

STATEMENT

From

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on the presentation of Asst. Dr. Damyan Krasimirov Damyanov in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field

8.2. Fine Arts (poster, graphic book design, calligraphy), Faculty of BF, Department of Fine Arts, NBU, announced in the Official Gazette 65/12.08.2022.

3-RC-19/05.10.2022.

In the competition for the academic position of associate professor in the professional field 8.2. Fine Arts (poster, graphic book design, calligraphy), faculty BF, department "Fine Arts" of the New Bulgarian University participates one candidate: as. Dr. Damyan Krasimirov Damyanov.

The candidate has interests in the field of visual arts and fulfils the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the Academic Staff Development Act field 8. Arts in professional field 8.2. Fine Arts, as well as the requirements of New Bulgarian University.

The professionalism of the candidate in his artistic, teaching and research work is impressive. From the presented documents it is clear that Dr. Damyan Damyanov is an active artist with numerous participations in national and international exhibitions, projects and forums, with the realized solo exhibitions, which proves the high level of his activity as an artist. His sphere of interests, on the other hand, is visible in his scientific publications. In the field of book design Damyan Damyanov (b. 1982) has completed more than 1000 covers, posters, illustrations, postage stamps, calligraphies. He has won four awards for his creative work. He works as an artist for the publishing houses "Ciela", "Colibri", "List", "Krug", etc. Among the books he has illustrated are "Tales as big as a Smile", "Typewriter Tales" by Gianni Rodari, "Seven Hajduti and a Donkey" by Branislav Nusic, "The Little Prince" by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "Complete Fairy Tales" by Oscar Wilde, "Poems" by Viktor Paskov and many others. He also worked on illustrated editions of Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis" and George Orwell's "1984". He is the author of "Draw Me a Sheep" (2015), "Under the Tongue" (2018) and co-author (with Julia Spiridonova) of the picture book "The Scissors" (2022). I have personal impressions of the candidate and his work from his solo exhibition "From book to book", opened at the exhibition halls "Rafael Mikhailov" in Veliko Tarnovo, where I presented his illustrations and book covers to the audience (14.04.2022).

Even then, I was impressed by the variety of techniques chosen by the author, depending on the genre and subject of the literary works they were intended for. Damyan Damyanov's approach to the illustrations of each book is strictly individual. When the readers are children, the author's aim is to intrigue them with characters whose characteristics he has sought in line drawings ("The War of the Hedgehogs"). In other cases he uses a plastic solution – the character "The Little Prince" and his flower are made of plasticine. The technique of plasticine and clay are close to the minds of children, and the originality also comes from the contrasting lighting of the plastic forms in the photograph. Quite different is his approach to the illustrations in Zachary Karabashliev's short story "Thirst". The figures are treated "in bulk",

with austerity and create a sense of monumentality. The achromatic white, black and grey shades of the watercolour technique reinforce the sense of inevitability and loneliness.

Damyan Damyanov takes a minimalist approach to the graphic design of his book covers. His skills as a poster artist are evident in the extraction of essence from the content of the book. The cover of Ray Bradbury's "Death Is a Lonely Business" uses the possibilities of computer graphics in combination with collaged retro and even heraldic elements. All of this speaks to an experimental spirit of the artist who never stops challenging himself by surprising the reader with creative solutions

All of these achievements in the artistic and creative activity of Dr. Damyan Damyanov are well thought out compositional and semantic decisions that rest on a well thought out strategy and scientific developments in the field of book design and calligraphy, presented in summary in his theoretical work.

The habilitation thesis "The Visual Translation of a Literary Text" with the subtitle "Expressive Media and Visual Language in Book Cover Design" presents one part of Dr. Damyan Damyanov's scientific interests. The main questions it raises are the underlying principles in the interpretation of the author's text. Emphasis is placed on visual education, which, according to the candidate, should begin at an early age, bearing in mind the challenges of our modern age, in which the main source for forming perceptions are the screens of various devices. According to Damyan Damyanov, the paper book is fighting a constant battle to gain attention and gain ground in the digital age, but the fact is that it still exists. Moreover, its value is by no means diminishing despite or because of the peculiarities of digitization, quite the contrary. "Communicating with a book cannot be replaced" – expresses the artist whose mission is to make the vision of the book body attractive and interesting.

In his habilitation thesis, Damyan Damyanov presents a finished formula, drawn from years of experience in the field of book design, which every young artist should follow when approaching book covers. He believes that the genre, the plot and the various literary elements determine the graphic stylistics and techniques in the cover art. An important addition to the statement that a book cover is a work of art, based on a literary work, is that a book cover is not, or rather should not be, an illustration of the content. It should be a graphic synthesis of the literary text. While illustration is the multi-word visual translation of a piece of literary text, the cover is the shortest pictorial form through which it can be interpreted.

The evolution of book design over the different periods of its development has brought book artwork out of the shadow of simple decoration or embellishment, with the 21st century seeing a linking of content to cover. It takes on a life of its own as an independent work of art. In order for this to happen, Damyan Damyanov recommends a careful reading of the book; it is the book that should inspire the artist, who will visually "dress" the author's text and through the use of appropriate means of expression, the maximum result will be achieved. This is also the contributory character of the habilitation thesis, in which the candidate formulates the basic principles in the interpretation of the author's text, which should represent semantically the content of the book through the rich palette of symbols. It is quite logical to use the most laconic pictorial form loaded with certain information. The artist's idea is aimed at unlocking certain associations in the reader – or the viewer.

The minimalist approach is not mandatory, but it is recommended in the cover art, as the key elements, loaded with a specific symbolic character, create an appropriate association and illustrate the author's message. "The minimalist approach creates the condition to focus on the essentials by eliminating all additional and unnecessary elements" writes Damyan Damyanov.

Another significant problem addressed in the habilitation thesis concerns typographic solutions and letters.

In conclusion it is argued that the design of the book gives additional value to the literary work and it is not just packaging or decoration, but is content in itself.

The examples discussed in the habilitation thesis are drawn from the artist's experience during his creative activity over 15 years.

I recommend that the habilitation thesis be published, as it would be useful to students studying in this field of visual arts, as well as to young artists who are moving into book design and illustration.

The candidate's scientific and artistic interests are fully in line with the specifics of poster design, book layout and calligraphy that he will be teaching. The candidate fully meets the requirements of the science metrics.

Conclusion:

Having read the materials submitted for the present competition, I consider that the candidature of Asst. Dr. Damyan Krasimirov Damyanov is in accordance with the nature of the present competition and the specific requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor in 8.2. Fine Arts (poster, graphic book design, calligraphy), for the needs of the Faculty of BF, Department of Fine Arts of the New Bulgarian University. I give a positive evaluation and propose to award the academic position of Associate Professor to Dr. Damyan Damyanov.

21.11.2022

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marieta Ivanova Konova

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