



Koestler Associates Newsletter - April 2022

Hello from the Koestler Team!

We are happily back working at the Koestler Arts Centre, with 2022 entries piling up around us, and as always can't wait to see what you have all been creating! Hopefully you are keeping well and have enjoyed putting together your 2022 Awards entries.

In this newsletter we're asking you to take part in a creative activity and help us choose a themed category for the 2023 Awards, updating you on how our 60th anniversary year is going so far, and sharing with you a short history of the Koestler Awards!

2022 Koestler Awards

The deadline for the 2022 Awards was 7 April - thank you to all of you who have entered creative work this year! We are now busy opening up thousands of parcels and processing your submissions.

We cannot confirm receipt of entries just yet, but will write to entrants in the summer to let them know their work arrived safely, once it has all been logged and prepared for judging. The 2022 Awards results will be announced on our website at the end of August.



2022 Awards entries arriving at the Koestler Arts Centre

2021 Artwork Returns

All visual artwork entered into the 2021 Awards that has not been sold or donated has now been sent back out to establishments or to entrants in the community. If you have queries about this please ask your education department or write to us and we can look into it for you.

Greetings Cards Activity

As 2022 marks the Koestler Awards' 60th birthday, we're inviting Koestler Associates to get creative with greetings cards in this newsletter. Enclosed are two blank greetings cards - one is for you to decorate and give or send to whoever you like, and the other we'd love you to decorate and send back to us.

We will be sending lots of messages of thanks to the people whose support has helped Koestler Arts reach its 60th birthday this year, and we'd love to make them extra special by using cards decorated by you!

You can use any medium you like to decorate the card you create for us, and don't need to make any reference to our 60th birthday - striking greetings cards are often abstract or just feature a work of art in miniature. You might decorate the front of the card with a pencil drawing, painting, or collage, attach a small needlecraft work, or write and decorate a poem.

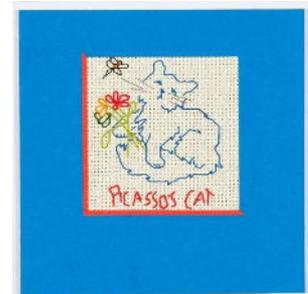
Please don't write inside the cards - we'll need space to write our own messages of thanks to supporters - and don't sign them or write your name on them, as we won't be able to send out any that aren't anonymous. Please write your unique Koestler Associates number on the inside of the front of the card so we can identify you and get in touch if we need to. Once you have decorated your card please send it back to us in the FREEPOST envelope provided by the beginning of June 2022.

Please note your cards won't be entered into the 2022 Koestler Awards - this is a separate creative task we hope you'll enjoy getting stuck into now our Awards deadline has passed. We were so impressed by your submissions to our Associates Christmas Card competition a couple of years ago, and hope you'll enjoy taking part again this time. We'll share a selection of our favourite cards in an upcoming Associates newsletter. We can't wait to see what you create!

Handmade Greetings Cards is a small but well-loved category in our Awards and we're always impressed with entrants' originality and skill even on the small scale the artform allows. On this page are some examples of previous entries that may inspire your creations.



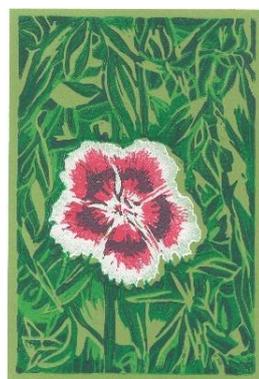
For Better or Worse, HM Prison Eastwood Park, First-Time Entrant Award for Handmade Greetings Card, 2021



Picasso's Cat, HM Prison Frankland, Platinum Award for Handmade Greetings Card, 2019



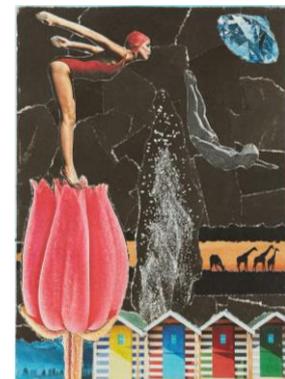
Being Equal @ Festive Time, 1 of 7, HM Prison Leeds, Silver Award for Handmade Greetings Card, 2020



