

'Wondrous' London exhibition comes to Cambridge

Rare dodo skeleton, Darwin plant samples and Muggletonian sect prints go on show at the Fitzwilliam

Discoveries: Art, Science and Exploration from the University of Cambridge Museums

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Tuesday 27 May to Sunday 27 July 2014

Late opening: Thursday 03 July 17.00 - 20.00

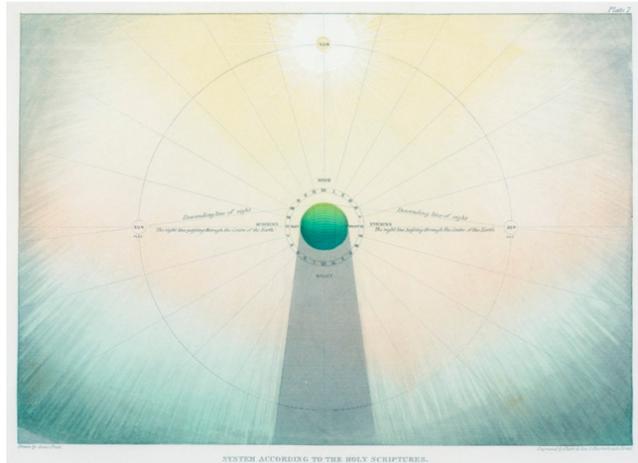
Panel discussion: Tuesday 10 June 18.00

Free admission

*"Eclectic and wondrous"*The Telegraph

*"Objects that breathe the spirit of inquiry and freedom of thought"*The Financial Times

*"A giant cabinet of curiosities"*The Spectator



Drawn by Isaac Frost.
The Newtonian system of the universe & system according to the holy scriptures; Muggletonian print 10
© Whipple Museum of the History of Science
Photography Paul Tucker

An exhibition exploring human discovery in all its forms – selected from more than five million objects at eight University of Cambridge museums and the University Botanic Garden – is coming to Cambridge following a critically acclaimed showing in London.

Discoveries: Art, Science and Exploration from the University of Cambridge Museums, is the first exhibition drawing together the University's unique, world-class collections under one roof. Together, they are as diverse in range and scope as perhaps even the Tate, British Museum and Natural History Museum combined, covering the span of human endeavour and exploration, from the minuscule to the majestic.

A highlights version of the London show with new material from the University of Cambridge Botanic Garden is going on display at the Fitzwilliam Museum from 27 May to 27 July, with a panel discussion with five of the eight University Museum Directors on Tuesday 10 June at 18.00 and a late night opening on Thursday 03 July from 17.00 to 20.00. The exhibition features, among many other objects: plant specimens collected by Charles Darwin during the voyage of the HMS Beagle, ancient fossils, contemporary art, modern Inuit sculpture, a rare dodo skeleton and a state-of-the-art digital instrument that searches for sub-atomic particles in the frozen depths of Antarctica.

For centuries, the University has been a powerhouse of learning; discovering, collecting and studying objects that have changed our



Dodo skeleton
© Museum of Zoology
Photography Paul Tucker



Thomas Akilak (b.1961), Drum Dancer, 1987, © The Polar Museum
Photography Martin Hartley



Still from the film
Growing Pains: the Life and Times of Victoria Cruziana
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understanding of the world, challenged long-held beliefs and fundamentally altered our view of the planet and the universe.

But it is the role of Cambridge as one of the world's leading research universities, with six of its museums embedded within academic departments, that establishes this exhibition's uniqueness. Five of the university museums are also nationally-recognised Designated outstanding collections, awarded by Arts Council England.

Professor Nicholas Thomas, co-curator of Discoveries and Director of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, said: "The exhibits on display lead double, if not multiple lives. They are not just museum pieces spanning millennia but living objects used for teaching and research that have changed our understanding of the world – and will continue to do so in ways we cannot yet imagine. Our collections are explored daily, offering new insight and revelations about the world around us.

"This exhibition challenges us to think about the notion and meaning of 'discovery'; not just epoch-making scientific or artistic discoveries, but everyday discoveries – and discoveries that are passed from generation to generation and renewed afresh each time.

"An exhibition of this scope and nature could only come from Cambridge. Our collections are exceptionally rich, but also unusual and even quirky. For over two hundred years our museums have accumulated every imaginable kind of artefact, art work, device and specimen."

The exhibition also features discoveries gone awry in the form of 19th-century 'Mugletonian' prints. The Mugletonians were a religious sect who rejected the Newtonian system of the universe, instead arguing that biblical statements took precedence over claims of scientific fact, intending to prove that the sun and moon revolved around the earth.

Elsewhere, Cambridge's position at the forefront of scientific discovery is highlighted in the Museum of Zoology's exhibits including Hugh Edwin Strickland's Chart of Bird Classification, dating some 16 years before the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. The chart had been stored rolled up for many years before its recent conservation and mounting and had never before been on public display.

The exhibition does not just focus on science, however, but also the intersection where science and art can meet. Professor Thomas added: "This exhibition is not just about our 'treasures'; we have deliberately selected works of art, artefacts, specimens, documents and images that allow us to reflect on diverse acts of discovery. They vary from sculptures or drawings representing artistic breakthroughs to paintings recording hazardous conditions at the Poles. We have telescopes that enabled the skies to be studied and new stars seen. What might be a scholarly resource to one person may for another be aesthetically arresting. It may be, simply, magical."

Professor Liba Taub, Director of the Whipple Museum of the History of Science, said: "Human imagination itself may be the most powerful instrument of discovery, allowing us to question the ideas of others, no matter how illustrious and famous they may be. The understanding of a known principle, or the seeing of a phenomenon with one's own eyes, offer a special sense of discovery as well."

Unseen in the London show, the Cambridge edition of *Discoveries* includes items from the Cambridge University Botanic Garden. The beetle-kidnapping and sex-change antics of one of the most challenging and captivating plants grown each year at the Garden, the Santa Cruz waterlily are presented in a newly-commissioned film and animation from Ryd Cook and Lizzy Hobbs, *Growing Pains: the Life and Times of Victoria cruziana*. In contrast examples from the Herbarium of the Garden's founder, John Stevens Henslow, demonstrate how his experimental research work into plant variation influenced his famous student, Charles Darwin, who sent around 2,400 pressed plants back to Henslow in Cambridge during his voyage on HMS Beagle, 1832-35. The three Darwin specimens included develop the story of plant variation, which continues to be explored today through the plant collections at the Botanic Garden.

Discoveries: Art, Science and Exploration from the University of Cambridge Museums is at the Fitzwilliam Museum Tuesday 27 May to Sunday 27 July 2014. Admission is free.

The eight university museums involved are: The Fitzwilliam Museum, Kettle's Yard, Museum of Zoology, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Whipple Museum of the History of Science, Museum of Classical Archaeology, Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences and The Polar Museum as well as Cambridge University Botanic Garden.

- Ends -

For further information and images contact the Press Office:

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Notes to editors:

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB
FREE ADMISSION

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00
Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00
CLOSED: 24-26 & 31 December and 1 January

Curators of *Discoveries*

The original exhibition of *Discoveries* at Two Temple Place in London was curated by Professor Nick Thomas (Director of Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) and Martin Caiger-Smith (curatorial advisor to Two Temple Place and Head of MA Programme: Curating the Art Museum at Courtauld Institute of Art) with the University of Cambridge Museums Programme Curator, Dr Lydia Hamlett.

The Fitzwilliam Museum

Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge and leads the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) Major Partner Museum consortium. The Fitzwilliam's collections explore world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century, world class prints and drawings, and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts. The Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.
www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk