

Postscript to an archive of Fiona Connor's *Closed Down Clubs*

pp.XX-XX Installation view,
Fiona Connor, *My muse
is my memory*, an archive
of *Closed Down Clubs*,
Château Shatto, Los
Angeles, April 2022





(1) Simon Gennard, "Unruly Objects: Fiona Connor's Recent New Zealand Shows," *Art New Zealand* 167, 2018.

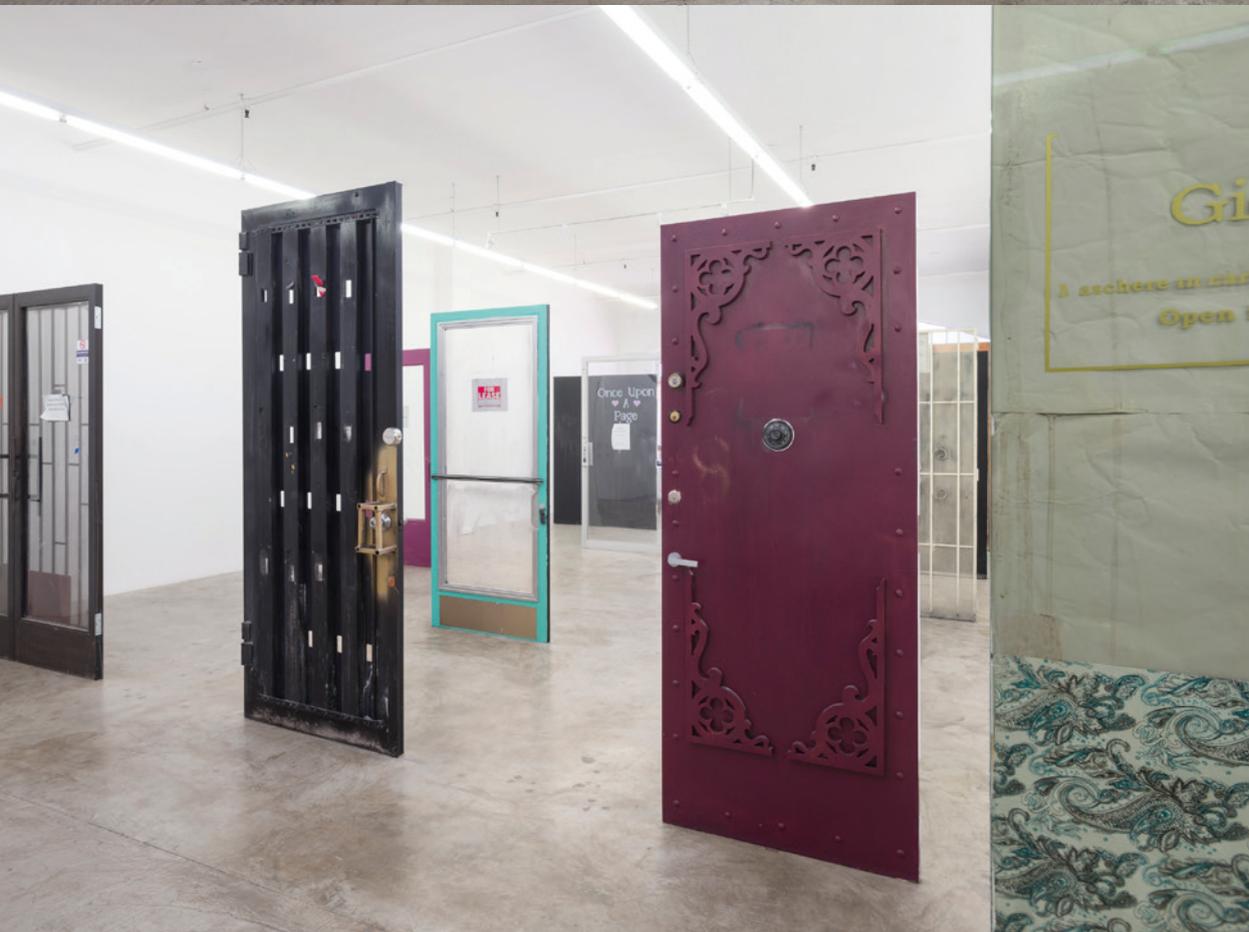
The first time I wrote about Fiona Connor's *Closed Down Clubs* I was in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, and so were Fiona's sculptures—exact replicas of the doors of closed-down businesses, which enfold printed and handwritten signage, ephemera, and the patinas of dirt that gathers upon buildings with no one around to care for them.¹ In the essay, I mentioned finding a kind of leakage occurring in the works, from the freshly painted space of Hopkinson Mossman's then-new Wellington gallery (now a closed-down club of its own), into the urban architecture within which the building was situated. At that time, the central city was heavily populated with buildings forced to close after being found unsafe following the 2016 Kaikōura earthquake. I think the point I was trying to make was that, even though Connor's sculptures were based on buildings in Los Angeles and Chicago, the sense of loss and estrangement wrought by the sudden departure of many familiar shopfronts couldn't help but infiltrate the works in the gallery.



