

First I would like to know a little about yourself, such as where are you from, what did you study, your age, etc. (basic bio).

I was born in Stuttgart (Germany) in 1967, a city that is dominated by the automotive industry. An interesting period for me as a child. You know, after WWII, the concept was to create a car-friendly city. During the reconstruction phase in the 50s, more buildings were destroyed than in the war. But that affected me a lot, the construction sites, the infrastructure and the avant-garde phase from the 70s. Later I studied German literature and history at the University of Stuttgart. I also wanted to study geography, because I wanted to get a deeper understanding of how the environment influences people. However, the course was dissolved. My master's thesis was then about literature and silhouettes, silhouettes as a medium of illustration, and about the mutual influence of authors and artists. In order to finance my studies I worked as a waiter, actor, driver and in several other jobs.

1. Do you work mainly as an artist or do you have another job?

I would love to be able to live on my art. But now I work as a manager in a power network company, organizing services and quality. I like my job, because I have time enough for my art, money enough to travel and enough joy in my work. I always wanted to work for museums, organizing exhibitions, services and building technology. My big goal is to open a *décollage* museum one day.

2. How and why did you start working with *décollage*?

Mmh, I think, it was back in the 90s. My best friend and I, we are urban observers and explorers. The *décollage* thing started by taking pictures from old billboards. We both love details, strolling (*flâner*) through cities and nature. Later I have torn the first posters in Portugal and Munich, mostly little fragments, not bigger than DIN A3. It started in 2008, and I had a feeling like "I have found my medium, with which I want to work for my whole life". The reason is, I am obsessed by the variety of *décollage*, of the urban context, cause it reflects the *zeitgeist*. I can work as an archeologist, as a surgeon, as a paper researcher, entomologist, restorer, all the professions that I like. Working with *décollage* opens a world to me. My intention is to renew perceptions!

3. What is it about *décollage* that most interests you?

The material and the context, where I find it. But first, I would like to quote from my manifesto from 2016:

*"A *décollage* is utterly ambivalent. Its character lies in what is visible and what is concealed. And yet - its layers contain stories, acting as narrators in the public sphere and as heralds of that which moves people and makes passers-by linger."*

My first intention was to show the differences of motifs, types, papers, textures, structures. *"Such a wonderful discovery, when plaster, rust and dust stick to the back as residue, and moisture has caused the colours to seep into the layers, painting the reverse in yellows or reds."* But like nature, billboards are endangered:

"Our representatives are working diligently with street furniture companies to replace

billboards and their immanent spontaneity and delicately anarchic diversity. It creates a supposedly clean public space. I call it monotonous, [... cause it lacks authenticity]. "How is an artist to respond to such deficiency? An artist can reveal the hidden beauty, extract and present details. Removed from a billboard or other advertisement, the *décollage* transforms it into art – by the artist's sheer will and intention."

So working on the *décollage* became more and more a political and consumption-critical theme. Billboards have to be protected! Whoever posts posters determines the discourse, *"the topics of discussion. Wild diversity yields to a monopoly on information. The artist intervenes, adding a new twist to the discourse, a new perspective."*

Unlike the first artists, I want to expand the scope of action, making visible the interaction with sprayers and passers-by, as well as the geological distribution of the *décollage*.

4. Do you have any favorite *décollage* artist as a reference?

I have several favourites, each one for special reasons. If I had to choose one, I would take Jacques Mahé de la Villeglé, because he is a kind of forefather of *décollage* and has a broad variety. Also Mimmo Rotella, he has transferred posters from billboards into art in an ever-evolving way. But I like also Arthur Aeschbacher, who plays with *décollage* fragments in a childish pleasure, very poetic. Reinhold Koehler too, has brought in a complete new perspective of *décollage* in the mid 50s.

I like Asger Jorn for his colorful *décollages* (he almost used the colorful layers of paper). François Dufrêne is a brother in spirit when it comes to the backsides of a *décollage* (the so called *retro d'affiche*), the part that stuck to the wall. He was also a *lettrist*, playing with different letters and font types. Maybe the first one who was active outside Europe was the Turkish artist Burhan Doğançay, discovering signs and billboards in New York.

5. Tell me about your process of finding and removing the posters

It's not only strolling through cities, it is nowadays strolling through Google Street View, observing Instagram with hashtags like *#tornposters* or *#billboards*, and asking other people if they could look for material.

Removing the posters is a craft in itself. If there are just one or two layers it is mostly useless to remove it, because it lacks layers and history. Removing depends also on the surface where posters stuck. Also the weather plays an important role. A certain humidity is very useful to remove posters. I use a cutter and a cake shovel, spatula and sometimes pliers. So it can last from a few seconds to more than one hour. Sometimes my friends take a video and comment the scenery. So the ripping off becomes a performance. I have several ideas to proceed with performances and videos. Maybe one day a similar performance like Michelangelo Pistoletto in 1966 with his giant paper bowl rolling through the streets.

6. Do you also create your own *décollage* pieces or only found ready made?

I use mostly found *décollage* material as a ready made. But it can happen that I consider a layer as ugly, so I tear it down. It is always a surprise what's underneath. Sometimes a part is missing, so I transplant a piece from another layer. Also in the moment of viewing a billboard it could happen that I determine the cutout - no need to work on it, cause it's already perfect for me.

7. Have you taken *décollages* from many different places? different countries?

O yes, most of the time I have pieces from Portugal. Also from France, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Austria, Czech Republic, Germany and The Netherlands. But I want to expand my range to Melbourne, Toronto, Seattle, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, India and other countries where I suspect *décollages*.

8. Did you notice any difference between *décollages* found in different places?

I only can give an opinion for the european *décollage*. There are some differences. In France, Italy and Portugal there are a lot of public billboards, where the city allows to post. In Perugia e.g. you need an official stamp on the poster. In Berlin a lot of the posters are posted illegally - but nobody cares, it belongs to public space and is typical for Berlin. In rich cities like Munich, Stuttgart or Oslo there are almost no wild billboards. But sometimes you can find some in hidden places. Then there's a difference in coloring. Italians like neon colours more than Portuguese, that are using a lot of strong yellow. In the country side, especially in Bavaria and Austria posters are often stapled on wood instead of glued. In Berlin and Stuttgart I noticed a lot of interaction with sprayers that left their tags. In Bulgaria and Serbia people often announce something on posters, e.g. they offer services. So the posters for clubs or events become just an information board. And it is just in Spain and Portugal that you can find a lot of old announcements for bull fighting, often with more than 40 layers.

9. As a graphic designer, what I find interesting about *décollage* is how this residue of graphic pieces, which is also a kind of dirt on the urban surface, becomes art by losing its function, and the dirt becomes beauty. Also I see this as a kind of ready-made. No one created them to look like that, it just happened, but the artist turns it into art by the single act of taking it and framing it. Could you talk about that or any other aspects that are interesting from your point of view?

Making art with disregarded and neglected material is sheer happiness. And it is a challenge for the artist to transform that particular material into art. So it is often a question of finding the balance, thinking of, how and if it could work, or to follow a certain idea. It allows you to see your city or other cities through different eyes. I am really eager to know, if there will a countermovement, that gives public space back to the people. Privatization is nothing else than taking away public good from community. There is also an interesting aspect, namely in the art scene itself: There is almost no perception and recognition of contemporary *décollage*. On art fairs, in galleries and museums you can hardly find *décollages* from the 2000s. But on the auction and second market, the *décollages* from the 50s, 60s and 70s get always very high prices. I am curious to know what has to happen that curators appreciate the contemporary *décollage*. Time will tell us.