Patricia Cronin

The Domain of Perfect Affection, 1993-2003

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DIRECTOR'S FORWARD

The University at Buffalo Art Gallery, Center for the Arts is proud to have organized Patricia Cronin's first survey exhibition. "Patricia Cronin, The Domain of Perfect Affection, 1993-2003" is a perfect curatorial debut for recently appointed Associate Curator, Sandra Firmin, establishing her commitment to feminist art practice within the UB Art Gallery's mission to present temporary exhibitions that reflect the complexity of ideas and formal concerns found in current art practice and theory. Cronin's masterful handling of art historical themes merged with contemporary content, diverse rendering of life forms, and shrewd commentary on social and political issues, accomplish one of the gallery's main objectives – to serve as a platform for critical, cross disciplinary discussion.

Among the many people who made this exhibition and catalog publication possible, I am most grateful to Patricia Cronin for generously sharing her time and wit with our professional staff, entrusting us with this large body of work, and for her steadfast commitment to lesbian politics. I owe much to Sandra Firmin who organized the exhibition and catalog, raising support for both in less than six months since her appointment last August. Special thanks are due to Robert Rosenblum, Curator, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, for his inspired essay that furthers the scholarship of Patricia Cronin's work, especially drawing compelling connections with nineteenth-century art production, and for his lecture.

The UB Art Galleries are extremely grateful to Deitch Projects, New York and to the dedicated collectors of Patricia Cronin's work who lent to the exhibition: Patricia Cronin and her partner Deborah Kass; Amy Cappellazzo and Joanne Rosen; David Frankel; Vincent Katz and Vivien Bittencourt; A.G. Rosen and Debi Sonzogni; Maria and Archie Rand; Susan Rice; and Sara Vance and Michelle Waddell.

Thanks are due to Michael Morgan for his enthusiasm and patience, producing an elegant catalog that embodies the intent of Patricia Cronin's work; to Renee Ruffino for her design of the announcement card; to Hal Leader at Leader All Surface Printing; and to Robert Freudenheim for the catalog printing and production. Several people provided invaluable insight and encouragement, for which we are deeply appreciative: Lawrence Brose, Executive Director, CEPA Gallery; Tyrone Georgiou, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education; and Jennifer McDonough, Vice President for University Advancement and Alumni Relations.

The exhibition, catalog and all related activities would not have been possible without the diligence of the professional and support staff of the UB Art Gallery, Center for the Arts: Kristin Riemer, public relations/development officer; Tim Ramsey, registrar for temporary exhibitions and preparator; Dwayne Sylvester, preparator and gallery manager; Kitty Marmion, administrative assistant; and a legion of work study students; and at UB Anderson Gallery: Nancy Wulbrecht, registrar.

At the University at Buffalo, I wish to thank the President, John B. Simpson; Interim Provost Robert J. Genco; and Uday Sukhatme, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences for their support of UB Art Galleries.

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Sandra H. Olsen, Ph.D.

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Commissioner, 1996

ON PATRICIA CRONIN: FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

Robert Rosenblum

At the chronological beginning of this anthology, Patricia Cronin offers such X-rated, in-your-face showstoppers that it may take a while to get our balance and to go on from sex to horses, to real estate, and finally, to life after death. Classified rather primly as "erotic drawings," this early group of watercolors (1993-95) (pg. 20, 21 & 23) stands unique in the annals of artists, great and small, who tried to record unabashed sexual activity. In the domain of twentieth-century art, there is quite a lot of competition for Cronin's candor, including Egon Schiele's records of himself masturbating and Picasso's gynecologist's view of copulating couples. But Cronin's work leaps off the wall for a number of different reasons. In the first place, what she depicts is lesbian sex, as enjoyed by the artist and her lover, Deborah Kass.

The theme, of course, is hardly new to art history – Courbet's same-sex, post-orgasmic embrace is a textbook example – but never has it been treated this way, which is from the vantage point not of a prurient voyeur but of one of the two participants. Here, the ultra-private views of sexual territory disclosed in the exploration of one's lover's body are revealed, making us feel as if we were also *flagrante delicto*, sharing the artist's own sights and contortions of love-making. So startlingly real are these views that, as in the actual experience of roaming about sexual parts, we lose all sense of gravity, with top and bottom, left and right totally interchangeable. It is telling that without instructions for hanging, these watercolors might work just as well upside-down or sideways, a perfect reflection of the vertigo produced by close-up visual encounters with someone else's groin. Moreover, this otherworldly spaciness is underlined by abrupt croppings on all sides that force us to zero in on the final goals of sexual play. Here, Courbet's notorious *Origin of the World* (1866), which Cronin saw when it traveled to the Brooklyn Museum in 1988, looms large as a liberation for another artist to enter the forbidden territory of a shocking, head-on confrontation with a female body of which we see nothing but spread thighs, pubic hair, and genitalia.

In a way, the most unexpected aspect of these "erotic drawings" is their total cool. Defying

the conventions of both high art or plain pornography, these watercolors avoid any sensual rhetoric, whether of febrile urgency or languorous ecstasy. Buttocks, vulva, thigh, hand, underwear are rendered with the kind of detachment familiar, say, to the American realist painter Philip Pearlstein's renderings of people, dressed or clothed, so that with the slight turn of a switch, these female body parts might just as easily be inert fragments of upholstered furniture. For something so overtly scandalous, these private pages from the artist's sexual diary are no more heated or seductive than an inventory of her kitchen cabinets, which is perhaps why they are uncannily fascinating, offering an invulnerable objectivity that rejects any possibility of sexual arousal. What we expect to be steamy is completely dry.

