

REVIEW

For the competition for Associate Professor in professional direction 8.4 Theater and Film Art and academic specialty *Film Studies, Film Art and Television* (Digital Technologies and Screen Images), for the needs of the Screen Arts Department, announced by the Institute of Art Studies – BAS in State Gazette (issue 52/18.06.2024)

With one candidate Sen. Asst. Dr Josif Emilov Astrukov

Reviewer: Prof. Dr Nadezhda Mihailova [Marinchevska]

The review has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (RIADASRB), the Regulations for the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for the Occupation of Academic Positions in the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, including the requirements set out in Annex 2 of the same Regulations, sec. 3.4. (3.41. to 3.4.4.) and in accordance with Order No. 418 RD, 1 07.2024 based on Chapter III, Article 57 (1-4) of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the decision of the Scientific Council of IAS, Protocol 6, item 7 / 21.06.2024.

1. Brief introduction of the candidate and general description of his/her scientific and pedagogical activity.

Senior asst. Dr. Josif Astrukov is an accredited researcher in the field of screen arts, digital technologies, transformations of works between screen and stage, photography and multimedia performances, audience reception, etc. He is also a film director, photographer and cinematographer with significant artistic output. He is also the author of short story collections.

Josif Astrukov graduated from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and graduated in Film and Television Directing from the NATFA "Krastyo Sarafov". He received his PhD in 2014 at the Institute of Art Studies - BAS for his theoretical work “Hybrid Forms of Contemporary Dance and New Digital Film in the Internet Environment”, diploma № 000441, date 07.07.2014. Since then, he has been working at the Institute as a Senior Assistant in the Screen Arts Department.

Dr. Josif Astrukov presents a considerable publication activity *after the* defense of his doctoral dissertation - 2 monographs, 22 academic articles in reputable peer-reviewed

journals and in journals refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases. Five of the publications are in English and some are in international journals. The quality of his texts is evidenced by the numerous citations of his academic publications - 34 times. One part of the citations is in refereed and indexed publications, others are in monographs and collective volumes with scientific peer review.

At the same time, the author actively publishes articles in the specialized press promoting current events in the world of photography.

Josif Astrukov is a participant in several projects with external funding for the Institute. In addition to winning two grants for the printing of the book "VideoDance" (based on the text of his doctoral dissertation) and the photo album "DanCine project" from the National Culture Fund, he is an active participant in the large-scale project of the Screen Arts Department - "Post-totalitarian Bulgarian Cinema - Models and Identities", funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund, as well as in the sub-project "Performing and Screen Arts in Bulgaria - Research, Historical Compendium and Laboratory" within the "Building and Development of Centre of Excellence Heritage BG" - a strategic project of 12 leading academic organizations with European funding. As the leader of the last two projects in which Josif Astrukov has participated, I can say that in addition to his analytical qualities, which he demonstrated in writing his scholarly texts, Astrukov has also contributed very much to the overall support of the team - technical expertise in purchasing the necessary equipment, filming a series of video tapes with prominent Bulgarian filmmakers, recordings of conferences and other events of the projects. Here his practical skills as a photographer and cameraman were of great importance.

Dr. Josif Astrukov was also awarded First Prize in the competition for young researchers "100 Years of Bulgarian Cinema - Facts, Practices, Reflections" for his publication "In Search of the White Swallow of the New Bulgarian Feature Cinema".

Dr. Astrukov also has ten years of teaching experience. In 2014-2020 he was a lecturer at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridsky". Since 2017 he has been teaching at New Bulgarian University at the departments of Design, Media and Communication and Photography.

1. Compliance with the minimum national requirements according to the LDASRB, RILDASRB and the additional requirements in the Regulations for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and Academic Positions in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

The review of the academic and creative output submitted to the competition shows not only compliance in quantitative terms with the minimum national requirements, but also their exceeding. With a requirement of 360 points according to the scientific-metric indicators for the academic position of 'Associate Professor' in field 8 Arts,

professional field 8.4. Theatre and Film Arts, the candidate has 905 points. The minimum points required for the academic position of Associate Professor have been exceeded in all parameters of the card. I would like to emphasize that in this case not only the quantitative indicators are very impressive, but also from the large number of citations it is evident that the texts of Dr. Josif Astrukov arouse the interest of colleagues in scientific terms.

