



# **BURN BRILLIANTLY**

## BURNING MAN IN QUOTES

**Edited by Rohan Roberts**



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Edited by  
Rohan Roberts

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*For*

Good Rainbow



In 2016, I attended my first Burn. By August 2022, I had participated in my fifth Burning Man in Nevada, three AfrikaBurns, and designed and built the temple at the 2017 Netherlands Burning Man. The regional Burns are absolutely wonderful, but nothing compares to the real deal in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada.

I invariably get asked the question: "How was Burning Man?" Over and over again, it's the same question, "How was Burning Man?" I say to them, as Jamie Wheal would: "You have to go there to know there." But obviously, that won't satisfy the curious. So, I offer my spiel about how it was a transporting, transformative, and utterly transcendental experience. Then I mention how it's the Olympics of art; an apotheosis of STEAM; a permission engine; a crucible of creativity; a vortex of artistry; a whimsical fairyland; a Disneyland for adults; a spa for the mind; a metamorphosis of the soul; a theatre of the absurd; a counterculture critique; a hyper-freak show; a Liquorice allsorts of whimsy and play; a raging, surreal maelstrom of lights, colours, sounds, emotions, and experiences; and a heterodox hodgepodge of people's dreams pouring out into reality.

There was a moment at Burning Man when I stood gazing at everything around me and I

kept saying over and over again: "Look at this! Just LOOK AT THIS! It's amazing! It's amazing! It's amazing! It's amazing...." I said it over 30 times! I was *lost* for words! All I could say about the splendour and magic of Burning Man was, "it is so *amazing*." I didn't so much *say* it as *gasp* it.

Some people think it's a mutant version of Glastonbury or Coachella or Shambhala or any number of vapid, commercial, soulless mainstream EDM music festivals. Burning Man is not a music festival. Burning Man is unlike anything on this planet.

Wikipedia describes it thus:

"Burning Man is an annual gathering that takes place at Black Rock City—a temporary community erected in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada. The event is described as an experiment in community and art, influenced by 10 main principles, including 'radical' inclusion, self-reliance and self-expression, as well as community cooperation, civic responsibility, gifting, decommodification, participation, immediacy and leaving no trace.

"At Burning Man, the community explores various forms of artistic self-expression, created in celebration for the pleasure of all participants.

Participation is a key precept for the community – selfless giving of one's unique talents for the enjoyment of all is encouraged and actively reinforced. Some of these generous outpourings of creativity can include experimental and interactive sculpture, building, performance, and art cars among other mediums, often inspired by the yearly theme, chosen by organisers. The event takes its name from its culmination, the symbolic ritual burning of a large wooden effigy ('the Man') that traditionally occurs on the Saturday evening of the event."

However, that description above seems slightly desiccated.

When it comes to Burning Man, the pen falters, the lexicon fails, and the keyboard refuses to yield a better description. The Muses expire, Pegasus wilts, and language falls short and proves inadequate if I tried to use words to describe how AMAZING (that word again) Burning Man is.

This compilation is an attempt to convey in the words of various people what Burning Man is and convey the magic that happens there.



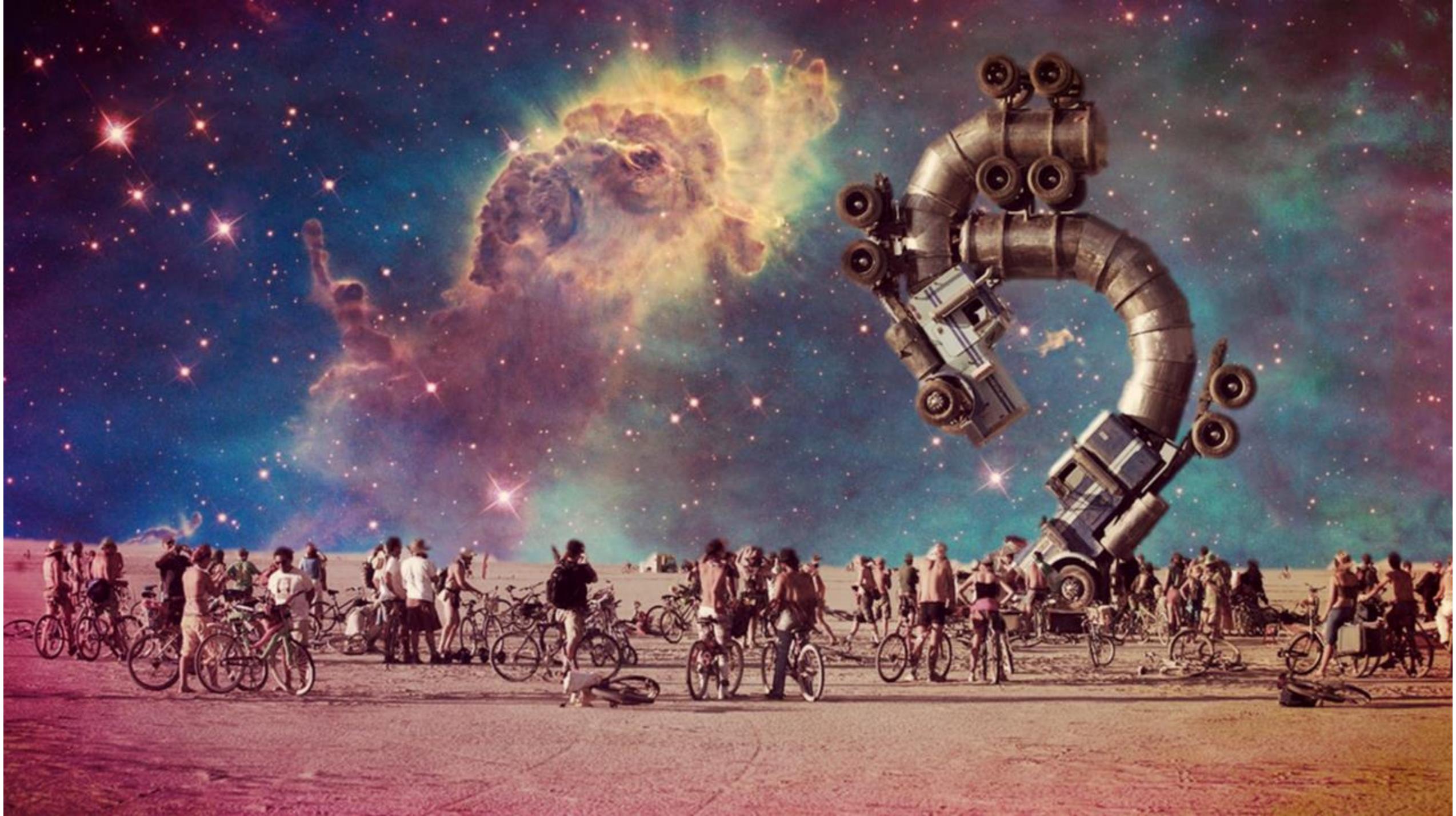
*“Black Rock cliché has that you can’t say anything very penetrating about Burning Man because its diversity and contradictions undermine any generalizations you might be tempted to make. This truism is solid enough and should be mulled over by any Burner foolish enough to venture into a written analysis of the yearly festival.”*

