

KOESTLER ARTS - ART AID

Koestler Arts produce monthly Art Aid sheets featuring creative tasks that can be done in your cell or room with just paper and pencil. The 2026 Koestler Awards deadline has now passed, but we hope these sheets will inspire you to remain creative and perhaps try something new.

MAY 2026

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 exhibited artist and mentee, Luis.

My Story

I was introduced to Koestler Arts by my probation officer. Since then I have had my artwork exhibited at the Southbank Centre in London and joined Koestler's mentoring scheme, which I hope will further support the lifelong passion I have for art.

Art has been a saviour and escape from difficult times in my life. Being introduced to Koestler is one of the most positive things to come from my engagement with probation. I never thought a really low point in my life would open such possibilities, enabling me to reach new people with my art.

At school and college, I was taught ratios, perspectives, to colour in the lines; this rule, that rule, there is a way it should be done. Moving on from formal education, I questioned the idea of rules when it comes to art, and came to see these things as more of a guide that you can deviate from.

More recently, I've developed a style of working that gets away from any sense of rules and really inspires my creativity. I now have hundreds of pieces on the go at the same time. I add to them and then when I feel a creative block, move on to another. When I return to pieces with a fresh perspective, I can appreciate the accidents or imperfections, and see new additions I want to make, or when to consider them finished and take them out of my rotation. I focus less on the now and appreciate what something could become in time.

With this way of working, I'm more fond of so-called mistakes, accidents, and chance. I experiment with mediums that may not mix well or are not commonly used together to discover how inks, oil paints and acrylics behave, and what effect bleaching and staining will have on pieces, allowing my art to take its own form and become something far removed from my intention.



*En Quatre Colours (1 of 10),
HM Prison Northumberland,
Bronze Award for Painting, 2022*



My Task: Draw and Draw Again

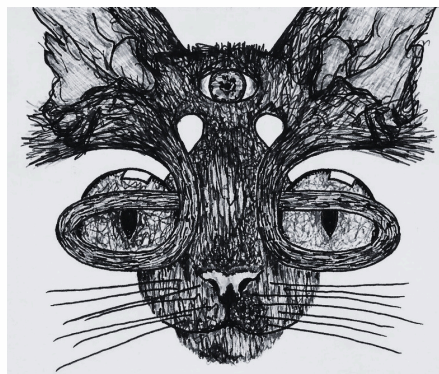
Draw something. Anything. Simple or complex. A tree or a bird, an ear or a car, something you can see or something from your memory or imagination. Spend half an hour, or even ten minutes, drawing it. Use any medium you like or have access to.

The goal is to see improvements by repetition. After your first drawing, draw the item again - this might be straight afterwards or the next day. Maybe you will change the image slightly, draw it a different size, from another perspective, or in a different style. You might produce an improved version, prefer the first, or make a mistake. Complete the drawing anyway if you do.

Repeat this process, drawing the same item every day or at regular intervals, developing it until you feel it can't be improved upon. This might take 10 drawings, but it could be more or less depending how long you spend on them, or how much you enjoy experimenting. As your drawings evolve, you will find the medium, scale, perspective, and level of detail you like most. You might end up focusing on a particular aspect of the item, or with your drawings becoming quite abstract. Don't feel you have to produce a perfect likeness of the item you've chosen, the goal is to get to a version you are happy with and feel proud of.

When you achieve this, leave the drawing for a week or longer somewhere you can see it, and then draw the item one more time. After some time away from working on it, you might find something new to add, or feel reassured that you have developed it as much as you can.

This is an exercise in dedication. By continuing to try at something, not giving up, and identifying things you like about what you create, you will feel proud of your commitment. You should end up with a drawing you feel is worth cherishing or sharing, and you might be surprised by what you can achieve. You may discover something within yourself that you didn't know was there, or develop an existing passion as you explore new styles and fine-tune your skills.



From the series *Zoey*. Images courtesy of Luis.

You don't need to send responses to these tasks to us, we just hope you'll enjoy giving them a go. If you do we'll be 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.