

2021–2022

# Koestler Arts Annual Review



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# Foreword

- 2 Introduction
- 4 Koestler Awards 2021
- 6 Mentoring & Scholarships
- 9 Outreach
- 10 Exhibitions & Events
- 11 Operations
- 12 Financial Review

2021 was another exceptionally difficult year for those in prison and detention. While restrictions virtually disappeared for most of us, they remained all too real for prisoners, with many still spending up to 22 hours a day in cramped cells. When we asked Koestler Awards entrants to tell us about how they had created their entries, a record 82% reported that their artwork had been made in their cell, in isolation and without support, advice or motivation from staff or peers.

However, for many, creating artwork for the Koestler Awards has been a lifeline – sometimes literally – allowing them to reach out from their cells and express their feelings, hopes and fears. It has been a light in a dark place, and a connection to others: over 93% of the 2,500 entrants to the Awards received personalised, written feedback on their work.

That was expressed most literally in our colourful UK exhibition at Southbank Centre, which was full of hope and positivity. As well as visual art, we published our third volume of poetry from prison, with a sold-out spoken word and poetry reading.

We were delighted to be shortlisted for the 2022 Award for Civic Arts Organisations in recognition of our work and response to the pandemic, and we are very grateful to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation for providing this opportunity to show the transformative impact of art in the criminal justice system.

Bringing increased self-confidence, wellbeing, hope and resilience to those in the criminal justice system has never been more vital. On behalf of the Trustees, I would like to thank the staff team, who have made sure that this vital work has kept going through very challenging times. Thanks also to my fellow Trustees, and all the donors, supporters and volunteers who helped to unlock the talent inside.

2022 will be an important milestone for Koestler Arts. It will be our 60th anniversary, and we can reflect back on the thousands of people who have participated in, and been inspired by, our work. But we will also very much be looking forward. Thanks to the amazing efforts of Sally Taylor and the team, our Koestler House sub-committee, and many of our loyal supporters, Koestler Arts will have its own home for the first time. Based in custom-built shipping containers, still in the shadow of HMP Wormwood Scrubs, it will continue to be a beacon of hope, now and for the future.

Dame Anne Owers  
**Chair of Trustees**

## On the cover

*Summertime*, HM Prison Shotts,  
Audience Choice Bronze Award Winner  
for Painting, 2021

## Opposite

*We Stay at Home*, The Spinney,  
First-time Entrant Award for Mixed  
Media, 2021

## Designed by

Carolina Magro

Koestler Arts is the working  
name of the Koestler Trust

The Koestler Trust is a registered  
charity in England and Wales n°. 1105759

Company limited by guarantee  
n°. 4961363

## Registered office

Koestler Arts Centre  
168a Du Cane Road  
London W12 0TX



Shortlisted  
Organisation  
Awarded by  
CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN  
FOUNDATION

# Introduction

As the UK's best-known prison arts organisation, Koestler Arts has been supporting men, women and young people in the criminal justice system since 1962. The annual Koestler Awards celebrate creativity in every form with certificates and prizes, expert feedback and the chance to exhibit and sell work, giving voice to the powerful role creativity can play in maintaining wellbeing in prison.

Mentoring, employment and family engagement projects further the transformative power of the arts and provide opportunity, access and growth in individual lives and in artistic talents for those in detention and those in the community.

Our year-round exhibitions, at venues including Southbank Centre in London, mac in Birmingham, Tramway in Glasgow and Turner Contemporary in Margate, raise public awareness and understanding of art by prisoners to challenge public perception and encourage greater reintegration of ex-prisoners into society.

Research by Manchester Metropolitan University identified the tangible impact of the Koestler Awards, concluding that prisoners who entered had higher levels of self-reflection, hope for the future, resilience and a greater sense of wellbeing. These findings, alongside those from 2019 focus groups, continue to inform the development of our activities, and we are committed to bringing the voices of those we support to the forefront of our work.

Outlook, HM Prison Peterborough,  
Commended Award for Painting, 2021





There can be few things in life that can compare, in terms of your life and mental well-being, with being sent to prison. For me it felt like nothing but an ending. It felt like nothing could ever be normal or worthwhile again and although it happened to me 15 years ago, entering prison is still a part of my life that I try very hard not to think about. Once you have survived the initial shock to the system, prison becomes an exercise in survival, and to try and achieve this you have to seek out the normal and the worthwhile wherever you can find it.

