



City Songs



CITY OF MELBOURNE

City Songs

9 February to
19 April 2017

City Gallery
Melbourne Town Hall

[melbourne.vic.gov.au/
citygallery](http://melbourne.vic.gov.au/citygallery)



The city is always singing.
These portraits and these stories
are part of the music created by
the people who live, work, visit,
struggle and play in the city of
Melbourne.

Within the boundary of one single
CBD block we discovered a whole
symphony of experience and of
worlds. We ask you to pause for a
moment and to listen to the sound
of our city.



Jonathon



White Ribbon



Adrian



Wallace



Tourist



Celide



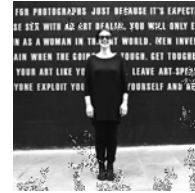
Chico



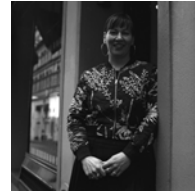
Chito



Daniel



Dillan



Dunja



Eddie



Emma



Gurdavinder



Helen



The Construction Workers



Ilana & Diane



James



Tom



Tim



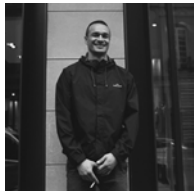
Joel



Jordan



Josh



Kueva



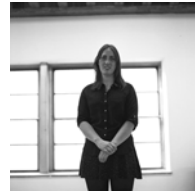
Patrick



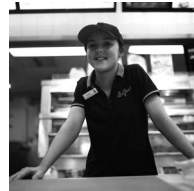
Lauren



Layla & Miyako



Patrice



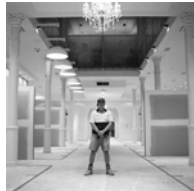
Lizzy



Lynn



Nick



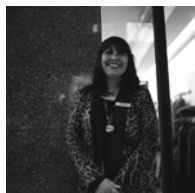
Nick



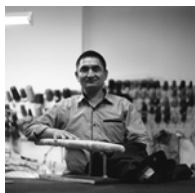
Matt



Rhythms



Simone



Nadin



Summer & Haylee



Nick



Tamsen



Tennille



Ray



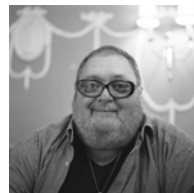
Roshan



Rowan



Sacko



Michael



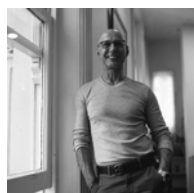
Sen



Simon



Spiro



Stavros



Rueben



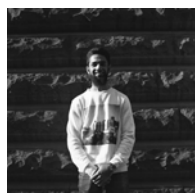
Steven



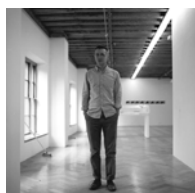
Student #1



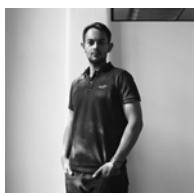
Student #2



Suhail



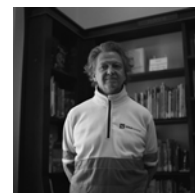
Rowan



The Architect



Thea



Thomas



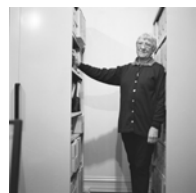
Wolfie



Mathias



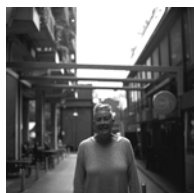
Zafas & Daniel



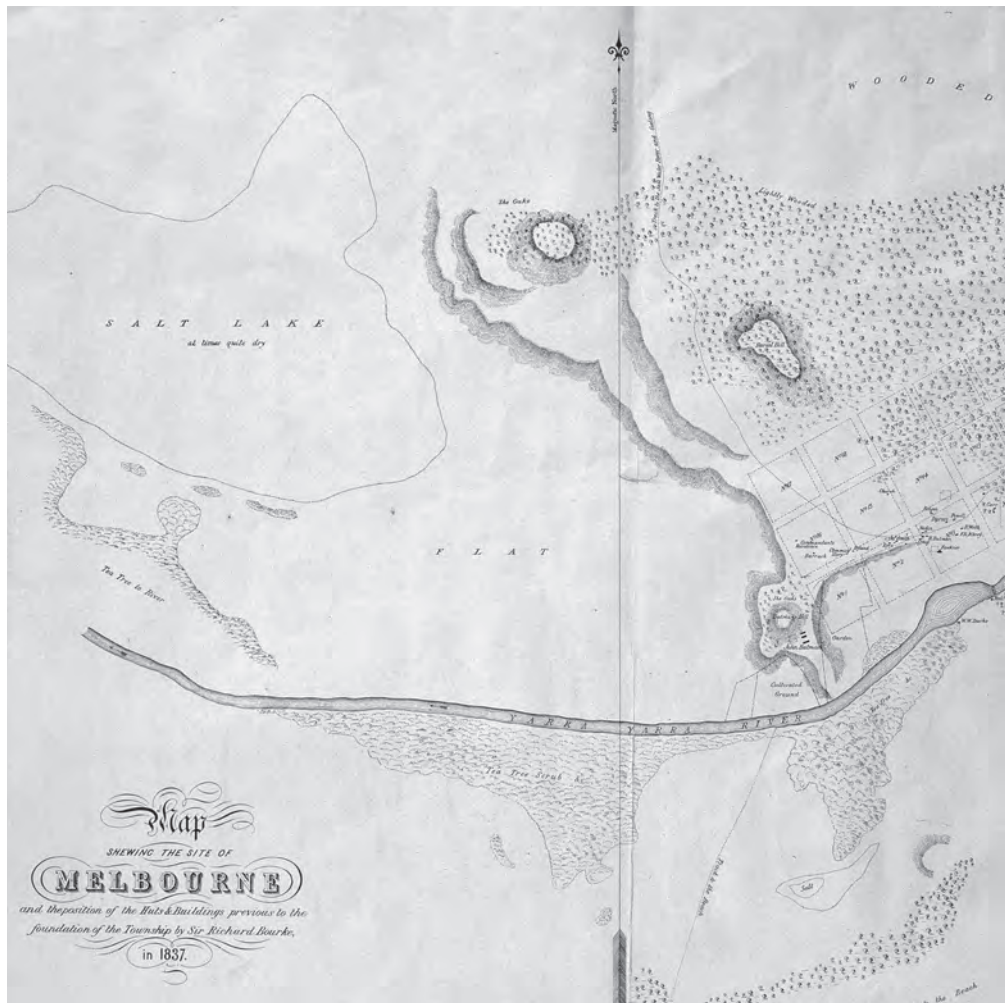
Marjorie

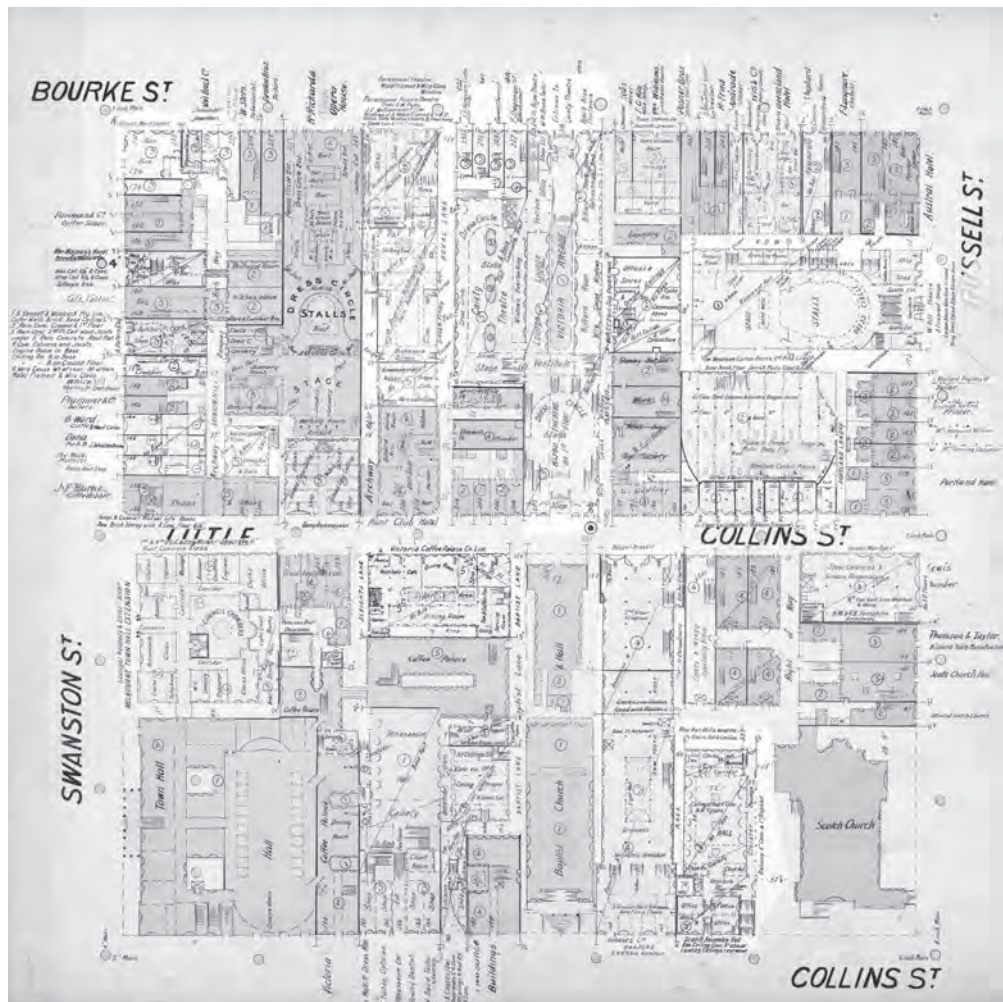


Annie



Jane





