

COFFEE TABLE

TABLECLOTH

MZ* BALTAZAR'S

LABORATORY



In the interactive installation Coffee Table (in German 'Kaffeekränzchen'), the legacy of gendered porcelain collecting, and the different functions and meaning of this in women's lives, was explored, while also engaging with themes of art, science and technology. The installation consisted of a set of porcelain vessels and plates arranged on a circular wooden table, surrounded by a series of interconnected circuits and wires. The vessels and plates were adorned with intricate floral patterns and delicate textures, showcasing the exquisite craftsmanship and aesthetic qualities of porcelain. The use of circuits and wires in the installation served as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of historical legacies, colonial histories (of gold mining) and contemporary technologies (which use gold in computer chips). And the use of porcelain vessels and plates alluded to the history of oppression and the global trade in luxury goods.

The installation represented an interactive circuit embroidered in a tablecloth with conductive textiles. The circuit used four open source hardware boards (Adafruit Audio FX Sound) that triggered sounds whenever a button was switched on. The buttons were triggered by old porcelain coffee cups with gold lustre. Gold has been urban mined as a conductive material that naturally establishes electric conductivity. The tablecloth worked as an instrument/performative tool: whenever one of the performers poured the coffee, 'drunk' the coffee or added sugar, a different sound was triggered. Sounds were collected from the natural coffee-drinking environment, but also from important texts that tackle the topic of coffee, gold and porcelain as precious materials mined in the Global South and brought to the Global North through colonialism and neo-colonialism.

The Coffee Table installation also addressed the legacy of gendered porcelain collecting, and the different functions and

meanings of this in women's lives. During the 17th century, the trend of decorating rooms with porcelain collections spread across Europe, with the chinoiserie cabinet being the most exclusive and ornate space. Women, in particular, collected porcelain, which was used not only as showpieces but also as suitable containers for hot drinks such as tea and coffee. The use of Asian porcelain for this purpose resulted in a significant rise in the amount of porcelain owned by women, and these items were legally counted as part of a woman's personal property and inherited by the female line. However, porcelain vessels were not always considered part of the female line of inheritance because they could be categorised as either tableware or ornamental items.

Collecting in general serves a deeper psychological and social need, and gendered collecting is a specific example of how humans use items to forge a sense of self. Women's ceramic collecting can be regarded as a form of both conspicuous consumption and social emulation, by which they imitated other women located higher on the social ladder. The gathering and exhibition of ceramics within the confines of individual women's lives was not just a reproduction of patriarchal norms but also a chance for them to actively create meaning for themselves and perform belonging to others. Porcelain was relegated from its practical purpose to an aesthetic one, valued for its tactile and visual features, and made accessible for the creation of adorning visual displays. When such pottery was used at all, it was often for ceremonial events like hosting significant visitors.

Like other works of art, they also assume extra importance as status symbols: they serve as a reflection of the owner's preferences and a platform for the display of taste and the application of specialised expertise. Since the capacity to enjoy them already constitutes a type of power, which was crucial for women,

they do not need to be possessed. At first, women collectors were rare, since they didn't have access to the financial means, education or freedom to pursue such activities. By the 1960s, however, the numbers had started to grow. It was also a way of constructing social networks through the gift economy between family and friends (Vincentelli, 2002).

Building on that legacy, we invited the participants to rethink the women's Coffee Table* gathering as a circulation of energies and potentialities that we exposed through the electric circuit, built with ecologically sentient methods and materials, reflecting on the colonial histories and presents of mining, import, consumption and performance (or faking) of belonging to a specific class or group.

The Coffee Table installation project is intricately connected to the principles of urban mining, upcycling and new materialism. Upcycling, a form of recycling, involves repurposing discarded or waste materials into new products that have higher value and functionality. The use of conductive gold porcelain cups in the installation is a prime example of upcycling and new materialism. Gold, a precious metal, is usually associated with jewellery or high-value financial transactions, as well as a safe investment. However, by repurposing it as a conductive material within an electric circuit, closed through fragile porcelain on a conductive tablecloth, the installation creates a unique blend of art, technology and sustainability.

