

# Petzel

## SIMON DENNY

### *Dungeon*

February 21 – March 30, 2024  
35 E 67th Street, Parlor Floor

Petzel is pleased to present *Dungeon*, a new exhibition by Berlin-based artist Simon Denny opening Wednesday, February 21, 2024. The show marks Denny's fifth solo exhibition with Petzel, and will be on view through March 30, 2024, at Petzel's Upper East Side location at 35 East 67th Street, Parlor Floor. For his upcoming show, Denny has produced new sculptures and paintings responding to the fantasy idiom of the dungeon. *Dungeon* celebrates the importance of the format in the history and present of virtual world and game design, and how it has been integrated within technology businesses as they build online environments.

In game design, the word dungeon is used broadly to describe any labyrinthine complex (castle, cave system, etc.) rather than a prison cell or torture chamber specifically. From tabletop and role-playing games to early computer games, to the busiest contemporary online worlds like *Roblox* or *Minecraft*, dungeons are ever-present components of virtual realms. The dungeon as an organizational logic has spread from virtual spaces to social media, metaverses and online retail experiences.

Denny's reverence for gaming culture has been evident in his artworks throughout the past decade. In the 56th Venice Biennale (2015) his installation *Secret Power* monumentalized fantasy elements found in NSA slides, including reproductions of board games designed by a former NSA graphic designer. For *Blockchain Future States* (2016) at Petzel, Denny made sculptural editions of the board game *Risk*, translating logics of businesses from early crypto companies. In his exhibition *The Founder's Paradox* (2017), Denny condensed the philosophical worlds around the entrepreneur and venture capitalist Peter Thiel into tabletop game sculptures.

For *Dungeon*, new artworks take two formats—paintings of *dungeon maps* and sculptures of *dungeon artifacts*. The installation references, appropriates and repurposes elements from *Dungeons & Dragons* (appearing in many iterations and formats since the 1970s), two tabletop games released by Milton Bradley: *HeroQuest* (1989) and a Hannah Montana edition of *Mall Madness* (2008), alongside more contemporary online games, forming a multi-era gaming dungeon survey, of sorts.

Following the intertwined narratives and affinities between the growth of gaming and big tech, the installation also includes sculptures made from Twitter office equipment liquidated by Elon Musk post-takeover, and a *Game of Thrones* t-shirt formerly owned and worn by his on/off partner, the musician and technologist Grimes. A replica of a sword from *Lord of the Rings*, based on a collectible hanging in the office of Palmer Luckey, has been cast by Denny in resin and coffee. Luckey is an entrepreneur and founder of Oculus VR (a headset startup acquired by Meta), and the defense start-up Anduril. Aptly named after the *Lord of the Rings* blade, Anduril Industries represents an important link between cyber and kinetic warfare, myth and reality: the growing space of “defense tech.”

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The sculptures and paintings mix digital and analog technologies, including rough and ready 3D prints (some very crude and others more high resolution) and traditional media like oil on canvas overlaid with digital print. The painted maps and sculptural artifacts are rough, touched; forged together in unconventional combinations of surfaces and techniques. Translating the virtual into the tangible, *Dungeon* synthesizes a visceral impression of a world between realities.

*Dungeon* is organized in conversation with *Multi-User Dungeon (MUD)*, a group exhibition curated by Simon Denny, presented simultaneously at Petzel's Upper East Side location at 35 East 67th Street, Third Floor.

## About Simon Denny

Simon Denny (b. 1982, Auckland) lives and works in Berlin. He makes artworks that unpack stories about technology using a variety of media, including painting, web-based media, installation, sculpture, print, and video. He studied at the University of Auckland and at the Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main.

Solo exhibitions include Kunstverein Hannover (2023); Frans Masereel Centrum (2023); the Gus Fisher Gallery, University of Auckland (2022); Outernet, London (2022); K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2020); the Museum of Old and New Art (Mona), Tasmania (2019); MOCA, Cleveland (2018); OCAT, Shenzhen (2017); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2017); WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels (2016); Serpentine Galleries, London (2015); MoMA PS1, New York (2015); Portikus, Frankfurt (2014); MUMOK, Vienna (2013); Kunstverein Munich (2013).

Denny represented New Zealand at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015. Denny has curated exhibitions such as *Proof of Stake* at Kunstverein in Hamburg (2021) and *Proof of Work* at Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2018). His works are represented in major institutional collections, including MoMA (New York), Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (Düsseldorf), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), Buffalo AKG (Buffalo), Kunsthaus Zürich (Zürich), Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Berlin), and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Wellington).

He cofounded the artist mentoring program BPA//Berlin Program for Artists and serves as a professor of time-based media at the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg.

Petzel Gallery is located on the parlor floor and third floors of 35 East 67th Street New York, NY 10065. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM–6:00 PM. For press inquiries, please contact Ricky Lee at ricky@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.