

IT'S NOT ALL BLACK AND WHITE



AN EXHIBITION OF ARTWORK PRODUCED BY MEN
SERVING PRISON SENTENCES AT HMP GRENDON

THE GUARDIAN GALLERY AT KING'S PLACE
20 MARCH – 18 APRIL 2014

THE SAME HANDS AND MINDS THAT HAVE BROUGHT ABOUT SUCH THINGS AS PAIN, SORROW AND DESTRUCTION – THROUGH ART CAN BRING SUCH THINGS AS SMILES, JOY AND WONDER

It's Not all Black and White

Through the artist in residence programme at HMP Grendon we present an exhibition of artwork produced by prisoners serving their sentences within this unique prison environment, which is a national resource for the prison system of England and Wales.

HMP Grendon, founded in 1962, is the only prison in the country that wholly operates as a therapeutic community. It takes men – all of whom have volunteered to go to the prison, who have been described as 'damaged, dangerous and disturbed'. Some of the men have elevated scores on Hare's Psychopathy Checklist or suffer from personality disorders. They have all committed serious, usually violent offences, and have often posed major control problems within the other prisons in which they have served their sentences.

Despite this, within the therapeutic communities at HMP Grendon, these men find ways, working together with the prison's staff, of coming to terms not only with their sentences and offending pasts, but also begin to learn ways to stop re-offending in the future. This approach works. Research evidence from a variety of Home Office and National Offender Management Service sources show that if a prisoner stays at least 18 months in therapy at HMP Grendon he is significantly less likely to re-offend. Many stay for several years.

Despite the long offending histories of the prisoners that HMP Grendon works with, the prison has some of the lowest numbers of infractions against prison discipline in the penal system; excellent staff-prisoner relationships; low levels of self-harm, drug abuse and institutional violence, within a truly democratic regime which allows prisoners a voice in how the prison is managed.

These are remarkable achievements – most recently acknowledged by Nick Hardwick, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, who described HMP Grendon as "an important national resource, working successfully with some of the system's most serious offenders" in his latest inspection report about the prison.

This exhibition seeks to explore the artist/prisoner/audience relationship and features work produced by the prisoners during the residency of Lorna Giézet – the only artist in residence working full time within a British prison since 2011–2014.

Lorna's residency has been wholly funded by monies provided by the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust (MLvM Trust) administered by the registered charity, The Grendon Friends Trust – which is more usually known as 'the Friends of Grendon' or 'FoG'. FoG supports the therapeutic work that goes on within the prison and so, for example, has helped to build a Visitors' Centre at the prison and a play area for children. This is a unique collaboration between the MLvM Trust and FoG and pays tribute to Marie-Louise von Motesiczky's (1906–1996) artistic career, which spanned seventy years – most of it within England, after Marie-Louise fled to London with her mother in 1939. Work by Marie-Louise can be found in several public galleries, including Tate (London), the National Portrait Gallery (London) the Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge) and the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere and Museum Wien (Vienna). Marie-Louise visited Wormwood Scrubs where she chose to spend her eighty-seventh birthday in 1993.

Further details about the residency can be found on the MLvM Trust website (www.motesiczky.org) but, at its heart, the residency has allowed the men to create

work through individual, collaborative, wing and prison-wide projects using drawing, painting, printing, sculpture and animation. Sessions are held weekly and are open to everyone. Participants have ranged from those who have no confidence or art skills to others who are already passionately engaged in the subject. It has provided access to the subject of art and offered the prisoners a chance to develop their interests with a practicing artist.

The works of art generated from this project have been exhibited both within the prison and outside, and have quickly come to form a rich body of work that captures the unique effects art can have upon us all. Comments from the men at include:

‘I have been painting for many years within my sentence, it allows me to express a positive and constructive side that exists in my character. I am now at a point when I will ask for a canvas and paints funded via the trust. I have great encouragement and enjoyable debates...and with the support of the trust I hope to pay this back with my work and efforts.’

