



Siddharth Parasnis

Contemporary artists have a complex, fraught relationship with art history: our reverence for our chosen art-gods vies with our desire to assimilate and transcend them. Gorky's filial, almost slavish dedication to Picasso ("If he drips, I drip") epitomizes the former; Pollock's Oedipal urge to vanquish that same art-king, the latter. Within today's theory-driven art world, the parricidal urge to dissect and dispatch (and analyze to death) often prevails, usually to the detriment of art.

Some artists, however, still find aesthetic nutriment in tradition where others find only dead, white husks. Siddharth Parasnis left a successful career in India as a book illustrator to study painting in San Francisco in 2005. He found within modernist painting, particularly within Abstract Expressionism and its "retrograde" representational offshoot, Bay Area Figuration, a range of styles and working processes that perfectly suited his developing sensibility; he now teaches at his alma mater, the Academy of Art College, and exhibits in San Francisco and Laguna Beach. Parasnis' medium-sized oil paintings of anonymous, isolated urban buildings synthesize a number of artistic visions that would seem strange bedfellows, even genetically incompatible: the melancholy solitude of Hopper and de Chirico; the abstract planarity of Mondrian and Hofmann; the architectonic poetry of Feininger; the improvisational freedom and painterly gesture of de Kooning, Kline, Diebenkorn and Park; and the oscillation between, and interpenetration of, representation and abstraction that we associate with Cézanne and Morandi.

Such stylistic dissection, though possibly useful, can inhibit our grasping the spirit or ethos of a painting. It is Parasnis' emotional, poetic response to the urban or suburban landscape that links his images, devoid of figures or narratives, with work of the past concerned with the mystery of even the humbler aspects of existence. Parasnis finds certain architectural locations charged with poignancy: "...odd places such as patios, corridors, thresholds, backyards, barns, a small alley or even a stairway supported by a broken old wall or it could be just a simple window. These places are often overlooked and quite mundane but they have something so emotional about them... We love them but we don't really understand their importance... One day they pass away and we realize what we have missed."

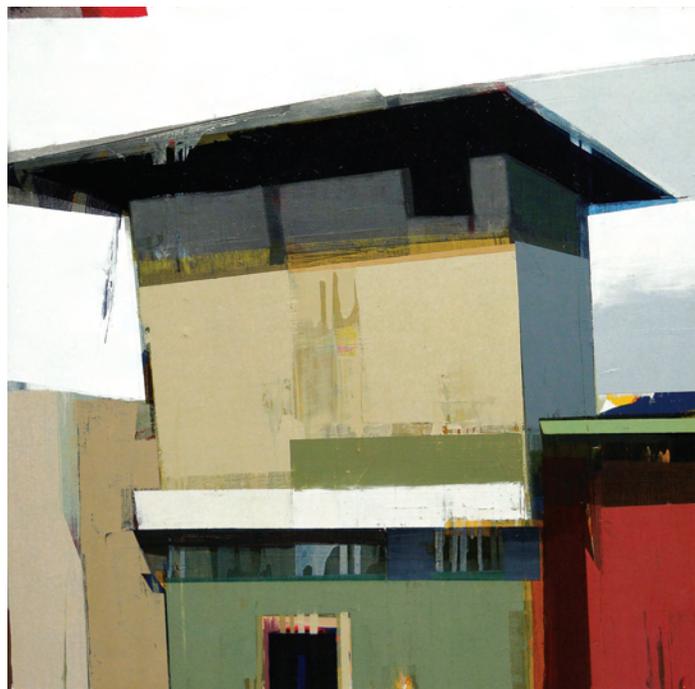
Instead of confecting sentimental genre scenes or ironic stage sets, however, Parasnis explores the poetics of space and place through the process of painting, with its balance of improvisation and organization. Sketches and photos that have been tightly framed and composed so as to energize the flat, abstract polygonal shapes of walls, windows, awnings, cornices, light poles and sky become the compositional scaffolding on which the artist adds richly textured and colored layers of paint—his walls. Dry-brushed and scumbled, scraped down and sanded, these hard-edged but abraded, "lived-in" planes not only breathe space and depth into the architecture depicted, but emotion; the paintings become recreations of buildings, and of their variegated histories in time, but also records of painterly seeing and feeling. Parasnis, an articulate and thoughtful man barely into his thirties, says that he relies increasingly

on intuition in order to keep surprising himself: "I try not to think so much; thinking sometimes ruins it ...You learn from everything."

The acerbic San Francisco writer Ambrose Bierce once defined painting as the coating of surfaces in order to protect them from weather and to expose them to the gaze of critics. Parasnis' palimpsestic works, with their frank sedimentary disclosures of creative process, evoke weathering and time, and they also stand up to the analytical cold gaze or heated glare of the erosive/corrosive critic. critic. Observes poet/essayist Peter Campion: "Parasnis doesn't paint figures into these canvases, and yet he always opens a space for imagination and feeling... formal ingenuity and excitement are everywhere intertwined with emotional seriousness."

—DEWITT CHENG

Siddharth Parasnis will be showing May 1–31, 2009, at Hang Gallery, in San Francisco, and August 1–31, 2009, at Sue Greenwood Gallery, in Laguna Beach CA.



"A BEIGE HOUSE," 2009

Siddharth Parasnis

OIL ON CANVAS, 30" X 30"

PHOTO: COURTESY OF HANG ART, SAN FRANCISCO