



## Contextual and Participatory Approaches in the Adaptive Reuse of Historical Buildings: Erimtan and CerModern as Contemporary Exhibition Spaces

Merve SAYICI<sup>1,\*</sup>, Alanur YAŞAR<sup>2</sup>, Bengü KUTBAY MUTLU<sup>3</sup>, Gözde KÜLFETOĞLU<sup>4</sup>, Hilal AYCI<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 0009-0006-3566-7085, Gazi University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Ankara

<sup>2</sup> 0009-0002-5071-7256, Gazi University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Ankara

<sup>3</sup> 0009-0009-8654-7106, Gazi University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Ankara

<sup>4</sup> 0009-0000-1306-3391, Gazi University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Ankara

<sup>5</sup> 0000-0001-5101-4873, Gazi University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Ankara

### Article Info

Received: 16/06/2025

Accepted: 05/08/2025

### Keywords

Contemporary  
Museology,  
Adaptive Reuse of  
Historical Building,  
Public Engagement,  
CerModern,  
Erimtan Museum of  
Archaeology and Art

### Abstract

Cities are not merely physical spaces but dynamic environments where historical continuity and social interaction persist. The sustainability of a city depends on the transformation of the built environment being shaped through an integrated relationship with historical accumulation, cultural values, and social dynamics. In this regard, it is important to reintegrate spaces remain unused within the urban fabric back into social life, in order to preserve urban identity and strengthen the sense of belonging. Emphasizing the importance of maintaining the connection between the space and its historical and social context, this approach reveals diverse layers of urban belonging. The aim of the study is to examine the potential of museum spaces to transform into discourse fields within the context of contemporary museology and to investigate the impact of spatial decisions on knowledge and meaning production throughout this process. The aim of addressing adaptive reuse and contemporary museology together in this study is to discuss design and construction strategies that can restore the original identities of historic buildings within a contextual integrity. The analysis examines the conversion of unused culturally valuable buildings into exhibition spaces. This framework investigated the Erimtan Archaeology Museum and CerModern as case studies. These two cases were analyzed in terms of contextual connection, cultural sensitivity, selection of spatial opportunities, and social participation. The study demonstrates that transforming historic spaces into exhibition areas within contemporary museology enhances spatial belonging and strengthens urban memory through their contextual and historical layers, thereby supporting sustainable transformation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cities are multilayered spatial constructs that transcend their role as mere providers of shelter; they are dense sites of socio-cultural interaction, repositories of historical layers, and formative environments for individuals' sense of belonging. Each street, square, building, and space constitutes a site of memory that bears the traces of the past and evolves. According to Lefebvre [1], every city becomes a meaningful space in individuals' lives and a constituent of their identity by embodying existing social structures and cultural heritage. The social structures of cities enable individuals to construct their identities and sense of belonging. To belong to a city and to identify with it allows individuals to establish a cultural bond through which they feel a sense of attachment. For instance, an individual who grows up in a built environment where historical and cultural identity has been preserved develops a deeper relationship with the city by internalizing its memory, history, and cultural codes.

<sup>1</sup> This study was conducted as part of the course M5101 City and Identity, conducted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hilal Aycı during the Spring Term of the 2024–2025 academic year at the Department of Architecture, Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences, Gazi University.

\* Corresponding author: sayicimerve88@gmail.com

The streets, buildings, and squares of cities are not merely physical spaces but also social and cultural realms that shape and touch people's lives. Moreover, urban landscapes encompass architectural structures from various historical periods, bearing traces of the past. These structures are physical entities and symbols of social transformation, cultural interaction, and historical continuity. The buildings in a city's historic center may coexist with modern structures, symbolizing a dialogue between the past and the future. These buildings and spaces become integrated into the daily lives of urban residents and serve as essential elements in the formation of urban culture. For this reason, the role of historic buildings in society's collective memory is becoming increasingly significant within the urban context. In particular, the adaptive reuse of obsolete historic structures as 'sites of memory' is crucial for preserving and sustaining urban identity. The process of adaptive reuse not only ensures the conservation of these structures and fosters public engagement by transforming them into civic spaces and facilitating their reintegration into the urban fabric. Moreover, adaptive reuse can be seen as a design act that transforms the embedded knowledge of a building its past functions, forms, and meanings into new layers of collective memory. By reconfiguring the building through the creation of a design space, interventions that reinterpret its material, spatial, and contextual dimensions generate what Küçük [2] defines as knowledge in designing a situated and evolving form of knowledge integrated into the very essence of the building. This process also introduces a design input shaped through public reuse, allowing collective engagement to inform new meanings. Therefore, adaptive reuse is not merely a preservation practice, but a speculative act that repositions the building within urban and cultural memory with a renewed identity.

Contemporary museology plays a significant role in this process of adaptive reuse. According to Sandell [3], museums have moved beyond their traditional function as spaces for exhibiting and preserving artifacts, evolving into platforms for social dialogue, learning, and interaction. This transformation enables museums to deepen their relationship with the city and its inhabitants, ultimately becoming active agents in the construction of urban identity. The use of historic spaces as exhibition venues contributes to their preservation and enhances public engagement, thereby supporting the transmission of cultural heritage to future generations. As Vergo [4] says, contemporary museology transforms the traditional museum concept by prioritizing interaction and participation, and incorporates diverse methods that encourage visitors to engage with the museum experience actively. In contemporary museology, interactive exhibitions, workshops, cultural events, and digital technologies enable museums to establish a more dynamic relationship with visitors, transforming the museum into a living space. In this way, the museum functions as a multifaceted cultural center that meets the needs of people of all ages and backgrounds for learning, entertainment, and social interaction.

