

# PASSAGES

SCULPTURES AND PRINTS, 1989-2017



MELVIN EDWARDS

This catalogue coincides with *Passages: Sculptures and Prints by Melvin Edwards, 1989-2017*, an exhibition organized by the Kingsborough Art Museum at Kingsborough Community College, CUNY. The exhibition was on view from April 18—May 16, 2018.

### **Kingsborough Art Museum**

The City University of New York

Dr. Brian E. Hack, Director

John Descarfino, Art Department Chair

[www.kccartmuseum.org](http://www.kccartmuseum.org)

Catalogue design: Brian E. Hack

All images courtesy of Alexander Gray Associates, NY, and Dieu Donn , NY.

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SCULPTURES AND PRINTS BY MELVIN EDWARDS, 1989-2017

**KAM**  
KINGSBOROUGH ART MUSEUM

## Director's Welcome

It is my great privilege and pleasure to welcome you to our current exhibition, *Passages: Sculptures and Prints by Melvin Edwards*. This marks an opportunity not only to present the work of this pioneering artist to our students, faculty, and other visitors, but also to celebrate the upcoming thirtieth anniversary of *Passage*, the monumental sculpture Edwards created for Kingsborough Community College in 1990. Commissioned for the Marine Academic Center (MAC), *Passage* has been an integral part of daily life at Kingsborough, both visually and philosophically, since its installation in the spring of 1991. This exhibition commemorates that long-standing relationship between Melvin Edwards and Kingsborough, and serves as a thank you to an artist whose life and work has helped give meaning to our own.

*Passages* focuses on three aspects of his illustrious career: first, the work for which he is best known, his powerful

*Lynch Fragments* series, on loan from Alexander Gray Associates, New York; secondly, his exploration of printmaking techniques through examples created at, and on loan from, Dieu Donn  Papermill; and lastly, the commission of *Passage* for Kingsborough Community College in 1989. The maquette (model) for the work, on loan from the family of then-President Leon M. Goldstein, is being exhibited here for the first time.

The Kingsborough Art Museum is pleased to welcome Melvin Edwards back to Kingsborough, and to introduce his compelling art to a new generation of students.

Brian E. Hack, Ph.D.  
Director

*KAM would like to thank Alexander Gray Associates, Dieu Donn , and the Goldstein Family for their generous support and assistance with this exhibition.*

## About the artist

Melvin Edwards was born in Houston, Texas, in 1937. He studied art at Los Angeles City College, the University of Southern California and the Los Angeles County Institute of Art. The sculptor's first solo exhibition (1965) was at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art; five years later (1970) he would become the first African-American sculptor to be given a one-person show at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Edwards has been awarded multiple Fullbright Fellowships, as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship. Truly an international artist, he has traveled extensively, most notably to Senegal, where he has lived and worked over the years, but also to South America, China, Morocco, and other locales across the globe.

His early barbed wire sculptures and *Lynch Fragments* are recognized as pivotal works in the Civil Rights movement, bold statements that address and confront the history of inequality and violence that still haunts the conscience of a nation. Using

the language of Modernist sculpture as developed by Pablo Picasso, Julio González, Wilfredo Lam, and David Smith, Edwards created a rich, unique narrative of poetic associations and historical references that are both personal and poignant. While perhaps less known, his printmaking practice has extended those ideas, offering additional avenues of expression.

His prolific career has been celebrated with retrospective exhibitions at the Neuberger Museum of Art, SUNY (1993, Purchase, NY) and the Nasher Sculpture Center (2015, Dallas, TX), along with countless solo and group exhibitions both here and abroad (including the 2015 Venice Biennale). Most recently Edwards has been represented in several major museum exhibitions: *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (Tate Modern, London); *An Incomplete History of Protest: Selections from the Whitney's Collection, 1940-2017* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2017); and *The Long Run* (MoMA, New York, 2017). Melvin Edwards is represented by Alexander Gray Associates, New York.



