

Nicola Parente is Wide Awake

by Maria Glymph
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Nicola Parente began painting late in life but caught up and earned an international reputation before he hit 40. Armed with an MBA because that was what was expected of him – he comes from a family of entrepreneurs – Nicola started his professional career in business. Actually, as a wine importer and distributor.

Only that day dawns to which we are awake.

These are Thoreau's words, and they have inspired Nicola's newest body of work titled "Edge of Awakening" opening this Friday, September 10th at Gremillion & Co. Fine Art, Houston.

The work "explores neither awakening nor its opposite, but the uncertain worlds between the two where each person must choose among possibilities. Those choices, those points of decision, visited and re-visited, both discover and invent the nature of our lives."

Flash back.

In a conversation with an old friend about regrets, Nicola pondered what he would lament with the passage of time.

"Not being an artist."

He couldn't come up with reasons not to jump in and try it. His friend encouraged him. The old stereotypes of starving artists living under bridges, the impossibility of success, and that it was unthinkable as a full-time existence weren't enough to deter him. The future was his. No remorse.

Two years later, Nicola had the same conversation with the same friend. While he had been "dabbling," he hadn't really committed himself to his art and couldn't shirk the responsibility of answering to 'Why not?'

Flash forward.

Nicola is where he wants to be and where he is most comfortable: the art world.

He began by showing his work in restaurants and coffee houses about 12 years ago. His first break came shortly after when he was asked to exhibit in a gallery, and it wasn't long before he had his first solo show.

In 2009, he participated in *Transparent/Translucent*, curated by Wade Wilson, at the Museum Gallery at the University of Texas in San Antonio. A museum show!

Not bad.

Many variables have contributed to Nicola's success, but the one that he points to and laughs about – a strategic plan. Music to my ears.

Once Nicola had launched into painting, another of his supportive friends urged him to develop a path with clear goals. He had an MBA. He knew about this stuff. When he was at the University of St. Thomas, he used all of his projects and case studies to focus on art, but now, it didn't seem important.

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When he was awarded a grant from Creative Capital that was spearheaded by DiverseWorks, that all changed. “The first thing they said was that we each needed a strategic plan,” he laughs. “There it was again.”

Nicola says that it forced him to start putting things in writing, to articulate what he wanted from his life and his art. “Once you start putting things in writing, they come to fruition,” he continues. “You put it out there in the universe, it’s pretty amazing, you put it out there and you get a lot back.”

One of his goals: To be in a museum show within three years. It happened in two.

Nicola has participated in numerous exhibits in the United States and Italy. His relationship with Gremillion & Co. Fine Art has been incredibly rewarding, and this is his second solo exhibit at the gallery.

Nicola’s work is organic on many levels. Themes include the displacement of people, the redevelopment of communities, and the sustainability of water. His earlier works can be viewed on his website.

Of his new series, “Edge of Awakening”, Nicola says, “Art is a venture into worlds that are often only discovered in the attempt to represent them to yourself and others.”

He prefers to paint in series, “exploring multiple ways of saying not the same thing, but similar things, related things—things that are in process and could go in a multiplicity of directions. The possibility of awakening is also the possibility of remaining unawakened. Our lives are more circuitous than linear, living in more than one environment, a step forward, a step back, moving through a land with no clear boundaries whose silence we interrupt with both our words as well as our marks of paint, discovering and inventing our futures.”

The circuitous part of Nicola’s life makes him an active member of the Houston community. The world according to Nicola is not bound by his studio walls.

With Writer’s in the Schools, Nicola teaches students about art and music and helps them articulate what they see. He creates visuals of their words for discussion and also asks their opinion of his other paintings. He enjoys getting out and interacting with the students. Don’t be fooled. He smiles, “I learn so much from the students as well.”

Over the last year, Nicola has generously donated his artwork to help raise over \$19,000 for non-profits and their efforts. In 2009 for example, he was the featured artist at the annual Art for Arthritis benefit and auction, which helps the Arthritis Foundation improve lives through leadership in the prevention, control, and cure of arthritis and related diseases.

He also enjoys working with other artists. In 2008, he collaborated with Dominic Walsh Dance Theater in designing and creating the set for the World Premiere of Terminus, which is being revived this season and presented on October 21 through 23 at Zilkha Hall. In 2009, Nicola and fellow artist Divya Murthy created two site-specific installations at the Art League Houston, and each November he participates in Dia do los Muertos at Lawndale Art Center.

And there’s more.

Nicola is a huge supporter of the Houston theatre and arts community. He gets out and visits galleries to support other artists and to see what they’re working on.

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He admires the work of local artists Michael Arcieri and Patrick Palmer. Both also have studios at Winter Street Studios where Nicola spends time wielding his brush. The Chilean artist Roberto Matta has had a profound influence on his work, and Nicola has spent significant time studying his paintings at The Menil Collection, which has a large body of Matta's art.

Nicola believes that music influences art, and it is a big part of his process. He's been told that rhythm can be seen in his work. Again he smiles (he does that a lot). In his studio, you're apt to hear everything from opera to rap. He loses himself in the sound and emerges astonished at what he's produced on the canvas as a result.

"Once I dedicated my life and went into my studio and began painting full time, I have found the possibilities endless. Once I opened my mind to the creative side, I had all of these ideas," he says.

Nicola's "Edge of Awakening" exhibit will be on view at Gremillion & Co. Fine Art, Houston through October 9th.