

WELCOME TO ARTOUT - THE FIRST ARTIST ESCORT SERVICE IN THE HISTORY OF ART!

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ARTOUT furthers the ongoing inquiry into the nature of art production and its economy and test the limits of the “art scene”. Indeed, is “art” an altruistic cultural gesture, a form of business transaction, or both? Or neither?



Fig 1. Artout artist escort, available 450 euro/hr. To book www.artout.org



Fig 2. Artout artist escort, available 250 euro/hr. To book www.artout.org

L'art... peut derivier d'un sentiment genereux: le gout de la prostitution; mais il est bientôt corrompu par le gout de la propriété.

_Charles Baudelaire

ARTOUT artist escort service, launched in Paris in 2006, in many ways is a fruit of a long observation of the art scene both in Europe and in the United States. Between 2000 and 2006, Artout founder, Anton Koslov Mayr, was in charge of an educational project Engarde that investigated the political economy of art through a series of exhibits, seminars and conferences. Engarde primarily focused on the issues related to production of cultural objects and meaning, their consumption and the identity of artists, critics, curators and collectors within a larger framework of the capitalist market system in general and the art market in particular. However, the traditional academic approach upon which Engarde was based demonstrated its limitations, and by 2006 it became clear that any serious inquiry, in order to produce tangible results, demands a more radical strategy. [1]

The ideological genealogy of Artout may be traced to various sources. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnival, developed in his seminal *Rabelais and His World* is one of them. Performance art as a form of this *carnavalesque time*, in which accepted boundaries and distinctions between reality and representation are subverted (and this is why it is radically different from traditional theater) may be an example. and it explains why Artout has a large number of performance artists as participants and enters squarely into the tradition of "distubational art" to use Arthur Danto's term. [2] Artout may also be put in the

context of *institutional critique* as developed by artists like Andrea Fraser and others. Institutional critique was conceived as a form of commentary of the various cultural institutions and assumed *normalities* of art as well as disarticulation of the institution of art and its various practices. In the case of Artout, it is the relationship between the artist and his/her collector/consumer (both individual and institutional) that is being staged as a performance.

Artout has also been informed by the conceptual art inquiry into the very morphology of art. This inquiry, political in nature, questions the economic dimension of art production, namely the commodity fetish of cultural production, mystification of products and commodification of the artist's personality. At a certain stage of its development, art lost its ability to generate its own definition and, therefore, produce any significant oppositional movement outside of the existing cultural institutions. Creation of culturally significant objects have been turned into an enterprise of creating marketable "novelty"; fetishisation of novelty meant the collapse of the avant-garde since any political opposition to the existing mode of art production and distribution became impossible. In many ways, collectors had become the supreme consumers of "art", its new "aristocracy." The art market imposed total reification of the process of art production, reducing it to manufacturing of objects and events in specifically designated spaces by professionally designated people. Cultural institutions became the superstructure of the market place on which art was being bought and sold like any other merchandise, relying on an all-encompassing process of mystification. This mystification consisted of investing objects with the market value by placing them in the context of art history. Art object as a commodity fetish that offers "art historical value" became an investment vehicle and as such re-affirmed (and continue to re-affirm) a certain economic model with its history of art and its hierarchy of culture. and the entire art market and its adjacent institutional territories became a one big Bernard Madoff collection...

In other words, the law of the capitalist market with its emphasis on the ever-narrowing specialization of labor and maximization of profits invites artists to reinvent themselves over and over in order to escape the market-imposed limits to their identity. This limited identity confines artists to seek satisfying the ruling class demand for the special commodity fetish known as Art and reproduce institutionally-defined ideology of culture. Dercon, director of Tate Modern, even describes artists today as 'zombies and vampires' due to the precarious working conditions they face and endless free services they are willing to offer. [3] In both cases, the producer and the consumer of Art are limited in their freedom by the traditional modes of material exchange.

De-materialization of the art-production process led the rise of immaterial ephemeral time-based art, be it performance, sound or light installation, or simply personalized time. If legal council or P.R. manager's time may cost X \$ an hour, why shouldn't artist's time be valued just as much? The social function of an artist is as important and its cultural message is surpassing anything other economic actors are capable for. Artists are the last ones who are still capable of evoking the real sense of modern tragedy, despite or may be because of their clownesque derisive behavior. [4] And yet, our society treats them as a bunch of extravagant clowns at best, and state employees at worst.

That is why artists must defend their economic interests, their identificational integrity, they must find new organizational forms that must surpass the logic of late capitalism. Artout is an open-end project that is set to operate on the threshold between "reality" and "art" and defies the idea of a designated art space. Artout may very well be a relational project, although, we do not believe that one night-out with an artist can produce a relationship – an enterprise too utopian to be taken seriously. However, we believe that the meaning in art, just like the meaning in a language, resides neither in the artist's intention nor in what he or she does but at a point between the artist's intention and that of his or her viewer

and consumer. Our goal (and/or our product) is to create a *dialogized heteroglossia* that explores an already existing set of meanings, relations, clichés and pre-conceived ideas. By doing so we want to further the ongoing inquiry into the nature of art production and its economy and test the limits of the “art scene”. Indeed, is “art” an altruistic cultural gesture, a form of business transaction, or both? Or neither? Do we have to accept the impossibility of conversation in the same way as it was formulated a decade ago by Michel Houellebecq: “L'effritement tendanciel de la créativité dans les arts n'est ainsi qu'une autre face de l'impossibilité toute contemporaine de la conversation. Tout se passe en effet, dans la conversation courante, comme si l'expression directe d'un sentiment, d'une émotion, d'une idée était devenue impossible, parceque trop vulgaire”? [5]

To conclude, we, at ARTOUT, believe that art is an open concept and artistic praxis is the process of becoming that corresponds to the totality of individual temporality. Artistic creativity results from the dialectical relation between the acceptance of the market as the underlying principle of social reality, and the need to escape its imperatives of obedience and consensus; its locus is the individuality of the artist. The artist plays the messenger and the message, the self-medium that finds its legitimacy through the charismatic negation of conventionality.

We believe that the individuality of the artist is far more significant than the material end-product of the artist's labor. We are extending the limits of the traditional market-model to recognize the artist as the self-defined commodity whose value resides in the immateriality of artist's creative becoming. Spending time in the company of the artist is a new "creative" commodity exchange; it reveals power relations within the existing artist-patron paradigm and leads to the mutual liberation of both artists and art patrons from the condition of simple material production and accumulation to the next level of the direct creative exchange within the dominant capitalist art market paradigm.

Be it in your international head-quarters, or in privacy of your home, offer yourself a true artistic experience! To book, <http://www.artout.org>

References and Notes:

1. *In the first four years of its existence (2006-2010) Artout went through a formative stage. It has been denigrated and accused of being an "illicit" enterprise, snubbed, presented as a freak show, but also hailed as the most innovative art project in the period of global financial crisis (by The New York Post.) Today we are entering a new stage – that of a fully functional company, with the CEO, advisory board, deposited trademark, and representing a group of highly motivated artists.*
2. *Danto, Arthur, The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).*
3. *H. Liebs, "Das Künstlerprekariat sitzt in der Falle," Monopol magazine (2010).*
4. *"Le tragique intervient exactement à ce moment où le dérisoire ne parvient plus à être perçu comme fun." Michel Houellebecq, Rester Vivant (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), 50.*
5. *Ibid.*