# EMERGENCE OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY GRAPHIC NOVELS AS A POTENTIAL SUBGENRE: A POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE

## POTANSİYEL BİR ALT TÜR OLARAK MİMARLIK TARİHİ GRAFİK ROMANLARININ ORTAYA ÇIKIŞI: POSTMODERN BIR PERSPEKTİF

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**Abstract**

This article introduces architectural history graphic novels as an emerging subgenre in the intersection of architectural historiography and graphic narrative, and examines the relationship between graphic novels and historiography within the framework of postmodern theory. Postmodern historiography contends that historical knowledge is not an objective, linear narrative but rather a representational construct shaped by subjectivity, multilayered representations, and narrativity. Graphic novels that adopt this perspective employ both verbal and visual narrative tools to reveal the fictional dimension of historical events and to foreground micro-histories, suppressed subjectivities, and alternative viewpoints. Gaining prominence with Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, historical graphic novels offer a compelling narrative form rooted in themes such as trauma, memory, and representation. Within this framework, works such as *Eileen Gray: A House Under the Sun*, *Mies*, *Bauhaus: A Graphic Novel*, and publications from the project *An Illustrated History of Modern Turkish Architecture* explore architectural history not solely through buildings and styles, but also through their social, emotional, and ideological contexts. This article highlights the contributions of the genre to critical and participatory historical narratives, and argues that architectural history graphic novels constitute a legitimate and distinctive subgenre shaped by the principles of postmodern historiography. As such, graphic novels are positioned as creative, multilayered tools for historical narration that make architectural knowledge accessible to a broader audience.

**Keywords:** Graphic Novel, Comic Book, Architectural Historiography, Postmodern Historiography, Graphic Narrative

**Öz**

Bu makale, grafik romanların tarih yazımıyla kurduğu ilişkiyi postmodern kuram çerçevesinde değerlendirerek, mimarlık tarihi alanında gelişen yeni bir alt tür olan mimarlık tarihi grafik romanlarını ele almaktadır. Postmodern tarihyazımı, tarihsel bilginin nesnel ve çizgisel bir anlatıdan ziyade, öznellik, çok katmanlılık ve anlatısallıkla kurulan bir temsil biçimi olduğunu ileri sürer. Bu anlayıştan beslenen grafik romanlar, sözel ve görsel anlatım araçlarını bir araya getirerek tarihsel olayların kurmaca boyutunu görünür kılar; mikro-tarihleri, bastırılmış öznellikleri ve alternatif bakış açılarını merkezine alır. Art Spiegelman'ın *Maus* eseriyle ivme kazanan tarih grafik romanları, travma, bellek ve temsil gibi kavramlar etrafında şekillenen güçlü bir anlatı formu sunar. Bu çerçevede, *Eileen Gray: A House Under the Sun*, *Mies*, *Bauhaus: A Graphic Novel* gibi grafik romanlar ile *Çizgilerle Modern Türkiye Mimarlığı* projesi kapsamındaki eserler, mimarlık tarihini yalnızca yapılar ve stiller üzerinden değil; sosyal, duygusal ve ideolojik bağlamlarıyla birlikte ele almaktadır. Makale, bu türün eleştirel ve katılımcı tarih anlatılarına sunduğu katkıları vurgulamakta; mimarlık tarihi grafik romanlarının, postmodern tarihyazımı ilkeleri doğrultusunda şekillenen, geçerli ve özgün bir alt tür olarak değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini ileri sürmektedir. Böylece grafik romanlar, mimarlık bilgisini daha geniş kitlelere ulaştıran, yaratıcı ve çok katmanlı bir tarih anlatım aracı olarak konumlandırılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Grafik Roman, Çizgi Roman, Mimarlık Tarihyazımı, Postmodern Tarihyazımı, Görsel Anlatı

**INTRODUCTION**

For much of its disciplinary history, architectural history was seen as a discipline focused on buildings, styles, periods, and the achievements of prominent architects, typically presented through a singular, linear narrative. However, postmodern approaches that emerged in the late 20th century challenged these assumptions and introduced new narrative forms and perspectives. Theorists questioning the idea of history as an objective reflection of reality emphasized the crucial roles of language, narrator, and context in historiography. As a result, historiography has shifted from merely transmitting the past to actively reconstructing it and highlighting diverse subjectivities.

Postmodern historiography enriches traditional narratives by replacing *grand narratives* with *micro-histories*. It dissolves strict boundaries between history and fiction, acknowledging that historical texts are shaped by subjectivity, ideology, and discourse (White, 1985; Ankersmith, 1983). This outlook challenges linear progress and highlights the fictional components within historical writing—an approach evident in both academic and popular media. New narrative platforms such as film, documentaries, games, social media, and particularly comics/graphic novels, allow for multilayered representations of the past (Aurell, 2015; Beck, 2015).

