

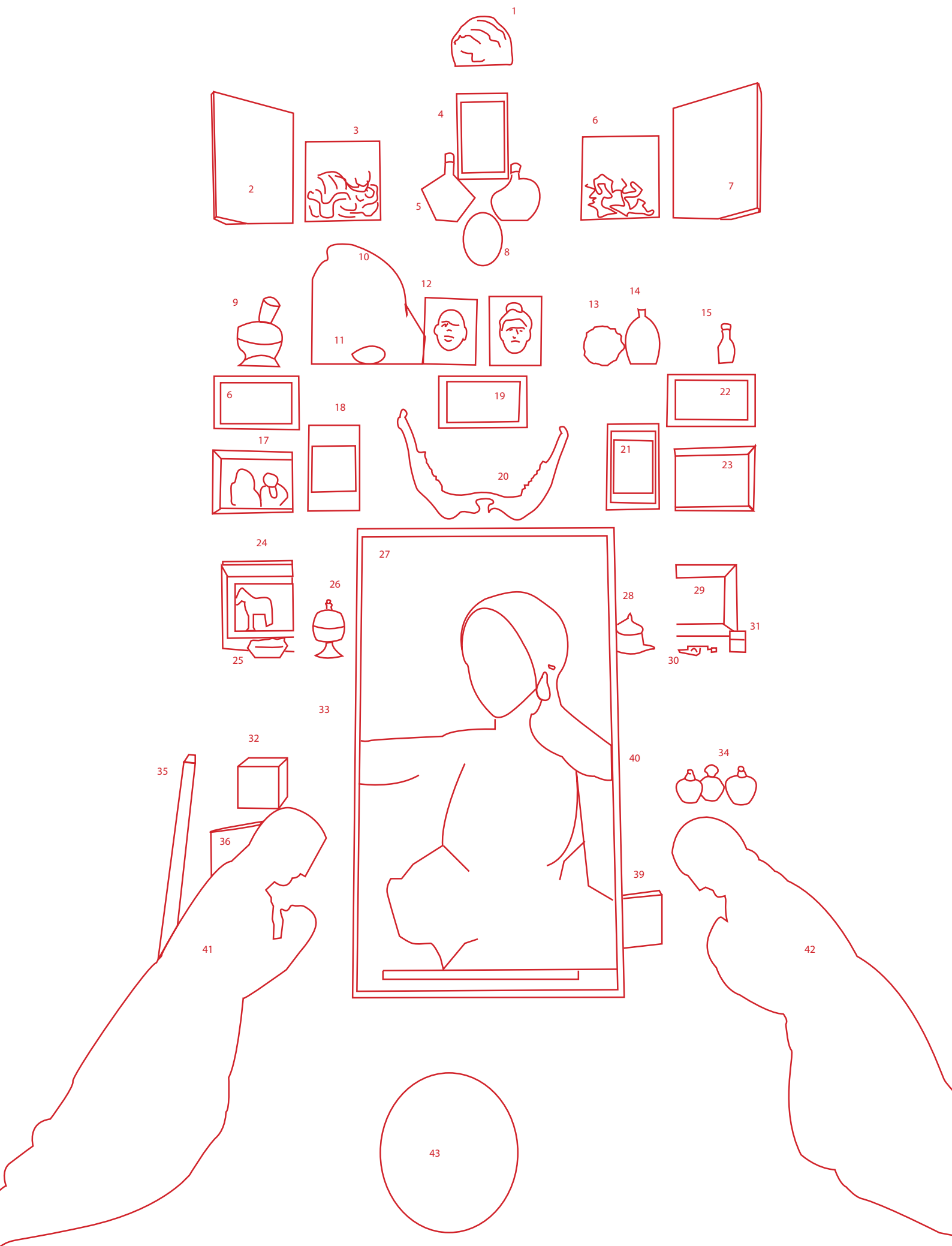
AND THE ONE DOESN'T STIR WITHOUT THE OTHER

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(l)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.



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. *L'úbezné 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