

**BUILDING**

# Burning Man

The Journal of the Burning Man Project

Spring 1997

## What is Burning Man?

It's ritualistic, it's anarchic, it's primal, it's a radical communal experiment, it's art, it's the death of art, it's dream-like, it's surreal, it's creative, it's destructive, it's absurd, it's spiritual, it's real.

Think of Burning Man as Disneyland turned inside out. But unlike an escapist fantasy produced by others, Burning Man is not vicarious. At Burning Man *you* are the fantasy. People do not come to this event to be distracted from themselves; they come here to discover and distill what they uniquely are. We will not tell you what it means, for Burning Man is based on your immediate experience.

There is, of course, the Man. He stands atop a pyramid. He glows at night. He is the landmark that will tell you where you are. He's like the axis of a spinning wheel; the center and the symbol of a world that we create. Or think of him as like a mirror in which you see yourself and others plus something vastly greater than ourselves all imaged as one. Better yet, don't think of him at all. His relevance is purely the result of your participation.

During an extended Labor Day weekend we will construct a temporary city upon the shore of a vanished lake. Serviced by streets, lighted walkways, it's own daily newspaper, and several radio stations, it will become a community peopled by thousands of citizens. While it lasts it forms a great metropolis which floats suspended like a space station amid the vast and empty space of the surrounding desert. And yet, it's great central plaza and canopied towers, it's corner bistros and clubs, it's outflung neighborhoods and monumental works of art; all of these, like Burning Man himself, are strictly temporary things. Burning Man City is a product of your imagination.

Come prepared to camp here and confront your own survival. Participants in Burning Man achieve identity through what they do. This is a wholly intentional world; a realm of virtual reality to which everyone contributes. We encourage spontaneous performances, costumes, artwork; anything that means what you uniquely are, what you uniquely see, or what you might become. We form a commonwealth of the creative and the desert is a vast blank screen on which reality may be projected. It is a place wherein the boundary that divides the inner from the outer disappears. What is Burning Man? It's what you make it.

*Burning Man is Moving*

## BACK TO THE BEACH

Burning Man began on a beach in San Francisco in 1986. From that birthplace it moved, in 1990, to the equally vast and oceanic space of the Black Rock Desert. In 1997 Burning Man will migrate once again to the nearby shore of Hualapai [WALL-A-PIE] Playa. Named after a now vanished Native American tribe, Hualapai means "people of the pines". Like Black Rock, this playa is a remnant of the prehistoric inland sea that once was Lake Lahontan.

Our camping ground will be the broad and sweeping plain which parallels the playa. Cattle grazing on this flat plateau reduce it's native grasses to a fine and intermittent haze which seems to hover on the ground. To the east and west it is surrounded by the Calico and Granite mountain ranges, like the floor of a vast amphitheater; to the north is bordered by Fly Springs. This legendary oasis is composed of seven separate hot-spring ponds



that are fed by Fly Geyser. Like so many other things at Burning Man, it is a sight so vivid that it seems unreal. Here superheated waters gush in plumes that petrify the landscape into brightly colored terraces of stone. Through special arrangement with the landholder, we will make these pools available to bathers. A small fee, dedicated to protecting and preserving this site, may be charged for their use.

Hualapai Playa itself measures five miles in diameter. It is administered by the Bureau of Land Management, but reachable only through the private land that is our campground. As a condition of entry, we will request that no one drive upon it. It will be designated "No Man's Land" and will belong entirely to pedestrians and works of art. No bush, or bump, or single blade of grass disturbs this flat expanse, and it will be our playground. Our downtown center will arise

*(Continued on next page)*

**Burning Man Hotline 415-985-7471**

(BACK TO THE BEACH continued)

upon the edge of this dry lakebed and it's theme camps will be spread along the "beach". Glittering in the moonless night, our city will resemble some impossibly exotic seaport.

