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**Evaluation of the doctoral dissertation of Ms Niga Sayyed
drawn up in connection with the doctoral degree conferment procedure in the field of art
in the artistic discipline of fine art and art conservation, pursuant to the resolution of the
Artistic Discipline Council, at the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in
Wrocław**

LEGAL BASIS

1. The regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 19 January 2018 on the detailed procedure and conditions for conducting activities in the doctoral degree conferment procedure, the habilitation procedure and the procedure for the conferment of the title of professor (Journal of Laws of 2018, item 261).
2. The Higher Education and Science Act of 3 July 2018, the regulations introducing the Act (Journal of Laws of 30.08.2018, item 1669, as amended).

TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION

Ms Niga Sayyed's dissertation topic: *Unfamiliar Folds of Expressions*. The academic supervisor of the dissertation is Professor Paweł Frąckiewicz.

THE CANDIDATE'S PROFILE

The candidate was born on March 2, 1981 in Lahore, Pakistan. She studied there and graduated from the Lahore College of Visual and Performing Arts (2005-2007). Ms Niga Sayyed is also a graduate of the Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław, Poland – she graduated with excellent results from the Faculty of Graphics and Media Art in 2018. After graduation, she completed her Doctoral Programme at the Wrocław University (2018-2021) and a month-long internship at Sarhad University of Science & Information Technology, in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Ms Niga Sayyed's doctoral degree conferment procedure was initiated at the Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław in June 2021.

Artistic activity

Ms Niga Sayyed organised 10 presentations of her own works (4 printmaking exhibitions and 6 performance shows) in the years 2018-2020:

2020

- Exhibition "Borders" at Omsk Museums of Fine Arts, Russia (postponed because of the pandemic till autumn 2021)
- Performance Exhibition "Wings of Hope" as part of "Chwilówka - II" at MD_S Gallery of Modern Art, Wrocław, Poland
- Exhibition "Satellite Imagery", TYPА gallery/Kastani 48f Tartu, Estonia
- Performance Exhibition "No Boundaries" as part of "Chwilówka", MD_S Gallery of Modern Art, Wrocław, Poland

2019

- Box Print Exhibition "Contradiction" at Buffalo University, Department of Art, New York
- "Zeniths" Exhibition at Wrocław Contemporary Museum (MWW), Poland (prepared in Wrocław, Poland in 2019, offset)
- South Asian Contemporary Printmaking exhibition, Chongqing, China

2018

- 6th Tokyo International Mini-Print Triennial, Japan (Title: *Muted*, prepared in Wrocław in 2017, Photography)
- Box Print Exhibition "Contradiction", Spain
- International Printmaking Triennial, Art Bunker, Kraków

Research, popularisation and organisational activities of the candidate:

- Teaching internship in the Studio of Prof. Frąckiewicz at the Wrocław Academy (2018-2021)
- One-month internship at Sarhad University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan

EVALUATION OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

The evaluation comprises an analysis of the theoretical and artistic parts. The doctoral dissertation of Ms Niga Sayyed entitled *Unfamiliar Folds of Expressions* is 103 pages long, including the English version and illustrations.

It consists of an Introduction and 5 chapters: I – Social Structure and Society Around Us, II – Humanity Based on Ethical and Moral Values, III – The Language of Archetypes, IV – My Artistic Journey, V – Summary, and Bibliography. In addition, the chapters mentioned above have a total of 18 subchapters.

The theoretical part

The effect of the huge amount of work dedicated to an analysis and selection of particular subjects and groups of issues is a well-developed and intelligent text. The topics the author addresses are now almost a priority issue – along with ecology.

In the introduction, Ms Niga Sayyed presents her personal vision of the role of migrants in the modern world and expresses her concerns about their fundamental rights. She emphasises the importance of preserving identity in alienated societies.

I understand that the author also perceives identity as identification with a particular place, its culture, history and community. The inhabitants of an area can be divided into indigenous population, natives, settlers and visitors. The first three groups form a territorial community, while the fourth one remains a community assigned to the area. The role of assimilation and multiculturalism in new conditions is important. This is often the main cause of animosity between natives and visitors.