The diversity of Melbourne's social life and its rapid material and economic growth from the nineteenth century are the stuff of urban legend. The city is myriad in its cultures, rich in its heritage, breathtaking in its scale. In the 175 years since the little Town of Melbourne was incorporated in 1842, how the reality of the twenty-first century metropolis has outstripped even the wildest imaginings and ambitions of its founders.

Generations of Melburnians have built the city in bricks and mortar, but they have also made the city socially and imaginatively—through personal interactions and chance meetings, by individual as well as collective acts of memory, and with their creative aspirations and impulses. As artists and historians we encounter objects, people and institutions in the library and the archive, in the city streets themselves, and in the stories people tell. From these fragments we build a history of place, an assemblage which is partly determined by what has been kept, what survives, what we can see, what we go looking for.

In this exhibition we take the map as our creative and historical departure point.

To make the city manageable, what happens if we reduce the frame? Put a pin in the map? Draw some arbitrary lines around a particular rectangle? Block XI on the original town survey, on which you now stand—bounded by Swanston, Bourke, Russell and Collins Streets—appropriately contains the heart of municipal government in this 175th year of its incorporation, but becomes a playful place of miscellany where historical events as well as creative urges collide and coalesce.

This city can be so vast and boundless that at times we grab on to metaphor to steady our view—the city as forest, manuscript, stage, poem, collage or text. To know a place we need both the soft city of stories and emotions, as well as the hard city of facts, figures and built forms. So the map of this city block, within the rigid symmetry of the grid, becomes a score—and then the boundless cacophony of stories and voices and memories and faces are suddenly tuned as a chorus of city song.

FIRST PAGE

Map showing the site of Melbourne, surveyed and drawn by Robert Russell, 1837, and used by Robert Hoddle to outline Melbourne's grid plan (Map Collection, University of Melbourne Library).

