THE GIJS BAKKER AWARD

The Gijs Bakker Award recognises a Master graduate whose research and design project embodies the core aspirations of initiator of the MA Programme Gijs Bakker: combining quality with relevance to open up new roles for the discipline of design. Each Master department nominates up to two final exam projects from their department, and an external jury from a range of backgrounds decides on a winner.

The Jury for the Gijs Bakker Award 2025 was comprised of Clara Balaguer, cultural worker & educator at WdKA and Piet Zwart; Hicham Khalidi, director Jan van Eyck & curator; Milou van Rossum, chief NRC Magazine; and Miriam van der Lubbe, Creative Head DDW, designer at Van Eijk & Van der Lubbe.

“This cohort demonstrated a strong case for the role of designers as collectors and amplifiers of stories from below. The jury was impressed by the depth of research and engagement with the research contexts, grounded in urgent and heartfelt subjects. Unlike journalistic or academic researchers, these graduates work with materiality, both to explore sensorial ways to enter a research subject and to create works that resonate affectively. At the same time, the jury was struck by a general tendency towards academic language and including many elements in the presentations, which did not always help to access the projects. To live up to the potential of amplifying relevant counterstories, the jury was curious how this role may translate in deliberate choices of audiences and consequently, formats and aesthetics.”

- Jury of the Gijs Bakker Award

Nominees Gijs Bakker Award 2025

- Gil Lima Monteverde (ID)
- Floor Berkhout (ID)
- Ze Qiu (CIL)
- Valdís Steinarsdóttir (SD)
- Sara Ballout (SD)
- Célestin Zion (GEO)
- Aleksandra Nazarova (GEO)
- Derrick Crichlow (CD)
- Kai-Hsiang Wen (CD)

WINNER OF THE GIJS BAKKER AWARD 2025

Critical Inquiry Lab

Ze Qiu

Who Stole the Sky?

Ze Qiu's project addresses how the seduction of environmental protection narratives can green-wash imperialist politics, through the stories of herders in China's Inner Mongolia. Through a grazing ban, these herders are forced to abandon their mode of subsistence under the banner of preventing desertification, yet their accounts tell different stories. Mixing on-site interviews and observations with footage gathered online, the resulting film contemplates the vertical struggle of narratives from above and below. The jury was impressed by the affective storytelling and how it evokes both the emotional pressure under narrative control and the seduction of counterspeculation. It challenged official 'truths' while at the same time not following the speculations blindly, instead honouring conspiring as a tactic to resist from the position of the scapegoat.

The jury especially applauds the relevant role that Ze Qiu embodies as a situated researcher, combining journalistic site visits and interviews with gathered footage from both state and amateur actors, and turning it into a poetic, convincing and touching film with flawless execution. What to do as a designer when encountering a story of injustice? Rather than assuming to be a truth-seeker, Ze Qiu proposes a role to invite people into the affective layer of truth disputes, to counter the marginalisation of the people being scapegoated, and question the comfort of received truths.

HONOURABLE MENTION
Contextual Design
Kai-Hsiang Wen
How to Catch the Fire Dragon

The project goes face to face with the Fire Dragon, a radio jamming system that prevents Taiwanese broadcasts from reaching China, by transmitting traditional Chinese operas on a stronger signal. The jury was impressed by the charismatic and flawlessly executed installation that stages a choir of modified radios, swaying to the interfering signals, as a window into the battle of radio waves in the air. The jury specifically applauds the intelligence of the choice of light and cute aesthetics in the confrontation of state oppression, as a disarming gesture that goes beyond both victimhood and aggression. Still, the jury wonders if the choice for a pre-recorded reenactment – while effective for dramatic purposes – introduces a distance towards the site, and would be curious to see ways that bring its urgency closer.