**- Erik Davis**



*“People refer to Burning Man as technopaganism, or neotribalism, or modern primitivism. BM is a laboratory — a testing ground — a blueprint — for what we could do together as a species in a post-A.I. world of UBI where everyone is freed up to play, create, and have fun.”*

**- Astro**



*"The primitive survivalist aspects of the festival may seem to contrast with the digital world of its inhabitants; but Burning Man has become a pastiche of various parts of our culture and history. It has the spontaneous-gathering feel of Woodstock, the spirituality and temporary community of the Rainbow Gathering, the campiness, outrageousness and identity-transformation of the drag-queen scene, the edginess and danger of a Harley-Davidson convention and the burning and worship of, well, the ancient Druids."*

**- Michael Colton**



*“At its core, Burning Man is an experiment in alternative living where you witness an outpouring of generosity. It is a celebration of the human spirit, human imagination, and human ingenuity and that experiencing it is like being slingshot through a wormhole to the centre of the universe only to emerge into an alien world where the kindest, most ingenious, creative, playful, innovative, warm, generous, ridiculous, and preposterous people live.”*

**- Astro**



*“Burning Man is a place where art is elevated to civic responsibility and gift-giving is a core principle. It is a place where the random flotsam and jetsam of human society and global cultures wash up for one week then wash out, as participants return to the default world physically drained, spiritually cleansed, and emotionally inspired.”*

**- Anon.**



*"Burning Man is the most influential tribal-techno-feral-pagan-digital event, happening, rave or whatever in the world. Out there in the desert, witches, warlocks and wired sorcerers use technology as if it were some electronic crystal ball. It is a living post-postmodernist Hieronymous Bosch painting with a just a touch of Fellini."*

**- Alex Priedite**



*“Burning Man themes include spirituality absented from religion; ritual absented from dogma; performativity, ideology, and ethos; multicultural and hybrid religious symbols; immediacy and transformation; anti-commodification sentiments; and utopian discourses of social protest. It is a place of visceral transformative encounters that derives from a wealth of cultural sources: from wicker men to contemporary culture jammers and is choc-a-block full of compelling, provocative, and weird things.”*

- Lee Gilmore



*"I think that the people at Burning Man are a lot kinder and freer than in regular life... and that they are more generous and open. I feel the art is more expressive than the art I've seen before. The stuff at BM has more meaning and is less about trying to show off. I love the dust - the desert is my favorite place to wander and see new things."*

**- Zohar**



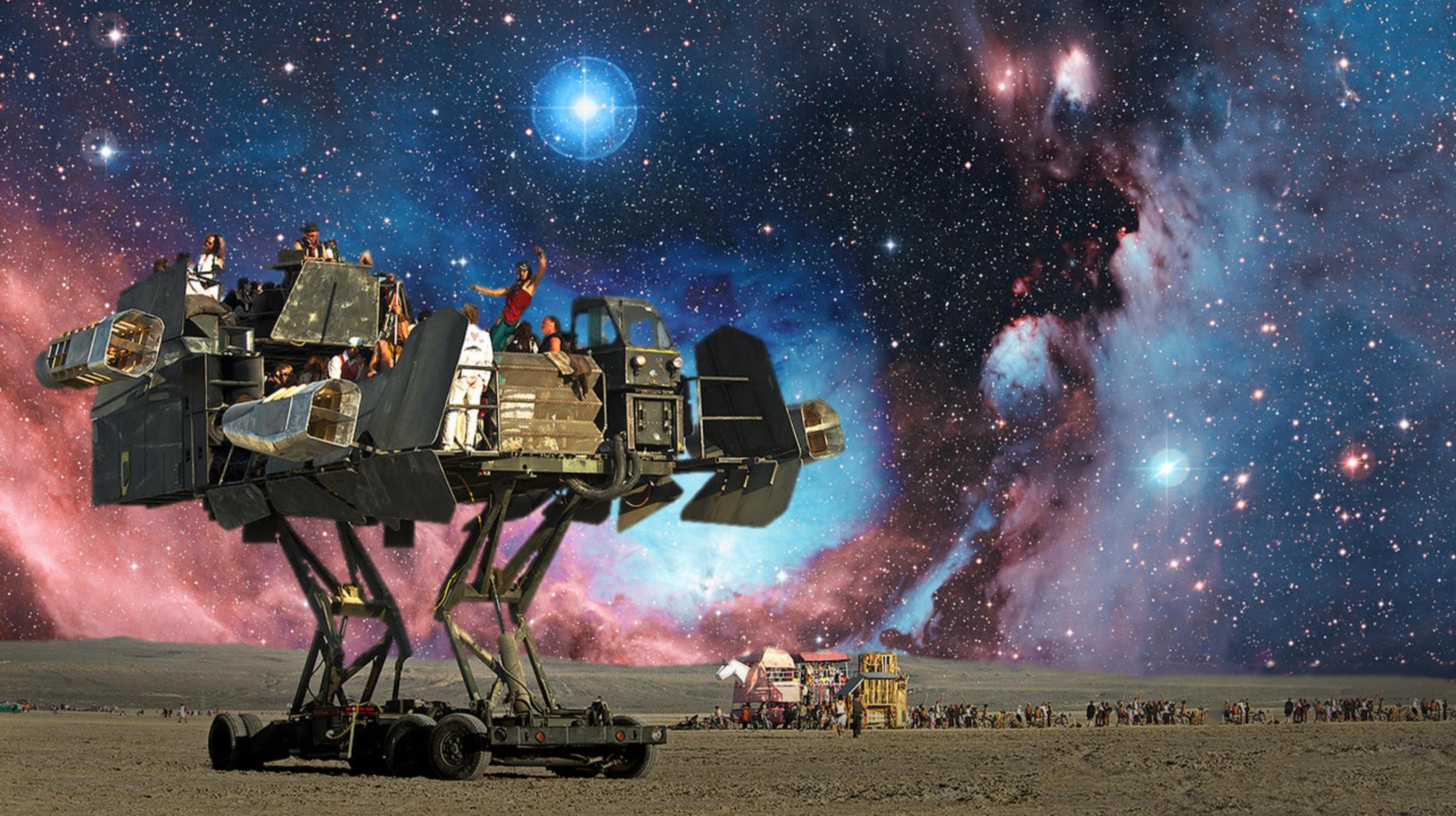
*“Black Rock City looks nothing like you’d imagined — like the extras from the last Mad Max movie threw a tailgate party and never left. Honestly, it’s a bit anticlimactic after all the hype. RVs, generators, shade tarps and Porta Potties radiate out in all directions. An elective refugee camp from 21st Century Normal. You wonder why everyone’s ambling around in their underpants and platform boots. The loucheness of it all feels slightly scandalous, and it’s only 10 in the morning.”*

**- Jamie Wheal**



*"Burning Man is often portrayed in the media as some wild, frenetic, carnivalesque, Dionysian orgy with drunken, drug-addled, naked people running around a fire. This is typical of lazy reporters who have neither the lexicon nor the gumption to adequately describe what Burning Man is. They often portray it as pagan, primitive, and tribal, while also declaring that it is the ultimate technological and postmodern happening."*

