

# **Pinault Collection**

Exhibition  
Punta della Dogana  
06.04—23.11.25

EN

# **Thomas Schütte**

Genealogies

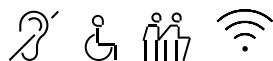
Welcome to Punta della Dogana, the second Venetian home of the Pinault Collection since 2009. In this venue, a landmark of the city of Venice, François Pinault shares his vast art collection with the public, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the world of contemporary art and architectural heritage.

The former *Dogana da Mar* of Venice underwent a major re-development and restoration by Japanese architect Tadao Ando, who blended the building's historic architecture with bold interventions in reinforced concrete, creating a dialogue between the venue and the city of Venice. With its expansive spaces capable of accommodating monumental works of art from the Pinault Collection, this unique venue hosts an exceptional exhibition program, featuring in particular group shows.

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### Any question? Just ask me!

Ask the **cultural mediators** if you have any questions about the current exhibition. The service is free and operates daily from 11 am to 1 pm and from 4 pm to 6 pm.



Thomas Schütte (b. 1954, Oldenburg, Federal Republic of Germany) is one of the leading voices in contemporary art. Based in Düsseldorf since the 1970s, he has developed a unique universe of sculptures, two-dimensional works, and architectural models, totally independent of trends and fashions.

The Pinault Collection possesses an outstanding selection of works by Thomas Schütte, representative of his various periods, and is exhibiting them here alongside pieces on loan from the artist, including a corpus of works on paper that has never been shown before, introducing us to a lesser-known and more intimate part of his universe.

The exhibition has been conceived in collaboration with the artist and takes us to the heart of his vast repertoire, which resists simplistic interpretation, offering instead a critical view of the world and human nature. In all its diversity, Thomas Schütte's œuvre is extremely coherent. There are red threads that appear very early on in his process and that he follows for years, which means that the genealogy of the artworks is always visible. The same motif will get taken up and worked out in a range of scales (from the very small to the truly monumental), materials (including clay, bronze, aluminum, ceramic, and glass), and dimensions (painting, engraving, sculpture). Schütte is forever transforming his approach, constantly demanding perfection, while also incorporating technical contingencies into his productions.

The exhibition offers us a thematic retrospective in which similar motifs realized decades apart and using very different techniques have been brought together to dialogue with one another in the same room, in a blend of momentousness and fantasy where humor and decorative elements sit side by side with psychological depth and emotional intensity.

Thomas Schütte was awarded the Golden Lion at the 2005 Venice Biennale. This exhibition at Punta della Dogana is his first major retrospective in Italy.

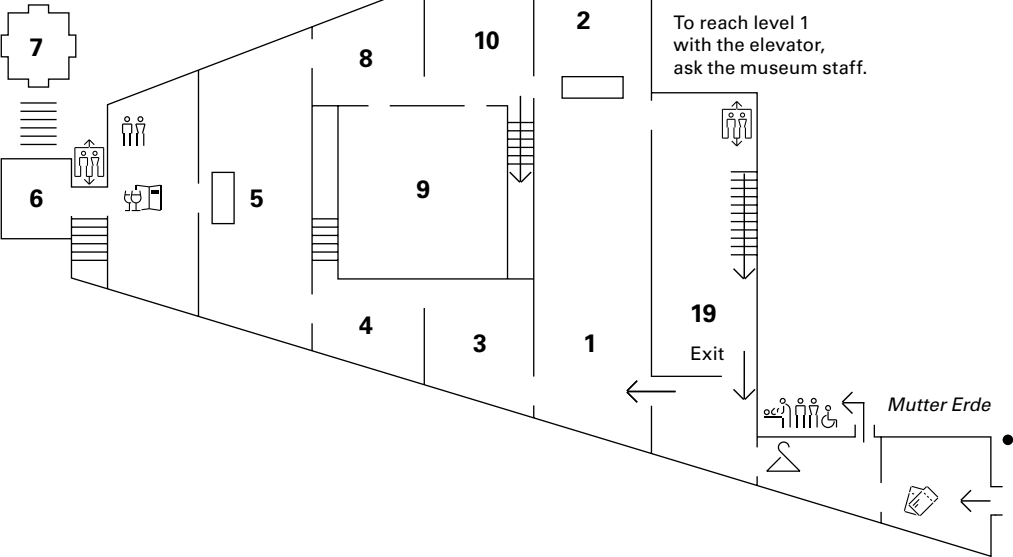


*Mutter Erde*, 2024. Pinault Collection. Installation view, "Thomas Schütte. Genealogies", 2025, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Matteo De Fina. © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection.  
© Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