Melvin Edwards, *Bogolon*, 2017.  
Welded Steel, 11h x 15.75w x 7d  
inches. Courtesy Alexander Gray  
Associates, New York. ©2018 Melvin  
Edwards / Artists Rights Society  
(ARS), New York.

## ***Lynch Fragments***

Melvin Edwards is perhaps best known for his *Lynch Fragments* series, which began in 1963 with the work *Some Bright Morning*. While Edwards had already been thinking and working in an abstract mode of sculptural representation, his ideas coalesced after reading about the horrors of lynching in *Freedomways*, a quarterly political magazine focused on African-American issues, and in *100 Years of Lynchings* (1962) by Ralph Ginzburg (both of which are on view in this exhibition). A graduate of The City College of New York, CUNY (1949), writer and publisher Ginzburg had compiled nearly three hundred recorded lynchings from 1880 to 1961, a small number of the nearly 5,000 lynchings estimated to have occurred in the United States. Edwards sought to create works as powerful *artistically* as lynching was *destructively*--to counter and combat racism through sculpture that could evoke a myriad of connotations and emotions—from oppression,

pain, struggle, and violence, to creation, tolerance and triumph. Chains, railroad spikes, tool blades, and other objects are fused into sculptures that are both defined by, and defy, their original purposes and meanings.

That Edwards's *Lynch Fragments* are hung on the wall, or suspended, reflects their historical associations to hanging bodies. For Edwards, it was crucial to create work both formally abstract and poetically saturated with meaning. As the artist remarked in a 2010 interview with The Getty Center, "I didn't see why there couldn't be some language and expression in the modern art world that was honestly about what I came from."<sup>1</sup> Created without preparatory drawings, the *Lynch Fragments* are designed as they are welded, as Edwards prefers to "find his way" through a spontaneous creative process. While their form may resemble and share the visual and poetic power of African masks, the

*Lynch Fragments* are not meant as portraits but, as the artist has stated, “fragments of different ideas, both visually and conceptually.”<sup>2</sup>

Over the years, Edwards would return to the series; however, with each iteration the *Lynch Fragments* would shift their meaning—from historical racial violence and the Civil Rights Movement (1960s), to a commentary on the Vietnam War (1970s), and later (1978-Present) to sculptural homages to personages and places, with much of the work relating to Senegalese history and culture.

Right: **Melvin Edwards**,  
*Memory of Winter*, 1996. Welded  
Steel, 13h x 6.75w x 8.63d inches.  
Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates,  
New York. ©2018 Melvin Edwards /  
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.







## Melvin Edwards at Dieu Donn 

Dieu Donn  Papermill is a papermaking and printmaking studio renowned for its encouragement of experimentation and bold techniques. Founded in Soho in 1976, Dieu Donn  (French for *God Given*) now occupies a large and impressive complex at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Melvin Edwards was awarded a residency there in 2000, beginning a long and productive relationship that is represented by the five framed prints exhibited here. It was also in 2000 that Edwards and his late wife, the poet Jayne Cortez (1934-2012), purchased a house in Dakar, Senegal, where he often returns to live and work. Many of the pieces in this exhibition refer to places and individuals he has met in Dakar.

