



THE OLYMPIC
> STUDIES
CENTRE



The Sports Pictograms of the Olympic Summer Games from Tokyo 1964 to Rio 2016

Reference document

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> INTRODUCTION

A pictogram is a stylised and schematic graphic representation which expresses a message, an activity, an action or a service. Pictograms do not belong to a particular language or form of writing, and therefore function as a universal language.

Already in prehistoric times, some types of rock drawings were similar to pictograms. Egyptian hieroglyphs also recall pictograms due to their use of figurative signs to convey information. Throughout the 20th century, the increase in international exchange and the need to have symbols that are understandable across cultures favoured the multiplication and development of pictograms. Today, they have now become indispensable in many areas such as transport, tourism, IT and meteorology.¹

Because of their international and multicultural scope, the Olympic Games are not immune. To improve organisation and communication, the Organising Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs) also resort to using pictograms. Used not only to indicate the many services provided to spectators, pictograms are also created specifically to represent the sports on the programme.²

For some editions of the Games until the 1960s, designs illustrating the sports featured, for example, in official publications or on the entry tickets. These illustrations are more figurative than schematic, and there are sometimes several types for the same edition of the Games. For example, in the official general rules of the sports publication for the Olympic Games Paris 1924, illustrations exist for each of the sports.³ For the Olympic Games London 1948, a set of 17 sports symbols were created and featured on entry tickets and in official publications.⁴ For the 1952 Winter and Summer Games, in Oslo and Helsinki respectively, as well as for the Summer Games in Melbourne in 1956 and Rome 1960, illustrations featuring the sports can be found on some official documents or the tickets.

It is from the Olympic Games Tokyo 1964 that a transition occurred with the creation of a set of pictograms that were more schematic and uncluttered in their shape and followed graphic standards. They were also part of a more general visual identity programme. Since then, pictograms have been created for every Games edition.⁵

For the occasion of the Olympic Winter Games Grenoble 1968, a set of pictograms inspired by op art, an art movement born in the 1960s, was created to present the sports and disciplines on the programme. The search for graphic solutions capable of translating the characteristics of the sliding and speed belonging to the winter disciplines is an aspect that inspired, generally speaking, the designers of the pictograms for various editions of the Winter Games.

¹ See Marie-Hélène Roukhadzé, "The pictogram comes full circle", *Olympic Message*, n. 34, December 1992, pp. 8-13.

² Idem pp. 14-15.

³ [VIIIth Olympiad Paris 1924/Organising Committee for the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924](#), Paris: Executive Committee, 1924.

⁴ *The Official Report of the Organising Committee for the XIV Olympiad*, London: the Organizing Committee for the XIV Olympiad, 1951, [pp. 131-132](#).

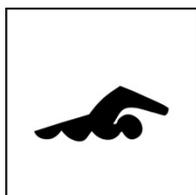
⁵ See Miquel de Moragas Spà, "Pictograms in the history of the Olympic Games", *Olympic Message*, n. 34, December 1992, pp. 39-40.

The Summer Games edition in Mexico City in 1968 was marked by the strengthening of the visual identity programme, which had a significant impact on the pictograms. For the creation of those of the Games in Munich in 1972, a system of graphic norms was established. Highly standardised and rationalised, these pictograms became a model which influenced those of later Games editions. In 1992, the pictograms for the Games of Albertville as well as Barcelona started a new trend with the style of silhouettes becoming more artistic and more abstract.

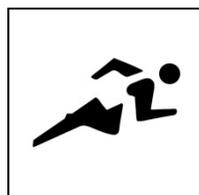
As communications needs expanded, the pictograms became available in several variations (black/white, colour, etc.). They currently appear in various mediums, such as in competition programmes, venue maps, TV broadcasts and giant-size on building walls. The pictograms are designed by the OCOGs and approved by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as well as the International Sports Federations.

Retrace the history of the pictograms starting from Grenoble 1968 through this document. Note that only the pictograms of the sports, disciplines and events on the official programme are included. The pictograms of services or demonstration sports are not presented here.

