



Steven Duval

Born 1970

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I have a project-based practice that relies a lot on research, so the form of the final work is determined by what I think suits that project best. Everything stems from the research and communicating the ideas raised, so it is pretty conceptual.

Much of my work deals with ecological issues, but ecology that goes beyond environmentalism. I am especially interested in Felix Guittari's *Three Ecologies*. He writes that ecology goes beyond the environmental movement, to social and mental ecology. The social, the mental and the environmental all impact into one ecology, all forming a topography for each person; thus the information that people receive about genetically modified foods impacts on how they consume, and the way that they feel about their environment. These things act as a kind of pollution – a social and mental pollution – as much as an environmental one. For me the ecology of food production says a lot about so many other things.

Currently, I am interviewing local farmers – using questionnaires and compiling statistics. I am also canvassing consumers with a similar list of questions. There are five questions specific to each group and then one question for both: what future do you see for genetically modified crops and foods?

In **presence**, I am presenting this research in the form of a booklet, together with other statistics that were gathered through larger research projects, surveying more people. I am using a tactic employed by lots of environmental agencies and organisations to collect statistics, but without the base that they have to access people. They create a lot of very pointed statistics, but the reason for me doing this is because I think statistics can be manipulated to support different arguments, and I don't believe organisations are unbiased when they go about collecting them – they have a vested interest.

Part of the work will present the statistics as numbers – as blunt as it gets – but accompanied by the differing responses to the equivalent final question. I see that as more telling, when people answer a question in their own words. Much of the work is attempting to open up a conversation, about showing how the bureaucracy allows, or doesn't allow, for a debate to happen. There are also wall drawings produced from the research, so it is not purely conceptual.

The booklet is an important format because people can take it away and investigate it at their leisure. The research that I do is meant to be a doorway for people to become interested in a subject. I provide information, covering many differing opinions, which gives people an opportunity to find their position within the debate. The installation incorporates an area for people to sit and read the booklet – as well as other books – alongside the wall drawings. There are different ways for the viewer to get involved in the ideas: if people don't want to spend time with a book, they may be happier to look at a drawing.

I believe that the art gallery is a place where issues can be discussed by non-specialists. I see the art space as a place of discussion, rather than just a place for looking. For me an artwork is a good departure point for a discussion, and I hope that it will prompt an investigation by the viewer, which in turn might affect their decisions about what they buy, and the things that they support.

Technology increasingly compartmentalises our lives and our opportunities for face-to-face interaction are becoming fewer and fewer. This is what my work addresses. Ethically, I don't assume that my politics are right – I dislike that arrogance – and in this position, if I give my opinion, I may be perceived as didactic. However, it is important that people become involved, and that is my agenda: to facilitate their involvement. The easier things become, the less people engage with what is fundamental and basic to their lives. If people are apathetic and disenfranchised then important things break down which are vital for my ethic of living in a democratic, equal society.

eco-nomia



Previous: Steven Duval, *Presiding over the gene pool*, 2001

Above: Steven Duval, *Eco-nomia*, 2002

Following pages: Steven Duval, *Agri-Culture*, 2002

