Microsculpture presents the insect collection of Oxford University Museum of Natural History like never before. The exhibition comes from a collaboration with photographer Levon Biss whose work has previously focused on the portraiture of celebrities. This exhibition focuses on the portraiture of insects, highlighting the hidden beauty of a variety of insect specimens from the Museum’s collection.

The beautiful, surprising, and often bizarre microscopic forms of insects themselves allow visitors to view an array of sculptural forms visible in a variety of insects as well as their colours and shapes, down to the fine hair like skeletal structures. Seen alongside the real life-sized insects from the collection themselves, this huge transformation of scale offers a unique viewing experience. The specimens on show have been carefully selected by Dr James Hogan, an entomologist in the Museum’s Life collections. Each picture in Microsculpture is created from around 8,000 individual photographs.

“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

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

Visit www.oum.ox.ac.uk for more details.
Ideas for creating art work during your museum visit:

• What are your first impressions of the photographs? Discuss with a friend.

• Try and describe the colours and textures in the photographs. How does the huge scale alter your thoughts and ideas on what you are seeing?

• Make a pencil study of a small area of one of the photographs in your sketchbook. Make notes on colour and texture so that you can add in more detail back at school.

• How do these enlarged detailed photographs make you think differently about insects?

• What is it like to see something so small enlarged to a huge scale. How does it make you feel?

Ideas for work back at school or at home:

• The Microsculpture photographs are made up on 100s of very detailed images put together; they are a form of photomontage. How have other artists used photomontage? Look at David Hockney or Chuck Close. Experiment with your own photomontages.

• Consider how natural forms are often used as inspiration for jewellery or textile designs. Look at designers such as Alexander McQueen for ideas and inspiration.

• Select objects to look at under a microscope in order to look at magnified detail. Try sketching the additional colour, detail and texture you can see. Look at the drawings of Robert Hooke in his book *Micrographia*. Hooke was a trained artist turned scientist that made detailed drawings of living things under a microscope.

• Try enlarging an image on a photocopier multiple times or enlarge a section using a scanner. Try making a study of part of what you have enlarged. Does it resemble the original image? What new things do you notice?

• Use the Microsculpture website www.microsculpture.net to view the images from the exhibition in detail. You can zoom in and look closely at certain areas and details. Make studies of sections of the images really focussing on texture and colour. Use a variety of materials to do this.