

# News release



25 April 2015

## Oxford University Museum of Natural History shortlisted for Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015

The Oxford University Museum of Natural History has been chosen as one of six finalists in the prestigious Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015. The annual prize, which is widely regarded as the most prestigious award for UK museums, surveys galleries and museums across the UK and selects those which have demonstrated exceptional creativity and ambition over the past twelve months.

The winning museum will be announced on 1 July at a ceremony at Tate Modern and will receive £100,000. The other shortlisted museums are Dunham Massey (National Trust), Altrincham; IWM London (Imperial War Museums); The MAC, Belfast; HM Tower of London; and The Whitworth, Manchester.



In February 2014 the Museum of Natural History in Oxford reopened after 14 months under wraps while its iconic Victorian glass roof was restored. This £4m project literally cast the Museum's main court in a new light, both through the cleaning and replacement of some 8,600 glass tiles, but also thanks to a new state-of-the-art LED lighting scheme that was installed at the same time.

While the Museum was darkened by scaffolding and construction work, a bigger transformation was taking place. Using the opportunity of closure to experiment with innovative and creative forms of public engagement, including the Goes to Town project in Oxford city centre which is shortlisted for a Museums + Heritage Award, the Museum remerged in 2014 with a new voice and an expanded programme for a wider audience.

“Our public programme encourages visitors of all ages to understand and engage with the natural environment, and sits alongside our world-class research and teaching. The museum's small team and our volunteers are delighted that this transformation has led to being named as a finalist in the

prestigious Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015,” said Professor Paul Smith, director of the Museum.

Professor Andrew Hamilton, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, said: “We are delighted that the Oxford University Museum of Natural History has been selected as a Finalist in the Art Fund Prize Museum of the Year 2015. This achievement recognises the exceptional quality of its public engagement, teaching and research. The Museum’s internationally-important collections are housed in a truly unique building, and the restoration of its roof and improvements to the court have assured it of a very bright future.”

On Friday 8 May the Museum will open two new exhibitions<sup>1</sup>. *Biosense* is a temporary exhibition looking at contemporary science research into the ways organisms use biological sensing to detect changes in their environments; and *Sensing Evolution* presents two new permanent displays of touchable specimens exploring the evolutionary adaptations of mammals and reptiles.

The Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015 will be celebrated on BBC Radio 2, BBC Radio 3 and BBC News Online, in a series of broadcasts and online interactive presentations during the period leading up to the announcement of the winner, enabling a widespread national debate about the value of the UK’s museums.

The Prize also partners with VocalEyes, a charity that provides access to arts and heritage for blind and partially sighted people. As well as creating introductory audio descriptions, VocalEyes will offer visual awareness training opportunities for staff and volunteers at the shortlisted museums to ensure that they are equipped to greet and guide blind and partially sighted visitors.

### **Photography competition with Martin Parr**

As part of the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015, the Museum of Natural History is taking part in a photography competition judged by Magnum photographer Martin Parr and the public. Visitors are invited to capture the many aspects of the Museum and submit their photographs to the Art Fund for a chance to win a photography holiday to Berlin. Details of other prizes and how to enter are available at [www.artfund.org/prize](http://www.artfund.org/prize). To read about Martin Parr’s photography of the Museum see the [More than a Dodo](#) blog.

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<sup>1</sup> While these exhibitions are installed there will be some disruption and closure in certain areas of the Museum’s court.

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## Notes to editors

### The members of the Museum of the Year Prize 2015 Jury are:

Stephen Deuchar (chair), director of the Art Fund  
Michael Landy, artist  
Alice Rawsthorn, design critic and author  
Fiammetta Rocco, books and arts editor of *The Economist*  
Axel Rüger, director of the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

## About the Museum of Natural History

Founded in 1860 as the centre for scientific study at the University of Oxford, the Museum of Natural History now holds the University's internationally significant collections of entomological, geological and

zoological specimens. Housed in a stunning example of neo-Gothic architecture, the Museum's growing collections underpin a broad programme of natural environment research, teaching and public engagement.

### **About the Art Fund**

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, driven by the belief that everyone should have access to great art. In the past five years the Art Fund has given £34 million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. The Art Fund also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, including ARTIST ROOMS and the 2013-18 Aspire tour of Tate's *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* by John Constable, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators.

The Art Fund is independently funded, with the core its income provided by 117,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 230 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibition. In addition to grant-giving, the Art Fund's support for museums includes the annual Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year, a publications programme and a range of digital platforms.