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View of "Laurent Le Deunff: The Mystery of Sculpting Cats," 2021.

PARIS

Laurent Le Deunff

SEMIOSE

44 rue Quincampoix

January 16–February 20, 2021

Under a slanted glass roof in the gallery's back room, Laurent Le Deunff has created an enchanting woodland scene with real dirt, leaves, moss, and birch and willow saplings for his exhibition "The Mystery of Sculpting Cats." Punctuating this loamy terrain, seven animal heads (bear, owl, snail, dolphin, hippopotamus, beaver, and seahorse) on pedestals suggest something between totem poles, a pet cemetery, and kitschy garden décor. Le Deunff made these works using a nineteenth-century decorative technique known as *rocaille*, whereby concrete is carved to look like wood. For an artist who has worked extensively with real wood—among several recent examples on view, a poplar brain (*Cerveau*, 2019–2020) and giant shark teeth hewn from materials including lime and fir tree, sapwood, and oak (*Collier de dents* [Tooth necklace] *I* and *II*, both 2020)—the use of this *faux bois* style is yet another reminder that things are not always as they seem.

On the walls surrounding the sculpture garden, a series of detailed graphite drawings depict the artist's studio. Each scene shows works-in-progress (some of which are presented in their final state in the gallery's front room) in the company of a striped housecat. All date from the last two years and are titled *Grelot* (Jingle bell) after the artist's late pet. In one drawing, Grelot naps on a worktable surrounded by wooden carvings of pasta shapes and miniature body parts (mostly internal organs), her paw tenderly draped over a piece of penne. In another, her arched back mimics the curve of a large wood-carved shell which is also on view in the other room as *Coquille* (Shell), 2019–2020. That certain sculptures seen in the drawings reappear in three-dimensional form underscores the cat's physical absence. Recalling Grimm's elves in the shoemaker's workshop, "The Mystery of Sculpting Cats" suggests a preternatural creative partnership.

—Mara Hoberman