



BACKGROUNDER

History

The ancient art of Chinese lantern making began in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. to 220 A.D.) and was a significant period of time for science and invention. From their use as lighting, they evolved into art forms and became an integral part of festivals and celebrations. Also, at that time, Buddhism flourished in China, and lanterns were lit at the Imperial Palace and temples to show respect for Buddha.

Original lantern construction varied according to the purpose. Palace lanterns were silk or glass over fine wood. Gauze lanterns, the traditional red lantern recognized around the world, used red gauze stretched over bamboo. Shadow-picture lanterns used a paper wheel inside which turned when heated, creating moving pictures around the outside of the lantern. Today's rayon, medicine bottle, and porcelain lanterns use modern materials and technology, adding colored bulbs, music, and visual effects, along with imaginative shapes, to create entirely new experiences.

One of China's most traditional celebrations is the Lantern Festival and falls on the 15th day of the first lunar month, typically February or March on the Gregorian calendar. Varieties of lanterns are hung in the streets with children making their own to parade in the villages. Other traditions include posting riddles onto the lanterns for people to decipher and often rice dumplings are eaten on the day. The dragon or lion dance often accompanies such festivities. Now the festival comes to the Calgary Zoo.

Production

Each ILLUMINASIA lantern has been made by a master of the craft in Zigong, the centre of China's lantern tradition. 12 artisans have travelled to Calgary to set up the 183 lanterns that will be displayed throughout the zoo.

How are they built?

A designer begins by drawing the outline of the lantern on the concrete floor and then traces the outline in metal, creating what will be the centre of the lantern. Once the structure is erect, the designers create the 3D lantern through the use of metal and welding techniques. LED lights are then secured on the interior of the lantern strategically for the best light and emphasis.

The skinning process involves stretching the rayon over the frame with the use of a durable glue product and all is secured to be tight on the frame. Colours are decided on for certain parts of each lantern design. Now the painting begins. Painting is done by hand or by using an air brush machine. Every lantern will be unique to each artist's design and interpretation.

Fast Facts:

- There are 183 animal lanterns, with the additional bamboo and other décor pieces the total number of lanterns is 366.
- The lanterns travelled 10,293 km to from Zigong to Calgary
- 55 artisans created the lanterns over 40 days
- 19,000 lbs. of metal was used to create the lanterns
- 30,370 lbs. of material, mainly rayon, was used to skin the lanterns
- 960 LED bulbs, 10,000 feet LED light belt/tubes and 800 LED modules are used to light the lanterns
- To create 10 zebras it took 6 workers 10 days to complete
- There are 30,000 lantern makers in Zigong
- Hanart is the company bringing the lantern festival to life; the word comes from “Han” the largest nationality in China and combined with “art”.

What does the logo mean?

The logo is a modern version of the Chinese symbol *guang* which means light, ray, brightness, shine, luster or honour. The logo has also been created in red, which is a lucky colour within the Asian culture often signifying prosperity or joy.