



KOESTLER ARTS - ART AID

Koestler Arts produce monthly Art Aid sheets featuring creative tasks that can be done in cell with just paper and a pencil. New sheets are available from the first Monday of every month.

We are now accepting entries to the 2025 Koestler Awards! Send your entries and signed entry forms to 'FREEPOST Koestler Arts' by 11 April 2025. Entry forms should be enclosed with this sheet, and you can contact your education department or Koestler Arts to be sent more. See our guidance notes for full terms and conditions.

MARCH 2025

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 and exhibited artist, Charlie.

My Story

The only classes I liked at school were Maths and Art. In Art, I was mesmerised by other pupils' work and inspired to paint by my father's amateur sea paintings. I briefly went to art college but after three months became disenchanted with the system and went on to qualify as a nurse.

Years later I had a meltdown and ended up in prison, hallucinating wildly. My world had fallen apart and I was barely able to hold a conversation. I remember complaining to psychiatrists of having over a hundred thoughts per second. I was diagnosed with psychosis; a delusional schizophrenic with a personality disorder. I was devastated.

I got a job in the art room and later in a wood workshop and I loved it. The routine helped me immensely and I started creating drawings and small paintings. From feeling very alone in prison and robbed of my dignity by the bleak, uncompromising system, I felt the creativity inside me was truly mine and couldn't be taken away. Making art can give you ownership, dignity and self-belief. I found art when I could no longer hold onto reality. It helped me separate my hallucinations from reality and build a more usefully creative me.

I value individuality and interpretation in art, and try to abandon any rules about what makes an artwork 'good' or 'right'. Now I paint and make sculptures freely. It excites and inspires me to search for new colour combinations and images that tell a story. I love art and when you love something you'll always find a way of doing it. After all these years I'd still say I'm a clumsy drawer. I make errors, but I'm ok with that. I just keep drawing or painting, adding to my scribble and building from there. Drawing for me isn't about producing a masterpiece, it's about mindfulness; letting my imagination roam and enjoying the journey.



My Task: Tackling a blank page

When making art, sometimes the hardest thing is to be inspired when not much around you is inspiring. This exercise is how I start my ideas these days.

Start by just making marks. Here I did a rubbing of concrete using a pencil on scrap paper.

Embellish and tease out an image from this. Sit back and observe what you've done and what possibilities there are. Here I used a wet tea bag to add colour and flesh out the pencil marks.

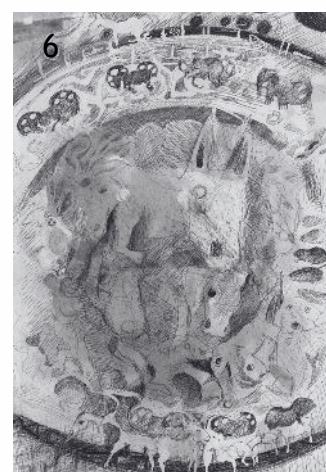
Gather vague ideas and go with whatever appeals to you at that moment. Turn the paper to see what shapes take your interest and keep adding marks and shading to develop the image.

Remember nothing is 'wrong' because you're creating something new. If an animal with five legs presents itself, I go with it. I didn't set out to draw horses, I just followed what the shapes I created suggested to me and built around them.

Rely on your memory and instincts rather than looking things up to try to perfectly recreate them. I made a point of not looking at a picture of a horse as this piece developed.

This drawing might be your finished piece or it might inspire some other creative work. From here I'll probably make a papier-mâché ornament from the design I made at the top.

Consider sending your drawing to a friend or relative. Involving others in your creative process can help build relationships and sharing something of yourself with others can be healing and break down barriers. I made a card from this drawing and sent it to my sister.



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 will only be entered into this year's Koestler Awards if they are sent with signed entry forms.