

REVIEW

of the dissertation thesis, presented for obtaining the academic and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional area 2.3. Philosophy, specialty 05.01.06 Aesthetics, by author: **Nikolina Dimitrova Deleva,**

On the topic “**21st century Art between Value and Price**”

Author of the review: **Assoc. Prof. Vyara Aleksandrova Popova, PhD**

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The review was prepared in accordance with the requirements of DASRBA, RIDASRBA of IPS-BA, and the decision, dating from 18.07.2024, of the members of the Scientific Jury for proceedings for defense of the dissertation.

I declare that I am not connected with the author of the dissertation within the meaning of § 1, p. 5 of the Additional Provisions of DASRBA, and that I have no private interest that might influence the impartiality and objective fulfillment of my work as member of the jury for this procedure.

I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DISSERTATION

1.1. Structure and size

The dissertation work consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, a report on contributions, and a list of literature. The total size of the dissertation is 263 pages (390 standard

pages of 1,800 characters with spaces). Of these, 235 pages are basic text, 28 pages are bibliography of sources (referring to 55 sources in Cyrillic and 189 in Latin script, 64 non-specialized sources: media, etc.), of which 36 are in Cyrillic script and 28 in Latin script. Thus, the dissertation impresses the reader by its detailed and scrupulous system of presentation of 21st century art and its comprehensive range along the value-price axis. It goes far beyond the minimal national requirements for a dissertation thesis, and thus merits our admiration for the author and her supervisor Prof. Ivanka Stapova, DSc.

The dissertation is excellently structured, starting with an introduction and comprehensive overview of the thematic fields: 1) The “contemporary” in its relation to 2) Art; 3) value is constructed in dialectical opposition to 4) Price; and going on to the final reversal of the regular historical order when price begins to determine value (which bespeaks the sad deflation and annihilation of axiological value).

One immediately notices the professional manner in which the chapters and paragraphs are arranged, the precise punctuation and presentation of references in the body of the text and in footnotes, which follows the standards of the IPS-BAS, the correct citations and scrupulous references.

The **introduction** clearly articulates the basic components of the dissertation research: the basic concepts, goals, tasks, the subject and object of the study; the author emphasizes the alarming significance of the problem in our time, implying the urgent need for a topical study of this kind; the basic (hypo)thesis formulated concerns the close connection between value and price in contemporary art; the author has purposefully set in place a systematic interdisciplinary approach that maintains the difficult synthesis of different readings of the paradoxical and ambivalent phenomenon of “21st century art”, including philosophical, aesthetical, sociological and (unfamiliar for most philosophers) economic readings of the problem.

In **Chapter One**, “21st century Art”, the author outlines the boundaries of contemporary art, which fluidly extend to elimination of the dividing line between art and reality, to the

transformation of all things into art, whereby art undermines itself and abdicates from its nature. A multiplicity of mutually contradictory, often mutually exclusive, theories and conceptual visions are presented, whereby the author of the dissertation has skillfully displayed her ability to find a path in this theoretical cacophony, firmly upholding her own research stance.

Chapter Two, “Values in 21st Century Art” presents a detailed analysis of the nature, history and development of values, and how they are reflected in art. This chapter serves as a genealogical foundation and prepares the reversal of the order of historical regularity in which (in the past) the value of a work of art determined its price.

Chapter Three, “21st Century Art and Money”, refers to a paradigm reversal whereby art is viewed not as a spiritual value but as an economic object, a commodity that has a price. The polyphonic chaos of subjective but, as a rule, equal in value opinions, resulting in deflation of the unified and unanimous axiological system, leads to anarchy and normlessness. All criteria of an epistemological, ethical and aesthetical kind are abolished, which makes any kind of value criticism impossible. Amidst this chaos of criteria, a new materially defined value begins to appear: the monetary price becomes a value. This reverses the old economic order in which the spiritual value defined the price; it now builds the relation in a new way, where the economic price sets the value of the art work: the greater the price at which it is sold, the more it is valued.

The **conclusion** presents the general conclusions: total axiological relativism, as a summary result of globalization, the lack of conventional collective values, the extreme impact of technologies that accelerate development, the lack of norms, are replaced by a mercantile monetary measure as a universal criterion that levels the evaluation. These observations provide the foundation for demonstrating the (hypo)thesis about the violated production-based link between the value of a work of art and its price, the latter being constructed via the market depending on the symbolic capital of agents in the field of art.

The author’s review, 59-pages long, is written in accordance with the standards and

strictly follows the contents of the dissertation, presenting its basic points fairly and concisely.

The author has indicated publications, in academic editions, that commend the main theoretical theses, and identified the contributions contained in the dissertation.

I did not find any cases of plagiarism in the dissertation or in the author's review.

II. Contents and basic points of the dissertation

1. Topical importance of the theme

The dissertation thesis on “21st Century Art between Value and Price” can most generally be viewed as a study that clarifies the scientific interpretations and aspects of a very old, but also very contemporary, element of art in particular and of individual human existence in general: the choice between spiritual and material values.

The topical importance of the dissertation theme is determined by the urgent need to rethink the nature and significance, in the 21st century, of contemporary art as an aspect of human activity; the author defines it as a mostly social phenomenon that expresses the value transformations that have taken place. The comparison between the cultural-aesthetic value of art works and their market value offers a different, new perspective, hitherto not undertaken in depth, which indicates the innovative quality of the dissertation and the enlargement it makes of the range of knowledge; it also determines its present-day usefulness as a generalizing diagnosis of our times.

