

Stephan Balkenhol

New Works

13 September - 26 October, 2024



AKINCI is proud to present a solo exhibition of new sculptures by Stephan Balkenhol, created especially for this occasion.

The internationally renowned sculptor Stephan Balkenhol (Fitzlar, 1957) is one of the most authentic and celebrated sculptors of his generation, reclaiming the human form and reintroducing figuration into contemporary art of the eighties. A student of the minimalist sculptor Ulrich Rückriem, he made a radical change towards the end of his studies. He began working with human heads and subsequently progressed to creating figures in clay and finally, in wood. Since then, he has had over 100 solo exhibitions in well-known galleries and international museums, and has created numerous sculptures for public spaces. Some notable examples are his commissions for the Thames in London, the

Hagenbeck Zoo in Hamburg, the Erasmus Hospital in Rotterdam and *The Fountain of Fortuna* in Sneek. Balkenhol has been commissioned by the De Doelen concert hall in Rotterdam to create a sculpture in honour of the early 20th century Dutch composer Willem Pijper. The sculpture will be inaugurated in April 2025.

Stylistically, Balkenhol's sculptures are deeply rooted in the history of European art, going back to Ancient Egypt, the polychrome sculptures of the Middle Ages and portraits of the Renaissance. However, his figures are devoid of any pretentious qualities and approach the viewer in a seemingly trivial manner. The work is open to individual interpretation and therefore appeals to the viewer's imagination, lacking any overt political message or social criticism. You can recognise the figures by their ordinary clothing and simple facial expressions, which convey no overpowering emotion. These ordinary people become archetypes of the twenty-first-century 'every man' or 'every woman' by being placed on a pedestal, representing no one in particular and everybody at the same time.

Over the years, Balkenhol has developed a unique style, characterised by a consistent simplicity and easily recognisable to the eye of the connoisseur. All his work is done by hand, without the help of assistants or excessive machinery. Starting with a chainsaw for the initial rough work, he then employs a hammer, chisel and gouge to refine the sculpture down to the smallest detail. Balkenhol's figures appear to emerge from the wood, as if they had always been hidden in the trunk of a tree. The traces of the production process are deliberately not removed or smoothed out, resulting in a captivating, vibrant surface covered in cracks and splinters. The wood is an appropriate material for the pace of thoughts and work, according to Stephan Balkenhol. Where stone is 'too slow' and plaster and clay 'too fast', wood is both resistant and alive, allowing for exploration during the process of carving.

In an ongoing exploration of the human form, Stephan Balkenhol has created an entirely new series of works for this exhibition, expanding his oeuvre beyond sculpture to reliefs and drawings. This new series of works is tailored to the space, creating an almost installation-like experience. Visitors can immerse themselves in the exhibition as the individual works form a whole, resonating with each other.

Biography

Stephan Balkenhol (1957, Fritzlar, Germany) attended the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg from 1976 – 82, with tutors including Ulrich Rückriem, Nam June Paik and Sigmar Polke. He has exhibited widely in galleries and museums around the globe, e.g. major solo exhibitions at Museum Wiesbaden, DE (2023); Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, DE (2020); Museum Jorn, Silkeborg, DK (2020); Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Malaga, ES (2018); the Moscow Museum of Modern Art, RU (2016); Austrian Landesgalerie Linz, AT (2014-2015); Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, DE (2014); Musée de Grenoble, FR (2010-2011); Deichtorhallen Hamburg, DE (2008-2009); Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden/Baden, DE (2006); the National Museum of Art, Osaka/Tokyo, JP (2005). In 2026 Balkenhol will have a solo exhibition at Kunsthall Rotterdam, NL. He has made a number of sculptures for the public space throughout Europe; e.g. Germany, Italy, France and the Netherlands and in the United States. In 2014, Balkenhol was awarded the French Order of Arts and Letters. His works are in many museum collections including the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the Tate Gallery in London, Centre Pompidou in Paris, Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Museum Voorlinden in Wassenaar, the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, the National Gallery in Berlin and The Museum of Art in The Hague.