THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

SELECTED WORKS
2018 - 2020

Pocobelli

ARTIST STATEMENT

One of the main sources of inspiration for artists over the centuries has been famous books. The Bible and Greek mythology figure prominently in the history of art – one could easily argue that they were the main subject matter in the Western tradition from Cimabue until the 18th century. In the 20th century, artists such as Salvador Dali and Robert Rauschenberg portrayed Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Picasso, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, to name a few prominent examples.

After reading Thucydides' history of *The Peloponnesian War* and realizing that it hadn't yet been conveyed as an art series, I decided to embark on the ambitious journey to retell the story, however fragmentary, using an iPhone as my tool and Greek vase paintings as my source imagery. My aim, however, wasn't simply to retell the story in a proto-comic book format, using vase imagery to illustrate the action in the text; rather, I wanted to explore how meaning is created when juxtaposing two different systems of signification: 1) text fragments from *The Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides; and 2) Greek vase paintings that show a wide range of depictions, from everyday life to athletic competition and famous mythological scenes, among others.

In this series, I intentionally sought to foster ambiguity between text and image in order to create unexpected connections when combining these two systems of story, while adding a third channel of signification as a further layer, incorporating elements from the modern world and intellectual history, the further and less related the better, although not entirely random. In this respect, the project became a kind of alchemy of meaning.

The Surrealists demonstrated that the juxtaposition of two opposed realities in a new context can create an otherworldly aesthetic based on an irrational logic. Using Lautreamont's famous image of a "sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table" as inspiration, they juxtaposed and reframed objects from the external world and re-presented them in unusual contexts that lead to a questioning of their traditional meaning, pointing to a second underlying meaning of everyday objects.

Having grown up in a world of screens, I've attempted to push that logic beyond objects from the external world to all forms of signification: alphabets, mathematics, corporate logos, computer code, information theory diagrams, music notation, quantum physics diagrams, traffic signs, symbolic logic notation, newspaper article fragments, web advertisements and more, replacing the Surrealists' focus on everyday objects with the widest assortment of information systems that I could imagine, in an attempt to produce a kind of surrealism for the internet age, and further, true to the theme of the book, a war of all signification against all signification.

Tracing in the digital medium, particularly using the touchscreen, is ideal for visually unifying disparate iconographies, as it enables the artist to harmonize different kinds of imagery in a simpler and more persuasive manner than in more traditional mediums, such as graphite on paper and oil or acrylic painting. Building on this flexibility and ability to mix, it was a small conceptual leap to sometimes make words look like images, and images like words, bouncing from image to word and back to image as quickly and as subtly as possible. This was done to highlight the act of reading itself, and how we read meaning from images and text in different ways — and further, to see what strange flashes of meaning might be produced by confusing the two processes.

Despite the fact that our technological society may seem far removed from the concerns of warring Greek city-states, Thucydides' work continues to show its relevance 2,500-years after it was written. Many of the big questions on why people go to war are first raised in this book, which continues to give it a pressing relevance in contemporary society. In this respect, *The Peloponnesian War* can be seen as a kind of Bible of military history, an ur-book of war. And I hope that by casting light onto the narrative in an accessible and contemporary format, it might contribute, in its own way, to the prevention of its occurrence in our own time.

