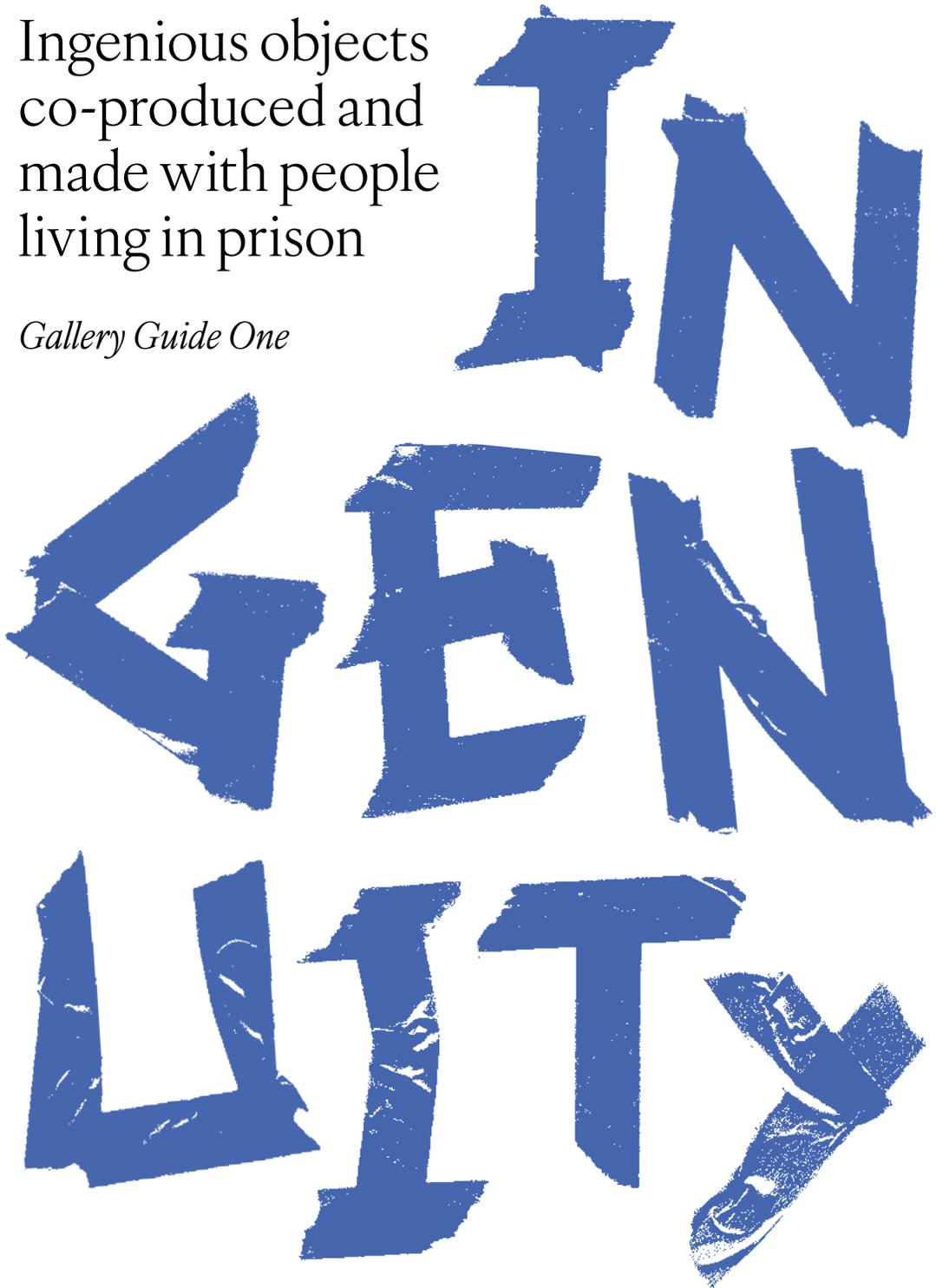


Ingenious objects  
co-produced and  
made with people  
living in prison

*Gallery Guide One*



#NJIngenuity

[nationaljusticemuseum.org.uk](http://nationaljusticemuseum.org.uk)

# Welcome to the *Ingenuity* exhibition. A sensitive and joyful exploration of ingenious creativity by people living in prison.

This interpretive guide is one of two, celebrating the carefully made objects and generously shared thoughts on display. Each guide reveals a different perspective on the exhibition. Use them in the way that feels right to you, to explore in the gallery or purchase from our shop to take home to reflect.

Here in 'guide one' you'll find information about the contemporary responses to our historic collection of objects made in prison settings. Inspired by the clever use of rudimentary materials and ingenious thinking, we crafted, cut, stitched, painted, sculpted, and sang with people to create what you see in the gallery. The artwork, songs and poetic texts were created in exploratory workshops, connecting our heads and hearts to amplify less heard voices from the past and present.

We worked closely and kindly across 54 prisons throughout the UK, with activity in our local community and a series of artist commissions. This ambitious project has connected people in open and closed communities with compassion and creativity.

Understanding and witnessing the desire and necessity to create in spaces of confinement was poignant and affirming. As you admire the artwork, take a moment to reflect on the tenacity and ingenuity required to make something beautiful or necessary where materials are scarce.

# Creative responses to historical object

## ENAMEL TILE

A collection of colourful spinners grew from a playful, materials led workshop. Exploring the historic enamel tile from the museum collection, we dripped, splattered, smudged and painted vibrant colours onto circular cards, imagining deep pools of water, bowls of soup and swirling galaxies. Words of hope, inspiration and memory were captured and layered onto the designs, and a spinning top was born! Twirling the component pieces together produces mesmerising art in motion.

This activity was co-produced with and named, *Spinning Tales*, by men at HMP Leicester. The prototype version was shaped in the prison library and made its way out to other prisons. A sharing of creativity, gifted from one person to another.

Some of the designs are represented graphically on the gallery wall. The *Spinning Tales* activity will move across Nottingham throughout the summer on our museum bicycle and pop up in the gallery during weekends.



ENAMEL TILE

A sorbet fruit salad delicate dish.  
My nan's Caribbean soup.  
Apple jalapeno pizza, with a side  
of egg and beetroot.  
Vibrant psychedelic paint pallet.  
Eyeballs. Kiwi fruit. Mediterranean.  
Chopped vegetables. Boiled sweets.  
Freshly made soup with cream  
stirred through it.  
A beach... the sand and water, with  
waves lapping over bright sea shells.  
Space, galaxies and stars.  
Flowery eye-like. Weird. Seasonal.  
Like an unwashed art room sink.

