

Light enough to read by

**Fiona Connor, Lucy Skaer,
Rachel Shearer and Cathy Livermore**

11 June – 25 July 2021

**THE
PHYSICS
ROOM** CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

Light enough to read by

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Exhibition preview: Thursday 10 June, 5:30pm

Exhibition runs: 11 June - 25 July 2021

Artist talk with Rachel Shearer: Saturday 12 June, 1pm

Gwynneth Porter talk and writing workshop (with guests): Saturday 3 July, 1pm

A metal hare runs, runs, low to the ground, across the wood floor; daylight comes in again and the workshop doorway is open; the gallery breathes like a lung with the names of Waitaha's winds. Works by Fiona Connor, Lucy Skaer, Rachel Shearer and Cathy Livermore transform the gallery, each turning to narrative as to oxygen, light, matter: as necessary.

Light enough to read by emerged from discussions around the return of The Physics Room's library into the gallery and to public access. For the last year and a half, since the shift to our current site in the Registry Additions Building, our publications have sat in boxes. The specific needs of the library—sufficient and natural light, space for reading, listening, resting, and being together—offered a script for us to work with in the development of this project. Underpinning it was the idea of the exhibition itself as a form of publication, and text or narrative as something social, material, and lived, subject to conditions of light and weather.

Works by Connor, Skaer, Shearer and Livermore open out from these ideas. Each of these works rely on dynamic relationships: with grammar and syntax, ko ngā hau me ngā wai (winds and waters), architecture and light, negative mould and positive casting, chase and flight, oxygen and lungs, reader and listener, fabricator and artist, correspondent and recipient, sequence and rest.

Connor's work, *Untitled (mailbox) #1-#8*, is a series of interiors, cast in plaster from found, disused mailboxes. These are small-scale domestic architectures, temporary residences for intimate exchanges and everyday transactions on paper. Mounted on the wall, the sculptures assert themselves abruptly, teethlike, into the space, but could also be seen as negative spaces, or placeholders for structures and correspondence that no longer exist. Across Connor's practice, the mailboxes join a larger archive of cast or replicated sculptural objects, including recent projects, *Closed Down Clubs* (2020) and *Community Notice Boards* (2018), that memorialise community notice boards and spaces. In the act of re-making, there is potential for slippage between original text and its quotation, in the way a many-times retold story gains a life of its own. In relation to her ongoing project, Connor has written, "That sentiment or fantasy has always stuck with me, a compulsion to find ground through a forensic quoting of surfaces."¹ That is, sometimes in the remaking of a material form, you may find a surer sense of where you stand in relation to it, or uncover new narrative, new ground.

Alongside this series Connor, in conversation with Skaer,² also proposed a number of spatial interventions in the gallery, with the agenda of letting the light in: revealing a window in the original 1957 structure of the building, last visible when the gallery was a cheesemongers, taking off vinyl and blinds that formerly blacked out another window, removing the workshop door and re-siting it in a gallery wall. The whole gallery is treated

as a sculpture in these moves, its windows opening like pages in a book.

Skaer's work, *In the Shelterbelt, Arrows Rain Down, The Day is Bright and Open, Hare Darts for Cover and the Chord of C Minor Sounds* (2021) is an act of translation. Originally made by the artist in 2018, in bronze, yew, copper, oil paint and lithographic stone, the sentence has been re-materialised here in Aotearoa, working with local makers and locally available materials. The yew woods are transformed into macrocarpa, the "bright and open day" to translucent resin, the running hare to aluminium. Across these shifts, in material and time, and from written words into sculptural forms, an essential momentum is sustained. The hare, known to be elusive,³ binary-defying and symbolic of queer desire,⁴ dangerous,⁵ and above all, swift, remains in motion.

The original text for *In the Shelterbelt* is Skaer's reading of the *Livre de Chasse*, by Gaston Phebus, a 14th-century illuminated manuscript which details the process of a renaissance hunt, through to the delivery of the hunted creature on a plate. This translates into a series of pictograms, not an exact correspondence between words and images, rather, a different form of legibility in which the materials become elements in the story. The simple sentence expands to signify a day, both bright and open, and contracts into something taut and even dangerous, as our stories have the potential to be. As the artist has written, "The narrative of the hunt, and the empathy felt with the hunted, somehow embodies the violence which I feel is part of abstraction / the making of images and words."⁶

Rachel Shearer and Cathy Livermore worked collaboratively to make *Te Huri Wai* (2021). In the work each of the principle Waitaha (Canterbury) winds announce themselves. *Te Huri Wai* is made in acknowledgment of the Kāi Tahu narrative of these winds, with particular reference to the record of Teone Taari Tikao's conversation with Herries Beattie in 1920.⁷ Tikao speaks of the ancestors of Māui, starting with his grandfather, Mahuika (on land) and Muri-raka-whenua (at sea), who married Hine-pu-nui-o-toka and had five daughters: Hine-aroraki, Hine-aroaro-pari, Hine-hauone, Hine-roroki and Hine-rotia.

