



Koestler Associates Newsletter Autumn 2023

Season's Greetings!

Hello from all of us at Koestler Arts. We hope you're keeping well and want to thank you for your involvement with us this year, when we received more entries to our Awards than we have since 2015! We have also been proud to showcase much of your wonderful work across four exhibitions in Berkshire, Glasgow, Southampton and London, as well as other displays and the fourth volume of our poetry anthology *Koestler Voices*.

In this newsletter we'll be rounding up the 2023 Awards and showing you our two current exhibitions. Enclosed is our latest Art Aid sheet, with a creative task set by a current Koestler mentee that invites you to reflect on the year that's passed, and which we hope you'll enjoy giving a go.

In January we'll be sending you entry forms and guidance notes for the 2024 Awards, and in February we'll be sending additional feedback for 2023 entries, so keep an eye out for those!

Timeline

January-April 2024: Unsold visual art entries from the 2023 Awards returned to establishments and entrants at home

February 2024: Sales money and additional feedback from the 2023 Awards sent to entrants

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

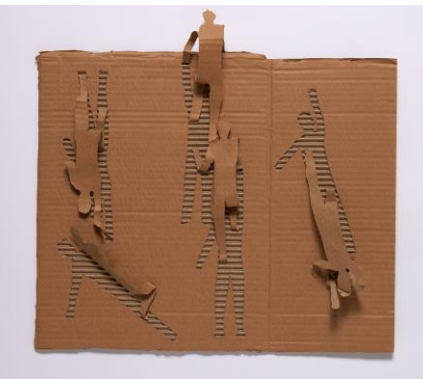
12 April 2024: 2024 Awards deadline

Platinum Award Winners

Thanks for sharing your entries with us this year. We published the 2023 Awards results on our website in August and sent certificates out in October so hopefully you have received these. Below is a selection of Platinum Award winning entries to inspire your future work!



Funfair Carousel, HM Prison Maghaberry,
Platinum Award for Craft



Suit, HM Prison Thameside,
Arts Society Greater London Area Platinum
Award for Fashion



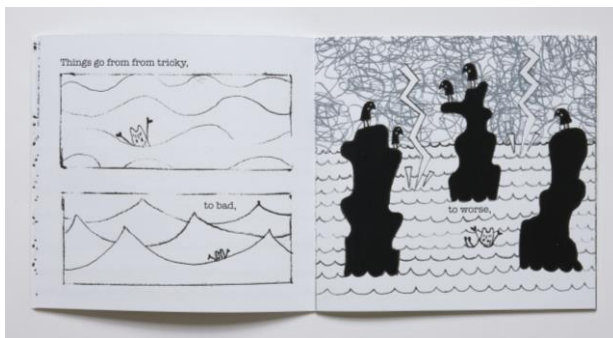
Out of the Frame Too,
HM Prison Garth, Clare Askew
Platinum Award for Mixed Media



Traditional Christmas, HM Prison Long Lartin,
Platinum Award for Handmade Greetings Card



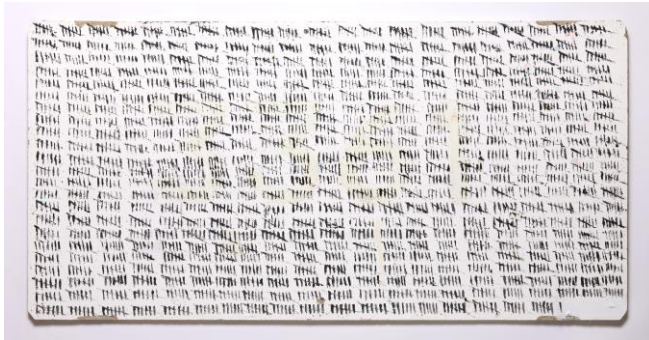
The Siege of Fray Bentos, HM Prison Isle of Wight
(Albany), Platinum Award for Matchstick Model



