

Sir Denis Mahon Sculptural Award 2022/23  
End of Project Report  
Alfie Biro

BA Year 3 Fine art  
Academic Year 2022/23  
City & Guilds of London Art School

I would like to begin by thanking you for your financial support this year, which gave me the freedom to continue the material exploration that has shaped my time at City & Guilds of London Art School, most of which has been spent learning traditional techniques and craft in the glass and metal workshops.

When applying for the Denis Mahon Sculptural Award, I had intended to make sculptural work exploring my paternal great grandfather's Galway heritage and his allotment travails, whilst creating a narrative that bridged the gap between the surviving tales of my family and those lost in the transit of history. Over the course of a year spent industriously in community gardens in London's industrial heartlands and the fantastic City & Guilds of London Art School workshops, the theme of my work accelerated towards the present day, and my own struggles shaped by the loss of local gardening spaces. Whilst on a less dramatic scale, the erasure of the fruits of my labour on the urban fertile soil as gardens were reclaimed and then left to rot by property developers resulted in a lineage that leads back through my family, to my forefathers displacement from their land in the Irish enclosures of old.

The generous material budget that the grant provided allowed me to extensively explore cold working glass, making a series of sculptural work using the traditional Pate de Verre method of creating three dimensional forms from powdered and frit glass, creating casts from archival kitchen equipment belonging to my late great Aunt Martha, whose home I helped clear after 68 years of faithful occupation. Alongside cold working, I was able to create panes of marbled glass, raked whilst molten at 904\* in the kiln, in a response to Leonor Antunes' permanent glass installation at St Luke's Chapel in Plymouth. The last portion of the grant money will enable me to visit her work in person this summer, which after researching her work in depth for my dissertation, I am looking forward to greatly.

Outside of the glass workshop, I was keen to use the metal facilities to create a fine art response to my grown environment, culminating in the production of a bronze cast of a Jersey Tree Cabbage stalk, a material which I explored in great depth this year. The cabbage once dominated the shoreline of the channel island, used to feed livestock, wrap the island's famous butter and then, as a victorian signifier of style as walking sticks, a craft practised today by just one family on the island, and now, myself. Now, as a testament to this dying craft and the now abandoned garden where the cabbage was grown, there stands a bronze reminder of this heritage.

I am pleased to report that I received a first for my degree and have every intention of using the skills I have amassed to continue exploring the worlds of metal and glass in order to bring other gardening heritage stories to life in the 21st century. I am now learning the ancient art of

coppersmithing and am planning to study this in greater detail, before applying for heritage craft scholarships and job opportunities in the near future. Thanks to my new and burgeoning skill set, I have been commissioned to create a weather vane to rise above a new community garden in Bermondsey, and this is the path I feel in good stead to continue down.

Images from *My Gardens Boundaries are the Horizon*, June 2023







3 glass pate de verre cast jelly moulds, alongside found fisherman's rope, materials collected from Rotherhithe Beach, grown chillies and pumpkin and hammered metal

Glass marbled panel, displayed upstairs in the Georgian Studios at the Art School





Bronze Jersey Tree Cabbage