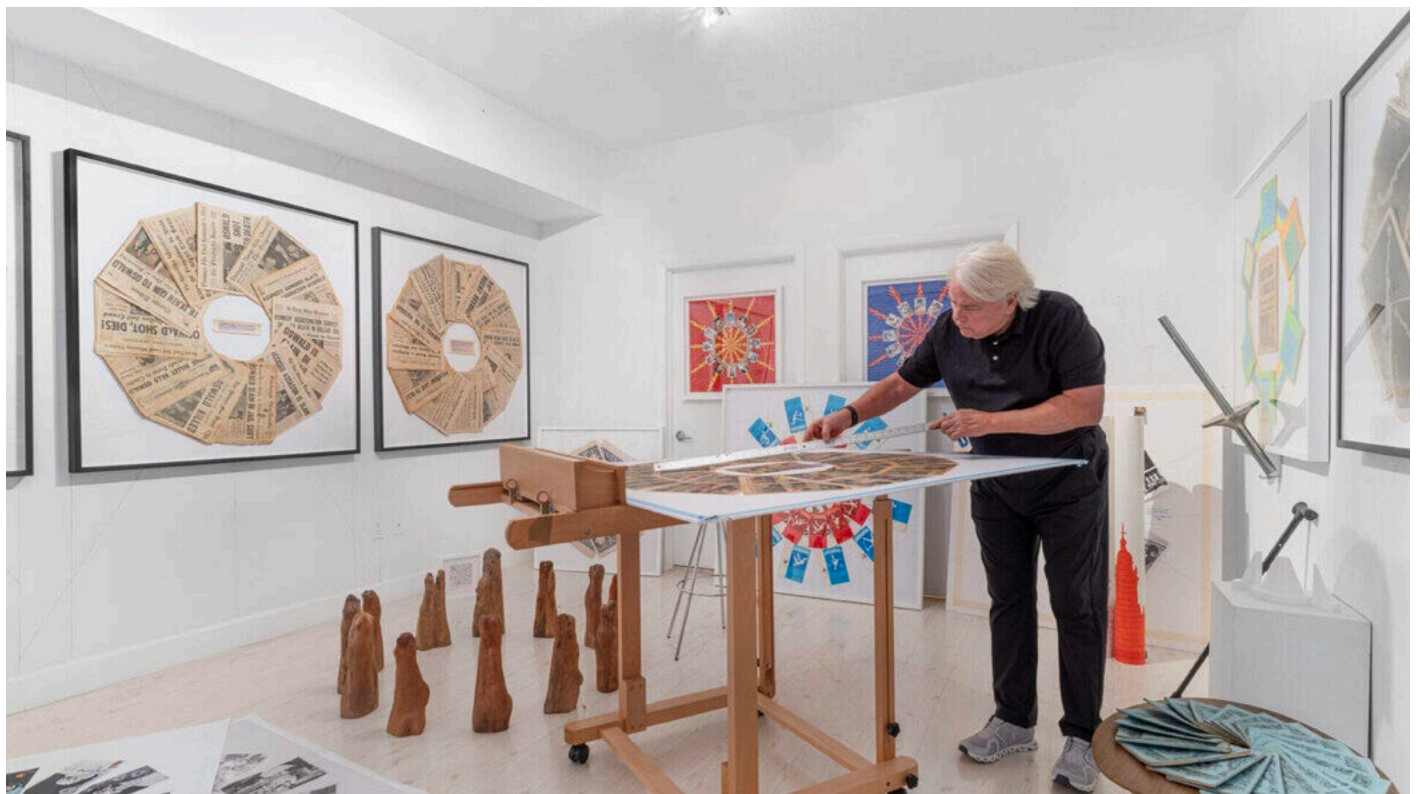


THINGS TO DO

Dennis Scholl transforms collected objects into art in his first solo show in the U.S.

