

# ART *mag* 009

by SYBARIS.



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Greetings from



Prada Marfa-Iconic Marfa, Texas? 13

20 John Chamberlain and Carl Andre  
Chinati Foundation

“The Block” 100  
Aluminum  
Works—Judd Foundation

25 Contact

21

01-02 Editor’s note

Donald Judd’s Marfa, Texas 04

07 15 Concrete Artworks—Chinati Foundation

The Growth of Marfa, aka Still Marfa? 09

11 What Makes Marfa So Special?

#greetingsfrommarfa  
@framacoffee  
#frama  
@katymilam



*Index*



Reaching Marfa is as hard as everyone says. However, leaving is even harder.

The red sunsets in the desert, the mysterious lights which scientists from around the world have been trying to explain for over 125 years, the best burritos in the area, and the awe-inspiring natural beauty surrounding Marfa are an incomparable stage for the monumental artworks here, each of which is as different and unique as Marfa itself.

We must thank Donald Judd for his pilgrimage to this windswept Texas prairie, for his radical conception about art, and for his vision to create an **astonishing** **aesthetical** **experience**.

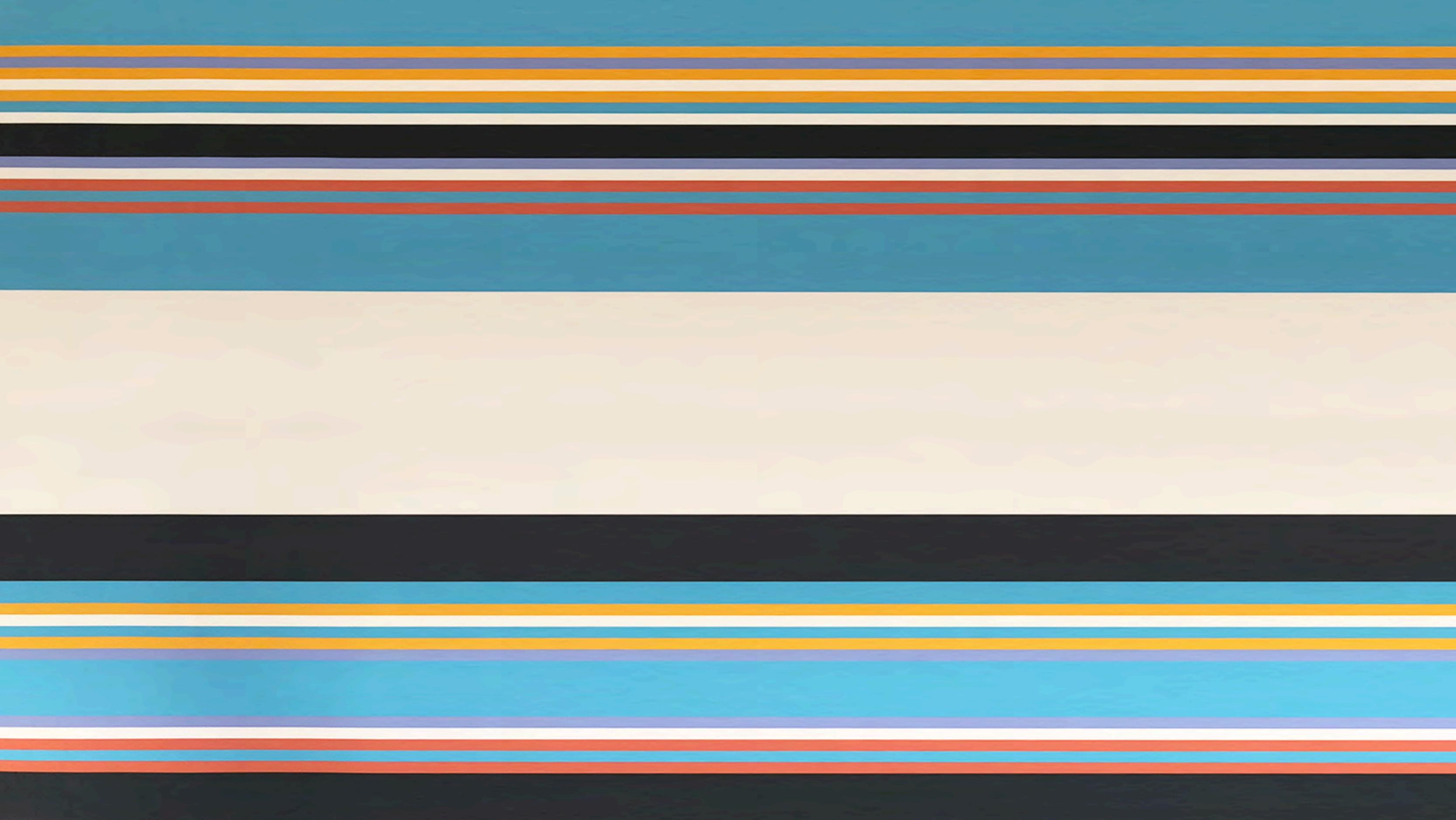


An ode to contemplation, Marfa showcases huge, heavy pieces, in situ pieces only to be seen here. Standing like the landscape in the background, these works were created FOR this place, to be understood here.

