

SERPENTS, GENIES,
CHIMERAS AND
OTHER WONDERS

2023-2026

P O R
T F O
L I O

ESMERALDA KOSMATOPOULOS

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”

— **Simone de Beauvoir**, *The Second Sex*

SERPENTS, GENIES, CHIMERAS AND OTHER WONDERS

Serpents, Genies, Chimeras and Other Wonders is a cycle of contemporary fables exploring three roles through which femininity is socially inherited, constructed and judged: daughter, wife and mother. Drawing on ancient Greek mythology, Islamic cosmologies and stories written by the artist, Kosmatopoulos transforms intimate experiences into narratives inhabited by hybrid female creatures. Myth becomes a language through which personal experience can move beyond autobiography and reveal the collective expectations imposed upon women.

Across three interconnected bodies of work, Chimera approaches the daughter through biological and emotional inheritance; The Jinn from the West examines the fantasies projected onto the foreign wife; and Hayāt al-Hayāt follows a serpent-woman who refuses motherhood and redirects fertility towards language, desire and creation. Embroidery, khayamiya, poetry and drawing bring text and image into the same narrative space. Together, the works reimagine femininity not as a stable identity or predetermined destiny, but as a continually transforming condition shaped between inheritance and choice, projection and self-invention.

Hayāt al-Hayāt

2025–26, Egyptian cotton, hand-cut and appliqué, poem

In Hayāt al-Hayāt, a serpent-woman refuses the destiny that would make motherhood the necessary completion of her body. Rooted in Kosmatopoulos's decision not to have children, the work moves beyond autobiography through a contemporary myth of rejection, exile and metamorphosis. The protagonist escapes the serpent charmer and enters a world of abysses, fire and unstable forms, seeking a language for a life that cannot be measured through biological transmission.

The twenty textile works are each accompanied by a poem from the artist. Inspired by Islamic miniatures and Sufi poetry, they transform the pierced belly of the serpent-woman from a presumed absence into an opening through which other forms of fertility may emerge: language, imagination, pleasure, desire and creation. The title draws upon the proximity between the Arabic words hayāt—life—and hayyah—serpent. What is not transmitted through flesh is carried elsewhere: through fabric, poetry, image and the stories a body creates for itself.





1.

The Reed's Sigh

The reed sighs the call from the
Source.

Ancient spells, before the
moons.

Each note embraces,
bodies tremble.

The world, gently, closes.



2.

The Captured Gaze

The eye brushes the eye.
In the pupil,
the vertigo of an ancient decree.
A breath, a shiver.
The moment freezes.
She sees him. He holds her.



3.

The Moon at the Sun

In the embrace of the walls,
hands weave a nest
The fertile body watches,
moon suspended before dusk.
The beginning trembles.
Time holds its breath.



4.

The Crowning of the Egg

Sacred statue, at the height of
her glory,
Celestial crown
upon her emptied womb.
Below, gazes bow before the
beginning
Beneath the moon's dust,
the void watches.



5.

The Forgotten One's Ball

At the windows, the feast spins,
Breath suspended
beyond the world,
beyond time.
Life dances without her.
An endless circle around the
beginning.



6.

The Night's Forgetting

What gives nothing cannot be kept.

Hands, closed doors,
shut to pierced souls.

A star falls,
Into the moonless night.
A breath, then nothing.



7.

The Simurgh's Embrace

Beneath the Simurgh's endless
wing,
the womb opens to breath,
Echo of a thousand winds.
She dissolves into the feather,
With only the sea as witness.
Nameless, she is reborn.
A new moon calls her.



8.

The Flame that Forges

The sea closes.

The stone opens.

In the hollow, a flame dances,
soft, fierce.

The fire cannot be seized.

It enters, it consumes.



9.

A New World With no End

The hooves of Buraq
split a moonless sky.
They cross the void,
Without beginning, without end,
Without form, without name.
A light bursts forth,
brighter than nothingness.



10.

What Still Burns

The sea remembers
the passing souls.
Full of emptiness, it overflows.
The fire draws its border.
A thousand flames against for-
getting.
Illuminate.



11.

Wound in the Wind

The sand bleeds.
The hooves strike.
The wind exhumes the cries.
The bite splits the skin.
The muscle remembers.
Flesh against light.
Shadow against nerve.
The truth breaks open.



12.

Wound in the Wind

The sand bleeds.
The hooves strike.
The wind exhumes the cries.
The bite splits the skin.
The muscle remembers.
Flesh against light.
Shadow against nerve.
The truth breaks open.



13.

Birth of the thousand Heads

Empty wombs, open doors.

From each, an army is born.

Full of nothing, strong with all.

A thousand breaths — one

voice.

The earth shudders, then bows.



14.

Rage and Sand, Ash and Wind

In the dust, rage erupts.

One body, a thousand heads,
a gaping hollow.

