Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague
Department of Photography

Assessment of the Bachelor's Thesis

Author of thesis: Hanlu Gong
Title of thesis: ON THE MEANING OF CIGARETTE SMOKING IN FASHION
PHOTOGRAPHY

Assessment of the primary advisor ✔   Assessment of the opponent ✕

Author of the assessment (first name, last name, workplace): Michal Šimůnek,
Department of Photography, FAMU

Evaluation of the content and final form of the thesis (A/excellent – B/very good – C/
good – D/good with objections – E/satisfactory – F/unsatisfactory – not recommended
for defence)

Suitability of the selected objective and work approach...B
Relative completeness of the literature used for the selected topic............................C
Ability to critically evaluate and use scholarly literature..C
Logicality of the thesis structure, connection of its chapters and theirs
proportionality……………………………………………………………………….A
Language and stylistic level of the thesis..A
Compliance with citation norms (should the text repeatedly contain adopted passages
without citing the source, the work cannot be recommended for defence)................A
Sufficient extent of image attachments, justifiability and suitability of attachments,
graphic layout..A
Originality of the thesis, contribution to the development of the field of study........B

Overall evaluation of the thesis...B

Verbal evaluation of the thesis including questions that the candidate must address in
his/her thesis defence:

Hanlu Gong's thesis traces the history of smoking models in fashion photography back to
1920s Lucky Strike "Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet" campaign that promoted
cigarettes as a symbol of liberated, attractive, self-confident, successful and even healthy
(smoking is healthier than eating sweets as it was proclaimed) woman. This early way of
promoting cigarettes is further compared with the 1970s and mainly 1990s, when anti-
smoking initiatives and legal enforcements have started to question smoking as healthy
activity and when several legal restrictions of cigarette promotion have been enforced. But
despite this restrictions against cigarette advertisements, the fashion industry has kept
working with smoking models.

After describing this historical and marketing background, Hanlu Gong analyses the meaning of smoking models on examples of the work of three canonical fashion photographers: Helmut Newton, Edward Steichen and Keith Trumbo, who all extensively worked with the figure of smoking-model. She aims to trace, how (if at all) these photographers reflected in their fashion photography anti-smoking campaigns and in what sense they have turned away (again, if at all) from using "fetishistic" smoking models connoting emancipated and seductive woman.

Hanlu Gong works with photographs which are available in online Vogue Archive which offers digital copies of all issues of this famous fashion magazine. It is an excellent source for tracing and examining fashion photography, but it has to be said, that Gong works with this archive rather unsystematically as it is not evident upon which criteria did she selected particular photographs for her analysis.

The analysis of particular photographs is then somewhat intuitive, that is there is not clearly stated and coherent methodological, theoretical or conceptual framework used for analysis. It is not clear (or at least explicitly stated) what was Gong's "research" approach. Although the author's thinking is very close to semiotics (detailed descriptions of the denotative and connotative level of images), she does not use semiotic terminology and concepts. In this sense, the thesis lacks a methodological rigour; her approach is somewhat random; the analysis is, in fact, an essay based on accidental discoveries of particular photographs. This fact is given – in my view – mainly by the fact that Gong works with just a few pieces of academic sources and her analysis reflects literature on fashion photography and particular photographers in a limited way (Gong works mainly with online sources, that has rather "popular" than academic qualities).

The thesis is written in a good academic (essayistic) style. Despite upper mentioned shortcomings – which are acceptable taking into account the type (bachelor) of a thesis – Hanlu Gong proved to be a reasonable observer and her analysis is readable and provide several interesting observations: slim cigarettes as a reference to desired shape of woman's body, persistence of symbolic meanings of smoking models (rebelliousness, emancipation, attractiveness, seductiveness) etc. I recommend her thesis for the defence and propose B as the final grade.

Questions for the defence:
Could you compare the meaning of cigarettes in fashion photography (smoking models) with the meaning of cigarettes in classical Marlboro Man advertisements? Think about campaigns like Marlboro Country, Come to where the flavour is or Marlboro's recent "No Maybe" campaign (slogans like No More Maybe, Maybe Never Fell in Love, Maybe Never Lights up the Night, Maybe Never Found a Way, Maybe Never Reached the Top).

In your conclusion, you write: "In a consumerism-based culture, a society in which women were fighting for societal gains and economic independence became fertile ground for artistic expression." Could you explain how consumerism and women's fight for economic independence was reflected in the artistic expression of photographers?

Date: 09/06/2019   Signature:...