Once seen as lowbrow culture, comics gained intellectual recognition with the emergence of the graphic novel in the 1980s (Peppas & Ebrahim, 2019). Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986–1996) was pivotal in proving that graphic narratives could address historical trauma and memory. Blending oral history with fiction, *Maus* reveals how historical storytelling is shaped by the author's subjectivity, ideology, and style (Frey & Noys, 2002). This work helped establish the historical graphic novel as a serious genre and contributed to the academic recognition of comics' potential within historiographical discourse (Baetens et al., 2018).

A similar shift is occurring in architectural history. Once limited to formal analysis of buildings as historical documents, architectural historiography is increasingly seen as a discursive, ideological, and subjective field (Arnold, 2006; Leach, 2015). Despite the rise of historical graphic novels, architectural history remained underrepresented in this format until recently. The year 2019 marked a turning point with the publication of *Eileen Gray: A House Under the Sun*, *Mies*, and *Opera'nın Hayaleti*. These works established *architectural history graphic novels* as a distinct subgenre (Malterre-Barthes, 2019; Ferrer Casas, 2019; Kutluoğlu & Şumnu, 2023). Blending fiction and documentary elements, they convey historical insights into the built environment while introducing emotional, personal, and social layers rarely present in academic texts.

This article explores the emergence, development, and potential of architectural history graphic novels through the lens of postmodern historiography. It begins with postmodernism's critique of the history-fiction divide, then examines key features of historical graphic novels shaped by *Maus* and other seminal works. It traces the formation of architectural history graphic novels as a subgenre through major publications since 2019 and concludes by analyzing new-generation examples like the *An Illustrated History of Modern Turkish Architecture* project.

Ultimately, the article argues that these graphic novels expand the boundaries of architectural historiography, offering emotionally resonant, accessible, and participatory narratives. As recent examples demonstrate, architectural history graphic novels now represent a distinct and promising subgenre worthy of further scholarly attention. This claim is grounded in the observation that these works combine visual storytelling with historical interpretation in ways that challenge conventional academic formats. By foregrounding marginalized voices, everyday experiences, and alternative modes of representation, they contribute to a more inclusive and multidimensional understanding of the architectural past. The article thus aims to position this emergent genre not only as a narrative innovation but also as a critical tool for rethinking how architectural history is written, communicated, and engaged with across disciplinary and public spheres.

## POSTMODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION

Drawing on the theoretical framework of postmodern historiography, historical graphic novels stand out as a narrative form in which the boundaries between history and fiction blur, and the role of subjectivity in historical representation becomes more prominent. The emergence of personal, local, or previously excluded micro-histories intertwined with fiction aligns with the core principles of the postmodern approach, offering a fragmented and polyphonic perspective in contrast to the grand narratives of modern historiography.

Postmodern discourse challenges the objectivity of history, emphasizing that historical texts reflect the author's subjectivity, ideology, and narrative style (Ulutürk, 2018). Rather than conceiving time and space as fixed entities, it advocates for fragmented and plural narratives. Southgate (2012) notes that the ideal of objectivity in history relies on strict separations between facts and values, or history and fiction. Drawing on linguistic theory, theorists like Lévi-Strauss, Kuhn, Rorty, Derrida, Foucault, White, and Eagleton propose a new historiography centered on representation (Kutluoğlu, 2019). This view suggests that history, like fiction, can be interpreted and reconstructed, making it more accessible and transformative (Cohen, 1998). The linguistic and historical turns further argue that historical narratives are shaped by ideological frameworks, bringing visibility to previously marginalized voices (Oppermann, 1999).

In this context, *New Historicism* highlights the literary dimension of history and the historical dimension of literature by reading literary and historical texts in parallel (Oppermann, 1999). According to Coates (1993), this method especially questions the boundaries of historical discourse by focusing on suppressed or marginalized narratives. Geçikli (2016) similarly argues for including everyday life and individual experiences in historiography to uncover what traditional texts omit.

A comparable theoretical stance appears in the works of Hayden White and Frank Rudolph Ankersmith, who underscore the fictional aspect of historiography. With the *linguistic turn*, they argued that the boundary between textual structure and historical reality is not clear-cut (White, 1973). In *Metahistory*, White (1973) contends that historical discourse is shaped by literary and rhetorical structures, suggesting that history is no less fictional than a novel. According to him, academic history, like fictional narratives, is constructed through the act of rewriting (White, 1985). Ankersmith (1983) likewise notes that the representation of truth is always interwoven with certain fictional elements. Beyond challenging the boundaries of academic historiography, postmodern approaches broaden the possibilities for how history can be represented. Dissolving the boundaries between history and fiction opens new narrative possibilities. Visual media such as film, documentaries, social media, graphic novels, and games make more layers of the past visible (Aurell, 2015), allowing historical knowledge to reach wider audiences (Beck, 2015).