**- Astro**



*"Burning Man is a time to be unapologetically you. A time to dress exactly as you wish. Everyone is in the same mindset supporting you on your journey of freedom of expression, encouraging and celebrating the uniqueness of you!"*

**- Nikki Starr Noce**



*"The Man is the sacrificial king — Osiris, Dionysus, John Barleycorn and the Nazarene — rolled into one. 'Mankind,' Goethe observed, 'has always crucified and burned.' Our Man is just the latest variation on that ancient theme."*

**- Jamie Wheal**



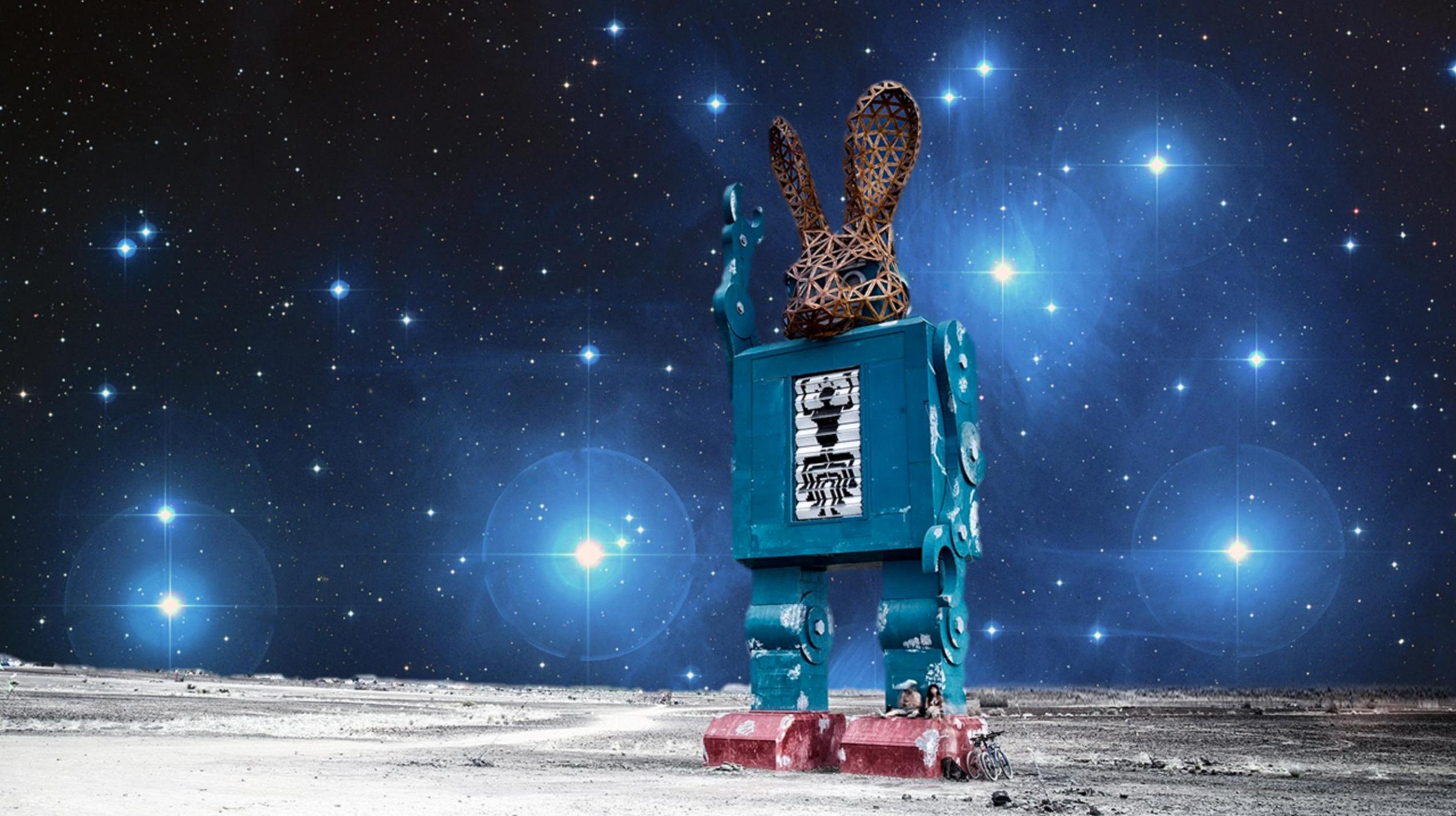
*"We ask that the participants commune with themselves, that they regard their own reality, that essential inner portion of experience that makes them feel real, as if it were a vision... No one can say what that vision might be. We just ask people to invent some way of sharing it with others."*

**- Larry Harvey**



*“There are so many survival skills from taking part in the “Burning Man Immersion Learning Program” (a.k.a going to Black Rock City), which come in handy. But there is also a deeper, more important Burning Man training that we need to lean into. Like the ability to look at a situation and say, “What is needed?” “What would make this better?” “What do I have to Gift?”*

**- John ‘Halycon’ Styn**



*“Burning Man is a heterotopia — an example of the adjacent possible. I daresay, it’s the closest thing we’ve got to Utopia (literally, both ‘good place’ and ‘no place.’)”*

**- Astro**



*"If you haven't seen something that offends or bothers you, then you haven't seen enough of Black Rock City."*

**- Penfold**



*“Burning Man represents the ultimate attention economy: what participants exchange are the willingness, and the opportunities, to submit to new experience. These experiences in turn create stories, which become the coin of the realm, fetishes traded over the fire, always pointing back to the mysterium tremendum of consciousness itself.”*

**- Erik Davis**



*"I keep on wondering if people will finally ask me why this radical expression of radical self-reliance? There's always radical stuck to the principles—what does that mean? Well, it in some sense it being said the people can live in the moment there, but at the same time, they do so in contemplation of continuities of time that extend all the way back to the beginning... say your birthday when you came into this world as a being and all the way forward potentially into the future and that future that if you live long enough then you very much hope to affect."*

**- Larry Harvey**



*“Burners ritualistically and self-consciously de- and re-construct ad hoc frameworks in which to create and perform self-reflexive spiritualities, which can become for many a profound life-changing experience.”*

**- Lee Gilmore**



*“For one precious week a year, we share the same address, each seeking our own experience, yet joined in our mutual vulnerability to the elements – an incredible metaphor for our interconnection as a species, facing global uncertainty, together.”*

**- Zippy Lomax**



*“When the man's about to collapse from sheer conflagration, some brave and hefty folks grab a pair of dangling steel cables from the Burning Man's shoulders. They tug and yank. The giant wooden man goes into a weird spastic dance, pointy arms upraised and shedding massive showers of fire. A 40-foot-high wooden doll dancing in flames is a sight that really hits the 9-year-old demographic. My kid is in ecstasy, she's loudly swearing that she'll remember this for the rest of her life. I'm sure this is true”*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*"One often hears Burning Man dismissed as a theme park, but what's more important is that it contains thousands of theme parks: little pocket universes butting heads. Space-time itself seems to morph into a flea market, a masquerade of memes, or the Mos Eisley spaceport from Star Wars. Burning man is a promiscuous carnival of souls, a metaphysical flea-market, a demolition derby of reality constructs colliding in a parched void."*

**- Erik Davis**



*"Burning Man's lightscape also serves as an open museum of classic visual phantasmagoria, like Brion Gyson's Dreamachine, or the moiré patterns and perceptual tricks of '60s Op Art, or the gothic lightning bolts of the almighty Tesla Coil."*

**- Erik Davis**



*“Burning Man fosters generosity, giving, and receiving. There is no money exchanged. We give because of our hearts’ desire to without agenda. We receive with gratitude and open arms.”*

**- Nikki Starr Noce**



*“Intelligent people build intelligent civilizations. I now get what a society made of brilliant people would look like.”*

- Anon.