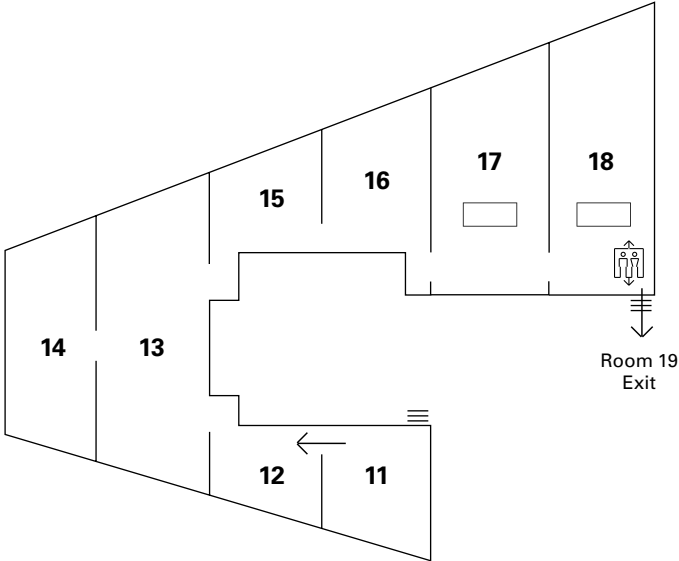
Thomas Schütte has unveiled here a monumental new bronze: *Mutter Erde* [Mother Earth], which greets visitors in the forecourt. The figure evokes a mythical queen or fairytale character. Its source is in fact a small figurine from a traditional *Dreikönigskuchen*, considerably enlarged. As with its male counterpart, *Vater Staat* [Father State or Fatherland] (2010), on view inside the building (Room 6), the tour de force of these archetypal full-length sculptures lies in the difference between their solid frontal aspect and the astonishing lightness that becomes apparent as one walks around them, with different facets emerging from *Mutter Erde*'s puff sleeves, the folds of her dress, and her tiara depending on where one stands. *Mutter Erde*, with all the symbolism of her name, seems to be protective while embodying a form of authority. At night, her eyes mysteriously glow, thanks to a solar panel on the back of her neck.

LEVEL 0

Access to Room 7 is possible only by taking the stairs.  
For safety reasons, the Belvedere terraces can only be visited with a guided tour.



