

# My Art Guides

United Kingdom - Interviews

## The urge to speak: an Interview with Alfredo Cramerotti

30 March 2015

Reading [Alfredo Cramerotti](#) recent activities as curator and writer, it seems he has been working non-stop for the last years on a wide range of art fields.

Director of [MOSTYN](#) (Wales, UK), one of the leading contemporary art centers in Europe, he developed a ground-breaking program of exhibitions in the last few years; co-curated **Manifesta 8**, the **Maldives National Pavilion** and the **Wales** participation at the **55th Venice Art Biennale** in 2013, co-curator of **CPS Chamber of Public Secrets** and **AGM Culture symposium**, among the head curators of [APT Artist Pension Trust](#) and artistic director of this year seventh edition of [Sequences](#), real time art festival, just to name a few. At the same time his research on theory and practice of critical photography and aesthetic journalism brought him to publish a large number of essays and to promote and participate to exhibitions, symposia and media initiatives.

Cramerotti, with Olga Jürgenson, is curating the exhibition **From One Citizen You Gather an Idea** with which the **Mauritius** will have the very first national participation at Venice Art Biennale, in its 56th edition next to come in May this year.

**Michele Perna:** Alfredo, can you explain how this project was born?

**Alfredo Cramerotti:** It was born out of artistic interest and the ‘urge’ to speak, to talk about difference in cultural and even aesthetic canons, why these differences are there and how we approach them. Not only as general audience, but as professionals, artists, curators, cultural directors, art writers, educators. Especially in Venice. It’s quite easy to ‘dismiss’ a certain approach as naive, immature or wanting to play hardball with geopolitical issues, without really understanding what’s going on in that region and why certain tendencies have developed and are there. Being that manifestation either a political / activist approach or a more transcendental / spiritual one – incidentally, both very present in the Mauritian artistic scene.

**MP:** The Maldivian first participation two years ago was not the typical national pavilion but comprised a series of activities and initiatives to bring light on some urgent environmental matters and western society behavioral patterns, which I found really interesting.

What are the themes you would like to tackle through this upcoming exhibition?

**AC:** Mainly how we value, judge and make opinions based on first impressions and certain superficiality if we want to put it that way. I was actually struck how different waves of occupation by western countries (Britain, France, Holland and – after the independence in 1968, strong links with the former Soviet Union) have somehow shaped the cultural output of art and culture in Mauritius. And how some very strong political activities and art-activism initiatives combine and mix, almost smoothly, with a more transcendental attitude as to making art, which in my reading comes more from an Indo-Asiatic approach. The picture is complex, and the opposite of straightforward understanding what’s going on.

This interest of mine comes also from my work as Head Curator of APT Artist Pension Trust. For that role, I review on a monthly basis hundreds of portfolios of artists from around the world, literally from the four corners – from Mongolia to Chile to the United States and Europe, and I can witness that preloaded aesthetic canons play a role in how we, art professionals and specialised audience alike, approach a certain artwork and artists’ body of work. To learn one must first unlearn. Very difficult path, but absolutely worth it.

**MP:** I think it's misleading to talk about nationalities as something art is related to or historically rooted. Maybe this approach is quite post-colonialist but don't you think it has much more sense to have deep knowledge about a particular history of events, a geographical area with its social and economic dynamics, and how that influences an artist?

What shall be the role of Biennials in shifting this perspective? Can biennials have some kind of cultural engagement on developing countries art scenes?

**AC:** I do somehow agree with your thought. It is what we are attempting to correctly put on show in Venice. The role of biennials is not fixed either. It started as a nationalist showoff, it's now more of a plethora of non-representational artistic expressions in relation to geographical or political areas – also due to the fact that artists travel and work everywhere, and rarely stay in one place for their life. When they are invited to show for their birth or adoptive country, they tend so not to invest too much in that notion, and rather open up a critical conversation.

