



**CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SEA MYTHOLOGY IN
THE SYNTHESIS OF NON-EXISTENCE**

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Abstract

Amid the uncertainty of mysticism, the understanding of existence has long been questioned. The basis for views on the concept of nothingness dates back to Parmenides. Some view nothingness as an absolute void in the universe, others view it as a phenomenon that can be captured but does not exist. From ancient times through the analytical thinking of the Renaissance, myths have been conveyed in different ways through abstract, expressionist emotions. Pagan societies have created and magnified their traumatic stories shrouding them in ambiguity within complex, synesthetic labyrinths of thought, and have attempted to interpret them through art informed by a psychology of nothingness. Based on the myth examined in this research, this study has focused on sea monsters depicted in different periods. Within the scope of qualitative research methods, open-access internet sources were used visual materials in the research for which the relevant literature review was conducted.

Keywords: Mythology, Sea, Cultural, Art, Monster

Introduction

The concept of “arche” the question of what the first principle of the universe is and ideas concerning the problem of existence were among the issues discussed by ancient Greek philosophers. At this point, Parmenides sought to understand the nature of existence. He noted that the concept of existence began to emerge from itself through thinking. For example, he wanted to explain the idea that existence is grounded by the phenomenon of non-existence. This paradigm aims to understand the reasons for non-existence by examining the structural characteristics of existence. According to him, discourse on non-existence is the result of movement and change (Atış, 2009, p.108). Among modern philosophical views, Heidegger's interpretation differs from that of Parmenides. According to him, existence is related to that of beings. However, this existence is not the brute existence of things, but rather an existence that finds meaning in human experience (Alan Sümer, 2011, p.138). What is being or non-being? Did non-being emerge in efforts to understand the nature of existence? The notion of universal existence has guided social psychology through cosmogonic frameworks. Perhaps this is why the non-being (non-existence) underlying the reality of existence has become an allegory. In this respect, the sea is the starting point of creation myths. In creation myths about the universe, the world, and the first living beings, the sea is the central motif. In addition, works of art created in various periods usually depict it in landscape paintings and render it with an aesthetic quality. For societies or sailors living in coastal regions, perceptions of the sea vary. Those embarking on a sea voyage tried to please the gods. Apotropaic talismans, amulets, prayers, and beliefs result from these fears.



The surreal creatures believed to inhabit the sea have always clouded human minds, created fear, and set the stage for various rituals to avoid encountering them. Because art is a human activity, expressionist modes of expression have found a place on canvas. Therefore, the works of this movement can be interpreted either as internalized reflections of the external world or as transfers of the artist's inner spiritual world to the external world. The aim of the research is to examine the surreal imagery of sea monsters in art through the synecdoche of existence and non-existence. For this purpose, surreal sea creatures depicted in European artworks from various periods will be evaluated iconographically from a mythological perspective. This study, which presents examples of engraving, painting, tile, and sculpture, is based on a literature review; however, visuals were obtained from publicly accessible online sources. The works have been organized by period according to their subject matter. Care has been taken to order them chronologically, but chronological ordering has been disregarded in some examples to preserve the integrity of the subject.

Surreal Sea Monsters in Western Culture

The phenomenon of monsters has occupied a place in human fears and has expanded through narratives. The seas, in particular, are dangerous in this regard and the consequences of embarking on a journey are unknown. Whether by a storm or by a sea-monster attack, one could drown in the depths of the sea or be killed by a monster emerging from the sea. From the Archaic period onward, this situation has transformed from an individual anxiety into a social one. Homogeneous fears evolved from vague nothingness to the Absolute. Therefore, the sea was a special part of the world that remained largely unknown in ancient times and awaited discovery. The main reason for its mystical value is its uncanny nature. In addition to the creatures that inhabit it, terrible monsters are also believed to dwell there. What, then, is a 'monster'? It is difficult to answer this question. The writers of Antiquity and the Middle Ages contradicted themselves on this issue. Writers such as Marcus Cornelius Fronto (100-170), Pierre Bersuire (1290-1362), and Sir John Mandeville (1300-1372) defined the term 'monster' as denoting supernatural, non-existent, and unnatural creatures. This view was opposed by writers such as St. Augustine (354-430) and Isidore of Seville (560-636). According to them, monsters are creations of God and ornaments of the universe that teach the dangers of sin. How, then, should sea monsters be judged? In his 13th-century encyclopedia *De Natura Rerum* (On the Nature of Things), the writer and theologian Thomas of Cantimpré devoted separate books to sea monsters and sea and river fish. Book 6 is about sea monsters. In this book, he discusses two important distinguishing features of them. These are their rarity and size. On the other hand, he classified a creature such as the sea hare (*Lepus marinus*), which humans would certainly consider rare, as a fish. Notably, medieval and Renaissance sailors portrayed sea creatures, such as whales and walruses, as monsters because they were dangerous. Pliny also argued, in his *Natural History*, that everything that exists in nature can also be found in the sea. Ancient theories and medieval depictions of creatures such as sea dogs, sea lions, and sea pigs, whose lower bodies are fish, support this view. Even hybrid creatures, such as sea rams, sea lions (Figure 1), and seahorses, seen in some Roman mosaics, were interpreted according to this view (Duzer, 2014, pp.8-9). This interpretation is supported by depictions of such hybrid sea creatures



