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## Everything is a copy of a copy of a copy

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**Antiquipop**



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Fabien Bièvre-Perrin, visuals for the 2019 Antiquipop program,  
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## “Everything is a copy of a copy of a copy”

### Preface

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A quote from *Fight Club* (Chuck Palahniuk, 1996) may seem unusual for a Classicist. Nevertheless, this famous sentence summarises the contents of this special issue of *thersites* perfectly. As specialists in classical reception frequently witness, there is a sort of *déjà-vu* effect when it comes to the presence of Antiquity within popular culture. Countless versions of the Laocoon and the Venus de Milo coexist, from the most faithful reproductions to the most eccentric re-interpretations. Since 2015, the project *Antiquipop* has analysed and inventoried the presence of antiquity in contemporary popular culture: from the authors and speakers who contributed to the blog, the first symposium, to the various events over the years – all have clearly highlighted this trend.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, postmodernism, mass culture and social networks have accelerated this ancient phenomenon to the extreme. One can wonder why so many creators build such an army of clones. How do they seek originality and how do they confer an *aura* to their work of art, making it more than a reproduction?<sup>2</sup> In 2019, to try to better under-

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1 *Antiquipop*: <https://antiquipop.hypotheses.org/>; Fabien Bièvre-Perrin & Élise Pampanay (eds), *Antiquipop: la référence à l'Antiquité dans la culture populaire contemporaine. Actes du colloque 2016* (Lyon: MOM Editions, 2018). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.momeditions.3299>.

2 On reproductions and the *aura* of works of art, see Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935).

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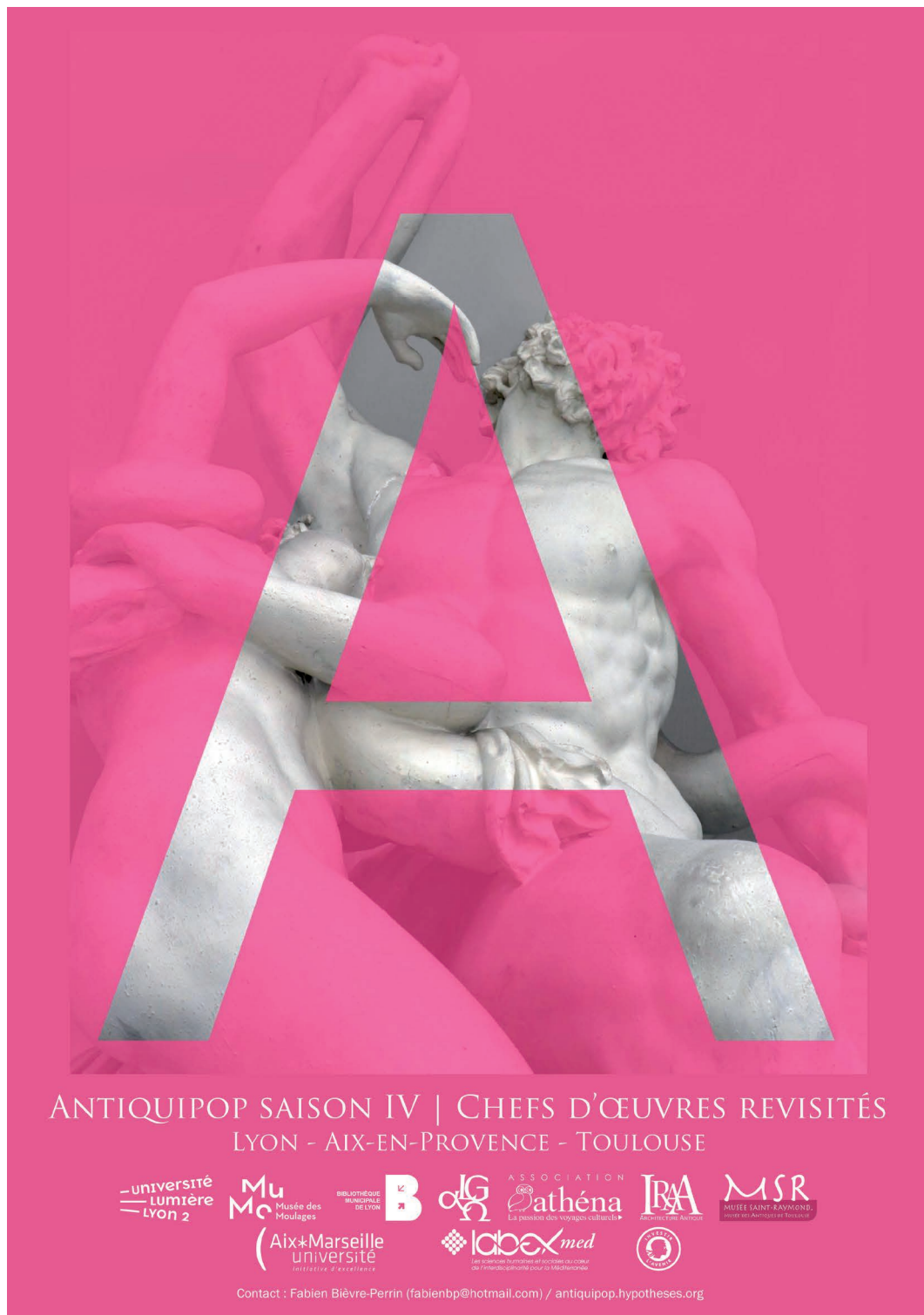


