

THOMAS SCHÜTTE *THREE ACTS*



15.03 —



16.06.2019

Thomas Schütte was born in Oldenburg and currently lives and works in Düsseldorf. A student of Gerhard Richter at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie until the beginning of the 1980s, today he is recognised as one of the principal re-inventors of contemporary sculpture. On closer examination, it becomes clear that he is at ease working in two dimensions (engraving, watercolours) as well as in three and exercises his technical virtuosity across a wide variety of media (ceramic, bronze, steel, aluminium, glass). He constantly experiments with scale by producing miniature works of which, often years later, monumental enlargements emerge. His recurring themes range from the representation of architecture to sculptures for the public space and include all kinds of out-of-fashion subjects as the artist himself states: “flowers, faces, portraits, houses, everything we neglect and what remains of tradition”. Schütte’s freedom in borrowing from different artistic styles – from classical sculpture to minimal art – and his wide range of expression – from the grotesque to the meditative – is an object lesson in art’s ability to re-invent forms that very few artists can claim to master.

The subtitle “Three Acts” echoes one of the oldest works in the exhibition (*Dreiakter*, 1982), from the collections of the Pompidou Centre. From the Monnaie de Paris’ interior spaces to its outdoor courtyards, the visitor is invited to discover Schütte’s oeuvre in three stages, through three themes and on three levels of reading, constantly intertwining in the exhibition spaces and sometimes within a single work: the dialogue between the male figure (the hero) and the female (the muse) is interwoven with his evocation of otherness and the afterlife. On the first floor of the exhibition, architecture from model to monument gradually imposes itself.

Within each oeuvre and within the dialogue between each work and the interior space or exterior courtyards, a performance takes place; that of a “dramatic event staged by the artist”, to cite Dieter Schwarz’s words in the exhibition catalogue. Through the dramatization of various objects, the mise-en-abyme of the artist’s and spectator’s vision and the constant questioning of the chosen subject, Thomas Schütte plays on the energy of theatricality and delivers a “play”, whose characters and settings, through their profound ambiguity, grant the spectator complete freedom of imagination.



Cour d'Honneur

Mann im Wind

I, II, III

[Man in the Wind]

2018

These colossuses, standing facing the wind, re-explore one of the artist’s early figurative subjects, which first appeared on a smaller scale in 1982 and which the artist has featured in many series throughout his career: that of a man whose legs are mired in mud. Within this ensemble, the passage from small to large is quite palpable. We can still clearly perceive where the wax has been applied or is deposited on the small sculptures. For the first time, the faces of older, mature men have given way to the depiction of young, open-faced men, eager to move forward even if their bodies seem somewhat prevented from doing so, as if they were emerging from a cocoon, perhaps that of childhood or adolescence.

Pinault Collection

Photo: Aurélien Mole



Cour d'Honneur

United Enemies

2011

These double figures, joined together in palpable tension, their faces in torment, are a monumental version in bronze, of miniatures produced in clay and cloth in the 1990s. The artist began this series two years after the reunification of Germany, whilst he was in residence in Rome, marked by the art of satirical Roman portraiture. These references should not obscure the more universal dimension of this group of sculptures, which powerfully evokes the tensions within a living being and a possible shift towards madness.

Photo: Aurélien Mole



Cour des Remises

Man Without Face
Mann mit Fahne
[Man with Flag]
2018

These two previously unseen sculptures, produced for this exhibition, take up one of the artist's recurring subjects, that of a man enmired in mud. The influence of classical sculpture is clearly felt: the man without a face echoes Cellini's masterpiece *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* where the face of Perseus and that of Medusa are identical. As with the sculpture designed for the Piazza della Signoria in Florence, these hieratic and impassive silhouettes question the representation of power and its possible heroes through the use of clear-cut metaphors.

Photo: Aurélien Mole



Cour de la Méridienne

Drittes Tier
[Third Animal]
2017

Produced for this exhibition, this sculpture is part of a new and astonishing series of fountains featuring an imaginary bestiary and thus reviving a little-known vein of outdoor sculpture from the Renaissance period.

