

New forms of cultural patronage

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On 4 July, 2012 the Institut du monde arabe (Institute of the Arab World) or IMA in Paris held a conference on cultural patronage, organised by ADMICAL, the meeting point of business patronage. A round table was proposed concerning the new forms of this patronage.

This conference was introduced by Bruno Levallois, president of the board of direction of the IMA, the venue hosting this meeting. According to him, cultural patronage is a key issue for all of the actors working in culture, gathered together for this event. It falls under the necessary general interest. The threat weighting on patronage should be compensated by the strength of all of the actors within the capacity to work together to give life to a rich meaningful project. In times of economic crisis, culture should not become a luxury, but instead should be a creator of social ties because its concerns are not superficial, but is considered an artistic, economic and educational issue.

Bénédicte Menanteau, general delegate of ADMICAL, wished to reunite the players in the culture and cultural patronage world in order to examine what were its roots. She insisted on the fact that the French Minister of Culture supports the defense of patronage. We have to keep in mind that the ministerial office postponed the installation of measures which would reduce the fiscal deduction. Aligned with the ministry, ADMICAL fights for a better "structuring and not paring down of the budget". All cultural institutions need business patronage and the PME (small and medium sized businesses) appeal to it more and more. Patronage fights against the budget reductions and the lowering of public funding. What's more, it is also a vehicle of original ideas.

A study conducted by the CSA Institute, upon the request of ADMICAL, indicates that the total budget of businesses went from €975m to €375m in 2010. Today, businesses seem adamant about reinvesting in the cultural arena. In 2012, the budget of businesses was at €500m. We observe that support for creation is possible, however the public concern brings in a lot of assistance.

Furthermore, large-scale structures attract a lot of attention. Cultural players had to rethink forms of patronage, a vehicle of creation and innovation permitting businesses to come up against other imaginations and reinforcing its cohesion and identity. Four stakeholders were present to present their innovation, their structure and their ideas. To the question, where does innovation in cultural patronage stand?, Khalila Hassouna, in charge of the development of

Atelier d'Art de France responded: "In September 2011, we created the foundation with the idea according to which no other foundation left room for beneficiaries, namely craftsmen. We would like, for their well being, to promote these artistic professions. These craft men are themselves at the foundation of this project. We are a living proof of complementarity : not social but inter-domain patronage, however our approach is to observe the gaps and to fill them. Craftsmen (217 savoirs-faire), traditionally not well supported by public powers, but better assisted by the private sector, were dependent on assistance reductions according to, for example, age limit. We have put in place a grant whose initial endowment is €200,000. This allows the financing of the production of exceptional works with the added benefit of giving consulting services to the winner for a period of nine months". Now with this foundation, created by craftsmen for craftsmen, is not the conflict of interests risky? According to Khalila Hassouna, Atelier d'art de France does not need the foundation to commercialise member craftsmen. Furthermore, prize beneficiaries are not even within the administration council. While these professions were pinned as old-fashioned because of the design and were by the luxury industry, the leitmotiv of this project is modernity. Ateliers d'art de France should raise money to start projects, this foundation is therefore both distributor and collector of funds. In all, eight patrons allow the foundation to **(more next page...)**

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Interview...

WALES AT THE VENICE BIENNALE

The artist Bedwyr Williams will represent Wales for the 55th Venice Biennial in 2013. Alfredo Cramerotti, Director of Mostyn, Wales' contemporary art centre, and Amanda Farr from Oriel Davies Gallery will curate the project together. Art Media Agency spoke with Alfredo Cramerotti; writer, curator, editor, artist, and, as of September 2011, Director of Mostyn. The latter is the largest publicly funded contemporary art institution in Wales and renowned as a flagship for art throughout the entire UK.

Life in Wales must be quite different from the one in your home country, Italy. Is there anything which was really difficult to get used to?

I have been living outside Italy for more than ten years now, so it's no longer a novelty for me. I have studied in Germany and to Sweden and last year I moved from England to Wales. It is a completely different language and country. With Mostyn being situated in Llandudno, we are quite far from the capital, Cardiff, and we have developed into our own cultural destination. But I am often in London, where I visit five to six exhibitions in one or two days, or in Manchester, Berlin and Paris.

You are the new director of Mostyn as of September 2011. What were your aims for the gallery and how did you realise them?

Mostyn is the leading publicly funded contemporary art gallery in Wales and is supported by the Arts Council of Wales and the Art Services of Conwy County Borough Council. It was founded in 1901 by Lady Augusta Mostyn, a noblewoman, patron of the arts and artist herself, member of the Gwynedd Ladies' Arts Society, and in 1902 the gallery featured its first exhibition. At that time, women were not allowed to exhibit alongside men, so originally Mostyn was dedicated to showing women's art and with that it was the first institution to do so. It continued like this till the First World War and was closed in 1913, when it was requisitioned for use as a drill hall. In the 60s and 70s, it was used as a piano storage space and in 1979 it reopened as a public gallery space. Mostyn has a very interesting story and that is what I want to emphasise. First, I want to draw attention to the unique history of the space, from its beginnings with women's art to then being used as military headquarters and today being an important art centre, with six galleries and a number of other facilities. I want to highlight these historical elements, which in turn

link with feminism, war, mobility and cultural identity, and connect them with contemporary art and contemporary culture. Second, I am interested in the different ways of visiting art. Mostyn was built with a specific function and I have been interested for a long time in seeing how people change the idea of making an exhibition. I want to explore other ways of making exhibitions, relating group and solo shows. One idea, developed with our new Visual Arts Program Curator Adam Carr, is to invite two artists to commission and curate each other's solo shows; another is to commission an artist to do a solo show and to accompany the exhibition with a group show curated by us, responding to the first. Another direction we are developing is to invite two to three artists to each have a solo show at the same time, to create an opportunity for discussion and exchange that goes beyond the curatorial vision of a group show. This concept is not a group show, it is the combination of several solo shows that investigate perhaps the same elements or correspond with each other.

