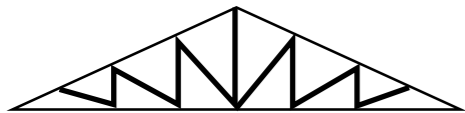


WILLIAM BINZEN

William Binzen is an American artist and photographer. He directed Desert Siteworks over three years, from 1992 to 1994, a project that took place in the Black Rock Desert, not far from the location of Burning Man. On his website, Desert Siteworks is described as “an experimental, temporary art community,” and it is noted that he was “instrumental in helping make art a major focus of Burning Man.” For more information, you can visit his two websites, williambinzen.com and binzenwalker.com, as well as his online shop at williambinzen.com/shop.html. The Waking Dream Part 1 Movie can be seen on [Vimeo](https://www.vimeo.com).

This written interview was conducted by “Flo,” Flore Muguet, a French anthropologist, in 2024.



Questions for William Binzen,
founder of Desert Siteworks 1992-
1994

FLO How did DSW create Burning Man
Culture?

WILLIAM Art came to the Black Rock
Desert and Burning Man principally
through the vehicle of Desert Siteworks
– an experimental, temporary art
community. For some years I had
been 4WD trekking to desert regions
in the Southwest, envisioning future
projects. When the time came, I
directed and- with a group of highly
talented collaborators - created Desert
Siteworks (DSW) over three years,
1992-1994.



William Binzen. Photo credit: George Post, 2017.

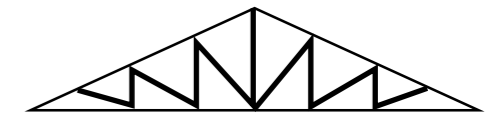
Although an art and pro photographer,
I photographed these events very
sparingly, with about 40 medium and
large format images made in total.
I didn't want the camera to interfere.
When I did use it, the 8x10" camera
was factored into the play or ritual
structure of our culture.

I am indebted, however, to the
documentation by one person, Richard
Darigo, a friend of a participant, who
came and recorded events on Hi-8
video. Because Richard's rediscovered
'reels' are now in the archive, I'm
working on a film about the project
30+ years after the events took place.

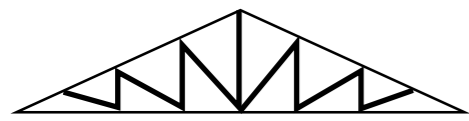
Of course, Desert Siteworks
happened long before cell phones.
It was experiential and experimental
for everyone involved. Nobody
posing for selfies. It was not a form
of entertainment for peeping eyes
and legions of smart phones, to be
shared on Instagram and Facebook,
as everything is today.

Based on a yearly theme, Desert
Siteworks was intensely collaborative.
It would not have happened without
the prodigious efforts of the core of
16 or so dedicated artists. Each artist
was supported within a prototypical
guild system, working side by side
with their friends.

Many original participants were from
the San Francisco Cacophony Society
and its tentacles. Most significantly,
Burning Man co-founder John Law,
and I did the first reconnoiter to the
Black Rock/High Rock Canyon area
in search of an appropriate location
for the first Desert Siteworks event.
That place turned out to be Black Rock
Spring. Posted in the Rough Draft



**“Art came to the
Black Rock Desert
and Burning
Man principally
through the vehicle
of Desert Siteworks
– an experimental,
temporary art
community. For
some years
I had been 4WD
trekking to
desert regions in
the Southwest,
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time came,
I directed and -
with a group of
highly talented
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created Desert
Siteworks (DSW)
over three years,
1992-1994.”**



“At that time Burning Man was like a tailgate party at a ball game. All revved up with nowhere to go. Drinking/ Boozing, Smoking, Drugging, Goofing, Carousing, Jawing and Shooting Guns.”



“Rhapsody of the Bohemes” — First performance of the ‘BM era’ ... it was pure Dada. John Law and Michael Mikel were in attendance (Black Rock Springs, 1992)
Photo credit: Wiliam Binzen.

Cacophony newsletter in 1992, our first project, at Black Rock Springs, included about 30 participants. Then, in 1993 at Trego and 1994 at Bordello Springs (aka Frog Pond), there were about 100+ participants.

At that time Burning Man was like a tailgate party at a ball game. All revved up with nowhere to go. Drinking/ Boozing, Smoking, Drugging, Goofing, Carousing, Jawing and Shooting Guns. It was great fun, though lacking in higher purpose. i.e., there was no essential reason for being in the desert, except that it was a safe zone away from the eyes of the law.

The aborted burn on Baker Beach in the spring of 1990 was the last time early burners went hoping to torch the figure on the beach. But police were lined up on the cliffs above, and they sent word down that we (revelers) could not burn the thing, and in fact, we would have to take the figure down and, essentially, leave the beach without a show.

