This catalogue was printed in conjunction with the exhibition

Death Watch
25 October - 17 November 2012
Screen Space

All images of works courtesy of the artist

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Thank you to Eugenia Lim, Pauline, Dan, Alice & Rosalind,
Blair Gatehouse, Rose Scott, Maggie Scott, and Screen Space.

ISBN: 978-0-9872860-3-1
Published by
Screen Space
www.screenspace.com
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Ground Floor / 30 Guildford Lane Melbourne Australia 3000
Minor Ruptures

When I step off the number 59 tram, two girls appear and ask me where Kmart is. I take a guess around to the back of Puckle Street and after a visit to Ray’s Top Nuts where a man, presumably Ray, sells me an assortment of nuts without speaking a word! I find myself on Everage Street. It feels good to get the Dame Edna reference out of the way so early in the day.

Things are pretty quiet here, except for the insistent bubbling of a deep fryer emanating from the Noodle Hut. The Ponds dwellers I know assure me things were different in the heyday of the Market’s demolition in 1997, a 1.25 hectare site on which much of it once stood has, well, just sat there, while the surrounding commercial precinct has enjoyed a mostly uninterrupted real estate boom.

The site’s owner, Reading Entertainment, was given approval in 2000 to build a twelve-cinema complex, but their plans have continually stalled or been postponed. Regularly attracting the attention of journalists and council bureaucrats, the complex has earned a kind of media fame and infamy as a construction project symbolising a wider problem of suburban investment. The Moonee Ponds Market, when this street was home to its vibrant Everage Court. Since the Market’s demolition in 1997, a 1.25 hectare site on which much of it once stood has, well, just sat there, while the surrounding commercial precinct has enjoyed a mostly uninterrupted real estate boom.

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I have a feeling Scott would disagree. While the standard complaints levelled at shopping centres as privatised, exclusionary spaces can also be directed at suburban markets (which are similarly owned by large property developers), there is a key difference in their social implications. Unlike the wide-ranging ambition of the shopping centre, the market is (in principle) a utilitarian space in which the transactional purpose of your visit is transparent. You go there to do your shopping, not to seek personal fulfillment. In practice, this transparency yields an unpredictable set of social relations, which might explain why Scott, her family and her friends valued the Moonee Ponds Market so highly for its contribution to their community.

It strikes me that one of the strengths of Scott’s work lies similarly, in its relationship to transparency. In Death Watch she directly presents us with such familiar and everyday scenery that we are made curious about its underlying history. Whereas photographs alone might have provided a kind of pop-archaeological evidence of the past, Scott’s multi-channel video conveys the complexity of the site’s history. As her camera encircles and examines the site, people, cars and birds slip subtly in and out of the three screens. These minor ruptures, and the flux-expository use of edge wipe transitions to reveal only more of the same scenery, hint at the opacity of the forces which will determine the site’s future.

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In one way Death Watch literally keeps vigil over the last signs of the Market’s life: the tiled scenic beauty. Scott frames it as if it looks today. Although listed as a temporary car park for the past six years, it still bears the crumbling indications of its past: a once-bloody butcher’s floor, a curved entrance in modestly-garnish tiles. In front of this backdrop we see cars glide in and out, and people ambling to and fro with shopping bags.