Adrian Pocobelli
Berlin 2020
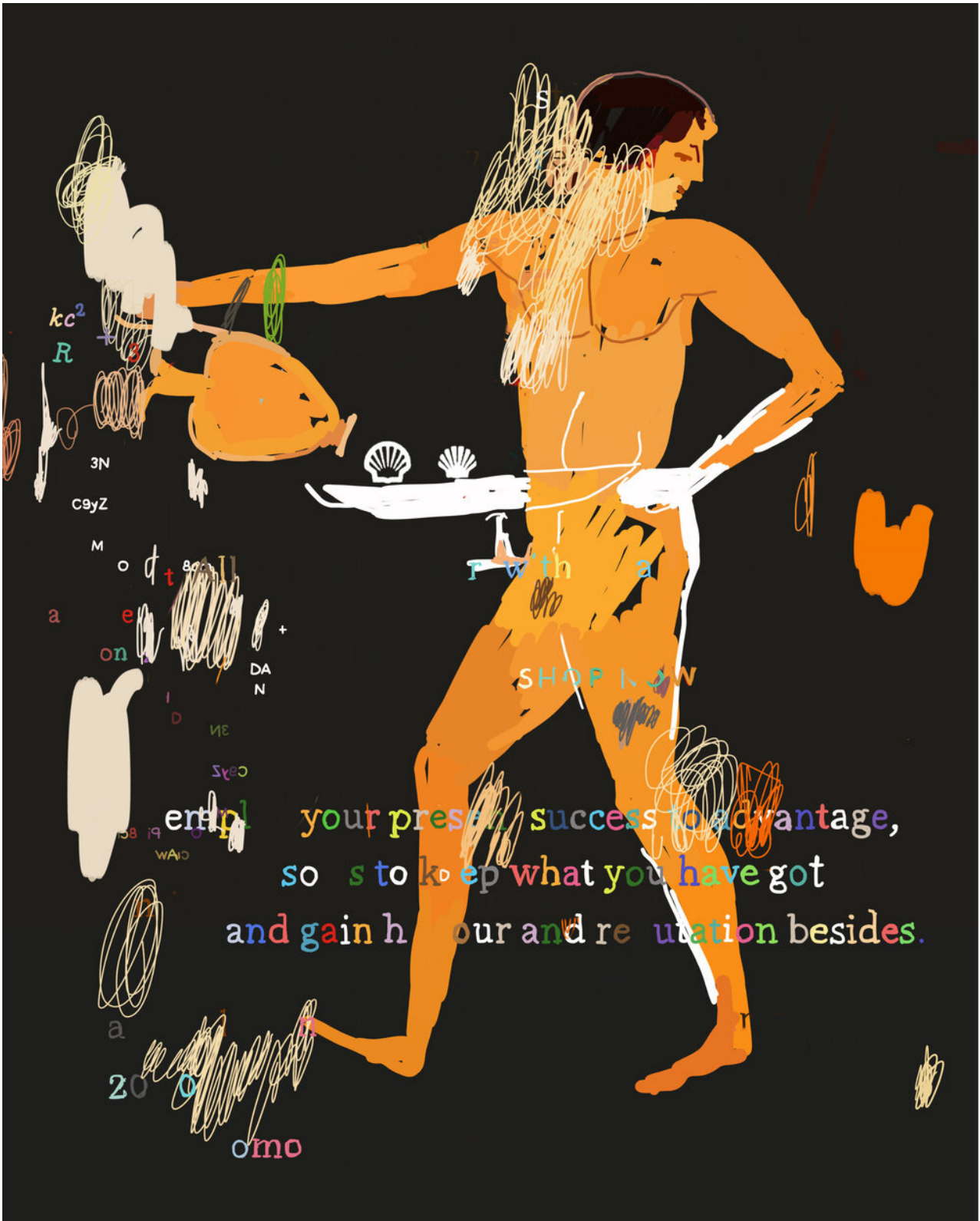
The Peloponnesian War, Book 4.17
2019
4000 px x 5000 px
iPhone X, digital image

The Peloponnesian War, Book 1.84
2017
2650 px x 3000 px
iPhone 6S, digital image

The Peloponnesian War, Book 4.42
2019
4000 px x 5000 px
iPhone X, digital image

The Peloponnesian War, Book 6.42
2019
4000 px x 5000 px
iPhone X, digital image

The Peloponnesian War, Book 3.39
2019
w: 4000 px h: 5000px
iPhone X, digital image

Study for The Peloponnesian War
2017
2650 px x 3000 px
iPhone 6S, digital image.

The Peloponnesian War, Book 4
2019
w: 4000 px h: 5000px
iPhone X, digital image

The Peloponnesian War, Book 4.75
2019
w: 4000 px h: 5000px
iPhone X, digital image

The Peloponnesian War, Book 1.144
2019
w: 4000 px h: 5000px
iPhone X, digital image

