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Istanbul prepares to share and exchange art with ‘Art Barter’

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This January Art Barter comes to Istanbul for its fifth International show allowing viewers to offer up their best exchange of services for pricey artworks



The Istanbul edition of Art Barter locates itself at 5533 in the Istanbul Textile Traders' Market (IMC). As a former commercial environment, 5533 was turned into a 'contact zone' where visitors from different backgrounds, professions and communities can interact with IMC inhabitants.

Most are dissuaded from purchasing art because of the high price tag that comes attached to many pieces, which is why Art Barter, an event featuring works meant to be exchanged for goods or services rather than money, is shaking up the international art world.

Art Barter is hosting its fifth international show in Istanbul at 5533 until Jan. 26 with works from a range of artists – both emerging and long-established talents – up for bartering to create a distinct mode of interaction between artists and viewers.

Filiz Avunduk, a well-known name in Istanbul's art scene, organized and helped curate Art Barter's Istanbul show after curators Alix Janta-Polczynski and Lauren Jones created the event in the United Kingdom in 2009.

Each piece of art featured in the exhibition is open to offers of any kind. Trade your gourmet-cooking skills for a painting, a private concert put on by your band for a sculpture, an original poem or a month of house cleaning for an art piece that catches your eye. Art Barter aims to re-examine the current system of exchange in the art world by encouraging the trade of art for goods or services rather than money.

Each artist's work is displayed in the exhibition with a number next to it. Viewers are invited to fill out barter forms with their offers for any work they desire. These offers are then pinned to a communal board or placed in a box to protect the privacy of the bid. At the end of the show, the artists will choose from the offers made on their work and decide which, if any, offer they will trade their work for. Prospective buyers should not bring items they are hoping to barter to the show. If the proposed trade sparks the artist's interest, the person will be contacted for more information shortly after the show.

Starting of the event

Early in 2009, Janta-Polczynski and Jones became aware of a shift that had occurred in how people obtain particular wants or needs. Projects such as "the free shop" and "freecycle" were prevalent in London at the time and the exchange of skills between friends and businesses found itself once again on the rise. Inspired by these and other initiatives, Janta-Polczynski and Jones formed Art Barter as an alternative platform to create an environment where the viewer always has a chance to acquire art. Artists worldwide have always been familiar with the word barter, however, the Art Barter schema is distinct in its promotion of such a form of exchange in the current art market and in the lasting working relationships that are born out of the project.

The Istanbul edition of Art Barter is befittingly located at 5533 in the Istanbul Textile Traders' Market (IMC). As a former commercial environment, 5533 was turned into a 'contact zone' where visitors from different backgrounds, professions and communities can interact with IMC inhabitants to experience various artistic forms in a non-exclusive and non-elitist atmosphere. As an independent space for research and discussion, 5533 hosts video screenings, performances and contemporary art exhibitions.

Valuing art for art's sake

In an effort to awaken viewers to valuing art for its content without being predisposed to a name or a price tag, works displayed at Art Barter are not listed with the names of the artist. Having to barter also motivates the viewer to think about what they have that is unique to offer the artists.

Previous Art Barters have seen artists exchange their works for six months of Italian lessons, three months of psychotherapy, 30 hours of reflexology, free website design, a gallop on a white horse, gardening lessons, a poem for each month of the year and other creative offers ranging from a woman offering to bear the artist's child to one promising a life time of cheese supply.

Following its successful launch in London in November 2009, the project has gone on to host shows in Berlin, New York, and Madrid, as well as two Mini Barter shows in London to coincide with Frieze Art Fair in 2010 and 2012.

Art Barter Istanbul will feature work from Murat Akagündüz, Bora Akıncıtürk, Volkan Aslan, Nancy Atakan, Güler Ateş, Bora Başkan, Elif Boyner, Banu Cennetoğlu, Aslı Çavuşoğlu, Natalie Edwards, Cevdet Erek, İnci Eviner, Leyla Gediz, Deniz Gül, Gözde İlkin, Borge Kantürk, Ayça Köseoğulları, Şükran Moral, Özgür Erkök Moroder, Yasemin Nur, Lara Ögel, Pınar Öğrenci, Ahmet Öğüt, İz Öztat, Güçlü Öztekin, Ali Emir Tapan, Ali Taptık, Güneş Terkol, Vahit Tuna.

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