

INTERVIEWED BY
KIM HEIRSTON

IMMATERIAL SERIALS

ARTWORK BY TONY CRAGG

IMMATERIAL LETTERS

PORTRAIT BY
TATIJANA SHOAN



TONY



TONY CRAGG
SPARK, 2012
Stainless steel
90 x 114 x 143 cm
unique
Courtesy of Tony Cragg
Photographer: Charles Duprat

CRA
GG



TONY CRAGG
TONGUE IN CHEEK, 2003
Bronze
129 x 169.4 x 229.8 cm
Courtesy of Tony Cragg
Photographer: Michael Richter

Tony Cragg is considered one of the most important British sculptors working today. This is no mean feat in a country renown for its rich sculptural heritage: Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Lynn Chadwick, Sir Anthony Caro, Antony Gormley, Anish Kapoor, Damien Hirst, Marc Quinn. Cragg began his career in the 1970's. One of the artist's very early sculptures might, for example, consist of the everyday objects he would encounter on a walk through the neighborhood. As a child, Cragg collected fossils and rocks on his grandfather's farm in Sussex, a practice that closely paralleled that of a young Henry Moore. Cragg's endeavor would ultimately take a decidedly urban turn. The artist was born in Liverpool in 1949. His father worked throughout the United Kingdom as an electrical engineer in the aircraft industry. As a teenager, Cragg took a job as a laboratory technician at the National Rubber Producers Research Association. In 1969, the artist enrolled at the Gloucestershire College of Art, later moving on to a three-year undergraduate course at the Wimbledon School of Art. It was at Gloucestershire College that things literally took shape: Cragg became fascinated by the endless possibilities of shaping something into something else. In between his art studies, the artist found part-time work in a foundry. This experience would have a profound influence on Cragg's later practice, as would the years he spent at London's Royal College of Art, studying under Bernard Meadows, a former assistant to Henry Moore. Cragg's first major series featured colorful discarded plastic objects that were arranged in site-specific configurations along gallery floors, and affixed directly to gallery walls. These plastic bits came to represent an alphabet of forms that the artist still draws upon today. Cragg's mature work incorporates a staggering array of materials from wood, glass, and plastic, to bronze, stainless steel, and marble... even dice. For every material, there is an endless subset of patinas. The artist explores these finishes with an almost obsessive rigor. With respect to form, Cragg combines the abstract and the figurative, the ancient and the modern, the monumental and the throwaway, all to reveal the inner energy of material. The artist has said, "Everything is material—sound, intelligence, even human emotion." From 2009 until 2013, Cragg served as Director of the famed Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (Düsseldorf Art Academy). Today, the artist lives and works in Wuppertal, Germany, with his wife, the painter Tatjana Verhasselt. When we visited with Tony several years ago, we walked the forested site of what was then his nascent sculpture park. When asked to comment on the difference between art and nature, Cragg replied, "Art provides a language for what doesn't exist in nature."

AS IF: So last night, you were in rare form!
Tony Cragg: Oh no, I mean uhh [laughs].

AS IF: You were entertaining, you were art historical, you were everything. I loved it.
TC: It was just the jet lag talking. It had been a very nice journey here. Been a very nice flight—a little bit hectic because of the snow here, landing and all. Then we just got to be very late. So I suppose that I was just happy I could do all the things that I had arranged to do. But it was great, great company [last night], wasn't it?

AS IF: It was, really. I love going to Marian's dinners because there's a good chance that you might actually TALK ABOUT ART!
TC: Yes, exactly. Well, if you've got [respected contemporary art collector] Aaron Levine opposite of you, and Michael Brenson [former *New York Times* art critic], then you have no options other than to talk about art [laughs]. So, there!

AS IF: At some points, I was straining to hear your conversation. I managed to pick up on a few things. One that really resonated with me was [Michael Brenson's] talking about the New York School artists, only Robert Motherwell had a higher education...
TC: Yes, higher education...

AS IF: Exactly! I was thinking it was very interesting, precisely because I am huge fan of Motherwell. Motherwell was a fascinating figure. Yet, oddly enough, he does not receive the credit he deserves for being the intellectual force behind Abstract Expressionism. The market doesn't seem to value the artist's work as highly as it should. And I think it's a shame. But you're so highly trained, and so involved in the education process; I wanted to hear your thoughts...

