

DEMOCRACY FOR SALE

by Kristian von Hornsleth

Kristian von Hornsleth

Tuesday, March 24, 2026, was the day of the national parliamentary election in Denmark. On that day, Danish artist Kristian von Hornsleth initiated this project. Across all social media platforms, he released a video inviting the public to sell their vote in exchange for an original artwork valued at € 2,000. To participate, individuals were asked to follow a few simple steps: Go to a polling station, cast their vote for the left-wing party Enhedslisten on his list, photograph the marked ballot alongside their face, and send the image to the artist. In return, each participant would receive a personalized artwork depicting and explaining the project, featuring their own face at its center. Everything proceeded as planned from the opening of the polling stations at 8:00 a.m. until the police raided Hornsleth's studio and private residence at 2:00 p.m. Over 200 voters participated before all social media platforms and websites were shut down by the authorities.

Ten police officers, along with members of the intelligence services, were involved in the operation. Without presenting a warrant, the police confiscated all computers, related artworks, and telephones, and conducted a thorough search of the premises. At 4:00 p.m., Hornsleth and his two assistants were taken into custody and placed in holding cells, where they remained for six hours. Following interrogation on the evening of March 24, they were released at approximately 10:00 p.m.. As of today, March 8, 2026, the only information available is that we are awaiting the prosecution's decision and a date for the court proceedings to begin. Our lawyers have told us that the punishment for selling and buying votes can range from fines to up to two years in prison. All artworks will be recreated and distributed to the participants and all works will be published here on www.hornsleth.com The police have stated that my team and I along with all 200 participants will be prosecuted. All participants will be informed when we know more. The fight continues!

DEMOCRACY FOR SALE ART PROJECT
Art critical explanation

Kristian von Hornsleth's March 2026 voting project, *“Democracy for Sale”*, holds significant artistic importance as a performative intervention into the legal and ethical boundaries of electoral politics.By offering original artworks valued at 15,000 DKK in exchange for photographic proof of a vote cast for the Red-Green Alliance Party *‘Enhedslisten’*, Hornsleth enacted a literal commodification of the democratic franchise. The work's power lies in its direct violation of Section 117 of the Danish Penal Code, which criminalizes the buying or selling of votes, thereby transforming a criminal act into a site of aesthetic and political inquiry. Rather than a genuine attempt to sway an election, the project functioned as a mirror, reflecting what Hornsleth identifies as a broader societal condition where fundamental rights are increasingly subject to market logic. The arrest of the artist and two voters by Copenhagen Police, along with the formal police complaint filed by the Red-Green Alliance Party *‘Enhedslisten’* itself, became integral components of the artwork, blurring the line between documentation and performance . This institutional response, from political party to law enforcement, validated the project's central provocation: that the sanctity of the secret ballot is more fragile than commonly assumed. Hornsleth's stated use of *“reverse psychology”* and his admission that buying votes is *“a problem if you do it right”* frames the entire event as a form of Socratic irony, where the artist breaks the law to dramatize its importance. The participation of over one hundred voters, including one who publicly switched his vote from the Liberal Alliance, demonstrates how the project activated citizens as co-performers in a collective critique of political influence-buying, from fuel price stunts to algorithmic manipulation. Ultimately, the importance of *“Democracy for Sale”* resides not in its legality but in its capacity to force a public reckoning with uncomfortable questions about what, in a democracy, must remain beyond the reach of transaction.*

Wolf Guenter Thiel

“BELLA CIAO”
The Vote Project by Kristian von Hornsleth

The question of whether law stands above morality is not simple. It depends on how you see the world, through a legal lens or a philosophical one. At its core, it is about the difference between what is legal and what is right. In the practice of the state, it is the law that applies. Legality is what gets enforced. Morality, what we feel is just and legitimate, lives instead in public debate, in conversations between people, and in society's conscience. This way of thinking is called legal positivism: the law comes first. Rules are made through the state—by lawmakers, courts, and authorities—and they are binding, whether or not they are experienced as fair. But against this stands the idea that something exists above the law: morality, certain basic rights we have as human beings. In a democracy, we try to turn these into laws—but we do not always succeed. That is why freedom of speech and art are so important. They create space to ask questions and to challenge what already exists.

Because what happens when the law is not just unfair, but directly immoral? History gives a frightening answer. During World War II, terrible acts were committed in the name of the law. Under the Nazi regime, persecution and murder of opponents were not illegal, they were part of the system's logic. Here, the law became a tool of oppression.The German legal theorist Carl Schmitt went so far as to claim that the leader stood above the law. His idea was that the true ruler is also the highest judge. In this view, power replaces justice. But even in ancient times, another idea existed: Nomos Basileus, *“the law is king.”* Here, the law is the highest authority, above both people and rulers. An idea that no one stands above the rules. The problem arises when the *“law”* itself becomes tyrannical. Throughout history, people have rebelled against such conditions—sometimes with violence, in what was called tyrannicide. From ancient stories to revolutions like the French Revolution, power has been challenged in the name of freedom.

