

In the studio with German artist Dennis Scholl

A JOURNEY TO ARCADIA

Thorsten Albertz

It was the inclusion of several of his drawings in the 2005 defining exhibition “Geschichtenerzähler” (German for “storytellers”) at the Kunsthalle Hamburg, curated by Christoph Heinrich, that put Dennis Scholl’s work in the public eye. Scholl’s drawings in the exhibition were surreal, alternating between comical and tragic fragments of ideas seemingly adrift on sketchbook-sized white paper.

In the early 2000s, while German figurative painting was experiencing an unprecedented surge in popularity, fueled by global interest in the works of the New Leipzig School, Scholl’s intricate works drew significant attention from gallerists and museums, all while he was still a second-year student at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg.

Though the dominance of German figuration ultimately waned, it did not affect Scholl as he had not taken part in the hype, despite numerous temptations. Still today, not only is he distinctly disinterested in obliging dealers’ demands, his process is so meticulous that his limited output exempts him from the fast-paced, voracious market that has no patience for such unconventional creativity.

Over the past decade, the size of his paper has increased and his fragmented figures have expanded into all-encompassing worlds. Now, in the ongoing evolution of his practice, Scholl introduces color in his most recent works.



The following is an excerpt from a studio visit with Dennis Scholl:

Until very recently you only worked in graphite on paper or, in other words, more or less only in black and white. You have just now started working with color pencil. What triggered the change?

After working pretty much exclusively in graphite for ten years, my inherent desire to work in color became so dominant that I had to give in to it. In addition to that, I felt like I had exhausted everything that was possible with graphite.

The drawings became larger and more dense, up to a size of 250 centimeters by 200 centimeters. Since I wanted to keep size and density, my only way forward was to move on into color. In black and white the drawings have a painterly quality and to a certain extent are comparable to black-and-white photographs of a painting. Interestingly enough, the color drawings are much more identifiable as “drawings.”

You work on a particularly large scale for a draftsman, often filling the entire sheet. Why are you so fascinated by large formats? How do you build these works?

The size of the drawings slowly developed. For years I worked in small and medium sizes. A couple of years ago it became important to me that the figures in the drawings were at least life-size. This change in scale affects the viewer’s relation to the image. The figure becomes the image’s counterpart. Because of the size, the spectator is also prompted to move around the picture, in a way similar to “zooming in” on an image.



Since the details are very delicately worked through in the drawings, you will find a constant back and forth [of perspective]. Things you didn’t see from two meters in front of the drawings appear suddenly when moving toward the picture. I was fascinated by this and, of course, even more so by the fact that it emphasizes the possibilities of drawing to the fullest.

Do you think that you will remain exclusively a draftsman or do you have ideas about working in other media?

I am planning to do a couple of paintings for the next exhibition that will enhance the drawings. I like the idea of combining large-scale drawings and small-scale paintings as a reversal of the traditional hierarchy of these media.

You create lavish, almost surrealist fantasy worlds. Where does the inspiration for your work come from?

For the most part, my works are a reaction to whatever I happen to be reading at the time of their creation and, of course, to images I’ve seen. In addition to this, regarding the formal aspects, there is a more coherent line of development: the drawings evolve out of their predecessors. It is comparable to an ever deeper exploration of a hidden world. This world manifests itself and becomes increasingly clear through drawing. At the moment, everything evolves around the topic of “Arcadia.”

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DENNIS SCHOLL, *Peeping Tom*, 2015, colored pencil on paper, 214 x 150 cm. Photo by Adam Reich. Courtesy private collection, Basel, Switzerland.

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Dennis Scholl at his studio in Berlin, 2016.

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DENNIS SCHOLL, *Immanence* (detail), 2015, colored pencil on paper, 54 x 34 cm.

(This page, left)

DENNIS SCHOLL, *Die Immunität der Glaubensstarken*, 2015, colored pencil on paper, 84 x 59.4 cm.

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DENNIS SCHOLL, *Mnemische Wellen der Vergangenheit*, 2016, colored pencil on paper, 51.5 x 38 cm.

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