

## NATURE AND DESTINY

By Gabi Scardi

We're born, coming into the light full of potential. But the path we will follow is one; one alone, unique and particular, the existence we will live; at each step, a choice, and every choice excludes other possibilities. Nature and nurture are the terms we use for that complex combination of factors that contribute to every choice, determining our personal destiny and therefore the collective evolution of which our individual stories are segments. If, as they say, "the lightest beating of a butterfly's wings can cause a tempest in another part of the world", then each of us, acting in the world and bringing to it our dreams and fears, passions and desires, inscribes a variable; each of us, with his or her own story, thus belongs to the future. But today the concepts of nature and future seem vague. Where nature is concerned, its very notion is part of the cultural baggage we contribute to construct. At the same time, though, nature is extraneous to our control. "Mother and stepmother", as the stereotype would have it. Today, as always, man enjoys her generosity, undergoes her violence, and takes part. In his artificial world he borrows her models, replicates her mechanisms. He tries to manipulate, exploit, contain nature: in many cases the feeling of belonging to the world coincides with the desire to tame it. Yet we always remain in a condition of dependency: we are born, we reproduce, we die; we are subject to the rhythms and cycles of life, our only body, unique, singular, has a profound relationship with time, and we depend on the environment for our survival. Furthermore, we can see that to a growing extent the situation is getting out of hand. Not only do we have the more or less realistic sensation that natural and artificial, the sphere of the born and that of the produced, are linked by an increasingly complex relationship. We also realize, above all, that we can seriously damage the planetary organism, the context, ourselves. We are conscious, by now, that the implications of our actions on the ecosystem can come back to haunt us, and we are afraid. So much so that while until a few decades ago we thought about the future in terms of hope and progress, of all good things, today this future is seldom mentioned, and man seems not to want it; he actually fears it. We can allow ourselves few certainties. Moreover, the impossibility of looking forward to something better has, in many cases, made us stop looking forward at all. And man, more global but

less happy, lives in a restless, remissive present; he no longer looks at what is in store for him, and he seldom dreams.

What's left is art. Pertinent to its time, from which it knows how to bring out what is salient but hardly visible, art is the sphere marked by an attraction to what does not yet have a definite form; the sphere of research and experimentation par excellence, open to change, simultaneously its expression and agent, art can meet the challenges of the present, deploying the weapons of critical force and perspective.

Like science, art implies attention and curiosity, and requires both analysis and intuition: a mind readied by study orients the gaze of artists, telling them in what direction to observe, allowing them to see things and distinguish details that are visible to all, yet of little import for most; and then they distill a meaning.

This open procedure permits artists not to miss signals, to catch the unexpected, to incorporate random happenings, making them an integral part of the work. "Chance favors the prepared mind", Pasteur said. All this takes on a synthetic, intelligible guise in the form of the artwork.

Art today is one of the disciplines that can anticipate the future; not so much in the sense of previewing destiny in precise terms, as in the sense of indicating an openness to change and a plausible direction, of conveying a constructive, projective dimension that allows us to recoup some faith in a destiny of growth that involves all mankind.