

Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle

Stephan Balkenhol

Feb 3, 2017 – Apr 1, 2017

Opening: Thursday, 02 Feb 2017, 7 – 9 pm



Stephan Balkenhol, Mann, 2016, obeche, 185 x 45 x 45 cm
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Stephan Balkenhol is internationally renowned for his painted sculptures carved from large tree trunks with saws, chisels, and burins. Often created from one piece of wood, the figures appear as if they have grown out of their plinth and mesmerize the beholder with the artisanal virtuosity they embody. The human being is at the center of Balkenhol's work. He confronts us with men and women the likes of whom we encounter every day, depicting them in a wide variety of poses and clothes and thus fascinate us with their subdued charm. Who hasn't seen him, the "man in black pants and white shirt," versions of whom you may bump into in heavily-trafficked public places such as museums as well as in the private sphere. Balkenhol's figures are incredibly present; they emanate serenity and a sense of calm. Our eyes are strangely unable to meet their gazes; the figures appear introverted and contemplative, as if pondering their own existence or interrogating the beholder's alter ego. In Balkenhol's oeuvre, it is especially the hybrid sculptures, embodying the animalistic qualities of humans, that exert a particular appeal. The artist's preferred kind of wood is the large abachi trunk, imported from West Africa, which possesses a uniform structure and can have a diameter of up to two meters. But Balkenhol has also mastered the art of working with other types of wood like no one else, such as *Lignum vitae*, one of the densest woods in the world.

Each work is based on a preliminary sketch. In an unmistakable, casual style, the contours and facial expressions are traced with only a handful of concise pen strokes. These ideas are then transferred to the third dimension on the block of wood, their rough structure first being sawed into the block and chipped away at in ever-smaller quantities, until finally the figures look at us in all their physicality and each splinter left on the surface has become part of the whole. It is not only wood that the artist uses: Many of his bronze sculptures can be found in public spaces—for instance in London, Paris, Hamburg, Salzburg, Frankfurt, Chicago, Amsterdam, and Berlin. Stephan Balkenhol's creativity is truly one of a kind; the hours of his industrious contemplation of wood are the artist's lifeblood. We are very excited to discover new humans and creatures by Balkenhol.

Stephan Balkenhol (born in Fritzlar in 1957; lives and works in Kassel, Meisenthal/Lorraine, Karlsruhe, and Berlin) is one of the most important contemporary German sculptors. From 1976 to 1982, he studied under Ulrich Rückriem at the Hamburg School of Fine Arts in and has been Professor of Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe since 1992. His works have been exhibited worldwide since 1983 in venues such as the Sprengel Museum Hannover (2003), the National Museum of Art in Osaka (2005), the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan (2007), the Deichtorhallen Hamburg (2008), the Museum of Grenoble (2010), the Landesmuseum Linz (2014), and the Moscow Museum of Modern Art (2016).

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