on the ceiling decorations of St. Martin's Church in Zillis, Switzerland (Duzer, 2014, p.27). The phenomenon of surreal nothingness is emphasized by the depiction of these hybrid animals in the ceiling decorations on land. That these depictions were made in a church may also be associated with their sanctity. Whether pagan or monotheistic, these beliefs have been preserved in social memory.



Figure 1. *Roman mosaic with a sea lion*, 2nd Century, Mosaic, Ostia Antica,(Duzer, 2014, p.9).

Many subjects of Greek myths concern the sea. Among these narratives are numerous water- or sea-related beings, including monsters as well as gods and goddesses. These monsters also punish people. Sirens (seiren) are among the most feared monsters in the sea. They are known as winged goddesses of death. They are usually depicted on tomb reliefs as female heads with bird bodies. Homer described them in relation to the sea. He said that the sirens bewitched the sailors with their beautiful melodies, and that whoever listened to them or unknowingly approached them while under their spell would never return. Today, sirens are commonly depicted as half woman and half fish. Therefore, they are also known as mermaids. It is also highly processed in Greek ceramic art. Another sea monster from Greek mythology that comes to mind is Scylla. It is shapeless, with twelve stubby legs and six long necks. A top each neck sits a terrible head, and on each head are three rows of tightly clenched dreams and a black mouth. According to myth, Skylla, who was once a beautiful girl, was cursed by Amphitrite's jealousy and transformed into a sea monster. Kharybdis is an even more terrifying sea monster than Skylla. Because of his gluttony, he drew Zeus's thunderbolts and was transformed into a sea monster. According to tradition, Kharybdis was thought to vomit and to swallow everything that came her way three times a day by inhaling the waters. Skylla and Kharybdis were believed to exist around the 5th century BC and were said to sit opposite each other in the Strait of Messina, preventing anyone from crossing it (Cömert, 2010, pp.86-87). In Greek myth, Laocoön, the priest of the temple of Apollo in the city of Troy, and his sons (Ethron and Melanthous) were killed by a giant serpent that emerged from the sea as punishment. It is associated with the Trojan War, the subject of Homer's Iliad. Apollo is furious with Laocoön, who is standing with his wife in front of his statue in the temple built in his name. In addition, at the height of the Trojan War, the people of Troy commissioned Laocoön to sacrifice a bull to Poseidon, the god of the sea, so that Poseidon would destroy the Achaeans in a storm. Then, just as the bull is about to be sacrificed, the sea swells and a large snake appears, resulting in the death of Laocoön and his sons. He also attempted to prevent the wooden horse, left by the Achaeans, from entering the city. This behavior was thought to have angered the gods. However, the real truth, unknown to the people, is hidden in the great sin he committed in the temple (Grimal, 2012, p.418) This tragic scene has been depicted by Western artists in various art forms. The most notable example is the statue



produced during the Hellenistic period. In this sculpture, the serpent, depicted as a sea monster, inflicts severe pain on both Laocoön and his sons. In the sculpture, where fear, anxiety, shouting, efforts to escape, and the feeling of helplessness in the face of death are depicted on the faces, the sea snake attempts to drown them with all its power in an almost intricate manner. The monster, wrapped around their bodies, must also have reserved its venom for Laocoön, as it is depicted about to bite him on the thigh (Figure 2). with a different composition. Information on sea serpents also appears in Olaus's Carta Marina, particularly in the waters around Norway (Nigg, 2013, p.182). It was thought to envelop ships and sink them, just as it had enveloped Laocoön and his sons. Serpents, which are represented in typologies variously as snakes or dragons, are considered harmful to sailors and have occupied a prominent place in the collective imagination since antiquity. In myths, whether monsters exist is rarely questioned. Monsters have often appeared at sea to kill sailors. This fear and perception have not changed for many years.



