

Snezhina Biserova

**HABILITATION THESIS**

**Transformations**

*/between metaphor and abstraction/*

If I have to determine my author's view, it is aimed at preserving the specifics of the classic type of graphics. At the same time, I actively experiment with a number of innovative methods and techniques of work, featuring a low degree of toxicity and providing fascinating opportunities for enrichment and expansion of the pictorial register.

The digital tools for designing and processing images also occupy an important place in my work. I expose my ideas equally comfortably, both in the range of classical graphic techniques and in digital graphics, and I often place them freely in both areas, thus creating graphic sheets of hybrid character.

In the graphical composition I strive to minimize the narration in favor of an impact of the image which has been rendered limpid to the utmost. By a clearly stated individual pictorial registry I try to construct a world, a new reality with a distinct autonomy. This modification of reality refers not so much to the vision as to the determination of a particular plastic problem, condition, metaphor or symbol beyond its purely sensory essence. I oppose objects and textures, directly taken from Nature with dynamic, hand drawn, space-structuring graphical elements.

Over the years I have tried to develop a recognizable artistic language capable of generating visual metaphors without the necessity of the integration of a narrative – a language which, however, is sufficiently polyvalent and universal, so as not to situate me in a self-repetition. In this aspect, I consider the graphics included in my habilitation thesis as contributions to knowledge in the sphere of art.

The theme of my habilitation thesis – *Transformations – between metaphor and abstraction* expresses my plastic searches in the most precise sense.

Duality, namely the unity and opposition of the elements of Creation, is manifested at all levels of existence and, particularly, in the fundamental laws of the plastic arts. It also stands in the very essence of the graphics as one of the main types of fine arts, in which the creation and transfer of the original image on paper (or another base) is done by the matrix processed by the artist.

The black and white, the discreet or almost absent color, the playing with the positives and the negatives of the forms, with light and shadow; the mirror images – that has been the dominant behavior in my graphic works over the last few years.

To try to discover the countless subtle manifestations of eternity – matter and spirit, space and time, and among all this – the man with his drama – that's the meaning and the direction of my chosen path as an artist; leaving aside the ephemerally attractive and commercial, to touch as closely as possible the essence of things with the means that I have.

For me art is an endless journey to what is the most unknown – namely, to myself. Therefore, everyone has to go alone along this way of self-discovery and self-knowledge. No one knows what he would find on the way, just as nobody knows his own boundaries. But would it be sensible to choose a particular way if we knew in advance where it would lead us?

In my habilitation thesis I have developed two main sections that correspond to the topic of this competition. Within the first section, covering the main area of my creative interests – Graphics and technologies, I have structured three sub-sections, corresponding to the increasingly distinctly defined areas in the development of contemporary graphic art with a view to the onset and the continued presence of digital technologies in its territory. In accordance with the theme of the competition, I have included a second section with works from the sphere of Graphic Design – mainly completed posters and advertising materials for art exhibitions, bibliophile editions and an artist's book.

## **1. Graphics and Technologies**

**1. Graphical sheets created using the traditional classical printmaking techniques without any or with a limited inclusion of digital applications.**

**1.2. Art works – graphic originals, designed and completed entirely through the components of digital technologies – digital prints.**

**1.3. Graphic originals in which the digital technologies build upon or mediate at different stages of the design and prepress of the matrix, processed and manually printed in a traditional way, such as intaglio or surface printing methods. Here are the so-called “hybrid techniques” including creation and hand printing from paper matrices, pigment transfer, digitally printed color pads, overprinted with handmade matrices (aquatint, siligraphy), embossing, again mediated by the computer prepress for perfect register.**

## **2. Graphic Design**

**2.1. Graphic Design products for visual identity of exhibitions (posters, invitations, labels).**

**2.2. Typographic and Design solutions in bibliophile editions and artist`s book.**

## **3. Additional works**

As additional works to the main habilitation thesis I have included 3 series of small format graphics and selected bookplates from different creative periods. The works are completed in classical and digital graphic techniques. They have participated and some of them have been awarded within various international graphic contests and exhibitions.

### **Description of the author's creative method used for the graphic artworks:**

I present the different artistic and technological contributory aspects in my habilitation thesis with a view to their application for solving specific tasks in my creative and teaching practice. All included graphic works are implemented in response to specific contracts; the artworks have been presented repeatedly in various national and international graphic forums; they could be seen in the respective catalogues and some of them have been awarded.

The practice of graphic art has always been open to experimentation and innovations. The role of print media in modern culture is changing hastily and in this context a new, powerful energy enters the world of graphical communication. The boundaries of the different creative spheres are intertwined and increasingly blurred.

When a printing technique becomes less used as a means of expression, its cultural context is inevitably transformed. The artist-printmaker is the one who reinvents the old technologies in a new way. And, indeed, every printed method that the contemporary printmakers are currently using is based on the re-contextualization of classical technologies, which in their nature have not changed to this day. The modern artist continues to discover new and different applications

of the traditional printmaking techniques, relying on his individual understanding and style, as well as, often, on chance and play. The integration of new methods and materials often extends and shifts the boundaries of what is possible to unexpected dimensions. The computer connected to the necessary peripherals (high quality scanner and various types of printers and plotters) offers new directions in the implementation of the ideas of the modern printmaker.

