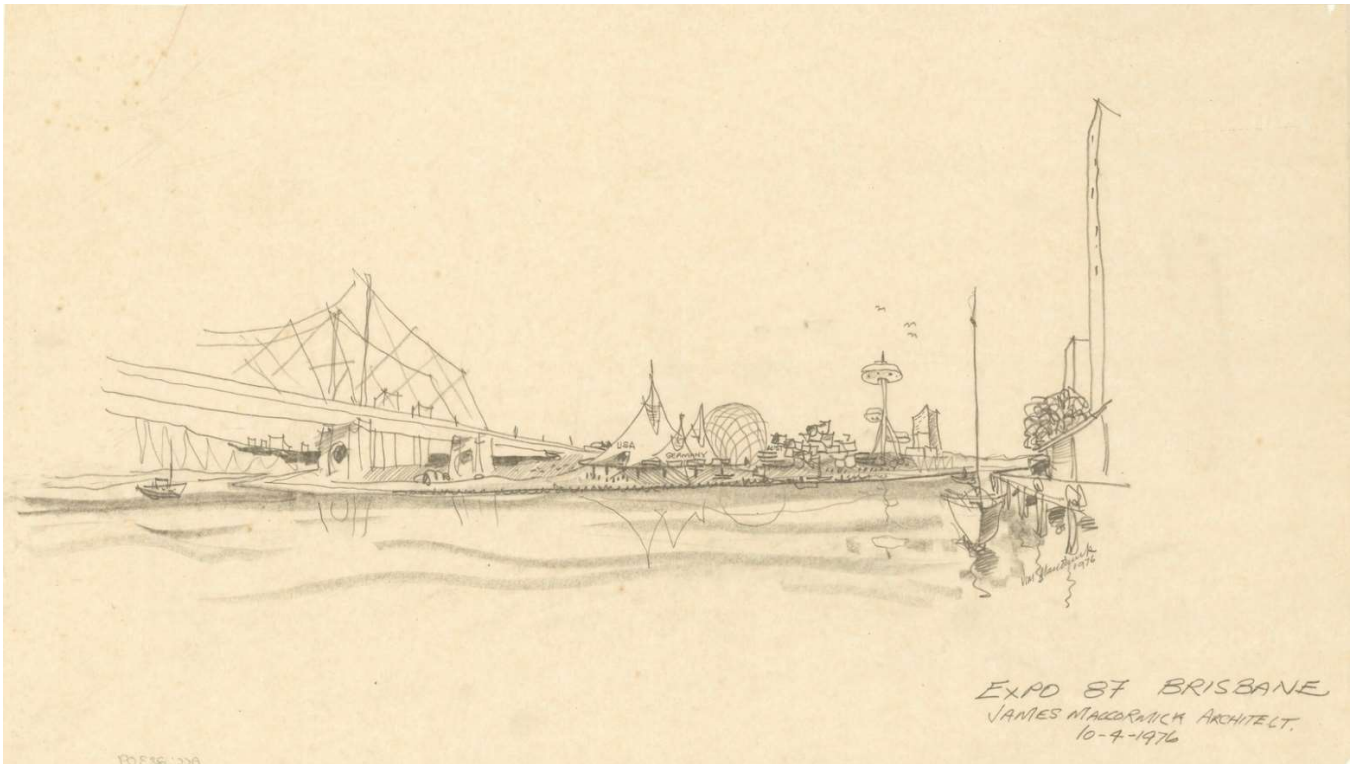


JAMES MACCORMICK (1926 – 2021)



Expo 87 Brisbane, 10 April 1976. James Maccormick. [Item no. 28309-3](#)

James Maccormick studied architecture at the University of Melbourne, graduating in 1950. Like so many others, he left Australia to work in London, Montreal and New York before returning to Melbourne in 1960 and joining the practice of Grounds Romberg & Boyd where he was a member of the design team for the National Art Gallery of Victoria.