Dr. Astrukov also applies as a proof of his scientific research numerous participations in conferences at home and abroad, and they are organized not only by the Institute of Art Studies, but also by various universities - SU, VTU, NBU, University of Nis, etc.

1. Scientific and applied achievements of the candidate, according to the materials submitted in the competition.

The candidate proposes for his habilitation the monograph "**Photography as...**", second supplemented edition, 212 pages, Sofia, 2023, ISBN 978-619-91370-4-8 ISBN 978-619-91370-5-5, ISBN 978-619-91370-3-1. This study is the result of Josif Astrukov's long-standing interest in photography, and in the transformations that are taking place in it with the advent of digitalization. Despite the large number of writings related to the digital revolution, the global effect of technology and the changes in the aesthetics and reception of photography, the author manages to find his point of view to make sense of the processes. Quite naturally, he draws attention to the debate about the original and the copy in digital photography, linking his analysis to the historical debates of a hundred years ago. It is noteworthy that making sense of the aesthetic transformations from analogue to digital photography are accompanied by a deep and detailed knowledge of the different processes and technical means that enable different types of imitations of analogue photography. Astrukov concludes that "it is precisely this infinite multivariate nature of digitization, together with the individual examples that practically do not lend themselves to satisfactory digitization, that is the reason I would tentatively call it *impossible*. Or to put it another way, digitization has an infinite number of possibilities, without one true solution" (p. 50).

The study of file formats, scanning problems, digital color features and its processing, light manipulation, the capabilities of digital cameras, etc. in a technological aspect also give the monograph a scientific and applied contribution useful for students.

Josif Astrukov pays particular attention to the problems of reception and creativity. The change in the viewer's perception and the ever-expanding transformation of the viewer into an "author" is the subject of the chapter "Photography as Pop Culture", and invariably here the emphasis shifts from the professional camera to the photograph with a phone. Communication is also shifting from exhibition halls and specialist albums and publications to the internet, and the selfie phenomenon continues to flood social media. The author draws attention to the gradual disappearance (or at least shrinkage) of the photographic profession, due to the mass

practice of everyone taking pictures of everything (with the inevitable consequences for quality and aesthetics). The book also discusses the fleeting image, mixed forms between photography and film (video), stock photography, mass simulations of the "old aesthetic", and more. Particularly interesting is the analysis of the different types of hybrid processes that allow the mixing of all kinds of photographic techniques and processes, flowing from digital to analogue and back again.

Josif Astrukov commented extensively on the most current phenomenon in photography - the topic of so-called Artificial Intelligence (AI). After the emergence of various image generation platforms and the concerns of several specialists reaching apocalyptic predictions, the author adopts a more moderate position and considers the emergence of AI as another tool that provides new opportunities for development. He also looks historically at the development of algorithms and 'machine self-learning', adopting the view that we are still at this stage far from the creation of true artificial intelligence. At the same time, he raises the issue of imitative photographs and collages that address ethical issues. However, Josif Astrukov concludes that "an invisible human-human relationship is of utmost importance to us. Part of the role of art is precisely communication on different levels. This need for human connectivity and sharing of emotions, thoughts, experiences and in general - of our lives, cannot be satisfied by a machine. It can only imitate the external elements of such relationships" (p. 190).

The monograph "Photography as..." is written by a competent scholar with a broad knowledge of both the aesthetics and reception of photographic images and the technical intricacies and details. As. Dr. Josif Astrukov perceives new visual techniques as part of the fine arts, with digital artistic means of manipulating the captured image becoming more widely used.

In the competition senior asst. Dr. Josif Astrukov proposes the text of another monograph "**Screen and Scene. New Multimedia Performances**". It is noteworthy that the author manages to trace in a broad historical perspective the interactions between stage and screen forms in art - from Cinéorama, presented in 1900 at the World Exhibition in Paris, through the animation experience of *Little Nemo* (1910) and Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) to the experiments of the 1920s and the subsequent rapid development of hybrid forms. The process is represented by the most significant developments in the blending of screen and stage means of expression to arrive at contemporary interactive performances on real and virtual stages.

