

My name is Iris.
"And it is true." –

This is how my story begins.

I started this project a few years ago. Or rather, I think I always had this story in my head, but I didn't know how to tell it. Five years ago I came to Berlin from Brussels, and suddenly it became clear: that's how the story starts, arriving in this city. It made sense, and therefore it should be somehow autobiographical.

Although I was born and raised in Brussels, I am Greek, from both parents. In the summer we would always travel to Greece with the family, where one has a completely different way of life. And then always back to Belgium. For me it was always a point of wonder and confusion: I didn't know – or couldn't choose, or couldn't tell – which life was really "truer", the Greek or the Belgian, which life I felt closest to, which life I preferred. One sees the beginning of a sort of identity crisis here: sure, in Belgium I was always the "Greek", and in Greece, the "Belgian", but it wasn't only that. In my head I always lived somewhere else. Wherever I would be, I knew my "true life" was the other one, the one far away, and so where my "true friends" and my "true self".

Strangely, to this day, I still can't say where I actually belong – except in Berlin. Berlin therefore plays an important role in my story – although it is clear that my so-called "City of B_" is a fantastic mix between Berlin and Brussels, where, for example, the biggest landmark looks like Berlin's television tower (the Fernsehturm) but with nine stacked spheres (like the nine spheres of the Atomium in Brussels). It is important to me to keep the line between the fantastic and the real blurred. These play a major part of my concept and storytelling.

In the theatre we often play around this limit. My master's thesis also had a lot to do with it: when I presented my project to the audience, they – and I – were also part and characters in the presentation. I created the link by exhibiting my comic in progress along with my stage and performance concept. These elements belong together, and there was a point where I saw this project as a "triptych", where three parts of the story would be told on three different media – paper/comics; stage/performance; film/photography. My goal is to create a kind of experience of reality on several levels.

In a way, I have already made part of the theatrical level, where some characters in my story were revealed publicly for the first time in a performance (in *Das Kunstraubkabinett*, Ackerstadtpalast, Berlin 2018).

The story and characters come from/are inspired by ancient Greek mythology, and more so from Sophocles' tragedy *Ajax*. In my comic book, mythical characters, ancient forces, gods and heroes collide with the story of Iris, my heroine and fictional self.

The project:

... is a long-term adventure, an epic story, with several parts (books) and chapters. Each piece goes a little deeper into the world of fantasy and mythology - but always somehow set in and inspired by this life and existence...

Book I. How it all started.

A young woman between 25 and 30, after a mysterious accident on "some Greek island", suffers from total amnesia. The arrival - at the very beginning of the comic - in the new city (City of B_) symbolizes the beginning of a new life, as is usual in timeless immigration history, something that is also very present in my own family history.

In her struggle to bring her life back together, old ghosts reappear. A thickening plot follows, with intensifying mystery, leaps in space and time, strange dreams, supernatural and mystical elements, objects of superstition behaving against the laws of natural physics, and so on (e.g. the "Mati": an amulet that protects against the Evil Eye).

Everything, of course, has to do with what happened some time ago - or a very long time ago - on this Greek island.

In this first part, Iris meets the mythical figure and ancient Greek hero, Aias, and indeed with her fate and her own story.

Book II. Road Trip.

In this part a journey is undertaken. Aias and Iris have to travel back to Greece and to this mysterious island (which, incidentally, is the island of Ithaca...) together. Similar in the narrative, and with many references to Homer's *Odyssey*, it would feel a lot like

being guided through Odysseus' *nostos*, just... reinterpreted and repositioned within the modern world.

After the narrative style of the rhapsodies (of course including the *Apologies*, the journey in the underworld of Hades, etc.), there will be stories told, and tales. These deeper "stories within the stories" – where every time the mythical, the mystical and the magical become a little more present – take us far back into ancient Greek mythology and fantasy, and also leading to a better understanding of the characters' history and their origins.

The point of the journey is to bring the "Mati" back to the sea, where it belongs ... Failure would lead to more years and centuries of curses and disasters ... or something like that. The world (or some generations) must be at stake somehow...

Book III. Odysseys.

In this part, we learn how Odysseus - who has been many people over the years - actually never died and is still roaming the earth trying to find a shore to land on.

These three books are the parts that are currently planned, but there can always be more; the story never ends there.

In short.

My themes here are "reality and fiction (myth)", along with "memory and identity". For me, the navigation between these worlds is what creates the stories we tell and start giving a meaning to our existence.

There are thin threads between imaginations, a tale told and mythology, that vibrate to the touch of the poet who is ready to pluck them and play them like the strings of his lyre.