Figure 2. *Laocoön and his sons killed by the sea monster*, 1st century BC, Marble Sculpture, Vatican Museum, Roma. (Author Archive, 2018).

Western myths also include accounts of sea monsters kidnapping and killing people. An engraving by Albrecht Dürer, entitled *Das Meerwunder* (The Sea Monster), relates to this narrative. However, the authenticity of the event is a matter of debate. In the 20th century, several researchers sought sources relating to Dürer's drawing of this event. They attempted to liken the scene depicted in the engraving to Achelous and Perimele in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or to other myths, such as the rape of Theolinda and the abduction of Amydone. However, they ultimately stated that it did not overlap with any of them. Although the kidnapping in the scene is presented as based on myths of classical origin, it should be regarded as one of the anonymous atrocity narratives thought to have occurred in a location known to Dürer in his time. Poggio Bracciolini described such an event in the 15th century off the Dalmatian coast. According to his account, a half-human, half-fish monster with small horns and a long beard kidnapped children and girls who were playing on the beach; it was killed by five washerwomen, and the corpse of



the monster was even exhibited in Ferrara to increase its credibility. In short, there is no clear iconographic interpretation of the scene in Dürer's engraving. The engraving (Figure 3) shows a horned, hairy, and bearded beast, half human and half fish, kidnapping a nude young woman. A weapon composed of turtle shell and jawbone hangs from its neck. A weapon made from turtle shell and a jawbone hangs around her neck. The woman, abducted by the monster, looks anguished at her friends on the shore while pointing with her left hand to Dürer's monogram at the bottom of the engraving. The women in the sea are trying to reach safety on land. One of the men is leaning against a rock and rubbing his hands, while the other is gesticulating and shouting at the monster. In the background, an imaginary castle landscape appears, and on the right a carrack/barge-type ship is depicted sailing away with its sails unfurled (Husband, 1980, p.196).



Figure 3. Albrecht Dürer, *Das Meerwunder*(*The Sea Monster*), 1498, Engraving, 24,8x18,9cm., Met Museum, New York.(Husband, 1980, p.197).

According to Leonardo da Vinci, quoted by Vezzosi in his book, movement has two properties. He defined these properties as material and spiritual. He based the spiritual aspect on imagination and the material aspect on objects. (Vezzosi, 2023, p.136). Sea monsters are among the concepts he sought to explain using his imagination. According to him, the material reality of the sea monster he described was unknown, but he said that schools of dolphins and tuna fled from him in fear, and that he was fast and had wings like branches and forked tails. He also stated that it appeared with lightning speed, burying ships in the water (da Vinci, 2023, pp.171-172). According to his account, the sea monster has wings. I wonder whether the 'wings' Leonardo described, which caused the problem, are fins? That he considered the fins to be wings may reflect an analogy to their ability to move rapidly in the sea. The 16th-century engraving by Maglioli shows a frightening sea monster with a half-lion body and claws. The sea monster has wing-like fins. Leaning against it is a chubby, naked little male figure (a putto) holding a trident, symbolising the holy angels. (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Maglioli, *Putti with the Sea Monster*, 1580-1610, Engraving, 7,4x12,7cm., Victoria&Albert Museum, Londra.(Victoria&Albert Museum, 2009).

In the 17th century, sea serpents and sea monsters were frequently depicted in tile art. Dutch tile art also depicts these monsters in figurative representations. The tile panel is thought to have been produced in the tile factory of the wealthy Rotterdamite Claes Jansz Wijtmans in Korte Wijnstraat. The sea monster is depicted with its mouth open and its sharp teeth bared, reflecting its frightening appearance. Its body is covered with scales, and its outer contours are coloured purple. Blue, orange, or brown colours are also used. Poisonous fumes rise from the mouth and gills of the sea monster. The belief that sea monsters have various lethal effects is evident in the depiction on this tile panel (Keramiek Museum Princessehof, 2025) (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Claes Jansz Wijtmans, *Sea Monster*, 1615-1630, Tile, 13x13cm., Keramiek Museum Princessehof, Leeuwarden. (Keramiek Museum Princessehof, 2025).

