**Tony Cragg**

**Alternative Reality**

Exhibition: 28.05-15.10.2023

Opening ceremony: 27.05.2023, godz. 18.00

Curator: Eulalia Domanowska

The State Art Gallery in Sopot proudly presents the art of Tony Cragg, one of best-known English artists. For more than 4 decades, he has relentlessly pursued new relationships between people and the physical world. He is a master of the material, freely using its different types such as stone, bronze, wood, metal, synthetic materials, and glass. In his sculptures, a propensity for experimentation is matched with unfailing perfection.

Cragg understands sculpture as a study of how material and physical forms shape and impact our ideas and emotions. He repeatedly affirms that he is uninterested in mimetic tendencies to reproduce or imitate anything, but in creating new, unknown forms, where creative imagination is the limit.

His works are dynamic, vital, and rich in sensual manifestations of matter. Two series, *Early Forms* and *Rational Beings*, are a case in point*.* By transforming familiar objects from everyday life, the artist creates new, unfamiliar forms, yielding new relationships, meanings, and emotional reactions. He transforms rational, mathematically based constructs into complex organic forms. In his sculptures, the human figure can become a geometric composition of molecules, cells, organs, and processes. Tony Cragg's works do not imitate nature and the way we look but are about why we look the way we do and why we are the way we are.

The exhibition features three sets of Cragg's works: on Gallery premises we display the artist's glass sculptures and installations as well as the drawings and watercolours accompanying them, while his sculptures will be installed in Park Północny in Sopot.

The works made of glass show the evolution of the artist's style from the early 1990s to the present. Tony Cragg initially used readymade or found objects, such as jars, bottles, wine casks, and laboratory vessels. By assembling them into new entities, i.e., *emballages* and installations, he created colourful, decorative compositions. Around 2009, the artist began working with Adriano Berengo and his Studio on Murano. This collaboration has borne fruit with a series of organic sculptures inspired by nature and architecture. Taking advantage of the beauty of glass, its infinite possibilities and extraordinary fluidity of matter, the author transposed the ancient technique into innovative contemporary forms, which we can admire at the Sopot exhibition.

From the earliest years of his career, Cragg made drawings, prints, and watercolours. He almost daily draws in pencil on paper sketches for his projects and autonomous works. Our exhibition will gather works from 1999 to the present.

First of all, however, Park Północny in Sopot, stretching along the Baltic shore behind the Grand Hotel, is the setting of Tony Cragg’s iconic sculptures: *Points of View* – meandering silver columns, *Mixed Feelings* – a form that writhes dynamically upwards, and *Versus* and *Masks*, so far exhibited in museums, sculpture parts and public venues around the world.

The exhibition of sculptures and drawings in Sopot is co-organized with the Tony Cragg Studio. It is held under the auspices of the British Council and the British Embassy, with the support of Hestia's Artistic Journey and ERGO Hestia.

Tony Cragg has been actively working and exhibiting since 1969. He graduated from the Wimbledon School of Art and the Royal College of Art in London. After graduating, in 1977 he moved to Wuppertal, where he has been living and working ever since. He took part in Documenta 7 and 8 in Kassel and represented Britain at the 43rd Venice Art Biennale in 1988. That very year he won the Turner Prize at the Tate Gallery in London for the Best British Artist. He also received the prestigious Preamium Imperiale Award in Tokyo in 2007, the Order of 1st Class of the Federal Republic of Germany (2012), and the Life Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award in Dusseldorf in 2017. He was a professor at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1999 - 2009) and at the famous Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, with which he was tied since 1978; he worked there as a professor from 1988 until 2016 and was the school's Rector between 2009 and 2013. Queen Elisabeth II knighted him, honouring his lifetime achievement and contribution to British-German cooperation (2016).

Exhibitions of Tony Cragg’s art take place intensively in museums and galleries worldwide, e.g. in the Tate Gallery in London, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, the Louvre in Paris, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh, Van der Heydt-Museum Wuppertal, Boboli Gardens in Florence, Yorkshire Sculpture Park in the UK, Sydney Biennale, San Paulo Biennale, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, and many other prestigious art institutions.

Tony Cragg is also a patron of culture. In 2006, he founded the Waldfrieden Sculpture Park in Wuppertal. This romantic nature reserve and its four galleries host exhibitions by other prominent artists in addition to Cragg's own sculptures. The artist organizes concerts. He has renovated a historic Rudolf Steiner-style villa located in Waldfrieden Park and in this way preserved the world's architectural heritage.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue and a dedicated educational and events program related to contemporary sculpture.

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