Miguel Harte

Miguel Harte was born in Buenos Aires in 1961. Thanks to his father—who in the late sixties co-directed with poet Julio Llinás one of the avant-garde galleries in Buenos Aires where artists including Federico Peralta Ramos, Antonio Berni, Pablo Suárez, Roberto Jacoby, Ricardo Carriera, Oscar Bonny, and Emilio Renart exhibited—Harte was exposed to the art world from an early age. During this time, he painted under the supervision of his grandmother, an amateur painter devoted to the art of copying. Following these experiences, already in his adolescence, he realized that his future would be related to the visual arts. Without attending any art school or private workshop, he trained through his own practice and exchanges with Pablo Suárez—an Argentine artist and family friend.

In 1981, he went into exile in Brazil, holding his first exhibitions in Rio de Janeiro. From 1983 onwards, with the return to democracy, his visits to Buenos Aires became frequent. During these visits, he connected with the local scene and began exhibiting in the underground circuit. Already settled back in his native city, in 1988 he was invited to participate in various group exhibitions. It was then that he abandoned expressionist painting to embrace an objectual art of mural and sculptural nature, aspects that have characterized his work to the present day. This character, combined with the caricaturesque, the popular, and the local in his imagery, quickly caught the attention of critics and curators. Harte distanced himself from the trans-avant-garde and neo-expressionist painting that had defined Argentine art since the early eighties.

Following this path, Harte would become one of the most representative artists of 1990s art and of the Galería del Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, a space indissociable from that period.

The caricaturesque, popular, and local qualities that characterize his early Buenos Aires works appear either through surface-objects featuring semi-humanized animals or in the sculpture-objects that Harte has called "monstruos tiernos" (tender monsters). These are unclassifiable beings, hybrids in which those traits are combined with something sinister and abject.

Oscillating between surfaces and object-sculptures—a characteristic he would maintain throughout his career—from 1990 onwards, the animal or natural universe already present in his earlier works becomes literally manifest.

In relation to the natural world, the industrial, and the dystopian, from 1992 specifically, Harte began developing extensive surfaces painted with hammered synthetic enamel into which he inserted polyester resin capsules containing insects and small plants and minerals; capsules that protect these life forms from calamity produced by some type of toxic liquid or magma spill.

During the period between 1994 and 1996, his production was limited to a few, though laborious, works. A chess enthusiast, he created a board of enormous artisanal effort—crafting each piece by hand without the use of a lathe—and recovering the character of works by his friend and artist Sebastián Gordín, he constructed a series of hemispheres

with minute scenes in their interior, which can be observed from different viewpoints thanks to small perforations extending around their surface.
In 1997, he began combining the use of polyester resin—a material that defines his work—with two-coat automotive paint. Continuing with the theme of tension between nature and industry, Harte employed this paint to create monochrome and immaculate surfaces that would be breached in different ways. In some cases, by protruding organic reminiscent bulges—as if something from behind the plane were struggling to break free. In other cases, by horizontal gashes from which a sort of slimy liquid or magma spills, dragging along microworlds composed of the same natural elements that the resin encapsulates on his hammered synthetic enamel surfaces.

Around 1997, Harte also began giving these microworlds or microscenes their own space by making them autonomous from the painted surfaces and converting them into small three-dimensional representations. For the moment, it is landscape that he miniaturizes: profuse and fantastical gardens, clifftop plateaus, or simply rocky geographies. The following year, he would amplify the scale of the scenes, endowing them with human dimensions.

From 2000 to the present, reworking aspects of his "monstruos tiernos" (tender monsters) he has developed the series of so-called "monstruos" (monsters). Connected to the dystopian, these beings evade any possible biological classification. In fact, in addition to exhibiting a cross between the animal and the vegetal, whether through the use of two-coat paint or the general character of their construction, there is something machine-like about them—an aspect that becomes even more pronounced when he equips them with electric light.

But Monstruos (monsters), or the monstrous, also appear in the human. Recovering once again the genre of self-portraiture, the fantastical, and the uncanny, from 2004 to the present day, Harte has intermittently represented and replicated himself as a hybrid dwarf in terms of age range; as a being whose body intertwines characteristics of child and old man. Situated in different spaces and situations, the multiple Hartes carry out different actions.

In line with the nature-industry tension that traverses his work in different ways, and more specifically, in continuity with the abstract-biomorphic pieces he began creating in 1997, in 2007 he initiated the production of a significant number of works that combine forms from the natural universe—volcanoes, branches, fins, flaps, etc.—with a pristine and shiny factory-like finish.

Likewise, the inclusion of natural elements that he undertook in 1990 with chicken eggs also continues to the present day—such as tree trunks and branches, beetles, stones, corals, etc.
As this last case exemplifies, the themes and procedures that Harte undertakes at different moments continue in alternating fashion over time. In this sense, it is not a matter of opening and closing periods of works—of opening and closing series—but rather of opening and developing ideas intermittently.

Finally, it should also be noted that throughout his career, Harte has trained different generations of artists through his teaching work. He lives and works in Buenos Aires.