Karl Kuerner’s artistic talent was recognized and nurtured at a very young age by the famed Wyeth family of artists. Kuerner grew up doing farm chores alongside painting artists in a world of equal parts art and agriculture. From the age of seven he watched Andrew Wyeth paint some of his greatest works at the Kuerner farm. The family’s homestead was a major source of inspiration for more than 1,000 of Wyeth’s paintings, and eventually more than 300 of Kuerner’s own works.

Beyond the Wyeths, other influences have brought out his own voice, often with subtle humor, in a style that emphasizes mood over method. In this exhibition, Kuerner explores the themes of Robert Henri’s famous art treatise The Art Spirit (1923).

Robert Henri (1865-1929), a founding member of the Ashcan School of American Realism, was at the forefront of the New York art scene at the beginning of the twentieth century. On the verge of a centenary anniversary of publication of The Art Spirit, Henri is still considered to be one of America’s finest art teachers. Henri is described as a dynamic teacher “with an extraordinary gift for verbal communication...and prophetic fire” that drew students to devotion. Henri primarily commented on principles of life and art, giving emphasis to connection and creativity. His greatest influence on his students has been to imbue the human subject with dignity.

When you think of a Henri painting an image of a portrait likely comes to mind. Henri particularly enjoyed painting children because of their innocence, honesty and lack of self-consciousness. Here we find the two-fold connection with the teachings of Henri that Kuerner regularly refers to. First, the art spirit is that of dignity toward all living things and second that all humanity has the capacity for great creativity. The Art Spirit encourages boldness to make art about what you know most intimately or feel most deeply.

In Kuerner’s portraits, often the human figure is placed in the context of his or her surroundings. The homeplace is of utmost importance to Kuerner, as it is an essential component of his characters’ identities. In “Miss Thomas,” she stands stoically with folded hands. “The painting to me is one that can take you away into a world of thought,” recalled Kuerner. We infer about who she is by the place she resides in the world of the painting. Kuerner considers his approach “very straightforward with a technical skill that does not obscure or outweigh [his] emotional message.” The quiet feeling he brings to a composition conveys an overarching mood and emotion present in all his paintings. Kuerner could be credited with one of Henri’s gifts, to look at contemporary life “with a fresh, unprejudiced, and unacademic eye.”

“Percheron at Chadds Ford,” seems to say that life will go on as it should. “Pennsylvania
Farmer” and “Farmall” suggest that change is inevitable. Like a farmer, Kuerner welcomes and is comforted by seasonal changes and makes them common themes in his work. Kuerner recalls, “My grandfather’s idea of a good time was to do three days’ work in one.” Kuerner has earned the badge of farmer and approaches his subject with an accuracy that comes from experience, using a technique he describes as “abstractions disguised in realism.”

A sense of oneness he feels with his family farm is like the unity in spirit he feels with Robert Henri. “Henri’s style of teaching farm is like the unity in spirit he feels with Henri’s idea of a good time was to do three days’ work in one.” Kuerner has earned the badge of farmer and approaches his subject with an accuracy that comes from experience, using a technique he describes as “abstractions disguised in realism.” A sense of oneness he feels with his family farm is like the unity in spirit he feels with Robert Henri. “Henri’s style of teaching farm is like the unity in spirit he feels with Henri’s idea of a good time was to do three days’ work in one.” Kuerner has earned the badge of farmer and approaches his subject with an accuracy that comes from experience, using a technique he describes as “abstractions disguised in realism.”

Farmer” and “Farmall” suggest that change is inevitable. Like a farmer, Kuerner welcomes and is comforted by seasonal changes and makes them common themes in his work. Kuerner recalls, “My grandfather’s idea of a good time was to do three days’ work in one.” Kuerner has earned the badge of farmer and approaches his subject with an accuracy that comes from experience, using a technique he describes as “abstractions disguised in realism.” A sense of oneness he feels with his family farm is like the unity in spirit he feels with Robert Henri. “Henri’s style of teaching farm is like the unity in spirit he feels with Henri’s idea of a good time was to do three days’ work in one.” Kuerner has earned the badge of farmer and approaches his subject with an accuracy that comes from experience, using a technique he describes as “abstractions disguised in realism.”