DAMIEN MINTON: The idea of this exhibition started when I was reading the book by New York based musician David Byrne, well-known for his role in the band Talking Heads. Early in the book, How Music Works, Byrne articulates how the environment musicians find themselves in helps shape and refine their creative output. They are responding and reacting not only to the social and cultural moment, but also the physical spaces that are available to them at the time.

In the early days Talking Heads performed at the now infamous New York club, CBGB. It was a small bar… “there was little reverberation in those spaces and they weren’t that big … so the groove could be strong and up front. The details of one’s music would be heard, and given the size of the place, intimate gestures and expressions would be seen and appreciated as well, at least from the waist up.”

With that in mind it is interesting to transpose the same principle to the physical spaces artists currently engage with in order to create and nurture their practice. Not so much the space they perform in—galleries—but the space where they are working, the studio. The space where they are productive, converting a creative notion into a tangible form.

Everyone is fascinated with an artist studio, the romantic notion of a pool of creative unbridled expression. Yet the hard yards of creation, destruction and resolution are determined in these spaces.

This exhibition working: newcastle presents three new bodies of work by three contemporary artists who are working in Newcastle.
JAMES DRINKWATER: [My studio is] a new space for me in an old glass factory in the West End of Newcastle. It's a monumental but run down Art Deco building and I'm in this great big Mezzanine/loft at the back of the property. It's a big dusty old space with high ceilings, untreated hardwood floors and big barn doors that open down onto a lane. I had to clean out all these relics and family heirlooms which took a few days and then a few more to move my junk in. All that junk, hardwood, glass and dust is just glorious.

I've moved around quite a lot in the last few years which has meant that I have worked in many different spaces and each space has definitely informed that body of work. When I am between studios I make site specific work. The aesthetic and scale of the space I'm in now means I can be quite ambitious while smaller spaces in the past have required a more sensitive approach and controlled orientation. I even like the idea of having not having a studio as such and simply use a city as your space and respond to that energy and space, you know, like a major installation.

Serendipity always seems to play its part. I met my current landlord in the cafe that I make coffee at... we now have a kind of patron/artist deal where I pay for the space with artwork. You must be inventive.

Newcastle is such a tramp, I love it. It has this fantastic gritty and tough side with this die hard little scene. I find it so appealing to live and work here. I spent quite a bit of time between Leipzig and Berlin and found it to be so aligned with the Newcastle and Sydney thing. You know Berlin is this big super fabulous art city but in reality, slightly further east in Leipzig is where I found a far more authentic and strong scene. It's easy in Sydney, like Berlin, to get caught up in all that art world crap, it's expensive and everybody is screwing everybody to get somewhere... [artists] should just be in their studio focussing on making meaningful work. It's always been those regional cities where great art and movements have come out of. It makes perfect sense to be here.