## **2. THE USE OF HISTORICAL SPACES AS EXHIBITION VENUES IN CONTEMPORARY MUSEOLOGY**

### **2.1 Adaptive Reuse of Historical Buildings**

Historical buildings serve as significant documents that reflect the social life and architectural understanding of the period to which they belong, and as symbols of cultural values [5]. With these characteristics, they act as spatial entities that ensure the sustainability of urban memory by transmitting the life of a past era into the future, thus forming a bridge between the past and the future. French thinker Pierre Nora [6] argues that past values cannot be preserved solely through mental recollection; instead, certain places are needed for this purpose, which he refers to as "memory spaces" (*lieux de mémoire*). According to Nora, any symbolic element belonging to a community's collective memory, whether material or conceptual, that gains meaning either through the will of the people or over time, can be considered a memory space [6]. In this context, the preservation of buildings that have lost their function over time, regardless of their period of construction, due to the symbolic identity they hold in urban memory, is essential for maintaining the continuity of urban identity and collective memory. With this approach, the reintegration of historical buildings that have lost their functions over time into the public realm as memory spaces can be achieved through preservation and reconnecting them with social life. The concept involves transforming buildings that continue to exist physically and maintain a meaningful relationship with the city into public spaces that are accessible to all and foster a sense of belonging. In this way, it contributes to community engagement and the sustainability of the public sphere.

The principles of adaptive reuse and reversibility are emphasized in adaptive reuse processes. Adaptive reuse allows historical buildings to be adapted to contemporary functions while preserving their physical characteristics. This approach ensures not only the continuity of the building within urban memory but also addresses social and environmental needs. According to Eneş and Karabağ [7], achieving the highest level of preservation with the least intervention is essential, ensuring that additions made, especially in interior spaces, are lightweight, flexible, and recyclable. Furthermore, new additions should be designed not to compete with the existing structure or overshadow its identity while expressing a contemporary language. Interventions aligned with the principle of reversibility are compatible with long-term conservation goals because they can be altered without damaging the building. These two approaches are also commonly applied within the context of museology in Turkey, where, according to Mısırlısoy and Günçe [8], historically repurposed buildings are often used as museums, thereby preserving cultural heritage and supporting community engagement.

According to Altınoluk and Yenice [9], one frequently used method in architectural conservation today is preserving buildings through changes in their functions. The primary goals of this approach include preventing the disappearance of structures, preserving their tangible and intangible values as much as possible to enable their reuse, protecting the cityscape from damage, increasing historical awareness, and providing economic benefits to the city. Evaluating these buildings as exhibition spaces is critical in promoting community engagement and ensuring this heritage is preserved and transmitted to future generations. One of the most prominent methods of functional change is the conversion of historical buildings into museums. An essential aspect of this process is the inclusion of informative exhibitions related to the history of the existing structure, which contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage. In this way, the museum building can become part of the exhibition [10]. According to Hooper-Greenhill [11], using historical spaces as exhibition venues ensures the physical preservation of the space. It revitalizes a site that might be forgotten in collective memory over time. Contemporary museology emphasizes the interaction between museums and society, transforming museums into platforms for social dialogue and learning by prioritizing community engagement. This creates a practical context for ensuring social participation. As museum anthropologist Macdonald [12] explains, contemporary museums have transformed from one-way institutions that merely convey information into educational spaces that foster reciprocal learning, community participation, and critical thinking, thus taking on a role quite distinct from the traditional museum concept within everyday life.

## **2.2. Contemporary Museology and Participation**

Historic buildings are not merely heritage assets to be preserved, but also cultural spaces that can be revitalized through contemporary functions and integrated into social life. According to Mısırlısoy and Günçe [8], repurposed historic structures are often adapted for museum use, thereby supporting both the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of public participation. These structures are being transformed into living spaces that engage with society in line with contemporary museological approaches. While preserving their authentic architectural identity, interactive exhibition areas, digital applications, and public events are incorporated, establishing a strong link between the past and the present. This transformation process can also be interpreted as the spatial manifestation of a new, participatory museology that does not position the public merely as passive observers but actively involves them in the cultural experience.

The emergence of participatory approaches in museology has transformed the relationship between museums and society, prompting the search for new solutions. According to Hooper-Greenhill [11], the paradigm shift observed in recent years within the field of museology has fundamentally redefined this relationship, bringing with it a need to explore alternative strategies and practices. Thus, a redefinition of the museum's function has also become necessary alongside a spatial and institutional restructuring. The classical understanding of museology has primarily been shaped by fundamental tasks such as collecting, preserving, classifying, and exhibiting artifacts. In this approach, visitors were positioned as passive recipients of knowledge, and museums were regarded as places where information and cultural heritage were transmitted in a one-directional manner [13]. In contrast, contemporary museology particularly shaped by the social and cultural shifts that emerged in the last quarter of the 20th century has evolved into a more participatory, interactive, and experience-oriented model [14].

Through these methods, museums aim to enhance public participation quantitatively and qualitatively by offering opportunities for learning, experience, and multidimensional interaction [15]. In doing so, museums are transformed into dynamic public spaces not only sites for preserving the past, but also venues for debating current social issues, reflecting cultural diversity, and enabling communities to express their identities. Participatory approaches would allow museums to become spaces of dialogue and learning co-constructed with diverse segments of society, facilitating a more inclusive and sustainable practice of cultural heritage [16]. In contemporary museological discourse, it is increasingly vital that museum spaces evolve into multifunctional venues that host permanent exhibitions and temporary displays, provide opportunities for social interaction, and fulfill educational roles. Atagök [17] states, contemporary museums are cultural centers where visitors both enjoy themselves and learn, deriving pleasure from the learning process. Various practices enable public participation, including interactive exhibitions, workshops, hands-on activities, and cultural events. By allowing visitors to explore and interpret exhibited works firsthand, museums create a unique environment supporting formal and informal education. Consequently, they provide opportunities for learning, entertainment, and social interaction for diverse segments of society.

With the rise of contemporary museology, the interior designs of buildings increasingly emphasize flexible spaces that accommodate diverse uses and host various activities. These spaces may be created through functional zoning or designed as adaptable areas that can be transformed according to specific needs. MacLeod [18] points out that one of the prominent spatial pursuits in contemporary museology is the creation of modular and multifunctional spaces that prioritize accessibility and inclusivity, featuring interactive zones and experiential elements instead of fixed exhibition layouts. Digital screens, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and touch panels are becoming key methods of spatial presentation. Spatial infrastructures integrated with mobile applications and digital guide systems are developed to enrich the visitor experience. Alongside this, narrative-driven spatial designs come to the forefront, enabling exhibitions to be conceived not merely as displays of objects but as tools for storytelling [14]. This approach organizes exhibitions in chronological or thematic sequences, allowing visitors to experience the space as if following a narrative. Therefore, spatial design assumes an aesthetic or functional role and a guiding and experience-structuring function. Narrative-focused spatial planning enables exhibitions to be arranged around chronological or thematic frameworks, guiding visitors through the museum as if following a story. Consequently, the design of the space facilitates visitor orientation and supports the flow of movement.

