



# Feral Cakes

*Ratons Laveurs Au Pays Des Merveilles*

This project began several years back while I was spending the winter months training dressage horses in Florida. Residing deep within the suburban sprawl of South Florida I began setting out fruits, vegetables, meats, cakes and other confectionery concoctions for the local animal inhabitants. The menus grew from a knowledge of the natural diet of animals such as raccoons, foxes, possums and other creatures I expected to find living along the borders of human habitation. Filming over the days, weeks and months I began to get to know the preferences and predilections of their régimes, and, usually these foods did not include green vegetables and apples, but donuts, hot dogs, pizza and lamb chops. A conversation started to emerge as I watched my videos each morning from the previous nights banquet and adjusted, tweaked and tested them. While browsing a local flea market I found a very charming children's table and chair set which I brought home and set up; complete with teacups and saucers, spoons and napkins. I filled the cups with water and the raccoons happily drank from them and used them to clean their food. This group of raccoons loved grapes, so my banquets tended to be full of them. I also made beautiful, milky, spiral, cone shaped jellies that I filled with grapes and donuts so that the raccoons (who generally don't like jelly) would dig into them, making them jiggle and tumble in the otherworldly light of the infrared cameras. Most of the spreads also included very large snail shells stuffed with steak, grapes and cake. As a symbol, the snail is a mysterious creature, the spiral design of the house-shell, the perfection of his aesthetics--shimmering, shell and soft, wet body—self sufficient and slowly making his way through the world with beauty and grace. This scene with the enigmatic snails, the extravagant confections, the table and chairs; perfectly sized for raccoons and possums to sit upon, exaggerates the absurdist, anthropomorphic tendencies present in the work. And while generally speaking anthropomorphism is frowned upon as much in art as in science, it makes a lot of sense to me in terms of underscoring the post humanist gesture that has been a strong theme throughout this body of work, and turns it on its head. In my practice I discover over and over again that the only predictable aspect of working with animal collaborators is unpredictability, and making this work necessitates giving up a certain amount of control over my subjects. I find that, as a species it is extremely difficult to see the world uncolored by the human gaze without human expectations and prejudices. If we cannot be objective in our observations of the natural world are we truly capable of understanding other creatures? How can this knowledge shape the way we interact with the planet and all the natural and wild places still left upon it? Is it possible to change our methodology from one of domination to one of collaboration? I think so, and over the years spent working on this body of work, I believe I may have found the emergence of a path.