

## **REVIEW**

By Prof. Dr. Habil Antoaneta Ancheva

For awarding the educational and academic degree "DOCTOR"

In the Professional Direction 8.1, Theory of Arts,

### **INSTITUTE OF ART STUDIES, BAS**

RG Modern Bulgarian Art

Dissertation on the subject:

#### **MODERN IDEAS AND TRENDS FOR WORKING WITH AUDIENCES IN ART MUSEUMS. AUDIENCE ORIENTATION IN BULGARIA (THE EXAMPLE OF THE NATIONAL GALLERY)**

PhD student: Nadezhda Yankova Dzhakova

Dissertation advisor: Prof. Irina Genova, PhD

The doctoral student Nadezhda Yankova Dzhakova has presented her dissertation study on "Modern Ideas and Trends for Working with Audiences in Art Museums. Audience Orientation in Bulgaria (The Example of the National Gallery)", consisting of text section of 174 pages and a bibliography including a large number of sources, of which 65 are in Cyrillic and 138 in Latin. Also included are applications – 63 pages of surveys, 13 tables and 49 illustrations. The dissertation work was discussed and directed for public defense at a meeting of the Research Group Modern Bulgarian Art at the Institute of Art Studies at BAS, held on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009. The PhD student has made 4 publications on the subject of her dissertation.

The abstract fully reflects the structure and content of the dissertation.

I am convinced that the topic about contemporary ideas and tendencies for working with audiences in art museums, oriented towards Bulgarian public, is an excellent subject for academic interpretation and in this respect it is worthy of a dissertation. The work is structured with an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. In the introduction, the doctoral student understands and substantiates the subject, aims and objectives, relevance of the research, theoretical and practical significance of the work and establishes the scope of the research and the methodology used. The author organizes the stages of development of the individual parts in order to solve the problems. What impresses us is the fact that she systematically, consistently and methodologically correct pursues her tasks.

The dissertation's main goal, formulated in the title itself, is to follow contemporary ideas and tendencies for working with audiences in art museums, with orientation and towards audiences in Bulgaria (specifically in the National Gallery), to formulate recommendations for successful strategies for their development. And since the work with the audience has its background, the author also includes a historical overview of their development. The doctoral student's motivation, as well as her good knowledge of the existing specialized literature on the topic, is supported by her work with contemporary artistic practices. The topic of the dissertation is problematized in several main lines - theoretical and historical aspects in the development of audiences, audiences in the Internet age, tracking the orientation of audiences in the art museums of Europe, North America and Bulgaria. In the general framework of the work, it is quite natural that the third, fourth and fifth chapters prevail. The classical scheme of chronologically following the development of audiences in art museums is applied and numerous examples are given. The latter, based on the location and specifics of the particular museum, are followed chapter by chapter. In view of the emphasis on the study of Bulgarian audiences, and in particular on our largest art museum - the National Gallery, a separate chapter is set out. The analysis of specific examples and museums is undoubtedly helpful in clarifying the overall course of audience development. In conclusion, the doctoral student defends her thesis with research.

The dissertation Introduction sets out the aims of the study and seeks "a balance between theoretical study of audiences and the empirical one, related to the knowledge and the pointing out of many examples from museum work." I would define the first as a theoretical part, followed by the second part, in which theoretical statements are realized in the pragmatics of concrete examples and practices.

In the first of the five chapters of the dissertation of great importance for the development and obligatory for such a study is sub-chapter *I. 1. Basic concepts and terms. New concepts formed.* It examines the terminology on which the author bases her analyzes in this study. It clarifies the conceptual apparatus and the use of basic terms in audience research, as well as the formation of new ones. In addition to terms such as "museum" and "audience," the PhD student is considering the introduction of new concepts that have become relevant in recent decades. She not only formulates them, but also differentiates them with the aim of creating more lasting relationships in the connection between the museum and the visitor. Emphasis is placed on the terminology systematized over the years, with some definitions noting their change as a result of the latest museum requirements. The first chapter also outlines the main ideas, a brief history containing a chronological tracing of the history of audience research in museums, including those in Bulgaria. In the second part of Chapter I. 2. *Studies of museum audiences* a historical review is made of the time when the ideas of the Enlightenment became reality, which led to the opening of museums to society. It was emphasized in the 70s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the study of the public began, which is the main task of the dissertation. While pursuing audience research, the

doctoral student zealously notes a number of publications by authors whose work is in the perimeter of this work. In part three - I. 3. *Reviewing the studies of visitors in Bulgaria*, the author carefully traces, though the brief history of the development of museum work in Bulgaria, the beginning of which is marked by the activities of the Chitalishte (a kind of municipal public libraires), which is a unique Bulgarian phenomenon. She conscientiously cites the only, unfortunately, publication on the "Marketing Survey and Evaluation of Interaction between Museums, Schools and Young Consumers" made by the National Museum of History (NMH). In the last part of chapter one - I. 4. *Methodological approaches to the research of the public* also noted is the methodology used, emphasizing the multidisciplinary nature of the research, which involves dealing with theories, research strategies and methods in different fields - sociology; communication and marketing; psychology; exposition construction; digital development. It is noteworthy that in the presentation of the text of the first chapter the author demonstrates a high degree of professional knowledge, striving within the set chronological parameters to cover the processes, dynamics and changes in the development of relations between the audience and the museum.

