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From the series "Until Tomorrow Comes"
by Robert Minervini at Marine Contemporary

Utopia and dystopia vie in Robert Minervini landscapes

By Leah Ollman December 24, 2013

Robert Minervini paints landscapes of disappointment, shot through with irrepressible promise. Structures are half-built, either rising or abandoned. The blank stares of empty billboards advertise a kind of existential vacancy, while twining vines spread new life.

In his recent work at Marine Contemporary (the gallery's final show in its current location), the San Francisco-based painter straddles the dystopian and utopian, invoking a built environment that encompasses simultaneity and contradiction.

Much of the strength of the work derives from oppositions within it--the dueling senses of hope and despair, and stylistic disjunctions that turn every surface into a lively wrestling match. A straight-ahead realism jostles with graffiti-like drips and sprayed stencilings, crisp graphics and loose, painterly collaged bits. Descriptive representation is overlaid by fragmented, abstract grids. Sallow hues counter neon exuberance. Order vies with decay.

Nine of the 11 paintings on view form a sequence, "Until Tomorrow Comes," which begins with dawn breaking brightly over a post-apocalyptic flood plain, and closes with the moon gleaming over a pair of sterile, self-important office buildings. Minervini's work gives the eye much to feed upon, while prompting essential questions: What constitutes progress? Which architectural forms manifest our civilized best, and which our self-crafted demise? Whose persistence will win out--nature's or culture's? Are these romantic views backward or forward?