



**External
Space**



2-303 Lansdowne Ave
Toronto ON M6K 2W5
416 849 2864
Tuesday-Saturday 12-6
www.xpace.info

Zana Kozomora: *Shifting Gestures (Father / Daughter)*
Nov. 1, 2016 – Jan. 2, 2017

Coffee is the most popular beverage among adults in Canada; it is undeniably part of our culture.¹ Think back for a second to the last time you drank coffee. You might have downed it as you were rushing out the door this morning, or you popped over to Timmie's and dashed back to work with your cup of liquid caffeine. You have most likely consumed your latest fix on the go, and alone. In comparison to North American coffee culture, the ritual surrounding coffee consumption is entirely different in Bosnia. The ritualistic gestures related to the beverage are a combination of careful preparation and communal tradition, symbolizing hospitality and friendship.

In her video work, *Shifting Gestures (Father/Daughter)*, Serbian-Canadian artist Zana Kozomora investigates the action of preserving and documenting intangible cultural rituals through the performative act of learning traditional techniques of grinding Turkish coffee from her father. The work functions as a candid portrayal of a father teaching his daughter about family traditions, and references institutional documentary by providing the viewer with visual and auditory instructions.

In a mirrored video stream, father and daughter perform the laborious action of manually grinding coffee beans. Kozomora has composed the shot to direct focus to the repetitive gestures of their hands. The video begins with presenting the paternal figure before slowly introducing the opposing child figure, indicating that she is always one step behind. The two streams are displayed side by side to further highlight the disparity of the experienced, smooth rotation of the father's hand, juxtaposed by the jerky attempts of the daughter. Her struggle is further intensified by the moments in which she pauses and seems almost ready to give up. This raw footage of fatherly guidance, paired with the artist's awkward motions creates an honest portrayal of intergenerational knowledge transmission.

The work questions the underlying notion of archiving, protecting and preserving things that are not 'tangible' objects. The artist notes that most people today, including her father, have begun to use electric coffee grinders because they get the

¹ "Beverage consumption of Canadian adults" Statistics Canada. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2008004/article/10716/6500244-eng.htm>. Accessed October 13, 2016

job done efficiently, making traditional manual coffee mills increasingly obsolete (outside of serious and minor groups of practitioners) and relics of a previous century. The following questions arise: why should anyone make the effort to pass on increasingly obsolete and laborious cultural practices into a continuously shifting, fast paced, globalized future? Is an intangible ritual endangered as its performance and purpose changes over time, evolving to serve the needs of future generations?

Throughout the video, Kozomora's father instructs her in their mother language of Serbian. While detailing his own personal narrative of the tradition, he stresses the importance of learning the proper grinding and infusion techniques, speaking of the ritual as a living, embodied thing. This dialogue is translated and displayed as English subtitles on the screen, allowing the father's words to become accessible in an institutional context, transmitting his knowledge to a wider audience.

The work oscillates between personal and general, private and public. The opposing figures are dark in contrast and their faces are cropped out, following documentary film techniques of depersonalization. They are stripped of personal details other than their own gestures in order to show the experience of not one particular father and daughter but any and all. At the same time, the video is set in a private domestic space, allowing for the vulnerable and often invisible trial and error process of learning ritual labor to be seen. The viewer witnesses both the detailed instruction and formal visual documentation of the ritual, and the artist's intimate process and laboured acquisition of her family's valued cultural heritage.

The practice of preparing and consuming Turkish coffee was nominated for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) database of intangible cultural heritage in 2013.² The database is populated through a national nomination system and aims to preserve and promote cultural cohesiveness. However, it fails to grasp and present how these rituals are actually performed, passed on, altered and evolved through migration and globalization, or even forgotten in certain living communities. Kozomora takes it upon herself to do what UNESCO has not yet been able to by documenting the raw essence of the cultural exchange, while questioning what it means for intergovernmental agencies to collect and archive such practices.

Kozomora's invitation to us to witness this practice references the history of ceremony, which evolves and spreads through living cultural performance, thousands of years of colonization, war and, more recently, globalization. Rituals are constantly collecting and losing partakers simultaneously.

² "Turkish Coffee Culture and Heritage" UNESCO. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/RL/turkish-coffee-culture-and-tradition-00645>. Accessed October 10, 2016

Methods of preparing coffee are tied up in the complex history of the Balkans, where this communal ritual has created a kind of social mesh for multiple cultures, ethnicities and traditions. During the Ottoman rule of Bosnia from the mid-15th century to the late 19th century, locals assimilated and internalized Turkish heritage, demonstrating that intangible practices can weave through physical borders and develop across ethnic boundaries.³ Kozomora's family brought the ritual overseas to Canada when they fled from the Bosnian Civil War in the 1990s, adding to the layers of communal traditions, simultaneously connected by similar coffee making practices of the East, and disconnected by the fast-paced, pay-and-go culture of the West. In the video, as Kozomora faces her father in an attempt to reclaim a sense of cultural identity, she questions how the performance of living rituals can ease the transition of peoples across borders and communicate ideas of culture and identity to future, displaced generations.

- Réka Szepesvári