

## REVIEW

by Professor Dr. Krasimir Andonov,  
National Academy of Theatre and Film Arts Krastyo Sarafov,  
regarding the competition for the academic position  
Associate Professor in professional field 8.4. Theatre and film art  
(Photography), announced by the New Bulgarian University and promulgated  
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The only candidate who submitted documents for participation in the competition announced by New Bulgarian University is Ch. Assistant Prof. Encho Naydenov Naydenov, PhD.

The candidate for the position is an established and renowned professional in the field of visual arts (photography and videography), whose work is primarily focused in the genres of fashion, advertising and portraiture. At the same time, Dr. Encho Naydenov is also a long-time lecturer (since 2001 until now) in the Department of Cinema, Advertising and Show Business at New Bulgarian University where in 2013 he defended his doctorate on the topic "Impact of digital photographic technologies on professional lighting".

According to the self-assessment card presented by the candidate (bibliographic data), Ch. Assistant Professor Encho Naydenov meets the requirements for the scientometric indicators required under of the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. Therefore, the materials proposed by him on the procedure can be considered and evaluated.

Naydenov has presented a creative summary (according to the author's definition), with the title "Specific photographic expressive and technical means in stage photography" as the main evidentiary material in the competition, The text contains descriptions and reflections in connection with the realization of two author's projects of the photographer, i.e. the *Red Apple* series, shot on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the EVA magazine, and the solo exhibition *Latent Portraits*.

I find Encho Naydenov's creative resume fascinating for two reasons. On the one hand, the photographs of the attached projects present the author in the light of his artistic performances, and on the other hand, the analyzes and interpretation of the achievements give us his point of view as a teacher. In a practical discipline like photography not only is it important for teachers to photograph well, it is also important for them to be able to deliver, systematize and communicate their practical experience.

Over the years, Encho Naydenov has worked for almost all Bulgarian lifestyle magazines such as *Amika*, *Beauty*, *Egoist*, *El*, but it seems that his cooperation with *EVA* magazine has proved particularly fruitful. The photo sessions "Bang Bang", "Absolute Classic", "Twilight", "Six Moments of Inspiration", "MONOGAMOUS", "Annie Hall and Her Sisters", "Second Skin", "Taming the Shine", "One Molecule of Water" shot by Naydenov in a team with creative directors Bilyana Hinova and Georgi Manov have remained iconic in the publication's production. Thus it is quite reasonable that the editors of *EVA* invited him to work on the *Red Apple* project, on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the magazine.

According to of Encho Naydenov's own description, the work on the series was planned for three shooting days, and it was expected that 6-7 shots of famous guests of the event will be taken per day. It was filmed in the lobby of the modern residential building *Red Apple* in Sofia, and the characters of the photos are people of different genders and ages. The last condition of the photographic task together with the rhythm with which it was expected to be performed (6-7 frames per day) determine its complexity. It is very difficult to find a visual solution that makes many different people look equally good in a photo. Bearing in mind that the shooting time for each frame is no more than an hour.

The realized photographic series shows that Encho Naydenov has found the right pictorial approach. The key to his success is the decision to use front overhead lighting, which "paints" well the different types of faces (from Nikol Stankulova to Tatiana Lolova and Lili Ivanova...) What's more - thanks to the light, the portraits and the overall atmosphere of the event look glamorous and festive, united in unified visual style.

I need to make two clarifications here. The classic approach to work in such a situation requires finding a specific lighting solution for each personality, for each face. A rule that the photographer gives up.

And secondly, the light coming along the axis of the camera (front light) is considered the most inappropriate type of lighting on a three-dimensional object, the cast shadows "hiding" behind the objects themselves and in the photographs they look flat and without volume. In the session, Naydenov did not comply with this rule either...

I would like to reiterate that the outcome is more than successful, and the reason for this success lies exactly in the disregard of the rules..

I am commenting on the creative approach of Encho Naydenov in the project, not simply because he broke the "taboo" of generally accepted norms. It is clear that a professional who works in the field of fashion and advertising often encounters situations that require going beyond the norm. I am impressed, however, with how well the photographer's creative brief describes the path to making such decisions. Naydenov explains that given the limited shooting time, he was well aware he would not have the opportunity to look for the specific lighting for each character. And that the "bulky", side light would be suitable for some faces and very inappropriate for others. So prior to the session he decided to work with a front overhead light, by which he could imitate the effect of the camera's built-in flash. Aware of the danger of obtaining a "flat" image, Encho Naydenov began to look for ways to avoid it. He experimented using the power of a studio flash and design the light path to find the right direction and distance. He also selected the correct modifier for the character of the light flux. With this, he arrived at the solution that created the desired results, not only for different types of faces, but also for many different sizes - from a close-up of a single person to full-length multi-figure compositions.