It should be no surprise, then, that Cronin transfers her deadpan approach to another, very different kind of subject that, with some artists, might elicit passion or sentiment but that she treats with an equally clinical distance: horses. Not quite up to sex as a universal theme, the horse nevertheless radiates far and wide in art and here, more relevantly, in cultural memory. Cronin's horses, in fact, belong, like Seabiscuit, in Anglo-American stables, evoking the kind of people-friendly animals, both mythic and real, that prompted a vast world of fiction. So close could horses be to their human masters that the British classic of this genre, Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877), was written as a horse's autobiography; its first word is "I." And other beloved horses like those in Enid Bagnold's book, *National Velvet* (1935) and Walter Farley's *The Black Stallion* (a series launched in 1941), reached even greater fame through the movie worlds of Elizabeth Taylor and Walt Disney.

Like so many American girls, Cronin grew up as a horse-lover. Although she never achieved her childhood ambition of having a horse, she rode, she subscribed to magazines like *Horse Illustrated, Spur, Young Rider*, and she collected horse portraits as if they were pin-up pictures of high-school crushes. In short, from her adolescence on, horses for her were an obsession. In her own words, "I love them and I always wanted one." Like love-making, another obsessive theme for her art, this one was also treated from a vantage-point of such passionless, dry objectivity that her horses almost seem the work of an anonymous artist. In view of the fact that most of these equine portraits are based on those featured in the magazines she treasures, this is no surprise. Nevertheless, these images are deeply personal in character.

Pony Tales, an installation of 1996, opens this diary (pg. 28 - 29). Against a wallpaper background with a floral Americana pattern ("Summer Country Estate") fifty oil-on-canvas horse portraits in an assortment of formats – oval, circle, square, rectangle – are displayed like love objects in a teenager's room. The equivalent of a gallery of celebrity head shots, these horses are

all individuals, seen not so much as four-legged animals who race or hunt but as humanoid portrait busts that demand eyeball-to-eyeball contact. It is predictable that, like people, they all have names. Here we meet, among others, Peppermint, Harry, Vamp, Topshelf, Kate, Sasha. And like their human counterparts, these horses radiate a wide spectrum of emotions, from macho passion to maternal tenderness.

Moving from the girl's bedroom to the stable, this installation has a sequel in *Tack Room* (1997-98) (pg. 30 & 31). Here we can take shelter in an equine sanctuary where these glamorous creatures are dressed for action with their saddles and bridles, like movie stars in changing rooms. But this shrine is also autobiographical, since the artist has covered the walls not only with the horses' gear, but with mementos of her own passion for horses, including photographs of her in riding contests and souvenirs of particularly beloved horses in her life.

In another case, horses move from individual pin-ups to a three-dimensional tableau of a horse community. On a pine table that smacks of Americana, a pastoral grouping of eight bronze horses – four parents, four children – seem to be grazing and moving with a natural freedom remote from the tack room. Always aware of art history, Cronin has said that she wanted these horses – they are actually bronzed versions of the plastic toys made for horse-crazy young girls – to be a combination of Degas and Remington. And thinking backwards, they also evoke the Arcadian world of mares and foals in the British countryside as painted by George Stubbs or, with more cosmic ambitions, the multi-colored horse societies painted by Franz Marc in an effort to regress to a state of pure and innocent animal being. It is telling that the title Cronin chose both for this work and her first survey exhibition, *The Domain of Perfect Affection* (1999) (pg. 32), is a reference to the most famous horse-painter of the nineteenth century, Rosa Bonheur, who referred to the Château de Bry, her country retreat on the edge of the Fontainebleau forest, by this idyllic name. From 1860 on, she lived there with her female lover, Nathalie Micas. This uncommon mixture of an artist, a passion for horses, and a harmonious lesbian couple living in domestic bliss, provided Cronin with a perfect genealogical table for her own life and art.

One year later, in 2000, Cronin explored another theme that, despite appearances, may be no less autobiographical than her passion for horses. Included in the Yale University Art Gallery exhibition "Looking at America" (2002), the *Luxury Real Estate* paintings (2000) (pg. 34 & 35) at first look like mechanical replications of the dream-house to be found in the most upscale ads of Sotheby's international real estate magazines. Their commercial point is emphasized by the titles, which instantly declare the asking price, ranging from a modest $2,300,000 to a hefty $20,000,000.

These visions of a private paradise in remote mountains and seas only accessible, one imagines, by private helicopter, pinpoint fantasies that reach geographically from the Rocky Mountains to the Caribbean, with stops in the Hamptons. For Cronin, these were unattainable and essentially preposterous fantasies, the Gardens of Eden so out of reach for her own pocket and almost everybody else's, that they turn into social satire, what she refers to as "yuppie porn."

The dimensions of these paintings, usually about ten inches square, correspond, in fact, to the actual size of the ads in the magazine, which instantly reduces them to the kind of real-estate icons found on Monopoly boards. Their total lack of connection with reality is further underlined by the aerial view, as if we had glimpsed a dream from the window of an airplane. Spatially, this distancing is the exact complement of what happens in the erotic watercolors, taking us from the extreme of a disorienting close-up to a faraway, weightless vision of an Oz that momentarily replaces Kansas. For Cronin, painting these glossy-paper mirages was a kind of catharsis, exorcising the demons that would waft her to the most expensive and secluded getaways on our planet. Often, she turned to making them as a break from a new, long term project, a far more personal and palpable dream of uninterrupted bliss.

That dream, *Memorial to a Marriage* (2000-02), is so imaginative a leap into an artist's personal life and so revolutionary a monument in terms of social history that it demands a full-scale monograph. But here, it can at least be seen in the context of her earlier works, which, in some part, may prepare us for this poignant transgression. Cronin was particularly obsessed with nineteenth-century funerary sculpture, making pilgrimages from one house of the dead to another. And predictably, she was drawn to American neoclassic sculpture, what Henry James had called "the white marmorean flock," especially to those women sculptors who worked mainly in Rome and whose lesbian liaisons have been the subject of many recent exposés of what could happen under Victorian sheets. From such historical inspiration, she dreamed of a neo-Victorian grave in which she and her lover might live forever in a mansion far more remote and beautiful than any in the Sotheby's catalogs.

