



Sharif Farrag, *Sore Eyes, Tasting Strawberries*, 2020, glazed porcelain, 13 1/2 × 10 × 10".

Sharif Farrag
FRANÇOIS GHEBALY

For his first show at François Ghebaly, in late 2019, Sharif Farrag debuted pots sprouting arms and gargantuan, technically improbable vases cleaved to expose orifices. Overall, their anthropomorphism was unapologetically libertine, their sensibility underscored by glistening coats of lavish glaze: Sometimes it dripped down the clay contours as an independent, physicalized entity; at others it became nearly selfsame with the forms. Six months later, Farrag presented new porcelain and stoneware works, one of which he made in quarantine, alongside related works on paper. (The drawing *Signal Hill Datura with Bee*, 2020, took as its subject a tree in Farrag's yard that also appeared in the ceramic *Datura Dust Jug*, 2020, and anchored the grouping relative to its site and time of production.) Whereas the 2019 show emphasized embodied viewing—featuring exaggerated shifts in size from the totemic to the domestic and choreographing a path for viewers amid the artworks across multiple rooms—the simply titled and tightly conceived “Drawings and Vessels” acknowledged that the remote viewing that dominates our present moment has long shaped the conditions of artmaking.

The eleven vessels on display were relatively consistent in size. They sat on a white-topped wooden U-shaped table that recalled a work space more than a pedestal. The whole ensemble, framed by the graphic, mixed-media works on paper on the back wall—the acrylic ink and watercolor *Egghead*, 2019, and the spray-paint, acrylic, and pencil *Piggyback*, 2019—could be taken in from a single, photogenic vantage. But the dense decoration encrusting every visible inch of work—embodying a level of detail that cannot be captured in a single image—problematized this easy digestibility, thwarting the otherwise smooth accommodation of objects to the tropes of installation photography. The ornamentation also complicated the task of apprehending these pieces in real space, as they continually challenged the horizons of perception, with aspects slipping out of view as others became frontal. They productively posed not reconciliation but perpetual and irresolvable difference within the same entity, especially as many likewise harbored contents inside, imbricating the relation between exterior and interior. Some elements could be seen only from above, as in *Sore Eyes, Tasting Strawberries*, 2020, with its depleted-seeming cartoon fruit peering back.

On virtual platforms (the show was also open to visits by appointment), Farrag conspicuously foregrounded *Sore Eyes, Tasting Strawberries*, the first work he finished in this grouping. A citron-lidded and bloodshot flower face peers out from a thicket of ripe strawberries festooned with blooms and insects, recalling precedents such as Ken Price's cups. Beside the flower face, another, larger face appears in profile, this one apparently modeled on Mr. Potato Head. A cigarette juts erect out of his pursed lips, and his sunglasses are cocked; a seeping halo of cobalt reads as liquid hair. Farrag's works are commonly conjured out of personal references—such as his Syrian-Egyptian heritage, the graffiti and skater cultures of the West Coast, and the San Fernando Valley of his childhood—and here, too, one can find aspects of identification if not self-portraiture. There are also references to art history, such as the garden—veritably Boschian—that appeared elsewhere in the show in different moments of growth and decay, decoupled from promises of a world to come. The motif invokes related themes of nurture and patience, and what an organism can tolerate in the meantime. Farrag fired some of these pieces, including *Datura Dust Jug*, at insanely high temperatures, testing the integrity of the material employed and producing a fiery alchemy of melted, bleached color. This violent facture cannot but be read in relation to exogenous events, occurrences that serve as reminders in medias res.