

# Owl

## She Digs a Pony

Painter Patricia Cronin's horsey obsession.

Visitors to New York's Wooster Gardens gallery will pony like Bony Moronie when they see, to borrow a phrase from the Patti Smith songbook, "promenading horses! horses! coming in all directions." "I'm head over heels in love with them," says Patricia Cronin, beaming at her 50 portraits of doe-eyed horses, hugging the walls like demented commemorative plates.

They represent a surprise development for the 33-year-old Manhattan-based artist, whose lucent watercolors in the early '90s gave the public intimate and telescopic views of lesbian sex with her girlfriend, painter Deborah Kass, the work's libidinous, semi-abstract qualities immediately raised her profile in the art world.

Blessed with unflagging optimism, Cronin hit on a new way to address the architecture of female eroticism when a Marlboro ad featuring a leaping horse jogged a childhood memory. "I really liked horses when I was a kid," she recalls with a quickening pulse. "I drew them all the time, I wrote poems about them. I even wrote myself a letter that said, 'When I grow up, if I don't have a career that has something to do with horses, it will be a sure sign that I had gone insane.'"



Through her first public commission was a landscape for Bellevue Hospital's infamous psych ward, Cronin now takes riding lessons twice a week and spends hours gazing at the silken forelocks and curvaceous haunches of thoroughbreds that the editors of *Young Riders* and *Horse Illustrated* have chosen as their Playmate-style centerfolds. She is also deeply engaged in an investigation of the horse's age-old appeal to prepubescent girls- the real subjects of her paintings, which are based on snapshots sent to the magazines by their predominantly female subscribers. "I'm not done with the girlie stuff," she warns, "but right now horses are my desired object." - Linda Yablonsky

*Linda Yablonsky is the author of The Story of Junk, forthcoming from Farrar, Straus & Giroux.*