

OPINION

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Regarding: PhD thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree “doctor”, scientific field 8.2 Fine Arts, New Bulgarian University, Department of Fine Arts, Doctoral Program in Visual and Plastic Arts.

Theme: “Interaction between viewers and artistic works in non-objective sculpture. Manifestations in Bulgarian sculpture at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century”

Author: Asst. Prof. Ilko Borisov Nikolchev

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Valentin Savchev, New Bulgarian University

The dissertation comprises 115 pages of main text as well as annexes to each of the chapters. The structure of the main body consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of scientific contributions and a list of references amounting to 65 titles in Bulgarian and other languages, as well as 36 electronic sources. In total, one hundred illustrations accompany each of the chapters in the annexes. Structure-wise, all the necessary components required for this type of research are present. There is a balance between the chapters in terms of volume and content. The quoted sources are correctly cited in the text.

Three publications related to the topic of the dissertation, published in different scientific editions, are also attached.

Art is a kind of a communicative act that takes place on an intellectual or an emotional level, and its perception in a sense is a cognitive process that requires active participation of the receptive consciousness. Drawing on this position (thesis) Ilko Nikolchev develops an in-depth study of a problem that largely stays away from the focus of contemporary theoretical practices in Bulgaria, namely the interaction between the addressor and the addressee in the

field of non-objective sculpture (defined as such by Ilko Nikolchev). In this sense, the topic of his research is relevant and dissertative.

The structure of the PhD thesis is logically composed, and the titles of the individual chapters consistently determine the direction of the research.

The dynamic development of the 20th century context is the reason for the lack of unanimity in the field of art regarding the conceptual apparatus used. In this sense, the definition of such offered by Ilko Nikolchev in the introduction undoubtedly contributes to the correct interpretation of the dissertation. The introduction clearly states the aims and objectives of the study. The methods used, based on a historiographical, comparative and sociological approach, clearly allow them to be achieved. A large number of theoretical sources by leading researchers dealing with this problem have been used.

In the dissertation, the processes that preceded the appearance of non-objectivity as a visual expression are thoroughly analyzed. The examples derived from the works of authors such as Rodchenko, Kandinsky, Malevich confirm the author's thesis. The approach used by Ilko Nikolchev in this part of the study is successful. On the one hand, manifestations of non-objectivity in certain areas of sculpture (minimalism, landscape art, site-specific art) as well as the interaction of these manifestations with the viewer are discussed. On the other hand, similar manifestations are considered depending on the specifics of the respective spaces (closed or open) in which an artist works. Particular attention has been paid to examples realized in public spaces, as well as to authors with indisputable achievements in this direction - Richard Serra, Anish Kapoor, Hristo Yavashev. Such an approach undoubtedly broadens the analytical scope regarding the presented problem.

Considerable attention has been paid to the prerequisites that influenced the manifestations of non-objective sculpture in the works of Bulgarian authors from the studied period (the change in the status of cultural institutions, the emergence of private galleries, the role of art critics). Having in mind the main theme of the PhD thesis - the interaction of the viewer and a work in non-objective sculpture, it is important to analyze the role of symposia in contemporary sculptural practices. The result of the sculptural symposium, as a kind of artistic manifestation (often the point of intersection of different cultural identities), is

essentially a direct intervention in public spaces, which calls for analysis of the process of communication between a work and a viewer. Projections of non-objective sculpture in the works of Bulgarian authors working at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century are considered.

The theoretical constructs outlined in the first and second chapters of the study are strongly supported by Ilko Nikolchev's personal experience which presented in the third chapter of the dissertation. In the annexes one can see works which are the product of his personal creativity and works which have appeared as a result of collaborating with other artists. Particular attention has been paid to the projects implemented by the art group *7 + 1*, whose co-founder and active member is Ilko Nikolchev. Most of these projects, implemented in public spaces, are conceptually attributed to the field of the research problem and are a practical demonstration of the specific interaction between a viewer and a piece of art through the means of non-objectivity.

The contributions of the dissertation can be summarized in several main points:

- Features characteristic of non-objective sculpture have been formulated;
- A thorough analysis of various factors influencing the perception of a work of fine art has been done;
- The influence of global trends on the changes in Bulgarian fine arts, which occurred at the end of the 20th century, has been studied;
- The opportunities for interaction between non-objective sculpture and viewers as well as strategies for social integration have been formulated.

In conclusion, in view of the above, I consider that the dissertation:

- Is correct and valuable as a scientific interpretation;
- Demonstrates in-depth theoretical knowledge of the problem presented;
- Is related to a wealth of practical experience based on a clear theoretical platform.

It is on these grounds that I would like to suggest that the Honorable Scientific Jury should award a PhD Degree to Asst. Prof. Ilko Nikolchev in the scientific field 8.2 Fine Arts.

I will definitely vote positively.

Sofia

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10. 11. 2019

Assoc. Prof. Kamen Tsvetkov,

PhD