

REVIEW

from Prof. DSc Laura Ivanova Dimitrova

member of a scientific jury in a procedure for obtaining the academic position of

“professor” in Field of higher education 8. Art,

Professional field 8.2. Fine Arts (artistic ceramics)

New Bulgarian University,

Bachelor’s Faculty,

Department of Fine Arts

In the competition for the academic position of “professor” in the Professional field 8.2. Fine arts (artistic ceramics), Field of higher education 8. Arts, one candidate participates – Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Petrova Popova.

The competition was announced for the needs of NBU.

The announcement for the competition was published in the state newspaper no. 51/ 18.06.2021.

By order Z-RK-230 / 22.07.2021 of the Rector of NBU the scientific jury for the competition was determined.

The competition procedure so far fully complies with the requirements of state and university regulations regarding the holding of academic positions.

Monika Popova’s candidacy meets the requirements for professional field 8.2 Fine Arts.

Monika Popova graduated from the National Academy of Arts in the course of Prof. Krassimir Dzhidrov, majoring in Ceramics in 1996.

Since 2000 she has been a lecturer at NBU.

Since 2001 she has been an assistant professor in the programs “Graphic Design” and “Fine Arts”, and since 2010 she is an Associate Professor in the Department of Fine Arts at NBU.

In 2014 she defended her dissertation on “Development of Sculpture during the Time of the Theban kings (XII, XVIII dynasties)” in the program “Egyptology” at NBU.

She has been a member of the Union of Bulgarian Artists since 1996 and a member of the Bulgarian Institute of Egyptology since 2009.

Monika Popova works in the field of ceramics, drawing, painting, installation.

She is the author of over 40 solo exhibitions and participates in over 70 group exhibitions in Bulgaria and abroad.

She organizes all student exhibitions for ceramics at NBU, where she creates workshops for ceramics and 3D ceramic printing.

She is the director of a training and practical unit in ceramics at NBU and the founder of the first and only in Bulgaria laboratory for 3D ceramic printing.

She has been awarded many times for her work: 2019 – the Union of the Bulgarian Artists award in the competition for specialization in 2020 at the Cité internationale des arts, Paris, France; in 2015 – the Union of the Bulgarian Artists and GEDOK award for specialization in Munich, Germany; in 2013 she was nominated in the competition for the award “Vladimir Dimitrov - The Master”; in 2012 she was nominated in two stages of the Allianz Contemporary Art Competition, Bulgaria; in 2011 she won the Union of the Bulgarian Artists competition for specialization at the Kunstlerhaus Arts Center, Schwandorf, Germany; in 2002 she won the First Prize for exterior sculpture “Hands of Poems” from the plein-air session “Sea of Shapes”, Golden Sands; 2002 – First prize for Young Author of the foundation “St. St. Cyril and Methodius”; 2000 – The award for Young Author of the “Irida” Gallery; 1998 – The Young Author Award of the International French Academy of Arts – Paris; 1996 – Award of

the Union of the Bulgarian Artists from the competition for specialization at Cité internationale des arts, Paris, France.

In the current competition, Assoc. Prof. Monika Popova presents a habilitation work from creative projects for exhibitions, which she has realized within 5 years, from the end of 2014 to the beginning of 2021.

The exhibitions are large-scale and have been presented in prestigious Bulgarian galleries for contemporary art: in the “Rayko Aleksiev” Gallery – 2 exhibitions; “Gallery of Contemporary Art” – the Union of the Bulgarian Artists (“Shipka” 6); “Red Dot” Gallery; “Industrialna” Gallery; Art Alley Gallery – 2 exhibitions; Arosita Gallery and Intro Gallery.

The largest of them is the project “Vacuum”, as a result of which in the gallery “Rayko Aleksiev” in 2021 was opened the exhibition of the same name, including over 150 works – paintings, drawings and ceramic sculptures created over the past 25 years. The project combines artworks from different cycles and has a retrospective character. The concept of the project reveals the space in its physical, philosophical and aesthetic dimensions, as well as Monika Popova’s subjective feeling of space as a synonym of creativity and art. Remarkable is the way in which the author imposes her vision of the comprehensiveness of the concept of “space”, linking it with the real, the imaginary, the intimate and the deeply hidden in original, memorable and exciting works, created primarily under the pressure of emotions and connecting the author’s life and her art as a whole.

As a result of the deep intimate experiences, the exhibitions under the projects “Maximum Degree of Pain” in the gallery “Industrialna” in 2015 and “Upper layer Dots” in the gallery “Red Dot” in 2019 appear – both projects, as the artist says “are a manifestation of a very strong and compressed emotion, where the detail is ignored in favor of a simplified symbol”, as the significance of these works “reaches the hieroglyphics” and the pain leads “to images similar to pictograms”.

