



Melvin Edwards



Alexander Gray Associates

Melvin Edwards

**Melvin Edwards: *In Oklahoma***

April 13–May 20, 2017

Alexander Gray Associates



Agricole, detail, 2016

### Melvin Edwards in Conversation with Carly Fischer

New York, NY, March 30–April 1, 2017

**Carly Fischer:** Let's discuss some important moments in your life. Your family's history and your own path of migration around the United States trace some key moments of migration for larger black communities. How did your family come to live in the Fifth Ward of Houston' by the time you were born, after living in both Alabama and Louisiana?

**Melvin Edwards:** You really have to go back to the end of slavery. Part of the family came from Alabama to East Texas. Land was very cheap, Texas was advertising cheap land because they had a lot of it and very few people. Texas wasn't interested in the Native Americans that were there; in fact, they were dispossessing them of their land. My family settled in Texas between 1870 and 1880. My grandmother's older brother was born in Texas in 1875. Their father was one of the founders of the Dotson community. In my house in Houston, my grandmother Cora was one of the first ones who migrated out of the farmland, which was in two counties: Panola and Rusk. In fact, the middle of this village was divided. Panola is the Native American word for Cotton. Panola County and the Native American's whose language it would have come from were Caddo. There's some relationship to my family and Cherokee, possibly others. I know this because on the fourth Monday in August, the day after our annual family reunions I always go to the Henderson Texas Rusk County Library, which has a genealogy section. On one of those Mondays, we checked the Cherokee roll book and we found family going back to about 1850.

**CF:** Your interest in historical narratives and your own family's history are often reflected in your choice of artwork titles that are both poetic and narrative. They invite us to learn more about people and places. Can you describe your inclination to closely identify the places you have visited with the people you have met?

**ME:** Everyplace does something, has done something and there is always something if you spend enough time. The term "tourism" has been so distorted by commerce that people don't understand that you really *tour* the word to know it better. My high school art teacher said something that was simple and profound. Everybody has heard some version of this, but I don't think they took it the way I did. She said, "Make your art from your life, from what you encounter in the world." I read a lot, so "other places" was a natural part of my thinking. By age seven, I had been to other places, including Dayton, Ohio where we lived until I was 12 [1949]. We went by train. This was

during World War II, so I was about as tall as the revolvers the soldiers were wearing. We took the train from Texarkana, Texas, and went by bus from Houston to Minden, Louisiana to see my grandmother. We passed through St. Louis, Missouri where we changed trains and had half a day there. I remember a fountain with what I now know were dolphins. The next time I was in St. Louis, I was 29-years-old driving through from California to New York, it was 1967. I was driving around and I saw the fountain that I had seen when I was a kid and I said “My god, it’s there, it’s real.”

**CF:** Let’s talk about your time in Ohio. You lived in Dayton from 1944 until 1949. Tell me about that time, and what your experiences were transitioning from a legally segregated childhood in Texas to then attending an integrated school in Ohio?

**ME:** Well because you’re a child, and the community is big, it’s just your family and friends and people you go to church with or kids you play with. The community that I lived in outside Houston was one of the little villages where black employees for Humble Oil [now Exxon Mobil] worked. There was no transition for me [from Houston to Ohio]. Kids were just kids and some looked different, but this has been a little difficult to explain to people over time. I just had a life in one place without white people, and then later in Ohio, I was with some other children, but that didn’t mean much to me. Now, to my parents, it meant a lot. Because they understood the differences and the potential. My father’s job was unusual for most black men at that time, and very different from our Texas life. He worked in an all white setting as an administrator for the Boy Scouts. He was the first black executive that they ever had in Dayton. [This] didn’t mean anything to me. When I got to camp, there were a lot of Boy Scouts, and thinking back, I don’t remember any black ones; but I was 7. I just went to see dad on Sunday at camp, I didn’t know what that world was like. When I see the photographs that remain, I understand his predicament. Upon our arrival to Dayton, we lived in a relatively new housing project. I now know this project was built by [President Franklin Delano] Roosevelt and the WPA, to take society out of Depression. It was nice housing, we had a two story apartment in this building with six units. We had two bedrooms upstairs and a living room and kitchen downstairs. We had a coal furnace, where I learned how to use coal to keep the heat going in the winter. The thing I remember the most are my friends, and winter. The first winter, I can still see it . . . the gardens looked like a postcard with the lights glittering in the distance and snow; a totally romantic notion. I had seen Christmas cards, but here was the real thing. After a few years, my father and the Boy Scouts

