

AN EVIL ANGEL AT WOONONA BATHS PROPOSED MYSTERY EXCURSION

Bookings Required by 6th May. Full Details From Joyce McCarthy 29 8225

We value artists for their vision.

We sometimes prize their way of seeing the world more highly than our own. They seem often to stand above us lesser mortals and we recognise that the artist frequently looks upon a landscape with a lens that speaks truer than any camera.

And to the truly great artist we sometimes ascribe the ability to see beyond.

Beyond the horizon, beneath the surface - to see, perhaps, even beyond the present.

To paint, to feel, to etch, with an insight that is, occasionally, downright scary.

To see, sometimes, just a little bit too much.

Such prescience is uncommon.

But in late December 1993, former Thirroul artist, Amanda Townsend, sent her many friends on the South Coast a Christmas greeting.

And so it arrived - a hand coloured sketch of a scene Amanda had painted at least thrice before - in her 'Bulli Beach (looking south) 1989, 'Bulli Beach (looking south) 1990', and the 1990 pastel 'Woonona Baths, after Giorgio di Chirico's PIAZZA D'ITALIA (1913)'.

In each of these earlier works the Woonona Baths was the dominant feature - standing like some ruined seaside Greek temple side by side a two storey red brick veneer and its attendant Hills Hoist in the 1989 work; and as the perfect spot for a reflective seaside passeggiata in Amanda's 1990 opus.

Ironically, the centre-piece of the 'after Di Chirico' 1990 landscape, detracting from the scene's all too obvious beauty, is a Wollongong City Council poolside sign indicating 'No Dogs, No Diving'.

Nevertheless, the painting conveys a clear impression of a peaceful Wollongong morning, framed by a pale blue atmosphere where the built and natural environments (with the exception of the Council's particularly tacky sign) are in harmony.

The viewer is given the warm yet distinct impression that at Woonona beach there exists, quietly transfixed between a remarkable Beach Pavilion and its associated baths and seascape, the finest piazza and historic promenade Wollongong has to offer.

The painting appears to suggest that even a demolition contractor specialising in heritage buildings would think twice before knocking over one of the quietest of Wollongong's unsung architectural treasures.

Some bureaucrat might have stuck a 'No Dogs, No Diving' smack in the middle of one of Wollongong's most glorious northern vistas, but this didn't stop the artist loving a landscape which only philistines could mock.

Indeed such was her veneration of this particular Woonona beauty spot that Amanda Townsend's 1993 Christmas sketch (pictured below) foretold of the

coming of an angel.

It was titled 'The Annunciation at Woonona Baths, near Wollongong. N.S.W.'

But, to me at least, the image of the angel was unsettling.

Amanda's first religious work? Maybe, maybe not.

Yet, at any rate, her reverence for this little bit of Wollongong was clear.

Now that Amanda (and her husband Paul and son Leo) had left the Illawarra to live on the North Coast, this place at Woonona, this Pavilion and its piazza by the sea, was obviously the place by which she had chosen to remember a landscape she still loved.

I immediately wrote, expressing my admiration for 'The Annunciation' and dared to suggest that she now had her first entry for the Blake Prize (the equivalent to the Archibald, but for religious painting).

But on the morning of the 23rd March, 1994, 5 days before Amanda Townsend was to make a lightning visit to Wollongong (after presenting a workshop on etching techniques at Sydney University) Wollongong City Council demolished a treasured part of our seaside heritage.

The Woonona Baths Pavilion was bulldozed.

They were still cleaning up the wreckage two days later on the 25th March.

The 25th of March is 'Lady Day'.

Annunciation Day!

Annunciation as in the announcement of the Incarnation of the Virgin by an angel (Luke 1 28-38) and the festival commemorating this event.

The vision.

The Angelic Vision.

'The Annunciation at Woonona Baths, near Wollongong. N.S.W.'

Such is the prophetic power of art!

If only we can read it right.

Just last Christmas, on looking at Amanda Townsend's sketch, I saw a blessed Angel.

Today, I see the Angel of Death.

But it's a part of Wollongong that has died.

The passing of an important piece of what was once our highly distinctive seaside architecture.

And if you are aware of Wollongong's record when it comes to preserving heritage buildings then there is no need to ask for whom the wild waves at Woonona weep.

Austinmer and North Beach Pavilions!

They weep for you.

Cause you're probably next on the hit-list.

[Amanda Townsend is a promising young artist and printmaker. She is available for commissions by phoning (075) 242485 or via P.O. Box 97 Kingscliffe, 2487.]

The Woonona baths were built in 1924.

The Pavilion was probably constructed in 1929. A Mercury report of 1928 notes that building will start soon. No report on the opening appears to have taken place. Ironically, the Mercury did not do a report on the demolition either.

JOSEPH DAVIS

The vision of the Angel of Death was a dark and gloomy one, but it was a vision that was shared by many of the people of Wollongong. It was a vision that was shared by the people of Wollongong who were living in the middle of the 19th century. It was a vision that was shared by the people of Wollongong who were living in the middle of the 19th century. It was a vision that was shared by the people of Wollongong who were living in the middle of the 19th century.