

REVIEW

by **Assoc. Prof. Kalina Hristova Hristova, Ph.D.**,

Full-time lecturer and Head of the Department of Fine Arts, New Bulgarian University, 8.2 Fine Arts

on a competition procedure to attain an academic rank „**Professor**“ of the New Bulgarian University, Sofia

in the Field of Higher Education 8. Arts

Professional Field 8.2 Fine arts (artistic ceramics)

In the competition for „Professor“, announced in the State Gazette, SG is. 51 / 18.06.2021 for the needs of the **Department of Fine Arts** as the only candidate participates **Assoc. Prof. Monika Petrova Popova, Ph. D.**, New Bulgarian University

I. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova was born on December 10, 1968 in Sofia, Bulgaria. In 1996 she graduated from the VIII "Nikolai Pavlovich" with specialty "Ceramics" in the course of Prof. Krassimir Dzhidrov. In 2014 she defended her dissertation on the topic: "Sculpture during the time of the Theban kings XII and XVIII dynasties", with supervisor Prof. Sergei Ignatov in doctoral program "Egyptology" at NBU.

Since 2000 Monika Popova has been teaching in the programs "Graphic Design" and "Plastic Arts" as a senior assistant, and since 2010 she is a full-time associate professor of ceramics in the Department of Fine Arts. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova demonstrates very actively creative and teaching activities. The list of her independent creative performances is long and marks not only the successes on the cultural scene, but also her successes in developing programs in the field of

ceramic art (module "Ceramics and porcelain. Digital forms" and "MP" Ceramics and "in New Bulgarian University).

After the establishment of the Department of Fine Arts, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova actively participates in building the structure and topics of many of the courses in these programs, in which ceramics is taught. Her teaching activity is deeply connected with stimulating the expression of the creative abilities of the students. Assoc. Prof. Popova organizes many internships that are extremely important for the practical training of students.

II. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate (Assessment of compliance with the minimum national requirements and the requirements of New Bulgarian University)

In the competition for "professor" Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Petrova Popova presented documents that are in accordance with the scientometric indicators set in the Law for the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the requirements of NBU as follows:

The candidate for the academic position "Professor" Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova with the required 750 points has presented scientific and creative production and materials for participation in the competition amounting to a total of 1885 points. This result exceeds the minimum national requirements and the requirements of the NBU by 1135 points. These provided data give me grounds to claim that the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova meets the requirements of Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of ZRASRB and those of NBU for participation in the announced competition for the academic position of "professor".

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

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova has an impressive creative activity. She does not seem to know the pauses between different creative periods and jumps from one to another, always finding some personal challenge related to the choice of means of expression. In her work, Monika Popova demonstrates a wonderful hybridity, in which she challenges herself with interesting and difficult technological solutions.

The skillful jump from the small to the large format in the works of Monika Popova is a testament to her creative flexibility and adaptability. In her latest exhibitions she presents sewn and embroidered ceramics and paintings, paintings in mixed media, some of them in a decorative style. She actively uses stylization and the illustrative approach, and her works are always an exciting visual story - always personal and emotional.

The presented habilitation work is a creative monograph of Assoc. Prof. Monika Popova, PhD for the period from 2014 to 2019 (Popova, M. 2019, Monika Popova, exhibitions 2014-2019, J-Point Plus, ISBN 978-619-188-278 -6). I would like to comment on selected creative performances of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova in my capacity as her fellow artist and admirer of her art. Arranging the performances in chronological order, I will start with the ones that have been realized most recently according to her participation in this competition. My comment on the creative performances is not ranked according to their significance and creative contribution of the candidate.

I fully agree with the words of Acad. Svetlin Rusev (now deceased) in his review of the exhibitions of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova, presented in her catalog, which is also a habilitation thesis in this competition:

"It is difficult for me to determine where we are. An exhibition, even in the most extended notion of an exhibition, can hardly be called! I feel like I'm in an ancient sanctuary where strange signs, hieroglyphs, drawings sent from the caves to a modern understanding of conceptual plasticity, along with simple and pure thoughts like parables, have entered the modern primordial national spirit."

In 2019, Assoc. Prof. Monika Popova, PhD realized the exhibition "Upper layer dots" in the "Red Dot" gallery, in which she presents six large-scale paintings designed as a two-layer highly stylized image. It can be said that the paintings turn into a two-pole, two-layer visual provocation. Monika Popova describes the layers in her paintings as created on the basis of a pictogram of human states in contrast with a second layer of dots – visual punctuation of different colors, dots of the same size.

