

REVIEW

By prof. **Buyan Yordanov Filchev**

SU "St. Kl. Ohridski"

Concerning:

Conducting a competition for the academic position "Professor"

in Higher Education Field 8. Art,

Professional Area 8.2. Fine Arts (Graphics and Technologies)

Announced in the State Gazette, No. 65 28. 07. 2023

With a single candidate

Assoc. Prof. **Snezhina Koleva Biserova, Ph. D.**

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure and the Order of the Rector of the Sofia University and as a member of the Scientific Jury, I submit a review, regarding the quality of the candidate and the evaluation of his products, from which he is involved in the above-mentioned procedure, on the basis of Art. 4 and Art. 25 of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The documents and materials submitted by Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Bisserova, Ph. D. are in accordance with the Regulations for obtaining scientific degrees and holding academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." The documentation supplied demonstrates that the candidate has a rich and diverse teaching, and publication, as well as significant artistic and creative activity.

My evaluation of the candidate goes in the following directions:

I. General qualities and professional biography of the candidate

A professional biography of the candidate is presented through all the necessary documents and materials carefully gathered over the years in which the author has purposefully and uncompromisingly followed the chosen path of his dreams and obviously ignored many things in order to fulfill them completely. Based on my experience and careful examination of the information provided, it is evident that the author has a clear and deliberate intention to pursue a fulfilling life in the realm of art.

II. Educational, research and artistic and creative activities of the candidate

Here are also present all the necessary evidence such as:

- education;
- qualification;
- professional development;
- teaching activities;
- list of creative manifestations and other forms for artistic or scientific manifestation;
- public lectures and reports;
- international exhibitions;
- individual, national and group exhibitions;
- awards;
- awards for teaching work;
- scientific and artistic-creative projects;
- international artistic and creative projects;
- areas of professional interest;
- communication languages;
- computer skills;
- membership of professional organizations;

In all these aspects, I registered abnormal indicators.

III. Habilitation thesis

"TRANSPOSITIONS /Metaphors of Transformed Reality/"

The habilitation thesis is 216 pages long and includes a title, an author's, and a publishing box, 2 pages of introductory text, 26 pages of body text, and 185 pages of Portfolio.

The primary content includes an explanation of the author's creative method.

The purpose of the introduction is to acquaint us with the fundamental creative challenges addressed by Snezhina Biserova in recent years. She lacks the ability to articulate, evaluate, or succinctly describe a current definition of graphic art and the primary challenges it currently faces. She refrained from providing input on the highly debated subjects of the integration of digital technology in the artistic creation process, specifically in relation to graphic works. She accomplishes this by conducting thorough analysis and providing various examples derived from her own body of work.

In reality, digital art enhanced and enriched the artist's opportunities for creating, circulating, distributing, and viewing works, as well as involving graphic work in symbiotic and interactive art forms through the use of photo transfer.

Snezhina Biserova speaks indirectly about all these possibilities in the context of her work, first identifying the main accents that can be reduced to keywords:

transposition, transformation, metaphors, new artistic reality, polyvariant composition development, monochrome color register, author's photography, painted elements and geometric shapes, duality, light - dark, positive - negative, statics - dynamics.

1. The integration of digital technologies in traditional printmaking.

Computer-generated graphics.

Digital graphics is an innovative technology that offers a wide range of tools and techniques. It allows for the replication and enhancement of traditional printmaking techniques, as well as the creation of new and diverse graphic interpretations. An approach that enables the attainment of varying degrees of artistic transformation by means of the layering of heterogeneous images.

Thus far, all the statements made have aligned us with the perspectives and interpretations advocated by the author on the digitization of graphic art.

2. Transfer toner-aquatint, in which the application of the image is made by manual transfer of a laser printer-copy of digitally prepared negative.

The entire method of working with the transfer toner-aquatint is described in great detail in this section of the text. All this technology's merits and downsides are highlighted, and the conclusion is that it provides numerous options to expand the graphic palette, such as:

– *Uniqueness of the trace: soft line with the possibility of including traces of the most diverse nature, resembling a charcoal or graphite drawing, as in soft varnish for example, fine transitions, gradients, and textures, radically different from the sharpness of the line inherent in the etching.*

– *Ability to realize the preliminary composition on the matrix with full predictability of the result.*

– *Acceleration of the processes of work by uniting traditionally performed as separate stages of the initial processing of the matrix – application of the image and preparation for the first stage of etching process, as well as providing a perfect (digital) image compliance at the next stage of etching in the acid solution.*

– *Ability to further enrich and develop the matrix through classical printmaking techniques etching, dry point and mezzotint.*

All of the foregoing is accurate, and I can attest to it because I have personally witnessed a number of successful experiments.