2. Basic achievements in the dissertation

2.1. Methodological premises

The statement that the dissertation thesis represents a “systematic study of art in the

21st century seen as a philosophical, aesthetical, sociological and economic phenomenon” indicates a very wide research range that requires competence in many areas and the ability to find one’s way within them, whereby the author’s distinct position is clear. This interdisciplinary method is reflected in the view that aesthetics is the predominant element in narration, evaluation and evaluation of art, and sets it on an equal level with any other epistemological discourse.

2.2. The object, goal and hypothesis of the dissertation

a) The object of study is 21st century art (1990-2023) examined through the paradigm of theory of values; the subject are the interrelations between diametrical terms: values and price of art in the period 1990-2023 in Western Europe and America.

b) The goals and tasks of the dissertation are linked to the following questions:

1/ the scope of the concept “contemporary art” and the contextual use of its definition.

2/ the subjective (who) and objective (what) factors whereby we define a given phenomenon as art or not art.

3/ the values that distinguish art today, how they are defined and legitimated in a situation of missing norms and criteria.

4/ the interrelations between author-work-public and what is being evaluated: the work itself, the idea it expresses, the market price, the author’s symbolic capital, the reaction of the recipient.

5/ the market mechanisms and the relation between value and price in 21st century art.

c) The basic **(hypo)thesis** of the study is that the reciprocal, deducible (in a previous historical development) interconnections, mutual determination and deducibility between art, value and price have been severed.

2.3. In terms of **content**, the following essential characteristics of the study are evident:

a) A very serious positive aspect of the dissertation is that it illustrates its theoretical assertions with examples of concrete authors and their concrete works; the author thus achieves a specific reflection on an impressively varied set of concepts and visions in contemporary art;

b) In presenting in clear and simple language the encyclopedic multitude of visions and concepts, the author invariably upholds her own stance. The dissertation confirms all along the observation that each term is precisely defined, thought out and carefully weighed so that it stands firmly and convincingly in its place, thus shaping and demonstrating an achieved intellectual order amidst the theoretical variety;

c) Another significant achievement is the polemical quality of the dissertation, the grasp of a multitude of theoretical visions and concepts amidst which the author's own view is upheld.

d) the author has made use of a number of concrete studies by various authors on topics related to the range of problems discussed in the dissertation; the chief criterion in her choice of literature has been the quality, not the quantity, of sources;

e) the enormous bibliographical framework and the author's sure grasp of it from the start of the dissertation indicates her very wide range of competence;

f) The brevity and concision that a review like this one normally requires, allows my giving only a limited idea of this rich encyclopedic work, which will attract the interest of many different scholars: philosophers of aesthetics, art critics, experts in cultural studies, and economists of culture and art.

The **conclusion** is that, based on her analysis, the author succeeds in confirming the

formulated (hypo)thesis.

III. Critical remarks, recommendations and questions about the dissertation

As for any academic work, critical remarks, questions and recommendation may be addressed to this dissertation.

I have a question that is also a suggestion:

Proceeding from Walter Benjamin's view regarding the origin of culture in cult and the reflection of cult in the work of art as a re-actualization of the sacred (art as a sacred spiritual practice), I would suggest that we should seek the origin of value of art works there, in constructing their archeology. Turning to our times, we see the proliferation of remakes of well-established successful plots that seek the attention of consumers. Perhaps we may draw a parallel here between the original work and the many portrayals of Saint Jerome or of the temptations of Saint Anthony, for instance. In leaning on the knowledge that classical painting imitates the well-established canon of painting, in analyzing the difference, it is perhaps a one-sided solution to view that difference through the lens of original vs. copy but to extend our perspective to the painter's originality. At first, art works were anonymous: the personality of the artist was of no value (as the profession was not a respectable one). Only with Jan van Eyck and the double portrait of Arnolfini and his wife (1434) do we have a signed painter's work. While the author's uniqueness is of predominant importance in classical painting (and the many imitators are in fact interpreters), the authentic idea of the author is no longer of interest in contemporary art, but is reduced to a profitable economic strategy that acquires commercial dimensions. Authorship is eliminated and the idea alone is turned into money, bringing profit to those who have property rights over it. Thus, future research should explore this line of thinking in order to draw a clear distinction between classical and non-classical art, a distinction

marked by Marcel Duchamp's figure with ready-made.

This remark suggests a possible basis for her future research and conveys my wish that she will indeed continue her work.

IV. Assessment of the scientific and applied-scientific contributions

The author's assessment of the contributions contained in the dissertation is made in accordance with the requirements; in fact, it is excessively modest.

V. Conclusion

The impressive and striking results presented in the dissertation justify my proposing with full conviction that the honorable scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation on the topic of "21st Century Art between Value and Price" award its author Nikolina Dimitrova Deleva the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional area 2.3. Philosophy.

VII. Declaration

I, the undersigned Assoc. Prof. Vyara Popova, PhD, do declare that I fulfill the minimal national requirements for holding the academic position of associate professor.

17.06.2024

Sofia

Signature: 

Assoc. Prof. Vyara Popova, PhD