



ON ART

HELEN A. HARRISON

The Prellwitz Legacy

When Wendy Prellwitz was a little girl, she spent summers with her family on the North Fork at High House, overlooking Little Peconic Bay, where her great-grandparents, the painters Henry and Edith Prellwitz, had his-and-hers studios. She remembers her enchantment with the many paintings by both artists that were still there, and her fascination with the diaries and photographs that documented the artists' community of which they were a vital part. Now, seventy years after their deaths, Wendy finds ideas for her own paintings and prints in the same locale that inspired her ancestors. Examples of her recent work are on view through July 28th at the South Street Gallery in Greenport.

Like its South Fork counterpart, the North Fork art colony attracted artists based in New York City because of its

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ready access by rail, as well as its natural beauty. Edith and Henry began visiting the area in the early 20th century and moved to Peconic in 1913, joining colleagues like Irving Wiles, Edward Bell, and Benjamin and Harriet Fitz, who were already established there, and William Steeple Davis, an Orient native. They lived in High House year-round for over a decade, during which they focused on views of their immediate surroundings—the coastal scenery, sailboats on the bay, the fishing fleet in the harbor—at all times of day, and in all seasons. Their property has stayed in the family, and with Wendy Prellwitz in residence the studio building is once again filled with creative activity.

During her career as an architect, with a practice in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Wendy nurtured her early aptitude for painting and drawing and is now concentrating on visual art full time. Her childhood attraction to Edith and Henry's maritime subject matter is reflected in her own



Departure #4

Wendy Prellwitz, oil and acrylic on paper mounted on panel, 24 x 18 inches.

imagery, but not literally. She starts from a similar place, but takes the impulse in a different, more personal direction. Instead of simulating natural elements in the impressionist style favored by her ancestors, Wendy uses visual metaphors to evoke them. The wavy grain of wooden boards—actually rubbings from the steps leading to her Cambridge studio—becomes a stand-in for rippling water and/or cloud-streaked sky, and works equally well as either one. Reflections are achieved by translucent layering, which is especially effective in her monotypes, with their complex multiple overprintings.

A recurring motif is a dock near the Prellwitz property that juts out into the bay. Wendy made one painting of it that's a fairly straightforward study, but it seems like a way to get the observation out of her system and move into more challenging interpretive territory. In "Departure," the dock's planks and pilings are clearly indicated, although schemati-

cally, leading the eye across the water toward Jessup Neck and the North Sea coastline. In other paintings, including "Departure #4" and "Coming and Going," the dock is reduced to a linear outline or chromatic area. The departure and return are optical rather than actual, so the travel from place to place that the titles suggest is accomplished in the viewer's imagination. The illumination, which could be reflected sunlight or moonlight, depending on your mood, enhances the ambiguity.

In an article in last October's Fine Art Connoisseur magazine, Wendy Prellwitz considered her relationship to her forebears in terms of their shared enthusiasm for the Peconic environment. She described her fascination with "the reflections, the ever-changing, unknowable light," and the pleasure of painting outdoors "in every season and in all weathers." One can imagine her great-grandmother jotting similar observations in her diary nearly a century ago.

The Sag Harbor Express
INSIDE & OUTSIDE

THURSDAY, JULY 17, 2014