

Rituals for the New World

Curated by Eleni Riga with works by Eva Giannakopoulou, Natalia Manta, Maro Michalakakos, Malvina Panagiotidi, Panos Profitis, Johnna Sachpazis, Panos Sklavenitis, Panos Tsagaris, Giorgos Tserionis.

In a time of global ecological and social crisis, humanity turns its gaze back to ritual, a sequence of actions performed in a set order. According to religion professor Robert A. Segal, ritual is something that happens in everyone's life, in all places and in all cultures. Modern societies do not always preserve the traditional form of rituals of archaic and pre-industrial times. However, modern societies continue to perform significant social events to inaugurate a new life chapter or the end of one, mark transitions and create or celebrate social ties that have much in common with rituals. By defining the beginnings and ends of social phases, rituals structure our social worlds and how we understand time, relationships, and change.

The exhibition taking place at Teras Athens approaches the theme of ritual through the lens of monstrosity, drawing inspiration from mythology, popular culture, feminist practices, and queer practices. Author Ocean Vuong provides an interpretation of the monster in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, "from the Latin root monstrum, a divine messenger of catastrophe, then adapted by the Old French to mean an animal of myriad origins: centaur, griffin, satyr. To be a monster is to be a hybrid signal, a lighthouse: both shelter and warning at once". Likewise, the curatorial intention of *Rituals for the New World* is pursued through three thematic entities, individual-family-collective, to introduce the monster as a symbol of strength and resistance to established norms, inviting different interpretations and perspectives.

Analyzing the symbolism of the monster on an individual level, we find that it relates to our deepest fears, hidden anxieties and unspoken fantasies, encouraging deep introspection and connection with ourselves and our environment. With the photographic collage *The Cave*, Panos Tsagaris combines references to the Cyclops, the one-eyed giants of Greek mythology, the rhapsodic Polyphemus and the allegory of Plato's Cave. Here, the monster becomes the bearer of inner truth and self-knowledge. The work *Grotesque figure #9* by Giorgos Tserionis combines characteristics between species and sexes, making reference to atavism, a modification of the biological structure resulting in the restoration of an ancestral characteristic, e.g. an infant with a tail, or of bringing back a way of thinking and acting of an earlier era.

The second section of the exhibition deals with the reclaiming of the monster by women, queer and trans people. Drawing on ancient mythologies, archetypal symbols and personal testimonies that break down dualisms, the artists in this section attempt to celebrate different ways of relating.

Maro Michalakakos often deals with archetypes around family, birth and death. In the exhibition she participates with the watercolor *In Orbit (Specimen 19)*, which creates a complex body with fragmented animal features that symbolize transformation and continuous becoming while suggesting new ways of being and relating, with references to deep ecology.

Johnna Sachpazis' series *Somatechnics* is based on the lived experience of the trans body. *Frankenstein*, a medically engineered body, "flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape

other than that in which it was born," (Susan Stryker) is at the center of trans claims. At the same time, Eva Giannakopoulou, with the project *at the beach 3*, presents testimonies of subjects who question the dominant family structure and stereotypical parenthood. By embracing the symbolism of monsters and seeing them as embodiments of strength, beauty, and resilience, queer and trans communities can challenge social norms and reclaim their own narratives.

Monsters are a prevalent theme in popular culture, mythology, and collective practices. Panos Profitis presents the artwork *Harpies*. Made from cast metal, it combines elements from Assyrian, Byzantine and Soviet art, as well as components from Apotropaic symbols and folk theater. In this context, the play refers to the Sibyls in the plural and their role as prophetesses. These are messengers with great socio-political influence beyond the spiritual dimension attributed to their feminine intuitive nature.

Supernatural power is often associated with monstrosity in literature and folklore because of the extraordinary abilities possessed by supernatural beings. In the sculptural work of Malvina Panagiotidis, *Until its wings bear off night's middle witch*, we meet monstrous females (Medusa, Lamia, Hekate, witches, etc.) who stir up social unrest and political revolutions. Through the ritualistic alchemical process of the electroforming technique, Panagiotidis creates a kind of fragmented plural body.

Through the designs of the *#thehead* series, Panos Sklavenitis deals with the concept of the "carnivalesque" and grotesque body. Carnival, as a form of ritual, emphasizes physical excess and disguise, offering a filter through which we can construct and interpret the monster. Humor and subversion play vital roles in cultural and social practices.

Finally, in modern societies collective rituals are still exercised by underrepresented groups and are often considered counterproductive, frivolous and outdated. We can find the roots of this criticism in the long period of transition from feudalism to capitalism in Western Europe. The great witch hunt can be understood as a stage of primary capitalist accumulation. Although monsters are not necessarily witches, witches are often portrayed as monsters. Natalia Mantas' work, *Death on a deer*, humorously negotiates the way in which the position of women has been demonized through the instrumentalization of sexuality, their relationship with spirituality, and their extensive medical knowledge.