> TOKYO 1964



Aquatics



Athletics



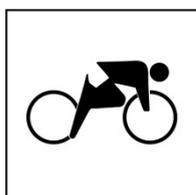
Basketball



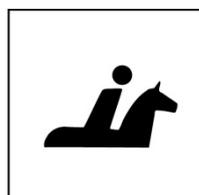
Boxing



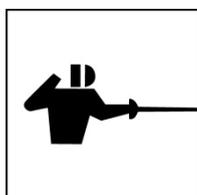
Canoe



Cycling



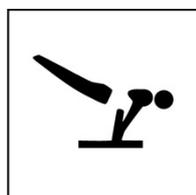
Equestrian



Fencing



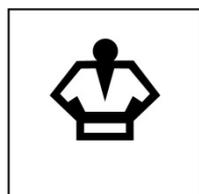
Football



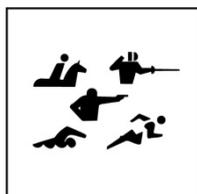
Gymnastics



Hockey



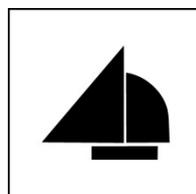
Judo



Modern Pentathlon



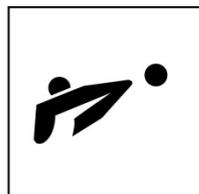
Rowing



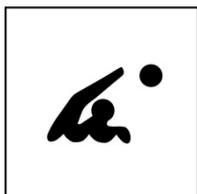
Sailing



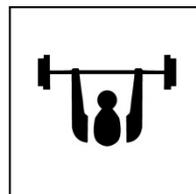
Shooting



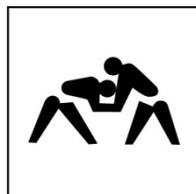
Volleyball



Water Polo



Weightlifting



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer: Yoshiro Yamashita / Masaru Katsumie

Creation context: The need to develop visual communication capable of effectively informing the participants and spectators of an ever-increasing number of nationalities at the Games was of particular importance for the Organising Committee of the Games in Tokyo. It is for that reason that symbols in simple and schematic shapes were created. The silhouettes show a part of, or all of, the athlete's body in a typical sporting pose and are made up of a limited number of graphical elements. For some pictograms, a part of the body silhouette, such as the trunk or pelvis, is suggested through the contrast with the other elements.

SOURCES

- Miguel De Moragas Spà, "Pictograms in the history of the Olympic Games", *Olympic Message*, 1992, no. 34, pp. 40 & 43.
- *The Games of the XVIII Olympiad, Tokyo 1964: the official report of the Organizing Committee*, Tokyo: The Organizing Committee for the Games of the XVIII Olympiad, 1966, [vol. 1, p. 473](#).
- Walter Diethelm, *Signet, Signal, Emblem*, Zürich: ABC Zürich, 1970, p. 25.

> MEXICO 1968



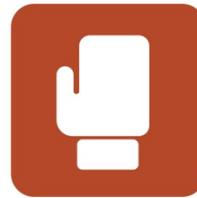
Aquatics



Athletics



Basketball



Boxing



Canoe



Cycling



Equestrian



Fencing



Football



Gymnastics



Hockey



Modern Pentathlon



Rowing



Sailing



Shooting



Volleyball



Water Polo



Weightlifting



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer:	Urban Design Department of the Organizing Committee of the Games of the XIX Olympiad, including Lance Wyman
Creation context:	<p>One of the distinct features of the Mexico City 1968 pictograms is that only a part of the athlete's body or the equipment is featured. This is the principle of representing the whole by a part.</p> <p>These pictograms make reference to Mexican culture and history, since pre-Hispanic glyphs served as the basis of inspiration. Secondly, the design of the water used for the aquatic disciplines and sailing recalls the parallel lines, inspired by the art of Huichol Indians, which can be found in the emblem and visual identity of this Games edition.</p>

SOURCES

- "[Lance Wyman, New York](#)", Walker Art Centre video, 7 March 2014.
- *Mexico 68*, Mexico: Organizing Committee of the Games of the XIX Olympiad, 1969, [vol. 2, p. 307](#).
- Walter Diethelm, *Signet, Signal, Emblem*, Zürich: ABC Zürich, 1970, p. 27.
- Wei Yew, *The Olympic Image: The first 100 years*, Edmonton: Quon Ed., 1996, p. 196.

