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Beyond the Walls: Artist Patricia Cronin Finds Inspiration in Aphrodite

Step inside the enchanting world of Aphrodite, reimagined by the artist Patricia Cronin at CHART Gallery in New York City.

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On view in New York through October 18 is **Patricia Cronin**'s exhibition "Army of Love" at **CHART Gallery**. Marking her first solo exhibition in Manhattan in nearly a decade, the show is inspired by Aphrodite. Reimagined by Cronin, the mythological figure is seen through a contemporary lens, drawing on archaeologist **Iris Love**'s 1969 discovery of the temple in Knidos, Turkey—once home to the storied **Knidian Aphrodite by Praxiteles of Athens**, the first monumental female nude that shaped depictions of the goddess of love for centuries.

Through paintings, sculptures, and watercolors, "Army of Love" shows Cronin's material use of oil, bleach, salt, marble paper, and tarps to craft ethereal sentinels that blur boundaries between past and present, public and private. By reframing the very idea of an "army," it hints to the viewer that they are a force for compassion, dignity, and care. The exhibition continues Cronin's decades-long practice of interrogating power, gender, and memory—seen in her landmark *Memorial to a Marriage* (2002), the world's first monument to marriage equality, and *Shrine for Girls* (2015), her Venice Biennale installation honoring exploited women and girls—further cementing her role as one of today's most vital feminist voices in contemporary art. *Whitewall* spoke with **Cronin** about putting together "Army of Love" and which ancient sites are calling her name this fall.

Inside "Armory of Love" at CHART Gallery



Patricia Cronin - Chart Gallery Patricia Cronin, "Army of Love," courtesy of the artist and CHART Gallery.

WHITEWALL: “Army of Love” marks your first solo exhibition in New York in nearly a decade. How does it feel to return with such a monumental installation at this moment in your career?

PATRICIA CRONIN: My last solo show in New York was “*Shrine for Girls*” at *The FLAG Art Foundation* in 2016, which followed its debut at Okwui Enwezor’s 56th Venice Biennale. That installation was about reclaiming dignity for women and girls who were exploited and murdered in Ireland, Nigeria, and India. Since then, the past decade has been turbulent. We’ve witnessed the rolling back of basic human rights many of us thought were secure—women’s bodily autonomy, LGBTQ+ rights, even voting rights. In the face of such hostility, “Army of Love” is my answer. Returning to New York with this body of work feels both urgent and defiant—it’s about summoning love as a collective force of resistance and survival.

“It’s about summoning love as a collective force of resistance and survival,”

Patricia Cronin

WW: The exhibition is inspired by Aphrodite. What drew you to revisit this goddess and her legacy through a feminist lens?

PC: After the 2016 election, I was despondent. For me, that loss signaled the fate of female ambition. Soon after, the *Tampa Museum of Art* invited me to inaugurate their “Conversations with the Collection” series, asking a contemporary artist to respond to their Antiquities collection. When I walked in and saw their first-century CE torso of Aphrodite—headless, armless, truncated—I thought, “Here’s one of the most powerful female figures of the Ancient Mediterranean world, in the birthplace of democracy, and she is literally dismembered.” At the same time, women were being pushed out of public life. I knew she was the perfect subject for me to focus my skills and imagination on.

Everyone thinks of Aphrodite as the goddess of love, sex, and beauty, but in the ancient world, she was a civic and religious authority. Entire city-states relied on her for protection and harmony—your harvest, your voyage, your marriage. That role, of female divine power integrated into public life, is what fascinates me.

Art Inspired by Aphrodite



Patricia Cronin - Chart Gallery Patricia Cronin, "Army of Love," courtesy of the artist and CHART Gallery.

WW: The discovery of the Knidos temple by Iris Love in 1969 is central to your imagery. How does this archeological history inform the visual and conceptual choices in your work?

PC: Iris Love's 1969 discovery of the Temple to Aphrodite Euploia at Knidos—on the very day humans first walked on the moon—is legendary. That temple housed Praxiteles' *Knidian Aphrodite*, the first monumental nude female figure in Western art, which became one of the most copied sculptures in antiquity. Love's discovery was a shockwave—academically, culturally, and politically.

I was struck by the timing. While men planted flags on the moon, Love uncovered a site that once honored a powerful female deity. For me, connecting Praxiteles' 4th-century BCE archetype to Arte Povera's embrace of humble materials in 1969, and to our own age of hyper-masculinity, created a perfect conceptual framework. It let me braid antiquity, feminist art history, and contemporary politics into one visual language.



