

heterotopia

The background of the image is a photograph of a desert landscape. A dark, straight road stretches from the bottom left towards the horizon. To the right of the road, there is a 'Welcome to Marfa' sign. The sign is dark with white and yellow text. It says 'WELCOME TO' at the top, 'EST 1883' on the left, 'MARFA' in large letters in the center, and 'MARFA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE' and 'MARFACCOM • 432.728.4142' at the bottom. There are some small icons on the sign. The sky is a pale blue with some light clouds. Overlaid on the top half of the image are several overlapping, semi-transparent circles in various colors (blue, green, yellow, orange, red, purple) that create a rainbow-like effect behind the title text.

October 5 - November 2, 2013

apexart: Marfa

Renowned French cultural theorist Michel Foucault defines heterotopias as real places composed of “different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other.” Although Foucault was speaking specifically about those architecturally defined spaces we commonly find in communities—such as cafés, theaters, even cemeteries—



Marfa road sign, unknown creator, 1969

and their impact on the residents and the cultural development of those communities, his theory should also work in the different social and cultural economies that converge upon a single place and unveil the heterotopic aspects of any given locale. This is true for Marfa, Texas, a small city with a big story dating back centuries and including characters from a wide array of cultural spheres.

Its ever-shifting composition makes it a mysterious place with an allure that attracts not only those familiar with its significance in the contemporary art world, but also those who connect with its remote location and frontier lifestyle. Located in the remote Chihuahuan Desert/Big Bend region of Texas, a six-hour drive from Austin and three hours from the nearest international airport, in El Paso, Marfa stands alone, geographically and culturally. The city's biggest employers are national law enforcement agencies, including the Drug Enforcement Agency and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol. Marfa's next biggest revenue stream is art tourism, which is serious business despite its remote location and scarce amenities. In the public imagination, Marfa is the city Donald Judd built with the backing of the Dia Foundation and a vision of an anarchist minimalist utopia.

Judd first arrived in Marfa in 1971 in order to escape the speculative marketeering that he believed was ravaging the New York art scene. In 1979, with the Dia Foundation's fiscal support, he acquired Fort D. A. Russell, a decommissioned military base just on the edge of town. Over the next 15 years, until his death in 1994, Judd transformed the 340-acre property into a contemporary art museum of permanent, large-scale minimalist installations by him and his contemporaries, most notably

among them Dan Flavin, Carl Andre, and Claes Oldenburg. Certainly the image of the artist-cum-pioneer, taming the Wild West with aesthetics, is a striking and romantic one, aligned with the aura and history of Far West Texas. However, Judd did not discover Marfa so much as Marfa called out to him, as it has to many others before and, of course, after him, from border activists to celebrities on Hollywood's A-list.¹

But long before Hollywood and disillusioned artists happened upon Marfa, back when a cross-country railroad seemed like a miraculous feat and Marfa had yet to be named, sixteenth century Far West Texas was home to the Jumano Indians, a seminomadic hunter-gatherer nation that remained culturally distinct from neighboring indigenous nations through the early part of Spanish colonialism. Although archeologists found evidence that the Jumano initially appealed to Spanish colonists and missionaries for support in fending off Apache cattle raiders, by the eighteenth century, colonial diseases had so decimated the nation that the remaining Jumano merged with their former enemies in order to survive Anglo expansion into the west, thus creating the Jumano-Apache nation.

Anglo-Americans were already coming from the east to the Big Bend area to escape a range of obligations—and in many cases the law—and it became the place where many of the economically displaced found a way to make a living during the race to complete the first transcontinental railroad. The incorporated city of Marfa² was initially founded as a water stop for railroad workers, including Chinese and Japanese immigrants who were instrumental in constructing the transcontinental railroad. With the railroad came the ranchers. Of course, given the fact that Texas was once part of Mexico, there were many Mexican families already living in the area. After numerous successful litigious efforts to reduce the Asian influence and population in



Mike Capron, *Runnin' the Road Brand*, no date, watercolor, 15 x 30 in

the country,³ Marfa became a largely Mexican-American and Anglo-American frontier. This is not to say that it was a culturally convivial atmosphere, but native Marfans from both communities learned to live and let live, until the Mexican Revolution of 1910,⁴ when Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata revolted against Mexico's feudal conditions. The revolution's violence drove thousands of Mexicans across the border, from Ojinaga, Chihuahua, in Mexico to Presidio, Texas, and then to Marfa, where many stayed to take advantage of the agricultural work as well as the federal aid offered by President Woodrow Wilson's administration.⁵