But this technique (constantly renewing) has another role in graphic art as a powerful tool to compose, process and recreate the visual material in order to prepare it for hand transfer to a printing plate for manual editing in any of the classical techniques. For many modern artists, including me, the digital software is a tool for drawing, and manipulating images with unprecedented ease, integrating together visual elements of a different nature and origin. I need to note here that in all my works, created after 2006 - 2008, digital technologies are invariably present at the stage of their design, regardless of what type of printing process has subsequently been implemented.

The layering of images, as a conceptual premise, conveys different ideas of time, natural and physical structures, psychic powers (memories and their transformations in fantasies; surreal and metaphorical images). In another aspect, the layers are coatings, interventions, boundaries, masks and filters. They are identified with a variety of actions, change (a censorship of a kind) or simply a prepress tool to provide color report. And although, visually the layers could seem simple, in fact they are conceptually complex. Graphic sheet, motivated by the idea and logic of the layers, prompts (requires) the viewer to align the different layers in order to grasp the meaning and interpret it.

In the aspects examined, the logic, repetition, upgrading and changes of images in layers (through textures, filters, transparency and blending) are transformed into a specific method of composing the graphic sheet, which is sufficiently personalized so as to allow me to consider it as a contributory element in the formation and development of my own artistic language. In the process of using and working with layers I develop every concrete graphic series of mine.

The variational development of the concept (again to a large extent on the principle of the play) through the use of the digital software, allows me to achieve a large (practically unlimited) number of plastic transformations with the inclusion of elements (not the collage principle), which are structural and essential. In this way I often implement the main conceptual and architectonic links in each of the graphic series.

In the process of the development of my artistic concept, I shape and guide each of the graphical series to a specific printing completion – implementation entirely in an original classical printmaking technique; in different forms of hybrid printing processes (digital printing with manual overprinting ) or entirely as a digital print. The process of operation involves a wide range of manipulations in the different layers, experimentations with their blending options and a rich experience in predicting the final effect; planning of the order in the application of the chosen techniques in the hybrid printing and last but not least, an appropriate selection of paper (or other non-conventional printed media), which in the most optimal degree would show the qualities of the graphical concept.

In the working process on my dissertation thesis "Siligraphy – a waterless method of surface printing" (successfully defended in 2006/2007) I had the opportunity to experiment with a variety of materials with a view to their application in Siligraphy, which is a surface printing technique. Even then I noticed the qualities of the dry laser-printing toners (available as powder that represents a styrene-acrylate polymer, respectively pigmented in black or in a colour pigment), which make it applicable also in intaglio, as after heating the laser-printing toners form a stable coating film against the corrosive action of acids and salts. Moreover, especially in combination with rosin powder (which is used in classical aquatint), the protective coating is extremely durable, even when using stronger acidic or saline solutions. As with the surface printing, here the ways of application of the toner are varied – by dry atomization, in the form of a toner ink (water dispersion or spirit solution – using a brush) and by manual transfer of a printer-copy from a laser printer). Unlike the application of the printer-copy transfer in siligraphy, which requires a positive image, in intaglio print is used a negative of the image, and in the graduated aquatint – several different in their contrast negatives – one copy for each of the different grades. The image is prepared using the digital software in the desired form and is turned in negative. The negative is transferred manually to the zinc plate, rosin is applied in the traditional way, then it is heated and etched in grades. Rosin supports the dry toner particles and strengthens them. The coating formed this way is characterized by great resistance. An image could be transferred to the zinc plate in a mirror form using a toner ink drawing on transparent PVC (Mylar, Veralite) with the help of the etching press, then is again heated in combination with aquatint as proceeded in the classical manner. Subsequently, the drawing on the zinc plate could be continued with a toner ink or permanent markers, or (instead of) using the retouching etching ground; it could be scratched and finalized with the etching tools. Different combinations between the two transfer methods are also possible. The transferring of negatives requires particular experience and precision, especially in larger sizes (often from 8 to 16 paper transferring printed sheets for each etching state). The result is an image that includes characteristics both of etching and aquatint, different tonal washes, positive and negative traces from only one processing stage. At the next stage of grading, the work on the plate could be continued with a second transfer of a treated in a new, different way negative of the main image, which is corroded longer or with the application of all well-known classical intaglio techniques – etching, dry point, mezzotint, etc.

- One of the advantages of the transfer method is that traces and marks of any kind can be achieved – resembling the line in soft varnish, reproducing different textures, transitions and overflows.
- Disadvantage: In case of insufficient experience – it is easy to over-etch the image on the plate during the acid bath, and as a result – to lose or equalize the halftones to the first degree.
- The line is soft, without the sharpness which is characteristic of the etching. (This feature could also be considered an advantage, depending on the purpose of the artist).

## 1. **Graphics and Technologies.**

## 1. Graphical sheets created using the traditional classical printmaking techniques without any or with a limited inclusion of digital applications.

The series of 5 graphic sheets, titled "*Eco-Fragments I-V*", placed in 2000 – 2001 the distant beginning of my creative searches into the plastic problem of transformation, of the fragmented reality that acquires a new visual reading and meaningful emphasis. The works are implemented in a complex, original combination of intaglio techniques – etching, several (up to 3) graded and subsequently, scraped and polished, reprints of paper textures on soft varnish and finishing the plates again through etching and mezzotint. Silhouettes are cut from the zinc base and edited on paper Magnani Pescia 300 g/m<sup>2</sup>.

