

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Slavs and Tatars, *Szpagat* 2017

Bronze with brushed chrome finish, marble, 11 x 27 x 5.5 cm

Collection: Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler



Photo: Rob Harris

TRANSCRIPT

This is an audio description of *Szpagat*, a bronze sculpture created by Slavs and Tatars in 2017. It will take about 5 minutes to listen to.

Szpagat is one of three artworks situated in the third gallery space within the exhibition, *The Weight of Words*, at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds. The main form of the sculpture is based on the shape of a human tongue, the tip of which is split into a shape that resembles a banana skin. The sculpture can be viewed from different perspectives, but for this description, we will focus on a side-on view to describe it in its full form. The work is small, measuring 27 centimetres in length, similar to the length of two hands turned up and touching at the fingertips. It is 11 centimetres high and 5.5 centimetres wide. The sculpture sits in the centre of a white cylindrical plinth topped with a pale marble surface which is part of the work. The plinth's diameter is 33 centimetres, slightly wider than the sculpture itself. There are some detailed natural markings on the marble which resemble polished wood, and emphasise the shadows cast by the lights and sculpture. The sculpture is lit by spotlight from above. It is made of bronze, coated with brushed metallic silver. It is highly polished, and captures the gallery light, which rebounds off its surfaces.

Although the sculpture is based on the shape of a tongue, the way it is split and curved creates a more abstract form which evokes various symbolic objects. At the top, there is a curved form with an indented line in the middle, which, as a formal reference, could be likened to a curl of a natural barrelled wave, before breaking. As you trace down the sculpture towards the base, the form sweeps and splits apart into two. It resembles an ornate banana skin, split and placed carefully ready to cause a slip of the tongue, or slippage between languages. The small size of the sculpture, its polished surface and the position on top of its cylindrical plinth also suggests some kind of trophy or award.

In the light, the sculpture reflects rich hues and darker cool tones. In some areas, the silvered bronze is matte and dull, while in others it has a soft sheen. To touch, this piece is smooth with a slightly raised texture, like creases from the bending process of the metal.

Inside the exhibition space, the walls are white and the floor is grey and there is no natural light. It shares the space with two other works. On the wall behind you as you work in are printed the words 'How you speak will be used against you' in capital letters, around one hundred and eighty centimetres from the ground, beside it on the wall various changing words are projected. On the far wall is a neon work by Glenn Ligon with the words 'negro sunshine' written in black painted neon tubing. The work is approximately 90 by 90 centimetres.

Although *Szpagat* is clearly abstract in its form, its forms also allude to particular geographical areas and dialects. Within this exhibition, the piece serves as a powerful reminder and metaphor for different ways

individuals can speak with deceptive or misleading communication. Slav and Tatars is an art collective devoted to an area East of the Berlin Wall and West of China known as Eurasia.

Playing on its title *Szpagat* from Polish, via Italian, meaning 'Split', the upside-down tongue is somehow doing the splits like a gymnast pointing two ways at once. A 'forked tongue' is also used as a metaphor for speaking with deceptive or misleading intent. Like a banana skin, it is ready to cause a slip of the tongue or slippage between languages, to provoke some mistranslation as the proverbial 'tongue in cheek'. The sculpture both celebrates and upsets the ideal of a 'mother tongue'.