



Gerlach SkyPoint

A permanent place to gather beneath the sky of Gerlach

Proposed New Public Artwork
Washoe Artrail Gerlach Trailhead
Washoe County, Nevada 89412

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Gerlach, Nevada
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Project Summary

Gerlach SkyPoint is a permanent civic landmark, gathering place and instrument for observing the sky above the Black Rock Desert.

Set at the edge of Gerlach overlooking the playa, the artwork comprises a semicircle of slender weathering-steel blades arranged around an accessible public viewing space. The blades frame the horizon and interact with the changing position of the sun, creating patterns of light and shadow that move throughout the day and year.

A central brass datum begins within the ground plane and rises seamlessly along the central blade, establishing a precise line between the visitor, the land and the sky. Additional brass markings identify Gerlach's geographic coordinates and selected astronomical events determined through consultation with specialist astronomy partners.

By day, SkyPoint is a bold and recognizable gateway landmark. At sunrise, it becomes an instrument for observing seasonal light. After dark, it becomes a shared viewing point for stars, meteor showers and community-led skywatching.

SkyPoint is not intended simply to depict Gerlach. It gives residents and visitors a permanent place from which to experience Gerlach more fully: its scale, horizon, seasonal light, darkness and extraordinary relationship with the sky.

The concept establishes SkyPoint as a public artwork designed for gathering, viewing and understanding the sky above Gerlach; a landmark and place of return connecting people with the land, the sky and one another.



Project Information

Project Title

Gerlach SkyPoint

Submission Type

Proposed New Concept.

Proposed Location

Washoe Artrail Gerlach Trailhead, Gerlach, Nevada. Final placement and orientation subject to site survey and approval.

Preliminary Overall Dimensions

Approximately 40 ft wide × 24 ft deep × 20 ft high.

Primary Sculptural Elements

19 weathering-steel blades arranged in a semicircular formation.

Ground Plane

Approximately 35–40 ft in diameter, subject to final site and accessibility requirements.

Primary Materials

ASTM A588 weathering steel, structural steel, brass and an accessible mineral-aggregate or concrete ground plane.

Preliminary Assembly Weight

Approximately 7,500–10,000 lb for the fabricated steel and brass assembly, excluding concrete foundations and ground surfacing.

Illumination

The artwork is designed to derive its nighttime presence primarily from darkness, silhouette, moonlight and the stars. No decorative upward lighting is proposed. Lighting for access to the site will be Dark Sky approved and designed to not interfere with night sky observation.

Project Budget

Designed for fabrication, transportation and installation within the anticipated project budget of up to \$100,000.

The Questions That Began The Work

What should the final point of the Artrail do?

SkyPoint began not with a predetermined sculpture, but with a series of questions about Gerlach and the responsibility of placing a permanent public artwork here.

What does Gerlach actually need - not merely what artwork could be placed there?

What should visitors encounter at the end of a public art journey extending more than 200 miles through Washoe County?

What experience is genuinely shared by residents, travelers and future generations, independent of any single event or institution?

How could the artwork become a place people use, revisit and recognize as belonging to Gerlach?

How could the final destination orient people not only geographically, but toward the landscape itself?

Those questions led to a clear conclusion.

The Gerlach Trailhead should not be treated as an empty location awaiting an object. It is a threshold between a small, resilient community and one of the most expansive landscapes in North America. The artwork should help people understand that threshold.

Gerlach did not need a sculpture that simply used the desert as a dramatic backdrop. It needed a permanent place from which people could gather and look outward together.

The most universal and enduring subject was already present:
The relationship between Gerlach, the playa, the horizon, seasonal light and the night sky.

SkyPoint emerged as a permanent civic observatory - a public place of orientation, observation and shared experience. It is intended to feel as though it belongs here now, could have belonged here 50 years ago and can remain meaningful 50 years from today.

A Civic Instrument for Land, Light & Sky

Philosophy of the Artwork

SkyPoint is about locating ourselves. We ordinarily understand location through roads, property lines, maps and coordinates. Gerlach offers another way of understanding where we are: through the horizon, the movement of sunlight, the recurrence of seasons and the immense scale of the sky.

