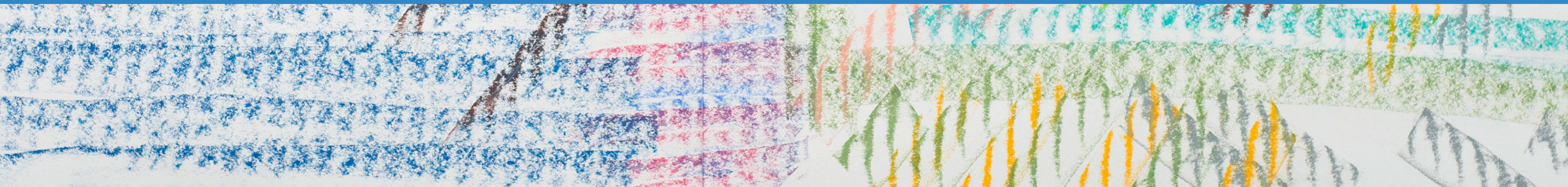


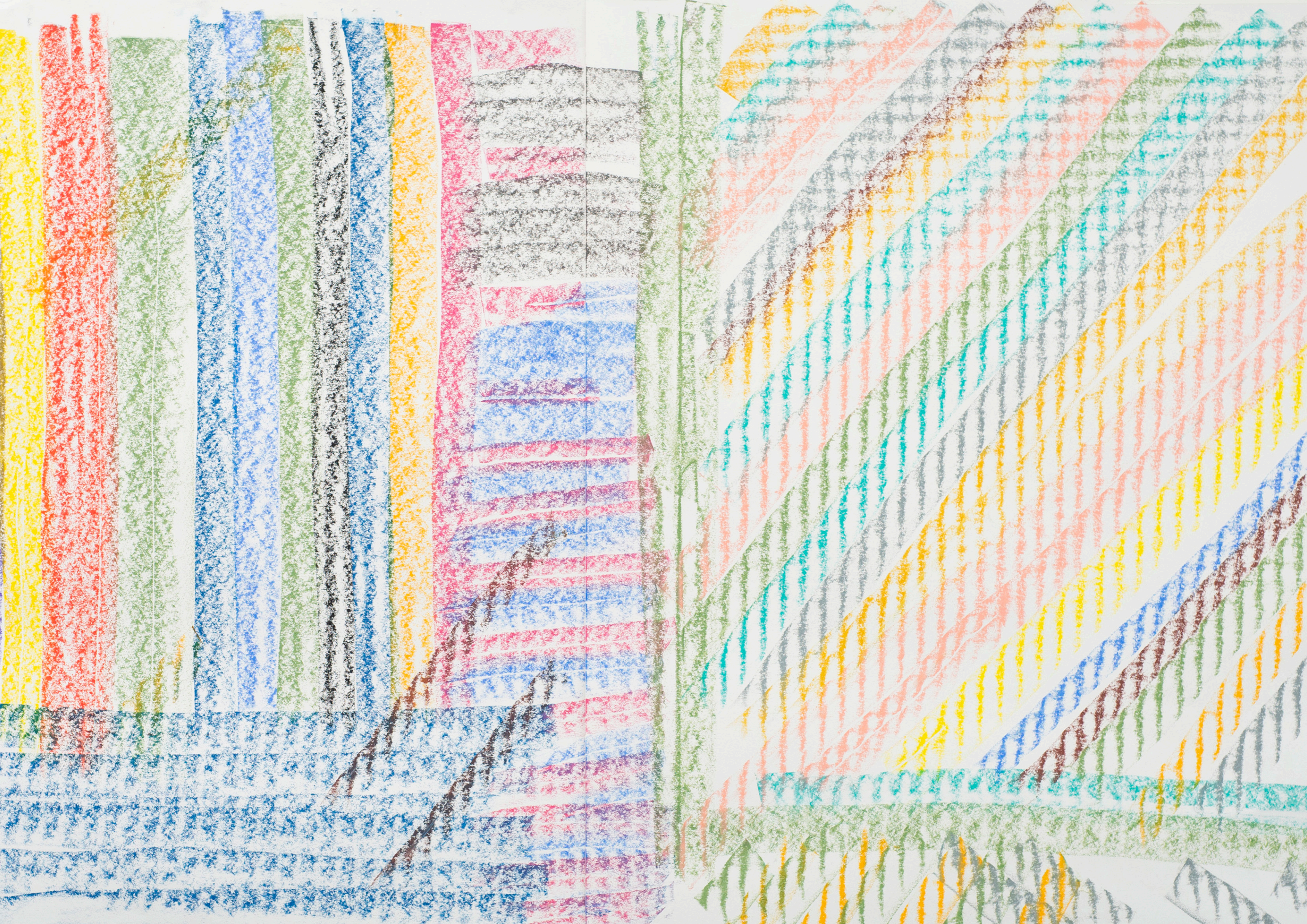
# Imagining a Polyvocal Prison Image Archive

Dialogical photography and the aesthetics of ethics in spaces of incarceration

Alice Myers - PhD Portfolio



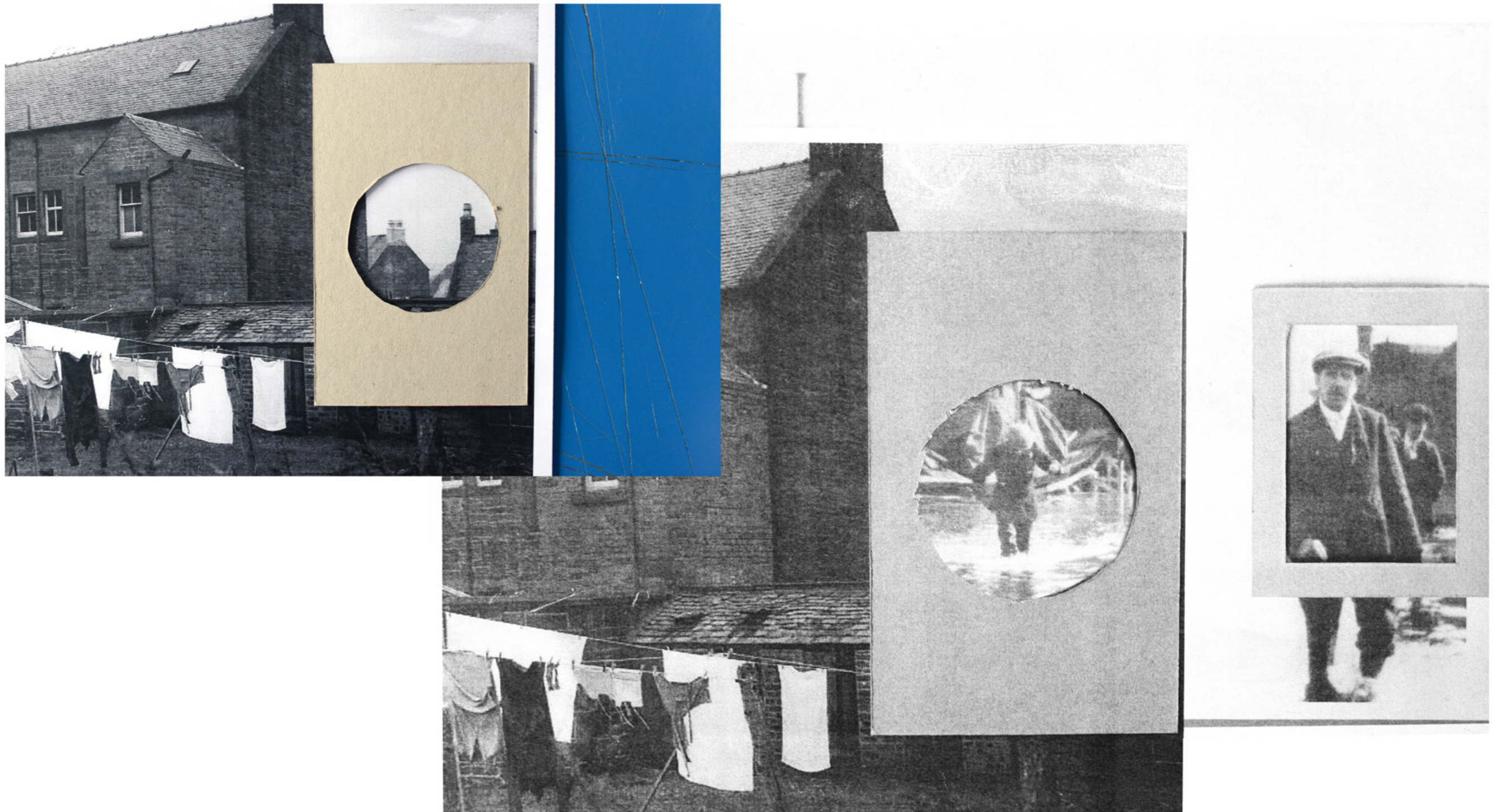






There is a difference between seeing and looking at something: To see is when something without any intention comes into your view and you become aware of it existing, like a bird flying over the sky... But to look at something is to observe and discover it in all different angles and know it in the best way.

