

31. January 2025

## Dear Members and Friends of the EOA,

I wish you all a happy and creative New Year!

There is both good and bad news to share. The good news is that 2024 saw numerous exciting exhibitions and projects focusing on Outsider Art across our countries, and more are planned for 2025. The community continues to grow, albeit slowly. The bad news is that the ongoing reduction in funding for cultural institutions in Europe, which began last year, is also affecting the supported studios and museums within our field.

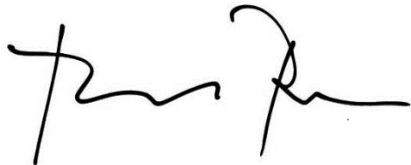
In the Netherlands, the Museum van de Geest/Museum of the Mind (Haarlem, Amsterdam), which won the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA) in 2022 for its exceptional achievements, has been struggling for some time. In Germany, the renowned Museum Prinzhorn Collection (Heidelberg) is facing risks, as Heidelberg University Hospital can no longer cover its annual maintenance costs alone. In Switzerland, the Bern Psychiatry Museum (Waldau), home to the famous Morgenthaler Collection, is fighting for a redesign and its survival, after the University Psychiatric Services Bern withdrew its already limited financial support for 2025. In Belgium, the Dr. Guislain Museum (Ghent), which receives funding from the Flemish Government but none from the City of Ghent and no substantial support from the founding organization, is experiencing financial difficulties due to a lack of substantial support from the founding organization. In fact, across Europe, public funding for museums dedicated to art from a psychiatric context or Outsider Art is even significantly lower than that for regular art museums or historical institutions.

This trend in institutions focused on human well-being, mental health, and particularly the destigmatization of psychiatric experiences, is deeply concerning. It comes at a time when the need to address mental illness in Western societies is growing. Public recognition of psychological challenges is on the rise, whether in the workplace, where the consequences of increased stress are becoming more acknowledged, or in the wake of trauma faced by victims of environmental disasters, war, and displacement. At the same time, cultural leaders are choosing to forgo the expertise of professionals in this field and are cutting off vital support for these museums. This undermines efforts to destigmatize those with psychiatric experiences and disabilities, and their cultural participation in our societies. Art and culture play a crucial role in conveying the lived experiences of individuals who are often marginalized due to exceptional psychological experiences. The recent cultural policy decisions are all the more baffling given that inclusion and participation have been politically emphasized at all levels in recent years.

The EOA board has decided to bring this concerning development to the attention of the regional offices of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and to urge them to address the issue publicly. However, we must do more, as these institutions are crucial to the continued progress and visibility of Outsider Art.

I look forward to personally discussing this and other topics with you at the EOA's International Conference and Visiting Program 2025, which will be held this year at BILBAO FORMARTE in Bilbao, Spain, from June 12th to 14th, under the theme "LIVING AND SURVIVING IN OUTSIDER ART IN OUR COUNTRY." The Annual General Assembly will take place on June 14th. I hope to see you there!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas Röske', with a stylized, cursive script.

Thomas Röske

President of EOA

EUROPEAN **OUTSIDER ART** ASSOCIATION