

Marfa Stories

A PIECE APART WOMAN



No, I'd never been to this country before. No, I didn't know where the roads would lead me. No, I didn't intend to turn back.

— *Mary Oliver*

Marfa, Texas is a destination easily romanticized. Hours from any major city, planted squarely in the middle of nowhere West Texas, Marfa is all open sky, dusty history, and starlit nights. After feeling the specific sort of magic the town embodies, it's easy to see why the location has long been a retreat for people looking to escape. And yet, it's one thing to spend a long weekend in Marfa, and another entirely to live and work there. Below, the stories of three women who call it home.

Photography by MICHAEL A. MULLER

Interviews by LEIGH PATTERSON | Styled by ALEXA HOTZ



Mimi wears **GALEANA BIB FRONT DRESS** in white

Mimi Dopson, Ceramicist

For Mimi Dopson, a life in the West Texas desert is a rebirth: after raising a family in Austin and working at the front desk of her husband's dental practice for most of her adult life, the pair retired and moved on a whim, taking on a more austere desert life, and starting ceramic classes together at a local college. In Marfa, she found connection, like with curator and former Judd partner Marianne Stockebrand, who stocked the couple's line Mimi y Roberto at Tienda M (co-owned by Dosa's Christina Kim), presenting the pottery in a new context.

How have you gotten to where you are?

I was born in a small central Texas town with food from the garden and hard-working people. My grandfather took us to the dance hall on week nights, and during the intermissions we would slide on the slick floor. In the early morning, I would draw, finger-paint, or make a small corner beautiful. I loved plants and flowers. Much later, Ikebana lessons brought my focus to one seed pod, one branch, one flower in a special container.

Both my husband Robert and I never studied ceramics before we moved to West Texas. However, we would often travel to Mexico; we loved Oaxaca and searched out well-known artists. Everything from weaving to clay interested us. We drove down long, unpaved roads to meet these artists. [I remember once] Theodora Blanca—sitting among her chickens—offered me a piece of clay to try. I was too timid and declined. But she planted a seed.



At home we set up our studio and worked every day to learn. We also expanded our borders and hiked in Copper Canyon, traveling on the cheap, always with the intent to learn. Eventually, a one-inch ad in *Ceramics Monthly* lured us to join a group from Santa Cruz on a trip to Japan. Such a big decision, but soon we were landing in Narita Airport and then on a train to Tokyo. We discovered a school that taught ceramics as if we were part of the family; we slept on the floor with no furniture and one lamp. Waking up at sunrise, we would slide the screen to open our room to the garden, inspired by the flowers, and how temples in Kyoto arrange flowers as part of their ritual. When our first

clumsy bowls made the slop bucket at end of day, we were still happy! No one would say we had arrived, but sweet, talented people at this pottery school slowly moved us along so that we knew we had improved. The spiral of the clay was always reassuring.

How do your surroundings inspire your work?

Well now, it's 7am in this small West Texas town. The early sky is pale amethyst. There are no street lights. There are a few street noises of the town waking up. In time we see incredible birds through our glass wall. Today we look for the oriole that we saw yesterday — golden yellow and black. Here we notice sky and space and quiet. We are out the door walking. There is always something intriguing.