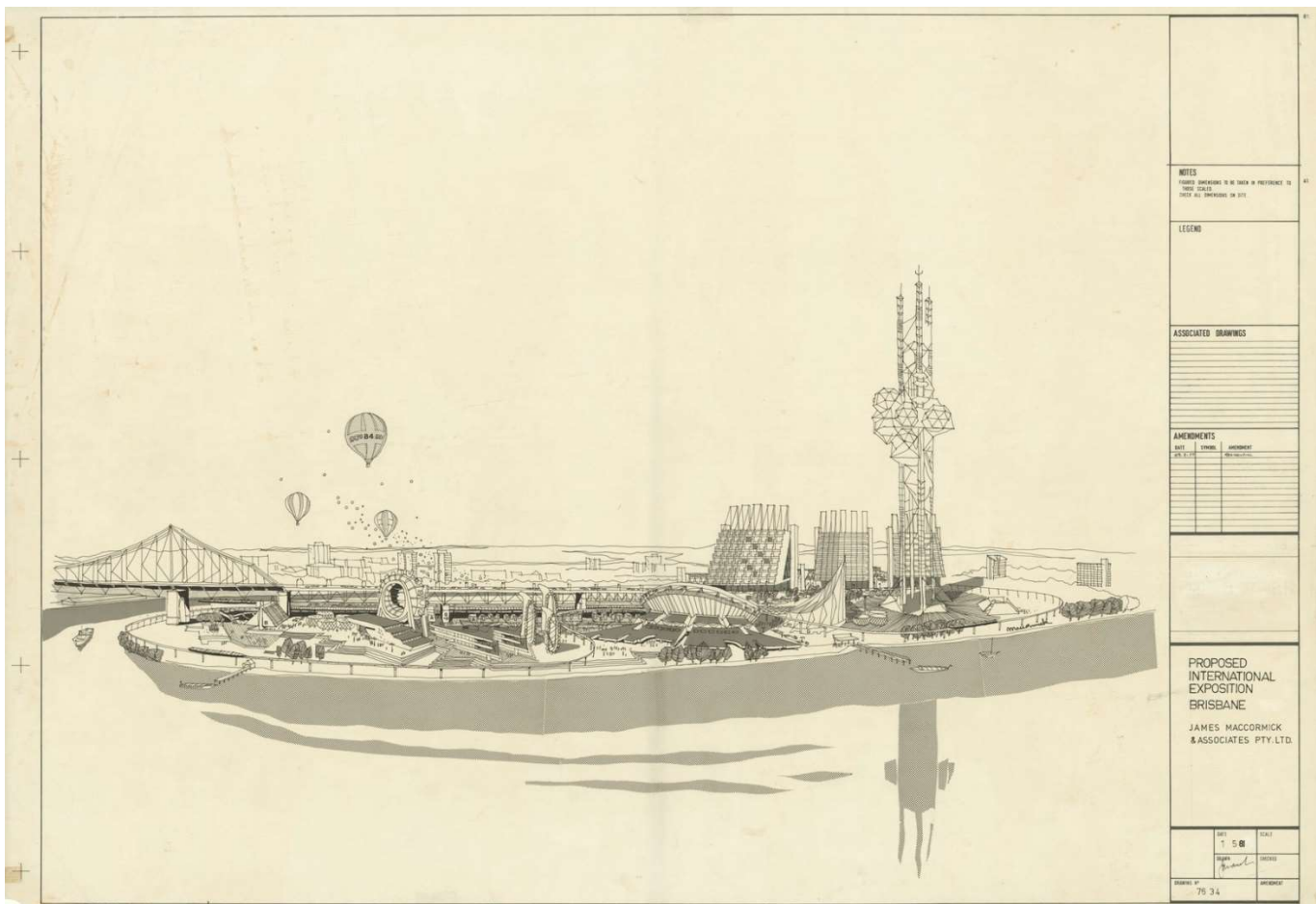
In 1964 Maccormick was appointed Principal Architect for the federal Department of Housing and Construction (also known as the Department of Public Works) in Canberra. Australia, in becoming more outward focused during the 1960s, decided to re-enter into International Expositions after a three decade absence despite a disappointing appearance at the World's Fair in New York in 1964. In his role as Principal Architect, Maccormick was tasked to oversee the Australian Pavilion at Expo 67 in Montreal after submitting a 'notional design' which impressed Cabinet. He also designed an Australian pavilion for the following Expo in 1970 in Osaka. During this period, Maccormick also designed the Defence Complex at Campbell Park in Canberra, now highly regarded as an example of Brutalist architecture.