Gratitude Flower, NPS Sussex, Gold Award for Handmade Greetings Card, 2021



Sparkly Love Card, HM Prison Frankland, Bronze Award for Handmade Greetings Card, 2020



Authentic HMP Collage Greetings Cards, 1 of 12, London CRC - Hackney and Islington, Gold Award for Handmade Greetings Card, 2017

2023 Themed Category

We've been told by entrants that they would like to know the themed category for each year's Awards earlier than we usually announce it, so they have more time to work on entries for this category. With that in mind, we're getting ahead for the 2023 Awards and starting to brainstorm ideas.

In 2021 our themed category 'Together' was suggested by Koestler mentees, and this time we want you, our Koestler Associates, to help us choose a themed category for 2023!

Other previous themed categories have been 'Forgiveness', 'Dreams', 'Journey', 'Comfort', 'Connections', 'Interlude', 'Window' and 'Taste'. The theme is always a single word that will generate a wide range of responses across all artistic mediums - poems, sculptures, paintings, music; a word that can be interpreted in both literal and abstract ways and that will encourage entrants to think creatively.

Please send us your suggestions for next year's themed category - as many as you like! You can send them in the FREEPOST envelope provided when you return your greetings card to us.

Art Aid

We know how important creativity is to our entrants and wanted to provide some inspiration in a difficult time, so began creating and sharing our Art Aid activity sheets in Spring 2020. Each month, we commission a former or current Koestler Mentee to set a creative task that can be done in cell, and ask them to share their own experiences of creativity and the criminal justice system, in the hopes it will inspire you.

The latest Art Aid sheet is enclosed with this newsletter. It features a task set by Koestler Award winning artist and mentee Jordan, inviting you to create your own mini masterpiece with your eyes closed! The theme of the task is 'celebration'. We hope you will enjoy giving it a try and perhaps even using it as a starting point for decorating your greetings card.

To access the new Art Aid sheets each month please speak to a member of your education department. They can be downloaded from the Koestler Arts website from the first Monday of the month. You can also write to us at FREEPOST Koestler Arts to be sent the latest sheets directly.

Koestler Arts at the Supreme Court, 29 June - October 2022

A selection of artwork entered into the 2022 Koestler Awards by under-18s will be showcased in a public display at the Supreme Court in London this summer. It will be a chance to celebrate work made by our youngest entrants, displaying their creations inside one of the UK's most iconic legal settings.

The Supreme Court is the final court of appeal in the UK for civil cases, and for criminal cases from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It hears cases of the highest importance that can affect the whole population. Members of the public can visit the Supreme Court for tours, exhibitions and to watch live court sittings.



A Light in the Dark, Bluebird House, Platinum Award for Drawing, 2021

60 Years of the Koestler Awards

We've been digging through our archives to bring you a history of the Koestler Awards so far!

Koestler Arts founder Arthur Koestler was a prominent writer and intellectual of the mid-20th Century. He was imprisoned in Spain in the 1930s as a political prisoner, and subsequently in France and Britain. These experiences inspired his famous prison novel *Darkness at Noon* as well as his campaigning efforts to improve the lives of prisoners.

Arthur Koestler campaigned for the abolition of capital punishment in Britain, and then sought to create 'an imaginative and exciting way to stimulate as far as possible, and in as many cases as possible, the mind and spirit of the prisoner'.



Wet Sunday, HM Prison Nottingham,
First Koestler Award winner for
Painting, 1962.

The Koestler Awards were thus begun in 1962 - an annual award scheme to award 'creative work in the fields of literature, the arts or sciences by those physically confined'. There was almost no precedent for work by prisoners being judged and rewarded by prominent experts from outside the prison system.

“When I first thought of the scheme, I thought of something which might counteract the death of the soul which prisoners experience. I wanted something more constructive than prison - something to compete for, something creative. And I hoped that by making it competitive some creative potential, unknown even to the prisoner, might be actualised.”
- Arthur Koestler, *The Times*, 1981

The first Koestler Awards in 1962 attracted around 200 entries, and 17 prizes totalling £400 in prize money were on offer. The scheme has steadily grown since - we now receive around 7000 entries each year and give out over 2000 Awards worth more than £30,000 in total.

