

ASK THE ARTISTS: DENNIS SCHÄFER



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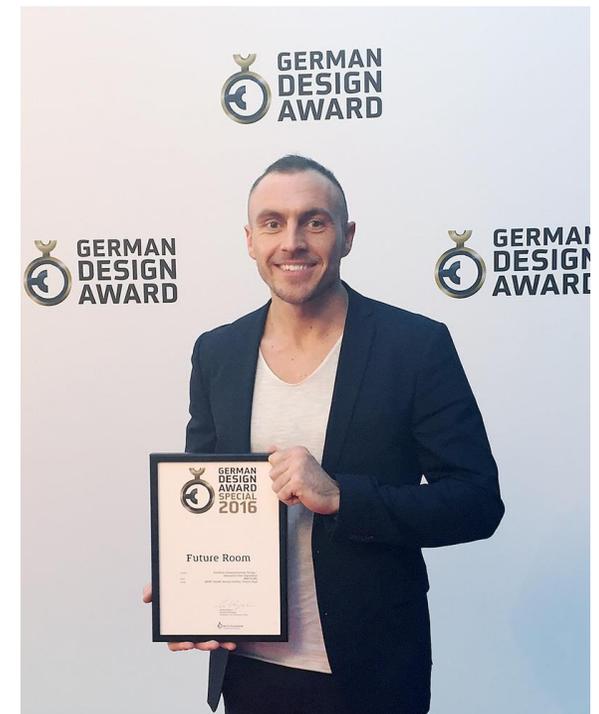
Dennis Schäfer has gained a reputation as a leading designer and Ventuz Artist at the German agency Stereolize and as cofounder of the agency 2RISE. Although he is still in his 20s, he has travelled the world and worked on some of the most prestigious projects, among them the Opening Ceremony for the Youth Olympics in Nanjing. His installations have been operated by state officials and presidents alike. We met him to discuss his future plans and ask about his work experience as a Ventuz Artist.

Ventuz:
Tell us how it all started.

Dennis:
It all started when I was 14, when I downloaded Macromedia Fireworks and began to teach myself how to do digital design. I had a thing for art, and luckily one of my teachers was very supportive and got me a talent sponsorship which paid for the license fee of the software. And then I started to recreate every great design I saw. I didn't so much watch tutorials, I tried to work out everything by myself.

Ventuz:
So you never trained as a designer? Took classes? Went to design school?

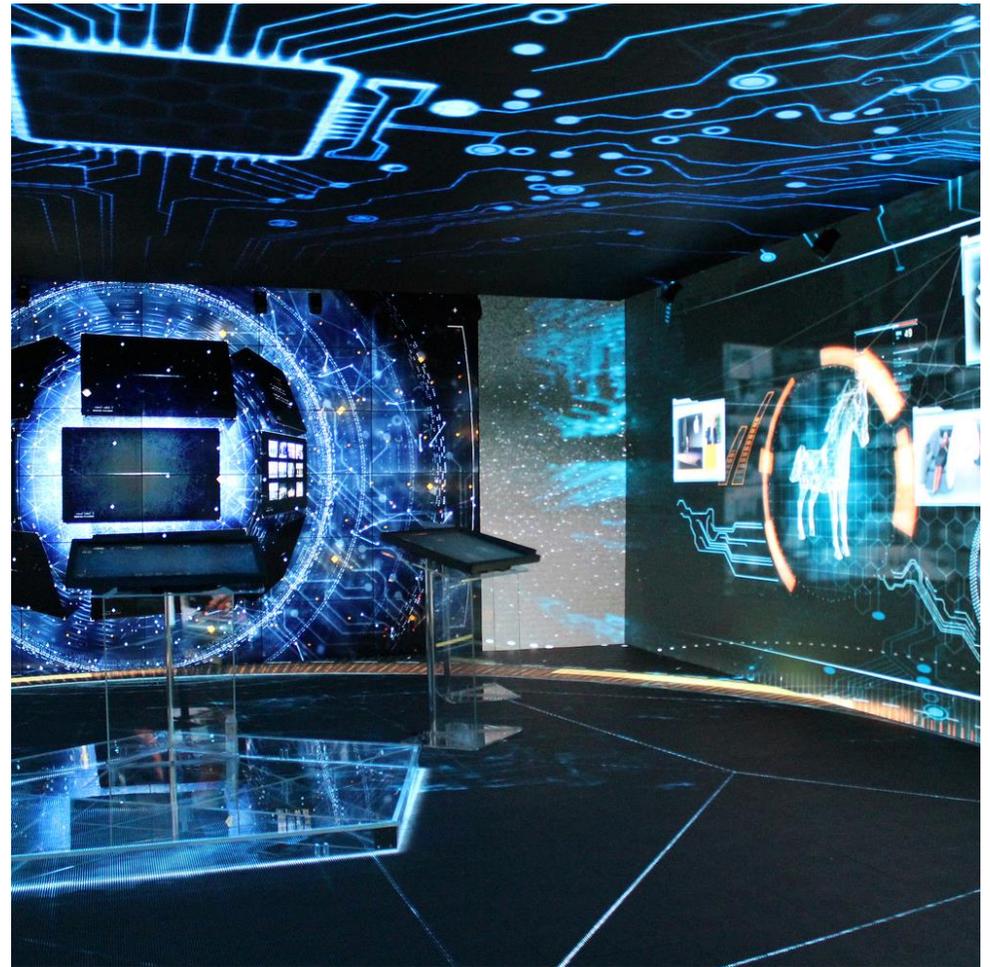
Dennis:
Never. I am totally self-taught. It was pretty much just a hobby throughout my school years and later, when I did my military service. I had a portfolio on DeviantArt and ended up having more than 150,000 clicks. People seemed to like my work. That is how Stereolize found me. They contacted me and I sent in my portfolio. In 2009 I started as an intern.