TC: Well, I'm not really now. I mean, we got into that conversation because Michael is writing a book about David Smith [the sculptor]. That was an interesting connection for me because of Back to Britain. I went to art school in the late 60's. St. Martin's School of Art was very active and had the generation... They had Anthony Caro, and the story of his relationship to Smith, bringing these ideas of Abstract Expressionism to Britain. And the way it worked in the late 60's [was that] a whole different generation actually rejected some of this kind of "making" ethic... It was quite radical. Artists went into installation, land art, conceptual art, all of those. So, it was Richard Long, Gilbert & George. It was an exceptional time in Britain, in the late 60's, for sculpture. I feel it was an enormous privilege in a way, but it [was] more an opportunity to become involved. Maybe that's why I became involved in sculpting—because it was a real thing going on. There was an atmosphere of



▲ **TONY CRAGG**
3D INCIDENT, 2013
White marble
185.4 x 129.5 x 129.5 cm
Courtesy of Tony Cragg
Photographer: Michael Richter

something one discussed, and the issues were pertinent and meaningful. There were so many people involved, which set the background—Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Anthony Caro—probably about forty sculptors working within a very tight-knit area, with one another. There were a lot of controversies, a lot of discourse, a lot of punch-ups. You know, people were really passionate. I'm not joking! Sculptors being sculptors, they got quite physical sometimes. So, it was an interesting time to start work.

AS IF: Takes us back to the heyday of Abstract Expressionism and the notorious dust-ups at the Cedar Tavern. I imagine that kind of engagement with a sense of near-longing. How do you account for Great Britain having had such a rich and passionate engagement with sculpture? Francis Bacon aside, the UK doesn't seem to have as rich of a tradition in post-war painting.

TC: Yeah, right. Maybe, they're not very #!xxx,%#. Alright... That's not an answer. We won't be printing that [laughs]. We will not be printing that [laughs].

AS IF: Ok, we won't. I promise!!!

TC: No, I think that there is a reason for that. I think that the British mentality is a very empiricist mentality. Made by learning by doing. I think sculpture is good for a certain making



◀ **TONY CRAGG**
UNTITLED, 2007
Pencil on paper
33 x 36.5 cm
Courtesy of Tony Cragg
Photographer: Jon Etter



◀ **TONY CRAGG**
UNTITLED, 2005
48 x 61 cm
Pencil on paper
Courtesy of Tony Cragg
Photographer: Niels Schabrod

and doing, making and learning as-you-go process. It's a consequence of this philosophical tradition. It is sort of tangible, you know, and real. Sculpture may, in its way, pose questions about reality. I don't want to say it's exclusive to Britain. I wouldn't like to say that. However, at least for a time, it looked very, very pertinent.

AS IF: Right.

TC: To British culture.

AS IF: Speaking of places as artistic epicenters, you are working in Düsseldorf, or slightly outside of Düsseldorf, in Wuppertal. I've often wondered why Düsseldorf has become such an incubator of post-war art. Obviously, there was Joseph Beuys. Then, Bernd and Hilla Becher. There is this extraordinary tradition of art historical practice. Do you have any explanation for this? Why are artists drawn to this place?

TC: Yeah, I think there are. I think there are very clear reasons why. I think that it's after the Second World War... when it was essential to find another culture. Nobody believed in the cultural images of the past. And so German societies were looking for alternatives. That wasn't going to happen in a conservative area like Munich. It wouldn't have happened in the East. Düsseldorf is the capital city of North Rhine-Westphalia, which was occupied by the British and, I believe, partly by the Americans.

They [were in] the parts of the country that had the most contact to Holland and Belgium, and even to France. So, it was a sort of cosmopolitan place. And, the Academy was there. All those factors coming to the Academy were there. It had, already in the 19th century, been a great Academy. It had a liberal cultural tradition. It offered itself as a place where artists accumulated. The first artists to come there were people like Norbert Kricke, who was very minimalist before minimalism had been created, art historically... and Eric Walsh and Ewald Mataré. So, this first generation, after the Second World War, had been vetted, if you like, for their beliefs and their activities. After that, a new generation, the next generation, of course, was with Beuys and with Ballbeck. The students were very successful. They were moving into a vacuum as well... Into a cultural vacuum.

