

Sanat Tarihi Yıllığı Journal of Art History



Research Article | Araştırma Makalesi

Open Access | Açık Erişim

Tony Cragg as a Moment in Material Reading

Malzeme Okumada Bir Uğrak Olarak Tony Cragg



Derya Baran¹  

¹ Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Sculpture, Van, Türkiye

Abstract

The assertion that emphasises the already formed itself rather than the materials formed by hand, transforming a technical product into a work of art, begins with avant-garde art. Elevating material reality into an artistic context opens new possibilities and interpretations, notably exemplified by Tony Cragg's sculptures. This study highlights Cragg's sculptural practice through his deliberate choice of industrial products, particularly analysing his innovative stacking and surface-coating techniques. Through qualitative research and document analysis of relevant publications and exhibitions, selected sculptures were analysed to reveal their iconographic and material-based characteristics. Findings indicate that Tony Cragg's artworks fundamentally embody "materiality," leading to their identification as "material sculptures". Cragg's meticulous selection and transformative handling of materials challenge traditional perceptions of form and substance effectively redefining the artistic potentials of industrial and synthetic materials. Ultimately, the research underscores that Cragg's sculptures foster a dynamic interplay between material and meaning, creating profound visual and conceptual experiences.

Öz

El ile biçimlenen malzemeden çok hâlihazırda biçimlenmiş olanın kendisini öne çıkaran, teknik nesnelerin sanat eserine dönüştürülmesi fikri avangard sanatla başlar. Malzemesel gerçekliğin sanatsal bağlama yükseltilmesi yeni ifade olanaklarına ve yorumlara kapı açmıştır. Bu yaklaşımın en belirgin örneklerinden biri, erken dönem eserlerinde plastik malzemeleri dönüştürerek çok parçalı ve parçadan bütüne yönelen araştırmalar gerçekleştiren Tony Cragg'in heykelleridir. Bu çalışma, Cragg'in heykel pratiğini endüstriyel malzeme kullanma tercihi üzerinden analiz etmekte; özellikle sanatçının istifleme ve yüzey kaplama teknikleri ile malzemeyle kurduğu ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Araştırmada seçilen eserler ikonografik ve malzeme temelli çözümleme ile değerlendirilmiş, Cragg'in sanatsal pratiğinin temel olarak "malzemesellik" kavramıyla ilişkilendirildiği ve eserlerinin "malzemesel heykeller" olarak nitelendirildiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Cragg'in titiz malzeme seçimi ve yenilikçi uygulamalarının geleneksel biçim ve madde algılarını sorguladığı endüstriyel ve sentetik malzemelerin sanatsal bağlamda yeniden tanımlanabileceği gösterilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, Cragg'in heykellerinin malzeme ve anlam arasında dinamik bir etkileşim yaratarak görsel ve kavramsal açıdan derin deneyimler sunduğu vurgulanmıştır.

Keywords

Materiality · Material Sculpture · Object · Stacking · Tony Cragg

Anahtar Kelimeler

İstifleme · Malzemesellik · Malzemesel Heykel · Nesne · Tony Cragg



“ Citation | Atıf: Baran, Derya, . "Tony Cragg as a Moment in Material Reading". *Sanat Tarihi Yıllığı-Journal of Art History*, 34 (2025): 92-110. <https://doi.org/10.26650/sty.2025.1571088>

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✉ Corresponding author | Sorumlu Yazar: Derya Baran deryabaran@gmail.com



Introduction

*Sculpture is only a method for dealing with the big world. It is only a method for looking for new forms and of developing questions about the world we live in, about reality. My experience in sculpture is that it is an incredibly dynamic and moving thing. There is something very immediate about reading the material.*¹

From a Heideggerian perspective, a new world is created when a work is produced. In this expansion, the path of the artist intersects with the material and the material is the basis of the existence of the work in artistic transformation. "That which gives to things their constancy and pith but is also, at the same time, the source of their mode of sensory pressure -color, sound, hardness, massiveness- is the materiality of the thing. In this definition of the thing as matter, form is posited at the same time. The permanence of a thing, its constancy, consists of matter remaining together with form. The thing is formed matter."² Like Heidegger, Henri Focillon emphasised that materials are forms. He mentions that they change the life of the forms in art due to their structure and that even their raw form brings other forms to mind.³ The artistic equivalent of the connection established with matter/object/material in life is the change in the form language and context of the work created with the pluralism brought about by alternative materials. In time, the categories of natural object, technical object and animate/inanimate being begin to occur within the material field of the sculpture discipline.

The Tony Cragg sculpture is also formed by the presence of a wide variety of materials used in certain themes. The materials the artist works with are wood, stone, metal, stainless steel, glass, porcelain, plaster, plywood, plastic, fibreglass, kevlar and other technical objects, natural objects and waste objects in a range where the classic and the new blend. According to the artist, sculpture is what can be made with any material. For Cragg, all kinds of objects as well as human daily actions, interests, impressions and perceptions are included in the material forms he uses for his art together with bodily relations. The artist has said, "Everything is material - sound, intelligence, even human emotions."⁴ Undoubtedly, it is not new for the 20th and 21st century artists to encounter traditional external materials on a mental or internal level and to make such effects visible. Considering the artist who lives in a transformed and materialised world, there is no definite conclusion that has been reached. Under this condition, every substance, every moment and situation can be a material in the case of Tony Cragg.

The material present in Cragg's sculptures is produced in different forms and with different meanings. In this article, the material world in his sculptures is investigated. For this reason, the terms 'material' or 'materiality' are used within the scope of matter-object-item, material, material-equipment and are discussed in terms of the effects they create in Tony Cragg sculptures. In addition, the materiality of Tony Cragg's art is analysed in terms of theme sequences, sculpture families and especially the works produced in stacking and surfacing techniques.

