

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Stephan Balkenhol

Friday 20 January - Saturday 25
February 2023

Private view:
Thursday 19 January, 6–8pm

Gallery hours:
Tuesday–Friday, 10am–6pm
Saturday 11am–5pm



Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition by German artist **Stephan Balkenhol**.

Balkenhol is recognised not only for the technical prowess with which he hand-carves wooden sculptures, but for his devotion to exploring the role of figuration within contemporary art.

Using a singular block of wood, Balkenhol creates his timeless works without the use of machinery. They retain the grooves, cracks, chips and fissures that reveal the sculpting process, demonstrating the artist's raw and spontaneous treatment of the material. His process advances the longstanding tradition of woodcarving in Germany, inviting comparisons to sculptors such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Ernst Barlach.

Balkenhol's anonymous figures are painted in simple colour combinations, appearing both living and inanimate, and devoid of emotion. The artist explains: "I don't want talkative, expressive figures, which is why I seek an open expression from out of which all states are possible." Whilst clothing or objects provide hints at potential narratives, the figures are liberated from moral, political and aesthetic precepts that frequently shape contemporary figuration.

In 'Man with hat' a male figure gazes upwards with his feet firmly apart. He is dressed in a simple shirt and trousers which comically contrast to his busby bearskin hat, usually accompanied by military uniform. The figure demonstrates what the artist describes as a "secret quality" that places the very idea of the subject into question, instead acting as a "wooden mirror" for the viewer's imagination.

Whilst much of Balkenhol's practice focuses on the human form, the artist also depicts scenes of nature. In one relief, a mushroom appears unusually enlarged, as though the viewer is bending down for a closer look. It is unpretentious and contextless yet conjures the immediate presence of the natural world.

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Contact Us

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Stephan Balkenhol

Stephan Balkenhol was born in 1957 in Fritzlar, Germany. He lives and works in Karlsruhe, Germany and Meisenthal, France.

Balkenhol studied at the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg from 1976-82. He has completed a significant number of public commissions throughout his career, with installations in front of the Blackfriars Bridge in London, at the entrance of the Hamburg Zoo, Germany; at the Städelches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt, Germany; in Le Havre, France; and in Kassel and Leipzig, Germany.

A solo exhibition of recent sculptures by Balkenhol opened at Stephen Friedman Gallery in January 2023. Other notable solo presentations include: 'Stephan Balkenhol', Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, Germany (2020-2021); 'Stephan Balkenhol', Museum Jorn, Silkeborg, Denmark (2020); 'Le Prévu et l'Imprévu', Palais d'Iéna, Paris, France (2020); 'Stephan Balkenhol', Museum of Sepulchral Culture, Kassel, Germany (2019); 'Stephan Balkenhol', Kunsthalle Emden, Emden, Germany (2018) and '30 Years Stephan Balkenhol', Deweer Gallery, Brussels, Belgium (2017).

Balkenhol's works are included in prominent collections internationally, including the Musée des Beaux Arts de Montréal, Quebec, Canada; Smithsonian Institution, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., USA; Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, USA; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Germany; Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn, Germany; Musée de Grenoble, Grenoble, France and National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan.

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Stephen Friedman Gallery represents exceptional artists from around the world. Since its inauguration in 1995, the gallery has been based in London on Old Burlington Street, Mayfair. The gallery has three spaces in which it hosts solo and group exhibitions throughout the year. Additional works can be viewed by appointment in private rooms and office spaces. There is also a facility to exhibit outdoor sculpture in a landscaped private garden.

In Autumn 2023, Stephen Friedman Gallery will expand and relocate to Cork Street, Mayfair. The new location will be designed by award-winning London architectural firm David Kohn Architects.