

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Kalina Hristova, PhD full-time teacher and Head of the Fine Arts Department,
New Bulgarian University, 8.2 Fine Arts

of the materials submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position of
"associate professor" at the New Bulgarian University, Bachelor's Faculty,
Fine Arts Department, Sofia

by field of higher education 8. Arts professional direction 8.2 Fine art
(poster, graphic layout of a book, calligraphy)

**In the competition for "docent", announced in the State Gazette, SG no. 65/12.08.2022
for the needs of the "Fine Arts" department, assistant professor Dr. Damyan
Krasimirov Damyanov, New Bulgarian University, participated as the only candidate.**

I. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate (Evaluation of compliance with the minimum national requirements and the requirements of the National Academy of Arts)

Assistant Dr. Damian Damyanov completed both his bachelor's and master's degrees at the National Academy of Arts, majoring in "Poster and Visual Communication", Faculty of Fine Arts. In 2019, under (my) supervision of Assoc. Prof. Kalina Hristova, PhD, he successfully defended his dissertation on the topic: "Typographic poster. Meaningful and formal connections and transformations between text and image in poster art at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century" at the New Bulgarian University, doctoral program "Visual-Plastic Arts".

The content of the habilitation work presented by Assistant Professor Damyan Damyanov covers key projects from the last few years of his creative work in the field of illustration and book layout. In his written summary, he focuses on the constant, yet specific topic of the visual translation of a literary text. A theme that is visibly at the center of his creative and scientific interests as an illustrator and artist. The presented author's printed publications with a markedly illustrative character, as well as the public lectures and creative tasks with which the candidate presents himself, also reveal his true creative potential.

Assistant Dr. Damyan Damyanov fully meets the minimum requirements for occupying the academic position "docent" of New Bulgarian University, Sofia, and of ZRASRB in the field of higher education 8. Arts professional direction 8.2 Fine art (poster, graphic design of a book, calligraphy).

II. General characteristics of the candidate's activity (Research (creative) activity and results)

The professional realization of the candidate is connected not only with teaching activities in the specialty, but also with multiple author's projects in the field of illustration, poster and book layout, postage stamp and calligraphy. Damian Damyanov is an established author with an extremely rich arsenal of visual statements – he is a skilled storyteller, and the stories are extremely synthesized and graphic, but also rich in diverse illustrative approaches. He oscillates between brush and ink, pen or watercolour, and it seems that no pictorial challenges are impossible for him. Dr. Dyaman Damyanov is definitely one of the most productive contemporary authors in the field of book layout and illustration, specific typographic and calligraphic styles. He works as the main artist for the publishing house "Ciela", but also for other successful publishing houses such as "Kolibri", "Leaf", "Krug" and others. This commitment to publishing gives him the opportunity to realize a huge number of book covers in a wide variety of genres. Thus, Damian's work turns book covers into a flower garden, in which each flower has its own unique color and aroma, all of them are different, unique. Here I will allow myself to mention one of Damyanov's real artistic advantages – being recognizable without blindly following a single style in his work. I agree with him that style is a limitation, a limitation that he apparently does not know.

The creative activity presented as a monographic work consists of two meaningful parts. On the one hand, a written summary of the candidate on the topic: "Visual translation of a literary text" is submitted to the application. Means of Expression and Figurative Language in Book Cover Design'. The text sheds light on a large part of Damyan Damyanov's artistic scope, his creative searches and statements, behind which there is a lot of creative practice, I would even say a tireless flow of ideas, at the same time realized.

In 2016, Damyan Damyanov realized a typographic project with ideograms under the name "Under the tongue", and in 2017 he presented part of the ideograms in an exhibition at the Bridge of Lovers, National Palace of Culture. The project also received its book version in 2018. "Under the tongue" is a graphic experiment dedicated to the Cyrillic alphabet, which turns letters into graphic characters and thus they become ideograms. In the summary presented by

Damyantov, it is also about the typographic solutions, or as he calls them "the letters that paint". I will dwell on this project in a little more detail, as one of the highlights of the candidate's presentation. Probably, like many other projects, this one was born on one of the pages of the notebooks and sketchbooks that Damian always carries with him. He stores them carefully, in them he grows ideas that he can realize later. Although a sketchbook always contains a visual marriage, this material is a visual diary of ideas that has "its intimate nuances – of course – again through the drawing."¹

In this project, we remain convinced that Damyantov speaks to us with symbolic forms. He speaks visually through signs. He masters them and manages to find them – diverse, stylized and contrasting visions, in which the humor and graphic synthesis skillfully found in the letter sign shine through. But it seems that the even more important advantage of this project is its socialization.

Damyantov started the first letters he drew as a fun experiment, which gradually developed into two alphabets, and he managed to turn it into a social one as well, inviting people whose work he liked and asking each of them to write their definition of one of the words. Thus, his book reflects not only the words that are important or relevant to us, but becomes a mirror of the time in which we live. Told through the words of the invitees and through Damian's imagination.