-YB



This page: Untitled collage by JK. From the series *Commonplace* (2019). Original images courtesy of the Dumfries and Galloway Image Archive.  
Cover page: *Window Rub* by PD.





Left: Untitled collage by JG, from the series **Commonplace** (2019). 'Where I'm from, Pollock, used to be all fields. Now it's all tower blocks and shops, housing estates.'  
Right: Photograph by AM of TW reframing an image of Sandgate Street, Ayr. From the series **Commonplace** (2019).



AK: Sometimes even looking at the pictures [without people in them] you can see some kind of tranquility y'know, so peaceful. Even give you some kind of peace. It's quite calm.

YB: ...Sometimes you want to be away from everybody just be on your own and have a peaceful time so this picture because there's no-one in it gives you that sense of calmness... Human is strange thing, strange creature. We like to be together but sometimes we like to be without anybody.

Anon: I was thinking it looks mair lonely. Cause here in jail's like a contradiction, just living with that many other people but it's still the loneliest place, ever.

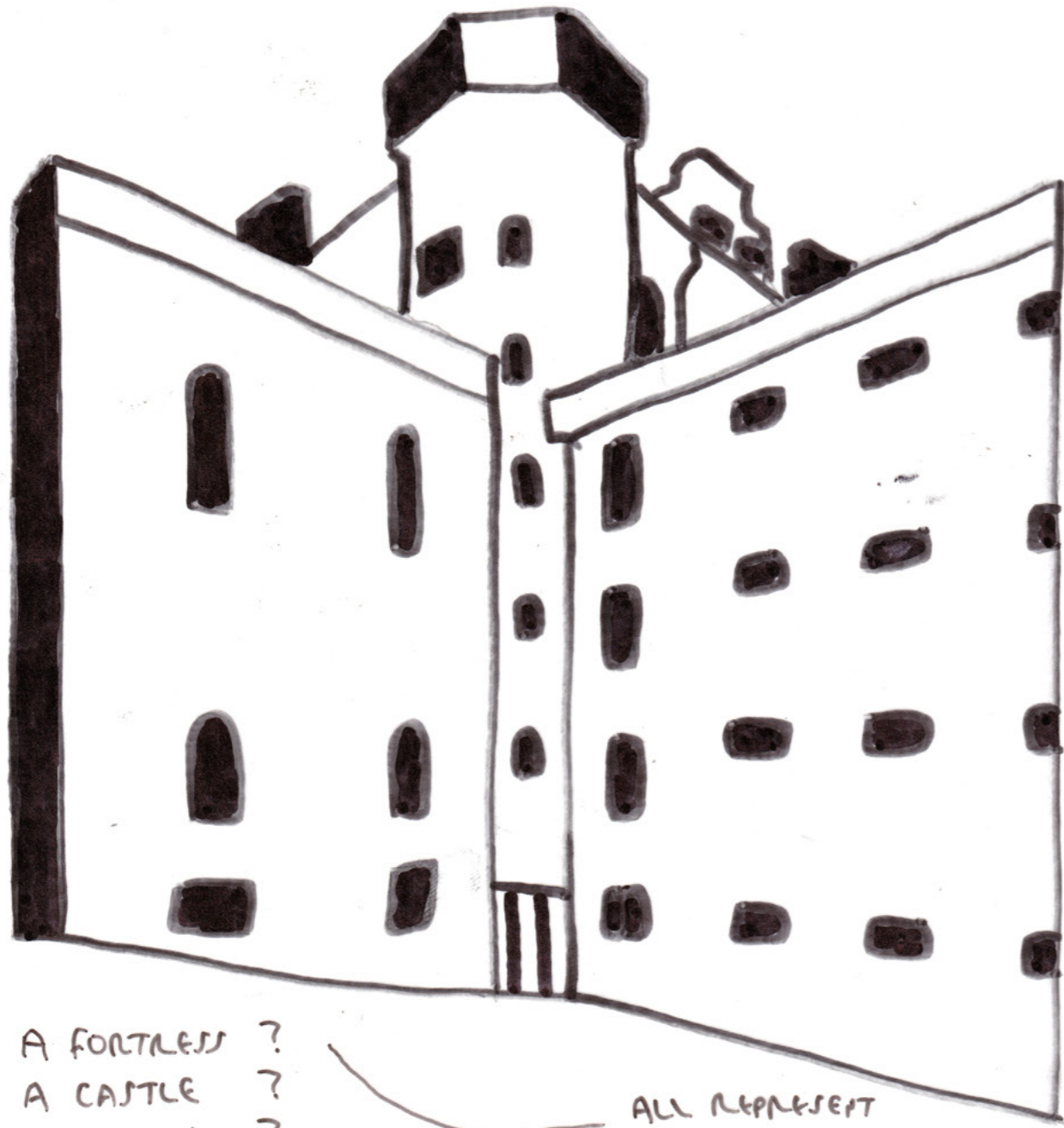
YB: The thing is, it's not just prison is lonely place. Outside people is lonely as well the same...Outside you think you've got more options, you try to find a new friend you go everywhere but still is the same it is nothing different just a bigger prison, for me I think.

JP: You get outside and you see a different face every day, that really screws with your head... See cause we're used to the same faces, we just get accustomed to it. You get outside and then everyone's new, you go to the shops, again different faces. And that really hurts your head, it really, mentally, just screws you over a little bit cause you're not used to seeing that amount.



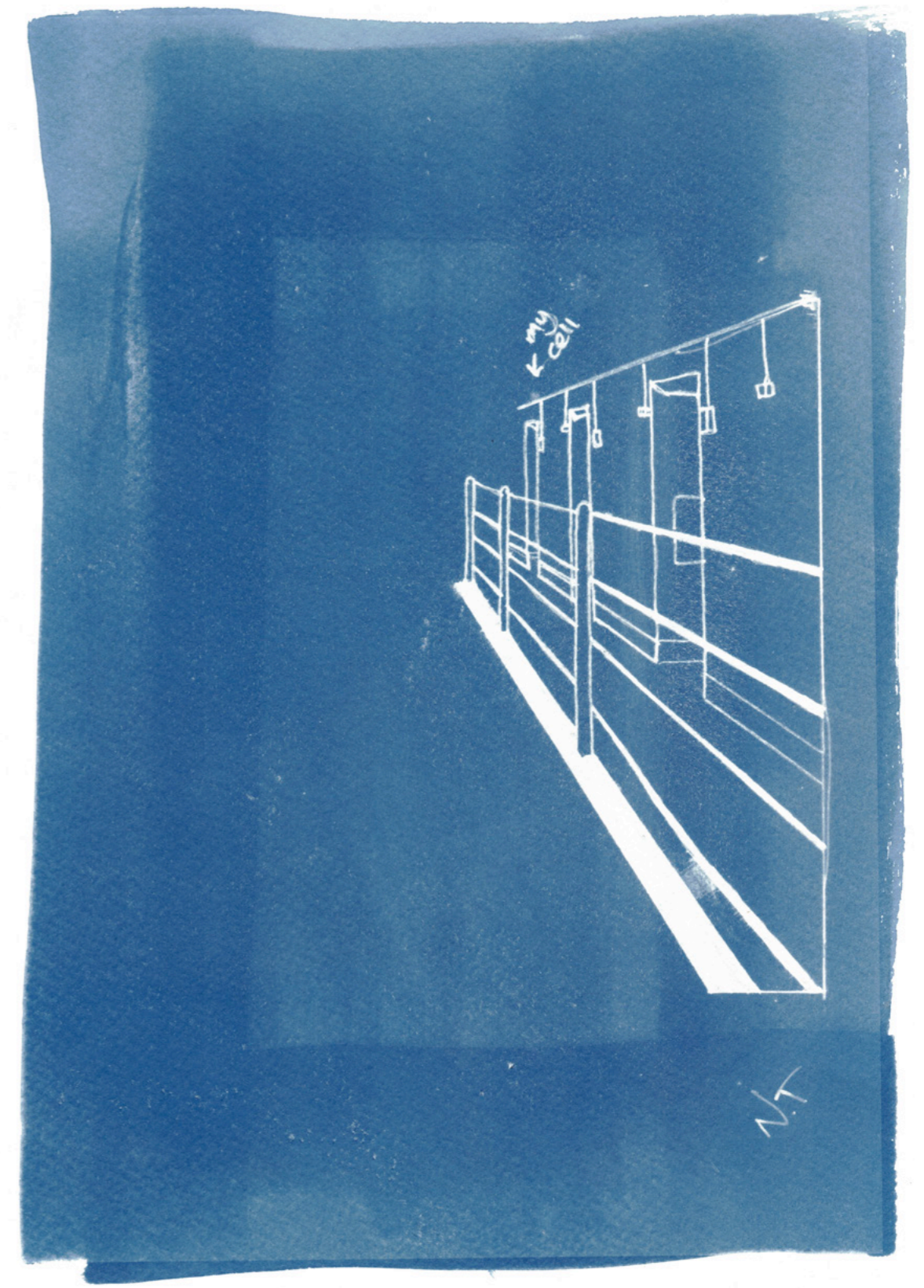
Right: *Open Galleries* by KF  
Traced from *View of 'A' Hall from NW (second floor)* © Crown Copyright: HES





