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# hube

## **TONY CRAGG: LIFE'S A FOREST WALK**

ART



TONY CRAGG  
Photography by DAVID KALUZA, 2007  
Courtesy the Artist and LISSON GALLERY

1988 Turner prize winner **Tony Cragg** is a widely recognised name in the field of contemporary sculpture. Nearly 4 decades on, his love for the medium still resonates with each sentence he speaks. Although Cragg has largely remained private, the source of his deeply intuitive practice is clear: a profound reverence for nature. A naturalist in his own right, the evolution of his sculptures often mirrors the forms he observes on his morning walks through the forest. By 1981, Cragg had already participated in twelve exhibitions; today, his work continues to be shown across galleries and museums worldwide.

While Cragg's work appears almost idyllic, appearing to take on a life of its own, it is never purely spontaneous. Each piece is a response, rather than an impulsive creation. Moving like water droplets down a windowpane, his forms bend and fold, using materiality to create a dialogue between the outer world and the artist's mind. As American naturalist Tom Brown Jr. writes, "this earth is a garden, this life a banquet," Cragg's work continuously captures the richness of textures, shapes, and delights all around, resisting any flattening of their complexity.

In this interview with *hube*, Cragg discusses walking away from Fluxus, listening to Jimi Hendrix in the studio, and whether materials might have a mind of their own.

**hube:** Sorry if I'm sounding a bit raspy, I've lost my voice.

**Tony Cragg:** It's the Christmas carols and alcohol that does it [laughs].

**h:** So going back, when you look back at the earliest days of your practice, what do you feel has changed the most in the way that you approach work and move within your practice?

**TC:** You mean from 55 years ago to now?

**h:** Yeah.

**TC:** How much time do we have? So many things have changed. First of all, when I started, it was just a pure delight of making things. I had no technical abilities and didn't know anything about sculpture. But in Britain, in '69, '70, there was Henry Moore in one generation and Anthony Caro in another. There was awareness of Richard Long and Gilbert and George. Being a young 20-year-old person at that time, I was influenced by what was going on in the art world: pop art and Arte Povera.

There were a lot of movements that centered on finding objects and bringing them into the context of art, like Andy Warhol's *Soup Cans* and Joseph Beuys's *Pictures to a Dead Hare*. Most of the art making was based on the ready-made principle. This was a very important thing for me to get to start with because I was just looking at the world and the different materials, forms, and shapes in it.

This provided me with an enormous vocabulary of objects and forms, which was what drove my work. But, by the '70s, other younger sculptors and myself felt that this ready-made principle was running out of steam – it got to the point where there were BMWs in a museum. And so, I started to carve and move materials around. The very first thing I did was a terrible sculpture. I took some found objects, and made their shadows. After, I took the found objects themselves away. It was just a black mess, but it was the beginning of making things physically for me.



TONY CRAGG  
*Incident (Vertical)*, 2022; Corten Steel; 230 x 84 x 94 cm; 90 1/2 x 33 1/8 x 37 in  
© TONY CRAGG, Courtesy of LISSON GALLERY  
Photography by MICHAEL RICHTER



TONY CRAGG  
*Incident*, 2023; Stainless steel; 185 x 84 x 87 cm; 72 7/8 x 33 1/8 x 34 1/4 in  
© TONY CRAGG, Courtesy of LISSON GALLERY



Exhibition views of TONY CRAGG at LISSON GALLERY, London, 19 November 2025 – 31 January 2026  
© TONY CRAGG, Courtesy of LISSON GALLERY

**h: Now you can see the way that you experiment with physicality across all of your body work. In your new exhibition at Lisson Gallery, your works unfurl in vertical gesture. What discoveries emerged for you during their making, and even after decades of exploring materials, do they still teach you something new?**

**TC:** Of course. That's the delight of the thing. I'm not a designer, and I'm not a sculptor that makes something that already exists in another material, so I don't have a prescribed destination for my work. When I put pencil to paper, I watch where it's going, respond accordingly, and see what feelings arise.

As with my new work, I was surprised about how it turned out, as I didn't know what I was going to do. I don't think good ideas are very good. They're not helpful in making interesting things, so I end up following the material and my chain of thoughts while working.

**h: Do the materials you work with carry different temperaments for you? Do they have personalities, almost like characters?**

**TC:** I would argue they have qualities, but not personalities. Material on its own is just matter; the response comes entirely from the human mind. Objects can exist without ever being seen, but without perception they hold no meaning. It's up to the sculptor, the musician, the writer, to give the material their personalities and meanings.

**h: Where does nature's tension find its way into your work? Are there elements of the natural world that still stop you in your tracks?**

**TC:** Being alive is what amazes me, to be honest. I am in awe about having an existence. I've actually just come out of the forest, as I've been walking through it this morning. It's a cold and windy, very typical autumn day, but it's somehow just magnificent.

I'm not a religious person in the formal sense, but I am reverent about being alive. I'm astonished all the time. There's very rarely an instant where I'm not in a state of wonderment.

**h: I was looking through your archive, and the drawings in it are so delicate and beautiful. How often do you find yourself drawing today, and does that act still function as an origin point for your three-dimensional work?**

**TC:** Many artists get to a point where they feel that their work just has to be made – there's not even a conscious moment about it. For me, drawing is more or less like that. First of all, it's a pleasure to draw, especially if I don't have to make something specific, but it is also a good way to two-dimensionally short-cut something that would take ages to work out with real material.

Some of my drawings are just explanatory diagrams, and act as instructions or reminders. I also think life drawing, which I did as a student, was invaluable. It's not just about drawing somebody, it's about looking at something so subtle, trying to get the feelings and the forms out of it. It doesn't matter how the drawing works out sometimes.



Exhibition views of TONY CRAGG at LISSON GALLERY, London, 19 November 2025 – 31 January 2026  
 © TONY CRAGG, Courtesy of LISSON GALLERY



TONY CRAGG  
*Path*, 2025; Corten steel; 236 x 151 x 106 cm; 92 7/8 x 59 1/2 x 41 3/4 in  
 © TONY CRAGG, Courtesy of LISSON GALLERY. Photography by MICHAEL RICHTER



TONY CRAGG  
*Contradiction*, 2024; Bronze; 340 x 117 x 131 cm; 133 7/8 x 46 1/8 x 51 5/8 in  
 © TONY CRAGG, Courtesy of LISSON GALLERY



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**h: Which creatives are subtly shaping the way you approach your work, whether they're artists, musicians, performers, or writers?**

**TC:** I'm very enthusiastic about sculpture in general. It's one of the only activities where we use materials without them being utilitarian – you don't have to sit on it, or drive it. It's about expanding material into space and seeing if it means anything.

There are lots of sculptors that I'm interested in. My wife's a painter, and I keep telling her that painting's just very thin sculpture, because for me, everything is sculptural, even music. It's still somebody vibrating the air, and then the ears. I also listen to music a lot: I can listen to anything from Bach to Jimi Hendrix. It's the quality of the music that I found interesting, not the genre. I also read a lot and walk in the forest every day.

**h: You've placed your work in so many remarkable settings around the world. Is there a moment that felt dreamlike to witness? And after showing work both outdoors and within walls, do you feel more at home in one space than the other?**

**TC:** After the Second World War, we knew that all materials and objects could be subjects of art. When making work indoors, you can create things out of sugar or chocolate. Making things outside is very different, because there're climate and human concerns. You go into a building of your own volition, whereas a sculpture in a public setting is subject to so many people seeing it involuntarily.

Every time you put a sculpture out there, it's like you've put an alien down in the back garden, and everybody gets a little bit aerated about it. After a while though, they usually say it's nice, and that it's their sculpture now. You can't have it back.

**h: Has there ever been an instance where one of your publicly installed works did get damaged?**

**TC:** Strangely enough, nobody's ever done any damage to my work. That's quite surprising in some ways.

We did an exhibition recently in a museum in Dusseldorf called *Please Touch* where visitors could touch all the big works. 135,000 people came for that show in a period of two months. They all touched every single work and we were amazed about how little damage was done. People were very respectful of it.

**h: Are there ideas or works that have remained unresolved over time, pieces that resist finality? How do you stay with that uncertainty without losing patience?**

**TC:** I have a little list of work I'm involved in at the moment – there are 34 projects on it, which I'm doing simultaneously. It sounds grand, but it's simply because I've been working on some of them for five or six years, and they don't seem to be going anywhere. I don't want to give up on them.

**h: Do you feel that the connection between the work and a grander idea or concept is necessary, or it's more about evoking emotion?**

**TC:** We live on a planet we are impoverishing and destroying. We've created a world driven by the simple parameters of industrial production. Its geometries are highly repetitive, and this destroys forests that are full of fantastic forms.

First, we need a meadow, so we take the forest down and plant it with corn. Then, after a while, we need a car park – we're dumbing things down. But sculpture is about discovering new forms. When you create new forms, you gain new ideas, emotions, and concepts that never existed before.

Art is the most human thing possible. When I was a student, there was a big conflict between form and content. One position was that content is not very interesting, and what's really important is the form. On the other hand, people that just were interested in content couldn't make reasonable drawings, paintings, or sculpture. Everything is a composite of both form and content.

**h: If you had to describe the future in three words, what would they be?**

**TC:** A lot of words I could do, but not three.

**h: That's okay too. It was a big ask.**

**TC:** Okay, then I'd say: A future is possible, but we have to think and behave differently.



Exhibition views of TONY CRAGG at LISSON GALLERY, London, 19 November 2025 – 31 January 2026  
© TONY CRAGG, Courtesy of LISSON GALLERY



TONY CRAGG  
*Untitled*, 2025; Bronze; 177 x 109 x 66 cm; 69 5/8 x 42 7/8 x 26 in  
© TONY CRAGG, Courtesy of LISSON GALLERY



TONY CRAGG

*All Shook Up*, 2025; Bronze; 226 x 151 x 118 cm; 89 x 59 1/2 x 46 1/2 in

© TONY CRAGG, Courtesy of LISSON GALLERY

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### **'Everything is Sculptural': Interview with Tony Cragg at Lisson Gallery, London**



*Exhibition views of 'Tony Cragg' at Lisson Gallery, London, 19 November 2025 – 31 January 2026. © Tony Cragg, Courtesy Lisson Gallery.*

**By GRACE PALMER** November 26, 2025

“Without material, there is nothing.” These powerful words, shared by Tony Cragg during our interview, encapsulate the very essence of his sculptural process. Embracing materiality, molecular interconnectivity and sculptural motion, Tony Cragg’s solo exhibition at the [Lisson Gallery](#), London, is a tribute to material. Centred around three significant series, *Path*, *Incident* and *Stand*, this exhibition showcases the rhythmic,

organic and even choreographic potential of sculpture. In works like *REM*, Cragg's handling of steel transgresses a legacy of sculptural formalism. Instead, Cragg grants his material agency. They adopt fluid forms that unravel, undulate and coalesce – confronting stasis through their dynamism. Yet, it is in the heart of the exhibition where Cragg's sculptural dance comes to life. Emerging from the ground, works like *All Shook Up* and *Recall* ripple and flow endlessly. As you pass through the space, their movement becomes all-encompassing. These sculptural bodies dance around each other, performing their routine. Navigating the gallery, it feels as if we, the spectators, become swept up in Cragg's choreography. I spoke with Cragg about his fierce espousal of materialism and his rejection of 'stuff', how his course of forms has a synonymy with dance, and the congruity he recognises in our material foundations.



Tony Cragg, *REM*, 2025, Stainless steel, 220 x 52 x 99 cm, 86 5/8 x 20 1/2 x 39 in. © Tony Cragg, Courtesy Lisson Gallery. Photo by Michael Richter.

**Palmer: This solo exhibition at the Lisson Gallery is centred around the latest additions to your *Incident*, *Path* and *Stand* sculptures. What is it about these series that keeps drawing you back to them? Why were these sculptures the ones you chose to return to for the Lisson exhibition?**

Cragg: The point of the exhibition is that I wanted to return to this gallery, where I've exhibited since 1979, to continue a dialogue with those interested in my work. It's more or less an exhibition of the work's development since the last exhibition, five years ago. That's where it really begins. *Incident* was, and is, an exciting way of working. Steel sculpture is historically quite new, as bronze has always been easy to manipulate. It's soft, with a low melting temperature. You can do a lot of stuff with it to make polymorphic

forms. But steel, as the word says, is the strong one. It's a turgid liquid when molten, with a much higher melting temperature. That's why you don't get people readily melting down steel. You need industrial things to do it. It's very difficult to work with, but it's incredibly strong. So, although many of the larger classical sculptures are bronze, they're full of steel inside.

Having looked at steel sculpture for many years, I became aware of the high beams and steel plates used by sculptors. That history passes through Eduardo Chillida to Mark di Suvero, through Anthony Caro, making steel sculptures that are always very constructive. It's usually these men, welding away, and I just thought what I wanted to do was to construct sculptures in this strong material, where you can expect more poise and position in space. By stressing the material, you could have a more organic or even lyrical quality. So *Incident* was fantastic because I carved them in polyurethane, a tough material that I can carve very precisely. Then, after I've carved the thing, it gets cast in steel. By doing this, it transfers that lightness of balance and poise from the soft material into the steel sculptures.

Since working on *Incident*, I've had two problems. One was, what are you using the strength for? You're using the strength to overcome gravity. That's all you're doing. It's the same with any building. So, what is sculptural? What's the next layer of meaning under that? Works like *Path*, or the other works in the central room, although they aren't necessarily steel, they tackle this problem: how to be more dynamic and energetic in the space. Whilst working with *Incident*, I have realised there are volumes of results that have to be dealt with and developed. There is more substance to them. They're not just bones, they're more muscular, more organ-like. I've been more or less working on works like *Incident*, *Path* and *Stand* simultaneously, exploring the substance of their materials.

**Palmer: Leading on from this, in interviews, you often reference the word 'matter' as the Latin derivative of the word meaning 'mother', calling yourself a materialist working alongside matter. As much as a 'mother' is a nurturer, do you find that in your position as a materialist, you can nurture the material? Is your role and oeuvre a means of returning agency to these materials, which, as you have been saying, in the past have been restricted to a constructive sculptural role?**

Cragg: I think that's a nice way of looking at it. When I've said I'm a materialist, it's an unpopular term. People think he's interested in 'things' which I'm not. I'm interested in the fact that I'm made of material, you're made of material, the room's made of material, and I don't know of anything else other than material. Even intelligence is a phenomenon of material; even love is a phenomenon of material. It's just that the result that comes out of it is that we are self-reflecting beings, which is a miracle. So I say I'm a materialist because I'm not a religious person. We are the result of all the material evolution up to today. space. Whilst working with *Incident*, I have realised there are volumes of results that have to be dealt with and developed. There is more substance to them. They're not just bones, they're more muscular, more organ-like. I've been more or less working on works like *Incident*, *Path* and *Stand* simultaneously, exploring the substance of their materials.

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*Exhibition views of 'Tony Cragg' at Lisson Gallery, London, 19 November 2025 – 31 January 2026. © Tony Cragg, Courtesy Lisson Gallery.*

**Palmer: The term 'porosity' is often used to describe your work, particularly those within the *Incident* series, as they bend and shape the air, space and viewer. For me, there's a sort of molecular interconnectivity between the internal material components and the external environment. Do you find that allowing the material to permeate its surroundings encourages your viewers to see beyond the form and consider our shared molecular foundation?**

Cragg: Absolutely. I don't want to get too chemical about it, but it is seriously the case. We have these survival mechanisms, such as seeing, hearing, and feeling, but people in front of art have completely different reactions. If you put a hundred people in front of an artwork, they'll write totally different things. Art allows a person to discover who they are. They come to that object with their upbringing, education, sensibilities, life experiences, and even their emotional characters. Standing in front of the art, they react with that material; it's an amazing reaction that happens all the time. It's the same for me with music. It becomes sculptural because it's a material object that vibrates the air, goes into my ear and tickles my brain. But an important reaction happens between these materials that allows me to enjoy the music.

When people say material is basic, that's totally wrong to me. It is the essence of everything, not just looking at art, but our whole way of dealing with the material around us. Understanding materials teaches us how to deal with the earth, our social structures, our educational structures, and the relationships between countries and societies. If you're trying to solve any problem on a religious or ideological basis alone, then you're in trouble. You can only do it on a super materialistic level, because suddenly there's an enormous parity in everything, and you realise we all have an equal share in this.

**Palmer: Just like the way that you're discussing how music is sculptural, I have found that dance and performance art lend themselves to a sculptural lens. I mention this, noting that your exhibition space, *Waldfrieden Sculpture Park*, was the location for Wim Wenders' documentary film for Pina Bausch. When you are constructing these sculptures, is there a certain rhythm or cadence you are drawing upon? In refuting traditional sculptural ideas of stasis and fixity, do you intend for your sculptures to dance, to escape their rooted locations? Do the likes of Bausch, Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti ever influence your sculptural designs, or is the rhythm and bodily motion inherent within yourself and the material?**

Cragg: Absolutely. If you know dance, you know that these people are amazingly tough. To hold the position and do what they do, they have to be incredibly strong; they're just made of sinew and muscle. So very durable material provides an enormous correlation with dance.

But my dance is much less expressive. If I stick my tongue out at you, then it's 5 grams of material, a tiny little thing. Something happens to your brain where you suddenly think, God, he's a weirdo, sticking his tongue out that way. Every tiny change in form means a change in your mind and emotions. That's exactly what's happening when I'm making my sculptures. As I change the form, my brain is thinking something different, and getting

different excitements about it, and disappointments in some cases. So emotionally and intellectually, one is constantly at one with the material. Everything is sculptural for me, because sculptural means it's material that you react with. It's not just about cutting things out of shapes.

**Palmer: Drawing on these ideas of dance and performance, I am curious about your use of repeated patterns, particularly within works like *Incident (Vertical)* and *REM*. Ideas of repetition in motion remind me of choreographic processes; I am particularly thinking of Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* and Pina Bausch. Is there a deliberateness to these patterns when you are constructing your sculptures? You have termed yourself a materialist, but would you also consider yourself a choreographer?**

Cragg: Pina Bausch was a fantastic artist, so I don't think I could come from Wuppertal and call myself a choreographer. I'm gonna stick with sculptor. But it raises the question of what choreography actually means. It's to do with the run of things. It's to do with the course of forms. I'm dealing with very resistant, bloody-minded materials, which have to be beaten in at every stage, to get this sense of softness. Perhaps that is my course of forms.



*Tony Cragg, Incident (Vertical), 2022, Corten Steel, 230 x 84 x 94 cm, 90 1/2 x 33 1/8 x 37 in. © Tony Cragg, Courtesy Lisson Gallery. Photo by Michael Richter.*

**Palmer: As a series, undoubtedly, your sculptures communicate and correspond with one another. I wonder if, as well, they are forming a part of a routine, each player a moving part, each with its own section of choreography, establishing a performance as they move and dance with and around each other? As viewers, by being within the**

**space of these sculptures, are we also a part of the performance?**

Cragg: I think very much so, especially when it comes to installing. In my generation, during the '70s and '80s, installations were one of the trending things. I had an enormous amount of experience working into a space. But then you begin to see bodies in space, and you start to understand the relationship between the sculptures and the audience. Now, my assistants come and unpack my work, and then when everything's on wheels, I come in and begin to arrange them. It doesn't matter what you're doing; if you don't have a natural sense of it, then life gets tough. You have to have a sense of balance, poise, composition, and size. It all has to work together. With every exhibition I've done, I suppose there has to be a kind of choreography. If you can't choreograph it in some way, from one room to the other, it won't work.

When you walk through a museum, it's almost scenic. In one room, you get one sense of motion, and then you get to another room, and it's a different kind of movement altogether. I used to make work like this, moving around, being amongst people. There's a work called *On the Hill*, which was my early engagement with 'performance', placing my body in a space and exploring motion.

**Palmer: For me, there is definitely a choreography, especially with this exhibition. It feels like sequences in the way that it has been curated; you move from each space, and there's a different rhythm being expressed, a different cadence.**

**My final question: you are often credited as a sculptor who 'constantly pushes the limits of what is possible within sculpture.' What are those limits that you are pushing against? Is there more that you wish to achieve within your sculptural practice that you have yet to do?**

Cragg: If you consider this: in a 10-kilogram block of clay, there are billions of forms. As a sculptor, when you're working with the material, eventually your mind and emotions are more engaged. Obviously, if you want to be diverted and make a horse out of the clay, then all of your thoughts and emotions go to 'horse'. But as long as you're looking for new things, things you've never seen before, then there are innumerable possibilities to discover. Sculpture is an investigation of the material world. It's not even me trying to push the barriers of sculpture. All I'm trying to do is look into the material myself. I don't have ideas; good ideas invariably make very bad art. I don't really want to be stuck on an 'idea'. It's the investigation, it's looking for stuff, and now and then finding it. The point is, it's only just starting.

When you look at all the possibilities of material, then I don't see what would ever stop. My parents died in 1980. They never saw an iPhone. They didn't know about computers. They didn't know about the medicine of today. They didn't know about the knowledge we have about the universe and the space around them. There was no idea of these things at that time. We're just looking at the world as it moves along. We're experiencing the kaleidoscope of life. And in another 50 years, God knows what.

My thanks go to Tony Cragg for his insightful discussion and for taking the time to reflect on his current exhibition. I would also like to share my appreciation for the Lisson Gallery and Pelham Communications for making this all possible.

*'Tony Cragg' runs between November 19, 2025, and January 31, 2026, at the Lisson Gallery, London. WM*



GRACE PALMER

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## Tony Cragg: Interview of the Month, December 2025 – Paul Carey-Kent



Dec 1, 2025

by News Desk

Share

Lisson is presenting a solo exhibition of new sculptures by Tony Cragg. The exhibition brings together a selection of animated and gestural configurations which, as Cragg himself describes, "are like drawings in space", communing with one another while still maintaining a hard-edged materiality. Cragg's focus is on the expressive use of materials rather than direct representation, harnessing the possibilities of movement, mass, and molecular arrangement that are inherent in all matter. I met the artist at Lisson Gallery to discuss this new body of work; at 76, he shows no sign of slowing down...

**PCK: Tell us about the use of material here – you have focused on manufacturing sculpture from patinated bronze, reflective stainless steel and Corten steel:**

TC: It's what I've been working with – all the works in this presentation result from what I've been thinking and doing in the last three years, since my last show with Lisson Gallery. And that's the idea behind this exhibition: to continue my discourse with the public here in the UK.

**The 'Incident' series are made from steel. Can you tell us about that process:**

I work with polyurethane, a soft yet firm material that can be carved very accurately. It's like drawing in space, in three dimensions. There's no plan, I just get on with it. I love drawing for its own sake, but these are not based on preparatory drawings. From that polyurethane form, we make a scaled-up mould and then cast it traditionally. I use technology in the manufacturing, not the design – computers are involved in the scanning to create a digital mould. Steel has historically been an industrially-formatted sculptural material, and it looks very constructed, somehow – as with Vladimir Tatlin, Eduardo Chillida,

Mark di Suvero, Anthony Caro – but I wanted these to be fluid, to look more natural than industrial. Steel is a strong material – that's what it means, 'strong'. So what's holding it up can be very thin, so thin it would break were it bronze. I am making the most of steel's material properties. And you can do things with it that you can't if you just stack things up – you can have poise, balance, a kind of internal dynamic.

**They can appear like water?**

Yes, stainless steel especially suggests a sense of water because it denies itself, and you can see the surroundings rather than the material.



**Tony Cragg: Installation view with Path, 2025, at front – Path, 2025 – Corten steel, 236 × 151 × 106 cm**

**All the works are vertically inclined, as if creating groups of figures?**

They are vertical, so one could imagine that they have a figurative quality. For me, they are much more to do with the landscape, but everyone sees what they fancy! 'Path' is like a track up a mountain, also a course of events. I start very irrationally, not knowing what I'm doing, then build it up. Just as history is building itself up all the time, but you don't get to a point of recognising what it is until you call it history.

**The 'Stand' works are a contrast with 'Path' and the 'Incident' series?**

They are more solid volumes, and that works for me in this size. They have at least three legs, as do all three series, as that is the minimum you need for stability – even when we stand, we are actually on at least three points across the instep and heel. They become pretty static, but have more volume than 'Paths' and 'Incidents', which are more dynamic. The 'Stands' did come, like the paths, from wanting to extend into space like a drawing, but where 'Path' really is like a drawing, here the edges turn into flat surfaces. Out of one thing come two directions.



**Tony Cragg: Installation view with 'Stand' works**

**The 'Stand' works are of painted bronze. How did you decide the finish on these?**

When I made the first one, they put on the undercoat, and I thought, 'It looks perfect in white!' So I kept that, though it isn't actually the undercoat you see now. There are smaller versions in steel and rust, and I kept the others in the identical spectra of browns and greys – oxidised metallic or mineral colours.



Tony Cragg: REM, 2025 plus detail – Stainless steel, 220 × 52 × 99 cm

**Can you tell me about 'REM' and the meaning behind this work?**

Yes, 'REM' is about the unease of that time when you're trying to sleep. The work is based on an African headrest that I've got, close to the tree branch from which it's carved, and somehow using the three-legged combination again. The headrest looks very animal-like. They are brilliantly made things, very sculptural, with minimalist structural functionality. But the headrest is just a starting form, there is no literal casting – everyone is different. Being a terrible sleeper, this sort of pattern seems to vibrate in my head.

