

Instagrammable Architectural Drawing?

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Abstract

Although the first social network dates back to the late 1970s, the real 'Big Bang' occurred twenty years ago, when 2003 Mark Zuckerberg led the birth of Facebook, still one of the most popular social networks today. However, even more critical to the discussion, including the interests of our community of image designers and researchers, is the emergence of social networks such as Pinterest and Instagram in 2010. The interest in these platforms lies in their way of sharing different forms of visuality, so much so that the digital images shared on these socials have become sources of inspiration for new generations, a kind of visual library, albeit a questionable one, to draw on for graphic production as well. Even architectural drawing has not been exempt from this practice, making architectural images more accessible to a broader audience. Today, it is common practice for architects to share their designs and drawings on these platforms, allowing people from different parts of the world to see, appreciate and even 'consume' their work. In this regard, through the reconnaissance and comparative analysis of some social pages and profiles of architect-draftsman who share and promote architectural drawings, the essay aims to investigate the plurality and complexity of formal aspects of architectural drawing in the age of social networks in order to identify its limits, expressive potential, and underlying or explicit cultural prodromes. The primary intent of the essay is to bring more attention to a now widespread and established practice that calls us into question as a academic community.

Keywords: architectural drawing, communication, social networking, Instagram.

Introduction

The transformation of architectural drawings from simple functional tools to "aesthetic objects" [Dufrenne 1969] with cultural and historical value has been a significant process that has profoundly changed the thinking about architecture and its practice. Before the 1970s, architectural drawings were primarily considered a means of making buildings. This epistemological and cultural transformation was fostered by a network of galleries, collectors and cultural institutions that helped to value them as autonomous works of art and important cultural artefacts. However, as the boundaries of architecture changed in the late 20th century, attention to drawings began to change. Exhibitions and expositions highlighting drawings as signifying objects independent of the

buildings helped trigger this new perception [Pelkonen 2018; Kauffman 2019]. Moreover, the founding of architectural museums dedicated to collecting and preserving drawings further enshrined the new status of these objects. Drawings became witnesses to the history and thought of architecture and acquired an essential role in academic, scientific, and artistic debate [Cervellini 2013]. The influence of this change has been significant both for architecture itself and for its history. Architectural drawings once considered mere tools, now influence discussions and theoretical reflections within different disciplines. This new perception has led to an increased focus on drawings' aesthetics and intrinsic meaning, going beyond their simple functional purpose.

Moreover, there is a new transformation of these objects being displayed, exhibited and shared in a totally new way. The advent of digital tools and technologies has not only enriched the possibilities of representing and displaying architecture. However, it has fundamentally changed the communication of architecture through new 'platforms' for sharing them.

Although the first social network –Usenet– dates back to the late 1970s, its spread was slow and gradual. So much so that it was not until the early years of the 21st century that there was a natural expansion due to the more significant and rapid accessibility of the network and the gradual spread of portable personal devices such as smartphones and tablets. However, probably the real 'Big Bang' of social networking occurred two decades ago, when in 2003, Mark Zuckerberg, together with some of his colleagues, developed an interactive photo album of Harvard students that led to the birth of Facebook, still one of the most popular social networks today.

However, even more critical for discussion, including concerning the interests of our community of image designers and researchers, is the emergence 2010 of social networks such as *Pinterest* and *Instagram*. The interest in these platforms lies in their way of sharing different forms of visuality, so much so that the digital images shared on these socials have become sources of inspiration for new generations, a kind of visual library, albeit a questionable one, to draw on for graphic production as well.

Even architectural drawings has not been exempt from this practice, making architectural images more accessible to a broader audience. Today, it is common practice for architects to share their designs and drawings on these platforms, allowing people from different parts of the world to see, appreciate and even 'consume' their work. In fact, if one looks at some of the metadata that allows for thematic aggregation of social network content, one can observe a wide use of these as containers and means for the dissemination of architectural images.