3. Engraving generated digitally. Increasing and upgrading the expressive ranges of the individual graphic language by incorporating digitally generated engraving effects.

Snezhina Biserova's efforts during the last two years (2021-2023) have been targeted at studying the possibility of achieving precisely controlled engraving effects in a digital manner. A more detailed explanation will be provided in the following section.

All experimental methods and practices were applied during this period, both in her personal artistic practice and in her teaching work on "Graphics and Technologies" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", FESA, the Visual Arts Department, (Bachelor's degree programs in Fine Arts and Graphic Design; Master's Degree Program in Graphic Design).

Habilitation thesis – commentary on the print series included by section.

1. Digital graphics. Graphical series produced completely via digital technologies – digital graphic software and digital inkjet pigment printing.

The interaction between humans and nature, as well as the relationship between humans and the environment, is a prominent theme in Snezhina Biserova's work. She explores this topic from various perspectives, including the physical, utilitarian, philosophical, ecological, aesthetic, and artistic aspects.

The NATURA SACRA graphic series is likewise encompassed within this broad subject. The artist presents it too fully via the series' emergence, progress, and conclusion. The anticipated effect on the observer is realized to a significant degree, and it truly induces a contemplative state. The compositions are based on the principle of mirror symmetry, which is distinctive of human creativity and, to some extent, provocatively announces the logic of artificial intelligence. NATURA SACRA XX is one of the most exquisite graphics for me, while NATURA SACRA XV and NATURA SACRA XVI are possibly the most graphically rich and compositionally balanced.

"DEHUMANIZED SPACES" graphic cycle presents a world metaphor for man's loneliness, isolation, and alienation. The distinctive method here is tied to the usage of photographs of a tangible, real-world existent space that has been changed by numerous layers of overlaying. And the compositions here are based on the mirror symmetry principle. A novel and distinctive feature emerges, where alphabetic characters (A, O) are seamlessly interwoven and controlled using 2D and 3D software. Here, abstract, and asymmetrical graphic components are introduced, which disrupt the static character of mirror symmetry to different extents. It is impossible to choose out dominant works in the entire series "Dehumanized Spaces" (2020), yet we have a distinct view of space by changing its depth.

"DEHUMANIZED SPACES. ECHOES" (2021 - 2022) is more graphically categorical and compositionally cleaner to a symbolic suggestion environment in my opinion. Both the visual structures and the rhythm of the contrast elements are more complex and powerful here.

The graphic series "STONES" is inspired by Boris Hristov's poetry, yet it has its own message that can exist independently from any poetry. Suggestions are cosmogonic in nature. The main elements and objects in the series are amorphous and asymmetrical, bringing them

closer to nature. This is a considerable departure from the previous series. And in general, these graphic opuses exude something classic. The form is a square, which is static, but the composition is dynamic. A contrasting object on a neutral gray background is the principle, which is also a traditional principle. The engraving effects reinforce this sense and bring digital structures closer to the traditional graphic techniques that we are familiar with. Despite the enormous number of graphic sheets, the series is also renowned for its diversity.

The graphic cycle "INTERVENTIONS. SPACE AND TIME" was created between 2021 and 2023 and consists of two series: "Interventions" and "Vertical and horizontal". The complete graphic cycle "INTERVENTIONS. SPACE AND TIME" was on exhibit at Alma Mater Gallery, Sofia, as part of the solo show "TRANS-POSITIONS" (26.05 - 17.06. 2023). These are works that could be classified as constructive abstraction. However, there is an evident feeling of space and time, and we still have statics as format and dynamics as composition in 9 of the prints. The remaining six compositions are in extended vertical and horizontal formats with a ratio of 2 to 1, which is on the edge of our range of view and gives the image a frieze character. In contrast to the graphic series "STONES," the architectonics of lines, networks, graphical patterns, and dotted lines dominate here. INTERVENTIONS IX is one of the most complete works.