From the beginning, the Awards have welcomed visual artwork, writing and music, and experts from these fields have been invited to judge the entries. Early judges included writers J. B. Priestley and Laurie Lee and artists Sir Hugh and Lady Margaret Casson.

“Judging the competition, I have been faced by so much that is compelling that one can only wish that there were more prizes to distribute.”

- Laurie Lee, 1971

Hundreds of artists, writers, and musicians have since judged the Koestler Awards including artists Grayson Perry, Sarah Lucas and Jeremy Deller, poets Kae Tempest, Wendy Cope and Carol Ann Duffy, and broadcasters Louis Theroux and Reggie Yates. We're proud that many former Koestler Award winners who have achieved success in the arts after release from prison have also returned to judge the Awards.

“It was a really wonderful experience to be involved in the judging process and also put into context how difficult it is to decide what work to award, making my own awards over the years that little bit more special.”

- James, former Koestler entrant and 2021 Awards judge



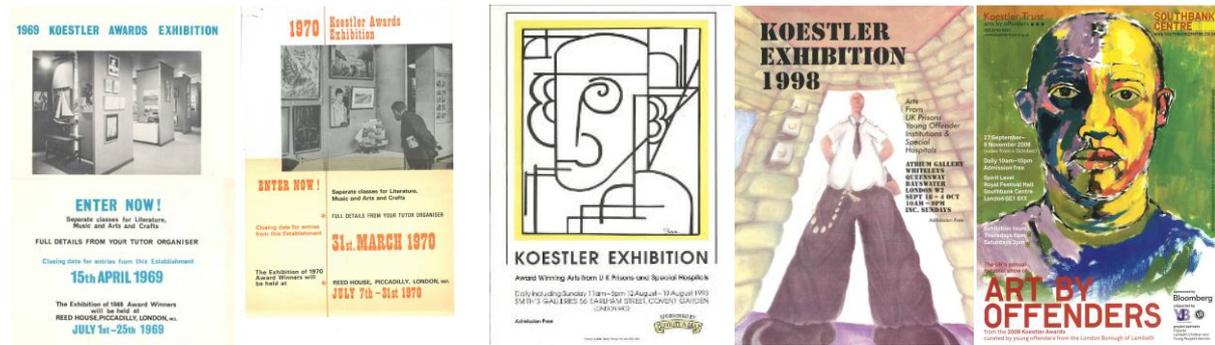
Koestler Awards judging, 1970s



Grayson Perry judging the
Koestler Awards, 2007

The best visual artworks entered into the 1962 Koestler Awards were showcased in Foyles bookshop in London. We have continued to exhibit a selection of Koestler Awards entries each year since, to highlight the creative achievements of people in the criminal justice system to the public.

Over the years this exhibition has been held at various London venues: Reed House, BP House, The Atrium Gallery, The Museum of London, the Institute of Contemporary Art, and, since 2008, at the Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre, where we still hold our annual national exhibition today.

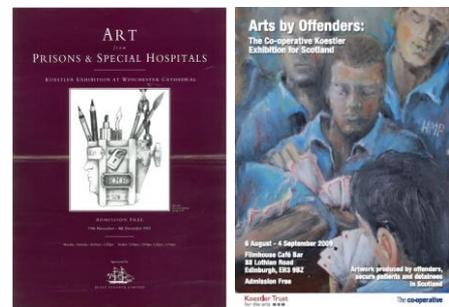


Koestler exhibition posters 1969, 1970, 1993, 1998, 2008

For the past 15 years we have invited a range of arts professionals and people involved in the criminal justice system to curate our national exhibition, including young people working with a Youth Offending Team, families supporting people in prison, victims of crime, women prisoners, rapper Speech DeBelle, poet Benjamin Zephaniah, and artist Anthony Gormley. In 2022 our national exhibition will be curated by artist and activist Ai Weiwei.

