

SET DESIGN AND PROJECTIONS

The Turtle - Support of the World

At the heart of many founding myths that live on in a variety of legends and oral traditions, the turtle represents the earth and carries the entire weight of the world on its shell. This totemic animal is also omnipresent in the scenic environment of TOTEM.

The large oval framework on stage represents the skeletal substructure of a huge turtle shell that serves both as a decorative set element and as acrobatic equipment. At the start of the show it is covered with a cloth printed with the shell markings of a forest turtle, reproduced through macro photography. Depending on the artistic needs, the skeleton is raised to the top of the tent or opened at an angle like an enormous shell.

An organic world of multiple transformations

The visual environment of TOTEM is an organic world, a marsh lined with reeds near an island (the stage), on which images are projected. Set designer Carl Fillion gave it curves and non-linear forms to reflect the natural world.

Tilted slightly forward, the image marsh acts both as a stage entrance and as a projection surface. Through the magic of moving images it becomes a virtual swamp, a river source, a marsh, a lake, an ocean, a volcanic island, a pond and a starry sky.

The images in the projections are drawn from nature and were shot for the production in various parts of the world, including Iceland, Hawaii and Guatemala. Even the images of boiling lava were filmed by Image Content Designer Pedro Pires.

The “Scorpion Bridge” serving as a mobile platform connects the marsh to the scene features variable geometry, allowing it to adapt to each tableau. In one of the clown numbers, for example, it becomes the prow of a boat then rises to become a plane in flight, and finally a rocket taking off. In another scene, the bridge is configured to look like a vertical totem pole.

The concept of the Scorpion Bridge was loosely based on a retractable pedestrian bridge in London. Built of steel and weighing 10,000 lbs, its 8 powerful mineral oil hydraulic motors allow it to rise, descend, extend, retract and curl in on itself like a scorpion's tail. Its reflective surfaces, which shine like mirrors, are made of stainless steel plates. The base of the bridge houses lighting equipment, a laser, speakers and cameras. During the show, the bridge is monitored by an operator using four infrared cameras.

Set and Projection Closeups

- The border of the stage recalls the plastron (underside) of a turtle. The motifs on the surface of the stage itself are a collage of hand-drawn images inspired by the patterns on the plastrons of several turtle species.
- Bordering the marsh upstage, the reeds conceal the artists and some set elements before they enter, as well as serving as a projection surface. To save weight and facilitate storage on tour, the reeds are inflatable.
- During the rings trio number, the Scorpion Bridge turns into an Indian carpet that unrolls on the beach in a reference to the Bollywood aesthetic that inspired the overall look of this scene.
- Some of the projections on the marsh interact with the movements of the artists in real time. Infrared cameras positioned above the stage and around the marsh detect their movement and produce kinetic effects such as ripples, splashes and reflections in the water and the flames.
- Photographs taken by Guy Laliberté during his 2009 Poetic Social Mission aboard the International Space Station are integrated in the show.

Acrobatic Equipment

- The turtle skeleton weighs 2,700 pounds (1,225 kg), includes 2 horizontal bars and is completely covered in a non-slip finish.
- The unicycles are 7 feet (2 m) tall but very light, which makes them easier to manoeuvre down the ramp at the beginning of the act.
- The perch poles are made of duralumin, an alloy used in aeronautics. The tallest pole is about 33 feet (10 m) high.

