

# After *Dissipate*

Christopher Brooks

**Abstract.** I propose to recreate Michael Heizer’s 1968 land art work, *Dissipate* at Burning Man, 2008. *Dissipate* was created in 1968 on the Black Rock Desert, this year marks its fortieth anniversary. The work will require digging five trenches, each of which will be less than 2.5 cubic feet.

## 1 Introduction

The Black Rock Desert, located in Northern Nevada, includes a endorheic dry lake bed. This location has been the site of many artistic activities, such as the Gary Cooper film, *The Winning of Barbara Worth* (1926) [Earl88], the Drew Barrymore/Matt Frewer film *Far from Home* (1989) [Barrymore89], two successful attempts at the land speed record (1983) [Ackroyd07], (1997) [Noble98], Burning Man (1990-) and the first civilian rocket in space (2004). In August and September of 1968, Michael Heizer created nine land art pieces in rural Nevada, the eighth of which, *Dissipate*, was constructed on the Black Rock Desert. This paper discusses an effort to replicate *Dissipate* in an effort to expose Burning Man event attendees to other artistic activities that have occurred on the Black Rock Desert.

## 2 Land Art

Land Art is art created using earth and rock. Smithsonian’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970), located in Great Salt Lake, is among the best known Land Art works. Michael Heizer’s *Double Negative* (1969) predates *Spiral Jetty*. Located near Overton, NV, *Double Negative* consists of two trenches separated by a small dry canyon. *Double Negative* effectively uses negative space to challenge the viewer to visualize the entire work. In 1968, before creating *Double Negative*, Heizer created *Nine Nevada Depressions* [Boettger02]. “Heizer’s 520-mile line of loops, faults, troughs and intersections linked nine sites on dry lakes located on government-owned land in Nevada, along the Nevada-California border.” [Boettger02] At the Black Rock Desert, Heizer determined the placement of five trenches by dropping five match sticks and created *Dissipate*.

Heizer’s work continues to attract main-stream media attention. *City*, located in Lincoln County, NV, was featured in the NY Times Magazine in 1999 [Kimmelman99] and 2005 [Kimmelman05]. *Dissipate* was mentioned in the Houston Chronicle in May, 2008 [Britt08].



**Fig. 1.** Dissipate No. 8 of Nine Nevada Depressions, 1968, (Wood, Each Liner: 12' x 1' x 1'; area: 45' x 50', Black Rock Desert, Nevada), Credit: [\[Crone82\]](#)

### 3 Reproducing *Dissipate*

My goal is to reproduce the five trenches of Heizer's *Dissipate*. In the original work, each trench was a 12' long wedge that tapered from a 1' x 1' square to an edge. Thus, each trench had a volume of 6 cubic feet. The five trenches were in an area of 45' x 50' [\[Crone82\]](#).

#### 3.1 Limitations and Concerns

**Digging Holes.** The 2008 Burning Man Art Questionnaire states:

”Event Stipulations require that holes dug in the playa may NOT be any larger than either 1 foot wide by 3 feet deep, OR 3 feet wide by 1 foot”

My reading of this is that each trench cannot be more than 3 cubic feet. Thus, each of the five trenches will be scaled down to a 8' long wedge that tapers from a 8" x 8" square to a edge. Each of the five trenches will require a 2.25 cubic feet of earth to be moved for a total of 11.25 cubic feet. During the event, the earth will be stored in buckets at a camp and replaced on Monday, September 2nd. The project will require an area of roughly 35' x 40'.

**Lighting.** Ideally, 10 unattended kerosene lanterns will be used at night to illuminate the site for safety reasons. The lanterns will be held to the playa surface with bailing wire and 1/2 inch by 12 inch rebar pounded flush to the desert. The kerosene light is in keeping with period of the piece. The inner part of the troughs will be lit with solar lawn lanterns. If kerosene lanterns are not permitted, then they could be replaced with solar lawn lanterns.

**Fence.** A fence around the installation shall prevent accidental traffic during dust storms. The current working plan is create a pentagon that mimics the BRC trash fence and echoes the five troughs. The fence shall consist of orange plastic fencing. The height of the fence shall be half the height of the BRC trash fence so as to avoid overwhelming the piece and to invite people to step over the fence and view the installation.

### **3.2 Trench Lining**

Each of the 5 trenches will be lined with 1 inch x 8 inch lumber painted black.

### **3.3 Setup**

Ideally, early access would be made available for a team of three people to prepare the site. The team has had early access before (Camp Brand U`r Ass) and has contributed to Burning Man in other areas, such as working with Andrew Johnstone on Virtual Playa. Being able to set up the trenches before the gates open would help ensure a clean, safe and low-impact installation.

Before digging, temporary plywood shall be placed on the sides of each trench location and then the trench shall be dug using a straight shovel. The dirt shall be placed in buckets, stored at a camp and used to fill in the trenches after the event. The liners shall be assembled and painted on location. Painting shall occur on tarps.

### **3.4 Operation**

The inside of the boxes will have text hand painted in white letters that describes the work. The current working text is:

In 1968, Michael Heizer came to the Black Rock Desert and created  
*Dissipate*, which is reproduced here in 3/4 scale.

The other trenches may have similar text describing other artistic events that have occurred on the Black Rock Desert. The inside of the box will be lit at night with the top part of a solar lantern.

The trenches will tend to fill in with sand. As this is part of the natural process, the sand may be left or it may be removed.

Each night, the lanterns will be lit. Each morning, cleanup and repair will occur.

### 3.5 Opening

S wine-in-a-box opening shall occur on Tuesday, August 26 at 5pm. As part of the "leave no trace" policy, no cups will be provided. The blurb in *What, Where, When* will read:

Tuesday, 5pm - Art has been created on the Black Rock Desert for many years. Join us at *Dissipate*, a reproduction of Heizer's 1968 Land Art piece for a white wine art opening. Bring your own cups.

## 4 Conclusion

Reproducing a forty year old piece of art work will help expand the attendees' awareness that they are operating in an area with an extensive history. Michael Heizer is an iconoclast and embodies the America spirit, which is very much in keeping with this year's theme.

**Acknowledgments:** This work is based on the work of Michael Heizer. The work is not to be sold and is reproduced for solely for the purposes of commentary and art history.

## References

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**“After Dissipate” Plan**

**Burning Man, 2008**

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**Scale: 1/8" = 1'**

