

# HYPERALLERGIC

BOOKS

## Literary Luminaries Respond to a Painter's Dark Scenes of Maine

In a new book, fifteen major contemporary authors respond to Linden Frederick's series of nocturnal paintings of small Maine towns.

Debbie Hagan | 2 days ago



Linden Frederick, "Ice" (2016), oil on linen, 36 x 36 in (all images courtesy Forum Gallery)

It's ironic that so many storytellers are drawn to Linden Frederick's paintings of small Maine towns steeped in twilight. The paintings are dark, with details defined by pinpoints of light shining from a window, porch light, or electric sign. Though Frederick's works are so detailed they're almost photorealistic, they lack people — the key to any good story.

Fifteen award-winning novelists and screenwriters, including Ann Patchett, Dennis Lehane, and Louise Erdrich, created characters and stories to complement Frederick's haunting paintings of liquor stores, row houses, farms, back alleys, and lonely roads. The tales and paintings come together in the lush new coffee-table book [\*Night Stories: Fifteen Paintings and the Stories They Inspired\*](#) (Glitterati, 2017).

"He's like Edward Hopper if he put Dempsey Dumpsters in the strip mall," says Andre Dubus III, whose contribution to the book is the short story "Ice." Frederick is often compared to Hopper, even though the modern realist did paint human figures in his works (as in "Night Hawks" and "Chop Suey"). While some of Hopper's most famous

works, like Frederick's, are night scenes, others ("A Woman in the Sun" (1961); "Sunday" (1926)) are harshly lit, as if the sun were straight up in the sky. Mostly, the two painters share a cloud of melancholia that hangs over the work, an apprehension that something is about to happen. It's left up to the viewer to complete and interpret the story

When Dubus joined this project, Frederick sent him three or four five-inch-square paintings, and Dubus gravitated immediately to the image of a convenience store with an ice machine out front. Dubus stared at it a long time and followed Flannery O'Connor's dictum: "There's a certain grain of stupidity that the writer of fiction can hardly do without, and this is the quality of having to stare, of not getting the point at once. The longer you look at one object, the more of the world you see in it." Dubus saw someone living above the store. "Could it be the owners?" he wondered, and he imagined a woman standing before a mirror getting ready to go out. From there unfolded "Ice," a poignant story that follows a woman in a tired marriage as she dresses to go out to take soup to a lonely, sick man who desperately needs help.

Frederick believes the tension in his work stems from the shift of day to what he calls "the hour when the dog becomes a wolf." He says, "Something happens then. People, animals, birds, they all change. They seek shelter. When I take a walk or drive at this time of day something happens to my psyche. What it is, I'm not sure, but it's enough of something that I want to get it down on canvas to relearn it, rethink it, and share it."

Because this is an unconventional book, some writers chose to take chances with their writing. "Luanne Rice comes to mind," says Frederick. "Her usual type of writing is totally different than one she used here, which has no punctuation, no capitals." The unorthodox spelling and run-on sentences in "Alley's End" enable readers to hear the voice of the narrator, a woman with cognitive disabilities, living on the street, longing for her child, James, who has been taken away. She dreams of being reunited with him, if she ever get a car.



Ted Tally (writer of the screen adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs*) creates a very short screenplay, "Repair." It's about a man seeking an emergency body touch-up late one night to his BMW 7 Series sedan. He tells the mechanic he has hit a deer, but they both know that's a lie.

Frederick's paintings are on view through November 5 at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, in Rockland, Maine. In an

Linden Frederick, "Repair" (2016), oil on linen,  
36 x 36 in

exhibition called *Night Stories*, viewers can borrow e-books and carry them around the exhibit so they can read the stories as they view the paintings. Copies of the book are on sale in the gift store.

"A lot of modern painters intentionally shy away from narrative because it isn't really very hip," says Frederick. "But I actually embraced it because I think it's pertinent. It's about real people and human beings, just as fiction writing is about real human beings." In fact, he considers this crossover of audiences a progressive move. It prompts the public to look and think differently about the connections between fine art and literature.

[Night Stories: Fifteen Paintings and the Stories They Inspired](#) *will be available from Glitterati as of October 7.*