

Tampa Bay Times

Patricia Cronin brings a monumental Aphrodite to the Tampa Museum of Art



MONICA HERNDON | *Times* Artist Patricia Cronin gazes up at her sculpture, *Aphrodite Reimagined*, on Aug. 15 at the Tampa Museum of Art. The sculpture is part of Cronin's solo exhibition, *Patricia Cronin, Aphrodite, and the Lure of Antiquity: Conversations with the Collection*. The exhibition is on display through Jan. 6, 2019.

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The next time you're strolling along Tampa's Riverwalk, look up at the Tampa Museum of Art and see a monumental sculpture of the goddess of love, Aphrodite, gazing and gesturing out over the Hillsborough River.

Aphrodite Reimagined, is part of the museum's first exhibition in their "Season of Love" series, "Patricia Cronin, Aphrodite and the Lure of Antiquity," which opened Saturday.

The exhibition is also the first of the "Conversations with the Collection" series, by which curators Seth Pevnick and Joanna Robotham seek to bridge the museum's collection of antiquities with its collection of modern and contemporary work. The two put together a list of contemporary artists whose work would play well with and help create dialogues about objects from antiquity.

At the top of the list was acclaimed Brooklyn-based artist Patricia Cronin, winner of the esteemed Rome Prize, who has deeply explored the ancient world in her body of work.

They invited Cronin to the museum to view the collection and choose a piece to respond to. A first century Roman marble fragmentary torso of Aphrodite was the instant winner.

"The torso was the first thing I saw and it blew me away," Cronin said. "I thought, I can do something with her."

That "something" meant re-creating the torso as a complete, monumental sculpture commissioned by the museum, thanks to the Vinik Family Foundation. As of yet, the museum does not own the sculpture.

The torso's head is in the collection of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, but is on display in Tampa for the exhibit. The original arms and legs are lost, but there was a past attempt to make the statue whole again using stone for the limbs.

Cronin's deep dive into research of antiquity's many versions of Aphrodite included a trip to Italy in January. Her creative process yielded a number of acrylic paintings of them, on display as part of the exhibit, that not so much depict them but rather capture their various gestures.

For the 10-foot *Aphrodite Reimagined*, Cronin used cold cast marble for the torso, but opted to make all of the missing portions out of a translucent, glass-like resin. Inspired by the sea glass she would collect at her beach cottage in Long Island, she wanted to achieve the same soft, misty green for the appendages and head. With its placement outdoors on the second-floor terrace, the sculpture's appearance will change with the light of the day.

It's also fitting that Cronin would choose a female deity to riff on, as much of her work deals with women's issues and sexuality. Examples of those are in the exhibit, including her 2003 neoclassical funerary sculpture *Memorial to a Marriage*, which depicts Cronin and her now-wife in repose. At a time when gay marriage was still illegal, and in the scope of history of monuments, this is quite revolutionary.

The process of creating *Aphrodite Reimagined* was one of the most creative of her life.

"History is never going to be finished, said Cronin. "We have to evaluate the past and help us find our way to the future. It's been such a unique and rewarding experience for me."

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