Acknowledgments


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Jenny Schmid lives and works in Minneapolis, MN. Her work is represented by Davidson Galleries, Seattle, WA, and Gráficas Gallery, Nantucket, MA.

About the Artist

Born in 1969, in Seattle, Washington, Jenny Schmid was educated at Macalester College (BA, Political Economy, 1991) and the University of Michigan (MFA, Printmaking and Painting, 1996). Since 2005, she has been Assistant Professor of Printmaking at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Schmid has received numerous awards, including the Fulbright Fellowship, the Jerome Foundation Fellowship, the McKnight Foundation Fellowship, and the Bush Foundation Fellowship.

Presentations of her work have appeared in Slovakia and Czech Republic, and at US venues including: The Spencer Art Museum, Oregon State University, Carleton College, The University of Tulsa, The Detroit Institute of Arts, and the Erie Art Museum. Her work has also been included in group exhibitions in Berlin, Buenos Aires, Pretoria (South Africa), and Tallinn (Estonia) as well as in New York, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Kansas City, and Madison.


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Schmid’s ongoing “gender utopia” project coalesces around the imaginary Dženská Republika (the “Republic of Jenny” in Czech/Slovak), or DJR, which emerges through prints and animation as a pleonasia of upended gender expectations and unfettered freedoms. Influenced by Baroque and Renaissance conventions, the landscapes of the DJR evoke the idylls of ancient Arcadia and Biblical Paradise. Here, however, super-active girls eye languorously passive boys. Is this an ideal state of “desire,” as the name play suggests? While failure perhaps inevitably unites all utopianism, the dreaming—imagining worlds of change—nevertheless remains ineluctably, irrepressibly compelling. Shot through with mischievous irony and wry humor, Schmid’s project is also willfully earnest, tickling and teasing toward the promises of gender equality. Enfolding cultural memory, countless multiplicities, and a yearning for more, Jenny Schmid’s eloquent, smart work trounces the gender game, and upends the rules.

The University of Arizona Museum of Art proudly presents Jenny Schmid: The Vistas of Gender Utopia, the artist’s first comprehensive museum exhibition, featuring multiple print series (including lithography, mezzotint, and experimental hybrid manual/digital techniques), along with a new body of animations. Densely packed with symbols and language, Jenny Schmid’s luxuriant, exquisitely wrought, and iconographically rich prints lob subversive wit at notions of gender and liberty. Her oeuvre quotes from Europe’s Medieval and Renaissance printmaking precedents, the medium’s traditions of social satire and arch caricature (i.e. Bruegel, Hogarth, Goya, and Daumier), journalism and sociology, feminist scholarship, graphic novels, and various strains of popular culture—visual, musical, and literary.

Sexy and tough, Schmid’s work is beguiling. It nonetheless throws down a gauntlet: re-imagine gender; re-consider liberty. Since at least 2000, her images have investigated the tricky cultural game of gender identity formation: see, for example, some of Schmid’s earliest prints on view — Rita Jo Catskills, Lady Boxer and Lucy, The Killer (both 2000) — which represent young women in traditionally “unfeminine” sports.

Over the course of her career, Schmid has developed a distinctive cast of characters: predominantly female and rendered with dark satire, her portraits are awash in history, seemingly plucked from sweeping allegorical narratives. In the series The Downfall of Young Girls (2002-03), Schmid’s characters (“Drunken Gal,” “Anorexia Girl,” “Druggie Gal”) strike alternate poses to Truth, Justice, and Liberty, say, yet seem as emblematic of our moment as were the former in the past. Graphically, these icons capture the bold flair, juicy figuration, and rich coloration of old carny posters. Increasingly jam-packed, they are compositionally akin to Medieval prints, yet their solo frames and wordy serpentine banners (plus provocatively empty “thought bubbles”) also redraw the visual language of comics.

Schmid’s images are rife with references, images, and ideas plucked and recombined from across the cultural spectrum. Among the myriad elements in her work, connections are suggestive rather than didactic, witty and wild, darkly comic and politically charged. 