

David Byrd: Ten Stops



by Jessica Farrell

DAVID BYRD: Ten Stops is an art pilgrimage of ten exhibitions that illuminate the life and artistic trajectory of artist David Byrd. Byrd, who worked in obscurity for decades, created hundreds of paintings and drawings, sculptures, and a book about the people, places and situations that haunted his memory. Each exhibition in the series, including a retrospective at the home and studio Byrd designed and built in the Catskills, will highlight a specific theme and will be shown in a location that correlates to the work.

Byrd's spare compositions bring viewers close to the action, allowing them an entry to the facets of his life, including a painful childhood in foster homes in Springfield, Illinois during the Great Depression, and nostalgic street scenes of Brooklyn, NY in the early 1940's where he lived as a young man. However, Byrd's principal body of work from the psychiatric hospital in Montrose, NY reveals the lives of the mentally ill patients he cared for from 1958 – 1988. Haunting images depict both the melancholy and dull repetition of life on the ward. His daily commute to the V.A. offered him inspiration for panoramic landscapes of bridges, waterways, mountains of the Peekskill, Montrose, Cold Spring area. An avid collector of old bottles, tools, early patents and antiques, Byrd found both the artifacts and the characters that attended country auctions to be another great subject. After retiring to the Catskills, Byrd filled canvases and sketchbooks with the people and places he encountered during his weekly trips to the laundromat, grocery store, doctor's office and gas station. Multiple renderings of these everyday scenes display Byrd's fascination with gesture and posture—the humor and pathos of the busy world he observed.

In following the path laid out in *DAVID BYRD: Ten Stops*, decades of observation, memory and imagination coalesce, unveiling Byrd's efforts to understand the world around him. In Byrd's own words, "I tried to paint because I had the remote idea that it might serve me in my behavior to others." Byrd's artwork invites viewers to question the forces that shape a life, and how we, in turn, shape others' lives.

DAVID BYRD: Ten Stops maps Byrd's odyssey from Brooklyn to Peekskill and West Point, continuing north to Delhi, Franklin and Sidney Center, on to Cooperstown, with a final stop in Seattle. His body of work explores the paradox that this man, who had great difficulty establishing relationships and cloistered himself away from others, is leading a journey to better understand the human experience.