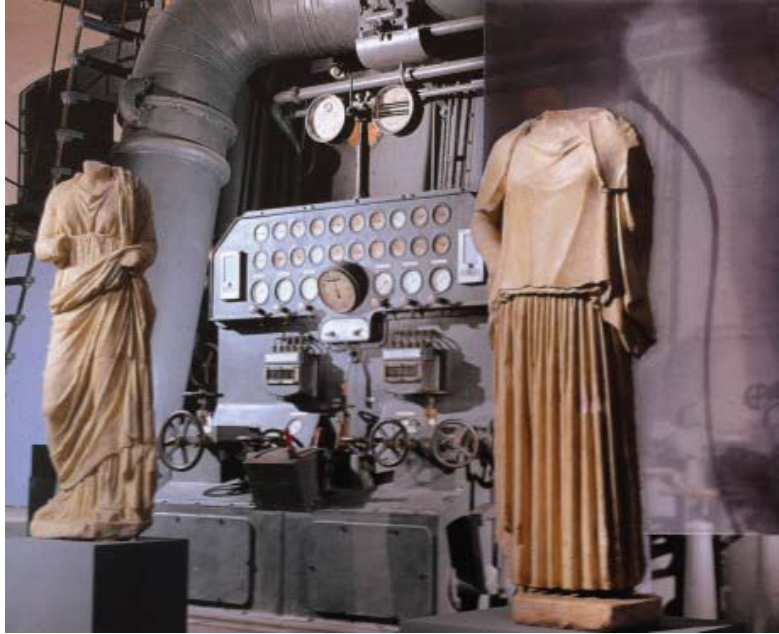


AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME

Patricia Cronin and the Ghosts of Rome Past

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Patricia Cronin, FAAR'07, was back in Rome this month for the opening of her new exhibition, *Machines, Gods and Ghosts*, at the Centrale Montemartini Museum on via Ostiense. The show, which runs from October 10 to November 20, was curated by Ludovico Pratesi and constitutes the first exhibition of contemporary art to be held in this remarkable space. A panel discussion, hosted by the American Academy on October 7, offered important critical perspective on the show and members of the academy community turned out to demonstrate their support for the initiative at its opening reception two days later.

Cronin is a Professor of Art at Brooklyn College City University of New York whose work has been exhibited widely in Europe and America. She is an artist with a strong commitment to social justice issues, particularly gay marriage rights and women's history. Much of her work engages with memory or contemplates the role of remembrance and memorial. Her work has found its way into several permanent collections including the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC, Deutsche Bank in New York, and the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow. Most recently she has had solo exhibitions at the Ford Project Gallery in New York and the Newcomb Art Gallery of Tulane University in New Orleans.

In this most recent initiative six paintings on silk, entitled "Ghosts," have been hung in the Sala Macchine, or Machines Room, of the Centrale Montemartini, suggestively hovering between the fragmented marble figures of Rome's classical past and the giant turbines of its early twentieth century industrial revolution. Centrale Montemartini is a former thermal power station, Rome's first public electricity plant, which opened in 1912, but operated using technology that would soon become obsolete. It ceased operations in 1963 and in its abandonment became highly dilapidated. When the city decided to store a surplus of ancient statuary from the Capitoline Collections at the Montemartini in 1997, this industrial carcass was resuscitated by the electrifying power of the ancient past.

A panel discussion hosted at the American Academy two days before the exhibition opening revealed the depth of Cronin's artistic process and explored the Roman inspirations for this exhibit within the wider scope of her career. Curator Ludovico Pratesi and Andrew Heiskell Arts Director Peter Benson Miller joined the artist in offering context and commentary in English and Italian. Patricia Cronin explained that the evolution of the project began with her discovery and recovery of Harriet Hosmer, a project she worked on as a Fellow of the American Academy. Hosmer, an expatriate sculptress living in Rome between 1853-1860, had a successful career in the nineteenth century that largely went undocumented by art historians. Cronin decided to reconstruct artistically her predecessor's missing catalogue raisonné and ultimately chose to represent many of the missing pieces as ghosts. Ludovico Pratesi suggested that the intricacies of this project properly emerge when one considers the reciprocity of historical perspectives involved. Cronin is a contemporary artist looking back at a neoclassical artist who in turn looked back to the classical past. Peter Benson Miller then provided a fertile art historical grounding for the project in the roots of nineteenth century society, which frequently imagined trouble-making women as ghostly social presences.

If Patricia Cronin's "Ghosts" are inspired by a desire to reclaim a forgotten history, their location at the Montemartini enhances that conceptual resonance. Cronin's black and white works are perfect shadows against the museum's own historical juxtapositions, facilitating a dialogue between Rome's past and present. In the words of the artist, "I now think this might be the fullest expression of the project. The goal was always to give presence to absence, missing sculptures, lost histories, remembering people... who are no more." Set among the acknowledged ghosts of Rome's past, Cronin's "Ghosts" suggest those still veiled layers of untold history that have yet to be laid bare.

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