The semicircle creates a place of arrival without becoming a closed enclosure. Its blades rise from the ground as a repeated rhythm, directing attention beyond themselves toward the landscape. Seen from the road, they form a distinctive civic landmark. Seen from within, they become a frame through which the visitor experiences the playa, mountains and sky.

At the center, a brass line crosses the ground and continues upward along the central blade. This uninterrupted datum is the defining gesture of SkyPoint. It connects the human scale of the visitor with a much larger field of geographic and astronomical reference.

Its execution must be exact. The selected solar alignments, celestial markings and geographic bearings will not be placed approximately or used as decorative symbolism. They will be established through professional site surveying and specialist astronomical consultation. Precision is not merely an engineering requirement; precision is part of the artwork itself.

SkyPoint does not place an image of Gerlach into the landscape. It gives people a place from which to experience Gerlach more fully.

Visitors should leave with a heightened awareness of where they are: standing within a small community at the edge of an immense desert, beneath a sky that connects every person who has stood there before them and everyone who will stand there afterward.

The Visitor Experience

From the Road

The ascending steel blades form a clear and memorable silhouette at the gateway to Gerlach.

The artwork announces arrival without competing with the landscape around it. Its repeated vertical forms are strong enough to be recognized at speed, while the open spaces between them preserve views of the desert, mountains and changing sky.

On Approach

As the visitor moves closer, the sculpture opens into a public gathering space. There is no prescribed doorway and no single correct way to enter.

The semicircle welcomes people from the trailhead while gradually turning their attention toward the eastern horizon and the edge of the Black Rock Playa.

Within SkyPoint

Standing within the work, the visitor occupies the relationship between Gerlach, the mountains, the playa and the sky. The steel blades frame selected views rather than blocking them. Their spacing creates a measured rhythm across the horizon, while the central brass datum establishes one exact point of orientation.

The work can be experienced alone, but it is deliberately large enough to support shared use: neighbors gathering at sunrise, travelers pausing before entering the desert, families watching a meteor shower or a community meeting beneath the evening sky.

Through the Day

Sunlight moves between the blades, producing long shadows that continually redraw the ground plane. The artwork changes with the hour, weather and season. At selected moments, determined during final astronomical development, the position of the sun will enter precise alignment with elements of the structure and brass datum.

After Dark

At night, the object recedes and the sky becomes the dominant experience. SkyPoint becomes a quiet public viewing place where people can safely and accessible experience stars, planets, meteor showers and the darkness of the Black Rock Desert without needing to drive onto the playa.

Gerlach, The Site & The Artrail

A Gateway Landmark

The sculpture creates a distinctive visual signal at the entrance to the community and establishes a sense of intentional arrival.

A Community Place

SkyPoint is designed to belong to Gerlach year-round. During winter and wet-weather periods, when direct playa access may be unsafe or impossible, it offers residents and visitors a permanent point of connection at the desert's edge - a place from which to remain connected to the playa, horizon, darkness and sky without needing to travel onto the lakebed. It also creates an accessible experience for people who may not otherwise be able to reach the playa.

Gerlach's relationship with the playa does not disappear when the lakebed becomes inaccessible. SkyPoint gives that relationship a permanent physical place.

A Point of Orientation

The final siting will preserve clear views toward the eastern horizon, the mountains and the playa. Site selection will consider elevation, drainage, accessibility, vehicle headlights and local patterns of light pollution.

The Washoe Artrail moves north from the urban communities of Reno and Sparks, follows the Truckee River toward Pyramid Lake and continues into the increasingly open landscape of northern Washoe County.

SkyPoint is designed to give the Artrail a meaningful conclusion. Earlier sites communicate through murals, historic landmarks, civic structures and public artworks. At Gerlach, the trail culminates by directing attention toward the region's largest and most enduring cultural resources: the land and sky themselves.

The proposed location at the Gerlach Trailhead allows the work to serve three complementary roles.

