



KOESTLER ARTS - ART AID

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. 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.

NOVEMBER 2024

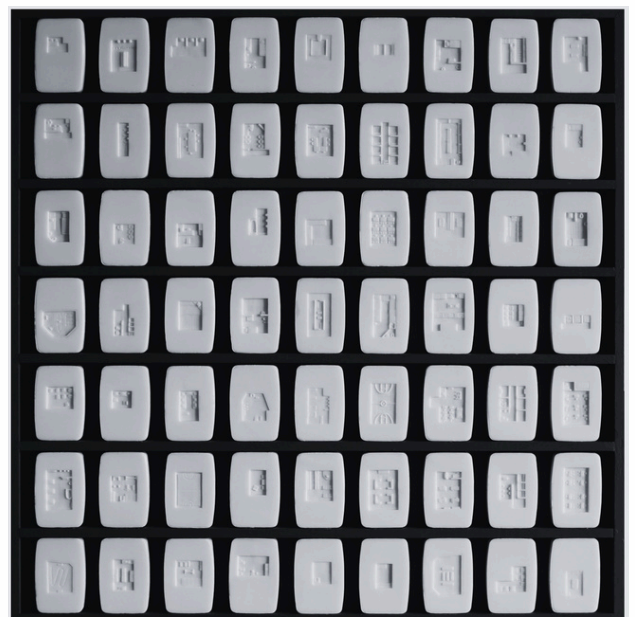
For each Art Aid sheet, we commission an artist or writer who has engaged with Koestler Arts to set a creative task and share their experience with creativity. This month we asked Lee, who, over the years, has been a Koestler Award winner, exhibited artist, mentee and member of staff.

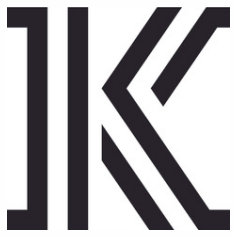
My Story

My creative journey began in a small single cell in a Young Offenders Institution. I didn't have a job or education class to go to and I was struggling with the isolation. I hadn't engaged in art before, but I knew I had to find something that would take my mind away from those four walls.

I began writing my thoughts and feelings onto scraps of paper - the back of a wing application form, an envelope, a cereal box etc. and these soon became observational drawings. I'd draw everything I could see - the sink, the bricks of the wall, the view from my window. It wasn't long before I ran out of paper. Normally I would have let this stop me, but my confidence was starting to build and I knew I had to find a way to keep the momentum going. I picked up my prison issue soap, pencil and plastic fork, and began drawing into the bar. Soap carving is a traditional prison artform and something that I knew of at the time, but had never tried until this point.

I've been released for some years now, and during this time I've found ways to continue my artistic path through writing, curating exhibitions, drawing and sculpting. I often revisit my time spent inside, as it gives me an opportunity to better understand this lived experience, and at the same time, use this as a tool to open up conversations about our prison systems with the public. One example of this is through exhibiting artwork, and I recently had a large collection of soap carvings on display in the 2024 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition called *Labyrinth, from above*.





I remember during longer periods of isolation watching birds fly into the exercise yard from the window in my cell. I didn't have many phone calls or visits during my sentence so sometimes I found it difficult to imagine another world existing beyond the prison walls. Watching the birds fly away so freely gave me hope and opened my mind, as I'd often wonder where they were flying, or what they might see.

This got me interested in bird's eye views and my *Labyrinth, from above* series shows views from above looking down into the sixty three spaces I encountered during my time spent across four Young Offending Institutions; a single cell, education room, sports hall etc.

My Task: Bird's Eye View

Step one: Decide on the materials you would like to use. This could be a pencil and paper (or if like me, you don't have access to paper, you could use another surface to draw on e.g. a cereal box), paint, collage, a bar of soap.

Step two: Think about a space that really means something to you. It could be a room or landscape from your memory, somewhere that you see in your day to day, or perhaps even an imaginary space.



Step three: What is the shape of your space? Is it a square, more of a rectangle, or a different shape entirely? Do you draw the outside walls on the paper or do you crop the paper so the actual surface you're working on is the shape of your space?

Step four: Once you have the shape decided you can start to think about how you would like to fill this space. What kind of objects would you put inside, and what do they look like from above? What materials and textures are they, do they have patterns? I often start with the largest objects first and work my way down to the smaller details.

Step five: Does your artwork include a person or people? Where are they positioned? Or do you prefer that it's unoccupied?

Tip: For soap carving, it can be good to first make a quick drawing to follow, and begin by carving the object that is closest to you (imagining that you are above the space, this would be the object closest to the ceiling) and continue to the next closest one, working your way down to the floor.



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.