

## **REVIEW**

**By Prof. Dr. Daniela Todorova Markova, a teacher at the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski," Faculty of Pedagogy, professional direction 8.2. "Art"**

of the materials with the artistic-creative and scientific production for participation in a competition for the occupation of the academic position of **Associate Professor** by field of higher education 8. Arts; professional direction 8.2 Visual arts (design of printed advertising, book publications, and web products), announced in SG - No. 50/09.06.2023, with candidate **Ch. Assistant Professor Sofroni Georgiev Varbev, Ph.D**

For participation in the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" at the New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bachelor's Faculty, Design Department, after the expiration of the legal term, one candidate submitted documents - Ch. Assist. Prof. Sofroni Georgiev Varbev, Ph.D. By Order No. 3-RK-286 of 13.07.2023 from the Rector of the NBU, I have been selected as an external member of the Scientific Jury for the announced competition. As a member of the Scientific Jury and a reviewer, I got acquainted with the materials provided by the candidate.

### **I. Assessment of compliance with the minimum national requirements and the requirements of the New Bulgarian University**

The materials submitted for review follow the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (DASRBA), the Regulations for the Implementation of the DASRBA, and the relevant Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff of the NBU and contain administrative documents, as well as documents proving the artistic and scientific activity of the candidate.

The materials on an electronic medium include the following documents: 1. Advertising vision of the National Autumn Exhibitions Plovdiv 2014-2022 (incl. extended summary and summary in English); 2. Autobiography; 3. Opinion of Prof. Dr. Galina Lardeva - Vice-Rector of the Academy of Music, Dance, and Fine Arts - Plovdiv, curator of the National Autumn Exhibitions - Plovdiv for the candidate's work on the visual concept of advertising materials. 4. Self-assessment of the candidate (Appendix 2: Minimum requirements for the scientific, teaching

and artistic-creative activity of the candidates for occupying the academic positions in professional fields, following DASRBA and the requirements of the New Bulgarian University); 5. Research and creative program; 6. The creative activity of the candidate; 7. Portfolio of artistic works; 8. Higher education diploma; 9. Diploma for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "doctor."

The candidate fulfills the conditions of the DASRBA and the Ordinance on the development of the academic staff of the NBU. The competition is announced in the State Gazette and on the NBU website.

Ch. Associate Professor Sofroni Varbev, Ph.D., obtained the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in 2013 with the topic of his dissertation "Corporate Identity in the Interior." Since 2013, he has held the academic position of "chief assistant," which meets the condition for the "associate professor" position with at least two years of the previous procedure.

The materials submitted for review meet the minimum national requirements and the requirements of the NBU, defined in Appendix 2;

In support of this conclusion is the following:

- The materials for participation in the competition are related to the announced competition's professional direction and scientific specialty. They outline the breadth of interests and the quality of the candidate's artistic and scientific activity.
- The review takes into account the materials after the year of holding the academic position of "chief assistant" (2013), which can be safely considered to be beyond those that may have already participated in the previous procedure; these are the solo exhibition (1997) and some of the awards received in an earlier period. Nevertheless, the "Scientometric Data Table" shows that the applicant has met the minimum national requirements. The obtained points for the individual indicators significantly exceed those indicated for the occupation of the academic position "associate professor" following the DASRBA and the requirements of the NBU.

## **II. Research (creative) activity and results**

Sofroni Varbev's CV shows extensive experience in the field of visual arts as a practicing designer and as a teacher. Before joining NBU as a part-time lecturer in the Design and Architecture Department, he worked as a designer in many companies. He taught fine art at "St. Patriarch Euthymius" - Plovdiv. Undoubtedly, this experience is of great benefit to the students whom S. Varbev teaches. He is a member of the Association of Interior Designers in

Bulgaria (AIDB) and the Society of Plovdiv Artists (DPH). He Has received honors and awards for logo and caricature from national and international contests in Japan.

