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MFA Integrated Master of Fine Arts

Téras

TRANSITION OF MONSTROUS SYMBOLISMS

An artistic and theoretical exploration of the transition of τέρατα/monsters into the contemporary.

MESTRADO EM ARTE E CIÊNCIA DO VIDRO E DA CERÂMICA

Universidade NOVA de Lisboa | Universidade de Lisboa

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MESTRADO EM ARTE E CIÊNCIA DO VIDRO E DA CERÂMICA

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Téras: Transition of monstrous symbolisms, Uncovering the evolution of ancient greek symbols of τέρατα/monsters into the contemporary.

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Master Thesis by Dafni (Daphne) Klagkou
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τέρας

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RESUMO

Os símbolos e a mitologia da Grécia Antiga desempenharam um papel fundamental na formação da civilização ocidental, influenciando a arte, a filosofia, a literatura e a cultura. Com o passar do tempo, estes símbolos não só foram preservados, como também se transformaram, adaptando-se a novos contextos e adquirindo significados diversos. Enquanto artista nascida na Grécia, testemunhei de perto a relação complexa e, muitas vezes, contraditória que a sociedade grega contemporânea mantém com estes símbolos antigos. Embora profundamente enraizados na nossa identidade cultural, estes símbolos são frequentemente reinterpretados, comercializados e até mesmo mal utilizados, tanto na Grécia como no mundo ocidental.

A minha investigação artística explora as conexões intrincadas e as forças culturais que contribuíram para a evolução da percepção destes símbolos. Através desta exploração, procuro compreender como os seus significados mudaram ao longo do tempo e como continuam a ressoar na sociedade contemporânea. Recorro a diversas disciplinas — arqueologia, história da arte, filosofia, psicologia e cultura pop — com o objetivo de fornecer uma análise abrangente do peso simbólico e cultural que estes ícones antigos carregam nos dias de hoje. A pesquisa pretende explorar vários contextos de monstruosidade e contextualizá-los através da arte. A transição dos símbolos estende-se também à transformação do significado da monstruosidade e às formas contemporâneas de a expressar. Paisagens híbridas, realidades monstruosas, a cosmogonia da arte e os τέρατα unem-se para formar uma imagem da realidade contemporânea.

Esta abordagem multidisciplinar ganha vida através da experimentação prática com materiais e técnicas. O meu trabalho integra tanto os elementos físicos como os conceptuais destes símbolos, investigando o seu poder duradouro e a sua fragilidade. O culminar desta investigação materializa-se em duas exposições, Téras e The Paths We Cross, onde estes conceitos se concretizam através da justaposição de formas tradicionais e contemporâneas. Estas exposições servem como uma exploração visual da tensão intemporal entre preservação e transformação, convidando o público a refletir sobre o legado dinâmico da mitologia grega antiga no mundo actual.

ABSTRACT

Ancient Greek symbols and mythology have played a foundational role in shaping Western civilization, influencing art, philosophy, literature, and culture. Over time, these symbols have not only been preserved but have also transformed, adapting to new contexts and acquiring diverse meanings. As a Greek artist, I have witnessed firsthand the complex and often contradictory relationship that modern Greek society maintains with these ancient symbols. While deeply rooted in our cultural identity, these symbols are frequently subject to reinterpretation, commodification, and even misuse, both within Greece and across the Western world.

My artistic research delves into the intricate connections and cultural forces that have contributed to the evolving perception of these symbols. Through this exploration, I seek to investigate how their meanings have shifted over time and how they continue to resonate in contemporary society. By drawing from various disciplines—archaeology, art history, philosophy, psychology, and pop culture—I aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the symbolic and cultural weight these ancient icons carry today. The research aims to explore various contexts of monstrosity and contextualize them through art. The transition of symbols also extends to the shift in the meaning of monstrosity and the contemporary ways of expressing it. Hybrid landscapes, monstrous realities, the cosmogony of art and terata, come together to form a picture of contemporary reality.

This multidisciplinary approach is brought to life through practical experimentation with materials and techniques. My work integrates both the physical and conceptual elements of these symbols, investigating their enduring power and fragility. The culmination of this research is presented in two exhibitions, *Téras* and *The Paths We Cross*, where these concepts materialize through the juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary forms. These exhibitions serve as a visual exploration of the timeless tension between preservation and transformation, inviting viewers to reflect on the dynamic legacy of ancient Greek mythology in the modern world.

keywords: Ancient Greece, art, mythology, monsters, ceramics and glass

INDEX

INTRODUCTION.....	8
METHODOLOGY.....	9
ARTISTIC CREATIONS-WORKS.....	11
1. IDENTITY OF A MONSTER.....	19
WHAT IS A MONSTER?.....	19
CHARACTERISTICS FOR IDENTIFYING A MONSTER.....	20
Sphinx.....	21
New Sphinx.....	24
ARE THEY EVIL?.....	26
2. ΤΕΡΑΣ.....	27
MONSTERS IN ANCIENT GREECE.....	27
COSMOGONY	27
Cosmogony in Art.....	27
Ancient Greek Cosmogony.....	28
The BIRTH.....	29
LANDSCAPE OF THE MIND and ETHNOGRAPHY.....	30
Roda da Vida.....	31
3. MYTHS AND SYMBOLS.....	34
THE IMPORTANCE OF MYTHS AND SYMBOLS.....	34
Janus.....	35
TRANSITION OF MYTHOLOGICAL SYMBOLS	36
Medusa.....	37
CONTEMPORARY MONSTERS.....	38
Past Monsters.....	38
Present Monsters.....	39
Future Monsters.....	39
4. IDENTITY OF A NATION.....	41
RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR OWN HISTORY.....	41
Penetrated.....	42
MONSTROUS REALITIES	44
The HILL.....	46
INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF SYMBOLS.....	48
Vase Installation.....	50
5. THE IMAGE OF SYMBOLS.....	52
REPRESENTATIONS OF MONSTERS IN ARTIFACTS.....	52
The Floor.....	53
MATERIAL AND COLOUR	54
The case of Material.....	54
The case of Colour.....	56
CONCLUSION.....	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	61

List of Figures

ARTISTIC

CREATIONS-WORKS.....	11
Figure 1. Overview of the solo exhibition <i>Teras</i> by the artist Daphne Klagkou in Cisterna FBAUL.....	11
Figure 2. view of the solo exhibition <i>Teras</i> by the artist Daphne Klagkou in Cisterna FBAUL.....	11
Figure 3. view of solo exhibition <i>Teras</i>	12
Figure 4. view of the solo exhibition <i>Teras</i> by the artist Daphne Klagkou in Cisterna FBAUL.....	12
Figure 5. <i>The Hill</i> in the solo exhibition <i>Teras</i>	13
Figure 6. <i>Janus</i> in the solo exhibition <i>Teras</i>	13
Figure 7. <i>Janus</i> in the solo exhibition <i>Teras</i>	14
Figure 8. view of the artworks in the exhibition <i>The Paths We Cross</i> in Galeria FBAUL.....	15
Figure 9. view of the artworks in the exhibition <i>The Paths We Cross</i> in Galeria FBAUL.....	15
Figure 10. view of <i>Untitled</i> artwork in the exhibition <i>The Paths We Cross</i> in Galeria FBAUL.....	16
Figure 11. view of <i>Untitled</i> artwork in the exhibition <i>The Paths We Cross</i> in Galeria FBAUL.....	17
Figure 12. view of the <i>Erinya</i> artwork in the exhibition <i>The Paths We Cross</i>	17
Figure 13. view of the <i>Roda da Vida</i> artwork in the exhibition <i>The Paths We Cross</i> in Galeria FBAUL.....	18
Figure 14 view of the <i>Roda da Vida</i> artwork in the exhibition <i>The Paths We Cross</i> in Galeria FBAUL.....	18
1. IDENTITY OF A MONSTER.....	19
Figure 1.1 Detail of marble capital and finial in the form of a sphinx. Greek, Archaic period, ca. 530 B.C. H. with acroterion.....	21
Figure 1.2. Two guardian sphinxes sit on a marble lintel at the entrance to the tomb at <i>Amphipolis</i>	22
Figure 1.3 <i>Nature Study</i> , biscuit porcelain (1996, cast 2004) by Louise Bourgeois.....	23
Figures 1.4 Artwork the NEW SPHINX, glass sculpture, bolts, construction tables, aluminium planks.....	24
Figures 1.5 Artwork the NEW SPHINX, glass sculpture, bolts, construction tables, aluminium planks.....	25
Figures 1.6 Artwork the NEW SPHINX, glass sculpture, bolts, construction tables, aluminium planks.....	25
Figure 1.7 <i>Hercules and Lernaean</i> on black-figure amphora app. 525 BC.....	26
Figure 1.8 detail medieval apocalyptic monster from a mural in Czech Republic castle.....	26
2. ΤΕΡΑΣ.....	27
Figure 2.1 view of <i>THE BIRTH</i>	29
Figure 2.2 detail of <i>THE BIRTH</i> , inside view.....	29
Figure 2.3 Artwork <i>Roda da Vida</i> , ceramic sculpture, earthenware, glazes, glass flowers.....	31
Figure 2.4 detail <i>Roda da Vida</i> , ceramic sculpture, earthenware, glazes, glass flowers.....	32
Figure 2.5 <i>Girl buried with a crown of ceramic flowers</i> . Patras, 300-400 B.C.....	32
3. MYTHS AND SYMBOLS.....	34
Figure 3.1. View of <i>Janus</i> in Cisterna.....	35
Figure 3.2 View of <i>Janus</i>	36
Figure 3.3 <i>Medusa</i> artwork from the exhibition <i>THE PATHS WE CROSS</i> , ceramic wall piece, special effect glazes, chains.....	37
4. IDENTITY OF A NATION.....	41
Figure 4.1 <i>Penetrated</i> artwork in Cisterna.....	42
Figure 4.2 view of the <i>Parthenon</i> under construction.....	43

Figure 4.3 detail of <i>Penetrated</i>	44
Figure 4.4. <i>Digital representation from the project THE LINE</i>	45
Figure 4.5. Artwork THE HILL , glass flowers, carbon fiber, metall.....	46
Figure 4.6 Details of the artwork THE HILL , glass flowers, carbon fiber, metal.....	47
Figure 4.7 <i>Tomb of Agamemnon, between 1300 and 1250 BCE in Mycenae, Greece</i>	48
Figure 4.8 VASE INSTALLATION,, glass blown vases, ready-made vases, enamels, lakers,mirroring.....	50
Figure 4.9 Vase details	50
Figure 4.10 Vase details.....	51
Figure 4.11 VASE INSTALLATION,, glass blown vases,ready-made vases, enamels ,lakers, mirroring.....	51
5. THE IMAGE OF SYMBOLS.....	52
Figure 5.1 <i>The Floor, terracotta tiles, terra sigillata, metallic base</i>	53
Figure 5.2 detail of Sirens chasing a satyr. Neck amphora, Clay, 525-500 BC. Taken at the Altes Museum, Berlin.....	53
Figure 5.3 example of raised floor.....	54
Figure 5.4 <i>The artist glass blowing</i>	54
Figure 5.5 <i>hand-built ceramic going into the firing kiln</i>	55
Figure 5.6 Carbon fiber fabric and glass details.....	55
Figure 5.7 “Peplos” Kore. Marble original: Greek, c. 530 BC, Akropolis Museum, Athens. Color reconstructions by Vinzenz Brinkmann and Ulrike Koch-Brinkmann.....	56
Figure 5.8 <i>Apollo with a Kithara, 2019-2022 , Jeff Koons artwork in Hydra</i>	56
Figure 5.9 Glaze details of Medusa.....	57
Figure 5.10.Janus under led lighting.....	57
Figure 5.11 mirroring with silver nitrate.....	58
Figure 5.12 .mirroring with lacquer.....	58
Figures 5.13 Artwork the NEW SPHINX, glass sculpture, bolts, construction tables, aluminium planks.....	59

INTRODUCTION

Monsters tell us stories, give us lessons and transform meaning in essential and existential ways. From the birth of civilization to the contemporary pop culture monsters, the anomalous, the unfamiliar and terror have always been with us, accompanying human existence. It is not unfathomed that artists have been interested in the psychological, cultural and societal impact of these creatures. Monsters have always pushed boundaries, either by challenging the opponent/hero to overcome their struggles, or by translating the unfamiliar into words, to bring it down within the limits of the human capabilities. In a similar way, contemporary artists have been continuing the 20th-century tradition of pushing artistic boundaries, by utilizing global influences, cultural diversity, and rapid technological advancements in their work with the use of various materials, techniques, ideas, and themes.

Accordingly, my research into my personal interests, themes, and “hunger” led me to the subject of monsters. As a Greek artist, it is natural that my references stem from ancient Greek mythology and folklore. However, when dealing with symbols of such far-reaching significance—studied by academics around the world and deeply embedded in Western civilization—an extensive exploration is required. While I don’t support the rigid approach sometimes taken by academia in studying or teaching ancient Greek subjects, where awe is projected onto “untouchable” symbols, I still believe in the importance of understanding the symbols and stories that we, as artists, choose to explore. Hence, this thesis draws on multiple disciplines, ranging from archaeology and art history to psychology, philosophy, and pop culture. The comparative nature of the research approaches the subject from all angles, guiding my artwork toward a cohesive concept. The culmination of this theoretical and practical artistic research resulted in a solo exhibition titled *Téras* and participation in a three-woman show, *The Paths We Cross*.

The solo exhibition *Téras* introduces my world of hybrid works and monstrous realities, created through a blend of traditional and contemporary methods. Ceramic and glass pieces come to life with the use of modern materials, concealing messages and interpretations as they search for their place in today’s world. The artworks found their “home” in the Cisterna of FBAUL, a site of historical significance, as though unearthed in an archaeological discovery, invoking the idea of re-discovering the *τέρας*. Additionally, in my participation in the exhibition *The Paths We Cross*, ceramic works with glass details, following a more object-focused logic, engage in a dialogue with the works of two other ceramic artists and their own cultural interpretations.

The term *τέρας* (monster) is intertwined with numerous symbols and myths that date back to ancient times, evolving into folklore that persists in contemporary contexts. Its associations can offer insights into current social, political, and human issues, and it has been extensively used in art. Monsters have been created since the dawn of civilization, and the quest to understand their essence has been a constant intellectual pursuit throughout history, making it a compelling subject for artistic exploration. Today, we find ourselves once again questioning what defines a monster and reflecting on our own ways of thinking. My personal journey of exploring my identity led me to use familiar symbols and concepts of monstrosity as a way of expressing my worldview. Thus, it is important to attempt to define what a monster is, identify its characteristics, and articulate my perspective on the subject, particularly the cultural monsters that captivate my interest.

The symbols and mythology of Ancient Greece have exerted a significant influence on Western civilization. They have not only been preserved, but have also evolved to acquire new meanings. As a Greek artist, I have witnessed first-hand the complex dynamics of modern Greek society with these symbols, its questions of identity and its relationships with the rest of the West. The intricate connections and forces that have shaped our current understanding have resulted in a transition of symbols and the creation of new images with different purposes. In this research, I aim to unravel the complex and intricate relationships and concepts surrounding the subject, inform my artistic practice, and connect the conceptual with the practical investigation.

METHODOLOGY

During the research of the thesis multiple methods were used and the conclusions were drawn by making comparative and semiotic analysis. Such a complex subject requires the use of multiple sources, disciplines and methods of review to create a tapestry satisfying enough to provide conclusions. Deducing an enlightened way of viewing and thinking, when encountered with symbols that transcend in contemporary times and contemporary art, is a challenging task.

The literature research was extended to multiple disciplines, from history literature to ethnography studies, pop culture and art texts. The academic world has been fascinated with the ancient Greek world and mythology for hundreds of years, resulting in a big pool of research, dissertations and articles to choose from. A literature review was inevitable and an important part of the thesis research. Literature texts are often used in the arts as either a starter point or a provider of context. My own artistic process relies a lot on reading to get ideas, needed information or to spark a conversation that can provide new directions. Alongside the documentary and bibliographical research, providing insight to the process.

In addition, a semiotics approach was taken for quite an amount of the research. The world is full of signs and symbols, from still-standing artifacts to broadcasts by contemporary media. Semiotics, as defined by the University of Westminster, is a theory that can be used to uncover hidden meanings in the messages through 'Decoding'. We all practice semiotics every day because we are always unconsciously interpreting the meaning of signs around us. These signs allow us to navigate our daily life and society as a whole, and in this case it allows the researcher to dig deeper into the hidden connotations and significance of the monsters (τέρατα). Furthermore, producing and interpreting art is a process of "decoding as well". Experimenting with symbols, imagery and materials means creating a puzzle of semiotic observations and connections. The 'play' of using multiple sources to end up with a "whole"/ finished artwork derives from semiotic thought and instinctive thought processes.

Since the questions were based on my need to create art that reflects my thoughts and worries, the thesis is heavily involved with art-based research. Arts-based research includes various methods and strategies that incorporate artistic practices into the investigative process. These approaches stem from the recognition that life and our experiences are complex, and that art provides unique ways of understanding the world through sensory and emotional, as well as intellectual, engagement. This type of research helped to explore the topics within the subject, like social and anthropological issues, aesthetics e.t.c. A key characteristic of this method is the emphasis on eliciting aesthetic responses. The final solo exhibition is the direct result of the investigation manifested in tangible objects, aiming to create a dialogue with the viewer and elicit emotions that reside within us, birthed thousands of years ago.