There are no photographs available, no reproductions at the store to be purchased as souvenirs, no chance to see them elsewhere; **just pieces which require open minds and open senses.**

*The city's motto was clear after my visit: "Tough to get, Tougher to explain. But once you get here, you get it". I just can't wait to be back there.*

*Regina*



## A Dream of Big Art in Big Country: Donald Judd's Marfa, Texas

It is predictable to begin with the oddity of Marfa, Texas; to describe how trendy city-dwellers flock to this remote location to discover **minimalist installation art championed by Donald Judd in the 1970's**. But it may be more sensible to consider the combination of open spaces, of natural beauty, and the melding of this starkly-different pair of sights.

### The Birth of Marfa, aka Why Marfa?

Many have wondered why New York artist Donald Judd chose this place—a deserted United States Army facility, used previously for pilot training in WWII. He rode in on the coattails of ranchers who established an attractive community in the late 19th century, but whose population had dwindled like many rural communities in the United States, thanks to the modernization of farming practices (and that of warfare, with the decline of the military cavalry) and exacerbated by mid-century droughts.

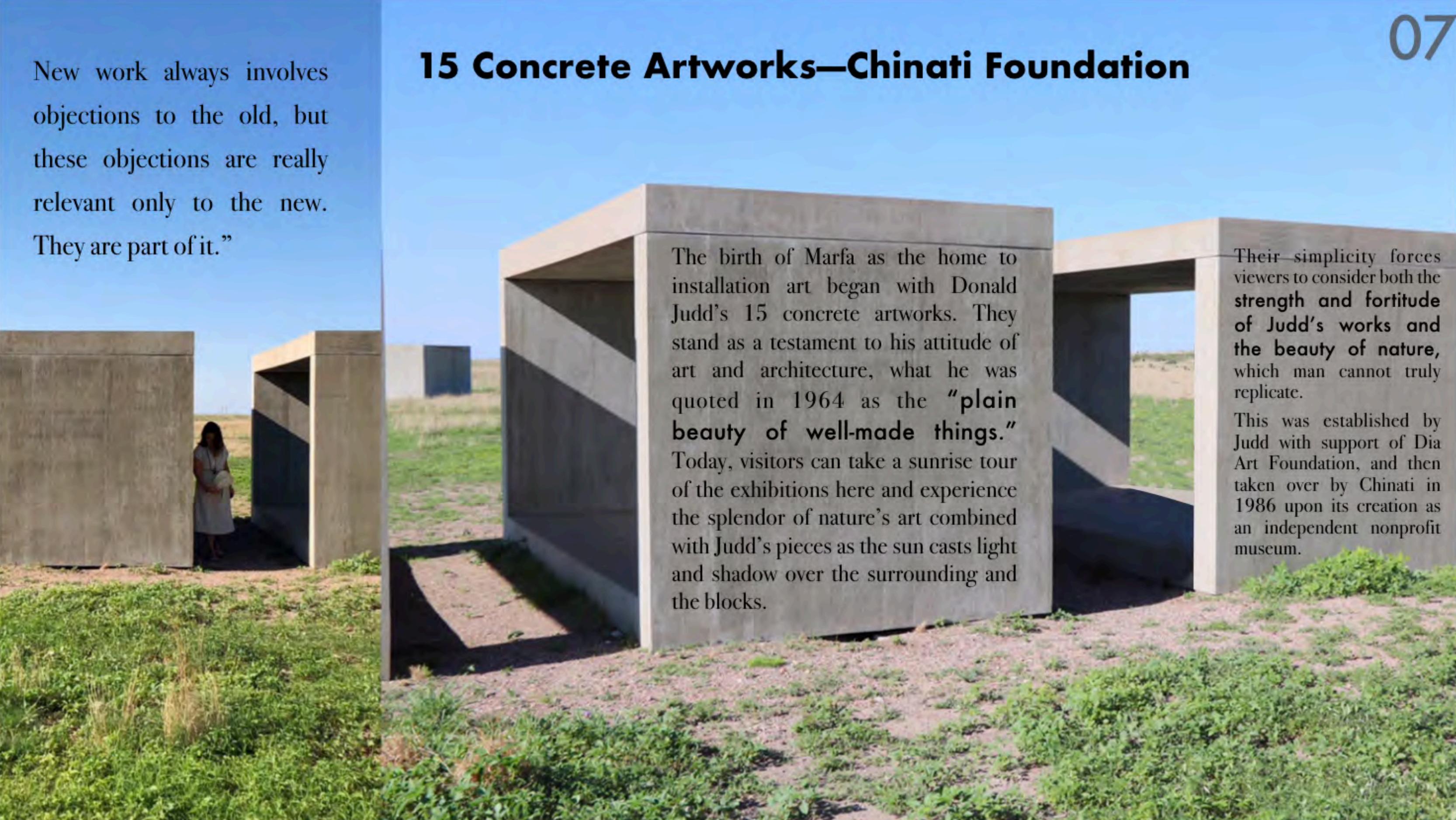




Beginning as a painter and later transitioning to work in three dimensions, Donald Judd wrote in his 1964 essay *Specific Objects*, that “The disinterest in painting and sculpture is a disinterest in doing it again, not in it as it is being done by those who developed the last advanced versions.

## 15 Concrete Artworks—Chinati Foundation

New work always involves objections to the old, but these objections are really relevant only to the new. They are part of it.”