Greek myths tell of girls offered as sacrifices to sea monsters. Examples include Andromeda and Hesione. Inspired by these myths and engravings of the past, sculptors also depicted sea monsters. The sea monster depicted in one of two bronze works by the Italian Severo Calzetta da Ravenna resembles the engravings in that it has the head of a lion and the body of a fish. The work is thought to depict the fate of Andromeda, who was saved by Perseus. Andromeda is the daughter of Cepheus, the king of Aethiopia, and Cassiopeia. Cassiopeia boasted arrogantly that she was more beautiful than the daughters of Nereus. Thereupon, he petitioned Poseidon to exact vengeance. Poseidon sent a terrible sea monster to destroy this country. King Cepheus asked the



oracle of the Zeus-Ammon temple how to get rid of this terrible monster. The oracle said that they could only be saved by offering Andromeda as a sacrifice to the monster. Perseus, returning from killing the Gorgon, saw Andromeda, who had been tied to a rock and presented to the monster, and fell in love with her. He asked his father for his daughter in return for killing the monster. He then killed the monster and married Andromeda (Erhat, 1996, p.38). The bronze statuette depicts Poseidon (Neptune), the god of the sea, stepping on the monster and holding several links of the chain with which he bound it. The sea monster's frightening characteristic is particularly prominent. It has a forked tail and forelimbs that are webbed but not clawed. Fins are visible on both sides. (Figure 6). In another branch of the visual arts, Charles André van Loo painted an oil painting depicting Andromeda and Perseus. Andromeda, chained to the rocks, is partially nude, while the monster has a hairy body and its clawed, webbed forelegs. Perseus attacks it with his shield and sword, poised to kill it. The sea monster in the oil painting resembles the sea monster depicted in the bronze sculpture by Severo Calzetta da Ravenna (Figure 7) in facial and bodily structure.



Figure 6. Severo Calzetta da Ravenna, *Neptune on the Sea Monster*, 1500-1509, Bronze Sculpture, 45,6x 26,7x20cm., National Art Gallery, Landover.(The National Gallery of Art, (a)n.d.).



Figure 7. Charles André van Loo, *Perseus and Andromeda*, 1735-1740, Oil Painting, 72.5x91.5cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.(O'Donnell, 2020).



In addition, the sea monster in another bronze work by Severo Calzetta da Ravenna is anthropomorphic. It is similar to Dürer's engraving in this respect (Figure 3). It has no horns on its head, but its face is human-shaped and bearded. In addition to fins, the forelimbs are webbed but lack claws. The fact that it has the face of an old man can be read as a concrete counterpart to the idea that monsters are, perhaps, long-lived beings. This may be regarded as a distinct Renaissance expression of the surreal, horrific legends of gargoyles originating in the Gothic period. The work, which expresses the artist's hysterical feelings, is shaped by the uncanny found in the unknown darkness of the seas. Perhaps it was the myths that fuelled these feelings (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Severo Calzetta da Ravenna, *Sea Monster*, 1500-1509, Bronze Figurine, 8.9x22.6x13.6cm, National Gallery of Art, Landover.(The National Gallery of Art, (b)n.d.).

Johann Wilhelm Baur was another artist who made reference to Greek myths. His 1640 engraving depicts the story of Hesione, who was sacrificed to the sea monster by her father Laomedon. The myth relates that, when Laomedon, the king of Troy, failed to pay Poseidon (and Apollo) the promised payment for repairing the city walls, Poseidon became enraged and sent a sea monster that ravaged the land and devoured its inhabitants. According to an oracle, the only way to appease Poseidon's anger was to sacrifice Hesione, the king's daughter, to the sea monster. While Hesione, bound to the rocks, awaited death, Heracles, who had come to Troy, said that he could kill the sea monster in return for being given horses as a reward. Subsequently, although Heracles kills the monster and saves Hesione, Laomedon fails to keep his promise. The engraving shows Heracles attacking the sea monster while attempting to save Hesione, who is naked and tied to the rocks on the short left side of the composition. When we examine the body structure of the sea monster, we observe that it has lion's head, a fish body, a tail, and wing-like fins (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Johann Wilhelm Baur, *The sacrifice of Hesione*, 1640, Print, 12.7x20.7cm, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge.(Harvard Art Museums, 2003).

