



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

EDITH MITCHELL PRELLWITZ (1864-1944)

Chanin Building, Midtown Manhattan, 1929

Oil on canvas

36 1/4 x 29 1/4 inches

Signed and dated 1929, lower right

Edith Mitchell Prellwitz was born in South Orange, New Jersey in 1864 to Cornelius S. Mitchell, a successful businessman and his wife, Helen Reed Mitchell. During her first trip to Europe in 1882 at the age of 18, she visited the artistic centers of Italy, Paris and London, which solidified her desire to become an artist. In 1883 she wrote in her diary, "I am a woman of 'aspiration,' with strong intentions to become an artist, a *great* artist." Shortly after this entry, she moved to New York to study at the Art Students League under the figural artist George de Forest Brush (1855-1941), noted American impressionist William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) and Kenyon Cox (1856-1919). In 1888, Prellwitz was elected as vice president of the Art Students League, and also began a short apprenticeship at the Tiffany Glass Company, which she soon abandoned due to her preference for painting. During this time she also became an early advocate for women artists as one of the organizers of the Woman's Art Club of New York, which later became the National Association of Women Artists. Remaining in New York until 1889, she then traveled to Paris to study for a year at the Académie Julien under the tutelage of William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905) and Tony Robert-Fleury (1837-1911). While in Paris, she exhibited at the prestigious Paris Salon, where she won a prize in 1894.

Upon her return to the United States, she established a studio, first at 49 West 22nd Street, and later in the Holbein Building at 152 West 55th Street, where she met fellow artist, Henry Prellwitz (1865-1940) who kept a studio across the hallway from hers. The couple married in 1894. She did not abandon her own career as an artist, however. Prellwitz became a member of the National Academy of Design and the Society of American Artists, where she won a prize for her submission to the annual exhibition in 1895. She also exhibited at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta and won a silver medal. In 1896, Prellwitz had a son, Edwin Mitchell Prellwitz. That same year, she earned Second Hallgarten Prize from the National Academy of Design, and in 1897 earned the Norman W. Dodge Prize, which had a cash award of \$250. The couple used the prize money to build a summer cottage in the artist colony of Cornish, New Hampshire. The couple spent many happy summers here with friends, including fellow artist Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907). Though Prellwitz was primarily known for her paintings of children, while in Cornish, she painted the local landscape in an impressionist style. In 1898, the Prellwitz home in Cornish was struck by lightning. Though the home survived, the couple never returned to Cornish. In 1899, the Prellwitzs became members of an art colony in Peconic, a village on the North Fork of Long Island, and lived there as full-time residents until 1928, when the couple moved to a cooperative apartment building on East 41st Street in New York City, where they lived for 10 years. It is here that Edith painted views of the skyscrapers outside of her studio window. In 1938, the Prellwitz's returned permanently to Peconic.



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The Chanin Building in Midtown Manhattan is located at 122 East 42nd Street, near the Prellwitz apartment. Prellwitz painted the stepped façade of the art deco Chanin Building while it was still an imposing landmark on the Midtown skyline. Soon surpassed in height and opulence by the Chrysler Building located across the street, the Chanin Building once held an elegant movie theater as well as an open-air observatory on the 54th floor. Prellwitz's impressionist style skyline, in its cool muted colors and smoky atmosphere, captures the energy and majesty of the late 1920s New York skyline, rendered in thick impasto paint.

Prellwitz and her husband shared joint exhibitions throughout their careers, including shows at the Charcoal Club in Baltimore in 1899, and the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. In 1901, Prellwitz won a bronze medal at the Pan-American Exposition, held in Buffalo, New York in 1901. In 1906, Prellwitz was elected to the National Academy of Design, and belonged to the Society of American Artists and the New York Water Color Club. In addition to her paintings and watercolors, Prellwitz also created a major mural for the Universalist Church in Southold, New York in 1926. In 1929, the National Academy awarded her the Julia A. Shaw Memorial Prize. She was a strong advocate for women in the arts, and she used her position on the Board of Control of the Art Students League to strengthen the role of women in the League. In 1995, the Museums of Stony Brook, New York organized an exhibition focusing on Edith and Henry Prellwitz and their association with Peconic art colony. Additionally, in 2005-2006, the Cornish Colony Museum in Windsor, Vermont provided one of the venues for the exhibition: *Painters of Peconic: Edith and Henry Prellwitz*. Prellwitz's works are also in the permanent collection of the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site and the National Academy of Design in New York.

References:

Biographical Information courtesy of Askart.com.