

# Reflections of Chimerism in Contemporary Art

## Çağdaş Sanat İçerisinde Kimerizmin Yansımaları

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### ABSTRACT

Primitive people tried to find a meaning for natural events through causal relations with their limited knowledge. One example is mythological monsters, which are actually the different aspects of nature in forms. All these monsters are products of the Mother Goddess as a woman, and they are visualized versions of uncanny and dangerous side of nature. One of these monsters, with a lion ahead, a goat body, and a snake tail in Greek Mythology, is called Chimera. Later, these multi-identity monster, whose parts also mean something on their own, became a symbol and a source of reference for different fields such as biology, psychology and art. Chimerism, i.e. the coexistence of different identities in one body, has gained a scientific basis, especially in biology through the advancement of gene technology. Finding different gene codes in the same body has proven that there are real chimeras, including humans, in nature. The fact that human, animal and plant genes can exist in one body has led to many ethical debates. Art opens a discussion space for the redefinition of such ethical boundaries today. In this study, the counterparts of creatures called Chimera in the history of contemporary art will be discussed

**Keywords:** Chimera, mythology, chimerism, contemporary art

### ÖZ

Mitler, ilk çağdaki insanların bilimsel bilginin yoksunluğunda, kendilerini çevreleyen doğayı anlamaya yönelik cevap arayışlarının sonuçlarıdır. İlkel insanlar kendi sınırlı bilgileriyle, nedensellik ilişkileri kurarak doğa olaylarına bir anlam bulmaya çalışmışlardır. Doğanın farklı yönlerinin biçim kazanmış halleri olan mitolojik canavarlarda bu duruma örnek gösterilebilir. Bütün bu canavarların hepsi bir kadın olarak Ana Tanrıça'nın ürünleridir ve doğanın tehlikeli halinin görsellik kazanmış halleridir. Bu canavarlardan birisi olan Yunan Mitolojisindeki aslan kafalı, keçi gövdeli ve yılan kuyruklu canavar, Kimeria olarak adlandırılmıştır. Daha sonra, parçaları tek başlarına da bir anlam ifade eden bu çok kimlikli canavar bir sembole dönüşmüş ve biyoloji, psikoloji ve sanat gibi farklı alanlar için başvuru kaynağı haline gelmiştir. Bir beden içerisinde farklı kimliklerin bir arada var olabilmesi anlamına gelen kimerizm özellikle biyoloji alanında gen teknolojisinin ilerlemesiyle birlikte bilimsel bir taban kazanmıştır. Aynı bedende farklı gen kodlarına rastlanması doğada da insan dahil gerçek kimeriaların var olduğunu kanıtlamıştır. İnsan, hayvan ve bitki genlerinin bir beden de var olabildiği örneklerin ortaya çıkması birçok etik tartışmaya yol açmıştır. Sanat yakın gelecekte daha sıklıkla karşılaşılabilecek bu örnekler için günümüzde etik sınırların yeniden belirlenmesine yönelik bir tartışma alanı açmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Kimeria olarak adlandırılan, yaratıkların çağdaş sanat tarihindeki karşılıklarına değinilecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kimeria, mitoloji, kimerizm, çağdaş sanat

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## Introduction

Chimera are organisms in which more than one genetic identity exists in one body. These organisms, of which we can see many examples in nature today, can also be produced in laboratories. In prehistoric times, independent of the developments in genetics today, allegorical chimera narratives were encountered. In this study, having both mythological and scientific counterparts, examples of chimera phenomenon in contemporary art and their analyses will be dwelt upon.

Chimerism takes its name from a character in mythology and fulfills its conceptual integrity with the references of this character. Chimerism, which started to be used as a concept in the 1970s, is used to describe developments in biology and medicine. It has also led to rearrangements in the field of

law due to the problems experienced in evidence based on DNA tests. While new research became necessary at some point in biology in order to assist the developments in the field of law, the field of psychology became aware of chimerism, as well. At the same time, human chimera experiments in biology have led to completely different moral debates. The field of art, on the other hand, deals with these discussions. Within the scope of this text, the mythological background of the concept will be examined and the similarities with the contents of today's artistic examples will be investigated. In this way, it is aimed to better understand the artistic examples. In the next section, the definitions of chimerism in other fields will be briefly mentioned and the light will be shed on the examination of art examples.

### Myths

Regardless of the subject of chimerism, its mythological origin should be mentioned at first. It would be appropriate to start such a study, that takes its reference from a mythological entity like Chimera, by briefly mentioning the definition of mythology. Myth, Mythos, which comes from the Greek word "Mythos" as a word, in this way, "... carries the meanings of a word spoken or heard, fairy tales, stories, legends. Mythos is defined as a rumor, fabrication, empty and ridiculous tale without historical value"(Çaycı, 2018, p.4).

In a sense, myths tried to explain how natural and supernatural events took place in times when objective answers were not enough. These explanations can also be accepted as ready-made answers, by participating in the collective knowledge of social groups and responding to relevant questions when necessary. This knowledge, which is used when needed, has been transmitted to the next generations.

Primitive people had to use their imaginations in their quests when there were no scientific and objective answers to their questions. While doing this, they personalized supernatural events based on themselves as their only point of reference would be themselves. They chose to explain the causes of the events around them by associating them with other beings like themselves or with other living things around them. In these explanations, sometimes hybrid beings with the characteristics of both human and non-human creatures are also encountered. Half-human, half-fish mermaids seen in many cultures, centaurs or satyrs, which are ungulates from the Greek mythology, and the Sphinx, which is seen in Ancient Egyptian culture, and hybrid creatures that appear abundantly in Mesopotamian and Hittite cultures can be given as examples for this situation.

### Monsters in Myths

In determining the external appearance of mythical monsters, the destructiveness of natural disasters was associated with the emotion of anger in humans and animals, and was visualized with

the bodies of animals believed to have this emotion. Monsters are actually exaggerations of wild animals that sometimes directly attack tribes, sometimes alien communities in enemy territory, and sometimes unseen threats incarnate.