‘Having the ability to discuss my pieces and influences has opened my eyes forever to what I can achieve.’

‘[The artist in residence] makes you work to do yourself justice, to open yourself, because she knows you’ll be happier when you’ve achieved the next level. She encourages you to challenge yourself AND enjoy it.’

As these comments indicate, art made by prisoners is prospering, thanks to support and encouragement from inside and outside the penal system. As a consequence the public has increasingly had greater access to the work produced, through charities, media coverage, national

exhibitions, online galleries and eBay. Despite the obvious carceral barriers, prison dialogues can still occur between maker and viewer.

This exhibition is our latest attempt to keep that dialogue alive.

The metaphor of ‘canvas as window’ is often heard in reference to art produced by prisoners. In reality there is no two-way viewing available – the audience can ‘look in’ but the prisoner cannot equally ‘look out’.

Regardless of this misconception, it has become something of a motif, associated with allowing the audience a valuable insight into incarceration and the prisoner their creative voice. But what lies beyond this story – what about the person beyond the prisoner?

This exhibition aims to examine the disquiet in the interdependence of the audiences’ proclivity and the artist’s creative freedom and asks the viewer to consider the exchanges between the creator and the audience, traced in the supply and demand of the work.

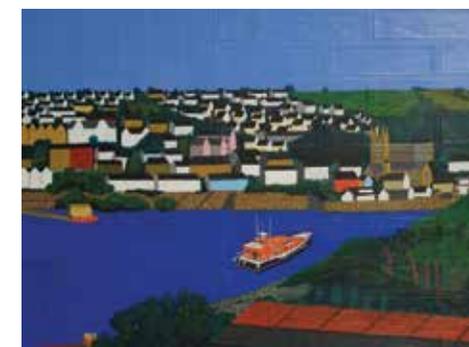
These points lie at the heart of some of the questions this exhibition aims to ask:

- What expectations do audiences have of artwork produced by prisoners?
- What expectations do prisoners feel in producing artwork for a public audience?
- What do labels such as ‘prison art’, ‘Prisoner Art’ and ‘art by prisoners’ represent to the artist/prisoner/ audience relationships?

To help to answer some of these questions, we offer a selection of comments made by the men whose work you can see being exhibited.

