

For immediate release

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Chinati Foundation Launches Adobe Apprenticeship Program

Marfa, Texas (February 8, 2022) — This March, an apprenticeship designed to recruit women in the region for job training in the field of adobe restoration begins at the Chinati Foundation. Participants from the tri-county area of Big Bend (Brewster, Jeff Davis, and Presidio Counties) will spend six weeks learning about earthen construction through a combination of workshop sessions and hands-on training. In the process, apprentices will help restore Donald Judd’s distinctive adobe-walled courtyards as part of Chinati’s major restoration of the John Chamberlain Building in downtown Marfa. The Central Marfa Historic District was recently nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for both its collection of adobe structures and for Judd’s contributions to the district. The apprenticeships, which will teach valuable construction skills for the preservation and building of adobe structures in the region, are supported by a generous grant from #StartSmall.

Chinati’s Adobe Apprenticeship program is being conducted in partnership with SILLA and MUDLAB, local firms of builders and designers that will introduce the key elements of basic adobe construction, including brickmaking, wall building, plastering, testing, assessment, and simple repairs. Guest practitioners will lead workshops on specialized topics such as natural plasters, soil analysis and testing, and structural adobe design. On field trips to historic sites and vernacular structures, apprentices will explore the diversity and culture of adobe building in the region.

Learning will primarily take place on location, through two very different kinds of adobe construction sites at Chinati. The Young House is an early 20th-century, two-story adobe outside the museum’s main gate; it currently stands empty and is slated for future restoration. The John Chamberlain Building in downtown Marfa is about to complete a major restoration, including the exterior walls of the courtyard Judd had built, using an adobe and concrete mortar construction.



Adobe-walled courtyard, John Chamberlain Building. Photo by Alex Marks



Partners

Chinati's lead partners, SILLA and MUDLAB, bring a wide range of experience and a sense of discovery and understanding to the Adobe Apprenticeship program.

SILLA is a design, fabrication, and restoration company founded in 1997 by Joey Benton. SILLA works on earthen restoration and preservation projects in the Trans-Pecos region within Big Bend National Park, Fort Davis National Park, Balmorhea State Park, and Fort Lancaster Historic Site. Projects within Marfa include historic, commercial, and residential adobe buildings and typically involve stabilization, basal restoration, and a return to traditional earthen methods and materials.

MUDLAB is a HUB-certified, energy-neutral architecture firm, founded in 2017 by principles Elizabeth Farrell and Zeke Raney. The firm's interest in adobe's potential to be a logical and affordable building solution in West Texas is part of a larger project to apply local building systems to new construction and to choose materials that are resourceful, unique, and responsive to particular sites. MUDLAB collaborates with SILLA on adobe restoration projects in the tri-county area.

Guest Practitioners

Guest practitioners will conduct specialized workshops and represent a range of professions within the field of earthen construction. These workshops will include a public program (schedule and programs to be announced).

David Keller will present a historical overview of adobe building in the local region, followed by an adobe brickmaking workshop. Keller is the senior project archaeologist at the Center for Big Bend Studies and is leading efforts to restore the adobe church in Ruidosa, Texas (a project that Donald Judd once had plans to achieve).

Pat Taylor will present on the organic nature and maintenance requirements of adobe, followed by a hands-on assessment of the Young House at Chinati. Taylor is an internationally renowned adobe preservationist, whose project Guadalupe House in Mesilla, New Mexico, is a case study in historic preservation.

Dr. Sonya Cooper will present on adobe as a particular matrix of soil and moisture, followed by hands-on structural analysis. Cooper is a structural engineer and has been involved in the preservation of significant landmarks including the McDonald ranch house and the Trinity Site National Historic Landmark, both in New Mexico.

About the Chinati Foundation

The Chinati Foundation/La Fundación Chinati is a contemporary art museum created by the artist Donald Judd in Marfa, Texas. The specific intention of Chinati is to preserve and present to the public permanent, large-scale installations by a select group of artists, in which the art, the architecture, and the land are inextricably linked. Artists in the collection include Donald Judd, along with Carl Andre, Ingólfur Arnarsson, John Chamberlain, Dan Flavin, Roni Horn, Robert Irwin, Ilya Kabakov, Richard Long, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, David Rabinowitch, and John Wesley. Public tours and viewing of the collection, the conservation of artworks, education programs, artists' residencies, special exhibitions, lectures, performances, and publications are all vital facets of Chinati's mission.

More information about the Chinati Foundation may be found at chinati.org.

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