

## Dalziel + Scullion's introduction to their work

Unveiling artwork 29.11.07 :: Great Glen House, Scottish Natural Heritage

Tonight is the culmination of a rather intensive 6 month period of work for us which has resulted in the symposium that many of you will be attending tomorrow, the student show at the far end of the atrium, and the artwork which will be a permanent marker of the More Than Us Project that SNH commissioned from us. We were very interested in working on this project and with SNH as an organisation and of the unique overview that they have of our shared environment. So to begin with tonight we'd like to say a few words about how that artwork came about.

The world of modernity and of commerce is a very powerful and persuasive force that keeps and holds our attention – it's no surprise then, that the world of the 'others' –the world of wet mosses, moths, seabirds, mountain flowers and wildcats, increasingly inhabit a place that is at the very periphery of our consciousness. Today we hear a lot about 'going green', about 'climate change' and the environment, and there are small industries of consultants and agencies employed to monitor, measure and predict changes within these – but these are all framed within the general pursuit of progress through continued growth and this 'growth' is nearly always at the expense of not only nature, but also of our own ability to develop any meaningful empathy with our greater environment.

As artists the subject we have continually been drawn to is that, 'other world', the "more than human world" as David Abram would say. We have over the last decade or so found ourselves in some odd situations: in deep litter chicken barns, in front of glaciers, in abattoirs and filming the effects of thermals on clouds. We have also met individuals such as botanists, North Sea fishermen, meteorologists and butterfly specialists who have hugely influenced both our thinking and our ability to see what they see and it was in this way that we came to make this work.

Through SNH we were introduced to Tom Prescott of the Butterfly Conservation (just one of the organisations that carries out research on behalf of SNH). Tom took us to a place on the west coast of Mull and to the habitat of a type of Burnet Moth, called the Slender Scotch Burnet. These are a day flying moth that are both beautiful and menacing. They have glossy black wings with a pattern of crimson spots, and have conspicuous black antae that thickens at the end to form a club-like shape, they feed on a select group of plants, the most striking of which is the yellow 'birds foot trefoil' into which their spring like proboscis uncoils.

At first glance this environment seems unexceptional, but with Tom's voice in our ear - an order and rhythm began to unravel – the crumbling cliffs of this coastline have eroded in such a way as to cause a slope of debris – the nature of these dark volcanic rocks creates the perfect pasture for the moths feeding and nectaring plants, but also, their darkness and steep angle to the sun make these slopes the perfect temperature required for the delicate winged creatures to function – so that in an otherwise cold dricht climate, this seaboard colony have found an oasis of sorts.

Into this enters other narratives, the permanently airborne swift, whose acoustic trill is a familiar voice in summer – whose life is governed by the shifting populations of insects on the wing – but who accurately read the crimson message of the burnet, an insect whose bodies are mini cyanide factories.

These and many other tails unravelled that day and this art work tells a few of them, but this of course is just one insect living in exile on a slim and contested strip of land, it belongs to a vast diverse genus in that insects make up 65% of the worlds animal population yet their urgent and complex lives, though often played out under our noses might just as well be on another galaxy. Our knowledge of these and other diverse life forms are becoming more and more the realm of specialist knowledge, and moving further and further away from the lives we lead and the demands we make of the earth – we see our role as artists as one of opening up dialogues, and our desires for this project is that it might bring to the forefront a more holistic way of thinking and being.