

ART

David Byrd



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To survive, most American artists need a side hustle, and **David Byrd** was no exception. For thirty years, the Illinois native—who studied painting at a French academy in New York City on the G.I. Bill—worked as an orderly in the psychiatric ward of a Veterans Affairs hospital, in Westchester. The despair (and, sometimes, the peace) that he witnessed became the subject of the plaintive figurative canvases he refined in almost total obscurity. (Byrd’s first solo exhibition preceded his death, in 2013, by just seven weeks.) The artist would have turned ninety-five on Feb. 25, the day that the Anton Kern gallery opens an homage to his magnum opus, “Montrose VA 1958-1988.” The cycle of notations and drawings (including the untitled image pictured above) crystallizes Byrd’s memories of his three decades at the institution from the vantage point of his retirement. Parts of it may call to mind the alienated souls of George Tooker, but Byrd’s concerned regard for his subjects sets him apart.

— *Andrea K. Scott*