The Tate Modern building in London, created through the adaptive reuse of a former power station, can be regarded as an iconic example of contemporary museology [19]. This transformation embodies the principles of modern museology through adaptive reuse, challenging the traditional notion of the 'museum building' and offering an extraordinary and compelling atmosphere. The underground galleries known as 'The Tanks' are dedicated to experimental artworks. While they typically host large-scale installations, these spaces also accommodate concerts, forums, and children's activities, serving various purposes. This versatility aligns closely with contemporary museology's emphasis on flexible spatial design. Museum floors are arranged thematically and based on conceptual narratives, allowing visitors to navigate the space by making meaningful connections. With its visitor-centered, flexible, experience-oriented, socially integrated, sustainable, and participatory spatial approach, Tate Modern exemplifies the core principles of contemporary museology. It demonstrates that adaptive reuse is a means of historical preservation and a powerful tool for social, cultural, and economic transformation, having successfully engaged an inclusive and diverse audience for years [20].

In conclusion, the additional functions introduced by contemporary museology create a space for interaction by bringing together diverse individuals with shared interests through various creative activities such as concerts, seminars, cultural events, film and theater screenings, workshops, and dance performances. This creates a conducive environment for fostering social participation. Whereas in traditional museology, a museum might be experienced in a single visit with little incentive for return, contemporary museology offers multiple avenues for repeated engagement, encouraging visitors to return and interact with the space in diverse ways. In summary, contemporary museology transforms museums from silent exhibition halls into vibrant social interaction spaces. It redefines the visitor from a passive

observer to an active participant, while reshaping the museum space into a living, adaptable, and experience-oriented environment.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study adopts a qualitative research method, specifically the case study approach, to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of two examples of contemporary museology within their own contextual frameworks. The study aims to examine the decisive role of spatial production decisions in shaping the transmission of knowledge and methods of meaning-making within the framework of contemporary museology, and to explore, in contrast to traditional approaches, the potential of the museum space to transform into a discursive domain. In this context, the study addresses the transformation processes of abandoned historical sites—embedded within the urban fabric and bearing historical layers and contextual codes—into exhibition spaces from the perspective of contemporary museology.

In the first phase of the research, the concepts of adaptive reuse, contemporary museology, and participation were examined through a comprehensive literature review. The primary reason for addressing adaptive reuse and contemporary museology in conjunction is to move beyond the mere preservation of historical buildings by converting them into cultural or educational facilities, and instead to open a discussion on design and construction strategies that can reproduce the authentic identity of these structures within their contextual frameworks. In order to ensure that the insights gained from the literature review could be consistently exemplified during the analysis phase, specific criteria were adopted in the selection of the museum spaces to be examined. Accordingly, preference was given to museum spaces that both preserve local identities linked to the historical context and social structure of their respective cities, and respond to contemporary spatial requirements and aesthetic sensibilities.

The selection of case studies analyzed in this research is limited to museum buildings located in the city of Ankara. This limitation is primarily due to the prominent emergence of contemporary museology and participatory approaches within recent adaptive reuse projects in the city. Additionally, the fact that certain museum buildings have become closely associated with Ankara and have acquired symbolic and cultural value as part of the city's identity further supports the selection of this sample. The significant role of museums in Ankara in shaping urban identity and contributing to city branding has been emphasized in various academic studies. For instance, in their 2023 study, Doğu Öztürk and Zeybek analyzed social media posts tagged with #ankaramüzeleri and revealed that events organized by museums enhance Ankara's urban image, while museum visits offer visitors an impression of the city's brand value [21].

The sample of the study consists of the Erimtan Museum of Archaeology and Arts and CerModern, both of which ensure inclusivity through different dynamics within the framework of contemporary museology. The selection of these cases is based on their capacity to cultivate their own communities and to develop recurring experiential practices within Ankara's cultural context. Erimtan Museum of Archaeology and Arts and CerModern represent a process of 'reproduction' that critically engages with traces of the past rather than a mere physical reconstruction. Both museum spaces share a holistic design approach encompassing documentation, design, and utilization phases throughout their spatial production processes. However, the two museum buildings differ in terms of the opportunities they offer for participation, a key concept in contemporary museology discourse. While the Erimtan Museum of Archaeology and Arts responds to the demands and expectations of a user profile considered a minority and situated outside popular culture, CerModern represents a participatory model that addresses the city's multicultural social fabric rather than targeting a specific group. In order to reveal different approaches to participation during the usage phase in contemporary museology examples, these two cases were analyzed in the study. Additionally, the positioning of both buildings as urban landmarks and memory sites within Ankara's social life was a decisive factor in the selection of the sample.

The data collection process in the analysis phase was conducted in two stages: a literature review and on-site observation. In the first stage, literature concerning the use of historical spaces as exhibition venues within contemporary museology was examined under specific conceptual frameworks. Priority was given

to articles and seminars in which designers critically address the production processes of museum spaces. Within the scope of the course M5101 Urban and Identity, offered by Associate Professor Dr. Hilal Aycı at Gazi University, Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences, Department of Architecture during the Spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year, the Erimtan Museum of Archaeology and Arts and CerModern museum buildings were experienced at different times throughout April 2025. During this period, the study participants experienced the temporary exhibitions *A Route on the Boundaries of the Mind: Fikret Muallâ*, which opened on February 28 at the Erimtan Museum of Archaeology and Arts, and *Musto: Layers of Belonging*, displayed at CerModern from April 3 to April 27, 2025. On-site observations and the reflections of research participants within the museum spaces were also incorporated into the analysis section alongside data obtained from the literature. The analysis of the case studies was conducted under two main headings: Contextual Connection and Cultural Sensitivity, which examines how continuity of the existing context and historical layers is maintained, and Selection of Spatial Opportunities and Facilitation of Social Participation, which evaluates how the reproduction process of the space responds to contemporary needs through current approaches. The conclusion section presents the findings and recommendations of the study.