The influence of this framework extends to architectural historiography. While buildings have long served as documents of art and cultural history, postmodern theories reposition architecture as a discursive, ideological field. Arnold (2006) emphasizes that architecture is both physical and intellectual, while Leach (2015) suggests focusing on underlying ideas and social contexts rather than just chronological development. Visual media such as photography and film reveal spatial and social dimensions, but graphic novels extend this further by reimagining architectural spaces. Architectural history thus becomes a field not only documented but reinterpreted. The postmodern lens deepens inquiry into how architectural history is composed, encouraging interdisciplinary engagement. The hybrid nature of graphic novels highlights their potential to rethink the relationship between architectural historiography and historical representation.

## THE EMERGENCE OF HISTORICAL GRAPHIC NOVELS

Although graphic novels and comics share the basic feature of combining words and sequential art to create visual narratives, they differ significantly in format, narrative structure, target audience, production process and cultural perception. Graphic novels typically present complete stories with a clear ending, while comics are usually more episodic. Graphic novels often address mature themes and target adult readers, whereas comics have traditionally been seen as lighter, comedic, or adventure-

driven (Baetens, 2018). The term *graphic novel* emerged to challenge the perception of comics as lowbrow. Especially from the 1980s onward, the medium evolved beyond humor, obscenity, or supernatural powers to engage with more serious and intellectual topics (Peppas & Ebrahim, 2019). Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978) helped popularize the term, linking it to artistically rich and mature storytelling. As a result, graphic novels have developed sophisticated narratives in genres like autobiography, history, and social issues, reaching a broader adult readership (Baetens et al., 2018).

This transformation has led to a theoretical redefinition of graphic novels. Scott McCloud (1994), defines comics as temporal maps created through the sequential arrangement of words and images and sees the succession of panels as a fundamental tool in the reconstruction of time and space. Especially with the concept of *Infinite Canvas*, he emphasizes the possibility of going beyond traditional page structures. On the other hand, Hillary Chute (2008) emphasizes the narrative power of individual panels and draws attention to the decisive role of textual elements in this form of narration. These theoretical approaches reveal that the graphic novel is not only a narrative genre, but also a multi-layered form of communication in which the text-image relationship is redefined.

Over time, this multi-layered structure has deepened the unique relationship that graphic novels have established with historical narrative. Especially in the postmodern narrative environment, where historical events are not only narrated but also questioned and reconstructed, graphic novels have become powerful tools that examine historical representation. The historical graphic novels that have emerged in this context stand out as works that not only convey information but also question established assumptions about historiography and often highlight marginalized or subjective voices.

In this framework, historical graphic novels become not only a new narrative genre but also a critical medium through which historical experiences are conveyed through personal memory. Concepts such as trauma, memory, testimony and representation are at the center of these works. In 2002, with the special issue of the journal *Rethinking History* devoted to graphic novels, the genre gained more visibility in academic circles, arguing that historiography is not only about listing events, but also about questioning who narrates these events, how and for what purpose. Researchers such as Frey and Noys (2022) argue that graphic novels are not only an alternative medium for historical narration, but also a unique form of expression that challenges historical representation and forces it to rethink.

Among the defining works of the genre, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* is widely recognized for its critical engagement with historical memory and narrative form. It tells the story of one of the darkest periods in human history, such as the Holocaust, through the testimonies of the author's father. The use of anthropomorphic metaphors, flashback structures, audiovisual clues and photographic evidence not only reveals the relationship between historical reality and personal memory, but also reveals how structurally constructed the historical narrative is. *Maus* is notable not only for its theme but also for its oral history method. Through interviews with his father, Spiegelman reconstructs the past in both a personal and historical context, while not hiding the subjective nature of the narrative (see Figure 1). This approach makes visible the role of memory in historiography. Beaty (2012) considers *Maus* as a work that calls into question the way the Holocaust is represented and questions the boundaries between history and narrative. The formal experiments used in the work not only offer visual innovations, but also enable the fragmentation of grand narratives and an understanding of history in which multiple regimes of truth can exist simultaneously.

**Figure 1.** Between oral history research and storytelling (Spiegelman, 1996).

Following Spiegelman, Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (2001) combined graphic novels and journalism, creating the genre of *graphic journalism* (Peterle, 2021). Based on personal observation and fieldwork, Sacco's work presents conflicts while questioning how they are experienced and whose voices are heard. Similarly, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000–2013) explores the Iranian Revolution through personal narrative, highlighting the link between history and individual lives (Baetens et al., 2018). Along with *Maus*, these works show how memory, trauma, and representation shape historical graphic novels. Through techniques like panel sequencing, visual metaphors, and fragmented timelines, they invite readers to reflect not just on events, but on how they are told. This visual-textual form enables nuanced, ethically sensitive portrayals of historical trauma.

