

# *The Dramatic Gesture:* *Paintings of* *David Byrd*

This exhibition celebrates Byrd's skill in exploring the possibility of dramatic expression inherent in a human gesture. Byrd worked 30 years as an orderly in the Veteran's Hospital's psychiatric ward in Montrose, NY witnessing patients grappling with the toll modern warfare had taken on them. Observant and empathetic, Byrd used these patients' bodily expressions as his subject matter. He wrote of his painting "*Enigma*", "The patient putting on clothing reminds one of a dance of the arms and is briefly performing some unknown mysterious entertainment".

This exhibition is made possible through the generosity of the The Erna McReynolds and Tom Morgan Artists-In-Collaboration Fund

●**David Byrd** spent a period of 2 years, from 1949-1951 in formal study at the Ozenfant School of Fine Arts in New York. His teacher Amédée Ozenfant was a French cubist painter and writer who, with Le Corbusier founded the post-cubist Purism movement. Purism (1919-1925) dismisses cubism as a decorative technique, and espouses that technique exists only to realize "loyally and without conceit" the concept of the artwork. To some degree this idea that technique be subjugated to concept can be seen in practice in Byrd's work: except for a few expressionistic works such as "*Graffiti*", "*Nurse at the VA*" or "*Fantasy*", Byrd's technique recedes in deference to the concept and image(s) in his painting. Although Ozenfant's Purism railed against Cubism, strong influences of the Cubist tenet can be seen in both Ozenfant's and Byrd's work. However, if we must assign a stylistic identity to Byrd it would be a muted form of Social Realism. This because of his figurative approach and empathy for the human condition, though unlike the ardent Social Realist, Byrd does not attack the status quo and social power structure. His body of work seems to be apolitical, a candid vision without the political implications of socialism and capitalist exploitation. His is a poetic view of the human condition displayed without guile or hubris.