





# Night Stories

Fifteen new paintings by **Linden Frederick** are paired with original short fiction in an exhibition at Forum Gallery. **BY JOHN O'HERN**

The definition of Carl Jung's concept of synchronicity can be boiled down to "meaningful coincidences." Painter Linden Frederick was born in Amsterdam, New York, a few miles from Gloversville, where his grandmother grew up. Writer Richard Russo grew up in Gloversville. Both artists migrated to Maine and joined the ranks of the great interpreters of the state's unique light and its even more unique people. People asked if either had met the other. They hadn't until they found themselves living across the street from each other in Portland. →

*Downstairs*, oil on linen, 36 x 36". The painting inspired a short story by Richard Russo titled *Downstairs*.



*Save-a-Lot*, oil on linen, 36 x 36". The painting inspired the short story *Save-A-Lot* by Anthony Doerr.

Frederick and his wife, Heather, had been talking about the interesting fact that so many writers were collectors of his work. She felt they could be inspired by the narrative quality of the work. He says, "I thought the paintings could be stage sets, where any story could happen. I began thinking of a project where I would do the paintings and writers would write the stories." The idea percolated for nearly eight years.

When he asked Russo if he would help him connect with writers, Russo jumped at the opportunity, relishing Frederick's outside-the-box thinking.

*Linden Frederick: Night Stories*, an exhibition of 15 paintings and 15 stories is being shown at Forum Gallery in New York through June 30. It will be shown at the Maine Center for Contemporary Art in Rockland, Maine, August 18 through November 5.

Russo assembled Pulitzer Prize winners, National Book Award winners and an Academy Award winner to take part in the project.

Most of the writers chose finished paintings and several wrote about paintings in progress. Frederick relates that "Lily King was writing about a beauty parlor on the first floor of the building in *Mansard*. I hadn't decided what to do with that area and decided 'I can put that in the painting.' Ann Patchett made a reference to stars when she was writing about *Vacant*, and I added stars."

Russo chose the painting *Downstairs*, a painting of a building in Belfast, Maine, that reminded him of buildings in Groversville. He recalled a macabre story from Groversville, and wrote the words "Except for a light in the basement the house is dark when he pulls in." He then took off creating a darkly amusingly Gothic story of serious family dysfunction. Describing his writing, he says, "At the risk of appearing disingenuous, I don't really think of myself as 'writing humor.' I'm simply reporting on the world I observe, which is frequently hilarious."

Frederick's paintings are more than stage sets. They are places



*Liquor*, oil on linen, 36 x 36". The painting inspired a short story titled *American Rye Whiskey* by Lawrence Kasdan.

where people live and work although the people aren't seen. A plate and silverware on a table seen through a window implies a human presence—as does a car on the road with its headlights on. He supplies the setting and we provide the narrative.

He composes his scenes within a square as he has since he moved from landscape paintings to architecture. "I like designing within the square," he says. "It's the simplest of shapes. They're centric and there's a flatness to them. That's my nod to modernism."

