

White Columns

David Byrd

White Columns is pleased to announce a solo exhibition by David Byrd (1926-2013.) This will be the first solo exhibition of Byrd's work in New York City. The exhibition has been organized in collaboration with the Estate of David Byrd.

Born in 1926, David Byrd joined the Merchant Marines, age 17, and traveled throughout Europe, the Mediterranean, and Asia, before being drafted into the US Army. During World War II he filled sketchbooks with military-themed drawings and portraits of his fellow soldiers. After the war he studied briefly, through the G. I. Bill, at the Dauphin School of Art in Philadelphia. He continued his studies for two years in New York's Gramercy neighborhood at the Ozenfant School of Fine Arts. (Amédée Ozenfant was a Parisian painter - influenced by Paul Signac and Le Corbusier - who had emigrated to the USA in 1938.)

In 1958, aged 32, Byrd took a job as an orderly in the psychiatric ward of the Veterans Administration Medical Hospital in Montrose, New York. For the next thirty years he worked with the doctors and nurses to care for patients damaged through their experiences in WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. This experience would provide Byrd with the defining subject matter for his art, which focused on his observations of the lives of the patients under his care. This aspect of Byrd's work; his extraordinarily empathetic depictions of the daily realities of life at the Veterans Hospital, is the focus of the exhibition at White Columns.

About this time Byrd said: *"For many years I was an orderly at the VA Hospital at Montrose, New York. I watched the patients, how they moved and how they interacted with each other and how they coped with the staff. All the patients were heavily medicated. I tried to paint because I had the remote idea that it might serve me in my behavior to others."*

In 1988 Byrd retired from the hospital, and settled in Sidney Center, a hamlet in New York's Catskills region. For the rest of his life Byrd worked full-time on his paintings – now largely created from memory – of the people, places and situations from his past. Byrd was a prolific artist, but he never exhibited his work and rarely showed it to anyone. In 2012 through a chance meeting with a neighbor, Byrd would have his first solo exhibition at the Greg Kucera Gallery in Seattle. Shortly before the exhibition opened Byrd was diagnosed with advanced lung cancer. Despite his failing health he took his first airplane journey to attend the opening. On May 30, 2013 Byrd died, aged 87, surrounded by friends at the New York Veterans Home in Oxford, New York.

In a 2012 statement Byrd summarized his life thus: *"For 70 years my life has mostly been bad jobs, like most everybody else, and occasionally drawing and painting, except now, being retired and having built my house to paint in, I am free. I have found that bad jobs can produce very good pictures. Don't know what good jobs produce."*

Since 2013 interest in Byrd's life and work has steadily grown. White Columns was introduced to Byrd's work via Sean Horton who organized a 2015 two-artist presentation of Byrd's work at Zieher Smith & Horton, New York, alongside the work of Peter Gallo (who had shown at White Columns in 2005.) Byrd's work was recently the subject of a 2018 solo exhibition at Fleisher Ollman Gallery, Philadelphia; and his work was recently on view in a four-artist exhibition alongside Lewis Hammond, Pierre Klossowski and Paulina Olowaska at Balice Hertling, Paris. Parallel to the White Columns' exhibition Anton Kern Gallery, New York will stage a second

exhibition of Byrd's work, centered around his landscape paintings, that will open on 7 February, 2019.

White Columns would like to express our sincere thanks to Jody Isaacson and The Estate of David Byrd for their support and enthusiasm in bringing Byrd's work to White Columns. To learn more about David Byrd's work and life, visit: www.davidbyrdestate.com



