

ROMA PAVILION

**EMÍLIA RIGOVÁ
AND THE ONE
DOESN'T STIR
WITHOUT
THE OTHER**

**Commissioner:
EUROPEAN ROMA INSTITUTE
FOR ARTS AND CULTURE (ERiac)**

AND THE ONE DOESN'T STIR WITHOUT THE OTHER

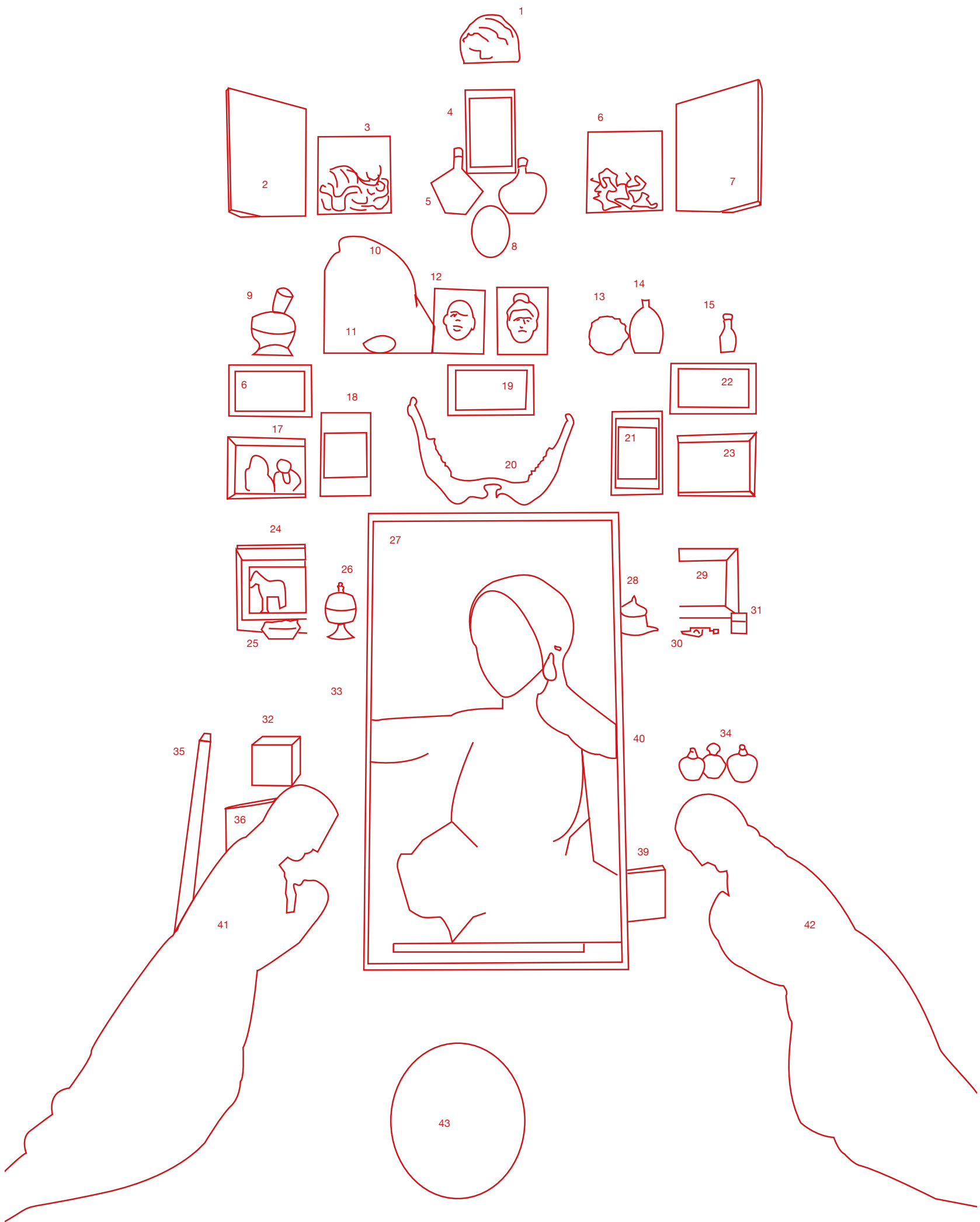
At the Roma Pavilion of Milano Triennale, ERIAC presents the work *oltáRIG* by Slovak artist, Emília Rigová (b. 1980). The installation was conceived as a central piece of the 2020 retrospective exhibition *Kale Bala, Parno Muj* (Black Hair, White Mouth) held at the *Schemnitz Gallery* in Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia. Due to pandemic measures, the exhibition was prepared as a virtual event, but here in Milano, the work can be seen in-person for the first time. 2022 marks the 10th anniversary of the inception of the artist's visual persona *Bári Raklóri* which anticipated a turn in her work towards critical exploration of the concepts of social identity, and topics with specific emphasis on Romani identity and Romani culture. From the vantage point of her own self-exploration and self-representation, Rigová takes an intersectional approach to the frameworks of collective and individual identification and labelling. The present installation *oltáRIG* symbolically reflects on the decade of this thematic preoccupation, and its presentation at the Romani Pavilion in Milano therefore underscores the fact that Rigová became a distinctive voice among artists self-identified as Roma, and also in national and the international contexts. Her approach, however, enabled her to avoid the trap of identity politics as, she primarily focuses on the universal experience of searching for ways of being and belonging.

