



CITY OF MELBOURNE



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Literature

Remnants of a food court by Timmah Ball



Callum Morton, *Monument Park*, 2014. Glass reinforced concrete, synthetic polymer paint, steel, landscaping, lights. Commissioned by MAB Corporation, 2014. City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection. 21 NewQuay Promenade, Docklands, Melbourne. Photo: Patrick Rodriguez.

Docklands 2014: an experiment in place activation

It was generally understood that artists required large vacuous spaces to develop work. Abandoned warehouses, empty buildings and post-disaster sites like Fukushima were ideal enclaves. A deserted food court on the edges of Melbourne's floundering suburb the Docklands was an opportunity to push what was possible, distorting the boundaries between creative practice and personal existence. Still equipped with plastic seating and bain-maries once full of hot chips, dim sims and sushi, the area was reimagined as affordable housing and studios for artists. Hopeful bodies filled the space in exorbitant numbers that both thrilled and alarmed organizers who were reluctant to turn people away.

At the official launch a young woman acknowledged that they stood on the stolen lands of the Kulin Nations while people erected makeshift bedrooms from the former take away outlets. She possessed the type of verve which would see her gradually emerge as the artistic director outlining a vision for the future, where they crossed new terrain.

"In an era that feels more fractured than ever this new way of living and practicing captures the unsettled atmosphere of our times. Full of frenzied conversation, interrogation and work that will never feel resolved we will play with our deepest creative desires in ways that are frightening and light hearted. With important moments to pause, relieving the intensity with curated dance parties."

As artists continued to flow through excessively, elated by the possibility of a place to live and work at a subsidized fee it was becoming evident that there was insufficient space to accommodate the eager bodies. Amidst the sense of confusion which cut through a tall thin woman with sharp eyes stood in the corner calmly. It was unclear whether she was disturbed or humoured by the large fight, which broke out between groups of young artists vying for the small area which used to be Nando's.

Bunjil 2048 (formally known as the Docklands): *Value Capture/Value Creation, the transformation of a nation*

The architects gather around a large glass table with red plastic trays piled with mash potato, vanilla custard and chicken casserole. A pork rotisserie positioned confidently in the center of the buffet reminds them of the circular nature of their work, the failed experiments they recycled which flourished overtime. The restaurant modeled on food courts popular in the 80s and 90s reflected the way culinary tastes had shifted back to cafeteria style eating. It was a difficult trend for younger people who grew up on clean eating, which they associated with left liberal values. But it was greatly embraced by older generations that dominated the population.

It was 85-year-old architect Graeme Madison Founding Director of RN Studio who chose the restaurant to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Value Capture/ Value Creation (VC/VC) and the visionary impact it had on their work. A step beyond development contribution schemes it required all major built environment projects to consider their broader context and potential to improve people's lives.

VC/VC promised more than just a hospital, school or housing complex but a conglomerate of facilities and services which looked aesthetically dazzling while being socially transformative. It was this strategic framework that had enabled the studio to create *Monument Park*, a collaboration with the artist Callum Morton. The traditional high-rise apartment was altered by the striking series of neon pink tent like sculptures which hovered delicately within the forecourt in the former Docklands. More than just public art, it had been described as "an attempt to make a topography..."¹, "...avoiding a repeat of art as spectacle. *Monument Park* is a real city park, with plants and shade and places to sit."²

Monument Park was received affectionately. Office workers flocked to the area during their lunchbreaks happily taking photos for the hordes of tourists on Melbourne art trail tours. But conflict arose as the broader policy objectives were implemented. VC/VC emphasized air rights (the rights to utilize the air above the surface level of a property). The air between and above buildings became a valuable commodity moving beyond the limitations of conventional building practice, which required vacant land for the erection of

¹ Moreton, C in Mackenzie, A, 2015 'Ghost town: Monument Park' in *Architecture AU* <<https://architectureau.com/articles/monument-park/>>. Accessed April 2018.

² Mackenzie, A, 2015 'Ghost town: Monument Park' in *Architecture AU* <<https://architectureau.com/articles/monument-park/>>. Accessed April 2018.

any new structure. Architects and planners were free to delve into the endless possibilities of air. “*The Sky is Not the Limit, It’s the Solution*” was a phrase that echoed through design studios and construction sites enthusiastically.

Theme park style hotels were created in the spaces between skyscrapers and growth like structures in the architectural style of Gaudí started to appear on side of restaurants, hospitals and galleries. But communities were divided. Narm/Melbourne had been settled without a treaty, resulting in a chaotic approach to Native Title, which resoundingly favoured settlers. As land was developed, air was becoming the fastest-growing resource. Developers and governments fought over air rights grabbing what was available at a furious speed. As the race for air heightened, little respect was given to traditional owners or the long-term needs of Victorian Aboriginals, even though an Indigenous engagement strategy was written and many places across Melbourne such as the Docklands were given Aboriginal names.

In late 2048, representatives from the Wurundjeri Land Heritage Council met with ministers on the steps of Parliament House but the precarious nature of legislation made negotiations difficult. A small faction from the Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance gathered significant momentum by building a large vessel in the air space between Port Phillip Bay and the West Gate Bridge. Like the 1972 Tent Embassy built by Billy Craigie, Michael Anderson, Bertie Williams and Tony Coorey on the lawns of Parliament house, people congregated in the air demonstrating their sovereignty. As the structure evolved many began living there permanently, and a fleet of boats were created which intercepted border security and ensured that many asylum seekers avoided detention. But these histories were not accurately recorded and few remembered the airship after it was burnt by right wing radicals in 2031, an incident many believed was orchestrated by the government.

It was evident in the way that Graeme Madison stood that he was exceedingly proud of his contribution to architecture. As he delivered a speech on the significance of his work he didn’t quiver as the audience shuffled in and out of their seats refilling their plates at the buffet. Instead he stated unequivocally that:

Value Capture/Value Creation radicalized how we thought about public projects and communities. It improved productivity, increased access to jobs, public amenity and design. It drove affordable housing, the provision of open space, community facilities, and energy efficiency. To put it succinctly it multiplied opportunities for innovation and radically reshaped our nation.

The architects gathered their jackets as the official proceedings ended. Tipping the gaunt artist/waiter generously, they decided to walk past *Monument Park* before returning to the office. They were struck by the variety of homeless people nestled in the bright angular structures which protected them from the rain and sharp winter wind. Delighted that design and public art created aesthetic joy while delivering social services as a sense of hope loomed.

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Timmah Ball is a mixture of things: urban planner, writer and community arts worker. She grew up in Melbourne but her heritage is Ballardong Noongar from Western Australia on her mother’s side. She is

passionate about using arts and culture to create inclusive cities and believes that planners need to think about people rather the zones and overlays.

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Monument Park – citycollection.melbourne.vic.gov.au/monument-park

City Collection – citycollection.melbourne.vic.gov.au

Public Art and Memorials Map - citycollection.melbourne.vic.gov.au/public-art-and-memorials-map