
TONY CRAGG

SCULPTURES

PARIS PANTIN

21 Feb 2016 - 16 Jul 2016



Opening: Sunday, 21 February 2016, 2-6pm

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is delighted to host a comprehensive solo exhibition of new sculptures by Tony Cragg (b 1949), one of the most distinguished contemporary sculptors, in the vast halls of the gallery space in Paris Pantin. The exhibition will feature 25 new sculptures of steel, bronze, wood, fibreglass and stone. The exhibition coincides with one of the artist's solo exhibitions at the Eremitage St. Petersburg (March to June 2016) and a retrospective at the Von-der-Heydt-Museum in Wuppertal (April to August 2016).

Cragg's sculptural oeuvre was originally motivated by his encounter with English Land Art and Performance, and is still distinguished by an immense wealth of surprising formal inventions and combinations. Cragg sees himself as a *materialist*, constantly seeking to explore and expand new materials. He has frequently applied techniques such as stacking, layering and heaping to different types of waste material and everyday objects, giving them an unexpected interpretation. Here, it is primarily steel, bronze and wood that he uses for his almost geologically layered arrangements. "Cragg's materialism suggests several meanings. In its most comprehensive sense, it implies a philosophical point of view, a conception of the world concentrating on physical phenomena and those circumstances which can be directly deduced from them. His artistic work shows a view of the human being gained through his relation to the environment – ranging from geological formations to urban constructions, from the tools we use to shape the world to furniture and other objects we produce in order to satisfy our needs." (Lynne Cooke, 2003)

In recent years, heads and faces have been appearing like *leitmotifs* in Cragg's work. A *morphing* circular movement shapes the rhythm of the sculptures. Overlapping, layering and convolution give rise to body landscapes forming positives and negatives, asserting a form and at the same time mapping out their vacant spaces. Cragg develops his forms from "artistic sediments that appear to arise from different eras" (Eva Maria Stadler, 2008). The horizontal extension of the biomorphic form is reminiscent of futurist Italian speed fanatics like Umberto Boccioni and Giacomo Balla, while the verticality of his pillar-like sculptures brings to mind Constantin Brancusi, who similarly arrived at a reduction of the natural form through his abstract formal language. Nature with all its structures, from micro to macro, has been the dominant theme of Tony Cragg's works over the past ten years (such as the monumental sculptures *Must Be*, 2012, *Mean Average*, 2014 and *Contradiction*, 2014, shown in the exhibition).

In *Early Forms*, a series of cast works, which began in the late 1980s, Cragg has created a catalogue 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. 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. In his latest sculptures, Tony Cragg draws on the idea of the *Early Forms* and increases the elasticity and dynamics of their composition to such an extent, making it hard to believe that such forms could actually be made out of bronze. This dynamic reaches a preliminary peak in the monumental sculpture *Stroke* (2014), resembling a giant frozen brushstroke.

A new way of cutting the shape, of *fanning it out*, is a further characteristic of his latest sculptures, such as *Hardliner* (2013), *Parts of Life* (2014) and *Parts of Life II* (2015), where the outer surfaces have apparently been effortlessly fragmented.

Tony Cragg's sculptures "are not closed objects, nor are they impenetrable, designed integral realities. To the contrary, their segmentation, their fracturing or lack of recti-linearity transforms them into open structures, into open motivations of a visual universality, of a visual cosmos. They are structures of a sculptural language that is ready to communicate with the others, *the different*, ready to be open to dialogue. Even the outlines of these sculptures are never classic geometrical structures, nor are they traditional optical narrations. The eye of the viewer falls upon them and, after the first contact, is directed towards a second reading, full of optical surprises and imbalances that are, however, structured in such a way that, despite their deceptive anarchy, they end up with a balanced, anarchic geometry" (Demsothenes Davvetas, 2015).

Tony Cragg's distinguishing feature is his primary concern to find new, unprecedented forms that amaze the viewer by their unusual biomorphic and technoid references. A very apt remark which was made in 1911 by the Cubist sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon might well have come from Tony Cragg: "The sole purpose of the arts is neither description nor imitation, but the creation of unknown beings from elements which are always present but not apparent".

A catalogue with texts by the Greek philosopher, poet and artist Demosthenes Davvetas will be published in April 2016 to accompany the exhibition.