only was she trying to get to know her friend again, but she had an agenda, and pushed him to open up. At the time that was hard for me to understand. But since that trip, I’ve done some journalism on my own. I’m doing a profile of Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein, and I was following her on the campaign trail. They’re not going to give you anything real. So I understood the frustration, the difference between them giving you a line and giving you what you want: to know, what does the person actually think, what does he ask himself when he goes to sleep at night?

As you worked on the book, you were afraid that it may have lost relevance by the time it was published. The so-called Arab Spring started six months after we got back, and the resulting refugee crisis has now surpassed the refugee crisis in Iraq, which I had documented, so I questioned if it was worth making this book. But no matter what happens, the Iraq War is something our generation hasn’t really reckoned with. Syria was a largely middle-class, largely educated country, and it’s not the kind of place you’d think would turn into a war zone. In Damascus, we walked around remarking on what a stable place it was, with no idea that something like this could ever happen.

Who do you envision as the audience for the book?
I’m thinking of Americans my own age, and it was me, too, before I went on this trip. I think a lot of us have forgotten about the Iraq War: it’s not our problem, and what goes on there is easy for people to ignore. It’s still our problem, and Syria is an extension of that. I’d like my own generation to read it, and to look again at what happened to get us there.

What are you working on now?
I have some ideas for other books, focusing on immigration issues and migration in general, subjects that have gotten under my skin. And maybe I’ll stick to home; there are so many issues in the United States that deserve attention.

IT APPEARS THERE IS truth to the adage, “Good things come to those who wait.” After nearly four decades in the business, veteran actor Reed Birney won his first Tony Award in June, for best featured actor in a drama for his performance in Stephen Karam’s moving play The Humans.

The recognition was hard-won for the 61-year-old Birney, who studied at the College of Fine Arts. He landed his first Broadway role in the comedy Gemini in 1977. But that early success was followed by many lean years, offset by roles in off-off-Broadway productions, occasional guest appearances in television shows such as Law & Order, and teaching gigs. Several times, he contemplated leaving acting altogether.

“She was flat on my back with despair,” says Birney. But, he adds, “despair is the enemy, and you lose too much of your precious life being sad when sad doesn’t help you one little bit.”

His fortunes began to turn around in 2008, when he played a ruthless journalist who rapes a woman in the off-Broadway drama Blasted, by Sarah Kane. Critics—and a whole new generation of playwrights and directors—took notice. He was then cast in a revival of William Inge’s Picnic in 2012, marking his return to Broadway after a 35-year absence. And, two years ago, he received his first Tony nomination, for his performance as cross-dresser Charlotte in Harvey Fierstein’s drama Casa Valentina.

The Humans, which won the Tony for best play, transferred from off-Broadway to Broadway in February. Charles Isherwood wrote in his New York Times review, “I have written many times of Mr. Birney’s excellence, but his perfor-
JUDITH SHUFRO (CFA’61) is a painter and an art teacher in La Jolla, Calif. “My current focus celebrates the produce here in California and it energizes me,” she says. Her painting Carrots won first place at the 2016 San Diego County Fair in the acrylic, still life, and florals category. Lemons and other works were shown in the Gotthelf Gallery in La Jolla this year. Visit Shufro’s website at judithshufro.com.

Carrots, 40” x 30”, acrylic on canvas, 2015

Lemons, 40” x 30”, acrylic on canvas, 2015