> MUNICH 1972



Aquatics



Archery



Athletics



Basketball



Boxing



Canoe



Cycling



Equestrian



Fencing



Football



Gymnastics



Handball



Hockey



Judo



Modern Pentathlon



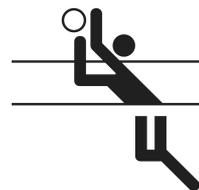
Rowing



Sailing



Shooting



Volleyball



Weightlifting



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer: Otl Aicher

Creation context: In the lineage of those from Tokyo 1964, the Munich 1972 pictograms present schematic silhouettes in typical sports poses. The accent is placed on standardising the forms through a system of graphic and geometric rules.

A checkered square serves as a reference for their development. The lines of the pictograms are constructed based on angles of 45° or 90°. The silhouettes are produced with a limited number of body parts: the head, trunk and limbs. These are formed by a line of constant thickness.

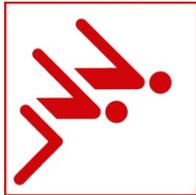
The standardisation of graphical elements subject to a system of norms contributes to the unity of the set.

The theoretical basis developed for this set and its easily comprehensible style is a milestone both in terms of the design of Olympic pictograms and pictograms in general. In addition, the way some sports are represented, such as modern pentathlon or sailing, influenced the sets of pictograms for later editions.

SOURCES

- *Die Spiele: the official report of the Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXth Olympiad Munich 1972*, Munich: Prosport, 1974, [vol. 1, pp. 268-269 & 271-272](#).
- Marie-Hélène Roukhadzé, "The pictogram comes full circle", *Olympic Message*, 1992, no. 34, pp. 16-17.
- Markus Rathgeb, *Otl Aicher*, Berlin: Phaidon, 2006, pp. 106-107.

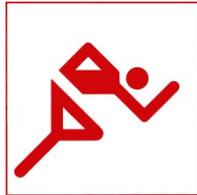
> MONTREAL 1976



Aquatics



Archery



Athletics



Basketball



Boxing



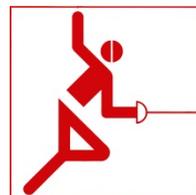
Canoe



Cycling



Equestrian



Fencing



Football



Gymnastics



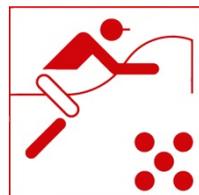
Handball



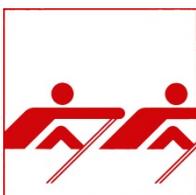
Hockey



Judo



Modern Pentathlon



Rowing



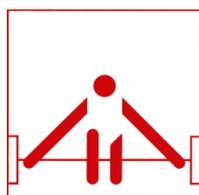
Sailing



Shooting



Volleyball



Weightlifting



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer:	Otl Aicher, adapted by Georges Huel and Pierre-Yves Pelletier
Creation context:	<p>The Organising Committee of the Olympic Games in Montreal decided to use the Munich 1972 pictograms to ensure continuity of the graphic symbols.</p> <p>Modifications were made to some pictograms, particularly for services (not presented here). For those for sports, a change is mostly visible in case of the judo where a different pose from that of Munich was represented with the character in the background executing a different move.</p>

SOURCES

- Miguel De Moragas Spà, “Pictograms in the history of the Olympic Games”, *Olympic Message*, 1992, no. 34, p. 52.
- “Munich Pictograms Adopted”, *Olympress 1976*, November 1974, vol. 2, no. 9, p. 20.
- *Montreal 1976: Games of the XXI Olympiad Montreal 1976: official report*, Ottawa: COJO 76, 1978, [vol. 1, p. 344](#).

> MOSCOW 1980



Aquatics



Archery



Athletics



Basketball



Boxing



Canoe



Cycling



Equestrian



Fencing



Football



Gymnastics



Handball



Hockey



Judo



Modern Pentathlon



Rowing



Sailing



Shooting



Shooting



Volleyball



Water Polo



Weightlifting



Wrestling



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer: Nikolai Belkov

Creation context: The Organising Committee of the Olympic Games in Moscow approached several art schools to include the theme of the Olympic pictograms in the students' degree projects. It was the work of Nikolai Belkov, a graduate of the Mukhina Arts School in Leningrad, which was chosen. The lines that are constructed on 30° and 60° angles aim to give an impression of suppleness to the image. The silhouette angles are rounded off and the body is one piece, with the exception of the head.