The steps of an art based research start with experimentation, which provides visual results that are then pondered upon. After a rigorous reflective analysis, the project execution begins. Specifically, a critical element of my art process is the investigation of fine arts through the lens of traditional crafts. Glass and ceramics are traditional crafts that date back to ancient and even prehistoric times. The long history of the materials is heavily connected with household objects and decorations, thus evolving a method, but not necessarily a methodology. The crafts aim to maintain knowledge and skills that are passed down from generation to generation or through apprenticeship, while fine arts attempt to deconstruct and question tradition. Employing these materials to produce visual arts means to redefine their abilities and form, creating a coexistence in which tradition and skill is a powerful tool for contemporary storytelling.

The key difference between art methodology and science methodology is the goal of the end result. Art doesn't need to provide a true statement at the end, while science can only be factual. Art evokes emotions and thoughts that can not be measured to be true or not. So, even though scientific

multidisciplinary research is part of my process, it aims to support and provide stimulus and information to my concept, but not to provide a universal truth.

Comparative thinking was applied throughout the investigation, needed by the nature of the research itself. A research method, quite suitable to the subject of the thesis, since the birth of that cross-cultural and comparative research is rooted in the scientific spirit that emerged in Greece in the 6th century and the profound appreciation for knowledge and learning characteristic of the 5th century, as Stavros Moutsios (2018) contends. This development reflects the rise of episteme and philo-sophia—a love for knowledge pursued independently of material gain. Episteme, as an intellectual activity within the realm of logos, signified a departure from cognitive closure, promoting empirical inquiry, logical argumentation, and the pursuit of truth. The high regard for intellectual endeavors fostered a genuine curiosity about other cultures, which has remained central to comparative inquiry.

Furthermore, the Greek approach to comparative research was driven by the philosophical and political questioning that typified the democratic polis. From the Milesians to the Sophists, Greek philosophers scrutinized their own cultural representations and cognitive traditions. As Herodotus' *Histories* illustrate, exploring the traditions of other peoples was an activity intertwined with the ethos of philosophical critique inherent in Greek democratic life. This scrutiny of Greek laws, institutions, and associated values and practices (such as isegoria and parrhesia) was part of a broader effort by early historians to reflect on their own society by studying others. Following in their footsteps, the thesis owed to look with the same empirical inquiry and logical argumentation at the “monstrous” symbols of today and connect the meanings and connotations that evolved or got saturated through time.

ARTISTIC CREATIONS-WORKS

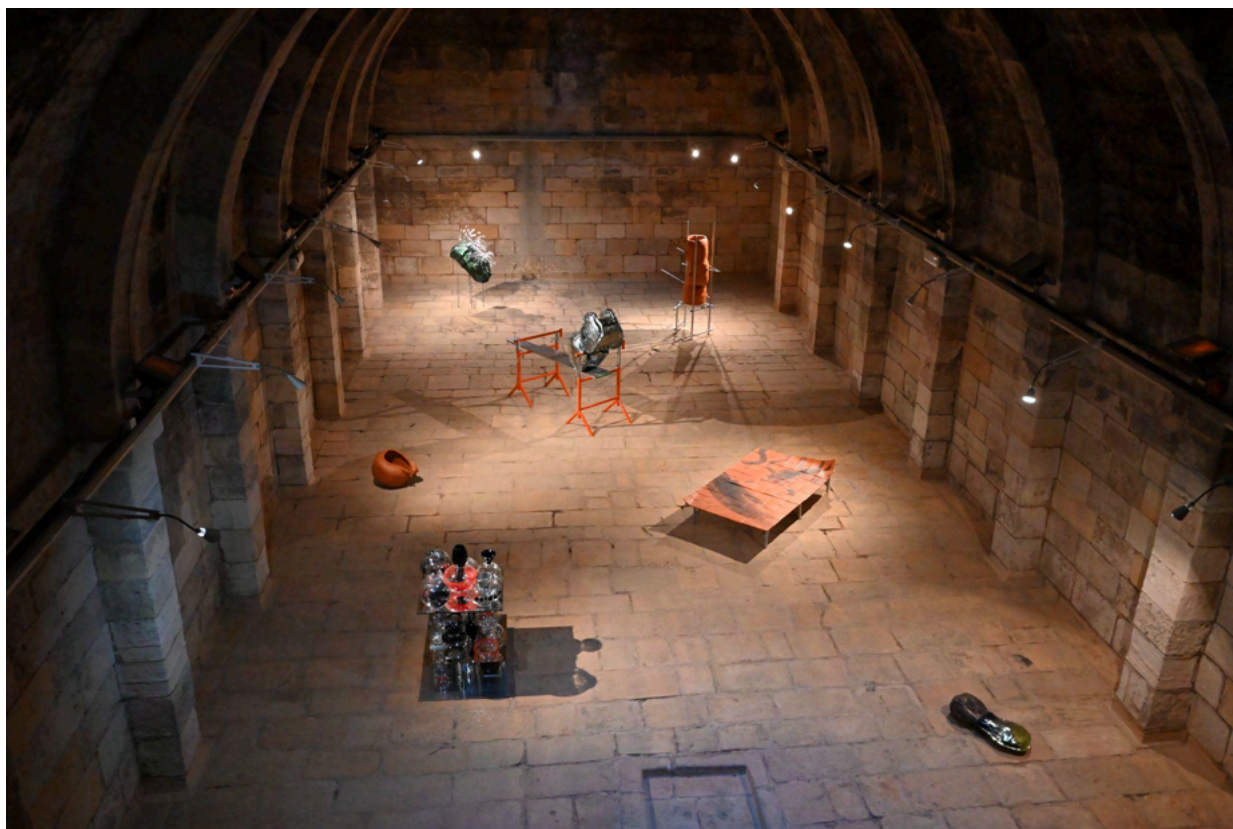


Figure 1. Overview of the solo exhibition *Teras* by the artist Daphne Klagkou in Cisterna FBAUL, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 2. view of the solo exhibition *Teras* by the artist Daphne Klagkou in Cisterna FBAUL, Photo by Daphne Klagkou

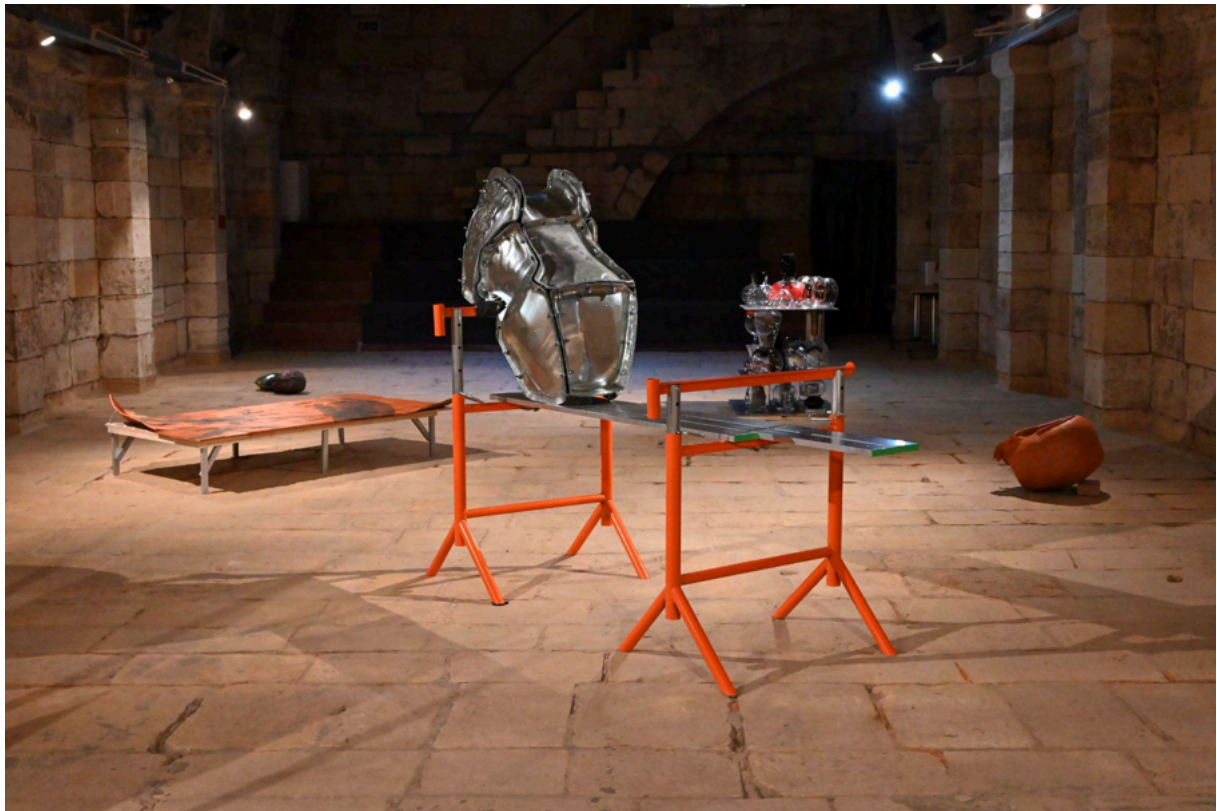


Figure 3. view of solo exhibition *Teras*, Photo by Daphne Klagkou.



Figure 4. view of the solo exhibition *Teras* by the artist Daphne Klagkou in Cisterna FBAUL, Photo by Daphne Klagkou

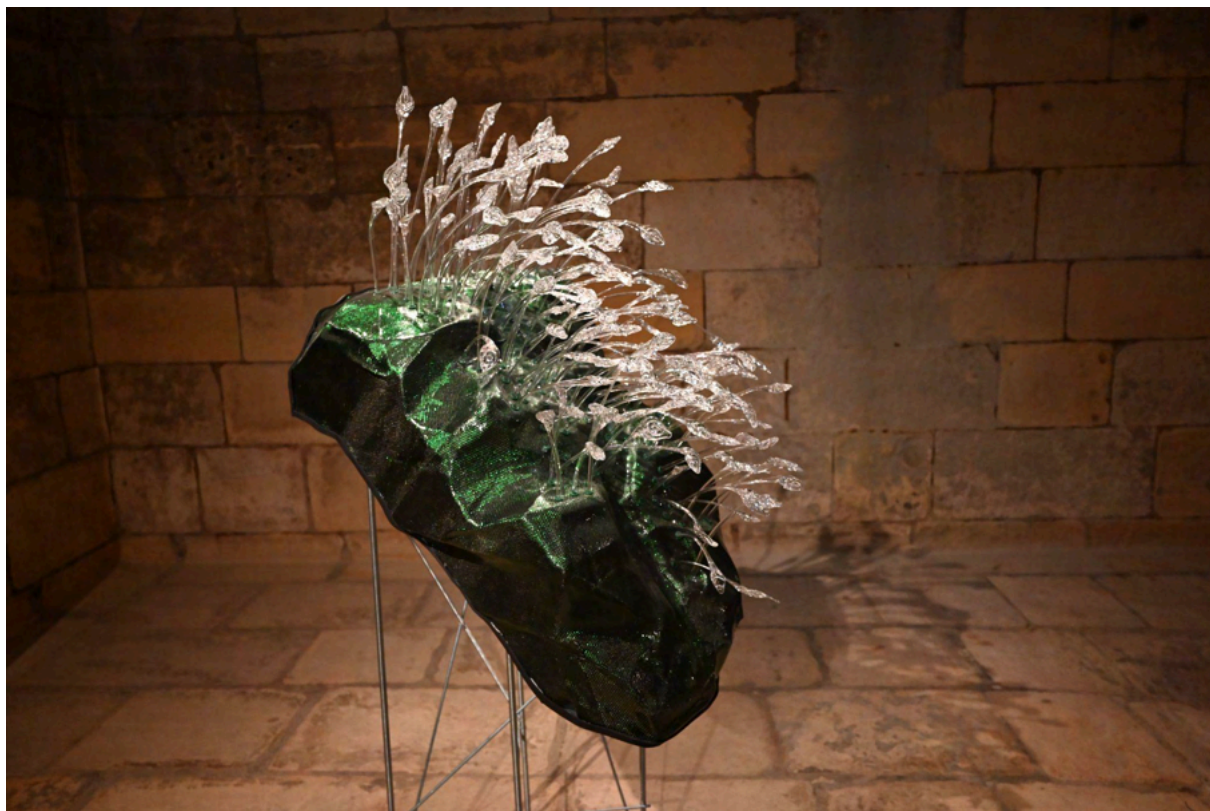


Figure 5. *The Hill* in the solo exhibition *Teras*, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 6. *Janus* in the solo exhibition *Teras*, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 7. Janus in the solo exhibition *Teras*, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 8. view of the artworks in the exhibition *The Paths We Cross* in Galeria FBAUL, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 9. view of the artworks in the exhibition *The Paths We Cross* in Galeria FBAUL,, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 10. view of *Untitled* artwork in the exhibition *The Paths We Cross* in Galeria FBAUL, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 11. view of *Untitled* artwork in the exhibition *The Paths We Cross* in Galeria FBAUL, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 12. view of the *Erinya* artwork in the exhibition *The Paths We Cross* in Galeria FBAUL, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 13. view of the *Roda da Vida* artwork in the exhibition *The Paths We Cross* in Galeria FBAUL, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 14. view of the *Roda da Vida* artwork in the exhibition *The Paths We Cross* in Galeria FBAUL, Photo by Daphne Klagkou

CHAPTER 1

IDENTITY OF A MONSTER

"reveal(s) more about what is inside man than what is outside"
Dowden (1992:133)

WHAT IS A MONSTER

Monsters are a universal concept dating back to antiquity, appearing in every culture and society, in artifacts, texts and imagery. All monsters are spawned by the human fear of the unknown and need to understand human nature itself by displacing it in unhuman-like entities. Man's attempts at gaining understanding, and a modicum of control over irrational experiences manifests into stories of creatures that seem relative to humans but have uncanny characteristics.

Nevertheless, defining monsters proves to be a challenging endeavor, extending beyond merely articulating their typical unearthly physical attributes or understanding the adverse psychological responses they provoke. Monsters embody both allure and aversion, occupying a complex space in human perception. To many, a monster represents an unequivocal divergence, often diametrically opposed to the esteemed figure of the 'hero' prevalent in many Western societies. Throughout history, monsters have played a pivotal epistemological role, influencing the foundational mental frameworks of various civilizations, particularly during their developmental phases. Consequently, monsters have become central figures in numerous cosmogonies across diverse cultural traditions. In this chapter we will dive into the nature of a monster and the meaning behind them.

The existence of such beastly entities seems to occur at the same time as literacy. As far as archeology can tell, the consciousness of such ideas starts with the earlier known civilizations around 3.000 B.C..(Mode, 1973). The places where first civilizations arise and obtain consciousness are Egypt and Messopotamia. In ancient Greece, there is an abundance of monstrous mythological creatures.

The Greek word *teras* carries the meanings both of something unusual or out of the ordinary, and of a portent, again creating a connection between the divine. Monstrous creatures could be described as τέρας (*teras*), πέλωρ (*pelōr*), both of which can be translated as 'monster', or simply δεινός (*deinos*, 'terrible') or θαῦμα (*thauma*, 'wonder'). In the Aristotelian corpus the term *teras* is consistently used to indicate a monstrosity. Its connection with the english language can be found today with the word *teratology*, meaning the study of birth defects. The English word "monster" originates from the Latin term *monstrum*, which signifies a prodigy or omen, derived from the root *monere*, meaning to warn or reveal (Cawson, 1995). This is also linked to the verb *monstrare*, meaning "to point out, instruct, or inform" (Simpson, 1959, p.379). Consequently, in classical texts, *monstrum* is frequently associated with an "unnatural phenomenon through which the gods send warnings to mankind" (Lenfant, 1999, p.198).

These definitions highlight two common attributes assigned to monsters: first, that they serve as warnings or premonitions, often preceding cataclysmic events like earthquakes or storms; and second, that they operate beyond the purely physical realm, having a connection with the otherworldly or the divine. Our responses to monsters seem to be contradictory. The abnormality of monsters

makes them compelling because they exist when they should not, but their physical contradictions can lead to fear and disgust. This is one of the many characteristics that make their nature ambiguous. They can have an apotropaic, guarding, or informing role, yet monsters always end up dead in gruesome ways by human hands, subsequently standing as both victim and victimizer. Furthermore, monsters create a feeling of awe because they break the rules and do what humans can only dream of doing, saying yes to all that is forbidden. David D. Gilmore (2003) has clearly stated his belief that "the endless fascination with monsters derives from a complex mix of emotions and is not simply reducible to the standard Freudian twins of aggression and repression," but that they are "sources of identification and awe as well as of horror." (p.15).

CHARACTERISTICS OF A MONSTER

A monster is firstly defined by its unfamiliar and abnormal appearance and then for its "function" as an entity. Usually monsters in myths and stories are recognisable by their animal-like appearance and deformities. In this chapter the focus will be mostly on the significance of the hybrid-monsters. Hybrid monsters, the phenomenon of zoomorphism, express the interrelationship between appearance, nature and behavior. In addition, the function of the monster figure is decisive for their importance and interpretation: apotropaic entities, explanation to how the world came to be, to an existential danger to the nature of a "group", an antihero to be defeated. The characteristics of a monster can vary but have approximately been categorized through the years.

Mythological beings from various world cultures share many features, reflecting commonalities in the human mind. These similarities go beyond physical characteristics and extend to moral and behavioral traits as well. Cynocephaly, thus a creature with a dog's head, is a common anomaly through civilizations, as well as wings, horse bodies and serpent features e.t.c. As far as the function of these entities, one of the earliest identifiable functions of monsters is that of being guardians. This role remained even in later Classical and Hellenistic Greece after monsters had become well-developed as mythological characters with a complex range of functions. Grecian monsters were meaningfully influenced by the ancient Near and functioned as apotropaic beings, but also as agents of transformation – beings that assist the mythological hero, or the observer, to cross over from one state to another.

