

STUCK IN MARFA, HELADO NEGRO CONNECTS THROUGH CREATIVITY

By Sarah M. Vasquez



Helado Negro
Marfa Myths 2018
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When Roberto Carlos Lange and his wife, visual artist Kristi Sword, headed to Marfa, Texas in early March, the original plan was to stay for two and a half weeks to work on an art project and leave at the end of the month. Those plans changed as quickly as the COVID-19 pandemic started unfolding. “It’s kinda crazy,” said Lange. “It didn’t seem that urgent when we were traveling. It was kind of like everybody was aware, but then all of a sudden it just went from zero to 100.”

The musician, who performs as Helado Negro, has stayed in Marfa for the almost three months that the world stayed in their homes to reduce the risk of exposure from the coronavirus. The City of Marfa issued a shelter in place that went into effect on March 27, around the time Lange and Sword originally planned to leave. There was a lot for them to consider should they continued with their plan. They weren’t sure if they would be able to fly out of Texas or if they would find a place to stay if they got stranded in another

city. If they were able to book a flight, they would need to find someone in Marfa to drive them to the nearest commercial airport three hours away in El Paso. There were a lot of unanswered questions that would not just risk their health, but those in the community.

So the couple stayed.

Of course, Lange’s work was affected. In a conversation on Talkhouse’s Instagram , Lange told Puerto Rican duo Buscabulla that touring is the largest percent of his income and two-thirds of his income went away overnight. His tours in South America and Europe were cancelled. He was scheduled to play The MusicNOW Music Festival earlier this month in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Primavera Sound festival next month in Barcelona, Spain, but those were cancelled and rescheduled for 2021. He told Raquel Berrios and Luis Alfredo Del Valle of Buscabulla that there was an initial shock when it all went down, but after coming to terms with it, he’s



decided to wait and see how it all pans out.

“Everything will be better,” Lange said to the duo. “Really at this point why are we trying to work so hard at hoping that something is going to change that we have no control over.” But he feels there’s a healing moment after touring “too much” last year. “This is the first time my body and my brain have recovered from so much,” said Lange.

It has been interesting for Lange to witness how quiet the touristy art town was after many businesses closed during the shelter in place, but it wasn’t an unusual sight for him though. It reminded him of his first visit to Marfa in 2009 when he performed at the Marfa Film Festival and things were a little less busy. “During that time, it was busy for the festival but still felt a little chill and slower,” said Lange.

He noticed the increase in tourism when he returned to perform in Marfa Myths in 2018. There were hundreds of people in town for the music festival and more food and shopping options. “It was like a million miles away from what it felt like in 2009,” said Lange.

While he’s in Marfa, he released “New Maps,” a sound map featuring a collection of

field recordings he gathered from his friends. He filmed performances at Building 98 and Marfa Recording Co. with the help of local musicians and the community.

“I think we were lucky to be here because we’ve had the support and encouragement from Ballroom Marfa and the person who brought us, the programs director Sarah Melendez, who was able to help talk through different things and help us reconfigure and get us through the project that we’re working on called Kite Symphony here,” said Lange.

Timing would have it that Lange’s new song with Latina songwriter and his friend, Xenia Rubinos, called “I Fell in Love” was written and completed days before Lange came to Marfa, but he wrote on an Instagram post that he wants the song about love to be a sonic bridge to get people from this moment to the next. “It’s the love that feels hard to hold forever and too good to be true and the love that makes no sense but feels right,” Lange wrote in the post. “It’s everyone’s love and LOVE that is just magic. It’s about loving yourself, FIRST!”

One of Lange’s motivation was to do something to inspire each other to keep everyone’s minds balanced and active. He released a phone number to text with people during the pandemic. He received sweet messages of people sharing what their life is like at home. Some have shared the music they’re listening to, a list of movies, photos of their gardens and more. Lange feel for his friends who are dealing with the pandemic in New York right now, so wants to share the feelings he’s experiencing living in an small town in the middle of the desert like Marfa.

“More than anything, we feel grateful and lucky to be able to step out and have this opportunity to just breathe in good air and big sky feeling and not be too overwhelmed,” said Lange. “To share that feeling, I think has been what I’ve been trying to do more than anything.”