

'Online Hammer'

Luecke Und Partner's 'Auction Of Ideas'

In September of this year, *Luecke Und Partner* launched a contemporary art auction using eBay as the bidding mechanism. No previously recognised work was available, instead, thirty three artist's ideas were on sale, starting at a price of 1 euro. Hundreds of people visited the site in order to raise bids on concepts by artists such as Ceal Floyer, Carl Michael Von Hauswolff, Olaf Nicolai, Carsten Nicolai, Jorinde Voigt and others, before the deadline ran out...

Adina Popescu and Mr.Cannon met with Marcus Wirthman, the initiator of the project, to discover how you can get people to buy a theatre performance disruption online.

What is luecke und partner?

Luecke & Partner is Heike Luecke and partners in cooperation. Right now, i am the partner in charge of artist's projects, but next spring there will be another project with another partner. The partners are changing from project to project.

How did you arrive at the idea to design the eBay auction for the luecke und partner project?

First came the Idea to establish a gallery on eBay, which hadn't been done before. Of course there are a lot of gallery projects operating on the internet selling pop-art prints or provincial artworks. Then there are a few projects from serious galleries, who tried to use the net as a commercial platform. But these are very carefully tried out things. I guess people still feel that it could ruin their reputation. Probably because of the common idea, that the things sold on eBay are a second hand market. I understood my project as an ironic and critical approach to the art market. A lot of friends, who are artists too, helped and so we founded the galerie, in order to be able organise this show, which is an auction of ideas. A curated action. For this you need a forum, such as eBay which I created for the project.

The biggest online art site *Eyestorm* offering multiples by contemporary artists, went into bankruptcy in 2002. The firm stayed afloat for only three years. Ironically, it was the fact that they decided to open non-virtual real life galleries in London and New York that cost them so much money to run - killing the business. Did you know about eyestorm when you started *Luecke Und Partner*?

No i wasn't aware of Eyestorm, but i was aware of other online projects that went bankrupt. It is difficult though, to drive Luecke und Partner into bankruptcy, because we don't own anything ! We opened the eBay shop which is easy and relatively cheap, the technical aspect is only that we use e.bay as a tool. Everyone knows how much it costs to place a bid on eBay, we don't have to program alot, we have a domain name but that's also relatively cheap. By now, eBay has become a trading standard by which people buy and sell goods and people trust it. Furthermore, the artists i approached were all familiar with e.bay and knew how it worked and therefore could understand the project and trusted it. Online galleries selling editions on the internet have to invest alot of money, fund the software, pay programmers and they lack the advantage to have a reliable platform like eBay, with services like Pay-Pall and re-station. I find it interesting to work with eBay as an institution providing law, which everybody has to cling to.

In the press release for the project, you are described as the curator of the auction, but also as an artist in your own right ... is the e.bay auction an extension of your own work?

Yes, it is true. I never made a difference between my work as an artist, who is being represented by galleries or exhibiting in a museum, and my work in this projekt as a partner in the gallery Luecke and Partner. I did several projects like this before, The *Stadtmodel* exhibition, was a curatorial project with no artists, just regular people. I knew them from my youth and i asked them to create a model of our home town. It was in-between a curatorial project, a sociological project and art. But of course for me, this project orientated work is more interesting at the moment, because it allows me to rewrite, interrupt, or work against the system of the artmarket in a different way as most artists do, when they try to reflect the

system. One of the columns of my work is to delegate the fundamental artistic aesthetic decisions to already existing systems. It could also be rules of nature, physics, normative systems or the algorithms of my computer, the matrix.

A structure lying underneath, formulating the conditions of what is possible and what is not?

Yes. In this case it is eBay, with its already existing structure, which you could also understand as a metaphor, not only for a trademark, but also for a landscape, a city, a map, or, to make this more clear: for example, the desktop on your computer is already a metaphor, so, eBay is the map, tracing the structure and borders for our project. You can play with this structure, as a lot of people have done before, like auctioning something which does not exist. For example, a person who auctioned a folder from a computer desktop. Funny, ironic and intelligent things happen at this point. But I tried to focus on art, tried to apply this on art, so that the project consisted of numerous tied actions (tied into bundles) in which each and every artist analysed the situation in his/her own way.

How did you come to choose the artists? Are they artists that you respect or that you have worked with before, or are they just friends?

I have worked with some of them before and yes, they are all artists I know. I only asked artists who I thought were capable of this project. I did not for example approach pure painters. The artists I approached, are mostly conceptual in their nature or I know them as humorous people.

Did you have to stop artists contributing actual pieces, in order that the 'Auction Of Ideas' concept was realised?

