

# DESIGNING PEACE

There are dozens of conflicts ongoing around the world today, yet one of humanity's most sought-after and valued conditions is peace. Peace is not simply the absence of war but a dynamic process that can be built, nurtured, and sustained for a more dignified life for all. In practice, both design and peacebuilding use communication, iteration, and understanding of context to envision a world that is accepting of multiple voices and cultures. Acting together, they offer transformative responses to an unjust world.

The works presented in this exhibition are intended to inspire dialogue and provoke questions about what would be possible if we were able to design for peace. These designs represent creative partnerships at various scales in which designers, activists, and artists are working together to respond to increasingly urgent social, environmental, and economic crises.

Designing Peace explores how we might combine our creative forces to envision the future we want to live in—and take action to create it.

Designing Peace was organized by Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

This exhibition was curated by Cynthia E. Smith, Curator of Socially Responsible Design, with Caroline O'Connell, Curatorial Assistant.

Media Partners:  
Dezeen, KQED

In-kind support provided by:  
Jensen Architects, Studio-Hinrichs, and Paper Tree.

# **Sections:**

## **How can design support safe, healthy, respectful environments?**

A life-affirming, long-term approach to peace and security is one less concerned with militarization and more with safety, well-being, and dignity for all. Design can support a culture that values and protects people, provides for fundamental needs, promotes healthy environments, and respects diverse identities.

## **How can design address the root causes of conflict?**

Causes of armed conflict are complex, driven by social divisions, economic disparities, and environmental and political factors. All are made more acute by a warming planet and a global pandemic. Design can play a significant role in building resilience, expanding access, and challenging repressive systems to protect and improve lives globally.

## **How can design engage creative confrontation?**

Not all conflict is damaging. Conflict can generate necessary change and improvements, especially when confronting unfair structures and systems. Creative confrontation can be transformative, making room for debate that allows for different voices and viewpoints. Provocative collaboration by designers, artists, and activists has brought new attention to longstanding injustices.

## **How can design embrace truth and dignity in a search for peace and justice?**

Realizing justice can mean engaging all of society in a dialogue about the past and raising voices historically excluded. Design can play a vital function in elevating universal human values by creating spaces for sharing hidden histories and innovative ways to disseminate new knowledge.

## **How can design help transitions from instability to peace?**

Establishing peace that is transformative, long-term, and beneficial to all segments of society requires a comprehensive approach to sustainable development, peacebuilding, and human rights. Collaborative design can play a key role by bringing together different disciplines, sectors, and stakeholders, especially women, youth, and those on the margins, to build durable peace.

# Object Labels:

## Art the Arms Fair

Every two years London is host to one of the largest arms fairs, where delegations from around the world trade and purchase weaponry. Running parallel, the Art the Arms Fair exposes and expands discourse on the international arms trade's role in contemporary society. Through visual art exhibitions, lectures, and workshops, along with poetry, comedy, and music events, artists and the wider public voice opposition while envisioning alternatives to the war industry. Free to all, the diverse set of art offerings present a more accessible format for people who are not comfortable engaging in confrontational protests.

## Astropolitics: Depletion of Terrestrial Resources and the Cosmic Future of Capitalism

Bureau d'Études creates critical cartography—maps that examine contemporary political, social, and economic systems. The Astropolitics map exposes a potential conflict over Moon resource extraction, locating satellite systems, environmental and social crises linked to mining, and lunar bases and machines required for extraction. By making these systems visible, the map helps us consider our future. Like the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which established use of space for peaceful purposes and the common interest of all, it calls on us again to reimagine the Earth, Moon, and other celestial bodies as interconnected places, not simply an endless cosmos ripe for exploitation.

## Black Lives Matter Harlem Street Mural

Sparked by the Washington, DC, mayor's decision to mark a street with "BLACK LIVES MATTER" during the summer of 2020 racial justice protests, dozens of murals were created in small towns and large cities across the US. The Black Lives Matter Harlem street mural was one of eight painted in New York City. Artists designed and painted the northbound mural and, in as much a historic event as a work of art itself, more than 300 community members completed the southbound side over two days. The murals have provided a platform to reframe the conversation about public space, identifying the need for safe spaces for people of color to gather, create, and heal.

## **Black Lives Matter Street Mural Census**

Soon after witnessing the rapid spread of Black Lives Matter murals across the United States—with an aim to create a public archive of this historical movement—an open civic data advocate posted an online spreadsheet for people to document the murals. The database is open to crowdsourced submissions and currently contains more than 200 works from big urban to small rural communities. The archive tracks key information for each artwork, including dates and locations of installation, links to photos and media stories, the mural's message, and the artists and organizers involved. The data visualization illustrates the ways this powerful declaration spread virally and how events intersect.