For example, one can see that architecture-related hashtags are widely employed by querying *Instagram* through some keywords. The hashtag #architecture has 182,296,546 posts, the one related to architecture photos #architecturephotography gathers 24,594,075 posts, and the one #architecturaldrawing 542,050 [1]. Although significantly smaller, the metadata related to architectural drawings highlights a wide use of this platform to convey content, albeit in its heterogeneity, assimilated to our discipline.

In recent years, several authors [Quici 2018; Ghosh 2019; Izadpanah 2021; Gutiérrez 2022; Shaikh 2023] have paid attention to this practice involving the graphic production of architects, identifying its prerogatives, practices, potentialities and criticalities.

Of particular interest is the position of Perry Kulper [2023], who, in his essay *Instagram as Interface: The New Picture Plane*, identifies in the social network a new way of seeing and interacting with images of architecture while tracing this practice back to the traditional concept of the 'plane,' that is, the two-dimensional surface on which an image is produced and projected.

Digital dimension

However, this shift toward a digital and shared dimension of architectural drawings, which has become established in recent years, requires a critical reinterpretation of the underlying artistic and scientific thought, but above all, a careful analysis of the operative action of drawing as it manifests itself in its object dimension.

Just as Walter Benjamin already pointed out in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility* [1936/2022], with the advent of photography and cinema, there is a substantial loss of the uniqueness of the work of art, which has entailed a radical transformation of the way these are perceived, produced, distributed and thus enjoyed. While there is a 'democratization' that makes them accessible to a broad audience, there is also a 'loss of authenticity' of the same that also implies a 'decay of experience' that can only occur with direct enjoyment of the original work of art.

Precisely today, in the midst of the digital age and immediate access to art through the Internet and social media, the reflections of the German philosopher and critic assume significant relevance for the reinterpretation of certain phenomena. Images that until a century ago existed only in the 'real world', albeit in different forms and exhibitions, today also manifest themselves in their digital dimension, produced or reproduced on electronic devices or the web. This dimension implies a different experience in observing a digital image than its physical counterpart. The observer's interpretation and experience are strongly conditioned by the environment in which it is exposed, which, in the case of the images in question, is subordinated to the limitations and potential of the device used. Digital production and

