



Art open call for 34: *THE CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS SHAPING OUR FUTURE* exhibition at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History

The Museum is seeking to commission a work of contemporary art to coincide with the next Contemporary Science and Society exhibition.

Submission dates: Friday 21 November 2025- Monday 12 January 2026

Exhibition dates: 17 June 2026 – 13 April 2027

Budget: Up to £7000

Exhibition overview:

34: THE CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS SHAPING OUR FUTURE

We use raw materials extracted from the earth in almost all of our technology, from tea cups to electric cars. These technologies, and the materials that make them, are critical to our ability to survive and thrive as societies, from communication, to transportation, to health care, to defence.

Our entire way of life in the UK rests on the supply of just 34 of these essential substances. But their availability is at risk. As global demand grows, and the UK transitions away from fossil fuels, science and industry are urgently seeking new ethical ways to mine vital raw materials, use them more efficiently, and recycle them effectively.

Governments, responsible for ensuring that their populations have access to the resources they need, designate a raw material as 'critical' when there is a risk that they won't have enough to meet the demand of ever growing and innovating populations. Materials are distributed unequally around the world, and extraction techniques can be environmentally damaging and energy intensive, or rely on unethical labour practices that violate human rights.

The exhibition, '34,' will trace the critical raw materials that are embedded in our everyday lives and explore how our need for them drives research, industry innovation, global investment, and politics. We will see how they are the key to sustainable technologies that might be our best chance of lowering our carbon emissions, and tackle the question of how to extract critical raw materials from Earth without further endangering humans and the ecosystems they call home.

This exhibition is developed in collaboration with researchers across Oxford University from the [OxfordEARTH](#) research programme and Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division.

Themes:

For this open call we are looking for art that explore themes and topics related to the exhibition including:

- Critical raw materials
- Labour and human rights in relation to the extraction industry
- Environmental cost of mining
- The green energy transition
- Geological processes and mining
- Human technology use

You may consult researchers from the OxfordEARTH research programme while developing your proposal, whose contact details can be found [here](#).

Tips for strong proposals:

- Present artworks that provoke thought and discussion
- Demonstrate a true connection to one or more of the themes explored in the exhibition.
- Encourage visitors to see the exhibition themes from a different perspective.
- We encourage collaborations between artists and researchers.
- Works can be playful or serious.
- We will consider and welcome all mediums including digital.
- Consider our unique building and gallery spaces (see below).

Budget:

The Museum of Natural History is seeking work for the exhibition, with a total budget of £7000. Please note that this must include all costs including artist time, shipping, fees, production, and travel (if necessary). We are happy to write letters of support for applicants seeking additional funding from elsewhere.

Location:

The Museum of Natural History is a Grade 1 listed Neo-Gothic building, so is not a typical gallery format, and doesn't have much wall space for hanging 2D work. We encourage artists to carefully consider our unique building and engage with our space creatively. Works can be displayed in many different locations around the building, even outside. You might consider the upstairs temporary exhibition gallery itself, in the main court in the centre of the building, on the Museum lawn (depending on planning permission), or other areas as appropriate. We are very open to discussion with artists on these ideas.

The Museum welcomes 750,000 visitors from all over the world every year. The Museum and its exhibitions are free to everyone. There is potential that this exhibition would tour internationally.

Timings:

The artist would be expected to develop the work between 30 January 2026 and 29 May 2026, with delivery of work to the museum by 1 June 2026. We would expect the artwork to be displayed throughout the exhibition duration.

Permissions:

The Museum will display this artwork for the duration of the exhibition, after which the artwork will be returned to the artist. The artwork will be licensed to the Museum for educational and commercial purposes, but copyright will be retained by the artist. If the exhibition tours, we would discuss further agreements with the selected artist.

Who can apply:

Artists over the age of 18.

Access:

Please get in touch if you need any access support in completing or submitting your application.

How to apply:

Email your application to camille.britton@oum.ox.ac.uk and kelly.richards@oum.ox.ac.uk by **12pm on Monday 12th of January**.

Your application will need to include:

- Artist CV
- Up to 5 images of past work and/or links to video and sound work
- Artist Statement (maximum 300 words)
- Description of proposed work - maximum 500 words
- Break down of costs involved, including artist time, materials, travel, delivery and installation.
- Brief schedule of work and installation

Please package your application up into one PDF.

Selection process:

Submissions will be reviewed by the exhibition team and members of the OxfordEARTH research group. We will be interviewing finalists in the weeks commencing the 19th and 26th of January and will notify the selected artist by the 30th of January.

Additional awards:

We will select three finalists in addition to the successful artist to be featured on the museum social media and website.

If you have any questions about the open call then please get in touch via:

camille.britton@oum.ox.ac.uk and kelly.richards@oum.ox.ac.uk