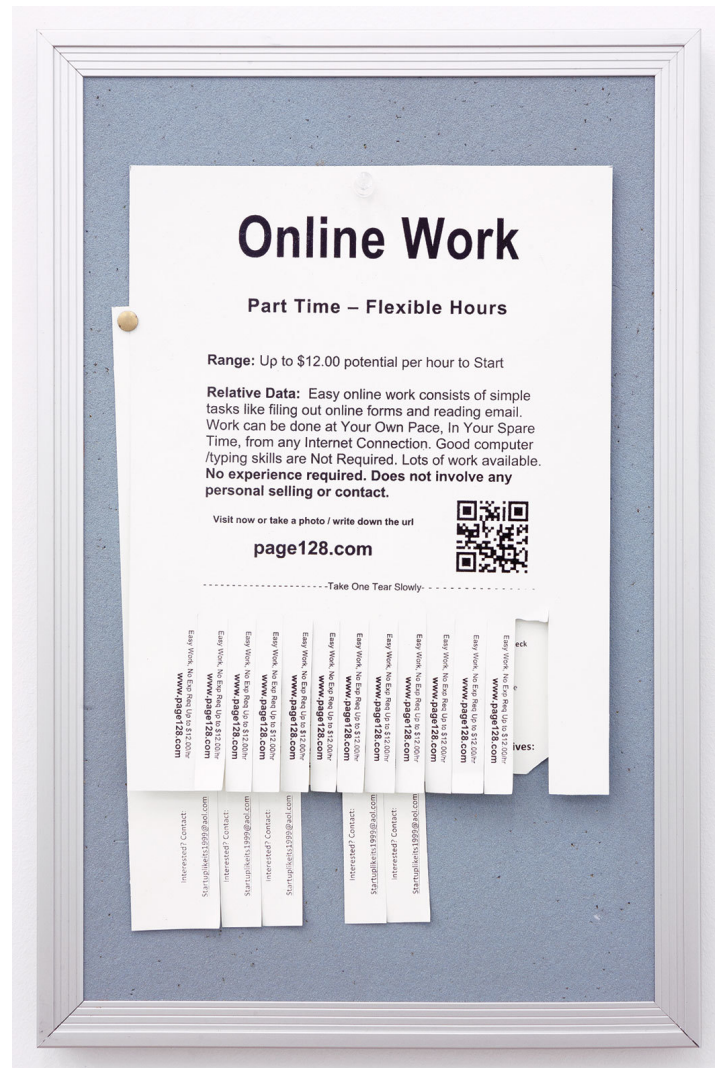


Openings: Fiona Connor

By Michael Ned Holte



Fiona Connor, *ComSci Bulletin Board #1*, 2014, aluminum, particleboard, paint, metal, thumbtacks, 17 3/4 × 11 3/4".

LONG BEFORE the advent of Craigslist, bulletin boards emblemized the self-organized welter of transactional democracy. That they continue to exist in schools, libraries, and coffee shops is a testament to their earnest, utilitarian promise, even as they tend to disappear in plain sight—that is, unless you're suddenly in need of communication with a highly localized audience: You've lost a pet, you're selling a car, you're seeking guitar lessons or a Spanish tutor.



View of “Fiona Connor,” 2014, Commercial Traveller’s Association, Sydney. From left: ComSci Bulletin Board #2, 2014; ComSci Bulletin Board #1, 2014. Photo: S. T. Lore.

In 2014, Fiona Connor initiated what would become an ongoing project by faithfully re-creating two small, gray, aluminum-framed bulletin boards she found on the University of California, Los Angeles, campus, along with their complete contents. In the case of *ComSci Bulletin Board #1*, this included a rather unassuming flyer advertising online work (“Part Time—Flexible Hours”), complete with a QR code and fringe-like tabs, one of which was removed. (Connor’s materials often duplicate those of the original bulletin board, though printed matter is typically silk-screened onto paper-thin aluminum.) *ComSci Bulletin Board #2*, meanwhile, features a comic strip beginning with an enthused new graduate, diploma in hand, who by the end of a short narrative—diagrammed with a graph—has transformed into a beleaguered office worker checking his watch in preparation for happy hour. The comic is low humor for a highbrow audience, sourced from www.phdcomics.com and shared by some anonymous intermediary using the relatively archaic technology of 8.5 x 11" bond paper. Later in 2014, Connor presented both of these exacting full-scale remakes in a context far removed from the UCLA campus: a group exhibition mounted in the lobby of the Commercial Travellers’ Association hotel in Sydney. Connor frequently employs these painstaking tactics, remaking and resituating in tandem across a wide variety of sites, from museums to tiny artist-run spaces to community centers.



Fiona Connor, Notice Board (Pacific Clay) #2, 2016, corkboard, paint, silk-screen and UV print on aluminum, pins, tape. Installation view, University of California, Los Angeles.