This year signals a return to contact with the natural world. Last year auto traffic in the Black Rock Desert neared a critical mass. The unrestricted use of cars for transportation almost buried our event within a cloud of dust. Reckless drivers threatened everyone. It is our goal in 1997 to reduce this traffic to a minimum. Day visitors, on Sunday, will be asked to leave their cars in our parking lot,

***"Last year...reckless drivers threatened everyone. It is our goal in 1997 to reduce this traffic to a minimum."***

and campers must agree to park their cars at their campsites, using them only to enter or leave the area. The firm terrain is suitable for trail bikes. Participants will also have the option to camp in a special low density zone located at a distance from our central city.

We have entered a new era. People who return from Burning Man each year internalize it's lessons. Burning Man, the event, has gradually become Burning Man, the phenomenon. The result is a prolific outpouring of energy, a creatively contagious cycle of activity which has spread through San Francisco and across the nation. Upon this fertile ground it seems as if the merest stick, if planted, will grow leaves—and we believe our new land in the desert is potentially a year-round home for many of these efforts. We envision a place where prodigious works of art can coexist with equally prodigious works of nature. We see it as a meeting ground for the community of Burning Man. Join us for our founding rites in 1997 and say, in years to come, that you were there.



Gerry Gropp



Barbara Traub

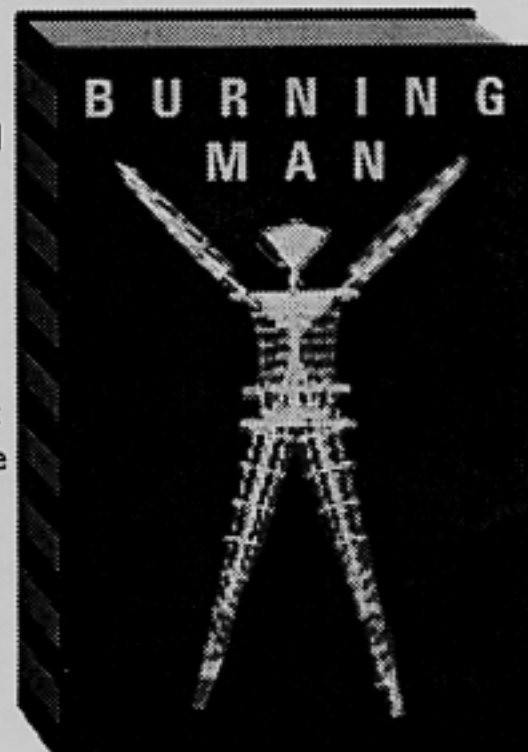
## New York Show

See Burning Man in New York City at CBGB's, 315 Bowery and CB's Gallery, 313 Bowery, April 25th- 26th, 1997. Special Preview book show featuring photography, performance, music and more... Call our hotline for details.

## Burning Man: The Book!

SOON TO BE RELEASED IN BOOKSTORES THIS MAY  
9 X 13 1/2 160 Pages,

Hardcover  
Full-Color  
Photos Throughout  
\$27.95/\$39.50 CAN  
To locate retail outlets call:  
Publishers Group  
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For more information  
contact: hardwired@wired.com



*BURNING MAN will receive a small percentage of the royalties from the sale of this book.*

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# Promised Land

## AN INTERVIEW WITH LARRY HARVEY

**Darryl Van Rhey:** Burning Man is moving to a new location. How will it be different?

**Larry Harvey:** Our community will have a defining perimeter. We are moving from the illimitable space of the Black Rock Desert to terra firma. This place has the permanency of real land. Until now we have floated in nothing.

**DVR:** But wasn't that its charm—the feeling that it had no context, that everything was somehow generated by us, magically the result of our presence alone?

**LH:** It will still be largely like that. Hualapai is wide and flat and empty. If, for instance, you dropped our central camp, the core of last year's settlement, onto our new site, it would be like placing a dime on a dollar bill. There is plenty of room. We're camp-

**DVR:** How will the new site promote community?

**LH:** First, it will make the environment safer and, at the same time, more accessible. Last year it was possible to live in Black Rock City, yet never really see the virgin desert if you traveled on foot. We were swamped in our own suburbs. Even if you did walk through that open space at night you ran the risk of being run down by a car. There were too many people in an unmarked trackless environment driving too many motorized vehicles. It actually restricted our freedom. This year we'll camp on the shore of a playa and leave the pristine desert clear of everything but art. People can camp next to their cars, but the playa and our campground will be reserved for foot traffic. Everything will exist at a pedestrian scale. This playa, in a way, will seem larger and our experience of Nature more immedi-