It is with this series and with three dry points from the same period that I associate my first attempts at developing my own symbolic and aesthetic visual system by inserting real objects (fragments of the trunks of trees) which are sufficiently well-preserved so as to be essentially recognizable in a new metaphorical context. The search for an original identity and an expression with the corresponding plastic language passes through these levels of artistic transformation of the visual prototype.

My first international awards have been connected with two of these dry points ("**Portraits of Trees-I**" and "*Portraits of Trees-II*") from that period. (First prize – **Finalist**, from the V World Art Exhibition for graphic and painting small format – ITART 2003, Pisa, Italy, and second prize – **Semifinalist** from the IV World Art Exhibition for graphics and painting small format – ITART 2002, Pisa, Italy.)

The mini-print series "*Still Life I-VII*" was completed in 2014-2016. The works follow the classical tradition of building the composition space by comparing an attractive light center with a highlighting, richly resounding periphery. Various plastic issues have been raised as references of a kind to the tasks, developed for the students in "Graphics and Technologies" classes. To the issues, advocated in the series, I can also assign the "*Sunflowers I-V*" series (2015/2016).

The light is the one that manifests the visible world to the viewer. Defeating the darkness (in the metaphorical aspect as well), the light renders the boundaries and shapes of objects legitimate, it makes them visible and what is more, focusing the attention onto the important area in the picture, light converts it into a compositional center. The periphery and the center interact with each other. In mediating this classic law of light, I organize the compositions of found objects in the series of Still lifes. Objects, often insignificant and inconspicuous under conventional conditions, placed in the focus of light, turn into aesthetically, semantically and plastically recreated artifacts.

The contributive aspect of the small-sized series "*Still Life I-VII*", as well as the others larger works, is expressed in the complex multi-layered application of a number of intaglio printmaking techniques (aquatint, dry point, mezzotint) in a particular consequence to achieve deep and rich materiality and completeness. With these works, in various configurations,

I have participated in a number of international biennials and competitions: 2015 –  
 International Mini Print Biennial – Tokyo, Japan; 2016, 2015 and 2014 –  
 "Annual Mini Print", organized by Lessedra gallery, Bulgaria; 2014 –  
 XV Biennial for graphics, small format and ex Libris – Ostrów  
 Wielkopolski, Poland. For the graphic sheet "Still Life II" in 2014  
 I received a honorary certificate of excellent mini-  
 print from my participation in the International Biennial in Guangzhou, China.

The same work in 2014 was included in the exhibition of the "**Finalists**" of the Second International competition for Gravure organized by GARZAPAPPEL, Spain. With the whole series "**Still Life**" I participated in the representative exhibition of Bulgarian Graphics "**Roses and Lions**" (Ex Libris and mini-print), 2019 in Milan at the palace of the regional parliament. The exhibition was an opening event at the 5th International Ex Libris meeting in Bodio Lomnago and was held under the patronage of the Lombardy regional government and the Consulate General of Bulgaria in Milan. (Organizers of the exhibition are: the Municipality of Bodio Lomnago, the Italian Ex Libris Association and Art Gallery Largo, Varna, Bulgaria.) The catalogue, published on the occasion of the event, includes all the works from the graphical series.

The "**Shadows**" theme has long been the focus of my creative interest. In my habilitation thesis I include two series of works on this topic, developed in the last six years and completed in various printmaking techniques.

At the heart of my work on the "**Shadows**" series stands my own original photography – pieces of reality, in essence, devoid of claims for composition – photos of land, grass covered with frost, eroded walls and trees. Poetic and mystical aspects are included on a conceptual level. In the chaos of our fragmented, information-cluttered world, I try to expose the visually unknown, the hard-to-note, the hidden and the unrecognized. The encoded messages between the metaphor and the abstraction offer the possibility of different levels of reading. Plastic issues involve again the transformation – the object, the environment, the space. The formulation of the visual message implies aesthetical revelation and recreation of the objects. The author's point of view – namely, the inclusion of the dynamic counterpoint of the drawing – is the means to legalize the space through the boundaries of the silhouettes, through the strength, rhythm and density of the graphical language. This is why the hand-drawn layer is extremely important to me in the process of creating the digital composition. The integration of the creative gesture – the drawing (stroke, stain) into a documentary, de-composed base in its role of texture, rearranges the whole and ultimately, completely transforms the photographic objective reality – both visually and as a meaning. Digital software is the tool through which I achieve this commitment, blending the visual material in ways not achievable by other means. On the other hand, the process itself includes endless possibilities in the composition process to build on variants and make choices. In the implementation of the first of the two series are used entirely classical printmaking techniques – two-tier aquatint with manual transfers of printed textures and drawings, supplemented with a dry point and (or) mezzotint.

