



# SIDDHARTH PARASNIS

## BUILDING COLOR

Siddharth Parasnis seems to thrive in the confusion of a big city. His studio — one tiny part of a large warehouse — sits right under Interstate 80 and the Bay Bridge, the main artery linking San Francisco and Oakland. It is noisy and dirty, made even more so because the building is undergoing an extensive renovation, turning the place into a chaotic construction zone. The hum of heavy machinery competes with the rumble of cars on the decibel scale and parking is next to impossible, but Sid barely notices. He sees angles, geometric shapes and a cacophony of colors. They all inspire him and form the foundation for every one of his canvases.

From the humble abodes that dot the countryside of his native India, to the grand facades of Nob Hill, Parasnis is enthralled with construction and design. In fact, if you ask him what he likes to do in his spare time, he'll say, "I like to walk around and study buildings. Sometimes I will stand in front of an old building for a very long time. For architecture to be attractive to me, it has to have history, and I try to paint that way." Parasnis is an artist, not a builder, so his abstracted creations celebrate the visual without any of the constraints of the mechanical. But there is no question that architecture is his muse.

Written by **ERIN CLARK**  
Photo by **DAN WHARMBY**



**IMAGE:** At left, *Cityscape*, oil on canvas. Above, Siddharth Parasnis outside his studio in San Francisco.



**IMAGE:** *A Gorgeous Day In The Country 3*, 32" x 32", oil on canvas.

Parasnis is soft-spoken, articulate and exceedingly polite. But don't let first impressions fool you. Underneath that mild-mannered exterior lies the heart of an ambitious and talented artist, willing to take risks and push himself way beyond his comfort zone.

He was barely 23 years old when he moved to the United States. He grew up in Pune, a large industrial city in western India. It is sometimes called the "Oxford of the East" because of the number of colleges there, or the "Detroit of India" because of its automobile industry. But it is perhaps best known as the home of legendary yoga

master B.K.S. Iyengar and his yoga institute, which attracts followers from around the world. This urban landscape, with its population of 5 million people, was the backdrop for Parasnis' creative beginnings, but it would be San Francisco that would offer the environment for his artistic coming of age. "It's an amazing city," he says. "San Francisco embraced me. I love the diversity. It's a liberal, nonjudgmental place with great culture and great architecture."

Graduate school brought Sid to the City by the Bay. "Most of my big decisions are spontaneous," he says. "My parents weren't all



**IMAGE:** From top clockwise: *A Gorgeous Day in the Country 2*, 30" x 30", oil on canvas. *A Town*, 30" x 30", oil on canvas. *House Near Railway Crossing*, 32" x 32" oil on canvas, *Midwest*, 26" x 26", oil on canvas.

that surprised because I was always an independent kid." Getting accepted at the Art Academy was the easy part; actually moving was a logistical headache. "When I first moved to San Francisco, I lived in seven different places in six months," he explains. "I couldn't afford anything." But he eventually settled in and got to work on a graduate degree and a promising art career.

He usually starts with a photograph taken on one of his many trips. "I like rustic architecture," Sid explains. "Back in India I adored the rural villages and old downtown Pune. Here in the U.S., I loved trav-

eling through the Southeast and Southwest. I found the pueblos in New Mexico, a rough neighborhood in Savannah, Ga., and industrial areas right off the freeway in Phoenix, very intriguing. But the photos just get me going. After a certain point, the paintings aren't about the photograph or even my memory of what I had seen. They are about the paint. It's like a game. Sometimes it's very playful and sometimes it gets very serious. Sometimes I'm chasing 'it' and sometimes it's chasing me."

For Sid, the "game" is about finding a balance, and that struggle



**IMAGE:** *Traveling through the South 2*, 31" x 43", oil on canvas.

very much reflects his personality. Look at his work and you will see deliberate, razor-sharp lines sharing space with big, bold strokes made with house paintbrushes. Like the artist himself, the process is a combination of very methodical and disciplined painting, interrupted by bursts of spontaneity and impulsiveness. Paint is applied, scraped away and reapplied until Sid is happy with the outcome. Sometimes, more often than he likes, the process doesn't work at all. "I don't know how many times I have ruined a painting that was close to its conclusion," he says. "But on the other hand, sometimes I get something I would never be able to get in a million years if I were trying to do it in a rational way. It's exciting but it also pisses me off sometimes."

Parasnis' architectural landscapes are familiar and foreign at the same time, in the sense that you feel like you've been there before, but you can't quite pinpoint where. And the experience is different for everyone: where one person may see Southern California bleak, another might see a rundown shack in Mexico or India. But that is the power and the beauty of the paintings. They aren't about places; they're about emotions. Where the painting takes you, how it makes you feel, depends entirely on your history, your experiences and yes, sometimes, your baggage. Sid likes this unspoken language between painter and the viewer, and believes there is an even bigger connection. "I believe that no matter how small or big a painting is and no matter how long I may have to work on it, I have to capture its soul in one session. The painting may take years to complete, but

the soul has to be discovered in one session. It's completely unpredictable when that moment will come. I'm always afraid it won't." It usually does, though, and it is what transforms a canvas of color, texture, lines and geometric shapes into something memorable and lasting.

Sid recently bought a condo in San Francisco, which given real estate prices in the Golden State, speaks to his success as an artist. He has settled in to his beloved adopted City by the Bay, but he certainly hasn't settled down. At 30, he doesn't know where his final destination will be — literally or artistically — and that's OK with him. He is content to live his life in a state of flux with one constant: his painting.

The yet-to-be-finished canvases hanging in Sid's studio right now show a new direction for the artist. They are still architectural, but more abstract than most of his recent work.

"I see myself going with simplicity; probably toward completely abstract," he says. But he admits he's never really sure of his next step. "I'm always in transition," he says.

What he knows for sure is that he will be in his studio daily playing the game. "Painting is like an addiction," he says. "I have to do it every day. I'm always afraid the creative energy won't come, but that pressure keeps me going and helps me find new things. I'm fortunate to be making it as an artist, but at the same time the hunger for finding something new is always there. It's not about money or fame. I paint because I can't think of doing anything else. I paint — that's what I do."

Working like an architect, Parasnis has the blueprint for building a long and successful career. It is an ambitious project for sure, but with talent, dedication, a good foundation and a healthy dose of the unpredictable, Sid Parasnis believes he has come up with a winning design.



IMAGE: *A Sunny Day*, 34" x 28", oil on canvas.

**"Painting is like an addiction, I have to do it every day. I'm always afraid the creative energy won't come, but that pressure keeps me going and helps me find new things. I'm fortunate to be making it as an artist, but at the same time the hunger for finding something new is always there."**