# Diethard Sohn

## Artistic Biography

In 1968 I was seven years old when Hermann Krupp moved his Galerie 66 into our immediate neighbourhood, on Ostpreussenstrasse in Hofheim am Taunus. To me as a child, the art I encountered there was a revelation. I sensed that a new era had begun: here was the antidote to croquettes with brown gravy.



*Diethard Sohn, 1978*

Artists such as Gernot Bubenik, Otmar Alt, Simon Dittrich, Geet Govind, Pitt Moog, Reinhold G. Müller, Hans Geipel, Jürgen Reipka, Ingrid Dahn, Sybille Schlageter, Renate Golla and many others brought a spirit of new beginnings into my childhood world. Sundays at Galerie 66 meant much the same to me as going to church did to other people.

I began to take an interest in the visual arts. That same year, my siblings and I were allowed to attend Hermann Krupp's painting classes for children.

Sadly, in 1970 we moved away towards Stuttgart. It was a brief but deeply formative period. My parents were interested in art and collected it, so paintings by Reipka, Bubenik, Alt, Dietrich and Moog, along with a lithograph by Pierre Soulages, came with us. As a child I was fascinated by the Constructivists and abstract painting. In my youth, however, I turned towards figurative and naturalistic work, especially portraiture and drawing my own comic characters. Apart from my pencil period from 1981 to 1983, colour and colour harmony played a major role in my visual understanding. Meeting an aesthetic standard also became important to me.

## The Path to Portraiture: Dürer and the Old Masters

What particularly appealed to me in the drawings, watercolours and paintings of the Renaissance, Mannerism and, to some extent, the Baroque was their artistic exploration of pictorial aesthetics: hatching, contour and line, composition and colour. In portraits, I was especially drawn to their often impetuous directness. Faces were not always idealised; some almost resemble caricatures. The love of detail in Van Eyck, Frans Hals and Albrecht Dürer, and the lifelike vitality of Caravaggio's works, also stayed with me. The care with which these artists worked showed me my own path, as both a painter and a draughtsman. Had I been interested only in content, I would have written or spoken. My language, however, was and remains the painted and drawn image. An image uses a different vocabulary, more immediate and sensual than the world of words can offer.

### 1976

My first serious portrait study dates from 1976. At the time, even the portraits on banknotes served as subjects for study. Wherever I was, I drew.

My school exercise books contained nothing but sketches, comic drawings and surreal horror doodles.

Later, at seventeen, I also began painting portraits in acrylic, often using photographs from newspapers, magazines and record covers as references.



Monotype



"Pirate" - Coloured pencil



School exercise books



First acrylic portrait

### 1979

This monotype shows a move towards a painterly approach. It was made in the school workshop, just as I was about to leave secondary school early following my father's death.



"Lacanau" - Plein air
Red chalk drawing

### 1980

The painterly phase continued, here through an exploration of Impressionist brushwork. I had begun my studies at the Merz Akademie in Stuttgart.



Impressionist skull
Gouache



"Biggi" - Acrylic portrait

### 1982

These sketches of a bearded vulture and a leopard were made on a visit to the natural history museum in Stuttgart's Rosensteinpark while I was studying at the Merz Akademie. I made many such studies, but sadly they were lost during renovation of the building where I rented storage space. Alongside my studies, I earned money animating cartoons, including work for EHAPA.



"Bearded Vulture" - Pencil



"Leopard" - Pencil

### 1983

The mystical, surreal phase. As in the previous year, I worked almost exclusively in pencil. The Roller Coaster Ride was inspired by a class visit to the Cannstatter Wasen fairground, where we were asked to draw scenes.



"The Roller Coaster"

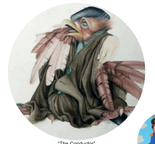


"Black Forest"

### 1986

After pencil, watercolour became my medium of choice.

For the publisher Thienemann, I reinterpreted The Robber Holzenplotz in gouache for a series of puzzle books, with the heirs' kind permission, in the style of the legendary original illustrator Franz Josef Tripp.



