Contemporary Art Review .la

Fiona Conner at the MAK Center

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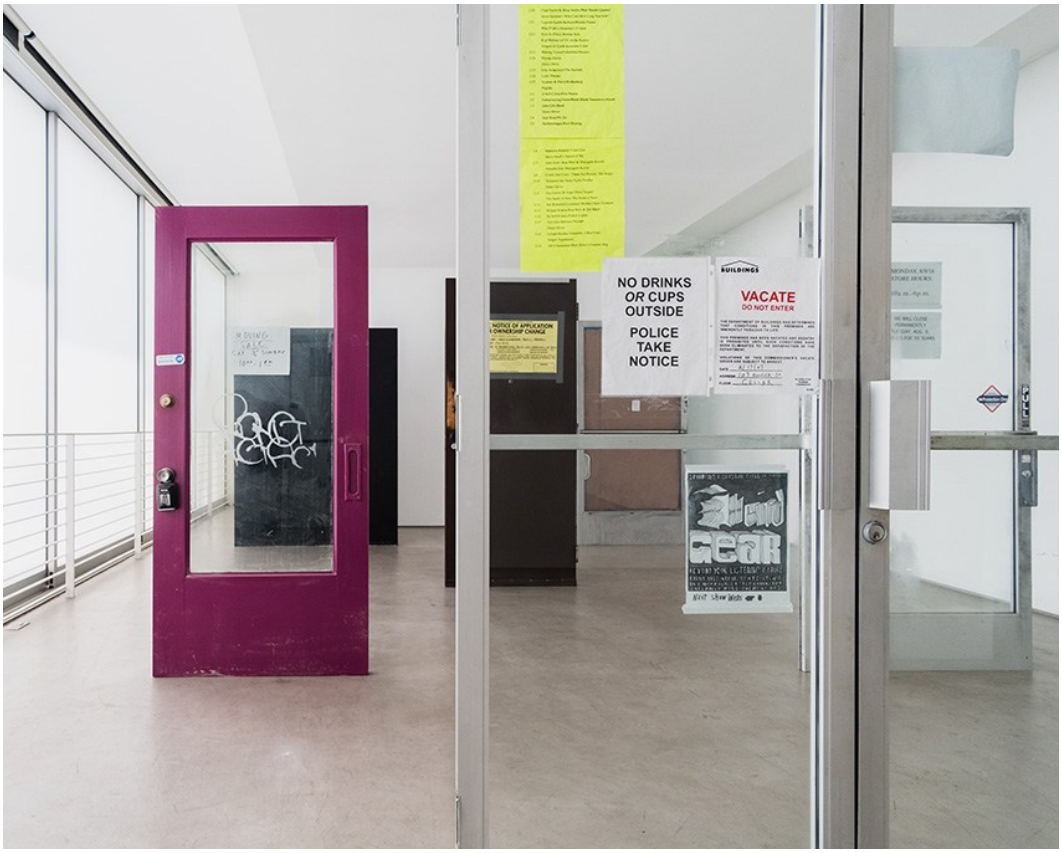
Text by Thomas Duncan