LEVEL 1

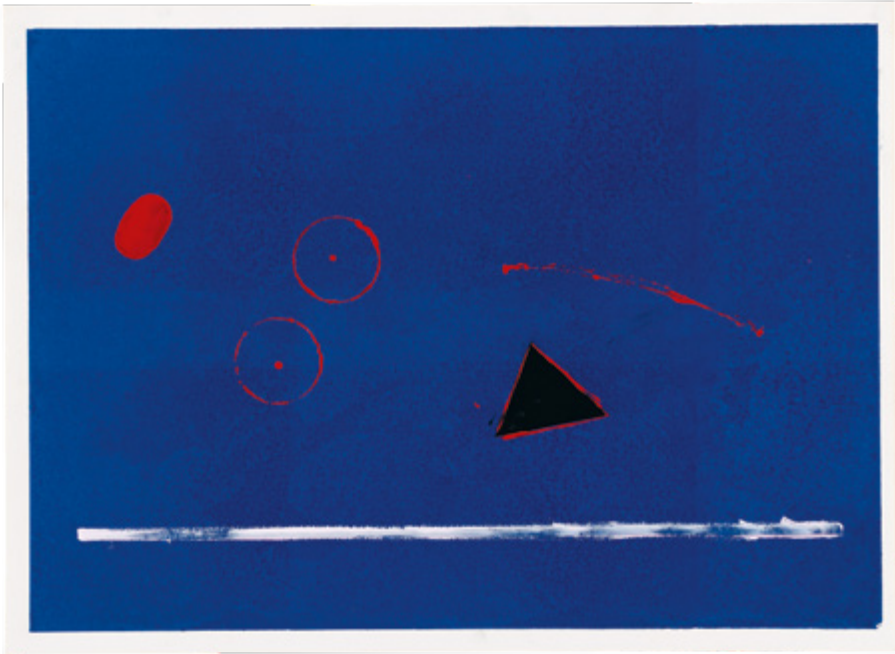






*Mann im Wind II*, 2018, Pinault Collection; *Mann im Wind I*, 2018, Pinault Collection; *Mann im Wind III*, 2018, Pinault Collection; *DEKA Fahnen*, 1989, Collection of the artist. Installation view, "Thomas Schütte. Genealogies", 2025, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Marco Cappelletti © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

As soon as we enter the room, we're faced with three monumental, youthful figures who seem to want to move, but are prevented from doing so by the fact that their feet are stuck in their pedestals. Men stuck in the mud is one of Thomas Schütte's major themes. Its first occurrences date back to the early 1980s. Trying to make a wax figurine stand upright, the artist stabilized it by submerging its legs in more wax. Schütte immediately projected it onto a monumental scale, as if making an ode to failure and perseverance. The pathos of these anti-heroes, trapped in their own material and buffeted by the wind, subverts the usual association between monumentality and glorification, as do the brightly colored *DEKA Fahnen* [DEKA Flags] (see also Room 19) on the walls around them. These large flags, created by Schütte in 1989 and only ever exhibited that year, constitute a symbolic repertoire in need of deciphering. There are motifs that keep recurring throughout his graphic and sculptural work, and they can be found again later on in the exhibition. At the back of the room, another man is stuck in the mud, holding his face in his hand, looking in the other direction.



*Untitled*, 1988, Collection of the artist. Photo: Achim Kukulies. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

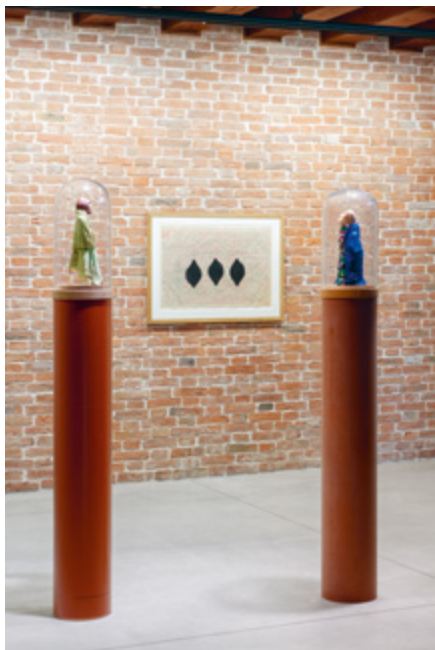
In the ceramic *Eierköpfe* [Eggheads], Thomas Schütte reduces the face to an extreme formal economy, almost objectifying it, stripping it back to a mere horizontal sign. This simplification enables him to play between abstraction and figuration, painting and sculpture, control and randomness, in a way that is characteristic of his work. He uses a variety of firing and glazing techniques to achieve surface and textural effects, with color evoking either tears or scars through stray drips or stains. Drawings and lacquers on paper from the very beginning of his career already show him busy with the same concerns: bodies or dramaturgies reduced to a few signs, and the search for balance (standing before an abstract wave, or in front of a slice of cake appearing like a pendulum or a metronome). The foundational variations on the theme of the brick and the wall demonstrate his interest as early as 1977 in the relationship between painting, wall, sculpture, and architecture, which continues to occupy him to this day.





