

Art in America



JULY 1996

TONY CRAGG
MORIMURA'S
"ACTRESSES"

ABSTRACTION AT
THE GUGGENHEIM

DE CHIRICO'S
AMERICAN SHADOW

\$5.00 USA

\$6.50 CAN £3.50 UK

Art in America

July 1996

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Cover: Tony Cragg, *Spyrogyra* (detail), 1992, glass, steel,
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Ends and Means

A recent show at the Centre Pompidou surveyed Tony Cragg's prolific and prodigiously varied sculptural output. The authors consider the impact of process on Cragg's style as well as the role of studio practice in the artist's two-decade career.

BY ANNE ROCHETTE AND WADE SAUNDERS

I remember when I was a boy going upon the beach and being charmed with the colors and forms of the shells. I picked up many and put them in my pocket. When I got home I could find nothing that I gathered—nothing but some dry ugly mussel and snail shells. Thence I learned that Composition was more important than the beauty of individual forms . . . On the shore they lay wet and social by the sea and under the sky.

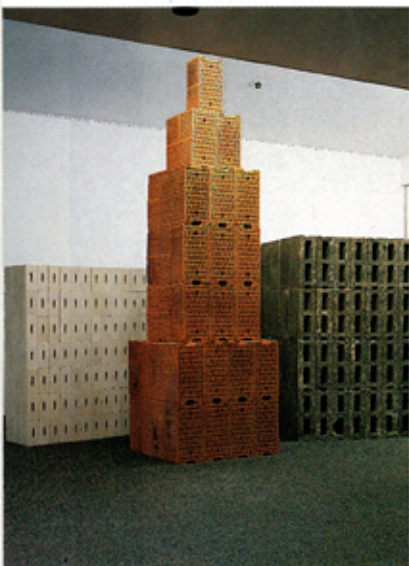
—Ralph Waldo Emerson (in his journal of May 16, 1834)

Many sculptors have an ambivalent relationship with the work of Tony Cragg: they relish his inventiveness and his agility with materials, reckon with his ambition, but resent the way his work, in its prodigious variety, can seem to annex territory they've been working themselves. Cragg, who was born in England in 1949 and has lived in Wuppertal, Germany, since 1977, has been the most exhibited sculptor of his generation. He recently had two shows in Paris. The Centre Georges Pompidou, in its Galerie Sud, mounted a survey of sculptures covering 1970-95, and Galerie Karsten Greve used the occasion to present recent drawings. In the '90s, Cragg has been offered numerous public commissions; two important pieces—for the Olympic Games in Atlanta and for Battery Park City in New York—are nearing completion.

The Pompidou show schematically mapped Cragg's two-decade career, with 22 sculptures, many of them quite large; each stood in for numerous related pieces. While curator Catherine Grenier omitted a number of significant families of works, she did give the viewer a sense of the idiosyncratic diversity of Cragg's methods, which are well documented in the very useful catalogue, bilingual and 300 pages long. Beginning with a roomful of ephemeral student pieces (1970-77) that survive as photographs, the exhibition included some important sculptures from the late '70s and the '80s and ended with recent resource-and-labor-intensive works, a couple of them near monumental in scale.

Cragg's enterprise is distinguished by its lack of formal and material inhibition. More than any living sculptor, he has continually augmented his repertory of techniques, and the Pompidou show bore striking witness to the multiplicity of manners and materials that Cragg has employed. In the catalogue for a show at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Contemporanea, Trento, one sees that in 1990 alone Cragg fashioned sculptures from, among other substances, plaster, glass, food-filled canning jars, glazed and unglazed ceramic, sandblasted porcelain, bags of iron oxide and iron sulphate, plywood, carved wood, tree trunks, rubber, cast polyester, granite, marble, various round scrap-metal objects, cast steel, cast iron, cast bronze and welded steel.¹ When Cragg is offered access to processes new to him, he usually turns the chance to advantage, as evident in his ongoing work with glass and ceramics. The variety of materials employed keeps any single exhibition of his pieces looking fresh, and also proves—should it still be necessary—that artistic seriousness does not require stylistic homogeneity.

Cragg's methodology, however, has a consistency to it. The student pieces were apposite as early embodiments of conceptual concerns, working processes and visual strategies which have remained active in Cragg's art to this day. In 1970, Cragg obsessively knotted webs of string, which he draped over things to hand—for instance, a disordered work table in the photo that was exhibited here. In 1972, he laid out lines



