

THE BIG PICTURE

Serpent Mother

Neither words nor pictures do full justice to the Serpent Mother, a fire-breathing steel-and-electronics dragon that debuted this past August at Burning Man, an annual orgy of art, technology, and water deprivation held in the Nevada desert. Serpent Mother took six months to create. Her 55-meter-long body supports a hydraulically activated moving head. Forced air shoots burning propane from her fangs and from 31 points along her spine—a total of 1700 liters is used each evening. The jets can be shot individually, or they can be controlled by a computer [lower left].

The humongous automaton was built by the Flaming Lotus Girls, an ad hoc organization of artists, electronic engineers, computer programmers, plumbers, welders, and anyone else who shows up at the group's San Francisco studio willing to work. About 60 of the 100 volunteers who contributed to the Serpent Mother were women, some of whom wielded welding equipment for the first time.

Photo by Josh Hunter/Flaming Lotus Girls

