



Marine Contemporary

006

Robert Minervini
*On the Nature
of Things*



Essay

Claressinka Anderson

When I first saw Robert Minervini's work, I was literally taken in by the view. His paintings often remind me of that moment when we look out at a view and wish we could capture it, only that we never truly can. The way we perceive space as humans, the way our brains take in a view and the way it actually makes us feel is very different from any possible representation through a picture. Yet, Minervini somehow manages to bring us to that very place. Perhaps it is partially to do with scale, the fact that his paintings are predominantly larger than life and therefore naturally leave us in awe of the infinity of space, but it is more than that. As a painter, Minervini has a gift for handling many opposing elements with deft and grace. Minervini plays with abstraction and surrealism, creating dynamic juxtapositions between desolation, glamour, the absurd and the sublime. These contradictory ideas happily intermingle on a Minervini canvas and that is ultimately what makes his paintings so compelling. The dreamy, sweeping views from futuristic high rises or urban swamplands under freeway overpasses evoke parallel universes full of strange promise. We are left feeling disoriented and giddy, the radioactive colors and uncanny landscapes, paired with every day objects are the perfect and necessary anchor to reality.



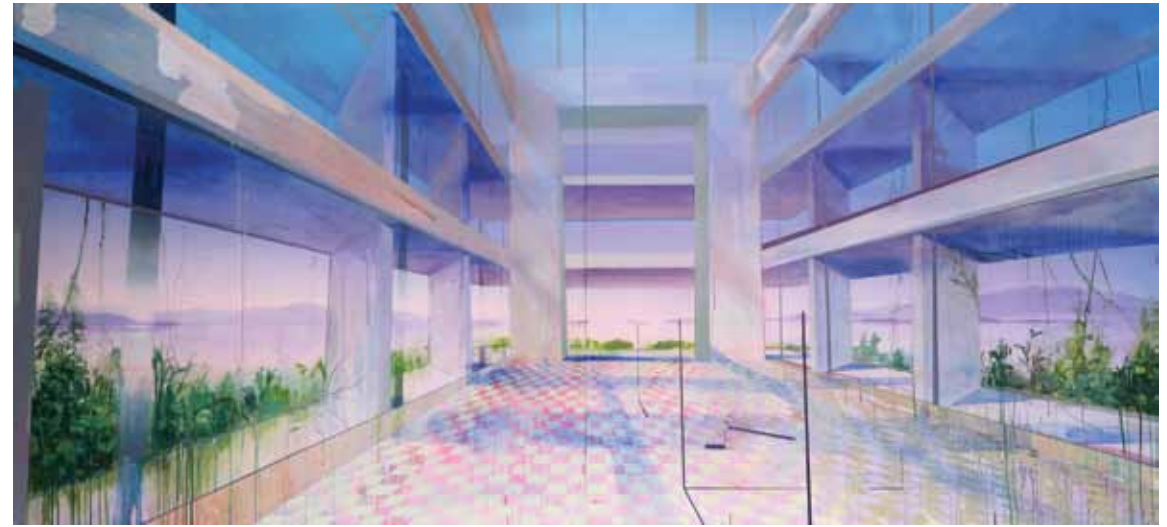
L.A. (sell me something else)
Acrylic on canvas,
50" x 68", 2009



The Rising Tide
Acrylic, oil and spray paint on canvas,
46" x 50", 2010



It's Time
Acrylic and spray paint on canvas,
60" x 96", 2009



The Generosity of Being
Acrylic on canvas,
46" x 100", 2010

The word Utopia, originating from the literal Greek meaning “non place,” suggests that perfection can only exist in the realm of imagination. Minervini’s work presents invented spaces that are based on reality, but revel in artificiality. In these non-places, he subverts nature, constructing or destroying architectural sites and alluding to the making of a utopian and/or dystopian environment. We are carried into and through the shells of buildings – have they been abandoned or are they being built? There is a feeling of movement, of being in a constant state of flux. Civilization in all its forms is the subject of Minervini’s work, but humans themselves are markedly absent. Minervini started off as a figurative painter, so it is interesting to note that although the works are no longer figurative, they are still about the figure in a more psychological sense. They are, in essence, meditations on humanity.

