

Art Now LA  
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Tony Cragg  
*Exploring the Relationships Between the Parts and the Whole*  
Marian Goodman Gallery  
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by Jody Zellen



Tony Cragg is a British-born, German-based sculptor who was best known in the 1970s and 1980s for floor and wall-based works made from found objects. These were often plastic parts or toys organized and assembled by size and color across walls into human shapes or recognizable objects. In the 1990s, Cragg began to move away from works made from found materials and started to create more monumental sculptures that had dominant presences in space. These pieces were less conceptual and more about investigations into the physical properties of their materials.

On view at Marian Goodman Gallery are awe-inspiring, free-standing sculptures created between 2018 and 2024. These are displayed as “families” within the gallery, allowing viewers to compare and contrast the physical properties of various substances and structures. Cragg has the uncanny ability to transform as well as personify bronze, steel, wood or stone into light, airy, organic shapes that appear to dance on their pedestals despite their weightiness.

The exhibition opens with the wooden sculpture *In No Time* (2018). This abstract form filled with intricate folds and layers of wood feels both human and other worldly. While the work wants to be appreciated from afar, it simultaneously demands close scrutiny as the smooth surface has been carved, molded and manipulated. Cragg’s wooden sculptures are made by gluing together many pieces of cut plywood that are then ground down to form a smooth surface.

Multiple sculptures are titled *Masks*. The two dated 2021 are made out of Guatemalan green stone, while the work dated 2023 uses bog oak wood. All three feel like compressed layers or odd shaped disks that have been fused together to resemble geographical strata. All of Cragg’s works have dimensionality as they are created through an assemblage of two-dimensional forms. Somehow the lines and the individual shapes are retained while the sculptures blossom into space. They twist and whirl in unpredictable ways. The veins of the green stone and the dark wood give the works depth and texture. They do take on human characteristics and become unsightly masks without identifiable features.

Works entitled *Incident* (2023) are also exhibited together. These stainless or Corten steel pieces are looser and strangely expressive. Rather than being dense “blobs” for example, the stainless sculpture *Incident*(2023) is alien-like and hyper reflective. The curvilinear forms have mirrored surfaces and rise from the floor or from low pedestals like elongated and distorted human skeletons. *Vessel* (2023) is a bronze sculpture filled with horns and holes. It resembles entangled and enlarged branches with softened thorns that surround shallow nests or hollows that penetrate the stoic form. *Hedge* and *Stand* (both 2023) are rusted Corten steel structures. *Hedge* is floor-based and spreads out like a surreal hedge made of interlocking and

overlapping organic forms, while *Stand* has the properties of a distorted silhouette neither male nor female, yet human-like nonetheless

It is interesting to contemplate the trajectory of Cragg's sculptures and the relationship between small-scale, fragmented throw-away plastic shapes and the monumental presence of these later works. It is almost as if he has scaled up and refined the fragile aspects of the found objects, now transforming them into solid, robust forms made from materials most often used in contemporary and traditional sculpture. While the new works still explore the relationships between the parts and the whole, they are more concerned with materials and their formal properties and the complex methodologies needed to create them, than in any commentary or critique of the environment from which these materials come.

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