Connor's remakes—recurring subjects include bulletin boards, walls, doors, and public fountains—are startling simulations of seemingly banal objects that nevertheless prove to be carriers of significant material and social histories. The artist stumbled on the ComSci bulletin boards in UCLA's Boelter Hall, the staid, brick-clad home of the university's computer-science department, where, remarkably, engineers sent the very first message over Arpanet, a precursor to the modern-day internet; the room in which this occurred is now preserved and displayed behind glass like a diorama at a natural—history museum. Connor's investigation of Boelter Hall coincided with a series of lectures and walking tours she gave on the proprietary bricks used in the construction of buildings throughout the UCLA campus—architects George W. Kelham and David Allison first used Norman bricks for their Lombard Romanesque—style buildings in the late 1920s, and the practice continues today. This history eventually became the subject of Connor's 2016 exhibition, which took place in an architecture-department classroom and included re-creations of bulletin boards from the Pacific Clay factory in Lake Elsinore, California, where all of the bricks at UCLA are fabricated.



Fiona Connor, *Community Notice Board (Pizza)*, 2015, corkboard, paint, silk-screen and UV print on aluminum, foil, thumbtacks, staples, 41 × 27".

Remaking is a way of taking without stealing, and without upsetting the precarious social order in which such objects originate.

A full exhibition of “new” bulletin boards followed the Sydney presentation at 1301PE gallery in Los Angeles in 2015, revealing a surprising variety of forms and uses. These bulletin boards were modeled on ones found at various sites around the city, where the artist is currently based, with subtitles that casually point to their sites of origin: *Community Notice Board (Pizza)*, 2015, is a haphazard array of flyers, business cards, and provisional scraps of information, collectively pitching haircuts, concerts, and free English lessons to Spanish speakers; by comparison, *Community Notice Board (Library)*, 2015, is tidily composed, with a careful selection of library-related matter crowned by a yellow “paper” sign that reads @MEMORIAL—presumably the name of the library but also a double entendre marking the passage of time.



Fiona Connor, *Community Notice Board (Library)*, 2015, custom corkboard, paint, silk-screen and UV print on aluminum, vinyl, thumbtacks, staples, tape, plastic sleeve, 22 × 19".

While a photographic operation is at the heart of this project—given the technical considerations of silk-screen printing, not to mention the legacy of appropriation from which these works draw—some of the boards are empty, meaning they were unused (or barely used) at the time they were found, though accumulations of staples and tack holes suggest they had already hosted years or even decades of ephemeral public transmissions. A subsequent series of works recasts otherwise barren and weathered outdoor display boards as aqua-resin monochromes, which Connor hangs on the wall, where they operate in the space of painting—and emphatically signal their art-historical implications (specifically recalling Thierry de Duve’s understanding of the readymade and the blank canvas as modes in an intertwined historical narrative). The source of these objects is left anonymous, so that despite the tactile exactitude of Connor’s duplication, these monochromes suggest the task of making meaning is an open and ongoing communal activity.



View of "Fiona Connor: Closed Down Clubs," 2018, Garage Top, Mackey Apartments, MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles. Photos: Esteban Schimpf.

IN HER 2018 SOLO EXHIBITION "Closed Down Clubs" at the mak Center for Art and Architecture's Mackey Apartments space in Los Angeles, Connor presented an arrangement of doors from shuttered music clubs, bookstores, and other commercial establishments, all upright and facing visitors as they entered the Garage Top gallery. While the message boards commemorate public spaces for private transactions, the doors represent a literal divide between those spatial orders; importantly, Connor renders the club doors useless, installing them as freestanding objects. Much like the bulletin boards, the sculptures appear to be found objects but are in fact meticulous replicas of specific doors in the world, complete with xeroxed flyers for long-past concerts, building-security stickers, and decades of accrued wear and tear, also exactly reproduced. Such replicas inevitably recall precedents such as Jasper Johns's remakes of factory-made ale cans (*Painted Bronze [Ale Cans]*, 1960) and Vija Celmins's painted bronze stones (*To Fix the Image in Memory I–XI*, 1977–82), but the objects Connor chooses to replicate are shaped not by natural processes but by communities of people and their needs, their changes accumulating over time into a kind of unscripted social history. Remaking is a way of taking without stealing, and without upsetting the precarious social order in which such objects originate. The originals are left in place, intact, subject to inevitable change or erasure, whereas in Connor's replicas it is the readymade contents that remain constant, frozen in a state of yawning obsolescence while accruing new meaning in their mobilization.



View of "Fiona Connor: Closed Down Clubs," 2018, Garage Top, Mackey Apartments, MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles. Photos: Esteban Schimpf.

