



Bee -
bumbling
around on the
kitchen table.
Sept 2013
F. J.



Museum of
**Natural
History**
University of Oxford

Visions of Nature

January 2016 – January 2017

A year-long showcase of art, poetry, and
photography inspired by the natural world

Image: Orchid Cuckoo Bee, Levon Biss



Visions of Nature in numbers

<p>Visions of Nature exhibitions attracted 573,543 visitors</p>	<p>The Museum hosted 3 poets-in-residence during the year</p> <p>John Barnie Steven Matthews Kelley Swain</p>	<p>24 poems were written by the poets-in-residence and were published in an anthology titled <i>Guests of Time</i>, edited by John Holmes</p>	<p>22 different Visions of Nature themed events ran during the year as part of the museums public programme. From workshops, to pop-up exhibitions, and museum late nights to family activities.</p>
<p>101,862 people visited Bee's (and the odd wasp) in my bonnet exhibition Mar - Sept 2016</p> <p>512 visitors a day Rated 4.3 out of 5</p>	<p>16 additional poems were written and contributed to our poetry tree by poets around the country</p>	<p>50 poems were written by visitors for our poetry tree on National Poetry Day</p>	<p>£30,000 of shop sales for Visions of Nature</p>
<p>443,456 people visited Microsculpture: The Insect Portraits of Levon Biss May 2016- Jan 2017</p> <p>1810 visitors a day Rated 4.5 out of 5</p>	<p>16 matches were made between poets and researchers and curators. The poets then met these researchers and curators on several occasions throughout the year for inspiration</p>	<p>6,700 Visions of Nature events. The events reached a broad audience from families to university students, and from adults interested in the arts to primary and secondary school pupils</p>	<p>£17,572 of sales of Microsculpture merchandise.</p>
<p>52 artists contributed to the four exhibitions</p>	<p>Microsculpture website has had over 350,000 visits</p> <p>The Microsculpture short film had over 9 million views</p>	<p>14,350 visitors to the Visions of Nature website</p>	<p>40 artworks were contributed to the Visions of Nature website by the public</p>
<p>269 works were included in the four exhibitions. The pieces included paintings, sculpture, photography, ceramics, glassware, jewellery and drawings</p> <p>18 Pre-Raphaelite works were loaned to us by the Ashmolean for a pop-up exhibition and guided tour</p>	<p>To date Microsculpture has toured to 4 international venues</p>	<p>2,000 Visions of Nature specific blog views</p>	<p>2,000 Visions of Nature specific blog views</p>
<p>1 Ashmolean bestiary was loaned by the Bodleian for a special Visions of Nature event</p>	<p>1 Ashmolean bestiary was loaned by the Bodleian for a special Visions of Nature event</p>	<p>2,000 Visions of Nature specific blog views</p>	<p>2,000 Visions of Nature specific blog views</p>

Visions of Nature

During 2016, Oxford University Museum of Natural History presented a rich programme of exhibitions, talks and workshops by artists and writers whose varied work celebrated the natural environment. Over the course of the year, in collaboration with Professor John Holmes of the University of Birmingham, the Museum presented four contemporary art and science exhibitions, hosted three poets-in residence, published an anthology of the poets' work, and delivered a large and broad public programme of events.

The fusion between art, science and nature that informed the Museum's architecture and decoration provided the inspiration for this arts focussed year. Professor John Holmes guided the Museum to look back to the relationship between the Pre-Raphaelite artists and the University scientists who were closely involved with the building's design, who together created a vision of nature that was both rigorously scientific and beautifully crafted. One of the principal aims of the Visions of Nature year was to return to this close dialogue between art and science and bring the results to our visitors

Through the Visions of Nature programme, the Museum aimed to broaden its audience by presenting different perspectives on natural history. The programme sought to attract an adult audience who were engaged with the arts, but who were unlikely to visit a science museum.

The exhibition and event programme presented contemporary science alongside the art, in line with the Museum's strategic aim of expanding the appeal of public engagement with science.

The Visions of Nature exhibitions attracted a large audience of 573,543 people. In the opening two months of Microsculpture visitor numbers increased by 15%, and in the opening month of Bees (and the Odd Wasp) in my Bonnet exhibition, visitor numbers increased by 10%. Overall visitor numbers increased by 4% in comparison to the previous year - an increase of 28,187 visitors. From a survey conducted in the

Microsculpture exhibition, the results showed that 44% of those questioned had not visited the Museum before and 45% had come specifically to see the exhibition, suggesting that the Museum achieved its aim of attracting a new audience.

