

HYPERALLERGIC

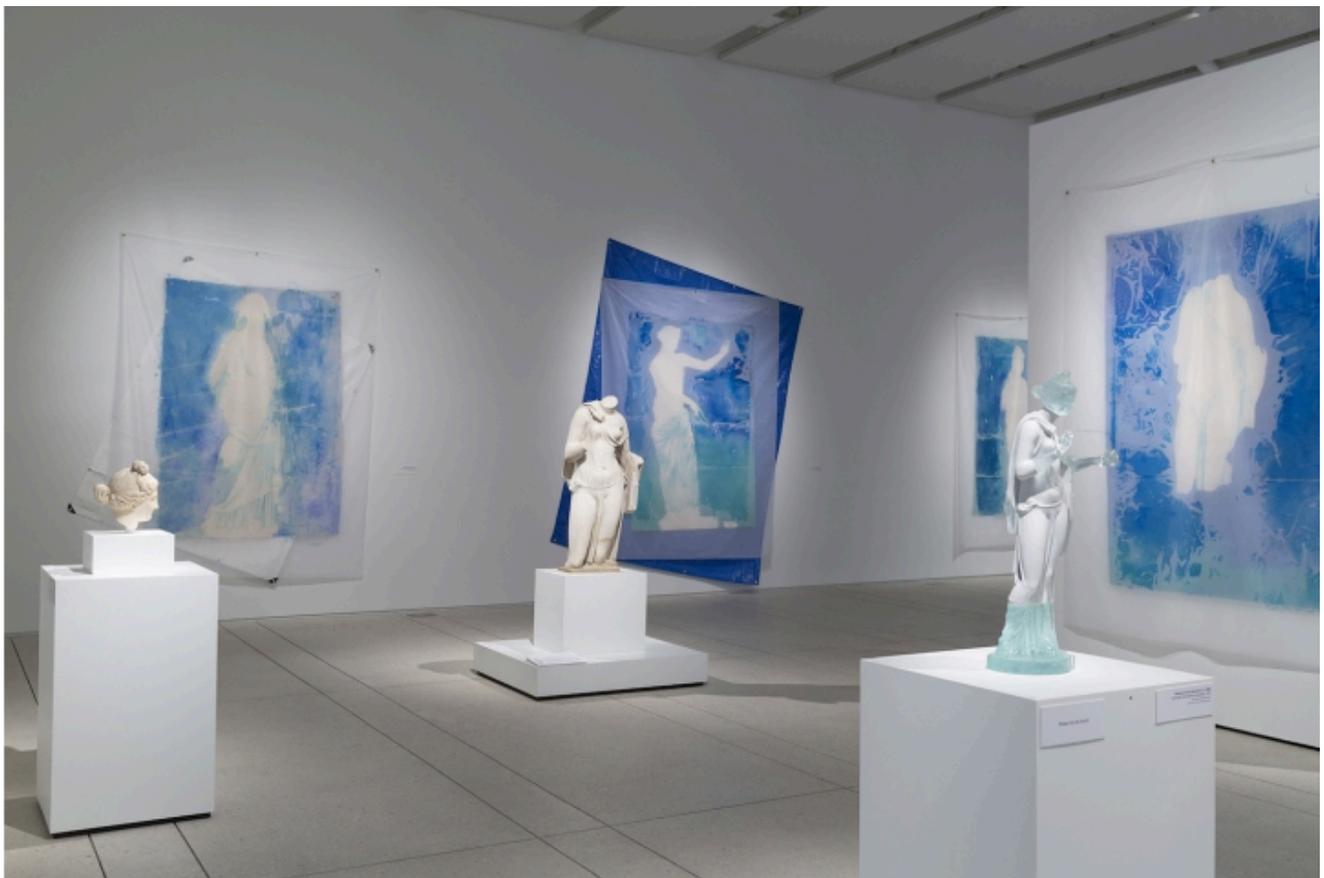
ART

Patricia Cronin Casts Aphrodite as a Feminist Role Model

Cronin puts a feminist spin on ancient myths.



Barbara Pollack October 29, 2018



Patricia Cronin, installation view in Sullivan Gallery, *Patricia Cronin, Aphrodite, and the Lure of Antiquity: Conversations with the Collection* at the Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL (all image courtesy the Tampa Museum of Art unless otherwise noted)

TAMPA, FL — In some ways, being a feminist artist is akin to being an archaeologist: digging through the past to find overlooked and forgotten people to add to the canon of art history. Brooklyn-based artist Patricia Cronin goes one step further by literally engaging with antiquities to put a feminist spin on ancient myths. Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty, would seem to be the perfect foil for Cronin’s imagination. At the Tampa Museum of Art, she has been allowed to engage with Aphrodite to her heart’s content.



