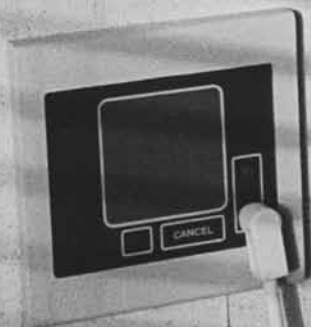


WILLARD TRAUB RECOVERY

DANFORTH MUSEUM OF ART





WILLARD TRAUB RECOVERY

ESSAY BY KAREN E. HAAS

DANFORTH MUSEUM OF ART

Framingham, Massachusetts

September 11 – November 6, 2011

PHOTOGRAPHIC RESOURCE CENTER

Boston, Massachusetts

February – March 2012

THE GATHERING PLACE

Beachwood, Ohio

July – September 2012

Britten

Take me out for a walk, I call to Britten.
Straining at the leash,
I relish the fresh air outside,
The possibilities,
the ramble
that will lead us in so many directions.



COVER

Recovery 1, 2006

LEFT

Recovery 8, detail, 2006

ABOVE

Recovery 6, 2006

Foreword and Acknowledgements

The Danforth Museum of Art is pleased to host Willard Traub's *Recovery*, a unique series of photographs that impose the lens of human experience on the healing process. These strong, emotional images provide an unusual connection to an artist who might have been critically ill, but remained actively engaged. We are positioned to see things from his point of view, and this is our privilege.

Profound thanks go to all who've made this catalog possible, especially Karen Haas, Lane Collection Curator of Photographs at the MFA, Boston; Tom Hinson, Curator Emeritus at the Cleveland Museum of Art; and Dr. Joseph Antin of Dana-Farber Cancer Institute for contributed writing. Support provided by Colene Abramson, Patience Epstein, Robert Harrington, Carol MacGregor, Pat Mattina, Sloan Nota, Alan Packard, Nancy Schön, Rosalie Shane, and others is much appreciated. And, once again, the talent and skills of designer John Colan really "put it all together."

We join the artist in acknowledging critical family support from Lynn, Elise and Ron Traub; the wise counsel of friends Marc Elliott and Pat Mattina; and the expertise of "medical oracles and mentors" Joseph Antin, MD; Toni Dubeau, RN; Tammy Weitzman, LSW; and Lee Cogswell. However, very special thanks must go to bone marrow donor Josh Kutlin, who granted the artist "the ticket to continue the journey."

Katherine French, Director
Danforth Museum of Art

The Transplant November 30, 2005

9:45 p.m.

Still waiting on word of the cells.

In a cooler in the hands of a courier.

My future still wandering around somewhere beyond this ward.

Soon to be here, I am told.

11:45 p.m.

Lynn and Elise left around 11:00.

I am hooked up to a group of monitors now.

A nurse pokes her head into my room,

"They are here with presents for you."

All the back-up equipment has been readied should something go wrong.

After all this, what could go wrong?

It feels like an EMT class to me.

Lynn calls from home just as the cells arrive.

12:15 a.m.

It begins, it ends.

Recovery 2, 2006





Recovery 3, 2006

WILLARD TRAUB

RECOVERY

After twenty-five years working as a commercial and fine art photographer, Willard Traub was diagnosed in 2005 with a rare form of cancer of the blood and found his life suddenly changed forever. This series of striking black-and-white photographs, which he calls *Recovery*, represents the long and difficult process that he has gone through since then, including chemotherapy, a bone marrow transplant, and multiple hospitalizations as his body struggled to deal with the healthy cells grafted from an anonymous donor.

Traub describes his debilitating illness and its aftermath as the “big story” of his life. So rather than simply endure it – deeply immersed in the visual world as he already was – he decided to do what came naturally to him: to try to capture some of these fragmentary and fleeting moments on film. Having worked for most of his career with medium and large-format cameras, the choice of the 35mm camera for this project was based on the fact that it was lightweight, compact, and allowed him to shoot in dimly lit hospital rooms and to hold the camera relatively steady even in his weakened state.