The things participants saw within the pattern.

## SPINNING TALES

Coloured in two-pence,  
Hence,  
In this art class  
One jumped over the fence.  
Folding paper, not causing an offense.  
Looking at patterns trying to make sense.  
Let go... karaoke.  
From Bob Marley  
Through to Elvis,  
Singing from the bottom of his pelvis.  
Unless you make a good few pence.  
Write with colour and spin  
So the words blur in.  
Visible once 'still'.  
Poetry in motion.  
Spinning art spill.



# Creative responses to historical object

## CAGED HEART

This voluptuous, vivid red heart, housed within a tight dark cage has proved to be one of the most evocative collection objects to share.

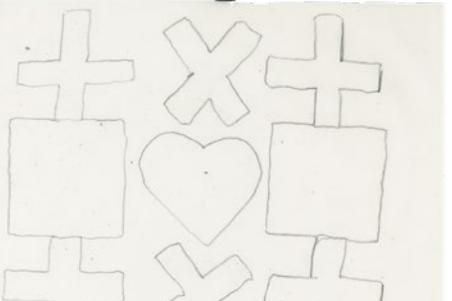
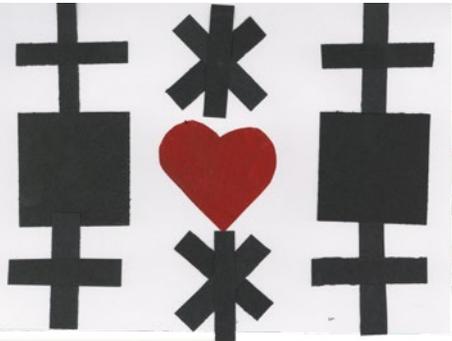
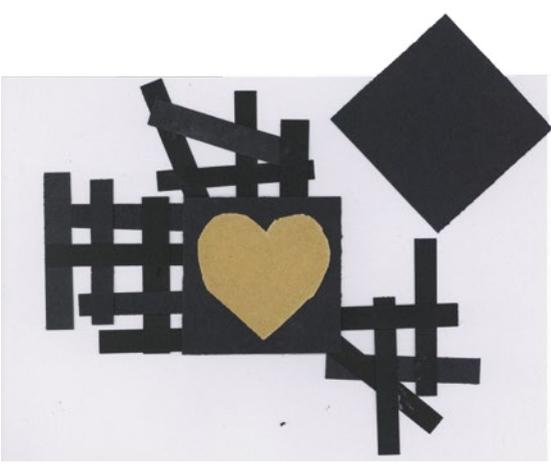
A tactile *Caged Heart* activity made its way by post to people in their cells during lockdown, and the object itself travelled with us to prisons across the country.

A gorgeous variety of heartfelt creative responses were produced, from collages, reimagined mini sculptures, and creative writing, to drawings, wooden maquettes, and a huge installation for the historic exercise yard at the museum.

Reflecting the basic material palette of the crafted historic objects, we used hand-cut sandpaper hearts, tiny black craft-card bars, and balsa wood components as tactile resources in these immersive workshops. Every reimagined *Caged Heart* structure is unique. Each holds its own special power in the space, all made with love and care.



CAGED HEART

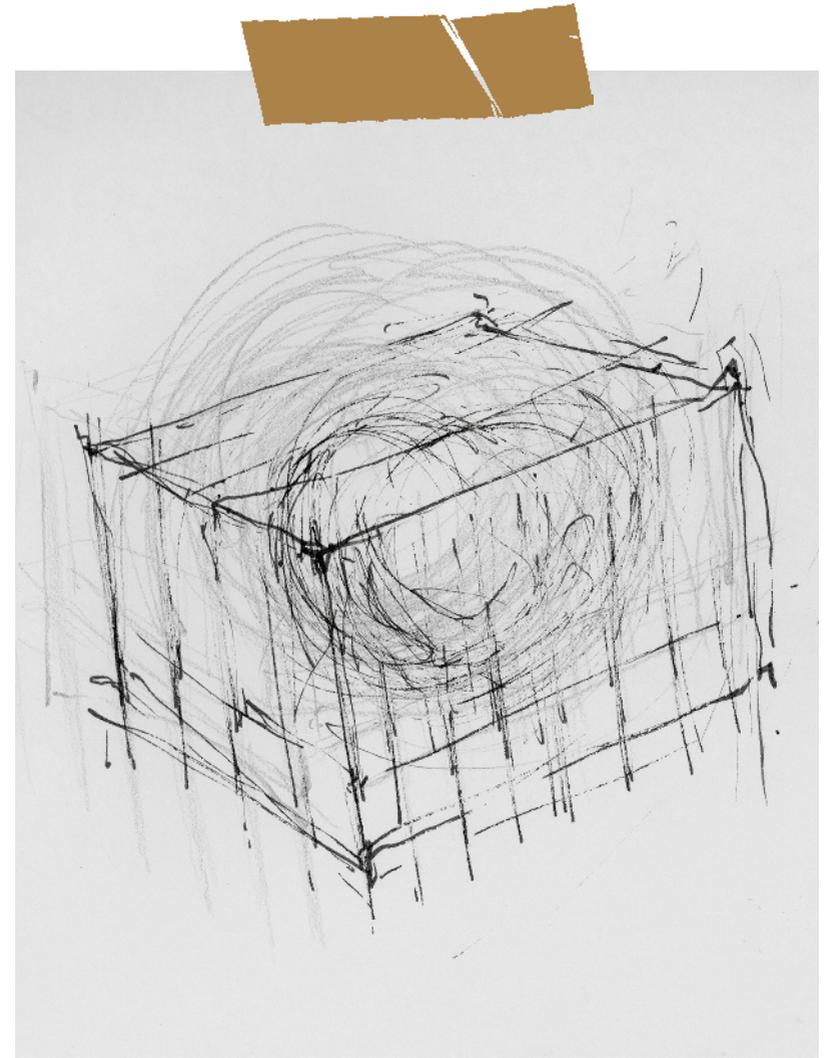


Moon and the star  
Caged in my heart  
Brain still scarred  
I need to stay apart  
This aint the end...  
It's the start

Participant  
HMP Birmingham

★ My ribs don't cage its heart  
She burst the parameters  
Relocating in  
The vicinity of the sleeve

Creative Commission: Matt (shortMAN)  
Poet





## CAGED HEART SCULPTURE

A giant *Caged Heart* sculpture in the museum's historic prison exercise yard was expertly designed and crafted in the carpentry workshops at HMP Liverpool by 27 skilful men. It stands as a potent symbol of love and compassion.