It opened up a completely new world for me. I instantly travelled to Dubai and worked on these massive installations. It was the first time I realized that there was a market out there for my art, that I could live off my designs.

Ventuz:
And that is probably where you first came in contact with Ventuz.

Dennis:
Yes, and with motion design in general, for that matter. It wasn't easy to wrap my head around the software at first, but I quickly realized how easy it was to transfer my design ideas into Ventuz. Many motion designers are not aware of this. They limit themselves to working with After Effects or Cinema 4D and don't realize that they could just as well work in real-time with almost the same design potential. Many people see Ventuz as a technical tool which allows them to create complex setups. They don't understand how great Ventuz is for designers.



Ventuz:
How did your career continue?

Dennis:
At Stereolize I met Tassilo, and in 2012 we founded the agency 2RISE. Together we worked on some amazing projects all over the world, like the Opening Ceremony for the Nanjing Youth Olympics or the Innovation Forum in Russia. We split up last year: Tassilo moved with his family to Spain and we decided to put 2RISE on hold for now. Currently, I work as a freelancer.

Ventuz:
What is your main area, what kind of designs do you focus on?

Dennis:
I have done a lot of interface design, and this is still interesting to me. But I would like to merge this more with the actual device. So much of my work has been for rectangular screens. I would like to get in the position where I can also work on the device and thereby create the entire application, not just the content.

Ventuz:
Do you have a certain style, and if so, could you define it for us?

Dennis:
I think details are very important. It doesn't need to be much, just enough to add a certain atmosphere to an application. When I was younger, I used to add way too much stuff, too many colors, too many effects ... just stuff. I have changed that. Now, simplicity is essential for me. It is so much harder to create something simple that is amazing, than to create something complex. Less really is more. Also, every project needs to have its own character, something that makes it unique. I don't like to repeat myself, I try not to redo things that I have done before. Instead, I try to approach each project with a clear mind and get the most out of it. But my style should be as recognizable as a handwriting.

Ventuz:
What is your workflow with Ventuz?

Dennis:
I strongly believe that every member of a project should do what they are good at and what they like doing. If I force someone to do things they are not interested in, they won't be good at it. And I follow this ideology in Ventuz projects as well. Generally, I try to find one person who works on the logic section of the project.



This person will be responsible for the framework, making all the buttons and sliders work, making sure the application does what it should do. In parallel I will have a designer create all icons, textures, images and 3D objects I need. When they both are done, they hand their work over to me and I bring everything together. This is a very efficient workflow, in my experience.

Ventuz:
New audiovisual technologies are flooding the market. Every gadget is said to be the next big thing. What do you foresee as the next big thing?

Dennis:
Everyone around me is talking about Oculus Rift and similar VR technologies. These devices are quite interesting, but the downside in my view is that they create isolated experiences for only one person. I like installations that are more open. As I've mentioned, interactive glass is still very exciting. Although this technology is currently a bit limited, due to the fact that it mostly works with projectors. I would love to see transparent OLED evolve into a feasible and affordable state soon, but it looks like this will take another few years. But with this and the development of flexible glass and the like, we would be able to create some astounding applications in completely new shapes and forms.

Ventuz:
Sounds like this might get complicated for designers.

Dennis:
Not really. In my experience it is usually much easier than it seems. If I think too much about a design, I end up not doing anything. When I just get down to work, I get the best results. I am also not the type to create many layouts. Instead I tweak and adjust a lot. This is another great thing about Ventuz, that it lets you work on a design in a very organic way. Everything you do is instantly visible in your render output and you can go back in as often as you want to change and adjust every detail. Customers love this feature as well, especially when it comes to changing text elements.

Ventuz:
Do you look at design trends?

