

BLACK ROCK BEACON

rites of passage • coming of age edition • tues aug 30, 2011 • vol VII, number II

1:30 @ center camp • www.blackrockbeacon.org

Rod Garrett



BY MRS. LUCKY

The Center Camp structure is an inverted airfoil. The open area at the center of the structure, called the ocular, directs the air in such a way that the harder the wind blows the more stable it becomes. To be in there on a windy day, amongst the cushions and the music, is unforgettable for any Burner. We thank Rod Garrett for that experience.

It was Garrett who thought to lay out Black Rock City streets in concentric circles. His goal was to make the city a little different each year but recognizable. "Like a Volkswagen, that's what Garrett would say. Change the lights, change the bumpers but it still looks like a Volkswagen."

The unique design of Center Camp is an example of what's being remembered as Garrett's genius. Garrett, visionary architect of Black Rock City, died Aug 22 after a long illness. The Center Camp Ring Road was named Rod's Road in his honor.

Beginning in 1997, Garrett designed the structures that supported the Man. Starting with hay bales, the bases became increasingly complex. "I'd have my own primitive ideas," Burning Man co-founder Larry Harvey said of their collaboration, "Rod was able to imagine things entirely in his head, to bring all his attention to bear to a single laser point."

Andrew Johnstone, who describes himself as Garrett's apprentice, said that in 2007 he awoke Garrett with news the Man had been torched early. "We had a bit of trouble with the Man last night," Johnstone recalled saying.

"Oh we did?" Garrett replied. "Well we better go out and take a look." As the two walked in mud through twisted neon, Johnstone says, "he was very matter-of-fact." The Man was rebuilt in 28 hours.

Unfappable, modest, and competent, Garrett was a man of few words. "The highest praise you'd hear from Rob was good job," Harvey says. He suffered fools poorly and was a stickler for details.

Johnstone mentioned Garrett's "almost clairvoyant ability" to picture how people would move within his structures. "He could look at a plan for steps and tell you right where people would become afraid."

In 2011, the Man has changed his stance for the first time in his 25 years. The striding forward, the Rites of Passage, are at least partly about death, Harvey said, and Rod Garrett's illness was one of the influences. Garrett's daughter will place some of her father's ashes in the Man before he burns.

BURNING AT THE CORE

BY GENIE GRATTO

As Burner culture spreads around the world, the world is upping its presence in Black Rock City. This year, for the first time, 22 huge art installations from regional Burner communities will encircle the Man, forming a perimeter 600 feet away.

The projects are the Circle Of Regional Effgies. These have been built by groups from countries like Ireland and Canada, and states including Maine, Louisiana, and California, feature regionally relevant designs that fit in 20-foot-wide by 20-foot-high spaces. They all be burn in a ring of configurations on Thursday at 9 p.m.

Calimba, a virgin Burner from Colorado, walked the in-progress CORE installations on Saturday with her friend Dr. Quinn, the Mighty Eskimo Medicine Woman of Portland, Oregon for her sixth Burn. The two said they heard about the project when they arrived on Playa and wanted to check it out. They got the opportunity to ride in the saddle temporarily affixed atop Ouroboros, brought to the Playa by the Austin, Texas CORE team and depicting a dragon eating its own tail, just an hour before that team was going to take down the saddle and declare the installation ready to go.

Calimba said she was amazed that the Austin crew had been working on the project for 13 years only to burn it to the ground on Thursday.

"It's so awesome when you're here early to see them going up, just to know they're going to burn it," she said. "We're so lucky to be part of someone's journey of letting it go."

Meredith Nicole of Vancouver wanted to assist on an art project during this, her fifth Burn.

"I was wanting to come and support somebody's project," Meredith said. "I'm a carpenter, so I really wanted to put my skills to use."

She contacted Machine with the Placement team to let him know she was available. He suggested she work on Playa Time, her regional CORE project. The art is a 20-foot-tall grandfather clock with a large drum in the base that will allow Burners to run inside it, engaging the clock mechanics and moving the time shown on its face.

Another Canadian CORE project is Rite of Mountain Passage, which originated in Alberta. The piece is a



Dopharchu Doiteaine
Vinnie Rafter, Ireland

giant lotus flower that visitors can sit inside. The effigy itself is a flaming snowflake that sits above the seating area.

"We wanted the art to be interactive, and not just regarded from a distance," said Mike "Half Hour" Hermann, a member of the build team.

Rites of Mountain Passage is set against an abstract painting created by Evelyn Reed. The crew took 12 photos of Rocky Mountains around Alberta and used those to cut out silhouettes in wood that Reed then painted on to evoke the sense of the mountains.

