



Biodiversity

KURT JACKSON

3 February – 15 May 2022

Oxford University Museum of Natural History



Museum of
Natural History

Jackson Foundation
North Row | St Just | TR19 7LB

Biodiversity

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Biodiversity is the variety of life. In any one location the range of organisms living there, including plants, animals, and bacteria, is referred to as its biodiversity. It is used as a measure of how well or poorly natural life is coping with environmental and biological stresses. Each habitat has its own distinctive biodiversity, from the fields and forests, seas and streams, to the increasingly urban places where we live. Under the water, on a mountain, in your garden; what lives there?

The exhibition *Biodiversity: Kurt Jackson* showcased artworks made by contemporary artist and environmentalist Kurt Jackson in a number of different locations across the UK. Alongside the art, displays of specimens from the Museum's collection highlighted the range of species found in UK landscapes. Combined with responses to the artwork from 13 researchers at the University of Oxford, the exhibition explored the theme of biodiversity. How can we understand it, how can we protect it, and what does it mean to us all?



The flower pot that rewilded itself, 2020, mixed media on wood panel.

About the artist

Kurt Jackson is a contemporary artist and environmentalist based in the UK. He specialises in plein-air painting using a variety of media, often incorporating collage and the written word.

Originally from Dorset, Jackson studied Zoology at the University of Oxford. He established his mixed-media studio in Cornwall in 1984. Throughout his career, his practice has engaged with landscape and the environment, focusing on the complexity, fragility and diversity of our natural world. He has been artist-in-residence on the Greenpeace ship, *Esperanza*, at Cornwall's Eden Project, and, for the past 20 years, at the world-famous Glastonbury Festival. He holds an honorary doctorate from the

University of Exeter and is an Honorary Fellow of St Peter's College, Oxford.

Biodiversity: Kurt Jackson is Jackson's second exhibition at the Museum following his 2016 show, *Bees (and the odd wasp) in my Bonnet*.



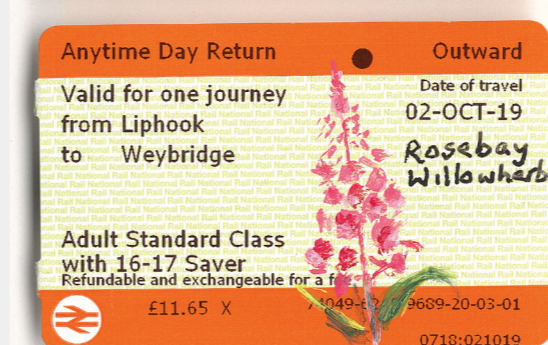
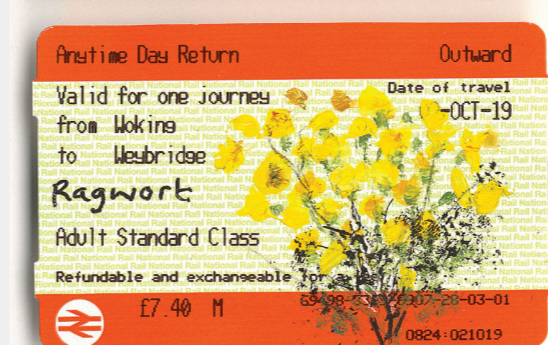
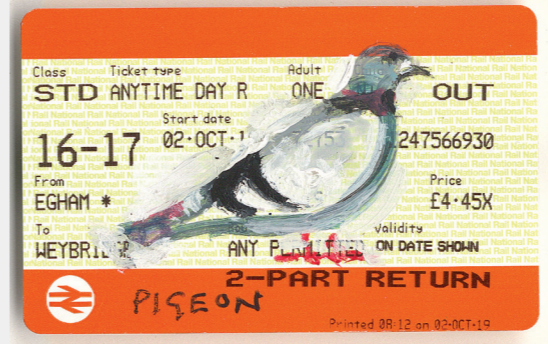
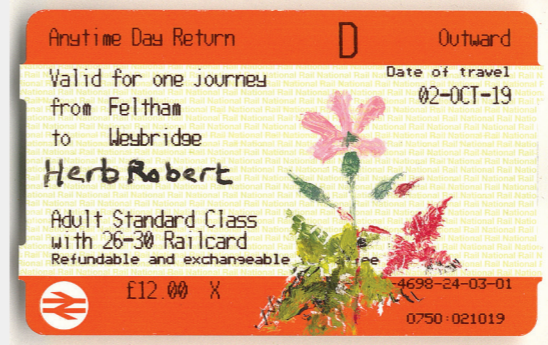




Passy full of light, mudflats, birdland, Norfolk, Saitmarsh, 2019, mixed media on linen.

the air is full of warbles & whistles & piping

Detail from Between the tracks, Weybridge Station, 2019. Monoprint and mixed media on train tickets.