By **Michelle F. Solomon** *Artburst Miami*

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As a collector, arts executive and philanthropist, Dennis Scholl gave his support to practicing artists. Now, he has his own artistic practice, shown above, working in his Miami Beach studio. His first U.S. solo exhibition opens on Saturday, March 15 at the Piero Atchugarry Gallery in Miami. *(Photo by Michael R. Lopez)*

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On the desk in Dennis Scholl's Miami Beach art studio is one of the collector-turned-artist's most treasured items. It's a collection of presidential bottle caps from when Scholl was a boy living in Linden, N.J.

When he was five years old, he began collecting the bottle caps. Every time the milkman came to the house to drop off a two-quart glass bottle of milk, Scholl would keep the cap and put it on the wall. It took him six months to collect them all – Millard Fillmore was particularly elusive.

“I just couldn’t get Millard Fillmore. Damn Millard Fillmore,” he says of the 13th president.



A triptych of President John F. Kennedy's assassination created with newspapers. "This is the one that is my collective memory," says artist Dennis Scholl. *(Photo by Michael R. Lopez)*

Scholl says it was the “sense of completion” he felt when he finally got the coveted last piece of the cap collection. It marked the beginning of a collecting journey that would evolve into an artistic practice.

Now Scholl's first U.S. solo exhibition, "[The Melody Haunts My Reverie](#)," is opening Saturday through May 17 at the Piero Atchugarry Gallery in Miami.

Almost a half century of admiring other people's art as a collector, patron, and community arts leader – he was president and CEO of Miami-based arts incubator

Oolite Arts and before that vice president for arts at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation – the former attorney, CPA, and leader in the redevelopment of South Beach and Wynwood, decided it was time to become an artist himself.

But he says he had to do something that made sense to him.

“If I’m going to have an art practice, it has to be authentic. And so, what would be authentic for me? Well, I’ve been collecting for a long time. So, for me, it’s important to be doing something that I learned – taking my skill set as a collector, which I’ve been doing for 47 years and that’s how the practice evolved.”



In 1865, Charles Dickens released a “serial” paperback. The original 19 limited editions make up “Untitled (“Charles Dickens),” 2023. (Photo by Michael R. Lopez)

What made sense for Scholl was assemblage, putting everyday items together to create something new. His show's curator Larry Ossei-Mensah explains Scholl's work as a gathering of ephemeral materials, archival fragments, and objects of cultural significance to "create evocative compositions that merge personal experience with broader cultural histories."

Nostalgia and collective memory

Scholl describes the solo exhibition as a "meditation on the collective memories we all share." Ossei-Mensah says the artistic practice is deeply rooted in recollection.

"It is his ability to identify these things that create an entry point, regardless of whether that is a moment of your generation. His ability to pinpoint (the items) and then assemble them and recontextualize them and then invite the viewer to reflect on the idea of 'What do these things mean?' What do these moments mean?' You don't look at Dennis' work and not feel something, whether it's a feeling of nostalgia or collective memory."

Scholl's own memories bubble up as he stands in front of three large works that are a focal point of "The Melody Haunts My Reverie." Completed in 2023, the triptych is made up of newspapers from a pivotal moment in American history. From the Kansas City Star to the New York Times circa 1963, the now yellowed newspapers, their front pages with bold headlines, are arranged in a dodecagon, a 12-sided figure that is a recurring motif in the artist's work. The first is "Untitled (Assassination)," the second is "Untitled (Oswald)," the third, "Untitled (Mourning)."

It took three years to acquire the pieces that are part of the John F. Kennedy assassination collection. "This is the one that is *my* collective memory," says Scholl. "This is the one I think about all the time – that the Kennedy assassination was the last time I felt innocent."

works, there is also something else that adds to the narrative. In the middle of the first Kennedy piece is a teletype from a news wire service that announces the breaking news, a collection of Jack Kerouac books has the author's original obituary photo, and a 1972 Olympic torch is included in a work about the Munich massacre during the 1972 terrorist attack on Israeli Olympic team members.