In terms of a Visions of Nature legacy, two of the exhibitions went on to tour; Bees (and the Odd Wasp) in my Bonnet to Cornwall and Microsculpture to Neues Museum Biel in Switzerland, the Xposure International Photography Festival, Sharjah, U.A.E., Salone del Mobile in Milan, and the Natural History Museum of Denmark, with plans to tour to further venues.

The success of the Visions of Nature year has encouraged the Museum to start commissioning contemporary art through an open call, to sit alongside the Contemporary Science and Society exhibition series. In addition, a new community display case has been installed since Visions of Nature to showcase the creative work of some of the community groups the Museum works with. Exhibitions have included a display of creative writing and artwork by local primary school children who have communication difficulties. The work was created in response to a number of specially designed sessions delivered in the Museums.



Image: Delivery of a special Microsculpture primary school session

Exhibitions

Bees (and the Odd Wasp) in my Bonnet
18 March - 2 October 2016

The first in the Visions of Nature series, Bees (and the Odd Wasp) in my Bonnet was a collaboration between the Museum and leading contemporary British artist, Kurt Jackson. A new body of Jackson's work that had not been displayed before was presented alongside specimens from the collections, including a display of all 270 British bee species, and archival material from the collections, along with the latest scientific research into the ecology of bee decline.

The exhibited work explored the importance, role, and current plight of bees and other pollinators as well as celebrating the diversity of bees in Britain. Embracing an extensive range of materials and techniques including mixed media, large scale paintings, print making and sculpture, this body of artwork included over 60 different pieces for our visitors to see. The latest scientific research into the hazards facing bees, such as neonicotinoid pesticides and habitat losses was presented in the exhibition alongside the artwork offering the audience a unique presentation of contemporary art and science.

Over 100,000 people visited Bees (and the Odd Wasp) in my Bonnet and it was rated 4.3 out of 5 (n = 4145) by the exhibition's visitors. An accompanying catalogue of the artwork was produced for the exhibition and was sold in the Museum shop alongside a range of bespoke merchandise.

The exhibition has gone on to tour at the Jackson Foundation Gallery in Cornwall.

When visitors were asked what aspect of the exhibition impacted on them the most, they responded with:

"The art made you aware and think about bees rather than not giving them a second thought"

"The characteristics of bees were depicted artistically. I found the juxtaposition of art and science fascinating."

"Informative, and I enjoyed the artwork very much. I spent a long time drawing the bees. Artwork integrated with science motivates me to draw myself."

"The range of work and the thoughtful way it links in with the museum collection."



Image: Bernard's Bees, 2014, Kurt Jackson

Microsculpture: The Insect Photography of Levon Biss

27 May 2016 – 29 January 2017

www.microsculpture.net



In May 2016 the Museum premiered Microsculpture, a striking photographic exhibition revealing insects like never before – in large-format and exquisitely-lit detail. Created by UK portrait photographer Levon Biss, the exhibition combined fine art photography, the science of entomology, and carefully chosen specimens from the Museum's collections.

The images and accompanying video created a worldwide impact on their release. International media coverage included numerous online articles along with national TV in the UK (The One Show) and

Germany (Deutsche Welle). Feature articles in the UK ran in New Scientist, the Observer, Guardian, the Daily Telegraph and Wired, as well as international publications and local media.

The award-winning five-minute promotional video has been watched more than nine million times, with an unprecedented reach on the University of Oxford Facebook page of well over 20 million people.

Microsculpture received almost 450,000 visitors during its eight-month run at the Museum of Natural History. It has subsequently toured internationally to Neues Museum Biel in Switzerland and the Natural History Museum of Denmark. As of summer 2017 there were plans to tour the exhibition to further venues in Europe, the UK, and the United States.

Visitor responses to Microsculpture:

"Great addition to the museum, something very different."

"Great work - wonderful idea to bring insects and museum items to life"

"Amazing detail and striking colours depicted in photos, fascinating to see creatures magnified in this way."

"Astoundingly beautiful. Just beginning to really appreciate insects and this exhibition takes my breath away"

"To see such photography is awe-inspiring and shows the massive diversity on earth"

Image: Jewel Longhorn Beetle , Levon Biss

Oxford Photographic Society - The Natural World

22 October 2016 - 22 January 2017

During the last part of the year, the museum hosted two exhibitions showcasing the work of local artists and photographers. For the first of these exhibitions, the Museum worked with Oxford Photographic Society. Sixty photographs showcasing the natural world were displayed on the walls of the café gallery.

The exhibition was opened by the Lord Mayor of Oxford Councillor Mohammed Altaf-Khan.

An Artweeks Arctic

11 November 2016 – 29 January 2017

The Museum also partnered with Oxfordshire Artweeks, a large network of artists, to put on an exhibition of new work inspired by the Arctic environment. An Artweeks Arctic presented over 90 paintings, ceramics, textiles, photography and glasswork by nine artists. The exhibition provided the museum with the opportunity to present the facts about current rapid changes to the Arctic environment alongside these artworks.

