

PRESS RELEASE INFORMATION

Snail Porridge

9 May to 15 June 2014

Koestler Trust and Castlefield Gallery present Snail Porridge: an exhibition of art by offenders curated by artist Bob and Roberta Smith.

Castlefield Gallery, the Koestler Trust and Bob and Roberta Smith have come together in a unique collaboration: *Snail Porridge*, an exhibition of artwork, music and writing from prisons, secure hospitals, secure children's homes and by people on probation in the North West.

The works in the exhibition have been selected by Bob and Roberta Smith from entries to the Koestler Awards – an annual scheme which has been running for over 50 years by the UK's best known prison arts charity, promoting artistic achievement in the criminal justice system and secure sectors.

Renowned for his humorous, opinionated, polemical art, Bob and Roberta Smith is known for using text as an art form. His best known works are *Make Art Not War* (1997), a work which belongs to the Tate collection and *Letter To Michael Gove* (2011), a letter to the UK Secretary of State for Education reprimanding him for the "destruction of Britain's ability to draw, design and sing". In 2013 Bob and Roberta Smith initiated the Art Party with Crescent Arts, Scarborough. Not a formal political party, the Art Party is a loose grouping of artists and organisations who are deeply concerned about the Government diminishing the role of art and design in schools and who seek to better advocate the arts to Government. Art Party the Movie will be released by Cornerhouse, Manchester in Summer 2014.

Snail Porridge, a title taken from a work of the same name selected for the exhibition, will see Bob and Roberta Smith recreate within Castlefield Gallery, a section of the Koestler Trust headquarters where thousands of artworks are sent from prisons and other secure establishments across the UK to be judged for awards and considered for exhibition. Bob and Roberta Smith has identified several themes in the work including Silence, remembered images of a life outside; Your Inner Being, well-being and inner peace; Snail Porridge, art as a tool for escape to fantasy worlds; and Deal or No Deal, art as a product of prison life. The works will be exhibited alongside a brand new piece by Bob and Roberta Smith inspired by his visit to the Koestler Trust.

"I was amazed to be part of putting together this show 'Snail Porridge'. I was overwhelmed by the Koestler Trust itself and by staging a partial recreation of the Koestler Trust headquarters in the Castlefield Gallery, I have tried to give a 'feel' for what the determination and generosity of the Koestler charity involves." **said Bob and Roberta Smith** *"By providing goals to work towards, rewarding achievement and celebrating humanity, the Koestler Trust listens to prisoners' voices. Making this show has been a great privilege. I hope the visitors to Castlefield Gallery enjoy hearing and looking at what the artists have to say."*

As part of Castlefield Gallery's main curated programme and sitting within the Self-Made strand, this exhibition will be situated firmly within a critical contemporary art context. *Snail Porridge* will offer visitors the opportunity to see an eclectic mix of artwork by artists working outside the 'Art World' or conventional 'Gallery System' and to reflect on the work of the Koestler Trust itself. The exhibition invites people to consider the values and ethics of promoting artistic achievement in the criminal justice and secure sectors, as well as encouraging creativity and the acquisition of new skills as a means to rehabilitation.

Tim Robertson, Koestler Trust Chief Executive, said *"After more than half a century of motivating and exhibiting art in prisons, the Koestler Trust is being taken in an audacious new direction. Art has a serious purpose in criminal justice: it makes offenders pursue the discipline and truthfulness that are essential to building lives free from crime. But lots of prison art is also great art, and this exhibition brings it into the heart of the contemporary art world - curated by one of the country's most radical artists, in the North West's most cutting-edge gallery. Like lots of contemporary art, Bob and Roberta Smith's installation is a mix of witty, moving and controversial – a multi-faceted setting to explore the complex human experiences of crime, punishment and creativity. What's disconcerting for the Koestler team is that the show re-creates the building where we work!"*

For further information, images or to arrange interviews, please contact: Jennifer Dean, Communications and Audience Development Coordinator at Castlefield Gallery, on jennifer@castlefieldgallery.co.uk / 0161 832 8034 / 07766046672 OR Ria Sloan, Exhibitions Coordinator, at the Koestler Trust on rsloan@koestlertrust.org.uk / 020 8740 0333

Listing information

Exhibition: Snail Porridge
Preview: Thursday 8 May 6-8pm
Exhibition Dates: 9 May to 15 June 2014
Venue: Castlefield Gallery, 2 Hewitt Street, Manchester, M15 4GB
Tel: 0161 832 8034
Web: www.castlefieldgallery.co.uk
Opening Times: Wed to Sun 1pm – 6pm
Admission: FREE. The gallery is fully wheelchair accessible

Notes to Editors

The Koestler Trust is the UK's best-known prison arts charity and has been awarding, exhibiting and selling artworks by offenders and detainees and secure patients for more than half a century.