Theoretical framework

New materialism is a framework that recognises the agency of matter, for example minerals and metals, in shaping human experience and culture, challenging the view that humans are the only agents of change. The Coffee Table installation project exemplified this perspective by repurposing gold porcelain cups, acknowledging the role of gold in shaping human technology and culture. The project denounces the human suffering caused by gold mining. It promotes sustainability by using upcycled gold on porcelain as a method. In this way, it acknowledges the tremendous social and environmental impact of mineral extraction as a global trade, speculating on ways of creating new relationships with natural resources that are more just and sustainable. The Coffee Table installation project took a decolonial perspective on the underlying social and environmental injustices of the computer chip industry. The use of upcycled materials to build an electric circuit challenged the dominant ideologies of economic growth enabled through exploitation of the peripheries, seeking to create awareness and a critical dialogue around imperialism and capitalism. The project instigated discussions to disrupt the silencing of witnesses of violent histories of resource extraction in the so-called Global South.

Performance

The installation was first presented in combination with a performative act during the Mz* Baltazar's Laboratory Salon of Open Secrets exhibition in 2022 at Kunstraum pro arte in Hallein, Austria; and then in 2023 at the Artistic Ceramics Bi-

ennial in Aveiro, Portugal. In the former, artists Patrícia J. Reis and Stefanie Wuschitz teamed up with artist–performers Anna Watzinger and Olivia Jaques (all active members of Mz* Balta-zar’s Laboratory collective) in a 15-minute performance, which started with all of the artists enacting coffee drinking as a female-connoted ritual while sitting in silence around the table. At minute 5, a shattering sound was triggered on the tablecloth as a clue for Watzinger and Jaques to take over and expand the performance to the audience, adding elements such as cleaning supplies, mirrors and, ultimately, a cake.

In the second performance – in Portugal – Reis and Wuschitz teamed up with local performers Ana Rita Carvalho and Silvia Amado in a 22-minute act, in which the interactive triggered sounds were added to a previously recorded main soundtrack containing the testimonies of our international project collaborators on the topic of ethical hardware, from their specific perspective.

Project collaborators: Gameli Adzaho and Seyram Avle from Ghana, Milton Raggi from Cuba, María Antonia González Vale-rio from México, Saad Chinoy from Singapore, Ira Agrivina from Indonesia, Hannah Perner-Wilson from Germany and Rajina Shresta from Nepal.

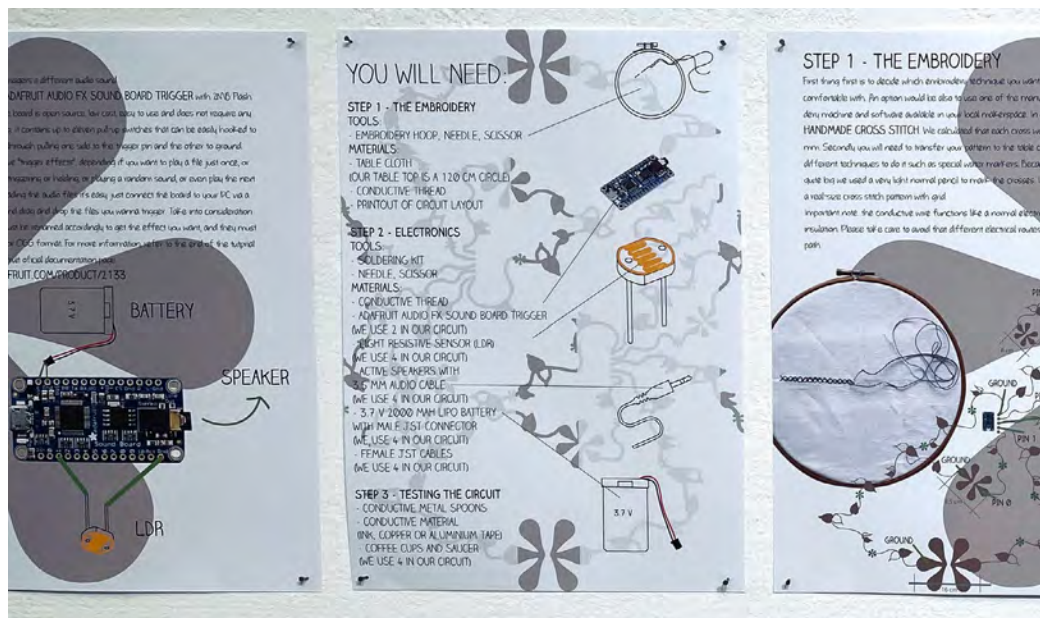
The installation is accompanied by a full manual describing, in detail, all of the necessary steps to make and program the table-cloth.



