

Blockhaus

Thomas Schütte, 2018

***Blockhaus*, a small structure by the German artist Thomas Schütte, will be inaugurated on the Vitra Campus on 13 June 2018. Serving as a shelter with a watering place, it adheres to different principles than the buildings on the campus designed by architects, thereby presenting an ambiguous antipode.**

Thomas Schütte's *Blockhaus* is the latest addition to the Vitra Campus. Set on a slightly irregular hexagonal footprint, the walls angle outwards like a funnel instead of rising perpendicular from the ground. The six-sided structure supports a steeply inclined roof whose ridge has a pronounced kink, giving it a dynamic silhouette. Constructed from untreated Nordic pine, the cabin will take on a grey tone as it ages. The visually prominent roof is covered in titanium zinc shingles, whose gleaming metal creates a stark contrast to the archaic log structure.

An opening on one side invites visitors to enter. Two simple benches are mounted along the interior walls. The central area contains a trough fountain made of fired clay, offering fresh water to cool off or enjoy a drink. *Blockhaus* thus assumes the role of a shelter or resting place, but it is also something else: more architectural object than house, it resembles a blown-up model – one that can not only be used, but also viewed and studied like a model. Analogous to the cabin's form and material, its function reveals the diverse shifts and ambivalences in scale and perception.

Blockhaus differs from the existing buildings on the Vitra Campus. The structures commissioned from architects respond to a clearly formulated brief as well as a specific site and utilise contemporary materials and technologies. *Blockhaus* is an object derived from a 1:10-scale model exhibited by Thomas Schütte in 2016 at the Konrad Fischer Galerie in Düsseldorf. Rolf Fehlbaum, Chairman Emeritus of Vitra, saw the model and asked the artist if he could imagine a full-scale realisation on the Vitra Campus.

Alexander Braun, a timber building specialist, executed the *Blockhaus* on the basis of Schütte's model. The structure was fabricated and assembled under Braun's supervision in Russia, and subsequently disassembled and transported to Weil am Rhein. The titanium zinc roofing was produced and installed by the Rathberger company from the nearby town of Efringen-Kirchen. The fountain was crafted by Heide Jansen, Cologne, and fired by the ceramics specialist Niels Dietrich, also of Cologne.

Thomas Schütte's *Blockhaus* joins other architectural elements on the Vitra Campus, including the walkway structures by Álvaro Siza, Carsten Höller's Slide Tower and the monumental tool sculpture by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, which are nestled amongst the buildings dedicated to specific purposes. Though not planned from the outset, these elements have become important guideposts and points of interest that invite visitors to stroll across the campus.

About Thomas Schütte

Thomas Schütte (born 1954 in Oldenburg, Germany) studied from 1973 to 1981 at the Academy of Art in Düsseldorf, where he lives and works today. Düsseldorf, Cologne and the Rhineland constituted the most vibrant region in Europe for art and artists during that decade. A focal point of the action was the Düsseldorf-based Konrad Fischer Galerie, which was frequented by such figures as Bruce Nauman. The gallery dedicated a solo exhibition to the young Schütte back in 1981, when the artist was still largely unknown. He achieved prominence in the early 1980s with his architectural models and objects, the first of which were shown at the 'Westkunst' exhibition in 1980. Parallel to the creation of such conceptual objects, Schütte had begun to develop a figurative sculptural oeuvre, which met with wide acclaim starting in the 1990s. Since that time, Thomas Schütte has successfully continued his creative activity in both areas. He has received numerous awards including the Golden Lion at the 2005 Venice Art Biennale. In recent years, his work has been the subject of major museum exhibitions.

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