

Research, Materials and Process. Thinking Through Making.

'Milking the Dairy Industry'



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Dairy farmers are increasingly under pressure to produce more milk for less and can in some cases receive less money for their milk than the cost of producing it. There are many political, commercial and social reasons for this, but in a time where consumers are prepared to pay more for bottled water than they do on milk, have we lost sight of how things are made and where they come from? The insistence of many supermarkets in selling milk as a loss leader at such a low price along with the demise of local dairies and doorstep deliveries appears to have forever eroded the value we place on milk as a product. This research hopes to prompt the viewer to question the price being paid to farmers for the milk they produce and how much we as consumers are paying for the milk.

From the growing of the crops for feed, the breeding of the calves, the daily milking, welfare of the cows, to the upkeep and investment in the land and machinery, these are just some of the many processes involved in making milk. Our desire for consistent, perfect dairy products at a low price seems far removed from the 'muck and manure' of the farm, the many processes and long hours required to produce the milk. Where once 'milking' and 'farming' were viewed as a craft, it appears we no longer value the toil and labour put in by the farmer, farm workers and cows. Do we think of this when we pay high prices for bottled water and our daily cappuccino?

This body of work illustrates the number, and complexity of processes, labour and materials involved in dairy farming and the craft of making milk. A series of objects and artworks engage the viewer in the notion of value of milk as a product amidst the increasing pressure placed on farmers for increased production at a lower price, increased mechanisation and fundamental changes to the dairy industry.

Research methods included farm visits, interviews with a farmer and a herdsman, desk research and extensive experiments with materials and processes related to dairy farming and milk.



Artists 'Book of bales' with
handmade straw paper



Cast concrete takeaway
coffee cup



Cast bone china and straw milk
bottle (unfired) with latex tubing

Farm and dairy related materials such as bone china, straw, clay from the farm fields, latex, found machinery parts and concrete have been used to explore the subject and create artwork. Outcomes ranged from an artists book made from handmade straw paper and sold at less than the cost of production to concrete coffee cups and milk bottles cast from bone china and mud from a local dairy farm which required extensive refinement and processes before use.

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