PEER REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dimitar Vodenicharov, PhD

for the competition announced by the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts Prof. Assen Diamandiev for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 8.2 Fine Arts, “Stage Technique and Technology” and “Scenography”, for the needs of the Department of Applied Arts, Scenography major, pursuant to Art. 25 of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBAct) and the resolution of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Fine Arts (Minutes No. 20/22.05.2026)

Competition Information

One candidate, Petko Tanchev, PhD, is participating in the competition announced by the AMDFA Prof. Asen Diamandiev, Plovdiv. He is a full-time tutor in the disciplines “Stage Technique and Technology”, “Stage Design”, and “Art Design and Lighting of Dance Performance” in the Multimedia master's program of Ballet Directing and Choreography, in the Photography major at AMDFA, and Visual Design major of the Digital Arts at NAA (National Academy of Art) master's program. The candidate has submitted a complete set of documents in accordance with the requirements of DASRBAct and the regulations of AMDFA. The habilitation materials contain current and well-organized information on his creative interests and achievements in the fields in which he works.

Education and Qualification

Petko Tanchev is a graduate of the High School of Fine Arts for Stage Design, Plovdiv (today the National High School for Stage and Screen Arts). He completed his bachelor's degree in Scenography (2008). Master's degree in Scenography (2010). Since 2016, he has been a part-time tutor in the Digital Arts master's program at the Department of Art Studies at NAA, where he teaches the disciplines: Motion Capture, Screen Arts, Introduction to Video Production, Documentary Practices, and Visual Programming Tools. In 2023, he successfully defended his PhD dissertation titled Visual Programming Tools, published in 2026 under the title Visual Programming. Creative Tools in TouchDesigner, ISBN: 978-619-186-936-7. As a professional, Tanchev is quite recognizable in a space that comes across as both tightly

profiled and interdisciplinary at once. Beyond his work as a scenographer, his creative output centers on integrating digital content into stage productions and works in public space, exploring the intersections between technology, space, and perception.

General Description of the Materials Submitted

The works presented in the attached documents are realized scenography projects and artistic works spanning a wide stylistic and genre range. Tanchev has taken part in numerous productions and exhibitions in Bulgaria and abroad. Among the notable projects is his debut as scenographer and video designer for the Four Rooms production at Sofia Theatre (2009), winner of two Ikar awards for scenography and technical execution; the interactive installation *CNNCTR* (2015); and his role as curator of the *Creative Media Lab* at the Night/Plovdiv Festival (2016-2019).

He played a key role in staging leading events in the program of Plovdiv 2019, European Capital of Culture. He created the visual environment for the Odysseus production at Plovdiv Drama Theatre. His scenography for Madama Butterfly at Plovdiv State Opera received the Plovdiv Award for Audiovisual Arts, and the interactive media design for the opening gala of Opera Open 2019 was recognized in the Contemporary Multi-genre Arts category.

Tanchev has worked with international creative studios, artists, and directors from the USA, China, Argentina, Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Poland, Malta, and other countries. His projects have been presented at video mapping exhibitions and festivals in Beijing, Chongqing, and Yifeng; at media and technology forums in Las Vegas and London; and at major cultural events in Buenos Aires, Dublin, Valletta, Berlin, and Stuttgart.

In 2022, he created the visual environment for the opening of the Tesla Light Festival in Novi Sad, Serbia, part of the official program of Novi Sad 2022, European Capital of Culture. The following year, he designed the lighting design and mapping installation for Mysteries of Transition, an event for the opening ceremony of Eleusis 2023, European Capital of Culture in Greece.

As an active participant in Bulgaria's artistic life, he is co-founder of Melformator (2013) and *Senselab* (2019), and develops innovative installations for global brands including Porsche, *Audi*, and *The Coca-Cola Company*.

Most of his realized productions are staged by our most prestigious companies, and titles co-authored with D. Dobreva, M. Kalanova, and M. Raychinova hold particular value, being the team behind some of the most distinctive theatrical events in the country.

As the subject of this peer review, I take the projects, productions and publications presented in the scientometric table under indicators B, C and D, among which I don't find prominent theatrical events such as Odysseus, Silk and others.

The Synergy of the Future project, which transforms data content into a large-scale audiovisual installation, comes close to contemporary forms of the so-called virtual museums. Its content is built using modern, high-tech approaches to 21st century public art: interactive systems design software, artificial intelligence, and machine learning algorithms. The archives are transformed and organized into an abstract cinematic experience, and the artistic intervention in architecture enables an aesthetic reinterpretation of the site, transforming it into an immersive interactive environment.

