

Interview

ART

Give Your Best

By ARSALAN MOHAMMAD 06/29/2010 05:10 PM



What's a piece of art worth? A course of French lessons, an all-expenses paid luxury holiday in France, or a year's free therapy? Massages, antique furniture, or a piece of your own art? For those of us unable or unwilling to fall in line with the roller-coaster economics of the global art market, a gang of Londoners have come up with a neat little idea aimed at removing the cash, hype, and fashion from the business of acquiring art. The project is Art Barter, an anonymous exchange of work by new and established artists with buyers offering the most imaginative, compelling, or plain irresistible non-cash offer. The inaugural show in London last November saw works by a group of artists, including old-school YBA Tracey Emin, Gavin Turk, Mat Collishaw, and newer talents like Boo Saville, exchange

hands for a variety of goods and services ranging from holidays to offers of free therapy, personalized songs, and a "careful and thoughtful plumber." Artists receive their bids after the exhibition and then get to choose a lucky winner. This week, the British-based group brought their concept to Berlin, for a four-day event at the city's .HBC complex, housed in a former Communist office block in East Berlin. There, an eclectic troupe of local artists offered up paintings, installation, drawings and sculpture. Amongst those exhibiting were John Isaacs, Stefan Rincke, Evgeni Dybsky and Sophie Holstein. Hardly international superstars, but a cross-section of the Berlin art scene, the selection was representative of an emerging wave of artists at work in the city. In Berlin, the city described famously by its mayor as "poor but sexy," the novelty of the Art Barter project clearly resonated with visitors, especially once guests realized there was no need to pull out their wallets for a shot at the work (or indeed, for the free vodka on offer). Instead, pads of pre-printed bidding slips were provided, onto which we scribbled down what we were prepared to offer the artists for their work. Organizer Lauren Jones, who moved to Berlin from London six months ago, looked with satisfaction at the wall festooned with bidding slips left by prospective bargainers. "Everyone is so laid back here," Jones explained. "The artists, visitors, even the press. But taking that all into account, I think that we have a really strong body of work. And I think this opening is certainly a success, from my experience of Berlin openings, there are a lot of people and a lot of people making barterers! There are some really interesting ones—some people are being more creative as they don't necessarily have valuable things to offer." Part of the appeal of Art Barter is that it reflects the character of its host city as much as it promotes art. "A Cheeky Foot Massage And Some Tea" read one bid tacked to the wall. "An Hour In A Brothel Of Your Choice-No Strings Attached" read another. "I was thinking of offering a year's unlimited sex," said one guest. "No, not with me. My husband wouldn't like it. But perhaps I could arrange for a hooker?"

ART BARTER IS SCHEDULED TO HIT NEW YORK THIS NOVEMBER