Patrícia J. Reis and Stefanie Wuschitz,
in collaboration with Mz* Baltazar's
Laboratory, Coffee Table 1, 2022

Interactive audio installation composed of
embroidered circuit, four Adafruit Audio
FX Sound Boards, conductive thread,
modified lustred porcelain coffee set,

metal spoons, transducer, mixing table,
sound: stereo
Installation during the SOS 2.0_ Fürsorge
ist die Schwester der Autonomie
exhibition at the Medienwerkstatt in
Vienna,
Austria, 2023–24
Photos © Janine Schranz



Patrícia J. Reis and Stefanie Wuschitz,
in collaboration with Mz* Baltazar's
Laboratory, Coffee Table 1, 2022
Interactive audio installation composed of
embroidered circuit, four Adafruit Audio
FX Sound Boards, conductive thread,
modified lusted porcelain coffee set,
metal spoons, four audio channels
Installation during the Salon of Open
Secrets exhibition at Kunstraum pro arte
in Hallein, Austria, 2022

Embroidery: Erika Farina
Photo © Gabriele Krisch
Photo © Patrícia Reis

to use or feel more
grains/sensors/embroider
our funnel we used
add correspond to 5
bits. There are many
use our cross stitch in
in this world we offer

colored but with no
temporarily cross their

STEP 2 - ELECTRONICS

1 WHEN ALL THE EMBROIDERY IS DONE, IS TIME TO CONNECT THE AUDIO BOARDS TO THE CIRCUIT.

BEFORE SEWING IT TO THE TABLE CLOTH, WE ADVISE YOU TO ATTACH (BY SOLDERING) A FEMALE 2.5T CABLE TO CONNECT THE BATTERY PLUG TO VIN PIN AND GROUND TO GND PIN.

< > ADAFRUITSFX

TD4HOLDL.egg

2 DRAG AND DROP THE AUDIO FILES, REMOVING THEM ACCORDINGLY WITH ADAFRUIT DOCUMENTATION. NOTE: SEE LAST PAGE FOR MORE DETAILS.

3 SEW THE AUDIO BOARDS TO THE TABLE CLOTH USING CONDUCTIVE THREAD AND CONNECT THE SPEAKER TO THE AUDIO OUTPUT.



4 YOU ARE READY TO CONNECT THE BATTERY AND TEST THE CIRCUIT!



STEP 3 - TESTING THE CIRCUIT

1 THE EASIEST WAY TO TEST THE CIRCUIT IS BY USING A CONDUCTIVE MATERIAL, SUCH AS A METAL SPOON, IN ORDER TO CONNECT BOTH SIDES OF THE TABLE CLOTH SWITCHES.

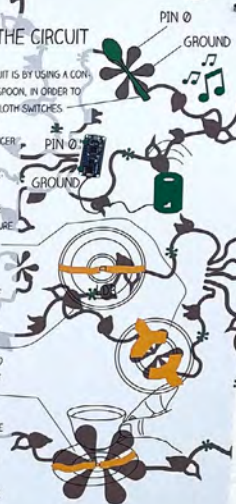
2 PREPARING THE COFFEE CUP AND SAUCER:

