

REVIEW

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Every
Picture
Tells a
StoryLinden Frederick's art
inspires tales by Anthony
Doerr, Ann Patchett and
other top authors

BY ELLEN GAMERMAN

SOME ART takes its subject from literature. It is far more unusual for literature to take its inspiration from art. But that is exactly what 15 writers—many of them prize-winners or best-sellers—have done for a new exhibition.

Each has focused on one of the 15 paintings in Linden Frederick's show at New York's Forum Gallery, opening May 11. Visitors to "Lin-

den Frederick: Night Stories" can read the short stories—which average a few thousand words—on electronic tablets as they view the new paintings. Many of the pictures are moody, photorealistic images of downtrodden New England towns at dusk.

The exhibition, seven years in the making, features work by Pulitzer Prize winners Anthony Doerr ("All the Light We Cannot See"), Richard Russo ("Empire Falls") and Elizabeth Strout ("Olive Kitteridge"). Other contributors include Dennis Lehane ("Mystic River"), Ann Patchett ("Bel Canto") and the screenwriter Lawrence Kasdan ("The Big Chill" and several "Star Wars" films).

"The mandate for the show is not necessarily to write about the picture but just to be in-

spired by the picture," said Mr. Frederick, 64, who splits his time between the Maine cities of Portland and Belfast. "I see it as a kind of trigger." A book of the stories and paintings, on sale at the gallery, will be widely available this fall.

The project took off after Mr. Frederick told his friend Mr. Russo about the idea at dinner one night. Mr. Russo started reaching out to his writer friends about the venture, and word spread to other authors.

Mr. Frederick and Mr. Russo, both upstate New York natives, knew of each other long before they met in Maine about eight years ago. "I kept hearing stories about this painter up in

'VACANT' (2016) inspired
an Ann Patchett story.

Belfast. People would say, 'He paints like you write,'" Mr. Russo said. "Linden's paintings, beside the fact that there are never any people in them, they're all narrative. You've got that beautiful, wonderful image. It's easy to come up with a story, once you get that image in your brain."

Mr. Russo chose the 2016 work "Downstairs," depicting a brick house in shadow and a solitary light in a window that looks partly buried. The picture's subterranean quality reminded him of a news story about a daughter who needed her mother's Social Security checks so badly that when the old woman died, she didn't tell anyone and held on to the body. Mr. Russo's story shares that same New England Gothic spirit. "It's the idea that something kind of grim and grisly might have happened in that house," he said.

The authors picked the painting that inspired them based on photos of small studies that Mr. Frederick created before executing the larger works. As payment, they got to keep the studies. The artist's full-scale paintings cost \$54,000 each.

The scenes led writers to unexpected places. Mr. Frederick's 2016 painting "Save-A-Lot" features a distant glimpse, in the fading light, of half a store sign bearing that name. In Mr. Doerr's tale, Save-A-Lot becomes the name of an orphaned baby raccoon adopted by a neglected girl who finds shelter in an unexpected friendship with her landlord.

Andre Dubus III, the author of "House of Sand and Fog," took on "Ice," a 2016 painting of a snowy corner store with an icebox out front. In his

story, a married woman stashes chicken noodle soup in the freezer, with plans to bring it to a dying customer who captivates her. Though Mr.

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Dubus said that one rule of creative writing is never to start a story with a person looking in a mirror, the painting sparked a mental picture of a woman doing just that. So he started with the mirror anyway, and the story took off from there.

Mr. Frederick is looking for new ways to combine his painting with other art forms, including music. "I kind of enjoyed the collaborative process," he said. "Writers, artists, musicians, we tend to work in isolation. I just found this extremely satisfying."