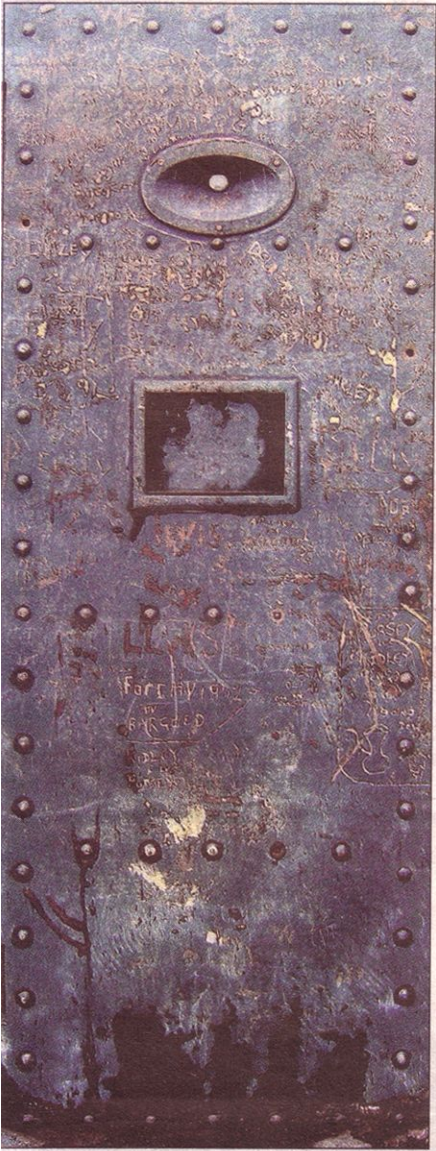


Headland Hotel is setting for Spectrum's annual all-star fund-raising event

Stellar line-up of artists for auction



A VICTORIAN cell door from Dartmoor Prison – metal plated and heavily graffitied with names and deeds of the interned – does not make an art-work for the faint-hearted.

Even artist Paul McGowan found he could not bear to have it in his home for long. But this somewhat macabre portal has inspired a triptych of panels of astonishing depth and power which will provide a centre-piece for one of the country's most interesting art auctions this year.

McGowan is among the scores of artistic luminaries – including Damien Hirst and Stella Vine – who have pledged work to *SpectrumArt 2009* to support the Spectrum charity in helping people with various forms of autism and Asperger's syndrome find ways of communicating their thoughts and feelings through art. Many, including the world-leading photographer Rankin, have really embraced the *Communication* theme of the auction in the work they have donated.

Mary Simpson, Spectrum's CEO said: "There is no such thing as 'typical' with autism – just many, many people whose needs are simply not catered for in mainstream schools or the life outside, and who are not able to communicate in the same way as most of us do.

"We offer many different services to people of all ages and abilities – and we want to explore further our theory that art, and working with artists, is an important key to expression for very many of our service users."

Paul McGowan, Lucy McLaughlan and Stella Vine are among the artists who have been working with Spectrum's service users aboard the charity's so-called 'Art Ark' – a restored barge moored against a quay looking straight down the River at Penryn in West Cornwall.

It was to this idyllic spot that the completed triptych – known as *The Divinity of Monsters* – was delivered and unveiled after a two-year-long artistic journey. McGowan was visibly moved.

"I was completely overwhelmed to finally see it," he says. "I've had the images in my head for so long – I had a clear idea how the three panels would look – but it's an emotional moment to see them framed and in all



their glory for the first time."

McGowan, who grew up on the streets of Margate, left school at fourteen with no qualifications and joined the Parachute Regiment, before going on to study fine art at four different universities.

His work has always been cutting edge and confronts issues that affect us all every day. His 1996 work *Friday night, Saturday morning*, named after an old Specials song, pre-dated Tracey Emin's *Bed* by two years.

For this latest work the cell door – which bizarrely enough came with a signed certificate of authenticity from the Warden of Dartmoor Prison – acted as a platform for McGowan, along with his three collaborators in a long-term project known as *BLOCKHEAD*, to explore themes of incarceration, chastity and denial.

The graffiti – which makes for deeply unsettling reading – covered only the inner side of the door available to prisoners locked inside the cell.



"It's too disturbing," says McGowan, "and in the end I didn't want it anywhere near my family. But for me it's become such a potent symbol of everything that's wrong with a culture that's losing its dignity and self-respect."

"The first step was for Chris Stocker and me to photograph the door in detail. I then gave illustrators Mark

Lascelles Thornton and Michael Cole individual briefs and left them to interpret their individual scenarios."

Mark Lascelles Thornton says of the work: "Paul called me up in the Autumn of 2008 and explained my brief in just a few words. I knew exactly what I was going to do and Paul was adamant that I interpret the brief in any way I saw fit.

■ Clockwise from far left: Dartmoor Door, and the 'centre-piece' triptych entitled *The Divinity of Monsters*, by Paul McGowan, and right, *I Love*; Stephen Wiltshire's *London*;

David Ashwell's *Vertigo* and Stella Vine's *Flight officer Maureen Dunlop*.

"The drawing explores themes of mortality and isolation. It took a little over two months to complete before I handed it back to Paul for reconstruction. I like the idea this drawing was almost two pieces of work merged onto one sheet of paper. It was the perfect collaboration".

The illustrations and photographs, along with various drawings and paintings from McGowan's *Mask* series – created during a period as artist in residence for the environmental charity The Eden Project – was handed over to Chris Stocker who placed everything through a series of treatments. He and McGowan then worked on the final composition of the piece.

After the SpectrumArt auction – scheduled for October 31 at the Headland Hotel in Newquay, Cornwall – *The Divinity of Monsters* triptych, along with the original prison door, will be on display at the Eden Project as part of the *BLOCKHEAD* exhibition.

All money raised from this and other artwork sold in both live and on-line auctions will go directly into Spectrum's ongoing work with artists.