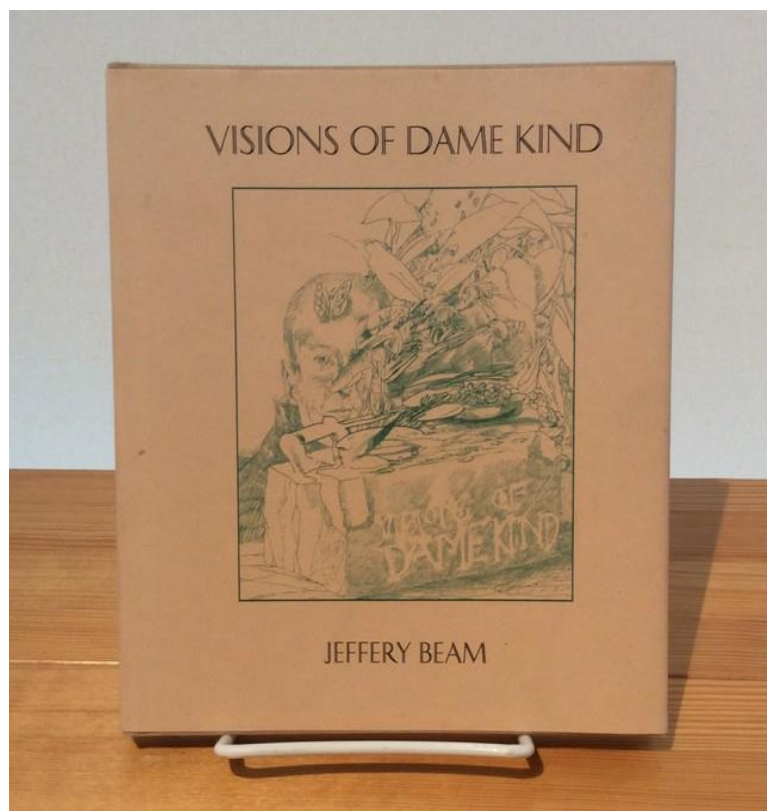


## Jeffery Beam

I'm coming late to sharing my thoughts on Jim. I kept putting it off since the distance from North Carolina to Vermont and his passing has made it easier for me to pretend it hasn't happened ... that Jim is still with us.

Soon after my husband Stanley and I met in 1980, we had become friends with Jonathan Williams and Tom Meyer. We quickly became friends and they became mentors as well. The McGarrells were people they spoke of often. Jonathan, who we saw regularly when he was in North Carolina, deemed it essential that we meet the McGarrells. Jonathan knew, of course, that we would be simpatico, and we were. [My husband Stanley had completed his Master in Italian Renaissance history in 1983, not long after he and I met. We had already become Italophiles — he had spent three months in Florence between undergraduate and graduate school — and we had already made the first of what would be, over the decades, many trips to Italy. Stanley had also become a chef at an Italian restaurant in Chapel Hill. I had an art and writing degree and had published my first few books, and worked as part of the support staff at the UNC Libraries.]

I wrote Jim first after my book *Visions of Dame Kind* was published by Jonathan's The Jargon Society press in 1995. Jonathan commissioned Jim to create the cover and frontispiece for it and when I finally had the book in hand I saw how lucidly AND mysteriously Jim had interpreted a visual entrance into my mystical plant poems.





Once we were connected, Jim and Ann invited us to stay at La Torre in Umbertide, and arranged for me to give a reading at the International School of Art at Montecastello di Vibio where they were in residence each summer. We had already been corresponding but we didn't meet until that June/July 1998 when we visited with three of our closest North Carolina friends. Fortuna smiled and Flora was staying next door in Andrew's apartment, with plans to leave a few days after our arrival. Of course Ann had notified all the locals of our arrival and so the neighborhood knew who we were even before we arrived and welcomed us with open arms — as anyone reading this likely knows, the Italians would have met us with open hearts anyway, but the relationship to Ann and Jim only heightened our sense of “being home.” We had a few days with Flora, as well as one full day with Jim and Ann at the school, and another day's lunch gathering at Ristorante L'Abbazia outside Umbertide with the three McGarrells and some of their other friends. Flora was in her crewcut, wearing massive cork-heeled platform shoes and tight jeans and a tube-like top. She was a vision climbing the wall of the L'Abbazia before lunch. I have a photograph of that climb. We were smitten. We returned to Umbertide in 2009 with one of our friends, but that time Ann and Jim were in Vermont.