The sculpture began with a creative ideation, exploring thoughts and feelings ignited by the historic caged heart model from the museum collection. The men deconstructed and reimagined the object in different materials. Wooden maquettes were built and embellished, and poetic texts were added. The installation evolved iteratively across a series of workshops with each group passing ideas and techniques on to the next, as people came and went.

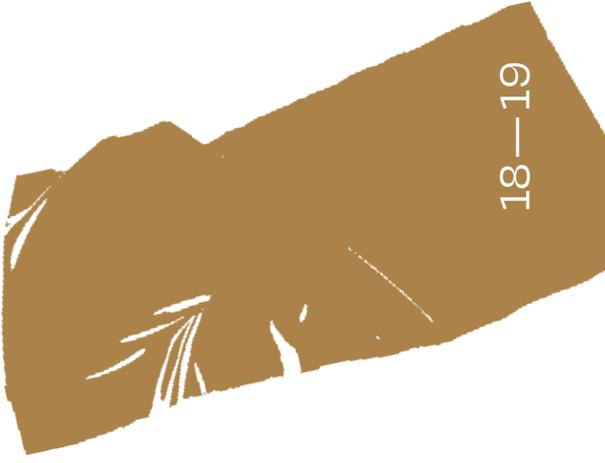
The final design features snapped bars, a revolving heart and a hand-routed inspirational quote — 'if you are not willing to learn, no one will help you. If you are determined to learn, no one can stop you.'

The work on this powerful structure has supported the men in achieving their City and Guilds qualification.



“It reflects a heart in a cage, within a prison, what that means to me personally is: That you can take the person out of the community, and away from family and loved ones, but you can’t take away your soul.”

“Fun to do. Interesting. Mind challenging. Interactive. Great working together as a team.”



18—19

“The one bar over the heart in my collage, is because I can only write ‘one bar’ (one verse). My sentence is almost up but I’m still not free yet. People will always judge you once you’ve been in prison, so that one bar will always remain”.

“You could have put anything in the cage. But here it is... Big, bursting out, big hearted. It says it all.”

“It’s good for mental health. Art is ‘the cure’. It’s therapeutic. Brushes up on your ‘brush’ (head/mind).”

“*We are someone* behind those bars. Not being able to express love on the outside. They think we haven’t got a heart. Assumptions about us. Haunts us.”

CAGED HEART

# Creative responses to historical object

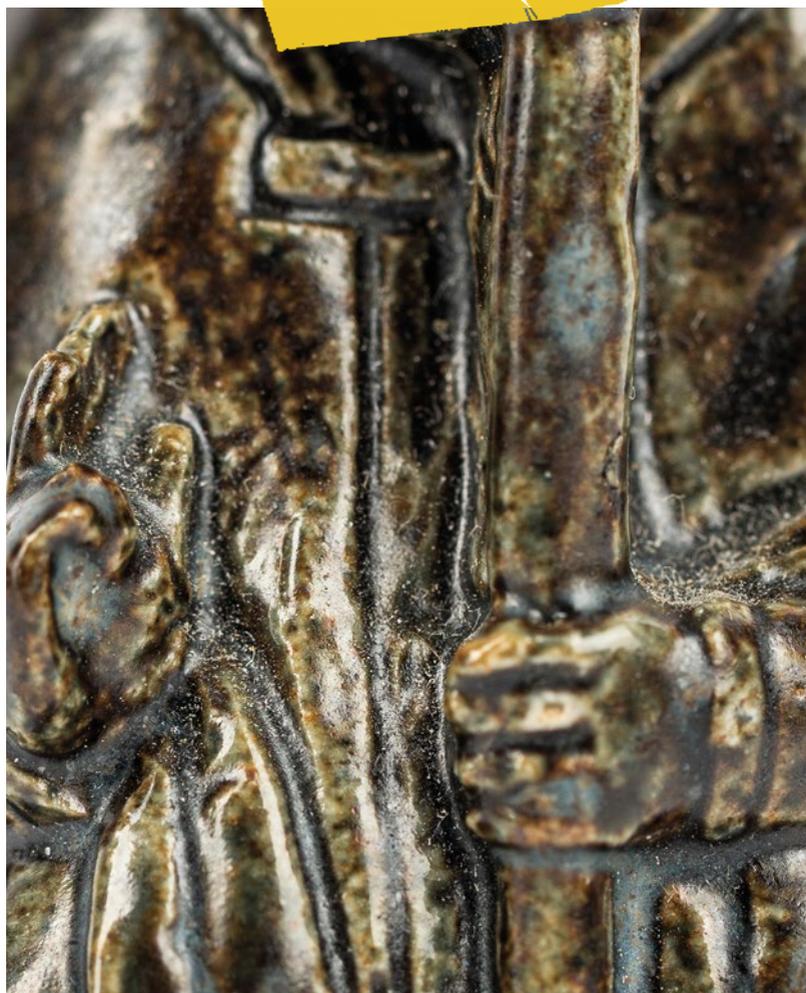
## CERAMIC CHESS SET

Inspired by the historic ceramic chess set, this constellation of body parts was made using bread, an ingenious material to sculpt with, rooted in the heritage of making in prison.

We discussed the static ceramic chess figures and explored how the process of ‘making’ activates a range of senses across our own bodies. These special workshops were delivered with creative practitioners Saul Hewish and Dan Higgs. People connected to the objects with their hands, hearts and minds, and beautiful little sculptures grew, representing the parts of the maker’s ‘self’ that were stimulated during the workshop.

Collectively, a group of men crafted the huge, handsome, head sculpture from 64 loaves of donated bread. This was a beautiful surprise during the coproduction process and will continue to gently deteriorate as the exhibition progresses. His brain is bursting out of his head, full of knowledge and inspiration to create with.

One talented man at HMP Hewell crafted an entire chess set of bread body parts and an accompanying chess board, his fingertips are pawns, ears are rooks, eyes are knights, nose is the bishop, lungs the kings and his brain is the queen. Admire these exquisite pieces in the tall wooden plinth.



CERAMIC CHESS SET





CEREMIC CHESS SET

## CHESS SET WORKSHOPS

A characterful collection of soft sculptural forms was also inspired by the *Ceramic Chess Set*.

