



Koestler Arts produce monthly Art Aid sheets featuring creative tasks that can be done in cell and with just paper and a pencil. New Art Aid sheets are available from the first Monday of every month. This sheet has been made with support from The Arts Society Northleach.

Although the 2024 Koestler Awards deadline passed on 12 April, we hope these sheets will inspire you to remain creative and perhaps try something new.

JUNE 2024

For each Art Aid sheet, we commission an artist or writer who has engaged with Koestler Arts to set a creative task and share their experience with creativity. This month we asked Koestler Award winner, exhibited artist and mentee, Cal.



My Story

I have always found art interesting. I remember as a child going to an exhibition and being amazed by the beauty of the paintings and variety of tone and colour. In school I tried hard at art, but wasn't naturally talented, and I still find it quite difficult to draw things so that they 'look right'. For a long time this held me back, and it wasn't until I discovered abstract art that I began to love drawing and painting again. When I am just expressing myself, experimenting with shape and colour, making the marks that I want to, to communicate some idea or feeling, I find this much more rewarding than stressing about whether what I have on the page looks exactly like an object or picture that I am copying from.

Your Eyes,
Koestler Arts Mentoring Scheme, Pastel

In 2022, one of my pastel drawings was chosen for the Koestler Arts exhibition at the Southbank Centre. I found it really validating and encouraging, because it was nothing more than shapes and colours, but an actual artist had decided there was something they liked about it, and that it was worth including. I started doing abstract drawings mostly because I found it a good way to channel my emotions, and it really helped my mental health while inside. Discovering that other people could also get something out of my art was a game-changer for me.

When I was coming up to my release date, I knew I wanted to continue making art, but I wasn't sure how I could progress with it, so I applied for the Koestler Mentoring Scheme, which I was accepted onto. Having a mentor gives me someone who I can go to for advice, share my work with, and get tips on what I can do to take it to the next level. He is keen for me to get my art out in the world more, so we are looking at opportunities to show what I've been working on. It's crazy to me that I have come from being a little kid who can't even draw well, to being on the verge of being an actual artist. I guess it shows what is possible if you really go for something, and take the support that is out there.



My Task: Free Drawing

Lots of people drawing in prison were focused on super-realistic drawings that were usually copied from photographs. While this is impressive, it's not accessible to everyone, so I am going to suggest something a little different.

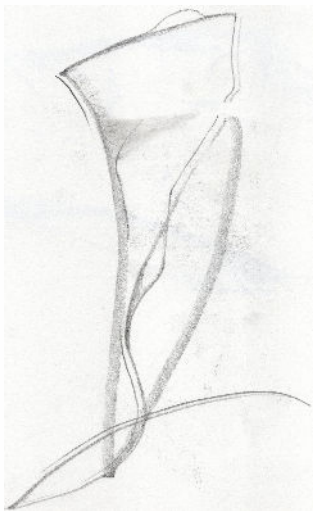
This task is about using shape and tone to express yourself. If you have access to coloured pencils, pastels, or paint, that's great, but it will work just as well with a pencil and paper.

First of all, try not to worry how the end result will look, as this will hold you back. The more you can let yourself draw without thinking or criticising too much, the better it will work.

Start by focusing on a particular feeling you have been experiencing a lot recently, it could be anything, just begin by holding that emotion in your head and letting all the words and images that you associate with it come to mind.

Take your pencil and start making marks on the page. You might start with a shape, a line, or some shading. There are no wrong answers and it is all about letting yourself get into a flow with it.

As you continue making marks, look at the edges, the points where different shapes or tones meet. What feelings do they communicate? Are the marks hard or soft? Is there a lot of contrast? How can you modify them to better express something?



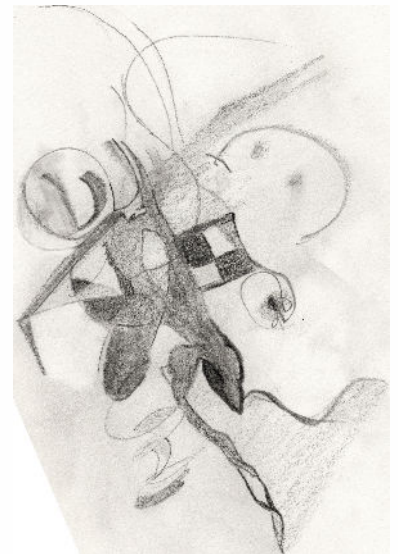
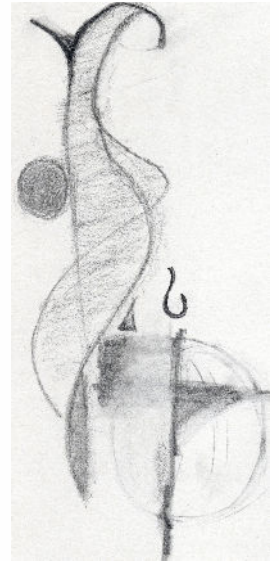
Don't be afraid to mess up something pretty. Just keep building up the different layers, using various ways of making marks, to express the feeling you were focusing on.

Keep going until you feel like it is done. It doesn't have to look perfectly finished, and it doesn't matter whether there is a lot going on on the page, or if it is quite simple.

Stop when you feel like you have used all the energy that you were holding on to. You can always come back to it later if you want to.

For me this process feels quite therapeutic, but also some of my best art has come out of working like this. I hope that you get something out of it too!

Drawings courtesy of Cal



You don't need to send your responses to these tasks to us at Koestler, we just hope you'll enjoy giving them a go. If you do we'll be very happy to see them but please note they won't be entered into this year's Koestler Awards and we won't be able to return them to you.