

Peace through design

Our design columnist **CYRIL ZAMMIT** hopes that the lessons of the past can better inform our present



DESIGN CAN RESPOND TO URGENT HUMANITARIAN NEEDS, PROVIDING SOLUTIONS TO REBUILD LIVES

It's hard not to be shaken by the current geo-political situation on our doorstep. And while many (if not all of us) are feeling somewhat helpless amid the turmoil, one common hope emerges: Peace.

A symbol recognized worldwide, a circle with an embedded branch, has come to represent this aspiration. Conceived by British graphic artist Gerald Holtom in 1958, it was originally associated with the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, hence its nickname: CND. Holtom's intention was to convey the image of a stylized figure with outstretched, open palms, symbolizing helplessness and resignation in the face of the nuclear threat. The original sketches of this iconic symbol can be found at Bradford University. Holtom, a committed pacifist and conscientious objector during World War II, intentionally refrained from copyrighting his design, making it accessible for all to use.

Earlier this year the US-based design museum, Cooper Hewitt, unveiled its 'Designing Peace' exhibition, exploring the unique role that design can play in the pursuit of peace. With more than 30 design proposals, the exhibit showcases how design can respond immediately to urgent humanitarian needs, providing products that aid individuals in rebuilding their lives and restoring their dignity. Creative forces are capable of addressing emergency requirements for secure, healthy, and respectful environments.

The United Nations, through its Sustainable Development Agenda (Goal 16), lays out a plan for nurturing peaceful coexistence. This exhibition is currently on view at the Museum Craft and Design in San Francisco.

Last month Tokyo hosted the World Design Assembly, of which one of the main themes was the pivotal role of design in driving social change across various dimensions, including design for peace, design for social change, innovation, inclusion, and cohesion. It is a thread that has played a prominent role in modern Japanese culture, where, since 1983, the Japan Graphic Designers Association have presented a project entitled 'Hiroshima Appeals' dedicated to creating posters with the purpose of promoting peace. Back in 2015, the Japanese government approved the 'Basic Design for Peace and Health' recognizing human security as the fundamental principle.

In the aftermath of Japan's defeat in World War II, the Japanese government harnessed the power of design to rebuild the nation through innovative products utilizing recycled materials to minimize production costs. Another testament to design's influence on modern society is *machizukuri*, a process of community design that involves both local authorities and residents, allowing the public to play a part in shaping their own futures.

These initiatives illustrate the ability of design practitioners to reinvent their field and address the economic and societal challenges that Japan, or any modern nation, may encounter in its history. Let's embrace the Japanese concept of *Kyosei* or 'conviviality', where true peace encompasses not only the absence of violence but also the rectification of past injustices, exploitation, and oppression. ☺

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