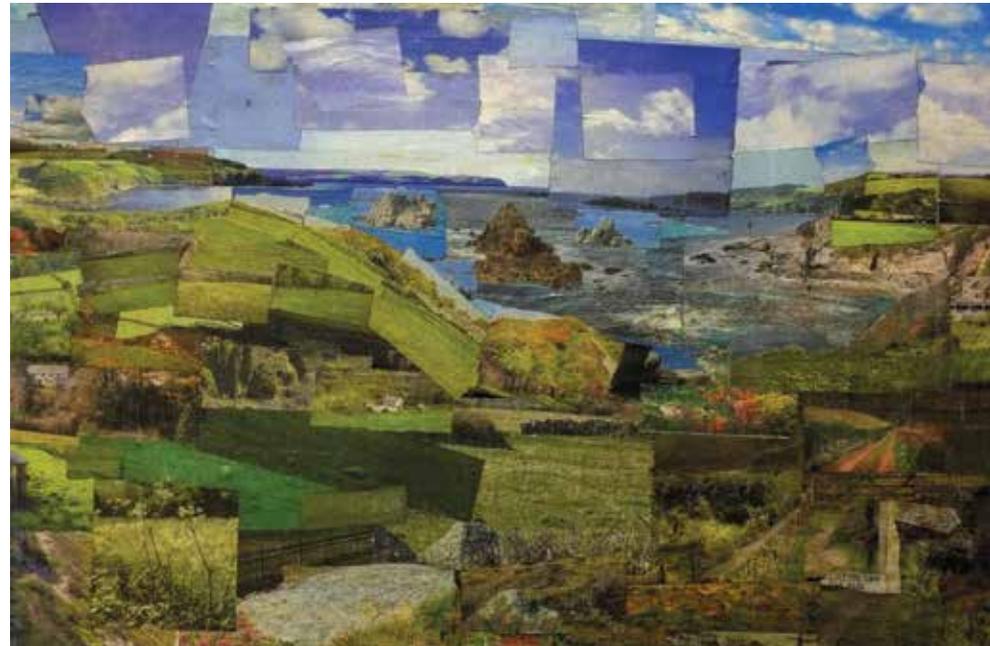


Clockwise from top left:
AJ, *Untitled*, pastel on paper
 58 x 41 cm
CA, *The House*, acrylic on canvas
 152 x 122 cm
Uncredited, *Sea Bay*, acrylic on canvas
 76 x 102 cm
Uncredited, *Letter*, watercolour on paper
 43 x 30.5 cm





Top: Uncredited, *Animals*
charcoal, 28 x 41 cm



Bottom: CA, *Mixed Memories 1*
collage on canvas, 39.5 x 60 cm

JW: One reason we would all like to show our work with you is to allow ourselves the chance to feel more than bodies thrown behind bars. We all accept that we have committed some really nasty offences.

I myself take on full responsibility for the murder I committed, but at the same time I would say quite often the same hands and minds that have brought about such things as pain, sorrow and destruction – through art can bring such things as smiles, joy and wonder.

SP: It occurs to me as I sit here surrounded by the last six canvases that I have painted in the last year, that I still possess a craving to acquire another to sate my need to be creative. In the five years I've been able to pursue my painting I've been greatly comforted by it.

The pictures themselves are neither accomplished nor beautiful but they are a way to transcend the everyday monotony of being confined within four walls. They are in themselves my outward expression, a way to reach others and be heard.

My work is not about prison or life behind bars but about my dreams, imaginations and my past experiences. The irony of the title of this piece (of writing) is that I work most productively within my cell and that whilst attending art classes and discussion groups may be a good conduit to ideas, they are not ideal places for producing work.

TP: Prior to prison, no-one was interested in me or the art I made, since being inside, all of a sudden, people want to know all about me.

GH: Prison art: is it art about Prison, or art by prison? Personally I've read too many poems about loneliness, remorse, guilt, shame and a hopeful redemption, as well as pictures of views through a keyhole or

from a cell window, too many handcuffs, balls, chains and keys, and sad faces in the visits hall and exercise yard. It's all very formulaic, clichéd and twee. I also find it very self-pitying. I'm sure every prisoner has gone through this phase, it's standard fare, and I also believe it's an essential part of the punitive aspect of prison. But surely of greater importance is rehabilitation, replacing old habits and behaviours with new direction and skills.

I learned to draw and write whilst IN prison, I had no time prior to this, I'm sure I'm not alone. We're talking untapped potential. I'd rather be a writer than a murderer. Our predicament may well have provided us with the time to find talents we never knew existed, we should be encouraged to exploit them but I don't think it ought to be our preoccupation. Prisoner is my occupation. And I used to have a hobby, now I write and draw, avoiding anything to do with prison. Materially I am restricted by prison, there are media that are totally unavailable to me, but my imagination is governed by no such constraints.

I may write or paint and yes, there are personally significant aspects to both, but the audience will, I hope, enjoy the story or picture on its merits; its technical execution or plot. It is immaterial that I am a prisoner if you are moved by my work: a beautiful painting is still a beautiful painting regardless. And in truth doesn't your enjoyment of a piece I produce go some way, no matter how small, to redress the hurt I have caused? I'm not attempting to paint my conscience clear, I'm merely suggesting that I still have the ability to contribute something positive to the society that I live in. And isn't that re-integration?

Who'd have thought that painting could fulfill all three aspects of a sentences' intention – punitive, rehabilitative re-integration.

