

# A History of the Future.

IMAGINING MELBOURNE



CITY OF MELBOURNE

**A History of  
the Future:**  
*Imagining Melbourne*

12 May –  
12 August 2016

City Gallery  
Melbourne Town Hall

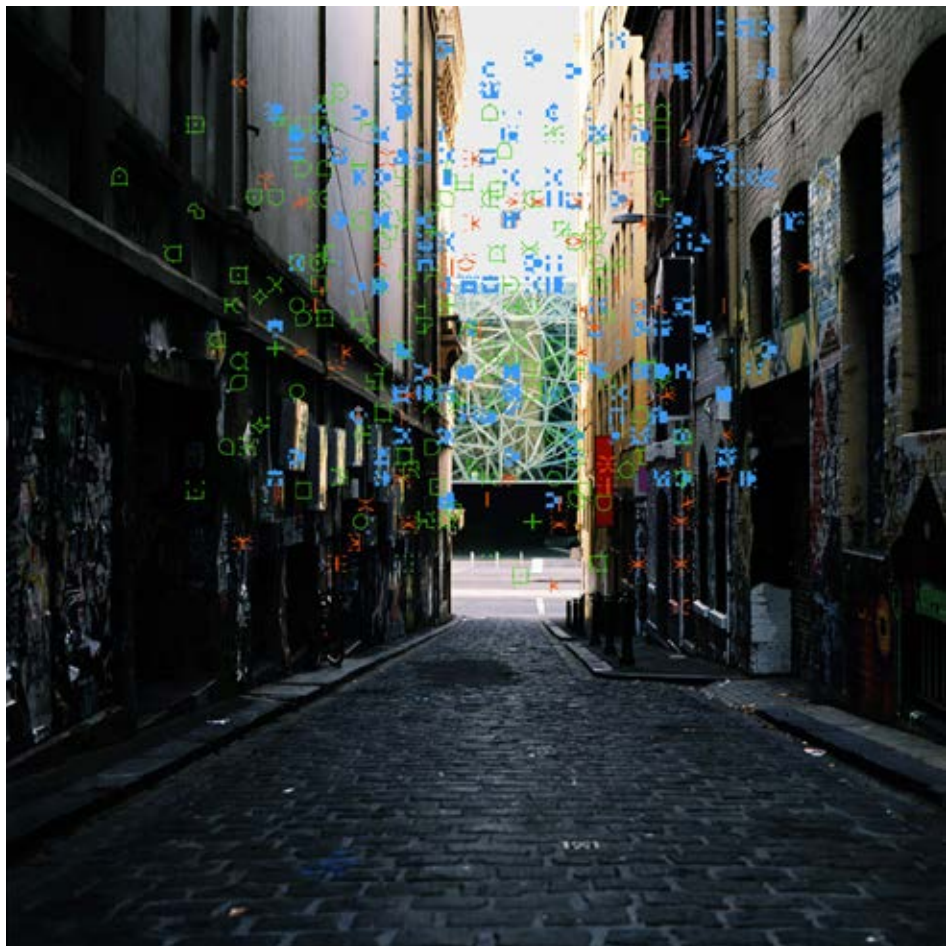
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*A History of the Future: Imagining Melbourne* looks back in order to look forward.

For 180 years, city planners, architects, artists and writers have imagined a future Melbourne from the vantage point of their own time and place. The stories told here provide just a snapshot of the many plans, schemes and dreams that have been variously realised or shelved as Melbourne has considered its future self.



