

# \_To live is to fly

Dawson Clutterbuck

## Works

1

*It's our future? It's our future*  
Two channel HD video,  
1 minute

2

*I'm freaking out!*  
Moyes GTR Hang glider,  
lustacryl paint,  
dimensions vary

The works presented within *To live is to fly* explore the potential of the creative act as a communicative agent. Appropriated found objects and documented performative actions aim to re-imagine a language of demonstration, protest, and mobilisation. Recognising the inherent complexity of current socio-political dialogue, this exhibition introduces these various modes of artistic exchange to help elicit political discussion.

Direct participation in decision making is needed for *tino rangatiratanga*. Without it we cannot be 'free', neither as individuals nor collectively. Reflecting on current socio-political concerns, such as the events surrounding the recent Trans Pacific Partnership signing, our representative democracy is seizing up – I say 'our', meaning something we all take part in. A noticeable lack of discussion, both within Parliament and through the public sphere, has cancelled out any possible participation and understanding of this multi-national agreement.

We are living in an unformed time, characterised by uncertainty. I am an artist, not an activist, but a realisation of *tūrangawaewae* – an idea referring to a solid, empowering place to stand – seems unachievable at the moment. Not that I do not know where I am from. Sidestepping regulated involvement in power structures is commonly achieved through bottom-up citizen action. Groups commonly use flags, banners, and signs to mobilise 'direct action' – a form of popular protest that tends to remain outside the institutional framework – and create a language of demonstration.

A nation is a socially constructed community, something that is largely imagined. Alienation is a crucial concept to philosopher Hannah Arendt's conception of modernity, which is characterised by *Weltverlust* the loss-of-world. Arendt sees a 'restriction or elimination of the public sphere of action and speech in favor of the private world of introspection and the private pursuit of economic interests'. In other words, modernity is the age of mass society and the rise of social out of a previous distinction between the public and the private. Individuals, having lost their traditional standards and values, must search for new grounds of human 'community'. It is 'our' future isn't it? This project has taken form while exploring what living might mean through different forms of artistic activity.

In the past I have explored kites both for their capacity to communicate ideas and to activate traditional notions through the triangular activity between site, kite, and flyer. Historically, *tohunga* used kites to communicate with the gods beyond the real world through *matakite*, a traditional and symbolic concept related to religion and ritual. Its contemporary understanding largely relates to Te Roopu O Te Matakite group who acted with urgency and imagination to challenge authority by way of the 1975 hikoi. Alienation from land was symbolised through bodies in motion united by a single white flag. This action changed popular consciousness and widened the arena for future political debate.



**Exhibition**

3–25 March 2016

**Gallery hours**

Monday to Friday  
12–4 pm

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Monday to Friday  
12–4 pm  
5.30–7 pm

**The Engine Room**

A Massey University  
School of Art  
Litmus Research Initiative

**Website**

[theengineroom.org.nz](http://theengineroom.org.nz)

**Twitter**

@theengineroomnz

Hang gliders continue a historical lineage to kites, although they are now highly engineered aircrafts capable of flying long distances at great heights. This particular hang glider is a Moyes GTR model made in the 1990's, an era when Mixed Member Proportional was new and political participation appeared more meaningful. Through appropriation the hang glider attempts to imagine a new language for demonstration at a new tone. It embraces the gallery's glass ceiling, suggesting a connection upward and outward of this space.

Art enables participation between artist, object, and viewer. Theorist Roland Barthes hailed the 'death' of the author in 1967. As Barthes stated, 'it is language which speaks, not the author'. Through appropriation and re-contextualisation, readymades question how ideas are exchanged to the viewer/reader. How might artistic gestures act as political catalysts? Constant oscillation between an artwork's status as a 'sign' and its status as a 'thing' is crucial. Thus keeping stable conclusions at bay. Objects re-contextualised into the gallery context endure a certain degree of *Weltverlust*. Within the confines of this space – a vitrine of sorts – the ontological potential of things can be explored. How does meaning change in context and in the time we are living in? The things presented are divisional objects; some people will try to fly, and others might view them as stupid. This 'not-knowing' separates people. Perhaps this is what Townes Van Zandt meant in his song.

I'm freaking out a bit. The artworks presented question artistic identity, the gap between personal experience and the enagement of a larger public world. Re-appropriating the past, and not traditions, via what Arendt called 'the deadly impact of new thoughts', hope can restore meaning to the present and create new understandings of contemporary situations. *To live is to fly* connects to an 'alternative' New Zealand, one the majority did not decide on and one yet to be known collectively. Each artwork is a direct action, exploring *matakite* as a communicative agent to go beyond the present.