In lands such as Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Greece, the relations of the god lineages are the reflection of the cultural relations between intertwined societies through migrations and invasions. For instance, the mythologies of successive Mesopotamian cultures, including the Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, and Persian civilizations, espoused analogous deities within their respective historical trajectories. In this sequence of stages, the god of the later culture either defeats the gods of the other culture or becomes the father of the previous ones. Mesopotamian culture would later form the foundations of Western culture. Another example of this interaction is the Hittites, who founded the first empire of Anatolia. Conversely, the Hittites exhibited a syncretic religious stance, wherein they demonstrated a propensity to assimilate and incorporate the pantheons of the conquered territories, rather than outright rejection of any deity.

Within this paradigm, the prevalence of the Mother Goddess belief system throughout extensive epochs of human history warrants examination. Even though the matriarchal system lost its power, the Mother Goddess continued to be influential in the background and regardless of the any kind of belief that came after her, became the mother of all other divine elements, including the monsters, which are the subject of this text. As mentioned, this situation is no exception for ancient Greek Culture. Donna Rosenberg expresses this situation with the following sentence; "Gaia, who is Mother Earth, is the first Great Goddess or Mother Goddess. When the Bronze period tribes invaded the land, The Peoples living in Greece, worship the Great Goddess because they are farmers, the fertility of the earth is a prime importance to them (Rosenberg, 1999, p. 82).

In Greek Mythology, Gaia is the mother of all the gods, goddesses and monsters that came after her. Hesiod describes this whole sequence in *Theogonia*. Gaia's first-generation child is her son and husband, Uranus. In the second generation, there are Hundred-armed Giants, Cyclops and Titans, the children of Gaia and Uranos. Later, Kronos, the youngest Titan, will castrate his father and take his place. American philologist David Adams Leeming, an expert in comparative mythology literature, analyzes this issue as follows;

*"...we can say that the Uranos-Gaia-Kronos struggle has many mythological antecedents—in Egypt and Sumer, for instance, but also in the Anatolian Hittite culture—in which Earth and Sky, the World Parents, must be separated so that creation may take place between them. There is also the fact that the passage from Uranos to Kronos to Zeus represented for the Greeks a passage from a primitive and brutal reality to the somewhat more ordered universe of Zeus and his fellow*

*Olympians, a gradual process of creation” (Leeming, 2015, p. 105).*

In this study, monsters will be addressed directly, as supernatural creatures are more important than the genealogies of the gods. As Rosenberg mentioned, Northern peoples brought their own gods when they invaded Greece, but they could not escape the strong influence of the Mother Goddess culture. Again, according to Rosenberg; just like the priestesses of the Great Goddess or Mother Goddess in the female oriented religion dismembered the sacred king, when Uranus became the ruler of the world, his son Cronus dismembers him. They thought that his blood was a prime source of fertility. They fertilized the soil with his blood to produce an abundance of crops. Uranus blood, too, produces “croops,” in the form of monstrous offspring. (Rosenberg, 1999, p. 82)

Hesiod will also refer to the ancestry of all other monsters in five separate chapters in his work on the lineage of the gods. According to Hesiod; again “- Gaia finally unites with Tartaros and gives birth to Typhon. According to other Theogonias, a daughter named Echidna was born from Tartaros. She gave birth to a giant named Antaios with Poseidon. Usually giants, monstrosities, monsters are all descended from Gaia” (Eyüboğlu and Erhat, 1977, p. 187). In the second part of the third section of the same work, the birth of creatures such as Graias, Gorgos and Pegasos is mentioned. The monsters born from the union of Typhon and Echidna are Orthos, Kerberos, Hydra and Chimera. Echidna also fuses with her progeny, Orthos, to produce the Phix (or Sphinx) and the Nemean Lion (Eyüboğlu and Erhat, 1977, p. 51). These creatures are often multi-headed monsters with heads in the shape of serpents or lions.

The snake figure, on the other hand, is a very old symbol associated with the matriarchal society and the land. It is mentioned that Typhon, the god of volcanoes, is a serpentine centaur. While Echidna is a half-serpent, half-female creature, Gorgo Medusa's hair and most of its body are designed as snakes. Again, Hydra is a many-headed snake, while Chimera's tail is a snake. The interplay between the female archetype and the serpent motif subsequently becomes integrated into the creation narratives of monotheistic faiths. In the context of our inquiry, the serpent symbol, as a constituent element within the composite forms associated with maternal deities, offers insights into the symbolism embedded within these mythical constructs. Subsequently, these chimeric entities are vanquished by heroic figures, symbolizing the triumph of patriarchal values embodied by the progeny of the paternal deity Zeus, thereby manifesting the tension between matriarchal and patriarchal cultural paradigms.

If one were to acknowledge the narratives surrounding monsters or chimeras as an analytical framework, it becomes apparent that they possess the potential to intersect with contemporary discourse on identity politics, despite the passage of centuries.

Phenomena that once lay beyond conventional societal constructs were historically categorized as antithetical to order and subjected to dehumanization. Presently, within the realm of artistic expression, there is observable acceptance and even embrace of the chimera motif by individuals occupying marginalized or ‘othered’ positions. The narrative surrounding chimeras thus serves as a poignant medium bridging the past and present, offering profound insights into contemporary realities through its historical resonance.

### **Myth of Bellerophontes and Chimera**

Heroes are children of gods born in extraordinary ways, stronger than ordinary people, slaying monsters with special weapons donated by the gods, embarking on difficult journeys, and dying in unusual ways. The hero associated with Chimera is Bellerophontes.

In Greek Mythology, which is a patriarchal system, the origins of the characters with a bad ending are somehow related to Anatolian and Mother Goddess culture. Upon examination of the genealogical lineage of Bellerophontes, additional intriguing facets emerge. Sisyphus is Bellerophontes's grandfather, condemned forever to roll a rock to the top of a hill for his sins against the gods. The story of Glaukos, the son of Sisyphus, King of Corinth, is also interesting. Glaukos trained his horses to eat human flesh to make them more aggressive. Ironically, Glaukos falls off his horse in battle and becomes food for his own horses. According to some sources, Glaukos is the father of Bellerophontes. As per mythological accounts, Sisyphus and Glaukos would later be accepted as the ancestors of the Lycians. The grandchildren of Bellerophontes, Sarpedon and Glaukos who are the grandchildren of the same name, would later join the Trojans, who were the losing side in the Trojan War.

