

REVIEW

by Prof. Viktor Paunov on the habilitation thesis of the candidate
for the academic title of Associate Professor (Graphic Design)
for the needs of the Department of Applied Arts,
Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts “Prof Asen Diamandiev”, Plovdiv,
announced in SG No 59 of 26.07.2019

with candidate Aleksandar Vasilev Gyoshev, including an digital photo catalog of his art projects

The habilitation thesis presented before me for review, though it includes various content and different products, is directly related to the main direction of creative pursuits and the professional line in the work of Aleksandar Gyoshev as an artist. It is a summary of the candidate’s educational background as a former graduate and subsequent PhD student at the National Academy of Art, his work in the field of art and book design, and experience, as a committed and dedicated educator, willing to share his academic achievements. The evidence in the catalog seriously rely on the argument of the published and realized production (printed editions, visual communication publications) that has accomplished its role through the connection with a wide range of consumers. The aforementioned is also evident from the attached references of received positive reflection and local and national recognition, materialized in awards.

I will not dwell on the biography of the candidate and his evidence covering the minimum scientometric criteria, they were published correctly in the procedure documentation. I will begin my analysis with clearly outlined contribution points in Aleksandar Gyoshev’s presentation. The applicant cites and demonstrates visually in his portfolio developments in several major areas in the design of book publications – popular science and informational publications, albums with specific themes, focus and purpose, books design (cover, book body design, illustration), and solutions for information and stage posters. I would like to emphasize at the outset the special typological place of such editions in the already very specific professionally defined space of the book. The role and place of the designer in this kind of graphic space presupposes both knowledge and mastery of modular and network structures and elements in design, as well as a

flexible and multifaceted approach in the application of graphic materialities of different impact and information orientation.

Undoubtedly Gyoshev, who is well-acquainted and has actively experimented in this area in the years of his development, growth and professional work, manages to organize in his developments a multitude of different content elements – diverse, but carefully organized in terms of typography, containing different types and levels of information arrays, photographic, informative, schematic, decorative visual elements – illustrations, info objects, decorations.

Thus, in the book *Bulgarian Traditional Calendar*, the behaviour of the designer has created a vibrant, pulsating picture of solutions whose rhythm is based on a combination of closed frames and free-standing autotypes, powerful large-scale solutions that take over large territories from the solution, but also categorical breaks and pauses in white. The overall feeling, enhanced by the color code, is uplifting, joyful, festive, and successfully introduces the reader to this otherwise unknown or forgotten, yet so Bulgarian worldview.

We see the different influence caused by the theme in the design of the book *Early Byzantine Culture in the Bulgarian Lands*. Here Aleksandar Gyoshev uses the opposite of the proportions of the form and the box pushed in the outer modules of the solution, to separate a wide area around the crease for illustrations, schemes and decorative details. The thin linearity of the images, the reduced color density, and the large overall whiteness in the solutions create a calm, stable and somewhat rigorous environment for better perception of voluminous textual content.

A similar approach, but already based on the categorically introduced horizontal, reinforced by the elements of the information apparatus of the edition (page numbering), is available in the *Roman Moesia* edition. The need to organize too many size and character images, without losing their information value, has found a suitable solution in the Gyoshev's project with free space involvement in the solution. The combination of half-tones with dashed images, variability in vertices and horizontals, "indentation" in the text and the mobile placement of ancillary texts on the graphical network creates a vibrant, diverse and interesting picture.

An indisputable contribution to the work of Aleksandar Gyoshev is the album editions presenting important historical events: *The Unification of Bulgaria*, *April of 1876*, *100 Years of*

Independent Bulgaria... Combined in large format and considerable volume, the books are conceived by Gyoshev as a kind of museum exposition. The content that gathers a wealth of documentary artifacts – photography, facsimiles, various emblematic objects, annotations, reference texts, catalogs, and other verbal information is cleverly structured and graded to be more clearly expressed and dignified. The designer's merit is the lack of self-expression and passion for graphic “bravura” – the rich and varied compositional deployment of the solutions aims to emphasize the importance of the content and enhance the impact on the viewer. Decorative elements and details, delicate backgrounds, and the color support the positioning of the material in the specifics of the era.

For the album *The Historical Year of 1885 in Engravings*, Gyoshev chose a suitable horizontal format (12/70X100), allowing full reproduction of landscape engravings from time without loss of detail and inappropriate framing. The use of different separation of the graphical network in the placement of the different texts, enhances the functionality and clarity in the perception of specialized content and corresponds to the source – European newspapers and periodicals. By choosing a color for the illustrations and colored paper (despite the slightly dominant shade), the artist sought and realized the sense of “patina” of time, documentary feeling and aesthetics.

