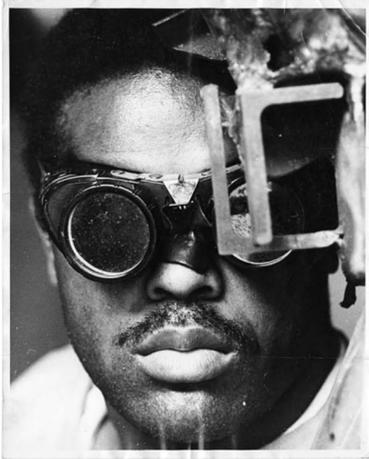


# 28 Greats

*A Celebration of African-American Art and Artists*



Melvin Edwards in his welding gear, 1965.

For generations of Kingsborough students and faculty, the art of sculptor **Melvin Edwards** (b. 1937, left) has been a beloved part of their campus experience. Born in Houston, Texas, Edwards studied art at Los Angeles City College, the University of Southern California, and the Los Angeles County Institute of Art. His first solo exhibition (1965) was at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art; five years later 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.



Melvin Edwards, *Some Bright Morning (Lynch Fragment)*, 1963. Welded steel, 14 1/4 x 9 1/4 x 5 inches. Alexander Gray Associates, New York. ©Melvin Edwards/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

He is perhaps best known for the *Lynch Fragments* series that he began in 1963, which addresses and confronts the history of inequality and violence that still haunts the conscience of the nation. The first of these was *Some Bright Morning* (right, top). Unlike most sculptures, these welded assemblages are installed on the wall, at a height that requires an upward viewing. While Edwards had already been thinking and working in an abstract mode of sculptural representation, his ideas for the *Lynch Fragments* coalesced after reading about the horrors of lynching in *Freedomways*, a quarterly political magazine focused on African-American issues. Edwards sought to create works that were as powerful *artistically* as lynching was *destructively*, to counter and combat racism through sculpture that evokes 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. Over the years, Edwards would return to the series; however, with each iteration the *Lynch Fragments* would shift their meaning, from Civil Rights (1960s) to the Vietnam War (1970s) to sculptural homages to people and places (1978-present). A more recent example of the series from 2005 (right, center) is dedicated to his friend Emilio Cruz (1938-2004), a painter whose work is part of Kingsborough Community College's permanent art collection.



Melvin Edwards, *For Emilio Cruz*, 2005. Welded Steel, 14 1/2 x 17 1/2 x 6 inches. Alexander Gray Associates, New York. ©Melvin Edwards/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Melvin Edwards with his sculpture *Passage*, April 18, 2018, Kingsborough Community College campus.. Photograph by Brian E. Hack, Kingsborough Museum of Art.

Edwards is also known for his large public monuments, including *Passage*, the monumental stainless steel sculpture that has graced the entrance of the MAC Building since 1991. *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 the intellectual passage undertaken by students as their lives are transformed by education, or, as the sculptor has hinted, the "passage through life; advancement through the process of learning." *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. In 2018 Melvin Edwards returned to Kingsborough (left) on the occasion of the KAM exhibition, *Passages: Sculptures and Prints by Melvin Edwards, 1989-2017*.