Mixed media

Union College

exhibition traces collaboration between painter and poet

By Amy Griffin

Artists residencies afford artists the gift of studio time that can be transformative. Just ask poet Jim McCord and painter Bruce McColl, who met at the Vermont Studio Center in 1996. That was the beginning of a unique collaboration that continues today, and is the subject of "Connections: Exploring the Ties Between Poet Jim McCord and Painter Bruce McColl." At Union College’s Manderelle Gallery. It’s not often you find a poet and painter who influence each other’s work in the way these two do. McCord, professor emeritus of English at Union College, taught there for 34 years, while McColl is the director of the Carrier Museum Art Center in Manchester, N.H. Their years teaching and working together spawned not only their influential collaboration but also a close friendship marked by long discussions of each other’s work.

In "Building Relationships: Selected works of Jim McCord and Bruce McColl," a companion book for the exhibition, the artists note that their collaboration is about exploring "complementary and existant relationships between art and poetry in respect to subjects, objects, images, designs, compositions, spaces, textures, styles, techniques." These explorations are evident on the walls of the gallery.

Listening while looking gives one the advantage of being able to focus on the words and images together at once, but it’s not essential. At times, the paintings literally illustrate the poems, while elsewhere the poems reflect the deeper ideas in the paintings. This reflects the process — sometimes a painting is done after a poem while other times the poem is influenced by the painting.

Bruce McColl once said that his work is "the extension of human interior," while Jim McCord also says that his work is "the extension of human interior." This dualism is evident in their work, which is both similar and different.

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Interiors

What kind of painter stays indoors in an art studio with shutters windows only colors that about beauty, evoke gracefulness desire?

What kind of painter returns home to well-known rooms to sketch to see the forms cut flowers, faceless figures, tables tinted with ceramic and glass?

Even Vuillard looked out his studio window to choose his wallpaper. Even Bonnard walked out and down stone steps to greet his morning garden, follow sandy paths to the sea.

Outdoor light52ed these two like wine. You find light breathing in common corners an iron filings scattered in memory waiting for a magnet.

A hand-made vase from a grandmother you never knew, a remnant of dress fabric discarded, a knife from an Appalachian sculptor who whipped mystical figures from stumps.

All of these odd encaustic painted in before you saw the place they hold in familiar niches alive with ubiquitous bouquet, flowering wife, bustling daughters you know so well.

— Jim McCord