

Peer Review

by Prof. Galina Georgieva Lardeva, DSc

on the conduct of the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 8.2, Fine Arts, Artistic Synthesis and Architecture major, Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts, with candidate Vladimir Zdravkov Petrov, PhD

1. General overview of the procedure and the materials received for review

Dr. Vladimir Zdravkov Petrov is the sole candidate in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 8.2, Fine Arts (Artistic Synthesis and Architecture) at the Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts. The competition was announced in the State Gazette on 26.03.2026, and a scientific jury for the procedure was appointed by Rector's Order No. RD-27-130 of 26 May 2026. The candidate submitted all required documents within the necessary deadline. The candidacy and the specific presentation of the achievements of Vladimir Petrov, PhD are structured according to the sections of the scientometric table corresponding to the professional field. In quantitative terms, these achievements are fully sufficient to meet the requirements for the position in question.

The materials submitted for review include four independent artistic products (three exhibitions and the complex design of one memorial); two accompanying artistic presentations; a monograph based on his defended doctoral degree; and three engagements as workshop leader. These activities interact with and complement one another, building a coherent and solid profile for the candidate.

2. Brief biographical data on the candidate

Vladimir Petrov, PhD, graduated in Urban Planning from the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy in Sofia, with a bachelor's degree (2013) and a master's degree (2015). In 2023, he defended his PhD dissertation in field 5.7, Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, scientific specialty Territorial and Landscape Planning and Urban Development, titled The Urban Silhouette: Factors and Influences in the Process of Urban Development.

Since 2026, he has worked as a specialist at the Institute of Mathematics and Informatics, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Alongside this, Vladimir Petrov, PhD, has been an expert in the Research, Registers and National Documentary Archival Fund Directorate at the National Institute for Immovable Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture (since 2022). In addition to this expert work, he's a part-time tutor at the AMDFA Prof. Asen Diamandiev, where he teaches the following subjects: History of Architecture, Architecture and Artistic Synthesis, Computer Design, Computer Animation and VR, and 3D Modeling.

He has also worked in investor supervision, construction management and project management at S T Developments EOOD, as chief expert (2021-2022) in the Territorial Development Directorate of Plovdiv Municipality (2021-2022), as a freelance designer and 3D visualizer, and in the Identification, Documentation and Status Assignment Directorate, Territorial Research Department (2013-2017). The candidate's specific project work is very well presented in the personalized section of his CV, which lists in detail numerous individual cases of research, documentation and preparation of scientifically grounded proposals for granting status to architectural sites.

Vladimir Petrov, PhD, is the author of three solo exhibitions and one group exhibition, all presented within the body of this candidacy, following a coherent internal logic that carries its own weight in the substance and profile of the candidacy.

3. Relevance of the subject matter

Let's first define the subject matter of this candidacy. Vladimir Petrov's activities and artistic presentations unfold a notion of artistic synthesis that is initially implicit and abstract, yet at the same time plastic in character. Architecture is understood as the key center and expression of this synthesis: a complex system for creating functional relationships and orienting them toward human living space. In this connection, a common motif and focus of development across Vladimir Petrov's various activities is the dynamics of public space, its simultaneous anthropologization and objectification, and the interplay between historical research and the management of its future development. This is undeniably a relevant issue. For decades, urban studies in Western Europe and North America, and more recently in many other parts of the world, have been among the strategic research areas bringing together scholars from different professional fields, from surveyors and landscape architects to ecologists, public figures, philosophers, and sociologists.

Even more relevant than the subject matter, though, is the candidate's approach in his work. His concept of minimizing information arrays stands out, something that highlights the functional capabilities and internal transformations of the complex urban system. A similarly pictorialist (with or without quotation marks) approach responds to current contemporary searches and understandings of all-encompassing urban space.

