

Opinion

by prof. Violeta Decheva, DSc, NBU

Professional field 8.4. Theater and Film Art

On the materials presented for the contest for awarding the academic title associate professor
at New Bulgarian University

In professional field 8.4 Theater and Film Art, as announced in SG, issue 14 /18. 02 2022, by
the candidate Ch. Asst. Prof. Chavdar Nikolov Gyuzelev, PhD, NBU

The material presented in the competition as well as the results of the research work, the tutoring, and the artistic works of Ch. Asst. Prof. Chavdar Gyuzelev, PhD do meet the requirements and the conditions of the implementing rules of the development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and those of NBU for taking the academic position of Associate Professor.

The work in focus, submitted for the contest by Chavdar Gyuzelev, PhD, namely *Visual Aims and Specificity of Graphics, Photography and Graphic Design*, is the synthesis of his interests and his research work not only after having defended his doctor dissertation, but also of his entire artistic work and tutoring. I used the word “synthesis,” as the point of Chavdar Gyuzelev’s paper is not to analyze the visual aims and the peculiarities of graphics, painting, graphic design, and photography per se, but to synthesize the conclusions he has drawn from his practical and research experience in these fields, so different and yet so similar. It is my contention that what makes this paper valuable is this very attempt to synthesize his own artistic experience with his observations, his research, and his theoretical knowledge about the way in which, in practice, these spheres can be made to overlap in visual arts in general. It us a well-justified decision, on his part, to exclude stage design from the observations and conclusion presented in his work, as it was the focus of his doctoral dissertation. And his dissertation provided a remarkably interesting comparison between the way space is organized on stage, as part of the set designer’s job and the way space is organized in a book, as a part of the job of the book designer.

What is presented in the first chapter, *Painting and Graphics*, is a collection of his recent works, the most prominent among them being his anniversary exhibition, *Heads in Free Flight* (2021), preceded by *No Fulcrums* (2014) and *Dangerous Games* (2017). The expert opinions presented for his work in this part wonderfully illustrate the creative beliefs exhibited by Chavdar Gyuzelev that contemporary painting and graphics, or, broadly speaking, contemporary visual arts have long since been impossible to contain within rigid genre

boundaries. At the same time, one of the most specific features of his creative style, namely the intersection of modernism and postmodernism is clearly outlined in his works. The important thing in these analyses, in my opinion, is to highlight the unique way in which he combines painting and stage design.

The second part is devoted to photography. In fact, Chavdar Gyuzelev's wonderful photographs are represented in the best conceivable way in the book which he published in 2018, *Discovered Installations*. Photography occupies a special place in his creative path. At the same time, what I want to point out about his photography is that it has the same features that I value highly in his occupation with painting, graphics, stage design or graphic design. Namely that, in fact, the choice of a certain art only determines the main genre framework, within which the artist makes the opportunities of the other arts overlap, or better yet, *plays* with them, with the arts he enjoys working (with). In his photographs and stage design, painting and graphics are the "actors" he uses to achieve the desired impact. That is why most of the critics, who review his photography point out the theatricality in them. The various means of expression of these arts are the instruments in his hands, the tools of his intuition, with which he composes his photographs. It is no coincidence that he points out in his paper that it is not the "the technology" that matters for him, that he does not "do any further processing of the photos," but it is "the eye" that matters (p.10).

Not only does the freedom to play with *the* means of expression of each of these arts give him the courage to mix their genre characteristics and push boundaries. It also gives him something else: it gives him the power over the eyes of the viewers. In his photographic compositions he guides the viewers gaze (that is why he calls them "installations"). It is not like that in his set designs though – the power over the viewers' eyes there belongs to the actors. In fact, the choice of the main art form to work with, or the one that will subordinate the rest is his choice of the means through which he is to guide the eyes of the viewers towards a certain phenomenon or a certain theme, or object, that he considers especially important. In photographs, these are the places in the urban environment, which a passer-by usually looks away from. If they have noticed them in the first place.

Similarly, the use of graphic design and typography as main art forms enables him to capture the viewer's eye and guide his gaze around the newspaper, in the journal or the book, to point it in a direction that he thinks is important. In this respect, it should be highlighted, as he claims himself, that what matters is the "idea behind the vision," (p. 26). Sometimes his idea can be a point of view that surprises even an author of the book.

The graphic designer works submitted for this contest perfectly demonstrate the candidate's ability to use graphics as an actor on the stage, but in the space of the book (that he has organized as a stage).

The works created by Dr. Chavdar Gyuzelev after his doctoral thesis defence can be seen as a practical extension of the presented paper. What I mean is his stage design work for *Waiting for Godot*, (2018) or *Whatever you want me to be* (2015). Other examples include his participation in the Eighth International Triennale of Graphics (2019) or his exhibitions at the Bulgarian Cultural Center in Prague (2010), in Berlin (2011), in Paris (2015), or in the house of Wittgenstein in Vienna (2013).

Being among the teachers with particularly good assessment by the students, Dr. Chavdar Gyuzelev participates in projects with his students, tutors graduates and PhD students, provides assistance for their internships, participates in devising academic programs. He does his administrative duties diligently and in due course.

In view of all that has been said so far, I strongly recommend that the academic title of Associate Professor be awarded to Ch. Asst. Prof. Chavdar Nikolov Gyuzelev, PhD.

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