

BOOK MAGAZINE

CRONINATRIX
PATRICIA CRONIN, ARTIST

New Yorker Patricia Cronin is a rare example of a female artist. We have discussed with her why such women are indeed a rare example and besides have talked about Riot Grrrl movement, about the role of the creative heritage and about life of a housewife as a comprehended choice.

Having started to remember all the creative units among women, one can quickly exhaust his or her memory without even leaving the circle of musicians: Yoko Ono, Kim Gordon, Laurie Anderson - and the memory is beginning to slip . Persistently tries to challenge the status of our world as the men's world - even in the aspect of art - Patricia Cronin , an artist, photographer , sculptor, Bachelor of Rhode Island College , Master (and now - a teacher) of Brooklyn College and former student of a few other schools. Dominant direction of her work is questioning the place of women in contemporary art, the role of her body, her sexuality and homosexuality.



CRONINATRIX

Strong creative position coupled with extra higher education has made Cronin a pretty dangerous woman in art, though, perhaps, the only one, whose voice is heard. And the first time this voice came in the mid-90s with provocative series of Polaroid pictures depicting sexual pastime of a lesbian couple, which were made first-person – by Patricia . Later there was a series of works with horses , 9 by 15 inches pictures of luxury private houses on the shores and three-ton marble sculptural work “Memorial To A Marriage “, depicting Cronin and her partner , artist Deborah Kass . Even in horse portraits and bird's-eye views of luxury properties Cronin inlays a motive of sexuality or a word of protest against the ruling party so arbitrary played out in favor of men .

You rather belong to the new generation of representatives of feminist art. Can you say from this perspective what radical changes have occurred within this issue? How do the statements of the previous generation differ from yours, and is this art still able to discourage someone?

I am fortunate that I went to school at a time when critically acclaimed women artists, like Lee Bontecou, were my professors and feminist artists like Carolee Schneeman, Kiki Smith, Nan Goldin and Deborah Kass were showing in galleries. I was part of the next generation like Jenny Saville and Lisa Yuskavage that made work that was a little more direct and in your face. Yes, I think art made from a decisively feminist perspective is still very challenging for most collectors and curators.



EROTIC WATERCOLORS

1994

Do you think the era of lack of “great female artists” is continuing or such artists as Marlene Dumas, Cindy Sherman, Georgia O’Keeffe could easily refute Nochlin’s thesis’s? We believe that contemporary art in principle no longer gives birth to the universally great.

Well Nochlin’s canon shattering 1972 article “Why Have there been no great women artists?” was written at the birth of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the United States before there was any feminist art history or criticism. Her thesis was if women historically were prohibited from the same education as men, specifically an art education, including nude models in a life drawing class, how could they ever become great. It was an unlevel playing field. Now things have changed considerably regarding education, there are laws in the U.S. prohibiting universities and employers from discrimination based on gender. The best colleges and corporations actually want a diverse environment. But in the art world this is not necessarily the case. And while the artists (both male and female) are well educated and have more diversity in their college experience, the people who are doing the majority of art collecting are wealthy, older, white heterosexual men. Not all, but many of whom still have ingrained conservative ideas about women and genius. So conservative people who think men are more valuable than women will think male artists are better artists than female artists and pay more money for their work, which forces galleries showing more male artists. So critics have no choice but to write more about men, and this vicious cycle continues. There are of course some women, who have broken through, but it’s a small percentage and all you have to do is look at the vast discrepancy between the auction prices of male and female artists. In that 1972 article Nochlin wrote about the necessity “to create a world in which equal achievement will not only be made possible but actively encouraged by social institutions.” This is still true today in 2014! In the U.S. the myth of the great male artist is still going strong. And if they can’t afford the older men – Koons, McCarthy, Wool, the alternative is the myth of the wonder boy. Who they hope will grow up to be the genius man. I call it irrational exuberance.

Studying what classic and contemporary artists’ works did you spent most of your time? What books are the most numerous in your library, whom are they about?

I’ve studied everything from Pre-Historic to Contemporary Art. But for the last few years I’ve been obsessed with late Medieval and Early Renaissance art – the ritual, meditative aspect of these deeply expressive images and objects. When I was an art student, I didn’t have a lot of money. While I didn’t scrimp on art supplies, I couldn’t afford a lot of art books. I’ve been making up for it ever since and they’re some of my most cherished possessions!

Whose artistic influence are you are trying to escape as an artist? Can or can’t you do that?

It’s impossible to make art in a vacuum. It’s our job as artists to know the history of our field, our shared cultural inheritance, and then make it new, relevant to our time.

In the 80-90s there was a musical movement Riot Grrrl, feministic in nature. Will you comment on this phenomenon? Were you or are you now is a part of it, do you keep in touch with people like Kim Gordon?

