

## **Review**

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on the creative and academic achievements of Sen. Asst. Aleksandar Gyoshev, PhD in concern with his application for the procedure for awarding the title Associate Professor in Professional Field No 8.2.: Fine Arts, Specialty Graphic Design.

### **I. Details on the Applicant and the Procedure**

Aleksandar Gyoshev graduated with a master's degree from the National Academy of Arts in 2002 in the course of Prof Vladislav Paskalev, Book Illustration and Artistic Design Department. In 2010 he became a PhD student at the Book and Printed Graphics Department with the NAA. The topic of his dissertation thesis was “Artistic Transformations in the Visual Characteristics of the Bulgarian National Symbol – the Lion” with Prof Kiril Gogov appointed as his scientific advisor. The dissertation thesis was successfully defended in 2016. Since 2009, Dr Aleksandar Gyoshev has been a tutor of graphic design and illustration in the Graphic Design and Photography specialty, Faculty of Fine Arts, AMDFA “Prof Asen Diamandiev”, Plovdiv. In 2017, after a successful competition procedure, he was appointed Senior Assistant.

The profile of the applicant's academic and creative interests in the field of graphic design is wide: font studies, their genesis and historical development (in particular the development of Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets), the tradition of black and white drawing in Bulgarian fine arts and Bulgarian illustration, synchronous and diachronic poetics of poster art. – All these fields of increased interest lead A. Gyoshev, PhD to both research activity and creative experimentation in his practice as a graphic designer.

Thus, Aleksandar Gyoshev's artistic practice takes a central place – as a place of reflection, experiment and didactic space – in relation to his academic and teaching work. He is the author of artistic solutions and the layout of dozens of children albums on historical, cultural and artistic subjects, textbooks and teaching aids, books, historical chronicles, magazines, catalogs, posters, leaflets, etc.

A. Gyoshev, Ph.D is the co-founder and director of the Pro Libris Foundation, whose main purpose is to promote the book arts.

He received an award by the Initiative Committee for the celebrations of the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Unification for the publication “The Unification of Bulgaria 1885”.

The procedure for awarding the title of Associate Professor in the Professional Field No 8.2. Fine Arts, Graphic Design Specialty was announced in State Gazette No 59 of 26.07.2019 with a term of two months from the publication of the announcement. The documents of the candidate, Aleksandar Gyoshev, were filed within the legal deadline. The procedural requirements for conducting the procedure were strictly adhered to.

## **II. Conceptual structure of the application**

The main documentation on the Aleksandar Gyoshev’s application was presented in a professionally prepared portfolio consisting of 60 pages. It contains general information on the applicant and his activities, while being an expanded story of his path as an author of artistic and graphic designs. In its focal points, however, this story presents a very minimal layout of the book design ideas development in the last two decades. In his portfolio, Gyoshev talks about the development of technology, but also about his teachers and co-authors, about the authors of the books (especially the authors of the popular science books), and about the publishers with great respect and understanding of many different points of view, with an awareness of the variability as a value in the thinking about graphic design. This is not only a matter of collegial ethics, but an important setting for the art of the designer: to respond with a solution to every need, to bring out and emphasize the different point of view, to visualize both his own and others’ ideas by taking a picture of the overall dialogue of this communication in the unity of the product.

In this perspective, historical volumes and popular science editions with rich photo material are of particular importance for the presentation of Aleksandar Gyoshev. Although the candidate has made the graphic layout of many other books – such as fiction, literary criticism, memoirs, and has always addressed them with a penetrating understanding – nevertheless the well-known popular science volumes provide the necessary space to build a critical and methodological reflection on his own work. The awareness of the visual images secondaryity is important to the concept of this presentation: that design products are created

in an endless circulation of images, in which they always appear in the second tier – as quotations or peculiar collages subject to recombination.

Last but not least, regarding the concept of the submitted set of documents: the portfolio itself is drawn up as a dual model in its targeting: on the one hand, as a practical example of a candidate's work in the context of recombining image fragments and, on the other, as an essence of a candidate's didactic approach to a students' audience.

