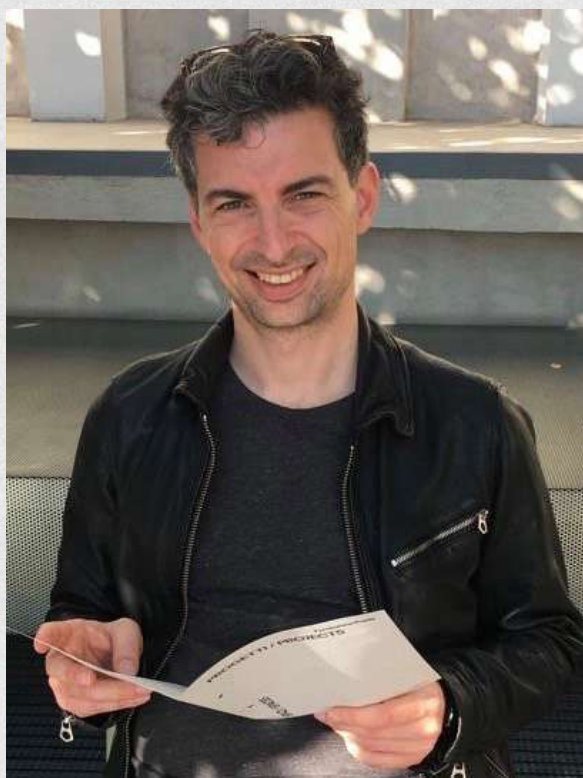




'Madonna of the Goldfinch', iPhone X and MacBook Pro, digital image.

# INTERVIEW



## ADRIAN POCOBELLI

### Biography

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.

### Solo Shows

2021 - «Screen Memories», Leo Kuelbs Collection x KunstMatrix, Berlin, Germany

2020 - «Screen Memories», Fata Morgana, Berlin, Germany

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

# Berlin-based artist Adrian Pocobelli was born in Canada and works on the intersection of digital, mosaic and painting.

## **Have you been interested in art since your childhood days?**

Yes, I was first introduced to art when my parents took me to the Vatican at 6 years old. On that same trip I started collecting postcards of Italian mosaics and buying small space Lego sets. I also received the stamp collection of my late Italian grandfather, whom I never knew. In a lot of ways, my aesthetic sensibility was formed during this time and has remained fairly consistent until today. I still make drawings of old space Lego boxes and stop in my tracks when I see a postcard showing a bird in a mosaic. I was also an obsessive trading card and comic collector. I would stare at these objects for hours on end when I was a teenager.

## **How have you developed your career, was it something that just happened or did you make strategic decisions?**

It's all been strategic decisions, although luck plays a role. Unless you're rich or well connected, there's no real easy path to becoming an artist. I come from a small city in Canada—Saskatoon, Saskatchewan—so I've spent most of my adult life pursuing opportunities to make my name. You really have to be determined. I first moved to Montreal, and then to Toronto, and five years ago I moved to Berlin, where I'm very happy to be based. Persistence and a 'never give up' attitude is crucial. That all being said, at the end of the day, it's about the work, and there's nothing that can improve your odds more than making great work. Nevertheless, I believe art should be treated as a business like any other, which means having an entrepreneurial mindset. Luck alone is rarely enough.

## **What is your scariest experience in your professional life?**

The sense that you may have screwed up your life. That feeling when you wake up at 5 am and think, "Have I made a huge mistake?" Things have been going well recently, so I don't have that feeling as often, but sometimes you wonder. Pursuing the artist's path will test your soul...repeatedly. In a sense, it can be a massive sacrifice of one's life, depending on how things turn out.

## **Who are your biggest influences?**

My biggest influences are writers. I wrote my master thesis in English literature on J.G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, which is an experimental novel. Interestingly, Ballard's biggest influences were visual artists, primarily the Surrealists, so it's full circle in a sense. The psychedelic philosopher Terence McKenna also had a big influence on me—he has a mixed legacy, but he reminds us in a very persuasive and insightful way that we basically have no idea what's going on. This is very important and something we easily forget.

## **What is the best piece of advice you can give to an artist just starting out?**

Focus on one thing at a time. If you have a part-time job, do your art first before your other work. Be practical—think of who might buy your work from the beginning. This can actually improve your work. And put in the hours — don't worry about failure — The important thing is that you put in the time and stay focused.

“ the road to success is paved with failure.”



'Galatea', 5,400 pixels x 4,440 pixels (18,746.611 bytes), iPhone X and MacBook Pro.

**On most of your art, you use red and yellow paint, what is the story behind your choices?**

Those colours happen to work well with a lot of the paintings that I paint over. It's primarily an aesthetic decision, although sometimes, say in the case of the red Caravaggios, there's a symbolic overtone.

**Is there an artwork that you are most proud of ? Why?**

One of my favourite pieces is Car Ad #2, which is one of my very early iPhone works from 2016. This showed me that the phone could be a serious tool for art making. I love David Hockney, but I think the phone has far more capabilities than acting as a kind of virtual paintbrush. It's more akin to a sampler to make hip hop and techno, and I treat it that way.

Otherwise, it's usually whatever I'm working on. I'm always trying to get better and develop new breakthroughs. It's important to try and do things that are slightly out of your reach because you achieve this goal more often than you might think—maybe 20% of the time—and that's pretty good.

**How did you came up with the idea of making «Galatea»?**

That's part of my Screen Memories series where I take well known paintings and cover up areas with digital shapes and fills. The idea originally started a couple of years ago with basic fills that I would add on top of screenshots of famous paintings using my iPhone. As the project developed over time, I began to add and remove some of the layers in Photoshop, which created a strange mix of organic and inorganic shapes, and over time, I've refined the method.

From a conceptual point of view, Galatea is a tribute to the women in my life who all seem to be working so hard to keep their families and their jobs going, while also maintaining their health. It's an image of a triumphant, powerful femininity, so it seemed appropriate. I use a lot of Raphael's work because of his unparalleled use of colour as well as his rich compositions. To see Raphael's work in person really is an otherworldly experience, and I recommend it to everyone. To have a full understanding of art requires an encounter with Raphael. It's real-world magic.

Further, I see the history of art as a dialogue among artists. And to be a part of the tradition, you have to be in conversation with the tradition. If you read Chaucer or Blake, you'll find endless references to other writers and the history of ideas. This is part of what makes them great artists. So, I directly reference art history in order to enter that conversation.



'Car Ad #2' 1000 px H- 1000 px. Sketchbook Pro, Instagram, iPhone 6S.