

December 2019

About Time: Visualizing Time at Burning Man

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Recommended Citation

Hoople, Gordon D.; Choi-Fitzpatrick, Austin; Parde, Nathaniel; Hoffoss, Diane; Mellette, Max; Nishimura, Rachel; and Gutman, Virginia (2019) "About Time: Visualizing Time at Burning Man," *The STEAM Journal*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 5. DOI: 10.5642/steam.20190401.05
Available at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/steam/vol4/iss1/5>

About Time: Visualizing Time at Burning Man

Abstract

About Time was a 30 foot long, 3000 pound wooden sundial that went up in flames at Burning Man 2019. The piece reflected on the role time plays in our lives. We organize our lives around time—are enslaved to time—and yet we know so little about it. Physicists and philosophers continue to grapple with deep puzzles of time—*Is time a fundamental quantity, independent of human actions or observations or is it an emergent property of our perception?* This installation projected time using two sundials: a horizontal dial which swept time out across the desert floor and an equatorial dial located on one face of the pyramidal structure. A platform at the peak of the pyramid allowed observers to become the sundial's apex and to experience 360° views of the landscape. A side doorway invited visitors inside, where they found interchangeable disks of pictographs and words that created shadows with shafts of light by day, and projected a fiery glow of LEDs at night. Exchanging the disks gave visitors control over the space and over time the installation evolved, altering the experience of subsequent visitors. At the end of the installation the piece was burned, a testament to the unidirectional march of entropy and time, underscoring the fleeting nature of the present moment.

Keywords

Maker, Sculpture, Interdisciplinary, Sundial, STEAM

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Cover Page Footnote

Funding for this work was provided by the University of San Diego, the San Diego Collaborative Arts Project, and generous donations from the public. The piece itself would not have existed without the hundreds of hours donated by dozens of volunteer artists/builders/designers/engineers/makers.

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About Time: Visualizing Time at Burning Man

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The piece was designed and built by Art Builds, a collective started at the University of San Diego to bring together faculty, students, and community members interested in STEAM projects.

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Figure 1. About Time, a sculpture consisting of a horizontal and equatorial sundial.
(You can view a video walk around of the sculpture at <https://youtu.be/i5IZxbYYV2U>)



Figure 2. About Time goes up in flames, it was burned as a testament to the fleeting nature of time.
(You can view a time lapse of the burn at <https://youtu.be/rSoccPaMaw0>)