

## **Review**

by Prof Galina Georgieva Lardeva-Minkova, PhD

on a dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor"

in professional field 1.3 Pedagogy of Fine Art Education ,doctoral program: Methodology of Fine Arts Education, with author: **Vanya Milkova Godzhelova**, title: **Depicting emotional characteristics in portrait painting by students in art schools**

academic supervisor: Prof Daniela Todorova Markova, PhD

### **I. General presentation of the procedure and the materials received for review**

Vanya Milkova Godzhelova was enrolled as a doctoral student by order No RD – 27 – 110/ 20.12.2018. 2022, issued on the grounds of Protocol No. 4/ 16.12. 2022 of the Faculty Council at the Faculty of Fine Arts. The candidate has submitted all the necessary documents: dissertation work together with its appendices and abstract, curriculum vitae, reference to the contributions of the dissertation, three approval publications, as well as the orders cited above in this paragraph. In this way, the procedure is followed and therefore legitimate.

### **II. Brief biographical information about the candidate**

Vanya Godzhelova graduated Painting at Tsanko Lavrenov National Art School in 2011. She is a graduate of Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, Plovdiv: in 2015 she receives a Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy of Fine Art Education (Painting), and in 2017 - Master's degree in the same major. From the moment of her graduation, she has been working in her specialty - first in the schools in the villages of Streltsi and Vojvodinovo, later in the "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" in Plovdiv, and since 2019 she is a teacher at Tsanko Lavrenov National Art School. Since October 2023, she has been teaching fine art teaching methodology at AMDFA "Prof Asen Diamandiev" Plovdiv.

Along with her active teaching work, Vanya Godzhelova is a painter with a distinct individual style - she is the author of five solo exhibitions, with numerous participations in collective projects and plein airs. She herself is the organizer of a number of exhibitions and projects related to the process of teaching fine art and the artistic practice of high school students.

### **III. Relevance of the topic**

The relevance of the dissertation is determined by two significant interpenetrating areas. The first complex meaning is associated with the educational process and its needs and requirements. The weight of its relevance is clearly visible today, when (once again) we discover the need for changes in the educational system and in the curricula, as well as the needs for intensity and systematicity of the learning process. The second area of relevance of the dissertation topic is connected with the increasingly diminishing nature of the individual today. It is indisputable that the pictorial genre of the

portrait is able to be a direct expression of the anxiety of the loss of individual sensitivity among young people, and also to help preserve such sensitivity, for its return and self-awareness.

#### **IV. Description of the dissertation work**

Vanya Milkova Godzhelova's dissertation consists of three chapters and two appendices. The **first chapter** undertakes the almost impossible task of providing a concise and functionally adaptable overview of the development of portrait art in the European cultural tradition. The author succeeds not only in following selected cases from the artistic practice of portraiture, but also in highlighting essential elements of the history of the concept based on her adequate methodological approach. Extremely vast arrays and contexts (from antiquity to the present day) are here reduced to such a synthesized symptomatology that is relevant in terms of specific pedagogical and methodical goals. These goals could be presented as follows: the European culture of the modern age can be thought of and presented as a kind of "civilization of the portrait" - a formula that the author uses specifically in connection with the development of the genre in the Dutch provinces from the end of the 16th century (page 22). However, this phrase can reasonably be thought of as shortened expression of the portrait's genre in the European cultural history. Here, the methodological setting of the work directs the tracing of the different functioning of the portrait in each subsequent era, but at the same time keeps in focus the process of preserving and passing on traditions between different historical manifestations. With all the abundant production, this systematization is a very difficult and responsible, and sometimes risky work, which the candidate consciously undertakes.

The portrait reflection in Renaissance art (in the north and in the south) is systematized, the achievements of the 17th century associated with the figures of Rembrandt, Velázquez, Vermeer, further on the chapter goes through examples from the work of Ingres, Modigliani, Manet, Degas, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, Egon Schiele, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Picasso and many other authors, raises questions about the transformation of the meanings of the portrait in pop art, examines the peculiarities of the portrait photographic image in authors such as Rineke Dijkstra and Annie Leibovitz, recalls the cases with the billboard portraits of Alex Katz, the works of Marlene Dumas, Shirin Neshat, Gerhard Richter, etc. It is noteworthy that the more these examples are established in modern times, the more the clarity of the individual cases crystallizes, their conscious didactic setting. After the historical examples, the first chapter contains the psychological dispositions of portrait art. Delineating the problems of individual sensitivity is a particularly important component of school work. Paying attention to the rationalization of sensibility as a key layer in the European artistic tradition is of particular importance here (44 sl.). Here the work is particularly detailed and careful. Foundational cognitive theories of information storage, orientation and transmission, classification of emotions, and an overview of the development in their understanding from antiquity to the present day are outlined, with a regular focus on the phenomenological experience of the 17th century (Descartes, Spinoza), on the experimental psychology of Wundt and the ideas on differential emotions in the

works of Carol Izard, as well as the relation of these works to the delineation of the concept of primary affects in the works of Silvan Tomkins.

Of particular importance in this section is the presentation of the ideas about physiognomy as a foundation of Western culture and especially of modernity. At the same time, here the author creates a detailed sense of the intense discussion around the concept, insofar as physiognomy's claims for absolute determinism between the visible appearance and the essence have at all times (both in the East and in the West) been the target of objective criticism. But it is not superfluous to recall, for example, how Walter Benjamin identifies the prototype of the modern man precisely on the basis of the phantasmagorias of physiognomy and his stagings in the public space of the Parisian passages. Vanya Godzhelova creates her own route of the physiognomic: from Aristotle through Leonardo to Johann Caspar Lavater, by rightly marking side branches, for example, the practical experience of phrenology.