## **Body Mapping**

Body Mapping is a tool to help former child combatants—boys and girls that have been used and subjected to abuse and violence during a conflict—begin to heal and re-enter their communities. Together, the children with their family and community members illustrate various physical, psychological, and social effects of child soldiering on a life-sized outline of a human body. The body maps are filled with images

and text about each participant's experiences before, during, and after conflict. To spark conversations and contribute to the healing process, ten maps were made in seven communities within the Democratic Republic of the Congo, resulting in concrete recommendations.

## **Christmas Operations**

In an effort to bring an end to the decades-long conflict in Colombia, the Ministry of Defense partnered with a Bogotá-based ad agency to create a series of campaigns to persuade FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) rebels to leave behind their weapons and come home. The successive campaigns built on lessons learned about effective tactics from returning guerrillas. The first campaign focused on the spirit of Christmas and its significance as a holiday spent with family; another brought lights to the jungle's rivers, sending floating orbs filled with homecoming messages; another featured stories from mothers of soldiers. These humanizing campaigns helped shift public perception of returning guerillas.

## **CONIFA**

CONIFA is the second-largest football or soccer organization in the world. With more than 60 teams and some 675 million people represented, CONIFA is composed of minority groups, stateless peoples, and organizations that are not affiliated with the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (known globally as FIFA). Dedicated to inclusion and welfare through sport, CONIFA is politically neutral, but its games and tournaments provide opportunities for teams to elevate their cause on an international stage. With an aim to build bridges all over the world through friendship, culture, and sport, each player essentially acts as an ambassador for their people.

## Designing for Dignity

Responding to a notable increase in sexual assault in Oslo, a product and service design student team worked with stakeholders—doctors, nurses, social workers, and police—to redesign the entire prevention and response system to be less clinical, but more dignified and comforting to sexual assault survivors. Design workshops led to three coordinated design responses: a soothing safety blanket for survivors; a customized patient education system to guide survivors through medical, social, and legal systems; and guidelines for creating restorative, reassuring interiors for a patient care clinic through lighting, color, and signage.

## Extinction Symbol

The Extinction Symbol was created to raise awareness of the need for transformative change in the face of an accelerating species extinction caused by humans. An unprecedented one million out of eight million plant and animal species are under threat. Designed to be easily drawn, recognized, reproduced, and understood, a circle signifies the planet and an hourglass sends an urgent warning that “time is running out” for many species. Used around the world, the symbol has become the visual identity for the growing Extinction Rebellion movement and the world’s “ecological symbol of peaceful resistance.”

## HarassMap

After experiencing daily sexual harassment on Egypt's streets, four women designed an online crowd-mapped anonymous reporting system, HarassMap. Anyone can share an incident—via text message, online, email, and social media—noting the location, date and time, giving either a personal or witness account, and telling whether an

intervention occurred. The posts are then geotagged and aggregated to reveal harassment hotspots on a digital map. The anonymity of the reporting platform has eased the burden of a topic that can be taboo, and the posts provide clear evidence to instigate social and policy changes that can lead to more secure and safe public spaces for all.

## **Hate Speech Lexicons**

An investigation by Iraqi journalists, who noticed the dangers of inflammatory language used in media coverage, led to the development of the Hate Speech Lexicons. These carefully researched guides include words, phrases, and examples of how and why certain words can cause strong and even violent reactions. With the rise of social media, PeaceTech Lab pioneered a process for identifying and contextualizing hate speech using machine learning, workshops, and interviews with local communities. The resulting lexicons, freely available online, offer alternative words and phrases that can be used to stop the spread of inflammatory language. A future lexicon focused on the United States is planned, once funded.

## **Ideas Box**

Ideas Box is a portable library and pop-up multimedia center that can be easily shipped, is energy independent, and can be set up in 20 minutes. It was designed to be deployed to areas of hardship—refugee camps, isolated communities, underserved urban spaces, and remote Indigenous peoples' land around the world. Each box's contents are tailored to the community's needs. Ideas Box has been distributed across six continents, offering free access to information, culture, and educational resources, which are key tools in promoting healing and building more tolerant communities.



## Island Tracker

Island Tracker is an innovative, public-facing online tool, part of the Center's Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative that uses easily attained commercial satellite imagery to record activity in the South China Seas—one of the world's most disputed waterways. The Tracker documents artificial island building and construction projects, such as new airstrips and ports, in the almost 70 disputed reefs and islands to which China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam lay claim. By increasing transparency in these remote locations, the tracker helps to prevent miscalculations and discourages assertive behavior, instead generating opportunities for collective actions that support regional stability.