I find it very important and valuable that this whole process of decision making and implementing a difficult project can reach Dr. Encho Naydenov's students.

His main task as a teacher is to teach them the laws and rules of photographic art. But it is also important for students to know that rules in art are not dogmas and they can be broken. And it is of utmost importance for students to understand when this can happen and that disregard for norms for the sake of disregard and originality is not the way. Here the role of the teacher is particularly important - he must explain (best by sharing his own experience) the fine line between error and solution.

The second project with which Encho Naydenov presents himself at the competition is the solo photography exhibition *Latent Portraits*. The exposition, consisting of 25 colour and

black-and-white female portraits, was shown in January 2022, in the exhibition spaces of New Bulgarian University.

“Latent image” is a photographic term from the classical period of the medium that describes the latent image produced in silver halide crystals when exposed to light. It is an invisible picture on the film strip that only the photographer knows about. It depends on his will whether this preserved moment will turn into a real photograph or not.

Reading Encho Naydenov's exposition on the occasion of the *Latent Portraits* exhibition, I think that perhaps his thoughts were similar when he selected the images.

As a seasoned artist who has photographed literally anything, Naydenov reflects on how many different portraits a photographer can capture. How many different types of light can it use, how many different sizes and directions to the subject can it have? And does the combination between them give all that a creator could achieve in a lifetime?

It seems that every person involved in any form of art long enough at some point comes to the question of "how do I not repeat myself"? Or "how to repeat the same plot in countless different ways?"

Answers to these philosophical-existential questions have been given through the works of many artists in the history of art for example, by the Japanese artist Hokusai (1760–1849), who painted the famous series *36 Views of Mount Fuji*, or by landscape photographer Ansel Adams (1902-1984), who returned to the same places in the American park Yosemite for years and photographed them in exactly the same compositions.

Encho Naydenov gives credence to Joe McNally, who says: "The language of light. This is how we draw the history of our objects. Just like language, we use the same words over and over again. But we just combine them differently every time we bring the camera to our eye".

However, it is my belief that the best answer for Naydenov is the one that he himself gives with his works. If we refer again to the name of his exhibition, these are those manifestations of the latent visions that only he saw and to which he gave life.

The identity of the photographs from the *Latent Portraits* exhibition is also related to concepts that are strictly specific to the work of its author.

First of all, Encho Naydenov is a photographer who has always thought things through and has in his head a solution for the most appropriate technique in the specific situation. My

impression is that he always chooses the combination of camera-lens-illuminator(s)-character of lighting according to the results he needs. As he himself writes in his exposition, he knows when to give up the shiny overly megapixel camera, in favour of the soft and poetic picture of an old lens and an old camera.

Moreover, there is no excessive ostentatiousness in Naydenov's portrait photographs. His pictures are straightforward and clean. Dr. Liliana Karadzova, Encho Naydenov's teaching colleague, describes his work as a "minimalist approach in portrait photography" and compares his style to that of the great American portraitist Richard Avedon. I will agree with the definition of Dr. Karadzova that an approach to simplifying the image can be seen in the works of both photographers, the background is clean, without additional elements on it, there are no "twisted" and complicated poses of the models, no heavy make-up or obtrusive accessories. And I will add to the above by saying that all these decisions leading to the purity of the composition are also the reason for focusing on the one and most important thing, i.e. the emotional presence of the character in the photograph.

The power and impact of the portrait image is in revealing the person in front of the camera. Encho Naydenov seeks (and succeeds) to capture precisely this revelation in each of the portraits. In some of his photos we see direct and sharp looks into the lens, in which we can read audacity, challenge, assertiveness, hidden or overt sex appeal... In other photos, the eyes of the models are lowered to the side of the camera, but in their presence a range of feelings and emotions is revealed.