I was really responding to the politics of the time and the Riot Grrrl Movement was part of that zeitgeist. We were protesting in the streets for our rights (Women’s, AIDS, LGBT, Abortion Rights, etc.) and there wasn’t any barrier between what we were doing at home in bed and the streets. In fact I even did a project that brought my art to the streets. “Maintaining Pleasure/Pleasuring Maintenance” was an interactive wheat paste campaign posted around SoHo



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and Tribeca in downtown Manhattan. The sexually explicit imagery challenged ideas about female sexuality, commodity, consumption and desire. The most successful ones were outside strip clubs and the images were a subversive "advertisement" that included a phone number. Men would leave the strip clubs, see them and call the number thinking it was advertising phone sex or prostitution, but only hear a recording of me reading Judith Butler! They would leave angry confused messages. It was very funny! Influences included radical performance artists like Karen Finley and Ron Athey, and New York clubs like Danceteria where I first saw Madonna perform, the Pyramid Club and the Clit Club were places of subversive celebration and discovery. I favored Madonna as you can see in the Polaroids.

How do you feel about women who do not want to "fight for their rights", demand men for shopping, leisure and hope to find a husband, and bind him to themselves with a birth of a child? Do you believe in their sincere desire to be a mother and a housewife just the way it was in the fifties? Don't you think that America has recently become somewhat more conservative in this sense?

I think it's ridiculous for women not to be feminists. To be educated equally, want equal pay for equal work, and live life to their fullest potential. Then if they choose a more conservative path of being a stay at home Mom supported by a man, then that's their choice and they should be able to do it. Who am I to judge? I think the popularity of the reality TV shows Housewives of Atlanta, Beverly Hills, New York, etc. give the false impression that a lot of people are doing this when in fact 4 out of 10 households have a female primary or sole breadwinner. I think when the economy suffers people find comfort in the fantasy of older traditions. And of course we are talking about white middle and upper class women when we talk about housewives. But this ties into your earlier question, if one of these housewives and her husband collect art, what percentage of their collection will be work by women artists? Feminist artists?

Do care in general about all these feminist things or have you moved to a new level, where people in the future will be deprived of gender identity and physiological characteristics of bodies and sex itself will go to the back of the media and personal life?

Ha! What a great idea! It's exhausting being a feminist, a person who treats herself as valuable as a man, and expects other people to see her the same way. There's quite a bit of resistance. And the general prudish American attitude toward sex, the body, particularly women's bodies is incomprehensible and infuriating.

Do you know men who are afraid that their not being female will be exposed?

No, I haven't heard of them. Do they exist in Russia? Please send some to the U.S.!

We bet you know some stereotypes about Russian women - which of them might be the most unexpected for us?

I actually don't. But I'd love to come to Russia to meet some Russian Feminists, especially Pussy Riot including: Yekaterina Samutsevich, Maria Alekhina, and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova. I think their radical art performances were tough, smart, powerful and courageous. They are my new heros.



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GIRLS

1993

How do you feel about Yayoi Kusama's cooperation with Louis Vuitton house? In your opinion, is it an homage to female artists, or a way for the House to use someone else's originality? Are you ready to collaborate with some fashion house or participate in any side projects with industrial manufacturers of toothpaste or tomato soup?

I think Kusama's collaboration with Louis Vuitton was really interesting! Andy Warhol said a long time ago that the museums of the future would be Department Stores and Department Stores would become museums. When I saw the Kusama Louis Vuitton store windows in London, they were museum quality installations and I loved that the general public could experience this for free. Yes, I would love to collaborate with a fashion house! My wish list includes: Karl Lagerfeld at Fendi, the Rodarte sisters, Rei Kawakubo at Commes des Garçons, Miuccia Prada, Hermes and New York's own Gary Graham.

Your Polaroid series are aggressive, sloppy, partly shocking. What impact radical punks and such characters as Dash Snow, Gigi Allin, Sex Pistols, etc. had on you?

Ha! Dash Snow was 10 years old when I was taking these photographs. I think I influenced him! I think a lot of art is created by people who feel marginalized or outside the dominant power elite. Speaking your truth loudly and clearly with all the messy rage is a way I'd describe a lot of radical people

Curators and critics have contextualized my Polaroids in relationship to Robert Mapplethorpe and Catherine Opie, but without the distance or the safety of a set-up photography studio. These are taken within the frenzy of participation. There's nothing orchestrated here. The camera's there and it's almost one of the characters. I'm a really good student of art history, art theory, performance art of the 80s and 90s, and it's when I came up in the art world, and I saw art move away from this material and I thought, okay, I want to test this. I was really interested in representation and power, feminism, and the gaze, but as a lived experience, not just about how art history problematized the gaze in terms of allegory, but like, I am a woman, I was there, I took those photos, and now you are me as the viewer. It's the seeing eye being inbricated and kind of like an index of a feminist narrative.

