





Making waves

Mostyn's director Alfredo Cramerotti is working hard to ensure that his gallery has a presence on the international art scene, even though it's located in a small seaside town in north Wales.

By *Simon Stephens*.
Photographs by
Phil Sayer

Alfredo Cramerotti at a glance

Alfredo Cramerotti became the director of Mostyn, Llandudno, in 2011. He was previously the senior curator at Quad, the art, film and media centre in Derby.

He has been involved in curating a number of international initiatives, including Manifesta 8, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art in Spain; the Wales and Maldives pavilions at the 55th Venice art biennial; and the 4th Triennale Ladina in South Tyrol.

Cramerotti is from Trento in northern Italy and studied in Berlin, Germany and Malmö, Sweden. He wrote *All That Fits: The Aesthetics of Journalism*, which accompanied the last exhibition he developed at Quad.

Its pier, beach, and guesthouses make Llandudno a classic British Victorian seaside town. Like some other resorts it also has a contemporary art gallery, although its north Wales location marks it out from the raft of new art spaces that have sprung up on England's south coast in recent years.

Alfredo Cramerotti, the director of Mostyn, is proud of the fact that it attracts 80,000 people annually in a town that has a population of just 18,000.

"We have an audience that is four times the size of where we are and that gives you an idea of the kind of challenges we are facing," he says. "You always have to find new ways to do things and nothing is taken for granted. And you have to reinvent yourself and the content you are presenting."

The exhibition programme, which has two main strands, is certainly ambitious. One strand explores the meaning and relevance of art in the 21st century and the other examines the history of the building where the gallery is housed and the local context.

The gallery first opened in 1901 as a venue to show work by female artists. It was created by Lady Augusta Mostyn, although today it has no connection with her beyond its name. ▶



The gallery closed in 1913 and in later years became a drill hall, an Inland Revenue office and finally a piano showroom. It reopened as a gallery in 1979 following a campaign that was supported by the artist Kyffin Williams.

The gallery's curator, Adam Carr, has been developing a series of exhibitions that will tap into Mostyn's rich history, starting off with Women's Art Society, which will show work by artists that tackle gender issues, identity and exclusion.

Carr has also been working on the strand of exhibitions looking at art genres and their meaning today. The first of these was called *You* and allowed visitors to change and add to the artworks during their visit. This was followed by *Dear Portrait* (until 13 October), which combines portraits with comments from those depicted in the works.

The exhibition programme usually features a group show, a solo show and a gallery dedicated to an up-and-coming artist.

Cramerotti is keen to emphasise that there are multiple audiences for the gallery and he tries to cater for as many of them as possible, be that local, international, via social media or the many other ways that people experience art today.

"I always have this feeling that contemporary art is about contemporary life, it is no more or less than that," he says. "So, for me, it is interesting to present subjects, themes, histories or situations through the work of artists but be relevant to the audience."

Cramerotti says he is interested in how art can be informed by areas such as science, law, media, and journalism that have an impact on people's lives.

"I am curious about those artists who can link these different fields," he says. "Less art for art's sake and more art in relation to our lives."

International outlook

Mostyn might be in a small Victorian town in north Wales but Cramerotti is very much part of an art world with an international outlook.

He is from Trento in northern Italy, where three languages are spoken (Italian, German and Ladin), so the bilingual nature of work in Wales holds no fears for him. He has worked and studied in Florence, Pisa and Bologna in Italy as well as in Berlin, London and Malmö, Sweden. He was the senior curator at the Quad art, film and media centre in Derby before joining Mostyn in 2011.

Cramerotti still spends time working overseas, and was part of the team that put together the Bedwyr Williams work that represented Wales at this year's Venice Biennale.

"I am keen to do curatorial projects elsewhere as that type of work tends to inform what I'm doing here in Mostyn and vice versa," Cramerotti says.

He also co-curated the Maldives pavilion in Venice, which was opposite the Welsh one and he has also recently been back to his hometown of Trento to work on an arts triennial that will take place in October 2014.

