

Sandu Raducioiu (Sid) was born in 1932 in the commune of Tudora in Stefan Voda District of Moldova. Born to a Gypsy mother and a Gagauzian father, they fled their home when Sid was just five years old in order to escape bullying from the Romanian majority in their village. They settled on a remote island called Sacalinu Mic in the Black Sea off the Romanian coast. While no records exist, Sid believes his parents died within a year of each other when he was in his early teens. Sid remained in the wilderness, living off the land, until 2004, when a pair of cartographers on a government expedition discovered him and called for help to bring him back to Bucharest.

From the time he could hold a pencil, Sid was trained by his academically trained father to draw and paint what he saw. He never stopped working on his craft during his time in isolation, using pigments that he collected and mixed into a starchy medium made of carob tree root and water. He learned from his mother how to make painting supports out of a jute-like fiber that he wove into coarse canvases. Most deteriorated over the years, and if any were brought out of the wilderness along with Sid, their whereabouts are now unknown. Once in Bucharest, efforts were made to locate Sid's closest living relative. Eventually, a grandniece named Liliana was discovered living in Astoria, Queens. After nearly two years of preparations, Sid, 74, landed at JFK International Airport on November 23, 2006.

According to Liliana, despite his excellent health, Sid rarely ventured from the small house in the first few months after his arrival. On one occasion when he did, Liliana discovered a pile of newspapers under his bed. Thinking it odd, as Sid had made little effort to learn English, she was amazed at what she found. Drawn directly atop the newsprint in pencil, pen, charcoal – apparently any marking device he could smuggle into the room - were drawings of interior scenes and still life compositions, landscapes depicting views from the windows, powerful self-portraits, and hundreds of drawings of dolls from the huge collection displayed throughout the house. Immediately, Liliana and her husband embarked on a plan to convert the garage into a painting studio for Sid. A collection drive from their church yielded a trove of art supplies and books.

Sid has spent the past five years working ceaselessly on his paintings. In the course of that time his approach to picture making has morphed as his reactions

to American culture evolve. What results is a type of social realism/surrealist-fantasy hybrid as seen through the mind of an artist reacting to a society that has been thrust into. His influences range from lessons gleaned from art history picture books, to time spent watching television shows with his adoptive family. In all, however, a palpable attempt at communication underscores the power of the language of painting. Sid's fearless approach, fertile imagination and critical eye shed light on aspects of American culture that most of us accept as normal.

American Idolls, 2008 - 2013

Liliana was obsessed with the reality series, *American Idol*, which began its sixth season shortly after Sid arrived. She made him watch it with her every week, and he liked it. One day Liliana noticed Sid hurriedly taking many of her dolls to the garage. He worked into the night, and the next morning Liliana found him still meticulously assembling a complex installation of her dolls that would form the basis of a painting that would occupy him off and on for the next six years. The assemblage was evocative of a Renaissance "Birth of Jesus" scene hanging in the National Art Museum in Bucharest that Sid may have seen during his two year's stay there. Lacking access to, or possibly interest in live models, he instead posed dolls as characters arranged around a central figure, on which he painted a likeness of Brittany Spears. Each of the other figures was also given the identity of a pop icon. The painting may have been motivated by what Sid saw as Liliana's unhealthy fixation with the series, or perhaps an indictment about American society's misplaced priorities, idolizing pop culture over most else. He saw the phenomenon as a sort of misplaced religiosity. And yet, instead of celebrating "the chosen one," the figures seem to be jockeying for position around her - conniving, scheming. Or they die trying. Clearly, a great amount of research went into identifying references for pop stars who both fit the arrangement and Sid's theme. It is fair to assume that he was aided in this process by Liliana.