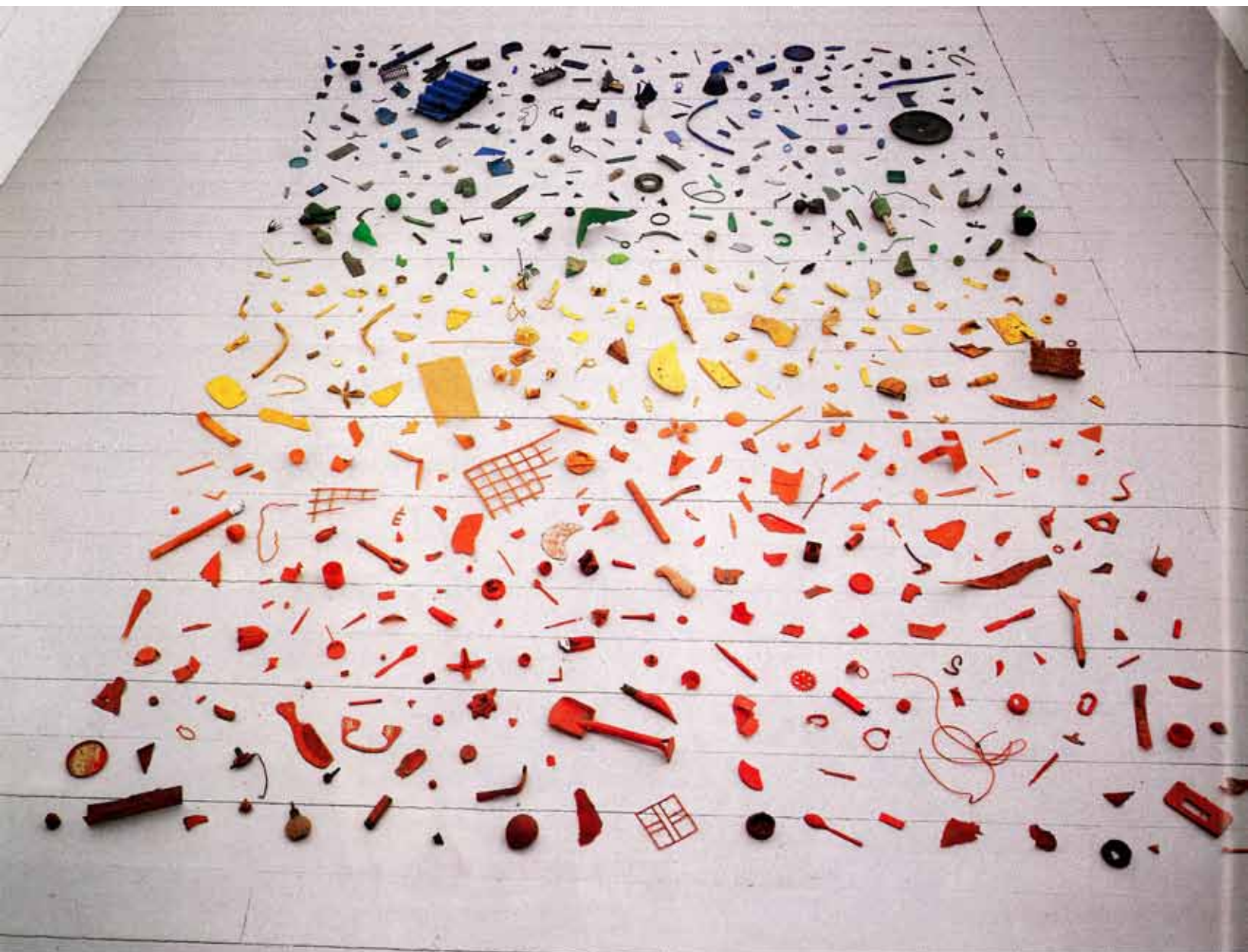
Tony Cragg: Three Modern Buildings, 1984, bricks and cinder blocks, 7, 19 and 13 feet high. Collection Cesare Grazioli.



Untitled, 1971, seaweed, Isle of Wight. Photo Tony Cragg.



Complete Omnivore, 1993, plaster, wood, steel, 60 1/2 by 59 by 59 inches. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo Tom Powel.



New Stones Newton's Tones, 1979, found plastic fragments, 10% by 7% feet. Collection British Arts Council, London.

on his own body with white stones and, in another photo, neatly arranged cut pieces of paper to create a rectangular surface split among a table, a chair and the floor. In 1974, several constructions got partly or totally covered with black markings. All these pieces prefigure the multiple and inventive surfaces of his subsequent sculptures. They make manifest his attachment to the repetitive gesture, as well as the manic energy that suffuses his oeuvre.

The material world is Cragg's oyster; he has a rare feel and sharp eye for the little-noticed made things that increasingly constitute our environment. Thus a 1971 picture shows a row of optically scannable digits, which had recently changed the way banks processed checks, and which Cragg enlarged and rendered in seaweed on a seashore. This is an early example of the continuing transmutations that would later see him construct a DNA molecule with welded-together bronze teddy bears, join five large cast-steel test tubes to form a hand, and blow up rubber office stamps into whimsical, over-life-size paraffin heads. Art critics rarely make much of visual wit, but it permeates his best sculptures, as it does those of Alexander Calder, another playful expatriate with an engineering bent.