*"Burning Man is a magical place. It seems like it is one of the only places on Earth where the spirit world and the physical world intersect and play with each other."*

- Anon.



*"It feels like people in this place bring their true selves. This is what happens when people's souls let their marvelous essences freely combine with each other."*

- Anon.



*“Among the many frameworks within which Burning Man can be situated – arts celebration, social experiment, or orgiastic revelry – of the experiences that it fulfills for many participants is ritual. In particular, Burning Man can be a venue for those who wish to express and ritualise individualised conceptions of spirituality but who wish to resist the doctrines and institutions of religion.”*

**- Lee Gilmore**



*“Although Burning Man has gentrified fire, the festival has also intensified the technology of flicker. Though screens are relatively rare in Black Rock City, the nighttime playa-scape has itself evolved into a vast, three-dimensional display of artificial lumiere. At night we find ourselves navigating through the after-images of a friendly arms race of lighting designers, who continue to push the envelope on relatively new (and increasingly cheap) technology like lasers, electroluminescent wire, LEDs, glow sticks, and computer-controlled strobe lights. Myriad lines, dots, and blinky lights dance before your eyes, many forming specific icons like dice or Mayan pyramids or mobile jellyfish. ”*

**- Erik Davis**



*"Burning Man is an interactive stage on which to perform, interrogate, and negotiate the meanings of religion, spirituality, ritual, identity, and culture, alongside a multitude of concurrent themes and possibilities."*

**- Lee Gilmore**



REFORM

*"Burning Man can be seen as a quintessentially postindustrial, liminoid event as participants themselves tend to view it as a transgressive, marginal, and otherworldly space for "counterculture" resistance."*

**- Lee Gilmore.**



*"Burning Man provides opportunities for participants to peel away layers of default cultural messages and constructions of identity. In doing so, they may discover a core sense of self that is deemed somehow more authentic and construct new or renewed identities based on the performative cultural ethos of the festival."*

**- Lee Gilmore**



*"Burning Man is a standard hippie tribal thing, except for the highly nonstandard fact that it is not kitschy '60s nostalgia. This event is very '90s, very big, and very much alive. It's a Tim Leary, Wavy Gravy, Deadhead caravan, grab-the-mike-at-Woodstock kind of event. Feels lovely and enormously persuasive. Nonbureaucratic, participative, solidarity-driven, noncommercial, arty. With all those manifest virtues, you have to wonder why a setup like this can't seem to last any longer than a Labor Day weekend."*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*"As the air cools, strange creatures come out from hiding. Fishnets and feathers. Hot pants and sequins. Furs and thigh-highs. Bedouin princes. Biker chicks. Space pirates. Acrobats and conjurers. Night falls and a procession to the open desert begins."*

**- Jamie Wheal**



*“The Man remains a blank canvas – an open signifier devoid of explicit or fixed meaning – the amorphous image continues to be available for multiple interpretations, as individuals are invited to transfer their own impressions and feelings onto it.”*

**- Lee Gilmore**



*"In this simultaneously imaginal and physical space, they could be reborn through the cleansing fires of the trackless, pure desert, framing the experience as a rite of passage."*

**- Michael Michael**



TIOGA

*“The placement of the Man at the centre of the city’s concentric semicircles and radial spokes readily suggests a template that the historian of religion Mircea Eliade called the axis mundi – a symbolic manifestation of the sacred centre of the cosmos and the location of hierophany, the eruption of the sacred into the profane world.”*

- Lee Gilmore



*“People go to Burning Man to play with alternative experiences, identities, and spiritualities. In so doing, they individualistically and idiosyncratically draw on a diverse and limitless pool of global cultural resources and engage in a la carte mixture of the world’s various faith and symbol systems in order to piece together ad hoc and hybrid frameworks through which to perform their personal spiritual beliefs and aspirations.”*

**- Lee Gilmore**



RABID TRANSIT

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*“Burning Man is not a religion. What self-respecting New Age cult would operate with no priests, no tithing, no doctrine, not even a shared belief in a higher power? BM employs ritual, but it is ritual removed from the context of theology. Unhindered by dogma, ritual becomes a vessel that can be filled with direct experiences. Burning Man is about having that experience, not about explaining it. In fact, if you can explain it, you’re probably not paying attention.”*

**- Stuart Mangram**



*"In their collective resistance to conformity and hierarchical authority, Burners also engage in creative critiques wherever they perceive that authenticity has waned, especially as the event has evolved and grown."*

**- Lee Gilmore**



*"One of the greatest thrills at Burning Man is the first sight of art that shouldn't exist. Art that is too big, too absurd, too breathtaking, too defiant to follow the laws of reason, or gravity, or expectation."*

**- Jennifer Raiser**



**hug nation**

HUG NATN

*"The art installations at Burning Man is] are huge, dazzling pieces meant to evoke wonder – pieces that invite you in, on, around, above, and below. These are pieces of presence that dare you to appreciate them in the present. They amaze you by the sheer audacity, originality, or absurdity. They take your breath away. And then they invite you to come and play."*

**- Jennifer Raiser**



*"Art lies at the literal and figurative center of the Burning Man experience. At the core of the festivity, libation, and bacchanal, there is a shared belief in creativity, community, and generosity. Without art, Burning Man would be a marvelous party, but it would not resonate in the same powerful way."*

**- Jennifer Raiser**



*"Like the earliest paintings in the prehistoric caves of Lascaux, art at Burning Man fulfills a basic human need for expression and explication, for storytelling, and for making our mark. In this prehistoric lake-bed [the playa on which Black Rock City is temporarily built] populated by meandering tribes of dusty, body-painted hominids, the essential role of art becomes abundantly clear. Over the course of seven days, art is what sets hearts and minds ablaze."*

**- Jennifer Raiser**



INSANITY

*"[Burning Man's Black Rock City] temporarily dominates a landscape that offers equal measures of exquisite beauty and punishing brutality. It defies an economic art market that equates price with quality, and success with sales. It repudiates the notion that art should be curated, protected, and observed behind the safe distance of a stanchion."*