The concept of the *Philippopolis* album aims to create a scientifically popular but highly artistic edition that presents the glorious cultural and historical heritage of the city to the public and visitors of Plovdiv. Here again, the contribution to the work of the designer is the solving of many difficult tasks. The specifics of the album format edition predetermined Gyoshev's decision to choose a three-column set box and the potential for multivalent modular solutions. The rich picture environment, containing the various materialities of a clean document, the conditionality of the scheme, the exposition object and, above all, the exclusive 3D restorations of Roman Philippopolis' urban landscapes, predetermined the flexible approach of the designer. Once again, we see a successful attempt to be introduced into a visual story, to have an imaginary virtual walk in which the text functions in the form of a guide.

The content compression and dilutions used in the design, the tight separation breaks, the selection and composition of frames and objects with different perspectives, scales and points of view, the peculiar “windows” beyond which the already existing city is located, really create

interesting spatial sensations for the viewer. We can ascertain the clear position of Aleksandar Gyoshev not only to arrange information carefully, honestly, and meaningfully – obviously with his approaches in the layout he plays the role of the viewer – the reader, expressing his reasoning behind the perception of the book.

An interesting accent in the presentation of Gyoshev is the project awarded with a national award (2013 Golden Lion Award of the Bulgarian Book Association) for a multi-volume edition dedicated to the art of Chudomir. The design of the five books that combined the works of the writer and the album with his brilliant drawings, watercolors paintings and landscapes set out a general principle emphasizing the typographic, pictorial and decorative attributes of the library layout. By integrating emblematic details of the famous Chudomir characters into the vision of the cover, the artist successfully integrates them with the contents of the books, supplementing them with a digital collage, thus creating original stories. The portrait of the writer, hovering through the letter, plays the role of an extra wink and focuses the composition.

The covers in the Hermes book series presented in the portfolio are a small part of Gyoshev's prolonged and fruitful work with the publishing house. The design of the artist, based on various compositional and technological techniques, although sometimes overloaded with elements and color, creates an interesting and recognizable panorama of various solutions, focusing on typography or painting, incorporating meaning or narratives from the content. The freedom with which Aleksandar Gyoshev combines different fonts is striking, though sometimes the diversity in scales, proportions and lines outweighs the vision.

Gyoshev's long years of experience as an illustrator are presented here with digitally created drawings for two editions. Undoubtedly, the artist's desire to create highly graphic, minimalistic images, relating to the works of our classics in illustration, but also hinting at the other possibilities of new tools and impact, generated by radically different technology, has been successfully realized. Undoubtedly, both the illustrations of the “The Dawn has Come”, reminding of silhouettes of the theater of shadows, and the iconic portraits of great Europeans, acting as icons, create new layers in an otherwise simple and casual design.

The works of Al. Gyoshev in the field of the poster, demonstrated in the portfolio with a number of projects related to opera and ballet productions, and information posters differ of the book editions. Emitting strong signals with their compositional solutions, powerful image zoom and sharp graphic opposition in color, posters are powerful and distinct in any environment. Subject to the his culture and worldview of an illustrator and book designer, Gyoshev falls into some unnecessary circumstances in his projects, moving away from the definitions of character and synthetics in the poster vision. The hierarchy of graphical elements is sometimes controversial, the volume of the picture and text message is offset, but its solutions are understandable and acceptable to the viewer.

Dear colleagues, as a specialist who has been actively involved in the last 40 years with the art of the book, design of different editions and teaching for 25 years the problems with which Aleksandar Gyoshev works as an artist, I can highly appreciate his performance in this competition procedure.

The specific field of his professional pursuits, his personal rich practical experience, justify his claim of being an author with contributions, recognition and presence in the artistic life. I can mention my impression of the tangible scale in the realizations and the organization inherent to the graphic designer, the clear practical focus of the works presented for evaluation. They also function as clear formulations to impart and acquire knowledge and skills and to acquire professional competences that are so useful to students. I hereby express my overall impression of a serious habilitation thesis with problematic themes and visible contributions. My positive attitude is naturally suggested by my belief that Aleksandar Vasilev Gyoshev will be very useful for the needs of the AMDFA institution of highly qualified personnel as Associated Professor in Graphic Design. I recommend with conviction that he must be awarded this academic title!

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