

My gaze rests upon portraits in which the subjects appear to have been sunk into bath tubs filled with colourful water. With this style, only the strongest characteristics of a person remain, in vivid zones of colours. Everything else is gone. This is how illustrator and graphic designer MAGNUS VOLL MATHIASSEN presents his portraits for a number of publications and clients.

# Vivid Zones of Color

Magnus Voll Mathiasen's creative story began back in the 90s when Hip Hop culture took a hold on Norwegian youth. It became an everyday thing to see kids in hats, hoodies and baggy jeans, listening to Oslo-based rap group *Warlocks* and breakdancing in their leisure time. In Drammen, Fredrikstad, and Oslo, graffiti became a common sight. In the early 90s it was criminalised, with the municipality of Oslo declaring 'a war on graffiti.' Young Mathiasen was 11 years old when he started roaming the streets with his cans of spray paint.

-I was always interested in subcultures, and black American hip-hop culture in particular. I started hanging out with a group of boys, of all different ages and from different kinds of circles. We found each other through our common love for visual self expression. We snuck around Drammen and tagged illegal and legal walls. My signatures back then were *Alot* and *Asthma* and I focused mostly on painting characters. If I'm not mistaken, a few of my 'public contributions' are actually still there, even though it was more than 20 years ago, says Mathiasen.

After three creatively prolific years around Drammen, Mathiasen had a fallow period. But when the glass doors of his high school swung behind him for the last time, he decided to dust off his old interest and apply to an art school in Oslo.

-My year in Oslo was beautiful, in the sense that I could spend my time at a desk, drawing and thinking about artistic idioms and coming up with simple concepts and manifesting them on paper. I then found out that my strength lies in the abstract, which was useful, he says.

A year in Oslo was followed by a move across the country to attend the *Art College of Bergen*. There, he quickly found two companions with whom he shared interests and a level of ambition, and the three started working professionally, creating graphic and

visual content for night clubs in Bergen, while still attending school during the day. Word soon got out and the trio, who'd named themselves *Grandpeople* by this point, had set a solid foundation by the time they finally waved goodbye to student life in 2005. That same year *Grandpeople* were featured across ten pages of the UK magazine *Grafik*, and they started working with international names such as *Nike*.

The years went by in the rainy city of Bergen and Mathiasen slowly started feeling a tug in his chest. It was time to leave Bergen, go back to his roots and start up on his own.

-I founded *MVM* in Drammen in 2009. By that point I had a list of clients who wanted to continue working with me personally and I did quite a lot of editorial drawings and profiling work for festivals. But my main focus back then was entirely on finding my own visual expression and I knew that, in order to keep my momentum, I had to develop my illustrative skills. Up until that point, in my late 20s, I hadn't really done any portraits at all. So the very first portrait series I did was for a personal project called *Rap/Pop Faces*. It was a test I did to see if I was able to combine the abstract with the figurative. In the end, that project actually turned out to be the foundation for every single project or job I've done since.

His style has become a national and international hit, and he is represented by the creative agencies *ByHands* in Norway, *Agent Pekka* in Finland, *Hugo & Marie* in the US and *Tiphaine* in France. His list of clients now includes *Adidas*, *Converse*, *PlayStation*, *Microsoft*, *Skype* and *Bose*—to name a few.

-When I started my own business it became clear, naturally, that I needed to commercialise my work in order to stay afloat. So, with time, my visual expression has become more and more pop-cultural in its look, and my use of colour is mainly because the market wants it, says Mathiasen.

His tinted, vibrant illustrations are not, however, humorous. Mathiasen is of the opinion that humour sometimes diminishes the sustainability of drawings.

-Some people work with humour. I do not. I guess I'm the slightly more serious and boring kind in that way. I like artists like Jean Arp because his work always has a mood, but it isn't supposed to be funny, he tells me.

His mind is currently occupied by patterns and three dimensional shapes.

-What I'm working on these days in my personal projects is very, very different to all of my commercial 'money' jobs. I'm in the process of doing something that might actually become what I do full time, eventually. We'll see. I don't want to reveal anything more, because I don't want to jinx it. But I'm a planner. I've always laid out a thorough five-year plan of strategies, goals and dreams, which I guess is quite rare for an illustrator. And I'm quite certain that I'm not going to have the same job in four years, as the one I have now. I've always wanted to create a career and a job where I'm allowed to redefine myself again and again. That's my greatest aspiration.

Words  
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Illustrations  
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THE WALKING RODIN





ABOVE: NORTHERN LIGHTNING  
RIGHT: INSPIRE MAGAZINE



ABOVE: GQ MAGAZINE  
LEFT: NEW NORDIC FASHION VOL. 2



# Birger Dahl 1916-1998



ILLUSTRATIONS FOR NORTHERN LIGHTNING  
SHOWCASING FURNITURE DESIGNER BIRGER DAHL