

Patricia Cronin  
Statement

For three decades I have forged a conceptual and feminist art practice that embraces a wide range of art historical tropes and formats such as Neo-Classical marble mortuary sculpture and ready-made fabric installations (to name only two examples) to address the intersection of gender and representation. I subvert these time-honored formats by shifting the subject matter to reflect issues pertaining to contemporary culture and politics as well as my own position inside the culture. In this work, I resuscitate and reify these familiar tropes handed down to us from Ancient times to the 20<sup>th</sup> century by infusing them with the subject matter of female autonomy, feminist art history, lesbian visibility, marriage equality, and the international rights of women. I use art history as a tool to reinterpret narrative, creating new ways to represent female subjectivity, insisting on female presence to female absence. The main questions I ask are: Whose body has value? Who gets to decide? And what are the consequences for the individual and the community?

My earliest bodies of work, created in response to the Culture Wars of the 1990s, consisted of erotic, feminist, performance-based polaroid photography and watercolor paintings to deconstruct the heterosexual white male gaze. I placed myself, the cultural producer, simultaneously into the roles of nude female object (traditional) and artist/subject (untraditional). The work was made from the viewpoint of the artist as participant, bringing the viewer into a lesbian erotic space from the perspective of one of the lovers.

After exploring depictions of adult female sexuality, I focused on the subjectivity of young women, girls, and the object of desire for many of them – horses. Reflecting on the erotic possibilities of representing equestrian themed spaces and objects, I built a wooden architectural immersive installation replicating the part a barn where all the equestrian equipment is kept. The Tack Room (1998), a wood paneled 12' x 12' room, bursting with “found

objects,” and handmade art objects, including authentic equipment: saddles, bridles, whips, and crops; clothing: breeches, suede chaps, gloves and helmets; nutrition and veterinarian aids: bandages, vitamins, treats, ointments, and oils; sporting materials: magazines, ribbons, trophies, and posters; bronze horse sculptures and equestrian portraits all interspersed with sensual imagery. Tack Room allows female viewers a safe space to explore sensuality and provides a counter-narrative to our culture’s ridicule of female sexuality.

Though I have had many one-person and group exhibitions in art galleries and museums, my most challenging and rewarding projects have been when I’m invited to create artwork for venues outside the white cube space, from a 19<sup>th</sup> century American cemetery to a 16<sup>th</sup> century Venetian church to a 20<sup>th</sup> century Roman power plant.

The work I am the best known for creating is the first and only Marriage Equality Monument in the world. Memorial To A Marriage (2002) (in the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery (Washington), The Fuhrman Family Foundation (New York), Perez Art Museum Miami (Miami) and Kelvingrove Art Museum and Gallery (Glasgow) collections), is a three-ton Carrara marble, mortuary sculpture of myself and my (now) wife sculpted when gay marriage was illegal in the United States. To simulate a few of the rights heterosexual marriage affords, same-sex couples could only acquire legal documents about the end of their lives, such as wills, health care proxies and powers of attorney documents. I employed the American Neo-classical sculpture form to address a federal failure of prohibiting same sex couples to wed. The challenge of this work, as always, was to strike a balance between a high level of sophisticated, formal execution and pointed political protest. I purchased our burial plot in Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY, designed as America’s Père Lachaise, and permanently installed the sculpture on our future final resting place. By buying my own land I also addressed the scarcity

of real women (as opposed to allegorical female forms) honored in public monuments in New York City.

Although the Supreme Court overruled the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013, making the United States the 29<sup>th</sup> country in the world, out of 195 countries, to legally recognize same sex marriage, homosexuality is illegal and punishable up to death in 33 countries. My work addresses this major international human rights issue and continues to need our attention.

Another field of investigation has been rewriting women back into Art History. I discovered Harriet Hosmer (1830–1908) while researching the history of sculpture for Memorial To A Marriage. Hosmer moved to Rome in 1852, apprenticed with the leading Neo-Classical sculptor, John Gibson, hung out her own shingle soon after, and became known as the first professional female sculptor. She lived among a community of British and American artists and writers and a circle of learned and well-to-do “independent women.” She was fabulously successful and somewhat infamous, was praised by critics, won competitive commissions, and earned enormous sums for her sculptures, many of which are in the finest museum collections in the world. Despite her fame and preeminence in her time, she is mostly forgotten today.

