

**Authorship, Architecture, Anonymity:  
The Impossible Career  
of Petra Andrejova-Molnár**

**a project by Katarina Burin**

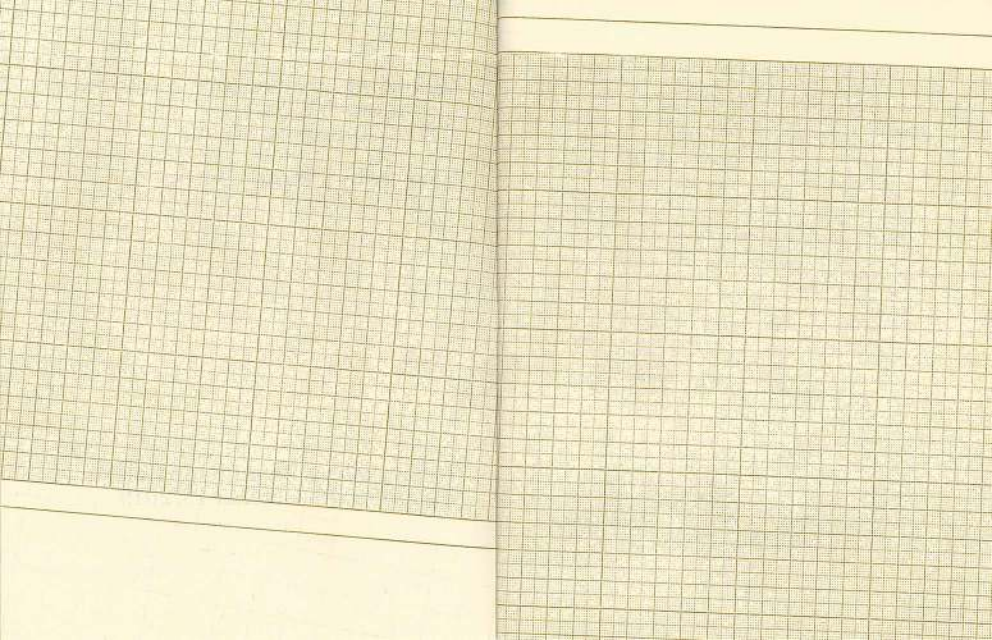
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In 2008, Katarina Burin felt the urge to design a monogram—but not for herself. An artist whose practice had long explored the social instincts of European twentieth-century modernist design, Burin imagined a female Czech architect from the interwar years and conjured the fictional Petra Andrejova-Molnár, known as P.A. Burin spent a decade developing an entire career for P.A., conducting meticulous historical research to aid her production of models and drawings; décor such as furniture, ceramics, textiles, and wallpaper; and documents such as photographs, stationery and catalogs.

It is important to note that all visual artifacts of this fictional archive are made by Burin. These include original works “by P.A.” as well as re-makes of existing models and drawings by historical designers who—in Burin’s imagination—influenced P.A. or with whom she collaborated. This fictive-historical mix serves to anchor P.A. within celebrated design circles that rarely included women despite their utopian goals. In this way, P.A. becomes an amalgam of the marginalized or anonymous women who contributed to the modernist program and, at the same time, represents a personification of creative longing and ghostly absence.

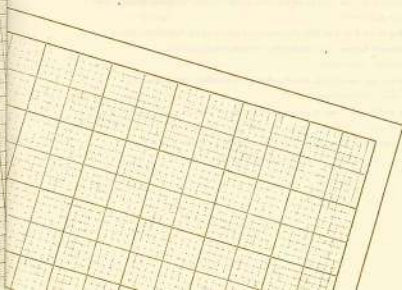
“Authorship, Architecture, Anonymity” marks the completion of Burin’s production as P.A. and is the first exhibit to survey the work in its entirety. As a whole, the project is a complex enterprise that embraces the collectivist zeal of modernism while noting the erasure of women designers from the modernist canon. Prior exhibits have leaned toward presenting P.A. as a forgotten or recently discovered figure. By acknowledging Burin as author, we consider her strategies and reasons for subverting historiographical norms. As researcher, producer, and drafts person, she inhabits bygone models as a means of discovering their bearing on the present.

Burin’s effort is a multilayered engagement with the slippery nature of collaboration, as something intrinsic to architecture and of philosophical value to the socialist spirit of interwar Eastern Europe and modernism overall. Many architectural collaborators—women in particular—have been and continue to be overlooked in favor of a single architectural voice or personality. In her manifestation of P.A., Burin performs a feminist correction of these histories and injustices. At the same time, she is a collaborator with the very history she critiques. Her maneuvers into the past point to propositions for the future—about visual culture, collaborative practice, and theories of collectivity.

