

Evaluation of the artistic, didactic and organizational achievements of Ms. Niga Sayyeda Shahryar, Sarhad University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan / E. Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław, drawn up in connection with a doctoral degree conferment procedure in the field of art, initiated by the Faculty of Graphics and Media Art of the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław.

University: Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław, Poland.

ASP Wrocław, Poland

Faculty of Graphics and Media Art

Subject: Hidden Elements of Expression

Doctoral dissertation in the field of arts, in the discipline of fine art and art conservation

Type of work: Doctoral dissertation in the field of art, in the discipline of fine art and art conservation

Author: **Niga Sayyeda Shahryar**

Reviewer: Prof. **Zbyněk Janáček**, PhD, the Czech Republic

The doctoral student's presentation

Ms Niga Sayyeda Shahryar was born in 1981 in Pakistan. She lives and works in Dubai. In the years 2018 - 2021, she pursued her PhD degree at the E. Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław. Since 2020 she has been a lecturer at the Sarhad University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan [Visiting faculty].

Evaluation of the organisational and popularisation achievements in the field of arts

Activities oriented at organizing and popularizing art, 2018-2021

To begin, I have to admit that the materials I received as a reviewer in their form and elaboration deviated from the level to which I am accustomed in the case of doctoral dissertations of Polish art universities, especially the works from the Faculty of Graphics and Media Art of the Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław. Unfortunately, this made it difficult for me to objectively assess the candidate's artistic profile (see: Evaluation of artistic achievements). The materials refer exclusively to the period of her doctoral studies and are prepared in the form of an enumeration/list or short comments. There are no

portfolios, visual documentation of exhibitions, possible links to online or hard copy sources, if they existed at all. I acknowledge that some issues can be excused by the unusual circumstances of Ms Niga Sayyeda's doctoral studies. I do believe, however, that both the doctoral student and her academic supervisor should have dedicated more attention to the materials required for the doctoral dissertation.

I highlight this fact also because in the relatively long dissertation (over one hundred pages of text) which was submitted, the author proved that she could work with textual and visual sources, had no problems with editing them, etc. I do not understand, therefore, why part of the submitted materials is not a portfolio, but only a collection of scattered, incoherently collected works, photographs, videos, which have a rather informative function.

In the form of an inventory/list, Ms Niga Sayyeda presents the exhibitions of her works held in several countries during her doctoral studies. It should be taken into account that the organisation of these exhibitions was often influenced by the coronavirus pandemic:

- November 2020 / *Borders* exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Omsk, **Russia**
(postponed to autumn 2021 due to the pandemic)
- March 2020 / performance *Wings of Hope* as part of the *Chwilówka- II* exhibition in the MDS Gallery of Contemporary Art, Wrocław, **Poland**
- February 2020 / *Satellite Imagery* exhibition at TYPA Gallery / Tartu, **Estonia**
- January 2020 / *No Boundaries* performance as part of *Chwilówka* exhibition at MDS Gallery of Contemporary Art, Wrocław, **Poland**
- July 2019 / Box Print Exhibition *Contradiction*, University of Buffalo, Faculty of Art, New York, **USA**
- June 2019 / *Zeniths*, Exhibition at the Contemporary Museum in Wrocław (MWW), **Poland** (prepared in Wrocław, Poland, 2019, offset print)
- March 2019 / *South Asian Contemporary Printmaking exhibition*, Chongqing, **China**
- October 2018 / *6th Tokyo International Mini-Print Triennial*, **Japan**
(Title: *Muted*, prepared in Wrocław in 2017, technique - photography)
- October 2018 / *Box Print Exhibition Contradiction*, **Spain**

Didactic achievements and popularisation activities

Similarly, the didactic achievements and participation in the education and upbringing of young artists are very concise. The reviewer, apart from learning about Ms. Niga Sayyeda's teaching courses during her doctoral studies (teaching internship in the lithography studio), did not find out anything specific about the length or scope of the courses, and there is no documentation confirming her teaching students of the E. Geppert

Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław as well as Erasmus students. It would be appropriate here to present examples of prints, students' works, etc. In the materials there was only a statement that the internship in the lithography studio at the Academy of Art and Design enabled the doctoral student to master the current remote teaching programme in an organised way. The reference to pedagogical activity(?) (since 2020) is information about the doctoral student's primary place of work - Sarhad University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan, and again we learn nothing to clarify the nature of the courses or to assess their quality. To reiterate, the absence of works is difficult to defend. Ms Niga Sayyeda has prepared four didactic courses(?) for her primary workplace, one of which, comprising 30 lesson units, is completed (monotyping, linocut, woodcut, collagraph printing and stencil techniques). Again, the doctoral student "hides" details from us or does not consider them important(?). This is detrimental for her, because the acquisition of pedagogical and didactic competences is an important part of doctoral studies. So is attending conferences (conferences and seminars - September 2019, Lithuania, March 2019, Croatia). Apart from the doubts concerning the questionable number of presentations - literally two in three years, the sparsity and incompleteness of information is surprising. In addition, it is stated that the second of the conferences was actually *not related* to the theme and field of her doctoral studies at the Academy of Art and Design. Therefore, I cannot help but ask why this item was included in the list of activities. The reviewer has not received detailed information whether the doctoral student actively participated in the conference or only submitted the listed articles, etc. Did it result in a peer-reviewed volume, a catalogue? I consider all this to be important information that would enable the reviewers to get to know the author better, to understand her work also in a different way than just on the basis of the dissertation.

Finally, we learn that in December 2018, Ms. Niga Sayyeda participated in the *Critical Dialogues* workshop in Tashkeel, Dubai. Again, the commentary regarding this activity is very limited, lacking detailed information or a link to online sources, as it is usually practised in similar situations.

The January 2020 performance - *No Boundaries* within the *Chwilówka- II* exhibition at the MD_S Contemporary Art Gallery in Wrocław, and the March performance *Wings of Hope* within the *Chwilówka- II* at the MD_S Contemporary Art Gallery in Wrocław, are subsequently mentioned in the list of the doctoral student's exhibition activities.

Evaluation of the doctoral dissertation

Motto:

“My archetypes are visual expressions that highlight my artistic identity through my language. Since I have started to address a wider global audience, I have adopted a minimalist approach so that my viewers can relate to my work more easily. I have used simple colours combined with bold graphic shapes and forms, standing up for migrants and their basic rights, and aiming to create a cohesive society”.

Ms Niga Sayyeda completed her doctoral study programme by writing an extensive dissertation entitled *Hidden Elements of Expression*.

I have taken the liberty of beginning this part of the evaluation with a quote from the abstract attached by the author. She summarises the objectives of the dissertation in it. Ms Niga Sayyeda's dissertation is a successful attempt to deal with the issue of migration, asylum seekers and migrants. The subject is complicated; it is present in politics, political science, sociology, generally speaking, it falls into the areas of a number of fields which are characterised by working with data, scientific research, the final effect of which is extensive texts, publications, etc. Unfortunately, nowadays, and in particular for more than five years, migration has been part of a discourse that often lacks valid arguments and substantiation. All the more so as reality is replaced by demagoguery, distorted information, nationalism, populism, etc. The European Union states, especially those that joined the Union after 1989, paradoxically, have played a sad role in this *non-dialogue*. I mention this because the doctoral student is dealing with a painful topic, which due to historical circumstances resonates in countries that have no previous or present experience with immigration, migrants and asylum seekers, apart from a mediated one. Despite this, it is precisely in these countries that this subject has become part of the political struggle, pre-election conflicts and, here again with a sigh, has found an audience not only on the extreme left and right wings, but has been deliberately and systematically abused and exploited from time to time by political parties or has led to the activation of new populist groups and movements. I take the liberty of making these remarks because of relations in my country and also because of the refugee situation in Poland on the Polish-Belorussian border.