National fears and phobias are often the reason for not accepting refugees into one's own country (Hungary, Poland or the USA, which for many years have been putting up barriers against Mexican immigrants). Niga Sayyed's considerations gain particular topicality if we look at them in the context of the migration conflict on the Polish-Belarusian border in 2021.

The author assumes that in the modern world there should be a place for both sides on an equal footing. This is a very humanistic idea, but we know from experience that it is not always applied in practice (as in the aforementioned border conflict with Belarus).

In the chapter entitled "Social Structure and Society Around Us", the author attempts to outline the complicated relationship between the individual and the community. She builds her argument on the basis of her own life, claiming that "the time has come to depict social problems using artistic and aesthetic means". This is an announcement of the idea pursued in her artistic activities, which constitute the doctoral dissertation entitled *Unfamiliar Folds of Expressions*.

The author goes on to analyse humanity based on ethical and moral values: morality is our personal values and principles, while ethics is provided to us by the social system. Let me quote: "As an artist, I always try to express in my works ethical and moral values (...) concerning humanity." These are not empty words, for when I analyse the artist's graphic works and performances, I can see complete coherence of ideas and the final works. Living in the modern world, we are now still subject to the ancient rhythm – even if the only sign of it are the holidays we celebrate, and the passage of time is determined by the seasons and the length of days... The aesthetics and functionality of new times refresh and transform old forms to such an extent that only their visual character remains unchanged.

These considerations have given rise to the creation of the sign graphics made by the candidate for her dissertation. In the subchapter entitled "The Meaning of Shapes and Their Visual Effect" she writes: "We live in an age of ubiquitous computer graphics. The words we hear stimulate our brain and are associated with short-term memory. Images and visual stimuli, on the other hand, are associated with long-term memory; clinical studies have shown that visual images have a greater impact on our brains than the words we hear"¹. As a result, she uses simple colours and bold graphic forms in her works to make them readable across cultures and societies, and thus more universal.

In chapter 5 entitled "My Artistic Journey", Niga Sayyed writes that "the acceptance of a person by a foreign culture does not affect the identity of either party", but "in this way a beautiful and healthy bond is formed". It can

1 Joel Pearson, Thomas Naselaris, Emily A. Holmes, Stephen M. Kosslyn, *Mental Imagery: Functional Mechanisms and Clinical Applications*, No. 10, 2015.

be said that the knowledge of the customs, history and traditions of one's own place contributes to the construction of collective identity and memory. It is tradition that is one of the most obvious and yet most difficult concepts to define. It is a process, a sequence of events, reflections, views and meanings that we pass on to each other. And this is probably the path the author follows in her reflections and artistic projects.

The artistic part

The aim of the project is to emphasise the role of migrants in today's world and to show the challenges they face every day – this is how the author defines her topic.

The dissertation project *Unfamiliar Folds of Expressions* was initially pursued in such printmaking techniques as lithography and offset. Later, Niga Sayyed decided to broaden the field to include methods less commonly used in printmaking, such as monotyping and especially laser cut drawings. Out of the need for self-expression and to enrich and expose her own experiences and thoughts, she began to create performances. Her artistic achievements include four such events: *Jump the Line*, *Build-in Identity*, *No Boundaries* and *Wings of Hope*, which were executed under the supervision of Professor Tomasz Opania.

First, however, a few words about her graphic works. The doctoral student has found her own, original formula for using print to pursue her project. As I have already mentioned, these are intaglio prints: lithography and offset. The author has applied various transformations and graphic arrangements of one word in them, e.g. *Dayira*, which in Urdu means the same as in Arabic, i.e. , "a circle". The 70 × 50 cm black and white print from 2019 is the author's manifesto stating that people are different because of their appearance and behaviour, hence the black and white colours, which are intended to show their diverse identities. Several graphics or layouts of this type have been created, where the author has used her knowledge of calligraphy, using these notations in individual prints of a set of intaglio prints. In some works, with the help of acetone, the doctoral student transferred them directly onto stone. The following works can be mentioned here: *Pineapple*, *Be nothing like* or *My oval world* - lithograph/offset from 2018. These works are very personal and characterised by the artist's ideological message. The descriptions attached to the documentation show Niga Sayyed as a person aware of her place on earth and strongly committed to raising awareness of the difficult situation of migrants in the world. Once again I will bring up the problem of the people on the Polish-Belarusian border in order to emphasise and express all the more clearly the concern about elementary freedom and human rights!

