

STATEMENT

for the habilitation thesis

Colour in the Culture of Vyara Alexandrova Popova

in a competition for associate professor in the professional field of

2.3. Philosophy, 05.01.06. Aesthetics (Aesthetics of Colour)

The work of Vyara Popova submitted for habilitation, *The Colour in Culture*, published by Faber Publishing House, Veliko Tarnovo, as a book in 2022, is a substantial and well-organized study, which includes a Preface, five sections, a Chromatic Epilogue, Appendices I and II, Notes (357 in number), and a rather voluminous bibliography containing 560 bibliographic items.

In the preface, Vyara Popova outlines the aim of the study: to examine colour as a cultural phenomenon and to focus on its symbolic value in relation to a wide range of cultural phenomena.

The five sections are entitled as follows. I. *Colour as a Symbol*, II. *Colour as a Sign*, III. *Colour as a system in painting*, IV. *Color wheels and circles*. V. *The new echoes of the old painterly three colors: blue, red, yellow and Goethe's theory of color in painting. RYB The Color Model*.

In the first section, the author's attention is focused on Victor Turner's three-part color classification (white-red-black) as outlined in his book *Symbol and Ritual*. The symbolism of the three colours in tribal society is presented in detail. References are also made to ancient Eastern cultures, leading the author to conclude that the archaic chromatic triad is "the beginning, the ground, the origin, the first cause and the principle with regard to conceptions of colour in the world and culturally in general". In addition to ancient cultures, the study also focuses on views of color and color in antiquity and the Middle Ages. Aristotle's ideas are presented as representative of antiquity and the "two chromatic systems" of the Middle Ages. Of the medieval thinkers, the ideas of Grosseteste, Jacob Boehme and Bernard of Clairvaux are presented.

The second section, *Colour as Sign*, is devoted to exploring the role of colour in heraldry. The transformation of the role of colour from symbol to sign allows the author to argue that the preference for the black colour of the robes of the judicatory is a secular motif that contrasts

with the sacred motif of the priestly order. The reduction of the sacred meaning of colour and its technification through the sign assists, according to the author, the emergence of systematization in the field of colour, which is the subject of the third section of the study.

In the third section, *Colour as a System in Painting*, Jan van Eyck's contribution to the establishment of the oil technique in painting is discussed, as well as the effects of this technique. A survey is made of earlier uses of the oil technique and of treatises that attest to it. Attention is given to the contributions of Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo in forming the modern understanding of colour as arranged in a single coherent system. The model of the 'old masters' is also examined in some detail. An interesting point in Vyara Popova's study is the consideration of typographic technique as a factor that influences the use of color and gives rise to a certain "degradation of color expressiveness" (p. 141). By the same token, the influence on the colour system of the stroke as an artistic technique is also noted.

The fourth section, *Color Wheels and Circles*, discusses theories that predate Isaac Newton's theory of color, as well as Newton's own theory as set forth in his *Optics* (1704). Logically, of course, Newton's theory is followed by that of his critic, the poet and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In *The Theory of Colours* (1810), which Goethe published after decades of research, the poet failed to disprove the great physicist in the eyes of the scientific community of physicists, yet his phenomenology of colour, in particular of 'physiological colours' and the theme of the 'emotional-moral effect of colours', managed to find adherents in philosophers such as Hegel and Schopenhauer, and also in artists such as Philipp Otto Runge and Joseph Mallord Turner. Michel Chevreuil's theory, which influenced the Impressionists and especially Georges Seurat and Paul Sinyak, was not overlooked. The theories of Thomas Jung and Hermann Helmholtz, Wilhelm Ostwald and Henry Munsell are presented at the end of the section.

In section five, entitled *New Echoes of the Old Painterly Three Colours: blue, red, yellow and Goethe's theory of colour in painting. The RYB colour model*, the author's attention is drawn to concepts of colour and techniques in painting developed during the diverse and intensive twentieth century in this respect. Concepts and techniques of the Fauvists, Malevich's *Suprematism*, Mondrian's *Neoplasticism*, and ideas developed in the Bauhaus school and in several varieties of abstract painting are considered here.

Interesting and valuable as an analysis and genre is the *Chromatic Epilogue*, which explores the concepts of Cindy Sherman and the ideas of "postmodern sensibility" theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, and Paul Virillo.

For the reader interested in the study, it is very useful to read the two appendices. Appendix I - *Colour Patterns (diagrams)* and Appendix II - *Colour Circles*, which as illustrative material for the ideas and concepts of colour presented in the exhibition, clarify and complement the rich material collected, systematised and carefully thought out by Vyara Popova.

The positives pointed out in the previous part of the opinion can be summarized in the following few characteristics: a rich, erudite and in many ways quite detailed study that can serve as a wonderful source of introduction to fundamental ideas about color.

A few critical remarks:

1. I'm not quite sure if it's appropriate to set a competition for an associate professorship in aesthetics in terms of a private topic ("aesthetics of color"). It seems to me that it is more appropriate to define such competitions in disciplinary terms - for example, "associate professor of aesthetics". However, this remark may be irrelevant to a scathing "opinion", since I do not know whether the wording was initiated by the author of the text or the result of an institutional decision.
2. The text is much more concentrated on the cultural studies of colour than on the aesthetics of colour, because the two main tasks of aesthetics (the analysis of aesthetic perception and the grounds for aesthetic evaluation through the categories of the beautiful and its modifications in art and beyond) are not quite the focus of the study, but rather accompany the extensive cultural studies.
3. The author's own voice is not sufficiently distinct. I have the feeling that the desire for comprehensiveness has limited the text from its own reflections on the collected and otherwise well organized and commented large amount of historical research.
4. It is not entirely clear in all cases exactly what first-hand sources are used, and sometimes this leads to oddities.
 - a. The title of Giorgio Vasari's book is based on the second edition (1568), and the year of the first edition (1550) is given (p. 104). The difference in titles is not unimportant because it is an indicator of changes in Vasari's conception, and it is therefore important to state the titles of the two editions accurately.

- b. There are also strange accents on personal names - Nicholas of Cusà (!?) (p. 380).
5. Some genre heterogeneity is noticeable in places in the text. Much of it is adequate to standard scholarly research, but there are places that are more suited to more popular publications. For example:
- a. The account of Jan van Eyck as a "matchmaker" (p. 385).
 - b. Biographical data about famous philosophers or artists that belong to common culture or are facts that are handy on the internet and general reference books.

In conclusion, I can confidently support Vyara Popova's research and will vote "FOR" her candidacy for Associate Professor because the research conducted is rich and detailed enough.

Signature:

/ Assoc. Prof. Ivan Kolev/