

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

IK KOESTLER ARTS

Turner Prize winner, Jeremy Deller, and former prisoner-turned-artist, John Costi, co-curate *No Comment*, the exhibition of art by people in criminal justice settings to open at Southbank Centre in November

This Autumn, Koestler Arts, the largest UK prison arts charity, presents their 17th annual UK exhibition of work created by people in prisons and other secure settings in partnership with the Southbank Centre.

The guest curators, Jeremy Deller and John Costi, invited six renowned figures from different creative spheres to help with the selection for the show; artists Abbas Zahedi and Larry Achiampong, curator and art historian Andrea Emelife, activist and founder of Sports Banger Collective Jonny Banger, Director of the British Museum Dr Nicholas Cullinan OBE and broadcaster Zakia Sewell.

No Comment

Co-curated by Jeremy Deller and John Costi

1 November - 15 December 2024
Southbank Centre, Royal Festival Hall



Images courtesy of Koestler Arts.

Opening on 1 November, *No Comment* is the 17th edition of Koestler Arts' annual UK exhibition at the Southbank Centre. The show will feature a selection of works by prisoners, secure mental health patients, immigration detainees, and other individuals in secure settings, from the UK and abroad, all submitted to the annual Koestler Awards.

The artists Jeremy Deller and John Costi were invited by the charity to select circa 200 artworks from over 7,500 submissions, and curate this free exhibition of art by people in the criminal justice system. Both artists have long associations with Koestler Arts. Deller has been a longstanding supporter of the charity, volunteering each summer to help judge the Koestler Awards and write feedback to creators in prisons for the past fifteen years. In his words, "the Koestler Awards are the Art equivalent of Wimbledon".

Costi first learnt about Koestler Arts in 2007 during his sentence at HMP Young Offender Institution Feltham. He has come full circle in his journey with the charity, from award-winner to mentee, scholar, member of staff, Awards judge, and now he is one of the co-curators of the annual exhibition. Before his engagement with Koestler Arts, he didn't believe art could be part of his future. "I was under the illusion that my life was predetermined at a young age, and that it was impossible to do art because of my class and where I come from. I was told art wasn't for me. It took me going to prison to realise it was", he explained. It was the handwritten feedback and commendations he received through Koestler Arts which encouraged him to continue pursuing art while in prison.

This project is not the first time Deller and Costi meet. The pair first connected in 2013 when Deller worked with the British Council to issue six Cultural Scholarships for artists with lived experience of prison to travel and visit his exhibition at the 55th Biennale di Venezia. In Venice, the pair developed a rapport talking about their work and shared approach to art, which is reflected in this exhibition.

Both artists have a distinctive collaborative artistic practice, which is why the decision to invite six other creatives with different roles in the art world to contribute to the process of selecting the pieces felt like a natural choice, bringing in multiple viewpoints and ideas. Abbas Zahedi, Andrea Emelife, Jonny Banger (Sports Banger collective), Larry Achiampong, Dr Nicholas Cullinan OBE and Zakia Sewell, spent time at the Koestler Arts Centre this summer making their selections.

The idea for the title, *No Comment*, was sparked by a piece of artwork selected for the show which depicts a person obscured by a large microphone. The painting prompted discussions about the lack of opportunities for people in secure settings to share their voice and opinions. The exhibition provides that platform and the curators wanted to 'let the art speak for itself', showing the range of topics and interests of artists within these settings. It will feature writing, music and design in a variety of themes; humour, honesty, sadness, political commentary and more.

Some of the artworks on display will be available to purchase through the Koestler Arts website. There will also be opportunities for visitors to write feedback on their favourite pieces in the exhibition space, which will be sent directly to the exhibited artists. Free exhibition tours will be available for the public at set times of the day on Wednesday's,

Friday's and weekends by tour guides, some of whom have personal experience of the criminal justice system and can speak about the important role creativity plays in these settings. Please see Koestler Arts' website for times and more information.

Fiona Curran, CEO of Koestler Arts, comments:

“We are delighted to be partnering with the Southbank Centre for our annual UK exhibition again this year. Being able to showcase the creativity of our beneficiaries in a world-renowned venue provides us with a great platform, and an opportunity for the public to engage and learn more about the power of the arts in secure settings, and its impact on rehabilitation.”

