

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Queen of Cosmos

Elisa Leonelli · Monday, September 14th, 2026



Queen of Cosmos Comix Trilogy by Barbara “Willy” Mendes, just published by Fantagraphics, collects into one large hardcover book the out of print Volume 1 (2020) and Volume 2 (2023), published by Red 5 Comics, adding Volume 3 (2024).



This cover is from a 2016 oil painting by Mendes that inspired the entire comic series. It still hangs in her studio.



The paintings for Volume 2 and Volume 3 were acrylics done specifically as cover art for the books.



[Barbara Mendes](#) became known as a pioneering underground comics artist after moving to San Francisco from New York around 1968, “the era of [Robert Crumb](#),” under the pen name Willy Mendes.



She collaborated with [Trina Robbins](#) in the anthologies of women cartoonists, designing the back cover for *It Ain't Me, Babe* (1970) and *All Girl Thrills* (1971), contributing “OMA” and “Realm of Karma Comix” on the inside.



The young artist “[turned on, tuned in and dropped out](#),” consulted the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, explored Tibetan Buddhism, reading the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, while living in Oregon, with her musician husband and their two young daughters, riding their horses, a Pinto mare and a Black Gelding. Their cartoon alter egos were Gypsy and Rocky.



Barbara Mendes. Photo by Elisa Leonelli

Barbara shows me the two page spread from *Tales for the Modern Mystic* (1976) reprinted in *Queen of Cosmos* Volume 1 with the pantheon of [Hindu Gods](#). “Here’s Vishnu riding on Garuda, here’s his wife, Lakshmi, the others would be Brahma, Shiva and Parvati.”

Mendes also fell in love with [Bob Marley](#)’s reggae music, especially the songs “Catch a Fire” and “Stir It Up.”

That was her hippie path to a spiritual life.

Barbara Mendes is [Sephardic Jew](#) on her father’s side and [Ashkenazi Jew](#) on her mother’s side, but her parents were not religious, they called it superstition.

Now she considers herself “extremely mystical” and believes in miracles.

On a day she calls 11-11-11, November 11, 1992 (9+2=11), she was painting a mural at Tropical Gardens, a restaurant in Los Angeles’ Fairfax district, when she was approached by a man named Gabriel (like the archangel) who asked her if she would paint his synagogue. She agreed. “I painted the Garden of Eden and Noah’s Ark in the courtyard of the Pinto Torah Center.” She became curious about the Jewish rituals, and decided to learn Hebrew, the “language of God,” at free adult classes at [Yeshiva University of Los Angeles](#) (YULA) where she met “amazing rabbis.” That’s when she became an observant Orthodox Jew.



Don?a Gracia Mendes by Mendes 1998

This “return” inspired a series of Judaic oil paintings, like this one celebrating “[Doña Gracia Mendes](#)” 1998, the Portuguese “Lady” who helped Sephardic Jews escape the Spanish Inquisition in the 1500s, eventually finding refuge in Constantinople.



Geulah by Mendes 2002

“[Geula](#)” 2002, meaning Redemption, represents Jerusalem on the day the Messiah will come and the dead will rise.

Now able to read the Torah in the original Hebrew, not translated into Greek, then to Latin, Mendes illustrated the first three books of the Old Testament in large and minutely detailed murals on canvas.

“[Bereshit](#)” (2002) about the book of Genesis is now displayed at Florida Jewish community center in Boca Raton.

“[Shemot](#)” 2004 about the book of Exodus is at Sephardic Educational Center in Jerusalem’s Old City.

“[Vayikra](#)” 2009 detailing all 859 laws of the book of Leviticus, is for sale for \$ one million (negotiable).



Barbara Mendes- Vayukra 2009. Photo by Elisa Leonelli

The artist points out how this work is conceived like “an intricate comic strip with word balloons.’

The painting “Shabbat Queen” 2008 was chosen by the publisher for the cover of the *Queen of Cosmos Comix Trilogy*.



Willy Mendes. Photo by Elisa Leonelli 2026

Mendes had read *When God Was a Woman* (1976) by Merlin Stone about the Goddess cultures that existed around the world before the three monotheistic patriarchal religions prevailed: Judaism, Islam, Christianity. She explains that she believes in the one God of the Bible, “but he’s a totally spiritual entity, it doesn’t have a physical body or a gender. Therefore, when we pray to our Father who are in Heaven, it’s a metaphor to make it easier to understand God, by giving it a human title. I created the Queen of Cosmos as a female metaphor for the same one God, and I am free to imagine it as a woman, as a mother, instead of a father, King of the Universe.”

You may [watch this video](#) interview with Barbara Mendes on “Amusing Jews” where she talks about how she developed her style as a teenager, by throwing what she loved on the canvas and making it beautiful, a style which is still recognizable today. “I extol women for their beauty, for their power, for their glory. “

You can [hear at this link](#) the edited version of a video interview titled “I Met God and Her Name is Barbara Willy Mendes” on the podcast *Ultraculture* with Jason Louv.

Among her role models Mendes includes the writers [Barbara Kingsolver](#), [Alice Walker](#), [Amy Tan](#), political leaders like [Golda Meir](#), “a towering figure in the history of Israel,” and [Jacinda Ardern](#), former premier of New Zealand, “a fantastic young woman, bright, intelligent, compassionate.”



Kamala Harris by Mendes

Of course Mendes voted for Kamala Harris in 2024, hoping she would be the first woman President of the United States.

Alas we were stuck with the disastrous second term of Donald Trump.



Donald Trump by Mendes

Mendes had already depicted T as a greedy elephant, the [animal symbol](#) of the GOP Republican party, in *Queen of Cosmos* Volume 2.

[Read here](#) the Barbara Mendes interview “The Queen of Cosmos and the Sacred Female” by Dominique Musorrafiti in *Retrofuturista*. “Her recent work is a love letter to the universe, to planet Earth, to life, to love, to sisterhood, to friendship, to motherhood.”

Mendes says: “I struggle mightily with the dichotomy of the depth, beauty, and Holiness of Orthodox Judaism vs. its firmly patriarchal nature. I await a world where female values are extolled and seen to be the earth-saving qualities our planet desperately needs.”



Mendes talks about [Womanism](#), her word for Feminism.

See page: When humans followed Womanly Ways



Page: When men from the North made their God a man.



Read this page about feminine cosmic consciousness:

Women are hardwired to be compassionate and seek solutions.
Men shake the world into a frightening horror-scape
instead of the bountiful Earth we were given.



And on this page Willy Mendes' hopes and wishes for a better world:

Have liberty for all
Can our poor planet heal?
Be kinder

[Order *Queen of Cosmos Comix Trilogy*](#) before it sells out.

Read my article "[Barbara Willy Mendes](#)" to see examples of her oil canvases from 1988 to 1994, lots of new work in acrylic, and the Angel Wall on Gibson.



Barbara Mendes. Photo by Elisa Leonelli 2026

Barbara Mendes continues to paint in her studio. See work in progress "Queen with animals" (horses, giraffes, antelopes, rabbits).

Go visit the artist at Ivan gallery, 2701 Robertson LA 90034. She may invite you to her upstairs studio to see more of her paintings. All are for sale, as rent has to be paid! Text ?(323) 533-6021? for appointment.

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