*Fratelli*, 2012, Pinault Collection; *Criminali*, 1992, Collection of the artist. Installation view, "Thomas Schütte. Genealogies", 2025, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Marco Cappelletti. © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

The sly, grimacing male faces that were to become Thomas Schütte's signature first appeared in 1992. He was artist in residence in Rome at the time, and this new typology of drawings and sculptures was the result of a collision between different sources: ancient Roman busts, his observations of elderly people on public transport, and the *Mani Pulite* [Clean Hands] scandal that erupted while he was in Italy, during which a large array of public figures from politics and business could be seen protesting their innocence on television despite the accusations of corruption mounted against them. The *Fratelli* [Brothers] plot and loom over the viewer, evoking all manner of past and present networks, while the *Criminali* [Criminals], dressed as prisoners, reflect the philosophical concerns of these series, which raise the question of the visibility of crime and guilt.



*United Enemy (Udo)*, 1992, Pinault Collection; *Untitled (United Enemies)*, 1995, Pinault Collection; *Untitled (Black Lemons)*, 1987?, Collection of the artist. Installation view, "Thomas Schütte. Genealogies", 2025, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Marco Cappelletti. © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

The figurines of the *United Enemies*, which Thomas Schütte developed at the same time as the *Criminali* drawings, are displayed almost like prototypes. Schütte has appropriated the grammar and vocabulary of the depiction of human expressions by means of these small figurines modelled in Fimo clay, perched on tripods made of sticks, and dressed in scraps of old clothing, then bound, either independently or in groups. They are given drainpipes for pedestals and placed under glass bell jars like specimens in a natural science museum. Paralyzed and forever united, they seem at times to accept their fate, at others to attempt to oppose it with a countermovement. Not far off stands the *Memorial for the Unknown Artist*, a monument based on a found toy, which Schütte has dedicated to all those artists whom the museums and our collective memory have failed to commemorate.



*The Good and The Bad*, 2007–2009, Pinault Collection. Photo: © Nic Tenwiggenhorn, by SIAE 2025.  
© Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

The works in this room are a continuation of Thomas Schütte's uncompromising depiction of male faces. Duality is a central theme here, expressed through dialogues between faces that have sometimes been inspired by popular culture, like those in *The Good and The Bad* or the *Berengo Heads*. The theme is brought to a climax in *Großer Doppelkopf Nr. 6* [Big Double Head No. 6], a monumental double head showing two ages. The deformed faces are sometimes in dialogue with drawings from different periods in Schütte's career, whether these are portraits of bluesmen, sad rats (*Sad Rat* is an anagram of *Art Ads*), or flowers. Schütte's fascination with materiality also shines through in this room in the richness of the ceramic glazes and his exploration of the properties of Murano glass in collaboration with the Berengo Studio. Bodies gradually become disembodied, turn into monstrous figures, translucent spirits, or vanish into diaphanous urns.

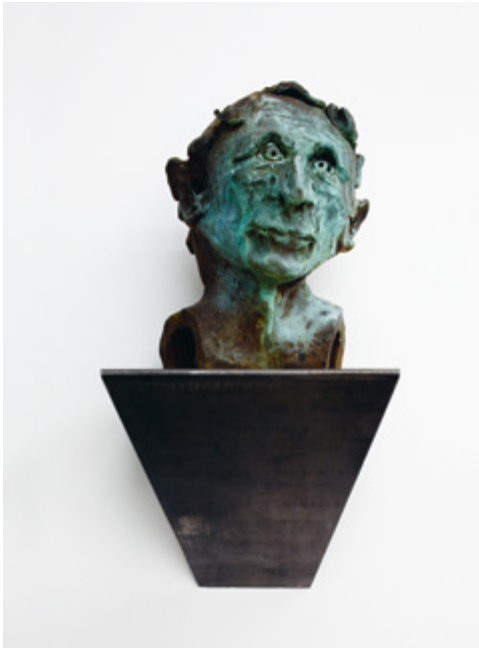


*Vater Staat*, 2010, Pinault Collection. Installation view, “Thomas Schütte. Genealogies”, 2025, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Marco Cappelletti. © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

