

GMOs like you've never seen before

By [Magda Becerra @artnois](#) · On September 14, 2015

Who would have ever imagined GMOs could be so beautiful. Well, no one of course, but this artist's interpretations of them are. Kirsten Stolle is an artist who studied the introduction of GMOs in an effort to find healthy vegetarian alternatives. During her exploration she developed the series called *Genetically Commodified* which represents the impact of genetic engineering. Her work has been featured in several publications and museums around the country. If you are in the Bay area in California you might have seen her work in the Monterey Museum of Art or the San Jose Museum of Art where she is part of the permanent collection. Check out her interview below and visit her site to see some more work for this and other collections.

In visiting your personal site and reading about your series, ANIMAL PHARM & Genetically Commodified, you seem to know a great deal about GMOs , which most people know are bad but not all understand why. Can you explain how this knowledge of the agribusiness and biotech companies is part of your background and how it triggered this series?

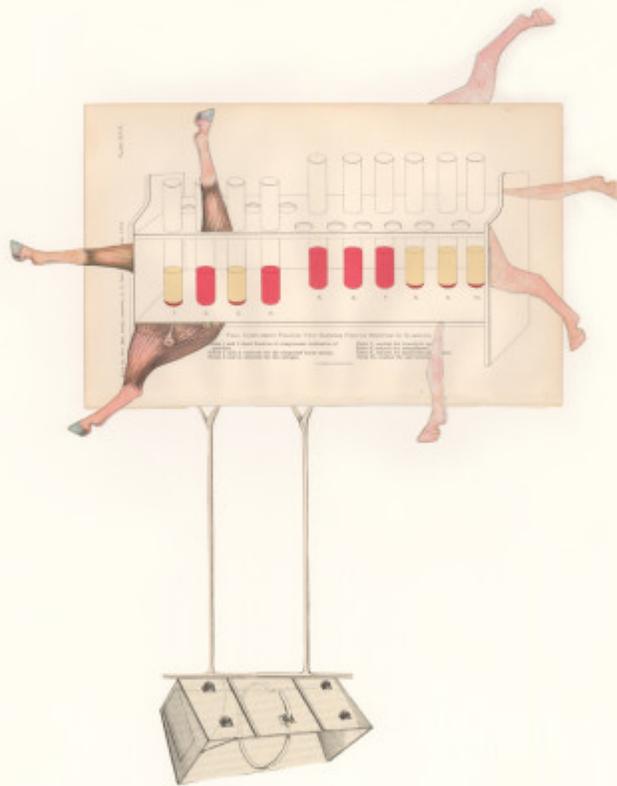
I learned about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in 1996. Genetically engineering food sounded like some futuristic technology, so I didn't give it much credence. It was only after having some of my own health issues with soy products, that I became acutely aware of the potential health risks of eating foods that contains genetically engineered ingredients. The fact that 90% of the soy, corn, and canola in the Unites States have had their genetic material altered through the insertion of bacteria, viruses, or gene splicing is overwhelmingly scary to me. And that the U.S. FDA has allowed GMOs into our food supply with limited oversight, inadequate safety testing and without labeling, is something that speaks to the larger systemic issue of the increased corporate influence that big agribusiness companies like Monsanto, Dow and Syngenta have within our government. Food is something we have to eat every day and without proper labeling, we are unable to make informed health choices for our families and ourselves.



Culturally, we get our information through mass media, television, the Internet, and newspapers. Generally, we hear short sound bites or see an impressive graph and then we move on to the next story. As a visual learner, I wanted a platform where viewers could engage with the work, have the opportunity to ask questions, form ideas of their own, or simply be drawn in aesthetically by the medium. Historically art has been a terrific medium for engagement, activism, social and personal change and I felt I could create a compelling narrative through this type of work.

Your works tells us you are very passionate about addressing issues with genetically modified food. Is there anything you hope your work communicates to your audience?

My goal with *Genetically Commodified* is to create dynamic work that stimulates thoughtful conversation and invites viewers to reflect on the influence of GMOs. *Genetically Commodified*, refers to the commodification of nature and the manipulation of genes for profit. We live in a world where economy trumps ecology, a society where food is no longer seen as a form of nourishment, but as a product.



If you could tell the whole world something about the food we eat what would it be?

