

Linda Troeller, "TB AIDS Diary," John Jay College Gallery, NY

Troeller Continued

novel to her credit, Troeller does not settle for a single sensibility. But she speaks about "TB-AIDS Diary" primarily as a photojournalist. "I see this as an extended form of documentary photography," she explains. "General audiences can view and react to it."

Troeller borrows from Madison Avenue aesthetics; her most successful pieces have the graphic punch of an ad, like the photo of the white-gowned woman stamped "INFECTED WITH" in bold red Barbara-Kruger-esque letters. Her visual imagery is more consistently potent than her texts, which at times flounder. For instance, we could do without the laundry list of society's woes in one otherwise-striking collage, *Aegism. Sexism. Racism. Etc.* In such a complex and thoughtful body of work, this reductionism seems a travesty. But the same collage offers this thought: "When a Zulu dies, everyone goes down to the river to be cleansed. Who is not unclean?"

Troeller's subject matter may be grim, but her message is hopeful. Putting AIDS into historical perspective, she reminds us that, once upon a time, there was no cure for TB, either.

— Marilyn Stern

Marilyn Stern is a NYC-based photographer and writer whose book about whaling in the North Sea (text and photographs) is due out this year.

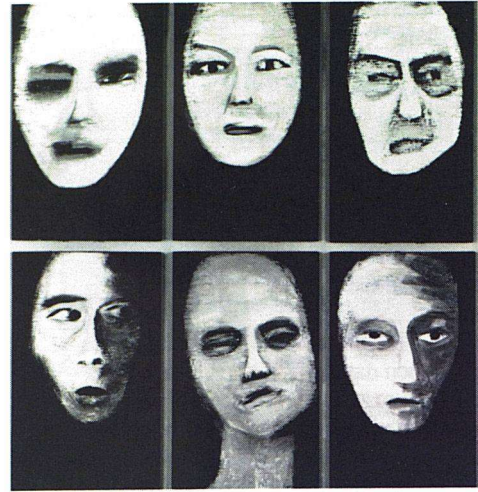
Darla Bjork

Ceres Gallery, NYC
October 1988

Darla Bjork, painter and psychiatrist, addresses the wounds of the soul caused by mental illness in a series of small untitled panel paintings. Forty incandescent faces lined the gallery walls, variations on themes of confinement and mental torment reverberating in a dark world.

Painted in melting pinks and dry-iced turquoise, they float and loom out of black backgrounds, female and male and neither, a lyrical description of how victims of schizophrenia lose their original identities and are consigned to a hell where they can't communicate their anguish.

Bjork began painting abstractly in 1979. Friends recognized quasi-facial images, which had surfaced unconsciously. Since then, the paintings have become increasingly intimate and specific. They bring to mind Edvard Munch and the German Expressionists, but the experiences and impulses propelling Bjork's art are unlike the Expressionists. She is trying to reconcile the meanings of madness. She says she has always questioned the "why" of suffering. Not only does she ask how much is genetic and how much is



Darla Bjork, "Faces," 1988, Ceres Gallery, NY

environmental, but how much is spiritual. Having worked with people from all kinds of backgrounds, she found that those from less grievous and deprived circumstances may experience more psycho-spiritual anguish than those with more painful histories.

While most of us aren't schizophrenic, these facial expressions are metaphors for what we hide or mask or can't get at through words. As a psychiatrist, Bjork can't really heal schizophrenics, but her paintings are poignant attempts to reach them. Her icons evoke the use of masks in West African medicine traditions. Both healer and afflicted engage in an act of faith in the healing process. The African masks represent a person (living or departed) or an exaggerated human quality and are energized by ritual and incantation.

In Bjork's mausoleum the afflicted cannot actively participate in their healing. The portraits are an elegiac attempt to communicate with their souls and to clarify their realities.

— Elise LaRose

Elise LaRose teaches English in a Foreign Language Program in Boston. Her articles on art and artists have appeared in Women Artists News, Arts, and elsewhere.