

Koestler Associates Newsletter - Summer 2023

Hello from the Koestler Team!

We've had a very busy few months here at the Koestler Arts Centre, processing thousands of entries to this year's Koestler Awards, welcoming judges, and preparing for two exhibitions which will open this autumn.

This newsletter includes lots of insights from behind the scenes of this work, some dates for your diaries, and a few exciting announcements! We hope you're keeping well and will enjoy catching up with us.

News

We're very pleased to share that Fiona Curran, our former Director of Arts, has been appointed Chief Executive of Koestler Arts, after former CEO Sally Taylor retired earlier this year.

"After witnessing the impact of this small charity on people across the justice system for over a decade, I'm so pleased and proud to be appointed Chief Executive. It's an honour to lead such a talented team of staff and volunteers and to encourage and represent the creative work being done in the criminal justice system.



Thank you for sharing your artworks with us this year, and for encouraging others to participate. Everything we do is shaped by our entrants so please continue to share ideas and feedback."

- Fiona Curran

2023 Koestler Awards

Timeline

Since April, over 8000 entries have been unwrapped, logged in and organised in preparation for judging and the curation of our upcoming exhibitions. That's the highest number of entries to the Awards since 2015! Thanks so much to all of you who have shared your work with us. Below are the key dates for the rest of this year's Awards cycle.

31 August 2023: Awards results announced on Koestler Arts website

31 October 2023: Certificates and prize money sent to entrants

By end of April 2024: Unsold visual artwork returned to entrants

In an effort to ensure as many entrants as possible receive detailed feedback on their entries, we'll be sending some feedback in October with certificates and prize money, with more to follow in the new year.

Judging

Judging of the 2023 Koestler Awards is well underway! For each of our 52 categories, we invite specialist judges to spend a day with us looking at, reading, or listening to entries in a particular category, assigning Awards, and writing feedback. Below are some of this year's judges and their top tips for entrants!



Rich Miller, Ceramicist and Judge on Channel 4's 'The Great Pottery Throw Down'
Ceramics Judge



Alexis Taylor of synthpop band Hot Chip
Computer Generated Music Judge



Jenny Eclair, stand up comic and host of Channel 4 life drawing programme 'Drawers Off'
Painting Judge



Bob and Roberta Smith, artist and author
Pastel Judge

Jeremy Deller, Turner Prize winning artist
Watercolour and Gouache Judge



Sefa Nkyi, award winning audio producer
Radio Production Judge



Lorna Hamilton-Brown, artist
Needlecraft Judge



Wilfrid Wood, artist, and Alayo Akinkugbe, writer and curator
Portrait Judges

Rich Miller, Ceramics Judge

Find a way to really celebrate the material and weave in a narrative, your own ideas. We really feel an affinity for the lovely textures of the clay, but with a strong idea and concept we get a real sense of you coming through what you make. Let go, trust yourself and the material and just enjoy it.

Alayo Akinkugbe, Portrait Judge

Be as unique as possible and try and create works that are personal to you as opposed to more general. And by that I mean even a portrait of an unknown figure is interesting, and stands out maybe more than a celebrity.

Holly Hopkins, Poem Judge

The winning pieces often showed an imagination that caught us as readers. We were also drawn to poems whose writers really considered the sound of their piece. Read the drafts of your poems out loud. It makes it much easier to hear the rhythm and textures of the words you are using and to choose which words to amend.

Mark Whaley, Furniture Judge

It's really useful to see some photos of the construction rather than just the finished piece. Especially if there's some intricate joinery or anything like that, anything you're particularly proud of. We're aware that when you're making something the things you're most proud of can't always be seen on the outside of furniture. Comments about how it's been made are always helpful as well.

Jeremy Deller, Watercolour and Gouache Judge

My advice is to put your personality in the picture and enjoy it and think of a different way to interpret something that you've seen, something that maybe is unusual.

Lorna Hamilton-Brown, Needlecraft Judge

The platinum award winner stood out to me for the levels of creativity. They have used so many techniques. I would encourage people to think outside the box. If you are using a kit try to keep the stitches the same size, width and even tension. Pay attention to the back of your work - finish by sewing in the ends and cutting off loose ends.

Jenny Eclair, Painting Judge

The last thing you should do is compare yourself with other artists, this competition is about getting something down on paper/board/packaging that says something about you, it's about the individual. This year the judges chose lots of very different artworks for prizes, the one thing they all had in common was their individuality.