According to the narratives, Bellerophontes should be punished for a murder he committed. The hero goes to Proitos, King of Tiryns, for trial and punishment. In Tiryns, the King's wife, Anteia falls in love with Bellerophontes but she is rejected by the hero. Angered as a result of this incident, Anteia, slanders the hero on the grounds that he tried to rape her. After this accusation, the hero is exiled to the country of Lycia this time. With the influence of his wife, Proitos sends the hero from his country with a sealed letter containing the death warrant of Bellerophontes. “From this instance Bellerophon being unconsciously the bearer of his own death warrant, the expression, “Bellerophontic Letters” arose, to describe any species of communication which a person is made the bearer of, containing matter prejudicial to himself (Bulfinch, 2004, p. 117)”.

Meanwhile, King Iobates of the Lycian Country is looking for a solution to a wild animal problem that is probably plaguing the herds or travelers. This wild animal, personified in the form of Chimera, will apparently be intertwined with other narratives and

will take its place in Bellerophon's adventure. To put it differently, according to the Paul Hamlyn Mythology encyclopedia, Chimera, whose father is already a storm, is a kind of wind goddess. "In opposition to these regular winds there were various monsters who personified the storm winds who, 'pouncing suddenly on the darkened waves, unleashed the raging tempest to destroy men'. ...She vomited forth horrible flames. It is agreed that she was a personification of the storm-cloud"(Hamlyn, 1969, p. 146) (Picture 2). It is plausible to say that the divine creatures of Mesopotamian origin are generally in the form of Chimera. Similar forms have also been seen in Anatolian Civilizations due to Anatolia's relations with Mesopotamia. Almost all of the reliefs on the orthostat, called the *Wall of Messengers* (Picture 1) in Carchemish (Kargamış), one of the late Hittite kingdoms, show hybrid creatures. In this way, we get more clues about Chimera, which is the result of a Lycian origin narrative. After the Hellenic influences in Anatolia and Lycia in particular, with Homer's *Iliad* and Hesiod's *Creation Story*, Chimera reaches its familiar form. In the end, the extension of the Mother Goddess, shaped by the perception of Anatolia and Mesopotamia and symbolizing the uncanny aspect of nature, becomes a test for a male hero to prove himself.



**Picture 1.**

*Wall of Messengers*

Having covered the story of Chimera briefly, it is time to focus on Bellerophon. Iobates, the King of Lycia Country, does not want

to kill the hero who came with his own death order. So he sends him on a Chimera hunt, a mission believed to be impossible to accomplish. However, in this adventure, the hero becomes the assistant of the winged horse Pegasus, a creature with multiple identities. Bellerophon's winged horse called Pegasus was of the Gorgon's blood, "which he had succeeded in taming thanks to a golden bridle that Athene gave him. Mounted on Pegasus, Bellerophon flew over to Chimaera and stuffed the monster's jaw with lead. The lead melted in the flames which the Chimaera vomited forth and killed it" (Hamlyn, 1969, p.183).

Although Chimera is a personification of storm clouds, it is interesting that this creature's habitat is limited to the land and therefore cannot defend herself against the spears of Bellerophon, who attacks from the air. However, after Chimera's death, an answer to a natural phenomenon is found. Chimera's corpse falls down a crevice where she dies and continues to produce flames there. According to a belief; "The place where Khimaira is located is shown as Yanartaş behind the city of Olympos (today Çıralı) in Lycia. Here, as in antiquity, natural gases gush out of the mountain today, and these are ignited by themselves or with a match and burn non-stop" (Erhat, 2017, p. 175).

Bellerophon is drawn to other trials at the request of Iobates. With the help of Pegasus, he returns victorious from all tests. After that, realizing that this hero was protected by the gods, Iobates, gives his daughter to him and bequeaths him to ascend to the throne after him. However, Bellerophon will draw the anger of the gods over time because of his disrespect and pride. He once attempts to climb the skies on his winged horse. He then sends a horsefly for Jupiter to sting Pegasus. Pegasus gets angry and throws his rider off, but Bellerophon survives. However, he loses his eyes as a result of the fall. After this event, Bellerophon escapes from people and hits the roads. He lives alone in the meadows of Aleion until he dies in misery (Bulfinch, 2004, p. 115).

One of the main subjects of Greek Mythology is the acceptance of human weakness in the face of nature. The stories that tell the pitiful end of the unbelievers, who do not accept this situation, are, in a sense, a cautious tale. Just like Phaeton, Ikaros and Sisyphus, Bellerophon is one of those who pay the price of crossing limits. The purpose of such myths is to teach individuals successful or acceptable values according to the culture they belong to, with religious references. In cultures divided into social classes, this situation can be interpreted as those who have the status of women, farmers or slaves should accept their fate. With a different solution, the king of a culture that was among the Greeks enemies in the Trojan War is not accepted as one of the gods like Heracles.



**Picture 2.**

*Chimera of Arezzo, Etruscan bronze statue, c. 400 BCE.*

### Chimerism in Biology

In response to the answers given by mythology in the past, there is science today. The methodical inquiry process of science disables answers based on an individual's thoughts and feelings. However, science can sometimes take mythology as a source, such as art. Taking its basic elements from mythology, Chimera becomes a scientific term and corresponds to a concept.

However, the process of chimera-like combination in biological science is a combination at the cellular level. Unification at the genome level does not result in the emergence of monsters. At the least, we cannot talk about the existence of a fire-breathing lion carrying a goat on its back. First of all, DNA is the molecules that make up life. We can think of these molecules as small data stores containing information about living things. In sexually reproducing organisms, especially on the basis of humans "When an egg and sperm combine their DNA, the genome they produce contains all the necessary information for building a new human. As the egg divides to form an embryo, it produces new copies of that original genome" (Zimmer, 2013). This original genome contains the most basic invariant outline of the hereditary characteristics of the living thing. When it comes to chimerism, inherited traits belonging to two identities in one body appear.