The series consists of 11 works, 50 x 65 cm in size, printed in limited edition by the author herself in the period 2014/2016 on paper Fabriano Rosaspina 285 g/m<sup>2</sup>. Parts of the series (in a different configuration) are exhibited within a number of international graphic forums: International Graphic Triennial – Sofia, 2014; International Graphic Biennial – Varna, 2014, 2016; XX International Graphic Biennial BIECTR, Quebec, Canada, 2017; International Graphic Triennial, Okanagan, Canada, 2018, and in the last two forums the works are presented in completeness in the events' catalogues, accompanied by an artist's statement and biographical data about the author in several pages. The works are also included as main exhibits within two individual exhibitions: "*Generated in the computer created by the hand*", Gallery ALMA MATER – Sofia (joint project with Assoc. Prof. Anna Tzolovska, Ph.D) and in the solo exhibition "*Stop On the Road*" (with the participation of students at the National School of Fine Arts "Iliya Petrov" from the atelier of Snezhina Biserova – "Debut" Gallery, Sofia.

## **2. Art works – graphic originals, designed and completed entirely through the components of digital technologies – digital prints.**

My second graphic series of seven works on the theme "**Shadows**", /launched in 2015 and finalized in 2017/ was designed and completed entirely as digital prints. I chose an unusual, highly elongated in horizontal dimension format /100 x 39 cm/. These are abstract compositions representing the idea of conflict (opposition) in the broadest sense: man vs. nature, light vs. darkness, good vs. evil... textures vs. silhouette. The dramatic impact of the compositions is predetermined by the powerful, expressive tenseness of the diagonal. I generate further highlighting of the suggested conflict by comparing graphic elements with varying degrees of density – from translucent, with the impact of a graphite drawing, to dense and powerful "brushstrokes". The works are part of an international project devised by the English artist Anna Alcock (director of Gnome House and Inky Cuttlefish Studios) on the theme "*Art of War*" and carried out in March-April 2016 simultaneously at Inky Cuttlefish Studios, London and in 'Alma Mater' Gallery, Sofia. I accepted her invitation to perform the functions of a curator of the two parallel exhibitions on the Bulgarian side. The project was focused on the problem of conflict in the broadest sense of the word. In a purely plastic aspect, the idea of conflict (counterpoint) stands in the very core of fine art. It is a founding principle in the visual composition, and in particular – the graphical composition. In this sense, generating a conflict, the artist uses a huge range of plastic techniques, via which he creates rhythm and architectonics and seeks harmony. Thus, in art the conflict is a structuring, creative, and non-destructive means. In their graphic sheets the different authors – Bulgarian and foreign, presented their vision of the problem.

Following the invitation of the English artist Anna Alcock, I participated in the exhibition together with the authors Assoc. Prof. Anna Tzolovska, Violeta Apostolova and Tsveta Petrova. I also included the works of students from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and students from the "Graphics" specialty at the National School of Fine Arts "Iliya Petrov", Sofia. My

contribution a- project`s curator for Bulgaria was to select and present authors from different generations and nationalities, some of them well-known to the Bulgarian art audiences. All the artists had worked specifically for the event for almost a year. The inclusion of established Bulgarian artists such as Prof. Bouyan Filchev and Assoc. Prof. Anna Tsolovska, Ph.D; Anne Desmet, UK (member of the Royal Academy, London and longtime editor of the magazine. "Printmaking Today"), Alicia Snoh-Pavlovska from Poland, Miriam Libhaber and Sarah Weissburd from Mexico is indicative of the level of the event.

Works from the series "*Shadows*" participated and were nominated in the framework of the two latest editions of the competition of Allianz Bulgaria for contemporary painting, graphics and sculpture in the first regional circle – section "Graphics" (2016 and 2018).

The graphic series "*Natura Sacra*" includes 17 works, designed digitally and accomplished in the technique Computer Generated Design - as digital prints on certified cardboard for digital printing Hahnemühle William Turner 350 g/m<sup>2</sup>, 110 x 145 cm in size.

The series is based on author's photographs, created specifically for the purpose of serving the particular concept. The compositions are built up on the basis of the central perspective and the mirror symmetry which gives the desired hieratic element. Another principle of visual transposition in this series was achieved through digitally generated positive and negative images. I had used a similar method of mirror duplication of graphical elements 6 years earlier as a compositional structure of two of the bookplates dedicated to the Enchanted wood ("*Solstizio d'Estate*", 2010, executed in dry point technique.) In this case, the mirror duplication generates new, fantastical images that fit into the subject.

The richly intonated graphical space creates the feeling of entering the sacred interior of a temple and is associated with the polyphonic impact of organ music. The sacral symbols – triangle (pyramid), square, arch – complement this suggestion. The visual elements are repeated over and over, yet in a new plane, thus generating space in accordance with the laws of the central linear perspective. The central point where all the lines converge is the "dead" point that is the focus of all the energy and which absorbs every movement within the space. That`s the point which concentrates the feeling of unity and peace; yet at the same time it is also the one that begets in the recipient that meditative-contemplative state which is the essence of art as a whole, which includes the viewer and makes him a part of the artwork`s space.

