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Now based in upstate New York after living for many years in the Caribbean, James McManus, who is known as "Jim," is an artist who routinely integrates collage elements into his paintings, partly for their graphic character and partly to create compositions he describes as "two-dimensional dioramas." Above: "Swell Event," 2013, acrylic paint, pencil, glue, and photo paper on canvas, 30 x 22 inches. Photo by Bill Westmoreland, courtesy of the photographer and Jim McManus

## JAMES McMANUS: COLLAGE MEETS PAINTING, NEAR AN OCEAN BREEZE

**AN ARTIST USES THE TECHNIQUE DECISIVELY TO SHAPE AND SUGGEST STORIES**

by Edward M. Gómez

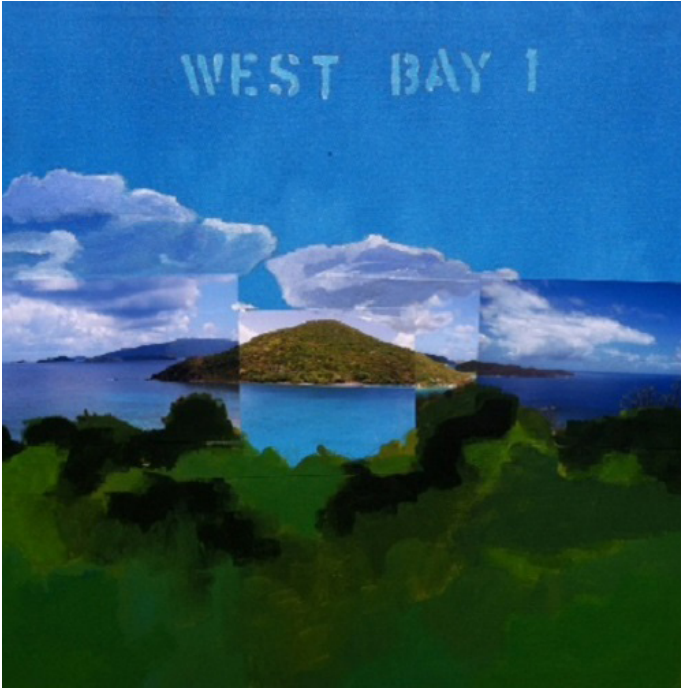
Today, James McManus, who is known to everyone, including his twin brother, as "Jim," lives with his wife, the artist Laura McManus (see "Art-making: Knowing When to Draw the Line," **brutjournal**, October 2021), on a bank of the east branch of the Delaware River in the town of Hancock, in upstate New York. Nearby, the west branch of that waterway serves as the border with neighboring Pennsylvania.

The two artists occupy a two-story building that was designed to include a retail space on its upper floor, which faces a street; that floor houses the couple's gallery and a shop selling design objects and imported kilims. Below, its lower level opens up onto a wide, long backyard that stretches out to meet the water's edge.

THE BIG PAGE  
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Above: James ("Jim") McManus, "West Bay 1," 2013, acrylic paint, pencil, glue, photo paper on canvas, 17 x 17 inches. Photo by Bill Westmoreland, courtesy of the photographer and Jim McManus



James ("Jim") McManus, two collage-integrating paintings from the "Scrub Island Collection"; on the left, "Festival," and on the right, "North Beach; both works from 2012, made with acrylic paint, pencil, glue, photo paper on canvas; each piece 24 x 16 inches. Photos by Bill Westmoreland, courtesy of the photographer and Jim McManus

Jim grew up in this area and, over the years, has never been too far away from a body of water, with easy access to the outdoors. A sense of an innate – and, for his art-making, indispensable – understanding of light and color, and the play of the two with and upon each other, seems to inform his work.

In the late 1980s, on the coast of Georgia, McManus attended the Savannah College of Art and Design. Later, he finished his studies and earned a bachelor's degree in painting from Pennsylvania State University in 1990. With Laura, McManus later lived for several years on the island of Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, where they operated their own restaurant and where they still show their work at the Old Customs Building (a gallery).

As a painter, Jim has often incorporated collage elements into his works. Recalling his involvement with the appropriationist technique, he told *brutjournal*: "I started with small collages in class assignments as a student. While still in college, I began using collage as a way to add compositional elements to my paintings. Collage elements also created graphic and textural excitement and allowed me to introduce printed words for further context along with paint."

Over time, McManus refined his handling of collage elements so that, in his recent works in which they play a role both as parts of his compositions and in conveying meaning, their integration into his paintings feels seamless.

In "Swell Event" (2013), for example, whose title refers to a sea-wave phenomenon and also recalls 1950s-era, American teenage slang ("You're a swell girl, Betty," Bobby said, "but I can't make collages with you, cuz you hog the glue."), McManus pastes photos of boats and islands in a bay into a broad, horizontal-format painting of a seascape that he seems to know well. Painting around them, he completes a vivid, blue-green vista that strongly evokes a sense of place while presenting the shape of the land with architectural precision.

Similarly, in the related pictures "Festival," "North Beach," "Boxing Day," and "Scrub Lounge," all from 2012, McManus incorporates cut-out photos of human figures in beach scenes whose surrounding, painted passages recall the character of stage sets; in these images, the artist's subjects are provided with waterside theaters in which to perform. In fact, as McManus noted, his use of collaged photos in these compositions helps give them the air of snapshots evoking memories of past pleasant times at a Caribbean getaway.

About this approach, McManus observed, "Because I often use personal photos and iconography that is repeated, the collage elements I use set up what might be called 'two-dimensional dioramas.' The resulting compositions make it clear that the imagery in these works is drawn from my own memory of events."

*Right, top: James ("Jim") McManus at work, with his assistant, in his studio in the town of Hancock, New York. Photo courtesy of The Camptons Art and Design Studio and Gallery*

*Right, bottom: James ("Jim") McManus, "View to Deadman's Point" 2013, acrylic paint, pencil, glue, photo paper on cardboard, 11 x 7.5 inches. Photos by Bill Westmoreland, courtesy of the photographer and Jim McManus*

McManus adds that, as he sees it, "Without the factual evidence the collage elements present [in these compositions], it would be more difficult to deliver the artworks' narratives."

Thus, compared to other collage-making artists who allow their compositions to remain more open-ended in terms of the meanings or messages their imagery might seem to convey, McManus uses collage more decisively as a communicative tool, while still leaving plenty of room for spontaneity in his art-making approach. He said, "It's the whole process [of collage] that is fun. It is two-dimensional and three-dimensional in a way. You're thinking, building, and constructing something, and that is satisfying. It's also an economical way to create a picture and tell a story."



#### Resources

James ("Jim") McManus's works can be found on the website of The Camptons Art and Design Studio and Gallery, the venue he operates with Laura McManus, which is located in Hancock, New York. URL: [www.thecamptons.com](http://www.thecamptons.com)