#### 4. A STUDY ON CONTEXT, EXHIBITION SPACE AND PARTICIPATION IN CONTEMPORARY MUSEOLOGY

##### 4.1 The Erimtan Archaeology and Art Museum

The Erimtan Archaeology and Art Museum is situated in the southern sector of the Hisar Gate within Ankara Castle, one of the city's oldest settlement areas. The museum was founded to share and exhibit, for public benefit, a collection of approximately two thousand movable archaeological artefacts of Anatolian origin, amassed over many years by the entrepreneur Yüksel Erimtan. The museum building comprises an interior volume formed by preserving the exterior shell-wall traces of three historic house ruins in Ankara Castle Square. The museum's design is attributed to Ayşen Savaş, Can Aker, and Onur Yüncü [22].

The production process of the museum space, as documented by Ayşen Savaş, is explained through the concept of 'praxis,' which emphasizes the dialectical relationship between thought and action and foregrounds the process of production rather than the final product. By employing the concept of praxis, Savaş foregrounds the process of the spatial output itself rather than the final product. This design approach treats the design process as a field of inquiry rather than subjecting the existing structures to restoration, transformation, or conservation; accordingly, the museum space has been reconceived to inaugurate a new discursive realm. This approach entails the development of all design phases by situating them within a rhetorical and theoretical framework. Savaş, notes that the Erimtan Museum's design is approached with a holistic methodology encompassing the documentation, conceptualization, and implementation phases, and that this process embodies a form of "re-production" [23].



**Figure 1.** North facade, Duygu Tüntaş Archive -South facade, Oğuz Karakütük Archive [24]

During the documentation phase, the remains of the three historic residences were deconstructed, with each structural component examined individually and regarded as an autonomous object of knowledge. The spatial and historical analysis obtained from the building elements was not used for physical reconstruction during the design and implementation phases but instead served as a tool to reinterpret the

vestiges of the past critically and to build the museum structure into a new, unified whole [23]. The approach adopted in the museum's design enabled the reintegration of the vestiges of the three historic houses within their own historical contexts and architectural scale through a more holistic understanding; thereby contributing to the preservation of the surrounding environment's historical identity and architectural scale.

#### 4.1.1 Contextual Connection and Cultural Sensitivity

Yüksel Erimtan and his colleagues undertook various initiatives to channel their interest in archaeological artifacts into societal benefit; the first of these was the 1996 establishment of the Association of Cultural Property Collectors, aimed at preventing the removal of Anatolian cultural heritage abroad and ensuring public access to these artifacts. With similar aims, in 2009, the Yüksel Erimtan Foundation for Culture and the Arts was established to support cultural and artistic awareness and to foster the development of Anatolian cultural heritage [25]. Both civil society organizations result from Erimtan's steadfast commitment to preserving Anatolian cultural assets. The private collection that Erimtan began assembling in the 1960s was expanded under the aegis of the foundation, guided by professional archaeologists; the curated selection was subsequently opened to the public in 2015 within the Erimtan Archaeology and Art Museum [22]. In this context, the Erimtan Museum exemplifies the metamorphosis of an individual passion for collecting into a permanent cultural institution serving the public good, while also actively contributing to the cultivation of societal engagement with cultural heritage and the formation of collective consciousness within the city.

The Erimtan Museum is located on a sloping site between the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations and the Rahmi M. Koç Museum, forming an integral part of the historical and cultural fabric envisioned for the surroundings of Ankara Castle. The methodology adopted in the production of the museum space can be defined as the transformation of historical knowledge into an architectural product that generates meaning and value within its context. In pursuit of this goal, the architectural traces documented by architects and restoration experts were considered the primary inspiration for the design decisions. No architectural elements that had lost their physical integrity and could not be documented were reconstructed [23]. The design process progressed concurrently with the dismantling and rebuilding phases, intertwining documentation, design, and implementation, and took on the character of an interpretative intervention, as described by Savaş. Therefore, the designer integrated the existing context and historical layer into the spatial production process as a design element beyond mere preservation. This critical approach defines the building and its collection as a product that establishes its context within the surrounding environment and delivers a novel spatial experience organized according to a different system.



*Figure 2. The State of the Building Before Intervention- Interior space [22] [26]*

Savaş [23] explains the traces obtained during the documentation process under four main categories: ground line, roof line, wall texture, and openings. The ground line, documented at the junctions where historic buildings meet the terrain, revealed the extent to which the structures were embedded; this phenomenon has been characterized as "displacement" due to its role in generating a new urban scale around Hisar Square. The roof line provided visual and proportional cohesion among the buildings, while the visual effect created by the stones on the walls, gradually decreasing in size from bottom to top, was observed to reinforce the relationship with the castle walls. Before the design and implementation phases, the research and documentation process involved deconstructing architectural elements, each gaining independent significance; upon reassembly, these elements created a new entity that critically engages with the original structure. As previously articulated, the preservation and reinterpretation of the traces

revealed during the documentation phase facilitated the reintegration of the existing context and historical layers into a more comprehensive and coherent whole, enabling the structure to acquire a renewed context in conjunction with its function [23]. The design process of the Erimtan Museum should therefore be understood as a reinterpreted representation of the theoretical framework developed by the data, observations, and critiques obtained during the research and documentation phases.

#### 4.1.2 Selection of Spatial Possibilities and Ensuring Community Participation

The museum's architectural form, which is perceived as three separate structures from the exterior [28], provides the designer with constructional flexibility through a continuous, singular, and cohesive interior space. Within the building's interior, the functional subdivision of the exhibition hall has been designed as a flexible and convertible spatial organization that centers on user experience and accommodates interdisciplinary activities. The design of the exhibition hall bears the signature of Ayşen Savaş [22].

The museum's internal spatial capacities have been harnessed in the design process by employing the building mass as a narrative plane, aiming to deliver a multiplicity of versatile experiences within the exhibition hall. For example, the niches carved into the interior faces of the structural walls and the partition elements treated as display surfaces within the exhibition space prompt an interpretation of the space as an exhibition object. To evoke a sense of infinity in the exhibition hall, a perspective vanishing line was created; this line is defined by the mezzanine boundary and is supported by lighting fixtures that become denser toward the floor level, as well as by a spatial form narrowing toward the western façade. This condition directs the visitor's perception from the entrance toward the exhibition hall, constituting a key element that transforms the time spent in the museum into a spatial experience.



