

Two Artists Reflect on the Contemporary Memorial: Patricia Cronin - Memorial To A Marriage and Judith Shea – Legacy Collection.



Patricia Cronin - Memorial To A Marriage

A few years ago Grand Arts, the Kansas City based non-profit art projects institution, invited me to make a dream sculpture project. I had just finished a series of bronze horses, and I started looking around New York City at all of the public equestrian monuments. In these 19th century war memorials, the men were specific, the horses were particular, but, alas, the women were ALL allegorical. I loved these sculptures but found them lacking. I tried to find images of women in public that were particular. In Manhattan the only sculptures of specific women I could find were: a statue of Eleanor Roosevelt, a bust of Golda Meir, Joan of Arc (on a horse), and then, Alice in Wonderland, and Mother Goose! That was it. Three real women in all of Manhattan and then two story book characters. The same artists who made the monumental war memorials also made art for cemeteries, the original American venue for sculpture. For example, Augustus Saint Gaudens' Adams renowned monument "Adams Memorial" (1886) commissioned by Henry Adams in honor of his wife Marian Hooper Adams is in Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, D. C. and his "Sherman Monument" (1903) is at 59th Street and 5th Avenue at Central Park in New York, NY. Soon I was researching cemeteries and the "Garden" or "Rural" Cemetery Movement, as it was known, where men, women and children are specifically remembered.

In addition to correcting a glaring omission I decided to address a federal failure, the prohibition of gay marriage in the U.S. Since the Federal Government won't accept any individual states' Civil Union or Marriage Certificates for same sex couples my partner and I had lawyers draw up legal documents (wills, health care proxies and power-of-attorney, etc.) in an attempt to simulate some of the legal protections of heterosexual marriage. These documents are depressing because their only usefulness is if one of us becomes incapacitated or dies. It's not about our life together; it's about the end of it. Since I was only officially afforded was death, I decided to make an elegant and dignified monument to our relationship. I chose a nationalist form, 19th century American Neo-Classical sculpture, to address what I consider the federal failure to give gay Americans the basic human right of legal marriage.

With the Grand Arts grant, I made "Memorial To A Marriage," an over life-size 3-ton Carrara marble mortuary sculpture is a double portrait of my partner (the artist Deborah Kass) and me. I studied the Western history of sculpture, which is pre-occupied with death and remembrance, the cemeteries of Paris, and the history of dying in the United States. "Memorial To A Marriage" was installed on our actual burial plot in Woodlawn Cemetery, designed as America's Pere Lachaise, in Bronx, New York. Deitch Projects represented the project and assisted in the purchase of our plot in Woodlawn Cemetery where it will be on view through eternity. The marble statue has just been moved in doors to protect it from the elements and a bronze version is there now. The statue addresses issues of lesbian invisibility, gay marriage, love and loss, and power and status. In death I make official my "marriage" which is still not legal while we are alive.