SOURCES

- *Games of the XXII Olympiad: official report of the Organising Committee of the Games of the XXII Olympiad, Moscow, 1980*, Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport, 1981, [vol. 2, pp. 420-421](#).
- Sergei Vtorov, "Olympic Design", *Olympiad*, 1978, no. 16, pp. 26-27.

> LOS ANGELES 1984



Aquatics



Archery



Athletics



Athletics



Athletics



Basketball



Boxing



Canoe



Cycling



Equestrian



Fencing



Football



Gymnastics



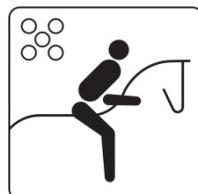
Handball



Hockey



Judo



Modern Pentathlon



Rowing



Sailing



Shooting



Volleyball



Water Polo



Weightlifting



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

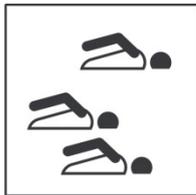
Graphic designer: Keith Bright and Associates

Creation context: The Organising Committee of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles was first interested in obtaining the rights to the Munich Games pictograms, but realised that creating new pictograms was more economical. It launched a contest among three Californian companies, and it was Keith Bright and Associates that was chosen. Six essential criteria were defined for developing the pictograms: clear communication, consistency, legibility and practicality, flexibility, design distinction, and compatibility with the look of the Games. The designers studied several options: the use of partial figures, realistic silhouettes or the addition of lines illustrating speed. Finally, for the sake of simplicity, they opted for a schematic silhouette formed of ten parts: a circle for the head, an oval for the trunk and eight parts which form the arms and legs.

SOURCE

- *Official Report of the Games of the XXIIIrd Olympiad Los Angeles 1984*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, 1985, [vol. 1, p. 248](#).

> SEOUL 1988



Aquatics



Archery



Athletics



Athletics



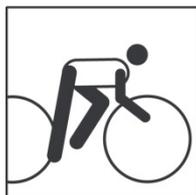
Basketball



Boxing



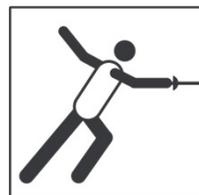
Canoe



Cycling



Equestrian



Fencing



Football



Gymnastics



Handball



Hockey



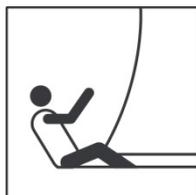
Judo



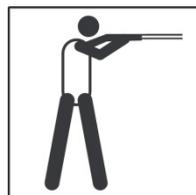
Modern Pentathlon



Rowing



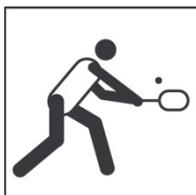
Sailing



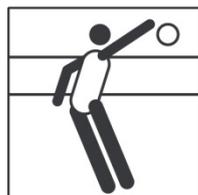
Shooting



Table tennis



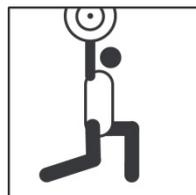
Tennis



Volleyball



Water Polo



Weightlifting



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer: Seoul Organising Committee

Creation context: In 1985, a set of sports pictograms was created to be used at the Asian Games in 1986 and the Olympic Summer Games in 1988, both of which were held in Seoul. However, wanting to have a unique image for the Olympic Games, the Organising Committee decided to create a new set of pictograms after the Asian Games. The pictograms were treated in four parts: the head, the trunk, the arms and the legs. Special attention was placed on the connection between the various body parts. The white trunk contrasts with the other elements of the body.

SOURCE

- *Official Report: Games of the XXIVth Olympiad Seoul 1988*, Seoul: Seoul Olympic Organizing Committee, 1989, [vol. 1 pp. 650-651](#).