As in previous instances, *oltáRIG*, is an expression of the author's predilection for a word play, aiming to encode an additional layer of meaning. Here, the pun builds on homophony of the suffix '**rik**' in Slovak diminutive *oltárik* (a 'small altar'), and the root '**rig**' in her Romani surname **Rigová** (suffix 'ová' indicates female gender). This composite could therefore be similarly read as the name of her alter ego, *Bári Raklóri*, a symbolic reference to the equally significant and inherently inseparable major formative experiences of growing up and living in both Romani and non-Romani social spaces. *oltáRIG* is therefore intrinsically personal, but it also clearly speaks of the universal irreducibility of humans into a set of conceptual frameworks, categories and labels. On the contrary, it testifies to the experience of searching for who we are as we engage in daily interactions and are impacted by major life events and processes.

Objects referencing or representing family and friends, Romani identity and culture, artistic and professional development, and idiosyncrasy of the author comprise a compact structure in which individual items can be traced semantically to many others. For example, gold is a clear reference to the Romani culture, yet it also connotes gold lettering on gravestones and therefore the author's family business of masonry. Gold also features in the Rigová's 2018 video performance **Vomite ergo sum!** in which she built on the stereotypical association of Roma and gold to question whether or not she forcefully strips herself of some identity markers so that she can feel more beautiful, purer, and more worthy of love. The issue of passing as white, thematized in *Vomite ergo sum!* is treated in a very different way in another work that is part of the installation, **Crossing B(I)ack** from 2017. While in the former piece, the author questions her desire to pass as white, in the latter she reclaims her existence of person of colour, while simultaneously pointing to the violence of categorization and labelling. The personal overlaps with the collective in the work thematizing *Porrajmos*, the Nazi genocide of Roma, and the issue of coerced sterilizations...

This richly interwoven web of meanings is conveyed by the fragments of her oeuvre including: family photographs, presents, awards, souvenirs, talismans, and sacred objects. All of this is all wrapped up in sound and fragrances, two major sensory stimulants which figure prominently in Rigová's work and personal life. Therefore, the altar fulfils a double function: architectonically it is conceived as a sort of an organicist metaphor, representing the inextricable entanglement of personal and artistic development, and semantically it points to the intimate and ritual celebration and giving thanks for the path walked.