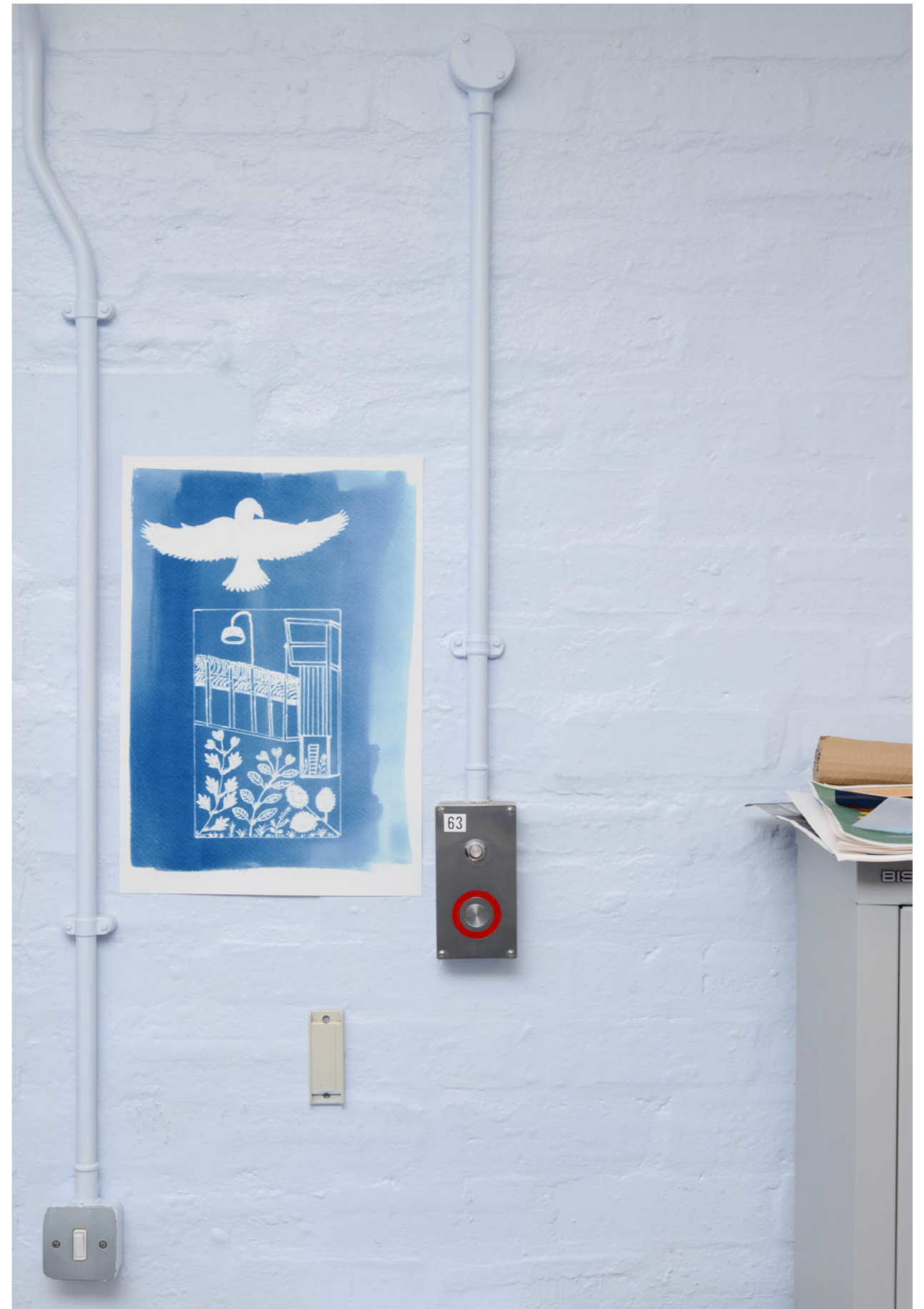
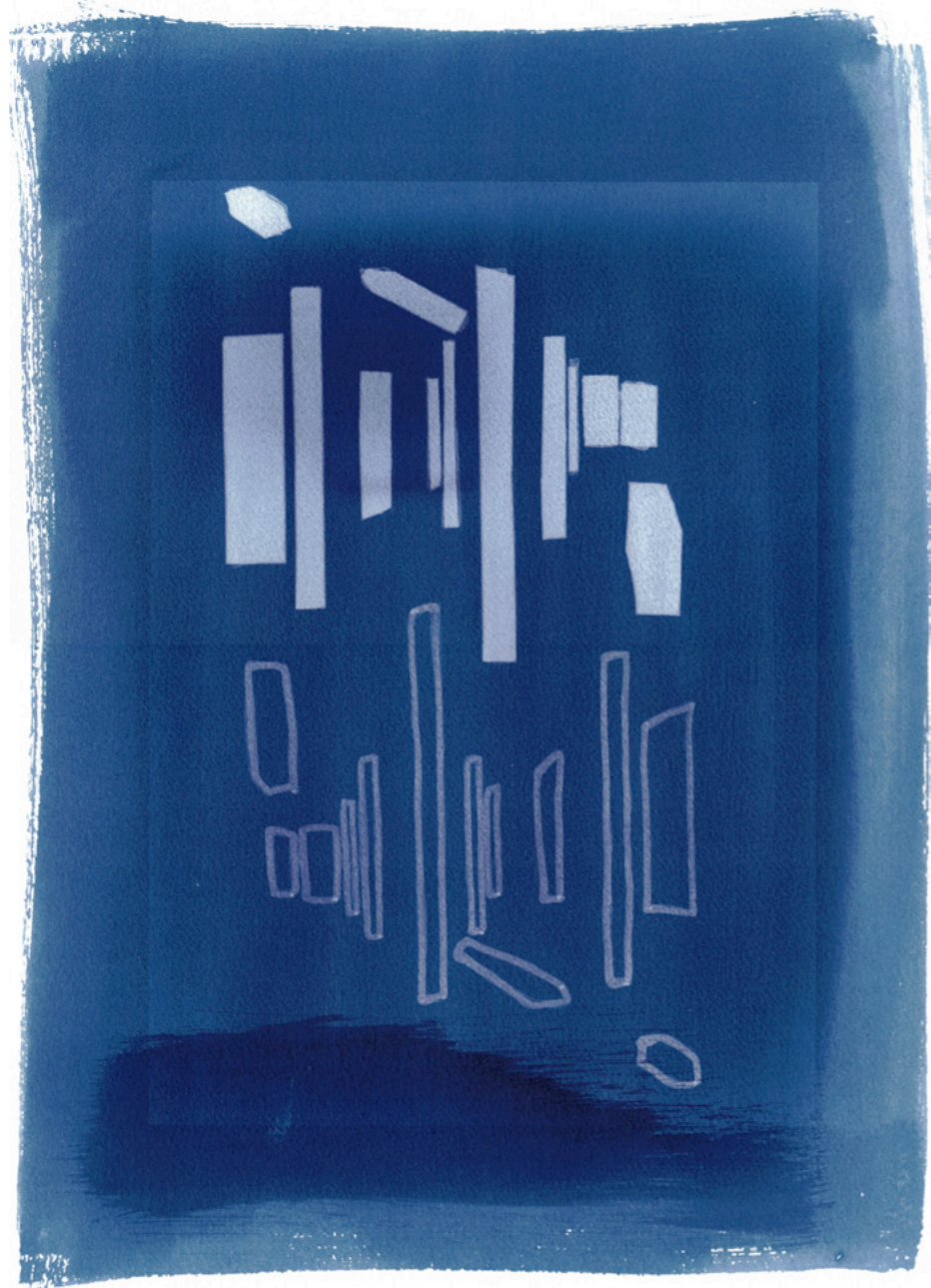
- A FORTRESS ?
- A CASTLE ?
- A PRISON ?
- A HOME ?
- A HOUSE ?