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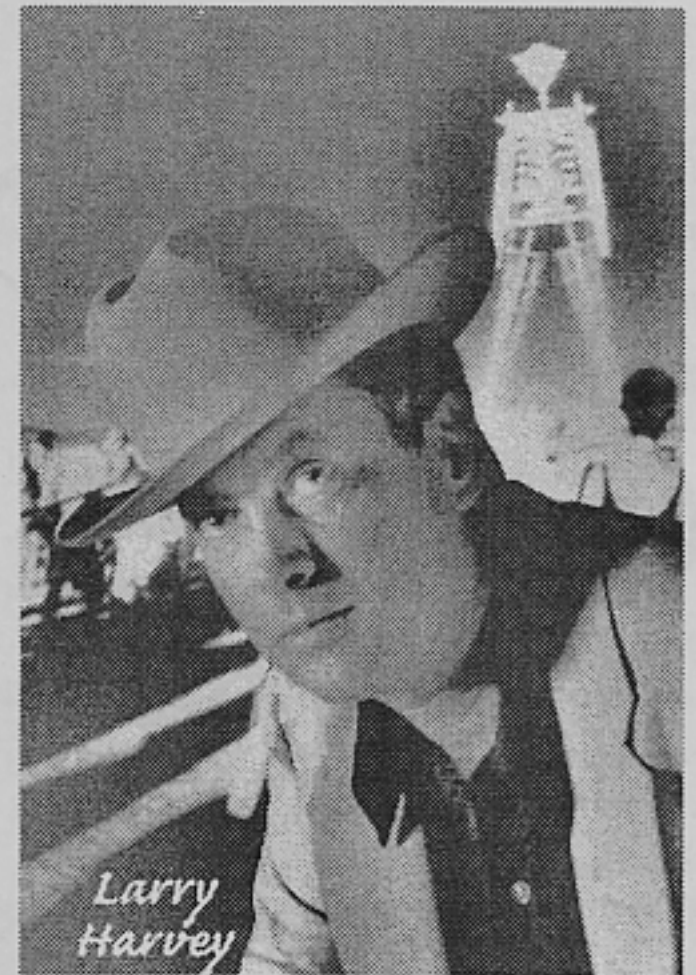
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ing on a huge plain. Yet, in a way, you're right; it's not so absolutely empty as before—but I welcome this change. Black Rock drew us together, made us huddle in a profoundly inhuman environment. It was, I've always said, like outer space, and this experience made us intensely aware of one another. All that nothing forged a primal bond between us. Yet now, having grown more conscious of ourselves as a community, it's time to assume more responsibility for what we are—and our new home will make this possible. We're like a baby, really, that takes its first steps. The beach where we began was like a nursery. Think of Black Rock as a sort of kindergarten. If we haven't learned the moral lessons that it had to teach us, what's the point? We'd reached an order of magnitude that requires more cooperation. The liberty to do anything had begun to infringe upon the freedom that had drawn us to the desert in the first place. Liberty is something you enjoy alone, but freedom is a state that's shared with others.

ate. Our camp will also be on private land, and that's another huge change. We will acquire sovereign boundaries. We'll be protected by natural barriers on three sides, an impassable trench seals off the fourth. We're completely enclosed. It's a vast tract, but access can now be controlled.

**DVR:** I understand that more than a third of all attendees have evaded your gate. Will this prevent people from sneaking in?

**LH:** You bet it will. Everyone must now contribute economically. The mountains there are majestic—more present than those at Black Rock—and the hot springs are almost beyond description. But when I saw that trench, it seemed like Zion and the Grand Canyon combined. It will make a huge difference. Now everyone must pay their share—a thing that we could neither demand nor enforce on public land. It could spell our salvation. But, even more fundamentally, it means we now have a skin.



**DVR:** What do you mean by a “skin”?

**LH:** Every community has one—some sort of semi-permeable membrane that protects it and preserves the integrity of its process. This is another lesson we've learned.

