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 Artist Mauro Restiffe

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[1] Carpet, 2004, black-and-white silver print, 125 x 200 cm, 49 x 78 inches
 [2] Pyramid, 2004, black-and-white silver print, 132 x 198 cm, 51.5 x 77 inches
 [3] #8, from the series "Empossamento [Inauguration]", 2003, black-and-white silver print, 121 x 175 cm, 47 x 68.5 inches
 [4] #2, from the series "Empossamento [Inauguration]", 2003, black-and-white silver print, 117 x 175 cm, 45.5 x 68.5 inches

Mauro Restiffe's work hovers ambiguously between the tradition of the photographic document and the aesthetically driven image. At times it appears that the photographer may even have set out intentionally to record or make manifest a particular time, place or moment, but despite his best intentions to capture something of this, a quite different impulse takes over. Take, for example, his series of photographs of the governmental capital Brasilia, taken on the Inauguration Day of Brazilian President Lula on January 1, 2003. This series, titled "Empossamento [Inauguration]", contains numerous ambiguities. The black-and-white film typically used by Restiffe immediately imbues the work with historical value—it is unclear if what we see, despite the date of the image itself, was taken three, ten or even forty years ago, due also to the manner in which the artist has avoided including any details of contemporary life—clothing, advertisements, ephemera and even posture are obscured. The wide angle and distant perspective echo the type of photography associated with various well-documented and familiar historical events, such as the political parades and demonstrations that took place in the United States, and Washington DC in particular, during the 1960s. Undoubtedly the striking backdrop of the architecture of Brasilia plays no small part in this impression of historical specificity; the familiar modernist buildings have become something akin to a film set in Restiffe's scenes of mass populist activity. One is left doubting whether what we see is in fact a series of stills from the set of a historical reconstruction.

The conceptual or analytical approach of Restiffe's photographic project only becomes apparent, however, when one compares these images to another architecture-orientated series. Photographing the equally striking urban environment of Istanbul, Restiffe uses a different approach. Though still characterized by subtle black-and-white tones, these images reflect the cramped, dense environment of the city through closely cropped images focusing both on the unexpected found sculpture of the street, and the characteristic densely patterned environment of Islamic architecture and design. In *Pyramid* (2004), for example, the artist isolates the narrow end of a residential building that sits at the corner of one of the city's steep and narrow streets. Starkly lit by unforgiving street light, the building's ornate façade is disrupted by the apparently random placement of a functionally modern window. The title of the image points to the pyramidal structure of the small flight of stairs, again an entirely use-orientated design but one that contains the abstract appeal of found sculptural form. Firmly placing the image in the present day, Restiffe has included a purposefully striding figure, a passer-by who conveys the ordinariness of this Istanbul street scene. Another image from this series, *Carpet* (2004), unexpectedly resonates with "Empossamento". The endlessly repeated pattern of the eastern design distinctly recalls the modernist façades of the buildings of Brasilia. Once again, the complex layers of Restiffe's work become apparent.—Jens Hoffmann