This time, I'm in Ngāmotu and Fiona's sculptures are in Los Angeles. Her exhibition *My muse is my memory, an archive of Closed Down Clubs* at Chateau Shatto (19 March–7 May) gathers works from Fiona's *Closed Down Clubs* series produced between 2017 and 2022. Laid out in an irregular grid, every work brings with it its own archive of loss—years of devotion, tireless work, dumb hope, and scheming succumb to the pressures of rising rents, rising costs and the aggressive encroachment of big business interests. And again, as artworks, they can't help but be read against a backdrop of economic upheaval wrought by Covid-19 lockdowns, interrupted supply chains, skyrocketing oil prices. Which perhaps says more about the vagaries of capitalism, and the chaos it guarantees, than it does about the work.

Fiona Connor, *Closed Down Clubs, Hollywood*, 2017, commercial aluminium-frame door, glass, silkscreen on coated aluminium foil, tape, surface coatings, 209.6 x 90.2 x 14.6 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Chateau Shatto

Fiona Connor, *Closed Down Clubs, Tonic*, 2017, commercial aluminium-frame glass doors, silkscreen on coated aluminium foil, surface coatings, 209.6 x 162.6 x 15.9 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Chateau Shatto



The sense of loss in Fiona's work is perhaps most acutely felt in the reproduced notes that bear a personal address, from a proprietor to a community to shoppers, diners, drinkers or hangers on—like the handwritten note which appears on *Closed Down Clubs, Avanti Cafe* (2018) which reads, "Avanti Cafe is closing it's original location after 30 years (1987->2017) Thank you for supporting us all these years..." Or the bright orange sheet of A4 paper pasted on *Closed Down Clubs, Circus of Books* (2018) which invites patrons to join in the filming of a documentary about the store, asking "How do you feel about the store closing? We'd love

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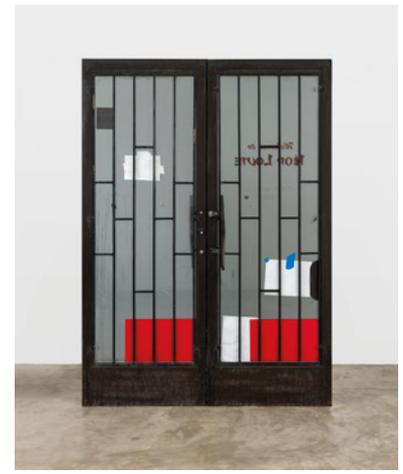
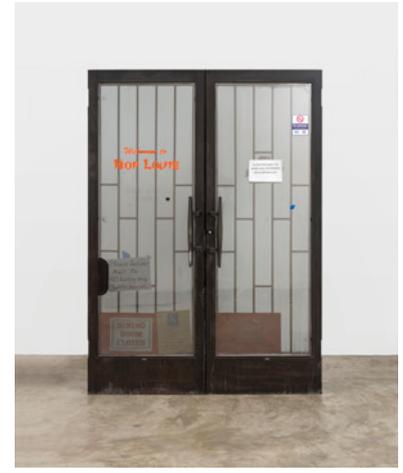


for you to stop by and share on camera your memories, experiences, and stories before our beloved institution shutters.”

But there's an obvious remove here, the hand that wrote these signs is not the hand that locked the door before vacating the premises for the last time. These doors are not doors in the world, but sculptures bolted to the floor in a controlled environment—an environment that, despite our best attempts, can't keep the world out. The doors can gesture to a network of relationships, but they can't restage the world each club contained. They act as stand-ins. If they enact a kind of theatre, each direct address contained on printed and handwritten matter reads a line said aloud by some actor. But as theatre, as fiction, they demand a suspension of disbelief. We can read these words knowing they're reproductions of words said in the world, but, from a distance, we can't know how closely they resemble the pace, timbre or intensity of the voice that spoke them in the first place.

When I called Fiona to talk about the works, we spoke briefly about body horror. I wasn't sure that I caught her drift then and I'm not sure if I catch it now, but I wonder if the logic that makes the genre so compelling might provide a way in. Body horror takes us to the extremes of human misery and bodily suffering, and operates by eliciting terror, squeamishness, perverted pleasure, from its audience. We know it's fakery—a combination of prosthesis, concealment, atmosphere and committed performance—and yet we want to go along for the ride. That very fakery may be the cushion that ensures our continued viewership. If things get too real, they might become unbearable. Some degree of camp, poor workmanship or overacting needs to be at play if we're to sustain our attention. Not that anyone would accuse Fiona of poor workmanship. But my point may be, is knowing that these sculptures are laboured

reproductions of things what keeps the conceit tipping over into morbid delight in someone else's ruin? Would the doors themselves, presented in a gallery in an arrangement that riffs on the spatial logics of modernist sculpture, be too gruesome to consider? Is it the careful, precise act of creation that tips the balance between a spectacle of loss, and an act of devotion to a temporary appearance within a constantly changing landscape? Or is it both? In viewing, we might be asked to consider that there's both morbidity and a sincere, affectionate attentiveness to the conceit. We could call it an act of getting to know an ever-changing landscape by attempting to suspend it—embedding the details of a city within the logic of the gallery, the archive, the institutional collection.



p.XX Fiona Connor, *Closed Down Clubs, Brooklyn, 2020*, commercial aluminium-frame door, polycarbonate, hardware, silkscreen on coated aluminium foil, vinyl, surface coatings, 210.8 x 152.4 x 10.2 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Château Shatto

p.XX Fiona Connor, *Closed Down Clubs, Hop Louie, 2020*, commercial aluminium-frame door, polycarbonate, steel grill, hardware, silkscreen on coated aluminium foil, vinyl, tape, cast aluminium, surface coatings, 213.4 x 152.4 x 17.8 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Château Shatto