

Sirp

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Projektijuhi kogemusega kuraator

Interview to Alfredo Cramerotti by Maria Arusoo and Rebeka Põldsam

Alfredo Cramerotti held for Contemporary Arts, Estonia Center in April 2014, the lecture "Curating Exhibitions, Conferences, Pavilions and Buildings: The Bizarre Life of the Curator"). His lecture was on contemporary art curating aspects, highlighting that the culture of contemporary art is more than just exhibitions. Cramerotti visited Estonia as the 56th Venice Art Biennale Estonian pavilion foreign member of the jury. Alfredo Cramerotti is an artist, theorist and curator who has worked in television, radio, publishing, media, festivals and exhibition organizer. Cramerotti directs MOSTYN, the excellent Centre for Contemporary Art in Wales, and is Head Curator of the Artist Pension Trust. He was co-curator of the 2013 Wales in Venice and Maldives Pavilion at the 55th Venice Art Biennale and the 2010 "Manifesta 8" biennial in Spain.

[What is MOSTYN - it has a very interesting history, please introduce it once more - and how/ why did you start working there?](#)

MOSTYN is the foremost centre of contemporary art in Wales; interestingly, it is not based in the capital (Cardiff) but at the opposite side, in Llandudno, a sea resort on the north coast of Wales. We have six truly beautiful galleries, studio space for education and learning activities, a trendy cafe'-restaurant and an amazing shop of contemporary craft and design. I'll stop here with self-praise. But it is indeed quite an incredible place, and artists are repeatedly referring to MOSTYN as one of the most beautiful spaces to show art in the UK.

Programme-wise, we have three seasons per year (Mar-Jun; Jul-Oct; Nov-Feb) with a number of solo shows, group shows and public events. The programme is planned approx three years in advance, with some flexibility regarding the smaller galleries. MOSTYN was founded and built in 1901 by Lady Augusta Mostyn as one of the first galleries in the world dedicated to women artists, and the building has had many lives in the last 110 years (with WWI it was transformed in a military drill hall, and subsequently was a refuge home, the sorting office for the Royal Mail, a piano showroom, and became again an art space in the 1970s). Hence the programme is focused on two main directions, one historical-contemporary, picking up and unravelling those moments and situations in the life of the gallery through the work of contemporary artists; and the other contextual, revisiting art genres, even traditional types like landscape, portrait, etc. within current art practices and also asking what is the position of the artist in our society, why we should care about it and debating its relevance. Each of the two directions include obviously solo shows, group show and a programme of public events and learning.

[How did you become a curator with a completely different background? What is your background?](#)

I'm the youngest of four siblings, and my brother, eighteen years older than me, did have a career as a painter. He then switched for advertising at a relatively young age, which in retrospect I found interesting since art always foregrounds some broader societal and cultural modes. Perhaps I have absorbed some of his creative approach when as a kid I was nosing around his studio. In any case, after my technical studies I had a first career as Project Manager in the retail design industry, and that gave me the sound experience in shaping ideas, managing resources, people and schedules that I found crucial in the art sector. At the same time, I founded a small contemporary art gallery in Pisa in the 1990s, where I was mounting an exhibition every three weeks, something quite hectic to think back. After a few years I moved to the UK to pursue a full-time career in art. I got a residency as an artist in London, lived there for three years (doing various jobs to pay the rent), then moved to Berlin on a scholarship to work in a contemporary art space for a few months, which introduced me to the contemporary art scene on a European and international level. I remained in Berlin to do a MA in Museum and Curatorial Studies, and moved on to Sweden to undertake Critical Studies in Malmö. This was my second cycle of education, and it happened in my 30s, so quite late in respect to other colleagues. But having the project management background made the difference not only in having ideas, but bring them to life as a curator.

You have initiated a number of on-going seminars and round-table series concerning art and culture. Whom do you think is it most important to engage in art today? What are the most effective media for talking about art according to your experience with press, radio, TV and Manifesta 8?