Schütte maintains that he was inspired by clay figurines created for his children. The naïve universe of these models is transformed into a phantasmagorical one, once erected on a monumental scale. We find ourselves at a loss to know if this creature, which seems both terrestrial and marine, belongs to a natural or supernatural order and in a way, to understand or justify its peculiar presence. The grotesque and the absurd coexist together with the tragic and the solemn within the artist's oeuvre.

Photo: Aurélien Mole



Cour de la Fonderie

Stahlfrau Nr. 18
[Steel Women]
2006

In the continuation of his *Ceramic Sketches* where Schütte explored the female nude, the artist began in 1999 this series of women lying, sitting, kneeling on a table or bending over. Each one has a number and is made of aluminium, steel or bronze. When he reached the number 15, the artist declared he was beginning to get tired of the series "but some things just need to be done". He finished the series with the number 18 two years later. At times serene and lascivious, at others mutilated and twisted, each of these sculptures measures itself against the depth of art history, some reminiscent of Maillol, others of Picasso.

Photo: Aurélien Mole



Cour de l'Or

Vater Staat
[Uncle Sam]
2010

Vater Staat is an expression in German personifying the state and is the equivalent of "fatherland" in English. The sculpture presents an elderly man, who is immense yet very thin and seemingly impotent. He is without arms and is devoid of any of the attributes of power but the figure's severe expression alone is sufficient to affirm his authority. When questioned on his conception of the state, Schütte cites Günter Eich who wrote in 1968: "What I find most disgusting in the world are my parents. Wherever I go, they follow me (...). As soon as I've found a chair, the door opens, and one of the two stares inside, Father State or Mother Nature". With another pirouette, when asked about the absence of arms, Schütte mischievously invokes a lack of time to finish the sculpture, even if it is monumental in size.

Pinault Collection

Photo: Aurélien Mole

1 MUSES AND HEROES

Bronze Edition, Frau IV
[Bronze Edition,
Woman]
2015



Photo: Luise Heuter

The human figure is one of the principal themes of Thomas Schütte's work. Figurines, at the beginning intended to give an idea of scale in his architectural models in the early 1980s, soon emancipated themselves and became subjects in their own right, at first the size of a puppet and later on a monumental scale. With constant interplay between scales, the artist has transformed these models into autonomous sculptures, liberating them from their décor and bringing them into the context of the museum by placing busts and full figures on pedestals. These figures in bronze, aluminium, ceramic or glass seem to be imbued with the history of art and its great codes of representation, from Daumier's caricatures to Rodin, Maillol or Picasso's sculptures.

In this exploration of stereotypes, the masculine figure strongly contrasts with the feminine. On the one hand, the busts of men are often grotesque or grimacing, hieratic figures, gesturing for reasons unknown to the spectator. Are the *Fratelli* bandits or musketeers? Or the faceless men of the 20th and 21st centuries? On the other hand, the female figure takes on the role and position of the traditional muse. Women were first represented by the artist in his series *Frauen*, which he began in 1997 and finished in 2006. These figures are enlarged versions of ceramic models, mistreated, crushed or dismembered during the modelling process or the result of playing on the codes of a schematic representation bordering on the abstract. Are they erotic, solemn or simply witnesses to a struggle to make desire last in a world where it is more usually just consumed?



Wichte
[Wights]

2006

Thomas Schütte has been modelling men's faces in ceramic since the 1990s, a period when this medium was rarely seen in contemporary art. These old men's faces are reminiscent of the busts of Roman emperors. Their grimacing features lend these busts the same grotesque aspect as 19th century caricatures, particularly those of Daumier and of the masks typical of the Basel carnival.

Photo: Nic Tenwiggenhorn



Mohr's Life
1988

Exhibited for the first time at the Nelson Gallery (Lyon) in 1988, this "play" in three acts places the artist Mohr at the heart of the plot: painting cloud landscapes, while observing a clothes dryer full of socks; an art dealer, who appears to be selling an old jacket to a collector; the sculptor scrutinizing and admiring his own creation. Summarily sketched in modelling clay, dressed in scraps of the artist's own clothing, these marionettes have been placed in settings made up of found objects. These cameos are autobiographical in character, a parable of the workings of the world of art, where the artist is depicted as a pariah.