Materials arrived by post to reach people in their cells, alongside a series of facilitated workshops playing with material qualities and form. From hard, glazed ceramic figures to soft stretchy fabric forms. Each workshop kit contained an identical set of materials to twist, tie, knot and assemble. People made “ghosts of the past”, tiny friends or their “other self”.

Women living at HMP Styal chose to knit an entire chess set with donated wool, using pencils as knitting needles. They knitted an accompanying chessboard and created a unique knitting pattern to enable more chess characters to be made.



# Creative responses to historical object

## METAL WASHBOWL

Crisp white bowls were embellished with heart-felt freehand designs, inspired by the words, marks, and patterns on the historic engraved washbowl, and the emotions the participants thought the engraver was trying to express.

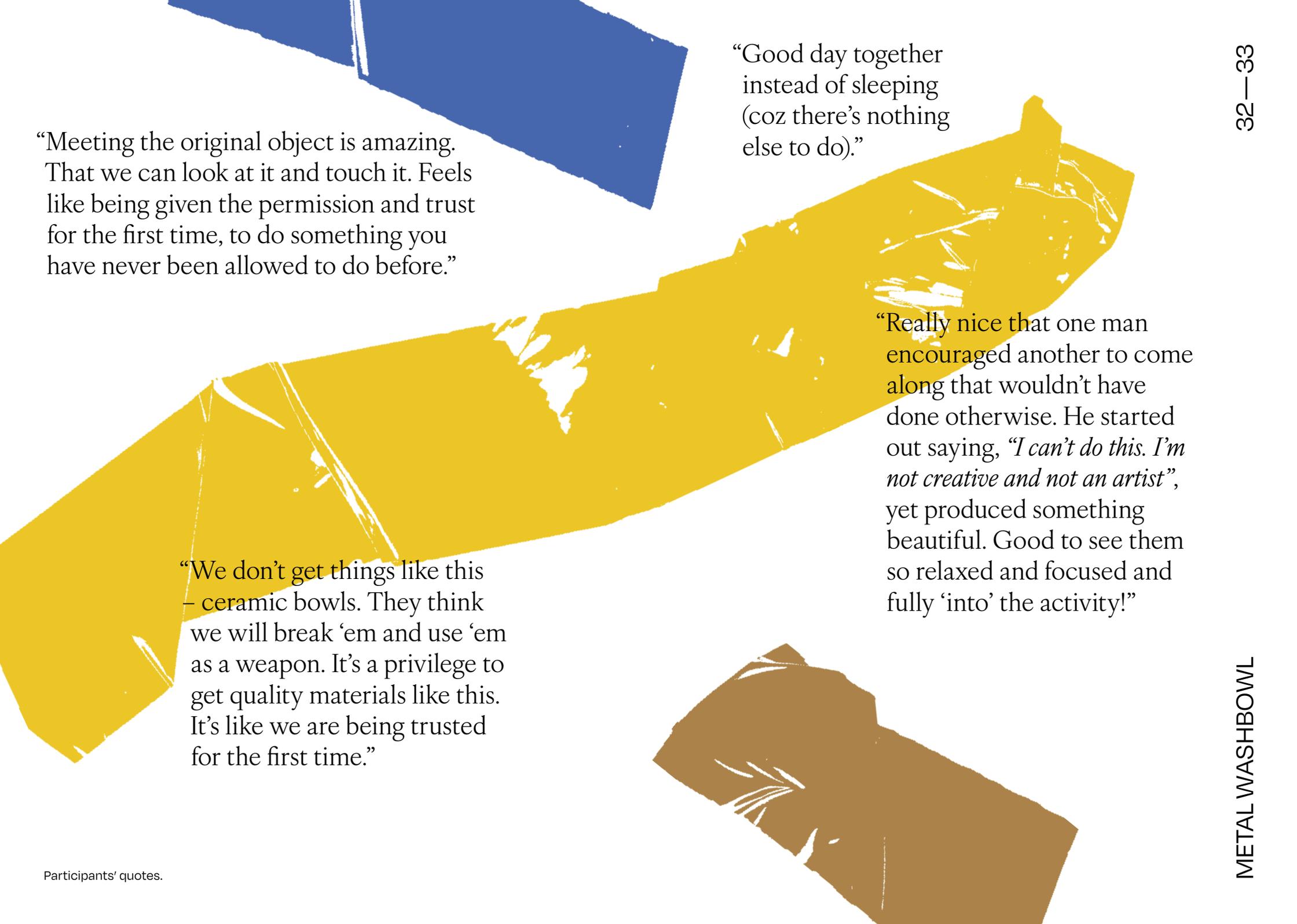
They marvelled at how something quite plain, practical, and functional, could be transformed into an aesthetic object.

Participants pencilled their ideas onto paper, then lovingly committed them onto the ceramic bowls you see here, displaying their own personal unique messages, designs, colours, and patterns.



METAL WASHBOWL





“Meeting the original object is amazing. That we can look at it and touch it. Feels like being given the permission and trust for the first time, to do something you have never been allowed to do before.”

“Good day together instead of sleeping (coz there’s nothing else to do).”

“We don’t get things like this – ceramic bowls. They think we will break ‘em and use ‘em as a weapon. It’s a privilege to get quality materials like this. It’s like we are being trusted for the first time.”

“Really nice that one man encouraged another to come along that wouldn’t have done otherwise. He started out saying, *“I can’t do this. I’m not creative and not an artist”*, yet produced something beautiful. Good to see them so relaxed and focused and fully ‘into’ the activity!”

*Creative commissions:*  
Madge Spencer and  
Martin Sommerville



One of four ceramic bowls made by Madge Spencer.

Experimental creative commissions are the quietly powerful projects that weave new direction and connection into museums. The historic embellished wash bowl was at the heart of this commission with Madge Spencer and Martin Sommerville. They worked independently with us to produce connected objects.

Madge embraced a new technique for this commission. Using words offered by the men at HMP Leicester in our conversations about creativity, she incised them into the wet clay and painted them onto the surface with slip glaze. Placing the men at the heart of the process.

*“I’m more than a prisoner”*

*“Creativity is to me... tiny moments of pure joy”*

*“Making passes the time and I feel proud”*

*“Making makes me feel like me again”*

Martin carved a ladle to fit within the ‘bowl with a hole’. Crafting the handle from a branch of an apple tree in Madge’s garden, where they met for the first time during this commission. He used a chunk of local plum wood for the bowl and ebonised the inside with a solution from “three rusty screws in a cup of vinegar”. Notice the slither of silver. This was inserted as the wood dried and split, an unexpected outcome that led to a beautiful ingenious addition.