AS IF: Right.

TC: There was a need to fill that culture vacuum. And so artists like Ulrich Rückriem, Gerhard Richter, and Nam June Paik were invited into that situation. Gunther Uecker [and] the Bechers, with their photography. And even [on] the list were Polke, Kiefer...

AS IF: The list goes on and on...

TC: Yes, the list is really extraordinary, you know. In my time as Director of the Academy, in, what year was it, 2011 or 2012?, we made

an exhibition just showing the sculptors that had come out of the Düsseldorf Academy since the Second World War. We ended up with a list of 150-something sculptors that had made relevant work.

AS IF: Wow!

TC: And sadly, in the end, you can only show something like 50. So, [laughs] that made me very popular! [laughs]. One was amazed by Reiner Ruthenbeck, and many artists that I don't think are even known in America, but...

AS IF: Reiner is fairly well regarded. Years ago, as Director of the Stux Gallery, we wanted to do a show with Reiner.

TC: Yeah.

AS IF: Interesting because many people associate the Academy, after Beuys, of course, rather exclusively with photography. Bernd and Hilla Becher, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Thomas Ruff, Candida Höfer, Thomas Demand...

TC: Yeah, but at the same time, [in the] same generation [are] Reinhard Mucha, Isa Genzken, Thomas Schütte. Then there's [the] younger generation after them. There's Wilhelm Mundt and Matthias Lambert.

AS IF: I've actually been to Reinhard's studio. I got a tour of Düsseldorf on his

motorcycle!!! This offered a rather unique vantage point from which to experience Düsseldorf.

TC: Oh, really? Okay [laughs].

AS IF: Speaking of your teaching and being involved in the Academy as its director, how has that influenced what you do, if at all?

TC: Well, I've had a very good education, I studied at a very certain time in Britain in the late 60's and into the 70's. I had a brilliant, I think, I had the best [education]. [I] went to [the Royal College of Art in London], the very best British art school at the time. I've gotten the best out of it. It was also a very culturally... it was about something. There were issues. There were cultural issues. There were social issues. There were political issues... everything. There was a real atmosphere and a need to, you know, sort of break... Germany having their needs, but Britain also had their own specific needs, to find a new culture after having given up their colonies, lost their colonies—however you want to look at it—and failing to keep their heavy industry, their prowess. So that meant that Britain was a good place for me to be studying. When I finished my studies, I moved to Germany, intending to stay there for one year in 1977. It was just so easy for me to get a studio. Different from Britain, Germans were so interested in culture. I was amazed to go to



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◀ **TONY CRAGG**
ELBOW, 2011
Wood
300 x 101.9 x 398.1 cm
Courtesy of Tony Cragg and Marian Goodman Gallery
Photographer: John Berens



◀
TONY CRAGG
 IM ALIVE, 2004
 Stainless steel
 250 x 390 x 360 cm
 Courtesy of Tony Cragg
 Photographer: Charles Duprat

AS IF: All of these lovely connections!

TC: Yeah, he's fantastic. I think [Thomas] is simply an amazing artist, you know. And so, what was initially a kind of helpful and interesting thing for me to do just turned... You know, I actually wanted to stop in the late 80's. And then Markus Lüpertz wanted to give me a professorship, so I stayed for that... I was in Berlin for five years, or something, and I came back in 2005 and finished...

AS IF: Well, I'm going to go a bit further back in time...

TC: Yes.

AS IF: So, you were born in Liverpool? But you didn't actually live there...

TC: Yes, I had aunts. I had family, relatives, that lived there. So I had two great aunts. I used to go back and spend some of my summer holidays with my brother there. It was a very exciting place at that time.

AS IF: Were you actually there in the, in the 60's?

TC: No. No, no, no, no. No, exactly not.

AS IF: Were you around for Beatles phenomenon?

TC: Not exactly.