¹Tony Cragg, Tony Cragg 11.02.2017-03.09.2017. Luxembourg: MUDAM The Contemporary Art Museum, 1997. Accessed March 1, 2023. https://d2smv9sex1hihw.cloudfront.net/documents/EN_Tony_Cragg_MUDAM.pdf.

²Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 8. Accessed January 11, 2024 https://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/01140/excerpt/9780521801140_excerpt.pdf.

³Henri Focillon, *Biçimlerin Yaşamı*, trans. Alp Tümertekin. İstanbul: Janus Yayıncılık, 2015, 65.

⁴Tony Cragg, "Material Matters: Artwork by Tony Cragg." Interview by Kim Heirston, *As If*, Issue 7, (Summer 2015), 179. Accessed February 15, 2023. https://www.mariangoodman.com/usr/documents/press/download_url/260/as-if-summer-2015-digital.pdf.



1. Contact with Material or Material Sculpture: Tony Cragg

In modern art, the sculptures of Constantin Brancusi and Vladimir Tatlin and the attitude of Marcel Duchamp have created a field beyond mimetic depiction. Brancusi (1876-1957) took the viewer to the most abstract in his sculptures. The use of real materials in real space began with Tatlin (1885-1953). Duchamp (1887-1968), on the other hand, demonstrated that all objects can be works of art, and his perspective provided a possibility of a different language in artistic transformation. In addition, Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), the shaman of the age, unleashed the energy of the object he used, and his materials came into existence through action. Thus, the conditions that create meaning have been associated with the new materials of art/sculpture: object, idea, action, and have been developed with approaches such as Fluxus, Arte Povera, Neo-Dada, New Conceptualism, Object Art. Student/young artist Anthony Douglas Cragg (b.1949) must have been influenced by these ruptures in art, especially referring to Duchamp; "he showed that all physical objects have a metaphysical power that comes from history, language, science and poetry. In other words, artists realised that they could change the meanings attributed to the object without changing the object."⁵ Such a transformation has also drawn Cragg's path.

Tony Cragg was educated in an active artistic environment. British Sculpture comes to mind with great canons such as Henry Moore (1898-1986), Barbara Hepworth (1903-1975) and Anthony Caro (1924-2013). Cragg knew these artists, the creators of the active art scene of his student years, and followed the interactions or oppositions among them. It is clear from this that he was a conscious observer of his time, interested in the artistic production and art scene of the period. His peers Bruce Nauman (1941), Gilbert (1943) & George (1942), Richard Long (1945) and Jacop Epstein (1880-1959), Alexander Calder (1898-1976), Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), Kenneth Armitage (1916-2002), Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), Donald Judd (1928-1994), artists such as Cy Twombly (1928-2011) and Phillip King (1934-2021) and movements such as Arte Povera, Minimal Art, Conceptual Art and Land Art attracted Cragg's attention from the 1950s to the 1970s. As a result, Cragg assimilated the artists and art schools of the period, and at this point, he strengthened the roots of his own sculpture tradition by separating it from them. Based on all of these justifications, Cragg's artistic mentality, which is receptive to gaining from experience in the pursuit of the new, can be characterised as explorations and research that blend the classical with the new. Therefore, Cragg's sculptures "immediately give the feeling of an ever-open geometry; movement; a sculptural continuity; a flexible transparency; an abundance of optical, sensory and mental adventure."⁶

When a natural object is transformed into an object/tool used for daily practices, it loses its essence. However, this material is not lost in artistic transformation; it repeatedly opens itself to the new. From this viewpoint, many technical objects can also create new readings in artistic transformation through their materiality, that is, their form languages. In short, every material can be transformed again by being tried. Tony Cragg is considered one of the most important artists of the last 40 years at the intersection of productivity and diversity. His artistic path is characterised by research, experimentation, and transformation through various media. Drawing is one of them for Cragg. It is still a pioneering and important tool that Cragg uses to solve formal problems in his creative world. His sketches and drawings are, at the same time, the thinking ground of his projects. The other tools he chooses are photography and computer software. He uses them to compute the morphological characteristics of his sculptures, including cross-sectioning, scale, deformation, and form combination. Despite all these intermediaries, the fate of his sculptures becomes clear after the

⁵Kültigin Kağan Akbulut, "İstanbul Modern Yeni Binasında Anthony Cragg'i Ağırılıyor," *Milliyet Sanat Dergisi* no. 711 (2018), 8-10.

⁶Demosthenes Davvetas, "Makrokozmostan Mikrokozmosa," in *Anthony Cragg: İnsan Doğası* ed. N. Can Kantarcı (İstanbul: Mas Matbaacılık, 2018), 104.

experiences of Cragg and his team and the hand-forming of the sculpture, i.e., its traditional production. This is the reason why the scale models of all his sculptures were made from wood. Cragg then begins to conduct more subjective research on the work to be produced. Of course, the final decision about the production of the sculpture belongs to the artist. The artist, who has been using the metal casting technique since 1980, has an expert team and an equipped workshop where the material is processed in all techniques except bronze casting.

