

JAMES COLLUM

Dawn, Davenport, 2011
platinum print, 12 x 12 in.



courtesy: Susan Spiritus Gallery

GALWAY KINNEL

The Sulphur Baths at Esalen

Those must be the two students I have not yet met, sitting up to their necks in sulphurous water, their heads distinct but the sunken rest of them blurry, like albumen of an egg poaching. The shuddery oiliness of the water slops with flashes of sky, and reeks sweetly of the bowels of the sea. When I reach them, and uncinch my towel, and drop it onto the deck, the two heads swivel as one, as if on synchronized axes, and gaze at me for a moment which goes on too long, in my opinion, to still be called a moment. Being writers, perhaps they form all things they meet into words, such as, in this case, “Navel squinting through nearly shut lids.” “Flesh falling in sweals as if partly melted.” “Cock which does not look as if it has been up and crowing at first light lately.” I grope around mentally for a supposed self that these two might have found in my poems, to face them with. Gone. I’m just a naked body, a body not as it was, nor as it wishes to be, but as it is. I sink slowly up to my chin in the bath water and wonder if I have ever written a truthful poem.

Galway Kinnell is the author of ten books of poetry, including, most recently, *A New Selected Poems* and *Strong is Your Hold*. A former MacArthur Fellow and State Poet of Vermont, he has won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award and has been a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. He taught for many years at New York University, where he was Erich Maria Remarque Professor of Creative Writing.