

LETTER OF OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Regina Vanchova Dalkalacheva, Ph.D.,
member of the Scientific Jury on the procedure for occupation
of the academic position "Professor"
in Higher Education Field 8. Art,
Professional Area 8.2. Fine Arts (Graphics and Technologies)
Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

The competition was announced in the State Gazette no. 65 28. 07. 2023

The competition procedure completely complies with the norms of state and university regulatory documents concerning the occupation of academic positions.

The normative prescriptions for attendance and absentee participation in the meeting were followed in the first meeting of the jury, and reviewers, as well as jury members, were chosen to prepare opinions.

One applicant competes for the academic position of "professor" in the Professional field 8.2. Fine Arts (Graphics and Technologies) - Assoc. Prof. Snezhina Koleva Biserova, Ph.D.

1. Information about the candidate:

In 1998, S. Biserova obtained a master's degree in graphics from the Higher Institute of Fine Arts "Nikolay Pavlovich" (presently renamed the National Academy of Arts).

In 1989, I obtained a diploma in Pedagogical Qualification, specializing in Pedagogy, Methodology of Fine Arts, and Pedagogical Practice, from the Higher Institute of Fine Arts "Nikolay Pavlovich" (presently renamed the National Academy of Arts).

In 2007, she effectively defended her dissertation on "Silligraphy – waterless method for surface printing" and obtained her Ph.D. from the National Academy of Arts.

Between 2019 and 2023, she took part in numerous renowned international exhibitions, primarily in the field of fine classical and digital graphics and ex libris. Each exhibition is thoroughly documented by the candidate as part of the competition entry.

She participated in numerous national group exhibitions and realized three solo exhibitions: "STONES" in 2022 at Etude Gallery, Sofia; "TRANS-POSITIONS" in 2023 at

Alma Mater Gallery, Sofia; and "WIND, WATER & STONE" in 2023 at San Stefano Gallery, Sofia. For her bookplates and prints, she has received national and international awards.

2. Overall evaluation of the candidate's habilitation thesis and its contributions

The habilitation thesis includes visual evidence and accompanying textual commentary that provide proof of the author's identifiable platform created by S. Biserova. This platform is convincingly defended through her independent appearances and participation in various national and international forums, many of which have received awards. The distinctive attributes of this notable plastic platform arise from the candidate's exceptional technological expertise in classical and digital graphics, as well as her inclination to continuously explore and seek novel avenues for artistic expression that extend to various key areas.

The presented series of works exhibit an authentic and sufficiently variable graphic language, which is the outcome of the artist's unique approach to using graphic means for artistic expression. Its peculiarity is also reflected in the very title of the thesis: "Transpositions – Metaphors of the Transformed Reality".

Biserova's pictorial works are derived from the observation and exploration of visual motifs in simple and ordinary, unpretentious everyday surroundings. These captured findings undergo an in-depth and author-determined process of conceptual and experimental transformation, which removes them from their material primacy and brings them to an absolute image through their spiritual saturation. An artistic-plastic game, initially provoked by literally visible, which traces the process of transformation is able to visualize invisible and difficult to capture things, for which have eyes delicate inner sensitivity to the artist.

To this author's approach can be added the experimental technological discoveries of the candidate in the field of traditional graphic and modern digital imaging tools. They enable the utilization of technological characteristics and practices as a distinct form of expression in various approaches, and when combined, they facilitate inventive development and expansion upon the established foundation of classic graphic imagery.

The habilitation thesis is divided into four comprehensive sections, categorized according to technological or genre principles. These sections analyze and illustrate various creative endeavors and the artist's successful professional achievements, which have made major contributions. The primary emphasis is on graphic works that are exclusively produced using advanced digital software and then produced using digital printing technology.

S. Biserova describes the reasons for being attracted to digital imagery generation, as well as some of its advantages over the pictorial potential of traditional printmaking, in the text. The

"specific personalized working method" is used to explain and analyze each of the graphical series provided in the first section. Monumental suggestion on the central axis composition and integrated in its structure on the clear geometric figures, gives impressive iconic effect on the prints in the "Natura Sacra", as well as their specific, absorbing the viewer space. Transformed to abstract conditionality primary objectivity on used photographic graphic textures impresses flickering impressionistic and at the same time powerful radiant inner light on pictorial images, which gives them mysticism. The clearly defined principle of their compositional construction realizes variations, which ensures a sufficient degree of delimitation on separate graphic sheets in a series.

The graphic compositions in the "Dehumanized Spaces" series, which are similarly developed on the basis of central axial symmetry, produce an impression in a monumental but incredibly dramatic way. Unlike the rather contemplative and existentially defined themes in the other graphic cycles, this series interprets in a particularly visually innovative and emotionally influential way the socially, socially, and politically significant theme of the alienation and isolation of man in modern times. The transformative move away from the photographic concreteness of the architectural prototype used brings out an entirely new, constructivist and semi-abstract vision, with a strong dystopian suggestion and impact.