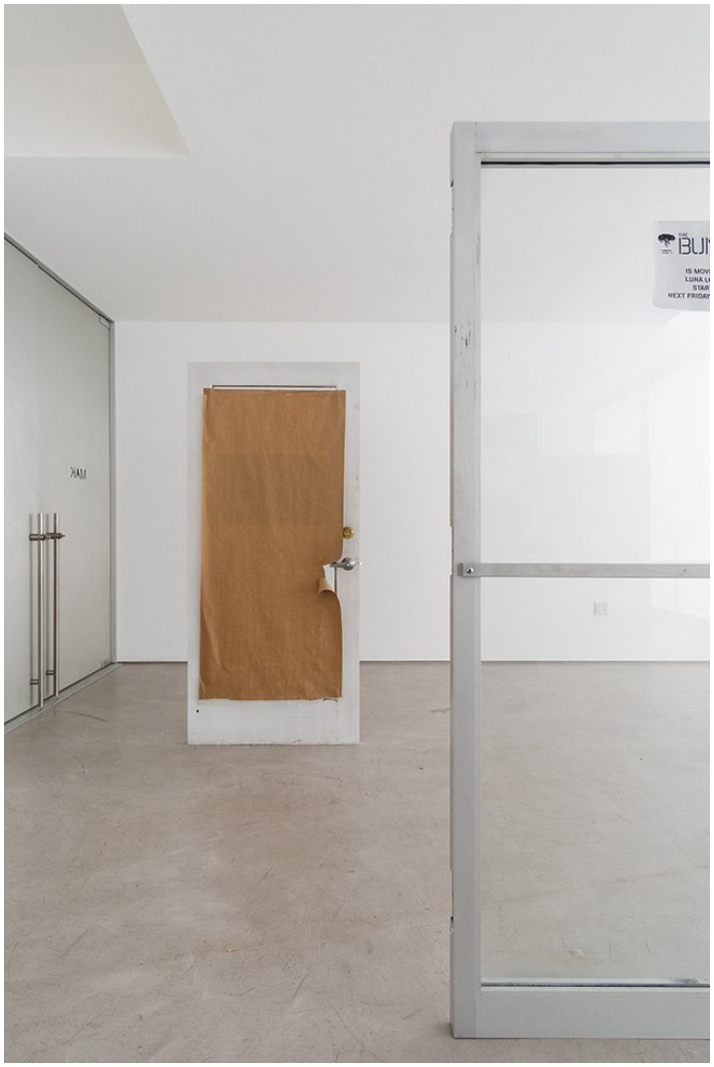


Fiona Connor, *Closed Down Clubs* (2018) (installation view). Image courtesy of the artist and MAK Center. Photo: Esteban Schimpf.

Beyond mere entry and exit, not much thought is given to the doors through which we pass every day. *Closed Down Clubs*, New Zealand-born, Los Angeles-based artist Fiona Connor's latest exhibition, invited contemplation of the larger significations of such mundane portals. Housed at the MAK Center's Mackey Garage Top (a sleek and airy space above a garage behind a Rudolf Schindler house), Connor's exhibition was comprised of nine freestanding doors installed in a staggered, parallel formation, each emblazoned with printed or hand-written signs announcing the recent closure of the businesses to which they were once attached.

Like virtually all of Connor's work, each of the sculptures included is a meticulous replication of an actual object. Having previously assumed such forms as bulletin boards, drinking fountains, and architectural infrastructure, her works are typically adorned with artist-drawn or screen-printed stickers, posters, or pamphlets to faithfully match the original reference as closely as possible. As relics of shared space, her works often bear traces of obsolescence or fatigue, expounded through the artist's fastidious duplication of objects' apparent wear or corrosion. *Closed Down Clubs* was no exception—one could sense the traffic that Connor's chosen doors had experienced in their past lives, as seen in suspended animation (such as where sullied hands cumulatively left their mark in instances of worn-o paint or accumulated grime). With such minute attention to detail, Connor's work offers a verisimilitude so precise that it could easily be mistaken for the real thing, which begs the question: why laboriously recreate an object that could simply be appropriated?

Unlike Danh Vo or Cameron Rowland, two artists whose use of the readymade foregrounds the compelling personal and political histories of their chosen objects, Connor's work is a deft repetition of the real. Indeed, her readymade-once-removed production is a fiction residing in tandem with reality—meaning we are meant to understand that her work is a facsimile of lived experience at a particular place and time. With this, Connor mobilizes the deceptive surface of artifice not only to underscore the often-overlooked aesthetic qualities of quotidian objects, but also what they communicate about the societies in which they function.



Fiona Connor, *Closed Down Clubs* (2018) (installation view). Image courtesy of the artist and MAK Center. Photo: Esteban Schimpf.

Connor's works at the MAK Center—as is the case in most of her work—were duplications of things that, by and large, are only truly experienced in person— whether that be the touch of a worn brass door handle (*Closed Down Clubs, Club Tee Gee*) (all works 2018), the kicked and nicked bottom side of a plum-colored entryway (*Closed Down Clubs, NoHo London Music Hall*), or the texture of corroded duct tape stuck on an emergency exit (*Closed Down Clubs, The Smell*).

As a title, *Closed Down Clubs* is more fictive than legitimate, being that not all of the establishments featured are actually closed and many are not clubs. (At least two are restaurants, one a bookstore, and one that's altogether undefined.) Nevertheless, while these portals obviously act as agents of erstwhile monetary exchange, these are also relics of physical access, frozen between states of entry and departure, assembly and dispersal. More pertinently, each work is a token of sidelined identity.

One only need recall the Cheers theme song to emote the pursuit of belonging and shared escape through spaces of congregation. When these establishments shutter, a part of us does as well. Additionally, these works called our attention not only to the potential pitfalls of being a small business owner but of the mortality of brick and mortar stores more generally. Connor, though, was not singing a song of financial victimization and e-commerce heartache, but was rather building a narrative of foreclosed selfhood and belonging. Ironically, the namesakes for the two works that were most regionally emblematic of this kind of belonging, The Smell and Club Tee Gee, are still open.

Closed Down Clubs was not just about communication consumed in transience—the taped note on the door seen while strolling by, "PULL" written in crackled signage, business cards crammed in crevices—but it was also about the state of community in the face of its looming digital annihilation. Indeed, with modes of identity shifting further out of the realm of the real and more into the realm of the immaterial, Connor's assiduously analogue endeavors gave clarity to this very reality.

Though Connor's exhibition decidedly conjured extinction, her simulacra reminded us that no matter what technological advances society makes, analogue forms of communication will outlive all others.