

**Esteban Pastorino**

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**ArtNexus No. 51 - Dec 2003**

The work of Esteban Pastorino (Buenos Aires, 1972) began to appear, timidly, in the late 1990s, amid the photography craze that took over Argentina's galleries and museums. His way of looking at things immediately stood out; almost without the artist's agreement we learned that most of his images were achieved by means of camera modifications and processes, which made him a rare example of technical sophistication among the many practitioners of urban and "ultranaturalistic" photography. Indeed, the landscapes Pastorino exhibited in 2001 at ICI-Centro Cultural de España (his first show in a mainstream Buenos Aires exhibition space) were elongated panoramic views that turned the objects of the photographs (small towns in the Pampas) into fine horizon lines interrupted only by lights or small houses. The viewer's perception of the image was directly related to sensations experienced in the real space. The "trick"—which was not really a trick per se, but rather a resource—was to expose film over several seconds. The long exposure plus the manipulations in the camera altered the three-dimensional references, that is, perspective, distorting the relationship of figure to background. In Pastorino, technical experimentation is not related to the search for originality or the need to find a personal style. His interests, it would seem, are extra-artistic. As a graduate of a technical school and a mechanical engineer by profession, Pastorino approaches his equipment with the curiosity of someone who has always understood that in order to achieve the best and most unexpected results, tools need to be disassembled and put together again. Two new series related to the Pampas photographs have emerged from the period of those panoramic views: a series that captures entire towns with a single shot; and a series of night shots where lights and contours are barely discernable. At the same time, Pastorino created a black-and-white essay about the monumental work of Francisco Salomone, an architect who in the 1930's, built bizarre slaughterhouses and cemeteries in distant provincial towns. Later, the technique of prolonged exposure generated a series of works on dangerous intersections in Buenos Aires; it creating a record of small and haphazard events with unquestionable documentary value. Pastorino's interest in "validating chance," as he describes his own attitude, reaches its peak in the new series at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Buenos Aires. It is a group of aerial views of vaguely recognizable areas of the city. Out of focus and shot from an unusual point of view, these images promote an effect of wonder in the viewer, who is faced with urban landscapes that at first resemble architectural models. Primarily interested in exploring how the codes for representation function, Pastorino enjoys generating such disorientation because it is a true "find:" it wasn't he who made the photographic decisions, but the camera mounted on a kite and operated by remote control. The artist participated in the construction of the image only by establishing the general orientation of the lens — the rest is unpredictable— the camera determines the focus by itself. The results are surprising, and are a conspiratorial wink toward the issue of photographic objectivity, about which Pastorino feels passionately. Next to Pastorino's systematic determination to erase his tracks—the personal markers that would reveal him as author—technique itself appears to bear sole responsibility for the work of art. It is a discursive lie we are forced to accept in support of the media's supposed neutrality, a strongly subjective and perhaps narrative strategy, and a tale devoid of ego or desire, governed only by science. Having recently received a scholarship to study at the Rijksakademie in the Netherlands, Pastorino will have ample time to create new artifacts and to hide behind his inventions.