

# Adam Graham paints a 'Worldview' from Provincetown's streets

By Howard Karren  
Banner Staff

Adam Graham thinks about painting philosophically. His new series of works, which will be part of a group show opening Friday at Rice Polak Gallery in Provincetown, is called "Worldview," the word that is the usual English translation of the philosophical term "weltanschauung" — literally, "world intuition," or awareness of the world.

This is not the usual art-school cant. Graham didn't go to art school, yet by no means is he unschooled. He's passionate about painting and what painting means, and he's passionate about phenomenology, the philosophy of how we understand the reality we perceive.

He did study with Lois Griffel at the Cape Cod School of Art when he first came to Provincetown in 1999. "I lived there for a summer," he says. "I gave Lois 50 bucks a week, and she let me sleep in one of the lofts. It was a place where all sorts of cool artists could meet. They were real painters. I started at the same time as John Clayton. That was my social network." Except for a couple of summers and winters, he's been living here ever since. He lives and paints in the apartment he rents in a local affordable housing complex.

Graham grew up in New Orleans. His father and mother worked as street artists on Jackson Square in the French Quarter. "We moved from Atlanta to New Orleans when I was four," he says. "I cut my teeth in Jackson Square. I would run errands for street artists. I was probably the youngest person, at 17, to get a license [to paint and sell my art] on Jackson Square. I got this great little apartment. I could see the sun rising over the Mississippi. Three hundred a month. There were days when I started out with no money." The life lessons he learned have never left him. "We're all born free, but people don't really want freedom — what they really want is security," he says. "Living without security is really hard. That's the reason I take painting so seriously."

When Graham's mother died, his father, who was a good friend of Henry Hensche's and had studied Cape impressionism,



From his Provincetown apartment/studio, Adam Graham paints local street scenes, distilling a unique "worldview" he hopes to share and connect with others. [PHOTOS ADAM GRAHAM]

encouraged him to move to Provincetown. "The arts scene in New Orleans is rich, but it's not sophisticated," Graham says. "This place is great. There's something about Provincetown that connects people from around the world. What we've lost in bohemian culture, we've made up in elite artists and writers. It's not like that anywhere else."

Though he started out at the Cape Cod School doing plein air painting, he eventually decided to switch to studio painting. "That opened up the possibility of new motifs," Graham says. "I wanted to do artificial lighting. Night scenes. I wanted to bring 20th-century painting into the 21st century."

Yet in some ways, he remains traditional. "The art world is so pluralistic now," Graham says. "There's a difference between being an artist and being a painter. I'm interested in being a good painter. I don't need to work in another medium."

And that brings him to phenomenology, and his current show, "Worldview." "I'm trying to re-create a phenomenon," Graham says. "I see it as a layered approach. I try to fuse impressionist principles with concepts of phenomenology. It's the study of reality through the appearance of things. As an observational painter,



In "Worldview #14," by Adam Graham, strokes of color on water-soaked Commercial Street tell a story in reflection of the stores and sky above.

my subject is reality. I'm studying what a thing is in itself. I'm deconstructing an object and reconstructing it. What I'm moving toward is a language of painting. We all share the world and we all have different perceptions. In the 21st century, we have less consensus on reality. The only way we get out of this mess is that we create a capacity for consensus. Everyone has a point of view of reality that's correct. The way to understand reality is to

## Art as a raison d'être

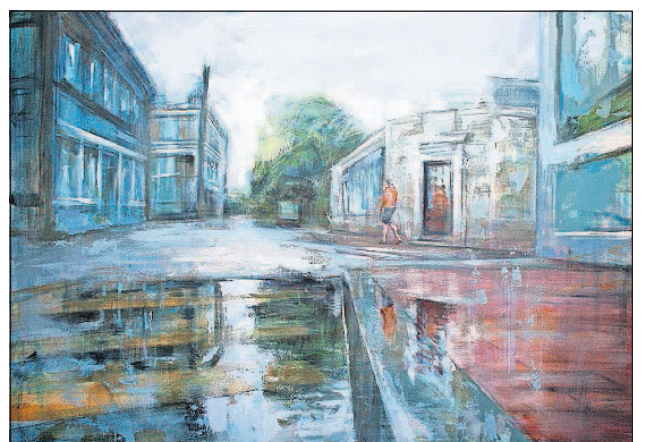
**What:** Opening reception for the paintings of Adam Graham, part of a group show  
**When:** 7 pm Friday  
**Where:** Rice Polak Gallery, 430 Commercial St., Provincetown  
**Admission:** Free

understand another point of view."

In Graham's painting  
**SEE GRAHAM, A21**



"Worldview #2," by Adam Graham, shows pedestrians on Commercial Street near Town Hall backlit by a car's headlights.



"Worldview #15," by Adam Graham, is a study in unconventional perspective, observing a much-reflected figure from the curb.