

### selected bibliography

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

*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.

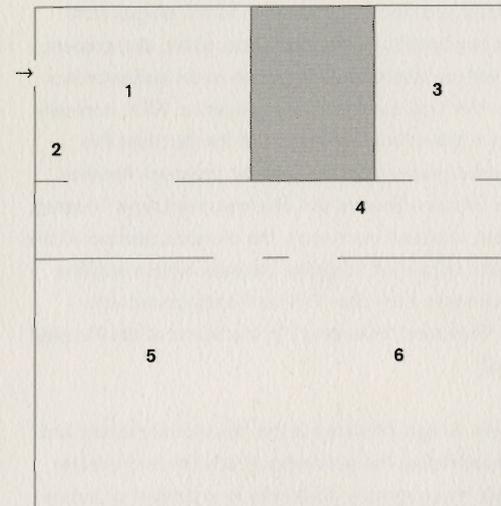
*Parkett*, no. 48 (1996). Special edition by Thomas Schütte. Essays by Elizabeth Janus, Ulrich Loock, Bartomeu Mari, Hans Rudolf Reust, Adrian Searle, and Neville Wakefield.

*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 1998), and the Münster Sculpture Projects in both 1987 and 1997.

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### site map and checklist



- 1. Westkunst Modelle (Westkunst Models), 1981**  
**Bühne (Stage), 1980**  
Collection Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst, Baden-Württemberg  
**Kiste (Box), 1980**  
Panza Collection, Lugano  
**Schiff (Ship), 1980**  
Collection Fischer, Courtesy Konrad Fischer Gallery, Düsseldorf
- 2. 14 Skizzen zum Projekt Grosses Theater (14 Sketches for Large Theater), 1980**  
photographs in gold mounts, each frame 15 3/4 x 19 3/4 inches  
Collection Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst, Baden-Württemberg
- 3. Grosse Mauer (Large Wall), 1977**  
1,200 bricks, oil on wood, each 4 x 8 inches  
Collection of the artist
- 4. Pläne I-XXX (Plans [I-XXX]), 1981**  
spray paint on oil cloth  
Collection Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Stuttgart
- 5. Dreiakter (Three Acts), 1982**  
oil on canvas, wood  
Collection Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée Nationale d'Art Moderne, Paris
- 6. Piazza Uno-Piazza Due, 1986**  
wood  
Collection of Ydessa Hendeles, Courtesy of Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation

Thomas Schütte's "Scenewright" is the first installation in a three-part presentation. Part II (February through June 1999) will concentrate on memorials and monuments; and Part III (September 1999 through March 2000) will focus on the motif of the human figure in his recent work.

**Thomas Schütte**  
Scenewright  
September 24, 1998–June 13, 1999



Cover Photo: Enzo Ricci

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**Thomas Schütte** Scenewright

"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 dimension, it has assumed an extraordinarily diverse and multifarious range of formulations in an oeuvre that now spans more than twenty years.

Executed while this young German was still a student at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, *Grosse Mauer (Large Wall)*, (1977), at once reflects his formative milieu and presages future directions. Some twelve hundred "bricks," loosely painted in a broad gestural manner reminiscent of the style of his teacher Gerhard Richter, are disposed in a grid against the white wall of the site so that these small, abstract paintings may be read as an illusionistic representation, as a literal intervention in the fabric of the venue, and as a witty and telling comment on theoretical issues related to institutional critique. References to the conceptual art of such forbears as Daniel Buren and Niele Toroni, to the grammar and syntax of Minimalism, and to certain recurrent pictorial concerns are deftly and cannily wedded in this prophetic work, whose hallmark innovation disarmingly combines modesty, portability, and ornamental embellishment. For in *Grosse Mauer*, Schütte articulates his fascination with certain conditions of presentation and reception, with confronting a particular architectural space to determine the possible roles of art in that setting, in a way that knowingly extends the terms employed by his predecessors into the realms of decor and the functional. He readily acknowledges, however, that "It was this generation that established the grammar, the training, and the language. They address the fundamental problems of lighting, material, meaning, and space."<sup>2</sup>

