



Art Barter, New York

By Ricky Lee

December 8th 2010

Have you ever seen a piece of art that you'd literally sell the shirt off your back to own?

Well, you won't have to go quite that far (and you still might be able to take home that undiscovered masterpiece you've been looking for) during Art Barter New York, which kicks off tomorrow.

For four days aspiring and veteran collectors and connoisseurs from the art-loving public, are invited to bid on the artworks by filling out barter forms. Each artist displays one work which only has a number beside it, making the viewer value the work for what it is, rather than for the name, price or title attached. The key selling point? The offers could be anything at all except for money. So button up your designer tops and put your pocket books away. At the event's end on Sunday, 12 December, each artist (some famous, some less so) will read through all the offers made on their work and decide whether they wish to exchange or not. Previous exchanges have included 30 hours of French tuition for a cat drawing by Tracey Ermin, a permanent position in the prestigious private 'Kabin' collection for a painting by Byzantia Harlow, and a ring by Solange Azagury-Partridge for a work by Polly Morgan. So far, each increasingly popular Art Barter exhibition (there have been two since 2009: in London and Berlin, plus a mini Art Barter that coincided with the 2010 Frieze Art Fair) can boast a success rate of over 70% of the art works being exchanged with the public. Participating artists in the London and Berlin shows have included Mat Collishaw, Isabelle Graeff, Charlotte Dualé, and Stephan Balleux. Artists whose works are available for trade in the New York exhibition include Tim Barber, Poppy de Villeneuve, Bruce High Quality, Terence Koh, Charlotte Kidd, Mick Rock and Toms Sachs, among others known and unknown. As she ran all over Manhattan setting up and preparing for the show, i-D Online caught up with Lauren Jones who, along with Alix Janta, is one of the founders and partners of Art Barter.

What is the mission of Art Barter and how did you come up with the concept?

Art Barter's mission is to bring the control back to the artists at the same time as giving the public a chance to acquire art works when they might not be able to under normal circumstances. It is also a way for people to get involved and interact at exhibitions. We want to make people think about the value of a work when taken out of the context of the art market and also how they value themselves. Barter has always been alive amongst artists but we wanted to bring it to a larger audience and create relationships between people who may not usually have the opportunity to meet. We were inspired by many other things as well, such as the Burning Man Festival, the RCA Postcard Auction and initiatives such as freecycle, the free shop and our friends all exchanging skills with each other during economically harder times.

You've had exhibitions in Berlin and London. Why come to New York?

New York seemed like a natural progression. There is a long history of barter in NY such as at the Chelsea Hotel where artists, musicians and writers would pay rent with their work. We wanted to know if the concept of bartering would hold the same resonance for the younger generation of New Yorkers who are more used to the buy now, think later attitude.

Where's the next Art Barter exhibition?

We will be doing an exhibition with Shoreditch House in London early next year. There are also talks for Tokyo, Istanbul and the Venice Biennale next year.

How do you select the artists included in the shows?

It's a mixture of making our wish lists for the city and trying to get in touch and then being there and discovering other artists through a series of studio visits which usually lead on to other studio visits. Also just visiting galleries, reading local papers, magazines and blogs.

What has the response been like? From the public and from the artists?

It's been great. The artists are always really excited when they see all of their offers, often many things that they wouldn't expect. The public are also really happy, especially the people who win the works, but others have commented that they enjoyed the experience and the opportunity even though they weren't the winner in the end.

Art Barter New York is on view daily from noon until 6pm from 9-12 December 2010, at NP Contemporary Art Centre, 131 Chrystie Street, New York, NY 10002