Approaching Cragg's work chronologically can be a thankless endeavor: one of the newest sculptures at the Pompidou, *Stack* (1995), is an outright



Spectrum, 1985, found plastic fragments, approx. 1 by 7 by 16 feet. Courtesy Galleria Tucci Russo, Torre Pellice, Italy.

The material world is Cragg's oyster; he has a rare feel and sharp eye for the little-noticed made things that often now constitute our environment.

reprise of a *Stack* made in 1983, but in its method it harks back to 1975. That year Cragg consolidated a number of his previous works and a greater quantity of found materials—boards, building rubble, cardboard and the like—into an imposing, stratified, rectangular prism. That first *Stack*, along with other early pieces, signals the way geometric structures will keep appearing in his oeuvre, both as formal devices and as metaphors for organization in the natural world. Like most of his subsequent pieces, *Stack* offers no preferred view. It foreshadows his interest in science (geology, in this case), his continual recyclings (here, his own student work) and the ongoing interplay in his production between parts and wholes. The incarnation of *Stack* shown at the Pompidou brought home the point that Cragg knows a good work when he creates one. He frequently makes new pieces that are similar to previous works in process and materials, if not in all details—pieces he treats as unique, but which sometimes are variations so close as to be almost identical. (In fact, he often gives them the same title.)

Cragg possesses an exceptional understanding of materials, seeing their sculptural possibilities in a jiff. His first celebrated piece, *New Stones Newton's Tones* (1979), represented at the Centre Pompidou by the similar but larger *Spectrum* (1979), is a rectangle of found, colored plastic objects and fragments laid out on the floor in the sequence of Newton's spectrum. Cragg had occasionally accompanied Richard Long on his walks, and Long's arrangements of sticks and stones were influential. But by shifting from natural materials to the urban and manufactured, Cragg caught some fresh air, and forever changed the way many of us see waste. Cragg's initial floor works were carpetlike in their flatness and expanse, making us conscious of the ground, since their constituent elements were spaced apart. Later, he consolidated his elements, making sculptures whose piled-up plastic parts resembled giant mattresses, as in *Black and White Stack* (1980) and *Spectrum* (1985), the latter a foot thick. Though witty and matter of fact, Cragg's plastic arrangements were received by many sculptors as a challenge of principles, just as Jasper Johns's "Targets" had been by painters two decades before. Both artists altered the rules in their mediums, Johns giving new meanings to painterliness and subject matter and Cragg introducing the trivial and quotidian into a near-Minimalist formal vocabulary.

Things in the world generally are Cragg's starting point, and those things may be the works of other artists. Cragg has shown himself to be that rare parodist whose work trumps his sources. In *Three Modern Buildings*, which exists in a couple of medium-scale versions from 1983 and 1984 and in a large-scale variant made in 1987 for the Hayward Gallery, London, Cragg used a signature method of Carl Andre's—the stacking of modular units—to acute effect, separately piling 100 red bricks, 96 cinderblocks and 70 yellow bricks into three "buildings." These structures are architecturally plausible in their form, color and utilitarian voids, which read as fenestration. They comment mordantly on prevailing building norms, skewering Andre's artistic stasis in the process.

A number of Cragg's sculptures of the past 15 years depend on his estranging the familiar, whether by change of scale or other quirky transformation. Claes Oldenburg had charted this terrain in his works from the '60s, before he became the darling of city planners and architects. Both pack rats, Oldenburg and Cragg share an interest in the store-bought and the tumescent, though the former's sensibility leans toward the domestic, while the latter's tilts toward science and engineering. Cragg also shares with Oldenburg a cartoonist's knack for swift characterizations of the everyday. His *Tools* (1986) and *Fruit Bottles* (1989), seen at the Pompidou, depend on enlargement and a substitution of materials—sandstone for wood and metal, bronze for plastic. Although visually efficient and smart, neither work has the unsettling power of a more recent piece, *Complete Omnivore* (1993), also shown. Here Cragg enlarged a set of human teeth (including their roots) about 20-fold and cast them in plas-



Untitled (*Stack*), 1976, mixed mediums, 39 1/2 by 39 1/2 by 70 1/2 inches; at the Royal College of Art, London.

Stack, 1995, mixed mediums; installed at the Centre Georges Pompidou. Photo Jean-Claude Planchet, Paris.



ter. The upper teeth are placed crown down on a thick sheet of plywood supported by a pair of steel sawhorses, while the lower teeth, set on the floor, are wired upright in a rough steel frame, all but the canines, which have longer roots, elevated on little plaster bases. The informality, even crudeness, of the structure focuses our attention on the imposing teeth, which have been only moderately fussed over. The whiteness of the teeth and our sense of the parts as belonging to a set lend the work formal coherence.