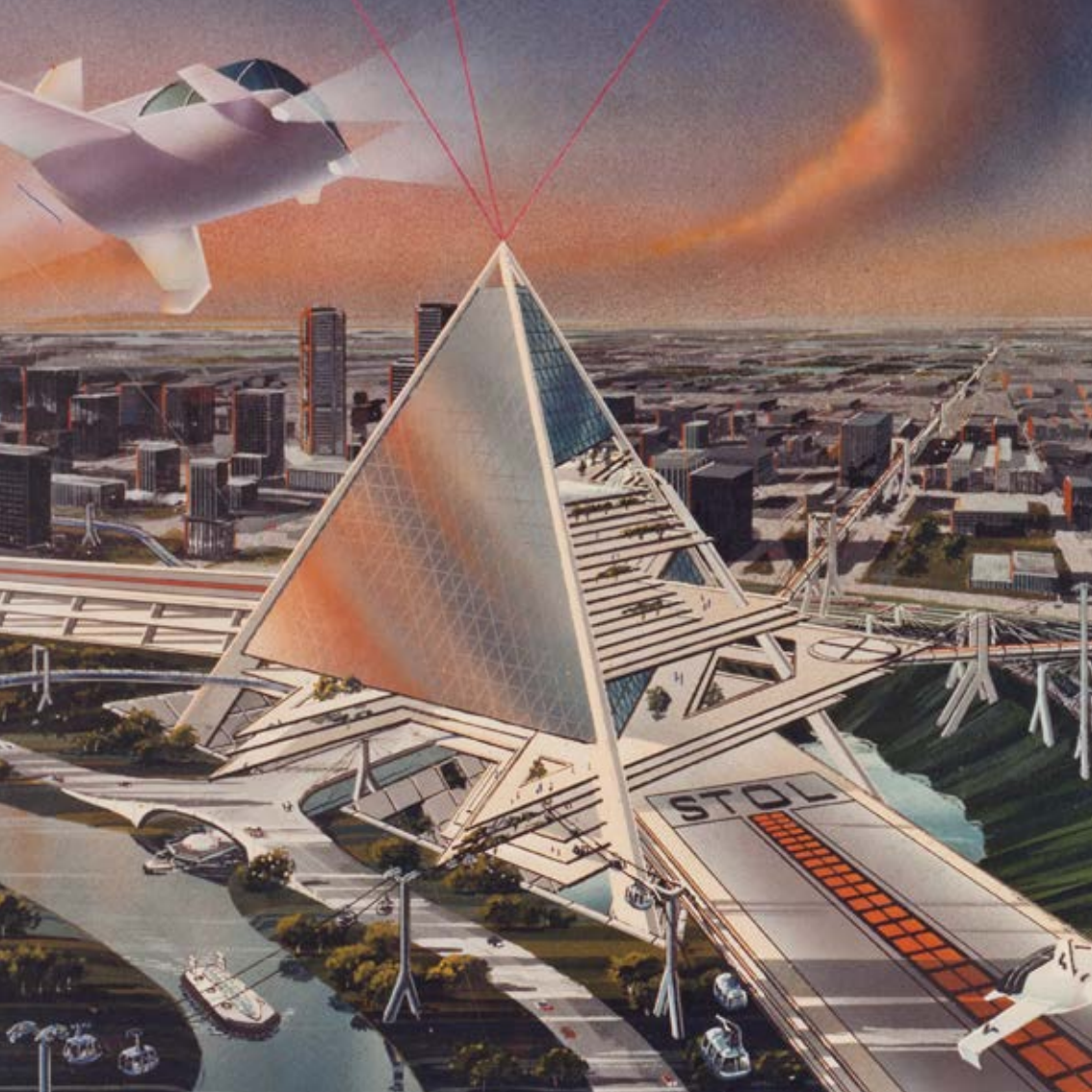


# A History of the Future.

**What's to come is still unsure.**

*William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night<sup>1</sup>*





In 2016, the City of Melbourne's 'Future Melbourne 2026' project urges Melburnians to consider the decade ahead. So what better time to reflect on the kinds of futures that were imagined for Melbourne in the past. Some big dreams and ambitious visions have been realised, others have not – for better or for worse. And it's not just the appearance of the city that these imaginings have shaped, but also how we interact with it, move through it and inhabit it.

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Clare Williamson  
Curator

Looking back over the past 180 years, one can see that changing attitudes have determined outcomes at specific times – attitudes towards heritage, the natural environment and modernity. Melbourne's history has been in some ways one of close calls. Consider this: we may have ended up with an ornamental lake with islands in the shape of the British Isles, outdoor escalators across the face of the Melbourne Town Hall and St Paul's Cathedral, runways for short-take-off-and-landing aircraft in place of Birrarung Marr and a giant hand – complete with an observation deck in its index finger – reaching for the sky. It's hard to fathom now, but if it hadn't been for a lack of resources here or a work ban there, we might now be living in a city without such distinctive landmarks as Flinders Street Station, the Royal Exhibition Building, the Queen Victoria Market and the Regent Theatre.

*... if your first plan for a new city is defective, you may adorn, and alter, and contrive, and patch, but you cannot rectify the fundamental error.*

Anon., 'Melbourne As It Is, and As It Ought To Be', 1850<sup>2</sup>

Dreams of a future metropolis date back to the mid-19th century, when Melbourne was little more than a frontier town. 'Melbourne As It Is, and As It Ought To Be' was published anonymously in 1850 in the first issue of a literary magazine, the *Australasian*.<sup>3</sup> Its well-educated and well-travelled author could clearly see beyond the small collection of buildings and wheel-rutted streets, foreseeing a city '... perhaps destined to become the New York of the future United States of the South'. This ideal city would have sweeping boulevards, majestic public buildings and a grand public square. The square would be ringed with arcades or with colonnades, and at its centre would be a fountain, '... or if a fountain should be impossible, an equestrian statue, or monumental column, or monolithic obelisk'. The author was clearly not enamoured of surveyor Robert Hoddle's 1837 grid, itself a great expression of future planning, lamenting: 'We have planned our metropolis as we should plan a coal pit'.<sup>4</sup>

A decade later, following the discovery of gold and the separation of Victoria from New South Wales, Melbourne was indeed becoming a city of grand buildings, a centre for commerce, government, education and culture. As immigrants poured in and gold and primary produce flowed out, the city looked for solutions to its limited port facilities and its twisting, shallow river. Engineer John Millar proposed, in 1860, that a ship canal be carved through the soil from Port Melbourne to the Yarra near Queens Wharf. Envisioned some 25 years before the opening of Sir John Coode's eventual (and differently routed) canal, Millar's ornate design included an extension of the city to the west, complete with islands in the shape of the British Isles in a lake encircled by 'Britannia Crescent'.

Other unrealised designs of the period included a grand dome for Parliament House, as well as one for the Russell Street side of the Melbourne Public Library. The library, of course, eventually got its dome, designed by Norman Peebles of Bates, Peebles and Smart and completed in 1913.

*At last I see a city in which are combined grandeur, cleanliness, order and picturesque loveliness ... Vehicles of different sizes are passing swiftly on the ground and in the air. Some disappear through large openings in upper stories of enormous buildings.*

Henrietta Dugdale, *A Few Hours in a Far Off Age*, 1883<sup>5</sup>

Writing in 1883, Henrietta Dugdale imagined a futuristic Melbourne of skyscrapers and spaceships. Some years later, Harold Desbrowe-Anneer's triumphal arch at Princes Bridge, built to welcome the Duke and Duchess of York and Cornwall to the new nation's Federation celebrations, heralded a new city for a new century.<sup>6</sup> Despite subsequent world wars and depressions slowing the city's development, Melbourne began to embrace modernist principles in thinking about its future self.

The arrival in the 1930s of European architects and artists, such as Frederick Romberg and Wolfgang Sievers, helped expose local architects and planners to new ideas about buildings and cities, such as those of Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus. This coincided with the desire to rid Melbourne of its inner-city 'slums' and with the formation of the Housing Commission of Victoria, in 1938, following the work of social reformer F. Oswald Barnett. Architects such as Frank Heath and Ernest Fooks worked for the Housing Commission and developed new ways for socially and economically disadvantaged citizens to inhabit the city, in dwellings ranging from two- to four-storey walk-ups in the 1940s and 50s to the high-rise towers of the 1960s and 70s. Given that the 'slums' of the past were located in the now highly desirable areas of Carlton, Fitzroy, Richmond, Collingwood, South Melbourne and North Melbourne, architecture professor Brian Lewis was prophetic in more ways than one in his 1949 essay, 'Fifty Years from Now':

*The best houses of 2000 A.D. may well be built in what are now the slum areas ... [Homes will be heated and] ... while some old-fashioned people will retain a fireplace for the look of the thing, in most houses the 'fireplace' will be the setting for the television screen. The family group will sit around it at night.*<sup>7</sup>

#### PAGE ONE

Troy Innocent  
Cloud, 2005  
Digital photograph  
120 x 120 cm  
City of Melbourne Art  
and Heritage Collection

#### PREVIOUS PAGE

Pyramid encapsulating  
the seasons (detail), 1978  
Designed by K. Baumeister,  
Oklahoma City, USA  
Landmark Competition  
Drawings  
Public Record Office  
Victoria, VPRS 2869/P2,  
Unit 33

In that same year, thousands of Melburnians attended the *Modern Home Exhibition* to peer into the future through Robin Boyd's 'House of Tomorrow', a full-scale two-storey home constructed inside the Royal Exhibition Building. Not all liked what they saw; Boyd categorised the responses into three groups: 'Pleased, pleased but worried, and displeased'.<sup>8</sup>

Also in 1949, Melbourne won the right to host the 1956 Olympic Games. Like the Federation celebrations of 1901, the Olympics provided an impetus for Melbourne to present itself to the world as a forward-thinking city. The new Olympic swimming pool set the tone. Designed by Kevin Borland, Peter McIntyre and John and Phyllis Murphy, in collaboration with engineer Bill Irwin, the pool used the latest building techniques to create a model of beauty in restraint.<sup>9</sup> Other modernist buildings to follow included the Sidney Myer Music Bowl (1959), the City of Melbourne's new Fish Market (1959) and the glass-walled ICI House (1958), the first office tower to break through the city's height limit of 132 feet (40.2 metres).

As Melbourne embraced the ideal of the 'modern' city and newspapers published artistic visions of the 'Melbourne of Tomorrow', complete with flying spacecraft landing on rooftops, the heritage value of its historic buildings was sometimes forgotten. Both before and after the National Trust of Victoria was founded in 1956, architects and planners regularly called for the demolition and replacement of buildings such as Flinders Street Station and the Queen Victoria Market.

A number of plans in the 1940s extolled the benefits of demolishing the Royal Exhibition Building – subsequently Australia's first building to make the World Heritage List. These plans recommended replacing it with government office towers or a model civic centre, complete with new town hall, post office, hospital, rest home and crèche, all laid out uniformly among manicured grounds.<sup>10</sup> The site would have no museum, art gallery or library.