The birth of Marfa as the home to installation art began with Donald Judd’s 15 concrete artworks. They stand as a testament to his attitude of art and architecture, what he was quoted in 1964 as the “**plain beauty of well-made things.**” Today, visitors can take a sunrise tour of the exhibitions here and experience the splendor of nature’s art combined with Judd’s pieces as the sun casts light and shadow over the surrounding and the blocks.

Their simplicity forces viewers to consider both the **strength and fortitude of Judd’s works and the beauty of nature,** which man cannot truly replicate.

This was established by Judd with support of Dia Art Foundation, and then taken over by Chinati in 1986 upon its creation as an independent nonprofit museum.



# The Growth of Marfa, aka Still Marfa?

In his statement upon establishing the Chinati Foundation, Judd said "The best is that which remains where it was painted, placed or built. Most of the art of the past that could be moved was taken by conquerors." Judd not only filled the town and surrounding Marfa with his own works, but also began to populate the landscape with works from other artists whom he liked and admired.



In the 1970s Judd began to consider his legacy and went so far as to establish the principles of Judd Foundation. In a 1977 essay he wrote "The purpose of the foundation is to preserve my work and that of others and to preserve this work in spaces I consider appropriate for it. This effort has been a concern second only to the invention of my work. And gradually the two concerns have joined and both tend toward architecture."



The large-scale, permanent collections could not be moved (“conquered”) and could stand as monuments as art outside of galleries or museums. The sheer space of Marfa gave free rein and freedom to other artists to create works which could be seen for what they were, stripped of backgrounds and curators’ approval (or disapproval) and appreciated for their simplicity and statements.

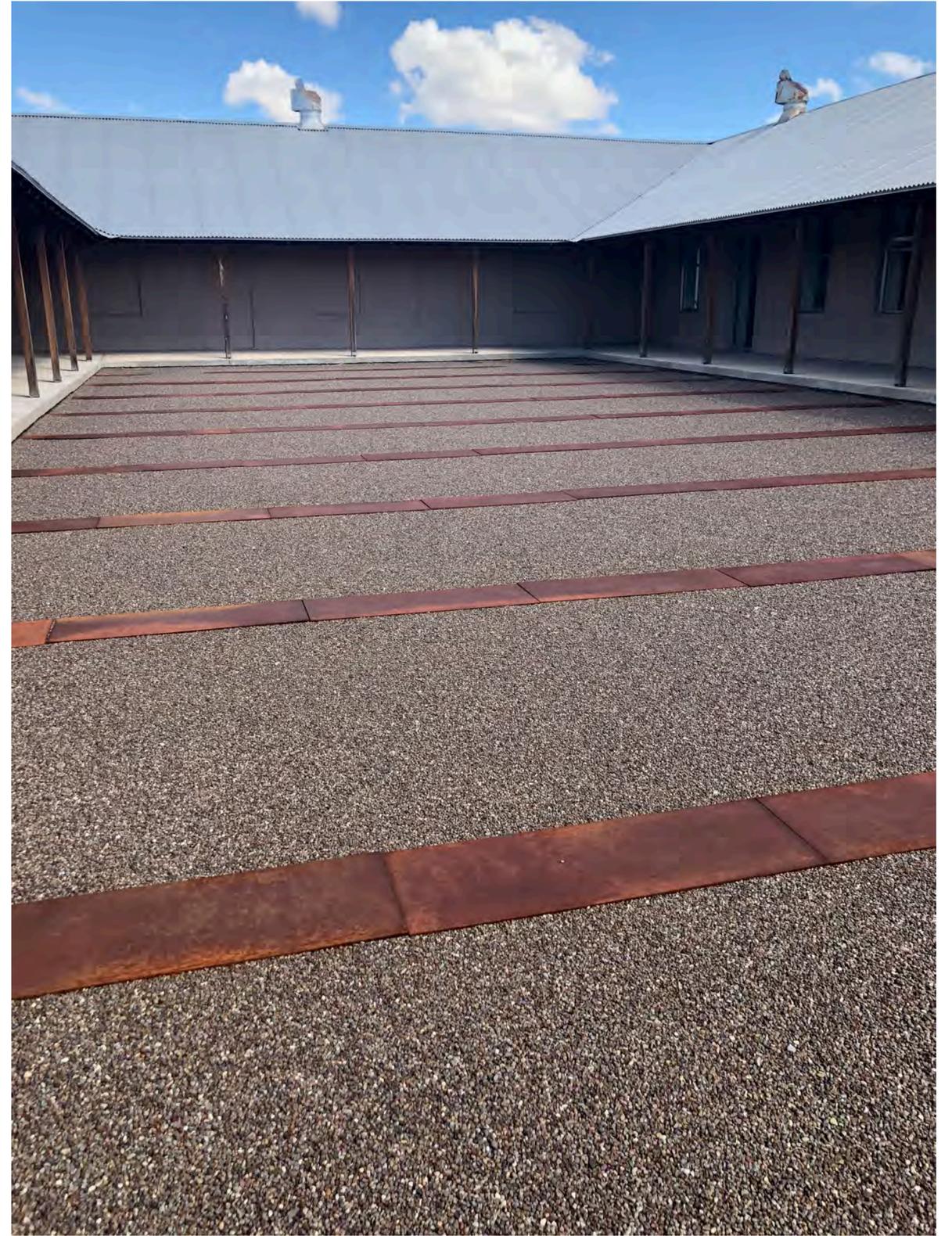
With the support of the Dia Art Foundation, and even the residents themselves, the town of Marfa became a mecca for minimalist and installation artists.



