

CORTNEY LANE STELL ON *FIRST DRAFT* AND BRINGING LOCAL ARTISTS TO THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE



BY SUSAN FROYD

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The curatorial team behind the Biennial's *Draft Urbanism* exhibitions wanted to turn the city into an international showcase so people-friendly that it's accessible by simply walking down the street. In turn, *Draft Urbanism*'s indoor element, *First Draft*, was conceived as a welcoming gesture from the local art community to the global one.

The challenge of selecting the artists to represent Colorado's front line in *First Draft* was entrusted to Cortney Lane Stell, a Denver-based continental traveler and gallery curator at the Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design. A young woman with an educated eye for art-world trends and philosophies being practiced both here and abroad, Stell was a perfect choice to mine the Biennial's forward-thinking themes through local art.

Stell notes that *Draft Urbanism* as a whole "looks at the city as an ever-changing entity that's a constant draft of itself," and does that through the eyes of city planners. *First Draft*, which opens tonight at the McNichols Building in Civic Center Park with a public reception at 7:30 p.m., isn't so different. "In a way, that's what *First Draft* is doing, too: Looking at the relationship between the art-making process and artists as first draftsmen who push boundaries to speak the new throughout the duration of a career," Stell notes.

Designed to both complement the beautiful Beaux Arts McNichols structure and coexist with the building's multi-use nature as an event center, *First Draft* is about the fragility of becoming and all the struggles therein. It's also a stunning survey of important ideas in local work, with a focus on artists who are largely young, emerging and flexible.

Stell says she chose the 22 participating artists, many of them "twenty- and thirty-somethings," with a certain practicality in mind, precipitated by time constrictions imposed by a project that only got off the ground in April. "I had to find artists who were willing to work with us," she explains. "A lot of them were selected from artists I've worked with before. I had to be able to trust them."

That trust, as well as a youthful willingness to do whatever it takes on the part of the artists, is paying off: Stell touts the overall quality of the work, from Gretchen Marie Schaefer's delicate

installation of "string and the changing light that comes from a window" to Conor King's photographic portrait series of expressionless subjects in standard poses, which despite their sterility "bring out subtleties that actually show the humanity in individuals."

Laura Shill's astonishing 600-pound fiber installation, *A Small Room*, promises to be a highlight of *First Draft*: a sheltering, ceiling-hung chandelier of stuffed fabric tubes falling like giant dreadlocks to the floor, the piece impresses the sheer weight of process in motion.



Devon Dikeou, "Open Art Fax Line." Courtesy of the artist.

And from Denver artist/collector/gallerist Devon Dikeou comes a piece that invites public participation for the duration of *First Draft's* run: *Open Art Fax Line* is exactly what the title promises. A fax machine on the floor, it's set up to receive faxed artworks from anyone and everyone, day or night. "It's new version of a fax people installed in the '90s -- part research, part invitation and part performance," says Stell, who notes that the reiterative piece represents an "electronic open-door policy with artwork." The line is open now; call 303-482-1988 to send your images. Dikeou will archive the results.

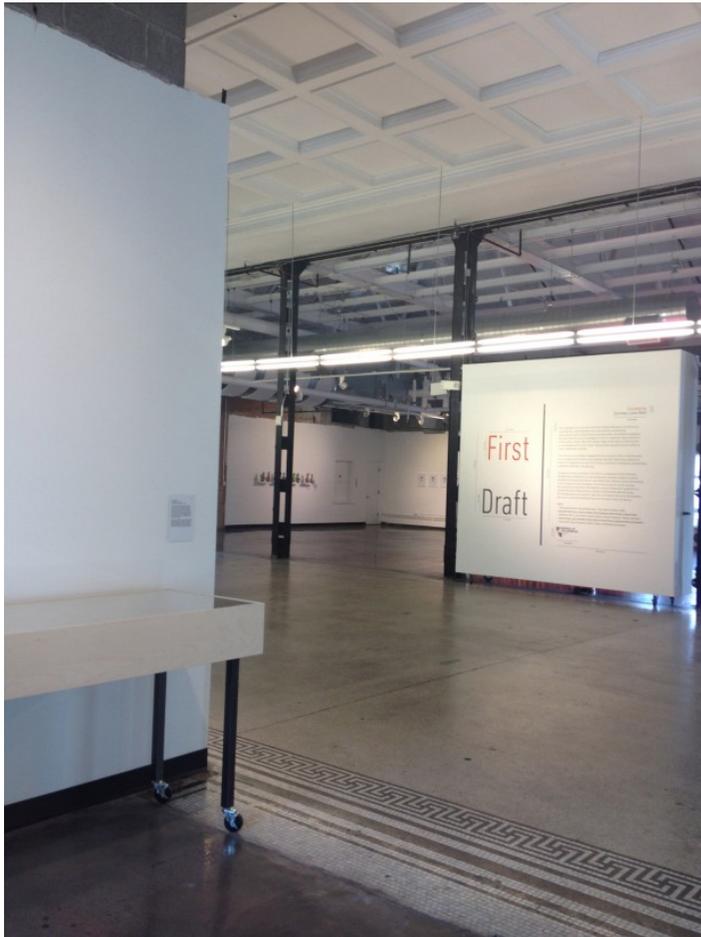
That's just a sneak peek of what you'll find in the McNichols Building tonight. But for Stell, it's a sign that her mission's been accomplished. "I do think it is important to place local community on an international stage," she concludes. "Denver has challenges with location -- it's a land island -- and anything we can do to support our artists helps support growth in the creative community."

