

artshouston

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Nicola Parente:
Journey



Parente challenges us, as local residents, to acknowledge the speed of our lives and to not just accept but to evaluate our emotions regarding time and progress.

The Italian-born, Houston-dwelling artist Nicola Parente has spent the years between 2004 and 2007 interpreting and portraying urban decay in our nation—more specifically, in and around the areas of the four “wards” of downtown Houston. If he sounds morose and sullen to you, the irony is that his demeanor is as opposite as one could imagine. After living in both America and Europe

throughout his formative years, Parente’s geographic and cultural savvy along with his liberal arts education at Houston’s premier University of St. Thomas served him well. His copious interpersonal skills leave no aspect of his particular artistic vision obscure. He is verbose, exuberant, and capable when explaining his art. Even when commenting, through his work, on the interconnectedness of all mankind or the slow exhale and death rattle of the cities we inhabit

and exploit, there is a joy about Parente - the kind of joy that can only be extinguished when an artist is not allowed to ply his craft.

For the past three years or so, Parente has concentrated on a series entitled, *The Edge Of Urban Time*. Wide panels made exactly to his specifications arrive at his warehouse space near the Washington Corridor. The material mimics plastic but is actually a synthetic with a similarly glossy texture—this is what helps

Nicola Parente: *Journey*

by Sarah Gajkowski-Hill

give his paintings a photographic appearance. He needs a great deal of space to work on these horizontally elongated, linear paintings. With the feel of the documentation's camera poised and pointed from a moving train or car, these paintings appear to always be in motion. The fact they are captured on the canvas is only by virtue of the fact that Parente's mind creates a still frame for the urban decay he envisions in fast-forward intensity before he translates it to

OPPOSITE: Nicola Parente, *Moving Forward*, 2008

BELOW: Nicola Parente, *Moving Sprawl*, 2008

PAGE 28: Nicola Parente, *Peripheral Movement*, 2008

PAGE 29: Nicola Parente, *Urban Movement*, 2008



the canvas. Primarily capturing the dirty and cloudy colors of Houston's "wards," the many shades of gray, ominous purples and olive tones hint at a dreariness and population instantly recognized as urban. As though you had glanced casually out the window of a quickly moving vehicle, the shapes and forms of a distinctly inner-city landscape appear, then change. Punctuated by frames, the picture repeats itself like an antiquated filmstrip snapping, and as you walk along the painting the individual images grow less distinguishable.

Parente uses his tools to slowly drag acrylic color paint and mixed media at times, across the panels. This is the way he achieves the desired effects of both the blurriness and the elongated "still frame" sections of each work. Knives, trowels, brushes, utensils of all kinds are littered around the perimeter of the unfinished works in his studio. The paints are meticulously catalogued so that colors can be duplicated or slightly altered and the swatches, tiny circles of organic palettes, are scattered nearby. Some images are reoccurring in this series—what appear to be skylines, industrial parks, chain link fences and factory smokestacks. But the perceptive is that they are fleeting. This time element is both literal and metaphorical. The city of Houston is notorious for its obscene amount of teardown and the incredible amount of money that allows developers to throw up new complexes in a few weeks time—with the bottom line always being financial. Houston has so much of the energy and has the resources to build sustainable structures in our city. On the other hand, we also boast the cheapest architecture projects in the nation. Without zoning laws, old neighborhoods skyrocket in property value even as the neighboring historic structures fall into disrepair. Other than weather, time is one of architecture's worst enemies. Metaphorically, everything moves quickly in an urban setting—everything speeds up. And it goes without saying that everything disintegrates and decays at this higher rate, too.



Being written up in *New York Arts Magazine* (July/August 2007) and having won the cover design contest at *002 Magazine* in December 2007, Parente has been getting a fair share of media attention recently. There are many more issues Nicola Parente's work purports to comment on—in the past he has thoroughly enjoyed studying and working out ways to help himself understand the interconnectedness of the universe and the people who inhabit it. A year of many honors for Parente, he also provided the background scenery and artistic direction for a highly intense performance pieced entitled, *E_Merging_II*. by the Dominic Walsh Dance Theatre.

The current show at the Gremillion Gallery, which has represented him for years, is entitled, *Journey* and is another comment on our city's urban landscape. In this slightly more optimistic series, the colors are a bit brighter and the chain link fencing is absent. The despair and dreariness of the constantly changing landscape shows promise instead of the emptiness of disrepair and

dilapidation. The repetition represents sustainability and the color palette he uses is full of a sense of rebirth and vigor. Especially small splashes of red, replace the dark ashes and dirty purples of *The Edge of Urban Time*. This evolving nature of Parente's work is due in part to the small strides he sees our city making towards eco-friendliness. By preserving "green" spaces and even adding green features such as the new "Discovery Green Houston Park" outside the George R. Brown, the effects of time on our city might actually improve its aesthetic. As far as artist's go, Parente is one of the most willing to look for the bright upside to every problem. After all is said and done, the name of the current show has an exciting aspect. Aren't all journeys expected to be a bit frightening? And, isn't every journey a learning experience in some sense? Parente challenges us, as local residents, to acknowledge the speed of our lives and to not just accept but to evaluate our emotions regarding time and progress.



Journey runs July 11th through August 25th, 2501 Sunset Blvd, 713.522.2701, gremillion.com

To find out more about Nicola, visit his website at nparente.com

