

Press Release

Stephan Balkenhol

Private view: 16 March 2017

Exhibition dates: 17 March – 22 April 2017



Stephan Balkenhol's ninth exhibition at Stephen Friedman Gallery opens in March 2017. The renowned German sculptor is recognised not only for his technical prowess, but also for his devotion to exploring figuration in contemporary art. With a career spanning over thirty years, the artist is committed to the representation of the unassuming everyday human. Balkenhol's sculptures are characterised by a textured surface that bears the marks of his craft.

"I want everything at once: sensuousness, expression, but not too much, vitality, but no superficial verbiage, momentaneity, but no anecdote, wit, but no corny joke, self-irony, but no cynicism. And, first and foremost, a beautiful, silent, moving, meaningful and meaningless figure" (Stephan Balkenhol, notes from 1984).

Balkenhol dedicates himself to translating what he sees in the world around him into wooden sculpture. His approach is focused on the portrayal of normality, creating timeless, relatable and instantly recognisable figures. He references art history and contemporary culture to distil what is present in humanity throughout time: the essential nature of man. Each figure is marked by a lack of expression, their faces reserved, quiet and still. He explains: *"I am perhaps proposing a story and not telling the end, just giving a beginning or fragment. There is still a lot for the spectator to complete"*. Balkenhol's work presents a starting point from which to approach existential questions, without suggesting any answers.

Balkenhol began making the figurative sculptures for which he is known in the 1980s as a response to the turn towards the abstract, minimalist and conceptual approaches of the 1970s. This placed the figure at the centre of his practice, and he has since added animals, hybrid creatures, landscapes and architecture to his vocabulary. Over his career Balkenhol has come to create what amounts to an encyclopaedia of the figure, re-presenting his instantly recognisable forms as busts, torsos, reliefs, groups, miniatures and in superhuman size.

The artist works alone, intimately engaged with the carving process. He uses a simple hammer and chisel to gauge his figures from whole tree trunks, rendering their features perfectly from the wood. The surface is left rough, exposing the trace of his tools. Also visible are knots, grain and cracks in the texture of the wood. The surface remains a document to the

STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

sculpting process. He then uses paint to accentuate the anatomy, in no way heightening the figure's expressiveness.

Balkenhol's continued quest towards the representation of reality and life through carving and the use of wood, renders him one of the most individual sculptors of his time. His work speaks to the relatable everyday man and reflects the individuality in us all amidst a world of similarities. His anonymous figures with a generalising vagueness exemplify the existential awareness of the life of the post-modern man.

Stephan Balkenhol was born in 1957 in Fritzlar, Germany. He now lives and works in Kassel, Germany.

Gallery Two: Lisa Brice

Gallery hours: Tuesday to Friday, 10am - 6pm and Saturday, 11am - 5pm

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Notes to Editors:

Notable solo exhibitions include; 'Stephan Balkenhol and Philippe Cognée', Fondation Fernet-Branca, Saint-Louis, France (2016); Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Palais Gogolevski, Moscow, Russia (2015); 'New Sculptures', Akinci, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2015); 'Stephan Balkenhol' Landes Museum, Linz, Austria (2015-2014); 'Stephan Balkenhol', Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, Germany (2014); 'Stephan Balkenhol', 'Unlimited Bodies - Corps Sans Limite', Palais d'Iéna, Paris, France (2012); 'Stephan Balkenhol', Musée de Grenoble, Grenoble (2010); 'Stephan Balkenhol', Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2008-2009); 'Stephan Balkenhol', Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden (2006); 'Stephan Balkenhol', National Museum of Contemporary Art, Osaka (2005); 'Stephan Balkenhol', Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv (2005); Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2003); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC (1995).

Group exhibitions include; 'Summer Exhibition', Royal Academy, London, England (2016); Animalia, Marian Goodman Gallery, London, England (2016); 'Inventory, Vol.5: Acquisitions from 1992 to 1996', FRAC Haute-Normandie, Rouen, France (2015); 'The Art of the Present', Helga de Alevear Collection, Centro Centro, Madrid, Spain (2013); 'Je t'aime... moi non plus', Musée des Beaux-Arts Eugène Leroy, Tourcoing, France (2013); 'Unlimited Bodies', Palais Dena, Paris, France (2012); 'Twenty Years of Presence', MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany (2011).