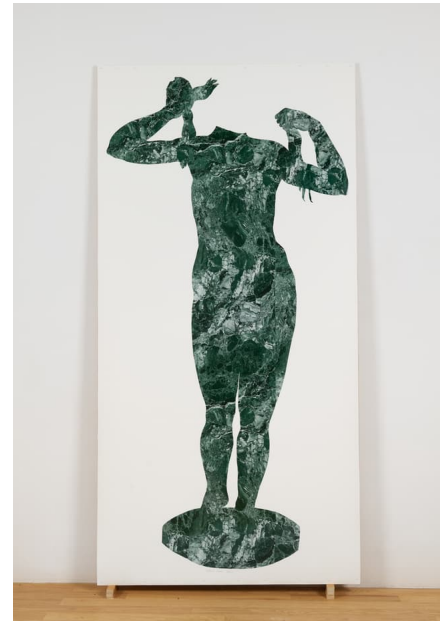


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Patricia Cronin: *Army of Love*

By Rebecca Allan



Patricia Cronin, *Aphrodite of Cyrene* (National Roman Museum, Baths of Diocletian), 2025. Mixed media on paper, 96 × 48 inches. © Patricia Cronin. Courtesy CHART. Photo: KC Crow Maddux.

Oracles and soldiers have something in common. When they are called up, both entities can influence the outcomes of wars, elections, natural disasters, or matters of the heart. In geopolitics, where oracles once offered guidance to political leaders, soldiers carried out the resulting orders. In *Army of Love*, Patricia Cronin considers how we might inhabit these roles, and think about new categories of armies that deserve support in this era of profound societal dismantling. In the exhibition, we stand at ease in the company of ancient Greek goddesses whose names are familiar, if only remembered from schoolbooks.

Cronin revitalizes the legacy of Aphrodite through a contemporary feminist perspective in this cleverly staged installation inspired, in part, by the goddess of love—a show that builds upon her 2018 exhibition *Aphrodite, and the Lure of Antiquity* at the Tampa Museum of Art. While these sculptures, large multi-layered paintings, and works on paper encompass the last seven years,

Patricia Cronin's thirty-year oeuvre has elevated, through portraiture in various forms and media, the lives and contributions of women to culture. The scale and choreographed arrangement of the works, on two floors, has the precision of an uptown step dance. On the first floor, filled with monumental figures, I feel like the general inspecting her troops, and want to salute. Descending the stairs, I enter an oracle's sanctum where three sculptures from the edition, *Aphrodite Reimagined* (2018), and other diminutive iterations of the goddess glow in artificial light passing through resin, or float in the speckled, aqueous glazes of watercolors shot through with sea salt.



Patricia Cronin, *Colonna Venus* (Vatican Museums), 2018. Polyethylene, acrylic on canvas, and dye sublimation on fabric, 84 × 132 inches. © Patricia Cronin. Courtesy CHART. Photo: KC Crow Maddux.

When art from antiquity is reinvested with new scholarship, interpretation, and material invention, it becomes relevant and catalyzing again. Cronin's work exists within wide-ranging art historical traditions from the classical age to Arte Povera, from Conceptual to protest art. This body of work also draws upon the discovery, in 1969, of the long-lost Temple of Aphrodite at Cnidus in Turkey by the archaeologist Iris Love. Love's discovery occurred on the very day that Neil Armstrong took his first steps on the Moon.

Moonlight and sunlight seem to emanate from Cronin's large-scale Aphrodite paintings, filtered through fluttering layers of fabric and resin, watercolor and acrylic pigments. The materials demonstrate the spaciousness of multiple meanings. Cerulean blue tarps become celestial grounds for *Aphrodite of Capua* (Naples National Archaeological Museum) and *Colonna Venus* (Vatican Museums) (both 2018). But tarps also signal the threat of environmental disasters, ubiquitous in places like Tampa and East Atlantic Beach, New York (where the artist has a cottage), as they can be quickly deployed to protect property during hurricanes. As Henri Matisse used colored paper for his joyous cutouts, Cronin realized *Aphrodite of Cyrene* (National Roman Museum, Baths of Diocletian) (2025) in shelf paper posing as green marble, the kind our mothers and grandmothers used to add a touch of "luxury" to kitchen shelves. Similar marble often frames the talking heads of state at the United Nations. As Cronin explains, "whenever you see world leaders addressing (and ultimately disappointing many of us) that marble is behind them." These silhouettes on large, uninflected sheets of paper have the glasslike clarity of a Maria Sibylla Merian botanical illustration, but more practical and less poetic.



Installation view: Patricia Cronin: *Army of Love*, CHART, New York, 2025. Courtesy CHART. Photo: KC Crow Maddux.

Cronin is recognized for her reinterpretations of memorial sculpture, and the reconciliatory healing power it can evoke. The headless figure of *Aphrodite of Cyrene* (appearing in three related artworks, from 2018 and 2021, in addition to the 2025 work) is all the more potent then, as fatal injuries to the necks and heads of the human victims of racial and political violence occupy our nightmares. To the extent that trauma penetrates the nervous system, we need our armies of artist-nurses dedicated to its repair. I think of Cronin's *Aphrodite Reimagined*, the original work commissioned in 2018 for the Tampa Museum's permanent collection. After the 2016 presidential election, the artist's despair was transformed into action when she encountered a first-century marble torso from the museum's collection. Its missing limbs suggested to her the excision of critical thinking, or the suppression of women's authority. She would make Aphrodite whole again, carving a stone torso, and casting the missing parts with translucent resin. The resin had the unexpected effect of conducting light in such a way that those parts momentarily disappear, underscoring the fragile nature of self-governance.

In a group of haunting paintings from 2021–25, Cronin deployed bleach on cotton as a medium, essentially painting “blind” as she rendered *Aphrodite (Capitoline)* (2021). inspired by the Roman copy of the Greek original by Praxiteles. The diluted bleach solution created variations in tone; Aphrodite hovers in and out of focus against a cyan blue ground, as in the photograms of botanist and photographer Anna Atkins. Later, in the aftermath of the destruction and insanity of World War I, the photograms of Man Ray employed unconventional processes and dreams—sources championed by Surrealist artists to counteract the absurdity of war.

Cronin unites her ever-evolving experiments in technique with these legacies of history as pennants of independence, the baselines for scientific inquiry, or creating art. Her goddess-sentinels, and the armies of love that we might form—protectors of landscapers and gynecologists, researchers and journalists—will need to be equally valiant in the coming years.

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