ALL REPRESENT  
SAFETY. THIS  
SAFETY CAN BE  
FROM OTHERS OR  
FOR OTHERS.



Left: *A Fortress? A Castle? A Prison? A Home? A House?* by Anon. Traced from *View of central tower from N*, HES Archives.  
 Right: *Untitled* by NT. Traced from *View of 'A' Hall from NW (second floor)* © Crown Copyright: HES.

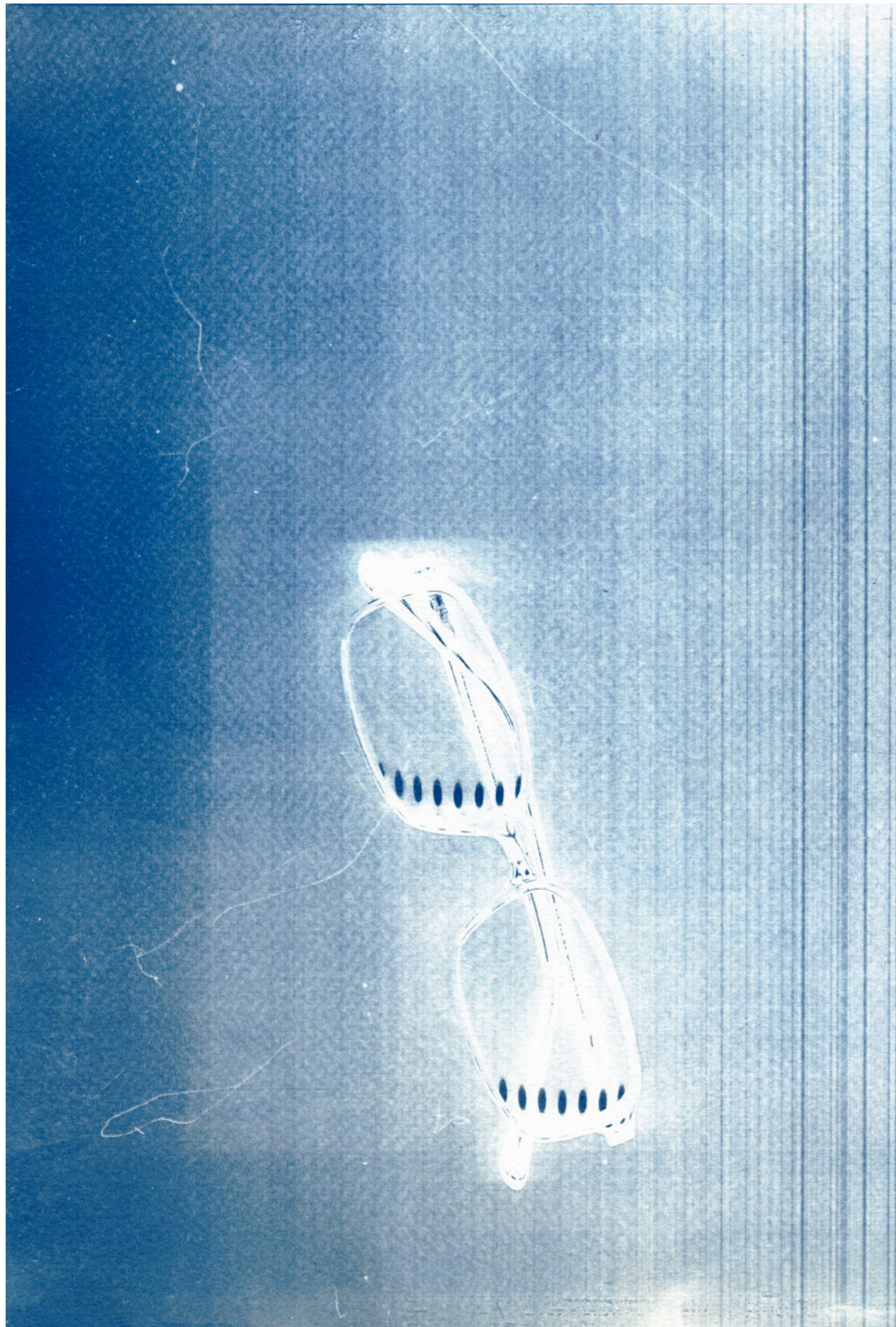




Left: *Structure* by Anon, Interpretation of *View of basement from NW*, HES Archives.

Right: *Peace, Light and Hope Within the Prison* by AK. 'The prison is a frightening place for the prisoner, visitor and the reader. Nevertheless, I have drawn plants with flowers, street light and the dove. There is a message of joy to the eyes and the heart by looking at plants and flowers, then there is a message of hope by looking at street light.'





Left: *Glasses* by GD.



Right: *This Door Gives Me Hope* by WL. 'This door gives me hope for the future because I get to see my loved ones that will help me on this journey in prison.'



EXHIBIT B

① OF ①

THE POSTCARDS (CONSISTING OF A SELECTION FROM MULTIPLE RECEIPTS) PERFECTLY ENCAPSULATE MY SISTER'S SENSE OF HUMOUR!!

TO ME, THEY ARE MORE THAN JUST PIECES OF CARD. THEY REPRESENT A FAMILIAL BOND, SUPPORT, LOVE AND SO MUCH MORE.

THE HUMOUROUS CARDS ALSO COME WITH A JOKE/PUN, WRITTEN ON THE BACK.

THE SELECTION DONATED CURRENTLY ADORN THE WALL OF MY CELL. EVERY DAY, I LOOK AT THEM AND THEY CHEER ME UP. PTO



Exhibit B by PD.



01/05/24

AM: So I've written that the artwork we've made emphasises the humanity, creativity and humour of people in prison, do you agree with that?

JP: Aye...we still were limited to what we could have done. We couldn't go in the halls, know what I mean? We couldn't go in the dining hall... It's not the full story... You couldn't really show, when someone gets in trouble, or what that's like, know what I mean? Or what it would be like if you do.

NC: Can't take photos of the locks.

BMB: The intimidation of the dining hall.

AM: The intimidation of the dining hall?

JP: First time, aye.

BMB: Going in there new, it's daunting.

NC: Just going into a new hall never mind the dining hall.

BMB: We tried to recreate a barber's scene with you, and we had to make sure the window wasn't in the background because we're not allowed to see what's outside.

AM: So I have mentioned these challenges in my writing but sounds like for you it's really important to underline the impact of that?

WL: Cause at the same time the way I feel about it is like the way the prison system makes it out to us that this is our life now, like in here the outside world doesn't exist... Within these four walls this is our life, we shouldn't know anything about the outside world... that's why they don't want us taking pictures of anything outside. And it's like, what happens when they want to eventually reintegrate us into society?

AM: So this is interesting, you think it's not just about limiting what other people can see but actually limiting what you can see, limiting your horizons.

WL: Aye like why should they put a limit on that? If they want us, see the prison system moto it's like 'changing lives...'

NC: 'Unlocking potential, transforming lives'.