We use this exhibition to formally bring Lorna's residency to a conclusion. However, FoG is delighted to announce that – once more through monies made available by the MLvM Trust, and now supported by Ikon Gallery – a second artist in residence will begin work in the prison later in 2014. Ikon have also facilitated this exhibition at the Guardian.

About HMP Grendon

Grendon was opened in 1962 as an experimental psychiatric prison to provide treatment for prisoners with antisocial personality disorders, under the direction of a medical superintendent.

HMP Grendon is jointly managed with HMP Springhill (situated next door) Although sharing a number of common services Springhill and Grendon operate as separate units.

Over the years it has been brought more in line with the rest of the prison estate and is now run by a prison service governor. It does, however continue to operate a unique regime in its therapeutic care of prisoners.

Currently Grendon can house up to 235 residents in Cat B secure conditions, with each of its six wings operating as autonomous therapeutic communities.

The Grendon regime is unique, as the therapeutic programme is the core work of the establishment. The therapeutic programme is based on therapeutic community principles, where a dedicated multidisciplinary team of staff work together with prisoners, in an atmosphere where attitudes and expressions, which would not normally be tolerated in prison, are accepted and used to give feedback to prisoners. This therapeutic dialogue leads to prisoners' greater understanding of their usual behaviour. Grendon aims to help prisoners develop more positive relationships, to change how they relate to others and to reduce their risk of re-offending.

Next page clockwise from top left:
Uncredited, *Face*, watercolour on paper 31 x 40 cm;
Uncredited, *Security*, acrylic on canvas 102 x 76 cm;
TP, *Rose Grendon*, acrylic on canvas 101 x 76 cm





Further Information

The artist in residency programme 2010–2014 has been formally evaluated by Dr Laura Caulfield, formerly of Birmingham City University and now Bath Spa University. Copies of Dr Caulfield's evaluation are available on request via: l.caulfield@bathspa.ac.uk

Further information about HMP Grendon can be found in a variety of places – most obviously on the NOMS website – www.justice.gov.uk For those interested in more academic accounts of the work of the prison, the best starting point is E Genders and E Player (1994) *Grendon: A Study of a Therapeutic Prison*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. For a prisoner's perspective on life at HMP Grendon the most recent account is Noel "Razor" Smith (2011) *A Rusty Gun: Facing Up To A Life of Crime*, London: Penguin Group.

For those interested in the work of FoG, please write to:

Prof David Wilson, Chair FoG
c/o HMP Grendon
Grendon Underwood, nr Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire HP18 0TL.

Each year, as part of their fund-raising activities, FoG take about twelve visitors into the prison to have lunch with the prisoners. The Guardian journalist Libby Brooks wrote about her experience in 'A Weekend Behind Bars Showed Me Why This Prison Is Precious' on 29 October 2009.

Previous page from top:
PO, *Segregating the Pig*, ink drawing,
28 x 40 cm, courtesy of
The Dark Urban Tale
PO, *Tattooing Pigs*, ink drawing,
28 x 40 cm, courtesy of
The Dark Urban Tale

Funding

The Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (no.7572024) and a registered charity (no.1140890).

Further information about the Charity can be found on its web site www.motesiczky.org

Support

Ikon Gallery is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue based in Birmingham and is supported using public funding by Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. www.ikon-gallery.org

Ikon Gallery Limited trading as Ikon registered charity no. 528892.

Acknowledgements

The Friends of Grendon would like to thank: the MLvM Trust and especially Frances Carey; Dr Jamie Bennett, the Governor of HMP Grendon; Lorna Giézet; Ikon Gallery – especially Debbie Kermode and Roma Piotrowska; Birmingham City University; Dr Laura Caulfield; the residents and staff of HMP Grendon; and the Guardian – especially Libby Brooks.

Photography of works by Richard Short



Cover: CA, *Not Everything is Black and White*, acrylic on canvas, 76x102cm

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20 March – 18 April 2014



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Admission free