

selected bibliography

Thomas Schütte. Bern: Kunsthalle, 1990. Texts by Ludger Gerdes, Martin Hentschel, and Ulrich Looock.

Thomas Schütte. Wolfsburg: Städtische Galerie und Kunstverein, 1996. Text by Susanne Pflieger.

Thomas Schütte. London: Phaidon, 1998. Texts by Julian Heynen and Angela Vattese. Interview by James Lingwood.

Thomas Schütte [Figur]. Hamburg: Kunsthalle, 1994. Texts by Martin Hentschel, Annelie Lütgens, and Uwe Schneede.

Parkett, no. 48 (1996). Special edition by Thomas Schütte. Essays by Elizabeth Janus, Ulrich Looock, Bartomeu Mari, Hans Rudolf Reust, Adrian Searle, and Neville Wakefield.

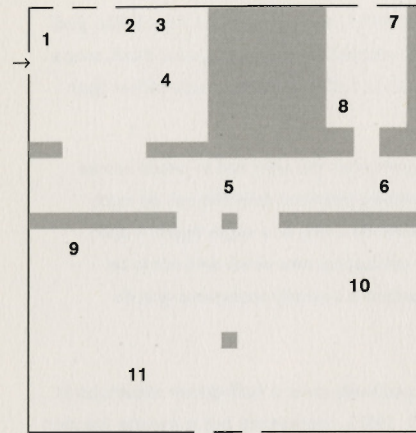
Sculpture Projects in Münster. Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum, in association with Verlag Gerd Hatje, Ostfildern-Ruit, 1997. Text by Friedrich Meschede.

Thomas Schütte was born in Oldenburg, Germany, in 1954. Between 1973 and 1981, he studied fine art at the Düsseldorf Art Academy with Fritz Schwegler and Gerhard Richter. Since his first solo shows in 1979, Schütte has exhibited widely in Europe and elsewhere. A large touring exhibition of his work, titled "Thomas Schütte," recently traveled to London, Tilburg, and Oporto. Among many group shows, he participated in Documentas 8, 9, and 10 (1987, 1992, and 1997), and the Münster Sculpture Projects in both 1987 and 1997.

Support for this project has been provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the members of the Dia Art Council, with additional assistance from Marian Goodman Gallery.

Thomas Schütte's "Gloria in Memoria" is the second installation in a three-part presentation. Part I, entitled "Scenewright" (September 24, 1998, through January 24, 1999), focused on issues relating to scenography and theater; Part III (September 1999 through March 2000) will concentrate on the motif of the figure in his recent work.

site map and checklist



1. *Monument für einen verschollenen Seemann (Monument for a Lost Sailor)*, 1989
Wood, glass, and Plasticine
20 x 98 x 10 1/4 inches
Collection Museo Cantonale d'Arte, Lugano
Donation Panza di Biumo

2. *Boje (Buoy)*, 1989
Mixed media
12 inches high x 6 inches in diameter
Collection of the artist

3. *Drawing for Alain Colas*, 1989
Mixed media on paper
23 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches; framed 24 1/2 x 32 1/2 inches
Private Collection, Bern

4. *Alain Colas*, 1989
Wood, clay, polystyrene, paint
Head: 40 1/8 x 31 1/8 x 25 1/2 inches
Palette (2): 5 7/8 x 47 1/4 x 31 1/2 inches
Collection Museo Cantonale d'Arte, Lugano
Donation Panza di Biumo

5. *Athener Tagebuch (Athens Diary)*, 1984
Suite of 144 drawings
Ink and watercolor on paper
Each: 15 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches; framed 23 1/2 x 18 3/4 inches
Collection Van Abbe-Museum, Eindhoven

6. *Self-Portrait as Candle Holder*, 1998
Mixed media
58 inches high x 16 inches diameter
Collection of the artist

7. *Mohr's Life*, 1988
Mixed media
71 inches high, other dimensions variable
Collection Martine and Didier Guichard

8. *Die Sammler (The Collectors)*, 1999
Mixed media
62 inches high, other dimensions variable
Galerie Nelson, Paris

9. *Mein Grab (My Grave)*, 1981
Drawing:
Lacquer on paper
41 1/2 x 38 1/2 inches; framed 52 x 44 3/4 inches
Model:
Lacquer on wood
21 x 25 1/2 x 10 inches
Collection of the artist

10. *Kleiner Respekt (Small Respect)*, 1994
Fimo, plaster, wood
85 3/4 x 46 3/4 x 46 3/4 inches
BACOB Collection, Brussels

11. *Wo ist Hitlers Grab? (Where Is Hitler's Grave?)*, 1991
6 tables:
Wood, paint, ink
Each 36 x 79 x 55 inches
4 drawings:
Ink on paper
Each 19 x 27 1/4 inches; framed 28 1/4 x 40 inches
Sprengel Museum Hannover, on permanent loan from the Niedersächsische Spar kassenstiftung

Translations

Drawing 1:
Where is Hitler's grave?