This was the overriding reason for taking the figure to the desert. I met Larry Harvey on the beach that night, and we struck up a friendship. I told him about the Black Rock, which I had first visited in late ‘70s with Ed

Holmes (SF Mime Troupe and leader of the annual SF St. Stupid’s Day parade). On the trip with Ed, I made a temporary language & fire piece at the north end of the Black Rock: I dug letters in the sand, poured gasoline in the resulting grooves, and ignited the flaming words:

“Look about you. Do you see what I mean?”

So I told Larry, “I know a place where we can fly beneath the radar.”

John Law and Kevin Evans also spoke to Larry about the location, and soon, planning got underway, mostly through Cacophony. By the end of the

summer, Zone Trip #4 happened, with a treasure map to guide us. It was the first playa gathering of what eventually became Burning Man festival.

Between when I met Larry on Baker Beach the night of the aborted burn, and arriving on the playa, and for two years or so following, I had long conversations with Larry, my friend at the time, wherein I filled his head with ideas for art in the desert and collaborative art-making culture taken from my multiple notebooks with ideas and sketches I subsequently used to conjure up DSW.

Further, the Black Rock Desert was ripe for art. From the early ‘80s through mid-‘90s, there had already appeared:

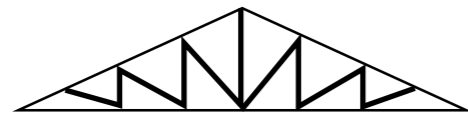
- Croquet X Machina (1987)
- Marshall Lyons and John Bogard (Planet X pottery)
- Black Rock Self Invitational Golf Tournament (beg.1988) - Douglas Keister
- Guru Road and its Iconic Signage -DeWayne (“Dooby”) Williams

The central idea of DSW, which we later transplanted to BM, was to create what I called an “experimental, temporary, creative art community” that included both visual and performance artists, based on a theme for collaborative art-making and survival-manifesting.

We all met at Judy West’s studio every three weeks for nine months for potluck brainstorming sessions. That’s how we came up with a theme for the project in 1993: “Preparing the Ground” and again in 1994, “The Kabbalah”. Everyone contributed to the process.

Since this was before cell phones and the Internet, I wrote notes of people’s suggestions, my own ideas, new things to consider, etc. for each gathering. I called these, “Desert TRACTS,” and I also shared them with Larry. These TRACTS gave us a framework on which each artist or performer could then hang their own ideas and improvisations.

Some had earlier antecedents. “Leave No Trace” was practiced by San Francisco’s Suicide Club in the late ‘70s; the idea of a “Gift Economy” was explored in a 1988 book of the same name by David Cheal. What Desert Siteworks did was show Burning Man the applicability of these concepts to a desert adventure.



11 Key Gifts Desert Siteworks Gave To Burning Man

SEMINAL IDEAS

The Desert TRACTS notes were full of ideas and proposals that helped shape a lot of early Burning Man culture. This was especially true regarding ideas of site specific art, project and site design, and performance.

COLLABORATION

Desert Siteworks provided proof-of-concept that collaborative art-making and ritual performance could transform lives and build community. Whether at our brainstorming, potluck evenings in the city or when we were on location, we were generous with each other, collaborating, helping, and gently criticizing in order to arrive at solutions that worked for (nearly) everyone.

CAMP LAYOUT

Larry came out to my house once. I designed it using sacred geometry and musical intervals, and located it using dowsing for local ley lines. (In fact, I situated our home astride the intersection of two small lines.) Sometime later, when the two of us were sitting at Larry’s kitchen table in SF, and knowing of my interest in and involvement with these things, Larry asked me if I had any ideas about how to lay out the camp. On two napkins I drew a rough schematic that overlaid a clock face on a target, and called out the four directions. This concept was later elegantly refined and greatly expanded by Rod Garrett and others into the city of today.

WHERE AM I

Desert Navigation Locaters were used to promote navigation at Desert Siteworks locations. They were intended to help people wandering out from camp to find their way back in the dark or in a dust storm. At Burning Man one year, I think ‘93, the Locaters marked the cardinal points of the circle. This impulse for self-location led Steve Mobia (an original DSW participant) to create the lantern posts for The Lamplighters at Burning Man to light each night for wayward travelers.

FIRST CENTER CAMP

Desert House, which I designed and built for Desert Siteworks in 1992, appeared at Burning Man a few months later as the first architectonic sculpture besides the Man on the playa. It included a working water flume sculpture by Greg Schlanger from University of Nevada, Reno, and quickly became the gathering place for folks. By form and function, this was the predecessor of Burning Man’s Center Camp.

LINGAM

Pepe Ozan built his first Lingam at Desert Siteworks in 1993. The night he torched it produced a wild, celebration/ritual, spontaneously created, that inspired him to develop lingams and the operas he brought to Burning Man for the next seven years. This was the first major art at Burning Man. It literally defied description, comprised at its peak of more than two hundred volunteer performers and radical dancers, with original music and libretto, staged on and around his elaborate Lingam sculptures.