But what if tyranny is not a person, but a system? Philosophers Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno warned as early as 1944: Enlightenment and progress can turn against themselves if we do not keep asking critical questions. If we stop thinking, we risk new forms of oppression—disguised as order, technology, or efficiency. Today, we see how economic forces and mass media can shape our shared reality. Culture becomes commodities. People become target groups. And the critical perspective risks disappearing. This is where art takes on a special role. True art is not just decoration or entertainment. It should show us where the world falls short. It should open our eyes and give us new ways of thinking. It often stands on the side of morality rather than law.

In Europe, artistic freedom is protected as a fundamental right. But in Denmark, it still applies: you are free to create, but you can still be punished afterward if you break the law. So art is not powerless, but it is not without consequences. Artists can choose to step into the tension between law and morality. To reveal the cracks in the system. To show clearly where something can be abused, so that we can correct it. This is where art becomes political. Not as propaganda, but as a mirror and a form of resistance. The Danish artist Kristian von Hornsleth works precisely in this space. By pushing the system to its limits, he shows where it might break down, not to destroy it, but to make it stronger. In the end, it is about the strength of democracy. About our ability to look at ourselves honestly, even when it is uncomfortable.

And this is where the title makes sense. Bella ciao is not just a song. It is a farewell and a protest. A voice from those who fought against oppression during World War II. It sings of freedom, and of the price of freedom.



Kristian Hornsleth in seinem Studio in Hellerup

Perhaps this is where everything comes together:

Between law and morality.
Between legality and justice.
Between what is and what should be.

*„And if I die as a partisan,
then you must bury me ...
And all who pass by will say:
What a beautiful flower.
It is the flower of freedom.”*

Kristian Hornsleth

is a concept-artist in the field of painting and artistic interventionism. He lives and works in Copenhagen. Throughout his whole work he expresses criticism about art institutions, art audiences and established art related structures. One of his main artistic claims was "Fuck You Artlovers" in which he attacked the cultural audience. He used images which broke many taboos in many ways. He implemented hardcore ponography, anti religious as well as politically completely incorrect items like attacking religious motives or homosexuality and feminism. He also branded his artworks putting his name Hornsleth like a logo on the canvas on top of the image. He has gained worldwide recognition with conceptual art-projects like the "Hornsleth Village Project " in Uganda 2006, the Deep Storage Project 2011 or the "Hornsleth Homeless Tracker" (also known as the "Buy a Homeless" project) in 2017 ... His work was banned from the contemporary art scene and institutional exhibitions until now. Instead he has built his own fame as a public figure. Today he is regularly on Television programmes commenting on art and mainstream cultural phenomenons. He is a national hero in Denmark and known like a pop-star.

DEMOCRACY FOR \$ALE

I \$OLD MY VOTE TO HORN\$LETH
FOR THI\$ ARTWORK AT THE 2026 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION
IN THE FIGHT FOR A BETTER WORLD



#0024

if HORN\$LETH 2026

AGREEMENT

AS PART OF HORN\$LETH'S ART PROJECT, I COMMITTED MYSELF TO THE FOLLOWING:

1. I MARKED MY VOTE FOR THE LEFT WING PARTY ENHED\$LISTEN.
2. I TOOK A \$ELFIE OF MY BALLOT \$O THAT MY CRO\$\$ WAS VI\$IBLE.
3. I \$ENT THE PHOTO TO HORN\$LETH.
4. I RECEIVED THI\$ ORIGINAL HORN\$LETH ARTWORK, IN WHICH MY \$ELFIE IS INCLUDED.

I PARTICIPATED IN HORN\$LETH'S PROJECT IN ORDER TO:
MOVE \$OCIETY TOWARD GREATER FREEDOM, EQUALITY, LEGAL PROTECTION, AND FREEDOM OF \$PEECH,
AS WELL AS BETTER CONDITIONS FOR PEOPLE, ANIMAL\$, AND NATURE.
NEVER FORGET THAT THE PEOPLE HOLD THE POWER.
WARN THAT TOO MUCH INEQUALITY LEADS TO FA\$CI\$M.
REMEMBER THAT DEMOCRACY IS A HARD-WON AND FRAGILE GIFT.
NEVER FORGET THAT COMMUNITY, INCLUSION, AND LOVE ARE ALWAYS PO\$\$IBLE.
ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ENHED\$LISTEN IS ONE OF THE FEW PARTIE\$ TRULY FIGHTING FOR THE ABOVE.

PARTICIPANT * 024 NAME: JONAS JELLEV OLSEN

HORN\$LETH

DEMOCRACY FOR \$ALE

I \$OLD MY VOTE TO HORN\$LETH
FOR THI\$ ARTWORK AT THE 2026 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION
IN THE FIGHT FOR A BETTER WORLD



#0023

if HORN\$LETH 2026

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PARTICIPANT * 023 NAME: ALBERTHE BJOERK ØRBECH

HORN\$LETH