The work must remain specifically Gerlach's. It is not conceived as a monument to Burning Man or any single chapter of regional history. It reflects the wider culture of observation, exploration, wonder, ingenuity, self-reliance, scientific curiosity and communal gathering that has long existed across Gerlach and the Black Rock Desert.

Physical Design

A Precise, Repeatable Structural System

SkyPoint comprises 19 slender steel blades positioned along a semicircular arc.

The blades share a consistent nominal width of approximately 8 inches and are fabricated from approximately 1/2-inch ASTM A588 weathering-steel plate, subject to final structural engineering. Their heights rise progressively toward the two outer edges of the semicircle, reaching approximately 20 feet at the tallest points.

The consistent blade width creates visual discipline and allows the components to be produced efficiently from standard plate stock rather than requiring individually manufactured custom sections.

ASTM A588 plate is commercially available in 20-foot stock lengths, including 1/2-inch thicknesses and standard widths between 48 and 96 inches. It can also be precision-cut through CNC or related industrial processes.

Preliminary Dimensions

Overall artwork width:	approximately 40 ft
Overall structural depth:	approximately 20–24 ft
Maximum blade height:	approximately 20 ft
Minimum blade height:	approximately 9–11 ft
Nominal blade width:	approximately 8 in
Preliminary blade thickness:	approximately 1/2 in
Accessible ground plane:	approximately 35–40 ft diameter

All dimensions remain subject to site survey, sightline review and structural engineering during finalist development.