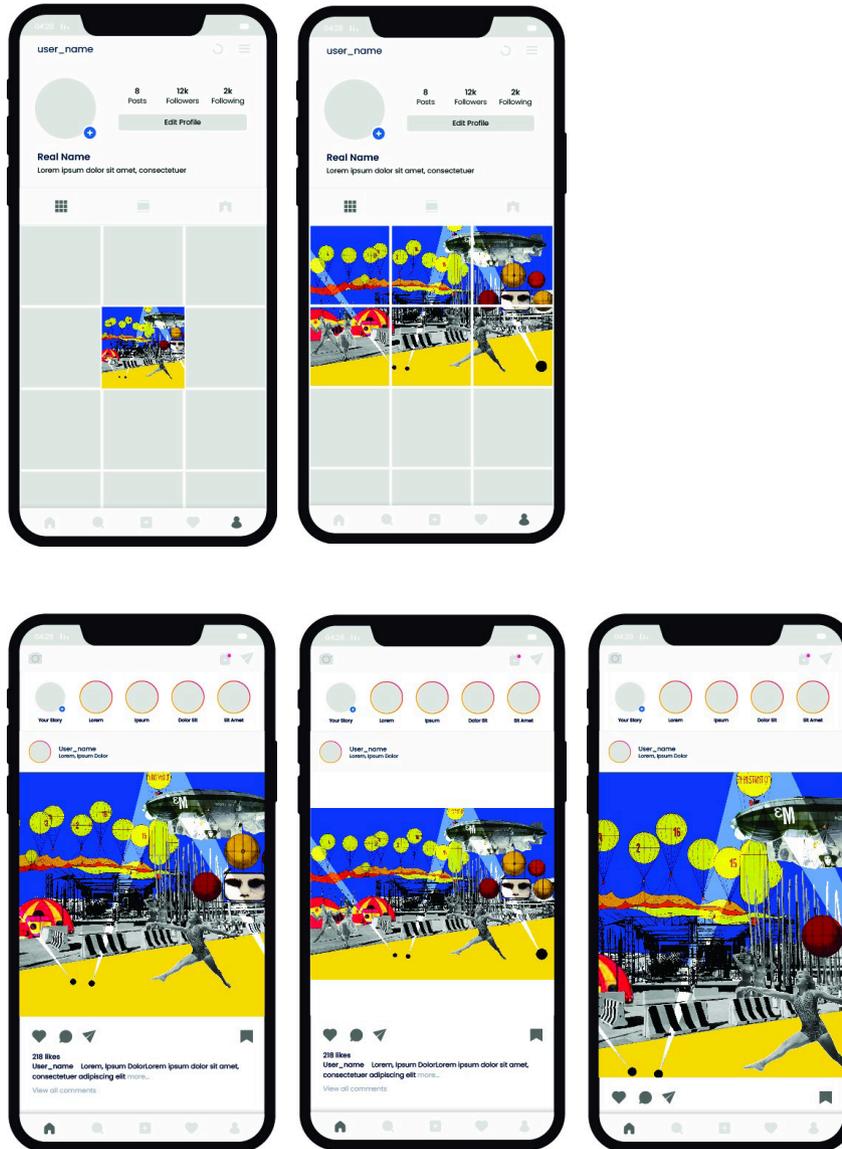


Fig. 1. Display the same image in the various modes with the relative standard sizes allowed by Instagram (graphic processing by the author).

reproduction techniques, same analogue ones, have constraints related to formats and resolution that inevitably subordinate the visual experience.

For example, on *Instagram*, it is possible to see how images are displayed multiple times, ranging from viewing the profile page to temporary Stories with a maximum of sixty seconds. The profile can display a series of square format images arranged in rows of three, which, once opened, can change in format –square, horizontal or vertical– with specific sizes and resolutions [2] (fig. 1). This implies that if images are not explicitly made to be shared in this social and may be significantly larger than the size of the devices; also the need to be cropped or to rely on cropping done automatically by the software. At the same time, it is also possible to spread the image, appropriately prepared, over several windowpanes provided by the 'profile' view (feed) to make it more extensively visible. However, if viewed on a single pane, it loses its entirety and may sometimes be incomprehensible. Of course, the practice of cropping images to fit graphic layouts is common practice, especially in publishing, but if not done with reason it can be an action that distorts the very meaning of the image [Berger 2007; Falcinelli 2020].

A further issue related to the use of this social falls into what Giovanni Anceschi [1992] called "Iconogeny", that is, the quality of some works compared to others to come better in their reproduction, and which today is called "Instagrammability", a neologism that indicates precisely the ability of an image in functioning better being enjoyed in such dimensions to be shared on various social platforms. In this regard, by reconfiguring some social pages that share and promote architectural drawings and profiles of architect-teachers, the essay identifies the plurality and complexity of aspects that make an architectural drawing more attractive, thus 'Instagrammable'. The methodology used is used to understand whether its success is related to the expressive potential of the graphic artefact or issues purely related to internal mechanisms of the social network.

Architectural Drawing and *Instagram*

The selection of profiles for analysis with more than 10,000 followers falls into three macro categories. The first of a collective nature; the second authorship that, in addition to having a graphic production, is characterized by a critical-cultural action on contemporary architectural