Tony Cragg, who seeks the fulfilment of the material in form and content rather than a particular ecoc and technique in his production, essentially defines sculpture as the effect of the material and material forms on the viewer.⁷ In search of this effect, Cragg analyses all kinds of materials in his sculptures in detail and makes them artistic. He believes that the material “can carry meaning, imagination and emotion and that sculpture is an environment which looks to the future with unused possibilities. According to this view, art occupies a territory between the organic realm of nature and the functionalist realm of industrial production. Offering a space of freedom beyond pragmatcal needs is, therefore, what constitutes the explicitly political dimension of Cragg’s art -or any art for that matter- as it allows him to give the material a new form by each new sculpture and to express his emotions and feelings in ever-changing ways.”⁸ His sculptures are both diverse and interrelated. In other words, the artist’s sculpture production is subject to versions. His explorations of material, form, image and colour range from the surface-mass connection to strategies of transposing basic geometric forms into organic forms, to layering open to coincidence in which the material retains its nature.⁹

Stacking, defined as piling, accumulating, or clustering, is a forming technique used in the early periods. In fact, these materials, formed in heaps, demand us to look at them from a different perspective from that of daily life. In any case, the aim of the artist is not to repeat the existing, but to transform it to find and show the unknown energy in the material. In other words, he questions why the existing thing looks the way it does, rather than how it looks. Therefore, the priority of the material or object for the artist is not the external form. On the contrary, it is the structure or entirety created by the internal dynamics of the material (the movement and energy it contains). In this sense, Gültekin Emre also talked about Cragg’s desire to draw attention to new energies in his drawings and sculptures, saying, “with the drawings that comprise the preliminary designs of his works, the works that we have difficulties perceiving and comparing them to something, which we will have problems getting used to, from layers and blocks assembled on top of each other, appeal to the eye, emotion, and, of course, thought. To make us think by making us look, to make us think by showing, and then to make us perceive; this is what the artist aims for. To prepare us for new formations and to introduce us to new objects.”¹⁰

After a while, Cragg gave up the process of classifying objects. Some sculpture families were created by layering because of the formal deformations of the material. These are deformations such as twisting, folding, stretching, compression, drilling, swelling, sprouting, and his *Forminifera* (**F. 1**), *Stroke* or *Migrant* group sculptures can be given as examples of this technique of the artist. This method, which also includes actions such as sandblasting, coating, and materializing internal and external spaces into wavy forms, physically transforms the material by intervening in the form.

⁷Tony Cragg, 3.

⁸Tony Cragg, 3.

⁹Tony Cragg, 4.

¹⁰Gültekin Emre, “Nesnelerin Gizilgücü / Tony Cragg,” *Sanat Dünyamız* 102 (2007), 41.



Figure 1: Tony Cragg, *Forminifera*, 1994, 225x480x390 cm

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1990-1999/forminifera-3.html>)

Tony Cragg's sculptures are far from representation. However, his works can also be seen as abstractions that show something. Tony Cragg's "language of art is based on the principle of 'iconisation'. In other words, Cragg depicts the inspiration he draws from an external event, a thought, an internal reaction, a dream, a feeling, an emotional behaviour or a synergy with the natural landscape, a natural event or object. 'Iconisation' expresses that the artist does not work figuratively, but creates forms that do not represent something finished and closed. There is a sense of an image, whereas there is no trace of mimetic figurativeness. 'Iconisation' means that the sculptor is in the process of creating an icon, but this process is never completed."¹¹ In addition, his sculptures related to space through the triangle of material, form and image have large families such as Early Forms and Rational Beings, which he created with many variants. Therefore, they have a fluid integrity that follows each other.

While working with waste and found materials in his early periods, he overcame the monotony arising from industrial production, which he noticed, with the original and free state of the work of art. Thus, he created a new plastic language by combining geometric industrial forms with organic forms. His sculptures produced with today's technology are forms with more intertwined volumes and complex geometries. Tony Cragg does not give up his desire to experience material and form in his increasingly complex sculpture style. This attitude from his laboratory days¹² is still a noticeable feature of his dialogue with the materials he uses. Carrying this experimentation into the organic forms of his works, Cragg's sculptures "never assumed the status of an object. They always harboured a state of becoming, in a lively and never-ending interaction with their surroundings. He cared not for artificiality but for a natural being, not for an abstract geometrical order but for a vital force and energy, not for a manufactured state but for a state of being that transcends time."¹³

¹¹ Davvetas, "Makrokozmostan Mikrokozmosa," 101.

¹² From 1966 to 1968, when Tony Cragg was about 20 years old, he was a laboratory technician working part-time for the National Rubber Manufacturers Research Association.

¹³ Levent Çalikoğlu, "İnsan Doğası ve Ötesi," in *Anthony Cragg: İnsan Doğası* ed. N. Can Kantarcı (İstanbul: Mas Matbaacılık, 2018), 21.

Cragg's interest in the material is the result of his research in which he analyses the effect-response processes of materiality. In other words, it is an environment of companionship that he developed between himself and the material or object. However, his main interest is on the aesthetic norm of the material. Cragg's desire to transform the objects of mass production, which serve as signifiers of the material world we make, originates from the technical object's goal of widespread acceptance. In fact, this interest is rooted in his view of objects of production as mediocre, boring and unnecessarily repetitive objects of design. The artist believes that such an effect is the result of the production process being characterised by simple, economic and industrial geometries.¹⁴ The system that transforms the material into an industrial form is pragmatically result-oriented. As such, for the artist, the material is not a reality transformed with pragmatic intentions. On the contrary, it is pregnant with forms and meanings that have not yet been applied with uses other than its intention. The only unique and unlimited formula to create this effect that will produce alternatives with materials belonging to daily practices is art. Because the decisions taken for art are not functional, the work is produced without any direct benefit and is far from the economic market logic. His works in this period have been a self-expression of expressing the deficiencies he sees in everyday objects and producing new forms of thought.