We all need a purpose. We all need something to look forward to. And we all need to feel that we deserve a future.

This is where Koestler Arts entered my life. I used to do a bit of drawing when I was young but gave it up in favour of other things, so I decided to enter the art class in the education department and immediately gave myself a goal; to be able to draw a portrait. With practice, advice and encouragement I eventually learned to do that and was then encouraged to enter the annual Koestler Awards. I was reluctant at first but I was getting more and more interested in art so I entered and won a couple of commendations which encouraged me to continue. I continued to improve and two years later I had actually won the Platinum Award for Portraiture. Then two years later I won it again! From being little more than a doodler I had found something that I loved doing and was pretty good at. I was even encouraged to write and have won quite a few things for that too. I was given a brilliant Koestler mentor called Nick who helped and encouraged me. Another avenue had opened up.

I've been back home for 7 years now and I'm still doing portraits and selling online, I still write every day and I still enter the Koestler Awards every year. Ironically there are now two huge parts of my life that I wouldn't have had if I hadn't been in prison; and if I hadn't come into contact with Koestler Arts. I can't imagine life without my art and my writing. Thanks to Koestler. Koestler Arts bring hope to those in an environment where hope isn't easily found. Those that they choose to help don't always garner much sympathy for very obvious reasons, but they believe that everyone deserves help; that everyone deserves a second chance at making a success of their lives. Mental health is a huge issue everywhere, but within a prison environment these issues can be magnified and accelerated to dangerous, life-changing levels. Koestler provides support, encouragement and hope for all. They gave me two huge and lasting interests in life. They gave me things to look forward to and to share with others. They were a window to the real world, and they constantly reminded me that I had a future and that it was achievable and that I deserved it. I can't speak highly enough of what Koestler Arts does for offenders and ex-offenders across the country and for what they've done, and continue to do, for me and others.

Mark

**Koestler Awards Entrant and Mentee**

# Koestler Awards 2021

We knew that a year without art classes, access to materials and encouragement from tutors would mean fewer people would be able to enter the Koestler Awards, so we did everything we could to make it easier to get involved.

We maintained several adaptations put in place in 2020 in response to the pandemic, including an extended deadline for entering the awards, increased number of entries and a stipend for our volunteer judges. These industry experts join us each year to grant awards and write feedback, and the stipend will become a permanent feature of our work in recognition of our commitment to inclusivity and supporting artists' development.



**It feels like being part of something which sees you as a person and not an offender.**

*Koestler Awards entrant, 2021*

Despite there being fewer people able to enter the 2021 Koestler Awards, the number of artworks has remained stable, and we are delighted that the Koestler Awards continue to represent so many different establishments across the UK.



## Entrants to the 2021 Koestler Awards:



**90%**

Reported improved achievement in the arts



**89%**

Reported increased self-confidence



**58%**

Reported improved achievement in education



**56%**

Reported improved relationships with friends and family



**51%**

Reported improved relationships with officers and staff



**47%**

Reported improved ability to keep free from crime

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## 2021 Koestler Awards Breakdown

**2,547**

Men, women and young people entered the Awards

**6,468**

Pieces of visual art, music and writing submitted

**269**

Secure settings represented across the UK, including 130 prisons and young offender institutions, 82 secure mental health facilities and 46 probation services and approved premises

**£30,000+**

Awarded in prize money to Koestler Awards entrants

**50+**

Koestler Awards judges, who this year included Joelle Taylor, Wilfrid Wood, Hot Chip, and Jeremy Deller

- **Jan – Jul**  
Artwork received
- **May – Jun**  
Regional Exhibitions
- **May – Aug**  
Entries logged onto our database
- **Aug – Oct**  
Koestler Awards judges join us at Koestler Arts Centre
- **Sept – Jan**  
Feedback writing
- **Oct**  
Awards announced
- **Oct – Dec**  
UK exhibition
- **Dec**  
Certificates and prize money sent to the artists
- **Jan**  
Artwork sales money sent to the artists
- **Jan – March**  
Regional exhibition
- **Jan – March**  
Artwork returned to the artists