Drawing 2:
52 Million

Drawing 3:
2nd World War
September 1, 1939–September 2, 1945 (Pacific)

6 Years
72 Months
312 Weeks
2184 Days
23,744 Dead

Every single hour a thousand people died

Drawing 4:

Table 1	524
Table 2	488
Table 3	574
Table 4	510
Table 5	606
Table 6	608

3,310

Approximately 100,000 tables are required

Cover Photo: Thomas Schütte

Thomas Schütte
Gloria in Memoria
February 4–June 13, 1999



Dia center for the arts
548 west 22nd street new york

Thomas Schütte Gloria in Memoria

"Fundamentally, my works are almost always in the nature of a proposal," Thomas Schütte contends, while conceding that, nonetheless, mostly "they exist in the form of models."¹ Schütte's notion of models is, consequently, encompassing and complex: at its core lies the proposition, the hypothesis, the speculation. And, given that it is imbued with both a metaphorical and a literal dimension, it has assumed an extraordinarily diverse and multifarious range of formulations in an oeuvre that now spans more than twenty years.

Décor and scenographic and architectural models formed the vocabulary of Schütte's first works. Vehicles for thought rather than action, they limned a history of the reconstruction and reconstitution of the built environment in the postwar years, and, on occasion, proposed alternatives. Miniaturized worlds that are predicated on a kind of displaced placelessness, they inscribe a restless nomadism that rigorously eschews the settled and established. In his memorials, which followed soon after, the cast of characters ranges from the historically (in)famous to the forgotten and the fictional, from Hitler to the lone Gallic sailor Alain Colas, to the artist himself or his surrogates. As well as a number of large-scale works realized in public sites, he has made a series of speculative tableaux, often constructed from makeshift structures and mundane materials.² They have the appearance of rapid responses, temporary, even tentative, as if only in such terms can he avert rhetoric and grandiosity, and only through a kind of self-mocking inclusion of his own imago into this pantheon can he confront the perennial issues of glory, fame, and immortality. *Ars longa, vita brevis*: once a palliative to ambitious but underrecognized artists, in today's era of instant celebrity this precept seems a pointless grail, or a poisoned chalice.

The post-Cold War era has been indelibly marked by the toppling of a virtual army of statues dedicated to political and military luminaries formerly deemed invincible and unassailable. It has also witnessed a host of fractious, unseemly, and inconclusive battles surrounding the creation of memorials to the victims of carnage and genocide. As a science, a *Wissenschaft*, the discipline of history was invented by Hegel and the great nineteenth-century German historiographers. Today, Germany produces a disproportionate number of historians as the populace attempts to come to terms with its twentieth-century legacy and, more particularly, to negotiate a new German past, resolving a duty to remember with a longing to forget. Together, the etiquette of commemoration and the politics of memory create a charged context in which Schütte's anti-monuments, notwithstanding their apparently playful and childlike forms, strike an acerbic, cautionary note.

A deeply felt yet understated ethic informs Schütte's engagement with the subject of the contemporary monument. The problem, in his view, is not only one of devising a

suitable language that bypasses the vacuity into which abstraction has now fallen and the banality of naturalistic representation, but is inherent in the very genre itself, since the foremost role of any monument, he argues, is to fulfill spiritual needs rather than strictly functional ones:

In my eyes the figurative tradition failed at the point when the artist had to create heroes in a democratic system, which nowadays is something television networks can do much more effectively. . . . Power is no longer represented by a king or a single figure; it operates through a system or many, many different, overlapping nets which tend not to be visible but to be hidden away. So the power structure is basically anonymous and it's impossible to give it a face or even a body.³

