

REVIEW

by

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member of the scientific panel for awarding the academic degree Associate Professor in 8.4. *Theatre and Film Art* (Graphic Design), announced in SG, issue 14/18.02.2022, candidate: Chavdar Gyuzelev

I. Assessment of the compatibility with the nationally required minimum for awarding academic degrees and the requirements of new Bulgarian university

After having considered the materials presented by the only candidate, Chavdar Gyuzelev, for participation in the contest, it can be claimed that he meets the nationally required minimum laid out in the *Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act*, as well as the requirements of NBU, which is a premise for reviewing the application in essence.

II. Research (Creative) Activities and Results

What the candidate has enclosed to the set of documents for the competition is: an extended statement, entitled *Visual Objectives and Specific Features of Graphics, Painting, Photography and Graphic Design*, amounting to forty-one pages and describing the theoretical framework of the process of creating and realizing artistic products. The candidate has also included references to reviews and awards received for his works. What he has listed as realized artistic projects are the stage designs of two plays: *Liv Stein*, by Nino Haratischwili, directed by Kris Sharkov, in *Little City Theatre – Off the Channel* (2016) and *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Becket, director Deyan Donkov, in *Azaryan Theatre* (2018). The album of photographs *Discovered Installations*, published by *Black Flamingo*, 2018, is listed as a solo artistic achievement, which is not among the main works presented for acquiring an academic degree. A few other artistic products, smaller in scope, are also enclosed, accompanied by other supporting artistic projects. There is also a sufficient number of reviews for the candidates artistic projects and products in specialized journals as well as evidence for participations in international and national creative and artistic projects.

A sufficient number of citations and references to realized artistic projects, published in Reputable professional publications, is also listed in the bibliography and the table of scientometric indicators. Among the reviewers there are quite a few prominent names, such as Alexandar Kyosev, Georgi Lozanov, Yassen Guyzelev, etc. Furthermore, the candidate has participated in the international artistic project, *The VIII International Triennial of Graphics* (Sofia, 2019) and has been awarded the the award of Fabriano Papers, *Directa*. Chavdar Gyuzelev has been awarded three times for his stage designs: with the 2015 *Askeer Prize* for the set design of the play *Whatever You Want Me to Be* by Luigi Pirandello; the 2015 *Ikar Award* for the same play and the *Ikar Award* for the stage Design of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, director Tedi Moskov, in the National Theatre *Ivan Vazov*.

Chavdar Gyuzelev is a member of the Bulgarian Artists' Union, Section *Painting*. The author's exhibitions in Prague, Berlin, Vienna and Paris are evidence of works of art with international recognition, applied in practice.

III. Teaching and Training Activity

The candidate has been an active participant in the activities of the department he works for by improving the programs and devising courses for these programs. Examples include: Improving the Bachelor Degree Program *Graphic Design*, within the *Cinema Advertisement and Show Business* Department; devising and teaching courses within the Bachelor Degree Program *Graphic Design* (e.g. *Compositional Approaches in Graphic Design*, *Composition in Graphic Design – Part II*, *Composition in Graphic Design – Part I*, *Illustration – Part I*, *Practice*, etc.)

Students' assessment of the learning satisfaction in courses taught by Ch. Asst. Prof. Chavdar Gyuzelev is positive and above the required minimum, which I do consider particularly important despite the fact that this indicator has a limited, if not insignificant, importance in scientometry. The fact that all his graduates, in the period 2017-2021, thirty students in total, have successfully defended their thesis projects also speaks of the successful and responsible teaching activity of the candidate. Mr. Gyuzelev is also the author of a significant number of teaching materials uploaded on the educational platform Moodle for the following courses: *Compositional Approaches in Graphic Design*, *Composition in Graphic Design – Part II*, *Composition in Graphic Design – Part I*, *Illustration – Part I*, etc.

It is obvious from the indicators provided by the candidate, that he diligently performs his duties as a tutor and takes active participation in the academic life at

NBU. It is also noteworthy that he is an active citizen with firm positions about a range of social issues, related to our political, social and cultural life.

In the statement of his art portfolio, entitled *Visual Objectives and Specific Features of Graphics, Painting, Photography and Graphic Design*, the author reviews his achievements as a visual artist. As an artist who effortlessly moves through various territories like painting, graphics, graphic design and typography, stage design and photography. I cannot think of another contemporary Bulgarian artist who has devised his own style and has left his mark in so many different, though seemingly similar areas of visual arts. As he himself confesses. “I do believe that the artist should not specialize in a certain area. The artist is a free creature and the more the genres, the styles the directions in art they encompass, the richer they will be.” What is particularly worth noting is that Gyuzelev feels just as comfortable in the solitude of painting and graphics, as he does in the clamor of street photography or when bearing the responsibility of teamwork in theatre. I believe this is a genuine gift. “The creative work should be done freely and effortlessly; I let the material lead me along the way in unexpected directions; I also like surprising myself; I like getting lost in what I do; I like roaming and discovering new combinations of techniques, materials and themes, without losing touch with both the classical and the modern.” The freedom Chavdar is talking about should be the natural state of every artist. It originates from the trust in, and a strong connection with, one’s own intuitions. The text that the candidate offers to our attention reveals an artist with a rich erudition, and a connoisseur of traditions, but these qualities do not interfere with the children's curiosity, with which he jumps the well-guarded boundaries of, supposedly adjacent, areas of visual arts. The statement does not explore two of the main activities the author performs, in which he is recognized as a true master – theatrical stage design and book design, as they are the focal point of his doctoral dissertation, *Constructing space in theatre and in the book*, which he has successfully defended in 2016.