[These wāhine] still hold important positions in connection with this world. They are in the points of the wind and stand at points round the world and hold or loose the principle winds. . . . The mother holds Te pu o te hau (the power of the wind) generally, but her own particular position is in the South-West, where she holds Te pu o te toka (the origin or beginning of the southerly winds).⁸

Accordingly, others have responsibility for the northerly, westerly and easterly winds, holding the sands in place, echos on the cliffs. The eldest, Hine-aroraki, is responsible for the soaring of the birds. Tikao says that each of these winds "holds a big tawhiriwhiri (fan) which she uses to fan winds over the earth, but what these fans are made of I know not."⁹ In the work, the speakers are sited in relation to each wind's direction, Livermore's voice or breath (hau, wind, vitality) carrying the narrative. A further speaker holds the place of water, a relationship fundamental to each of the winds: in Livermore's words, "winds are what move the water, the weather."¹⁰ In this work, warm breath is returned to the oral account, and the names of the area winds are called out, listened for and heard.

While each relates to narrative, none of the works in *Light enough to read by* rely on writing itself. A current of questions runs through the exhibition instead. If written

words are not the dominant vehicle for information, what other material languages, voices, histories, and relationships can be held in the gallery space? How might the site generate alternative forms of reading, not contingent on words on a page, rather on conditions including light, relationships, oral and material narratives? The works might be received as a series of speculative responses to these questions.

Ask anyone, there is a perfect amount of light for reading. But this definition of enough depends on the reader, the text, the time of day, the space: it shifts. In this move the library too is recognised as a living form: incomplete, idiosyncratic, implicated in institutional and community politics, responsive to its environment. A library is a physical experience, sometimes, a social one, a space to research or a space to rest. With this in mind the gallery's library space will remain after this exhibition ends.

Light enough to read by is curated by Abby Cunnane, Michelle Wang, and Hamish Petersen.

This exhibition was made possible through the generous support of the Jan Warburton Trust. With thanks also to Ilam School of Fine Arts.

¹ Fiona Connor, artist talk, The Physics Room, 14 April, 2021.

² This work developed from a collaboration initiated in the exhibition, *Spew forth foliage, exhale tendrils, weep leaves*, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, 2018.

³ Seamus Heaney's translation of 'The Names of the Hare' a 13th century poem, includes some of its 77 names: The stubble-stag, the long lugs, the stook-deer, the frisky legs, the wild one, the skipper, the hug-the-ground, the lurker, the race-the-wind, the skiver, the shag-the-hare, the hedge-squatter, the dew-hammer, the dew-hopper, the sit-tight, the grass-bounder, the jig-foot, the earth-sitter, the light-foot, the fern-sitter, the kail-stag, the herb-cropper. See *The Rattle Bag*, Seamus Heaney and Ted Hughes, eds. (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), 305-306.

⁴ "[The hare was] was, Donatus writes: 'modo mas, modo femina' (sometimes male, sometimes female). Because of this, it became in antiquity a way to express homosexual love: in one of Terence's comedies, Eunuchus, a bold young man, is told: 'Quid ais, inquam, homo impudens? Lepus tute es, et pulpamentum quaeris.' 'What are you saying, impudent creature? You're surely a hare and you seek flesh.'" See Katherine Rundell, 'Consider the Hare', *London Review of Books*, vol. 42, no. 13, 2 July 2020.

⁵ "Hare before, Trouble behind: Change ye, Cross, and free me." These words are from a book on folklore from 1875, in which it was recommended that, passing a hare, you should recite these words to prevent danger. As cited by Rundell, *ibid.*

⁶ Email correspondence, 15 November, 2020.

⁷ Teone Taare Tikao and Herries Beattie, *Tikao Talks: Ka Taoka Tapu o Te Ao Kohatu* (Dunedin: Reed, 1939).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Phone conversation, 28 May, 2021.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Fiona Connor was born in Tāmaki Makaurau; she lives and works in Los Angeles. Connor received a Bachelor of Fine Arts through Elam School of Fine Arts and her Masters in Fine Arts through California Institute of the Arts in 2011. Recent solo exhibitions include *New Low (Rampart)*, New Low, Los Angeles (2020); *Closed for installation, Fiona Connor, SculptureCenter, #4*, Sculpture Centre, New York (2019); *#8, Closed for installation, Sequence of events*, Secession, Vienna (2019); *Object Classrooms*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 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); and *Colour Census*, 1301PE, Los Angeles (2017). In 2015 Connor founded Laurel Doody Library Supply, an ongoing initiative to support artists publishing on a small scale.