PREVIOUS PAGE

Detail from City of Melbourne fire survey (Map 8), compiled by G. Mahlstedt, civil engineer and surveyor, 1910 (State Library of Victoria).

Start with one city block. Let's call it 'Block XI', numbered as the surveyors had done. Not only convenient shorthand, 'Block XI' adds a layer of arbitrary mystery for those less acquainted with Hoddle's survey. An infinite number of elements—people, events, places and physical objects—contribute to its history. Put differently, historical, social, cultural, political and economic elements combine to produce urban spaces. Images of the two-tiered Victoria Fountain, erected at the Swanston and Collins Street intersection in 1859, conjure stories of leaky pipes and vehicular crashes. Watch the 1964 video of The Beatles stepping out onto the Melbourne Town Hall balcony to the deafening noise of their cheering fans. Walk around the block itself; look up at the late-nineteenth century tiling, and down to see the gold marked heritage trail.

Our block is a contained place, wrapped in the straight lines of colonial symmetry. As with all the other blocks, it is interspersed with laneways—including Rainbow Alley, Royal Lane, Russell Place—and bisected by Little Collins Street, which like all of Melbourne's

little streets was intended as an access route but became more of a thoroughfare over time. Block XI is defined by more than just the footprint of its built form. Its reality is produced visually by its sightlines from the streets, physically through sound and smell, and in our minds, through text and memory.

As the site of the Melbourne Town Hall, the block strikes a key note in the city's history. 'An act to incorporate the inhabitants of the Town of Melbourne' (6 Vic. No. 7) was passed in 1842. As Melbourne's first representative governing institution, the City Council had a range of powers and responsibilities to regulate markets, accept property for charitable purposes, form and repair streets, preserve footways, appoint special constables and specialist committees, make common sewers, and maintain waterworks. Importantly, it also now had the power to make by-laws and regulations, covering everything from noxious trades and meat supply to brothels, baths, billiard tables and porters. Early council meetings were held in the rooms of the Melbourne Mechanics Institute (later the Athenaeum), founded

in 1839 as a place for workingmen's education and which opened a building in Collins Street early in 1843. The current town hall was opened in 1870, replacing an earlier 1850's building.

Photographs, maps, newspapers and city directories enable us to build up an image of the city's development. Maps, together with city directories which listed the inhabitant of each property, provide detailed information about the businesses and buildings that occupied the spaces on the block. Through them we can trace the continuities and disruptions that occur within the built and lived urban environment, which can in turn reflect wider social, cultural and political events. On Bourke Street, in the short period between 1895 and 1910, maps show that the architecture and usage of space in this section of the city changed at a swift pace. Rows of smaller two-storey shopfronts, a number of hotels, open yards and stables, were all replaced in a short time by larger edifices that gradually overwhelmed the older Victorian buildings surrounding them. The street was long home to Melbourne's entertainment district, a busy lively

spot, which was frequently compared to the streets of London and Europe: in 1901 it was characterised as a 'non-stop vaudeville show'. In the late-nineteenth century it featured some of Melbourne's best-known theatres and amusement spots such as the Opera House and Bijou Theatre (once the Victoria Arcade); watering holes such as Miller's and the Royal Mail Hotels; pie shops and oyster saloons; and numerous small businesses such as booksellers, jewellers, hairdressers and tobacconists.

By the early-twentieth century, the Opera House had been enlarged and renamed the Tivoli, the Bijou Theatre extended through to Little Collins, the Gaiety Theatre was built next door and the fledgling movie industry showed its potential with the opening of the Paramount Picture Theatre. Smaller traders remained but the slow encroachment of these larger buildings onto the urban footprint of this city block, heralded further changes to the street and its businesses as the century progressed. Eventually the nightlife died and theatres were replaced, the Bijou demolished in the 1940s for a Commonwealth Bank

and the Tivoli with an office block and modern shopping arcade in the 1960s.

We tend to think of cities in straight lines. Blocks, grids, high-rise. Stern squares vying for the last scraps of sunshine. As we wander deep into the gloom of Baptist Place, where the Victoria Hotel literally comes into contact with the back of the Collins Street Baptist Church, we notice that our block's buildings resemble a jumble of teeth, slowly growing into each other. Squares forcing themselves onto more squares. But we can form cities out of other shapes too. There are alternative and complementary ways of understanding a city. Like a landscape, a soundscape is culturally informed, an acoustic environment. It refers to two things: the way sound behaves in a place, and how people listen and respond to those sounds. What sounds do we invest with meaning? Which sounds do we seek out, and which ones don't we want cluttering up the air above the pavement?

Listen to the multilayered songs of the streets. Mid 1890's street life in Collins Street was not only characterised by gigs and phaetons, street hawkers, flower sellers and bonneted ladies.

It was also a place for critical reflection. Kaiser Wilhelm II had recently sent a congratulatory telegram to President Krueger of the Transvaal Republic for repulsing an armed assault by a misguided gang of British upper-class hooligans. The British press was outraged over the Kaiser's lack of etiquette, and as loyal colonials, Australians followed suit. Australia's German community was tainted for siding with the Kaiser and came in for some harsh criticism for what various writers saw as disloyalty. A German street band making its way down Collins Street literally changed its tune, switching from 'Wacht am Rhein' to 'Rule Britannia' to allay any fears the public might have about its sympathies.

The street cries of itinerant Asian or Middle Eastern hawkers also caused considerable anxiety among white colonial Melburnians. Nuisance, mischief and disorder are always about more than just sound; they are socially, culturally and politically charged. Festivals, parades, royal visits, protests; all are spectacular, but they are about more than just the eyes. In 1906, a group of visiting British gentlemen was apprehended playing a

wild game of golf on Little Collins Street in the early hours of the morning. When questioned in court, the young dandies declared that due to their high status and wealth, they could make whatever sounds they wanted in the city without fear. Sometimes, too, the ambient backdrop of the city itself can jump into the foreground. Modernist reformers and artists decried noise in the city. Each generation since the mid-nineteenth century has declared war on urban noise, whether buskers, automobiles or the rock 'n' roll of the legendary Cherry Bar. There are multiple ways of knowing place, in this block and beyond.

