



Dream where I curate an exhibit in my childhood home la Jilava

BY **Adriana Oniță**

În prima cameră, three bright paintings of zambile, lalele, narcise. Rothko size. Floor-to-ceiling triptych, petalled in shades of magenta. No vase, no earth. The only reason you know they are flowers is because their tender names repeat in Romanian, echo in your thumping blood, settle in the soft spot behind your earlobes. Zambile, lalele, narcise. This whole stanza might have to be in Romanian, you think, then forget. Then remember, but it's too late. In the middle of the room, a large chestnut table with a sunlit bowl of gutui, which appear in Romanian, since *quince* is not adequate to describe the real meat of the fruit. The table is so large that you are forced to stand close to the paintings, and you start believing they are landscapes, or portraits. Anything but still life. Wait. I should have mentioned there are windows—două ferestre, nord și est—and the pale pink afternoon light slices the bowl of gutui so precisely, that you start to wonder if that's what you should have been looking at all along. There are no didactic panels. There are no visitors, but you. There are no flowers. Nici o zambilă, nici o lalea, nici o narcisă.

În camera doua, covoare pe pereți. Rugs hang on all four walls. Very Romanian. You almost skip this room, certain that you've seen these scenes already, that they lack surprise. Stag, roe deer, cadmium blue sky, fish that turn into snakes, snakes that turn into fish, women and men kissing in burgundy robes. There are no windows in this room. This is the dark stanza where you used to sleep, sob, memorize poems. Recite, forget, wait. Dry midnight paintings cu feonul. Drown out the moans. Pronounce the word *treaz*, over and over. Eat your parizer și cascaval sendviș in your cobalt uniform and plastic headband. Wait. The darkness was good. Light was not necessary to learn the difference between smuls și atins, farmec și rugăciune, iasomie și adevăr. This is the room where you learned to manipulate. People, words, dreams, silence. These rugs tell stories about you, nu invers. Look closer and witness them unravel, the scenes changing. From stag to doe, from cadmium blue to ochre, from kiss to atac cardiac.

În camera treia, a sensory installation. Aroma pâinii din traistă. Dulceață de vișine pe masă. English will never be sufficient for this. Un nuc imens crește în mijlocul camerei. How am I supposed to translate that? A walnut tree grows in the middle of this third room. Dar nucul și-a pierdut toate frunzele. It is November and you are reliving your worst nightmare, whatever shape that may take. Each exhibit visitor is compelled to relive their own agony here. Yours involves death in the bed right next to yours, right where the walnut tree now grows, leafless. Când a tăiat tataie nucul din grădiniță, ai plâns o săptămână. On top of the bones of the severed walnut tree, you wept for a week, for the tree, but never for him. Here you are, the sound of two decades whirring past, nu contează. You are eight or twenty-eight, and you are glad the dark-haired man died in the adjacent bed. You had a dream where all of this happened. It did.

Open to all students at any level at the University of Alberta, MacEwan University, and Athabasca University, the Canadian Literature Centre Poetry Contest awards the best original poem. The theme was re/placing language.