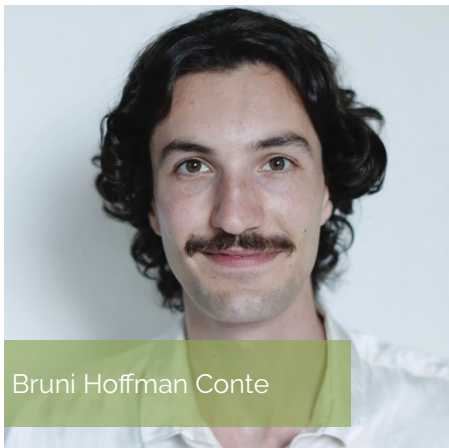


CAREER TIPS

Social Justice and Sustainable Development Through Art

ENCATC spoke to Bruni Hoffman Conte, the Commercial and Customer developer at ARCA Fine Arts, a social enterprise in their planning and testing phase focused on the production of Fine Art framing. In his final phase of his Master's degree in Social Entrepreneurship Bruni shared with us his experiences in setting ACRA's business model, its social mission and products that are related to black migrant women in Brazil, arts and technology to address social justice and sustainable development.



Bruni Hoffman Conte



ENCATC: What is your project ARCA? What is the story behind it and how did you get the idea?

Bruni Hoffman Conte: In the pace of constant change, we might find ourselves distant from the place we firstly called home. The town we have left behind to start college, or the country that was not big enough to fit our dreams; we move abroad, learn new languages, live flourishing cultures.

Knowing that not everyone can move freely and safely as much as we wanted, ARCA is a Brazilian creative project that connects conscious consumers in Europe to migrant females in South America through the tools of design, photography and technology.

Aware of the challenges our world is currently handling, the issues of migration, gender and race, ARCA - in Portuguese: 'a box with a treasure inside' -

focuses on the education and empowerment of women in vulnerable situations to transform their lives by the force of creativity. We are currently piloting the concept through the production and distribution of printings in Europe. We understand that when we hang something in our homes, we fill a space with our taste and personalities. We are telling others what we enjoy seeing and how they can perceive us. With this in mind, ARCA proposes a dialogue between what you see on your wall and who we usually don't see in our society. We empower migrant women amplifying their vision and making their stories heard, sharing universal sentiments of longing, affection, hope and the search for a dream.

The idea came to me in 2016 when I worked within the high-end decor sector in Brazil. Through the years, ARCA has been co-created as a concept by

different lovely and inspiring people that I had the opportunity to present the business model. Through my experience in London, I finally found myself confident in getting the project started. Although challenging, it has been enormously gratifying.

ENCATC: How have you been rethinking taking the project forward due to the impact of COVID-19?

Bruni Hoffman Conte: Of course, the challenges are now more significant. For example, every process we run must be carefully thought to preserve people's safety, and markets are pressured due to economic uncertainty. We are experiencing great instability, and the pandemic has forced us not to commit to long term plans. Two people in the team caught COVID during the project (and are fully recovered now, fortunately) and we faced the emotional turmoil during that moment. Also, our target, the impoverished communities are facing harsh conditions: people from the margins are the most affected by the novel coronavirus. Therefore, we are actually pushing harder the project roadmap. We started piloting the concept within the pandemic, which was good timing. It gave us key experience in operations and logistics. Through market research, we also know that consumers are more eager to buy ethically and environmentally concerned goods. On the other hand, underrepresented communities are crying out for projects like ARCA, so it has inspired us to keep going and think bigger. Supporting women in fragility while helping consumers to renovate their houses responsibly move us forward.

ENCATC: Can you give us some background into your education and professional experience that has led you to where you are today with this project?

Bruni Hoffman Conte: I have a bachelor in Business Administration and recently completed the Masters in Social Entrepreneurship at Goldsmiths, University of London (a member of ENCATC) through the Chevening scheme from the UK government. The masters gave me essential knowledge to set the project towards a social mission and understand the consumer's behaviour and needs in Europe. Back in my country, I held leadership positions in different industries and in the public sector as the head of the Brazilian government's creative economy. I also have work experience in the high-end decor sector in Latin America, which showed me different possibilities of materials and colours and references in design that I want to experiment in Europe. Currently, ARCA is also led by Fabiane Cruz (PhD Candidate in Latin American Studies at the University

