handcuffed, after three cops, two border patrol officers, and a K-9 unit descended upon my six-and-a-half-hour journey from a show in Austin. The desert had begun to extend as far as the eye can see, similar to the way the ocean stretches for an eternity. Only the mountains interrupted this transcendent flatness, until the most terrifying experience in my life unfolded just 10 miles from my destination.

Thinking about it now, it probably didn't help that I was wearing my favorite –Sailor Poon t-shirt, decorated with the most phallic text anyone could think of: the band's name spelled out in images of bare legs and dildos.

After the cops found ... well, nothing, and

realized that my plates were, in fact, not stolen, they returned my freedom with a quick handshake.

Sitting here now outside one of the Chinati Foundation buildings, waiting for famed composer and synth pioneer Suzanne Ciani's set to start seems slightly unreal. The landscape is like nothing I expected. Permanent sculptures seem to fit a bit too well to have been created by human hands, yet they are perfectly maintained—creating a conflict between the forgotten, barren land of West Texas, and the artists now walking it.

People are approaching; I snap out of these thoughts to realize the set will start soon. I'm continually struck by the stark contrast presented here, between the fashionable New York cool kids and the abandoned trucks and



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gas stations that seem to be present at almost every corner.

It seems every object one encounters at this festival was curated in place by someone at some time. Maybe it was. Ciani's set liberates me from these considerations. The fear and anxiety remaining from my experience on the highway earlier this morning completely evaporated. Isn't it wonderful how good art can do that?

Ciani's control over the modular synthesizer is like nothing I've ever witnessed. The audience becomes still; for a minute I think there are maybe some rules I hadn't been told about attending shows here. I look around to find people in an almost meditative trance.

I am careful with my footsteps as I make my way towards the front, hoping my camera will act as a sort of one-way ticket there. I'm allowed, and I begin to snap some photographs only to find that I am slowly joining the masses in the communal trance. It's like Ciani is conducting an orchestra of stillness, and I'm catching up with the rest of the orchestra.

Finally, I'm there in complete stillness allowing for the sound of the wind and the leaves hitting against the tin roof of this building to compliment the soundtrack being performed. Finally, we are all here, I am here; time to breathe.

I think I am starting to better understand the relationship between this town and the festival. It's almost like they rely on each other to exist. The remote location and seemingly perfectly curated American Southwest scenery is necessary for this to happen as it does—in stillness, and at a slow pace. The more the day goes on the more it feels like a massive art walk as opposed to a festival. No crazed fans or overlapping sets. Instead, a sense of mystery and magic. I wave to someone passing by my van as I write this and receive a half smile back, spelling out the sentiment that we are both in on something together, something that no one else knows, like we have to keep it hidden from the world so that the world won't ruin it.