

Artist Profile – Melvin Edwards

b. 1937 Houston, TX; lives and works in New York City

Edwards grew up in segregated Houston, Texas, but lived part of his adolescence in integrated Dayton, Ohio. Both his father and grandfather were artistic, skilled in wood carving, and his mother taught him to sew at a young age. In high school, Edwards was one of six students from black high schools chosen to attend art classes at the Houston Museum of Fine Art. Edwards went on to attend the Los Angeles City College for painting and then the University of Southern California, where he discovered sculpture, before ending up at the Los Angeles County Art Institute. Edwards continues to work on his art, travel, and teach, and just in 2014 received his honorary doctorate from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.

Edwards is best known for his small, welded steel sculptures that are an abstract representation of the history of lynching. He uses found and repurposed materials in his sculptures including tools, railroad spikes, and scraps of steel and chains. Edwards believes that using certain colors and forms in his works will express the esthetic sense of African American people and change the way African culture is portrayed in art. Another common theme Edwards circles back to is the idea of home, he spends time travelling trying to make connections between his youth in Houston and African American culture in the U.S. and Africa, paying particular attention to materials used in railroads and their connection to his father and grandfather's pasts.

These *Lynch Fragments* that Edwards is so well-known for are meant to contain many meanings that encompass political topics like personal memory, race, and cultural history, mainly inspired by the Civil Rights Movement. The sculptures bring up the topic of slavery quite often, not just from the title of the series but also because of the specific materials he uses such as nails or padlocks. Edwards' goal with these sculptures is to represent the idea of oppression while adding the juxtaposing idea of liberation, and he is able to do this with his dynamic compositions of incorporating both stillness and movement.

The sculptures Edwards makes, specifically in *Lynch Fragments*, are all done in a similar process. Edwards does not use an assistant or request any help in assembling his pieces, all he uses is a scale he can handle and his own two hands. Edwards hangs almost every piece he creates on the wall, and uses a geometric shape as the sculptural base to hang them with, this causes his sculptures to be restrained. Because they are affixed to the wall, Edwards always incorporates some kind of movement to the pieces, this includes curved lines, sharp points, and even shadowy voids, to make sure his pieces are never passive.

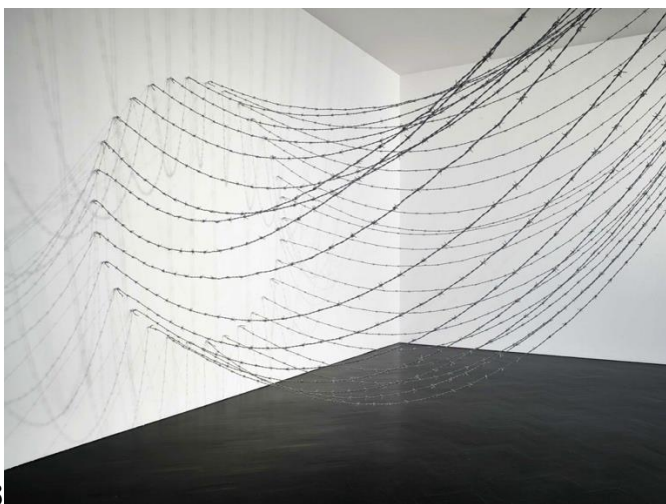
Edwards has received awards that include a Fulbright Fellowship to Zimbabwe, grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, and was also elected into the National Academy of Design in 1992. Some examples of Edwards works are *Some Bright Morning (1)*, which was the piece that started his journey into the Lynch Fragments series, *A Song That Comes to Mind (2)*, and a detail from *Then There Here and Now (3)*.



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