

S-T-R-E-T-C-H

Widening Participation



Griffins Fellowship 2007 Carlotta Goulden

This research is an investigation to attempt to understand the epistemology behind arts intervention with female offenders. I hope to validate the belief that access to culture for female offenders can combat social exclusion and so aid resettlement from custody.

This research aims to:

- Provide evidence that working with the arts has a positive effect on the rehabilitation of female offenders
- Argue that participation in arts-projects for offenders is their cultural entitlement and should be facilitated by the authorities as a human right
- Investigate the problems that arts organisations have in delivering projects to female offenders and suggest ways to overcome these problems

Background and Methodology

The specific area of research I have chosen is the use of museum and gallery education with female offenders. This is relevant to my current work as I have set up a charitable arts organisation called 'Stretch', which aims to widen participation in museums and galleries for disadvantaged groups. I organise artist-lead sessions in museums and galleries for groups of offenders with attending officers. The project finishes with an exhibition and celebration at the prison.

As a piece of qualitative research a range of methods have been employed: from observations, questionnaires, field notes and semi-structured interviews through to participation and action research. Interpreting this wide range of interconnected data is an attempt to make sense of the phenomena of using the arts to rehabilitate offenders.

As a researcher I enter the research process from inside an interpretive community; my personal history, biography, gender and social class shape the investigation. To quote Denzin and Lincoln (24:1998) 'There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed.' As a practitioner working with offenders in gallery programmes I have the opportunity to get close to the participants and their situation, these different levels of involvement lead to complex levels of understanding.

Part of the intended research is investigating the problems and barriers that arts organisations face when delivering art projects. This will use a more traditional research methodology seeing research as gathering data to answer problems. Research can be a tool for informed decision-making, policy making. Research can help set new directions and contribute to broader guiding principles.

The clear model presented by O'Leary in 'Researching Real-World Problems' (2005) shows how research is positioned in a hierarchy: Starting with one's own professional development, action and experiential learning; this in turn impacts on your practice (within the prisons for example) which then influences programmes within wider communities. These in turn lead to policy change and recommendations to alleviate situations; all this sits within a broader context of cultural shift. This model neatly shows how even minor research has a part to play in heralding change.

The Social Inclusion Agenda

This report argues that access to culture is a human right and an entitlement, looking at the shift in perception of culture and the democratisation of culture. The United Nations (UN) declaration of human rights clearly states there should be no barriers to public accessibility to culture.

- Article 57

"Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific benefits..."

The social role and purpose of the Museum or Gallery is a dialogue that has engaged the professionals and their critics for decades. Dodd and Sandell (2001) explain that in return for public funding museums and galleries are being called upon to demonstrate good value service. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) claims that museums and galleries can empower people to determine their place in the world and play a full part in society (DCMS 2000).

History of policy making within the DCMS with regards culture based around four central themes:

- Promotion of access of the many not for the few
- Pursuit of excellence and innovation
- The nurturing of educational opportunity
- Fostering of the creative industries

Stretch projects often work with museums and galleries. Stretch aims to forge links between offenders and cultural institutions. This relationship with offenders is indicative of the relationship that museum culture has with the wider community



Prisoner's work on show at the V&A

Learning through visual arts

It is well documented by Hein (1998) and Falk and Dierking (1992) that arts education can provide an rich and rewarding learning experience, and that this experience is vital in offering something formal education can not. Anderson (1999) acknowledges the many ways that a museum or gallery experience can benefit people who have failed in, or have been failed by, formal education.