I did not interfere with their production, even if I was not exactly satisfied with what they were doing. Three months in advance, I gave them the invitation letter describing what was required and then left them alone with it, but they all began to think just before the deadline. Some artists were unsure what they should do, and tried ideas out on me, it was difficult to get the ideas in the end, some were being very slow to respond. I just had to wait, I am not a well-known curator, I didn't have a budget for this...but they all answered, all artists that were asked, answered.

Did you accept any idea thought up by the artist or were there any ideas that you had to refuse or censor?

No, but I thought I might have to with Via Lewandowsky. He gave me the idea that the highest bidder would send him into a cultural performance such as a theatre or a reading and he would disturb it. The intensity of the disruption depended on the price. The higher the price, the bigger the disturbance, up to something that could put him into prison.

Art is traditionally a sensory medium. Even though you may not be able to touch art when on display in the gallery surrounding, you may often walk into or around it, let it have a physical effect on you. What do you think are the limitations of viewing and handling art on the internet?

I believe that certain things can not be sold, or, are hard to be sold in the internet. Especially it gets harder the more unknown an artist is. With a well known artist people can imagine, how the object will feel like, when they once have it. But I think that the limit lies within painting, or on tactility based art. Also painting is quite hard to sell. Unconceptual painting is not in the field of what interests us. The more conceptual an artwork is, the more graspable or thinkable a piece is, the better. Ideas of artists are very well to sell. What is quite hard, is to discover young artists on the internet. The more unknown an artist is, the harder it gets to sell his piece.

Do you think art will lose its tactility the more it is traded on the internet?

I am sure that art will always be a sensual medium. But I don't think that trading art on the internet will be just a trend. The internet will be a way in which galleries will sell, which is already happening. This market surely will increase, and become more accepted, but it will always stay a certain percentage of the

artmarket. I believe that collectors for example, prefer to go into a Gallery in order to find what they like. What will probably will happen more and more, is that collectors will visit art fairs, in order to find what they like. I can also imagine, that galleries close down completely their permanent spaces and just show their art pieces on fairs. The internet trade will limit itself to certain segments, like very well known artists or not very sensual art. I think it is always the fear people have of avantgarde movements, that it might remove the traditional ways. But I don't believe in that.

You only gave people an invitation to a physical location once during the project, when you hosted a closing bid party in a space in Torstrasse. Did you feel there had to be some human focus?

This is my experience with the internet. I have been working for quite a while with this medium, I don't refer only to artwork, I have also been working in other jobs or projects, or just out of interest with the internet and I found that you have to include all activities from the internet into the material world. If not, the project runs the risk of failing. To receive an invitation via mail is one thing, to hold a invitation card in your hands is something else...we always do both. We also try to cross every auction or action we are doing on the net with reality. For example, with an event. So we also presented our auction of ideas on the artforum. It is the best way to do it. A project purely existing in the internet will not be noticed that fast, if you don't bring it into connection with the physical world. Of course that weakens the concept, but I have to remember what is important. As a curator I see it as my duty to get people to see it. You have to connect the project to the real world somehow, even if it is just a printed invitation card you can hold in your hand. I am a curator, I am working for and with people, so somehow, I have to bring the project to the people.

How was the atmosphere on the closing night?

We had two computers connected to the internet for people to bid on, and we also had a wireless land connection and encouraged people to bring their laptops to bid online, but people were fighting for the use of the two computers, the atmosphere was very tense !

Were the artists there?

Yes, some.

Was it your intention to introduce works of art to people who would not usually enter a gallery or bid on an online art site?

No. I didn't think of this. We had a mail out list connected to the cultural and art world. As far as I know, 90% of the people who were following the auction were connected to the art-world or friends of the artists, or people who knew of the artists and their work.

But artworks in your auction were purchased on eBay by people who knew nothing about the Luecke und Partner project and just happened to find the work by making a general search, unconnected to your website.

Really ? I didn't know, they must be exceptions.

You are continuing the eBay project with a full 'show' of work by Gerhard Mantz.

These are fixed price pieces. We cannot enter these into an auction, because they are traded by established galleries. However we have a edition of smaller works that we put into the exhibitions area of the website. From this, some works go into the auction.

With the eBay auction you were interested in ideas, but this seems to be more interested in actual pieces, such as a gallery would deal with.

The gallery is continuing and is serving as a forum for ideas such as 'the auction of ideas' but there will be further projects, that I cannot speak about at the moment... I constantly have ideas for new projects and those ideas need a forum. The eBay gallery is an art piece in itself.

Will you keep the site going with presentations of different artists, has the project got a timespan?

No, no timespan. It's open ended. If i don't like it anymore, i stop it...

Did luecke und partner take a percentage of the sale price as regular galleries do?

Yes we did.

How much?

30%. This covered the eBay online costs and the costs of the closing party. It was not enough to make a profit.

Do you think you will become established as a gallerist as a result of this project?

I hope not !