

The World's First Passenger Atomic Bomb

Local artist seeks funding for a hot air balloon in the shape of an atomic bomb

Steven Robert Allen

What do you consider the ultimate symbols of New Mexico? Ristras? Coyotes? Adobe buildings? Drunk drivers?

For artist Chad Person, the answer is easy: When he thinks of New Mexico, he thinks of two things: balloons and bombs. Person earned his M.F.A. from the University of New Mexico last fall. In his first stab at a major public art project, he's attempting to gather enough financial support to create a bomb-shaped balloon to fly at this year's Balloon Fiesta. The task he's set for himself is not a simple one.

Person's grandfather, Charles Blazec, was a World War II veteran who is celebrated to this day as an ace pilot. Blazec died shortly after Person was born, but because he was raised by his grandmother, Person heard lots of war stories about his famous grandpa from both her and other family members.

"I was intrigued by his piloting," says Person, "and that led to an interest in Fugos."

Fugos were balloon bombs sent across the Pacific by the Japanese during World War II. They were supposed to land in the Pacific Northwest, burst into flames and set the entire West Coast ablaze. Obviously, they didn't work, but they did land all over the western half of the United States, as far north as Canada and as far south as Mexico. The new



Chad Person

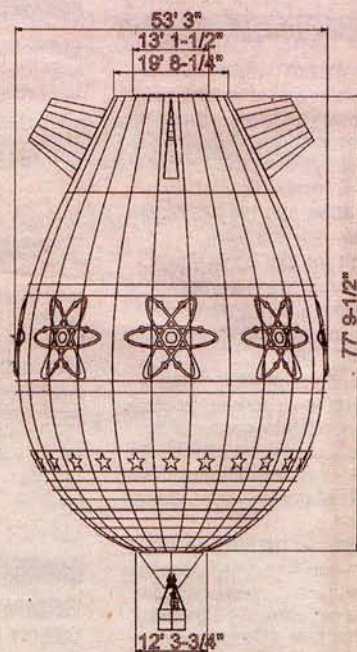
Albuquerque International Balloon Museum has a Fugo in its collection.

"From the standpoint of weaponry," says Person, "even though they didn't work, Fugos were an interesting conceptual idea. I became interested in how the Japanese relied on forces so far outside of human control. It seems like in our own culture the military is always trying to maximize control over nature."

With this in mind, Person decided to name his balloon Fugo II—a satirical project designed to capitalize on the stunning visual impact of hot air balloons while taking a not-so-subtle jab at New Mexico's claim to fame as the birthplace of the atomic bomb.

Person has come up with a design. He's also signed on Scott Appelman, a veteran balloon pilot who has offered to fly the thing and donate a crew, basket and torches. Person has found several possible manufacturers. He also got permission from Fiesta administrators to fly the controversial balloon at this year's Balloon Fiesta. What Person doesn't have is all the money necessary to construct his flying air-filled bomb.

"These things are really expensive to make," he says. "I've been able to get a handful of people to pledge several thousand dollars. I'm now looking at sponsorships from various



foundations and corporations. I'm really kind of under the gun here, though. That's why I put together the website and am taking donations directly from individuals in the community."

As Person notes, this will be the world's first passenger atomic bomb. He hopes the public will be enthused enough to support his mad dream with cold, hard cash.

"Just imagine how great it would be to see this balloon flying over the city," says Person, "and say, 'Hey, I was a part of that.'"

Chad Person is soliciting funds for the construction of Fugo II through the website buildthebomb.com, which also includes more fascinating details about the project.



Designs for Person's hot air balloon in the shape of a stylized atomic bomb