These five centuries of cross-cultural encounters and exchange transformed Marfa into a unique cultural incubator that ultimately led to it becoming the contemporary art capital and destination city now known to the general public. There is little doubt that Marfa's current topography—geographic and cultural—reflects its creolized parentage. Yet, understanding the city's evolution demands not a linear approach to tracing its rich history, but more of a circuitous consideration of its seemingly disparate and diametrically opposed communities, whose proximity to one another is the backdrop for *Heterotopia*. For this reason, the exhibition spans several venues, including fiber optic frequencies, and invites visitors to travel—by foot or bicycle or device—to each site and to pay attention to the sights along the way as they consider the propositions presented by, in, and between the works on view. For the exhibition, I selected participants who each, whether through a specific project or through a range of practices, tease out the heterotopic aspects of Marfa and the surrounding area, primarily the indigenous, Hispanic, and cowboy cultures that are sometimes obscured by the city's turn toward the global art conversation.

The **MUSEUM OF THE BIG BEND, SUL ROSS UNIVERSITY**, which works closely with the **CENTER FOR BIG BEND STUDIES**, has been collecting and exhibiting artifacts from the Big Bend region for the past 70 years. They present several interpretive panels about area rock art that was featured in their 2012 exhibition *Removing the Shroud of Mystery: Archaeology in the Big Bend*.

ENRIQUE MADRID, a life-long resident of border town Redford, Texas, and the official historian for the Jumano-Apache nation, seeks to introduce the public to the hidden histories of Big Bend's indigenous legacy and its interrelationship with the Hispanic culture of the American West. In addition to acting as a consultant on this project, he has generously lent several Jumano-Apache artifacts.

ALLAN DESOUSA, a San Francisco-based artist and professor at San Francisco Art Institute, engages with issues of cultural hybridity, transculturality, and diaspora. DeSouza is a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Kenya



Allan deSouza, *Banana*, from the Love Shack series, 2013, digital print, 10 x 6.7 in

of East Indian parentage. We present one of his latest bodies of work that explores cultural tourism as a contact zone where both nativism and acculturation are transformed into performative props.

FEATHER RADHA, who lives and works in Alpine, creates paintings, drawings, and illustrations drawn from ancient Hispano-American themes. We present several of her large-scale paintings based on dreams and visions of ancient peoples of pre-colonial Mexico.



Anna Jaquez, *Mexican Elders*, 2002, metal, wood, Sculptamold, Prismacolor, enamel paint, acrylic paint, 8 x 6 ft

ANNA JAQUEZ, an El Paso-based artist and professor at University of Texas, El Paso, uses metalsmithing and ceramic techniques to create large-scale sculptures that speak to her experience of being a woman, mother, and an American

of Mexican descent living and working on the border. We present two of her works that demonstrate the convergence of her personal story with her political concerns in her art practice.

ANDREI RENTERIA, a San Antonio-based artist, is originally from Chihuahua, Mexico, but grew up the border town of Presidio, Texas. His experiences growing up in one of the most militarized border zones of the U.S. serves as inspiration for his paintings for which he uses a traditionalist style with contemporary materials to address issues about the U.S.-Mexico border, Mexican American history, and immigration rights. We present a reproduction of

his large mural commemorating the tragic killing of fellow Presidio resident Esequiel Hernandez Jr. by U.S. Marines.



Andrei Renteria, *Redford*, 2010, Oil and Spray Paint on canvas, 192 x 72 in, (above image cropped from original)

BIG BEND SADDLERY, the only saddlemaker in Presidio County, maintains the traditional cowboy art of saddlemaking for the area. Their handmade saddles represent the love for and exceptional quality of fine craft saddlery. We present two saddles from their collection: one produced approximately one century ago by an unknown saddlemaker and the other they produced for a champion steer roper in the late twentieth century.

MIKE CAPRON is the quintessential artist of the Great West. Working in the traditional cowboy style, we present four of his lively paintings about the American West and ranching, depicting core aspects of American cowboy culture: riding horses and roping steer.