**You have pursued sculpture very consistently for half a century – what is it that has drawn you to this medium for this time?**

I love sculpture, and not just my own. I've been making sculpture for 55 years, and that's what I'm obsessed with in a way. For me, there is just sculpture. I like to spend as much time as I can in the studio.

**And you never seem to run out of ideas?**

The materials drive me. Good ideas do often not result in good art. Or even, rarely do. My recent book, titled 'A Line of Thought' – for which Jon Wood wrote the text – looks at my work from the very beginning. We wanted to produce a book that, rather than aiming to record all the work, reflects the line that goes through it. People think there are breaks, but in my mind, I know exactly how and why each thing leads to another, even if the continuity still surprises me.

**Tony Cragg is at Lisson Gallery from 19 Nov 2025 – 31 Jan 2026. He also has an exhibition titled 'Line of Thought' at the artist-founded Skulpturenpark Waldfrieden, Wuppertal, Germany, to Jan 1 2026.**

Top Photo: Tony Cragg with Stand, 2025 – Bronze, 220 × 75 × 127 cm

Images provided by Lisson Gallery; portrait Tony Cragg © Paul Carey-Kent first published Artlyst 2025

Tony Cragg is at Lisson Gallery from 19 Nov 2025 – 31 Jan 2026. He also as an exhibition titled 'Line of Thought' at the artist founded Skulpturenpark Waldfrieden, Wuppertal, Germany to Jan 1 2026.

*The Guardian*  
21 November, 2025



## 'People once threw food at modern art!' Turner-winning sculptor Tony Cragg's amazing journey to success

He may now live in Germany, but he loves returning to Britain, not just to put on a show, but to enjoy the weather, the food, the humour - and the selfie-takers in galleries

**Stephen Smith**



**L**et's suppose that you are a Turner prize-winning sculptor, with more than 50 years in the game. One restless night, an idea comes to you. You work it up in your studio and send it off to the foundry, to be cast in bronze. Finally, you're ready to show it to the world, but the first person through the gallery doors barely glances at it before taking a selfie with it. What do you do? Bear in mind that you are Tony Cragg, Royal Academician, and you are on record bemoaning the preference of many art-lovers for listening to audio guides as they tour exhibitions.

The perhaps unlikely answer is that you welcome the selfie-taker with outstretched arms, or at least give a convincing impression of doing so. “No, I don’t have problem with that,” says Cragg, albeit faintly, as if he’s thinking about the people who might be crossing the threshold of his latest show, which just opened in London. “People are bound to respond in different ways.”

### ■ ■ *My father thought sculpture was a very dull and unnecessary activity*

Liverpool-born Cragg, in a zip-up sweater and dark trousers, is a lean 76-year-old but could pass for 20 years younger. He has lived for many years in Wuppertal, Germany, exhibiting and teaching across the continent and collecting many honours to add to his 1988 Turner gong. He has had his own decided views and gone his own way since he told his father he wanted to be an artist as a teenager. “He said, ‘What a waste of time and education!’ My father was bitterly disappointed. He was an electrical engineer and worked on aircraft and thought sculpture was a very dull and unnecessary activity.”

Cragg’s problem with audio guides is that they get in the way of a spectator’s relationship with an artwork. “If you have a picture on a wall,” he says, “it doesn’t matter what the artist’s intention was. A hundred people stand in front of it and they will tell you a hundred different things about it. The person comes with their education, background and abilities - and responds to what’s in front of them. People interjecting all the time disturbs that direct dialogue with the artwork.”

Technological distractions aside, Cragg is pleased to be back in London. “I’ve lived abroad for the main part of my life, but I still feel very British. When I come back to Britain, immediately I’m more relaxed. I love British humour. I love the weather. I love the food. I feel like I’m back home, anyway.” He still supports Liverpool FC and rues their recent form. “Someone once told me, as an artist you’re only as good as your last show, and in football you’re only as good as your last game.”



📷 Cragg's work at Lisson Gallery. Photograph: George Darrell/© Tony Cragg, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Cragg's recent works include tall, free-standing forms that might gesture towards buckled or twisted skeletons. We are speaking just before his show opens and, as I watch them being wrestled into place, I think about artists on the road - musicians, say - and how much easier it is for the percussionist playing the triangle than the cellist. Of course, Cragg now has his own roadies. "I have a fantastic team," he says. "They do everything. I arrived yesterday, moved things around for an hour, then left." You don't take your art on the plane with you then? "I used to," he laughs.

### ■ ■ *When I was growing up, the French were 'Frogs' and the Germans were 'Krauts'*

Cragg's early work included pieces that explicitly addressed issues in the land of his birth, including *Riot*, a frieze produced in the aftermath of the miners' strike in 1984 and clashes between police and youths in Brixton, London. "I left Britain in 1977 at the beginning of the Thatcher period, and the destruction of the arts schools here, and a lot of other developments. It was a very extreme form of capitalism that paid no regard to the needs of the wider population."

He has also used the motifs of the crown jewels and the union flag. What did he make of seeing the flag on lamp-posts during protests in the UK this summer? “Well, it’s very difficult to live abroad and then be critical about how people live in another situation. But the most bitter disappointment I had initially was Brexit. This idea of isolationism, stepping back - I think it’s bad for the general population. It’s sad. And then you feel tendencies which are very nationalistic.

“When I was growing up, the French were ‘Frogs’ and the Germans were ‘Krauts’. My parents were very unhappy that I went to Germany because of the war. But thanks to the Royal College, I went to France to work for a year and I realised, ‘Hey, the food’s not bad here!’ I noticed the furniture and the way the French treated their families: wow! But everybody has a history. My children, who are German, have this terrible burden of their history on their shoulders, from their grandparents’ generation.”

Although he didn’t see eye to eye with his father about sculpture, Cragg considers it a waste of time to make busts of the famous, or the likeness of a horse. “For me, representing exactly what’s in front of you is a senseless activity, a vain attempt by humans to parody or copy nature.”



📷 'Art makes life more livable' ... Cragg in 2007. Photograph: David Kaluza/Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

That's not to say the sculptor fails to acknowledge masters like the 17th-century Italian Gian Lorenzo Bernini. But, he feels, the time for figurative sculptors to lay down their chisels is long overdue. Artists such as Auguste Rodin incorporated the ideas of Sigmund Freud into their work, says Cragg, and Marcel Duchamp, who took a urinal and called it art, introduced the readymade. "When I was student, we realised that readymades were kind of running out of steam, but then people like Damien Hirst took it to another dimension with a shark in a tank."

Cragg's first job was in a laboratory and he's all for children studying Stem subjects, but says that without art lessons they'll struggle to visualise what they're learning. "Art is one of the best ways for people to have a better existence. It makes life more livable. To ignore that, in a way that has happened in Britain, is almost criminal."

He still loves what he does, saying: "I hate holidays. Twenty-five years ago, everybody needed a holiday. I spend a lot of time in Scandinavia so we found somewhere we can spend the summer in a very beautiful place where there's the ocean and nature - and a studio! That's perfect for me, it's my dream."

He shows me a list of new ideas on his phone and reads some out. "First and Second, Recall, For a While, Long-stop, On and off, Way to Go, Path, Backtrack ... I'm not telling you these are future sculptures or anything. They are just things that tick through in the time I wake up."

Was that a month's worth of ideas? "I hate to say it, but that was last night."

Cragg is astonished by the popularity of contemporary art, unimaginable when he was starting out. "Now, everywhere you go has its own gallery. I live within an hour of 40 galleries showing contemporary art. But in Britain, there used to be just London. In France, only Paris. When I was in France, the arts bodies were trying to take modern art out into the countryside - but the people threw food at it!"

● [Tony Cragg's sculptures are at Lisson Gallery, London, until 31 January](#)

# LISSON GALLERY

*Art Plugged*  
27 November, 2025

## ART PLUGGED

Five Exhibitions To See In London In December 2025



**Your guide to the five exhibitions to see in London in December 2025, spanning painting, sculpture, photography and more across the city's leading galleries.**

Yes, it is cold, and the darker mornings are doing little to persuade anyone to abandon a warm bed. Yet for those still inclined to look at art rather than the thermostat, **December** offers a strong set of shows across the city. If you are searching for **five exhibitions to see in London in December 2025**, this list gathers the most thoughtful and engaging of them.

**Stacey Gillian Abe** begins the month at **Unit** with ***Garden of Blue Whispers***, a measured study of how memory lingers in the senses. The **exhibition** follows her earlier show *Shrublet of Old Ayivu* and extends her interest in the ways sound, touch, scent and sight can hold fragments of the past long after the moment has passed. It stands among the most compelling of the **five exhibitions to see in London in December 2025** for its quiet precision and emotional depth.

At Lisson Gallery, **Tony Cragg** presents new sculptures that shift between the suggestion of the human figure and the clarity of engineered forms. Cast in bronze, stainless steel and corten steel, the works explore weight, movement and the interplay between material and space. For visitors seeking **five exhibitions to see in London in December 2025**, Cragg's presentation offers a distinctive take on sculptural form.

If London's winter feels severe, there is always Miami, where **Art Basel**, **CONTEXT Art Miami** and the surrounding fairs provide a sunnier escape. For those staying closer to home, January brings the **London Art Fair**, which arrives just as many of us begin to venture out again.



Tony Cragg, REM (small), 2024,  
Stainless steel, 120 x 58 x 138 cm / 47 1/4 x 22 7/8 x 54 3/8 in,  
© Tony Cragg, Courtesy Lisson Gallery.  
Photo by Michael Richter

## Tony Cragg: New Work at Lisson Gallery

**Lisson Gallery presents a solo exhibition of new work by British sculptor Tony Cragg**, centred on the latest in his *Incident* series and accompanied by pieces from related ongoing bodies of work. The show brings together upright forms that suggest standing figures or columnar pillars, abstracted through Cragg's meticulous process of carving, construction and erosion.

The porosity and openness of these *Incident* sculptures dissolve the boundary between interior and exterior, between solid mass and the surrounding air. The works create sculptural moments that feel both transitory and eternal, organic yet deliberate. Their material presence—cast in patinated bronze, reflective stainless steel and weathered corten steel—adds a tactile counterpoint to their sense of movement.

### **Tony Cragg**

**19th November 2025 – 31st January 2026**

**Lisson Gallery**

**67 Lisson Street**

**London NW1 5DA**

# LISSON GALLERY

*The Art Newspaper Turkey*  
27 November, 2025



## THE ART NEWSPAPER TÜRKİYE

### Another Look at Tony Cragg

Tony Cragg's new exhibition can be visited at Lisson Gallery between 18 November 2025 and 31 January 2026.

**Ela Demiral**



Courtesy of Tony Cragg and Lisson Gallery

London's Lisson Gallery presents a new solo exhibition by Tony Cragg, one of the most prominent figures in contemporary sculpture. Selected works from the artist's series "Incident," "Stand," and "Masks" explore the boundaries between body, mass, and movement, using a rich array of materials ranging from bronze to stainless steel. Tony Cragg has long been on the radar of collectors in Türkiye and is one of the most renowned foreign artists. Cragg's new exhibition opened at London's Lisson Gallery on November 18th.

The artist's sculptures have been found in numerous private collections in Türkiye for years. However, his sculpture, "Runner," which appeared in public at the opening of Istanbul Modern's new building, has elevated Cragg's recognition in Türkiye to a whole new level; for many art lovers, it has become the first form that comes to mind when they think of "Tony Cragg." This new exhibition in London offers a new perspective on the artist's familiar sculptural language.

### **Who is Tony Cragg?**

Born in Liverpool in 1949, Tony Cragg has lived in Wuppertal, Germany, since 1977. Cragg began his career in science before becoming an artist, working as a laboratory technician. He completed his art education at Wimbledon School of Art and the Royal College of Art in London; he taught for many years at various higher education institutions and served for a time as director of the Düsseldorf Art Academy. One of the most significant turning points in his career was representing the British Pavilion at the 43rd Venice Biennale in 1988, winning the Turner Prize, Britain's most prestigious art award, that same year.

For over 50 years, Cragg has transformed his interest in the relationship between nature and the man-made world into an original sculptural practice based on experimentation and imagination.



Courtesy of Tony Cragg and Lisson Gallery

### ***Incident, Stand, Masks***

Lisson Gallery presents the latest in Tony Cragg's "Incident" series of sculptures, alongside works from his parallel series. The exhibition centers around a multitude of vertical forms, reminiscent of standing figures or columnar columns, but abstracted and complicated by Cragg's meticulous craft, sometimes built layer by layer, sometimes carefully eroded and hollowed out.

The porosity and openness of these new "Incident" works virtually dissolve the boundaries between interior and exterior structure, solid mass and air, giving the sculptures a character that is simultaneously ephemeral and eternal, organic and highly controlled. The impact of these dynamic, gestural forms, which converse and merge with each other as if drawn within space, is further intensified by their use of hard materials such as striking bronze, reflective steel, and velvety Corten steel. Located in the gallery's back room, these works offer a radically different perspective on Cragg's traditional sculptural language.

The new interpretation of the "Hedge" series, dated 2025, contains only a fleeting evocation of the curves and windings of garden hedges the artist studied in his childhood; these references quickly explode into interlocking surfaces and sinuous lines. Similarly, the new "Stand" works in the exhibition may at first glance be read as anthropomorphic volumes bearing heads or limbs, suggesting the torso; however, they soon transcend memory and perception, evolving into unique forms possessing both corporeal and otherworldly connotations.

Cragg's works, titled "Masks," consist of overlapping stone rings in circular or elliptical layers, creating a futuristic, dynamic effect. Abstracted from the multiplied and superimposed profiles of a human face, these works nevertheless remain intimately connected to the human being through their scale, material presence, and the almost empathic, bodily response they evoke in the viewer. Throughout the artist's work, the focus is not on direct representation; rather, it is on the expressive possibilities of materials, the possibilities of movement, mass, and molecular organization inherent in all matter.

This dialogue between the figurative qualities of the "Stand" and "Masks" series continues beyond the venue, with monumental-scale open-air sculptures installed in the gallery courtyard. In the inner courtyard at the center of the exhibition, a large-scale bronze sculpture, "Contradiction," is positioned. While creating the impression of a rotating force, it also appears to defy gravity by rising into a vertical mass, rising toward the sky.



Courtesy of Tony Cragg and Lisson Gallery

**Ruya Worthy, from Lisson Gallery's Sales and Artist Management Department, shared her assessment of the exhibition with The Art Newspaper Türkiye.**

Tony Cragg is a master interpreter of form, capable of conveying a powerful sense of movement even with hard materials like bronze and steel. Our new exhibition conveys a playful energy while remaining firmly grounded in the essence of the artist's practice. Beyond presenting Cragg's innovative latest works, this exhibition also introduces a special paint formulation that adds a completely new dimension to his sculptural language. This innovation further demonstrates that the artist not only refines his sculptural language but also constantly questions and expands it.

This exhibition follows recent solo exhibitions at leading institutions in Dubrovnik, Dessau, Salzburg, and Rome, and a comprehensive UK presentation at Castle Howard in 2024. The exhibition at Lisson Gallery also runs concurrently with the artist's ongoing presentation at Sculpture Park Waldfrieden in Wuppertal in 2025-26.

The exhibition is open to the public at Lisson Gallery London until 31 January 2026.

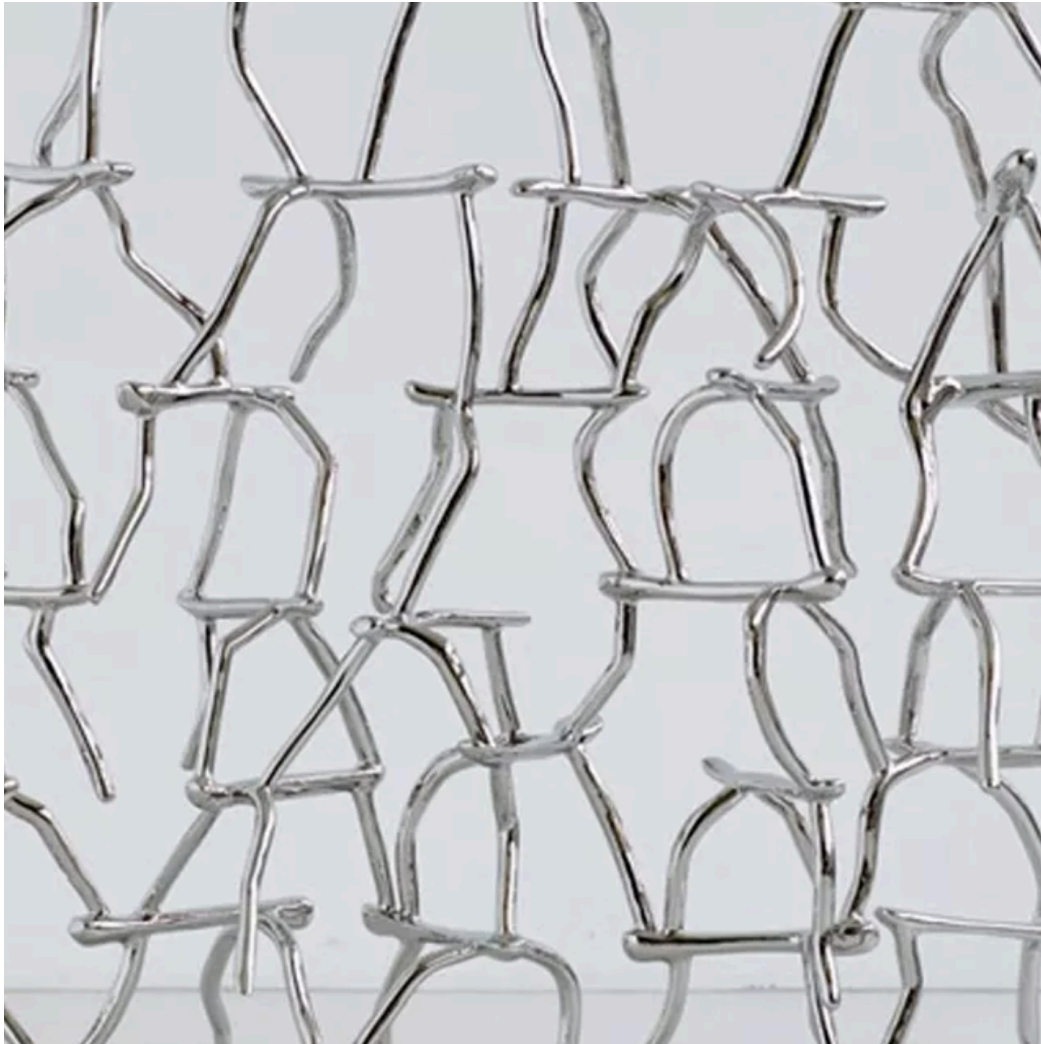
LISSON GALLERY

*Art Plugged*  
25 November, 2025

# ART PLUGGED™

Tony Cragg: New Work at Lisson Gallery

ART PLUGGED Art Plugged Exhibitions November 25, 2025



**Tony Cragg and Lisson Gallery present a new body of work that explores movement, material and form through the artist's latest *Incident* sculptures**

**Tony Cragg**

**19th November 2025 – 31st January 2026**

**Lisson Gallery**

**67 Lisson Street**

**London NW1 5DA**

**Lisson Gallery** presents a solo exhibition of new work by British sculptor **Tony Cragg**, centred on the latest in his *Incident* series and accompanied by pieces from related ongoing bodies of work. The show brings together upright forms that suggest standing figures or columnar pillars, abstracted through Cragg's meticulous process of carving, construction and erosion.

The porosity and openness of these *Incident* sculptures dissolve the boundary between interior and exterior, between solid mass and the surrounding air. The works create sculptural moments that feel both transitory and eternal, organic yet deliberate. Their material presence—cast in patinated bronze, reflective stainless steel and weathered corten steel—adds a tactile counterpoint to their sense of movement.



Tony Cragg *Prescription*, 2020

Bronze

55 x 32 x 26 cm

21 3/4 x 12 5/8 x 10 1/4 inches

© Tony Cragg. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Lisson Gallery

For more than five decades, Cragg has sustained a practice that fuses the natural and the manmade while remaining a product of his own imagination and experimentation. A new 2025 iteration of his *Hedge* series, for example, hints at the hedgerows of his childhood but quickly transforms into interlacing planes and sinuous, expanding lines. Similarly, the *Stand* works on view can at first appear anthropomorphic—torsos, limbs or heads—but soon transcend recognisable forms, evolving into wholly original structures with their own associations, both bodily and otherworldly.

Cragg's *Masks*, made from stratified stone in circular or elliptical layers, move toward a futuristic dynamism. Though abstracted from overlapping profiles of the human face, they retain a strong connection to the human body in scale and material presence. The works invite a physical, almost empathic response from viewers. Across his practice, Cragg's focus remains on the expressive possibilities of materials rather than direct representation, exploring movement, mass and molecular structure as sources of form.

This dialogue between the figurative and the abstract extends beyond the gallery walls.

Monumental outdoor versions of the *Stand* and *Mask* series are installed side by side in the external courtyard, while at the exhibition's centre stands a major bronze *Contradiction* sculpture. The piece shifts between centrifugal motion and vertical stillness, appearing to defy gravity as it rises skyward.



Tony Cragg *Pair*, 2018  
Bronze  
100 x 46 x 38 cm  
39 3/8 x 18 1/8 x 15 inches  
Lisson Gallery

Together, these works reveal an artist continually expanding the range of materials and ideas that shape his practice. Cragg remains a sculptor pushing at the boundaries of what is possible, constantly seeking new expressions of energy and structure in matter.

This exhibition follows a series of major solo shows this year at institutions in Dubrovnik, Dessau, Salzburg and Rome, as well as Cragg's recent display at Castle Howard, York (2024). It runs concurrently with his presentation at the artist's Sculpture Park Waldfrieden in Wuppertal (2025–26).

**Tony Cragg opens on the 19th of November 2025 until the 31st of January 2026 at Lisson Gallery**

*Hube Magazine*

## hube

### TONY CRAGG EXHIBITION BRINGS CONTEMPORARY ENERGY TO SALZBURG EVENTS



Courtesy of THADDAEUS ROPAC GALLERY

A major highlight among Salzburg events this summer, the **DomQuartier** hosts *Tony Cragg: Zeiten*—the first-ever contemporary sculpture exhibition staged in the opulent State Rooms of the Salzburg Residenz.

Running from July 24th to October 6th, 2025, this landmark **Tony Cragg** exhibition was created in collaboration with the **Thaddaeus Ropac** gallery and marks a striking dialogue between centuries-old architecture and cutting-edge contemporary sculpture. Celebrated British artist and Turner Prize laureate Tony Cragg brings his innovative works into direct conversation with the historic interiors, forging new ways to engage with material, space, and tradition.

#### **Tony Cragg sculpture in conversation with history**

Renowned for his exploration of structure and form, Cragg developed an entirely new body of work tailored to the Salzburg Residenz's grand architecture. His sculptures, in some cases, draw inspiration from specific decorative elements — such as the curled legs of Biedermeier furniture — revealing a sensitivity to the aesthetic codes of the past while radically reinterpreting them.

The exhibition features an impressive range of Tony Cragg's sculpture, from intricate glass forms that glimmer like captured motion, to monumental stone compositions that seem to pulse with organic energy. A standout example is a series of fluid forms carved from Iranian stone, which the artist first encountered during exhibitions in Tehran and Isfahan — each piece exemplifying Cragg's ongoing dialogue between material history and future potential.

#### **A contemporary sculpture exhibition with expansive vision**

As part of the wider contemporary sculpture exhibition, three additional large-scale works — *Mixed Feelings*, *Runner*, and *Points of View* — are installed outdoors at Salzburg's Krauthügel. This secondary location, nestled in a tranquil corner of the city, offers a natural stage for Cragg's monumental pieces, reinforcing the show's theme of transformation through space.

Cragg views sculpture not simply as static form but as a direct intervention into perception: "Any change in material form," he states, "immediately alters how we think and feel — and therefore how we act. In this way, all art deals ultimately with the human condition."

*The Week*

29 November 2025

## THE WEEK

### Where to buy...

*The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery*

#### **Tony Cragg**

*at Lisson Gallery*

Tony Cragg is one of Britain's most important living sculptors, but it's easy to see why his art can set the cognoscenti's eyes rolling. His sculptures – monolithic stainless-steel things that blend the dynamism of the Italian futurist Umberto Boccioni with a certain organic quality reminiscent of, say, Barbara Hepworth – have long been a favourite for corporate art buyers, adorning the lobbies of many a multinational business HQ. If a reminder of his brilliance is needed, though, this show does the job well. It is composed of a half-dozen pieces about the height of the average man, with which Cragg (b.1949) makes heavy metal look like dashed-off pencil strokes; a



*Stand (2025), 170cm x 160cm x 70cm*

towering green column placed outside; and some (literally) reflective efforts that have the air of a partially melted cutlery drawer. Everything here is beautifully finished, in some instances almost velveteen; you want to reach out and touch. It's entirely abstract but you can't help but make sensorial associations. Prices on request.

*27 Bell Street, London NW1 (020-7724 2739). Until 31 January*

*Time Out*  
5 September 2024

## TimeOut

### It's your last chance to see these seven amazing UK art exhibitions

All of these brilliant shows are closing soon

Autumn is the best time of year for art exhibitions in the UK, but before the country's major institutions and galleries put on their big end of year shows you've still got the time to catch their summer extravaganzas. This is your last opportunity to see everything from clever, funny installation art to big, imposing sculptures at country houses, powerful Black painting to immersive conceptualism.