TEMPLE

The Ritual Temple at Trego I designed on graph paper and themed, created a spiritual hub that benefitted community without being religious or dogmatic. In plan view (from above) it traced a Native American swastika. This was seven years before David Best built the first of many amazing temples at Burning Man.

THEME

Each year Desert Siteworks had an overarching theme to express our collective intent and to help people organize and coordinate projects. I shared this concept with Larry through the Desert Tracts newsletters.

RITUAL PERFORMANCE

With ritual events like the 48-Hour Continuous Improvisation of a Human Lifespan at Trego, we demonstrated that ritual theater could promote intense participatory experiences and facilitate higher-order culture.

GIFTECONOMY

Desert Siteworks was based on shared ideas, including an early “gift economy” starting in 1993. Todd Reed, a clay sculptor who built our working kiln out of clay bricks he sun-dried and a metal flue he found in the junkyard across from Frog Pond, fired small totem-like sculptures using local mud and gave his fired pieces away.

LEAVE NO TRACE

The idea of leaving a project site cleaner than when we arrived started with the Suicide Club. Then in 1993, Judy and I spent three days cleaning up the site at Trego Hot Springs before others arrived. When we left, the site was spotless. Word spread that if Burners were coming to the desert we had to clean up after ourselves

so we’d be welcomed back. But Burning Man didn’t leave no trace until AFTER 1997 on the Hualapai playa at Fly Ranch. That year three huge open top debris boxes, 40’ long and hugely overtopped with garbage, sent litter to three counties and as far as Winnemucca when a windstorm hit. No one remained at the site. No one covered the debris with tarps. Clearly, for BM to continue, it HAD to clean up its act.

From the beginning, I knew I wanted to situate the project at different hot springs. Beside creature comforts of hot bathing water in a remote desert, around the world, oases are the central gathering place for Indigenous tribal communities in deserts. So John and I went on a reconnoiter up the Black Rock and into High Rock Canyon, before choosing Black Rock Springs at the foot of the Black Rock massif.

Black Rock Springs is where the Applegate-Lassen Emigrant Trail is crossed by the modern OHV trail that runs up from the playa into the back country. Here history and the modern world intersect. Astride that intersection we erected Desert House — the first architectonic sculpture of the Black Rock. Later that same year we brought the Desert House to Burning Man, where it became the prototype for Center Camp.



“Black Rock Hot Springs - Blessed by Water Sprites and Submerged Neon - Commencing Desert Siteworks, 1992 (sunset+ night).”
Photo credit: Wiliam Binzen.

Desert Siteworks Critically Considered

Bill Fox is the director of the Center for Art & Environment at the Nevada Museum of Art. A few years ago, he acquired the notes, work prints, drawings, etc. from the three years of the project for the museum’s archive collections. He also wrote an essay for the “Waking Dream” catalogue (as did John), a selection of my photographs and back stories from Desert Siteworks and the early years of Burning Man. Following are excerpts from Bill’s essay:

The three Desert Siteworks projects were explorations through performance, architecture and art of the necessities for boundaries and discipline to survive, and even thrive, in an unfamiliar and hostile environment. The inevitable tension between trying to survive and make art at the same time was a method through which people could understand more clearly their relationships to self, to others, and to the environment. Binzen’s photographs—which are few in number because of the amount of work it takes to assemble such artifacts—at their base document not only the physical presence of Siteworks in the desert, but also, by virtue of the artist’s degree of manipulation, make manifest how Dada and Surrealism infused the Suicide Club, Cacophony Society, Desert Siteworks, and Burning Man.

Dada and surrealist performances and artworks use randomness and chance in a deliberate fashion, and at heart Binzen’s layered images present

us with the essential paradox posed by these earlier art movements: how to create enough order to survive long enough so that we can walk up to the edge of and even into chaos, and then return. There is no successful career as a human without personally experiencing this paradox, and Binzen has given us both a concrete example of how to do so, as well as documents of the process, which is one of the more extraordinary contemporary accomplishments to arise from the Black Rock Desert.

FLO Did any of your readings influence your vision of DSW? Hakim Bey, TAZ was published in 1991. Were you inspired by it? Were you inspired by the New Age movement? If so, by which books/activities/experiences?

WILLIAM I was inspired by a little bit of everything, but no one source—except for formulations relating different forms/types of art, by Lucy Lippard. Most ideas bubble up from Carl Jung’s “collective unconscious.” We go to the desert to seek patterns of the earth that out-picture the patterns of “inherited structures” of our brain. That is, also (by way of Chaos Theory), how/why our human DNA and the structure of the brain are linked to other life-forms ... and can be represented by topographies and landforms in the desert, which are the pagan Earth Mama’s bones, the bones of us all, and the ‘hot springs’ of Art, if you will.