*Vater Staat*, is a monumental male figure nearly four meters in height, cast in 2010. This was the first time that Thomas Schütte took such a frontal approach to the history of monumental statuary, particularly that of the nineteenth century and of authoritarian regimes. *Vater Staat*'s bathrobe, drawn tight around the waist, seems to amputate his arms, while at the same time conveying an offbeat image of domestic comfort somewhat reminiscent of the bathrobe of Rodin's *Monument à Balzac*, creating dissonance between his official nature as evoked in the title, and the neglected, even impotent appearance of this metal colossus. If this is an image of the State, then it is one that is idle, aged, and immobile. *Vater Staat* could be seen as the culmination of Schütte's visions of unreliable men. Having chosen to place the sculpture at the entrance to Punta della Dogana for an exhibition in 2011, this time he has decided to display it imprisoned in the turret, looking out towards the lagoon and the sea without being able to get out, while its pendant piece, *Mutter Erde*, greets the visitors in the forecourt.

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**THE EXHIBITION CONTINUES UPSTAIRS  
AT THE BELVEDERE (ROOM 7).**



*Wicht*, 2006, Pinault Collection. Courtesy the artist and Peter Freeman, Inc., New York/Paris.  
Photo: Mathias Johansson. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

1995 was the year in which the *Geister* [Spirits] first appeared in Thomas Schütte's vocabulary. These are ghostly bodies with expressive, pantomime-like gestures, first created in wax, then cast in aluminum, bronze, or glass in hundreds of variations. At the center of Room 9, *Drei Ganz Große Geister* [Three Very Large Spirits], the most monumental versions of this figure, stare each other down as if in an arena or boxing ring, watched by other heads (the *Wichte*, or "Jerks"). The bodies of the *Geister* bear the traces of their process of fabrication, specifically the malleable wax threads that Schütte twisted together to make them. For the first time, he has chosen to show them with the structure under their feet that anchors them to the ground visible. In the room before this one (Room 8), we encounter what Schütte calls a *Zombie*, a compact version of a large, dismembered *Geist*: piled up and robbed of its movement and expressiveness.





*Drei Ganz Große Geister*, 1998–2004, Pinault Collection. Installation view, “Thomas Schütte. Genealogies”, 2025, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Marco Cappelletti © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025





*Crime has no face* (from the series *Requiem*), 1992, Collection of the artist.  
Photo: Achim Kukulies. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

Thomas Schütte has always made drawings and watercolors. From the 1980s onwards, most of his drawings have belonged to series, some consisting of dozens of sheets. On the side walls, two series testify to the narration that is at work in the drawings, as well as their high degree of abstraction. Sometimes he has added a handwritten indication: "How much cost the cosmos" concludes the series on the left, while the drawings on the wall to the right follow a script that includes death as one of its elements (the word *tot* means "dead" in German). On the back wall hangs a selection of shadowy ink drawings which he made in 1992 while he was working on the *Criminali* and *United Enemies* series. These include puns on a "Mankind" lacking in kindness ("Not very kind"), and lyrics from a Bob Dylan song that resonate with Schütte's own work: "Crime has no face."





*Efficiency Men*, 2005, Pinault Collection. Installation view, "Éloge du Doute", 10 April 2011–17 March 2013, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Fulvio Orsenigo © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection.  
© Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

The figures that make up the *Efficiency Men* (part ravenous predators, part aliens, part horror movie characters, there is very little about them that seems human) impose their dominant, frightening stance on the space. Their colored silicone faces continue the tradition of Thomas Schütte's evil men. Created in a very short space of time in 2005, their frail iron skeletons and the industrial blankets provide these hollow creatures with the semblance of a bodily envelope. The group is also reminiscent of carnival effigies on parade. Created in the middle of the debate on hedge funds in the German parliament, *Efficiency Men* reads like a grating commentary on the forces that rule the world, ready to spring into action and strip everything in their path in the name of efficiency.