Three years in the making, with funding by Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO, *Memorial to a Marriage* began as a plaster cast (pg. 38) that, through new technologies, was ultimately transformed into larger-than-life-size Carrara marble sculpture. And this dream of the afterlife, of a pair of same-sex lovers embracing forever, was, even more astonishingly, accepted as a monument in one of America's most beautiful cemeteries and, by the standards of its wealthy occupants – Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, et al. – one of the most conservative. Nevertheless, now that it is part of Woodlawn Cemetery, sometimes referred to as America's "Père Lachaise,"

Cronin's dream of the afterlife is, in the words of the invitation to its unveiling on November 3, 2003, "on view through eternity." Right in the middle of the most tight-laced, dead WASP neighbors, the artist and her lover are reincarnated in an ultimate marmoreal embrace whose mixture of the very real and the very ideal resurrects the ambitions of the American Neoclassic sculpture that inspired this time-travel from a century past to kingdom come. A new version of a Wagnerian *Liebestod*, this contemporary "love-death" locks the two women in an embrace as innocent as the hugging babes in the wood so familiar to nineteenth-century imagery and as carnal as Courbet's lesbians. The two heads, resting together on a marble pillow, are recognizably portraits, but the bodies, naked to the waist and then covered by rising and falling waves of draperies that forever wed them, belong to that idealized, classical vision of human beauty which haunted so many nineteenth-century sculptors.

Suspended in time and history, this contemporary Tristan and Isolde also mirror Cronin's earlier works. The physical closeness of the erotic watercolors now moves to a spiritual realm; and the obsession with the purity and innocence of the horses (which, in one case, *Cookie and Napoleon* (1997) (pg. 25), are actually paired as a loving couple from a heavenly stable) now moves to supernatural heights. Moreover, the terrestrial dreams of luxury real-estate have now become an extraterrestrial dwelling. But if *Memorial to a Marriage* may seem to sum up Cronin's career and life, she was, fortunately, born as recently as 1963. We have much to anticipate.

PATRICIA CRONIN'S XX PORTFOLIO

Sandra Firmin

Brooklyn-based artist Patricia Cronin began to work with the Polaroid camera in 1993, producing a large "shoebox archive" that documents a multiplicity of sexual lifestyles dominant in New York at the time. In contrast to her contemporary, photographer Catherine Opie, who received critical acclaim for her dignified studio portraiture of queer leather communities in California, Cronin's snapshots are taken in the frenzy of participation. Emerging concurrently in the early 1990s, both Cronin and Opie offer a lesbian counterpart to Robert Mapplethorpe's controversial *X Portfolio* from the late 1970s and early '80s, which filtered multiracial sex acts and sado-masochism through a highly disciplined language of formal photography, merging homoerotic pornography and high art in the process.

Queer history in the twentieth-century partially can be traced through personal photographs passed privately among friends, which established contact between previously isolated groups and individuals. The formation of these communities was often associated with specific self-identifying characteristics: alternative sexual practices; legible outward markers such as clothing, hairstyles, tattoos, and makeup; and relationships, one example being the butch/femme dynamic.

Within this queer narrative, photographs like Cronin's, which catalogue a jumbled insider's view of sex and sex-related activities performed both in New York's exclusive subterranean nightclubs and in domestic settings (one informative Polaroid humorously depicts the safe-sex practice of boiling dildos) would have been originally intended for circulation solely among participants. Cronin, however, willfully removes these frank images from private viewing and composes them in a grid format to endow them with a rationality that comes with such arrangements [not in exhibition]. The grid is the ultimate formal device used to organize space, but like William Penn's institution of the easy-to-navigate city plan, this imposed order often cloaks less than ordered lives.

A pivotal moment for the visual arts in the United States occurred in 1990 during the trial of Dennis Barrie, the Director of Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center, for his refusal to censor a

survey of the artist's work, "Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment." Organized in 1988 by the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia with partial funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the exhibition included Mapplethorpe's homoerotic imagery alongside his more palatable photographs of celebrities, classically inspired nudes, still-lives, and children. This controversy raised questions about institutionalized homophobia, censorship, and the role of the United States government within the arts. The subsequent debates took place not only in court, but also in the media, extending its reaches into the popular imagination and ushering in a decade where a battle ensued between art professionals and the government regarding obscenity laws.

Ultimately the jury acquitted Barrie, but deep cuts to the NEA's budget indicated that the government was adopting a more active and dictatorial role in imposing standards of cultural production.[1] Clearly, Cronin's early Polaroids were made within the context of the Culture Wars, which were inextricably tied to gay and lesbian artists' struggle for self-representation and increased visibility of the queer body in a society transformed by the AIDS epidemic.

The Polaroid camera's internal processing is a tantalizing feature that has equipped untold numbers of people with the means to create their own "at home" erotica. Cronin exploits this unique property to create her untitled erotic watercolors (1993-95), which are based off photographs she took of her and her lovers in the act (pg. 13). These works, in particular, are influenced by 1970s feminist, body-based practice, specifically, Joan Semmel's self-portraiture and larger-than-life-sized oil paintings of heterosexual couples. Like Semmel, Cronin playfully uses the camera during sex to frame tightly cropped compositions that magnify moments of bodily contact until the background is completely overwhelmed. Both artists avoid letting their subjects' heads totally enter into the picture plane, a formal device that deflects attention away from the work as portraiture and encourages viewers to focus on the dynamic interactions.

In Cronin's gravity-defying watercolors, a medley of vulvas, breastplates, nipples, thighs, elbows, bra straps, stomachs, underwear, shoulder blades, and toes cohere into palpable legibility before softening into indecipherable stratums of pliant flesh animated by light and shadow. She dislodges sex from the confines of an actual bedroom and places them topsy-turvy into an insistent present circumscribed, but not harnessed, by the picture frame.

