



BY MISS. KITCH

M. ULLADULLA

Who was Missy Kitch?

Do we look back on the past with optimism or pessimism? Historical photographs have become facades on Sydney streets. I find them a kind of outrage. They are so fascinating at first inspection but they disguise the collision of the present and the past. A Crown St historical photograph is placed to cover up some architectural folly on Pitt St. The photograph makes us swoon but it is in effect highly misleading. I suspect all of us now look at the future with pessimism and sigh at the past. The historical bill boards are like weasel words, they usher us into some dreadful future with no chance to protest, no accountability and above all, no authorship.

In the 1980s the State Library of NSW sent some intrepid librarian activists to 24 regional towns around the State 'to take photographs of amateur photographs' of regional areas.¹ One of them is this remarkable photograph of Ulladulla by Miss Kitch or Miss Hitch. You can find the picture opposite reproduced on the wall of Dominos Pizza on the corner of South St and the Princess Highway. Dominos is about three quarters up the hill past the prominent white house, now a pub, across the bridge over Millards Creek. So the photograph is reproduced at a place that is a reversal of the vista. Now Woolworths, K Mart, Funland and the whole kabal of commercial shops run up the right hand side of what is now the Princess Highway.

The irony is Ulladulla, with one of the worst civic landscapes of any town, rivalling Nowra for its ugliness, is a wonderful coastal place. I prefer it, far more to the twee Milton for many reasons. The ugliness prevents the destruction and invasion of tourists. Vance Palmer wrote **The Passage** about the stretch of water between Bribie Island and Caloundra in the 1930s. It really should be turned into a film because it sums up how and why we have tried to destroy the spirit of all our coastal areas.

It may be you curse the long traffic queue that now invariably winds up this now covered up bridge as you make the journey south along the coast, it remains a place of wonder. It is a place where Tim Winton's loners still live in some tent or car parked on a reserve or in a caravan park. There are many secret places that I don't want to tell you about here. Miss Kitch has captured for us something of the Garden of Eden Australia was and still is, despite it all. She is shouting at us from the past. Imagine a fresh water source coming into a small harbour like this - how good it must have been and against all odds still is. Somewhere near here was a shanty town made out of tin, a happy place to live that some city council would later close down in favour of some empty, desolate sporting ground. They moved people on, but they could not. For all the gloom there is still spirit alive in ugly places like Ulladulla. I am glad too that we don't know who Miss Kitch or Miss Hitch was? We have to imagine her.

Endnotes

1 In 1988, funded by the NSW Bicentennial Council, the State Library of NSW devised a project to collect images of rural NSW. Project co-ordinator Alan Davies and photographers Jenni Carter and Shayne Higson, toured regional NSW, visiting 24 towns. At each town members of the public were invited to bring in their photographs for inspection by the project team. Suitable images were copied, and the original returned to its owner. Selection criteria included a pre-1940 date and that the subject of the image could be identified. Alan Davies described the basic criterion as “Will this photograph be of interest to other Australians?” Generally portrait photographs were not copied. Data sheets were filled out to record any information the donor could recall about each image. About 7000 images were selected, and put onto a videodisc, called “At work and play”, in 1988/89. In January 1999 digital copies of the videodisc images were made available on the Internet. Reference: At work and play : our past in pictures / [compiled by] Alan Davies. Sydney : State Library of New South Wales, 1989.