Minervini has a high regard and understanding of art history and the urban landscape with its ever-changing patterns. His work has a dreamy, luminescent quality, evocative of painters such as Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Cole from the Hudson River School, which were in turn influenced by the Northern Romantic Painters like Caspar David Friedrich and J.M.W Turner. The fundamental difference of course, being that those works were about man’s communion with nature and its symbolic relationship to religious, spiritual and cultural ideas of the time. Minervini’s works portray a more post-apocalyptic vision of the world: we are at once at odds with nature, yet completely subsumed by it. It continues to survive regardless of our obvious success at destroying it, like the small plants that creep their way through concrete in the middle of a city sidewalk, the nature in Minervini’s work grows and literally takes over the canvas, sometimes as a literal framing device that we look through, as if we are forced to look at the earth from nature’s

perspective, irrespective of any perceived power we may think we hold over it. A Minervini painting shows the scars that humans have left on the earth, albeit they are beautiful scars. Like the clichéd expressions about scars making humans more layered, perhaps Minervini is implying that the earth is a more interesting place because of humans, with their contradicting inventive thoughts and destructive tendencies.

There are nods to painters ranging all the way from Caravaggio to members of the Leipzig School, like Matthias Weischer and Neo Rauch. With an eye both on the future and the past, Minervini is constantly reinterpreting art historical references from Tondo paintings to classical sculpture. He is also heavily influenced by literature, especially those writers that look at the contemporary philosophical underpinnings of our relationship with beauty and the sublime, namely Jacques Rancière, Dave Hickey and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. Minervini also looks at architecture from Mid-Century Modern design to Buckminster Fuller. So inspired by Fuller, was Minervini, that he painted an entire series of work inspired by his geodesic dome design. He also often moves seamlessly between exterior and interior, the worlds of nature, architecture and fantasy coexisting perfectly and uses quirky objects that reference the Mid-Century Modern aesthetic as anchors to or obvious departures from reality in his paintings.



Sunken Dreams
Acrylic and oil on canvas,
48" x 72", 2011



Domestication
Acrylic on canvas over panel,
18" round, 2010



New Age Mansion on the Hill (detail)
Acrylic and oil on canvas,
60" x 96", 2011



New Age Mansion on the Hill
Acrylic and oil on canvas,
60" x 96", 2011



Automatic Model (detail)
Acrylic and oil on canvas,
60"x 120", 2011



Automatic Model
Acrylic and oil on canvas,
60"x 120", 2011



The Bridge
Acrylic on wall,
10' x 50', 2011

As an artist, Minervini progresses at almost an alarming rate, with each new painting building on the next. His work has become progressively more detailed and nuanced. Where there was a rougher quality to his earlier work, his new paintings are more refined and elegant, yet still retain some of the feel of his earlier murals, with references to graffiti and street art. As part of a continuing investigation into reinterpreting contemporary landscape painting, *On the Nature of Things*, takes a slightly new direction by exploring the outside world through the framing of interior spaces and furthers the spatial complexity seen in previous bodies of work. These imagined locations are highly layered and meticulously built, layer upon layer, each added element further pushing the boundaries of perceived space and quietly alluding to a sense of the uncanny.

On the Nature of Things is both a reference to the repetition of the still life motif featured in many of the works in this exhibition, as well as a direct quotation from the ancient Roman poet Lucretius' poem by the same title "*De Rerum Natura*." The book of poetry, now more than 2000 years old, is a call to radical ideas such as that the universe functioned without the aid of gods, that religious fear was damaging to human life, and that matter was made up of very small particles in eternal motion, colliding and swerving in new directions. Lucretius' serendipitous prediction or understanding of atoms is poeticized in what he called the world to be made up of "matter" and "void." All of the titles of the paintings for this exhibition are direct quotations from the poem and the literary references are a part of the conceptual underpinning for these multi-faceted works, which, through the juxtaposition of these various references, place the viewer somewhere between the past, present and future. One of these is the *Vanitas* painting, a type of symbolic work of art meant for humanity to reflect upon the temporariness of life and morality. It is derived from the Latin origin "emptiness," which in turn relates to Lucretius' interpretation of matter and the void. Minervini looked particularly at the works of Rachel Ruysch, (1664 — 1750), a Dutch artist who specialized in still-life paintings of flowers. In a way, the works in *On the Nature of things*, function as contemporary *Vanitas* paintings, in which the contemplation of existence is made through a mixed symbolism of the intermingling of historical and contemporary objects.

