

Ariel Ruiz i Altaba

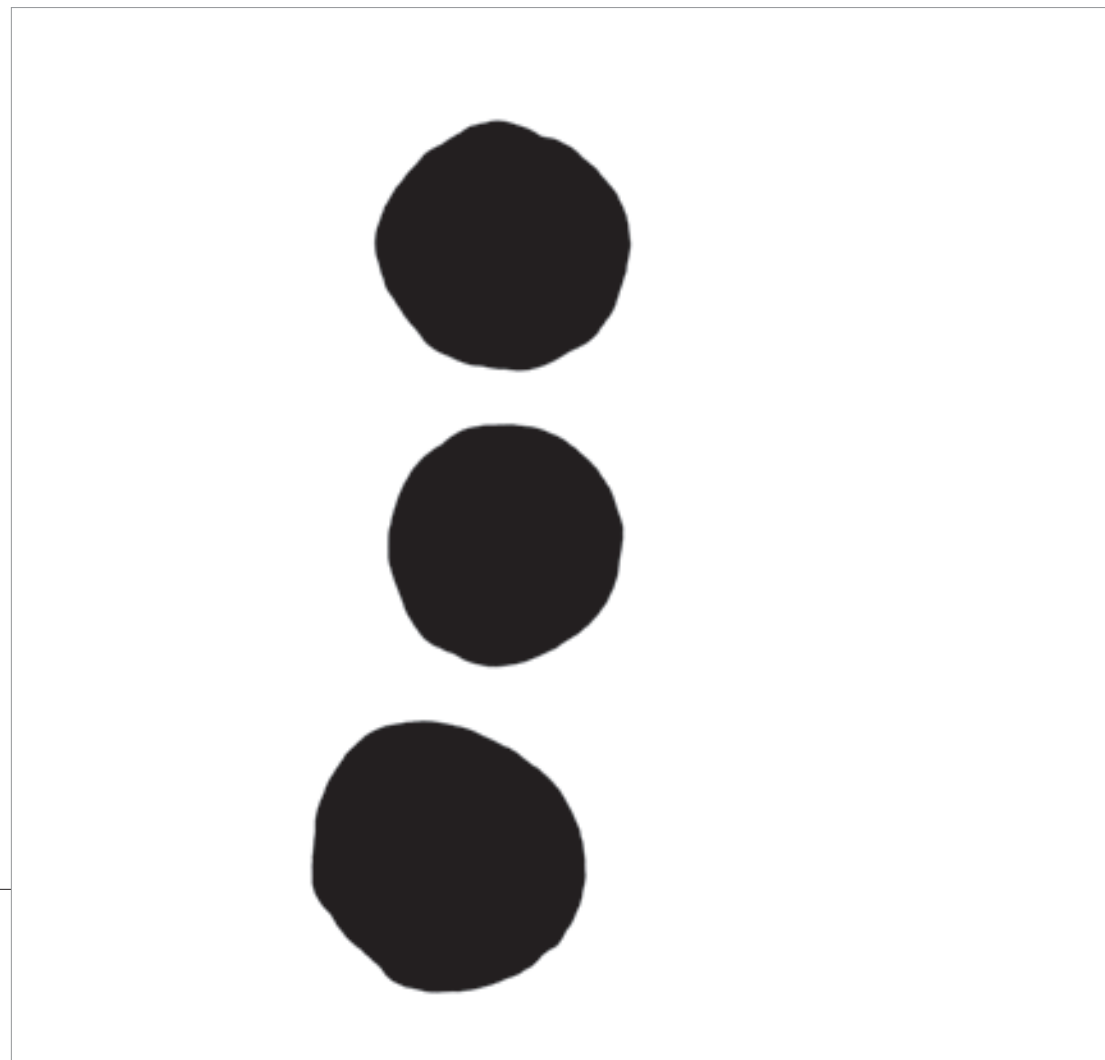


Supriya Joshi meets artist and scientist Ariel Ruiz i Altaba, and is left with a whole new perspective on photography.

How does one begin to describe minimalist works? As I looked at each picture from Ariel Ruiz i Altaba's recent exhibition *Minimal Landscapes*, I could not help being drawn into the various patterns and formations I saw. Besides

being the photographer who created these stunning images, Ariel also happens to be a scientist studying brain development and cancer. These facets of the artist's work really fascinated me, and I was really looking forward to getting to know more about him. It was only after an engaging

144 **"Technique is just a base in the creative process. Developing a conceptually interesting or challenging project is really the limiting step."**



↻ *Traces de llum* from the series *Minimal Landscapes*. Archival pigment print on heavy weight 100% cotton rag paper. 105 X 105 cm.



