

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Elena Nikolaeva Kantareva-Decheva,
Department of Fine Arts at the Faculty of Fine Arts
AMDFA Prof Asen Diamandiev - Plovdiv

on the procedure for awarding the academic position Associate Professor, field of higher education 8. Arts, professional field 8.2 Fine Arts, specialty Mural Painting, announced by the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts Prof Asen Diamandiev – Plovdiv

in connection with a competition for the awarding of the academic position Associate Professor in professional field 8. 2. Fine Arts, specialty Mural Painting, for the needs of the Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts of AMDFA Prof Asen Diamandiev, Plovdiv.

I. Information about the competition

The competition for the needs of the Department of Fine Arts at the Faculty of Fine Arts of AMDFA Prof Asen Diamandiev - Plovdiv, was announced in the State Gazette no. 63 of 25.07.2023. A scientific jury was appointed to conduct the competition by order of the Rector of AMDFA No. RD-27-121 of September 21, 2023, as well as based on the decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Fine Arts with protocol No 2 of 18.09. 2023. Documents for participation in the competition have been submitted by only one candidate: Stefka Popova, PhD. The submitted documents correspond to the requirements and regulations according to Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, as well as to the internal rules of the Academy. All terms and regulations of the procedure have been observed, no violations have been identified.

II. Information about candidate

Stefka Popova completed her education at AMDFA Prof Asen Diamandiev - Plovdiv, where in 2007 she obtained a Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy of Fine Arts Education, in 2009 Master's degree in Church Painting (2009), and in 2020 the scientific-educational degree Doctor with a dissertation on the topic *Creation of Creative Models for Decoration of a Modern Temple in the Education of Students*. She is a long-time teacher at AMDFA in the specialty Church Painting (2010-2019) and the specialty Mural Painting (2019-present).

Stefka Popova has participated in a number of art exhibitions, among which stand out the solo exhibition in Sempre Gallery of NBU Plovdiv (2011), Biennale of Church Arts in Veliko Tarnovo (2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2023), as well as the annual exhibitions in Saint Dimitar Gallery at the church of the same name in Plovdiv and those of students and teachers from AMDFA Plovdiv. Stefka Popova works very actively in the field of church painting and mural painting, she is the author of many icons and murals in a number of churches in Bulgaria, a key team member in a number of projects for the

realization of murals and icons of Prof Elena Kantareva-Decheva and Prof Dechko Dechev, as well as in the project for "Conservation, restoration and exhibition of the mosaics from the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis".

An important part of the presentation of Stefka Popova in the current competition is her work as a teacher, which I would like to draw attention to. Assistant Stefka Popova teaches the disciplines of Icon Painting, Mural Painting, Composition, Iconography, Drawing, Painting, summer internship, etc. in the Bachelor's and Master's programs at AMDFA since 2010. She also participates in the preparation and updating of the curricula and programs of the specialties Church Painting and Mural painting. She is a beloved and respected teacher who applies the latest methods and technologies in the education of students with a focus on their individualities. She encourages them to be involved in the educational, creative and scientific activities and demands high results from them. She actively participates and supervises the practical work of the students in the majors Church Painting and Mural Painting in the process of painting frescoes and icons for the chapels of St. George the Victorious in Military base 24490 Asenovgrad, St. Archangel Michael in Krumovo Airforce Base, St. Marina in the village of Pavelsko, the St. Athanasius Church in the town of Chepelare, etc. The submitted reference on the scientometric indicators and the attached evidentiary material show that the uniform state requirements for occupying the academic position of Associate Professor are fulfilled to a sufficient extent, covering equally several types of activities - scientific-research, artistic-creative and teaching-methodical.

III. Scientific work of the candidate

The scientific work of Stefka Popova, PhD is concentrated around the doctoral thesis and development dedicated to modern church wall painting and the subsequent book (2023), created on the basis of the dissertation *Creation of Creative Models for Decoration of a Modern Temple in the Education of Student* published by AMDFA – Plovdiv in the Academic Library series.

The presented book examines the evolution of the church murals and their synthesis with the modern architecture, with the aim of integrated training of students and their actual opportunity to adapt and create new thematic models in the modern Orthodox Church. The problems considered by the author are numerous and complex, not only referring to the structure of the educational process, but also to the disclosure of the specific features in the construction of the wall painting, caused by the technical-technological and aesthetic appearance of the new architecture. On the basis of her experience as a teacher and an active and experienced artist in the field of contemporary church mural painting, Stefka Popova highlights the new trends and development prospects for art education in the field of church painting from the point of view of modern architectural realities, expanding knowledge and experience in this way.

The book has an applied-scientific character and would be very useful both for teachers and students, as well as for artists and architects working in the field of modern Orthodox wall painting.

