Elliott, David, "Un creador de mundos" (A creator of worlds), *Miguel Harte*, [Exhibition catalogue], Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, fall 2003.

Miguel Harte is a creator of worlds. When we first met in Buenos Aires in the early 1990s it was almost as if he was still inhabiting the world of a child. The small objects he showed me seemed like toys. The humour, too, had an innocence not wholly in keeping with the hyper-sophistication of the great capital.

But this is Argentina!! Life is not all one big white *Manifesto* and appearances can be deceiving. Under the surface another richly coloured, but rather disturbing, world is trying to break out. And Harte gives us a private look into this world by cutting into his smooth, immaculate surfaces to show us another reality beneath.

Although his objects have a strange, rather deathly beauty, they could almost be products from the small workshops that litter La Boca. Their elegant lacquered surfaces could have been fashioned in a car repair workshop – the kind of place where a beat-up old jalopy is transformed into a flashy, customised Cadillac. This is where Harte feels at home.

And then when you penetrate beyond the glittering surface, through a lens, through what looks like a bodily orifice, or see fixed in a clear resin block, this other world slowly reveals itself and you are not sure whether what you can see is a tragedy or a joke. Is the small gesticulating figure caught under the glass thumbing his nose at you, waving a greeting or just trying to escape? Are those stinging insects or viral bacteria fixed forever in time, or are they just waiting to get out?

Perhaps it doesn't matter. The importance is in the act of looking. "*I'm a natural voyeur. I like watching more than participating*", the artist becomes complicit with the viewer in this act. Who is looking at whom? Are the artist and his audience to be forever locked in an eternal revolving loop - like two dogs who have just met each other in the street?

But in spite of any protestation to the contrary Harte is no Conceptualist - materials and ideas matter too much. In his world of artificiality, nature is king, although, regrettably, owing to circumstances in the real world, the role it must play is one of the subject. In a number of recent works an elegiac tone has come to the fore.

Gasparlandia, *2001;* started out as a toy for his son but took on a life of its own to become a monochromatic world of mountains, cities, rivers, roads and forests. It is formed in one piece rather like a racing track for model cars. Beneath the surface there is a void and supporting it is a forest of elephant-leg, resin stalactites. To me this seems to be a lost world – one where there is little hope – the city is made of impassive monoliths and even the countryside has no life in it.

Other works share a similarly pessimistic view. Rootless “trees” scuttle like crabs across the gallery floor. It almost seems like they are tortured bodies. They sprout “buds” – or are they sores?- and like David Cronenberg’s “Fly”, they seem to be stuck in a pathetic no-man’s-land between Cyborg and mutation. These are objects that have been placed beyond hope.

A blasted tree sits in a biosphere supported by its roots, but on looking more closely each branch and twig ends in a miniature human head and tiny humanoid insects shuffle across the inhumanly coloured earth. This is no idealistic union of man and nature but a phantasmagoric nightmare of chemical or nuclear despoliation.

Has Harte become a moralist – a prophet for our times? This is hard to say. The humour and child-like imagination continue but now for a more serious purpose. The worlds that Harte now creates seem worse than our wildest dreams. But in their horrible beauty we can clearly see our own face.