4. Suitability of the research methods for achieving the stated goals

Directly related to the previous section is Vladimir Petrov's methodological approach to the various fields of his research and artistic-creative interest. It's an approach of synthesis, consistently directed toward different yet mutually comparable possibilities for observation and research understanding. Not just urban space, but the human habitual environment as a whole, is conceived as a synthesis, as a zone where rationalizing practices intersect with intensive subjective expression. Artistic reflection, and the relationship to the artistic product in general, is likewise presented as a complex synthetic expression, one that carries the traces of various solutions, manifestations and subsequent updates. You could say the

urbanistic gaze, or the essence of the urbanistic as such, lies precisely in this synthesis: a virtual archive of dwelling, developing at every moment, in its inexhaustible combinatorics, structure and complexity. This methodological stance isn't just fully compatible with the subject matter. It's organically bound up with it.

5. Assessment of the dissertation

Vladimir Petrov's scientific and artistic work unfolds mainly across four areas that interact intensively with one another: a monumental sculptural project; graphic sheets, studies and compositions; pictograms; a theoretical framework that situates the notion of all-encompassing urban space, one that both receives and directs thought itself; and practical applications (workshop guides) linking perception, design and environmental impact.

The first independent artistic product presented is the memorial to the members of the 6th Bdin Infantry Division who fell in battle in 1916 in the village of Kozloduytsi, Dobrich Province. The author places “the striving for material retention of collective memory through an abstract-symbolic language” at the foundation of his concept for the architectural project. In this way, the impact sought here doesn't follow the established iconography of similar monuments, but instead works through spatial architectonic suggestion: in the dynamic between the figure's tectonics and its pronounced verticality against the horizontal natural landscape; in the light breaks positioned where compositional and figurative accents are conventionally placed; in the symbolic weight carried by the different stone pavings, and so on.

The Graphics exhibition (at the Plovdiv Cultural Institute, May 2026) carries the author's sharpened sense of three-dimensional space into intriguing planar projections. Even though the genre of these works is illustration, a viewer of the graphic sheets can rightly confirm the sculptural tangibility claimed in the annotation, because the marked attention to detail (to drapery and fabric, anatomy, the pronounced joints in the figures' forms, and so on) and its execution have an architectonic origin and making. This choice of the author isn't about foregrounding some instrumental mannerism, or demonstrating a well-mastered technique. What remains central here is the intention to trace the correspondences between the plastic language and the narrative, to mark out the projection of their mutually complementary dialogue.

The Pictograms exhibition unfolds the possibility of setting a counterpoint to Graphics: against the baroque lavishness of drawing and the plastic fracturedness of the first project stands the sign-based and technological austerity of the second. In Pictograms, what matters is the decisive presence of the silhouette, the “compositional discipline” in relation to the material. Here, information is directed laconically and clearly toward its unambiguous functionality. From there, though, these functionalities arrange themselves into a distinctive system of wholeness, in which each individual relation both signifies and opens up a field of adjacent connections. The principle of pictographic encoding and its development is raised to the level of a universal mechanism for interactions within the living environment. It's no accident that the individual sections in the Urban Metrics monograph are marked with

specially developed pictograms, organically fused with their problem focuses. You could say that for the architect-urbanist, the pictogram is the basic metric unit for those interactions unfolding within the inhabited environment that build up the city's cognitive matrix.

The Portraits of Bulgarian Poets and Writers exhibition (at the Penyo Penev Library, Dimitrovgrad) carries the same understanding of pictography, only here it's directed at the stability of the writer's image in the public imagination. Thinking about the appearance of Bulgarian writers within the paradigm of the canonical opens up the possibility for systematic code reduction, for playing with the transformation of emblems and pre-iconographic descriptions.

The Urban Metrics monograph, built on the dissertation of Vladimir Petrov, PhD, carries the essential grounds for the wholeness in his concept as an architect-urbanist. In this way, the text develops a node that includes, systematizes and directs the candidate's remaining activities. The core problem at this node is the dynamic interdependence between dwelling and essence. To this end, the author settles on a phenomenological approach to urban space: an approach that insists on sensory experience, on individual experience as a receptive and existential category, on immediate lived experience. Added to this is the foundation of German idealism in philosophy, with its notion of reality as a construct, as an intersection point of different planes, fields of activity (cf. p. 24 ff.). In this way, urban space is presented as a cognitive buffer in which all human notions and ideas are deposited, compared and enter into dialogue with one another. This construct of consciousness develops a dynamic and recursively returning notion of wholeness and completeness, in which the interaction of the various elements and possibilities exceeds the sum of the participating entities.

