



Patricia Cronin's Army of Love

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THE FEMALE NUDE has been the subject of art for at least 30,000 years. Since the Venus of Willendorf to the present day, the meaning of the female body has remained a flashpoint in art and culture. Patricia Cronin's first New York solo show in almost a decade took on this long and complicated history last fall at the Chart Gallery in Manhattan. The exhibition, titled *Army of Love*, presented a striking new body of paintings, sculptures, and watercolors centered on Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty. Cronin reimagines the lost 4th-century BCE masterpiece by Praxiteles, *Aphrodite of Cnidus*, believed to be the first full-standing female nude marble, using it as a springboard to rethink classical ideals for our time.

Walking through the gallery's two floors felt like entering a contemporary temple of love, courage, and defiance. The exhibition's title refers to the legendary Theban warriors united by affection and devotion who fought side by side. Cronin turns that idea on its head: instead of an army of conquest, her *Army of Love* is one of empathy, solidarity, and resistance through love.



Patricia Cronin. *Aphrodite (Capitoline)*, 2021.

Cronin knows her Aphrodite well. After years of studying classical depictions of the goddess in Italy and beyond, she draws inspiration from Harriet Hosmer, the 19th-century neoclassical sculptor and pioneering lesbian artist to whom Cronin once dedicated an artist's book. This new series extends that feminist lineage, using materials as varied as polyresin, glass, Mediterranean-blue tarpaulins, watercolor, and sheer gauze scrims. The result is a luminous, immersive environment that reframes classical beauty through the turbulence of our current world—one marked by dictatorship, war, misogyny, and chaos. In Cronin's hands, love itself becomes an act of radical resistance.

When I spoke with Cronin, she shared heartbreaking news: her bronze sculpture *Memorial to a Marriage*, a groundbreaking work familiar to G&LR readers and held by the Smithsonian

American Art Museum, is at risk of being destroyed by the Trump regime in its crusade to erase our nation's legacy of diversity and inclusion. In that light, *Army of Love* feels even more urgent. It's Cronin's passionate answer to the wave of homophobia, sexism, and racism sweeping our country; a call to speak out, stand up, and defend equality, justice, and human rights. Through *Aphrodite*, she reminds us that love, in all its forms, remains the most powerful weapon we have.

Standing before Cronin's glowing sculptures and shimmering canvases, one feels both heartbreak and hope. *Army of Love* insists that tenderness is not weakness but strength; that beauty, compassion, and desire can still light the way through darkness. In an age of cruelty and division, Cronin's art offers a rallying cry for the human heart: love as protest, love as power, love as survival.

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