



PAWNSHOP

E-FLUX, NEW YORK

1 OCTOBER - 29 FEBRUARY

The pawnshop is a cruel form of loaning money that has existed since ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, one that the poor and desperate regularly fall prey to in the real world. At e-flux's headquarters in the increasingly relevant gallery district of the Lower East Side in Manhattan, invited artists were asked to loan work to this exhibition-cum-shop. Unlike dealings in a real pawnshop, each artist received the same small sum of \$99.99, so the loan was not based on the value of the work. For the first 30 days of the loan, the work was on display but not for sale. Within that time period, the artists had to repay the loan plus interest of \$22 or the work would be offered for sale at its full value. After the opening day, any artist could walk in and present something for consideration.

In a real pawnshop, if you're a day late with your loan, you don't get your item back. It's unclear whether e-flux's establishment was run as strictly. The ultimate twist to this convoluted temporary grant is that the loan amount would be donated to charity – the recipient being the worthy Doctors Without Borders organisation.

The shop itself was utterly convincing, with glass vitrines, pegboard displays, a cash register, phoney security cameras and believable signage. The majority of people who came in off the street were looking to pawn real goods, disappointed and a bit confused by the actual intent of the enterprise. A range of items, from art objects like Christoph Keller's *Coupon for one time changing the weather in NYC* to Mike Smith's functional 35mm camera were on view. In the storefront's window, husband and wife collaborators

Bengala pawned an acoustic guitar with their marriage certificate in gold writing printed on its body. More traditional two-dimensional works were harder to come by, but a drawing of a ram, in ink on sheet-music paper, by Keren Cytter, was a tempting find. Adding another level of intrigue, in many cases it was hard to tell what was art and what was a regular object. The vintage boom box with a stack of tapes on the floor next to it including Tone-Lōc's *Lōc-ed After Dark* (1989) seemed to make an ironic statement, but it was just there to entertain staffers. Additional services available at *Pawntshop* were fax and Xerox copies, Internet access, phonecards, cheque cashing and passport photos.

With *Pawntshop*, organisers Julieta Aranda, Liz Linden and Anton Vidokle have set up a project that is in direct opposition to the current state of the art market, with its greed and high prices, and the questionable long-term value of untested artists. *Pawntshop* is a real anomaly, in that any profit being made is given away in an exercise of philanthropy. It's rare that contemporary art gives back to the real world, and for that the project should be lauded. And in case you thought the artists weren't getting anything out of the deal, their contributions are tax deductible. *Chris Bors*

Pawntshop, 2007 (installation view). Photo: Carlos Motta