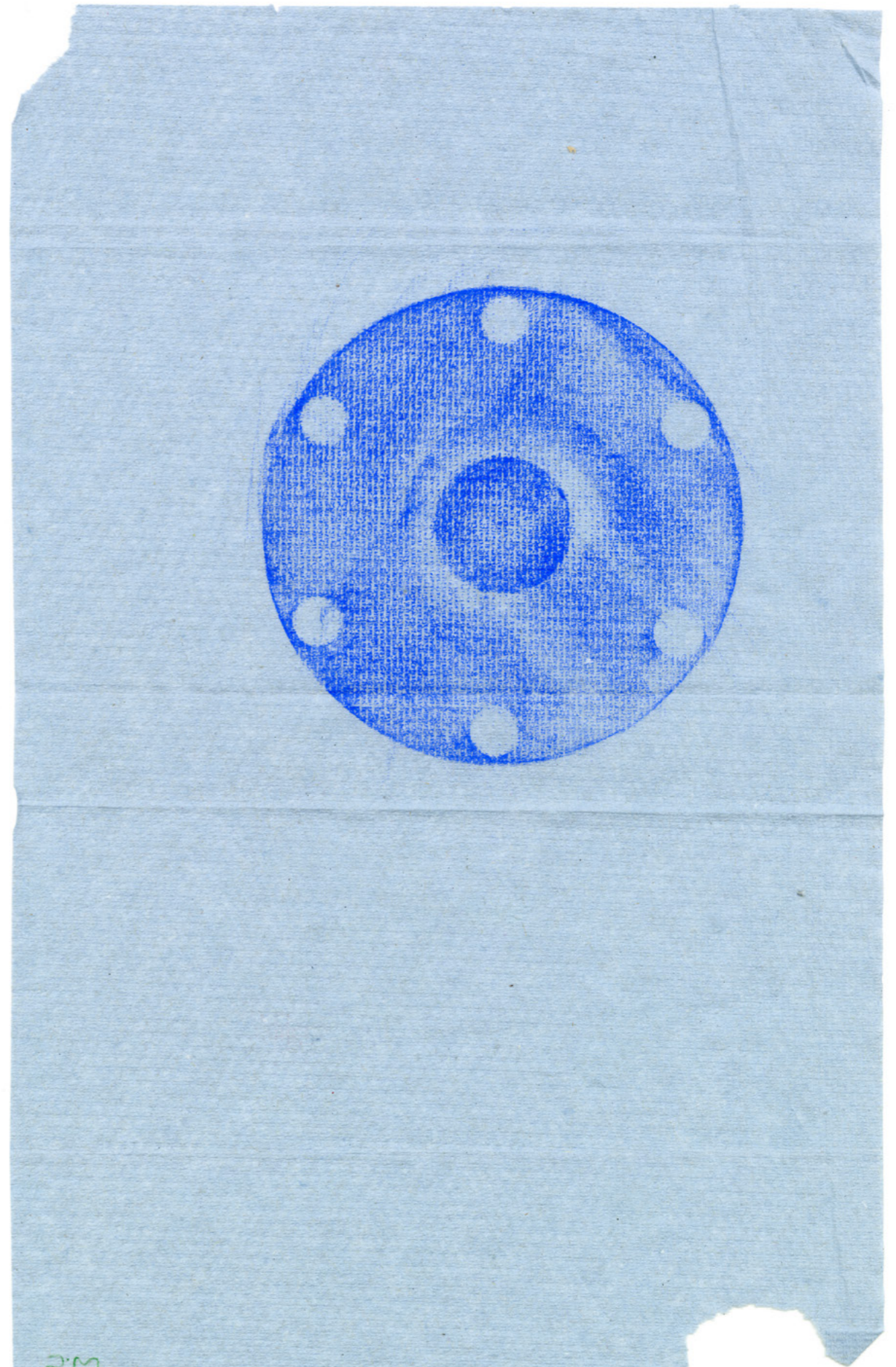


SW

### INFERNO PREVENTION AFTER LOCK-UP

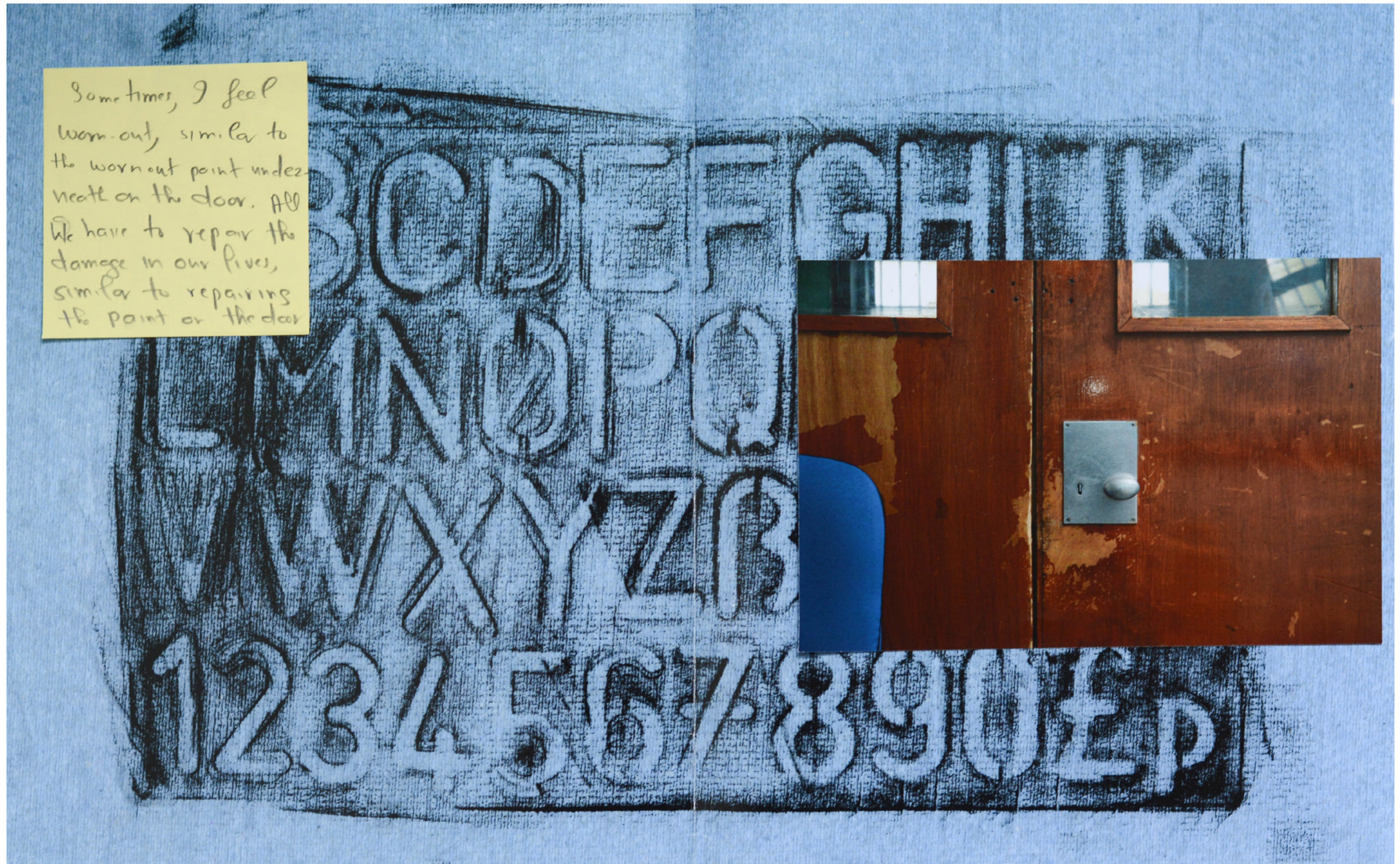
After night time lock-up the reduced staffing means that cell doors are not opened until morning.

If a cell catches fire the fire hose is screwed in to the hole in the middle of the flange once the plug is removed, and water sprayed into the cell.



*Inferno Prevention After Lockup* by SW.  
Oil pastel rubbing on prison paper towel.



