

**FIRE ARTS FESTIVAL  
THE CRUCIBLE, OAKLAND**

**JULY 17, 2005**



The Crucible held its fifth annual Fire Arts Festival at its location over in Oaktown on the edge of the Jack London Waterfront. The art center, which is the premier center for industrial arts on the west coast, hosts classes and private studios for glassblowing, sculpture welding, cast metal pours, wood carving, metal fabrication, neon sculpture, blacksmithing, cartoneria, as well as jewelry and enameling.

The Center supports interdisciplinary cooperation and often hosts mixed media and performance events. One of these was this past week's week-long

extravaganza starting with a free Desert Art Preview spotlighting artists creating new work for Burning Man 2005 related to the theme "Psyche" on Wednesday evening.

Thursday was a formal black tie affair costing some \$75 a ticket and which featured an auction of some of the magnificent bronze and iron creations by the crucible artists. The evening also included live fire performances by Apsara and the music of Rosin Coven as well as a long drop bronze pour from a an overheard crucible located fifteen feet above the moulds.

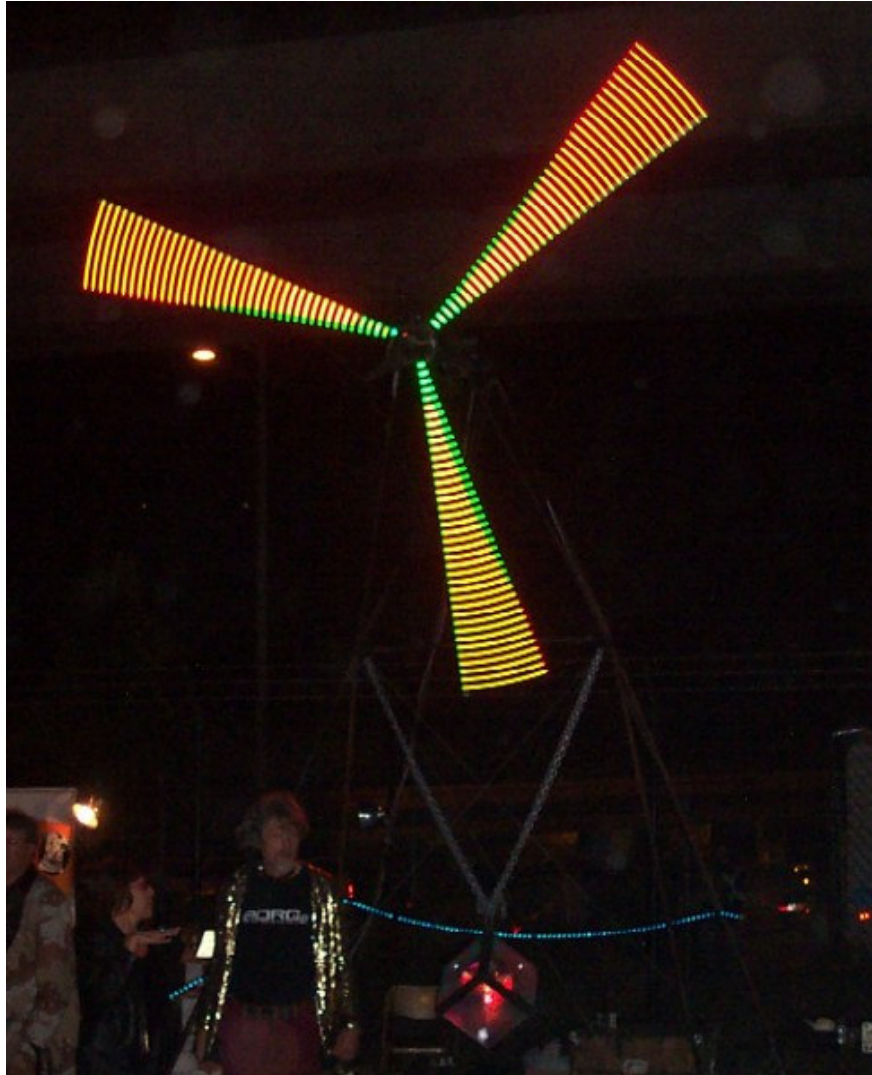
Friday began with a minor key version of the performances held Saturday. Saturday, Island-Life staffers volunteered for bar and security duty from three pm to two am for an inside look into the machinery behind such big events. The Crucible held a day-long Open House with workshops in welding, woodworking, glass blowing and other industrial arts.

