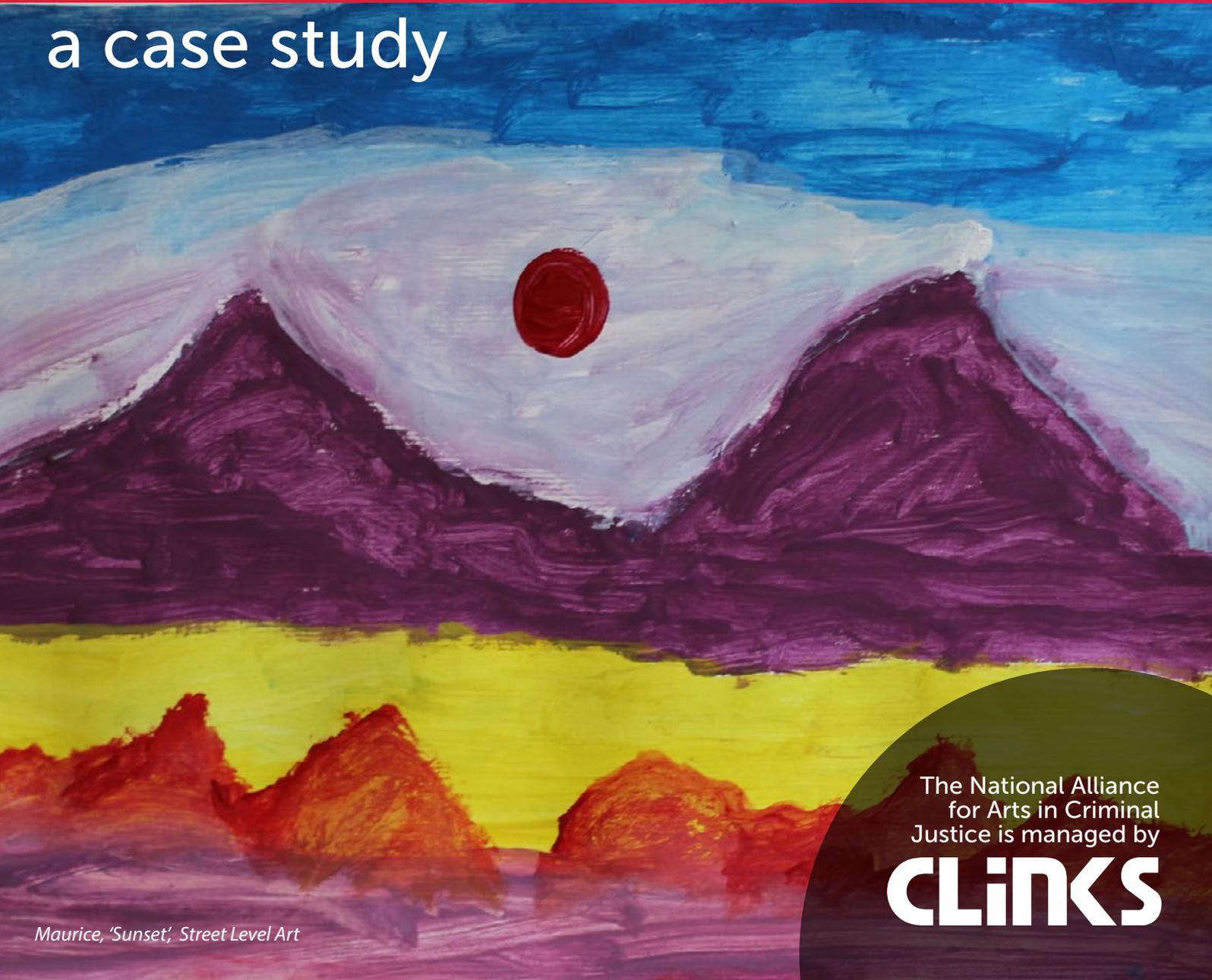


watts gallery
*a national gallery
working in collaboration
with prisons*
a case study

