

PINAULT COLLECTION

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September 2017

Thomas Schütte

From October 2016 to January 2017, the three sculptures that form Thomas Schütte's Efficiency Men were included in Stockholm's Moderna Museet's monographic exhibition devoted to the career of the German artist born in 1954.

Thomas Schütte's body of work, produced over the course of the last thirty years, is unique in the history of art of the twentieth century in its complexity and variety. Schütte has worked in a vast range of scales, producing works only a few centimeters tall for the "Laufbahn" (1988–99) and "Them and Us" (1995) series to monumental sculptures such as Mann im Matsch (2009), and Grosser Geist (1997). He has employed highly diverse materials, including wax, bronze, wood, ceramics, aluminum, steel, cortex, glass, silicone, and polystyrene panels. Schütte's work is figurative, but the styles he employs range from the tubular and highly geometric forms of Die Fremden (1991–92) to the futuristic register of Grosser Geist Nr. 1

(1995), the neoclassical inspiration of Vater Staat (2010), the expressionist outlines of United Enemies (1991), the rudimentary and grotesque sketches of Mann und Frau (1986), and the fabulous universe of Hase (2013). Schütte's choice of themes is fascinating in its captivating diversity. Take for instance the "Laufbahn" series, an autobiographical meta-story, or his extraordinary "Frauen" series devoted to women (1997–2009), the 12 Shitheads – My Private Kosovo (1999–2001), the enigmatic spirits of the Grosse Geister (1996–98), the monument to cherries Kirschensaule (1987), the fantastical animals of Hunde (2003–10), the army General (2011), the memorial to the unknown artist (2011), the crying women of the "Weinende Frau" series (1989–2010), or the monument to Alain Colas (1989). Through his sculpture, Schütte speaks of himself, the art world, human misery, beauty, greed, capitalism, contemporary geopolitics, melancholy, and death—both his own and that of others. Obsessively challenging, Schütte relies on a range of formal inventions and solutions, making him one of the major figures in contemporary art, a cannibal who devours the past, the present, and the future of sculpture.



Exhibition view, « La Collection François Pinault, une sélection Post-Pop »

Like much of his work, the three Efficiency Men were first conceived as small-scale models. Created in 2005 from a few inches of iron wire and Fimo modeling clay (only $34 \times 29.4 \times 65.3$ cm), these prototypes outlined an initial conception of the work, like a snapshot of a soul-scape. Schütte minutely transformed a few inches of iron wire into the outlines of fragile and menacing skeletons, roughly shaping their small heads by hand. That same year, the artist created the monumental version of the three Efficiency Men in steel and silicone, now part of the Pinault Collection. These silhouettes retain several characteristics of their smaller versions: the posture of the body, projecting forward; the frail structure, now made of thin tubes of steel; the silicon heads in three different colors, red, green, and yellow. Three identical blankets cover their bodies, in an odd contrast between empty and full; their heads have a grotesque, primitive, almost menacing aspect. Schütte is consistently able to strike a perfect equilibrium between the rapidity of his gestures, which here gives the sculptures their schematic appearance and their industrial blanket, and the refined intelligence with which he captures human physiognomy, giving shape to its dark, inscrutable nature, to an almost extraterrestrial otherness that seems as though it could communicate with invisible tectonic forces. The notion of efficiency is highly relevant to our current era, our contemporary society: it is a term frequently used to qualify what would a priori appear to be a positive goal. For Schütte, on the contrary, our world and the emphasis it places on a certain conception of efficiency, is rather menacing, obtuse, and relentless. His ambiguous characters seem to position themselves as the all-seeing witnesses to our dystopian era.