Robert Minervini

(b. 1981, Secaucus, New Jersey, USA)
Lives and works in San Francisco, CA

Solo Exhibitions

- 2012 *On the Nature of Things*, Marine Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA
- 2011 *Sunken Dreams*, Gallery Hijinks, San Francisco, CA
- 2009 *A Means to an End*, Eleanor Harwood Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 2008 *Race to the Bottom*, Queens Nails Annex Extensions, San Francisco, CA
- 2005 *New Paintings*, Darius Gallery, Philadelphia, PA

Selected Group Exhibitions

2011

- *Mythic Futures*, Eggman and Walrus Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
- *Bay Area Now 6*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA
- *Unreal World*, Southern Exposure, San Francisco, CA
- *Incognito*, Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA
- *Salon No.8*, Marine Contemporary Art Salon, Santa Monica, CA
- *Call & Response*, Root Division, San Francisco, CA (Curated and Participated)
- *Micro/Macro*, Lobot Gallery, Oakland, CA

2010

- *Hi-Tide*, Aqua Art Fair Miami, Art Slant, Miami Beach, FL
- *A New Beginning*, 941 Geary, San Francisco, CA
- *Salon No.5*, Marine Contemporary Art Salon, Santa Monica, CA (Catalogue)
- *Space Odyssey*, Art Auction, Southern Exposure, San Francisco, CA

— *Formal Gardens*. Wild Nature, Pehrspace, Los Angeles, CA

2009

- *Brooklyn Utopias*, Brooklyn Historical Society, Brooklyn, NY
- *Introductions*, Root Division, San Francisco, CA
- *The Space Between Us*, We Art Space, Oakland, CA

Awards and Residencies

2010

- Artist in Residence, Root Division, Root Division Studio Program, San Francisco, CA
- Golden Frame Winner, 3rd Place, Art Slant

2009

- Artist in Residence, The Project Space, The Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, CA
- The Headlands Center for the Arts, Graduate Fellowship Finalist, Sausalito, CA

2008

- Murphy & Cadogan Fellowship, The San Francisco Foundation, San Francisco, CA
- Edwin Austin Abbey Mural Fellowship, The National Academy of Fine Arts, New York, NY

2007

- Artist in Residence, The Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT

2005

- Carmela Corso Scholarship, Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, PA

Robert Minervini received his MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2009 and his BFA from Tyler School of Art in 2005. His art has been published in "Future Perfect, Book 6", Beautiful Decay Magazine, 2011, "New American Paintings, No. 91, 2010" and "Mural Art: Large Scale Art from Walls Around the World", 2008.

Consequences of Matter
(and the places they came to pass)
Acrylic on canvas ,
60"x48" , 2011

