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BARBARAELEN KOCH PHOTO

Artist Wendy Prellwitz in her Peconic studio, where her great-grandfather, well-known painter Henry Prellwitz, once worked.

Below: 'Full Moon (High House)'



Art that harks back generations

North Fork artist Wendy Prellwitz works in a studio once used by her great-grandfather

BY RACHEL YOUNG
STAFF WRITER

Two years ago, Peconic painter Wendy Prellwitz was in an artistic rut.

Tired of the oil-on-panel water scenes she normally created, she felt herself struggling to map out her next project.

"Every once in a while you hit a moment where you think, okay, I'm not sure what to do next," she said recently from her studio at High House, the bayfront home her family has owned since 1911. "I just didn't like the paintings I was doing."

But one day, as she sat in the Dutch colonial's kitchen and looked out toward its handsome sun porch, a proverbial light bulb appeared.

"I saw this view and thought, 'Hmm, I wonder what it would be like to paint interiors,'" she recalled.

As time passed, Ms. Prellwitz became increasingly entranced by the thought of using a paintbrush to recreate the house's furnishings, particularly the way the golden October light hit certain objects: a purple throw pillow, an antique lamp in the foyer.

Those paintings — 16 in all — are on view at Cutchogue New Suffolk Library through Aug. 31 in Ms. Prellwitz's latest exhibition, "Conversations."

"I got really connected to the idea of painting these spaces I've known all my life," she said. "This house is the most consistent place I've ever been connected to. It's the most wonderful place in the world."

Ms. Prellwitz, a retired architect who teaches

at the Maud Morgan Visual Arts Center in Cambridge, Mass., and spends summers in Peconic, has good reason to feel attached to the property. Her great-grandparents, the well-known figure and landscape painters Henry and Edith Mitchill Prellwitz, purchased the house a few years before the start of World War I and built adjoining studios on the property as work spaces. The couple belonged to the Peconic Art Colony, a group of local artists whose members gleaned inspiration

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Left: 'Closed Door'

Below: 'Conversation'



Left: 'Conversation With Myself'



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Ms. Prellwitz's great-grandparents purchased this Dutch Colonial, nicknamed 'High House,' in Peconic in 1911.

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from the North Fork's natural beauty.

During her childhood, Ms. Prellwitz spent many idyllic summers at High House, which was then owned by her grandparents, Edwin and Eunice. Her family moved several times when she was a child, so the property represented a place of security for her.

"There was a measured pace to the day," she said, recalling how her family always ate breakfast and dinner together, in the same rooms, with the same plates. "It's very comforting to have those rituals."

Ms. Prellwitz's great-grandparents died in the 1940s, several years before her birth in 1950. But though their paths never crossed in a physical sense, Ms. Prellwitz, who works in her great-grandfather's studio, grew up feeling deeply connected to her forebears, whose oil paintings decorate that light-filled room's walls.

As she told *Art Connoisseur Magazine* in a 2013 article about her family, "Spending summers digging around the studios, living in High House with the mundane pieces of their lives, their furniture and teacups, Henry and Edith became a living presence for me."

The pieces that comprise "Conversations" reflect this intimate connection. In fact, one work, "Closed Door," is a cropped version of a painting her great-grandmother did of the house's back hallway. In another, "Conversation With

Myself," autumnal light pours into the living room and bounces off a window seat.

Ms. Prellwitz admitted she was initially hesitant to display the paintings, since the collection is so personal and unlike the rest of her work. But when the library approached her about doing a show, she felt more at ease about the idea.

"Showing them here, in Cutchogue, the next town over from where my great-grandparents lived, is kind of a nice thing," she said.

There's no way of knowing for sure, of course, but Ms. Prellwitz believes her ancestors would heartily approve of her latest work and, of course, be thrilled that their beloved home remains in the family.

"I can't help but think they would be pleased," she said. "I almost think of the house as a being. It has its own soul."

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