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Katarina Burin wins ICA's Foster Prize

By [Geoff Edgers](#) | GLOBE STAFF MAY 08, 2013

Katarina Burin, who took her conceptual creation of a fictitious Czechoslovakian architect from Berlin to Boston, has won the Institute of Contemporary Art's 2013 James and Audrey Foster Prize.

The \$25,000 award comes as Burin, a native of Slovakia, has accepted an offer to become a member of the faculty as lecturer in Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University. She's been a visiting lecturer at Harvard since 2009. The ICA award, she said, will allow her to expand on a project centered around Petra Andrejova-Molnár, a character she created who is rooted in the movements of early-20th-century modernist architecture.

Burin's work, now on view at the ICA, includes architectural drawings and models supposedly done by the figure she affectionately refers to as "PA." And Burin's creation is just getting started.

"She's only designed and fully constructed two buildings," said Burin, from her office at Harvard. "There's still a lot she hasn't done."

Other finalists for the Foster Prize, established in 1999, were Sarah Bapst, Mark Cooper, and Luther Price. Their work, along with Burin's, remains [on view at the ICA](#) through July 21. Past winners of the prize have included Ambreen Butt, Laylah Ali, Kanishka Raja, Andrew Witkin, and Amie Siegel. The jury this year was made up of artist Mark Dion, Hammer Museum curator Ali Subotnick, and Paul Ha, director of the MIT List Visual Arts Center.



JOHN KENNARD

KATARINA BURIN

Ha, in a phone interview Tuesday, said he was impressed by both the conceptual nature of Burin's work and her craftsmanship.

"Her ambition was incredible, to create this atmosphere of these fictitious characters," said Ha. "And just as an exhibition, it really shined. I think there is that moment where the viewer discovers, 'Oh my goodness, this is a fictional character' and you go beyond that and end up looking at the objects just like any other exhibition."

Burin was born in Slovakia where, as a little girl, she began to draw. At 6, her family moved to Toronto; she earned her undergraduate degree at the University of Georgia and a graduate degree at Yale University. Shortly afterward, Burin moved to Berlin, where she lived from 2002 until 2009. Burin's work has been shown around the world, including solo exhibitions at Andreas Grimm Galerie in New York and Munich and Form/Content in London.

In creating Andrejova-Molnár, Burin drew on her own childhood, growing up among the severe concrete buildings of communist Slovakia and her own knowledge of the modernist movements that emerged after World War I. Though she began the project in Berlin about five years ago, Burin drew inspiration from her move to Cambridge, particularly her work at Harvard. Burin teaches in the Carpenter Center, the only Le Corbusier building in the United States. She has also studied the work of another legendary modernist, Walter Gropius, who fled Nazi Germany to eventually land at Harvard's Graduate School of Design.

It's no coincidence that Burin created a woman as her character.

"All of these women, at that time [of the modernist movement], were studying but none of them were able to take on architecture as fully as men," she said. "They were maybe doing designs or tapestry, and it was kind of this amazing, radical moment in that sense. But then, of course, I keep coming across these stories of architects who had a sort of female partner or somebody that they worked with that people rarely talk about. She's the person we don't know about. [Andrejova-Molnár] could have existed, and she may as well have."

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