AS IF: Do you feel any connection to the Beatles, and that particular history?

TC: Oh, well, how could you not like them? No, they were amazing. I mean, I was twelve. I think twelve or something like that when I heard the first Beatles song. And they just changed British society. The stuffy, austere, hierarchical nature of British society broke down because of their influence. So, everybody profited from

the Beatles and the whole pop movement of that time.

AS IF: Do you have a particular song that resonates with you? Are you an avid music person?

TC: *[laughs]* Yes, I listen to music all the time. But, not necessarily the Beatles *[laughs]*.

AS IF: No? Then who?

TC: We actually have music, two music programs, one for jazz, one for world music. I think we sort of had a load of people I think who are great that have played there. We also have [a program] for contemporary classical music. Which is music, classically written music, from the twentieth and even the twenty-first century. I think people think classical music is kind of... Somebody said, a sort of throw-away comment "Well, only the old music really sounds great." And it's just not true. Because there has been more classical music composed in the twentieth century than there has been ever, ever before. So, I listen to some classical music, and then jazz and world music.

AS IF: Do you listen to music while you're creating?

TC: No.

AS IF: No?

TC: No, no. Just to relax and to just to listen to it. I can't *[while working]*. It's a romantic idea that you can put on the radio, or put on a CD, and work. And I just cannot do it... I need to concentrate.

AS IF: That's interesting too...

TC: I need to get lost in my thoughts and I don't need any distractions. I cannot take work with any distractions.

AS IF: We were able to spend some quality time together on the occasion of your installation at Madison Square Park this past September. You know, I was taken aback by your generosity and spending time with me before the opening reception. So, thank you! It was fun to walk around with you, looking and talking about the sculptures. Are you pleased with *Walks of Life*—both the outcome and the reception? Do you ever feel a sense of melancholy when your exhibitions are taken down? I certainly do.

TC: *[laughs]* Well, I... Yeah, it was actually three very large sculptures. And so, for the work and the effort, maybe. I had the feeling it could have been a longer exhibition, but that's up to the museum, the organizers. I was happy with the exhibition. I had the intention of showing three works and I knew, quite quickly, which works I wanted to show. They were as they should have been. In terms of the response, I don't know because I don't ever hear responses. I'm not really very interested in response either.



▶
TONY CRAGG
 VERSUS, 2010
 Wood, stained red
 280 x 295 x 100 cm
 Louvre Museum
 Courtesy of Tony Cragg
 Photographer: Charles Duprat

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 BRONZE IS AN INTERESTING, REALLY INTERESTING, AND USEFUL MATERIAL. AND IT'S NOT BECAUSE IT'S BRONZE, AND IT'S ANCIENT, AND IT HAS THIS PARTICULAR AESTHETIC THAT I THINK IS WONDERFUL.
 ”

museums and [find] queues on a Sunday to go into the museum. I hadn't seen that in Britain. Things have changed, of course *[laughs]*.

AS IF: Everywhere. Everywhere!

TC: Everywhere *[laughs]*.

AS IF: Now, even Americans go to museums!

TC: *[laughs]* No, but you're right. It's the questionable success of art. Anyway, I was offered a small teaching job in the Academy. It was an enormous help to me. Well, first of all, I had a young family to bring up. It was also an opportunity to meet artists and people who worked there. Joseph Beuys was still there. Gerhard Richter, Nam June Paik, and all of these people were part of that thing. So, it was an amazingly active, impressive scene!

AS IF: You've gone a little fast forward because I wanted to ask you how and where you met [your wife] Tatjana.

TC: *[laughs]* No, I won't get into that...

AS IF: Come on... Just a little... A little romance???

TC: *[laughs]* Yeah. But, anyways I... For me, when I actually started the Academy, I was only 28 years old. The students at the time were, I think, a little older than they are nowadays. They do come for school, and these were my first friends and contacts, so it was a social thing as well. Those people, a whole bunch of them, I'm still friends with after all these years. [He motions] That's a Thomas Struth hanging on the wall there. As a reminder to all those people who like Andreas Gursky, [he] was a student in the foundation here that I taught... So, all those things.