There are varieties of chimerism such as microchimerism, tetragametic chimerism, and germline chimerism. Tetragametic "Chimerism is when two embryos, which are formed as a result of the development of two eggs fertilized separately by two sperms, are born as a single living thing by merging at an early stage of development, instead of forming twin brothers" (Haberler - ntv.com.tr, 2022). "These so-called embryonic chimeras may go through life blissfully unaware of their origins" (Zimmer, 2013). This is different from hybridity. Hybrid creatures contain a

sperm and an egg, and a single living thing emerges in a body. "Microchimerism is the presence of cells from one individual in another genetically distinct individual. Pregnancy is the main cause of natural microchimerism through transplacental bidirectional cell trafficking between mother and fetus" (Shrivastava, Naik, Suryawanshi, and Gupta, 2019). Microchimerism also has its own sub-branches. In chimerism, there are traces of two living things in one body. There is no monster, but on the scale of DNA, a living thing has two different genomes. DNA samples taken from different parts of the same body may belong to different genetic identities. Thus, the hereditary characteristics of the living thing will differ. "Instead of a mixture of genes from each parent organism, a given cell contains the genetic information of only one parent organism. Thus, a chimera is made up of populations of cells that are genetically identical to each of its parent organisms" (Vidyasagar, 2016). As a result of our chimerism, many surprising results can be encountered, such as the fact that a woman has male chromosomes, someone else's DNA is found in a man's sperm, or a person's cell type changes as a result of a marrow transplant. At first glance, the phenomenon of chimerism may resemble many phenomena such as hybridity, mutation, twinning and conjoined twinning, but it should not be confused with these phenomena. In a text such as this produced in the field of art, going into technical details concerning more biology and medicine will be beyond the scope of the subject, so the details will not be discussed here.

However, two cases in the field of forensic medicine reveal interesting examples of chimerism shaping jurisprudence. It would be appropriate to mention these examples in order to understand the scope of chimerism. In the first example, Karen Keegan, 52, in Boston, USA, was suffering from acute kidney failure and was looking for a donor who could donate a kidney. Genetic tests were performed on the patient's three sons to determine whether their kidneys were suitable. As a result of the tests, two of Keegan's three sons that she carried in her womb did not turn out to be her own children (M.Sc., 2022). However, tests showed that she was related to her two children. With this result, the possibility that Keegan cheated on her husband or that the babies were mixed up in the hospital was ruled out. As a result of detailed investigations, it was revealed that Keegan is Chimera and this was reported as a case in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. A similar event would occur later. A woman named Lydia Fairchild needed public assistance for her family. In this case, she took tests to prove that her children belonged to her, and as a result of the tests, it turned out that the children were not hers. She was then accused of allegedly trying to defraud the government by becoming a surrogate and risked losing the custody of her children (M.Sc., 2022). Fairchild's lawyer showed Keegan's *New England Journal of*

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Medicine file to the court, claiming that her client might also be Chimera. As a result, Fairchild took tests like Keegan did. She won the case as a result of the discovery that she was indeed Chimera. The Keegan case became an example for similar cases due to being brought to court.

In Keegan and Fairchild examples, chimerism was detected by repeating DNA tests in different parts of the bodies. While some tissues of the human body show chimera features, some regions may not. This can be seen even in the human brain. The brain's presence of microchimerism may initially seem unlikely due to the blood-brain barrier (BBB). However, studies showing microchimerism in mouse brains suggest that the same thing may happen in humans (Chan and Nelson, 2013). In a study called *Male Microchimerism in the Human Female Brain*, it is reported that 37 of 59 subjects, i.e. 63% of the women tested, harbor male microchimerism in the brain (Chan and others, 2012). The existence of traces of another identity in an organ such as the brain raises the question of whether some mental illnesses may be caused by microchimerism.

We can easily say that there is no evidence that people living in antiquity had today's genetic information. As such, of course, chimera designs in mythologies contain symbolic references contrary to reality. This issue is addressed in this text. However, with today's technical information, it has come to a point where these symbolic references can no longer be references but real. Chimeria can also be produced in the laboratory. "... "geep", a goat and sheep chimera, was first of its kind according to the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The body of the geep was wooly in parts which had sheep cells and DNA while hairy in other parts with goat cells and DNA" (Vidyasagar, 2016). The purpose of producing these organisms may be to improve the quality of animal products, as well as to provide medical benefits. To explain, the immune system of the human body rejects foreign elements. By controlling the immune mechanism with chimerism trials, it is possible to produce drugs for some diseases or enable organ transplantation from other animals. As another purpose, human tissue produced in the body of an animal would be developed and transformed into an organ, and then transferred to those in need. Such studies have been carried out in countries such as Spain, China, and Japan. Where humans are concerned, ethical debates arise. Researchers from the Catholic University of Murcia (UCAM) in Spain continued their studies in China due to the ethical obstacles they faced in their country. There, however, their work resulted in success. The Spanish team created the first human-pig chimera in 2017. The same team created the first human-ape chimera in 2019. Barcelona Regenerative Medicine Centre's member Angel Raya, said experiments on organisms containing cells from two species was challenged with "ethical barriers" (Dalton, 2019). As mentioned before, a chimeric element

can move and copy itself in every part of the human body without any limits. This will apply to animal bodies as well. The reason why animals such as mice, pigs and monkeys are preferred in such experiments is that the bodily structures of these animals can accept human elements more easily. Thus, it is a matter of curiosity whether a chimeric element can act in an animal body just as it does in a human body. Angel Raya touches on this and goes on to ask about the consequences of the possibility of stem cells escaping and forming human neurons in an animal's brain. She wonders if it would have cognizance and "what would happen in the case of stem cells turning into sperm cells?" (Dalton, 2019). Because of such concerns, experiments are terminated before embryos develop. "However, the Spanish scientists, who did the experiments in China to circumvent a ban on such practices in their home country, said a human-monkey hybrid could have potentially been born" (Dalton, 2019). Another research crew inserted human stem cells into mouse embryos. "These experiments, mentioned in an article in the journal PNAS (2005), revealed that the human embryonic stem cells created a lot of diverse and functional neural types of cells. These cells continued to grow into mature and active human neurons in the forebrain of the Mouse" (Vidyasagar, 2016). The list of examples of the abuse of scientific developments in human history is quite long. Considering this situation, there is no guarantee that someone in the world will not bring an already successful experiment to a level that has overcome ethical barriers. Thus, while it is now quite possible to encounter a lion with goat and snake elements in its body, even if it does not spew fire from its mouth in the near future, the main problem is that such a creature may also have features that make it human.