Just as we listen to the city's cacophony, we delve further into the archive of place and time. It is 1895. A young woman named Emily enters the Rotunda through a door on Little Collins Street between Yik Lee's tea and silk company and Switzer's anatomical bootmakers. She walks down a long dim corridor, into a slightly shabby round hall. Its walls are draped with a 'cyclorama' of Paris. Emily is here to learn the gentle skill of riding a bicycle. The Rotunda was quickly constructed in 1891 to show a spectacular circular painting,

the 'Siege of Paris'. Thrill seekers stepped from Bourke Street into a 'Moorish'-style foyer. From there they entered a great circular hall lit with electric lights and with a single painting covering its curved walls.

The Rotunda, extending from Bourke Street to Little Collins Street, was Melbourne's second cyclorama and a success at first, though foundering in the 1890s depression. A photography salon moved into the fancy foyer. The Velodrome Cycling School laid down an asphalt track inside the circular hall and opened its entrance in Little Collins Street. The cycling school was a hit, advertising classes for women taught by Miss Wilson and for men by head instructor Clarence Apthorpe. It was 'Crawling with women', according to the *Argus* in 1895, but plenty of middle-aged men with their trousers safety-pinned around their ankles also took lessons.

The freedom that bicycle riding promised was not the only attraction. Clarence was a 'handsome blue-eyed athlete', dressed in 'knickers and stockings'. He gave individual cycling lessons to young women in the mornings, and

took a hands-on approach to his work. Emily was one of those women. After a romantic ride for a few years, a marriage ended in scandalous divorce; labelled a 'sequel to a cycling lesson', their personal affair briefly made for good newspaper headlines around the country. Then Emily and Clarence disappeared from public view. The Rotunda hosted a few events, a 'cinematographe' or moving picture show, and Canadian 'horse-tamer' Professor Norton B. Smith gave several exhibitions of his 'scientific and humane system of subduing wild horses'. Then the doors of the strange round building closed for good and it faded from public memory.

Many other doors have opened and closed on Block XI. William and Arthur George's fashion store of the 1880s is no longer but they may still take comfort in knowing that fine apparel features in the windows. The nineteenth-century elders of Scots' Church may be pleased to see their Assembly Hall still in use but would the basement bookseller's volumes be to their puritanical taste? The city never stands still; adaptive reuse gives continuity to a city's stories.

Lines on a grid made Block XI, but the place itself is a hymn to the people who lived and loved in it, of working lives as well as passers-by. It is a place of firsts: the first elm street tree planted outside the Town Hall in 1875; the first women's public toilet at the corner of Russell and Bourke Streets in 1902. It is a place of the extraordinary: the day in 1911 that a lion strolled out of the Melbourne Opera House and down Rainbow Alley to Little Collins Street, causing a lady to swoon before it was directed by an enterprising gentleman with a wire fork into the offices of the Temperance and General Mutual Life Association. This block is a place of the long-remembered and the mostly-forgotten: the Legend Café opened in 1956 in Bourke Street, with its funky black-and-white marble floor and Sinbad the Sailor mural. Among all its churches and skittle saloons, dressmakers and department stores, undertakers and newspaper offices, you can still hear the city's songs.

Melbourne History Workshop, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne:
Professor Andrew J. May, with Nicole Davis, James Lesh,
Henry Reese, Susan Reidy, Weiyan Sun, Volkhard Wehner,
Roland Wettenhall.



City Songs

Zoe Ali & Christos Tsiolkas



The city is always singing, that's what we discovered working on this project. It is a discordant and modernist buzz, and it has to be, for a city is full of activity and rushing, work and labour, selling and trade. The songs we hear are an unruly and anarchic chorus. The individual members of this chorale are often strangers to one another, unaware of how their own arias and chants are contrapuntally in tension and competition with the songs of others. But in the six months we spent documenting and observing the city, listening to it, we were moved by the harmony in difference, by the diverse and richness of the sound emanating from our city. This city sings in different languages and accents, a bastard chorus. The song is richer for that.

When the land that Melbourne sits on - its river and streams, its woods and shrub lands, its hills and plains - was first claimed and settled by European strangers, the colonial mindset carved out boundaries in straight lines. This was an Old World order imposed on an even more ancient land and history. The City of Melbourne asked us, as a photographer and as a writer, to work within the limits of what was designated by the 19th century city planners as the 11th Block. The boundaries were Bourke Street on the north side, Collins Street on the south, Swanston Street on the west and Russell Street on the east. For both of us, born and raised in Melbourne, we thought this was a block we knew and understood. We had walked through its streets and laneways a thousand times. But one of the great joys of our exploration was discovering lives and histories that deepened our knowledge of our city. We knew that people worked here, studied within this block; that people streamed into this part of the city from all of Melbourne, from all of Victoria and from all the world. We discovered, however, that people also lived here, celebrated here, drunk here and played here. That people worshipped here. We became as travelers in our own city, learning to also look up and to look down, to follow stair cases up to offices and dens and workshops, to explore rooftops and to descent into basements.

