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EDITORS' PICK

Burning Man 2026: The Most Outrageous Mutant Vehicles And Art Installations In The Black Rock Desert

A fire-breathing dragon with 60-foot wings, a 72-foot shark and a sinking Titanic are among the extraordinary moving sculptures and large-scale artworks rising from the Nevada desert this year.

By Jim Dobson, Senior Contributor. ⓘ Jim Dobson is a full-time luxury...

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permanent structures. Instead, glowing art moves through dust storms, ships show up on the horizon, and sculptures as large as small buildings fill the empty playa.

Burning Man returns to Nevada's Black Rock Desert in the first week of September and attracts estimated crowds of over 70,000 people. This year's theme, Axis Mundi, looks at how people, communities, and nature are connected. The art features major Honoraria projects and hundreds of other works, many of which take months to create and use lighting, sound, fire, and engineering.



El Pulpo Magnifico by Duane Flatmo
SCOTT LONDON

Mutant vehicles are some of the most striking sights at Black Rock City. They look part machine and part ghost, moving slowly across the dry lakebed like relics from a lost civilization that never stopped building. A few years ago, I wrote about some of the most well-known vehicles and the people who made them. In 2026, the playa will see new creations alongside old favorites. Some are quieter this year, some are almost ridiculous, but all of them share a strange sense of purpose. These are carefully built

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Instead of only admiring the wild designs, I wanted to find out what some of these teams are really building, who is behind the work, and why they would spend months making a complex machine that will only move slowly across a place meant to erase it.

Some of these mutant vehicles and big installations have been captured by top Burning Man photographers, including longtime participant Scott London, whose photos are featured in the popular book Burning Man: Art on Fire. These are the projects and stories that caught my attention at Burning Man 2026.

THE MUTANT VEHICLES



SharkCar is 72 feet long and 17 feet tall
SCOTT LONDON

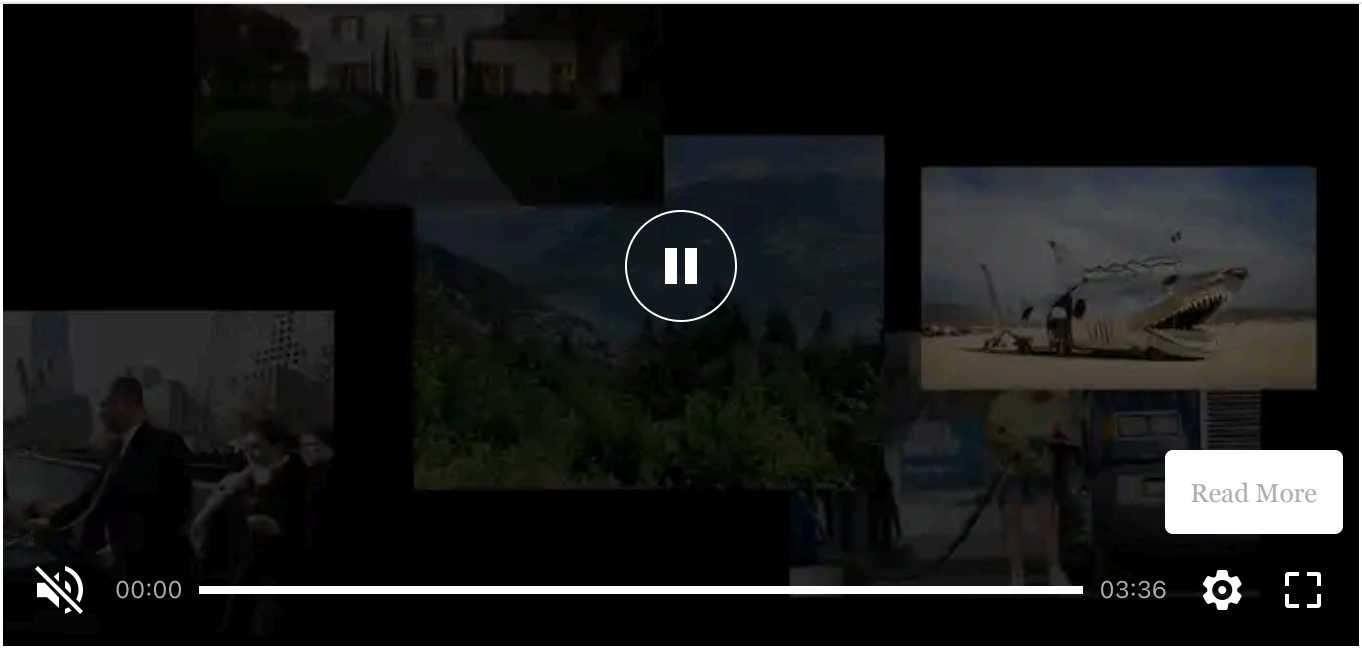
SharkCar

Design team: Sid Kurtz and crew

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SharkCar has one of the simplest ideas here and one of the biggest footprints. Burning Man lists it at 72 feet long and 17 feet tall, roughly the length of a large motor yacht. Red LED rope lighting traces the body from head to tail, so the shark keeps its unmistakable outline after dark as it moves across the playa.