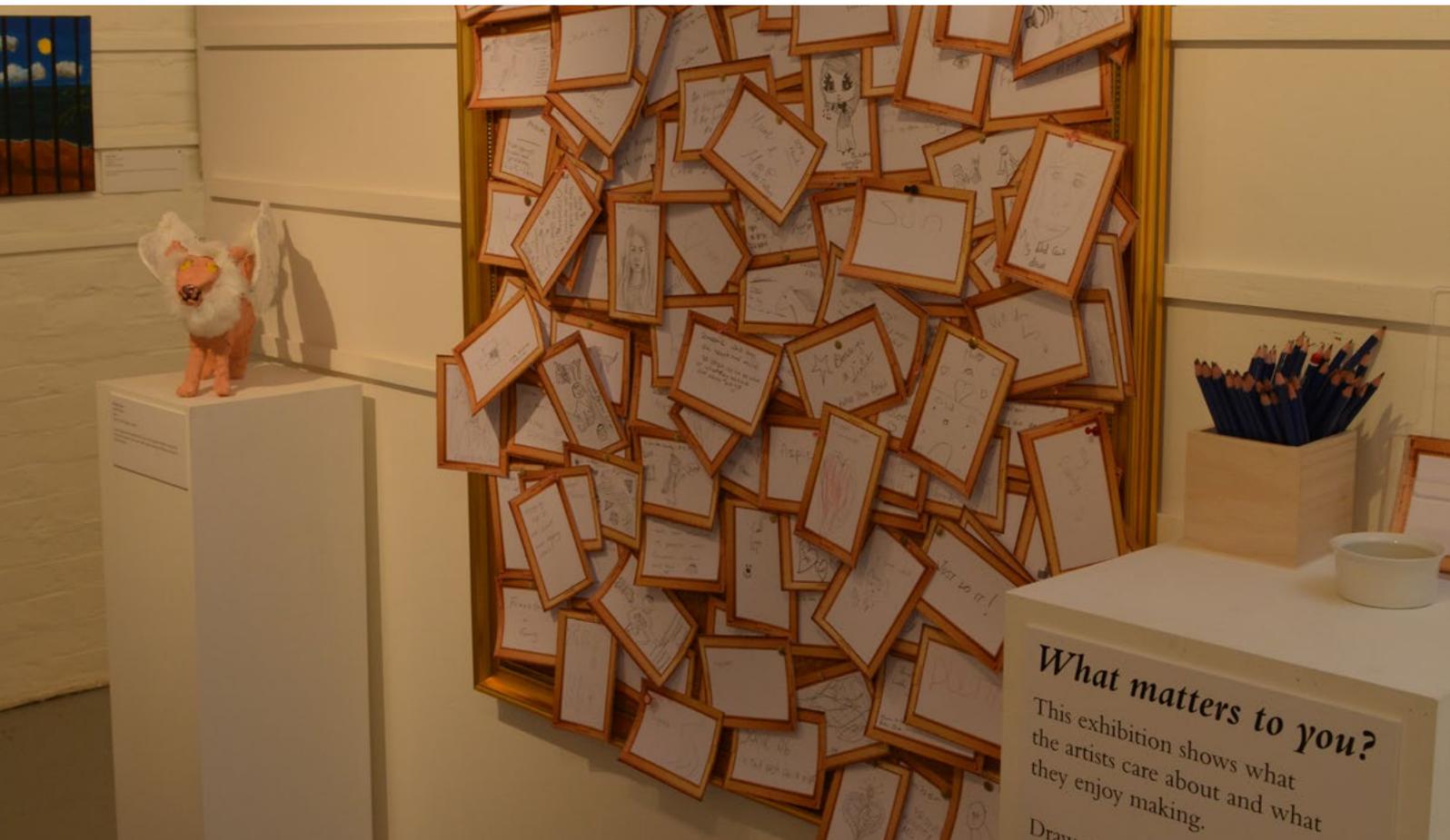




About the NAACJ case study series

One of the key threads running through the work of the National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice is the promotion of good practice within the arts and criminal justice sector. We want to encourage excellence amongst organisations and individuals working in this area, and ensure that our work continually encourages and celebrates good practice. To address this, we run a professional mentoring scheme, which expands opportunities for our members to develop professional skills and knowledge in the field of arts and criminal justice through a one to one mentoring relationship, and we continually update our online Evidence Library, which houses the key research and evaluation documents on the impact of arts-based projects, programmes and interventions within the Criminal Justice System.

On top of this, we want to explore and share some of the excellent work already happening in the sector on a more detailed level. We focus on interesting collaborations happening between arts organisations and criminal justice organisations, exploring how they work together and the impact this has on participants and the process of rehabilitation. This case study will look specifically at a national gallery working closely with its local prisons.



The Big Issues exhibition at the Watts Gallery

About the Watts Gallery and the Big Issues Project

First opening its doors to the public in 1904, the **Watts Gallery** in Compton, Surrey is a purpose-built art gallery created for the display of works by the Victorian artist George Frederic Watts OM RA (1817 – 1904). After a major restoration project, visitors can now experience the Watts collection in the historic galleries displaying the original decorative schemes.

