

CAN MARFA BRING ITS MAGIC TO MANHATTAN?

By Amy Perry — October 15, 2013



*Gaia Squarci Gap Ecology
(Three Still Lives with Cherry Pickers and Palms)*
David Brooks
at Socrates Sculpture Park
in Queens.

You don't have to be a scientist, engineer or policy maker to weigh in on the impact of climate change. Right now, all around New York City, visual artists, architects and performers are tackling the subject as part of Marfa Dialogues/New York, a two-month series of environmentally engaged public events.

The ambitious festival is organized by Ballroom Marfa, a tiny gallery in the tiny West Texas hamlet of Marfa (population 1,899, according to last year's census). But the desert town's cultural footprint has long belied its size. In 1971, the Minimalist artist Donald Judd arrived there from Manhattan, and subsequently transformed a decommissioned Army base into the Chinati Foundation, an indoor/outdoor museum that is a favorite pil-

grimage of the art cognoscenti. More recently, a wave of artists has moved there. "There Will Be Blood" and "No Country for Old Men" were both filmed there, and in 2008, the town got its own film festival. Founded in 2003 in a former dance hall, Ballroom Marfa serves as a younger counterpart to the Judd compound. Its year-round programming balances the emerging with the established (Takashi Murakami balloons, screenings with John Waters, a Bon Iver concert), helping place Marfa within the broader cultural consciousness. This year's New York migration offers proof of Ballroom's expanding sphere of influence. "Art and culture's new paradigm is not regional anymore," said Ballroom Marfa's co-founder Fairfax Dorn, "much like how the issue of climate change is not regional. It affects everyone."

Gaia Squarci
Fairfax Dorn, founder of
Marfa Dialogues.



Wanting to create an event at the intersection of art and politics, Dorn founded Marfa Dialogues in 2010 with a three-day program, in Marfa, that explored issues related to the United States-Mexico border. This third iteration marks the first time she's taken the show on the road, teaming up with various New York institutions, including Pratt, Joe's Pub, WNYC and Cooper Union, to do so. The program includes "Solar," a set of four cosmic video pieces on the High Line by various artists, a musical cabaret about climate change at the 14th Street Y and sustainability-focused walks along Broadway led by teams of artists and scientists. In Queens, at the Socrates Sculpture Park, a former East River dump site, there's an outdoor installation by David Brooks of three cherry pickers brimming with palms, bamboo and shrubberies seeking higher ground. Naturally, the memory of Hurricane Sandy, which swept through the city just under a year ago, is the subtext for many of these projects and events.

The festival is also being underwritten by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. The late artist, who was born in Texas — in the Gulf of Mexico refinery town of Port Arthur — famously designed the poster for the first Earth Day in 1970. Starting tonight, a Rauschenberg artwork composed of recycled materials, from his Glut series, will be exhibited, along-

side architectural drawings of desert spaces by Judd and a sculptural piece by Maya Lin that tracks the Hudson River waterway and floodplain of Hurricane Sandy with thousands of stainless-steel pins. They are all part of the festival's "Quiet Earth" exhibit, curated by Dorn at the Rauschenberg Project Space in Chelsea. Consider it Ballroom Marfa's fall annex.

In fact, this roadshow might be the first step towards a truly mobile — and global — festival. Dorn said she's already been contacted by institutions in Paris, Berlin, Miami and Los Angeles, all interested in importing that Marfa magic. "Marfa exists in the imagination of the art world, but in reality it is a very remote town with very little resources," she explained. "This project has highlighted its common interests with organizations in New York City who want to contribute the same way we do."

Marfa Dialogues takes place at various locations throughout New York City during October and November. For additional information and a schedule, go to marfadialogues.org.

Correction: October 18, 2013

An earlier version of this post mischaracterized the Robert Rauschenberg work in the "Quiet Earth" exhibition. The piece is a sculpture composed of recycled materials, and there is only one on display, not several.