A shark this large has to be stored, transported, maintained and maneuvered through Black Rock City before anyone gets to enjoy the visual joke. Underneath the spectacle is a serious piece of mobile engineering built to move a sculpture larger than almost anything parked beside it.



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Chester

Designed by Jason Anderholm

Chester began as a napkin sketch, created by Jason Anderholm, who went from electrician to showman. The frame was once a delivery truck, but now it's a rearing horse with a driver's platform, a mane made from welded motorcycle tires, glowing red eyes, and fire-shooting nostrils. A stripper pole on its back transforms it into a moving stage for acrobats.



¡AXOLOTL! The Earth Guardian
PHOTO COURTESY OF CAMP AXOLOTL

¡AXOLOTL! The Earth Guardian

Design team: Camp Axolotl, San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

¡AXOLOTL! is almost 50 feet long and feels more like a moving stage than a typical art car. Inspired by Mexico's endangered axolotl, Camp Axolotl turned this unique

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other body parts. This has made it valuable in medical research. As its habitat disappears, the axolotl has also become a strong symbol of both environmental loss and survival.



Abraxas Dragon at the 2019 Burning Man Tool CD Release Party
EBPHOTO (ERNESTO BORGES)

Abraxas

Design team: LuvWorx

Abraxas has been a familiar sight at Burning Man since 2006. This dragon-shaped art car stands out for its music, performances, and unmistakable silhouette. Beyond the playa, the team has helped with disaster relief through the Grassroots Aid Partnership, including work after Hurricane Helene in North Carolina, and has supported the Moonlight Orphanage in Uganda.

The designers told me in an interview, “The team that came together for our first build has gone on to undertake increasingly audacious projects, from activist movements to a decade of disaster relief and humanitarian work. We were forged in

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entire community of free-thinking individuals, each bringing different talents and a shared dedication, to imagine and bring such a vision to life. The result is a single work of art that reflects the creativity of everyone involved. That is the true magic of it."



Blue Bull transforms Maria Prymachenko's 1947 painting into a massive UV-reactive mutant vehicle.
PHOTO COURTESY OF YAROSLAV KORETS, KURENIVKA, WONDERS WORKSHOP

Blue Bull

Design team: Yaroslav Korets, Kurenivka, Wonders Workshop and Ukrainian collaborators in Kyiv, Odesa and the United States

Blue Bull started as a painting nearly 80 years ago. The vehicle is inspired by Ukrainian artist Maria Prymachenko's 1947 Blue Bull, one of the imaginative animals central to her work. At Burning Man, this artwork becomes a three-dimensional piece with a large body covered in bright blue UV-reactive fur, along with lighting and sound that make it stand out at night on the playa.

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Golden Mean, created by Kyrsten Mate and Jon Sarriugarte, takes its form from the mathematical golden ratio.
PHOTO COURTESY OF FORM AND REFORM

Golden Mean

Design team: Kyrsten Mate and Jon Sarriugarte and EOD

Golden Mean takes its name from the golden ratio, a mathematical proportion that's said to produce aesthetically pleasing art and architecture. Other inspirations for the project include the Giant Pink Sea Snail from Doctor Dolittle, giant mechanical elephant puppets by Royal de Luxe and Jules Verne's imaginative creations.

Jon Sarriugarte tells me, "My motivation to make things is to encourage others to create what they imagine. The Golden Mean snail car came from my wife Kyrsten Mate's dream. We sketched it on a napkin and made it over the summer with 6 of our friends and her dad. I'd like to see people make something they imagine and show people."

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Eileen, the Pearl Peacock
ROBIN DAMORE

Eileen, The Pearl Peacock

Design team: Cassidy Damore, Kristen Hoard, Dennis Damore, and Niko McManus

Eileen is a pearl-white peacock with five big metal tail feathers that stand tall behind her lace-covered body. During the day, you can see all the fine details in the sculpture. At night, the feathers light up and the whole bird glows across the playa. The camp calls it a celebration of creativity and storytelling, but the story behind it is much more personal.

