

STONE CIRCLE: THE STORY BEHIND HAROON MIRZA'S TEXAS STONEHENGE

The solar powered project by the British artist brings light and music to the small town of Marfa, an unlikely destination for the art world.

By Nadja Sayej— May 29, 2018



Stone Circle by Haroon
Mirza. Photograph:
Ballroom Marfa

Ever since New York artist Donald Judd relocated to Marfa in 1979, this small Texas town has become an art destination.

It isn't exactly a place you'd expect to find a booming creative scene, but artists and galleries moved here in the 1980s to take advantage of empty spaces and cheap rents, while also paying tribute to Judd's legacy. The Ayn Foundation – which currently boasts Andy Warhol's *The Last Supper* – opened in Marfa in 1993, and art galleries like Inde/Jacobs and Rule Gallery, as well as design boutique *Wrong Marfa*,

are all set up in Marfa. So is a landmark fake Prada boutique on the roadside, which is an artwork by Elmgreen & Dragset from 2005.

Just last year saw the small town of 2,000 people host Solange Knowles at a concert for Judd's Chianti Foundation.

Next up, Marfa will see a new solar powered Stonehenge project by British artist Haroon Mirza. The piece, entitled *Stone Circle*, is a set of black marble-like rocks in the Texas desert until 2023 (but



Stone Circle by Haroon Mirza. Photograph: Ballroom Marfa

potentially indefinitely). Every full moon, there will be a musical concert and light show in what Mirza calls “solar symphonies”, with the first one held on 28 June.

“On full moons, the stones will start to play composed electrical signals, which will be quite musical,” said Mirza over the phone from his London studio. “You will hear the electricity as sound.”

The stone pieces stand in a circle, like the ancient Stonehenge or the famed Nine Ladies site in Derbyshire. Set in the high desert, eight chunks of marble will sit in a circle with the ninth as the “mother stone”, charging the circle through a bank of batteries underground. “You see the electrical current as light and you hear it as sound,” said Mirza.

The stones are made of marble shipped from Mexico,

which light up at night. “During the day, they look like quartz crystals, but at night they glow with electricity,” he said.

Mirza, who is the winner of the Silver Lion for Most Promising artist at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011, has made solar-powered artworks in the past, like wall-works which generate sound from electricity, including *Duet for a Duo (Solar Symphony 7)* from 2015.

He recalls his first mystified experience with the Stonehenge as he drove past it decades ago. “I remember thinking it was an alien thing, like a UFO landing,” he said. “It has an incredible aura to it, from a distance and up close.” It wasn’t about replicating the Stonehenge, but presenting a new experience. “The feeling of being at the Stone Circle is a sense of commune with nature,” said Mirza. This artwork is more than just a journey out into the desert, as it also promotes solar power in the south.

Freedom Solar, the Austin-based solar panel company, donated half of the solar panels for the project. They’re also offering a rebate for new solar customers referred through the gallery which is presenting this project, Ballroom Marfa. (Freedom Solar also offers local workshops for west Texans wanting to switch to solar power at home and at work.)

Surprisingly, it’s working. “When I first visited Marfa, I didn’t see one solar panel anywhere, which I thought was surprising because there is a lot of sun,” said Mirza. “There is controversy around it, but there is potential for solar energy in that part of Texas and people have started installing solar panels, which is a positive move.”

“It’s a no brainer, actually,” he adds. “If you live in a climate like that, it makes a massive difference.” The project was no easy feat, as Stone Circle took five years to materialize, and it didn’t help that the marble was stuck at the Mexican border for nine months.

“I thought it was going to be easy, but it was complicated and expensive,” said Mirza. “Sometimes it’s better to be naive and have ambition and think big.”

For the first full moon gathering, the marble ‘stones’ will light up and play sounds that call to mind electronic music. “I’ve composed the electrical signals,” said Mirza. “It depends what you regard as music.”

Even though the Stonehenge was used as a site for worship, there will be no sacrificial lambs. “People are perceiving and preaching it as a spiritual gathering, but I don’t have an intention of it being a spiritual thing,” said Mirza.

Link: [Stone Circle: The Story Behind Haroon Mizra’s Texas Stonehenge](#)