

ART

Review: work by Patricia Cronin at Newcomb Gallery

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MEMORIAL TO A MARRIAGE BY PATRICIA CRONIN

This is not what you might expect from a feminist art show. Patricia Cronin's *All Is Not Lost* expo at the Newcomb Art Gallery is in many ways like stepping into the past. All the watercolors on the walls depict mysterious classical sculptures that might have appeared in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, but are in fact renderings of the neoclassical works of Harriet Hosmer, a successful 19th century sculptor from Massachusetts. Art historians overlooked Hosmer's legacy, perhaps because she was part of a reportedly sapphic coterie of female artists in Rome whose proclivities might have been too hot for earlier art historians to handle. Amounting to catalogue raisonne, or inventory of her work, Cronin's images, if sometimes ghostly, are so evocatively and deftly rendered that some almost seem to breathe, as we see in *Medusa*, whose stony gaze under serpentine locks evokes cool marble statuary even as her pert torso suggests softer and warmer stuff. The contemplative figure of the tragic nymph *Oeone* comes across as one of those female archetypes of unapproachable perfection, but *The Fountain of Siren* is a more baroque confection, with a sassy seductress above, cavorting fauns below.

The most powerful piece in the show is a sculpture, her slightly larger than life, white marble *Memorial to a Marriage*. A Hosmer-esque depiction of Cronin and her partner, New York art star Deborah Kass, embracing in bed, nude under their Carrara marble sheets, it is a full-size, three-quarter ton replica of the one they had installed in the Cronin-Kass plot in New York's Woodlawn Cemetery. Of course they are not remotely dead yet, but beyond making a statement about same sex couples, it also romantically affirms the finality of marriage as expressed in the line "in sickness and in health, until death do us part." Although marriage might have seemed only a remote possibility in 2002 when the original sculpture was made, Cronin and Kass were officially married in the state of New York in 2011.

Through June 30

Patricia Cronin: *All Is Not Lost*

Newcomb Art Gallery, Tulane University, 865-5328