This awakened my questioning as a female artist: Who gets written into history? Who is written out? What are the conditions such eradication can occur?

Harriet Hosmer: Lost and Found, A Catalogue Raisonné (Milan: Charta Art Books, 2009) combines my hand painted images of every sculpture Hosmer created with my art historical research to create a document that reveals the complexities of Hosmer’s career, reputation, and legacy. In this unique volume, I’ve pieced together a conceptual framework to examine the histories of art and women at the intersection of the ivory tower and the marketplace in the form of a catalogue raisonné. This hybrid project encapsulates three projects

all in one: 1) Hosmer's actual catalogue raisonné, 2) an exhibition catalogue of my watercolors of Hosmer's marble sculptures at the Brooklyn Museum and 3) an institutional critique of the dearth of scholarship on women artists' work.

My second book, The Zenobia Scandal: A Meditation on Male Jealousy (New York: Zing Books, 2013) detailed the difficulties Hosmer encountered with her male competitors as recounted by all the prominent cultural personalities of the day and is a sad reminder of the professional obstacles women artists still find themselves in today.

Shrine For Girls (2015), a series of site-specific sculptural installations and portraits reflecting the global plight of exploited women and girls, debuted as an Official Solo Collateral Exhibition at the 56th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy in the Church of San Gallo. Curated by Italian curator, Ludovico Pratesi, it focuses on gender violence in three recent horrific events in India, Nigeria and Ireland. By gathering girls' clothing from these countries, using a minimalist sensibility, I arranged them on top of three altars. These piles of clothes placed on 16<sup>th</sup> century marble altars act as relics for these young female martyrs. I created a shrine in their honor as a meditation on the incalculable loss of unrealized potential and the hopelessness in the face of unfathomable cultural and historic misogyny, hopefully bringing awareness to an urgent crisis of continuing violence against women and girls around the globe.

Over my career, the most creative processes are always when I'm invited to engage with pre-21st century art works or architecture. I use my conceptual puzzle solving skills, grow as an artist formally, technically with new materials, technology, larger scales and create projects I never could have dreamt. Aphrodite Re-imagined (2018) is another example of one of these experiences. The Tampa Museum of Art commissioned me as the inaugural artist in a new bi-annual series "Conversations with the Collection" where they invite a contemporary artist

to respond to their antiquities collection. Focusing on their life size Aphrodite (1<sup>st</sup> c.e.) fragment and 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs of flawed 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century restorations in the object file, I reimagined the Goddess of Love as a complete monumental cult statue by hand sculpting the missing parts and casting them in translucent resin. Installed on an outside terrace overlooking the Hillsborough River sometimes the statue appears whole and other times more fractured depending on the changes in the light. Aphrodite Re-Imagined becomes a comment on our shifting certainties about truth and history. In a cultural climate hostile to women, it was satisfying to focus on the history of cult worship of a female deity, a symbol of female authority in domestic and public spaces throughout the Ancient Mediterranean world.

Currently, I am researching and conceptualizing a reconstruction of the Temple of Aphrodite at Knidos, Turkey, the original architectural placement of Aphrodite by Praxiteles (active c. 375–330 BC), the first female nude in Western Art History, discovered by archaeologist Iris Love in 1971. This project continues my life's focus on representing female authorities in the public sphere and expands my work with historic settings by creating one.

For almost 30 years, I have had an unwavering commitment to gender equality as a central theme of my life's work. I have chosen unpopular subjects, manipulated unfashionable art forms, and relied on the seduction of the familiar to encourage viewers to see these themes with fresh eyes and empathy. I strive for a delicate balance of conceptual rigor and visually engaging imagery and form to align with content that addresses some of the most pressing issues of our time - gender, sexuality and equality. I continue to examine the place of women in the world and believe exploring the past will continue to illuminate the present and forge a way forward.