

Bogomil Nikolov at 80

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Fig 1. Prof. Bogomil Nikolov holding the Saltus Award during the award ceremony, Sofia, 2018

‘Medals’.

This answer almost always causes bewilderment and lack of understanding, when asked what I do for a living. And I begin to explain what a medal is, how it is made, why it exists... I like to live in the world of medals, where one can get lost, as in any art. I like to explain and every time I learn something new, another view, another opinion... It is interesting to rediscover yourself in the eyes of others. Isn't that the purpose of art?



Fig 2. *Danae and the Golden Rain*

In 2004 in my first (and only, so far) article for *The Medal* magazine, I wrote about the curious way I discovered the art of the medal solely because of Professor Bogomil Nikolov. To him I owe eternal gratitude and respect for opening my eyes through his art, conversations, encouragement, critique (always justified and to the point). Bogomil has done it in an almost invisible, but yet very present way.

So, I wanted to reciprocate and do something for Bogomil and for the art of the medal. Thus, in the spring of 2021, in the heart of the pandemic, I wrote a short script for a documentary that would explain to the larger audience what a medal is. I had a young talented director by my side, Slav Velkov, whose contribution was key. I hired a professional crew, half of whom donated their time and equipment for the cause. In the beginning Bogomil was reluctant (he is not the type who likes to be in the center of attention) but finally he agreed. I also asked Philip

Fig 3. *Dyptych*

Fig 4. Saltus Award ceremony, at Academia Gallery, 2018
 Left to right: Assya Pessotskaya, Dr. Ute Wartenberg-Kagan,
 Prof. Bogomil Nikolov, Yulia Krasnobayeva, Nadia Rozeva

Fig 5. *Departure*

Attwood, keeper of the Coins and Medals Department at the British Museum, to participate with an online interview and happily he agreed. We shot the footage with Bogomil and me for two full days in the beginning of May 2021 in my Sofia apartment studio. It was a trying, yet gratifying time, because it was quite hard to fit all the equipment in the living room – seven people with all the lighting, two cameras, boom, cables and medals everywhere... But it was a great moment of creation and teamwork. And I could see that even after all the stress and long days in front of the camera, Bogomil was happy.

In October 2023, I showed the film to the participants in the FIDEM XXXVII Congress in Florence and afterwards I had my lecture on the 80th anniversary of Professor Nikolov. In fact, I would not call it a lecture, to me it was a personal testimony to honour my professor by showing the film and speaking about what Bogomil Nikolov has done to introduce and establish the Medal Studio at the National Academy of Art (NAA) in Sofia and how this had introduced the art of the medal for the first time in an academic environment by allowing hundreds students to master this art form in Bulgaria since 1996.

Bogomil Nikolov (b. 1943 in the village of Brashlyanitsa, Bulgaria) studied in the Fine Arts High-School in Sofia, majoring in Painting. After two years in the National Academy of Art, he graduated in 1971 from the Stroganov Institute in Moscow, where he made his first medals. In 1976, he organized a first solo exhibition entitled *Medal, Plaque, Small Relief*, which is also the first of its kind in Bulgaria. In the following years, he worked actively in the field of art medals.

Bogomil Nikolov has created over 600 works. He has also designed a large number of collection coins, medals, state and institutional insignia of honours such as the Paisii Hilendarski award, Golden Age, Golden Griffin awards and many more. In addition to his personal creative



Fig 6. *Depression*, 2010
Brass, cast, 160 mm



Fig 7. *Genetic code*, 2004
Brass, cast, 110 mm

success, he has received high international recognition in the field of art education and the organization of major national and international events and art projects. As a pioneer of Bulgarian medal sculpture, he not only created a national art school, but also contributed to making Bulgaria one of the leading countries in this field. As a result, FIDEM (International Art Medal Federation) assigned Professor Bogomil Nikolov to organize the 33rd World Congress of the Federation in Sofia in 2014. In 2015, the City of Sofia awarded him with the Sofia Prize for merit in the field of culture.

Bogomil Nikolov is also recipient of other prestigious awards – FIDEM at 70 for his work on promoting the art of the medal, the Marsh Annual Award and the BAMS President Medal and the Sanford Saltus Award of the American Numismatic Society for excellence in medallic art. The latter was presented in an official ceremony in



Fig 8. *Hopeness*, 2023
Brass, cast, 120 x 120 mm



Fig 9. Prof. Bogomil Nikolov at the opening of his exhibition in the National Gallery of Art, Sofia, during FIDEM 2014

2018, accompanied by a retrospective exhibition of works by Professor Nikolov at the Academia Gallery of the NAA, by Dr Ute Wartenberg-Kagan, who came to Sofia specifically for the occasion.

During my active years as a student at the NAA Medal Studio there was a small sign, printed on paper by Bogomil, a quote by Tao Te Ching which read: ‘When the student is ready, the teacher will appear’. When I first read it, it took me a while to understand what it meant. In fact, this was Bogomil’s way of saying to his students to be more recipient and open, so he can be of help. In fact, he never spared his efforts and time to extend a hand, to critique, to go to the foundry with his own car, to bring all student plasters along, to patinate, to open our eyes for the positive sides of every medal. He has an innate aesthetics, eye and feel for the genre, that helps him to immediately decide which patina is best for a work. ‘The patina makes or breaks the medal. You can really improve

Fig 10. *Three Graces*, 2009
Brass, cast, 86 x 65 mm



Fig 11. *Sketchbook*, 2006
Brass, assemblage, 130 mm

a mediocre work with patina, or make a good work appear uninteresting. The work is never finished, until the patina is applied. And finally, it's God's work in a way, how the patina will turn out, how the chemicals will react with the metal' – he would say.

I have learned so much from Bogomil. To appreciate, to be restrained in my expression, to know when a work is



Fig 12. Prof. Bogomil Nikolov and Nadia Rozeva
during the shooting of the short doc *The Medal* 2021, Sofia.

finished. I will never forget the day, it must have been in 2004, when still a student and working on a series of assignments, I was trying hard to discover the hot water in medallic art, to create that one incredible medal, the one that will make the whole world stand in awe. Yes, but no. After one month of work, lots of sleepless nights,



Fig 13. *Summer Night Dream*, 2006
Brass, cast, 80 x 80 cm



Fig 15. *Requiem*, 2023
Brass, wood, fabricated, 2 elements, 100 x 95 x 75 mm, 130 x 75 x 75 mm



Fig 14. *Ceremony*, 2019
Brass, cast, 3 elements, 125 x 120 mm each

I am telling this story to illustrate how important Bogomil Nikolov has been in my formation and my growth as a medallist. I am sure it is the same for many of my colleagues.

On the eve of his 80th anniversary, I can only say: thank you for all, Maestro! Your work and your intellect have marked generations of students at the NAA, who will

cherish your talent and perpetuate the art of the medal for generations to come!

frustration and no acceptable results, I called Bogomil. He came to the rescue and to see for himself. Contrary to my hopes that in fact I was wrong, he criticized my work even more and I was so desperate, that I picked up all the plasters and threw them in the garbage, my eyes full of tears. Bogomil did not say anything. I was not angry at him, but at myself. When he was leaving the house, he just mumbled, that if I wanted to participate in the FIDEM 2004 in Portugal, he had to receive my work in the coming week. That same evening, I created my *Glass I* medal, which was later acquired by the British Museum.