

**Michael Mikel: Burning Man**  
**Collection CAE1305**

**Introduction/Abstract**

This archive contains materials related to Burning Man, the annual art festival and temporary community held in the Black Rock Desert during the last week in August every year. Burning Man began in 1986 at Baker Beach in San Francisco, then moved to the Black Rock, Nevada, in 1990. Materials include and participant program ephemera, slides, photographs, and press.

**Biographical Note: Michael Mikel, aka Danger Ranger**

Michael Mikel, whose playa name is Danger Ranger, was one of the three founders of Burning Man in 1990 along with John Law and Larry Harvey. He remains a part owner of the parent company, Black Rock City LLC, as well as serving on the board of directors of the nonprofit Burning Man Project. In 1992 Mikel founded the Black Rock Rangers, and he continues to oversee security for the annual event.

Mikel created the first Burning Man mailing list/data base, produced the first issue of the Black Rock Gazette, established the Burning Man Archive, and drove the first art car to the Black Rock Desert. In 2001 he visited regional communities during his Tour of America as an ambassador for Burning Man. In addition, Mikel functions as an important member of San Francisco's Cacophony Society—"a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in pursuit of experience beyond the mainstream." It was the society that organized a trip to the Black Rock Desert in 1990, known as "Zone Trip #4", and which hosted the first burn of the Man in the desert that year.

Mikel has an engineering systems background in computers and robotics. His Silicon Valley career began with Fairchild Semiconductor just a few years before it gave birth to Intel. After 1984, he served as a robotics consultant to Apple Computer and later engineered the rise (and fall) of Jasmine Computer Systems. He contributed to the Mondo2000 house in Berkeley and wired *Wired Magazine's* first office in San Francisco. Mikel is a Vietnam combat veteran and was for years involved with the machine performance group Survival Research Laboratories.

**Scope and Content**

Burning Man is "an annual art event and temporary community based on radical self-expression and self-reliance," according to its website. The festival is held annually during the last week of August on the Black Rock Desert playa one hundred miles north of Reno. Attendance has grown from the low hundreds in the early 1990s to more than 61,000 in 2013.

The roots of the event began with the burning of figures on the summer solstice by sculptor Mary Graubeger, a friend of Larry Harvey's girlfriend, on San Francisco's Baker Beach in 1986. In 1986 Harvey erected a 9-foot tall wooden figure. In 1990 the then 40-foot figure was drawing so many attendees for the burning of "The Man" that police outlawed the event. A separate event had been planned by members of the Cacophony Society on the Black Rock Desert for that year, "Zone Trip #4, A Bad Day at Black Rock," which was billed as a dadaist and situationist performance happening. Harvey joined forces with the Cacophony Society and the first burn of the Man was held on the playa in 1990.

As Wikipedia describes it (accessed May 1, 2013): "Michael Mikel, another active Cacophonist, realized that a group unfamiliar with the environment of the dry lake would be helped by knowledgeable persons to ensure

they did not get lost in the deep dry lake and risk dehydration and death. He took the name Danger Ranger and created the Black Rock Rangers. Thus the seed of Black Rock City was germinated, as a fellowship, organized by Law and Mikel. Drawing on experience in the sign business and with light sculpture, John Law prepared custom neon tubes for the Man in 1991 so it could be seen as a beacon at night.” Materials include and participant program ephemera, slides, photographs, and press.

**This archive is currently in process.**