



Churches  
Together in  
Westminster

# An Occasional Newsletter

**W**elcome to Issue 13 (Summer 2018) of our Occasional Newsletter which is a Prisons Mission Special. Please feel free to photocopy this for distribution amongst your congregation.

Issue 13  
Summer 2018  
Prisons Mission  
Special

## Contact us

Website: [www.ctiw.london](http://www.ctiw.london)

Email: [ctiw.net@gmail.com](mailto:ctiw.net@gmail.com)

## Introduction

**W**hen the CTiW Executive met in May, the series of shows of art by prisoners was in full swing at central London churches. "First Impressions: Portraits from Prison", an exhibition of paintings by men, women and children, curated by the Koestler Trust, had been open to the public at St James's Piccadilly and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church and had just been launched at St Martin-in-the-Fields. At each church, the exhibition is the focus for worship, lectures, debates and discussions on the subject of penal policy and the crisis in British prisons. Many visitors have attended from churches in London and far beyond, including Prison Chaplaincy team members of different faiths, as well as other individuals and organisations.

This is a major initiative led by the Prisons Mission, which operates under the auspices of CTiW. The venture involved a partnership with the host churches and the Koestler Trust, which for over fifty years has promoted the visual arts in prisons as an aid to education, recover and rehabilitation. The Prisons Mission raised over £10,000 from individual benefactors so that there would be no financial burden on either the churches or the Koestler Trust.

The Prisons Mission will review and evaluate the whole venture and is keen to learn lessons for the future. However, it was clear to the Executive that there would be a significant beneficial

impact. It was therefore decided that there should be a 'Prisons Mission Special' CTiW Newsletter to report on the art shows and related events. We welcome your comments, observations and suggestions.

*John Plummer,  
CTiW Prisons Mission Co-ordinator & member of  
CTiW Executive.*



*Tooth Pick Lady - Don't go to the Dentist in Prison!  
Camden and Islington Community Rehabilitation  
Company Portrait*

## **First Impressions: Portraits from Prison**

We identified four churches as suitable hosts because of their busy central London locations, keen support for the work of our Prisons Mission and cross-denominational reach. These were St James's Piccadilly, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, St Martin-in-the-Fields and Notre Dame de France in Leicester Square. Unfortunately, the last of these had to withdraw from the programme for entirely internal reasons.

The artwork on display included 24 paintings, drawings and sculpted pieces by men, women and children serving custodial sentences in British prisons. Each picture had a brief narrative describing what it meant to the artist. The exhibitions attracted a lot of interest from casual visitors and they were asked to complete forms explaining why they had liked or found a particular piece of work interesting. These forms were all sent by the Koestler Trust to the individual artists in prisons. We found that the most effective use of the shows was to arrange for groups of visitors from interested churches or other organisations to attend together. On these occasions we had a former prison artist and an experienced Prisons Mission volunteer in attendance, to answer questions and facilitate discussion.

## **Can Prison Work: For Offenders? For Victims? For Taxpayers?**

From the outset the Prisons Mission was determined that Portraits from Prison should be much more than a display of pictures painted by men, women and children while serving custodial sentences. At present Britain has 149 men, women and children in prison for every 100,000 of the population – more than any other country in Western Europe. We aimed to provide information about the criminal justice and penal system and to provoke debate about the very grave crisis which now affects all concerned.

### **St James's Piccadilly**

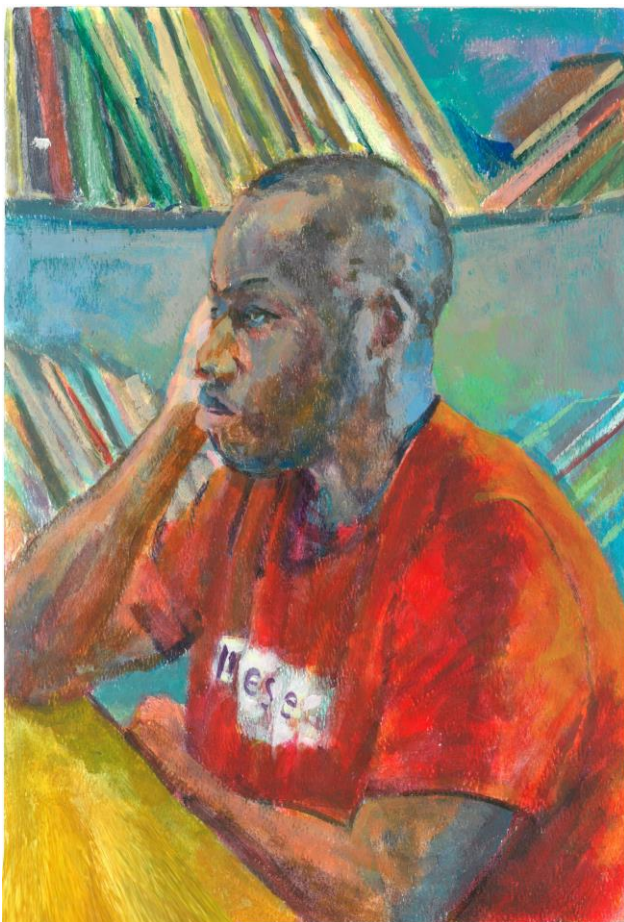
The first show was opened on 20<sup>th</sup> March by Jonathan Aitken, the former Government

