

FIRST DRAFT

Leanne Barnett Helen Hyatt Johnston
Jane Polkinghorne Sharyn Raggett Virginia Ross

Like most artist-run galleries, First Draft functions for the specific purpose of providing an exhibition venue which enables diversity, dialogue and experimentation, mainly through the art practice of newer artists. Like most artist-run galleries, it is firmly based in its particular niche within the gallery hierarchy, this position is known and understood by artists, the art audience, the gallery system and funding bodies.

However, First Draft has an idiosyncratic history in terms of its mode of functioning-unlike many other spaces of its kind, it experiences a kind of reconstruction every two years when it is taken over by a new group of directors. The directorial dynamism has had a potent influence on the construction of First Draft's curatorial policies and has denied the possibility of the gallery maintaining any permanent or blanket curatorial position, instead promoting an ethic of diversity and experimentation (notwithstanding that individual directorial groups might have had specific briefs about the type of art practice they wished to give attention to). Another fact colours the way that First Draft is perceived and functions-it has existed at three different locations in three very different spaces. Each change of location represents some sort of conceptual shift-and the fact of these shifts renders an understanding of First Draft in relation to one space as untenable. Instead it functions as an idea, a notion which transcends associations with any one location or architecture or ambient atmosphere. However, it is true that for each of the different spaces-Abercrombie St, Chippendale, Parramatta Road, Annandale and Chalmers Street, Surry Hills-the specific idiosyncracies have been integral to the way the spaces have been conceived and used by exhibiting artists. Gallery 2 at the current location in Chalmers St, with its roller door, large aluminium grease trap and the chemical catching indentation in the concrete floor, seems particularly to invite exhibition proposals which, presumably, would never have been received at previous locations, and vice versa. This transferability of site specificity suggests a certain transcendence inherent to the strategy of producing site specific work-it is not just about the space it functions within, it is about a general politics of space.

Perhaps it is because First Draft's evolution and construction is so tied up with concepts of location and space that our approach to the Critical Spaces project has been one which takes up, literally, the problematics of space, both materially and as a political concept. The relationship between the contemporary art space and the artist-run space begs analysis, and it is this relationship which is being explored in different ways by the artists who are 'representing' First Draft in this project. At Artspace, Bruce McCalmont will build a structure around the existing pylons in the large gallery space-appropriating and refiguring a space within the contemporary art space. Anne Kay conjures up a temporal relationship with First Draft-first by developing her weed work as exhibited at First Draft in 1994-using the plants to literally obscure the Artspace entrance-and, with Poor House, transplanting the moulded form of a fire place from First Draft's Annandale building into Artspace, a subliminal reminder, perhaps, of other spaces, other times.

Meanwhile, back at First Draft, for one night only (Monday May 1st, 6-8 pm) Michael Florrimell takes up the complexities of documentation and its role in constructing the artists, the space and the concept. His is a one day (fly by night) event which maps the territory of the empty art space, First Draft, in polaroid and video. This documentation will be incorporated into the gallery's archive. Mark Brown has positioned the artist run space, as epitomised by First Draft, between the museum and the ruin. His three week documentation of the humidity and temperature of the gallery, using a thermohydrograph (usually used in museums to maintain archival conditions) acknowledges, and charts, the existence of the negative space of the gallery, and reaches out, via a mediated sound track of the readings, across town to Artspace.

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