



# Don't Panic®

## ART BARTER / ART BELOW

Written by *William Alderwick* / 24 Jun 2010



*Art Barter* has followed up its successful launch in London last autumn with a new show opening in Berlin tonight! Not only that, but they have teamed up with *Art Below* to decorate pillars across the hip streets of Mitte and Kreuzberg with posters of the works to be bartered.

Art Barter is a blind auction for artworks submitted by participating artists. Anyone can bid for a work and they can bid anything, except money. It could be French lessons, a free PA, use of a holiday home, or one of the weirder offerings from last year's London Barter, a foreskin! Each artist then decides which bid they'd like to accept for their work and the trade is made.



"Art Barter started as a response to the current art market and its restrictions", explains curator Lauren Jones. "We wanted to highlight the fact that the actual work itself was losing out to the price that it was given or the creator's name. Many people seem to have lost sight of their own opinions and just follow those few who run the entire market. We want to offer an alternative."

It's an alternative that challenges bidders to be creative, coming up with something which an artist would be happy to swap for rather than simply handing over a set amount of money. In so doing it promotes dialogue and exchange between viewers and artists. As you do not know which artist has made any particular work, you have to bid simply for the work that you like the best. You could end up with a Tracey Emin or a relatively unknown emerging talent. But the point is that the work has to speak for itself away from the associated hype and hubris of the art market's own brand of celebrity. The anonymity cuts this out.

Art Below is another company offering an alternative to the established art industry and gallery system. The group, started by brothers Ben and Simon Moore five years ago, turns 'ad space into art space' through occupying vacant billboards and advertising hoardings with works from young and emerging artists. They have worked with the likes of 20 Hoxton Square, The Macbeth pub in Hoxton, Tank Magazine and the Saatchi Gallery to show artists as diverse as Banksy, Ronnie Wood, [Eleanor Lyndsay Fynn](#), [Caron Geary](#), [Sarah Maple](#) and photographer Thomas Hodges.

"We both have the idea that art should be available for everyone, not just those with disposable income," continues Jones. "Art Below makes it available to look at whilst not just in an art institution and at the same time Art Barter works towards making the art available to take home for something other than money."

The Berlin exhibition, including work from artists like Jonathan Monk, Melissa Frost, Wolfgang Ganter and Gabriel Loebell Herberstein from the Gelitin collective, runs until Sunday June 27 at HBC Karl-Liebkecht-Strasse 9, Berlin.



Don't Panic spoke with Ben Moore from Art Below about the collaboration with Art Barter in Berlin.

**Given the saturation of street art in Berlin, how do your activities differ there as opposed to London?**

I think where Art Below provides an interesting alternative to street art is that, especially in the case of our [Art Barter](#) collaboration we are publicly displaying the works of artists who you would normally find in a leading contemporary art gallery on sale for thousands of pounds. These are not artists who are climbing ladders with a can of spray paint in their hand! Art Below is making the works of these leading high profile and emerging artists visible to a public audience who might not otherwise come across such treasures. Although it is public art it is kind of different to street art as it has gone through the legalities of space hire, printing, copy approval and curatorship and needless to say there is an obvious difference between contemporary art and urban art. Our London campaigns however have really picked up interest from the street art community and we have been proud to play host to urban artists including

Goldie, Don, Inkie, and Mike Ballard who is artist of residence at the [Art Below gallery at the Macbeth in Hoxton](#). It is an interesting irony that artists who have made their name in street art are now going through the conventions of having their work displayed in a public space but through a different route. It will be interesting to see if any follow in the footsteps of legendary New York street subway artist [PosterBoy](#).

**How did the Berlin collaboration with Art Barter come about? What do you think of their project and in what ways do you see it dovetailing with your own?**

I first became aware of [Art Barter](#) after going to their launch night in London near Brick Lane. I was interested to see the works of artists like [Johan Anderson](#), [Oliver Clegg](#), [Henry Hudson](#), [Lawrence Owen](#), all who continue to display with Art Below, and I immediately recognised that we shared the same sense of adventurous revolutionary spirit. When it emerged that they were doing Art Barter in Berlin it made perfect sense to see if they wanted to do a collaborative public art campaign out there as we always do something out there in June to coincide with the Berlin Biennale. What I really like is that we are two groups involved in art doing things in a very unique and different way and I think we really compliment each other. They have an amazing ability to seek out and source artwork from some very special high profile and emerging artists and we are able to display that work in a very unique and bespoke way outside of the conventions of the modern gallery.

**What in your opinion do the works Art Below shows, or perhaps the way the work is shown, offer to us, the public?**

Art should be, and in some senses already is everywhere, and we believe that it should be for everybody. The gallery often has a stigma, leading people to perceive art as a closed door, a private establishment, and suggests an exclusive forum which only certain people are encouraged to participate. Today's urban people lead increasingly busy lives, they often do not have the time to appreciate the value of art. We bring change by taking the art to them. We show art in a new, public context.