In the 17th century, the depictions of the sea monster retained characteristics similar to those of previous periods. The monsters have lion heads, fish bodies, fins, tails, and claws. As is evident from the drawings, they are depicted as horrible creatures with frightening features. In Bisschop's sketch, the human figure on the sea monster is probably an unfinished depiction of a god (Figure 10). It can be argued that the attempt to slay sea monsters parallels the dragon's symbolism as the enemy of God. The subject of the engraving also exhibits this symbolic language. For example, the dragon figure represented the devil in Christian iconography. He was expelled from heaven, is the enemy of God, and embodies symbolism that leads people to evil. This is why the saints who attempted to slay the dragon are mentioned. In the icons of the church of St George in Cappadocia, the dragon bows before Jesus Christ. He is also depicted under the feet of the Apostle Philip, St Sylvester, Theodor of Amasya, and Michael the archangel (Beydiz, 2019, p.81).



Figure 10. Jan De Bisschop, *Man on a Sea Monster*, 1628-1671, Drawing, 7.3x10.5cm, Victoria&Albert Museum, Londra.(Victoria&Albert Museum, 2009).

The belief that terrestrial animal species are similar to marine species also found expression in 18th-century art. In particular, the sea monster depicted is half goat and half fish. In Sumerian mythology, the attribute animal of Enki (Ea), the god of water, is the goat-fish. In Islamic astrology, the sign Capricorn is called Cedî, and some representations of this sign take the form of a goat-fish (Beydiz, 2016, pp.183,195). Venus (Aphrodite), known in some Greek myths as



the woman born of waves (Grimal, 2012, p.69) and thus associated with the sea, is often depicted with some artistic compositions. John Deare's relief, 'Venus Lying on a Sea Monster,' depicts the goddess of love and sexuality in a different scene (Figure 11). Venus, depicted naked to emphasise her beauty, rides a goat-fish-shaped sea monster that appears to move on the waves. She preserves her privacy by holding her dress with one hand and touching the goat's beard with the other. On the beast's tail, an Eros figure is about to shoot his arrow (J. Paul Getty Museum, 2025).



Figure 11. John Deare, *Venus Lying on a Sea Monster*, 1787-1790, Marble Relief, 33,7x58,4x11,2cm., J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.(J. Paul Getty Museum, 2025).

Some of the sea monsters depicted in the Neoclassical style in 18th-century art are copies of wall paintings and mosaics (Figure 1) that originally adorned Roman villas. The painter Christen Købke travelled around the Gulf of Naples in southern Italy in 1839. During this journey, he visited the city of Stabiae, located near Pompeii. Here, he drew inspiration from a mural he had seen in a Roman villa and created an oil painting based on it. The painting depicts a sea monster that is half fish and half tiger. The tiger figure may refer to the cult of Dionysus (Bacchus in Roman mythology), as attested in Greek mythology. The naked figure, drawn on the tiger's back and facing away, may be interpreted as one of the fifty Nereids born of the marriage of Doris, daughter of Okeanos, to the sea god Nereus (Beydiz, 2021, pp.461-462). However, the figure in the painting is not a nereid: the sea monster is offering wine to the tiger. Therefore, the figure is more likely a bacchante associated with Dionysus (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Christen Købke, *Half-Tiger Half-Fish Sea Monster and Bacchante*, 1839, Oil Painting, Glyptotek Museum, Copenhagen(Author Archive, 2025).



In the Neoclassical style, depictions of goat-fish sea monsters alongside Aphrodite or Eros are also found across different branches of the arts. Inspired by pagan and Christian beliefs, artists depicted Eros, also called the god of love and one of the favourite characters in mythology, in a composition similar to John Deare's relief. In the work of the French painter William Bouguereau, Eros sits on the goat-fish-shaped sea monster. With one hand, he holds the beard of the sea monster, which is half fish and half goat. They are in motion on the sea, and the front legs of the monster goat-fish, together with its hooves, are carried to the stage this time. (Figure 13).



Figure 13. William Bouguereau, *Eros on a Sea Monster*, 1857, Painting, Unknown.(Gurney, 2023).

Joseph Mallord William Turner's mysterious sea monster is also positioned, awaiting its prey in the ambiguous sea at sunrise. In the oil painting, rendered in intense shades of yellow, the sea monster, watching its surroundings, evokes fear and anxiety in the viewer. It is an allegory of thalassophobia (the fear of the sea), which causes psychological crises. The work reflects the chaotic inner worlds of both the artist and the viewer, evoked by the synesthesia of nothingness (Figure 14).