**DVR:** Does that mean you want to exclude certain people?

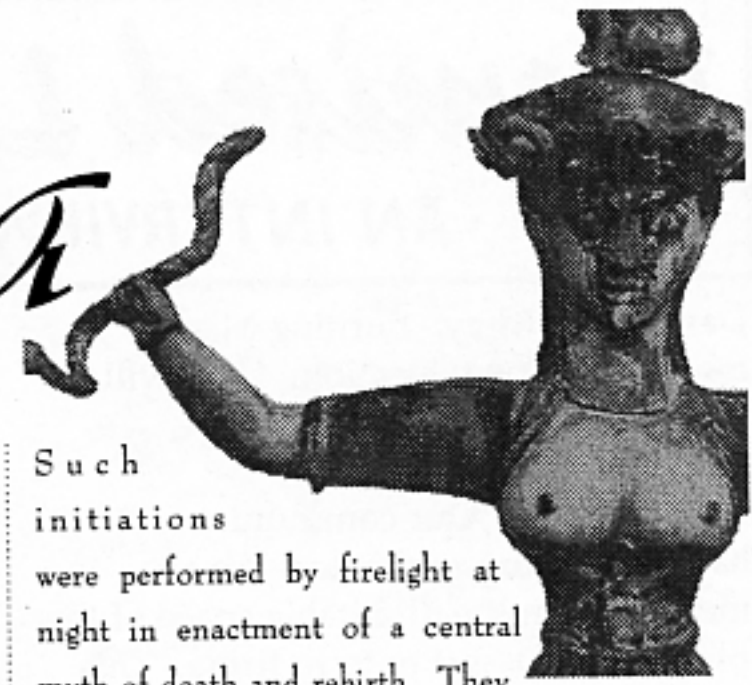
**LH:** No, not specifically. Burning Man is radically inclusive and always will be. It does mean, however, that we need to be selectively inclusive. To exclude anyone on the basis of a prejudicial preconception is invidious and wrong. Burning Man is about whatever we have primarily in common, but we do need to discriminate in a positive way. We need to select for a higher level of commitment. Now we can ensure that anyone who comes to Burning Man is ready to contribute. Now we can educate newcomers. The growing presence of casual tourists in cars was becoming disruptive. It's not that these people are bad or belong to some evil group. It's that they haven't any context for their experience. It's much too easy for them to see the event as mere spectacle, but Burning Man isn't something you can experience passively.

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*Larry Harvey is the founder and director of the Burning Man Project. Darryl Van Rhey is a free-lance writer living in San Francisco. An article by Mr. Van Rhey, "Burning Man: A Post-Modern Mystery", appears in this edition of the newsletter.*

The Secret Rites Of Burning Man  
Somar Gallery 934 Brannan Street,  
San Francisco  
Friday and Saturday  
June 20 & 21 AND 27 & 28  
8:00 - 12:00 P.M. \$10 Admission

# Mysteria



Our San Francisco show in 1997 is called "Mysteria". Translated from the Greek, it means "initiation". Participating artists are invited to create a mystery cult—some rite of passage that reveals a visionary secret. Such secrets will be closely guarded. Only members of our audience who undergo initiations can become *illuminati*. Help Burning Man put the cult back into culture.

Help Create *Mysteria*  
Attend our Artist Meeting  
Minna Street Gallery, 111 Minna St.  
in San Francisco, on Sunday, April 6  
from 3PM until 7PM.

We can't reveal the secret of our featured presentation, "The Burning Man Mythos", except to hint that it involves the greatest mystery of them all—fertility and sex. Burning Man's sub-cults in 1997 will have a predominantly female character. Expect the advent of Cruel Mistress Gaia (with her subservient court of vegetables). Anticipate also **The Secret Rites of Barbie** (and the creation of Ken). Burning Man himself will, of course, be present, accompanied by a lingam fountain spouting unpasteurized milk. The following article, abridged and amended, first appeared in the Summer 1995 edition of Gnosis Magazine:

## BURNING MAN: A POST-MODERN MYSTERY

Organizers [of Burning Man] shroud the meaning of this celebration in a cloud of calculated ambiguity. Pressed to explain their intentions, they cite a simple doctrine. "The Project," one is told, "never interferes with anyone's immediate experience." Participants are urged to create their own meaning through participation. The event might be described as an avant-garde art festival, a ritual enactment of creation and destruction, or an exotic free-wheeling party. Yet to the student of religion, these activities suggest a time, a place, and a social setting that has precedents in ancient history.

