

## **A brief background to the series of photographs taken by Alan Bates during the period April to September 1963**

I was twenty two and living where I was born in Sydney and not feeling very settled in my career as an insurance clerk. I was studying music at the time, clarinet being my first love. Oddly enough, my teacher, Ken Hardy, further nurtured my interest in painting, and I could see no reason why the two pursuits couldn't go hand in hand. My musical studies were at a stage where I was considered for the B.M.C. Youth Orchestra, however painting seemed to come to the fore, something I had been doing on and off since I was about fifteen. Both my parents were involved in the photo industry in the processing side of Kodak, so I was well initiated with taking pictures from an early age. My first major purchase after starting work in 1956 was a Voigtlander Vito B 35 MM camera, the cost of this was equal to about six weeks wages. The taking of colour transparencies was extremely popular at the time and most of the family were keen photographers, slide nights being the big thing.

Back to 1963 and me feeling restless. I left my job in Sydney and headed south for Melbourne. My first accommodation was a bit of a culture shock, the Staffa private hotel in Nicholson Street opposite the Exhibition Building. Thankfully that only lasted a few days before I found a flat at the Moulin Rouge in Dickens St. east St. Kilda, this building no longer exists however there are two images in my collection of photographs. I managed to secure a job in an insurance company in Collins St. and would quite often walk to work along St. Kilda Rd. The stately homes which once graced St. Kilda Rd. made quite an impression on me and have photographed a few of them, an urban landscape quite different from anything I had encountered in Sydney. On Friday nights I would walk from Dickens St. to a friend's place in East Malvern, the most noticeable sensation during those winter walks was the not unpleasant smell of briquette smoke, uniquely Melbourne. The number of photos I took during that time doesn't seem great but unlike digital photography care was taken to make a good photograph with every shot, considering the cost of film and processing. My choice of subject was mostly related to my interest in architecture, being closely related to sculpture and the visual arts. The grand Victorian buildings and the ICI building, being the first high rise modern 'glass' building in Australia took my interest, and were quite different to what I had been accustomed to in Sydney.

I decided that shift work might suit my lifestyle and returned to Sydney to join the airline TAA, returning to country Victoria around 1970. My interest in art never waned so as a mature age student left the airline and studied full time at the University of Ballarat where I gained my BA and Graduate Diploma, majoring in painting. I still use photography as a means of note taking. I trust that the series of 1963 photographs will find a useful place in the history of Melbourne and am grateful to Mr. Eddie Butler-Bowdon and Julia Johnston for taking such an interest in them.

Alan Bates

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