For Traub the process of making these pictures has taken on a greater significance than he initially imagined. They are political, in that they allowed him to gain a much-needed sense of control in the face of this seemingly out-of-control disease, and also symbolic, as he has come to see them as signifying larger issues, such as love, loss, sustenance, and healing. As Traub explains it: “I

don’t look through the viewfinder like I used to” and, as a result, this protracted fight for his life has inspired an entirely new direction for him as an artist. For one thing, color, which was such a significant part of his photography prior to his diagnosis, does not make sense for these pictures. The grainy, dark prints, so unlike Traub’s previous work, seem to perfectly replicate a patient’s-eye view of the strangely disembodied, monochromatic world of the hospital rooms he found himself in, complete with looming IV drips, beeping monitors, and sterile still lifes of meals and medicine. Even devoid of color, and looking at times as though they were shot through a drug-induced haze, these images nevertheless retain an artfulness that points to his having found inspiration in the delicate stripes of light falling across a wall in an early photograph by Alfred Stieglitz or the timeless beauty of a simple windowsill tableau by Josef Sudek.

Not all of Traub’s *Recovery* photographs were made during his hospitalizations, however; several evoke the simple pleasures of his resumption of everyday life at home – the sorts of things that we often take for granted. In one of the most memorable of the group the photographer is literally tugged back into normalcy by his beloved little Westie eager to go out for a walk. In another, which is reminiscent of his earlier pictures of his backyard garden, a skeletal weed stands out against a stark backdrop of snow suggesting the strength and optimism necessary to weather the winter and believe that somehow spring will come again.

And other views of nature, such as an eerie, flash-lit image of a fallen tree at twilight or a watery, soft-focus landscape, seem more like dreamscapes than evidence of Traub’s actual surroundings – neither completely real nor entirely imagined.

So even though many of the works appear quite desolate and bleak, the title of the series, *Recovery*, nevertheless implies hope and healing. Traub’s goal in taking these pictures was to shake himself out of the lethargy of illness and act: to return to the photography that he loved, but with a clear-eyed, unsentimental look at his situation. By focusing his camera on subjects as abstract and ephemeral as changing conditions of light and the mutability of nature, he has discovered a way to beautifully convey the tightrope that he now faces, between the stability of “normal” life and the uncertainty of the future. We only need to look at one of the last images in the sequence, though, to sense that Traub has regained that equilibrium in both his life and his work. In it the view from a window encompasses a shadowy expanse of lawn and distant woods punctuated by a brilliant rectangle of light, reminding us somehow that such bright spots of hope exist all around us if we are only willing to look for them.

Karen E. Haas

The Lane Collection Curator of Photographs
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Stone Not Rock

And so today
the rapids
have become slow.

Waterbugs could have spun
their dance
with little hindrance
from me, the director of this little show on this little river.

As a long ago skipped stone
I lay on the bottom,
fuzzy with algae
a deathly grey.

Still.

Recovery 4, 2006





Recovery 5, 2006

GVHD

This soup was my first real food.
Many days had passed as if in a dream;
where I would go and what I would eat once I got there?

Yet with all this change, this chaos,
I finally find myself seated before a place-setting of perfect harmony.
The waft of the broth and the elemental order of what I see,
kick starts the ritual of trying to put it all back in good working order.

The Reaper Appears

I could make out the view of a swamp. It seemed somehow familiar in its clarity; its well defined character, but I was too woozy to be sure. Thanks to the morphine for that and the “sweet spot” that this hospital bed often provides.

It was not some misty bog on a heath somewhere in Dorset. No, this was here and now. Near the back tree-line on the far shore I could first sense the movement, then see the floating charcoal mantle gliding at weed height over the reeds and hear the dull roar of its flight.

He must have sensed my breathing and banked my way. The chill, bone chill, preceded his presence as his cloak rustled by; brushing me in his flight, like sitting on a cold leather chair with just shorts and a T on. No scythe swishing through the air; just the cut of cold as he passed by and continued on his way.

I shouted at him, I might have even shaken my fist, “Not my time yet!”



Recovery 7, 2008

Little Brother

Ron, my little brother,
All those years ago
had become comfortably lodged in my heart.

From the time he first heard
my BIG NEWS
Ron would call everyday.

One of the ones I could always count on.

I seem to have become
the littler brother.
On the mend,
hopefully growing again in strength,
yet pinched, folded at the edges.
A diminished me
with my little brother
standing,
not at the end,
just in a loud pause.



Recovery 14, 2007

Meds: February, 2009

Valtrex 500mg
1x2daily

Rapamune 1mg
1daily

Simvastatin 40mg
1daily

Prednisone 1mg
1daily

Boniva 150mg
1xmonth

Myfortic 360mg
2x2daily

Furosemide 20mg
1daily

Sulfamethoxazole tablet
1xdaily

Caltrate 600mg
1xdaily



Recovery 9, 2009



Shoveling Coal

I am reminded of an afternoon long ago;
A work detail shoveling coal
For some transgression at school.

