

## REVIEW

for the presented thesis of

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

in connection with the competition for occupation

of the academic position "Professor"

in Higher Education Field 8. Arts,

Professional Area 8.2. Fine Arts (Graphics and Technologies)

By Prof. Bisera Valeva, Ph.D., FESA, Sofia University

Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Koleva Biserova, Ph.D. is the only candidate in the announced competition for "professor" in professional field 8.2. Fine Arts (Graphics and Technologies), announced in the State Gazette no. 65/28.07.2023, for the needs of the Visual Arts Department of FESA, Sofia University "St. Kliment. She presented for review several different routes in her visual-plastic searches, text concepts to the graphic series, several critiques of her work, and awards obtained in her habilitation thesis.

The candidate has extensive pedagogical and methodological experience in the field of artistic education in graphics. She taught drawing and graphics at the National School of Fine Arts "Iliya Petrov" in Sofia from 1991 to 2017. The earned professional qualification degrees (fourth and fifth) issued by the Central Institute for Teacher Improvement, Sofia, are related to this activity (now Department of Teachers' Information and Development of Sofia University).

Assoc. Snezhina Biserova has been a part-time graphics lecturer at the National Academy of Arts, in the specialty „Book, Illustration, and Printed Graphics" since 2006. Her activity as a lecturer at the FESA, Sofia University, impresses with purposefulness and consistency: from a part-time lecturer in Graphics and Technology (2006) to Senior Assistant Professor in 2017, and

Associate Professor of "Graphics and Technologies and Graphic Design" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", FESA, the Department of Visual Arts (2020).

Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Biserova, Ph.D. is a remarkable artist with a reputable artistic biography, in addition to being an established teacher. She took part in approximately 50 group exhibitions and art forums after 2020 (the year of her first habilitation). She has three large solo exhibitions set across this period: 2023 – "WIND, WATER & STONE" – in San Stefano Gallery, Sofia, with 30 graphic works and 3 art books; 2023 – "TRANS-POSITIONS" – digital graphics (31 graphic works), in Alma Mater Gallery, Sofia; 2022 – "STONES" – digital graphics (21 graphic works), in Etude Gallery, Sofia.

This activity in the creative activity of Assoc. Dr. Snezhina Bisserova has been invested in various awards, nominations, and distinctions. These are: 2023. – International award "Leonardo da Vinci – universal artist" – for artistic merit – from the EFFETTO ARTE Foundation, Italy. In 2022. – First prize at the international jury exhibition "Primo Premio Arte Grafica DIGITALE EX LIBRIS 22" – Vygonza (Padua), Italy. The competition is annual in several sections – Classical and Digital Graphics, Ex libris, Artist`s Book, etc., and is organized by the National Association of Italian Engravers; 2022 – First prize for the Artist`s books URBAN WALLS and CORONA FUTURE, "Primo Premio Arte Grafica DIGITALE LIBRO D'ARTISTA 22" – Vygonza (Padua), Italy; 2022 First prize for the work "Natura Sacra-XXI", "Primo Premio Arte Grafica DIGITALE" – Vygonza (Padua), Italy; 2022 – First prize at an international jury exhibition in section – classical graphics "Primo Premio SENIOR Grafica Italiana 22" – Vygonza (Padua), Italy; 2022 – Honorable Mention award from the 5th International Ex Libris Competition-ISTANBUL 2022, Istanbul, Turkey; 2021 – First prize in section "Graphics" and nomination for the "Sirak Skitnik" award at the national exhibition of fine arts – Sliven,

Bulgaria; 2021 – First prize for the work "Interventions-1" from "Primo Premio Arte Grafica DIGITALE 2021", Vygonza (Padua), Italy; 2021 – Special Mention in section – classical graphics for the work "Cora`s Window" from "Primo Premio SENIOR Grafica Italiana 21", Vygonza (Padova), Italy; 2021 – Silver medal and diploma from the second international triennial mini print "Intalio 2021", gallery "White World" – Kiev, Ukraine; 2021 – First prize in the thematic section "Earth" from the international exhibition "Ex libris", Meander Gallery, Apatine, Republic of Serbia; 2021 – Special award for the development of world contemporary graphic art by the International Graphic Triennial, Bitola, Republic of North Macedonia (due to the pandemic the edition is held online); 2020 – One of the six equal ex libris prizes awarded by the Keith Wingrove Memorial Trust – FISAE Open Ex Libris Competition, Off-Centre Gallery, Bristol, UK.