My work on the "*Natura Sacra*" series lasted from 2017, when the fundamental core of the series was created, including 6 graphic sheets, shown within the eponymous solo exhibition, held at the Alma Mater Gallery, Sofia in October 2017, until the beginning of 2019, a period during which I developed it and brought it to completion. During this period works of the series in various configurations participated in a number of national and international printmaking forums and competitions:

2019 – participation with 4 graphic sheets of the "*Natura Sacra*" series-II, IV, VII, VIII in the international competition "Premio Combat 2019 Art Prize", section graphics, Museo G. Fattori, Livorno, Italy;

2019 – Participation with 3 graphic sheets of the “*Natura Sacra*” XI, XII, XIII in the International Triennial of Graphics, Sofia, Bulgaria;

2019 – Participation with 5 graphic sheets of the “*Natura Sacra*” series in the exhibition “*Bulgarian Graphics and Artist’s Book*” within my curatorial project “*Graphic Transformations II: digital and hybrid graphic techniques*”, implemented under the Scientific Research Fund of Sofia University – Gallery WA UMCS, Lublin and BCI – Warsaw, Poland;

**2019 – VII International Graphic Biennial, Guanlan, China – “*Natura Sacra II*”;**

**2018 – International Graphic Biennial, ROC, Taiwan – “*Natura Sacra II*”.**

In 2018 the print “*Natura Sacra IV*” was honored with the Grand Prize Award in the Graphics section of the National Competition for Painting, Sculpture and Graphics organized by Alianz Bulgaria.

### **Graphical installation (polyptych) “*THE LIGHT-OUTSIDE-INSIDE*”**

The work was designed and implemented especially for the exhibition of the section “*Graphic and Illustration*” of UBA - “*Entrance-Exit*” (30 May - 18 June 2017, Shipka 6 Gallery). The graphical installation consists of 9 elements – 9 graphic sheets, each with the size 60 x 106 cm, designed by means of a digital software application and executed in the technique of digital printing on paper Fabriano Artistico 300 g/m<sup>2</sup>, 100% cotton. Total size of the installation: H-180 cm, W-320 cm.

At the heart of the idea is the window as a symbol of the border between reality and the spiritual world – the world of enlightenment. Throughout his life, man gravitates between these two worlds. The installation is a metaphor for the introverted spiritual essence of modern man in his quest for self-discovery and for becoming aware of his own place in the world.

The window is used intentionally not as a real object with its inherent functionality – an outward or, respectively, inward opening - but as its light projection transformed by the means of graphics. The play of light from the window on the wall surface is identified by the ripple of the inner light, a surreal bridge between the material and its spiritual projection. Light provokes meditation and spiritual experience. The overall composition inspires a sense of opposition – without darkness we are not able to understand and reach the light. This dualism is at the heart of Creation, of art, and of graphic art in particular.

In reduced form, consisting of three central elements, the graphic installation “*The Light - OUTSIDE - INSIDE*” was exhibited during the exhibition “*Bulgarian Graphics*”, in the cities of Nis and, subsequently, Tsaribrod, Serbia in 2018.

The “*Urban WALLS*” series includes 32 works, of which 13 works – 56 x 100 cm in size; 15 works – 67 x 100 cm and 4 works – 100 x 100 cm.

The idea about the wall – a metaphor and a symbol of man-generated restraint, imprisonment and isolation - is not new; the different arts, and particularly, the visual ones have exploited it widely. But in the urban environment the wall is also a place for situating

a variety of graphic messages – with its walls the city comes to life through the layers of graffiti and posters, overlaid layers of history, which time turns into a cacophonous visual scream.

The series is based on original photography, documenting real urban environment, with particular time and place messages, announcing long past and forgotten events from city life. These specific collages, generated in result of overlaying different strata in the course of time, are preserved in their authentic form, but they are included in different connotative interactions, upgraded with new meanings, allusions and interpretations and recreated in artistic artifacts. In the context of Post Modernism, the work represents the artistic transformation of fragmented images which testify to the urban cultural turmoil with its inherent tendencies for chaos and consumption. Unique phrases that partially preserve the readability of their messages become the occasion for a visual play with the re-codification of their meaning so to serve as a reminder of the actual spiritual values. Out of their original context, words, symbols, and alphabetic characters are turned into accents in the compositional structure of the graphic sheets.

Digital software is the tool through which I achieve this commitment, blending the visual material in ways not achievable by other means. On the other hand, the process itself includes infinite possibilities and, last but not least, the temptation of the playing man (*Homo Ludens*), to multiply variants and to make choices, to provoke and to reconfirm his artistic worldview.

**3. Graphic originals in which the digital technologies build upon or mediate at the different stages of design and prepress of the matrix, processed and manually printed in a traditional way, such as intaglio or surface printing methods. Here are the so-called “hybrid techniques” including creation and hand printing from paper matrices, pigment transfer, digitally printed color pads, overprinted with handmade matrices (aquatint, siligraphy), embossing, again mediated by the computer prepress for perfect register.**

The series "*Imaginary Landscapes – Meditations on the Song of Water in Blue and Yellow*" (6 graphic sheets, 45 x 60 cm, 2015) was accomplished as a hybrid print. The key plates have been printed in black in siligraphy technique on a color basis, printed digitally (Giclee print, pigment inks, on paper Magnani Pescia 310 g/m<sup>2</sup>). The former are images drawn with ink that are deformed through the digital software (stretched, elongated, inverted, rotated and pre-framed). The color layer is identical throughout the whole series. It is a deliberately slightly dissolved, grained texture, designed in a yellow and a blue scale. The alternation of color within the series symbolizes the change of day and night and provokes the viewer for appropriate contemplation. The absence of sharp outlines and concreteness provokes introspection. The hand-printed in siligraphy technique final black plate (using contrast black ink – intense black) structures the space by means of powerful, silhouette-clipping, abstract forms – one and the same elements, placed either vertically or horizontally. The printing elements are cut from the aluminum base along their silhouette outlines and are easy to register on the colour print, with original and perfect fit.

