

Review

on the artistic and academic achievements of Dr Dimitar Vodenicharov in connection with his application in the competition for associate professor in professional field 8.2 Fine Arts, specialty History of Costume and Scenography.

I. Information about the applicant and the competition

Dr. Dimitar Vodenicharov is a long-time lecturer in Scenography, Faculty of Fine Arts, Academy of Music Dance and Fine Arts “Prof Asen Diamandiev”, Plovdiv, since its establishment in 1996. In addition, over the years he has been an active set designer with over 30 stage performances for different theatres, with different directors, for different target audiences (productions for adults and children; popular, classic titles, "genre", entertaining, experimental works). Dimitar Vodenicharov also works actively in the field of fine arts and has a rich biography of individual and collective exhibitions, curatorial projects, plein-air, etc. His individual artistic participations have been recognized with prestigious awards, and have received numerous media reviews.

The competition for associate professor in professional field 8.2., specialty History of Costume and Scenography, was announced in the State Gazette No. 59/ 26.07.2019 with validity two months from the publication of the announcement. The documents of Dimitar Vodenicharov were filed within the legal deadline. The procedural requirements for conducting the competition are strictly adhered to.

II. Conceptual building of the application

The documentation submitted by Dr Vodenicharov for the competition represents, in an eloquent and well-organized completeness, the candidate's scientific and creative interests, as well as their characteristic and symptomatic intertwining. - For Dimitar Vodenicharov, scenography is a broad conceptual platform, as a diverse aesthetic and as a historically committed project. On the one hand, this project has its immediate meanings and functions in/ for the present, and – on the other - it is initially tied to the learning process, it is understood as such a transfer of practical experience that, in the perspective of one *techne* (τέχνη), carries out the interactions between art, science and technology. This is an idea of the overall appearance of the scenographic image and its functional permeation, which is typologically similar to those understandings of the nature of art that Vodenicharov himself follows, rethinks and builds on in parallel in his creative career, in his teaching and scientific work:

creative Bauhaus workshops and their large-scale creative and social context. In this perspective, the scientometrically structured documentation is fully consistent not only the standardization requirements, but also with the applicant's artistic profile. In his work, the bridge between science, practice and pedagogical sharing of experience is the conceptual node and object of observation.

III. Description and evaluation of the application activities

Within **criteria group A** there is a defended dissertation work on the topic: *Aesthetic and Technological Practices in Stage Lighting in the European Theatre* (from the last quarter of the XIX to the second half of the XX century)". The dissertation of Dimitar Vodenicharov was successfully defended on October 25, 2018, and its contributions exceeded by far the minimum requirements. I had the opportunity, as a member of the defense jury, to express an opinion on this work. Here I will just mention that Vodenicharov's dissertation also exceeds its own original tasks, because in it the concrete problems and the historical development of stage lighting are presented in the plan of ideas for a complex work of art (Gesamtkunstwerk). That is, the lighting at the core of these ideas is not an element of the performance, but one of the possible projections of its complex wholeness, an expression of the synthetic transition between different types of textuality. Such presentation of the dissertation topic suggests interdisciplinary work and, in a sense, establishing intermedial perspectives – a serious challenge, which Dimitar Vodenicharov handled extremely well. The research starts with a problem that we are wrongfully used to think of as purely a technical matter. The candidate fully deploys this problem as the focus of different traditions, of different stage-visual practices and concepts, of aesthetic systems, to bring out the visions of the stage lighting to their significance as a signature of the modern era. In the end, the dissertation problem discusses the possibilities for emancipation of the stage art from its theatrical basis, and this is an important topic with numerous approaches to it.

Two theatrical productions are presented under **criteria group B**. Dr Vodenicharov the author of the set design and costumes for the play *Undress!* Based on Joe Orton's *What the Butler Saw* (in Plovdiv Drama Theatre, 2014), as well as the set design for the musical *The Schmuck* by P Radevski and L. Capon (Plovdiv Drama Theatre, 1996). I draw attention to the large time interval between the two performances (18 years), which is supplemented by additional differences that form a wide genre, style, technical and conceptual range. The early production, *The Schmuck*, focuses on its seemingly hermetically sealed and self-contained (as if fairy-tale) stage space, which, however, is able to abundantly metamorphize, to “pulsate” in

