

# Museum exhibition shares art and culture of Burning Man

Most of the year, the 1,000 square miles of the Black Rock Desert in north-west Nevada sit isolated, occupied by wildlife that has adapted to thrive in the harsh environment. Two nearby towns, Empire and Gerlach, are home to a population of less than 800 residents.

Then in early August, a temporary city of 80,000 begins to emerge as people arrive to erect colossal works of art. For eight days at summer's end, a community gathers dedicated to self-expression and transformation.

It is Black Rock City, and this February, the High Desert Museum will give visitors a glimpse into the phenomenon called Burning Man.

The new, original museum exhibit, "Infinite Moment: Burning Man on the Horizon," opened on February 1. The exhibition will explore the history, art, culture and impact of the event.

Infinite Moment: Burning Man on the Horizon will explore the ways that the

high desert enables and empowers the art and community of Burning Man.

The vastness of the Black Rock Desert provides a unique backdrop for art, allowing for large-scale pieces that take shape and transform according to the elements and position of the sun. After sunset, the structures glow with vibrant lights and the desert is filled with a cacophony of sound.

The roots of Burning Man lie on San Francisco's Baker Beach. In 1986, artist Larry Harvey and his friend Jerry James built a wooden man that stood eight feet tall. Joined by 20 friends, they burned the structure to mark the summer solstice. The event became a tradition, and more people attended every year, leading organizers to move the growing celebration to the alkali flats of Black Rock Desert in 1990. The annual event now includes hundreds of art installations, leading to the reference of Black Rock City as a "crucible of creativity." The central Man structure, still burned

at every event, has at times reached over 100 feet.

The harsh environment of the desert plays, known for dust storms that lead many "Burners" to keep goggles and masks at the ready, challenges humans at the same time that it creates a space for a community centered on 10 principles, which will be explored in the exhibit. The principles are: Radical Inclusion, Gifting, Decommodification, Radical Self-reliance, Radical Self-expression, Communal Effort, Civic Responsibility, Leaving No Trace, Participation and Immediacy. The principles are core to the Burning Man experience and the museum exhibit.

"We are creating an immersive experience that will allow the visitor to engage with the art and one another," said Museum Executive Director Dana Whitelaw, Ph.D. "Through the exhibit, visitors will explore how the vastness of the high desert fosters art and creativity not typically seen within four walls."



PHOTO PROVIDED

Burning Man Identity Awareness.

Original art will be a part of the exhibit. For instance, artist Jesse Small co-created for the exhibition a "mutant vehicle" to represent the fleet of art cars in Black Rock City. Programs and talks will also take place at the museum during the duration of the exhibition.

The High Desert Museum sent three of its staff to experience this year's Burning Man, including Senior

Curator of Western History Laura Ferguson, Ph.D.

"We were able to witness first-hand why the experience is so meaningful to those who take part," said Ferguson. "It was amazing to see the playa transformed and to explore art in new ways."

Infinite Moment: Burning Man on the Horizon (highdesertmuseum.org/infinite-moment) will be on display through October 4.

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