

Category: Universal Design

Project: Tokyo 2020 Olympic Agora Noren Curtains

What was the challenge?

The International Olympic Committee's Olympic Foundation for Culture & Heritage established the Olympic Agora as a cultural hub, enabling the Olympic movement to engage with the public during the Olympic Games through a free and accessible art and design installation. Following the global health crisis and subsequent postponement of the 2020 Games, the Olympic Agora for 2021 was adapted for an exhibition that would celebrate the connections between sport and creativity in the heart of Tokyo, while allowing social distancing. Five selected Olympians and one Paralympian were tasked with designing/creating Noren curtains (traditional Japanese panels that hang at entryways) to visualize resilience, optimism, determination, and global solidarity, ingrained in sport and cultural values.

What was the solution?

The design process was additionally guided by my goal of representation and communication without indication of gender, race, nationality, orientation, limitation, sport, stature, etc. The aspiration to create a universal message is realized in the inherently common need of humans to connect with the natural environment—a thread that all cultures share. The Noren curtains represent micro and macro moments that may occur during the Japanese practice of Shinrin-yoku (known as forest bathing in English)—providing calmness, balance, hope, and wonder. Parallels between our shared experiences with nature, and our shared experiences through the Olympics are visualized. Japanese characters are integrated with English, demonstrating partnership and respect for the host country, especially in consideration of travel restrictions.

What was the effect?

Thirty curtains hung before, during, and after the Tokyo Olympics in the busy Mitsukoshi-Mae Underground Passage-way, celebrating the global community, human potential and determination at a time when hope and resilience were

a necessity. The creative contributors connected with the public through virtual and social media platforms. The Olympic Foundation for Culture & Heritage is in the process of planning the next rendition of the Olympic Agora for Paris 2024.



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