I view the integration of engraving effects into the toolkit and the use of digitally generated graphics as a particularly significant artistic and technological contribution by S. Biserova. This technique was specifically employed in the "Stones" graphical series.

The compositions originate from a macro format photograph capture of common stones. The photo lens with high macro-approximation, combined with extremely rich graphic and engraving processing, magnifies the insignificant size of the captured object, and transforms it into a visually striking terrestrial or cosmic topographic objectivity, where we reveal details such as mountain ranges, elevations, valleys, trenches, plains, craters, and more.

The personal approach of employing the digital engraving plugin for Photoshop Engraving III has played an important part in developing distinctive graphical pictures. The masterful application of a diversified engraving raster results in a very rich as plastic and graphic nuance shape, which appears silvery in some areas.

The remaining three graphic series ("Interventions", "Follow the White Bird", "Dehumanized Spaces / Echoes"), showcased in the "Digital Graphics" section, serve as autonomous artistic manifestations that further explore the fundamental discoveries established in "Natura Sacra" and "Dehumanized Spaces".

Contrary to the meditative spaciousness of *Natura Sacra* or the static and lifeless quality of *Dehumanized Spaces*, the compositions in *Interventions* have a pronounced and active sense of motion. They boldly confront the graphic elements, intertwining and penetrating one another. Appropriately, this series bears the subtitle "Space-Time" because the compositional dynamics create the perception of a continuous movement unfolding in both time and space – movement, from which a single moment is captured inside each individual print's pictorial field.

As a second focus in the habilitation thesis and a significant contribution to S. Biserova's work, I would like to highlight the incorporation of digital technology at various stages and in a specific method in the production of plates intended for printing in various traditional graphic techniques. This integration method, which is characteristic of the artist's work, has a high degree of originality in terms of the different alternatives used, as she correctly points out: "This allows the achievement of original imagery, which is otherwise impossible." The works in the series "Deconstructs" are characterized by their intricate composition and graphic complexity. These works are specifically designed to be created using the linocut technique. The potential for creative expression using digital technology in the realm of traditional graphic art is also demonstrated in the field of the intaglio printing process. This is well displayed through several graphic cycles, such as transfer aquatint combined with dry point and mezzotint techniques in the series "The Fourth Wall", "Cora's Window", and "Wind, Water, and Stone". S. Biserova has also played a key role in the advancement and introduction of the surface printing technique siligraphy for usage in Bulgaria.

While primarily emphasizing the technological possibilities of classical and digital printing methods for producing limited edition works, it is equally noteworthy to acknowledge the artist's endeavors in the field of artist's books. I categorize them mostly as bibliophile editions, which align closely with conventional approaches in art editions, rather than considering them as artist's books in the contemporary sense and content of this visual category.

Passive as verbal-visual interaction and dramaturgy narrative structures, as well as the experimentally activated book spatial form – used in "Corona Future" and "Octavio Paz, selected verses" – limit their impact in the narrow framework of the familiar traditional model of book perception: first I read, then I examine. At the same time, I'd like to point out that S. Biserova is now the only printmaker in Bulgaria who is not only interested in the unique possibilities of art publication but also has successful realizations in their area.

As a book artist aware of the historical development of the *ex libris* /bookplate/ and its long-lost natural functional belonging to book editions, I am astounded by the passion with which contemporary graphics continue to keep it on artificial breathing. However, my worries

regarding the genre's viability have nothing to do with the undeniably excellent creative characteristics of the bookplates presented in the fourth section of the habilitation thesis. Again, the vast number of awards granted to S. Biserova's miniature prints with an already collectible focus is impressive.

3. Evaluation of the candidate's teaching and educational effectiveness

In summary, but without diminishing its significance, I would like to highlight the candidate's long-standing, outstanding activity, and fruitful teaching activity as a contributing moment. The text devoted to her teaching engagement contains a substantial amount of evidence: creation and updating of curricula for a number of compulsory and elective courses in the Bachelor's and Master's Degrees; management of national and international artistic projects involving lecturers, students, and Ph.D. students from the Visual Arts Department of FESA, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," as well as participants from other Bulgarian and foreign universities. All of these confirm S. Biserova's unique vocation and unwavering adherence to the noble duty of a teacher.

4. Conclusion:

Considering all the information provided, I believe that Snezhina Biserova's habilitation thesis, which is being presented in this competition, has a significant impact. The material provided by the candidate presents a thorough analysis and is supported by visual proof. The candidate formulates several contribution moments, most of which I find to be objective and agree with.

Therefore, I highly recommend that the esteemed scientific jury select Snezhina Koleva Biserova for the academic position of "Professor" in the Field of Higher Education 8. Art, Professional Area 8.2. Fine Arts (Graphics and Technologies) for the Visual Arts Department at the Faculty of Educational Sciences and the Arts, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Member of a scientific jury:

Assoc. Prof. Regina Dalkalacheva, Ph.D.

18. 11. 2023.

Sofia