It is appropriate that drawing has been essential to the creation of P.A. Architectural drawings are instrumental (for their relationship to physical construction), and perspective (for the desires and goals that they reflect). Burin’s use of technical drawing to give shape to P.A.’s life and career emphasizes the supple relationship to time afforded by the medium. For these reasons, we have placed drawing at the center of the exhibition.

One way to view Burin’s fiction is as individual pieces of a historical puzzle. Instead, we invite the viewer to appreciate the production of P.A.’s career as a single work of art. For Burin, the documentation of architecture is perhaps more important or “real” than the buildings or events it represents. Among investigations that are usually textual, Burin’s project is all the more intriguing for being visual: having allowed herself to be possessed by the spirit of a past moment, the artist has made manifest an archive that would have been.

Farhad Mirza and Anne Thompson, exhibition curators

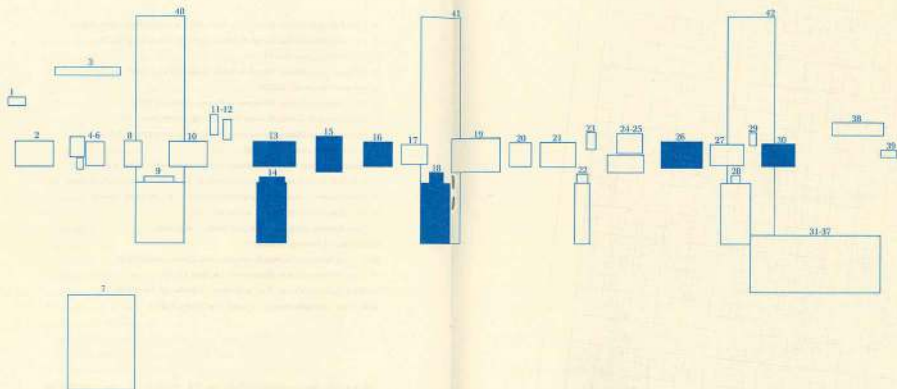


Works on the main gallery wall, keyed to the map on the following pages:

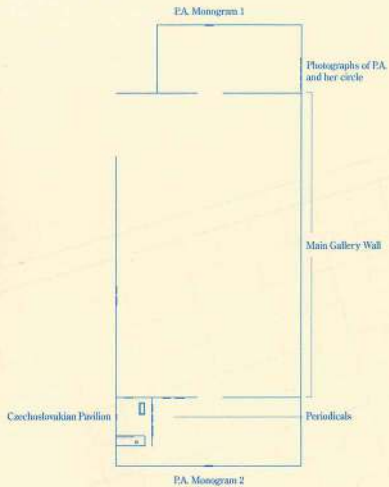
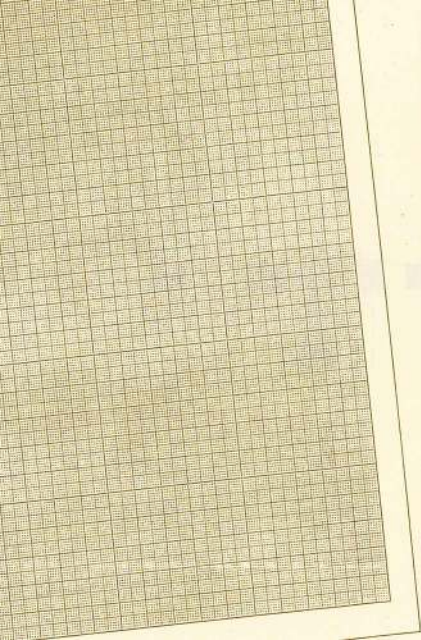
1. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Wall sconce*, 1930
2. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Hotel Nord-Sud north and south elevation drawings*, 1932-34
3. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Hotel Nord-Sud sign*, 1932-34
4. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Hotel Nord-Sud stationery*, 1932-34
5. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Hotel Nord-Sud stationery*, 1932-34
6. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Hotel Nord-Sud notebook*, 1932-34
7. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Hotel Nord-Sud night tables (blue and yellow)*, 1930
8. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Hotel Nord-Sud drawing for night table with drawer*, 1930
9. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Hotel Nord-Sud model*, 1932-34
10. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Hotel Nord-Sud lobby interior perspective drawing*, 1932-34
- 11-12. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Wall sconces (vertical stripes)*, 1927
13. Jaromír Krejcar, *First project for a villa for Dr. Vladislav Vondruš in Zbraslav, near Prague, perspective view*, 1924
14. Jaromír Krejcar, *First project for a villa for Dr. Vladislav Vondruš in Zbraslav, near Prague, model*, 1924
15. Jan Víšek, *Project for Sílvan Sanatorium, perspective view, firm's event*, 1929-35
16. Jaromír Krejcar, *Competition entry (first prize) for a sanatorium, Třebíčský Teplice*, 1929
17. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Project for Modern Apartment, elevation drawing for Czechoslovak Werkbund*, 1927
18. József Fischer, *House at Szépvölgy Avenue, model, Budapest*, 1935
19. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Second project for Studio Efficiency for the Group of Creative Artists (G.C.A.) in the countryside, elevations*, 1938-50

