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# Mara '12, A Trip to the Moon: A Weekend of Aliens and Astronauts

By Alexander Adler | 06/06/2012



Performance by Kathryn Andrews at the Hip-O Ranch, home of Nancy & Red Sanders

Over Memorial Day weekend, a select few eschewed beaches and mountains traversing through a barren wasteland to a Mecca in West Texas known as Ballroom Marfa. The organization hosted their annual benefit dinner and concert, titled, "A Trip to the Moon: A Weekend with Aliens and Astronauts."

Set in the high desert with the days hot enough to push daisies and evenings brisk enough to warrant that extra swig of moonshine, Ballroom Marfa co-founders Fairfax Dorn and Virginia Lebermann played host to almost 200 guests over three days of events celebrating nine years of art in Marfa that raised over a quarter million dollars for the worthy organization.

This tiny Texas town has become a bucket-list destination for anyone with an affinity for Minimalism and even the mildest sense of adventure. However run-down it once was and, arguably, still remains, certain members of the community with substantial means have poured their heart, souls, and much of their pockets into maintaining a thriving arts scene while building a series of beautiful homes, as well as the relatively decadent Thunderbird Motel.

Between the Chinati Foundation, a contemporary art museum founded by Donald Judd and spread over about 350 acres complete with permanent installations by Judd as well as Dan Fla-

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vin, Roni Horn, Ilya Kabakov, and Claes Oldenburg, the Judd Foundation, an institution dedicated to preserving the artist's legacy, as well as Exhibitions 2d, and, of course, Ballroom Marfa, there's a flurry of activity that keeps this sleepy town of 2,000 residents entertained. Throw in Padre's, a former adobe funeral home turned dive bar with an excellent game room, Frama @ Tumbleweed Laundry hawking lattes and cappuccinos, a dollar store that was giving away pup-pies during our visit, and a DQ, you've got the makings of a great weekend.

Friday evening, Ballroom Marfa hosted a reception for the exhibition "Data Deluge" featuring work by Rebecca Bollinger, Jon Brunberg, Anthony Discenza, and Hans Haacke among others, before attendees relocated to the home of co-founder Fairfax Dorn for a Chuck Wagon dinner and margaritas by the bucketful. Stragglers stuck in the kitchen trying to juggle limes as the whistle of the train marked time passing us by.

Those with some steam left woke up at 5am to haul out for sunrise at Elmgreen & Dragset's famed Prada Marfa. The few and the proud passed around bottles of champagne with scones and coffee while we listened to Yvonne Force Villareal detail the project from inception to its current state on the side of the highway.

After a second breakfast at Marfa Burrito and an espresso at Frama, the morning and afternoon were dedicated to exploring the Chinati Foundation (Judd's 100 aluminum boxes and Chamberlain's 22 monumental sculptures in the former Marfa Wool and Mohair building are an absolute must), and a visit to Dennis at 2d Marfa, where a slew of minimalist work by Gloria Graham and Susan York was on view. That evening, Nancy and Rod Sanders hosted a dinner at their "Hip-O Ranch" which featured an "alien summoning" performance by Kathryn Andrews in collaboration with composer Scott Benzel during which participants methodically entered onto the plain with metal instruments.



Marianne Boesky and Rashid Johnson

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Matthew Day Jackson designed the plates and glasses, linens from Rashid Johnson (a big presence all weekend), ceramic cowry shells by Simone Leigh, and lighting by Leo Villareal. With enough Tito's Vodka and Casa Dragones Tequila to sedate a herd of elephant, the party hummed along until the sky turned and began to fall. Throngs rushed for cover as the rain filled Jackson's glasses to the brim, soaking Rashid's tablecloths and washing away almost 200 shots of tequila. The Marfa crowd was unfazed, so bottles of wine were salvaged, glasses were shared, cheese and sausage plate were annihilated while this flash flood reigned on. By the time it cleared up, the crowd was ready to roll.

By all accounts, the lack of food made the after party at Julie Speed's Marfa studio all the more worthwhile with Ballroom's own JD DiFabbio (aka DJ Palindrome) spinning as we fluttered in and out of that sweaty space, sometimes hitting the late night grilled cheese parlor for a bit of sustenance. Some managed to hop the fence for a nightcap at the Thunderbird Pool, knowing full well that there was much to cover on Sunday.

The weekend wound down with "Houston, We Have a Problem" brunch at the home of Virginia Lebermann and John Wotovicz, co-hosted with Suzanne Deal Booth that featured performance artist Dion Laurent dressed as an astronaut walking around with a bouquet of daisies followed by a benefit concert with the band Cansei de Ser Sexy (CSS) at the Capri, which brought together seemingly every soul in town.

The spirit of Marfa is unlike anything else in the region, with its aging and antiquated town and powerful yet comparatively new sense of history and purpose. Unlike the Lighting Fields, Roden Crater, Spiral Jetty, or any other sight on a land art tour or Southwestern art loop, Marfa revolves around one artist and his singular vision. Whether a fan of Judd or not, the town has the capacity to shed light on a man of brilliance.