Literary interest in monsters begins with Aristotle in ancient Greece with his written work *The Generation of Animals*. When writing about unnatural anomalies, they are declared ambivalent in nature. He accepts the duality and does not reject certain creatures as monstrous anomalies, but to look for a logical explanation for the variance. In his own words: "contrary to the ordinary process of nature, but not contrary to nature in the absolute sense". So, Aristotle uses the word *teras* to describe actual cases of deformity or physical anomaly, when an offspring does not resemble its parents. For him both a child that does not resemble his parents in physical attributes, and a person that does not resemble a human or has resemblance to another species, are *terata* in the sense that both diverge from the natural type (Aristotle, Gen. an. 767a35 – 767b9).

It's not a coincidence that ethnologists call the study of imaginary creatures "cryptozoology". Mythological creatures that bear animalistic hybrid characteristics and folklore beasts can contain information about extinct animal species. The way ancient civilizations explain the existence of creatures that were unfamiliar to them, is to intertwine imaginary narratives containing anomalous beings.

Hybrid monsters as challengers to cultural taxonomy. The inventory of Greek monsters is indeed an enormous category that has transcended to today's western civilization through folklore and later through pop culture. The most familiar are known to every school child who has studied classical mythology, people around the world. The most known named monsters include, the Gorgons (wings

and snake like characteristics), Tritons (half-human sea beasts), the Satyrs and Silenoi (lustful goat-men who waylaid innocent maidens) the Centaur (frisky half-horse, half-man hybrids, depicted as oversexed if not necessarily evil) and of course the terrible Minotaur of Crete (a cursed creature with a bull's head and horns) (David D.Gilmore ,2003, p.53).

Monsters nature is birthed by the human imagination, thus a part of human nature and need. Plato (Republic 9. p. 588-589) draws an interesting picture of man as a composite creature. His nature is described as made up of human, animal and also monstrous attributes. This definition provided by Plato, makes the "human" part of the monsters even more prominent and validates their function.

Sphinx

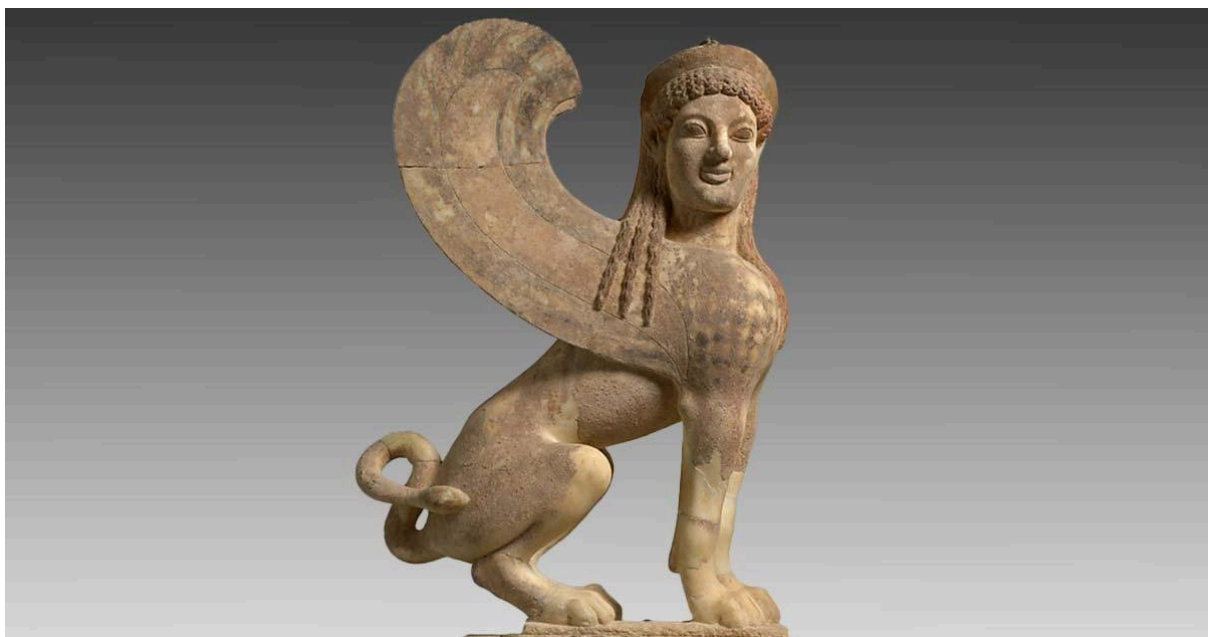


Figure 1.1. Detail of marble capital and finial in the form of a sphinx. Greek, Archaic period, ca. 530 B.C. H. with acroterion 56 1/4 in. (142.6 cm), www.metmuseum.org

The Sphinx is an intercultural creature that first appeared in Egypt and Mesopotamia, later spreading throughout the ancient world, acquiring new meanings and functions. Initially, the Sphinx's symbolism was closely tied to the pharaoh, serving as a guardian. As it spread across the East, it was tasked with protecting sacred thrones. In Greek tradition, however, the Sphinx came to embody supernatural powers that evoked fear in the archaic world.

This transition to Greek culture brought numerous changes to the Sphinx's depiction and roles. In Greece, the Sphinx became associated with death, acting as both a harbinger and witness. Additionally, there was a notable shift in gender representation. The Egyptian Sphinx was primarily male (*androsphinges*), but in Greek mythology, the Sphinx increasingly appeared as female. By the sixth century BCE, Greek depictions often featured a Sphinx with a human head or upper body, a lion's lower body, and wings. Initially, the feminine aspects were subtle, marked by the disappearance of male features like beards and helmets. By the fifth century BCE, feminine characteristics such as breasts became more pronounced, though not always present.

The Sphinx was typically portrayed as a composite creature with a woman's head and a combination of dangerous animal parts, such as a lion's claws or eagle's talons. Its nature was both chthonic (related to the underworld) and apotropaic (intended to ward off evil), which is why Sphinxes were commonly found in necropolises and sanctuaries.

Embodying the ambiguity that monsters have demonstrated throughout the ages, not all sphinxes in ancient lore were depicted as malevolent beings. Some could turn benevolent if approached correctly, guarding buried treasure or assisting with tasks such as finding missing objects, thus displaying a basic moral ambivalence. However, the majority were dangerous or hostile to humans, often lethally so. Some sphinxes terrorized entire villages or killed large numbers of people indiscriminately (Lehrer and Lehrer, 1969). A notable example is the path guardian monster that threatens Thebes in the Oedipus legend.



Figure 1.2 Two guardian sphinxes sit on a marble lintel at the entrance to the tomb at Amphipolis.
www.nationalgeographic.com

In ancient Greek mythology the Sphinx was mentioned by Homer, Hesiod and Apollodorus in different versions of ancestry, events and meanings, but the most famous version of the myth was written by Sophocles in *Oedipodia* (430-420 BC). In this version of the myth, King Laius after receiving a prophecy from the Delphic oracle that a son born to him would be the cause of his death, King Laius abandons his newborn, Oedipus. The infant is found by shepherds and taken to Corinth, where he is raised by King Polybus and Queen Merope. As Oedipus grows up and begins to doubt his parentage, he visits the oracle at Delphi, who tells him that he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. Believing Polybus and Merope to be his true parents, Oedipus decides never to return to Corinth to avoid this fate and instead ventures into the unknown. During his journey, Oedipus encounters Laius at a crossroads in Phocis. Unaware that Laius is his biological father, Oedipus kills him in a violent altercation. Continuing on, Oedipus arrives in Thebes, where the Sphinx is causing devastation. He defeats the Sphinx by solving her riddle, leading to her death. As a reward, Oedipus is granted sovereignty over Thebes and marries the widowed Queen Jocasta. Eventually, Oedipus learns that Jocasta is his mother, but this realization comes only after he has fathered four children with her and a plague has struck the city. Apollo's proclamation declares that the plague will only end when Laius' murderer is found and punished. Through questioning the blind seer Teiresias and uncovering further revelations, Oedipus finally discovers his true heritage. In despair, Jocasta hangs herself, and Oedipus blinds himself (Renger, 2013).

In the Oedipus story, the beast poses impossible riddles to passersby and kills them when they fail to answer correctly (Bulfinch, 1970). Traveler Oedipus of course answered the sphinx correctly, though with unforeseen and tragic consequences. In most such classical sources, sphinxes are depicted not only as dangerous or frightening, but as the very “embodiment of evil” (Scafella, 1987, p.180). But such monsters as sphinxes bring forth the necessary heroes to defeat them, and because such heroes make civilization by the example of taming the monster, an important concept for the existence of civilization in its whole. In fact, one may say that monsters and heroes arise simultaneously in virtually all the ancient cosmologies as paired twins, indeed as inseparable polarities of a unified system of values and ideas underlying order itself (Renger, 2013).

This scandalously liminal being, perceived as a socially intolerable existence at the threshold, symbolizes the transition, both in terms of how it is described and in terms of the mythic events that happen there. The Sphinx episode serves as the transition between the events that take place narratively and topographically outside Thebes and the events that take place inside Thebes. The Sphinx episode is the connecting point in the narrative that mythographically generates an intervening space, a threshold, a zone. It is also a critical moment, upon which “the major remaining narrative segments are symmetrically arranged, indeed, upon which they revolve, using this episode as their fulcrum: it brings the first major segment of narrated events outside Thebes (taboo 1: “exposure” and “parricide”) into a **mirror-** image relationship with the second major segment (taboo 2: “mother incest” and Oedipus’ “re- exposure”), without making the two parts identical” (Render, 2013, p.25)

Victor Turner extensively attends these transition phases, in his essay “Betwixt and Between” (1967) and in “The Ritual Process” (1969). According to Turner, the threshold phase is the most important part, since it is the backbone of the transformation from one phase into another. It is distinctive, for it is the condition of being “betwixt and between”: between and amid two precisely defined states, in a state of indeterminacy outside of socially accepted boundaries. It is characterized by general uncertainty, lack of structure, and ambiguity. People in this state are neither one thing nor another, which, especially with pubescent teenagers, often expresses itself in an extreme reduction or exaggeration in the individual’s range of social behavior. It is precisely these kinds of changes that are ritually dramatized in ceremonies. Turner explains that the “threshold state” (liminality), and these “threshold people” (border walkers), “slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and position in cultural space”. In his words: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony.” This means that all usual economic and legal relations are changed in the threshold phase, sometimes even rendered moot. Social rules belonging to the “world” from which the separation takes place as well as those belonging to the other “world” about to be introduced are no longer or not yet valid. Classifying conclusions on the position of the person or the group, either in the prior social structure or in the one that will subsequently predominate.

Additionally, the question the Sphinx asked Oedipus is of great interest itself : “τί ἐστὶν ὃ μίαν ἔχον φωνὴν τετράπους καὶ δίπους καὶ τρίπους γίνεται;—“*What is it that has a voice, and is four-, two-, and*

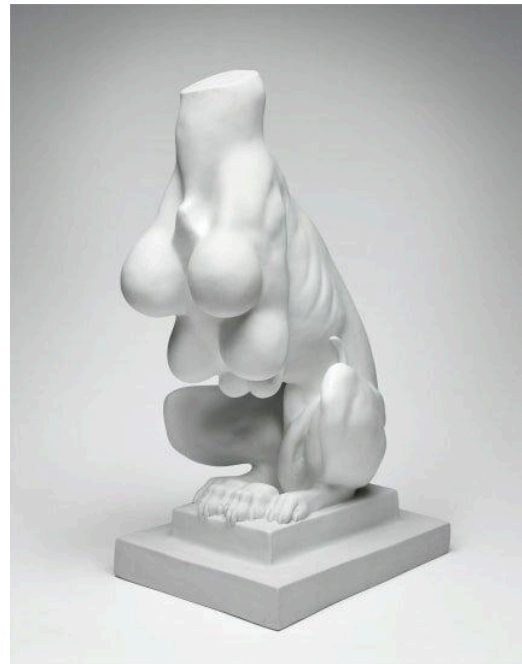


Figure 1.3. *Nature Study*, biscuit porcelain (1996, cast 2004) by Louise Bourgeois.
www.thelondonlist.com

three- footed?" (Apollod. 3.5.8 [= 3.53]). The answer to the riddle is "anthropos/ man". Oedipus, reflecting on the face of the Sphinx as it appeared before him, found himself there, realizing that he himself was the "man" of the riddle's solution. He heroically confronted the Sphinx head- on, coming right into the sphere of her power, without losing himself in it as those before him had.



Figures 1.4, Artwork the NEW SPHINX, glass sculpture, bolts, construction tables, aluminium planks. Photo by the Author

New Sphinx

My artwork "**New Sphinx**" is a life-size sculpture of a Sphinx torso, resembling the body of a ruin found at an archaeological site, with its legs, wings, and head amputated. This glass sculpture essentially functions as a mirror. Looking at it from underneath means seeing yourself in the reflection, as it is placed high up, creating a sense of awe and perspective. (pictures will be added when the artwork is finished).

As explained beforehand a monster can be identified either by its hybrid animalistic features or be some kind of bodily dysmorphia. In this instance, the Sphinx is transformed into a different kind of monster by losing its original beastly characteristics. The loss of the lion's limbs, wings, and human female head signifies the loss of the monster's original identity. As a symbol of a threshold marking an important transition from a previous state to a new one, its transformation appears to have shifted the symbol itself into its subsequent state. It no longer exists in the in-between but has evolved into a contemporary final version of itself. There is no head to pose riddles to the passersby anymore, no wings to fly away, no legs to move. Its permanent state now creates a symbol without insight to the intricate works of moving someone from one state to the next. The existential riddle that seems to impose an obstacle to the hero doesn't exist anymore, there is no monster to tame, to overcome in order to find thyself.

The only remain of self-reflection is the material of the sculpture itself; the mirror-viewer relationship doesn't demand its solution, but remains there to be discovered by initiative. So even though this new creature is disabled, thus seemingly not able to actively affect someone, its mirrored form is quietly bringing the viewer against thyself. According to Bernard McElroy (1989), "The modern grotesque is internal, not infernal, and its originator is recognized as neither god nor devil but man himself" (p.21) and he adds that "perversity is the weapon with which the individual fights for his autonomy against the stupid conformity of the average man." So, this new beastly sculpture is more internally grotesque, than physically threatening. Also, even though the mirror has its origins to antiquity, this way of three-dimensional use started quite recently, placing this artifact into the contemporary.

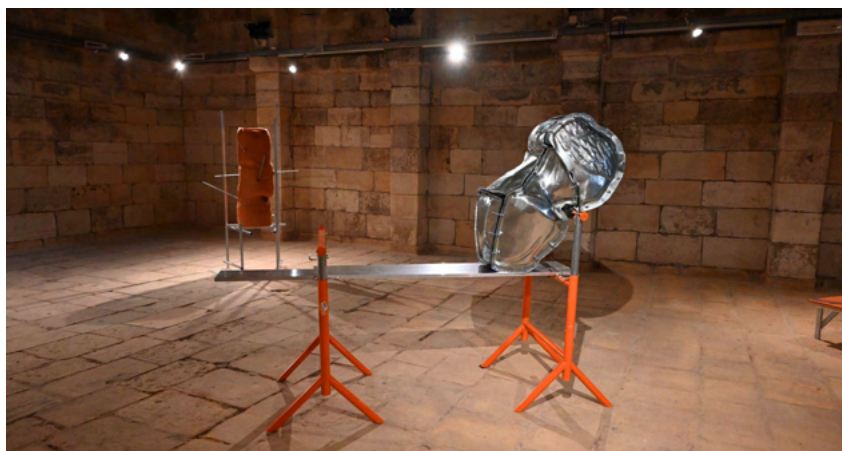


Figures 1.5 Artwork the NEW SPHINX, glass sculpture,bolts, construction tables, aluminium planks. Photo by the Author

According to Oedipus' ontological mystery - even though, what Oedipus has achieved is that he has successfully internalized the Sphinx into his psyche and eliminated her out of his sight through the rites of conquest - he has failed to realize his own ontological disparity as reflected by the Sphinx. In other words, the Sphinx constitutes a double that Oedipus fails to recognize (Yuan Yuan, 2016). This is an example of an alternative model or modified model to the conquest model in terms of internalization, brought forth by psychoanalysis. Would it be a leap to view the New Sphinx as an internalized version.

The existence of the new Sphinx raises a lot of questions to its function and purpose.If

Hegel equates the solving of the Sphinx's riddle with the advent of Greek culture, and thus sees Oedipus as the hero who raises humanity to self consciousness (Rudnytsky,1992, p.157), then what is this new monster equate to? If the Sphinx,as well as other monsters, helped civilization come to consciousness, does the "New" one help with the next step, and if so what is that? Furthermore, if the New Sphinx does not bow to a specific place, therefore does not express local fears and interpretations of the unknown, does it speak to ecumenical questions and positions of existence? As symbols always evolve in history, they are bound to express the needs of their time. Nietzsche called the sphinx "*the symbol of symbolism*", but now that this primordial symbol has been raised to a different form, has the symbolism changed? (Nietzsche, as cited in Gilmore, 2003, p.39) Even though we would expect it to change meaning, perhaps its ecumenical nature persists, holding its importance in the same manner, just expressed through different characteristics and means.



