

Architecture in the Age of Social Media

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Instagram and social media have become primary resources for architectural inspiration for students and young practitioners. A collective shift towards social media as an ideas base has meant that traditional outlets, such as major magazines, are no longer the gatekeepers of success in architecture.

The propulsion of one's career is no longer quite so caught up with 'who you know'; instead, rising stars and influencers are emerging by sharing their work online. The era of starchitects may well be ending; however, the age of the 'architectural influencer' is upon us.

But what do we make of this algorithmic revolution? How fair is this algorithm, and what is the constant need for attention doing to the wider architectural discourse in education and practice?

Since my second year of university, I have been sharing my architectural drawings and ideas through Instagram and various other platforms. Why, might you ask?

In all honesty, it's because I wanted to build a following that I could leverage to start an architectural business in the future. I realised during university that architecture often struggles with a disproportionate balance between the skills required, average working hours and salary. Consider the almost decade-long process of becoming an architect, during which time the average income rarely rises above £35,000. However, something kept me passionate and inspired despite the lack of income and often intense hours of work. Perhaps it was the opportunity to be intensely curious about society, politics, philosophy and art, on a daily basis? Or maybe it was realising the power of architecture to improve people's lives and cause cultural shifts?

In hindsight, the aspect of architecture that I and perhaps most others find the greatest satisfaction in is the process of communicating and conveying ideas through artistic mediums which have the potential to come to life. This is arguably also our most valuable offering as architects. The fundamental iterative struggle that we go through as designers, balancing rational thinking with an edge of playfulness, is simultaneously the most difficult and satisfying part of our profession. At the heart of this defining dilemma is a crude skill. And although in the last few decades, technological innovation has evolved uncontrollably and transformed entire sectors, the field of architecture remains reliant on this one intuitive skill ...

Drawing.

Drawing is the most important skill an architect has at their disposal. While visionary thinking and problem-solving may be the hallmarks of a successful architect, there would be no vision without a drawing. How else would you communicate your idea to a client? There is only so much that your words and your writing can convey when dealing with architectural ideas. A tissue paper sketch could say more than a paragraph, a chapter and maybe even a whole book. What's more, it only takes a few seconds to see a drawing and conceptualise it.

Throughout history, architects have been held in high esteem by the profession and society as master draughtsmen, akin to knights gilded with their mechanical pencils as solemn swords and their drawing boards as sovereign shields. It's only recently that drawings have moved beyond physical paper into digital and even virtual form. Looking ahead, the development of disruptive technology and software, such as non-fungible tokens (NFTs) and artificial intelligence art generators could also make a defining impact on our profession.

The demand for digital artists is growing, and so too is the pressure for students and young professionals to learn advanced artistic skills and software. Digitisation has not just expanded the range of jobs on offer in practice, but more widely, has propagated the notion of 'architect as artist'. Now when we consider Instagram, the most popular audio-visual social media platform in the world, powered by attention and accessible to all within milliseconds,

we can perhaps understand why practices and professionals take it so seriously. Furthermore, social media's attention-fuelled algorithm has in many ways created a level playing field where people from any background can equally rise in prominence.

This digital shift and era of social media has quite rightly brought into question wider societal concerns around mental health and social value systems. But seldom do we discuss its positive effects, such as causing a communication revolution or being a catalyst to innovation and change – perhaps that's because it's obvious.

My intention is not to make any rudimentary claims as to what is good or what is bad. Rather, I hope to shine light on what I believe is a significant moment in the architectural drawing discourse. This book has been curated to include guidance, insights and tips from some of the leading and best emerging talents in the architectural drawing community – a niche that has begun to establish itself on Instagram. The aim is to gather their works and insights to concisely share how you can practically improve your drawing skills – an area often overlooked in architectural education.

Like me, the contributors selected have been sharing their explorative depictions and experimental drawing outcomes online for many years. Some of them are veterans in the field – architects turned academic artists – while others are emerging professionals, award-winning practitioners or freelance illustrators with architectural backgrounds. The selection is truly diverse and includes people from all around the world.

Every artist in this publication has a story to tell or an idea to convey, whether it's a complex harmony of linework depicting spatial mapping experiences or endless horizons of fictional pies falling from the sky. Through the unveiling of their architectural process and by offering an insight into their styles, you will learn how to draw so that you can communicate effectively.

The book does not aim to explicitly teach you drawing styles in a prescriptive manner for you to copy, but instead, to inspire you to create your visions equipped with a broad toolset, references and tips. Most of us recognise that university education often fails to teach drawing skills and techniques – and this book aims to fill that gap. It gives you the insights and guidance to help you improve your artistic capability by trying new drawing styles and processes.

You have unique skills and interests, which if allowed to flourish, will help you define and improve your design process. You have an idea in your mind that may be revolutionary, and someone somewhere needs to see it – we live in a world where attention is the most valuable currency and drawing could be your most valuable skill.

This is your guide to drawing attention.