

G A L E R I E F O R S B L O M

Stephan Balkenhol

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The minimalist sculptures of German artist Stephan Balkenhol radiate a quiet, archaic power. Though his figures often assume formal poses and wear expressionless faces, they are anything but detached. Instead, they convey a restrained yet compelling intensity. Balkenhol's primary focus is the human condition—whether his subjects are actual people or animals dressed in human clothing, they serve as reflections of humanity. He deliberately preserves the visible marks of his carving tools, giving each figure a tactile roughness that underscores its vulnerability. Sculpted from a single block of wood—typically soft poplar or Douglas fir—each work embraces natural cracks and coarse textures, foregrounding the imperfections that define what it means to be human.

Stephan Balkenhol is widely recognized as one of today's foremost contemporary sculptors. In the early 1980s, he broke away from the dominant abstract and conceptual art movements of the time, turning instead toward figurative expression. Since then, the human form—and the existential questions it evokes—has remained central to his practice. While clearly representational, Balkenhol's works resist literal interpretation, inviting viewers into open-ended encounters.

Stephan Balkenhol (b. 1957) studied at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg and has served as a professor at the Akademie für Bildende Künste in Karlsruhe since 1992. His sculptures are held in major international collections, including the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, Kunsthalle Hamburg, the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, and the Art Institute of Chicago. He lives and works in Karlsruhe, Kassel, and Berlin, as well as in Meisenthal, France.