“Building an art car is by far the dumbest, hardest, and most expensive thing I’ve ever done that had no purpose other than to make people happy,” Project Co-Lead Cassidy Damore tells me. “And it completely changed my life. It reignited my passion for building. I left my career in film and went back to school. I graduated with my second bachelor's in mechanical engineering in May.”

The car is a tribute to Damore’s grandmother, Eileen Hoard. “It’s built on her ’97

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purpose for her car than taking children around to all the magic on the playa."

Eileen's daughter, Kristen Hoard, says the project grew into something bigger for the family. "Creating art together and sharing it with the Burning Man community has been one of the most meaningful experiences of our lives. Most importantly, the art car became a timeless tribute to my mother, Eileen, whose creative spirit continues to flow through our entire family. We were so happy that it eventually found a new home surrounded by children, a place my mom would have loved."



Elektra is a fully engineered, fire-breathing dragon with wings spanning roughly 60 feet.
SCOTT LONDON

Elektra

Design team: Engineered Artworks

Elektra is a fire-breathing dragon built by Engineered Artworks, with wings stretching about 60 feet and wrapped in addressable, sequenced LEDs. The scale is theatrical even before the flames start. At night, the lighting turns the wings into a

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Rendering of Above & Below rises 50 feet above the playa and allows visitors to climb through its house, twisting beanstalk and Victorian...
ENGINEERED ARTWORKS / SEAN ORLANDO

Above & Below

Design team: Lead artist Sean Orlando; fabrication by Engineered Artworks in partnership with Five Ton Crane Arts Collective and a crew of over 50 contributing artists; structural engineering by Tipping Structural, with Andrew O'Keefe of Figure 13 as lead technical designer.

Sean Orlando's Above & Below stands 50 feet tall on the playa. It starts with a house at ground level and winds up a twisting beanstalk to a Victorian cottage near the top. Made from steel, wood, found objects, and recycled materials, this piece is meant to be explored up close. Visitors are invited to climb through it. Since June, over 130 artists, fabricators, and volunteers have worked on the project at Seaport Studios in Richmond, California.

For Orlando, the size of the piece is just one aspect. "Above & Below started as a very personal project, it's my version of a self-portrait, built around an inventor and his

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He drew inspiration from fairy tales, unusual workshops, and sketches of impossible machines. Still, he does not want visitors to follow a set story. “I don't want to hand people a fixed meaning though, I want them to climb through it, find their own artifacts and clues, and leave with their own wonder-filled story.”

Bringing this fantasy to life in the Black Rock Desert is a different challenge. The structure is modular, so it can be taken apart, loaded onto 48- and 53-foot flatbed trucks, and reassembled in just a few days at Black Rock City. It also needs to stand up to desert winds and dust while thousands of people explore it. “It has to come apart into truckable pieces that can be assembled in a matter of days, and still feel like a fairytale and not a jungle gym,” Orlando said. “Getting the engineering and the storytelling to hold together at the same time, on that timeline, that’s the real challenge.”



Temple of the Moon surrounds a 30-foot central tower with an organic, inward-folding design intended for gathering and reflection.
RAND LARSON

Temple of the Moon

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shape wraps around a 30-foot central tower, forming a space where people can come together to reflect, remember, and gather.

Gwertzman worked on the project with architect Annie Locke Scherer, the Moonlight Collective, and the Temple Build Crew. Burning Man calls the temple a sacred communal space before it is released by fire on Sunday night. The design reflects the cycles of the moon and the short life of the cactus flower, giving this important structure a unique and personal feel.

Gwertzman tells me, “It’s magical to see this Temple take shape, having lived with it as a constant companion in my head for nearly a year. What makes it so special, though, is not the structure that we've built, but the community of more than 100 builders who have given up their time and energy to bring it to life. It's the love that binds this team together that makes this Temple sacred.”



Cryptomeria, Alexander Rose’s three-level pavilion surrounding the Man, is inspired by Japan’s ancient Jōmon Sugi cedar. Sunrise shot at the 2026...
MARK FROMSON

Cryptomeria: The 2026 Man Pavilion

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ancient Jōmon Sugi cedar tree. The pavilion has three levels, starting with roots and the natural world, moving through the human realm, and reaching toward the sky. Paths shaped like roots guide visitors inside, and a double spiral staircase leads upward. This pavilion directly reflects the year's theme and serves as the physical center of Black Rock City.