All of the artwork displayed was on sale, and many of the pieces were sold during the exhibition. Three of the artists also sold their products in the shop throughout the exhibition.

An Artweeks Arctic attracted 28,225 visitors in the 11 weeks it was open to the public.



Top image: Bald Eagle, Ron Perkins

Bottom image: Svartisen glacier, Arctic Norway, Susan Avery



Poets-in-Residence

Throughout the Visions of Nature year the museum hosted three poets-in-residence: John Barnie, Steven Matthews, and Kelley Swain. The residency was established and developed by Professor John Holmes from the University of Birmingham in partnership with the Museum. The three poets worked alongside a number of collections staff and researchers, and out in the Museum court to gain inspiration for their writing. The access to the collections and current research taking place at the museum led to the creation of 24 poems that were directly inspired by these interactions.

As part of their residency, the poets engaged with the public through a number of different events, including National Poetry Day, one of the Museum's late night events and an evening of poetry readings. During these events the poets encouraged members of the public to write their own poems, and talked to visitors about their residency.

On National Poetry day, the Museum launched a poetry trail which involved a number of the poems created during the residency placed alongside the specimens in the museum that had directly inspired them. Visitors had the opportunity to look at these specimens in a different light through poetry and to actively see the work of the poets-in-residence.

The residencies concluded with the publishing of *Guests of Time* by Valley Press. This anthology was edited by Professor John Holmes using the poems written during the residency together with poems written by nineteenth-century poets who would have been writing around the same time as the Museum was built.

The New Welsh Review wrote the following about *Guests of Time*:

"The anthology's three contemporary poets lead you through engaging, precise, and provocative responses to the Museum's architecture, varied contents, time zones and associated specialists – much like the experience of wandering through the physical building."

"Viscerally rendered observation characterises pieces by all three poets, but there is also the pleasure of their differing voices interposed and contrasted in museumly manner."



Image: Poet-in-Residence Kelley Swain reading from *Guests of Time* anthology at the launch event

Visions of Nature public programme

Alongside the four exhibitions ran a rich and varied programme of events aiming to reach a wide audience. Events and activities were programmed around both the Bees (and the Odd Wasp) in my Bonnet and Microsculpture exhibitions, and the poetry residency. From a photography masterclass delivered by Levon Biss, to a Kurt Jackson-led tour of his artwork, the programme aimed to engage an adult audience. The programme sought to present alternative 'visions of nature', for example through comedy in a specially written show by comedians The Dead Secrets, and through dance in *Dancing the Tree of Life*.

To celebrate the end of the Visions of Nature year and the publishing of the *Guests of Time* anthology, the Museum ran three special events for an adult and student audience. The Museum worked with Professor Janine Rogers (Mount Allison University, Canada) and Professor John Holmes to curate and deliver the events: 'Building the Book of Nature' and 'Visualising Nature'. These events showcased contemporary research in both science and the humanities, communicated the work of the poets, and included special pop-up displays of rare material including the Ashmole Bestiary from the Bodleian. For a special one-day exhibition curated by Professor John Holmes, the Ashmolean loaned a series of Pre-Raphaelite drawings, sculptures and paintings, including designs for the Museum by John Ruskin to highlight the Museum's artistic history and to provide a unique experience for attendees of the events. A number of researchers and collections staff were involved in these events, presenting their work and the collections. In the finale event, the launch of *Guests of Time*, the researchers and collections staff that the poets worked with during the year brought out the specimens that had directly inspired the poems that were being recited.

Attendees of each of these events were asked to comment on what they enjoyed the most:

"All of it. Such a privilege to come to the museum and learn from the experts. Thank you!"

"Direct relation to the objects drawn attention to – an incentive to return. Plus excellent speakers"

"The interactive pop-up exhibition and chance to ask speakers questions alongside their work"

"The conscious intersection of arts and science – so important at this time"

