

Funerary Sculpture Celebrates Same-sex Couples at Woodlawn Cemetery

By Patrick Rocchio

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Woodlawn Cemetery is now home to a piece of funerary sculpture that celebrates the legalization of marriage for same-sex couples, as well as the artist and her wife's love for one another.

Artist Patricia Cronin installed a bronze sculpture that will serve as the headstone for her and her wife Deborah Kass' plot in the cemetery on Tuesday, September 20.

The sculpture was made from a cast of an earlier work called Memorial to Marriage that Cronin created in marble for her plot at Woodlawn from 2000 to 2002. It is a neoclassical-inspired nude sculpture that depicts her and Kass in bed.

The installation comes just after the couple celebrated their marriage on Sunday, July 24.

"At the time that I created Memorial for Marriage, I was in a relationship and could not get married because it was illegal back in 2000," Cronin said. "We were going to a lawyer to draw up wills, health care proxies, and power of attorney documents to simulate just a few of the benefits that marriage affords couples."

While going through the process of working with the attorney, Cronin decided that it might be time to make a statement both about her love for her then partner and about the need for same-sex marriages to be legalized.

"These were very depressing documents that did not celebrate our life together," Cronin said. "So I thought I would make the most elegant statement I could about some of the most basic human rights afforded by marriage."

After receiving a grant from Grand Arts, Cronin created the first version of the sculpture in marble, and Memorial for Marriage was installed in the cemetery in 2002, Cronin said

"I was concerned about vandalism and made a rubber mold of the marble, Cronin stated. "I had to use a special kind of rubber so that it didn't damage the marble, and I got a call a few years ago saying that the rubber mold was slowly disintegrating."

The artist had to work fast in order to create a bronze sculpture from the existing mold. The marble sculpture has now been moved off of the plot and has been switched off with the bronze.

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The original marble sculpture of Memorial to Marriage is currently on a nationwide tour that includes Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana and the Station Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston, Texas, Cronin said. Cronin said she hopes that a collector will buy Memorial for Marriage and donate it to a museum to be permanently on display.

"When I created the sculpture, I believed that I would be making it for people who were not yet born, who would turn around and ask 'remember when same-sex couples could not get married,'" Cronin stated. "I didn't think we would see same-sex marriage within a decade of creating the original sculpture."

Now that same-sex marriage has been made legal in New York State, Cronin said she feels Memorial for Marriage can be an impassioned plea to make gay marriage legal across the country.