Cronin's translation of her perspective onto paper is confrontational, denying viewers an easily assimilated stance as outside observers. But, by divulging what she sees during these undeniably intimate encounters, she also reproduces a pleasurable experience that is participatory. Cronin's *Untitled #16* (1994) (pg. 20), for instance, draws viewers into the represented space by inverting Gustave Courbet's *Origin of the World* (1866) and the ravaged torso in Marcel Duchamp's *Étant donnés* (c. 1946-66).[2] Rather than being faced with a recumbent woman whose legs are splayed in perpetuity, the perspective is reversed and we are able to assume Cronin's aroused position. We look down into compressed space, following a foreshortened stomach down towards a seductively haloed patch of pubic hair, watching in mounting anticipation as our would-be lover advances.

To pick up once again the comparison with Semmel, Cronin works at an accelerated pace and on a smaller scale, quickly transforming her photographs into watercolors. The speed and spontaneity with which Cronin paints finds a direct correlation in erotic temporality. Furthermore, her use of watercolor promotes the unique properties of a medium long deemed secondary to oil and historically identified with women and Sunday painters. She triggers a material conversion, associating the paper's grainy texture with skin, the absorption of color and water into the support building up diaphanous layers of sweat and flushed flesh tones. The most marked difference, however, between Semmel and Cronin's paintings is the latter's politically-motivated appropriation of Semmel's self-representational strategies to establish a matrilineage of artistic influence and convert, in Cronin's words, "the subjectivity from heterosexual to Homo."[3]

A major feminist critique involves challenging a universal model of sex, which is presumed applicable to men and women equally, as well as all types of couples across the board. This understanding gives credence to sex defined solely by male penetration and climax, a definition which is unable to accommodate the reality of female pleasure and orgasm. This narrow characterization is especially perplexing because a masculine paradigm does not pertain to lesbian experiences of intercourse.[4]

A possible corrective to this ambiguity, Cronin's watercolors engender an elastic view of intercourse that has significant ramifications for lesbians seeking a shared sexual vocabulary. Heavy petting, in Cronin's perfected erotica, is not anterior or posterior to intercourse, but is rendered obsolete, as all points of contact are folded into a transcendent experience of sex. These paintings insist on a wide range of activities that disrupt the trajectory of sex as climactic, arguing for a nonlinear alternative based on an inexhaustible exploration of one's self and partners.

Deliberately moving away from graphically explicit imagery to an investigation of the erotic

subtext of horse culture, Cronin painted portraits of horses obsessively throughout the year 1996. A passionate collector of equine paraphernalia throughout her life, Cronin delved into this new subject matter with the enthusiasm of a fanatic to make real what she had previously only dreamed. She began taking riding lessons and subscribed to multiple equestrian magazines such as *Young Rider* and *Spur.* Cronin's source materials were the real-life horses housed at stables in Brooklyn and Long Island and images taken from calendars, postcards, and magazines. She was particularly fascinated by the sexy pinup logic of *Horse Illustrated's* "Gallery" page, which featured a different horse each month selected from mountains of photographs sent in by its readership of young girls.

Pet owners' attempts to align animal temperament with their own personality traits is evident in the offbeat names of the horses in Cronin's head shots, including superior appellations: *Consul, First Edition, Apollo*; seductive: *Vamp, Lorenzo*; celestial: *Firestar, Stardust*; fated: *Victory, Destiny*; human: *Harry, Katie*; and prosaic: *Bear, Sparky*. The presentation of these works in traditional three-quarter view or profile produces an odd sensation that the horses might have actually commissioned the portraits themselves. This humorous effect draws our attention to anthropomorphic projections that transform these animals into cherished friends.

Pony Tales (1996) (pg. 28 – 29) originally comprised fifty of these portraits installed salon-style against a fine backdrop of F. Schumacher and Co. wallpaper, redolent of country estates, Ralph Lauren, and the leisure activities of the affluent [34 are included in this exhibition]. The highly individualized oils, hung in a mock living-room environment, provide a quirky commentary on the high status accorded to horses in American culture while underscoring their transformation from utilitarian to recreational.

These horses, with aristocratic airs, stare doe-eyed out of their walnut frames: a pure white *Queenie* (pg. 26), with a dappled pink nose, coyly tilts her head to the side in a delicious nod to hyper-femininity while *Commissioner* (pg. 6), with his rugged demeanor and wind-strewn mane, embodies the romance of the wild frontier. This family album is a proclamation of social standing. It is also a gentle parody of a privileged domestic space placed in the public view of an art gallery, exposing most people's lack of access to these cultural symbols of want and might. Still, this playful critique does not negate girls' fascination with horses, but rather passionately upholds the value of their homespun imagination.

A Crayola palette and a paint-by-number coloring-book aesthetic align Cronin's horses with girlhood longing, and by extension, incipient sexual identity. A delightful example of latent eroticism implicit in childhood naiveté is Velvet, Liz Taylor's horse-struck character in the film

National Velvet (1944). The equestrian sport's accoutrements and terminology are a treasure trove of sexual innuendo in which the twelve-year old smolders as she dreams, swoons, and ecstatically rides.

Cronin's *Tack Room* (1997-98) (pg. 30 & 31) is a more overt immersion into the sensuality of horse culture. From the exterior, viewers encounter an unassuming 10 x 10 x 8 foot cube with two entrances that lightly references early minimalist sculpture. Contained within its walls is an accessible fantasy realm with lesbian undertones. Audiences are invited to wander freely through the life-size replica, stocked with posh riding equipment, clothing, and heavy blankets. Cronin's meticulous attention to detail – a slight scent of fresh hay, leather, and grooming products; a phone number for a veterinarian haphazardly scrawled into the wooden panels; an empty Diet Coke can – causes reality and fantasy to co-mingle promiscuously.

Obviously, horse lust is not a strictly female preoccupation. Traditional equestrian bronze statuary, for instance, habitually depicts a military hero astride a stallion, imprinting the man plus horse equals virility equation into collective consciousness. Casting off all masculine associations, however, *Tack Room* is exclusively about femininity and female pleasure: cluttered with posters and magazine clippings of horses and women, framed photographs of Cronin mounted or standing by her horse, postcard reproductions of Edgar Degas' racetrack paintings.

