

Exhibit on ‘queer identity’ requires unusual preparations

Museums are beehives of semi-chaotic activity during the days leading to an exhibition’s opening night. Curators, preparators and artists scramble to unpack crates, build faux walls, adjust light fixtures, hang some artworks and assemble others before the crowds arrive.

Even so, it was startling to see Brooklyn, N.Y.-based artist Patricia Cronin taking a hose to a three-ton mortuary marble statue outside the Station Museum of Contemporary Art earlier this week. Not that the monument, which is sculpted in a quasi-nationalist, neo-classical style, didn’t need a good rinse, since it has spent the past seven years at a plot in Woodlawn Cemetery in Bronx, N.Y.



Patricia Cronin, Memorial to a Marriage

Cronin’s plot, to be specific. The one she plans to share with her partner, artist Deborah Kass, when they die. The monument depicts the couple in an embrace.

“We’re the third-most visited plot in the cemetery. It’s Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, and then us,” she said. “They do walking tours, and this one is on the veterans’ tour, the jazz tour, the Victorian tour. ... It’s my cross-over piece.”

Titled *Memorial to a Marriage*, Cronin's work goes on view in *Because We Are*, a group show opening with a reception 7-10 p.m. Saturday. The exhibit "challenges the viewer to examine queer identity and its validity in contemporary American society," Station curator Timothy Gonzalez said.

Focusing on art made during the past two decades, the exhibit presents artists who have bypassed media representations of gays, lesbians and transgendered people to present their own unfiltered takes on sexuality, gender and identity, Gonzalez said.

Often those expressions simmer with outrage. The affable Cronin cracked jokes as she washed off *Memorial to a Marriage*, which she has replaced with a bronze version at the cemetery, but it addresses what she called "a federal failure — gay people not being able to get married."

"I thought if all we get are wills, health-care proxies and power-of attorney documents to try to simulate some of the protections of marriage — which doesn't really work — those are so boring and depressing," she said. "It's not about our life together. So if all I get afforded legally is death, I thought I'd make it really elegant and dignified."

Untitled (One Day This Kid ...), a classic 1990 photo-text collage by the late David Wojnarowicz presents a snapshot of the artist as a child in the 1950s, surrounded by text that grimly outlines the abuse and discrimination the boy will endure at the hands of his family, church, gay bashers, the medical establishment and the government. Countless gay men have lived that story, and Wojnarowicz's telling seethes with a fury that could peel paint. Two years after he made that piece, Wojnarowicz died of AIDS-related complications at 37.

AIDS also informs Daniel Goldstein's sculptures. *Medicine Man*, which seems to straddle the line between despair about lives lost and hope for longevity, is a totemlike figure made of hundreds of empty medication bottles and dozens of syringes donated by HIV patients, forming a new whole out of the lives of many.

Other works take on a sassier, sexier tone. For New York-based Slava Mogutin's *Stock Boyz* series, the artist superimposed images of young men he found on Eastern European porn websites on top of New York Times stock charts. He began the series in 2008 as a sly commentary on the commodification of youth, but it took on added meanings after the stock market collapsed and the numbers behind the nubile bodies got progressively grimmer.

A frequent collaborator of Mogutin's, Brian Kenny takes police shooting-range targets and draws sexual imagery and text on top of them to comment on youth, sex and violence in popular culture. Although his works had already arrived at the Station on Thursday, they weren't yet complete. He and Mogutin were heading out to a large piece of land to fire bullets into Kenny's pieces in a nod to their origins as police targets and an homage to the late William S. Burroughs' shotgun paintings.

All in a day's work getting ready for a museum show. I haven't even mentioned an Eric Avery installation featuring safe-sex how-to imagery. You won't find it in the Station's regular gallery space, however. If you want explicit instructions on how to use a female condom, you'll have to head for the bathroom.

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