Patricia Cronin, “Aphrodite Reimagined” (2018), cold-cast marble and resin, height: 121 inches (Tampa Museum of Art, Commission Installed on the Brett B. Sullivan Terrace, courtesy Patricia Cronin, photo by Philip LaDeau)

“Aphrodite Reimagined,” a towering 10-foot-tall statue gracing the museum’s outdoor balcony overlooking the Hillborough River, is the artist’s vision of the goddess, inspired by a fragment of a

marble torso from 1 AD in the museum’s collection. Recreated on a larger-than-life scale in cold-cast marble, the torso now has a head, arms, and legs fashioned in resin the pale shade of aquamarine blue, like beach glass. Mimicking the drapery and posture of the original statue, Cronin’s version reads as both ancient and modern simultaneously, allowing contemporary viewers to gaze upward at the classical figure just as ancient audiences once did in columned-filled temples.

“Aphrodite Reimagined” is the result of a conversation that Cronin had with antiquities curator Seth Pevnick and contemporary art curator Joanna Robotham, who were looking for an artist that could bridge the time span of the museum’s diverse collections. Cronin is the inaugural artist in the new series, *Conversations with the Collection*, which will biannually find a contemporary artist to engage with the classical artifacts at the museum. Given Tampa’s abundant holdings in antiquities, Cronin chose fine examples from the past, including statuettes of Aphrodite in bronze and alabaster, and an Etruscan funeral urn.



Patricia Cronin, “Aphrodite (Metropolitan Museum)” (2018), cast glass (image courtesy Patricia Cronin, photo by Philip LaDeau)

But Cronin’s own contributions are in the spotlight here, especially her series of paintings inspired by various renditions of Aphrodite found in museums around the world, such as “Aphrodite of Cyrene” from the baths of Diocletian and “Diane and Aphrodite” of the British Museum. These paintings in a monochromatic shade of blue are reminiscent of cyanotypes and just as ghostly. They came about when Cronin painted silhouettes of the statues on canvas, resting them on a sheet of plastic on the floor of her studio. Later discovering that the plastic was as beautiful as the painting, she transferred the image of the paint residue to sheer fabric which she then draped over her

paintings, creating a multilayered artwork that feels almost interactive. The installation of these works surrounding the gallery is absolutely ravishing.



Patricia Cronin, “Memorial to a Marriage” (2002), carrara marble (image courtesy Patricia Cronin Studio, photo by Philip LaDeau)

In a second space, the museum revisits Cronin’s past, including her most well-known work, “Memorial to a Marriage” (2002), which the artist created as a funeral statuary for herself and her wife, artist Deborah Kass, 15 years before the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage. Inspired by neoclassical sculpture, this composition of two lovers resting in each other’s arms is potently political as well as unapologetically romantic. In the same room, Cronin’s many watercolors depicting the works of Harriet Hosmer, the most distinguished female sculptor in the United States in the 19th century. Paired with two heads of infants by Hosmer, Cronin’s paintings, such as “Tomb of Judith Falconnet” (2006), capture the technical skill of the original while looking at it from a

contemporary perspective. Even more persuasive are her more abstract works or “Ghosts,” shadowy renditions of Hosmer sculptures that are no longer in existence with no visual record to be found.



Installation view, foreground, Hiram Powers' "Greek Slave" (1849), flanked by Patricia Cronin, "The Queen of Naples" (2006), dye sublimation on silk, and "Ghost #6" (2006), dye sublimation on silk

There is no doubt that Cronin interprets Aphrodite, and for that matter Harriet Hosmer, as a feminist role model worthy of our attention today. Instead of merely recycling stereotypes or reinvigorating sexist myths, this artist captures the essence of the goddess's power through her mastery of scale and technique in a variety of mediums. I was drawn back to these works, especially the paintings, wondering why these images seemed so of-the-moment and not old fashioned at all. Cronin works her magic, instilling her own take on the female form that erases the bias of the original myth and replaces it with an icon absolutely appropriate for contemporary women.

Patricia Cronin, Aphrodite, and the Lure of Antiquity: Conversations with the Collection continues at the Tampa Museum of Art (120 Gasparilla Plaza, Tampa, FL) through January 6, 2019.

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