S. Varbev is a graphic designer of what has become a traditional forum for artistic expression, organized on a curatorial basis - "National Autumn Exhibitions" in Plovdiv for the editions from 2014 to 2022. An idea of his achievements as a graphic designer is given by the realized author's product in the field of the arts "Advertising vision of national autumn exhibitions in Plovdiv" 2014 - 2022 with text and illustrative content (93 pages - 38 pages of text; 55 pages of illustrative material). The artistic concepts for the respective years are explained and analyzed for the different media – catalog, leaflet, invitation, or poster. The creative results are presented by years, objects, and project methodology. It was approached with the thoroughness inherent to a professional - a work plan was considered, the main goals were defined, the means for their achievement were specified, and the structure of the individual forms of design expression was defined. An intersection between curatorial idea, representativeness, and measured provocativeness is achieved without extreme eccentricity.

The work on the advertising vision of the exhibitions is a challenge for every designer, serious in terms of volume and responsibility, considering that the forum is one of the most prestigious for contemporary Bulgarian fine art, a key event in the cultural calendar of Plovdiv. The exhibitions correspond to the high level of the art world, presenting established and promising artists (some of whom work outside the country's borders) and continue to arouse sustained interest.

The advertising vision that gathered the design ideas for the specified period clearly shows that the goals have been met. With so many art events featuring works created in a variety of mediums, going beyond the narrow boundaries of traditional genres, with an overflow from one genre to another, painting, graphics, sculpture, ceramics, drawing, collage, video, photography, spatial compositions, installations, objects, etc., a connecting thread has been brought out, an organic unity has been achieved, which gives character to the general vision of the forum. A uniform brand presentation style is maintained in advertising products for the period. At the same time, each annual event has its own visual identity following the name determined by the curator. The choice of image is accurate and adequate to the idea, and the essential specificity of the exhibited works is followed without the standard monotonous display of a series of works. Some pieces are transmitted directly, others through fragments. In the pictorial messages to the audience, philosophical concepts, social problems, and challenging the author's ideas are skillfully bet.

The impression of the overall appearance of the National Autumn Exhibitions is conveyed through the aesthetic solutions of the advertising materials – the strictly defined presentation structure, the choice of means of expression, color, and compositional solutions.

The vision of the advertising materials – catalog, leaflet, invitation, poster, vinyl banners, banners for the web environment, is consistent with the openness of the exposures to new directions and trends in the visual arts, in sync with the attractively designed expositions, aesthetically sustained and at the same time challenging and posing questions.

Advertising materials have a modern look and style and have an impactful effect. Their impact is based on knowledge of the fundamental essences of art, a demonstrated psychological sense, and skillful use of subtleties to achieve suggestions through form, color, font, etc., which makes them relevant and memorable. Attractive decorative elements and additional accents are used. The choice of colors (from a contrast between blue and yellow, blue and black, a pink-brown range or a predominance of neutral gray and other bold solutions) that he made was with taste, in which the color fully fulfills its aesthetic, pictorial, and, above all, expressive function. The graphic solutions are clear and definite. Featured is the most memorable of the exhibiting artists.

The developed design materials have a recognizable, attractive symbolic imagery and visual identity in their aesthetic integrity and stylistic unity. The project has its design character, which makes it an equal participant in any exposition (from the description in the summary, it is understood that this is also the author's goal). It shows how graphic design itself can be a form of contemporary art.

The essential is said sparingly. It needs the unnecessary clutter of visuals. As a result of the delicate approach where nothing is superfluous, a high artistic value of the final design product has been achieved.

The artistic approach in the additional project for the advertising vision of the exhibition "Inconceivable for Kolyo K." with works by the artist Kolyo Karamfilov, a significant event held as the main event within the framework of "Plovdiv - European Capital of Culture 2019", is memorable. The uniform visual style, skillful choice of detail from the artist's painting, compositional arrangement, and evoked associations successfully visualizes the essence of the symbolic creative imagery of K. Karamfilov and the creative element in general.

Sofroni Varbev is the author of the design of the Anthology "Collection of Folk Thoughts" edited by Boris Hristov. This NBU publication received the "Golden Lion" award for publishing plan. He authorizes book and book-album design (cover, book body, pre-press preparation). It is clear from his creative activity that he designed the posters for exhibitions of teachers and

students from NBU. There are numerous designs for logos, flyers, catalogs, packaging, and calendars; advertising and design products for exhibitions; scientific and practical conferences; album design for an opera production; book and magazine covers; thematic, informational, vinyl boards, advertising posters, etc. creative products. What they have in common is that they are aesthetically sound and convincing in interpretation and message. They contain, at the same time, a complete, legible compositional structure and organization on multiple informational levels. This multi-layered information evokes rich, sometimes unexpected associations while at the same time not making it difficult to read the message.