AS IF: Thomas is a friend and actually did a video portrait of me. Thanks to Thomas, I "lived" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art—in the Great Hall, no less! It will probably be my only chance of ever being displayed at the Met...

TC: Oh, really *[laughs]*. Yeah, oh one of these things!



◀
TONY CRAGG
 POINTS OF VIEW, 2007
 Bronze
 548.6 x 150.1 x 150.1 cm
 Courtesy of the artist,
 Marian Goodman Gallery and
 Madison Square Park
 Conservancy.
 Photographer: Yasunori Matsui

to the material world. I think that gets very important. I think it does a very, very important job. Most of the materials we use, of course, have all to do with the practicalities of life. You know, putting on clothes, sitting on chairs in rooms, and walking along streets in cities—an enormous material aggregation. But that's more governed by the roles of economy and lowest common denominator rules. Once you've started to make sculpture, you realize that this material can grow into space in unanticipated ways and produce unanticipated meanings. I think that's the great value of sculpture.

AS IF: I remember seeing an exhibition at Marian's [Marian Goodman Gallery], more than ten years ago. There was a work—a low-lying, greenish, propeller-shaped form in this most marvelously strange material. I later learned it was Kevlar.

TC: Yeah.

AS IF: I am curious because I have taken up sailing again. Sails are now made of this carbon-fiber. I seriously impressed my skipper when I identified this material... and it is all due to my encounter with *Species!*

TC: [laughs] That's right. Yeah, so happy...?

AS IF: I wondering how you discovered Kevlar and what induced you to work with this curious material?

TC: Strength. Yeah, well I've used it continually in different things because of its strength. I actually have a large work standing in the studio now which is Kevlar. But, it's an incredibly useful material, especially if you have any sort of engineering issues. I mean, it's so strong and you get a good surface out of it as well.

AS IF: It's a really beautiful material. I understand that it is also used for bulletproof vests, as well as recreational sailing!

TC: I mean, we've seen artists make things out of DNA and blood and anything you can possibly imagine, you know, nowadays. And then, there are materials that actually do a job. So, in the end, despite the enormous range that's available... It's not like, "No, you can't make things out of chocolate." Of course, you can make things out of chocolate. It's just not as good as making it out of another material. Because [chocolate] melts and rots. Sadly, I saw one of Dieter Roth's chocolate sculptures recently and it's just disappearing now because its got weevils. It's not just an art conservation problem. Using all the materials one did over the last fifty, sixty years, from Pop art onwards, it is very difficult to maintain these works. You know, they disappear quite quickly.

AS IF: Do you think a lot about conservation? Do you work with conservationists to achieve desired effects?

TC: No, not really.

AS IF: You're pretty knowledgeable about materials. I know you worked in a foundry many years ago. It sounded like a truly formative experience. Would you describe it a bit more?

TC: I was interested in chemistry, always. I will say some physics, early [on]. And then, combined with the activities in the foundries... I mean, you get a feeling for materials. You get a feeling for the relationship. Not just of the surface of the material, but of the structure of the material. Why wood is like wood. Why wood behaves like wood, and why it looks like wood. Why metal is like metal. Or why water... All these things, they have an internal meaning. You know, even our own fingers, maybe. We are responding continuously to the outside of our bodies. Of course, every form we have is always the result of something going on below, forces on the inside. We see the material world by grace of light hitting the surface and coming into our eyes. But I think there is a kind of psychological pressure to always know what's behind the surface, you know. So, when you see somebody's face, very nice, very beautiful. However, what is actually beneath? What are the values, what does it mean beyond that surface? You see people with their clothes on, and, of course, we want to know the figure. You'll also want to know what's under their clothes, somehow or

another. On another level, you want to know the materials, whether they are positive or negative. I mean, you're assessing materials and material objects all the time... We, as grown ups, just get used to walking across a surface. The floor of the gallery here [stomps]. But, you see young children walking on the surface, they test it [stomps again].

AS IF: They're engaging...

TC: Yes, because they don't have that knowledge or trust of it. So, they want to know what's underneath the surface. Sculpture has always been a question of the message the surface sends about what's underneath. What you know... What you want to know.