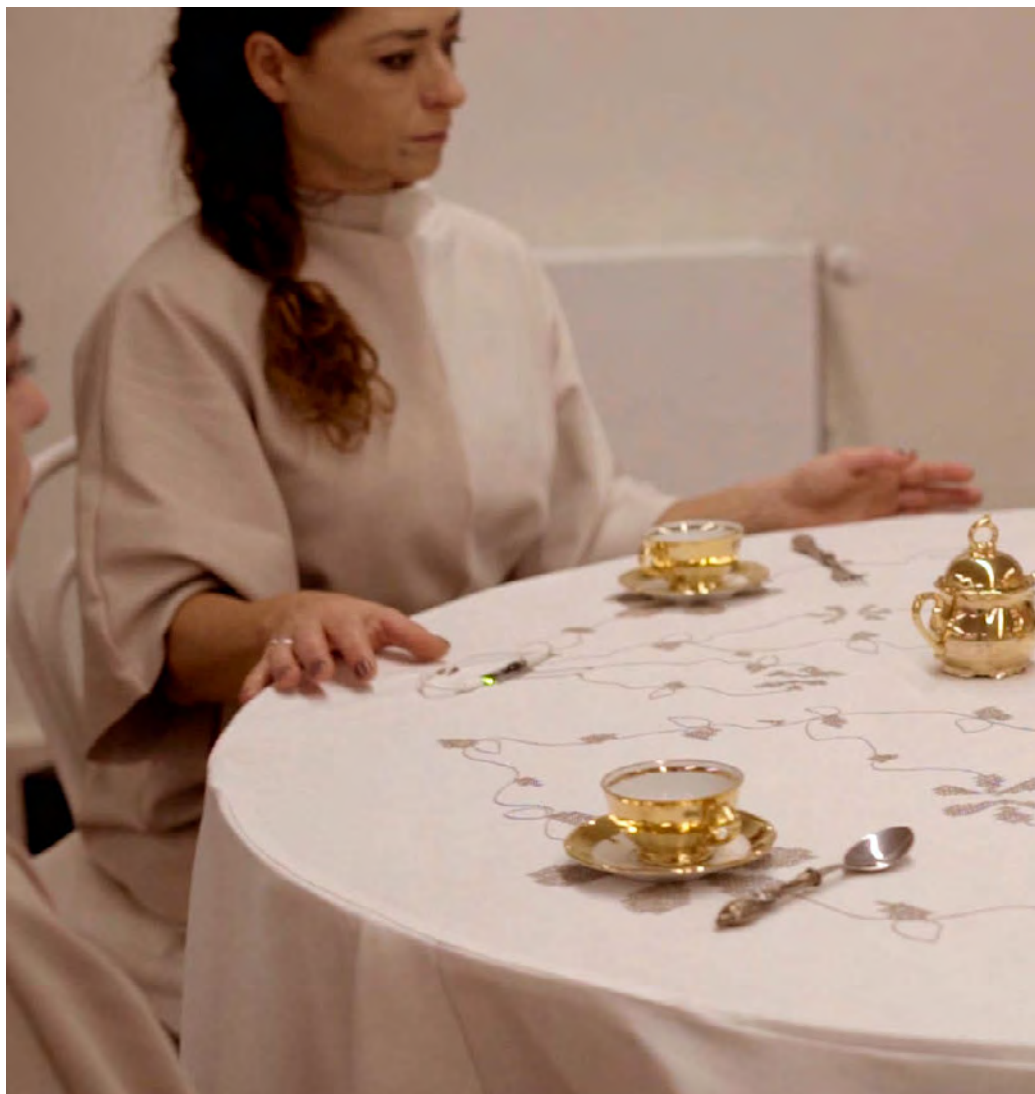
A. ADD TWO SEPARATED LINES OF CONDUCTIVE MATERIAL (E.G.: CONDUCTIVE INK, COPPER OR ALUMINUM TAPE) FROM THE BOTTOM UP OF THE SAUCER, MAKING SURE THAT THEY TOUCH THE EMBROIDERED SENSORS.

B. ADD THE LDR SENSOR IN THE CENTRE OF THE UPPER PART OF THE SAUCER CONNECTING EACH SIDE TO THE DIFFERENT CONDUCTIVE LINES.