This capacity has elevated graphic novels beyond popular culture, establishing them as serious artistic and academic media. The exhibition of *Maus* at MoMA symbolizes this shift, as graphic novels gain cultural legitimacy and challenge perceptions of "**low culture**" (Baetens et al., 2018). Historical graphic novels go beyond narrating events—they interpret and reconstruct them, engaging with memory, trauma, and representation. Works like *Maus*, *Palestine*, and *Persepolis* highlight the genre's narrative strength and cultural impact, bridging history and storytelling by questioning not just what the past is, but how it is remembered.

Just as historical graphic novels have evolved into a recognized subgenre since the 1980s, recent developments since 2019 suggest that architectural history graphic novels may also be defined as a distinct and emerging subgenre.

**THE EMERGENCE AND KEY EXAMPLES OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY GRAPHIC NOVELS**
Architectural history graphic novels can be defined as a new narrative format that combines illustrations (panels) and text to explore and represent the history of architecture and the built environment. This subgenre addresses urban spaces, buildings, and architects within various social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. It may rely on documentary-style objectivity or incorporate fictional elements that reinterpret historical events and reveal perspectives absent from traditional academic literature. Following the revolutionary impact of *Maus*, the question arises whether a similar transformation is possible for architectural history.

By adopting the pluralistic and subjective stance of postmodern historiography, this subgenre can unearth overlooked or marginalized stories. Shifting focus from grand narratives to micro-histories and local accounts encourages broader social and cultural insight into the built environment. Informed by fiction, this method goes beyond formal and typological analysis, attending also to the narrated dimensions of architectural history.

913

Rather than opposing fiction and historical accuracy, this approach sees them as intertwined. Drawing reflects reality in layered ways and raises questions about the factual or fictional nature of historical representation. When combined with archival documents and spatial evidence, fictional elements in architectural history graphic novels help construct richer narratives—both historically and in design terms. This not only boosts reader engagement but also makes the socio-cultural and emotional dimensions of architectural space visible (Tosh, 2021).

The genre also invites formal and conceptual experimentation. Fictional storytelling enables innovation in spatial depiction, page layout, and panel transitions. Through the graphic novel format, it offers unique perspectives on architectural spaces and design processes, while reconstructing their historical and social significance. These qualities align with graphic novels' inherent capacity to express communication, space, and movement simultaneously. Every building contains functional and programmatic stories—fiction can uncover these, embedding spatial transformation, social context, and user experience into the narrative. In this way, architectural history graphic novels frame the built environment not as static form, but as lived, experienced, and culturally constructed. As academic interest and creative output grow, this genre is poised to reshape how architectural history is told—making it more layered and experimental.

Before 2019, architectural history had not been prominently explored as a central narrative focus within the genre of graphic novels, with only a few scattered or implicit references observable in earlier works. That year marked a turning point with the publication of *Eileen Gray: A House Under the Sun* (UK), *Mies* (Spain), and *Opera'nın Hayaleti* (Turkey) as the first notable examples of the subgenre. This was followed by *Bauhaus: A Graphic Novel* (2021) in Italy, and the launch of *An Illustrated History of Modern Turkish Architecture*[1] in Turkey the same year. In 2023, revised editions of *Opera'nın Hayaleti* and *Ankara Palas'ın Merdivenleri* were published, followed by *Yüzen Köşkün Anahtarı* and *Sultanahmet'te Var Bir Yılan* in 2024. These works allow for the identification of architectural history graphic novels as a distinct sub-genre and open discussions on their contributions to both architectural historiography and visual narrative forms.

### Eileen Gray: A House Under the Sun

*Eileen Gray: A House Under The Sun*, published by Nobrow in London in 2019, combining texts by Charlotte Malterre-Barthes and illustrations by Zosia Dzierzawska, not only tells the story of Eileen Gray but also provides a powerful example of a postmodern historiographical approach.

Eileen Gray (1878–1976) is a designer long overshadowed in the canon of modern architecture. Her architectural career, beginning after her meeting with Jean Badovici in the 1920s, includes original approaches that challenge dominant norms of the era. Gray's design stands out for its emotional quality, user focus, and simultaneous decorative-functionalist character—contrasting sharply with the rigidity of modernism. However, tensions with influential figures like Le Corbusier led to the marginalization and distortion of her work, especially E.1027. Le Corbusier's unauthorized murals on its walls and the nearby construction of a clubhouse were not only spatial interventions, but also infringements on Gray's authorship and architectural identity. As feminist criticism underlines, such occupations constitute a typical example of ignoring women's labor in the field of architecture (Colomina, 1996; Rault, 2005).