AS IF: Continuing on with material matters, you did a stint at Britain's National Rubber Producers Research Association.

TC: Yes, I hadn't decided that I wanted to become a sculptor or an artist or a... I was working in the laboratory after school.

AS IF: As I recall, the story goes something like this: You were assigned to keep watch over the laboratory experiments. Bored to death by the endless waiting, you started to draw...

TC: Yeah, exactly. Exactly, yeah, yeah, yeah. But that's exactly how I did start. I ended up

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▼
TONY CRAGG
 DECLINATION, 2005
 Bronze
 240 x 230 x 360 cm
 CASS Sculpture Foundation
 Courtesy of Tony Cragg
 Photographer: Charles Duprat



So, I just don't know. You know, the remarks I heard, when people went out of their way to say something, were positive.

AS IF: It was amazing. I visited at least a dozen times... And was blown away each time!

TC: Oh, that's great.

AS IF: À propos one of your works in the park, *Mixed Feelings*, I remember your telling me that it needed a bit more rain.

TC: Oh yeah, I mean [the sculptures], they're very fresh. They came to Madison Square Park from the foundry, more or less. There's this whole thing about bronze, you know. Actually, the form is really important, but the base of the form, the structure under the bronze that formed the work, is, for me, important. Especially when you put things outside, you expect changes and even anticipate it...

AS IF: Or, desire it. I loved how you discussed the work in terms of aging—wanting your sculpture to appear as though it were 100 years old. I thought that very beautiful...

TC: Well. Maybe not 100 years, but at least erase the marks of transport. Yeah. I mean, bronze is... I will put it this way: Bronze is an interesting, really interesting, and useful material. And it's not because it's bronze, and it's ancient, and it has this particular aesthetic

that I think is wonderful. The great thing about bronze is, when you melt it, at a relatively low temperature, it is MUCH more fluid than water. So, when you pour it into a mold, you can get incredibly accurate forms out of it. In theory, not necessarily in theory, but in practice, if you do a lost-wax principal of burning out a rose, you can actually cast the rose, and you get a perfect copy of the rose in bronze. Because it fills every, every part of the mold. Water wouldn't do that. You wouldn't be able to fill the form at all. That's the great quality... You can get incredibly complicated polymorphic forms using bronze. If you made that in steel, it becomes heavy and weld-y... It's impossible to do.

AS IF: Do you have a favorite material? I know you embrace them all.

TC: No.

AS IF: I love what you say about being a sculptor - the idea of "thinking in material." THINKING IN MATERIAL: That just says it all!

TC: I think that sculpture is about how, what—I think it's too pretentious to say, it's the study of... However, it IS about how materials and the material world affects us. In the last hundred years, at the end of the nineteenth century, there were only a few materials to do that. In the end, we are at the point where you can use ANY material. It's become a study of the material world. At least, a study of our emotional responses

▶
TONY CRAGG
 DISTANT COUSIN, 2006
 Sculpturepark Waldfrieden,
 Wuppertal
 Courtesy of Tony Cragg
 Photographer: Charles Duprat



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 NOWADAYS, I'M AT THE
 POINT WHERE I DON'T
 WANT TO KNOW WHERE
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 THEMES AND THE THINGS
 I'M DOING ARE BETWEEN
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 ”

just starting to draw. From drawing, I didn't even think about art. It was just something I enjoyed doing. Then I did apply and went to an art school. So that was that [laughs]. And then it was a surprise to make sculpture. Because you know, that wasn't something I thought I'd have to [do]. But, then [the school] said it was a part of the course, and I made, for the first time, something of material. I was completely... I mean, I started the day feeling, "Really, do I have to make a sculpture? What a boring exercise." At the end of it, after a few hours, I was absolutely enthralled with the fact that every time you change the material and bend it [into] whatever different lines, different volumes, different surfaces, it was speaking to me. You actually had a different idea about that material, you had a different emotion about it. That's really what sculptures are about. It's not that different from making music, because what people do is they change the material, and you change the form of what they're doing. All time feeling and thinking about what those changes in form do to you.