Figures 1.6 Artwork the NEW SPHINX, glass sculpture,bolts, construction tables, aluminium planks. Photo by the Author

ARE THEY EVIL?



Figure 1.7, Hercules and Lernaean on black-figure amphora app. 525 BC, www.worldhistory.com

What makes monsters not easily definable is their complexity and adhesion to multiple categories. They transgress boundaries that make humans feel uneasy and can be used as deterrents. The contemporary understanding of the collective unconscious is that a monster is the opposite of a hero, a personification of evil and its purpose is to be defeated. This simple explanation is in reality an oversimplified expression of what monsters used to be, expressed in the present by pop culture literature and film. The explanation of this devolution can be tied to many reasons, like the influence of christianity and the introduction of the concept of

evil, cultural and societal changes and today even the power of pop culture.

In Early Christianity there was the problem for Christian thinkers of reconciling monsters of the imagination with an all-knowing moral deity. The contrast of good and evil posed an intellectual dilemma for theologians similar to the question of why God allows evil in the world. The patristic fathers in the first few centuries after Christ felt very conflicted about this issue. The broad belief was that monsters did exist in reality and to view them as essentially evil, as sworn enemies of God, and, specifically in light of Christian eschatology, as descendants of Cain or agents of the Devil, they were seen as remnants of ancient pagan sinfulness that needed to be eradicated by the warriors of the cross. But the question still remained why God tolerated monsters, why they persisted into the Christian era. (Gilmore, 2013).

Here lies once again a case of the basic ambivalence of the battle between monsters and humans. The important difference, however, is that the Greek monsters were often under divine protection or were creations of the gods themselves, in contrast to the Christian ones. For the early Christians, monsters have come to symbolize pure unvarnished evil, at least at the conscious level, meaning that which is opposite to God, spiritual malignancy in a general sense. Monsters became a visual trope to visualize God's opponents, serving the Catholic cause as theological "other," equivalent to the Prince of Darkness (Friedman 1981; D. White 1991).



Figure 1.8 detail medieval apocalyptic monster from a mural in Czech Republic castle. Source: www.canterbury.ac.uk

My interpretation of "Monstrosity" is closer to the ancient Greek view, and I would even say that my stance on the matter is largely a conscious choice. Throughout my text, I mention that my personal experience and upbringing have been critical in my choice of subjects for my artwork, and thus, the subject of this thesis. The identity of monsters and their history in Greece have been influenced equally by ancient philosophy and Christian teachings. While we are taught ancient Greek myths growing up, superstitions about evil and the "evil eye" also become part of our vocabulary at a very young age. In my practice, I try not to view the "monster" with fear or judgment but to look for the needs or problems behind it, rather than seeing it as purely malicious. If monsters are evil, consequently we are evil. Either way monsters of demonic possession are imaginative expressions of loss of control. I prefer looking at the Monster with sobriety and a sense of control.

CHAPTER 2

ΤΕΡΑΣ

MONSTERS IN ANCIENT GREECE

One of the earliest identifiable functions of monsters is that of being guardians. Some of this trait remained even in later Classical and Hellenistic Greece after monsters had become well-developed as mythological characters with a complex range of functions. The Greeks sublimated many instinctive fears in the monsters of their mythology, in their satyrs and centaurs, sirens and harpies, but they also rationalized fears in another, non religious form by the invention of monstrous races and animals which they imagined to live in the East. (Wittkower, 1942)

In Greek mythology monsters are ubiquitous. In appearance and behavior they confuse and terrify. They haunt inhospitable terrain and have a habit of feeding on humans. Hybrid monsters, those that combine human and animal elements into a single form, found in the mythology, literature and art of ancient Greece, add an interesting view on the subject of mythological monster figures: "these creatures combine the familiar and the foreign, the Self and the Other, into a single complex being". (Posthumus, 2011) Additionally, they are part of the evolution of the cosmos and its progress into its current form (Gilmore, 2003).

The most known monsters of ancient Greek times are the gorgons (Medusa), the centaurs, the satyrs, the harpies and the giants. thousand other monsters have been described in artifact throughout the ancient Greek period, but these are the ones that seem to persist extensively till today and have morphed the notion of what a monster is, especially with their appearance if not their stories. Some of these creatures will be approached in my research later, the same way the Sphinx was examined and "used" as a symbol in my artmaking. Also, the importance of their origins and "place" are to be emphasized; the questions "how" and "where" will be answered as an origin and as a home.

COSMOGONY

'I don't know how God managed, I'm having a terrible time.'

John Huston on directing *The Bible*, 1964

Cosmogony in Art

The most important act when making art is essentially the creation of a new "world." According to Peter Conrad in his book, *Creation: Artists, Gods and Origins* (2007), God has been sidelined, at least in the major works of Western culture, and artists have taken his place. They see themselves as the primary creators, since they create things out of nothing. Poets can make us see the world as new with just a single word, writers create multiple worlds in their plays and portray rich believable characters in their novels. People create worlds and destroy worlds; this is reflected in our art.

Historically, in Europe a new way of thinking was developed from the Renaissance, when artists began to celebrate their creative abilities, to Romanticism, when the myth of the artist as being

free to transcend boundaries. Distinctly, Nietzsche and Wagner saw themselves as rivals of God. Nowadays, whether the artist sees themselves as a vessel for God's creation, opposes God's already perfect design by committing sacrilege, or creates art as a "Creator" themselves, the end result is probably the same: the birth of a new world.

Making art could probably be considered a cosmogony itself. Carl Jung (1960/1981) has said that "a work of art is clearly not a symptom but a genuine creation," and that "a creative achievement can only be understood on its own merit" (p702). Shouldn't something be regarded as an independent existential whole if it can only be valued by its own rules?

Ancient Greek Cosmogony

Subsequently, since the explanation of the beginning seems to be a primal question, all religions have a theory of explaining how the world came to be, their own cosmogony. *Cosmogony*, is a theory or story of the origin and development of the universe, the solar system, or the earth-moon system. An explanation of the beginning of everything. In Ancient Greece Hesiod's *Theogony* is the first known Greek mythical cosmogony. The *Theogony* constitutes an attempt to understand the cosmos as the product of a genealogical evolution and a process of individuation which ultimately achieves its telos under the tutelage of Zeus (Straus Clay, 1993)

Hesiod's *Theogony* (Θεογονία) is a poem describing the origins and genealogies of the Greek gods, composed c. 730–700 BC. (written in the Epic dialect of Ancient Greek and contains 1022 lines). It is a large-scale synthesis of a vast variety of local Greek traditions concerning the gods, organized as a narrative that tells how they came to be and how they established permanent control over the cosmos. It is the first known Greek mythical cosmogony. The initial state of the universe is chaos, a dark indefinite void considered a divine primordial condition from which everything else appeared. Theogonies are a part of Greek mythology which embodies the desire to articulate reality as a whole; this inclination towards universalization laid the groundwork for subsequent speculative theoretical endeavors.

Within this poem with the genesis of the cosmos, the beginning of monsters is happening simultaneously. So, in the consciousness of the Greek people monsters existed from the beginning of the world. Gaia and Pontus produced children of monstrous nature, who themselves produced even more terata. The importance of their creation is substantial, thus the decision of analyzing it this far. Since the monsters symbolize important thoughts, worries and inclinations of humanity, the fact of the birth of monsters happening with the origin of the world, indicates that all artistic concerns around those same issues can be recognized as a primordial process. Additionally, an interesting observation is that the timeline of Hesiod's recordings is mixed and sometimes births of parents and children seem to happen at the same time or with the wrong order. These anachronistic descriptions of earlier phases of cosmic evolution, give the *Theogony* as a whole a double perspective in which being and becoming are intertwined.

Theogony is my personal base on creating my own world through my artmaking for my exhibition *Teras*. My Greek upbringing and experiences are the keyline of my decision to engage with the Greek monstrous mythology and its birth. While the myths and stories, or even some traditions related to them have endured to contemporary Greece, they have also evolved and can carry different meanings, as it will be analyzed extensively later in the text. Some of those monstrous symbols and their importance provide a great starting point for me to express my own opinions and build my artistic world. Although this approach may seem arbitrary, especially given the rigor the academic world demands in the use and analysis of myths, art itself is inherently arbitrary to some extent. My own identity and familiarity with the concepts give me permission to "play around" and create something new with them.

The BIRTH



Figure 2.1. view of *THE BIRTH*, Photo by the author



Figure 2.2. detail of *THE BIRTH*, inside view, Photo by the Author

As understood so far, the importance of the birth of a cosmos lies not just in the details of the gods and creatures that constitute it, but in the process that leads to the creation of the theory that shapes it. My artwork *The BIRTH* might seem out of place at first glance with the theme of terata. This artwork is not about a contemporary version of a monster or a monstrous reality, but the creation itself.

A deformed type of vase/vessel lies on the ground, like a forgotten relic or even a discovered artifact. Looking down its opening resembles gazing like inside a big wound. The rime has been torn down, revealing a mirror sphere. This peculiar finding looks back at the viewer with their

own deformed reflection. As the light comes through the rim the disfigured image of yourself looks like it is facing you through a cave. It is apparent that there is repetition in the use of the mirror in my artworks due to its incredibly powerful suggestions. Nietzsche in *Daybreak* (1881) offers his own interpretation of the traditional symbolism of a mirror, suggesting that any distortion seen in a reflection is not the fault of the mirror itself, but rather a distortion within the self that gazes into it.

It has been commented by viewers before that the way the rim bursts in half resembles a vagina and that the sphere could even be a pearl. Whether it is depicting a literal birth or a treasure hidden in its clam, the creation of something new is its undeniable context. A creation actualized by the person themselves.

LANDSCAPE OF THE MIND and ETHNOGRAPHY

J.K. Wright argued in his famous essay of 1947, 'Terrae Incognitae - The Place of Imagination in Geography,' that crucial to the understanding of our behaviour and ourselves is not so much what we perceive, but how we feel about what we perceive. In this process monsters are born, within our perception of the unknown and with the sight of foreign and enemy lands. The landscape of the mind, in its entirety of meanings is entwined with the tangible landscapes. (Douglas Porteus, 1990) For instance, Apollonius on his return to Greece reported that the Asian countryside was full of dragons and that "no mountain ridge was without one" (according to Philostratus) (Mayor, 2000). Today, we can logically conclude that there were no real dragons in Asia, but that the vivid sensory stimuli that the Greeks perceived created a reality of the enemy land as an opposition to their own.

Geography isn't always rooted in the physical earth; often, it emerges from our perception of the earth. The geography shaped in our minds can sometimes hold more influence over our actions than the actual physical geography, guiding how we navigate the world. Humanity possesses a unique ability to live according to concepts of reality that can, at times, surpass the significance of reality itself. (J.W. Watson, 1968) Vision seems to drive out the other senses. It is the most suitable sense for "an intellectualized, information-crazed species that has withdrawn from many areas of direct sensation" (G.Douglas Porteus, 1990, p.5)

These kinds of observations and correlations of place and culture, are the clues ethnographers work with to understand a society or culture. Accordingly, ethnography, much like myth, should be interpreted in relation to the society that created it (Buxton, 1994). Ethnographic accounts of monsters are in certain respects analogous to myths. If the ethnography of the ends of the world is not strictly speaking mythology, its imagery looks in many ways like that of a myth. Mythological monsters had appeared already in the Archaic period. Since ethnography claims to report on the contemporary Greek societies and their self-representation, it is important to be mentioned. The ethnographical process chooses to locate monsters in places quite distant from the Greeks, as mentioned before. The characteristics that are considered anomalous are identified as an ethnic feature, adding a hereditary nature. Ethnographical monsters constitute a threat to the Greek world, but not as punishers of the unjust. (Lenfant, 1999)

Today monsters don't seem to be bound to a specific location, but can become a *commonplace* for many. Contemporary monsters, as an expression of an anomalous appearance and hybrid characteristics, can be spotted in pop culture in western civilization. Whether they exist in movies (Harry Potter, Vampires e.t.c.), novels or other (even sport's mascots), civilization seems to acknowledge that they don't exist in reality and use them for their own entertainment. Any fear evoked stays in their own world, not really touching reality. It can be said that while the topographic residency of the monsters doesn't really exist anymore; the cultural impact can be detected in large groups of people. Ethnography, as a systematic study of individual cultures can still provide anthropological conclusions, but in a more global perspective, than on a clear expression of a "topos". These monsters express the common identity of people in certain groups that can be located anywhere in the world.

So what does Landscape, Geography and Ethnography have after all to do with monsters and art? Monsters always seem to be tied to a specific place geographically, somewhere near human society but limited to that space, for reasons like guarding its territory, hiding in a place that provokes

fear to humans. Some time if they decide to emerge from their lair it is to bring destruction and disturbance to the people. The *topos* where they reside is formed by landscape in the mind of the observer. Respectively, the place where art and artworks reside isn't a real place but an expression of the observer. Artists try to match the inscape with the landscape by creating their own artwork (and monsters). Furthermore, *Topos* (ancient Greek for "place") is usually used in art with the meaning of *commonplace*. So maybe by creating art all artists try to find the commonplace where their interests and worries reside in this world. While environmentalists and geographers strive to protect and study tangible landscapes, poets, artists, and novelists preserve, restore, and express our landscapes of the mind. On the same path of logic, my artworks exist simultaneously in different places and conceptual backgrounds, reaching for a common understanding.

Roda da Vida



Figures 2.3. Artwork *Roda da Vida*, ceramic sculpture, earthenware, glazes, glass flowers. Photo by the author

The ceramic piece I've created (for the exhibition *The Paths We Cross*) explores the timeless theme of the circle of life, drawing on subtle ancient Greek references to convey its message. In Greek mythology, life, death, and rebirth were interwoven concepts, symbolized by figures like the Moirai (Fates), who spun, measured, and cut the thread of life. This sculpture embodies those ancient beliefs

through its circular form, representing the endless cycle of existence, observing elements of it all around it.



Figures 2.4. detail *Roda da Vida*, ceramic sculpture, earthenware, glazes, glass flowers. Photo by the author

Roda da Vida is crafted with a blend of classical hand-sculpting techniques and contemporary glazing techniques. The subtle depictions of natural elements through the glass flowers speak to the regenerative forces of nature, symbols of renewal and victory over death. A recognizable reference in the piece is the young childish face that wears a ceramic flower crown on their head. It is an altered image from the skull of an ancient Greek girl wearing a ceramic flower wreath that was discovered and dates back to around 400–300 B.C. It is now housed in the New Archaeological Museum of Patras, Greece. This skull is part of a collection of remains from women and girls found in the North Cemetery of Patras, dating to the Hellenistic period. By restoring the original alive form of the girl, I am making a tangible comment of the inevitability of death, since we are born we are meant to perish.

This ceramic piece is deliberately fractured in places on the base, reminding us of a naturally formed form or a rock, hinting at the fragility of life and the inevitable passage of time. As if this “rock” has been weathered by time and rain, it has holes and craters that have been occupied by some kind of creature or creatures. Ancient Greek mythology is filled with tales of serpents acting as adversaries to both gods and heroes. Some were guardians, like the sacred snake of the Athenian Acropolis, protecting entire cities. In Athenian vase paintings,

snakes often appear alongside tombs and fountain houses, symbolizing their protective role. Additionally, serpents were believed to ensure the well-being of worshippers dedicated to various gods, serving as symbols of health and divine guardianship.

The interplay of smooth polished glass, and rough, textured ceramic areas mirrors the contrasts in life itself—moments of peace and moments of struggle. Through its form, texture, and ancient symbolism, this ceramic sculpture becomes a physical manifestation of the eternal circle of life, weaving together history, mythology, and the universal human experience. Life is sprouting again from the tomb, winning the monstrous reality of death and decay.

An interesting correlation between death and ancient Greek monsters is their intrinsic connection to place, particularly the landscape. In mythology, monsters like the Hydra, the Sphinx, and Typhon were often bound to specific locations—swamps, mountains, or crossroads—reflecting the ancient belief that such creatures were guardians of thresholds or embodiments of natural chaos. These mythical beings were rooted in their surroundings, blending into the geography and becoming one with the landscape. In the same way, the human experience of



Figures 2.5. Girl buried with a crown of ceramic flowers. Patras, 300-400 B.C. From the Museum of Patras. www.commonswikimedia.com

death is tied to place, with the earth becoming the final resting place for the dead, often marked by tombs or offerings that shape the environment and create a sacred geography.

The physical earth in ancient Greece was both a literal and symbolic space. In mythology, it represented the unknown, the boundary between the living and the dead, and the domain of forces beyond human control. For example, the underworld, ruled by Hades, was imagined as being beneath the earth, and many monsters in Greek myth guarded entrances to this underworld. The landscape itself, whether a dark forest or a desolate mountain range, became a liminal space where humans encountered the supernatural and the monstrous. The monstrous, in turn, became a projection of human fears and uncertainties about life, death, and the afterlife.

Humans, in their grasp of reality, needed to create common places for grief, reverence, and understanding of these forces. The tombs and grave offerings found throughout ancient Greece were not just burial markers but symbols of an ongoing dialogue between life, death, and nature. These places served to ground concepts like death in the tangible world, making them more manageable for human comprehension. Ethnographers and archaeologists have found these human creations essential for understanding ancient Greek society, as they reveal how the Greeks dealt with mortality, remembrance, and the divine.

The cycle of life and death played out not just in myth but in nature. Just as monsters could represent the untamable forces of nature, the land, once it "hosted" the dead, would revitalize itself, giving rise to new life. In this way, the ancient Greeks saw the earth not merely as a passive receiver of death but as an active participant in the eternal cycle of renewal.

