

PINK IN ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

When architects first trained as masons, their informational brown ink drawings served to communicate instructions to workers. As Basile Baudez recounts in his 2021 book titled *Inessential Colours*, this appears to originate from military engineers whose colourcoding systems helped to communicate construction techniques and materials efficiently. However, while the early eighteenth century saw French architects adopt colour conventions as systems to express information, the latter part of the century brought with it a major shift - a revolution - and colours became more widely used for representation. Today, as colour saturates our contemporary world, it is intriguing to investigate a period when colour in architectural drawings perhaps required more careful consideration.

A sense of vying between line and the painterly idea of colour has always been present within architectural representation. Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) dismissed coloured architectural models as 'lewdly dressed with the allurements of painting'.¹ One could argue that this preference for line over colour stems from the Italian Renaissance emphasis on harmony, proportion and mathematical precision. Giovanni Battista Piranesi's presentation drawings for the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano, dating from around 1764, employed only black ink to depict the multicoloured marbles, polychrome paintings and gold in the nave and choir. These precise representations of structures say something of how artists and architects interpreted classical architecture, reflecting a yearning for the past and a desire to understand and connect with classical antiquity.

Rome's Villa Borghese, one of the grandest Roman estates, is an ancient expression of wealth, status and beauty, and a remarkable document for the history of Roman architecture. Antonio Asprucci's (1723-1808) Temple of Diana was the smallest of three temples in the landscaped park. Within his sectional drawing, Asprucci's use of pink points to the construction, causing the representation of marble to stand out against the grey wash. As Baudez points out, this tradition stemmed from France and the Low Countries, where draughtsmen used red tones to represent masonry in section, a technique that can be found in all of Europe two centuries later. This

structure sought to reimagine the refined simplicity of the classical era, and soft colours reminiscent of ancient Roman or Greek architecture were often favoured to evoke a sense of nostalgic admiration for the classical past. Asprucci's emphasis on the principles of order, proportion and scale, alongside the use of pink, has a certain affective sense, particularly within the temple to Diana. The colour may be interpreted as an atmospheric hue to complement and contrast with the natural environment, as the temple sits amidst the lush greenery of the gardens of the Villa Borghese. Or perhaps the pink wash symbolises romanticism or an affinity with the goddess Diana herself, who was associated with love and nature in Roman mythology, the hints of pink framing her statue and portraying her presence as ethereal and somewhat intangible. This idea is further emphasised through the sense of ambiguity in the understanding of the spatial quality of the design of the dome; Diana is placed in the centre but has not been cut through. A true section cut through the centre of the temple would have sliced through the statue of Diana, removing the pleasing sense of harmony that Asprucci conveys through his soft shading and intricate detailing. There is, thus, a sense of temporality, of a temple, partially cut through, conveying how 'the distance between architectural drawing and building has always been opaque and ambiguous'.²

Indeed, the most common, widespread and earliest application of colour in the depiction of architecture derives from mimesis, the imitation of the visible. Colours allowed draughtsmen to depict materials in an efficient way, eliminating the tedious task of representing each element of construction with multiple strokes. In this context, pink was practical, as it allowed for a clear differentiation between building materials and, thus, facilitated communication. However, it is here that the line between imitation and convention can become elusive, since the warmth and energy of the pink 'would achieve something new, inspired by painting: it would please and delight the senses'.³ A more symbolic approach may interpret pink through its associations with elegance and femininity, warmth and romanticism, and its ability to engage the viewer through a sense of depth and realism.

The application of pink became superfluous and paradoxical once it left two-dimensional representations. In this period of the late eighteenth century, precisely when it began to prevail even in the Mediterranean countries, pink played an increasingly decorative role. The border that appears on a sheet showing the order of the Arch of Constantine, drawn by Giovanni Baronci for the Accademia di San Luca in 1789, shows pink becoming an affective colour, an element of chromatic contrast to the decor. It is not simply something arbitrary, but signifies something inessential to the image, reinstating the drawing's own picture plane. In the second half of the century, these works displayed a colour that 'transcended the world of signs, whether natural or conventional, in order to embrace affect'.⁴

Dating back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, line is seen as reigning supreme over colour: 'if one were to cover a surface randomly with the finest colours, one would provide less pleasure than by an outline of a picture'.⁵ By contrast, and writing in the nineteenth century, Owen Jones states that 'form without colour is like a body without a soul'.⁶ Baudez has been instrumental in theorising about the entry of colour into architectural drawing, and indeed has paved the way for more academic exploration, as he documents the time when colour moved from its initial function of eliminating ambiguity towards a more ornamental role. So there is a conflation, as Baudez concludes that:

architectural drawings are unlike those of painters; they do integrate colour as a sign, as a convention, and not simply as a means of imitation or affect. The representation of architecture shuttles between two poles, the imitation of visible nature and the use of conventions that can convey the information necessary for the object to be understood in mathematical terms.⁷

Whether employed for its practical or representative qualities, systematically or symbolically, the use of colour in architectural drawing continues to both communicate concepts and, perhaps more importantly today, evoke emotional responses from those experiencing it.

ENDNOTES

¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), p. 34.

² Alberto Perez-Gomez, 'Architecture as Drawing.' *JAE* 36, no. 2 (1982), p. 2.

³ Basile Baudez, *Inessential Colours* (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2021), p. 149.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 145.

⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), p. 8.

⁶ Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1910), p. 15.

⁷ Baudez, p. 7.