At this point, the graphic novel *Eileen Gray: A House Under The Sun* (2019) brings Gray's story back into focus with a fictional narrative fed by postmodern historiography. In the very first pages of the book, showing the scene of Le Corbusier's drowning on the beach in front of Eileen Gray's house gives the narrative a provocative start and prepares the reader's perspective for the feminist and critical aspect of the text. The novel goes on to present stories from Gray's life: her childhood, interest in furniture and lacquer, architectural experience after meeting Badovici, and her struggle against sexism (Malterre-Barthes, 2019).

The narrative flexibility of the graphic novel format allows for shifts between layers of time and space beyond textual and visual unity. On the same page, we examine Gray's interior designs through technical

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[1] Official Turkish title: *Çizgilerle Modern Türkiye Mimarlığı*

drawings, while details of daily life or emotional conflicts appear in the next panel (see Figure 2) (Malterre-Barthes, 2019). This multiple time-space construction reminds us that the history of architecture cannot be reduced to an analysis of scale or style; rather, design is always intertwined with social relations, power dynamics and individual stories. Indeed, *Eileen Gray: A House Under The Sun* shows the tension between Badovici and Le Corbusier on the same plane as Gray's process of designing E.1027, demonstrating that space can be treated as a stage for life.



**Figure 2**. Intersecting technical drawings and graphic novel panels (Malterre-Barthes, 2019).

The visibility of women in architectural historiography has long been a focus within feminist theory. In this context, Gray's story symbolically represents the experiences of many women architects and designers who have been unfairly relegated to the background throughout their careers (Colomina, 1996; Rault, 2005). The phrase *"**This book is for girls, women, grandmothers and the men who support them**"* on the cover clearly reveals the political dimension of the work (Malterre-Barthes, 2019, n.p.). The author and illustrator reconstruct Gray's story in a fictionalized style, incorporating archival materials, letters, and photographs without detaching from historical reality. This reflects the postmodern historiographical trait of blurring fiction and fact, prompting readers to reconsider the nature of historical narrative. Through micro-stories, it brings visibility to the emotional, social, and political dimensions of a hidden heroine of modernism, uniting them into a meaningful whole. Applying postmodern historiography's critical and pluralist lens to architecture, the work exemplifies the transformative power of interdisciplinary interaction.

**Bauhaus: A Graphic Novel**
Valentina Grande and Sergio Varbella's *Bauhaus: A Graphic Novel* (2021) explores the process of the Bauhaus school from its foundation to its closure, its basic principles and leading figures within the economic, political and intellectual conditions of the period. The three-part narrative constructs the journey from Weimar to Dessau and from there to Berlin not only as a physical move but also as a reflection of shifts in intellectual orientations (Paul, 2022).

One of the prominent narrative techniques in the work is the positioning of the Bauhaus school itself as the narrator (see Figure 3). By placing institutional memory at the center, this method develops a collective and internal point of view, in contrast to the one-way perspective in grand narratives. The school's speaking as a subject allows events and intellectual transformations to be reflected directly from the institution's point of view. Thus, the voice of the school creates a more participatory and internal narrative structure that strengthens the interaction between fiction and historical reality (Grande, 2021).

**Figure 3**. The use of the building as a narrator (Grande, 2021).

The narrative addresses the economic and political conditions of the period as well as the educational system of the Bauhaus, which developed innovative practices in art, design and architecture. For example, Walter Gropius' theories and the school's design approach based on unity and equality are supported by visual panels, making it easier for the reader to follow conceptual ideas through space and objects (Grande, 2021). The work also extensively addresses the position of women designers and students within the Bauhaus (Paul, 2022). Reflecting the gender roles of the period, issues such as limited educational opportunities and being mostly directed to specific workshops show the existence of stories that are left out of the grand narratives or rendered invisible.

The graphic novel format offers a more accessible way to engage with art and design history. It portrays the school not just as an institution, but as a holistic movement shaped by its cultural, political, and social context. Blending fiction and documentary elements, it presents a layered narrative that internalizes each period's experiences, including war, economic hardship, and the school's closure. Rather than simply following a chronological flow, the work reconstructs institutional memory through text and image, offering an alternative, more intimate interpretation of Bauhaus within modernist history.