*Figure 3. Exhibition space (Personal Archive, 2025)*

The theoretical approach adopted in forming the Erimtan Museum facilitates the re-examination, exhibition, and re-production of the space and collection in various forms. This approach differentiates itself from traditional museums by enabling the creation of new layers of meaning through technological or sensory interactive exhibition methods. For example, the display of archaeological artifacts reflecting everyday “home” life within the exhibition hall, juxtaposed with the building's transformation from a residential function to a museum space, embodies a symbolic experience of temporal displacement within the museum [28]. During the presentation of the collection in the exhibition hall, contextualizing labels and descriptive texts were employed; anamorphic texts inscribed on the walls, letters embedded in leather, writings formed through shadow, and notes conveyed via light collectively served to mitigate the effects of temporal disjunctions and spatial displacements within the museum experience [23]. The primary aim of this approach is to configure spatial possibilities in a way that diversifies individual experiences and contributes to cultural life in a multifaceted manner.

Gül Pulhan and Adrian Saunders have conducted the curatorial work of the museum collection, assisted by Selma Ünal [22]. The exhibited works have been grouped using typical traces within their context; the flow between them has been organized by establishing a narrative structure. Through guidance designed considering visitors' visual and auditory perceptions, the works were presented to the audience based on their respective periods' historical and cultural realities. This approach provides a concrete example of the expectation, prominent in contemporary museology, to individualize the experience based on the observations and perceptions of the individual engaging with the space. The awareness intended to be fostered at the museum scale regarding the cultural heritage of the Anatolian region is being conveyed by

presenting the works within their context to the societal experience. Erimtan Museum, due to the events, educational programs, and social spaces it hosts, holds the identity of a cultural institution. It can be argued that this potential of the museum has gradually contributed to the diversification of the visitor profile in its surrounding area, thereby increasing its visibility.



**Figure 4.** Exhibition space (Personal Archive, 2025)

In this respect, the exhibition hall has been configured with both permanent and temporary spatial components; the permanent exhibition area on the entrance and first basement has been linked in spatial continuity with the temporary exhibition hall on the second basement level. The museum's architectural design allows visitors to engage in repeated experiences; furthermore, incorporating a textual language within the collections of the temporary exhibition hall enhances the museum's unique context, elevating its identity to a distinguished position within the urban setting. For instance, the temporary exhibition A Route at the Boundaries of the Mind: Fikret Muallâ delivers an integrated experience with the permanent exhibition space by incorporating critical texts alongside the artist's works. Meanwhile, exhibitions such as Scent and the City transcend the visual realm through the museum, allowing visitors to perceive and engage with the city in novel sensory and reflective ways [27].



**Figure 5.** A Route at the Boundaries of the Mind: Fikret Muallâ (Personal Archive, 2025)

In the discourse of contemporary museology, the notion of the museum as a space for experiential learning has been taken a step further at the Erimtan Museum of Archaeology and Art through its educational workshops. In addition, the museum serves as a venue for events targeting a specific audience, including concerts focused on classical Turkish music, Western classical music, and jazz, as well as the regularly held Erimtan Archaeology Conference Series [27]. The participants' relationship with the space is aimed to serve as a means for the conscious construction of identity, thereby fostering a sense of awareness regarding the space itself. This process has enabled the site to develop a distinctive visitor profile over time gradually. It has led to its transformation into an urban space identified with a specific social and cultural group. Additionally, unlike other museums in Ankara Castle and its surroundings, the Erimtan Museum of Archaeology and Art has attracted a distinct visitor profile to the area and has facilitated the repeated engagement of this audience with the site. The sense of belonging established with visitors has identified the museum with the region and has contributed to the transformation of the surrounding area's historical identity and socio-cultural dynamics.

## 4.2 CerModern

Although the Ankara Cer workshops once served as train maintenance and repair facilities, technological advances and changes in production and consumption methods led to their functional obsolescence and eventual abandonment. These workshops remained unused for an extended period before being repurposed in 2010. Uygur Architecture Office completed the restoration and survey projects, and the site was reopened to the public as a modern art museum [29].

These workshops, which hold an essential position in their historical place and function, are one of the architectural elements that fall within the transition from traditional to modern architecture. Located in the middle of the axis between Ankara Castle and Anıtkabir [30], these workshops and the additional sections built onto the structure are situated where Ankara's historical and cultural spaces converge. This location primarily hosts buildings from the Republican Era, highlights the spatial significance of the carriage workshops.



*Figure 6. CerModern -Construction Phase [30]*

The cer workshops, repurposed and revitalized for public use, connect the past with today's modern world, preserving these traces without erasing them and passing them on to future generations. Nowadays, as a modern art museum, the workshops known as "CerModern" can be described as a bridge linking the past and the present, hosting a wide range of contemporary art.

### 4.2.1 Contextual Connection and Cultural Sensitivity

CerModern takes its name from the Arabic-origin word "Cer." The word "Cer" originally means to pull or drag, and the workshops where trains were maintained and produced are called "cer workshops" by the community [31]. In the Republic's early years, during 1926-27, within the framework of the policy of "weaving the country with iron networks," railways were nationalized, and the ceramics workshops were built in this period. These workshops result from the first railway, constructed in 1892 in Ankara by the Germans during the Ottoman era as part of the Anatolia-Baghdad Line [32]. This historical background demonstrates that CerModern, revitalized and reintegrated into the city and society through adaptive reuse, adopts a culturally sensitive approach in a historical context by carrying the traces of the past into the future.

The cer workshops, consisting of three units and train maintenance hangars, were partially demolished to allow the passage of the railway line. For CerModern, whose primary function is known to be related to trains and railways, transparent façades were used to ensure continuity between the preserved original structure and the newly added buildings. Large spaces such as museums and exhibition halls were placed underground to avoid concerns about scale in the original building. Examining the building's spaces, it can be said that traditional and modern construction methods have been integrated [31]. Today, influenced by contemporary museology and community participation, the additions to CerModern have allowed traditional and modern elements to coexist. In this way, while the museum structure combines the conventional and the contemporary, it remains connected to its environmental context; instead, it aims to reflect both physical and ecological contexts in its spaces.