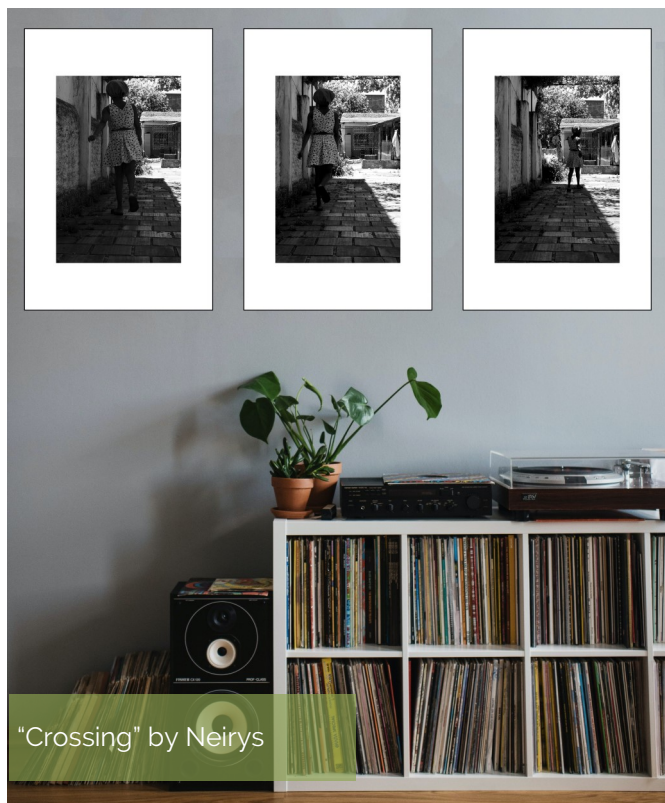


Photos taken during one of the training sessions with the group conducted by Fabiane Cruz and Edinara Patzlaff in Porto Alegre, Brazil.



Ruth from Haiti (pictured left) and Neirys, from Venezuela (pictured right)

of London), who has vast experience in international trading and impact-driven models, and Lara Machado (MA Curating Contemporary Design in a collaboration between Kingston University and the Design Museum) our design strategist and curator. The diversity of skills and work experience and the team's passion for social transformation have built an excellent foundation for the project to grow strong and steady.



ENCATC: What skills or other personal attributes do you think have helped you develop and grow ARCA?

Bruni Hoffman Conte: ARCA is only possible because of the collaborators who support the project along the way with their ideas and hard work. So networking and leadership skills are must-haves, in my opinion. It does not matter if one has a big vision or a great idea but can't deliver the message and inspire supporters. On a personal note, I would add that the balance between work and playtime has helped me not burn out as a creative entrepreneur in a pandemic. It is vital to take care of oneself, connect with friends and family, and keep the mind nurtured to develop creative ideas and innovative solutions.

ENCATC: What do you wish you had known before starting this project?

Bruni Hoffman Conte: This is an interesting question because we designed the pilot scope around hypothesis and assumptions that we wanted to try out and learn during the execution when we started the project. I would say that beauty lies in the unexpected. The project would not be as exciting as we knew beforehand what would've happened or even would have gone wrong. However, we had significant issues related to the creative process that impacted the schedule and made us push back some important deliveries - mostly because the concept was new so everyone in the team was learning how to fly the aeroplane on the go. For example, during the edition of the pictures, we took more time than

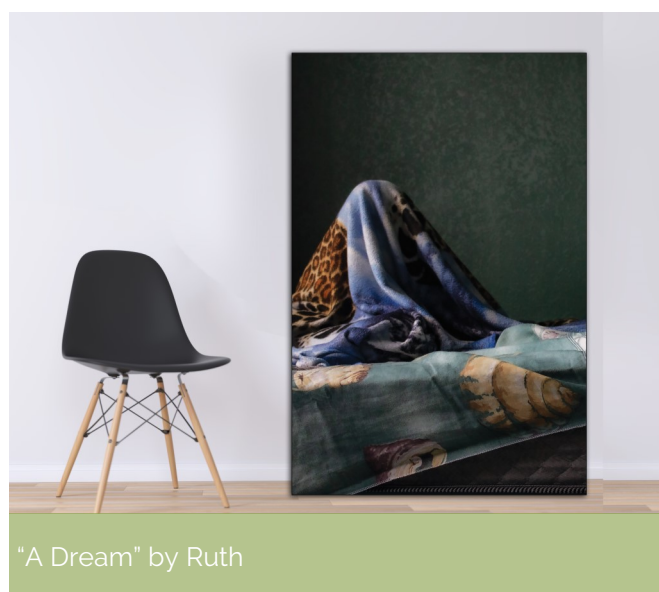
expected with the cycles of feedback to reach the quality standards and aesthetics that would stand out in the wall decor market.