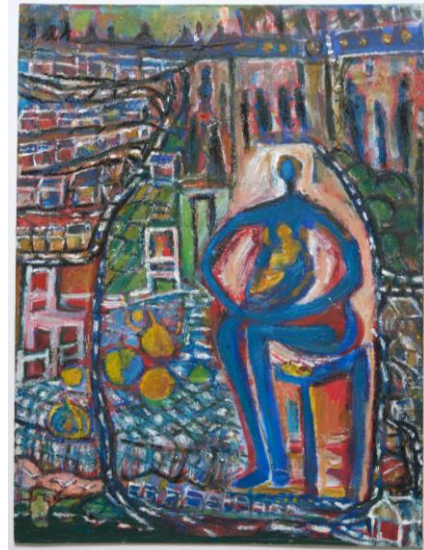
Adrift, Priory Llanarth Court, Platinum Award for
Graphic Novel



Me and Dad, HM Prison Glenochil, Platinum Award for Printmaking



One Day in the Life of 3361, HM Prison Standford Hill (Sheppey Cluster), Patrick Holmes Platinum Award for Themed Category: A Day in the Life



When I Was Young, HM Prison & Young Offender Institution Parc, Department of Law and Criminology at Royal Holloway University of London Platinum Award for Painting



The Little Birdie, HM Prison Dovegate, Platinum Award for Ceramics



Umbrella of Diversity, HM Prison Bronzefield, Sodexo Justice Services Platinum Award for Pastel



The Street, Manchester CFO Activity Hub - Interventions Alliance, Evelyn Plesch Platinum Award for Drawing

The Jar

I found a cloud in a jar.
I opened my jar with a sonorous pop,
Alert to the lively, sprightly air.
Velvety, cushioned clouds,
Relaxed against the pallid, pastel blue.
And warmth enveloped me
In peace.

The Jar, Arbury Court, Platinum Award for Poem



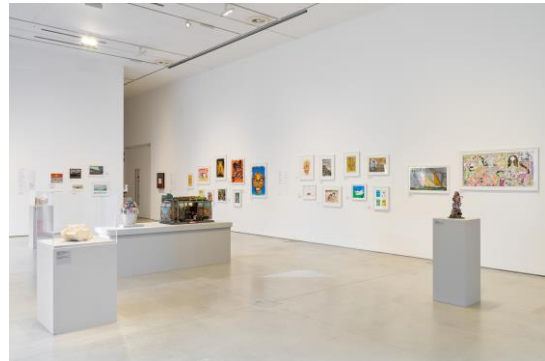
Sea of Hope, HM Young Offender Institution Polmont, Space Station Sixty-Five Platinum Award for Photography



Number 31, Brighton Probation - Lancaster House, Hyko Platinum Award for Portrait

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

Standing on the Edge is our exhibition in Southampton, featuring around 80 pieces of artwork, music and writing entered into the 2023 Koestler Awards from the South West and Hampshire. The exhibition was curated by a group of ten learners at HMP Isle of Wight, who spent a week with members of the Koestler team coming up with an exhibition title and themes, and selecting works for display out of hundreds entered from the region.



The group were drawn to artworks featuring oranges, pinks and blues - colours that evoke sunsets and the seaside and ground the exhibition on the south coast. Sculptures of seagulls are dotted around the space, recalling the constant squawks that soundtracked curating sessions at the prison and are a feature of daily life for the learners.

