

Opinion

for a competition for the academic position of *Associate Professor in Art Studies and Fine Arts* (decorative and applied arts in 20th century Bulgaria), professional field 8.1.

Theory of Arts, for the needs of the Fine Arts Department, RG Modern Bulgarian Art, Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, announced in the State Gazette (No. 41 of 20.05.2025) with a single candidate, Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Maria Koleva Miteva.

From Assoc. Prof. Dr Katerina Gadzheva, Institute of Art Studies, BAS

In connection with the announced competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in Art Studies and Fine Arts, professional field 8.1. Theory of Arts for the needs of the Fine Arts Department, RG Modern Bulgarian Art at the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, one candidate has applied – Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Maria Miteva. She has presented the monograph *Art and Commissions. Through the Artistic Practice in Bulgaria in the 1930s and the Beginning of the 1940s*, (298 pages) as a habilitation thesis and 23 articles published in scientific collections and journals. The quality and volume of the materials submitted for the competition meet the national and institutional criteria for habilitation.

For years, Maria Miteva has focused her attention on the development of decorative and applied arts and their problematic inclusion into the general history of Bulgarian art. The determination and consistency with which she builds on her scientific studies are impressive, starting with the art of the Bulgarian Revival, in which she had a serious interest in her early student years (her bachelor's thesis, defended at NBU in 2002, was dedicated to a monument from the period), moving on to the in-depth study of the personal and creative biography of the artist-decorator Stefan Badzhov (master's thesis at NBU, 2004) and focusing on the problems of decorative art at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, which she examines in detail in her doctoral dissertation, defended in 2009 at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS. Maria Miteva's conscientiousness, her long-standing work with a prominent specialist in the field of applied arts in our country, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Violeta Vasilchina, the successfully implemented individual planning projects at the Institute of Art Studies,

dedicated to various aspects of artistic life in the country in the first half of the twentieth century, her participation in a number of conferences, the production of valuable scientific publications and her practical work at the National Art Gallery, where Miteva has worked as a curator since 2018, testify to the fact that she is among the leading contemporary researchers and connoisseurs of decorative and applied arts in our country.

Art and Commissions (the habilitation thesis) is a natural conclusion to Maria Miteva's long-term efforts to present, systematize and make sense of the problems of the sponsorship of works of art in the field of applied and decorative types. The depth and punctuality with which she examines the artistic, culturological and social aspects of the topic are impressive, and her good scientific orientation, built on the solid foundations of classical art studies, gives her the confidence to include various other research approaches. The monograph is clearly structured - it begins with a clarification of the concepts and with highlighting the significance of the commission as a cultural phenomenon that accompanies each stage of the history of art. The important processes concerning the development of the economy and artistic taste during the different decades of the first half of the twentieth century, which determine the relations between sponsors and artists-performers, are carefully described. The specifics of the Bulgarian environment are highlighted, the relations between the individual guilds and professional associations are examined in detail. Miteva also focuses on specialized educational institutions - in particular the State Art Academy and the first private school for applied arts in Bulgaria. Particularly interesting and contributing are the sub-chapters in which the artistic layout of the pavilions, the work of some of the most prominent Bulgarian artists, representing our country at world exhibitions in the 1930s and early 1940s, is examined. Even more important, I would point out the part dedicated to the relations between the clients and the contractors and between the architects and the artists in the work on the construction and design of important public buildings - ministries, courthouses, banks, school and academic buildings, galleries, etc., some of which determine the appearance of our capital and other large cities even today.

I believe that the book *Art and Commissions* have all the characteristics of a necessary, scientifically condensed, comprehensively presenting the currently available facts and contributing with the new documents, images and interpretations a habilitation work, which will be useful both for specialists and for lovers of the history of architecture and applied arts in our country. To it we need to add the 23 articles with which Miteva participated in the competition, proving her determination to continue her professional development, researching the development of applied

arts after 1944. An application that marks the beginning of a significant new monographic study, which, I hope, soon we will also hold in our hands.

Maria Miteva's interest in applied arts does not remain solely in the field of theoretical pursuits - as a curator at the National Art Gallery, she takes care of the Ceramics Fund, describes and studies works from different decades, prepares exhibitions, enriches her professional contacts, works with young scholars, whom she attracts as authors in the journal "Art Studies Quarterly" or as participants in the traditional conferences "Art Readings" and "Art and Context". I consider this regular "removal" from the familiar institutional environment to be particularly useful, as it allows for a more realistic assessment of one's own scientific achievements.

Along with Maria Miteva's conscientious research work, I would like to highlight her human dedication to the Institute of Art Studies, where she has worked for more than 15 years, patiently, wisely and tolerantly leading the Modern Bulgarian Art research group. In addition to all the administrative duties that she has always strictly fulfilled, Miteva has participated in a number of projects, among which I can highlight the long-term series *Bulgarian Artists for Children*, thanks to which many adolescents from Sofia and other cities in our country and abroad were able to get acquainted not only with the work of our prominent artists, but also with the activities of the Institute of Art Studies and the publication *155 years of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. 155 works of art from the collections of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*, in the preparation of which Miteva was able to fully develop her organizational and research potential. The high professional ethics that have distinguished Maria Miteva's work up to this point must also be noted - the respect for the work of all colleagues from the research group, the correct citation of their theoretical developments, the unreserved help when information, literature or professional advice is needed.

Based on all the above, I firmly believe that Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Maria Miteva, with her habilitation work, the 23 publications, and her active scientific and organizational activities, deserves to occupy the academic position of "associate professor" in professional field 8.1 Theory of Arts at the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. I appeal to both the members of the Scientific Jury and those of the Academic Council of the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences to vote positively for her election as I shall do.

Sofia, 03.10.2025

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Katerina Gadzheva