

MARFA MYTHS BRINGS ART AND MUSIC TO THE TEXAS DESERT

Lauren Santo Domingo, Poppy Delevingne and Jessica Hart attended the remote weekend festival.

By Rebecca Kleinman – April 17, 2018



Marfa, Tex. — As 125,000 revelers raged each day at Coachella, an under-the-radar festival for music, art and film went down in West Texas' Chihuahuan Desert. But there is a reason Marfa Myths, a collaboration between Ballroom Marfa arts space and Brooklyn record label Mexican Summer that's become an annual pilgrimage for the creative class, hasn't blown up like Art Basel Miami Beach and SXSW.

"It's just so hard to get here that it's only for the diehards who have a real interest," said Lauren Santo Domingo, whose husband, Andrés Santo Domingo, cofounded Mexican Summer. "Our friends like it because they can keep a low profile and blend in."

Tight as the tumbleweeds whipping through town in Friday's epic dust storm, their entourage of Lazaro Hernandez, Poppy Delevingne, Jessica Hart, James Jagger and Olympia Scarry were able to let loose indeed. They snacked on chips and dip at the Hotel Saint George,

shot pool at the Lost Horse Saloon, and scored floral Doc Martens and Chanel silk bomber jackets from the Raba vintage shop. Several rented a ranch together for the full "Dallas" fantasy.

"I've been to Marfa at least six times," said Hernandez, who took last year off from the mezcal-fueled, four-day event. "I was so hungover, I had to recuperate."

Amid the late-night dance parties and intimate concerts with not a smartphone in sight (more evidence in the modern age as to why Marfa is compared to the Bermuda Triangle), serious art was on view in Ballroom Marfa's new exhibit, "Hyperobjects." Cocurated by Ballroom Marfa executive director Laura Copelin and Rice University philosopher Timothy Morton (whose book on ecological theory bears the same title), the group show references issues on a scale too overwhelming and vague to comprehend.

Art installation at
Marfa Myths
Alex Marks



“The beauty of it is you can’t tell where science stops and art begins,” said Morton, of works such as Tara Donovan’s installation of stacked plastic cups, which most viewers interpreted as undulating topography, and Sissel Marie Tonn and Jonathan Reus’ earthquake simulator vests inspired by the terrifying man-made effects of gas drilling in the Netherlands, where they live.

There’s as much talk about real estate as art these days in Marfa. From artists to trustees, everyone seemed to be house-hunting or selling their home. Donovan lamented not buying a \$10,000 property here 15 years ago when Fairfax Dorn and Virginia Lebermann, whose families have lived in Texas for generations, launched Ballroom Marfa.

“It’s so idyllic, like living on an island with creative intellectuals,” said Donovan, who had her eight-year-old twin boys in tow. “They went to their first drag show last night and loved it. It’s that kind of place.”

Due in July with her first child, Dorn is also on track for motherhood. Both wearing pink outfits — she in a Céline suede dress and he in a guayabera — Dorn and her husband, Marc Glimcher, hosted a dinner in the backyard of their vacation home during which they had guests including Leo Villareal, Gryphon Rower-Upjohn and Jenny Laird guessing the baby’s gender.

“It’s actually a boy,” said Dorn, hoping she’ll have as much energy for her next role as starting a nonprofit in the middle of nowhere. “I came here to paint and saw an opportunity

to create something bigger. But, wow, I was so young then and don’t think I could do it again.”

Part-time locals Jenny and Trey Laird entertained company all weekend, too. Works by Richard Serra, Rashid Johnson and Walead Beshty filled their renovated historic home on a hilltop with views of the downtown’s landmarks, from the water tower to the peach-painted Presidio County Courthouse. With only the home’s landscaping left to go in the major renovation project, just about every contributor to AD has been circling for the story.

“Amy Astley’s a good friend, and it just occurred to me that every single one of our homes has been published,” said Jenny, whose son, William Jess, and his girlfriend, Sarah Levine, camped out in the guesthouse while producing a Marfa Myths episode for their podcast, “Image Culture.”

If Marfa were a lifestyle brand, the Lairds could be its campaign ambassadors. The clan strongly supports local designers like Ashley Rowe for raw-edged cotton tops, and Mano boutique’s owners who upcycle Wrangler denim shirts with custom sashiko embroidery. “Most of my Marfa gear stays here, but sometimes I’ll get in Marfa mode in New York,” said Trey.

Some festival attendees realized they packed all wrong and immediately copied the local uniform. They raided Cobra Rock for handmade leather boots with quirky, upturned toes, while Ballroom Marfa trucker hats shaded every other head in the blazing sun. The magical moment ended Sunday afternoon as everyone turned their attention from style and sipping Ranch Water cocktails to planning the exodus. Newbie Bettina Santo Domingo tried not to get too discouraged by her insane travel day ahead.

“The only direct flight from El Paso to L.A. was at 6 a.m., so I guess I’m leaving at two in the morning. It’s ‘escape from Marfa’ time.”