*Figure 7. Additional Structure and Hangar [30]*

Context is a critical concept that helps to understand the environmental influences existing before the design object, how it becomes part of a whole, how it should adapt to its surroundings, and the effects of the new order brought by the design object [33]. From this perspective, CerModern carries multiple layers of context: physical context due to its location, cultural context through its contemporary museum function, social context as a public art space accessible to all segments of society, and historical contexts by bearing traces of different historical periods. With the redefinition of its spatial functions and the new additions enhancing the building's utility, CerModern has a strong contextual narrative.

In the digital presentation published by Akbank Sanat [34], the design and implementation processes of CerModern were explained, providing information about the architectural applications. During this presentation, Semra Uygur emphasized that the building owes its existence to the trains and the railway. Therefore, when repurposed, it continued without breaking its connection to its original functions. Uygur [34] stated that the old and new parts were designed not to overshadow each other, reflecting a design approach that allows limited interaction between the old and new elements, preventing either from dominating the other. This approach makes the space functional and aesthetic in itself and considers its historical, cultural, and social context, demonstrating a holistic understanding and thereby contributing to the city's identity.

#### **4.2.2 Selection of Spatial Possibilities and Ensuring Community Participation**

The possibilities offered by the space during the design process should respond to the users' needs while also demonstrating a sensitive approach to the cultural and social dynamics of the community by ensuring community participation. When examined in the context of the possibilities provided by CerModern, it supports community participation through both temporary and permanent exhibition areas and additional user-oriented features, enabling users to shape the spatial possibilities.

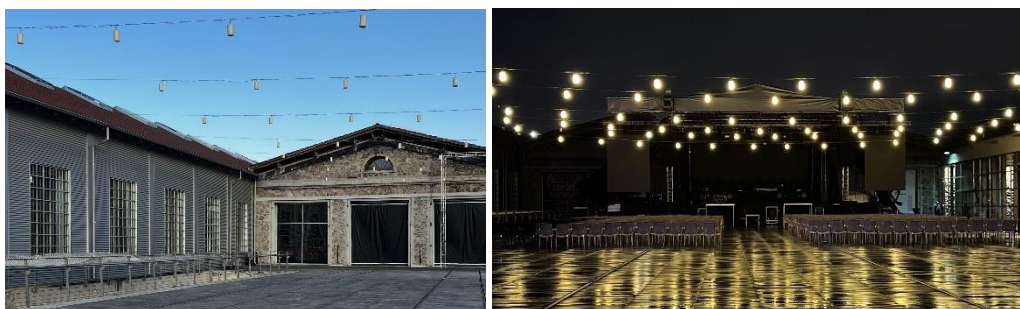
CerModern, offering extensive possibilities regarding exhibition methods, diversifies exhibition practices and increases spatial capacity through permanent and temporary exhibition areas and digital and open exhibition spaces. The unit, which was repurposed and incorporated into the exhibition complex, called the "North Hangar," has become a permanent space within the building for digital exhibitions. Additionally, temporary exhibition arrangements are facilitated, while the active use of online platforms enhances the accessibility and visibility of the exhibitions [35].



**Figure 8.** Exhibition Area [30]

In the exhibition space located on the lower floor of CerModern, visitors are greeted by a glass entrance door, and directly opposite it, an informational panel on the column provides details about the exhibition content, accompanied by an introductory video of the artist. The exhibition space's color scheme is arranged according to the artworks on display; while some works are presented in three dimensions, others remain two-dimensional. Lighting decisions have also been made to incorporate both natural and artificial sources. The exhibition spaces, which generally follow a coherent flow, transform into spacious and comprehensible environments for the visitor. By embracing its historical context and positioning itself as a bridge between past and present, CerModern brings together contemporary art and artists under one roof, fostering the coexistence of differences. These spaces transform their physical environment and impact the broader society and invite participants to engage in unique and diverse experiences [36]. Thus, the exhibition design becomes a crucial element that enhances the function and visibility of the space, adds aesthetic value, and ensures the most effective presentation of artworks. Within the context of CerModern, exhibition methods can be understood as tools that enable a direct dialogue between the artwork and the space, thereby reinforcing the coherence of meaning. Elements such as the color, lighting, and even sound of the environment can directly influence the interpretation of the artwork. In this regard, the multifunctional use of space and the encouragement of community participation contribute to a richer exhibition experience.

Semra Uygur explains that during the design and implementation of the building, the open space between the hangars and the additional structure was initially conceived solely as an open-air exhibition area. However, she notes that today this space hosts evening open-air cinema screenings, jazz nights, and events such as dinners and weddings. Highlighting the adaptability and suitability of the space, Uygur emphasizes that users can utilize the space more enriched from their perspectives [34]. This statement reveals that users can actively participate in the space physically and in terms of usage dynamics. Architectural design defines physical boundaries and offers a flexible spatial infrastructure that evolves through user experience. As Uygur [30] emphasizes, the flexibility that allows for multi-purpose use of the space can exceed the designer's original intentions. In this context, the relationship between spatial design and everyday practices depends on the architect's vision and the user's creativity. This creativity enables a space, designed initially as a single-function open-air exhibition area, to acquire diverse functions through user intervention, thereby revealing the transformative nature of the space in response to social participation and demands. As a result, exhibition areas enriched through community engagement acquire new functions and contribute to expanding the space's potential.



**Figure 9.** Outdoor Exhibition Area -Open-Air Cinema (Personal Archive, 2025)

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the process of adaptive reuse of historical buildings, it is essential to consider that these structures are integral to the city's physical and cultural identity. Therefore, maintaining historical and cultural sensitivity throughout the design, restoration, and usage phases is of great importance. Adaptive reuse carried out with this approach requires a strategy that goes beyond merely preserving historical buildings by converting them into cultural or educational venues; instead, it aims to reproduce their original identity within their contextual framework. This holistic approach grounded in principles of contextual connection and cultural sensitivity, and emphasizing public participation during the usage phase enables the building to gain the status of a site of memory within the urban fabric. The recognition of such buildings as memory spaces in the city depends not only on their ability to represent former users through historical and cultural layers but also on the development of policies that allow contemporary users to maintain their social practices within these spaces. In doing so, these spaces become integrated into urban life by contributing to public continuity and evolve into environments that embody urban memory and identity within a temporally layered context.

