

Hernán Marina. Modern Nature

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The Possibility of a Garden

In a poem from 1992, Diana Bellesi describes the construction of her own garden as that of someone who makes the right gestures in the wrong place. The wrong place, but also the "roamed-over" place. Erred-upon, she says, not out of error, but as *another* place, "like talking to the mirror's reflection and not with the person who's looking at herself in it." A garden in which to hold dialogue, she says, elbow to elbow with beauty, "with ever mute yet ever active death working in the heart." The garden, this space which sometimes opens onto the edge of the world, presents, above all, as a condition of possibility, the suspension of any task not focused on the precise choreography of care. Investigation, discipline, silence, among other placid forms of work, become the variables that give shape to the intimacy of this heterotopia. One specific kind of space that has within it powers, forces, ideas, regularities or discontinuities, which we might easily classify but which in their entirety offer one and the same form of grace: to be the owners of a logic of one's own.

As an other space, as a territory of difference, the garden achieves the utopian through a careful passion for the small gesture. To turn over earth, gauge the sun's impact, provide water, celebrate what is born and dispatch what, on drying up, is defeated in the face of time. A place out of place, said Michael Foucault referring to architectures of power. Scenes of transience, urban hideaways, or rather, terrains artificially modulated for rest, which, in a novel guise, under the innocence of their latent power, promise to suspend the normal, twist the course of the same, opening themselves like some tunnel of reason and thus asking for the time not to do what is expected, what 'ought' to be done, what's been imagined as possible, or paradoxically, what feels natural. To keep a garden, Bellesi sums up, is to let oneself be kept by it. That is, to be diluted into the form of this non-space. To lose face, body and the notion of oneself, in this fashion, sets itself as a starting point for yielding to the absurd mystery that's revealed in being that otherness of time, that love for the present that's required in difference. A fertile, conflict-laden, uncontrollable space which, when it is listened to from the patient humility that its contemplation inspires and demands, speaks of nothing more than the precious detail of underestimated forms, of life's repetitive beauty, deemed unintelligent, of one's relinquishment to the speed of sense, of all and of nothing in particular, since, in the vital intensity of the experience without a demand, it is impossible to give way to the selfishness of separation.

Modern Nature [Naturaleza moderna], Hernán Marina's current exhibition, embraces the docile requirement of this arduous labor that cultivation implies, the recovery and hospitable listening that the practice of retreat offers, from enclosure and voluntary abandonment of the complex significations the possibility of a garden necessitates. In the set of large-sized paintings that make up the show, Marina creates a narrative that is not linear, but rather, sparkling and spontaneous, of moments of accidental intensity, of autonomous beauty, and of subjective immersion in the everydayness of someone who creates a custom-made garden, a little park: to flee from time, to rest from history, or, momentarily, to close down the

operativity of meaning, through the zig-zagging, imprecise lines of a green botanical nervation.

Through the careful observation of these organic details that expand over his canvases, that oscillate between close-ups of radiant flowers, surprise visits from colorful insects, and natural aromas enveloping all this new growth, Marina enacts the radical mellowness of a change, at a rhythm of his own steady pulse. He narrates, with the capricious freedom of the personal diary, that something difference demands to take shape, that something appears to have departed, but that, even in the face of the urgent irruption of this desire to leave behind, *"still" is "later."* A vital mourning over oneself that captures the energy of a collective farewell. A form of in-gathering retreat of the human that not only tells a story we might surmise to be personal, but rather that incarnates the major question of an era in crisis over its own future.

This ambivalent stance Marina takes in his return to painting is offered as a method for the non-conflictual coexistence amid that which encounters no synthesis, something in his long path as an artist he has managed to cultivate as a particular form of erotic suspension in the preservation of contradictory drives. If through his recognized hollow figures, in which gymnasts, colossi, laborers or adepts of sadomasochism are ascetically, analytically captured at points of peak physical tension, Marina offers a strange approach to the body's potential, to the study of its shapes and the intimacy of the social choreographies out of which subjects are made, connected and function in some communality, in *Modern Nature* he gives continuity to that operation, writing in a direction contrary to or going beyond the redemptive instrumentality of content, the transparency of analysis and the speed of social meanings. Decentering the focus of his reflections onto work, efficient output, industrial technique and the materiality of project-based cultures, Marina replaces the analysis of social mechanics with the learning that arises out of suspension, the inactive, what enters into a state of rest, surrenders itself and allows itself to be thoroughly taken over by the natural.

