

STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

Stephan Balkenhol

4 September – 8 October 2013



Stephen Friedman Gallery is delighted to present an exhibition of new work by German artist Stephan Balkenhol. This is the artist's eighth exhibition at the gallery and follows his recently unveiled monument to Richard Wagner in Leipzig and an installation at St Elizabeth Church, Kassel, to coincide with Documenta 13. Continuing his devotion to exploring the role of the figure in contemporary art, the exhibition combines an oversized ballerina figure, a series of wooden screens, adorned with Balkenhol's photographic prints, plus a selection of figurative column works and reliefs.

The front room contains a series of new wall-mounted works on board. Inspired by a recent trip to Canada, Balkenhol has printed his own digitally altered photographs of the epic landscape of British Columbia directly onto the wooden surface. He has disturbed the original image by painting or carving into the printed background, enhancing the atmospheric quality created by the view of this vast, unpopulated landscape. These bold areas of colour and incision contrast with the muted tone and palette of image behind. The installation is completed by a large ballerina figure, carved from a single block of wawa wood, removed from the imagery behind by the nature of her pose, costume and physical standing. Balkenhol has subverted the landscapes, placing a strong figure from another place entirely in amongst the barren scenery.

The back gallery spaces feature a series of smaller sculptures, both single columns and two part works with panels and stools, plus wall-mounted reliefs. These pieces continue Balkenhol's commitment to figurative expression. Though still expressive, each work proudly displays the rough, chiselled and hand-painted surface upon which the artist has worked yet the proportions of the figure are precisely coordinated. Each man or woman wears the same unpretentious, indifferent expression which acts as vessel for the viewer's emotional projection, described by the artist as being a 'wooden mirror'. These works are grouped together yet somehow separate; one sculpture gazes on another while that objects affection lies elsewhere.

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Balkenhol is renowned for his technical prowess in depicting the human figure through the medium of hand-carved poplar or wawa wood. He creates these sculptures from a single block, often combining the anonymous subjects with tall columns. Each work proudly displays the rough, chiselled and hand-painted surface upon which the artist has worked yet the proportions of the figure are precisely coordinated, frozen in unpretentious, emotionless poses. A semblance of the Minimalist tradition still resides in the calm, understated beauty of these works, trends the artist was exposed to whilst attending the Hamburg School of Fine Arts from 1976-82. His tutors there included Nam June Paik and Sigmar Polke who both profoundly affected his subsequent artistic practice.

Balkenhol, when shrinking the scale of his works, playfully disrupts the history of figurative sculpture by subverting the monumentality so often associated with it. Furthermore, his figures emanate timelessness through the simple, plain-coloured clothing and the confident yet unassuming poses of the everyday man or woman; the open expressions align with any state of mind, emotion or situation.

Stephan Balkenhol (b. 1957 in Fritzlar, Germany) lives and works in Karlsruhe, Germany and Meisenthal, France.

Recent Solo exhibitions include; 'Universe', Galerie Thaddeus Ropac, Salzburg (2013); 'New Works', Galerie Forsblom, Helsinki (2012); 'A Sign in the Forum of Caesar - Stephan Balkenhol More and More', Valentina Bonomo Gallery, Rome (2012); 'Unlimited Bodies - Corps Sans Limite', Palais d'Iéna, Paris (2012); Stephen Friedman Gallery, London (2011); Tomio Koyama Gallery, Kyoto (2011); Musée de Grenoble, Grenoble (2010); Dogenhaus Galerie, Leipzig (2009); 'This is Not to be Looked At: Highlights from the Permanent Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art', Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2008).

Recent group exhibitions include; 'Lost in LA', Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles (2013-2012); 'Art is beautiful but hard work too', Kunstbau, Munich (2012-2013); 'Unlimited Bodies', Palais Dena, Paris (2012); 'Invisibleness is Visibleness', Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, Taipei (2011); 'Wings', Galerie Thaddeus Ropac, Salzburg (2010); 'PastPresentFuture: Works from the UniCredit Art Collection', Bank Austria Kunstforum, Vienna (2009); Toured to Palazzo della Regione, Verona and Yapi Credi Cultural Center, Istanbul (2009); 'Listen Darling The World Is Yours', Ellipse Foundation Contemporary Art Center, Lisbon (2008); 'New Dimensions', John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco (2007); 'Figures in the Field: Figurative Sculpture and Abstract Painting from Chicago Collections', MCA Chicago, Chicago (2006).

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

Forthcoming exhibition: **Kehinde Wiley 'The World Stage: Jamaica'**, 15 October to 16 November 2013.

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