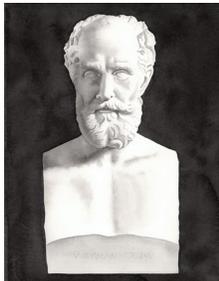


Patricia Cronin  
Book Cover  
2007



Patricia Cronin  
The Sleeping Faun by  
Harriet Hosmer, 1865  
2006



Patricia Cronin  
Portrait of Wayman  
Crow, 1866  
2007



Patricia Cronin  
Beatrice Cenci, 1856  
2007



Patricia Cronin  
Medusa, by Harriet  
Hosmer, 1854



2006  
Patricia Cronin  
Queen Isabella of  
Castile, 1893  
2007

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## THE LADY HOSMER

by Charlie Finch

After five years of hard work, one of which was spent in Rome under a fellowship from the American Academy, Patricia Cronin has completed her monumental recreation of the life of the renowned 19th-century American expatriate sculptor Harriet Hosmer. Cronin's artwork consists of a catalogue raisonné of Hosmer's work titled *Harriet Hosmer: Lost and Found*, just out from Charta Press, and a solo exhibition opening at the Sackler Wing of the Brooklyn Museum on June 14, 2009.

Much of Hosmer's work has been destroyed or disappeared, or was never realized. Patricia Cronin has painstakingly recreated Hosmer's body of work in a striking series of black-and-white watercolors, which appear as ambiguous ghosts of Hosmer's main themes, strong women who often suffer through serious tribulations and fancy free men of nature surrounded by charmingly diabolical cherubs.

Hosmer was the lover of Lady Ashburton, a prominent British arts patron; a friend of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who based a character in his story *The Marble Faun* on her; an object of mystery to Henry James, who dubbed (some think derisively) the circle of women sculptors around Hosmer in Rome "the marmorean flock"; and the protégée of the St. Louis philanthropist Wayman Crow, father of her best friend Cornelia Crow, and founder of Washington University in St. Louis and its wonderful museum.

The lines of bohemianism, however aristocratic, are strong and supple, for Cornelia Crow's husband became the curator of the Peabody Museum at Harvard, her grandson was the great muse of the Beats, Lucien Carr (indeed, both Carr and his best friend William Burroughs were scions of the St. Louis arts aristocracy), and Cornelia's great grandson is the acclaimed novelist Caleb Carr, author of *The Alienist*.

The duality of the elite and the avant-garde are strong within Hosmer. Indeed, it can be argued that the sly touches in her otherwise classically attuned work are hints to the homoerotic ribaldry of her circle. Hence, her majestic females wear diadems of stars and flowers and their breasts are demurely alluring. Hosmer's bust of Medusa, for example, is sexy, not grotesquely fearsome. Her famous sculptures of a faun, sleeping and waking, are languid meditations on the male body at the cusp of being bound by a mischievous Cupid.

Hosmer's political sympathies have a similar duality. The studies she submitted for the Abraham Lincoln Memorial competitions are revolutionary in their depictions of the emancipation of slaves from chains to the rigors of service in the Union Army. Yet, Hosmer's extraordinary statues of Queen Isabella, the patroness of Columbus, and the Queen of Naples, her personal friend, who was exiled by Garibaldi in 1860, establish these controversial women as unambiguous totems of a rare, historical female puissance.

When I first observed Patricia Cronin's painstaking watercolors of Hosmer's oeuvre in her Brooklyn studio three years ago, I marveled at the completeness of such a project that would subsume any artist without the bright, marathon spirit of the indefatigable Cronin. Her pictures add a shade of vulnerability and pathos to the residue of Hosmer's fame, but they also, by their very existence, seek to restore Harriet's glory. Let this be the beginning of a wider search into the buried past of the great women artists, of whom Patricia Cronin is one.

"Patricia Cronin: 'Harriet Hosmer, Lost and Found,'" June 5, 2009-Jan. 24, 2010, at the Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11238

CHARLIE FINCH is co-author of *Most Art Sucks: Five Years of Coagula* (Smart Art Press).

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