

OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Nevelina Mitkova Popova, NBU

Professional Field 8.4. *Theatre and Film Art*

On the materials presented for the contest for awarding the academic degree Associate Professor in professional field 8.4. *Theatre and Film Art* (Graphic Design), as announced in SG 14/18.02.2022,
Candidate: Ch. Asst. Prof. Chavdar Nikolov Gyuzelev, NBU

Chavdar Gyuzelev is an applicant in the contest for awarding the academic degree Associate Professor in professional field 8.4. *Theatre and Film Art*, announced by the *Cinema Advertisement and Showbusiness* Department at NBU. He is the only candidate for the degree, but that does not mean that awarding the degree to him is not subjected to careful consideration.

Chavdar Gyuzelev is a prominent and widely acknowledged Bulgarian artist with a strong presence on the Bulgarian cultural stage: he is a set designer, a painter, a photographer, and a graphic designer. He has been teaching courses in our department since the academic year 2008-2009, at first, he was appointed as a lecturer and since 2013 he has been holding tenure as a tutor. In 2016 he defended his doctoral dissertation entitled *Constructing Space on the Theatre Stage and in a Book* and at present he is a Chief Assistant Professor at NBU.

The didactic and pedagogical experience gained are the premise for his natural next step of gaining a higher academic degree; they are also the evidence for his motivation and his lasting interest in the tutor's work. Our students and the Department, as well as the University with its undeniable humanitarian orientation do need such prominent and charismatic individuals like Chavdar Gyuzelev. The scope of his creative quests, as well as their realization are impressively wide. It is immensely beneficial for young artists to be able to communicate with an author with an ever-enquiring creative talent. Therefore, I might just as well conclude my opinion here, but the requirements posed by the Implementing Rules of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the NBU Ordinance on Academic Staff Development necessitate a more detailed review of his works.

The above-mentioned act allows the candidates for higher academic degrees in disciplines related to the arts, after having received a doctoral degree, to present their artistic works instead of research papers and academic publications. Among the abundance of memorable theatre performances realized with director like Tedi Moskov and Diana Dobрева, Chavdar Gyuzelev has decided to present some of his recent stage design works, like the stage setting for *Waiting for Godot*, by Samuel Becket, director Deyan Donkov, *Azaryan Theatre*,

NDK (2018), as well as the stage design for *Liv Stein*, by Nino Haratischwili, directed by Kris Sharkov, *Little City Theatre – Off the Channel* (2016), and as samples of his individual projects, he presented two solo exhibitions: *Dangerous Games*, in *Rakursi Gallery*, Sofia, 2017, and the anniversary exhibition *Heads in Free Flight*, again in *Rakursi Gallery*, Sofia, 2021. Both Chavdar Gyuzelev's stage design solutions and his paintings are always memorable, piercing into the emotions and the mind of the viewer. His works represent a recognizable world of images that fall apart or look for support amidst bleak spaces, deprived of human presence – chaotic but, at the same time, frozen – as well as heads weirdly focused while roaming in their own primordial loneliness...

His two other stage design projects, presented as additional and accompanying the set of materials for the contest, are no less interesting and memorable. These are the leaflets for the exhibition *Heads in Free Flight* and three book covers. Being a superb graphist, Chavdar Gyuzelev has always been an artful illustrator and book designer. It is no coincidence that this was one of the objects of research in his dissertation work. What he presents as a solo creative project is his album of photographs *Discovered Installations, 2018*, published by *Black Flamingo*. This collection is living evidence of Sofia's changing image and spirit through the years, from 2002 to 2018, as well as of the method and style, typical of Chavdar Gyuzelev and his philosophical perspective to photography. Here is what he writes himself in the abstract: *My photographs are not only provoked by aesthetics, but also by social issues. The reason to publish an album of photographs for me was to create a sort of an archive, as no one notices the environment that we live in, while certain elements of that environment quickly fade away and disappear. I take photos with a digital camera, and, in most cases, I only take one photo. I do not do any further processing of the photos, as it is not the technology that matters most for me. It only focuses the eye of the photographer... My perception of street photography is that it is conceptual art: the photographer does not create a new object, they work with ready-made ones; the photographer makes the object more distinct, standing out from its environment and cuts it out, puts it in a frame, turns it into an image or a painting, thus changing its ontology, and places it within a new context... the photographer changes the nature of the object from an aesthetically neutral element to a meaningful artefact – the eye of the artistic photographer performs an alchemic transformation which turns essentially banal objects into something conceptually meaningful, something signifying and significant..."*

Indeed, Chavdar Gyuzelev is an artist in photography as well, with his sincere, searching eye, unbounded by prejudice, with his determination to capture - without interfering with the

surrounding space, both the absurdities and the poetry of reality, which reveal themselves spontaneously through the accidental combination of images.

These creative quests of the candidate are particularly important for his work as a tutor in our department where Photography is among the leading academic disciplines.

As my Opinion significantly expanded, I will try to briefly outline the accompanying artistic projects, presented for the contest: his participation in exhibitions like: *Sound and Colour*, *Poems Remain*, the participation in the national exhibition *Chasing Away Evil Spirits* and in the International Triennial of Graphics, in the en plain air *Sound and Colour*, in painting exhibitions in Prague, Berlin and Vienna, the design and the visual concept of each issue of two of the most prestigious and serious periodicals – *Christianity and Culture* and *Kultura*, as well as the personal pages of the digital magazine *ARTizinin*, which unfortunately ceased to exist. Chavdar Gyuzelev's abundant artwork has, of course, received the acknowledgement and praise it deserves. His numerous reputable awards like *Ikar* or *Askeer* for stage design can be pointed out as just a few of the pieces of testimony for this statement. As further justification I can list the reviews of prominent critics like Alexander Kyosev, Georgi Lozanov, Lachezar Boyadzhiev, Svetlana Dimitrova, Yasen Gyuzelev.

His work in the NBU as a serious educator, whose advise is highly valued, is also indisputable. The students' highly positive assessment of his work is also indicative. Young people, who are only now making their first steps in art always need the opportunity to communicate with acknowledged authors. The wide scope of Chavdar Gyuzelev's artistic realization, his interdisciplinary approaches and the synergetic manifestation of his artistic skills are immensely beneficial for our students. Chavdar Gyuzelev has been actively involved in the improvement of the Graphic Design program; over the years he has devised eleven academic courses, which he currently teaches, and this significantly exceeds the required minimum for the academic position of Associate Professor. In the last five years he has tutored thirty graduates, he has written forty reviews, he invariably participates in a number of panels (for diploma paper defences and for course accreditation), he is also actively involved in all the activities and initiatives of the department. His tangible presence among the students and the colleagues is always interesting and warmly received. Without exaggeration, I can say that Chavdar Gyuzelev is one of the prominent personalities of New Bulgarian University. Contributing to his professional promotion and attracting him to various university structures and activities will be an asset for the overall image and presence of NBU in society.

The statements and facts laid out above give me reason to strongly support the awarding of the academic degree Associate Professor to Ch. Asst. Prof. Chavdar Gyuzelev, PHD.

I wish him creative powers and joy in communicating with students in the future.

I vote “Yes.”

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Nevelina Popova