However, the exhibition part will not be the only side of Mostyn, there are two more main strands in which we will focus from 2013. We will massively expand the Engagement programme, the relational part of what we do organising debates, symposia and conferences, informal gatherings and online discussion and forum debate, and the Learning and Participation programme, which is what I call our 'active citizenship' strand — creating the opportunities to work not only with schools,

Colleges, Universities and adult learning, but installing a sense of critical enquiry in every community with which we come into contact. This is why I do not only have one curator but three, one for each strand of the programme.

Why did you choose Bedwyr Williams to represent Wales at the Venice Biennale?

He is a very, very talented artist with a strong international presence. He takes into consideration the position of the viewer and has a particular way of introducing himself as an artist. He currently lives in Wales, not far from Mostyn, where he also used to work. So he already has a relation to Mostyn. In his work, he generally draws upon his Welshness, expands on it, and turns it into a universal condition in which everyone can recognise in their own experience; a very intelligent approach to making art. At the Venice Biennial, Williams will be curated by myself and Amanda Farr from Oriel Davies Gallery. When we suggested to the Arts Council of Wales a joint venture of two institutions curating one artist, they went for it.

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Alfredo Cramerotti

Interview...

WALES AT THE VENICE BIENNALE

(...more) Can you reveal what Bedwyr Williams will be exhibiting at the 55th edition of Venice Biennale?

It is still a secret, but what I can say is that it will also be a project challenging both the perspective and the perception of the visitor, going from one extreme to the other, from minimal to maximal elements. In two weeks we will visit the exhibition space for the first time, so, once we have better familiarised ourselves with the space, we will start producing the whole thing.

How does Williams fit into the program of the Welsh pavilion in the Venice Biennale since the country first participated in the event in 2003?

At the moment, Williams is probably one of the most interesting artists in the international scene, who happens to be Welsh. He has been invited to the recent Performa Biennial in New York, and had a number of solo shows around the world, with a current solo show at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham. Already in the 2005 Venice Biennale, he was awarded an artist placement commission, culminating in a book and presentation entitled BASTA, the Italian for "That's Enough!" This is the time for him to present his work on an international, prestigious stage and Venice is the place where he needs to be now. Williams fits well with Wales' previous programs at the Biennale. He is Welsh and at the same time aware about what this may/may not mean; he considers his Welshness as a possibility to spark dialogues and uses it in a provocative sense, pushing boundaries and certain directions. I am proud that the Arts Council of Wales went for the idea. It will be a challenging project.

What kind of role does Wales play in the British art scene?

In the UK contemporary art and cultural scene, the public sphere for debate generated by the work of artists is recognised as valid, and incentivised via public funding scheme — though there is always an agenda that one has to negotiate. Put in perspective with the small size of the Country, Welsh and Wales-based artist and institutions take up a good chunk of this debate. Culture is the way we communicate and pass on information. In the UK, this role by art is quite integrated in the production of knowledge and at the same time quite successful economically due to a number of circumstances, one of them being the hegemonic role of the English language. That is why being in a bilingual country, with close ties to the hegemonic but at the same time critically reflecting on it, is quite interesting.

You are also the writer of the book *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform without Informing*. What do you mean by "Aesthetic Journalism"?

I work myself as artist and in 2003 I was commissioned to create an art piece taking as its inspiration the bridge in Istanbul that connects Asia and Europe. After realising the work in the form of a sound installation and then a video, and successfully presented it in Berlin and Copenhagen, I realised that I had created a piece of investigative journalism, and this is what many artists do. Being an artist is a way of communicating and processing reality in a certain way, different but not opposite, rather complementary to being a journalist. Journalistic methodologies i.e. interviews, graphic visualisations, photo captions etc. have since long been 'imported' into art. Artists (including myself) can be very committed and 'critically responsible' about a certain topic, or subject; but at the same time not critical enough in the means of investigation and presentation. What I am interested in is to discuss if there is any possibility, through various strategies, not only to 'import' journalism into art, but also re-insert an artistic approach, even an aesthetic one, into the information industry. We live in the information age, yet there is so little awareness about the aesthetic traditions in journalism and mass media, because they are so ubiquitous that they become invisible. Journalism can be described as the view on what is happening in the world, and art as the view on the view. Artists, curators, and cultural mediators can become pivotal in shifting perspectives and help understand better the information process.

Art does not replace other 'systems' through which we live and form (mass media, law, science, education etc.), but it helps to understand better those systems that shape our existence. Being aware about this possibility, and enacting it, can possibly make the difference in one's life.



Alfredo Cramerotti at a talk

Interview with Alfredo Cramerotti, director of the Mostyn Gallery and co-curator of the Wales pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale.