

# REVIEW

By

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On the dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"  
on the subject:

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

Dissertator: Eva-Maria Ivanova

Department of Fine Arts

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Irina Genova

Academic specialty *Art Studies and Fine Arts*

Professional direction 8.1 *Arts Theory*

## **General presentation of the procedure and the materials received for review.**

This review has been prepared in accordance with Order No 82-RD of 26 February 2024 of the of the Director of the Institute of Art Studies - BAS. All legal provisions have been complied with, namely: the PPPRAS of the Republic of Bulgaria; the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for the Occupation of Academic Positions in BAS; the Regulations on the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for the Occupation of Academic Positions in the Institute of Art Studies. I hereby declare that I have received and thoroughly examined the documentation sent to me regarding the procedure. Based on the examination of the documents, I confirm that the scientific requirements necessary for admission to the defense of a thesis for the award of the degree of PhD in the professional field 8.1. Arts Theory.

## **Biographical data about the PhD student**

Eva-Maria Ivanova is a graduate of New Bulgarian University, where in 2019 she graduated with a master's degree in art theory from the Comparative Art Studies

Program with a thesis entitled "The Work of Carol Rama in the Context of Twentieth Century Art", under the scientific supervision of Associate Professor Dr. Boyan Manchev. I consider this part of her biography to be particularly important, since in Ivanova's later work as a PhD student we find the interdisciplinary research approach, independence, and courage in the construction of scientific theses, and an updated art historical analysis, expanded by the inclusion of cultural, philosophical, and semiotic interpretations. I would also like to pay special attention to some personal qualities, which all colleagues from the Modern Bulgarian Art research group had the opportunity to observe after Eva-Maria Ivanova was enrolled as a full-time PhD student in 2021. We were impressed by the diligence, performance, dedication to the chosen topic, professional ethics, respect, and esteem that the PhD student demonstrated during her work at the Institute of Art Studies.

### **Relevance of the subject**

Bulgarian art history needs updated art studies, especially those focused on artists, works and artistic phenomena from the second half of the 20th century. The approach of younger colleagues, born after 1989, is distinguished by analyticity, rationality, and emotional distance, which makes their texts more accessible to contemporary students. The work of the two female artists, Lika Yanko, and Carol Rama, who attracted the attention of the dissertation author, is not unknown or unexplored. What makes Eva-Maria's work relevant, and contributory is precisely the new, refracted through the prism of modernity, look at their professional and personal histories. An attempt has been made to overcome the established clichés and stereotypes of the two authors, to rethink their place and role in art history locally and globally. I would also like to mention the fact that both abroad and in Bulgaria, the work of women artists is now being revisited with particular interest, placed in a broader cultural context, and reconsidered based on new interpretations focused not only on art but also on a wide range of social, cultural, economic, political, and other issues relating to sexual identity and gender. In this sense, Eva-Maria Ivanova's work is in line with the most contemporary research trends in the field of art history and theory.

### **Relevance of the research methods to achieve the set objectives.**

At first glance, Eva-Maria Ivanova's dissertation is constructed as a comparison - between two creative and life stories, between two aesthetic and conceptual approaches, between two phyletic and cultural realities. However, we see two narratives developing in parallel, two peculiar dissertations, which are connected in places through global examples, through bold and innovative psychological, semiotic,

and aesthetic interpretations. Ivanova's approach is innovative and has its risks, but the reader is not surprised by it once he or she finds that this is the spirit of the whole study, in which the striving for independence from the theoretical templates and frameworks established in art studies is clearly visible. It is imperative to note the impressively detailed analysis of the works of the two authors that the dissertator makes, her scrutiny of all the elements of composition, some of which are extensively examined in semiotic and psychoanalytic terms. Clearly, Eva-Maria Ivanova boldly takes the risk of overinterpretation that such an approach undoubtedly entails, and resolutely formulates quite new, sometimes quite controversial hypotheses, which she defends with respectable erudition and fervor. As an achievement of the dissertation, I would like to highlight the fact that throughout her research, biographical and iconographic analysis are intertwined, not separated, as is often the case in classically constructed dissertations.

