

# ARCHIECTURAL DIGEST

## AUGUST 12, 2021

### MEET THE CALIFORNIA BASED ARTIST MAKING STRIKING BIOMORPHIC SCULPTURES OUT OF CLAY

by Hannah Martin



Photography by Kameron Richie

“I’ve been working nonstop since 2017,” says Woody De Othello, Zooming from his studio in California’s Bay Area, where he’s preparing for two ambitious fall shows: one this September at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and the other in October at Jessica Silverman in San Francisco. Ceramic ears, lips, noses, and hands that he made during a Kohler Arts Center residency (cut short by the pandemic) cover the tables, ready to be assembled into vaguely figurative vessels that nod to precolonial Yoruba pottery and Nkisi figures. “I’ve been freestyling a lot more,” says the artist, lately inspired by the “spontaneous, intuitive, improvisational energy” of jazz. Such abstraction marks a shift for Othello, born in Miami to Haitian-immigrant parents and best known for his witty takes on household objects, like the eight-foot-tall box fan he debuted at Art Basel Miami Beach in 2019. But domestic touchstones (telephones, stools) are still part of his language, emerging subtly from the Kohler pieces and appearing more literally at Jessica Silverman, where vanities and hand mirrors speak to self-reflection and planters to self-care, two themes that have been especially top of mind this roller-coaster year. Work has always been his catharsis. “It’s where the bad juju goes,” he explains of the pieces, many seemingly strained under pressure. “All that anxious energy goes into the ceramics, and it leaves me with the freedom and the space to be lighter and more optimistic.”