

Art

'Embracing the ideals of the Olympics': LA artist's powerful sculpture takes centre stage at Paris 2024

News By [Lauren John](#) published yesterday

We talk to Alison Saar about the creation of 'Salon'.

The Olympics are an experience like no other, with those lucky enough to be in the French capital seeing how art and culture intertwine with sporting greatness. Sitting alongside the Paris Olympic mascot, medal designs, [Olympic logos](#) and countless other artistic details is a sculpture called the 'Salon' by U.S. Artist Alison Saar. She chats to Creative Bloq about her first public foreign art project and what it means to create an Olympic piece representing the handing over of the games from Paris to L.A.

"I think the initial request for submissions asked the artists to simply embrace the ideals of the Olympics. The idea that it's an opportunity for people from all over the world to come together to share their passion and learn from each other, so I was interested in that. I was also really interested in kind of looking at how the Olympics has grown in terms of being more focussed on equality, in terms of representing smaller countries, representing people of all races, and also how the world of sports has come to embrace women's sports, taking them a bit more seriously."



(Image credit: IOC Storm Studio.)

Alison was one of four artists invited to submit sculpture designs to the International Olympic Committee in Spring 2023, and the process continued with the final two expanding on their proposals and submitting a small-scale model of their ideas. Alison's piece called the 'Salon' was installed in the Aznavour Garden and features a sculpture of a female holding a torch and olive branch, alongside traditional chairs and stools from different cultures. Representations of different cultures coming together, peace, and passing on the Olympic torch are all emotive symbols in this piece, which Alison says is not just art to admire, but also to participate in.

"I wanted to create a space that was not just about a sculpture to walk by, but a space for people to come and sit down and participate." This vision was realised when the sculpture was unveiled in June, at an event attended by city dignitaries and Olympic representatives. Alison was there to witness it all and says, "I think the most beautiful part of the unveiling was that we were able to invite a young Haitian poet, Jean d'Amérique, who wrote a poem for the occasion in response to the piece. I felt it was a sort of rite or initiation for the piece, hopefully setting in motion the idea that this is a space where people can read poems, create, share, and communicate."



(Image credit: IOC Storm Studio.)

Between submitting proposals and the unveiling of the sculpture on Olympic Day was a site visit with various people involved in the commission, working through the logistics of the piece, then taking up residence in France to bring the 'Salon' to life, which was an education in itself. "This has been my first commission outside of the United States. I think it was a bit of a learning curve, working outside of my studio, outside of my comfort zone in terms of manufacturers that I work with, fabricators that I work with, but it was just wonderful. I got to meet Mathias Jouannet and Pauline de Gourcuff. Mathias is the stone mason who created the stone for this piece, and we went to a quarry and chose the stone. This stone is unique to Mont Dore, one of the volcanoes in Auvergne." Using local French stone for the sculpture, worked on by a family fun foundry, that also trains up local men and women in the craft, sits well alongside Olympic values, and gives the project a sense of sustainability and community.



(Image credit: Henri Garat)

It was also the first foreign public art project Alison Saar has worked on, something that's not been lost on the artist. "I've shown mostly in the United States, and I am hoping that this will open opportunities to have exhibitions in Europe. I think I have a show in Paris scheduled for the Spring of 2025." In the meantime, she will join a global audience in watching the Olympic sporting story for 2024 unfold, while encouraging Paris visitors to stop by the Aznavour Garden. "The site of the installation is incredible, and I am very honoured to be part of this historical space. I think it's wonderful that it is not only a space for tourists, but it's also a space used by people that live and work in the city. I love that it is accessible to people from different walks of life."

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