The buildings and spaces of Melbourne and of this block fascinate us but it became clear very early on that our deepest interest was for the people who used and worked in and inhabited this city. It is within the faces of those we photographed that the real vitality of our city comes alive. We were grateful for the good cheer, the good will and the kindness that was extended to us as we explored our block. The people we have photographed have genealogies that stretch across the globe yet they expressed a key identification and love for this city, a pride in place regardless of whether their families had only recently arrived or whether

their ancestry stretched back to the First Nations of this country. In concentrating on the faces and voices of the people who we discovered on “our” block, we realised that the mercantile and bureaucratic institutions of the CBD are only a part of the city’s song. An important part but certainly not the whole story. A young homeless man’s song was as resonant as the multivalent chorus of a family who had worked in a little upstairs shop on Swanston Street for three generations. We hope this exhibition and this work is a celebration of such song but we also hope that in pausing before these portraits, taking the time to look at the faces staring back, that we honour the silence that is part of the music of the city. We are all in a rush, running to appointments, examining the screens of our phones, impatient for the lights to turn green. It is only in pausing, in that sweet hush, that we truly see and we truly hear.

The photographs represent the city in the present, the here and now of 2016, the year we worked on *City Songs*. The city, of course, is also history, a history that reaches back to a time before the foundation of Melbourne and a history that includes the boom and bust of the gold rush, the celebration of Federation, two terrible economic depressions and two devastating world wars. It is a history that witnessed the end of the White Australia Policy and the transformation of Melbourne into a multicultural megalopolis. Our text is an attempt to allow some of the past to re-emerge, to hear the voices of shop-keepers, workers, artisans, soldiers and singers who are as important to the story of Melbourne as brick and stone and concrete. It is impossible to do justice to all that history and there still remains great work to be done in reclaiming the voices from the past. Some of the city’s song is protest as much as it is celebration. It is to betray the complexity and beauty of the songs to not recognise that some must be laments.

OPPOSITE
Lei
(2016)

One of the greatest love songs to a city remains Woody Allen's 1979 film, *Manhattan*. It is filmed in luminous black and white and near the film's conclusion there is a dazzling montage of the city's buildings, streets and parks and the soundtrack is George Gershwin's sublime mid-century symphony, *Rhapsody in Blue*. *Manhattan* is a work that celebrates the musicality of a city. Of course, an argument can be mounted that the jazz soundtrack reveals the film as a nostalgic celebration of the past, that the film ignores the radical musical fermentations of punk, post-punk, disco, hip-hop and salsa that were there to be heard in 1979 and were going to define American cultural life well into the 21st Century. We hope our work is not merely nostalgia, that we have been attuned to the music of our contemporary city. We are aware that there are songs that we have missed, both from the past and from our present. Please see our work as one mix-tape, a compilation of what we heard when we travelled through the block and through our city. There are infinite more mix-tapes to be created and to be heard. This is just one of them.



1842

This is our country and it
will always be our country.



LEFT
Ziad
(2016)

RIGHT
Summer
(2016)



LEFT
Jess
(2016)

RIGHT
Steve
(2016)

1981

He takes the train with his old man into the city. His father walks him to the Greater Union and says, I'll pick you up in two hours. The boy looks up at the movies playing and chooses *Ordinary People*. He likes Mary Tyler Moore and he adores Robert Redford. Redford isn't in it but he's directed it, he knows that. The film consumes him, the boy can't believe that a film can so perfectly mirror his own heart. He's shaking when he comes out of the screening and he blinks in the harsh reality of the fluorescent lights. His father is there, standing in the foyer, waiting for him. The boy starts howling, he can't control his sobbing, he falls onto his father, can't stop hugging him. Shocked, the man freezes, and then he embraces his son. The boy can smell coffee and pistachio on his father's breath, from the cake he must have had in the kafenio in Lonsdale Street. Finally his father says, That's enough. They don't speak as the walk down Russell Street towards the train station. As they wait for the light to go green, his father turns to him and says, You know, the movies aren't the truth.

1945

Lawrie opens his eyes and the curse of the hangover is a punch. He is aware of the body lying next to him. Carefully, to not disturb the sleeping youth, Lawrie turns to look at him. The skin on his face and neck and arms, red and blistered. But everywhere else, the white of milk. The boy's breaths are long and hoarse, somewhere between breathing and snoring. He still reeks of tobacco and the stench of whiskey. And the damned stench is too much for him, he can't help retching, prays and hopes and manages not to chuck. The boy wakes up. And the first thing he does, he smiles. And then he tries to say something but words can't come out. Lawrie understands, he doesn't know what to say either. They take turns washing at the basin, they put on their uniforms, they split the bill for the night. At the entrance, the boy swings his pack over his shoulder and he finally speaks. He says, "Well, mate, the war is over." They shake hands and the boy rushes off to catch the train to Geelong. Leaving the hotel, walking up Little Collins, Lawrie clutches at his khaki collar. He's forgotten, it's been four long years, he has forgotten how bitterly cold it can get in Melbourne.



THIS PAGE
Mark
 (2016)

PAGE 30
Nancy & Ivy
 (2016)

PAGE 36
Laura
 (2016)

PAGE 42
Rami & Fee
 (2016)

PAGE 48
Mahbuber
 (2016)

PAGE 54
Jean-Paul
 (2016)

LAST PAGE
Peter
 (2016)

PAGE 31
Beau
 (2016)

PAGE 37
Mark
 (2016)

PAGE 43
Yusuf
 (2016)

PAGE 49
Aneeka
 (2016)

PAGE 55
Mylat
 (2016)

1964

It was the **biggest roar she had ever heard, she couldn't believe how deafening the screaming was.** And all for those long-hairs. She had never heard screaming like that before, even when the Germans were dropping bombs on the mountains around her village, no one had screamed like that. She would have thought it sounded like Hell if she didn't find it all so silly. Afterwards, when the long-hairs had gone back to their hotel and the crowds had dispersed and the night was coming, they asked the cleaners if they could all stay back. She agreed to it straight away, for the overtime. There was so much garbage, so much litter, right up to the steps of the Town Hall. There was a toy, a stuffed bear, soiled in a puddle. Some stupid girl had even lost her bloody panties. As she was sweeping she started to hum one of their tunes, one of the songs by those English long-hairs. She loves you and you know you should be glad. She rested on her broom and she laughed out loud. They were like songs they sung at school before the war, those songs they taught little children. She loves you and you know you should be glad.