Hybrid printing is a continuation of a kind of the graphic artist's aspiration to combine and mix different techniques and processes of printing with a view to enrich his artistic language but already in the context of the integration of digital technologies, including post-photography at different levels of the printing process. Here are included different types of pigment-transfers (the method of Krasimira Drenska-Wirtz, developed in Basel), the usage of paper plates to print images, composed by digital software and printed on a laser printer – black and white or colored. The transfer itself is done by temporarily melting the toner by using acetone-impregnated filter papers and by means of an etching press. The method is practiced extensively in the sphere of artist`s books. My personal contribution to this method, allowing unrestricted freedom in the printing elements` collage, is the inclusion of different types of overprinting in intaglio, relief or siligraphic matrices on the transferred image, as well as embossing. Inkjet prints on certified digital print cardboard can also be overprinted using manual and etching press transfers from a laser printed paper matrix. I actively involve the rich possibilities for experimentation and artistic impact through the method of printer-copy transfer in my teaching practice at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", within the discipline "Graphics and Technologies-IV" in the Bachelor programmes of FESA, the Visual Arts Department, as well as within the Master programme "Graphic Design"– discipline "Graphic techniques" and the elective discipline "Digital Graphic Techniques". /Due to the active effect of acetone on the body, securing the work process and environment is mandatory/.

## 2. **Graphic design**

### **2.1. Graphic Design products for visual identity of exhibitions (posters, invitations, labels).**

The posters and invitations included in my habilitation thesis accomplish a visual identity, determined by the specific functionality of each concrete event.

1. Poster and invitation for my individual exhibition "***Between Earth and Clouds***", held in October 2012 in the gallery-cum-bookshop "Sofia Press" together with a presentation of the bibliophile edition "***It`s Raining in the Garden***". The poster is organized on a horizontal basis, the message is aligned on a central axis, and the role of the color in the typography is to accentuate each of the individual events. The colour interactions of the poster (image and typography) are sought in the direction of contrast resistance. The invitation is double-sided, and the design is organized on the same principle – in horizontal, with 2 folds and in a final size: 21 x 10 cm; the message is bilingual, (in Bulgarian and in English) and is exported to the folded last (respectively, from backside – first) third of the invitation.

1. Poster and invitation for the exhibition "***There is a Light***" of the American artist Catherine Brooks, held at "Debut" gallery, Sofia in October 2013.

3. Poster and invitation for the exhibition "**Graphic and painting**" of graduates from the atelier of Snezhina Biserova, National School of Fine Arts "Iliya Petrov", "Yuzina" Gallery, Sofia, June 2016.

4. A series of 3 posters, an invitation and a label, elaborated specifically with a view to the advertisement of my author curatorial projects "**Graphic transformations-I**" and "**Graphic transformations-II**" implemented under the Scientific Research Fund of Sofia University, which took place in two consecutive years in Bulgaria and in Poland. The visual identity is based on continuity, on the one hand, i.e. intentionally used elements of the same graphical image – a composition with a neutral-abstract character, created specifically for the purpose. A greater variety was sought in the typography. The composition was organized around a central axis, accented in colour, which bears the title of the project in Bulgarian and in English (respectively, in English and Polish in the second part of the project). Individual text messages are hierarchically organized and mutually subordinate within the unified construction of the posters. The two main posters on the project used different glyphs of the same font /Akrobat/.

- Poster message for an international workshop on siligraphy conducted within the same project managed by Senior Assist. Prof. Snezhina Biserova, Ph.D – Visual Arts Department, Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts, June 2018.

5. A series of advertising materials for announcing my solo exhibition "**URBAN WALLS**", "San Stefano" Gallery, July 2019 – a poster, a perfo folio, an invitation.

6. Poster for the exhibition "**Digital Prints. Computer Generated, Hand-made**" at "Alma Mater" Art Gallery, Sofia University, Sofia (a joint project with Assoc. Prof. Anna Tzolovska, PhD, Sofia University" St. Kliment Ohridski ", implemented in January, 2015.

7. Poster for "**Graphics**" – an exhibition of students from the National School of Fine Arts "Iliya Petrov", Sofia and students from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts, Department of Visual Arts, Etude Gallery, Sofia, Bulgaria. The exhibition took place in November 2016 and was devised by Ventsislava Stoyanova.

8. Poster for my individual exhibition "**NATURA SACRA**", held in October 2017 at "Alma mater" Gallery, Sofia. The poster is accomplished in 3 different sizes – a vinyl for outdoor advertisement with dimensions 120 x 100 cm, a poster with dimensions 70 x 50 cm and 42 x 29.7 cm (A3). The composition of the poster is organized along a central vertical axis. The typography is designed in white on the background of a print from the exhibition, uppercase letters are used for the main messages, and only the title is accented in color and italics.

9. Poster message for a lecture with a presentation on lithography by professors and students of the “Marie Skłodowska-Curie” University, organized within the framework of the project "**Graphic transformations-I**" of the Department of Visual Arts, Sofia University, Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts, June 2018.

