

BEYOND BAUHAUS

KATARINA

BURIN:

IRRATIONAL

ATTACHMENTS

JANUARY 15TH

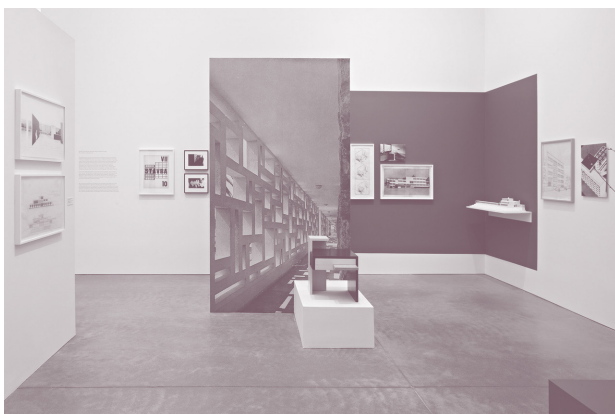
– MARCH 14TH

2020

Providence
College—
Galleries



Katarina Burin and Farhad Mirza
"a low storey between two others,", 2019
 (Courtesy the artists, Anthony Greaney
 Gallery and Peter Smith Studio)



Katarina Burin
*Hotel Nord-Sud, 1932–34: Design and
 Correspondence* installation view, 2013
 ICA Boston. Photo: John Kennard.



Katarina Burin
*Petra Andrejova-Molnár: Contribution and
 Collaboration*, installation view, 2015
 Neubauer Collegium, University of Chicago

Katarina Burin: Irrational Attachments January 15th, 2020 – March 14th, 2020.

Katarina Burin has long been intrigued by the shared visual language of art, architecture and design, maintaining an artistic practice that consistently mines the legacies of functional images, objects and architecture. She has used a variety of sources and techniques—from sculpture and spatial interventions to historical fiction conveyed with mixed media visual art and text—to explore the ways modernism has profoundly influenced the built environment, especially that of Central and Eastern Europe. In installation and exhibition formats, Burin's artworks come together to tell new, inspired- by-true-events stories that change viewers' understanding of modern art history and underlying geopolitics.

Burin was born in Czechoslovakia in the Slovakian capital city of Bratislava and emigrated as a child to Canada, then eventually to the United States. This sequence of experiences continuously influences the subject matter of her work. For nearly ten years, her studio practice and production revolved around a fictitious Czech Modernist architect named Petra Andrejova-Molnár, or "PA" as the artist lovingly calls her. Burin fabricated specific biographical and art-historical narratives for PA. She made detailed architectural renderings and designed objects all look as if PA had planned, visualized and crafted them herself during the interwar period. She staged "historic" photographs documenting PA with friends and colleagues. She even published journals and catalogs, documenting PA's work on this or that project or exhibition. In its entirety, this body of work instrumentalized PA to draw attention to the lack of women and the lack of recognition for women in the field during that period.

Without resorting to didacticism, Burin has been using art projects like that of PA to advocate for the acknowledgement of women in the development of all things modern for several years. By weaving together elements of fact and fiction, her work with PA suggested that her own rewriting of history is perhaps as, or perhaps more, accurate than the factual record itself. The danger of historical documentation, as Walter Benjamin warned, is the inherent subjectivity of a view of the past that is cultivated and promoted by a dominant class but relies on the anonymous work of their contemporaries. By creating and then mining PA's visual research archives and total oeuvre, Burin generated what would be a more genuine reflection of the art history if the fields it historicized as well as the discipline itself were more gender inclusive.

But art history—factual or fictional, fair or tilted—rarely communicates the tangled complexities of lived experience as it relates to historical periods or events. *Irrational Attachments*, Burin's first entirely new body of work since the project of PA, is still specific to the story of modern art and architecture, but it is far more personal, ambiguous and open-ended because it comes out of the artist's experience of history, not only her study of it.



Katarina Burin
Nova Strana, installation view, 2013
 Langenhagen Kunstverein



Katarina Burin
Petra Andrejova-Molnár: Contribution and Collaboration, installation view, 2015
 Neubauer Collegium, University of Chicago



Katarina Burin
Zijeme, installation view, 2017
 ViPer Gallery Prague

The installation of *Irrational Attachments* at Providence College Galleries includes models, assemblages and sculptural objects informed by the architecture and infrastructure of public spaces common in former Eastern Bloc countries. Positioned throughout the gallery, concrete fragments make up tableaux of furniture-like anti-monuments, or in the artist's words "monuments to the banal." Form blurs with function. Carved inscriptions meet pure abstraction. Smooth concrete surfaces abut natural terrain, as bits of greenery peek out to show signs of life in an otherwise abandoned scene.

The entire scene alludes to several design histories, most obviously to the allusive and varied International Style of Bauhaus and its offshoot of Brutalist architecture, which allowed the likes of Le Corbusier to trade the spatial poetry of steel and glass for grounded, castle-like structures of exposed concrete. But also cast in smooth cement are the hopes and compromises of pre- and postwar Czech architects, who spent decades attempting to develop roles for architecture and design within the larger project of 'constructed socialism.' For these architects the idea of utopia was no longer synonymous with the production of fantastical images of a perfect world sometime and somewhere else. Utopia instead was a conceptual means for working out an effective role for art, architecture and design within the confines of a repressive political system, like that of the Soviet Union. The malleability and cost effectiveness of concrete presented opportunities to think and build holistically. Vast expanses of public and private space could be easily connected, and the landscape designed and shaped for evermore communal living.