Text by Nikola Ludlová



oltáRIG – legend

1. Salt lamp – personal object
2. *O Muj* (2019) – print and sewing on canvas
3. *Mire Bala* (2018) – personal object
4. *Intimate Public Catharsis* (2013) – video
5. Glass bottles – personal objects
6. *Mire Bala II* (2018) – personal object
7. *O Muj II* (2019) – artwork, print and sewing on canvas
8. Photo – personal object
9. Stone mortar – personal object
10. Golden dress – a part of the artwork
Raw Gender (2016) personal object
11. Aventurine (stone) – personal object
12. Heads, Reliefs – personal object
13. Ball – personal object
14. Bell – personal object
15. *Lúbezné pagáče*, lino cut, print by Kikki Love, (2015) *Bottle of Baileys* – personal object
16. *from Untitled series “PORAJMOS”* (2019) artwork, video performance
17. *Kale Bala, Parno muj, AVO AVO* (2012) – artwork, photo
18. *Bari devouring her own roots*, (2018) detail, video performance
19. *Vomite ergo sum!* (2018) – artwork, video performance
20. Bone – personal object
21. *Untitled series* (2020) – artwork, video performance
22. *There is No Freedom Without Victory (Ishtar)* (2019) – artwork, video performance
23. *From Bulletproof culture series, Batman and Robert* (2018) – artwork, photo
24. Photo of Emília Rigova’s great grandfather – personal object
25. Chisels with engraved initials „E“ and „R“, a gold leaf and a golden compass – personal objects
26. Incense – personal object
27. *Covering Up* (2016) – artwork, video
28. Small cup – personal object
29. Lost forest – artwork, photo
30. Music box – personal object
31. Antique table lighter – personal object
32. 3D portrait of Emília’s parents – personal object
33. *Portrait Bari Rakli* (2012) – watercolour
34. Perfume *Hypnotic Poison* by Dior – personal object
35. *Ledbox Keres kultura!* (2018) – artwork, object
36. ENTER – personal object
37. Photo of Emília Rigova’s great grandparents – personal object
38. Miscellania – personal objects
39. Photos of family members – personal object
40. Prize – personal object
41. Wooden statue – personal object
42. Wooden statue – personal object
43. Crystal ball – personal object
44. Ceramic objects – personal object

Emília Rigová (*1980) a/k/a Bári Raklóri, is a Slovak visual artist and academic of Roma origin and laureate of the Oskár Čepan Prize. She teaches art at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (SK), where she established the Office of Roma Art and Culture in 2019. Rigová is a trained sculptor. She studied stone carving at Bratislava's School of Applied Arts and later the Sculpture Department of the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica. Even though she does not create sculptures in the traditional sense, work with space is a typical feature of her art. She moves primarily in the media of installation, performance, video, and graphics, while her works are formally characterized by a search for meaning and possibilities of employing principles of sculpture in the contemporary digital age. Thematically, she focuses on the question of (her own) identity, tension between social constructs and subjectively experienced reality. She investigates the problems of gender and racial and ethnic minorities in an engaged manner, especially the relations between Roma identity and the majority society. She demonstrates the issue of social and cultural stereotypes and body politics by means of her alter ego, Bári Raklóri, which she created in 2012. She uses it to de-construct and newly construct representation of the Roma woman in the Western canon of art and contemporary culture. Her oeuvre also has an activist dimension, markedly present in the projects she realized in cooperation with other artistic subjects – such as interventions in the public space.



DIJANA PAVLOVIC

Roma activist and actress

Dijana Pavlović is an Italian actress, activist, politician and leader of Movimento Kethane, the movement uniting Roma and Sinti from Italy. Born in Serbia, she has campaigned for language rights for Roma and Sinti and against forced evictions in Italy, as well as working with disadvantaged youth in and around Milan. A dedicated mother and a devoted leader, her life revolves around the fight for justice for the Roma community in Italy and transnationally.

ITEMS OF HER PERSONAL ALTAR

TOP OF THE SHELF

- Handcrafted wooden object prepared by her son, Alessandro, which includes a poem written by Alessandro in the kindergarten.
- Childhood photo of Dijana and her brother in a small Lamborghini toy car
- A printed flyer of the theatre performance „Una Ragazza d’Oro”; the play, inspired by Dijana’s life, is about her struggle for justice for the Roma community
- A childhood photo of her brother next to a Christmas tree
- Old Serbian banknotes from the beginning of the nineties, a period of extreme inflation when millions were worth of nothing
- Small golden-painted Roma and Traveller caravan object, representing Travellers’ theatre company
- A metal pin, symbolic object with the logo of Kethane movement led by Dijana
- Vintage copper spoon inherited from her mother
- Handmade jewellery prepared by Dijana herself during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Human hair, a piece cut from her baby son’s hair tied with red yarn, used for protection against bad and evil.

