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Cultural Capital

Reflections on books and the arts
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Don't believe the hype

Posted by [Stephanie Hegarty](#) - 27 November 2009 12:16

A new barter scheme tries to short-circuit the distortion of
aesthetic value



Credit: ©Art Barter

What would you do for the following? A melting technicolor landscape. A telephone earpiece with tiny squawking birds waiting to ravage the caller's ear. A romantic message about the memories we carry in our souls spelt out in solar panel powered lightbulbs. Three box-lit lit close-ups of an anus perhaps?

This is the concept behind [Art Barter](#), an exhibition that is the lovechild of two young curators Lauren Jones and Alix Junta, and which asks what value we put on art. Fifty emerging and established artists have offered their work up to the public in return for . . . well, anything except money.

"In a world where the actual piece of work and its message or beauty often falls second to the hype or price that is attached, we hope to encourage people to value the work themselves, not for the name or price tag attached" says Jones.

For the next three days these fifty -- among them big guns such as Tracey Emin, Mat Collinshaw, Gary Hume and Gavin Turk -- will grace the walls of [The Rag Factory](#), Hume and Emin's old studio off Brick Lane. Their identities are kept anonymous, in order that personal taste is allowed to dictate the value of the work -- at least that's the idea.

But some are a giveaway. Simon Tyszko, who has built a full size replica of a Dakota wing in his apartment in Fulham offers the whole lot, wing and apartment complete with a 98-year lease. What he is expecting in exchange? "A hamlet in the South of France".

One corner of the exhibition is reserved for punters scribbling on "barter forms" with tiny pencils. They are offering anything from home-cooked curries and trumpet lessons to adult-sized giraffe suits or "the fur of 25 minks".

Artists are not obliged to accept and it remains to be seen whether these noble intentions can have any effect on an industry where notions of value and worth have become so skewed. At best, the popularity and support that Art Barter has achieved could indicate a re-emerging bohemian sensibility among some of Britain's most eminent artists; at worst, it is at least an entertaining experiment for all involved.

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