This study highlights the importance of reproducing structures that have lost their function over time, regardless of the period they were built and their original functions, through their qualities as “memory spaces” in the collective memory, for the sake of urban culture and social life. The study suggests that historical structures that have the quality of memory spaces should be repurposed as exhibition spaces within the context of contemporary museology and thus be reintroduced to social life. This approach is exemplified through the examples of Erimtan Archeological Museum and CerModern. Both contemporary museum structures in the sample have been recreated through the new relationships they have established with the city and its actors, without breaking away from their historical and cultural contexts. The museum spaces in question maintain their quality of representing the past by preserving their contextual integrity; and in the process of reproduction, they have become dynamic and transforming cultural areas that respond to today's social needs with the new layers of meaning they have gained in line with the discourse of contemporary museology.

The Erimtan Museum of Archaeology and Art is part of the historical and cultural fabric of Ankara Castle, one of the city's oldest settlement areas. It offers a unique museum model in which a private collection of roughly two thousand Anatolian archaeological artifacts is shared with the public, turning individual accumulation into a social asset. Savaş, focuses on the production process of the museum space rather than viewing it as a final product; he considers the design process as a field of research [23]. The documentation, design, and implementation phases carried out during this process were fundamentally conducted through a critical design approach and interpretive intervention. In the process of transforming the remains of three historic houses into an exhibition space, the context and historical layers of the buildings, along with the spatial traces obtained during the documentation process, were reinterpreted and reproduced as design elements. This critical approach has enabled the structure to be reassembled in its environment in a new and different arrangement, achieving a more comprehensive unity and thus acquiring a new context.

Erimtan Museum, with the events, educational programs, and social spaces it hosts, functions as a cultural institution. The spatial possibilities of the existing structure were arranged in the spatial organization to transform the museum space from merely an exhibition area into an experiential environment, aiming to diversify visitor experiences and provide multifaceted contributions to social culture. The labels attached to the exhibited objects, along with descriptive texts and events and workshops organized in conjunction with temporary exhibitions, provide the opportunity to convey the artist's intended meaning of the object to the audience on multiple levels. This distinguishes the Erimtan Archaeology and Art Museum from other contemporary museum examples by raising user awareness and enabling the conscious construction of a museum-specific identity. By organizing events tailored to specific audience segments including classical Turkish, Western classical, and jazz concerts, as well as regular conference series the museum has broadened its visitor profile and consequently enhanced its visibility within its community. Thus the museum has been identified with the region and has contributed to the transformation of the castle's historical identity with socio cultural dynamics. Therefore, unlike CerModern, the Erimtan Museum has enabled the representation in the public sphere of groups typically excluded from popular culture.

CerModern, which has been reintegrated into the urban fabric and society through adaptive reuse, presents a culturally sensitive approach that carries the traces of the past into the future. By refunctioning its physical infrastructure, CerModern enhances social participation and thus serves as a cultural bridge between the past and the present. The transformation of the former railway workshops into contemporary exhibition spaces has allowed traditional and modern elements to coexist, granting the space a renewed identity that both preserves its environmental context and reflects physical and environmental qualities. CerModern can be defined as a space of memory where physical, social, and historical contexts are reconsidered, functional characteristics are enriched, and traditional and contemporary elements are brought together through a holistic approach. The various opportunities offered to users evolve through public engagement, allowing the space to transcend its physical structure and become an integral part of urban life. This not only promotes the use of public space but also supports cultural continuity and contributes to the formation of urban identity. Moreover, CerModern offers users a unique sense of place through its diverse range of events; this experience, shaped by art, culture, and social interaction, enables various forms of participation and contributes to the transformation of the space into a distinctive public venue recognized within the urban context. Compared to the Erimtan Museum, CerModern appeals to a broader user profile, allowing for a more inclusive form of social engagement with the space.

The methods of literature review and case study employed in this study have provided a comprehensive opportunity to evaluate the impact of the adaptive reuse of historical buildings, while preserving traces of the past, on urban identity and social belonging, through the examples of the Erimtan Archeology Museum and CerModern. The findings obtained through these methods have revealed several essential characteristics of both structures regarding contemporary museology practices and strategies for public engagement. According to the findings, the flexible and adaptable structure of the temporary exhibition spaces observed in both buildings ensures the preservation of the historical fabric without causing damage. It encourages visitors to return to these spaces. This way, the connection these historically significant buildings establish with urban memory is strengthened by increasing community engagement. At the same time, the exhibition methods employed in both buildings offer experiential approaches aligned with the concept of contemporary museology, transforming the visitor from a passive observer into an active participant. Practices such as open workshops for visitors, multifunctional and adaptable event spaces, and digital technologies have strengthened the relationship these spaces establish with the public. In this context, the preservation of the historical setting, multipurpose usage scenarios, temporary exhibitions, event programs, and design choices that prioritize user interaction all contribute to enhancing the role of these structures in urban identity and collective memory.

The most significant finding of this study is that the adaptive reuse of historical buildings with contemporary functions gives rise to a new, more powerful context one that is nourished by the existing setting and historical layers, yet transcends them. This new context does not merely carry traces of the past; instead, it reinterprets those traces, intertwining them with today's cultural and functional expectations. The historical building is no longer just an object of memory; it has transformed into a dynamic interaction space integrated with contemporary life. Thus, by establishing a connection between the layers of time, the building re-creates the past within the present, while simultaneously reshaping the present within the past. In conclusion, the adaptive reuse of historical buildings within the framework of contemporary museology has been addressed through the examples of the Erimtan Archeology Museum and CerModern, to ensure the continuity of urban identity and encourage community engagement. The examined cases demonstrate that it is possible to transform historical structures into living, evolving cultural spaces that promote community engagement by blending traces of the past with the needs of the present.

