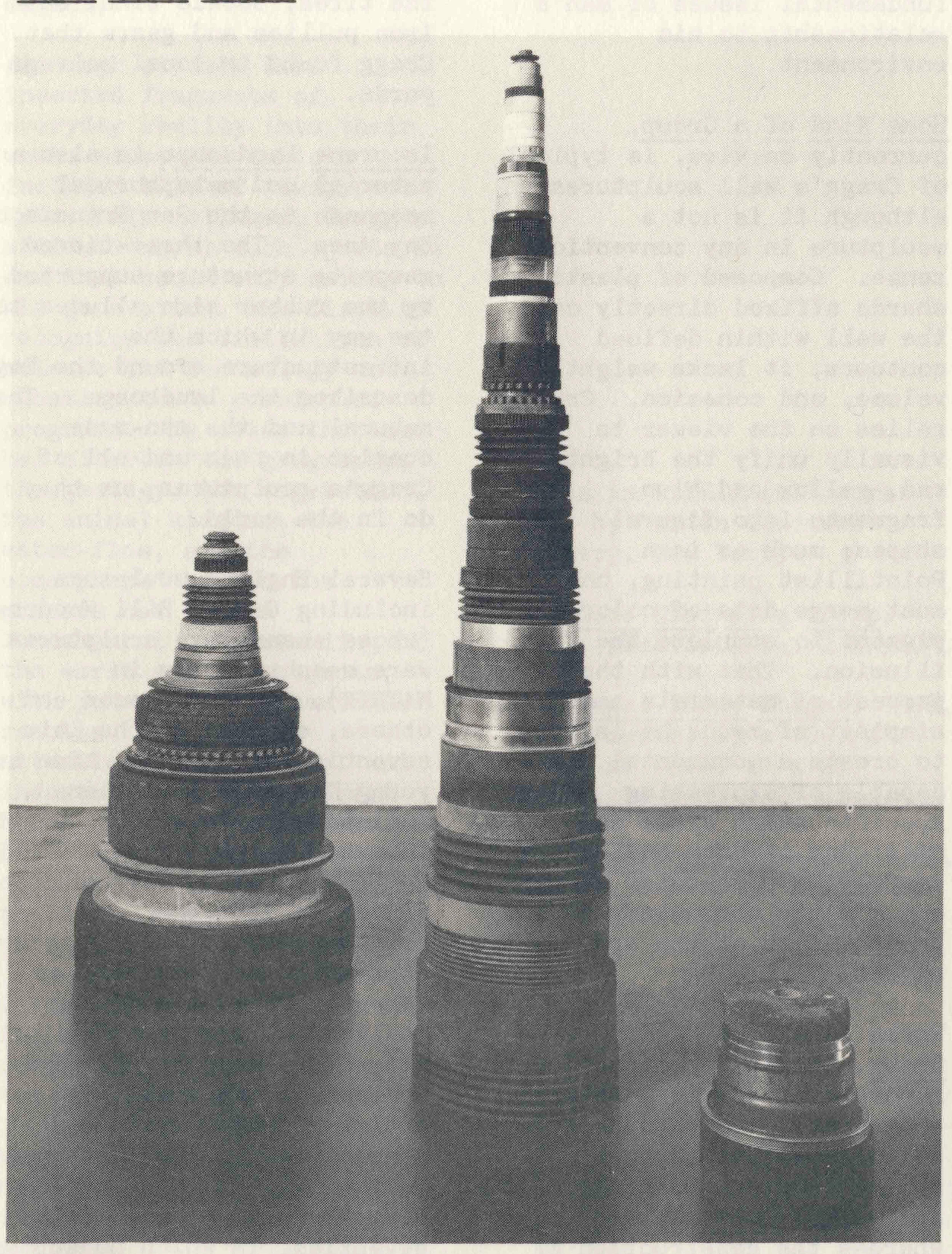
Pegs: Three Stages, 1986



British artist Tony Cragg uses the refuse of 20th century society to create sculpture. Bits and pieces of debris--used plastic containers, broken toys, tin cans--are used like paint daubs or collage elements and arranged to form familiar icons. His references to people (Some Kind of a Group), landscape (Isoprene Landscape), and architecture (Pegs: Three Stages) address fundamental issues of man's relationship to his environment.

Some Kind of a Group, currently on view, is typical of Cragg's wall sculptures, although it is not a sculpture in any conventional sense. Composed of plastic shards affixed directly on the wall within defined contours, it lacks weight, volume, and cohesion. Cragg relies on the viewer to visually unify the bright red, yellow and blue fragments into figural shapes; much as in a Pointillist painting, one must merge dots of colored pigment to complete the illusion. That with the poorest of materials and simplest of means he is able to create a monumental work capable of expressing specific human types and attitudes is both indicative of Cragg's particular genius and a witty commentary on the preciousness of the art object.