### Artistic Examples

In order to talk about life, we expect some kind of self-replication process to occur, even at the molecular level. This situation shapes our perceptions from the very beginning. In this way, we expect a customary order, and the steps that disrupt this order mean confusion for us. For this reason, we consider chimeras as monsters because they evoke chaos in us. Especially when it comes to chimera trials with human characteristics, moral debates come to the fore. At this point, art prepares an environment for moral discussions and prepares a foresight basis for the exchange of ideas to get results. In that sense, we come across artistic works that bring a new understanding within the Bio Art movement.

### Reflections of Chimerism in Bio Art Movement

"On the other hand, the artist can intervene in what exists through art. They can reproduce what exists through art by blending it with what belongs to its artist" (Sarıncı, 2015, p.39). When art has entered the path of destruction of traditions, innovation and change with modernism, it has also entered the

path of continuous growth, derivation and proliferation with technology. An important bond has been established between technology and art, and this double bond has created significant radical changes in many areas of plastic arts (Kaya, 2023, p.3). Bio Art Movement is an art movement that uses the possibilities of technology. The Bio Art movement, on the other hand, uses the possibilities of advanced technology such as gene manipulation to reveal examples of chimera living beyond representation. The works of Eduardo Kac, a Brazilian-American artist who is one of the leaders of the Bio Art movement, can be considered in this way. The artist's works named *Natural History of the Enigma*(2008) (Picture 3) and *Alba*(2000)(Picture 4) are works that he performed by injecting different genetic codes into different living things. In the work called *Natural History of the Enigma*, the artist transfers the gene extracted from his own blood sample to a petunia plant. “*Natural History of the Enigma*” was made in collaboration with professor Neil Anderson and professor Neil Olszewski in the Department of Horticultural Science, both of whom are professors in the Department of Plant Biology at the University of Minnesota (Vaage, 2011, p. 35)



**Picture 3.**  
*Enigma*



**Picture 4.**  
*Alba*

Eduardo Kac calls this plant *Edunia*. Although *Edunia* looks like a normal petunia, it contains a foreign gene in its structure. Since this gene is human, we can talk about human-plant chimera with this study. Referring to *Edunia's* Chimerism the artist says that through red veins where his blood gene is, he created a chimeric gene composed of his own DNA and “a promoter to guide the red expression only in the flower vascular system” (Vaage, 2011, p. 38) Although it has been produced before in history, Kac's most well-known work is the GFP rabbit *Alba*. GFP stands for Green Fluorescent Protein and is found in a jellyfish found in the North Pacific Ocean. With the support of the artist, zoo expert and producer Louis Bec, and Louis-Marie Houdebine, who was trained as a chemist and transferred to molecular biology, he transfers the Fluorescent protein to the rabbit embryo and a phosphorescent green rabbit emerges. This work causes controversy around the world. These debates have several subheadings, such as animal rights or normality, and otherness. In the context of the subject of this text, it is communication between species, or more clearly, gene exchange between species. With gene exchange, the normal limits that should be between species are exceeded. Eduardo Kac, on the other hand, defends the naturalness of transgenic by giving an example from a bacterium called *agrobacterium* in his article *Life Transformation—Art Mutation*. *Agrobacterium* has the ability to transfer its DNA into plant cells and integrate its DNA into the plant chromosome (Kac, 2007, p. 180). With this logic, it can be said that nature itself exceeds the limits set by itself. In this case, chimerism becomes normal and there is no moral problem in producing chimeric creatures.

Born in 1978, Slovenian artist Maja Smrekar's work, *Hu. M.C.C. [The Human Molecular Colonization Capacity*(2012)] (Picture 5) can also be taken as an example in the context of the subject. “In collaboration with biologists, the artist combined genetic code from her own DNA to alter yeast, changing its metabolism so that it produced lactic acid. This compound, which is quite common in the food industry, was then harvested to make a yogurt, called *Maya YogHurt*” (Myers, 2015, p. 38). *Center for Genomic Gastronomy*, a group that studies the biotechnology and biological diversity of human food systems, is another artistic formation that brings edible products produced with biotechnology to the field of art. Zach Denfeld and Katherine Kramer, members of this group, in their performative work titled *The Glowing Sushi Project*, deal with genetically modified organisms that are included in the eating habits of American Society. In this study, they use genetically modified organisms called *GloFish* to make sushi. (Picture 6) Unlike in yogurt, a visible organism has become food. “A subtext of the work is the unfortunate invisibility of food sources in contemporary life and the hypocrisy we are susceptible to when we develop reflexes to dismiss particular ideas or practices. The title of one work within the Project resonates powerfully: *Not-in-California Roll*” (Myers, 2015, p. 44). Through such studies, the possibilities of chimeric creatures to be included in the food sector are opened to discussion.



**Picture 5.**

*The Human Molecular Colonization Capacity*



**Picture 6.**

*The Glowing Sushi Project*

### **Taxidermic Sculptures**

As technology develops, genetically modified organisms will perhaps bring to life the forms we are accustomed to seeing in mythological narratives in the near future. Sculpture works created using the taxidermy technique, on the other hand, reflect the concept of Chimera in the first sense that comes to mind. Among these examples, the works of Thomas Grünfeld are undoubtedly direct examples of chimera. “Grünfeld morphs the disparate creatures together so seamlessly that they look as though they could generate a new and lively species, capable of surviving in a changing world” (Collins, 2014, p. 89). The artist’s series Misfits can be considered as one of the most extraordinary examples of the

logic of collage technique. (Picture 7) These works of art also bring different interpretations to the concept of upcycling. “The term upcycling, unlike recycling, is the preparation of waste objects for reuse without chemical treatment” (İlden & Sarıca, 2023, p.82). Since the chemical processes in the taxidermy process are different from the recycling process and the bodies of different creatures are used, taxidermic samples can also be interpreted in this context. There are other examples of incorporating frozen animals into the artwork as ready-made objects. When we look at Grünfeld’s taxidermy sculptures, we witness that different animal parts are included in the new body without losing the connotations of the nature of the animal they actually belong to. In the Misfits series, the fragmented and reassembled animal parts show parallelism with the eclectic principle of bringing together different things and forming a whole. While this situation parallels the logic of postmodern philosophy to create new things by coming together without losing their own identity, it reminds the phenomenon of chimerism to exist with other identities in a body. Therefore, it is plausible to claim that these studies attempt to overcome the boundaries between species, at least in the perceptual dimension.



