

**Reviews:** New York

**Charles H. Traub**

**Gitterman**

This mini-survey of work by teacher and activist Charles H. Traub—23 pictures taken between 1983 and 2003—affirmed the kind of modest goals and sociable values that are rarely in evidence in the art world today. Armed with only a 35mm camera and a bemused nature, Traub roams the streets, beaches, stores, parks, and theaters of the world in search of moments and scenes revealing transitory human dramas. The people in his pictures are on stage, but they don't know it. Indeed, were Traub not there to record their clownish gestures and outfits, we wouldn't observe them either.

Presented in conjunction with the publication of his book *In the Still Life* (Quantuck Lane Press), the show overflowed with harmless visual puns. A man in a red striped shirt stands before the Orvieto cathedral, oblivious of the fact that he clashes with the striated stone. As a man and woman embrace on a Rio de Janeiro beach, a white poodle leaps up and wedges itself between them, insisting on a threesome.

At his best, Traub is alert to instances of the surreal lurking in the ordinary. The managers of a motel in Washington, D.C., may have intended the basket of fruit on the bed and flowers on the nightstand as a gracious touch, but instead, the place looks like a funeral parlor.

Robert Doisneau and Elliot Erwitt became masters of this genial style in the 1950s and '60s, and it is rarely seen in galleries today. Even if no one seems more amused by his own jokes than Traub—a fatal trait for a comedian—it is heartening to see an artist who doesn't care whether he is out of step. There is no posturing, hostility, or fake profundity in his photography. Traub is grateful for what the world offers. We can be, too.

—Richard B. Woodward



Charles H. Traub, *Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*, 1984, pigment print, 13" x 19".  
Gitterman.