

Jet
Set
MELBOURNE



CITY OF
MELBOURNE





INTERNATIONAL

A black and white photograph of a modern building facade. The word "INTERNATIONAL" is prominently displayed in large, raised, sans-serif capital letters along the top edge of the building. Below the text is a long, horizontal row of windows with dark frames and light-colored mullions. The building's exterior is a light, neutral color. In the foreground, there are several young trees and plants, some supported by stakes, suggesting a landscaped area or courtyard. The overall architectural style is clean and functional, typical of mid-20th-century modernism.

‘GONNA TAKE HER FOR A RIDE
ON A BIG JET PLANE. HEY HEY.
HEY HEY.’

ANGUS AND JULIA STONE, *‘BIG JET PLANE’*, 2010

We often hear about the romance of travelling by train. But what of the romance of travelling by plane? Can there be anything more romantic than taking flight into a new world, leaving behind the old? In a recent hit for siblings Angus and Julia Stone, Angus drawls about riding on a ‘big jet plane’. The song is about escapism; the ‘jet’ represents another life – a *better* life. The song is awash with helplessness and with the self-knowledge that the dream cannot be fulfilled. So the jet comes to stand for that which is impossible.

Even today, international jet travel seems somehow implausible: implausibly romantic and implausibly transformative. For many, visiting an airport arouses an Angus-Stone-esque yearning for escape. But in a more tangible way, airports breathe life into cities, becoming major arteries that pump ideas and culture into potentially stagnant outposts. Prior to the opening of Melbourne Airport in the 1960s, the city was the epitome of the stagnant outpost; the smaller Essendon Airport had limited capacity for international jets and could not receive the new breed of Boeing super-jets. A series of newspaper articles in the *Herald* from 1963 declared Melbourne: 'This Stifled City'. The first served as a stinging critique of Melbourne City Council, warning that 'Melbourne is growing fast but the heart of the city is not growing with it'. Key business and political leaders concurred, with former lord mayor Sir Bernard Evans noting: 'The inner city of Melbourne has seen hardly any change since the 1880s. Melbourne was a great city then, but we've been sleeping for the last 50 years. We need big builders with big ideas.'

The opening of the airport seven years later gave Melbourne the jumpstart it needed. It was like giving the city a new set of lungs, which allowed it to breathe and to absorb the potent liberalism that was spreading through the Western world. *Inhale*: planeloads of tourists flooded into the Melbourne. *Exhale*: Melburnians escaped, travelling into foreign worlds they had only read about, only dreamt about. The effect was profound. The international airport allowed the world to come to Melbourne, but just as importantly it permitted the hopes and dreams of Melburnians to take flight, giving them a sense of connectedness to the rest of the world. They became part of the 'jet set' and the newfound exposure to international travel blew the cobwebs off the club-like 'old' Melbourne, reinventing the city as a sophisticated metropolis. Travelling Melburnians returned with fresh ideas: sidewalk cafe culture, international cuisine, fashion, art. In 1972, Brian Carroll wrote:

By the 1970s, many migrants [to Melbourne] had become prosperous enough in



FIRST PAGE
Don Edwards,
*Melbourne International
Airport entrance, Tullamarine,*
1971
National Library
of Australia

OPPOSITE
Don Edwards,
*Vehicles at the arrival area
with the departure road
swinging across the front
of the building overhead at
Melbourne International
Airport, Tullamarine,*
1970

National Library
of Australia

OPPOSITE
TAA Annual Report
1965-66 front cover
image, 1965

State Library
of Victoria

*their adopted city to make a triumphal tour back to their old home town. They gathered in planeloads on Sunday afternoons at Tullamarine, Melbourne's new international airport. With them went many a locally born Melbourne citizen, launching his own international odyssey. Others just came to watch them go, momentarily to turn their thoughts to the world outside, momentarily to realise that theirs had become an international city.*²

As Carroll suggests, such was the intoxicating thrill of Melbourne's new airport that it sent ripples of excitement through the city, affecting even those who could never, or would never, travel. Its power has not waned over the years. The Melbourne Airport holiday of local sitcom celebs Kath and Kim may have been underwritten with irony, but it nevertheless attests to that power. They didn't need to fly; the romance of air travel was enough.

