

**SOUTHBANK  
CENTRE**

**IK** KOESTLER  
ARTS

**Koestler Arts presents 'IN CASE OF EMERGENCY', their 16<sup>th</sup> annual UK exhibition at the Southbank Centre**

Opening on 2 November, the show curated by award-winning poet Joelle Taylor, features nearly 200 artworks by artists in prison and other secure establishments from across the UK. The exhibition, in partnership with the Southbank Centre, draws attention to themes of separation and connection through a series of glass cases and vitrines, inviting the public to metaphorically 'break the glass' and overcome barriers to creativity.

**IN CASE OF EMERGENCY**

**2 November - 17 December 2023**

**Southbank Centre**

**Exhibition Space, Level 1, Royal Festival Hall**



Joelle Taylor at the Koestler Arts Centre

*IN CASE OF EMERGENCY* will feature nearly 200 artworks across visual, writing and music categories entered into the 2023 Koestler Awards. The scheme has been awarding talent and creativity by individuals in prisons, secure mental health facilities, immigration removal centres, young offender institutions, and on community sentences, across the UK since 1962. Through their programme of exhibitions, they work to debunk stereotypes and demonstrate the human value and potential of people in the criminal justice system.

Having worked creatively in prisons for over twenty years, Joelle Taylor's motivation for this year's exhibition is to showcase the talent and imagination that springs from secure settings. Choosing from over 8,000 pieces sent into this year's Awards, the poet selected artworks that showcase both excellence and ingenuity. These qualities are shown in different ways by the artists, through concept, skill and story-telling, as well as through

the use of unusual materials that highlight their resourcefulness. These include artworks made from crisp packets, prison issue soap, rice, seeds and even clinical waste bags.

Shaped by her own work, the poet's focus settled on the concept of encasement to explore themes of separation and connection. Taylor was keen to explore how things are presented, contained and scrutinised and this is reflected in the design of the exhibition, where artworks are encased in various ways. Ten table vitrines contain many of the artworks, creating a clinical and imposing environment. In the same space, large metal structures are used to hang pieces of work and present 3D artworks. While these structures support the imposing atmosphere created by the vitrines, they also represent a change to the encasement of the artworks. The structures are not covered by glass or Perspex and only serve to frame the artworks. In this way, visitors will be invited to think about how it feels to be on either side of the glass as they become framed by the structures, too.

The title, *IN CASE OF EMERGENCY*, encourages visitors to complete the well-known phrase with 'break glass'. This will be reinforced at the end of the exhibition, where artworks are no longer 'encased' but are now free from this constraint. "When I see these cases, it makes me think of what happens when we break the glass, what happens when ideas escape," said Joelle Taylor, curator of the show and previous Koestler Awards judge. The hope is that the exhibition reinforces the idea that creativity does have the power to break down barriers and by engaging with the artworks, visitors are bringing this action to life.

As a poet, Taylor was also keen to celebrate the written word and consider different ways of presenting it. Poems are printed on materials associated with prison - a single bed sheet, a grey jumper, food trays - while spoken word is played through phones to mimic a moment of interaction and create a sense of connection. In addition to curating the exhibition, Joelle Taylor is also the foreword writer for Koestler Arts' fourth volume of poetry, *Koestler Voices: New Poetry from Prisons Vol.4*. The anthology, which features poetry written by those in criminal justice settings over the past two years, will be published in the Autumn and available to buy at the Pop-Up Shop in the exhibition space. *Voices from Prison*, Koestler Arts' annual poetry event, will take place on 8 November at the Southbank Centre. Limited tickets are still available to purchase through the Southbank Centre website.

Some of the artworks on display are for sale and will be available to purchase through the Koestler Arts website from 2 November. 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 artists after the exhibition.

Free exhibition tours will be available for the public at set times of the day, Thursday to Sunday, by specially trained guides who have personal experience of the criminal justice system (please see Koestler Arts' website for times and more information). The guides will be happy to talk more about the important role creativity plays in the criminal justice system and to supply more information about the wider work of Koestler Arts.

Joelle Taylor comments:

“I’ve spent about twenty years now working in prisons so I’m aware of the vast range and diversity of arts that are created within the criminal justice system, and the opportunity to be able to introduce that to a wider public is compelling.

I think people should come to the exhibition to be in the presence of excellence. And then the secondary reason is I want people to challenge their understanding of who prisoners are, who inmates are, who residents of secure units are. They are part of humanity, and a vibrant part, and through that I want them to question the way that we operate the criminal justice system as well. But excellence and life and humanity - that’s why you should come.”

Fiona Curran, Chief Executive of Koestler Arts, comments:

“This year people across the criminal justice system responded with one of the highest levels of participation in the Koestler Awards to-date and it is amazing to see numbers back to pre-pandemic levels. Joelle has worked hard to get a sense of all these voices and this is reflected in her thoughtful and urgent selection for this year’s exhibition.

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

“I am thrilled to see Joelle Taylor curating this year’s Koestler Arts exhibition. A very welcome and familiar face of the Southbank Centre, Joelle’s long-time commitment to working in prisons makes her the perfect choice to curate this year’s exhibition which shines a light on the breadth of creative expression and artistic talent in prisons today.”

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For more information visit: [www.koestlerarts.org.uk](http://www.koestlerarts.org.uk)

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## **ABOUT JOELLE TAYLOR:**

Joelle Taylor is the author of four collections of poetry and a novel. Her most recent collection *C+NTO & Othured Poems* won the 2021 T.S. Eliot Prize and was the subject of a Radio 4 arts documentary *Butch*. *C+NTO* was nominated for the Rathbone Folio Prize, longlisted for the Ondaatje Prize, and won the Polari Book Prize 2022. A former UK SLAM Champion, she founded the national youth poetry slams SLAMBassadors through the Poetry Society in 2001, remaining its Artistic Director until 2018. She is a co-curator and host of Out-Spoken Live, resident at the Southbank Centre, and an editor at Out-Spoken Press. She is also completing her memoirs for publication in 2024, and her novel of interconnecting stories, *The Night Alphabet*, will be published by Quercus in Spring of that year.

## **ABOUT KOESTLER ARTS:**

Koestler Arts (formerly Koestler Trust) is the UK's best-known prison arts charity, inspiring individuals who are imprisoned, detained, or recently released from the criminal justice system, to seek a brighter future through art. Since 1962, it has helped to encourage creativity in secure settings via an annual awards scheme, and to bring those artworks closer to the public with a programme of exhibitions, publications, and events. Its Mentoring scheme, developed since 2009, supports those who wish to continue with their arts practice on release.

Having experienced the *apathy, depression and gradual dehumanisation* (in his own words) of incarceration, in 1962 writer Arthur Koestler organized the first scheme to award monetary prizes for artistic achievement to prisoners, detainees, and psychiatric patients in the UK. Today the Koestler Awards receive over 8,000 annual entries across 52 creative categories, each of them judged by panels of volunteer experts, ex-entrants and high-profile artists.

Participants on the Awards scheme receive feedback and certificates, have the opportunity to be selected for public exhibitions or mentoring, and are able to sell their visual artwork. Koestler Arts holds a programme of exhibitions and events each year around the UK. The biggest is the annual UK exhibition at London's Southbank Centre, visited by c.20,000. The exhibitions increase public awareness and understanding of art by people in the criminal justice system, ultimately reframing the way we see prisoners, and allowing them a creative voice in a system that can often be silencing.

Past curators have included Ai Weiwei, Camille Walala, Antony Gormley, Benjamin Zephaniah, Speech DeBelle, 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 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/](http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/)