TITANIC creates the illusion of a massive ocean liner breaking apart and sinking beneath the Black Rock Desert. Shot at the 2026 Burning Man.
MARK FROMSON

TITANIC

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Design team: Titanic's End, led by Chris Di

TITANIC could become one of the standout sights at Burning Man 2026. The San Francisco group Titanic's End is creating a large wooden ship that looks like it has split in two and begun to sink into the desert. The way the two parts are arranged makes it seem as if the ship is vanishing under the playa. The wreck will also serve as a casual amphitheater for performances and watching the sunset.

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Eiffela Broken Dream splits the Eiffel Tower into two sections, with a cable stretched between them for a tightrope crossing.
RENDERING BY FLORINE MAUDET / MAINDRON PRODUCTIONS

Eiffela Broken Dream

Artist: Philippe Maindron

This piece is a metal model of the Eiffel Tower, first built for Paris's 1889 Exposition Universelle, shown here at one-tenth its original size. In this version, the tower is split in two, as if it crashed into the desert after a wild journey. The lower part, with its four legs on the ground, stands for the fall of a lost civilization. The top, reaching up, suggests hope for a better future. A cable will connect the two parts, allowing a tightrope walker to cross from one side to the other.

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Artist Gazelle Dasti in front of ZARVAN on the Playa
ELEANOR PREGER (WWW.ELEANORPREGER.COM)

ZARVAN

Artist: Gazelle Dasti

Gazelle Dasti's ZARVAN stands 23 feet tall on the playa, shaped as a large human head inspired by the ancient Persian deity linked to time. The sculpture features patterns from Persian rugs, hand-painted details, and a glowing crown inspired by traditional stained glass. These elements give it a look grounded in Persian art, which is different from the futuristic style usually seen at Burning Man.

Inside, the experience is different. Periscopes behind the eyes let visitors see across Black Rock City, and speaking tubes through the ears allow people on opposite sides to talk to each other. Dasti is the first Persian woman to receive a Burning Man

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large-scale steel sculpture, ZARVAN is deeply meaningful to me. Inspired by the Persian divinity of boundless time, she combines Persian heritage, art, and engineering. Her hand-painted Persian rug patterns, acoustic ears, and internal periscopes that let you see through her eyes invite people to experience time, perception, and connection, and simply come together as human beings."



Black Rock City spreads across Nevada's Black Rock Desert during Burning Man.
SCOTT LONDON

What It Takes To Build The Impossible

It's easy to capture Burning Man's wildest creations in photos, but the real stories behind them often reveal much more than the spectacle itself. This year, artists are turning an 80-year-old Ukrainian painting into a moving sculpture, building a 50-foot fairytale world you can climb, and creating a broken Eiffel Tower for a tightrope walker to cross high above the playa.

This is why the best Burning Man projects are worth seeing for more than just their looks. They might be impractical, costly, and tough to build, but they let artists, builders, and engineers try things they wouldn't get to do anywhere else. For one

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Burning Man

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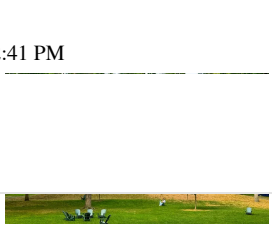