The Peloponnesian War, Book 2.82
2019
w: 4000 px h: 5000px
iPhone X, digital image
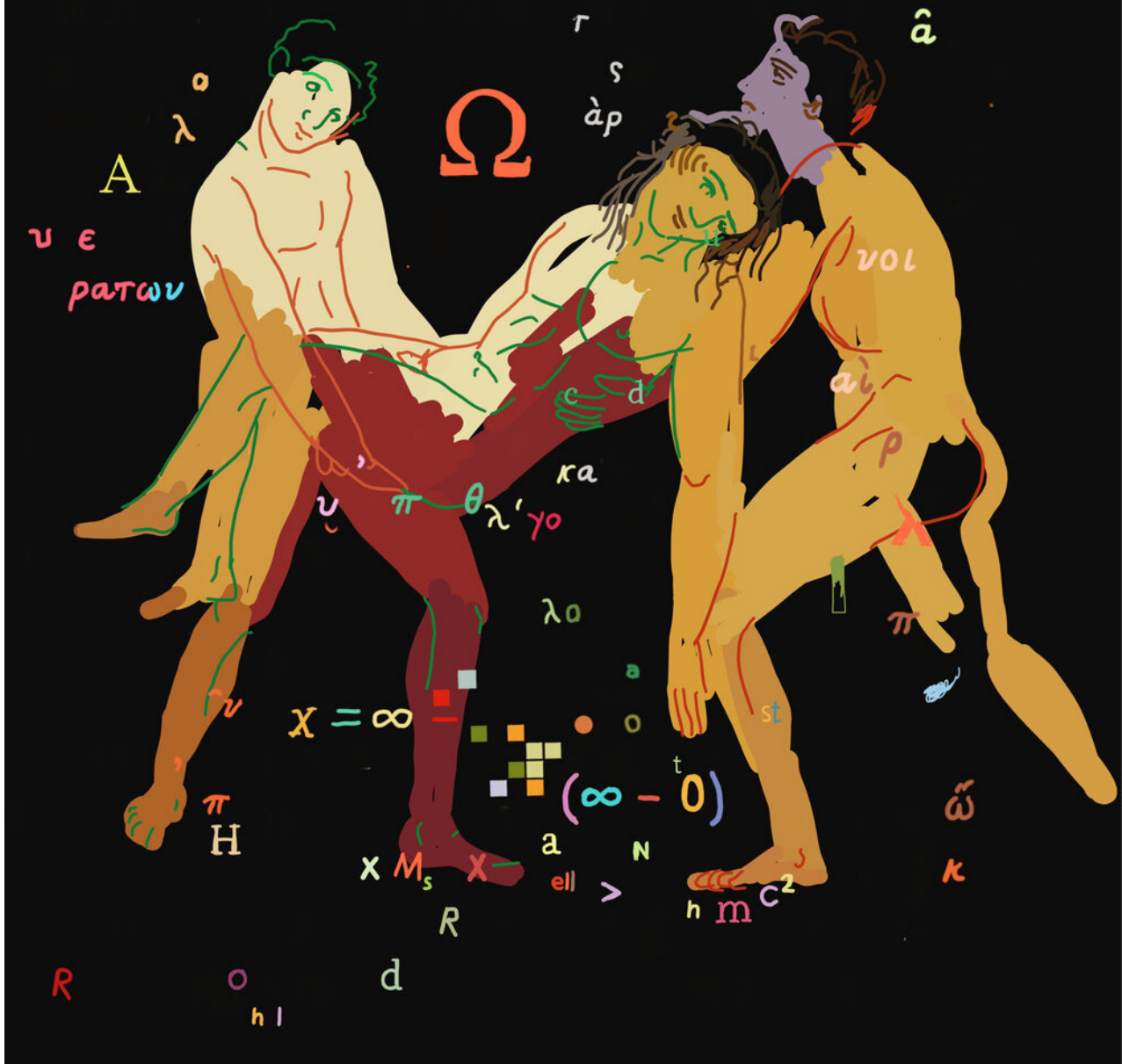
The Peloponnesian War, Book 5.52
2019
w: 4000 px h: 5000px
iPhone X, digital image

The Peloponnesian War, Book 4.117
2019
w: 4000 px h: 5000px
iPhone X, digital image

The Peloponnesian War, Book 1.56
2019
w: 4000 px h: 5000px
iPhone X, digital image

The Peloponnesian War, Book 5.70
2019
w: 4000 px h: 5000px
iPhone X, digital image.

Adrian Pocobelli (1979) was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in Canada's midwest. He became interested in images at a young age when he began collecting postcards of Roman mosaics on his first trip to Italy and was given the stamp collection of his late Italian grandfather. As a teenager he became interested in sports cards, and later comics, eventually working his first job at a comic store in Saskatoon.

In his twenties he completed a Masters in English Literature at the University of Saskatchewan, writing a thesis on *The Atrocity Exhibition* by J.G. Ballard, after which he moved to Montreal, where he worked as a graphic designer. He later moved to Toronto, where he spent four years as a news editor before moving to Berlin in September 2016. Pocobelli currently lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

Education

1997-2001 - University of Saskatchewan, Double Honours, Visual Arts and English Literature
2001-2004 - University of Saskatchewan, Master of Arts, English Literature

Public Speaking

2019 - "The Peloponnesian War", presentation, Motion Lab Berlin, Berlin, Germany
2019 - "The Peloponnesian War", presentation, Ping Pong, Berlin, Germany
2018 -"J.G. Ballard and the Visual Arts", lecture, Mitte Media Festival, Berlin, Germany

Exhibitions

2018 - "Digital Hallucinations", Fata Morgana (two-person show sponsored by Leo Kuelbs Collection), Berlin, Germany
2018 - "Related Images", Factory Berlin, Berlin, Germany
2017 - "Screenshots", Factory Berlin, Berlin, Germany
2017 - "Internet Pop", Fata Morgana (sponsored by Leo Kuelbs Collection), Berlin, Germany
2017 - "Promoted Stories", Fata Morgana, Berlin, Germany

Awards

2016 - ArtSlant Prize Round 5, Juried Winner

pocobelli.net
contact@pocobelli.net
instagram.com/pocobelli
twitter.com/pocobelli
medium.com/@pocobelli