

Corralled in the Chihuahuan Desert, Donald Judd's library has its own ecosystem.

MOLLY MANDELL

Cult Rooms

The artist Donald Judd had admirers so passionate that, following his death in 1994, they created bumper stickers and T-shirts emblazoned with “WWDJD”—an acronym for “What would Donald Judd do?”

Perhaps a better question would have been, “What would Donald Judd read?” Unbeknownst to many, Judd was an avid bibliophile. His passion for books culminated in a library in the west Texas town of Marfa, an unlikely destination that has since become a hotbed for the arts as a result of Judd's influence and work.

Judd first visited Marfa as a soldier in December 1946 and the landscape captivated him so much that he sent a telegram to his mother about it. Before he settled there 26 years later, in 1972, Judd had become an influential member of the New York art world, both as a critic and as an artist. Eventually rejecting the New York scene as “glib and harsh,” he resolved to find a new place for his art. After considering multiple towns in southwest Texas, Judd chose Marfa because it was the “best looking and most practical.”

Until his death, Judd invested almost all his money in the town. Over time, he acquired two aircraft hangars, a former cavalry base, a bank, more than 40,000 acres of land, a defunct grocery store, a hotel, six homes, several commercial buildings and the local hot springs. He also built a library to house his collection of nearly 13,000 books.

“Don believed that you should have a lifelong relationship with books and always question the world around you,” says Judd's daughter, Rainer. She fondly remembers purchasing books with her father. “We bought a lot of

books on our travels, and always shipped them back to Marfa. Back in Marfa, if you weren't careful, you would find that Don had taken your books. He thought that every book was interesting in some way.” It was this conviction that drove him to amass a library spanning 40 languages and 576 shelves.

Judd had very fixed ideas about the organization of his library and personally catalogued his inventory (this detail is perhaps unsurprising given he also held notoriously strong views about how and where his artwork should be displayed). Judd's collections were split between pre-20th and 20th-century topics. The first was organized by country and the latter by subject matter. “Within the arts and architecture section, Don arranged the books by artists' or architects' birth dates,” says Rainer. “He also created lists, a few of which are still on the shelves, of artists' birth and death dates.”

Thousands of people make the pilgrimage to Marfa each year, many of whom are interested in getting a glimpse into the seminal artist's legacy. Judd Foundation, which is run by Rainer and her brother, Flavin, preserves Judd's studios, offices and private residence in the town. Perhaps most importantly, the foundation preserves his library.

“Don was always interested in the writers who lived and worked in the cities and countries that we traveled to,” says Rainer. “He felt it was important to understand the context and history of these places and the people who lived there.” For those traveling to Marfa, Judd's vast collection of books is arguably the best way to get to know the artist and the town that he reinvigorated. *Photography by Elizabeth Felicella*



Judd wrote on a broad range of topics. In 2016, Judd Foundation and David Zwirner Books published *Donald Judd Writing*—a collection of the artist's essays, notes and manuscripts from 1958 to 1993.

SELECTED READING

by Molly Mandell

Donald Judd's library offers an insight into just how varied his interests were. Of the 13,000 books in his collection, 3,129 focus on art. The artist was known for having duplicates so that he could lend or give away his favorite books: He owned not one but four copies of *Cacti of the Southwest*, published by the University of Texas Press. “Dozens of periodicals and books on cacti and succulents can be found in Judd's library,” says Caitlin Murray, an archivist and director of programs at Judd Foundation. “He planted and maintained his own cacti garden at The Block [his residence in Marfa].” Murray also identifies the writings of Italian political philosopher and rhetorician Giambattista Vico as an integral part of Judd's collection. In one personal note dated August 28, 1985, Judd calls Vico a “man to admire.” Lastly, Murray points to another of Judd's favorites, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*—a critique of Western economic models.