



Tony Cragg, *Bent of Mind* (2002) © The Artist; photograph: Charles Duprat

PRESS VIEW: 11.30 am – 1.00 pm, 28 July 2011

TONY CRAGG: SCULPTURES AND DRAWINGS

30 July – 6 November 2011

Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, 75 Belford Road, Edinburgh, EH4 3DR

Telephone 0131 6246 6200

www.nationalgalleries.org

Admission £7 (£5)

With support from Holtermann Fine Art and The Henry Moore Foundation



The major summer exhibition at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art this year will highlight the work of one of the world's greatest living sculptors. Tony Cragg is a central figure in the remarkable generation of British sculptors which emerged in the late 1970s. Based in Germany, Cragg enjoys a huge international reputation and will have separate exhibitions this year in Edinburgh, Venice, Dallas, Duisburg, and Paris (his recent exhibition under the glass pyramid at the Louvre is the first to be staged there by a living artist). Operating from a vast suite of studios in a former tank repair garage in Wuppertal, Cragg produces some of the most extraordinary sculptural forms of our time. He is Director of one of the world's great art academies, the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, and owns and runs a 30-acre sculpture park, the Skulpturenpark Waldfrieden. Cragg won the prestigious Japanese Praemium Imperiale international art prize in 2007 and the Turner Prize in 1988 (the year in which he also represented Britain at the Venice Biennale).

Tony Cragg: Sculptures and Drawings will be the first UK museum exhibition devoted to the artist in more than a decade, and will concentrate mainly on monumental sculptures made in the last fifteen years, to be shown with a number of significant earlier works. There will also be a selection of some 100 drawings, watercolours and prints, which offer a fascinating insight into the artist's working processes. Featuring nearly fifty major sculptures, with some

of the larger works sited in the Gallery's grounds, the exhibition will offer a rare opportunity to see the range and breadth of Cragg's extraordinary recent and new work.

Born in Liverpool in 1949, Tony Cragg began his career as a laboratory assistant, helping to test, manipulate and develop different types of rubber. At the time he was also studying art, and began to use drawing as a means of understanding the experiments he was conducting. Cragg's background in science can be seen to inform his imaginative, creative way approach to the making of sculpture. His work bears witness to an intense curiosity that has driven him to create, test, push and pull materials, to see what each one does: this has been a defining characteristic of Cragg's work throughout his career.

From the early to mid-1970s Cragg studied at Wimbledon College of Art and the Royal College of Art in London. On leaving the Royal College in 1977 he moved to Wuppertal in central Germany, initially for a year, but has remained there ever since. At this stage, Cragg was making works from found materials - man-made urban waste, such as broken toys, chair seats and plastic bottles - that he gathered on walks. *Runner*, a wall-based work made in 1985 is typical of this period, in which individual fragments of waste retained their original identity yet were reconfigured to create a seemingly unrelated image or form. Cragg is dismissive of the idea that such raw materials are 'rubbish': to him, the discarded plastic objects he used carry as much significance and meaning in relation to contemporary life as ancient artefacts speak of the cultures that produced them.

In the mid-1980s Cragg began casting in bronze and iron and using materials such as wood, Kevlar, plaster, steel, polystyrene and glass, which he has subsequently explored and manipulated like no other sculptor of his time, or perhaps any other. Unusually, given their scale and complexity, Cragg makes all of his sculptures by hand, employing a team of assistants to bring them to completion. This painstaking process is the stimulus to everything that the artist does - through making one work he finds inspiration for the next. In addition, this approach to his work has led to it being made in 'family groups' or series. Works from two of these - *Early Forms* and *Rational Beings* - will comprise the major component of this exhibition.

In *Early Forms*, his longest-running series of cast works, which began in the late 1980s, Cragg has created a vast array of unique sculptural forms, derived from a diverse range of vessel types - from ancient flasks to test-tubes, jam jars and detergent bottles - that are twisted and mutated together to make new forms, imagined and realised by the artist. The title refers to the fact that vessels are among the simplest and earliest surviving man-made forms and, in archaeological terms, are important markers of culture. During the 1990s the *Early Forms* became increasingly complex, organic and elastic in form, exemplified here by works such as *Early Forms St Gallen* (1997), a twisting, screw-like form which seems to be wrestling with itself and turning inside-out.

The series evolved further in the early 2000s, when Cragg made a group of more geometric works, with more structured internal dynamics. He also overcame the problems of permanently fixing colour to cast bronze by using new paint technology, producing vibrantly coloured works such as *McCormack* (2007) and *Outspan* (2006). The latter demonstrates how, in his more recent works, Cragg has incorporated the forms of a broad range of ordinary vessels: the sculpture is based at one end on a ribbed oil can which transmutes via two other vessel shapes and a shampoo bottle into an astonishing work. Another

development in the *Early Forms* sculptures in recent years has been their elevation from the ground, as in *Declination* (2004), a large, two-and-a-half-ton yellow-painted bronze which stands nimbly on three points.

Cragg invariably works on several apparently unrelated series at the same time. While the *Early Forms* series was in progress he was also developing the *Rational Beings* series, which has been a major element of his output in the past decade. These works are, typically, characterised by tall columnar forms in bronze, wood, stone, plaster or steel, in which facial profiles emerge and disappear as one walks around them. They are created by an elaborate process of building up circular or elliptical cross-sections (of wood, polystyrene or stone) on a vertical axis, which are then cut and shaped to meet Cragg's design. This, in turn, derives from an intensive process of drawing and modelling. The imposing and intricate *Rational Beings* works, such as *Constructor* (2007), *Bent of Mind* (2002), and *Elbow* (2010) are breathtaking in their complexity, and though they share a 'family resemblance', their diversity is a testament to Cragg's ceaseless curiosity and experimentation, as well as his mastery of materials.

The exhibition will conclude with an example of work from the recent *Hedge* series. It is typical of this remarkable artist, that in something so apparently mundane as a hedge, he recognises a fabulously complicated, flexible form - an outer skin hiding something that is alive with energy underneath – upon which he can draw, taking his work yet more new directions.

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pressinfo@nationalgalleries.org
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