The Ancient and Eternal: Imagined Urban Finds project, besides being a logical continuation of the above, stands as a bold media experiment that successfully replicates and reconsiders the boundaries between physical archaeological heritage and intangible digital art. The mapping projection's intervention in the urban environment isn't aggressive, but rather fluid. Using authentic archeology as a visual field allows the digital images to come alive as a natural extension of the architectural fabric. Beyond serving as an example of meaningful and effective use of resources from operational programs (Heritage 2023), it's also visual poetry that should certainly be built upon in future creative projects. The project's only debatable shortcoming is its severely limited window for physical experience.

In the scenography for The Magic Flute, Tanchev finds his key in a strongly graphic, almost entirely black-and-white dualistic contrast, a minimalist approach that deliberately restricts the stage's color palette. The visual concept is a conscious counterweight to Mozart's extremely rich musical palette, with the sole exception in this monochrome environment reserved for the character of Papageno. His character brings a sharp, colorful accent through its saturated pink. It should be noted here that the digital environment works in perfect sync with Marina Raychinova's mystical costumes and the performers' body language, heightened by the lighting design and developed by the choreographer.

The video design in Moby Dick is a masterful interweaving of technology and stage space that goes beyond multimedia's standard illustrative function. Tanchev doesn't design a static backdrop; instead, he uses complex mapping that selectively dresses scenographer Mira Kalanova's structures in digital layers, turning surfaces of wood and metal into living matter,

from an endless expanse of water to a claustrophobic ship's deck. The multimedia is designed so as not to compete with or blur the stage lighting. It manages to generate its own light atmosphere that works with the lighting concept, bringing out the actors' silhouettes as graphic accents. The absolute aesthetic fusion between Tanchev's video and Pashnin's lighting is without question the artistic achievement of the project, and his presence on the production team was a key factor in winning the Ikar Award for masterful technical realization of a production.

Scientific Research and Publications

Dr. Tanchev's research interests lie in the highly effective contact between classical scenography and advanced digital technologies, with a substantial contribution to the study of contemporary media arts. His academic profile stands out for a clearly interdisciplinary character, aimed at the theoretical understanding and practical systematization of digital scenography, interactive design and media stage environments. His research and publication output fills a significant gap in Bulgarian specialized literature on digital stage arts. His research texts carry not just theoretical value; they function as a practical guide within the contemporary scenography toolkit. This establishes him as one of the country's leading academic authorities at the intersection of visual arts, coding, and theater.

Teaching and Academic Activity

This area of Dr. Petko Tanchev's academic work is, alongside its varied character, expertise gained on the ground. His research activity is closely tied to educational workshops, lectures and curatorial projects, through which he carries the theoretical models from his publications into the real practice of young artists. His teaching approach to the Stage Technique and Technology discipline combines practical skills gained on the professional stage with research interests that extend well beyond the scope of his PhD dissertation. His academic approach moves beyond the boundaries of traditional art education, introducing software engineering and visual programming as legitimate creative tools for contemporary scenographers and visual artists.

Conclusion

Petko Tanchev, PhD, meets the indicators for the academic position of Associate Professor, and there is full compliance with the requirements:

An established author with recognition in academic circles and a contribution to the research field.

An established tutor with a contribution to the development of course and program content in the major.

Having reviewed the competition materials in the context of Tanchev's artistic efforts, I have grounds to consider that we have before us a candidate with clearly demonstrated expert competencies. A distinctly contemporary artist, commanding a wide range of expressive means. His artistic practice interweaves theoretical inquiry, various digital technologies, interactive performance and installation, theatrical practices, urban public art, video art and video installation. His work in team projects as scenographer for large-scale theatrical and opera productions is well known. He's the author of theoretical texts and publications. His expert assessments have repeatedly been included in state, municipal and private funding programs, committees and competitions.

The submitted habilitation dissertation is directed at the educational process, carries high artistic, theoretical and applied scientific value, and represents a significant academic contribution to the knowledge of contemporary art.

All of this gives me grounds for a positive evaluation, and I confidently recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury support the candidacy of Petko Alexandrov Tanchev, PhD, for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field 8.2 Fine Arts.

02.08.2026 Assoc. Prof. Dimitar Vodenicharov, PhD

City of Plovdiv