 'Industrial Nature' 2024, Tony Cragg, Castle Howard. Photo by Michael\_Richter

#### **Tony Cragg at Castle Howard, North Yorkshire, until Sep 22**

Cragg by name, and judging by his sculptures, craggy by nature. Tony Cragg has been one of the leading figures in British sculpture for over 50 years, and his clever, flowing, undulating and craggy massive sculptures have been placed in the grounds of the beautiful Castle Howard.

*The Guardian*  
2 May 2024

# The Guardian

## 'They look sad': Tony Cragg scraps audio guides for Castle Howard exhibition

Sculptor says he wants visitors to form their own relationships with art, without 'anyone else interfering'



📷 Cragg's sculpture *Points of View*, which has been installed in the grounds of Castle Howard. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

They are ubiquitous at art galleries across the world: the audio guide telling shuffling visitors the full story of what they are looking at and occasionally how they should feel.

In the eyes of Sir Tony Cragg, one of the world's leading sculptors, they are a "terrible" modern scourge that "mess up" the enjoyment of art. "I think they look sad," he said. "It is a new world image that I really dislike and distrust intensely."

Cragg is opening a major exhibition at Castle Howard, one of Britain's most spectacular stately homes made even more famous by being a location for *Brideshead Revisited* and *Bridgerton*.

There are 28 sculptures across the house and gardens - most being seen in the UK for the first time - and there are definitely no audio guides for the exhibition.

“We’re happy,” said Castle Howard’s head curator, Christopher Ridgway. “We don’t want to be overly prescriptive.”

In Cragg’s eyes, audio guides spoil the experience of looking at art. “The way I have met art and become engaged with it is just standing in front of an artwork and having my own experience. That is what is so fantastic about looking at stuff.

“To have things formatted with the opinion of someone else ... why? Why do that?

“When you come to an artwork you come to it with the sum of your education, your personality, your upbringing, your life experiences and you find in an artwork your relationship to those things.

“You don’t want anyone else interfering in it. I think it relativises the experience of the artwork.”

Cragg said he yearned for the days when “you would just walk into a gallery and there is whatever there is, *Carl Andre and his bricks on the floor*, say, and you just had to come to terms with it”.

He is fine with labels, as long as they stick to just the title, artist and materials. “That doesn’t mess up people’s experiences,” he said. “But not what the artist thought. Who cares what the artist thought?

“Do you listen to music and someone explains what you’re listening to? That’s ridiculous, isn’t it? Do you read another book about the book you’ve read? You read poetry because it’s poetry, not because someone is going to explain it to you.”



Industrial Nature, another of the sculptures in the grounds. Photograph: Oli Scarff/AFP/Getty Images

There are no exhibition audio guides at the new show, the first contemporary sculpture exhibition at the North Yorkshire estate.

Instead, visitors will have to decide for themselves how they feel about the glass bottles, vases and glasses precariously piled up in the Vanbrugh-designed Temple of the Four Winds.

It is a magical place. For some, it's famous as Charles and Sebastian's wine-tasting spot in the 1981 film *Brideshead Revisited*, the place they got drunk. For others it could be where Simon and Daphne got fruity on their honeymoon in *Bridgerton*.

Elsewhere on the estate there is a magnificent plinth in the middle of a small reservoir, which has had nothing placed on it since it was built in the late 18th century. Now it has a 5-metre-wide yellow-gold sculpture titled *Over the Earth* (2015).

Made from fibre-glass, it looks as if it should be outside the headquarters of a futuristic, probably evil world corporation. Or it could be relaxing, reminding people of floating clouds.

The point, says Cragg, is that we, the visitors, decide what we are looking at and how we feel.

Liverpool-born Cragg, 75, has been based in Wuppertal, Germany since 1977 and has a formidable international reputation. He represented Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1988 and his public sculptures can be found all over the world, whether outside the Bundestag building in Berlin or in the countryside near Consett in County Durham, an unexpected and brilliant surprise for cyclists going coast to coast.

Nicholas Howard, whose family has owned Castle Howard since it was built in 1699, said Cragg was the perfect person to begin "a new era of contemporary art" at the estate. "Having now lived with the works for a few weeks, it really feels as if they belong here," he said.

"With his amazing eye Tony has placed the pieces so they don't feel like interventions, but more something that has grown up organically."

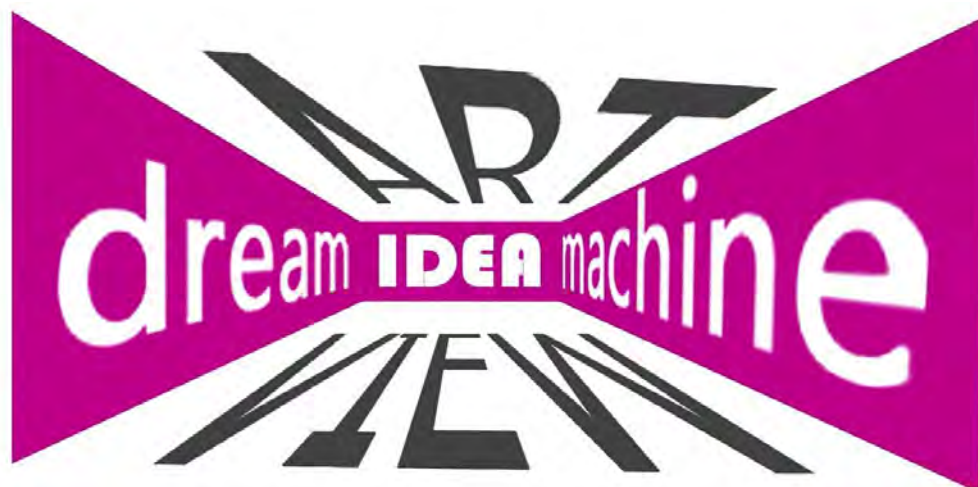
Cragg has strong views on the commodification of art, with audio guides being one terrible aspect of that. "My voice isn't alone on this," he said. "You hear it among artists and even among visitors - they don't want it any more. It puts people off.

"But I do think it's just a phase and we'll get through it and we'll grow up."

- Tony Cragg at Castle Howard opens on 3 May and runs until 22 September.

# LISSON GALLERY

*Dream Idea Machine*  
March 2023



ART CITIES: N.York-Tony Cragg



Tony Cragg is one of the world's foremost sculptors. Constantly pushing to find new relations between people and the material world, there is no limit to the materials he might use, as there are no limits to the ideas or forms he might conceive. His early, stacked works present a taxonomical understanding of the world, and he has said that he sees manmade objects as "fossilized keys to a past time which is our present". So too, the floor and wall arrangements of objects that he started making in the 1980s blur the line between manmade and natural landscapes: they create an outline of something familiar, where the contributing parts relate to the whole.

By Dimitris Lempesis  
Photo: Lisson Gallery Archive

Tony Cragg's seminal work "*Riot*" (1987) is on show in New York. Comprising found, discarded plastic objects, this large-scale wall relief, is readable as a response to the political and social turbulence of the 1980s in Britain and is considered as one of his most acclaimed works. Despite its initial historic specificity, the work is simultaneously comprehensible as a current reflection of our own fraught context. Alongside this work are two further compositions from 1981, "*Policeman*" and "*Leaf*" that similarly address this unrest as well as our paradoxical relationship with nature. Assembled from a multitude of meticulously positioned plastic objects, which span the entire width of the gallery wall, *Riot* conveys a barricade of police officers wearing special protective gear. Following Cragg's enduring interest in the dynamic power of

matter to assume form, the wall work figuratively foregrounds a scene of militarized state power, alluding to the many social upheavals that arose in reaction to the conservative Thatcherite regime in 1980s Britain. Considering the monumental scale, the work is evocative of Parthenon Friezes, playing on traditions of spatial engagement with relief composition and narrative-led portrayals of imperial warfare and societal collapse. These art historical nods simultaneously position Riot with a view towards the past while make striking connections with our present context of rising authoritarianism and police repression. An early example of the artist's studied interrogation of industrial materials, Cragg uses the vivid colors and unaltered forms of disparate plastic objects to materialize a sensorially immersive and dynamic image-sculpture. "Policeman" (1981), similarly echoes the volatile political conditions under which the work was made in its depiction of a singular police officer that towers over the viewer. Composed of a mélange of blue plastic objects, the work unpacks the color blue and its loaded symbolic associations with two interconnected institutions of societal repression during this period, the Metropolitan Police and the Conservative Party. "Leaf" (1981) underscores Cragg's interest in exploring humans' relationships with their material environments. A commentary on the rapid accumulation of man-made materials (especially plastic) in industrialized economies, Cragg substitutes pointed ecological critique with playful humor by forming a leaf – a charged symbol of organic purity – out of green plastic objects. The artist explains that his preference for man-made materials arose out of a desire to confront viewers with their overlooked yet deeply intimate quotidian relationships with such objects. The paradoxical form of Leaf further probes viewers to question what separates the natural from the unnatural. Taken together, these three works give important historical context to an artist who has gone on to become one of the world's foremost sculptors. Though the works are reflective of the socio-political context of 1980s Britain, their poetic allusions to civil unrest and industrial pollution could not be more contemporary.

**Photo:** Tony Cragg, Riot, Installation view Lisson Gallery-New York, 2023, courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

**Info:** Lisson Gallery, 508 West 24th Street, New York, NY, USA, Duration: 14/3-15/4/2023, Days & Hours: Tue-Sat 10:00-18:00, [www.lissongallery.com/](http://www.lissongallery.com/)



Tony Cragg, Riot, Installation view Lisson Gallery-New York, 2023, courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery



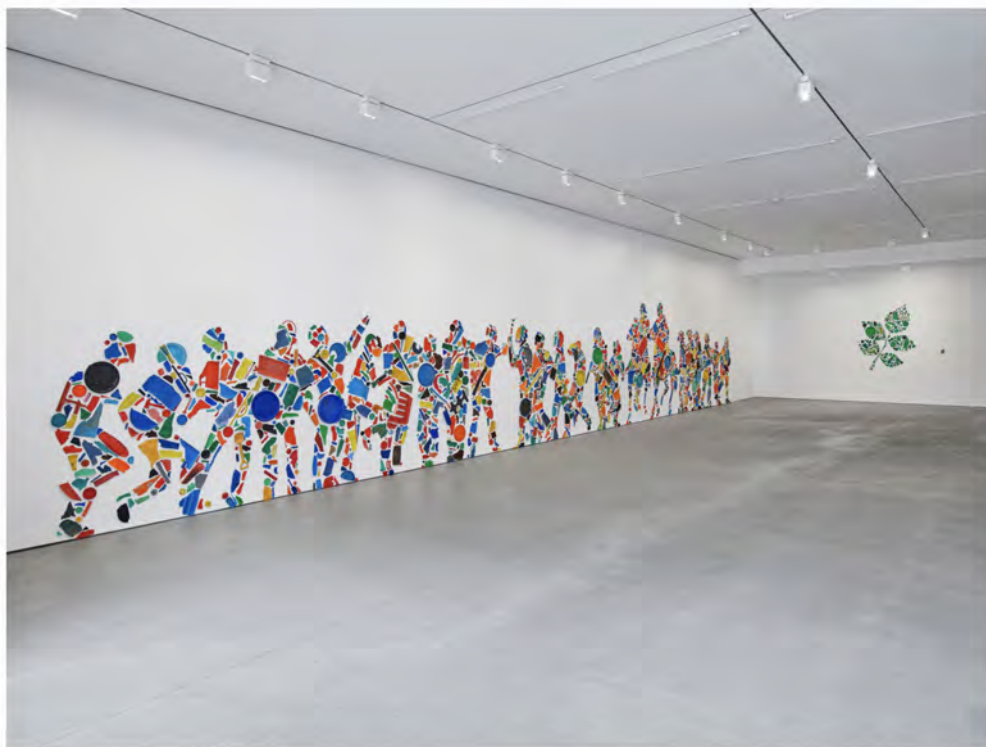
Tony Cragg, Riot, Installation view Lisson Gallery-New York, 2023, courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery



Tony Cragg, Riot, Installation view Lisson Gallery-New York, 2023, courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery



Tony Cragg, Riot, Installation view Lisson Gallery-New York, 2023, courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery



Tony Cragg, Riot, Installation view Lisson Gallery-New York, 2023, courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

# APOLLO

THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE

ART DIARY

## Tony Cragg. Sculpture: Body and Soul

1 JULY 2022



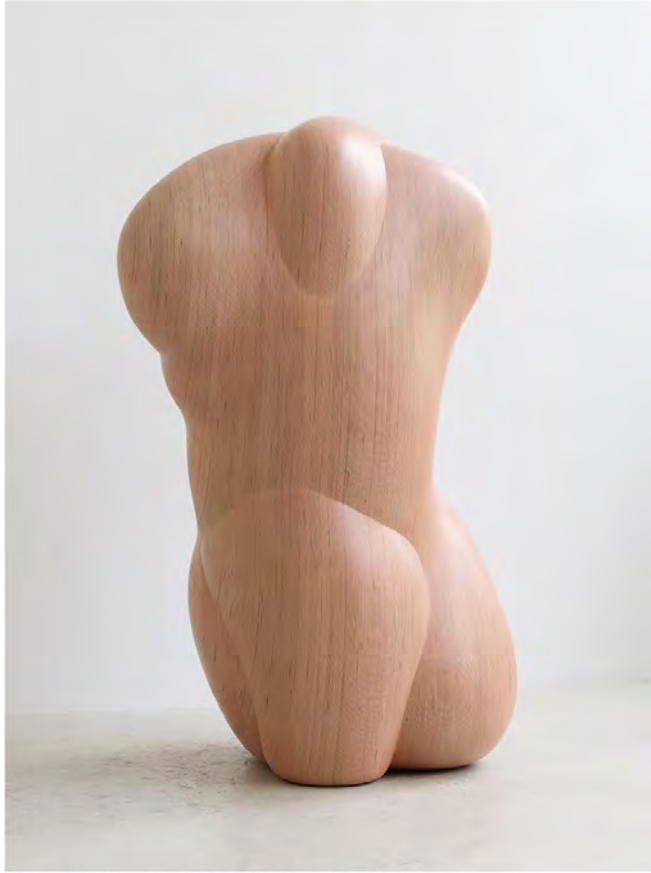
*Compound* (2015), Tony Cragg (b. 1949). Photo: Francesco Allegretto; © Tony Cragg / Bildrecht, Wien 2022

The Albertina Museum in Vienna (7 July–6 November) charts the development of the British sculptor Tony Cragg, taking in the breadth of the artist's career, from earlier figurative works to the abstract forms of his later sculptures. The display of more than 20 works demonstrates the artist's diverse and unusual use of material, from Kevlar and fibreglass to wood, stone and steel. The exhibition will also host a rarely seen array of Cragg's drawings, including preliminary sketches and theoretical accounts of the artist's creative practice.

Highlights include the irregular glass sculpture *Compound* (2015) and the abstract stainless steel figure *Justine* (2015). [Find out more on the Albertina's website.](#)



*Off the Mountain* (2011), Tony Cragg. Photo: Michael Richter; © Tony Cragg/Bildrecht, Wien 2022



*Integers* (2021), Tony Cragg. Photo: Michael Richter; © Tony Cragg/Bildrecht, Wien 2022



*In Frequencies* (2019), Tony Cragg. Photo: Francesco Allegretto; © Tony Cragg/Bildrecht, Wien 2022



In No Time (2019), Tony Cragg. Photo: Michael Richter. © Tony Cragg/Bildrecht, Wien 2022













*Forbes*  
17 June 2021

## Forbes

Jun 17, 2021, 09:41am EDT | 261 views

# Monumental New Works By Tony Cragg Unveiled At Houghton Hall, Norfolk



**Joanne Shurvell** Contributor @

Travel

*I write about travel, food, culture and fashion.*

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03:02



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Tony Cragg, Mean Average, fiberglass, 2018 at Houghton Hall, Norfolk **PETE HUGGINS**

Major works by the celebrated British sculptor [Tony Cragg](#) are on show in the grounds and historic interiors of [Houghton Hall](#) in Norfolk until 26 September 2021. The exhibition, curated by the artist himself, includes 11 large-scale bronze, stainless steel, fibreglass and polyester outdoor sculptures sited in the gardens and grounds plus 20 smaller pieces shown in the state rooms and gallery spaces of the house. Several new works have been made specifically for the exhibition and are on public display for the first time.



Installation by Richard Long at Houghton Hall, Norfolk PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAHY

David and Rose Cholmondeley's annual sculpture exhibitions, at their home [Houghton Hall](#), have rightly become a UK art calendar highlight since the first show in 2015. [Tony Cragg](#)'s exhibition is the sixth at [Houghton Hall](#). Last year's exhibition featured 21 sculptures by [Anish Kapoor](#) and in previous years works by [Henry Moore](#), [Damien Hirst](#), [Richard Long](#) and [James Turrell](#) have been on show. Some works by these artists remain in place for public viewing.



Tony Cragg, Integer, 2020 at Houghton Hall PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAHY

Houghton Hall, built in 1722 for Sir [Robert Walpole](#), the first British Prime Minister, is one of England's foremost examples of Palladian architecture and alone is worth a trip to Norfolk. The house, a family home since the 18th century has, along with its expansive gardens, been open to the public each summer since 1976. Houghton's longstanding connection to the art world is well known, housing one of the world's greatest private art collections. Robert Walpole's collection of artworks, which included Roman busts and paintings by Da Vinci, Van Dyck, Rubens and Rembrandt, were sold to Catherine the Great of Russia and the [Hermitage Museum](#) in St Petersburg now owns more than 120 works from the collection.



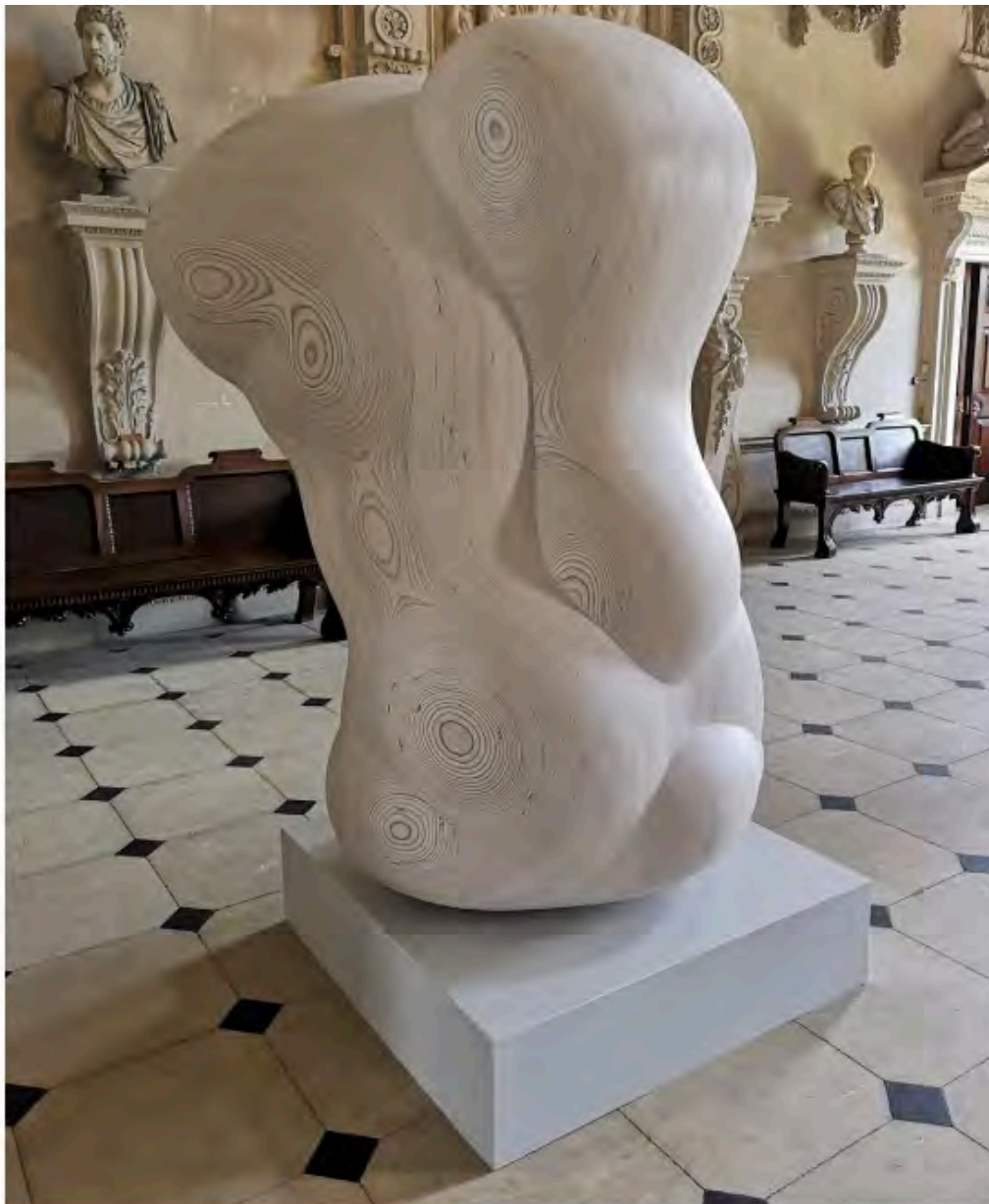
Ferryman, Houghton Hall, Norfolk PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAHY

Turner-prize winning sculptor Tony Cragg represented Britain at the Biennale in Venice in 1988 and has won numerous other prizes and awards during his 50 year career. He says that “sculpture gives us new forms, new ideas and new emotions. It literally gives things meaning and opens new perspectives.” His intention to discover what ideas and emotions he can create with materials explains why his sculptures have a dynamic feel to them; they seem to be in motion. They are thrillingly disruptive against the beautiful but perfectly ordered Palladian backdrop.



Tony Cragg, Versus, Houghton Hall, Norfolk PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAHY

Tony Cragg’s works evolve from drawings in his studio “that then may result in smaller works and if I feel they are worth pursuing I will follow up by making larger works.” The works are made from a wealth of materials, with the large sculptures weighing up to 1.5 tonnes, including a brand new piece straight from the foundry, a bronze that looks like a voluptuous golden bum. Two intriguing looking sculptures “Skull” in the courtyard are made from aluminum while “Integers” a beautiful curved white piece in the state room looks like two figures embracing and is from wood.



Tony Cragg, *Integers*, Wood, 2021 at Houghton Hall, Norfolk PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAHY

A visit to Houghton Hall offers a closeup view of the newest works from one of the titans of British sculpture, in a spectacular setting. For a taste of Tony Cragg's work before heading to Norfolk, there's a lovely room with several sculptures at [Thaddaeus Ropac](#) in London.

***Tony Cragg at Houghton Hall* (Until 26 September 2021). Open Wednesday - Sunday 11am-5pm. Entry via [pre-booked tickets](#) (£18 /Students £10, free to under 18s).**

*The Telegraph*  
7 May 2021

## The Telegraph

### Tony Cragg brings a thrilling disorder to the Palladian symmetry of Houghton Hall

★★★★☆ 4/5

The Turner Prize-winning artist's quasi-abstract sculptures surround Lord Cholmondeley's family seat, subverting its grandeur cleverly

*By Alastair Smart*

7 May 2021 - 6:00pm



Tony Cragg's Untitled 2020 at Houghton Hall | CREDIT: PA

**I**n recent years, Lord Cholmondeley has attempted to turn his family seat – Houghton Hall in Norfolk – into a destination for lovers of modern and contemporary art. He has held solo shows by the likes of Damien Hirst (in 2018), Henry Moore (in 2019) and Anish Kapoor (in a Covid-curtailed 2020). This year, it's the turn of the eminent British sculptor, Tony Cragg.

As ever, works have been placed both inside the house and about the grounds. In truth, Houghton itself – the stunning Palladian mansion built for Sir Robert Walpole in 1722 – is always the star. No artist can compete with it; all he or she can do is complement, enhance or subvert the surroundings. How does Cragg fare? Overall, pretty well.

Now 72, he's a master at using the traditional material of bronze in fresh ways. Located on the grass just behind the house is *Ferryman* (2001), its surface punctured with holes revealing a void within. The sculpture resembles a wild beast on its hind legs, howling – its sound would surely disturb the Lord's herd of English Longhorn cows grazing not far off.

Even from this one sculpture, it becomes clear that, of the three options cited above, Cragg's plan is to subvert the surroundings. Standing nearby, *Mean Average* (2018) is a giddy interweaving of top-heavy columns. As so often with Cragg, it almost seems to defy gravity. The difference is marked between these columns and the Classically-inspired examples on the house's rear façade.

Here, in fact, lies the key to the whole exhibition's success. Where Palladian architecture is all about balance, harmony and symmetry, Cragg has made a career out of quasi-abstract sculptures with irregular forms.

He has curated this show himself, remotely, liaising with Lord Cholmondeley via Zoom from his home in Germany. It features 12 sculptures outdoors and 18 indoors – including two new works made specifically for Houghton. (One of these, tucked away behind a hedge and as yet untitled, owes a debt to Jean Arp and resembles a pair of lovers in a clinch).



Runner by Tony Cragg, installed in the grounds at Houghton Hall | CREDIT: Pete Huggins

The most eye-catching work is *Runner* (2015). Painted green, it stands several metres tall and boasts a zigzagging form that suggests someone moving at speed. Its positioning is crucial: some way down the long, perfectly straight, grass avenue which stretches two miles from the rear of the house to the horizon.

Most sculptors would have wanted to place a work in the centre of that avenue, so as to guarantee a pleasing view. Cragg, however, has deliberately placed Runner off centre. He's that sort of artist.