Because unusual materials create different textures, the forms he moulds have a strong sense of touch. The natural identity of the form with its material fuels our desire to move our hands around the sculpture surface.¹⁵ For this reason, his sculptures can be defined as tactile surface organisations. Because every surface function, has a haptic effect. He constantly renews the relationship between texture and touch on the sculpture surface with qualities and effects such as inside-outside, empty-full, negative-positive, perforated-coated, and energy-movement. For this purpose, the sculpture group *Forminifera* (**F. 1**) produced in the 1990s can be mentioned. These sculptures are reminiscent of fossils or calcified organisms with their matt white colours, the entire surface of which is composed of small holes. The sculpture in question is a description of the smallest unicellular crustaceans, which means 'Hole Bearers' in Latin. The series consists of 12 plaster-cast sculptures with different geometric forms placed on metal bases and carriers or directly on the ground. The forms also bring to mind tools such as mortars and retorts. Cragg sculpture means experimenting with many techniques and materials together or in different ways. Therefore, he experimented with the method for drilling holes on the surface of different materials. Some of them are even functional in the transmission of air flow and light. Thus, he expands the sensations towards the work both by using metaphor and by providing actual light. Another practical aim of the artist is to enter the viewer's thoughts. Thus, this will enable him to actualise the energy he seeks in the material and give the sculpture surface a moving appearance. All the forms of the sculpture surface, which are marked by turning the sculpture surface from the inside out or by drilling, scratching, bending, and coating, demand a different look from every direction. The viewer who responds to this call reaches the real transformation of the sculpture in his/her mind. In fact, it is essential for the artist that the form and material are understood and perceived within the scope of the thought created by the gaze.

In Tony Cragg's creative process, the sculptures reach their variations by being produced repeatedly with different sizes, materials and media. Seeking and finding the sensory potentials of the possibilities offered by alternative materials, the artist achieves new results by evaluating each variation he produces. "Today, sculpture no longer has the function of depicting things, especially not human anatomy. At its core lies the study of materials and material forms, and how they affect us."¹⁶ Cragg is a material fetishist. He is interested

¹⁴Tony Cragg, 6.

¹⁵Çalikoğlu, "İnsan Doğası ve Ötesi," 20-21.

¹⁶Tony Cragg, 6.

in how the material itself affects or will affect the viewer, and in turn, how that material transforms or will transform. Thus, he always produces new sculptures in which he refers to the previous one.

Regarding production by stacking in art, the first thing sought is not unity but multiplicity. Cragg's material realm is a multiplicity that includes this and other techniques. Therefore, in the following, the artist's sculptures consisting of glass-made tools and equipment, inert industrial products such as bricks, bottles and paper, plastic finds arranged on the ground and surface, and wooden furniture and various objects covered with technical objects such as steel hooks, plastic granules and dice are categorised and discussed in two sections.

2. Stackings and Ground Sculptures

Since the 70s, Cragg's interest in humans, nature and industry cannot be ignored. His works, constructed with the technique of stacking all kinds of inert, waste or found objects such as wood, metal, plastic and glass, were created in this period. "In his early works, he combined or accumulated plastic or wooden debris, building materials, bottles, mechanical elements and the like into abstract or distorted figurative motifs. Gradually, his sculptures unfolded within a wider scope ranging from organic to technoid forms, yet without entirely renouncing the use of identifiable elements."¹⁷ When the manufactured objects in Cragg's work are assembled in elaborate, shifting and multiple forms, it is noticeable that the apparent identity of the objects is not lost. In other words, while each piece retains its individual identity in stackings, the character of the objects is lost in the whole. The substitute objects he uses in his stacks are finished, processed materials. When he produces experience by considering almost every situation of such objects, this is one of his proposals for dealing with the material world created by man.

Among the works analysed, the pieces arranged by leaving a space between them are ground sculptures. The pieces that rise on the ground or descend towards the ground with closely spaced pieces in a certain form constitute the stacks. The *Axe* installations, which he realised with the same logic from objects such as wood, plastic or waste, are other arrangements that include these two approaches and have many versions. In these arrangements, Cragg used the monolithic form of the object. *Axe-Head* (1981), a 100x100 cm. piece made of red-orange-yellow plastic, and *Axehead* (1982) (**F. 2**), a 109x393x490 cm. piece made of 49 wooden objects, are examples of this family. The descending volumes of many different objects made of a single material such as plastic, glass, wood, etc. towards the ground show an axehead. Cragg's approach brings to mind Schwitters with his *Merz* piles, Arman with his accumulations, Cesar with his compressions, and Spoerri with his trap paintings as precursors of this style. In this context, it is immediately recognisable that these installations, which are combinations of different types of objects to resemble another object, are a classic Cragg arrangement.

¹⁷Tony Cragg, 3.



Figure 2: Tony Cragg, *Axehead*, 1982, 109x393x490 cm., Wood.

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1980-1989/axehead.html>)

The artist calls these works, which have the effect of large-scale reliefs or reliefs arranged on the wall or on the ground, *drawings*. He uses the material with weak or, conversely, strong intensity. In his installations, he follows a specific form or colour. He gathers together objects of various sizes dominated by a single colour, sometimes following a colour scale and sometimes mixing colours. These everyday objects can, at times, take on a rather chaotic form. In the meantime, the artist continues his search. Because he aims to produce new artistic forms in which he blends the necessity of the material from the industry and the sensory and symbolic aspects of the material from the human perspective with the relationship between form, image and language. In this context, he does not hesitate to exhibit banal approaches when necessary. However, it should be noted that Cragg's choice of natural or synthetic debris materials was not a haphazard approach. "... because he wanted, right from the beginning of his career, to create a 'poetic mythology' for the industrially produced materials of our time. In his own way, he was working in the manner described by William Seitz in 1959, turning matter into poetry."¹⁸ In this respect the artist's mass sculptures are analysed below and classified into mixed media, plastic, metal and glass works.