The opening of Melbourne Airport on 1 July 1970 was a huge event, sending a buzz through the metropolis. The airport was opened by Prime Minister John Gorton, who said: 'I will declare Melbourne Airport open, but I hope that lovely liquid name, Tullamarine, will not disappear from our vocabulary'.³ True to Gorton's wish, the airport was known as Tullamarine until its privatisation in 1997, which then brought an official name change to 'Melbourne Airport'.³

Guests at the opening included American astronaut John Glenn and the US ambassador to Australia, Ed Clark, who remarked: 'Man, that airport's really something'.⁴ And it was. This was due to Victorian Premier Henry Bolte's foresight to establish a major international airport on the outskirts of the city, where it could grow and where it would not be hemmed in by suburbs in the way that Essendon and Sydney airports have become. The airport was part of the Americanisation of Melbourne. It was one product of an influx of American ideas that included shopping centres (Chadstone opened in 1960), bowling alleys, highways and hotels. In a reflection of the times, Kenneth Myer travelled not to Europe for inspiration but to America when he was looking for ideas to invigorate his Myer shopping empire.





LEFT
Tullamarine Freeway
and Melbourne
Airport under
construction,
1967
State Library
of Victoria



CENTRE
Don Edwards,
*Entrance foyer
at Melbourne
International Airport,
Tullamarine,*
1975
National Library
of Australia



THIS PAGE
Brenda L Croft,
A Hostile Landscape,
2003, from the series
Man About Town,
2003
Giclee print on
rag paper.

Courtesy the artist
and Stills Gallery,
Sydney.
City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage
Collection.

Wurundjeri Land
Eastern Markets
Reed & Barnes
Southern Cross Hotel
International
Intercontinental
Featurism
Welton Becket & Associates
Robert Menzies
Logies
Beatles
Frank Sinatra
Tenpin Bowling Alley
Blue
Ignored
Design
Lost
2003

Academic Architectural Publications



Melbourne Airport was the first in the world to be based on the 'Airport City' model. Bill Bradfield, the airport's chief planner in 1946, developed the idea of using aviation land for non-aviation purposes to increase revenue.⁵ The airport featured a range of shops, cafes and bars, as well as a 300-seat cinema, a spacious observation deck and an extraordinary masterstroke called the Astrojet Space Centre, described as a 'window to the Space Age'. The centre's supporting booklet trumpeted that its 'working models, displays and films offer glimpses of aviation's past triumphs and look forward to man's newest eras of space exploration'.⁶ It had an educational focus, through its expansive study of human achievements in aerospace. This included moving vision of the recent moon landing, as well as elaborate scale models of the airport and the Melbourne CBD.

The arrival of the jet age in the 1960s, of which the airport was the apogee, not only excited the city's residents but it piqued the interest of multinational companies. Melbourne City Council recognised a boom and acted. It cleared the way for Pan American Airlines to build a world-class hotel on council land, bulldozing the historic Eastern Market at the corner of Bourke and Exhibition Streets to make way for its Southern Cross Hotel. As early as 1958, the *Herald* described the £3-4 million 250-bedroom hotel as 'jet-age'.⁷ As stewardess Betty Riegel later surmised, no-one could resist the charm of Pan Am:

*Pan American [was] the world's number one airline and the epitome of glitz, glamour and sophistication. Everyone who was anyone flew with them, from royalty and world leaders ... to Hollywood stars like Marilyn Monroe, Ava Gardner and Frank Sinatra.*⁸

Such was the confidence of the American airline in the Australian market that it completed the Southern Cross eight years before the airport itself opened. Among its early guests were Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland and the Beatles. The excitement began.

Through the 1960s anticipation for the airport mounted. Its development was inexorably linked to that of the city itself, as was reflected in the

OPPOSITE PAGE
Glenn Walls,
Southern Cross Hotel
(Bookcover), 2013

Acrylic Perspex
on wood panel
(2 panels),
70 x 50cm each.
Courtesy John
Buckley Gallery,
Melbourne.

Photography
by the artist.

City of Melbourne
Art and Heritage
Collection.



workings of the CBD scale model that would later feature in the Astrojet Centre; push a button on the airport model and a building in the city would light up. The expansion of infrastructure was astounding. The Southern Cross Hotel was soon joined by the Hilton, the Sheraton and the TAA head office, the latter in Franklin Street and an uncompromising vision of International Style architecture. It dramatically contrasted with Mac's Hotel, an authentic 19th-century pub that stood with newfound humility at the tower's feet. Other airline offices opened in the city – booking centres for the Melbourne 'jet set' – as did the offices for car rental companies. The perception was that international flights bringing international visitors would change the city – and this perception was accompanied by a determination that it would.