In this piece, as in much of his work, Cragg shows himself to be a sculptor concerned with mass. While a sculptor like Richard Deacon may carefully investigate contour and negative space in his works so that emptiness comes slowly to seem palpable, suffused with presence, Cragg seems little concerned with his objects' relationship to surrounding space. In *Omnivore* the space between the upper and lower teeth is charged, though more because of our own associations than because of any inherent spatial tensions.

Some writers, in imagining the rest of the human being extrapolated to this scale, have found the teeth somewhat sinister, but such a reading seems peripheral to Cragg's concerns, which are to make us, through sculpture, per-



Mollusk, 1987, steel, 123 by 101 by 62 inches overall. Collection Fundacio Caixa de Pensions, Barcelona. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

ceive and understand the world afresh. Here we are brought up short by the disparateness of the parts that together form our dentition, the sum of whose shapes, some related to carnivores and others to herbivores, makes us the omnivores we are. Looking at the sculpture, we remember how subtly living tissue functions and how complicated everything becomes in its absence, since no mechanical prosthesis approaches the elegant efficiency of the natural. Teeth are critical to research in physical anthropology, and today are sometimes the final recourse in identifying a corpse. Cragg appears to delight in stuff that leaves hard evidence, especially when it comes to the human body, short-lived and prone to decay as it is.

The *Spyrogyra* (1995) exhibited at the Pompidou—based on a 1992 piece of the same title—has an organic reference too, but of a more abstract nature. Despite its size (8 by 16 by 11 feet), the sculpture is technically direct and could be speedily made: a long, pieced-together steel pipe a bit less than 2 inches in diameter was machine-rolled as if wrapping down around a vertical cone; the pipe then arches back and forth to form an inclined, tentlike vault and ends by repeating the conical form, this time horizontally. Round steel rods about 10 inches long are welded densely along the length of the pipe, generally oriented so that they incline upward.

A sandblasted glass bottle is slipped onto each rod, over 600 bottles in total, almost all of wine size or larger. The sandblasting gives the bottles a matte surface, making them slightly milky and lessening the visual differences among the

green, brown, colorless and blue glass. While numerous artists have used Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* (1914) as a point of departure, Cragg almost uniquely escapes the Frenchman's gravitational pull. Compared to the 1992 version, this *Spyrogyra* has gained in monumentality and spatial fluidity, and it better asserts its independence from *Bottle Rack*. Where Duchamp's work was cool and rational, Cragg's is exuberant and allusive.

The title plays with the word "spirogyra," a genus of freshwater green algae with spiral chloroplasts, and the fact that only some of the bottles are green suggests the way photosynthetic activity can occur in discrete places within an organism, where we usually think of the process being all over, as in leaves. While in art the word "biomorphic" usually designates forms with stretched and curving surfaces, Cragg takes the term more literally, making objects which stand convincingly for living organisms, but do so at a remove, since his materials and his forms are typically distant from their referent. He has a sweet eye for visual metaphors, whether to embody the complexities of organic chemistry or to make us wonder about algae, whirlwinds and artistic genealogies.

Cragg first became known in 1978-82 for arranging found materials—plastic, wood, tin cans—into works that were quick-witted and quick to make. These pieces were typically conceived and realized on site in a week or two, since the artist could find the detritus he used almost anywhere. While the earliest of these works were abstract, Cragg soon shifted toward recognizable



Early Forms, 1991, bronze, two parts: 99 by 64 by 48 inches and 102 by 80 by 44 inches.

imagery. Almost always working on the wall, Cragg might, for example, re-create at large scale the contour of a found element, as in *Redskin* (1979). He also made self-portraits in silhouette—a practice dating to his student days and continuing to the present—of which *Self-portrait with Bottles and Bricks* (1982) is typical. Often he decided on his images on site, as when he discovered, upon arriving at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1981, that the galleries had been reconfigured and he had twice the amount of space he had expected; out of this sudden surfeit came *Britain Seen from the North*, which is more than 30 feet wide. Such locally themed works constituted another strand of Cragg's practice during this period.

His work was emblematic of the new British sculpture: its freshness and Cragg's personal vigor were instrumental in bringing himself and his English colleagues to international prominence, just as Damien Hirst's work and persona have been crucial for the current wave of young London artists. Around 1982, when Cragg tired of traveling all over to create site-specific pieces and had increasing means, he hired assistants, invested in equipment and reinvented himself as a studio head.

Capital is more important to sculptors than to painters, since sculptures generally cost more to make—and ship and store—than paintings. While you rarely can tell whether a painter earns \$50,000 or a million a year by looking at his canvases, you often can see which sculptors have money to spend. Successful painters may diversify, interesting themselves in sculpture, movies, music or interior decorating, but sculptors tend to pour profit back into the studio to make grander works. David Smith's impressive run of pieces at Voltri in 1962 shows how access to resources can transform a sculptor's work. The remarkable flowering of Louise Bourgeois's output in the past two decades can be traced partly to her being better able to pay carvers and fabricators.

Few artists have kept developing and exploiting their financial resources as creatively as Cragg has. He has formed long-term relationships, most dating back a decade or more, with about 10 major galleries, which ensure his visibility in all the world's significant art markets. Since 1979, Cragg has had more than 140 solo shows, a number of them in museums. At present, he has a half-time office manager and four full-time studio assistants. That number fluctuates according to the work load. Others do contract work, as was the case with John McCormack, who in Cork, Ireland, assembled the piece destined for Atlanta.

While gallery shows are financially speculative in nature, commissions typically have budgets that provide the maker a steady income stream. In conversation, Cragg has said that the piece for the Olympic Games was budgeted at roughly \$500,000. A comparably scaled work for the Stadtparkasse in Wuppertal involved foundry charges of \$330,000, again according to the artist. And the large two-element bronze sculpture soon to be installed at Battery Park City, New York, was surely costly. This quite apart from the 30 or so medium-to-large-scale sculptures that Cragg is likely to produce and market this year, other large commissions that are in the planning stages, and his numerous drawings. Money does matter here, since it permits Cragg to move ideas speedily from his notebook to the public eye, while other artists, who perhaps have similar intuitions, are still figuring them out in the studio. Cragg often wins turf wars; sculptors can suddenly find themselves working terrain taken over by him, since it is the ongoing visibility of one's work, not its date of inception, that carries weight in our short-memory art world.

By shifting from natural materials to the urban and manufactured, Cragg caught some fresh air. He also forever changed the way many of us see waste.

Cragg has repeatedly found efficient ways to make imposing pieces, though his craftsmanship sometimes has been rough. While exact figures are hard to come by, in recent years he seems to average about three completed sculptures a month, and that kind of productivity requires an inventive studio approach. In a 1990 catalogue for the Newport Harbor Museum, the most complete accounting of Cragg's production up till then, chief curator Paul Schimmel noted a "prodigious oeuvre of over seven hundred works."² If one subtracts the 50-odd student-era works, that would come to 650 works completed between 1978 and 1990, or about 50 a year (drawings not included). The Trento catalogue, which doesn't claim completeness, illustrates 32 pieces, a number of them large in scale, dated 1990, and 26 dated 1991.

Cragg's works rarely involve touch—traditionally taken by sculptors to mean the trace or sense of the artist's hand. The absence is understandable, since Cragg's own hands are seldom the ones making his objects. In an interview published in the Pompidou catalogue, Cragg faults Henry Moore for making work that appeals to our haptic sense and asserts his own preference for the optical. While Moore rarely if ever did the physical labor on his large works, he taught his assistants to mimic his quality of touch. Accordingly,



Cellulose Memory, 1991, beech wood, three pieces: 54 by 147 by 140 inches overall. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.

Tools, 1986, sandstone, 3 1/2 by 10 1/2 by 8 feet. Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London.



Cragg has a profound sense of the practical and its uses. His solution to the question of touch has been to invent unlikely skins for his works.

although certain assistants' personalities might be discerned in a work's details, Moore's pieces, taken all together, have a tactile homogeneity.

One senses, on the other hand, that the question of touch presents a dilemma for Cragg. He isn't one to forego any means of conveying additional information, which is one of the functions of touch, but he's also absolutely free of the kind of romanticism implied by a traditional sense of touch. He also has time constraints. Besides his daunting schedule of exhibitions and travel, he has for a number of years held the second-ranking post on the academic side of the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf. But Cragg, whose father designed electrical parts for aircraft, has a profound sense of the practical and its uses, as well as an understanding of science rarely encountered in an artist. His solution to the question of touch has been to continually invent unlikely skins for his works. These surface treatments, labor intensive for his assistants, pull together his often partite forms, mask their occasionally slapdash construction and give many a piece a disquieting indeterminacy by rendering its contours perceptually fuzzy. These skins offer the viewer's eyes many of the rewards that touch has traditionally provided.

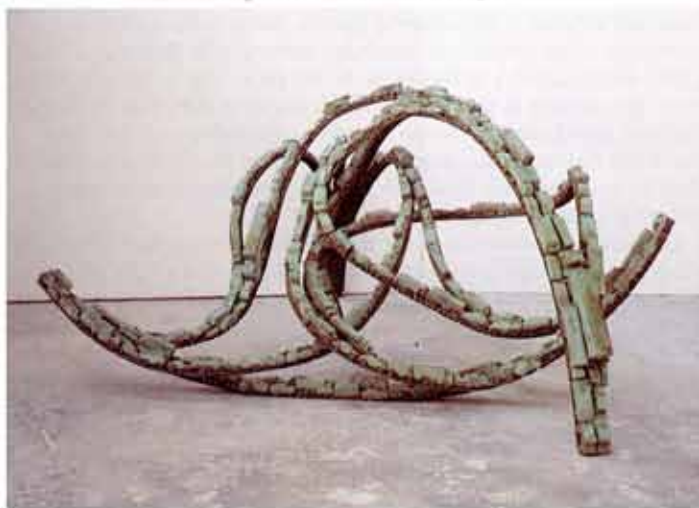
Since the allover oil-pastel zigzags that mark every face of the hollow parallelepipeds in *Echo*, 1984 (and reappear as myriad curved 1/8-inch-wide graphite arrows suggesting the earth's air circulation in *Trade Winds*, 1995), Cragg has surfaced his work with parti-colored plastic chips like fish scales, innumerable bored holes, steel rods that a hedgehog might envy, turned wooden knobs, a

