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"If you look at Adjaye Associates, it's not about making showy, spectacular things. It's about shaping the 21st century."  
—David Adjaye

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Ballroom Marfa's new executive director, Susan Sutton; Sam Falls' *Untitled (Life in California)*, 2014 will be included in the artist's upcoming solo show there.

# BIGGER IN TEXAS

As the new executive director of Ballroom Marfa, Susan Sutton has bold plans for the former dance hall turned art institution.

BY BROOK S. MASON

**Susan Sutton, the newly appointed** executive director of Ballroom Marfa, is taking the Lone Star State's contemporary arts center to new heights. While the tiny town of Marfa, Texas (population 1,900), is known for the late sculptor and innovator Donald Judd's dynamic art installation, Ballroom Marfa has remained a relative footnote in the high-octane international art world. But now, Sutton has put together an impressive lineup of multidisciplinary events that are bound to put Ballroom Marfa back on the map as a must-visit cultural destination.

Best known for funding artists Elmgreen and Dragset's *Prada Marfa*, a quixotic rendition of the fashion mecca back in 2005, the nonprofit Ballroom (a converted 1920s dance hall) already has a number of A-list supporters and board members, including Leo Villareal, Allison Sarofim and Matthew Day Jackson. What's new is that Sutton is infusing the space with a reenergized spirit.

"Susan is digging our roots even deeper as a creative hub," says Ballroom co-founder and Artistic Director Fairfax Dorn. Sutton adds, "I'm aiming for a dialogue between art, music and film." So, she's been active in expanding the institution's music residency and commissioning new work by artists and musicians. Next month under Sutton's aegis, there will be an exhibition devoted to the work of L.A.-based artist, photographer and videographer Sam Falls as well as the second-annual New Myths festival—a sort of precursor to SXSW—which will feature both established and emerging

musical talent along with film screenings.

Yet these types of events are hardly of a temporary nature. "A recording of rocker Dev Hynes (aka Blood Orange) and Connan Mockasin—who are both performing at the festival—and a book by Falls will be produced, so there's a lasting effect to those efforts," says Sutton. "And that's where it's at now. We're a seed growing new talent."

Before joining Ballroom Marfa, Sutton had long been steeped in wedding exhibitions and events while heightening the visibility of Houston's Menil Collection, known for its meditative Rothko Chapel and vast holdings of Henry Matisse and Brice Marden. In 2012, she honed in her curatorial skills managing "The Progress of Love," a collaboration with the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos in Nigeria and the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis, which featured performances, videos and other programming from over 20 international artists. In 2014, Sutton also organized the Menil Collection's "A Thin Wall of Air: Charles James," an exhibition dedicated to the eccentric couturier for which she tapped Harold Koda, curator of the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Lady Amanda Harlech, writer and former consultant to Karl Lagerfeld and John Galliano, to serve on the panel.

What's next on Sutton's project list? She's planning a collaboration with British curator Tom Morton for Ballroom Marfa's Fall 2015 group exhibition, "Apparat." "The new events are all part of the Ballroom securing its rightful position on the L.A. and New York cultural axis—and beyond," she says.