### Opposite

**Left** Koestler Awards Portrait judges, 2021

**Right** *In This Together (Don't Forget About Us)*, HM Prison Dovegate, May Day Thursday 2021 Platinum Award for Ceramics, 2021

# Mentoring & Scholarships

The mentoring and scholarship programme offers bespoke, one-to-one assistance over the course of the year, and despite the challenges brought by the pandemic it has continued to deliver on the 4 key objectives of the programme:

- To help prisoners maintain an arts practice post-release through bespoke arts mentoring
- To improve mentees' coping ability, reduce stress and engender hope for the future
- To support mentees to access education and training
- To provide a diversion from reoffending



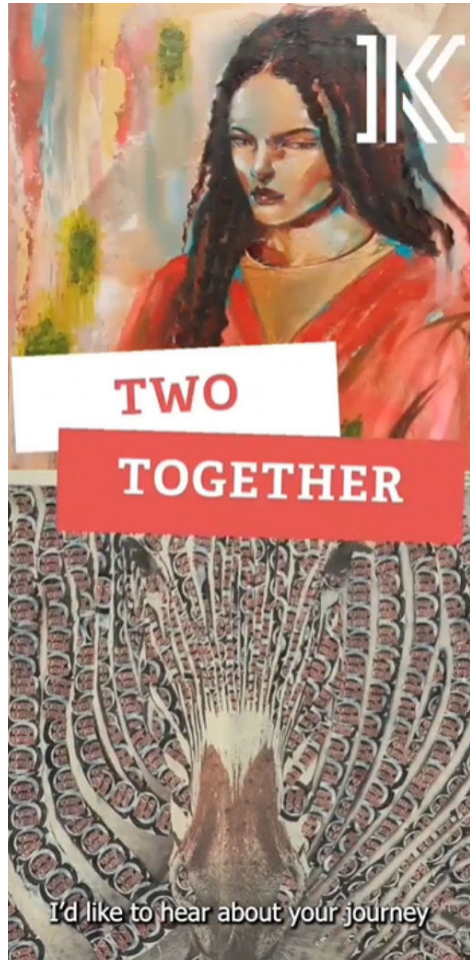
**My mentor was a mentor in the truest sense, and upon release I entered university and started my artistic journey beyond prison.**

*Koestler Arts mentee, 2021*

**Face-to-face mentoring sessions** have started again following lockdown, and we are also actively recruiting and training mentors again to meet the growing demand for support via the programme.

One of the key outcomes of the programme post-pandemic is its holistic impact on wellbeing. With resettlement presenting varied challenges, the pandemic has heightened many of the emotional pressures which people are faced with on release. We are extremely pleased that through participating in the project, mentees have continued to report reduced stress and anxiety, as well as reduced isolation and increased support networks. The data from our new project evaluation tools has shown, through both qualitative and quantitative data, the impact of the mentoring and scholarship programme, see opposite.

We have continued to offer bespoke opportunities to mentees, including our **Two Together** Instagram takeover. Following feedback from mentees around the positive impact of feeling part of a like-minded community, we produced a series of interviews between 10 current and former mentees which are available on Instagram. These videos give an insight into the impact of developing an arts practice in prison, and also work as a marketing tool for the mentoring scheme.





# Milestones

Over last 3 years

**95%**

Mentees report a reduced sense of isolation/increased support networks

**89.5%**

Mentees report improved self-esteem and confidence

**89.5%**

Mentees feel that they are better equipped to manage their mental health/wellbeing

**89.5%**

Mentees report reduced stress/anxiety

**85.5%**

Mentees have desisted from re-offending 6 months from finishing mentoring

**85%**

Mentees participate in 7 arts-based sessions



# Outreach

We are pleased to have seen the return of many of the outreach programmes which the Covid-19 pandemic made impossible in 2020. These programmes celebrate achievement and encourage creativity, as well as providing tailored opportunities to encourage participation in the Koestler Awards.

Having hosted a virtual **Arts Tutor Seminar** in 2020, we were pleased to welcome back around 30 staff members from secure settings to our in-person 2021 seminar, which coincided with our UK exhibition at Southbank Centre. Having taken on board feedback from the previous virtual event, we have also hosted a webinar for around 20 members of prison staff, enabling people from across the UK to attend and share best practice and learning from the year.