Throughout the classical period of Western

civilization, there existed a diverse spiritual movement that is known as mystery religion. The mystery cults, as they were called, arose within a new world order. The conquests of Alexander and the subsequent spread of Roman rule throughout the Mediterranean world had greatly expanded the scope of classical civilization. Stretching from the shores of the Atlantic to the Caspian Sea, it occupied a vast cosmopolitan domain, teeming with commerce and hosting the ideas of many cultures. Immense allocations of men and monies had displaced entire populations. The citizenry of the empire, uprooted and heterogeneous, now congregated in large urban centers, and within this sophisticated and self-conscious setting, huge societal gaps now separated rich from poor and urban from rural populations. It was world, in other words, remarkably like our own.

Arising from this complex milieu, the mysteries derived from diverse sources. Traditions drawn from many cultures flowed like tributary streams into the great Mediterranean basin, bringing with them the worship of Isis and Osiris of Egypt, Mithra of Persia, and the Anatolian Great Mother. Yet the mystery cults had much in common. All were grafted to the stock of agrarian fertility festivals—relics of a prehistoric past—yet were essentially urban in character. They typically employed theatrical parades and pageants to attract a pool of individuals who might share little else in common, and they were organized as lodges. Membership within a cult implied a broad equality with fellow *mystai* or initiates.

Ceremonies often took the form of pilgrimages. Participants removed themselves to sacred sites. *Mystai* sang and danced to flutes and cymbals; others wore masks and sported strange attire. Such celebrations might take many days, and while they lasted, class distinctions were dissolved. "Persons who are being initiated into the mysteries throng together at the outset amid tumult and shouting," wrote Plutarch of the Eleusinian Mysteries celebrated near Athens, "but when the holy rites are being disclosed and performed, the people are immediately attentive in awe and silence."

Such initiations were performed by firelight at night in enactment of a central myth of death and rebirth. They were often highly theatrical performances and, unlike the tribal traditions from which they sprang, placed unique emphasis on personal choice. Many people probably attended the festivals simply to have fun. Intense, ecstatic, and immediate, these rites did not stress doctrinal belief, but valued outward show and inward feeling. Aristotle states the mysteries weren't about a teaching; they were initiations focused on direct experience.

The mystery cults, long a dominant form of worship in the late classical world, perished with the fall of Greco-Roman civilization. Yet the modern immolation of the Burning Man, surrounded by impromptu rites of celebration, forms an arresting analogy. The parallels are striking: fire, sacrifice, pilgrimage, visionary spectacle, egalitarianism, revelry, recruitment from an urban population, direct experience as opposed to doctrinal belief, and, central to it all, a myth of death and regeneration. Functionally, Burning Man appears to be a form of mystery cult. Perhaps the only fundamental difference between this event and its ancient predecessors is the absence of a supernatural context. Post-modern irony, not superstition, rules the rites of Burning Man. Its nascent myths are mostly borrowed, with a sly appropriative flair, from the stock of pop culture, and Burning Man himself, in an existential twist, is very clearly the creation of His devotees themselves.

Organizers of this modern mystery disclaim any conscious plan to reproduce the past and relentlessly satirize the metaphysical claims of Religion. Yet it may be that culture is adapting to the changing needs of our society. As anyone who studies ritual will understand, the past and future are united on a single wheel in time.

-Darryl Van Rhey



# Survival

Burning Man has never been about money. It is about survival; the survival of each individual, the survival of our community, and the survival of the Burning Man Project itself.

## The registration fee for Burning Man is going up!

Here are the answers to a few questions.

