

Eternal Portrait of a Lesbian Marriage

September 19, 2011 by [Michele Kort](#)



Tomorrow, in [Woodlawn Cemetery](#) in The Bronx, artist [Patricia Cronin](#) will once again celebrate her future death and that of her longtime partner and fellow artist, [Deborah Kass](#).

Back in 2002, she unveiled a marble funerary sculpture there called “Memorial to a Marriage,” which portrayed she and Kass lying naked and entwined in each others’ arms. Now, she’s replacing that piece with a bronze version, which will better weather time and the elements. And, happily-ever-after, the title of the sculpture will now represent an actual married couple and not just an imagined one.

In 2002, when Cronin finished [carving a three-ton block of Carrara marble](#) into the sensuous joint portrait, same-sex marriage wasn’t legal in any U.S. state. But just because the nation wouldn’t formally acknowledge lesbian couples didn’t mean that Cronin couldn’t—and she decided to do so with all the elegance she could muster.



Cronin's a sly one, artistically: She loves to take traditional forms and subvert them with lesbian content. In this case, she chose 19th century neoclassical American sculpture as her model, and chose Woodlawn—home to other glorious artworks from the “robber baron years” of U.S. history—as the resting place not only for her artwork but, eventually, for her and Kass. She imagined that the sculpture—which became quite a popular stop on the cemetery’s regular tours—might look like two “angels” to unsuspecting visitors. A closer look would then reveal, oh my!, it’s two actual lesbian women, and they’re making a political statement as well as an artistic one.

Says Cronin,

Women’s history gets erased all the time. Lesbian history is often not written at all. But for as long as there is a Woodlawn Cemetery, guides will lead walking tours and have to say out loud the names of two lesbian women artists: Patricia Cronin and Deborah Kass.

The marble version of “Memorial” is now on travelling exhibit around the country, but Cronin hopes it will eventually have a permanent indoor home. She has high hopes that a collector will buy it and donate it to an art museum, such as the Metropolitan in New York, where the two real women’s portraits can take their place among the many representations of allegorical nude women.

But back to same-sex marriage: On July 24, the first day lesbians and gay men were allowed to legally marry in New York, **Cronin and Kass** waited three hours in stifling heat on the steps of City Hall to wed. They could have married as early as 2004 in Massachusetts, where Cronin is from, but held out for recognition in their current home state. Now, marriage—both in real life and in sculptural form—takes on a whole new meaning.

*For more from Patricia Cronin on “Memorial to a Marriage,” read her essay in the forthcoming anthology Here Come the Brides! (Seal Press, March 2012), coedited by (shameless plug alert!) this author and Ms. Blog regular **Audrey Bilger**.*

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