



KOESTLER ARTS + ART AID

Hello from Koestler Arts!

Koestler Arts + Art Aid sheets suggest creative tasks that can be done in-cell. For most all you need is paper and a pencil - though if you have further materials please use them.

Please note that the 2021 Koestler Awards deadline has now passed (1 June 2021) and Art Aid sheets will be produced on a monthly basis again. New Art Aid sheets will be available from the first Monday of every month.

For each Art Aid sheet Koestler Arts are commissioning an artist/writer who has directly engaged with Koestler to set a creative task.

September 2021

This task is set by Koestler Award winner, exhibited artist and former mentee, Paul.

My Story

I spent a lot of my time behind my cell door writing. I wrote poetry, stories and film ideas. But the thing that really kept me busy and engaged was drawing. I could usually get my hands on a ballpoint pen but sometimes I used a pencil, whatever was available.

My experience of growing up in a council property with a displaced family made me dream of a home which had stability, clean air and peace. Unsurprisingly, when I found myself getting into drawing inside, I started drawing my dream home. To be honest, my thoughts at the time were; I'll never have a home like this, but something about drawing it made me feel as though I owned it.

At first, I looked at magazines in the prison library and used tracing paper to draw from them because, if truth be told, I was never that good at drawing. I was lucky because the art teacher in my prison was a supporter of Koestler and told me to put down the tracing paper and free my mind.

As it happened, I was rigorous in my belief that I couldn't draw but there was something about the thought; 'No one ever has to see this and I can rip it up afterwards' that made me feel safe to crack on. By taking away the fear of someone seeing my drawing, I was suddenly free to put pen to paper.

It was incredible, I started drawing a home where I could live on my own with a cat and my music and all my things around me. A safe place where the sea air blew through the windows while I sat and enjoyed the beautiful present moment without any bother from anyone. Total and utter freedom.

For me, drawing provided mental and emotional freedom which I'd never experienced before. Once I was released, I found myself creating bigger and more deep meaning projects and found myself being mentored through Koestler's Mentoring Programme. I even had a piece exhibited at their Southbank Centre exhibition. It changed my life. I became an award-winning artist, writer and film-maker. It all started with 'no one ever has to see it'.





Image: Home by Paul

My Task - Drawing Freedom

Think about what symbolises 'freedom' to you - it might be a place, a person, an activity or a more abstract feeling.

Take whatever materials you have. For me, a ballpoint is one of the most beautiful raw drawing tools. Any scrap of paper will do. Start by doodling, allow the pen to move the way it wants to go whether it be rough and angry or smooth and shading, or a combination of both. The ballpoint pen is a master craftsman tool of the person who uses it right and by right, I mean with purpose and feeling.

The best way to begin is by making shapes, any shapes at all just to get a feel for the pen. Make the outline of the shapes first, then once you're comfortable with it, start shading areas lightly and heavily. For example, a triangle is simple but can be made complex - by drawing lines within it, it forms a pyramid. The same goes for any shape, turning shapes into 3D objects is a good way to learn to draw with perspective. You can also start by drawing a point in the middle of the page, then lines coming out of it toward the edges of the paper giving a sense of distance and a point of origin. The most important thing you can do is experiment, draw like nobody's watching until you have more than just shapes and distance.

Once you have a feel for your materials start to build up your drawing to create your image of freedom. Freedom means different things to different people - perhaps it means breakfast in bed, or mountain biking, swimming, or being with a loved one. Try drawing what freedom looks like and what it feels like. If you feel unsure of where to start, why not draw your own dream home to escape to in your imagination.

My best work has been done whilst allowing myself to feel the emotion of what I'm creating. If it's a mass of rage scribbles, then that's what your heart wanted to say. There is NO wrong way to make art. If it turns out as what society calls a masterpiece, then so be it. But when the door's locked and no one's watching, the art becomes the dance, and it will set the mind free.

If you are inspired by Paul's story and would like to apply for Koestler Arts Mentoring please contact the Outreach Team, FREEPOST KOESTLER ARTS for more information and an application form.