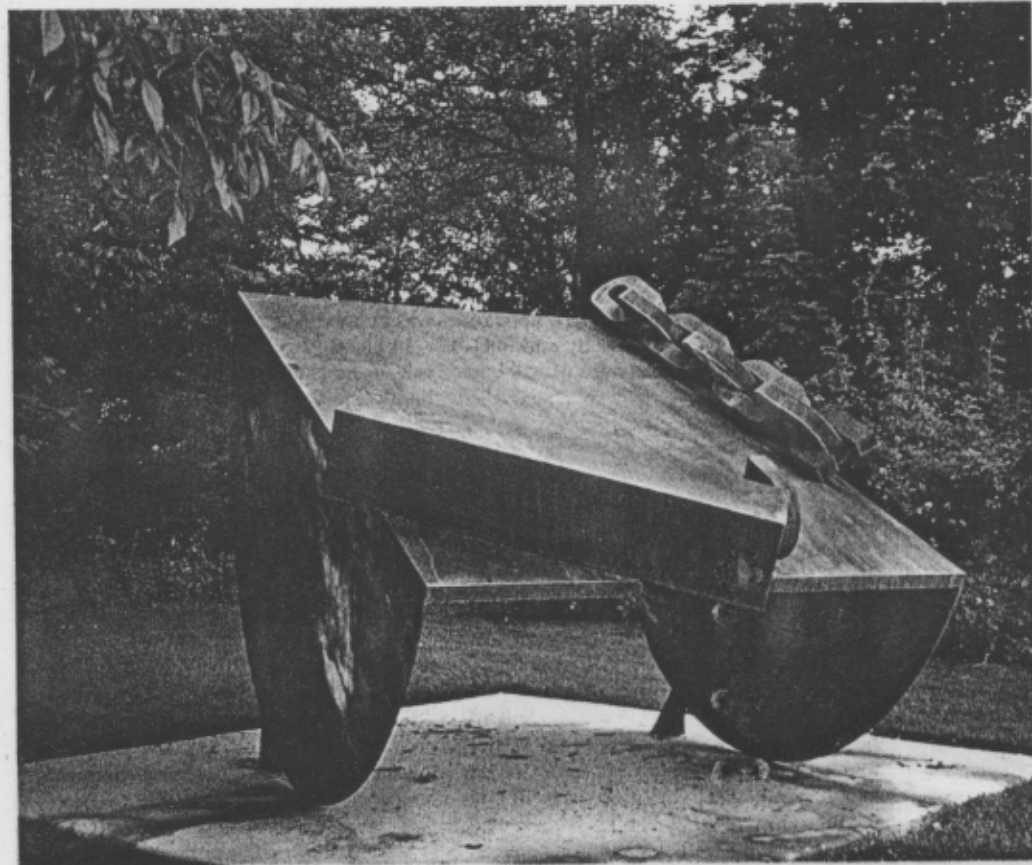


NEW YORK

Mel Edwards' Lyric Outcry



Mel Edwards, *Before Words*, 1990, steel, 9 by 8 by 10 feet. Neuberger Museum of Art.

In this major retrospective at the Neuberger Museum of Art at the State University of New York in Purchase, African-American sculptor Melvin Edwards takes his rightful place among the best artists working today. The 133 pieces on display, drawn from several different kinds of work, made elegant use of the modernist idiom, but Edwards' real achievement lies in his ability to give a lasting form to political and social anger. As much a lyric outcry as a coming to terms, the sculptures, especially the "Lynch Fragments" series (shown both at the Neuberger and at New York's CDS gallery), have the power of metaphor—even when created in response to specific historical events. The transformation of Edwards' wrath into visionary reliefs keeps his art remarkably alive.

The "Lynch Fragments" are welded-relief assemblages composed of tools that resonate across the past: chains, locks, spikes,

wrenches, hammers, gears, nuts and bolts. In these small-scale works, the composition bristles with activity, as if Edwards had decided to take the worst of the past and reform it into pieces dense with meaning. These works were by far the most numerous of the show, yet they provoked endless interest in their subtle modulations of form and historical directness.

Another group of sculptures, resembling rocking chairs, seemed less tied to an unjust past. Such pieces as *Before Words* and *Pamberi* have the strong forms associated with the sculptor: planes are soldered together in a manner reminiscent of David Smith's work. Yet these pieces, too, originate in memory—the rocker of his grandmother Coco. Their formal elegance shows another side of the artist.

The large public works maintain ties with African culture as well as modernist form.

Gate of Ogun might be the stylized entry to a village dwelling: Ogun is the name of an African patron saint of metalworkers. Other pieces make use of shield forms. What is remarkable about these works is that Edwards is as sure with large shapes as he is with small. In the concurrent show at CDS, Edwards contributed still more examples of his "Lynch Fragments," as well as a few outstanding pedestal sculptures. Together, museum exhibition and gallery show proved just how inventive and prolific this fine sculptor has been for many years.

—Jonathan Goodman

Mark di Suvero

GAGOSIAN

Have we seen enough of monumental sculpture? Didn't we burn out on rusted I-beams and brown slabs of steel long ago? Apparently not. The recent single-sculpture installation by Mark di Suvero at Gagosian's downtown space indicates that perhaps the medium is only beginning to be explored.

Di Suvero's 8 tons of metal—in this case 18-inch H-beams and one-inch-thick hand-cut steel—is surprisingly simple in format: a K-shape intersects a triangle that is also intersected by a pair of bisecting hemispherical circles. It is 26 feet at its longest point, and its diagonals

stopped short of pushing through the 20-foot-high ceiling of the skylit gallery.

The viewer is drawn in by the way the sculpture appears completely different from every angle and by its contradictions: a sense of weightlessness despite obvious tonnage, and a harmonic balance amid asymmetry. In the past, di Suvero's ideas seemed to spring directly from the materials, from the found objects and metals he used. In this, his most recent piece, there's a new logic and coherence as his shapes—simplified and therefore more universal—take on mysterious, symbolic references.

Titled *Aurora*, the construction simultaneously suggests both space and spaceship—or maybe, with its gritty, rusted surface and knobby screw heads, an artifact dredged from the oceans of Atlantis. It looks entirely new while evoking memories of Cubism and Russian Constructivism in its skillful manip-

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