Stefka Popova is the author of a number of scientific publications related both to her teaching work and to problems in the field of technology, iconography and aesthetics of modern church frescoes and paintings. Three of them are included in documentation submitted for review: *Restoration of the icon St. Nikolay village Yoakim Gruevo. Study of its origin*, 2021. AMDFA Yearbook, ISSN 2738-7712, 118-128 p.; *New artistic practices in wall-monumental panels.*, 2022., AMDFA Yearbook - ISSN 1313-6526, 115-124 p.p. and *Use of old icon painting techniques for gilding in modern painting*, 2023-AMDFA - Spring Scientific Readings- ISSN: 13 14 -7005, in press.

The required citations in monographs and peer-reviewed collective volumes and two reviews are also presented.

IV. Creative work and author's projects

The artistic and creative work of Stefka Popova are an integral part of her scientific and teaching activities. As her former teacher and current colleague, I have witnessed with great joy and satisfaction her growth and formation into an established artist working in the field of contemporary church painting, both in easel and monumental. In this regard, apart from the indisputable qualities of Stefka Popova as an artist, I would highlight her exceptional motivation, determination, initiative, sincere interest, love and dedication to her entire work as a teacher, scientist and artist.

As key moments in Dr. Popova's work, I would define the solo exhibition with author's icons held in 2011-2012 in the gallery of New Bulgarian University - NBU-Plovdiv, the two mural panels at the entrance of Paisiy Hilendarski Secondary School, Plovdiv, realized in 2015-2016, the painting of author's icons for the church "St. Iliia" - the village of Churen, 2019, Ascension of Christ Church - Churekovo, 2015, apostolic row of icons, Royal Doors and rapidia for the church Intercession of the Holy Virgin, Smolyan, 2012, festive row of icons for the iconostasis of St. Iliia Church, Sinapovo, 2016, Haskovo Region and restoration and study of the origin of the temple icon of St. Nikolay Church, the village of Yoakim Gruevo - 2020-2022. All of them are a demonstration of exceptional creative work, diverse genre, thematic and iconographic solutions and complex technical and technological implementations.

In addition to her solo projects, Stefka Popova is a member of the creative teams in the realization of murals for the church St. George the Victorious, Byala Cherkva, Sofia; icons for the temple "St. Dimitar" in the village of Sarnegor, the chapel Intercession of the Holy Virgin, Smolyan, the church "Holy Prophet Elijah" in the village of Sinapovo, etc. In 2019, she also joined the team of Prof Elena Kantareva-Decheva in the project "Conservation, restoration and exhibition of the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis".

Stefka Popova's work as an artist is also manifested in her regular participation in specialized forums such as the International Biennale of Church Arts in Veliko Tarnovo (2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2023), the annual exhibitions in the St. Dimitar Gallery at the church of the same name in Plovdiv, exhibitions of AMDFA Plovdiv and others.

Dr. Popova leads and participates in specialized workshops and creative studios in the field of mural painting, such as "The Art of Fresco" - in 2019 and 2020 and "Sgraffito" - June 5, 2023 - community center - "Kiril Dzhenev" Primary School - Plovdiv .

V. Scientific and artistic contributions of the candidate

As her contribution to science and practice, I would point out Stefka Popova's book *Creation of Creative Models for Decoration of a Modern Temple in the Education of Students* based her dissertation work. It is a relevant scientific study on the decoration of the modern temple, in which, in practice, by applying the field-situational method and the various organizational forms, the author proves the enrichment of knowledge and the development of the creative potential of the students. In this sense, the researched problem is related to the current needs of higher pedagogical education in the field of arts. Undoubtedly, the book fills a gap in the methodological and pedagogical literature regarding the building of a comprehensive, alternative methodological approach in the creation of new models for decoration of the modern church, not only by students, but also applicable to artists and architects working in the field of modern Orthodox wall painting.

The contributions of Stefka Popova are also significant in terms of her artistic and creative work, with an emphasis on her excellent handling of iconographic and technical-technological rules in the creation of author's canonical Orthodox images with a contemporary appearance, her mastery of a wide range of easel and wall painting techniques and their author's interpretation and integrated application.

This comprehensive and integrated approach is inherent in Stefka Popova and her work as a teacher, which I certainly consider a contribution.

Conclusion. Considering the serious versatile achievements of Stefka Popova, PhD – of her scientific, creative and teaching potential, as well as in view of her indisputable contributions to contemporary Bulgarian Orthodox painting, I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award her the academic position of Associate Professor in scientific field 8.2 Fine Art. I confidently vote **“in favor”**.

Assoc. Prof Elena Kantareva-Decheva, PhD

19 November 2023