*It may seem strange to many thinking people ... that Melbourne has not been functioning and growing to a preconceived plan, but has been allowed to expand in a haphazard and disorderly way ... [Cities] are living entities, constantly changing, and if these changes are not guided along the most fruitful lines, the community must suffer.*

John C. Jessop, *Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme*, 1954<sup>11</sup>

The *Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme* of 1954 marked a significant milestone in attempts to formalise Melbourne's development. After World War II, responsibility for town planning was given to the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, previously focused on sewerage and water services. Engineer Edwin Borrie and his team spent years researching Melbourne's housing needs, traffic congestion hotspots and infrastructure deficiencies in order to map out a plan for the future. The board commissioned a film, *Planning for Melbourne's Future*, and invited the public to consider the city's needs through an exhibition at the Melbourne Public Library and a free single-issue newspaper entitled *Future Melbourne*.

The ways in which Melburnians move through the city remain a major focus in plans for its future. An underground railway, called for as far back as 1929, finally commenced operation in 1981, and is set to expand over coming decades, with five new stations planned as part of the Melbourne Metro Rail Project. Imagining the Melbourne of 2001 in a 1969 article in the *Australian*, Robin Boyd predicted the city would come to a standstill if its traffic issues weren't addressed:

*About 1975 every street became as paralysed as Sydney Road, Brunswick, was in 1969. Then in 1985 all cars became finally immobilised. Now they are double parked in every street and each is used by its owner in a different imaginative way ... Some are used as a TV room, some as a home for the family's senior citizen.*<sup>12</sup>



Melbourne had a taste of a car-free CBD in 1985. For a weekend in February, as part of Victoria's 150th anniversary celebrations, grass was laid down and trees were installed along Swanston Street between Flinders and Lonsdale Streets. Melburnians interacted with their city in a new way – and they liked it. This became a precursor to closing Swanston Street to cars in 1992.

The past three decades have seen dramatic changes in the city, as well as in the ways Melburnians and visitors engage with and inhabit it. Previously a space that was largely unpopulated after the theatres closed, the city is now a lively 24-hour hub of culture, art and dining. Its distinctive lanes have been activated through art installations, conversions of office buildings into apartments, boutique stores, bars and cafes. City of Melbourne programs – such as tree planting along Swanston Street, sustainability initiatives, bicycle lanes and the very successful 'Postcode 3000' scheme – have helped create a city that is regularly at the top of worldwide lists for liveability. Ironically, Melbourne has been transformed, not by towering landmarks, dramatic demolitions or outdoor escalators, but by subtle adjustments to the fine grain of its urban fabric.

The challenge for Melbourne now is to maintain this urban ecosystem as it looks towards the second quarter of the 21st century and beyond. In years to come others will look back and write the history of this future and assess the decisions that were made, as well as what might have been, from the perspective of their own time and place.

