

STEPHAN BALKENHOL

NEUE SKULPTUREN

SALZBURG VILLA KAST

28 Aug 2017 - 15 Nov 2017



Opening: Monday, 28th August 2017, 6 - 7.30 PM
The Artist will be present

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac Salzburg presents a solo exhibition by the German sculptor Stephan Balkenhol (b 1957 in Fritzlar, Hessen). During his studies with Ulrich Rückriem at the Hamburg Academy of Fine Arts (1976-82), Stephan Balkenhol had already decided on figurative work. In view of the conceptual strictness and minimalism of his teacher's works, and the dominance of abstract trends in sculpture in the 1960s and '70s, this was by no means a matter of course. His first coloured wood sculptures, created in 1982 and 1983, evinced a typical Balkenhol style, which continued to develop over the ensuing years, gradually expanding to include a growing body of themes. An archaic, expressive treatment of the wood is combined with the representation of human, animal or fantastic figures, either frozen in unpretentious poses or involved in everyday, emotionless interaction. Despite precise coordination of the proportions, the wood remains as roughly split, carved material. The creatures depicted are either over- or undersized – never their natural size. This method of alienation creates an interesting field of tension: while from a human angle the figures seem very close, they are spatially detached and far removed from reality. In addition, Balkenhol's figures are not associated with any particular milieu, and are not to be regarded under social aspects. Their content is open and neutral, and they convey no other message apart from that of their own presence. On the one hand, with his commitment to banality and playfulness Balkenhol demonstrates an affinity with Pop Art, and with his insistence on autonomy and self-referentiality a kinship with Minimal Art. On the other hand, in his endeavour to liberate sculpture from political, religious or allegorical implications, he stands in the tradition of sculptors such as Aristide Maillol, Georg Kolbe or Wilhelm Lehmbrock. Balkenhol says: "I don't want garrulous, overly expressive figures. So I look for an open kind of expression which will allow any state of mind or situation."

"Stephan Balkenhol is one of those contemporary sculptors, who transfers principles of Minimal Art and Conceptual Art the closest and the most precise into a present context" (Robert Fleck). This point of view may appear surprising because Stephan Balkenhol's work is primarily associated with figurative approach. The shape of the steady cube, that constitutes these sculptures' origin, remains visible for the viewer in the whole-body sculptures as well. The upper part is virtually present as the figural shape accepts its measure. The real cube in the lower part is connected inseparably with the figural shape that arises out of it and therefore seems to continue. Ulrich Rückriem: "As the only one of my students Balkenhol understood that you are only allowed to make a sculpture out of a single block and that you have to accept the block."

In a conversation held in 2011 about Balkenhol's works, Thomas Oberender remarked: "In their white shirts and black trousers, in their simple clothes, these people could equally well come from town or country, they could be rich or poor sad or contented. They ... look. They are poised very precisely in that state of repose that makes them somehow universally familiar. In their attitude, too, they are subtly unpredictable because they are occupied with nothing but waiting, looking into the distance whence they came and whither they are going, apparently without wish or intention. [...] I think this indeterminacy that we find so attractive is achieved by most precise calculation."

Stephan Balkenhol lives and works in Kassel, Meisenthal (Alsace), Karlsruhe and Berlin. His works are to be seen in the collections of major international museums of contemporary art, and have been presented worldwide in institutional solo exhibitions since the 1980s. His most recent comprehensive solo exhibitions have included the Moscow Museum of Modern Art (2016), the Fondation Fernet-Branca, Saint-Louis (2016), the Landesmuseum Linz (2014), the Skulpturenpark Waldfrieden, Wuppertal (2014), the Kunstmuseum Ravensburg (2014), the Musée de Grenoble (2010), Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2008/09), Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden, Museum Küppersmühle, Duisburg, Museum der Moderne, Salzburg (2006/07), National Museum of Art, Osaka (2005) and Sprengel Museum, Hanover (2003).

For public spaces Stephan Balkenhol realized among other: *Man with Fish*, Chicago (2000), *Four Large Figures*, San Francisco (2005), *Giraffenmann*, Strasbourg (2006), *Sphaera*, Salzburg (2007), *Balanceakt*, Berlin and *Sempre più...*, Roman Forum, Rome (both 2009), *Mann im Turm*, St.-Elisabeth-Church, Kassel (2012), *Denkmal für Richard Wagner*, Leipzig (2013) and *Denkmal für Jean Moulin*, Metz (2014).

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