In the late 1970s and early 80s of Burin's early childhood in Czechoslovakia and the greater USSR, concrete structures were the backdrop of many family memories of camping and vacationing in Yugoslavia. "We were in public spaces always, with other people. We'd eat together [as a family] under a roof on a concrete platform every night."¹ Such sites, designed for collective activity and serving as a kind of leisure architecture for Soviet workers and their families, inspired Burin's installation for *Irrational Attachments*.

Synthesizing personal memories and biography with what she knows of art and architectural history into a total artwork reminiscent of the plazas common in former Soviet Bloc countries, Burin stages something that seems almost lost: the possibility of architecture to be collectively aspirational, a shared pursuit towards a higher quality of life. Purported to instill active citizenry by unburdening people of irrational attachments to personal spaces and objects, sites such as the one Burin has abstractly envisioned deployed modernist forms to point towards a lifestyle of vacation and leisure.

1 As told to Cate McQuaid for "Conjurer of Worlds" in Architecture Boston, January 2020.



But the collective project of modernism like this was mal adapted to signify a false sense of freedom within oppressively rigid political and ideological borders. With *Irrational Attachments*, Burin knowingly attempts to reconstruct memories that are incongruent with the kind of historical and political accuracy she has honed over years as an art and architecture professional. In the act of trying to remember and recreate, she has instead created something altogether different, a kind of third space that's very much in between.

The architectural ubiquity of the materials and fragments on display in *Irrational Attachments* do not immediately suggest much sentimentality or nostalgia on Burin's part. But upon closer inspection, the viewer sees that incorporated into each object is some quirky detail. A photograph here, a vinyl cushion there. Reliefs of symbols and verse mark several objects. These details are just familiar enough to jog a viewer's distant memory of some forgotten time and place before the memory slips away, back into that in-between space. The familiarity, the in-between space, the distant memories... they all imbue Burin's pavillion and plaza features as much with personal longing as with her predecessors' failures to reconcile political optimism and political doctrine, making concrete and geometry into bittersweet poetry.

–Jamilee Lacy

Katarina Burin: *Irrational Attachments* is the penultimate presentation in PC–G's *Beyond Bauhaus* program, a more than yearlong series of exhibitions, publications and commissioned installations featuring contemporary artists whose studio practices register with the history and concerns of Bauhaus (1919-1933), the German art school so influential on modern art, architecture, craft, design and education.

Installation view of Katarina Burin:
Irrational Attachments, 2020. Concrete,
vinyl, plants. Dimensions variable.



Installation view of Katarina Burin:
Irrational Attachments, 2020. Concrete,
vinyl, plants. Dimensions variable.



Installation view of Katarina Burin:
Irrational Attachments, 2020. Concrete,
vinyl, plants. Dimensions variable.



About Katarina Burin

Katarina Burin was born in Bratislava, Slovakia, and currently lives and works in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and New York City. She has recently exhibited in institutional solo and group shows at Usdan Gallery at Bennington College, Vermont; The Drawing Center, New York; Fitchburg Museum of Art, Massachusetts; Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society at University of Chicago; Kunstverein Langenhagen, Germany; Aspen Art Museum, Colorado; and Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, among others. She is a former Radcliffe Institute Fellow and recipient of the James and Audrey Foster prize from ICA Boston. She has been an artist-in-residence at Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, MuseumQuartier Vienna, Skowhegan, Yaddo, and MacDowell Colony. Burin holds a Master of Fine Arts from Yale University and Bachelor of Fine Arts from University of Georgia. She is faculty in the Department of Art, Film, and Visual Studies at Harvard University.

About PC–G

Providence College Galleries (PC–G) presents exhibitions and public programs focusing on contemporary art, innovative artistic practice and interdisciplinary cultural activity. Operating within two gallery spaces and across Providence College's campus, PC–G supports the educational, service and community-oriented mission of the College with dynamic visual arts productions, including those that foster audience participation, cross-departmental collaboration at the College, and cultural exchange at local, national and international levels. PC–G ultimately strives to produce projects by artists and intellectuals who demonstrate how and why creative practitioners are vital forces in promoting diversity and shaping contemporary global culture.

Katarina Burin: Irrational Attachments is organized by Jamilee Lacy, PC–G Director & Chief Curator, with Jenna Lavallee, Consulting Exhibitions & Events Coordinator. Technical assistance provided by Scott Alario and Naushon Hale.

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Providence College Galleries
—Hunt-Cavanagh Gallery at Hunt-Cavanagh Hall,
—Reilly Gallery at the Smith Center for the Arts
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BEYOND BAUHAUS 2019 – 2020

A New(er) Unity
An Online Primer for Beyond Bauhaus

April 15, 2019 –
August 1, 2020

On the Wall:
Elizabeth Corkery

May 1, 2019 –
July 26, 2019

From the seafoam and
clouds to the here and now

September 11 –
November 17, 2019

Construction House
Heather Rowe & Ad Minoliti

December 4, 2019 –
March 1, 2020

Katarina Burin:
Irrational Attachments

January 15, 2020 –
March 14, 2020

On the Wall
LUFTWERK

March 25, 2020 –
July 26, 2020

PC
-G



Andy Warhol
The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

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of Israel to New England

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