The dissertation, which is over one hundred pages long (106 to be precise), has a clear structure. Apart from the introduction, bibliography and list of illustrations, it consists of five chapters:

- *Social structure and society around us*

- *Humanity based on ethical and moral values*

- *The language of archetypes*, 64 pages in total.

Chapter five, *My Creative Journey*, and the Conclusion are over thirty pages in length. Chapters two, three and four are undoubtedly the effect of careful reading of the mentioned literature and proof that the author has a very good understanding of the problems. When she finds a connection with her own work in the texts, she enlivens the fragments of the dissertation with examples or comments concerning her own work. The disadvantage of these fragments of the dissertation is that they do not go beyond the circle of specific fields. In other words, the doctoral student moves (exclusively) within the area of humanistic disciplines and, apart from the references to her own work, she has not managed to refer to contemporary visual arts, and there is a complete lack of references to the context of world art, at least the 20th century art. Adopting such a closed perspective is, of course, a possible solution (and certainly it is the author's choice). Thus, the text of the dissertation becomes very concise, solidly based on arguments and quotations of good quality. I dare say that it would be possible to successfully defend the dissertation also in other faculties than the Faculty of Arts. The question remains whether the volume and the chosen direction of the dissertation ultimately speak for it as a whole. Particularly because in the quantitative summary above, where, I do not conceal, I deliberately quote the number of pages, there is an evident asymmetry to the disadvantage of comments on her own creative work, which should be and is the main achievement. This, however, does not diminish the value of a well-written text which, in addition to the well-known and frequently repeated statements found in discourses on globalisation, neo-colonialism, ethics, or gender, proposes a redefinition of social structures. All this always taking into account the main topic - emigration and immigration. Ms Niga Sayyeda also focuses on the issue of language. The dissertation contains references to both general linguistics and the author's mother tongue. This testifies to the wide substantive range of the chapter entitled *Language of Archetypes*.

It turns out that her approach to artistic projects, be it printmaking, installations or performances, has a very good theoretical background, which deserves respect and recognition. The dissertation, at least in the case of the second, third and fourth chapters, meets the strictest evaluation criteria. Referencing and orientation in the specialist literature is meticulous and exemplary. Thematisation of migration as one aspect of globalisation, environmental problems including phenomena predicting catastrophic consequences for climate and weather, local armed conflicts over resources, political instability, water shortages, famine, etc., proves that the author's approach is not

superficial, that she has drawn conclusions from the texts she has read, but also that her approach is based primarily on the experienced reality. The doctoral student draws inspiration from the experience of a culturally different geopolitical circle, from historical experiences such as the establishment of India and Pakistan in 1949, for example, from the religious and ethnic conflicts in the Indian subcontinent in the twentieth century. The eventual relocation to a seemingly more peaceful part of the world is no guarantee that Ms Niga Sayyeda and her family have definitively escaped the danger of potential conflicts, because, among other things, the world is getting smaller as a result of globalisation and problems are percolating from continent to continent. Environmental threats know no borders.

The set of works presented by the doctoral student is diverse in form and content and provides an interesting artistic parallel to the problems that Ms Niga Sayyeda has discussed in the main part of the dissertation. She is well acquainted with traditional technologies (lithography, etc.), but at the same time she uses or updates the latest techniques, for example printing technologies (offset), laser, 3D printing, etc. Another question is to what extent the concept of this cycle, or cycles/installations, fulfils the expectations not only of the author but, above all, the viewer. Has the deeply humanistic and ethical ethos, which cannot be denied in the author's theoretical work, been reflected in her artistic language? Is the content of the titles of her individual works not unequivocally simplex, on the one hand (see *Pineapple*)? Or, in other words, is it possible, through Urdu calligraphy, to write texts in italics in Polish (formatted with great elegance in basic geometric shapes), and to reach the declared goals? The key to the questions posed above is the lack of a broader cultural artistic context, because the theoretical part of the dissertation is more of a work in the humanities, and the author has evidently abandoned artistic contexts, not only the European narrative of art history, but also references to calligraphy, which occupies a prime position in Islamic art. The author explores and attempts to grasp archetypes and symbols, yet in the literature referenced the reviewer senses a burning lack of canonical texts that would probably correct the author's thinking in defining the purpose of the practical work submitted for defence. I am not sure whether it is possible to talk about archetypes without referencing texts by Carl Gustav Jung, for example, describing the content of archetypes. "According to Jung, archetypes are images of pre-instincts that spontaneously emerge from the unconscious. As such, these images have no fixed form or content, they are changeable and dependent on a given epoch and