Wooden ladle made by Martin Sommerville.

# Creative responses to historical object

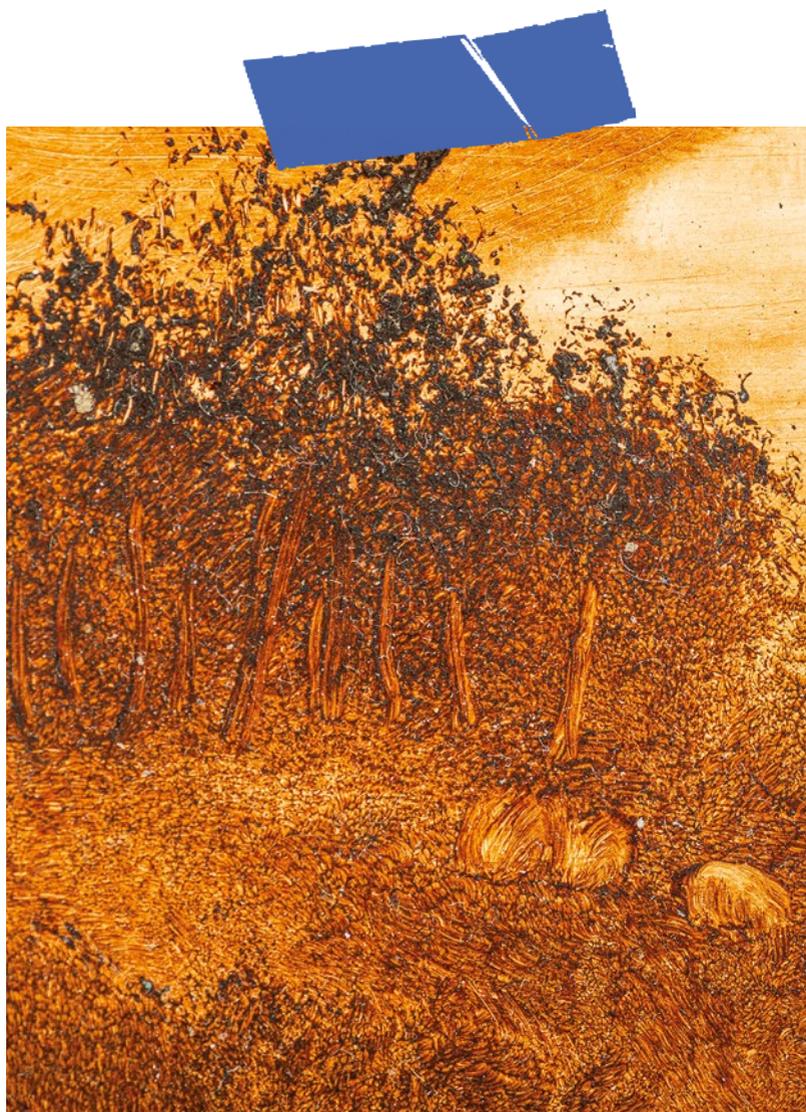
## BT PHONECARD

Vintage phonecards are the canvas for these exquisite miniature artworks. Cards were crafted in museum workshops inspired by the historic painted BT phonecard displayed on the sandpaper gallery wall.

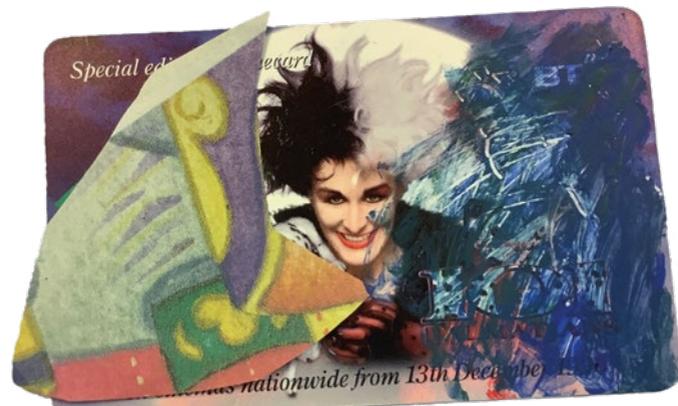
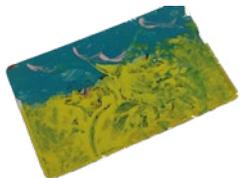
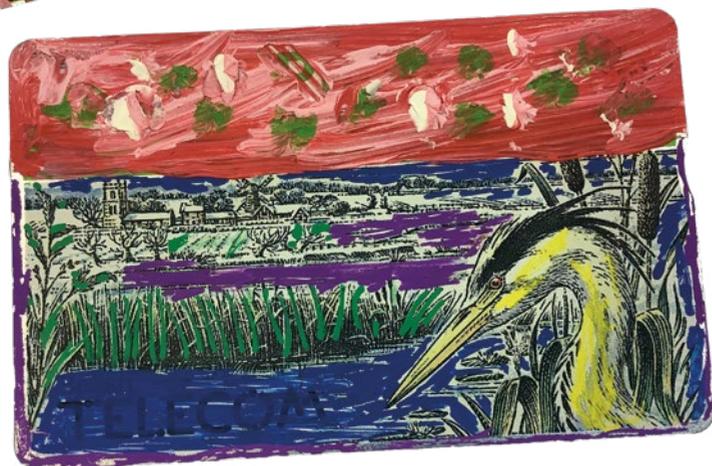
We explored the preciousness of uncontrolled communication and the freedom to connect with people we care about whenever we please. The tiny cards covered with painted and collaged scenes are a beautiful example of compassionate connection using improvised and found materials.

Men at HMP Humber chose to use the historic painted phone card as inspiration for creative writing. One creative learner produced a 6ft sculpture called *Transformation* to share his words. Using communication as a starting point and connecting it to the history of the museum, he considered how it might have felt to be someone standing on the gallows, “communicating with their God and then transcending”.

You can see this figure in the museum’s historic double cell.



BT PHONECARD



# Creative responses to historical object

## CARD CHESS TILES

Bright, bold graffiti style chess pieces were drawn and painted expressively onto pulpboard discs. Applying a sparse colour pallet, participants reflected the colours of the historic card chess set and designed distinct graphic chess symbols.