> BARCELONA 1992



Archery



Athletics



Badminton



Baseball



Basketball



Boxing



Canoe Slalom



Canoe Sprint



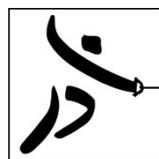
Diving



Cycling



Equestrian



Fencing



Football



Gymnastics



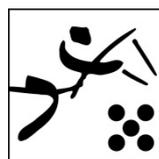
Handball



Hockey



Judo



Modern Pentathlon



Rowing



Sailing



Shooting



Swimming



Synchronised Swimming



Table tennis



Tennis



Volleyball



Water Polo



Weightlifting



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

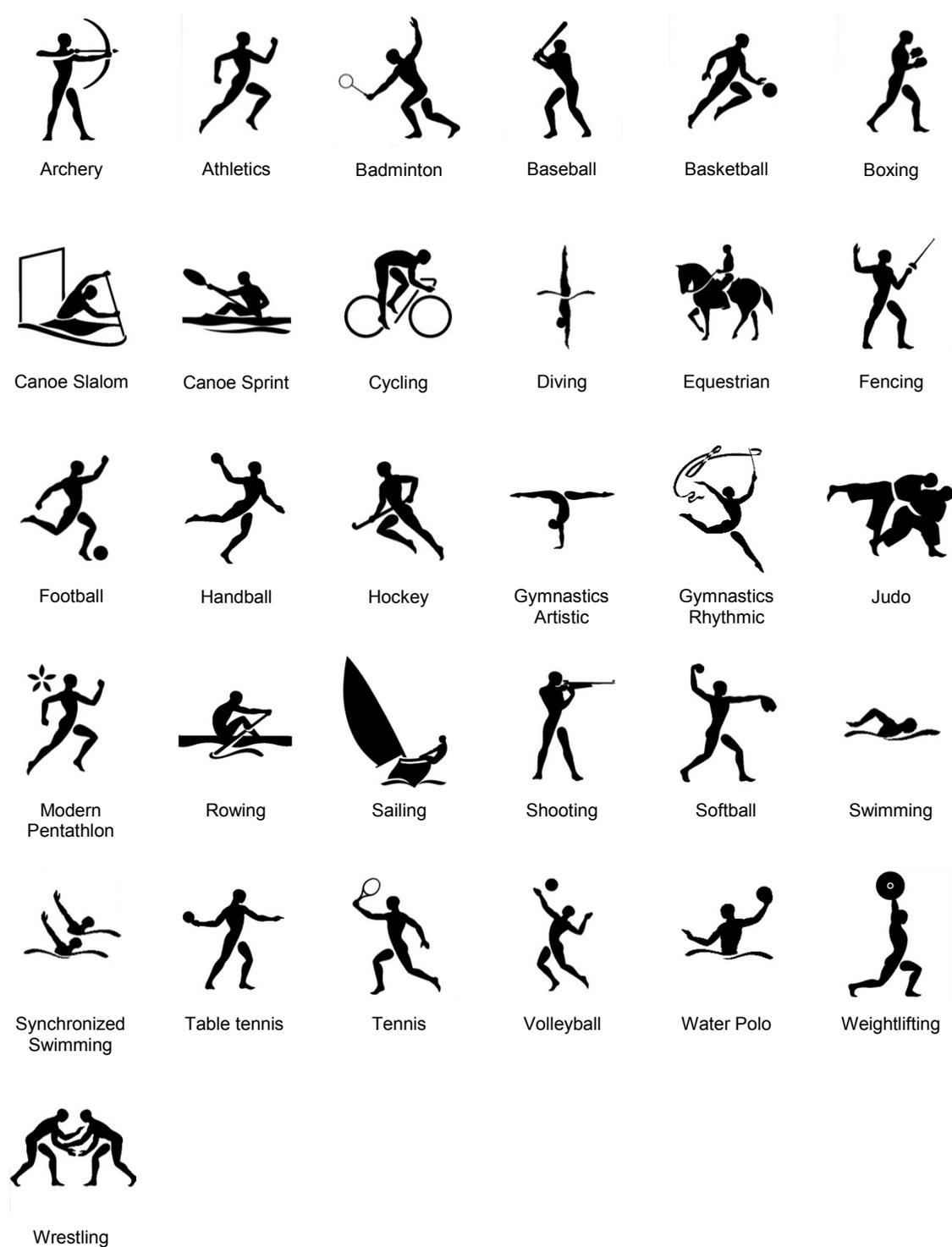
Graphic designer: Josep Maria Trias

Creation context: For these pictograms, the accent was placed on the artistic aspect as well as the analogy with the Games emblem, which was also designed by Josep Maria Trias. Like the character of the emblem, they are made up of lines that recall those of a brush stroke and are formed in three parts: the head, the arms and the legs. The trunk is never represented but it is suggested by the other elements. Finally, the pictograms and emblem aim to transmit a dynamic, open and human movement.

