

DUST STORM

BROKEN TRACK VANE

Gerlach Trailhead Public Art Proposal

STANISLAV SHMINKE + IRINA SHMINKE

Reno, Nevada | shminke.art | [@shminke.art](https://www.instagram.com/shminke.art)



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Dust Storm: Broken Track Vane is a large-scale kinetic sculpture inspired by the railroad history of Gerlach and the powerful winds and dust systems of the Black Rock Desert.

At the base, a recognizable section of railroad track rises from the ground. Fabricated steel rails and heavy timber ties establish a direct connection to the infrastructure that shaped Gerlach. As the track rises, its order changes: the rails separate, rotate, and transition into a faceted vortex of weathering steel.

The upper form becomes an abstract dust storm - a layered field of cut steel planes that appears to gather, expand, and dissolve into the sky. The transformation is gradual, allowing viewers to read both the original railroad form and the environmental force that reshapes it.

The complete assembly is mounted on a central industrial bearing. Its asymmetrical form allows the wind to slowly change its orientation. The movement is intended to be deliberate and calm, not fast or uncontrolled.

PRELIMINARY PARAMETERS

- **OVERALL HEIGHT**
18-22 ft, scalable after engineering review
- **MAXIMUM UPPER WIDTH**
Approximately 14-16 ft
- **PRIMARY MATERIALS**
Corten steel, structural steel, exterior-rated timber, reinforced concrete
- **MOVEMENT**
Slow wind-driven rotation on a sealed industrial bearing
- **FABRICATION**
CNC plasma- or laser-cut plates, simple bends, welded faceted assemblies
- **ESTIMATED ROTATING WEIGHT**
Approximately 8,000-12,000 lb, subject to engineering

The lower railroad form is intentionally fabricated from welded plate profiles rather than bent full-size rail. This reduces weight, improves control over the geometry, and keeps production within the capabilities of regional metal shops.



PHILOSOPHY & ARTISTIC INTENT

“The work begins with the certainty of a railroad and transforms it into the uncertainty of weather.”

Gerlach exists at the meeting point of human infrastructure and immense environmental forces. The railroad established a permanent line through the landscape - a symbol of order, direction, connection, industry, and movement. The desert behaves differently. Wind changes direction. Dust erases tracks. Distance dissolves scale. A familiar route can disappear within minutes.

The sculpture does not describe destruction. It describes adaptation and transformation. The track does not simply break; it becomes something new: a storm, a vortex, a changing landmark, and an instrument that makes the wind visible.

The work also connects the railroad history of Gerlach to the deeper geological memory of Ancient Lake Lahontan. The dry lake systems that remain today are not empty. They hold traces of water, transportation, extraction, migration, and repeated human attempts to cross and understand the landscape.

Rotation is essential to the meaning of the work. The sculpture has no permanent front. From one direction it appears dense and storm-like; from another it becomes open and nearly transparent. Visitors experience the work by moving around it, observing its shadows, and seeing the desert wind continue the movement after they step away.

Site-specific intent. The materials, movement, history, and imagery of the sculpture belong specifically to Gerlach and the Black Rock landscape. It is designed as a permanent trailhead marker whose identity changes with the same wind and dust that define the region.

DIPTOWN

Large-scale desert environment / Burning Man Honoraria



Diptown

Black Rock Desert, Nevada | 2022 | Steel, timber, architectural assemblies

Diptown is an immersive architectural installation built as a partially submerged ghost town. The work transforms a flat desert horizon through a series of tilted building fragments that appear to be disappearing into the ground.

The project required the team to manage concept development, structural design coordination, steel and wood fabrication, modular construction, transportation, remote installation, public interaction, weather planning, and maintenance.

Originally realized in the Black Rock Desert, Diptown is now being prepared for permanent placement at Goldwell Open Air Museum near Rhyolite, Nevada.

Its relevance to the Gerlach proposal lies not only in its desert setting, but in its ability to create a recognizable place from industrial materials while remaining responsive to scale, distance, wind, and visitor movement.

TRANSFORMATION

Permanent public sculpture / light and fabricated steel



Transformation

Koltsovo International Airport | Permanent installation | Steel and integrated light

Transformation is a permanent public artwork created from a cylindrical steel form carrying a continuous spiral of illuminated text.

The work uses steel, light, language, and a simple industrial volume to create a sculpture that changes as the viewer circles it. The text cannot be read from a single fixed position; meaning unfolds through movement.