It must be said that the works indoors don't work particularly well, bunched into just two downstairs rooms (the Stone Hall and the Saloon) almost as an afterthought.

Perhaps I'm also slightly more enthusiastic than I might have been in any other year. But, after lockdown, the chance to see art again – and to be in the beautiful outdoors again – is thrilling. You won't be disappointed.

**May 19 to Sept 26. Tickets must be pre-booked online: [houghtonhall.com](https://www.houghtonhall.com)**

# LISSON GALLERY

*FAD Magazine*  
16 February 2020

**FAD** magazine

## The Top 5 Art Exhibitions to see in London before the end of February

Art critic Tabish Khan brings you 'The Top Art Exhibitions to see in London'. Each one comes with a concise review to help you decide whether it's for you. For those looking for more art, [3 of last week's top 5](#) are also still open to see as well:



[Tony Cragg: Stacks & Richard Deacon: Deep State @ Lisson Gallery](#)

Swirling, curved, polished stacks reach up towards the ceiling and wooden beams twist and surge across the gallery. A beautiful duet of exhibitions is a chance to admire the latest works of two masters of sculpture. **Until 29 February.**

## **MONOPOL** Magazin für Kunst und Leben

**The world-famous sculptor Tony Cragg created choir windows for a village church in the district of Anhalt-Bitterfeld (Saxony-Anhalt)**

They were inaugurated on Saturday in Großbadegast, a district of the city of Southern Anhalt. The British artist, who lives in Wuppertal, was absent due to illness. Saxony-Anhalt's Prime Minister Reiner Haseloff (CDU), on the other hand, took part in the ceremony.



Photo: dpa

Tony Cragg explains his work in an exhibition hall in the sculpture park, Wuppertal, North Rhine-Westphalia, February 2019

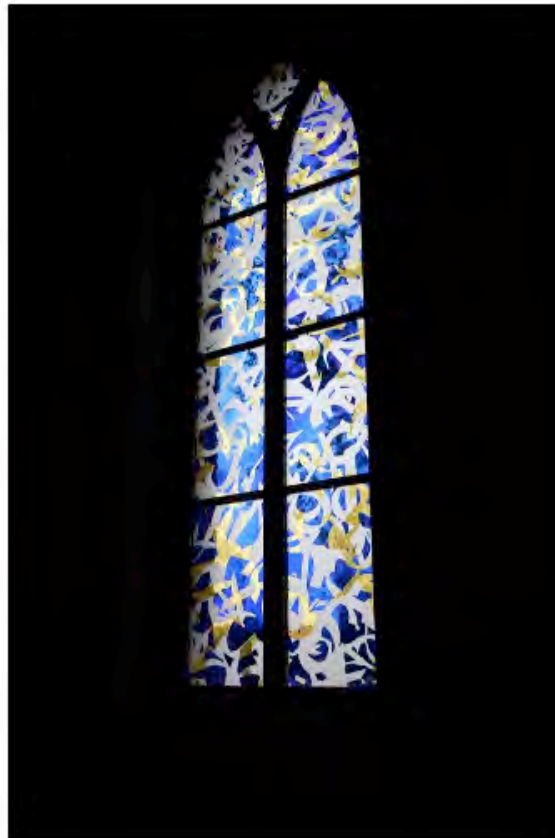


Photo: Dietmar Sauer Architects

Tony Cragg, stained glass window,  
Evangelische Landeskirche, Anhalt-  
Bitterfeld

According to the Evangelische Landeskirche Anhalt, Cragg has designed three abstract windows in shades of blue and yellow in recent months. For this he used mathematical formulas and symbols. The works showed that science and religion could enter into a dialogue, it said. There should be a total of twelve windows.

### **"The project caused a stir and caused a sensation"**

The work is part of the "Glades" project of the Evangelical Church in Anhalt. "The project was well received and caused a sensation," said Holger Brülls, area officer at the State Office for the Preservation of Monuments, the German Press Agency. This is how Cragg became aware of the campaign. The concrete project was then created in a conversation.

Cragg was listed in this year's "Art Compass" ranking as one of the most important artists worldwide. The 70-year-old comes from Liverpool. In Wuppertal, he created the Waldfrieden sculpture park, in which numerous sculptures by himself and other artists are shown. He was a Documenta participant and director of the Düsseldorf Art Academy, is a Turner award winner and Commander of the British Empire.

Other world-famous artists have also designed church windows. In the cathedral of Naumburg, the painter Neo Rauch created three church windows in the Elisabeth chapel that show episodes from the life of St. Elisabeth of Thuringia.

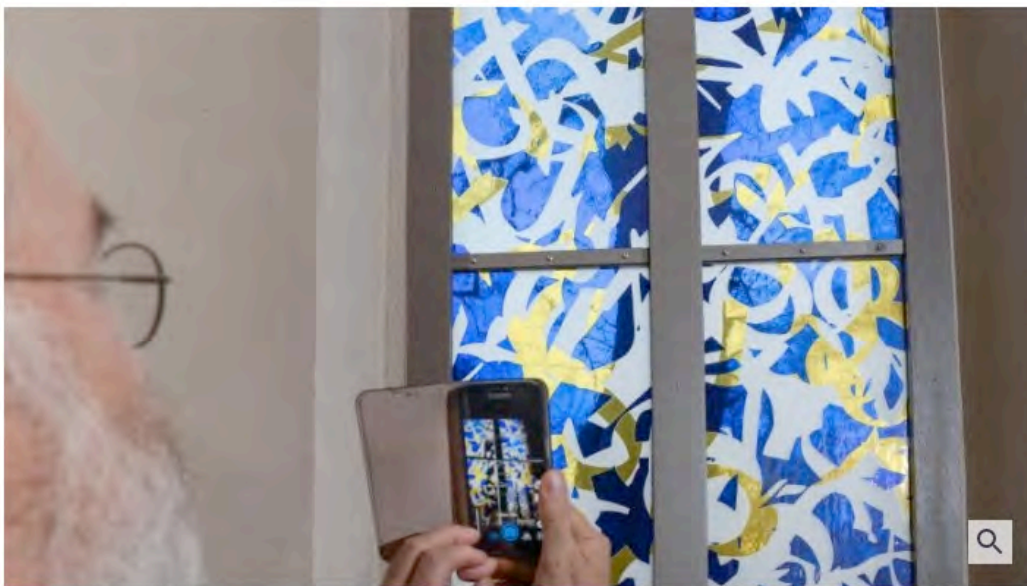
*Süddeutsche Zeitung (translated)*  
15 December 2019

# Süddeutsche Zeitung

SZ.de Zeitung Magazin

December 15, 2019, 3:25 p.m. Art

## Tony Cragg creates windows for the village church



One of the three new choir windows in the village church of Großbadegast. Photo: Heiko Rebsch / zb / dpa (Photo: dpa)

Southern Anhalt (dpa) - The world-famous sculptor Tony Cragg has created choir windows for a village church in the district of Anhalt-Bitterfeld (Saxony-Anhalt). They were inaugurated on Saturday in Großbadegast, a district of the city of Southern Anhalt.

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Feedback

# LISSON GALLERY

*TimeOut London*  
22 November 2019



## Tony Cragg: Stacks

Art  [Lisson Gallery](#), Marylebone  Until Saturday February 29 2020



Tony Cragg 'Stack' (2018) © Tony Cragg. Image courtesy of Lisson Gallery

### Time Out says

Stack 'em high! Since the 1970s, artist Tony Cragg has created bronze, wood and steel sculptures made by layering up his artistic materials. The richly tactile sculptures look like organic rock formations weathered to smooth, silky surfaces. See them now at Lisson Gallery's Bell Street space along with several of the artist's other works that use strata in a slightly different way, conjuring the claustrophobic-but-comforting feeling of existing in between layers.

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*Ignant*

26 August 2019



IGNANT

ART · SCULPTURE

## Sculptor Tony Cragg Creates Bold Works That “Embody A Frozen Moment Of Movement”

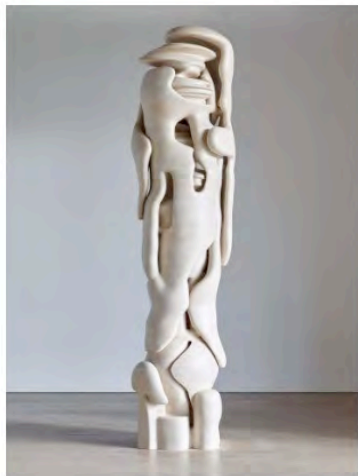
The English-born, Germany-based Tony Cragg is one of the world’s leading sculptors; his large-scale works, the result of a lifelong interest with material and form; he is fascinated by the materials that can be found in nature, yet his work is preoccupied with representing nature itself.

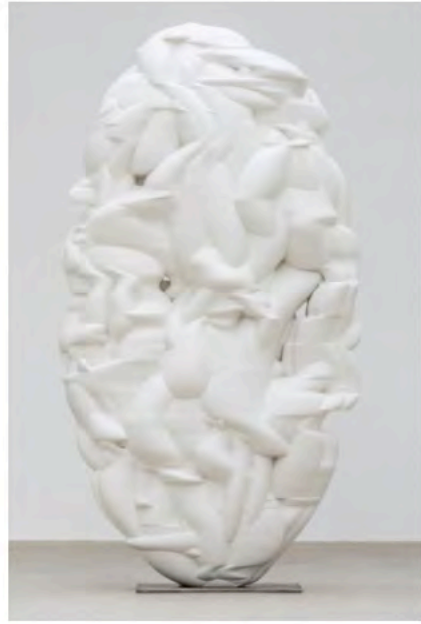
Cragg’s abstract, sinuous sculptures are made by exploring unconventional shapes and materials. Whilst very different in their scale and design, Cragg’s works are drawn together in likeness by their twisting and rippling forms. Artnet has described his works as “embody[ing] a frozen moment of movement,” almost akin to a blurred motion. Cragg has shown that there are endless material possibilities in sculpture. “It’s infinite,” he says in a short documentary film created for Tate Shots. “Really, the job is to find out where it becomes more meaningful.”

Certain topics that have enchanted him since childhood include geology, natural history, and the study of landscapes—and what has truly fascinated him about them is the materials that can be found within them. Cragg explains that they are “like a painter’s palette... This is a palette where I can move a material around, and find my own path through the material”. Cragg understands sculpture as “just pure fantasy, there’s no natural model for it”. This is exemplified in the reworking of familiar objects into new and unfamiliar forms, in order to produce new meanings simply for the sake of it. “Sculpture is an enormously

dynamic, and dramatically developing discipline and it's one of the only uses of material that's not utilitarian," he says in the film. "It's literally just about new forms, ideas and emotional experiences. When you see how ugly everything is built—simple geometries, flat straight edges, boring right angles, in the repetitive and inferior world we've built, sculpture is the only one that actually builds something crazy and interesting."







# LISSON GALLERY

LdM News, Italy  
17 June 2019



Tony Cragg at Boboli Gardens

260 views · 17 Jun 2019

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**LdM NEWS**  
1.46K subscribers

British sculptor, Tony Cragg, has installed 15 of his works in the Boboli Gardens.

Part of the Uffizi's new contemporary sculpture motive, the Boboli Gardens are installing contemporary works more frequently; last summer's Fritz Koenig exhibition and this spring's Anthony Gormley installation at the Uffizi Galleries are just two most recent examples of this.

Tony Cragg's extra-terrestrial-like forms are dotted around the gardens; reflecting the natural shapes of the trees and plants, their colossal size acts as a medium through which nature communicates to man.

Florence is the public space in which Cragg's works find themselves, the perfect back drop for smooth metallic lines and globular forms. Precise mathematics define Brunelleschi's dome which creates a stark contrast as a backdrop for Elliptical Column (2012) and Point of View (2018); two works that undulate and reflect their surroundings, warping the visitor's perception of their environment.

Tony Cragg is at the Boboli Gardens until October 2019.

*Iran News Daily*  
30 April 2018



## "Roots and Stones", a gift from Tony Cragg, unveiled at TMCA



**TEHRAN - "Roots and Stones", a huge abstract marble sculpture donated by British artist Tony Cragg, was unveiled in the courtyard of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on Sunday.**

The ceremony was attended by the Turner Prize-winner Cragg and a number of cultural officials and Iranian artists.

The museum showcased a large collection of Cragg's huge sculptures and drawings in an exhibition titled "Roots and Stones" from October 24, 2017 to January 12, 2018.

Visual Arts Office director Majid Mollanoruzi praised Cragg's decision to donate the artwork to the museum and said, "Organizing such an exhibit and the donation of such an artwork have resulted from cultural diplomacy."

"Interaction between Iranian and foreign artists could give a positive image of the country in the international arena," he added.

Veteran painter Ali Faramarzi said that the dialogue between nations can easily pave the ground for further collaboration better than other types of diplomacy.

Cragg also on his part called the sculpture a memorial of his visit to Iran that he hoped could promote friendship and understanding.

He said that he enjoyed holding the exhibition at the museum and added that he was most impressed by the excited youth who came to visit his works.

**Photo: British artist Tony Cragg poses beside "Roots and Stones", his gift to the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, in the courtyard of the museum on April 29, 2018. (Mehr/Majid Asgaripur)**



*Discover Benelux*  
1 April 2017

*discover*  
**BENELUX**  
*Promoting Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg*

STATES OF ART

## Tony Cragg at MUDAM

TEXT: MATT ANTONIAK | PHOTO: COURTESY MUDAM LUXEMBOURG AND THE ARTIST

**Working in large, ambitious, intricate sculpture, Liverpoolian artist Tony Cragg has shown an unwavering and ceaseless interest in material for the past 40 years.**

Until September, the grand halls of MUDAM Luxembourg are filled with Cragg's monolithic, amorphous creations made from plaster, stone and Kevlar (amongst a whole lot more besides). At the core of his practice is the firmly held belief that any material has the inherent ability to convey meaning, emotion and imagination – be it plastic rubbish that you disregard without thinking or precious metal, Cragg sees it as having a "bubble of information surrounding it". Working from this mantra, Cragg combines initial sketched ideas with art historical traditions and the latest design technology to create sculptural forms that sit somewhere between nature and industry.

In this exhibition, the artworks range from early pieces made using found materials, to his latest works made using specialist design software. Although this may seem quite a jump in interest and materials, throughout Cragg's oeuvre one can track a natural progression to where we are now. It is a healthy self-propagating practice, where one work will feed the next – meaning the artist has been able to explore countless materials and forms.

Perhaps that is what is most impressive about Tony Cragg; his sculptures are wondrous and, at times, visually mind-boggling, yet it is his infallible ability to innovate and push the boundaries of what art can be that truly leaves you in awe. Tony Cragg at MUDAM Luxembourg runs until 3 September 2017.

*Matt Antoniak is a visual artist and writer living and working in Newcastle, UK. He works mainly in painting and drawing and is a founding member of the art collective M.I.L.K.*



Photo: Charles Duprat

LISSON GALLERY

*Apollo*  
14 March 2017

# APOLLO

THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE

REVIEWS

## Tony Cragg's constantly evolving challenge to mass design

Ned Carter Miles

14 MARCH 2017



*Elliptical Column* (2016), Tony Cragg. Photo © Ned Carter Miles

Tony Cragg left the UK for Germany in 1977, the same year Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) was founded on a 500-acre country estate near Wakefield. In the 40 years since, Cragg has become a truly international artist, and YSP an internationally renowned arts venue. Now the two have mounted an extensive exhibition of new and recent works, artfully contextualised with key pieces from Cragg's prolific career.

The eponymous 'Rare Category of Objects', for Cragg, is sculpture itself. Echoing Walter Benjamin, he is a vocal critic of the 'mediocrities' of mass design, which he challenges through his assiduous engagement with his materials.



*Spring* (2016), Tony Cragg. Photo © Ned Carter Miles

This alertness to physicality and willingness to constantly address it anew makes his wood pieces perhaps his most compelling. *Spring* (2016) and *Group* (2012) – both in YSP's Underground Gallery – were created by a process of iteratively adding and shaping layers of plywood with little predetermined design. Every passing moment of creation informs the next, as do the material's intrinsic properties and the forces to which it is subject. Cragg's meticulous handmade approach, for which he employed the help of 20 assistants in his Wuppertal studio, defies the supposed vapidness of mass production to create unique pieces so complex they are sometimes impossible to cast.

Certain creations are surprisingly literal despite appearing abstract. The elaborate interplay of interior and exterior planes in *Lost in Thought* (2015) openly references the relationship between our inner and outer selves. Similarly, a recent series of *Hedge* sculptures evokes the intricate matrices of branches that lie beneath the surface of hedgerows, recalling those in YSP's 18th-century gardens.



*Lost in Thought* (2015), Tony Cragg. Photo © Ned Carter Miles

An occasional tendency towards cubism results in a number of works that explore both visual and tactile perception with equal weight, notably in a series of 'portraits' whose abstracted forms derive from the recursive profile of a face.

Out in the open air, *Points of View* (2013) and other pieces treat perspective as a force capable of warping an object out of dull uniformity. The artist deliberately allowed the angle from which the pieces were viewed to influence their form as they developed. Were the material treated differently - as something to be seen and worked on from one perspective and with a preconceived notion of the eventual form - these gnarled bronzes might conceivably rise from the ground with the uniformity endowed by a manufacturer's specifications; however, Cragg's alternative approach to his task activates them, favouring creative intelligence to mechanical production.



For a time Cragg was resistant to using bronze, opting instead to work with iron in conscious alignment with Richard Serra over Henry Moore. This had as much to do with differences in the sculptural problems he and Moore faced as with the material, whose necessary hollowness conflicted with his interest in interiority. By the time Cragg came to his art, the issues of breaking away from sculptural tradition had already been explored in bronze by his predecessor, opening the way for new challenges. There are nonetheless many exceptional bronze pieces on display, including from the series of cast *Early Forms*, whose flowing lines and planes evoke the lips of oyster shells and the endlessly regenerating curvature of the sea. As with a small selection of watercolours displayed elsewhere, they also highlight Cragg's virtuosity as a colourist.



*McCormack (2007)*, Tony Cragg. Photo © Ned Carter Miles

Whether exploring colour or form, this exhibition, like the art, draws its strength from its attentiveness to change. It helps us view the sculptor's work as he views the world: always with a fresh eye.

'Tony Cragg: A Rare Category of Objects' is at [Yorkshire Sculpture Park](#) until 3 September.

*The National, UAE*  
14 March 2017

## **[N] ARTS&CULTURE**

# **Artist Tony Cragg: 'How much of the reality that we see in front of us exists when we are not looking at it'**

► The Turner Prize-winning artist tells us his works are not as abstract or random as they might appear.



British sculptor Tony Cragg, who won the Turner Prize in 1988, says: 'My interest is not what things look like, but why they look like that!' Courtesy Abbi Kemp / Leila Heller Gallery Dubai

When Tony Cragg won the Turner Prize in 1988, he was a controversial choice. Many believed the award should have gone to Lucian Freud, who was commended by the committee in the same year.

However, Cragg, now considered one of the world's foremost sculptors, says the honour had little effect on his career – he even gave away the £10,000 (Dh46,358) prize money to charity.

At the time, he was noted for using recycled material, but this was only one aspect of a lifelong exploration of the nature of material of all kinds – something that manifests itself in his large sculptures, which mostly defy description. He creates objects and forms that do not exist, and for which we do not have words.

"My interest is not what things look like, but why they look like that," he says. "I don't want to represent something or reproduce something we are already familiar with. I want to be involved with the internal structure of the material."

Conversations with Cragg about material are deeply philosophical and can spin off on fascinating tangents.

"How much of the reality that we see in front of us exists when we are not looking at it?" he asks, almost rhetorically, and then pauses to ponder.

"Human thought is a dimension in my opinion and my sculptures are the result of thought and experience with material."

It is clear that Cragg thinks long and hard about any structure before building it. In that sense, his sculptures are not at all random or abstract, as many people might describe them.

Actually, he says, they are "not chaotic at all". He creates mathematical systems and rules, which he then explores and follows until he reaches a form with which he is happy.

*A Head, I Thought* (2011) is a two-metre box-like sculpture, carved out of wood, and is both geometric and anamorphic. It has complex fluidity, but seems structured enough to be aesthetically pleasing, albeit for reasons that you might not quite be able to fathom. This is true with all his sculptures, 18 of which are on show at the Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai this month.

*Hardliner* (2013), made of bright-orange bronze, has an industrial feel, with both jagged and rounded edges. *3D Incident* (2007) resembles a head, with a profile clearly visible from one side, but on the reverse, the bronze undulates like a wave of shiny black, which transforms the structure into something without a name.

This is, perhaps, a nod to the history of sculpture which, from the Renaissance until the end of the 19th century, was mostly concerned with reproducing the human form.

"This reduced sculpture to craftsmanship," he says. "For me, it is not that exciting to copy things because nature made these things and made them so magnificently.

"What is so wonderful about making a head in marble when a head has several trillion neurons in it and is the most magnificent, complicated structure in the universe? Why would you then make it in marble? I don't quite get that.

"I think there are other ways of expressing the complications and the sublime quality of the material!"

Cragg's ongoing experimental approach to materials, and how he can elicit an emotional response from a viewer by creating new forms and new expressions with them, have paved the way for a long and successful career.

He left his native United Kingdom in 1977, settling in Wuppertal, western Germany, and began teaching at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. After winning the Turner Prize, he represented the UK at the Venice Biennale, and had many high-profile exhibitions over the next two decades.

Notable venues on this long list include Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in 1996, London's Royal Academy in 1999, and the Musée du Louvre in Paris in 2011.

Last year, his exhibition at the Hermitage museum in St Petersburg received critical acclaim, and next month, his biggest UK exhibition to date, will take place at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

In the Middle East, a touring exhibition is planned for three cities in Iran: Tehran, Isfahan and Yazd.

A chance to see Cragg's work in the flesh, as it were, is extremely important, because the wonder of his artworks can only truly be appreciated this way.

When he speaks about his work, a word that continually comes up is emotion. He is clear that he is attempting to elicit an emotional reaction. "My works are absolutely geometric objects, but at the same time, they have a complicated enough form that you can get involved with them and have an emotional response. I think that is very significant," he says.

This significance is mostly bound to the fact that most of us do not give much thought to reflecting upon our existence, he adds.

"One of the saddest things is that we don't realise what an unimaginable miracle it is that we exist and that we can reflect upon that," he says.

Perhaps, then, rather than trying to work out the meaning of a Tony Cragg sculpture, we should simply sit and meditate on what it means to be alive.

• Tony Cragg runs until March 6 at Leila Heller Gallery, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai. Visit [www.leilahellergallery.com](http://www.leilahellergallery.com)  
aseaman@thenational.ae

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*The Financial Times*  
8 March 2017

## FINANCIAL TIMES

Visual Arts

✓ Added

### Material world: Tony Cragg at Yorkshire Sculpture Park

A thoughtful show illuminates an artist poised between the abstract and the figurative



Jane Ure-Smith MARCH 8 2017



One of the most revealing moments in Yorkshire Sculpture Park’s exhilarating Tony Cragg exhibition comes near the end: a magic moment in a film when we see the artist drawing. Taking a blank sheet, he sketches a nose, a mouth and an eye. Then, suddenly, the pencil marks proliferate and the drawing explodes into life as a pair of richly layered, slightly skewed human profiles, one male, one female.

“I have no idea where a drawing might lead,” Cragg tells us. “It’s a journey — an adventure.”

As the highlight of its 40th anniversary year, YSP has mounted what it calls a “thoughtful survey” of Cragg’s oeuvre. With displays in both the indoor galleries and the gardens surrounding them, the show focuses mainly on work made since 1990 — and much thought has indeed been devoted to the siting of the outdoor work. The ragged, toothlike, bronze “Caldera” (2008) stands sentinel at the gate, inviting the visitor to peer through its “roots” to the landscape beyond.



But the real stroke of genius is the placing of the three pale bronze pillars “Points of View” (2013) on the sloping lawn above the Underground Galleries. These twirling, swirling, tottering columns don’t look like they should stand up at all: on this terrain it’s a miracle.

Cragg calls himself a “radical materialist”. Since the 1990s, when he stopped making sculpture from found objects, he has delighted in materials. The world is a giant storehouse offering endless possibilities to the artist, he says. Over the years, he has created different “families” of work, moving on from one to another with the door still ajar, in case he wants to come back. YSP’s show seeks connections between these different series, delving into the artist’s experimental approach, his relationship with his materials, and the handmade nature of his work. Cragg’s pieces may look like machine-made perfection, but he doesn’t outsource them to fabricators: everything is made in the studio by himself and his team.



The show also connects Cragg's sculpture to his drawings, many of which are on display. Drawings are often the starting point for pieces, notably drawings of human faces, such as we see in the film. If one worries that finding physical references in an abstract work is a little unsophisticated, it's both a revelation and a comfort to learn that works such as "Versus" (2011), on the terrace, and "Mean Average" (2013), opposite the Underground Galleries, are full of buried faces. Part of a family of sculptures entitled "Rational Beings", they hark back to the idea of portrait busts, and specifically to a futurist sculpture of Mussolini's head from 1933. Cragg has created profiles, then manipulated them beyond recognition, so that only the ghost of their humanness remains.

Working in his teens as a lab technician, Cragg, now 67, began doodling to stave off boredom, then rapidly escaped to the art world, graduating from the Royal College of Art in 1977. He moved immediately to Wuppertal, Germany, and a year later began teaching at nearby Düsseldorf's Kunstakademie — formerly the haunt of Joseph Beuys — eventually becoming its director. He has lived in Germany ever since.

