Devon Dikeou Solo Show at James Fuentes Gallery NYC

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“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 friarleo – 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.
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