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## Marfa Myths

Posted by [Jam Bi](#) on March 13, 2015 in [#Marfa](#), [Events](#), [Interviews](#) · 0 Comments

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Texas music festivals are typically monolithic productions: South by Southwest (SXSW), Austin City Limits or Neon Desert Music Festival just to name a few, as if you could expect less from a State where everything is big—our hair, our boots, our lifestyle. We’ve built our collective identity as being the State of ample excess.

One town in west Texas is changing the way music festivals are done, and by doing so, they’re revolutionizing the way that art, music and film are experienced. Marfa Myths, now in its second year, is fortifying the music festival experience into a multi-sensory appreciation of the arts. Contemporary art gallery Ballroom Marfa has partnered up with their friends from New York, indie record label Mexican Summer, to craft a weekend in March into something unforgettable and unique. The only way to understand the ‘myth’ is to behold it yourself.

Nicki Ittner, Ballroom Marfa’s Music Director, and Keith Abrahamsson, Arts and Repertoire for Mexican Summer, took time from their busy schedules to discuss their upcoming collaborative weekend in Marfa, Tx and to explain the method to their process.

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**What is the central theme in this festival? We know that music, art and film will intermingle for three days, however, is there an energy that binds these into a central theme?**

**Nicki:** For me, it has a lot to do with energy. It has a really great energy; it's looseness but with community. It's about encouraging these artists and involving the community too.

**Keith:** I think you're on point, man. There's a definite common thread that runs through each of those disciplines. You have artists who are crossing into each format. Like Liz Harris, who will be painting a mural and also performing. This is also about artists that are multi-disciplined. At Ballroom, we often work a lot with these kinds of artists, so it's very natural for us to incorporate these things [into the festival].

**Nicki:** That's a very excellent example. It feels very natural and...right.

**It seems to me that this will be a very unique, alternative showcase. Would you say that's accurate? How would you describe this festival to someone who hasn't heard of it?**

**Nicki:** I do think that it's very contemporary. Ice Age is very popular and well-known, I'd say. For me, it lies in the interdisciplinary nature of the festival: art, music and film. It's an 'experiential' weekend. On Friday night, we'll have the Software Co. artist music, then afterward the opening of Sam Falls. Then Saturday, we have sort of a meditation session with Jefre [Cantu-Ledesma] and then followed by a sound installation with Greg [Kowalski] and then Saturday night, there's a big concert and the after party. So it's like all these different elements of music; it's not just about having a concert, it's about how you can experience music in many different ways.

It sounds like a very multi-sensory experience.

**Nicki:** Ideally, people will come here, they dive into the whole thing. See, the great thing about the festival is that there are many different places around town. It allows people to experience the town, but in a very relaxed way. It's different from other festivals, where you're confined to the grounds not really experiencing the city. It's a nice way to get around the town; they co-mingle, the town and the festival.



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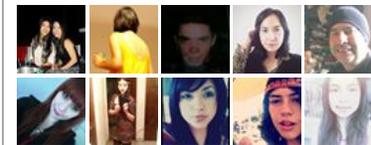
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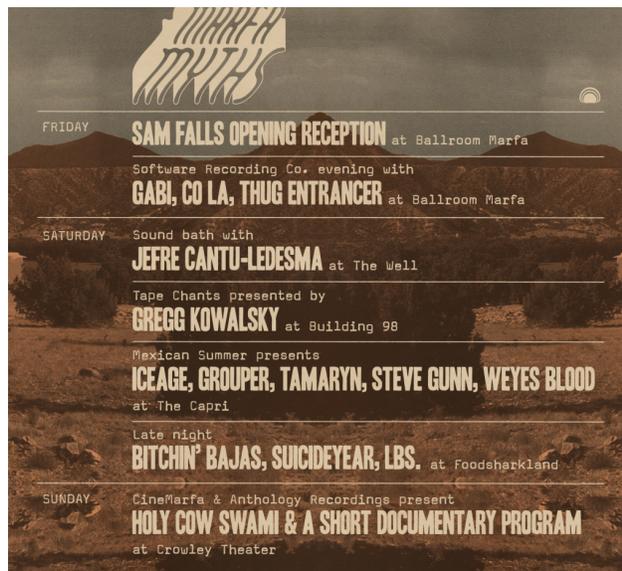
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**Keith:** Which is a huge part of the agenda: to engage the community and have them be a part of this.

**Why Marfa Myths? How did this name come about?**

**Keith:** We tried to figure out what would 'fit' for a while and liked the idea of creating this 'new mythology' in a way. We just liked the name and felt like it was a right fit aesthetically for what we are doing and trying to achieve. It's a non-traditional festival location-wise and in terms of the way we are setting it up, so it felt right.

**What do you hope will be a part of this 'new mythology' you are trying to establish?**

**Keith:** I don't feel we're trying to reinvent the wheel or anything. There have been a lot of festivals have been very well curated, with lots of care and attention to detail. That's what we are trying to do: present something that is compelling to people, something that will make them want to travel and make the trip out to Marfa. It's not the easiest place to get to, you'd really want to come out and want to participate in what we are presenting. I don't think we want to grow huge; I don't think we can, in terms of what the infrastructure can handle.