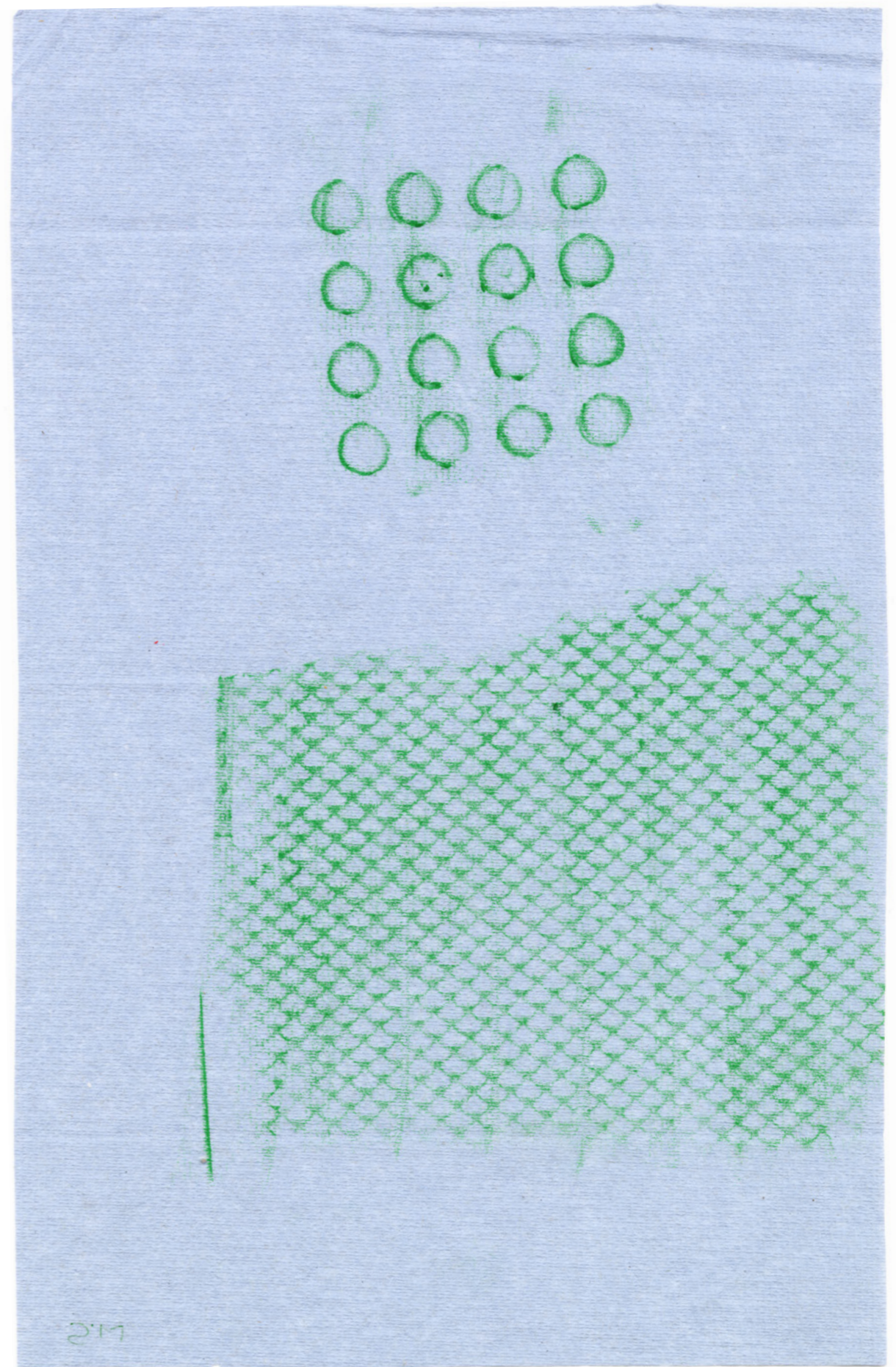


Sometimes, I feel  
worn-out, similar to  
the worn out paint under  
neath on the door. All  
we have to repair the  
damage in our lives,  
similar to repairing  
the paint on the door

Book dummy pages with comment by AK.  
Background: *Alphabet* by SP. Inset: Photo by Alice Myers.



KEEPER OF A  
THOUSAND CONVERSATIONS  
  
SW



*Keeper of a Thousand Conversations* by SW.  
Oil pastel rubbing on prison paper towel.





*Eye in the Sky* collage by SW and Alice Myers.  
Background: *Views from the Bottom Bunk* by SW. Inset: *Dictionary* by SW.



13/06/23

BMB: It's difficult, In my position as untried prisoner. The cell I'm in temporarily. I've been told today that I'm getting moved tomorrow. So personalising a cell is really a folly for me at the minute. But I do have a calendar up and some photos of the family.

...I've a new grandchild so it's a photo of my son holding the baby up on the wall so it is. Makes me look forward to eventually getting out.

Going to be moved tomorrow so we'll be seeing what the new cell's like and getting something new up. And at the minute we have toothpaste on the wall which someone previous to us, I share a cell with JP, that's what they used to stick their posters up on the wall. White toothpaste.

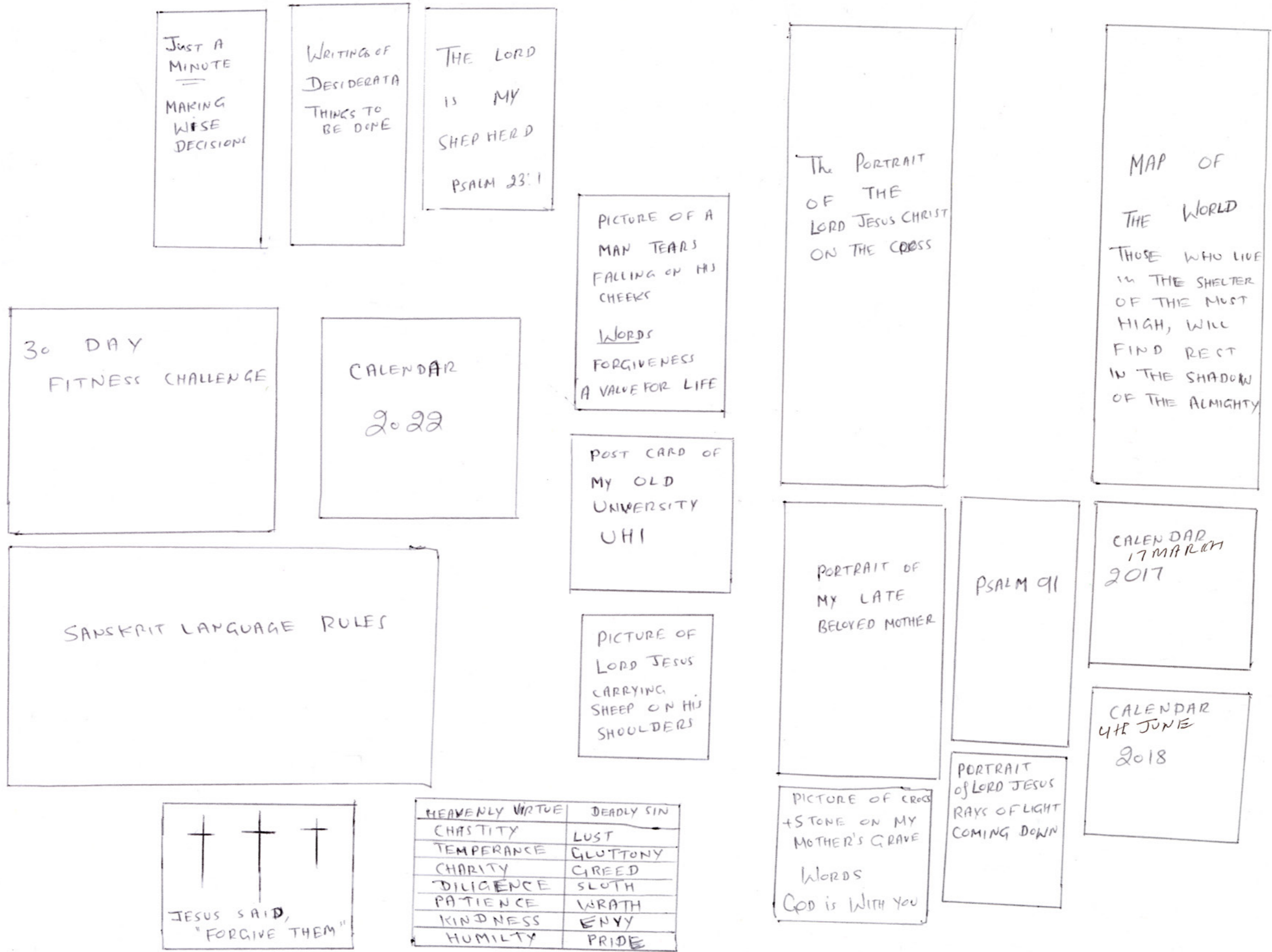
JP: Leaves an absolute mess so it does.

BMB: It just crumbles everywhere.

JP: You can just ask for Sellotape on the desk and just do it that way, you know what I mean, why do you need to put the graffiti of toothpaste up on the walls.

BMB: So our wall is decorated by toothpaste, it wouldn't take much to improve on.





AK's diagram of the pictures on the wall of his cell.





**Dumfries Photo From Above.** Collage by YB and Alice Myers with artwork by YB and SW. "Looking at it I get a sense of freedom. Also remind me the feeling of looking down to town when I climb the mountain and could see the whole town beneath me. Also feel like freedom and power." - YB





*Control* by SW, with artwork by SW, AK, YB and PD. Photo: Alice Myers.



When I do my painting, it takes me away out of the prison, like especially in 'Flower Tree' I can see the mountains, when I paint I feel like I'm walking in the mountains. All the birds you know, going away to their homes. And I feel like flying in the air. And I put some boats in my painting. And I feel like I am inside the boat on the river. Painting gives me freedom. I feel like I'm not in the prison, I'm in the trees or the mountains or the water. -AK



*Power of the Brush* by AK with artwork by AK and Alice Myers. Photo: Alice Myers.







**31/05/24**

NC: Just to say, although I might give you stick about you getting the PhD and that I'm only joking when I say it.

AM: [laughs] Yeah It's alright I can take it.

NC: Don't want you going home and like, having a breakdown!

AM: [laughs] No it's alright I can handle it!

NC: Cause obviously it's the reality is that we're doing work and we can't get...

AM: Yeah absolutely, yeah. And what you said today that made me see that differently. In a wider context of being hard to achieve anything in prison...

NC: A lot of the stuff in here that we might do positively, and it might be little things that we do but it doesn't get kinda brought up.





*Structure* by Anon. Installation view, HMP Dumfries Visits Room. Photo: Alice Myers.





Left: **Work in Progress**. This artwork is installed by the visits room door, where people wait to be let out of the room. Artwork by NC, SW and NK. Photo: Alice Myers.  
 Right: **Work in Progress**. Here the artwork is installed beside the cafe in the visits room, where people queue to buy refreshments. Artwork and arrangement by GD, NC, NT, RF, SP and AM. Photo: Alice Myers.





