

Stephan Balkenhol

26 April – 24 May 2008

Private View Friday 25 April 2008, 6–8pm

Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by German artist Stephan Balkenhol.

Following on from a major retrospective at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden which toured to venues in Germany and Austria, this exhibition presents an important opportunity to reassess the artist's work at this significant moment in his career.

Balkenhol's practice grew out of the dominant trends of Minimalism and Conceptualism in the 1970s, where he stood alone in his desire to reintroduce the figure to contemporary sculpture. His rigorous and deep commitment to the exploration and reworking of the figurative tradition has continued throughout his career. In his artistic vocabulary the artist has monumentalised the 'everyday man'. Using drawings, photography or working from memory, the artist treats his subject with an immediacy that recalls the style and concerns of German Social Expressionism.

Carved from a single wood block and often incorporating a pediment, each work demonstrates the artist's raw and spontaneous treatment of the material. Chisel marks, fissures and splinters show the medium as both living and inanimate. The surface reveals but ultimately contains the figure within.

Sensuous and sturdy, yet fragile and enigmatic, the people, animals and architectural scenes Balkenhol depicts are approximations of reality; they are ideas of beings, objects and places. With their everyday attire, neutral poses and expressions, his figures negate and transcend the specifics of individuality and narrative. On occasion the artist seeks to playfully undermine their classical stasis with familiar poses from art history or gestures that could indicate expression and personality; ultimately these remain unfulfilled. His relentless pursuit of the human form ennoble his subjects from their humble materiality, capturing an experience that is universally familiar and yet distant and inert.

In November 2008, Balkenhol will present a major survey exhibition at the Deichtorhallen, Hamburg. Recent solo exhibitions include Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo (2007); Regen Projects, Los Angeles (2006); Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (2006) touring to Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg and Museum der Moderne, Salzburg (2006); The National Museum of Art, Osaka (2005); Sprengel-Museum, Hannover (2003). Recent group exhibitions include 'Figures in the Field', MCA, Chicago (2006); 'figur/skulptur', Sammlung Essl - Kunst der Gegenwart Klosterneuburg, Wien (2005); 'Faces in the Crowd', Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2005) and 'Bodily Space', Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo (2004). His work is included in major museum collections worldwide.

Forthcoming exhibition: Jim Hodges, 31 May - 19 July 2008

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

For further details please contact Charlotte Nourse on +44 (0)20 7494 1434