Thomas Schütte was born in Oldenburg, Germany, in 1954. Between 1973 and 1981, he studied fine art at the Dusseldorf 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 Munster Sculpture Projects in both 1987 and 1997.

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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 1, 1999 through March 2000) will concentrate on the motif of the figure in his recent work. 

selected bibliography


site map and checklist

1. Monument für einen verschollenen Seemann (Monument for a Lost Sailor), 1989
Wood, glass, and Plasticine
Wood, paint, ink
Each 36 x 79 x 55 inches

2. Boje (Buoy), 1989
Mixed media
12 inches high x 6 inches in diameter

3. Drawing for Alan Cole, 1989
Mixed media on paper
35% x 37% inches; framed 24% x 25% inches
Private Collection, Bern

4. Alan Coles, 1989
Wood, mixed media, paint
Head: 40% x 27% inches
Plaque (2): 12% x 27% inches
Collection Museo Cantonale d'Arte, Lugano
Donation Panza di Biumo

5. Athene, Tagebuch (Athens Diary), 1984
Suite of 144 drawings
Each 15% x 11% inches; framed 23% x 16% inches
Collection Van Abbe-Museum, Eindhoven

Mixed media
58 inches high x 16 inches diameter
Collection of the artist

7. Mohr's Life, 1990
Mixed media
71 inches high; other dimensions variable
Collection Martens and Dirk Scherkhoud

8. 6 Days: The Collector, 1999
Mixed media
62 inches high; other dimensions variable
Collection Alexei and Gisela Becker, Paris

Drawing
Lacquer on paper
41% x 29% inches; framed 52 x 44 inches

10. Kleiner Respekt (Small Respect), 1994
Fimo, plaster, wood
6% x 46% x 14% inches

Wood, paint, ink
Each 19 x 27% inches; framed 25% x 40 inches
Sprung! Museum Hanover, on permanent loan from the Niedersächsische Staatssammlung für Kunst und Kultur

Translations

Drawing 1: Where is Hitler's grave?
Drawing 2: 52 Million
Drawing 3: 3rd World War
September 1, 1939-September 2, 1945 (Pacific)
6 Years
72 Months
192 Weeks
264 Days
23,744 Dead
Every single hour a thousand people died

Drawing 4:
Table 1 534
Table 2 489
Table 3 574
Table 4 510
Table 5 606
Table 6 608
Approximately 100,000 tables are required

Gloria in Memoria
February 4–June 13, 1999
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." 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 translation, it has assumed an extraordinarily diverse and multifarious range of formulations in an oeuvre that now spans more than twenty years.

Decor 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 placenesslessness, 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 infamous to the forgotten and the fictional, from Hitler to the lone Gallic sailor Alan 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.

They have the appearance of rapid responses, temporary, even tentative, as if only in such forms can he avert rhetoric and grandiosity, and only through a kind of self-mocking inclusion of his own image into this pantheon can he confront the perennial issues of glory, fame, and immortality. Arc longa, vita brevis: 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 on which the lone yachtsman disappeared in 1978 coincided with his own birthday. 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 fascist fantasies be undermined by burying the undead, hence revealing Hitler's grave to be as ordinary and prosaic as any other? 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 unmourned, meaningless life. Obivion 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 is choly portrayal. If the meticulously ordered shoes in Tisch (Table), 1989/99, where the artist, confronted by his enthralled patrons, grotesquely piecemeal and corrosive, 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, as 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.

notes
2. Schütte realized several public sculptures between 1985 and 1987. Exh (Paris), 1985, converted a public site into a large, gigantic installation. It has a 3-foot-tall marble and granite pedestal table with twelve chairs. (See Arsenale, 1998, for a more comprehensive survey of Schütte's work.) In 1986, devised for Documenta VIII, a concrete "funeral" set into the slope of a hill. Exh (Crete), 1987, devoted to Documenta VIII, took on the form of a functioning ice-cream parlor; and Kirschensaule (Column of Cherries), 1987, devised for Skulptur Projekte Münster, continues as a permanent piece in the city's civic parking lot.
4. Such questions seem possible only as artistic specialization, within the conditions of the model and behind a shield of desperate absurdity. Julian Heynen argues, Exh (London: Phaidon Press, 1989), p. 75; when Schütte was approached to redesign the House of Remembrance at Nausheima Labor Camp outside Hamburg he designated his role as that of a consultant not an artist.

Athenex Tagbuche (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 rehashes in private what might later become public.