**Mies**
Spanish illustrator and writer Agustín Ferrer Casas's graphic novel *Mies* , published in 2019, is a comprehensive account of the life and professional development of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, one of the leading figures of modern architecture, but it does not claim to be a biography. Ferrer Casas's architectural education has enabled the work to gain depth on both theoretical and visual levels (Efe, n.d.). While focusing on Mies' Bauhaus period, his escape from Nazi Germany and his career in America, the work examines his architectural productions as well as the breaking points in his personal life in a historical context (Ferrer Casas, 2019). Ferrer Casas' narrative, based on archival documents and historical research, reveals many details about Mies' life. In particular, the positioning of the German Pavilion he designed for the 1929 Barcelona International Exhibition not only reflects Mies' aesthetic and structural approach based on the principle of less is more, but also reveals the position of the architect in the context of the socio-political conditions of the period.
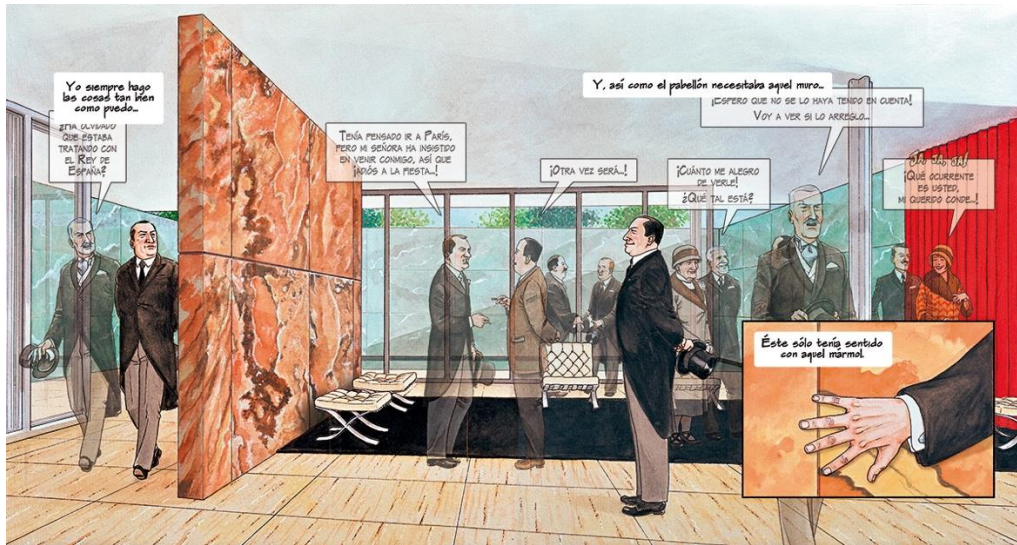
**Figure 4**. The combination of different time layers (Ferrer Casas, 2019).

The narrative possibilities offered by the graphic novel format (see Figure 4), through visual elements and textual content, convey to the reader the intellectual processes behind Mies' projects and the social, cultural and political dynamics affecting these processes. Elements such as Mies' complex relationship with the Nazi regime and his subsequent emigration to the United States strengthen the dramatic structure of the work. Ferrer Casas (2019) examines Mies' life and career not only in the architectural context, but also in the light of individual experiences, ideological conflicts and historical context. In addition to architectural projects, the study of the breaking points in the architect's personal life shows that the history of architecture is not limited to building design; this historical process is also shaped by human stories and social transformations. In this respect, the work constitutes an important example that contributes to academic discussions and artistic interpretations of architectural history.

**An Illustrated History of Modern Turkish Architecture**
Developed specifically for the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Turkey *An Illustrated History of Modern Turkish Architecture*, the project stands out as an innovative form of historical representation presented in graphic novel and animation format, focusing on architectural structures that played a critical role in Turkey's modernization adventure and their creators. While the project aims to take the history of architecture beyond the limited readership of academic circles and make it accessible to a wider audience, it attempts to produce an alternative to traditional historiographical practices with the methodology and perspective it adopts (Şumnu, 2024). Particularly in line with the basic principles of postmodern historiography, the project emphasizes the openness of history to multiple narratives, the importance of subjective perspectives and fiction, and reveals the suspicion of grand narratives and the value of micro-stories. In this way, the events and structures of modern Turkish architecture are analyzed not only in terms of their chronological or formal characteristics, but also in terms of their human, emotional and sociopolitical layers.

The project is based on Onur Kutluoğlu's master's thesis written in 2019 under the supervision of Umut Şumnu. Kutluoğlu's (2019) thesis can be considered as a search for a potential alternative method for architectural history narrative in the graphic novel format. The *graphic* novel *Opera'nın Hayaleti*, the concrete output of the study, deals with the process of the transformation of architect Şevki Balmumcu's 1934 Sergi Evi building into the Ankara Opera House by Paul Bonatz in 1948 and the traumatic effects of this transformation on Balmumcu's life.

*Opera'nın Hayaleti* (2023) is a pilot work that embodies the basic philosophy and methodology of the project. While traditional architectural history narratives often focus on the building, style or the dominant ideology of the period, this graphic novel follows a different path. The inter-temporal construction (e.g. the flashbacks of Balmumcu with the main story taking place in 1982), the

917

interweaving of historical documents (building plans, photographs, etc.) with fictional elements (dialogues between Balmumcu's ghost and an architecture student), and the emphasis on the subjectivity of the architect as well as the architectural object distinguish it from mainstream historiography (see Figure 5). This approach parallels postmodern historiography's suspicion of grand narratives. An overarching narrative such as modernization is treated not only with stories of progress and success, but also with individual tragedies, professional rivalries and overlooked details. The story of Balmumcu, offers a microhistory of modern Turkish architecture that shows that it is not only about buildings, but also about human tragedies, professional tensions and ideological conflicts. The visual language of the graphic novel, with its color palettes used for different time periods (such as sepia, gray-blue, black-and-white) and the grid system that breaks down at moments of narrative break, not only conveys information, but also opens up an emotional experience and a space for interpretation for the reader[2] (Kutluoğlu & Şumnu, 2023).



