

E Film Studios presents

a film by Alex Nohe

**BURNING MAN –
THE BURNING SENSATION**

**Preliminary Production Notes
Not for Publication**

**Running Time: 75 Minutes / Not Yet Rated
In Color / English**

**Publicity—Burning Man
Maid Marian Goodell
Mistress of Communications
Burning Man
2739 Webster St.
San Francisco, CA 94123
415-550-3080
marian@burningman.com**

burningman.com

**Publicity—Film
Michele Robertson
MRC
8217 Melrose Avenue
Suite 115
Los Angeles, CA 90046
323-651-3682
mrobertson323@aol.com**

theburningsensation.com

Phrase Generator

Each of the four columns below. These may then be strung together in a sequence. The Burning Man Phrase Generator (c) is capable of generating 160,000 colorful descriptions. It has been thoroughly tested.

Burning Man is a:

proto	hippie	apocalyptic	freakfest
neo	pagan	cyber	be-in
pyro	deadhead	millennial	rave
ur	anarchist	dada	happening
post	erotic	surreal	hoedown
sub	hipster	drug-induced	orgy
crypto	techno	mind-altering	phantasmagoria
homo	tribal	counter-culture	riot
anti	cultural	nihilistic	love-in
supra	communal	ecstatic	nightmare
pre	archaic	primordial	meltdown
retro	esoteric	futuristic	mindmeld
specto	deadbeat	ritualistic	extravaganza
semi	bohemian	narcissistic	rampage
meta	druidic	post-modern	pow wow
trans	weirdo	naked	lollapalooza
nerdo	alternative	life-style	burn-o-rama
inter	visionary	iconoclastic	confab
exo	satanic	renegade	conspiracy
intra	psycho	underground	revolution

– (sic.) from *The Black Rock Gazette*, one of Burning Man's daily newspapers.
Volume 8, Burning Man 1999. Sunday, September 5, 1999.

Synopsis

' The Burning Sensation' will scorch your senses as it takes you into the heart of the Burning Man experience. In 2001 some 20,000+ souls made a pilgrimage to the Black Rock Desert to practice radical self-expression and self-reliance in a temporary, commerce-free community. At the end a 50-foot high, neon-lit, wooden effigy is burned, igniting a wild, tribal, all-night celebration.

The world's largest venue for public art, Burning Man has elements of a Vegas acid trip, a nudist colony, a pyrotechnic convention, the Rose Bowl parade, a rave, the Museum of Modern Art, and a Mad Max movie dispersed over the 107 degree desert. The film captures intense footage of several art events as well as interviews with Burning Man organizers Larry Harvey (also co-founder), Crimson Rose and Will Roger who explain how, what started in 1986 as an impromptu Summer Solstice celebration, put on by a few friends at a beach in San Francisco, has turned into a full-blown exercise in city planning and management with a hefty price-tag. This temporary city is the 6th largest in Nevada.

Some of the featured art events include ' Burial In Space' by Woodpussy (a group of musicians and pyro-technicians who blast their deceased founder into space in a rocket of their own creation); ' Nebulous Entity' and ' Futura Deluxe' (two large, roving installation pieces engineered using mathematics derived from fields of neural networks, ecological systems and fractals); and a performance artist Dea Million who stages her ' wedding' to America.

Soundtrack features a salad of eclectic artists including Mogwai, Sonic Youth, The Crystal Method, Os Mutantes, Guided by Voices, Friends of Dean Martinez, This Kid Called Miles, Nightmares on Wax, Kruder & Dorfmeister, Estradasphere, and Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys.