Minister who served a prison sentence for perjury in 1999. He quoted Oscar Wilde, who was shattered by the harsh regimes at Pentonville and Wandsworth prisons in the Victorian era. The bread and water diet and six hours each day on the tread-mill caused his mental and physical health to break down. But, half way through his sentence he was transferred to HMP Reading, where a more enlightened Governor allowed him access to paper and pencils. So, Oscar Wilde began to use his artistic talents to write two literary masterpieces - The Ballad of Reading Gaol and De Profundis. These endeavours made his prison journey bearable. His jangled nerves stabilised. He became calmer and quieter. He recovered some of his shattered self-esteem. He began to recover hope about the prospects of life after release from prison. So, while still in prison, his art as a poet set him free.

Jonathan Aitken explained that "although Oscar Wilde's sentence took place long before prisons had education departments, art teachers or the encouragement of the Koestler Trust, nevertheless, it is fair to say that he blazed a trail that runs all the way to this exhibition of art by prisoners". He added that while he was serving his sentence, he "was allowed to do education and given a table in the art room. I was studying theology, but a prison officer thought this sounded like art. So, I learned my New Testament Greek in the prison's art room surrounded by fellow inmates learning to paint or draw and make sculptures. I saw at first hand, how a little progress at art would often raise the spirits and self-esteem of prisoners and play a vital role in their journey towards rehabilitation."

On 3<sup>rd</sup> April, Peter Dawson, Director of the Prison Reform Trust presented a lecture on the theme of Can Prison Work? For Offenders? For Victims? For Tax payers? After a career in which he progressed from Prison Officer to Governor of prisons for men, women and young offenders, as well as spells in management and policy roles at the Home Office, Peter Dawson moved to lead what many consider to be the most authoritative think-tank in this field. He explained that "occasionally people say that prison saved their life. And, quite often they say that someone they have met in prison gave them belief that a better future was achievable. But, for the overwhelming majority of people, prison

does harm to them and to those who care about them. We need to have a very good reason for every occasion that we choose to subject anyone to this terrible experience". He described the purposes of prison as for punishment; for the reduction of crime; for the reform and rehabilitation of offenders; for the protection of the public; and for reparation". But, he argued, "for the last three of these purposes, prison was the worst possible start to these ambitions". With regard to reparation, he said that "with no job, no money and no capacity to engage with the community which had been harmed, the reverse happens, with tax payers paying to keep someone idle and unaccountable".



*Inside The Prison Library*  
Staffordshire and West Midlands Community  
Rehabilitation Company  
First-Time Entrant Award for Portrait

Peter Dawson told those attending that there are currently more than 2,300 prisoners serving indeterminate sentences, with a minimum of 15 years in custody - over 10,000 indeterminate sentences overall; twice as many as France,

Germany and Italy combined. The average tariff length is now 21.5 years, up from 13 in 2003. Despite this inflation, he explained that "public attitude evidence showed no increase in public confidence. Indeed, people think the system is less punitive than it is". And yet, sometimes there are shafts of light. He quoted a young man serving a 15 year tariff: "The last thing (the victim's mother) said to me (during an organised encounter) was that she didn't want two lives to be wasted and that she wanted me to make sure that my life turned out with something good and not to waste it, you know, partly in memory of her son who died that night. And it was like taking a deep breath for the first time, you know, like when I breathed in, like I felt some new life in my lungs".

