

# The Dollhouse

EUGENE COLLECTIVE PREPARES AN ENTRY FOR BURNING MAN

By Ester Barkai

Eugene's art collective House of Strange Rituals describes itself as being led by femmes. Tiana Husted, Amanda Langley, Carlye Cannon, Lindsay Swing and Caitlin O'Rourke want to present their work as being led by "femme energy," Husted says.

Each of the five members leads or co-leads a crew. That doesn't mean they want to exclude anyone else, Langley adds. Men as well as non-binary people have helped on the crews as well.

The collective was formed to build "The Dollhouse," a life-sized dollhouse patterned after a turn-of-the-20th-century Victorian home. Driving up to meet the five members, I saw the top of the house peering behind a fence at the construction site, the backyard of a friend of a friend's house in the River Road area. It looked like a large shed or a guest house in progress — nothing unusual for Eugene.

When finished, though, "The Dollhouse" is headed toward one of the most unusual venues for experiencing art: Burning Man.

How did five femmes wind up being Oregon's only Burning Man Honorarium recipient this year? Well, Burning Man isn't just for burning a man anymore. It actually hasn't been since nearly its inception.

Back in 1986, before many of this year's Burning Man's participants were born, Larry Harvey and Jerry James burned a wooden figure of a man, a few feet taller than life size, at Baker Beach in San Francisco.

According to the Burning Man website, a "curious crowd gathers to watch it burn."

By 1990 two things occurred. The man had grown in size to 40 feet, and a police officer stopped the burning due to its being a fire hazard. Long origin story short, the cofounders of what is now referred to as Burning Man took their "elaborate piece of firewood" to the Black Rock Desert in Nevada.

The attendance for Burning Man this year is expected to be upwards of 80,000 people. It lasts one week, this year from Aug. 25-Sept. 2. Burning Man organizers insist it's not a festival. It's a city that's constructed and deconstructed each year; it's a global network tied by social media and regional "Burns."

Most of all, it's a culture: a system of beliefs codified

in the "Ten Principles," one of which is Radical Self-Expression.

The entertainment and art at Black Rock City — the event and temporary city — is created by attendees. In theory, there are no spectators. Everyone participates at Burning Man — everyone, that is, who can buy tickets at \$425 per person, with another \$100 for a vehicle pass.

The Eugene "Dollhouse" references a real Victorian family — the Eddys — said to have had psychic abilities such as summoning spirits from beyond. Visitors will experience "haunted elements within," Swing says.

They will interact with objects by triggering light and sound sensors, walk among walls covered with handmade paper and strange art, photographs, dolls and windows etched with illustrations of bones and dissect-

ed animals. The backside of the structure will be transparent, so people at Burning Man will see the triggered happenings within from a distance.

Husted and Langley have degrees from the University of Oregon in music technology. The idea for the dollhouse came from O'Rourke, who studied fashion design at Lane Community College and has had a life-long interest in dolls.

Swing studied biology but has always been interested in art, especially biological illustration, and Cannon builds festival structures for a living (she most recently worked for Disney and two years ago built the decking for the eclipse platform at the Eclipse Festival in Bend).

The members of House of Strange Rituals bring their various talents and expertise to the project, but they all share a fascination with mysticism, technology and strange art. Before Cannon met with me on the day of the interview, she found a dead raccoon on the road. It was in her car as we spoke.

"When you spot roadkill," I asked, "do you see art?"

All members of the collective responded by nodding.

How excited were they to receive the Burning Man Honorarium? Swing said she was working, meeting with a client to discuss an arts commission, when she got the text. She had a hard time focusing on her meeting. Husted said it was the most excited she'd ever been. None of the members had ever submitted an art proposal before, much less received a grant.

In addition to being recipients of the Honoraria program, the collective also garners support by holding parties, sharing details and progress of their work. They've raised nearly \$10,000 on GoFundMe, including a donation from a descendant of the Eddy family.

Visual Arts Week in Eugene is Aug. 2-9 this year, a few weeks before Burning Man begins. Lane Arts Council partnered with the city to start it last year with the reopening of the Mayor's Art Show, the first BRIDGE Exhibition, related gallery shows, art talks and workshops and viewing of new street murals for the 20x21 Eugene Mural Project.

This year will also feature studio tours removed from the downtown area, as far as the River Road area. "The Dollhouse" will open Aug. 8 as part of VAW's open studio tours. The studio is the build-site, the artwork is the building in back.

If you're also going to Burning Man, look for "The Dollhouse" on the Playa, the art installation area that forms around the monumental metal statue of a man. Three of the five of House of Strange Rituals have been before — multiple times. What keeps them going back? Cannon said the first time she returned from Black Rock City she thought, "This is my life now. I'm doing it." ■



Photo by Ester Barkai

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