I was not stoking some boiler in a dark, dank basement
with a well-worn scoop.
I now hefted a fork
to fuel my depleted self.

Though warm outside,
a chill remained deep within.

Many more shovelfuls,
before it would warm up in here.

Time was,
not so long ago that each bite or sip was savored.
So many are now needed that pleasure is diminished,
it becomes just another chore,
like shoveling coal.



Open Window

Withdrawn even to those with me;
with my closed northeast windows,
housebound.

There were limited choices of how
I could photograph.

An evening snow and quick clearing
by mid-morning; a wonderful detailing
sunlight appeared with which to work.

That Monday morning was no exception.

The sun, flower stalks,
the glisten in the melting.

This photo session felt so much more intense.

And it did stay that way for awhile.

I remember the feeling, but I don't have
it often or for long anymore.

That love of life that is one of the
few gifts from all this.

After the body fails and attention is required.

Recovery 11, 2006

My Outside

A child plays
in the shore shallows of a camp pond.
Delighting in the tadpoles,
whose home he's visiting
with his play.

Now in these softer days of recovery,
it is also a yearning for
The place that has changed.
The time that has passed.

These are the places to which I always return
with camera
and a watchful eye.
The places whose healing arms I hope to
imprint on the film
as it is imprinted in me.



Recovery 12, 2006

Artist Bio

Willard Traub is a Massachusetts based photographer whose interests range from the commercial photography of architecture to teaching to fine art photography. Recipient of numerous grants and awards, including a Photography Fellowship from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and a Polaroid Foundation Grant, his work is represented in private, museum and corporate collections, both nationally and abroad.

Checklist

Recovery 5, 2006, 8 x 11.625 inches
Recovery 1, 2006, 8.1875 x 12.5 inches
Recovery 6, 2006, 8.1875 x 12.5 inches
Recovery 3, 2006, 8.1875 x 12.5 inches
Recovery 4, 2006, 12.5 x 8.5 inches
Recovery 2, 2006, 12.625 x 8.25 inches
Recovery 9, 2009, 8 x 11.625 inches
Recovery 8, 2006, 13 x 8.25 inches
Recovery 12, 2006, 11.625 x 8.25 inches
Recovery 7, 2008, 7.875 x 12 inches
Recovery 10, 2006, 12.875 x 8.5 inches
Recovery 11, 2006, 12.875 x 8.5 inches
Recovery 13, 2006, 10.625 x 8.5 inches
All photographs are gelatin silver prints.

Credits

Printing **Kirkwood Printing**
Art Photography **Willard Traub**
Design **John Colan**

The Healing Power of Light

So when you feel the blues deep inside of you,
like the hole you find yourself in
has got stainless steel sides to it.

Ain't any way you can climb out.
Yet you can still see, the tired eyes still work.

The light from which you hid is glowing now in front of you.
The warmth from that shape as it travels across your range is drawing you on.
Keep your knees bent; at the ready.
The door-shaped light, this portal,
open it.
Warm the chills; bring back the vital glow to your sweating face.

Storm tossed days are different now
with clouds achingly beautiful,
the wind a push, a cool puff.

By looking into the light rather than hiding from it,
begin to find the "new you."
A you who can see a way to get out of any hole
you find you've fallen into.

Recovery 13, detail, 2006



"Without sentimentality, Traub shares a personal journey with quiet images of compelling beauty, honesty, and emotional impact. About his work, he has said: I hope my photos give a moment of insight or pleasure. Sometimes you can surprise people! He has surely accomplished that goal with his Recovery photographs that engage a viewer's attention and then sustain and reward that interest."

Tom E. Hinson

Photography Curator Emeritus
Cleveland Museum of Art

"I met Wil Traub in 2005, when I was asked what I could do to help deal with an insidious, ultimately fatal bone marrow disorder called myelodysplasia.... We embarked on a long journey, really an Odyssey of sorts, during which Wil dealt with hurdles of Homeric proportions with Homeric bravery.... He did not emerge unscathed ... [but] it was my privilege to accompany Wil Traub on this journey."

Joseph H. Antin, MD

Chief of Stem Cell Transplantation
Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

Danforth Museum of Art
123 Union Avenue
Framingham, MA 01702

©2011 Willard Traub
All Rights Reserved