The wind dances.

The earth trembles.

The camp fades.



15.

Unifying the Void

One body, two breaths.

One rends, the other embraces.

Teeth locked, iris brushed.

Beneath the shadow, a fragile
peace.

Silence wounds no more.

The world breathes.



16.

The Radiance of Return

What fled regains its forgotten form.

Absent among the living,
the moon erases the wounds.

Arms open.

The void fills.

The eyes search no more.



17.

Come, I'll Take You

Alone with the void,

another voice rises.

The black moon joins the full.

The shadow touches the light.

The void opens —

it becomes a path.

All is reborn.



18.

The Man of Pleasure

When the body expects nothing,
it receives it all.

The flesh trembles,
the skin stretches.

The moment passes through.

Nothing to carry, nothing to
hold.

Only surrender.



19.

The Fertile of the Void

Nothing has been sown.

Nothing is meant to bloom.

Wombs open to the wind.

Without seeds, without fruit,

They move the moon.

The sky falls silent.

The world listens.



20.

Fertile Abyss

Nothing grows — everything
throbs.

Full of emptiness, empty of fear,
she becomes world.

Without egg and without wait-
ing.

The invisible moves.

Create.

The Jinny from the West

2024–25, Egyptian cotton, hand-cut and appliqué

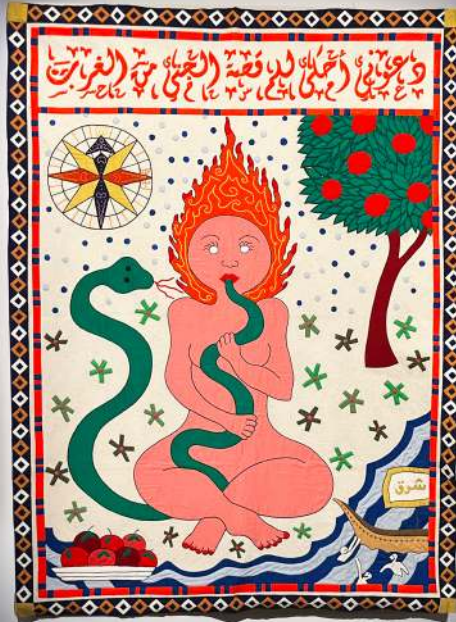
The Jinn from the West transforms the prejudices surrounding a Western woman married to an Egyptian man into a contemporary fable. The series originates in the unsolicited warnings repeatedly addressed to the artist's husband: that a foreign wife would be sexually available, wealthy, useful for obtaining a European visa, incapable of becoming a devoted wife or mother, and likely to separate him from his family. Rather than refuting these projections directly, Kosmatopoulos pushes them into the realm of mythology. The *agnabeya* becomes a mischievous jinn whose supernatural powers embody everything she is simultaneously desired and feared for.

Across ten hand-sewn khayamiya panels, the couple's relationship unfolds between seduction and suspicion, intimacy and collective judgement, departure and belonging. Drawing on the visual language of Persian and Islamic manuscripts, the works transform contemporary stereotypes into episodes that seem to belong to an ancient cosmology. The traditional Egyptian craft of khayamiya—historically associated with tents made for weddings and public celebrations—becomes the material through which the contradictions surrounding one particular union are exposed. The foreign woman appears supernatural precisely because those observing her refuse to let her remain ordinary.









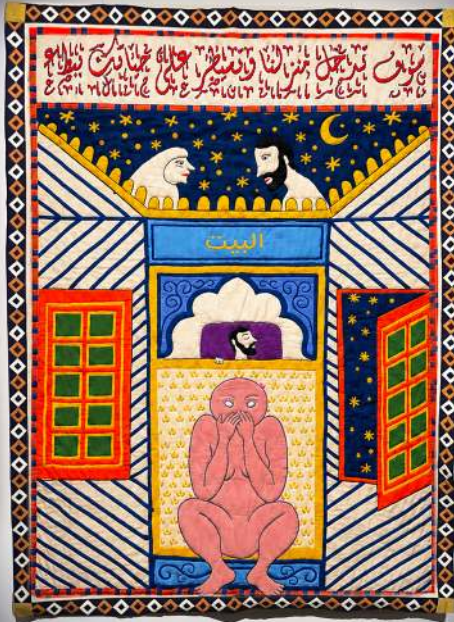
01.

« Let me tell you the story of
the Jinny from the West »



02.

« She will cross the vast sea that separates our two worlds and will sow chaos in her paths »



03.

« She will enter our house and
little by little, she will take
control over your life »



04.

« She will make you believe
that she can turn our sand into
pure gold »



05.

« She will make you discover
the forbidden pleasures »



06.