My many influences include *Be Here Now* by Ram Das, the Carlos Castaneda books, studies in cross-cultural shamanism, the Kabbalah, Tarot, Edward Abbey, Overlay (Lucy

Lippard), and familiarity with Land Art and earthworks from paleo/primitive to modern, including Robert Smithson (Spiral Jetty), Michael Heizer (Double Negative and drawings/excavations on dry lake beds), Nancy Holt (Sun Tunnels), Walter de Maria (The Lightning Field), Ana Mendieta (body art/performance in the landscape), and so on...

FLO I've read "Inside DSW" on your website, looked at the Waking Dream Part 1 Movie and read articles online on DSW. I've seen that you proposed activities such as artistic interactions in a natural environment and a key experience was a 48 hour improvisation participatory performance at Trego in 1993 based on a human life span from pre-birth to death.

Through those activities, would you say that the collective was experiencing a collective transformation as a whole? Or that one was being individually transformed by the experience through the collective?

WILLIAM It was both, certainly. As noted in Part 1 of the film, some participants had an experience that was foundational and caused meaningful change in their lives. Everyone in our temporary community was affected, even those who were not radically involved in the 'performance.'

The 'performance' was an experience of self- and communal discovery through dramatic means. There was a (bare bones) birth-to-death script. Most of what happened was purely spontaneous. It stayed within the context set down and agreed upon in advance. Several folks said it was a

peak experience, a transformation, a profound rewiring of the brain, unlike any other in their life.

FLO How did you conceptualize the DSW map and visualize the different dedicated zones? Was it the same cartography transplanted into different locations over the 3 years?

WILLIAM In the DSW map, we considered focal points for various activities, sensing how to fit them together harmoniously (considering feng shui) into the topography of the art grounds. Each site had its unique structures and realization in form, based on terrain, with practical and spiritual aspects.

My 1988 draft proposal for development of a collaborative art site at Fly Ranch is in the archives of BM, and various ideas there may have been, and may be, featured (utilized) and made available to people seriously interested in organizing small scale, site-specific sculpture, ritual performance events and environmental/earthworks at Fly, the Regional Burns, and elsewhere.

FLO Can you describe the idea of "intentional community" you applied to DSW? You and Larry had conversations about that. How did he implement it at BM?

WILLIAM During numerous late-night phone conversations over the first few years, Larry and I had lengthy periods of sharing. I talked about ideas that I had been developing for collaborative art-making in the desert, the why, the how, and when and where (in conjunction with a cardinal point of the year like solstices and equinoxes).



Desert House at Black Rock Springs – 1st Architectonic Sculpture on the Black Rock, 1992. Photo credit: William Binzen.

I first used the term "intentional community" when telling Larry about why our events in the desert should have meaning and heft, and not just be (only) a hedonistic party in the desert. I told him there should be a significant theme that would draw everyone together for a shared purpose, creating a "commons" of artisans making site-specific works in this very austere place.

Soon, Larry repeatedly used the phrase "intentional community" in his dispatches & talks. When, later, he introduced the Ten Principles, it was apparent that much of what

he had there had come from Desert Siteworks, either via our long late night conversations, the Desert TRACTS newsletter (sent out every three weeks), F2F conversations with Larry on the playa, or through other DSW folks who also made art at Burning Man.

As the years rolled on, it became evident that Larry seldom, if ever, gave anyone credit for ideas that came from someone else. While he liked to present himself as a "visionary," what he actually was was an outstanding marketer.

The way he constructed the tale of Burning Man's EARLY history was all about him, as if he were a modern prophet of the desert, channelling lightning flashes of revelation while on the playa.

Actually, the person who came closest to that description as the idea-guy for art in the desert was me. (See this article by Summer Burkes in the summer, 2016 issue of the [Burning Man Journal](#).)

“I first used the term ‘intentional community’ when telling Larry about why our events in the desert should have meaning and heft, and not just be (only) a hedonistic party in the desert. I told him there should be a significant theme that would draw everyone together for a shared purpose, creating a ‘commons’ of artisans making site-specific works in this very austere place.”

I've had an affair with the desert from my youth, playing in the sand box with my toys. When I grew up and moved with my wife, Nancy, from New England to California to get an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, I began widely traveling in deserts, photographing and scheming and fantasizing.

It all came together in 1983 when we visited Rolling Mountain Thunder, 1/4 Creek Indian and a lovable eccentric who built a way-station for hippies along the interstate in Nevada, south of Winnemucca. I saw how one man, with helpers, could construct an alternate reality abode and sculptures that honor the Indian way, with compassion for others, and sharing. I felt if he could do this, so could I. Then, after the first two years of BM, I saw a way to do it, entirely by collaboration under my direction, and without tickets or monetary compensation.

Larry had a different idea. He wanted LOTS of people. Not scores or a few hundred, as DSW wanted, but thousands, and not just a few thousand. At a SF party following our return from Christo's Umbrellas installation by the Grapevine, near LA, Larry leaned close to me and whispered, "Bill, I see a million people on the playa."