Thus began over two decades of deepening affection and friendship with Ann and Jim and Flo. Much of it long distance, of course, with Ann and Jim paying one visit to us in Hillsborough a few years later during their first residency at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and we traveling to see them in Virginia during their second residency in 2012.

Subsequently we made three visits to Newbury, the first arranged when Flora, now Flores, would be home from Haiti for a short time, in September 2009, just months before we lost him, — almost a year after we lost Jonathan. Zaka was there too. I remember how difficult it was for Jim, at first, to get his pronouns out right. He kept calling Flo “she” and *he* (Flo) and Ann kept

gently, teasingly, correcting him. He wanted so much to say it accept it well. Habit kept getting in the way. By the end of our five days there he succeeded! It felt good. He felt good. All was well.

Another visit in 2014 during which both Ann and Jim still were visibly grieving. Ann took us aside and told us grim details of Flo's last hours that she had kept from Jim and that had clearly and visibly worn away at her heart. She wept, and we wept with her. It was so hard, that moment with her, but we were grateful to have had it. There was a tenderness and care between Jim and Ann on that visit that seemed a re-centering, a renewed gentility and mutual sympathy, of their relationship, which we were happy to see despite the tragedy that had engendered it. Finally, we returned in 2016 to cater and otherwise help with Ann's memorial. We did not have the joy of meeting Andrew (and Margaret) until that beautiful but sorrowful occasion.

Each time, in Montecastello and in Vermont, we came home with gifts of art and books, and purchases too. Three paintings: *Fun to be Fooled* from the *Verso Variants* which we purchased in 2009; a small oil painting *Tenors* sent to us when we were finally allowed to marry in 2014; and an older oil painting, *Eros and Psyche* (inscribed to Ann 1996), which Jim gave us after Ann's memorial service saying it was one of Ann's favorites. We also returned home in 2009 with an *Astronomies and Pleasures* that doesn't appear on his website, inscribed *No. 15 Sur Malhar: Morning Rain*. After Jim and Ann sent us a tile for Christmas one year, we purchased a couple of more and was given another in 2009; then purchased a couple more sometime between 2012 and 2015. Now there are seven (one a plate). We display them in our master bath and so every day feel as if we are in Newbury, remembering how they are displayed there. Jim had given us a large lithograph, *The Great Tufted Still Life*, in Montecastello, and later Jonathan gave us another large lithograph, *Spring Pull*, that had been inscribed to him. In 2008, I edited a chapbook of Jonathan quotes, *A Hornet's Nest*, that Jargon and my own imprint Green Finch published as a memento for Jonathan's memorial service. I commissioned Jim to create the cover and he later gave us that work, *Goodbye Magpie*. Unfortunately, the cover and frontispiece to my Jargon book was lost. Whereabouts unknown.

Ann and I became regular correspondents, sharing poems, sharing grief for Flo and for Jonathan when he passed. Ann translated some of my poems into Italian, although we never pursued a publisher for them. Limited edition books appeared in the mail — Jim's Whitman, his own copy of his collaboration with Jonathan *Sharp Tools for Catullan Gardens* — as did other Jargon collaborations, a copy of William Benton's *Marmalade*, exhibition catalogs and announcement postcards, and of course all of Ann's works including copies of manuscripts. My one regret is not owning a copy of *Flora*, Ann's limited edition book with Jack Beal from The Perishable Press. After Ann passed Jim and Andrew and Zaka provided me with a pdf of the book. Not quite the next best thing, but a treasure to me nevertheless.

It's a comfort to have so much of Jim and Ann here at Frog Level. The McGarrell collection is an integral part of our daily lives and will always remain so.



In 2009 I made a number of successful photographic portraits of Ann, Flo, and Jim. And in 2014 made a delightful set of portraits of Ann and Velma-kitty, the best of which I printed as a limited edition to give to Jim and Andrew and some other friends at Ann's memorial.



James McGarrell in his studio, Newbury, VT, 2009 photo by Jeffery Beam



Ann with Velma, Newbury, VT, 2014, photo by Jeffery Beam



Flores, September 14, 2009, Newbury, VT, photo by Jeffery Beam

One of the great boons of being a Jargonaut was (and remains so) becoming part of a world-wide community of the living and the dead, a glittering community of geniuses, outsiders,

“great unknowns”, and as Jonathan stated, people otherwise “bright-eyed, non-uppity, autochthonous, wacko, private, isolate, unconventional, unpaved, non-commercial ... outside, fantastic, subaesthetic, home-style and bushy-tailed.” Little effort would be needed to place any of those adjectives on Jim, or Ann, or Flo. Both Ann and Jim should have been, and will be someday, better known than they were. Entering Ann and Jim’s orbit was undoubtedly the best kinship Jonathan gave us, out of many very fine and treasured ones.

