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ondan-bundan: inquiring on culture from this and thats
Aydan Hasanova
September 15th - November 11th, 2023
Essay by Talia Golland

The Azerbaijani phrase *ondan-bundan* (translation: “from this and that”) answers the question ‘*what’s this made of?*’ with nonchalant ambiguity. A first glance through the doorway into the space of Aydan Hasanova’s installation reveals a fittingly miscellaneous arrangement. Projected video is cast across an array of panels, sheets, and scraps of various materials and sizes that hang clipped to cords which stretch and intersect across the room. The moving images dance across the walls and these suspended surfaces as they refract, diffuse, and fragment.

Here, *installation* is more a verb than noun - the arrangement is routinely dismantled and re-constructed during the exhibition’s run, the components shuffling and the composition shifting with each reiteration. *ondan-bundan*’s dynamic structure melds the immersion of a hybrid installation environment with the ephemerality of performance. In this playfully open-ended process, Hasanova physically enacts an interest in mutability and continual reconstruction - defining attributes of what the artist describes as a “textility of culture”¹, the project’s conceptual core.

¹ Aydan Hasanova, *ondan-bundan: inquiring on culture from this and thats* (2023)

The artist's selection of the moving image material emerged from their research into Soviet Azerbaijani cinema as a site of construction for a hybrid and contested cultural identity. The clips are brief excerpts from three Azerbaijani films from across a 40-year period, each of which express attempts to maintain collective self-definition via gendered roles and social formations. From *Arsın Mal Alan*/"The Cloth Peddler" (1945), Hasanova has extracted a shot of a group of women dancing and waving billowing fabric sheets against a painted landscape backdrop. From *Bir Cənub Şəhərində*/"In a Southern City" (1969), a row of men lean against a wall to observe unseen passers-by. An excerpt from *Ötən İlin Son Gecəsi*/"Last Night of the Passing Year" (1983) features a holiday gathering around a family table, centering on the figure of the mother. Hasanova selected films that are notable and enduring within Azerbaijani popular media, easily accessible online and still well-known to many Azerbaijani audiences. Encountered as fragments without prior context, these images become emblematic distillations that also invite a more universal recognition.

While these three clips remain the same across *ondan-bundan*'s many reinstallations, the conversation Hasanova stages between these sources suggests culture formation as necessarily in flux, defined by tensions and contradictions. She further teases these themes through the interactions of these projected moving images with the installation's physical components, generative collisions that multiply as she continually alters their arrangement in the space.

Hasanova's methods of gathering the found objects were both spontaneous and deliberate. For the project's first public presentation², she frequented the OCADU free bins for studio remnants of metal, plexi, and paper. During her residency at Xpace, she scouted for new additions in the constantly renewing resource of curbside discard piles in the

<https://aydanhasanova.com/ondan-bundan>

² Aydan Hasanova, *ondan-bundan: inquiring on culture from this and thats*. MFA Thesis Exhibition. March 1 - 9, 2023. Experimental Media Space, OCADU, Toronto, ON.

gallery's surrounding neighborhood. This process of selection was guided by a set of material criteria - texture, transparency, surfaces that absorb light or refract it. These relationships with the projected media were strategically anticipated, but not entirely pre-determined, instead continually discovered through Hasanova's durational process of re-assembly, accumulation, and release.

Baku, Azerbaijan's central and capital city, is the site of all the films featured in *ondan-bundan* and the locus for the project's initial inquiry. Hasanova drew inspiration from their own photographs, notes, and memories of the city's textural and atmospheric specificity. The installation's industrial materials are dangled and scattered, transforming the gallery into a loose evocation of Baku's nooks and alleyways. Mass-produced curtains stand in for textiles draped from the clotheslines connecting windows and balconies and canopied alleyways, here in the gallery evoked by the criss-crossing cords hung overhead.

In an area of the floor tidily demarcated with black tape, unused materials are laid out and arranged in neat piles, hinting at the organizational processes and improvised parameters used to prompt and guide their many redistributions. The various functional tools that facilitate each install also remain conspicuously in this space - a ladder, a cart, a roll of tape, a bag of clothespins, a work light. Their presence seems to anticipate the next cycle of de- and re-installation, an expression of non-finality and reflexive interest in tactile, spatial exploration. In *ondan-bundan*, the process is never finalized, and the outcome can never be precisely replicated.

Through successive re-installations, Hasanova creates new choreographies, placing intention and chance in cooperative tension. Apparent contradictions are simply materials to repurpose, juxtapose, overlap, and continually re-arrange. In any given variation, *ondan-bundan* does not overwhelm us - its elements are distributed with a careful carelessness, arranged through internal logics of inclusion that can be felt even when unapparent. Enveloped in the space, our bodies enter the interplay as new surfaces and shadows.

Perpetual motion invites contemplative stillness. Fabric flutters in the artificial box-fan breeze.

ondan-bundan is made out of heres and theres, thens and nows, eithers and alsos.

-Talia Golland