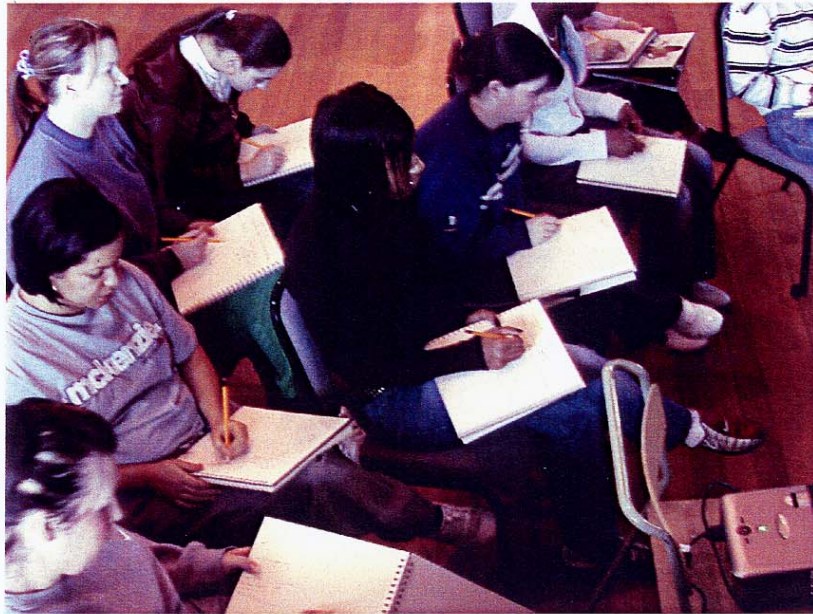
It is difficult to evaluate the experience of working with visual arts and the ways in which it can be beneficial to the audience. Art education attempts to nurture *visual literacy* in the audience, enabling the viewer to *read* and make sense of art works. As discussed by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) visual literacy may not be a social problem in terms of economic productivity, but it does distract from the quality of life and leads to cultural impoverishment.

The idea that people need different learning experiences is central to promoting the arts programmes across the board. Experiential learning is at the heart of Hein's

constructivist institution, where learning must not only be 'hands-on but minds-on' (1998:10). This in turn is founded on the educational philosophy of theorists such as Dewey (1970) who stressed that education begins with experience and Arnheim (1969) presenting the case for a need for visual literacy and understanding in relation to thinking development. Falk and Dierking (1992) amongst others notice that cultural visits take place more often in social groups, such as class. This social component of learning can be facilitated in this way; peers, artist, teachers, gallery educators or members of the group can provide intellectual 'scaffolding' (Vygotsky, 1962) to the learner. Interactive learning in a social group can build confidence in the individual.



'What I enjoyed most about the project was interacting with the women on a more informal basis, opportunity to chat, watching them develop and surprise themselves' (Prison Staff Member attending Stretch project 2006).



'I enjoyed today, seeing everybody working together and all the individual ideas from everyone was amazing' (Stretch Project Participant March 2007).

Shaun McNiff in his book 'Art Heals' comments on the importance of working in a group and the strength and motivation that comes from the bonding, *'the slipstream of group participation takes individuals to places where they cannot go alone. Groups of people can generate, reinforce, and revive creative energy and imagination'*(McNiff 5:2004)

A Healthy Community

It is vital that cultural communities such as museums, artists, theatres and musicians make the most of their growing social influence. Dodd (2002) suggests that new holistic policies have integrated health, culture, unemployment, social inclusion and education and the professional responsibilities have begun to merge. A healthy community is one where people receive good education, active participation, they have self worth, respect diversity and people have their creativity harnessed and are engaged in their culture. Jackie Harvey (2007), Head of Learning and Skills at HMP Holloway, supports this view in relation to the prison, *'A strong culture of art practice can promote a positive and humanising atmosphere for staff and prisoners in an otherwise stressful environment.'*



Silverman (2002) proposes that those marginalised by various problems (for example: depression, substance abuse, lack of confidence), as so many prisoners are, are individuals who also crave opportunities to learn, to reflect, to restore and perhaps most importantly, to affirm a sense of self and continued connections to others in the face of difficulty. The language of mental health treatment can be used to gauge the 'patient responses' where the rich diversity of human response is valued. Silverman discusses 'role engulfment' (79:2002), where the role of 'sick person' overshadows former roles (mother, worker, etc.) In my experience the role of 'offender' has had a hugely negative impact on the sense of self and therefore on the competence and confidence of each individual. Any opportunity through the gallery work to impact on the sense of self and connect with others is therapeutic. Each offender can become a gallery visitor, a valued artist and afforded a social role that is valued by others and valuable.