A traditional feminist analysis of this installation would likely focus on the strict rituals of elite socialization for girls and the constructed roles that women assume throughout their lifetime, as well as the race and class inequities that equestrian sports maintain. It could be argued that by pinning up advertisements – such as one for riding breaches that depict two models with upper class poise declaring "Our Bottoms Are Still Tops" – Cronin glosses over the privileges of wealth and implications of product marketing that link women with sex and consumerism. The lesbian politics of Cronin's installation, on the other hand, aim to generate codes that give visibility and free reign to women's desire for women. This agenda necessarily supercedes strictly feminist critiques. Aside from pornographic depictions of lesbians, typically created by men for male consumption, there are few detectable traces of lesbian interests in either European or American visual culture. While *Tack Room* appeals to a broad demographic, it also functions as a repository of insider jokes and suggestive imagery that brings Cronin's experience of lesbian identity into representation.

The Domain of Perfect Affection (1999) (pg. 32) is comprised of eight solid bronze horses originally cast in wax from plastic toy models – each representing one of the four levels of equine sexual status: mare, stallion, gelding, and foal – and arranged on a pine table in pastoral bliss. The

comforts of a lived-with piece of furniture establish the mood for this whimsical tableau that depicts, in miniature, a make-believe world where the conventions of domestic hierarchies, often reinforced in children's play, are subverted by a utopian promise of non-gendered familial duties. Cronin was inspired to fabricate these horses after reading an article in the *Wall Street Journal* that reported "the plastic toy horse model industry, of which Breyer is the main manufacturer, had sales of more than $50 million last year." The artisans sculpting the horses are predominantly women and 95 percent of the collectors are young girls. Despite the article's apparently flippant summation: "Apparently, only women know what women want when it comes to modeled horses," Cronin recognized the value of a female-driven economy and happily integrated its product into her practice, which, by the late 1990s, was undeniably horse-obsessed.[5] Casting her figurines in solid bronze, she endows girlhood passion and play with the weight of art history.

Over the course of the last ten years, Cronin has taken us on tour of a virtual home made manifest in her work to explore hidden meanings concealed within. She has unveiled the private seduction of the bedroom where women make love and young girls daydream; exploited the living room's essential character as an exhibition site to display possessions, lineage, and status; and lastly conceived of the stable as realm separated from the house to entertain unbridled fantasy.

The *Luxury Real Estate* paintings (2000) continue Cronin's preoccupation with the interplay of domestic space and spaces of privilege. She zooms out of the home's interior to present aerial views of crème de la crème estates in majestic isolation. The mansions are embedded in idyllic landscapes painted in a style reminiscent of Bob Ross' democratic "joy of painting" technique. Cronin's small-scale paintings – partly ironical, partly about longing – are named for the price and location of each estate: *$3,500,000 (Figure Eight Island)* or *$15,000,000 (Southampton)* (pg. 35). These informative titles simultaneously dispel the mystique of each property with hard numbers and reinforce their aura by locating them in specific geographical areas that evoke luxuriant lifestyles befitting the Great Gatsby.

Gated estates are immune to daily nuisances with which most homeowners have to contend, allowing the wealthy to transcend many social realities. Rosa Bonheur's estate in the French countryside was such an Eden-like environment where the artist lived with her life-long companion Nathalie Micas and their animals until Micas' death in 1889. The American artist Anna Klumpke (1856-1942) moved into the chateau nicknamed "the Domain of Perfect Affection" a year before Bonheur passed away in 1899. These household arrangements subverted the French social system as the women forged their own matrimonial conditions, living financially interdependent lives in chosen retreat. Gretchen van Slyke, translator of Bonheur's biography, explains:

> Because the state would not give legal sanction to marriage between women, Rosa Bonheur exploited the next best thing—her last will and testament—in order to force some official recognition of their private vows. Despite her family's fierce opposition, she declared first Nathalie Micas, and then Anna Klumpke, her sole legatee and staunchly affirmed her right, rather her solemn duty, to dispose of herself and her estate as she pleased. In this way she used the letter of the law against its spirit and established another transformed sense of matrimony: the transmission of property from woman to woman, bypassing the traditional father-son circuit.[6]

In a lasting tribute to the love that Bonheur shared with Micas and Klumpke, the three women are now buried together in the Micas' family vault at Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

Over a century later, Cronin's most ambitious project to date, *Memorial to a Marriage* (2000-02) (pg. 38), calls to mind Bonheur's radical entombment. The sculpture is an enlarged double portrait of Cronin and her partner lying snugly in bed. Carved out of Carrara marble and permanently installed at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, the monument is the apotheosis of Cronin's exploration into cultural expressions of lesbian relationships, love, and wealth.

One of the most telling laws enacted in the 1990s was Bill Clinton's 1994 "don't ask, don't tell" military policy. This deliberate closeting of gay public identity implicitly tolerated homosexual acts as long as they remained private, ensuring that to avoid punishment gays and lesbians had to refrain from or conceal same-sex relations by adopting a pseudo heterosexual identity. Because homosexuality is often narrowly categorized according to private sexual acts rather than physical markers, gays and lesbians are often subsumed under the rubric of heterosexuality; a reduction that does not take into account outwardly visible civic rituals of heterosexual life: flirtations, dates, marriage, childbirth, and wills, and all of their attendant expressions, including hand holding, dancing, weddings, and financial planning.

Memorial to a Marriage is seamlessly integrated into its outdoor surroundings rather than assimilated into the rarefied realm of an art museum as an autonomous sculpture. The piece carves out a space where the lesbian body can be publicly integrated into the everyday vernacular of birth, life, death, and renewal. In a fittingly ironic gesture, the marble borrows its outward appearance from American mid-nineteenth century neo-classicism, a style that combined Puritan beliefs with renewed interest in Greek statuary. Cronin's nudes cradle each other, eyes closed, suspended between sleep and wakefulness. The all-pervading calm imposed by their blissful facial expressions and relaxed body postures is pleasantly disturbed by dynamic folds of a sheet fluidly wrapping the lower-half of their bodies, leaving feet uncovered. Their naked toes are pressed

together in an erotic register of the other's presence.