SOURCES

- Josep Ma. Trias, *The Sports Pictogrammes of the Barcelona'92 Olympic Games*, Barcelona: Image and Communication Division, COOB '92, 1990, pp. 7-9.
- *Official Report of the Games of the XXV Olympiad Barcelona 1992*, Barcelona: COOB'92, 1992, [vol. 3, pp. 326-328](#).
- *Press Dossier*, Barcelona: Images and Communication Division – Presse, COOB '92, January 1991, pp. 75-77.

> ATLANTA 1996



DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer: Malcolm Grear

Creation context: The pictograms were inspired by figures found on Ancient Greek amphorae. Their classic design thus established a link with the ancient origins of the Olympic Games.

The style of the silhouettes aims to be realistic and close to the human form and the silhouettes exhibit a striking, clearly marked muscle structure.

The pictogram for sailing, which depicts a whole boat, as well as the one of the modern pentathlon, broke with the stylisation that had been used since Munich 1972 for those sports.

SOURCES

- "[1996 Centennial Olympic Games](#)", website of Malcolm Grear Designers.
- *Centennial Olympic Games 1996: the Games of the XXVI Olympiad: Official Souvenir Program July 19 - August 4 1996*, [Atlanta]: [ACOG], 1996, p. 24.
- "Classical forms on bed of leaves", *Olympic Review*, September 1994, no. 321, [pp. 342-343](#).
- *Press Guide: Atlanta 1996*, Atlanta: ACOG, June 1995, p. 45.

> SYDNEY 2000



Archery



Athletics



Badminton



Baseball



Basketball



Beach
Volleyball



Boxing



Canoe Slalom



Canoe Sprint



Cycling



Diving



Equestrian



Fencing



Football



Gymnastics



Gymnastics
Rhythmic



Handball



Hockey



Judo



Modern
Pentathlon



Rowing



Sailing



Shooting



Softball



Swimming



Synchronised
Swimming



Table Tennis



Taekwondo



Tennis



Triathlon



Volleyball



Water Polo



Weightlifting



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer: Saunders Design

Creation context: Just like the character of the Games emblem, the pictogram silhouettes are made up of boomerangs, generally one for the legs and two small ones for the arms. The use of boomerangs, traditional hunting tools, pays homage to Australian Aboriginal culture. The pictogram style aims to be dynamic to recall the speed and agility of the athlete.

SOURCES

- Martin Cahill, *Universalism versus National Identity: The evolution of the Olympic Pictogram*, B. A. in Design, Dublin Institute of Technology Mountjoy Square, January 2003, p. 35.
- "Pictograms Lead The Way To The 2000 Games", *Sydney Spirit*, May 1998, no. 5, n. p..
- *Sporting pictograms of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games*, N.S.V: Ultimo, [SOCOG 1998].
- *Sydney 2000 Olympic Games Image Guidelines*, Sydney: SOCOG, 1998, n. p..

> ATHENS 2004



Archery



Athletics



Badminton



Baseball



Basketball



Beach
Volleyball



Boxing



Canoe Slalom



Canoe Sprint



Cycling



Diving



Equestrian



Fencing



Football



Gymnastics
Artistic



Gymnastics
Rhythmic



Handball



Hockey



Judo



Modern
Pentathlon



Rowing



Sailing



Shooting



Softball



Swimming



Synchronized
Swimming



Table Tennis



Taekwondo



Tennis



Trampoline



Triathlon



Volleyball



Water Polo



Weightlifting



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer: ATHOC 2004 Image & Identity Department

Creation context: The pictograms were inspired by Ancient Greece. Through their plain and uncluttered shapes and simple layouts, they make reference to Cycladic figurines.
The silhouette of the athlete and the fine strokes which define the details recall the black-figure vases of Ancient Greece.
Finally, the fragments of ancient vases served as inspiration for the irregular shape of the pictogram frames.