Documentation of *Work in Progress*. Arrangement made by NT, SW, JP and YB. Artwork by NT, SW, JP, YB, AK, BMB, NC, GD, KF, Anon, WL and Alice Myers. Includes *Detail of 'B' Hall cell* © Crown Copyright: HES.





*Work in Progress* Re-presented at Glasgow School of Art. Photo: Alice Myers



13/06/23

AM: One thing I've really noticed with these arrangements that you have made, you're much more ordered than I am when I arrange pictures...do you have any idea why that might be?

NC: Small amounts of control I'd say. Control of your life is not really in your own hands any more while you're here so all the tiny little bits, might be that you're not even realising that you're doing it but you're doing it, setting them all in a straight line, or curved in a specific way.

AM: Yeah maybe disorder might feel less appealing if you're less in control.

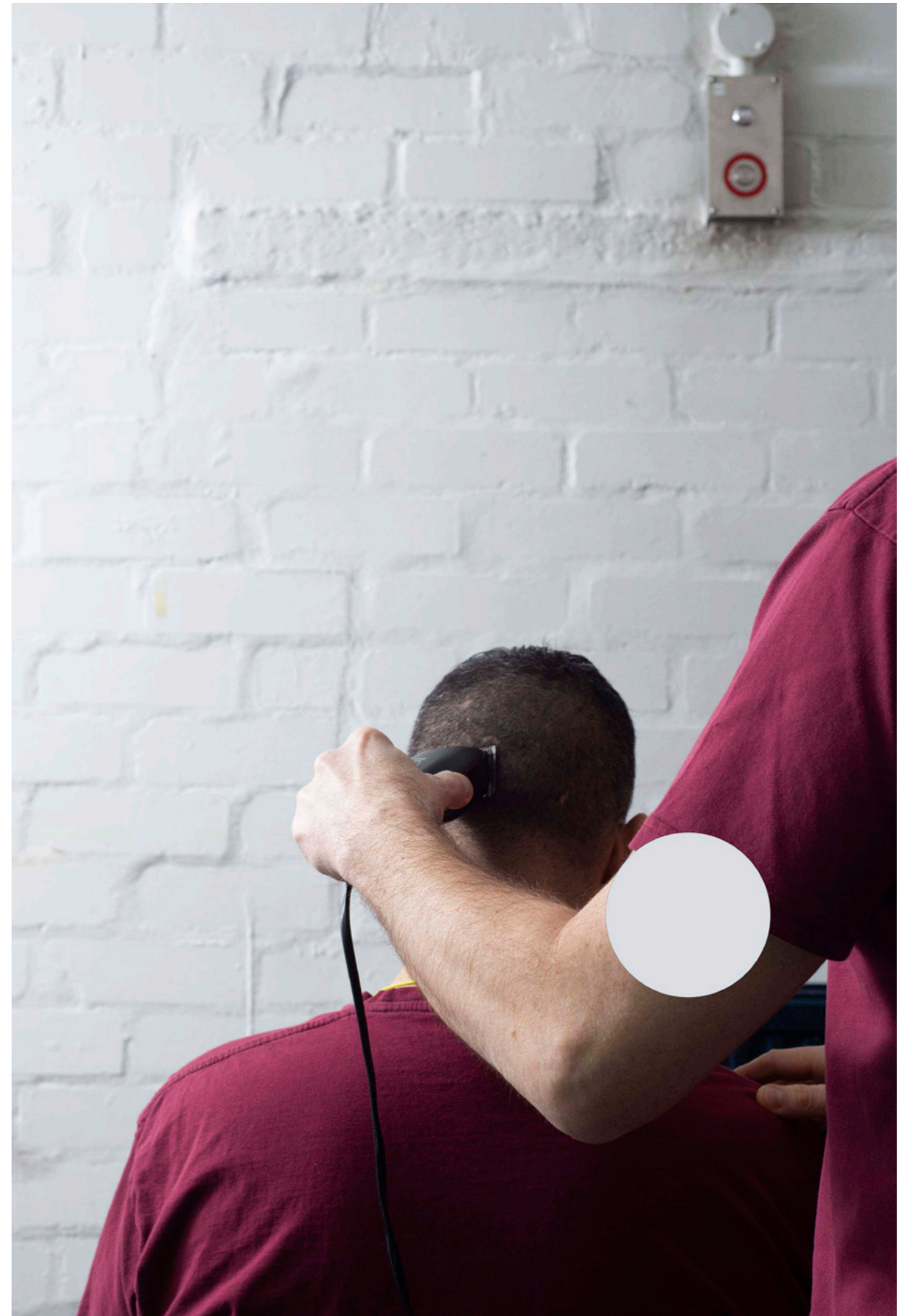
NC: It's like you're taking back little bits of control or little bits of whatever you're doing if you can control them yourself.





Left: *Cup of Tea 4 You and Me* by AK, JP, BMB, SW, YB, NC and Alice Myers. 'Everybody likes a good cup of tea after work. It is about inviting a person for friendship' - AK  
Right: *Sustenance* by AK, JP, BMB, SW, YB, NC and Alice Myers.













*PD's Time and Motion Study* by PD. 'From one aspect time appears to go by very slowly; minute by minute. It was perhaps only a minute or less that the camera shutter was open to take this photograph. However, every now and again, as we reflect on custodial life, prisoners conclude that life goes by, quickly; almost in a blur'. - PD







29/08/23

PD: I know we joked about [us being] guinea pigs but ... for me, doing that time lapse was just ... 'let's just go with this P just get the pen ... And I went fast and slow and experimentalist a word like that I don't know. I was doing something, I was experimenting ... this is one of the rare occasions that words fail me ... By that stage it was your sixth or seventh visit. And you'd established quite a good, we all had established quite good relationships in terms of the project, we knew ...

GD: There's very good support there.

PD: And you said, 'PD just do what you need to do', and you didn't have to tell me to do anything, and that's as a result of a good working relationship but it allowed me to feel comfortable enough to just do that.

...

PD: And it's a bit like, it's the swan. You're the swan elegantly swimming across the lake and we're the legs going like that. Y'know not very elegant but we're still having to do it and it makes you look good.

AM: [laughs] That makes it sound terrible!

PD: Maybe that was an analogy too far. But that was, serious point was we're making it happen. When people see that photograph they might say 'Alice, she's certainly caught that hasn't she?' but that had to happen because I was there.

AM: Well yeah and it's your work as well.

PD: It's my work as well. And I had no knowledge of art at all. Wasn't interested in photography before I started that.

...

PD: We're kinda detectives aren't we?

GD: Gatherers, we're gathering things all the time...

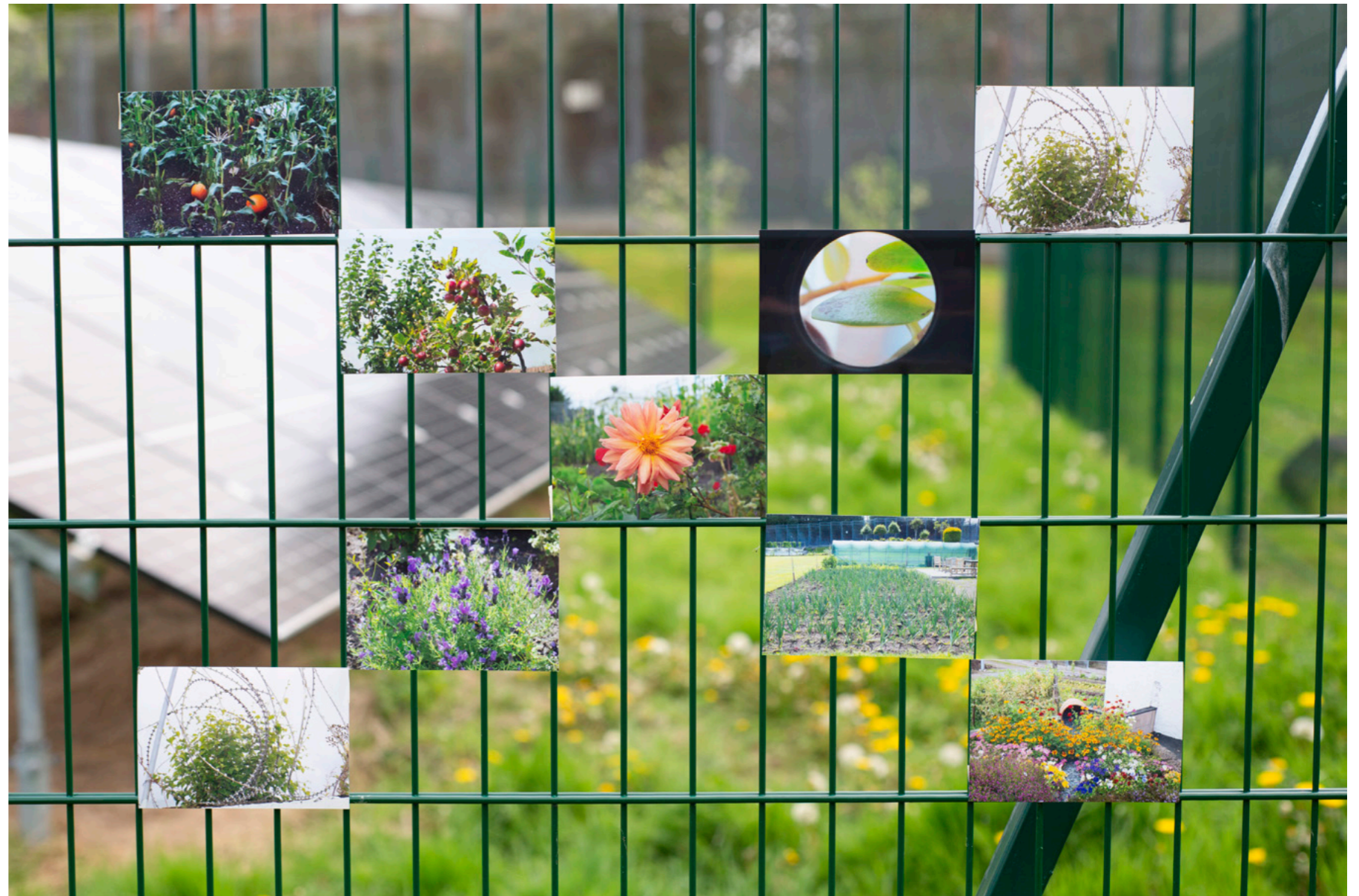
AM: Looking behind appearances?

