

July 2016

**BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH CURATES *WE ARE ALL HUMAN* -  
THE ANNUAL KOESTLER AWARDS EXHIBITION AT  
SOUTHBANK CENTRE**



*Fruits of my Labour*, HM Prison Grendon

**15 September – 13 November 2016**  
***Spirit Level at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall***

The annual Koestler Awards exhibition returns to Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in September for the ninth year running. The exhibition is the Koestler Trusts annual UK showcase of arts created by prisoners, offenders on community sentences, secure psychiatric patients and immigration detainees. The annual awards scheme is run by the Koestler Trust, the UK's best-known prison arts charity and is part of an ongoing partnership between the Koestler Trust and Southbank Centre.

This year's exhibition, ***We Are All Human*** (15 September - 13 November 2016) is curated by internationally acclaimed writer, dub poet and musician **Benjamin Zephaniah**, who has selected a diverse range of artworks from nearly 7,000 pieces submitted to the 2016 Koestler Awards from across the UK. The works on display in the exhibition include painting, music, writing and ceramics as well as traditional prison crafts such as matchstick modelling. The curator has selected works that explore themes of time and the natural environment, with a particular focus on creative writing and poetry within this year's display. *We Are All Human* provides a unique and thought provoking insight into the lives and minds of prisoners, secure patients and detainees across the UK.

To present the exhibition to the public, ex-prisoners have been specially recruited, trained and employed by the Koestler Trust as exhibition hosts. They will work alongside Southbank Centre staff to invigilate the exhibition and welcome visitors throughout the exhibition run. As well as gaining unique work experience and new skills, the ex-prisoner hosts will deepen visitors' engagement with the exhibition, enabling everyone to hear first-hand how the arts reflect and enrich the lives of people in secure and criminal justice settings.

On Thursday 15th September, there will be an official exhibition opening by Benjamin Zephaniah with speeches, performance and a panel discussion exploring behind the scenes of the exhibition. Artworks will also be available to purchase in the Koestler pop-up art shop alongside tours through the exhibition led by ex-prisoner exhibition hosts. Further details below.

**Benjamin Zephaniah said:** *"I was in prison myself in the 1970's and back then there was no way you could express yourself. I felt like a creative being but there was nothing there to do. I express myself through words, and here I am surrounded by people who express themselves in different ways – matchsticks, paper mache, painting. Every bit of artwork in the exhibition has meaning, everything is relevant to the person who's created it. We are all human, it's a really simple truth, even if people are going through difficult times we are all trying to survive. We are all here because of circumstance. In my younger years everyone told me I would spend my life in prison, but there was a little spark inside of me that thought – 'no, I'm a poet.' I want the artists to know that their work is valuable, in terms of expression and adding to the whole conversation about life. The same for people who visit the show – it's good art!"*

**Sally Taylor, Chief Executive of The Koestler Trust said:** *"We are delighted to be working in partnership with Southbank Centre on our ninth UK Exhibition curated by renowned writer and dub poet Benjamin Zephaniah. Benjamin has selected works that are colourful, vibrant and reflect themes of the natural environment and time - themes that connect us all as humans."*

#ENDS#

**For further press information and images please contact:**

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**For more information on the Koestler Trust please contact:**

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## **OPENING DAY**

Thursday 15 September 2016, 2pm - 7:30pm

**2pm – 3pm** - Official exhibition opening by Benjamin Zephaniah with speeches, performance and a panel discussion exploring behind the scenes of the exhibition - The Clore Ballroom

**4pm & 6pm** - Exhibition Tours led by ex-prisoner exhibition hosts

Meet at the exhibition entrance, Spirit Level, Royal Festival Hall

**3pm – 7.30pm** - Koestler Pop-up Art Shop, Spirit Level at Royal Festival Hall

**The Koestler Pop-up Art Shop** will be open at various times throughout the exhibition run on the Spirit Level at Royal Festival Hall. It provides a chance to see and purchase even more original art by entrants to the Koestler Awards, as well as merchandise. A 25% donation from sales of original artwork goes to Victim Support. See [www.koestlertrust.org.uk](http://www.koestlertrust.org.uk) for details.

#### **Exhibition artwork for sale**

Some artworks in the exhibition are for sale, please contact the Koestler Trust on 020 8740 0333 if you are interested in purchasing an artwork and supporting the work of the Trust.

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#### **LISTINGS INFORMATION**

*We Are All Human*: Art by offenders, secure patients and detainees from the 2016 Koestler Awards - curated by Benjamin Zephaniah

15 September – 13 November 2016

Spirit Level, Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre, London SE1 8XX

Daily 10am – 11pm, FREE

[www.southbankcentre.co.uk](http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk)

#### **VOICES FROM PRISONS EVENT - PART OF LONDON LITERATURE FESTIVAL**

Friday 14 October 2016, 6:30pm, Level 5 Function Room, Royal Festival Hall

The Koestler Trust presents an evening of art created in custodial settings and by ex-offenders. The event is run in conjunction with the *We are all Human* exhibition and celebrates award-winning music, poetry and prose entries submitted to the Koestler Awards. The event provides an insight into the varied music and writing projects within secure settings and features live performances, recordings and discussion.

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#### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**About Southbank Centre**

Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre, occupying a 21 acre site that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 Festival of Britain. Southbank Centre is home to the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery as well as The Saison Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. For further information please visit [www.southbankcentre.co.uk](http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk). Southbank Centre is carrying out vital restoration work on the Hayward Gallery, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room to make the buildings fit for future generations to enjoy, more information can be found here: [letthelightin.southbankcentre.co.uk](http://letthelightin.southbankcentre.co.uk)

**The Koestler Trust** is the UK's leading prison arts charity. Founded by writer Arthur Koestler (author of the classic prison novel *Darkness at Noon*), it has been awarding, exhibiting and selling artworks by offenders, detainees and secure patients for 54 years. The Koestler Awards receive over 6,000 entries a year in 52 artforms from over 300 prisons and other establishments - inspiring offenders to take part in the arts, raise their aspirations and transform their lives. Koestler exhibitions attract 50,000 visitors at venues across the country annually - showing the public the talent and potential of offenders and people in secure settings. The Trust has no endowment or capital - its work depends entirely on grants and donations.

The Koestler Trust's aims are:

- To help offenders, secure patients and detainees lead more positive lives by motivating them to participate and achieve in the arts
- To increase public awareness and understanding of arts by offenders, secure patients and detainees
- To be a dynamic, responsive organisation, which achieves excellent quality and value for money.

### **About Benjamin Zephaniah**

Benjamin Zephaniah was one of the pioneers of the performance poetry scene in Britain. He was part of the 'school' known as the 'Dub Poets'; who worked alongside reggae music. He has spent most of his life performing around the world in schools, universities, prisons, concert halls, and in public spaces. His poetry mixes serious issues with humour and is accessible to a wide range of people. He was the first person to record with The Wailers after the death of Bob Marley in a musical tribute to Nelson Mandela, other musical collaborations include the Bomb The Bass, Sinéad O'Connor, Brian Eno, Kinobe, Todla T, and Peter Gabriel. He has published numerous novels and books of poetry, and is a visiting professor at De Montfort University, Leicester and Professor of Poetry & Creative Writing at Brunel University.

[Benjaminzephaniah.com](http://Benjaminzephaniah.com)