Friedrich Christian Flick collection
im Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin

Photo: Florian Kleinfefenn



Glaskopf C, Nr. 4
[Glass Head]

2013

From 2010, the use of glass marks a turning point for the artist: the assumed appearance of beauty, through feminine or androgynous faces. With the use of this material, as he puts it himself, he was no longer interested in just "cobbling something together and bringing it somewhat brutally into shape, so much as in making beautiful things". Invited by the famous Berengo workshop in Murano, he designed these models, leaving their elaboration in the hands of the craftsmen. The starting point for these faces was the bust *Walser's Wife*, a portrait of the fictional wife of the Swiss writer and poet Robert Walser.

Photo: Luise Heuter

2 OTHERNESS AND THE AFTERLIFE

Mein Grab
[My Grave]
1981



Photo: Thomas Schütte

“Death is an idea that distances you from all absurdity. What is really interesting is when the shock of realizing one’s own mortality manifests itself.” The artist seems to have experienced this shock early on in life as he made a model of his own tomb in 1981 at the age of 27, on which was inscribed the date of his death: 25 March 1996. Fortunately non-prophetic, this work seems to have initiated the artist’s constant preoccupation with death and otherness. He re-explores classic motifs from painting and sculpture, some of which are very old indeed: the faded flower, the death mask, the funeral urn, the mausoleum and the tomb. As a counterpoint to the representation of myths and heroes that swings between the tragic and the comic, the artist lends his figures a quite different register, as disturbing as it is striking, where the body is arrested in its movement, frozen for eternity like his *Geister*. The otherness expressed is not only that of death, it also explores the divergence and dissonance of madness, embodied in particular by the double figures in *United Enemies*. Irony, despair, insoluble contradictions, lighter or more profound thoughts and concerns, seem to collide violently within his oeuvres, which strive to express all the difficulties in “being of this world”.

Muses and heroes, death and otherness coexist within the space of the artist’s work, always leaving a certain doubt in those who seek to lend a fixed interpretation to Schütte’s work. As the artist himself states, his works “all work off each other – in a kind of balance of contradictions”.



United Enemies
1993-1994

The starting point for this series, which can be seen on a monumental scale in the Cour d'Honneur, was this group of figurines, with their disgruntled faces and twisted bodies, brought together in pairs and planted on wooden rods. They are among the artist's most famous works, even though their initial reception proved difficult in a context where the human figure, particularly in sculptural form, was decried and where his evocation of the universe of dolls and marionettes, made them even more disturbing. The artist explains that when he exhibited them, "nobody wanted to look at them: they were simply too small". He therefore decided to photograph them in close-up, thus directing the gaze of the public towards the wide range of expressions of these double figures, obliged to live together, yet mistrusting their partner's gaze or simply trying to avoid, at whatever the cost, the presence of the other.

Centre Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne – Centre de création industrielle



Grüner Kopf
[Green Head]
1997

Schütte has been portraying flowers since 1994, a subject he is astonished that so few of today's artists explore, since for him, "Flowers are rewarding because they always narrate something". As is often the case with the still life genre, flowers remind us of the transience of existence and tip these watercolours from simple realism into symbolism. Positioned next to sculptures they seem to act as a commentary on them. Thus the artist associates cut flowers with this funeral mask lying on a bedcover. Reconnecting with the tradition of immortalizing the face of the deceased, his jaw closed by a strip of gauze, Schütte attempts "to ward off the fear of death through depicting the grotesque", as Dieter Schwarz states in the exhibition catalogue.

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
Düsseldorf. Gift of Dorothee and Konrad
Fischer Collection in 2015

Photo: Serge Hasenböhler

3 FROM MODELS TO MONUMENTS

Kristall II (Modell 1:1)
[Crystal House]
2014



Photo: André Morin

The work *Dreiakter* borrows from theatre the idea of scenes unfolding in front of a backdrop or décor. The spectator can observe symbols of power and progress; small figurines are organized around a desk, a tribune and a barrier. This installation is unique in Thomas Schütte's oeuvre, yet from a very early stage in his career, in 1982, it resumes certain preoccupations to which the artist has constantly returned: the place of "spectators" viewing fictive or real monuments, whether it be his figurines or ourselves, as visitors to his exhibitions; the way in which his oeuvres create a décor that is sometimes autonomous in its own right or sometimes depends on the space in which it is placed.