Shaun McNiff has written extensively on art therapy and is a firm believer on the power of creativity to cure the soul. With such a large proportion on the female offending population suffering from mental disorders it is appropriate to site good practice from the mental health field. McNiff states that 'Whenever illness is associated with loss of soul, the arts emerge spontaneously as remedies, soul

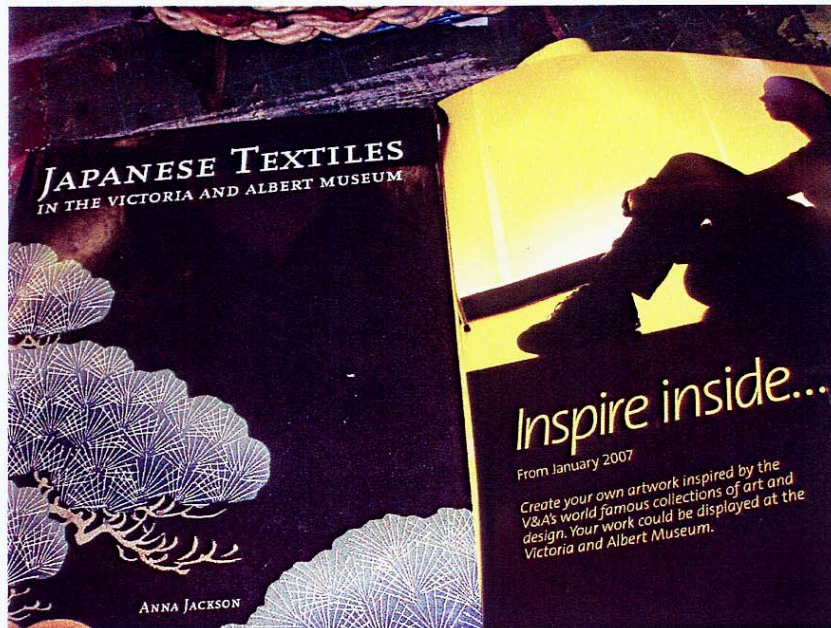
medicine' (McNiff, 2004). He argues that the core process of healing through art involves the cultivation of the creative spirit. One organisation that works to this ethos is Artists in Mind in Huddersfield who work in secure hospitals and units. They have published a book by Pauline Quinn, a former patient who has transformed her life through her art practice.

"Creativity has helped me tremendously in the healing process of my recovery from such things as depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress syndrome, anorexia, acrophobia and obsessive compulsive disorder. I'm thinking I'm on a right trip here. I don't need "Ecstasy pills etc, I'm on a natural high. Oh yes, just like I get on a natural low, there is nothing wrong with getting on a natural low, it's what you do when you get there" (Pauline Quinn 2005)



'The project has given me a sense of purpose- something to look forward to each week and a sense of accomplishment. Being in the public has been good for confidence because 'town visit' usually means 'shopping' and that is not enough to help me remember who I am. It has also given us conversation other than 'when is your release date?' Something to talk about to a stranger outside. Our life in here is very one-dimensional and the art projects give us some colour' (Stretch Project participant March 2006).

Stretch – Inspire Inside



For the purpose of this research the most recent and relevant work Stretch has undertaken has been the Inspire Inside projects with the Victoria and Albert (V&A) museum in London. Stretch has a history of working with female offenders at HMP Askham Grange and local museums and galleries, evaluations and lessons learnt from former projects have been useful in informing planning for this most recent programme.

The thinking behind Inspire Inside represents totally the ethos of Stretch. Stretch was approached by the V&A, as the only organisation that had made the partnering of prisons and cultural institutions its speciality. The remit of Stretch in this area is to widen participation to those institutions that are traditionally 'high art' and not accessible by socially disadvantaged groups such as prisoners who can not visit the museum or access the website, they may have never heard of the V&A or have even thought of becoming involved in museum education. The idea is enable the participants to enter a new sphere of experience and take from it what they can. Participants can engage on many levels; some may immerse themselves totally in the project and use it as a catalyst for future learning; some may dip in and out of the project enjoying the new inspiration and group dynamic; each experience is equally valuable.

To be working with the V&A has given Stretch a chance to raise the profile of the work and try and increase access to a traditionally 'stuffy' and closed institution. I have found that the V&A have as many institutional problems as the prisons I work in, such as a misunderstanding and fear of working with the 'difficult' group. This is typical of many large cultural institutions although smaller arts organisations are much more used to working at a grass roots level.

The education staff at HMP Askham Grange and HMP Holloway were keen to be involved in a such a prestigious partnership and welcomed Stretch into the prison to deliver the projects. I have found that the support of the Head of Learning and Skills, the education staff and the officers is crucial to the smooth running of a project. This is an issue that the Irene Taylor Trust have discussed, adding that you can never be too well prepared or have too many briefings with staff at the prison.

