

Koestler Trust

arts by offenders ■ ■ ■

Arts Mentoring

Why Prison Art?

We are the UK's best-known prison arts charity. We award, exhibit and sell artworks by offenders, detainees and high security patients. Our aims are:

- to help offenders lead more positive lives by motivating them to participate in the creative arts;
- to demonstrate the power of arts activity in the criminal justice system.

The Koestler Awards attract around 5,000 entries a year from inmates of prisons, young offender institutions, high security hospitals and immigration removal centres across the UK, as well as offenders supervised by probation and youth offending services. The entries come in 52 art forms, including:

- creative writing
- film
- graphic design
- music
- needlework
- painting and drawing
- photography
- sculpture
- woodcraft

Experts from these fields volunteer their time to judge the entries. Every entrant is sent a participation certificate, most get feedback on their work, and a quarter win cash prizes up to £100. The awards have a profound impact on offenders' self-esteem, often leading them to positive new directions in life.

The best visual artworks are shown at our annual exhibition – the national showcase of arts in criminal justice. In 2007, the exhibition was “Insider Art” at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, generously sponsored by Bloomberg. The curators included Turner Prize-winner Grayson Perry.

Most of the artworks are for sale. At least a third of the proceeds goes to the offender, with a contribution to Victim Support.

We were founded in 1962 by Arthur Koestler, author of the prison novel *Darkness at Noon*. We have no endowment or capital. Our Government grant covers only a fifth of our costs and has an uncertain future. We rely on charitable trusts, business sponsors and generous individuals. Please support us if you can.

The value of the Koestler Trust's work is underlined by testimonies from many quarters. Here are just some:

Roger Graef, film-maker and author, writes:

'The case for art in prisons is not theoretical: it is practical and pragmatic. The arts are not an alternative or an optional extra to education: they offer a far more effective way of reaching the same goals. In place of passive formal classes, the arts provide the first form of learning. Direct experience, lived by the participants who are on the journey to knowledge in ways much more likely to be retained when they leave than the more conventional teacher-pupil relationship. Through art, such learning passes not only through the brain but through the heart.'

New efforts to address offending behaviour more directly may prove successful, and educational programme hopefully will lead to better prospects for employment. But the emotional interior landscape of each prisoner – their confidence and sense of themselves as individuals – is not

addressed by such work. Art speaks to all of these. It is an absolute essential for people to live peacefully in the world that they be able to express themselves without violence.'

Maggi Hambling, artist, writes:

'Any artist anywhere, in the South of France or in Wormwood Scrubs, is trying to respond to the motif in front of him or the dream inside him, as honestly and sensitively as he can. And then we can enjoy, loathe or be indifferent to the product... I have always felt very lucky indeed that I can try to deal with love, hate, fury, despair or passion with a bit of charcoal or a brush-load of paint in my hand. You can paint a murder rather than live with the problem of committing one. And artists in their work don't borrow, they steal. And a painting often suffers a lot of abuse on the way to resolution. So artists and criminals have a lot in common. Henry Moore described his work as therapeutic and so do I. Art is free to go wherever the spirit takes us. And that is what we artists, inside or out, appreciate.'

An Award-winning entrant writes:

'I have been very lucky over the years at the Koestler Awards. Apart from selling almost all of my work I have also received the full range of awards... You know it has been great winning awards and selling my work but the event gave me more than that, it provided me with something positive to talk about with my family and another stepping stone to help me through my sentence. Who knows what will happen with my art when I get out?'

Judges of the 2005 Prose Awards write:

'In the hundredth anniversary of Arthur Koestler's birth it is interesting to speculate on what he would have made of the submissions for this year's awards. As a novelist, a powerful political thinker and a man condemned to death during the Spanish Civil War (with experience of both Spanish and British gaols) he would surely have applauded the passion displayed in fiction and political ideas and the accounts of prison experience – especially those which go beyond their subject-matter to explore inner meanings... This year entries have ranged from learned Biblical exegesis to fairy stories, from crossing a Falklands minefield to experiencing life as an immigrant, from life as a child in the 1940s to the very different lives of kids today ... the Award-winners and Specially Commended entries have taught us a lot and given pleasure, humour, concern and food for thought.'

Stephen Shaw, Prisons and Probation Ombudsman writes:

'Despite the progress made in recent years in prisons in terms of regimes, the quality of accommodation, and the treatment of prisoners, all jails inevitably restrict the human spirit ... Prison life is grey, monotonous, predictable. The major exception to this rule is to be found in the arts and crafts rooms in prison education, or in the artefacts made by prisoners in their own cells. Art flourishes in prisons to a degree perhaps unknown in any other institution. It inspires thousands of prisoners, most of whom have shown neither inclination nor talent before entering custody. And the greatest driver of art in prisons in recent years has been the Koestler Trust.'

