

OPINION

By Associate Professor Dr Nevelina Popova

Lecturer of Film Dramaturgy at NBU, professional direction 8.4 Theater and Film Art (Film Studies, Film Art and Television)

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

Candidate: Senior Assistant Dr Josif Astrukov

Josif Astrukov has provided his documents in the competition for the academic position of associate professor with a respectable amount of academic research works and numerous creative and professional presentations, behind which his consistent and persistent interest in the conceptualization of the processes in different areas of the screen arts - dance and cinema, multimedia performances, photography.

The main habilitation work that Josif Astrukov presents for the announced competition for the academic position of associate professor is the monograph "PHOTOGRAPHY AS..." published in 2023, second supplemented edition. This is a serious comprehensive study of the contemporary processes and transformations of photographic images in today's digital age. With the proficiency of someone who knows and has extensive personal experience in the art of photography, Josif Astrukov analyzes and systematizes the characteristic changes in analog and digital photography with their accompanying new technological solutions. The text contains many diverse examples from world practice and from the author's personal creative experience. The rich empirical material is conceptualized in a substantive, in-depth way. The text is very well structured. Each individual chapter with a corresponding key title is dedicated to a particular contemporary phenomenon in photography: the "impossible" digitalization; photography as pop culture; the fleeting image; mixed forms between photography and cinema with the increasing possibilities to move the frozen photograph; the "loop" as a characteristic phenomenon of repetition in digital culture; the hybrid processes of mixing analogue and digital technologies of image capture and processing; the ever-growing possibilities of image simulations, through which previous aesthetic suggestions are achieved; of contemporary generative

platforms and the use of artificial intelligence for image generation; of the business potential of the photographic image, of "stock" photography with the clichéd stock aesthetics imposed by advertising strategies; and last but not least of the parallel, regular processes of revival of the old retro aesthetics. The processes are examined not only in terms of technology, but also in a broader social, philosophical and aesthetic context. Various basic concepts are introduced and clarified in terms of genesis and current usage. Photographic images are analyzed as an integral and very important part of contemporary communication, of the complex processes of spectatorial perception and of image consumption.

The other works of Josif Astrukov presented for the competition complete the picture of his authorial search in recent years. Here is the key to his interests and activities monograph **“Screen and Stage. The New Multimedia Performances”**, published in 2023, which for me is a kind of continuation of his first book **VideoDance**, the basis of which is his doctoral dissertation. “Screen and Stage. New Multimedia Performances” is an important and timely study that sets out to explain the dynamic picture of today's performing arts and to systematize their interactions with the screen arts, from the early years of cinema to contemporary interactive multimedia performances on real and virtual stages. Personally, I found it useful and interesting to get into the dynamics of this current and ever-changing picture of contemporary performing arts, to update my understanding of different technologies and concepts that are at the core of today's multimedia performances - digital performance, virtuality, interactivity, cyber performance, motion capture/tracking. The presentation of the concepts related to the author's scientific methodology, through which he systematizes the types of performances in terms of the creative process and communication with the audience, is also beneficial: sound and visual performances, interactive illusion and interactive reality, avatar performances, virtual performances, tele-performances. The final part of the monograph, devoted to the complex ambiguous relations between art and technology, not only reveals trends, but also leaves the reader with age-old questions about the meaning of art and the ambiguous directions of technological development.

In addition to these two monographs, Josif Astrukov has presented three articles that address the problems of contemporary reception. They could be united around the theme of the "lonely spectator", of "divided individuals" - these are some of the respective titles of the articles. This theme continues to unfold in “Are the New Serials a Mirror of Society.” In them, Josif Astrukov updates the problems of spectatorial perception from a broader philosophical angle - through the prism of complex social processes and the psychological effects of digital platforms and social networks, focusing on the changes in human relationships torn between the real and

virtual worlds. They have been published in the annual proceedings of the Institute of Art Studies, refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information. The other two articles, “Contemporary Bulgarian Experimental Cinema, Sketches of the New Bulgarian Cinema” and “Generated Images: is Artificial Intelligence Art?” are devoted to experimental cinema and dance, as well as to the current situation of the penetration of artificial intelligence in today's digital world - all topics in which the author has shown a lasting and deep interest over the years. The texts have been published in the journal *Art Studies Quarterly*.

An invariable part of the scientific research work of Josif Astrukov is his constant participation in scientific conferences at home and abroad, round tables and forums, in almost all editions of "Art Readings", but also at Sofia University, NBU, Veliko Tarnovo University, the University in Nis, as well as in scientific events organized under various projects. Particularly important for his development as a scientist is his participation in the two projects – “Performing and Screen Arts in Bulgaria - Research, Historical Compendium and Laboratory” within the framework of the project "Building and Development of Centre of Excellence Heritage BG", and "The Post-totalitarian Bulgarian Cinema - Models and Identities".

A complete list of citations from Astrukov's works (7 in number) in the works of his colleagues is attached to the competition materials, which again shows how meaningful and useful his research is.

In the materials for the competition, Josif Astrukov also presents his personal creative projects in photography, cinema and literature. The quantity of these creative performances is impressive - 6 exhibitions, 8 short films, a photo album and two books. His collaborative work with choreographers and dancers from contemporary dance circles over the last 20 years has been the foundation of his research. Within the framework of their productions, Josif Astrukov has realized dozens of stage illuminations, photographic projects or coverage of performances, videos. In collaboration with Petya Stoykova, in 2016 they made two short dance films, "A Dream Come True" and "Another Dream Come True", selected in the Open Horizons program of the Golden Rose Film Festival in 2017.

In the path of Josif Astrukov as a researcher, his teaching work also occupies an important place. Since 2017, he has been a lecturer at New Bulgarian University, at the departments of Design, Media and Communication, Photography, in master's and bachelor's programs, with a total of seven courses to date.

Previously, from 2014 to 2020 he was a lecturer at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, master's program "Production and Creative Industries".

My personal impressions of Josif Astrukov have been scattered over the years, and they are usually related to his participation in competitions, conferences, festivals, our chance meetings in the corridors of the university and on the street. For me, Josif has always been an interesting, searching, immersed in his research and creativity young man, with serious potential and internal consistency.

I highly appreciate the many works and overall activity of Josif Astrukov. I am convinced that he deserves the academic position of Associate Professor in Film Studies, Film Art and Television (Digital Technologies of the Screen Images) in the professional field 8.4. Theatre and Film Art, for the needs of the Screen Arts Department of the Institute of Art Studies, BAS, announced in Official Gazette No. 52/18.06.2024. From the bottom of my heart, I wish him success.

I strongly support his candidature and vote in favor.

11. 11. 2024. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nevelina Popova