So, Peter Dawson continued, "can we imagine a system that, despite its fundamental character and reason for existence, achieves something worthwhile?" For this purpose, he argues that "prison must always be the last resort and the unavoidable necessity because of the seriousness of the crime." That it is the systems' task to mitigate the inevitable damage. "Prison should never be used because we think it will 'do them good', or because we have run out of ideas. When prison is unavoidable, the minimum requirements are that it must be Just, Decent, Safe, Connected, Compassionate, Empowering and Proportionate." The lecture was followed by numerous questions and a lively discussion.

### **Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church**

On 29<sup>th</sup> April John Plummer, Coordinator of the CTiW Prisons Mission presented a lecture on the same Can Prison Work? theme to a group which mainly comprised members of this church and Baptists from elsewhere in London. He explained that the origins of the Prisons Mission lay in the widespread ignorance about the prisons system among the clergy and congregations of most churches of all denominations. This initiative, under the auspices of CTiW, provides opportunities for individuals to give service in support of multi-faith Prison Chaplaincy Teams and take their learning, observations and experiences back to the churches. He asked those present to imagine that they were welcoming artists of the pictures on display into the body of the church. Most of the artists are sad, lonely,

frightened, angry, remorseful, bereaved or resentful. But, in addition to being convicted criminals, they are also sons, daughters, brothers, husbands, wives, fathers, mothers and neighbours. Very few of them are wrongly convicted or angels and some are also difficult and dangerous. Many of them have been damaged by many years of violence, neglect or abuse and also suffer long term mental health issues and are at risk of further health impairment while in custody.

John Plummer explained that having visited many prisons over the years he had met some good and well-intentioned staff at all levels. Despite this, few prisons are places of safety and hope where the process of recovery and rehabilitation can begin. He relies on his own judgement about the state of British prisons and continues to learn from the reports of successive HM Chief Inspectors of Prisons, such as pillars of the establishment Lord Ramsbotham and Dame Anne Owers. In recent reports they have used such terms as “dirty, dangerous, vermin-infested, unsafe and inadequate” to describe our prisons. Charles Dickens would not be surprised by the situation which often prevails today. Too many men, women and children are detained in British prisons - more pro rata than any other western European nation. Too often they are places where hope and recovery are simply not available options. I am deeply ashamed of our prisons. It is wrong for people to be detained within them in our names. There are some sparks of hope. An example is HMP & YOI Bronzefield, now the biggest prison for women and girls in Europe. They have devised a Trauma Informed Strategy whereby a team is dedicated to ensuring the approaches to working with and rehabilitating residents recognises that many women residents have experienced trauma due to a male figure in their lives. This requires special training for both male and female staff. It is, in my view, essential for such often modest initiatives to be very thoroughly evaluated and costed so that where appropriate, these can be more readily replicated.

Since the lecture, the Minister Simon Woodman and several local Baptists have agreed to make their first visit to a London prison to consider the church ‘engaging’ with the Prisons Mission.

## **St Martin-in-the-Fields**

On 5 May a large invited audience attended a lecture on the theme ‘Can Prison Work?’ at St Martin- in-the-Fields. The evening was opened by Rev Jonathan Evens, who welcomed people to the church which is an active and engaged member of the Prisons Mission. Sister Catherine Jones of Notre Dame de France read a message from Rt Rev Richard Moth, the Roman Catholic Bishop for Prisons, who regretted that he was unable to attend: “The medium of art often provides a most effective expression for the deepest of human thought and emotion. For many, it is a means to a renewed sense of value, self-worth and a significant step on the journey of life. The Prisons Mission and Koestler Trust, merit congratulations on this high profile exhibition. I am sure it will do much to raise awareness of the needs of all in prison and those who work with them. With every blessing. Bishop Richard”. The panel of distinguished experts on penal policy and practice was introduced by John Plummer.

The first speaker was Professor Nick Hardwick CBE. His career began with NACRO before moving on to leadership with Centre Point and work with youth homelessness and then Director of the Refugee Council and the first Chair of the Independent Police Complaints Commission and HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. Until very recently, he was Chair of the Parole Board and is now Professor of Criminal Justice at Royal Holloway, University of London. Nick Hardwick focused on the prisoners convicted of the ‘most serious and high-risk offences’ and explained that 26% of sentenced prisoners have committed a violent offence. He argued that “reformers too often duck the issue of the harm that crime does and the responsibility of those who commit the offences. Such people have made bad decisions. To deny this denies them agency and the possibility of change”. He explained that “the only good reason to send people to prison is as punishment, or to keep us safe. Don’t send people to prison to make them better - but we must try to reduce the harm prison does”. He emphasised that “people are sent to prison AS punishment, not FOR punishment” and quoted Nelson Mandela: “Imprisonment and other measures that result in cutting a person off from

the outside world are afflictive by the very fact of taking from these persons the right of self-determination by depriving them of their liberty. Therefore the prison system shall not, except as incidental to justifiable separation or the maintenance of discipline, aggravate the suffering inherent in such a situation". Nick Herbert concluded by saying that "for many prisoners, distance (from crime) depends on creating a 'new me'. This can be helped by relationships inside and outside prison. But it can also be found in art, such as we see here. Art involves seeing the world and our place in it in a different way and this helps to create a 'new me' on which rehabilitation depends".