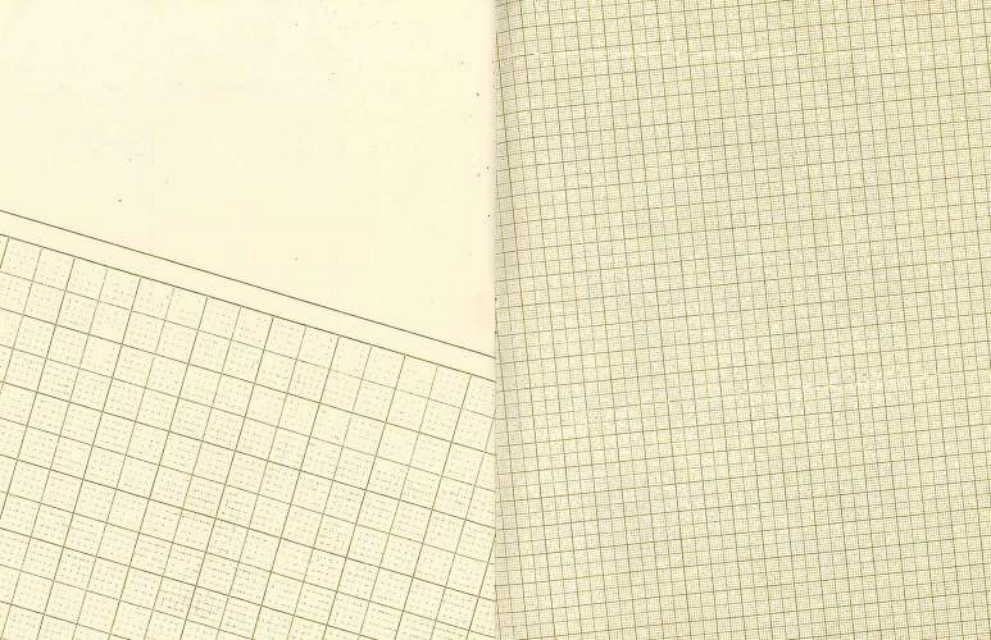
20. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Bedroom for Studio Efficiency, axonometric view*, 1938-50
21. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Second project for Studio Efficiency for the G.C.A. in the countryside, elevations*, 1938-50
22. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Second project for Studio Efficiency for the G.C.A. in the countryside, model*, 1938-50
23. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Mailbag and sconce with clock*, 1934
24. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Weekend House, Felsőlőd, perspective*, 1932
25. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Second project for Studio Efficiency for the G.C.A. in the countryside, elevations*, 1938-50
26. Bohuslav Fuchs, *Competition project for the Pavilion of the G.C.A. in Brno*, 1936
27. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Competition project for the Pavilion of the G.C.A. in Brno*, 1937
28. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Second project for storefront design, model*, 1937-50
29. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Brno wall sconce*, 1948
30. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Design for Klaber 21 shop front, first and second drawings, Brno*, 1935
- 31-37. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Merchandise from Žijeme, Brno*, 1928-31
38. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Žijeme store sign, Brno*, 1928-31
39. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Brno wall sconce for Studio Efficiency*, 1948
- 40-42. Petra Andrejova-Molnář, *Wallpaper from Žijeme*, 1928-31

Other works in the exhibit include two P.A. monograms, cover designs for periodicals, P.A.'s designs for the Czechoslovakian Pavilion in Paris, 1935, and photographs of P.A. and her contemporaries.











