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## **An Artist's Notes on the Marfa Invitational Open**

The 2025 Marfa Invitational brought together a wide array of Texas artists in a panoramic and luminous desert setting. This year's show differed from past iterations, where select, established galleries had been invited to participate. For 2025, the name changed to the [Marfa Invitational Open](#), the last word in the title suggesting it was opening up to artists, not galleries, who are directly connected to Texas. The show had its moments — both impressive and underwhelming — and raised some questions about organization, transparency, and artist support. This article aims to provide insight for future participants, especially as the Invitational prepares to produce a new fair in Santa Fe this fall.

Here are some things to be aware of:

During the application process in the winter of 2025, the Marfa Invitational website did not provide basic information about the MI Open. There were some beautiful pictures of work in the rural desert of Marfa and text about its vision and what had been accomplished in the past, however if you were looking for necessary info, such as dates, directions for the application process, or even what it was about (a 10-day art fair), the website did not provide it. The essential information provided to artists was largely done through email, which one received after applying and paying the fee. Since the winter, the website has undergone some updates. However, as of June 2025, information about the upcoming Invitational in Santa Fe (this October) has yet to be shared on the MI website.

Should you apply (through an online platform), be aware that for the spring 2025 event the application fee was \$75, which is not insubstantial but not a deal breaker. For the inaugural MI Open, those who got in ([about 170 people](#)) were initially asked to pay an additional \$150 for preparators to hang the work. This created quite a stir, and an online witch hunt ensued of many angry emails that quickly culminated, in a day or two, in the organization removing the second fee to keep the peace and the fair moving forward. Regarding transparency, the second fee should have been posted as part of the initial application as a courtesy to applying artists, but the website didn't provide information about fees.

For the artists that did choose to move forward (some bowed out), here is what they got: there was a single hall rented out with tan walls that went up about eight feet high. The walls were not white, a problem for some artworks executed in bright and/or dark colors that would have benefited from the contrast. The hall was divided into a large central area that took up over half of the space, a front area with less space, and a back area that was the narrowest. The interior walls of the building displayed a few large pieces.

The fair used a salon style presentation to accommodate the vast number of artworks selected. If your art was in the center or on the side walls, you may have been pleased with the appearance of the work. The larger 2D works and sculptures maintained visual

acuity because of their scale. In the front and back rooms, the spacing was more compressed, with smaller paintings hung far too tightly together, stacked one on top of another. More room would've helped, and a more intentional curator's eye could've made a big difference.

I don't think it is unreasonable to state that there were too many artists to pull together a cohesive vision or point to a regional aesthetic. Perhaps the show was done with the idea of an egalitarian, democratic attitude toward Texan art. Except, how does anyone stand out among 150 other artists? They don't. Which leads into the next issue.

The organizers did not provide individual wall labels with the requisite information of an artist's name, title, medium, date, etc. To find out who made what, a QR code was provided that delivered a sprawling list; however, connecting an artist with their work was nearly impossible, as this could only be done by scrolling through a spreadsheet, on a phone, of about 135 names.

Artists cannot sell work if collectors don't know who they are, and let's face it, that's a big part of what art fairs are about. Without a name next to your work, people can't find you online or follow you on social media to see what else you are doing. This greatly inhibits the ability to network. The only way people knew who made what was by artists being there and pointing to their work, saying, "that's mine." This oversight is unprofessional and puts artists at a disadvantage.

A quick note on shipping: if your work is relatively small and lightweight, using UPS or FedEx is okay. However, anything easel-sized or bigger will leave your bank account significantly lighter; two medium-sized paintings can easily cost over \$500, one way. Your best bet is to participate in a community crating service (someone takes the lead in transporting art from a given city) if you wish to be efficient with money and time. If you have the time to drive the work down and think that's a fun idea (which is not a bad way to go if the work is large), enjoy the ride and the scenery.

In full disclosure, which by now may be obvious: I did participate in the MI Open. I had a great time seeing the fair, meeting people, and learning what Marfa has to offer. One of the best things about the MI Open was the outdoor sculpture park, which boasts a handful of interesting works plunked onto the desert floor, looking like a modern-day site for ritualistic activity or a place to throw the next Burning Man festival. In addition, the town had several events that coincided with the MI Open, such as gallery openings (including the colossal Max Hetzler gallery) and open studios by local artists. There was work on display by Christopher Wool and, of course, the Chinati Foundation, which has pioneering installations by Donald Judd and company. Plus, and this cannot be overstated, the magnificent skylines that are the town's trademark.

Here's hoping for greater things that Texas artists can feel good about at future Marfa Invitational Opens. Artists probably won't get white walls, but if the website can be updated more promptly, the roster reduced to something more curatorially manageable, labels for the artworks provided, and let the show be more in service of the artists, it would make all the difference for an art fair that is worthy but needs better organizing and greater transparency.

**Description**

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