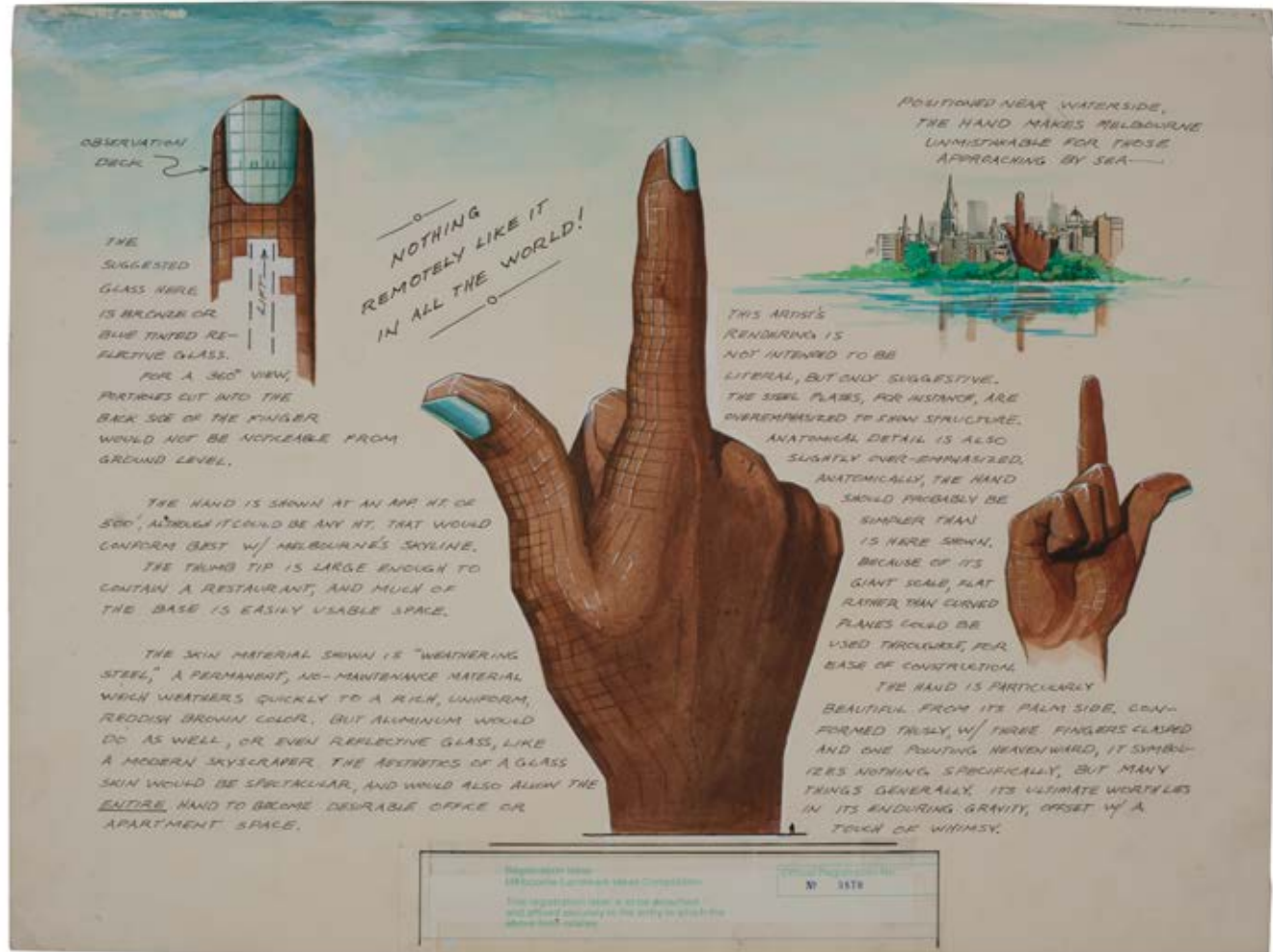
## Notes

- 1 William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Act 2, Scene 3.
- 2 Anonymous, 'Melbourne As It Is, and As It Ought To Be', *Australasian*, no. 1, 1850, quoted in Graeme Davison, 'Melbournes that Might Have Been: Three Dreams of the Future City', *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 63, nos 2 & 3, October 1992, p. 173.
- 3 Graeme Davison suggests Sir Redmond Barry or G.H. Wathen, editor of the *Australasian*, is the possible author. See Davison, p. 173.
- 4 'Melbourne As It Is, and As It Ought To Be', quoted in Davison, pp. 175–176.
- 5 Henrietta Dugdale, *A Few Hours in a Far Off Age*, M'Carron, Bird and Co., Melbourne, 1883, p. 7.
- 6 Harriet Edquist, *Harold Desbrowe-Anneer: A Life in Architecture*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2004, pp. 97–98.
- 7 Brian Lewis, 'Fifty Years from Now', in Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara and Philip Goad (eds), *Modernism & Australia: Documents on Art, Design and Architecture 1917–1967*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2006, pp. 612–613.
- 8 Robin Boyd, quoted in Judith O'Callaghan, 'The "House of Tomorrow"', in Ann Stephen, Philip Goad and Andrew McNamara (eds), *Modern Times: The Untold Story of Modernism in Australia*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2008, p. 164.
- 9 Max Delany, 'Structural Acrobatics: Small Homes and the City', in *1956: Melbourne, Modernity and the XVI Olympiad*, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne, 1996, p. 61.
- 10 See Frederick Romberg and Best Overend's design, published in the *Age*, 3 March 1948, and *Rebuilding the Melbourne of To-morrow*, a 1943 pamphlet by 'Veritas'.
- 11 John C. Jessop, Foreword (L.H. Luscombe). *Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme 1954: Planning Scheme Ordinance*, Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, Melbourne, 1954, p. vii.
- 12 Robin Boyd, 'Melbourne 2001 AD', quoted in Davison, p. 183.



