

CENTURIES OF THE BRISTLECONE

In *Centuries of the Bristlecone*, artist Jonathon Keats, collaborating with clockmakers Phil Abernethy and Brittany Cox, presents a monumental clock that tells time according to the growth of the Great Basin Bristlecone Pine—Nevada’s state tree and the oldest living complex organism on Earth.

Before mechanical clocks, people understood time by observing nature—the migration of birds, the flowering of plants, and the changing seasons. Today, our lives are ruled by the split-second accuracy of atomic clocks and the Gregorian calendar, supporting fast-paced industries and global coordination. But what if we measured time differently—in a way that responds to the rhythms of the natural world? Keats offers a bold alternative.

This clock tracks two kinds of time. The left side marks standard time. The right side marks what the artist describes as “Bristlecone Time,” calibrated to the annual growth of Bristlecone Pine trees atop Mt. Washington in eastern Nevada’s Snake Range. There, a related project created by Keats in collaboration with the Long Now Foundation and the University of Nevada, Reno, marks the passage of time in a grove of Bristlecone Pines. These remarkable trees grow slowly and unevenly, affected by changing conditions. That means “Bristlecone Time” may drift away from standard time—offering a living, climate-aware measure of passing years.

Keats’ work is more than an artistic experiment. It’s a call to rethink our relationship with time and nature. By giving authority to ancient trees, the project reminds us that the planet doesn’t run on human schedules. “Bristlecone Time” invites us to slow down, pay attention, and take responsibility for our role in sustaining life on Earth—a future shaped by our choices in an era of environmental uncertainty.

The Nevada Museum of Art commissioned *Centuries of the Bristlecone*, an artwork by Jonathan Keats created in collaboration with Phil Abernethy, Brittany Cox, Jason Iceman, and The Long Now Foundation. The wall graphic is based on a photograph by Ian Van Coller.