The abiding principles that Schütte first articulated as a precocious student took on more ambitious form in the initial proposal he made, several years later, for a tribune or viewing platform from which visitors might survey the vast exhibition of postwar art "Westkunst," planned for the halls of a trade fair in Cologne. Reminiscent of the prow of a ship, this elevated stage would have permitted the viewer to scan the multitude of pavilions and displays of recent and contemporary-art practice that were to be brought together in this blockbuster spectacle. Since financial limitations ultimately precluded its realization, Schütte developed his project further into a series of propositions that took the form of a trio of related scaled-down models: *Schiff (Ship)*, *Kiste (Box)*, *Bühne (Stage)*, which he intended to exhibit on three stacked tables. As an alternative, he also executed *Pläne I-XXX (Plans I-XXX)*, 1981, a series of seventeen lightweight banners on which he stenciled various paradigmatic architectural and urban motifs, whose sequence loosely traces a history of reconstruction and reconstitution of the built

environment. The repertoire of talismanic architectural and urban forms ranges from fortresses to bunkers, from spaghetti junctions to rudimentary floor plans, skyscrapers, and communications towers. It ends with an abbreviated depiction of an audience in a cinema whose luminous screen bears the final number in the sequence, XXX, ironically also an image of negation, and hence a bittersweet reiteration of the fact that this narrative is but a fiction, a well-rehearsed proposition, an idealistic proposal. Another, related work, *14 Skizzen zum Projekt Grosses Theater (14 Sketches for Large Theater)*, 1980, also made at this fertile moment, explored more wryly the clichéd optimism of the postwar era via a series of photographs of painted stagelike tableaux whose sublime vistas are witnessed by toy figures borrowed from *Star Trek* and emblazoned with overused catchphrases and slogans: "Freedom," "Harmony," "In the Name of the People," "Everything in Order," "Pro Status Quo," . . .

The potential for functional or utilitarian design intimated in the Westkunst models and related exercises, the concern with interrelating the autonomous artwork and decoration, and the underlying fascination with scenography coalesced in a number of subsequent projects in which Schütte's modes of working proved far from conventional in their forms, techniques, and materials. As seen, for example, in the monumental backdrops that comprise *Dreiakter (Three Acts)*, 1982, his characteristically economical graphic idiom continued to bypass rhetoric and grandiosity in the search for a more immediate, yet disconcertingly dystopian, expression.

Because, for this young German artist, "sketches and notes are the actual humus," and, as he avers, his "works don't come from anywhere else but the sketchbook," sketching will, inevitably, often take on three-dimensional form.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the 1980s in numerous miniaturized mise-en-scènes, whose architectural vocabularies echo the inspirational classicism of Karl Schinkel, the pared structures of Aldo Rossi, as well as the haunting milieus of Giorgio de Chirico, Schütte played out an understated sociopolitical thematics: "I like the small scale of the model," he explained, "because you have the whole world inside a room or on a table top."<sup>4</sup> Problem solving as a modus operandi is articulated on the basis of blueprints, vehicles for thought rather than action, for a vision that incorporates both the disarmingly lighthearted geste and the deeply sardonic and skeptical excursus. Whether in the guise of deliberately crude, rapidly articulated makeshift proposals or of an elegantly refined calligraphic diary, Schütte's worlds are predicated on a kind of displaced placelessness, a restless nomadism that rigorously eschews the settled and established. In so doing, his work eloquently and persuasively bears witness to Theodor Adorno's ironic but seminal dictum that "it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home."

**notes**

1. Thomas Schütte, "Inside and Outside," conversation with Martin Hentschel, in *Thomas Schütte* (Bern: Kunsthalle, 1990), p. 82.
2. Thomas Schütte, quoted in Neal Benezra, "Thomas Schütte: A Path Toward That Goal," *Distemper: Dissonant Themes in the Art of the 1990s* (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, in association with Distributed Art Publishers, 1996), p. 97.
3. Schütte, "Inside and Outside," p. 83.
4. Thomas Schütte, interviewed by James Lingwood, in *Thomas Schütte* (London: Phaidon, 1998), p. 25.