↻ *Loneliness in your dreams* from the series *Minimal Landscapes*. Archival pigment print on heavy weight 100% cotton rag paper. 105 X 105 cm.

conversation with him that I could consider myself enlightened on the beauty, the ideas and the art of minimalism that stems from this artist's work.

Early Influences

With a painter for a mother, Ariel's childhood saw him being surrounded with the smells of brushes and fresh canvases—this greatly influenced his interest in the arts. "I developed an interest in photography at the age of 8 or 10. I have been fascinated with the idea, message and concept of 'the image' since then," he says. Since he grew up in Barcelona, Spain, his formative years were heavily influenced by Catalan paintings. "These painters had very important influences on my work, even when I was not

thinking about them." He speaks of the sheer energy and vibe that the New York art scene provided, when he travelled there for his higher education. "There were a lot of artists doing very different things, and that was truly an enriching experience. New York is a boiling cauldron with people with many desires, interests and energy."

A Mixed Approach

While observing his pictures, one cannot help wondering how these beautiful and intriguing forms took shape. "I use a variety of methods to develop my pictures—old and new, 19th century, gelatin silver and digital," he explains. He uses a vast range of cameras, from 35mm and medium format equipment to Polaroids, plastic cameras and

"One can see how different images could hold similar relations to the intention of an artist doing classical fashion or street photography."

➤ *The Self-I* from the series *Genome and Identity*. Gelatin-silver print, 38 X 38cm.



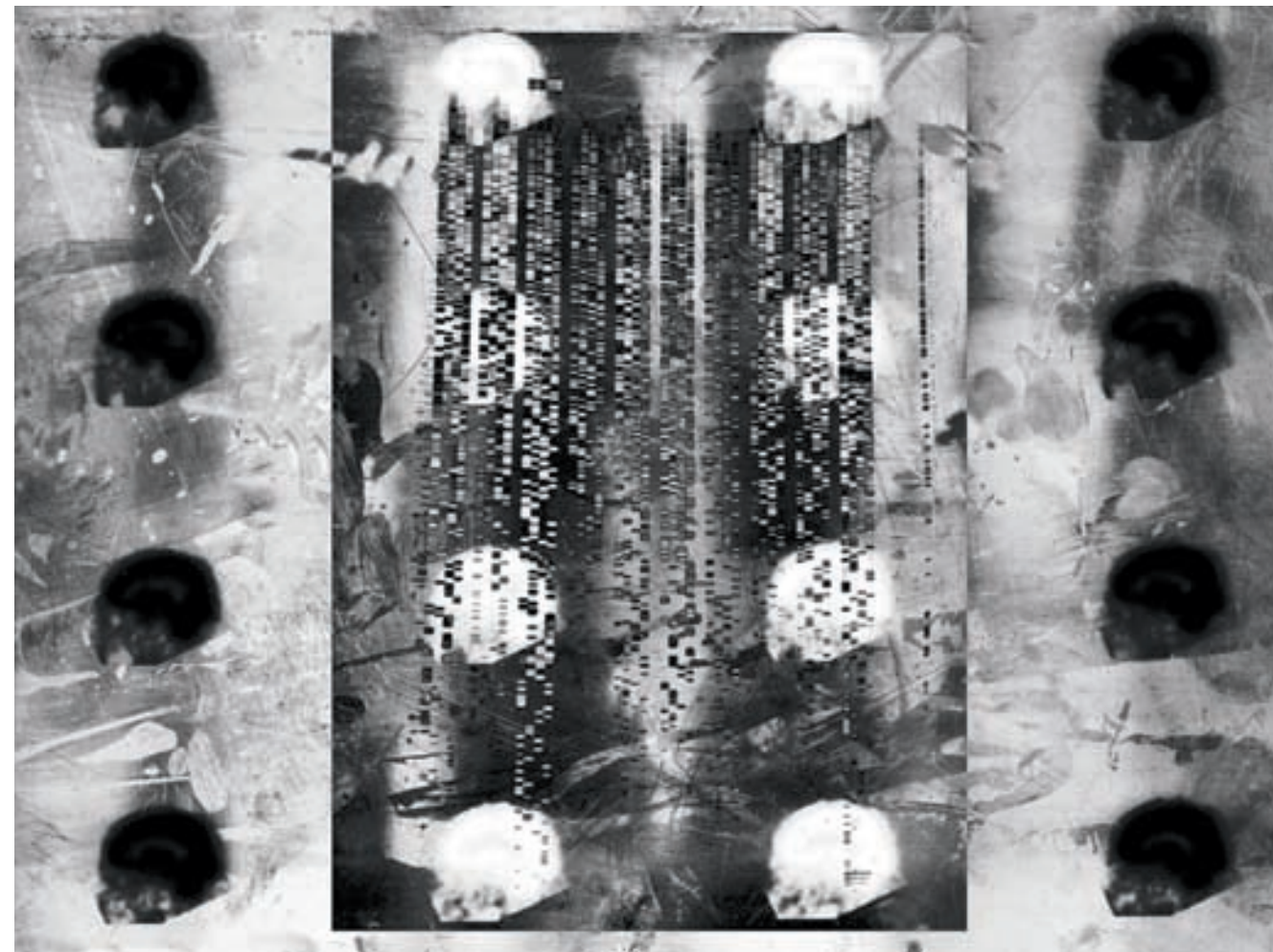
pinhole devices. "I develop the negatives and sometimes paint the prints chemically and replace the silver for other metals, or with different paints. The technical part

