Don’t exit through the gift shop

To celebrate ten years of Tate Modern this weekend, the Turbine Hall hosts a non-profit convention for independent artists. Ossian Ward meets the “No Soul for Sale” gang

Aside from scoffing a big power station-shaped cake, Tate Modern will mark its tenth birthday this weekend by inviting 70 artist-run collectives, publishers and alternative spaces from all over the world to participate in an anarchic anti-art fair, “No Soul for Sale – A Festival of Independents”. Among those bringing wares from afar are Barbur from Jerusalem with a self-styled bazaar, the Filipino Green Papaya Art Projects and the eccentrically named Auto Italia South East, from deepest Peckham. Time Out caught up with the curatorial trio behind “No Soul for Sale” – Cecilia Alemani, Massimiliano Gioni and artist Maurizio Cattelan – and asked Tate Modern’s outgoing director, Vicente Todoli, why he’s letting the lunatics take over the asylum.

Why ‘No Soul for Sale’? Are artists fed up with selling out? Is anyone really not-for-profit these days?

Maurizio Cattelan “It’s first of all a tribute to the artists and the art lovers who work beyond the traditional market system; it’s about the people who keep art alive, during boom and bust periods and down periods. People who don’t think in terms of investment or market logic, but who, instead, create spaces and platforms for others to present their work.”

Massimiliano Gioni “It’s not so much that artists are fed up with selling or with selling out. It’s simply that nobody ever pays respect to those who work in situations in which there is very little money but a lot of energy and enthusiasm. If it didn’t sound so much like a Mastercard ad, I would say that what the participants in “No Soul for Sale” have in common is that they invest their time, their knowledge, their energies, which are simply priceless.”

Cecilia Alemani “In the end, it doesn’t matter if you are really not-for-profit. What matters is how resources are distributed and who they support: the participants in “No Soul for Sale” can do a lot with very little, creating new spaces, and new, possible art worlds for other people to participate in. Rather than being about money or selling, “No Soul for Sale” is about hospitality and generosity.”

Tate Modern is a cathedral, but it’s also a strange bazaar and a great place to hang out. Tate, too, is much more porous than we think. It’s a museum I like a lot because it promotes a sort of mass elitism, which I find very contemporary.

CA “In general one could also say that the whole opposition – centre versus margin or underground versus mainstream – has dramatically changed in the last few years. “No Soul for Sale” is also about this shift: it recognises that the role of Tate and of a small not-for-profit place like Beijing is in the end almost equal. It might be idealistic or romantic, but we do believe such different institutions are more and more equal as we think. Recently Davide Quadrio from Arthub Asia spoke of “de-institutions” to characterise the work of organisations that reinvent themselves and de-structure themselves. Maybe that’s what Tate and these smaller groups have in common, the necessity to reinvent themselves, if they want to remain connected to art.”

MG “And let’s not forget that you don’t become institutional by simply taking part in a three-day event at Tate; you talk to a different audience, you connect with other people, you show the art you believe in. It’s not about being institutionalised but rather about creating a symbiotic, or parasitic, relationship with it.”

VT “What did the Romans say? We are all dwarves on the shoulders of giants, aren’t we?”

“No Soul for Sale” runs May 14-16 (see Other events in listings for more details or www.nosoulsforsale.com).

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Poster children
All participants have designed a flyer, including Arts from Israel, Western Front Society from Canada and White Columns from New York

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