Though replication is a recurring tactic for Connor, it's not her only one: Elsewhere, including at the 2018 exhibition "The Green Man" at Talbot Rice Gallery at the University of Edinburgh, the artist has taken existing doors and simply relocated them in the space they initially resided—often snugly inserting them into gallery walls while leaving the original doorframes empty. At the Talbot Rice show (which was organized by artist Lucy Skaer), Connor removed the door from an otherwise-overlooked storage closet and plugged it into the middle of a gallery wall. This tactic shifts the emphasis away from the artist's virtuosic tricks—her trompe l'oeil simulations of objects and architectural details—and toward attentiveness itself as an act and a value to be shared between the artist and her viewers.



Fiona Connor, On What Remains (fountain), 2015, concrete, expanded polystyrene foam, antique brass hardware, plumbing supplies, steel, plywood, paint, coatings, car battery, pump, water. Installation view, Lisa Cooley Gallery, New York.

In this sense, Connor's work encourages a viewer to perform a rack focus, in which attention shifts from an extraordinary detail—of a club flyer, a business card, a piece of door hardware, etc.—to the larger context of the material history and the mess of social transactions that produce it. And indeed, Connor is especially alert to vernacular details, from the building elements, practices, and codes specific to a particular locale to the social formations her chosen objects metonymically represent: In reproducing the doors from shuttered experimental music venues such as the Smell in Los Angeles or Tonic in New York, the artist perpetuates (or perhaps resurrects) the collective narratives and communal aspirations that seemingly came to an end when the venues did. At times, Connor has found herself playing a role in these narratives: One of these closed-down clubs, at 107 Norfolk Street, in New York, became Lisa Cooley Gallery, at which Connor has had several shows. That gallery has since closed, too.



View of "The Green Man," 2018, Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh. Wall: Fiona Connor, All the doors in all the walls (detail), 2018. Photo: Ruth Clark.

Connor's own focus frequently racks between individualized object making and an expansive engagement with collective and collaborative efforts.

Connor's own focus frequently racks between individualized object making and an expansive engagement with collective and collaborative efforts. For exactly one year—from April 2015 to April 2016—she operated the gallery Laurel Doody (named after a family friend) out of her one-bedroom apartment in Los Angeles's Miracle Mile neighborhood, overseeing a varied sequence of exhibitions and public programming. Following the planned closure of the gallery, she began to develop Laurel Doody Library Supply, a distribution service that, as the name suggests, provides an idiosyncratic and networked selection of small-press publications and records to libraries around the world, from Bibliothèque Kandinsky at the Centre Pompidou in Paris to Beta-Local in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Much like her sharply focused sculptural simulations, these and other cooperative endeavors—which trace back to her cofounding, in 2007, of the erstwhile artist-run space Gambia Castle in her native Auckland—effectively remake the social context in which one encounters the work of art: Objects originally created for a hyperlocal audience, typically Connor's friends or collaborators from Los Angeles or Auckland, circulate and are resituated beyond it. Like the act of reproducing a bulletin board from a community center, such gestures appear small at first, but they mark time and social relations with fastidious purpose.



Fiona Connor, *Closed for installation*, 2019, bronze, twenty parts. Installation view, SculptureCenter, New York. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

For two concurrent exhibitions at SculptureCenter in New York and at Secession in Vienna this year, Connor has replicated matching sets of studio tools—tape measure, level, drill bit, push broom, furniture dolly, work stool, plastic crate—in patinated bronze, rendering the commemorative aspect of her practice explicit by transforming humdrum objects into weighty, even precious memento mori. What exactly is being commemorated here? Work, certainly—hers, inevitably—but also the broader field

of manual or artisanal labor. It's worth noting that the tools in question are not only, or are not specifically, those of an artist.



Site of Fiona Connor's #4, 2019–, annual window cleaning. Long Island City, NY, 2019. From the series "Sequence of Events," 2017–. Photo: Kyle Knodell.

Collectively titled *Closed for installation*, 2019, these objects present a hide-and-seek experience in the basement at SculptureCenter, but the exhibition extends outward as well: For #4, 2019–, from a series Connor calls "A Sequence of Events," 2017–, the museum has contracted with the owner of a Long Island City building to have the windows of a third-story apartment professionally washed on an annual basis. The building is a fifteen-minute walk from SculptureCenter; the residence is currently occupied by a young family, otherwise unconnected to the institution. Drawing on a history of maintenance art—"After the revolution," Mierle Laderman Ukeles pointedly asked in her "Maintenance Art Manifesto" (1969), "who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?"—Connor also brings together an institution and its context, "unseen" labor and urban tenants at the mercy of economic upheaval in a rapidly developing neighborhood. Despite relentless technological updates and social transformations, Connor trains attention—first hers, then ours—on objects that stubbornly persevere beyond their cultural moment, and on the transactions that allow them to persist.

"Closed for installation, Fiona Connor, SculptureCenter, #4" is on view at SculptureCenter, New York through July 29.

"#8, Closed for installation, Sequence of Events" is on view at Secession, Vienna June 27–September 1.

Michael Ned Holte is an independent curator who teaches in the art program at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, CA.