drawing; and the third is related to emerging profiles of architect-illustrators. Three profiles were selected for the first category: KoozArch (@KoozArch - 157,528 followers), a digital magazine that explores architecture beyond the built form through critical readings of drawings; Post Digital Architecture (@postdigitalarchitecture - 50. 811 followers), which focuses on promoting the post-digital culture of architectural drawing and also has a commercial character; Drawing papers (@drawingpapers - 34,723 followers), which presents itself as a platform for sharing speculative architectural drawings with a more traditional character. For the second category, profiles were chosen that promote the culture of contemporary architectural drawing and are curated by authors who are also academically active: Bryan Cantley (@bcantl3y - 29,740 followers), an architect and professor at California State University in the Department of Visual Art, as well as the author of the volume *Speculative Coolness: Architecture, Media, the Real, and the Virtual* (2023); Daniel K. Brown (@danielkbrownarchitecture - 23,427 followers) an architect and professor at the Victoria University of Wellington at the School of Architecture, who investigates the relationship between architecture and dystopia in his academic research; Eric Wong (@ericwong_folio - 17,947 followers) an architect and illustrator who works primarily on illustration and editorial design, and professor at the University of Melbourne at the School of Design. For the third category, three profiles of illustrators who are establishing themselves as 'influencers' of architectural drawings were chosen: Saul Kim (@saul_kim_ - 119,486 followers) Korean architect famous for his Architecture Anomaly series of architectural models and images; Karina Armanda (@karinaarmanda - 11. 776 followers) an architectural illustrator based in Tokyo, known for her online courses on the use of some vector software for post-production of graphic designs; Pauline Personeni (@pa.per.narratives - 10,586 followers) an architect and illustrator who has been working as a graphic designer with *Actar Publishers* for several years.

The nine selected *Instagram* profiles were first compared through some online artificial intelligence tools that perform profile analysis using metrics and related graphs [3]. Specifically, all the profiles were analyzed by detecting users' interests following the pages, identifying the nine most liked images and the related use of hashtags, and checking for the presence of tags on the image with the most likes that leads it back to other profiles.

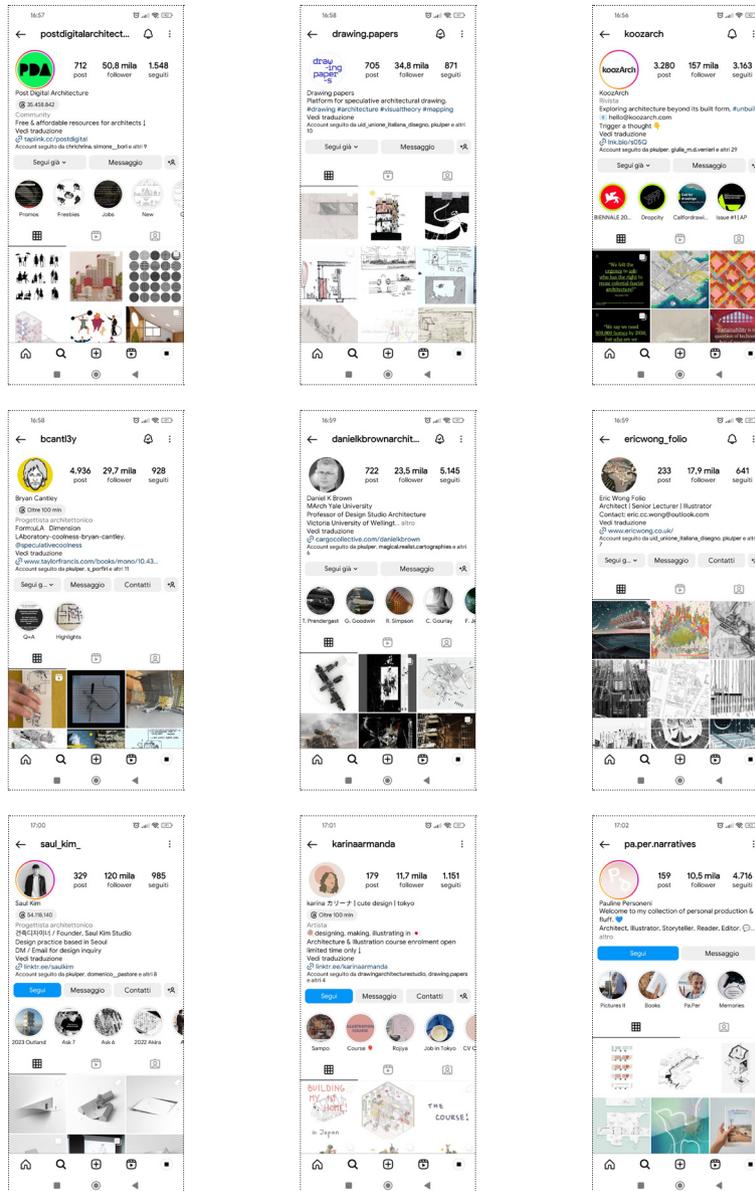


Fig. 2. The nine profiles selected for comparative analysis in feed visualization (graphic elaboration by the author).