### DOESN'T BURNING MAN MAKE A LOT OF MONEY?

Burning Man does not make as much money as you may think. Many people make an easy calculation. Their reasoning follows: If a reported 10,000 people attended our event in 1996 at an average of \$35 per person, then Burning Man must have earned more than one third of a million dollars; a vast sum. This figure is erroneous for three reasons. First, the figure of 10,000 is merely a loose estimate of our total attendance on Sunday evening, the night of the Burn. This includes many hundreds of people who have streamed onto the playa from surrounding counties to witness our final event. These individuals have paid nothing. Secondly, more than a third of all participants have evaded our gate. Entry to the Black Rock Desert can be gained at several points and each year a small army of the canny, cunning and unscrupulous have taken advantage of this fact. Lastly, many people have paid less than the stated admission fee at our gate or paid nothing at all. We are not legally empowered to refuse anyone direct entry onto public lands.

### WHERE ARE THE PROFITS?

There are no profits. The Burning Man Project finished 1996 more than \$30,000 in debt. Our staff has gone unpaid. Burning Man has never been run as a normal profit making enterprise. Similar festivals reap their profit from concessions, but Burning Man purposely creates a commerce-free zone. Where else in North America is it possible to attend a mass gathering at which the principal activity is not the consumption goods, services, or paid entertainment? The one concession we have sponsored, apart from the very sporadic sale of souvenir shirts, has been our coffeehouse in Central Camp, and it's primary purpose is social.

The vending of ice directly supports the school district in the local community. It is a goodwill gesture and Burning Man does not receive this money. Finally, it is easy to sell things to those who are passive and bored, it is hard to sell things to folks who are active, engaged, self-sufficient, or naked.

### WHERE DOES ALL THE MONEY GO?

When asked to identify what our money goes for, participants most frequently mention port-o-potties— the single feature of our festival that most affects them. As with any enterprise, however, money is mostly spent on things that are invisible.

### WHY IS THE PRICE OF A TICKET INCREASING?

The price of a ticket to Burning Man has doubled from last year. The price for early

Buy a Burning Man T-shirt or cap!

Our shirt is screen printed on black in sizes Large and Extra Large.



\$15

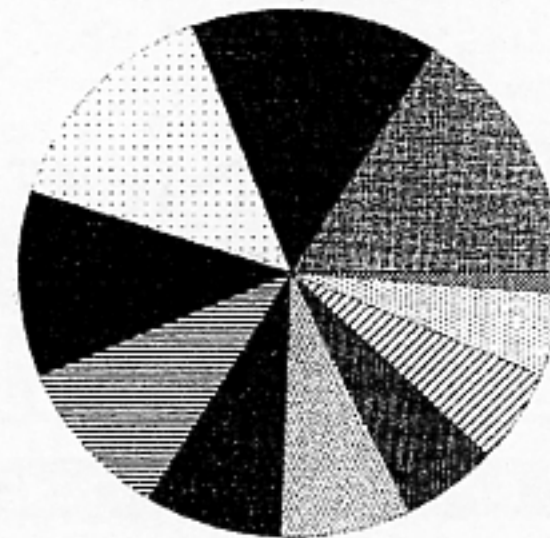
The cap is high quality, adjustable, and embroidered with the Burning Man logo. Always fashionable, makes a great gift!



Available by mail order \$10 (form on back page)

a petrified ocean, and a towel too small to dry your body. Participants in Burning Man inherit an entire world. We're still quite cheap and plan to stay that way. This years' increase of our ticket price will help us pay for increased costs, many of them

### Here is a breakdown of our expenditures in 1996:



Camp Construct	%16.14
Cleanup	14.78
Art Projects	14.21
Staff Expenses	11.62
Federal Fees	9.98
Communications	8.17
Transportation	7.78
Safety	5.94
Gate	5.88
Office	5.17
Insurance	0.33

registration has increased to \$50. As of June 1997 the fee will be \$65. Possible restrictions on attendance permitting, we will charge participants \$75 at our site in the desert. However, we encourage everyone to register early. Space at our new site to attendants may be limited! The price of a ticket to our five-day event has always been remarkably low. Consider: \$50 is what you might pay for one night's stay at a motel— complete with midget soap bar, a picture of

Burning Man for every participant who attends our festival.