I was dumbfounded. I had been sharing all my ideas about a village, an intentional community of artists and artisans and poets and performers, and he'd heard what I said—and took much of it and turned it into a business. Using my ideas, Larry started adding art as entertainment, although he used the DSW terms to

market it.

He created an origin story about himself and BM challenging "default" society (a concept directly co-opted from the Cacophony Society and, before them, the Suicide Club). Larry wanted power, and to a large extent he succeeded.

It's quite a long way, though, from DSW seeking essence in art and self-transformation for 100 participants, and literally "no spectators" ... to the world's largest (art-infused) party which costs most of the 70,000+ non-volunteer attendees close to \$1,000 each. And welcomes absurd, choking layers of law enforcement, celebrities, Internet influencers, and 'plug-and-play' tech billionaires. This is NOT Cacophony. In fact, law enforcement oversight is partly why Burning Man left Baker Beach!

^{FLO} The growth of population of Burning Man was massive and fast. It was a bigger event than DSW. However, DSW impacted so much Burning Man. How do you explain that? Was it the impact of key figures like you and artists such as Pepe Ozan?

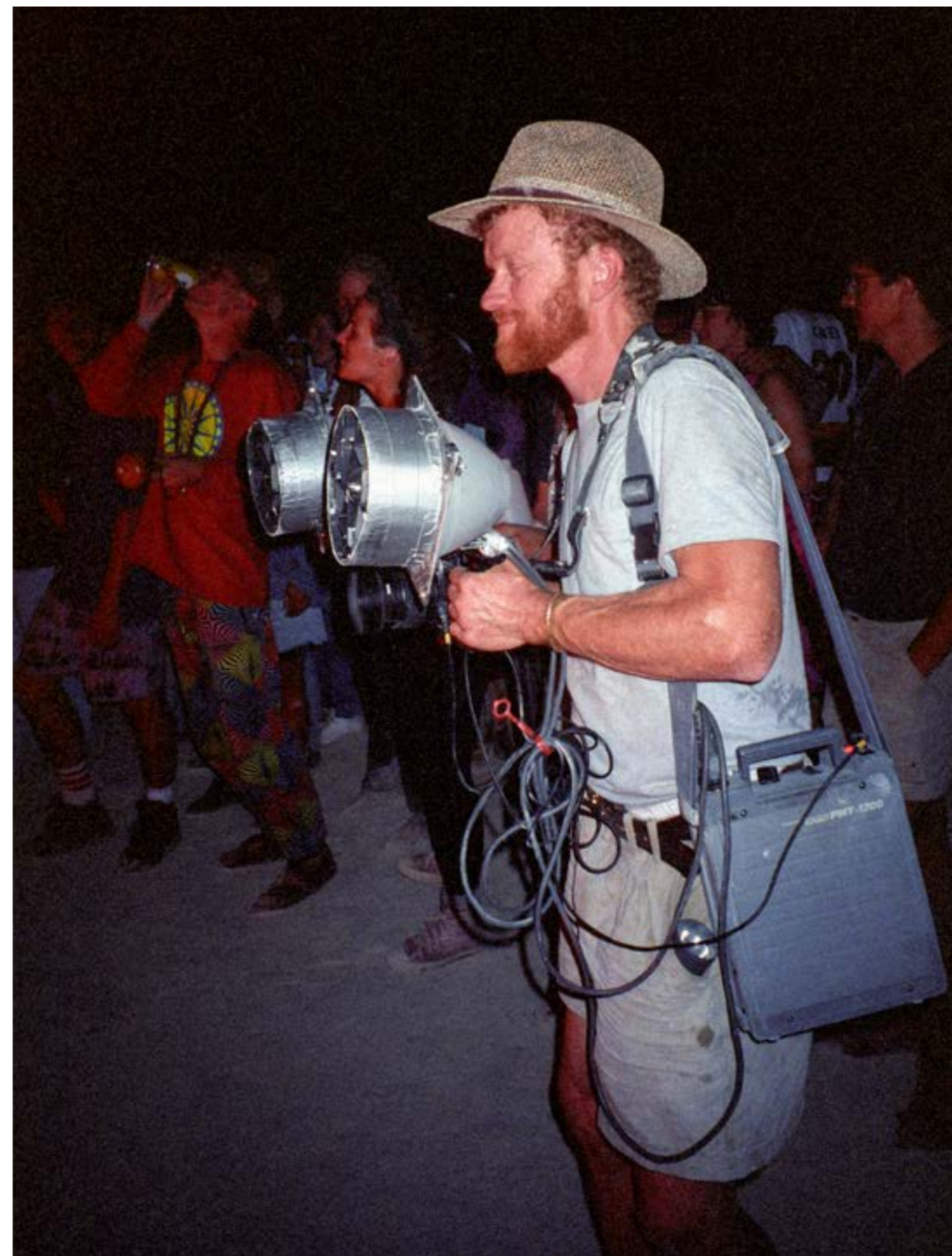
BM/ DSW Population Growth:
-1990: BM: 90
-1991: BM: 250
-1992: DSW: 30 (Black Rock Spring)
BM: 600, weeklong
(encouraged by William Binzen)
-1993: DSW: 100 (Trego)
BM: 1000
-1994: DSW: 100 (Frog Pond)
BM: 2000

^{WILLIAM} As you know, DSW was visualized as having the scale of a small village, where everyone would

come to know each other, and collaborations of all kinds would ensue. I saw us as a modern band of gypsies gathered in one place, refiguring old icons and constraints like patriarchal religion, social and economic thought that limits what's possible for us to accomplish in the remote desert. The desert being a place to play with mirages in games of transformation.