Founded in 2009, The Big Issues project has grown out of the work of G.F Watts and his wife Mary Seton Watts. They cared deeply about a number of social, cultural and environmental issues that are still extremely pertinent in the present day. These concerns are reflected in G.F Watts' work, in philanthropic projects he and his wife supported and in public and community art projects they founded. At the heart of their work was the belief that art could transform lives, and they campaigned to widen access to art for people in society with least access to it.

The Big Issues project works with local community groups from in and around Surrey offering practical art, craft and design workshops led by professional artists and designers. The sessions help participants to develop confidence and learn transferable skills through creating art. Participants work towards creating finished pieces inspired by the Watts collection. Their art is then displayed in an annual exhibition in which participants are given the opportunity to sell their work.

Participating organisations

Prison work

In 2007, the government-commissioned **Corston Report** highlighted the plight of vulnerable women in the Criminal Justice System and made recommendations for an improved approach towards their rehabilitation. Drawing inspiration from G.F. Watts' ideas and works offering art for all, the Watts Gallery formed its partnership with HMP Send. The Sisters In Art group was subsequently formed, offering the women of HMP Send opportunities to acquire and practice new skills, an outlet for creative energies and emotions, recognition of achievements and encouragement to continue in the arts and education. Underpinning the project is the desire for the women to contribute to the content of The Big Issues exhibition whilst developing new skills. The project also works with HMP/YOI Bronzefield and HMP/YOI Feltham.

The Artist in Residence scheme at HMP Send, which has been running now for five years as part of The Big Issues project, provides a link between the inside and outside. A recent evaluation report by Laura Caulfield on the impact of an Artist in Residence scheme at HMP Grendon found that the presence of the residency quantitatively improved the prison environment. Additionally "participation in the residency enabled individuals to begin to redefine themselves, and important factor in working towards a successful, non-offending future." [L. Caulfield, 'Final evaluation of the Artist in Residence at HMP Grendon, 2014, p4].

Community work

Alongside their important work in prisons, the Watts Gallery also run The Big Issues project in community settings, working with groups such as Surrey Youth Support Service, Street Level Art, the Cellar Art Group, and Art Venture. Surrey Youth Support Service works with young people who are 16-19 years old in order to help them achieve their goals in work, education or training. During 2013/14, eleven young people attended weekly artist led workshops at the gallery to work towards their Bronze Arts Award qualification.

Street Level Art is an art rehabilitation group for people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction, homelessness and mental health problems. As part of the project, the group partakes in monthly workshops at the gallery, and has had the opportunity to explore a variety of creative activities, including clay modelling, painting, drawing and print-making.

The Cellar Art Group is based at the Cellar Christian Café in Godalming, which encourages people of all faiths and none to visit. It opens its doors to many disadvantaged or misunderstood groups, allowing people to meet and discuss any problems together with staff and volunteer helpers.

Outcomes and impact

The work the Watts Gallery is doing with prisons in the Surrey area, along with its community outreach, is invaluable in breaking down the barriers between those in prison and the general public. By displaying the work of the project participants in an acclaimed gallery space, they are accepted as artists and are able to have their voices heard. They also have a new, more positive 'label' – artist, rather than offender or ex-offender.

In addition to the annual exhibition and participation in workshops as part of the project, women prisoners have created a permanent sculpture at HMP Send. The sculpture was commissioned in 2012 by the Governor of HMP Send and saw the Artist in Residence and a group of prisoners calling themselves the 'Sisters in Art' create a life size sundial at the entrance of the prison. It is a female figure reaching skywards triumphantly breaking the chains wrapped around her body. The feet of the figure are encircled by 380 terracotta tiles decorated by members of the Send community: inmates, staff, and even sniffer dogs. These tiles follow in the tradition of terracotta modelling established by Mary Watt's creation of the Watts Chapel in Compton.

The women at the centre of this project, which focused on the theme of 'time', explained:

"It can represent a personal experience, a moment, a memory, whether time was good or bad. On first entering prison, the feelings of frustration, despair, regret and loss can be overwhelming. It is as if we have lost so much; many of us have families who depend on us and need us. With that comes the realisation that the wrong choices have affected many of us and we are here 'doing time'."

The sculpture is a permanent reminder of the value of the programme, and *"reinforces that it is possible to break the cycle and the chains that bind us, to be able to look skyward and plan for a better future."* [Jo Clunie, Director of KMPG Foundation – supporter of The Big Issues project].