Nevertheless, with respect for the author's ideological stance, I have a problem with referring to her works as prints. It must be admitted that her works, created in the noble technique of lithography, use only basic techniques of image reproduction and in my opinion are closer to the formula of a stencil or, perhaps, a poster as such. I would be more inclined to call them ideograms, or boards visualising specific assumptions or ideas about which the author writes in her doctoral dissertation.

I would particularly refer to objects created by cutting out forms and inscriptions in Plexiglass as ideograms or infographics. I think that such a name would be closer to the author's commitment and would adhere more to the theses put forward by her, such as the one where Niga Sayyed explains to us the meaning of the work/ideogram entitled *Be Nothing Like*: "In this work I use a single word repeatedly. This work has been prepared in 2 layers of Plexiglass by means of a laser cutter. On the first, transparent background layer, I have used the laser cutter to engrave the word *faraq*, meaning 'difference'. The second layer consists of yellow circles of varying thickness, giving the work a three-dimensional appearance. The central circular shape stands out from the yellow forms because of its distinct identity. This work raises the issue that having a different identity is normal and brings with it its own beauty and qualities that should be acceptable to us".

A similar method has been used in the works *Azadi* or *Equilibrium*.

As it can be seen from the description, the individual layers of Plexiglass have their own purposes to fulfil: each is a carrier of a specific assumption and has a purpose to fulfil – a bit like on a reference board. Hence my suggestion to call them ideograms or infographics. Let me add that I do not treat these terms pejoratively, but it seems to me that in this case they are more appropriate than "prints".

Finally, I would like to pay attention to some interesting performances by Ms Niga Sayyed in Poland and Pakistan. I have in mind her performances referring to the notion of a border, treated by the author literally and in a general sense. The first example is the work "No Boundaries", in which Niga Sayyed breaks down barriers and looks for a way to move forward in order to conquer fear and pain. In effect, she erased a square warning area and covered it with soil brought in a suitcase. After spreading some sand, she hid the marked square (the boundary) by writing "No boundaries" on it. Similarly, in *Jump the line* she created a public space for social interaction. For this, she chose the motif of the world-known hopscotch game, which created tension in a public place because the outline was made of yellow and black caution tape, which the participants did not want to cross. Artistically, she managed to find a way to transcend these existing barriers.

In her work, Niga Sayyed explores how racist and discriminatory behaviour towards migrants has built up in different societies. She develops her story through a series of archetypes to protest against these attitudes in the contemporary world.

It is worth quoting the author's words that most fully define her attitude as an artist and a human being living here and now: "The archetypes and symbols I have created deal with the problems causing global destabilisation. They reinforce our conviction that it is time to create a solid social structure based on human ethical and moral values. In this structure, each of us will have a role to play in building a stable world for our common good and the good of future generations."

SUMMARY

Ms Niga Sayyed's dissertation entitled *Unfamiliar Folds of Expressions* represents precision and logic in the construction of an artistic narrative, as each element is the result of an in-depth ideological analysis and a well-thought-out visual layout. Having become familiar with the provided material and its description (abiding by the above remarks concerning the naming of graphic objects), I am convinced that Ms Niga Sayyed is a mature and responsible artist who does not treat her theses superficially, claiming that "Differences between people do not make anyone better or worse. (...) These differences are basic elements of our identity, but they should not result in creating walls and building racism or hatred towards other people." Let the author's message be the conclusion of my review, the rationale for which the author has included in her doctoral dissertation.

CONCLUSION

After a detailed review of the artistic output, the dissertation and the documentation provided, considering the qualifications of the candidate, I state unequivocally that, in accordance with the Act on Academic Degrees and Academic Title in Art (Journal of Laws 2018, item 261), it is fully justified that Ms Niga Sayyed be awarded the degree of Doctor of Arts in the discipline of fine arts and conservation of art.

I address this request to the Artistic Discipline Council of the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław.

Professor Mirosław Pawłowski

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