## **2.2. Typographic and Design solutions in bibliophile editions and artist`s book.**

### BIBLIOPHILE EDITION „**NATURA SACRA**“, 2019

The bibliophile edition “**NATURA SACRA**” is based on a graphic series of the same name, created by the artist Snezhina Bisserova. The idea of the edition is focused on a metaphor of nature as a temple and a way towards inner enlightenment and spiritual development. The transcendent perception of nature is a key to self-discovery, wisdom and insight about the initial cause of existence and life. The concept underlying the selection of texts is to meet the ideas of two outstanding American scientists – the writer and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, founder of American Transcendentalism in 19-th century, and one of the most remarkable biologists of 21-th century – Edward O. Wilson.

As a form, the edition is a double-sided accordion book transformed additionally through the insertion of pop-up elements into the central area of the folds. Forms and symbols borrowed by sacral architecture are activated to create a new, different, non-conventional three-dimensional book space.

The bibliophilic edition “**Natura Sacra**” consists of 13 folds. The page size is 28 x 19 cm. The dimensions of the unfolded printed sheet are 28 x 266 cm.

The edition contains 7 original prints by Snezhina Bisserova, printed in siligraphy technique in a limited edition of 10 identical copies on paper Platinum Etching 285 g/m<sup>2</sup>, hand punched and signed by the artist.

Cover: cardboard Fabriano Murillo 360 g/m<sup>2</sup> with embossing.

In the edition are used fragments and quotes from the first essay “**Nature**” by Ralph Waldo Emerson, /1836/, /**The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph W. Emerson**/, Random House, New York, 1940/1950 and fragments and quotes from “**The Diversity of Life**”, by E. O. Wilson, Harvard University Press, 1992.

The edition is bilingual, in English and in Bulgarian language.

Translation by Snezhina Biserova.

### BIBLIOPHILE EDITION "**It`s Raining in the Garden**", 2012

Artistic concept of the edition, graphic design and illustration: Snezhina Biserova. Author of the text – Vera Tasheva

Prepress: Snezhina Biserova

Manual printing in technique siligraphy: Snezhina Biserova

Bibliophile edition "*It's Raining in the Garden*" is a bilingual edition in Bulgarian and in English, based on a poetic text by Vera Tasheva. The book is structured on the basis of a contrast opposition between visual and poetic language. The interaction between image and text is sought in a spiritual-subjective aspect rather than as a direct narrative. The prints build on the meditative-contemplative text, complementing and bringing the artistic reading to a deeper level. The bibliophile edition includes 22 unfolded hand-printed sheets, according to the idea that they could be perceived separately, by themselves, as objects of meditation and aesthetic contemplation. The box in which the sheets are stored is designed on the principle of symmetry and creates the feeling of introduction and entry into an individual and intimate artistic space.

The bibliophile edition contains: poetry by Vera Tasheva in Bulgarian with an English translation by Mira Daniels, Gary Gray and Veselina Tasheva.

22 graphic originals – hand-printed sheets in full colour using the techniques siligraphy and embossing.

Print run of 30 numbered and hand-signed identical copies.

Page format – 127 x 210 mm,

Media format – 800 x 1200 mm of the basic sheet,

Hahnemühle paper, Archival Board 230 g/m<sup>2</sup>

The total volume of the edition contains of 22 foils, unbound.

Typography – HSGrotesk.

Hand-made cardboard box with embossing – AssiPrint team.

#### ARTIST'S BOOK "*URBAN WALLS*", 2019

The artist's book "*Urban Walls*" is a bilingual art edition in Bulgarian and English, based on my own author's texts and photographs. /Translation from Bulgarian to English – Snezhina Biserova/. The visual material has documented a real urban environment, with time and place announcements for long past and forgotten events from the cultural agenda with its inherent tendency for chaos and consumption.

The collages created by overlays, accomplished in the course of time, are preserved in their authenticity, but are included in different connotative interactions, upgraded with new meanings, allusions and interpretations and are recreated in artistic artifacts. Separate phrases that have preserved their readability only in certain zones, as well as words, symbols and alphabetic characters displayed outside their original context become the occasion for a visual play through which I re-encode their meaning and convert them into peculiar accents, which are reminiscent of the real spiritual values. Bypassing partially the main function of typography – its readability, I rely on the pure experiment by integrating the typography in the picture. Thus, the main textual message stands out against the background. The artist's book includes two graphic sheets with expanded size 50.6 x 136.5 cm and final size after folding 25.3

x 19.5 cm. The overall graphic sheet by cutting and folding individuates a non-standard book form with a non-conventional mode of deployment, provocative to individual interpretation.

The graphic sheets consist of a face and a back. The front side of each graphic sheet contains a general composition which consists of combinations of separate, relatively independent self-composite segments. The back of the graphic sheets represents an entire image combined with typography, activated in a picture image direction, which only in certain zones performs a correct reading function. The limited edition of 15 identical copies was accomplished in digital print technique on paper Hahnemühle 230 g/m<sup>2</sup>, signed by the author.

### **3. Additional Works**

The additional works included in my habilitation thesis in certain aspects enrich the *Graphics and Technologies* section with a slightly different perspective – more intimate and meditative-contemplative. All of them are united by the small size and the genre affiliation. /Mini-print and Ex Libris /bookplate/. They are implemented both in classical and digital printmaking techniques. All of them participated in a number of international exhibitions and competitions and became part of the respective graphic collections, and some of them were honoured for their qualities.