The second speaker was Dame Anne Owers. Her career began with the legal advice services of the JCWI, before moving to Christian Aid and the Community & Race Relations Committee of the Church of England and then becoming the Director of Justice. She led a Home Office Task Force on the implementation of the Human Rights Act and was appointed Chair of Clinks in Brixton. She followed the previous speaker as Chair of the Independent Police Complaints Commission and then became the first woman to be appointed as HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. She is now Chair of the Koestler Trust and the first National Chair of the Independent Monitoring Boards, which oversees the work of all prisons. Dame Anne spoke of the importance of prisoners retaining links or connections with the outside world. This can be done via the medium of art. Imprisonment deprives inmates of agency, but to seek to

change their personal lives, they must accept agency for both past faults and future prospect. She had often observed the positive role art could play in the life and personal development of prisoners. She and her Inspectors would often be invited into a cell so that an inmate could proudly show a picture, through which they were finding some self-esteem.

Having listened to two former Chief Inspectors of Prisons, John Plummer drew attention to the little known fact that the reports of all prison inspections go not only to the Justice Secretary but are also public documents and available to all

of us. These are extremely detailed and provide much information about the day to day operations of the whole system, 'warts and all' and are most illuminating.

The third member of the panel was Juliet Lyon CBE who, until recently was the Director of the Prison Reform Trust, the influential think tank, which publishes the Bromley Report, containing the most extensive range of data on every aspect of the criminal justice and penal system. Juliet Lyon's early career was with ChildLine and focused on mental health and learning disabilities. She gained the Perry Award as the "person who has done most to promote understanding of the

work of the Prison Service" and played a leading role in Penal Reform International. She is now a visiting Professor of Law at Birkbeck University of London and Chair of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody.



*A Head Full of Possibilities*  
 HM Prison Isle of Wight (Albany)  
 John Crockett Highly Commended Award for Portrait

Juliet Lyon explained that the gravest act of any state is to send its citizens to war. Next only to this is to send them to prison. To the question 'Can Prison Work?' - yes, if we expect it to work as a place of last resort in a fair and proportionate justice system. No, if we expect it to operate as a capacious social service, or safety net, for some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

"Currently we ask too much of our prisons and the governors and staff who work in them. Ever-lengthening sentences, including the Kafkaesque indeterminate sentence for public protection (IPP), and a marked reduction in the use of community sentences, coupled with cuts in resources and staffing levels, have imposed an almost unbearable burden on our least visible, most neglected public service. Around 70% of our prisons are overcrowded and outcomes are poor - homelessness, unemployment, debt, unmet mental health needs and unacceptably high re-offending rates.

The Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (IAP), which I chair, was established to advise Ministers on how best to reduce deaths, both natural and self-inflicted, in State custody. A stark indicator of the vulnerability of people in prisons comes in Ministry of Justice figures which reveal that 21% of men and 46% of women in prison have attempted suicide at some point in their lives prior to imprisonment. This compares with 6% of the general population. Last year there were 44,651 recorded incidents of self-harm in prisons in England and Wales.

Early in 2017 the IAP began working with Inside Time, the prisoners' newspaper, Prison Radio and the Samaritans to reach out to people in custody and seek their views on how to prevent suicide and self-harm. Altogether we heard from 150 men across 60 prisons. This Keeping Safe initiative, together with an earlier consultation with 45 women in prison, provided a wealth of constructive, practical advice. Above all relationships with staff were seen as pivotal in keeping people safe. One man wrote: "There is one particular officer who can tell just by talking to me how my mood is. He notices if I am down, if I don't eat, if I don't socialise. I rarely see my offender supervisor but if each officer adopted one side of one landing, got to know his or her

prisoners and kept casual watch, warning signs could quickly and easily be detected." Another wrote: "I long for a proper conversation. I go to bed at 8pm and I cry. I cry for myself. I cry for wasted lives. I cry for relief."