"New Figuration" (1985), the joyous, looped body of an impossibly tall man, is the only sign in this show of the artist who in the 1980s made brightly coloured collages from plastic objects washed up along the Rhine. By the end of that decade Cragg was eager to swap found objects for traditional materials (though the spectre of Henry Moore loomed large, prompting him to cast initially in iron rather than bronze).



The only other piece in the show made from found objects is “Minster” (1992), five surprisingly delicate spires built from heavy-duty industrial junk. Positioned in the foyer of the Underground Galleries it serves to focus our minds on materials – the steel, bronze, stone, wood (and, over in the Garden Gallery, exquisite glass) to come.

The more you look, the more you see variety. The play of inside-outside is also revealing. The bronze “Runner” (2013), in the formal garden, for example, has a later counterpart indoors, “Runner” (2015),

which is bright red, slightly taller and made from wood. Both have huge dynamism, but shoehorning the latter into a gallery seems to compress its energy and add to its power. The indoor works invite you to dwell on the texture of what Cragg might call their “skin”: particularly striking are “Secretions” (1998), a collection of soft-bottle-like shapes, covered entirely in dice, and “Spring” (2016), painstakingly constructed from layered plywood and suggesting a fountain, a fern, a controlled explosion.

That spread of possibilities gives a clue to Cragg’s originality. Driven by delight in his materials, for more than 25 years he has flitted between the abstract and the figurative, creating shapes that speak to our humanity yet lie just out of reach of language. Like his drawing, his sculpture is an adventure.

*‘Tony Cragg: A Rare Category of Objects’, until September 3, [ysp.co.uk](https://www.ysp.co.uk)*

*The Guardian*  
5 March 2017



**Observer New Review**  
**Q&A**  
Sculpture

**Interview**

## Tony Cragg: 'I'm most interested in the emotional qualities of things'

*Interview by Kate Kellaway*

**The Liverpool-born sculptor on how nature complicates art, and what he's learned from teaching and living in Europe**



Sun 5 Mar 2017 09.00 GMT



72 21



▲ 'Sculpture is the opposite of boring and repetitive forms': Tony Cragg with two of his exhibits at Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Photograph by Christopher Thomond for the Observer

### **You've called your exhibition at Yorkshire Sculpture Park A Rare Category of Objects. Why?**

Sculptures are rare. It's not as if you walk down pavements dodging sculptures, do you? Sculpture is a rare use of materials. We're in the industrial north here, where billions of tons of material are being used to make cars, pottery, books, textiles, chemicals - but how many kilos of sculpture are made today? The non-utilitarian use of material is important. Utility means limitation in the forms produced. Expedient industrial production systems produce simple geometries - a world of boring and repetitive forms. Sculpture is the opposite of that.

### **The park is a tremendous setting for your work...**

It is a magnificent institution. I don't know anywhere else like it. This exhibition is extensive - with 14 large sculptures [made within the last 10 years] outside, 35 indoors and 80 works on paper. Today, it is dramatic here in Yorkshire: there is snow on the hills, beautiful blue skies, the sun is shining, and Atlantic clouds are scudding about. Sculpture is not only measuring itself against nature; changes in climate, time of day - all these have an effect. People can make anything, but nature has had a long time to make things complicated. If you live in nature, you have a richer vocabulary of forms in your mind.

### **Could you compare two works from the show - one old, one new?**

*Minster* (1990) is stacked circular objects that go three metres high, with little pinnacles. The circles used to be stacked straight, but at some point I had to fix the piece for security reasons, and realised gravity was no longer the glue. There are weldings and rods inside the structure, and the geometries took off into space. A larger work, *Points of View* (2013), is three - seven metres tall - columns. These are stacked, horizontal ellipses. Along their tangents are drawings. There is more than 20 years between these pieces, but what they share is a geometry that takes on an emotional quality.

**/// When I went to Germany my colleagues were people like Joseph Beuys. There was much existential bantering over lunch**

**Am I right in thinking that, as a little boy, you wanted to be a scientist - and does your life as a sculptor resemble a life in science?**

Actually, as a small boy, I wanted to work on my grandfather's farm. I was always interested in geology. As a seven-year-old, I found a fossil that fascinated me - I still have it. My brother and I moved to a council estate in Welwyn Garden City and were given a job, by Dad, to make a path with pebbles. We found an amazing heart-shaped, flint echinoid. We thought it must have fallen from outer space. I was never a scientist, although my father was an electrical engineer who worked on Concorde. When I left school, I worked as a lowly assistant in an establishment researching rubber. Art is different from science. Science influences our lives, dictates the forms of materials around us. But science means nothing without art. Art gives everything meaning and value.

**You once said: "You only learn about art by making it"...**

People who write will know what this means. They might think, "I'll change that word", or "this needs a new ending" and, eventually, they'll write something more powerful than their original thought. If you make something with your hands, every change in line, volume, surface, silhouette, gives you a different thought or emotion. After several moves, you're in unknown territory. Although I change material with my hands, the material itself changes my mind. It is a dialogue in which the material always has the last word.

**What is most important in teaching art?**

I taught at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 1978. The level of engagement is important. I tried to get people to find out what they really had to do. I'm glad I studied in the 60s, when you went to art school for idealistic reasons. Art has been such an enormous success over the last 30 or 40 years that today's students, instead of following a personal path, often strategise about the best way to become successful.

**What was the turning point in your career?**

I was at the Royal College in 1977 and invited to exhibit in the Queen's Jubilee exhibition. I was over the moon. I've had a lucky life. I pinch myself regularly. But every time a work turns out that I feel excited about, that's the real reward.



▲ Migrant, by Tony Cragg. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian



### **How important are your titles - *Sinbad, Manipulation, Can-Can...*?**

They're not frivolous - although my assistant will sometimes say of a piece, "That ugly thing in the corner" - and that's what we'll call it.

### **In conversation at the American Academy in Berlin, you said everything in our heads comes from the outside world. Is there any spiritual element in your work?**

This is what philosophers like Heidegger talk about. Everything is material. But the material is so complicated. We've no idea what absolute reality looks like. I find that sublime and uplifting. It has a spiritual quality. I'm most interested in the emotional qualities of things. Every emotion has a material basis - run by hormones and nerves. But isn't that magnificent?

### **You are based in Wuppertal in Germany - how did that come about?**

I met my first wife studying at the Royal College in London. She was from Wuppertal. I moved there with the idea of staying a year. We had a couple of kids, a divorce and I married again. I have four kids and never thought of leaving them. But I'm British, and so is my sense of humour. I'm not a nationalist. Working in France, in 1974, opened my eyes. I come from a family that did not have much opportunity to travel. I found the French dress well, have nice family relationships, eat well... There's a hell of a lot to learn from other people. When I first went to Germany, my colleagues were people like Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter - we had great conversations, with much existential bantering, over lunch.

### **Drawing remains essential to you - why?**

There are endless ways of joining two spots on paper. Once you move the pencil, it becomes the most complicated, fantastic journey. It's like modelling with clay where you could - if you were God or good enough - make limitless forms.

### **You talk about art as a defence against mediocrity?**

We use materials to impoverish form. We cut down a forest, make it into a field and, after a while, a car park. We screw up landscapes - everything has been changed by us. But sculpture? Art takes on space, makes new forms, ideas, emotions, languages, freedom. An increasing number of people have a better quality of life because art is in their life. Just think about that.

*A Rare Category of Objects is now at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, until 3 September 2017*

*The Times*  
3 March 2017

# THE TIMES

VISUAL ART

## A fossil from the bronze age

If only the work of Tony Cragg were not so difficult and ugly

Rachel Campbell-Johnston

March 3 2017, 12:01am,  
The Times



Caldera by Tony Cragg, 2008  
TONY CRAGG/JONTY WILDE

Imagine a little boy poring over his fossil collection: examining and fiddling and sorting and dreaming; grouping together similar pieces; lingering lovingly over favourites; pondering the slow science of geological creation and responding to the prehistoric as excitedly as if it were present again. This might be a good way to start tackling the work of Tony Cragg. I only suggest it because I am assuming that quite a lot of the visitors to his new Yorkshire Sculpture Park exhibition, *A Rare Category of Objects*, will find themselves casting about for some sort of way in.

Cragg's glory days came in the Eighties when sculptural fashion, having progressed from the direct carvings of Henry Moore, through the weldings of Anthony Caro and the pastoral wanderings of Richard Long, moved on to the urban scavengings of this artist, born in Liverpool in 1949. For the next few years he cropped up on every curator's hotlist. By the end of the decade he had taken the Turner prize, had a major show at the Hayward Gallery and represented our country at the Venice Biennale. And then he was swept away by the whirlwind of Brit Art into what feels (deservedly) like an increasingly outmoded realm of ageing white men who like big lumps of bronze.

So how are we supposed to respond when we pitch up at YSP and discover a huge, view-blocking mass — Cragg’s 5m-high 2008 *Caldera* — presiding over the landscape like the vertebral bone of some massive metal dinosaur? If you, like me, find such lumps of bronze as impenetrable as they are unappealing, you should be grateful for the fossil idea. Cragg has been fascinated by fossils since he was a child (a few pieces from his boyhood collection are even included in this show) and the ideas that we tend to conjure up as we peruse such prehistoric legacies resonate with the ideas that Cragg expresses and explores in his work.



Elliptical Column, 2012  
TONY CRAGG/JONTY WILDE

Science and natural history are Cragg’s twin fascinations. The structures of his thought have a geological feel. He lays down idea upon idea in a gradually thickening sediment. He traces the slow processes of accretion and transformation and evolution. He is interested in the way that man-made objects can become what he has described as “fossilised keys to a past time which is our present”. He is fascinated by the processes of sorting and categorising. This might all sound a bit theoretical, but you need to bear it in mind as you visit the exhibition so that what otherwise feels alienating begins to explain itself.

*A Rare Category of Objects* (the title comes from Cragg’s definition of sculpture) counts, apparently, as the most extensive exhibition of Cragg’s work in this country. Yet although it touches on all phases of his career it doesn’t include such celebrated landmarks as his 1981 mosaic *Britain Seen from the North* — a map made from smashed-up bits of discarded plastic. The main focus of this show is emphatically on recent and sometimes completely new works (one sculpture was completed just days before the opening).

The main point is to allow us to see where Cragg, a sculptor who typically creates work in series or “families”, has got to in the process of his incrementally developing ideas. What have those famous stacks that he made in the early Eighties stacked up to?

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Cragg was swept away by the whirlwind of Brit Art

wobbling on the verge of collapse — dominate. I would start in the underground gallery where he creates sculptures on a more human scale. There you can begin to understand how his thoughts have evolved. Cragg, for instance, began his *Early Forms* series in the 1980s. These pieces were based on the shapes of vessels, on the test tubes and conical flasks that he had encountered as a 17-year-old lab technician (he worked for the British Rubber Producers Research Association before going on to art college). We find that in his newer works these forms have grown increasingly more complex and befuddling, twisting and turning and rotating. Similarly his *Rational Beings* series — a family of sculptures first inspired by the idea of a facial profile — have become more elaborate, turning into a complicated visual analysis of relationships between external appearances and a secret interior world.

Unless you are a fan, I wouldn't start in the gardens where his slewed and toppling towers — they look like a pot spun out of control on a giant wheel,



Manipulation, 2010  
TONY CRAGG/JONTY WILDE

The displays in these galleries put you in what feels like direct touch with the processes of making. You can almost see the flow of the pouring and folding; the glooping and looping. You can get up close and scrutinise the minute shifts of each slight transformation. Preparatory sketches hung alongside are energetic, informative and fresh. The range of materials is striking. You will find cobalt blues, crimson reds, mustard yellows. You will find wood, glass, marble, fibreglass, bronze and even, in one piece, a surface of dice. Cragg is an adventurer fascinated by the possibilities of material.

It is only by following Cragg on his experimental path that you will find yourself entering his mind, understanding how what began as a classical sculpture of a face ended up as something that looks like an abstracted totem pole. The excavation of the idea is interesting. It's just a pity that the end product when scaled up and cast into bronze looks so ugly that this viewer, at least, can't quite manage to get past it. But that isn't a reason not to have a try for yourself. If any exhibition is going to convince you of Cragg's merits, it's probably this one. So it's worth pitching up.

***Tony Cragg: A Rare Category of Objects*** is at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield (01924 832631), March 4 to September 3

*The Daily Telegraph*  
2 March 2017

## The Telegraph

'Mind-boggling structures in a stunning landscape': Tony Cragg: A Rare Category of Objects, review

★★★★☆



Tony Cragg, *Versus*, 2011

By **Mark Hudson**, ART CRITIC

1 MARCH 2017 • 6:12PM

It isn't often these days that you encounter art that is not just indescribable, but almost literally unimaginable. However looking at Tony Cragg's recent works in his largest British show to date, the question is not so much what do they mean, as how did he dream up the ideas and processes that brought these mind-boggling structures into being in the first place.

A bronze "figure" set on the highest point of Yorkshire Sculpture Park's stunning landscaped grounds is a mass of disc-like, strangely muscular forms that appear to be permanently slipping out of alignment. Elsewhere phantom forms, like layers of tremulous jelly, are rendered in super-solid marble, while a gigantic outcrop of cliff-like masses radiates an almost animal, organic energy, the whole thing constructed in mind-bendingly intricate layers of polished plywood.

If Cragg's forms appear neither quite animal, vegetable nor mineral, but a bit of all three, that feels appropriate, as a preoccupation with categorisation – or “taxonomy” as it is slightly pretentiously put – provides the theme of this exhibition.

Cragg, 67, sprang to fame in the early Eighties as part of the New British Sculpture movement alongside Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor and Antony Gormley, and has become one of Britain's best-known sculptors, by literally sorting things out. Rather than evolving new forms from scratch, Cragg organised rubbish from his studio into monolithic stacks, or gathered plastic detritus into colour-coded assemblages that gave him some of his early hits. The irreverent wit of his *Britain Seen from the North*, for example, composed entirely of junk objects, has made it an enduringly popular work, with its life-size viewer looking at the Scottish end of a vast, wall-filling British map lying on its side.

While the exhibition doesn't pretend to be a retrospective in the sense of fully representing Cragg's career, there are works from all periods which have been arranged principally for visual impact in the beautifully designed underground galleries and dotted through the grounds.

The earliest pieces have a child-like faux naivety: *New Figuration* from 1985 shows a figure spiralling into space in shards of dustbin lids and brightly coloured plastic spades, while *Minster*, 1990, a collection of spires formed from stacked industrial components, has an unlikely fairy-tale quality.



Tony Cragg, Minster, 1990

Yet it's far from self-evident how this early enthusiasm for ordering found materials has fed into the more carefully constructed, but inscrutable forms of his more recent work.

Drawings of simplified human profiles from the Nineties, however, give a clue to his future direction. These rather anonymous brows, noses and chins are put into a kind of whirling sculptural rotation in his Rational Beings series. In Cast Glances from 2002, a blurred head in black bronze is clearly discernible with a tornado-like cloud emanating from the top. And if the idea of blurring – an optical effect – feels odd in relation to sculpture, which is all about tangible physical objects, then defying and confounding such categories is what Cragg's sculpture is all about.

These attenuated and endlessly morphing heads and body-parts become a sort of all-purpose texture, a quasi-geological strata that has lost any clear connection to its original human form, but is explored in almost endlessly diverse permutations and materials.



Tony Cragg, Secretions, 1998

In *Points of View*, 2013, three teetering gold-tinged bronze columns of strata perform a kind of wavering dance up on the green sward above the gallery; the layered plywood of *Runner*, 2015, a brilliant red structure completely filling the tall Underground Gallery corridor, harks back to his early enthusiasm for stacking, while *Instant*, 2011, with its mass of serrated profiles in deep red polished marble is – completely counter to what you'd expect – actually a portrait.

While Cragg's work always strongly reminds me of early 20th century Italian Futurism, which sought to capture motion through minutely assembled multiple viewpoints, he is interested less in portraying movement per se than in embodying the sub-atomic energy and dynamism that is present in all things.

In Cragg's hands materials take on an exuberant life of their own. Lengths of what looks like industrial piping, split at the side to reveal interior and exterior, get themselves into writhing, almost copulatory permutations. One, spreading into a rippling yellow fan-shape at the end of one of the garden walkways, feels like an industrial equivalent to the scallop-shell in Botticelli's erotic masterpiece, *The Birth Of Venus*. *Secretions*, an arrangement of enormous bulbous forms, like internal human organs, is covered in an oddly glittering surface that proves on closer inspection to be thousands of plastic dice – a play on the much-vaunted role of chance in modern art.

This is a beautifully organised exhibition that sets Cragg's work off to strong effect. It might appear to make too much of Cragg's interest in the quasi-scientific analysis and categorisation of materials and processes – from his early days as a lab technician in Welwyn Garden City to his professorship at Dusseldorf's prestigious *Kunstakademie*, where he taught for 36 years. Yet I suppose Cragg's desire to push materials far beyond the limits of what they would naturally do is about understanding how things work. Far more though, you're left with a sense of the universal human urge to create extraordinary stuff, to bring into being forms and structures that have never been conceived before.

In that sense, this show couldn't be more appropriate as the centrepiece of a programme celebrating forty years of Yorkshire Sculpture Park: the vision of Peter Murray, then a lecturer at Leeds University, the Park had modest beginnings but has gone on to be globally influential in the way sculpture is exhibited and understood, as well as becoming a hugely successful visitor attraction – with 600,000 visitors last year. You couldn't hope to find a more appropriate embodiment of YSP's innovative exploratory spirit than the visionary work of Tony Cragg.

**Tony Cragg: A Rare Category of Objects** is at Yorkshire Sculpture Park from March 4 to September 3.

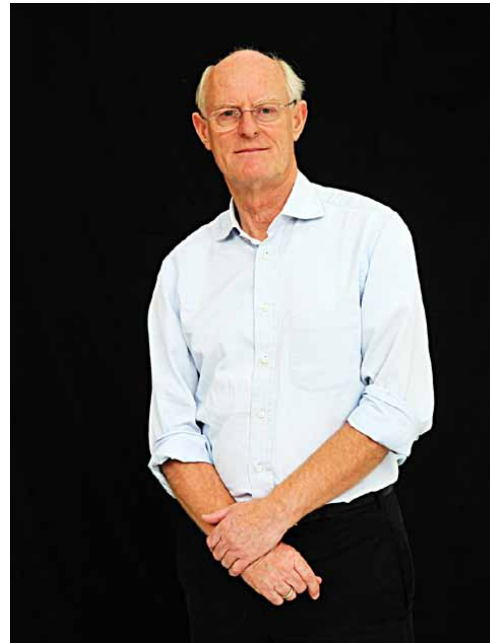


Tony Cragg  
Parts of the World, 2015  
200 x 133 x 66 cm, Painted Aluminium  
Photography: Michael Richter  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

## MATERIAL MATTER

**RAJESH PUNJ**

AN INTERVIEW WITH TONY CRAGG



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Tony Cragg  
Photography: Mart Engelen  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Tony Cragg's new works appear as these attractive alien interventions that are as well suited to the set of a science fiction film, as they are "sculptures as stage" as he described them. Brightly coloured contortions of wood, metal and glass that have been perfectly manipulated

by man and machine represent for Cragg a kind of beauty that is closer to nature and as far removed from man's modernist ideals as his practice allows. Reacting to the atmosphere every single twist and turn of the organic and artificial elements of his works are regarded by the celebrated British sculptor as a moral mutiny against the hardened line and fixed edge that defines everything else. As his new sculptures challenge our understanding of the physical constitution of an object, with its inner workings concealed by its encasing. Focusing on the foundation of a form Cragg invites us to scrutinise over the anatomy of our living and working environment, as we are surrounded by technological apparatus that are operative whilst being unobtrusive. By which the slick simplicity of everything new has rendered an object's complexity invisible. Yet as much as Cragg's contemporary works appear as aesthetically appealing as objects of new technology, his is a concern for the 'sub stance' of something as he explains it, in order we see within materials the anatomical structure of a more impressive world. Further demonstrating, by virtue of his belief systems, of his wish to examine the natural energy of an object's existence, as much as he is interested in the physical form itself. Deciding that, "Anything that resists gravity requires energy. So trees and people grow up, and with our own body we fight for the entire length of our lives, and the day we stop fighting we just get absorbed by it. That is why gravity is called gravity, because



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Tony Cragg  
*Industrial Nature 2015*  
 220 x 366 x 190 cm, Painted Aluminium  
 Photography: Michael Richter  
 © Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Tony Cragg  
*Manipulations I & II 2015*  
 110 x 115 x 120 cm, 142 x 120 x 130 cm  
 Bronze  
 Photography: Michael Richter  
 © Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery  
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reality, we have no idea what ultimate reality looks like. It may not look like anything." As though our relationship with the real lies in our grasp of the incomprehensible.

**Interview**

**Art&Deal:** *What I was keen to do by way of introduction was to talk about the work here, and then if it requires we can go back to my original questions; in order for me to understand from your perspective the sculptures you have between the two galleries for your new Lisson exhibition.*

**Tony Cragg:** It is quite big for a gallery exhibition, but obviously gallery exhibitions are of new work. So it represents the work that I am concerned with right now. I think there are over twenty-five works here in a dozen different spaces when you add them all up. And there is one large space here that is not as easy to work with, which is at

a little bit of a right angle to the rest of the building. I put four sculptures in there, which are all my latest works. The first one is *Sail 2016*, and maybe even the title suggests something. A sail is a very rational thing because it is full of parabolas and forms that are obviously to do with wind pressure. That work itself consists of thirty-four elliptical columns, vertical, and they are all inside one another. The intention was to make something that looks on the surface quite organic but is also totally rational, because at any cross section you are able to see a series of ellipsis that run through it. So I think that is a good starting point for the exhibition because it is one of the fundamental aspects that I have concentrated on. I want an internal structure to the thing I am making, which I build up in certain ways.

**A&D:** *So there is a kind of architecture to how you construct your works, is that how you would describe it?*

it pulls you into its grave. It takes your energy, your living energy to a zero state." Seeing "sculpture as a vital extension of us, a vital science, and a sign of vitality of our own existence."

Having organised and ordered everything for much of his adult life, as art stacked, shelved, packed and placed, Cragg has since absorbed new technology as a way of making works that are impossible to comprehend and accomplish by hand alone; and it is either an irony or an evolution that sees his sculptures being applauded now for their visual sophistication, when his approach in the 1970's and 1980's was much more elemental, by virtue of his selecting and intentionally rearranging a

series of domestic ready-mades into creative configurations. In the interview determinedly speaking of his replacing the rudimentary with something more rigorous, "With my work I am not interested in chaotic gestures. I am no longer interested in throwing colour at the wall or braking plates, I have gone a long way from that. I don't really want to do those things even though I know they produce nice effects. I want to keep my hands on the reins of the formal structure inside the work, and by doing that I can influence the outside appearance and my relationship to it. I am not really that happy when things change without my controlling them."

Side-by-side the early forms with

his modern manipulations, Cragg concentrates on what is current, replacing the stack of broken bricks and cracked and cut furniture for the whipped up energy of his contemporary bronze and wood works; as he sees sculpture as an opportunity to understand perfection from the inside out. Most striking of all of his new works are the tarnished coloured aluminum sculptures *Industrial Nature 2015* and *Parts of the World 2015*, that might well appear as reconstituted car body parts. Which for Cragg lead us into a parallel sphere of structures within sculptures; which he explains as seeking "a clear rational basis for an internal structure to the thing I am making." Propositioning "we couldn't even cope with ultimate



**INTERVIEW**



TC

TC: Absolutely you could say that, but I see it as an 'internal structure' that is within everything. Like within our own bodies. We are not chaotic we don't have ears everywhere; we are carefully constructed. Even the most complicated things and material are well constructed. It is not just chance. It is not wildness and chaos. So it is part of our own existence, it is about our being human.

We are stuck with this thing for thousands of philosophical years, because we have the potential to be logical, systematic and rational about things. But on the other hand we also add a great deal of emotional input into our lives. We pride ourselves for our intellectual

abilities. Evolutionarily that is what has given us an advantage on this planet. But ninety-five to ninety-nine percent of our decisions are emotional. We are able to decide how we look, of how we dress, what you eat, how you spend the rest of our lives without emotion. So even in a carefully constructed work like *Sail* it has an internal structure to the extent that I feel takes on an emotional quality. And that is the characteristic of a lot of a work I make. Sometimes the structures are very different, which means that every surface and every point on the surface is not there by chance. It is there exactly because it has to be there. It can be a few centimeters in, it can be a few centimeters out, but it is exactly where it should be. We can

be in or out, but it has consequences for the entire form, and that is similar to the other works in that room.

*Spring 2015*, which is big work with the working title *Inca*, is a slightly more complicated work. With a lot of the work, I make it in wood initially. I use plywood, layering it up because it leaves me with an enormous amount of freedom to change the form. I can build it up, and if I don't like it take it down, change bits, cut it out again, and keep changing it until I have the sculpture I want to make entirely upon my own subjective needs or desires. And *Spring* is slightly different because the first one that was made had layers stacked up,

in a similar vein to an older work *Stackfrom 1976*. Which is a bad habit I have had for over forty-five years, of stacking things up as ecological structures. But the problem with stacking a work like *Spring* is that there are passages that were much too thin, and that wouldn't easily adhere to each other. So in the studio I scanned the sculpture in to be able to create cross sections, which become bigger throughout the work; and that way I created a greater optimal strength. And for that reason that sculpture is a lot about the way material works.