We drew collectively from our life experience, seasoned with philosophic traditions like the Kabbalah and Tarot. One day-long ritual was based on a giant Tree of Life, with a layout of pilgrim paths as branches. Performers dressed as Tarot trumps engaged in thematic interactions at the 10 Sephiroth, or 'power places' along the branches. We made sand-drawings for pattern-dancing and wrote starting scripts for alternate-reality inducing rituals of extended, in-character trance states; we decorated and disguised our camps and vehicles to hide their "default culture" imagery; and with fire we did intensive healing rituals for self and tribe.

As noted, Pepe Ozan was a galvanizing creator, a passionate, visionary promoter of cultural and tribal connection through his site-specific sculptures (the Lingams, first built at DSW). At Burning Man they became the primary, flaming fixture for rhapsodic dancing and cross-cultural amalgams of drama. What he had begun at Desert Siteworks, he then established as a large-scale, performative fire-art spectacle for a party audience of thousands. I doubt there's much like it out there, even today!



William Binzen (playa tag, Imago Photon) - 1993. Fuji medium format film camera with twin studio strobes. Photo credit: George Post.

Pepe left DSW for BM after his first year because he wanted the applause of large crowds; he wanted a city, more than a village. Paradox Pollack and Ape Theatre / Dream Theatre were huge players at Desert Siteworks who went all in on Burning Man after the last year of DSW. They brought highly creative performers, wild chaos agents—who were formally trained in theatre arts. They became the early backbone and set up the drama for Pepe's operas based around his lingam sculptures.

FLO John Law split up in 1996 with the BM organizers Larry Harvey and Michael Mikel. What was your position at the time?

WILLIAM Like John Law, I was gravely disappointed by the drunken, fatal accident involving the death of punk rocker Michael Furey. This is well documented, for instance by John, in Trippingly. The fact that Larry didn't seem concerned about Furey's death, other than how it might affect the success of the BM event, horrified many of us. Larry's reaction when he finally arrived at the accident site was, reportedly, "There's no blood on our hands. The accident's not our fault."

It was a heartless, self-serving reaction. Not the kind of ethos some of us were dedicated to having on the desert. Child of Cacophony, Burning Man began as a group who craved freedom, chaos and responsibility for one's actions at all times. We sought the freedoms that come with smart use of chaos.

It only works if there is a pervasive sense of personal responsibility on the part of attendees. Neither Michale

Furey or Steve, the driver of John's van that was involved in the accident, were acting responsibly. They were drunk as shit and pressing the envelope. But the difference between John's deeply compassionate response, and Larry's utter disrespect is key to understanding their rivalry. Larry's unconcern (except for the tragedy's effect on BM), was a life-marker.