In fact, if I had to summarize, perhaps the most important feature of Encho Naydenov's portrait photography is the fact that the people in his images are real. His pictures lack fakery or posturing. The openness of the models to the camera speaks of the mutual trust between the portrait and the photographer. And when such trust exists, the emotion of the moment cannot fail to reach and empathize with the one who looks at the image.

Encho Naydenov is known as an author for whom the photography studio is home and portraiture, advertising and fashion are his field. Therefore, I think I need to make two additional points which present the candidate in a slightly different light.

In 2014, Naydenov opened the *35 mm* exhibition at the Vivacom Art Hall. It consisted of 44 photographs of landscape, impression and detail. What united them was the fact that all images were shot with a 35mm focal length lens, hence the name of the exhibition itself. I think the photographs from the exhibition are a good example of how one can also do well in

areas that are outside his main interests when they have the ability to "see". The landscape photos from the series show open natural spaces dominated by a feeling of freedom and tranquillity. The details are graphic, textured, monochrome or colourful, each one conveying a sense of the beauty of form, light and colour. 35 mm is a project in which the human presence is absent but nevertheless the photographs carry a load of life.

Even more unexpected and curious is the exhibition entitled *The Wild Nature of Sozopol*, shown during the *Apollonia 2016* arts festival, and subsequently at New Bulgarian University.

The exposition presents almost imperceptible, miniature animal and plant species from the natural environment near the city of Sozopol. They are arranged and photographed in a way that turns each composition into a separate microcosm. The installations (that's the only way I can call these wondrous paintings) are the work of biologists, but the shooting - light, optics, scale - is what makes them extraordinary.

*35 mm* and *Wildlife of Sozopol* are definitely not typical of Naydenov's style yet looking at them, I would recommend that Encho Naydenov should find more time for these research projects of his. I am convinced they carry emotion in the same way as the rest of his works.

Finally, I will briefly dwell on the teaching and lecturing activities of the candidate in the competition.

The amount of work Encho Naydenov does as a teacher and his teaching activity are evident from the self-assessment brief.

Naydenov develops courses in the Bachelor's programs of Photography, Photographic Art, Advertising, Advertising Management and Visual Branding and Graphic Design delivered at the Cinema, Advertising and Show Business Department. Furthermore, he is the main author of the Master's programme in Photography at the university.

Along with the commitments of a full-time teacher in the program of the Department of Cinema, Advertising and Show business, Encho Naydenov is also the organizer of many extracurricular activities.

He was the leader of the workshops "Working with light in the studio", held on May 19 and 20, 2018; "Storytelling in action", held on July 24 and 25, 2021 at NBU, "Fashion and advertising photography", held on 19 -20.03.2016, in Varna, to name a few.

Naydenov is the author of numerous public lectures: "Portrait Photography" delivered on September 5, 2018 with the organizer "Photo Vacation"; "Why do we take portraits?", held live and online on 25.04.2019, organized by Fotosvyat; "Advertising photography as a business", held on 29.03.2022, International Forum for Photographers and Videographers; "Architectural photography", held on 27.10.2017 at the University of Architecture, Construction and Geodesy; "Photography as a way of life", held on 08.11.2016, organizer Fotosynthesis; "Advertising photography - What is it?", held on 22.10.2017, organizer - National Association of Professional Weddings our photographers and videographers; "Portrait and Light. The Living Portrait", held on 22.10.2018, organizer - National Association of Professional Wedding Photographers and Videographers.

The reason behind listing in detail the held lectures and their organizers is because I believe they are indicative of the attitude of the professional circles towards the photographer and teacher Encho Naydenov. As can be seen from the list, his lecturing qualities are sought after and appreciated by various associations, organizations and universities.

A teacher's scientific work is also an important factor in their academic development. According to the rating card, Encho Naydenov has the required number of publications and his articles cover the required volume of citations.

With this final clarification, I trust the portrait of the candidate Encho Naydenov Naydenov is complete.

### **Conclusion**

Given the artistic value of the applicant's submitted photographic works, his overall creative work and his long-standing work as a teacher and respected lecturer, and based on the arguments set out above in this review, I vote in favour of the fact that Ch. Assistant Professor Encho Naydenov Naydenov, PhD should take the position of Associate Professor in professional direction 8.4. Theatre and film art (Photography).

Therefore, I propose the candidacy of Ch. Associate Professor Encho Naydenov Naydenov to be forwarded for voting by the Academic Council of the New Bulgarian University.

Sofia, 01/03/2023

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