**Picture 7.**

*Misfits*

Glenn Kaino’s series named Craft are also works that can be formally included in the Chimera class. Craft series, which was created by feeding from different fields of interest such as plastic surgery, science fiction and medical zoology, are studies in which taxidermy is used in a different way. In the series produced using the patchwork technique, the skins of animals that are hostile to each other under natural conditions are covered over each other’s forms. For example a salmon layered in shark skin (Picture 8), a pig covered in cow skin, an ostrich covered in python skin, and a goat hidden beneath the scaly skin of an alligator all “create moments of gentle disturbance in which material contradiction, symbiotic survival, and grotesque beauty come into question and negotiation” (Graft, 2006). In Kaino’s Craft series, irony is added to the sense of irrationality in Thomas Grünfeld’s Misfits series. Both series are unsettling against the background of their apparent

ironic surprise. In the Craft series “This possibility is projected beyond dreary concepts of hybridity and pluralism, and instead expresses tension and conflict” (Graft, 2006). As an American artist with Japanese roots, Kaino deals with the problem of identity sociologically, but the problem of identity finds its expression again in the form of chimera. “Simply wearing a mask is not a strong enough metaphor for social identity; here Kaino demonstrates the sometimes absurd lengths people go through to find place or acceptance” (Okinaka, 2008).



**Picture 8.**  
*Kaino's Craft series, salmon layered in shark skin*

### Female Artists

The forms of monsters, the children of the mother goddess Gaia, are gaining visibility in the artistic works of women artists today, as if imitating the Mother Goddess. “Several artists, mostly female, have conflated human and animal imagery for just these reasons. For them, turning a human into an animal is powerful way of looking at ourselves from another viewpoint. Alongside Smith are Rona Pondick, Rosemarie Irockel, Liz Craft, Daisy Youngblood and Jane Alexander” (Collins, 2014, p. 93). Kiki Smith's 2001 bronze statue of Harpie is an example of chimera with reference to hybrid female and raptor creatures in Greek Mythology. Referring to the time when she first started creating figurative work, Kiki Smith says that she was fascinated by the symbolic morphing of animals and humans. Smith goes on to say that anthropomorphizing of animals; animals being assigned human qualities and vice versa was very interesting. She questions the role of animals in the construction of “our identity, our well-being and our environment” (Collins, 2014, p. 93).

Artist Patricia Piccinini is another female artist who expresses herself in the form of chimera by bringing together the forms of different living things. Born in 1965 in Sierra Leone, West

Africa, Patricia Piccinini lived in Italy until she was seven years old. The artist, who immigrated to Australia with her family after the age of seven, still lives in Australia. The emphasis on reality given by Grünfeld and Kaino using real animal embalming in the artist's figures corresponds to a hyper-realistic attitude. In an interview with the artist Rosi Braidotti, she describes her figures as technically ‘chimeras’. However, she goes on to say that she prefers to use the word ‘creature’, because it entails the idea of both ‘an animal’ and also “something that has been created” (Piccinini, 2019). Using her imagination, the artist realizes the products that genetic engineering can produce in studios instead of laboratories. Patricia Piccinini's “dreamlike illustrations, hybrid animals and monster-like creatures question how today's technology and culture alters our perception of what being human means and “wonders at our relationships with – and responsibilities towards – that which we create” (<http://www.patriciapiccinini.net>, 14). The artist does not show the results of man's pushing the limits of nature as punishment by bringing disasters to the person who imitates God. In the artist's sculptures, monsters are often visualized as helpless and needy freaks. Piccinini expresses itself in the form of having to face the reality of taking responsibility for the creations of the creator by trying a different way. This expression is also thought-provoking today about what the rights of chimeras who have human tissues in their bodies can be raised for possible organ transplantation in the near future. (Picture 9)

Kate Macdovel's ceramic sculptures also move along a sensual line parallel to the empathy that Piccinini wants to create. The artist's porcelain sculptures often contain human skeletons or limbs. For this reason, we can include Macdovel's related works within the scope of chimera. The artist defines her works on her website as a romantic unison with the natural world that contradicts our current impact on the environment. For Macdovel, her pieces are in part responses to environmental adversities such as “climate change, toxic pollution, and gm crops” (macdowell, 2023).



**Picture 9.**  
*Patricia Piccinini's The Young Family*



**Picture 10, 11.**

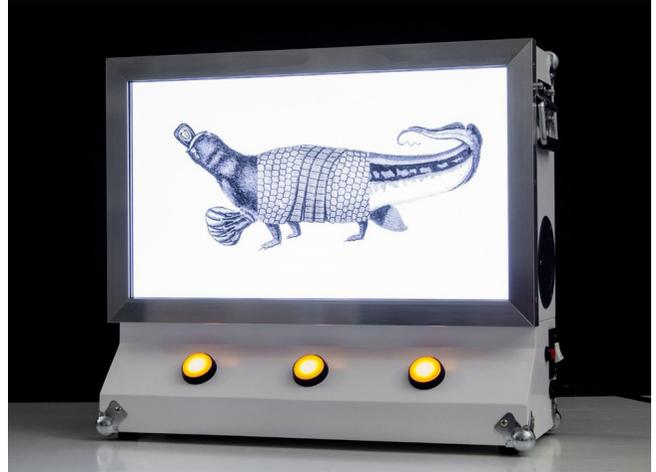
*Kate Macdovel's ceramic sculptures*

### Examples of chimerism in two-dimensional art

Uli Westpal's Chimaerama is a kind of machine. Having collected one hundred animal illustrations from the Victorian era, the artist "cut them into three parts and positioned them in a way that that each head fits onto each body onto each tail. The separate parts can be re-united into a million new creatures by pushing three buttons" (Myers, 2015, p. 83). "As a generator of novel lifeforms, the work also refers to crossbreeding and horizontal gene transfer as a driving force of evolution: The constant shuffling of genetic makeup forms a major aspect of evolutionary processes" (Westphal, 2023).