Diane Pacitti, Poetry Collection Judge

Put all your emotions and ideas in a first draft. Perhaps put it away for a while. Then work at putting the essence of your draft in a more concentrated form. Perhaps it will help to use a traditional poetic form like a rhyming four-line stanza. When you read it through, ask if some of your phrases could be expressed in a fresher, more direct way.

Robert Taylor, Photography Judge

Be as bold, authentic, and experimental as possible. Try not to just emulate things you've seen. Bring something personal to the process of creating your work.

Bob and Roberta Smith, Pastel Judge

Start with an image but then explore what pastels can do. Chalk pastels can be 'mixed' on the paper, creating atmosphere whereas oil pastels have rich and deep colours. All the artwork I have seen today, not just the ones I have chosen for awards, are small beacons of hope and light. Each artwork is an excuse to think outside of the box. In this case the box being imprisonment. This is such important work.

Exhibitions

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, Southbank Centre, London 2 November - 17 December 2023

We'll be returning to the Southbank Centre this autumn for our 2023 national exhibition, curated by poet and author Joelle Taylor. Joelle spent a week with us in July, looking over all entries to this year's Koestler Awards and selecting around 200 pieces of artwork, music and writing to be displayed. Those whose work has been selected for the exhibition will be notified in the coming month, and we'll share images of the exhibition with you in our next Associates newsletter.

"I've spent about 20 years working in prisons and I'm aware of the vast range and diversity of arts that are created within the criminal justice system, and the opportunity to be able to introduce that to a wider public is compelling. Having spent so long working with people in the criminal justice system, it wasn't a surprise that the works were so excellent and so finely tuned and so varied.

The title 'IN CASE OF EMERGENCY' emerged because of the idea of the case - caseloads, criminal cases, the enclosure itself, and the idea of breaking it, breaking out. 'Emergency' is a very important word as well because I think art is urgent and I think it's a brilliant response to emergency of any kind.

The concept for the exhibition is that everything is held in display cases of some kind, echoing the glass vitrines you'd find in the Natural History Museum and in art galleries. The cases themselves become a metaphor for the criminal justice system, the way we separate people. But most of all for me, when I see these very regimented cases, it makes me think of what happens when we 'break the glass', what happens when ideas escape.

When you're looking over 8000 different artworks, what really stands out is life. Some things might not be technically (from a fine art perspective) perfect, but they're perfect in concept and force. I like to see life in artwork.

I think people should come to the exhibition to be in the presence of excellence. And I want people to challenge their understanding of who prisoners and residents of secure units are. They are part of humanity, and a vibrant part."



Joelle meets a bread model of herself!
God Save the Poetry Today,
HM Prison Wandsworth, Sculpture



Joelle and Koestler Director of Arts,
Phoebe look through your paintings



Out of the Frame Too, HM Prison Garth, Mixed Media



Our Time, Our Week, HM Prison Send, Handmade Book

- Joelle Taylor

Standing on the Edge, John Hansard Gallery, Southampton 7 October 2023 - 13 January 2024

We're delighted to be exhibiting a selection of work entered into the 2023 Koestler Awards from the South West and Hampshire at John Hansard Gallery later this year. Around 80 pieces of artwork, music and writing were selected for display in this exhibition by a group of 10 learners at HMP Isle of Wight.

In July, our Outreach Team spent a week with an art class at HMP Isle of Wight, showing them Koestler entries from the region and asking them to co-curate this exhibition. The group carefully considered around 500 works, picking out those that particularly spoke to them as individuals and identifying themes that tied these together to come to a final selection, which they then pitched to Koestler's Director of Arts and John Hansard Gallery's Senior Curator.

We're really excited about the exhibition the group have put together and look forward to sharing images of it with you in our next Associates newsletter.

We asked the group to share what they enjoyed about the curating process...

"I have enjoyed seeing what kind of entries are submitted to Koestler. I can see different themes and messages from the entries and someone's feelings and maybe what's important to them."

"It has been eye opening to me to see so many other artists' works. I have enjoyed putting forward my suggestions and being listened to."

"I've enjoyed seeing the quality and technical ability of the artists. In particular I liked the paintings, pictures, sculptures and poems I felt put across a message or an emotion effectively."