Angels and Other Antibodies, 1992, wood, metal hooks, approx. 7' by 7' by 5 feet. Courtesy Christine and Isy Brachot Gallery, Brussels.



Echo, 1984, wood, paint, pipes, boxes, 6' by 11' by 6' feet. Private collection.

Hildener Kreuz, 1989, bronze and steel, 39' by 67' by 59' inches. Private collection. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery.



hardware stockroom's worth of hooks, and small hemispheres abutting one another like a mass of soap bubbles. The two-element *Secrete* (1995), shown at the Pompidou, is fully tiled with well over 20,000 dice. The artist remarked that covering the Styrofoam-fiberglass-and-resin sculpture with dice ended up costing a bit more than casting it in bronze would have. Sometimes the idea for a surface even seems to precede the sculptures to which it is ultimately matched, or at least to motivate the continuation of a series.

At their best, these skins tie the works back to the world, suggesting the rich complexity of natural surfaces at both micro and macro levels, and helping lodge the sculptures in our memory. In *Angels and Other Antibodies* (1992), whose proxy at the Pompidou was *Untitled* (1993) [see *A.i.A.*, Apr. '94], thousands of hooks screwed into the surfaces of the sculpture's component forms ape the molecular functioning of antibodies, which lock onto the pathogen body by means of chemical hooks. Taking a cue from the work's title, we can speculate that a scientific view of healing is implicitly contrasted with a religious understanding of sickness and cure, here embodied by the carved wooden angels that are also part of the piece. Cragg's manic embellishments are often funny, as when the logs piled up in *Administered Cellulose* (1992) sprout large versions of the wooden handles of rubber stamps. In *Hildener Kreuz* (1989), the top surface of a looping, steel-strip structure, which resembles the track of a roller coaster, or perhaps a mid-'80s Richard Deacon sculpture, is covered with small bronze trucks and cars lined up bumper to bumper; the whole evokes the nightmarish German highway interchange cited in the title.

Most everything that can be is made in Cragg's 10,000-square-foot workshop, including the patterns for the metal castings, which now occupy pride of place in his output. The castings themselves are let out on bid to industrial foundries where they are molded, poured and welded together, often in

editions of three with an artist's proof. Cragg worked as a laborer in an iron foundry in 1970, but his artistic involvement with metal casting didn't begin until 1986, the year he completed a large outdoor commission in bronze, iron and granite for the Tate Gallery Liverpool. His early preference for iron over bronze seemed fitting. Iron evokes the history of industrial production, and bronze, the history of art. *Fragmente* (1987), displayed at the Centre Pompidou, was a pale stand-in for some impressive pieces in iron, such as *Mollusk* (1987), where Cragg cast three giant podlike objects, to which he welded assorted small toys, likewise cast. Quickly enough, though, Cragg got involved with bronze, a metal that is far more expensive, but also more supple and technically forgiving.

Untitled (1988), included in the Paris show, is a so-so bronze sculpture. A juxtaposition of two little-suited elements, it offers a rare instance of Cragg ill at ease in developing a work. The taller element looks like an upright test tube, its bottom end seeming to touch just into a little pool of bronze. Another test tube, set on a diagonal, looks more than half submerged in the same pool. The second and more massive part resembles an enlarged version of a recumbent five-gallon water bottle moving through space to grow into a giant laboratory flask. The transition between the two forms is lumpy and awkward, and the piece as a whole lacks Cragg's usual decisiveness and energy. But this 1988 piece also presages the "Early Forms" series of cast bronzes, from which two examples—one large, one small—were chosen to be installed alongside their predecessor. *Early Forms (Big Version)* (1993), a physically massive and formally mysterious work, has a real breath, like the best pieces from this series, where Cragg shows himself a master at creating resonant volumes using a simple method.