**Nicki:** I think it's nice to keep it tight, keep it intimate.

**Tell me more about the talent that will be featured in the show. I saw a 'sound bath' will be a part of the experience...**

**Keith:** Let me touch on the 'sound bath' for a bit. So Jefre Cantu-Ledesma is a recording artist with Mexican Summer and he just released a new record. He's an artist that works with a type of music that is noisy and ambient. A sound bath is a meditative and physical experience. We paired him with this holistic center called The Well. He's going to do a 90 minute set of instrumental music that can be pretty dynamic, guttural, low-frequency and immersive.

We are working with a bunch of contemporary artists for the live music sets for Friday and Saturday nights that span across the Software Recording label, which is our sister label—they focus more on electronic music. We've also got the Mexican Summer artists and some outside, off-label artists such as Steve Gunn and Ice Age. Then we've got artists like Tamaryn and Weyes Blood, which are a part of the Mexican Summer family.

Then we've have Liz Harris, whom performs as Grouper on Saturday night, but

she's also going to be painting a semi-permanent outdoor mural.

**Nicki:** It's at The Lumberyard, which is next to a coffee shop called Do Your Thing. The Lumberyard is a really cool space—they have artist studios. One note is that Grouper played for Ballroom Marfa back in 2010 and also had a residency with us as well.



**Seems like there's a really deep connection between New York and Marfa. Keith, your label, Mexican Summer, is based in New York, with several artists under its belt. How would you describe the music that your artists make? Tell me about the diversity—perhaps tell me about the philosophy behind your label.**

**Keith:** That's a tough question. I think it's more about the music being great, and the people willing to work hard and be easy to get along with. It's got to be a combination of those things. That's really the only criteria—I don't go out and try to pull any particular kind of music in. Just whatever resonates and we try to have that resonate as widely as possible. I know that's really vague.

When we started Mexican Summer, we had already been a label for years. It was called Kemado at that point. Mexican Summer started as an aside, there weren't huge expectations for the label. I just really wanted an outlet to release singles and 12 inch vinyls. Something low-pressure that would give me a form to develop artists. It just started to click, it wasn't something we really planned, it just grew on its own and ended up naturally becoming a record label. It was a nice and natural evolution.

**Nicki, lets talk a little more about the visual artists and the films that will be a part of the festival.**

**Nicki:** Sam Falls is an artist that we have been working with for about a year and he was scheduled to have his opening. We usually have live music at all of our openings and we talked about having the Mexican Summer weekend at the same time, just to make it into a big celebration. So that's how that fell together.

We're working with CineMarfa, they're a non-profit here and have a curated film festival. They're truly exceptional and do amazing work. It's a free film festival. So we partnered with them and they chose the screening of Holy Cow Swami which is a documentary about Hari Krishna and his saga. We're also showing a series of documentaries by Anthology Recordings, which is also an extension of

Mexican Summer.

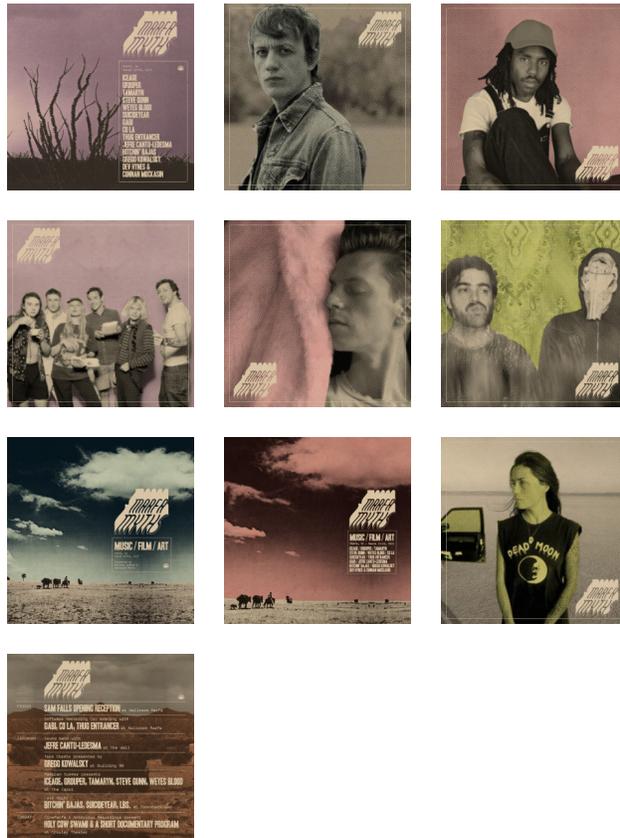
**There's a lot happening! You guys are actually giving out a 12 inch vinyl along with the \$40 Marfa Myth package, too...**

**Nicki:** Right, Mexican Summer is printing that and it'll come with a zine too. This year has just grown so much. Last year the festival only lasted one day and there were 5 bands. This year we're doing the zine, 3 days of events, music, film, visual art and these installations. It's pretty amazing! It's grown so much in such a small amount of time—but all of it feels so organic and natural. It just feels totally right.

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