

Anthony Cragg

Anthony Cragg was born in Liverpool in 1949. He worked as a laboratory technician at the Natural Rubber Producers Research Association (1966-68) before attending Gloucestershire College of Art and Design, Cheltenham College, and the Royal College of Art, London (1973-77). Cragg has lived and worked in Wuppertal, Germany, since 1977.

Cragg's early work involved site-specific installations of found objects and discarded materials. From the mid-1970s through to the early 1980s he presented assemblages in primary structures as well as in colourful, representational reliefs on the floors and walls of gallery spaces. Cragg constructed these early works by systematically arranging individual fragments of mixed materials, often according to their artificial colours and profiles, so as to form larger images.

In 1981 he created "Britain Seen from the North" considered a seminal early work, made of multi-coloured scraps of various materials assembled in relief on the wall. The piece depicts the outline of the island of Great Britain, orientated sideways so that Northern Britain is positioned to the left. The island is scrutinized by a figure, representing Cragg himself, who looks at his native country from the position of an outsider. The piece is often interpreted as commenting on the social and economic difficulties that Britain was facing under 'Thatcherism', which had particular effect in the north. In the early 1980s Cragg gradually moved away from installation art and began to examine more closely the individual objects used as parts of his larger constellations. This was the beginning of his engagement and experimentation with the properties and possibilities of a wide range of more permanent materials in the form of wood, plaster, stone, fiberglass, Kevlar, stainless steel, cast iron and bronze.

In the 1990s Cragg continued to develop two larger groups of work that have sustained his production up to the present: the "Early Forms" and the "Rational Beings". The "Early Forms" series investigate the possibilities of manipulating every day, familiar containers and the ways in which they can morph into and around one another in space. The sculptures derive their profiles and contours from simple, thick-walled vessels such as chemistry vessels, plastic bottles and mortars. The surface of these initial objects are extended and contorted until new, sculpturally independent forms of movement arise. Through these processes of manipulation the initial objects develop new lines and contours, positive and negatively curving surfaces and volumes, protrusions and deep recessing folds. The broad field of containers and vessels used function as metaphors for cell, organ, organism or body. The "Early Forms" can be characterized as forms trans-mutating along a bilaterally curved axis, often with organic, even figurative, qualities. The "Rational Beings" are describable as organic looking forms often made of carbon fibre on a core of polystyrene. These sculptures derive their forms from the contours of gestural drawings, which Cragg then translates into the third dimension using thick, circular or oval discs which are superimposed (often vertically), glued together and covered with a skin. The underlying structure of these

sculptures gives their skin the tension of a membrane, reflecting the basic structures of many organisms, organs, plants and animals.

Cragg's work has been exhibited in many major Institutions around the world, including most recently; Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK (2017); the National Museum of Havana, Cuba (2017); MUDAM Luxembourg, Luxembourg (2017); Ludwig Museum, Koblenz, Germany (2017); Wroclaw Contemporary Art Museum, Wroclaw, Poland (2017); The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia (2016; Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal, Germany (2016); Benaki Museum, Athens, Greece (2015). Cragg was selected to represent Britain at the 43rd Venice Biennale in 1988, and won the Turner Prize in the same year. In the early 1990s, Cragg was awarded the Chevalier des Arts Lettres (1992) and appointed Royal Academician in London (1994). In 2001 he received the Shakespeare Prize of the Alfred Toepfer Foundation of Hamburg. He was made a CBE for services to art in the 2002 New Year Honours List, and also won the Piepenbrock Prize for Sculpture in that year. In 2007, he received the Praemium Imperiale for sculpture of the Imperial House of Japan for the Japan Art Association. Since 2010, Cragg has been appointed Honorary Fellow of University of the Arts London (2012); awarded Artist's Medal of Honor of the Hermitage, Russia (2012) as well as the 1st Class Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany (2012). In the 2016 Birthday Honours Cragg was created a Knight Bachelor for services to visual arts and UK-German relations.