

## AN OPEN LETTER TO TATE

### TATE: NO SOUL FOR SALE // ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM // FAIR PAY FOR ARTISTS

*"We don't really cherish our artists to the degree we should."*

Sir Nicholas Serota, Director of Tate, quoted in the Evening Standard 23.04.10

As a grouping of national and international artists, we publicly challenge No Soul For Sale (NSFS) at Tate Modern over the weekend of 14th-16th May 2010.

The title No Soul For Sale re-enforces deeply reductive stereotypes about the artist and art production. With its romantic connotations of the soulful artist, who makes art from inner necessity without thought of recompense, No Soul For Sale implies that as artists we should expect to work for free and that it is acceptable to forego the right to be paid for our labour.

It has come to our attention that many participants are not being paid by Tate Modern for their efforts. In fact, most are self-funding their activities throughout the weekend. Tate describes this situation as a "spirit of reciprocal generosity between Tate and the contributors". But at what point does expected generosity become a form of institutional exploitation? Once it becomes endemic within a large publicly funded art space?

Reciprocal generosity is the lifeblood of independent art communities throughout the world. This spirit is not however the property of any one institution, artist or curator and it is complacent for Tate to believe that their position is comparable to ground level arts activity. It therefore seems disingenuous for Tate to claim that their hosting of NSFS is somehow altruistic or philanthropic. Tate publicly has the most to gain, yet we have discovered that Tate's reciprocity does not even extend to the provision of basic resources, such as the use of chairs and tables for some of the participants in NSFS. Tate will commercially benefit from NSFS through increased audiences and the inevitable increase in the sale of books, magazines, merchandise, refreshments, donations and exhibition entry fees. Is the nature of this exchange really occurring on a level playing field? Is the relationship as reciprocal as it could be?

As many of us in Making A Living have worked with Tate and other major art galleries, we understand that the expectation of free labour and self-funding is not exclusive to NSFS. During our discussions it has come to light that Tate has not paid artists for some exhibitions, workshops and events, including last year's Tate Triennial, and that this policy has existed over a considerable period of time, long before the current economic crisis became an issue for arts institutions.

We call for an end to this poor practice and manipulation of generosity as Tate Modern celebrates its 10th birthday. We call on Tate to make public its policy in regard to artists' fees.

If artists continue to work for free, or are expected to pay for their efforts when working with our major art institutions, then we deny opportunities to the great majority of artists who simply cannot afford to take such financial risks. Tate and other major publicly funded galleries risk spoiling their good work by unwittingly limiting their pool of future exhibiting artists to individuals who can afford to pay for the privilege, or who are content or able to work for little or no pay. If NSFS manages to start a productive conversation about this 'elephant in the room' then we think it may yet be described as a success.

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(Making A Living: A discussion group of Arts professionals currently active across the UK)

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