Working in plaster and Styrofoam, he enlarges a laboratory flask or similarly shaped container, slices it in half vertically and connects it, via a continuously flowing surface, to the opposite half of a second container, so that each form becomes the other in moving through space—rather like what computer morphing does. The originating and recipient half-vessels may be oriented horizontally, diagonally or vertically; sometimes a third or fourth vessel appears to have been placed in the trajectory between the two. Fifteen years ago, Bruce Nauman used a related method to formally simpler ends when he cast an iron ring whose cross sections, taken 120 degrees apart, were a circle, a square and an equilateral triangle, with the surfaces in between being stretched to effect the liaisons. In the "Early Forms" series, a long, sinuous slit of near-constant width connects the original mouths. Like all traditional castings, these pieces are hollow, as the slit makes explicit. Though in their making these sculptures follow a logical process, the resulting forms frequently offer a number of unforeseeable configurations.

Perhaps the most surprising piece in the Pompidou show was *Rational Beings* (1995), whose three elements, visual cousins of the shmoos that Al Capp used to draw in "Li'l Abner," are enlargements of members of the 19-element work called *Flock* (1995). Each Being is made of numerous circles, of progressively varying diameter, cut from Styrofoam sheet and then glued together into a stack, with the centers of the circles often askew rather than aligned. The stepped edges of this Styrofoam assembly are rasped down until the surface is smooth. The whole is spackled, wrapped with carbon-fiber mesh, like black fiberglass, and then sealed with a clear epoxy resin. Despite their cross sections generally being round, the forms are surprisingly diverse, surging this way and that and recalling those weighted toys that spring back when knocked down.

The surface of the work is visually rich: depending on the angle of the illumination, it changes from being opaque to offering a shallow transparency. Given their scale, the pieces are quite light. At the Pompidou, the smallest of the three elements stood vertically, resembling a human figure in its 5-foot height and its volume; the largest unit, which is about 10 feet from top to bottom, balanced off kilter, and the middle-sized one lay like a fallen top. We sense an emotional relation among the three, linked as they are by their genesis, but their connection remains ambiguous. Cragg obviously likes this working technique for the way it yields biomorphic sculptures that are quickly made, physically strong and, because constructed of disks of known diameter and thickness, can be readily enlarged when necessary.

In the "Early Forms" series, as well as in *Rational Beings*, we recognize formal qualities usually associated with classical art, such as clarity of organizing principles and the absence of disequilibrating tensions. This classicism is partly the unfolding of characteristics that were always present in Cragg's work: a distance verging on coolness, an evenness of tone, a predilection for clear

geometric shapes (even if made fuzzy by surface treatments) and a sense that method is the mother of form. There also is a practical logic to the newfound consistency in his vocabulary. As Cragg keeps increasing the scale and frequency of his public projects—he now completes three to four major commissions a year—he is staying close to what he knows, and what his assistants can manage without him, since he is more often absent than present in his own studio.

For example, a recently commissioned bronze, designed to sit atop the Stadtparkasse building's ventilation system in Wuppertal, owes its method and shape to *Flock* and *Rational Beings*, though here the Styrofoam, plaster and resin object serves but as a casting pattern for bronze. The sculpture, which rises over 25 feet tall, looks like a sagging water drop, or an upstretched Hershey's Kiss, its skin punched full of many thousand roughly 2-inch round holes. Cragg previously used this surface treatment to give visual access to the interior of a human-scaled group of nested Russian dolls, *Matrushka* (1989), a quite wonderful sculpture. In the Stadtparkasse piece the holes are functional; they permit air flow. The heating engineer required that their combined area



Trade Winds, 1995, plaster, glaze, paint, 7½ feet high by 3½ feet in diameter. Courtesy Galleria Tucci Russo. Photo Enzo Ricci.

Cragg's enterprise is distinguished by its lack of formal and material inhibition. He continually augments his repertory of techniques.

total at least 110 square feet, a number that Cragg's design comfortably exceeds. He has developed a way to cast the bronze with the holes already in place, while in *Matrushka* they had to be painstakingly and expensively bored after casting. Given the technical requirements and engineering complications, as well as a casting that is thicker at the bottom for strength and thinner at the top for lightness, Cragg stayed with a form and working method well known in his studio.

Cragg is that unusual artist who is well-regarded by both the critics and the public, making him a logical candidate for major commissions. Cragg was solicited to propose an important, emblematic work for the Olympic Games in Atlanta, and in April 1995 his proposal was accepted over those of two unnamed competitors. His sculpture—which uses elements and constructional techniques comparable to those he employed in *Our Daily Bread* (1994), a commissioned piece sited in Vienna, Austria—measures 25 by 19 by 16 feet and is set atop a 7-foot-high base.



Rational Beings, 1995, Styrofoam sheets, carbon fiber mesh, mixed mediums, 9' by 4' by 5' feet. Courtesy Galleria Tucci Russo.

Flock, 1995, fiberglass, 2' by 9' by 5' feet overall. Courtesy Galleria Tucci Russo. Photo Enzo Ricci.



