Curatorial Text

The Romanian word for "other", *celălalt*, carries more weight than its English equivalent. It implies both exclusion and a kind of dangerous power. A power that comes precisely from standing outside what a culture agrees to call normal. This is the concept at the heart of the exhibition.

Romanian folklore has always given that power a face. Its outsiders aren't incidental. They are feared and revered in equal measure, because their refusal to conform is exactly what grants them access to something ordinary life can't reach. The *Strigoi* are troubled spirits risen from the grave, bodies society failed to fully contain, now living outside the rules that hold everyone else in place. The *Sânzienele* are gentler but no less liminal. Benevolent maidens, guardians of fertility, mediators between our world and the *Celălalt Tărâm*, the Other World. Different temperaments, both existing at the edge.

Mircea Eliade built his entire theory of religion on this same split. Where human experience is divided into sacred and profane space and time. The other lives in the liminal zone between them. Expelled from the profanity of the everyday, but in touch with the sacred creative. Eliade described encounters with the sacred as encounters with something wholly other. So unfamiliar that its very unfamiliarity fuels its fear. This is the same logic a culture applies to its radical creatives. In this absence of understanding, awe and expulsion reside.

The exhibition inverts this. The artist carries what the sacred requires. The capacity to sit in the liminal, to translate what conformity cannot survive contact with. So, the artist occupies the sacred position. The conformist center becomes the profane. Not because it's wrong to protect itself, but because what it's protecting itself from is usually the only thing capable of renewal.

— Thom Oosterhof