...How they approached the task of selecting from so many artworks...

"Keeping an open mind was key and the more I viewed certain pieces the more they spoke to me. So much can be said from each piece, brilliant ideas."

"I selected the work on how it made me feel. I like the use of different colours and I try to understand how the entrant may have felt or what it means to them. I didn't think about the skill or quality of the entry, I wanted to explore where it will fit in with the other entries."

"Personally I struggled to choose between the entries because there was so many great ones to look through. The entries I chose either struck a chord emotionally or left me wondering what the subject was thinking."

...And what they hope visitors will get from seeing the exhibition:

"I hope the visitors will see that despite being in custody, a children's home, or secure setting, we all have feelings and are actually talented, we have a story to tell, or that this is how we show that's important to us. I hope they see the good in us and not just the bad."

"I hope that they feel inspired just as I have been."



*Sssh! Stolen Seagull Scavenger Hunt
(Library and Arts Community Project 2022),
HM Prison Channings Wood,
Highly Commended Award for Arts Project*

2024 Koestler Awards

Themed Category

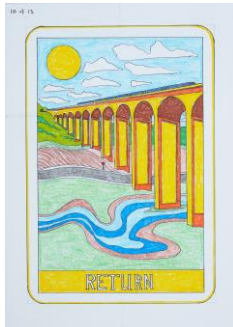
Since we've welcomed Fiona as our new CEO this year, alongside a number of new members of staff, we've set our next themed category with looking forward in mind. We're excited to announce the themed category for the 2024 Koestler Awards is...

FROM NOW ON

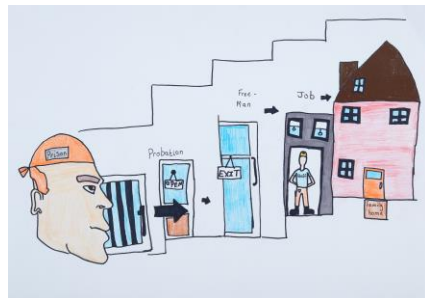
You might want to depict movement forward or the passage of time, change or continuity from now into the future, hopes and plans for years to come - in your life, society, or a fictional world. Work made in any artform - visual, written or performed - can be entered into the themed category. We are always amazed to see the huge range of work the category inspires, and the variety of ways our themes are interpreted by different entrants. We are interested in personal and creative interpretations of the theme and what it means to you.

Below are past Koestler Awards entries that relate in different ways to 'From now on', which we hope will spark some inspiration. We can't wait to see what you come up with!

But remember! ...As always, our themed category will be just one of 52 categories in 2024 - the others all being different artforms such as drawing, poem, choral music, and spoken word, to which you can enter work on any subject or theme. Full guidance notes on how to enter the 2024 Awards will be sent out in January.



The Railway Tarot (1 of 13), HM Prison & Young Offender Institution Norwich, First-Time Entrant Award for Drawing, 2020



Free Life, The Shrubbery, Commended Award for Drawing, 2020



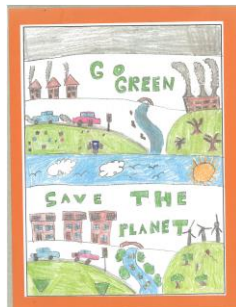
Siula Grande, HM Prison Northumberland, Bronze Award for Mixed Media, 2021



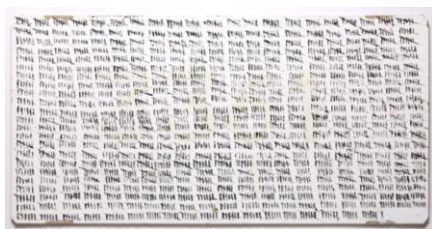
Raspberries, Cygnet Hospital, Commended Award for Textile Art, 2022



Hope, HM Prison & Young Offender Institution Low Newton, Bowman Smart Bronze Award for Textile Art, 2020



Go Green, HM Prison Exeter, Drawing, 2021



One Day in the Life Of..., HM Prison Stanford Hill (Sheppey Cluster), Themed Category: A Day in the Life, 2023



The Stairs, HM Prison Wandsworth, Painting, 2019

Timeline

We hope you'll be looking forward to entering the Koestler Awards next year! Below are the key dates to remember for the 2024 Awards:

January 2024: Entry forms and guidance notes sent to establishments and Koestler Associates

12 April 2024: Deadline for 2024 Awards entries

Recent Events

Affordable Art Fair

We were delighted to be chosen as the official Charity Partner for the Affordable Art Fair, Hampstead this Spring. More than 16,000 people visited the fair, where over 100 local and international galleries had stalls with works on display and for sale. On our stall, we sold donated Koestler Awards entries and works made by Koestler mentees.