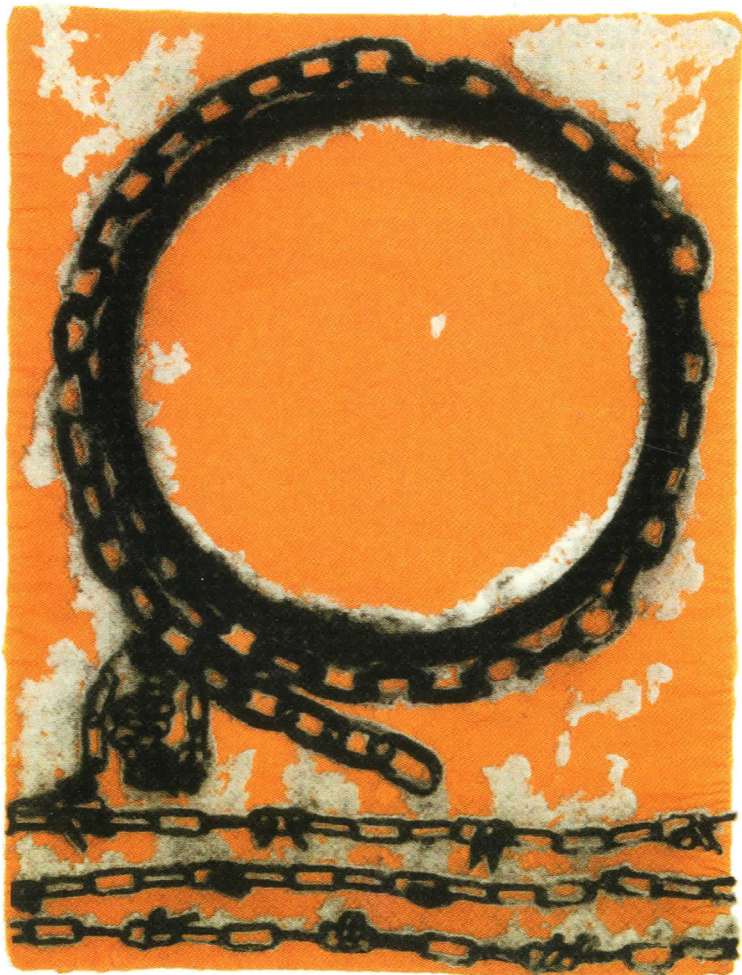
In these prints appear the chains, tools and objects Edwards has long incorporated in his sculpture practice. As with the *Lynch Fragments*, Melvin Edwards works

spontaneously, allowing the prints to develop during the unique printmaking process. Often using a wet technique created at Dieu Donn  called "blowout," Edwards found a new means of expression, as described by Dieu Donn  Project Manager Bridget Donlon:

"...rather than use paint to fill in negative space around [the chains, work gloves, and other tools used as stencils] on top of dry paper, water was sprayed to wash away wet pulp exposed on the surface of a screen not covered by the objects. The remaining pulp was pressed onto a base sheet, still retaining a shadow of the image created through a reductive process where positive and negative spaces are reversed."<sup>3</sup>

Printmaking has long been an art practice running parallel with his work in sculpture, one that allows Edwards to explore new artistic pathways.

Opposite: Melvin Edwards assembling stencils and other objects during a printmaking session at Dieu Donn . Photograph courtesy of Dieu Donn , NY.



**Melvin Edwards,**  
*Dakar Days*, 2006.  
Cotton blowout on pigmented abaca base sheet, 22 x 17 inches  
Courtesy of Dieu Donné  
Papermill, New York.



**Melvin Edwards,**  
*In Gorée, 2006.*  
Cotton blowout on  
pigmented abaca base  
sheet, 22 x 17 inches.  
Courtesy of Dieu Donné  
Papermill, New York.



## ***Passage: Melvin Edwards and Kingsborough***

In 1989 Melvin Edwards received the commission for *Passage*, a monumental stainless steel sculpture that has graced the entrance of the MAC Building since 1991. Painter Emilio Cruz (1938-2004), also represented in the Kingsborough Art Collection, recommended Melvin Edwards to the college's Art Acquisitions Committee, then led by President Leon M. Goldstein (The sculpture *For Emilio Cruz* is included in this exhibition to commemorate the friendship of the two artists). Impressed with Edwards, the committee chose *Passage* from a number of maquettes (models) proposed by the artist; the original steel maquette is on view here for the first time, on loan from the Goldstein family.

*Passage* has many poetic and visual implications: one may think of the Middle Passage, the route on the transatlantic slave trade; the more literal passage one may

make around and through the sculpture; or, as the sculptor has hinted, the intellectual passage undertaken by students as their lives are transformed by education, "the passage through life; advancement through the process of learning."<sup>4</sup>

After its installation in the spring of 1991, *Passage* received a favorable review from Michael Brenson of the *New York Times*, who declared it "like a house with movable rooms," and "one of the clearest of Mel Edwards's sculptures, one of the most successful formally, and one of the most responsive to light and air."<sup>5</sup> *Passage* has been not only a daily part of the Kingsborough landscape for students and faculty, but also the backdrop of nearly thirty years of Commencement Exercises, outdoor concerts, and other campus events.