Lucy Skaer lives and works in Glasgow and London. She graduated from the Glasgow School of Art with a Bachelor of Fine Art in 1997. In 2009, Skaer was a Turner Prize finalist, and in 2007 represented Scotland at the 52nd Venice Biennale. Recent solo exhibitions include *Rural Works*, GRIMM, Amsterdam (2021); *Forest on Fire*, Bloomberg SPACE, London (2020); *Future Sun*, S.M.A.K., Ghent (2019); *Day Divider*, Meessen De Clerq, Brussels (2019); *Heavy Weather*, with works by Carol Rhodes & Hanneline Visnes, GRIMM, Amsterdam (2018); *The Green Man*, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh (2018); and *Sentiment*, Peter Freeman Inc., New York (2018). This year Skaer will participate in the Watou Arts Festival, Watou, Belgium, and she has been selected as a 2021 Chinati Artist in Residence, in Marfa, Texas.

Rachel Shearer (Pākehā, Rongowhakaata, Te Aitanga a Māhaki) is a sound artist and sound designer based in Tāmaki Makaurau. Shearer has previously released experimental music on labels including Xpressway and Corpus Hermeticum, Ecstatic Peace, and Family Vineyard. Shearer currently investigates sound as a medium through a range of sonic practices—installations, composing, recording as well as collaborating as a sound designer or composer for moving image and live performance events. *Te Oro o te Ao: The Resounding of the World*, Shearer's PHD thesis (AUT, 2018) culminated in a sound installation, one part of which, *Waha*, was made in collaboration with Cathy Livermore, with whom she again collaborates on this project.

Cathy Livermore (Waitaha, Kāti Māmoe, Kāi Tahu, English, Irish and Scandinavian), is an artist, educator, activist and healer. Livermore has spent the past 20 years performing, choreographing and teaching nationally and internationally. As an educator, she has developed pedagogies incorporating Kaupapa Māori and Pasifika worldviews within tertiary institutional environments for performing arts in Aotearoa. She has also developed Mauritau, practices of mindfulness in Te Ao Māori. Her art practice, centred in dance, performativity and embodiment, has evolved to focus on new media technologies, and is informed by intercultural spaces of collaboration. Livermore is an independent artist and has also performed with Atamira Dance Company, Body Cartography, Vospertron, Ivy Granite Productions, Oceania Dance Theatre, Red Leap Physical Theatre, Belgian choreographer Hans Van den Broeck, French Company GROUPE F, Native American Contemporary Dance company Dancing Earth, and Louise Pōtiki Bryant.

WORK LIST (ALL 2021)

1 Lucy Skaer

In the Shelterbelt, Arrows Rain Down, The Day is Bright and Open, Hare Darts for Cover and the Chord of C Minor Sounds

Oak (ebonised), resin, aluminium, macrocarpa, bioplastic

Piano keys made by Tim Boyd (Cross St, Auckland)

Bough made by Louise Palmer (St Albans, Christchurch)

Hare made by Peter Newton (Woolston, Christchurch)

Lozenges made by Steve Yoon (Onehunga, Auckland)

Day made by Simon Dyer (Hillsborough, Christchurch)

2 *Enough light to read by*

Fiona Connor, Lucy Skaer, Rachel Shearer and Cathy Livermore

Existing windows, walls, and a door.

*This work is an iteration of *All the doors in all the walls and windows* that were revealed for Lucy Skaer, *Spew forth foliage, exhale tendrils, weep leaves*, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, 2018.

3 Fiona Connor

Untitled (mailbox) #1-#8

Plaster of paris

This work was made possible through the generous support of the Jan Warburton Trust, and Ilam School of Fine Arts. The artist would also like to thank Sean Duxfield, Rachel Sleight, Sam Towse, and Orissa Keane.

4 Rachel Shearer (Pākehā, Rongowhakaata, Te Aitanga a Māhaki) and Cathy Livermore (Waitaha, Kāti Mamoe and Kāi Tahu)

Te Huri Wai: Wai, Hine-pu-nui-o-toka, Hine-aroraki, Hine-aroaro-pari, Hine-hauone, Hine-roriki, Hine-rotia

Seven speakers and seven channel audio

a *Hine-roriki*

b *Hine-hauone*

c *Hine-pu-nui-o-toka*

d *Hine-aroaro-pari*

e *Wai*

f *Hine-aroraki*

g *Hine-rotia*

The artist would like to thank Clinton Watkins, Jo Burzinska, and Malcolm Riddoch.



