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Art Barter 2010

by **Katherine Koster**

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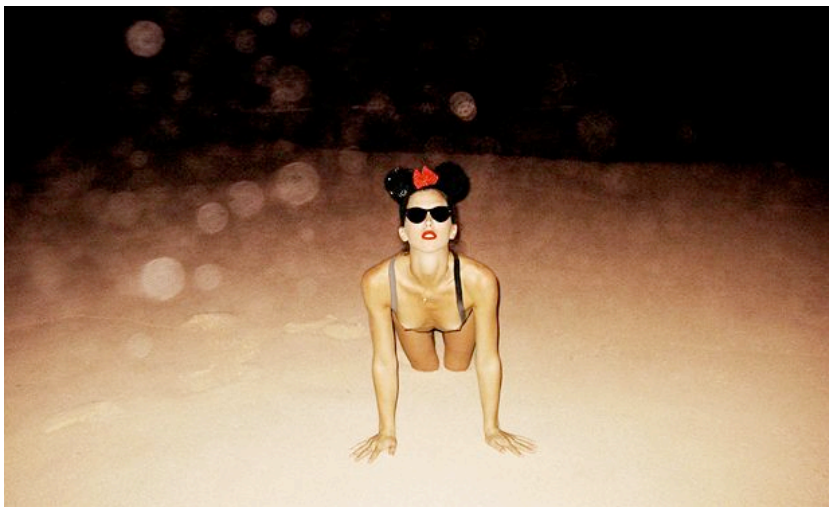
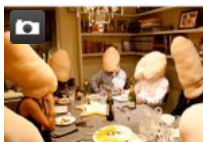


Image courtesy of Art Barter

From June 24-27, art's most radical experiment comes to Berlin: bid (with services!) on unnamed, uncaptioned, unauthored and unpriced works... that may or may not be by somebody famous.



Art Barter 2010

Elitism in art has existed since (literally) the dark ages. What was considered to be art, and good art, was dictated by pharos, emperors, the church, patrons. Even communism didn't democratize the valuation of art: bureaucrats simply replaced private collectors. Capitalism and free market trade did even less: not the collector and connoisseur, but rather the curator, the magazine editor, the museum collections manager now determine the price of works.

Another problem with art? If it isn't the professional critic or curator who determines a piece's worth, the artist's reputation does: Warhol, once famous, tells us that blown-up posters of soup cans are art, and we fall for it. Found art, object art, installation art...

Art Barter draws on pre-feudal, pre-currency barter-exchange to return critical power to the layman, and focus from the artist to the works themselves. How? By creating web-based platforms and exhibitions where art is displayed unnamed, uncaptioned, unauthored and unpriced. Without knowing the artist's name, without reading PR-factory texts, visitors can browse and bid.

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Oh...and bid by offering services, not money. Art Barter exhibitions don't just undermine the state of art under capitalism, but the inequality of the capitalist model in general: visitors can write down what they'd be willing to trade for a piece – from a year of manuscript translation to three months of psychotherapy, to a favorite toy – and the artist can choose the most appealing. Trading services, not cash, opens art ownership to everyone, even kids.

Berlin's Art Barter, a [three-day show \(June 24-27\)](#) at [HBC](#) featuring the work of 26 international (but mainly Berlin-based) artists is the organization's second exhibition, following the premiere event at London's Rag Factory in November 2009.

We like the idea. And apparently, artists do too. The first exhibition featured works by established artists like Tracey Emin, Gary Hume, Gavin Turk, Mat Collishaw...but no more name-dropping, lest we let this recommendation undermine the intent.

June 23, 2010

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