

MALLS FOR AMERICA: DEVON DIKEOU AT 179 CANAL



PHOTOS BY TIM VOYTEK

For the last year, Margaret Lee has run exhibitions, performances, readings, dances, and parties out of a second-floor walk-up at 179 Canal Street. Lee has run some 17 exhibitions in just over a year, with boundless energy and little regard for the architectural limitations of her space—a long chamber on a block full of tourists primarily interested in knock-off sports watches, with limited natural lighting. A recent two-person installation by artists Josh Kline and Anicka Yi filled the exhibition space with paper and plaster-of-Paris effigies of natural ecosystems and an office. Both were pointed criticisms of forms of naturalized inhabitation.

It's Deja Vu All Over Again, the present exhibition by artist and publisher Devon Dikeou, brought out the affirmative aspects of the building's architecture. Viewers could finally notice the uneven but also gestural painting of the walls, the marble-life linoleum on the floor, the ornate lighting fixtures, and the coffered ceilings. Dikeou built a screen door that simultaneously bisects and expands the space; on one side, she's installed fake plants from mall architecture. Dikeou's from Denver, where her family is in real estate development: "You have to make them not too small, so they don't feel depressing or stunted, and not too large, so they don't block the sun," she explains. The description sounds like a satire of the limits on an artist's ambitions. The artificial plants are paired with a series of Dikeou's photographs, mounted on



Print Article



Devon Dikeou's "It's Déjà vu All Over Again" at 179 Canal Street, installation view



Devon Dikeou
"Takes a Licking, and Keeps on Ticking"
 - Timex Ad Campaign
 1991-ongoing
 179 Canal



Devon Dikeou
Displaced Denver: The Vogue
 2000-07
 179 Canal Street



WISH YOU WERE HERE by Elisabeth Kley

Originally a jewelry store and diamond exchange, Margaret Lee's second-floor Chinatown project space at 179 Canal Street is already a fascinating readymade. With its dark green stone-tile floors, some rather cheesy crystal light fixtures and a heavy metal safe, the setting is perfect for Devon Dikeou's "It's Déjà vu All Over Again," a witty retrospective of artworks first made between 1991 and 2007. Appearing in their latest incarnations, they act out a Duchampian masquerade that touches on labor and commerce, two central conditions of art that are often overlooked.

"Takes a Licking and Keeps on Ticking" – *Timex Ad Campaign* (1991-ongoing), for example, is an actual time clock that allows viewers to write their own names, or fictional ones, on time cards and punch in and out of the show -- as if going to look at art was a job. Turning the routine of wage slaves into a game, Dikeou manages to produce a strange record of the show's visitors at the same time she invites people to circumvent this infernal machine.

People are welcomed into the gallery's front room by a cornucopia of ersatz greenery, via a pair of arrangements of artificial plants in mirrored boxes, titled *Cajole (Oriental Opulence and Tropical Paradise)* (1992). Extensive labels placed on sticks describe each fake species as if it were a living plant, ending with saccharine sentiments. The placard for *Tropical Paradise*, which includes ferns, bird of paradise flowers and a poppy bush, reads, "Bring a little of this tropical warmth into all our lives."

Dikeou is clearly fascinated with the ways that titles reflect our most grandiose aspirations, despite the humble realities that often underlie them. In *Displaced Denver* (2000-2007), a series of large Cibachrome color photographs of the front-door facades of various run-of-the-mill apartment buildings, the incongruous monikers include Vogue, Bermuda, the Fountainhead, and Versailles. It's an American thing -- baptize your locale as if it were. . . someplace else.

A picture of a building named Emily Dickinson hangs next to a wall of transparent mesh screens, complete with screen door, that divides the gallery in two. Titled after a work by the reclusive 19th-century writer, *"So We Must Keep Apart, You There, I Here, With Just the Door Ajar, That Oceans Are, And Prayer, And That Pale Sustenance Despair!"* -- *Last Stanza, Emily Dickinson Poem* (1993), the screen is both an entrance and a permeable separation -- a reference, perhaps, to communication's failures and successes.

Moving through the door while remembering Dickinson's ghost, the viewer can enter the show's second section, *What's Love Got to Do With It: zingmagazine 1-21* (1992-ongoing). On the walls hang a row

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Devon Dikeou
What's Love Got to Do With It:
zingmagazine 1-21
 1992-ongoing
 179 Canal Street



Devon Dikeou
Peep
 1991
 179 Canal Street



Devon Dikeou
Peep (detail)
 1991
 179 Canal Street

of 21 directory boards, of the old-fashioned sort often found in lobbies and vestibules. Each lists the contributors to one issue of *zingmagazine*, a publication Dikeou founded in 1995. Issues of the appropriate magazine can be found on a shelf below each directory, and a table and chairs for reading is placed in the center of the room. A kind of curated exhibition of works and images contained between paper covers, *zingmagazine* allows Dikeou to collaborate with artists, curators, writers others.

Distorting sheets of mirrored mylar cover the back wall of the space and its two bathroom doors. "Cres Jewelry Exchange, All Welcome," reads the lettering on the wall, implying that treasures to trade can be found in the toilet. For this version of *Peep* (1991), Dikeou has added a peephole to each door, looking into the rooms instead of out. Rather than identify intruders, outsiders can, as Dikeou says "watch people doing their business," potentially invading someone else's privacy.

Resembling Duchamp's *Étant Donnés* without the simulated nude and landscape, *Peep* offers a sight to be seen that is real. The inside of the doors are also covered with distorting mirrors, so that users can watch themselves while being observed. The bathroom becomes a site of production and voyeurism both inside and out -- a complex and comical interpenetration of twisted reflections, and a meditation on the excrement that everyone creates.

Devon Dikeou, "It's Déjà vu All Over Again," May 6- 31, 2010, at 179 Canal Street, New York, N.Y. 10013.

ELISABETH KLEY is a New York artist and writer.



Devon Dikeou
Peep
1991
179 Canal Street

aluminum and hung salon-style, featuring buildings in Denver whose marquees announce exotic sounding European travel destinations for names, but make no other efforts to affect authenticity.

Across the screen door, Dikeou, who is the editor and publisher of *zingmagazine* (now in its 21st installment), has installed archive copies with corresponding tack-board editions. On each black directory board she lists an issue's masthead, creating a souvenir and a memento to the issue, and to the niceties involved in collaboration and cohabitation.

DEJA VU ALL OVER AGAIN IS ON VIEW THROUGH MAY 28. 179 CANAL STREET IS LOCATED AT 179 CANAL STREET, 2ND FLOOR, NEW YORK.

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