AS IF: You also studied painting. However, you have never really painted. Is there ever an impulse to do so? I ask you because I get asked all of the time, "Do you draw?" "Do you paint?" My answer is always that I possess absolutely no graphic talent. I

hope, I actually believe, that I recognize talent, or even the "g" word [genius], in others. However, I would need to feel something akin to divine intervention before I picked up a pencil, or brush [laughs].
 TC: Some people say, "I can't paint. I can't draw a straight line." Well, we don't have to draw a straight line, do we? No need to draw a straight line. I think it would be great if more people would draw. I think drawing is something that one can learn to do. I think it's just the same as ABC's. It's like writing. Writing is a very useful life tool to me. To draw, why wouldn't one learn that? Painting is obviously kind of... Well I do [paint]. I make watercolors and I still draw quite a lot. My wife's a painter. Tatjana's a painter, but I'm not. I can say, I don't ever think about stretching a canvas.

AS IF: I guess that's a good thing. Sometimes painters try to move into sculpture, or add sculptural elements to their works — often, for me, in a manner that is less than satisfying.
 TC: Yeah, I think it's usually just sort of... [laughs]

AS IF: So, I suppose you have to stick to your knitting!
 TC: What'd did you say? Stick to your what?

AS IF: Stick to one's knitting!

TC: Oh, is that what you're saying? In Germany, they say... *bauer... auffenthalt auf acre*? Translation: "The farmer should stay on his field."

AS IF: Okay, I like that. Can you say that again for me?
 TC: The *bauer, bauer*.

AS IF: The bauer.
 TC: ??...*auffenthalt auf acre*.

AS IF: Gliber?
 TC: *Acre*. It's like "acre."

AS IF: Ah, okay.
 TC: So it's like, "on your field." You know?

AS IF: I like that. I'm going to perfect my German.
 TC: "Stay on your field." That's what it says.

AS IF: Switching gears, as we are also a fashion magazine, I'm wondering about your sweater... Do you think a lot about what you wear? How important is texture?
 TC: Clothes...

AS IF: Yes, clothes are important.
 TC: [laughs]

AS IF: I'm not asking about your fashion

sense, but more about your sense of materials vis-à-vis clothing. I know that I respond to certain types of fabrics.
 TC: I love, love materials. Yes, I mean absolutely.

AS IF: It's a beautiful sweater, by the way!
 TC: I think it's just really well-designed [with] little leather things and works... This [sweater] is an old one, as well. It just doesn't seem to wear out [laughs]. I wouldn't say I'm a fashionable person. However, on the other hand, it's great to put clothes on and feel, you know, feel...

AS IF: Protected.
 TC: ...An extension of one's self and whatever. One's persona? [It] has a good effect. Definitely.

AS IF: It comes in to play a little bit, for everybody.
 TC: Again, it's not sculpture. But you can see exactly the way materials make you feel different. You know, how they affect you. They make you feel differently. They make you think differently. On some level, anyway.

AS IF: À propos your sculpture, Versus, that you housed inside the Louvre's I.M. Pei pyramid, you said you don't think very site-specifically in terms of your work.
 TC: That's true.

AS IF: I'm wondering to what extent artists engaged in site-specific practice have influenced you. I am thinking specifically of Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty or Richard Long's wanderings. I was reminded of Long when I learned about your early interest in and practice of collecting fossils, or later, bits of urban detritus. The color plastic pieces you used in your first major works, such as Britain Seen from the North, enforces this connection for me. It also ties into what I had re-learned (during a recent trip to Perry Green) about Henry Moore picking up bones and stones as a child. Would you expand on these connections and ideas?