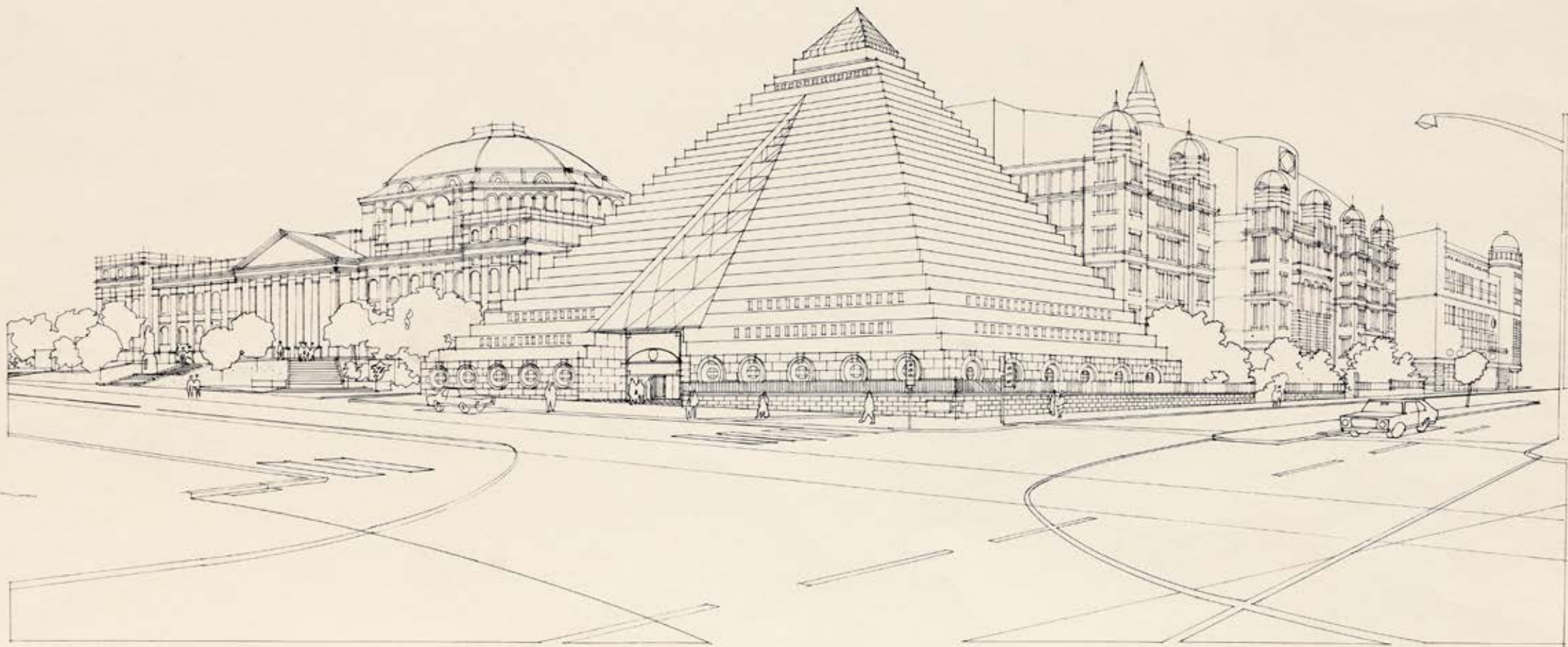


Human-hand-shaped  
building, 1978  
Designed by Michael  
Hilton, Decatur, Texas,  
USA  
Landmark Competition  
Drawings  
Public Record Office  
Victoria, VPRS 2869/P2,  
Unit 1626



№ 3678







#### PREVIOUS SPREAD

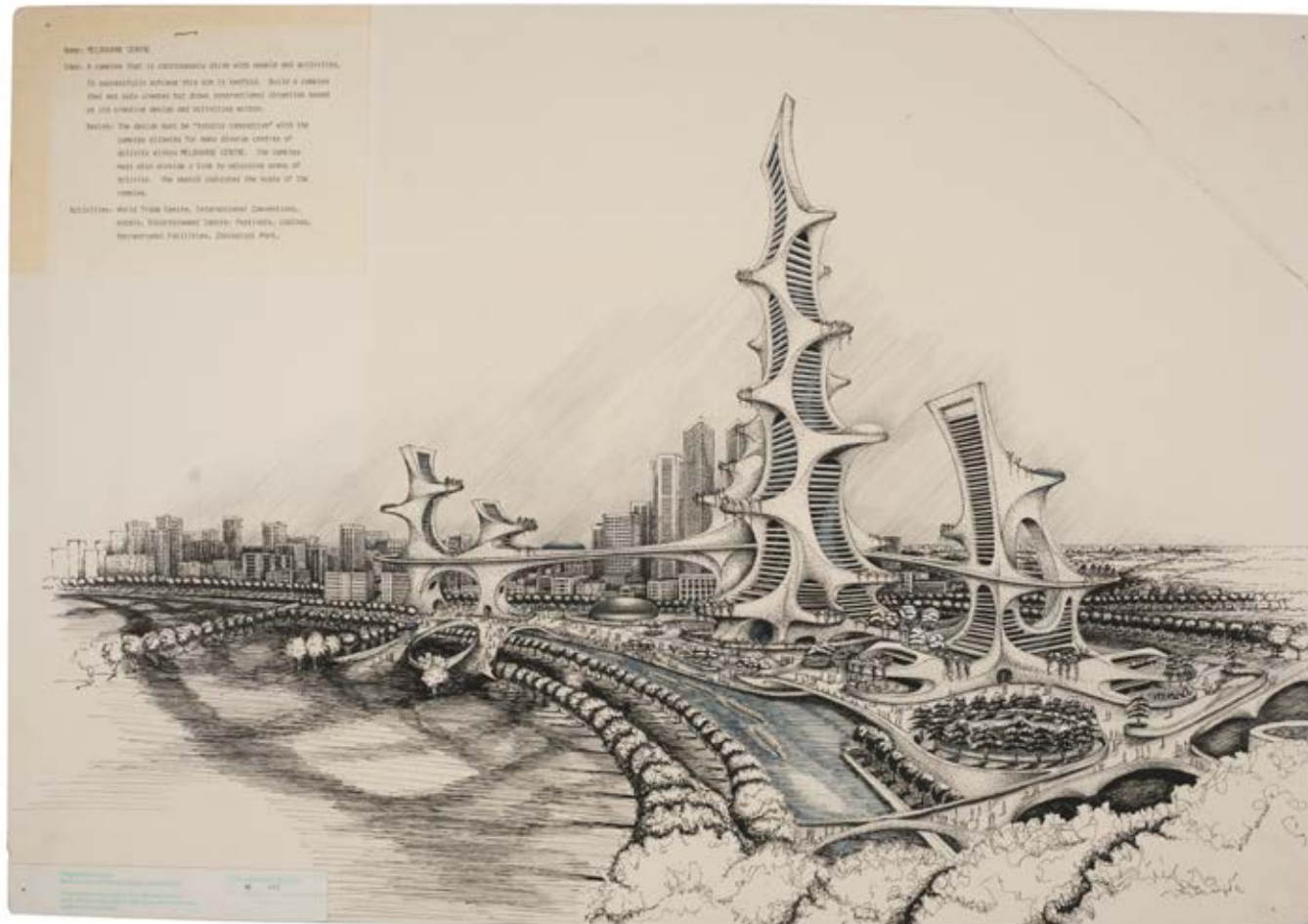
Peter Corrigan  
(Edmond and Corrigan)  
Design for the Victorian  
State Library and Museum  
Architectural Competition,  
1985  
Architectural drawing  
Courtesy of Edmond  
and Corrigan Pty Ltd