Jim was the first REAL LIVE VISUAL ARTS MASTER I ever knew intimately. Stepping into *Redwing* for the first time was breath-taking, and the second time, and the third time and... When we were invited into his studio in 2009, we were overwhelmed by the magnitude of his talents — in productivity, in imagination, and in the importance ... the breath ... of his vision. Yet, with us, Jim was always a modest man, a loving friend, an authentic fan of both of us as people and as creators, and, of course, candid in all the right ways, for all the right reasons. We were always treated as equals despite the difference in age and our less sophisticated experience — a delight and amazement to us. Jim didn’t seem god-like by any means; his human fallibility was right before you, but we felt “held” by Ann and Jim as if by immortals.

Jim’s art parades life’s theatric, quotidian objects and moments, and its merriments, but with the drama offered so naturally as to make it all seem *ordinary*, despite its radiance in form, content, and color. I suppose I mean ordinary in an ironic way, but I do find the “entertainments” in the paintings distinctly unselfconscious and without arrogance. I find something somber and wistful moving through the landscapes, still lives, and figures as if to point to an infinite music orchestrating the events. And as if some damage had been healed in their making. In the later, semi-abstract and abstracted work, the years of *Ragamalas* and *Astronomies* and *Verso Variants* and big paintings such as *Cadence Cobalt*, Jim said he hoped that the work was “moving beyond nameable iconographic subjects while still maintaining ... a convincing integrity of place.” Certainly that was true. Jim’s work is always listening as much, or perhaps even more, than it is seeing. The dramas finally enacting not just a jazz vibration, but a cosmic one. Jim’s work — so utterly unique — finds stillness in motion, coolness, *Cool*, in turbulent color and form. When I’m paying *attention*, the same is true, in the earliest, and even later, monochromatic works in which action evokes color.

Judith Lerner mentioned Jim’s “twinkle” in her memorial. I like that. It’s true. I’m sure I speak for Stanley too. Jim’s voice, Ann’s voice, their laughter, flair, intelligence, skepticisms ... their beliefs, their charm, their stories, their genius ... all live in my mind as music. And in vibrant color like Jim’s paintings. When our own lights are extinguished and we bundle away in our heavenly knapsacks, the bond with the incandescent personalities in our life — Jim, Ann, and Flo among them — is what we’ll be packing. Those now gone and those still with us, whom we love and are loved by so ferociously, are the only irrefutable treasures of this world. So much to be grateful for, such many good, glad, and lively memories.

I think I shall let Jonathan have the last word, and image. From Jonathan’s book *A Palpable Elysium: Portraits of Genius and Solitude*.



**JAMES MCGARRELL**

(1930—)

THERE ARE DAYS when I can't think of a more refined and accomplished artist in America than Jim.

He hasn't taught in the fashionable places. To teach in a university in Bloomington, Indiana, and in St. Louis, Missouri, makes more sense for a mid-American baseball player. To show paintings in galleries in Paris and Umbria and Rome (despite all the shows in Chicago and New York) is probably not too wise either. We are such pussies.

I have known him a very long time. First it was in New Orleans, when he was helping make recordings of local music for Bill Russell, along with Alden Ashforth and David Wyckoff. That's about 1952. Emile Barnes, Peter Bocage, Kid Thomas Valentine, Wooden Joe Nicholas, One-Eyed Babe Phillips, Lawrence Marrero, Alchide "Slow-Drag" Pavageau — precisely the right local guys.

Like Philip Guston, he has kept at it. Knowledge of Max Beckmann, knowledge of Balthus. Knowledge of the Cardinals, knowledge of the Indiana Hoosiers. Fantastic knowledge of a great tradition of European and American painting. You sense in him a depth of command as well as his great finesse. At this moment he is working quietly away in a mansarded attic in Newbury, Vermont. He has painted the four walls of the dining room and the mantelpiece into a 68-foot composition called "Redwings." The color is stunning. His wife Ann (poet and translator), daughter, Flora (media artist), and son, Andrew (librarian), are lucky to dine in such splendor.

James McGarrell reminds me of Maurice Ravel, who had to keep doing it on his own. "O Sing, O Barren."



Photo by Jonathan Williams