Hellacious Housewives, 2008

Liliana developed an immediate and serious addiction to the first season of *The Real Housewives of Orange County*. Sid would sit on the couch next to Liliana, always with an art book on his lap that he would peruse while ignoring most of the action on the screen. *Hellacious Housewives* is a conflation of the bizarre spectacle of the show with the period of art history that Sid least favored from his books. He equated the nihilistic display on screen with Modernism's final dismantling of Classicism. Frieda Kahlo, Georgia O'Keefe, Lady Troubridge, and Gertrude Stein, in an arrangement reminiscent of Matisse's *Dance*, are dressed in the style of clothing he observed the women on TV wearing. They are depicted in the process of throwing Sergeant 's Madam X, to his mind the last vestige of Classicism, into a river of hell, seemingly used to represent the past as the landscape depicts demons springing from the molten river in homage to Bronzino. The theme also seems influenced by Goya's *Three Witches*, as there are undertones of some sort of feminist or Wiccan ritual.

Bjorn Identity, 2010

Sid painted *Bjorn Identity* as a reflection of his journey from Sacalinu Mic to America. The landscape represents the pristine nature of his homeland. The picket fence, symbolizing the American Dream, winds its way from his past to the present where Sid depicts himself next to Liliana and her husband, Bobby. Next to Sid is Bernice, a companion from his neighborhood in Queens. Liliana was three months pregnant at the time Sid made this painting. The babies on each character are a bittersweet statement on the nature of legacy. Obviously, Sid never had children of his own, and he reflects on progeny, materiality and his very existence.

Aldecocker Rockers, 2013

In the summer of last year, Bobby took Sid to Philadelphia to see the Rolling Stones in concert. To the surprise of no one, within a day of his return Sid was busy on a new project, having been energized by the expressive display he witnessed onstage, (thinking that the musicians were older than he was.) Living independently in isolation most of his life, Sid never had occasion to measure his age relative to others, and to this day resents being treated differently than those a younger than he. He now runs five miles daily, and is vital and youthful. *Aldecocker Rockers* is a statement about the real or supposed limitations of the flesh versus the boundlessness of the imagination. While the musicians depicted are anchored to their room, their expressions, along with the surrealist treatment of their setting, expresses the virtual freedom achievable when in the grips of passion. The musicians are so lost in the moment that they seem to be affecting the metaphysics of their space.

Sid's painting style is evolving, becoming much less tied to the past and clearly picking up influence from his surroundings. *Rockers* is painted with vigorous abandon, and it seems Sid has fully embraced his new reality.

While the room is evocative of an assisted living facility, certain attributes and spirit are channeled from Van Gogh. The aesthetic connections and decisions that Sid makes are innocently generated, but as art world commentary they are profound. Is the conflation of a hospital room and Van Gogh's asylum room an attempt to use the glow of Van Gogh to gain attention for his work? Is the fact that Van Gogh is a product of branding a hope that the same will happen for him?

For under flap on back cover:

Warning: Opening this flap may result in buzz-kill.

Sid is real. He is eighty-one years old and was born and bread in New York City. He has a life long interest in art, but it was not until he retired last year from his job running the collections department for the Bulova Corporation that he turned his focus to making it the focus of his life. Sid is an artist like Jeff Koons is an artist. He has ideas that he wants to pursue, and he needs help manifesting them. He turned to Mikel Glass, an artist whose work he had collected over the years, who then enlisted Liz Adams Jones and Marshall Jones to collaborate in making these works. Daniel Baltzer made the frames.

This was a true collaboration. Sid came to Mikel, to whom he had a shared interest in narrative realism, with a long list of ideas he wanted to pursue. Mikel was tasked with turning the ideas into images, and together they hashed out the content and tenor of the works. Liz and Marshall helped with the painting, but were also counted on to advocate for their positions on form and content. The shared goal was to make paintings in the Social Realist tradition that also felt current and fresh.

The effort is a statement on the nature of manufacturing, branding and marketing contemporary art. It's rarely enough these days to create a compelling image. To gain traction, art often has to contain a compelling backstory about the artist.