The remit of the Inspire Inside projects was to bring the collection of the V&A into a closed environment and use the V&A as inspiration for creative workshops. The V&A created a virtual tour of the fashion collection and Stretch facilitated and delivered six days of workshops in each prison with the fashion designer Nicola Grant. Using the film, books, pictures and talks we hoped to engage and inspire the groups of women.

HMP Askham Grange

HMP YOI Askham Grange is an open and resettlement prison that is quite unique. Stretch has carried out six projects there in the past that have all been successful, taking women out to surrounding museums and galleries. The V&A project was designed for closed conditions so had to be delivered all onsite at the prison. As the prison is a resettlement facility they are not well equipped for arts projects and finding the space to deliver the projects can be difficult. Education rooms are often filled 'back to work' programmes, computer skills, etc. Art resources and provision in Category C/D prisons are seriously over looked. Askham Grange is a former stately home however so we were able to deliver the project in the 'ball room' which was a good size.

We advertised the project in the education department and asked education staff to approach women they thought would have most to gain. Participants filled in a pre project slip listing three reasons why they wanted to attend the course. This has become an important part of the recruitment process, especially in a re-settlement prison where the women are beginning to take responsibility for their time. The staff

and the workshop leaders like to know that the participants have thought about what they hope to gain from the project, which generally varied from interest in art education through to trying something new.

Personal responsibility

Interesting issues arose over the project at HMP Askham Grange around personal responsibility. Most of the women at the prison have recently arrived from a 'lock-up' prison (higher category) and are not used to thinking for themselves and having the freedom to make decisions about their daily routine. Some mornings a couple of the ladies did not show for the workshops – this was something that, from experience, I had decided to be quite strict about. In meetings with the Head of Learning and Skills, Carol Burke, we discussed that it was important for the women to realise the opportunity they have been given and to take responsibility for arriving on time and getting the most from the project. It is well documented how institutionalised offenders become and to be helpful in the resettlement process Stretch aims to encourage decision making and empowerment as part of a set of transferable life skills. After three occasions of lateness, missing sessions, participants were asked to leave the group – this only happened with one woman. Obviously the offenders have a host of issues and distractions within the prison and may be called away, but where it is their decision and their effort there has to be some effort from them. Carol Burke believed this to be key to successful resettlement: *'real life is hard, the women need to make certain decisions about what they can do, what must take priority and what they want to achieve – we should not just hand them the projects on a plate, it has to be a two-way understanding'*

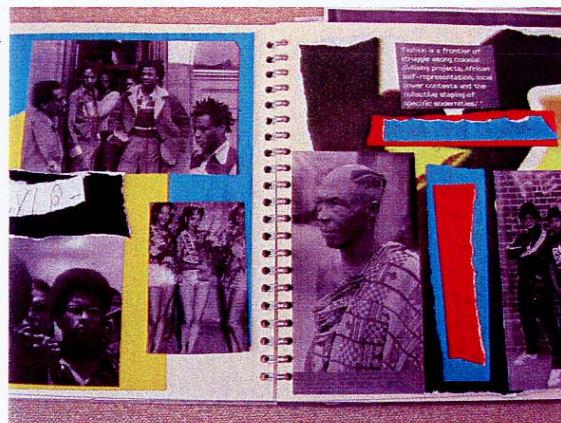
The notion that the participants should not be passive is one that cropped up in the delivery and the research. As arts practitioners we aim to inspire and engage but we should not patronise and hand-hold in any way. Nicola Grant, the artist and fashion designer who worked on both projects made some interesting comments in her evaluations. Working alongside the education staff at HMP Holloway she noticed that the craft and the needlework teachers, although keen and on-side, were far too used to doing a lot of the work for the women. *'What these women need is to really learn the technical skills so they can realise their ideas for themselves. Although the teachers are trying to help they are exasperating the nanny-mentality and encouraging the child-like behaviour of the women'* (Grant 2007). Through the

delivery of the projects there is a growing sense that a way to really help the women is not to simply 'do projects' with them but to teach them new skills, introduce new ways of thinking, really broaden their sphere of experience and empower them for the future.

In the planning of the projects it is always important to have the staff at the prison involved and part of the project. Prison officers can be obstructive in the delivery of the project if they do not see the worth for themselves. It is my view that too much emphasis is placed on 'back to work' training and in-house initiatives which take away from the holistic women-centred approach. This is championed by Baroness Corston sites the need to 'treat each woman as an individual with her own set of needs and problems and to increase the capacity to take responsibility for their lives' (Corston 2007) One way to do this is to invest more in multi-agency partnerships and make more use of the third sector.

