

# LISSON GALLERY

LONDON

**TONY CRAGG**

**28 June - 3 August**

One of the hallmarks of Tony Cragg's sculpture, since it first received public attention during the mid-1970's, has been its sheer variety of forms, materials, imagery and techniques. More recently, however, commentators such as Richard Wollheim have drawn attention to the strong threads of consistency which underpin this apparent diversity.

In a typical Cragg show, be it at a small gallery or a major museum, the visitor will be presented with an extraordinarily rich variety of materials: from bronze to polystyrene, plaster to steel, wood to plastic, granite to glass. He or she will also be faced with an equally complex set of imagery and forms: a massively oversized disposable plastic screw-top bottle, or a schematic house, an abstracted human head or figure, a landscape, a piece of industrial machinery, or a musical instrument case.

This kind of systematic diversity is uncommon in contemporary art. We normally expect an artist's work or an exhibition to be visibly homogenous - to be made from a single material or process, or to treat a particular subject or genre in a characteristic way. Cragg's work seems to defy this convention, to go against the grain.

Yet at the same time, faced with this unusual variety, the viewer is not left with a sense that this is an arbitrary or an undisciplined array of images and materials. Rather, one is made to look for less obvious levels of continuity, to reflect on the kinds of choices and decisions made by the artist concerning the treatment of a particular image and the relationship between different works.

Cragg himself, who will often be working in his studio on a number of different sculptures at the same time, always pays close attention to the selection of works for particular space. This might mean that the final decision of works to be included in an exhibition will only be decided at the last moment, during the installation of the works.

For this exhibition, Cragg will be showing up to nine new works. These will represent the full diversity of his subject matter and materials, but the precise selection and arrangement will not be finalised until the installation.

As Cragg's work has evolved over the last decade and a half, he has consistently engaged with the complex problems facing contemporary sculpture. Much of his earlier work tackled the issues of the Duchampian 'Readymade' and the Surrealist 'Found Object'. He took on the legacy of Conceptual Art and the 'Earthwork' in the production of a series of classic scatter pieces and stacks made from shards of plastic waste and industrial detritus.

Cragg's work has continued the tradition of the 'painter of modern life' in his critical yet open engagement with the conditions of contemporary industry, science, archaeology and the environment. This is a particular unifying thread in his work. The 'readymade' now has a less prominent place in his production, having given way to a more pictorial form of sculpture where the image has been more systematically worked. But in the process of subjecting his forms to different kinds of manipulation - through enlargement or stretching, or in artificially ageing the forms through techniques of patination, erosion or excavation - Cragg has given his work more substance and complexity. Throwaway objects become monumental and totemic; the products of contemporary industrial western culture appear as the fossilised deposits of a distant evolutionary cycle.

In such ways Cragg's sculpture bears on our perceptions of the modern world and on our ideas about history, reflects on the places and values we ascribe to objects and experiences. That is, it both looks carefully at the world and at how we look at things.

Tony Cragg was born in Liverpool in 1949. After working in a scientific laboratory he attended Gloucester and Wimbledon Schools of Art before taking his MA at the Royal College of Art in 1977. Since his first one man exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in 1979, Cragg's work acquired wide international acclaim throughout the 1980's. In 1987 he was given a large solo show at the Hayward Gallery, London; the following year he was selected as the British representative at the Venice Biennale. In 1989 he was awarded the Tate Gallery's Turner Prize, and last year the Newport Harbor Art Museum organised a major touring exhibition 'Tony Cragg: Sculpture 1975-90', for which a full colour catalogue was produced. This is Cragg's sixth exhibition at the Lisson Gallery.

**For further information, please contact Caroline Logsdail or Louise Flesh on 071 724 2739.**

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