## The Persistence of Marfa, aka What Makes Marfa So Special?

After Judd died, the town seemed to fade. In his last ten years, Judd had been at odds with the Dia Art Foundation, which had previously provided millions of dollars in support for his dream. After the dust faded, very little money was left, but two organizations continued to champion art: The Judd Foundation and Chinati Foundation, which worked to bring Judd-esque artists in, from those who had been part of Judd's artistic circle, as well as emerging artists who share similar styles and vision as the forefather himself. Today, the Judd Foundation is supported by revenue from ticket sales for guided, gifts from individual donors, and foundation grants. The endowment provides general operations in support of the mission: to maintain and preserve the permanently installed spaces.





Chinati Thirteener by **Carl Andre**

## Prada Marfa-Iconic Marfa, Texas?

Installation art is known for challenging viewers; it can be gritty, defiant, quirky, and even dismal. It can represent volatile experiences from the past or make fun or common social norms. Prada Marfa may be a perfect representation of strange decadence in a foreign (to the everyday city dweller) world.



There was a Marfa, Texas before Prada Marfa, but one cannot deny what the iconic installation-turned-museum has done for Marfa's notoriety (even though it stands over 30 miles OUTSIDE of Marfa proper). It almost embodies the whole idea behind an artsy community in the middle of the Texas desert, with miles of scrub and longhorns to welcome art-loving visitors, who likely echo the classic road trip question "Are we there yet?" as they zoom along the open road for hours.



## History

Berlin-based artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset created this pop-culture land art project in the fall of 2005, to stand unchanged in the desert. Borne out of a silly sign in NYC which hinted at gentrification and consumerism as a powerful modifier to neighborhoods, nonprofit Art Production Fund and gallery Ballroom Marfa provided the nearly \$100k necessary to make the dream a reality.

“Prada” holds a special meaning for those in art and fashion, both for being a cutting-edge designer and for its mystique as virtual authorities in fashion. Prada, a notorious supporter of art, approved the use of its name and even provide a few items of inventory from their 2005 collection to add to the feeling of a true free-standing boutique in the desert. This pop art installation is a true blending of art, fashion, and museum, visited by art enthusiasts, celebrities, and tourists alike.

## Vandalism in Marfa

Anything built along a roadside is fodder for vandals, and even in the middle of nowhere, Prada Marfa was no stranger. Immediately after it was revealed, someone broke in and stole all the inventory. GPS trackers, cameras, an alarm, and even its own personal bodyguard (a local sheriff) was instilled to protect the building. In classic Texas style, one contactor even suggested rattlesnakes be placed inside for protection. From being spray painted to being shot at, Prada Marfa has seen a lot of angst.



Texas Department of Transportation Incident—Art or Advertising?  
 In a potentially dramatic turn of events, the Texas Department of Transportation deemed Prada Marfa illegal roadside advertising (like a billboard). After pursuing Playboy for the display of its logo on the highway nearby, the Texas government took issue with the Prada Marfa sign itself, considered advertising for the retailer (even though the doors are locked and no current—useable—inventory is housed inside).