This blending of myth, death, and landscape speaks to the profound interconnectedness of Greek society's understanding of the natural and supernatural worlds. The earth was both a resting place for the dead and the home of monsters, making it a powerful symbol of life's fragility and continuity.

CHAPTER 3

MYTHS AND SYMBOLS

THE IMPORTANCE OF MYTHS AND SYMBOLS

To understand the impact of these "monstrous" myths and symbols and their transition into the contemporary, we must first establish their general importance. Even though there is a conception by many that myths are poetical, symbolic and beautiful, in reality many of them are prosaic, utilitarian and ugly. Yet what is familiar to us, perhaps does lie closer to that poetical view of myths, and to the kind of value they accumulate in their literary uses (G.S.KIRK). It is needed to understand what myths are and what makes one symbol mythical and another not. Greek mythology is a complex topic, and the biggest challenge is that no one has yet provided a satisfactory definition of what exactly constitutes a myth. In his book, *The Nature of Greek Myths* (Harmondsworth, 1974), Kirk proposes that we might approach this issue through popular inclinations—essentially, we recognize a myth when we see one. While this is an intriguing suggestion, Kirk is well aware of its limitations. (Carter Phillips, dec1978-jan1978).

The vagueness of the definition has invited many disciplines to study and try to interpret the importance of a myth, as it has become apparent this far. Psycho-analysis has also approached the matter by dealing with myths, for the most part, with the elementary facts of life. Mythical symbolism reflects universal concerns with themes like the dangers and allure of incest, infantile sexual curiosity and its related fantasies, which often tie sexuality to aggression and mix up different bodily functions, and the processes of physical and psychological incorporation and expulsion. Perhaps the most significant one is the Jungian theory: Jung and his followers bring myths into their basic theoretical theory about the nature of the human mind. On the other hand, Freud's followers treat the phenomena of myth as descendant from other fundamental properties, an approach that I don't endorse myself. (Persy S.Cohen, 1969) According to Jung, the universal traits of the collective unconscious of humanity manifest in local forms, which are expressed through various myths. But none of this interpretation of the symbolisms or the analysis of the mechanisms of mythical expression explains why men construct myths. In conclusion psycho-analysis is not really equipped to explain the social significance of myth.

But since it is difficult to define myth, is it possible to define its differences today from the past? Persy S.Cohen (1969) supports that nowadays the term 'myth' is almost always intended derogatory. Myths, from his point of view, are false beliefs held onto despite all evidence. The term is often used interchangeably with "fallacy" or "old wives' tale," suggesting that the believer is either out of touch with reality or deeply misguided. Myths have key features: they are narratives of events, have a sacred nature, convey their messages through symbols, include events or objects that exist only within the myth, and deal with origins or transformations. Myths differ from general ideas or cosmologies because they tell a story. Their sacred nature and focus on beginnings and changes set them apart from legends and other types of folk-tale. The storytelling of events and the inclusion of objects not found outside the realm of myth distinguish myths from history or pseudo-history.

Investigating the modern usage of myth with a differing approach, Ben Halpern (1961) believes that "Myth" and "ideology" are closely related concepts that are widely and often loosely used today. Myths and "ideologies" are significant embodiments of the symbols accumulated through generations of culture. By definition, they are substantial enough to impact history, be remembered, and influence successive generations.

Up to this point the case has been made for quite a few definitions of myth, but the critical question is what's the relation with art and what is its importance in the realm of contemporary

expression. Classical myths are one of the earliest attempts of visualizing representation, trying to figure out “what images are, what they are capable of and what it is to regard and make them”. (Hirsh, 2011,p.8) Modern art renews the connection between art and myth by breaking away from imitation, while contemporary art continues this exploration through its conceptual approach. This creates a new context for thinking about art and myth. Visual arts are thus positioned to engage in the aesthetic conversations initiated by myths, now asking questions about themselves that were once addressed through the stories of classical mythology.

Janus



Figure 3.1. View of Janus in Cisterna, Photo by the Author

In ancient Roman religion and mythology, Janus is revered as the god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, thresholds, and endings. Typically depicted with two faces, Janus represents the dual nature of change and movement. His role as the deity of new beginnings is extensively documented in ancient texts, including works by Cicero, Ovid, and Varro. As a god overseeing transitions, Janus governs the initiation of actions and the movement between different phases. His two-headed imagery reflects this duality, symbolizing the connection between movement and transformation. He also presides over the entrance and exit of homes, with the Latin word for door, *ianua*, deriving its name from him, rather than the other way around.

While Janus doesn't have a direct link to ancient Greek mythology, the Romans were heavily influenced by Greek culture and often associated or blended similar notions and contexts. The concept of duality and transition is distinct in many gods, figures, and monsters in ancient Greece. Examples include Hermes, a liminal figure; the Moirai (Fates), symbolizing the beginnings and endings of life; and the Sphinx, which represents the threshold between what was and what is to come. Furthermore, there was an abundance of Janiform imagery in ancient Greek artifacts. While not representing a

specific deity, some ancient Greek art and architecture featured dual-faced figures or motifs that illustrate concepts of duality or transition. Coins, vases, theater masks, and architectural motifs depicting two-faced heads have been discovered, creating a clear connection to the concept of dual "sight" within a single figure.

With one face looking to the past and the other to the future, while existing in the present, this deity serves as a metaphor for my entire artistic endeavor. My personal creative process is deeply intertwined with the relationship between the past and the future, and the dialogue between traditional and contemporary techniques. Similarly, half of the sculpture is crafted from ceramics, following the classical form of Janus sculptures traditionally found at crossroads, while the other half adopts a futuristic aesthetic, placed symmetrically opposite—as if it represents a future version of the same sculpture. The green and black mirrored glass is secured with stainless steel bolts, creating a striking contrast between the industrial, manufactured appearance of the sculpture and the tactile, traditional sculpting techniques. This juxtaposition highlights the tension between the character of modern materials and the organic craftsmanship of classical methods.



Figure 3.2. View of Janus, Photo by the Author

TRANSITION OF MYTHOLOGICAL SYMBOLS

Many mythological symbols and monstrous entities have transitioned in meaning and are perceived in a different light by people today. The fact that so many of these myths and symbolisms have survived to the present day speaks to their value. Society's way of perception, moral values and social structure has changed, so do these symbols. Symbols undergo shifts in meaning and significance due to a range of factors, including cultural, social, historical, and technological influences. One of the primary drivers of this evolution is cultural context; as societies change, the meanings of symbols adapt to reflect new values, beliefs, and practices. A symbol that holds specific significance in one culture may take on a different meaning in another.

Historical events also play a crucial role in the transformation of symbols. Major occurrences such as wars, revolutions, or social movements can prompt a reevaluation of symbols. Religious or philosophical shifts can lead to the reinterpretation of existing symbols. A notable example is the cross, which evolved from a symbol of punishment in ancient Rome to a powerful emblem of Christianity. Similarly, artistic interpretation can also contribute to shifts in meaning; artists often draw on symbols to convey contemporary themes or critique societal norms, imbuing them with new layers of significance. Globalization and cultural exchange further facilitate the blending and recontextualization of symbols. Increased interaction among diverse cultures can lead to the adoption and adaptation of symbols, resulting in a transformation of their meanings. Technological

advancements have also introduced new symbols; for instance, the rise of digital communication has given birth to emojis and memes, which serve as modern symbols conveying emotions or ideas in unique ways. Generational changes also affect the interpretation of symbols, as different generations may perceive them based on their unique experiences and social contexts. A symbol that resonates with one generation may lose its significance for another. Additionally, political and social movements can turn symbols into rallying points, leading to significant shifts in meaning.

In summary, the shifting nature of symbols reflects the fluidity of human culture and experience. As societies evolve, so do the symbols that encapsulate their identities, values, and beliefs, allowing for continuous reinterpretation and reinvention. Ultimately, the evolution of ancient mythological symbols into contemporary contexts highlights their enduring power and adaptability. While their specific meanings may shift, these symbols continue to evoke a sense of familiarity and resonance, bridging the gap between past and present. Through art, media, and cultural discourse, mythological symbols remain vital, reflecting the complexities of human experience and our ongoing quest for understanding and meaning. In this chapter, examples will be given of the transformation of mythological symbols from ancient Greece, with the example of Medusa, to the significance of the monster in modern and future context.

Medusa



Figure 3.3. Medusa artwork from the exhibition THE PATHS WE CROSS, ceramic wall piece, special effect glazes, chains. Photo by the Author

The myth of *Medusa* has gone through a lot of transformations in meaning through history. Even though Medusa was the emblem of female power back in Ancient Greece and a symbol of both protection and aggression, she historically has been used to serve different political agendas, and perspectives on her have changed dramatically. The most common story today is the story of her death by Perseus, the hero that killed a monster that could kill anyone just by looking at them. However, when looking back to her origin story, the myth becomes more complicated. In a late version of the Medusa myth, by the Roman poet Ovid, Medusa was originally a beautiful maiden, but when Poseidon raped her in Athena's temple, Athena punished Medusa by transforming her beautiful hair into horrible snakes.

Contemplating Medusa's story today evokes a strong sense of injustice — a woman punished for a man's actions, castigated by society as a monster, and ultimately slain by another man while she slept. Hélène Cixous (2010), famous french feminist critic, argues that Medusa's decapitation at the hands of Perseus is a representation of men attempting to mute women and destroy their ability to use language: "A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow" (p.880). So we find ourselves compelled to once again question what defines a monster and ponder on our own way of thinking. The subject itself can be the perfect "excuse" to comment or start a conversation on contemporary issues.

In my artwork I aim to reimagine the symbol of Medusa and bring its image into the contemporary. Its image has been known to us mostly by artifacts and especially ancient Greek

and Roman ceramics. When attempting to retell a story it's always important to use "tools" appropriate to the times. For that reason vibrant glazes and textures have been used to give the context. The sense left of the crawl glaze is reminiscent of scales, referencing the snakes in Medusa's head. Additionally, vibrant green colours nowadays reminiscent of toxicity, warning and danger, play into the narrative of the monstrous nature of the Gorgon. Ceramic elements are intertwined with metallic chains, symbolizing the constricting situation imposed upon her. So the context of the artwork is given mostly by colours, textures and materials, instead of a realistic narrative of the form. Finally, the cautionary phrase "DON'T LOOK" transforms into a bold "LOOK AT ME," compelling viewers to confront the responsibility associated with their gaze.

In essence, my artistic exploration of Medusa seeks to challenge preconceptions, initiate conversations on contemporary issues, and prompt a reevaluation of the narratives that have shaped our understanding of this iconic figure from Greek mythology.

CONTEMPORARY MONSTERS

At this point it is pivotal to discuss what constitutes a contemporary monster and try to pinpoint their form and utility in today's society. A contemporary monster might be a mythological symbol that transitions into a new "entity" in this world or it might be what groups, types of characters or inherent characteristics we consider a "monster".

Monsters are familiar figures from Greek myths and fairy tales. In these stories, monsters must be fought, with victory often leading to conquest followed by relief or a sense of calm. After the battle, the protagonist must abandon everything monstrous—everything used to defeat the enemy—in order to reclaim their humanity (Botting, 2008). Only then can they grow, embrace their new, improved self, and begin anew. Traditionally, the monster has been a measure of what it means to be human, both in terms of appearance and moral choices or actions. Conflict is inherent, and inappropriate behavior must be addressed to ensure the proper functioning of human relationships and political systems. In the following subchapters these mechanisms that give the monsters their identity, from the near past (modernity) to today and the near future that has been already imagined and perceived.

Past Monsters

Monsters have always been rich with meaning, demanding interpretation. However, certain times become particularly fixated on monsters: early modern Europe was one such era, and today's Western civilization seems to be another. As modernism developed, the grotesque, once dismissed as unimportant or strange, ironically became central in representing the modern individual in states of alienation, crisis, or decline. Traits like imbalance, distortion, breakdown, and difference, which had previously been used to discredit the grotesque, were now used to depict the modern subject. (Yuan Yuan, 2016) During the early modern period, monsters could be individual beings—humans or animals with birth defects—or self-replicating species. Their obvious differences from normal creatures provoked a range of emotions, from horror and fear to awe. Interpretations of these monsters were mostly religious, seeing them as signs of divine disapproval or symbols of God's power and creativity. Moral interpretations have largely replaced religious ones. These differences and similarities between premodern and modern monsters provide a basis for understanding why monsters capture our attention and what our current fascination with them reveals about us today.

One of the most seminal novels in history that can be considered a postmodern novel long before modernism is Shelley's *Frankenstein*. A novel that engages with questions of origin as well as identity, seen through the prism of the relationship between Frankenstein and the Monster (Smith, 2016). This gothic story has been told in numerous adaptations and ways till this day, but its original

form is an incredible example of how the times influence what a monster is and where it comes from. In the introduction to the third edition, published in 1831, Shelley mentioned 'galvanism' (Baldick, 1987, p. 4; Vasbinder, 1984, pp. 32–37). This scientific practice references the experiments of the Italian physician and philosopher Luigi Galvani (1737–1798), who used electric currents and discovered their electro-magnetic effect. Galvani noticed that the muscles of dissected animal limbs contract (Turney, 1998). It is quite clear that this way of thinking was developed within the Enlightenment's focus on progress and the advancements of the Industrial Revolution. Frankenstein appears to be the origin of the mad scientist trope, serving as a symbol for scientific or technological advancements that have gone awry.

In *Frankenstein*, monstrosity is linked not only to appearance but also to actions, as Frankenstein's creation is a killer. Despite this, there is a tendency to excuse its monstrous behavior by pointing to neglect or mistreatment. For instance, the Monster kills Frankenstein's younger brother William, yet it is often seen as blameless due to its abandonment by its creator. It is viewed as a victim, encouraging readers of Shelley's novel to feel compassion. (O'Shea and Jacobs, 2018). This shift towards greater empathy engages readers in new and intriguing ways, differentiating the nature of the monsters from before.

Foucault, in his *archaeology of the Abnormal* (2003), reviews the shifting relations between the normal, the abnormal and the sexually deviant to explain the transgressive quality and moral challenge embodied by the monster. When it comes to defining 'monster' and 'monstrosity', Foucault differentiates between three figures: one, the 'human monster', like someone or something who has the position to create anxiety due to the fact that it violates the law by its own existence. Second, the 'individual to be corrected', who needs to conform to the law, and third, the 'masturbator' who violates moral law.

Present Monsters

Today, monsters are usually thought of as species: human-like creatures such as zombies and vampires, who might not be immediately identifiable and who inspire fear or horror, non-human creatures, who can sometimes be harmless or humans with "monstrous" behaviors. From Vampire lovers to "celebrity" serial killers, there is an obvious allure with these entities that leaks into our entertainment, a love to the feeling of being horrified and disgusted. It seems like the empathy Shelley made us feel towards the "being" has remained in our gaze, so much that like the past we choose to create stories with monsters to express our worries, but with the fascination of almost wanting to participate in the story or to become the monster ourselves. This extreme humanization of the monsters creates an environment or situation where sometimes the viewer relates more with the monster than the hero.

After considering these new parameters of what a monster is, there is a clear need to redefine this already difficult concept. Patricia McCormack's definition of 'encounter' is useful here: "The Monster" is the external element that triggers an event of perception, requiring the involvement of two dissimilar entities. According to McCormack (2012), a monster is "a catalyst for an encounter" (p. 294).

Future Monsters

Recent advances in robotics have led many people—and numerous Hollywood films—to envision a future where a race of artificial beings might rise up and overthrow their human creators. This imagined scenario raises intriguing questions about free will and the development of self-agency in digital systems. It also brings up ethical concerns about slavery. But when it comes to monsters, it centers on the fear that something we control might turn around and start to control us.

In today's world of cloning, nanotechnology, genetic engineering, and neuropharmacology, a new type of posthuman thinker is emerging. It's not just fiction writers and filmmakers fascinated by the idea of transcending human limits; a few forward-thinking, albeit somewhat eccentric, artists, scientists, and cultural theorists are exploring the increasingly blurry line between technology and the biological body (Asma, 2009). As we've seen, hybrid creatures have always challenged our understanding of nature and stirred our emotions. How should we feel about beings that exist in liminal spaces? Zombies are neither fully alive nor fully dead, hermaphrodites exist between male and female, and chimeras blend different animal species. Now, we live in a technological era that enables us to engineer more boundary-crossing creatures than ever before. Darwin left us a legacy of gradual changes rather than fixed, unchanging categories, and biotechnology has provided the means to move creatures along these continuums.

Even with just a clear technological focus, the creation of a new robot "species" occupies a lot of the human kind. It's clear that every effort is being made to replicate human beings and create armies of them. It might take a couple of centuries, but it seems to be a goal that we humans are determined to pursue. Whether it's a humanoid hybrid or a robot with human behaviour, the technological advances once again after the industrial revolution provoke ethical concerns and our imagination seems doable to actualize in the near future.

CHAPTER 4

IDENTITY OF A NATION

RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR OWN HISTORY

In continuation to the previous chapter, an observation that needs to be made is the significance of the interruptions or continuous beliefs and cultural structure of a nation through history. Even though ancient Greek polis structure does not allow us to speak of a united nation, the fact of the very same religion, language and many of the beliefs allows us to make comparisons with what is now called Greece/Hellas (whose boundaries include these ancient polis/territories). The understanding of myths and symbolisms today can either develop in a devolution or a transition. A devolution can happen when the common understanding of a symbol loses touch with its original meaning due to a lack of memory of history and traditions; it ends up “deformed” following the “deformed” notion of what is the identity of a nation and its history by its own people. This complex dynamics and pathogeny leads to “monstrous realities”, as explained in the chapters.

