

Smithsonian.com

Check Out These Thought-Provoking Additions to the National Portrait Gallery

The museum is showcasing 25 new artworks through next autumn

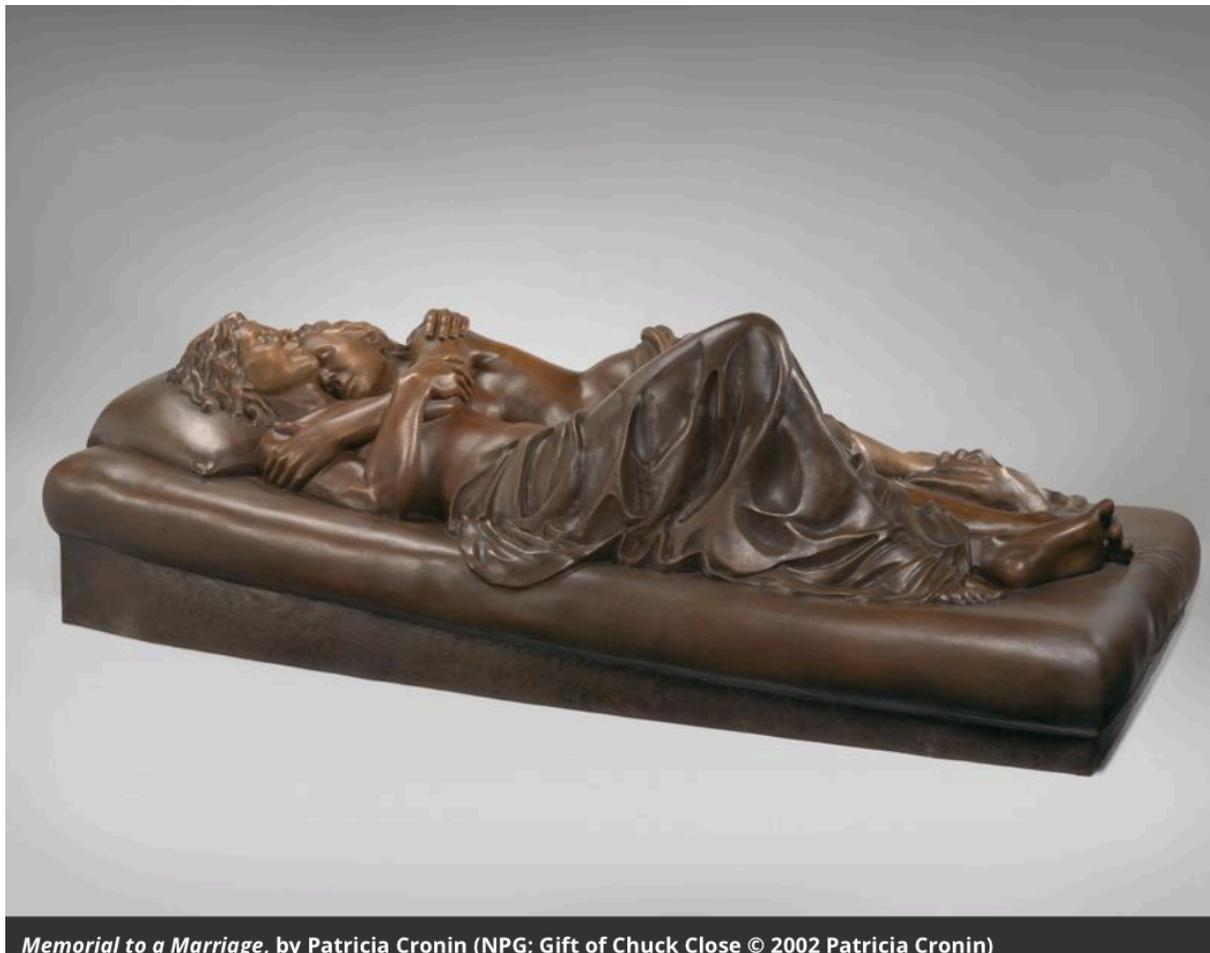
By [Ryan P. Smith](#)

SMITHSONIAN.COM

NOVEMBER 17, 2017

The National Portrait Gallery's latest acquisitions, whose subjects range from activist actress to glass ceiling-shattering civil servant, prodigious musician to lifesaving medical researcher, once-famous 20th-century magician to now-famous 19th-century lawyer, have just gone on view in Washington, D.C. The assortment—25 objects in all—will remain accessible through November 4 of 2018. Below is a sample of what you can look forward to in the year ahead.

Memorial to a Marriage



Memorial to a Marriage, by Patricia Cronin (NPG; Gift of Chuck Close © 2002 Patricia Cronin)

Though [Patricia Cronin's](#) sculpture *Memorial to a Marriage* portrays a pair of nude subjects entangled beneath a bedsheet, the impression it gives is not one of fiery eroticism, but rather of warm, abiding tenderness. Both of the women depicted are at rest, eyes closed; one subject nestles up against her partner's neck, a smile on her sleepy face, her free arm arced across her companion's torso. It is an intimate but quotidian scene: a picture of two women in love.

The two women, in fact, are Cronin herself and her longtime partner [Deborah Kass](#). Initially, as its dark title suggests, the work was conceived as a statement on the impossibility of a simple human dream. "Cronin created the original marble sculpture in 2002, before same-sex marriage was legal in New York," notes curator Dorothy Moss. Cronin installed the stone "memorial" in a Bronx cemetery, on a plot of land she paid for.

Now, 15 years later, the significance of the art has evolved. The bronze cast donated to the Smithsonian by Chuck Close, a dear friend of the couple, still harbors the melancholy of loving whom you love in a disapproving world—but it also inspires more hope than ever before that that love will triumph in the end. Cronin and Kass did [tie the knot](#), in 2011, and gay rights movements across the world have continued to find success in their pursuit of freedom and acceptance in the years since.

Find article at: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/check-out-thought-provoking-national-portrait-gallery-s-new-additions-180967255/?page=2>