His performance in the field of graphic illustration cannot be underestimated either. Damian Damyantov has achieved a perfect graphic synthesis in his illustrations and the overall layout of "Fairy Tales" by Oscar Wilde published by "Ciela" Publishing House from November 2021. This is also one of the highlights, in my opinion, in his creative presentation (by indicator group B). In this project, Damian Damyantov shows his graphic skills by bringing the illustrations into a particularly synthesized aesthetic, highly graphic. An incredibly elegantly designed book with fabulous illustrations, just as befits Oscar Wilde.

The second author's edition presented at the competition is the coloring book inspired by "The Little Prince" – "Draw Me a Sheep". Damian Damyantov realized this author's project in 2015, after in the same year he illustrated the edition of "Ciela" publishing house of "The Little Prince" by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. In this book, Damyantov presents himself with plastic illustrations, through which the Prince seems to come alive. Another proof that Damian

¹ <https://webcafe.bg/story/165892725-damyant-damyantov-za-krilata-na-impulsa-i-smelostta-koyato-dvizhi-izkustvoto.html>

Damyanov is not afraid of pictorial challenges and always looks for the aesthetic in his work – he is a romantic.

Illustrator Damyanov creates the game and coloring book "Draw My Sheep", suitable for game lovers from 6 to 10 years old, it offers various tasks to develop imagination, fine motor skills and love of reading. This is what makes this project so valuable, it is child-oriented, in an engagingly graphic and synthesized way, but with the presumption of developing certain skills and knowledge in children. Damian also includes crosswords, detective puzzles, a pop-up card and even a board game in the book. On the pages we find quotes from "The Little Prince" related to a given task, there are many ideas for paper models – of a sheep, an airplane, a chest, a rose. The book "Draw Me a Sheep" is for the fun of the young and the older people as well.

III. Learning and teaching activity

The educational degrees covered by Dr. Damyam Damyanov give him the opportunity to lead classroom and non-auditory classes in two of the modules of BP "Visual Arts" (module "Graphics and Illustration" and module "Poster and Advertising Design") in two of the master's programs, offered by the Department of Fine Arts (MP "Poster and Communication Design" and MP "Illustration and Graphic Technologies").

Assistant Dr. Damyam Damyanov has a busy curriculum – he leads numerous lectures, both in the general education offered by NBU, and in the bachelor's program "Visual Arts". Another important part of his work is with students and involving them in creative projects and exhibitions.

This is also one of the main contributions of the candidate's presentation – assistant professor Damyam Damyanov – demonstrates an extremely good balance between his teaching and creative activity, the latter presenting the candidate as an extremely good artist, with numerous realized professional and personal creative projects, but his teaching dedication also presents him as a very good teacher, a teacher with real, very active experience and creative development.

IV. Administrative and public activity

The work of assistant Dr. Damian Damyanov as the author of over 1000 book covers is the basis of his public activity. Improving the visual environment, *ennobling it*, taming the *tastelessness* is a noble creative mission that he fulfills. Damyam Damyanov is the winner of the national award "Hristo G. Danov" in the category "Artist or book design and layout" for

2021 and the winner of the national award "Konstantin Konstantinov" for contribution to children's book publishing in the category "Illustrator" for 2017 .

He worked on numerous postal and philatelic publications, was an artist in "Literaturen Vestnik", took part in "TedXVarna", and recently he is part of the newly appeared literary magazine "Textile". His project "Under the tongue", his ideograms, have also come to life in several exhibitions that are visiting the European Commission in Brussels and Luxembourg, as part of the events presenting Bulgaria as the host of the Council of the EU.

V. Personal impressions of the candidate

I can express my personal extremely positive impressions of Ch. assistant professor Dr. Damian Damyanov, as a colleague and friend with whom we have similar goals as teachers and artists. Damian is one of those artists who tirelessly cares about improving the environment in which we live, the visual environment. And not to show off his skills or achievements, but because he really cares, and that's what he can do – draw, constantly. I think that in his present presentation he himself emphasizes his creative findings. He presents himself with a rich arsenal of diverse projects that present him quite widely as a creator. For a true poster artist and illustrator, a sense of humor and a knack for self-irony can be said to be mandatory personality traits. Damyan Damyanov owns them. I am glad that we are colleagues and friends who respect common artistic and aesthetic values.

Most of all, I appreciate Damian's extremely erudite behavior - with colleagues, students and friends. For Damian, the opinion is valid that the artist must have a rich common culture, he must not be isolated neither from the environment in which we live, nor from the other arts. And Damian is really such an artist, with a very rich common culture and many talents, who is really a pleasure to communicate with. His ability to hear and accept the otherness of ideas, to be patient and persistent in his efforts to convince, with the means he uses, makes him a really good teacher. I have the opportunity to attend some of his lectures and witness the positive feedback from the students. I think this is a really good testament to the success of his teaching experience – open and very detailed.

VI. Opinions, recommendations and notes on the activity and achievements of the candidate

I have no critical remarks about the candidate's overall performance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to express my positive opinion about the outlined contributions to the creativity and research activity of Assistant Professor Damyan Krasimorov Damyanov, as well as his teaching activities, which correspond to the field and professional direction of the announced competition. I am calling the respected members of the scientific jury to support his candidacy and to propose to the NBU Academic Council that Dr. Damyan Damyanov, assistant professor, be elected as an "associate professor" in professional direction 8.2. Fine art (poster, book layout, calligraphy).

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