S. Varbev masters a wide range of technical and artistic means of expression. The variety of creative techniques, the original plastic thinking, and the aesthetic persistence show the qualities of a sophisticated, modern-thinking graphic designer. The presented works complement and confirm the conclusion of a high aesthetic level, and the author's style is demonstrated in the entire artistic and advertising service of the autumn exhibitions.

The applied artwork in a portfolio - cartoon, painting, miniature, completes the overall impression of the candidate - it is seen that he has a wide range of means of expression, boldly seeks the challenge of visual language, shows artistry and creativity in posing and solving creative problems, as an interest in maximally expressive imagery.

Articles and reports published in specialized publications in the field of arts are considered for participation in the competition. Since they are not presented as text, I can judge the applicant's subject matter and scholarly interests by their titles. The publications, mainly publications of the NBU, concern exciting and diverse topics and are related to the professional field and the scientific specialty.

The candidate has indicated citations in non-refereed journals with scientific reviews - collections of scientific publications, which are 9 in total and carry 45 points.

S. Varbev conducts joint work with students and teachers in creative projects - "Author's development of wall decoration, city of Tsarevo, Children's language camp "Z - Camp." He conducted a "New function" workshop with students from NBU, BP "Interior Design," from NBU. Supports and contributes to the participation of students in creative performances in the art exhibition Technomebel 2018 - 2022, financed by the Study Programs Fund.

Sofroni Varbev has proven professional applied skills in the scientific field and professional direction. He is a worthy candidate for the academic position of "Associate Professor" with serious competencies in the theory and practice of fine art (print advertising design, book publications, and web products). With his work, S. Varbev contributes to maintaining a high level in the development of design products.

### **III. Learning and teaching activity**

S. Varbev is engaged in the classroom and non-auditory work, actively participating in the creation of master's programs - "Product design for interior" - 2017/2018; "Spatial and product design for interior," 2023/2024 Participates in working groups on updating and improving bachelor's and master's programs; has developed various training courses. The author's study materials for 12 courses are provided in the electronic training module "MOODLE - NBU.

The average rating from the student satisfaction surveys with the courses and the teacher is over 4.00.

Ch. Associate Professor Sofroni Varbev, Ph.D., is the supervisor of four graduate students; has prepared 20 reviews of diploma theses; participated in 29 commissions for state exams and graduate defenses.

All this shows the teacher's commitment to all the main activities at the University.

### **IV. Administrative and public activity**

S. Varbev participates in the academic administration of the NBU. He is the director of the Program Board from 2021 until now. He has participated in preparing a project for a new seminar hall in Interior Design and in preparing a conceptual project to optimize the educational base.

### **V. Personal impressions of the candidate**

Sofroni Varbev is a recognizable name in advertising, graphics, and product design. His works impress with sophistication and, simultaneously, with challenging, memorable imagery. I know him as a colleague, and I have excellent impressions of the professionalism in his work as a part-time teacher at the Faculty of Education of Plovdiv University in the specialty "Graphic Design with Advertising."

### **VI. Opinions, recommendations, and notes on the activity and achievements of the candidate**

I recommend S. Varbev think about publishing a practical development or a guide for students - future designers, in which he can share his rich experience as a teacher and graphic designer.

### **Conclusion**

The documents and materials presented by Ch. Assistant Professor Sofroni Georgiev Varbev, Ph.D., **meet all the requirements** of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (DASRBA), the Regulations for the Implementation of the DASRBA and the Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff of the NBU. The candidate's scientific, artistic, and teaching qualifications are undoubted, so it is reasonable to assess his academic activity positively. I propose the admission of Ch. Assistant Professor Sofroni Georgiev Varbev, Ph.D., to be elected by the Academic Council for the academic position of "Associate Professor" at the NBU in the professional field 8.2. Fine art (print advertising design, book publications, and web products).

27.09.2023 г.

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