

REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof Alexander Vassilev Gyoshev, PhD
Academy of Music Dance and Fine Art “Prof Asen Diamandiev” – Plovdiv
Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Design

Regarding the dissertation of
Sonya Todorova Stankova

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT – GENRE TRADITION AND MODERN MANIFESTATIONS

with academic supervisor Prof Galina Lardeva-Minkova
Professional field: 8.2. Fine Arts
Doctoral program: Applied, Fine Arts and Design
Department of Fine Arts
AMDFA “Prof Asen Diamandiev”, Plovdiv,
Faculty of Fine Arts

Stankova's research presents in detail the historical development of the photographic portrait from its creation to the present day. She makes an attempt to describe not only the contributions of a number of individuals that led to the invention of the photographic process, but also outlines the complex multi-layered processes that exerted significant influences on the establishment of the portrait as a leading genre in the photographic art. The author marks the connection between the creative experiments of a number of artists with different pictorial techniques in the field of photographic portraiture in the period 19 - 21 centuries. Various manifestations of the social and cultural dynamics during this period are reported, which are directly related to the identification of the portrait as a leading genre in photography in a global aspect.

Stankova is a prominent representative of the photography community in Bulgaria, a member of the Union of Bulgarian Artists, a prominent artist with numerous national and international exhibitions. She completed her secondary education at the "Julius Fuchik" Technical School of Printing and Photography in Sofia. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy of Fine Arts and a Master's degree in Photography. In 1982 she started working as a studio photographer and photojournalist, and after 1989 she became freelance photographer. She shoots for various periodicals and advertising campaigns, actively works in the field of product photography. Her photographs have been published in specialized magazines such as *Colors* by Benetton, *Mary Claire* - Italy, *Photo Eye* and *PHO* - Bulgaria. Her artistic career goes through different stages of development and creative experiments with different techniques and visual media. Participates in numerous professional forums

at home and abroad. Winner of the Plovdiv Award for 2011 and 2019. Winner of the prestigious awards: Gold Medal of the Photographic Academy, Bulgaria (2001); Second prize at the Biennale of Bulgarian Photography (1989); First prize of the national plein air Social Photography, Sofia (1987); First prize at Photovacation, Oasis resort, Bulgaria (1985).

The dissertation consists of an introduction, an exposition in three chapters, a conclusion, an appendix and a bibliography. The main problems that Stankova traces in the individual parts of the study are:

The **introductory part** begins with a thematic introduction. The subject, the goals and the tasks are clarified, but not the research methodology, which could additionally be added when the text is published as a teaching aid.

In the **first chapter**, Stankova focuses on tracing the historical prerequisites and sociocultural dynamics that led to the emergence of the photographic portrait. She emphasizes the contributions of various authors to the establishment of the portrait genre and examines the stages of development of the photographic process and the transition from daguerreotype to the wet collodion process. In this part of the study, Stankova outlines the relationship between photography and other arts, and more precisely with the work of writers such as Emile Zola, Giovanni Verga and Jack London in the field of portrait photography. My recommendation here is that if the dissertation is published as a book, as I very much hope, in this part the author emphasizes with more examples the fact that the portrait in photography is inextricably linked to the development of the arts, graphic design, printing and modern electronic social media. This is advisable not only to emphasize the interdisciplinary focus of the subject chosen by Stankova for the photographic portrait and its connections with various socio-cultural manifestations, but also to deepen the compositional integrity of the text with the other parts of the study, where the issue under consideration is mentioned more than once.

The **second chapter** discusses the historical development of the photographic portrait in Bulgaria. Significant attention is paid to the historical development of photography during the Revival and the connections of the Bulgarian masters of the photographic portrait with the European practices in this field in the 19th century. The pioneer photographers who started and popularized the art of photography in Bulgaria are listed: Anastas Karastoyanov, Toma Hitrov, Georgi Danchov, Ivan Dospevski, Ivan Zografov, Stoyan Karshalev, Nikifor Minkov, and after the Liberation in 1878 Anastas Karastoyanov, Toma Hitrov and Todor Fakirov opened studios in Sofia; in Plovdiv Georgi Danchov Zografina, Dimitar Kavra, Vaclav Velebni, Katsarovi brothers; in Ruse, those who came from Vienna, Francois Bauer, Samuel Gelch, Rudolf Liebig; in Varna Papazian, the brothers Sarkis and Hovhannes Hadjolyan, E. Xanthopoulos, Karl Albrecht and Honori Marcolesko. The role of Peter Beron and the issues he addressed related to optics, photochemistry, photography and color science are highlighted.

An important line of meaning that can be traced in the second part of the text is related to the **creative contributions of a number of women photographers in the field of portraiture**, namely:

Elena Cherneva-Hitrova, Nedyalka Kachuleva, Raina Baldzhieva-Karastoyanova and Elena Yotova, Lotte Mihailova, Deyana Stamatova, Yanka Kyurkchieva, Iglena Ruseva, Deyana Stamatova, Neli Gavrilova, Stanka Tsonkova-Usha, Svetlana Bahchevanova, Neli Nedeva-Voeva, as well as Yanina Manolova, Pepa Hristova, Yana Lozeva and last but not least, Sonya Stankova - the author of the reviewed text. This semantic axis of the research is extremely interesting, not only because it touches on the topic of the **role of women in the historical development of the photographic portrait**, but also reveals their significant social role in the **development of the artistic community in the country during the various historical periods in Bulgaria**. It is important to highlight Stankova's contribution in highlighting the creative merits of women photographers in Bulgarian fine art in the historical development of the photographic portrait from the Revival period to the present day, a contribution that should be added at the end of her dissertation.

In the **third chapter** of the study, Stankova reviews her personal experience as a portrait artist in the field of photography. She comments on her photographic experiments in portraiture during the late years of the totalitarian period and his creative pursuits after 1989 in the following artistic projects:

- **Reportage portraits in a studio** - taken in the photography studio on Dzhumaya Square in the 1980s;
- **In mom's home 10 years later** – a project presenting Stankova's creative pursuits in the intimate space of the home;
- **A parable of my tree and my friends** – a project recreating Stankova's personal interpretations of ancient texts related to the symbolism of the tree as an emanation of the power of nature;
- **APPLAUSEE Circus theater that goes where no one goes** – explores Stankova's encounter with traveling artists;
- **The Faces of Plovdiv** - a project presented at the official opening of Plovdiv – European Capital of Culture 2019.

Stankova concludes her dissertation work with an appendix related to her project "**Second Take**" – an exhibition of twenty-five black-and-white portraits, shown at the Synthesis Gallery.

Finally, I emphasize the conclusion that the photographic portrait is a specific field in the field of visual arts with a strong emotional, aesthetic and psychological impact, which finds a worthy place in the creative development of Sonya Stankova as a photographer and visual artist.

Conclusion: After reading the dissertation of Sonya Stankova, I consider that the **research is significant and has a contributing character** not only in terms of tracing the historical development of the photographic portrait, but also in relation to the knowledge of the portrait as a personal experiment and creative field of expression of the visual artist.

I give a **positive assessment** and recommend to the Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Sonya Todorva Stankova.

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Assoc. Prof Alexander Vasilev Gyoshev