

arcVision Prize
Women and architecture 2013
Honorable mention



SIIRI VALLNER
KAVAKAVA
TALLIN, ESTONIA

Siiri Vallner is one of the young fresh contestants who has caught the Jury's attention. Dividing her work between two architectural practices, including the all women practice, KAVAKAVA, Siiri Vallner has completed structures for schools, sports and cultural activities which have become recognizable landmarks in Estonia's new architectural scene. The jury felt that her Downtown Gym embodied sensitive interpretation of the site as well as contributing to the immediate surroundings. Both the ground works and the elevation relating to the existing building draws the outdoor space into the interior of the gymnasium space. The gymnasium is sensitively wrapped in an inventive and crafted brick wall.

The Jury believes Vallner deserves special mention as this multi-purpose work successfully brings out clarity, simplicity, flexibility and courage while it harmonizes with its natural surroundings and the neighborhood. It is both flexible and courageous in blending the old and the new: Vallner's work exhibits many of the qualities we want to encourage in the built environment.

BIOGRAPHY

Siiri Vallner (born in 1972) set up her own practice after studying architecture and urban planning in Estonia, Denmark and the US. She has carried out a broad array of works, mostly public buildings. Recently she has been working on different social projects – short-term accommodation for temporarily homeless people in Tallinn, foster homes in Kuressaare and a public sauna in Tallinn. Siiri Vallner has won many awards including the first Estonian Young Architect Award in 2009. She is a studio instructor at the Estonian Academy of Arts, dept of architecture. Besides other projects, she was co-editor of the landscape architecture issue of the Estonian architectural review Maja in 2006 (together with Katrin Koov).

"A real surprise in the little known cultural landscape of Estonia, Siiri Vallner works at a highly sophisticated level in relation to the historical context, although her aim is to design buildings that are clearly contemporary.

In just a few years she has managed to complete a series of infrastructures (for education, sport and culture) which are genuine landmarks in Estonia's new architectural scene.

Of these, the public sports hall in Pärnu is the best known and most interesting: the building has been designed as a fluid masonry box in a "fabric" of bricks in relief, closed on one side and left open on the other with a large glass wall looking outwards and, symbolically, toward the community and the two historic buildings that form the complex's original identity.

A building explicitly linked to the memory of a dramatic past is the Museum of the Occupations (the Soviet and the Nazi occupations) in the capital, Tallinn.

In addition to the ethical motivations of her work, Vallner provides a special sensitivity to the gender issue in the architectural profession: one of the two architectural practices with which she works, Kavakava, is staffed entirely by women." Stefano Casciani, scientific director arcVision Prize

DOWNTOWN GYM - Pärnu, Estonia

“The Gym is located in a park (former bastion belt) which surrounds historical town center. It is addition to existing school house – old brick building from 19th century. Newcomer is facing towards the old building, between them cozy courtyard is formed. Gym is designed for children of three surrounding schools (one of the schools is for disabled kids). It is also publicly used at evenings and for competitions. A simple sculptural volume creates different dialogues with old building. At daytime gym's north facing glass facade is mirroring the old building, at night time it works as a big projector-lamp.

Red brick is characteristic material for Pärnu likewise the closest neighbor building. For the gym wall we looked for new way of using the traditional material. Special angular pattern was used for brick walls to animate the surface. 365 small windows inside brick wall bring light in during day and out to park at night. In summertime when the trees around are green, the building disappears into the park, in winter-season it communicates more with surrounding cityscape.”

