
Review/Art

By MICHAEL BRENSON

Melvin Edwards

CDS Gallery
13 East 75th Street
Through tomorrow

This show introduces the gallery public to different aspects of Melvin Edwards's work. "To Listen" is a freestanding stainless-steel sculpture, more than seven feet tall, representing Mr. Edwards's interest in monumental public sculpture about memory and hope. The sculpture is simple in form, roughly like two doors set at a right angle, and with its burnished surfaces, it feels light. Set on one edge of the work — seemingly crawling along it like caterpillars — are four large chain links and one half-link shaped like a good luck horseshoe that lifts the sculpture toward the sky.

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The exhibition includes 17 sculptures from the "Lynch Fragment" series for which Mr. Edwards is best known. These works are small, rarely more than a foot tall, and they are placed on the wall at eye level so that they confront the viewer like masks. Unlike "To Listen," they seem so heavy from their mass of steel and emotion as to be almost unliftable. Although they are not all equally successful, each has something about it that is compelling. None are overbearing because of the fantasy and wit of the juxtapositions and the improvisational speed with which hard steel seems to have been bent and shaped as if it were bamboo or tin. While his large sculptures seem made, many of the small ones seem to have created themselves.

The "Lynch Fragments" incorporate all sorts of found objects, including shears, cups or spades. Mr. Edwards continues to use objects, particularly tools, that he could have found or made. What is new is that a number of the "Lynch Fragments" bear no relation to heads or masks: they can be like compartments in which some dark, magical secret is contained. They suggest Surrealism but they have a hard physical weight that Surrealism never had. With their visual puns, psychological and cultural history and sculptural freedom, the "Lynch Fragments" deserve serious study.