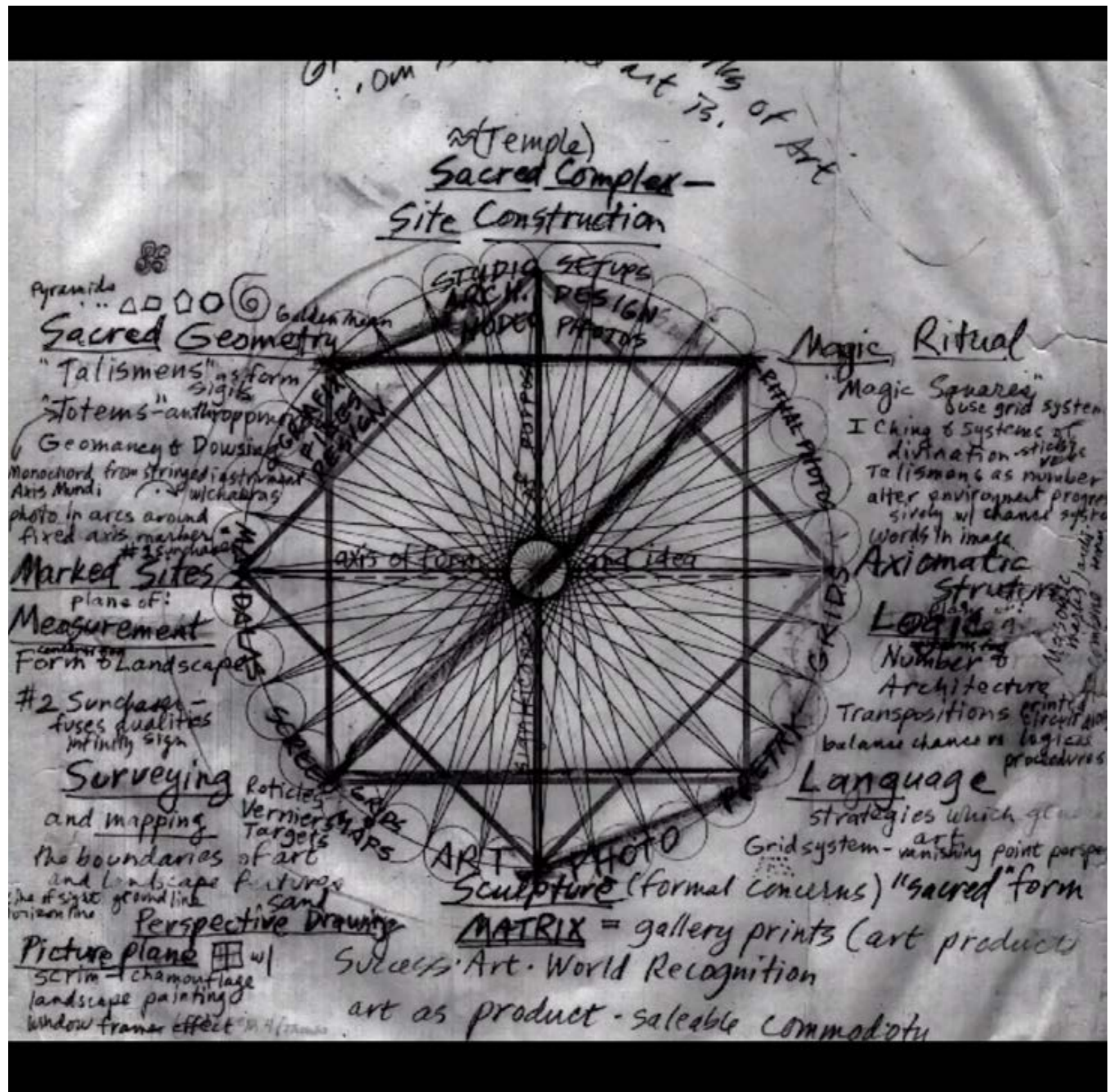
I'm with John. Larry was on his way to becoming the figurehead-Autocrat of BM by then. In response to the spate of vehicular accidents in 1996, Larry & company clamped down on vehicles and instituted the stay-put parking scheme of today.

(Of course, it makes sense from a law enforcement point of view. But that's exactly the opposite of prevailing winds of thought among old timers who were present at the birth of the Man.) Early BM had been about escaping from regulations and laws imposed top-down on the gathering. And yes, "Flying beneath the radar." We wanted chaos with individual freedom buttressed by personal responsibility. We didn't want law enforcement, which was the antithesis.

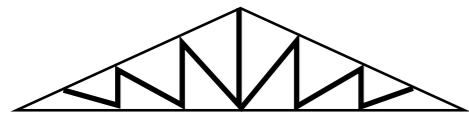
For Burning Man to embrace the law presence as hand-in-glove makes it clear where priorities now lie for BMOrg.

You can argue that's not a bad thing, given the scale of BM today, right? Well, yes, if you gotta have humongous scale. Pre-BM involvement, though, the Black Rock Desert was generally considered a desert wilderness.

Burning Man lives on as a high-flying, alien planet today, not the Dada-esque, down-to-earth playa



Screenshot of original, hand-drawn sketch of master concept for Desert Siteworks. Source: [Vimeo](https://www.vimeo.com/100000000).



“Solstices were indeed important. One of the 8x10’ format photographs I made is Summer Solstice, Human Alignment. A panoramic view of the Trego site.”



“Summer Solstice Sunset, Human Alignment”. Photo credit: William Binzen.

project it once was. Early on, BM was highly inclusive; today, it’s a closely watched giant organism ruled by the few. There’s some kind of “freedom”, I guess, but it’s far less than we had, being spookily watched today, 24-7, for a week.

If all the event does is police an ever-growing crowd, then freedom is limited to the small scale and any grand vision of a playa gathering actually free of “default society” quickly dries up like bleached pits in the sun.

FLO Why did you stop DSW?

WILLIAM DSW provided experiences more fulfilling than any others in my lifetime to date. The second year (Trego) was a peak experience, perhaps THE peak experience of my lifetime. I’ve heard similar responses from a number of others who were there. I was doing DSW for art, for self-transformation. For intimacy, not for crowds. And certainly not for commerce, tickets and police. When you’ve been to the mountain and been hit by lightning for the soul, anything else is a come-down.