"As you approach the art, you see the lotus flower, and then you get closer, and you see the mountain range," said Hermann. "Then you get closer and you see a glacier on the mountain range."

The project was primarily built in the yard of Gregory "Knee High" Polmans, a virgin Burner from Alberta. Polmans is an avid stiltler who had friends in the Alberta Burner community. He was invited to a meeting about Freezer Burn, the regional event, but said that meeting rapidly turned into an extended conversation about the CORE concept.

"I knew the project needed to flow well to get done in time, and we were having trouble thinking of a location to build it," Polmans said. "I said, 'How about we start this at my house?'" According to Hermann, Polmans' donation of his home, his money, and his construction expertise made him the heart and soul of the project.

The New York regional installation, Tree of Heaven, is designed to carry up to 6,000 wooden leaves, erupting from a map of the New York subway — hey, it ties the city together — and surrounded by benches in the shapes of some of Gotham's bridges.

The project was taking shape on a rainy day in June, at a Burner-friendly event called Figment, where children were decorating

the leaves with magic markers and other art supplies. They had come out to Governor's Island, a former Coast Guard base in New York Harbor, for a day of urban art, and some of them were trying to wrap their minds around the idea that after all the work to make this big tree, it was going to get torched.

"Why do you want to burn it?" one child asked.

Kat, co-designer of the project, revved up for an answer, and it seemed like it would be hard to convince the scamp about impermanent art and the persistence of memory. She threw an elegant curve instead.

"We like to burn things. Wouldn't it be fun to see it burn?"

New York-area children weren't the only ones who participated at a community level. In Las Vegas, the CORE project received a residency grant to work on the project all summer at a city art park and invited locals to contribute any amount of time, even just an hour, to working on putting Lucky Lady Lucy, a wooden depiction of a Las Vegas showgirl. Over the course of the summer, the project was highlighted during city-art-walk-style



Ouroboros
Pat Wheaton, Flipside (Austin)

events. Hundreds of local residents participated in building the project.

"It made it really inclusive," said Doran. "I think it will be hard to do anything other than that now. The Burners are the perfect people for starting the parade. We can bring something back from the Playa, so [community members] can get a taste of that feeling."

Working with such a broad spectrum of participants presented a challenge to Las Vegas CORE project designer, Merritt Pelkey. "The personal expansion, and its giving me the ability to work with multiple personalities across all energies, has been most difficult and most rewarding," Pelkey said.

Now seeing Lucky Lady Lucy placed at 10 o'clock on the ring around this year's Striding Man, has been gratifying, said Pelkey. "We think she's actually his girlfriend, and he's walking toward his lost love," he said.

"How can you become the hottest showgirl in Nevada?" Doran asked. "Get a huge stage and light yourself on fire."

It took a much smaller crew to bring the Kentucky regional project, a 16-foot bourbon barrel, to the Playa. Approximately 35 people worked outside of and inside Black Rock City on this particular piece, including

people not only from Kentucky, but also from Asheville, North Carolina; Atlanta; New York; and Ohio, said Heather LeBlanc, who managed the fundraising effort to bring the piece to life.

This was LeBlanc's second Burn and her first year working on a large-scale art project. "It's nice to experience something new," she said. "It's been really nice to be part of this since it's the first type of this project to happen at Burning Man."

On Saturday afternoon, the crew experienced a harrowing moment as they attempted to set the top of the barrel in place. Valkyrie, a crew member who was perched precariously on top of a ladder, managed to catch



Carnegeia Gigantea
Michael Garcia, Arizona

the lid as it nearly slid off the forklift helping them get it to its spot, and then guided it into place with the assistance of the rest of the crew. It was a banner moment, and when the lid was in place, a palpable relief settled over the group.

Members of the Kentucky crew will be out on the Playa each evening during the week before the effgies burn, handing out bourbon samples and talking about the art piece.

In addition, there are biking art tours of the entire project available today and tomorrow at 4:30 p.m. Meet at the 6 p.m. point of the CORE ring to be matched up with a docent who will guide you through each of the 22 pieces.

It will be an opportunity to journey along with the many artists and community members who went bigger than themselves this year and built pieces that raise awareness of the many regional communities while simultaneously bringing those communities together around a central pyre.

"The best thing about this project for me is the restoration of my faith in the community that we have. It ended up being a big canvas that everyone lopped a piece off of," Hermann said. "Now, people are already saying 'What's the next thing we're going to do? You can only do so much with one pair of hands.'"