Figure 14. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Sea Monster at Sunrise*, 1845, Oil Painting, 91.4x121.9cm, Tate Art Gallery, Liverpool.(O'Donnell, 2020).



In the 19th century, sea monsters that acquired anthropomorphic features were also depicted in paintings. The body of the sea monster in Theodor Kittelsen's painting is covered with seaweed. A shark's mouth and teeth are as frightening as possible. The sea monster's arms differ from those of humans and bear tentacles. His face and gaze appear menacing. It may be about to come ashore, and the depiction of a crab falling may indicate that different sea creatures can live in it (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Theodor Kittelsen, *Sea Monster*, 1881, Painting, 25x28,3cm., Nasjonal Museet, Oslo. (Nasjonal Museet, n.d.).

Elihu Vedder, on the other hand, depicts a sea serpent waiting for its victims on the beach in a more realistic style. It is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The sea serpent, which is the subject of the work, resembles a predator lurking calmly and waiting for its prey. It is quite large, with its curved body, and for this reason, it has been among the monsters feared by sailors since antiquity. It was thought to sink ships and swallow sailors. In 19th-century art, it can be interpreted as another depiction reflecting the perception of a zoomorphic sea monster (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Elihu Vedder, *Sea Serpent's Nest*, 1899, Oil Painting, 30,5x76,2cm., The Met Museum, Boston. (The Met Museum, 2025).



Sculptures in fountains that adorn the squares of European cities depict various gods or monsters associated with the sea. In the 18th century, the Trevi Fountain in Rome, designed in the Baroque style by Nicola Salvi, depicts Neptune and hippocampi (half horse and half fish), as does the famous Neptune Fountain in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence. In addition, sea monsters are not forgotten. In 1629, Pietro Tacca created a fountain of sea monsters for a Medici duke; after the discovery of the moulds, a replica was built in 1965 in Livorno, Italy. The work, produced at the renowned bronze sculpture workshop Fonderia Marinelli, is currently located in Piazza Santissima Annunziata in the centre of the city. The two back-to-back sea monsters take the form of fish from the waist down and humans from the waist up. However, their heads are frightening and covered with scales, and their fins rise from their shoulders. Their faces are human-like but resemble eerie fish with moustaches. Livorno is a coastal city, and this work attempts to explain to all segments of society that the seas are not a particularly safe place. Creatures with semi-anthropomorphic features, such as sirens, nereids, and tritons, are sometimes depicted with more grotesque faces through the acquisition of different identities (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Fonderia Marinelli Workshop, *Fountain of Sea Monsters*, 1965, Livorno.(Author archive, 2018).

One work in which the fear of the sea monster is abstracted is an oil painting by Mark Bradford. The work reflects the Abstract Expressionist psychology of the dark, unknown phenomenon of nothingness, which the artist could not conceptually transform into a concrete entity and in which he grew up. The dark tones that cover the entire painting must indicate a tense, uncanny mood. Blue tones evoke the sea, while the eerie coldness of its depths is conveyed through darker colours. The viewer may become lost in the painting or perhaps anxious that the sea is a frightening place. In this work, the idea of nothingness is reinforced by the power of abstract art, thereby eliciting neurotic feelings (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Mark Bradford, *Sea Monster*, 2014, Mixed Media on Canvas, 259.1x365.8cm, Gerald Fineberg Collection, New York.(Baptist, 2023).

The sea-monster image in 21st-century postmodern art has elicited varied interpretations among art lovers. The historic Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, which once served the US Navy but is no longer active, has been integrated with art. Since 1996, British artists Filthy Luker and Pedro Estrellas, who have created large-scale inflatable installations in various cities, have designed the arms and tentacles of an inflatable octopus (kraken) that appears to be escaping from shipyard building 611, on the theme of the sea monster (Figure 19). Their work, intended to draw attention to the urban environment and to create a different perspective for the audience, aroused considerable interest (Navy Yard, 2023). The interpretation of the monster in the artefact as a kraken is based on the observation that it was thought to be like an octopus in 17th-century portraits. It was believed that it pulled everything in the sea towards the depths (Beydiz, 2021, p.349). In the installation, the monster's arms protrude from the building's windows. Just as it is believed to sink ships in the sea by wrapping them in its arms, here it symbolises the destruction of the building. The severe destruction and palpable sense of abandonment that the dysfunctional shipyard building has suffered over time are conveyed to the viewer through the allegory of a monster taking it over. The building evokes death and extinction through its neglected structure; a stronger emphasis of this evocation is conveyed by the number of the monster's arms. With a surreal, arithmetically disproportionate number of its arms, the symbolic expression of the architectural structure succumbing to time and the large size of the monster are reinforced.



