

# OPINION

By Corr. Member Prof. Ivanka Gergova

For the dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

ARTISTIC AND LIFE EXPERIENCE IN CAROL RAMA AND LIKA YANKO -  
TWO CASES OF FEMALE ARTISTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IN  
EUROPE

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Eva-Maria Ivanova has chosen a very ambitious and difficult topic for her dissertation, which is both risky and a prerequisite for success. She decided to examine in parallel the life path and work of two women artists who lived and realized their careers in different conditions, but who are organically interwoven into the history of European art in the twentieth century. The chosen personalities are not random; the analysis of their works and of their "media" image allows for much broader generalizations about the place of women in modern art, its directions, and the vicissitudes of mass perception and critical reception.

The structure of the work has been carefully considered and is entirely adequate to the research aims and intentions: it is symmetrical, with two sections of text devoted to the two women artists with roughly the same parameters.

The biographical narrative both on Lika Janko and Carol Rama is hampered by the lack of accumulated reliable documentary data, especially in the former case. Elucidating the life paths of the two proves to be a difficult and fascinating task. Eva-Maria's approach is original: instead of constructing a chronological narrative that introduces the reader to the life of the two artists, she analyses what has been written about them to highlight stereotypical notions that she subjects to analysis and often rejects. In the section on Lika Yanko, the author has also done some serious research work, gathering not only the existing bibliography but also archival data and accounts from people who knew the artist. This has allowed her to make a "synthesis of the main data on Lika Yanko's life", where the biography is outlined in general terms.

In the case of Carol Rama, the researcher is facilitated by the existence of materials of a different nature, but as with Lika Yanko, significant 'gaps' remain.

The main aim of this dissertation is to analyze the work of both artists and place it in the broad context of contemporary artistic trends. Here again, a great deal of work has been done to collect, systematize and make sense of the material. Eva-Maria Ivanova demonstrates here both an aptitude for research and something essential for a researcher - a desire and aspiration to achieve authenticity, to contact the original, despite the difficulties that such work creates. The chapters dealing with the poetics of Lika Yanko and Carol Rama are particularly rewarding. In fact, the dissertation has a much broader scope than the title sets out, because other artists with whom the two women had a direct or indirect relationship are analyzed in detail and argued for. Intriguing are the findings of typological similarity between the two female artists studied.

While the works of Lika Yanko and Carol Rama have been and are the subject of research by other authors, what is particularly contributory and interesting is the analysis of the art historical narrative of the two, the creation of stereotypical notions and the introduction of clichés, which are sometimes, for example in the case of Lika Yanko, also triggered by her own statements.

In our scholarly practice, printed dissertations are relatively rare, and in some cases, it is better that way. But the text under review has the merits to be published in its entirety and I hope the author makes efforts to publish it as a book.

As a casual reader of the dissertation, I might note some points that are somewhat disturbing, or raise questions and desire for completion and elaboration. The classic outline of an introduction in a doctoral dissertation provides a bibliographical overview to convince the reader that the chosen topic has potential for future development. This is lacking in the manuscript under review and would not be superfluous to add in the case of a future publication. The manner of footnote citation and in the bibliography is not maintained everywhere (for example, pages are missing for the articles). Repetitions that could have been avoided are encountered, as are excessively long citations, especially in footnotes, which make reading difficult. Apart from these rather formal problems, which could easily be overcome, I would raise some questions about Lika Yanko's life and personality. I realize that it may not be possible to answer some of them. For example, Lika's family - where they come from and what are the reasons for their emigration to Bulgaria is not an unimportant question. They are obviously not Muslim, but do they come from an area with an Orthodox Albanian population, or are they Catholic? Hence, were they religious, did Lika Yanko receive an initiation into Christian values in her family, was she religious, or are the Christian themes in her works not internally experienced but rather the product of conjuncture? What was her environment at the National

Academy of Art - who were her fellow students, did she maintain contact with any of them? What is her attitude towards nature - are the sea motifs only imaginary and are they only the fruit of fantasy and a search for mythological motifs? Has she gone out to work in the open air, or are her individual works that suggest this incidental?

I accept the entire dissertation as conscientiously completed and appreciate Eva-Maria Ivanova's dedication and research abilities. I believe that she has accurately identified her contributions and I join her in her self-assessment. The abstract lists 9 publications related to the thesis, some of which are in reputable scientific journals.

The work exceeds not only in volume, but also in the issues addressed, the usual requirements for dissertations for the degree of Doctor of Education and Science, and I will vote in favor of awarding this degree to Eva-Maria Ivanova. I wish her success and to keep her dedication, which is the key to achieving them!

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