

FAIRFAX DORN AND MARC GLIMCHER'S NEW YORK LOFT

Fairfax Dorn, the co-founder of pioneering arts organization Ballroom Marfa, and her husband, Pace Gallery's Marc Glimcher, open the door to their new home, decorated with contemporary art

By Whitney Robinson – October 9, 2015



A DECADE AGO, what appeared to be a Prada store opened on a deserted stretch of road in Texas, three hours from El Paso and 37 miles into the Chihuahuan Desert from Marfa, home to the minimalist sculptor Donald Judd's renowned Chinati Foundation. Nothing is sold here, however—it is actually a site-specific, permanent installation by the artistic duo Elmgreen and Dragset called Prada Marfa. When the artwork was unveiled so close to the place where Judd spent the last 21 years of his life, it was a little like opening a lemonade stand outside Coca-Cola headquarters. One of the primary instigators behind the gutsy move was Fairfax Dorn, a native Texan who co-founded the nonprofit arts organization Ballroom Marfa, which supported Prada Marfa along with the Art Production Fund. “Fairfax was in Marfa before the cappuccino, before the Learjets and the hip hotels,” says Judd’s son, Flavin. “She was the first of the new wave coming to Marfa and making it their own.”

“It takes guts—and vision,” adds Flavin, who manages the Judd Foundation along with his sister, Rainer. He’s talking about the ambitious programming by Ballroom Marfa, which Dorn co-founded in 2003 with fellow arts enthusiast Virginia Lebermann. Since then, Ballroom Marfa has continued to host shows of daring new work by art stars such as Peter Doig, Sam Falls and Rashid Johnson in its gallery space on Judd’s doorstep. “In some ways, my father saved Marfa from becoming a dusty, abandoned Border Patrol stop,” he says. “But in other ways it was Fairfax and Virginia who did it. They put their faith in the future of Marfa.”

Today Dorn, 40, has traveled far from the streets of Marfa to her new loft in New York City. The bustling Flatiron neighborhood below boasts the New York edition of Japanese retailer Dover Street Market, a far cry from Marfa’s Last Horse Saloon. She is standing in her stark, white dining room, next to a



large 2000 work by Robert Rauschenberg that features swirling blues and greens and collaged palm trees. “It’s a recycled piece,” she says. “It speaks as much to the future as it does the past.”

That comment could just as well be about Dorn’s life at the moment. In June she married a scion of the international Pace Gallery, Marc Glimcher, in a Vedic ceremony on her Texas ranch (her first wedding, his third). Together, they are embarking on a new chapter, one that combines small-town Texas and New York City. (That spirit was evident in their celebration, attended by close family and friends including Flavin Judd, former talent agent and venture capitalist Michael Ovitz and his fiancée, designer Tamara Mellon, branding guru Trey Laird and artists Matthew Day Jackson and James Turrell. Francisco Costa, the Calvin Klein designer, made one of Dorn’s two wedding dresses.)

The Rauschenberg canvas, like many of the other pieces that Dorn and Glimcher have selected for their new home, is by an artist with whom Pace had a long relationship. Witness a John Chamberlain wall sculpture in twisted and warped steel the colors of a vintage Chevy truck, a James Turrell hologram that shines gold or blue depending on the time of day and one of the largest Louise Nevelson pieces in private

hands: an 8-by-10-foot work from 1974 with dozens of intricately carved shelves in blackened wood that once belonged to Glimcher’s grandmother Eva Glimcher.

Alongside all this storied art, Dorn has introduced pieces by emerging artists like a colorful shredded work that is part wall relief, part canvas by Ballroom Marfa alum Rosy Keyser. Dorn and Glimcher have also become obsessed with the work of Mathieu Matégot, a French artist and furniture designer and midcentury contemporary of Jean Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand and Serge Mouille. “I am enchanted by the concept of ‘Brazilian French,’ ” she says, a phrase she uses to refer to a kind of warm modernism. While in London last year for the PAD art fair, she and Glimcher found an early example of a Matégot bar made of mahogany and painted steel that suspends from the ceiling. “I love objects that bring in nature, the landscape or even the jungle,” she says. That theme continues in the choice of a hulking raw-wood dining table from Espasso that seats 20 (picked up in Rio de Janeiro) paired with chairs from the New York minimalist furniture emporium BDDW (which also made her bed), a pair of Theo Ruth sheepskin armchairs and the free-form Vladimir Kagan sofa covered in a soft purple velvet, the color of a far West Texas sunset.

“I didn’t know how it was all going to fit because we live in a loft,” Dorn says. “I just take risks—there’s not a lot of precalculation.”

IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, Dorn has been surrounded by art her entire life. Her maternal grandmother, Nancy B. Negley, was an artist and early benefactor of the San Antonio Museum of Art. Dorn and her younger brother and sister grew up in Texas and Colorado, where their mother owned an antiques store and their father worked in the family oil business. After studying art history and studio art at the University of Texas, Austin, Dorn moved to Manhattan in 1998 to practice art, before working in the Whitney Museum’s development department and then at the nonprofit



arts organization Exit Art. But after almost five years she returned to Texas. “I needed to leave the city to figure my life out,” she says. With Lebermann, whom she met in New York, Dorn moved in 2002 to the abandoned mining town of Terlingua (population 58), 13 miles from the Mexican border, to focus on her paintings of surreal landscapes. “I was in a place in my life where I needed that stillness,” she says.

There are three artistic communities in western Texas that defy the state’s conservative reputation: Terlingua; Marathon, which sits close to Big Bend National Park; and Marfa, best known for the sprawling Chinati Foundation. The story of how Chinati came to be is art-world legend. Judd had first passed through the region while enlisted in the United States Army and was taken with the light and the open landscape. Frustrated with the increasing commodification of the New York art scene in the ’70s, the famously mercurial Judd purchased his first Marfa property in 1973 and relocated there full time with his two children, Rainer and Flavin, four years later, shortly after his divorce from his wife, Julie Finch (though he maintained a studio in New York). With assistance from the Dia Art Foundation, he bought an old Army base,

which he converted into a working museum that showcased his site-specific pieces as well as work from his friends and contemporaries, including Dan Flavin, Claes Oldenburg and Larry Bell. In 1986, with the help of Dia, he established an arts foundation, named for the nearby Chinati Mountains. Today it attracts more than 22,000 visitors a year and supports both emerging talent and well-known artists like Mark Flood, Hernan Bas, Christopher Wool and Robert Irwin through an ambitious program of residencies, internships and exhibitions.

During her stay in Terlingua, Dorn regularly made the two-hour drive to Marfa, where she found the beginnings of a scene. The town was starting to attract transplants from New York, Dallas and Los Angeles; all had come to worship at Judd’s temple and stayed on, lured by the striking landscape and cheap real estate. The first high-end restaurant, Maiya’s, opened in 2002, as did a bookshop and a few haute-hipster boutiques. After four months in the desert, Dorn, then 28, stopped painting. She and Lebermann thought there was an opportunity to create something in Marfa that would bear their own stamp. Together, the two hatched an idea to create a community space that would incorporate art, music, performance and film.

Marfa is a famously complicated town. Apart from the tourists and occasional Julia Roberts sighting, the place is inhabited mostly by ranch hands who have tended the land for generations, as well as migrant workers. Chinati and the Judd Foundation (which is run separately) occupy the majority of the town’s most significant buildings, most of which Judd designed and restored himself. In other words, there wasn’t much room to spare. But Dorn and Lebermann chased down every lead. Soon Lebermann purchased a former dance hall next to a gas station in the center of town, and Ballroom Marfa was born.