The first interesting finding that emerges from the metric analysis relates to the main words –‘art’ and ‘student’– in the profile descriptions of users following the different pages, which point to a prevalence of certain propensities. This suggests that users interested in the architecture drawings shared on the various Instagram profiles analyzed are students, probably of architecture, and interested in art-related fields.

For each profile and on the related nine images with the most likes, the prevalent use of hashtags was observed [4], data that detected a more or less developed ability to index pages. If in the first category –related to the profiles of KoozArch, Post Digital Architecture and Drawing papers– one notices the prevalent use of a hashtag proper to the page that helps index it and some other prevalent ones that profile more the authors or curators’ interests. In the second category, some difference is noticeable. Bryan Cantley uses hashtags on only two of the nine images, and Daniel K. Brown uses the same ones for all the images. At the same time, Eric Wong chooses to adapt them to the type of image. However, in the latter case, it is interesting to note that among the nine images identified, as many as seven were processed with the help of artificial intelligence. These do not correspond to the prevalent type of illustration he typically processes. In fact, if one looks at his profile in its entirety, these seven images are related to a small just 9 out of 233 from a short experimentation conducted with *Midjourney*.

In the last category, except for Saul Kim, who does not use hashtags, Karina Armanda and Pauline Personeni mostly use the same types to be indexed and recognizable for their authorial work.

On the other hand, if we look at the images with the most likes (fig. 3), we notice some internal mechanisms within the social network.

In the case of the KoozArch profile, the image in question (2,742 likes) (fig. 4a) has a tag that links it directly to the profile of Technische Universiteit Delft (@tudelft - 57,400 followers), as the author Dominika Kopiarová turns out to be a student at this institution. The image, a digital photo-collage cropped from a more extensive one on the magazine’s website, is in formal aspects very similar to the one in the ninth position, which in turn was elaborated by Pier Vittorio Aureli and Martino Tattara of Dogma, a studio famous for its critical-cultural positions that find their arguments not only in theoretical writings but also in images with an evocative solid character. In the Post Digital

Architecture profile, the image in question (1,397 likes) (fig. 4b) tags and links back to the profile of Dimitris Gourdoukis (@object.e - 27,300 followers), founder of Object.e architecture and professor at the School of Architecture at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The drawing in question falls into what can be described as a postdigital collage on a photographic basis that has the characteristics peculiar to the page that re-posted it. The last image (3,279 likes) (fig. 4c) in the first category regarding the Drawing papers page two profiles are tagged: Troy Donovan (@the_donnies - 350,000 followers), an architect who is characterized by his interest in the design of architectural skins, and Arno Pieters (@apie08 - 10,600 followers), the author of the drawing. Unlike the first two, this one shows a sketch of a sectioned portion of a building that contains many construction details, with an attitude similar to the famous drawings of Australian architect Glenn Murcutt. The first image (27,186 likes) (fig. 4g) of Saul Kim and the third (1,501 likes) (fig. 4i) of Pauline Personeni, belonging to the third category, do not have tags. In comparison, the second image (1,919 likes) (fig. 4h) by Karina Armanda tags some profiles [7] who share and promote contemporary architectural drawings with particular attention to the illustrations reworked with vector graphics, typical of her profile.

