microcosm of Australian society and, instead, shows how the ADF ‘took active steps to promote Reconciliation and Indigenous service’ (140).

Although Defending Country examines racist policies and how they impact Indigenous experiences in the ADF, the authors do not undermine the servicemen and women’s agency by presuming the effect of these policies. Instead, Defending Country is an example of an oral history that recovers marginalised voices while simultaneously mapping the marginalising forces. In doing so, the authors provide a deep history of how these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women entered and negotiated military life.

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EXHIBITION REVIEW
A HISTORY OF THE FUTURE: IMAGINING MELBOURNE
12 MAY TO 12 AUGUST 2016, CITY OF MELBOURNE, CURATED BY CLARE WILLIAMSON. FREE ADMISSION.

Two thousand and sixteen marks the five hundredth anniversary of the publication of Englishman Thomas More’s Utopia. More inspired the idea that humankind might imagine and create a better world. This anniversary was commemorated at London’s Courtauld Institute in its year-long programme entitled Utopia: A Year of Imagination and Possibility. These themes have also been explored in Australia this year. While the tumultuous international events of this year might dampen utopian thinking, I contend in this review that the pursuit of utopian ideas, especially in the urban realm, is as important than ever. It also explains why this exhibition resonated for Melburnians.

A History of the Future: Imagining Melbourne was presented at the City Gallery between May and August 2016. Drawing on the City of Melbourne’s Art and Heritage Collection, the City Gallery hosts a rolling annual programme of Melbourne-themed exhibitions curated by academics, freelancers and in-house specialists. Entered from Swanston Street, near the corner of Little Collins Street, located within Melbourne Town Hall, the City Gallery is a prominent exhibition space. It attracts dedicated museum goers as well as passers-by. It is a large turn-of-the-twentieth-century single-room space; re-presented for each exhibition, and flooded with light, noise and movement from Swanston Street. In contrast to outside, the space is nevertheless relatively serene and rarely crowded.

For the presentation of concentrated exhibitions such as this exhibition the City Gallery is ideal. Freelance
curator, formerly of the State Library of Victoria, Clare Williamson expertly realised this exhibition. The exhibition was an aspect of the City’s ‘Future Melbourne 2026’ project; as part of which Melburnians are being asked to reflect on their city. To inspire responses, this exhibition sought to conjure a historical consciousness amongst visitors; to show that the city has been subject to a diverse range of imaginings and contestations since its colonial foundation.

Entering *A History of the Future*, the exhibition demanded to be viewed as a historical, temporal and spatial urban panorama. Looking up, the visitor saw a 180-degree twenty-first century cyclorama. Commissioned by the City of Melbourne, illustrative artist Lewis Brownlie made a ‘wall drawing’ of 140cm by 1,384cm that crowned the exhibition space (figure 1). Contained in this figurative sketch, black ink on white backdrop, are motifs from the visuals on display within the exhibition, which are fused into his captivating creative Melbourne CBD landscape.

At eye level, images and plaques were presented under five themes: ‘Unbuilt Melbourne’, ‘Moving through the City’, ‘Homes for People’, ‘The Future is Here’ and ‘Looking Ahead’. Along with the introductory and concluding remarks, each theme had a label contextualising and historicising the displays that followed. Each of the themes corresponded to a section of exhibition space, which contained smaller labels and visuals such as paintings, sketches and photographs, architectural and planning drawings, and digital urban renders on screen displays.

The theme ‘Unbuilt Melbourne’ appropriated the largest amount of exhibition space, perhaps because of the abundance of archival material at the curator’s disposal. From at least the time of the anonymous 1850 pamphlet *Melbourne As It Is, and As It Ought To Be*, the city has been subject to countless architectural and planning proposals. Williamson primarily selected twentieth-century modernist comprehensive redevelopment schemes to illustrate this theme as interspersed with other notable unrealised proposals such as the 1990s Grollo Tower skyscraper.

Similarly optimistic, future-oriented imagery was used in the other displays. For the housing theme, slum clearance ephemera referencing social reformer F. Oswald Barnett was employed—albeit without explicit reference to the people that were displaced by these apparent improvement measures. ‘The Future is Here’ theme presented captivating architectural photographs, such as of the city’s first modernist skyscraper ICI House, the 1956 Olympic Pool and the Sidney Myer Music Bowl.
As in other recent public explorations of postwar modernist urbanism—such as the 2016 ABC documentary *The Streets of Your Town*—the underbelly of modernism, such as its technocratic and destructive aspects, were not brought into relief.

The ‘Moving through the City’ display juxtaposed interwar transport cross sections, one even incorporating spaceships, with 2015 Melbourne Metro Rail Project ephemera. This began the temporal transition from past to present to future; culminating in the ‘Looking Ahead’ theme, as part of which visitors were asked to record their ideas for the ‘Future Melbourne 2026’ project.

A short catalogue accompanied the exhibition. It took the form of an illustrated pamphlet, containing illustrations and a brief essay. The essay referenced a handful of primary historical sources, plus famed urban historian Graeme Davison’s article ‘Melbournes that Might Have Been: Three Dreams of the Future City’ from the *Victorian Historical Journal* (63.2 & 3, 1992, 168–88).

Davison’s article examined the imaginings of our 1850 anonymous pamphlet writer(s) alongside urbanists Frank Stapley and Robin Boyd. Davison observed, ‘Utopian thinking appears to be a characteristic product of those times when the see-saw is rising rapidly from a period of decline’ (172).

Perhaps affirming this point, a city dreamer himself, this year Davison published a compilation of his scholarship *City Dreamers: The Urban Imagination in Australia* (NewSouth, 2016). This year may well be one of those periods when utopian urban thinking is especially important, giving this exhibition added relevance.

The question arises whether the exhibition adequately engaged with the most pressing contemporary urban issues. There were certainly more opportunities for the exhibition to take a critical stance. There was
practically no indigenous presence, despite Melbourne’s extended and ongoing Indigenous heritage. Around slum clearance, issues of social inequality might have been better flagged. The realms of architecture and planning—for instance, in design and construction, heritage and transport—also lends itself to more sustained discussions of the environment and sustainability. That said, this exhibition had limited physical space—perhaps a digital supplement might have been useful?—and, within its conceptual and physical boundaries, it presented a complete, enjoyable and inspiring narrative.

A History of the Future was at once historically engaged and future orientated as well as impactful. With reference to the past, Melburnians were being asked to reflect on, debate and suggest ideas for their city. Urbanists call this form of participatory urbanism ‘placemaking’.

By bringing history to the forefront of the urban debate in such an engaging way, this exhibition was arguably cutting-edge. It certainly triggered a strong public response: favourable articles and reviews appeared in newspapers, online and on radio. The exhibition also drew on sound historical scholarship.

For those with a stake in Melbourne public and urban history, this exhibition was a triumph. A History of the Future successfully prosecuted the case that contemporary urban utopian thinking must engage with its pasts.

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Figure 1 (below). Lewis Brownlie, A Melbourne That Might Have Been, 2016, Wall drawing 140 x 1,384cm. Commissioned by the City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection. Reproduced with permission of the Artist and the City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection.