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AN ARTIST'S ARTIST

DEVON DIKEOU, THE VISIONARY BEHIND ONE OF DENVER'S MOST AVANT-GARDE COLLECTIONS OF ART, IS SWITCHING GEARS WITH A NEW YEAR-LONG SHOW OF HER OWN WORK.

WORDS: *Gigi Sukin*

Last April, the lights went dim on the Dikeou Collection—"one of Denver's best-kept contemporary art secrets," as independent curator Cortney Lane Stell puts it. That collection of roughly 100 works, free and open to the public inside an inconspicuous fifth-floor showroom at 16th and California streets, had drawn twenty years worth of art lovers.

But one adventurous collection is giving way to another: a retrospective of Dikeou's own works, called "Mid-Career Smear," which will be open to the public for a year starting on Feb. 20.

Before her new show was designed and assembled, drill holes and faint obscurities of



• "Tricia Nixon: Summer of 1973," (detail) 2017:
• Clock radio circa 1973 with looped CBS radio
• broadcasts from the summer of 1973.

frames from previously installed works were left untouched in the 7,600-square-foot, maze-like office space in the 16th Street Mall building, owned by the Dikeou's. "The empty space was still haunted with the specters of artworks past," Stell said. "The simultaneous absence and presence of the Dikeou Collection was all around."

The 56-year-old Dikeou's signature style molds and mutates ordinary objects and concepts into living commentaries, taking stock of the impermanent and the fragile. Over nearly 30 years, she has produced a body of work that "blurs the frontiers between the



photo: Lisa Kerezi

Devon Dikeou

"THE ARTISTS COLLECTED BY THE DIKEOU COLLECTION WERE EMERGING AND ALL NOW QUITE SIGNIFICANT. WE HAPPENED TO BE LUCKY ENOUGH TO KNOW, RECOGNIZE, BEFRIEND, COLLECT AND SHOW THE ARTISTS OF THE COLLECTION BEFORE THEIR RECOGNITION WAS SOLIDIFIED." —Devon Dikeou

intimate and the public, the past and present, art and life," says Stell. The subjects in her new show range from pop culture to art history and interior design, and reflect a tone that is both tongue-in-cheek and deferential.

The retrospective "is not a traditional chronological survey; rather, like the soundtrack for the audio tour that she has organized, it's a journey," Stell says. In fact, a melody has been selected to accompany each visual.

- "What's Love Got To Do With It?", NYC, 1993:
- Lobby directory board listing artists, gallery, curators, exhibition, titles, and dates
- replicating the lobby directory board at 420 West Broadway.





THE RETROSPECTIVE "IS NOT A TRADITIONAL CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY; RATHER, LIKE THE SOUNDTRACK FOR THE AUDIO TOUR THAT SHE HAS ORGANIZED, IT'S A JOURNEY." —Cortney Lane Stell

- "Tricia Nixon: Summer of 1973", 2017:
- Antique marble fireplace, mirror, clock, urns, a
- working heating element, air conditioner, and
- a vintage clock radio circa 1973, with looped
- CBS radio broadcasts from summer 1973.



- **"Please,"** 2011, ABOVE
- Surrounded by faux marble wallpaper and two fan-topped wrought-iron infinity mirrors are 10 hand-blown vases made to hold flower bouquets used to replicate each of the last 16 paintings Édouard Manet painted before dying, displayed on a 19th-century Portuguese table.
- **"Please Douze,"** 2011, LEFT
- C-print of a hand-blown glass vase and fresh lilacs arranged to replicate one of the Manet paintings.

"THE WORLD IS MY STUDIO. MY PROCESS BEGINS WITH JUST TRYING TO NOTICE, SEE, LOOK, FIND, WATCH, FEEL THE VIBE, AND MAYBE MAKE SOMETHING RELEVANT. THE WORK IS CONCEPTUAL BY NATURE, ROOTED MOSTLY IN THE SIXTIES, SEVENTIES, EIGHTIES, BUT ONWARD AND BACKWARD TOO. IDEAS HAPPEN SERENDIPITOUSLY. THE BEAUTY OF ART IS THAT WE ALL TAKE WHAT WE WANT FROM IT OR IGNORE IT ALTOGETHER, BOTH LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY." —Devon Dikeou