## Korea Remade

Korea Remade explores alternative futures for a reunified Korean Peninsula through landscape design by providing social, economic, and cultural opportunities for Korean citizens. The landscape design studio focused on one of the most heavily fortified territories in the world, the demilitarized zone (DMZ) that separates North and South Korea, considering human re-habitation, natural restoration, and existing infrastructure. This includes scattered observatories, abandoned military bases, minefields, subterranean tunnels, as well as existing forests, estuaries, and wetlands. Proposals erase and redraw borders while addressing population displacement, live landmines, soil contamination, and the importance of scenic vistas through complex landscape reorganization and ecologies.

## Maps (Bullet Rug Series)

In the Maps series, Raúl Martínez gathers discarded bullet casings,

weaving them by hand into shimmering rugs to tell hidden stories. Each casing is marked with a manufacturer's code and country of origin and can thus be used to track international arms trafficking routes, backdoor diplomacy, and secret military interventions, exposing the complex economics that underpin gun violence. The first rug in the series, made of 9mm casings gathered in Guatemala, is stamped with marks from the United States, Russia, and Israel—the three main suppliers of weapons during the country's civil war.

## **My Ancestors' Garden**

My Ancestors' Garden memorializes the port of entry for nearly half of all enslaved Africans brought to North America, where thousands of people were warehoused, sold, and many died. The landscape design for the International African American Museum exposes what had been erased—the former Gadsden's Wharf location had never been marked—and now reveals truths that have been long obscured. The landscape design marks the watery terrain with the full-size outlines of bodies drawn in an abolitionists' diagram of a packed slave ship and takes cues from "hush harbor" landscapes where enslaved Africans could meet freely and share stories and traditions from their homeland.

## **Papers, Please**

Building empathy is the goal of the game Papers, Please. Rather than playing as an elite international spy, gamers take on the persona of a low-level border agent for the fictional communist state of Arstotzka. Tasked with deciding who can enter the country or be turned away and/or arrested, players are dropped into a complex scenario of borders, power dynamics, administrative operations, and moral dilemmas. By shifting the perspective around these politicized issues, the game sheds light on immigration questions and builds empathy for those affected, a central aim in conflict resolution and peace education.

## Peace Pavilion

Mumbai-based architects challenged a national war museum competition with a design proposal for a “peace museum,” aiming to shape a new narrative and alter India’s discourse on war and nationalism. The ideals of peace and nonviolence are integral to the museum’s content and programming. The ambitious design aims to explore the narrative of nonviolence in the country’s history while creating more democratic places for its future. The welcoming Peace Pavilion structure is centered in a public plaza and, like a tree canopy, it is designed to provide shelter from the elements and daily chaos found in urban India.

## Positive Peace Index

Challenging the vast amount of research devoted to conflict, an Australian think tank instead explores the drivers of peace with an aim to shift “the world’s focus to peace as a positive, achievable, and tangible measure of human well-being and progress.” The organization has designed a set of tools to measure peace around the world, including a Positive Peace Index, which provides a yearly snapshot of the level of positive peace—the attitudes, institutions, and social structures that create and sustain peaceful societies—around the globe. The index identifies factors that help to make societies resilient to economic, political, and environmental turmoil and more adaptable to a changing world.

## Rare Earthenware

Rare Earthenware makes visible a critical but often unseen aspect of the global supply system, the rare earth elements used to make

electronics and renewable energy technologies. More than 95 percent of the world's rare earths come from China and the majority are from Baotou, one of the most polluted regions on the planet. As with conflict minerals, rare earth extraction can lead to or aggravate existing conflicts and the mining and processing of these materials can be highly toxic. And yet, rare earth elements continue to be used widely in the technology that supports daily life.

## **RefAid**

RefAid is a mobile application designed with the understanding that people fleeing conflict often travel with few possessions except a phone. The app shows refugees, and those who help them, where services are nearby, geolocating them on a map. Available in a growing number of languages, the interface uses simple, color-coded icons to indicate necessities such as food, shelter, toilets/showers, and legal help. The app has transformed the speed with which organizations can update their services and communicate with people on the move in realtime by aggregating information into a single platform, pushing the entire sector to be more digital.

