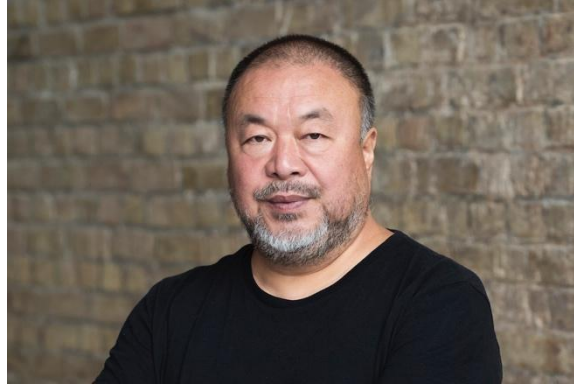


Koestler Arts announces details of its annual UK Exhibition to be curated by Ai Weiwei



FREEDOM

27 October - 18 December 2022

Southbank Centre

Exhibition Space, Level 1, Royal Festival Hall

Koestler Arts is proud and thrilled to announce that their fifteenth Annual UK Exhibition in partnership with the Southbank Centre this October will be curated by Chinese contemporary artist, documentarian, and activist, Ai Weiwei. 2022 marks the 60th anniversary of the Koestler Awards and Ai Weiwei wants this landmark exhibition to be ‘the most ambitious yet’.

The vision for the exhibition is inspired by the artist’s visit to the Koestler Arts building, which currently holds over 6,500 artworks entered into this year’s Awards. Taken aback by the quantity of artworks and the range of categories on display, Ai Weiwei’s concept evolved; to be as inclusive as possible and to let the artwork show how humanity responds when put in extreme circumstances.

This year, the exhibition space at the Southbank Centre will be transformed physically to realise this vision, which will help to preserve the environment within which the artworks are made. The aim is to not ‘translate’ the work but to retain the wholeness of it. Ai Weiwei explained this idea with an analogy: he wants to present the forest, not just a branch that comes from it.

During his curation period, the artist also visited HM Prison Wormwood Scrubs, which is situated next to the Koestler Arts Centre. Having visited many prisons around the world, as well as experiencing his own restriction of freedom during a period of secret detention and constant surveillance in China, this additional visit to HMP Wormwood Scrubs helped to strengthen and confirm the vision for the exhibition.

Despite the severe knock-on effects that Covid has had on prisons, which are only now beginning to return to 'normal', nearly 3,000 artists have worked to create artwork for this year's Koestler Awards. These figures reinforce the motivation behind this year's exhibition.

Mirroring Koestler Arts' philosophy, Ai Weiwei wrote, "expressing oneself is a part of being human. To be deprived of a voice is to be told you are not a participant in society; ultimately it is a denial of humanity".

The exhibition will showcase artwork created by and submitted to the 2022 Koestler Awards by individuals in prisons, secure mental health facilities, immigration removal centres, young offender institutions and on community sentences across the UK. The exhibition will be presented to the public by ex-prisoner exhibition hosts who have received specialist training to lead tours, answer questions and share their first-hand experience of the importance of art and creativity for those within the criminal justice system.

Ai Weiwei comments:

"This exhibition focuses on the role that the act of thinking and creating plays in life under constraints. Notable works of art and literature in history were created when the artist was restricted, oppressed, and challenged, rather than being completely free. The language and feelings that emerged from these conditions are much more profound, convincing, and powerful.

I visited different prisons in the UK and saw the living conditions of different kinds of prisoners. I hope that this exhibition can inspire people to reflect upon the loss of freedom and those that continue to create art to fight for space in life and freedom of expression despite adversity."

Sally Taylor, Chief Executive of Koestler Arts, comments:

"Koestler Arts could not be more thrilled to welcome Ai Weiwei as the curator for our 60th Anniversary exhibition. Our entrants have often asked whether he could curate for us, and Ai Weiwei's vision for the exhibition could not be a more appropriate way to celebrate our artists and our work this year. *Freedom* will be a very different and powerful Koestler Arts exhibition."

Mark Ball, Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre, comments:

"Ai Weiwei's work as an artist, activist and campaigner for freedom makes him the perfect choice to curate the Koestler Arts 60th anniversary exhibition. We're thrilled that this exhibition will share and showcase both Ai Weiwei's curatorial vision and the incredible artistry and craft of those whose own freedoms have been curtailed. I started my career in the arts working in prisons and the probation service and I've seen on countless occasions how art can be a space for personal liberation and growth, a belief that is made manifest by the extraordinary work of Koestler Arts."

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

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AI WEIWEI:

Ai Weiwei (*1957, Beijing) lives and works in multiple locations, including Beijing (China), Berlin (Germany), Cambridge (UK) and Lisbon (Portugal). He is a multimedia artist who also works in film, writing and social media.

KOESTLER ARTS:

Koestler Arts (formerly Koestler Trust) is the UK's best-known prison arts charity. Koestler Arts encourages people within the criminal justice system to express themselves creatively, and learn new skills, by entering work into the annual Koestler Awards. The Koestler Awards are simple and powerful. They motivate over 2,500 people each year across the whole of the UK's criminal justice system to participate in the arts, and to show the public their talent and contribution to society.

Each year Koestler Arts receives more than 6,000 entries, in 52 creative categories. Entrants receive feedback and certificates, can be selected for public exhibitions or mentoring, and may sell their visual artwork. Koestler Arts holds a programme of exhibitions and events each year around the UK. The biggest is the annual exhibition at London's Southbank Centre, which c.20,000 people visit.

Past curators have included Antony Gormley, Benjamin Zephaniah, Speech DeBelle, Camille Walala, Sarah Lucas, 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 arts centre occupying a prominent riverside location that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. We exist to present great cultural experiences that bring people together

SOUTHBANK CENTRE



and we achieve this by providing the space for artists to create and present their best work and by creating a place where as many people as possible can come together to experience bold, unusual and eye-opening work. We want to take people out of the everyday, every day. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 Festival of Britain. Southbank Centre is made up of the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery as well as being home to the National Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. It is also home to 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/