

OPINION

By Prof. Dr. Radostina Neikova

on the academic works and creative activity of Josif Astrukov for participation in the competition for the position of associate professor in professional direction 8.4 "Theater and Film Art", published in State Gazette, issue 52 from 18.06.2024 for the Screen Arts Department of the Institute of Art Studies – BAS

In the competition for Associate Professor of Film Studies, Film Art and Television announced by the IAS there is only one candidate – Chief. Ass. Dr. Josif Astrukov.

Josif Astrukov graduated performing arts directing from NATFA "Kr. Sarafov". In 2014 he defended his doctoral dissertation on "Contemporary Experimental Cinema. Hybrid Forms between Contemporary Dance and New Digital Cinema in the Internet Environment", at the Institute of Art Studies - BAS. That same year, he was appointed as a senior assistant at the Institute of Art Studies - BAS.

The candidate is a director, cinematographer and photographer of documentaries and feature films such as "Elusive" (2019), "Lucid Dream" (2017), etc. He has realized several individual photography exhibitions (e.g. "Still Life" at Odeon Cinema Gallery, Sofia, 2022, "One", Odeon Cinema Gallery, 2018, etc.) and participated in collective ones. He won First Prize in the Competition for Young Researchers -100 Years Bulgarian Cinema - Facts, Practices, Reflections in 2015.

The following materials have been submitted for the competition: a scientific study "Photography as..." (monograph, second supplemented edition, S., 2023) in a volume of 212 pages; a monograph not submitted as a major habilitation work - "Screen and Scene. New Multimedia Performances" (S., 2023) in a volume of 135 pages; 3 articles published in refereed and indexed scientific journals and 7 articles and reports published in specialized journals in the field of arts; 1 study published in a collection indexed in ERIH PLUS; and 1 chapter of a collective monograph - Contemporary Bulgarian Experimental Cinema, ("Brushes to the New Bulgarian Cinema", S., 2021).

The habilitation thesis submitted for the competition by Chief. Asst. Dr. Josif Astrukov's the monograph "Photography as..." represents a thorough and innovative research.

The analyses of the contemporary transformations of photographic images in the age of digitalization are extremely interesting and thorough. Dr. Astrukov's view is important not only from a research and academic point of view, but also the view of a practitioner who has gone through most of the presented stages with real practice.

The text comprehensively examines key examples from specific areas of photography, including both classical methods of capturing an image and all kinds of contemporary, digital and hybrid processes.

An interesting point of the study in the research is precisely the constant attempt of Josif Astrukov to consider the problem from all possible perspectives, to explore it in depth and breadth. Often Astrukov argues with himself, trying to find the most accurate and profound context of the problem: "It is precisely this infinite multi variation in digitalization, together with individual examples that practically do not lend themselves to satisfactory digitalization, that is the reason why I conditionally call it impossible" (p. 26).

The candidate explores the nature of image transfer from old defects, through the fleeting image, the photography-cinema interrelationship, regenerative images in the pattern of copying and re-copying, contemporary versions of generated images, and much more, and questions the use and development of different authorial styles, characterization of time, technology, etc. in this visual re/over/building. The use of comparative analysis and interdisciplinarity helps the author a to develop his analyses very pertinently. With this theoretical work, Josif Astrukov carves out a new and interesting field of scientific research in Bulgarian art history and uses specific scientific terminology related to the creation of illustrations.

I believe that besides its theoretical contribution, the monograph is also very useful for practitioners and students working in the field of screen arts.

This is Dr. Astrukov's third monograph after the publication of the supplemented edition of his dissertation "VideoDance", where he examines and analyzes the specifics of screen dance in various forms and formats, as well as his personal experience in the field. This is one of the rare, published studies on the subject in Bulgaria. And it is a companion to the previous study of new multimedia performances in the monograph "Screen and Stage".

The candidate's academic publications and papers are again focused on the topic of the interesting compilation between screen and performing arts, various experimental forms and multimedia performances. It is noteworthy that the candidate works on the topic very seriously, with dedication and passion. Some of the texts have been presented to the public when participating in conferences. It is noteworthy that the proposed publications cover a wide field of analysis and interpretation. Josif Astrukov focuses his attention with a very professional flair on the effects of digitalization in contemporary art, on photography as pop culture, on dramaturgical models that isolate an increasingly solitary spectator in his concreteness, on various dramaturgical problems of contemporary screen art, and of course, the key in the candidate's research, contemporary dance. The candidate's analyses are also very precise on the topic of contemporary generative platforms and "artificial intelligence", an area in which Dr. Astrukov handles very skillfully, perhaps because of his previous master's degree in medical physics at Sofia University "St Kliment Ohridski".

As an expert, Josif Astrukov participated in the projects: "Performing and Screen Arts in Bulgaria - Research, Historical Compendium and Laboratory", within the project Building and Development of a Centre of Excellence Heritage.BG; "Post-totalitarian Bulgarian Cinema - Models and Identities", supported by the Scientific Research Fund.

In addition to the candidate's activities, it is important to note his teaching activities at the NBU in the field of audiovisual creativity, journalistic photography, fashion photography, visual practices, etc.

Dr. Astrukov's scientific works have been cited 8 times in 7 publications. One review of his products and works has been presented in the magazine "Kino" - a specialized publication in the field of screen art. All this shows the candidate's recognition in the scientific community.

Considering the presented scientific, research and teaching work of Chief Asst. Dr. Josif Astrukov, I propose to the Honorable Scientific Council of the Institute for the Study of the Arts to elect him to the academic position of ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in Film Studies, Film Art and Television (Digital Technologies of Screen Images), at the Institute of Art Studies.

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