"The Conductor"
Watercolour



"The Robber Holzenplotz"
Gouache



"The Robber Holzenplotz"
Gouache



"The Robber Holzenplotz"
Gouache

### 1989

For several years I also produced illustrations for book publishers and advertising agencies to support myself and make room for painting.



Ashtray - Watercolour



Ashtray - Detail

### 1991

Many other studies from life, such as this watercolour of a young African boy, were part of my daily practice. It was painted directly, without a preliminary sketch. I drew closer again to models such as Albrecht Dürer. During this period I began teaching as a guest lecturer at the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design, continuing until 2004.



"The Young African Boy"
Watercolour



Watercolour illustration



Book cover - Watercolour
Illustration

### 1992

A whole series of watercolours like these, studies of wildflowers and grasses painted directly from nature, were made between 1989 and 1992.



"Pantsies"
Watercolour



"Thistle"
Watercolour



"Bellflowers"
Watercolour

### 1993

An expressive phase and transition towards Comic Cubism. The painting below shows the house in the Würmtal in the northern Black Forest where I had my studio. I lived in the attic from 1986 to 1995 for 50 DM, with a wood-burning stove and cold water. Without this space, I could not have continued my work.



„Paul"



"Two Girls"



"The Emperor"



"The Würmtal Studio"



"The Poet"



"The Flowerpot"

### 1994

From this point on, I began creating the paintings that I now produce under the artist name dItArdo.



„Columbus"



"A Long, Long Journey"



At work



"The Woman in the Sun"

### 1995

The birth of Comic Cubism, the new style I had invented and continuously refined since 1993. The first exhibitions followed, and the City of Leonberg acquired a painting.



At work



Philosoph am Neuen Markt

The Philosopher
at the Neuer Markt

### 1997

Alongside painting, I worked freelance, entering a media agency as an art director from a different professional background. Some of my ideas caught the management's attention. Before I knew it, I was swept up in the booming New Economy and became a board member of a rising start-up preparing to go public, with Lothar Späth as chairman of its supervisory board. My art benefited too: I had a studio on the company premises, while my large Comic Cubist paintings adorned rooms on every floor. For the first time since childhood, I experienced prosperity again. Yet in 2000 I left this seductive comfort zone to devote myself fully to painting. For my original ambition in life, to bring my vision of painting into being on white surfaces, I needed one thing above all: time.



"Girl with a Violin"



„Luke"



"The Guardian"

### 2005

Indonesian internet entrepreneur and art patron Toto Otto Sugiri invited me to Jakarta for a working stay. In Indonesia, Marina Budiman commissioned portraits of her children. Independent portraits followed only afterwards.



"Girl"



"Boy"



"The Off-Road Vehicle"



"The Rickshaw Driver"

### 2007

Back in Germany, I worked extensively with oil paint, and the paintings became somewhat more expressive.



"The Rubbish Collector"



"Two under One Hat"

### 2008

As expressive oil painting threatened to become a dead end, repeating earlier phases of my work, I returned to a precise, sharply drawn line. It opened up new aesthetic possibilities.



"The Pear"



"Dr Grub"
Commissioned portrait



"The Rice-Cake Woman"



"Hannah"
Commissioned portrait



„Francis Rosa"

### 2010

A number of portraits and the "Darksider" series emerged in this manner. I could never stand still and say, "This is it." That would be the day I stopped painting and drawing. In 2011 my interpretation of Saint Anthony made headlines in the Stuttgarter Zeitung after the "Dezemberschau" group exhibition at Amrei Heyne's gallery.



"The Temptations of
Saint Anthony"



"Mrs Grub"
Commissioned portrait



„Julia"
Commissioned portrait



„Mon Cherry"

### 2013

Portrait commissions continued. After meeting my patron Toto in Stuttgart, I painted his portrait.



