

# ARTFORUM

October 2017

## Devon Dikeou

JAMES FUENTES



Devon Dikeou, *"Pray for Me"—Pope Francis I, 2014*, ten *friarleros*. Installation view, 2017. Photo: Jason Mandella.

Before David H. Koch affixed his name to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exterior plaza; before the Rockefellers funded the Museum of Modern Art's international program during the Cold War; before Solomon R. Guggenheim, J. P. Morgan, and Andrew Carnegie marshaled their fortunes toward "refining" American culture; before several centuries' worth of upstanding burghers, upstart aristocrats, and absolutist royals who amassed collections and awarded commissions, there were popes. How different the history of Western art would be without Julius II, who commissioned Raphael's Stanza della Segnatura frescos and Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling between orchestrating military campaigns against Venice and France.

Raphael's *Portrait of Pope Julius II*, 1511–12, belongs to a veritable subgenre of painting: the seated pope. In the 1950s, Francis Bacon resuscitated this motif with his haunting studies of Velázquez's *Pope Innocent X*, 1650 (memorably described by Gilles Deleuze as “the insistence of a scream that survives the mouth, the insistence of a body that survives the organism”). More recently, Devon Dikeou has identified ten different seated-pope portraits, painted over some three hundred years, and has restaged them as photographs featuring only the chairs. For each, she has sourced separate *friarleros*, seventeenth-century “monk chairs” made of orange upholstery set over a carved-wood frame. In the project's previous iteration, Dikeou provided the *friarleros* as seating for art fairs—a wink at how fatigued fair visitors often find themselves anxiously determining whether a booth's chairs are welcome rest stops or off-limits antiques.

Grouped together in this gallery exhibition, “‘Pray for Me’—Pope Francis I,” the *friarleros* appeared largely identical, save for various rips, scratches, and other traces of extended use. (Anticipating further deterioration, Dikeou included a cabinet as a “reliquary” for storing torn-off bits of cloth.) Visitors were welcome to sit as they viewed the photographs that hung on the surrounding walls and considered the effects of their minute variations. How did the chairs' rotations force their occupants to position their bodies in relation to the picture plane? What crop most engendered a sense of intimacy? Such comparisons are far different from those prompted by the original paintings (reproduced in the exhibition's supplementary pamphlet). To arrange side by side a common motif painted by Raphael, Caravaggio, David, and so on is to present a sequence of styles. Rehearsing the progression from Renaissance to Baroque, Rococo to Neoclassical, is an outmoded art-historical method, yet the key question raised by Dikeou's project is best formulated in its terms: Has institutional critique entered a Mannerist phase?

In a handful of remarkable, posthumously published essays, Robert Smithson attempted to distill the essence of Mannerism—the principles underlying works such as El Greco's *Pope Pius V*, 1605, with its elongated features and unearthly palette. For Smithson, Mannerist painters rejected “Renaissance naturalism” and displayed “an exquisite but noxious sense of decorum.” That is, Mannerism (i.e., the style) both intensified mannerisms (i.e., idiosyncratic behaviors) and tested manners (i.e., the rules of the game). “Here is a world of countless plots and counterplots, all combining to make up a delicate structure, that evades simplism.” Dikeou's play on gallery-booth seating options lacks the moral authority of, say, Hans Haacke's laying bare of corporate sponsorship or Fred Wilson's excavations of cultural disavowal, but art fairs, like reality shows and the Trump presidency, have long proven impervious to reasoned objections and righteous outrage. A little more Mannerism might be exactly what our era needs—provided that the Mannerist's delight in surface also cuts deep. “‘Pray for Me’” is at its most trenchant when you take a seat. The physical experience is revealing. The backs and armrests of the *friarleros* push up the shoulders and pull out the chest; the chairs are ergonomically engineered to convey monastic rectitude. The power of art's erstwhile patrons inheres in their furniture, however threadbare.

—Colby Chamberlain



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A SHADED VIEW ON FASHION  
BY DIANE PERNET

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# Devon Dikeou Solo Show at James Fuentes Gallery NYC

JULY 16, 2017 *by* GERALDINE POSTEL

The latest Devon Dikeou solo show is an installation entitled “*Pray For Me*”- *Pope Francis I*, currently taking place at James Fuentes Gallery in New York.