We are pleased to report that **establishment visits** resumed from early 2022, giving Koestler Arts staff the opportunity to meet current and potential Koestler Awards entrants in prisons and secure mental health units, and encourage creativity more widely across the establishments.



**Thank you for what you do at Koestler Arts; it makes a world of difference for our residents! And great for staff morale too.**

Art tutor, HM Prison Addiewell, 2021



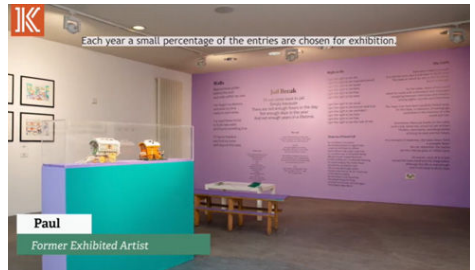
**Visits were always the highlight of my month, mine and many others really, whether it was the opportunity to present some pieces that we'd be entering or receiving awards and having the chance to meet the amazing staff from Koestler Arts.**

Koestler Awards entrant, 2021



The **Art Aid** sheets established during 2020 have developed and become a permanent feature of our outreach programme. They continue to offer professional development opportunities to former entrants and mentees who receive a fee for the commission and experience of working to a brief.

We are also continuing to **commission videos** and audio from entrants, mentees and Koestler Arts alumni, as well as employing alumni to create and edit marketing material. Including the voices of our beneficiaries brings an integrity to the content and will continue to be core to our marketing material.



**Top** *Dear Future*, HM Prison The Verne, Transformation Commended Award for Painting, 2021

**Bottom** *The Koestler Awards 2022 - Visual Artforms*, commissioned video, February 2022

**Opposite** *The Surveyor*, HM Prison Haverigg, Bronze Award for Painting, 2021

# Exhibitions & Events



Through showcasing the talent and imagination of Koestler Awards entrants at exhibitions and events across the UK, Koestler Arts works to increase public awareness and understanding of arts by prisoners, secure patients and detainees.

**The I and the We**, our UK exhibition at Southbank Centre, opened at the end of October 2021. Curated by artist Camille Walala and her sister, curator Sarah Ihler-Meyer, *The I and the We* showcased around 200 artworks selected from the 2021 Koestler Awards. The exhibition was free and open every day until Sunday 5 December, and featured daily tours by ex-prisoner exhibition hosts, employed by Koestler Arts and specially trained to help guide visitors around the exhibition.



**The dearest thing to me are the cards from 'best in show' at the Southbank. The general public's personal and emphatic comments still make me weep.**

**Exhibited artist, 2021**

**Left** The I and the We, Southbank Centre, October 2021

**Right** Voices from Prison, Southbank Centre, November 2021



**It was a joyous and spirit-lifting exhibition - beautifully installed and full of pathos in the way it shone a light into the lives of prisoners.**

**Exhibition visitor, 2021**

In conjunction with the exhibition, we launched **Koestler Voices: New Poetry from Prisons Volume 3**. Featuring a foreword by former Scots Makar Jackie Kay, the anthology gathered together 50 poems from the 2020 and 2021 Koestler Awards, showcasing some of the inspiring poetry written by people in the criminal justice system.

Our annual spoken word and poetry event **Voices from Prison** also took place at Southbank Centre during the course of the exhibition, and featured performances of written work from the 2020 and 2021 Koestler Awards by former Koestler Awards entrants.



We were delighted to open the Koestler Arts Centre to the public in September for **Open House London**, as part of our commitment to share the incredible creativity of Koestler Awards entrants with as wide a public audience as possible. This 2-day event also provided entrants with more opportunities to sell their work and gain confidence and self-esteem from that experience, as well as supporting the charity Victim Support, which receives 25% of each artwork sale.

# Operations



A new **Equality and Diversity Policy and Action Plan** has been developed to sit alongside our 5-year business plan. This plan will underpin our responsibility to attract a more diverse workforce and Board of Trustees, alongside our standing commitment to have a board member with lived experience of the criminal justice system. The policy and action plan will ensure this commitment reaches beyond our internal structures, recognising and removing barriers which people from all backgrounds may face in accessing our Awards Scheme, exhibition and events programme, and outreach projects.