First Draft remains on view through September 2; visit the Biennial website for more information.

ART=CITY

First Draft: A Survey of Denver's Artistic Talent

by [PADDY JOHNSON](#) on AUGUST 20, 2013



Draft Urbanism at McNichols Building Civic Center Park

It must have been five or six years ago, when I asked a friend how he knew when his paintings were done. The question came up during a two-hour-long studio visit where we'd talked about everything from his painting influences to his struggles with addiction. Even the psychedelic paintings that were barely marked up looked complete, so it seemed relevant. "They're done when the truck comes to pick them up," he told me, explaining that he'd just keep working on them if they weren't taken away. "It's like drinking, I guess. I don't stop."

My friend's tragic reflections reminded me that what completes an artwork often isn't anything more than the presence of a viewer. That reality seems particularly relevant today, since there's a viewer for almost everything (nothing is private), and digital files are manipulated endlessly.

This context informs "[First Draft](#)," an exhibition curated by Cortney Stell for Denver's Biennial of the Americas. Located at the McNichols Building Civic Center Park in Denver, the one floor exhibition

includes 23 artists and surveys talent in the Denver area. In doing so the show reveals a peculiar brand of obsessive formalism and conceptualism that relentlessly calls completeness into question. That tactic has its pluses and minuses in this show. On the one hand, this obsessiveness can produce work that's formulaic. There's plenty of that in the show. On the other, that context allows ideas to develop in surprising directions. There's plenty of that in the show, too. What follows is a slideshow with commentary on some of the work in the exhibition.

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Devon Dikeou's "Open Art Fax Line", 1992

Getting a sense of the real art jewels people sent in to Dikeou's fax line when they're all in a pile may be difficult, but I like the piece regardless. It offers a sense of history (this is how the piece was originally displayed in 1992), and it removes some of the preciousness of art. You can always fax your work again. In fact, you can still fax in your work to Dikeou's number 303-482-1988. For "First Draft", Dikeou also put together a vitrine to display some of the faxes she received over the years.

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Sight Unseen

Come All Ye Faithful, Curated by Carson Chan

by Monica Khemsurov

12.23.13

In last week's Saturday Selects post, we pointed out a recent mini-trend of design exhibitions being staged in residential contexts, including the subject of this post: *Come, All Ye Faithful*, a show in which Berlin-based writer and curator Carson Chan has replaced all of the objects in Zürich gallerist Florian Christopher Seedorf's home with works by his favorite European artists and designers. Opening last month and running through January 12, the exhibition was timed to coincide with the holiday shopping season, when consumerism runs rampant and people are in a state of frenzied acquisition. With *Come, All Ye Faithful* — which also functioned as a kind of tongue-in-cheek holiday pop-up shop, since everything in it is for sale — Chan wanted to examine the consequences of all that acquiring. "When purchased objects enter the home, they assume new roles, entangling themselves with the lives and emotions of their new owners," he explains in his curators' statement. "*Come, All Ye Faithful* is an exhibition that observes our relationship with the objects we live with." Chan took time out of his busy holiday schedule to answer a few questions about the project for Sight Unseen.

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Humberto Díaz, Devon Dikeou, Ethan Hayes-Chute, Lindsay Lawson, Nathan Peter Jeremy Shaw, Something Fantastic



Bless, Devon Dikeou, Andreas Greiner and Fabian Knecht, Charlie Koolhaas, Nathan Peter, Jeremy Shaw, Tobias Spichtig



Shane Anderson, Jón Þór Birgisson, Devon Dikeou, Marianne Eigenheer, Nuri Koerfer, Anca Muntenau Rimnic, Antoine Renard, Ana Roldan, Jerszy Seymour, Something Fantastic, Pedro Wirz