



## *Tony Cragg: Incidents*

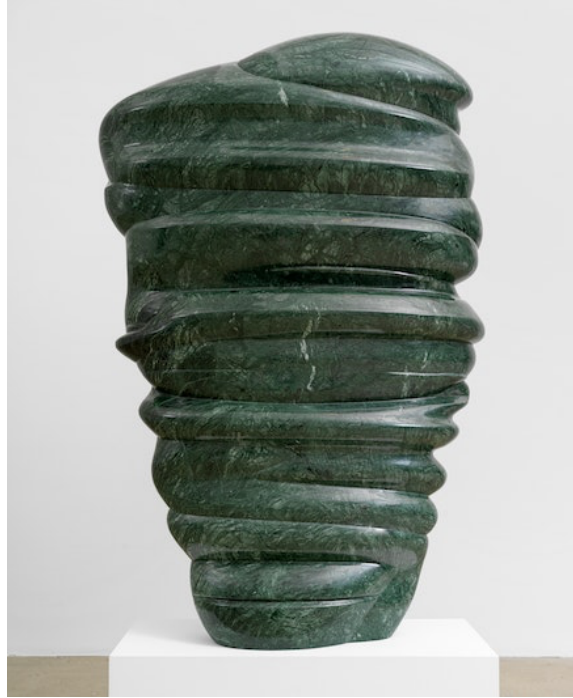
by Jonathan Goodman (December 2022)



Installation view: Tony Cragg: *Incidents*, 2022. Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo: Alex Yudzon.

Tony Cragg, who has been working since the 1970s, makes sculpture characterized by an effective diversity. In his show *Incidents*, Cragg's sculptures occupy a middle space between the abstract and the figurative; the extreme plasticity of his work results in forms that move back and forth between suggestions of a recognizable figure and sensuous abstraction. Sequences of similar forms, differing in materials that range from bronze to stone to steel, provide the major differences in the works' exteriors and their color. Thus, individual works become an extended meditation on subtle changes within a group of sculptures. These series brilliantly exist in a clearing that is formally diffuse, not in the sense that the work is indistinct, but rather as a zone in which abstraction and figuration sharply influence each other without merging.

A number of works suggest the female torso. A 2021 bronze from the series "Integers" (all the works in this series are also individually titled *Integers*) is decidedly sensual, a contemporary take on a traditional trope: the unclothed body of a woman. The deep, copper color of the torso-like form highlights the voluptuous curves of the back, the waist turning into broad hips, and the rounded buttocks upon which the sculpture rests on its pedestal. Another work in this series, made of portoro nero (a fine-grained black marble) is particularly striking, with rounded protuberances for arms and light-colored striations enlivening the dark rock. These sculptures verge on the representational, but here is an instance where Cragg blurs the line between the figurative and the abstract. The figure is not so specifically realist as to indicate a human body alone, but neither is it entirely non-objective, indicating a purely abstract form. The subtle undulations of the work's outlines can be enjoyed both as an erotic reading of the body and an objective exploration of form alone.



Tony Cragg, *Masks*, 2021. Guatemalan verde. 63 x 41 3/8 x 17 3/4 inches.  
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo: Alex Yudzon.

Works made of wood and stone from the “Masks” series (all 2021), also suggest the torso. Consisting uniformly of horizontal extensions that break out, in a small way, from a broad, chest-like form which widens as it rises; the ridged surfaces of these sculptures add a volumetric interest. One stained wood piece, *Masks* (2021), standing nearly five feet tall, has a decided emphasis on frontality. The dark jade color of the stain is moving, even slightly mysterious, projecting a sense of human form and also a non-objective exterior. Another sculpture, also dated 2021 and titled *Masks*, is a smaller version at just over forty-three inches high, but it is made of white statuario stone, and appears to list slightly to the left when faced frontally. Its ridges are thicker, and its lack of color emphasizes an immaterial, nearly spectral presence, even as its outline suggests the form of a chest. The sculpture is so different from the other works in the sequence, it may be seen as an exploratory advance even more than a variation on a theme.

In the back room of the gallery, two linear, vertical sculptures from the series “Dreamsleeper” (both 2022), are significant in their dissimilarity from the other series on view. Made of thin bars of steel, both pieces resemble a skewed version of a child’s outdoor jungle gym. One has a central stem, off of which horizontal bars extend, while the other work looks like a ladder slowly narrowing as it moves upward. From these extensions, bars of steel, some bent, hang downward. Both are composed of a rusted, corten steel, giving the appearance that the works had been left out in the rain. Verticality, along with several appendages jutting outward from a central pole, result in a figurative gestalt. Cragg, a master of various kinds of shapes and materials, here and throughout this outstanding show, indicates just how much can be done with contemporary sculpture in the challenging space between realism and abstraction. If he demonstrates a penchant for the traditional, it is because he is so far ahead of everyone else.



Tony Cragg, Dreamsleeper, 2022. Corten steel. 84 5/8 x 41 3/8 x 36 1/4 inches.  
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. Photo: Michael Richter.