#### ABOVE

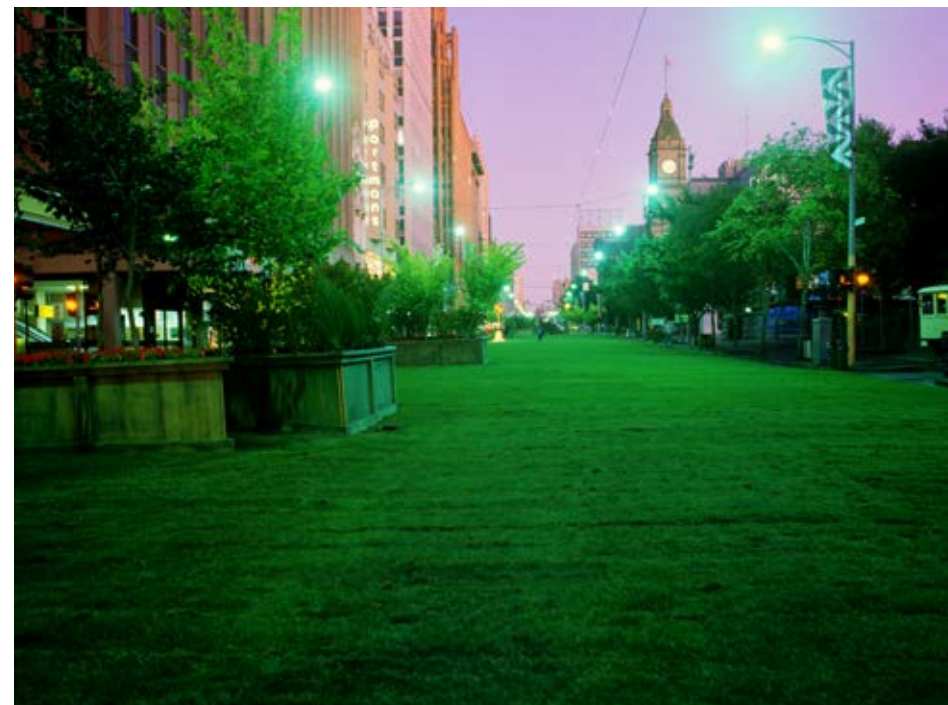
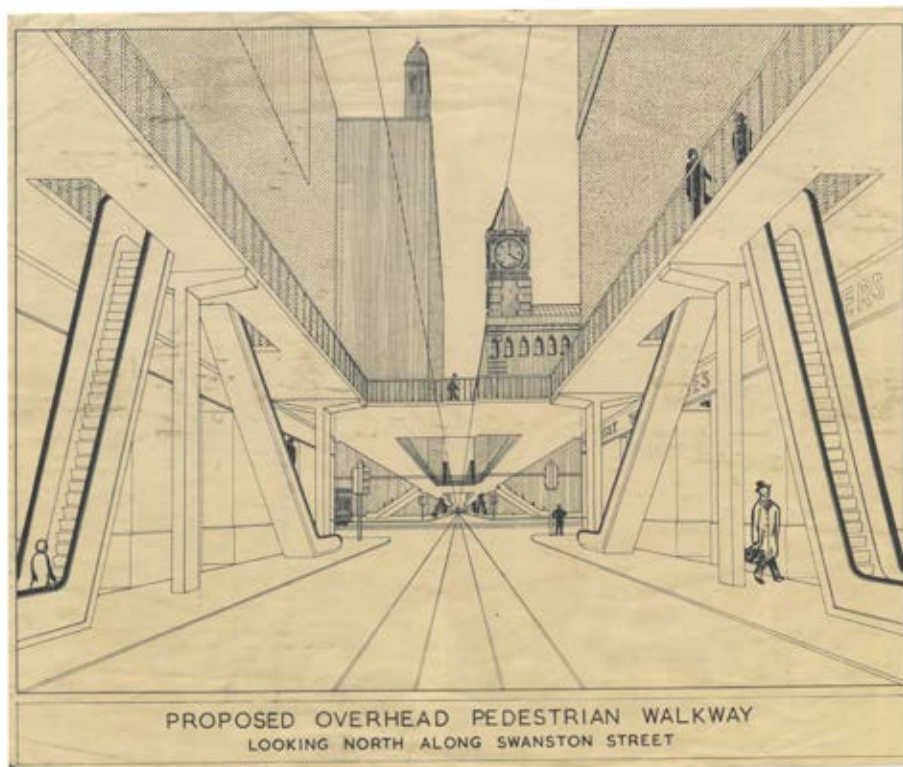
*Proposed Redevelopment  
of the Queen Victoria Market  
Site, c. 1970s*  
Architectural drawing  
City of Melbourne Art  
and Heritage Collection

