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# idea journal

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(extra) ordinary interiors:  
practising critical reflection

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vol. 18, no. 01

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2021

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the journal of IDEA: the interior design +  
interior architecture educators association



# **idea journal**

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**the journal of IDEA: the interior design +  
interior architecture educators association**

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**cover image**

Lying motionless, listless. Consuming time; being present, each moment folds into another. Surfaces becoming expanses of inflections of hue. Normality expands into a stream of observing luminosity. Still image from video by Chora Carleton, 2021.

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### this issue's provocation

(Extra) Ordinary Interiors calls for contributions from academics, research students and practitioners that demonstrate contemporary modes of criticality and reflection on specific interior environments in ways that expand upon that which is ordinary (of the everyday, common, banal, or taken for granted).

This theme has two agendas: First, the desire to amplify critical reflection as a key practice of the disciplines associated with this journal's readership. In short, to prompt interior designers, interior architects, and spatial designers to be more proactive and experimental in asserting their specialist knowledge and expertise as critical commentary. This asks authors to reconsider the role of critique and criticism in their scholarly and creative works, or, to demonstrate how to reflect critically upon a design and to locate the design's relation to material, political, social, cultural, historical and geographical concerns. Such an enterprise may reveal whether models of criticality centred on judgement, authority and historicism are relevant, constructive, insightful or generative, or, as Bruno Latour poses, have they 'run out of steam'?<sup>01</sup> This exercise may prompt some to revisit key thinkers who pose new discursive, visual and temporal models for critical practice in this recent age of criticality. We draw your attention to *Critical Spatial Practice* by Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen, which asks for thinking "about 'space' without necessarily intervening in it physically, but trying to sensitise, promote, develop and foster an attitude towards contemporary spatial production, its triggers, driving forces, effects and affects... [to] speculate on the modalities of production and potential benefits of the role of 'the outsider.'"<sup>02</sup>

We also look to Jane Rendell's introduction to *Critical Architecture*, which asserts that criticism and design are linked together by virtue of their shared interests in invoking social change.<sup>03</sup> Whether it takes written, built or speculative form, criticism is an action, which according to Roland Barthes, is a calling into crisis, a moment where existing definitions, disciplinary boundaries and assumptions about normativity are put into question.<sup>04</sup>

The second agenda of this journal issue takes heed of the ordinary, and how, in its intense observation, what is normal or often taken for granted exceeds itself, becomes extra or more ordinary. Everyday spaces such as supermarkets, service stations, laundry mats, hardware stores, parks and four-way street intersections, and banal gestures such as washing the dishes, walking the dog or street sweeping become subject to critical scrutiny and introspection. Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage Around My Room*, Julio Cortázar's *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds*, and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* are but a few historic examples that draw out critical depth and aesthetic meaning about ordinary interiors, interiors understood in the most liberal sense.<sup>05</sup> What new actions to the crisis of critical commentary lurk restlessly in ordinary interiors?

While a nostalgic or romantic response to this journal's theme may dwell on interior situations with no special or distinctive features, or explore the persistence and abundance of ordinary interiors, even commonplace spaces, noticed or not, it can not be denied that recent pandemic events world-wide have flung the many facets of everyday life into crisis, including long-standing notions of proximity, intimacy, hapticity, privacy, freedom and rights to access 'essential' services. For many, the world has become home and home has become an internal world, an interior contaminated or augmented by virtual technologies serving as lifelines to a previous highly social and diversified lifestyle. As the interior of one's domestic space finds coincidence with one's isolation bubble, many are finding that interiority and interiors are conflating to take on new meaning, new function, and new configuration. Ordinary scenes of dead flies on windowsills, sun rays pointing to poor house-keeping habits, mounting bags of uncollected rubbish and recycling, shuffling of mattresses, improvised work surfaces, revised chores rubrics, commandeering of the bathroom, and the commodity of headphones and adapters highlight an intensified condition.

Authors are prompted to practice a form of critical reflection on one (extra) ordinary interior.

### reviewers for this issue

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01 Bruno Latour. 'Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,' In *Critical Inquiry - Special issue on the Future of Critique* 30, no. 2 (2004): 25-248.

