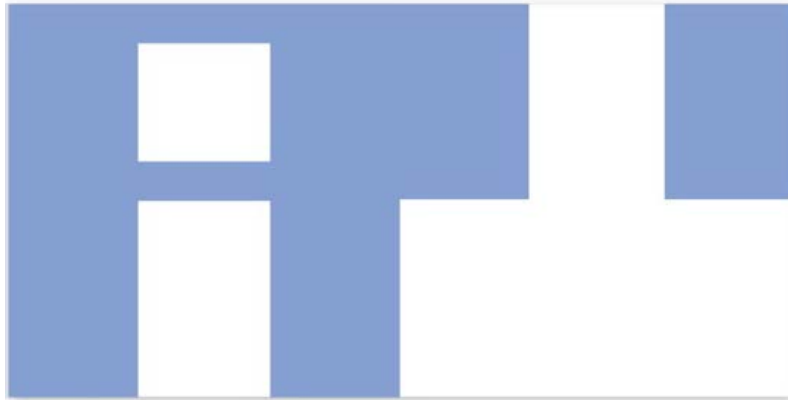


7 March 2014

## Artists' flag to be raised on West Gate Bridge on Tuesday 11 March at 8am



On Tuesday 11 March a specially designed artists' flag will be raised on the West Gate Bridge to celebrate the final weeks of *Melbourne Now*.

A newly commissioned 10 metre flag, collaboratively designed by Brook Andrew, Jon Campbell, Kate Daw, Helen Johnson and collaborating curator Stewart

Russell, will be flown on the West Gate Bridge from 11–25 March to mark the conclusion of *Melbourne Now* and its engagement with the city.

Tony Ellwood, Director, National Gallery of Victoria said that the unveiling of the West Gate Bridge flag signals the finale to the *On Top of the World: Flags for Melbourne* project, a keynote project of the NGV's major exhibition *Melbourne Now*.

*"On Top of the World: Flags for Melbourne* extends *Melbourne Now* into the city at large and sees 41 flags designed by 16 artists fly atop various flagpoles across the City of Melbourne including the Town Hall, Manchester Unity Building, Royal Botanical Gardens and the Haymarket roundabout.

*"To raise this flag on the West Gate Bridge is a significant way to celebrate the end of the *Flags for Melbourne* project and the *Melbourne Now* exhibition with 200,000 people travelling across the bridge every day,"* Mr Ellwood said.

*"On Top of the World: Flags for Melbourne* invites us to celebrate and debate questions of place and cultural identity, communication and belonging. Each of the artists designed a flag that specifically responded to the site in which it flies to commemorate its social, cultural, political or architectural relevance and heritage," Mr Ellwood said.

The Hon Heidi Victoria, Minister for the Arts said the West Gate Bridge flag is a fitting finale to *Melbourne Now*, which is the largest and most ambitious exhibition in the NGV's history.

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"*Melbourne Now*, is a celebration of the Melbourne artists, architects and designers who have shaped our capital city, its culture and reputation. The exhibition has truly had an impact right across Melbourne and beyond, and has already attracted close to 650,000 people," Ms Victoria said.

"Congratulations to the NGV and the artists who have created this flag. What better pronouncement about the valuable role that art and culture plays in Melbourne than to place an artwork at a major gateway to our city," Ms Victoria said.

The West Gate Bridge flag represents the phrase 'I can spare what you asked for' and is based on an 1803 maritime code invented by Rear Admiral Popham who created the code using a system of fifteen flags to represent 3,000 words and phrases, providing seafarers with the ability to compose and decipher signals before the creation of Morse code. Maritime code was considered especially relevant to the relationship of the bridge with commercial shipping.

Minister for Roads Terry Mulder outlined the importance of this initiative and how it promotes Melbourne and its vibrancy.

"The National Gallery of Victoria is the first organisation to use the flag pole on the West Gate Bridge," Minister Mulder said.

"It creates awareness for all Victorians and visitors to this State of the exciting events and activities we have on offer, which makes Victoria such a great place to live.

"The West Gate Bridge is one of 16 significant flag pole sites in the *Flags for Melbourne* project as part of the *Melbourne Now* exhibition. This amazing piece of infrastructure is integral to Melbourne and will be the backdrop to this flag being flown on Melbourne's skyline," Minister Mulder said.

*Melbourne Now* celebrates the latest art, architecture, design, performance and cultural practice to reflect the complex cultural landscape of creative Melbourne.

*Melbourne Now* is on at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia and NGV International until 23 March 2014. Open 10am–5pm daily.

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**Event details: West Gate Bridge flag will be raised at 8am on Tuesday 11 March, 2014**

**The flag will be flown from 11-25 March, 2014**

**Artists: Brook Andrew, Jon Campbell, Kate Daw, Helen Johnson. Collaborating curator: Stewart Russell**

**Flag dimensions: 5.0 x 10.0 metres**

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## **ABOUT ON TOP OF THE WORLD: FLAGS FOR MELBOURNE**

*On Top of the World: Flags for Melbourne* is a project curated by Stewart Russell of Spacecraft Studios as part of *Melbourne Now* at the National Gallery of Victoria.

Flags are often aligned with notions of triumph or resistance or can be seen as celebratory acts of community, festivals and parades. *On Top of the World: Flags for Melbourne* presents an alternative opportunity for flag-waving.

## **THE ARTISTS**

Extending on their contribution to *On Top of the World: Flags for Melbourne*, Brook Andrew, Jon Campbell, Kate Daw and Helen Johnson were invited to work collaboratively to create a new flag to be flown upon the West Gate Bridge. They each have strong research-based practices, an interest in collaboration, and a relationship with the West Gate Bridge either through geography, research or cultural history.

## **THE WEST GATE BRIDGE**

The West Gate Bridge is a site and place of considerable historical, architectural and cultural significance to Melbourne. In welcoming a newly commissioned artist-designed flag, the West Gate Bridge will also become a bold temporary public artwork which engages a huge audience, with up to 200,000 motorists expected to cross the bridge on a daily basis. Significantly, this is the first time the West Gate Bridge has flown a flag other than the Australian and Victorian flags.

## **THE FLAG DESIGN**

The design process started with a site visit for the artists hosted by VicRoads inside the body of the West Gate Bridge, 40 metres above the river. In response to various contexts of the bridge and river, and conditions associated with the display of flags upon the bridge, the artists' design development gravitated towards the use of a maritime 'code', a symbolic and graphic language and form of communication that could be used as an alternative to text.

Maritime code was considered especially relevant to the relationship of the bridge with commercial shipping. Sight lines from the bridge recalled the historic association with the port at Williamstown and the practice of signaling between Williamstown and Flagstaff Gardens.

The code settled on was an 1803 maritime code created by Rear Admiral Popham (1762 – 1820). Popham created the code using a system of fifteen flags to represent 3,000 words and phrases, providing seafarers with the ability to compose and decipher signals before the use of Morse code. Popham's achievement was to take signaling with flags beyond simple directions to provide a system capable of communicating substantial information and conversation.

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To communicate the code, flags were hoisted in combinations of three or four, each grouping signaling a word or phrase. The artists experimented with many of Popham's phrases and their graphic potential before settling on the phrase 'I can spare what you asked for' represented in Popham's code by the four flag configuration 2,7,7,8.

The end result is a contemporary abstraction of message devised in 1906. The combination is a visually compelling flag that utilises a maritime code as its graphic framework and the conceptual key to the work.

**Image caption:** design of the West Gate Bridge Flag, supported by VicRoads and the Department of Premier and Cabinet