

Diane DiMassa / Hothead Paisan

Overview

Diane DiMassa drew the comics, *Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist*, beginning in 1991. They were published under the imprint Giant Ass Publishing, run by Diane's partner. The comic book series ran for 21 issues, ending in 1998. In response to questions posed by interviewer, Diane offers her reflections about why she created Hothead, why she stopped drawing the comic, and what she's working on now.

Summary

As a newly sober and angry Lesbian, Diane DiMassa started drawing Hothead as a goal to address her artistic block along with her anger. Hothead was autobiographical insofar as managing her level of rage especially in relation to the violence of men towards women and LGBT peoples. The Hothead Paisan comics struck a nerve as they received many enthusiastic letters and postcards from supporters. Hothead "served as a release valve for everyone's oppression."

As years went by and the popularity of the comic grew, Diane's life changed and her behavior became calmer. Diane managed her anger; however, she did not want Hothead to lose her passion so Diane stopped drawing the comic.

In the current political climate of 2025, Diane doesn't consider herself "a terrorist;" just a dyke who continues to act when necessary. Hothead remains silent for now – but may decide it's all too much and could emerge again with similar responses as in the past.

Currently, Diane has been painting in oil, mostly abstracts and graphic work. She doesn't do much with cartooning. She doesn't have a website but some of her work is visible on Instagram @flaming_hothead. Her perspectives on life, through the lenses of pissed-off lesbian, dyke, and feminist, still inform her work today.

She advises young Lesbian artists to know that images provide a way to express one's voice – by sharing your work (in whatever medium) you can make a powerful impact. People can then “see themselves made visible in art.”

On a personal note of the interviewer: In the mid/late 1980s until 1992, Mev worked with Diane at Inland Book Company, a wholesaler of independent press books located in East Haven, CT. Diane would draw comic/graphics for the book company and they sometimes featured Mev. In her private collection, Mev has a couple of these caricatures.

Quotes from Written Responses

“I was newly sober and in therapy with a woman who required her patients to have goals. Mine were anger (no way!) and creative block. She suggested I put them together and do some artwork around my anger. I went home and saw something shitty on the news and bam! The Paisan popped out of the pen. The therapist started the whole thing.”

“I thought I had played it out and didn't want HH to calm down just because I did. I thought it was better to leave it as it was. Her activism would be violence, like always. But she's been sleeping. Chicken pays attention, though, and thinks humans are inane.”

“I love the little shit. The only change I can imagine is that she'd do stuff with cohorts more. She's usually a solo act. Organize a guerrilla army perhaps.”

“As long as there are haters, I will always be inspired to fight back.”

Related Items in Wanderground Collection

- Complete set of the comic book series (1-21) and also *Chicken Rules*
- T-Shirt: Giant Ass Publishing / Crack a Smile
- Hothead Paisan Secret Stuff Box – the boxes initially held candy bars. Diane sold a variety of candy bars with Hothead images on the wrappers and boxes
- Buttons
 - Cleis Press – No Guilt

- Hothead Paisan Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist
- Card: Hothead Paisan Holiday Bomb
- Photos:
 - Flyer advertising reading at Golden Thread Booksellers
 - Caricature of staff of Inland Book Co., circa 1990
- *The Revenge of Hothead Paisan*, Cleis Press, 1995
- Books that include Diane's work
 - *Pussycat Fever*, A K Press Distribution, 1995
 - *Dyke Strippers: Lesbian Cartoonists A to Z*, Cleis Press, 1995

Details

- Interview with: Diane DiMassa
- Topic(s): Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist Comic Books, Giant Ass Publishing, comics, young Lesbian artists
- Date Recorded: Diane preferred not to be interviewed. She responded to a series of questions via email – received Feb. 20, 2025
- Interviewed by: Questions and correspondence with Mev Miller
- Summary Prepared by: Mev Miller