"FOLLOW THE WHITE BIRD" is a small-format graphic cycle that thematically connects three independent mini-series, each of which nuances the core message in the wider context and has its own title.

– "In Search of the White Bird" /3 graphic sheets/

– "Is There a White Bird" – /4 graphic sheets/

– "Follow the White Bird" – /4 graphic sheets/

"In human terms, the image of the white bird symbolizes freedom and is associated with hope and dreams for a better future. Bird flocks are carried in a conditional, markedly aggressive space for them, following the light, in search of the right direction – Salvation?"

I allow myself to cite the author because it is difficult to determine the meaning, content, and suggestion of these vital works more exactly than this quote. The three series are thematically connected yet visibly differ in terms of graphic language. The most unforgettable works are IS THERE A WHITE BIRD IV and FOLLOW THE WHITE BIRD I, which is clear evidence of achieving a full synthesis of the means of expression.

2. Graphic originals where digital techniques are used at different stages of creating design and preprint of the printing plates, which have been processed and printed manually in a traditional way, as relief, intaglio, or surface print.

Computer-generated images with a vision related to the special language of relief, intaglio, or surface print - classical printmaking processes - are modified and transferred to an appropriate matrix, processed, and printed manually - that's typical of the graphic series in this section.

This gives them a characteristic feel of classic prints, which digital pigment printing cannot achieve.

The graphic series "DECONSTRUCTS" was created in 2023 and consists of seven linocuts measuring 50 x 46 cm. The principle of pure graphic rhythm and graphic counterpoint dominates here. This series is notable for its graphic fabric, structural richness, and almost musical rhythm, which exemplifies the charm and definiteness of relief-print engraving. The series depicts a well-mastered technique of engraving on hard linoleum, allowing us to get closer to the capabilities of the wood engraving technique. DECONSTRUCT III and DECONSTRUCT VI would be of special interest to me.

The graphic series "CORA'S WINDOW" consists of seven prints in the aquatint (hand printer-transfer) technique, each measuring 29 x 50 cm. These images, developed during pandemic isolation, give a sensation of an isolated and depopulated world, exuding loneliness and fear of the unknown. This is accomplished through the sophisticated overlaying and processing of interior and outdoor locations with surreal effects such as anxious sleep. They are directed at the dark aspect of our mind, emphasizing our longing for a more positive and harmonious being.

The "Fourth Wall" graphic series. They were done by hand in the transfer aquatint technique, supplemented partially, and improved with dry point and mezzotint. The concept of the mirror world connecting the illusory with real space is aimed at self-awareness and relates to the labyrinth of our subconscious, which appears to have no way out.

The graphic series "WIND, WATER, AND STONE /TRIBUTE TO Octavio Paz/" consists of 9 intaglio-printed graphic sheets measuring 40 x 65 cm and created using intaglio graphic techniques such as aquatint /transfer/, dry point, and mezzotint. The series' graphic sheets transmit experiences inspired by Paz's poetry and his amazing surreal world, as well as the concept of nature's perpetual cycle.

"WIND, WATER, STONE /GARDENS"/ graphic installation (polyptych). The work is made up of 16 frames that are meant to represent the path of spiritual progress in harmony with the natural beginning. Finally, a complex visual panel (polyptych) is created that may be viewed as a whole while also being considered and studied in detail. It could also be used in a unique interior design that highlights its monumental nature.

3. The integration and artistic transformation of graphic originals on the territory

of an artist's book and bibliophile edition.

The artist's book "CORONA FUTURE" is entirely on the Corona pandemic, which has raised more questions than answers regarding the future. The most affected psychological characteristics are those linked to solitude, anxiety, and the dehumanization of urban areas. The book is developed in an original way, with graphic images of large-scale interiors of public spaces and typographic elements in Latin and Cyrillic serving as the basis for its design. Image and typography were balanced, with typography dominating as well as color. The primary graphic sheet is cut and folded to make a conditional book body that is unconventional in shape and unfolding method. The constant repetition of the word "CORONA" is the proper semantic and structurally narrative signal that fits the theme properly. Furthermore, the structure of the book body is completely consistent with the content and is not an end in itself.