Physical Design

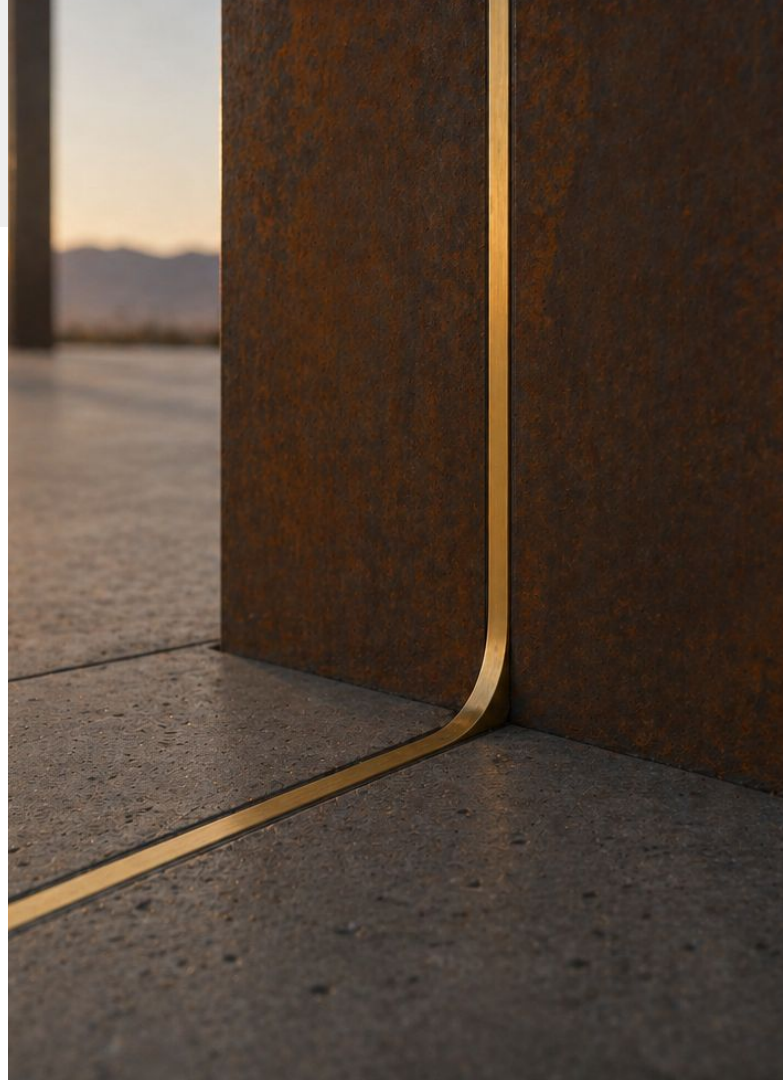
Central Brass Datum

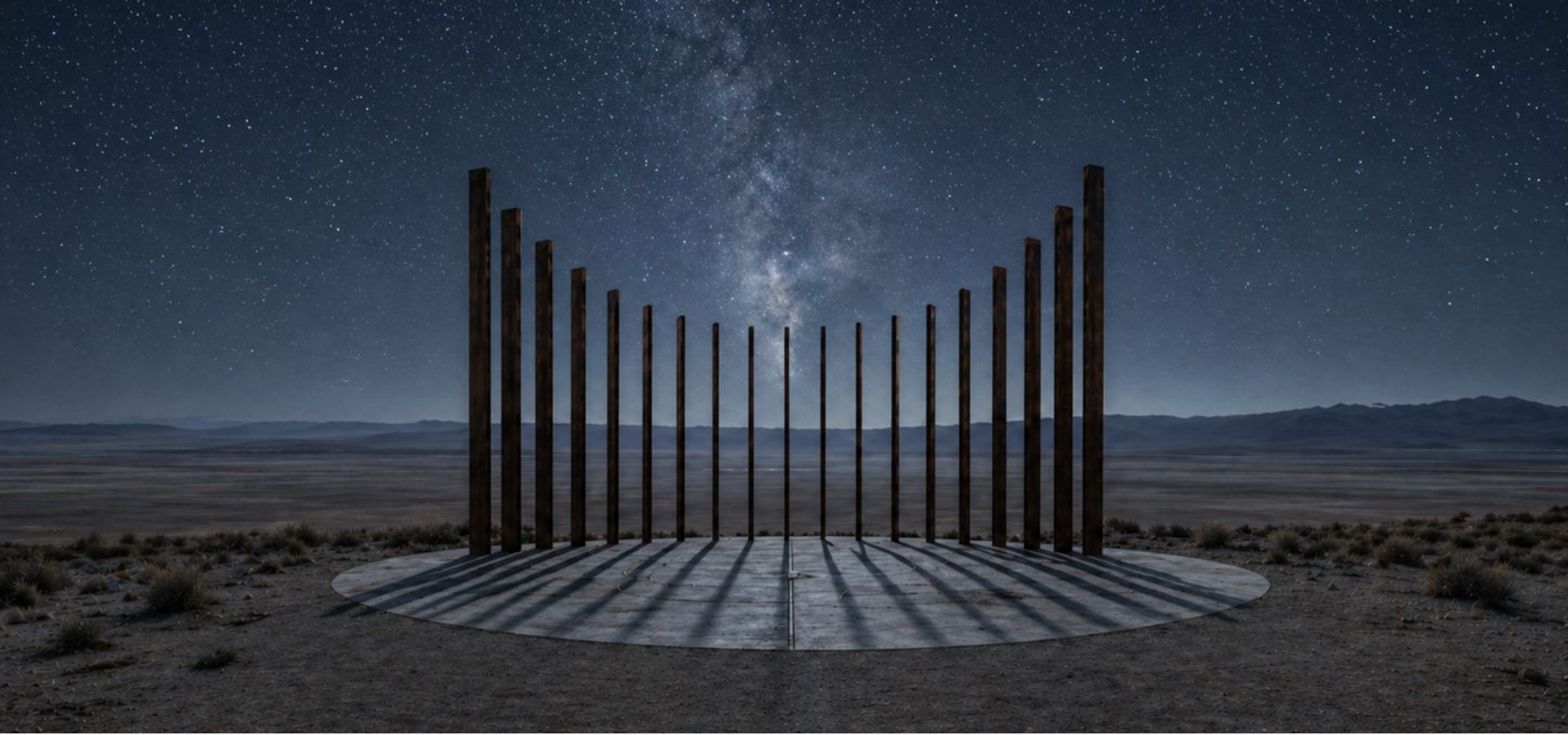
A brass line is embedded within the ground plane and travels toward the center of the structure. At the central blade, the line turns upward and continues along the vertical edge without visual interruption. This creates one seamless axis between ground and sky.

