

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof Nikola Lautliev
of Sonia Todorova Stankova's dissertation
for the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree "doctor"
on the topic *The Photographic Portrait - Genre Tradition and Contemporary Manifestations*
Academic supervisor: Prof Galina Lardeva-Minkova

I know and have been following the professional and artistic career of Sonia Stankova since her graduation and placement in the Regional Centre for Photographic Services - Plovdiv, where she worked for nearly ten years until the end of the 1990s. In the portrait studio on Dzhumayata square, she made her series of unprovoked portraits, which brought her international recognition. All this time, she was a welcome participant in the national youth photo contests, of which I would like to mention the most prestigious one in Blagoevgrad and the "historic" one in Sofia's Lyulin district, where she won the grand prize with an original and innovative approach to the social photography.

In the years after the democratic changes, Stankova was particularly active in photography and exhibitions. She had many artistic projects and participations in Italy, Greece, Vienna – Wittgenstein Home, Vietnam, Brazil, Poland, Slovakia. With author's exhibitions in Plovdiv, Sofia, Burgas, Varna, Ruse, Dobrich, Kazanlak.

The choice of the subject of the dissertation follows her artistic specialty – the portrait. I can say without hesitation that this is her favourite genre and it is present in various forms in exhibitions and publications. Not by chance, this was also her choice for her enrolment exhibition – *The Faces of Plovdiv* and the further development of the subject after that. As contributions to her dissertations should be mentioned not only her last exhibitions, as this would be incorrect limitation. That is why I want to list her exhibitions that made her a well-known and respected name in Bulgaria. These include *Second Take, Mothers and Daughters, Tale of the Tree*", the installation *The Bed, Caipirinha* in the first Night of the Galleries. I put a deliberate focus on her black-and-white montages in the early 1990s, which revealed her as a potential illustrator and foreshadowed her much later works of the *Real Abstraction* series.

I do not think that the Sonya Stankova has correctly and reliably indicated the contributions necessary for her defense. They are much more serious and essential, so I will redefine them:

1. Stankova has the valuable quality for an academic teacher to work dedicatedly, to have close contact with each student, to motivate them, to attract them and to bring to fruition every creative initiative with them.
2. She constantly generates ideas, both for her own works and for the academic environment, which makes it useful for the development of young photographers. Along with that she provides for the material base and improvement.

3. She has active social work for in the photographic community, in the artistic circles, which makes her popular and respected artist.

Conclusion:

1. In opinion the dissertation and materials presented by Sonya Stankova meet the requirements of the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and Article 38 of the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions in AMDFA.

2. The achievement of the main goal of the dissertation is apparent and understandable, namely:

- The doctoral candidate is a highly qualified photographer and conscientious teacher;
- She has realized new artistic and creative achievements during her studies;
- Her exhibitions are an expression of high professionalism and artistic freedom.
- They had a strong public resonance for Plovdiv and for the photography community, especially *The Faces of Plovdiv* included in the visual show at the opening of the European Capital of Culture.

2. An essential part of this type of doctoral study is the development of a scientific research, thematically linked to the relevant phenomena. In this case, it is a 98-page text called *The Photographic Portrait - Genre Tradition and Modern Manifestations* and a 100-page appendix with photographs and explanatory text. For its significance, we can quote the author, who claims that the presented text cannot and it does not have the ambition to capture the diversity and the artistic depth of the photographic portrait. The main motive was its usefulness in the teaching work at AMDFA, as well as theoretical support for doctoral studies. Critically, the insufficient argumentation of the modern directions of the photographic portrait is visible, where authors from the 19th and 20th centuries are cited, and the volume of seven pages does not reflect the weight of the sub-topic in the title of the dissertation.

I give my positive assessment of the presented materials in defense of Sonya Stankova's artistic and creative doctoral thesis and propose that the members of the respected scientific jury award her the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

Assoc. Prof Nikola Lautliev,

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