At six o'clock, however, the big facility shut its doors and the focus shifted to the area -- a former parking lot about the size of a football field surrounded by chain-link fence and the nearby elevated rails of the BART.

As the sun went down, the canned beats of DJ Vordo yielded at 8:45pm to the eerie wailings of Sinder the Wicker King with ominously rumbling synthesizer playing over the occassional hoot of an exploratory jet of flame from this and that installation on the lot playing against the fading sun's aurora. Well over two thousand people stood in line to enter right at 8pm and many more thousands poured in throughout the evening.



As the last light faded, the neon installations lit up and began revolving as one by one the various fire sculptures began firing up with hisses and bangs across the lot, turning the place into a surreal world where otherworldly rules seemed to apply. Figures dressed in ropes of EL tubing and neon lights strolled through the crowds and a constant press of people congregated in front of the stage which hosted Poi dancers twirling batons, flails and pugel sticks tipped with flames and performing intricate gymnastics requiring absolute precision, for any one mistake would result in disastrous and very painful consequences, but which amazed the eye and delighted the senses.



Because of the press of the crowd it was difficult to get a good look, but we managed to climb up on a crane to watch Los Suenos Del Fuego the Enemy Combatant Dance Theatre -- which heavily employed martial arts techniques -- and the very subtle and sexual Nekyia, which used dancers outfitted with flaming peacock plumes. Sadly, the camera batteries chose this time to crap out.

As with Xeno, the emphasis was upon a female-empowered paganistic and stylized form of ritual dance which attained remarkable heights of spiritual

awakening worthy and better than the most shouting Baptist ministry, while remaining infused with powerfully atavistic sexuality.

Out in the yard, Therm crackled and popped from its twenty-foot high abstract flower of iron as the jet turbines shoved fireballs from a high firestack on the east side. On the west side of the yard, the fire tornado once again astonished random passengers on BART, whose trains passed only a few yards from the top of the forty-foot pillar of flames whipped up by ten industrial fans.

Around ten the crew broke open the mini kiln for an aluminum pour into glowing moulds surrounded by deepset concrete "footprints" glowing with an alcohol flame.

Behind the stage, on a raised berm, two massive ten-foot high Tesla coils ejected crackling blue lightning beside a pendulum which swung from a forty-foot slender arch of steel. At the end of the pendulum a sort of six-foot oval resembling a UFO launched itself with great jets of flame to swing wildly high into the air on four-way propane repulsion.

All of this was eclipsed by the bronze "Hand of God", which required the crowd be pushed back some thirty feet beyond its original perimeter as the fingers launched immense jets of flames that expanded into great fifty-foot donuts of flame at least 300 feet into the air. In an interview with the maker, we found that the Hand used pure propane compressed to 900 PSI to propel a mixture of kerosene, alcohol and white gas into the air from each of its extended fingers.



The effect was rather spectacular and the fire safety team was kept busy extinguishing the drop-off all around the area. No way could we get a photo of something that big.

And, of course, no Crucible event would be complete without the primitivistic Deer People with antlers aflame and striding on stilts another five feet in the air like animated cave paintings.



The event was still cranking well past two am with all sorts of fire mayhem going on and a fine time was had by all, although it is true the beer keg ran dry way too soon for our likes.

Got home and barely downed a beer before falling asleep in the comfy chair in fifteen minutes with Dr. Friederich snuggled in on the armrest.