Opposite: **Melvin Edwards**,  
*Passage*, 1990. Stainless Steel,  
approx. 144 x 144 x 192 inches.  
MAC Building, Kingsborough Com-  
munity College, CUNY, Brooklyn.





## Exhibition Checklist

### *Lynch Fragments*

#### ***Memory of Winter*, 1996**

Welded Steel

13h x 6.75w x 8.63d inches

Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates,  
New York. ©2018 Melvin Edwards/  
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

#### ***August*, 2001**

Welded Steel

11.30h x 6.80w x 4.30d inches

Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates,  
New York; Stephen Friedman Gallery,  
London. ©2018 Melvin Edwards/  
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

#### ***For Emilio Cruz*, 2005**

Welded Steel

14.30h x 17.30w x 6d inches

Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates,  
New York. ©2018 Melvin Edwards/  
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

#### ***Oyo*, 2010**

Welded Steel

10.75 x 5.88w x 5d inches

Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates,  
New York. ©2018 Melvin Edwards/  
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

#### ***Bogolon*, 2017**

Welded Steel

11h x 15.75w x 7d inches

Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates,  
New York. ©2018 Melvin Edwards/  
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Opposite: **Melvin Edwards,  
*For Emilio Cruz*, 2005.** Welded  
Steel, 14.30h x 17.30w x 6d  
inches. Courtesy Alexander  
Gray Associates, New York.  
©2018 Melvin Edwards /  
Artists Rights Society (ARS),  
New York.

## ***Melvin Edwards at Dieu Donn ***

### ***Ognu Knows, 2000***

Stenciled cotton/polyester rag pulp on linen base sheet, pigment, 39 x 28 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Dieu Donn  Papermill, New York.

### ***Rufisque, Les Routes du Fer, 2002***

Stenciled cotton pulp on linen base sheet, pigment, 39 x 58 inches. Courtesy of Dieu Donn  Papermill, New York.

### ***In Gor e, 2006***

Cotton blowout on pigmented abaca base sheet, 22 x 17 inches. Courtesy of Dieu Donn  Papermill, New York.

### ***Dakar Days, 2006***

Cotton blowout on pigmented abaca base sheet, 22 x 17 inches. Courtesy of Dieu Donn  Papermill, New York.

### ***Sud foire, 2006***

Cotton blowout on pigmented abaca base sheet, 22 x 17 inches. Courtesy of Dieu Donn  Papermill, New York.

## ***Passage: Melvin Edwards and Kingsborough***

### ***Maquette for Passage***

Welded Steel  
Courtesy of The Goldstein Family, New York.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Melvin Edwards Speaks About His Works" [Video], *Pacific Standard Time at the Getty Center, The Getty Center*, last accessed April 10, 2018. <http://blogs.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/archives/v11/>.

<sup>2</sup>The Getty Center, "Melvin Edwards Speaks About His Works."

<sup>3</sup>Bridget Donlon, "Material Synergy: Paper, Process, and Potential," in *Pure Pulp: Contemporary Artists Working in Paper at Dieu Donn * (New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2016), 12.

<sup>4</sup>"Mel Edwards Sculpture Installed at MAC," *Kingsborough Community College Currents* (Brooklyn: Kingsborough Community College, 7:3 (Spring 1991),1.

<sup>5</sup>Michael Brenson, "Natural Gallery: Cityful of Sculpture Under the Sky," *New York Times*, July 26, 1991, C28.

Front cover: Melvin Edwards, *August*, 2001. Welded Steel, 11.30h x 6.80w x 4.30d inches. Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.  2018 Melvin Edwards / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Back cover: Melvin Edwards, *Bogolon* [detail], 2017. Welded Steel, 11h x 15.75w x 7d inches. Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York.  2018 Melvin Edwards / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

