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Karl Rabe/Poughkeepsie Journal

Joel Griffith of Red Hook paints a nightscape on Broadway in his native Tivoli, lighting his canvas with lamps powered by a car battery.

## Art of darkness

### Tivoli painter is inspired by the night

By Kathleen Wereszynski Murray  
Poughkeepsie Journal

Artist Joel Griffith and his easels are a familiar sight to barflies who roam Tivoli's streets after last call.

Griffith, 32, paints streetscapes at 3 a.m. with the use of lamps powered by a car battery.

"The visual world is different at night," he said. Through his oil paintings, he hopes the viewer will look again at the world with a refreshed and deepened vision.

Griffith, who now lives in Red Hook, grew up in Tivoli.

"It's more compelling for me to paint something that I have a personal attachment to," he said. "I just find myself going back to Tivoli."

Griffith earned a master's degree in fine art from Bard College in 2003, but has been exhibiting throughout the Hudson Valley since 1994.

Six of his Tivoli landscape paintings are on exhibit in the "Art in the Loft" group show at Millbrook Vineyards & Winery.

"I like the fact that though his work is purportedly 'straight' documentary representation, it has such an undercurrent of moodiness," said Amy Sillman in an e-mail interview.

Sillman, who teaches

#### If you go

**What:** Art in the Loft fall exhibition, Joel Griffith, Gene Cadore and Nestor Madalengoitia.

**When:** Now through Nov. 12 (gallery is open in conjunction with the tasting room hours); free artist's reception Sept. 16, 2-4 p.m.

**Where:** Millbrook Vineyards & Winery, 26 Wing Road, Millbrook.

**Information:** Call 845-677-8383 or visit [www.millbrookwine.com](http://www.millbrookwine.com).

painting at Bard's Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, has purchased two paintings from her former student.

The first was an earlier painting of "Mrs. Pease's house" from the lawn of Sillman's friends' home. The second painting, of two trailers in the snow, was purchased at an exhibition in Tivoli.

"He gets at this melancholy mood of upstate that is so interesting to me," Sillman said. "It feels a bit abandoned, like all the people moved away."

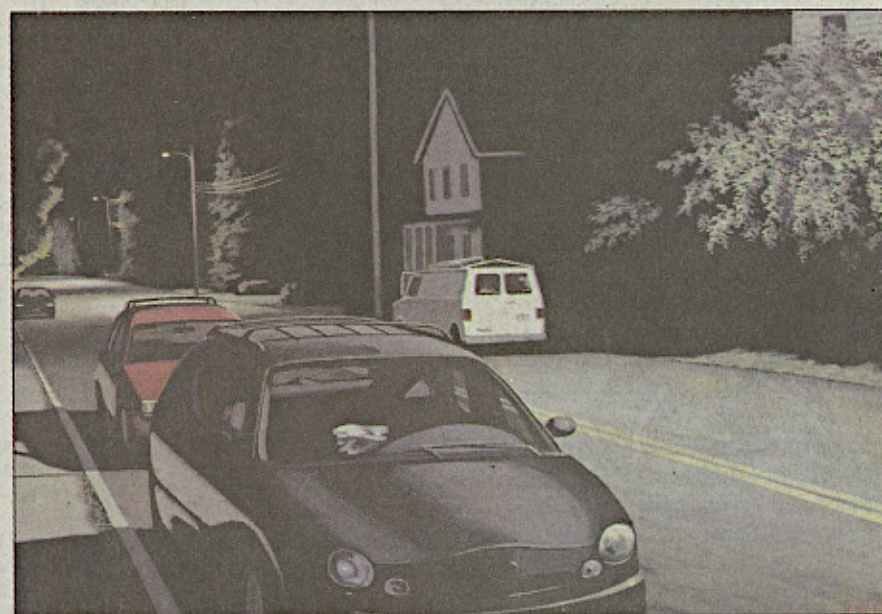
Sillman compares Griffith's paintings to Walker Evans' photographs.

"You feel like you're looking at the town in hindsight while it's still in the present," she said.

Please see **Darkness**, 2D



"Montgomery Street" by Joel Griffith, 2006, oil on panel.



"West Broadway" by Joel Griffith, 2006, oil on panel.

### Darkness: Artist found inspiration by candlelight

Continued from 1D

Griffith was inspired to paint outdoors at night after working on a still-life indoors by candlelight.

"Because the room was so dark and the light was so limited, the color I was responsible for and the level of detail I was responsible for were completely different," Griffith said.

He decided to take the same approach to landscape and headed out with his lamps.

Griffith is inspired by the "editing element" of night, he said.

"I found it really liberating, and it's really beautiful," he said.

In some ways, it is easier to paint outdoors at night than during the day. Griffith said he knows a lot of photographers who also prefer to work after sunset.

"If it's 10 p.m. or 2 a.m. the light is the same," Griffith said.

This season's "Art in the Loft" exhibition highlights the beauty of the Hudson Valley, said Loretta Spence, program director of the Dutchess County Arts Council. The council aims to bring local artists' work into nontraditional venues.

"We picked artists who work in landscape," Spence said. "We feel that each has his own unique style."

#### Painting as performance

As an artist who works on location, Griffith's style is performance-like.

"It's a very big part of what I do," he said. "I'm out in the street. Ultimately, I enjoy that human contact."

In 2003, Griffith was named the "Painter Laureate" of the village.

He has been completing a series of seven paintings documenting Tivoli for permanent display in Watts-dePeyster Hall.

"You see him at his easel all over the place and everyone knows he's the chronicler of the town," Sillman said. "It's an interesting role to take on for oneself."

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