Josif Astrukov has made a typology of the terminology in which he draws attention to each individual term and the different contexts in which it is used - Digital performance/Ciberformance, Motion tracking/capture, interactivity, virtuality, etc. It is particularly important that the author systematizes the different types of performances, methodologically highlighting their characteristics according to the type of creative process or communication with the audience. Such forms are sound

performances, visual performances - interactive illusion, interactive reality, avatar performances, virtual performances, tele-performances, etc. Examples from the world and Bulgarian practice in performing and screen arts are analyzed, and here I should note that in the Bulgarian literature there is almost no similar research, and the book analyzes a new and original material that is of interest to a wide range of readers and professionals. Dr. Josif Astrukov's long-standing work with video dance and different types of videos reaches here a new level of conceptualization and contributes to this practically unexplored field in our country.

Besides the two monographs, senior asst. Dr. Josif Astrukov presents six more scientific articles and studies, published in scientifically referred or peer-reviewed journals. “**The *Dune* contemporary dance company's film productions**” continue the author's research in the field of dance. Several of the articles are devoted to spectatorship - **The Lonely Spectator**, Personalia, S., IAS, 2022, pp. 489-499, **The Screen of Divided Individuals**, Art Studies Quarterly, IAS, no. 4, 2021, pp. 38-42. They discuss the growing trend of film communication in which the viewer perceives works individually rather than in a group. The pandemic has further deepened these processes, and the self-absorbed viewer staring at the digital screen is the rule rather than the exception. At the same time, this transformation in viewer communication and reception is the result not only of the lockdown, but of more recent social processes of alienation, the psychological effects of social networks, and the overall environment of human relationships in the real and virtual world.

Are the New Serials a Mirror of Society, Art Studies Quarterly, IAS, no. 2, 2020, pp. 36-40 is an article on the new and more powerful effect of serials in the face of changed communication and streaming platforms. The new models of serialization as well as economic, social and technological changes are analyzed in the context of high-profile titles aimed primarily at young audiences.

Generated Images: Is Artificial Intelligence an Art? Art Studies Quarterly IAS, no. 4, 2023, pp. 52-61 is a continuation of Josif Astrukov's analysis from the monograph *Photography as...*

Contemporary Bulgarian Experimental Cinema, Sketches of the New Bulgarian Cinema, S., IAS, 2021, pp. 102-153, ISBN 978-619-7619-18-8 is devoted to current developments in the field of contemporary dance and experimental cinema. In this case, Josif Astrukov distinguishes between the terms experimental, independent, alternative, underground, etc., to highlight some of the aspects in the development of experimental cinema in Bulgaria. And although the focus of the article is once again dance and its film version, the study also examines other processes such as the creation of experimental forms in various alternative ways - for example in film clubs, as well as the unusual works of Alexander Morfov, Teddy Moskov or Dimitar Kotsev-Shosho.

The publications of Dr. Josif Astrukov show a competent and confident handling of the selected material, while at the same time he draws on his typology of terminology and systematization of film and stage works in theoretical terms. A contribution of his texts is the fact that he searches for areas of research that have not been explored (or at least have been poorly explored) in the Bulgarian literature, and in doing so expands the field of analysis beyond the traditional perimeters of film studies.

I have known Josif Astrukov since his doctoral years at the Institute of Art Studies - BAS and I believe that since then he has grown as an independent scholar who deepens his knowledge and his potential for original research. He is a colleague with the ability to work in a team, correct as a scientist and as a person. At the same time, he is also a creative person with six photographic exhibitions, eight short films, two books of fiction and one photo album. As a university lecturer, he managed to gain authority and respect among students and colleagues.

Conclusion:

The serious and thorough academic monographs and articles, the professional, creative and pedagogical qualities, as well as the contributions of Dr. Josif Astrukov give me reason to believe that he has all the necessary qualities to take the academic position of "Associate Professor". I propose to the Scientific Jury to support him and to the Scientific Council of the Institute of Art Studies to confirm him to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in "Film Studies, Film Art and Television (Digital Technologies and Screen Images)".

With conviction I will vote "Yes".

Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Mihailova [Marinchevska]