The numbingly vast sea of crosses stamped repetitively over a half-dozen tabletops in *Wo ist Hitlers Grab? (Where Is Hitler's Grave?)*, 1991, represents but a minute fraction of those killed during World War II. Through its lapidary, low-key form, this anti-monument tersely probes problematic questions: What could constitute an adequate, let alone worthy, representation of such a horror? How best can collective memory be sustained? Would the malign legacy of Nazism be better contained, constrained, and defused if the actual death site of the principal perpetrator were recorded? Would fascistic fantasies be undermined by burying the undead, hence revealing Hitler's grave to be as ordinary and prosaic as any other?⁴ This sculpture was created some ten years after Schütte had devised his own tombstone, prompted by a walk one day in 1981 through his vast neighborhood cemetery, where all the graves were laid out like a suburban development. Schütte's proposal looks disarmingly small as a wooden model, whereas in the drawing it appears overpowering, gargantuan. Although its brilliant hue demands attention, the laconic text betrays little beyond the fact that its incumbent led an unnaturally brief life. Oblivion and renown meld uneasily in this elegiac tribute.

Contrarian restraint likewise informs *Self-Portrait as Candle Holder* (1998). The absurdly colossal light, which dwarfs the overburdened artist staggering on his elaborate, lofty plinth, renders the familiar topos of the artist as visionary pathetically comic. The tone grows more sardonic in *Die Sammler (The Collectors)*, 1989/99, where the artist, confronted by his enthralled patrons, grotesquely pirouettes and cavorts, transforming himself in the process from inspired creator into clownish puppet. Their fixation on the maker, instead of the fruits of his labor, reinforces the bathos at the heart of this melancholy portrayal. If the meticulously ordered shoes in *The Collectors* assume the guise of fetishes, relics of the artist's life, the host of worn-out socks in *Mohr's Life*, by contrast, take on an architectural function. They create an improvised canopy for the grandee who observes the painter, the Moor, the quintessential outsider, conjuring dreams of the Sublime, cataclysmic visions of destruction and bounty.

Athener Tagebuch (Athens Diary), 1984, is a suite of 144 drawings that Schütte executed while spending several weeks in Greece in 1984 in order to fabricate a forthcoming gallery show in situ. While it takes the form of a visual diary, it avoids biographical revelation. Rapid sketches, lists, proposals, plans, observations, and notations for the upcoming show and for future works, including civic sculpture, coexist alongside homages to artist friends and mentors and to the modest pleasures of daily existence. Proximity to the moment makes this wide-ranging suite at once free and fleeting, as it rehearses in private what might later become public.

The only works in this installation relating to an actual commission are those devoted to the explorer, adventurer, and sportsman Alain Colas, the very epitome of the modern hero. Invited by the lost seaman's native town to construct a memorial, Schütte was struck by the at once fortuitous yet not irrelevant fact that the day on which the lone yachtsman disappeared in 1978 coincided with his own birthday. He sketched several variants: a truncated figure on a column in the local river is submerged up to his shoulders at low-tide, to his lips at high water; alternatively a bust balances astride a buoy, barely keeping its head afloat; in a third maquette, an anchor is appropriated as an armature for the figure, which is leashed to a small and, consequently, ineffectual weight; and finally in the largest of the four, the torso of the affrighted sailor is lashed to a palette—now not only the figure but the artwork itself seems cast adrift, in transit. The fate of the contemporary art object is isomorphic to that of this unrealized monument: no more than the artist can it secure a stable resting point, a sure place in history.

L.C.

notes

1. Thomas Schütte, "Inside and Outside," conversation with Martin Hentschel, in *Thomas Schütte* (Bern: Kunsthalle, 1990), p. 82.
2. Schütte realized several public sculptures between 1985 and 1987. *Tisch (Table)*, 1985, commissioned to commemorate Hamburg's resistance movement, consists of an oversized and solemn granite table with twelve chairs. *Schutzraum (Shelter)*, 1986, made for Sonsbeek '86, was a concrete "bunker" set into the slope of a hill. *Eis (Ice Cream)*, 1987, devised for Documenta VIII, took the form of a functioning ice-cream parlor; and *Kirschensäule (Column of Cherries)*, 1987, devised for Skulptur Projekte Münster, continues as a permanent piece in the city's civic parking lot.
3. Thomas Schütte, conversation with James Lingwood, in *Thomas Schütte* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), p. 14.
4. Such questions seem possible only as artistic speculation, within the conditions of the model and behind a shield of desperate absurdity, Julian Heynen argues. (See Julian Heynen, "Our World," in *Thomas Schütte* [London: Phaidon Press, 1998], p. 73.) When Schütte was approached to redesign the House of Remembrance at Neuengamme Labor Camp outside Hamburg he designated his role as that of a consultant not an artist.