Cronin explains the motivations to cast her lesbian partnership in these funerary terms: "we have wills, health-care proxies, powers-of-attorney, and all the legal forms one can have, but they all pertain to what happens if one of us should become incapacitated or die. It's not about our life together; it's about the end of it." Death provides a poignant means to institute an eternal domain of perfect affection that transcends changing legal and social structures while addressing the systemic exclusion of the queer body from the public sphere. A site of mourning and contemplation, the gravesite honors in death what U.S. law, for the time being, does not – a lifelong, matrimonial commitment between same-sex partners.

FOOTNOTES

1. Former *New York Times* critic and art historian Michael Brenson states: "In 1995, funding for the endowment was cut forty percent from $162.3 million to $99.5 million, but the agency survived. Despite the advocacy of NEA chair Jane Alexander (1993-97) and others, fellowships to individuals, except writers, were eliminated." Michael Brenson, *Visionaries and Outcasts: The NEA, Congress, and the Place of the Visual Artist in America* (New York: The New York Press, 2001), 89-91.

2. *Origin of the World* depicts an up-close view of a woman's vagina. Her body is cropped mid-thigh by the bottom and side edges of the canvas and her head and arms fall outside the picture frame. While her stomach and right breast are left uncovered, a sheet obscures the upper half of an extremely foreshortened torso. Duchamp's installation *Étant donnés* (permanently on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art) presents a peephole bored into a wooden door through which lies a simulacrum of a naked woman's lower body and hairless sex organs among bramble. Nineteenth-century art historian Linda Nochlin writes about the analogy between the two works: "In both cases, the crucial relation between looking and desire is established by means of a realist strategy that foregrounds the role of voyeurism in artistic experience." See Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin, *Courbet Reconsidered* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum. New York, 1988), 178.

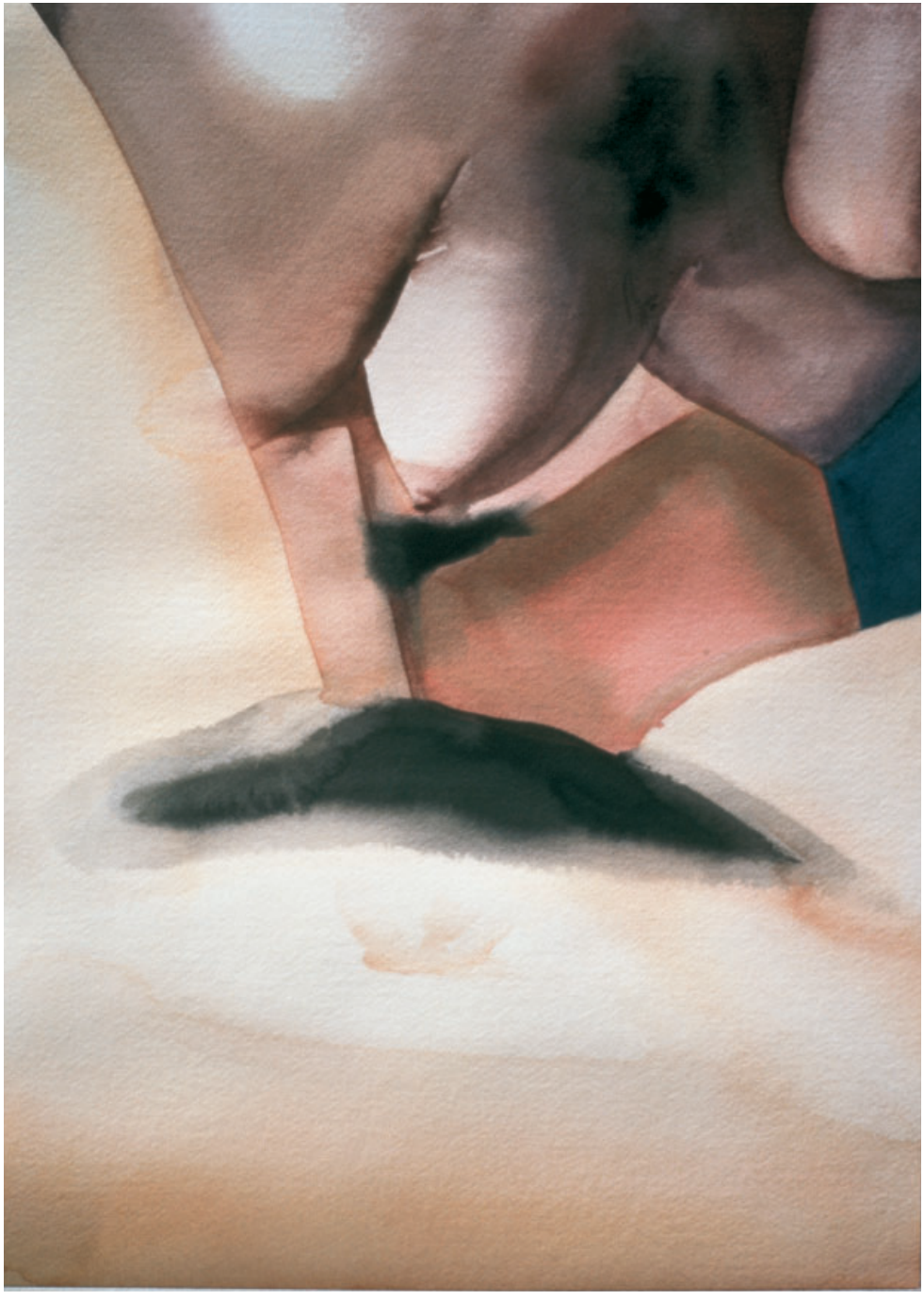
3. Patricia Cronin and Deborah Kass, "Conversation: Patricia Cronin and Deborah Kass," in *Patricia Cronin & Deborah Kass* (New York: Art Resources Transfer, Inc, 1998), 1.