**A&D: There is a real science to what you are doing.**

TC: No I wouldn't say that, all of the material if you leave it to itself... look at the moon it just becomes dusty flat, while on our planet there is a lot of stuff going on. With living things anything that resists gravity requires energy. So trees and people grow up, and with our own body we fight for the entire length of our lives, and the day we stop fighting

we just get absorbed by it. That is why gravity is called gravity, because it pulls you into its grave. It takes your energy, your living energy to a zero state. That is what that is all about, a vital science, a sign of vitality of our own existence.

So it has to be well made, if you don't make it well it will have to be dismantled and on the dump. Another work in that room is *Migrant 2015*, which is the latest version of a work that I first made in 1984. Whereby I took a known thing, a vessel and moved it through space to create another form. So the idea being I have never been interested in copying a natural model. I never made the figure it just doesn't interest me. It is there already so I could only ever make an inferior model of it. It was the sadness of art from the nineteenth century, and there is something terribly melancholic about it, because they were doing their absolute best to make a sculpture that resembled a person; and it

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Tony Cragg  
*Hedge 1 & II 2016*  
103 x 100 x 60 cm, 126 x 110 x 86 cm, Steel  
Photography: Michael Richter  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Tony Cragg (Left)  
*Migrant 2015*  
220 x 150 x 147 cm, Bronze  
Photography: Michael Richter  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Tony Cragg (Right)  
*Ginko, 2015, Wood*  
280 x 245 x 74 cm  
Photography: Michael Richter  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery



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didn't. It is more like a hologram. If they could have had a hologram, then they would have had a copy of what they wanted; nature is more complicated. And also at the same time what that did was to show their obsession with copying anatomy, which lead them (artists from the nineteenth century) to copying and using specific materials to do that. And those materials were the best materials to copy things in. They didn't take on any risky materials. So that then became an idea in peoples' minds that still exists, of a skill attached to making sculpture. Now we realise, most of us, that sculpture is not about copying nature, in its essence it is about how material and material form affects us. And that is an enormous affect because everything we have in our head has come from the material world.

We have seen, heard, felt, smelt or tasted the material world. All of the terms we have in our minds, in our brains, all of the synaptic firings, the patterns we have in our brains, come from our experiences of looking at the outside world. With language every word is grounded in the material world, so human beings make disastrously boring things out of material. Like flat, white, straight edged, boring surfaces. Rectangular, circular, cylindrical, silly geometries, stupid geometries. Boring, with no colours. So we have to react to an enormous impoverishment of form on this planet. We cut down a forest and make a car park. It is always a disaster, it doesn't matter what we do. We are incapable because we cannot make anything as complicated as nature, nature has had a long time to evolve. It has obviously had billions of years to make things, so of course it is very complicated. But in the hands of human beings we will turn this planet into a desert. It will become a desert.

**A&D:** *Is that as a consequence*

*of our whole adventure with Modernism?*

**TC:** Well it is just the human era. It is what humans do.

**A&D:** *Control, design, determine.*

**TC:** Well not even that. It was only when the planet became populated by plants that produced oxygen. There was no oxygen on the planet originally so oxygen was a waste product of plants, and gave us and animals and bacteria possibilities to come in. So we'll just keep going until we have done our thing. It's not quite true, there are other aspects to the human period.

Anthropocene is a different period of the planet, so we were very adaptable. And we have a different consciousness about it, so maybe we can come up with a different result. Maybe we won't have to die like the trilobites. I love the trilobites, they were everywhere on the planet. They were the most successful species. And you get fossils and trilobites in all possible positions. It's like the Karma Sutra trilobites. And they were huge, and some of them were incredibly big.

**A&D:** *Going back to one of your original points, you talk very eloquently of the 'emotional' component of our automated lives. If the emotional supersedes a design for life, how do you encompass that in your work? How do you make the emotional physical?*

**TC:** You do, inevitably. There are no materials; there is nothing you can look at to allow you to understand an emotional experience. I think that was something that I maybe... you don't have to know you are having an emotional experience. That is the other thing, you are not conscious of it, it is entirely effecting.

**A&D:** *But also what is interesting is of your endeavor to capture something ephemeral, entirely*

*abstract and make it more permanent. There is an incredible sense when I walk through the show of objects and arrangements that are not 'regular.' That are determined as much by detail as they are by abstractions, 'emotions' and 'sensations'. Are you constantly moving between what is physical or real and our mental state, or our response to what is in front of us?*

**TC:** You have just used two fundamental terms there. When I was a student we would have terrible dogmatic rows about the figurative and the abstract. Everything you see is at the same time figurative and abstract, which is dependent on the way you want to look at it. If you say this is your figure, and you qualify that by saying that you are five feet ten tall, that is already abstract. Five-ten is already an abstraction, and we can't get away from that. It is completely crazy. It is just a stupid convention of art. But to get back to your point, there are always dichotomies and dualities to our own nature. As I said, the emotional, logical and rational, subjective and spiritual, corporal, bodily, whatever; is in everybody, in all of us. I don't know but I have a fluxing mind, I assume it is like that for most people, confirmed by my wife. Whereby I can never make decisions. I know I can make decisions, I am actually quite quick at making decisions, but it requires a going backwards and forwards; of going through the possibilities before something is decided. So I am always asking 'Do we think this? Do we think that? Do we really think this', so there is never a rock hard position. We really are like (Arnold) Isenberg's Quondom; we can never actually decide where we are at any given moment. Because we generalise, 'I think that, or I think that', but for the most part of our lives we know certain things, a little bit; but beyond the horizon of what we know, we have to believe. And actually most of our lives, most of



Tony Cragg  
Sail, 2015  
280 x 149 x 51 cm, Wood  
Photography: Charles Duprat  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery



our existence is based on what we believe.

Because we are in a time when awful people are fighting and going to war, dividing themselves up for what they believe. I am amazed that two people could possibly believe the same thing, because in that area of belief there are no proofs. So you could just believe anything. The whole idea of being on the back of a tortoise; the universe as the tortoise, why not? If that's what they want to believe, it doesn't make any difference. It doesn't have to be true does it to be believed? So what we are actually doing is making things, making art; I mean art is about being. Who makes the images that you believe

in? How do you start to imagine you have a belief system? You believe the chair is not going to collapse? So we are constantly in a state of belief on millions of different levels at any given moment. But in order to do that we have to have some basis for it, and somehow we conjure that up. How do you prove your beliefs? How do you revise your beliefs? How do you deepen and intensify them? Make them more relevant, whatever? Who provides images for that? So that is something religion has always done, and why other religions forbid it, because they don't want that you start making images that fool around with your beliefs. And in a funny way this is not about sculpture it is more about the ideal. Because it does

not belong in the natural world and it is not part of the industrial world either. It is not a practical necessity like everything else that is being made around us disastrously. It is in a little category of its own if you like.

**A&D: There is something wonderful contradictory in the notion of your making works of such permanence, when everything is in a constant state of flux.**

**TC:** Well every sculpture is just a stage.

**A&D: Do you see them as 'permanent stations' as you have said?**

**TC:** They are stations that look

back at history; there were very few pictures. All this painting going on, it will all rot thank God. So in the end if you go back all the artworks we know are bits of stone and bone. Stuff that could actually make a form, and most of those forms are about their spiritual relationship to something, be it fertility, sexuality, nutrition, to survival strategies, and all those kinds of things. They have acted as the fundamentals of art, the practical things we use as common denominators to make things. That's why they are so awful, so boring and incredibly repetitive, and sculpture is the total opposite of that. There are no lowest common denominators about things there. Things are complicated, and they do remain for better or worse. You walk past Hyde Park and shudder at the awful sculpture they have there. If ever there was an argument for the ephemeral it's those sculptures. God it makes me so angry.

**A&D: Are your sculptures a reaction to everything 'out there' that you don't approve of?**

**TC:** Probably, when I started making work in the late 1960's and into the 1970's, there were a lot of things going on; people living in skyscrapers dropping bombs on people living in bamboo houses, and lots of awful things everywhere. And when I grew up my father designed some of the electrical parts for aircrafts in lots of different places, so I went to several schools and we kept moving. Living in totally strange places, on council estates that were not built properly, there was no road, no pavement, just mud. So you start to accumulate a sense of dissatisfaction, not bitterness but you realise that everything is transient, impermanent. Can you imagine this place; it was only a couple of hundred years ago that this

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Tony Cragg  
Early Form, 2014  
72 x 64 x 62 cm, Bronze  
Photography: Michael Richter  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Tony Cragg  
Willow, 2014  
70 x 69 x 75 cm, Wood  
Photography: Michael Richter  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery



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place (where we are now) was a field, a meadow with a nice little river running through it.

**A&D:** *I immediately think of Wuppertal, Germany, and of your studio there; is that an attempt to detach yourself from this kind of gentrification?*

**TC:** No I don't think it is any better than here; the same thing, still the same culture. There is not much difference between Germany and Britain. Everyone in Britain thinks Germans behave in a strange way. Wuppertal is nearer to London than Newcastle is. Calais is nearer to there than Bristol.

**A&D:** *You have created a Sculpture Park in Wuppertal, which triggers*

*a question about your work being in-situ, off-site, while at the same time in the gallery space, and of how you determine that? Of how you decide upon a work's location in relationship to the weight of space around it?*

**TC:** Well that determines itself. Sculpture in the nineteenth century was just about the figure, and of using certain materials to replicate it, and since then there has been an enormous evolution in the last one hundred and twenty years of people realising that sculpture is about the way that all material affects us; so it has become a study of the material world. And that is why it is so relevant. That's why it is so important because science tells you how things work, but it is only

art that gives material meaning. And it also provides the vision for science in some ways. Artists and poets walked on the moon before a scientist got there. There is always something, but when it comes to going outside there are not that many materials that you can put outside, and I am convinced that the oldest materials are the best.

Because that's why they have naturally existed for so long. Bronze, which is many of thousands of years old, is the best material to put outside, more or less. Iron rusts away, steel rusts and is problematic, stone you can use but not a great deal; and that's it. Plastics rot away in the sunlight. So it is kind of limited, and the thing about outside is that there is a different kind of

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convention, because it becomes more much about the form than the material. And when you get out there what you are confronted with is the form of nature. We are not confronted with nature in this room, but when you step outside you are confronted with either an urban setting or something more rural.

What interests me much more is the natural confrontation, maybe not even confrontation, of being together with the natural being. And you notice that nature has had billions of years to make stuff, and it is very very good at it.

**A&D:** *Are the works in dialogue with the outside world?*

**TC:** Absolutely it is a dialogue with nature, so as I said you can make things. Most of my work I make in wood to start with, producing and applying layered wood because it is easier for me to do so. You have got to be able to make and model stuff.

And then it either gets made bigger or is cast in other materials, and that is the only way. You cannot put wood out there. Every now and then somebody tries to their peril. Two years and the work is rotting already.

**A&D:** *Natural decay and the effect of entropic energy upon materials, do you have a desire to engage with that?*

**TC:** Again with my work I am not interested in chaotic gestures. I am no longer interested in throwing colour at the wall or braking plates, I have gone a long way from that. I don't really want to do those things even though I know they produce nice effects. I want to keep my hands on the reins of the formal structure inside the work, and by doing that I can influence the outside appearance and my relationship to it; and that is how I work. I am not really that happy when things change without my controlling them. It is not a nice way to put it but when things are in

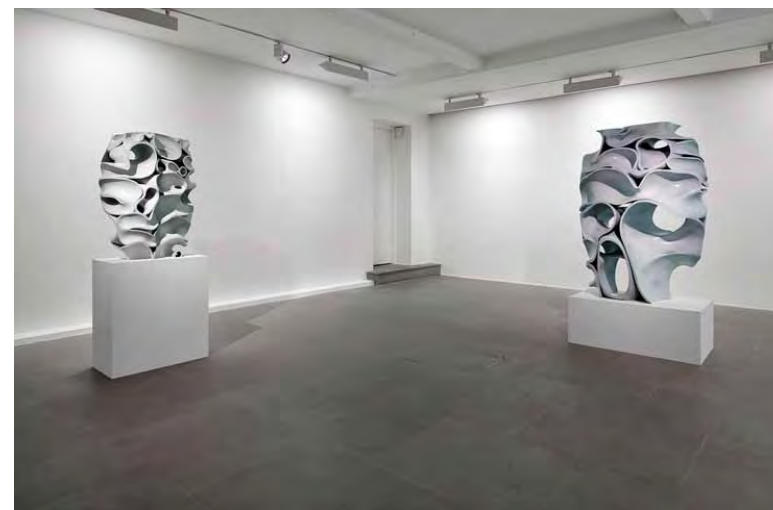
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**Tony Cragg**  
*Willow* 2016  
123 x 110 x 110 cm, Wood  
Photography: Michael Richter  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

**Tony Cragg**  
*Ginko* 2016  
82 x 135 x 30 cm, Bronze  
Photography: Michael Richter  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

**Tony Cragg**  
*Skull I & II* 2016  
97 x 75 x 40 cm, 150 x 104 x 68 cm, Bronze  
Photography: Michael Richter  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

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the studio they are about as good as they are going to get. Because the minute they start to move to the door they are in a state of decay.

**A&D:** *Do you seek a state of perfection with your work before you relinquish control of them?*

TC: Well perfection that is a very good question, because of course that is the point we are at now in our culture. Nobody believes in perfection do they? They want it to be cruddy. Everyone is afraid of perfection and solemnity now. It is the last thing that anybody can cope with. (English sculptor) Henry Moore would be unthinkable today, and as a young artist I really didn't appreciate his works. He was an older artist. But when you look at his work now, his main idea was that he

wanted to make the 'best sculpture'. What an amazing/crazy idea, he wanted to make the best sculpture. Which is a very non-contemporary idea, 'I am going to make the best sculpture, the best painting'. But it was his thing to do that, which is totally impossible today. It has to be 'grungy' or 'bleakly physiological' when it isn't that.

**A&D:** *Going back to your show here, can you explain a little more about works like Industrial Nature and Parts of the World, and of their aesthetic disorder?*

TC: I made Hybrid2015 in the back room here and have already talked about the work Migrant. Those works have been through all sorts of phases. Some that are straight forward, others more complicated,

with a lot of internal movements, baroque. Reducing everything into simple spaces, simple outer forms, cylinders, blocks, resulted in an enormous amount of internal activity, which I wanted to reveal. So I made sculptures inside of sculptures. Stupidly you could not see the inner ones, which took a long time to make. That led to sculptures with holes running through them so you could see more of the inside; leading to a breakthrough. Which altered the relationship of the vessels on the ground with space. The sculptures didn't have a natural relationship with the ground they were lying or standing on, they were in the air and I produced totally different coloured versions of that. They became two hyper complicated works using technical means.

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**A&D:** *As a form Industrial Nature appears as this alien shaped free standing structure, made up of a series of manipulated aluminum plates. How does the works creative damage relate to the kind of perfection you referred to before?*

TC: What happened with the green work Parts of the World, the more important of the two works standing, is that I previously made a work entitled Hardliner 2013, which I thought was a very good work, and Hardliner was really about the internal structure of a work. It was without the nice curves and clean finish, focusing entirely on the structure of the sculpture. That is very often what I am interested in, of the 'substance' of the appearance of things? What is the substance? What is carrying the form and the appearance of material? And I followed those shapes and decided to leave it open. So the green work Parts of the World I thought was

fantastic. It has a feeling of xylem, of cells, organs, of cross-sections, bio-botany and biology. And the work entitled Industrial Nature is exactly the same, a different mock with a similar rectangular block. It is a little bit longer, with a square section and longer. Slightly canted, and all I did was literally extend the shape. I literally drew onto polystyrene those wings and nuts and leaves, and built them on and had them cast and welded onto the block; that was it. That was how the work was made. It took me a long while to make. It has been an incredibly long and expensive journey to have those two works made.

**A&D:** *So a work like Industrial Nature how many years is that in the making?*

TC: I would have liked to have that ready at the beginning of this year, but it has taken me about a year and



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a half to make, something like that.

**A&D:** *And with a work like that, is its completion a trigger for more works of a similar nature? It can't be that you stop there.*

**TC:** Yes everyone asks where your ideas come from. Of course working on ideas or whatever, there is no direct relationship between good ideas and good art, some people have good ideas and make awful art. So I am not so interested in ideas but I mean the most influential thing for me is the work I have just finished.

That is what is in my mind, and for the last year or two I have had a good period in the studio where I have had lots of things that I feel are moving on and that I am moving through. Once I make progress I feel like I have understood something and will see how that develops. Did you see the glass skulls (Glass 2016) downstairs? I am in love with those. They are the best things I have made. When I see the show I am quite happy. I am looking forward to going back to the studio because of those (the skulls), because of the hedges. The Hedge, 2016 looks like a thing from the outside. Like a blob, but when you get inside a hedge it is a world within itself, of nests and insects. So that was the idea of the hedges. So the 'hedges', 'the skulls', and 'the industrial forms', all these provide an incredible energy for me to move on.

**A&D:** *Going back to curating and context, how do you see your works in relation to one another; when their isolation and independence proves one of their strengths? Moreover how do you 'curate' the works into the space? And by bringing a whole body of works together do they infringe upon each other or are they able to influence a better understanding of your practice as a whole?*

**TC:** Yes they do (infringe) but it's a rare coming together, they have never been like this before and they

will never be seen like this again. Because the exhibition I have done is, with minor exceptions, exactly the exhibition I sent to the gallery. I did a sketch of it months and months ago and it has not really changed since then. But they group up anyway. It is a competition in itself with congruity and some little contradictions; so tensions are building. Like everything else I am subjective, art is subjective, the exhibitions I make are subjective. There is no ultimate logic to anything.

**A&D:** *With your intention for greater control over the creative process, I wanted to understand movement as you encapsulate it within your work?*

**TC:** Well it is very simple, there are three trillion cells sitting in your chair, everyone of them in a constant state of movement; and in one cell thousands of chemical exchanges are going on in an instance. Things can be very still while movement and energy envelope them. The sun is a ball of energy in the sky with a billion atomic explosions. Anything that assumes a form is carried by complicated energy, it is never static. It requires incredible energy to do that. We send a message through our body to our spine eight times a second so that we don't topple over. So if the message doesn't come, if you have had too much to drink, or you are tired, or you die; you are on your way down and you give into gravity. Gravity is taking your energy away, and the ground is very pleased, that's it. As I have said that's what gravity is, that which takes you into the grave. Taking you to zero energy. All of these things are very natural.

**A&D:** *Which makes me think it is about how we see things.*

**TC:** It is. We make everything happen in our heads, there is nothing else. We couldn't even cope with ultimate reality; we have no

idea what ultimate reality looks like. It may not look like anything. Ultimate reality is something that we are nowhere near. The image we have of each other is something we have just made up, that our brains make up for us as all of the simple things. If you understand psychology of perception, you are aware of how much the brain is doing to make that image. From every surface we are just getting the light reflected off of it, and with that information you can make something of it; that's it. But again that is not a constant that changes with everything else. You can change with your experience. That's why it is important to make a material world and use nature, because that is what makes our heads. This is what makes our thoughts and our emotions. It is the stuff around you. You know that material affects you, so why be horrible about it, why make such stupid decisions because of the economy. Of course we are forced into it because of survival strategies, but we have to work against that. It is not about aims of perfection because that is something else. That is way down the line, but to get beyond the point we are at that's for sure what we should be doing.

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Tony Cragg  
We, 2015, Bronze  
190 x 59 x 57 cm  
© Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery



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## Seeing Behind The Surface: An Interview With Tony Cragg

—*Robert Barry*, October 15th, 2016 03:42

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As his new solo show begins at the Lisson Gallery, London, Craft/Work talks to Tony Cragg about a love of geology, the trouble with minimalism, and trying to see beyond the surface of things

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*Installation view: 'Tony Cragg', Lisson Gallery, London, 1 October – 5 November, Photography by Jack Hems © Tony Cragg, Courtesy Lisson Gallery*

“We don’t make very interesting things, human beings.” Tony Cragg is disappointed with the world and the way it looks. “Look at this room,” he says to me. “It’s white, grey, straight-edged, quadratic. Boring! Look at the cities! They’re so *boring*. One city after another, always the same damn window.” He starts gesturing about the room, expressing his frustration with the design of every object. “I can find that window in every part of the world. And the same telephone, the same table, the same books. Everything’s the same. Repetitive and boring and mediocre.”

The way Cragg sees it, it’s part of his job, as a sculptor, to try and do something about it. Smarten the place up a bit. It’s a task he takes very seriously. “Everything we have in our head has come from the outside world,” he explains. “So if that is the case, then it’s really – evidently – very important what the material is that is around us. That’s the ultimate thing.”

We’re sitting in a meeting room above the Lisson on Bell Street, the London gallery that has represented Cragg for the past four decades. It is the eve of his new show opening, his fourteenth with the gallery. Downstairs (and in the Lisson’s other space, a few doors down the road), some ten different rooms are filled with new works, each one more wild and peculiar than the last. They look like inscrutable machines from extraterrestrial worlds where the line between the organic and the mechanical is considerably more porous than our own, like the fossils of sublime processes frozen in time, like atoms bonding or cancer cells metastasising in extreme close-up. Of all things, I am reminded most of Frank R. Paul’s illustrations on the covers of Hugo Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories* magazines. What absolutely none of them look like is “white, grey, straight-edged ... repetitive and boring and mediocre.”

A former Turner Prize winner who was received official honours in three different European countries, Tony Cragg is one of Britain’s most esteemed and respected sculptors. If you have been to visit the new Tate Modern Switch House building that you can’t have failed to see his *Stack* from 1975, a perfect two-metre cube of assorted detritus, compressed together by ill-matched planks of wood. It resembles a cross-section view of geological strata, except that every layer is composed of man-made junk. Now that everyone from left-wing media theorists like McKenzie Wark and Joana Zylińska, to august institutions like the International Congress are declaring the arrival of the anthropocene, a new epoch defined by the effects wrought upon the earth by humanity, the return of Cragg’s work to public view could scarcely be more timely.

“I’ve always had an interest in geology,” Cragg tells me when I mention this. “As a small boy I always collected fossils and rocks. The idea that looking at a landscape, you know exactly what’s under the landscape – it’s very, very exciting to know what’s underneath it. We only ever really see the surface of everything, from light reflecting off the surface onto our eye, but my whole thing is that I think we always have this psychological pressure to see behind that surface. I think that’s the basis of sculpture for all time.”



*Installation view: 'Tony Cragg', Lisson Gallery, London, 1 October – 5 November, Photography by Jack Hems © Tony Cragg, Courtesy Lisson Gallery*

Born in Liverpool in 1949, by the age of 17 Cragg was working as a lab technician at the National Rubber Producers’ Research Association in Welwyn Garden City. He took to drawing in his spare time. Eventually he left to pursue his hobby full-time. “Going to art school in 1969,” he says, “I wasn’t interested in sculpture. I wanted to draw. That was my interest. But when I went to Wimbledon, the situation in sculpture was so dynamic. There was [Henry] Moore and [Anthony] Caro and after Caro there was already Gilbert & George and Richard Long. And that was just Britain! The dialogue was amazing.”

There is something almost punk *avant la lettre* about Cragg's early approach to sculpture. "I just wanted to make very, very simple things," he says. "No skills. That was important for me. Not to have a skill. I didn't know anything about sculpture. I just wanted to see what one could *do* with materials." So he started experimenting with simple procedures: tying knots in things, making piles of them, stacking.

By the early '70s, Cragg had developed a fascination with American minimalists like Robert Morris and Donald Judd. "It looked," he tells me, "almost like a sort of full stop in the history of sculpture." It was finally a trip to New York, meeting his heroes, that decided him against it. He realised how far apart he was from them in sensibility. "It was another generation," he says now. "People living in this super-minimal landscape of New York, with these shiny surfaces and tall structures with straight edges. At the same time they were dropping bombs on people living in bamboo houses. It just seemed so crazy, the whole thing."

"So I wanted to do something that was earthy and simple and related to nature," he continues. "That's where that started. Where the *Stacks* came from."



*Installation view: 'Tony Cragg', Lisson Gallery, London, 1 October – 5 November, Photography by Jack Hems © Tony Cragg, Courtesy Lisson Gallery*

Dressed in a button-down, short-sleeved shirt and little round glasses, Cragg comes across at times more like a scientist or engineer than an artist. His thoughts stray very quickly from the eminently practical to the almost metaphysical with barely a breath between. His manner is animated and expansive, comfortable in his own skin without ever seeming arrogant. Despite many years living in mainland Europe, he still takes his tea with milk and sugar.

Next year he will have his largest UK exhibition to date at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, a 500 acre site in West Bretton, near Wakefield. I'm curious to know what difference he thinks it makes, to have his work out in the wild, instead of the controlled indoor environment of the gallery. But for the most part he seems more concerned with the practicalities of what *can* be left outside. "Most stones don't do very well outside," he insists. "You can't put wood. You can't put chocolate out there. So that's a limit. And then the scale, the size, the stability – because you can't have it rolling around, you know, doing damage to people."

But take, say, this particular work here, I say gesturing to a picture in the catalogue for the present show, that could go outside.

"Yeah..." he says slightly grudgingly. "That could go outside."

But would it change for you if it was outside? Its meaning? Its emotional resonances?