Patricia Cronin - Chart Gallery Patricia Cronin, "Army of Love," courtesy of the artist and CHART Gallery.

WW: You incorporate materials like bleach, salt, tarps, and marble contact paper. What role do these choices play in reimagining classical archetypes for today?

PC: Arte Povera fascinated me, but most of its celebrated practitioners were men—working with “poor” materials yet ignoring women’s domestic labor. I wanted to reclaim that terrain. So I turned to materials women know: bleach for cleaning, salt for cooking, fabric and plastic tarps for protecting belongings, marble contact paper for lining drawers.

My assemblage paintings span the hierarchy of materials: traditional hand-painted acrylic on canvas layered with dye-sublimation prints of paint traces on sheer fabric, all anchored by utilitarian tarps. The works hold echoes of sails, veils, and protective coverings. They synthesize Aphrodite’s ancient power with materials from our everyday lives, insisting that women’s work belongs in the conversation with classical grandeur.

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Freeing the Audience of Restrictions



Patricia Cronin - Chart Gallery Patricia Cronin, “Army of Love,” courtesy of the artist and CHART Gallery.

WW: The works sometimes “flutter and float free of their supports,” dissolving boundaries between past and present, public and private. Can you share how this sense of movement connects to your vision of love and power?

PC: I wanted to liberate painting from the stretcher bar. Letting them flutter like sails evokes the ancient harbor cities where temples to Aphrodite stood. It also felt urgent to counter our present age of restriction—restrictions on women, on queer lives, on freedom itself.

These works are activated by air and human presence. As they move, they remind us: your presence matters. In a time of so much noise, I wanted subtlety—a contemplative, bodily encounter. Our small movements—like the flutter of fabric—connect us with centuries of human gesture and ritual. That’s love as resilience, and love as power.

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Patricia Cronin

WW: “Army of Love” reframes the idea of heroism—not as conquest, but as compassion and care. How do you envision this message resonating in our current cultural and political climate?

PC: Mary Beard’s analysis of Sappho’s “Hymn to Aphrodite” was pivotal for me. Sappho takes the language of male epic heroism and redirects it toward female desire, subverting the heroic order by applying the rhetoric of war to the pursuit of love.

I wanted to do something similar—redefine an “army” not as conquest and domination, but as collective care, dignity, and safety. In a climate so hostile to women and LGBTQ+ people, focusing on a female deity’s cult of authority felt radical. To me, *Army of Love* is a way of saying: our survival depends not on domination, but on compassion.

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WW: Your practice has long been rooted in feminist and queer perspectives on art history. How does this exhibition build upon or diverge from your past projects?

PC: My work has always challenged who gets represented, remembered, and revered. With *Memorial to a Marriage*, I insisted on lesbian visibility in monumental form before marriage equality was legal. With *Shrine for Girls*, I memorialized anonymous victims of gender violence. With “Army of Love,” I return to classical archetypes, but through a feminist queer lens that subverts certainty.

By flattening, repeating, and layering silhouettes of Aphrodite, I resist the sexualized three-dimensional nude that has defined art history. These are feminist and queer gestures—but they’re also expansive. I want anyone open to human experience, beyond fear of women or lesbians, to find resonance.



Patricia Cronin. *Memorial to a Marriage* at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, NY, courtesy of Patricia Cronin.

WW: What conversations do you hope “Army of Love” sparks for audiences encountering your work for the first time, as well as for those who have followed your career over the past three decades?

PC: Honestly, I needed to feel safe. Every morning in my studio, I’m greeted by eight-foot-tall female figures from antiquity, and that gives me refuge. Only when I’m not in survival mode can my imagination feel free. I hope audiences—whether first-time viewers or those who’ve followed me for thirty years—feel that safety too. Even a moment of respite in this hetero-patriarchal culture is valuable. I want my work to be that breath, that space where love and dignity prevail.

“I needed to feel safe,”

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WW: What are you working on this fall?

PC: This fall, I’ll be in Ireland at the **National Gallery** and the **Irish Museum of Modern Art**, speaking about *Memorial to a Marriage* on the tenth anniversary of the Marriage Equality referendum. Then, on sabbatical from Brooklyn College, I’ll travel to Portugal, Spain, Italy, and especially Greece for research. Athens and the ancient sites are calling me.

Because misogyny, homophobia, and lesbophobia remain constant, the content of my life’s work is sadly secure. But Aphrodite—through her many archetypes—offers a vehicle for endless formal and conceptual experiments. I plan to keep following her lead.

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