SMALL SHELF 1

- Small items linked to family: candle from her son’s first birthday cake; knitted baby hats from her childhood; her grandmother’s golden wedding ring

SMALL SHELF 2

- Small glass ball
- Handmade objects that bring luck, prepared by Dijana’s grandfather: knife and straw tied with red yarn
- Plastic wristband received at the hospital when her son was born (number 14128)

SMALL SHELF 3

- Wooden toy kept out of superstition which she would have with her before going on stage and performing in theatre plays
- Old copper fork bought by her mother as a present for her wedding
- Necklace, symbol of her place of birth, Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia



NOÈLL MAGGINI

Roma fashion designer and activist

Noèll Maggini, of Sinti origin, is a fashion designer and freelance stylist. Noèll has always been very proud of his Roma origins, which serves as source of inspiration in his creative work as well. He studied at the Loretta Oltremari Fashion School, and now he is the artistic director of Maison Noèll Maggini. Living and working in Milan, Italy, he devotes most of his free time to Movimento Kethane, and inspires many young Roma to never stop pursuing their dreams.

ITEMS OF HIS PERSONAL ALTAR

TOP OF THE SHELF – MOST CHARACTERISTIC OBJECTS OF HIS LIFE

- Flyer of his first fashion show
- Childhood photo of him and his cousin, taken at a Luna Park in a moment of great sense of freedom; handmade photo frame painted by him when he was 8 years old
- Family photo of his parents and the cousin of his mother, representing the source for great creative inspiration.
- Coffee cup with a quote from the Bible painted on it; when served in this cup, guests receive a religious message next to their coffee.
- Page with a quote from a journal that you give as a gift to someone as a blessing

SMALL SHELF 1

- Handmade designer earrings created for one of his fashion shows, titled „N.M Gipsy”
- Handmade designer hair band created by him, which refers to a tradition within Sinti culture when women tie their hair after getting married.

SMALL SHELF 2

- Family photo of his parents on their marriage which he later used to recreate the exact pose with contemporary fashion models.
- His own rubber pacifier from when he was a baby
- Tiny liquor glass that he received from his mother; symbol of respect to guests who get served in that glass

SMALL SHELF 3

- Handmade design card uniting his traditions, memories of the Luna park shows and Sinti cultural elements

SMALL SHELF 4

- Dry rose that his mother wore before she died; a respectful way of conserving the memory of his mother, who transmitted the love for Sinti culture to her son
- Eyeglasses of his late grandfather whom he never met, but who was a tailor and wore those glasses while sewing



TONI DERAGNA

Roma activist and singer

Toni Deragna is a Roma activist from Italy, from a small village close to Milan, which is officially called by the authorities “The Roma Camp.” Born in a family with a tradition of strong community leadership and a desire to advance the living conditions and rights of Roma and Sinti in the settlements, Toni is a creative soul, who likes to sing, paint and do artistic design in his free time. He is an active member of Kethane Movement and the international Opre Roma Association, following the steps of his great grandfather, Valentino Deragna.

ITEMS OF HIS PERSONAL ALTAR

TOP OF THE SHELF

- Family photo of his two grandfathers sitting next to each other at a community feast; both of his grandfathers were leaders of the Roma community where he lives
- Tiny figure, an amulet-like object that is carried to protect from all evil
- Pocket knife that his grandfather gave him as his last gift before he died
- Metal lighter, a family heirloom from his great grandfather that belonged to several generations in his family

SMALL SHELF 1

- Vintage decor glasses from his grandmother, a traditional item of Croatian Roma who settled in Italy

SMALL SHELF 2

- Cooking pot that he received from his grandmother, on the occasion of his first cooking lesson at the age of 7

SMALL SHELF 3

- Old razor of his maternal grandfather, the only object left from him

SMALL SHELF 4

- Wooden pipe of Valentino Deragna, his great grandfather, powerful leader of the community

MIGUEL FIORELLO LEBBIATI

Roma activist and sculptor

Miguel Fiorello Lebbiati is an Italian Roma and Sinti of many subgroups, including Kalderash. A truly devoted member of the Kethane Movement, and a proud father of two kids. He has inherited not only the stories of survival and resistance, but also the wisdom of his ancestors, who on one hand were travellers performing in circuses in Luna parks shows, and on the other hand worked as artisans, metal workers, craftsmen. An activist and an artistic soul, he does sculpting as a hobby.