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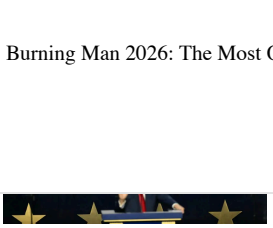
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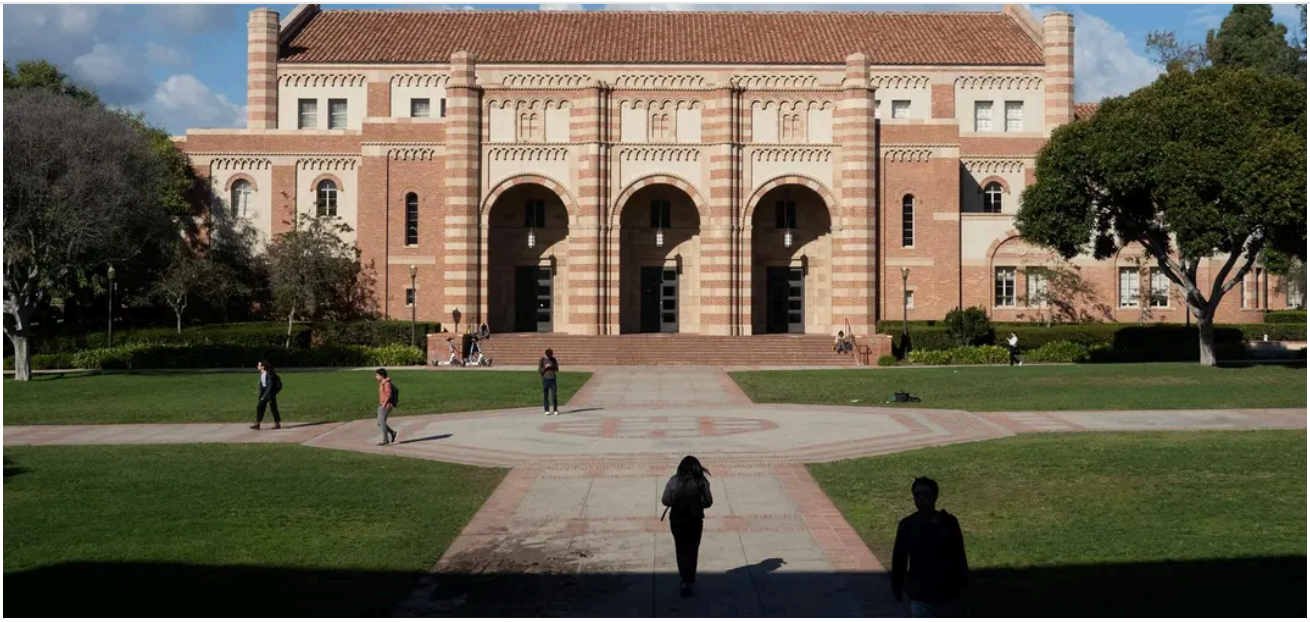
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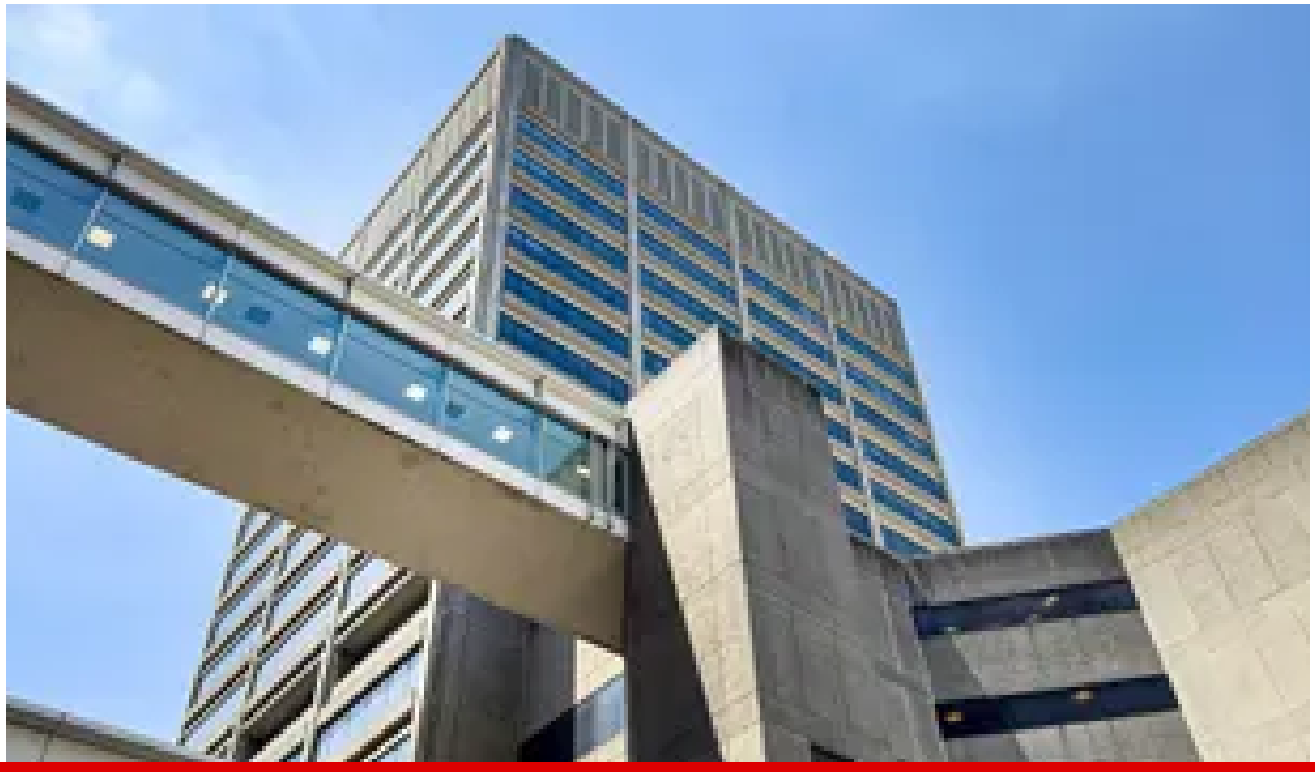
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