

ITALY • JOHN CENA • WESTERN ADVENTURES

Hemispheres

AUGUST 2024



This magazine has been treated with an antimicrobial process

THREE PERFECT DAYS Paris

Where you can
soak up the
artistic energy
of Montmartre
from a
sidewalk table
at a historic
brasserie

Burning Hombre

Santa Fe celebrates 100 years of Zozobra

By Hillary Richard

Santa Fe, New Mexico, is a city often associated with the arts and peaceful, desert-hippie vibes. Once a year, however, crowds gather in the city's Fort Marcy Park, not far from the historic Plaza de Santa Fe, to set fire to an effigy while chanting "Burn him."

This isn't as incongruous—or as scary—as it sounds. It's a 100-year-old tradition known as the Burning of Zozobra, which takes place on the Friday of Labor Day weekend (August 30 this year). Zozobra is a figure built to represent all of the anxiety and gloom that has accumulated since the previous year's burning; his destruction is supposed to be a cathartic purging of these ills, as well as a symbolic end to the summer.

Not to say that the world is a more anxious place than it once was, but Zozobra has grown. The first figure, which was burned in artist Will Shuster's backyard in 1924, was 6 feet tall. The 2024 iteration is expected to reach



50 feet, having been constructed by volunteers, over the course of the last year, in a project sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Santa Fe. The wood, wire, and cloth marionette has bulging eyes, large ears, a moving mouth, and lanky limbs. It's stuffed with notes on which locals have written down their "glooms," as well as divorce papers, paid-off mortgages, and other items that represent things people are looking to release from their lives.

"Zozobra is infinitely more than a spectacle," says John Feins, a volunteer who has served as a Zozobra torchbearer since 2017. "The primal magic behind burning your gloom away and then starting a new, better life is intoxicating. I intend never to miss one."

Feins isn't alone, as the festival around the burning has

grown at a rate exceeding its namesake's. Over 60,000 people come to Fort Marcy Park to take in art, dance, and Zozobra-inspired performances, as well as the burning. This year, in honor of the event's centenary, Santa Fe's New Mexico History Museum and New Mexico Museum of Art are also planning Zozobra special exhibitions.

The festivities reach their climax when the Fire Spirit—a character created by former New York City Ballet dancer Jacques Cartier, who performed the role for 37 years—sets the marionette ablaze after sunset.

The flaming Zozobra waves its arms and spits fireworks as the crowd's worries and problems go up in smoke. When the burning is complete, the atmosphere feels somehow lighter; in fact, it's perfectly Santa Fe.

From top: the 2023 festival's national anthem contest winner, Kyanna Naranjo, sings in front of Zozobra; fiesta performers on parade after the burning

Bryce Risley (all photos)