



On exhibit

"CONNECTIONS: EXPLORING THE TIES BETWEEN POET JIM MCCORD AND PAINTER BRUCE MCCOLL"

■ **When:** Through Oct. 28; hours: Monday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

■ **Where:** Mandeville Gallery, Nott Memorial, Union College Campus, Schenectady

■ **Admission:** Free

■ **Info:** 518-388-6729; <http://www.union.edu/Resources/Campus/mandeville/>

■ **Note:** A poet's tour of the exhibition with Jim McCord is slated for 1 p.m. today and Thursday, Oct. 25, at the gallery

BRUCE MCCOLL'S "Brick and Mortar I," at left (oil and fabric on canvas)

MCCOLL'S "DAY LILLIES," bottom right (pastel on paper)

Mixed media

Union College exhibition traces collaboration between painter and poet

By Amy Griffin

Artist 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 1998. 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 Mandeville 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 Currier Museum Art Center in Manchester, N.H. Their fortuitous meeting 12 years ago 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 contrasting 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. Each painting is accompanied by a corresponding poem. A smartphone application enables visitors to scan a QR code next to each poem to hear members of the Union College community read the poems aloud.

"The benefit for me is to really be able to experience this exhibit in a complete sensory way," said Annette LeClair, librarian at Union College's Schaffer Library, a visitor who was working on downloading all 16 poems in the exhibit.

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 viewer must decipher connections. This reflects the process — sometimes a painting is done after a poem while other times the poem is influenced by the painting.

"This back-and-forth has fueled creativity for both artists. The exhibition statement notes that McCord began to examine "the intimacy of human interiors" while, for McColl, the basic elements of poetry, like alliteration, got him thinking about basic visual elements such as line and color.

Color is no doubt at the forefront of McColl's process, and McCord responds in kind. In the poem "Interiors," which accompanies the abstract painting "House of Cards" (2007), McCord writes about "bold colors that shout/beauty, evoke

gratified desire."

McCord often name-checks art historical giants such as Bonnard and Vuillard, who no doubt have influenced McColl but, curiously never mentions Matisse, who appears to be the biggest influence of all, with his flattened spaces and emphasis on color. With oil paint instead of cut paper, McCord's work closely resembles the colorful collages of Matisse's later work. His still lifes with faceless figures recall some of Matisse's last paintings.

A departure from abstract interiors, "Spring Blossoms" (2008) is a pastel drawing of a tree with purple and green blossoms accompanied by a meditation on death, "Early Blooming Azalea."

It's an example of how, for these two artists, their partnership allows for a give and take with plenty of room for individual expression.

► Amy Griffin is a frequent contributor to the Times Union.

Interiors

What kind of painter stays indoors in an ill-lit brick studio with shuttered windows mixing bold colors that shout beauty, evoke gratified desire?

What kind of painter returns home to well-known rooms to sketch from safe distances cut flowers, faceless figures, tables littered with ceramic and glass?

Even Vuillard looked hard out his patio 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 light soothed these two like wine. You find light breathing in common corners on iron filings scattered in memory waiting for a magnet:

a hand-me-down vase from a grandmother you never knew, a remnant of dress fabric discarded, a knife from an Appalachian sculptor who whittled mystical figurines from stumps.

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

— Jim McCord



PHOTOS BY LINN KRIKORIAN, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND MCCOWAN FINE ART