

Devon Dikeou: *Mid-Career Smear*

The Dikeou Collection
1615 California Street, Suite 515,
Denver, CO 80202

February 20, 2020–February 2022

Admission: Free

Curated by Courtney Lane Stell

Review by Tameca L Coleman

Walking through the Dikeou Collection's *Mid-Career Smear* with director Hayley Richardson and artist Devon Dikeou this spring felt like an initiation into a particular artist's aesthetic, worldview, and process. The exhibit is also like a portal by which we can travel in-between (and often experience all at the same time) what usually separates the present and the past, the personal and the public, the art and process of its creation, and even the artist and the viewer and/or collector, historian, and consumer of art.

Further, *Mid-Career Smear* continually invites us to participate, testing the idea of "immersive art," and I would say in many ways it flips that concept on its head. It offers experiences that do not solely exist inside of a room, building, medium, technology, or ruleset, but morphs depending on who arrives, what they notice, and how they interact with the space, its information, and its contents. Even viewers' knowledge of and relationship with the artist plays a part, and what they do with any pieces of the exhibit they encounter once they are out on the street.

You start with coins or dollars, if you want to, with **PAY WHAT YOU WISH BUT YOU MUST PAY SOMETHING**.



Above: An installation view of Devon Dikeou, *City Gates* (6 total), 1989-ongoing.

Below: Devon Dikeou, *Ring Sizer (Maybe)*, 2013-ongoing, ring sizer with 35 different ring sizes on a loop, dimensions variable. Images courtesy of the Dikeou Collection.



It's an installation of museum collection boxes inspired by the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art's entry policy which requires local entrants to pay something, even if it's a penny, to see some of the world's greatest art. The cash at the bottom of the collection boxes also leads you forward between walls bedecked with framed menu boards containing the details of past exhibitions and the artists' names, many of whom were once emerging, often now very well known, and some having passed. They are now archived and on display in community along with Devon Dikeou's name. In a sense, the hallway has become a portal as well as an archive, positioning us in multiple places at once and without boundary, so long as we read the boards.

When we come around a corner into the next installation, I do not

immediately recognize it as such. A series of gates—recently shown at James Fuentes Gallery in New York—is positioned inside a brightly lit room. The gates look polished. I learn that the gates represent a lot of what's seen in the city every day that is taken for granted as we rush past. "The compositions are real compositions that I found on the street while wandering from The Village to Soho," Dikeou tells us. For most of us, the kiosks, gates, and other structures we pass predominantly go unnoticed, serving as little more than partitions barring entry. But as a Dikeou art installation, we might forget that we are being subtly trained on the immersive and interactive qualities of what's to come. If you scan the full length of the gates, you will notice that each of them is without a lock and may be partially open already.

In so many instances, we are invited to participate with the items in a space, not just to simply be present with them. I admit that without Dikeou's gentle nudges, I might not have otherwise known that I could touch, move, and interact with, say, the ring sizers in *Maybe*, or shuffle through the donated grab bag of

city posts and stickers, or even search underneath a pillow for her beloved and many times mended security blanket called Niney.

It isn't just through touch that we get to interact with the *Mid-Career Smear*. It is with all of our senses, shared memories, and storytelling too. We can experience what feels like an intimate show-and-tell. We can learn about what art is, and the study of it, and we can go as deep as we want to, or simply gaze upon the surface, depending on our curiosity.

While a good deal of contemporary immersive art venues tend to use high tech and digital tactics, Dikeou tends

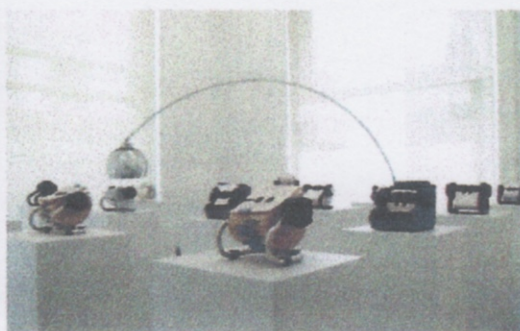
towards old-tech and/or slow-tech, such as what can be passed between hands: a matchbook, a recipe, a business or post card, a voicemail, a fax, a slice of pie or bread, a handful of popcorn, a sticker that we might stick on a telephone pole while no one is looking.

We also experience pauses inside of Dikeou's memories, many of which we are allowed to sit and contemplate, including the angles of a chair, a coffee meeting with artists, the importance of a room, or the items from a space that hosted a banquet for an art opening. We consider the importance of collecting itself, and how collecting sometimes requires

of us recreation in order to make what was otherwise inaccessible very magically accessible to us as an art student, as an artist, as a lover and observer of art, and so on.

I often felt transported, moving inside of a cocoon of the liminal where the ghost of the Dikeou gallery's currently pocketed-away collections reminded us of their presence (and inevitable return) by the unhidden scars on the walls. I was also reminded of this liminality by the unfinished nature of many of the pieces, and their dependence on our participation, which makes their outcomes at times unpredictably fun and potential time capsules of various political climates.

In the end, if you haven't already guessed it, just as the names and numbers on the business card wall or the room full of rolodexes (*Do I Know You?*) imply, exhibit goers may become part of the exhibit itself, sometimes as collaborators and also sometimes as artifacts.



Top Left: Devon Dikeou, *"PAY WHAT YOU WISH BUT YOU MUST PAY SOMETHING"*, 2013-ongoing, three of eighteen replicated functioning American art museum donation boxes: the Aspen Art Museum, Clyfford Still Museum, and Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, dimensions variable. **Top Right:** Devon Dikeou, *DO I KNOW YOU?*, 1991-ongoing, personal and business rolodexes of New York contacts from 1991 (the year the artist first began collecting personal contacts/business cards) and ongoing years, dimensions variable. **Bottom:** Devon Dikeou, *"WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?"*, 1991-ongoing, lobby directory boards listing artists, gallery, curators, exhibition titles, and dates; replicating the lobby directory board at 420 West Broadway, dimensions variable. Here: an installation view of *Decorous Beliefs*, *Gang Warfare*, *Oy*, *Transex*, *I Could Do That*, *Papier*, *Manes*, *Prague*, *Ornament Ho Hum All Ye Faithful*, *Back Room*, and *Romper Room*. Images courtesy of the Dikeou Collection.

About the Author:

Tameca L Coleman is a singer, multi-genre writer, itinerant nerd, and point and shoot art dabbler in Denver, Colorado. Their work explores heartbreak and healing, finding the words for our experiences, familial estrangement, being "in-between" things, finding beauty (even during times of strife), and movement towards reconciliation. Their writings have been published in *pulpmouth*, *Rigorous Magazine*, *Inverted Syntax*, *Full Stop Reviews*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Lambda Literary*, and more. Their photography has been featured in literary magazines and other venues. Their debut book, *an identity polyptych*, will be available from The Elephants on the Salish Sea in Fall 2021.