The text is divided into several themes: *Painting and Graphics, Photography, Graphic Design and Typography*, and *Conclusion*.

In *Painting and Graphics*, the author, quite rightly, pays attention to his anniversary exhibition entitled *Heads in Free Flight* (Rakursi Gallery, 2021). “The exhibition includes works in two directions, the first one being large-format lithographic prints, in lava technique, with these soaring heads and free images and objects. The other one consisting of paintings freed from any human presence – retracted through his set designer work in the theatre” (Y. Popova). Instead of trying to analyze himself, the author prefers to give his competent viewers a say,

citing reviews and feedback of his works. Since I know his paintings well, and I will not hide that I like them very much, I fully share what G. Lozanov said: „There's no down or up here, no left and no right; Whatever perspective you choose to look at his paintings from, it's always the correct one; because *correct* does not exist as well. These are geometric shapes and human heads, frozen in fixed compositions, floating in pieces of black, outer space, as much as to awaken fleeting hope for order and meaning, for law and trust. Before you know it, the artist, who has already been involved in a conspiracy with theater and myth, jokes; that for him God is a child who plays with cubes, and we, for no particular reason, have chosen to call his play "our life".

The longest chapter, *Photography* is Chavdar's own review of his album of photographs *Discovered Installations (2018, Black Flamingo)*. "My photographs are not only provoked by issues of aesthetics, but also by social issues. The reason to publish a collection of photographs for me was to create a sort of an archive, as no one notices the environment that we live in, while certain elements of that environment quickly fade away and disappear. I take photos with a digital camera, and, in most cases, I only take one photo. I do not do any further processing of the photos, as it is not the technology that matters most for me. It only focuses the eye of the photographer." This chapter also contains reviews from authors line L. Boyadziev, A. Kyosev, G. Lozanov, etc., who define the candidate as a "visual activist", "a passer-by who never passes by" , "a decorative absurdist". I follow these photographs of his with particular curiosity, as they pass their first test on social media. I am impressed by Chavdar's sensitive eye for the visual absurdity on a micro level. And this absurdity, when isolated from the environment of the banal, often becomes a kindly verdict on our life.

In the third chapter *Graphic Design and Typography*, the author sets the theoretical framework of graphic design, establishing the compositional principles: alignment, balance, contrast, accent, gestalt principles, harmony, dynamics, proportion, distance, repetition, rhythm, connectivity, empty space, etc. "The modern graphic designer must have multiple competencies in different fields, required for through the different stages of the design: collection of materials, formation of concepts, sifting out preliminary ideas and projects, figurative thinking, working with photographs and illustrations, word processing, creation of a prototype. The designer often has to balance on the boundary of aesthetics and ergonomics, management and psychology, philosophy and law, to be proficient in software, which all make it possible to give a spectacular shape to the designer's initial creative concepts, that he/she had considered yielding and

had presented to the assignor.” This is the chapter in which Mr. Gyuzelev reviews his particularly successful works: the redesign of *Kultura* magazine and the design of the periodical *Christianity and Culture*.

In the conclusion of the statement accompanying his portfolio of documents and materials for the competition, the applicant indicates that: “Graphic designers are the people who build a bridge between art and design, oriented and centered around functionality. They bring together the power of art and functionality within certain limits, defined by specific objectives and specific audience, and make beauty work for people.”

At the end of my review, I would like to point out the following: I have had the opportunity to work with Chavdar Gyuzelev in two plays for *Little City Theatre – Off the Channel: When the Rain Stopped* by A. Bovell, director Zornitsa-Sofia Popgancheva and *Liv Stein*, by Nino Haratischwili, directed by Kris Sharkov. Both plays have earned quite a few national awards. What has always impressed me about his work as a stage designer, is his absolute dedication to the final result. Even if that sometimes means, that he has to reshape his own ideas, to modify and reconstruct them until the very last second before the performance. And all that is done within his subtle presence, so as not to affect the rehearsal process. At times, I have noticed his silhouette on the side of the stage, between the scenes, as if he were observing the different perspectives of his ideas, already realized, or keeping an eye on whether the actors were comfortable enough in the environment he had built.

Or maybe at this point it is the visual absurdity that provokes the author, though the author doesn't dare use his camera, out of respect for theatre and actors alike.

Conscientiously and with conviction, I vote “Yes” for Ch. Asst. Prof. Chavdar Gyuzelev’s being awarded the academic degree *Associate Professor* and I recommend that the scientific panel support his application!

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Sofia