ITEMS OF HIS PERSONAL ALTAR

SMALL SHELF 1

- Two plastic hair clips that belonged to his parental grandmother, who passed away four years ago
- One button, representing the lifestyle change of his grandparents, when they settled down and started to sell buttons and all kinds of small objects for a living
- Family photo of her two daughters
- Personal photo of him as a child next to his Roma grandmother
- Family photo of his grandparents and uncles from the seventies
- Family photo with his cousins from the eighties



MYKHAILO SHPAKOV

Roma student and activist

Mikhailov is a Ukrainian Roma activist, who moved to Italy 3 years ago, and currently pursues his studies in computer sciences in Milan. He followed the steps of his parents, who also left Ukraine to make a living and create a better future for their children. However, the sweet memories of his former homeland and his strong ties to friends and family left behind keep motivating and inspiring him in this new situation, which he confronts with dignity and success.

ITEMS OF HIS PERSONAL ALTAR

SMALL SHELF 1 – ROMA TRADITIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

- Handmade leather whip made by his uncle, which is used for training horses; it is a symbol of traditional Roma craftsmanship

SMALL SHELF 2 – MEMORIES FROM THE SOVIET UNION ERA

- Portrait of his great grandfather who fought during the World War II and escaped prison of the Nazis
- Binoculars of his grandfather, a major in the Soviet army
- Old Soviet banknote from 1947
- Coin from 1842, a heritage from the grandfather of his grandfather, who was selling horses to the hordes of Emperor Nicholas I of Russia

SMALL SHELF 3 – DEDICATED TO UKRAINIAN CULTURE

- A printed card, a gift from his high school teacher that protects the owner from bad and evil in life, a tradition that has kept for generations
- A picture painted by his aunt, an amateur painter who also moved to Italy

SMALL SHELF 4 – PERSONAL HISTORY NARRATIVE

- A photo of him with his brothers when he was 11 years old, when he moved from the Eastern part of Ukraine to the Western part, from Luhansk to Lviv, in order to live with his aunt; his parents left to Italy to work there, but he recalls this period as the best 8 years of his life, surrounded by a large Roma family who kept horses and celebrated together



The exhibition of Emília Rigová: And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other, commissioned by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) for the Roma Pavilion at the 23rd International Art Exhibition Triennale Milano, comprises of installation, video, photography, found objects, and a community art project involving contributions from the members of the Roma community, who responded to artists' invitation to mount their own altars and display personal memories and stories. The realization of this site-specific installation and the involvement of local artists and activists eager to share their personal stories was made possible through collaboration between ERIAC and Movimento Kethane, an Italy-based Roma civic organization. Building on Roma cosmology and forms of knowledge and delving into the richness of their spiritual and material traditions, Rigová aptly uses the stories evoked by the altars to cultivate a self-determined imaginarium of Europe's largest ethnic minority. In elaborating hidden Roma stories rooted in affective familial rhizomes, the artist reveals their entanglement with overarching historical, national narratives. Through the collaboration with the local community, the exhibition unfolds as a site-specific Wunderkammer, the tangible materialisation of the diversity of Roma identities and experiences, despite the homogenizing majoritarian narrative.

The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), as a joint initiative of the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations, and the Roma Leaders' initiative—Alliance for the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, has a unique mandate as the transnational, European-level organisation for the recognition of Roma through the means of arts and culture. ERIAC supports a broad network of Roma individuals and organisations working in the fields of arts and culture, giving space to a contemporary art gallery and educational programmes. ERIAC exists to increase the self-esteem of Roma and to decrease negative prejudice of the majority population towards the Roma through arts, culture, history, and language education.

Movimento Kethane – Roma and Sinti for Italy aims to create a stable environment for the inclusion of Roma and Sinti in Italy by advocating for human rights and supporting promotion of Roma cultural heritage. Kethane strives to ensure that all people can gain freedom, equality and dignity.

Unknown Unknowns. An Introduction to Mysteries
23rd International Exhibition, Triennale Milano,
July 15 – December 11 2022.

Roma Pavilion*

Emília Rigová

And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other

Curator: European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC)

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The title of the show 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other' is taken from the title of an essay by French philosopher Luce Irigaray.

ERIAC
EUROPEAN ROMA
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*ERIAC follows the Council of Europe's definition of "Roma". The term is used to describe the largest minority of Europe (10-12 million people) to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.