

Keith Cooper finds a group of female convicts turning their prison experience into free-thinking creativity

Artistic salvation

An art exhibition that aims to help women prisoners escape incarceration has opened at the gallery run by Novas.

The housing group is not, of course, offering them the keys to the cells, but rather the chance to display their work in its north London exhibition space.

Mind, body and soul features paintings and collages by women who are serving or have served prison sentences. The influence of major artists such as Salvador Dalí, Edvard Munch and Frida Kahlo can be seen in their work. In *Night Demon* a tortured female figure is scrutinised by a Dalí-esque free-floating face, its eyes filled with images reminiscent of Munch's *Scream*.

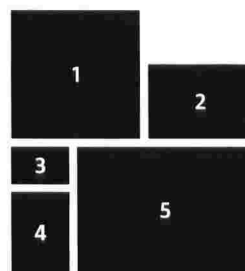
In another, entitled *Kate Moss*, a woman grips a hypodermic syringe between her painted fingernails while quoting an adapted epigram made famous by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. 'That, that don't kill me...only makes me stronger,' it says.

The more basic craving for freedom seems to have inspired a less conceptual work, formed of a simple sketch of a bird and a butterfly. 'Flying free' reads the caption.

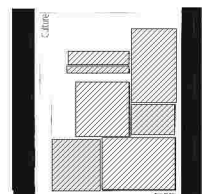
The disturbing nature of some of the imagery is partly explained by publicity produced for the exhibition. 'Most women in prison have experienced some form of domestic violence or have been victims of childhood abuse and many have mental health problems,' it states.

The exhibition has been put together by former prisoner Eve McDougall, whose work has been shown at major galleries including the Tate Modern.

● **Mind, body and soul, until 11 November, Novas Gallery, 73 Parkway, Camden, London, open Wednesday to Sunday, 11am to 5pm**



1. *Flying Free* by Sophie Henderson
2. *Night Demon* by Jayne Richards
3. *Untitled* by Eve McDougall
4. *Baby Prison Issue Uniform* by D. Begum
5. *Kate Moss* by Valerie Watson



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