### **Evaluation of the dissertation**

The dissertation consists of 303 pages of text, with an introduction followed by the actual research, divided into two parts, one devoted to Lika Yanko and the other to Carol Rama, broken down into numerous subchapters that examine different aspects of the biographical accounts and aesthetic features in the work of the two artists. Impressive is the well-structured and correctly described bibliography (24 pages), consisting of 103 titles in Cyrillic and 127 in Latin. This is a considerable amount of information - assimilated, comprehended and skillfully used. This is followed by an album of nearly a hundred works, but not only by the artists who are the focus of the study, but also by several prominent representatives of world art whose works are mentioned and are important both for understanding the individual narratives and for making the connections between them.

The overall impression of the dissertation is that it is written with great care, with a precise eye, noticing the smallest details not only in the compositions but also in the lives of the main heroines. There is a good grasp, interpretation and adequate citation of the literary sources used, and a research confidence is demonstrated, based on an excellent knowledge of the pictorial material and its already existing interpretations by other specialists. Hypotheses about women artists in the wider European context are formulated because of private examples relating to the lives and work of the two authors. Women artists' connections (both personal and ideological) with a range of other artists are explored - for example, in the case of Lika Yanko with the musicians Stoika Milanova and Vasil Kazandjiev and with the aesthetics of Picasso, Paul Klee, Jean Dubuffet, Max Ernst and others, and in the case of Carol Rama - with Man Ray, Cy Twombly, Louise Bourgeois, etc. I would like to highlight two undoubted

research achievements of Eva-Maria Ivanova. The first is her account of the collaboration between Lika Yanko and Binka Zhelyazkova in the 1973 film *The Last Word*, in which the artist painted the walls of the prison cell where the main action takes place. The second is the close examination of the studio dwellings in which Lika Yanko and Carol Rama lived and worked, describing them as a kind of "total works of art" that captured the energy and artistic presence of their now departed occupants.

The dissertation is written clearly, understandably, at a good level of language.

### **Contributions and significance of the scientific work and the publications on the dissertation topic**

I fully agree with the contributions mentioned by the dissertation author, which I would like to extend by paying special attention to Eva-Maria Ivanova's critical approach to the already existing studies devoted to the two authors, and especially to those dealing with the work of Lika Yanko. The author's theses are presented with due respect for the works of our eminent art historians, but at the same time with admirable youthful audacity and determination. It is the dissertator's own positions, which she is not afraid to put forward and argue, that I find to be one of the greatest achievements of the work presented. They testify to an entirely justified self-confidence, the result of knowledge acquired with diligence, perseverance, consistency, and collegial respect.

Eva-Maria Ivanova has indicated a list of nine publications on the topic of the dissertation, six of them - published in prestigious scientific journals, which exceeds the requirements of the law and the Regulations of the Institute of Art Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. I would like to mention the dissertation's commitment to the Institute's publications - the journal *Art Studies Quarterly* and the collection *Art Studies Readings*, distinguished by their exceptionally high criteria, which Ivanova met without significant effort.

The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation, presenting it concisely and clearly, despite the complex structure of the actual text.

My recommendations are that the dissertator reprints her research, revising it so that the focus is clearly on Lika Yanko, without excluding comparisons to Carol Rama's personal and creative journey. I would advise Eva-Maria Ivanova to enrich her already formulated theses and conclusions by placing them in a broader cultural and historical context, introducing the reader to the specifics of Bulgarian artistic life

during socialism. Such a monograph - written in the spirit of the new art historical research approaches - will certainly attract the attention of a younger audience, while at the same time it could broaden the horizons of classically oriented art historians who deal with various issues in the history of Bulgarian fine art.

I accept the dissertation of Eva-Maria Ivo Ivanova ART AND LIFE EXPERIENCE OF CAROL RAMA AND LIKA YANKO - TWO CASES OF TWENTIETH CENTURY ARTISTS IN EUROPE as extremely conscientiously executed and valuable and I will confidently vote FOR awarding the candidate the educational and academic degree of doctor.

24.05.2024

Sofia

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Dr Katerina Gadzheva