Additional brass details may identify:

- Gerlach's latitude and longitude.
- Selected seasonal solar events.
- Astronomically significant bearings.
- Celestial events appropriate to the site.
- Interpretive information developed with astronomy and community partners.

The final astronomical content will be deliberately limited. SkyPoint should remain visually quiet, legible and elemental rather than becoming overloaded with information.





Materials, Dark Sky, Safety & Stewardship

Materials, Dark Sky, Safety & Stewardship

Weathering Steel

The primary blades and visible structural components are proposed in ASTM A588 weathering steel.

When properly detailed and exposed, A588 develops a stable oxide patina and is commonly used for exposed bridges, buildings and infrastructure where durability and reduced long-term maintenance are important.

Its changing surface reflects the material culture of Gerlach and the Black Rock Desert: industrial, elemental, durable and improved rather than diminished by visible age.

The current concept is expected to require approximately 5,000–7,000 lb of weathering-steel plate for the blades, receptor structure and related components, depending upon final engineering.

A preliminary procurement allowance of approximately \$18,000–\$25,000 will be carried for weathering-steel plate, cut loss, base components and initial material transportation. This is a planning allowance rather than a supplier quotation and will be verified during finalist development.

Public Safety

Final engineering and detailing will address:

- Regional wind and environmental loads.
- Foundations appropriate to confirmed soil conditions.
- Safe spacing and circulation between structural elements.
- Finished or eased exposed edges.
- Elimination of trapping and pinch points.
- Clear sightlines throughout the installation.
- Accessible routes, slopes and ground surfaces.
- Drainage and erosion protection.
- Tamper-resistant exterior connections.
- Inspection access for all structural components.

Long-Term Maintenance

The artwork has no moving parts and is designed to operate without permanent electrical systems.

Routine care is expected to consist primarily of:

- Periodic structural and foundation inspection.
- Monitoring of connections and exposed edges.
- Ground-plane and drainage maintenance.
- Inspection following exceptional weather.
- Occasional cleaning or renewal of brass details.
- Repair of surrounding accessible surfacing as required.

Materials, Dark Sky, Safety & Stewardship

Dark Sky Leadership

Darkness is not an absence within SkyPoint. It is one of the artwork's principal materials. The preferred illumination plan is therefore **no decorative illumination**. The artwork remains visible through silhouette, moonlight and ambient conditions while preserving the visitor's natural adjustment to darkness.

Any lighting determined to be essential for safe access will be:

- Used only where genuinely necessary.
- Fully shielded and downward-directed.
- Kept at the lowest practical lumen level.
- Warm in color temperature.
- Controlled by timing or occupancy.
- Designed to avoid glare, spill and upward-directed light.

These provisions correspond directly with DarkSky International's five principles: *lighting should be useful, targeted, low-level, controlled and warm-colored*.

SkyPoint's objective is not merely to satisfy a project requirement. Gerlach is currently engaged in continuing conversations around responsible lighting and potential recognition as a Dark Sky Community. Certification processes commonly involve night-sky measurement, lighting inventories, a lighting-management plan and ongoing public education. The project team intends to use SkyPoint as an opportunity to support that wider work.

The final design will be reviewed with relevant community and Dark Sky stakeholders so that the trailhead can demonstrate an exemplary approach to public-space lighting in Gerlach.

Fabrication, Installation & Specialists

Designed for Off-Site Accuracy and Rapid Installation

The remote environment around Gerlach makes conventional site-intensive construction expensive, weather-dependent and difficult to control. SkyPoint has therefore been designed around a prefabricated structural system.

The subterranean base - or precision steel receptor ring - will be fabricated and trial-assembled off site. Rather than creating the semicircle individually in the field, its radius, blade spacing, socket positions and central datum can be digitally established and verified under controlled shop conditions.

The receptor ring will be divided into engineered transportable modules. These modules will be delivered to Gerlach, reassembled on the prepared foundations and surveyed into their final position as one accurate semicircle.

