Neves, Manuel, “Extrañas formas, ambiguas poéticas”[Strange Forms, Ambiguous Poetics], Máscaras y Caretas magazine, Buenos Aires, July 8, 2003.

[...]

CONSTRUCTING FABLES

Amid the confusion caused by the tragic theft of a Rodin work at the National Museum of Fine Arts, an anthological exhibition by Miguel Harte opened, one of the most personal artists to emerge in recent years on the neighboring shore. Despite having begun his career in the eighties, Harte is a typical artist of the nineties. Together with Fabio Kacero, Alfredo Londaibere, and Sebastián Gordín, he forms a group of artists who work in silence producing a powerfully original and almost impossible to classify work. Fundamental in contemporary Argentine art, despite the fact that his work is not in tune with the prevailing international taste.

The excellent selection presented in Visual Arts, of fifteen years of his work, very well mounted and illuminated (something infrequent in this museum room), shows Harte's work in its totality. His obsession with insects, with their dissection and preservation. The autobiographical winks, which are comfortably integrated into his work, permanently characters from his family and personal environment. His formal quality, which links materials foreign to art, such as hammered paint (Martilux in Argentina) and nitrocellulose lacquer (two-layer paint), which are used in industry to paint machinery and automobiles.

Harte's works produce an uncontrollable seduction. One can see for the first time his evolution from irony and humor to parody and fable. From a Rojas aesthetic (1) of shine, decoration, and hedonism, to ambiguous narratives, between drama and humor. Harte interweaves biography with fable, generating a necessary complicity with the viewer, where insects and other living beings less defined in their species appear as characters in strange stories. Laura Batkis says: "The perverse scene encapsulated in a microcosm captures the spectator with the velvety sensuality of the material, which the artist now works with greens, purples, opaque and satin colors, turning these works into paintings that ask to be touched, caressed, like the disturbing skin of a surface of pleasure."(2)

Thus, the glossy surface of the painting is a skin that hides more than it shows. This formless skin, like a thick liquid in ebullition, lets bubbles escape where the stories develop. The approach to each of Harte's works occurs in gradual moments that inevitably end in closeness, almost putting one's nose to the painting. In that process the history of the work, the one that is being narrated, is discovered. The spectator easily enters a kind of reverie and attends a staged spectacle, where one does not know (or it is not possible to define) the drama or the comic, although without doubt a parodic tone hovers at all times. And the artist obliges us—finally—to be voyeurs, without ethical or moral remorse of any kind.

STRANGE NATURE

Nature appears as an artificial, controllable and manipulable construction, which integrates perfectly into Harte's private world. It is also about nature as a source of inspiration and information. It permanently raises the ambiguity between the organic and the artificial, as in *Los gusanos de piedra*, in which three strange worms, each with one eye, come out into the open after breaking a stone wall, which is actually made of formica.

Harte's work hides more than it shows, and what is hidden will never be shown, but we can still intuit what it is about. A metaphor for other concealments, which we know we will never discover. A drama with which we live eternally. In *La Mosca, 1991*, ambiguity gives way to humor: a group of flies is trapped in water spilled on an ordinary folding table. One of them is a caricatured portrait of the artist. This work, influenced by Pablo Suárez's aesthetic, destroys possible existential complexes, crushing them with irony and humor. In one of his first achievements in works in space, *El Gordiplan Hartico, 1995*, plays in the title with the surname of his friend, the artist Sebastián Gordín, and his own. It also anticipates the Matrix psychosis so fashionable in these times. In a white ball a conspiracy develops that can be observed through some holes; we don't know if it is a macabre game or the hive of some strange insect. The doubt that borders on drama is always aided by humor and irony. Without doubt, the most beautiful and highest quality works, those that demonstrate the maturity achieved by the artist, are the 'tree sculptures'. *Accidente domestico, 1999*, shows a scene in which three characters—the artist and his closest family—contemplate, perplexed and fearful, how the branch of the tree they inhabit mutates and transforms from a crystalline sphere into a strange liquid. Tenderness is present in this excellent work. In *Lampara esquinera*, meanwhile, one of the most recent works in the exhibition and, without doubt, one of the most suggestive, we see a young tree with barely two branches that end in fruits, shaped like bubbles. One fulfills the function of illuminating, as the title of the work indicates; the other is a glass bubble inside which we observe a muscular green dragonfly (Hulk-style) emerging from its cave. It looks annoyed and observes us. We uncomfortably realize that we are interrupting something: its rest, its sleep, or a love act. The scene freezes in time, transpires but has no end; we barely see an image as in a film frame. In this moment of uncertainty, humor does not help: the same thing happens as when we make a mistake and compensate for the embarrassment with a pathetic smile.

Notes: (1) Generalizing, 'Rojas' is known as the aesthetic and taste of a group of artists who exhibited and circulated through the Ricardo Rojas Cultural Center, of the University of Buenos Aires, which from the end of the eighties until 1997 was coordinated by the artist Gumier Maier. (2) The Language of Parody, by Laura Batkis, Lápiz Magazine 158/159, Spain.