In numbers

197,690 visitors	40 artworks	
60 specimens	£7,800 in shop sales	
178 event attendees	13 researchers	
8 events	1 research paper	77 comment cards
31,814 web views		

Three thousand species of fungi in the New Forest, 2019. Mixed media on linen.



Visions of nature

Art meets science

Biodiversity: Kurt Jackson brought together art and science, weaving current biological and environmental research with Jackson's contemporary artwork. From doctoral students to professors, researchers from across the University of Oxford responded to the works in the exhibition. Exploring how their research is embodied in Jackson's artwork, they shared their reflections on how it speaks to the essence and importance of the natural world.

Researching the functioning of the biosphere and its interactions with global change

Professor Yadvinder Malhi



"I am an ecosystem scientist, and what fascinates me is the web of interactions between individual organisms and species.

This artwork resonates with me because it captures how everything

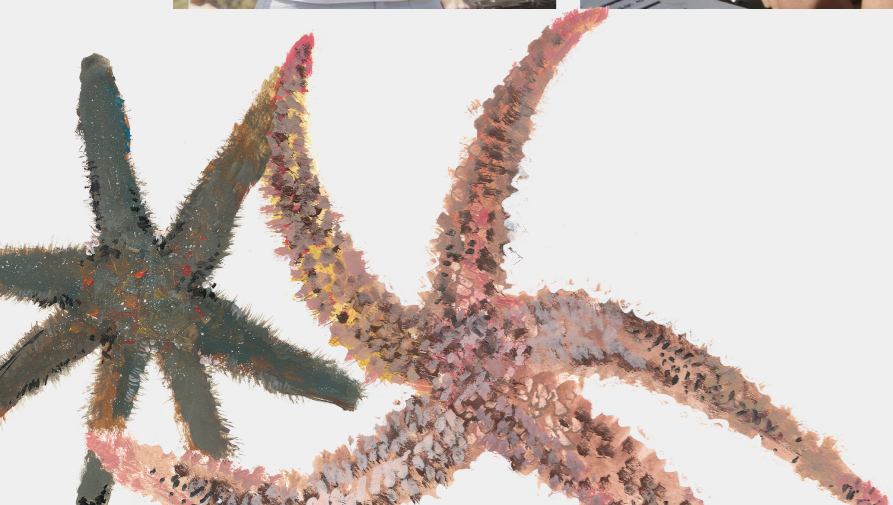
interacts with everything to build the whole. The title refers to the fungal webs that connect trees belowground, but I see this as pointing to the many ways trees and other organisms interact, whether through chemical signals, food webs, or shaping each other's physical environment. So much of this is still poorly understood. The way the web in the artwork dissolves into a blur captures for me the sense of so much still being unknown; of us just being able to see the vaguest sense of pattern in a complex, awe-inspiring and enduring mystery. Something I think true for the whole natural world."

Researching seascape ecology to inform ocean policy and conservation

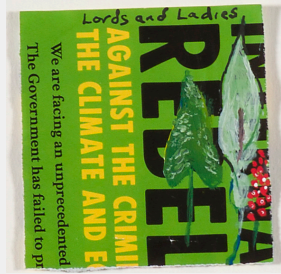
Dr Lisa Wedding

Rosalie Wright

“When we gaze across this seascape, many of us will initially see a homogenous expanse of ocean. How can we protect what we don’t understand or value? Upon closer inspection, the labels on the shoreline represent the many diverse species found within this unique coastal habitat. The viewer begins to see the significant biodiversity that coastal ecosystems support. This brings us together with Jackson, as both scientist and artist seek to identify and place value on the diversity of coastal life, highlighting the awe-inspiring ecosystem complexity and enabling us all to see the value in protecting the oceans.”



Taxonomy of a Cornish foreshore, 2018. Mixed media on linen.



