

Praying Mantis Sculpture Burning Man Festival

Black Rock Desert City, Nevada



Organizers of the “Burning Man Festival” say that trying to explain it to someone who hasn’t been there is like trying to describe color to someone who is blind. Near the end of summer every year, nearly 100 miles north of Reno in the Nevada Desert, tens of thousands of people gather for the Burning Man Festival – essentially an oasis for the most eclectic group of people on the planet. This past year the event sold out in 44 minutes and tickets went for nearly \$400 each, according to festival organizers. However, when the festival originally started as a summer solstice celebration in 1986, it was simply a gathering of a small group of friends. San Francisco-based artist Larry Harvey and a few collaborators built an eight-foot wooden man on San Francisco’s Baker Beach and set it on fire.

The event has quickly grown into an iconic festival that has become so popular it has been moved to Black Rock Desert in Nevada to provide more space for the masses. In fact, during the past few years, it has continued to

become more mainstream and has had big names such as former Google CEO Eric Schmidt and celebrities such as major rap star Diddy (a.k.a. Puff Daddy and P. Diddy). This event celebrates the expressed talent and individual uniqueness of the human spirit and boasts a net zero impact to the environment. Once the festival is over, it leaves without a trace. The festivities take place from the last Monday in August through the first Monday in September, which coincides with the U.S. Labor Day holiday weekend.

Black Rock, when not in use, is a non-descript area of desert better identified with latitude and longitude coordinates. During the event this area becomes home to more than 60,000 temporary community inhabitants. The event is described as an experiment in community, art, radical self-expression and radical self-reliance. The festival is a haven for artists to express themselves without the trepidation of judgment. This year, Heather Dessel, a local artist from Tempe, AZ made the trek to the Nevada desert to show off her self-expression. Her sculpture “Praying Mantis” was not only a hit, especially with the youth, but it used hot-dip galvanizing (HDG) in the artistic process.

The pictures throughout the fabrication process culminate with the recorded night video of the Mantis being lit. Dessel says she decided to use hot-dip galvanizing because she did a similar project two years ago that she had powder coated. Transporting the sculpture multiple times, assembling and dismantling it all took its toll. “The sculpture wound up chipped with many scratches and areas that soon started to weep rust,” Dessel explains. “I wanted something more durable that would hold up to the rigors of being moved about while maintaining resistance to blowing sand, rain and extreme sun “Hot-dip galvanizing seemed like the logical solution.”

Once the concept of the sculpture was achieved, a bit of reverse engineering needed to take place to ensure all the components could be processed properly. After the components were processed, everything fit together as expected, Dessel says. “The project was very well received and the festival was a joy to participate in,” she says “An added benefit that was discovered during the process was that galvanizing is green. This fits with one of the key 10 principles, which include “leaving no trace” and recyclability. I look forward to the next project and hope to include Hot-dip galvanizing in the design.” ■



Galvanizer
AZZ Galvanizing - Arizona

Fabricator
Kornegay

Owner
Heather Dessel

Artistic