In the profile image of Bryan Cantley (1,395 likes) (fig. 4d), a magazine [5] and several schools and institutions of architecture [6] are tagged, underscoring the author’s university affiliation. Of particular interest is the tag related to the SCI-Arc profile (@sciarc - 216,000 followers), a centre of cultural innovation and school of architecture in Los Angeles that shows in all its channels a focus on architectural drawing, in its most contemporary forms, as a privileged tool of investigation. The image in question, which starts with a plan of Le Corbusier’s *Notre-Dame du Haut*, highlights the speculative prevalence of drawings produced and posted throughout the page.

The one (3,660 likes) (fig. 4e) related to Daniel K. Brown’s profile, on the other hand, reports to the profile of Nick Sinclair (@sinclair_architecture - 662 followers), a Master of Architecture student at Victoria University of Wellington, an institution where the profile owner teaches. The entire profile’s seemingly authorial images are instead attributable to university students and the result of courses taught by the author.

While not fully representing the author’s work, as mentioned above, the last image in the second category

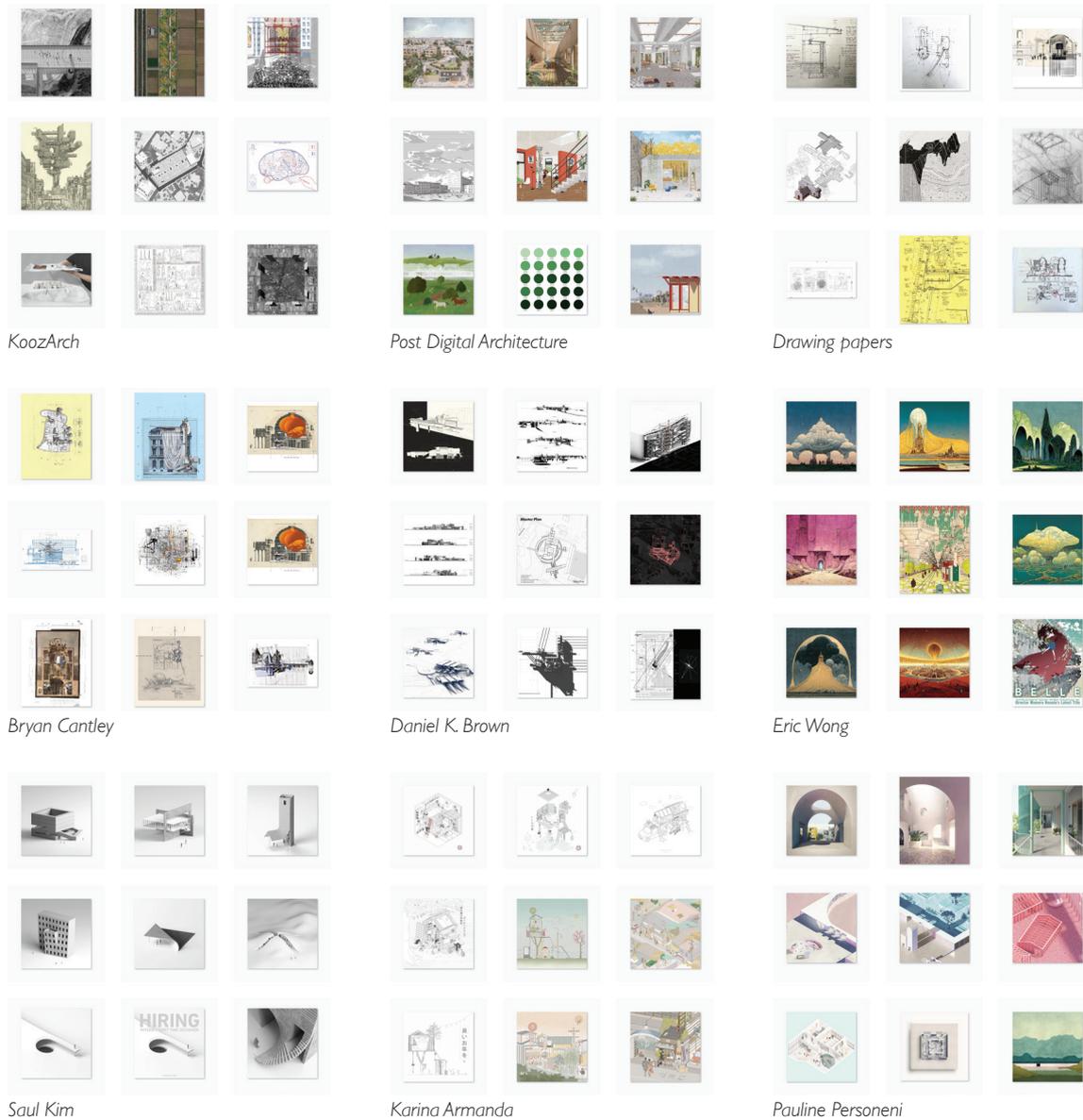


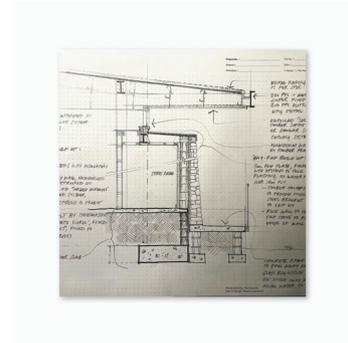
Fig. 3. Summary table of the nine images with the most like of all nine profiles selected for comparative analysis (graphic elaboration by the author).



a. KoozArch



b. Post Digital Architecture



c. Drawing papers



d. Bryan Cantley



e. Daniel K. Brown



f. Eric Wong



g. Saul Kim



h. Karina Armanda



i. Pauline Personeni

Fig. 4. Image summary table with more like of all nine profiles selected for comparative analysis (graphic elaboration by the author).

(5,597 likes) (fig. 4f) regarding Eric Wong's profile highlights with its unique tag Midjourney Gallery (@midjourney.gallery - 219,000 followers) a relevant theme that is invading architectural drawing, related to the experimental and innovative use of artificial intelligence in image production.

The first image (27,186 likes) (fig. 4g) of Saul Kim and the third (1,501 likes) (fig. 4i) of Pauline Personeni, belonging to the third category, do not have tags. In comparison, the second image (1,919 likes) (fig. 4h) of Karina Armanda tags some profiles [7] that share and promote contemporary architectural drawings with a focus on illustrations reworked with vector graphics, typical of her profile.