For the second and third years, Judy West helped immeasurably with organizing. We held potluck planning and discussion sessions at her loft in SOMA. To complicate (yet also facilitate) DSW, she was also my girlfriend at the time. At the end of the third year, we broke up and I decided, “I’m gonna take a sabbatical.” Putting on the DSW events was quite exhausting and expensive for me, personally, buying and renting stuff to make it happen. Since I had no interest in selling tickets, as tickets lead to speculators attending, rather than core participants, I let it go. After a few

years with no more events, it all just seemed like more than I could handle. I’m an artist and photographer, as well as a poet and jamming musician, and I have many other pursuits that had been put on hold.

FLO Prior to DSW, were you organizing events? Are you a Cacophony member and what’s your evolution (which roles/which events) within the Cacophony Society over the years?

WILLIAM A Cacophony member, yes. Rich in experiences, well out of the mainstream, including one I organized, a Tunnel Hum in a military tunnel above the Golden Gate Bridge. WWII gun pivots served by long tunnels running back through the coastal hilltop. The tunnel I chose had massive decay times, around 7-8-10 seconds depending on sound source. Cacophony folks brought sound-makers of all descriptions and we found our way into a never-never land of sound interactions with unreal long sustains. Very trippy, to say the least when played by so many mad hatters.

FLO Since BM is on Playa, since Zone Trip 4 in 1990, BM happens annually the week of the Labor Day weekend (last weekend of August). DSW happened each year on summer solstice? I’ve read that it happened on solstice June 21 in 1992 and on solstice June 21, 1994, but 4th of July in the summer in 1993. Is that correct? Was the summer solstice important for you? Any meaning? Did you previously go to Mary Graundberger’s solstice gatherings on the beach?

WILLIAM I went to Stonehenge as a teen, before the fences. It left an indelible impression and I’ve been fascinated

by sacred sites ever since.

Solstices were indeed important. One of the 8x10” format photographs I made is Summer Solstice Sunset, Human Alignment. A panoramic view of the Trego site. My instruction was for Paradox to stand by the train tracks in the West, and dance in place as the sun was about to set. Then a second person stood behind Paradox with one foot standing on the shadow cast before him. Then the third stands on the shadow of the second person, and so on down the line. Nearly the entire camp took part in this ritual performance. Each person addressing the Summer Solstice sunset, each person dancing on the shadow of fellow humans all facing the light in a ritual of ecstatic release and a reminder of and re-orientation to the day of longest light.

FLO Which year did you go to Burning Man? On Baker Beach? On Playa, which year? Are you still going?

WILLIAM As mentioned above, I was one of three people (I know of) who were familiar with the Black Rock, and suggested to Larry it was a perfect place to burn the figure. (This was after I met him at Baker Beach during the final, aborted burn attempt.) I attended and photographed BM for the first 21 years it was on the playa. Only sporadically since. Mostly due to health concerns as well as the sense that BM is over-corporatized today, and probably the most closely watched/spied on city in America, where anyone could be plainclothes and bust you for whatever, no matter how insignificant. That rots the experience we come for.



“Blue Man Chew”. Photo credit: Wiliam Binzen.

FLO You titled your 2016’s gallery show and catalog book: “Waking Dream”. BM titled its 2022’s event theme “Waking Dreams”.

WILLIAM Stuart Mangrum says in his article for the Burning Man Journal: “I’d like to say that this year’s art theme was conceived as an homage to Binzen’s work, but it wouldn’t be true. The theme title occurred to me, appropriately enough, in a dream, rising from the depths of subconscious like Leviathan, dragging dark garlands of sea-kelp and half-formed barnacles of memory. So when it was brought to my attention that Binzen had used it in 2016 for his gallery show and catalog, documenting the Siteworks events of 1992-1994 and his early Burning Man years, I could only marvel at the wily ways of the multiverse to weave its threads across time and space, and create the appearance of coincidence from the fabric of synchrony.”

FLO In “Inside DSW on your website, you say: “Desert Siteworks was a weeklong event. This worked well, so I encouraged Larry to do the same (Burning Man at the time was a three-day event).” When did BM become a week-long event? In my research, I’ve found that it happened in 1992. Is that correct?

WILLIAM I don’t precisely recall what year. You may be right because I was already planning for the second year of DSW, and I was thinking at least a week, or more likely, a month.

FLO A document in [the archive of BurningMan.org](#) shows that DSW was ongoing while BM happened. Was it at really the same time? I thought it was during the solstice so June 21.

WILLIAM DSW 1994 event at Bordello Springs was over a month long, although only three people remained by the end. Most were there for a week to ten days or so.

I had pitched the idea in advance to Larry that we hold both events at the same time, and that we could create a mutual avenue of sculptures over the path several miles long, a pilgrimage path, if you will, between our projects.

Larry hated the idea. And that was that. But, in some form, DSW remained in existence for about five weeks, encompassing two full moons, with one being close to Summer Solstice.



**“Each person
addressing
the Summer
Solstice
sunset,
each person
dancing on the
shadow
of fellow
humans all
facing the
light in a
ritual of
ecstatic
release and
a reminder
of and re-
orientation
to the day of
longest light.”**