

MASTERWORKS



Sculpture by Patricia Cronin, Memorial to a Marriage. Jeffrey Isaac Greenberg / Alamy Stock Photo

Who is Patricia Cronin?

Micaela Preble March 16, 2022

Patricia Cronin is a contemporary conceptual artist that has worked in a variety of mediums. Her work ranges from watercolors to large installation pieces. Most of her work is inspired by her life and the discovery of her sexuality. Cronin works in different themes dealing with identity, mainly those of gender and sexuality.

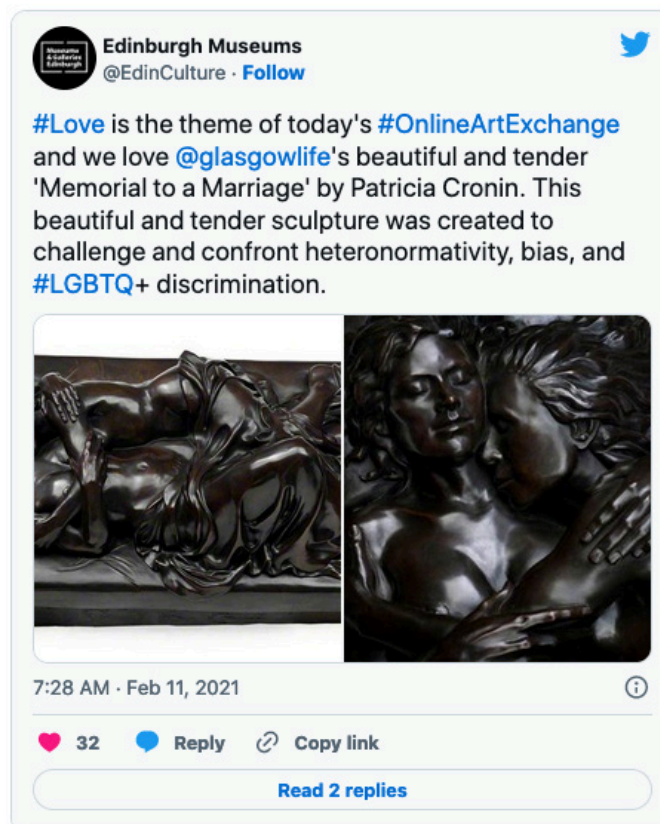
Born	1963
mediums	Photography, watercolor, sculpture
Movements	contemporary , feminist , conceptual

Patricia Cronin Biography

She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Rhode Island College before going on to receive a Master of Fine Arts from Brooklyn College, where she is currently a Professor of Art. After growing up throughout the 1980s and 1990s, where visibility of the LGBTQ+ community was primarily negative, Cronin became very strongly opinionated in more political and human rights issues. Political subjects are present in almost all of Patricia Cronin's work, and a lot of it has to do with her own identity as a lesbian.

Cronins's Artistic Style

LGBTQ+ rights are an important subject to Cronin due to her own sexuality. Over the course of her life, Cronin has seen both push back and growth on society's stance on gay rights. The Defense of the Marriage Act was signed in 1996. It wasn't until 2015 that gay marriage was made legal. Cronin and now wife, Deborah Kass, have been in a relationship since the 90s, and therefore both of them were barred from marriage for many years. Using this to fuel her work, Cronin created one of her most famous pieces, *Memorial to a Marriage*. She wanted to immortalize the relationship that wasn't legal in the eyes of the law and how the justice system had – as she believed – failed the LGBTQ+ community.



A Woman Depicting Women

After studying art history throughout her time at college, Cronin takes inspiration from art periods and artists that came before her. In *Memorial to a Marriage*, for example, Cronin molds her figures after American Neoclassical sculpture. Her work is inspired by and relates to her understanding of the importance of medium as well as message. She also addresses an art history theory known as the 'gaze'. After many centuries of female nudes being done by male artists, Cronin tries to explore women's bodies through the female gaze. The 'gaze', which is the understanding that looking is not a neutral activity, is typically done by a male viewer. The audience is always looking and the work is typically geared toward who the artist assumes their audience will be. By focusing on the female gaze, Cronin combats the historical view that art could only be understood and created by men.