Attention toward humans and their capabilities, then, is cut back in this set of paintings by the moving experience of waiting, silence, sufficiency of detail. There, the delicate beauty of plants comes in as a school against the ego, blurring the imperative of identity in order to offer the wrinkled softness of its textures; interrupting the truth of the body in order to illuminate the space from the underestimated complexity of the monochromatic; and altering the blank asceticism of spatial metaphysics through the gratitude for a sky that gradually mutates in its thickness, epitomizing the presentness of what is living.

So it is in the simplicity of this garden that Marina shows not just a microphysics of the long conflict between nature and modernity, between what lives without authority and what aims to control it; but rather, he shows that one similarly risks pronouncing on the longevity of this paradox, out of the vital intensity of a suspended agency, from the splendor of the contemplative and from a return to inaction, meaning, an irremediable return to experience, with the pressure of an event, of proposition or conjecture. A stimulating opportunity, which reminds us that, when we fix our attention on the immediate, the near and the small, what wells up is a profound awareness of the materiality of the world, and with it, the urgency to reconcile ourselves to be an indivisible part of it.

Nicolás Cuello

Archivist, art historian and free-lance curator

Hernán Marina (Buenos Aires, 1967) is a visual artist and sociologist. He works in many different formats, such as performance, intervention and sculpture.

He took part in group exhibitions: *Microcentro Cuenta, reposición Lírica y Cambiaria*, Performance Biennial (Buenos Aires, 2023); *Poéticas botánicas*, Museo Campo Cañuelas and *Arte en Juego*, Fundación PROA (Buenos Aires, 2021); *Yoko Ono Universo Libre*, Centro Metropolitano (Quito, Ecuador, 2018), *BP.17*, Performance Biennial (Buenos Aires, 2017), *Naturaleza: recurso y refugio del hombre* [Nature: Resource and Refuge of Mankind] (Centro Cultural Kirckner, Buenos Aires, 2017), *Evento agua* [Water Event] (in the frame of *Yoko Ono. Dream Come True*, MALBA, 2016), *Marina / Rosales / Stoppani* (Prisma Kunsthalle, Buenos Aires, 2015), *Perceptus Mutantis* (Museo da Imagen e Som, São Paulo, 2011), *Remap 02* (Athens, 2009), *Cine y Casi Cine* [Cinema and Almost Cinema] (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2007), among other exhibitions.

Among his solo presentations and shows were: *Hermes* (Espacio Fundación Telefónica, Buenos Aires, 2014), *Gestos, diagramas y posturas* (Museo Castagnino, Rosario, 2014), *Gestures and Postures* (Ivo Kamm Zürich y Mirta Demare, Rotterdam, 2013), *Helenismo* (Mirta Demare, Rotterdam, 2009), *Silencio* (Galería Nueveochenta, Bogotá, 2007), *Le Partenaire* (Teorética, San José de Costa Rica, 2007), *Coloso* (MALBA, 2004-2005), *Men's Health* (MAMBA, 2003).

He created many public interventions, such as *Proyecto inmersión*, Subterráneos de Buenos Aires (2019), *El salto*, MALBA, Escobar (2017); *Hermes*, Fundación Telefónica (Buenos Aires, 2014); *Tecnópolis* (Vicente López, provincia de Buenos Aires, 2013).

He received the First Acquisition Prize in Argentina's *104th National Visual Arts Salon* (in the sector Installations and Alternative Media, 2015), the MAMBA Fundación Telefónica Prize (2009), the Creative Fellowship of the National Arts Fund (2007), the Konex Prize, Diploma for Merit (2002), the Leonardo Prize (Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2002), among other distinctions.

His work is found in the collections of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, MALBA (Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires), Fundación Telefónica de Argentina, Museo de Arte y Diseño Contemporáneo de Costa Rica, Fundación Ars Teorética (San José de Costa Rica), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León [Spain], Museo Castagnino+macro (Rosario) and Museo de Bellas Artes Dr. Juan R. Vidal (Corrientes).

He lives and works in Buenos Aires.