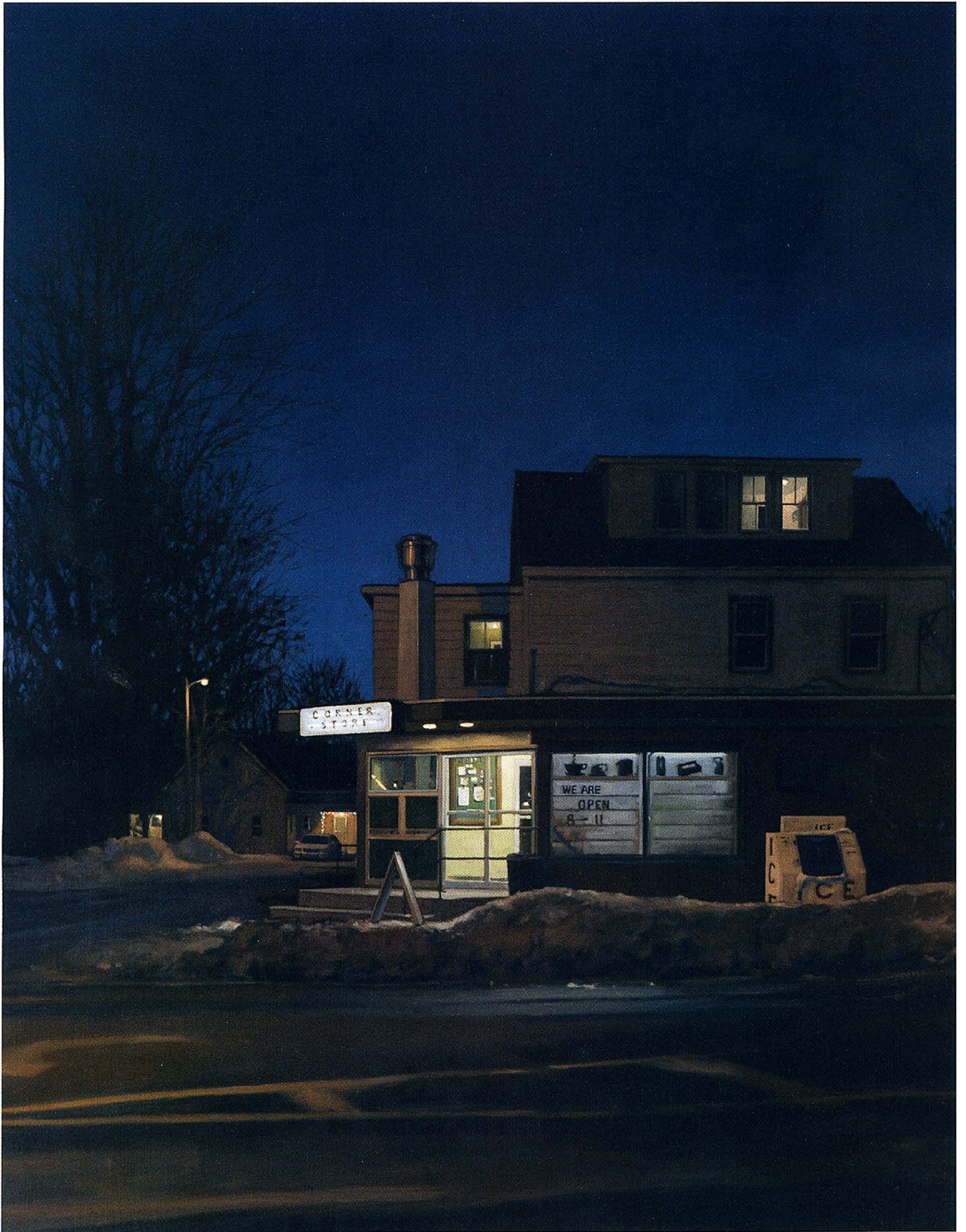
Occasionally his penchant for frontality will give way to a little manipulation of the viewer's path into the picture. In *Save-a-Lot*, composed with one-point perspective, the eye moves immediately to the Save-a-Lot sign, brightly lit just below the horizon line. But there is the foreground that the eye missed as it charged toward the distant shiny object. Devoid of people, there are signs of their having been there—in the mowed patch of grass and the rake to keep it all tidy. On the porch there are plastic lawn chairs for

relaxing—Creature comforts in a life that may not offer many others. A potential conflict is suggested by the tidy lawn running up against the neighbor's neglected garden.

Anthony Doerr, author of *All the Light We Cannot See*, remarked that he normally has to come up with everything himself when developing a story but *Save-a-Lot* gave him a starting point and suggested a number of possible themes.

When I called Frederick to talk about the exhibition he had been playing his cello. The cello provides a break. He plays and paints with emotion, but emotion supported by analytical explorations.

I remarked on the rhythms in *Liquor*, another painting in which the eye is drawn immediately to a bright neon sign. The painted lines in the street lead the viewer back until he is paused by the solid white horizontal line running perpendicular to the curb. After that rest he proceeds toward the store and is stopped by the repetition of the horizontal line, this time in red, as if in a different key.





Above: *Repair*, oil on linen, 36 x 36". The painting inspired *Repair*, a short screenplay by Ted Tally.  
 Left: *Ice*, oil on linen, 36 x 36". The short story *Ice*, by Andre Dubus III, was inspired by this painting.

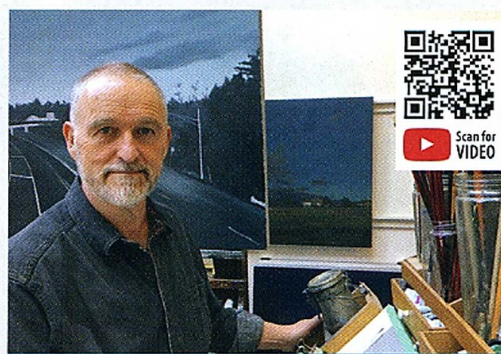
Frederick refers to his use of color triads in another reference to music. A triad takes every fourth color of the color wheel as the basis for the chromatic theme of a painting. "When I look at a scene I ask myself what palette do I need, what color dominates, what is subdominant? What are the jewel tones," he says. He then selects a triad from which all the other colors in the painting are derived. "Just as you don't use all 88 keys on a piano when you're composing you don't use every color when you paint. You play chords. You create harmonies."

In an earlier conversation, he described the sensation of early evening (the time frame of his paintings) as one of melancholy and apprehension and recalled music composed in a minor key that is elegiac and moody.

In his review of Russo's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Empire Falls*, *New York Times* critic A.O. Scott wrote that *Empire Falls* "is the kind of place tourists from Boston or New York speed through en route to the mini-Martha's Vineyards of the Maine coast."

The people who tidy up their yards in their hardscrabble lives, who shop at liquor stores

at night or who live in basement rooms are an invisible presence to those speeding through. Frederick celebrates their anonymity. ●



## LINDEN FREDERICK: NIGHT STORIES

**When:** Through June 30, 2017

**Where:** Forum Gallery, 475 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022

**Information:** (212) 355-4545, [www.forumgallery.com](http://www.forumgallery.com)