

Exhibition Title: This Is What I See From The Back Window At Sunset

Artist: OMARA Mara Oláh

Curator: Zuzana Janecková, Péter Bencze

Venue: East Slovak Gallery, Košice

Duration: 28 Jan 2026 - 17 May 2026

Photo: Áron Weber

Tags: @omaramaraolah @vychodoslovenska_galeria @everybodyneedsart
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Photo: Áron Weber / Courtesy of VSG, Kosice and Longtermhandstand

Text: Péter Bencze

This Is What I See From The Back Window At Sunset

The exhibition *This Is What I See From the Back Window at Sunset* presents a selection of works by OMARA Mara Oláh (1945–2020), an artist best known for her expressive paintings featuring striking textual elements and a wide range of media. OMARA began creating art at the age of forty three following the death of her mother and the onset of her own health problems. Although she lacked formal training, she produced authentic and highly original works that stand as powerful testimonies to life, identity, and social relationships from the perspective of a Roma woman living in the second half of the twentieth century.

Today, she is considered one of the most significant and widely exhibited Roma women artists on the international art scene, with her works included in the collections of numerous renowned institutions.

The dramaturgy of the exhibition introduces viewers to multiple layers of OMARA's life and practice. Paintings and a short film by Hungarian director Ábel Santa from 2024 present fragments of her biography, including her television appearances as a fortune teller. This aspect inspired the architectural concept of the exhibition and resonates with the curatorial interpretation, which operates on the level of metatexts, deliberately moving away from strictly art historical readings of individual works and instead offering an experimental spectrum of meanings.

A crucial chapter in OMARA's life began when she moved to the village of Szarvasgede, where she built her own wooden house with a swimming pool adapted entirely to her wishes. She called it her "Luxury hut." As a member of an ethnic minority, she encountered prejudice and hostility, yet overcame these challenges through extraordinary energy and humour. She knew exactly what she wanted and what she did not, and her spontaneity proved magnetically appealing. She often inhabited the exhibition spaces themselves, occasionally guiding visitors through her

shows at four o'clock in the morning. Her work provides deep insight into her culture, philosophy, and unforgettable style, while also revealing her activism, including visits to prisons.

Another turning point occurred in 1988 when she painted her first artwork, a portrait of Sophia Loren, based on magazine cut outs collected by her daughter while OMARA was waiting for her child to return with money for a doctor to treat her severe headaches.

Earlier, in 1983, she lost the sight in one eye. This experience later shaped her self identification as the "one eyed Gypsy OMARA," an artist who would go on to conquer the world with her vision of a free life. Her artistic career gathered momentum from 1988 onward. This was followed by the founding of the Mara Gallery, the first Romani gallery in Hungary, in 1993, and by growing international recognition from 2004 onward. Her work has been exhibited at documenta fifteen in Kassel, the Berlin Biennale 2025, the Ludwig Museum in Budapest, the Romani Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and the Kunsthalle Wien.

The central section of the exhibition focuses on OMARA's paintings, offering an overview from her earliest experiments to her final works. Her first drawings and paintings emerged as responses to physical pain, later expanding into self portraits, depictions of her daughter, motifs linked to the house she built, and reflections on women's rights, Roma emancipation, and universal human rights.

Special attention is given to her so called "Blue Period" from 1997 to 2015, characterized by the incorporation of written commentaries into her compositions. Alongside these are her striking "red" paintings. Miniatures form another important chapter, works produced between 2010 and 2020 on unconventional supports such as cigarette packets and wooden wedges. While many of her paintings record milestones of motherhood and social struggle, other series such as Dancing Trees explore landscapes, flowers, and arboreal motifs. The exhibition's title is drawn from a phrase inscribed on one of these works, resonating metaphorically with both her eye operation and her fortune telling practice.

Also on view are OMARA's specially designed tarot cards based on her paintings. Later printed as inserts in women's magazines, the cards depict motifs drawn from everyday life and are accompanied by explanatory texts explaining their symbolism. Original recordings of OMARA's television appearances, during which she predicted callers' futures, are also included.

Visitors enter a visually immersive world saturated with colour and deeply affecting reflections on life, accompanied by music OMARA loved, such as songs by Karel Gott and Engelbert Humperdinck.

An educational guidebook in the form of the artist's own zine accompanies the exhibition, alongside a limited edition series of matches.