To make *World Events* (1996) Cragg dismembered and then enlarged those little articulated wooden mannequins that artists learn to draw from, replicating them at seven heights ranging from 24 to 64 inches. Cragg's patterns were cast in aluminum in Germany then shipped to Ireland, where the roughly 2,000 parts were welded together to form 130 or so genderless figures frozen in ordinary postures. These figures in turn were welded together to create the image of a person from the waist up holding a sphere in his arms. The larger figures serve to make the torso and arms, the smaller to make the head and the ball, and the whole piece is a weblike skin. Structurally the work functions somewhat like a Buckminster Fuller dome or a Brower Hatcher sculpture, and visually one is reminded of Pavel Tchelitchev's *Hide and Seek*.

Cragg has said, "Given the introduction to the project and after visiting Atlanta, I thought it would be appropriate to make a work with figuration on the theme of a world united, a global event." The mannequins seemed the right answer to his wish "not to personalize the figures, but still have them remain human and friendly." The work is certainly livelier than the statuary that Robert Graham made for the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1984, and Cragg's sculpture suggests the ideas of fraternal cooperation, communication and competition that are played out in the Games. Perhaps less intentionally, the piece also evokes the way money now inflates the Games, and mass leisure generally, like a gargantuan soccer ball. Though Cragg has always worked large, many of his sculptures have been unsuited for display outdoors because of the fragility of their materials. That now is changing, and this fall, at the Middelheim Museum in Antwerp, he will have his first outdoor exhibition.

Cragg's drawings, as seen at Galerie Karsten Greve, have the energy of his sculpture but lack the latter's diversity of approach and freshness. The 61 drawings were mostly of three formats, small (8 1/2 by 11 1/2 inches), medium (11 1/2 by 16 1/2 inches) and large (19 by 26 1/2 inches). Cragg typically uses a soft lead pencil, at times adding washes in ink or gouache, or employing them alone. Few if any are working drawings. Many are quick renditions of existing sculptures, some of which were realized years earlier: dots stand for the myriad holes in *Forminifera*, office stamps from the "Administered" series metamorphose into heads, and several "Early Forms" unfold their curves. Willfulness pervades Cragg's drawings. Seldom does a line get erased, and he rarely takes the time to linger on a curve, grope for a form.

What could be impressive as a demonstration of sheer artistic self-confidence rapidly becomes disquieting, as Cragg's uninflected, essentially prefabricated marks begin to seem overly familiar, even rote: dotted lines, squiggly lines, curving arrows, rapid whirls. His drawing doesn't involve him struggling with ideas, figuring things out spatially or making a mess to get somewhere. If such juicy drawings exist, most likely they come and go on the large blackboard in his studio. At Karsten Greve, one sensed the relentlessness of Cragg's production, despite agreeable passages where his humor suddenly erupts or his efficiency gives way to reflection. Half the drawings (they were all dated) appeared to have been completed in the two weeks preceding the exhibition.

Seemingly supreme in his self-confidence, Cragg spent the '80s chewing at the boundaries of the sculptural object, making brush works that looked for trouble. In this decade, as public commissions take a growing share of his energy and interest, his pieces more often please than provoke. In the interview for the Pompidou catalogue, Cragg takes pains to distance himself from Henry Moore, the last English sculptor to function at a scale and in a studio manner comparable to his own; like Moore, he largely leaves the shaping of his pieces to assistants. Cragg criticizes Moore for, among other things, a lack of inventive-



Secrete, 1995, Styrofoam-fiberglass-and-resin sculpture covered with over 20,000 dice, 11½ feet high; at the Centre Georges Pompidou.

ness, a conservative formal sense and, as noted above, a preference for the tactile over the visual. But some of Cragg's recent bronzes clearly recall Moore in their sinuous, curvilinear forms. Moore's work is indeed tactile in its address, and he strove to keep it that way. While tactile qualities are rich and pleasurable, they are efficient for neither sculptor nor viewer, and efficiency remains the watchword in Cragg's production, mostly for the better, but occasionally for the worse. □

1. In conversation with author at the artist's studio, Mar. 20, 1996.
2. Germano Celant and Danilo Eccher, *Tony Cragg*, Milan, Edizioni Charta, 1994.
3. *Tony Cragg: Sculpture 1975-1990*, Newport Beach, Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1990. After its run at Newport Harbor Museum [Oct. 14-Dec. 30, 1990], the show traveled

to the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. [Feb. 1-Mar. 31, 1991], the Power Plant, Toronto [Sept. 6-Oct. 27, 1991], and the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston [Nov. 16, 1991-Feb. 9, 1992].

"Tony Cragg" appeared at the Galerie Sud du Centre Georges Pompidou [Jan. 24-Apr. 15]. The show did not travel. An exhibition of his drawings took place concurrently at Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris [Jan. 24-Mar. 30]. Cragg's work can be seen this summer in "A Century of British Sculpture" at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume [June 6-Sept. 15], and at the Olympic Games, Atlanta, where his World Events was dedicated on June 7. His large-scale commission for Battery Park City, New York, has also been recently inaugurated.

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