Our relationship with history is deeply intertwined with identity, shaping how we understand ourselves and the world around us. History serves as a bridge between the past and the present, offering lessons, context, and continuity. As Greeks, this connection is particularly profound. With a rich cultural heritage that spans millennia, we carry the weight of ancient civilizations, philosophies, and symbols that continue to influence modern life. Our history is both a source of pride and reflection, reminding us of our achievements, but also of the challenges and transformations that have shaped who we are today. Engaging with this past helps us navigate contemporary realities, ensuring that we remain rooted in tradition while evolving with the present.

Identity, both as an individual and collective concept, has become a key topic in discussions about historical and modern societies since the 1970s. It is used not only to describe historical and sociological trends but also as a legitimate claim by individuals and groups. Today, people, social groups, and nations demand the right to live according to and defend their identities.

Communities rely on an understanding of who they are to exist, consciously or unconsciously. We generally accept their right to preserve and defend their identity, whether it's the Greeks against the Persians or modern groups under threat. However, this focus on identity is not without problems. Over the past generation, the push for collective and national identity has fueled conflicts worldwide. This was also true in ancient societies like Athens and Rome. Therefore, the concept of collective identity has recently come under critical review.

It's likely not a coincidence that the concept of cultural memory, which focuses on an exclusive past, has gained popularity in the Western world during this time of conservative reflection. Hoelscher (2011, p.48), in his text *Myths, Images and the Typology of identities in Early Greek Art*, is not convinced that basing modern collective identities on old, unchanging memories is beneficial. Even though research shows that collective memory can change and adapt over time, the intention behind using these memories to build identity is often to create a sense of lasting, stable identity.

Myths help create collective identity by linking the mythical past to the present. This happens when a person or group in the present identifies with characters or events from the mythical past. Through this connection, individuals or communities shape their identity based on these mythical models, becoming "identical" with them in a symbolic sense.

However, this relationship between modern societies and the mythical past is not fixed. Greek communities—entire cities and the social groups within them—changed over time, and with that change came new versions of mythological identity. Each generation selected new myths or adapted old ones to fit their present reality, creating a dynamic interaction between the past and present.

This identity-building process happens in three main ways. Firstly, *Genealogical Identity* which is based on tracing lineage to great ancestors. *Local Identity* focuses on reverence for mythical figures tied to specific places. Even if genealogical lines were broken, these heroes were celebrated because of the power they were believed to have in their specific regions. Lastly, *Paradigmatic Identity*: This refers to the adoption of mythical heroes as models for values and behavior, even without direct genealogical or local connections. While genealogical and local identities require specific ties to a hero, paradigmatic models are accessible to anyone willing to embrace the values they represent. These three forms of identity often overlap, but distinguishing them helps us better understand how myths shaped and legitimized individual and collective identities in the ancient world. (Hoelscher, 2011, p. 49)

In this chapter, the concept of identity will be further analyzed in the text below, with emphasis on its problematic nature. How symbols and myth come to play as instruments of a false or self centered identity and what's its role in my personal art practice.

Penetrated

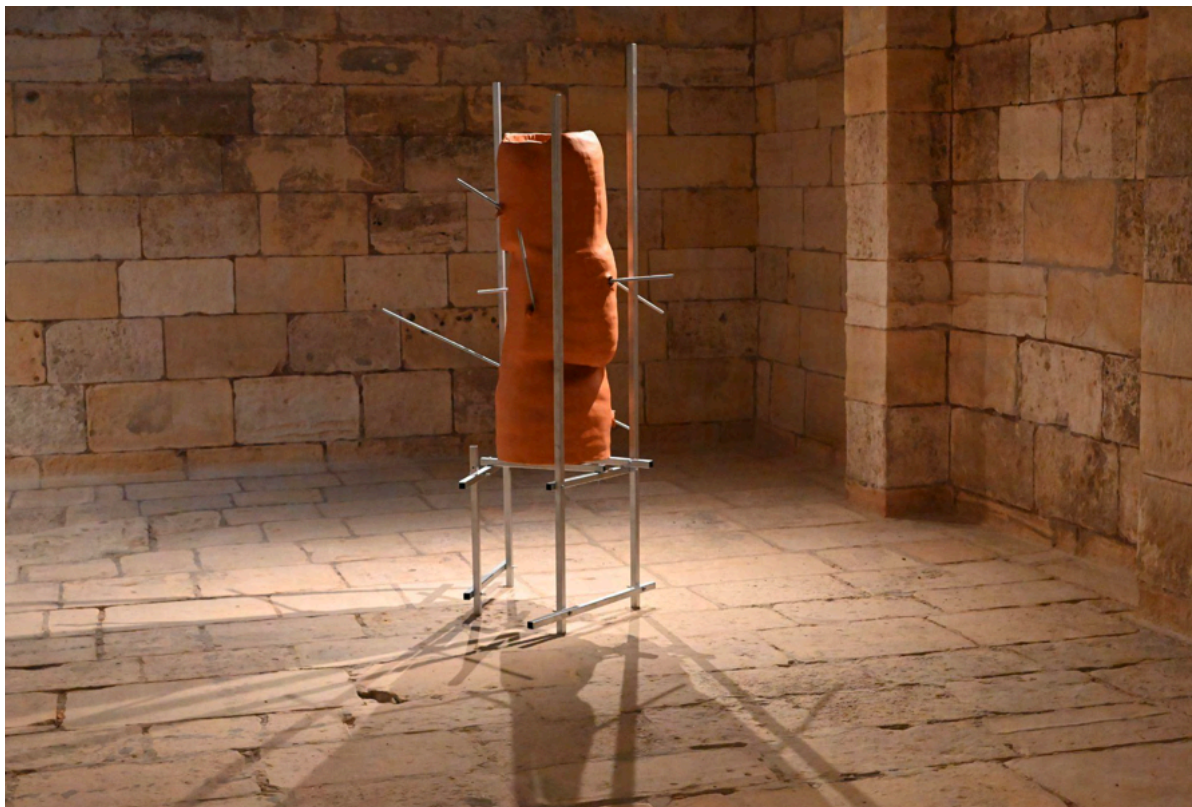


Figure 4.1. *Penetrated* artwork in Cisterna, Photo by Daphne Klagkou

Cultures and societies are more often transformed and altered through violence than peaceful processes. Wars, altercations and oppressive systems hold great power against values and delicate relations between humans and their origins. Greece, or Hellas, is a country with a rich history of migrations, occupations by foreign powers and war. The blend of cultures that remained, migrated, or occupied the land has created a new culture—a mixture of Western and Eastern traits, Balkan influences, all of which are situated within a globalized

world. This creates significant internal conflict within Greek society—ancient Greek philosophy versus Orthodox teachings, a history of democracy coexisting with a strong fascist undercurrent, and an economy heavily reliant on foreign powers. External and internal forces are constantly at odds, and the battlefield that remains is the reality of Greece.



Figure 4.2 view of the Parthenon under construction, www.wikimedia.com

Penetrated is an artwork that embodies this struggle on its very “skin.” A ceramic sculpture resembling a decaying column or vessel has been forcefully pierced by metallic rods typically used in construction, creating wounds as if the piece had flesh. It is placed within a structure reminiscent of the scaffolding used around monuments for preservation. However, upon closer inspection, this “support” serves no real function for the piece. It is a false promise, offering only the illusion of restoration and ongoing work.

This reflects the parallel between literal and metaphorical truths, exposing the tension between appearances and reality. In Greece, it is common to witness ongoing conservation work that lasts for years, with monuments covered in scaffolding. The image evokes a building imprisoned by its own protection, or an armor that can easily be penetrated. As I investigate my Greek identity and the national identity crisis present in culture and society, I realize that the efforts to maintain ancient connections often create a false narrative. Rather than truly exploring our roots, we settle for a devolved contemporary version, one that we try to keep alive at all costs, without taking the essential steps for genuine understanding.

Another reference that might come to mind is Greece's relationship with its industrial history. An industrial sprout appeared 35 years after Greece became a nation-state, but the industrial foundation started from scratch, in a domestic market that was small, with low levels of literacy and limited capital accumulation. The Industrial Revolution, as defined by E. Hobsbawm, never took place in Greece. Greece's independence did not lead to the formation of a unified national economy, and the fragmentation of the economic space was sustained by the predominance of the agricultural sector. The absence of a historical connection to the Enlightenment, and later to a true industrial revolution, resulted in slow but “violent” societal changes. The Industrial Revolution, as a historical period, was a particularly complex system of extreme transformations and upheavals, but one that unfolded within a historical continuum.

In the end, Greece's historical trajectory reflects a nation caught between the weight of its past and the pressures of its present. The continuous tension between preserving a glorified history and confronting modern realities reveals the complexities of national identity and societal evolution. Whether through cultural symbols, economic shifts, or the struggle to reconcile ancient philosophies with contemporary ideologies, Greece stands as a vivid example of how nations can be simultaneously shaped and fractured by both internal and external forces. The challenge, then, is not merely to preserve the past, but to understand it in a way that fosters true growth, rather than perpetuating illusions of continuity. Only through

genuine reflection and action can Greece—like the artwork, “Penetrated”—heal its wounds and move beyond the false promises of restoration.



Figure 4.3 detail of *Penetrated*, Photo by Daphne Klagkou

MONSTROUS REALITIES

The words *τέρας/τερατώδες* (monster/monstrous) are often used today to describe people who commit heinous acts, as well as things and systems that seem to go against nature. So we consign them to the category of monster: we can not comprehend ,therefore they must be “other”. The same way the English word “monster” doubles in translation as evil. By categorizing these people as no longer belonging to the human race we can keep ourselves free of them. Distancing ourselves from acts, groups of people or realities that we comprehend as “evil” creates an ethical and logical order in the way we view our world and organize our societies. In this chapter we will examine the essence of contemporary monstrous realities today and their relation to what was originally the comprehension of a monster.

Why do we depict other groups or entire races as monsters? This behavior may be rooted in xenophobia, a heightened and irrational form of a natural, instinctual fear. Fear and anxiety are prevalent in human beings; they are some of the most commonly reported emotions in our dreams. Just as certain mental disorders can intensify normal feelings like fear, entire societies can experience elevated fears, especially when mass media amplifies these emotions. Perceiving outsiders as monsters may be a neurotic cultural reaction in a society plagued by paranoia. Fear is an intrinsic aspect of being human, as is the tendency to be wary of those who are different from us. (Asma, 2009)

A lack of basic necessities like jobs, food, and housing can dehumanize people, but so can an excess of wealth and comfort. Sometimes people seem zombielike because their main purpose appears to be the consumption of goods and pleasures, making them more interested in “plastic

surgery, reality TV, and large SUVs than in family, honor, or integrity” (Asma, 2009, p.270). All these interests homogenize society in a peculiar way of false needs. In the seventeenth century, Thomas Browne viewed large crowds as threats to reason, virtue, and religion, calling them “a monstrosity more prodigious than the hydra.”

By now, we have seen how a hostile imagination can create negative stereotypes for any perceived “other,” labeling them as unclean, barbaric, sexually immoral, or spiritually corrupt. In a melting-pot democracy, the social construction of an enemy is ingrained in the generational dynamic. Sociologist James A. Aho (1994) describes a recurring pattern in American history involving three generations: those currently in power, a second generation waiting to take over, and the children of the first group. The ruling generation, which stays in power for about fifteen years, defines itself as “good Americans” by opposing a chosen enemy, whether it be African Americans, LGBTQ+ individuals, Catholics, immigrants, communists, Japanese, Nazis, or other targets from America’s history of demonization. However, since these “enemies” are often collective projections rather than actual sources of social problems, policies targeting them usually fail. This incredible description of how generational mechanisms shift the focus from one enemy to another, while never realizing the circular pattern, can be applied in the whole of Western society and even “further”. Also, the power of the U.S.A. to the rest of the world has proven extremely influential and most of the Western countries tend to follow in their footsteps.

It is undeniable that certain social environments can encourage the worst behaviors in people. Zimbardo (2007) writes, “Situational forces can work to transform even some of the best of us into Mr. Hyde monsters, without the benefit of Dr. Jekyll’s chemical elixir. We must be more aware of how situational variables can influence our behavior.” (as cited in Asma, 2009, p.274) Desperate environments lead to desperate actions. For instance, “thug life” may seem monstrous to polite society, but it emerged from a context where it offered distinct advantages. In contemporary critiques of ideology and religion, we see a parallel to the secular notion that stepping beyond reason and empirical evidence leads to monstrous outcomes. Just as early cartographers marked uncharted areas with “Here Be Monsters,” critics of ideology issue similar warnings. Monstrosity, in this view, is anything that defies rational coherence. When zealots embrace such monstrosities, they invite monstrous consequences. (Asma, 2009)

Social constructionism refers to a collection of ideas about how human knowledge—and by extension, reality itself—is artificially created. We’ve reached a point in history where we can assert that people are not born monsters, but rather become one. During societal change, technology is often viewed as a threat to human integrity and relationships. In times of conflict, diverse groups can be marginalized and seen as monstrous (Struthers, 2017; Kenny and Ghale, 2015).

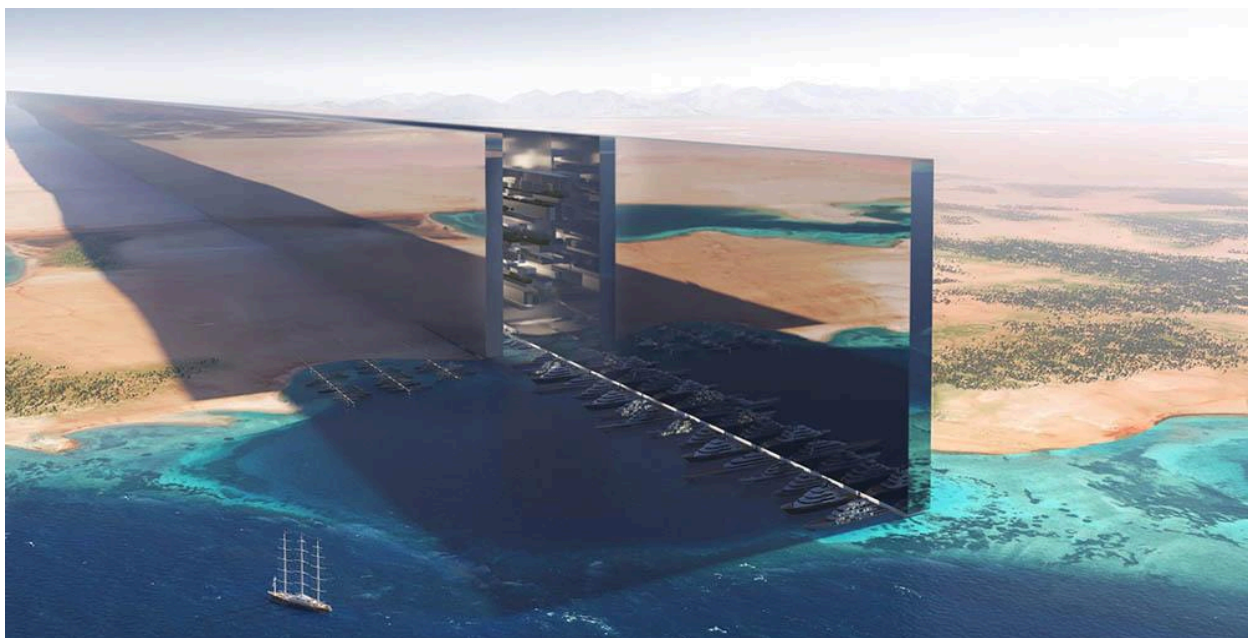


Figure 4.4. Digital representation from the project THE LINE, www.line-neom.com

Another kind of monstrous reality is intertwined with the environment and landscape, whether it is hybridism or artificial nature. The technological advances of today come to solve problems of the environmental crises or sometimes solve non-existent problems. A unique example of an artificial environment resembling sci-fi becoming reality is *The Line* project (see figure 34). This vision for Saudi Arabia is a tall, narrow city stretching over 105 miles, designed to house 9 million residents and run entirely on renewable energy. Construction is underway, with plans to accommodate 1.5 million people by 2030. The futuristic city will feature a mirrored façade on both sides, extending from the Red Sea, through the desert, and into the mountains. It is an endeavor that promises sustainability and almost a hedonistic way of life. Essentially a dream greenhouse. While the experts debate what the true environmental impact of this stacked up city is, the question for us is : is it a monstrous reality? For sure it is a hybrid, in the way that it is built to be the house and the nature, everything in one; a pile of contemporary materials of the latest technology forming a new kind of green environment in the middle of the desert. It is also monstrous in size, “πέλωρ”, as a gigantic monster. It seems we no longer understand nature's purposes, if such purposes even exist beyond the basic Darwinian truth that animals strive to reproduce. Without predetermined goals for human development, biotechnology offers us a chance to choose our own objectives. Man has become so powerful that, as Freud (1930) characteristically said, he has become a kind of prosthetic God.

The Hill



Figure 4.5. Artwork THE HILL , glass flowers, carbon fiber, metall. Photo by Daphne Klagkou

The Hill stands out in my exhibition because, unlike the other pieces, it doesn't evoke feelings of the “monstrous,” “horror,” or “discomfort.” We could say that it relates to both chapters: “Landscape

and ethnography” and “Monstrous Realities”. A section of land, like it was detached from a hill, stands above ground level as if it still serves the same purpose as before.