2.1. Mixed Material and Unit Repetition/Stack and Three Modern Buildings

From 1973 onwards, Tony Cragg began to create a family of sculptures called *Stack* (**F. 3**), consisting of various materials piled up in compressed layers. In these cube-shaped sculptures, of which he produced 5 until 1985, he used pieces of wood, metal sheets, plastics, fabric rolls, cardboard, newspapers and old magazines, and construction rubble. Similar to the way the *Forminifera* (**F. 1**) sculptures resembling porous fossil fragments, the *Stack* sculptures, created by placing objects of different colours and textures horizontally, are reminiscent of geological and archaeological layers. The irregular diversity seen in a solid and tight whole such as a cube is an effect provided by the material structure it uses. The dull unity formed by these materials, whose original structure is preserved, is interrupted by vivid colours such as yellow, green, red and pink. At the same time, Cragg tried changing the rigid form of understanding of minimalism.

¹⁸Judith Collins, *Sculpture Today* (London: Phaidon, 2007), 419.



Figure 3: Tony Cragg, *Stack*, 1975, 120x120x120 cm., Mixed Material.

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1969-1979/stack-6.html>)

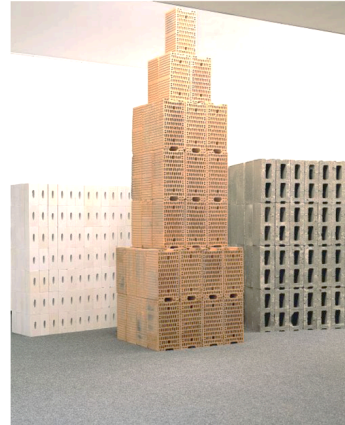


Figure 4: Tony Cragg, *Three Modern Buildings*, 1984, 210x300x400 cm., Brick and Slag Briquette.

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 28.10.2023, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1980-1989/>)

The sculpture, consisting of three separate pieces named *Three Modern Buildings* (F. 4) is an early version of the artist's sculpture called *Brick Built* (1987). It is among his works with variations in different scales. With their different heights, shapes and colours, the stacked objects point to architectural construction/cities with their inherent elements such as emptiness. *Three Modern Buildings*, which has an iconic effect, is composed of 100 red bricks, 70 yellow bricks and 96 briquettes with unit repetition.

2.2. Waste Plastics or Plastic Rubbish/Spectrum and Menschenmenge (Crowds)

Between 1979 and 1985, he was busy organising and stacking a series of waste plastic pieces on the floor and wall surfaces in the form of figures or objects. These pieces, which he organised by collecting from the seashore, garbage, in other words from almost everywhere, are everyday objects made of all kinds of plastics such as bottles, buckets, sieves, toys, laundry baskets and flowers.

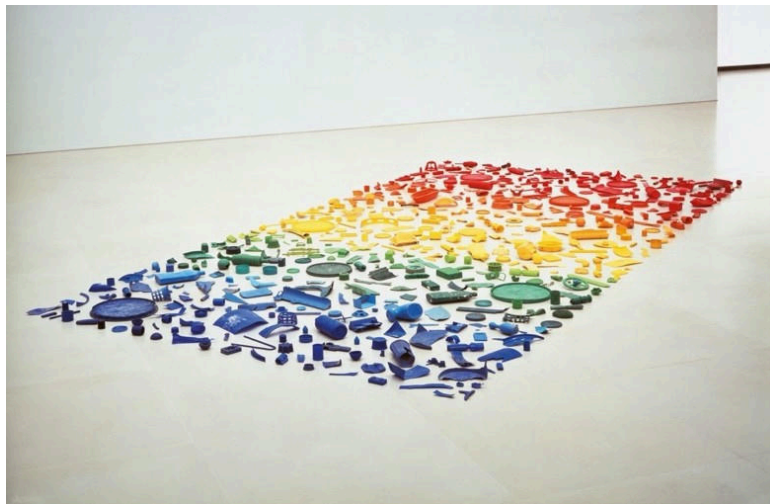


Figure 5: Tony Cragg, *Spectrum*, 1979, 250x500 cm., Plastic.

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1969-1979/dpectrum.html>)

Since some plastics are piled up according to their colour, shape and size, the artist has subjected these objects to a taxonomic classification. In the physical sense, he used the wastes as he first encountered them or preferred to deform them. Geometric abstract arrangements, the artist's self-portrait and the city plan of England, which he transferred to the wall surface, can also be referred to as reliefs. In addition, familiar

images of everyday life and consumption such as sausages, detergent bottles, cars and televisions are also seen among them. The colour scheme in the assemblages progresses around a single colour, in different colours from light to dark, dark to light or in rainbow tones of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, purple and purple. From a distant perspective, the multi-part installation gains a new meaning by removing the materials it contains. For example, in the 1979 version of *Spectrum* (F. 5), coloured objects and fragments referring to Newton's spectrum are arranged at regular intervals in a rectangular form on the floor. In the multi-part work, the eye focuses on the connotation created by the colours of the work rather than the parts.

