

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof Nikola Lautliev, PhD on dissertation thesis
on competition for the occupation of the academic position of Associate Professor
in AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv,
Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Applied Arts;
in the professional field Fine Art - code 8.2,
with candidate: Mariana Todorova Dafova, PhD

The only candidate in the announced procedure - Mariana Todorova Dafova is a graduate of Southwestern University, Bachelor in Economics with focus on Economics of the Public Sphere and Business Marketing and Advertising and two-year Master's program at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" with a degree in Photography in 2010.

During her student years at the academy, Dafova showed an increased interest in the theoretical aspect of the history of the world photography, and in the applied aspect – in film black-and-white photography, laboratory work and finishing processes.

Her professional career so far has passed mainly through two fields of the visual practices: the advertising design and advertising marketing and her academic work as a teacher of photography disciplines at AMDFA. Her experience and knowledge of advertising design, software and hardware allowed her to easily integrate into the specifics of the specialty Graphic Design and Photography as a part-time, and later as a full-time teacher appointed after a competition.

The review analysis and evaluation are based on the indicated habilitation reference for the candidate's work. The presented documents and materials, arranged in several folders, are well substantiated and are evidence of a wide-ranging activity. They meet the requirements of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the Regulations for its implementation:

Curriculum vitae, diplomas for completed higher education and for the acquisition of a scientific and educational degree Doctor, certificates – medical and criminal records, a table for the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for the academic position "Associate Professor" and a reference for scientific contributions.

Evidential materials by indexes:

Scientific-pedagogical and teaching-methodical activity:

D7 – Book on defended dissertation work,

D17 – Reference for citations;

D9 –Project with Master students,

E22 and E24 – Completed academic projects with her participation,

E28 – Workshop with students

Artistic and creative work:

B4 – Solo exhibitions,

G12 – International participation in Lodz Photo Festival,

D14 – Participation in collective exhibitions,

14 – Studio portraits of the academic staff of AMDFA.

With the dissertation work: *Time and Transformation in Photography*, Mariana Dafova received the Doctor degree and fulfilled the requirements under DASRBA. The title has two provocations for the author: one – emotional, associated with her summer vacations in an old house in the village of Hvoyna and the second as a reverberation – much later, about the need for a complete, in-depth study on time and its role in the transformations in photography.

For the defense of her master's degree in 2010, Dafova presented a series of photographs of a half-forgotten and accidentally inhabited house in the village of Hvoyna. With the photos, she brought out of anonymity the objects – witnesses of the years gone by, and juxtaposes them with the traces of her daughter's vacation, synonymous with the present time. This was a well thought solution to reflect on time as an invisible character in the picture. Undoubtedly, this primary creative charge has preserved in her the desire to decipher the feelings and thoughts generated by time in photography. This later became the subject of two of her own exhibitions and the starting point for the topic of her dissertation.

The author synthesizes the scientific scope and the problem that will be investigated in the dissertation. This is very important, because it establishes the limits of the study, namely "*This dissertation is entirely aimed at the study of the notions of time in photography and the transformation of objects in space, which are subject to time through the expressive means of photography*".

The text is structured to deal with two genetically embedded and eternal questions, insofar as the history of the discovery is permanent – Craft or Art? and Document or Imagination?

Dafova rightfully gives preferential attention in the content to the influence of the historical aspects and factors determining the meaning of the studied concepts. This is what she does in the first section, Science in the Captivity of Photographic Time. Next are the technological changes in the photographic technique and technology that change the processes of image capturing and the visible result thereof. She argues with correctly selected photographic examples from the world history, which have become educational examples of the fixation of time and changes in the world around us.

The arrangement and systematization of the bibliography and photographic theories related to time, space, and memory in the second section, "Photographic Theories," is helpful and innovative. She brings out the modernity of the medium in a third section, "Photographic Interpretations of Time," with examples of photographers who use a conceptual approach to recreate time and space in their works. With this, she closes the selected circle of analyzes and research on the topic, which gives the necessary integrity and completeness.

A major critical source on the subject of the dissertation is the collection of essays *Time and Photography*. This collection is a good choice, because as a relatively new - 2008 university edition - it

is in maximum accordance with the topic. Dafova discusses the texts of Joanna Lowry, who examines the "modern times" in the context of a series of photographs. Quite aptly in the following chapters she uses the conclusions that photography can be seen as a technology that is capable of creating an image with certain features, as this characteristic appearance of the image is born of the camera's shutter and time.

She makes good use of the author's claims and examples of the connections between photography and time as multiple: that time can be directly represented in the image, it can be its subject and philosophical horizon, but it can also represent the global framework in which the photographic practices develop and change over time.

