

# STEPHAN BALKENHOL

KÖNIG SEOUL

16 DECEMBER – 3 FEBRUARY 2023

KÖNIG SEOUL is pleased to present a solo exhibition of the work of Stephan Balkenhol. Since the 1980s, Balkenhol has dedicated his artistic practice to investigating the human figure in all its complexity and ambivalence, using wood and bronze media to realize his contemporary mode of anonymous portraiture or, as he playfully calls it "Mr. Everyman".

The exhibition in Seoul will be his first in Korea and features 12 works, the bulk of which are wooden, wall-hanging reliefs. Additionally, a selection of his signature men, clad in black trousers and a white shirt, as well as women figures will be on view. A work in bronze is placed in the outside space of the gallery.

Balkenhol has revived earlier traditions of portrait-making and infused them with a contemporary sensibility, presenting his subjects without personal attributes and accessories. Instead, the artist imparts his subjects with a uniquely haptic character, focusing on the surfaces of his sculptures and reliefs, imbuing them with a granularity and texture that belie the straightforwardness of their character's indifferent faces.

Balkenhol sculpts and carves his free-standing sculptures in a single piece from tree trunks. This is apparent from the solid plinths, which are conceived as integral to the sculpture. His materials of choice are easily workable soft woods, such as poplar, obeche, and cedar. Their roughly worked surfaces and coloured finishes lend them Balkenhol's unmistakable signature style celebrates the craftsmanship of the artistic process.

His figures are characteristically void of obvious emotions or sentiments, all are having a neutral facial expression. As he says: "the figures are all relatively similar, having no distinct expression such as appearing joyous or sad (...). I find this to be more emotive and inspiring rather than affixing a specific expression to my figures (...)."

The exhibition in Seoul features examples of his signature motif of a man in black trousers and white shirt, depicted with a shift in scale, all of which were created in 2019: MAN ON PEDESTAL; MAN, BLACK TROUSERS, WHITE SHIRT; and MAN IN BLACK SUIT. The first of these two is life-size, while the third appropriates the height of the other two with a high pedestal, where a diminutive figure is perched. In the intimate exhibition space in Seoul, viewers can perceive a spatial, as well as textural, understanding of the repetition of a single figure when presented in varying scales. These works are complemented by two women figures from 2023 clad in fresh colours of yellow and blue to look ahead to the new year.

Viewers both familiar and unfamiliar with Balkenhol's work are treated to a focused look at the qualities of a sculptor who works vehemently to keep up with the speed and distraction of contemporary life, treating his materials like hurried sketches on the way to becoming something else, qualities that can only be appreciated in person.

**Stephan Balkenhol** (b. 1957 in Fritzlar, Germany) is one of the most renowned German sculptors of our time and famous for his coloured wood sculptures, as well as drawings and prints.

Balkenhol's public bronze sculptures, some of which are of monumental dimensions, often entail an element of surprise, appearing in unusual places. Back in the early 1980s, Balkenhol resolutely turned his back on prevailing trends to embrace figuration. Working at the intersection between minimalism and concretion on the one hand and the rise of the Neue Wilde on the other, he has since made the human figure and fundamental questions around human existence the consistent focus of his art.

Balkenhol sculpts and carves his free-standing sculptures in a single piece, from complete tree trunks. This is apparent from the solid plinths, which are conceived as integral to the sculpture. His materials of choice are easily workable soft woods, such as poplar, obeche, and cedar. Their roughly worked surfaces and coloured finishes lend them Balkenhol's unmistakable signature style.

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## EXHIBITIONS

MONIRA AL QADIRI  
Usurper  
KÖNIG GALERIE  
19.01 – 24.02.2024

JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER  
A Pancake Show  
KÖNIG GALERIE  
19.01 – 24.02.2024

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