HMP Holloway

The lessons learned informed the planning for the following project at HMP Holloway. The group at Holloway were identified by the staff and were already showing an interest in the arts. The facilities at HMP Holloway are very good and the staff have been very helpful in facilitating the project. We delivered the project intensively over two weeks and the group were very productive and engaged. The fashion designer Stretch worked with, Nicola Grant is interested in offering work placements in her studio to prisoners as she works with recycled materials and her ethos fits the remit of Stretch. It has been possible to place two of the women from the project at her studio for work experience. This has been really encouraging, to see the skills and enthusiasm from the project make the transition to real life skills in the outside world.





Sue Saunders – Governor HMP Holloway, talking at Stretch Launch at the V&A

"I first came across the project by accident, I looked in on the room and was struck by how engaged the women were, all gathered round listening intently to the visitors. I visited the project again a few days later and once again was amazed to see everyone beavering away on their designs, totally immersed in their activity. It means so much to the women to have outside organisations visit and work with them, offering them fresh inspiration and motivation, it has been a very rewarding project to have been involved in for the women and the prison staff alike" (Sue Saunders, Governor HMP 2007)

Part of the evaluation of the V&A project (2007) carried out by Stretch and twenty female offenders attempts to classify the outcomes in a quantifiable manner. Twelve out of the twenty wanted to continue art education and ten wished to visit more museums and galleries; these could be motivational outcomes. All expressed an increased understanding of art; an educational outcome. Sixteen of the twenty are proud of their achievements and ten feel they are better at communicating ideas, these outcomes suggest confidence building. By looking in retrospect at past evaluations I can begin to build a picture of the most common themes.

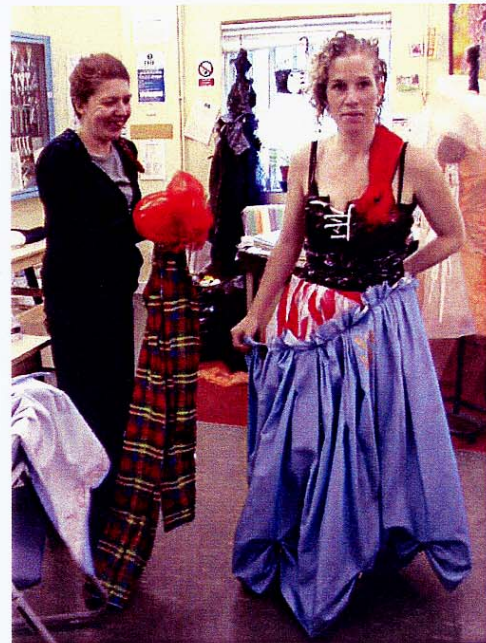
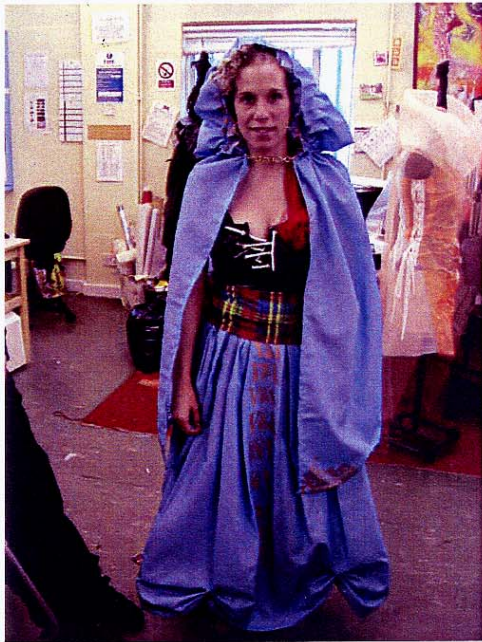
| Confidence and motivation | Self-esteem |
|---|---|
| At first I had my doubts, but in the end it was great, I didn't want it to end | I was excited because it's our work on display, people might talk about me for the right reasons! |
| The sessions were a unique experience, the whole concept was good, working with the V&A was a once in a life time experience | It gave us inspiration and encouraged us to be proud of our achievements |
| It was great fun and educational with a friendly atmosphere which inspired people to try and do as good a job as possible, it was different to normal education | I was really impressed with what we achieved, I thought every ones projects were impressive |
| I am really pleased with my final piece of work, as are all the other women | I was surprised that we had no experience and we all designed and made some good clothes |
| I would like to be involved in another project as I have more ideas I would like to try out | I felt very proud, much more than I ever expected I would do |
| I have learnt that anything can be achieved if you put your mind to it | It was good to show other women at the prison what we had done |