These eye-catching responses were produced in a workshop at the museum led by graffiti artist SmallKid 30 and inspired by his energetic signature style. The workshop connected people to the idea of improvised design in prisons and sustainable D.I.Y making, imagining having plenty of time but a poverty of material to make with.



CHESS TILES





PLAYING CARDS

# Creative responses to historical object

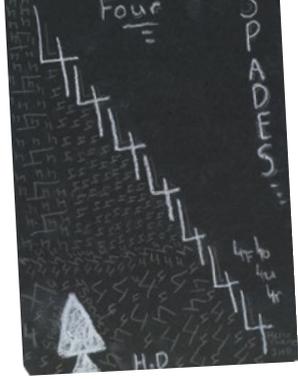
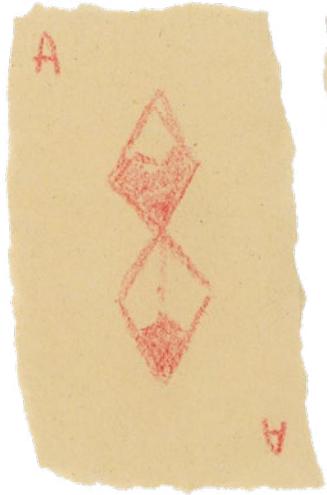
## PLAYING CARDS

A fragile deck of improvised playing cards, crafted from torn paper scraps and simple inked designs, were the inspiration for two new packs of cards. A commissioned creative response by Dr Panya Banjoko and a collective deck made across open and closed communities.

The *Human Connection* deck has been collectively crafted by people across open and closed communities. Each person chose a card that resonated with their life and redesigned it to be uniquely significant to their self. Each fascinating hand-drawn card is as special as the people that made them. Designed to get you thinking... to pause to figure out which card you hold before playing your hand, for some aren't as obvious as you might hope!

“Playing cards is like *life*:  
You get the hand you're  
dealt, basically.”

Participant's quote.





*Creative commission:*  
Dr Panya Banjoko

The potent *Cards for Future Activists* grew from a desire to create, uplift, empower and make change. A series of gentle explorations around the power of creative voice and agency shaped their form, with hand-drawn symbols, a poem and positive affirmations drawn from Panya's personal experience.

# Creative responses to historical object

## KEYS

Open the display drawers slowly to reveal intricate key imprints, formed in heavy grey concrete moulds by the makers. These beautiful little objects were inspired by the historic set of foam key moulds displayed in the gallery.

This workshop took place at the museum and was led by Lubna Din. We explored material led making and connected people with the compassion to the ingenuity of the incarcerated makers.

Each one beautifully embellished with subtle hints of colour, texture, symbolism, and fanciful shapes that bring the concrete to life. Tiny objects and natural materials were gently sunk into the wet concrete key moulds. As the leaves, flowers, and found objects were carefully removed from the dried concrete they left behind subtle traces of their presence.



KEYS



KEYS

# Creative responses to historical object

## SLIPPERS

Improvised paper slippers were made using simple materials of card, paper, coloured pens and paper tape in a rapid prototyping workshop at HMP Altcourse. Participants ripped, folded, bent, shaped, coloured, and fixed the materials together to bring imagined designs into reality.

We explored thoughts of identity, our past, present and future selves and what our footwear says about us. These designs shaped further workshops in open and closed communities, linked to the historic felt slippers on display.

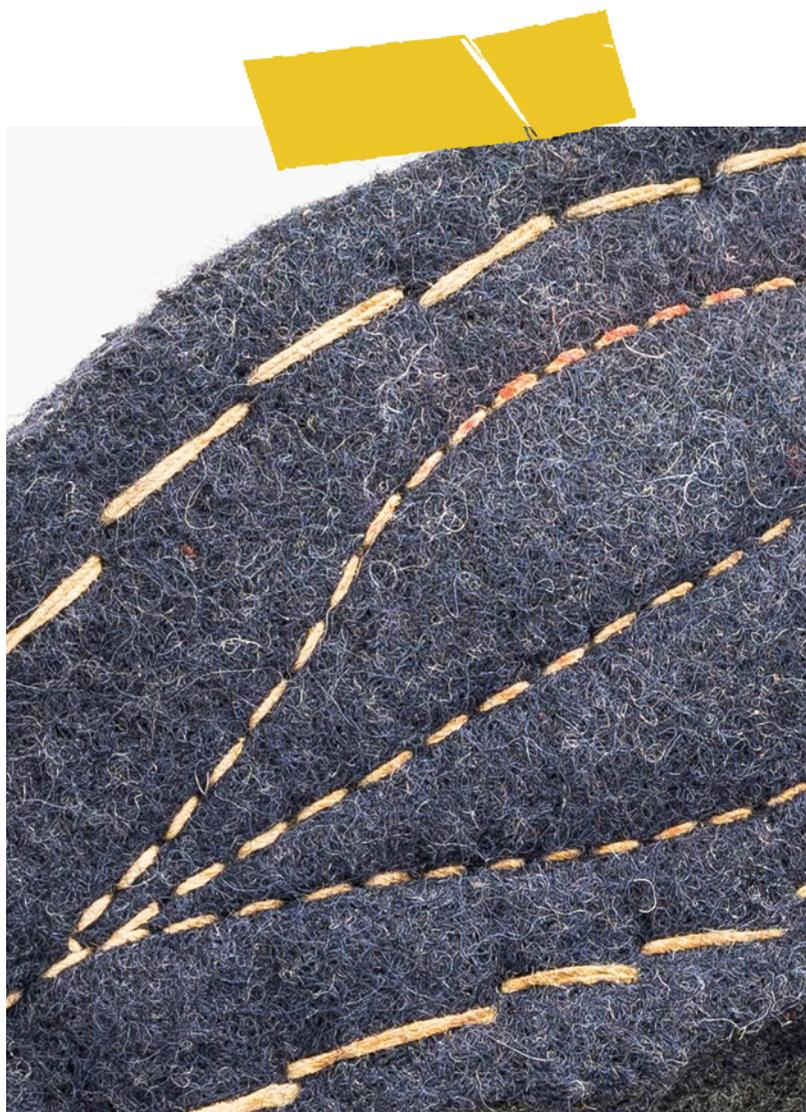
The slippers inspired men at HMP Humber to produce a commanding concrete shoe installation titled *Footfall* which you will encounter in the museum's double cell, as an extended part of this exhibition.

One man had a 'bit box' that he was constantly looking for things to add to. He found our resources fascinating and rich. He was very moved and excited by them.

