Garbage In, Fire, Art Out

BY ROCKSTAR

The hottest spot on the playa isn’t DJ Triolo’s dance floor or your secondary’s parties or even your own upper lip at high noon, but inside the blue-roaring bowels of a dragon that eats aluminum cans and excretes art. The climate within sculptor Dan Macchiarini’s Dragon Forge reaches a mindbending, fire-crisping, 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit, hot enough to turn Blatz beer cans into art. An imposing resident of the Promenade, Danny Mac’s Dragon Forge has a terminal statement about the default world’s mass-consumption culture.

“Black Rock City produces tremendous amounts of trash, most of which people haul out of here personally,” grins the grizzled, bearlike North Beach sculptor. “The idea was to turn it into art and use that to impact consciousness—ever out here—about recycling. We do a lot of consuming here. So in the process of playing hard we can also produce things and transform waste into art.” The means became a rolling serpent over 20 feet high that snorts an impressive boil of flame from its jaws. Black with brass-tipped scales, the beast is an elegant compromise from Danny’s original vision.

“the original idea was that I thought I was going to be able to smelt thousands of cans. Without a more sophisticated forge than this, that wouldn’t be possible. But, this is way more important, because it promotes the idea of recycling. Secondly, the sculpture itself is a piece of kinetic art, itself made out of mostly recycled materials. Sixty percent of the smelter came from stuff people were throwing away. The trailer, the 55-gallon drum, the blowers I use in smelting, even the flamethrower effects this year, I use propane containers people threw away. We took ‘em back and made sure they weren’t condemned and could still hold gas safely and reconditioned those. Even the improvements we’ve made over the years come from recycled materials.

The molten aluminum from the dragon is poured into molds to make sculptures, each representing a different aspect of this year’s theme of Hope and Fear. Each piece uses two to three hundred cans. “There’s a lot of educational art out there,” Macchiarini allowed, “but I wanted to make this one dramatic and beautiful.”

So in the process of playing hard, we also want to feed the world. It’s not just a matter of the art, but it’s also the ideas that go with it. Art is not an end in itself. Art is a way of getting the message out.”
Near 8:30 and the Espalanade, you will find the Fire in the Belly art installation. It consists of two pagodas—one for hope and the other for fear—dancing an effigy of a pregnant woman wearing a mask of joy. Sometimes during Black Rock City the 13-foot tall mother figure will miscarry, and the mask of joy will be removed. It will be all burn. However, when Glimmer, the artist behind Fire in the Belly, first posited her art concept on tribe.net she did not realize the cultural impact it would have.

Her concept was to create a place of mourning for lost children. "It is a cathartic ritual and a carton of tissue," stated Glimmer. The Pagoda of Hope represents a nursery. Glimmer said it portrays "a mother's-type fantasies for a successful pregnancy." The Pagoda of Fear represents the "Los Angelitos Medical Center," a doctor's waiting room. "Every time you go to the doctor's (during pregnancy) you become a hypochondriac. Doctors are always there because stuff goes wrong some time."

This year, we are invited to write messages on the whitewashed pagodas or offer tokens on altars to acknowledge hopes and fears. Performance is encouraged. Protest is not.

After the Fire in the Belly project was announced, pro choicers and pro lifers had long online discussions mostly trying to prove their points onto the art installation. Glimmer was careful to point out that her project was not a political statement. It is there for Glimmer was careful to point out that her project to make contributions to the Black Rock Arts Foundation, and technicalities in California "work" and "buyers" to donations to the Black Rock Arts Foundation, and technicalities in California Community Property law. "I just want to be judged by a jury of my peers," stated Glimmer. She added, "Basically, people in totus."