### **III. Overview of the documents contents**

The candidate rightly points out the creation of the visual appearance of collections referring to science and its functional application as popular knowledge – presented in the portfolio in the section “Popular Science Editions and Albums” and “Album Editions” – as conceptually leading in the presentation of his work. These are the representative volumes of the Bulgarian Traditional Calendar, in which A. Gyoshev, PhD works with a team of the BAS, the book by Prof. Dimitar Ovcharov, “Early Byzantine Culture in Bulgarian Lands in 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> Century”, which is extremely rich in visual material, as well as “Roman Moesia” by Rumén Ivanov. A typologically similar task is faced by the graphic designer in the development of the artistic space in the albums, for example, in the volumes “The Unification of Bulgaria”, “April 1876”, “100 Years Independent Bulgaria”, “The Historical Year of 1885 in Engravings”, as well as of the extremely popular issue “Philippopolis” (authors Dimitar Raychev and Elena Kesyakova), which was supplemented and republished in this year. – In all these cases, the mere fact that the work on graphic design is entrusted to the applicant speaks of his qualities and authority in the dedicated circles and publishing houses. Essential to the author's own work on these editions is his attempt to open digital images to the spaces and fields of the book and to strike a balance between different types of images (p. 28). In his design solutions for this type of publications, A. Gyoshev, PhD uses scientific sketches and maps as a figurative base to create graphic structures that integrate the artistic fabric of the book (p. 10).

An important place among the art products, presented in the portfolio, are the collected works of Chudomir (Abagar Publishing House, 2013). The edition was awarded with the prestigious Golden Lion Award of the Bulgarian Book Association. It is worth emphasizing the decision of Aleksandar Gyoshev, based on the idea of “six visual jokes” (p. 34), according to the wording of the intention. It places the familiar Chudomir's images in a situation of their intense receptive doubling, of their peculiar “descent” from the frame of their media: sitting

on the surface of the open book, carrying the book under arm, facing the frame of a museum exhibit, or just leaving their own image from a poster. Put in this way in the perspective of mutual reading, the images emphasize their own modular character, their principle compatibility and their ability to relate. But at the same time, mutual reading directly addresses the tradition of our culture since the dawn of modern Bulgarian times, in the tradition of that constituent reflexive capacity of “Bai Ganyo reads ‘Bai Ganyo’”.

The other author's solutions in the field of book design, featured in the portfolio in the “Cover Design” section, impress with their extremely varied versatility, which reflects in extremely diverse solutions. Usually, with the layout created, the book's designer puts his handwriting, recognizable in certain circles – this is the kind of signature that publishers are looking for. Aleksandar Gyoshev is doing something fundamentally different. He imposes his own visually interpretive reading on the immediate reading of the text, as the interpretation acquires its own, specific face. All types of reads are present in this space – from purely genre, popular or even for example self-suggestive texts to experimental or provocative titles. “Flow. The Psychology of Optimal Experience” by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “160 Years of Wall Street” by Georgi Vukov, “Metropolitan” by Andrey Zahariev, the poem collections “Catching up with the World” by Marko Ganchev and “Stake” by Marko Markov, “The Heart's Memory” memoirs by Georgi Stoyanov, “The Bulgarian Dilemma” socio-psychological collection of articles by Toni Nikolov.

Particularly curious are the design solutions described in the “Illustration” section. Here, the example focus is on two typical and fundamentally different cases: Ivet Anavi's book “The Dawn Has Come” and the popular volume “The Great Europeans” by Plamen Asenov. In the first case, with his illustrations for “The Dawn has Come”, Aleksandar Gyoshev, PhD seeks to strike a balance between various drawing traces in the spirit of the tradition of Iliya Beshkov and Boris Angelushev (p. 44). In contrast, the plastic approach chosen in the second case is consistent with the sketchy nature of the texts. The drawings are created through digital with frugal gestures and display the pictorial characteristics of the portrayed persons (p. 46).

Last but not least, the activity of Aleksandar Gyoshev as a posters author presented in the “Poster” section should be noted. In fact, the work on posters for opera performances such as “The Lion's Face”, “Don Carlos”, “L'Africaine”, “The Barber of Seville”, and the “Ghetto” Ballet are part of a complex collaboration with the Stara Zagora State Opera and the director Slavcho Nikolov. In addition to stage designs, Aleksandar Gyoshev also creates a series of posters and graphic images for various opera and ballet productions. As a designer, he strives

to diversify the graphic layout of a traditional opera poster. The main visual techniques in his design work are aimed at creating artistic unity of the images with the typographic elements. He shows creative approach to stage poster composition – uses different images: maps, works of art, photo images, etc. and combines them with two-dimensional author's images. His authorial solutions contrast the poster works with the other visual forms in a conceptually solid way, on the one hand, and on the other, bring out the poster art as completely independent in its specific visual genre form – such as format, attractive vision, content, communication, qualities, accessibility, etc.

In view of all this, and appreciating the production outlined above, I find it quite reasonable to give my positive assessment to the candidate and give my recommendations for the scientific jury to prepare a report proposal to the Faculty of Fine Arts at the AMDFA “Prof Asen Diamandiev” for the awarding of Sen. Asst. Aleksandar Gyoshev, PhD with the academic position of Associate Professor in the Higher Education Field No 8. Arts; Professional Field No 8.2. Fine Arts; Specialty Graphic Design.

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