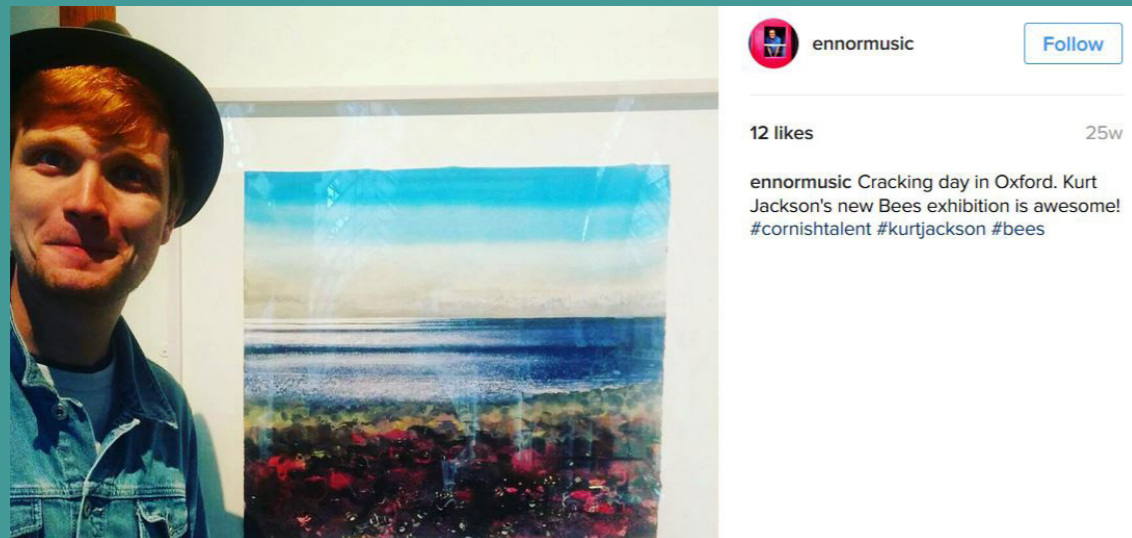
"Dr Imran Rahman's talk as he very well explained how new technologies relate to scientific curiosity in today's scientific pursuits."



Top image: *Building the Book of Nature* event led by John Holmes and Janine Rogers

Bottom image: Conservator Juliet Hay presenting Eve the plesiosaur at the *Visualising Nature* event

Visions of Nature in Social Media



ennormusic @ennormusic Follow

12 likes 25w

ennormusic Cracking day in Oxford. Kurt Jackson's new Bees exhibition is awesome! #cornishtalent #kurtjackson #bees



EmilySD @RaisingGinger Follow

We saw Star Wars characters and fantastical creatures in the mega-magnified insects @morethanadodo #microsculpture

7:24 PM - 11 Jul 2016

3 Retweets 10 Likes



NaturalHistoryDK @NHM_Denmark Follow

Happy #InternationalMuseumDay. We are celebrating by opening the exhibition #Microsculpture. Come visit us! @LevonBissPhoto @lcomOfficial

5:08 PM - 18 May 2017



MiND Magazine @MiNDMagazine_ Follow

@LevonBissPhoto this week on #MiNDMagazine talks all this #insects and #microsculpture for our #artistoftheweek bit.ly/2uhbtC4



Jo Wimpenny @JoWimpenny Follow

@LevonBissPhoto Blown away by detail, beauty and innovation of #microsculpture exhibition. Stunning!

10:15 PM - 3 Aug 2016



Graham Meeks @GrahamMeeks_d3 Follow

Amazing #Microsculpture exhibition @morethanadodo @LevonBissPhoto - always good to see the world in a different way

9:19 PM - 25 Jul 2016



Toad Ink @toadink Follow

.@morethanadodo here's my wasp (ink pen) #visionsofnature

2016 all rights reserved. www.toadink.co.uk MARK WRIGHT

10:08 PM - 15 Nov 2016



nessgoddess @nessgoddess Follow

21 likes 14w

nessgoddess Did you know that we have 270 different #bee #species in the uk?! I didn't! Amazing! #bugsarecool #pollination #kurtjackson #beesandtheoddwaspinmybonnet #exhibition #dayofbugs #naturalhistory #hymenoptera #oxfordmuseumofnaturalhistory #entomology



Sandra Knapp @SandyKnapp

A panoply of British bees @morethanadodo @BBSRC - wonderful art-sci fusion!



Barbara Shaw @art_in_textiles Follow

Hello @morethanadodo here are my #visionsofnature #hand #stitched #textile pics.

3:33 PM - 3 Aug 2016

12 Retweets 30 Likes



give bees a chance



BUMBLE
BEE

45/50

Kurt Jackson 2013

With special thanks to Professor John Holmes, University of Birmingham, for approaching the Museum with the idea to return to its artistic roots as well as his support, guidance, and work during the Visions of Nature year.

Special thanks also to: Professor Janine Rogers, Mount Allison University; Canada; The Ashmolean Museum; Bodleian Libraries; and Esther Lafferty, Oxfordshire Artweeks.

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Front page image: *Bees bumbling around the kitchen table*, 2013, Kurt Jackson

Back page image: *Give bees a chance*, 2013, Kurt Jackson



Museum of
Natural
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University of Oxford



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www.visionsofnature.net