Logistics dictated that the time had come. The post-war years brought a surge in migration, resulting in rapidly expanding suburbs. The original vision of Essendon Airport expanding to meet the demand of newer jets could not be fulfilled; the airport had become landlocked. An Australia–US agreement signed in August 1957 allowed Pan Am to fly Boeing 707s into Melbourne, but they needed more runway than Essendon could offer. In July 1958, the Melbourne Airport Panel selected Tullamarine as the site of the new airport, with land acquisition commencing in 1960. The airport's architecture had two key influences: the position of the terminal in relation to the runways; and the terminal layout, which bore a striking resemblance to the Tecoma Airport, in Seattle, and its steel-and-glass facade stylistically recalled the recently completed La Guardia Airport, in New York. The \$50-million airport also needed a new freeway. On its completion, the Tullamarine Freeway was, at the time, the largest freeway in Victoria.

After many delays the new airport was finally operational, and Melbourne made no secret of its infatuation with it. The pride in this new structure could not be contained. The airport adorned the cover of the 1970 telephone directory and souvenirs from the opening

OPPOSITE PAGE

LEFT
James O. Nicholls,
The TAA Building
next to Mac's Hotel
in Franklin Street,
Melbourne, 1975

Pictures Collection,
State Library of
Victoria

LEFT
Wolfgang Sievers,
Aviation House,
1966

Pictures Collection,
State Library of
Victoria



ABOVE
Photographer
unknown, *Alitalia*
display at *Astrojet Space*
Centre, *Melbourne*
Airport, c.1970

Museum Victoria,
History and Technology
Collection



RIGHT
Don Edwards,
Cocktail lounge with
interesting ceiling at
Melbourne Airport,
Tullamarine, 1975

National Library
of Australia



spanned a stunning range of products. A folder produced by Qantas to commemorate the arrival of international flights included stickers, postcards, notepaper, an envelope, a serviette, and a leaflet giving 'Your clothing sizes around the world'. Each week an average of 120,000 travellers passed through its terminals – a substantial number that paled against the 250,000-odd sightseers to the airport each week.⁹ More than any other attraction in the city – and much more than just a place to catch a plane – the airport became a destination for all Melburnians. Aside from the sight of international jets taking off and landing, visitors flocked to Tullamarine to luxuriate in the extravagant interior of gold, red and purple, brimming with paintings, murals and sculptural reliefs by Harold Freeman, Guy Boyd, John Firth-Smith and Alun Leach-Jones. Some \$100,000 had been spent commissioning artworks for the new airport, and apparently little less had gone into furnishings and décor. This was the architecture of intent; after more than half a century in the wilderness, Melbourne had arrived.

The Airport brought countless tangible benefits to the proud city, but its benefits were also intangible. Aside from the migrants and international tourists who could now fly to Melbourne direct, Melburnians were able to travel and return home with new ideas. Melbourne's status as a multicultural city was confirmed. This could be seen at the airport itself, with its Brutalist-style architecture based on European ideas. The Top Air restaurant became one of the best in Melbourne, its head chef imported from Strasbourg where he had run a Michelin three-star restaurant. Culture and cuisine collided, epitomising Melbourne's newfound international credibility.

Melbourne Airport is an interesting case because it defies the airport typecast. If we think of airports as neutral interstitial spaces that are merely passed through on our passage between places (thus rendering it, according to French theorist Marc Augé, a 'non-place'), then Melbourne's model is anything but. This airport was aspirational and

LEFT
Photographer
unknown,
*Concorde aircraft at
Melbourne Airport,*
1972
Museum Victoria,
History and
Technology
Collection



transformational; it signalled Melbourne's coming of age. It pumped international sophistication into Melbourne's CBD via the new Tullamarine Freeway. But the excitement overshadowed the cost, in both human and built terms; the Eastern Market, for one, was casually swept aside during this urgent period of modernisation, and to this we might add something of Melbourne's individuality. The city seemed to disown its own character, trying to be something it wasn't in a self-conscious effort to look cool. Melbourne wanted what London, Paris and New York had: an international panache, at the expense of its own hard-won persona. Other casualties were the homes compulsorily acquired and demolished to build the Tullamarine Freeway, as well as the Moonee Ponds creek, which was buried beneath tonnes of concrete and steel.

Looking back at the 50 years since the arrival of the jet age in Melbourne, which predated the actual opening of the airport, reveals the repeated collisions of dreams and reality, and the points at which the alignment skews. The Alitalia display at the Astrojet Space Centre – one of many such displays from international airlines – offered a radical vision of the future, and makes for a fascinating contrast with the image of a TAA service check-in, with an almost robotic young clerk serving a customer. The arrival of the Concorde in 1972 was another key moment when the rest of the world noticed Melbourne, or cared enough to let us see firsthand this jewel in the crown of international jet travel.

