

“PRAY FOR ME”—Pope Francis I
2014 Ongoing

Seating at galleries, museums, and art fairs is always a conundrum. Gallerists, museum curators, and art booth proprietors either lack chairs to sit on, curate seating within their environments, rent chairs for their booths, and/or sell the chairs they use. There is rarely a place for the tired art-goer to settle for long, and because of this lack of seating in galleries, much less in antique establishments, museum period rooms, or antique fairs—one might mistakenly sit on a treasure, or worse, be silently admonished by tasteful placards displayed with phrases such as: Please Refrain from Sitting on Furniture, Do Not Touch, or simply an elegant ribbon tied from arm to arm.

“PRAY FOR ME”—Pope Francis I is an installation in the form of ten 17th century Italian “monk” chairs, which function as random seating throughout an art installation/fair or otherwise. These chairs were originally called friarleros—meaning “brothers”—due to their use by monks or higher religious actuary, even Popes. Each chair in the installation is named after an historical painting of a Pope: Raphael’s Julius II and Leo X, Sebastiano del Piombo’s Clement VII, Titian’s Paul III (twice) and Sixtus IV, El Greco’s Pius V, Caravaggio’s Paul V, Velázquez’s Innocent X, and Jacques Louis David’s Pius VII. Each chair has been individually photographed and positioned according to the respective painting’s perspective, but without the seated subject—the absence of which conjures Papal ghosts. The friarleros are all tagged with price tags alluding to their commercial value as antiques. Yet these are marked not with a price, but with the name of the painter and that of the Pope who ostensibly would sit in the chair represented. The photographic portraits of the chairs appropriate and cite the place of monetary and art historical value in real and literal terms by the photographs being reproduced to the sizes of their inspiration. Additionally, the installation features a reliquary housing “relics” shed by the chairs over the course of their lives as artworks. As the chairs lose these fragments of fabric, they are added to the reliquary in another nod to the practices of the Catholic Church. So while the reliquary steadily grows and relics accumulate, the photos and chairs, with nothing in them, serve as backdrop—the negative space that defines what is there and not. In their emptiness, the images and chairs dismantle and play on in-between ideas of portraiture, patronage, politics, art history, and memorial.