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ALEX R CREATES 'GLASS GARDEN' FOR CHRISTCHURCH SCHOOL

A new work by upcoming glass artist **Alex R** has just been installed at Christchurch School in Chelsea, London. She has created a spectacular glittering artwork from 245 glass tiles that were made in collaboration with all the pupils in the school, plus a few teachers as well! Entitled 'The Glass Garden', the piece is a large wall-mounted lightbox (2.35x1.65m) with a front surface that looks like an enormous, amazingly colourful tapestry in glass. 'The Glass Garden' is installed in the first floor corridor of the newly rebuilt school on Robinson Street, SW3, making it a special centrepiece for this special Beacon school.

Alex R was commissioned by Anna Kendall, the Head Mistress of Christ Church School, to create a glass piece that would involve all the pupils. Alex worked with the Art and Design Co-ordinator, Arabella Davies, who had designed a theme around creating a garden represented in glass. This was to complement the real school garden which the school's Organic Gardening Club had recently planted. Alex and Arabella ran workshops with each year group in the school focussing on a different element of a garden, for instance flower beds, vegetable patches or patio. Under their direction each child produced a 10cm square glass tile using techniques appropriate to their age group. Most of the workshops involved using pre-prepared glass pieces which had rounded edges, so little fingers were safe from cuts.

The youngest children were shown the applique technique, sticking glass 'flowers' and 'vegetables' in their patch using pattern and symmetry. The seven and eight year olds used collage techniques with kiln-polished pieces of glass to create a tessellating design for a garden patio. Under Alex's guidance, they used their knowledge of fractions to fit the 'paving stones' together and finally adorning their patios with glass nuggets representing flower-pots. The older children spent much of their workshop in the garden using viewfinders to focus on curves in the garden. They were helped to translate their sketches into simple iconic imagery which they painted onto glass tiles in water-based enamels. The eldest children were shown how to cut glass and they created simple compositions based on their garden designs.

"I had my own agenda with this project," reveals artist Alex R. "I felt very strongly that this project should inspire the kids to get excited about glass, a material they are usually told off for breaking! Glass is such a beautiful medium for making art, but it rarely gets taught in schools because it is a niche subject and because of the obvious health and safety issues. But without exception, children have always been fascinated by the glass in my studio... sure enough when the Christchurch kids saw all the trays of coloured glass nuggets at the first workshop, it was really rewarding to hear their cries of 'Cool!' and 'Wicked!'"

The resulting tiles are tactile as well as visual, having been fused together in the kiln, and children are encouraged to run their hands over the glass lightbox. Installed directly opposite a row of large windows, the lightbox is beautiful even when switched off, as the daylight reflects from its many glossy surfaces. Within a week of its installation, the Glass Garden was selected as the winner of the ‘Glass in Interiors’ category of the Pearson’s Prize, so its appreciative audience widened beyond the school walls. However this project was as much about the making process as it was about the result. Over 200 children each got to spend a few hours handling the jewel-like nuggets of glass, seeing how translucent colours combine and looking at inspiring imagery of glass art. The making process was indeed as magical as the final piece.



INFORMATION FOR EDITORS

Title: *The Glass Garden*
Artist: Alex R
Year: 2006
Size: 2350mm x 1520mm
Materials: 245 fused and painted glass tiles
Location: First Floor Corridor, Christ Church School, 1 Robinson Street, London SW3 4AA

FOR MORE INFORMATION/HI-RES IMAGES, CONTACT: alex@alex-r.com

Alex R is an upcoming artist who has completed many previous commissions for private clients, as well as a public art piece for University College Hospital (2005). She was the winner of the Stevens Glass Competition (2005) and was selected to show at the prestigious British Glass Biennale (2006). She set up her business after graduating from Central Saint Martins in July 2005. Her studio occupies the ground floor of her 1970's townhouse in south-east London which she shares with her eight year old son.

www.alex-r.com

Christ Church School is a well established Beacon School under the guidance of headteacher Anna Kendall. Last year it underwent an extensive rebuilding programme to transform the warren of small, dark rooms in the original Victorian building into a bright functional space for the children. The art programme at the school is run by Art & Design Co-ordinator Arabella Davies who worked with Alex R on this project.

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Pearsons Glass was founded in Liverpool, England in 1901 as J Pearson and Company. The Company has a firm commitment in investing for the future, and over the past few years has been developing its "Art Glass" department in order to promote stained glass as an art and as a hobby alongside the more commercial applications of glass. To this end, Pearsons Glass launched a new competition within the glass industry, the "**Pearsons Prize**", which celebrates the achievements of practising glass artists in the UK.

www.pearsonsprize.com <http://www.pearsonsglass.com/home.asp>