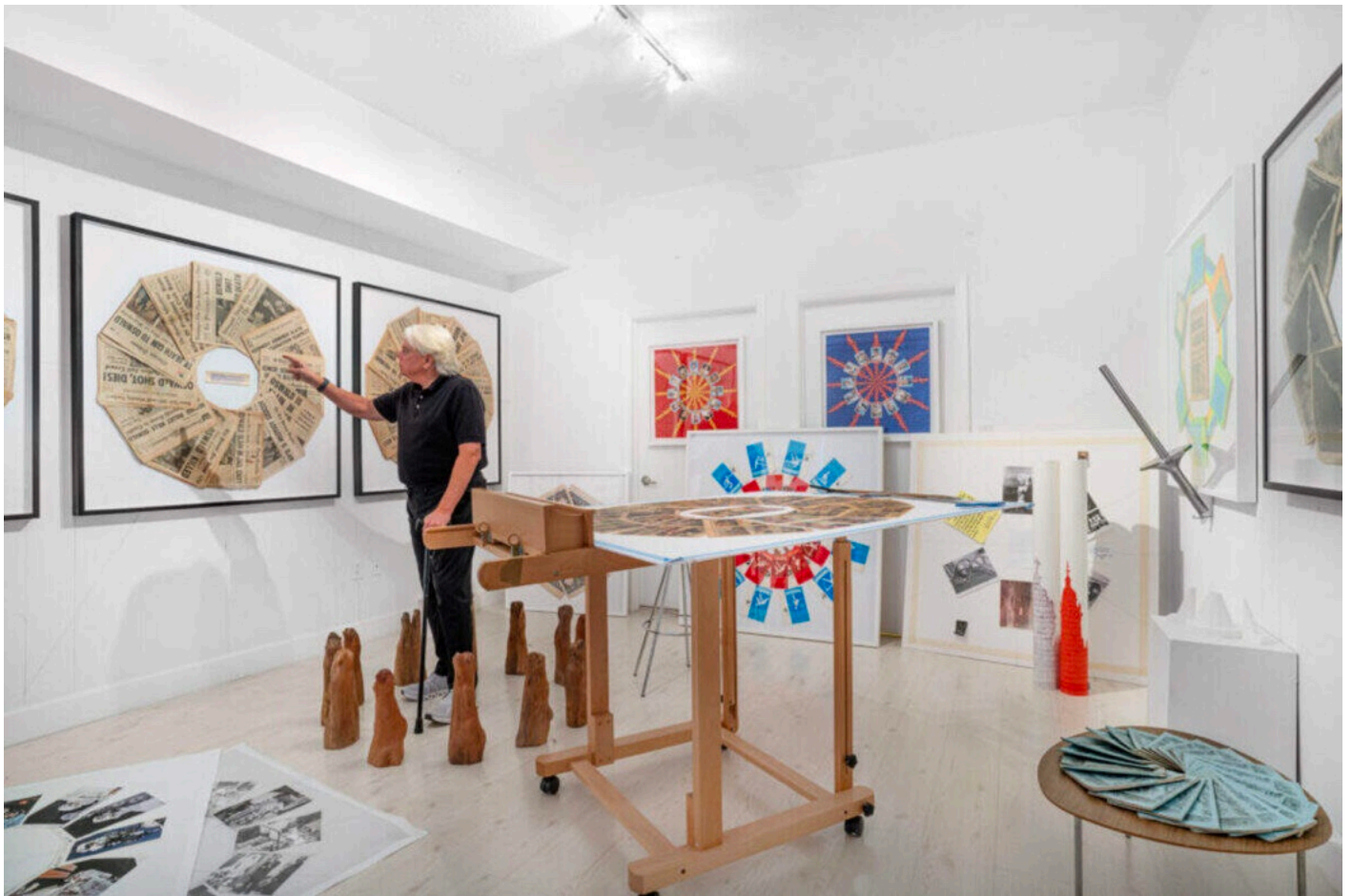


"Untitled ('72 Munich Olympics)", 2023, acquired objects and graphite, features ephemera from the games, an original Olympic torch, and a copy of the front page of the New York Daily News. (Photo by Michael R. Lopez)

While it's the final result that the viewer sees, it's also the process of getting there that is just as integral as the work itself.