**- Jennifer Raiser**



*“Pagan hierophants in tall headdresses and silver lamé march in slow step, toting flaming standards of arcane device. Swarms of nude dancers, male and female, caper up in bizarre sword-and-sorcery bondage gear. The soundtrack switches to repeated, insane, bestial screaming. An awe-inspiring insect goddess — a hunchbacked bug on red stilts — comes towering and tipping and tottering into the firelight, like a mad Kafkaesque advent. It's like a cross between Vatican ceremony, Cirque du Soleil, and a necro-erotic cannibal mantis mating ritual. The performers seem ready to burst into a flagellant orgy at any instant, in front of a solid milling crowd of at least 3,000.”*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*"There are many ways to frame what Burning Man is. At the end of the day, Burning Man is a physical manifestation of a Rorschach inkblot: it can be whatever you want it to be."*

**- Astro**



*"At Burning Man, art is valued according to the perception and participation of the individual, not by a critic, gallerist, or collector."*

**- Jennifer Raiser**



*“Bohemian renegades, outliers, and visionaries from the nascent Silicon Valley technology industry were attracted to the wide-open space and original thinking. People living on the fringes of society were attracted to the free-for-all philosophy, where resources were shared out of necessity. Word spread about, and “that thing in the desert” encouraged ever more outlandish activities and attracted more seekers, many of whom became adherents.”*

**- Jennifer Raiser**



*“The experience of Black Rock City is complex and varied. Participants – meaning everybody, because there is an explicit prohibition against ‘spectators’ – are encouraged to engage with the art, the desert, and one another.”*

**- Jennifer Raiser**



CLIMB AT  
YOUR OWN  
RISK

*"Variously described as a 'summer camp for adults., 'an annual reboot for a complicated life,' and 'the cheapest trip to Mars you'll ever take,' the playa offers a vast array of diversions, distractions, and pleasures."*

**- Jennifer Raiser**



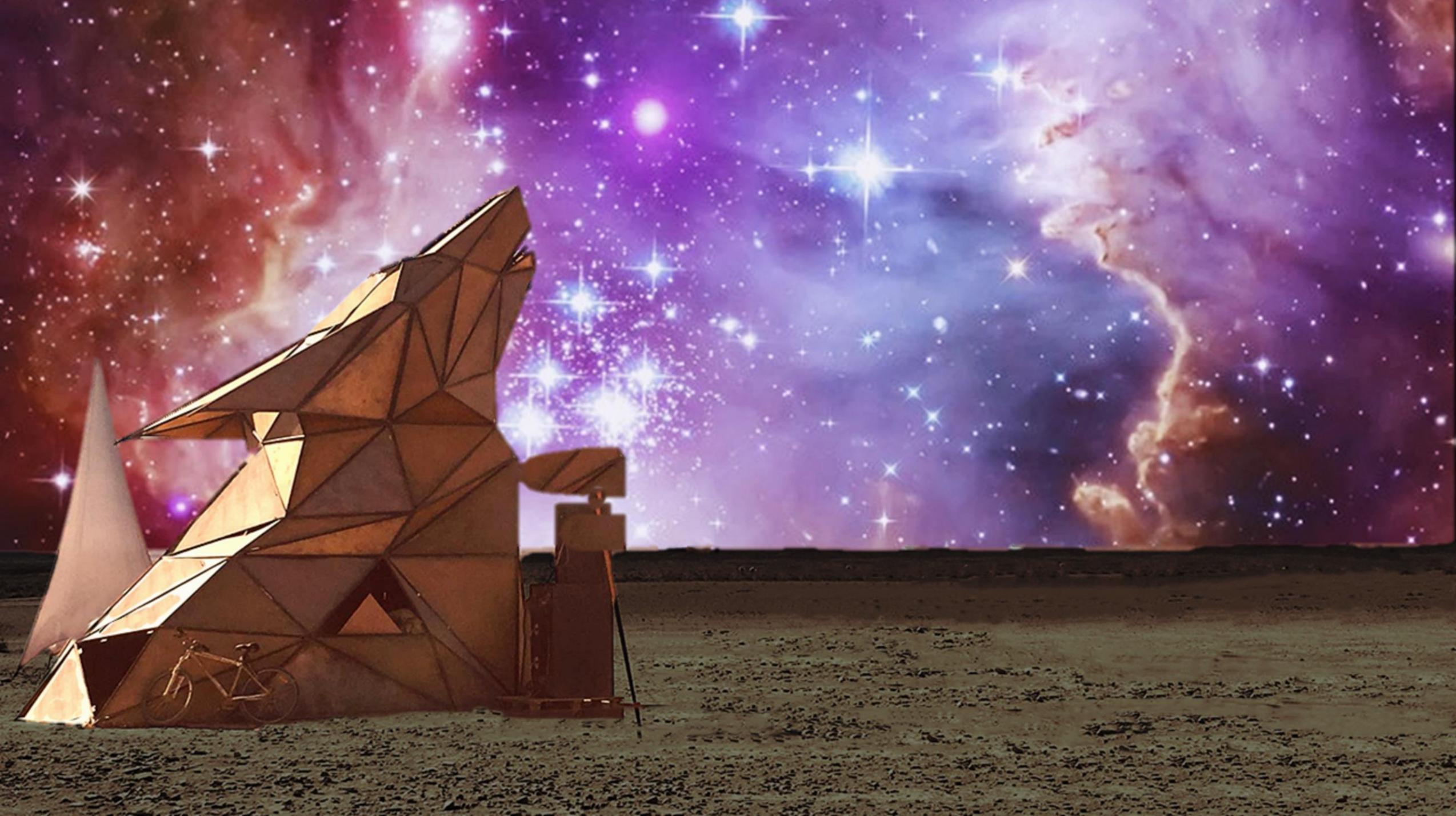
*"My daughter describes Burning Man as a place where 'adults can play like kids.' I'll take this one step further and remind us that playing is one of the most rewarding forms of experimentation toward learning – that's why kids do it. That's what so many adults rediscover at Burning Man – spontaneous, inspired, non-judgmental play. Thank god for the young ones at Burning Man showing us how and why."*

**- Harley K. Dubois**



*"Black Rock City is both a playground and a classroom - learning is an inevitable byproduct of participation in the grand, lively experiment that is Burning Man. Beyond the innumerable micro-lessons one gleans from individual interactions, there is immeasurable value in being surrounded by thousands of people from across the planet - to be so unified by the shared experience of becoming 'playafied'; covered in dust - momentarily blurring the lines that ordinarily separate."*

**- Zippy Lomax**



*"We want our children to know that what they imagine can be realized. On the playa, not only do they see this as possible, but they also get to experience the imagination of others. We see it as getting to step into a wondrous picture book."*

**- Tim, Sarah & Indie**



*"At Burning Man, where people are so generous with their art and imagination, stepping into another world is possible. All this, coupled with the respect of personal space displayed by the community, makes for an unparalleled experience."*

**- Tim, Sarah & Indie**



*“Taking our kids to Burning Man was an experience we’ll never forget – even my youngest who was 4 at the time. As radically different as the playa is or us adults, it just made sense to our kids. Why shouldn’t the day be about having fun, surprising, and novel experiences? Why shouldn’t we be able to climb on anything we like and play for free, not for pay?”*

**- Dustin Urban**



*"The best way to describe the vibe here is that a guy can go to a thrift store and buy the ugliest fucking dress ever – and he'll get a compliment when he wears it on the playa."*