„Toto Otto Sugiri"
Commissioned portrait



"Angelika"
Commissioned portrait

### 2014

Quinces became a central subject in my work. I explored them in greater depth through a series of photorealistic paintings using Old Master techniques.



"Quince 02"



"Quince 01"



"Quince 05"



"Quince 04"

### 2015

Together with Irene Müller, I founded the art label Müller & Sohn and registered it as a European trademark. Alongside our individual practices, we create joint projects, artworks and exhibitions under this name. Irene Müller worked as an artistic collaborator with Christoph Schlingensief. She brings documentary photography and video into a dynamic dialogue with painting to celebrate the forces of nature.



"Quince 07"



"Quince 08"



"Wind bekommen" video installation
(Müller & Sohn)

### 2016

Commissioned portraits continued to recur throughout my work. Here, a portrait of a beloved horse: Peppy.

Solo exhibition at Kunstverein Ludwigsburg: Müller & Sohn with the project "WEGE - Alpen".



"Peppy" - Commissioned portrait



"The Cow"

### 2018

Audience Award at the First Southwest German Art Prize for my portrait of actress Elke Twiesselmann.

I also kept seeking ways to reconcile the artistic identities of dItArdo and Diethard.



Portrait of Elke Twiesselmann



"The Carnation"



Quince - Detail

### 2019

The collaborative Müller & Sohn project "Land gewinnen" received the Art Prize of the Karl-Heinz Knoedler Foundation in Ellwangen.

I had the chance to see Dürer's Hare in the original. For conservation reasons, the Albertina exhibits it only every five years. That moment alone made the journey worthwhile. Dürer has always inspired my realistic approach to painting.

That year, the Renaissance paintings at the National Gallery in London inspired me to introduce trompe-l'oeil effects into my own painting.



"Land gewinnen" video installation
(Müller & Sohn)



Quince - Detail



Trompe-l'oeil effects

### 2022

Haus der Wirtschaft Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart: solo exhibition (Müller & Sohn). DAI art-award, Stadtmuseum Düsseldorf: group exhibition (Müller & Sohn). artwerk projekt, Vaihingen-Enz: group exhibition (Müller & Sohn), Donaueschinger Regionale, Donaueschingen: group exhibition (Müller & Sohn), catalogue.



„Quitte-M-02-4040-A-2021"



Trompe-l'oeil effects



„Quitte-M-04-4040-A-2022"

### 2023

A year of commissions: "Sophie Scholl" for the City of Leonberg, the "Cafe Künstlerbrot" project with actor KurtvonSuSo in St. Gallen, Switzerland, and the portrait "Nathalie", alongside preparations for the exhibitions in 2024.

art-figura 2023, 10th Art Prize of the City of Schwarzenberg: group exhibition (Müller & Sohn), catalogue.



City of Leonberg commission
"Sophie Scholl"



Commissioned portrait
„Natalie"



Commissioned portrait
"Natalie" - Detail



„Fish Plate III"



„Cafe Künstlerbrot"

### 2024

"The Wall", one of the most rewarding projects under my label "dItArdo the Comic Cubist", is a mural on school grounds created with pupils of the Ludwig-Uhland-Schule in Leinfelden.

Solo exhibitions: Müller & Sohn und Ko (Irene Müller, Diethard Sohn and Hyunjeong Ko) at Kunstverein Ludwigsburg, and Müller & Sohn at the municipal gallery in Plochingen.



"The Wall" - Communication



"The Wall" - Preliminary study



"Rubin" painting - Detail
(Müller & Sohn)



„Leucasia"
(Müller & Sohn)

### 2025

I now paint Quince Portraits measuring 40 × 40 cm in egg tempera on wooden panels, following medieval and Renaissance traditions.



„Quitte-MUS-03-4040-ET-2025"



„Quitte-MUS-06-4040-ET-2025"



„Quitte-MUS-05-4040-ET-2025"



„Quitte-MUS-02-4040-ET-2025"



„Quitte-MUS-04-4040-ET-2025"