Works like Some Kind of a Group, which are composed of hundreds of small, scattered components, are metaphors for cellular structure (not unlike Jonathan Borofsky's archetypal Molecule Man), whereas the construction of Pegs: Three Stages parallels geological stratification, a record of the earth's

formation. At the same time, the three vertical stacks suggest Moslem minarets or church spires, architectural analogs to spiritual aspiration. Cragg has made structures of graduated circular elements before (Circles, 1985), but Pegs: Three Stages, made specifically for the MATRIX exhibition, derives its specific character (shape, size, color, texture) from the tires, cookie tins, cast iron pullies and gears that Cragg found in local salvage yards.

Isoprene Landscape is also a material and metaphorical response to the San Francisco Bay Area. The three-tiered masonite structure supported by the rubber tire allules to the way in which the infrastructure around the Bay describes the landscape. The natural and the man-made coexist in this and all of Cragg's sculptures, as they do in the world.

Several English sculptors, including Cragg, Bill Woodrow (whose assemblage sculptures were seen recently in MATRIX), Richard Deacon and others, emerged in the late seventies at the same time as young German and Italian artists were becoming internationally known. The British artists were not as concerned with the reinterpretation of expressionism, however, as were the Germans and Italians, but were more closely related to the Conceptual and Minimal artists of the previous generation.

Cragg's works of the early seventies, in which he sorted and arranged materials that had washed up on the beach, recall Richard Long's

configurations of rocks that marked his forays into the English countryside. But Cragg's concern was never with shells or stones but rather with exploring the expressive possibilities of man-made materials that, once discarded, have lost their original identity and function and merged back into nature. The worn, moss-covered rubber tire in Isoprene Landscape is such an object.

Although artists have inserted fragments of everyday reality into their works since the Cubists included bits of newspapers into their collages, Cragg's attitude about such ojects is one that could only belong to his generation, the first to recognize the limitations of science and technology and question their promise of progress. He notes that man has altered "the geography, the geology, the vegetation, the animal kingdom, the water-flow, and the atmosphere" but in the process has lost a fundamental understanding of the world and its objects, with potentially disastrous results. In calling attention to commercial and industrial castoffs, Cragg helps us see beyond their banality so that we might consider their "metaphysical, poetical, mythological" possibilities.

Cragg was born in Liverpool, England, in 1949. After completing his art studies at the Royal College of Art, London (1973-77), he moved to West Germany. Since that time he has lived in Wuppertal and taught at the Düsseldorf Academy.

Pegs: Three Stages and Isoprene Landscape were made especially for the current
MATRIX exhibition, Cragg's
first on the West Coast.
Subsequent to its
presentation at the
University Art Museum,
Cragg's exhibition will
travel to the La Jolla Museum
of Contemporary Art.

Constance Lewallen

Works in MATRIX (all works lent by Marian Goodman Gallery, New York):

- 1. Some Kind of a Group,
 1983, plastic, 75-1/2 x 360".
- 2. Pegs: Three Stages, 1986, mixed media, 13 x 10-3/4" diam. at base, 41 x 25" diam., 79 x 15-1/2" diam.
- J. Isoprene Landscape, 1986, rubber, masonite, steel, 28-1/2 x 48 x 63".

Selected one-person exhibitions:

Lisson Gallery, London, '79,
'80, '82, '85; Konrad
Fischer, Düsseldorf, W.
Germany, '80, '82; Marian
Goodman, NY, '82, '83, '84,
'86; Kunsthalle, Bern,
Switzerland, '83 (catalogue);
Palais de Beaux-Arts,
Brussels, '85 (traveled,
catalogue) KestnerGesellschaft, Hannover, W.
Germany, '85 (catalogue); The
Brooklyn Museum, NY, '86.

Selected group exhibitions:

Venice, Italy, Biennale,
Aperto '80 (catalogue);
Whitechapel Gallery, London,
British Sculpture in the
Twentieth Century, '81
(catalogue); Kassel, W.
Germany, Documenta 7, '82
(catalogue); The Museum of
Modern Art, NY, International
Survey of Recent Painting and
Sculpture, '84 (catalogue).

Selected bibliography about the artist (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Biggs, Lewis. "Tony
Cragg," Arnolfini Review
(Bristol), May/June, '80.
Celant, Germano. "Tony
Cragg and Industrial
Platonism," Artforum, Nov.
'81.

Newman, Michael. "New British Sculpture," Art in America, Sept. '82.

Feaver. William. "The

Feaver, William. "The New British Sculpture," Art News, Jan'84.

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