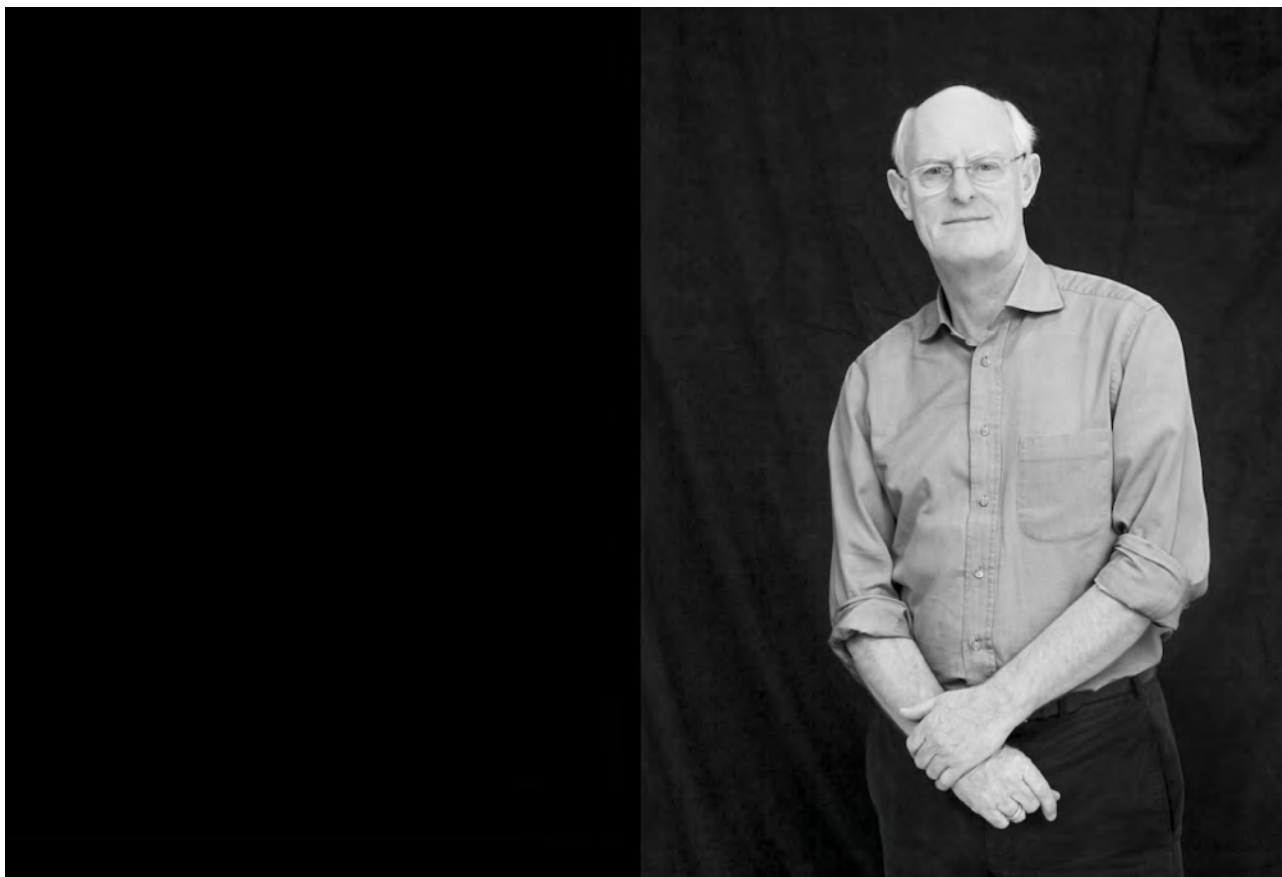
"Well," he says with a smile, "I think what changes is the outside."

*Tony Cragg is at the Lisson Gallery, London, until 5 November. His show at Yorkshire Sculpture Park opens in March 2017*

LISSON GALLERY

*Whitewall Magazine*  
7 October 2016

**whitewall**



## **ART FROM THE OUTSIDE IN: TONY CRAGG ON THE MEANING IN THE MATERIAL**

**Tony Cragg's** artistic legacy is in its craft—he is accomplished in translating our neurological reactions into three-dimensional objects. The sculptor manifests meaning into his work, pulling from both the physical and material worlds, and the internal and intellectual worlds..

For this edition of *Whitewaller*, we spoke with Cragg about his upcoming shows at [Lisson Gallery](#) (October 1–November 5) and Yorkshire Sculpture Park (March 4–September 3, 2017), and about his fascinations with the complex, and often times materialistic, mind.

**WHITEWALLER:** Your fourteenth show at Lisson Gallery is set to open around the same time as Frieze. What can we expect?

**TONY CRAGG:** The exhibition is in two venues in the Lisson Gallery. It's a continuation of some works that I started in the mid-eighties, and this is the latest development of some of those works. Then, there will be a new group of blown glass works, which were made in Murano, and a new group of works, which are called "Industrial Nature."

They're very frontal works that have complex internal structures, which are quite new for my work. Fundamentally, it remains to do with the materials around us, and how we convert materials into thoughts, and also, the relationship between natural forms and manmade forms.

**WW:** You're also gearing up for an upcoming spring show at the [Yorkshire Sculpture Park](#), which is the largest to date. Can you tell us about your new pieces that will appear in the venue's central gallery and Open Air?

**TC:** There's certainly an awareness of the relationship of the geometric forms and organic forms. We seem to think of them as being two different aesthetic groups of objects, but the truth is that even our own bodies, our figures, do not and would not function without geometry—in our cells, molecules, bone structures, organs. It shows that relationship between the dichotomy. It's also about the idea of an emotional quality and unemotional quality.

**WW:** Most everything you create starts with a drawing. When do you find it best to draw?

**TC:** Well, I draw almost every day. One drawing I do is in my studio. A group of people help me make the work, and sometimes it's necessary to write down, or draw, or just put on paper what we're talking about or how I envision the form. And then, there's another kind of drawing I do

on my own where I'm playing, trying to develop new sculpture forms, and using drawing as a kind of adventure, which it is.

**WW: Let's talk a little bit about your fascination with the human mind...**

**TC:** Well, it has a little bit to do with my entire attitude with making a sculpture. I acknowledge the fact that everything we have in our minds comes from outside. We feel materials by the light that's reflected from the surface of those materials. In doing that, the information we get from this material we turn into thought and into language. All language has come from the material world around us. So when I see a piece of material, I then also see this sort of cloud or envelope of meaning behind that material; there's an associative feel around that material. The only way that that can take place is when things are in our minds. There is a hierarchy of materials, and the neuron is the most complicated of all of the materials we know. It has the most complicated function, and it's that what makes our reality possible.

**ELIZA JORDAN** | *October 7, 2016*

LISSON GALLERY

*FAD*

28 July 2016

**FAD**

## Tony Cragg to have major solo exhibition ahead of Frieze

This exhibition will be Tony Cragg's 14th with Lisson Gallery since his first solo show in 1979. Spanning both London venues, it will feature the latest works in Cragg's career-long pursuit of his interest in developing specific groups of sculptural themes and forms. As always, Cragg's radical and experimental approach to making sculpture produces surprising new forms and meanings that add congruently to his already considerable oeuvre.



*Tony Cragg Willow, 2014. © Tony Cragg; Courtesy Lisson Gallery. Photography Michael Richter*

A process of continual enquiry infuses Cragg's practice with a restless energy, manifest in his continuing exploration of a multitude of materials and ways of reshaping the world around us. His axiom is that "There are many more things that do not exist than things that do exist" and with this he points to a deep well of things and forms that are as yet beyond our perception. Sculpture is for Cragg a method to unlock this enormous potential not just for new forms but the new meanings, dreams and language that will become associated to them. For him it is a method for discovering the as yet unseen.

The exhibition shows several new departures, including works entitled Industrial Nature resulting from the collision and fusion of organic and artificial elements within and without contained volumes. The juxtaposition of geometries with organic forms has been a constant theme in Cragg's earlier works and represents for him the dual nature of most things we see around us, given that our own mindset is inherently and necessarily rational, in order to build coherent forms, but is also obviously complex and subjective enough to be described as organic.

Very different approaches to related themes can be found in the monumental bronze sculptures Willow, Skull and Migrant. While the wooden sculpture Spear and Sail in white onyx open new lines of investigation that derive from his Versus series. A new body of glass works made in Venice and aggregate, seed-like casts of the sculptor's own head (Identity) are exhibited next to the latest developments of three of Cragg's larger groups of work Early Forms, Rational Beings and Manipulations. All of which have evolved far from their origins in the 1980s and surprise again in this exhibition with new twists and turns.

Cragg never forgets the path he has taken to arrive at his latest works that still find references in some of his earliest works, such as the stacks, assemblages and his figurative collages made from discarded materials. This latest body of work, however, once again affirms the contemporaneous nature of the artist's practice.

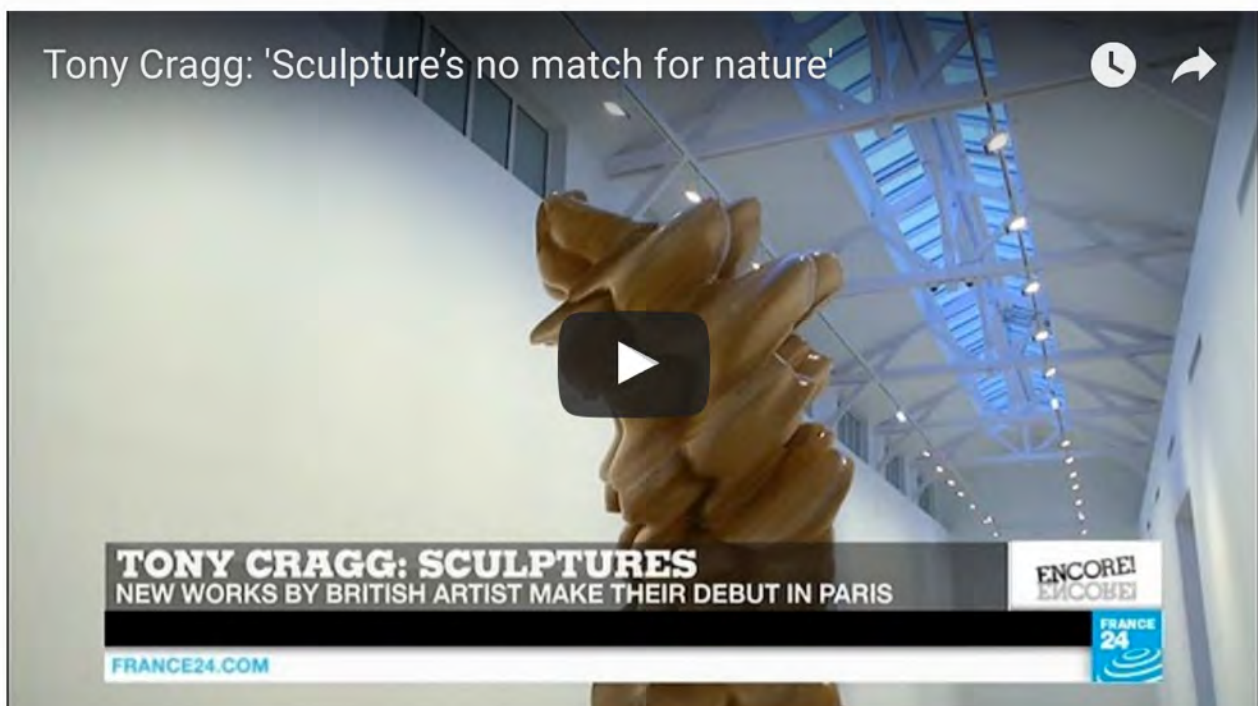
If nothing is as it first seems in this exhibition – materials, forms and resonances fool the eye and confound the viewer – then these disorienting sensations reflect Cragg's own conscious, dense layering of visual phenomena and historical references, one on top of another. This creation of an enhanced and extruded reality as experienced through technology and the multiple perspectives afforded to us by the pace and prisms of modern life, is further evidence of a sculptor working at the height of his powers.

Tony Cragg 1st October – 5th November 2016 Lisson Gallery 27 & 52 Bell Street,  
London Private View: Friday 30 September, 6-8pm

[www.lissongallery.com](http://www.lissongallery.com)

The artist has recently been the subject of a major career retrospective 'Parts of the World' in Germany, at the Von der Heydt Museum (19 April – 14 August 2016) near his studio and sculpture park in Wuppertal. Next year Cragg is to be honoured with his largest exhibition to date in the United Kingdom at Yorkshire Sculpture Park (4 March – 3 September 2017).

[www.tony-cragg.com](http://www.tony-cragg.com)



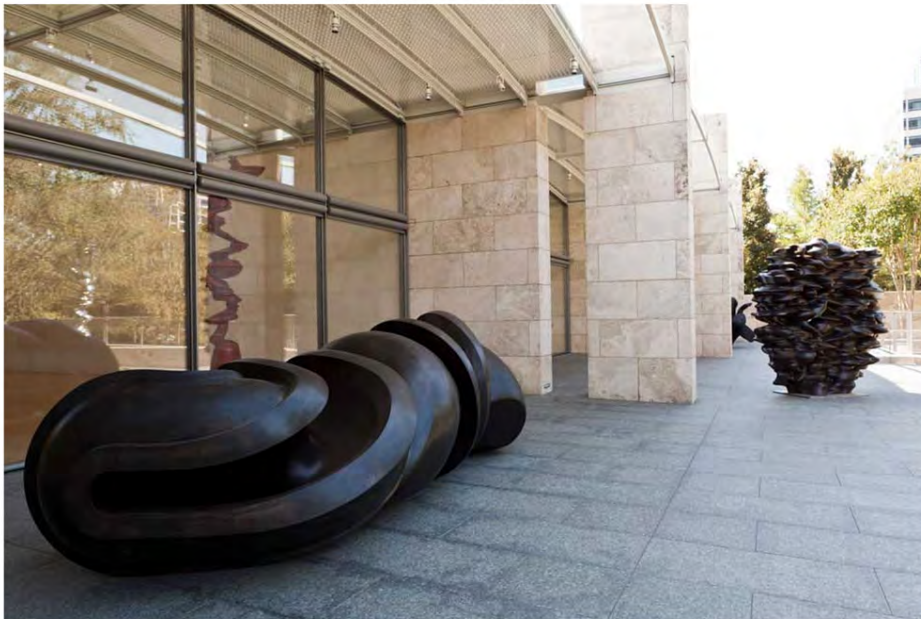
# LISSON GALLERY

Artsy  
June 2015

ARTSY

## On Tony Cragg and His Deep Partnership with the Nashers

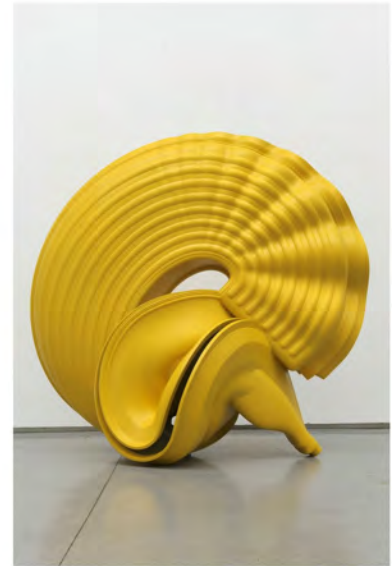
NASHER SCULPTURE CENTER  
JUN 15TH, 2015 3:53 PM



Since his first solo exhibition in 1979 at Lisson Gallery in London, British artist Tony Cragg has received global recognition as one of the most influential artists of our time. In the years following that first show, Cragg's work was eagerly acquired by private collectors and museums, as well as being exhibited in numerous prestigious institutions such as the Louvre, Paris; The National Gallery, Prague; and the Royal Academy, London.



Tony Cragg  
*Sinbad*, 2000  
Tony Cragg: Seeing Things at Nasher Sculpture Center



Tony Cragg  
*Outspan*, 2008  
Tony Cragg: Seeing Things at Nasher Sculpture Center

Ray and Patsy Nasher developed an intimate relationship with the artist fairly early into his exceptional career, Cragg sharing the Nasher's deep interest in the exploration of the potential of sculpture, drawing upon a broad array of intellectual interests—science, philosophy, poetry—to create fully realized, sophisticated, yet refreshingly experimental works of art. This spirit of curiosity and innovation is precisely what drew Cragg and the Nashers so closely together, and they first introduced Cragg into their permanent collection in the early 1990's. Over the next decade, the momentum of recognition for Cragg only accelerated as he was presented with the art world's most esteemed awards including the Turner Prize, the Shakespeare Prize, and the Praemium Imperiale for sculpture.



Tony Cragg  
*Eroded Landscape*, 1998  
Tony Cragg: Seeing Things at Nasher Sculpture Center

Despite the artist's persistent global success, Cragg's pace of exhibition in the U.S. was disproportionately slow. While the Nashers initially introduced Dallas to Cragg's work through their private collection, more recently the Nasher Sculpture Center reacquainted the U.S. artist by bringing his first major exhibition in the states in 20 years. The 2011 exhibition, [Tony Cragg: Seeing Things](#), offered a thorough examination of the artist's work over a 20 year span, featuring approximately 30 sculptures ranging from earlier works such as *Eroded Landscape* (1998), a densely piled arrangement of frosted glass objects, to the 2001 *Ferryman* series in pierced bronze, to the monumental *Ever After* series (2010) comprised of gnarled pillars in bronze and wood. With his return to the United States for the Nasher show, the artist brought an entirely new perspective on his sculpture, straying from his "materialist" reputation to create bold, polished, and quite traditional pieces from classic materials such as wood and bronze. The Wall Street Journal said of the show, "few major artists today make objects as joyously beautiful as the British sculptor Tony Cragg... What makes him important is his transformation of raw matter into art that transcends but never allows us to forget its material."



Tony Cragg  
*Ferryman*, 2001  
Nasher Sculpture Center

Following his exhibition at the Nasher, Cragg went on to show at many notable institutions in the U.S. and beyond, including recent exhibitions at the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York; Exhibition Road, Victoria & Albert Museum, London; and Musee d'Art Moderne, Saint-Etienne.



Tony Cragg  
*Loop*, 2014  
Marian Goodman Gallery

Recently, the artist returned for another collaboration with the Nasher, releasing a series of limited-edition sculptures available for sale through the Nasher. The small sculpture edition, called *Loop*, is based on a series of works called *Rational Beings*—compositions that suggest facial profiles that spiral fluidly or stagger upward from certain points of view—several of which were featured in *Seeing Things*, Cragg’s 2011 Nasher exhibition.



Tony Cragg  
*Loop (orange)*, 2014  
Nasher Sculpture Center  
\$9,500



Tony Cragg  
*Loop (turquoise)*, 2014  
Nasher Sculpture Center  
\$9,500

The sale of the edition, which is available through the Nasher Artsy shop, will directly benefit the Nasher's exhibition and education programming.

SHARE THIS ARTICLE



*New York Times*  
12 September 2014

## The New York Times

N.Y. / REGION

### *This Art Is Indeed Long (66 Feet). And Very Heavy (About 12 Tons).*

By JAMES BARRON SEPT. 12, 2014



Workers for Dun-Rite Specialized Carriers orchestrated the placement of "Points of View" in Madison Square Park on Friday. Benjamin Norman for The New York Times

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[Brooke Kamin Rapaport](#), the curator who shepherded an art world set piece in Madison Square Park on Friday, called what was being installed “the great levitating sculpture.”

The sculpture was “Points of View” and consisted of three extremely tall, extremely heavy pieces, but none of them rose from the ground and floated magically through the air. There were no [David Blaine](#) maneuvers, no seemingly impossible sleight of hand.

And that raised a question: How do big sculptures — in this case, irregularly shaped bronze towers just over 22 feet tall that weigh 8,000 to 10,000 pounds each — get there?

They cross the Atlantic on a container ship, go through customs at the Port Newark-Elizabeth Marine Terminal in New Jersey and are driven across the George Washington Bridge and the [Macombs Dam Bridge](#) in the middle of the night. Tractor-trailers take them to a lot in the Bronx used as a staging area by the company that would install them.

From there, they go over the [Madison Avenue Bridge](#) into Manhattan and down Fifth Avenue. And finally, with help from a 10-person crew and a 40-ton crane with a 148-foot-long boom, the pieces take the places in the park that they will occupy until Feb. 8 as part of the [Madison Square Park Conservancy's](#) public art program, known as [Mad. Sq. Art](#).



"They're quite big sculptures, but everything in New York is big," said the sculptor, Tony Cragg.

Benjamin Norman for The New York Times

That was the short answer.

The long answer, according to Michael Narcisco, the president of [Dun-Rite Specialized Carriers](#), the hoisting and rigging company hired by the conservancy to handle the installation, involved moving more than the sculptures. It involved moving a line of people "longer than any conga line I know," he said.

It was the line of customers waiting at the [Shake Shack in Madison Square Park](#). The customers were blocking the route for the sculptures, which were delivered early Wednesday morning.

He asked everyone in the line if they would simply move a few yards.

"Nobody gave up their place," he said. "They all sidestepped."

"Points of View," and two other sculptures that were installed in Madison Square Park earlier in the week, were created by the artist [Tony Cragg](#). He made casts of pieces he had done from 2008 to 2013 at a foundry in the German city of Wuppertal, where he lives. He visited Madison Square Park last spring to decide where to put them.

"They're quite big sculptures, but everything in New York is big," said Mr. Cragg, who arrived at the park at 8 a.m., six hours after his plane had landed and two hours after the Dun-Rite crew had begun setting up for the installation. "There's a tendency to be monumental, but these are just big. It's a question of scale."

Several things happened as the crane lifted the second of the three towers. The restaurateur [Danny Meyer](#) walked by, cellphone clamped against his ear. Dog-walkers and nannies paused. Dogs strained on their leashes. Children dozed in their strollers. And Mr. Cragg said he was mostly pleased with the way the tower looked after its long trip from Europe.

“It needs some rain,” Mr. Cragg said. “It’s slightly buffed from the wrapping around it. It needs a patina. A few days in the New York air and some rain, and it will settle down.”

For the next couple of hours, he and Ms. Rapaport stood watching what she called “the choreography of the installation.” As with any important performance, there had been a dress rehearsal.

“We spent a whole Sunday in the yard figuring how to pick them up,” said Marek Kowalik, a project manager for Dun-Rite.

Mr. Narcisco said the idea was to become familiar with the work in a way that is different from just staring at it.

“So many times, with monumental sculptures, they lift awkwardly and the center of gravity is not known,” Mr. Narcisco said. “At the job site, there can be no conjecture. You have to know where your sling placements are. This is why homework has to be done. We’ve already done the installation, so to speak, in the yard.”

Or, as Mr. Kowalik put it, “It looks easy here, but we spent 12 hours on it on Sunday.”

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*Baku*

1 August 2014

# MATERIAL MAN

Words by **PETER ASPDEN**

Photography by **DANIEL STIER** and **ELMAR MUSTAFAZADEH**

Entranced by the relationship between physical materials and their function, former lab technician Tony Cragg became one of the foremost sculptors of the modern era. Now retired from his academic work, he is revelling in a new-found creativity.



ony Cragg is an artist who reminds us that we live, in all senses, in a material world. In the British sculptor's more recent work, elegant, twisted forms radiate with energy and possibility. They pulsate with dynamism, looking like they may take off at any minute. They are both futuristic and primitive. Even his most abstract works make oblique

references to the natural world: is that a human profile buried low in that otherwise strangely shaped totem of stainless steel? Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. Cragg loves nothing more than to tease us with those questions, without providing any direct answer. Towards the end of our interview, he pulls me up even for using the terms 'abstract' and 'figurative'. "They are stupid words," he says dismissively. "Meaningless."

His demeanour is serious, but genial. I meet him in his impressively large studio in a quiet district of Wuppertal, a small industrial city in the Rhineland area of Germany. Cragg has lived here for the past 37 years, away from his native country, and far away from the buzzing world of contemporary art, which has improbably become one of the most dominant cultural forces of the new millennium. You won't find Cragg networking in the VIP salon of an art fair, however. He confesses to me that

he has only ever been to two art fairs, and the face he pulls indicates that he won't be visiting any more in a hurry.

Cragg moved to Wuppertal, rather than the creative hub of Berlin, in 1977, after marrying a trainee German teacher whose home town it is and who was required to

spend a year there for her teaching examinations. (That marriage ended; he met his current wife, the artist Tatjana Verhasselt, in 1984.) He began to teach at the nearby Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, a prestigious institution attended by such luminaries



as Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter. Over the years he rose to become its director in 2009, a post from which he retired only last year. "It was a job I had never thought of doing, but I ended up being the person who knew just a little bit more about the place than the others," he tells me drily. "It was very exciting, we did a lot in that time. But I also felt that when an artist wakes up at night and he is not thinking about his own work, but about the economics and personnel of an art school, then it is time to move on. I was beginning to feel quite emotional about getting back to the studio. I felt the need to come back here."

He is revelling in the new-found freedom: a tour of his studio, full of gorgeously shaped forms crafted from wood or cast iron, is evidence

liquids in a glass, but each has a very different meaning to us."

He quickly found that the drawings he used to make to while away some of the time were interesting him more than his actual job, and in 1969 he decided to go to art school in Cheltenham. "I was very timorous about going to art school," he says. "I just wanted to learn to draw. I received a very good education in drawing and painting, and then one Monday we were told that we had to make a sculpture. I thought, 'that sounds terrible', but I was shown to a broom cupboard full of all these battered materials. I took a bunch of stuff, and started to make something."