Many of the Welsh-born artists Cramerotti works with are also part of this international art scene. Williams is a good example of this: the artist was born in north Wales, studied in London and the Netherlands and his work has been shown all over Europe. He has now returned to Wales to live and work.

Developing a tradition

Cramerotti says this generation are international artists rather than followers of a particular Welsh artistic tradition.

"They see themselves as contemporary artists who happen to live here but have this extra layer of the landscape, the language, the



Since reopening as a gallery in 1979, Mostyn, in Llandudno, has positioned itself at the forefront of the Welsh visual arts scene



Mostyn at a glance

Mostyn was the first art gallery in the world built to show the work of women artists. It was opened in 1901 by Lady Augusta Mostyn.

The gallery was home to the Gwynedd Ladies' Arts Society, although it closed in 1913 when it was requisitioned for use as a drill hall. It was requisitioned again in

1939, this time by the Inland Revenue, and eventually became a piano showroom.

It reopened as an art gallery in 1979 following a campaign that included the artist Kyffin Williams. It underwent a £5.1m redevelopment in 2010 by Ellis Williams Architects that saw its original exhibition galleries

restored while other areas were remodelled to include new spaces and social facilities.

Mostyn employs about 20 people and in 2011-12 received £400,000 from the Arts Council of Wales. It also receives annual grants from Conwy County Borough Council's Arts Service and Llandudno Town Council.

history and the customs of Wales, which can only be enriching.”

Artists such as Williams who choose to live and work in Wales demonstrate that the Welsh arts scene is changing and is gaining a higher profile. Cramerotti says that the Venice Biennale is important for the visibility of Welsh art, as is Artes Mundi, a biennial international exhibition and prize. The most recent winner of the £40,000 prize was Mexican artist Teresa Margolles.

“Scotland is much further ahead than Wales in the sense that the visual arts environment is more established because there are specific aesthetic schools and they have built over time a recognised visual arts scene,” he says. “In Wales there is more a literature, theatre and music scene, but the visual arts is still at the stage where it has a lot of room to grow and to expand.”

Mostyn underwent a £5.1m redevelopment in 2010 and it is now a high-quality contemporary arts space. The Welsh visual

‘[The Welsh arts scene] is dispersed but very, very knitted together’

arts scene will be further boosted next year by the reopening the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea following a £6m project. Karen MacKinnon, the current director of Artes Mundi, is a former curator at the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery.

Close-knit

The close-knit nature of the Welsh art scene is shown by the fact that many of the curators and directors know each other well and are in constant contact.

“Every artist, every curator, every director, every institution working in Wales knows what every other artist, curator, director, institution is doing,” Cramerotti says. “[The Welsh arts scene] is geographically dispersed but very, very knitted together.”

Although Cramerotti is part of the international art scene, a lot of his time is spent addressing the day-to-day challenges faced by many other medium-sized regional museums. He says much of his first two years were taken up with reorganising the finances, staffing and management structure at the gallery.

About 60% of the funding comes from the Arts Council of Wales, while there is also support from local councils. The rest of the

money is raised from fundraising and income generation.

“I think it is healthier that you have an amount of money you decide to work with because you apply for it and decide to use it in a specific way,” says Cramerotti, who divides his budget equally between exhibitions, learning and engagement. “In a way it is more relevant to the current economic climate.”

Funded projects include Tate’s Circuit programme, which aims to engage 15-25-year-olds with art. Mostyn is one of five national partners in the scheme.

“We are talking about the future generation and if you don’t take them now, you lose them,” says Cramerotti. “So it is really crucial to use this extra help.”

Looking ahead is also vital. “Long-term planning is crucial and we have a programme that runs until 2017 and this five-year span is the minimum that you can plan with,” he says. “An art institution should somehow project itself 50 years from now and then work backwards and pick up those issues and situations that might be relevant in society and try to work on that. That is how you are fulfilling your purpose of talking about contemporary life.”