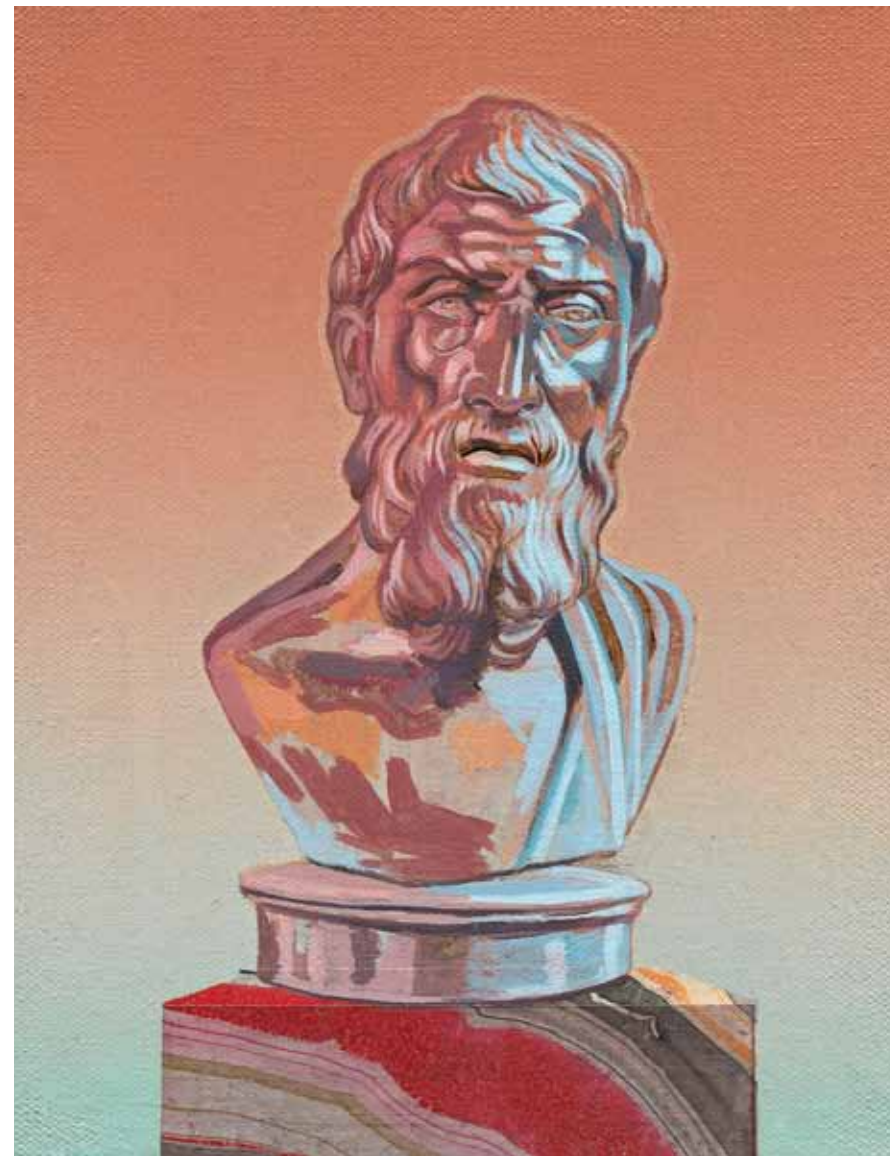


As Light Kindles Light
Acrylic on canvas over panel,
24" x 24", 2011





The Paths of Matter
Acrylic on canvas over panel,
8" x 10", 2011

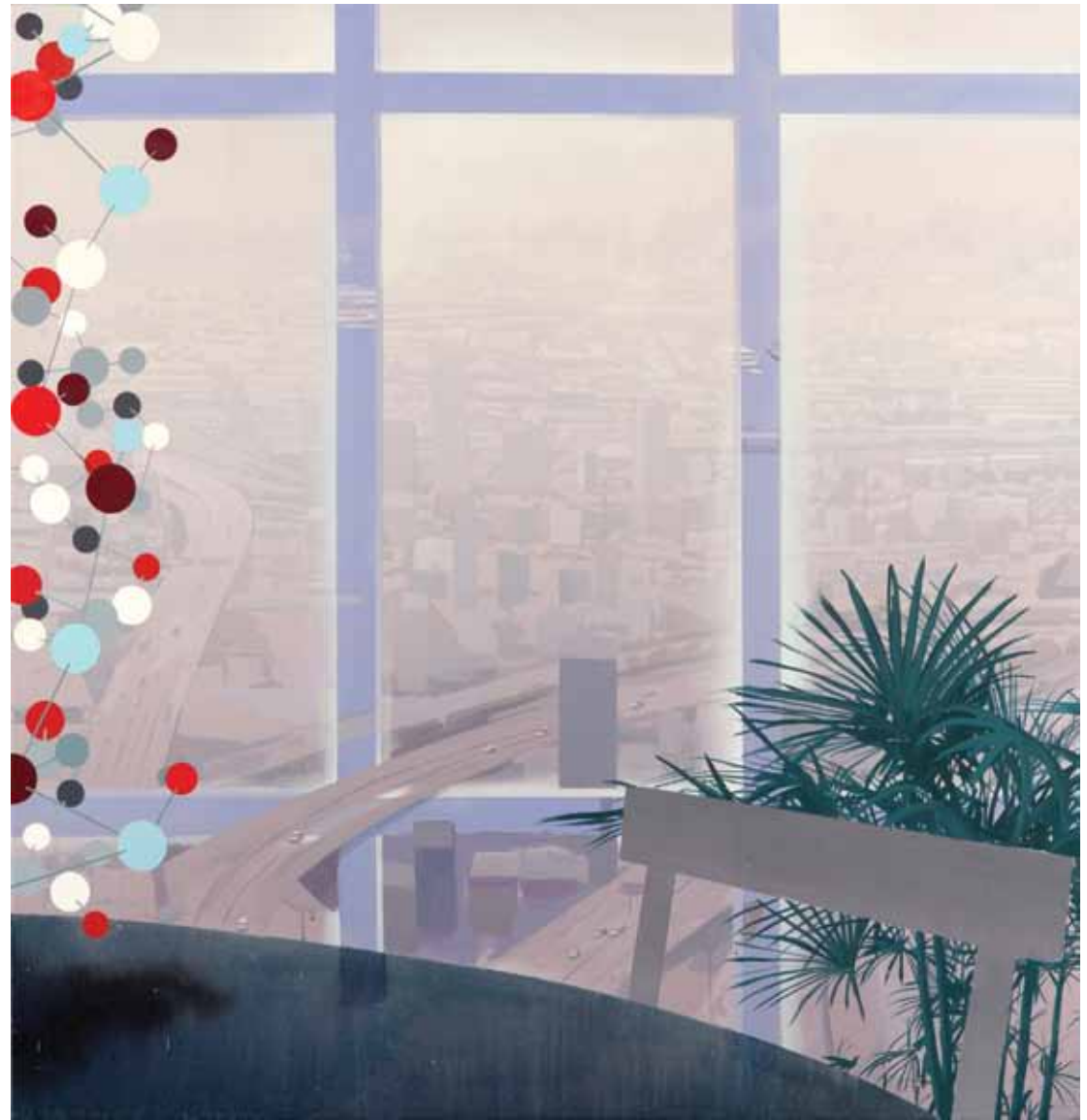


**A Voice So Loud and Clear
(Bust of Epicurus)**
Acrylic and paper on
canvas over panel,
8" x 10", 2011



Invisible Inane
Acrylic and oil on canvas,
48" x 72", 2011

In Fixed Order (and primordial seeds)
Acrylic and oil on canvas
48" x 46", 2011





Matter and Void
Acrylic on canvas over panel,
24" x 24", 2011