C3, a San Francisco-based artist, creates highly detailed graphite drawings of a darker, less romantic alternative vision of the American West. We present several of his older works as well as a new drawing made specifically for this exhibition that draws compelling parallels between the violence that accompanied expansion into the American West and that which accompanies contemporary U.S. military expansion into the Middle East.

JASON KOLKER, who splits his time between Los Angeles and Marfa, spends the better part of his days in Marfa interviewing and chronicling some of its more interesting current residents. We present a selection of these interviews in a continuous stream.

THE JUNIOR HISTORIANS OF TEXAS archive, which is housed at the **MARFA PUBLIC LIBRARY**, is a collection of folk histories and photographs about original and long-term residents, businesses, and significant events of Marfa and Presidio County. These essays and photographs were written and compiled by Marfa High School students who participated in the program from the

mid-1960s to late-1970s. We've curated a selection from the archive that reveals Marfa's lesser-known but no less provocative histories and offers a potential response to the question: What happens when two or more conflicting groups converge?

MATTHIE MATTHAEI is a Texas native who, after graduating from art school in San Francisco, relocated to the border town of Ruidosa, Texas, where she had a front row seat to the border lifestyle, which is fraught with politics and conflict. We present a selection of her photographs about living on the U.S.–Mexico border.

C.M. MAYO is a travel writer from El Paso, Texas, who writes on the cultural life of Far West Texas and Mexico. We present her long-running series of podcasts, *Marfa Mondays*, which reveals some of the hidden histories of Marfa and its surrounding areas.

JUSTIN HOOVER, a San Francisco-based artist of Chinese descent, presents a project that addresses the often-observed history of Chinese railroad workers from the mid-nineteenth century.

crystal am nelson © 2013

Franchise Program Winner 2013-2014

1. Working back from recent history, in 2007 the Coen Brothers filmed their critically acclaimed adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's novel *No Country for Old Men* (Knopf, 2005) in Marfa, and in the same year, Paul Thomas Anderson filmed *There Will Be Blood*, his Oscar-winning adaptation of Upton Sinclair's novel *Oil!* (Albert & Charles Boni, 1927). Fifty years earlier, the studio Warner Brothers set their star-studded cowboy epic, *Giant*, at the Ryan Ranch in Marfa, bringing James Dean, Dennis Hopper, and Elizabeth Taylor to the isolated border town for two months.
2. Reportedly, a railroad magnate's wife christened the city Marfa after reading the name in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*.
3. In 1882, President Chester A. Arthur signed into law the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers.
4. Fort D. A. Russell was originally established as Camp Albert in 1911 in order to protect West Texas from Mexican bandits who conducted sometimes-lethal, cross-border raids during the Mexican Revolution.
5. In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson opened the borders to the refugees and ordered border patrol and the military to escort them to safety, albeit the "safety" of internment camps. During the winter of 1914 alone, the U.S. government spent nearly \$45,000 to transport, house/secure, and feed the Mexican refugees, which would be just over \$1,000,000 today. There are some reports that during this time the U.S. Government also invited Mexicans to relocate to Texas, where they were given tracts of land to farm.

Special thanks to: David Beebe/Airstreamland; Mary Bones, the Museum of the Big Bend, Sul Ross University, Alpine, Texas; Daniel and Jessie Browning/Frama Coffee; Jules Bouteleux/Fieldwork Marfa; Andy Cloud/the Center for Big Bend Studies Sul Ross University, Alpine, Texas; Laureta Huit, exhibition assistant; Renee Mick/Marfa Public Library; the Museum of the Big Bend, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas; Reeda Peele/Center for Big Bend Studies, Sul Ross University, Alpine, Texas; Thomas Schmidt; Cory Van Dyke/The Lumberyard; Marilyn H. Fedewa/author of *Maria of Agreda, Mystical Lady in Blue*

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apexart's exhibitions and public programs are supported in part by the Affirmation Arts Fund, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Greenwich Collection Ltd., Lambent Foundation Fund of Tides Foundation, and with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York State Council on the Arts.

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ISBN-13: 978-1-933347-69-1

cover image: **crystal am nelson**, *Welcome to Marfa*, 2013, digital c-print, 10 x 7.5 in