The project demonstrates experience with durable public-facing fabrication, integrated lighting, controlled visual effects, installation in a major transportation environment, and the translation of an artistic concept into a permanent constructed object.

For Dust Storm, this experience is especially relevant to the integration of weather-resistant steel, low-maintenance lighting, public circulation, and a form whose interpretation changes with the viewer's position.

POWER STATION

Interactive kinetic sculpture / transformed industrial object



Power Station

Interactive installation | Found industrial object, fabricated structure, rotational mechanism

Power Station transforms a found industrial object into an interactive kinetic artwork. Visitors physically activate the piece, causing its visual structure to dissolve into motion.

The project explores the moment when a heavy mechanical form becomes visually unstable. The object remains materially present, while rotation changes its apparent volume, color, and internal relationships.

Power Station demonstrates the team's direct experience with rotational movement, audience interaction, balance, mechanical components, repetitive use, and the difference between a static sculptural form and the same form in motion.

This experience informs the kinetic strategy for Dust Storm: movement should not function as spectacle alone. It should reveal a second condition of the artwork and make transformation physically visible.

SEA MINES

Reflective landscape installation / Black Rock Desert



Sea Mines

Black Rock Desert, Nevada | Polished metal, fabricated supports, site-responsive installation

Sea Mines places polished spherical forms on slender industrial supports within the Black Rock Desert. Their reflective surfaces collect the sky, dust, distant mountains, moving participants, and changing light.

The work uses a minimal physical vocabulary to produce an unstable reading: the objects appear simultaneously industrial, celestial, defensive, and strangely delicate.

The installation demonstrates the team's ability to create visually precise objects for an exposed desert environment, work with long-distance sightlines, and use the surrounding landscape as an active component of the artwork.

For the Gerlach proposal, Sea Mines is relevant as an example of site-responsive form, durable outdoor construction, and the use of open desert space rather than visual clutter.

ARTIST TEAM

Stanislav Shminke and Irina Shminke are a Reno-based artist team creating large-scale outdoor installations, site-specific sculpture, architectural environments, interactive artworks, and permanent public projects.

Their practice combines industrial materials, narrative, memory, humor, and direct engagement with landscape. They have extensive experience carrying projects from initial concept through fabrication, transportation, installation, public use, maintenance planning, and long-term placement.

Their work regularly incorporates welded steel, timber, found industrial objects, architectural structures, light, sound, and mechanical interaction. Living and working in Northern Nevada has given the team a practical understanding of the Black Rock Desert, remote logistics, exposed sites, dust, wind, heat, and the demands of public-facing work in extreme environments.

Their current artistic direction focuses increasingly on permanent public art that connects local history, environmental forces, infrastructure, and human imagination.

PROJECT DELIVERY EXPERIENCE

- Concept and visual development
- Large-scale steel and timber fabrication
- Modular design for transportation
- Remote desert installation
- Lighting and electrical integration
- Mechanical and kinetic interaction
- Public safety and maintenance planning
- Coordination with engineers, venues, museums, and production teams

Selected works
Diptown
Transformation
Power Station
Sea Mines

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fabrication approach

The upper storm form is intentionally conceived as a faceted assembly of CNC-cut Corten steel plates. Most panels remain flat or receive only simple single-axis bends before being welded to internal steel ribs. This avoids complex compound rolling and makes the object practical to fabricate, transport in modules, test-fit off-site, and repair through replacement of individual panels.

Kinetic system

The rotating assembly will use a sealed industrial bearing designed for combined axial and radial loads. Final development may include rotational damping, a speed-limiting mechanism, inspection access, and a lockout system for service or extreme weather.

Engineering and safety

The artist team will work with licensed structural and mechanical engineers to finalize wind loads, bearing capacity, foundation design, weld requirements, fatigue resistance, visitor clearances, drainage, climbability, and maintenance access.

Lighting

A restrained dark-sky-conscious lighting system may be integrated into the base. Warm, shielded LED fixtures would illuminate the interior of the vortex without sending light above the sculpture. Rotation would create slow-moving bands of shadow rather than flashing or theatrical effects.

Community engagement

During finalist development, the artists would welcome conversations with Gerlach residents, local historians, Tribal representatives, and people connected to the region's railroad and water history. Any culturally specific Indigenous language, imagery, or narrative would be developed only through appropriate consultation and collaboration.

Maintenance

Weathering steel, sealed mechanical systems, replaceable timber elements, and serviceable lighting are selected to minimize long-term maintenance.