She also expresses that the audience she interprets is usually herself. This brings another element of how Cronin represents the women she depicts. If she is the audience, and the one viewing the female nudes, Cronin begins to challenge centuries of stigmas against women looking, exploring, and understanding nudity. For centuries, women were kept from life study classes simply because they would be faced with nude figures. Cronin, by addressing herself as both artist and audience, begins to challenge this societal standard for women. Not only is she displaying nudes and drawing them from reference, but she is also an active participant in viewing and she is creating.

By using historically 'feminine' mediums like watercolor and textiles, Cronin explores her own femininity as she recognizes which mediums, over the past centuries, relate to that. However, what Cronin begins to do with these typically feminine mediums is use them to portray typically male subject matters. Her aims to bring this topic to light help bring attention to the expression of female sexuality and how for so long the male point of view was the only point of view.

In Cronin's own words, "Besides reinvigorating traditional forms and injecting my specific contemporary political content, I think the main question all throughout my work—my career—has been: whose life has value? Whose body has value? And who decides?"



Featured works

Erotic watercolors

She was first recognized for her series *Erotic Watercolors*. The work shows Cronin's point of view in a series of sexual interactions with her partner at the time. The point of this series was to explore how women in a sexual environment would be viewed by a female artist. She explores the view of women's bodies but through the lens of a woman looking at another woman. For many years, nudes were painted by men for men, but Patricia Cronin breaks that tradition by painting the intimate relationship she has with another woman through the female gaze. She also takes a very traditional medium, watercolor, and relates it to a very contemporary subject matter. Watercolor is usually viewed as a "traditionally delicate, feminized, and often devalued medium" and Cronin relates these sexual images to a more conservatively feminine art style. By making these paintings on a smaller scale, Cronin forces her audience to be very intimate in this sexual encounter. She directly addresses the view that the audience has as an outsider looking in and how they must interact with the scene. By zooming in on the breasts, vagina, and curves of the female body, Cronin takes the act of looking away from gazing and forces the viewer to come face to face with their own voyeurism.

Memorial to a Marriage

In a similar attempt of exploring the female body and her own relationships with women, Cronin focuses on a more intimate and romantic moment between herself and her now wife, Deborah Kass. The marble statue – which was later replaced with a bronze replica to save the marble from air pollution – was placed on Cronin and Kass's grave site. The work directly relates with Cronin's theme of identity in sexuality. Due to the fact that gay marriage was illegal at the time, *Memorial to a Marriage* places Kass and Cronin in a permanent union where their marriage could be recognized and preserved when the courts would not do so.

The statues are made from marble, which was a typical medium used for heroic figures or important, influential people for their grave markers. Cronin took this intention for her work, immortalizing the relationship even in death. By basing her work off of American Neoclassical sculpture, Cronin relates back to the failings she felt the American court system and government had in terms of legalizing gay marriage.

Shrine for Girls

Straying from her typical themes of gender and sexuality, Patricia Cronin's installation piece at Venice Biennale deals with violence against different groups of women. She uses different clothes used by women – saris, hijabs, and aprons – to create piles of fabrics on altar tables. Cronin wants to create a conversation between gender, memory and justice. The piles of clothes that are placed on each altar in *Shrine for Girls* is meant to be a representation of the women lost to violent acts. The point of these shrines is to make the viewer stop and contemplate the numerous loss of women in many communities around the world. Cronin recognizes the importance of women and their roles in each culture.



Tampa Museum of Art
@TampaMuseumArt · [Follow](#)



She's always ready for her closeup 😊
Patricia Cronin's ([@patricia_cronin](#))
[#aphroditereimagined](#) will always be a favorite for us
and for museum visitors. Make sure to stop by to see
her in all her glory yourself and tag us in your
Aphrodite closeups!



6:00 PM · Sep 15, 2019 from Tampa, FL



5



Reply



Copy link

[Read more on Twitter](#)

find this article: <https://insights.masterworks.com/art/artists/patricia-cronin/who-is-patricia-cronin/>