

30 May – 11 July 2015
Opening 30 May, 5 – 8 PM

Stephan Balkenhol

New Sculptures



Neuling / Newcomer
2015, coloured Wawa wood, 30 x 30 x 4 cm

As one of the most important sculptors of his generation, Stephan Balkenhol's (1957, Fritzlar, Germany) predominately figurative works have influenced the contemporary idea of sculpture in an enduring way. Lodged in the temporal and stylistic continuity that extends from ancient Egypt, through medieval polychrome wood statuary to Renaissance portraiture, his archetypal figures, usually carved out of one massive block of wood, are a kind of twenty-first century "every man" or "every woman." Neither idealized nor individualized—frozen in mundane postures, representing nobody in particular—the figures do not seek to impose or represent. Instead, the lightness, appeal, and simplicity emerging from the wood give them an enigmatic presence, unpretentious in their character of play.

With Balkenhol's work, one is encouraged to observe. There is no pathos speaking from the figures' gestures and expressions—every emotion would already be a reading, which would pin down the figure—and as they are only what they are, they become astonishingly open for the viewer, liberated from all political, religious or allegorical implications, free in their own reality; one that, though in a way seemingly "not of this world," still belongs to our present time.

As Balkenhol himself comments, his figures are, in some way, "exactly like us," as they "say a lot and nothing." The wood corresponds to the tempo of Balkenhol's thoughts and labour. Where stone is "too slow," and plaster and clay are "too fast," wood is both resistant and alive, material that can be researched in the process of chiselling. The sculptural possibilities are, somehow, already hidden in the wood of the tree trunk.

Stephan Balkenhol, who studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg in the class of Ulrich Rückriem, has exhibited widely in galleries and museums around the globe, including major solo exhibitions at the Austrian Landesgalerie Linz (2014-2015), Kunstmuseum Ravensburg (2014), Skulpturenpark Waldfrieden in Wuppertal (2014), Musée de Grenoble (2010-2011), Deichtorhallen Hamburg (2008-2009), Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden/Baden (2006), the National Museum of Art, Osaka/Tokyo (2005), Fries Museum Leeuwarden (2001), and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. (1995). He has made a number of sculptures for the public space throughout Europe; e.g. Germany, France and the Netherlands. Balkenhol was recently awarded the French Order of Arts and Letters (2014).