

in appearance, with salt and pepper hair, Tony Cragg has a dress sense that does not attract attention; but behind those round steel glasses, his blue eyes always have a lively, intense gaze. I met him in his huge, well-lit studio-laboratory in Wuppertal, which he designed in 2003 in collaboration with his trusted architect Rudolf Hoppe and which is somewhat Finnish in style with its wood, high ceilings and large windows. The entrance displays prototypes of his latest plaster sculptures, which have almost "extraterrestrial" shapes. All around there are various machines and numerous large-scale works in progress; others, placed along long corridors and in different rooms, await final checks and additions. As he took me around, my host-guide inspected each sculpture, stopping to talk to his assistants or answer his mobile phone. "The most passionate thing about creating a sculpture is co-ordinating the intellectual and imaginative process with the doing. When I make a work, I attempt a kind of interaction with the material. I want it to have its own dynamic and to move and grow. And I want this to happen during the creation process, so that the moment a series of sculptures is finished, another is born: in this way things continue to grow around me". It is a true assembly line, and Cragg, creator and master of his artistic operation, has everything under control in the studio; he goes there every day, to meet his large team – he has always created "work groups" – and to keep track of his many projects (in bronze, but also in stainless steel, wood, and fibreglass). This is his totally private work place, but a few kilometres away is the Skulpturenpark Waldfrieden, centre of the Cragg Foundation, created in 2005 and curated by the artist together with his current wife Tatiana. Immersed in a magnificent park with a villa and gallery, it opened to the public in October 2008 and is open year round; there is also a restaurant in which typical regional dishes are served. The place reflects Cragg's desire to show his monumental works in a personal way, in an itinerary through nature, and also to regularly promote the work of other contemporary sculptors. "Villa Waldfrieden is an important example of 'anthroposophical' architecture, based on the philosophy of Rudolph Steiner," he explains. "Here there are no right angles, only round ones, and so inside you feel like you are in a cave. The complex was conceived by the architect Franz Krause between 1946 and 1949 for the entrepreneur Kurt Herberts, who managed a factory of industrial paints in Wuppertal. Herberts, who was also a modern art collector and well-known writer, saved many Bauhaus artists persecuted by the Nazi regime by employing them in his factory". After his death, the villa was left abandoned for years and was to be sold by his heirs; if Cragg had not discovered it, the place would have become a municipal crematorium. After the purchase, the villa and park underwent necessary restoration and renewal. "Now the building is used for inaugurations and conferences, but sometimes I shut myself up in one of the upper floors to draw. In contrast we completely reconstructed the gallery, because the idea was not only to exhibit artwork, but also to collect the work of other artists and organise concerts. The first exhibition was dedicated to Eduardo Chillida; at the moment there is a Richard Long solo show, and shows dedicated to Calder and Jean Tinguely will be held in the near future". As in Cragg's studio, here the large, high windows enable communion with the surrounding landscape. For Cragg, physical matter is in fact the basis of experience. As a whole, his work is a kind of profound and articulate enquiry into the natural and industrial environment that surrounds man, and on the relationship between the two. Beginning with the Turner Prize in 1988, Cragg has received numerous international awards (the Japanese Praemium Imperiale, in 2007, was the most recent) and many official recognitions; recently he has returned to exhibit at the Lisson Gallery in London (his first solo show was held there in 1979) where he is presenting five large sculptures, a group of smaller works and a series of drawings (until the 18th of this month). This selection of works demonstrates how much Cragg has developed artistically. The show will be followed by exhibitions in Europe, including a collective show in May at Wolfsburg, in Germany, another in July at the Kunstmuseum in Bonn and a solo show in September at the Ca' Pesaro in Venice. *Chiara Donn*

**THE AVENGERS. INTO THE REAL BRITISH MOOD** (page 158) Among the various beacons from the sixties whose light can still be seen today, the television series "The Avengers" is one of the most brilliant. Conceived by Sydney Newman and produced in the United Kingdom between 1961 and '69, with seven consecutive seasons broadcast in 90 different countries, the episodes featured the leading character in his bowler hat and smart suit – agent John Steed, played by Patrick McNee (who created his own suits, except for a brief designer interlude from Cardin) – and a tight-fitted, black leather-suit worn by the amazon lead woman; first by Honor Blackman, alias Cathy Gale (1961-64), then the legendary Dana Rigg-Emma Peel, whose charismatic presence coincided with the change to colour (1967), and finally, for the last run of the series, Canadian actress Linda Thorson in the role of the young (and youthful) Tara King. If the costumes had made the "Avengers" style up until '64, in the 1965-66 season designer Harry Pottle revolutionised the history of English television stage design; and this was further intensified (destroyed, according to some opinions) during the last two seasons by Robert Jones. These two managed to turn the environments into the indispensable materialization of the otherwise abstract nature of the characters and their world. While set design as an "art" was traditionally believed to be the domain of the silver screen, Pottle and Jones demonstrated how television, despite its break-neck

