

Snapshots of Urban Life on Gieve Patel's Canvas

Image no: 1

Caption: *Car Traffic on the Central Streets of Mumbai*, India, December 2018, Envato Elements.

Link:

<https://elements.envato.com/mumbai-india-december-17-2018-car-traffic-on-the-c-U3Y3NTR>

Image no: 2

Caption: Gieve Patel, *Ship Building in Mumbai*, 2005, Acrylic on canvas, 177.8 x 304.8 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 3

Caption: Gieve Patel, *Crows with Debris*, 1999, Oil on canvas, 83.8 x 71.1 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 4

Caption: Gieve Patel, Detail, *Two Men with a Handcart*, 1979, Oil on canvas, 176.53 x 144.78 cm, E301289, Courtesy of the artist and Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. Gift of the Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection, 2003.

Link: N/A

Image no: 5

Caption: Gieve Patel, *Drowned Woman*, 1984, Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 60.9 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 6

Caption: Gieve Patel, *Dead Politician*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 60.96 x 91.44 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 7

Caption: Gieve Patel, *Footboard Rider*, 2016, Acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 152.4 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 8

Caption: Gieve Patel, *Early Guest*, 1982, Oil on canvas, 136.84 x 137.16 cm, E301096, Courtesy of the artist and Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. Gift of the Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection, 2003.

Link: N/A

Image no: 9

Caption: Gieve Patel, *At Kala Ghoda, Lovers In Summer Time*, 2018, Acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 198.12 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 10

Caption: Gieve Patel, *Gateway*, 1981, Oil on canvas, 137.16 x 272.73 cm, E301102, Courtesy of the artist and Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. Gift of the Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection, 2003.

Link: N/A

Image no: 11

Caption: Gieve Patel, *Early Morning Local*, 1981, Oil on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 12

Caption: *Passengers Boarding a Crowded Train in India*, Videvo.

Link: <https://www.videvo.net/video/passengers-boarding-a-crowded-train-in-india/6429/>

Image no: 13

Caption: Paolo Veronese, Detail, *The Wedding at Cana*, 1563, Oil on canvas, 660 x 990 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris.

Link: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Veronese,_The_Marriage_at_Cana_\(1563\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Veronese,_The_Marriage_at_Cana_(1563).jpg)

Image no: 14

Caption: Pietro Perugino, Detail, *Delivery of the Keys*, 1481–82, Fresco, 335 x 550 cm, Wikimedia Commons.

Link: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Entrega_de_las_llaves_a_San_Pedro_\(Perugino\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Entrega_de_las_llaves_a_San_Pedro_(Perugino).jpg)

Image no: 15

Caption: Pietro Lorenzetti, *The Crucifixion*, 1340s, Tempera and gold Leaf on wood, 41.9 x 31.8 cm, 2002.436, The Metropolitan Museum Of Art, New York. Lila Acheson Wallace Gift and Gwynne Andrews Fund, 2002.

Link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/438605>

Image no: 16

Caption: Gieve Patel, *Off Lamington Road*, 1982–86, Oil on canvas, 137 x 224 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

Image no: 17

Caption: Gieve Patel, *Early Guest*, 1982, Oil on Canvas, 136.843 x 137.16 cm, E301096, Courtesy of the artist and Peabody Essex Museum, Salem. Gift of the Chester and Davida Herwitz Collection, 2003.

Link: N/A

Image no: 18

Caption: Gieve Patel, *At Kala Ghoda, Lovers In Summer Time*, 2018, Acrylic on canvas, 152.4 x 198.12 cm, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Mirchandani + Steinruecke, Mumbai.

Link: N/A

“Everything that I knew about the streets of my city came to my aid. In Bombay the street is an extension of home, and as we know, is sometimes the only home. The emotional range expressed by the crowd was intoxicating, from serene presence to happy camaraderie, to destitution and misery, all in close proximity to each other.”
—Gieve Patel (1940–2023)

Born and raised in Bombay, Gieve Patel traverses multiple roles as a poet, playwright, painter and a practising physician. His narrative paintings take the form of ‘snapshots’ of everyday life in a monumental city.

Throughout his career, Patel has considered both the grotesque and the ordinary elements of urban life and the sometimes violent dimensions of mortality. His early works centred on images of single figures, as we see here in this painting, *Dead Politician* (1969), that depicts a deceased body covered in garlands. The harrowed look on the figure’s face draws us in to make us empathise with the individual, commenting on the way society honours corrupt leaders.

Patel’s later works progressed to feature more layered compositions, as we see in some of his paintings that present aspects of everyday life in Bombay, using soft pastel colours and simple contours to depict the human form. In *Gateway* (1981), we see two figures with the Gateway of India in the distance. *Early Morning Local* (1981) portrays a notably uncrowded train berth in the city. Rather than depicting the typical chaos of public spaces, such works draw us into emotionally charged moments and intimate interactions between individuals.

Following a visit to Italy in the mid-1980s, when he was exposed to important Renaissance paintings, Patel’s multi-figured narratives became even more complex. He was captivated by Pietro Lorenzetti’s iconic painting, *Crucifixion* (1340s) that portrays a crowd standing at the foot of a cross. This inspired his depiction of crowds in his seminal work, *Off Lamington Road* (1982–1986) that references a busy street in Bombay, close to his medical clinic. While his early works focused on the solitary experiences of one or two individuals, Patel envisioned this particular composition differently. Here we see a series of individual narratives contained within a singular canvas.

Patel's quiet compositions allow viewers to reflect on their experiences of Bombay as a shared social space. At the same time, his poignant subject matter reveals to us the stories of those on the margins that may otherwise go unheard.

Postscript

In addition to being an accomplished painter, Patel (1940–2023) has also received great acclaim for his writing career. He published his first collection of poetry in 1966, the same year as his first exhibition at the Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai. He has won numerous awards for his writings, and has been a part of major exhibitions in India and abroad.

In 1995, the name of the city was officially changed from Bombay to Mumbai, as it is known today. Since this video discusses a time period before the official name change, we refer to the city as Bombay here.

Bibliography:

Gieve Patel. *Asia Art Archives*. 2003.

<https://aaa.org.hk/en/collections/search/library/gieve-patel>

Hoskote, Ranjit, et. al. *Gieve Patel and Sudhir Patwardhan*, New York: Bose Pacia, 2006.

“Gieve Patel Interview by Parul: Chandigarh Lalit Kala Akademi.” *Lalit Kala Academy*, July 1, 2015, Video, Length: 59:10.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxnuL_OOGA4

Nerlekar, Anjali. “Poetry as ‘an Effort to Understand’: An Interview with Gieve Patel.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 53, no. 1–2 (2017): 25–32.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2017.1294647>

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17449855.2017.1294647>

Patwardhan, Sudhir. “Gieve Patel: Looking into a well... beyond metaphor.” *Critical Collective*.

<https://criticalcollective.in/ArtistInner2.aspx?Aid=31&Eid=22>

This document is part of the course ‘Modern & Contemporary Indian Art,’ authored by Dr Beth Citron. Click [here](#) to start learning.

This course is provided free of charge, for non-profit educational purposes only. While certain images used in the course may be subject to copyright, their usage complies with India’s fair-use policy. In case you would like to ask questions, or make any suggestions in relation to captions or credits, please reach out to us at learning@imp-art.org.

© 2026 Impart, all rights reserved.

[Impart](#) is an online platform that encourages greater engagement with South Asia’s art and cultural histories. We are a unit of the Art & Photography Foundation, and an institutional partner of the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bengaluru.