**- Penfold**



*“The Way that can be named,” Lao Tzu once said, “is not the true Way.”*

*And that goes triple for Burning Man.*

*Attempts to describe what goes on at this annual gathering in the middle of the Nevada desert range from the overtly earnest “Ten Ways Burning Man Changed My Life (And Can Save the World)” to the reflexively judgmental “Burning Man is a pagan sex carnival for billionaires and an environmental catastrophe.”*

*As tantalizing as those tropes are, they miss the point entirely.*

*That’s because there isn’t a singular event to speak of, either critically or adoringly. Instead, there are at least three different Burning Mans, all getting crashed, smashed and lumped together in the conversation. And it’s not until you tease them apart to find the final one that things get really interesting. That’s arguably what all the fuss is about — a glimpse of “the Burn that cannot be named.”*

**- Jamie Wheal**



*"I like going to Burning Man, for example. That's an environment where people can try out different things. I think as technologists we should have some safe places where we can try out some new things and figure out what is the effect on society, what's the effect on people, without having to deploy kind of into the normal world."*

**- Larry Page**



*"It's impossible to say that live art enjoys any single status in the information age—there are versions of live art that are still primarily art-world phenomena, others that appeal to much broader audiences. The Burning Man festival is a case in point—an event featuring performance that is itself a performance, which partakes simultaneously of frontier mythology, a counter-cultural impulse, and popular cultural visibility."*

- Larry Page



*"I made a conscious decision to take my life and career in a different direction. I started working on a play, and also, by attending Burning Man for several years, I was incredibly stimulated by the art there. I increasingly wanted to be a part of it, and focused on what I wanted to say as an artist."*

**- Scott Cohen**



*"Burning Man will change your life... You just do not know how yet."*

**- Scotto**



*"You can vacation in say Jamaica and see things that millions have seen before you and millions will see after you...Or you can trek yourself & stuff to Black Rock City and see things that will only be available for one week to see."*

**- Scotto**



*"Burning Man is an art gig by tradition. Over the longer term it's evolved into something else; maybe something like a physical version of the Internet. The art here is like fan art. It's very throwaway, very appropriative, very cut-and-paste. The camp is like a giant swap meet where no one sells stuff, but people trade postures, clip art, and attitude."*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*“People come here in clumps: performance people, drumming enthusiasts, site-specific sculptors, sailplane people, ravers, journalists, cops. I’m a journalist and a newbie, but even I can tell the pros from my fellow newbies. The veterans have brought their own pennants, bicycles, flashlights, and tiki torches, plus enough water for anything.”*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*"Burning Man is a standard hippie tribal thing, except for the highly nonstandard fact that it is not kitschy '60s nostalgia. This event is very '90s, very big, and very much alive. It's a Tim Leary, Wavy Gravy, Deadhead caravan, grab-the-mike-at-Woodstock kind of event. Feels lovely and enormously persuasive."*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*“Nonbureaucratic, participative, solidarity-driven, non-commercial, arty. With all those manifest virtues, you have to wonder why a setup like this can't seem to last any longer than a Labor Day weekend.”*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*"People think it's good that Burning Man is difficult and rather dangerous to reach. This keeps the gawking frat boys and the sodden alcoholics at bay. To get this far out here you've got to pay some dues and take some risks."*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*"Gotta live on the edge, at least a little. "Survival is a matter of personal choice," as the Burning Man official tabloid puts it. But when there are 10,000 people making risky choices, cold statistics dictate that some will surely croak."*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*“Pagan hierophants in tall headdresses and silver lamé march in slow step, toting flaming standards of arcane device. Swarms of nude dancers, male and female, caper up in bizarre sword-and-sorcery bondage gear. The soundtrack switches to repeated, insane, bestial screaming. An awe-inspiring insect goddess — a hunchbacked bug on red stilts — comes towering and tipping and tottering into the firelight, like a mad Kafkaesque advent. It's like a cross between Vatican ceremony, Cirque du Soleil, and a necro-erotic cannibal mantis mating ritual. The performers seem ready to burst into a flagellant orgy at any instant, in front of a solid milling crowd of at least 3,000.”*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*"Our preoccupation has always been to craft space in such a way as to induce social interactions that would in turn generate a sense of community and a culture, but starting from the very immediate issue of how action influences perception."*

**- Larry Harvey**



*"There are lessons here. Las Vegas is a major family destination. Nevada casinos have become American family values now. It's considered just fine to go into one of these windowless scary gambling-malls, drink yourself silly, lose your ass at roulette, and then go ogle showgirls with breast implants. Republicans do this now. Working-class folks do it in polyester stretch pants. It's normal. Meanwhile, if you want to get high and be a naked hippie, you're under suspicion of engaging in the moral equivalent of terrorism. You've got to haul out into the middle of some godforsaken desert and hope that not too many people find out about it."*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*"I went to Burning Man. I took my kids. It's not scary, it's not pagan, it's not devilish or satanic. There's no public orgies, nobody gets branded or hit with whips. Hell, it's less pagan than the Shriners. It's just big happy crowds of harmless arty people expressing themselves and breaking a few pointless shibboleths that only serve to ulcerate young people anyway. There ought to be Burning Man festivals held downtown once a year in every major city in America. It would be good for us. We need it. In fact, until we can just relax every once in a while, and learn how to do this properly, we're probably never gonna get well."*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*“Well, it seems to me, that all real communities grow out of a shared confrontation with survival. Communities are not produced by sentiment or mere goodwill. They grow out of a shared struggle. Our situation in the desert is an incubator for community.”*

**- Larry Harvey**



*"I'll believe in utopia when I meet my first perfect person, and this community is made up of 70,000 imperfect persons."*

- Larry Harvey



*"People out here build whole worlds out of nothing, through cooperating."*

**- Larry Harvey**



*Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play. We make the world real through actions that open the heart.*

**- Burning Man Principle**



*“People give because they identify with Burning Man, with our city, with our civic life. The idea of giving something to the citizens of Black Rock City has enormous appeal to them because it enhances their sense of who they are and magnifies their sense of being. That’s a spiritual reward.”*

**- Larry Harvey**



*"In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience."*

**- Burning Man Principle**



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Low Profile  
AIRSTREAM

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*"Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather. We clean up after ourselves and endeavour, whenever possible, to leave such places in a better state than when we found them."*

**- Burning Man Principle**



*“Participants often tell me, ‘Burning Man changed my life.’ We know that transformation happens when people leave their comfort zone. Immersed inside an unfamiliar environment, confronted with the forces of nature, participants often question their assumptions and abilities. They have to summon ingenuity, adjust ingrained routines, form new affiliations, and to have a lot of trust. And in the midst of this upheaval, they discover inclusion, whimsy, generosity, and their own creativity. Burning Man doesn’t actually change their lives, they do. But it opens them up to the possibility, and then they want to share it with other where they live.”*