“When I decide I’m going to make a new work, I don’t go searching for something.” He looks at around 30,000 objects a month on auction sites. “I might identify maybe 10 things a month that I think could make good pieces but then I have to bid on them. And you don’t get them most of the time. But when I get one or two, that becomes the work. What makes it all happen is that it’s kind of the thrill of the chase.”

The title of the exhibition is a lyric from American composer Hoagy Carmichael’s 1927 “Stardust.” It’s one of the songs on Scholl’s Top 20 jazz playlist shared on Spotify and the soundtrack to “The Memory Haunts My Reverie,” which he says he plays while working, and while creating the current exhibition – Charlie Parker’s “April in Paris,” Miles Davis’s “It Never Entered My Mind,” Billie Holiday, Nina Simone and Edith Piaf.



"Making art is what I'm going to do the rest of my life," says Dennis Scholl, shown surrounded by his work at his Miami Beach studio. (Photo by Michael R. Lopez)

"We talk a lot about jazz," says Ossei-Mensah, "and improvisation and how there is a rhythm, a choreography in the show, which allows for it all to work collectively but will also draw the viewer into the pieces individually."

Hometown homecoming

There's excitement around this first U.S. solo exhibition and especially that it is in Miami, where he has become a native son having moved here with his family at the age of 6.

"I've done most of my shows in Europe and I did that because I wanted to be somewhere where frankly, no one knew what I had done before or who I was so I

felt like I was getting a fair read of the work,” says the artist. “And it was very well received.”

Scholl has exhibited in Serbia and Croatia, in London and Berlin with upcoming shows in Scotland, Poland and Uruguay. “It’s so interesting to me that people abroad have really dialed into this very American aesthetic and embraced it.” There are also more U.S. shows planned at Columbia University in New York and at the Art Center of Hollywood.



As a youngster driving with his family from New Jersey to Florida to visit his grandparents, there was always a stop at Thom Gaskins Cypress Knee Museum along U.S. 27. Arranged in Scholl’s “architecture” of a dodecagon is the installation “Untitled (Cypress Knees),” 2023, acquired objects. *(Photo by Michael R. Lopez)*

The owner of the Piero Atchugarry Gallery says it is nothing short of an honor to be hosting Scholl’s first solo exhibition in the United States.

“When I visited his studio in 2023, I was immediately taken by the work,” says Atchugarry. “As an emerging artist, Dennis presents a mature body of work and his approach to art making – rooted in his experience as a collector and centered on collective memory – is truly unique . . . This exhibition is not only a significant milestone for Dennis but also for the Miami art community.”

When asked about artists who may influence his practice, Scholl mentions Félix González-Torres, a conceptual artist born in Cuba who died in Miami. González-Torres’ use of everyday objects was meant to invite physical as well as intellectual engagement from his viewer.



"Untitled (Kerouac Library)", 2023, with the author's obituary photo. (Photo by Michael R. Lopez)

"I would say that for me, not because he's doing the same thing, but because he's mining emotional content and taking you to a place. He's someone I think about a lot when I'm making work," says Scholl.

Ossei-Mensah says the recall of González-Torres in Scholl's work is probably the most relevant. "If you're thinking about just taking these mundane items and the

repetition and the arrangement and the potential accessibility to these things, that resonates.”

Scholl says he’s devoting full time to his art practice and producing and directing film documentaries – he’s made almost 90 films in 15 years and won numerous regional Emmy awards. “I’ll continue to make films as I have for the past 15 years. I’ll be involved in arts patronage, and I have a big art collection to give away at some point. I’ll make art as I have for about a decade now. Making art is what I’m going to do for the rest of my life.”

If you go:

WHAT: Dennis Scholl solo exhibition “The Melody Haunts My Reverie,” curated by Larry Ossei-Mensah

WHERE: Piero Atchugarry Gallery, 5520 NE Fourth Ave., Miami

WHEN: Opening reception, 7-9 p.m. Saturday. Hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday - Saturday; through May 17.

COST: Free

INFORMATION: (305) 639-8247 or pieroatchugarry.com

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