In the course of a morning, Cragg found his vocation: "After a very short period of time, by lunchtime in fact, I thought,

dynamic and brutal kind of discourse about what sculpture was." There was also political change in the air. "In the early 1970s one took sides. One side was authoritarian and dogmatic, and the other seemed open-ended and freer and younger in spirit, so I was obviously more attracted to that."

By the time he left Britain, his previously eclectic tastes began

**6 I LOOKED IN THE ROOM AND SAW 31 STUDENTS STANDING BEHIND THEIR EASELS, AND I INSTANTLY THOUGHT, 'THAT IS NOT WHAT I WANT TO DO'. I FELT MUCH MORE AWAKE THAN THAT. 9**

works, as well as a selection of earlier pieces, are on show at the Heydar Aliyev Centre in Baku until the end of August. "It's about trying to get people to see what the work is all about," Cragg says of the exhibition. "I don't know the audience in Azerbaijan very well, but I have had students from there and I have a vague impression of its cultural developments."

Cragg was born in Liverpool in 1949, and there is still a Merseyside twang in his rapid conversation, which is also littered with German inflections. He left school to start work as a laboratory technician in the National Rubber Producers' Research Association. "I have always had, and continue to have, an interest in science, but I have never been a scientist," he says. "But I felt pretty isolated there; I was 19 and surrounded by elderly academic men." What the job offered him, he says, was a chance to think about the substances that were all around him. "You realize that there is this amazing relationship between the form of something, and what its role and meaning are. For example, water and sulphuric acid are just two clear

"wow, this is amazing, every time you bend the material you have a different thought, and feel a different emotion". That relationship between your responses and form became frighteningly close. I was very impressed by that." The first thing he made, he says sheepishly, looked like a boat.

The following year, he decided to enrol at Wimbledon School of Art, but spent the intervening summer working in a foundry near Bristol. "I was on the nightshift, and it was very dramatic, a fantastic place, watching all these materials being worked on. There was a real sense of the primordial." Arriving at college was almost anticlimactic. "I looked in the room and saw 31 students standing behind their easels, and I instantly thought, 'that is not what I want to do'. I felt much more awake than that."

He duly focused his attention on sculpture. I ask him what his early influences were. "I was a student, so inevitably there was no great self-consciousness about it. I just had this general preoccupation with material and what it means to us."

He has fond memories of the early 1970s, which he describes as a "great time to be a sculptor. There was this hard-headed,

towards minimalism and conceptualism, they became irksome to me. It was a pretty grim time in Britain, there were a lot of reasons to be dissatisfied with things. You could understand why punk arrived. Everyone was pissed off with the dominance of the post-war generation. They started as revolutionaries and reformists, and all they have done for the last 40 years has been to defend their position."

Accordingly, Cragg's own work developed a more political edge. In *Britain Seen from the North* (1981), a giant mosaic of found objects, a human figure – Cragg himself? – looks at a map of Britain tipped on its side. The work, which was bought by the Tate Gallery (as it was called then), was widely regarded as an explicit indictment of the devastating effects of the Thatcher recession. I ask him whether that was a true interpretation, and he is coy. "All art is political," he says, finally. "But it doesn't have to be overtly so. In fact I am suspicious of art that purports to be political. Making art is a political act because you are doing something no one else is doing."

By this time he had already been living in Germany for a few years. Did he feel like an outsider? "There was this whole thing about Diana and her marriage to Prince

Charles], everyone was totally immersed in the subject. It did seem to me that there

**6 ALL ART IS POLITICAL BUT I AM SUSPICIOUS OF ART THAT PURPORTS TO BE SO. MAKING ART IS A POLITICAL ACT BECAUSE YOU ARE DOING SOMETHING NO ONE ELSE IS DOING. 9**

art since the turn of the millennium has treated Cragg well – his work is widely collected, and appears in the unlikelyst of contexts. I make a comment on seeing some of his sculptures in Las Vegas, and he looks almost embarrassed. What does he make of contemporary art being the new rock 'n' roll? "If you mean the fact that the volume of art has expanded immeasurably and become a real feature of social life, I think it's great. There are aberrations in that, but I am not going to focus on them." Does he mean the art market? Is it a pernicious influence? "No, I wouldn't say that. In the 1970s, when no one bought

were other things one could be talking about. I could never follow that enthusiasm."

Cragg declines to comment on whether the move from Britain to Germany affected his art. It is a question that he is still asked "every week," he says. "I had the experience of living in France for a while and really enjoyed it. I found out I could learn languages quite quickly. Nowadays people travel so much, but I came from a lower middle-class family and had never been abroad. When I went, I discovered that people had a generally better quality of life than in Britain, which I thought was amazing." In Wuppertal, he found a cheap studio with lots of space, which would have been far more difficult in the UK. But, he adds, he would have found "some way of continuing" if he hadn't left.

Cragg's first moment in the sun happened in the late 1980s. He was granted a solo show at the Hayward Gallery in 1987, and the following year he won the Turner Prize and was chosen to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale. Did that level of public recognition make him happy, I ask. He pauses before answering. "That's a very difficult question. When you are making a show, all you are concerned with is the making of it, and then there are these couple of days that are a bit of a blur. I suppose if no one was interested it would be disappointing. But I can't answer that question, I just don't know. I felt very engaged with my work at that time." On top of his game? He laughs. "Never that."

The explosion of interest in contemporary

art, only about 100 people were involved in the art world, and everything cost \$1,000. The first piece I sold was for £50, to Southampton Museum. Things have grown since then, and one can only be thankful. When the base [of collectors] becomes very wide, then inevitably you will have people with very different motivations. Money and sex – you never know what people will do for them. But I don't want to be moralistic about it. All art is doing is reflecting society. And at least it has some positive effects."

I ask about the various contexts that his art is seen in. "How do you think an artist can control that?" he asks me, and then answers his own question. "You can't. In the end, you become less and less interested in context. I just want to make the work. The feeling I want to have in my life every day is the feeling I had in that broom cupboard in Cheltenham. I don't want to know where the work goes, when people tell me I just close down. I just want the work to be as good as it is going to get. When it leaves the studio, as soon as it is being packed, I have the feeling it's already in a state of decay. If I were to follow the stories of what happened next, it would drive me nuts."

We leave the studio, and Cragg drives me a short distance to the Waldfrieden Sculpture Park, a secluded woodland that he took over, via his own non-profit foundation, eight years ago, to create an exhibition space for sculpture. Inside the park there is a fabulous, restored 1940s villa. He takes obvious pride in the venture, clearing away stray branches from the path as we walk around.

Back in the studio, while looking at one of his pieces, I summon up the courage to ask if that combination of curves and edges in the middle of a column is actually a human face. "I don't know whether it is a face," he says after a little thought. "I didn't draw it. It was by chance, more or less." A pause. And then, flusteringly: "I suppose it's chance." ■



Tony Cragg, and his work on show at the Heydar Aliyev Centre in Baku.





1. Installation view of Tony Cragg at the Heydar Aliyev Centre. 2-5. More Cragg works at the sculpture park: 'Here Today, Gone Tomorrow' (2002); 'Luke' (2008); 'It Is, It Isn't' (2012); and 'Mixed Feelings' (2012).







# TONY CRAGG

## ART

You may have heard his name - and perhaps seen his work - a few months ago, when he pitched his monumental sculptures along Exhibition Road and inside some of its neighbouring museums, such as the Science Museum, Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum; one of the great names of British sculpture, Tony Cragg returns to Lisson Gallery for his twelfth solo show at the venue. On the scene for over 30 years, Cragg made his debut in the late 70s, in the midst of the conceptual/minimalist revolution; primarily interested in working with found objects, he later turned his attention to "surface quality" and its feasible manipulations. A careful observer of the natural and material worlds - notably, he worked as a laboratory technician at the Natural Rubber Producers Research Association 1966-68 before turning to art - Cragg explores the possibilities of volume, material, scale and image in his gripping work, bringing to mind visions of *non-Euclidean* geometries and fractal figures.



Tony Cragg, *Group*, 2012, Wood, 325 x 236 x 386 cm; Courtesy, Lisson Gallery, London

## RA Magazine Autumn 2012

Issue Number: 116

### Tony Cragg's road show

*Take a trip along South Kensington's Exhibition Road and you will be greeted by sculptor Tony Cragg RA's powerful whirling forms. Richard Cork caught up with him at his studio in Wuppertal, Germany, as he was preparing for a trio of shows*

Unlike the mediocre sculptors who defile and clutter so many of London's outdoor spaces with banal work, Tony Cragg RA is enhancing Exhibition Road in South Kensington with five major pieces this autumn as part of the London 2012 Festival. This partially pedestrianised road, bordered by institutions as indispensable as the V&A, the Science Museum and the Natural History Museum, is one of the city's finest thoroughfares. It was originally linked to the site of the Great Exhibition in 1851, a world-class event conceived by Prince Albert and Henry Cole. They ensured that the immense profits from admission to the Great Exhibition contributed to the cost of the museums erected along Exhibition Road, and Cragg himself feels exhilarated about installing his sculpture in such a special place. 'Like a lot of British children who make magic visits to this beautiful wide road', he recalls, 'I was brought up to see a wondrous world of marvels in the museums there – everything from steam machines to meteorites.'

Later, as a student at the Royal College of Art in the 1970s, he felt thoroughly at home in Exhibition Road. 'That's where the Sculpture Department was, run by Bernard Meadows, the modernist sculptor who was Henry Moore's first assistant,' says Cragg. 'I spent as much time in the Science Museum and the V&A as I did in the Royal College! I'm very familiar with that area. The Albert Memorial knocks you over: it's a power symbol of yesteryear and must have been incredibly expensive to make. But they had cultural ideals in those days.'

Cragg is aware of the problems that his own work might encounter in Exhibition Road. 'Sculpture in a public place is difficult', he says, 'because people can get really upset about it. No one worries about the effect on London of 10,000 buses and millions of cars, but when a sculpture arrives, they think an alien has landed!' Even so, he says he was delighted when the project was offered to him by the Cass Foundation, which is also displaying his work in their grounds at Goodwood. 'The Exhibition Road show involves three London boroughs, so it was quite a complicated thing to negotiate. But they've all been very keen and helpful,' he adds.



Tony Cragg RA with his sculpture, 'Mixed Feelings', 2012, at his studio in Wuppertal, Germany. Photo Michael Richter.

What, I wonder, does Cragg hope to achieve on this challenging metropolitan site? It will, after all, be his first outdoor exhibition in London. 'To be honest', he replies, 'I would like it to be subtle. I'm a little leery about those in-your-face public art projects. There's a tendency to make outdoor sculpture very territorial, but I want to integrate five sculptures subtly into the road. They're not overly large pieces. There would be no point for me to make 20 or 30 metre-high sculpture. I don't want to plaster the place and become very excessive. Art in public spaces is a sensitive question.'

Which works is he placing in Exhibition Road? 'The largest of them is nearest to the V&A, and it's called *Mixed Feelings* (2012),' he says. Although profiles of faces can be detected in this whirling bronze, it is filled with suggestions of other forms as well. Its figurative content can't be pinned down, and the same applies to an even more agitated and fascinating bronze called *Versus* (2011). 'It will be placed in a small recess,' he explains, and it will undoubtedly animate the space with a prodigious sense of restlessness.

Its horizontal bulk is very different from the slender verticality of *Points of View* (2012), which Cragg describes as 'a stainless-steel column installed up near Imperial College.' As its title suggests, this piece has a more vigilant air, as if surveying the neighbourhood from a wide variety of vantage points. Twisting and turning, it will surely have a tantalising impact on the road. As for *Luke* (2008), this hefty bronze seems to explode as it rushes upwards, in an organic flow, from its rectangular base. But *Ferryman* (2001), the fifth sculpture in the sequence, looks more like a strange bronze creature. Punctured by holes, it appears to have a tail, legs and arms waving in the air. Passers-by are bound to enjoy speculating about its possible identity, and Cragg is bent on keeping them guessing.

Although his use of bronze links him immediately with sculptural tradition, and proves how tough and durable he wants these works to be, Cragg is determined to catch us off-balance when we encounter his supple, slippery, ambiguous and unpredictable sculpture. 'My work is the reverse of site-specific,' he says. 'I make it according to my own needs and ideas. I want authentic and complete objects that have their origins in my studio here in Wuppertal in Germany.'

Visitors to Exhibition Road will encounter even more of Cragg's work inside the nearby buildings. 'In the Science Museum there will be a new, large sculpture: *Lost in Thought* (2012)' says Cragg. This tall, pale wood image gathers its forms in a compact cluster, looking almost defensive as it refuses to disclose everything held there so tightly. A related wood piece, *A Head, I Thought* (2011) is to be found in the Natural History Museum, along with the more abstract and rectilinear carving, *Chip*, and a dark stone work, *I Thought So* (both from 2011), which resembles a face caught in blurred motion. Cragg admires 'the new part of the Natural History Museum where they will be displayed – not among the dinosaurs!' And he is even more enthusiastic about 'the beautiful room' at the V&A where his work is also being exhibited.

'It's the room going into the V&A from Exhibition Road', he explains, 'and works by sculptors such as Rodin, Maillol and Gill are usually displayed there.' Cragg's bronze, *False Idols* (2011), appears to be thrusting up from the floor, whereas *Accurate Figure* (2010) stands poised and upright, yet still bristling with vitality. And Cragg promises that the exhibition he will hold later this year at the Lisson Gallery in London, will be 'almost boiling over with energy. There will be a couple of really substantial pieces there.'

Looking forward eagerly to his eventful autumn, he says 'I'm genuinely excited to see how it all works. Maybe it won't! Who knows?'

- **Tony Cragg with Cass at Exhibition Road**, London, until 25 Nov and \*Tony Cragg at the Coastal Field, Cass Sculpture Foundation, until 4 Nov.
- **Tony Cragg, Lisson Gallery**, 28 Nov–12 Jan, 2013.

# LISSON GALLERY

*Artlyst*

27 November 2012




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*Tony Cragg, turner prize, Lisson Gallery*



## Tony Cragg Exhibition Perceiving The Natural And Material Worlds

DATE: 27 NOV 2012

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**Tony Cragg is exhibiting a powerful new selection of works at Lisson Gallery in London from tomorrow 28 November. This is Cragg's twelfth exhibition at Lisson, representing more than three decades of collaboration since his groundbreaking first show in 1979.**

Cragg's work is based first on observation and understanding of the natural and material worlds, then an intuitive and exuberant engagement with the possibilities of volume, material, scale and image. He continues to find endless possibilities of formal and associative significance in two broad bodies of work: Early Forms, in which vessels are turned into and around themselves to create delightful paradoxes of containment; and Rational Beings, where human profiles provide the sometimes evident, sometimes deeply hidden source material for wild improvisations on natural processes and the forms they give rise to.

New Early Form works in the show, cast in bronze, demonstrate an ever greater boldness and formal assurance. The core of the exhibition however is dedicated to dramatic extensions of the Rational Beings methodology. Cragg explores the tension between dynamic form and surface by using materials with widely varying qualities of mass and surface, including richly veined marble, vibrantly patinated bronze, cast iron and wood. His invention is most notable in the way these new works are both more complex in their detail, and at the same time presented within strong 'whole' forms such as spheres or discs. The exhibition contains work on both intimate and larger sculptural scales, provoking different engagements with the viewer. Most dramatic is a new, never previously shown wooden work on a monumental scale nearly four metres wide and over three metres tall.

Tony Cragg (b. 1949 Liverpool, England) studied at Gloucestershire College of Art, Cheltenham, from 1969-70, Wimbledon School of Art, London, from 1970-73 and the Royal College of Art, London from 1973-77. Cragg took up his first teaching post at the School of Fine Arts, Metz, before moving to the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 1978. In 1988 he was awarded a professorship, and was appointed director in 2009.

In 1979, Cragg had his first solo exhibition at the Lisson Gallery, London. This has been followed with a string of national and international solo museum shows, including the Tate Gallery, London (1989); Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (1996); the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1997); the Tate Liverpool (2000) the Nasher Sculpture Centre, Dallas (2011); the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh (2011); the Musée du Louvre, Paris (2011) and the CAFA Art Museum, Beijing (2012). His work has been shown in countless important group shows worldwide, including at the Hayward Gallery, London (1987); the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice (1992); MoMA PS1, New York (2000); MoMA Museum of Modern Art, New York (2005); Skulpturepark Köln, Cologne (2007) and the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2008).

Tony Cragg won the Turner Prize in 1988 and represented Britain at the XLIII Venice Biennale in the same year. In 1994, he was elected Royal Academician and in 2007 he was awarded the Praemium Imperiale for sculpture. In 2012 he was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Most recently, Cragg has installed a series of monumental sculptures along Exhibition Road and inside some of its neighbouring museums, including the Science Museum, Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. He lives and works in Wuppertal, Germany.

*The Daily Telegraph*  
28 August 2012

# Sculptor who looks beneath the surface

*Tony Cragg tells Mark Hudson  
about the London 2012 show that  
brought him back to Britain*

I call bronze the archaic plastic," says Tony Cragg, looking at one of the extraordinary objects that have materialised, virtually overnight, along Exhibition Road. "When you melt bronze it's more liquid than water. So you can cast very fine, complex forms from it. People knew this 6,000 years ago. Bronze has never lost its relevance."

Blurs of irregular, knifelike forms that appears at once rocklike and insubstantial; towers of twisting matter that suggest the aftermath of a human presence rather than the presences itself – Cragg's sculptures are the first works of art to be exhibited in this newly pedestrianised thoroughfare through the Victorian museum land of London's South Kensington. Their fugitive, near-ectoplasmic forms challenge the four-square grandiosity of the surrounding Natural History and Victoria & Albert Museums, in

which more of Cragg's works are exhibited.

Yet for all their apparent amorphousness, these forms are nothing if not solid: wrought from stone, wood, stainless steel, but above all bronze. While they have been given unusual patinas – gold, green, and a deep purplish brown – they were cast using methods that were familiar to the ancient Greeks.

It all seems rather surprising from an artist who came to prominence in the early Eighties through his use of unlikely found materials.

"Until the early 20th century, sculpture was made from a very

limited range of materials," he says. "But it was one of the tenets of Modernism that artists should go out and find more and more diverse materials to bring into art. When I started exhibiting in the late Seventies, I would turn up at a gallery without work or materials. Finding the materials and assembling them in the gallery became a kind of performance that was part of the work."

Signature works of the time include *Britain Viewed from the North*, a sideways map of Britain assembled from multicoloured plastic detritus, with a figure, representing Cragg, regarding the country from the top – a piece that was interpreted as a comment on the way the North was suffering under Thatcherism. *Axehead* was a large

installation in the shape of an axe, comprised of an apparently random assortment of wooden objects. Yet while this way of working brought Cragg early renown, it palled for him relatively quickly. "I realised I couldn't go on endlessly finding new materials, and I wanted to do more with the forms themselves." The result was a gradual move towards more traditional materials.

Cragg is now 63, a serious but amiable man, at once down-to-earth and professorial – he has been a professor at Düsseldorf's prestigious Kunstakademie since 1988. He is one of this country's most respected sculptors, garlanded with honours – from a CBE to a Turner Prize. Yet he didn't initially set out to become an artist.

He was born in Liverpool, the son of an electrical engineer who moved frequently with his work. "I went to six different schools," Cragg says. "Science seemed the best career option, because the syllabus was the same at every school."

Leaving school at 17, he got a job as a lab assistant at the Natural Rubber Growers Research Association in Welwyn Garden City, where his family then lived, but was soon bored.

"It was the late Sixties, radical changes were taking place in society, and I was stuck in a smelly old laboratory. I had to get out." He began doodling to fill in time as experiments developed, which led to full-blown drawings of views around the laboratory. Someone suggested he apply to art school and, he says, "I was off."

After a degree at Wimbledon School of Art, where he met fellow sculptors Bill Woodrow and Richard Deacon, with whom he became associated in the so-called New British Sculpture movement of the 1980s, he went to the Royal College of Art in South Kensington, an experience that had a crucial bearing on his works in Exhibition Road.

"The RCA Sculpture School shared a back yard with the Natural History Museum and the Geological Museum. I was constantly in those places – particularly the Geological Museum."

The museum, now part of the Natural History Museum, conveyed a profound sense of how Britain's development has been determined by its material structure. "There were minerals, rocks and fossils from various parts of Britain. You could look at crystal forms and see exactly why they look the way they do, not just through their surfaces, but the atoms and molecules behind them."

It is this interplay between surface and substance, and the expectations we bring to them, that informs his current works.

"We perceive the world through light reflected on surfaces," Cragg says. "We develop a fantastic ability to read these surfaces and what lies behind them. And these surfaces are always the product of a function. There's a reason things look the way they do – a value to everything. But if you shift these relationships just a bit, put another emphasis on them, new meanings come out of it."

And that's what Cragg is doing in his current sculptures, shifting our sense of what things should look like so that what appear to be human profiles blur out of existence as you move around them, and mineral-like strata slide out of alignment or bulge in bronze like gelatinous sludge.

Cragg's independence as an artist has surely been strengthened by the fact that he has lived outside Britain since he was in his twenties.

He moved to Wuppertal in Germany, his first wife's home town, in 1977. A job at the nearby Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, which nurtured mega-talents such as Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter, gave him a reason to stay on. He is now the academy's director, and has his own sculpture park in the forest near Wuppertal.

Yet for all his success as an artist, there still seems something of the scientist in his hyper-rational approach to his work.

"I still am interested in science. It has determined the form of the

world we live in. Yet it's really just a very good system for observing the world, and it's not the only one. Art brings something else, a sense of human value and meaning."

*Art Sales returns next week*

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*Radical changes were taking place in the Sixties and I was stuck in a smelly lab*



*The Telegraph*  
29 July 2011

# The Telegraph

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## Edinburgh Festival 2011: Tony Cragg interview

There's no point copying what already exists, says visionary sculptor Tony Cragg.



A human face: 'Bent of mind', 2002

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By Emma Crichton-Miller

1:39PM BST 29 Jul 2011

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The afternoon I meet Tony Cragg in a hot upstairs gallery in London's Bond Street to talk about his new show at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, he has flown over from Germany, where he has lived, in Wuppertal, since 1977. A renowned British sculptor, the 1988 Turner Prize winner and a leading figure in the remarkable generation of sculptors that emerged in the late Seventies, he is also currently director of the respected Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf. He acknowledges that while he settled there largely by accident – he followed his first wife back home – what Germany offered, in the Seventies, besides ample studio space, was "a sense of the necessity of contemporary art".

Behind us as we talk, four sculptures stand on plinths. One sleek black bronze, *Hollow Head* (2008), rises up, a spiral of matter surrounding a void, the shape revealing, as you walk around it, a human face in profile and then revolving once again into abstraction. Another bronze, *It is, It isn't* (2010), plays a similar game of hide and seek, at one turn offering smooth amorphous curves, at another a human face.

The mind locks eagerly onto the profile, and yet the power of these pieces lies in the movement from intriguing mass to recognition. Two further pieces, twisting, interlocking towers of piled matter that seem to dance or writhe like baroque gladiators or lovers in the muted orange of rusted steel, look almost as if they have bored vertically upwards out of the soil.

It is this conviction of their own necessity that is one of the essential characteristics of Cragg's work. It is there also in the looping urgent drawings that line the walls and which, alongside watercolours and prints, will also be in Edinburgh. Drawing was Cragg's first love. But, required to make a sculpture as part of an art foundation course in Cheltenham in 1969, he says: "I very quickly realised that every single change of volume or line or surface actually did give me a different idea, it did give me a different emotion and a different set of associations, and I found that fascinating." By the time Cragg emerged from the Royal College of Art eight years later, he was a sculptor.

Since then, he has played obsessively with volume, line and surface, using wood, glass, plastic, bronze, steel, polystyrene, plaster, ceramic and a variety of found materials, and moving in scale from small objets to massive pieces that occupy the landscape

What unites all his work is intense curiosity about forms and materials, and the world itself: "These are not at all things that people need for any practical purpose in the world," he says. "But they do reveal so much for me as I am making them. They offer me a new way to see the world, and that is all I am interested in."

This major exhibition, part of the Edinburgh Festival, offers the first full survey of Cragg's work in Britain for more than a decade, and runs in a year that will also see shows in Venice, Duisburg, Paris and Dallas.

Featuring nearly 50 major sculptures, and using the grounds to display work too large for the main exhibition rooms, the show is focused on work from the past 15 years, with some earlier pieces.

Cragg's early work was influenced by Minimalism and Conceptualism. It often involved site-specific installation and performance. *Stack* (1975), the startling cube he made from layers of mixed materials, and which looked so convincing in the RA's recent Modern British Sculpture show, was a notable exception.

In the early Eighties, he changed tack decisively: "I very often ended up with some material or with some kind of an object and I would wonder what would happen if I spent more time in the studio with this." He bought a bigger studio, a former tank repair garage in Wuppertal, got some technical help and began making discrete objects.

Two significant strands of work have sustained his production ever since: Early Forms and Rational Beings. The Rational Beings are those spiralling almost-faces. Early Forms are born of Cragg's conviction that the sculptor's role is "to make the things that aren't there. There is no point in copying what is there – the role of art is to open a door onto other realities." Haunted by the idea of all the extinct creatures which lie between those we see, he makes brilliantly coloured hybrid vessels and creatures, challenges to "the simple, flat and boring" homogenised, industrial world we inhabit.

Everything he does, unusually for a major contemporary sculptor, has its origin in hands-on making: "You play around with the material, looking for a form, and suddenly you find forms that say more than you had thought possible, and that is creation, that is poetry."

Tony Cragg: Sculptures and Drawings opens today at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (0131 624 6200) and runs until Nov 6