

# The LAB 5.5

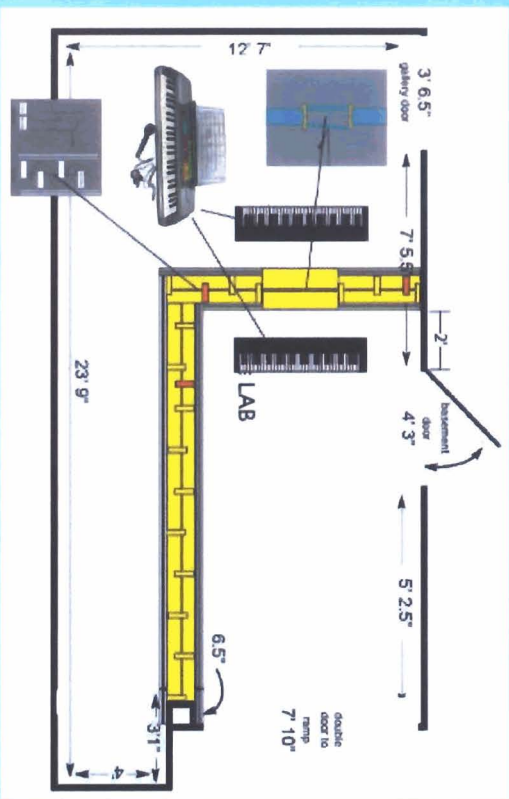
## IMPROVISATION SPACE

Alisdair MacRae

February 17, 2006 – April 23, 2006

Opening Reception: February 16, 2006

Artist's Talk 7:30pm | Opening 8:00pm



## ***Artist Statement***

In my art practice, I have been drawn to interactive works in which the viewer becomes involved with an object or technology through their direct engagement with it. Plans and exchanges have been a key element of my work for the past six years. In all of my work, the finished project is as interesting to me as the process of getting there.

Making models and following instructions have always held a special fascination for me. My work explores how a viewer or participant may use "blueprints" for directions and procedures in order to create an object, and the ways in which people can be brought together to form a community through an exchange of information or objects.

When proposing a project that involves this kind of exchange, I use common means such as bulletin board postings and raffles. The perceived community—which can consist of two or more people, including myself—dictates the plans that I choose, how I follow them and how the object finds its way out of my studio. If only a few casual words are exchanged, I consider the project a success. In the case of *Improvisation Space*, the work involves an implicit invitation to the community of gallery-goers, to engage with the work and with each other in the LAB space.

In keeping with ideas of community and the "process of getting there", *Improvisation Space* also uses a soundproof wall to divide The LAB into two rooms. Viewers are, hence, forced to traverse the gallery in order to reach either side of the wall. This provides an opportunity for the viewer to travel through a familiar space in an unfamiliar way. Keyboards allow participants to communicate musically, sending ambient performances aurally and visually through a window inserted into the dividing wall, improvising as they find themselves confronted with each other through the Plexiglas window.

Both architecture and music follow from plans that lay out basic, structural rules. To paraphrase Joseph Campbell, a writer on mythology and comparative religion, a person practices such rules until achieving mastery, then, having integrated them, moves beyond them into the territory of improvisation. During my late teens, I took jazz piano lessons from Victoria musician George Essihos in order to build on my previous classical music background. In his article, *Painting with Sound*, writer Ellery Littleton, describes the teaching technique George used—one he adapted from Chopin: "Chopin's approach, feature[ed] improvisation, imagery and keyboard exploration, as musical "conversations" between student and teacher. In keeping with this approach, Essihos encouraged me to play just the melody of a song, as he played both the bass and melody; we would take turns improvising and creating a "musical conversation" of our own. I learned just how demanding jazz improvisation can be.

In the case of *Improvisation Space*, I combine planning and improvisation to execute the work: I have relied on a plan to construct the installation in the gallery space. The viewer must also use a plan to navigate both the gallery space, and the keyboard space. However, when the viewer has mastered her plan, she can improvise, taking detours, taking side roads, taking switchbacks, taking her time, taking shortcuts, walking sideways, walking forward, walking to and fro, crab walking, making fun, making pratfalls, making strides, doubling back, falling back, free falling, retracing her footsteps, disguising her footsteps, following in the footsteps of others, seemingly losing her place.

And then finding it again.

Alisdair MacRae

# Alisdair MacRae

Alisdair MacRae is a sculptor whose works often lend themselves to installations, and whose drawings often lend themselves to schematics. Following undergraduate studies at the University of Victoria, where he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts with honours, MacRae worked for the Canadian Navy as a civilian graphics and Web designer. During that time, he completed a Master's of Fine Arts from Bard College, and relocated to Brooklyn, New York after completing his studies. MacRae currently works at Seton Hall University as an administrator; he has realized projects for artist-run centres and cultural festivals on an international basis.



Alisdair MacRae at keyboard | 2005

## Acknowledgements

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