

## Goya Contemporary / Goya-Girl Press

3000 Chestnut Ave, Suite 214 . Baltimore, MD 21211

Goya Contemporary is pleased to present sculpture by German artist Stephan Balkenhol. A student of Ulrich Ruckreim in Hamburg, Balkenhol's exploration of the figure emerged from the minimalist tradition in German sculpture. Balkenhol's sculptures are roughly hewn from single blocks of wood, though the artist professes that it is not the material itself that interests him, but the spontaneity and immediacy it allows in creating his forms-- more than metal or stone could allow. The figures are painted and cut from the same block as their pedestals. Unlike Expressionists such as Kirchner and Baselitz who use color to heighten the figure's expressive possibilities, the features of Balkenhol's figures are bluntly distinguished by a minimal application of paint. Raw wood is left to represent skin or flesh.

The distant expression of many of these figures evokes the seemingly objective gaze of photographers such as August Sanders and Thomas Ruff. This cool evenness of expression contrasts the expressive quality of sculpted wood and the strong presence of the hand. Balkenhol has remarked that the figure is "so heavy with meaning: human figures always have to do with self-reflection on some level... they can work like a mirror." Balkenhol counteracts this by generalizing his subjects, isolating only the most subtle nuances of character in the gesture of a hand or the bend of a knee.

(Stephan Balkenhol. The Arts Club of Chicago. 1998)

"Marshalling incredible technique with understated force, [Balkenhol] can be thought of as a young sculptural counterpart of Alex Katz. There is an aloof poignancy common to them, which is at once tough and vulnerable. They similarly reconcile opposites: Awkwardness and fluency, bruteness and sensitivity, economy and detail. ... Rough and smooth cohabit effortlessly in a Balkenhol. Sometimes he seems, literally, to draw with an axe, and even where he obviously is using a more delicate implement, he manages to balance tender specifics -- especially in hand and face gestures -- with an allover robustness." (Cohen, David. "Balkenhol." New York Sun. Thursday, May 29, 2003, pg. 15.)

Born in Fritzlar/Hessen in 1957, Balkenhol lives and works in Karlsruhe, Germany and Meisenthal, France. Balkenhol has exhibited extensively throughout Europe and the United States. He has been awarded the Karl-Schmidt-Rottluff Grant; the Baden-Württemberg International Prize; and the Bremen Art Prize. Recent solo exhibitions include: the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea de Santiago de Compostela, Spain; The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg; the Von-der-Heydt Museum, Wuppertal-Elberfeld; The Arts Club of Chicago; The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; the Centre Europeen d'Actions Artistiques Contemporaines, Strasbourg; and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.