In light of the resumption of production of cartridges for Polaroid - did you have any desire to create more series in this manner?

I have hundreds and hundreds of Polaroids from this series that have never been exhibited. David Zwirner owns the two works "Boys" and "Girls," each work is a grid of 24 Polaroids. I've just editioned prints of these first two works in the series. They were exhibited in Massimiliano Gioni's NYC 1993: Experimental, Jet Set Trash and No Star exhibition NYC 1993: Experimental, Jet Set Trash and No Star exhibition at the New Museum in New York last year. I thought it was really funny to use the Minimalist strategy of the grid to attempt to order this messy chaotic life. I don't have any interest in photographing myself right now, but I am really interested in photographing other people's lives! That would be fun!

Don't you perceive first the webcams, and then Instagram as continuing tradition of Polaroids as a process with instant results? Has something mysterious remain in sexuality of an individual taking into account such urge for publicity against the background of technical capabilities?

This is a really interesting question. The beautiful characteristic about the Polaroid was it created a unique object in the privacy of your own home. Before digital photography there was film and you had to take your roll of film to photo labs to have the images developed and printed. Polaroid was invented for people to take sexy photos at home without the embarrassment of the neighborhood photo lab knowing what they were into. With webcams and Instagram there's a very thin veil of intimacy covering an enormous need for public attention and/or money. The clean, neat, self-curated lives people are posting on Facebook don't interest me very much.

Do you watch porn as students do - as something secret, shameful, desired and exciting - or you do not see anything there aside from cynicism in relation to the female body?

Except for Candida Royale, a feminist pornographer and filmmaker in the 1990s, I never could relate to pomography made by heterosexual men for heterosexual men. Cynicism in relation to the female body is a great way to say it.

How big is the range of things that can be seen from the sexual point of view, whose hidden sexual connotation can be noticed? On the other hand, this is probably your personal approach to any topic, is it?

Since my subject for over two decades has been the body, female and then recently again the male body, there's a sensual, feminist lens that I see through. But lately I am interested in a more humanist approach. At the end of the day, what we all have in common is bones, blood, skin and flesh, our shared common humanity. Powerful people seem to forget that.

In the second half of the 90s you had several works devoted to horses and related attributes. In your understanding, what is the nature of the sacred-sexual status of this animal?

I started using equestrian imagery in huge installations of oil paintings equine portraits, a full size tack room installation complete with saddles and whips and bronze horse sculptures as a way to address some of the same issues in the erotic polaroids; female sexuality & autonomy, body language and desire. But it expanded to include economic class. The horse was a subject where many levels of meaning all coalesced; the coded behavior of different demographic groups; aristocrats, horse breeders, sexual rebels, feminists and young girls.

Which media do you like best - canvas and oil, acrylic or photos?

Oil paint on linen because oil painting first appeared at the same time as the rise of humanism in the 14th century and watercolor on velvety smooth paper because it mimics the soft surface of skin best.

Do you think there is any sense to create a separate education departments with profiling subjects connected sex, erotica, pornography?

This is a terrific idea!



DANTE: THE WAY OF ALL FLESH
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Are you ready to teach, do you think your experience would be worthy of passing it to others?

Yes I already teach. I'm Professor of Art at Brooklyn College of The City University of New York where I teach everything from undergraduate Figure Drawing courses to my graduate Seminar "The Political Body." One of the most rewarding aspects about learning so much, developing refined aesthetic skills and critical thinking is to share it, whether its your artwork going out into the world via exhibitions and collections or teaching young artists.

Would you please tell us, is there anything that you would like to say to everyone the most?

Criticizing power structures is an honored tradition in Art. From the rawness of Francesco Goya raging against the horrors of wars to punk music raging against social injustices and economic inequality. In the 14th century Dante Alighieri railed against the church and state in the Inferno and today Ai Weiwei is protesting the oppression of the Chinese government. Bertolt Brecht said, "Art is not a mirror to reflect the world, but a hammer with which to shape it."

So if the art is messy or loud or not pretty, that's fine with me. This might not be the most financially lucrative choice, but its historically significant and you stay true to yourself and your core values. In 2002 I made a critically acclaimed sculpture "Memorial To A Marriage" protesting the prohibition of gay marriage in the U.S. before it was legal anywhere in the country. Now the marble and bronze versions of the project are in international museum collections and exhibitions. Some things like social change take time, but to stay silent is soul crushing.

What would you recommend to girls and maybe guys living in provinces who want to conquer New York art scene with their works, illustrations, designs, etc.?

Well, New York is a very expensive city and with the Internet, artists' websites, numerous on line art purveyors, international biennales and global art fairs, I don't know if young artists living in the provinces need to come to New York. I think you can create a vibrant art scene wherever you are. Having the time and space to mature and become an artist with something important to say is a luxury many young artists don't have in New York and its legible in some of the work.



BOYS
1993