Dennis:
Absolutely! I follow many artists on the internet and try to see what they are doing. Currently, everyone is going simpler. Less colors, less effects. Black and white is still the hype. This trend has been going on for a while, but I think it will continue, which I welcome very much since I love these mysterious colors. On this same

note, animations are becoming flatter but a lot more detailed. While just a year ago every installation had content flying in from all angles, animations are now very reduced and don't go as deep into 3D space. Everything is cleaner and the third dimension is only stressed where it makes sense to show more detail.

Ventuz:
Tell us about one of your favorite projects.

Dennis:
That must be the installation I did with 2RISE for the Arab Media Forum in 2015. Our job was to create an interactive application for an entire room. Everything was LED, the walls, the floor, the ceiling. The goal was to visualize the way in which a reporter publishes a news article. We added a large variety of different segments that were all interconnected. The installation could be operated via a touchscreen. Whenever someone chose a different segment, the entire room would change. At the end, the user could 'publish' a news item, for which we created a fast tunnel animation. They installed a ventilator in the front that would blow air into the people's faces to enhance this effect – pretty crazy, but also pretty cool. This project won us an if Award and a German Design Award. The Sheikh of Dubai himself came to see it.

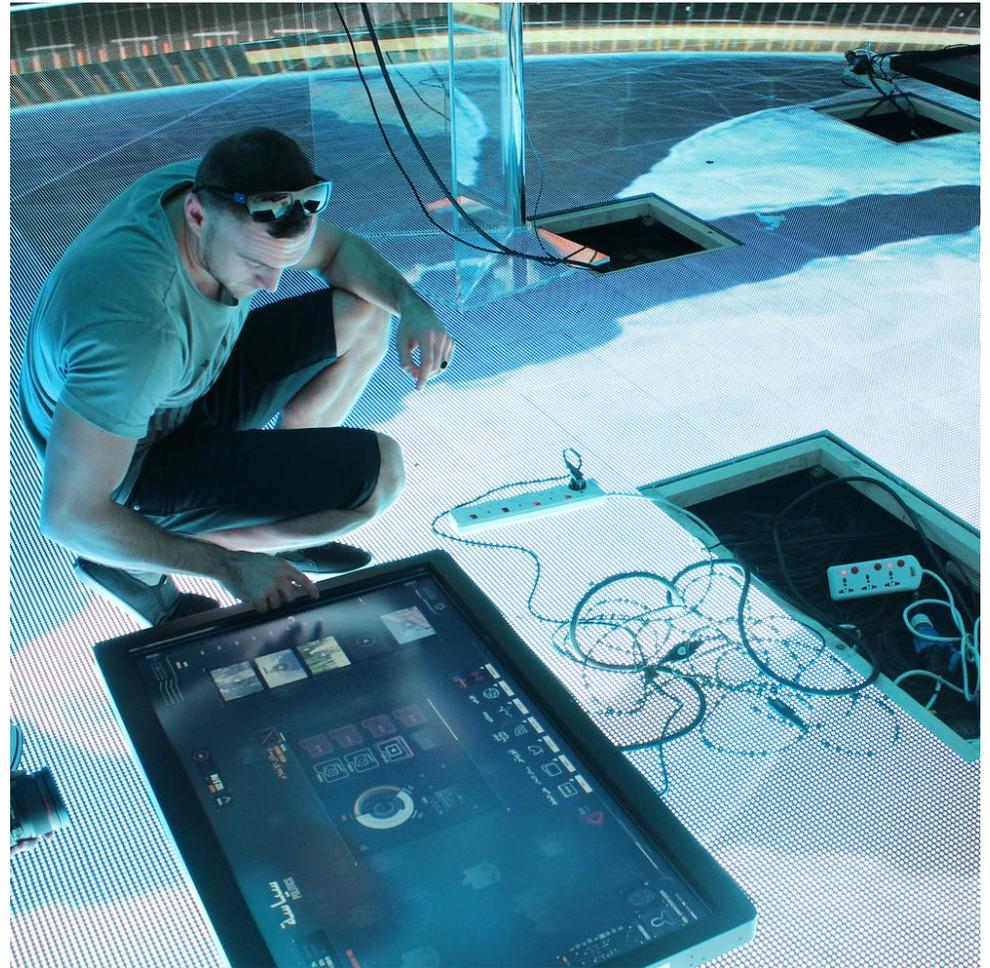
But the greatest part about it was probably the freedom we were given when we created it. They just told us to do something cool, and so we did.

Ventuz:
What does the future hold for you?

Dennis:
I would like to get more into a mentoring position for Art Directors and Ventuz Artists. I have just participated in a Ventuz training that allows me to work as a Ventuz trainer as well. It would be great to meet with designers from all over the world and show them all the things they can do in real-time. And use the chance to learn from each other. And one of my dreams is to design an entire brand experience, preferably for a product that already has a great design. That would really tickle my creative nerve.

Ventuz:
Any advice for young Ventuz artists?

Dennis:
Stay positive, fail, learn, be open minded and find that motivation to still produce new sh##.





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