Filmmakers

Directed by..... **ALEX NOHE**

Produced by..... **ALEX NOHE**

..... **ALAN ROBERTS**

Co-Producer..... **TRAVIS HARROD**

Associate Producers..... **CHUCK CIRINO**

..... **DUANE WEAVER**

Editors..... **JAMES FRISA**

..... **CASSANDRA MARSHALL**

Associate Editors..... **JOY MOELLER**

..... **MARK OGUSCHEWITZ**

..... **TIM COUNIHAN**

Camera..... **ALEX NOHE**

..... **PILAR OTERO**

..... **DAVID SMITH**

..... **CHRIS STONG**

..... **TED TROST**

Additional Burn Footage..... **CHUCK CIRINO**

..... **ALLAN LUNDELL**

..... **WILLIAM KAUFMAN & LANCE BLACK**

Music Supervisor..... **CHARLES RAGGIO**

Music Coordinators..... **KIM MICHALOWSKI**

..... **ANDREA VON FOERSTER**

Creator of the Nebulous Sound System..... **AARON WOLF BAUM**

Sound Re-Recording..... **MARTIN LOPEZ**

Graphic Design... **DANIEL CHAVIRA & TRAVIS PAGE, NAKED EYE**

Director's Statement

Being a fan of the absurd, the extreme and the bizarre, I was drawn to Burning Man in order to witness the phenomenon and to participate in it. I expected something like an outdoor concert, but became overwhelmed by the extravagant displays of personal freedom and artistic expression.

I'd heard the words Burning Man from different people over the years and whenever I'd ask, "What is that," the participant would excitedly fumble for words and eventually say, "I don't know. It's hard to describe. It's wild." Much later I was in a bookstore and came across the Burning Man photo book that was published by *Wired*. I was immediately engrossed by the images: foreign, terrifying, unnerving, compelling. I showed the book to my girlfriend at the time and within a minute we decided to attend.

Even somewhat prepared for the chaos it took us a couple of days to figure out how to participate. Our first days, we were overwhelmed by the extravagant spectacle and felt as if a circus was about to attack us. While I participated as much as I could, I really didn't feel completely at home until my second year, when I had a religious experience. From Moses to Jim Morrison, wandering the desert has been a path to find something beyond the human experience.

Burning Man is a form of art unto itself. Unlike sculpture, painting or film, Burning Man is interactive, participatory. It's not something you watch, it's something you do. It's a place of fantasy, of abandonment.

People that come to Burning Man unwilling to join the community tax the citizens who have come to create, express and participate. While there's definitely a place for you to appreciate the artwork and performances of the other citizens, Burning Man is not a spectator sport.

* * * *

About the Production

Burning Man is an improvised but momentary community that provides an open forum for "radical self-expression" and by its very existence stands as an implicit rebuke to the negative aspects of contemporary Western consumer culture.

Last summer 24,000 people participated in the art movement and temporary community. The annual convergence stresses radical self-reliance and radical self-expression, climaxing in the burning of a fifty-foot wooden man. Burning Man is the world's largest art venue with aspects of a Vegas acid trip, a pyrotechnic convention, the Museum of Modern Art, the Rose Bowl parade, a Mad Max movie, a nudist colony and a rave dispersed over the 107 degree Black Rock Desert. "The Burning Sensation" captures the artists of Burning Man including the information scavenging Nebulous Entity, Dea Million as she weds America, the launch of the Woodpussy rocket and the fire machines of Seemen.

Though it's temporary, it is a playground for ideas and forms of expression that might not otherwise flourish in a capitalist society. Modern American life has wiped the earth clean of many things that are counter to the whims of the individual including small pox, entire species of insects – and community. Burning Man is a place for people who feel somewhat unsatisfied with corporate niceties and generic human interaction to explore man's more primal and human side.

The origins for the event come from Co-Founder Larry Harvey's personal life some years ago. Going through a divorce and the ramifications of that, Harvey suggested to his friend Jerry James that they "burn a man," a wooden man about eight feet tall that they took to a San Francisco beach around the summer equinox of 1986.

Lore has it that the "Man" symbolized his father, his relationship, himself. However, Harvey doesn't really ever say what the symbol means: its personal, yet transcendent and means something different to everyone. Fire is powerful, timeless and symbolic; and on a literal level it brings together people to stay warm, which is what happened on the beach. They decided to repeat the burning and it became a personal holiday that was open to anyone who wanted to join.

After four years, they decided to move to the Black Rock Desert about 90 miles North of Reno, Nevada. In 1993, approximately 1,000 people attended Burning Man, which has doubled or nearly doubled in size every year since. In 1999, 24,000 people made the pilgrimage.

Burning Man is a temporary community in which thousands of people come to the desert to camp. You have to bring everything with you that you'll need to survive: food, clothing, shelter. Once you arrive, you are encouraged not to leave (an extra \$25 to return once you've left). Also, commerce is outlawed. There is nothing to buy.

You are encouraged to give or barter your goods or services with your neighbors, whether it's help with building their theme camp or maybe even cooking a communal meal. The extremities of the desert – and the emergencies they can create – also force an immediacy that's been removed from post-modern life. There's nothing like a 50 mph windstorm with 100 mph gusts to bring people together for survival.

