

The Diary of Linda Troeller

TB-AIDS photo exhibit has its Canadian debut on Ryerson campus

By Mark Medley
Ryersonian Staff

Photographer Linda Troeller recalls the story that inspired her to begin work on TB-AIDS Diary, an award-winning collection of photocollages that has toured the world and makes its Canadian debut at Ryerson this month.

"I read in the newspaper that at the local hospitals . . . the nurses were leaving the trays of people with AIDS in the halls and wouldn't touch them," she says over the phone from New York City. "That affected me because when I grew up my mother had this diary and this big beautiful scrapbook of photographs from when she was in a tuberculosis sanatorium.

"I knew that she was stigmatized with having had TB."

Troeller used the diary and scrapbook her mother had kept since her time in the Trudeau Sanatorium as the foundation for the exhibit, which has won numerous awards and has been translated into 14 languages since its debut in the late 1980s.

TB-AIDS Diary, which was unveiled Monday at the school of image arts, consists of 19 20-by-24-inch photocollages.

The exhibit parallels Troeller's mother's experience as a TB sufferer in the 1930s with that of a young man grappling

with AIDS in the 1980s.

Jean Mason, a professor in the department of professional communications at Ryerson, suggested the school host the exhibit. She had travelled to New York City last December to interview Troeller for a book chronicling the "illness narratives" of patients in the Saranac Lake tuberculosis community. It included Trudeau Sanatorium, which Troeller's mother was in. Mason calls the exhibit "a deeply moving and provocative exploration of two of the most feared contagious diseases in modern history."

Prof. Don Snyder, chair of the school of image arts, concurs.

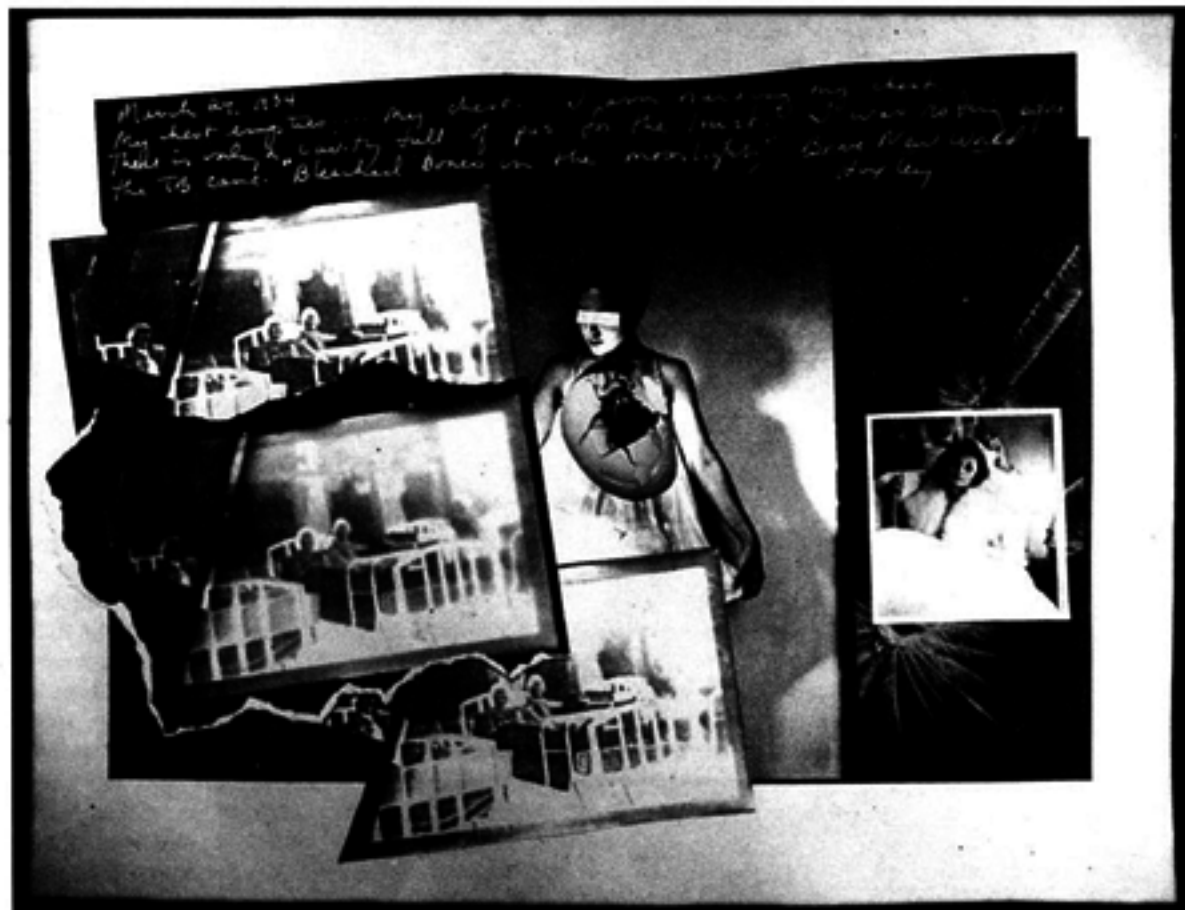
"She's taking (on) an issue that's of tremendous global importance."

