Fagnani, Fernando, "La luz sellada" (The sealed light), *Miguel Harte*, [exhibition catalogue], Galería Ruth Benzacar, Buenos Aires, October - November 1998.

After being rejected and bearing the consequences of a weary struggle that leaves it exhausted and at the mercy of the other, reality enters Harte's work. In that conflict, two complementary opposites, violence and melancholy, have fused, and from that sudden encounter a concrete substance emerges: polished surfaces, dimmed remnants of nature, small vaults where the mineral shines with an alien light.

That ensemble, in the instant it takes shape in the eye, seems to resist any vision. Yet in the next moment, as the gaze begins to exercise its skill, that exterior yields and reveals its shades, it becomes an infinity of nuances. Like an oblique line, the work incorporates diverse materials and employs secret procedures. They await an ironic and paradoxical fate: neither explosion nor escape, but rather shelters that are both confinement and its gentle parody.

The inventory of all these materials leaves us before a strange constellation that opens, extreme, in two directions. On one hand, one might say Harte is a (bizarre) nature lover, with the alternation of brutal passions and false calms that this implies. Yet at the same time, he appears as a devotee of the most trivial domesticity, faithful to Formica and acrylic, devoted to those stainless materials impervious to any recovery by Culture. As is fitting, this marriage has produced a finite—though not meager—number of misunderstandings. The first, and reproductive father of them all, is that this tendency brings him close to kitsch. The argument goes, supposedly, that the appropriation of low and vulgar materials in the artist's hands becomes a critique of their mundane use, a reflection that makes the observer oscillate between identification, irony, and a soft repulsion—placing the work in critical tension with the cultural values of its time. From there unfolds a chain of sympathetic reasoning: Formica simulates nobler materials (marble, for instance); nature appears as a minor double of a lost, monumental original; and the whole work suddenly aligns itself with the figure of the simulacrum. There is truth in that reading, but it is a small truth. And when understood as total, it diminishes Harte's work. For while Formica may mimic marble—and independently of that fact—it also evokes a domestic familiarity alien to kitsch: it can provoke untroubled identification, distress through its coldness, or awaken a violent unease. If it simulates anything, it is anonymity—the endless series of beings and memoryless homes it once covered—and that reference, rather than parodic or critical, is cruel.

The appearance of nature, sealed in resin coffers embedded in the surface, is not minor but dramatic. However small, it is the point that holds the gaze. They are miniature baroque scenes, including outbursts and metamorphoses, and though luminous and vigorous, they generate claustrophobia and perplexity. This could, in some sense, be a realist reflection: in the twentieth century, nature seems to have turned into a

monstrosity that must be annihilated, reduced to a necessary presence rather than an origin—though in that criminal reduction, everything is lost.

Harte operates upon nature as fiction does upon science when it produces science fiction. His is, if we may allow the oxymoron, nature fiction: a work that raves about nature, baroquizes it, twists it, reconstructs it, and finally seals it away to preserve it. In his own way, he behaves like a philosopher of nature—undeniably perverse, yes, but of a proven love. Between this natural world and its context of laminated plastic, there lies an original tension: that of two spheres seeking, mirroring, and reinforcing each other. The resin inclusions reinvent degraded natural forms. It is difficult not to think of battered bodies, of organs and organisms on the verge of dying or already dead, in those works where the surface caves in. They are traces of an internal wound that will not heal.

And if any doubt remains, one need only pause before *El Jardín filosófico* (The Philosophical Garden), the most imposing work—and perhaps one that signals a change of course. There, nature unfolds in space: it occupies it entirely, it explodes. Observing it, one might think: if only the roots sank into the earth; if, instead of a dark whirlpool, there were clear water; if the landscape were green rather than stony and lunar; and if that pyramid were not covering everything—then we would have a small Paradise. The necessary elements are all there; they have merely passed through catastrophe, and we have lost them. A mute witness, a deformed Narcissus, suffers an absurd and unforeseen sentence: instead of a serene mirror, a faithful companion allowing him to lose himself in his image, he faces a dark, turbid liquid that annihilates him. The whirlpool that begins and subsides forms chance organisms, provisional, macabre reflections of a hot, disintegrated interior. We stand before a new harmony. Harte has taken another step toward a nature that covets unreality, and toward tiny beings who establish their ruin before it.