TC: Yeah, okay. Well it's very simple. I have two brothers, one that's a little bit younger than I am... I always loved these geological maps—fantastic things! It makes the world look totally different than it is. Whether it's Jurassic, or Cretaceous, or Carboniferous, or whatever, you know. So, as kids, we used to get on our bikes and we used to have a project. We used to go off like ten, fifteen, twenty miles on [our bikes] to a quarry and look for some minerals or fossils or whatever. So maybe that's something—nothing to do with art at all, but an adventure. It was a great to find something. It was exciting to do that. And, yes, obviously in the 60's and the earlier 70's, as an art student, one was influenced by everything. I loved minimalism as a student. Now, I can't understand why anybody would do it. I mean, that sort of, [laughs] the sort of meaninglessness about it, I'm not interested in. When you

▼
TONY CRAGG
 ELLIPTICAL COLUMN, 2012
 Stainless steel
 580 x 154 x 136 cm
 unique
 Exhibition Road, London, 2012
 Courtesy of Tony Cragg
 Photographer: Charles Duprat



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get involved in art, it's like getting to the edge of a river that's flowing fast and you decide to jump in. You don't think about what's happening upstream. You just try and swim [laughs]—stay afloat. So, the things I found were the tendencies of land art and all those things. But, even in the middle of the 70's, I had already begun to react against minimalism and I didn't want to make site-specific works. There were lots of things I decided I wasn't interested in doing. My exhibitions in the late 70's and into the early 80's were very much about going someplace, finding materials, doing it. In 1983, I absolutely had a bit of a crisis doing that. I kept traveling, I couldn't, I didn't have time to develop the work. It was sort of like a performance. And so, I really radically decided to get back into the studio to start working, not on filling space, but on creating specific discreet objects. Nowadays, I'm at the point where I don't want to know where the work is going. My themes and the things I'm doing are between me and the way I'm developing the work. And probably, the work is at its very best in the studio. The minute a work moves towards the door, it's already in a state of decay [laughs]. Maybe that's a selfish way of

seeing things. However, I don't want to have to hear about, you know, what kind of carpets or curtains people have [laughs]. You know, this is a very important place, or a very unimportant place. I just make the work.

AS IF: Cool.

TC: Very un-contemporary. I know the world is full of filling up rooms with this and that. However, I find that too conditional, you know? It's too relative to all circumstances around us. I'm not particularly prepared to bend my ideas just to accommodate what's around me.

AS IF: Okay, so, no commissioned works? Got it!

TC: Actually, very rarely. The very few commissioned works I do are really when I take the opportunity to make something I'm making in the studio. I don't go out of my way. In my early work, my first commissions offered a chance to make larger works. I may have made that mistake of sort of trying to do something new. It's a ridiculous thing to have done. And, it's not my best work. Now, I just want to stick to what is core.



TONY CRAGG
 IM ALIVE, 2000
 Polystyrene, carbon, kevlar
 111.7 x 200 x 174 cm
 Courtesy of Tony Cragg and
 Marian Goodman Gallery
 Photographer: Jon Abbott



TONY CRAGG
 COMPANIONS, 2008
 Fiberglass
 278 x 205 x 294 cm
 Courtesy of Tony Cragg
 Photographer: Charles Duprat

TONY CRAGG
 BRITAIN SEEN FROM THE NORTH,
 1981
 Plastic, wood, rubber, paper, other
 material
 440 x 800 x 10 cm
 Tate Museum
 Courtesy of Tony Cragg



AS IF: I had the pleasure of sitting next to Marian [Goodman] last night for the first time, after knowing her and being in her presence for so many years. You were seated on her other side. I felt such an extraordinary warmth between you two. What makes artists love Marian so much? What makes her such a great gallerist?

TC: Marian makes a commitment to something. Perhaps I had a particular advantage in meeting her after she closed her first venture [Marian Goodman Multiples]. I was one of the very first artists that she worked with. She only does something she really believes in. [With Marian, there is always] a kind of aesthetic, or artistic reason for being interested. She does have a hell of a great tenacity, very, very incredible discipline. I wouldn't say we always agree. We've had times where we've seriously disagreed with one another about certain things. However, she just does a good job. That's all I can say, really. Marian is very un-intrusive, as well. She never puts herself in the middle of the situation. Marian always lets whomever she's dealing with do the job they have to do. And I think that's fine. I think it's very, very good.

AS IF: You said sometimes you might disagree... However, I think that commitment is the ability to say what you believe.

TC: Yes, it really is.

AS IF: Commitment. We are going to end on that note, because it's a lovely thought. It's also one that is missing a bit in some aspects of the art world today. So, we'll wrap up with COMMITMENT!

TC: Commitment. Exactly.