Mark Ball, Artistic Director of Southbank Centre, comments:

“We're delighted that such a fantastic pairing of curators is leading the 2024 Koestler Arts Exhibition. Jeremy has a long association with Southbank Centre and his and John's combined curatorial vision are rooted in a long track record and understanding of arts and the justice system. The imagination can never be locked up and it's vital that we continue to highlight the spaces and organisations within the criminal justice system that encourage artistic expression.”

For more information visit: www.koestlerarts.org.uk

Koestler Arts Press Enquiries

Lisa Baker Associates Limited

Ned Mansfield or Lisa Baker

Email: ned@lisabakerltd.com or lisa@lisabakerltd.com

Tel: + 44 (0)7927 574720 | + 44 (0)776 8310 038

JEREMY DELLER:

Jeremy Deller (b. 1966) studied Art History at the Courtauld Institute and Sussex University. Deller won the Turner Prize in 2004 for his work 'Memory Bucket' and represented Britain in the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013. He has been producing projects over the past two decades which have influenced the conventional map of contemporary art. He began making art in the early 1990s, often showing his work outside conventional galleries.

Deller has curated numerous projects including: 'Iggy Pop Life Class', Brooklyn Museum (2016); 'Love is Enough: William Morris and Andy Warhol', Modern Art Oxford (2014); and 'All That is Solid Melts Into Air', Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester (2014). His filmwork includes 'Putin's Happy' (2019), 'Everybody in the Place (an incomplete history of Britain 1984-92)' (2018), 'So Many ways to Hurt you' (2010), 'Our Hobby is Depeche Mode' (2006).

Jeremy has been a visual arts judge for the annual Koestler Awards for over a decade.

JOHN COSTI:

John Costi (b. 1987) is an artist whose work draws on his Cypriot/Irish heritage, and experience of growing up in London. Costi's work analyses upbringing and class as a means of critiquing negative versions of masculinity. He uses sculpture, installation, painting, and performance to map his life. Often improvised and informed by chance, the work lives in the social sphere. He is interested in dismantling hierarchies of art experience, turning passive audiences into active participants. Costi graduated from Central St Martins with an MA in Fine Art in 2022, and was then selected for the South London Gallery post-graduate Residency Programme. He now works from his art studio at Somerset House.

KOESTLER ARTS:

Koestler Arts is the UK's best-known prison arts charity. Since 1962, it has played a unique role in motivating prisoners, young offenders, secure patients, immigration detainees and people on probation across the whole of the UK to lead creative and positive lives.

Through the annual Koestler Awards scheme, exhibitions, post-release mentoring, employment, and family engagement projects, they harness the transformative power of the arts to encourage people in secure settings and upon release from custody to reframe their lives free from crime.

Each year, ca. 4,000 people in the criminal justice system send their creative visual, written and audio work into the Koestler Awards, judged by a panel of experts. Entrants receive personalised feedback and certificates to reward and encourage their efforts. Work entered into the Awards can be selected for exhibitions or publication, and has the opportunity to sell.

Throughout the year, Koestler Arts demonstrates the human value and potential of people in prison to the public through a diverse programme of exhibitions and events around the UK. The biggest showcase is at London's Southbank Centre every autumn, visited by ca. 10,000 people. These displays increase public awareness of the otherwise hidden talents of people in secure settings, allowing them a creative voice in a system that can often be silencing.

Past exhibition curators have included Ai Weiwei, Camille Walala, Antony Gormley, Benjamin Zephaniah, Speech DeBelle, Joelle Taylor, Grayson Perry, the families of prisoners, victims of crime, serving female prisoners and graduates of the Koestler Arts mentoring programme.

ABOUT THE SOUTHBANK CENTRE:

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest multi-arts centre and engages the most diverse audiences of any performing arts organisation in the UK. Our biggest venue, the Royal Festival Hall (2,700 seats) is the lasting legacy of the 1951 Festival of Britain and the ambition and values of that project - that arts, ideas, innovation and culture can heal

communities and should be available and accessible to everyone - are still our guiding principles today.

The Southbank Centre is uniquely able to offer a wide-ranging, inclusive and world-class artistic programme spanning contemporary visual arts, music, dance, performance, literature, comedy and spoken word across the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, the Hayward Gallery and our free spaces. We are also home to the National Poetry Library, the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) and six resident orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Philharmonia Orchestra).

www.southbankcentre.co.uk