#### OPPOSITE

Melbourne Centre, 1978  
Designed by Kenneth John  
Tuskes, AIA, architect,  
Ohio, USA  
Landmark Competition  
Drawings  
Public Record Office  
Victoria, VPRS 2869/P2,







**OPPOSITE**

*Proposed Overhead  
Pedestrian Walkway,  
Looking North Along  
Swanston Street, c. 1945*  
Architectural drawing  
City of Melbourne  
Information Management  
and Technology Services

**ABOVE**

Robert Suggett  
*Lawn at Dawn*, pre-dawn view of Swanston  
Street with grass laid for Victoria's  
sesquicentenary celebrations, 1985  
Colour silver halide archival print  
City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection  
Courtesy of the artist



A City Without  
A Plan Is  
A City Without  
A Future

# FUTURE MELBOURNE

A Better City to Live In



To Work In and Play In

Melbourne, Victoria, 1953

Melbourne, Victoria, 1953

## Why We Need To Plan

MELBOURNE today has  
1,400,000 people and  
more every day.

Without the kind vision of the  
future, the city will be a  
jumble of haphazard growth  
and uncoordinated chaos.

There is no room for  
error in the future. The  
city must be planned for  
the future, not just for  
the present.

But to have an ordered  
city, we must have a  
plan. We must have a  
vision of the future.

Planning does this for  
us. It gives us a vision  
of the future. It gives  
us a plan for the future.

The fact that the world  
is changing so fast, that  
the future is so uncertain,  
makes it even more  
important to have a  
plan.

That is exactly what the  
Future Melbourne Plan  
is. It is a plan for the  
future. It is a plan for  
the future.

## PEOPLE WELCOME SCHEME TO TACKLE CITY PROBLEMS

Preview of Things  
That Can Come



THANK COUNCILS.  
FOR SCHEME

WHOSE idea was it to draw up a Plan-  
ning Scheme for Melbourne? The  
credit must go to the municipal councils.  
It was they who first  
suggested the idea.

People's Turn Now To Have Say  
THE Planning Scheme is completed and is on exhibition. Now it  
is your turn to say what you think about it.

All you have to do is  
go to the exhibition and  
say what you think.  
It is your turn now.

PARENTS, housewives and businessmen who have been  
agonising for more schools, hospitals, playgrounds, roads  
and industrial sites will welcome Melbourne's Planning  
Scheme.

They will find it the first step toward  
obtaining the improved facilities they have  
been urging for many years.

Motorists will also welcome it as the first  
move toward easing traffic congestion.

Visual Needs  
The scheme will also take  
into account the visual needs  
of the city. It will ensure  
that the city remains a  
pleasant place to live in.

Many Benefits  
The scheme will bring  
many benefits to the city.  
It will improve the  
city's appearance and  
make it a more pleasant  
place to live in.

OVERPASS PROPOSED  
FOR ST. KILDA  
About 20,000 vehicles pass through St. Kilda  
each day and often cause congestion.

ADOPT SCHEME  
URGES EXPERT  
The scheme is a model  
of what a city can be.  
It is a plan for the future.  
It is a plan for the future.

People's Turn Now To Have Say  
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OPPOSITE  
Future Melbourne  
November 1953  
Newspaper  
Courtesy of Planning  
Institute Australia (Vic)

ABOVE  
Office of Frank Heath  
Housing Commission Slum Reclamation, c. 1952  
Architectural drawing  
Picture Collection, State Library Victoria  
YLTD/20/183, gift of Mrs Frank Heath, 1981







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## THIS PAGE

Miles Howard-Wilks

*Flinders Street*, 2015

Gouache on paper

38x56cm

City of Melbourne Art  
and Heritage Collection

Courtesy of the artist and  
Arts Project Australia

## INSIDE COVER

Lewis Brownlie

*A Melbourne That Might*

*Have Been*, 2016

Wall drawing

Commissioned by the City  
of Melbourne Art and  
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