* * * *

Burning Man currently has a policy of “radical inclusion” where they'll allow anyone to enter who is willing to buy a ticket. For Burning Man 2000, however, they stopped selling tickets three days before the burning of the Man. What they've found is that the people who come during the final days of the festival are very taxing upon the other participant's experience. They get a lot of “yahoos” who come for the wrong reasons: to get drunk, stare at the naked girls, and fuck shit up. They don't come for the reasons that everyone else does: to participate in a unique, wild and bizarre festival of art and radical self-expression.

While Burning Man does no advertising for the event, they've received a lot of attention from the press over the years. Their main form of communication is their website, www.burningman.com, and an email newsletter called “The Jack Rabbit Speaks.”

* * * *

The Burning Man Experience

Hurtling down the road to the Black Rock Desert, the colors paint themselves like a spice cabinet – sage, dust, slate gray. Maybe you're in your trusty car, the one that takes you to and from work every day. Perhaps you've got a spacious RV, your Motel 6 on wheels for the next days in the desert. Or you're driving your glittering art car, complete with poker chips and mirroring to make a disco ball proud. The two-lane highway turns off onto a new road. You drive slowly onto the playa, the 400 square mile expanse known as the Black Rock Desert. There you've touched the terrain of what feels like another planet. You're at the end – and the beginning – of a journey to Burning Man, a place where there are no spectators, only participants.

There's never a feeling of someone being "the weirdest kid in the classroom" – there's always somebody who's thought up something you never even considered. You're there to breathe art. Imagine an ice sculpture emitting glacial music – in the desert. Imagine the "Man" greeting you, neon and benevolence, watching over the community. You're here to build a community that needs and relies on everyone.

Everyone is there to survive. What happens to the brain and body when exposed to 107 degree heat, sweat wicking off, dehydrating you within minutes?

The mind-altering experience of Burning Man is its own drug. Participants slather on sunblock before the sun's rays turn up full blast. They bring enough food, water and shelter because the elements of the new "planet" are harsh. There is no restaurants or other sources of vending to be found.

Participants go to create. Nobody at Burning Man is a spectator, rather a builder of their own new world. It's a place where "eggs" can be built for shelter, a suit made of light sticks, a car that looks like a shark's fin. Individuals cover themselves in silver or maybe a straw hat and a string of pearls or maybe a skirt for the first time.

Everyone is here to experience. This can include riding a bike in the expanse of nothingness with your eyes closed. Meet the theme camp – enjoy Irrational Geographic or relax at Bianca's Smut Shack and eat a grilled cheese sandwich. Find your love and understand each other as you walk slowly under a parasol. Wander under the veils of dust at night on the playa.

People come to celebrate. On Saturday night, they'll burn the Man. As the procession starts, the circle forms and the man ignites. The experience is something personal, something new, something never felt before. It's an epiphany – primal and newborn.

When this tribe leaves from Burning Man, there is no trace. Everything that is built is also dismantled. The waste made and objects consumed, leave with the participants. But they take the world that was built with them. As they drive back down the dusty roads toward home, they slowly reintegrate to the world they know. Over time, vivid images still dance in the brain, floating back to when the weather changes. The Burning Man community, whether friends, new acquaintances or the Burning Man project, embraces. At the end, though the journey to and from Burning Man are finished, participants embark on a different journey – forever.

* * * *

415-to-flame

www.burningman.com

On-Camera Participants

Dana Albany

Aaron Wolf Baum

David Best

Christian Breeden

Michael Christian

Horny Demon

Donnie Donson

Flash

Nate Foll

Sue Glover

Larry Harvey

Jack "Jak" Hays

Larry Heminez

Les Izzmore

Dan Miller

Dea Million

Steven Raspa

Tania Rehse

Will Roger

Crimson Rose

Kal Spelletich

Chris Stong

Dominc ' Dark Angel' Tinio

About the On-Camera Participants

AARON WOLF BAUM / CREATOR OF THE NEBULOUS SOUND SYSTEM

Dr. Aaron Wolf Baum produces musical pieces and installations using mathematics derived from the fields of neural networks, ecological systems and fractals. He has created sound systems, performances and content for many art installations and shows such as SIGGRAPH '99, Omnimedia, and the Crucible Steel Gallery. He created the soundscapes and helped with the construction of the Nebulous Entity and the Futura Deluxe, two large, roving installation / performance pieces at Burning Man '98 and '99. He graduated summa cum laude in physics from Harvard University in 1991, and received his Ph.D. in Applied Physics from Stanford University in 1997. In his spare time he manages a team of engineers in Silicon Valley.