In the same period, the artist began to design architectural models, a subject to which he returned in the 2000s. Constructed from almost nothing, these models represent a "one man house", a "museum" that has become a place of leisure and a "holiday home for terrorists". It is difficult to decide whether the artist is making light of the great stereotypes of architecture or if he is seriously involving himself in the discipline. Since 2007, at the request of collectors, he has built several life-sized structures, while at the same time he decided to build, with the help of architects, his own foundation, the *Skulpturenhalle*, which was inaugurated in 2016.

This play on the relationship between the oeuvre and space, the scale model and the monument reaches a culminating point in life-sized models such as *Kristall II*, a real house exhibited in Salon Dupré. The spectator can thus discover this structure by simply taking a look or through longer meditation, by exploring the oeuvre from the inside and observing the points of view chosen by the artist and the work exhibited in its interior as a final nod to the museum space.



Modelle
[Models]
1973-2016

The *Modelle* are a series of objects the size of the hand, often assembled from almost nothing and that Schütte has been designing since the mid 1990s. The artist recently took the decision to reveal this repository of forms. Like his watercolour sketchbooks, this production attests to the essential characteristics of his work: everything or almost everything is there, from the very beginning of his practice; each oeuvre stems from the passage of small to large or from his exploration of scale.

Photo: Luise Heuter



Skulpturenhalle III
(M 1:20)
[Sculpture Hall]
2012-2015

The artist-architect Thomas Schütte has pushed his reflection on volume and space to the point of deciding to construct a place: a foundation dedicated to sculpture that attests to the renewal of the medium. The artist only occasionally shows his own work, between two exhibitions of sculptors he admires. The building also houses his archives and can accommodate researchers. Constructed near Neuss, the building is the result of a simple assembly: a potato crisp placed on a matchbox. From these beginnings precise models and drawings were made in close collaboration with the architects Lars Klatte and Heinrich Heinemann. This construction is the most ambitious of all Schütte's achievements and he plans to add a second wing, with an apartment on the first floor and a storage space for works in the basement.

Photo: Hans Schröder, Marta Herford

Curator
Camille Morineau

Associate curator
Mathilde de Croix

Cultural Administrators
Anne-Sophie
Duroyon-Chavanne
Agnès Abastado

Production Manager
Mathilde Hivert

Registrar
Pierre-Nils Stenstad
with Julien Landais

**Head of Public Programs
and Publishing**
Stéphanie Molinard

Architect
Atelier Philippe Papy

Graphic Design
Lisa Sturacci

Translation
Chris Atkinson

Interns
Louise Sénéchal
Sadie Fletcher

**Thomas Schütte,
in conversation with
Camille Morineau**

In English.

Tuesday 18 April at 7 pm.

In partnership with Goethe Institut



And also, every week-ends

**Guided tour, open to all
in French**

**Saturday and Sunday
from 11 am to 12.30 am
and Sunday from 3 pm
to 4.30 pm**

**Find the detail of the cultural
programmation on
monnaieedeparis.fr**

**Information, fares and
reservations**

01 40 46 57 57

billetterie@monnaieedeparis.fr
or on site at the ticket office,
subject to availability.

11 Conti - Monnaie de Paris

11, quai de Conti – Paris 6^e

Open from Tuesday to Sunday
from 11 am to 7 pm.

Wednesdays until 9 pm.

Closure of the ticket office
30 minutes before the closing
of the exhibitions.

Copyrights

© ADAGP, Paris, 2019 for Thomas
Schütte and the photographers:
Serge Hasenböhler, Luise Heuter,
Nic Tenwiggenhorn

Couverture

Glaskopf B, Nr. 12, 2013
[Glass Head]

Photo: Luise Heuter



ARAGON

EST.  2001