### HOW CAN I CONTRIBUTE?

Send in your \$50 registration fee today! Make an OPTIONAL EXTRA CONTRIBUTION and we will thank you by listing your name— with your permission— in our summer (June) newsletter. Buy a Burning Man t-shirt or cap. Copy this newsletter and pass it on to your friends. We also need volunteers. Have you clerical or organizational skills? Can you help with construction? Are you planning a theme camp or large art project? Do you have access to services or materials? There are hundreds of tasks which sustain our community. If you think you can help us, please call our Hotline: (415) 985-7471. You may also contact our website: burningman.com The Burning Man Project is a society of activists. Join us?

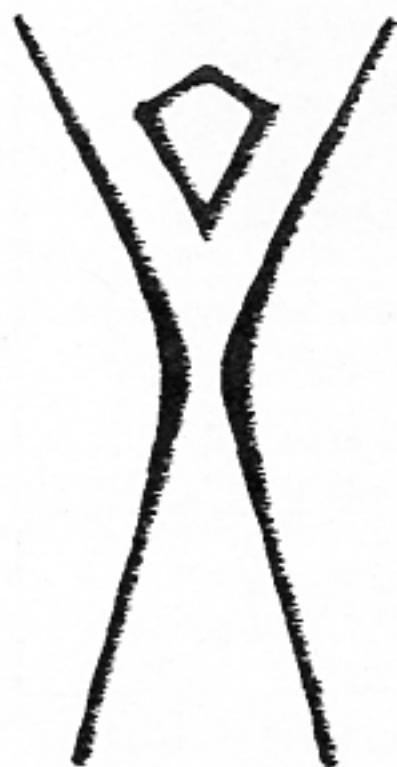
## Coming Soon

INTERNET: [www.burningman.com](http://www.burningman.com)

Imagine a world without context, a place that is no place at all apart from what you bring to it. This world is known as cyberspace, but it is also known as Burning Man. Very soon you can visit our new website at: [www.burningman.com](http://www.burningman.com). It is the gateway to hundreds of individual websites that participants have created.

Burning Man Project  
P.O. Box 420572  
San Francisco, CA 94142-0572

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# BURNING MAN '97

*Burning Man  
1997*

Registration  
Materials

## BURNING MAN FESTIVAL

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27 THROUGH MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1997

The annual celebration of BURNING MAN will take place over the Labor Day weekend at Haulapai (WALL-A-PIE) Playa in Northern Nevada. This form can be used to register for the festival and/or order Burning Man merchandise. Feel free to make copies. If you are purchasing tickets you will receive your registration packet (including ticket, 1997 map, survival guide, and schedule of events) approximately one month before the festival.

**ORDER YOUR TICKETS NOW. SPACE TO ATTENDANTS MAY BE LIMITED!**

**Tickets:** Purchase a ticket now for Burning Man, August 27 - September 1, 1997 and receive a substantial discount! Ticket price will increase to \$65 on June 1, 1997 [see "Survival" section]. **Order now and save!** We will mail you a ticket, your survival guide, map, and a detailed schedule of events approximately one month before the event.

**T-shirts & Caps:** Buy a Burning Man t-shirt or cap. Color on black. Shirt sizes available in sizes Large and Extra Large, caps are adjustable. Design appears in the "Survival" section of this publication. Shirt Price: \$15 Cap Price \$10

Make checks payable to:  
**BURNING MAN**

Detach this form and mail, with payment, to:  
Burning Man  
P.O. BOX 420572  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94142-0572

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

### BURNING MAN T-SHIRTS

QTY: \_\_\_\_\_ LARGE \_\_\_\_\_ EXTRA LARGE  
TOTAL SHIRTS-QTY: \_\_\_\_\_ X \$15.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### BURNING MAN CAPS

TOTAL CAPS-QTY: \_\_\_\_\_ X \$10.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### REGISTRATION TICKETS

NUMBER IN PARTY: \_\_\_\_\_ X \$65.00\* = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\*Standard price after June 1, 1997. Special Offer: Send in your order form before June 1, 1997 and pay only \$50.00 per person!

OPTIONAL EXTRA CONTRIBUTION: \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Burning Man is a 100% participant-funded event, entirely dependent on your support.*