Menschenmenge (Crowds) (F. 6) shows a group of approximately 25-30 people placed along the wall surface. In the work, although the coloured plastic materials are in a mixed order, different human silhouettes draw attention. Physical characteristics such as gender, clothing, height, and weight can be distinguished. This 16-metre-long installation, which we perceive as a wall sculpture or a wall painting, reveals the volumes of the pieces when viewed closely. The contoured images, which are placed on the surface like a mosaic and whose gaps are filled by the eye looking at them, come alive with the full-void balance they carry, and the forms are almost animated.



Figure 6: Tony Cragg, *Menschenmenge* (Crowds), 1980, 200x1600 cm., Plastic.

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/current/tony-cragg-restrospective-parts-of-the-world-at-von-der-heydt-museum-wuppertal-19-04-2016-14-08-2016.html>)

2.3. Found Metal Works/Minster

From 1980 to 1990, Tony Cragg worked with steel and found metal in vertical forms that would later become his signature, such as the *Minster* sculptures (F. 7). The worn discs, regularly placed one on top of the other and bearing the traces of time, allude to some architectural elements. Similar architectural allusions are already one of the artist's leitmotifs. The machine parts, whose functionality is finished, are stacked without being fixed in the form of elegant towers where the material is faithful to its authenticity.



Figure 7: Tony Cragg, *Minster*, 1992, 285x250x250 cm., Metal.

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1990-1999/minster-1.html>)

The discs and cylinders of different colours, heights and diameters are actually inactive parts of another whole, such as the wheel of a gear, the cylindrical container of a machine or the air filter of an engine. The structure of these circular cross-sections, which are standard, static and obsolete parts, rising to 2-2.5 metres, makes the sculpture energetic in contrast. Cragg's experience of materials is, of course, an experience of combining many objects that differ in function, size and form into a single whole or object. The artist reads the multiple faces of the world's materiality through the relationship between man and material. For this reason, Cragg's sculptures consist of families or groups of sculptures with a diversified system.

2.4. Glassworks/Eroded Landscape and Fields of Heaven

From the seventies to the nineties, the stacking technique, repeated in his forms over and over again, was the source of many of his works made of glass, such as *Eroded Landscape* (F. 8). Inspired by his days as a laboratory assistant, transparent/reflective, sandy/matte and colour-enhanced glass apparatus are stacked on top of each other, side by side, one after the other, as if to reach the ethereal. In almost all of these variations, everyday glassware such as vases, jugs, plates, cups, glasses, bottles and carboys are constructed on glass plates or shelves that form a structure by separating these pieces from each other. Other glassworks that are nested inside each other or where vehicles such as bicycles serve as carriers can also be mentioned. For example, *Crockery Stacks* (1996), in which porcelain is stacked on a platform separate from the floor, is different from other glass works with its cramped form and self-made matte colour, referring to a banality. In the end, while showing the anonymity of everyday objects with a monochromatic appearance, Cragg also touches upon a point with which he is obsessed; the uniformity of industrial production. His 1999 work *Clear Glass Stack* is one of the glass works in which he uses the material in its transparent form without

interfering with its structure and raises it on planes. In this group, there are also works in which he distorted the perfection of the piece, altered its structure and drilled holes as a typical Cragg behaviour. His glass works with more original forms emerged in 2009 when he started working with Berengo Studio. As in the others, the possibilities of the material led the artist to prefer glass.



Figure 8: Tony Cragg, *Eroded Landscape*, 1998, 200x125x125 cm., Glass.

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1990-1999/eroded-landscape-1.html>)

The monotonous combination of glass of a single colour and texture creates a complex perception through the shifting formality of the objects (chubby-narrow, short-long, small-large vessels with thin or wide necks). Such an effect can also be seen in Cragg's stack of laboratory and modern everyday vessels, which "provide an inter-temporal presentation, some evoking ancient forms, others sexual limbs"¹⁹, *Eroded Landscape*. Some contents are eroded. *Fields of Hevaen* from 1998 (F. 9) is another gigantic installation in which he has created layers with similar pieces. These monochromatic objects with different shapes and sizes appear in multiple order. In the two-way installation, the artist has stacked the materials in layers of 3 and 6 in a triangular movement upwards. The glassware on one side has created a more intricate and mobile space due to its form. On the other side are the carboy with uniform and large forms. It offers an orderly, clear, and monotonous atmosphere. These sandblasted and magnified glass carboys invite the viewer to experience an optical illusion. Because their mouths are placed obliquely towards the ground and their concave lower parts point upwards, towards the sky.

¹⁹Thomas McEvilley, 1990, 118. "Tony Cragg: Landscape Artist," In *Tony Cragg: Sculpture 1975-1990*, 110-162. Newport Harbour Art Museum, New York/London: Thames & Hudson, 1990. accessed March 3, 2025. https://archive.org/details/cor5_0_s06_ss01_boxrg5_0_2008_024_01/mode/2up.



Figure 9: Tony Cragg, *Fields of Hevaen*, 1998, 300x300x1250 cm., Glass.

(Artist Collection, Accessed: 13.02.2023, Germany, https://madisonsquarepark.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Tony-Cragg_Walks-of-Life.pdf)

3. Coated Surfaces

The surface as an element of a plastic formation is important for Cragg. For this reason, he created many surface organisations in his sculptures. Cragg's choice of covering prefabricated or self-produced surfaces can be read as an obsessive approach. However, he continued to investigate the surface in this way in the works he covered, as in his multi-part and hollow arrangements or stacking. Dice, hooks, steel rods, coloured plastic parts, holes, and pastel drawings are the methods and materials used in the act of coating. The turned wooden apparatus is also among them. For example, the sculpture *Unschärferegulation (Uncertainty Principle/1991)* (F. 10), in which the surfaces of different wooden objects placed on top of each other are intermittently covered with turned wooden knobs. In the installation *Cellulose Memory* (1991) (F. 11), turned and large-sized wooden seal stems are used much less frequently on the surface compared to the other covered works. The seal stems are mounted on three logs, and the logs are placed on three pallets positioned on the floor.