The installation sequence is anticipated to be:

- Complete site, topographic and orientation surveys.
- Confirm astronomical bearings and celestial alignments.
- Complete structural and foundation engineering.
- Fabricate and trial-assemble the segmented receptor ring off site.
- Precision-cut and prepare the individual steel blades.
- Prepare the trailhead site and engineered foundations.
- Transport the prefabricated ring modules and blades to Gerlach.
- Position and survey the receptor ring.
- Insert and secure the numbered blades into their predetermined sockets.
- Install the central brass datum and related details.
- Complete the accessible surface around the installed structure.
- Conduct structural, alignment and finish inspections.

Once the site and foundations are ready, the principal sculptural installation becomes a controlled process of positioning the prefabricated arc and installing repeatable components. This strategy provides several benefits:

- Greater geometric and astronomical accuracy.
- Reduced field fabrication.
- Shorter on-site construction duration.
- Lower remote labor and accommodation costs.
- Reduced exposure to wind and weather delays.
- Easier quality control.
- More predictable installation planning.
- Straightforward future inspection and component repair.

Fabrication, Installation & Specialists

Proposed Specialist Collaboration

These organizations are identified as intended project partners. Final participation remains subject to scope confirmation, availability and contracting.

Rbhu | Structural Engineering

The artist intends to engage Rbhu Engineering for structural design, analysis and construction documentation. Rbhu specializes in monumental artwork and the translation of ambitious artistic concepts into buildable public structures. Its experience with hundreds of large-scale sculptures makes it particularly appropriate for resolving SkyPoint's wind loading, blade behavior, connections, foundation system and public-safety requirements.

Peik Construction | Transport and Site Installation

The artist intends to work with Peik Construction as the principal installation and logistical partner. Peik is familiar with Gerlach and the practical realities of transporting and installing large objects in the Black Rock Desert environment. Its federal carrier profile includes art and sculpture, machinery and large objects, building materials and construction.

Their involvement would support realistic planning around transport dimensions, loading, site access, lifting, field assembly and rapid installation in a remote location.

Black Rock Observatory | Astronomy and Celestial Interpretation

The artist intends to collaborate with Black Rock Observatory to identify and verify the astronomical content embedded within the artwork.

Black Rock Observatory is a nonprofit educational organization bringing telescopes, scientists and astronomy education to art festivals and unconventional public settings. Its leadership brings together scientists, engineers, educators and artists, including people who have taught astronomy and contributed to space-telescope missions.

Their role would include advising on:

- Which solar and celestial events are most meaningful at the site.
- Which events are consistently observable from Gerlach.
- Accurate azimuths and bearings.
- Seasonal and long-term astronomical considerations.
- Interpretive language and scientific accuracy.
- Opportunities for public skywatching and educational programming.

Professional surveying, astronomical analysis and structural fabrication information will be coordinated so that every encoded alignment is accurate from the completed visitor position - not merely accurate within a conceptual drawing.

Artist & Delivery Capability

Jonny Rigby

Jonny Rigby is a Gerlach-based artist, experiential designer and creative operations leader whose practice focuses on the relationship between people, physical environments and shared public experience.

Across more than 20 years, he has led the development and delivery of large-scale spatial, retail and experiential programs across 6 continents for international organizations including Amazon, Nike and Puma. His work combines artistic direction with fabrication planning, supplier coordination, cost control, operational execution and the creation of repeatable physical systems.

He was recognized as a **design:retail 40 Under 40 Honoree** in 2020, received the **Global Business Award for Retail Innovation** in 2022, and was granted United States **EB-1A** classification for extraordinary ability in the arts in 2024.

SkyPoint grows directly from living within the Gerlach community and observing the ways residents and visitors encounter the Black Rock Desert across different seasons.