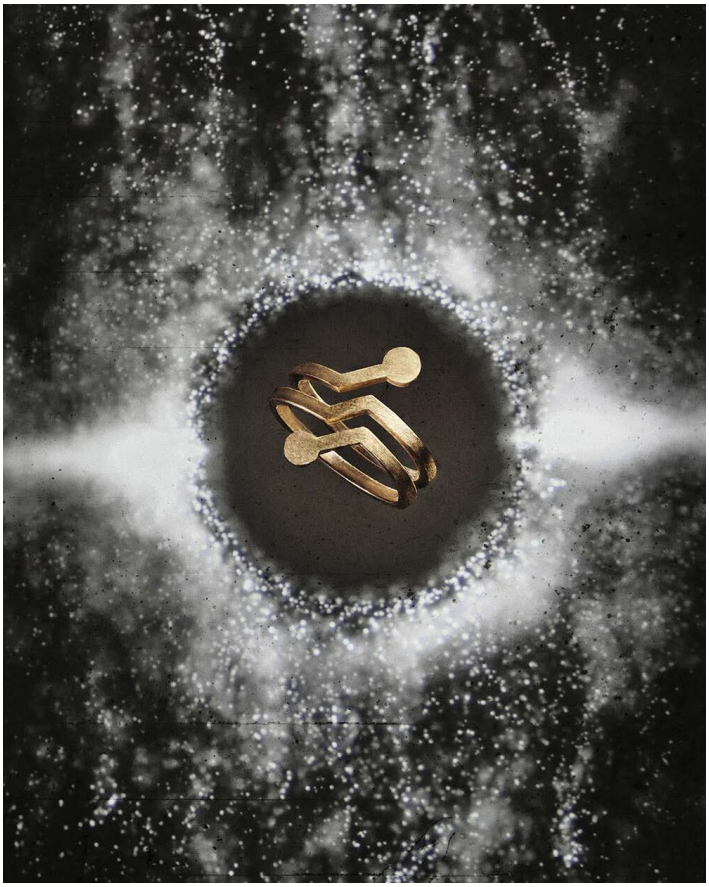
For its focused presentation and powerful aesthetic gesture, opening up a possibility space of responding to power, the jury would like to extend an honourable mention to How to Catch the Fire Dragon.

Information Design
Floor Berkhout
born under thread

Floor brings computing back from the techno-utopian cloud to social and material reality, by turning a loom into a computer interface for collective activation. The jury appreciated how Floor took on the challenge of using weaving not only as an effective metaphor to carry the gender critique, grounded in the history of computation, but also as a functional interface. To move further beyond the metaphorical, the jury would have loved to see more integration of the role of the resulting weave beyond a mere interface, and was curious how the project could develop from what read as a storytelling device into a counterproposal for computing.

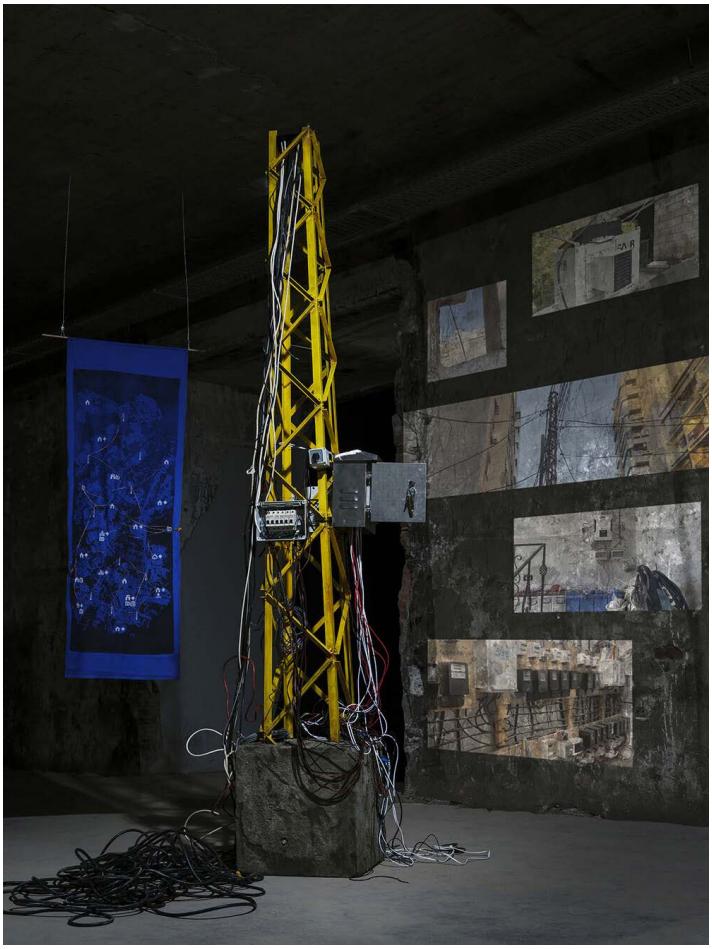
Information Design
Gil Lima Monteverde
Atmospheres from Below

