



LINDA TROELLER

During the first half of the 20th century, the scourge of public health was tuberculosis. The death rate of those infected with the “white plague” was 95 percent. Telltale tuberculosis symptoms included a cough, fever, drenching sweats, weight loss, and weakness.

Here in the late 20th century, the death rate and many major symptoms are mirrored by AIDS.

In the 1930s, photographer Linda Troeller’s mother was confined to a TB sanitarium, where she kept a diary of her experiences. It details society’s morbid fear of those afflicted with the disease. Inspired by the diaries and her abhorrence of discrimination against AIDS patients, Troeller has created a traveling exhibition of photo-collages addressing

the parallels between the diseases, from which the above was taken.

For *TB-AIDS Diary*, Troeller has taken lines from her mother’s diary and fragments from the diary of a woman whose son died of AIDS, and has superimposed them on X-ray film over 20 impressionistic collages, combining snapshots, models, flowers, and other three-dimensional objects.

“I chose collage because I can layer realities, memories, and time,” Troeller says. “It was a way to translate the scars, stigma, and possibilities.” Through her art, Troeller attempts to demystify AIDS by reminding us of the terror caused by TB, and urges us to retain the hope that AIDS, like TB, will be cured.

“When the hysteria about AIDS began to mount, I started to hear that AIDS patients were having problems getting housing, or a teacher was going to get barred from the job,” Troeller says. “I remembered my mother telling me that in the 1930s, when people like her who’d been in tuberculosis sanatoriums started returning home, their employers were sometimes afraid to hire them back, fearful that TB would infect the work force. So I was

immediately sympathetic to that aspect of the AIDS experience.”

The caption drawn from Troeller’s mother’s diary in the collage above reads: *March 24, 1934. My chest empties . . . my chest. I am nursing my chest. There is only a cavity full of pus for the locust. I was nothing before the TB came . . . “Bleached bones in the moonlight,”: Brave New World, Huxley.*

“The fact that TB is being reported as an increasing cause of death in AIDS patients,” Troeller says, “is a warning of the cycle of disease. Who is not unclean? We see ourselves in them. Their mortality is ours. And we’re afraid. That a terrifying health crisis like tuberculosis was overcome in America is a reminder of hope.”

Troeller, who holds master’s degrees from both the Newhouse School (1972) and College of Visual and Performing Arts (1975), is the recipient of a New York State Council on the Arts Grant and a former teacher at Stockton State College and Indiana University. Her photos have appeared in the *Village Voice*, *Tokyo Journal*, and *Photo Review*, among others.

—GEORGE LOWERY

TB-AIDS DIARY will soon be on display in the following locations: Omega Institute Gallery, Rhinebeck, New York, September 7-12; Women’s Studio Workshop, Rosendale, New York, September 10-October 5; Center for Photography at Woodstock, Woodstock, New York, September 17-October 16.