

# OPINON

By

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On the dissertation work on the subject:

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

by

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Academic specialty *Art Studies and Fine Arts, 8.1 Arts Theory*

Academic supervisor: **Prof. Dr. Irina Genova**

I would like to state at the very outset that it has been a long time since I have read such a satisfying PhD thesis. I have known Eva-Maria since her studies in the BA Art Studies and Art Management program and MA Comparative Art Studies at New Bulgarian University, where she stood out even among our best students. Her research skills were evident in her master's thesis on Carol Rama, which she defended with excellence. And despite my logical expectation that Eva-Maria's growth would be evident in the thesis, I am very impressed by the well-structured thesis, with clearly formulated theses, whose argumentation is professionally done and defended through bold polemics with other authors and approaches.

Respectable is also the serious theoretical background of the dissertation, thanks to which she has put the research on a solid basis, following the method of Rosalind Krauss and Yves Alain Bois. The terms defined by different authors and used by Eva-Maria in her work are justified.

The definitions of "aesthetic experience", "artistic experience", "life experience" and "liminal experience" are argued, the latter concept being particularly applicable in the presentation of the biographical and creative path of the two artists.

While the theme of *Artistic and Life Experience of Carol Rama and Lika Yanko - Two Cases of Female Artists in Twentieth Century Europe* warrants the expectation of two entirely self-contained studies, the work is organic and the comparison between the life experiences and aesthetic explorations and realizations of Carol Rama and Lika Yanko is made both directly and indirectly wherever it is seen. Nevertheless, I believe that the contributions of even just Lika Yanko's presentation are serious enough and fully satisfy the requirements for a PhD thesis. Through her study of Carol Rama, these expectations have been exceeded. Particularly given that Eva-Maria is not content with a comparative presentation of selected Bulgarian and Italian women artists, both of whom lived at the same time, with similarly unconventional biographies, which have been equally overused and overdramatized, and on that basis ignored or overlooked by much contemporary art history. This is one of the reasons given by the author for their prolonged absence from national and pan-European art scenes in the twentieth century.

The dissertation identifies and analyses the similarities in some of Lika Yanko's paintings with works by Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso, and Carol Rama's with Louise Bourgeois, Man Ray, Rodin, Cy Twombly, and many others.

The sources on which Eva-Maria draws in her dissertation are highly respectable. Works by Lika Yanko have been found in the National Art Gallery, Sofia City Art Gallery, the City Art Galleries of Varna, Dobrich, Lovech, Sliven, and the Bulgarian National Film Library in Sofia. Also included are paintings from private collections. Work has been carried out in the Archive of the Union of Bulgarian Artists, monographs, articles and other publications on Lika Yanko and Carol Rama have been analyzed, the missing documents on Lika Yanko have been problematized, which the dissertation has tried to compensate for through interviews with persons close to the artist, the house-museum and the archive kept there of Carol Rama in Turin have been presented in detail.

I would especially like to point out that Eva-Maria's research on the life and creative path of Lika Yanko from the 1960s to the 1980s is another testimony, together with that of Prof. Irina Genova in her book "The Bulgarian Perspective on Art Culture Beyond the Iron Curtain in the 1960s: A Look at France" that quite a few Bulgarian artists are well aware of the current demands of Western European visual artists.

I could go on enumerating the scholarly merits of this dissertation, but I will conclude with a brief comment on the third chapter of the first part, devoted to Lika Yanko's participation in Binka Zhelyazkova's film *Their Last Word* (1973). Undoubtedly, what is presented in Poetics III (pp. 139-161) is a serious contribution to the overall survey of Lika Yanko's work.

The case of the film *Their Last Word*, brought into focus by Eva-Maria, provokes reflection and analysis in a broader socio-cultural context. First, on the authorship of the script. Binka Zhelyazkova's first two films were made in tandem with her husband Hristo Ganev, who wrote both *Life Goes on Quietly* (1957) and *We Were Young* (1961). The screenplay of *Their Last Word* was signed by Binka Zhelyazkova, but I wondered if she was the actual author. The reason for this doubt is the fact that one year before the production of the film - in 1971 - Hristo Ganev was expelled from the Communist Party because of the Solzhenitsyn scandal and a script signed by him could not have passed through the script committee. This is only a hypothesis that requires further study.

I also thought about the assumption made by Eva-Maria that Binka Zhelyazkova had invited Lika Yanko to paint the ceiling of the cell in Vratsa prison because of stylistic similarities between the artist's work and the aesthetic concept of the film. This assumption, through the precise analysis of the stylistics of the mural and the film, has been convincingly proven by the dissertation. But the quoted line from an interview of Lika Yanko, which Eva-Maria was able to download from the documentary *Buy Some Hope - Lika Yanko*: ("Binka Zhelyazkova is the one who somehow got me out. They would not allow me at exhibitions..." 140) is also a testimony to the unstinting support that Binka Zhelyazkova and Hristo Ganev gave during the last three decades of socialism to unjustifiably neglected or sanctioned writers, artists, authors of theatre productions and films.

Again, I would like to emphasize that the opportunity to share these thoughts is entirely to Eva-Maria's credit and shows how promising her research is and how significant its contribution is to the history of Bulgarian art culture in the second half of the twentieth century.

The abstract intelligently presents the main theses of the dissertation and meets all the requirements of the law. I fully agree with the listed contributions.

The publications on the topic of the dissertation (9) exceed the administrative requirements, the same applies to Eva-Maria's other activities during the PhD studies.

The attached illustrations in the album are professionally selected and are an essential part of the dissertation's contributions.

In conclusion, I express my admiration for the professionalism of Eva-Maria Ivo Ivanova, I propose that the work be published, and I will gladly and with full conviction vote "For" the awarding of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Art Studies and Fine Arts.

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