The trust's awards receive up to 8,000 entries a year - inspiring offenders to take part in the arts, work for achievement and transform their lives. The exhibitions show the public the talent and potential of offenders and people in secure settings. The trust has no endowment or capital and depends entirely on donations.

The 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.

The awards were set up by Arthur Koestler. In the 1950s Koestler campaigned for the abolition of capital punishment. It became clear the campaign would be successful and he turned his attention to “an imaginative and exciting way to stimulate as far as possible and in as many cases as possible the mind and spirit of the prisoner”. As a result he set up an awards scheme for literature, art and science by “those who are physically confined”. The idea was welcomed by Home Secretary R A Butler and the first award scheme, in 1962, attracted nearly 200 entries.

The Koestler Awards cover 60 different artforms including visual art as well as music, writing, film and project work. The entries are judged by over 100 professional artists, writers and musicians. Koestler Awards entrants receive certificates, and many receive written feedback about their artwork from a judge or a member of the Koestler Arts Team. Around a third of all entrants receive an Award, ranging from Commended to Platinum, and many of these are named by supporters of the Koestler Trust. The higher Awards carry a cash prize – from £20 for a Bronze Award to £100 for a Platinum Award. Each year the prize money totals around £30,000.

Past Koestler Trust exhibition curators include Sarah Lucas (*Free*, Royal Festival Hall, London, 2012) and Grayson Perry (*Insider Art*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 2007). In 2013 Jeremy Deller worked with the Koestler Trust to facilitate prisoners’ artwork for his exhibition *English Magic* at the Venice Biennale, commissioned by the British Council.

For further information about the Koestler Trust visit the website at <http://www.koestlertrust.org.uk/index.html>

Castlefield Gallery (CG) Founded in 1984, CG is one of Northern England's most active and successful organisations/agencies for developing emerging contemporary artists and practice. Its ambitious curated exhibitions programme responds to national and international trends, promoting artists at key stages of their careers, including subsequent Turner Prize nominees/winners and exhibitors at international festivals. Central to CG’s activities is an artist development programme including the CG Associates members scheme and the recently launched New Art Spaces. CG’s vision is for the North to be where artists can develop work of international standing. Its mission is to nurture talent, explore cultural trends and deepen audience's relationship to contemporary art.

Castlefield Gallery’s curated programme encompasses four original curated exhibitions per year, often working in collaboration with artists, curators and partners. The four exhibition strands are: **ReView** - solo shows by mid-career or established artists making work that challenges contemporary art practices and inspires emerging generations of practitioners and audiences; **Art & Society** – exhibitions co-curated with artists or non-curators that turns the notion of traditional curating and display on its head. Lifted from Herbert Read’s book of the same title, these projects often have socially engaged collaborative elements; **Head to Head** - curated exhibitions that explore relationships between two artists’ practices, developing an intergenerational dialogue between an emerging artist and an artist of national and international recognition; and **Self-Made** - expanding the gallery’s definition of contemporary art (and ‘outsider art’) to encompass and explore notions of ‘nascent practices’, integrating it as a valid ‘art’ form into the wider dialogue around visual culture.

CG is supported by Arts Council England through Grants for the Arts (2012-14) and is a cultural partner of Manchester City Council (2012-15). CG is a limited company (Reg. No. 1838334) and registered charity (No. 515571) that owns its city centre venue thanks to Arts Council England's capital lottery funding in 2000.

Bob and Roberta Smith is a British artist who is best known for his text paintings which often display messages and slogans about the role of art in today's society. His best-known work includes *Make Art Not War* and *Letter to Michael Gove*.

Bob and Roberta Smith is the pseudonym of the artist Patrick Brill. He sees art as an important element in democratic life. His text pieces are often painted on found timber or board using glossy sign-writer's paint. Bob and Roberta Smith's work is currently focused on his campaign about how current education policy is affecting art education in schools.

He studied at the University of Reading from (1981-1985) and Goldsmiths College (1991), was a trustee of the Tate between 2009 and 2013 and is currently a trustee for the National Campaign for the Arts, a patron of the National Society for Education in Art and Design: NSEAD, and he has recently been elected to be a Royal Academician.

Bob and Roberta Smith has selected the visual work for the 2014 Koestler exhibition for the North West and has created an original artwork about his experience of visiting the Koestler Trust Headquarters.

Snail Porridge is kindly supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Arts Council England, the Granada Foundation and Manchester City Council.