Never underestimate what prison staff, colleagues and volunteers achieve day in day out, often in bleak, stale environments. Or the tremendous work of Samaritan Listeners, men and women in prisons across the UK, supported by local Samaritan branches, who help fellow prisoners in extreme distress. If people here are wondering 'What can I do?', a publication with that title is available from PACT or the Prison Reform Trust. It sets out a number of opportunities ranging from prison visiting to independent monitoring, from prisoner pen friends to criminal justice charities.

How much more could be achieved if prison were reserved for people whose offending was so serious or so violent that they couldn't serve their sentence in the community. Overcrowded, under-resourced prisons are an age-old problem. It must be time for a more sensible, more imaginative and more effective approach to crime and punishment."

The three lectures were followed by many questions and a discussion. The meeting was closed by Rev Richard Carter, who expressed thanks and appreciation to all the speakers who, he said, had almost unequalled authority and experience which they had shared so generously and usefully. He also thanked the Koestler Trust and the many prison artists whose fascinating pictures were displayed and some of the former prison artists who were present that evening. He was very pleased that St Martin-in-the-Fields had agreed to host the lectures and the Portraits from Prison exhibition which remained open until 10<sup>th</sup> June. This is a demonstration of the church's ongoing commitment to the issues and the work of the Prisons Mission,

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## Volunteers

The work of our Prisons Mission is undertaken by volunteers from 'engaged' churches. They support the work of multi-faith Chaplaincy Teams and visit inmates in London prisons and the

Immigration Removal Centre at Heathrow. They attend Visitors Centres to support prisoner's families and some become Prisoner Penfriends. Proper training and support is essential as volunteers learn from their experience of this very unfamiliar environment. A crucial role for volunteers is to report back to their churches, so that Priests, Ministers and congregations become better informed about the issues which concern prisoners, chaplains, staff, families and victims of crime. They also play an important part in the promotion of Prisons Week, which this year will be marked from 14 - 21 October. We need new volunteers for this vital, but challenging ministry. If CTiW member churches or individuals are interested in 'engagement' or volunteering, they should contact the Coordinator for an exploratory discussion.

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**Ian Whiteside**  
**Director - HMP & YOI Bronzefield**

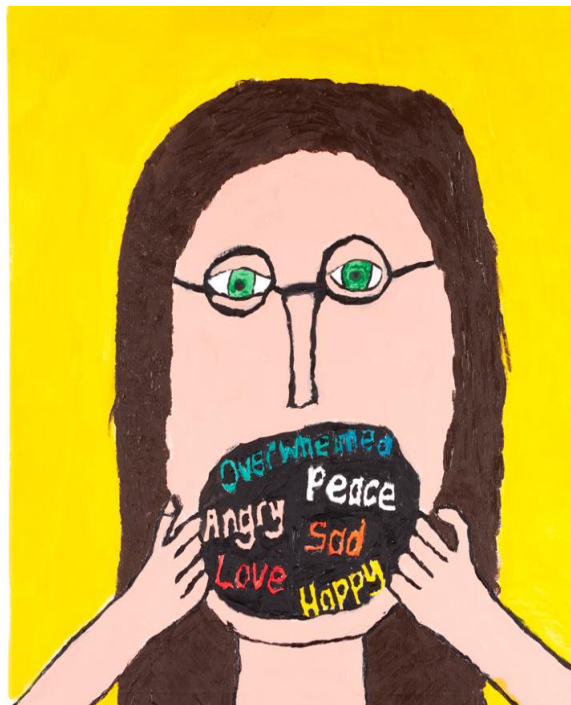
My job as a Director of the largest women's prison in Europe can be challenging and time consuming and sometimes it can be hard to see the wood from the trees. Having opportunities such as attending the evening at St Martin-in-the-Fields allows me time to reflect and is rewarding in so many ways.

I attended on the 8 May for two reasons firstly to see the art work and secondly to hear from a distinguished panel of prison experts.

Bronzefield has an excellent record of achievement at the annual Koestler art exhibition and I never fail to be impressed by the standard of art work that is on display. What I often find so moving is the powerful, emotional creativity that prisoners are able to communicate through their art and the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> of May was no exception.

I was significantly impressed by the panel who consisted of Dame Anne Owers, Nick Hardwick and Juliet Lyon. Having met all three panellists professionally over the years and holding them all in the highest regard this was an opportunity not to be missed. It was encouraging to hear that the

panel had a synergy in their responses relating to a commitment to improving safety and decency within prisons, a message I totally support and agree with.