In Chapter Two, entitled "*The Museum and Meeting the Public in the Internet Age*," the focus of the study is on how the museum is present in our world today and the opportunities that digital technology offers to the museum institution. The practice of world museums to digitalize their collections, offer virtual exhibits, etc. The author makes the main conclusion about the applicability of new media, the opening of new opportunities for access, participation and interactivity, i.e. the opportunity to create a new connection between museum and audience. In fact, the second chapter of the dissertation also traces several lines, formed as three chapters – *The Museum Exposure and Visitor Access*, *Branding the Museum*, and *Social Media as Shared Space for Dialogues*. Examples of museum exhibitions are cited and the connection between a museum - an architectural environment - an exposition - an audience is sought. The doctoral student's conclusion is that the functions of the museum today extend far beyond the exhibition space and collections, and new media and social networks create new digital worlds and public relations. Thus, according to N. Dzhakova, the museum is "transformed from a place of research into a place of communication." In this aspect, the doctoral student also substantiates its future, which she sees in "the rapid and easy reach of a wider audience through the digital technologies and the access opportunities they offer."

In Chapter Three, "*Guiding audiences in art museums in Europe. European audience development projects. The Museums of Germany*" explores the factors for effective public relations based on the practices of world-renowned museums. Audience development strategies as part of countries' cultural policies have been followed. Examples of successful audience orientation are given; attention is paid to projects funded by the European Commission which set out a development strategy over the next 10 years.

Chapter Four, *"Audience orientation in North American art museums"*, focuses on cultural policy in this part of the world, distinguished by its management and funding. Cited is the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), whose exhibit model and development strategy focuses on the virtual presence of the audience and online feedback. A good example is the Atlanta High Museum of Art, which is also cited. Quite logically, the author wonders what is to be expected from a museum today and lists the main factors that play a role in its promotion, including the attractiveness of the exhibits, advertising strategy, etc.

The contribution of this study can best be seen in Chapter Five, *"Audience orientation in Bulgaria. The example of the National Gallery"*, since the dissertation student conducted her own survey on audience research in the largest art museum in our country. This is an issue that is still not well researched in our museum studies and N. Dzhakova consistently and thoroughly collects, classifies and organizes a database to serve the better knowledge of Bulgarian audiences. A large number of visitors of the National Gallery were surveyed and results analyzed that are of importance for the specific work of the museum. The introduction of European public relations practices in the national context is also considered. Practical guidelines for museum work in art museums are given, which can be applied in Bulgarian museums when planning and organizing a permanent exhibition; temporary exhibitions; branding of the museum; digital and communication strategy; educational activity on the profile of the museum visitor, which is also a significant contribution.

In the Conclusion to the study the author explicitly notes the main ideas of the text. The bibliography respects with the diversity of the literature used, relevant to the topic of the dissertation.

The thesis of Nadezhda Yankova Dzhakova deals with an important and socially relevant topic, showing enviable theoretical preparation with knowledge of "ab intra" of the issue, as well as good handling and systematization of the material, appropriate quotations of authors, examples, models, etc. The actuality and the new moments in it are supported by the research and analyzes made, by the author's demonstrated view and attitude towards the discussed issues.

I agree with the contributions pointed out by the doctoral student. She knows the issues very well, is well versed in the material, which gives her the ability to openly and freely handle the theoretical basis and the various examples on which she bases her analyzes and judgments.

I believe that the dissertation submitted for review "Modern Ideas and Trends for Working with Audiences in Art Museums. Audience Orientation in Bulgaria (The Example of the National Gallery)", as a formulated problem and in each of its chapters is of a contributive character. Presents the doctoral student as an excellent specialist. The text is written at a very good linguistic level and the proportions

between the academic style and the intelligibility of the academic thesis have been found. The dissertation presents its own substantiated research opinions.

My assessment of the dissertation, author's abstract and academic contributions is positive and I believe that it fully meets the requirements of the ZRASRB.

With all this in mind, I give my positive assessment and strongly recommend to the distinguished Academic Jury to award Nadezhda Yankova Dzhakova the educational and academic degree "Doctor" in professional direction 8.1. Theory of Arts, academic field 8. Arts.

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