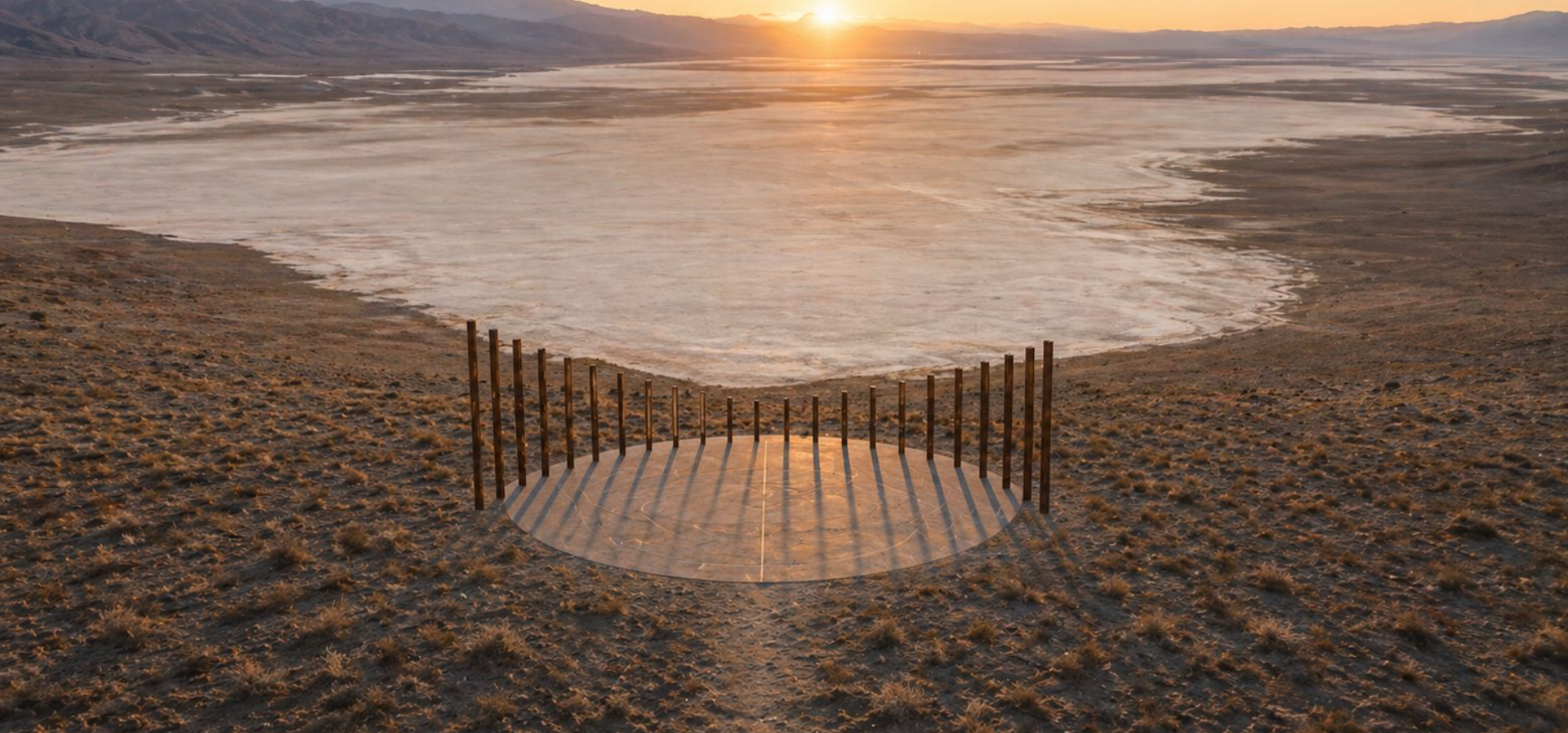
His approach to public art is grounded in the belief that artistic ambition and operational discipline should strengthen one another. The most meaningful work is not only original in concept, but safe, durable, maintainable and capable of being delivered responsibly.

Why This Artist, Here

SkyPoint could only have emerged from sustained attention to this particular place.

It responds to Gerlach as a living community. It recognizes the difficulty of reaching the playa in winter, the extraordinary accessibility of the night sky, the importance of seasonal light and the need for public places that residents can genuinely use.

The proposed design combines Jonny's experience in visual storytelling and environmental design with the specialist knowledge of structural engineers, fabricators, astronomy educators and construction partners familiar with monumental artwork and remote desert conditions.



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