4. Lesbian theorist and philosopher, Marilyn Frye discusses in depth the inability to articulate what constitutes lesbian sex and the necessity to develop such a language. See Marilyn Frye "Lesbian 'Sex'" in *Lesbian Philosophies and Cultures* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 305-315.

5. Patricia Cronin, "What a Girl Wants," *Art Journal* (Winter 2001): 96.

6. Anna Klumpke, *Rosa Bonheur: the Artist's (auto) biography*, trans. Gretchen van Slyke (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), xxix.

7. Jan Garden Castro, "Making the Personal Monumental: A Conversation with Patricia Cronin," *Sculpture Magazine* (Jan/Feb 2003): 42.



Untitled # 16, 1993

Untitled #125, 1995

Memorial to a Marriage, detail, 2000-02

Untitled #109, 1994/95

Steely Dan, 1996

Cookie and Napoleon, 1997

Queenie, 1996

Topshelf, 1996

Pony Tales, 1996

Tack Room, 1997-98

Tack Room, 1997-98, interior view

The Domain of Perfect Affection, 1999

33 *Memorial to a Marriage*, detail, 2000-02

$20,000,000 (Bedford), 2000

$15,000,000 (Southampton), 2000

Memorial to a Marriage #1, 2002

Memorial to a Marriage, 2003

Memorial to a Marriage, 2000-02

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover: *Untitled #104*, 1994, watercolor on paper, 25 x 29 inches, collection of Deborah Kass, Brooklyn, NY. Photograph by Steven Bates.

6. *Commissioner*, 1996, oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches. Photograph by Steven Bates.

13. Polaroid, 1993, 4 x 4 inches. Photograph by Patricia Cronin.

20. *Untitled # 16*, 1993, watercolor on paper, 17 x 13 inches, collection of A.G. Rosen and Debi Sonzogni, Wayne, NJ. Photograph by Steven Bates.

21. *Untitled #125*, 1995, watercolor on paper, 24 x 27.5 inches. Photograph by Steven Bates.

22. *Memorial to a Marriage*, 2000-02, maquette detail, 53 x 26.5 x 17 inches. Photograph by Steven Bates.

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25. *Cookie and Napoleon*, 1997, oil on linen, 42 x 42 inches. Photograph by Steven Bates.

26. *Queenie*, 1996, oil on canvas, 24 x 20 inches. Photograph by Steven Bates.

27. *Topshelf*, 1996, oil on canvas, 16 x 16 inches, collection of A.G. Rosen and Debi Sonzogni, Wayne, NJ. Photograph by Steven Bates.

28-29. *Pony Tales*, 1996. Installation at Atlanta Contemporary Art Center (Formerly Nexus Contemporary Art Center), Atlanta, GA, 2000. Photograph by Mike Jenson.

30. *Tack Room*, 1997-98, 9.5 x 10.5 x 8 feet. Installation view, horsePLAY, Real Arts Ways, Hartford, CT, 1999. Photograph by John Groo.

31. *Tack Room*, 1997-98, interior view. Photograph by Steven Bates.

32. *The Domain of Perfect Affection*, 1999, wax and pine table, 40 x 48 x 30 inches.

33. *Memorial to a Marriage*, 2000-02, maquette detail, 53 x 26.5 x 17 inches. Photograph by Steven Bates.

34. *$20,000,000 (Bedford)*, 2000, oil on linen, 13 x 10 inches. Photograph by Steven Bates.

35. *$15,000,000 (Southampton)*, 2000, oil on linen, 9 x 11 inches. Photograph by Steven Bates.

36. *Memorial to a Marriage #1*, 2002, Giclée print, 18 x 24 inches. Photograph by Steven Bates.

37. *Memorial to a Marriage*, 2003, bronze, 35 x 11 x 17 inches, collection of Sara Vance and Michelle Waddell, Cincinnati, OH. Photograph by Sarah Wichlacz.

38. *Memorial to a Marriage*, 2000-02, plaster maquette, 53 x 26.5 x 17 inches. Photograph by Steven Bates.

Back cover, flap: *Memorial to a Marriage*, 2000-02, Carrara Marble, over-life size (84 x 42 x 27 inches), Cronin-Kass plot, Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, New York. On view through eternity. Photograph by Lee Sandstead.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All works courtesy of the artist and Deitch Projects, New York unless otherwise noted.

Untitled #16, 1993
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 14 x 10 inches
Framed Size: 17 x 13 inches
Collection of A.G. Rosen and Debi Sonzogni, Wayne, NJ

Untitled #37, 1993
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 12 x 17 inches
Framed Size: 15.5 x 20 inches
Collection of the artist, Brooklyn, NY

Untitled #102, 1994
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 21 x 26 inches
Framed Size: 24 x 29 inches
Collection of A.G. Rosen and Debi Sonzogni, Wayne, NJ

Untitled #103, 1994
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 22 x 25 inches
Framed Size: 25 x 28 inches
Collection of Amy Cappellazzo and Joanne Rosen, New York, NY

Untitled #104, 1994
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 20 x 26 inches
Framed Size: 24 x 29 inches
Collection of Deborah Kass, Brooklyn, NY

Untitled #106, 1995
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 20 x 23 inches
Framed Size: 23.5 x 26.5 inches

Untitled #109, 1994/5
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 22.5 x 26 inches
Framed Size: 25.5 x 29 inches
Collection of Susan Rice, New York, NY

Untitled #111, 1994
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 20 inches x 23 inches
Framed Size: 23.5 x 26.5 inches
Collection of Karen Heagle, Brooklyn, NY

Untitled #115, 1994/95
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 22 x 20 inches
Framed Size: 25.5 x 23 inches

Untitled #119, 1995
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 20.5 x 23.5 inches
Framed Size: 23.5 x 26.5 inches
Private collection

Untitled #123, 1995
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 20.5 x 24 inches
Framed Size: 23.5 x 27 inches

Untitled #125, 1995
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 20.5 x 24 inches
Framed Size: 24 x 27.5 inches