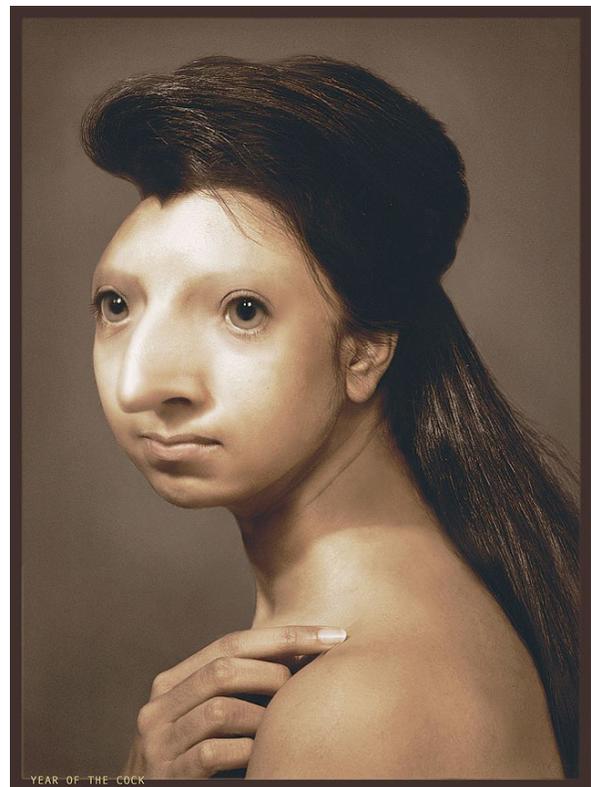
Chinese artist Daniel Lee, born in 1945, also uses digital manipulations and the art of photography to present chimeras

that seem to come from the realm of legends. Using photoshop, the artist reshapes portraits of himself and his friends with animalistic lines. In one portrait, a man's skull is placed in the stretched profile of an ox, in another the woman's nose is as pointed as a rooster's beak. Other forms depict the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, such as the tiger, goat, monkey and other animals. Most portraits are entertaining when they look like animals. But when the artist distances his subjects a little from the human, the results are staggering, hovering at the height of horror. (Andrews, 2011)(Picture 13)



**Picture 12.**

*Uli Westpal's Chimaerama*



**Picture 13.**

*Daniel Lee's Year of the Cock*

We can say that the feeling of otherness brought about by having different cultural or racial origins is one of the common features of artists using the chimera form. While the Chimera form was the visualized form of the other and the unknown in the past, today it is in a sense owned by others. In examining this phenomenon, science is now responding to many unknowns, reducing the possibility of danger from unknown and feared areas. In addition, by revealing that different possibilities are possible, science opens up an intellectual discussion ground for those who are others in the area left behind by the uncanniness of chimeras.

## Conclusion

The concept of Chimera somehow bears traces of the manifestations of the Mother Goddess cult. The ancestry of the heroes in Greek myths is often traced back to the father god Zeus in order to give a theocratic legitimacy to the origins of the region to which the heroes belong. Heroes are sometimes presented directly as the sons of Zeus. As the chief god of a patriarchal society, Zeus represents the rationality attributed to the masculine title. The matriarchal culture, which reflects the religious aspect of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, is much more intertwined with nature. With the spread of agriculture and the transition to settled life, the control of nature and soil now results in the patriarchal culture dominating the matriarchal culture. In this process, the heroic children of the Father god Zeus, one by one, begin to destroy the monsters, i.e. the remains of the ancient culture, which represent the destructiveness of nature. The attempt to dominate nature, which is symbolized by the monsters and wild animals brought to its knees in myths, reaches as far as the Enlightenment, Industrial Revolutions and Modernism, as well as the World Wars and environmental destructions in which some species are now extinct. The stereotypical identity, which took shape as western, white and male with modernism, began to be criticized during the 1960s. In particular, the feminist movement is determinant in other identity politics within these opposition stances. Identity politics, which can express itself within artistic orientations such as performances and installation art, pushes the limits of the body and while doing this, tries to break down cultural codes. In a more direct expression of modernism, one of the basic elements for Western culture is the white male person. Beyond that, women, different races and cultures, foreigners, people with disabilities, people with different sexual orientations and animals are all limited as others. In the studies seen in the examples of chimerism, the borders lose their meaning. At its most basic, the foundations of anthropocentric understanding are shaken by transcending the most basic boundaries between human and animal. Such works are examples where the collage technique of Cubism is brought to a stage that forces the imagination. While Synthetic Cubism breaks the boundaries between painting and sculpture, in examples of chimerism the boundaries between

genres, identities and even the living and the inanimate are eroded. However, in such examples, new genres that did not exist before emerge against the eclectic structure of postmodernism that takes references from the past. This way of crossing the borders with a mythological application opens up new untested options.

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### Picture 2.

Chimera of Arezzo, Etruscan Bronze Statue. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimera\\_of\\_Arezzo#/media/File:Chimera\\_d'arezzo,\\_fi\\_04.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chimera_of_Arezzo#/media/File:Chimera_d'arezzo,_fi_04.JPG)