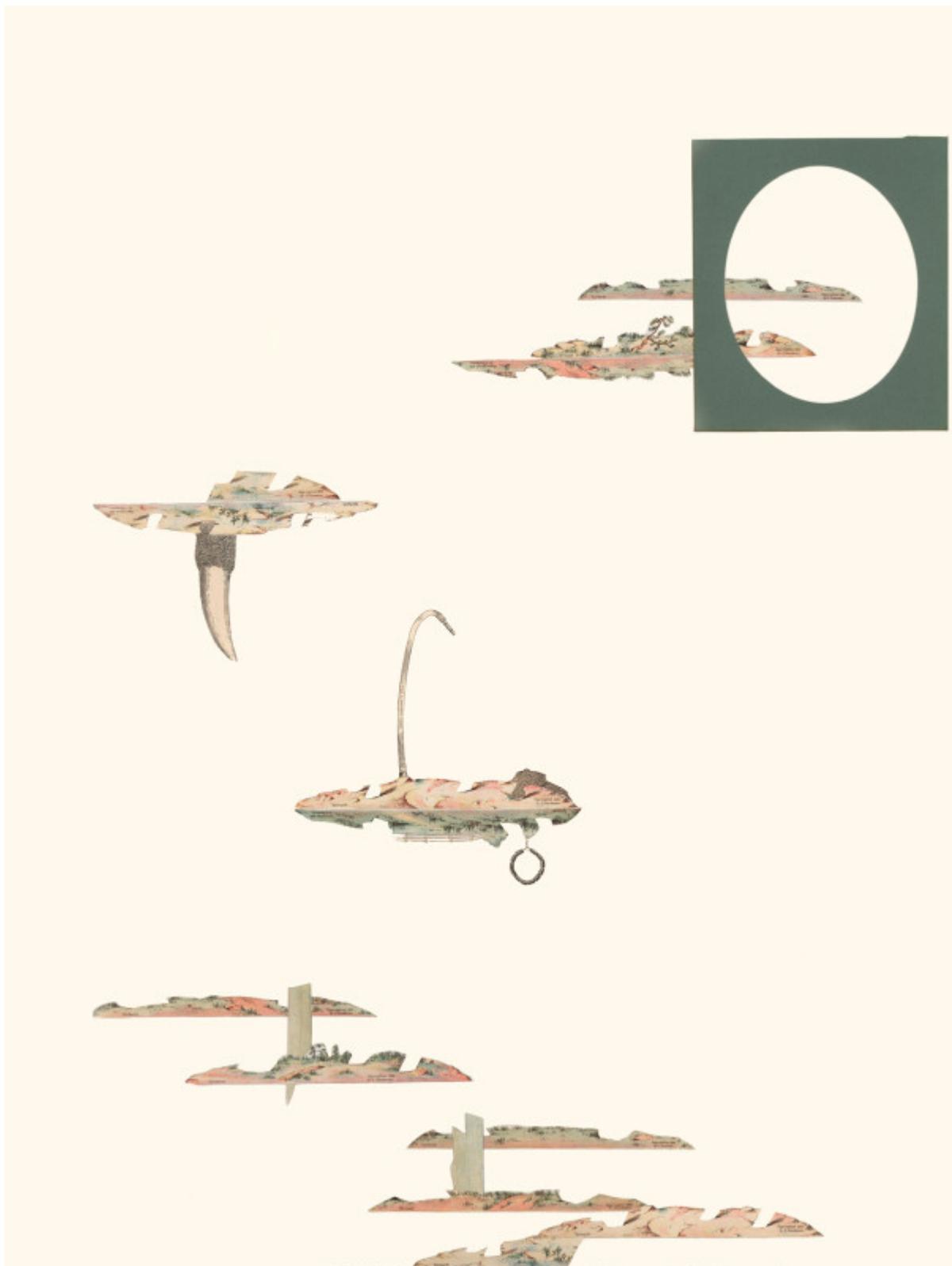
I like Michael Pollan's mantra: Eat Food. Not Too Much. Mostly Plants.

What do you think humanity must do to protect itself from the evil doings of the greedy companies creating GMOs?

For me, what's most helpful is making informed choices at the local grocery store. When I buy food from local, independent, and mostly organic producers, I'm choosing NOT to support multinational corporations that support factory farming, corporate agriculture, and oppose GMO labeling.

Buying organic, when possible and economically feasible, not only supports the local economy, it reduces farm workers' exposure to pesticides and generally promotes improved working conditions.

If readers are interested in buying non-gmo foods, they can look for the [Non GMO Project Verified seal](#). [The Environmental Working Group](#) also produces terrific consumer guides (Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen) related to pesticides in produce. When trying to avoid large corporations and determine which companies own popular organic brands, [The Organic Consumer Association](#) created a list of parent companies that should be avoided.



You do such a great job collaging and putting pieces together that it's difficult to tell what is drawn, painted or printed. Can you walk us through your process for creating one of these beautiful pieces?

Each project begins with several months of research and culminates into an articulated visual body of work. In the initial stages, I conduct extensive on-line research related to my particular interest and begin developing a project narrative. I then search eBay, Etsy and my local antique shops for interesting and novel collage materials. I'm fascinated by older illustrations and etchings found in vintage medical books, 20th century agricultural magazines, 1950s hardware catalogs, and mid-century chemical company print advertisements.

At this point, lots of cutting with an X-acto knife happens and piles of collage materials begin to emerge. I start by putting down collage material on a sheet of stark white paper, constantly moving and removing the cutout pieces until the beginnings of a composition emerges. Often this can take weeks! Sometimes I work in my studio for hours and seemingly nothing happens. Yet this is my process, and eventually the "moving" starts to coalesce into a meaningful arrangement, frequently complemented with drawing and painting.

What is your favorite series/project to work on?

It is often the one I am working on at the moment!



Are there any other social issues you have considered addressing through your work?

I've recently completed *de-identified*, a collage-based project that examines the impact of facial recognition technology on individual privacy. Using augmented portraits of 19th century women and an imagined narrative, *de-identified* explores how to conceal facial features to avoid image detection.

Some of your pieces would be amazing on our walls! Do you sell your work and if so where could one go about purchasing your work?

Yes! You can visit my website and reach out to me at www.kirstenstolle.com.