

# Artist: Nicola Parente

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(<http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/sudmoennicolaparente1.jpg>)

“It’s the people that make a city.” –Nicola Parente

If this quote is true, then Houston is lucky to have Nicola Parente in its midst. This self-taught artist was named by Houston Press one of the “100 Creatives,” was an Honoree for the Cadillac *Texas Spirit* award, and has had solo exhibitions in both Mexico and Ethiopia. Besides for his professional work in numerous galleries, Parente also raises awareness for environmental and social problems in the community with public installations. He donates his time and money to multiple non-profit organizations, especially Writers in the Schools, where he helps students create visuals from their writing.

Parente was born in Italy but has been living in Houston for 23 years. He graduated from Kings College in Wilkes-Barre, PA but moved to Houston because of his work with the Italian Trade Commission. Parente had been making art his whole life but was never trained. He always felt the need to be creative but did not pursue art school in his early life because he was intimidated by the thought of making something for everyone to see. However, after a conversation with a friend about regrets, he decided to fully commit to making art and has now been a full-time artist for over ten years.



[http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/11-372\\_thirdnaivete\\_lr.jpg](http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/11-372_thirdnaivete_lr.jpg)

From "Edge of Awakening" series.

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Parente feels the contemporary art sphere provides a new world of possibilities for an artist. When Parente first began his career, he painted in a traditional manner with customary materials. However, he soon desired new materials to help mark his place as a contemporary artist. He experimented for two years with different plastics, which he believed to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century material. He utilized Houston's natural qualities, specifically the heat, as he tested each new material; Parente would leave his completed works on the different types of plastic in his car to see if the paint would crack or melt. He finally was able to find an industrial plastic that held onto the paint, ink, and powder he uses. He has been using this plastic for 6 years now. Parente uses acrylic paint, ink, and charcoal powder and thinks of painting as cooking a meal; he needs all the ingredients to create a masterpiece. Besides for his paintings, Parents sells his photographs and is involved with textile design. His paintings serve as inspiration for the patterns on carpets and rugs.



<http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/photo-3.jpg>

An example of a rug inspired from Parente designs

Houston has been a significant influence on Parente's work. The changes the city has gone through, specifically in the wards of Houston, triggered a specific series titled, "Edge of Urban Time." Parente documented the six different wards and how they were being transformed. Many of these changes are still happening today so it is interesting to see the portion of the journey Parente captures in his work. The wards of Houston, 19th century political systems established for dividing land, were poverty stricken and dangerous areas of the city. However, chain fences went up, Midtown was built, and the area began to grow into a developed and booming area. This series is a documentation of this transformation, viewed from behind the chain link fences. Parente would take photographs of the scenes and translate them into his paintings. His work captures the grittiness involved in the creation of the concrete jungle with the different grays and darkness incorporated in the painting. His bio states, "His paintings capture the fluidity and static elements of the urban matrix." This idea of movement is important in his work, but the movement becomes stationary through his perspective from the fence. Although most of the works are monochromatic, with the lines representing the fence he is peering through, each painting contains bits of red to represent the humanity in the city.



[http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/e\\_dscf6320\\_3b.jpg](http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/e_dscf6320_3b.jpg)

From "Edge of Urban Time" series.

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Parente became very involved in Houston, which in turn helped get his work out to the public helping him become known. Houston has so many organizations that help artists make their start, such as DiverseWorks and the Lawndale Art Center, and the entrepreneurial spirit of the city appeals to Parente. Houston allowed him to pursue his passion for art and the intense energy of the international city helps inspire him. As he said, "people make a city," and the people of Houston helped welcome Parente into the art world to create a start in his career.

Parente gives back to the city in many ways, including his public installations. About every two years, Parente creates a project that is focused on an environmental or social problem. While these installations are not a profitable venture, it is his way raising awareness about an important cause. His most recent installation was "Colony Collapse," completed in April 2013. Parente was inspired by the recent decline in honeybee combs and utilized 2,700 brown paper bags to recreate the comb environment. On top of the bags was a projection of bees with sound bytes of a bee colony. The work was installed in Micro scope 1824, a tiny installation space in Spring Street Studios, which helped recreate the setting of a hive. Parente's goal was to raise awareness concerning the harmful pesticides that are causing bees to leave their homes, and to inform the public about the importance of bees in our ecosystem.



[http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/nicola\\_becolony\\_shoot2\\_b21-1024x682.jpg](http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/nicola_becolony_shoot2_b21-1024x682.jpg)

“Colony Collapse”

Photo by Aaron Courtland

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Other installation work includes his project, “Wasted Resolve” and “Natural Recyclers,” which targeted Houston’s lack of recycling. Houston used to be the nation’s worst recycler for major urban cities, and Parente, along with Dyvia Murthy, worked to show the need for a decrease in local waste. The project was installed at Art League Houston, where the duo used trash found within a two-mile radius of the building to create trash graphs with information regarding recycling. “Natural Recyclers” was set up on the Art League’s patio, where Parente and Murthy create a garden of larger-than-life mushrooms made from wire and peat moss. Mushrooms are natural recyclers, and these representations worked as a reminder to the community concerning recycling.



<http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/wastedresolve2.jpg>

"Wasted Resolve"

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<http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/mushrooms41.jpg>

"Natural Recyclers" Copyright Nicola Parente Website

Parente's work has also served as inspiration for Houston dancer and director, Dominic Walsh. Walsh choreographed a 2008 ballet titled "Terminus" around Parente's paintings, which were then used as set designs for the performance by the Dominic Walsh Dance Theater. He also helped with scenic design the 2011 production of "Time Out of Line." Parente enjoys his work with the dance company because it helps him leave his comfort zone and work with modes of expression and creation other than painting.



[http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/terminus-058\\_lr.jpg](http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/terminus-058_lr.jpg)

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[http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/terminus-017\\_lr.jpg](http://htownart.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/terminus-017_lr.jpg)

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Here is a clip from the performance:

For more information on Nicola Parente, visit his website at: <http://www.nicolaparente.com/>  
(<http://www.nicolaparente.com/>)

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What a cool guy! I wish that I had thought of helping the environment like him!!

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