Major national institutions such as museums and galleries can provide a link between being on the 'inside' and the outside world. When the National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice team visited the Watts Gallery to find out more about this project, we were told about a female prisoner who had been working from photographs of the Watts Cemetery Chapel (a Grade I listed building designed by Mary Watts and made by local villagers) during her time in prison. On her release, she finally got to visit the chapel in person; an overwhelming and very powerful moment considering the amount of hope the images of the chapel had given her. This individual has now found employment in the creative industries.

"On first entering prison, the feelings of frustration, despair, regret and loss can be overwhelming."



The sculpture at HMP Send "reinforces that it is possible to break the cycle and the chains that bind us, to be able to look skyward and plan for a better future." Jo Clunie, Director of KMPG Foundation – supporter of The Big Issues project

The Big Issues project has undoubtedly had a hugely successful impact on its participants:

"The Watts Gallery art workshops saved me. I had little hope and no self-esteem when I started the workshops. This was my turning point. I have enjoyed doing this course. I've gained my confidence back and instead of self-harming I've found that now when I get depressed I can just draw instead."

Dr Helen Bowcock DL, High Sheriff of Surrey has said:

"I have seen the way the Watts Gallery has reached out through The Big Issues programme to work with prisoners and with our rather exceptional Surrey Youth Support Service and its clients. I have also seen the extraordinary way in which Watts continues to speak to people through this symbolic art, engaging some who really believed that art was not for them, providing a new purpose and a means of expression."

Sally Varah, the Chair of the Michael Varah Memorial Fund (MVMF) who support The Big Issues project says:

"The fact that the Michael Varah Memorial Fund agreed initially to fund [the Artist in Residence post at HMP Send] for just one year and is still funding it four years on is entirely because we can see such positive outcomes for the participating women at HMP Send... it is one of the most life changing programmes that the MVMF funds."



"The Watts Gallery art workshops saved me."

Changing public perceptions

A strong link to the local community makes the work of institutions like the Watts Gallery vital for marginalised and vulnerable groups of people. In addition to their place at the heart of the community, galleries and museums can help project the voice of those who so often go unheard. By displaying the work of socially marginalised groups for the public to see, large national institutions are challenging the stigma surrounding who can and cannot be a part of society.

As part of a larger research project, the National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice asked UK prisoners their thoughts on prisoner arts products, including exhibitions, being open to the general public. The findings illustrated that the majority of all respondents said these outcomes should be shared with the general public as a way of altering public perception about offenders and prisons.

Showcasing their work to a public audience gave many survey respondents closure and a sense of completion. Additionally, highlighting offenders' successes – such as exhibitions and performances – in equal measure to their failures might help the media to represent them in a less biased way.

James, 'Pelican', Street Level Arts



Other galleries working with offenders and ex-offenders

Inside Art at the National Gallery

Inside Art, a project developed by the National Gallery and HMYOI Feltham, aims to engage young offenders in responding to the gallery's collection, inspiring them to explore their creativity and to develop practical, personal and communication skills.

The project consists of four practical art projects per year. Projects last one week and take place in Feltham's Art Academy: a centre providing a wide range of creative and performing arts courses, which aim to encourage rehabilitation and develop communication skills in preparation for release. Projects are delivered by freelance artists who work for the National Gallery. They use high quality large scale prints of paintings in the collection as inspiration for discussion and practice activities, focused on a particular theme.

www.nationalgallery.org.uk/learning/outreach-projects/inside-art

The V&A and HMP Wandsworth

In 2010, the Victoria & Albert Museum commissioned offenders from HMP Wandsworth – in collaboration with arts project Fine Cell Work – to produce a quilt for display in an exhibition at the museum. Hand pieced over paper, each hexagon on the quilt has been designed by an inmate and presents an aspect of contemporary prison life. The design is based on the floor plan of HMP Wandsworth and some of the cottons and wools are the same colour and weave as those used for the inmates' uniforms.

The emphasis of the collaboration was on creative expression, personal reflection and community, centred on the art of bringing the participants together to stitch. Many of the hexagons demonstrate a clear conversation with both the history of the British prison system and contemporary discourses on authority.