**- Marian Goodell**



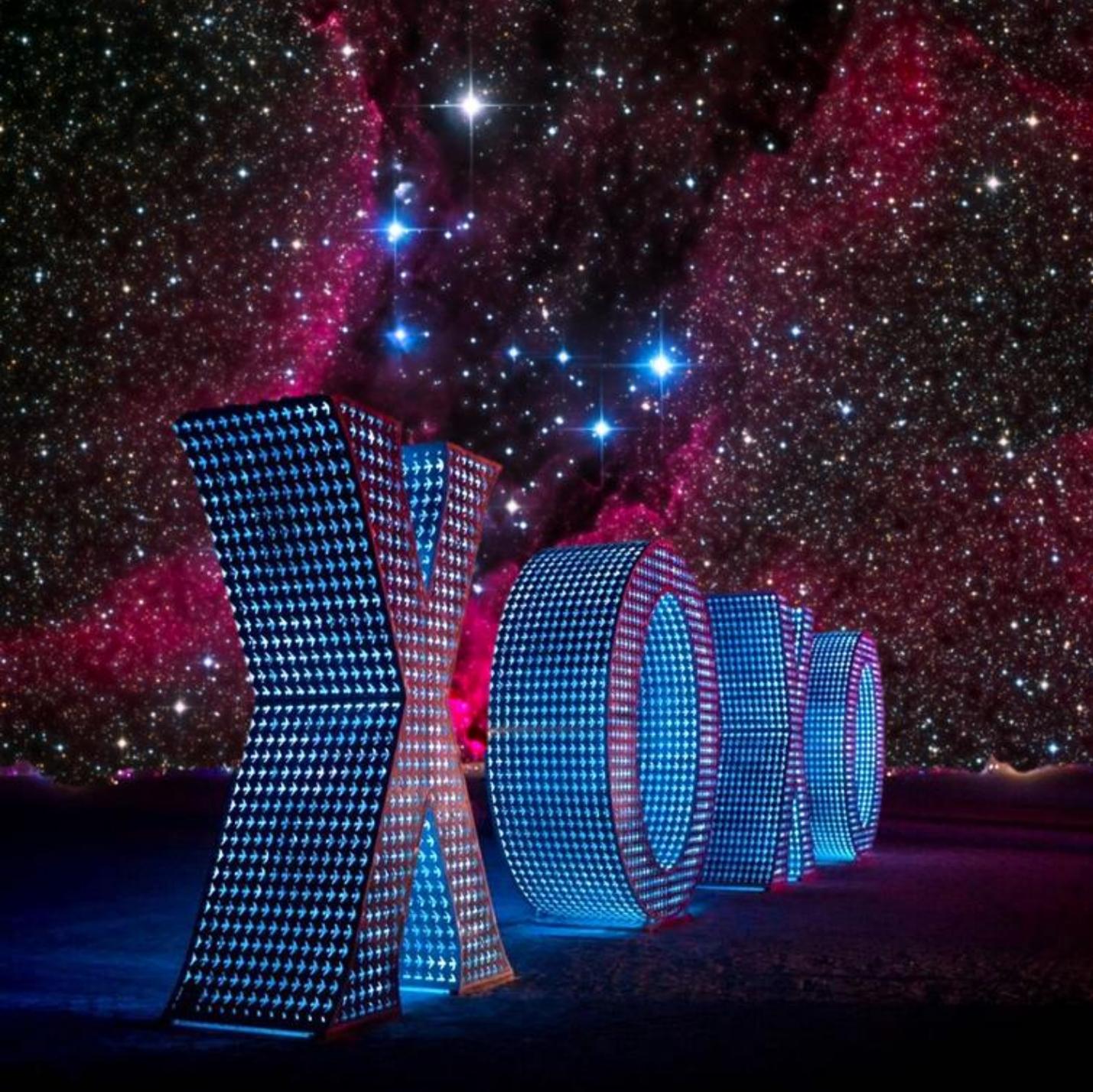
*"Everything you take to Burning Man including yourself will never be the same."*

**- Scotto**



*“Even if we acknowledge the vagueness of terms like sacred, spiritual, and religious, it is still safe to say that, from the outside at least, Burning Man comes off as exceptionally profane. Ironic and blasphemous, intoxicated and lewd, Burning Man’s ADD theater of the absurd might even be said to embody the slap-happy nihilism of postmodern culture itself.”*

**- Erik Davis**

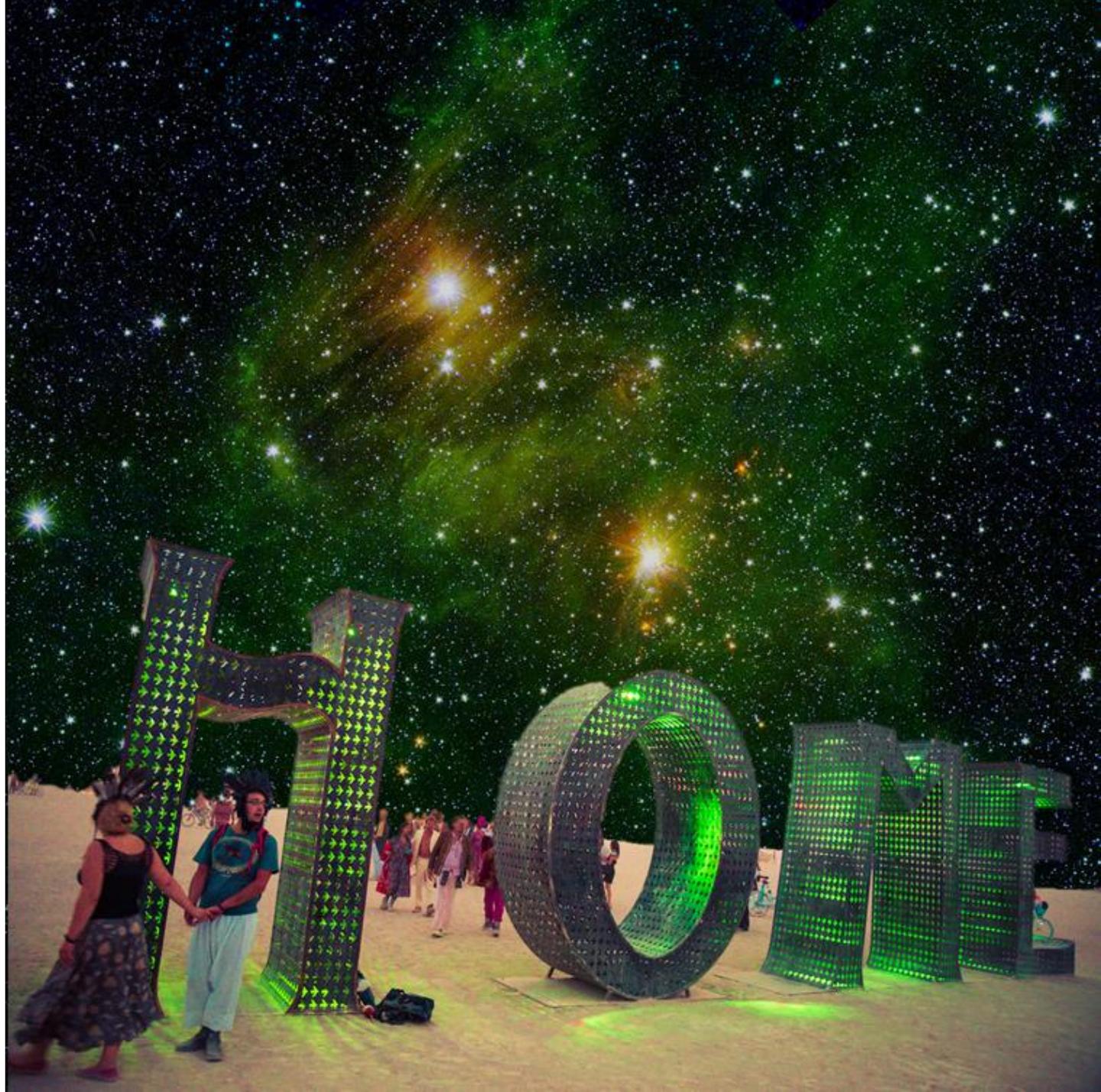


*"This sure isn't the sort of thing one sees every day. It's something that a desperately horny sci-fi fan might see on acid and cough syrup. Then the performers set fire to the set."*