Figure 10: Tony Cragg, *Unschärferegulation (Uncertainty Principle)*, 1991, 160x115x85 cm., Wood. (TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1990-1999/unscharferegulation.html>)



Figure 11: Tony Cragg, *Cellulose Memory*, 1991, 3 pieces: 137x373x355 cm., Wood.

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1990-1999/>)

Since the works whose surfaces are coated are not finalised with the traditional method, they do not bear the characteristics of ‘the artist's hand or artist's touch’. This quality, which is also attributed to the signature of the artist, is reversed and is not seen in Cragg’s works in this category. Any material that has already become a coating material is a manufactured product with its own identity. However, the production of material sculpture and the approach of object on object and form on form is Tony Cragg’s artistic attitude and signature. Anne Rochette and Wade Saunders also emphasised Cragg's solution to the issue of the artist's touch by inventing unusual surface coatings. “These surface treatments, labor intensive for his assistants, pull together his often partite forms, mask their occasionally slapdash construction and give many a piece a disquieting indeterminacy by rendering its contours perceptually fuzzy.”²⁰ In all his forms and arrangements of material forms, the coated surfaces are intended to reinforce the optical and haptic effect. “We can associate the act of coating with the opposite of covering, enclosing, or concealing, which is to make apparent, reveal, or disclose. In other words, such an action is a form of marking that will reveal the object more. Because in this way, artists want to achieve a new appearance and, therefore, a new effect. This way develops between the oscillations of sight and touch, and with the contribution of all our bodily senses, it triggers our urge to touch and creates the haptic perception that shows us the work in a different way.”²¹

3.1. Plastic Granules or Granular Plastics/Lens and Birnam Wood

In her essay *Plastic*, Roland Barthes talks about the plurality that plastic, as a substance, offers against its singularity.²² Indeed, no substance other than plastic has ever surprised people by transforming into another thing/object in such a variety. The intrinsically untransformable structure of plastic transforms it into a powerful transforming material in human hands. Tony Cragg’s installations with plastic granules are a good example of the plurality offered by plastic. This is not the first time he has worked with granular structures like these. The artist chooses the plastic material and uses it as a ‘transforming’ element to give a new perspective to the ‘transformed’. In contemporary sculpture, turning towards plastic/synthetic materials and producing with the nature of these materials is a break from the classical tradition. Similarly, Cragg’s process, which started with his appropriation of plastic material, was a criticism of the art and production principles of that time.

Lens (F. 12), an installation in which Cragg works with plastic granules, is a display of everyday objects brought together for a specific purpose. The functional stances and identities of the numerous objects on display seem to be clear. By covering all surfaces with dark-coloured plastic granules, an ensemble was achieved in which the parts were neutralised within each other. The aim in the organisation of the work is to develop a form that turns into an ocular lens by referring to the idea of seeing.²³ In *Birnam Wood* (F. 13) from the same year, 1985, similar objects are covered with different coloured plastic granules. Here, the plastic, a raw material of industry and culture, and the artefacts, which are objects of production and culture, neutralise each other. Both sides have been forced to give up their identities. The unbelievably many plastic grains used in these two works emphasise another aspect. That is the smallest points in the structure of the universe, the world, the beings; an integration consisting of atoms, molecules, cells, etc. The syntax or unifying force in both the *Lens* and *Birnam Wood* is the coating of all surfaces of the objects that make up the work with plastic grains.

²⁰Rochette, Anne, and Wade Saunders. “Ends and Means,” *Art in America* 84, no:7, (1996), 72.

²¹Derya Baran, “Bir İma Eylemi Olarak Yüzey Kaplama,” *The Journal of Kesit Academy*, no. 33 (2022): 618, accessed May 25, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.29228/kesit.66009>.

²²Roland Barthes, *Çağdaş Söylenler*, trans. Tahsin Yücel (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2014), 158.

²³“Lens,” Grand Est Museums, accessed November 17, 2023, <https://www.museesgrandest.org/les-collections/lens/>.

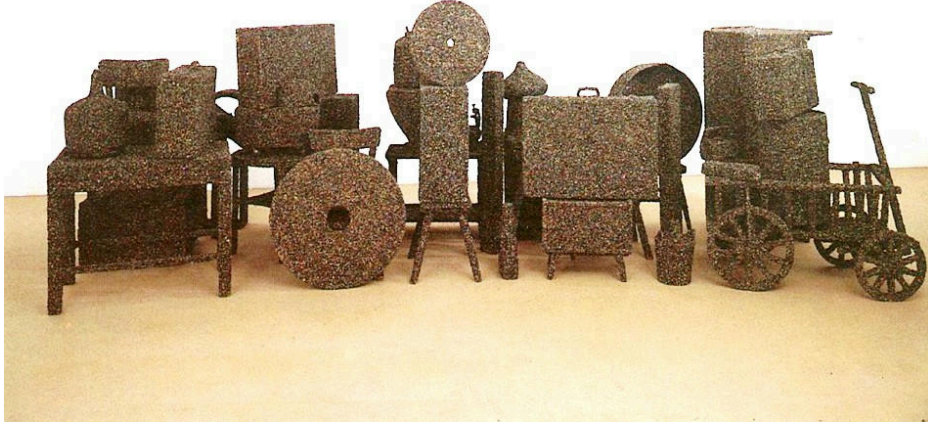


Figure 12: Tony Cragg, *Lens*, 1985, 160x500x200 cm., Plastic, Object.
(Grand Est Museums, Accessed: 17.11.2023, <https://www.museesgrandest.org/les-collections/lens/>)



