

Art

Reviews

Patricia Cronin, "Harriet Hosmer, Lost and Found"

★★★★★

Brooklyn Museum, through Jan 24
(see Museums)

For her first New York show in seven years, Patricia Cronin has become an art historian, recuperating the career of Harriet Hosmer, a 19th-century American sculptor who achieved fame in her own time but has been largely forgotten. Cronin's deft watercolors depicting 24 of Hosmer's works in glorious black and white amply demonstrate the talent and range that brought the latter success—from the smooth, translucent flesh of *The Sleeping Faun* to the massively draped and intricately ornamented figure of *Zenobia*. The 3rd-century queen who expelled the Romans from Egypt must have appealed to Hosmer (and Cronin) as a powerful woman who competed against the odds in a man's world.

For the works by Hosmer known only through written descriptions, Cronin has produced "ghosts," nebulous, glowing forms that recall both the outlines of the missing sculptures and spirit photography of the Victorian era. These serve as elegiac placeholders for a woman's work lost to history.

Complementing the exhibition, an artist's book in the form



of a complete accounting of Hosmer's works features reproductions of 36 watercolors as bookplates, leading one to wonder why the Brooklyn Museum didn't exhibit Cronin's conceptual project in full. Moreover, the works are squashed on a single wall, hung in a row in the triangular gallery that is otherwise devoted to a timeline accompanying Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*—that historic but cringeworthy icon of 1970s art, installed in the room next door. Curiously, the effect is rather like the museum's Center for Feminist Art giving short shrift to two women artists—Cronin and Hosmer—as well.—Joseph R. Wolin