*"If people could stand in our shoes!  
Walk a mile in my footsteps".*

*"You wouldn't want to stand in my shoes...  
they've been passed on and worn by so many people."*

One man looked at the slippers and exclaimed  
"COBBLERS!"



SLIPPERS



# Creative responses to historical object

## CERAMIC CHESS SET AND BONE MANICURE TOOLS

Creative imaginations were fuelled by the historic ceramic chess set and bone manicure tools. Men at HMP Buckley Hall handled and considered a selection of eight historic objects, from which two stimulated their imaginations. Their stories, ideas, assumptions, and tales about the chosen objects became the basis for an amazing sequence of songs and poems. They tell imagined stories of the original objects, layered with their own personal thoughts and emotions by connecting with the objects whilst enduring their own lived experiences of being in prison.

Using a variety of creative techniques, including writing, editing, rhythm and beat body percussion, voice and tone coaching, over three days of intense high energy workshops. Supported by commissioned singer/songwriter Matt Hill, the participants' minds were enabled to expand and run free with written word, impromptu spoken word, rap, lyrics, and freestyle responses.

*“Capturing a performance can be challenging and chaotic. Some people are confident. Some shy. I reminded them that we’re all in this together. It could only get made if we all committed. Compromise is all part of the process. It sparked a convo about prison. About boredom. About having a reason to fill those hours. Serving time. How creativity can help people do that.”*

— Matt Hill, commissioned Singer/Songwriter

You can listen to some of the resulting songs played throughout the day in the gallery, with lyric cards for you to take away.



BONE MANICURE TOOLS

*Creative commission:*

Matt Hill

I used to be a sailor,  
on a whaling ship

With the wind at my face  
and the rum on my lips

It was in an old dive  
at Liverpool dockside

When the knives were  
pulled I struck him down

Old vulture of a judge  
clawed and plucked me down

Now am destined to hang  
and my neck must be broke

Doing the hemp dance  
on the hangman's rope

I'm gonna whittle all my pain  
into this totem of Hope.

Been a long way from home  
chipping carve a piece of bone

100 years on they tryna figure  
what I was on

Around the country where  
it's shown I was just chilling  
in my zone

Made it on me own, when I was lone

Bored alone.

# Creative responses to historical object

## SOAP CARVING



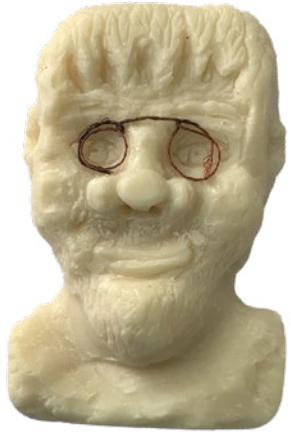
SOAP

Peer inside the long low case to discover simple plain bars of soap that have been transformed into intricate and tender portraits of self and loved ones, hobbies, beloved pets, alongside butterflies and birds symbolizing freedom. Many have been cleverly embellished with scrap finds, or colour made from crayons, or toothpaste, Weetabix, coffee mate, or ink.

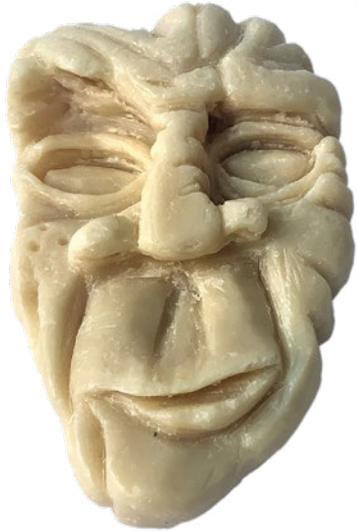
The *Ingenuity* project spanned the Covid-19 lockdown where people living in prison were locked into their cells for 23 hours a day. During this time we gifted materials and workshops by post, hoping they would offer a small and welcome distraction and support wellbeing.

Although there was no obligation to return the completed artworks a gentle influx of completed soap carvings arrived back to us. These creative expressions from some of the most basic materials available are ingenious and affecting. Instinctively applied textures and patterns became a therapeutic mark-making process.

Using soap as a medium to carve or sculpt is a traditional prison art as represented in the historic collection.



64—65



SOAP CARVING

## SOAP OPERA

Don't drop the soap. 50 year old gov issue soap.  
Same as ours but these smell nicer.  
Feels homely. Smells like real soap.  
Smells like the outside world,  
cos nothing smells nice in here.  
Smells traditional and clean.  
You can't model or carve a bottle of shower gel.  
The sound of sculpting, concentration. Tip-tap-scrape.  
The shape was already in there,  
we just chipped the edges off. It spoke.  
4:00am in the morning face.  
Like whittling wood, but without the splinters.  
Very therapeutic. We lose ourselves.  
Well, that's soap for ya!

**Participant**  
HMP Stafford

## SOAP

Pass me the mic bro  
Here we go  
It might be made out of soap  
Jamie's ready to flo..  
And it's a soap opera  
Flakes mixed with water  
Sculptures to give your sons and daughters  
Crushed up and condensed into one  
Make it into a beautiful swan  
With a purple bow in its hair  
Girlfriends name, in a heart  
Let her know while you're apart  
That I'm thinking of you  
And the kids too  
Keep 'em out of trouble  
While I'm locked in a cell where there's no bubbles.

**Participant**  
HMP Oakwood

“It activates all the senses.”

“Joinery skills help with soap carving. Now I’ve got time. Intuitive. See where it went.”

HMP Staff

“The more time you spend, the more you get into it. I can hear my Dad sitting here saying to me *“Get stuck into it!”*<sup>1</sup>

“I’m happy just buzzing off you lot.”<sup>2</sup>

“Thought it would be a car wreck, but I’m pretty chuffed!”

“I’m top cat happy! Well pleased. It was fantastic.”

“This smells like my grandma. It reminds me of her.”

“Supercalafragilisticexpialidosis!!!”

<sup>1</sup> A participant who believed they couldn’t do the task at the start said this.

<sup>2</sup> One participant was very reluctant to commit anything onto their soap and was sat touching and feeling the soap and said this.