ENCATC: What have been the most difficult challenges you encountered? How have you overcome them?

Bruni Hoffman Conte: The biggest obstacles we had were concerned with the qualification of the women. The participants had no previous experience in photography, the number of training sessions was limited, and to meet the high quality standards of fine art photography we designed the brief thoughtfully to be simple and effective. Logistics were also an important issue. We had to be creative to hand in the cameras to the women following social-distancing rules also making sure that the group would commute safely to the training sessions. We worked with a group spread around the Porto Alegre area, a lovely city in Southern Brazil shaped by hills and mountains, but that lacks metro services and a reliable public transport system. In the virtual dimension, I guess the hardest was the image editing and curating due to the totality of material produced and the subjectivities inherited to the creative process. Nuances in the decor market helped us to design the storytelling of a unique collection with more than 50 printings organised in four dimensions that we will launch next month. Having a curator in the team was essential as she built the strategy to handle the complex flow of information.

ENCATC: How did you go about getting start-up funds and how did you use them to get the project up and running?

Bruni Hoffman Conte: It was a straightforward process, and I was lucky enough to get very good responses early on. I gathered the dots to set up the



business plan during the masters, pitching the idea within my UK and Brazil network.

Fabiane Cruz, who I met in 2016 when working for the Brazilian government, has been my mentor ever since. She had the idea of piloting the concept before going to market and offered to fund the initial investment and her skills in ARCA.

I would highlight the importance of designing a small pilot with predetermined activities and name the responsables, plan the schedule and costs. Starting a new project is possible with low complexity - which requires knowledge and experience.

We are managing the budget on the activities related to the pilot, which involves the payment of the female group, workshop materials and equipment such as the cameras, among others.

ENCATC: What advice would you give to students or early-career professionals looking to start their own creative projects?

Bruni Hoffman Conte: I would definitely say: find a mentor. Mentorship will save you valuable time by learning from someone more experienced and helping you foresee shortcuts during the project ideation and execution. Having another person who is especially connected to you because of your professional goals will motivate you to share the progress, obstacles, and issues that require a second opinion. Moreover, the mentor will be there for you with excellent advice for the decisions that will impact your future.

ENCATC: What keeps you motivated and going?

Bruni Hoffman Conte: I remember when I was little, I was a very creative and curious child. The type of kid who stays after class to chat with teachers asking questions about the things that most classmates would find boring, and of course, a big bookworm during his spare time. At college, I met my first love who I remember was way smarter than me, and who also gave ARCA its name. We would stay awake overnight talking about the big questions, sociology, culture, the arts. He brought me a new vision of life, and I started becoming more conscious about our social structure and the injustices in the world. This feeling of uneasy has always been there though we experience inequality in all sorts of forms in Brazil. As a queer man, I have been exposed first-hand to violence and exclusion issues and saw my own life being transformed by the power of education. So I think that this intense desire for a better world, the need for regenerative values like solidarity, makes me feel an enthusiast for a better society. And by better, I mean a structure where social justice is put

into practice and where people in the margins have access to the basic human rights.

Immigration and the current refugee crisis are for me, personal drivers for a change. Back in the 1800's, my ancestors crossed the Atlantic from Italy and Germany looking for better living conditions in Brazil. However, instead of endless prosperity in the tropical country, they found themselves stuck into cycles of poverty - only the recent generation was able to finally access higher education, for example. On the one hand, the migrants from white backgrounds managed to overcome those dark times; on the other hand, the black communities are still oppressed, experiencing injustices from old colonial times. But still, there is hope. I believe that COVID-19 is raising awareness to those subjects. And through collective action and creativity, I strongly believe we all can achieve a more sustainable and egalitarian economic system within my generation yet. Besides working with ARCA, I am continually studying social transformation theory, system thinking, and new technologies to help organisations and disadvantaged communities achieve this vision.



KEEP IN TOUCH

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