Her ambition is to bring together findings on the different aspects of time in photography, as well as photography in time, and to illustrate them with examples ranging from the first photographic images to the latest cross-media uses of photography in and outside of art.

Mariana Dafova presents general evidence for six citations from her theoretical works. The passages are her statements, which have a more generalized art critic nature and are therefore used by professors from the departments of Fine Arts and Applied Arts of the Fine Arts Faculty of AMDFA. D17 shows the cited texts and certificates for their citation.

In confirmation of her extracurricular work are the evidence of project participation in various artistic and educational initiatives with students in folders E 22 and E28.

As the most interesting and effective, I would point out the project with the two Master students aimed at realizing photographs in the context of defining contemporary photography by Charlotte Cotton. Undoubtedly, exposure of photography students to *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* has enriched the approaches to interpreting contemporary social, economic, and personal photography issues.

Quite logically, Mariana Dafova sums up the experiment with quotation "*At the heart of this lie the possibilities that postmodernist practise represents for contemporary art photographers, to be able to knowingly shape the subjects that intrigue them, conscious of the heritage of the imagery into which they are entering to see the contemporary world through the pictures we already know*". This example shows that the students have the psychological attitude and understanding for a more modern interpretation of the photographic actions.

Pedagogical and teaching-methodical activity:

Over the years, she has established herself as a teacher and photographer with high professionalism, with an acute sense of responsibility towards the problems of the modern photography education. From the very beginning of her teaching career in the department, Dafova has been responsible for the development and teaching of the disciplines History of Photography and Applied Photography. There are detailed curricula developed, lecture material very well illustrated with photos and films for the History of Photography, part one - from 1839 to WWII, as well as part two - Photography of the 20th Century.

Regarding the discipline Applied Photography, it could be emphasized that the content and way of conducting the lectures and the exercises have practical usefulness, not only because of her knowledge and training, but also because of her long experience as a corporate expert in Advertising Design and Advertising Photography.

I know very well her creative works – individual exhibitions

2021 *Mom, how are you, mom*, Hindlyan House, Maazata

2017 *We were here*, House of Culture "Boris Hristov

2012 *Plovdiv - through my heart*

2012 *Hvoyna in four seasons*,

2009 *My Big Friends*, TRAKART gallery

and ten collective performances, two of which at Bulgarian Cultural Center in Warsaw.

In each of her appearances, she showed a creative maturity that has grown over the years, a deepening of her philosophical reflections embodied in photographs. I would mark the exhibitions *My Big Friends*, *We Were Here* and *Mom, How Are You, Mom* as the most significant for our national photography scene.

It should be noted that parallel to the full color, which she chose for five of her author's exhibitions, she has also created a collection of black and white photographs *Plovdiv - through my heart*, which showed her strong sensitivity to the form and the classic halftone.

These were fully thought-out and complete exhibitions in which Dafova's positions and attitudes towards photographic art and self-importance moved from portraiture, through documentary photography, to end with a conceptualized idea of time, distance and parental feelings as a personal confession.

About *My Big Friends*, Dafova says: “*Color is magic? A magic that can cheer and sadden, heal or sicken, soothe or irritate, play with emotions without asking us. And since the human face is the greatest scene of emotion, I allowed myself to deviate from the reality of that face by using non-native color palettes. The local color in this case is unreal and expresses the inner tension of the spirit. I created these portraits from people's subjective reactions to their own selves, where small objects and accessories point to individual aspects of their social environment*”.

Right from her first exhibition, she firmly relies on the conceptual approach in the realization of her main idea. This continues in the last exhibition. *Mom How Are You Mom* is a look at two very different realities existing together in a visual dialogue, that of the mother with a laid-back lifestyle and that of the daughter who is in constant search and movement.

Her last photographic engagement was also a document of creative maturity and professional improvement. These are the studio portraits of the academic staff of AMDFA, which are now documentary states intended for a website, but which contain a clear artistic potential in the future to become a historical testimony of a bygone era.

Conclusion:

I have known Mariana Dafova since her student years, throughout her teaching and artistic journey so far. I highly appreciate her professionalism as a teacher and photographer. To this I add my high assessment of the presented habilitation materials. After analyzing their significance and their scientific and applied contributions, I give my categorical assessment in support of the procedure to the overall and artistic work. Proof of this is the fulfillment of the scientometric requirements according to the table on the DASRBA and the regulations for its application.

I propose to the members of the esteemed jury to approve the occupation of the academic position Associate Professor by Mariana Dafova for the needs of AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv, faculty of Fine Arts, department of Applied Arts professional field Fine Arts.

Plovdiv

21.11.2023

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