Snezhina Biserova's dissertation was successfully defended in 2006. The title "Siligraphy – a Waterless Method of Surface Printing" represents her individual artistic pursuits in the realm of graphic technologies, thereby accounting for the disparity in the image. Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Biserova's study on graphics theory and technology is centered around two main areas: visual research and technological methodology. Furthermore, alongside her active artistic pursuits, she effectively fulfills her role as an inquisitive educator who upholds tradition while also embracing and advancing innovations within a certain art form.

The habilitation thesis titled "TRANSPOSITIONS /Metaphors of Transformed Reality/" comprises four primary sections containing graphic artistic works created between 2019 and 2023. The key issue that Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Biserova focuses on in her work is the problem of plastic, which serves as both a visual representation and an internal-emotional dilemma. The different volumes of cycles that make up the habilitation thesis are NATURA

SACRA series consisting of 24 works; "DEHUMANIZED SPACES" composed of two relatively independent series of prints created in the period 2020 - 2022 – "Dehumanized spaces", created in 2020. as a core of 5 works and "Dehumanized Spaces. Resonancies " (2021 - 2022); The graphic series "STONES", inspired by the poetry of Boris Hristov, composed of 24 works; The graphic cycle "INTERVENTIONS. SPACE AND TIME", developed in the period 2021 – 2023 and consisting of two series – "Interventions" and "Vertical and horizontal", in formats 50 x 50 and 50 x 100 cm. The graphic sheets are printed in limited edition on certified cardboard for digital printing Fotospeed Studio XPRESSION 300 g/m<sup>2</sup> 100% Cotton; Small-format graphic cycle "FOLLOW THE WHITE BIRD", which thematically binds 3 separate mini-series, each of which nuances the main message in the overall context and has its own title. The first mini-series is "In Search of the White Bird" (3 graphic sheets), the next is "Is there a white bird" (4 graphic sheets), and the third part (series) is "Follow the white bird" (4 graphic sheets); The graphic series "CORA'S WINDOW", as part of the habilitation thesis, includes 7 works performed in the aquatint technique (manual printer-transfer); The "DECONSTRUCTS" series from 2023 includes 7 linocuts with a format of 50 x 46 cm, printed in a limited edition of 7 copies on white paper - 20 g / m<sup>2</sup>; Also the series "The Fourth Wall", which includes 5 graphic sheets with a format of 39.4 x 28 cm; The graphic series "DEDICATED TO OCTAVIO PAZ" from the period 2019 – 2022 (9 graphic sheets, 40 x 65 cm, created in intaglio printing techniques – aquatint / manual transfer/, dry point, mezzotint); Graphic installation (polyptych) "WIND, WATER, STONE (GARDENS)". The installation consists of 16 elements that measure 35 x 35 cm. It was created digitally but printed by hand using the surface printing technique siligraphy. Two artist's books, a bibliophile edition, and a set of bookplates are included in the thesis.

Snezhina Bisserova's habilitation thesis is formally linked by graphic imagery. This recognizable visuality is intricately built from digital and classic graphic techniques. They interconnect, juxtapose, and superimpose one another in an intentional change of reality. The compositions appear monochrome, with only color touches in the author's works. The prints appear to be constructed using classical graphic oppositions at first glance, but closer inspection exposes intricate symbolic and technological links that entice the observer, encouraging him to emotional identification in the deceptive creative environments.

For a long period, Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Bisserova has focused her creative energies on the creation of digital graphic works. The artist develops cycles with multiple accumulations of imagery, which is achievable utilizing technology, but this enriched toolset is not a goal in itself and leading, but rather a technique to build multi-layered images that are visually decipherable. This can be seen in the series "NATURA SACRA", "Dehumanized Spaces (2020)", "Dehumanized Spaces. Echoes" (2021 - 2022); and "CORA'S WINDOW."

