



## Gold Arts Award in secure settings

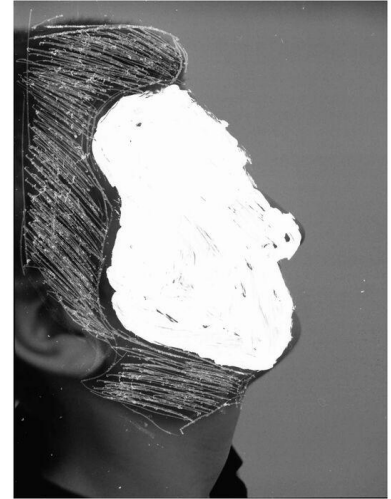
**Centre:** Odd Arts

**Adviser:** Rebecca Friel

**Level:** Gold

### Context

Odd Arts deliver arts projects and work creatively with vulnerable and at risk groups. This includes working with young people in the criminal justice system to help reduce the risk of offending, improve self-esteem and confidence, and help build safer communities. They have been delivering Arts Award for many years.



A large portion of their work is delivered in secure children's centres. They have developed a strong working relationship with Salford City Council's Barton Moss secure care centre, where Arts Award has been an invaluable way of accrediting the young people's work. This project saw two young people achieve Gold Arts Award.



### Approach

Odd Arts worked with a group of 15 young people at Barton Moss, two of whom were working towards their Gold Arts Awards on a photography-based project. The candidates worked with Manchester photographer Megan Powell, to create distorted images of their peers. Initially, the young men were shown the work of Bill Jacobson, an American photographer, and became excited about creating portraits that blurred and distorted the identity of the subject.

They took the photographs in black and white on a medium format camera, creating close ups and blurred portraits of their Barton Moss peers. The challenge was to capture the subjects' characters, but not reveal their identities. The Gold candidates' art was exhibited at a private gallery opening in Manchester's Z Arts.

As well as the Gold candidates, three other young people were able to go on to achieve their Silver Awards. The project was always intended to inspire other young people at Barton Moss who were working towards Silver Awards, but in

fact, the project went even further. The two Gold candidates were able to discuss and share their project with all those who modelled for them. This large scale educative process, and opportunity for skills sharing arose out of the modelling and photographing process. Each model was intrigued to see how their image would be distorted and warped and learnt a huge amount in the sessions. A further four more young people from Barton Moss have begun their Bronze Arts Award, in part, due to this inspirational project.

Resettling after life in a secure unit environment is an incredibly daunting task. Odd Art's resettlement programme, which is accredited using Arts Award, helps ease this transition. A member of Odd Art's staff will build on the passions explored in the Arts Award, to help the young person to discover cultural spaces. The initiative is sponsored and respected by Greater Manchester Police, Clinks, Arts Alliance and Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organization.

Odd Arts received support for the project through Arts Council England and an Arts Award Access Fund grant.

## Impact

The two Gold candidates are among the first in the country to achieve Gold in a secure unit setting, and Odd Arts are now working with a further eight young people to help them achieve Gold as well. Arts Award made a massive impact on their lives and they have continued to work with Odd Arts and with artists after release. Through the project, the young people were able to explore themes such as identity through photography, and were able to use the arts to regain some of their lost identity within a prison environment.

For at least one of the Gold candidates, this project has led to a very promising resettlement outside of prison and back into mainstream society. He is hugely keen to continue his artistic journey with photography and has been attending exhibitions in Liverpool such as FACT's 'Type Motion'. The whole project was a massive inspiration to their peers at Barton Moss and encouraged a number of other young people to begin working towards the awards.

As an organisation that works with high profile young offenders, it was exciting for Odd Arts to have completed a portrait focused photography project. Using an abstract approach, inspired by Bill Jacobson, was incredibly effective both visually and pragmatically, and set an exciting precedent for tackling abstract art with young people.

'The Gold Arts Award is certainly a step up from Silver. It is not to be underestimated but nor should the interest and potential of these particular young people: young people who have offended. Attempting an Arts Award within a secure setting can be part of a larger, life changing experience and ethos for the young people.'  
*Rebecca Friel, Arts Award adviser*