Both exhibitions impress with the author's ability to immerse the viewer in her personal world and emotions, where the pain is experienced, meaningful and ultimately "aestheticized" through the symbiosis of universal and personal symbols. The project "Sieve" and the exhibition of the same name in the gallery "Rayko Aleksiev" together with Metodi Popov in 2016 is the result of the residence of Monica Popova in Munich, Germany after winning a Union of the Bulgarian Artists and the organization of women artists from Germany – GEDOK competition. The project continues one of the main lines in the artist's work related to the embroidery technique, in this case – embroidery on metal sieves. An installation of 500 sieves is presented at the exhibition "Sieve", 30 of which are embroidered. Monika Popova interprets the sieve as a feminine and ritual attribute and at the same time as a symbol of the search for values in life both personally and globally.

"Torn and Sewn" is a project implemented in the Art Alley Gallery, Sofia in 2016 together with Metodi Popov. In this exhibition, the artist presents a series of 16 ceramic "sewn heads" – revealing different mental states. The combination of contrasting and seemingly incompatible means of expression – ceramics – textiles – embroidery, and the transformation of objects taken from everyday life into works of art is a challenge that Monika Popova accepts and solves in an original way, combining conceptually diverse techniques, materials and means of expression with contradictory mental states in general and personal terms.

The project "1 + 1 = 1 + 1" was realized together with Ivan Kulekov in the Gallery for Contemporary Art of the Union of the Bulgarian Artists "Shipka" 6 in 2017 and as Monika Popova says, it is "the result of communication between two authors from different creative areas, but with respect for the other and with equality between them". In the exhibition, the artist presents a series of paintings in mixed media and "ceramics in the form of wombs", on which are "tattooed" texts by Ivan Kulekov. Here again seemingly contradictory and

incompatible ideas, techniques, materials, views, works have found a place – and this is stated directly with the title of the exhibition “1 + 1 = 1 + 1” and at the same time all these are surprisingly well existing in parallel – contrasting, but also complementary affirming both the absurdity and the wisdom of being.

The exhibition “Drawings before Going to Bed” was opened in the gallery “Art Alley”, Sofia in 2019. It includes drawings created by the artist in moments of tension when sleep does not come, and as Monika Popova herself says in the annotation of the exhibition, the drawings are “pictograms” of her life – on paper “inherited” from her grandfather, transforming “happiness or pain”, Registering the state of desire to “dissolve into nothingness”. The exhibition is a bridge between the intimate and the universal, based on the aestheticization of traumatic experiences through the therapeutic power of art.

The exhibition “Sewn in Black” was presented at the Arosita Gallery, Sofia in 2019. Monika Popova participated in the exhibition together with Hristina Popova. In this exhibition, Monika Popova presents works that she calls “Sewn in Black - CUBOIDS a symbol of spirituality and knowledge” because in ancient Egypt such statuettes “were owned only by people who were engaged in art.” In the artist’s interpretation, the “cuboids” are “mothers, black but also white, embroidered with silk“ – universal and personal symbols intertwine again to emphasize the power of the feminine, the creative energy of the women, her apotropaic functions, tenderness and empathy achieved through suffering and compassion and leading to spiritual insight and wisdom.

The “Swimmer” is an exhibition opened at the Intro Gallery in 2019. Monika Popova presents there large-format paintings, ceramic sculptures and drawings created within a year. Here, for the first time, the author shows a work combining large-format drawing and ceramic sculpture.

In addition to her habilitation work, the artist presents the artwork “Self-portrait during Separation” 600 cm x 200 cm, triptych, exhibited at the exhibition “Portrait” at the Union of the Bulgarian Artists, “Shipka” 6 Gallery in

2020. In this work personal experiences are again aestheticized in a peculiar way and brought to symbols. “My self-portraits are everything else, but not beautiful. They bear the pain of the pain!” – says Monika Popova. And this is true of all her work, where intimate, deep personal emotions are transformed into exciting contemporary artworks, contradictory, absurd, wise and ultimately as optimistic as life itself.

In her work as a lecturer Monika Popova is a supporter of the application of innovative methods and the achievements of modern technologies, but is guided primarily by the belief that students must feel the emotions of contact with the work of art and the full experience of the creative act. She is a competent teacher who teaches, educates and inspires through her own devotion to art.

Main contributions related to the practice of teaching art ceramics:

- contribution to the development of the ceramics programs at NBU;
- contribution to the introduction of new technologies in the teaching of artistic ceramics;
- contribution to the stimulation and development of interdisciplinary professional orientation in art education;
- an innovative approach in the training of ceramics, established in practice and with proven results.

Main creative contributions:

- through her valuable, original work Monika Popova convincingly affirms the positions of artistic ceramics as an important part of the contemporary visual arts both in Bulgaria and abroad;
- through the achievements in her own work, the author emphasizes the importance of the interdisciplinary approach in contemporary art and culture;
- she imposes her own aesthetic principles and creates a kind of visual language based on stylized, brought to signs, emotions;

- she emphasizes the importance of subjective experience and emotional beginnings as basic creative energies in contemporary art.

In conclusion, I would like to say that having in mind everything that has already been said about Assoc. Prof. Monika Popova, her indisputable high artistic achievements, the level and the quality of her teaching activity, I give my positive assessment.

I strongly suggest Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Petrova Popova to be elected to the academic position of “Professor” in the Field of higher education 8. Arts, Professional field 8. 2. Fine arts (art ceramics) for the needs of NBU.

October 30, 2021



Prof. DSc Laura Dimitrova