DONNIE DONSON & NATE FOLL / WOODPUSSY

Woodpussy is a group of musicians, artists and pyrotechnicians from central Oklahoma who are currently based in Los Angeles. They combine their talents in a thematic manner making every show a unique and rare occurrence. Each performance is different in set design, costuming, music and special effects and often require months of preparation.

Woodpussy has been performing since 1992 when a home video earned them the coveted title of "third worst band in the world" from *Spin* Magazine. Since then they have been banned from almost every club in L.A. for "nudity and other behavior unbecoming a rock band," released sporadic singles and CDs, toured the West Coast with Tool and done several large-scale pyrotechnic performances. The most recent of these was Burning Man 1999's "Burial In Space" in which G. Don Wetumka, the beloved and deceased founder of Woodpussy, was placed inside a fourteen foot rocket ship of the group's own design and launched from a ramp into deep space. Immediately following the launch, sixteen members of Woodpussy ignited what the band calls "Hot Heads," large helmets covered in fireworks, to celebrate the departure of their good friend from the planet he called home. Woodpussy is available for events worldwide and can be contacted via email at woodpussy@loop.com.

LARRY HARVEY / CO-FOUNDER & DIRECTOR OF BURNING MAN

Larry Harvey likes the word "prodigious." "Primal" would run a close second, "looming" and "vast" would doubtless place. He has, by his own admission, a grandiose imagination. This is tempered, it should be added, by a love of friends, a fondness generally for people, and a keen appreciation of their characters, capacities and ideas.

In his role as spokesperson for the Project, Harvey is an adamant idealist, but pragmatic and patient with people – part visionary, part ironist, part planner. Most importantly, he is extremely skilled at getting other people to help him. Since founding the Project in 1986, he has overseen its operation.

Harvey's chief characteristic is a love of language and ideas. Animated by a notion he'll begin to talk – massaging it with metaphors, analogies, repeating and rehearsing it, until, at times, his closest friends but feign an interest. Such a conversation can seem more a seance than a dialogue. This man who talks in spurts and stammers, whose words careen like bats in flight, is clearly possessed. It must be admitted that he also has a way of making those he talks to feel like his companions – that together with him they are witness to a vast, prodigious, and, perhaps, a primal prospect – and that all they need do, in this sudden circumstance, is step into it.

In May 1998, Harvey was invited to Harvard's Second International Conference on Internet and Society as a panelist for Charles Nesson's discussion "The Internet and Education." Harvey also spoke with art critic, Mark Van Proyen at the San Francisco Library's Koret Auditorium in August 1998.

STEVEN RASPA / FUTURA DELUXE

Steven Raspa is an artist, writer, and performer. His art has been featured and reviewed in international print and television, including *SF Weekly*, *Public Art Review*, *Wired*, *New Art Examiner*, *The Washington Post*, *Village Voice* and *Geo*. For the last three years he has focused his energies on creating inspirational public installations that viewers complete for themselves, often in deeply personal ways. Raspa refers to his most recent works as "frames or mental spotlights into which people can step, bringing with them their aspirations and imaginations to consider and shape their own realities." His work in performance permeates every level of his life as he mines aspects of his identity and fantasy through assumed personas and alter-egos. He is currently working on an "unauthorized autobiographical fantasy" and is a founding member of the multimedia supergroup HAPPY. The Futura Deluxe Bubble Fountain and performance were created specifically for Burning Man 1999. Raspa has also written and performed works for the St. Mark's Poetry Project in New York City and is a winner of the United Nations Peace Medal for younger poets.

WILL ROGER/ BURNING MAN SITE MANAGER

Will Roger builds Black Rock City, and comes to us from Rochester, New York, where he taught photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology. As a teacher he was known to be patient, saturnine, and subversive. He naturally attracted a group of devoted students. The title of his course, "In Search Of the Mystical Image," expresses the character of his work. Vapor trails of motion in these portrait studies seem to blend body and spirit, and this, in turn, suggests Roger's person.