Near the entrance, the hallways are shrouded in black-and-white directory boards. "The series of hallway directory boards is titled 'What's Love Got to Do With It.' It's one of the first pieces I ever made and exhibited in New York City as a young artist," Dikeou explains. "I just loved the analog board at 420 (West Broadway in Soho), where Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonebend had their galleries. Those simple black flat boards with white letters in lobbies tickled me. I wanted to be on that 420 directory board. So I replicated it, but with the names of those in my first group show. It is the place that boards fit that is interesting to me, the place that is overlooked, the thing that is not seen, the ultimate wallflower." The board series has expanded to include all of the group exhibitions Dikeou has participated in, as well as every issue of her NYC-based art publication *zingmagazine*, and every round of new installations at the Dikeou Collection.

A collection of found and saved objects is also on display, including old *TV Guides*, outdated newspapers, a massive assemblage of phonebooks, and a smattering of Rolodexes—most decorated with Dikeou's scribbblings.

One work—titled "Pray for Me—Pope Francis I" emerged after Dikeou's antique-dealer husband brought home 10 unrestored monk chairs. She was unamused, so she channeled her newfound acquisition into a project that positions photos of individual Popes alongside each seat. "These are really regal chairs for monks who might become a Pope," Dikeou says. "So I thought of all the incredible Pope portraits of the Renaissance (including Titian, Raphael, Caravaggio and El Greco), chose 10 and attempted to photographically replicate the positioning of the chairs in all those portraits."

"Each of the 10 photographs are reproduced to the exact size of the original master's paintings, and my photographic images try to mimic them exactly but



- "Between The Acts (Virginia Woolf):
- Johnny Carson," 2014
- This work reflects the pipe-and-drape curtains at fairs, meant to be unobtrusive. The title is from a Virginia Woolf novel about a play in the English countryside where all the action happens behind the curtains.



- **"Pray for Me: Pope Francis," 2014**
- "I saw the chairs as Renaissance paintings from the likes of Titian, Velazquez, and Raphael," Dikeou says.
- "We set up a photo shoot in which we replicated the position of the Popes as they sat in paintings and photographed the chairs in the various positions."



• **“Not quite Mrs. DeMenil’s
liquor closet” 1991**

• The artist’s collection of charity-generated
• artwork displayed in a closet at an art fair rep-
• licates the liquor closet of the collector Mrs. De
• Menil with shelving, glassware, liquor, mixers,
• artificial birds, and the art of Marcel Dzama,
• Bill Radewec, and Harrison Haynes.

Though she says it’s not the overriding theme of her work, political references freckle the collection, with subtle jabs and not-so-illusiv e callouts to past and present office-bearers, including Presidents Trump and Obama.

In “Please,” Dikeou replicates the final 16 still-life oil paintings from impressionist Édouard Manet, creating precise arrangements of roses, lilacs, peonies, and tulips and teaming with a glassblower to copy the containers in the original paintings for her photos. “They are displayed in a room within a room within a building with two mirrors,” explains Dikeou. “All artwork is essentially about life and death; the in-between is memory. Manet’s paintings of flowers created the transition between his backgrounds and sitters with flowers. In the end he addressed the role of the artist in ‘The Bar at the Folies Bèrgere’ with mirrors. Mirrors accompany the installation, reflecting each other in infinity.”

Amid Dikeou’s originals, Wade Guyton’s colossal, parquet-covered cube intentionally obstructs the path and view of the room it rests within, in the spirit of in-betweenness that Dikeou seeks to celebrate. Titled “The Room Moved the Way Blocked,” the piece is plucked from her personal collection and beckons visitors to interact. “The artists collected by the Dikeou Collection are emerging and all now quite significant,” Dikeou says. “We happened to be lucky enough to know, recognize, befriend, collect, and show the artists of the collection before their recognition was solidified.”

When asked about her process, Dikeou says she’s not one to “go into a room to sit and think.” Rather, she takes her inspiration from the world around her. “The world is my studio,” Dikeou says. “My process begins with just trying to notice, see, look, find, watch, feel the vibe, and maybe make something relevant. The work is conceptual by nature, rooted mostly in the sixties, seventies, eighties, but onward and backward too. Ideas happen serendipitously. The beauty of art is that we all take what we want from it or ignore it altogether, both literally and figuratively. The early work is oddly prescient and foreboding, the latter more reflective, the time span necessarily changing the meaning.” ■