PD: Critical analysis. Where is all this coming from? It must be something I had for lunch.

GD: I was just about to say what did you smoke at lunch time? It wasn't that rotten soup that's for sure.

PD: That soup was nice actually, I enjoyed it.





Left: *Untitled* by SW.

Right: *Safe Planet*. Arrangemnet by YB, using images by YB, SW and AK. Photo: Alice Myers.





Left: *Untitled* by PD, with an image by SW. Photo: Alice Myers.  
Right: *Untitled* by JP and Alice Myers.



**13/04/23**

BMB: That's brilliant. That's brilliant [pointing to mirror photograph].

SW: It's one of my favourite pictures in here.

BMB: [to AM] yours? That's brilliant.

JP: I'm surprised you were allowed to take pictures of that?

AM: Yeah so was I. I was on a walk around the prison and...

BMB: That's great.

AM: Why are people drawn to that one then? Why is that one standing out for you?

BMB: I stand there looking at it most days.

JP: It's the way you walk down to the dining hall and you see it pretty much...

SW: ...twice a day

BMB: We have to wait at the door to be allowed in. When I check that my hair's OK. That's great.

...

NC: Someone should bring down a tea pack next time, take a photo of that.

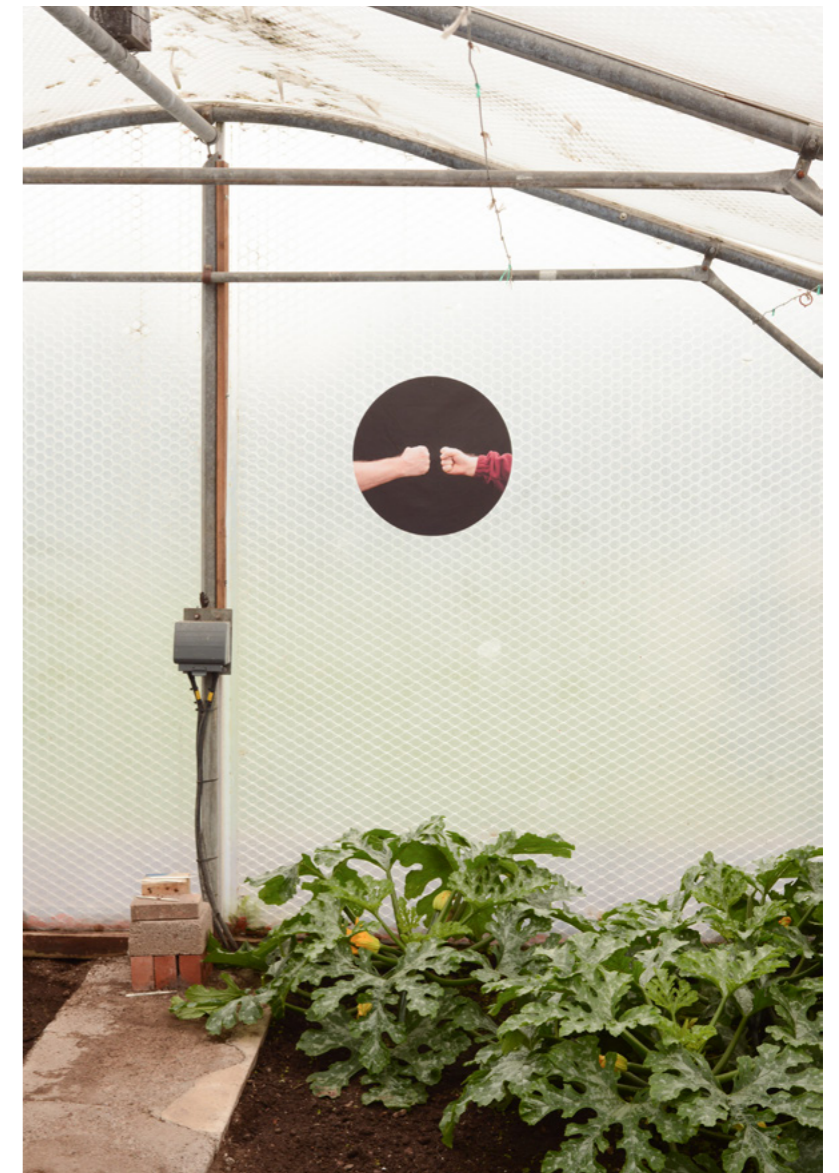
AM: Oh yeah we still haven't got any pictures of the tea pack and that's quite a particular aspect of prison life isn't it?

NC: Everyone has them but no one wants them

SW: Except the one person who collects them all.

JP: Aye some guy with a massive bundle in his gaff aye, he's not even used one though. 'It's for when I get out', 'when's that?', 'years'.





Left: *Cup of Tea 4 You and Me* by AK, JP, BMB, SW, YB, NC and Alice Myers. Installation view, HMP Dumfries Gardens.  
Right: *Clash* by AK, JP, BMB, SW, YB, NC, GD, NT and Alice Myers. Installation view, HMP Dumfries Gardens.





Left: *Haircut* and *PD's Time and Motion Study*. Installation view, HMP Dumfries Gardens.

Right: *Life is a big Circle (Life is big, like an Elephant)*. Painting by AK. Photo by AK, YB, SW, NT, NC and Alice Myers. Installation view, HMP Dumfries Gardens.





*Jetting out of Here* by AK, JP, BMB, SW, YB, NC and Alice Myers. Installation view, HMP Dumfries Gardens.





*Untitled* collage by NT. Background photograph by Alice Myers.



04/10/23

JP: Also, I wouldn't put that [photograph in the visits room], y'know, because people don't really want to notice that.

AM: Interesting.

JP: D'you know what I mean? They want to see their families, they don't want to be reminded of that.

AM: What do other people think about that?

NT: What's that?

AM: JP is saying not to put the [picture of the security] camera in [the visits room]. Are there any...

JP: I wouldn't put it in there. People who've come to see their families will want happy pictures and that. I wouldn't put that [image of the property store] in there either ... Because family don't want to see your life, in bin bags, with a [security] camera ... You want never to have ... a back, negative, niggling question in their head or summat like that. But that [more optimistic artwork] sort of helps half answer it or half calm it down in a way. So if someone's struggling with conversation they'll point at that, know what I mean? They'll go, 'look at that' ... to talk to them ... can be hard. Hard seeing your family inside.

YB: Thing is we cannot think for the people what they gonna think, what they wanna say ... I don't know what they think. Each person has got different point of view.





*Jetting out of Here* by AK, JP, BMB, SW, YB, NC and Alice Myers. Installation view, HMP Dumfries Visits Room.





*Stand off: Clash, Friendship, Blunt Scissors* by AK, JP, BMB, SW, YB, NC, GD, NT and Alice Myers. Installation view, HMP Dumfries Visits Room. Photo by Alice Myers. 'At visits, other than the initial physical contact at the beginning and end, people do not touch, I thought this was reflected in the photos.' -NC







[www.thejessiefieldcollection.org](http://www.thejessiefieldcollection.org)