

Special effects expert Clare tackles a tricky secret mission

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ARTISTRY: Clare Grotefeld says it was one of the most exciting projects of her life

Rocket girl blasts top magician into the sky

PICTURE: THE BUDAPEST SUN



LIFT OFF: The magician heads for space – and a safe landing

MOST art requires at least a modicum of talent but it is hardly rocket science.

Unless, of course, your field of expertise happens to be building vehicles to launch people 6,000ft into the air.

This was the challenge taken up by special effects artist Clare Grotefeld, 29, of St George's Street, Brighton, who was selected to be part of an international team building Europe's second largest amateur rocket for a trick by Hungary's most popular illusionist.

She spent five weeks helping to design and build a 42ft, 1,300lb rocket that could be blasted 6,600ft into the air.

The rocket was made of steel rods and wood and clad in aluminum, with 24 small rocket engines built into its base.

It was assembled at a secret location in England then shipped to Hungary, where the final preparations were made for lift-off.

Hungarian magician David Merlini was sealed inside a pod towards the top of the rocket and had to escape by the time the vessel reached 6,600ft.

He commissioned the rocket and had it made by a group of artists in England, including Clare who had worked for a special effects company after studying silversmithing and metalwork at university.

Clare said: "The work was a combination of engineering, special effects and art. We had to work out the thickness of the materials, the weights and techniques that would make it structurally sound."

"I was involved in designing the structure and working out how it would fly. It was not

by CHARLES WHITNEY

really scientific but we had to calculate how much power the engine rockets gave off, the weight and how we would make it fly. Now I feel I could do anything. It was one of the most exciting projects I have ever been involved in. The fact it was going to fly was amazing.

"I had made similar large works before but never anything that would have to take off. I was confident throughout that it would work but it was a nail-biting experience. I would definitely do it again – I'm always on the lookout for something challenging and new."

It took five weeks to build the rocket and Clare was nervous something could go wrong as there was no way to test it before it was launched.

She said: "We were anxious that a man was going inside it but the responsibility was his."

"We had slow burning rocket engines that took it slowly up to 2,000m without exploding."

Some 10,000 spectators watched the rocket launch without any technical problems earlier this month and the magician escaped unharmed, floating back to earth on a parachute. But the secret of his escape remains a mystery.

Clare said: "We were all kept in the dark as to how he was going to get out."

Now back in Brighton, Clare has launched Gallery 70 in St George's Street, where she plans to hold exhibitions of artwork by herself and other artists every three months.

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ALL SET: Hungarian illusionist David Merlini inside the custom-built rocket

Trinidad band left penniless

A BAND are struggling to survive after quitting their jobs in Trinidad to pursue fame.

The Xenn Band are penniless after a six-month tour of Britain fell through. Brothers David and Nigel Khan and bandmate Rene Coryat now cannot even afford warm coats for winter.

David, 30, said: "Nigel and Rene have children and we can't go back to our jobs."

David said the rock band came to England in May believing Brighton-based No Moss Management had many gigs lined up but when they arrived there were only one or two.

However, Diorlyn Grosvenor of No Moss said she had never promised the band a full tour.

She said she set up interviews for them but told them they would have to work to make their way in the music industry.

The Xenn Band are playing at The Greenhouse Effect in Church Road, Hove, tomorrow night from 10pm to 2am. Tickets cost £5.

Dame's eye on police

A ONE-TIME pantomime dame has been chosen as the mouth-piece of police watchdogs in Sussex.

Andy Freeman, 48, has been appointed public relations officer for the Sussex Police Authority which oversees the work of Sussex Police.

Born in Brighton and a resident of Lewes, he is a familiar face on stage in Lewes Operatic Society performances and also as a pantomime dame.

He is also a key figure in the organisation of Bonfire Night celebrations in Lewes.

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