

"Balkenhol's sculptures are not only deeply rooted in our reality, they also embody something inexplicable, unnameable and timeless...The prototypical exterior of the figures reminds the viewer of something...hovering between the familiar and the alien."

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of new sculptures in wood by Stephan Balkenhol. Balkenhol, an internationally renowned German artist who has been concentrating on the human figure for over two decades, began his sculptural process of figurative wood carving in the mid-eighties - as a response to the abstract, minimalist and conceptual approaches of the Hamburg School of Fine Arts where he studied from 1976 to 1982 under Ulrich Rückriem. His first figurative wooden sculptures from 1983 of a larger-than-life naked man and woman placed the human figure at the centre of his work and reintroduced the figure to contemporary sculpture. In the 1990s he added animals and hybrids, and more recently architecture to his artistic vocabulary. His practice also comprises drawings and photographs.

The artist uses a hammer and chisel to gouge his figures out of the tree trunk, leaving the shavings and traces of the tools visible in the wood with its knots, grain and cracks. He then uses paint to structure the sculpture and accentuate the anatomy, in no way heightening the figure's expressiveness. Balkenhol's people, heads and animals suggest an inner distance while remaining open to the viewer; "I seek an open expression from out of which all states are possible," emphasizes the artist.

Harriet Zilch, "Stephan Balkenhol's Images of Man in the Context of the Sculptural Tradition" in Stephan Balkenhol, Snoeck, 2006

Balkenhol has been representing contemporary figures, either as free-standing sculptures or reliefs in wood, of the everyday man or woman, which are at once enigmatic and playful and not devoid of humor. The figures are dressed in inconspicuous clothes (white shirts, plain trousers, simple dresses) in order to strip them of any narrative content and onto which the viewer is able to project his own image. The artist explains, "...my sculptures do not tell stories. They have something of a secret quality. It is not up to me to unveil it, but up to the viewer to discover it..."

Stephan Balkenhol was born in 1957 in Fritzlar (Hesse) in Germany. Today he lives and works between Karlsruhe, Germany and Meisenthal, France. He has exhibited widely in Europe and the United States and has had important recent solo exhibitions at: Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2008-2009); Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, touring to Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg and Museum der Moderne, Salzburg (2006-2007); The National Museum of Art, Osaka (2005);

Sprengel-Museum, Hanover (2003) and Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela (2001). Balkenhol is currently showing a monumental sculpture of a male torso in the Foro di Cesare in Rome, a human presence among the ruins, until 15 January 2010.

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