

## PEER REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stefka Ilieva Popova

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regarding the submitted materials in connection with the announced competition by Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts for occupation of the academic position of “**Professor**” under Scientific field 8. “Arts”, Professional field 8.2. “Fine Arts”, specialty “**Mural Painting**”, for the needs of the Fine Arts Department, Faculty of Fine Arts, Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – Plovdiv

Basis for presenting the peer review – participation in the composition of the Scientific Jury, according to Order No ПД-27-047 dated 14.03.2024 by the Rector of the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts. There are no violations in the competition procedure.

### I. Data about the competition:

In the announced competition by Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts for occupation of the academic position of “Professor” in Mural Painting under Professional field 8.2. “Fine Arts”, Higher education field 8. “Arts”, there is one candidate participating – Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Nikolaeva Kantareva-Decheva. The announcement for the competition was published in State Gazette, Issue 5 dated 16.01.2024.

The procedure is in accordance with the requirements of the state and university normative documents regarding the occupation of academic positions.

### II. Data about the candidate:

Elena Nikolaeva Kantareva-Decheva was born in 1963. In 1989, she obtained a Master’s degree from the National Academy of Arts in Sofia, specializing in “Conservation and Restoration”. In 1997, she completed a specialization (through a competition) in “Conservation and Restoration of Paintings and Objects of Art” at the Art Conservation Center in Williamston, Massachusetts, USA, organized by the Open Society Institute – New York and the Soros Centre for the Arts Foundation in Sofia. In the same Center in 2006, she specialized in “Analytical Techniques in Conservation”. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Kantareva-Decheva has extensive professional experience as an artist-restorer.

In 2020, she successfully defended her doctoral dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree “**Doctor**” at Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in Plovdiv.

From 2008 to the present, she has been an **Associate Professor** at the Fine Arts Department at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in Plovdiv.

From 2021 to the present, she has been the Director of the Ancient Plovdiv Municipal Institute. Her professional and artistic achievements are numerous, including projects, management, and execution of restoration work on mosaic floors and icons in

sites such as the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis and the archaeological site Small Basilica Plovdiv, restoration of Royal icons from the St. Archangel Michael Church in Tryavna, and many others.

Since 1998, she has been the author of numerous realized icons and murals, such as 20 icons for the iconostasis of St. Prophet Elijah Church in the village of Sinapovo, designing and executing 10 icons for the Royal row of St. Archangel Michael Church in Asenovgrad, painting 25 icons for the iconostasis of St. George Church in Pancharevo, Sofia, in collaboration with Assoc. Prof. Dechko Dechev.

Her murals are equally impressive; in 2012, she realized 386 sq.m. of murals for St. George the Victorious Church in Pancharevo, Sofia, in collaboration with Assoc. Prof. Dechko Dechev, and from 2018 to the present, she has been designing murals for St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Church in Sarafovo, Burgas. She is also responsible for the murals in the apse and dome of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Church in the Pamporovo Resort Complex, in collaboration with Assoc. Prof. Dechko Dechev.

Her creative work is difficult to describe due to its comprehensiveness, but it is evidence of undeniable capacity and high professionalism.

Assoc. Prof. Kantareva is an outstanding specialist who, together with Assoc. Prof. Dechev, has established the specialty "Church Painting" at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in Plovdiv. Over the years, as a driving force in the specialty, she has been a true inspiration for her students. Her teaching activities cover a wide range of fundamental disciplines: painting techniques and technology, icon painting, mural painting, and composition.

### **III. Description of the scientific and artistic activities of the candidate**

The materials submitted for participation in the competition for occupation of the academic position of "**Professor**" comprehensively cover the minimum national scientometric criteria and meet all the requirements outlined in the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as in the Regulations of Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts. The candidate's creative endeavors are difficult to summarize as they are all socially significant. They clearly mark three directions in which the candidate works, namely mural painting, restoration of icons and mosaics, and creation of original icons for churches across the country.

As a fundamental part of the materials related to the artistic and creative activity of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Kantareva-Decheva, the following is included:

1. Design and execution of 386 square meters of murals for St. George the Victorious Church in Byala Cherkva Residential Complex, Pancharevo District, Sofia, from 2011 to 2012.
2. Design and execution of murals for St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Church in the Sarafovo Region, Burgas, from 2018 to 2023.
3. Design and execution of 24 icons for the iconostasis of St. George the Victorious Church in Byala Cherkva Residential Complex, Pancharevo District, Sofia, from 2008 to 2009.

The leadership of creative workshops is numerous and adequately complements the candidate's professional experience.

As part of the habilitation materials related to the scientific research activities of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Kantareva-Decheva, the published book based on her defended doctoral dissertation on the topic *"Floor Mosaics from the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis – Technology and Technique, Condition, Problems, Restoration"*, is included. It was published by Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in 2022, ISBN: 78-619-7682-16-8, 178 pages. From a scientific point of view, the research is of interest given the technical and technological investigation and documentation of the mosaic floors during their restoration, by providing important information about the sequence and method of their laying, the techniques used, the work organization, and the type and properties of the materials used.

The presented scientific articles support the author's research efforts, in which she is either the sole author or co-author, published in specialized publications in the field of arts. In them, her professionalism and dedication to the mosaic art of Philippopolis are clearly evident.

#### **IV. Scientific and artistic contributions of the candidate**

- A significant contribution is her leadership and implementation of the project for the "Conservation, Restoration, and Exhibition of Floor Mosaics from the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis" from 2015 to 2021, as well as the project for the "Restoration of Mosaics from the Small Basilica";
- The substantial volume of murals realized in various churches across the country vividly demonstrates her professionalism and astounding painting skills, which immerse viewers in the world of the divine. Valuable contributions are not only her original compositions but also the iconographic programs that serve as a guide for monumental church painting. I would like to mention just a few of the significant projects completed, such as the 386 sq.m. murals for St. George the Victorious Church in Biala Cherkva, the murals for St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Church in Sarafovo, Burgas, and many others;
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Kantareva has led numerous national, scientific, educational, or artistic projects. In 2019, she was the recipient of the Plovdiv Award in the category "Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Memory Preservation".

**In conclusion, given the materials presented, I believe the candidate far exceeds the national requirements for participation in the competition announced by Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts. The materials presented, along with her exceptional professionalism, are compelling arguments. Therefore, I confidently propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award the academic position of "Professor" to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Kantareva-Decheva under Higher education field 8. "Arts", Professional field 8.2. "Fine Arts", specialty**

**“Mural Painting”. With conviction, responsibility, and excitement, I will vote “FOR”.**

Plovdiv

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Stefka Popova