

KETELEER GALLERY is very pleased to present a new solo exhibition by Stephan Balkenhol. The exhibition consists of an entirely new series of sculptures and a selection of drawings.

Stephan Balkenhol (°1957, Fritzlar/Hessen, Germany) is an artist whose unmistakably unique style has earned him an inimitable place in the world of contemporary sculpture. Since the beginning of his artistic endeavours, Balkenhol resisted the conceptualism and minimalism of his peers and, instead, became famous for his 'dry' figurative sculptures: roughly cut, hyper-simplified anonymous human and animal figures coated with matte paint. Simultaneously lacking in overt facial expressions while exuding an irrefutably strong aura, 'a Balkenhol' can be distinguished from afar.

The artist makes big and small standing sculptures, often carved from a single block of wawa or poplar wood, but also 2 dimensional relief panels – portraits and landscapes with which he unites painting and sculpture – and bronze statues, meant to be able to stand outside. Many of his monumental bronze sculptures can be found in the urban space across the world.

Already during his education at the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg ('76 – '82), Balkenhol wanted to save figuration from the then prevailing abstract, minimal and conceptual art. But the artist doesn't want to impose a hidden message on to the figurative. He's interested in showing the people as they are, their perceivable form and the stuff they're - literally and figuratively - made of. The direct, seemingly unfinished sculptures come across as quick sketches, fleeting impressions which do justice to the directness with which we generally notice people. The viewer has to fill in the gaps, imbue it with meaning. Fantasy and associations are in the eye of the beholder.

"In my visions my sculptures become a question, a mirror."

Now and then absurd elements pop up: humans with animal heads, mating couples on antique vases, monumental figures with stretched-out legs... a sense of humour which counteracts the – at first glance – seriousness of Balkenhol's works, emphasizing instead the artist's overall playfulness. Man is never reduced to banality however, on the contrary, the mundanity of Balkenhol's characters are in honour of the intrinsic value of man.

Lauren Wiggers, 2021.

The exhibition will be on view from May 13th till June 24th, 2023.

A selection of recent solo exhibitions: Lehmbruck Museum, DE (2020) – Museum Jorn, DK (2020) – Museum of Sepulchral Culture, DE (2019) – Kunsthalle Emdem, DE (2018) – Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga, SP (2018) – Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, FR (2018) – Deweer Gallery, BE (2017) – Moscow Museum of Modern Art, RU (2016) – Fondation Fernet-Branca, Saint-Louis, France (May 2016), the Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Düren, Germany (2015) – ...