Art Production Fund worked with others to work around this designation, considering it a “civic gift” to the residents of Marfa. The final decision was made to lease the property on which the building stands and labeling it an art museum site, a choice which was met with approval by the Texas Department of Transportation, which wanted to preserve the site for its cultural value.



The most noteworthy act of vandalism, however, was a bit more calculated. Another artist (perhaps envious and wishing for notoriety at any cost) seriously damaged Prada Marfa in 2014, including dumping blue paint on the sides, cutting the awning, and gluing nonsensical signs on the front. The offender left a sort of written explanation of his act, spewing dissatisfaction about commercialism and calling the building TOMS Marfa in response to anger with the retailer’s failure to help prevent economic inequality in its business-doings. This is a strange site upon which to leave damage, since the origins of the exhibit lie in a similar observation. Multiple volunteers and thousands of dollars later, Prada Marfa was returned to her previous glory(?). Donning the marks of both average hooligans and envious limelight-seekers, Prada Marfa lifts its head up high as if to say, “So What?”, and the artists confidently reported that Prada Marfa was designed to weather the treatment, letting nature decide its lifespan.

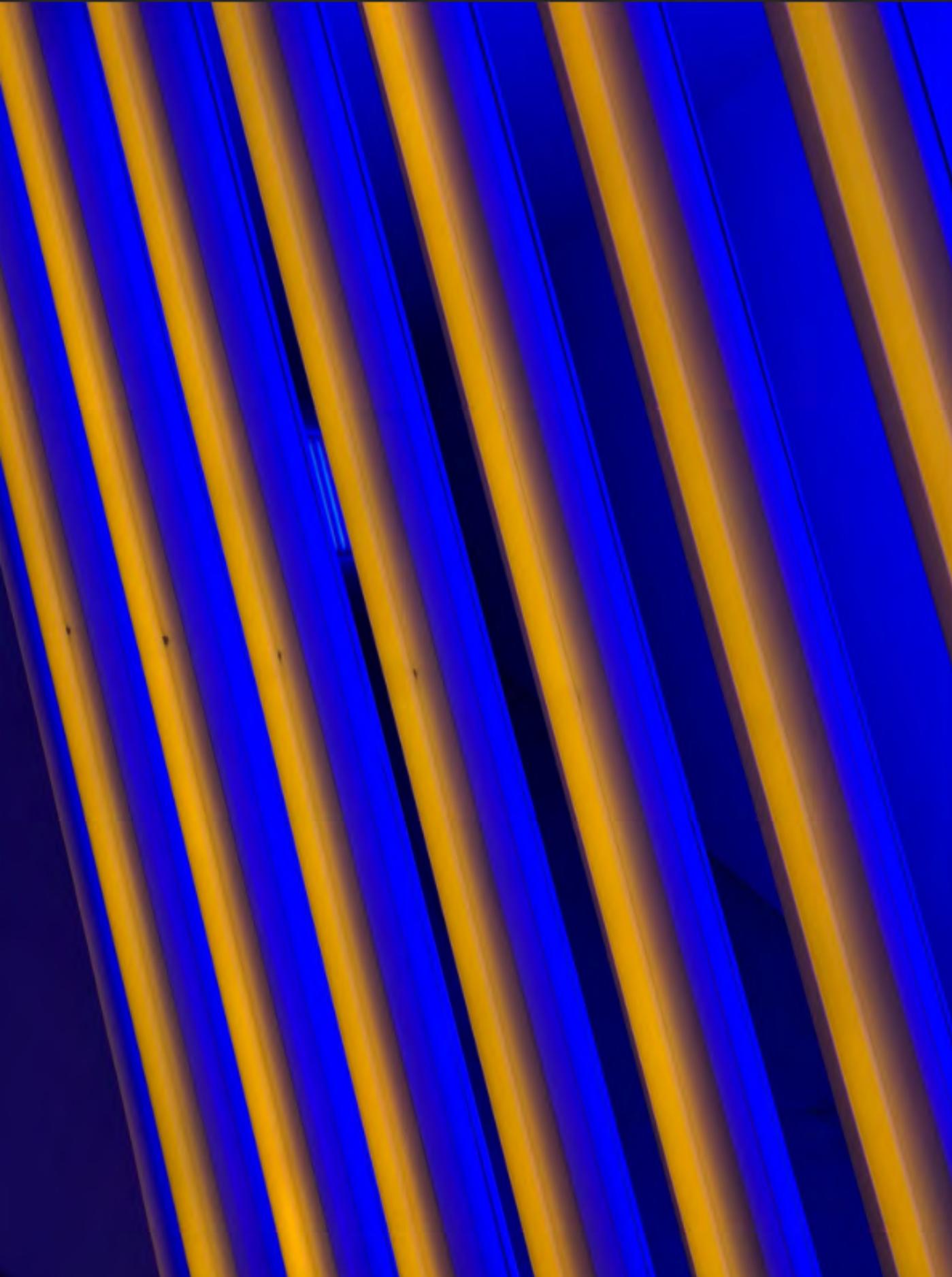


## Making a Mark in the (Art) World

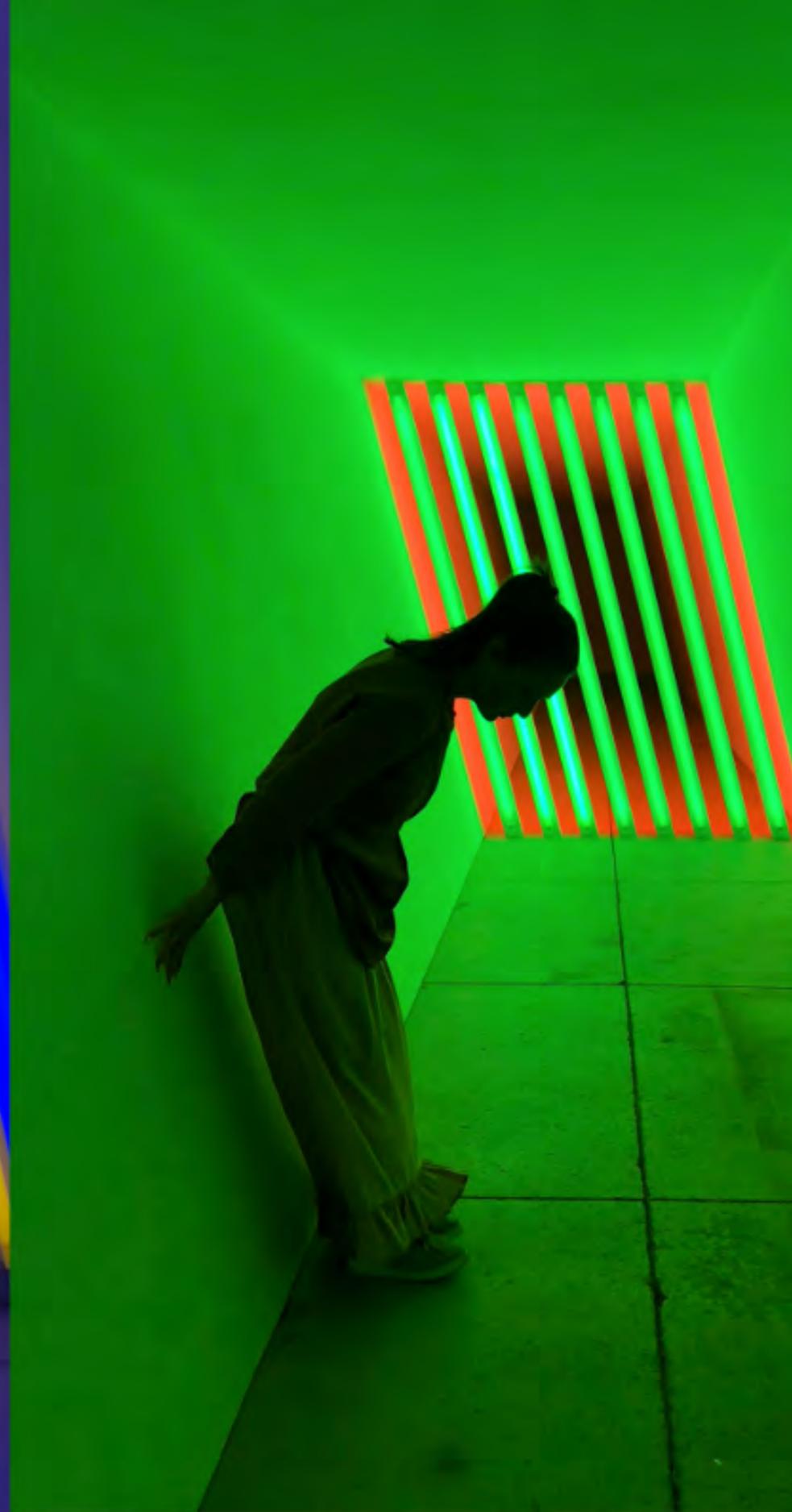
No matter how you feel about the consumerism and even hedonism expressed in Prada Marfa's brazen existence in rural Texas, where the population couldn't dream of shopping within its stucco walls, it is a **s u c c e s s f u l i n s t a l l a t i o n .** Successful for provoking passersby, drawing visitors to photograph themselves in front of its mystical entrance, and enticing people to search online for information about this strange facility. What IS Prada Marfa and why has it stood outside of Marfa, Texas, for nearly 20 years, weathering an environment truly irrelative to what it represents.