Figure 13: Tony Cragg, *Birnam Wood*, 1985, 111x230x143 cm., PVC, Wood, Metal.
(Bonniefantten, Accessed: 25.12.2023, <https://www.bonnefantten.nl/en/maker/tony-cragg>)

3.2. Plastic Dice/Secrections

The sculptures of the *Secrections* series (**F. 14 and F. 15**) consist of forms covered with thousands of real dice. In the series, several large-scale organic forms are displayed stacked or separated from each other. The dice, with a side length between 1 and 3 cm, are made of different materials and colours such as bone, ivory, glass and metal. The standard dice are made of wood, which has an aesthetic and natural effect, or plastic, which is cheaper and lighter. In sculptures, the surface is covered like a skin and a second surface is formed from plastic. In this sense, the sculptures appear hermetic, that is, closed to external influence.²⁴ But they also demand the thinking gaze of the viewer. Because after a while the viewer will not be able to free himself from contact with this surface/surfaces.

²⁴Tony Cragg, 8.



Figure 14: Tony Cragg, *Secretions*, 1997, 195x140x125 cm., Styrofoam, Fibreglass, Dices.
(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1990-1999/secretions-2.html>)



Figure 15: Tony Cragg, *Secretions*, 2000, 255x290x220 cm., Plastic.
(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1990-1999/secretions-1.html>)

3.3. Metal Hooks/Congregation and Angels and Other Antibodies

In the sculpture *Congregation* (F. 16), wooden objects are covered with threaded metal hooks. A closer look reveals that the hooks are black, silver and copper-coloured. When all the surfaces of the various and differently shaped objects such as boats, oars and stools are covered with these hooks, the sculpture gains a new outer surface that appears monolithic. The metal apparatus on the warm dysfunctional objects physically creates a cold, grey atmosphere and a fuzzy aura. This is created by the silver coloured hooks that dominate the majority. The blurred space or atmosphere provided by the hooks complete the sculpture consisting of many parts.



Figure 16: Tony Cragg, *Congregation*, 1999, 280x290x420 cm, Wood, Metal Hook.

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1990-1999/congregation.html>)



Figure 17: Tony Cragg, *Angels and Other Antibodies*, 1992, Wood, Metal Hook.

(TONY CRAGG, Accessed: 30.09.2024, <https://www.tony-cragg.com/works/sculptures/1990-1999/>)

Angels and Other Antibodies (F. 17) refers to an epidemic situation. “Taking a cue from the work’s title, we can speculate that a scientific view of healing is implicitly contrasted with a religious understanding of sickness and cure, here embodied by the carved wooden angels that are also part of the piece.”²⁵ In the

²⁵Rochette and Saunders, “Ends and Means,” 72.

sculpture, he expressed the retention of antibodies that act against disease-causing molecules by screwing the surface of the objects. Compared to the previous work, it is seen that a smaller amount of hooks are held on the surface. In addition, the long wooden plank, which is one of the parts of the work, enables the installation to communicate with the space where it is located. This sculpture is the predecessor of the artist's *Untitled* (1993). Measuring 240x310x410 cm, the work consists of a piano, eight chairs, pieces of wood and hooks. Again, the method for combining the independent parts was pursued. When the connection of the piano, chairs and wooden planks here is read as a strategy for constructing a space, the reference of the plank to very traditional architectural elements can be recognised.

Conclusion

This study primarily examines Tony Cragg's early works, focusing specifically on his stacking and surface-coating techniques. It explores how he artistically transformed diverse materials such as plastic, everyday objects, waste, wood, metal, glass, bricks, and rubble. The research particularly analyzes the stack and floor sculptures produced during this intensive technical period.

Tony Cragg's sculptures exemplify the close interaction between the sculptor and his materials, representing the fusion of concept and substance. For Cragg, every type of material—including discarded objects—offers new languages and experiential possibilities. Thus, he makes no distinction among materials; his sculptural vocabulary shifts according to the nature of the materials used. Cragg artistically transforms synthetic materials, subjecting them to controlled reinterpretations while preserving their manufactured identities. He converts industrial objects, initially lacking artistic value, into works of art. A notable characteristic of his sculptures is the powerful presence of contrasts, such as the interplay between industrially produced forms and those reshaped by the artist's hand. Additionally, Cragg integrates the organic qualities of the forms with the processed synthetic materials, creating a unified aesthetic harmony. Through repeated explorations of multiplicity-unity and part-whole relationships, Cragg's sculptures continuously evolve, presenting viewers with profound aesthetic insights into materiality.

Art has long embraced the artificial, and our fascination with the materials that shape it remains strong. As both creators and consumers of the material world, we have woven these elements into every aspect of our lives—our perceptions, our routines, and our interests. Tony Cragg's material sculptures draw attention to this condition, seeking to expand our awareness of the material reality that surrounds us and defines our experience of being. While the use of synthetic objects in his works may not immediately disclose the artist's identity, Cragg's distinctive approach emerges through his thoughtful selection, transformation, and presentation of materials. His engagement with materiality not only defines his practice as "material sculpture," but also allows viewers to discern his unique artistic signature through the recurring visual language and iconographic structure present across his body of work.



Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest	The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support	The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

Author Details

Derya Baran

¹ Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Sculpture, Van, Türkiye

 0000-0002-5827-9468  deryabaran@gmail.com



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