Conclusions

Investigation of the nine social pages that share and promote architectural drawings allows us to identify several internal dynamics within *Instagram* that characterize some of the reasons why an image, in this case, related to architecture, may be more successful. However, suppose one looks at the phenomenon of which the nine profiles are only illustrative. In that case, one can see multiple manifestations related to the plurality of architectural drawing – a complexity of visual artefacts that vary in graphic form and intent. From the first category, one can

deduce a willingness to collect drawings with a definite editorial line, ranging from the speculative form of drawing to the more formal one, much like what used to happen and continues to happen in many trade magazines. From the second, it is inferred that the medium is a way of amplifying and conveying the individual research that takes the form of a speculative form manifested through the drawings produced, from the more theoretical investigations to those in the field of education. From the last, one can infer a need, albeit very heterogeneous, for promoting work about a form of linguistic research of authorial drawing.

The analysis and observation of the phenomena related to the sharing of architectural drawings on *Instagram* highlights a renewed interest in this practice. Although very different from what occurred in the 1970s with art galleries, a phenomenon highlights the vibrancy and plurality that architectural drawing is summarised in the last decade. Social media, with all the risks associated with the superficiality and speed of their use, have, on the one hand, led to the emergence of new networks of sharing that are thickening around this subject. On the other hand, they have brought about the emergence of graphic languages of their own related to new media. Both topics require careful reflection that our academic community should not shy away from and should devote more attention to.

Notes

[1] The data presented and analyzed in the essay were updated as of August 25, 2023.

[2] All images in the feed are cropped to a square. Instagram posts can be square (1080 × 1080 px, with a ratio of 1:1), horizontal (1200×566 px, with a ratio of 1,91:1), or vertical (1080×1350 px, with a ratio of 4 :5). Recommended story image dimensions are full-screen vertical (1080×1920 px, with an aspect ratio of 9:16).