Untitled #128, 1995
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 22 x 20.5 inches
Framed Size: 25.5 x 23.5 inches

Untitled #131, 1995
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 19.5 x 19.5 inches
Framed Size: 23.5 x 23.5 inches

Untitled #132, 1995
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 20.5 x 25.5 inches
Framed Size: 23.5 x 29 inches

Untitled #134, 1995
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 20.5 x 21.5 inches
Framed Size: 23.75 x 25 inches

Barney, 1996
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 13 x 13 inches
Framed Size: 16.5 x 16.5 inches
Collection of Oliver Katz and Isaac Katz, New York, NY

Dandy, 1996
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 13 x 13 inches
Framed Size: 16.5 x 16.5 inches

Piper, 1996
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 13 x 13 inches
Framed Size: 16.5 x 16.5 inches

Steely Dan, 1996
Watercolor on paper
Image Size: 13 x 13 inches
Framed Size: 16.5 x 16.5 inches
Collection of the artist, Brooklyn, NY

Pony Tales, 1996
Oil on canvas, walnut frames, and
F. Schumacher & Co. Wallpaper
Dimensions variable

Harry, 1996
23 x 19 inches
Oil on canvas and walnut frame
Collection of Deborah Kass, Brooklyn, NY

Peppermint, 1996
23 x 21 inches
Oil on canvas and walnut frame
Collection of David Frankel, New York, NY

Roscoe, 1996
23 x 21 inches
Oil on canvas and walnut frame
Collection of Maria and Archie Rand,
Brooklyn, NY

Topshelf, 1996
16 x 16 inches
Oil on canvas and walnut frame
Collection of A.G. Rosen and Debi Sonzogni,
Wayne, NJ

Vamp, 1996
16 x 16 inches
Oil on canvas and walnut frame
Private collection

Cookie and Napoleon, 1997
Oil on linen
42 x 42 inches

Tack Room, 1997-98
9.5 x 10.5 x 8 feet
Mixed media installation

The Domain of Perfect Affection, 1999
40 x 48 x 30 inches
Bronze and pine table

$20,000,000 (Bedford), 2000
13 x 10 inches
Oil on linen

$2,300,000 (Emerald Isle of Monkey Key), 2000
8 x 15 inches
Oil on linen

$3,500,000 (Figure Eight Island), 2000
Oil on linen
9 x 11 inches

$15,000,000 (Southampton), 2000
Oil on linen
9 x 11 inches

$3,100,000 (St. Lucia), 2000
Oil on linen
8 x 10 inches

$8,500,000 (Telluride), 2000
Oil on linen
24 x 30 inches
Collection of A.G. Rosen and Debi Sonzogni,
Wayne, NJ

$4,250,000 (Watermill), 2000
Oil on linen
10 x 10 inches

Memorial to a Marriage #1-6, 2002
Giclée print
Edition: A.P.
Image Size: 18 x 24 inches
Framed Size: 29 x 35 inches
Collection of artist, Brooklyn, NY

Memorial to a Marriage, 2000-02
2/3 to scale plaster maquette
53 x 26.5 x 17 inches

Memorial to a Marriage, 2003
Bronze
35 x 11 x 17 inches
Edition 1/3
Collection of Sara Vance and Michelle Waddell,
Cincinnati, OH

Memorial to a Marriage, 2003
Bronze
Edition 1/10
9.5 x 6 x 3 inches
Private collection

Memorial to a Marriage, 2004
Curable ink on twill
96 x 145 inches
Photograph by Lee Sandstead

BIOGRAPHY

PATRICIA CRONIN

BORN: 1963, Beverly, Massachusetts

EDUCATION:

1991 Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME
1988 MFA, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY
1986 BFA, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI
1985 Yale University Summer School of Music and Art, Norfolk, CT

AWARDS:

2004 Distinguished Alumni Award, Rhode Island College, RI
2002 New York Arts Recovery Fund/NYFA, New York, NY
2001 Grand Arts Award, Kansas City, MO
1998 Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Inc. Grant, New York, NY
1996 Art Matters, Inc. Grant, New York, NY
1995 Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Inc. Grant, New York, NY

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

2004 *Patricia Cronin, The Domain of Perfect Affection, 1993-2003*, UB Art Gallery, Center for the Arts, Buffalo, NY
2002 *Memorial to a Marriage*, Deitch Projects, NY
Memorial to a Marriage, Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO
1999 *The Domain of Perfect Affection*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC
1998 *Tack Room*, White Columns, New York, NY
Pony Tales, Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans, LA
1997 *Pony Tales*, Brent Sikkema/Wooster Gardens, New York, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

2004 *Open House: Living and Working in Brooklyn*, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY
2003 *Collaborations with Vincent Katz*, Alessandra Bonomo Gallery, Rome, Italy
2002 *Family*, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT
Looking At America, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
Queer Visualities, University Art Gallery, Stony Brook/SUNY, Stony Brook, NY
2000 *Here, Kitty, Kitty*, Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Atlanta, GA
1999 *horsePLAY*, Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT
1998 *Patricia Cronin & Deborah Kass*, Art Resources Transfer, Inc., New York, NY
1997 *The Name of the Place*, Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, NY
1996 *The Strange Power of Cheap Sentiment (Or A Beintot to Irony)*, White Columns, New York, NY
Gender, Fucked, Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA
1995 *Pervert*, Irvine Art Gallery, University of California, Irvine, CA
Patricia Cronin & Lee Gordon, Richard Anderson Gallery, New York, NY
1994 *The Long Weekend (Ellen Cantor, Patricia Cronin, Marilyn Minter)*, Trial Balloon, New York, NY
Up the Establishment, Sonnabend Gallery, New York, NY
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1993 *Coming to Power: 25Years of Sexually Xplicit Art by Women*, David Zwirner, New York, NY
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1998 Liebmann, Lisa, "The Best of 1998," *Artforum*, December (illus. color & cover).
Canning, Susan, "Tack Room," *Sculpture Magazine*, October (illus. color).
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