AWARDS

Every year, DAE grants a small number of awards to graduates and students. The shortlist for each award is announced at the end of each academic year, and the winners are revealed during a ceremony as part of the annual Graduation Show.

There are three main graduate awards and – since 2021 – one award open to all students, created in collaboration with mental health organisation GGzE. Each award has its own jury, consisting of design practitioners and professionals from design companies and associated industries.

The awards began in 1977, with a prize named after René Smeets, the institution's founding director. The prize is awarded to a BA graduate, recognising professional attitude during the design process and in the resulting graduation project.

The Melkweg Award was introduced in 2003 and highlights a BA graduation project demonstrating originality and potential – a 'far out and outspoken talent'.

The Gijs Bakker Award was created in 2014, 10 years after the establishment of the first Master's programme at DAE, and is named after the designer that created the department. It recognises a graduate whose thesis research and design project demonstrate outstanding skill and imagination ,tenacity and originality, personality, and relevance to the profession and the outside world.

Our records for DAE's awards and prizes are incomplete pre 1995. Can you help us add to this list or do you have a story related to the awards? Please email us at: alumni@designacademy.nl

THE RENEÉ SMEETS AWARD

The René Smeets award recognises a Bachelor graduate with a high level of empathy whose project has grounding outside the academy and demonstrates a (potential) big impact on and in collaboration with society. The jury were impressed by the level of determination across this year's projects, many of which moved from concept to outcome with clarity and intention. The students demonstrated strong communicative abilities and reflective storytelling, presenting their processes with confidence and precision. The individuality of each proposal, shaped by distinct cultural perspectives without defaulting to claims of globalism, did not restrict them to a particular locality. The return to interlocal concerns gave the projects grounded, situated qualities, often oriented around conviviality in form, method, or ambition. The jury also observed a refreshing absence of default reliance on digital tools or AI, pointing instead to a hands-on, process-driven ethos that felt especially relevant within today's design landscape and its possibilities of collaboration. Together, these graduates presented themselves as well-prepared, thoughtful professionals ready to engage with complexity across contexts.

Nominees Renee Smeets Award 2026

- Tijn Geerts
  Elie Seksig
- Margaux Vaïana Guillot
- Philippe Gaud
- Laurin Bohm
- Karin Pinto
- Morgan Steyaert
- Iduna Aurora Snip

Karin Pinto
Bruno

Bruno is a communication device and radio designed for people living with dementia. Rooted in personal experience, this project explores how design can preserve emotional connection and dignity when language and memory begin to fade. Throughout his life, Karin's father was an avid radio collector. Even as dementia progressed, music and familiar languages remained a lifeline - a way to reach him, however briefly. Inspired by these moments, Bruno reimagines the traditional radio as a tool for both connection and self-agency. Bruno features a tactile, intuitive interface with one large button and three smaller.

It is designed to be used independently, encouraging daily rituals, personal control, and a sense of autonomy. Loved ones can send voice messages and curated playlists through a companion app, but it is the user who decides when to listen. The balance of care and independence is central to the design, The project emerged through conversations with caretakers, families, and dementia support groups, including the Dutch choir Forget Me Notes. Their stories revealed the profound impact of music and routine in maintaining a sense of self.

Laurin Bohm
Flößern (in fluent)

The jury praised the project for its grounded yet complex engagement with environmental and institutional questions. Laurin positions himself as both observer and actor, offering a form of soft activism that is precise and deeply situated, while holding poetic qualities. The design of the raft functions as both material intervention and symbolic gesture, opening up conversations around ownership, water, and responsibility. His ability to speak across disciplines and initiate meaningful collaborations with institutional players is noted as a rare particular strength. The jury, recognising the project's capacity to shape new modes of engagement, encourages Laurin to continue advancing this trajectory with the same integrity and critical depth, and build symbiotic relations with kindred communities.

Philippe Gaud
LE LABO 1.0

Philippe demonstrated a strong command of material experimentation and production logic, with a refined aesthetic sensibility and an elegant handling of sustainable alternatives. The integration of process visibility and industrial feasibility was considered particularly compelling. The project resonates with broader shifts in fabrication and material ethics, while maintaining a strong, self-contained identity. The jury encourages Philippe to further articulate the material origins and life cycles to consolidate its credibility and potential for broader implementation.