2016

I don't like boarding houses, they're not good for you **those places, lots of bad things happen in those places, I prefer to be on the street.** I was fifteen when I first came to Melbourne, I was born in the country but now I can't go back. I was homeless for three years and now I am on the streets again. There should be places like they have in America, there the homeless have tents that they can go back to every night. Here we are shunted from place to place and corner to corner. There's a lot of people making their living from us homeless, they want us to be on the streets, that's their job to keep us on the streets. I want a home, one day I'd like a home. I've put my name down for public housing but they've told me the wait is for fifteen years. Maybe seventeen years. I'll be an old man by then.

2016

There were twelve of us in our family, now there's only the two of us left. We live interstate and we don't see each other much. But we love coming to Melbourne, to see the shows. We're going to see *Singing in the Rain*, we love the musicals. My sons live in Melbourne, it's always lovely to visit. I miss my sister, it would be nice to live close. Maybe one day. Did you see *Les Mis*? You should have. That's been the best musical we've seen. That had the best story. We used to have a coffee in Georges. Ooh, we did love Georges. Now we have a coffee around the corner. It's not bad, but it isn't Georges.

2015

Lin-An is waiting for Kevin in her favourite jewellery shop in Collins Street. She carefully, gently touches the window, imagining that she is caressing the smooth cold stone of the pearls behind the glass case. She glances over her shoulder, conscious she might be giving offence. Her mother always scolded her: *Don't touch the glass, it's dirty*. But the shopgirl is listening to something on her phone, she seems unaware that there is anyone in the shop. There is a gust, and the peal of a bell. She turns away from the display, rushes towards Kevin but one look at him and her smile is gone. *What is it?* He replies in English: *Haven't you heard?* And then in their language: *They have slaughtered ninety youths in a nightclub in Paris*. His hand is on her shoulder but she is looking at the shopgirl. How can she not have noticed before? The girl's eyes are full of tears.



1998

She stares into the mirror. She is blonde, she has never been blonde before. The woman behind her leans in and whispers, You look terrific. She can't stand how yellow her skin is, another bloody side effect of the chemo.

— Do you really think so?

The woman is smiling.

— I really think so.

The woman turns and calls out to the old man who runs the store.

— What do you reckon, Dad, doesn't Lynne look terrific?

The man doesn't look up from his accounts, like he hasn't even heard his daughter. There is a tall man seated next to her. He is putting on a wig of long shining hair, stretches his cheeks flat with long and dainty fingers. And then he affixes a gold hoop to each ear. She is reminded of Dusty Springfield. He turns to her, beaming.

— Listen to her, darling. You look *faarkin* fabulous.

1925

The lady brings the cuff of the sleeve to her nose.

“I’m sorry, Madam”, Daisy is blushing from the apology, “It’s the fire, the smoke has gotten into everything.”

The woman walks to and forth from the full-length mirror, looking over her shoulder to see herself from the side.

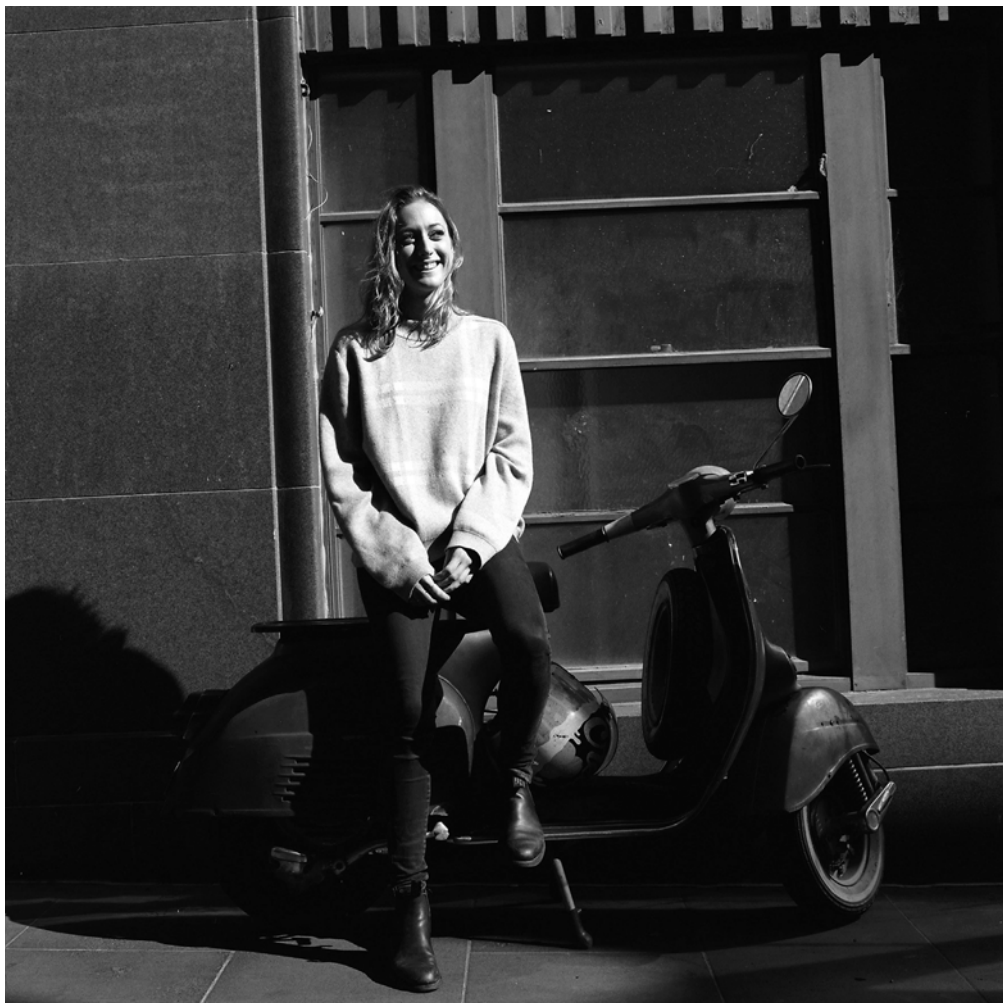
Then, at the nod and the raising of the lady’s arms, Daisy rushes over to assist extricating the client from the gown.

