



'Complex Conversations' now features the work of mother and son Prilla and Matt Brackett, which is on display through April 10 as part of the program.

Bloodlines

By Debra Filcman
MPG Newspapers

Location, location, location. This, as a subject matter, is what unites the two artists who currently share billing at the Art Complex Museum's new "Complex Conversations" exhibit.

That, and a shared bloodline. The work of Prilla and Matt Brackett, mother and son, is on

display through April 10. Both artists' paintings depict the family's longtime summer home in Duxbury.

The house at Powder Point, which just went on the market this month, has been in their family since 1915, Prilla said.

"My mother and I just felt so much synchronicity," Matt Brackett said. "We realized that we

See **ART WORK**, Page A43

'My mother and I just felt so much synchronicity'

■ ART WORK, from Page A1

were both working on a similar theme, and I think it's a wonderful piece of providence that this opportunity came just as the house went up for sale."

In the beginning, the house served as a summer getaway location for the family, which then lived in Brookline. When Prilla's late grandmother was widowed in 1938, she moved to the Duxbury home full time. But younger generations – including the Bracketts – continued to use it as a vacation spot.

"After my mother, Catherine, died, I started doing a lot of thinking about how the old family house fits into the landscape and tried to figure out how I felt about the house itself," Prilla said. "Especially because I didn't know how much longer it would remain in our family."

It came as a complete surprise to both mother and son, they said, that they were sharing a dominant subject matter in their works.

At the time of this realization, Prilla had already been in communication with the curators at the museum about displaying some of her work – mostly with environmental messages, she said – but the museum needed a clearer reason for including the Cambridge-based artist's paintings in their exhibit.

Enter: the house. And the son.

While Matt's work had previously been considered for a show at the museum, the prospect never panned out, he said. But when Prilla alerted representatives at the museum that her son, too, was painting depictions of the family's

waterfront home, the tides turned for both Bracketts.

"The Complex Conversations program was meant to pair artists to create a conversation between their works," said special projects director Craig Bloodgood. "With Matt and Prilla, we also have a conversation between artists – two artists in the same family – as well as between works."

The duality of Complex Conversations came to light last year, when glass-blower Alan Klein asked if he and fellow Mass. Art student Mike Newby, a woodworker, could show their pieces concurrently.

Matt, who had observed his mother painting since his childhood, studied painting in college. After graduating from Yale with a degree in fine arts, Matt continued painting in his free time, but worked as a carpenter to pay the bills.

Prilla, originally a sociologist by education, returned to school years later in Nebraska to receive a second master's degree in drawing and painting.

And while the pair has grown accustomed to sharing an avocation, this year they, for the first time, found themselves conversing as colleagues, Prilla said.

"This is the first time we've gone out professionally into the public to discuss our works as a family," said Prilla. "But we didn't plan it this way; we just each followed our own muse."

The duo, however, took very different approaches to their representations of the particular time and place in question.

Prilla's portion of the show focus-

es on the sleeping porch that figures prominently in her childhood memories of the house. In fact, it doesn't only evoke images of her own childhood, but also conjures images for her of her mother's childhood. Viewers are privy to the porch from a variety of angles and points of view.

"There's an old hospital bed out there, which for me, is very evocative of the passage of time," Prilla said. "It doesn't tell you what century it is, but it's very old and it makes me think of all the generations of our family who have slept out there or sat and read a book."

She also employed some formal techniques to suggest those items that are not physically present in the paintings, including the anthropomorphication of trees and other inanimate objects.

"The sense of movement in the trees surrounding the porch suggests someone might have just been there," Prilla said. "It gives it a little mystery, and I'm hoping to make people think about the elusive quality of memory."

Working from a conglomeration of snapshots, Prilla paints that which actually exists: doors and walls, fences and trees, but takes a bit of artistic license, sometimes changing the colors or details, she said, fully making the work her own.

Matt's approach is less literal, sketching his stream-of-consciousness thoughts or memories of the space, and superimposing fictional narratives on top of those backgrounds.

"The scenes are realistically rendered, but without realistic people or events," said Matt. "The scenes I painted never actually happened."

While Prilla's paintings suggest a sense of tranquility, according to Bloodgood, Matt's paintings serve the opposite function. Leaving the



'Complex Conversations' is now on display at the Art Complex Museum.

viewer to piece together unusual plotlines, Matt's work is a bit more unsettling.

In their attempt to iron out their

individual emotions about time and mortality, mother and son Brackett struck a balance, both on and off the canvas.