Artists are sensitive to the undercurrents of cultural change, as works in this exhibition attest. Brenda Croft revels in the good feeling of flying in the 1960s; her father stands proudly in front of a domestic jet at Essendon Airport. Glenn Walls digs beneath the nostalgia to remind us that Melbourne was never ours to build airports on. The colours of the Aboriginal flag creep across the ground and upwardly consume the Southern Cross Hotel, a symbol of Melbourne's internationalisation in the 1960s. It serves as a stark reminder that

LEFT
Photographer
unknown,
*TAA Service check-in
with computer and
female clerk, 1972*
Museum Victoria,
History and
Technology
Collection



the arrival of the jet set only accelerated the loss of traditional ideas and people. Had John Batman's 1835 negotiation with the traditional owners of the land on which Melbourne was built included this future vision of concrete and steel perhaps the outcome would have been different. Paul White does give us a future vision – of the airport itself – where the jets have become rotting metal hulks. He proposes the reality of Croft's earlier dream of a better life promised by air travel, where hopes and dreams fall into decay – the brutal embodiment of what for many remains a resolutely unfulfillable dream.

The arrival of the international jet set in 1970 brought a profound and sweeping change to the city, but assessing its effects remains a challenge. While the tangible effects are easily quantifiable, the intangibles prove more elusive, although they continue to resonate. The Southern Cross Hotel – that most material product of Melbourne's romance with international travel – was demolished in 2002, and with it went something of the sheer aspirational will that settled over the city in the 1960s. It continues on in a variety of guises today, but in a different form to that remarkable moment on 1 July 1970, whose strange afterglow still pervades the city streets. Like the 1956 Olympics, it lingers in our collective memory. The formal transition from old to new on the tarmac of Melbourne Airport in 1970 signalled a surprising shift in the city's evolution, from an entirely future-centric focus to the beginning of a tolerance of and (eventual) infatuation with its history. Perhaps only with the arrival of the international jet set was Melbourne able to identify and understand how special Melbourne was.

Simon Gregg

LEFT
Paul White,
Desert Exile, 2012,
pencil on paper,
45 x 45cm, Courtesy
Scott Livesey
Galleries, Melbourne
and Mick Gallery,
Sydney. Photography
by Andrew Wuttke

- 1 'This Stifled City', *The Herald*, 21 October 1963.
- 2 Brian Carroll, *Melbourne: An Illustrated History*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1972, p. 123.
- 3 'Tulla 24 Hours a Day – PM', *The Herald*, 1 July 1970, p. 1.
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 I am indebted to Associate Professor Arun Chandu for this information; from a conversation on 10 December 2013.
- 6 *Space Vision: Melbourne Airport, Australia*, Sun Books Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1970, p. 1.
- 7 'Supermarket – 80 years ago!', *The Herald*, July 1958.
- 8 Betty Riegel, *Up in the Air: The Real Story of Life Aboard the World's most Glamorous Airline*, Simon and Schuster, London, 2013, p. 48.
- 9 *Melbourne Airport* (brochure), Department of Transport, Australia, undated [c. 1972].

JetSet Melbourne:
*When the Tullamarine
Airport brought the
world closer.*

20 February –
20 April 2014

City Gallery
Melbourne Town Hall

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



AUTHOR

Simon Gregg is a multi-faceted curator whose interests are wider and deeper than he cares to mention. Previously the Senior Curator of Melbourne's City Museum at Old Treasury, he is currently Curator at the Gippsland Art Gallery in regional Victoria. He is the author of two books of Australian art history.



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ABOVE

Amateur photograph
of passengers boarding
aeroplanes, Essendon
Airport, c.1960s

Private collection

INSIDE COVER LEFT

Aerial photo of Melbourne
Airport, from Melbourne
Airport Official Opening
Booklet, 1970

State Library of Victoria

INSIDE COVER RIGHT

Front elevation of perspective
view of Melbourne Airport,
from Melbourne Airport
Official Opening Booklet, 1970

State Library of Victoria

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citygallery.com.au



Jet Set Melbourne follows the fortunes of Melbourne during the 1960s ‘jet age’, culminating with the opening of Melbourne Airport in 1970. The exhibition relives the glitz and glamour of the era through stories, images, artworks and original artefacts.

Jet Set Melbourne celebrates 50 years since the first TAA and Ansett jet flights, heralding Melbourne’s ascension to the international jet set.