02 Nikolaus Hirsch and Markus Miessen, 'Architecture and Critical Spatial Practice,' 1 May 2020, [criticalspatialpractice.org](https://criticalspatialpractice.org).

03 Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian (Eds), *Critical Architecture* (Oxon UK, USA and Canada: Routledge, 2007), 4.

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# closed down clubs

## Fiona Connor

Independent Artist

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### abstract

*Closed Down Clubs* is a body of work that replicates doors to clubs located in various places the artist encounters, where personal, technological, economic, and political forces have led to their failure as part of the urban fabric. As full-scale objects that one can walk around, these doors are place holders for the entities they mimic or represent; they point to places that had once supported communities, autonomous places that have now been erased.

The archive is the source material for a number of exhibitions internationally. When not on exhibition, this archive is based in Connor's studio. The visual essay charts the artist's making process in her own words, accompanied by photographs taken by Marten Elder in her studio. This piece expands on and will become part of the archive, and along the way, ruminates on an extraordinary moment of NOW.

### cite as:

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### keywords:

archive, closed down clubs, micro history, threshold, installation, placeholder, mapping, mimesis, decentralised, documentation





## introduction

*Closed Down Clubs* acts as a memorial for spaces. Their doors are documented as 1:1 objects and installed as sculpture that you can walk around. They are place holders for the entities they once held.

*Closed Down Clubs* is an archive that anticipates its own collection. It is based in my studio in Glendale and supported by many hosts that care, house, document and help it circulate. It is a single archive that is supported and housed by many.

Pointing to spaces that had supported communities, and that have now been erased, the project builds an autonomous archive which includes an ongoing series of sculptures. Parts of the archive can enter into other collections, be photographed and circulate, but each door remains tethered to the logic of the larger archive, casting galleries and institutions as contributors to and collaborators in the project.

## micro history

*Closed Down Clubs* multitasks between a document and an art work. The works contain many lives: before I find them on the street, when I work on them in the studio, and then, after I am finished and they become part of the series.

A catalogue of all the doors in the archive is accessible online ([fconnor.studio](http://fconnor.studio)). Members of the public can request access; they may type in and search something like: "Hop Louie Chinatown Los Angeles." While only some club doors are chosen to be part of the project, once selected, everything that is on the door is reproduced to the same level of verisimilitude. As documents, they are open to decentralised interruption in the future.



## dead and alive

Being dead and alive is a productive contradiction, like two sides of a magnet in opposition creating a spin. Finishing a work and calling it DONE is a conclusion but also a beginning; cropping an image is a loss, and yet, new games begin. The threshold of a door between two spaces is like the edge of the magnet. Closed, it is a hard NO, but I don't leave. I hang around and return, learning its entangled logics of construction, use and maintenance. *When to hold on?*

## mapping

Sometimes I find *Closed Down Clubs* unexpectedly, sometimes I seek them out, sometimes I find them when I am looking for something else. Images accumulate on my phone; documentation of each door is automatically mapped in the phone's 'People & Places Album' using the GPS function. I refer to this map often, crocodile fingers, zooming in and out. As the series of *Closed Down Clubs* grows, it gathers together a network of singular touch points that take people elsewhere and punctuates something horizontal and boundless. Something embedded in the everyday, the normal, and yet entangled with ample portions of the more than ordinary.

The 'getting to know you process' takes place over multiple visits. I start wide and zoom in — walking distance from home, old haunt, Virgil Village, Smog Cutter, single door, wood, black paint, diamond-shaped window with quarter-curved, uncoated wooden bead around it, Victorian bronze pull handle, drawer pull, dead bolt, kick plate, faux tongue and groove panel attached, inside dead bolt, wood veneer, piece of sheet material covering window attached with red tape, small holes covered with too big circular taps.