“The ritual of carving, scratching, scoring onto a surface to form deep marks and lines of distraction... I was satisfied doing this activity. Carving the soap stopped me carving my arm”

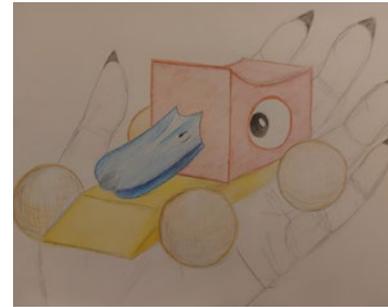
# Creative responses to descriptions of historical objects

## CAR, KOALA & HEADPHONES

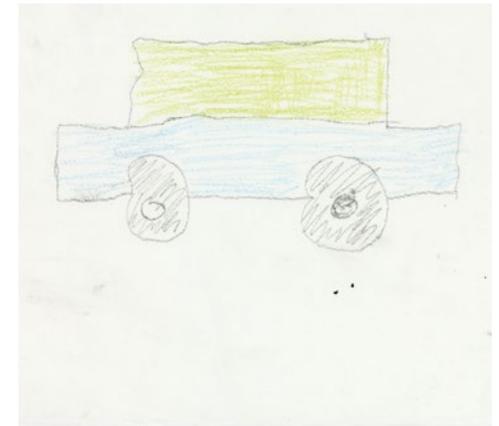
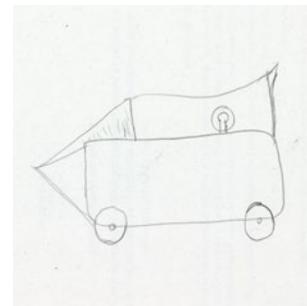
These drawings grew from an 'ebb and flow' activity between communities of people inside and outside of prison. A way to connect and share digitally and by post during the Covid-19 lockdown.

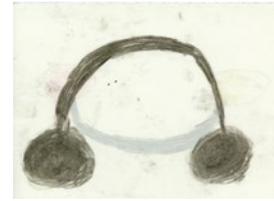
People received images of the historic objects and translated the photographs into creative written descriptions. These descriptions were shared in a second activity pack for people to translate into drawings. Like a game of whispers, these drawings and descriptions were unique, subverting the original object into something similar and yet unseen before. Joining people together through their imaginations across decades and geographical boundaries.

'Describe it Draw it' packs, 577 in total, full of interesting and experimental materials were offered to people in prisons, across local neighbourhoods and community organisations to stimulate their finger tips and thoughts.



This little toy has four wheels to enable the user to push it around easily. The rectangular base colour is yellow. The angled cube on the front is blue. The third rear shape is coloured red.





This object has no scale, so I cannot give size, but I have seen small and large, medium, and varying colour. The object is made, soft, material, often furry, a head, face, ears, two eyes, nose, body, two arms, two legs, mostly sits upright when made – and placed on a chair on occasions!

An item which you can wear a semi-circle band, beige in colour, and length of a 30cm ruler but just a couple of centimetres wide. At the end of each end of the semi-circular band lies a circular disc, the diameter of an apple or thereabouts! Each disc is lined with yellow sponge, soft and springy. In the middle of each disc you'll find a £1 coin sized circle – texture would be cold to touch, with a sheen. Tied to the middle of the band, imagine a shoelace – casing, housing a wire. Chocolate colour two strands of lace about 45cm long. Hear me, find some power and enjoy!



*People living in prison:*

Not prisoners

Not offenders

Not inmates

Not criminals

*...people!*

Choose your  
words carefully.

It matters.

*People matter.*

The *Ingenuity* exhibition is full to bursting with creativity and ingenious thinking. It is also infused by trauma.

We are mindful that some objects in the museum collection have been ingeniously crafted for less joyful reasons, to cause harm to self or others, to soothe or quell addictions. We have respectfully shown a glimpse of these objects in order to reflect a full picture of made objects from prison settings. Our coproduced workshops shined a light on the power of creativity to connect, soothe, uplift, upskill, delight and pass time. Our materials, approach and playful exploratory process have enabled us to better understand and represent the creative experience and voice of people living in prison.

With love and gratitude to everyone who contributed to this joyful, poignant project. To our funders for enabling us to work in this experimental, iterative, person-centred way. To our project partners for their energy and support. To the unknown creatives who made the inspirational historic objects, we treasure your work as a source of inspiration, connectivity and hope. And the biggest thank you goes to the people who we met in prison, for your generosity, interest, knowledge, time, humour, and ingenuity. We appreciate you all.

HMP Altcourse  
HMP Askham Grange  
HMP Berwyn  
HMP Birmingham  
HMP Brinsford  
HMP Brixton  
HMP Bronzefield  
HMP YOI Buckley Hall  
HMP YOI Cookham Wood  
HMP Deerbolt  
HMP Drake Hall  
HMP Durham  
HMP Erlstoke  
HMP Featherstone  
HMP Five Wells  
HMP Garth  
HMP Grampian  
HMP Hatfield  
HMP Hewell  
HMP High Down  
HMP Hindley  
HMP Holmes House  
HMP Hull  
HMP Humber  
HMP Isis  
HMP Lancaster Farms  
HMP Leeds  
HMP Leicester  
HMP Lindholme  
HMP Liverpool  
HMP Lowdham  
HMP Low Newton  
HMP New Hall  
HMP Nottingham  
HMP Oakwood  
HMP Pentonville  
HMP Risley  
HMP Rye Hill  
HMP Stafford  
HMP Styal  
HMP Swaleside  
HMP Swansea  
HMP YOI Swinfen Hall  
HMP Wakefield  
HMP Wealstun  
HMP Werrington  
HMP Wetherby  
HMP Wormwood Scrubs  
HMP Wymott

Broxtowe Women's Project  
Clayfield House  
Evolve CIC  
HEYA Arab Women's project  
Meadows Youth Group  
Nottingham City Homes  
Nottingham Trent University  
Novus Foundations For Change  
Renewal Trust  
Rideout Theatre

## Special extra thanks to

Madge Spencer, Martin Sommerville, Matt Hill,  
Saul Hewish, David Kendall, Dr Panya Banjoko,  
Louise Dowell, Russell Jenkins, Steve Smith, SmallKid 30,  
Lubna Din, Tracey Meek, Katherine Buckland,  
Dr Susie Hulley, Tom Platinum Morley,  
Amanda Sinclair, Kim Errington and Sarah Hartley.

A co-produced exhibition with the Artistic Programme  
team Andrea Hadley-Johnson, Michelle Hubbard,  
Bev Baker, Sarah Gotheridge, Chiara Dellerba and  
Bex Carrington.

Design: Cafeteria  
Print: Jump North



Supported using public funding by  
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