Figure 19. Filthy Luker and Pedro Estrellas, *Navy Yard / Art: Navy Yard Sea Monster*. 2018, Inflatable Sculpture, Approx. 9.35 to 12.19m. tall, Philadelphia Naval Shipyard.(Navy Yard, 2023).



Methodology

The research employs a theoretical study population. To this end, it was prepared using the literature review method. The qualitative research method applied in most theoretical studies constitutes the primary method of the research. For this purpose, relevant sources were scanned. Although most of the images were obtained from open-access websites, they were sourced from academic publications, and some of them were taken by the author. The sampled works were examined in chronological order using an unbiased selection method to reveal differences between periods across various branches of art within the research universe. Therefore, the focus was on the image of the sea monster in plastic artworks, and attempts were made to reflect the periods and the artists' points of view.

Findings and Discussion

Artists, especially those inspired by ancient Greek myths, have long sought to keep the image of the serpent-shaped monster alive. The serpent attacking Laocoön also appears in portraits from later periods. In the 19th century, the image of the existent and the non-existent was transformed into a sea monster through reference to snakes in nature and was interpreted as a serpent. In Renaissance art, the serpent was transformed into a hybrid creature combining the features of a lion and a fish. In addition, two depictions of goat-fish from the 18th and 19th centuries serve as examples of periodic change. The mythological foundations of this image date back to Mesopotamian culture. However, anthropomorphic sea monsters are often depicted. This situation should be related to the monstification of humans, which is intertwined with medieval beliefs, as well as to the effort to represent diseases in human form, as in ancient Greek sculptures. Some examples of postmodern art have been conveyed to viewers through installations. Notably, abstract art should not be forgotten. The interpretation of the receiver's mental journey is conveyed through colours. The installation's large size can also be perceived as a manifestation of humanity's helplessness in front of them. However, the octopus (kraken) in the example presented is frequently encountered in historical myths about the sea. Although myths about sea monsters show that they are engraved in memory as embodiments of nothingness, for sailors the truth is that they are harbingers of death.

Conclusion

Art is an important means of communication that represents human beings. Many subjects depicted in the work of art meet the viewer within different compositions. Artists reflect their souls in their works through both realist and expressionist styles. Myths are also an indispensable source of inspiration for artists. The subjects described in myths for centuries are memories and experiences transmitted from the past to the future. At this point, art assumes an important role, building an imaginary bridge between generations. In addition to everyday subjects, surreal figurative depictions sometimes reflect the symbolic language of the artists. In addition, imagined or real landscape paintings are a dance of colours and light in the Impressionist style. The sea is frequently depicted in both rural and coastal areas. Artists sometimes sought to overcome aesthetic concerns about the sea. However, in the narratives, the seas always harbour an ambiguity and a sense of the uncanny for humans. It is a separate world that remained



unknown until the invention of submarines. In the creation myths of the universe, it has been accorded special sanctity as the first entity to appear. Many creatures observed in it, or believed to inhabit it have elicited fear among people. Myths and experiences have concerned the dark spaces of the seas. This study attempts to reveal the allegory of sea monsters through a few examples, particularly evident in European art across the centuries. It is observed that land-dwelling creatures, such as lion-fish or goat-fish, metamorphose into hybrid sea monsters upon entering the sea. However, in some instances, the Abstract Expressionist rendering of fear is also evident in the works. Artistic images, whether abstract or transformed into concrete objects, aim to reflect the frightening characteristics of sea monsters. This indicates the degree to which they are dangerous to humans. Heroic narratives in which divine beings are unafraid of them and can even kill them remind people of divine power. Therefore, in the context of their beliefs, the best protection from them is the gods, who will keep them away from themselves. With the gods' help, they were able to navigate the seas; offerings were made to them to avert disaster. In the works examined, alongside neoclassical influences, the phenomenon of nothingness is manifested in the spiral of colour characteristic of abstract-expressionist emotions.

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