SOURCES

- "2004 Olympics sports pictograms", press release, website of Athens 2004, 9 September 2002.
- *Official Report of the XXVIII Olympiad: Athens 2004*, Athens: ATHOC, 2005, [vol. 1, p. 323](#).
- "The sports pictograms", *Athens 2004 Olympic News*, September 2002, no. 11, n. p..

> BEIJING 2008



Archery



Athletics



Badminton



Baseball



Basketball



Beach
Volleyball



Boxing



Canoe Slalom



Canoe Sprint



Diving



Cycling



Equestrian



Fencing



Football



Gymnastics
Artistic



Gymnastics
Rhythmic



Handball



Hockey



Judo



Modern
Pentathlon



Rowing



Sailing



Shooting



Softball



Swimming



Synchronized
Swimming



Table Tennis



Taekwondo



Tennis



Trampoline



Triathlon



Volleyball



Water Polo



Weightlifting



Wrestling

DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer: China Central Academy of Fine Arts / Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University

Creation context: The Organising Committee of Olympic Games in Beijing called on four graphic arts institutes to submit projects. Two were retained based on an evaluation by experts: one from the Central Academy of Fine Arts of China and another from the Institute of Fine Arts of the University of Tsinghua. A working group uniting the two institutions, in collaboration with the Organising Committee and Chinese and international experts, perfected and finalised the project.

Incorporating mainly the notions of aesthetics and movement, the pictograms make reference to Chinese culture through several aspects.

The seal-script characters of Ancient Chinese calligraphy serve as the basic structure. This writing gives a rounded and smooth aspect to the pictograms. The set name, “The Beauty of Seal Characters”, refers to this calligraphic style.

The pictograms were also inspired by inscriptions on bone and bronze from Ancient China adapted in a modern and simplified style.

Finally, they recall the traditional Chinese art of rubbing, through the marked contrast between the colours.

SOURCES

- *Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Pictograms Usage Manual*, BOCOG, July 2006, p. 46.
- “Pictograms: Beijing 2008”, website of Beijing 2008, pictograms section.
- *Official Report of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, Beijing: BOCOG, 2010, [vol. 3, pp. 265-270](#).

> LONDON 2012



DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer: SomeOne Design Agency

Creation context: The pictograms were created with two distinct formats: a “silhouette” version designed for standard use and a “dynamic” version (one example presented above) which was inspired by the London Underground map and incorporated lines which extend outward from the figures.

The pictograms were designed for a variety of uses, including digital and 3D applications.

The modern pentathlon pictogram is made up of the pictograms of its five disciplines: swimming, fencing, shooting, athletics and equestrian - jumping. This stylisation had not been seen since the Mexico City 1968 pictograms.

SOURCES

- *Annual Report 2009-10 - On target*, London: LOCOG, n. d., [p. 13](#).
- “[London 2012 Launches Games Pictograms](#)”, news, website of the International Olympic Committee, 16 October 2009.
- “[London 2012 Olympic Sports Pictograms](#)”, website of SomeOne Agency.
- “London 2012 show the way with Olympic pictograms”, press release, website of London 2012, 16 October 2009.

> RIO 2016



DESCRIPTION

Graphic designer:	Rio 2016 Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Game
Creation context:	<p>The Organising Committee of the Olympic Games in Rio put a team of graphic designers in place internally to produce the pictograms. The silhouettes of the athletes are formed based on characters from the official typography of Rio 2016. This typography is itself inspired by the Games emblem and the curves of the carioca landscape. The fluidity of the lines aims to simulate the movement of athletes in action. The pictograms are formed by a continuous line which varies in thickness to give an impression of depth. The frame of the pictograms, in the shape of a pebble, adapts to the silhouettes and strengthens the movement of the athletes.</p>

SOURCES

- "[Pictograms - Rio 2016](#)", Rio 2016 Organising Committee video, 13 December 2013.
- "Rio 2016 launches Olympic and Paralympic pictograms", news release, website of Rio 2016, 7 November 2013.
- "[Rio 2016 launches sport pictograms](#)", news, website of the International Olympic Committee, 8 November 2013.

> CREDITS

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