



Takes two to tango.

*The Viana Art journey.  
Photographed in New York City  
by Cameron Krone. Interview  
by Victoria Camblin.*



*Andre Mellone.*



*Top, Oscar Tuazon "Slick and rigid" (2009).  
Previous spread, Hugo McCloud "Cover Story" (2014).  
Next page, Oscar Tuazon "Untitled" (2010).*



Andre Viana founded his first gallery in 1998. At the time, he was 19 years old and living in Porto; in the decade since that project concluded, his career in the arts has taken him out of Portugal and into positions at Gagosian Gallery's London and New York locations, Philips de Pury, where he was head of private sales, and Galerie Yvon Lambert's Chelsea outpost, with a stint as director. Viana's decision to go out on his own again happened to coincide with the opening of Studio Mellone – an architectural and design firm run by his partner, the Sao Paulo born Andre Mellone. "I kind of forced myself to go out from my house and move my office to his space, as an excuse," says the private art dealer of what became their joint workplace—complete with an exhibition area. "We weren't really expecting to open a gallery," he explains, "but it was an opportunity, and I took the risk." While Viana Art has handled works by artists Lucy McKenzie, Sterling Ruby, Tauba Auerbach and Nate Lowman – and brought the likes of Donald Judd into the mix for its inaugural exhibition in fall 2014 – Studio Mellone has been busy with projects for clients like designer Thom Browne, opening their first women's store in Korea, soon to be followed by an outpost in Hong Kong. "It's incredible to be a creative in New York City," says Mellone of their adopted home base. We spoke to both Andres about their work and life at the intersection of art, design, and indeed, fashion.

**What did you do with the space once you acquired the gallery? It has a more bespoke, designed aspect than the usual “white cube.”**

*Andre Mellone:* We’re in a typical old West Chelsea building—a former fabric warehouse—so when we moved, the spaces were completely bare except for piles and piles of fabrics that went all the way up to the ceiling. Once they were removed you could see the bare bones of the space and columns, painted black. Everything you see now has really been designed by ourselves. For the gallery, I pretty much treated Andre as a client: he needed to tell me how he envisioned his exhibition space. We tried to evoke the sense of a beautiful living room, using woods with deep wine or yellow vibes. It’s warmer and more “lived in” than the usual art gallery, which makes sense for a private dealership, where your relationship with the clientele is really tailored. Younger dealers are creating their own ways to sell art, and a huge stark gallery space is not the norm anymore. *Andre Viana:* It’s about providing a boutique experience, rather than one that can just be duplicated anywhere else. This space gives everything a story.

**Has the shared environment changed the way you work independently? How you work together?** *AM:* The space is just very conducive to creativity – it’s really a dream to come to work everyday. And I feel that now that everyone is excited, the work is improving. It feels like an extension of our own home –we created a good structure, in which we can also create that kind of mess that happens in any creative environment. **But it’s not like all your furniture looks like Donald Judd now?** *AV:* [Laughing] Those are not very comfortable!

**Do you both see a hierarchy between art, architecture, and interior design? Should architects respond to the art, should the art respond to the architecture, should design fill in the gaps?** *AV:* The architecture should serve the art, not the other way around. You see some art museums that are presenting a sculpture rather than building a museum. The Guggenheim in New York has a sensorial aspect to it – when you navigate through the museum, you experience the art in a different way and on a different scale. The Guggenheim in Bilbao is just the opposite – it just doesn’t work. It’s like all the museums in Paris – they are all just too much! *AM:* At home, we designed our space; then, Andre brought in the art. We had to change and scale back some of the design – we took stuff out, because between the furniture and the art, the art felt more powerful. But what I strive for, and what my ideal client strives for, is to have a relationship with the art, the furniture, the objects, and the architecture – all of which might be re-invented to create a balance. **Andre [Mellone], you are working with designers, and Andre [Viana], you are working with artists who have textile sensibilities or have done collaborations with major designers. How do art and design intersect with fashion for you, in your work and in your wardrobes?** *AV:* Fashion is a social platform; there’s a big attraction between fashion people and art people, which forms a very strong link. It’s certainly not the same world, but you see big collectors from the fashion world investing hard in museums and collections, and supporting artists. Personally, I’m not really “creative” when I’m dressing; it’s very much a uniform.

Usually I wear a shirt and a jacket, maybe something from Ralph Lauren, which is easy, well cut, and good quality. I always go to stores like J.Crew. I’m not someone who follows one label, or who is very much looking for the new jacket. *AM:* Clients react better when you’re more sort of neutral and classic than when you try to go too edgy or too “fashion.” When you are the art dealer, or when you are the architect to a designer, they want to see you in something more classic rather than anything a bit over the top. Something I’ve been hearing a lot from clients lately is, “I like interiors that don’t look designed.” If you bring that attitude back to own personal style, then I find you can actually do more crazy things design-wise. I’m always attentive to what fashion designers are doing for their own spaces – not only how they are designing stores, but also how they live. **What if a client or collector is of the type that wants to be flashy or to “stand out” through design or collecting choices?** *AV:* My profile of client is definitely not flashy – it’s ultimately not the type of art that I sell. Clients might like something privately; then they like to feel that you are giving them priority, before you offer it to other people. It takes time to decide on a work sometimes, but because we are a private company, we can afford that. Galleries can’t always do that – they have deadlines, openings, and so on. With the first show in the Viana Art exhibition space, we didn’t send a single press release. On our website, you won’t find a lot of information. **Is it important to be picky about your clients?** *AV:* Yes. You have to establish a personal relationship, and that’s something that you reveal over time. If you don’t trust the client or if he doesn’t trust you, it’s only a question of time – it doesn’t last otherwise. Sometimes a client starts in this very flashy mood, though, but they’re willing to listen, learn, and change. The problem are those who are not interested in knowing anything about art, but just want the name of the minute. Two months later they realize that’s not hot anymore, and then they want another one and just put it to auction. *AM:* Andre [Viana] and I decided that when you are in this business, sometimes you don’t have the luxury to say no. But every time that we know someone is doing it for the bling, usually it’s a bad experience. Do you remember Rafael Viñoly? He was based in New York in the 70s and he designed the subway maps and graphics. He was also an architect, and I saw him one time and he said, “I advise this for anyone involved in design or who is an artist: starve, and stay away from bad clients.” **What are your plans and ambitions for the space going forward? What’s going to influence the next move?** *AV:* I think we’ll do three or four shows a year, working with private collections mostly on a consignment basis with the works that we select. Maybe this won’t be possible right away – we’re still adapting to the new reality and it takes a lot of time to do a show. It’s a huge production to bring works from all over the world. We also want to create a small publication for each show, as a record. Also, in terms of the selection, we’ll always try to create a balance between young artists and established ones – we’ll even bring in artists’ works that aren’t for sale, just for their energy. We always want to have that freedom.





*Previous page, Wade Guyton  
"Untitled" (2006).*

*Andre Viana.*