

In the Midst of Life

Artist David Byrd's story sounds ripe for the Hollywood treatment. He grew up in foster homes during the Depression, went to art school on the G.I. Bill as a young adult, and then worked as an orderly at the Veteran's Administration Medical Hospital in Montrose, N.Y., for 30 years. After retiring from the hospital in 1988, he settled in Sidney Center, N.Y., devoting himself

to painting full-time. In April and May 2013, Greg Kucera Gallery, Inc. in Seattle, Wash., staged a successful major exhibition of Byrd's work, and almost immediately afterward, Byrd passed away. Since then, presentations of Byrd's work, notably at the ADAA Art Show in 2015, have brought the late artist wider attention and acclaim.

In "Drawing from Painting,"

a current show at Greg Kucera Gallery (through December 23), Byrd's unique figurative paintings are on view. Though his story is extraordinary, Byrd's subjects are mundane moments, tasks, or spaces. In *Mop Wringing* (1973), an apron-clad employee at a grocery store can be seen with a mop bucket through a doorway, while produce—oranges, apples, and watermelons—is neatly arranged

to his right. In *Woman Reading* (2008), a woman in shorts and a low-cut blouse is curled up and engrossed in a book. Byrd also took the process of painting and the studio as subjects. *Studio Still Life* (1973), for instance, shows easels, a palette, and studies in a calm tableau. *Place to Paint* (1995), meanwhile, finds a painter in the midst of work while a nearby cat watches.