*Shout It Out*  
 Pinetree Court Hospital  
 Portrait

The next day returning to my work within Bronzefield I visited the prison's art workshop and reviewed this year's work that is ready to be dispatched for scrutiny by this year's Koestler judging panel. I am confident the current artists in my care will continue with our past run of successes and hope to see their art in future Portraits from Prison exhibitions.

As for the wider prison, my focus and determination on improving standards in safety and decency were appropriately refreshed and I will continue to endeavour to deliver a rehabilitative and trauma informed culture that will enable the women at Bronzefield every possible opportunity to become contributing members of society when they are released.

(YOI stands for Young Offenders Institution, for the detainment of children aged from 10 to 17. In the UK 10 is the age of 'criminal responsibility').

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**Sally Taylor**  
**Chief Executive, Koestler Trust**

When Arthur Koestler formed the Koestler Trust with David Astor and Hugh Casson in 1962, one of their charitable objectives was to change the way the people think about offenders. There have been many fellow travellers along this path and the Prisons Mission is one of them. So it is with a common aim that we have come together to curate this exhibition in three London churches over the Spring and early Summer this year. It was particularly appropriate I feel that the work from 'First Impressions' was actually placed in the pews in Bloomsbury Baptist church. We are all human and we can and should share the same space as everyone else.

It was also very important to be in a church such as St-Martin-in-the-Fields, which has done such pioneering work with disadvantaged people over the years, especially with the homeless, and I was particularly moved by the reactions of those who are served by 'Connections' at St Martins when they were brought round the exhibition.

St James's like ourselves has a long and distinguished connection with the Royal Academy (Hugh Casson was RA President) At the beginning of the Summer Exhibition St James's is packed to the rafters with artists represented in the show,

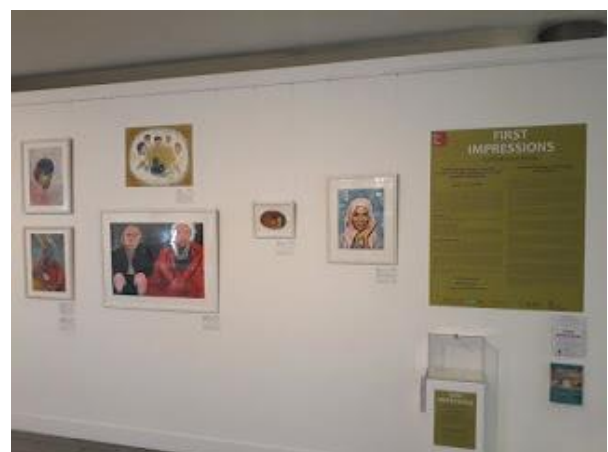
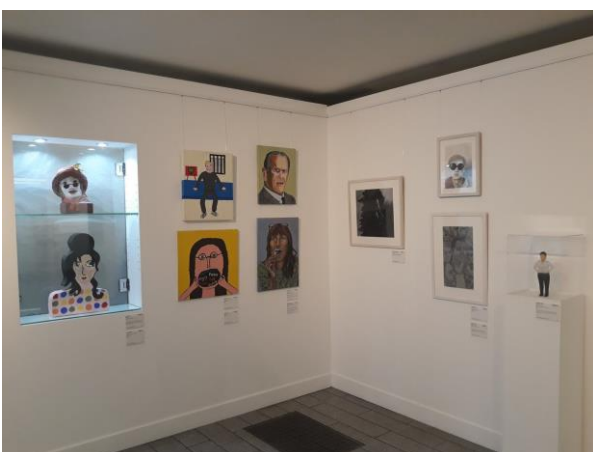
for a special artists' service. This year those artists included three men who had been awarded Koestler Awards and been mentored by the Koestler Trust on release. We are extraordinarily proud of them all. Their journeys have been remarkable ones and should be celebrated.

I will leave the last words to one of the exhibition visitors, who responded on a Visitors Feedback card. 'Thank you for sharing your exceptional talent with me by entering the Koestler Awards. Your portrait is one of the most original and captivating pieces I have seen at this evening's opening of the exhibition. I hope you will continue to develop as an artist and wish you all the best for a bright and successful future.'

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**Sister Catherine Jones**  
**Notre Dame de France, London**

One of the most moving aspects of the art display for me was to write to the artists and share with them what I appreciated about their art work. I returned several times to St Martin in the Fields to do this, and invited other casual viewers to do the same. I hope it was for the artist an encouragement to look at their lives in a new and hope-filled way.



Photos courtesy of Rev'd Jonathan Evens