The three workshops described (Composing the urban silhouette in the context of the planned and the spontaneous; Architectural surveying, practical training in contemporary methods for studying Orthodox churches; and Working with specialized Urban Metrics software for the aestheticization and contextual development of the architectural environment) were carried out at three institutions of different type and orientation. Together, they bring the candidate's focal interests into alignment, while also highlighting his potential as a university tutor and the methodological structure behind his inquiries.

6. Contributions and significance of the research and the publications on the topic of the dissertation

– A foundational contribution in Vladimir Petrov's work is the harmonious mutual coordination between different artistic programs, products and phenomenological concepts, which gain a striking systematic quality and internal organization through the notion of the urbanistic. What matters for Bulgarian academic circles is the very framing of the concept of the urbanistic as a dynamic, dialogic field with a distinct internal processuality. Under this new framing, the city is understood not as a sum of architectural drawings and centralized planning, but as a lattice with zones of permeability and diffusion, of automation

and updating, of the assembly and transformation of meanings, of palimpsest-like projections.

– On a somewhat more concrete level, an important contribution is the author's pictogram concept. This concept goes well beyond the immediate achievements of the exhibition of the same name. It amounts to arranging sign elements into a system of distinctive features that, in their minimalist interaction, cut across expression and narrative, compressing the silhouette drawing and the code of spatial construction into a highly condensed form. In this way, the author develops an urban subsystem governed by an economy of the sign, one marked at the same time by a particular intensity.

Another significant contribution in the work and activity of Vladimir Petrov, PhD, is his defended and broadly developed notion of synthesis. Synthesis is likewise a pivotal concept, one that brings together thinking about architectural space and the artistic view of forms and expressions. It's the very disposition of simultaneous presence and virtual juxtaposition of sign systems, a phenomenological experience of the world in its connectedness and unity, an understanding of the world as a semiosphere in general. Through the lens of this disposition, the urbanist researcher manages to see and make sense of things and their order beyond his specialized field, projected instead into a coherently built system.

– The shift in attitude toward monumental sculptural complexes represents a relatively specific contribution in Vladimir Petrov's work. It's found in the design of the memorial to the members of the 6th Bdin Infantry Division who fell in battle in 1916 in the village of Kozloduytsi. This shift shows up in the sign-based laconicism and the free spatial treatment and signification, in the dominance of abstract semanticization over fixed commemorative iconography, and in the weight given to natural presence in memorial planning. But beyond these specific innovations, what matters are the traces this contribution leaves on the general principles outlined above: the phenomenology of perception, the pictographic disposition and the economy of the sign, and the framing of every object within the plane of the semiosphere, and so on.

7. Critical remarks and recommendations

Only minor formal remarks can be made regarding the materials submitted for the competition, none carrying substantial weight for the overall assessment of the work.

First, the bibliography of the Urban Metrics monograph is fully relevant to the issues it develops, but the individual titles and entries go unreferenced in the text itself. As a result, the paths of individual ideas and motifs aren't easy to trace, even though their development comes through clearly in the work. It's clear the author has thoroughly utilized the works cited, but as a rule, the network of scholarly approaches a given text draws on should be laid out so future researchers can pick out a specific path within that network, follow it and build on it.

Second, presentations and annotations of the artistic products need to include the names of other participants, and where relevant the organizers, along with their roles, especially for

larger and collective projects. For example, the annotation for the monument doesn't identify the name(s) of those who carried out the other roles, such as the creator of the sculptural work itself.

8. Conclusion

Based on the candidate's undeniable achievements and the complex thinking on display, linking different fields of creative activity, I propose that the esteemed scientific jury award Vladimir Zdravkov Petrov, PhD, the academic position of Associate Professor in professional field 8.2, Fine Arts (Artistic Synthesis and Architecture major), and I confidently vote in favor.

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