## **Regreening Africa**

More than 80 percent of people living in sub-Saharan Africa are dependent on land, yet almost half of the land is degraded, making the soil vulnerable to droughts, storms, and nutrient deficiencies. This massive loss of productive land increases competition for dwindling resources, which can lead to migration and conflict. The Regreening Africa initiative was developed to meet this urgent challenge. Its mobile app tracks and disseminates local and scientific knowledge. Farmers can record and share their own proven regreening approaches and applied restoration efforts. Collected data is analyzed to adjust and optimize the sustainable practices underway.

## **Safe Passage Bags Workshop**

Fleeing conflicts and persecution, record numbers of refugees have arrived on the shores of Greece's island of Lesbos. In solidarity, local residents transformed a former summer camp into a community-run refugee camp, setting up the Safe Passage Bags workshop. Employing refugees, as well as local residents, the workshop was set up as a place where they could work and create something together while learning a new skill. Sending an important message to the world—the right to safe passage—bags of all sizes are made from recycled life jackets and dinghies no longer needed after the treacherous sea journey.

## **Social Emergency Response Centers**

Social Emergency Response Centers (SERC) are pop-up workshops designed to help communities when they need them. Rather than responding to natural disasters like hurricanes, the centers were created to respond to social emergencies such as social injustices, oil spills, gentrification, and more. The team reimagines clear emergency procedures, like the “stop, drop, and roll” fire drill, asking participants to STOP, look around, gather your people; DROP fear, anxiety, assumptions; let's ROLL, roll out new ideas, roll together . . . . Co-led by activists and artists, SERCs aim to bring communities together to envision and build a stronger, more just democracy.

## **Startblok Elzenhagen**

Startblok Elzenhagen is the second of three affordable housing developments designed to create community between young refugees and Dutch youth, ages 18–28. They live together while working and attending school, helping each other as they start life in Amsterdam.

The designers, MUST Urbanism, approached the physical and social design of the housing as a city—a system of connections and interactions between people of different backgrounds—providing a variety of shared public spaces. Hallways in the buildings act like small neighborhood streets where numerous chance encounters can occur, with common areas for amenities and social activities. Large balconies on each floor expand the hallway's utility.

## Stone Garden

Stone Garden is a 13-story tower imbued with hopeful futures for inhabitants of a post-war city. Conceived by a Beirut architect as an inhabited sculpture, it transforms tumultuous events into creative potential. Framing the sea, each opening is filled with verdant gardens that invite nature into the dwelling while providing natural adaptation to the changing Mediterranean climate. Standing as a landmark to Beirut's experience, the architect describes it as “living archeology” that materializes what the city has endured in built form and signals a new belonging for the construction workers who fled neighboring wars, their handwork visible in the tower's straited façade.

## Teeter-Totter Wall

Two communities in Mexico and the United States, long separated by a border wall, came together to play on three oversized teeter-totters that spanned the US-Mexico border. The wall itself acted as a fulcrum for the teeter-totter installation. Echoing US-Mexico relations, movements and actions taken on one side of the border directly impacted the other, as children and adults alike enjoyed the see-saws. The installation temporarily transformed this small section of the border into a space of hope and elation, exposing the borderlands as a place where women and children live with dignity in spite of the xenophobia and violence perpetuated by the wall and its construction.

## **The Adventures of Daly Graphic Novels**

The Adventures of Daly graphic novel campaign used comic books to counter extremist recruitment that targeted especially vulnerable Tunisian youth. Each comic, centered on a different character's experience, was developed collaboratively with local teens who reviewed the graphics, stories, and dialogue; the comic then served as a launching point for discussions about creating alternative narratives to violence. The fictionalized accounts in the novels offered stories grounded in real experiences, resulting in authentic narratives that did not revolve around extremism but could address sensitive topics and real issues facing young people in Tunisia.

## **Universal Declaration of Human Rights Posters**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was and is a groundbreaking document that proclaims all persons across the world are entitled to certain absolute rights and freedoms. A partnership between the United Nations and ArtCenter College of Design led to the creation of a series of posters illustrating the document's ideals. Students across the school, from illustration and fine arts to graphic and product design, selected various articles to visualize, resulting in a powerful set of designs that remind us that the declaration's global agreement is as relevant today as when it was first created in 1948.

## **World Peace Symbol**

An emerging graphic designer in Uruguay sought to create a universal symbol for peace that could be used freely by people around the world. Existing signs and symbols are linked with problematic meanings, a barrier to unconditional use by all. The V hand gesture signaled

victory and resistance, the dove was also a religious symbol, and the 1960s counterculture peace sign was originally designed for a nuclear disarmament campaign. The World Peace Symbol fuses the iconic peace sign within a globe—a representation of our interconnected planet—with lines that connect and radiate from this symbolic ideal of freedom and goodwill.