The graphic cycles provided are divided into those that are entirely reliant on digital printing and those that use traditional intaglio printing processes. Because of the use of mixed (graphic) techniques - means of expression - some of the compositions are additionally visually and meaningfully complicated.

Snezhina Biserova's visual and emotional artistic missions are further developed, built, and summarized in the NATURA SACRA graphic series. The prints from 2021 to 22 are smaller in size than the previous series, but their message is more concentrated. The author deliberately misleads her plastic language as a description of the feminine principle here. NATURA SACRA IX - XXIII embodies several thoughts and ideals, with the first impression of feminine referring to the mystery of detail, of nature, through the dramatic contrast of dark and light. Particularly intriguing are the works of XIV-XXIII, in

which the intertwining of visual elements of vegetation, splashes of water, and delicate female presence layer meaningful layers for the generation and finish, as well as the inherent nuances between them, beyond surface curiosity. The artist's use of digital pigment printing technique emphasizes delamination even more, as she manages to superimpose and construct an unusual graphic reality.

The series "INTERVENTIONS. SPACE AND TIME" (2021 - 2023) is a fascinating exploration of the capabilities of technology that can replicate the impression of engraving on a halftone raster. This process manifests the consolidation of emotions by intensifying the grid pattern and enhancing the visibility of areas that lack human presence.

The elongated compositions from VII to XII, in which format alludes to a road, escape, and salvation, but the wandering spectator discovers the impossible labyrinth that has merged or rather replaced its exits with a Minotaur, tearing and destroying the spiritual spaces, are particularly noteworthy. The following works from XIII to XVII are evocative of Vasareli's logical and serene play with space, but closer inspection reveals the unattainable and unsurpassed traps of illusion.

The works in the series "STONES" utilize an identical technique but with a different grading melancholy and doubt message. The compositions are in a steady square format, which contrasts with the images' dynamic disintegration. This is the author's allusion to spiritual dissolution and deviation from original values - in this case, separation from nature. Emotional crossroads materialize in a personal universe of halftone relationships that try unsuccessfully to weld the construction of forms. STONES I, VII, VIII, X, XII, XIII, and XXI are a few examples.

Snezhina Biserova's creative technical and technological interests are combined in the graphic installation (polyptych) "WIND, WATER, STONE, /GARDENS/" (consisting of 16 graphic sheets with a format of 35 x 35 cm),

which is produced in the surface printing technique siligraphy. This polyptych is a kind of intersection, a collective image for the artist's explorations. At first view, there are meaningful - visual allusions from series like NATURA SACRA, and STONES, which generate an internal emotional rhythm - that is as universal as they are unique to each observer.

The graphic series "THE FOURTH WALL" (consisting of five graphic sheets) had a similar impact. This series has a similar connotation to the series of dehumanized spaces but with a brighter and more delicate impact due to the technique used. Light and shadow, truth and illusion are united by the diffusivity of the aquatint, the softness of the mezzotint, and the somewhat more clearly defined line of the dry point.

The graphic cycles showcased demonstrate the impact of the habilitation thesis, which is evident in a well-established artistic approach that integrates various methods and techniques in utilizing digital software as a versatile tool for traditional graphics. This approach enhances and expands the visual and conceptual language employed in the artwork.

This contribution is evident in the incorporation and modification of graphic originals within the framework of artist's books and bibliophile editions. In the digital era, where speech and imagery are closely linked, visual elements often take dominance. This phenomenon is manifested in the artist's book, which was distinguished as a graphic genre in the 20th century. Over the past ten years, this product (artist's book) has gained a certain level of independence and acknowledgment in Bulgaria. Snezhina Biserova has created an artist's book titled "CORONA FUTURE" in 2020. The book was presented as part of the international project "CORONAALPHABET-STRUKTUR UND FREIHEIT IN DER KRISE" by Reinhild Gerum from Germany. Through the simultaneous collaboration of graphics and typography, the visual image is constructed to identify layers and reveal significant messages.