Iduna Aurora Snip

What's Burning? Campfire sharing sessions

The jury appreciated the clarity of intent and the commitment with which Iduna carried the project forward. The work addresses the pressing issue of student loneliness with sensitivity and conviction, creating an accessible and inclusive format that opens space for dialogue, particularly for those less inclined to speak. The concept was seen as having much potential for implementation, both for high school students and beyond. The jury wished, however, to see the visual and material articulation developed with more consistency, and was curious if engagement with the field of listening and facilitation practices could strengthen the project's methodological foundation.

Morgan Steyaert

Queer and Feminist Interventions for Martial Arts

The jury valued the strength of the book as both a graphic object and a conceptual gesture, recognising its potential to evolve into a design method binding and caring for dispersed embodied practices. The project was acknowledged for its attentiveness to vulnerability across communities and for the clarity with which it proposed activation over representation, and used graphic design strategies to do so. The accompanying staging of a reading circle was considered effective as a proposal to activate the work within its contexts, but the jury wished for more deliberate material choices towards a stronger engagement with those same contexts of bodily training.

Margaux Vaïana Guillot
Social Animal

The jury appreciated the affectionate and finely executed tribute to human-dog mediated relationships, noting the project's likability and cultural immediacy. The magazine format was considered an effective medium for exploring social connectivity. While the overall execution was detailed and consistent, the additional focus on dog's clothing seemed to introduce some ambiguity in the position of the dog. The jury saw potential in expanding the project's contextual framing to elaborate its desired effects and suggested a scaled-up approach towards diverse applications beyond its current focus.

Elie Seksig
Viens glander!

The jury commended the clarity of the project and its grounded approach, highlighting Elie's ability to apply a design lens to the immediate environment. The use of coffee as both material and ritual was considered an effective means of activating urban awareness and practices of resource sharing. The project demonstrates clear decisions that reflect a confident design attitude and mindful use of natural and industrial materials, with the mapping of local tree species standing out as a strong communicative gesture.
With the focus on coffee as a coherent entry point, the jury was curious to see the broader strategic potential of the work developed and drawn out.

Tijn Geerts

P =? NP

The jury appreciated the originality of the starting point of scientific arguments and the eloquence of Tijn's presentation. The project opens a relevant and timely inquiry into AI interaction, with potential to foster meaningful dialogue between computer science and design. The playful and experimental format was considered a promising vehicle for engaging with complex systems. Following the ambitious goal of public engagement, the jury encourages the graduate to develop a clearer articulation of the guiding questions and relevance. A more situated understanding of the designer's role within the field and in relation to its intended interlocutors would open up possibilities for a strong interdisciplinary proposition.

THE MELKWEG AWARD

The René Smeets award recognises a Bachelor graduate with a high level of empathy whose project has grounding outside the academy and demonstrates a (potential) big impact on and in collaboration with society. The jury were impressed by the level of determination across this year's projects, many of which moved from concept to outcome with clarity and intention. The students demonstrated strong communicative abilities and reflective storytelling, presenting their processes with confidence and precision. The individuality of each proposal, shaped by distinct cultural perspectives without defaulting to claims of globalism, did not restrict them to a particular locality. The return to interlocal concerns gave the projects grounded, situated qualities, often oriented around conviviality in form, method, or ambition. The jury also observed a refreshing absence of default reliance on digital tools or AI, pointing instead to a hands-on, process-driven ethos that felt especially relevant within today's design landscape and its possibilities of collaboration. Together, these graduates presented themselves as well-prepared, thoughtful professionals ready to engage with complexity across contexts.

