



Rome

Tony Cragg

MACRO, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma

Organization and careful assemblage were the overriding themes in Tony Cragg's 10-year retrospective in Rome. Large anthropomorphic phallic sculptures made with dice or stone dominated the entryway. Cragg's ongoing engagement with monochromatic manufactured materials was reflected throughout the galleries. The insistent stacking of glass, a hallmark of Cragg's style and present in a new work, has expanded his tradition. *From the Fields of Heaven* is a seven-foot-high stack of glass shelves filled with frosted glass vases, carafes, and wine glasses. Abutting the stacked shelves is a perfect pyramid formed

by five layers of frosted demi-johns, Italian wine jars that are rounded at the base and taper to a thin sensuous neck. The demi-johns are stacked on their sides, with the spouts pointing down and their concave bottoms pointing skyward. Touching one corner of the pyramid is a second pyramid, also constructed of stacked demi-johns, with bottles missing from the stack. The orderly arrangement and monotony of the frosted glass easily obscure their absence. Five tall stacks of white wicker baskets (the kind used to cradle the demi-johns during transport) complete the central axis of the installation.

From the Fields of Heaven is a quietly absorbing work. The stacking and piling reflect an ordering, an obsession, or even penitence.

The sculpture has strong meditative and religious connotations, with frosted glass suggesting more about obscurity than revelation and the missing jars evoking ideas about presence and absence.

Influenced by Richard Long and Daniel Buren, Cragg remains true to the simplicity of form. His sculpture is not about the crafting of an object or the metamorphosis of materials. Cragg works to re-examine his chosen materials, assembling and configuring them to create something new. The integrity of the materials always remains in his work. The acceptance of the simple over the complex is as evident in his choice of materials as in his choice of monochromatic color. The natural hue of the material either domi-

Tony Cragg, *From the Fields of Heaven*, 2001. Mixed media, 200 x 400 x 300 cm.

nates the sculpture or is artificially muted as is evident in *From the Fields of Heaven*. The individual element or character of an object is always subordinated to the larger organization. Although Cragg has traveled far from his colorful plastic-shard figurative work of the past, the medium remains the object itself. Cragg is an object-maker, but not in the traditional artisan sense. The execution of the idea remains paramount in his work, but control over the ready-made material takes precedence. Cragg's manipulation or re-manufacturing of the object enables the medium to bend to suit his purpose. Cragg is at his