The second art book featured in the habilitation thesis, titled "EAST MEETS WEST," was specifically designed for the fourth edition of the international project "EAST MEETS WEST" – "Daily News" (2019) by Prof. Martin Bayens from Belgium. Within this work, the artist employs a color accent to reveal the convergence of personal emotions and artistic points of view with many cultural and semantic aspects.

The compact small-format series of ex libris exemplifies a deep awareness of composition development and balance within a limited pictorial area. It serves as a valuable addition to the integrity of Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Biserova's habilitation thesis. The artwork is shown in a limited range of black and white, with only one ex libris featuring a subtle touch of color. All works in the series are created using digital printing (CGD) technology, enabling the artist to effectively convey imagery and messages. This cycle confirms and highlights the extensive range of capabilities of digital printing. These artworks contain distinct visual representations of labor, conveying meaningfulness and metaphorical expression. This is achieved by combining recognizable realistic elements with abstract graphical forms.

The habilitation thesis of Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Biserova, Ph. D., not only showcases her artistic accomplishments but also highlights her significant contributions to the theory and practice of artistic training in the subject of "Graphics and Technologies." As a faculty member in the Fine Arts and Graphic Design departments at FESA's Department of Visual Arts, she updates the existing curriculum and introduces new educational content in the following subjects: "Graphics and Technologies" – Parts I, II, III, IV of the bachelor's degree in fine arts specialty and „Graphic Design" – Parts I, II, III, IV of the Graphic Design specialty. Her author's program for the elective discipline "Silligraphy" and studio "Silligraphy" is both intriguing and appealing. It also extends to the elective discipline "Art specialization graphics I, II, III". The

author develops curricula for the mandatory course "Graphic Techniques" and the elective courses "Experimental Graphics" in the two-semester Master's program "Graphic Design", and "Siligraphy" in the Master's program "Pedagogy and Semiotics". Additionally, the author also creates curricula for the Bachelor's and Master's programs starting in 2021, which have been approved by the Academic Council under protocol No 9/26.05.2021.

Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Biserova, Ph. D., is dedicated to teaching and implementing innovative, low-toxic techniques and methods in the graphic atelier. Her goal is to reduce and minimize toxicity levels in accordance with global environmental principles followed in the field of graphics technology. Consequently, she employs a blend of non-hazardous traditional and innovative techniques in the "Graphics and Technologies" courses. For instance, she utilizes a test scale made with non-toxic permanent and varnish markers that can be used as a potential alternative to the traditional toxic asphalt primer for etching in the learning of intaglio printmaking methods.

Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Bisserova, Ph. D., applies digital graphic software to include approaches and procedures into classical graphic techniques during the design and matrix processing stages. The artist actively promotes the low-toxic surface printing technology known as siligraphy in Bulgaria and internationally through lectures, presentations, and workshops. This activity is manifested through the organization and administration of worldwide workshops, talks, and presentations focused on the graphic technique of siligraphy. Such are: in 2019 a lecture at the invitation of the Faculty of Arts of Marie Curie – Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland, as well as a master class (lecture and workshop) on siligraphy in The Hague, the Netherlands, at the invitation of the Grafein Foundation, the Netherlands and with an accompanying event to the exhibition "Change – Form & Nature" – "Bulgarian Graphics", organized by Stichting Grafein, the Netherlands and Lessedra Gallery, Bulgaria.

In 2023. in Graphic Atelier (229), FESA, a workshop on siligraphy is organized with the participation of Marina Podolska, lecturer at the University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland and second-year students, Siligraphy Atelier, FESA, the Visual Arts Department.

I am confident that the habilitation thesis presented fulfills the criteria set forth in the Academic Staff Development Act and the corresponding regulations for its implementation, as well as the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of FESA, Sofia University. Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Biserova, Ph.D., has obtained the necessary number of points mandated by the National Centre for Information and Documentation (NACID) to qualify for the academic position of "professor". They are derived from the repeatedly inflated necessary minimum.

Conclusively, I recommend that the esteemed members of the scientific jury elect Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Koleva Biserova to the academic position of "Professor" in Graphics and Technologies.

Prof. Dr. Bisera Valeva

22.11.2023

Sofia