In this context, the study reveals that, in contemporary museology, the use of historic spaces as exhibition venues carries significant potential during the utilization phase owing to their existing contextual and historical layers. It has been concluded that the individualization of spatial organization in contemporary museum spaces, along with the provision of narrative and experiential participation opportunities in exhibition methods, supports these institutions in defining unique spatial practices and developing distinctive visitor profiles.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space*, D. Nicholson-Smith (Trans.), Blackwell, 1991.
- [2] Küçük, İ., "On Architectural Design Knowledge: Reflecting upon the Knowledge in Designing", *Materiart*, Lisbon: Caleidoscopio, 411-422, 2022.
- [3] Sandell, R., "Museums and the combating of social inequality: Roles, responsibilities, resistance", *Museums, Society, Inequality*, R. Sandell (Ed.), Routledge, 3-23, 2002.
- [4] Vergo, P. (Ed.), *The New Museology*, Reaktion Books, 1997.
- [5] ICOMOS, Mimari mirasın analizi, korunması ve strüktürel restorasyonu için ilkeler, Z. Ahunbay (Çev.), *ICOMOS Türkiye Milli Komitesi Yayını*, 2003. [https://www.icomos.org.tr/Dosyalar/ICOMOSTR\\_tr0033791001536913477.pdf](https://www.icomos.org.tr/Dosyalar/ICOMOSTR_tr0033791001536913477.pdf)
- [6] Nora, P., *Hafıza Mekânları*, M. E. Özcan (Çev.), Dost Kitabevi, Ankara, 2006.
- [7] Eneş, G., & Karabağ, N. E., "Tarihi yapıda çağdaş müdahale; yeniden işlevlendirmede tasarım stratejisi olarak 'ekleme'", *Tasarım Kuram*, 19(39), 351-370, 2023.
- [8] Mısırlısoy, D., & Günçe, K., "Assessment of the adaptive reuse of castles as museums: Case of Cyprus", *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning*, 11(2), 147-159, 2016.
- [9] Altınoluk, Ü., ve Yenice Karadayı, T., "New uses for old buildings: the case of 'Soğukçeşme' street, İstanbul, Turkey", *International Journal of Architecture & Planning*, 7(1), 314-329, 2019.
- [10] Öztürk, G. B., "Müze olarak işlevlendirilen tarihi yapılarda dijital teknoloji kullanımı: Ankara Kelime Müzesi örneği", *Bodrum Journal of Art and Design*, 4(1), 53-74, 2025.
- [11] Hooper-Greenhill, E., *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, Routledge, 2000.
- [12] Macdonald, S. (Ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.
- [13] Bennett, T., *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, Routledge, 1995.
- [14] Simon, N., *The Participatory Museum*, Museum 2.0, Santa Cruz, 2010.
- [15] Watson, S. (Ed.), *Museums and Their Communities*, Routledge, London, 2007.
- [16] Crooke, E., *Museums and Community: Ideas, Issues and Challenges*, Routledge, London, 2007.
- [17] Atagök, T., "Determination of the Cultural Activities of Turkish Art Museums in Line with the Concept of Contemporary Museology", *MSc. Thesis*, Mimar Sinan University, İstanbul, (1982).
- [18] MacLeod, S., *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, Routledge, London, 2005.
- [19] Sudjic, D., *The Edifice Complex: How the Rich and Powerful Shape the World*, Penguin, London, 2000.
- [20] Tüfekçi Karagül, N., "Tate Modern ve Göç [Tate Modern and Immigration]", *İnsanat: Sanat Tasarım ve Mimarlık Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 3(2), 205-220, 2023.
- [21] Öztürk, İ. D. and Zeybek, B., "The Role of Museums in the Process of Creating a Brand City: The Case of Ankara", *Türkiye İletişim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 44: 73-89, (2023).

- [22] Internet: Erimtan Archaeology and Art Museum, *Museum*. <https://erimtanmuseum.org/tr/muze>, (2025).
- [23] Savaş, A., “Tarihin İzini Sürmek: Erimtan Arkeoloji ve Sanat Müzesi’nin Tasarım Süreci”, *Arredamento Mimarlık*, 291, 63–77, 2015.
- [24] Internet: Erimtan Archaeology and Art Museum, *Onuryuncu*. <https://www.onuryuncu.com/51-2011erimtanarkeolojimuzeesi>, (n.d.).
- [25] Ertürk, V., “The Concept of Hybridity in Repurposed Interior Spaces: The Case of Erimtan Museum”, *MSc. Thesis*, Başkent University, Institute of Social Sciences, Ankara, (2021).
- [26] Internet: Erimtan Archaeology and Art Museum, *Arkiv*. <https://www.arkiv.com.tr/proje/erimtan-arkeoloji-ve-sanat-muzesi/4385>, accessed 18 April 2025.
- [27] Internet: Erimtan Archaeology and Art Museum, “Events”, <https://erimtanmuseum.org/tr/etkinlikler>, accessed 17 April 2025.
- [28] Savaş Sargın, A., “From Home to Museum, from Museum to Home,” *Arredamento*, 300, 73–77, (2016).
- [29] Torunbalcı, N., Günay, H. and Köroğlu, N., “Adaptive reuse of Ankara CerModern art gallery evaluation of structural system”, *Gazi University Journal of Science, Part B: Art, Humanities, Design and Planning*, 10(4): 335–345, (2022).
- [30] Uygur Architects, “Cer Modern Arts Center – Ankara”, *Uygur Architects*, retrieved April 11, 2025, from <https://www.uygurarchitects.com/site/en/projects/cermodern.html>.
- [31] Çevik, R., “Bir bakışta: Cer Modern”, *Şantiye Dergisi*, August 30, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.santiye.com.tr/bir-bakista-cer-modern-3004.html>.
- [32] Sezer, S., “Endüstri Yapılarının Yeniden İşlevlendirilme Sürecinde Aydınlatma Tasarımı: Ankara Cer Modern Örneği”, *Master’s thesis*, İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, Mimarlık Anabilim Dalı, Çevre Kontrolü ve Yapı Teknolojisi Programı, İstanbul, 2013.
- [33] Koçyiğit, R. G., “Mimarlıkta Çoklu Bağlımsallıklar Sorunsalı”, *Mimarlık Bilimleri ve Uygulamaları Dergisi (MBUD)*, 7(2), 763–780, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.29185/mbud.1163550>
- [34] Akbank Sanat, “Architecture Seminars Series - CER Modern Arts Center”, YouTube Video, Internet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huwxEXLiupE> , Accessed April 18, 2025.
- [35] CerModern, “CerModern Official Website”, Internet: <https://www.cermodern.org> , Accessed April 21, 2025.
- [36] Şahin, B., “Exhibition Design in Modern Art Spaces: The Cases of OMM Modern Museum, Istanbul Modern, and CerModern”, *Bingöl University Journal of Technical Sciences*, 5(2): 28-42, (2024).