

OPINION

by

Prof Krasimir Andonov – NATFA Krastyo Sarafov,

on Sonya Todorova Stankova's dissertation titled:

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT – GENRE TRADITION AND MODERN MANIFESTATIONS

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "**doctor**"

I. Dissertation work and reason for the opinion

Sonya Todorova Stankova realized her dissertation work as a doctoral student, individual form of study, at the doctoral program of the Department of Applied Arts at the AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv. The academic supervisor of the candidate is Prof Galina Lardeva - Minkova.

Sonia Stankova was discharged with the right of defense, at a meeting of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Fine Arts of AMDFA, with protocol No 6/ 15.01.2024.

The dissertation is a study of 204 pages (including the appendix) and contains: an introduction, an exposition in three chapters, a conclusion and an appendix. The bibliography consists of 31 titles and 13 internet sources.

II. Information about the candidate:

Education: Sonya Stankova completed her secondary education at the Technical School of Printing and Photography "Julius Fuchik" - Sofia, subsequently she obtained Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy of Fine Arts at Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" and then - a Master's degree in Photography in AMDFA - Plovdiv.

Professional positions and awards: Sonya Stankova is one of the iconic names in the contemporary Bulgarian photography, her creative pursuits over the years cover a wide range of photographic genres and styles. Her work has been recognized at prestigious forums and competitions - Sonya is a two-time winner of the Plovdiv Award for photography – in 2001 and 2019, she was also awarded the honorary statuette for "*outstanding contribution to the development of photography in Bulgaria*" by the Academy of Photography "Yanka Kyurkchieva" in 2020 and many other awards. Sonya Stankova's works have been shown at dozens of author's exhibitions, published in prestigious editions from Bulgaria and abroad. At the same time, Sonya Stankova is well known in the professional photography circles also for her long-standing teaching work.

III. Relevance of the research topic and methods for achieving the set goals

The problems discussed in the dissertation *The Photographic Portrait - Genre Tradition and Modern Manifestations* are directly related to the professional experience and practical pursuits of Sonya Stankova as a photographer.

The definition of the title clearly defines both directions in which the research is developed – on the one hand - it is an overview of the historical prerequisites for the development of the portrait genre, on the other - the author talks about the photo portrait from the position of a participant and author in the modern processes.

The initial part of the dissertation situates the emergence of the photographic method of expression in its context of the new visual memory of humanity and, in particular, considers the desire and the need for the preservation of the human face, which has grown into one of the most influential media genres - the photographic portrait. In this first part of the study, Sonia Stankova reviews and analyzes the work of iconic names in world photography, but also includes information on native portrait photography and its pioneers.

Given what Sonya Stankova said in the conclusion of the dissertation, that "*the main motive (for writing the theoretical work) was for its usefulness in the teaching work at AMDFA*", I think that the author's goal is well fulfilled here.

I find the second part of the dissertation, in which Sonya Stankova writes from her position as an author and participant in the processes of the contemporary Bulgarian portrait photography, very interesting. In this broad review, the work of several generations of artists is discussed, and for me the most valuable is the fact that Sonya Stankova talks about the work of her colleagues not as a statistician, but as a researcher who is aware of the relationship between the individualities in an artistic society. These reflections of hers are also very personal, they show what she likes and discovers in the works of her colleagues, how their works provoke her imagination, what ignites the spark of her own desire to shoot...

Thus we come to the final part of the text, in which the author talks about her personal projects. Here, Sonya Stankova shares curious details from the background and the kitchen of her iconic projects, but between the memories sneak in reflections that complement the dissertation with the depth of Stankova's own self-portrait: "*The side view of the processes and stages in my work as a photographer and on this photographic journey there are many different subjects, single works or larger projects, but "Reportage Portraits in a Studio", taken at an early stage of my career, is the series of photographs that largely defined my photographic portrait.*"

Much has been written about how to make a good portrait. The ingredients that the photographer must "mix" in order to "make things happen" are many - good lighting, appropriate optics and perspective, a subtle psychological sense, captured moment and mood...

In the last part of the dissertation, Sonya Stankova actually indirectly reveals that one of the most important reasons for capturing an impressive photographic portrait is not only who is standing in front of the camera, but also who is behind it. In order for the viewer to see the image, that image must first have been seen by the photographer.

IV. Conclusion

Everything that has been said up to now supports my opinion about the contribution nature of Sonya Stankova's dissertation work, and on this basis I propose to the respected scientific jury to make a positive decision regarding her candidacy and award her with the educational and scientific degree "**doctor**".

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Sofia

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