

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof Mariana Todorova Dafova, PhD
for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor"
in field of higher education 8. Arts,
professional field 8.2 Fine Arts,
AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" – Plovdiv
Dissertation work titled

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT – A GENRE TRADITION AND MODERN MANIFESTATIONS

Doctoral student Sonya Todorova Stankova
Academic supervisor Prof. Dr. Galina Lardeva - Minkova

The Doctoral student Sonya Todorova Stankova presents a dissertation titled *Photographic Portrait - Genre Tradition and Modern Manifestations*, consisting of a textual part of 100 pages and a bibliography. It also includes an Appendix that contains colour and black-and-white images related thematically to the study. The dissertation work is discussed and referred for public defense after a meeting of the department and selection of a scientific jury.

The text of the dissertation is organized in the following structure: introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendix. In the introduction, the author defines the focus of the research, indicates its goals and tasks, as well as their relevance. The dissertation *Photographic Portrait - Genre Tradition and Modern Manifestations* is a study that focuses on the meaning, development and evolution of the photographic portrait as a genre in the Bulgarian photography. The dissertation analyzes the historical and sociocultural factors that influence the formation and development of this genre in Bulgaria, drawing a parallel with the history of world photography, as well as the contemporary trends and transformations that define its contemporary face.

By assessing the role of the photographic portrait in Bulgarian culture and public life during different historical periods, the dissertation seeks to reveal the relationship between photography and socio-cultural processes in the country. Looking at various aspects of Bulgarian history and culture, the author of the dissertation examines how the portrait becomes a reflection of society, its values, ideals and identity. For Sonya Stankova, the photographic portrait is an important phenomenon that not only reflects cultural and historical processes in Bulgaria, but also actively participates in them, forming and transforming the image of society and its individuals.

In the second chapter of the doctoral thesis, Stankova commits to her role as a narrator who guides the reader through the evolution of the photographic portrait in Bulgaria. Through this personal perspective, the text takes on the character of an exciting historical journey, where portrait images are transformed into living narratives created with each press of the camera shutter. This transition from a

simple image to experiencing life and culture through it contributes to a deeper understanding of the meaning and influence of photography as a means of preserving the historical and cultural heritage. Ultimately, the text provokes the reader to engage emotionally and intellectually with the richness of the Bulgarian photographic tradition, transporting him through time and exciting him with inspiring perspectives from the researched topic.

The third chapter in the dissertation immerses us in the exciting world of "Photographic portrait in Stankova's work". She takes us on an unforgettable adventure, revealing the secrets of an art that everyone loves. Through her personal memories, the author shakes our imagination with her vivid stories about studio photography in Plovdiv. The exciting story that unfolds before us is not just a simple narrative. It is a journey through time that takes us through different eras and perspectives of photography. Her exhibitions, such as *In Mom's Home and in Mom's Home 10 Years Later*, *A Tale of My Tree and My Friends*, *Applause*, *Reportage Portraits in a Studio*, and *The Faces of Plovdiv* are like mosaic stones that help us piece together the puzzle of our city's cultural heritage.

Through this emotional travelogue, we understand the power of photography as an expression of Sonya Stankova's individuality and her relationship with the world around us. She is an active participant in the art and culture scene, participating in numerous exhibitions and forums, both nationally and internationally. The theoretical aspects developed in her dissertation work are also reflected in her teaching activities, as she successfully integrates academic knowledge into the learning process.

Sonya Stankova's dissertation is an extensive study that provides valuable information about the importance of the photographic portrait within the framework of the Bulgarian culture and history. In addition, the dissertation provides new perspectives and ideas that are essential for the development of the photographic theory and practice in the country. It plays a key role in shaping the academic environment and provides new knowledge to photography students.

In the text, the doctoral candidate demonstrates an excellent understanding of the topic, good orientation in the available material and mastery of the theoretical base. Sonya Stankova is able to build her analyses and judgments, relying on a wide range of theoretical knowledge and diverse examples. Also, for the needs of the dissertation work, she has provided photographic material with works by a number of Bulgarian and foreign authors, which successfully support and enrich the theses developed by her.

Considering all the mentioned aspects, I believe that the dissertation work submitted for review entitled *The Photographic Portrait - Genre Tradition and Contemporary Manifestations* is essential and makes a significant contribution to the field of photographic theory and practice. The dissertation's abstract is fully consistent with the structure and content of the overall research. My positive peer-reviewed and evaluative conclusion for the dissertation, the author's abstract and their scientific contributions is strongly "in favour" and I consider them to be in accordance with the set criteria.

I give my positive assessment and recommend to the respected Scientific Jury to award Sonya Todorova Stankova the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 8.2. Fine Art, scientific field 8. Arts.

10.05.2024

Assoc. Prof. Marianna Todorova Dafova, PhD