The anomalous and unfamiliar nature of the sculpture becomes apparent quite fast, since the materials create an unbecoming sight. The green hillside is covered with carbon fiber, a very popular material in aerospace, civil engineering, military, motorsports, and other competition sports, because of its properties. Carbon fiber's high stiffness, high tensile strength, high strength to weight ratio, high chemical resistance, high-temperature tolerance, and low thermal expansion, could be a slightly sci-fi approach to replace rock, or even better optimize its properties. The metallic rods, serving as a base for the sculpture, are reminiscent of constructions and implies that the hill slope is a puzzle piece ready to be installed.

On top of the hill, a field of glass weeds and flowers with frozen movement stand as a monument of life. Fragile and transparent, the flowers seem to represent the life that should live on the field, almost like ornaments. Similar to the artificial snow-covered Christmas tree that comes out of the attic every year, untouched, my artwork resembles a natural element, preserved in time. The materials used are meant to last for many lifetimes, making the field an anomaly, an entity with abnormal appearance and “function”.



Figure 4.6. Details of the artwork THE HILL , glass flowers, carbon fiber, metall. Photo by Daphne Klagkou

This artwork deals with the duality of life and death and the ambiguity of what is “natural”. In the bronze era, the preferred way of burial was the use of a tholos tomb (plural tholoi; from Greek *θολωτός τάφος* "domed tombs"). This burial structure is characterized by its false dome created by corbelling, the superposition of successively smaller rings of stones, resembling a beehive. From the outside it resembles a hill with a long entrance passage. These tholoi were built on level ground and then enclosed by a pile of earth. Basically, an artificial hill , an anomaly on the ground, hiding the dead with earth and flowers. Covering the morbid with life itself.

The *topos* where my artworks reside is defined by the exhibition space of Cisterna, a historical place with ties to the water, and this sculpture of “land”. The visual landscape is formed in the mind of the viewer, by collecting these clues and finding the common place where the artworks and themselves can exist. As said before, the place where art and artworks reside isn't a real place but an expression of the observer. Above all, the phrase “seeing is believing” reflects the idea that “to see” often equates to “to understand.” It is widely accepted that sight leads to insight (Pocock, 1981), and that a geographer's ability to observe a landscape should result in thoughtful and perceptive interpretations. So the viewer, like a geographer or ethnographer, is welcome to investigate this new environment and the entities that live there.



Figure 4.7 ,Tomb of Agamemnon, between 1300 and 1250 BCE in Mycenae, Greece. www.en.wikipedia.org

Furthermore, following the example of the *Line Project*, it reminds us of an artificial environment, technologically enhanced, but with questionable virtues. Nature that produces nothing can never sustain life. Isn't the idea of nature, frozen in time as merely a component or decoration, a kind of monstrous reality?

INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF SYMBOLS AND POLITICAL MONSTERS

Symbols that originate in antiquity have historically been used to serve purposes quite different from their original meaning and often political agendas. A prime example of this phenomenon is the symbol of the swastika. The Swastika is one of the most common and enigmatic symbols in human history. It has been found among hundreds of cultures around the world. However in all of these cultures, the swastika possessed a different meaning. It is hardly surprising that we also find it in Ancient Greece with the name “tetraskelion” symbolizing the continuous movement (resembling a windmill). Hitler's party forced the most violent devolution of a symbol in history when the party adopted swastika as their own. This “misuse” of the symbol created such an intense transition of meaning and connotations; up to the present moment the West flinches away at the view of this symbol. This is one of many examples of symbols that have transitioned their meaning due to their political instrumentalization into a “monstrous” symbol.

Monsters have been central to Greek political thought from its earliest days. The creation of fantastical and threatening figures in the collective imagination was closely linked to the rise of the polis during the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. These monstrous figures helped shape Greek identity by acting as a contrast to the individual's sense of self. De Polignac (1984) highlights how the geography of sacred cult centers played a crucial role in the Archaic conception of the city-state. By constructing the sacred landscape and establishing boundaries between sacred and profane, or natural and cultural, the groundwork for the polis was laid.(Catalin Pavel,2022, p.69)

These hybrid monsters dominated vase painting, particularly in Corinthian and Ionian pottery from the 7th to mid-6th centuries BCE, influencing everything from funerary to ritual vessels. The prevalence of these creatures raises the question of whether they also represented unresolved tensions, failed negotiations, or political frustrations. As hybrid beings, monsters like the Centaur challenge notions of control and authority, raising questions about whose decisions govern—those of the human or the beast? These figures, much like the political and cultural landscapes they inhabit, embody complex negotiations of power, identity, and societal structure.

In contemporary times , a lot of ancient Greek iconography has found its place in twisted expressions of their essence and even imply fascistic tendencies and beliefs in Greece. This chapter will explore the use of symbols and iconography in contemporary Greece , as an expression on an inverted "monstrous" reality. Ancient Greek symbols and figures today are used in flags, graffiti and tattoos as symbols of national dominance and excellence, identifiers of fascist political parties and underground groups. This a great proof of devolution of values and meaning of origin. (see figure) That's the reason Fascist Scholars are becoming increasingly interested in the aesthetics of the movement. The connection between aesthetics, politics, and society can offer fresh insights into our understanding of fascism. This perspective moves beyond dismissing it as mere propaganda or a simple effort to manipulate the masses against their will. (Mosse, 1996)

This phenomenon stands to reason, since the concept of collective identity comes with two major problems that can be dangerous. First, when social groups or nations focus too much on their own identity, they often become self-centered. This can lead to neglecting or even destroying the identities of others. It's hard to share or socialize identity. Second, identity is inherently conservative. It is tied to how a group came into existence and how it has remained the same over time. Although traditions can change, they usually emphasize stability over change. This makes identity feel almost sacred and unquestionable, based more on emotional ties to heritage than on reason. This can lead to irrational behavior.

These issues are even more serious when political identity is based on a group's specific history. Shared memories of the past are often exclusive, leaving out those who don't share the same history. Even myths meant to be inclusive, like the Roman story of blending Trojans and Latins, were still centered on Roman interests. A better approach would be to build communities based on shared values that anyone can adopt through understanding and choice, rather than exclusive histories. (Hoelscher, 2011)

Today, this has resulted in a shared aesthetic of symbols, particularly in Greece, where symbols from ancient Greek history and mythology serve as a common identifier for those with a nationalistic, conservative identity. These symbols, which hold significant historical importance and carry nuanced meanings, are distorted into grotesque forms within a political reality that could be described as "monstrous" and maddening. Madness, to a rational observer, might reveal humanity's primal instincts and expose the raw fury beneath the veneer of civilization. Yet, it also holds a certain allure, being an unfamiliar and fearsome mode of existence—a form of knowledge, albeit alien. The distinct perspective of the madman can be unsettling precisely because it is so different; he perceives and acknowledges things that are the same, bound to the conventions of a rational world, must overlook, suppress, or outright reject. (Mc Elroy, 1989, p.95) Is this irrational, "monstrous" reality ultimately alluring to people because it offers a way to identify themselves, or is it because the sense of belonging to a sacred, unquestionable past can override any criticism directed at them?

Vase Installation



Figure 4.8. VASE INSTALLATION., glass blown vases, ready-made vases, enamels, lakers, mirroring. Photo by Daphne Klagkou

My artwork *Vase Installation* is a contemporary representation of today, similar to how information and historic recordings of social and political issues and interpretations used to take place in ceramic vase imagery (especially in Athenian vase-painting). The imagery could express social class status of individuals, social practices like symposiums, role-playing and fluidity characteristic of social identity (Neer, 2002), religious beliefs, and historic events, as well as mythology of course. While Greek pottery was mostly made for ritualistic purposes, sacrifices, libations, and as votive offerings, they carried information of life at the time.



Figure 4.9. Vase details . Photo by Daphne Klagkou

In a similar fashion, this stack of shelves is full of transparent glass vases with painted scenes and symbols aimed to inform us of today's contemporary Greek society. The vases are painted with enamels and lacquers, creating an unchangeable condition for the glass. The transparency of the vase creates a new aesthetic, a new version of the ancient Greek amphoras, stamnos and psykters. Additionally, mirrored elements on the vases create a complex image in collaboration with the mirror selves on which the vases stand. Images repeat and combine with each other, since the reflection travels from one mirrored surface to another. This creates the impression of all societal and political manifestations being woven in our society and how interconnected they are.

The imagery combines contemporary and ancient references that are linked by certain concepts. As it has been clear till now, symbols from ancient times have been extensively used today for various reasons or the history of them has been silenced in favor of beliefs and systematic oppression. An example is the “concealed” information from the general public of the aspect of homosexuality and sexual explorations in Ancient Greece. (see figure) Today, the majority of Greeks seem to believe that ancient Greek warriors were “alpha” males, shaped in the image of the modern-day “steroid” man. The thought that homosexual people didn’t exist is absurd and a devolution of our history on the minds of the people. Ancient Greek vases have an abundance of homosexual scenes, “feminine” boy figures and acts between a mentor and the student. As a result of this confusing state of people’s beliefs, especially when it comes to our own history, the first vase of the installations was created, by painting a complex scene of ancient iconography and figures of the contemporary lgbtq community, like drag queens and performers. Maybe one of the few interpretations of a symposium could be drag Balls (sort for Ballroom scene, subculture competitions that consist of individuals, often drag queens, who perform different drag genres and categories.) Following the same methodology, armed Spartan warriors find their place next to armed police men, ancient greek symbols used as fascist tattoos decorate the vases and images of monsters reside in between.

In the case of the arbitrary use of historical figures and symbols, I defend this “exploitation” as follows: Symbols and elements with ancient origins have either been integrated into everyday Greek life or have persisted through folklore and traditions, making them part of my culture. While Greece has undergone extreme changes—through wars, population migrations, and globalization in recent years—some things remain constant. The Greek language is a direct descendant of the ancient one, and many expressions used in daily life have been preserved or reference ancient ways of thinking or historical figures. A common example of the arbitrary use of these myths and figures is found in newspaper cartoons, where



Figure 4.10. Vase details . Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 4.11. VASE INSTALLATION,, glass blown vases, ready-made vases, enamels, lakers,mirroring. Photo by Daphne Klagkou

mythology is often used to comment on current events, or Plato and Sophocles are depicted having modern-day discussions.

I defend the extensive use of combining different references, not just because it is already done, but because the freedom to use such symbols in everyday life is a part of my culture. I believe this practice is sufficient not to upset the rigorous academic rules of meticulously defending each individual reference. In the worst-case scenario, rather than creating clear commentary on these subjects, I become part of the confused mindset of contemporary Greek society, which still serves as a form of commentary in itself.

CHAPTER 5

THE IMAGE OF SYMBOLS

“We look at the present through a rear view mirror. We march backwards into the future.”

— *Marshall McLuhan, The Medium is the Massage*

REPRESENTATIONS OF MONSTERS IN ARTIFACTS

Representations of monsters in ancient Greek are found in artifacts and literature. Noticeably there are differences in representation in writing and in material forms. In literature, the freedom of a running wild imagination and its ability to actualize it through words creates creatures hard to interpret in material form. As a result the iconography seems simpler a lot of the time on amphoras, sculptures and other material artifacts. Images of monsters and symbols have been prominent in architecture in temples, columns, tombs e.t.c. since the Archaic times. The way these symbols were integrated in ancient Greeks everyday life is remarkable and can possibly lead to some comparative observations of the present.

For those concerned with the distant past, of which so few records survive, the principle is especially important: “a robust formalism will not recognize a clean break between artifacts and social life. On the contrary, it will insist that we only know social life in and through the artifacts. For us, the artifactual record *just is* social life; and, to a lesser extent, it always was” (p. 8). In the second chapter (p. 23-26), this principle is contrasted with “contextualism,” the assumption that a finite and definitive set of concepts or ideas makes up the background of any object of interpretation, and is capable of providing a guide to understanding its meaning. The trouble with “contextualism” is that the object of interpretation is necessarily part of the set of ideas that makes up what one wants to call its context. (Neer, 2002)

Since the object is part of its context, the material itself plays a crucial role in shaping the representation and interpretation of symbols within that context. So representations in the ancient world and especially in ancient Greece were made from ceramics, marble, bronze, ivory and gold. In addition to their practical qualities, the materials of these artifacts often carried symbolic weight. Metals like bronze conveyed strength and resilience, while clay connected the monstrous creatures to the earth, highlighting their primal and ancient origins. Marble and stone, on the other hand, linked them to the realm of the divine and eternal, while precious materials like ivory and gold emphasized the allure and fearsome power of these creatures in elite and religious contexts.

The Floor



Figure 5.1. *The Floor*, terracotta tiles, terra sigillata, metallic base. Photo by Daphne Klagkou

A relic of the past, but different. A curious ceramic art piece has found its place among the other monsters. Its fragmented form speaks of both history and transformation, straddling the line between the ancient and the contemporary.

In archaeological sites, it is more common to find fragments of artifacts than intact objects. These broken pieces, weathered by time, tell part of a story, but never the full narrative. For archaeologists and historians, the challenge lies in reconstructing these fragments to uncover the complete truth, piecing together the lives, cultures, and beliefs of ancient peoples. Their work strives to preserve and restore the past, to make sense of what was once whole, but is now fractured. For

artists, however, the approach is different. We do not necessarily need the full narrative or complete understanding to create meaning. A fragment can serve as both a symbol and an inspiration. It provides just enough mystery to ignite a creative process, encouraging us to explore what is left unsaid. Where archaeologists aim to reconstruct, artists can embrace the incomplete, letting ambiguity and imagination shape our work.

A single fragment—whether a chipped piece of pottery or a half-erased inscription—can become a sentence that unravels an entire narrative in the mind of the artist. It does not need to be explained or restored to its original state. Instead, it can stand as a representation of transformation, decay, and the passage of time. In my own work, I am drawn to these incomplete forms, these relics that suggest rather than explain.

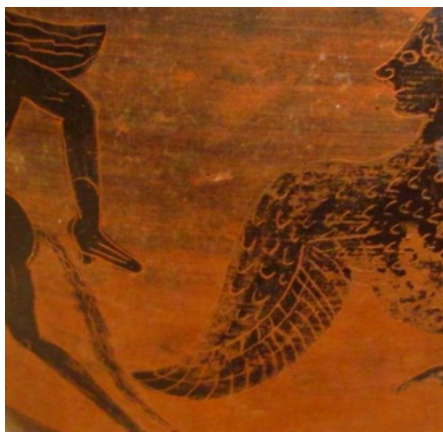


Figure 5.2 detail of Sirens chasing a satyr. Neck amphora, Clay, 525-500 BC. Taken at the Altes Museum, Berlin. www.flickr.com

The cracks and gaps in a ceramic piece become part of its story, an invitation for reinterpretation and reinvention. This curious ceramic art piece is more than a relic of the past—it is an evolution of the ancient into something new. It stands among the other monsters, fragments of myth and memory. And just as these mythological creatures defy the boundaries of form and logic, so too does the fragmentary nature of this piece challenge the notion that art must be whole to be understood. In the fragmented, we find the space for new ideas to emerge, for the past and present to coexist in ways that are both familiar and entirely new.

The imagery on the tiles establishes connections with the rest of the artworks in the exhibition. The partial wing could reference the lost wings of the New Sphinx, while the expressive, powerful strokes of the black terra sigillata echo the paintings in the Vases Installation. The painted ceramic tiles are elevated above the ground, similar to a raised floor. A raised floor, also known as access flooring, is an elevated surface installed over a solid base, typically used to conceal mechanical and electrical systems. Raised floors are common in modern office buildings and specialized environments like command centers, IT data centers, and computer rooms, where efficient cable management and access are essential. In this context, the ceramic surface may suggest hidden information beneath it.

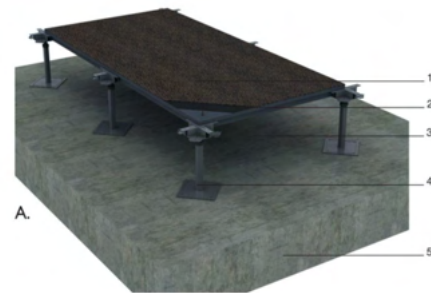


Figure 5.3 . example of raised floor. www.kritio.gr

While this reference might seem technical or rigid, the piece itself follows a more poetic approach. The tile floor appears to be lifting or peeling from the edges, as if either revealing what lies beneath or detaching from its own reality. Interestingly, some viewers have remarked that the installation resembles a bed. While this was indeed within my scope during its creation, the strength of this association among those interacting with the piece has been notable. Perhaps the artwork, in its partial yet magnified form, invites us to rest upon its version of the truth—one that is incomplete but still deeply resonant.

MATERIAL AND COLOUR

The case of material

The material and colour used in the past and present in the representation of these symbols will be discussed as an important part of their influence or translation of the iconography and vice versa how societal development (industrial and technological advances) is dictating those choices.