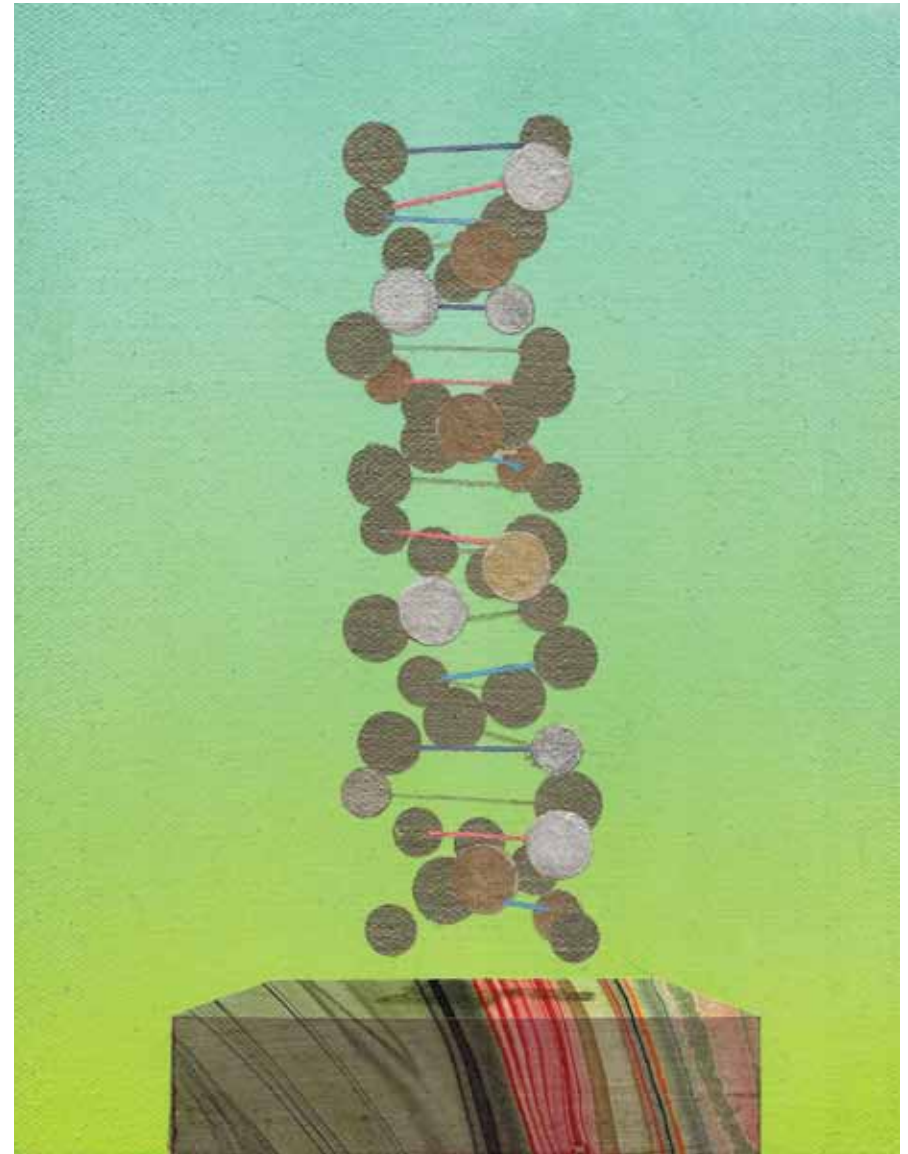


The Sum of All Things
Acrylic and paper on canvas,
32" x 33", 2011

The Peacock's Golden Generations
(stained with spotted gaieties, would lie o'erthrown,
by some new colour of new things more bright)
Acrylic and oil on canvas,
48" x 48", 2011



The Seeds for Things
Acrylic and paper on
canvas over panel,
8" x 10", 2011





On the Nature of Things
Installation



Marine Contemporary 006
Robert Minervini: On the Nature of Things

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