

## Stephan Balkenhol

18 March – 16 April 2011

Private View Thursday 17 March 2011, 6 – 8pm.



Stephen Friedman Gallery is delighted to present an exhibition of new work by German artist Stephan Balkenhol. This is the artist's seventh exhibition at the gallery and follows on from his acclaimed public sculpture *sempre più* at the Roman Forum in 2009. Balkenhol has developed a significant repertoire of public commissions spanning his twenty-year career, with installations in front of the Blackfriars Bridge in London, at the entrance of the Hamburg Zoo and at the Städelches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt.

As a renowned sculptor, Balkenhol is recognised not only for the technical prowess with which he hand carves each of his wooden sculptures, but for his continual devotion to exploring the role of the figure within contemporary art.

*"The demystification of monumental sculpture pursued by Balkenhol was obtained by the total anonymity of the subject, as well as the handcrafting of the material...(his) sculptures assert themselves like anonymous but disturbing presences."* Ludovico Pratesi 'sempre più' pp.50-51, 2010

Attending the Hamburg School of Fine Arts from 1976 – 82, Balkenhol was exposed to the Minimalist and Conceptual trends popular at that time, with tutors including Nam June Paik and Sigmar Polke. His experience here profoundly affected his subsequent artistic practice. Sensing an absence in these two schools of thought, Balkenhol sought out the human figure and began a considered campaign to reintroduce it into contemporary art, declaring: *"I must reinvent the figure to resume an interrupted tradition"*.

The artist's unique sculptures combine anonymous human figures with tall pedestals, all hand carved from singular blocks, often of poplar or wawa wood. The figures emanate timelessness: simple, plain-coloured clothing and the confident yet unassuming poses of the everyday man are key here. Yet the monumentality so often associated with the history of figurative sculpture is playfully disrupted. The works are shrunk in scale and display proudly the rough, chiselled and hand painted surface upon which the artist has worked. Concurrently, a semblance of the Minimalist tradition still resides in the calm, understated beauty of these works.

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Stephan Balkenhol (b. 1957 in Germany) lives and works in Meisenthal, France. Notable past solo exhibitions include *Stephan Balkenhol*, Musée de Grenoble, Grenoble (2010); *Stephan Balkenhol*, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2008-2009); *Stephan Balkenhol*, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden (2006); *Stephan Balkenhol*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Osaka (2005); *Stephan Balkenhol*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv (2005); Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2003); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC (1995); The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (1991). Notable past group exhibitions include *Stephan Balkenhol – Alberto Giacometti*, Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg (2010); *Listen Darling The World Is Yours*, Ellipse Foundation Contemporary Art Center, Lisbon (2008); *Faces in the Crowd*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2005); 1995 *Carnegie International*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh PA (1995); *Doubletake*, Hayward Gallery, London (1992).

Forthcoming exhibition: **Ged Quinn** 22 April – 28 May 2011.

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

For further details please contact Alice Walters on +44 (0)20 7494 1434