The last section of the first chapter (1.4.) returns to the presence of the portrait in the fine art tradition, this time focusing on educational structures as well as teaching methods and the clarification of some specialized concepts such as composition and colour.

The second chapter of the study entitled "Experimental model for depicting emotional characteristics in portrait painting by students in art schools" presents the actual part of the work done: the teaching and learning of the portrait genre in school and especially the practical activity of creating a portrait. Here, the author makes an orientation of her methodological complexity, which includes "a didactic experiment [which is] carried out in three stages: ascertaining, forming, concluding; survey, interview with an expert, discussion, talk, lecture, demonstration, conference" (p. 91). The author offers a detailed description and methodical motivation of the set tasks with their particularities. She also presents the time estimate, the criteria and indicators for diagnosing the results of the students' work. In their combination, indicators and criteria form a dense grid of competences, knowledge, skills and abilities, pictorial intuition and artistic thinking.

The **third chapter** entitled "Analysis of the results of the experimental activity" contains an analysis of surveys related to the students' abilities to build a portrait, as well as their theoretical training for the genre. Here, an analysis of student works has been conducted depending on the methodological settings. The difference between the sketch marking of the features and the portrait image is derived and traced. The excellent analyses and the detailed knowledge of each individual element of the dissertation's work with the students are impressive. No less good impression is made by the ability to think invariantly, to situationally readjust the established teaching-methodical matrix depending on the task and the individual abilities of the students. In this chapter, two particularly important emphases come to the fore: the burden of training with all its constituent components (lectures, conversations, exercises) and the observation of tasks and their implementation in development, in their principled procedurality (this is evidenced, for example, by characteristic expressions such as *at this stage* and *for now*). Such a setting provides the idea of the non-finishing process of learning. Vanya

Godzhelova's qualities as an excellent teacher and methodologically reflective specialist are evident here: from the idea of holding a discussion around the animated film "Inside Out" (p. 118) to the remarkable observations of the personal psychology of students (with just one example: the outline of the psychological " portrait" of the student Natalia St., p. 131). The problems of bringing the portraits to their state of completion, of subordinating the otherwise truthfully conveyed image to the artistic idea are noted.

## **V. Contributions of the Dissertation**

- The very addressing of the problem is a contribution, insofar as the comprehensiveness of the portrait in the complex combination of technique, individual style, physiognomy, emotionality and their mutual direction and mastery, as well as the communication between object and subject, represents problematic territory even in specialized art schools. However, Vanya Godzhelova is aware of the entirety of the problem and finds ways to present the arguments for her searches.
- The combination of theoretical-historical training for the portrait genre in the conditions of the curriculum and long-term practical work with students is another significant contribution of the dissertation work. At the same time, the interaction is described extremely skilfully, with the outlining of complex methodological accents and with the indication of possibilities for stimulating independent thinking and creative impulses among students.
- A contributing point in the dissertation is the densely outlined and detailed foundation of students' works. This is not a random selection from what is available, nor is it a selection made from among the best to bring glory to the teacher. The fan of exemplary portrait images represents a neat system, which in turn can be thought of both as a "portrait" of the communication that took place in the learning process, and as defining the appearance of this process. Behind each example of this system is direct methodical and research work, as well as a strictly individual approach to each student.
- The developed system for evaluation and analysis of the portraits created by the students is an independent contribution. By combining interactions between criteria and indicators (five criteria and two indicators), the system identifies a network in which the achievements of student works are located. This achievement is of particular importance in the conditions of today's unification, which the assessment systems and the totally introduced principle of success inevitably bring about. Vanya Godzhelova's work convincingly outlines possibilities for assessment principles to build individualities based on a well-thought-out assessment grid.
- Last but not least, the well-found balance between research and applied work is also a contributing point in the dissertation work. This balance does not appear by itself, but results from a conscious and active interaction at all levels in the work.

## **VI. Critical remarks and recommendations**

The first chapter still needs partial linguistic editing, after which the work should be referred for

publication, which would be of undoubted use to art teachers in schools, as well as to university teachers of art education methodology.

### **VII. Abstract**

The abstract covers 44 pages, conveying completely accurately in a summarized form the structure, progress, tasks and achievements of the dissertation.

### **VIII. Approbation publications**

Vanya Godzhelova has presented three approbation publications: *The portrait of the XXI century through the lens of the photographer*, *The portrait in the XX and XXI centuries* and *The portrait image - problems and specifics in the work with students from a specialized art school*, and they point out especially relevant issues: the relationship between the photographic and pictorial image and the characteristic pictorial searches in modern times. These three articles are completely sufficient for the purposes of the dissertation defense and correspond to the main ideas of the dissertation. They are indeed published in local forums of AMDFA, but on the other hand, they stand out significantly against the background of the collections in which they are present, with their distinct concreteness, with their clearly set tasks and with the consciousness of scientific responsibility.

### **IX. Conclusion**

Considering the outstanding achievements of Vanya Milkova Godzhelova's dissertation work, I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award her the educational and scientific degree "doctor" and with full conviction I vote "in favour".

10 February 2024

Prof Galina Lardeva, PhD