Detail from Pyramid stage field, Glastonbury Festival, 2019, mixed media and collage on board.

Programming

Highlights

An evening with Kurt Jackson

In this evening talk UK contemporary artist and environmentalist Kurt Jackson discussed his inspiration behind the exhibition and the process of creating his artworks.

Nature poets

Dr Sarah Watkinson, Emeritus Research Professor in fungal biology and inaugural Writer in Residence at Wytham Woods, led a poetry workshop at the Museum. Inspired by the exhibition, visitors explored nature through the spoken word.

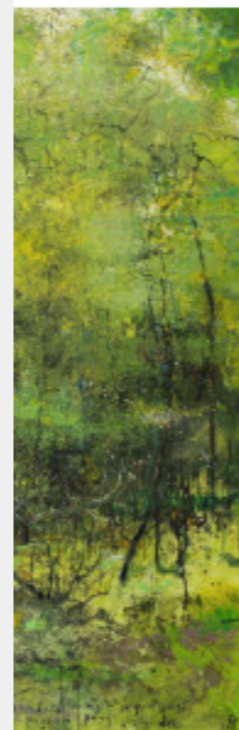
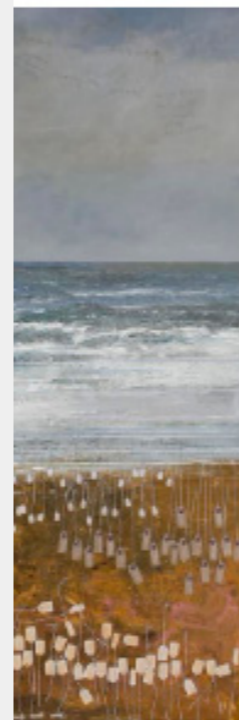
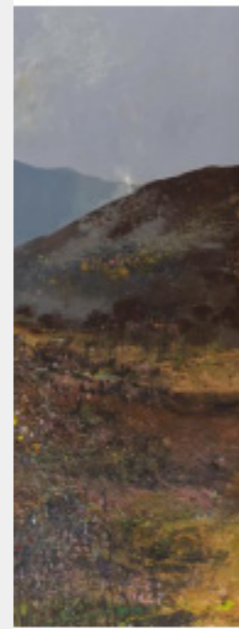
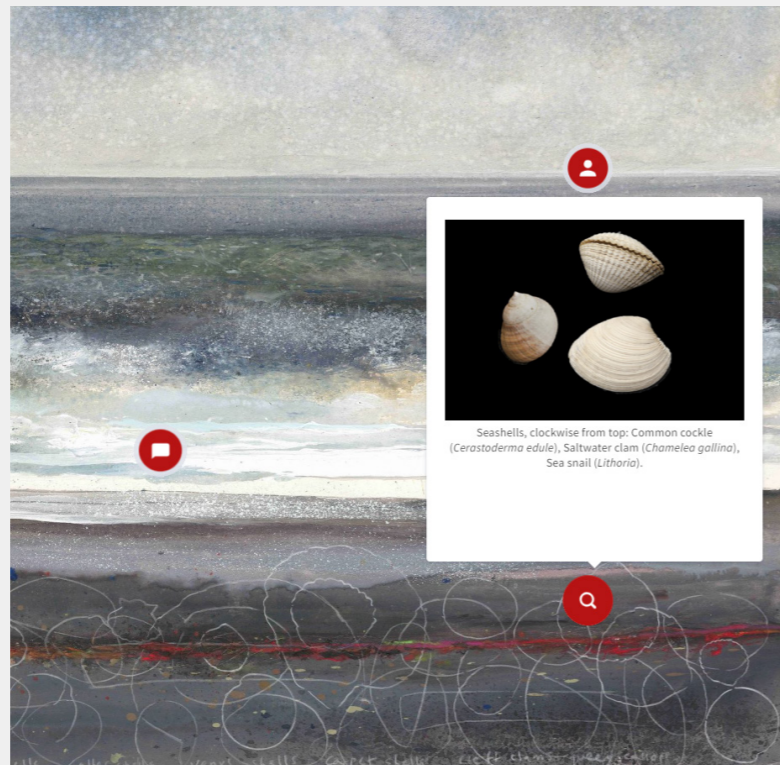
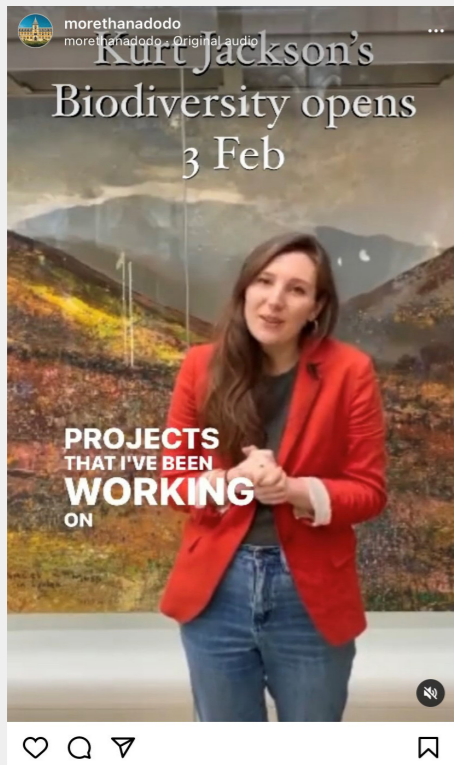
Drawn to nature