Biography of Petra Andrejova-Molnár, b. 1898, date of death unknown

PA, as she was known professionally, was at the center of a vibrant architectural community working between the World Wars in the newly established Czechoslovak and Hungarian People's Republics. She and those in her circle, including József Fischer, Bohuslav Fuchs, Jaromír Krejcar, and Farkas Molnár, came of age with the countries that rose from the Austro-Hungarian Empire's demise in October 1918. In the shifting political arena of redrawn boundaries, these architects were emboldened by the utopian spirit of the age. They embraced an architecture that championed modernity, efficiency, functionality, and a commitment to human progress and innovation.

Petra Josefína Andrejová was born in Zlín (Moravian Czechoslovakia) to an educated bourgeois family with connections to a thriving Czech textile industry. She studied at the School of Decorative Arts in Prague and the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. While traveling extensively in the early 1920s, spending time in Brno, Budapest, Prague, Vienna, and Berlin, she sought out like-minded architects, designers, typographers and artists and developed a broad regional network. It was in these years that PA encountered the Hungarian architect Farkas Molnár who would become her husband and sometime collaborator.

PA's early work comprised drawings, models and unrealized projects for exhibits of the Avion Hotel, in Brno (1927-29) and with Krejcar on his Machinář Sanatorium, in Trenčianske Teplice (1928-30). This training proved influential when, in 1932, she began designing her first solo project, the Weekend House, a simple rectilinear structure dominated by a recessed glass wall.

Andrejova-Molnár played an editorial and design role in several architectural and design journals of the 1920s and '30s in Prague and Brno. In 1928, in Brno, she established Žijíme—roughly translated as “living”—a small shop and meeting place for which she designed the storefront, signage and interior. Run by fellow architect Hana Kačerová-Záveská, Žijíme sold decorative objects and furniture by Czech designers but, more significantly, served as a hub for an international design community that would gather there for readings, lectures and political discussions.

PA's signature interwar project was the Hotel Nord-Sud (1932-34), on the Adriatic near the Yugoslav coastal town of Zadar. Notable for its sense of intimacy, it contained fourteen cabin-like bedrooms and two suites, all with balconies; a third-floor lookout café; a second-floor restaurant and bar; and glass-walled terraces. Extensive use of glass allowed constant views of the sea. Destroyed during the Second World War, the Hotel Nord-Sud synthesized architectural trends of the day and, like the structure itself, defines a design era of hopeful internationalism and youthful idealism now lost to us.

After attempting and failing to open her own architecture practice in Brno, PA left the city in the mid-1930s for Budapest and Vienna. She fled Austria after the Nazi annexation and settled in France, where she remained until the liberation of Paris by Allied Forces in 1944. Her precise activities in France remain unknown—there is little concrete evidence for suggestions that she was involved in leftist politics, but it appears likely she was in contact with artists and designers including Robert and Sonia Delaunay. By 1945, she had relocated permanently to the United States, where she began once again to design. One of the few known details about her life in the United States: she oversaw construction of her minimal Studio Efficiency countryside retreat, designed in 1938 and redesigned in 1950 for an American client.

As a rare female participant in the male-dominated dialogues of the period, PA not only found establishing her own architectural practice to be a challenge but also was neglected by historians who considered her work marginal. In recent years, especially since the fall of Communism, archival material has become more available and the breadth of PA's contributions and influence have become apparent.

Excerpted from:

- *Between Brno and Budapest: The work of Petra Andrejova-Molnár and her Contemporaries*, catalog for exhibition at the Architectural Association, London, 1978

- *Contribution and Collaboration: The Work of Petra Andrejova-Molnár and her Contemporaries*, catalog for exhibition at the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, University of Chicago, 2015.

Katarina Burin was born in Bratislava, Slovakia, and fled with her family at the age of six via Yugoslavia to Toronto, where she grew up. She received her BA from the University of Georgia and her MFA from Yale University. She is a lecturer in the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University. Recent exhibitions include *Zijeme*, at ViPer (Prague); Open Sessions residency and exhibitions at the Drawing Center, New York; Neuhauer Collegium for Culture and Society (University of Chicago); Kunstverein Langenhagen; the Aspen Art Museum; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and shows at Ratio 3 (San Francisco), M29 Richter & Brückner (Cologne), and Lucile Corty (Paris). Her awards include fellowships from the Radcliffe Institute and the Graham Foundation; the 2013 James and Audrey Foster prize from the ICA Boston; and residencies at MuseumsQuartier (Vienna), Skowhegan, Yaddo, and the MacDowell Colony.

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