In 1991 Koestler held an exhibition of artwork made in prisons and secure hospitals outside of London for the first time, with an exhibition at Winchester Cathedral. We have gone on to develop a programme of regular regional exhibitions, and have since showcased work all over the UK, including in Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Margate, Newcastle and Essex.

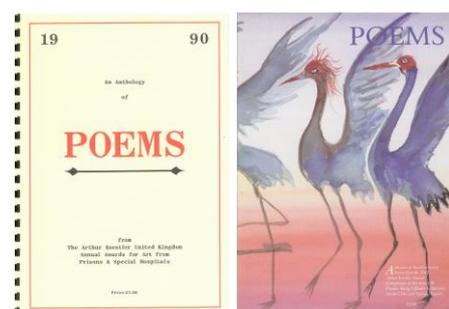
We have also proudly showcased written entries to the Koestler Awards over the years, publishing a number of poetry and prose anthologies. Since 2017 we have been producing our poetry anthology *Koestler Voices* every other year.



Koestler Winchester Cathedral exhibition poster, 1991 and Scotland exhibition poster, 2009

In 2007 we set up an arts mentoring scheme to support ex-prisoners to continue their artistic activities by matching them with a specially trained arts mentor. We have since supported more than 200 people to develop their skills and achieve their goals through this scheme. Many have gone on to publish books, exhibit artwork, and study at college or university.

Since 2000 Koestler Arts has been based at the former Governor's house at HMP Wormwood Scrubs in West London. In 2022 we will move to a purpose-built arts centre next to our current building so that we can continue to grow the Koestler Awards for years to come!



Koestler poetry anthologies, 1990 and 2002

Koestler Arts Mentoring Scheme

We asked Lee, a Koestler entrant, mentee and writer, to reflect on his experience on our arts mentoring scheme:

“Following my two years in custody and winning my Platinum Koestler Award for my stage play *Opening Doors?*, it was shortly after my release that I was proud and privileged to be selected by Koestler to participate in the scheme and I was able to meet my wonderfully inspiring mentor, Natasha.

Coming out of custody is difficult. Sometimes you walk around with a sense of feeling that you have the word “CRIMINAL” glowing in neon lights on your back. One of the most wonderful things about Natasha was that there was absolutely no judgement upon me. This absence of judgement, accompanied by sheer encouragement to push towards turning all negative anger and frustration into positivity through the medium of art, not only filled me with confidence but also led me to the fantastic achievement of publishing my own book. My mentor and I have visited many galleries and exhibitions on the Southbank which has been entertaining and a great source of inspiration. My personal favourite exhibition was the Koestler Exhibition last November.

I don’t know what it is about incarceration which seems to bring out artistic talent within mankind. Maybe it is having so much time on our hands leads us to discovering new artistic talent. Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that as a society, there is so much to celebrate and encourage about the artistic talents of those who experience deprivation of liberty, and that is why I would advise anyone to embrace the opportunity to seek out a mentor with Koestler Arts. You never know what you may learn about yourself or what it may lead to. It is often hard to find positives about an experience with the criminal justice system, but my mentor, Natasha, and Koestler Arts have certainly been the most positive thing about my last few years.”

Our arts mentoring scheme supports ex-prisoners to continue with their artistic interest and activities by matching them with a trained arts mentor; a professional artist, writer, producer or craftsperson who they meet with regularly over a 12-month period, identifying and working towards their arts related goals. To find out more about our arts mentoring scheme, and to apply for a place, please write to Ellie Donaldson, FREEPOST, Koestler Arts.

Reminder

Please note that if you haven’t entered the 2022 Koestler Awards but would like to remain an Associate, you must write to us to let us know, otherwise your name will be removed from this mailing list.

Please also let us know any changes to your address or contact details, so we can ensure future newsletters, certificates, feedback, awards and sales money, and returned artwork reach you!

For this or any other queries, you can always:

- write to us for free at: FREEPOST Koestler Arts
- email: info@koestlerarts.org.uk
- call: 020 8740 0333



Shoe Round the Object, HM Prison Littlehey, Silver Award for Drawing, 2021