

Art Barter

BY JASMINE BAGER



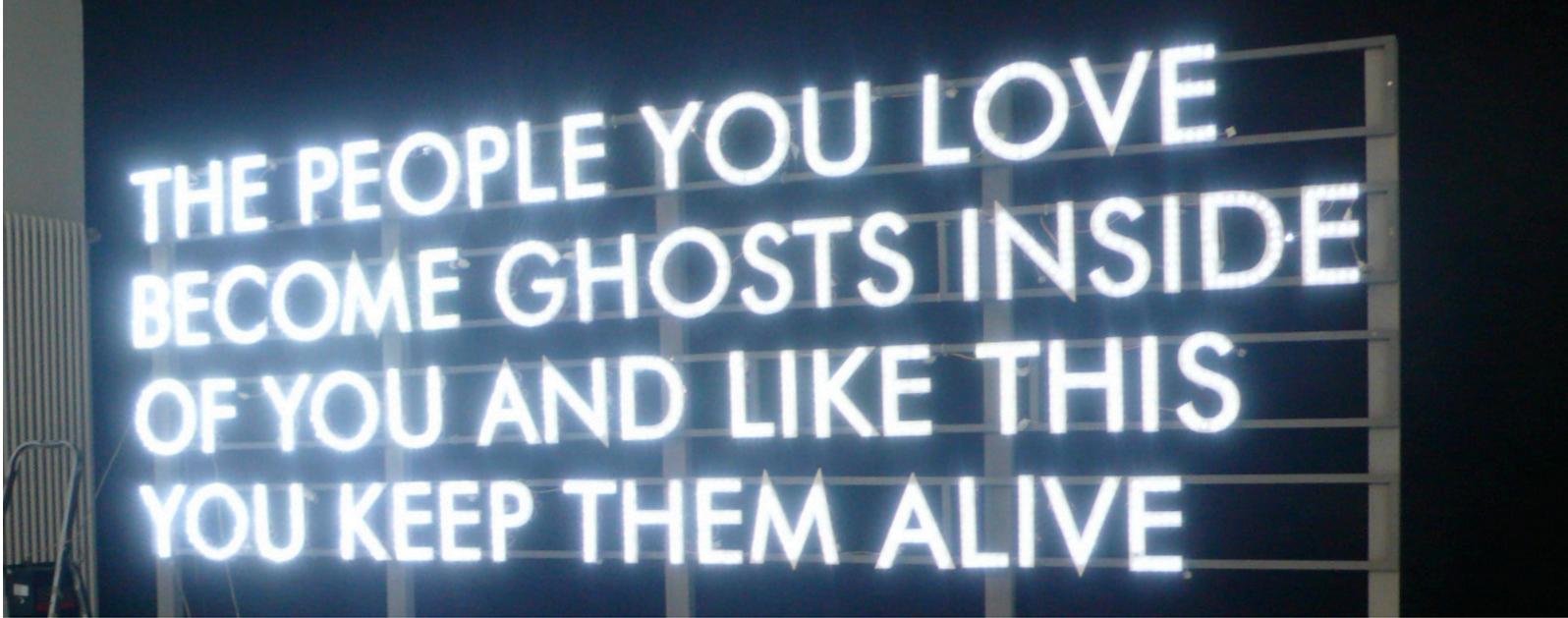
Did you ever walk into an art gallery and wish that you could pay for the really cool painting with things that you have in your garage (like your sticker collection from the fifth-grade)? Well, at Art Barter, you might just be able to.

Twenty-something girls Lauren Jones and Alix Janta noticed that most people who bought art at galleries were wealthy collectors/buyers and that did not give other art lovers the chance to purchase art. In a strained-economic world where putting a price tag on an art

piece is getting frequently more difficult, the girls created a solution; Art Barter.

This is how it works: the local art is displayed in the space, with no description, title or even the name of the artist. If you like it, you stop by and fill out a form of what you would "trade" for that piece and you stick it there. At the end of the show, the artist picks what they would choose from those forms and an art "barter" is made.

The catch is, you can't use money.



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Above: Artwork by Rob Montgomery. Opposite: Artwork by Asger Carlsen. © 2011

After the success of their first show in November 2009 in London, Art Barter visited Berlin then New York. It prides itself in being "The Platform for Free Exchange Between Artists and the Public." Oasis Magazine's Jasmine Bager caught up with the ladies of Art Barter for an exclusive interview.

What does art mean to you?

Lauren: Art is the same in this day and age as it has ever been in the sense that it is a freedom of expression that the artist feels, he must share and expose from his mind or body. It is the range of medium that is currently included as "art" that is the most notable difference of the time.

Alix: It is a representation of society and the world around us.

How many art pieces go on display and what is the selection process?

Between 25-50 artworks are on display. We choose a selection of established, emerging and unknown artists whose work we enjoy and believe in. The artists are always living and working in the city of the show at the time of the show so it displays a cross section of the art scene in that city at the time.

What is the ratio between works created by famous artists and not-yet-famous ones?

It varies depending on how many artists we include in total and who we want to include in each show. It is not a set ratio as long as we have a range.

Do the artists keep the forms or slips that are offered to them or do you collect them after the winning deal is revealed?

We keep all of the barter forms and are planning to create a book including them at some point in the future.

What was the most unusual barter that you came across?

The strangest thing that was offered is probably a kidney or an ex-girlfriend, although the artists did not decide to take these offers up. Some of the best exchanges are holidays, for example two weeks in the Bahamas and two weeks in a French Retreat.

What would you barter if you had the chance to?

We actually did barter in the New York show. We offered one of the artists, Baptiste Ibar, to curate a show for him in London. He chose our offer over all others and we are preparing for his show this May. The only problem is we have to share his one piece between the two of us, 6 months each at a time!

Is there a maximum number of bids each person can make?

There is no maximum amount of bids that one person can make, however, if they bid the same thing on many artworks and win them all then they must be able to provide each artist with what they have offered.

Were you ever surprised by a barter offer that you felt was far greater in value than the actual chosen piece?

We would not be able to judge that, as we do not know the "actual" value of any of the artworks that we include.

Are the chosen ones usually satisfied with knowing who the artist of their winning bid is?

Everyone can see who the artworks belong to after the event is over by visiting our website.

Any unclaimed or unused deals?

There are many offers on each artwork so there can only be one winner, in some cases, the artist also decides to keep their work. So, yes, there are lots of offers made that do not get taken up as the average ratio of works to offers is about 1:40.

Do you personally check that each deal is finalized or do you let them talk among themselves?

We usually make the initial enquiries to various people before the artist makes their final decision. Once the artist is happy with the offer they wish to take, then we introduce them and they usually take it from there and keep us updated. However, there have been cases where we stay more involved with the exchanges, it varies really depending on the nature of the exchange.

Which Middle Eastern artist do you find inspiring?

Alix: Shirin Nashat

Lauren: Diana Al-Hadid

Any plans of coming to the Arab world?

Yes, we have discussed doing a Middle Eastern Art Barter in 2012.

Check them out at: www.artbarter.co.uk