Nominees Melkweg Award 2026

- Kirsty Soutar
- Moos Geene
- Noam Hasak-Lowy
- River Andrews
- Lucy Hodge-Sellers
- Anna Zoe Hamm
- Layla Junqueira Guertzenstein
- Jack Austin

Anna Zoe Hamm

Tenderlymilitant.exe: A Weapon Armoury for the Queer-Feminist Counter Apocalypse

Anna Zoe's project articulates a subversive notion of care through a radical and refined material language, drawing from feminist and queer theory, without resorting to didacticism. The broom-weapon hybrid opens up a compelling semiotic field, informed by plant intelligence while turning domestic labour into a site of resistance. The jury was impressed by the coherence and exceptional level of craft across performance, glossary, archive, and sculptural elements, each contributing to a layered and expansive narrative. With its fusion of gaming aesthetics, biology, and politics, the project maintained precision and overarching strengths without falling into the trap of extractivism or reductionism, and projected potential across formats.
For the strength of its vision and execution, the jury unanimously named Anna Zoe the winner of the Melkweg Award 2025.

Kirsty Soutar
Treasures of Mine

The jury valued the striking gesture of transforming bodily fluid into a sealed object, articulating a compelling link between biology and material practice. They acknowledged the project's thoughtful engagement with cultural lineage and its nuanced stance on vulnerability and taboo. They noted further that its final form seemed to introduce a shift in tone that is approaching adornment, and were curious to see how the work might grow if its critical inquiries would speak through the jewelry pieces.

Moos Geene
Bank Robbery

Moos's project was recognised as a clever reflection on the current undervaluation of craftsmanship. The jury appreciated the whimsical and self-aware narrative framing, noting how the graduate constructed an autonomous story to validate the making. They were drawn to the playful tension between commentary and craft, and saw potential in this narrative device to evolve across future explorations. Beyond the wit, the central metaphor of robbery was seen as germinal; with a distinct articulation in both aesthetics and conceptual clarity, the jury was curious to see the project's humour and critique tested with alternative funding models.

Noam Hasak-Lowy

"How can you see it like that?!"

The jury found Noam's project highly relevant in its engagement with conflict and the negotiation of opposing views. They valued the way design was positioned as a tool for shaping argumentation, and praised the methodological precision in the approach of maquettes as analytical instruments. Beyond aesthetics, the project demonstrated the power of design to articulate complex dynamics through form, which suggests a powerful methodology. While the project carried strong energy grounded in a personal position, the jury wished to see more on how its framing could balance the particular with the methodological proposal so its critical potential could be more thoroughly expressed.

River Andrews

A World Forms in Whispers

The jury regarded the proposition of sculpture functioning as a laboratory to be both original and intellectually fertile. They commended the layered conceptual grounding, and the precise articulation of a material practice as relational in history, ecology, and identity. The sculptural outcome was received as striking in its design and memorability, with each detail carefully considered. However, the jury wondered if the present translation from research to form could fully carry the project's intended complexity, beyond the commemoration towards a generative invitation in its engagement with the themes at stake.

Lucy Hodge-Sellers

Telling the Bracken

Lucy's project demonstrates strong documentary qualities, amplified through an installation that fosters an affecting dialogue between effigies, agency, and cinematic space. The jury praised its authenticity and grounded engagement with a specific social context. The focus on children's education, framed through activist role models, was seen as a generous and forward-looking gesture. They further noted that, while the project is firmly situated, its underlying methodology holds potential for adaptation across broader contexts—a direction worth exploring.

Layla Junqueira Guertzenstein

Glass Memory

The jury commended the strength of the presentation and appreciated the decision to work through handcrafted puppetry. The making process was considered deliberate and well-aligned with the narrative intent. While the film demonstrated technical care, the jury wondered if it fully conveyed the conceptual depth of the project, with the aesthetic language occasionally relying on familiar tropes. The jury would be curious to see the narrative further elaborated, for instance in a series of different stories, allowing for nuance to emerge over time.

Jack Austin

The Floor is Lava

The jury acknowledged the bravery of the process and the refinement achieved through working with the raw and unruly material of basalt. The resulting objects were regarded as charming and convincing, reflecting a pragmatic and collaborative approach to making. While the focus on materiality was clearly established, the jury wished to see a more explicit cultural framing and articulation of relevance within current discourses, both materially and in its presentation, to fully situate its intent.