**Figure 5**. Difference between documentational and fictional elements on drawing style (Kutluoğlu & Şumnu, 2023).

Its potential to bring the history of architecture to a wider audience made it possible to transform the project into a series in coordination with VitrA and Arkitera Architecture Center. The project team and the advisory board[3] decided to tell the story of the early Republican period between 1923 and 1950 through the metaphor of the four seasons with four iconic buildings and their architects: Architect Kemaleddin and the Ankara Palace (Spring), Seyfi Arkan and the Florya Atatürk Marine Mansion (Summer), Şevki Balmumcu and the Exhibition House (Fall), Sedad Hakkı Eldem & Emin Onat and the Istanbul Courthouse (Winter). These selections reflect not only architecturally significant buildings, but also the spirit of the period, its compromises, divisions and turning points representing different aspects of the modernization process. The drawings for the graphic novels were also turned into short animations by Ahmet Aslan and Kayahan Kaya, aiming to increase the number of people who met with the project.

*Ankara Palas'ın Merdivenleri (2023),* the first book in the series following *Opera'nın Hayaleti*, narrates the life of architect Kemaleddin Bey and the construction of Ankara Palas within the framework of the First National Architecture Movement through a conversation between an academic (Yıldırım) and a

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[2] For further information, see Kutluoğlu (2019).

[3] Project was developed in collaboration with VitrA and Arkitera Architecture Center. The visual narratives were illustrated by Onur Kutluoğlu, Bahadır Yazıcı, and Kayahan Kaya; written by Cem Dedekargınoğlu, Umut Şumnu, and Onur Kutluoğlu; animated by Kayahan Kaya and Ahmet Aslan; and accompanied by music composed by Azevzir. The advisory board included Dr. Saitali Köknar, Ertuğ Uçar, and Dr. Funda Uz, while the project was coordinated by Ezgi Erdin, Emine Merdim, and Merve Nur Saygı. (Arkitera, 2019).

young literature student (Ayşe) on a train journey in the 1970s (Dedekargınoğlu et al., 2023) Like *Opera'nın Hayaleti*, this book has a double-time narrative; the narratives of Kemaleddin and important figures of the period (e.g. Yakup Kadri) are enriched with documents (newspaper clippings, sketches) and literary quotations. The inclusion of these documents and the researcher in the story, as in *Maus*, allows the historian and historiographical methods to become part of the fiction (see Figure 6). At the same time, the fact that the character of the academic named Yıldırım in the story is based on Yıldırım Yavuz, who produced the first comprehensive academic research on Mimar Kemaleddin, points to another bridge between fact and fiction.



**Figure 6**. The use of historiographical documents as panels for graphic novels (Dedekargınoğlu et al., 2023).

The work emphasizes the contradictory nature of modernization by presenting both the architecture of Ankara Palas with its Ottoman references and its interiors reflecting a Western lifestyle. The staircase of the building becomes a class and cultural metaphor in this book; the symbolic meaning of the acts of going up or coming down coincides with postmodern thought's questioning of space-power relations. Kemaleddin's personal story, his professional ideals, his tragic end and the subsequent revision of his work by other architects (e.g. Ernst Egli) show how history can be rewritten by dominant narratives. By mentioning actors other than Kemaleddin - such as his son İlhan Mimaroğlu and his wife Sabiha Hanım - the narrative implies that history should be read not only through the main actors, but within a wider network of relations.

*Yüzen Köşkün Anahtarı* (2024) is another work designed to take shape around Seyfi Arkan and the Florya Atatürk Marine Mansion. The graphic novel, written by Cem Dedekargınoğlu and Umut Şumnu, and illustrated by Bahadır Yazıcı and Kayahan Kaya, is fictionalized through a mysterious key found in Florya in 1959, through which the character Muhittin travels to Arkan's life and projects in his dreams (see Figure 7). The transitions between dreams, memories and reality reveal the intention to use a non-linear, metaphorical and subjective language to convey historical knowledge. Muhittin's dreams reveal not only the architectural elements but also their emotional and symbolic meanings. This key metaphor functions as a gateway to the architect's legacy and layers of history, pointing to the fact that modern Turkish architecture is not only a history of physical structures (Dedekargınoğlu & Şumnu, 2024a).