I don't think there is a specific 'target' for art, as it depends from the art itself. Some art addresses universal issues, some specific themes, and some other are touching the individual simply because he or she is in a receptive mood. You cannot really plan in advance the effects art may have on its audience. Having said that, I believe art should not confine itself to the art system, made of studios, academies, galleries, fairs, biennials and auctions houses. It should try to link up, work with, disrupt some, making the most of, and contribute to other 'systems' – being that newspapers, television, radio, the Internet or a cycle of informal meetings in a community centre. The effectiveness of art depends on the artist's approach, the context in which he or she wants the work to function, and its timing. My idea is that the context should also change, and even the same work revisited, re-iterated, and 'channeled' through different systems. It happens with the digital age, where something is published or streamed and then constantly fed back, revisited, transformed and used in other ways. In that respect, I believe the arts and humanities in general are very much rooted in the analogue mode.

Wales is peripheric in terms of geographical disposition. Who is your prime audience you are working with in MOSTYN? You do have an outstanding program with emerging but great artists, e.g. Nina Beier, Meric Algün Ringborg and also classics Franco Vaccari, Keith Arnatt, which brings you on a world art map. What is the quality and value of being on the map without being accessible for most of the audiences who know you? (Estonia and Israel and Riga and Poland and Spain are similar peripheries, so it would be interesting to hear from your perspective)

I thought Wales was peripheral in relation to its position, but possibly it is so in terms of disposition too – I like the (presumably) Freudian slip. The crucial bit here is to be not only artistically visible, but foremost culturally relevant. I explain better: there is no point in bringing international artists to MOSTYN, or invite the most 'hot names' in the art world today, if there is no connection with the context in which you are, your position (and

disposition), your history, anxieties, ambitions, and ultimately all the conditions that makes us living in a certain place at a certain time. If you put together a programme which on the paper is great, with great artists, but that doesn't speak to the community of which you are part of, you become an alien in your own context. The decision to focus the programme in the two directions mentioned above, each of them with a series of solo shows, group shows and public events that are presenting different takes on the same subject, based on a certain criteria, has been taken precisely because the programme must be implicitly relevant for your most immediate and local audience. The 'e-flux audience' is as important as the local audience, but not exclusively so. The real difference is if you can shift perspectives on something through the work of the artist, even for a single day and a single person. You can do it online, or through a well-crafted press release (maybe), but it is crucial that you achieve that in the space where you are, to experience the difficulty, benefits, and the drive to bringing yourself on the front line. Otherwise it is too safe, and art (and the art institution) loses its relevance. Never, ever, work for 'another audience'. Work in a spiral way, starting from where you are and what you do. Cultural relevance comes into place, and artistic visibility will follow.

[In your experience, what is the most effective way of working in small places concerning diverse audiences? What facilitates small art worlds to collaborate friendly?](#)

Some of the comments above are valid in response to this. Collaboration is important especially if it is on equal terms (as in 'small countries' or 'small art worlds') but is essential that in this collaboration the relevance of the programme is not diluted for the sake of an 'international art'. People can sense a good programme instinctively; they also sense a vacuum as fast as.

[You met a number of Estonian artists and art historians. What did you find interesting, what did you find uninteresting, new, worn out? Do you see any trends specific for Estonian art?](#)

I got the same question for another interview. As mentioned in that one, I met twelve artists, and all with a generally robust practice. They have vision, expertise, network and can find themselves career opportunities. Estonian artists don't have anything to envy to anyone else; today's mobility of cultural producers means you can establish your contacts and be informed about the work of other artists and institutions fairly easy. But you have to work hard, every day, and 'make your homework' in a sense. There is no point in complaining about being peripheral, or belonging to former eastern Europe, etc. It boils down to how much you believe in your work, and how much you are prepared to push to get what you want. It is still economically sustainable to live in Tallinn (unlike London, for instance) and this provides not a limitation, but an opportunity: mental space for producing work. One cannot think and produce art if he or she works ten hours a day on other jobs just to pay the weekly rent.

original interview in Estonian posted here

<http://www.sirp.ee/s1-artiklid/c6-kunst/projektijuhi-kogemusega-kuraator/>