“It’s lovely”, says the lady, “But I can’t be smelling of ash and cinder.”

1977

She can't contain herself, she has heard the phrase before but never really thought about what it means, never really understood it. But now she knows, her elation is too big, her emotions too strong to fit into her body. Her breathing hurts and she doesn't know if she is devastated or happy. No. It is joy, it is thrilling exhausting uncontrollable joy. A girl in front of her is heaving and sobbing and soon she is crying as well. Another girl, tall and bony, is pushing hard against her back, her elbow is digging into her shoulder blade. But she can't turn around, she will not dare look anywhere but up, up at the balcony. Then the crowd roars and she knows she is in that roar, part of that roar, for there they are, as brilliantly gold as the sun, there is Benny and Bjorn but best of all most important of all there they are, Ann-frid and Agnetha. Brilliant gold. Like the sun. A girl collapses, another girl screams and from within the writhing mass is the smell of urine. Has she wet herself?

She can't tell. She is not herself and she is not in her body. She is in the crowd and all that there is, is the crowd. Then Agnetha turns and looks down and smiles. At her. Only at her. She is sure of that and will be convinced of that all her life. That's when she swoons and that's when she falls. From the gold light into darkness. When she comes to, shivering, a blanket over her shoulders, in the back of the ambulance, the kindly paramedic is urging her to sip some water. Have they gone? He nods his head. She begins to weep and she can't stop crying.



1870

me mum is carrying me sister and we are pushing through the people a gentleman turns and yells at her sorry sir sorry sir but she keeps pushing and the street is mud from the rain and the mud is all up my pants and mum carries the baby and she says don't stop Pat keep pushing keep pushing and the band is playing and a copper says where you think youse going and mum whispers something to him and his face stops being mean and he says alright then and we are as far as we can get there is a rope that we mustn't pass and that's where mum gives me my sister and I hold her as mum drops the white rose in her hand and it falls to the ground and she says that's for your father who died building this town hall and she doesn't weep but she is singing a song and I say mum what are those words but she keeps singing people behind the rope are looking at her a lady is snickering and I want to push her in the mud but mum

keeps singing and when she is finished she takes my sister and says we can go now and tells me that the words she was singing are irish she learns it from my gran may the lord have mercy on her soul and as we cross collins street and the foul wash of the river is in our noses I look down and quick as a lark I dart and pick up a ha-penny in the mud and mum smiles then for the first time that day she smiles and says your da is looking down at us your da is still looking after us.

2016

We're from Sydney, we used to run a coffee shop there.

But we are so glad we moved to Melbourne. We love it here, love working in the city but we love where we live as well. You're in Preston? We're in Coburg. We're neighbours. Yes, you can smoke at the table outside. It's only a problem if it's raining. Then we have to put the covers up and then we can't let our customers smoke. Stupid, really, but that's the way it is. Is the macchiato okay? I'm still getting used to making them. Not many people have macchiatos in Sydney, we reckon it's a Melbourne thing. *Shokrun* to you as well, so you speak Arabic? Oh right, like me, all the Greek I know is *euharisto* and *eisai vlakas*. And *kali nyhta*. How do you say "good morning"? *Kali mera*. I'll remember that. *Kali mera* and *euharisto*.

2008

The man says, Bridge Road, Richmond, just before Coppin.

Ali is about to switch off the radio but the man says, No, leave it on. They listen to the confident voice of the new American President. The man says, Thank God, Bush is gone. Ali nods. The man then says, The whole world can breathe again. And with a returning smile, Ali says, You are right, brother.



1975

There is no-one serving at the counter.

The whole family are crowded around the transistor radio.

Adriana calls out, curtly, "Excuse me, I want a sausage roll."

Costas turns to her, the man is crying.

"The bastards have just sacked the Prime Minister".

1918

Mel watches the couple dancing, they are spinning and laughing and kissing under the pale glow of the electric lantern. Mel still thinks of electricity as fire, as a child she feared that if the light would land on her it would burn. The dancing woman stops for breath, she smiles at Mel, says to her partner, "Look, Danny, that Abo girl is watching us." The boy waves, calls out, "The war is over." Mel smiles because she can't do anything but smile. She hurries to Bourke Street, to the pub where she cleans. She doesn't know about their war but her war isn't over.

1976

Essie hears the booming lowing of the pipes, as deep and vast as the glens. She lifts her foot off the pedal and the machine clunks to a stop. Angeliki, sewing a seam, glances across at her.

“Can you hear the bagpipes?”

Angeliki shrugs her shoulders.

“What is bagpipes? Like plumbing?”

Essie laughs and mimes the instrument.

The Greek woman still looks confused.

“It’s music from my home”, says Essie.

She gets up and walks to the window, struggles with the latch, forces it and it flies open with a shudder. Dust and flecks of white plaster are in her hair, all over her blue tunic. Three pigeons, flapping and complaining, rise to the sky. The pipes, the sound of lochs and forest, of snow and ice, the music fills the room. And something else, the sting of electricity that is rock and roll.

Down below the trams are stopped, a mob of young kids are swarming around a flat-bed truck. The singer is smiling like

the devil, growling into a microphone. Angeliki and Vera, Sophia and Bettina, they have joined her at the window. Essie points to the band following the truck.

“There, Vicky, those are the bagpipes.”

Bettina lights her cigarette.

She gestures to the singer, the drummer and the guitarists.