**Figure 7**. Witnessing the history of architecture through dreams (Dedekargınoğlu & Şumnu, 2024a).

*Sultanahmet'te Var Bir Yılan (2024)* presents a multi-layered historical representation through the intertwining of three parallel narratives. In the work written by Cem Dedekargınoğlu and Umut Şumnu and drawn by Bahadır Yazıcı and Kayahan Kaya, the architectural production processes of a reporter (Gülçin) following the news in 2012 and Sedad Hakkı Eldem and Emin Onat in the past are connected through temporal shifts. The narrative gradually blurs the boundaries between documentary and fiction, reality and mythos. Three different timelines are used; these transitions are emphasized through the use of color and page layout (see Figure 8). Thus, the graphic narrative carries a historiographical innovation not only at the level of content but also formally. The mysterious woman who appears at the end of the text and says, **"I am Istanbul, I do not disappear. I am Istanbul. I do not disappear, I only change form."** This character who appears at the end of the text turns into a narrator who identifies with the memory of the space, reinforcing the idea that both spaces and buildings can be heard as subjects of history (Dedekargınoğlu & Şumnu, 2024b).

**Figure 8**. Time jumps represented by different colors (Dedekargınoğlu & Şumnu, 2024b).

All four works of the project position architectural objects not only as material structures but also as narrative carriers. The representation of buildings through drawings, panels that refer to their historical context, and the personal relationships that characters establish with architectural spaces expand the representational power of architecture. The sequential image-text combination offered by the graphic novel medium makes possible the layering and multiple perspectives that classical academic writing struggles to express. The balance between visuality and text increases the reader's engagement with the text on both an intellectual and emotional level. In this regard, Peterle's (2021) notion of drawing narrative geographies is illustrative, where spaces are not only represented, but also constructed, interpreted and lived. These graphic novels not only write the history of architecture, but also draw it, so that history is reconstructed in both an epistemological and an aesthetic space (Peterle, 2021).

Going beyond traditional approaches to the representation of architectural history, the project *An Illustrated History of Modern Turkish Architecture* addresses historical events, characters and structures in a multi-layered manner through the medium of graphic narrative. It questions subjective narrative forms, transitions between time, collective memory, and the permeability between fiction and document in a way that can be directly related to the basic principles of new historicism and postmodern historiography. This approach enriches perspectives on the history of architecture at the academic level, while reaching a wider readership at the cultural level. The project reconstructs the architectural heritage of modern Turkey and the stories behind it in a vibrant, accessible and open to interpretation by presenting architectural structures as carriers of human experiences, social conflicts and cultural meanings beyond their physical presence.

**CONCLUSION**

The close readings presented in the preceding section—from the trans-national modernism of *Bauhaus: A Graphic Novel* and the feminist re-framing of *Eileen Gray: A House Under the Sun* to the locally inflected narratives of *An Illustrated History of Modern Turkish Architecture*—reveal a common set of strategies: hybrid documentary/fictional registers, visually staged historiographical debates, and a deliberate foregrounding of marginalised voices. These shared traits provide the empirical foundation for the synthesis that follows, showing how works produced in different cultural contexts nevertheless converge in redefining what it means to "**write**" architectural history.

Postmodern historiography points out that the past does not consist of rigid and unidirectional frameworks, but rather that every historical narrative inevitably contains subjectivity, ideology and

921

fictionality. This perspective has begun to transform the habit of seeing the history of architecture only as the chronological development of buildings or the "**heroic**" narratives of great masters. Instead of remaining within the confines of classical academic texts, new forms combining visual and verbal narrative have made historical events, with their layers of memory and experience, accessible to a wider audience. The graphic novel format, in particular, has the potential to bring architectural history to a multi-layered, critical and participatory plane with its possibilities such as visual metaphors, temporal jumps and the use of multiple narrators.

In this context, the reconstruction of the lives and buildings of architects such as Eileen Gray, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Şevki Balmumcu in historical graphic novels reveals the multidimensional nature of architectural history, intertwined with identity, gender, power relations and professional conflicts. Increasing in number after 2019, these publications reach a wide audience in digital and print media, transforming the abstract and often distanced narrative of academic writing into a more emotional and relational environment. This approach, combined with the pluralistic approach of postmodern historiography, not only emphasizes microhistorical and subjective narratives, but also expands the boundaries of architectural history with unique presentation techniques that consider the built environment as an actor.

Recent studies such as the *An Illustrated History of Modern Turkish Architecture* project have made the scientific legitimacy and artistic expression of this narrative form even more evident. Therefore, it is argued that architectural history graphic novels can now be considered a valid and worthy sub-genre with unique narrative strategies. The development of this genre will enrich the history of architecture in both academic and popular contexts and pave the way for new projects that will address different periods, geographies and practices in the future.

Ultimately this article introduces architectural history graphic novels as an emerging subgenre at the intersection of architectural historiography and graphic narrative, arguing that their distinctive blend of visual storytelling and historical inquiry offers new possibilities for how the architectural past can be represented, interpreted, and shared.

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