

Time Out  
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## Reviews

### Tony Cragg

★★★★

#### Lisson Gallery

Soho to Hampstead

It's hard to know quite what Tony Cragg means, exactly, when he describes himself as a materialist. Certainly, the label makes sense for the early works – his '80s arrangements of junk and coloured plastic, his affection for the detritus of everyday life. But the phrase sits less well with the work he's been making for the past decade – two prime examples of which occupy the external courtyard at the Lisson. With their monolithic sizes, their swirling, billowing forms that resemble a viscous liquid streaming up from the ground itself, the two pieces are virtually identical – except that one is made from buff-coloured bronze, the other from milky white stone. While the two substances give different effects, you also get the feeling that Cragg could equally well have chosen any other material to impose his aesthetic upon – a materialist, then, but simultaneously an anti-materialist or even an idealist.

So too with the works inside the gallery: the twin, Dr Seuss-like constructions, all looping levels and corkscrewing pathways, one done in ruddy metal, the other in mottled fibreglass ('Companion', 2008, below). Or the various darting, convulsing, sinuously zigzagging forms – in mirror-polished steel, in unctuous black metal, in beautifully striped plywood. Sometimes it's as though Cragg is trying to surpass the strictures of matter altogether, to arrive at something purer, more imagistic: in the way his rippling contours evoke the outlines of faces, or how certain pieces appear to shimmer and blur, stretched out sideways like an anamorphic distortion in a painting.

Ultimately, it all feels slightly relentless, making you yearn for some old-fashioned formalism, a truth-to-materials approach. Instead, the only truth there's room for is Cragg's own, admittedly bracing, vision.

*Gabriel Coxhead*