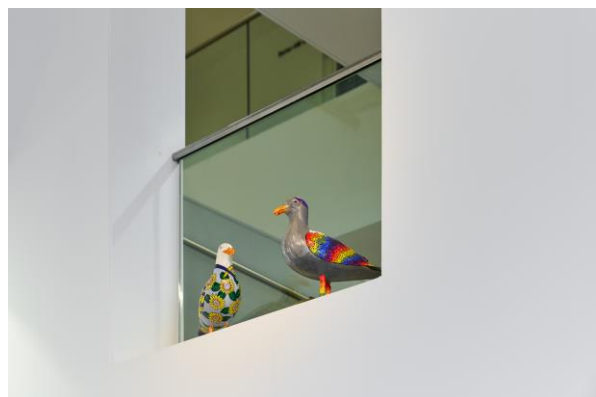
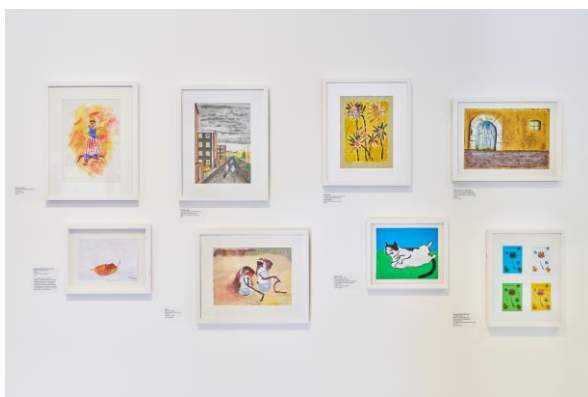
While the exhibition's primary focus is these colourful works evoking memories and hopes for the future, it was also important to the group to show the everyday reality of prison life. One section of the gallery features pieces that reflect the difficulties faced by many in secure settings, including a number of works about IPP sentences and public perceptions of prisoners.



The brilliant audio and poetry works featured in the exhibition reflect the duality of the visual artwork selection, as does the exhibition title, which was taken from the title of one of the exhibited artworks.

“*Standing on the Edge*’ conjures thoughts of danger but it also could be a new beginning - the edge of a relationship, a new life, a return home or freedom.”

- Exhibited artist



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

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY is our sixteenth annual national exhibition at London's Southbank Centre. The exhibition was curated by award-winning poet Joelle Taylor, who selected around 200 works to be displayed out of over 8000 entered into the 2023 Koestler Awards.

The selected works showcase excellence and ingenuity through concept, skill, storytelling and the use of unusual materials that highlight artists' resourcefulness - including bed sheets, seeds, and bread.



Joelle Taylor

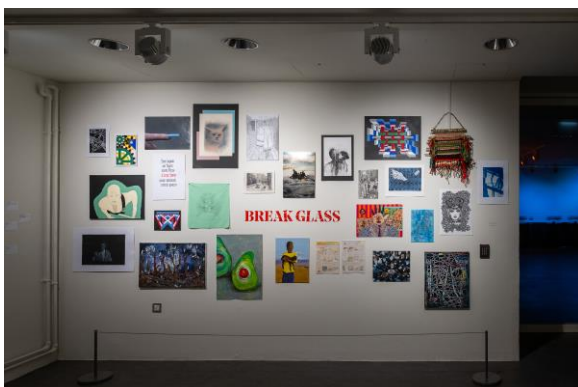
Joelle has worked creatively in prisons for over twenty years and wanted this exhibition to showcase the talent and imagination that springs from secure settings. She was keen to explore how things are presented, contained, and scrutinised, and to draw out themes of separation and connection. This is reflected in the exhibition design, where many works are encased in glass vitrines. Others are framed by large metal structures, or displayed freely, inviting visitors to think about how it feels to be on either side of glass.

Poems are printed on materials associated with prisons - a single bed sheet, a grey jumper, and food trays - and spoken word is played through phones to mimic a moment of interaction and create a sense of connection between artists and visitors.

The exhibition title invites visitors to complete the well-known phrase with 'break glass'.

"Most of all when I see these cases, it makes me think of what happens when we break the glass, what happens when ideas escape."

- Joelle Taylor



Voices from Prison

We were delighted to hold our annual evening of poetry and spoken word performances at the Southbank Centre again this Autumn. This year the event was hosted by our national exhibition curator, Joelle Taylor. Poems from the 2023 Koestler Awards were performed by a range of people involved with Koestler Arts, including former entrants, mentees, prison tutors, and poets' family members.



“I’m grateful for the opportunity to share some of the amazing poems from the entrants, so [the public] can hear their voices.”

- Kathryn, mother of a poet featured in *Koestler Voices*, who read his work at the event.