In 2017, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova realized the exhibition " $1 + 1 = 1 + 1$ " in the Gallery of Contemporary Art at the UBA (The Union of Bulgarian Artists at 6 Shipka Street in Sofia). The exhibition is a project in which Monika Popova dialogues with texts and ideas of Ivan Kulekov. It presents a collection of collages, embroideries, drawings and ceramic vessels that socialize the emotions and desires that leave the viewer to summarize what has been seen, paintings that do not impose rhythm, but represent a symbiosis between text and image.

In 2016, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova realized the exhibition "Sieve" in the "Rayko Alexiev" gallery. As a spectator who has visited the exhibition, I consider this exhibition to be

very performative. In this exhibition Monika Popova presents an installation made of 500 kitchen sieves, 30 of which are embroidered. Arranged in a net on the floor of the gallery "Rayko Alexiev" sieves fill the space of the gallery very measured and at the same time creating a physical structure that forces the viewer to move on the periphery of the space. Monika Popova locks in the sieves the symbols of everyday life, home and woman as such. The image of the woman always has a special symbolic meaning in the author's paintings.

In 2014, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova realized the exhibition "Maximum degree of pain" again in the "Rayko Alexiev" gallery. I definitely think that this exhibition is one of the culminations in the creative path of Monika Popova. This is a particularly candid visual story, given that all her projects are very personal and experienced. In this exhibition Monika Popova testifies to her original and expressive artistic style.

The works in the exhibition "Maximum degree of pain" are a synthesis of her longitude work on plastic and thematic accumulations, and stylistic experiments on the embedded symbolic meanings. The exhibition presents a homogeneous fabric of signs and drawings – a real aesthetic experience for the senses.

IV. Teaching and learning activities

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova has been teaching at the New Bulgarian University since 2010. She teaches courses in various arts programs at NBU at the Department of Fine Arts and the Department of Cinema, Advertising and Show Business, as well as general education courses for knowledge and skills. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova is the author of a general education course "Performance" and teaches in a general education course for knowledge: GENB057 "Expressive

means in the fine arts". She is also the author of the master's program "Ceramics and Porcelain. Modern and digital forms" and is the main teacher in it. The program enjoys increased interest from prospective students.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova has a very busy curriculum of courses in general education for skills, in courses to the bachelor's program "Visual Arts", module "Ceramics and Porcelain. Digital Forms", as well as in the master's program Ceramics and Porcelain. Modern and digital forms. I will mention the titles of only a few of the courses that Monika Popova is the author of and which she leads in the current school year: Decorative processes in ceramics and porcelain, Experimental shaping and firing processes, Working with natural materials. Mixed media, Drawing and stylization, Ancient and modern sign and form, Ceramics, Porcelain and others.

V. Administrative and public activity

One of the important aspects in the administrative activity of the candidate consists in the ability of Assoc. Prof. Monika Popova PhD to skillfully manage UPIZ "Ceramics" at the Center for Arts of NBU. It can be said that the ceramics studio is one of the most active. Students present the results of their training in the programs with exceptional frequency. More importantly, their performances do not go unnoticed by the audience.

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One of the last organized student exhibitions by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova at the "San Stefano" Gallery in Sofia about 110 works have been shown, 80 of which became foreign property, finding their new owners. This investment of time and energy in ensuring the practical realization of students' efforts is admirable.

VI. Personal impressions of the candidate

I would like to express my personal positive impressions of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova as one of my most enthusiastic and tireless colleagues in the Department of Fine Arts. Monica is an erudite teacher and a talented artist. Her works are not afraid of scale and space – a skill that is difficult to maintain with such intensity that Monika Popova does. She is a *халла* (a gale), which is also one of the topics that have occupied her in the last year and a half, a topic that she shares with students in their studies. Undoubtedly, Monika Popova is one of the most interesting artists of our time, and her work is recognizable being original and constantly transforming author's style at the same time.

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

I have no critical remarks on the general presentation of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova. I only recommend her to continue her teaching and creative work with the same energy and dedication, professional spirit and broad outlook, without abandoning the traditional forms, and without neglecting the new technologies and innovations in teaching methods and ceramic art.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to express my positive opinion about the outlined contributions in the work and research of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Petrova Popova, as well as her teaching activities, which correspond to the field and professional direction of the competition. I am calling on the esteemed members of the scientific jury to support her candidacy and proposing to the Academic Council of NBU Assoc. Prof. Dr. Monika Popova to be elected as a "professor" in the professional field 8.2. Fine arts (ceramics).

29 October 2021

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/Assoc. Prof. K. Hristova, PhD/