[3] The tools used for the analysis are: Toolzu <<https://toolzu.com/profile-analyzer/Instagram/>>; InsTrack <<https://instrack.app/>>.

[4] Below are the prevalent hashtags obtained by *InsTrack* for the nine *Instagram* profiles analyzed and which are repeated at least five times. KoozArch (@KoozArch): koozarch 7; unbuilt 7; archipelago 6; architecture 6. Post Digital Architecture (@postdigitalarchitecture): postdigitalarchitecture 9; illustrarch 9; architecturecollage 7; archisource 5; archive 5; showitbetter 5; archdaily 5; collage 5. Drawing papers (@drawing.papers): drawingpapers 9; architecture 7; architecturestudent 7; architecturelovers 6; design 5; illustration 5; drawing 5; drawingarchitecture 5; sketch 5. Bryan Cantley (@bcantl3y): no hashtag that re-

peats more than twice. Daniel K. Brown (@danielkbrownarchitecture): sketch 11; architecturesketch 9; architecture 9; arch 9; archisketch 9; art 9; drawing 9; sketchbook 9; illustration 9; architecturedrawing 9; architecturelovers 9; architects 9; urbansketchers 9; architecturestudent 9; sketching 9; arq 9; architecturedesign 9; archilovers 9; arches 9; hunter 9; urbansketching 9; architect 9; design 9; sketchoftheday 9; sketchcollector 9; watercolor 9; architecturephotography 8; urbansketch 7; bhfyp 7. Erik Wong (@ericwong_folio): design 9; architecture 9; midjourney 7; midjourneyai 7; midjourneyart 7; at 7; aiart 7; aigeneratedart 7; aiartist 7; artists 7; artwork 7; aiwork 7; aiartwork 7; aiartcomm 7; aiartcommunity 7; aidesign 7; digitaldrawing 7; aiarchitecture 7; architect 7; imagination 7. Saul Kim (@saul_kim_): no use of hashtags. Karina Armanda (karinaarmanda): best_of_illustrations 9; architecture 9; thebna 9; archlibrary 8; tokyo 8; architecturecollage 8; showitbetter 8; archit_magazine 8; archisource 8; critday 8; the_yap 8; urbandesignlab 8; archdl 7; ghibliredraw 7; team_map 7; archvizz 6; ukiyoe 5; architecturevisualization 5; designinspiration 5; kyoto 5; japanesearchitecture 5; dezeen 5; instaarch 5; architecturefoundation 5; poggiodanese 5. Pauline Personeni (@pa.per.narratives): architecture 9; storytelling 9; nextarch 9; critday 9; thearchiologist 9; heyai 9; archive 9; kntxtr 9; architectureonpaper 9; photoshop 8; archviz 8;

KoozArch 8; illustrarch 8; archisource 8; showitbetter 7; thearchitecturestudentblog 7; studioofblo 7; illustration 6; thebestnewarchitects 6; av_platform 6; architecturestudent 5; creative 5.

[5] Glue Publication. Ball State College of Architecture and Planning Official Journal (@gluepublication - 618 follower).

[6] David R. Ravin School of Architecture (SoA) at the University of North Carolina – Charlotte (@cltarchitecture - 4.193 follower); UCLA Architecture and Urban Design (@uclaauad - 20.800 follower); SCI-

Arc (@sciarc - 216.000 follower); College of Architecture and Design at University of Tennessee, Knoxville (@utkcoad - 3.854 follower); School of Arts and Humanities at University of Huddersfield (@ah-huddersfield - 3.672 follower).

[7] Toffu | Architecture (@toffuco - 112.000 follower); Tokyo Designer's Club (@tokyodesignersclub - 314 oollower); illustrArch • Architecture (@illustrarch - 1 Mln follower); Archi Pop (@archi.pop - 4.100 follower); ARCHIHUB (@archihub - 23.100 follower); ARCHITECTURAL BOOM (@archi.boom - 52.200 follower).

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