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Giuseppe Ducrot: *Monumental Statuary*

By Donatien Grau



Installation view, Giuseppe Ducrot: *Monumental Statuary* at Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, 2025–2026, Rome. Courtesy Galleria Lorcan O'Neill.

It has been decades since Giuseppe Ducrot began making religious sculptures—in bronze and ceramics, in the tradition of master sculptors. Living in Rome, of Neapolitan descent, Ducrot makes portraits of saints and other religious figures with the same precision and expression as some would have done 500 years ago. His work is at the same level of technical mastery as the great classical and baroque sculptures of saints, of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, of cardinals, and the popes. In itself, this is quite an achievement.

His debut exhibition at Lorcan O'Neill presents an introduction into his work. In the second room, we see his portrait of Pope Francis, an archetypal image of the Pope, at once respecting his traits and fixing them in history, as the great classical sculptors would have done. Looking at this bronze bust, we think of all the important portraits of previous popes, which invoke their humanity and attest to their greatness. In the same gallery, we see a series of *Ecce homo*, a variation on this quintessential representation of art and religious history. The suffering of Christ as he recognizes his own humanity through his suffering (and the humanness of those who have sentenced him to death) finds a poignant manifestation in this series. The variation invites us to reflect on the artist's statement that the perfecting of each work is a process resembling meditation. In making these works, Ducrot aims to perfect the form he has set to achieve. These works could be from centuries ago—part of tradition. They converse with a form of craftsmanship—which art also was, up until not so long ago.

Giuseppe Ducrot:
Monumental Statuary
Galleria Lorcan O'Neill
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2026
Rome





Giuseppe Ducrot, *Papa Francesco Primo*, 2016. Bronze, 132 x 106 x 63.5 cm. Courtesy Galleria Lorcan O'Neill.

The first room brings together deconstructions of sculptural types. Ducrot no longer shows us the perfect form of the perfect portrait, but cuts through, divides, and opens bare the signs of historical symbols, knights in armor, River Gods, and a stemma. He brings together signs from the past, all of which are part of the classical language present in the city of Rome, and he remakes and deconstructs them today. It is rare to make a papal stemma today, or to shape a sculpture in armor, or even to represent the Tiber or the Nile as the Ancient Romans very often did.

Looking at these works, one cannot help but consider how contemporary they are: not in a direct, straightforward fashion of trying to adhere to the present, but, in fact, as a discrepancy. Yes, someone working today still makes figures of saints and popes, as technically adept as they would have been made in the Renaissance. And this person knows how to deconstruct them as well. As a matter of fact, this artist is not religious, and these works are not statements of faith in their own right. They are statements of belief in the power of the craft. Returning to these methods that have been developed for centuries, and even millenaries, going back to Roman sculpture, one can create a form that is completely contemporary.



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Ancient sculptures did not separate artwork from decor: and a number of Ducrot's works address the very nature of the decorative, taking pieces of palatial furniture and remaking them in ceramic. Classical works of art were celebrated for the craft of their making, not on the interior life they aimed to reflect. Ducrot's intent is not to pay a tribute to the greatness of the church, or to the religious structures of Ancient Rome; it relies in fact in the fulfillment that the completion of a perfect form grants him.

Recently he unveiled a Saint Joseph, a new sculpture, in the Basilica di Sant'Agostino, in the chapel next door to the Caravaggio, and not far from the miraculous Madonna sculpture by Jacopo Sansovino, which in fact is based on an Ancient sculpture of Agrippina the Younger—the mother of the first persecutor of the Christians; quite a Roman paradox. His work fits perfectly. It looks like it was made at the same time as all the other works created for the

perfectly. It looks like it was made at the same time as all the other works created for the church. And yet, it is of our moment. By creating a sense of stability within the unstable field of the present, Ducrot accomplishes a quintessential contemporary gesture, one that turns temporalities upside down. A gesture that shows how much of the past still is in the present, if we are ready to experience it as such.

Looking at his works in the contemporary setting of Lorcan O'Neill's gallery in central Rome, one cannot help but think of how much the classical language of religion and sculpture has pervaded our contemporary culture. Contemporary artists have many concerns: the techniques and the questions of Renaissance art, the notion of series, the idea of the archetype, and the question of belief. Ducrot nails these very questions in his sculptures, magnificent works of today.

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