From 1969 to 1978 Maccormick worked as University Architect at University of Queensland where he oversaw master planning and redevelopment of the St Lucia campus. During his tenure, in 1973, he was seconded to the federal Department of Special Minister of State to design the Australian pavilion and exhibits at Expo 74, held at Spokane, Washington state in the United States.

In 1976, Maccormick began to actively advocate for the idea of Brisbane hosting an International Exposition. He believed an exposition would be the ideal catalyst for the redevelopment of Kangaroo Point, meeting with government and business to enlist support. Maccormick, who established his own practice in 1978, realised that the celebration of Australia's bicentenary in 1988 provided an ideal opportunity to push for an expo to be held in Brisbane. His lobbying included talking to politicians and business leaders, as well as appearing on television and radio to raise public awareness of the idea. He finally won over Queensland premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen who undertook direct representations to the International Expo Authority after securing immediate support from acting Prime Minister Doug Anthony. Queensland eventually secured the rights for Brisbane to host the World Expo from April to November 1988.

With approvals granted and a 40-hectare site along the Brisbane River at South Brisbane selected, Maccormick realised that he needed a partner to deliver such a major project. While he had experience with expositions, his friend Graham Bligh had a much larger practice and the necessary resource, so Bligh Maccormick 88 was established in 1983 and soon appointed as master architects of World Expo 88 in Brisbane. The built form of the site comprised a series of eight giant 'sun sails' structures that evoked the festive spirit of circuses or shows without being enclosed. At night, the sails were lit and served as giant projection screens. A monorail transported the more than 15 million visitors around the site which also featured a pink submarine, and a giant Sky Needle acting as a beacon and landmark for the site. Expo 88 was undoubtedly a huge success and is widely credited with changing the landscape, both built and cultural, of Brisbane forever.

Following Expo, Maccormick formed his own practice, James Maccormick and Associates, working until he retired in 2011. He had been awarded an MBE for his contribution to Expo 67 in Montreal and in 2013 was awarded an OAM (Medal of the Order of Australia) for services to architecture. Maccormick passed away in 2021, aged 95 years.



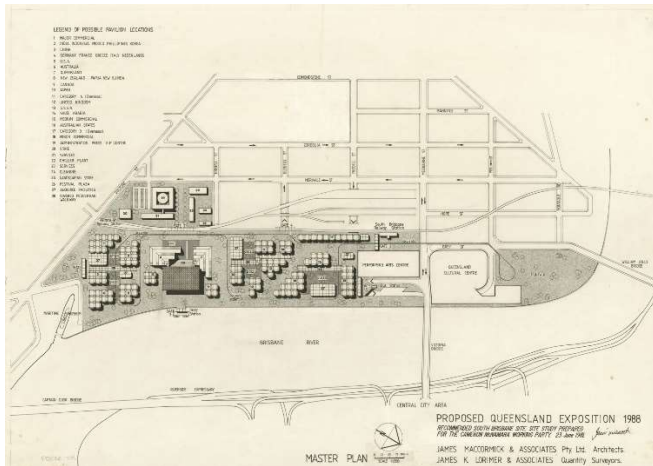
Early artistic impression of an exposition on the Kangaroo Point site, 1 May 1981. James Maccormick. [Item no. 28309-8.](#)

Collection resources

- [28309 James Maccormick World Expo 88 collection 1976-1999](#)
This collection includes records maintained by architect James Maccormick, including correspondence, notes, newspaper clippings, reports and 12 drawings in relation to World Expo 88 held in Brisbane.
- [29006 James Maccormick digital story 4 March 2013](#)
In this video, James Maccormick discusses his World Expo 88 collection to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Expo 88 in Brisbane.

State Library blogs

- [New acquisition: James Maccormick correspondence regarding the birth of World Expo 88](#) (2012)
- [More Expo 88 material from James Maccormick](#) (2012)
- [James Maccormick digital story and the 25th anniversary of Expo 88](#) (2013)
- [James Maccormick Expo 88 plans now digitised!](#) (2013)
- [Flashback – World Expo 88](#) (2018)



Left: *Master Plan, proposed Queensland Exposition 1988 [South Brisbane], 23 June 1981. James Maccormick. [Item no. 28309-5](#).*

Right: *Panoramic night view of Expo '88 in South Bank, Queensland, 1988. Photograph by Noel Pascoe. [Image no. 10028-0002-0008](#).*