In an evening of art and science combined, visitors met ecosystem researchers from across the University of Oxford whilst sketching specimens and landscapes featured in the exhibition.

Energy of forests

In this evening talk, Professor Yadvinder Malhi discussed his latest research on the flow of energy in tropical and temperate forests ecosystems.

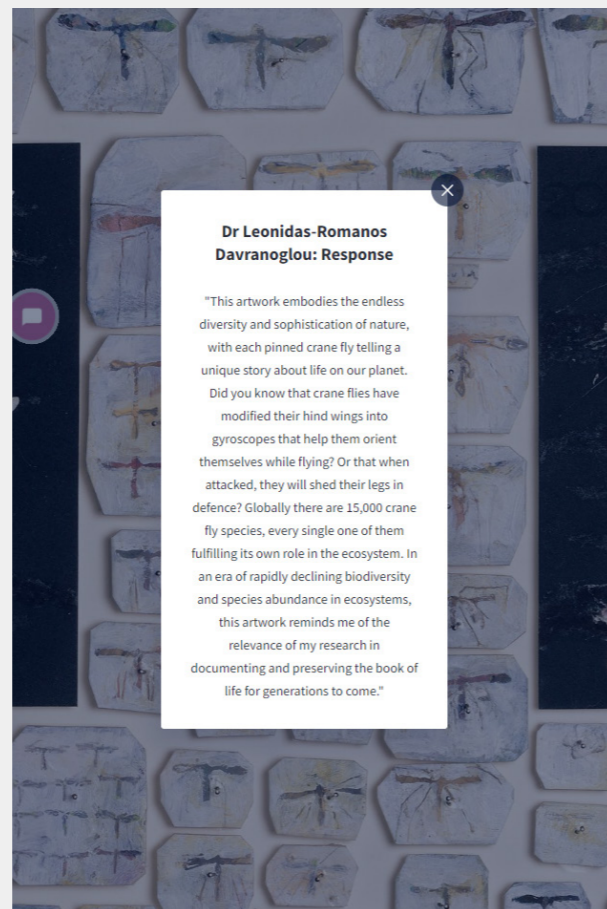




Digital

An online version of the exhibition provided an opportunity for visitors to explore interactive versions of the artworks, and learn more about the connections between Jackson's work, the Museum's collection and environmental research at Oxford University.

The exhibition was promoted on social media, featuring tours by Museum staff and insights into the process of developing the exhibition.





Evaluation

Evaluation revealed that Jackson's artwork provoked strong emotional responses from visitors. Interviewees described how the beauty of the displays stimulated reflections on the value of biodiversity and concern for its loss, with many describing feeling inspired and interested.

The artwork was particularly effective as an accessible medium for making connections between nature and science to facilitate visitors' awareness and understanding of biodiversity. Many interviewees explicitly referenced the power of Jackson's artwork for turning the ordinary into the extraordinary and persuasively illustrating the environmental impact of humans, whilst simultaneously celebrating the diversity of fauna that surrounds us.

Visitors were also given the opportunity to contribute to the exhibition. Comments cards prompting visitors to complete the sentence "Biodiversity is..." were collected and displayed in the exhibition.



Acknowledgements

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