is important, just like the choice of chisel and hammer is important for the sculptor working with marble," he says.

Where Art and Science Meet

Although Ariel's work as an artist speaks for itself, I was also interested in knowing how he could balance photography and his scientific research. Was he a scientist first or a photographer? "My interest in art began long before I became a scientist. But, as much as I try to keep these two

➤ *47* from the series *Embryonic Landscapes*. Gelatin-silver print, 38 X 38cm.



➤ *Race* from the series *Genome and Identity*. Archival pigment print on heavyweight 100% cotton rag paper. 75 X 105cm.

separate, I cannot help but be influenced with what I do and see," he opines. It was during his work in the laboratory that he noticed the beauty of the forms that he was recording data with 35mm film and there were a few frames left in the roll. Instead of just rewinding the roll, I decided to photograph these formations. I saw these fantastic images forming before me—valleys and mountains, with different contours, contrasts, shades and moods, depths and colours," he reminisces.

images. You choose the framing, the mood," he said. As I pondered over this statement, he continued, "While framing an image, we make certain key decisions to interpret the reality that we perceive. That, in fact, clearly proves the impossibility to capture or shoot reality," he explains. According to him, all images are messages and the messages are ▶

"Images are not shot—they are constructed"

"The idea that reality is portrayed in a photograph is political and relates to the (ab)use of the message, for instance in advertising."

Art Mirroring Reality

Some of his works have taken him a long time to finish. He explains, "The series of photographs entitled *Embryonic Landscapes* took me around 15 years to complete. With it, I wanted to share what most people do not get to see. I photographed developing embryos of non-human species, as a way to reflect who we are and what we have become. As a concept, it served as a mirror of all the things that we go through and how we change as we further develop." Ariel also believes photographs are not 'shot'—they are constructed. "You do not really capture



➤ *Homo sapiens* from the series *Genome and Identity*. Archival pigment print on heavyweight 100% cotton rag paper. 170 X 105cm.

not independent of the messengers or the media that supports them.

Fading Boundaries

Ariel sees genres like fashion portfolios, landscapes and street photography in his photographs. Though this interpretation could be confusing to some, he believes that genres and distinctions are related to the intention of the messages or images. "For instance, landscape photography

can relate to landscapes of cells or even galaxies, as these old definitions are very flexible. There is a certain flavour in the treatment of the image that can hold such parallels—it can be gritty, smooth, velvety, and we subconsciously associate this with certain genres," he says.

A Unique Interpretation

Ariel has always had a keen interest in knowing how a viewer interacts with his

67 from the series
Embryonic Landscapes.
Gelatin-silver print,
38 X 38cm.



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Still Life from
the series *Biophilia*.
Selenium split-toned
gelatin-silver print,
38 X 38cm.

photographs, enhancing the interaction of the viewer with his work. In fact he considers such personal interaction essential to impart meaning to his images. In his exhibitions, he often asks people what they see in his photographs. He ends up with interesting and amusing interpretations of his work. Speaking about his series *Minimal Landscapes*, he says that every viewer has a different relationship with any one particular image. "It is interesting to learn how people interpret the meaning between boundaries. As one goes closer to the images, one begins to notice that these boundaries are not perfect. They are diffused, porous, full of exchanges and permeate with possibilities. They try to suggest that each one of us is part of a greater self."

Moving Forward

So what are his plans for the future? "Recent works of mine focus on maps as mirrors of our own understanding and as the accumulation of individual traces. In addition, they incorporate landscapes composed in distant areas like Patagonia, Assam, Crete and Alaska," he says. Ariel hopes that this exploration never ends. "Even if I do not find something new to explore, I hope I can find a new way of exploring the same." It is this endeavour that forms the basis of Ariel's thought-provoking photography. ■

To view more of Ariel Ruiz i Altaba's stunning photography and visions, visit his website www.ruizialtaba.com

"My work, which is largely autobiographical, relates to the problem of identity..."