We are approaching the completion of our **new premises**, a custom-built office and arts processing site created using recycled shipping containers. It is anticipated that the building will be completed in late 2022, with the team taking occupancy in our 60th anniversary year, and will enable a sea change in our operations and capacity.

Koestler Arts has a strong ethos of social justice and is committed to taking action to reduce its energy consumption and waste.

As outlined in our **Environmental Action Plan**, our new premises will build on the recommendations of an eco-audit, and has had sustainability embedded at each step. Alongside the premises, we are committed to greening our awards and exhibitions as well as our office activities, with a commitment to sustainable printing and materials as well as a reduction in landfill waste.



The New Koestler Arts Centre under construction

# Financial Review

Throughout the pandemic, Koestler Arts has been immensely grateful to the individuals, trusts and corporate partners who have continued to show their support for arts in secure settings.

This support has enabled us to securely plan and develop projects for the future, while maintaining the integrity and value of the programmes at the heart of our work.

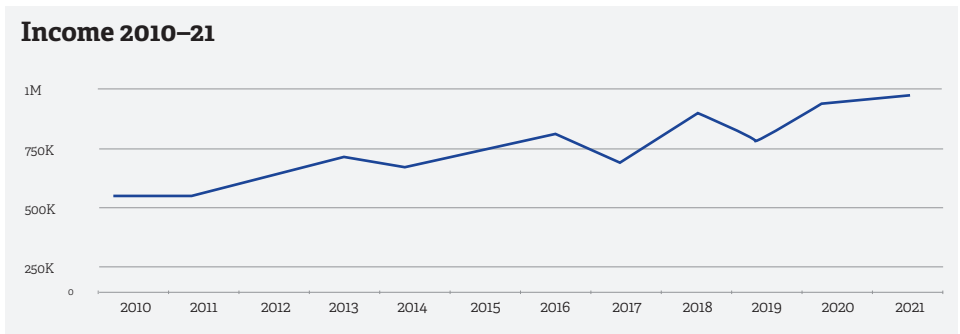
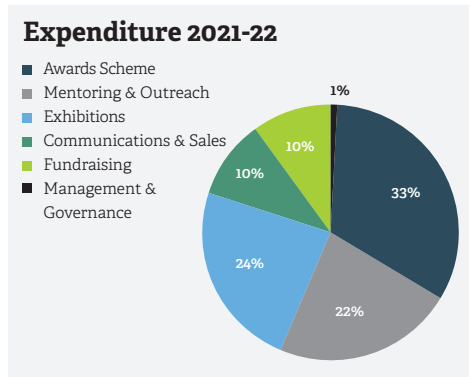
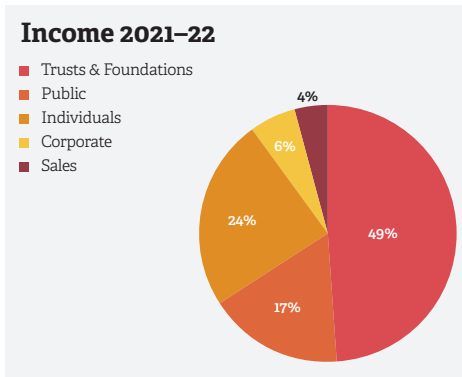
Koestler Arts is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, and receives support for our core programming from Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service and Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Ongoing support from organisations and trusts including Bromley Trust, Elysium Healthcare, Henry Smith Charity, Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust, Monday Charitable Trust and Monument Trust is greatly valued, and in addition we have been fortunate to receive several legacy gifts and anonymous donations this year.



**If you choose to support Koestler Arts you can be assured that you will have done something really worthwhile. Something that will make very real and very positive changes in lives that otherwise might have slipped through the net.**

**Koestler Awards entrant, 2021**



Income raised against our ongoing capital campaign has not been included in the stated income figures.

**Opposite Rainbows, HM Prison Bure, Gold Award for Calligraphy, 2021**



The rain  
shows the  
rainbows  
in the oil  
stains



Art is an extra window  
(with a much better view)

Koestler Awards entrant and mentee, 2021



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