its rotation on stage, to withdraw with the imperceptible by the naked eye movements, or resolutely "to sail", "to blur with the space" (p. 108 of the documentary section) and to return again. Thus the stage solutions set the pace of the performance, but also express its conceptual idea: to build a world resembling a ship-fortress for those who are too adult for a puppet theatre, and too young for an adult. The more recent performance, the comedy *Undress!*, is an exemplary of the opportunities offered to the set designer with minimal space stylization. As the visual illustrative material (p. 15-22) well demonstrates, the seemingly realistic dramaturgical basis with the dominant humour of the situation and the changing of clothes, is set in a plastic, rich of light segments space. Here, the play of frequent dramatic twists, the growth of a network of finding-outs and confusion, is in sync with the stage concept, which combines light focuses and interferences, opens lateral spaces to the main scene and imposes an active presence on the shadows and silhouette projections of the stage. All this contributes to the suggestion of a "fusion of the actor and spectator zone" (p. 109), as well as to the dynamic and ironic turning of a presumably sterile, ornament-free environment: the set of the psychiatric clinic.

The publication of a monograph based on the dissertation, three articles published in specialized editions and one artistic event: a watercolour exhibition at the Bulgarian Cultural Institute "Wittgenstein House", Vienna, are presented in the broad profile of **criteria group D**. The monograph is undoubtedly an extremely useful scientific work that can be used by specialists in various fields of the cultural history.

The watercolours of Dimitar Vodenicharov are curious enough in themselves. Here, in relation to their "scenographic" potential, I just want to mention their ability to create a homogeneous space. It is so homogeneous in its interior and atmospheric unity that if it could accept anything on its territory, it would carry unexpected transmissions and interpretations. Crucial to the project of this application are the three articles in this section (D 9). They indicate the connection between the dissertation thesis (the articles *Historical Analysis of Stage Lighting* and *Adolphe Appia, first performances of modern theatre*), and his practice as an artist (*Three scenographic solutions for "light" theatrical genre*). Of essential importance here is the consistently developed self-reflection, the correct inference of supports to an explicit poetics of the scenographic image. Moreover, one of the three examples in the article on scenographic solutions, sheds light on the musical *The Schmuck*, (the production brought out as a creative focus in the previous criteria group). The scenographic solutions of Dimitar Vodenicharov are presented clearly and consistently, with a prominent and deliberate

didacticism, and at the same time with a strong respect for the potential recipient – the reader theatregoer, the professional set designer, or a student in the respective specialty. I am particularly curious about the “return” of the author to the historical traces of Gesamtkunstwerk, seen in the third of the examples of scenographic solutions: *The Wizard of Oz* (directed Leo Capon, 2000). The stage costumes, described and illustrated on page 55, refer to the best traditions of constructivism of the 1920s: with the geometric elements integrated in the costumes, with the collaged two-dimensional images and small geometric volumes.

In **criteria group D** are included two quotations and three reviews for author's products by Dimitar Vodenicharov. We see an article by the candidate, which is approbatory for his dissertation. It is published in *Stranitsa* magazine, which is included in the NACID reference list. The reviews of Vodenicharov's artistic work are also positive.

In the also versatile **criteria group F** are listed two participations in international scientific, educational or creative projects (two participations are listed): within the Sixth German-Bulgarian Creative Meeting - Plovdiv, 2015, entitled "From the Centre to the Periphery" (13.02 – 13.03.2015), and in a graphic symposium - a joint event by the Saxony-Anhalt Artists Society, Germany, and the Union of Plovdiv Artists. The management of similar a project is also noted here: an exhibition of Deutsche Telekom collection titled LISTEN TO US – ARTISTIC INTELLIGENCE, Dimitar Vodenicharov is the exposition manager and coordinator. Last but not least, in favour of the group F criteria there are two awards received by the author: the Plovdiv Award – in the Fine Arts section for 2017 and the Award of the Union of Plovdiv Artists (2016).

In **conclusion**: My personal impressions on the work of Dr Dimitar Vodenicharov as a teacher and an artist, complement the picture painted by his scientometric indicators. His presence at the Academy, and especially in the Scenography major, is solid, important and strong. All of this gives me reason to propose to the honourable scientific jury to award him the academic title Associate Professor and I confidently vote “in favour”.

Prof Galina Lardeva, PhD

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