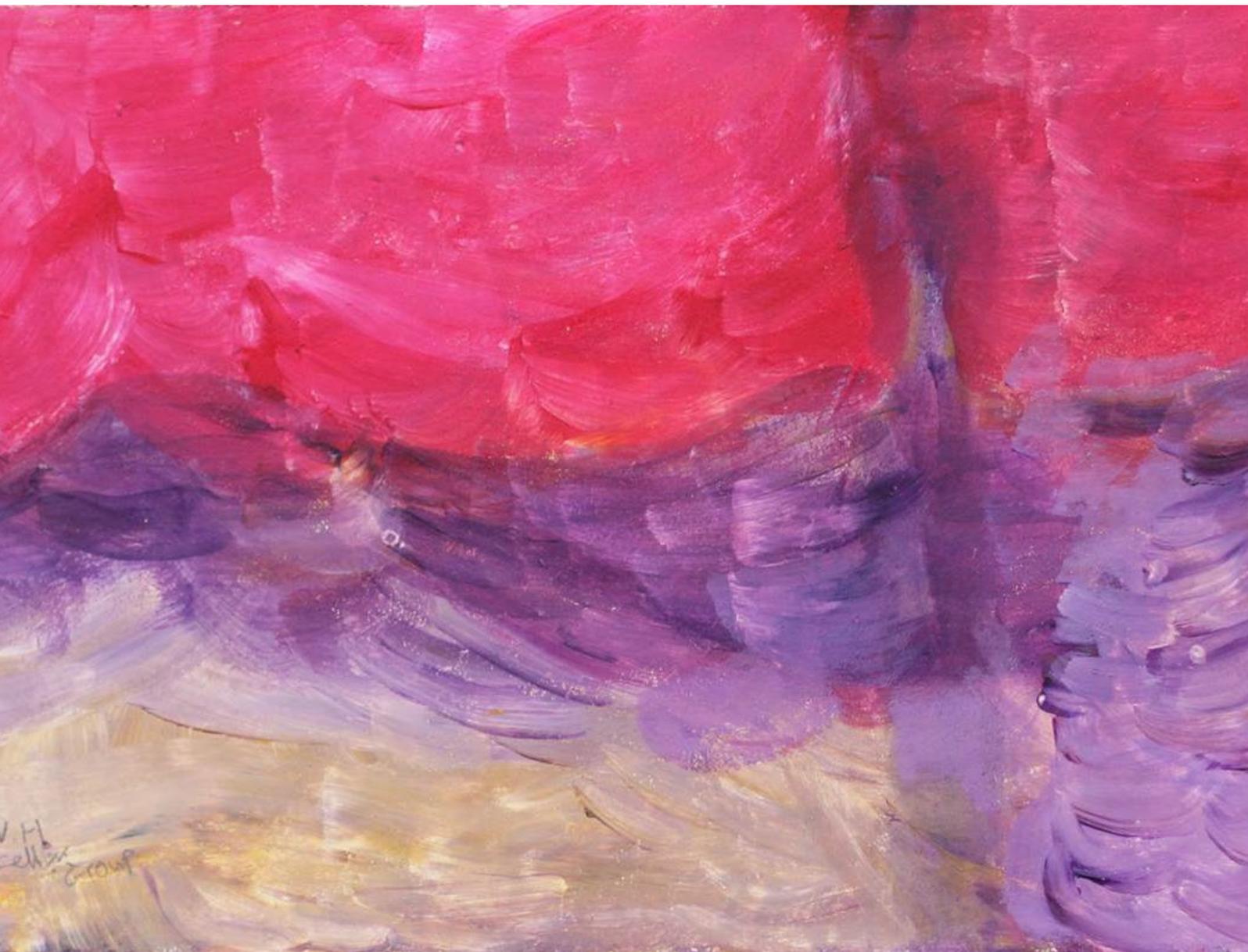
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1165208/hmp-wandsworth-quilt-quilt-hmp-wandsworth/>

The Koestler Trust

In addition to the above two collaborations, the Koestler Trust – a national prison arts charity – has held its annual exhibition at the Southbank Centre for the past seven years.

www.koestlertrust.org.uk

Susan, 'Tempestuous Sea', Cellar Art Group



Resources

For further information about museums and arts institutions working with prisons, the Museums Association have a whole sub-site dedicated to the topic:

www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/museums-and-prisons

The National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice's website also has a whole resource page for museums and galleries: www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk/resourcesmuseums

You can visit the Watts Gallery's website for more information on The Big Issues project:

www.wattsgallery.org.uk/learning/community-programme

Corston Report: www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/corston-report-march-2007.pdf



Case study written by Kate Davey, 2015
National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice

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www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk

The National Alliance for Arts in Criminal Justice is managed by Clinks; the national membership body which supports the voluntary sector working with offenders in England and Wales.

Clinks, Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9NA

www.clinks.org | info@clinks.org | 0207 383 0966

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*Lee, 'Letting it Pass Away',
Street Level Art*