



Matthijs Scholten
(Dutch, born 1983)

Biography

Matthijs Scholten was born in 1983 in Huizen, The Netherlands. Scholten describes his artistic inspiration as originating from the streets, from graffiti art and weathered elements of buildings. All of which serve as the impetus for his imaginative faces. Scholten's bold compositions largely focus on the striking eyes of his characters. Eyes that look at him, you, and out to the world.

The work of Matthijs Scholten is immediately recognizable as a 'Scholten' and difficult to classify in any particular style or school. He brings many, partly contrasting components together to create his own new, atypical visual language. Explosions arise from the depth of his psyche and this is his translation of the chaotic world around him. Constructivist elements and symbolism come together to form his very recognizable style.

The urge to establish order out of chaos is present and dominant in all of his artwork, giving every element of a composition equivalent meaning.

Through the use of the characteristics of the material, Scholten represents the objective world with expressionist techniques of spontaneity, reminiscent of Basquiat, Picasso and the COBRA movement.

This explosive connection forms his unique strength. Recognition, ultimately, is subordinate for Scholten, rather it is the emotion that the total image evokes that is most important.

Scholten transforms his visions, explosions, and his reality into a completely visual event. Tensions are either about to come to a discharge, or the drama has already happened.

Simply put, Scholten's work expresses the turbulent emotions of human existence. Scholten's combative attitude towards the world around him is evident in his work through his use of colour and shape, making the clashes and movements experienced almost palpable.

Selected Exhibitions

2024

Solo: *Angels & Demons*, SmithDavidson Gallery, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands

2023

Anna Singer Artweek, Museum Singer Laren, Laren, The Netherlands
SmithDavidson Icons, SmithDavidson Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Solo presentation Art on Paper Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2022

Contemporary Art Exhibition, SmithDavidson Gallery, New York, USA
Duo: *Free or Form*, SmithDavidson Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

2021

Museum Singer Laren, Laren, The Netherlands

2019

Museum Singer Laren, Laren, The Netherlands
Solo: Maritime Heritage Museum, Tivat, Montenegro

2018

Museum Singer Laren, Laren, The Netherlands
Gallery of Contemporary Art, Irkutsk, Russia

Selected Art Fairs

Art on Paper Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
KunstRAI Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
PAN Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Art Miami, Miami, USA
EXPO Chicago, Chicago, USA
The Armory Show, New York, USA

Matthijs Scholten: The Accidental Artist

Written By Grace Bydalek September 30, 2022

Last week, **Matthijs Scholten** sat in the SmithDavidson Gallery at High Line Nine, flanked by works from his inaugural exhibition in New York City. The Dutch painter, who is coming off a whirlwind of international success, looks the part of a seasoned artist — tousled hair, a worn-in leather jacket over a white tee-shirt, work boots, and a cautious, observant gaze. No one would guess that his career was an accident.

“Four or five years ago,” he told me, “I met a girl at an art fair. I was there by invitation of a friend of mine, just to watch.” She asked if he was a painter, and he told her no. But in a stroke of luck, or of divine intervention, the girl persisted in her questions until **Scholten** showed her a sample of his work. The colorful, chaotic paintings of abstract faces, reminiscent of a **Sex Pistols** song, captured something in her.

“She said, “I'm going to arrange for you a show in Russia.” But you know how it goes. Everyone promises you things in life, and 99% of the time, they are false,” **Scholten** recounted. “A month later, I got a call from a gallery. They said, “we want to do a show with you. Are you in?” I couldn’t believe my ears.”

First was an exhibition in Irkutsk. Moscow, Laren, and Porto Montenegro followed. Then Paris, prestigious art fairs in Holland, and New York City.

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or in a mask with huge eyes. And those eyes, they watch me.
They are a reminder of who I am, a reminder to stay close to
myself.”*

The world’s happy accident was borne of the artist’s unhappiness.

“I always painted as a child, but 10 or 15 years ago, I was reading the newspapers and it made me so sad. Depressed. So I said to myself, I'm consuming all this bullshit. Why? Why shouldn't I do something, like when I was younger? I started to paint on small papers, and people saw it and they wanted to have it.” So, he gave his work away for free, a practice which he continues to this day.

As he grew as an artist, so did the size and stakes of his work. “When you start on a small paper and you have 10 papers, it's not a big problem when you mess it up,” **Scholten** said. “But when you stand in front of a canvas, that’s different. You have only one. And then when you mess it up, you become free because it's already ruined in Your faults.”

“I feel that way with notebooks, too,” I said to him, touching the cover of my journal on the table in front of us. “I’ll spill coffee on it, and then I can finally write.”



Scholten in front of his works in the SmithDavidson Gallery at High Line Nine, New York, 2022

The light of mutual understanding flickered across his face and brought him alive. “That’s it!” He picked up my notebook. “That’s exactly the same. You mess it up,” he says, mimicking scribbles on the inside cover, “and now you start to create it.”

To **Scholten**, the world is a canvas. Born to an entrepreneur father, he is the founder of two companies, the first of which developed a unique recipe for skin friendly ink. “Women, you have Your lipstick,” he said. “We have always been using skin as a way to communicate with our surroundings. I give organizations the opportunity to communicate through the skin.”

“I also have a company that makes electric bicycles,” he said, referring to his Harley Davidson inspired second venture. Each bike is handmade by people with disabilities. “There were a lot of companies who couldn't assemble my bikes. Then, I came across this company. They said, “leave one bike here, completely assembled, and the parts to another” and after two weeks, they had another bike ready. They don’t look at what people cannot do, they look at what they can. It takes a little bit more time, but at the end of the day, you get something beautiful.”

Scholten and I traced the perimeter of the gallery, coming nose to nose with the art. His artistic influences are evident — **Pablo Picasso’s** abstract shapes and intense colors, little crowns and skulls a la *Riding With Death* (1988) by **Jean-Michel Basquiat**. More surprising are his other, less lauded inspirations, like street corners, old buildings, a crust of dried paint from the top of a bottle, which he’s incorporated into one of his nameless works. “My inspiration comes from ugly, dirty things.”

Each of his works is a play on the same motif. “When I paint, I always want to paint in face form, or in a mask with huge eyes. And those eyes, they watch me. They are a reminder of who I am, a reminder to stay close to myself.”



"Are they self portraits?" I asked.

"I have no idea," he responded, surprised. "But I think so...here," he said, gesturing to his darker works on the right side of the room, "you see a guy who was really rock and roll, but not really lucky. But here, you see a really lucky man."

He walked toward the other side, where his larger, more vibrant works on canvas were hung. "My wife was pregnant when I was asked to do a show in New York. These pictures remind me of a beautiful time. My wife, sitting in the garden, commenting on my work while I was doing it. And one day before my son was born, I finished." On one side is an artist in darkness. On the other, an expectant father.

"I hope the eyes are a reminder for the people who watch my work. Most people start to live lives that they don't really want to live. They study things they don't really like, they go to parties where they don't want to be...and that makes people sick. I see it everywhere. People don't do what they love.

"I thought to myself, what are the things that you really love? And that was painting, fishing, and cooking. So I started to create things," he continued. "It proves also that when you start to do things that you really like to do, good things come to Your path. And now, I'm here in New York."

Which begs the question: what accidents want to happen to us? What might the world gain if we let them?