

DEWEER ART GALLERY

Stephan Balkenhol

New works

11.11 - 16.12.07

Deweer Art Gallery was Stephan Balkenhol's first gallery abroad and has documented his evolution in several shows. After a first appearance in the group-show *Neue Deutsche Skulptur* in 1986, Stephan Balkenhol was introduced one year later with a solo-show. His most recent exhibition at the gallery was in 2005. The gallery was a partner in a lot of Balkenhol's international projects, such as his exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution (US) in 1995, a sculptural ensemble placed on the Rembrandt Square in Leiden (NL) in 2005, another ensemble for the Veemarkt in Kortrijk (BE) in the same year, his project for the Beaufort Triennial in 2006 and recently his outdoor show in the sculptural program of the Museo Parco Archeologico di Scolacio in Catanzaro (IT).

For this show - his eighth solo-show at Deweer Art Gallery, celebrating 20 years of collaboration - Stephan Balkenhol will present new wood sculptures, wood reliefs and drawings, and a lithography made for the occasion. Some of the pieces will demonstrate the artist's latest sculptural experiments, both in form and concept.

Balkenhol's wooden sculptures spurn the classical ideals of beauty and present us with the nondescript everyday man or woman. His works have affinities to the wood carving tradition of the Middle Ages and northern renaissance and the 'naive' folk art of Poland and eastern Europe, yet there is more whimsy than Gothic in his forms. As Neal Benezra said in catalogue text of Balkenhol's exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 1995: *'He does not seek to recapture the heroic glory of bygone periods but rather demonumentalizes the figurative statue by thrusting the most unremarkable men and women onto pedestals historically reserved for heroes and heroines.'*

Balkenhol avoids creating a narrative or leading to an allegorical interpretation. His figures are devoid of specific associations. The figures are either smaller than life or larger than life, but they are never quite human size. Balkenhol

doesn't want to fool you, he wants to make sure you know it's a sculpture. He has resuscitated the figurative sculpture from what was a burdensome tradition and has given it his own distinctive approach.

In the catalogue on Balkenhol's first solo show at Deweer Art Gallery in 1987, Jo Coucke wrote: *'The sculptures of Stephan Balkenhol have a surprising quality. Is it because they gaze without seeing? Or because their posture is so timeless? They are present, but they never impose themselves. They are statues in the most solemn sense of the word. The artist has deliberately excluded emotion from their gesture and posture, so they could have an inner psychological life. Their appearance is characterised by classic, almost Egyptian features.'*

'What I find interesting is to use the pretext of making a figure, a head – that is, first, to state the theme – to make something that is concentrated and closed, that does not expect any applause from its environment, but that is present without making any claims on the spectator... I am concerned with the resistance offered to me by the theme and the material', says the sculptor.

Whether it is a figure of a lion, an equestrian statue, a male or a female figure, in the round or in relief inside half a tree trunk, Stephan Balkenhol always and explicitly offers the simultaneity of (sculptural) object value and (pictorial) representational value. The sculpture's object value is the result of material reality, in which a train of events has led to its creation, while the representational value is an homage to the unattainable idea.

In Balkenhol's oeuvre, iconography is not a direct function of meaning. In fact, it is mainly a function of sculpture. And that is essential to this oeuvre. These sculptures do not have a subservient function. They do not convey a message, nor do they personify anything: they are sufficient onto themselves.'

At his very first exhibition in 1987, when these words were written, and on every occasion after that, Balkenhol's originality and inventiveness have been surprising.

Stephan Balkenhol: biography

1957

born in Fritzlar / Hessen – lives in Karlsruhe (D) and Meisenthal (F)

1976-82

studies at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg

1983

Karl-Schmidt-Rottluff-Stipendium

1986

working stipendium of the Free Hansatown of Hamburg

1988-89

teaches at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg

Förderpreis of the international prize of the State of Baden-Württemberg, Bremer Kunstpreis

1990-91

teaches at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Frankfurt (Städelschule)

1991-92

teaches at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Karlsruhe

1992

professor of sculpture at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Karlsruhe

Selected solo exhibitions (since 2000)

2000

Kunstverein Oldenburg

The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio (USA)

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

Saint Louis Arts Center, St Louis, Missouri

2001

Centro Galego de Arte Contemporaneo, Santiago de Compostela

Fries Museum Leeuwarden

Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig

Kunstforum Baloise, Basel

2002

Begegnungsstätte Kleine Synagoge Erfurt

2003

Le Rectangle, Lyon

Goethe-Institut, Lyon

Sprengel Museum Hannover, Hannover

2005

The National Museum of Art, Osaka

2006

Stephan Balkenhol, Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden

Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg

2007

Deweert Art Gallery, Otegem

Museo Parco Archeologico di Scholacium, Catanzaro

Museum der Moderne, Salzburg

2008

Deichtorhallen, Hamburg

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