untitled (Marfa project) by **Dan Flavin**

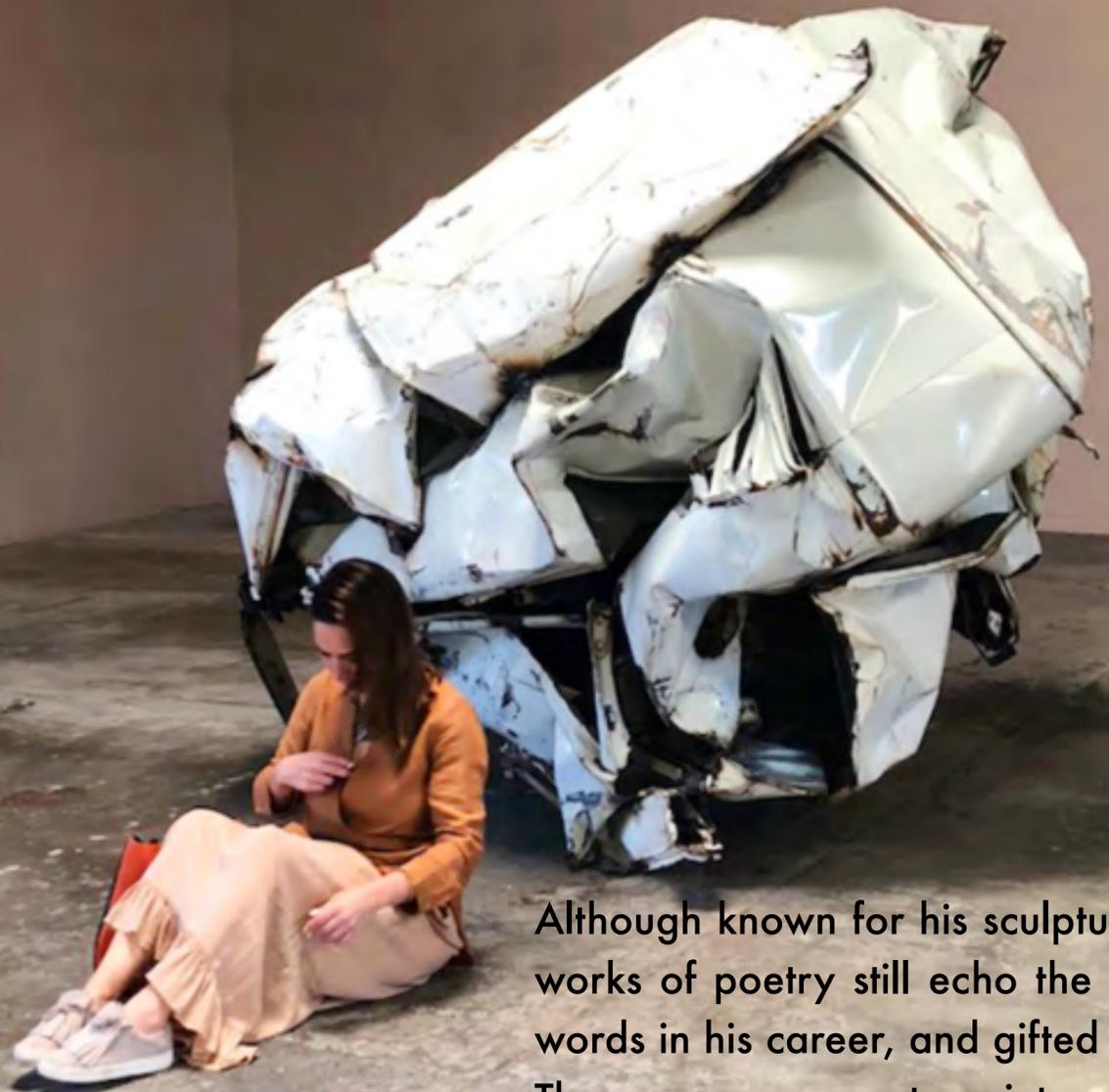


untitled (Marfa project) by **Dan Flavin**



# John Chamberlain and Carl Andre—Chinati Foundation

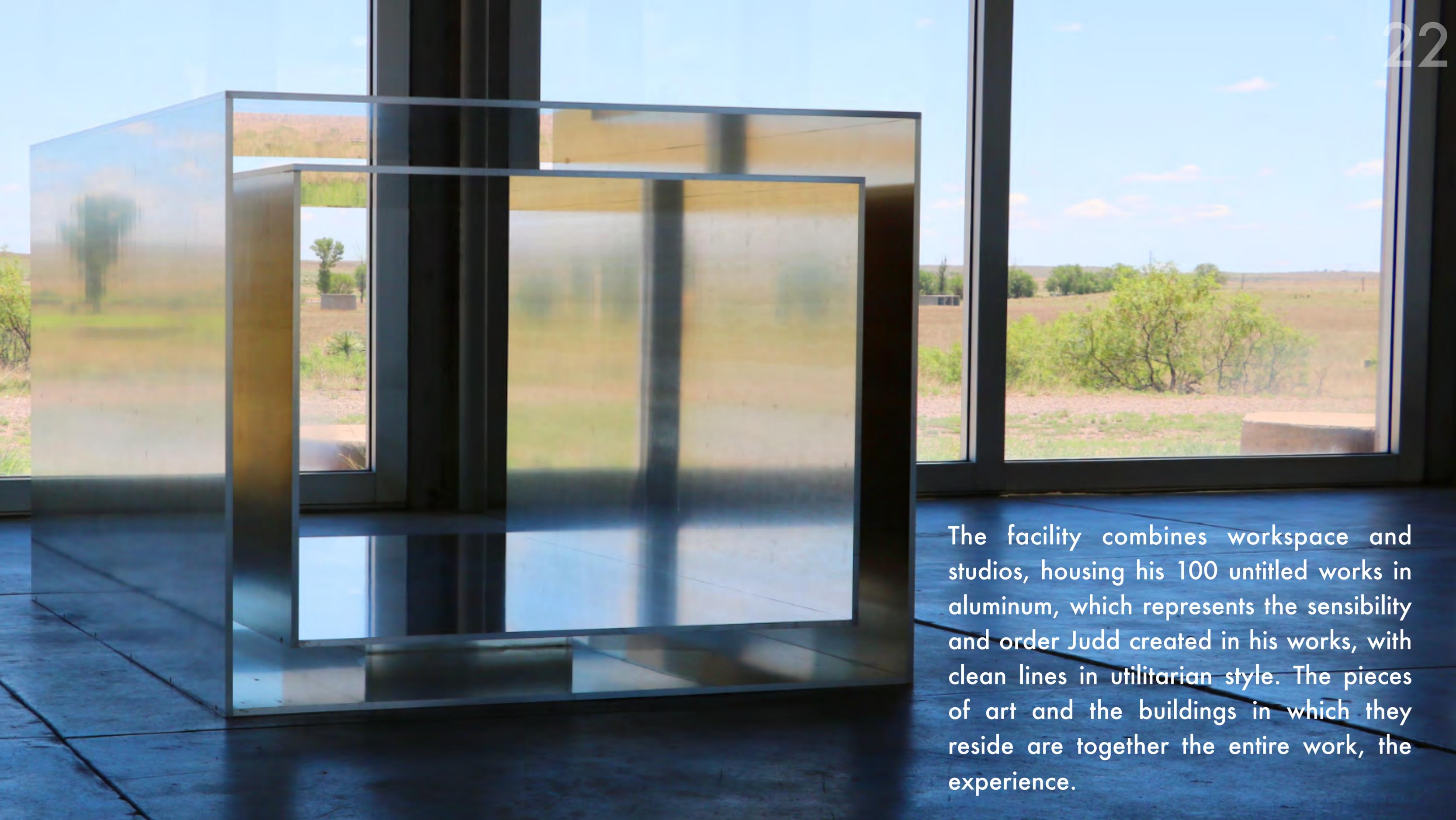
Although he never would admit that his iconic crushed car sculptures meant anything related to consumerism or the fascination with cars in America, his works are successful for the varied interpretations viewers have expressed over the years. Chamberlain and Judd together installed the works in the early 1980's as the facility was being overhauled for its use as an art gallery. Chamberlain later attempted to separate himself from the overwhelming attitude that he was a "car sculptor" and began creating works in foam, some of which are on display here in Marfa.



Although known for his sculpture, Carl Andre's WORDS exhibit breaks from large-scale installation art, as Carl Andre's works of poetry still echo the simplicity Judd was looking for when he came to Marfa. Andre has written over 1,500 words in his career, and gifted nearly 500 to the Chinati Foundation, adding another layer to the works on display here. The pages represent an interesting combination of visual and written art, a style in which Andre recreated the same sensibility found in many other Marfa works. Housed in its own building, **Andre's poetry provides a union of visual and written art.**

## “The Block” 100 Aluminum Works—Judd Foundation

Judd’s plan for wide open spaces to create and exhibit his large-scale installation works started with purchasing the former US military airplane hangars, barracks, gymnasium and warehouses, which at one time housed German POW prisoners.



The facility combines workspace and studios, housing his 100 untitled works in aluminum, which represents the sensibility and order Judd created in his works, with clean lines in utilitarian style. The pieces of art and the buildings in which they reside are together the entire work, the experience.

The image shows the interior of a modern building with a high ceiling and large windows. The walls and ceiling are finished with dark wood. The floor is made of large, dark concrete tiles. Several tall, cylindrical concrete pillars support the ceiling. Large windows provide a view of a grassy field and a building in the distance. The lighting is bright and natural, coming from the windows.

The Judd Foundation was established to maintain and preserve the heart of Judd's works, including the buildings and facilities located within The Block.



untitled (dawn to dusk) by **Robert Irwin**



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