I visit a prison on average every ten days, and I know the enthusiasm the Koestler Awards engender. Prisoners, whose only acquaintance with art and creativity has often been unhappy memories from school, discover skills they never knew existed. The impact on their own sense of self-worth (and, I believe, on their behaviour) is incalculable. What is also so impressive about the Koestler Awards is the range of work it encourages: from painting to poetry, from calligraphy to carpentry. Through its Annual Exhibition, the Koestler Trust plays an important part too in educating the wider public about the talent that resides in prisons and special hospitals. The Koestler Awards represent an injection of creativity, humanity and empowerment into the closed world of prisons.'

A new era for the Trust

September 2006 saw the retirement of Dorothy Salmon, OBE, the Koestler Trust's director for 25 years and the appointment of our new chair of trustees, Sir Joseph Pilling, former Director General of the Prison Service and Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Office. Our new director, Tim Robertson, is a poet and social worker who has spent 14 years managing services for children and young people in London boroughs.

We have carried out a thorough review of the Trust, consulted with offenders, partner agencies and funders, and produced a Business Plan for the next 3 years. The Plan launches the Trust into a new era of modernisation, outreach and growth. Our core activities of awarding, exhibiting and selling remain unique and profoundly worthwhile, so the Plan is co-ordinated around them. But we have also identified some significant development needs, notably:

- to increase the impact that our awards have on offenders' lives,
- to bring our exhibited artworks to much wider audiences.
- Download a summary of our development strategy here.

Our first new initiative is a 3-year pilot arts mentoring programme for released prisoners, funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and an another anonymous trust. We hope this will enable talented prisoners to sustain their involvement in the arts, and help deliver wider benefits for them and for others, potentially breaking a cycle of re-offending.

We also have plans for other outreach and education programmes designed, for example, to:

- engage more vulnerable offenders in the Koestler awards
- attract offenders' families and communities to participate in events around the exhibition
- help more offenders continue to participate in the arts on release
- give offender artists a stronger voice, both within the Koestler Trust and beyond.

Koestler Awards

Koestler awards have a powerful impact on offenders' self-esteem, and we have informally supported several individuals to go on to careers as writers and painters. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that offenders who have taken part successfully in the arts while in prison fully intend to carry on when they are released, but in practice fail to do so. Like many other positive habits and plans made in custody, arts activity often gets lost in the difficult transition back into life on the outside. So we are now looking to innovate a kind of support that addresses the transition out of custody and has more sustained impact.

There is lots of research evidence that ex-prisoners are more vulnerable to re-offending if they are unemployed, socially isolated, homeless or using drugs. Participation in the arts can lead to employable skills, high self-esteem, collaboration with others and a feeling of purpose in life. So it makes sense that, if artistically inclined prisoners can be supported to keep up their creative interests after release, this will not only sustain their involvement in the arts, but also have wider benefits for them and for others, potentially breaking a cycle of re-offending.

Thanks to a 3-year grant from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and further funding from an anonymous charitable trust, we will train a group of professional artists as mentors, then match them to prisoners (mostly aged under 30) who have won Koestler awards and are due for release.

Working alongside Probation and other resettlement services, the mentors will support the offenders to maintain and develop their arts activity in the community. We will integrate an evaluation into the initial 3-year pilot, aiming to demonstrate that the arts can have wide-ranging benefits for offenders and their communities – potentially reducing re-offending – and to disseminate an imaginative new model of resettlement support.

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Principles for Development

Our activities and plans for the future are underpinned by the following principles:-

Fairness and equality

As an organisation aiming to benefit some of society's most vulnerable and marginalised people, the Koestler Trust is committed to fairness in all its decision-making, and, as far as lies within its power, to promoting equality in access to resources and social opportunities. We have a Diversity Strategy in place to ensure our progress in this area.

Quality

In order to change and grow, the Trust needs to maintain and improve the quality of its core processes – staffing, finance, administration, management, governance, communications, policies and procedures. These processes ensure that the service received by offenders and other stakeholders is consistent and responsive.

Focus on outcomes

All the proposals in our business plan are aimed to achieve specific outcomes for offenders or for the public. Evaluation and monitoring will help the Trust see how well it achieves these outcomes, and develop its activities in response. However, the Trust recognises that social and creative outcomes cannot always be measured in numerical or scientific terms. Although the Trust will gather statistical evidence as far as possible, its primary role is to demonstrate effectiveness through artistic means – by showcasing the creative achievements of offenders.

Consultation and involvement

The Trust is also committed to developing its activities in response to the views of service users and other stakeholders. This will include regular questionnaires and a forum of offender-artists.

Partnership

The Trust is committed to working in collaboration with other organisations in the arts, criminal justice and related fields. This is the only way that we can achieve many of our objectives.

Co-ordination

Co-ordination is necessary to maintain the Trust's distinctive national identity and role. There are many organisations that run arts projects directly with offenders. Koestler is distinctive in awarding, exhibiting and selling the resulting artworks. So, whenever we work directly with offenders, this work is always integrated with the awards, exhibition and sales.