Holodomor Memorial Parkette in Toronto

A Guide to Memory

The Holodomor Memorial Parkette, unveiled in October 2018 on the 85th anniversary of the Holodomor, stands at Exhibition Place in Toronto as a permanent memorial to the millions of Ukrainians who perished in the genocidal famine of 1932–1933, inflicted on Ukraine by the Soviet regime.

The parkette is not only a monument — it is a carefully designed landscape of remembrance. It organizes movement physically and emotionally, guiding visitors through reflection, confrontation with loss, and ultimately toward resilience and renewal.





Location

Located at 2 Strachan Avenue, it serves both as a gathering place for annual commemorations and as a contemplative public space open to all.

Directions

Understanding the Holodomor

Between 1932 and 1933, millions of Ukrainians were deliberately starved under policies enacted by the Soviet regime under Joseph Stalin.

The famine was not a natural disaster but the result of forced collectivization and grain requisition policies designed to crush Ukrainian resistance and national aspirations.

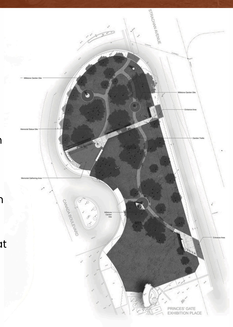
The word *Holodomor* derives from two Ukrainian words:
holod (hunger) and **moryty** (to cause death) — meaning death inflicted by starvation.

At its height, thousands were dying daily. Today, the Holodomor is recognized by Canada and many other countries as genocide

A Walk Through the Parkette

The parkette was designed as a layered spatial experience. Circular and branching pathways form internal and external rings that guide visitors between elements linking the symbolic components of the memorial.

Three main entrances lead into the site from Strachan Avenue and Exhibition Place. Depending on the route taken, visitors may first encounter a millstone garden before reaching the central statue — emphasizing that remembrance is not linear but layered.





As visitors walk, they might notice:

- The narrowing and widening of pathways
- Transitions in paving materials
- Openings and wooded enclosures
- The interplay of shadow and openness

These spatial shifts mirror the emotional journey from despair to renewal.

The Central Sculpture

Bitter Memory of Childhood

Sculptor: Petro Drozdowsky

At the heart of the memorial stands a life-sized bronze girl holding five stalks of wheat — grain that, during the Holodomor, was confiscated and forbidden.

Petro Drozdowsky (b. 1957, Ozerna, Kyiv Oblast) created *Bitter Memory of Childhood* to honour the most vulnerable victims of the Holodomor: **children.**

The original statue was installed in Kyiv in 2008 at the National Museum "Holodomor Victims Memorial." Customized bronze casts stand in Kyiv, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, and inside the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.



Symbolism



Five stalks of wheat

a reference to the Soviet "Law of Five Ears of Grain," (or Five Stalks of Wheat) under which starving farmers could be punished for collecting leftover grain.



Life-sized scale

allows visitors to approach, relate, and empathize.



Placement at eye level

invites direct human encounter.



Visibility from the Princes' Gates

the child's vulnerability confronts visitors entering Exhibition Place.



The statue stands on a plaza paved in patterns inspired by traditional Ukrainian embroidery — symbolizing cultural continuity even under attempted erasure.

The Millstone Memorial Gardens

Remembrance – Resilience – Renascence

The millstones in the Remembrance and Resilience gardens are broken apart in the same way they were broken during the Holodomor. In the Renascence garden the millstone is symbolically made whole again. The Memorial Gardens represent the past, present and future legacies of the Holodomor.

The 3 Millstone Gardens provide a narrative of the Holodomor and its legacy, with links to information and resources through scannable QR codes sited in each garden.

Ornamental screens further interpret each theme in the gardens. Seating and sheltered areas create a space to hold informative class field trips or for rest and contemplation.



Remembrance Garden

Screen by Artist: Anastasia Zaiats

Two elevated stainless-steel panels (1.5 × 3 metres, 2018) form the sculptural screen of this garden. The screens incorporate symbolic imagery — including crosses — evoking mourning and memory. Seasonal plantings, including poppies, reinforce themes of remembrance.

This garden invites visitors to pause and confront loss.



Resilience Garden

Screen by Artist: Brad Emsley

The Resilience Garden marks movement forward. The screen and landscape elements emphasize endurance, survival, and the preservation of identity despite attempts at annihilation.



Renascence Garden

Screen by Artist: Rhonda Weppler

Renascence (rebirth) completes the narrative arc.

The open space and tree canopy create a sense of emergence and renewal. Visitors experience increased openness beyond the statue that symbolize hope and continuity

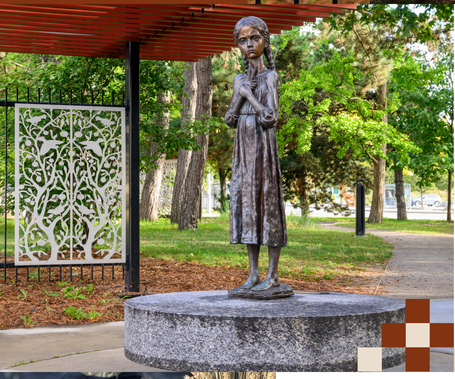


Spatial Language

The memorial was designed to convey remembrance alongside humanism, democracy, civil society, and the defense of human rights.

- Space for public commemorations which maintains intimacy for individual reflection
- White spikes rising from grasses symbolize the lifting of human souls
- Integrated benches function both as design elements and places for reflecting the fragility of life
- External and internal rings organize visitor movement and connect elements conceptually





Tree of Life motif screen

This motif appears in Ukrainian traditional pottery, embroidery, textiles, pysanky and clothing. It represents family roots, ancestry and continuity.

It symbolizes the bridge between heaven, earth and the afterlife.

It is a symbol of regeneration (cycles of life/death) and protection.



Holodomor Memorial Parkette in Toronto

was created as a space of memory, learning and respect for the tragic periods and moments in our histories.

Memorial ceremonies are held here annually on the fourth Saturday of every November; these take place simultaneously at all of the Holodomor monuments globally.