Anyhow, it would be interesting to see a deep commitment for that geographical and political realities, and see what happens now to re-introduce that approach, with visitors well aware about the globalisation of the artistic profession and funding stream for art. This would provide somehow a powerful 'screen' against naively representation and interpretation. It may be that Biennial in the future will steer more (or back) towards that model, who knows.

**MP:** What do you know of Mauritius art scene? Has there been a diaspora of artists as in other small countries far from the big art centers?

**AC:** I mentioned above my thoughts and experience of the art scene there. As for the diaspora, only partially. Germany, UK, France, Holland. The known phenomenon of colonisers who welcome back their former political subjects and these rightly using their former governors' structures for professional development. Generating in due course an integration process more or less successful. Art diaspora is no different form other professional diasporas for that matter.

**MP:** How did the selection of the artists work in this case?

**AC:** For the Mauritian artists, we did an open call through the main national newspaper of Mauritius last year, and we put together an international panel of art professionals to express their opinions for the project presented and the portfolio examined (again, putting in practice and testing the idea of cultural and aesthetic canons). From that open call, we invited seven artists.

For the European artists, following up the testing of the aesthetic canons via the open call, we decided to invite seven artists from those countries which had a say, or an influence, on how the artistic and cultural scene in Mauritius have developed through the centuries. So we started a discussion with artists based in France, Britain, Germany, Russia and Holland. We ask them to respond to each other's work. We basically created the conditions for the beginning of a conversation.

**MP:** I read your essay *Mediating Spaces* (2006, *International Journal of Media Cultural Politics* #2.1), where starting from the analysis of the 3rd Berlin Biennale you questioned the use of diverse exhibition spaces for some art practices and their influence on the viewers. From *One Citizen You Gather an Idea* will be located in a XVII century baroque Venetian palace, Palazzo Flangini. How are you going to work with this space?

**AC:** Well put it. I like your work ethic, seriously. We are using the baroque palace precisely as a context in which cultural and aesthetic canons are very visible: their influence, their 'value' (still nowadays) on the visitor, their impact on transferring some cultural currency. It is the perfect setting for a Pavilion centered precisely on those questions. As mentioned above, we created the space for a discussion to take place, and the location is very much at the centre of that conversation.

**MP:** Last but not least, your name is linked to another exhibition in town in the same period, **Weird Tales** by **Francesco Jodice** at Galleria Michela Rizzo. Can you tell something about this project?

**AC:** I have followed Francesco since his days as part of *Multiplicity*, the collective that worked across disciplines in raising (visual) questions to geo-political situations around the globe and especially in Europe. I have researched their work in-depth when I wrote my book *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform without Informing* published in

2009, but i actually never worked with Francesco before. It was a very welcomed proposal when this arose. The exhibition and publication is a sort of walk-through scenario in which very 'liminal spaces' and 'minimal ideas' are counterposed by massive presence in terms of known landscapes and scenarios, places and situations that we cannot grasp because their scale are bigger than human's scale but at the same time we can conceive and understand.

Conversely, the fragments are those which we are supposed to comprehend well because they are within our daily reality, but instead escape totally our capacity to mediate, digest, make sense. Hence, the sense of 'Weird Tales'. It's truly a fascinating journey.

**MP:** And what about the second half of the year? what are you working on?

**AC:** First of all MOSTYN, where I have plans for tow solo shows, one with Diango Hernandez and then one with Marinella Senatore early next year. These will be in combination with other solos and group shows that will happen at the same time. For the off-site part of my work, in September I am working on a group show in Vienna for 'curated by\_Vienna' art week on the particularly controversial and engaging idea of art & capital. It starts with a text by the philosopher Armen Avanesian 'Tomorrow Today – Art and Capital'. With which I partly disagree. So I decided to take up the challenge.

After that I will curate EXPO VIDEO in Chicago for the main cultural platform of EXPO CHICAGO. Fifteen artists showing film and video on an idea more related to narrative than anything else. But I am still working on that.

**Michele Perna**