speeds (screenplay and sets created over a weekend), could free stage design from the naturalism of cinema. In his book "Reading between Designs. Visual Imagery and the Generation of Meaning in 'The Avengers', 'The Prisoner' and 'Dr. Who'", written together with J. Braker (2003, University of Texas Press), Piers D. Britton, lecturer in art history at the University of Redlands, shows how the set design and furnishings in these three series, especially the first, thanks to the work of practically unknown artists, express through the language of stylisation, artifice, paradox (and self-reference) the historical passage between post-modernism and pop culture. According to Britton, more than being a series with a style "The Avengers" was a series about style; for the first time a popular product was also both an experimental work and a global success. The point in common between the three series, according to Britton, was the emphasis placed on a stylised imaginary environment, associated rather surprisingly to realistic design; an interior design of the absurd expressing post-modern irony, defined by Umberto Eco as a challenge against time, playing at a distance with what has been "already said" and "already seen". In this specific case, Pottle plays along with his public mentally, using kitsch and cliché to express the concept of dissimulation that underlies the series. "He saw kitsch," Britton explains, "as having a satirical potential because he worked on 'The Avengers' in a period when refined middle-class taste held sway in England, and kitsch expressed the vulgarity of the parvenu and the foreigner in a comical fashion". On the other hand, cliché provided a two-sided reading: "The authors understood that, contrary to satire, it was a highly exportable commodity. Therefore, no matter which way the English understood it, the series provided a very inviting cliché of 'Brit' identity for foreign audiences. If some English viewers found Tara's apartment, decorated by Kenneth Tait, to be youthful and daring, and others found it vulgar, across the Channel it projected a hip image of 'Englishness', like the shops of Carnaby Street". It was no chance that Tara's address was 9 Primrose Crescent. From 1968, the principal of dissimulation became exasperated, episode after episode it became a playful mechanism reflected as much in Tara King's home as in the costumes designed by Alun Hughes, becoming the essence of the "Chelsea girl", "a tableau of vintage objects, with extravagant floral patterns, sweet-shop pinks and golds". It was a playground aesthetic, "and the game was one of accumulation: space became tactile, luminous, full of hugeness, objects asking to be touched, pervaded with childish pleasure in things and bright colours". It was an accumulation that was absent, however, in the interiors of the establishment, their state of being above all things was expressed in a form of minimalism, where everything was turned into line and purity, even without any room for art. "Avenger land according to Bob Jones was a world where furnishings were the refined solos of a virtuoso; graceful notes played against a clean bass line. Art objects were transformed into elementary forms, furniture and accessories were emblems of minimalism on a pop scale, in their intensity of colours and purity of form. In such an environment, the art work became an obstruction and appeared when its function was that of caricature". Even colours created categories, like in the mansions of the upper class British government officials; an example is Simon Wakefield's interior in "Love All": "Purple is the colour of sovereignty and empire, green suggests nature, and nothing represented 'Georgian' elegance better than white. Stylised to the maximum, these designs express nostalgia for rural, feudal and aristocratic England; a fantasy England that the series 'The Avengers' made to suit itself, where the emptiness of the set reflected the emptiness of a social world to be parodied". If post-modernism, with its playing with different styles and periods and, according to Britton, its turning the very notion of originality into "old-hat", is beyond the grasp of our everyday reality, today more than ever its sophisticated language would bring back irony to an age where it is lacking. Because, as the American scholar writes, "post-modernism induces a suspension of judgement, an ability to keep things in a state of reciprocal unsolved tension". *Angela Maria Piga*

**DESIGN FORECAST: ZEEV ARAM AND KATARINA NOEVER** (page 164) **ZEEV ARAM.** Quality, quality and quality. This has been my guiding principles over the last 46 years: quality in design, manufacture and service. We still strive to get better. And quality for me is epitomised by Charles Eames. You can still see his influence everywhere: his films, his graphics, his furniture; his famous lounge chair with the ottoman from the early fifties has never become outdated. It is quality. A shining example of truly great design. But these days, what counts for many companies is not to be the best out there, but to always be bigger: therefore profit wins over quality. One has to understand, to be interested in what one does and one's products, not just aim at making money. You could meet Zanotta in his factory running around happy as a child; likewise Dino Gavina: both were passionate and interested in every phase of their projects. When I began, I went to see Gavina in Milan: he said, if he thought I was not the right type of person, he would not do business with me. Luckily, as I am a designer by profession, we got on very well, and in 1964 I started importing furniture from two companies only, Gavina and Flos, a lighting company, into my first showroom in Chelsea, on the Kings Road. Of course, Gavina was already very important. He got the license for Marcel Breuer in 1962 and opened up the gates for companies like Zanotta, who immediately got this message. As a consequence, designers such as the Castiglioni brothers, Zanuso, Magistretti and Joe Colombo became popular and were massively