It was fantastic to showcase the talent of people in the criminal justice system to so many people, and we raised thousands of pounds to help fund our arts mentoring scheme through artwork sales and donations. It was also a wonderful opportunity for our mentees to have their work shown and sold in this prestigious setting, alongside hundreds of other artists.

“Being allowed to show my artwork at the Affordable Art Fair supplied much needed validation. None of my artwork thus far has been seen outside of Koestler Arts and immediate family. Months, years of drawing and painting, without ever really knowing if there was a point to it all? Or was it even worthy of being seen by others? Then for people to critically see my artwork, actively engage with it and ultimately choose to own it, more than justifies the amount of time, effort and hope that has gone into my artwork.”

- Koestler mentee

Postcards from Prison

In May we held our third Postcards from Prison fundraising event, this time at The Art Worker's Guild in London. Postcards created by Koestler Associates and major British artists such as Grayson Perry and Maggi Hambling were displayed together, and guests purchased postcards which were allocated to them at random in our lottery draw.

Fred Baier, furniture designer and Master of The Art Worker's Guild, hosted an engaging Q&A with Chris, a former Koestler entrant and mentee, about the power of creativity in secure settings, and catering was provided by Liberty Kitchen, a social enterprise based at HMP Pentonville. There was much excitement around our lottery draw, where guests found out which postcards they were taking home. The event raised a whopping £10,000 for Koestler Arts! Thank you to those of you who generously created postcards for the event and helped make it such a success.