More than 15 years ago when she began working on the exhibit, Troeller used tuberculosis as a historical reference point from which to compare AIDS. Drugs had virtually eradicated the disease from the western world.

"Then I started reading the last year or two how TB was growing," Troeller says, adding she may update the diary to reflect the current climate. "So this little diary that's in some way outmoded, outdated - it's not."

It's reported that 75 per cent of those infected with AIDS also suffer from TB.

"It's there more than you believe," says Mason.



Photograph provided by Linda Troeller

Linda Troeller's TB-AIDS Diary: photocollages give viewers insight into what it was like at a sanatorium.

TB-AIDS Diary is a thought-provoking and powerful exhibit. Using the medium of photocollage, also known as photomontage, Troeller combines image and text to explore themes of illness, stigma and survival.

A photographic narrative, partly fictionalized, it tells two stories based on real life. It explores "the relationship between fact and fiction," says Mason.

The TB section chronicles a woman's life in a sanatorium.

The content is drawn from the diary entries Troeller's mother made while at Saranac Lake: the train ride, the bloody hankerchiefs that were a mark of the disease, the endless hours spent lying in bed, the sounds of the dying:

"Wheezing pierces through the hallways and passes floor to floor, like an ambulance siren whizzing along city streets," she writes.

The work is heart-wrenching and lyrical at the same time.

In the AIDS section, Troeller focuses on a man dying of AIDS and his mother, a hairdresser who doesn't want her clients to know about her son's illness.

In one collage, Troeller turns symptoms of the disease into poetry: kaposi's sarcoma, genital warts, night sweats.

The AIDS section parallels the stigma faced by those suffering from TB. In one collage the mother wonders if it would be best if her son does not come to a family dinner.

The project, Troeller says, was "a long, hard battle."

The 57-year-old native of New Jersey studied journalism at West Virginia University. She then attended graduate school at Syracuse University, studying communications and photography.

She's released several books including *Spa Journeys*, *Healing Waters*, and *The Erotic Lives of Women*, which was hailed as "one of the most gutsy and imaginative erotic books of the decade" by the New York Times. She has lectured at various universities, including Yale.

Troeller is also the subject of an upcoming film by Canadian filmmaker Jeff McKay. *Linda Troeller: A Portrait*, will focus on her photography of the famed Chelsea Hotel in New York City, where she's lived since 1994.

What should students expect from the exhibition?

"They should expect to see something very personal and historical." Yet, she adds, given the growing epidemic in Africa, the diary is as relevant now as in the 1980s.

"The cycle has come back again."

TB-AIDS Diary: Photocollages by Linda Troeller, runs until Nov. 17, Third Floor Gallery, School of Image Arts, 122 Bond St. Artist Lecture and Reception: Nov. 7, 7 p.m., IMA 307 (School of Image Arts). TB-AIDS: Realities & Representations Experts' Panel Discussion: Nov. 9, 7 p.m., Free.



Lothar Troeller / Photograph provided by Linda Troeller

Linda Troeller is an award-winning photographer, activist and artist whose work has toured the world.