The artist's book "EAST MEETS WEST" features two graphic sheets, each measuring 56 x 131 cm when unfolded and 28 x 32.5 cm after folding and trimming. Graphic sheets are constructed using the digital graphic collage approach. Title pages from Chinese daily newspapers are merged with photographs by the author of specially picked graffiti from Sofia's streets. This artist's book combines two distinct lines of information in an intriguing manner. The collages are quite rich, and the aesthetics of Chinese characters add to their complexity. The book's vision is incredibly artistic and fits in well with the overall project.

"OCTAVIO PAZ /selected poems/", bibliophile edition, 2021-2023. Snezhina Biserova created the artistic concept for the edition, the compilation, as well as the graphic design and illustration. The edition is devoted to the 100th anniversary of Octavio Paz's birth in 2024. The edition is bilingual and comprises 24 graphic sheets that are not bound into a book. As a result, they are reasonably self-sufficient. The 48 abstract compositions create a parallel visual narrative with a distinct and multi-layered artistic interpretation. The box in which the foils are stored (black canvas laminated on cardboard with embossing print) replicates the folding concept. This gives the edition authenticity and exhibits a high level of artistic taste.

4. Bookplate (Ex Libris) – selection /2019 – 2023/

The section includes 15 bookplates (ex libris) implemented in digital graphic techniques and siligraphy.

1. Ex Libris "Regina Dalkalacheva", CGD, 14 x 10 cm, 2020
2. Ex Libris "Tsveta Petrova I", CGD, 10 x 13 cm, 2022
3. Ex Libris "Georgi Kolev /20 Years Lessedra Gallery/", Siligraphy, 13 x 10 cm, 2021
4. Ex Libris "Milena Blazhieva – Dedicated to Chopin", CGD, 10 x 13 cm, 2019
5. Ex Libris "Buyan Filchev", CGD, 13,5 x 10 cm, 2022
6. Ex Libris "Dora Biserova – EARTH", CGD, 10 x 13 cm, 2021
7. Ex Libris "Lyubomir Naydenov – EARTH", CGD, 14 x 10,7 cm, 2021

8. Ex Libris "S. Bisserova – Ikaros 21", CGD, 14 x 8 cm, 2021
9. Ex Libris "Yordan Petkov – in Memory", CGD, 15 x 8 cm, 2023
10. Ex Libris "Desiseva Mitova", CGD, 13 x 11.5 cm, 2021
11. Ex Libris "Stephan Altakov, Laura Dimitrova", CGD, 14 x 11.3 cm, 2023
12. Ex Libris "Ovidiu Petca II", CGD, 13 x 11 cm, 2023
13. Ex Libris "Dora Biserova", CGD, 13 x 11.5 cm, 2023
14. Ex Libris "Ekaterina Koleva", CGD, 14 x 8.5 cm, 2023
15. Ex Libris "Boris Hristov", CGD, 13 x 11 cm, 2023

Exlibris as a specific genre, symbolizing a bookholder's sign, on the boundary between graphics and illustration, has a special place in Snezhina Biserova's work. Snezhina Biserova prioritizes the picture to the categorical character and generalization, with an emphasis on the search for visual metaphor, considering the traditions and stylistic features of this specific genre, as well as the mandatory text parts. Snezhina Biserova's overall graphic work aspires for the same level of artistic alteration and synthesis of the picture, thus stylishly completing the circle of her graphic searches.

IV. Contributions

The author of this habilitation thesis has clearly and explicitly stated various contributions throughout the entire text. Therefore, there is no need for me to reiterate them. Snezhina Biserova's work primarily showcases technical and technological advancements, incorporating a blend of classic and innovative digital tools. Additionally, there is a deliberate focus on developing a distinct style through the incorporation of philosophical, conceptual, and stylistic elements. All of this, in my opinion, has been accomplished, with emphasis placed unreservedly on her contributions to this, highly complicated and patinated by time and multiple practices of great authors, matter.

V. Conclusion

Based on the favorable evaluations of the candidate's teaching, publication, and creative activity mentioned above, I am writing to express my positive assessment of his candidacy in the competition. I propose that Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Koleva Bisserova, Ph. D. be awarded the academic position of "Professor" in the professional field of 8.2 Fine Arts (Graphics and Technology).

17. 11. 2023

Member of a scientific jury:

Prof. Buyan Filchev