

Art in America

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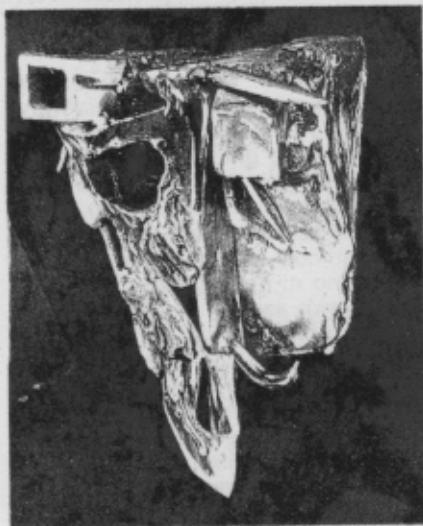
Melvin Edwards at CDS

The small, wall-hung welded metal sculptures shown at CDS are not related by name to the "Lynch Fragments" that Melvin Edwards has been making intermittently since 1963. These new works are collectively called "The Way of Fire," for the physical and spiritual force enabling their creation. Like *The Gate of Ogun*, a monumental sculpture that summered on the White House lawn, the new work is dedicated to Ogun, the Yoruba and Benin god of fire and metalwork. But these sculptures are close enough to the "Lynch Fragments" to elaborate that body of work's meanings while also staking new ground.

Many of the sculptures in "The Way of Fire" are made of brushed stainless steel and appear as flashy as new cutlery. Indeed, pieces of flatware here and there emerge from the cut and twisted metal: a slotted spoon in *Origins*, a fancier spoon and some knives in *Protocol*. *Warning*, a horsehead-shaped form, is spiked with what could be meat hooks. Jagged-edged, scarred with thickly welded seams that look like great raised welts, these sculptures would be studies in unbridled anger if it weren't for their showy shine and the clean geometry that punctuates their forms. But even these ingratiating touches have a kind of a wicked smile.

The vocabulary employed in "Lynch Fragments" appears in several works. *Well Done* is a burnt-looking tangle of darkly patinated cast iron, in which a big bolt and a few chain links emerge. The spiky *Orozco* includes a heavy chain, *RPM* a horseshoe and a massive, brutal-looking railroad-tie nail. More important, the new work is consistent with its predecessors in its sense of scale. Portable and conversational, these sculptures invite themselves in, but seem ready to detonate on contact.

Edwards, who came of age in the late '60s, has always been a political artist. Violence against



Melvin Edwards: *Warning*, 1996, welded stainless steel, 12 by 7 1/2 by 6 1/2 inches; at CDS.