“I attend the Voices from Prison [event] every year that I can, and it never ceases to amaze me the pure talent that can be nurtured in such difficult circumstances. You could feel the support and enthusiasm from all of the staff and guests, and it was a really beautiful evening that left most of us teary-eyed but emotionally full.”

- Audience member

Stephen’s story

Stephen is a former Koestler Awards entrant and exhibited artist from Northern Ireland, who we met in 2018 when his artwork was displayed in our exhibition *I’m Still Here* at London’s Southbank Centre, and he came with his family to our family and friends event to see it. He is now making and teaching art, and this year came to our London exhibition in his role as a prison art tutor, to see his learners’ work on display in the same gallery. We asked him to share his story with you:

I’d done some art back in school but I fell out with my teacher because I wanted to do my own thing and they were like “No, you have to do the curriculum”, and that was me out. By the time I went to jail I’d completely forgotten I could draw or paint, I didn’t even think about it because my life was just too mad. I was on 23-hour lockdown when I first came in, and that’s when I started drawing again. Typical prison cell, there was a picture of a woman in the cell, so I started drawing the poster on the wall just out of boredom.

After six months they moved me to HMP Magilligan and I met the art teacher, Alison. If it wasn’t for her, I wouldn’t be doing what I’m doing today. I never had confidence in my work, I just did it, never thought anything of it, and Alison used to push and push. She taught me how to paint with oils and acrylic paint, how to blend and mix colours. We ended up getting a really good relationship because I was the art room orderly, I worked down there five days a week.

I did my art GCSE and got an A, and that was the first time I got an achievement in something I actually enjoyed and was actually quite worthwhile, because getting that A meant when I eventually got out of prison I was able to go and do an Art Foundation Diploma. They wouldn’t let me go out for my interview for the course, so Alison and my mum actually went and did my interview for me. I got out on a Tuesday and started the course the week after. It kept me focussed and kept me busy. If I’d taken six months out, life would have caught up with me again, art would have went out the window. But I had a determination too because I started to get a bit of feedback, people were interested in my work, a lot of people were saying it was decent.

The best thing for me was entering the Koestler Awards. I entered the whole time I was in prison and I think I won an Award every time. One year I won an Award for all five pieces I entered, which was a bit of a shock. When you're in jail and you get that certificate and you get the feedback - especially feedback from professional artists like Grayson Perry, people who really know what they're talking about - it's something really, really good.

The first year I got out, I came over to the Koestler exhibition in London, where my work was on display. Walking over that bridge and seeing the Southbank Centre, it blew my mind to be honest with you. I'd never been in somewhere like that. I'd never been to London, I'd never even been to Dublin. Now I've exhibited in both. It felt brilliant to come to London. Having your work in a venue like that gave me inspiration and the drive to go on.



Bars of Freedom, HM Prison Frankland,
Printmaking

This year, I was included in a BBC documentary about five artists creating work to enter into the RUA competition, which is the biggest art competition in Northern Ireland. Because of the feedback about my story in that, they made a second documentary that shows me going back into HMP Magilligan, into the art room which I took up art in, to work with two prisoners on their art. It was an emotional day. And because it went so well, I ended up getting a job working back at Magilligan. So I'm there every week now, teaching art. I love it. It's giving back. I believe you have to give it back.

When I was getting out, I always said that if I could do for somebody else what Alison did for me, it'd be worthwhile doing. It's life changing. I started getting involved in a bad lifestyle when I was about fifteen, sixteen, so I went my whole life not knowing any different, and here I found something that could give me a different outlook on life.

Since I got out of custody I've taken part in seventeen exhibitions. I've done three solos and the rest were group shows. It just shows you - don't let your past define you. At the end of the day if you want to make a change and you're doing it for the right reasons, you can and you will. Anything's possible. If I can turn my life around anybody can, believe me.

Reminder

Please note that to remain an Associate you must enter the 2024 Koestler Awards. If you are unable to enter, or don't wish to this time, but would like to remain an Associate, please write to us and let us know before the end of 2024.

Please also let us know 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

Best wishes for the new year from all of us at Koestler Arts.

Christmas Cones, Fromside Clinic,
Craft

