

News release



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Large-scale photographic exhibition reveals hidden beauty of insects at Oxford University Museum of Natural History

Microsculpture – The Insect Portraiture of Levon Biss

27 May – 30 October 2016

www.microsculpture.net

The beautiful, surprising, and often outright bizarre microscopic form of insects is presented in breathtaking clarity in a new exhibition by British photographer Levon Biss at the Museum of Natural History in Oxford. Created as part of the Museum's [Visions of Nature](#) year in 2016, *Microsculpture* shows specimens from the collection like never before, in large-format and exquisitely-lit detail.

On show in the main court, the largest of *Microsculpture's* photographic prints measure up to three metres across and surround the visitor. Seen alongside the tiny insect specimens themselves, this huge transformation of scale offers a unique viewing experience.



Orchid Cuckoo Bee (*Exaerete frontalis*)

The specimens on show have been carefully selected by Dr James Hogan, an entomologist in the Museum's Life Collections, to reveal the array of sculptural forms visible in insects at the microscopic level. Visitors can view the intricate shapes, colours and microsculpture of the creatures up close in the pin-sharp photographs, before stepping back to take in the beauty of the insect as a whole.

Each picture in *Microsculpture* is created from around 8,000 individual photographs. Segments of the specimen are lit and photographed separately, 'stacked' to maintain sharp focus throughout, then combined into a single high-resolution file.

"I photograph the insect in approximately 30 different sections, depending on the size of the specimen. Each section is lit differently with strobe lights to bring out the micro-sculptural beauty of that particular section of the body. For example, I will light and shoot just one antenna, then I will move on to the eye and the lighting set up will change entirely to suit the texture and contours of that part of the body. This process continues until I have covered the whole surface area of the insect." – **Levon Biss**

Combining art with science, the exhibition also provides information about each creature in the show, where possible discussing the evolutionary adaptations that have given rise to its particular microsculpture form.

"It's thought that microscopic structures alter the properties of an insect's surface in different ways, reflecting sunlight, shedding water, or trapping air. The evolutionary process of natural selection should account for all this wonderful diversity of microstructures, but for many species their specific adaptive function is still unknown. By observing insects in the wild, studying museum collections, and developing new imaging techniques we will surely learn more about these fascinating creatures and close the gaps in our current understanding." – **Dr James Hogan, Oxford University Museum of Natural History**

To see zoomable images from the *Microsculpture* show, and to watch a short video about the making of the project, visit microsculpture.net.



Wasp Mimic Hoverfly (*Cerioides* sp.)

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Splendid-necked Dung Beetle (*Helictopleurus splendidicollis*)

For further information:

Scott Billings
Digital engagement officer
Museum of Natural History
scott.billings@oum.ox.ac.uk
01865 272 537

Notes to editors

About Levon Biss

Levon Biss is a British photographer based in the UK who has been shooting campaigns for international brands for the last 18 years. His work has graced the covers of publications such as TIME Magazine and he has produced a bestselling book on the global game of soccer titled 'One Love'.

Biss's passion for nature and photography have now come together to create **Microsculpture**, a unique photographic study of insects in mind-blowing magnification. For his latest personal project, Biss embraced the world of macrophotography and has taken the genre to a new level. His photographs capture in breathtaking detail the beauty of the insect world and are printed in large-scale formats to provide the audience with an unforgettable viewing experience.

www.levonbiss.com

contact@levonbiss.com

@LevonBissPhoto

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 Pre-Raphaelite-inspired example of neo-Gothic architecture, the Museum's growing collections underpin a broad programme of natural environment research, teaching and public engagement.

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