The installation stages microcosms of land crisis in rumbling boxes of soil. The jury was convinced by the clear and effective choice to monitor extractive mining operations in the Amazon through the medium of tremor: from detecting operations through seismic sensing towards evoking their terror through low frequency speakers. The jury was curious to see more reflection on the limits of employing the 'master's tools to dismantle the master's house', concretely those of making legible as a political strategy – for whom and to whom? – and of reproducing violence as visualisation.



Social Design
Valdís Steinarsdóttir
A Contemporary Myth of Gold, Greed, and E-Waste

From the sharp observation that the electronic waste stream has grown so colossal that even the gold contained in it is not retrieved, Valdís crafts a myth that unfolds around the powerful gesture of turning the remains of electronic waste into a golden ring. The jury was impressed how this artefact and the video narrating the myth were able to hold a complex systemic story. There seemed to be an ambiguity about the status of the ring as pointing to a possible solution or rather a prop symbolising the mythological downfall of civilisation. The jury would have loved to see either more from the process of making the ring, or a scenography and aesthetics that lean deeper into the darkness of the myth.



Social Design
Sara Ballout
Networks of Necessity

The project embodies a powerful gesture of honouring community energy networks in and around Lebanon as forms of resilience and resistance in the face of energy scarcity and political crises. Out of the eclectic installation, the component that particularly captivated the jury was the archive of bottom-up energy solutions, as it pointed towards a role of caring for and spreading informal knowledge. However, the inclusion of many components risked watering down this role. The jury wished to see the project's connection to the context of research followed through in the outcome, exploring the potential of bringing a supportive knowledge infrastructure to the sites.

Geo—Design
Céleste Zion
Anarchist Forest Pavillon: Tree-pod

The project read as an homage to the embodied activist practice of forest protection through occupation. It's a challenge to work with activism in an exhibition, with conditions of urgency and threat that cannot be simply recreated. The jury was impressed by how the compelling performance reenacted the mundane beauty of life in the trees, and by the consistency in the choices of construction materials and method, which supported a reading of the project as a rehearsal. Still, the jury remained unsure about the status of the Treepod object between a monument and potential future protest material, and wished to see where a clearer decision would lead it.

Geo—Design
Aleksandra Nazarova
Chronotopic Fractures

While making a comment on the limits of the exactitude of timekeeping, the jury was struck by how the multiple elements of the kinetic and immersive installation worked together like a Swiss clockwork. They were particularly charmed by how the installation managed to subtly generate movement in the viewer. In its attempt to invite the audience into a more earth-bound perspective on time however, the jury missed the role elements outside the paradigm of technology, and wished to see the work move more from the representational towards letting the material create time hiccups in substantial ways.

Contextual Design
Derrick Crichlow
Donning a Fa(ça)de: The Kap-salon Barber Chair*

The jury was touched by how the project carried the personal, situated in a black and queer perspective, to a nuanced discussion of bigger themes of diasporic identity, queer identity and their interplay. They were particularly struck by how the intimacy of the barber chair was activated through the performative elements of the presentation. The jury was less convinced by the materiality of the chair and how it lived up to its aims, and would encourage following the theatrical aspects where Derrick emerges as a performer and the chair with its surrounding scenography performs as the set.