Figure 1 Poster of the fourth “season” of Antiquipop, Fabien Bièvre-Perrin.

stand the phenomenon, Antiquipop invited researchers to take an interest in the construction and semantic path of these “masterpieces” in contemporary popular culture, with a particular focus on the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This volume brings together the proceedings of a seminar organised in the first half of 2019 (1 February – 24 May) in Lyon as well as the output from the congress organised in Toulouse on June 1 of the same year with the support of LabexMed. The Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon welcomed Manon Renault for her talk about fashion, while the Musée des moulages de Lyon offered the perfect backdrop for Isabelle Jouteur’s lecture on the Laocoon, as well as guided tours of the museum led by Tiphaine Annabelle Besnard and myself. The congress was hosted by the Musée Saint Raymond as part of the events surrounding the exhibition *Age Of Classics* (22 February – 22 September 2019), curated by Tiphaine Annabelle Besnard and Mathieu Scapin. I would like to thank all these institutions for supporting and welcoming our events in such ideal and fitting settings.

The proposals Antiquipop received in response to its call for papers easily confirmed the special status of five ancient works that have become iconic. Three of them have been known for a long time and as such form part of an extensive tradition: the Laocoon (1506), the Venus de Milo (1820) and the Victory of Samothrace (1863). These are used in popular culture so often that establishing an exhaustive catalogue of their recurrences has become unthinkable. Their whiteness and incompleteness have fuelled their aura and made them icons of classicism, a process now questioned.<sup>3</sup> The two Riace Warriors, in polychrome bronze, have a shorter contemporary history since they were only discovered on the shores of Calabria in 1972. The circumstances of their discovery, their exceptional state of preservation and their quality made them immediately famous. Their popular reception is mostly traceable to Italy, in particular in Calabria and Reggio Calabria, where they are now preserved.

While these five works differ in their artistic, historical and technical aspects, they illustrate common reception phenomena exclusive to a very restricted club of classical statues, among which the Discobolus or the Apollo of Belvedere could also be have been discussed.<sup>4</sup> Of course, not all facets of these masterpieces could be covered by the contributors. Several volumes would be neces-

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<sup>3</sup> Philippe Jockey, *Le mythe de la Grèce blanche: Histoire d’un rêve occidental* (Paris: Belin, 2015). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3917/bel.jocke.2015.01>.

<sup>4</sup> The club could also be opened to non Graeco-Roman works, such as Nefertiti’s bust; Fabien Bièvre-Perrin, ‘Nefertiti, a queen for the XXI<sup>st</sup> century’, in Penelope Kolovou, Richard Cole &



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sary for such an undertaking. Given its central place, the Laocoon is the subject of two quite different and complementary approaches. Michel Briand looks at it as a queer and camp icon, questioning aesthetic, cultural and political issues, while Isabelle Jouteur focuses on its status as a muse of contemporary art. The Victory of Samothrace is examined by Élise Pampanay who seeks to decode the meanings and symbolism of its latest reinterpretations, focusing for example on contemporary art by Omar Hassan or Xu Zhen as well as the music videos of Beyoncé and Jay-Z. Through the Venus de Milo, Tiphaine-Annabelle Besnard explores hyper-artistic practices in modern and contemporary art and how they remade the famous statue into a “palimpsest object”. Finally, Daniela Costanzo offers a deep analysis of the fate of the Riace Bronzes in contemporary culture, especially in Calabria where they play a central political role, covering a wide range of issues, from tourism exploitation to the migrant crisis, to which the two bronzes are regularly linked.

The second half of the volume is devoted to analyses that do not focus on specific works, but on a more diffuse and abstract reception of Classical Art. Manon Renault deals with fashion, from *haute couture* to *prêt-à-porter* and shows how classical models keep influencing designers and shaping trends. Arnaud Saura Ziegelmeyer deals with the difficult subject of sound and asks how, in the absence of models, the contemporary imagination has approached ancient music and created new *clichés*, and what these can tell us about our society? Finally, Mathieu Scapin offers a vast panorama devoted to comics, the widespread presence of ancient models, whether famous or not, and their multiples uses.

This volume shows to what extent the same phenomenon, the repetitiveness of classical models in recent popular culture, is nourished by various phenomena and intentions. If an appeal to the collective imagination, itself nourished by numerous previous reinterpretations, seems to have motivated most of the creators, these masterpieces and their history are also put into perspective to consecrate them as models as well as to question their role and their impact on today’s societies and ways of thinking. Somewhat paradoxically, each new version reinforces the iconic status of the original work and its *aura*. To clarify the extent, the mechanisms, and the effects of the phenomenon, it will surely be appropriate in the future to devote a consequent collective and interdisciplinary effort to one of these masterpieces, for example the Laocoon or the victory

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Markus Stachon (eds), *Classical Antiquity in Our World* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming).

of Samothrace, which have found further success in recent popular and mainstream culture.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Many thanks to Lorna Richardson for her careful proofreading and corrections.



