?Modern slavery survivors to exhibit art across landmark London spaces: “I felt freedom, liberation and rebirth”

Friday 9 October, 2026

- Hestia’s *Art is Freedom* exhibition will appear at Trafalgar Square, London Bridge Station, St Pancras International and Aldwych between 12 October and 8 November.
- Art is Freedom showcases the work of survivors of modern slavery.
- Art is Freedom will take over Piccadilly Lights on Anti-Slavery Day (18 October).
- In 2025, 16,362 adults were identified as potential victims of modern slavery by designated government first responders

Embargoed for 12 October 2026

This October, artwork created by survivors of modern slavery will be displayed across central London’s landmark spaces as part of Hestia’s annual *Art is Freedom* exhibition.

The exhibition calls on Londoners to recognise the devastating impact of modern slavery and the importance of supporting survivors to reclaim their identities after exploitation.

Launching at Marble Arch on **12th October**, this free exhibition will travel across London throughout October and into November, with displays at Trafalgar Square, London Bridge Station, St Pancras International and The Strand / Aldwych.

On Anti-Slavery Day, 18 October, the artists’ work will also take over the world-famous Piccadilly Lights for 10 minutes.

Where to see *Art is Freedom*

The exhibition is free to visit, with no booking required.

- Marble Arch: 12-17 October
- London Bridge Station: 12-25 October
- St Pancras International: 12-25 October
- Piccadilly Lights: 18 October, Anti-Slavery Day
- Trafalgar Square 18-23 October
- Aldwych: 23 October-8 November

Art is Freedom is more than an exhibition. It is the culmination of a series of artist-led workshops that give survivors the time, materials and guidance to explore their creativity. The exhibition is delivered in collaboration with Ashurst Perkins Coie and We Soda, with artist-led workshops facilitated by Create, EPIC Arts, Gawain Hewitt, and MN.

Hestia supports people who have experienced crisis and trauma to find safety, hope and purpose, including survivors of modern slavery. Modern slavery is the exploitation of people for personal or commercial gain through force, coercion, deception or abuse. In 2025, 16,362 adults were identified as potential victims of modern slavery by designated government first responders. However, the hidden nature of the crime, the extreme psychological control exercised by traffickers, and practical barriers such as the lack of documentation often make it impossible for victims to provide proof of their exploitation, which can result in victims being prevented to access life-changing support.

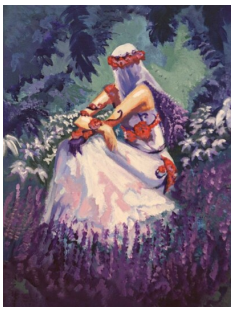
This year’s theme, *This is me*, was chosen by the survivor-artists themselves. It invited them to explore and celebrate who they are beyond their experiences of modern slavery. Curated by a panel of survivors and the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Eleanor Lyons, the exhibition highlights both the continuing reality of modern slavery in the UK and the strength, resilience and creativity of those who have experienced it.

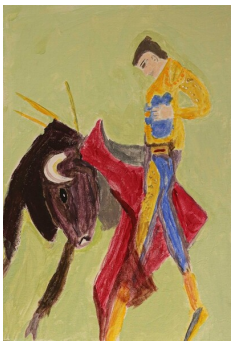
JR is a Survivor- Artist. JR was born in London and trafficked abroad as a child. He wasn’t allowed to paint as a child, but fifty years later his artwork will be displayed across London. JR said:

“When I was four years old, I was trafficked and sent abroad. When I was around five, I tried to draw something, but I was bullied and stopped. Although I still loved art, for 50 years it held both grief and passion for me. When I arrived at the Art is Freedom workshops, I felt welcomed and safe. The theme

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'This is me' allowed me to focus on myself and find my own identity through the images I was creating. Art is Freedom showed me that there were still things I could do. It not only gave me hope and made me feel powerful; it helped me come out of the darkness. I felt freedom, liberation and rebirth."

Read JR's story: JR's Journey: Freedom Through Art

LV is also a Survivor- Artist. After being isolated for most of her life, finding her feet has been overwhelming. Art is Freedom gave her a safe space to paint, make friends and manage her anxiety.

"*With trauma, you end up with a lot of self-worth issues. I struggle with having an identity and understanding who I am. But I ended up deciding that I could find those things in what I love and what's around me. Like flowers, for example, and nature and the sky. I'm really proud of the work I created, which usually is something that I would struggle with. With everything else in my life being stressful it was a little bubble I could go into, and not have to worry about things."*

Read LV's story: LV's Journey: Art, Healing & Freedom

Patrick Ryan, Chief Executive of Hestia said:

"Modern slavery is a terrible crime, but a person's experience of it should never be allowed to define them. Art is Freedom gives survivors the space to express who they are and shows the role creativity can play in rebuilding confidence, hope and identity after trauma.

"These works will be seen by thousands of people across the capital, from Trafalgar Square to the Piccadilly Lights on Anti-Slavery Day. We hope Londoners will pause, and take the time to consider the people and stories behind the artwork.

"Ending modern slavery requires action from all of us. By visiting and sharing Art is Freedom, Londoners can amplify survivors' voices, raise awareness of the fact modern slavery is taking places on our doorstep, and play their own part in ending it."

To discover more about the exhibition and the artists behind *Art is Freedom please visit: Art is Freedom 2026: a Hestia exhibition by survivors of modern slavery*

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View Online

Additional Assets:
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