- Bruce Sterling

*"People have come to hell and created heaven."*

- "Eskimo"





*"At Burning Man, the practice of art unleashes individual creativity, gathers collective endeavor, and galvanizes a community."*

**- Jennifer Raiser**

*"We've been civilized from the beginning. In the desert,  
it's a baroque city like Paris or Rome."*

- Larry Harvey





*"The first version of Burning Man is the one that lives in popular imagination, caught somewhere between tales of "naked hippies in the desert" excess and breathless "supermodels, DJs and tech titans" star-spotting. Folks who don't go, but like to fancy themselves In the Know, nod and cluck. They've watched the videos and scrolled through friends' newsfeeds. Like Ibiza, or Studio 54 before it, it's important, they think, to be familiar with this scene, but dangerous to commit to it. Work. Family. Skeptical spouses. Reputations. They doubt their ability to taste that much and not binge on the excess of it all."*

**- Jamie Wheal**



*“The second version of Burning Man is the actual physical place. That only reveals itself if you do commit. Clear the calendar. Find the ticket. Pack your bags and beg for forgiveness in advance. Drive in along washboard roads reading the strange quotes staked along the fenceline. Bang the giant metal gong at the front gate if you’re a first-timer. Get persuaded, against your better judgment, to make a snow angel in the dust. Pull into the crowded city and search for a place to park and camp.”*

**- Jamie Wheal**



*“The third version of Burning Man shows up when you’re too worn down, cracked open or gobsmacked to steer anymore. It doesn’t appear on any schedule (but around midnight and sunrise are good times to go looking), though when it does, it’s the experience that makes all the hassle and heartache worthwhile. It puts a shine in the eyes of those who have glimpsed it, and a glaze over the eyes of those who haven’t.”*

**- Jamie Wheal**



*"After the hot, cramped bedlam of the city, you suddenly burst out into the open. It's freeing to see clear to the horizon again. The sensory overload of it all overwhelms. LED-lit mutant vehicles, ranging from giant schooners to scaly dragons to angler fish, glide by. Some bump otherworldly music, others are ghostly silent."*

**- Jamie Wheal**



*"Scattered in between, rare fixed points in a hyperkinetic landscape, stand the art installations. Not regular, pretentious artist's-statement-art. But knock-your-socks-off-draw-you-in-and-make-you-dance-art. Massive skeleton sculptures, kaleidoscopes and merry-go-rounds. Glow in the dark hopscotch, a phone booth to talk to God (she's on the other end of the line, 24/7), a scale replica of a Gothic church propped up at one end with a stick. A spooky apothecary cheerfully advertising "we buy organic spare parts."*

**- Jamie Wheal**



*"At some point, all of this deranged creativity unmoors you. The music, the costumes, the mutant vehicles, the performances, the kindness (and strangeness) of strangers. You fall through every preconception, through every layer of culture and conditioning, into a space between worlds. The corner of Everywhen and Neverwas."*

**- Jamie Wheal**



*"Burning Man is an initiation into remembering who we are. Remembering where we're from. Remembering what we're here to do. It's what the Greeks called anamnesis — "the forgetting of the forgetting."*

**- Jamie Wheal**



*"Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value."*

**- Burning Man Principle**

*"You have to go there, to know there."*

- Zora Neale Hurston





*"Burning Man can make or break relationships because all facades are stripped away. We truly come to know ourselves well as well as those around us for there is no room for trickery – all truth is revealed."*

**- Nikki Starr Noce**

*"Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community."*

**- Burning Man Organization**





*"Burning Man offers a chance to experience the tragic and the magic of the human condition in real time. Grace, to be sure. But a fierce grace that, as T.S. Eliot once said, "costs not less than everything."*

- Jamie Wheal

*"You are not lost. You are here. Welcome Home."*

- Anon.





*"The dumbest myth of all revolves around the Man itself. Whether it represents Larry Harvey's grandmother or seventh grade teacher or ex-lover or whatever, how does that possibly concern you. The art stands on its own, period."*

- GGALLIN13

*"No one should ever tell you what the Man means. That would only spoil it (and make all three of us wrong). He is some things to all people, and All Things to some: a stand-in, an inkblot, a scarecrow on fire. Our future. Our past. And a truth-telling liar."*

**- Jamie Wheal**





*"People think it's good that Burning Man is difficult and rather dangerous to reach. This keeps the gawking frat boys and the sodden alcoholics at bay. To get this far Out Here you've got to pay some dues and take some risks. Gotta live on the edge, at least a little. Survival is a matter of personal choice,' as the Burning Man official tabloid puts it. But when there are 10,000 people making risky choices, cold statistics dictate that some will surely croak."*

**- Bruce Sterling**



*“Newbies quickly learn that status and fun are not to be gained through familiar modes of consumption or spectatorship. Instead, participation, spontaneity and immediacy are prized, even (or especially) at the sizable risk of delirium, discomfort, or the sort of excess that your parents might call “making a fool of yourself.”*

**- Erik Davis**



*"Burning Man is an art gig by tradition. Over the longer term it's evolved into something else; maybe something like a physical version of the Internet. People come here in clumps: performance people, drumming enthusiasts, site-specific sculptors, sailplane people, ravers, journalists, cops. I'm a journalist and a newbie, but even I can tell the pros from my fellow newbies. The veterans have brought their own pennants, bicycles, flashlights, and tiki torches, plus enough water for anything."*

**- Bruce Sterling**





“Burning Man is an annual gathering that takes place at Black Rock City—a temporary community erected in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada. The event is described as an experiment in community and art, influenced by 10 main principles, including ‘radical’ inclusion, self-reliance and self-expression, as well as community cooperation, civic responsibility, gifting, decommodification, participation, immediacy and leaving no trace.

*Burn Brilliantly* is a collection of quotes and digital art that aims to capture the awe, and wonder that so many Burners feel at the event.

The excerpts and citations in this book have been curated from various sources including, overheard conversations, blogs, Reddit threads, and an eclectic set of authors who’ve written about Burning Man and have experienced first-hand the magic of Black Rock City.

The astronomy-themed digital art have been selected to capture the whimsy and other-worldliness of the Burn experience.

