

# Buenos Aires Herald

A WORLD OF INFORMATION IN A FEW WORDS

## An Indomitable Quest for Life As It Is

By Alina Tortosa  
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Frank Rodick, a Canadian artist born in Montreal, who currently works and lives in Toronto, was one of the foreign photographers to exhibit last year in August in the context of the The Festival of Light 2002. The Herald interviewed him at the time and was lucky in establishing a relationship with him since that allowed for a deeper understanding of the work and of the man.

Rodick, who read philosophy at Berkeley, discovered his vocation as an artist on the rebound, though the basic impulses may have been there from the very beginning. He found the scope of academic life and academic pursuits too narrow, as achievement depended on the writing of papers to prove trains of thought and concepts based on basically trustworthy facts, that could nevertheless, be manipulated to illustrate different and antagonistic points of view. He realized that this inbred and prestigious, if you will, intellectual pursuit had little to do with a committed, stripped to the marrow search for sense, or what may be called "the truth." Rodick felt that the impulse to excel academically was clouded by this very need to excel, and that erudition may cloud a straightforward view of nature and man. Of course, art can also be clouded by pretentiousness, or by the need to succeed at all costs, but the artist felt that it was easier to make individual choices with the visual arts, in a less rarified atmosphere and without as much peer pressure.

Rodick grew up in a restrained domestic environment where habits and issues were calmly taken for granted rather than discussed. This polite and inexpressive family life went hand in hand with the intellectual atmosphere of a sound literary and academic bookstore own and run by this parents. This tension between well mannered understatements and profound analytical and emotional probings are today the very essence of his work. it was his need to understand, to acknowledge and to try to explain that is the basis of the three photographic essays he has worked on so far as a visual artist.

*Liquid City* (1991 to 1999), the show of 45 black and white photographs exhibited at the Centro Cultural Recoleta, is the result of his experience and perception of "growing up in a downtown urban core" where he was "always fascinated by its surreal diversity." And he goes on to say: "As it has for many artists, the city street became my photographic starting point."

He has traveled extensively in Canada, the US, Europe and Asia looking for subject matter. His sensual, roving, inquisitive look embraced the urban characters and then moved on to other characters and other cities. The result are these prints we saw, partially or totally out of focus, a "vision of the contemporary city not as a specific location but as a personal world." He chose the characters he portrayed for different reasons that appealed to him, some of them apparent at the time, or for subliminal impulses that became apparent later after the development of the prints. The unfocused and blurred vision gave the show at Recoleta a kinetic energy that was very attractive. The lines and shadows on his gelatin prints are soft and sensual as in lithography, or shapes and shadows may spread throughout the surface as paint on canvas to illustrate "the coexistence of order, discord, and enigma."

From 1995 to 1997 Rodick worked on *sub rosa*, a set of 13 images on the nude female figure in a process that combined polaroid photography with gelatin silver prints. "I was looking to illuminate and preserve what are, to me, two the subject's most compelling qualities: unknowability and elusiveness. Rather than analyze or irradiate, my goal was to bring these qualities closer to the viewer while preserving their dreamlike and mystical qualities."

From 1997 to today Rodick has worked on his *Arena* series. In the site under his name, the author refers to the prints that make up this essay as to "a recognition of something primal. They are my exploration of sexuality and eroticism as an amphitheatre of passion and fear, abandonment and pain, love, desire, hatred, and mortality." In *In pain there burns a secret joy*, a polyptych—four selenium toned gelatin silver prints—the title itself announces the tense and conflicting vocation of passion fueled by the need to explore masochist impulses. In *Reveries (dusk)*, a triptych—toned gelatin silver prints—vaguely distorted images of a mouth crying out and of female bodies floating space project a nightmarish feeling.

To Rodick, the underhand psychological violence in polite society is a symptom of madness, the madness he alludes to in the *Arena* pictures and in some of the *Liquid City* images as well. "I look at them sometimes and see an attempt to somehow scream back at so-called "decent" society, to somehow raise a voice against that relentless hum of civilized manners that masks an ongoing hammering for mediocrity, superficiality, and submission. Not just a scream, but perhaps a kind of metaphorical dissection that states, in effect, 'This body you tell me is so beautiful is also something else: organs, blood, feces, bacteria, decay'. These things are at least as real and important as everything else."

Rodick has put to good use his knowledge of philosophy and literature. He has used these tools as elements to be handled by his intuition and feelings, and by his own perception of things to burrow into the meaning of what life and people are about.

*Rodick has had solo exhibitions in Toronto, Canada, of course, in Cordoba, Santa Fé, Resistencia and La Plata in Argentina; group exhibitions in Cornwall, Edmonton, and Toronto in Canada, Philadelphia, Harrisburg and New York in the US and in Odense, Denmark. Upcoming solo exhibitions in 2003 will be held in Mar del Plata, San Juan, Rafaela, Santa Rosa, La Rioja, Rawson, Chubut and Patagonia in Argentina; in Chile*

*and in Uruguay; and in the Centre of the Photographic Image on line exhibition curated by Stephen Perloff, editor and founder of the Photo Review. In 2004 an exhibition of his Arena series will be held in Arte x Arte in Buenos Aires.*

*Rodick has received grants and awards from the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Arts Promotion Grant, 2002; Ontario Arts Council: Exhibition Assistance Grant, 2002 and 2000; the Ontario Arts Council: Exhibition Assistance Grant, 1999; Ontario Arts Council: Visual Arts Individual Grant, 1998; he was a nominee for the Jean A. Chalmers Award, Visual Arts, 1998; and received the Canada Council: Creation/Production Grant to Professional Artists, 1997; and the Award of Merit, Annual Open Juried Exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists, 1994.*

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