Materials play a significant role in influencing my creative process. They guide the form, texture, and conceptual depth of my work, often shaping the narrative I aim to express. Each material carries its own history, physical properties, and cultural significance, which allows me to experiment and discover new meanings in my art. For example, the fragility of glass contrasts with the strength of metal, creating a dialogue between

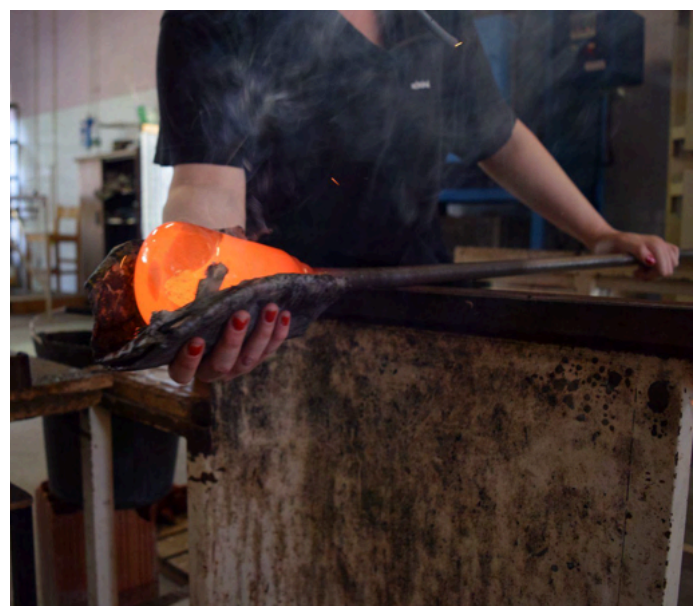


Figure 5.4. The artist glass blowing. Photo by Daphne Klagkou

vulnerability and endurance. By transforming the materials, I find new ways to express complex ideas and emotions, transforming abstract concepts into tangible forms.



Figure 5.5. hand-built ceramic going into the firing kiln. Photo by Daphne Klagkou

In my art, I explore the rich interplay between ancient/traditional techniques and contemporary materials, creating a dialogue that bridges past and present. This fusion allows me to honor the heritage of craftsmanship while embracing modern innovations, resulting in hybrid works that resonate with both historical depth and contemporary relevance. Drawing on traditional methods, such as hand-building ceramics or ancient glassblowing techniques, I connect with the age-old practices that have shaped our artistic legacy. These techniques carry stories, cultural significance, and a sense of tactile engagement that I find profoundly inspiring. By incorporating these methods into my work, I pay homage to the artisans of the past, acknowledging their mastery while infusing their practices with my personal vision. At the same time, I actively engage with contemporary materials—like synthetic resins, metals, and experimental glass compositions—that expand the possibilities of my artistic expression. These modern materials introduce new dimensions, textures, and colors that challenge traditional boundaries. They allow me to experiment with forms and ideas in ways that resonate with today's dynamic world.

The combination of these approaches results in a rich layering of meaning and aesthetics. For example, a ceramic piece might incorporate ancient glazes alongside contemporary finishes, creating a dialogue between the organic and the synthetic. By doing so, I invite viewers to reflect on the evolution of materials and techniques, encouraging a conversation about the continuity and transformation of artistic practices. Ultimately, this blend of ancient and contemporary not only enriches my work but also reflects the complexities of identity and culture in a globalized world. It serves as a reminder that while we draw from our past, we are also continuously evolving, creating a vibrant tapestry of artistic expression that honors both tradition and innovation.

Technological innovations play a crucial role in this evolution, transforming how materials are produced and manipulated. The development of synthetic materials, such as plastics and composites, has significantly expanded the range of available options and their applications across various fields, including art. Materials evolve through a dynamic interplay of natural processes, technological advancements, and cultural shifts. Many materials, such as clay, glass, and metals, undergo changes over time due to environmental factors like weathering, erosion, and chemical reactions, which can alter their properties and lead to new forms and uses.

Cultural influences also drive the evolution of materials. As societies change, so do their needs and



Figure 5.6. Carbon fiber fabric and glass details. Photo by Daphne Klagkou

preferences. Contemporary values, such as sustainability and environmental responsibility, have sparked a resurgence of interest in natural and traditional materials. Artists and creators contribute to this evolution by experimenting with materials, pushing the boundaries of what is possible. This exploration often leads to new techniques, mixed-media approaches, and the fusion of different materials, transforming their meanings and uses in the process.

Finally, interdisciplinary practices—where art intersects with science and engineering—can lead to innovative uses of materials. For instance, advancements in nanotechnology may result in new pigments or coatings that change how artists work.

In *The Medium is the Message*, Marshall McLuhan (2002) argues that the medium with which a message is sent is itself another message; he claims that “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium.” To McLuhan, “the message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.” (p. 107). This reading has been essential to my way of thinking in my art practice and it’s a constant reminder in my mind of the importance of letting the material itself guide you to solutions and new ways of seeing. The evolution of materials is a complex and ongoing process influenced by a variety of factors, creating new possibilities for creative expression and innovation.

The case of colour

The subject of colour itself is of great importance, colour can be symbols themselves or add to the context of one. Especially in the case of art, and specifically in my work, the colour can define the character and chronology or the material. When showcasing my artworks it might seem like it is not such a colourful image, but the “colours” are all chosen for a certain purpose. From the terracotta that adds the feeling of the past and the tangibility of earth to the “chrome”, mirrors and fluorescent green.

An important aspect of my art practice is the emphasis on choice of color. David Batchelor in his book *Chromophobia*, argues that Western cultural and intellectual thought harbors a deep-seated fear of color, viewing it as a potential source of corruption or contamination. This chromophobic impulse is evident in the numerous ways color has been marginalized: it is either assigned to “foreign” entities—such as the oriental, the feminine, the infantile, the vulgar, or the pathological—or it is dismissed as superficial, secondary, and non-essential, relegated to the realm of mere decoration or cosmetics.

Maybe this reference would create a bit of wonder on the readers part, but Greek art has been through intense colour washing through history, so the research on the topic is self-evident. For hundreds of years it was believed that the ancient Greek temples and sculptures were white, a belief that was used by the enemies of colour as proof of the superiority of colour minimalism. Characteristically, Le Corbusier shouted “Oh! Light! Marbles! Monochromy!” when he saw the Acropolis up close (as cited in Batchelor, 2000, p.44). Many important historical figures that played a great role in the development of culture expressed their aversion to intense colours. Nevertheless, nowadays after



Figure 5.7, “Peplos” Kore. Marble original: Greek, c. 530 BC, Akropolis Museum, Athens. Color reconstructions by Vinzenz Brinkmann and Ulrike Koch-Brinkmann., www.mono-choco.com



Figure 5.8, *Apollo with a Kithara*, 2019-2022, Jeff Koons artwork in Hydra. www.desteg.gr

years of research it has been proven that ancient greek marble sculptures were painted with vibrant colours.

So if an artist would like to use ancient greek imagery, how would they have to colour their artwork to place it into the contemporary? Jeff Koons offered an answer to this question by recreating an ancient marble sculpture, "Apollo with the kithara" and painted it as we imagine it would be painted at the time the original was created. In my opinion this decision creates a paradox - how is it possible that an "exact" replica of the ancient sculpture and temple is viewed as contemporary art? While it is true that it feels contemporary, it is not a new progressive view of the art itself. I admit that I see the value in reinstating the truth of these objects after years of "white washing" (even if it wasn't the artist's aim), a worthy gesture. Still, when I reflect on the new ways of seeing and what would be "appropriate coverage" of a 21st century sculpture, I look towards more modern materials and effects. It's not that I believe contemporary art must always include this element, but there should be a balance between shape and surface, or at least a detail or installation that connects it to the present. When I want to reference my own culture, I don't wish to recreate it, but rather transform it and see myself in it.

For my *monstrous* works I chose to combine the palette of the tradition materials, so that the character of the terracotta and the glass will still be persistent in the final result, but to add colours or what could be considered "colour" in the 21st century, which add to the industrial and futuristic aesthetic of the pieces. Characteristically, the only true colour that is evident is the bright green, yellowish-green, almost fluorescent. This kind of green didn't exist until the last century and a lot of its connotations are intense. While green is typically linked to tranquility and has a soothing effect on the mind and psyche, neon green creates a more stimulating response. Because neon colors are extremely bright, they are often associated with alertness, warning, and danger. Additionally, bright green is used to express toxicity or colour artificial life and nature.

Lively greens were used in both ceramics and glass, creating a collection of different finishes and textures due to the manipulation of the two different materials.

Different green glazes were used in the ceramic artworks after extensive research of special effect glazes that use a higher concentration of clay sources to create tangible finishes and intense texture. On the other hand, in the glass pieces the greens were either embedded in the glass itself, like the



Figure 5.9. Glaze details of Medusa, Photo by Daphne Klagkou



Figure 5.10. Janus under led lighting, Photo by Daphne Klagkou

flowers that were pulled from molten glass in the hotshop, or only on surface level by using industrial lacquers.

Another unconventional “colour” that I use in my art making is the mirror and chrome effect. While by the traditional standards it would not be considered a color, in the 21st century, neon, iridescent and even the mirror are considered colours, since they are used as such to cover surfaces of forms and objects. Artificial colours, city colours, industrial colours. Colours that are consistent with the images, materials and forms of an urban, industrial art. These types of effects became popular in the late 20th century but have become integral to today's industrial objects, fashion and pop culture.

Mirrors are flat and reflective, and this paradoxical appeal extends to commercial paints and materials. These surfaces possess a dual nature: they are both lifeless and vibrant, dull yet dazzling. A glossy finish adds an illusion of depth to a flat surface while simultaneously reinforcing its flatness. However, this kind of depth is very different from the atmospheric depth found in traditional easel painting. It is mechanical and impersonal, lacking the emotional or psychological depth we might expect. Instead of heaviness, reflective surfaces convey a sense of lightness—ironically, even when mirrors themselves feel unexpectedly heavy to lift. (Batchelor, 2000, pp 106)

A shiny surface doesn't reflect an imagined inner world but rather the real, external environment where the work exists—it captures the viewer's surroundings. Despite this, it remains striking and vivid. Its reflection is crisp, hard, and dynamic, yet in a somewhat bold or even crude way. This sharpness, though seemingly vulgar, is a key aspect of its appeal. (Batchelor, 2000, pp 106)



Figure 5.11 .mirroring with silver nitrate,
Photo by Daphne Klagkou

Different sources were tested to create the mirror effect. The first trial was done in 2023, in Vicarte labs, with the method of creating a film on the glass through chemical reactions using silver nitrate. Due to the difficulty of the procedure this method was not chosen for the rest of my art-practice. This kind of process has a lot of difficulties of having a high rate of success in adhesion, due to contamination risks and it was observed later that the objects mirrored with this technique were oxidized. Additionally, the cost of mirroring big surfaces with silver is great and not attainable.

Finally, the technique of spraying industrial lacquers was chosen. In this technique, a mirroring effect lacquer and a transparent protective layer with adhesive are sprayed in that order on the glass in a thin homogeneous layer. After

they are dried they are cured in a kiln at approximately 170 degree celsius for 10 minutes. This temperature curing ensures the permanence of the mirror on the glass. Furthermore, with this technique painting with a brush, using the mirror as paint was successful.

An interesting aspect of the mirror is that it needs a perfect smooth glass surface for the light to absorb and reflect in a way that the image reflects to be clear. So, in the example of the glass sculpture new Spinx, the texture of the glass makes the image reflected not clear, creating the effect of a material with depth, due to the thickness of the glass, but in between mirror and chrome.

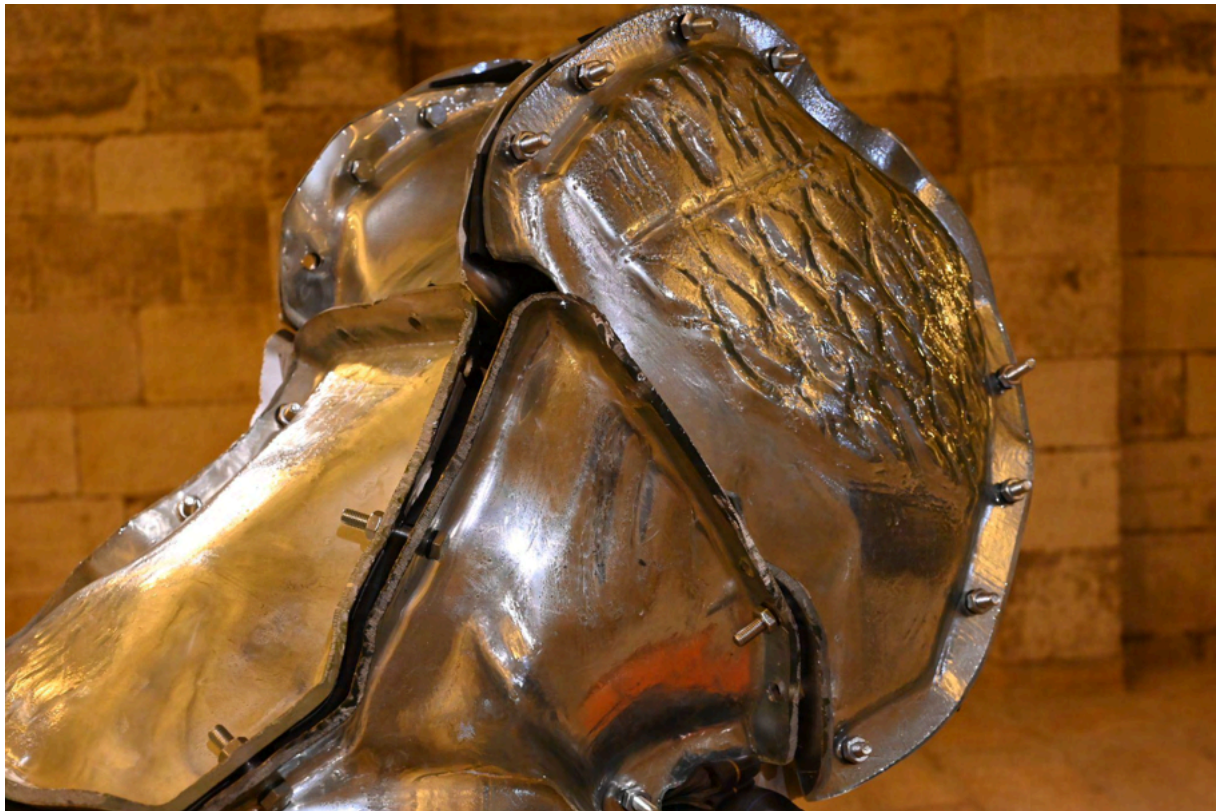
So, the final palette of my exhibitions is concluded in terracotta, black and red, similar to the black and red-figure vases, mirrors, chrome and metallic. An assemblage of characteristic elements, that run through the entirety of the whole through different materials, to create a coherent picture at the end. The browns, red and black while they



Figure 5.12. .mirroring with lacquer,
Photo by Daphne Klagkou

might seem the ones that are referring to antiquity, in reality they are just the colours that remained after thousands of years, since we already established the multicultural nature of ancient art.

The conclusion of my research in materials and colours in my art practice and choice of including contemporary material is expressed in Smithson's published essay, 'Entropy and the New Monuments', where he argued that 'instead of being made of natural materials, such as marble, granite, or other kinds of rock, the new monuments are made of artificial materials, plastic, chrome, and electric light.' (as cited in Batchelor, 2000, p.109).



Figures 5.13, Artwork the NEW SPHINX, glass sculpture, bolts, construction tables, aluminium planks. Photo Daphne Klagkou

CONCLUSION

Art-making, to a certain extent, involves the exploration of personal worries, interests, and questions through creative means. My artistic process and research have evolved into an intentional effort to discover my identity and understand the realities of the environment that shaped me. In a world marked by globalization and rapid technological growth, our origins tend to fade, and we often grasp onto misguided concepts and systems in an attempt to maintain our identity. My research has taken a direct approach, addressing these concerns through targeted investigation in multiple fields. I believe that partial understanding can contribute to a broader picture, an exploration requiring both introspective and extrospective processes. While artists may try to adopt the role of external observer, they often find themselves entangled in the very issues they seek to address. Therefore, an honest approach becomes essential when questions arise. External forces also play a significant role in shaping personal and social identities, revealing aspects beyond one's control that must be identified and confronted.

My work's focus on my own culture is prominent, as we are inevitably tied to the environment in which we grew up. We carry with us the influences that shaped our worldview. The use of comparative methodology across disciplines that study various aspects of monstrosity has been particularly fruitful for my artistic development and exploration of identity. Our reality is highly complex, and a one-dimensional focus is insufficient to grasp its depth. Monsters and monstrous realities are universal themes that have long intrigued psychology, anthropology, ethnography, and other fields. By engaging with these disciplines, I gained valuable tools to disentangle my own empirical knowledge.

When it comes to actualizing these themes in tangible artworks, experimentation has been a crucial part of my process. By playing with techniques and materials that reference both the ancient and the contemporary, I achieved intriguing results that evoke unfamiliarity and transcendence of the material. Each medium, as a unique environment, reshapes people and culture through its widespread use. By creating strange, hybrid objects and installations, I generated an environment within Cisterna that resembles alien artifacts in an archaeological site. When past, present, and future converge in one image, the result is almost prophetic—if we were more conscious, we might have seen it coming.

At its core, my work underscores the need for poetry and symbolism in our lives. The absence of symbolism and metaphor in contemporary culture has led to a resurgence of cultural symbols and myths in 21st-century art, as artists seek to explore their heritage on their own terms. We live in an age of information and technological advancement, where clear rules, specific functionality, and universal systems dominate. The magic of the unknown is no longer part of our daily experience, making it difficult for us to achieve the spiritual transcendence necessary for self-discovery.

The resurgence of Greek myths in art and popular culture can also be seen as a personal cultural response to political, societal, and class fragmentation. Myths create a collective identity by linking the mythical past to the present, allowing individuals and communities to shape their identity through symbolic alignment with these archetypes, fostering a sense of generational continuity.

In conclusion, the exploration of identity through art, intertwined with cultural symbols and myths, reveals the need for deeper connections to our past and present in a rapidly evolving world, where partial understandings, experimentation, and symbolism offer pathways to self-discovery and collective meaning. Embracing our past as we step into the future!

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