*TR? – UST?* (from the series *Deprinotes*), 2006, Collection of the artist.  
© Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

The watercolor drawings in this room from the *Deprinotes* series are being exhibited for the first time. They testify to particularly difficult periods in the artist's life between 2006 and 2008. And yet, even in the harshest drawings, humor is present through wordplay. For example, in a dream (*Traum*), where a character has to balance between two pillars across which the word "TRUST" has been written, a play on words appears in the caesura between "TR" and "UST," as the letters "UST" on the second column are the German equivalent of VAT! Gradually, darkness gives way to flowers, which the artist has continually drawn throughout these periods. In the center of the room, two recent ceramics form a strange couple facing St Mark's Square: a monk (*Mönch*) with an almost animal face rubs shoulders with a Geisha, a figure of feminine seduction depicted here in old age and in a fantastical manner (small figures have taken the place of her breasts, a distant reminder of the inner dualism of *The Good and The Bad* [Room 5]).



*Üppig* (from the series *Drawings/Watercolors*), 2022, Collection of the artist. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025



*Ceramic Sketch*, 1999, Pinault Collection. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

In the center of this room, Thomas Schütte's formal variations on the traditional sculpture of a reclining woman have been executed in miniature on blocks of clay, a selection of which have been remade in bronze, and sometimes enlarged to monumental scale (see Room 19). These sculptural "sketches" are juxtaposed with an extraordinary group of watercolors Schütte made while in hospital for three months in 2022. The room is organized chronologically, from the first watercolor to one of the last he made. The selection here has been made from among more than a thousand watercolors, providing an insight into the most intimate aspect of Schütte's œuvre. His watercolors could be divided into categories, but their dates reveal that, within the space of a single day, he can move blithely from one subject to another, with no opportunity to revise or retouch. With their references to art history, music, and the triviality of everyday life, their echoes of personal demons, of sad moments and happy ones, and their portraits of animals, imaginary beings, and loved ones, these differently styled compositions are full of puns and all share the same goal: to move us in their very simplicity.



*Bunker, Modell A, Bunker, Modell N, Bunker Modell L*, 1981, Collection of the artist; *Rote Bilder*, 1981–1982, Collection of the artist; *Ausgang*, 1981, Collection of the artist. Installation view, “Thomas Schütte. Genealogies”, 2025, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Marco Cappelletti © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

At the crossroads of sculpture and drawing, architecture is an essential practice for Thomas Schütte. Among his earliest maquettes is a series of *Bunkers* made in 1981. Made from glued and painted telephone directories on elaborate bases, the bunkers evoke both a symbolic, primordial shelter from the violence of the world, and the trace of a body (the letters of their titles refer to organs: A for *Augen* [the eyes], N for *Nase* [the nose], and L for *Leber* [the liver]). A testimony to the psychological dimension architecture holds for Schütte, they are placed in front of a series of drawings on bright red paper which he made in the same year with industrial lacquer, creating a repertoire at once basic and loaded with connotations. *Modell und Ansichten* [Maquette and Views] ironically presents us with maquettes of decorated high-rise cages or bottles. Some of Schütte’s models are on a 1:1 scale, such as his own exhibition venue, the Skulpturenhalle in Neuss, Germany.





*Weinende Frau Nr. III*, 2011, Pinault Collection. Installation view, "Éloge du Douce", 10 April 2011–17 March 2013, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Fulvio Orsenigo © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

Between 2009 and 2017, Thomas Schütte created *Weinende Frauen* [Weeping Women], a series of bronze fountains, usually set in corners. While a woman's face is still recognizable in the first one he made, in the following fountains, the link between the work and the title is stretched, the face reduced to a rudimentary oval pierced by three orifices through which the water flows, producing a soft trickling sound. Schütte's fountains commemorate nothing historical, nothing narrative: these inconsolable figures are monuments to anti-heroines. On the wall, two ceramic medallions depict a childlike cosmos and an angel, whose reliefs and reflections dance in the Venetian light, lending this room an air of gentleness and contemplation. Indeed, the female faces, like that of the green head, have a softer appearance than the male figures seen so far.