Before assuming his position in 1997 as the Project's budget officer, Roger labored as a work beast, a one man work crew, patiently sledging stakes in the noon-day sun. His prepossessing presence – he is a massive figure – combines with a serenity of character. Roger has a way of seeing the large picture, of grasping the greater scope of things around him, while, all the while, remaining planted in the present moment. He is an excellent cook, a disarming host, and a knowing connoisseur of life's varied pleasures.

CRIMSON ROSE / ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGER, NAKED FIRE GODDESS

"Fire is the greatest draw on Earth," as Larry Harvey likes to say. He calls it a "primal attractant." The naked human body would undoubtedly be second in its power to hypnotically assemble human beings. Crimson Rose has combined these two mesmerizing experiences throughout her career as a fire dancer. Crimson has ignited Burning Man since 1992. With her partner, Will Roger, she has performed at many Burning Man events: breathing fire, bearing it aloft, dancing around it, sheathing her body in this combustible medium. Indeed, she is likely to materialize in the presence of any fire. Reporters seeking Crimson in the desert are advised to go directly to the largest burning object. She'll be near the flames. Like fire itself, we should add, she will not suffer fools – yet, also like fire, she's endlessly playful. Who else would have invented fire badminton (a game played with rackets, a net and flaming tampons)?

KAL SPELLETICH / SEEMEN

SEEMEN is the collaborative effort of Kal Spelletich and some forty odd art drop outs and extreme technology inventors who enjoy exploring their taste for the dark side of technology and perfecting their Art of The Ephemeral Spectacle. SEEMEN are artists that use technology, storytelling and live performance to create a unique event. They see themselves as post-industrial folk artists. Since they create situations where audiences are encouraged to interact with machines, no two performances are ever the same. The actions of their robots poetically symbolize man's struggles and triumphs.

Since their formation ten years ago in Austin, Texas, SEEMEN have presented more than 150 performances throughout the United States and Canada at numerous art institutions and venues including night clubs, warehouses, and freeway underpasses. Since 1997, SEEMEN have been the featured performers at the renowned Burning Man festivals held annually in Black Rock, Nevada. Their works have been exhibited at the Jack Hanley Gallery and included in the collections of the New York Museum of Modern Art and the Getty Museum. SEEMEN have received numerous grant awards from The Jerome Foundation, Art Matters, Art Without Walls, and many others.

* * * *

About the Filmmakers

ALEX NOHE / DIRECTOR & PRODUCER

The Burning Sensation marks Alex Nohe's debut as a feature film director and producer. Nohe is the former Director of Programming for IFP/West, a Los Angeles-based non-profit organization that provides services, programming, and education for independent filmmakers. There he served as a producer of *Independent Focus*, a show on the Independent Film Channel in which *New York Times* Film Critic Elvis Mitchell interviews major independent filmmakers. At IFP/West he assisted many independent films acquire distribution including *Gods & Monsters* (Oscar® winner), *The Long Way Home* (Oscar® winner), and *Waco: The Rules of Engagement* (Oscar® nominee).

Nohe has contributed to *Film Threat* and *Filmmaker: The Magazine of Independent Film*, served as a juror at the Seattle and Santa Barbara film festivals and as a programmer for the Slamdance, Los Angeles, and AFI International Film Festivals.

A native Kansan, he graduated from the University of Kansas in 1993 with degrees in Psychology and Film. At the University of Kansas, he ran the Student Union screening series and booked other live events for the University.

ALAN ROBERTS / PRODUCER

Alan Roberts is an editor and runs Genesis Post-Production, a digital post facility. His recent credits include *Deterrence* (Paramount Classics) and *Stanley's Gig*, starring Faye Dunaway; and the award-winning short *4 Second Delay*. Roberts also directed *Save Me*, *Round Trip to Heaven*, and the erotic classic *Young Lady Chatterley*.

JAMES FRISA / EDITOR

James Frisa was awarded Best Editor at the 1998 Slamdance Film Festival for *Six-String Samurai*. His other feature credits include the supernatural thriller *Stir* and Rodney Wilson's *Junkies*. Born and raised in Cincinnati, Frisa graduated from Loyola Marymount University.

CASSANDRA MARSHALL / EDITOR

Cassandra Marshall is an editor, fire performer and video artist in New York City. She has been attending Burning Man since 1996. Her editing credits include *Mysteries of SRL*, for Survival Research Laboratories and *B Movie* starring James Urbaniak.