

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Melvin Edwards

A pioneer in the history of contemporary African-American art, Melvin Edwards is celebrated for his distinctive sculptures and three-dimensional installations created from welded steel, barbed wire, chain and machine parts.

Melvin Edwards was born in 1937 in Houston, USA. He lives and works just outside of New York, USA and in Dakar, Senegal.

While Edwards' formal language clearly engages with the history of abstraction and modern sculpture, his work is born out of the social and political turmoil of the civil rights movement in the United States. Themes of race, protest and social injustice permeate the artist's practice.

Edwards' career began in southern California with a solo exhibition at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 1965. In 1970, he went on to become the first African-American sculptor to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, presenting a ground-breaking installation of work made from barbed wire. Tying with the duplicity of meaning and contradictions embedded in objects, he states in the accompanying catalogue:

"I have always understood the brutalist connotations inherent in materials like barbed wire and links of chain and my creative thoughts have always anticipated the beauty of utilizing that necessary complexity which arises from the use of these materials in what could be called a straight formalist style."

The artist is perhaps best known for his 'Lynch Fragments' series. Inspired by the practices of modernists such as Julio González and David Smith, the series spans three distinct periods from Edwards' life; the 1960s, during which work evolved in response to racial violence in the United States; the 1970s, in protest against the Vietnam War; and from 1978 to the present, during which work for the artist became a vehicle to honour individuals, consider nostalgia and explore his interest in African culture and artefacts. Both the materials – metal objects such as hammers and chisels forged together – and the titles of individual works refer to hard physical labour and the history of brutality against the black body.

Public Art Fund presented the first major survey of the artist's outdoor sculptures at City Hall Park, New York in May 2021, which toured to DeCordova Sculpture Park, Lincoln, Massachusetts in June 2022. A solo exhibition of Edwards' work opened at Dia Beacon, New York in May 2022, featuring three installations that recently entered Dia Foundation's permanent collection. He was awarded the prestigious US Artists Fellowship 2020 and was included in the landmark touring exhibition 'Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power', initiated by Tate Modern, London in 2017. In 2024 Edwards will have his first comprehensive institutional solo exhibition in Europe, at the Fridericianum in Kassel, Germany.

Other notable solo exhibitions include: 'Melvin Edwards', auroras, São Paulo, Brazil; travelling to Museu da República, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, Salvador, Brazil; Museu Nacional da República, Brasília, Brazil and Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo, Brazil (2019); 'Crossroads', Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; travelling to Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans, Louisiana and University of Southern California Fisher Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California (2019); 'Lynch Fragments', Museu de arte de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2018); 'Festivals, Funerals and New Life', David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University, Rhode Island (2017); 'Melvin Edwards', Oklahoma Contemporary, Oklahoma (2016); 'Five Decades', Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas; travelling to Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, New Jersey and Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio (2015); 'Lynch Fragments', Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, Michigan (1998); 'Melvin Edwards Sculpture: A Thirty-Year Retrospective 1963-1993', McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas (1995); 'The Sculpture of Melvin Edwards', UNESCO, Paris, France (1984); 'Melvin Edwards', The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (1979); 'Melvin Edwards', Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1970); 'Melvin Edwards', Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota (1968) and 'Melvin Edwards', Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, California (1965).

Edwards' works are featured in many prominent collections internationally including Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum

Stephen Friedman Gallery

of Modern Art, New York and The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Texas; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC.