

## Hope Fulfilled

THIS MONTH, Anton Kern Gallery showcases the late American artist David Byrd's original book *David Byrd: Montrose VA 1958–1988* in two ways. The New York gallery is collaborating with Hatje Cantz and the David Byrd Estate to publish the homemade book—a goal Byrd was unable to attain before his death at 87 in 2013. It also opens “Montrose VA” on April 2—an exhibition that will



present pages from the original book in a series of vitrines, as well as related paintings, sketchbook pages, and index-card-size pencil sketches on scrapbook paper.

Byrd worked as an orderly in the psychiatric ward at the VA Hospital in Montrose, N.Y., for 30 years. The book is a compilation of the pencil sketches, color drawings, and handwritten notes Byrd made in response to the hospital, its patients, and his work. Empathetic, strange, and sometimes grotesque, his representations showcase both the mundane and the harrowing aspects of working among patients dealing with psychological trauma.



The Springfield, Ill.-born Byrd was a veteran himself, having served in the U.S. Army in World War II. He studied art at the Ozenfant School of Fine Arts in New York City on the GI Bill. A lifelong artist, Byrd only began exhibiting work publicly several months before his death, at the Greg Kucera Gallery in Seattle. Posthumously, however, his talent has come to receive substantial recognition.

Byrd had approached both MoMA and the Whitney for help in getting *Montrose VA 1958–1988* published. He wrote letters to an extensive list of publishers in attempts to rouse attention for the project. That it is now finally published marks the attainment of a long-held hope.



## Dynamic Asymmetry

IN THE 18TH century, a *capriccio* (caprice) was a painting in which enigmatic architectural elements were deployed to create scenes that straddle the boundary lines between fantasy and reality. The term also referred to improvised music in which the composer's creativity was allowed to flow untrammelled.

Today, artist Mokha Laget applies the term to a series of paintings that use brightly colored geometrical forms to create fictive spaces. From April 4–June 20, Gallery Sonja Roesch in Houston, Texas, is presenting “Capriccios,” an exhibition of Laget's hard-edged abstract paintings.

The artist makes these

works by painting on unprimed canvas with a special clay-based paint that she has devised. This process creates a distinctive matte texture. Some of the paintings are on shaped canvases, such as a trapezoidal painting hung so that the corners point straight up like



apexes of a triangle, echoing the geometric forms within the composition itself. The interpenetration of the colored shapes in the paintings, in ways that seem spatially possible but are actually optical illu-

sions, creates a strong sense of dynamism.

Laget, who was born in North Africa and is currently based in New Mexico, has been deeply influenced by desert landscapes. One of the few women associated with the Washington Color School, she studied at the Corcoran School of Art, was a studio assistant to Gene Davis for four years, and was a lifelong friend of Paul Reed's.