In between the chairs of installation and interactive performance piece, the conceptual American artist and publisher of the art publication “*zingmagazine*”, will pick your brains and engage once more the public to take part of her new art project, here in the form of ten 17th century Italian “monk” chairs, which function as seating throughout the art gallery. These chairs were originally called *friarlero* –meaning “brothers”- due to their use by monks or higher religious actuary, even Popes. As Devon Dikeou’s work is known as being grounded on classical, literary, historical and contemporary art resonances, in this installation she plays with the function and multiple interpretations of the furniture piece in portrait painting of clerical authorities, while her peculiar sense of humour and twirling ideas wink to the lack of seatings and comfort to look at art in museums and galleries... 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, but without the seated subject-the absence of which conjures Papal ghosts. The *friarleros* are all labeled 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.



With the chairs revealed, the artist shows us here what is usually hidden behind the painted subject. Shedding light on the furniture piece in its essential role, as the hidden pedestal, Devon Dikeou is playfully revealing the intrinsic sign of a given 'holy' status. Where the unseen pedestals become the essential elements, by symbolizing the specific clerical authorities and their inherent classical portraits representations.

Additionally, the installation features a reliquary housing “relics” shed by the chairs over the course of their lives as artworks in the artists’ possession. As the chairs lose these fragments of fabric, the artist will add them 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 ideas of portraiture, patronage, politics, art history, and memorial.



Reliquary and installation view





On a Pope's chair... Viewers will enjoy for a moment the power seat and Instagram their memorable experiences.



Left: Caravaggio, Portrait of Pope Paul V, oil on canvas, 80 in x 47 in, c. 1605-1606

Right: Devon Dikeou, “Pray For Me”-Pope Francis I: Caravaggio, Portrait of Pope Paul V, mounted C-print, 80 in x 47 in, 2014

Opening photographs by Kel Burchette, all others © Devon Dikeou.

**The show is open until July 28th at James Fuentes Gallery**

**55 Delancey Street New York, NY 10002 – 212.577.1201 – For more: [info@jamesfuentes.com](mailto:info@jamesfuentes.com)**



## DEVON DIKEOU AT JAMES FUENTES, NEW YORK

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | July 05, 2017



"Pray for Me" ---Pope Francis I, Titian: Pope Paul III and his Grandsons 2014 mounted c-print  
82.625 x 69.33 inches (209.87 x 176.10 cm) Edition of 1 plus 1 AP and 1 exhibition copy

Courtesy: James Fuentes Gallery

James Fuentes, New York is hosting “Pray For Me”—Pope Francis I”, an exhibition by artist Devon Dikeou, on view through July 28, 2017.

The exhibition presents an installation work by Texas-based artist Devon Dikeou (b. 1963, Denver, Colorado, United States), known for her works that define the spaces that act as interfaces between the artist and the context of viewing the art, which often includes the viewers into a participatory role in her works. The visual properties of her works distinctly involves the Conceptual models in their physical reality, with the titles of her works further delve into these ideas by tapping into popular culture, creating another level of critique. For this installation, Devon focuses on the lack of seating arrangements for the tired visitors at the antique establishments of galleries, museum period rooms, and art fairs, which raises the risk of someone mistakenly sitting on an artwork, or being silently reprimanded by placards displaying phrases such as “Please Refrain from Sitting on Furniture”, or “Do Not Touch”, or simply by a fancy ribbon tied from arm to arm. “Pray For Me”—Pope Francis I” presents ten 17th century Italian “monk” chairs, which function as random seating throughout the art gallery. Originally termed as “friarlero”- meaning “brothers”- due to their use by monks or higher religious actuary, even Popes, each of these chairs are named after an historical painting of a Pope. Individually photographed and positioned according to the respective painting, but without the seated subject, these chairs highlight their absence, conjuring their papal ghosts. Additionally, the installation features a reliquary housing ”relics” shed by the chairs at the artists’ possession, hinting towards another practice followed by Catholic Churches.

*The exhibition is on view at James Fuentes, 55 Delancey Street, New York, NY 10002, USA.*

# International New York Times

Art & Design | Art Review

## Gathering of Far-Flung Friends, and Trends Pope Chairs and Carpets at NADA NYC Art Fair

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER MAY 8, 2014



The artist Devon Dikeou, also the editor and publisher of zingmagazine, has created a kind of public-service art project: seating for the fair in the form of 17th-century Italian monk chairs, under the title “‘Pray for Me’ — Pope Francis I.” (Each chair is named after a historical painting of a pope.)