USE THE COFFEE CUP ON THE SAUCER TO OPEN THE SWITCH (GROUND OFF) AND LIFT IT TO CLOSE IT (GROUND ON).

NOTE: THE LDR SENSOR IS A LIGHT DEPENDENT RESISTOR, MEANING THAT THE AMOUNT OF LIGHT INCIDENT ON THE SENSOR WILL AFFECT ITS RESISTANCE IN THE CIRCUIT. WHEN THE SENSOR IS EXPOSED TO MORE LIGHT ITS RESISTANCE DECREASES ALLOWING ELECTRICITY TO FLOW THROUGH ITS CONNECTORS.





Patrícia J. Reis and Stefanie Wuschitz,
in collaboration with Mz* Baltazar's
Laboratory, Coffee Table 2, 2023
Interactive audio installation composed of
embroidered circuit, four Adafruit Audio
FX Sound Boards, conductive thread,
modified lustred porcelain coffee set,
silver spoons, transducer, mixing table,
sound: stereo, 22 min.

Installation during the Coffee Table
exhibition at the Artistic Ceramics Biennial
in Aveiro, Portugal, 2023



Embroidery: Erika Farina
Sound: José Lopes
Video: João Nunes

The installation features testimonies
by: Gameli Adzaho, Seyram Avle, Milton
Raggi, María Antonia González Valerio,
Saad Chinoy, Ira Agrivina, Hannah Perner-
Wilson, Rajina Shresta.
Still from video © João Nunes

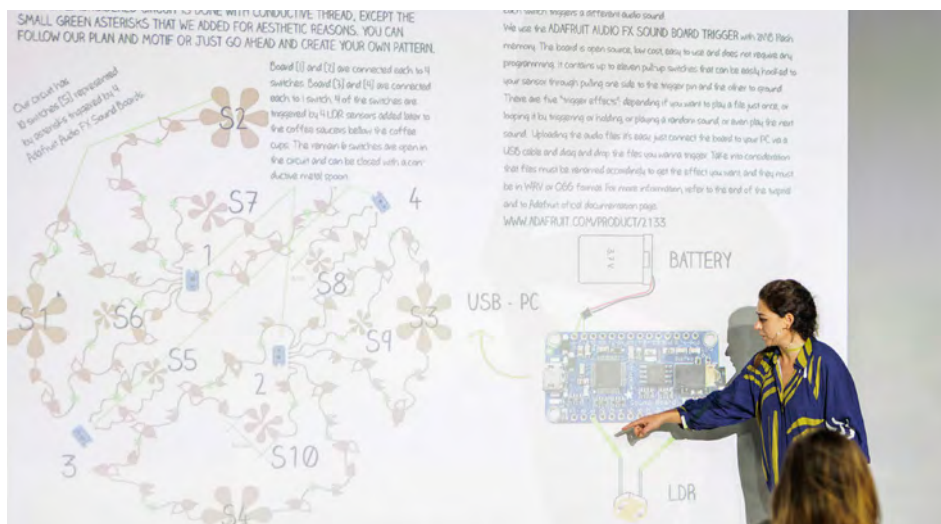




Coffee Table workshop, Ljubljana

As a follow-up to the Coffee Table installation, we offered a workshop with the same name in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 2022. Building on the legacy of the feminist salon culture of the 1920s, we invited participants to rethink the women's Coffee Table gathering as a circulation of energies and potentialities that we expose through the electric circuits. Forms of collective knowledge transfer that were believed to be outdated, such as a secret, a coffee party or a manual, are playfully reactivated.

Remembering these outdated forms, while also becoming aware of their colonial context, can inspire generative resistance. The workshop focused on the need to build these electric circuits using ecologically sentient methods and materials, reflecting on the colonial histories and presents of mining, import, consumption and appreciation of art and hardware. We asked participants to bring old cups with gold decoration (if they had any), which we implemented into DIY sensors.



Coffee Table: workshop on ethical hardware, wearable tech and feminist hacking by Patrícia J. Reis and Stefanie Wuschitz, at project Atol, Ljubljana, Slovenia
19 October 2022
Photo © Matjaž Rušt