

# HYPERALLERGIC

## An Artist Serves Up Decadent Feasts for Wild Animals

by Allison Meier on February 1, 2016



Dana Sherwood, "Crossing the Wild Line" (2015), still from digital video

Over the past few years, New York-based artist Dana Sherwood has organized a picnic for wild baboons on the South African coast, left banquets for raccoons in the suburbs of South Florida, and concocted a molded terrine of jellied spam, beef, hot dogs, and marrow bones for coyotes. Most recently, she made elaborate confections of meat, fish, and local produce for ocelots, bugs, bats, and birds in Brazil. Her wooden food cart that was stationed for two weeks in the Botanical Garden of Brasília is now on view at Denny Gallery as the centerpiece for her solo show *Crossing the Wild Line*.

Each dish in Sherwood's homemade feasts looks like it's out of a vintage Betty Crocker book, the kind of decadent dessert you might find at a 1970s house party, albeit with ingredients specific to certain animals' diets: jello mold-shapes topped with tiny fish, a fish head temptingly displayed on a bed of carefully positioned shrimp. (The food is all resin in the Lower East Side show, so don't worry about competing for space with rats and roaches.) A video that is embedded on the cart shows the snacking animals captured by her trail cameras, like an ocelot nibbling on some hanging meat, or birds scavenging in the darkness. On the walls, framed with sausage links, are whimsical watercolor illustrations of her animal visitors, which she often makes while waiting the days, and sometimes weeks, between leaving her feasts and retrieving the videos.

The impulsive reaction might be that Sherwood is encouraging wild animals to rely on humans, and is disrupting their natural life cycles. However, she focuses on animal populations where a human presence has already pushed the wildlife to the boundaries of its original habitat. Directly engaging with wild populations



Dana Sherwood, "Possum with Cake and Sausage" (2014), ink and watercolor on paper, 7x10 in



Dana Sherwood, "Dana Sherwood Meat Grinder with Raccoon" (2014), ink and watercolor on paper, 7x10 in

embedded in human-claimed space, she's considering our relationship with other animals when we've already damaged their ecosystem.

Back in 2014, when she was exhibiting her "Banquets in the Dark Wildness" installation at the Museum of Biblical Art, she explained to me that what's interesting to her "is how our territories are overlapped. There's a desire to forge some kind of community. We want this idealized coexistence to happen, but when it comes to our backyard, it causes stress."

In 2008, she collaborated with her husband, artist Mark Dion, on a tiny conservatory full of pastry confections in the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris. It was only on closer look that visitors to the central, heavily-touristed garden noticed it was swarmed with insects. Despite our ongoing expansion of human habitation in formerly wild space, we tend to keep nature at a distance. By collaborating with the chaotic, unpredictable, natural world, Sherwood is crossing that line.



Installation view of 'Dana Sherwood: Crossing the Wild Line' at Denny Gallery



Dana Sherwood, "Crossing the Wild Line" (2016) (detail)

*Dana Sherwood: Crossing the Wild Line continues at Denny Gallery (261 Broome Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through February 21.*