“Who are the bodgies?”

“I don’t know.”

Bettina giggles.

“The singer’s pants are very tight.”

Sophia dangles her arm and shakes it from the window ledge.

“It is like a snake inside his trousers.”

The women whoop and holler, they smoke and laugh.

Vera stubs her cigarette end on the sill, turns to the women.

“Come on girls, this order needs to be finished by the afternoon.”

Essie goes to close the window. Angeliki touches her shoulder.

“Leave open. Listen to home.”



1982

Shame! Melinda hears the student call out the word, in fierce and venomous rage. Almost as if in pain, that's how loud the white girl is hurling that word. **Shame!** Another student, a ginger-bearded boy, he takes up the call and yells, The world is watching, *shame!* Behind her a group of students are reciting the names of those arrested up in Brisbane, for defying the State of Emergency and protesting the Commonwealth Games. Melinda peers through the students and protestors and banners. Up ahead, marching to the City Square, she catches sight of Leroy and Ally, Gary and Jack, Destiny and Sue. She pushes past the whitefella students, links arms, Gary on one side and Sue on the other. *This is our land! This will always be our land!*

2008

Melanie is rushing rushing rushing to get to the Square, she doesn't think she's ever run so fast. This is what it must be like to sprint, she thinks, this is what it must like to be an athlete, not thinking of breath and not thinking of pain, all there is the running. She is running down Swanston, passing the Town Hall, only two blocks away, only two blocks away, there is the future. Where the Prime Minister, he's going to say sorry. And she knows that is not enough and she knows that this is only the start and she knows this war seems never-ending but she needs to hear the word. Sorry. If she hears it her mother will hear it and her grandad will hear it and his folks will hear it and their folks and the folks before them. The whole world will hear it. So she runs, like she never has run before.

1980

Sasha stands on the corner of Swanston and Collins, under the shadow of the Town Hall. He is watching the builders dismantle *Vault*. He shakes his head, mutters, deliberately loud, so the passing strangers can hear him. Australians are so short-sighted. He blows a kiss across the traffic, a kiss for a sculpture that he loves.

2012

Safeera, Kendra and Amy are watching the drunk man try to bring a chicken leg to his mouth. He is so pissed he can't manage it. The girls try hard not to laugh. A boy and a girl, she's shivering, in her thin cotton top, they are feeding each other fries. The three girls keep glancing at their phones, half an hour and the shift is over. The door slides open and they catch a hint of a voice, someone is singing Beyoncé's *Hola*. And the voice is beautiful. Kendra slides from under the counter and goes to stand by the door, to keep it open. It's a homeless girl, one of the girls from off the street, they haven't seen her for a month, she is the one singing. The drunk man, the shivering girl and her boyfriend, everyone working at the KFC, they have stopped to hear the singing. When the song ends, everyone applauds. Without a word, the decision doesn't need to be communicated with words, they give her a bucket of chicken, they give her fries, they give her a large diet Coke. The girl has moved on by the time Safeera's mum arrives to drive them home.



1937

She only dares touch the furs late in the performance, in the final act, when the broken heroine is about to fall on her dagger if it is a tragedy, or the reunited couple are singing a fevered duet of joy for their love. Then, and only then, her fingers run across ermine and mink, sable and fox and – for the destitute or daring – possum. She never dares try a coat on. Does she want to? Of course, she does, I’m only human, she thinks. But what if one of the ushers descending the staircase was to peek over and see that she wasn’t at her station? The good God forbid, what if a guest, excusing themselves because of illness or emergency, what if they were to catch her? They’d get rid of her, and too right, they’d have to. And how would she deal with the shame? And what would she do for money? No, she’s content to just once in a while brush her hand against the furs.

The good Mr. Woodley, who manages them all, said that the first skill required for this job was propriety. “Always propriety, darling”. At the end of her first month he was very kind. He said, “Sally, you are a handsome girl and you are very diligent”. Then, lowering his voice, he added, “Just one word of advice, darling, if I may, try not to speak much. Our guests don’t want to be reminded of the Australian accent when they’re at the opera”.

2017

This is our country and it
will always be our country.



City Songs

9 February to
19 April 2017

City Gallery
Melbourne Town Hall

[melbourne.vic.gov.au/
citygallery](http://melbourne.vic.gov.au/citygallery)



ISBN 978-1-74250-897-9

CURATORS

Christos Tsiolkas and Zoe Ali are long-term collaborators, exploring questions of identity, longing and urban life through image and text. Both Melburnians, this is their sixth collaboration.

Christos Tsiolkas is a writer. His novels include *The Slap* and *Barracuda* and he is also a playwright, scriptwriter and essayist.

Zoe Ali began studying photography under John Cato and has since had work exhibited nationally and internationally.

Andy May is Professor of History at the University of Melbourne where he runs the Melbourne History Workshop (melbournehistoryworkshop.com) in the School of Historical & Philosophical Studies. His books on Melbourne include *Melbourne Street Life*, *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, and *Espresso! Melbourne Coffee Stories*.

THANKS TO

We would like to thank Eddie Butler-Bowdon, Victoria Garton, Cressida Goddard, Megan Simondson, and Jeanette Vaha'akolo from the City of Melbourne, Stephen Banham from Letterbox for his wonderful design work and to Rueben Berg for enlightening us on the Aboriginal heritage of our city. This project owes so much to Andrew May and his wonderful team from the University of Melbourne. Thank you a million times.

Our thanks, as always, to our friends and family: to Dave, Isabelle, Cleo and Georgia. And finally, and most importantly, a huge thank you to all the people we met on our exploration of our city and for their generosity and good humour in letting us photograph them and ask endless questions. We hope that you hear some of your music in *City Songs*.

NOTE

We wish to note that Christos' back-pack was stolen early on in the residency and so some of the names of the people we photographed have gone missing. We apologise for that.