### Picture 3.

Eduardo Kac's Enigma. <https://www.ekac.org/gfpbunny.html>

**Picture 4.**

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## Yapılandırılmış Özet

İlk çağdaki insanlar, bilimsel bilginin yoksunluğunda, kendilerini çevreleyen doğayı anlamaya yönelik sorular sormuş ve bu sorulara cevaplar aramışlardır. Mitler bu cevap arayışlarının sonuçlarından birisidir. İlkel insanlar kendi sınırlı bilgileriyle, nedensellik ilişkileri kurarak doğa olaylarına bir anlam vermeye çalışmışlardır. Bu anlam verme çabalarında insanın kendisi ve çevresindeki hayvanlar başlıca başvuru noktalarından olmuştur. İnsan aynı zamanda kendisine bakarak, doğa olaylarını kendi davranışlarıyla ilişkilendirmiştir. Bu şekilde mitlerin nasıl oluştuğunu açıklayabiliriz. Bu anlamda öfke gibi yıkıcı bir duygu insanların etrafındaki vahşi ve korkutucu hayvanlara başvurularak görsellik kazanmıştır. Doğanın yıkıcılık gibi farklı yönlerinin biçim kazanmış halleri olan mitolojik canavarlar bu duruma örnek gösterilebilir. Doğa ile daha fazla iç içe yaşanan dönem olan avcı toplayıcı süreçte, doğanın hem bereketli ve üretken yönü hem de ürkütücü yönü kadınlık ile ilişkilendirilmiştir. Böylece doğaya kişilik kazandırılarak tanrıça olarak kabul edilmiştir. Bu duruma paralel olarak en temelinde Neolitik Dönemde, Anadolu'da karşılaşılan kadınlık uzuvları vurgulanmış şişman kadın heykelciklerinin yansıttığı inanç sistemi, binlerce yıl boyunca gelişmiştir. Bu bağlamda bölgesel ve süreçsel yorumlara da bağlı olarak ana tanrıçanın farklı isimleri oluşmuştur. Yunan Mitolojisi özelinde bir şekilde bereket ve toprak tanrıçaları olan Artemis, Rhea, Demeter ve Gaia'nın da birbirleri ile ilişkili ve hatta aynı tanrıçanın farklı yorumları olduklarını iddia edebiliriz. Hangi isimle olursa olsun ana tanrıça inancı binlerce yıl büyük bir coğrafya da egemen olmuştur. Bahsi geçtiği üzere eski Yunan Kültürü için de bu durum istisna değildir. Yerleşik hayata geçilmesi ve kuzeyden gelen savaşçı halkların ataerkil kültürlerinin baskın hale gelmesi ile birlikte ise anaerkil kültürün anlatıları baskın kültür içerisinde geri plana itilmiş ve farklı bir şekilde yer edinmiştir. Bu aşama sıralamasında sonradan gelen kültürün tanrısı ya diğer kültürün tanrılarını alt eder ya da öncekilerin babası ya da anası olur. Bu sebeple bütün canavarların hepsi bir kadın olarak Ana Tanrıçanın ürünlerine dönüşmüşler ve doğanın tekinsiz ve tehlikeli halinin görsellik kazanmış halleri olarak tanımlanmışlardır. Bu canavarlara birçok kültürün anlatılarında rastlanmaktadır.

Rüzgârın ya da fırtınanın canavarlaştırılması biraz daha Mezopotamya ve dolaylı olarak Anadolu etkileri içermektedir. Bu metnin konusu olan Kimeria'nın izini sürdürdüğümüzde ona benzeyen başka yaratıklar ile de karşılaşırız. Benzer olarak Mezopotamya da görülen Lamaştı ve Pazuzu gibi tanrısal varlıklar rüzgâr ve salgın hastalıklar ile ilişkilendirilirdi. Bu metnin konusu olan Yunan Mitolojisindeki aslan kafalı, keçi gövdeli ve yılan kuyruklu canavar ise Kimeria olarak adlandırılmıştır. Kimeria Ana tanrıça ile ilişkili olarak hem tanrıçanın torunu hem de dişi bir canavardır. Kimeria ile ilişkili olan kahraman ise Belleprontestir. Anlatılarda Bellerophontes'in yolu Anadolu'nun Akdeniz kısmında yer alan Lykia ülkesine düşecektir. Bir anlamda hem Kimeria'nın hem de Bellerophontes'in yurdu Lykia'dır. Başkentleri Arna (Xantos) olan Lykialıların Letoon isimli kenti bir diğer Ana Tanrıça olan Leto ve onun çocukları olan Apollon ve Artemis'e adanmış olan dinsel başkenttir. Lykia'lıların anaerkil bir toplum olup olmadıkları tartışılırken bu durum ana tanrıça kültürüne verdikleri değeri gösterir. Lykia kültürüne değinmemizin sebebi Kimerianın neden bu kültürden çıktığının ve bu yaratık ile paralel olarak Bellerophontes'in hikayesinin sonunun daha iyi anlaşılması içindir. Bellerophontes hikayesinden sonra, parçaları tek başlarına da bir anlam ifade eden bu çok kimlikli canavar bir sembole dönüşmüş ve günümüzde biyoloji, psikoloji ve sanat gibi farklı alanlar için başvuru kaynağı haline gelmiştir. Bir beden içerisinde farklı kimliklerin bir arada var olabilmesi anlamına gelen kimerizm özellikle biyoloji alanında gen teknolojisinin ilerlemesiyle birlikte bilimsel bir taban kazanmıştır. Aynı bedende farklı gen kodlarına rastlanması doğada da insan dahil gerçek kimeriaların var olduğunu kanıtlamıştır.

Teknolojinin gelişmesi sanatı da etkilemiştir. Özellikle gen teknolojisi gibi teknolojilerin gelişmesi ile sanat da bu gelişmelerden nasibini almıştır. Gen teknolojisi kullanılarak üretilen sanatsal çalışmalar ile yapay yolla da kimerialar üretilmiş ve sanat eseri olarak sunulmuştur. Bu çalışmalar ile birlikte insan, hayvan ve bitki genlerinin bir bedende var olabildiği örneklerin ortaya çıkması birçok etik tartışmaya yol açmıştır. Sanat, yakın gelecekte daha sıklıkla karşılaşılabilecek bu örnekler için günümüzde etik sınırların yeniden belirlenmesine yönelik bir tartışma alanı açmaktadır. Günümüzde popüler ve alternatif kültür yayınları içerisinde de kavram olarak kimeria örneklerine rastlanılmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Kimeria olarak adlandırılan, yaratıkların çağdaş sanat tarihindeki karşılıklarına değinilecektir. Çalışmanın ilk bölümünde mit olarak Kimeria'nın mitolojik hikayesine değinilerek temsil ettiği değerler anlaşılmasına çalışılacaktır. Bu değerler ışığında günümüzdeki biyoloji alanında Kimeria kavramı ele alınarak metnin alt yapısı oluşturulacaktır. Biyolojideki Kimeria kavramının açtığı tartışma zemini ileri dönüşüm ya da kimlik politikaları gibi tartışma alanlarına yorum katarken, kolaj gibi postmodernist üretim şekillerine de farklı bir boyut katmıştır. 1960'lı yıllarda ortaya çıkan kimlik politikaları ile birlikte kimliği oluşturan sınırlar ve tanımlamalar tartışılmaya başlanmıştır. Kimeria gibi bir kavram ile birlikte bu sınırlar belirsizleşmiştir. Bu tartışmalar sanat alanında da karşılığını bulmuştur. Son bölüm ile birlikte sanatsal örnekler ele alınacaktır. Kimeria'nın arka planı ile birlikte günümüzdeki Kimeria kavramının sanat alanındaki karşılıklarına değinilecektir.