« She will vow that, one day,
she will give you a big family »



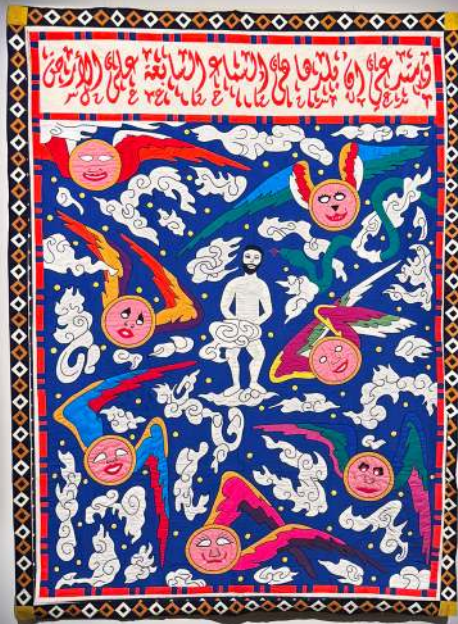
07.

« Despite all our fights and prayers, she will take her away from us »



08.

« She will promise to save you
from the hardship of your life
here »



09.

« She will pretend that her
land is the seventh sky on
earth »



10.

« She will burn in hell and will
take you with her »



Chimera

2023, hand embroidery on linen

Chimera explores the mother–daughter relationship as a condition of biological, emotional and mythological coexistence. The series brings together the ancient figure of the Chimera—a creature composed of several incompatible bodies—and the scientific phenomenon of microchimerism. During pregnancy, cells pass between mother and child and may remain within both bodies for decades. The mother continues to carry living traces of her daughter, while the daughter carries cells originating in her mother, making their separation real but never absolute.

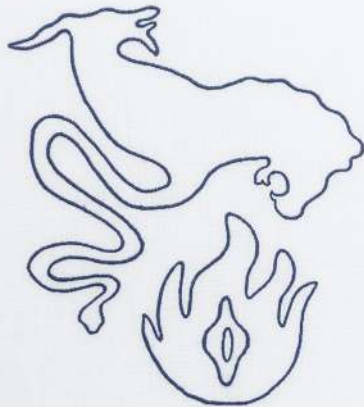
Through hand embroidery on linen, Kosmatopoulos extends this biological entanglement into the transmission of language, gestures, memories and expectations across generations of women. Fragments from Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Pliny the Elder and other ancient authors are removed from their original narratives and recomposed into a new mythology of the maternal bond. Presented within wooden structures inspired by ancient Greek metopes, the embroidered panels give physical form to a relationship in which several histories and identities coexist within a single body. Here, multiplicity is not monstrous: it is the ordinary condition of a woman shaped by the women who came before her.





01.

Pline l'Ancien, Histoire naturelle, Livre II, V, 26



Echidna with the glaring eyes gave birth to Chimera

02.

Hésiode, Théogonie, Vers 318



she was ravaging the land and mistreating the herds

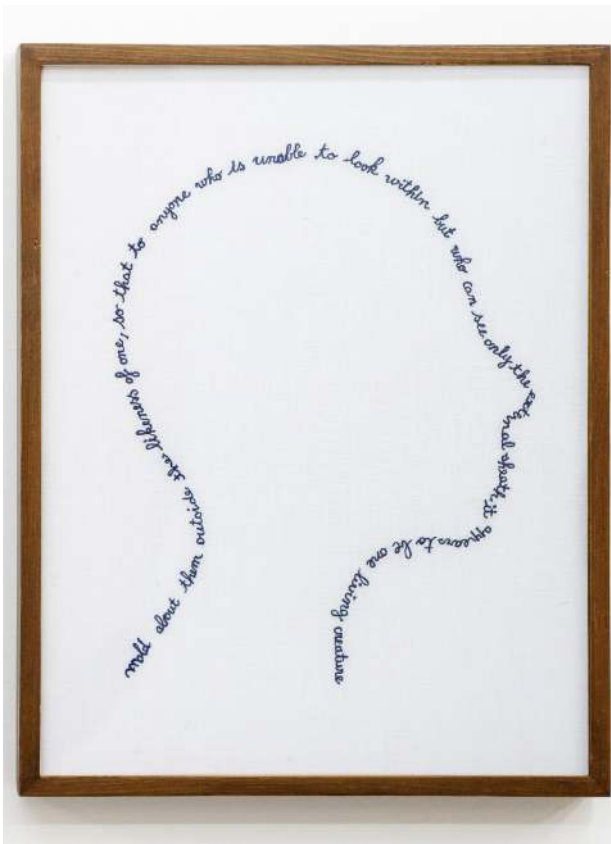
03.

**Apollodore, La Bibliothèque,
Livre II, III, 1**



04.

Platon, La République, Livre IX, 588c



05.

Platon, La République, Livre
IX, 588d



06.

Platon, La République, Livre
IX, 589a



07.
Platon, La République, Livre
IX, 589a



08.
the artist

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