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Art for hugs – barter for pics on Brick Lane

Thu Sep 3 2009

Christian McLaughlin



Ian Bruce Ian Bruce

The art is on the wall and you want it, but the crunch is hitting your pocket. So how bad do you want it? Would you give the artist... 40 hours a week as their butler? Your soul? Or maybe just a hug?

The bidding is up to you for 50 pieces by Tracy Emin; Polly Morgan; Gavin Turk and Matt Collishaw at the [Art Barter](#) auction/exhibition at the [Rag Factory](#) just off Brick Lane.

Much like the annual [RCA Secret](#), the work by these big-guns will sit unnamed among some of London's latest graduate work chosen by curators Lauren Jones (25) and Alix Janta (28). 'We can't wait to see how creative people will be with their offers,' Laura says with a smile. 'And we like the idea that the art won't be associated with a price tag. It's just what you think it's worth.'

After four days the offers will be collected – hopefully interesting enough to make up an exhibition of their own one day – and taken to the artists, who retain right of refusal. An online platform is the end goal, where all kinds of arts-swaps will be welcome.

It's an idea that has already been explored by [Ian Bruce](#), who's [Exchange Room](#) exhibition went on display on Tuesday at 121 Charing Cross Road.

Also working along the lines of what he calls 'A reassessment of value and worth', the exhibition displays twelve of the [painter-performer's](#) works (Ian's alter-ego fronts the contempo-swing band The Correspondents) hanging next to the objects that he received in return. 'It's a side-step away from the dealers/galleries and the culture of valuing artists by price,' he says. 'Overhearing conversations at Frieze that go, "Is he serious?", "Yes, he's serious, he's selling for £300,000", are just too ridiculous – some of these people haven't even seen the art that they're talking about.'

One of Ian's most prized exchanges to date has been a portrait he did for [Jonathan Queamey](#), an ex-tailor to the Queen. 'Mr Bruce at Mr Queamey's is actually a portrait of my father,' Ian says. 'The Soft Tailor suits that Jonathan makes are perfect for fluid movement and in the painting you can see my dad clicking his fingers, about to break into a dance.'

In return for the portrait, which hangs on the tailor's wall, Ian now owns one of the finest three-piece suits money can't buy. 'Bespoke collaborative commissions – it's a lifestyle which turned into an exhibition,' he says.

[The Exchange Room](#) is at 121 Charing Cross Road from September 1-8. [Art Barter](#) is the Rag Factory, 16 Heneage Street, off Brick Lane, from October 2 – November 1.

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