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| Group dynamics |
| Planning at the prison was excellent everyone in an excellent mood in agreeing what and what not to do |
| The groups worked brilliantly, everyone helped out on each other's pieces. |
| There was a really good atmosphere in the classroom, we all helped each other |
| It was good to see the women all involved in a group effort and on the same task |
| We felt free to experiment and supported each other |
| What I enjoyed most was the way everyone worked together |
| I was surprised at how everyone worked together and the good relationship with the staff |
| Everyone was working towards a target, it was good way of bonding |
| It was really good to feel welcomed by the group and the teachers every session |
| The groups worked very well, I have made new friends even though we are in the same prison I hadn't seen much of them before |
| Everyone worked together excellent, there was no arguing or fighting |

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| Art and education |
| Trying to understand other peoples ideas and new ways to learn about what fashion designers do |
| I have learnt how skilful making and designing is, but I can do it! |
| What I enjoyed most was seeing sculptures for the first time |
| I have learnt a new insight into design and that there's always new things to learn and ideas to explore |
| I had new experiences and felt free to experiment |
| Making things from rubbish was weird at first but if you let your imagination run wild you could achieve lots |
| There is no limit to what you can do when you focus |
| It was really interesting to learn all the techniques in eyelets and jewellery making, I hope I can carry on after the project |
| Clothes and designing will never be the same now I know the work that goes into them |
| It was really hard to understand what art is, I still don't really know what art is |
| I've learnt quite a lot about the V&A and fashion, it will be a happy memory at Holloway |
| On the whole eye opening, sometimes I found it hard to keep focused |
| I have learnt new techniques and ideas and how to turn an idea into a reality |
| I've learnt a lot and enjoyed it, something I've never done before but would jump at the chance of doing again |

Recommendations

- Education departments in prisons need to look outwards and welcome partnerships with artists and should be open to working with outside arts organisations and institutions
- As the prison population is so transient arts projects should be delivered intensively with support of other departments to give the participant a chance to immerse herself in the project.
- Prison education and regimes should have a set yearly budget to contract visiting arts organisations
- Staff from the prison, including officers, should be given a chance to experience the workshops and be involved in the planning and delivery
- Prisons should have designated space for arts and crafts activities in their routine, learning journey and within the physical prison estate
- Policy makers should accept the growing collection of soft outcomes, feedback and evaluation as proof of the worth of involvement in the arts
- Third Sector arts organisations should be supported by government initiatives without needlessly long application processes
- Resources for arts projects such as recycled arts materials, clothes, packaging, that could be collected from businesses should be collected at regional centres and distributed to education departments in prisons
- Where the offender can progress from an arts workshop to a work placement the prison should be able to give full support and make the transition as obstacle-free as possible.
- Funding should be available for arts charities and projects that can offer this progression and see the skills started in the on-site provision used and continued off site



*“Another charity, **Stretch**, operating on a shoestring and an abundance of enthusiasm from director Carlotta Goulden and colleagues, is currently running an exhibition of prisoner art at the V&A. Goulden recognised that people in prison were denied access to museums and art galleries, and so arranged for a film-maker to create virtual tours of places like the V&A and took them into prisons, helping to transform the bleak prison landscape. She also organises workshops whereby artists go into prisons and share their understanding of the creative process with prisoners, which has resulted in the current exhibition. The workshops have led to prisoners getting work placements after release, proving that such initiatives can bring practical, tangible advantages.*

Engaging with art can restore confidence and self-worth; it can improve sociability and generate aspiration. Art and creative activity can be the perfect vehicle for revealing the complexities of the human condition. Prisons should open their doors wide to anyone who wants to promote it, and the government should recognise its value as an effective deterrent to re-offending. Lammy has made a wise decision regarding Koestler Trust funding in the short term but the sooner he announces a long term commitment to arts in prison the better. Prisoner lives enhanced bring enhancement to the wider community.”

Erwin James, Guardian Unlimited Blog, July 19th 2007