#### **3.1. Small Size Graphics**

- 3.1.1. Graphic series *Water I-III* – aquatint, 16,5 x 20, 2013.
- 3.1.2. Graphic series *Windows I-III* – aquatint, 24 x 16,7, 2013.
- 3.1.3. Graphic series *Crossing Points I-IV* – aquatint, etching, burin, dry point, mezzotint, 28 x 28, 2014.

#### **3.2. Bookplates I-XIX (A selection from the period 2010 - 2019)**

- 1. Bookplate *'Solstizio D`Estate'-I*, CGD, 13 x 10, 2010
- 2. Bookplate *'Solstizio D`Estate'-II*, dry point, 14 x 9, 2010
- 3. Bookplate *'Solstizio D`Estate'-III*, dry point, 13 x 10, 2012
- 4. Bookplate *'Solstizio D`Estate'-IV*, CGD, 13 x 9, 2012
- 5. Bookplate *'Bisser'-I (Snezhina Biserova)*, CGD, 10,5 x 14, 2016
- 6. Bookplate *'Bisser'-II (Snezhina Biserova)*, CGD, siligraphy, 10,5 x 14, 2017
- 7. Bookplate *'Bisser'-III (Snezhina Biserova)*, CGD, 10,5 x 14, 2014
- 8. Bookplate *'DORA' (Dora Biserova)*, aquatint, dry point, mezzotint, 13 x 9,5, 2014
- 9. Bookplate *'Lyubomir Naydenov'*, aquatint, dry point, mezzotint, 10,5 x 13, 2016
- 10. Bookplate *'Lions Clubs International' (Lyubomir Naydenov)*, CGD, 10 x 13,

2014

11. Bookplate `*Boris Hristov`*, CGD, 13 x 10, 2016
12. Bookplate `*70 Years Boris Hristov`*, CGD, 13 x 10, 2016
13. Bookplate `*Dora Biserova - Sign 17`*, CGD, 10 x 14, 2017
14. Bookplate `*Tsveta Petrova - Sign 2017`*, CGD, 14 x 11, 2017
15. Bookplate `*Largo Gallery Varna`*, CGD, 10 x 13,5, 2016
16. Bookplate `*KBK-60` - S. Bisserova'*, CGD, 14 x 13,5, 2019
17. Bookplate `*KBK-60 - Tsveta Petrova`*, CGD, 14 x 10, 2019
18. Bookplate `*KBK-60 - Violeta Apostolova`*, CGD, 13 x 10,5, 2019
19. Bookplate `*Milena Blazhieva`*), CGD, 14 x 8,6, 2019

My creative experience and innovative methods and practices in the field of graphics have been combined with my teaching activity of 28 years - of which 26 years at the National School of Fine Arts "Iliya Petrov", Sofia, and 12 years at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ochridski", FESA, the Visual Arts department – 10 years, as part-time lecturer in Graphics and Technologies (from 2007 till 2017), and in 2017 I joined the Visual Arts Department as a Senior Assistant Professor of Graphics and Technologies. For the last 12 years (and currently) I have been a part-time lecturer in Printmaking techniques /elective discipline/ at the National Art Academy, specialty "Book, Illustration, Print graphics".

The discipline "Graphics and Technologies-I, II, III and IV" is a compulsory discipline, which provides students of the specialties "Fine Art" and "Graphic Design" (Sofia University, Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts, Department of Visual Arts) with professional knowledge about the nature and the historical peculiarities of the graphics and the printmaking techniques, as well as the latest modern trends in their development. At the same time, students master their technological skills and competencies related to graphic art which provide them with the opportunity for unlimited creative experiments and for participation in the artistic life in Bulgaria and abroad. This academic discipline is part of the curriculum for all years of study within the BA programmes of both specialties. Since the beginning of my teaching practice in Sofia University I have taught two elective disciplines, unique for Bulgaria – the elective discipline "Siligraphy" and "Siligraphy-Atelier" in Bachelor's degree programmes. Since 2017 I have taught students from MA programme "Graphic Design" in the compulsory discipline "Graphical Techniques" and two elective disciplines – "Computer Graphics with Photoshop" and "Digital Graphic Techniques". I am the author of the academic syllabi of these three disciplines.

I am also the author of the syllabus of the discipline "Graphics" and the curriculum of specialty "Graphics" at the National School of Fine Arts "Iliya. Petrov", last updated in 2017, as well as of the syllabi of the elective discipline "Siligraphy" and "Siligraphy-Atelier" in the Bachelor's degree programme of the specialties "Fine Arts" and "Graphic design" at Sofia University, the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts, Department of Visual Arts. In the beginning of 2019 I updated the syllabus of the discipline "Graphics and Technologies" for the specialty "Fine Art" in accordance with the new curriculum

for BA degree programmes (as approved by the Academic Council with Protocol No 13/12, July 2017).

In the educational process, I strive to achieve interconnection and continuity between classical and innovative printmaking techniques and methods with the domination of the latter and with a special emphasis on the non-toxic materials and application practices. I have received numerous national and international awards and diplomas for my teaching practice (including, twice, from the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria in 2005 and 2012) – as a recognition of the excellence of my students.