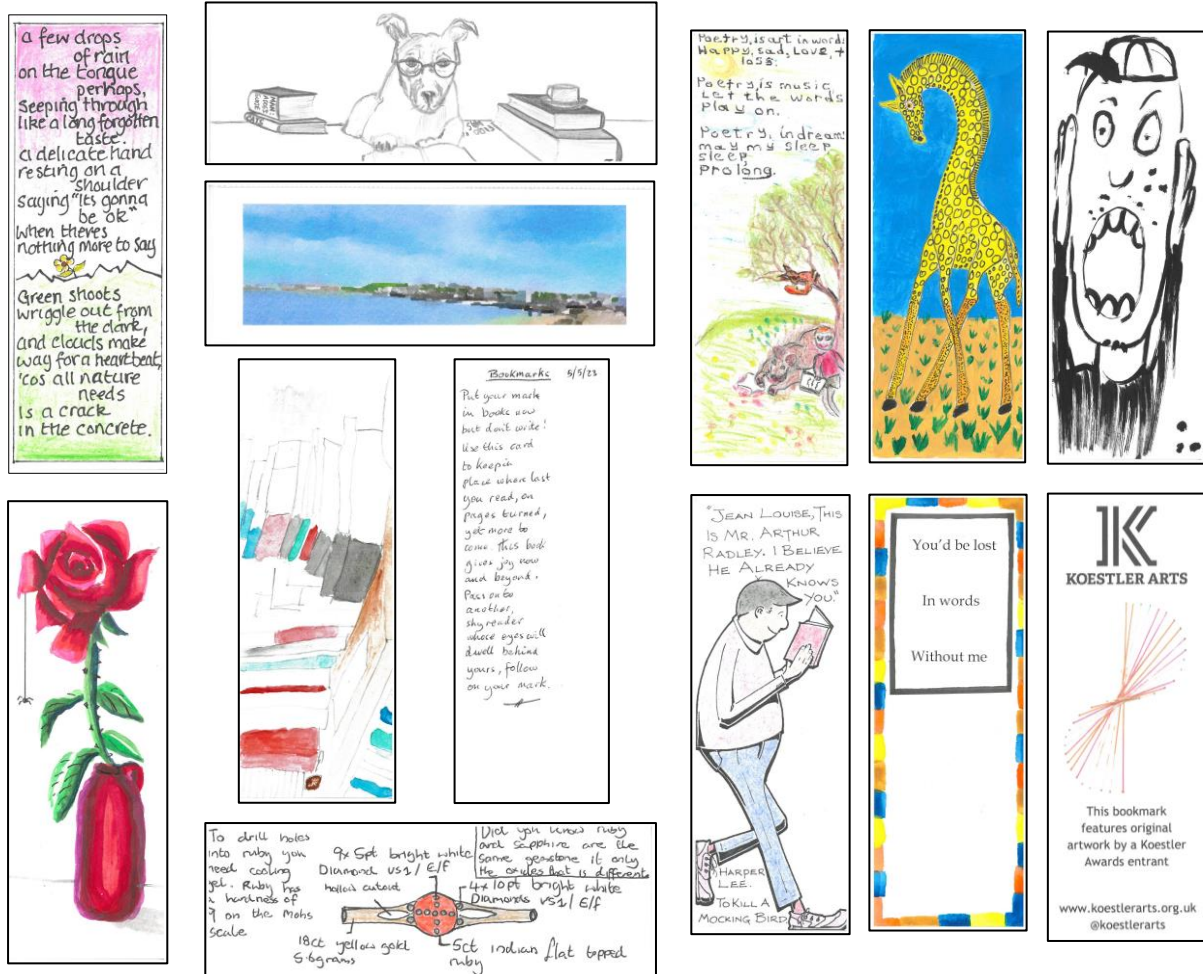


Koestler Voices Anthology

This autumn we will publish our fourth poetry anthology, *Koestler Voices: New Poetry from Prisons, Volume 4*, which will feature a selection of poems entered into the 2022 and 2023 Koestler Awards. Those whose poems have been selected for inclusion will be notified in the coming month, and we'll celebrate the book's publication with a poetry event at the Southbank Centre in November.

Bookmarks

In our Spring newsletter, we asked Associates to decorate bookmarks for us to give to supporters who help fund this next issue of our poetry anthology, and were amazed by the response! Thanks so much to those of you who sent such wonderful bookmarks, our supporters will be delighted to receive them. Below are a few of our favourites...



Reminder

Please 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

More Ways to Get Involved

If you're not already and would like to become a Koestler Associate, receive new Art Aid sheets each month, and/or be sent an Arts Mentoring application form, please tick the relevant box(es) on the slip overleaf and return it to us in the Freepost envelope provided.

Associates

Koestler Associates are entrants who would like more regular communication from us and to help spread the word about our work. Associates receive seasonal newsletters (like this one!) with information about events and exhibitions, insight from judges, curators, and entrants who have gone on to achieve in the arts after prison, and creative inspiration, activities and opportunities.

Associates are also directly sent Awards entry forms, guidance notes, posters and flyers at the start of every year, when we ask that they help us to promote the Koestler Awards within their establishments. They might stick posters up around their wing or education department, encourage others to enter the Awards, or help someone fill out an entry form.

Art Aid

We produce monthly Art Aid activity sheets featuring creative tasks set by former or current Koestler mentees and information about their experience of creativity and the criminal justice system. These sheets are intended to provide creative inspiration, and the tasks can always be done in cell with just a pen or pencil and paper.

Each month new sheets are published on our website and distributed to establishment staff and Koestler entrants who sign up to receive them. The latest Art Aid is enclosed with this newsletter and features tasks set by a Koestler award winner, exhibited artist and ex-mentee, Mark. We hope you will enjoy giving it a go!

Arts Mentoring

Since 2007 we have run the Koestler Arts Mentoring Scheme to support individuals who have been in prison to continue developing their creative work in the community. Successful applicants are matched with experienced local arts professionals - artists, writers, musicians and craftspeople - who have been specially trained by us to be Koestler mentors. Mentees and mentors meet 7-10 times over a 12 month period, where together they identify and work towards the mentee's goals. These might include applying to a course, building up a portfolio of work, or developing techniques.

Mentees also maintain regular contact with us at Koestler and we offer them support and creative opportunities - for example the recent opportunity to sell their work at the Affordable Art Fair, and to produce the content for our Art Aid sheets. A leaflet with more information on the scheme and how to apply is enclosed with this newsletter.

Name:

Prison Number (if applicable):

Address:

Tick here to become a Koestler Associate

Tick here to be sent new Art Aid sheets every month

Tick here to be sent an application form for the Koestler Arts Mentoring Scheme