

David Byrd
Kabinett, Booth K10

Art Basel
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Outer World, n.d., Oil on canvas, 20 x 26 inches (50.8 x 66 cm)

Anton Kern Gallery

David Byrd

American, 1926-2013

David Byrd was born in Springfield, Illinois in 1926, and lived and worked in various parts of New York State for the majority of his life. At age 17 he joined the Merchant Marines, and was later drafted into the US Army during World War II. He used the GI Bill to enroll at the Ozenfant School of Fine Arts in New York City, where he studied for two years under the French painter Amédée Ozenfant.

In the 1950s, Byrd left New York City and moved Upstate. He worked a series of odd jobs – including janitor, delivery man, movie house usher – anything that would cover his bills while also (and more importantly) allowing him time to paint. From 1958 - 1988 he worked as an orderly in the psychiatric ward at the VA Hospital in Montrose, New York. His daily experiences during this time inspired his most defining body of work.

Byrd's style bears influence from different art historical periods: from European Post-Impressionism (ie: Seurat), to Modernism (ie: Balthus and his brother Pierre Klossowski), and Cubism (ie: his teacher Amédée Ozenfant), to American Realism (ie: George Tooker and Ben Shahn), and Regionalism (ie: Andrew Wyeth). Byrd injects realistic portrayal with fantasy, creating an unsettling psychology to the otherwise tranquil compositions. His paintings have a distinct quality of light, and a harmonious palette of muted greens, yellows, greys, and browns, applied with thinned oil paint using a dry brush technique. His prodigious output demonstrates his understanding of human emotion, his isolation, and a lifetime spent carefully looking.

Byrd was a keen observer of his surroundings, his perspective was that of an outsider looking in. He painted the people and situations he encountered, past and present, from memory. Byrd also painted scenes from his daily commute including mountains, bridges, houses, gas stations, and shopping centers. In 1988 David retired, bought land in the Catskills and spent the next several years building a home and studio for himself, where he focused full-time on painting until his death in 2013.

David Byrd's work was not publicly exhibited until he was offered a solo show at Greg Kucera Gallery in Seattle, only a few months before his death at the age of 87. Since then, and through the establishment of the David Byrd Estate, his work has continued to be exhibited posthumously.

All images courtesy of David Byrd Estate, and Anton Kern Gallery, New York



Food Tray Patient, 1976, Oil on canvas, 34 x 26 inches (86.4 x 66 cm)



Nurse With Dietary Cards, 1998, Oil on canvas, 29 x 38 inches (73.7 x 96.5 cm)



Tortured Woman, n.d., Oil on canvas, 28 x 23 inches (71.1 x 58.4 cm)



Woods Hospital, 1968, Oil on canvas, 26 x 34 inches (66 x 86.4 cm)



Card Players, 1889, Oil on canvas, 20 x 26 inches (50.8 x 66 cm)



Butcher Shop, 2009, Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 inches (101.6 x 127 cm)



Man With Doll, 2009, Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches (61 x 50.8 cm)



The Blue Door, n.d., Oil on canvas, 20 x 27 inches (50.8 x 68.6 cm)



Sidney Dam, 2009, Oil on canvas, 30 x 38 inches (76.2 x 96.5 cm)