culture. They are symbols, images and stories that man has attributed to the darkness of the universe from time immemorial”¹.

The above quotation does not exclude the possibility of understanding the archetype through the form the author has chosen, but I do not know to what extent her construct, given its content and ambitions (which in effect cannot be challenged aesthetically, artistically and technologically), is successful in communicating with the viewer. Undoubtedly, Ms Niga Sayyeda's work is a confirmation of the thesis that the unanimity of scientific-technical and hermeneutic thinking is a part of contemporary discourse, and any doubts on part of the author concerning the validity of such discourse should be completely excluded. On the other hand, according to C.G. Jung, archetypes are not defined thematically, but only formally, and ultimately only in a very limited way. Thematically, an archetypal image is only defined if it is conscious, that is, filled with the material of conscious experience. The archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, nothing but a *facultas praeformandi*, a possibility of representation which is given a priori². The representations themselves are not inherited, only the forms, and in that respect they correspond in every way to the instincts³. When it comes to symbols, the above words are no longer contradictory, because Jung understands a symbol as the most appropriate form for expressing content that is unknown in its nature, but whose existence is acknowledged. According to Jung, a symbol is an expression that best reproduces a complex reality that human consciousness has not yet clearly grasped⁴.

Conclusions

Getting acquainted with the theoretical and artistic work of Ms. Niga Sayyeda was a new experience for me. However, this does not mean that I cannot notice shortcomings, mainly of a formal nature, in the documentation submitted to me. The layout, the volume, the lack of a well-prepared and clear portfolio is far from the standards, and I mean not only the requirements of the reviewer, who would certainly find it easier to get to know the works of the doctoral student, which (paradoxically) is to her disadvantage(!), but also the standards adopted in other doctoral dissertations. In assessing the dissertation, I will use a comparison from the field of hermeneutics. In the triangle of the author's work, one vertex is constituted by theoretical foundations of general, political sciences, which, it must be

¹ Cf. J. Cír, *Značky a archetypy*, 2017, online: <https://www.perfectcrowd.cz/2017/11/znacky-a-archetypy-2.html>, transl. M. Kalita [accessed: 08.11.2021].

² C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections. Transcribed and given for publication by Aniela Jaffe*, transl. R. Reszke, L. Kolankiewicz, Warsaw 1997, p. 360.

³ Cf. C. G. Jung, *Duše moderního člověka*, Brno 1994, transl. M. Kalita, p. 311.

⁴ Cf. C. G. Jung, *Archetypes and collective unconsciousness*, Warsaw 2016.

admitted, are somewhat ideologised and controversial; the other vertex is constituted by the author's own artistic language, individual works with a certain disproportion between the declared content and their communicative potential, but nevertheless prepared with great class, with respect (judging from the documentation) for the craftsmanship and technology, convincingly mastered by the doctoral student. The third vertex of the imaginary triangle remains - in the reviewer's opinion - unfilled. This is the aforementioned artistic and historical context. The doctoral student has the right to resign from this approach, but by doing so, she risks casting doubt on a coherent and comprehensive approach in her work, but again, this is only the opinion of the reviewer, who will be glad if this accusation is refuted by the Author.

Despite these reservations, I think that Ms Niga Sayyeda's dissertation entitled *Hidden Elements of Expression* should be admitted for defence and, following a successful defence, I think that she should be awarded the degree of **PhD in the field of art, in the discipline of fine art and art conservation.**

Ostrava, 22.10.2021

Prof. Zbyněk Janáček, PhD