

“Kramer Ausenco APT7”

By Sarah Stratton

The Papua New Guinea project in APT7 was the result of a unique collaboration between QAGOMA, the artists of the East Sepik and PNG-based engineering and architectural company Kramer Ausenco. Here, Sarah Stratton writes on the success of this representation and the relationships that were forged in the process.

The Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art has had a longstanding partnership with Leading Australian engineering and project management company Ausenco. This alliance has been particularly successful because of our shared commitment to working closely with the community and promoting the culture of Australia, Asia and the Pacific. Ausenco's support has focused on our contemporary Indigenous art collection, through the acquisition of many key works, and as Principal Sponsor of the extremely popular Collection-based exhibition 'The China Project' (2009).

As 'The 7th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art' (APT7) began to take shape, we approached Kramer Ausenco — a joint venture between Kramer, the Papua New Guinea-based multidisciplinary engineering and architectural business headed by Chief Executive Frank Kramer — to continue Ausenco's tremendous support of arts and culture from the region. One of the central themes that emerged in APT7 was the built environment and the way structures influence people's engagement with their surroundings. We wanted to work with the artists of Abelam and Kwoma from the East Sepik province of Papua New Guinea (PNG) to showcase their stunning spirit houses, and we knew, with their engineering and architectural interests and their home base in PNG, that this would be a perfect project for Kramer Ausenco. Ausenco's Chief Executive Officer, Zimi Meka and Frank Kramer, truly embraced the project to commission the work of these artists and it has undoubtedly been one of our most rewarding and successful corporate collaborations. With Kramer Ausenco's support, the Gallery was able to invite the artists to Brisbane from January to March 2012 to work on the enormous carvings and paintings that would decorate their spirit houses. They returned to Brisbane in November 2012 to complete the structures and participate in the opening celebrations of APT7.

While the art works themselves are remarkable, without a doubt the greatest outcome of this project was the opportunity for Gallery staff and Kramer Ausenco to form genuine relationships with the Abelam and Kwoma artists and for these artists to be able to communicate directly with our audiences over the opening weekend. This simply would not have been possible without Kramer Ausenco's sponsorship. Speaking at an Australian High Commission function for the artists in Port Moresby just prior to the APT7 opening, Frank Kramer emphasised the immense value of PNG's cultural heritage and its ongoing vibrancy. He encouraged the artists to put PNG on the world map with their works. Australian High Commissioner Ian Kemish, AM agreed that constructing the spirit houses in Brisbane's Gallery of Modern Art was a significant event and added that he hoped the buildings would capture the interest of the people who visited the Triennial. These remarkable works have done more than just capture our audiences attention; they have become one of the standout favourites of the 270 000 visitors who have so far attended the exhibition, and the performances by the Abelam and Kwoma artists over the opening weekend were among the highest attended and most talked about. Thanks to the generous support of Kramer Ausenco we have been able to present the largest ever representation of work from Papua New Guinea to date in an APT. We congratulate the artists on such a tremendous outcome and extend our sincere gratitude to Frank Kramer, Zimi Meka and their teams.

Sarah Stratton is Senior Communication Officer, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art.

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Members of Brikiti Cultural Group and Kwoma Arts, with Frank Kramer, Zimi Meka and Uncle Des Sandy, in front of Brikiti Cultural Group's magnificent *Korumbo* (Spirit house) 2012, during the opening weekend of APT7, December 2012- Courtesy of QAGOMA Photography



Frank Kramer during the opening weekend of APT7, December 2012- Courtesy of QAGOMA Photography