*Glaskopf A, Nr. 10*, 2013, Pinault Collection. Courtesy the artist and Peter Freeman, Inc., New York/Paris.  
Photo: Francesco Allegretto. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

This stylized self-portrait of the artist, which began as a woman's face, was made in molded glass in Murano. Its color, shifting between purple and blue, changes according to the surrounding light, and as one walks around it, several profiles seem to blend together. The solitary face, tilted back, a real or symbolic self-portrait, points towards a corner of the room. Around it, ceramic medallions feature variations on recurring motifs such as angels, flowers, and an animal from a fantastic bestiary—some kind of salamander or lizard. Thomas Schütte is again making chromatic experiments with this series of sunken and high reliefs, somewhere between two and three dimensions. He plays with the Venetian light, which also changes their appearance throughout the day.



*Glass: You No. 24, 2018, Pinault Collection; Glass: Me No. 33, 2018, Collection of the artist; Fleurs pour M. Duchamp, 2002, Collection of the artist. Installation view, "Thomas Schütte. Genealogies", 2025, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Marco Cappelletti © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025*

The two glass faces in *You and Me*, created in 2018, seem to gaze eternally into the sky. The unreal slenderness of the female face (*You*), its elongation, recalls certain stylized Ancient Egyptian female heads. The man (*Me*) has a more tense face, slightly tilted, showing a bit of hair and keeping his eyes closed. Although Thomas Schütte doesn't designate them as death masks, these flat-lying portraits are unmistakably reminiscent of this ancient tradition. Perhaps the idea behind *You and Me* is to represent, rather than death itself, those who reflect on it, their eyes sometimes open, sometimes closed in fear. Memory rather than event. Around them, engravings depict other eternal faces—those of famous female blues singers—and a series of wildflowers directly incorporated into the paper by an ink press like so many ready-mades, in a tribute and an affront to Marcel Duchamp.

## LEVEL 1 ROOM 18

Screening of the documentary *Thomas Schütte. Ich bin nicht allein* [I am not alone] by Corinna Belz (2023, 52', in loop, in German and English with English and Italian subtitles).

Movie starting times: 10.10am; 11.02am; 11.54am; 12.46pm; 1.38pm; 2.30pm; 3.22pm; 4.14pm; 5.06pm; 5.58pm



*Aluminiumfrau Nr. 18*, 2006, Pinault Collection. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates.  
© Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

Between 1997 and 2006, Thomas Schütte set about depicting women on a horizontal plane. Starting with over a hundred small *Ceramic Sketches* (Room 13), he enlarged some of them to monumental scale. Here, two aluminum women are on display. Their bodies are deformed and so strangely positioned on their pedestals (a steel table) that one has to walk around them in order to take in their whole anatomy. With these sculptures, Schütte has made an art-historical subject his own: the reclining feminine nude, mostly depicted by male artists, eroticized with or without the filter of the odalisque or another mythological figure, when not that of the muse. He has chosen to show these two sculptures surrounded by abstract hangings from the *DEKA Fahnen* series seen at the beginning of the exhibition (Room 1). A final monumental female face, impenetrable and totally serene, once again testifies to the artist's technical virtuosity and calls on the power of the imagination.





*Großer Frauenkopf*, 2021, Pinault Collection. Installation view, "Thomas Schütte. Genealogies", 2025, Punta della Dogana, Venice. Ph. Marco Cappelletti © Palazzo Grassi, Pinault Collection. © Thomas Schütte, by SIAE 2025

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Jean-Marie Gallais

(some texts are excerpts  
from the work descriptions published  
in the exhibition catalogue)

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## Discover, read, listen



Interviews, videos, a calendar of events dedicated to the exhibition "Thomas Schütte. Genealogies". Browse all in-depth content at [pinaultcollection.com/palazzograssi](https://pinaultcollection.com/palazzograssi).

The exhibition catalog published by Marsilio Arte in a trilingual edition (Italian, English, French) is available at the bookshop and online.

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Keep your Punta della Dogana ticket and visit the exhibition at Palazzo Grassi "Tatiana Trouvé. The Strange Life of Things" until 4 January 2026.

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