

# Doors of perception

By J. Michael Welton



## Sargam Griffin creates contemporary paintings that double as doors

Artist Sargam Griffin's epiphany arrived, appropriately enough, in Rome. "It was in the Vatican, of all places," she says. "You know, 25,000 people a day go down to the Sistine Chapel, but I was in a museum apartment there, with just contemporary works of art, sculptures 20 feet tall and paintings, all very modern."

She looked at the old walls and the modern art and realized she wanted to dedicate herself to that kind of work. Then she went home to Healdsburg, California, in the middle of wine country, and set up her studio. She never looked back at her career as a color consultant. "Basically, I retreated from the world for two years, and just painted," she says. "I went back [to Rome] a year later to double-check, and it was the same message."

Last October, New York's Ceres Gallery opened its first solo exhibition of her work, in three sets: Winds of Change, with five large oil on canvas paintings; Moments, a series of 24.9-inch by nine-inch oils on canvases; and two of her monumental ArtDoors, a groundbreaking new series of painted doors for residential or commercial use.



She develops her ArtDoors while working on museum quality panels, with complex layering of paint. “It was born out of a simple idea when I ran out of wall space,” she says. “I was sitting on a couch, looking at my paintings, and I thought: my paintings are about the size of a door.” So she developed the first one for herself, taking seven months for the contemporary, minimalist painting. Her process, she says, is the same as for any of her other pieces, with at least 40 layers of paint and an intense feeling of depth. “I start with an inner sense of what I want to do, with a reflection on the light and the color composition,” she says. “I get this amorphous feeling once I start painting; it’s a combination of a majestic feeling and of being truly humbled, of moving between those two.”

For the first ArtDoor, she spent a great deal of time researching the means to move it from closed to open positions. As a result, her ArtDoors now slide seamlessly, aided by a specially developed hardware. “It’s a 300-pound door, but my cat can actually slide the door open,” she says. “And people have a choice, it can be used as a door, or as a painting.”