## clubs

'Clubs' is a loose category, like counterculture, currently in crisis. Binaries like public and private, visible and invisible, inside and outside, now not only rely on each other but have become undecipherable. *Closed Down Clubs, Full O' Life, Closed Down Clubs, Smog Cutter, Closed Down Clubs, Kings Arms, Closed Down Clubs, Brooklyn, Closed Down Clubs, NoHo Photo, Closed Down Clubs, Hop Louie, Closed Down Clubs, Catch One, Closed Down Clubs, Once Upon a Page*. When they close, the leaving tenants often post a direct address to their patrons expressing gratitude and informing them of their change in circumstance.

## mimesis

For me they are real; I cannot recognise the difference between these sculptures and my memory of the actual doors. They have become one thing in my mind through the process of making — memorising, touch intelligence and reverse engineering. They are formed from the inside out — their construction and finish, their ephemera, additive marks of use and entropic wear. The logic of their fabrication is a combination of standardised and custom-made parts with stand-in materials for archival purposes. The paper of the notices is actually kitchen foil coated with clicker-can white primer which then receives a silk screen print. The stickers are silk screen and digital print on vinyl. The screens are made from images reconstructed in an old version of Adobe Photoshop. Sometimes I take molds of the actual doors and get parts made at an aluminum foundry. Once, when I contacted the door owner to see inside, they offered me an actual handle. When they are structurally complete and standing up, I work round the room, arranging the ephemera and completing them with a palette of washes, pigment, spray and wax.



## installation

The doors find their way into a grid. When they are installed, they are upright; we can move around them. A reversal has taken place: a former gateway that controlled access to a protected space has been removed from its surrounding architecture and is now fixed to the floor. They appear to balance on their bottom edge, unplugged from their doorway, standing up and singular.

Doors meet people by design. Their proportions and fittings take human scale into account, setting the terms of exit and entry. In *Closed Down Clubs*, anatomical prompts are still at play — PUSH/PULL handles reach out at hand height, kick plates are at ground level, and peep holes at eye height. Instead of touching the doors, we activate them by looking; we choose our relationship with them, deciding to walk around them, or not. As a 'thing' they let us see exterior, interior and the threshold (the edgy in-between space) as one.





## libraries

I have tried other spatial arrangements, but they always snap back into a grid. Is it that I can't get away from a minimalist strategy of arranging a show with a singular gesture in mind? Or maybe the grid is a way to address the existing architecture of a rectangular room? I worked at Geisel Library at University of California San Diego shelving books, walking down corridors between stacks, looking down rows, dense with material, then the next, and the next, and the next. The stacks became a rhythm that helped me mark time.

Ken Bernstein at the Office of Historic Resources in the Los Angeles Department of City Planning has shifted his attention from preserving 'good' examples of architecture to sites with 'cultural importance.'

The doors pack up like pages in a book.

## the club

I can remember landing at LAX in 2009 on my way to California Institute of the Arts from Aotearoa. I could feel its inconceivable expanse. I remember thinking — what if I treated Los Angeles as a real place? That sentiment or fantasy has always stuck with me, a compulsion to find ground through a forensic quoting of surfaces.

When I get to make things, I often think — this is when I am happiest — between worlds — on a mission. What happens afterwards I don't mind so much, but I like that *Closed Down Clubs* have the potential of staying together, somehow.

**Figures 01-06:**  
Fiona Connor, *Closed Down Clubs*  
(detail). Photos by Marten Elder  
taken at Fiona's studio in Glendale,  
California in 2020.

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**author biography**

*Fiona Connor* was born in Tāmaki Makaurau; she now lives and works in Los Angeles. Connor received a BFA through Elam School of Fine Arts and her Masters in Fine Arts through California Institute of the Arts. In 2007 she was a founding member of Gambia Castle. Recent solo exhibitions include *#8, Closed for installation, Sequence of events*, Secession, Vienna (2019); *Object Classrooms*, Govett-Brewster, New Plymouth (2018); *Closed Down Clubs*, MAK Centre for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles (2018); *Community Noticeboard and Monochromes*, Stuart Shave Modern Art, London (2018); *Colour Census*, 1301PE, Los Angeles (2017); *Brick, Cane and Paint*, Hopkinson Mossman (2016); and *On What Remains Part 2*, Lisa Cooley, New York (2016). In 2015 she founded Laurel Doody Library Supply, an ongoing initiative to support artists publishing on a small scale.