fell out, this coincided with the Post-War depression in the Midwest and we got hit very hard economically. So, we ultimately moved back to Texas in 1949. I first learned about art in Ohio, but when I got back to Texas, certain progressive things happened [to me] . . . I was lucky, as I was one of two black students from Phillis Wheatley High School, and one of the six students from three black high schools, who was able to attend class at the museum one day a week.



Fig 1 Melvin Edwards (no. 44) playing for Phillis Wheatley High School football team, Houston, TX, 1954

**CF:** When you moved back to Texas football and swimming became big parts of your life (fig. 1). You’ve mentioned that you first traveled to Oklahoma in high school for a football game that you lost . . .

**ME:** Terribly . . . The worst in the school’s history. The visual things I remember from the first trip, were two. We left Houston and it was 80°[F], this was October or early November, and when we arrived in Oklahoma it was 7°[F]. The other thing that I remember, which is more physical, were the oil wells in people’s

backyards! I came from an oil center, you know my grandfather and my father worked for Humble Oil, but [in Oklahoma] people had chickens and an oil well in their garden. I knew more from reading about Oklahoma than from my first visit. I had read a lot about the history of the Native American peoples who were taken, sent, or driven there. My own grandfather was going to move there. He had been saving money to move to Oklahoma to buy land, but when he got home, his family situation had changed so he just took the family to Texas. Growing up in Texas was good for me. I think it was better for my life that we were in the South in the neighborhood where my parents had lived. I went to the high school that my father and mother went to. Some teachers had taught my parents, others had been their classmates. My parents knew what was going on with me. Not that it was much anyway. I wasn’t a problematic young person. Though, our neighborhood could be a violent and dynamic section; you could get killed, usually by knife or pistol. The other name for my area, the Fifth Ward, was “Bloody Fifth.”

**CF:** You mentioned your keen interest in reading. A few years ago you read “The Warmth of Other Suns,” a book about migration from the South in the twentieth century. Why was that was so striking to you and your own relationship to that history?



**ME:** Well, just about everyone I met anywhere I went was subject to paths of mass migration. While that book is specific to black people, the truth is that migration impacted all communities. For instance, when I was in junior college in California, on my football team, we had Chuck Ponti, an Italian, another white guy was from a small town in Texas, other black students who came from immigrant [families] living in Texas, one Chinese-American guy was from Hawaii, and I remember a mixed Portuguese teammate. Southern California is a very mixed place, so we always shared a little bit about our heritages among each other.

**CF:** Now that you mention California, you have said that when you first arrived in Los Angeles in 1955, very little of the art scene there was African American, but in the years that you lived there, that changed . . .

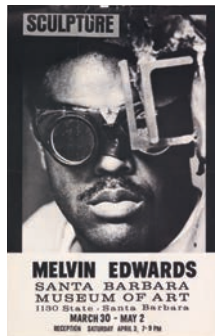


Fig 2 Exhibition poster, Melvin Edwards, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1965

**ME:** It did but it didn't change much by the time I left. People talk about the Brockman Gallery, I left in January of 1967 and they opened in June of that year. The spark for the Afro-American arts movement was the [Watts] riot, it was the revolution really.<sup>2</sup> For a lot of people that was the [key] moment. It happened four months after I had my first one-man show at the Santa Barbara Museum (fig. 2),<sup>3</sup> so the Rebellion was different for me or Danny Johnson, or Ronald Miyashiro or Ed Bereal, Marvin Harden, or Virginia Jaramillo; those of us who had already sort of cracked the art scene. I would say the scene for black *culture* was expanding rapidly. In 1964, Jayne [Cortez]<sup>4</sup> founded the first black theater group organization in Watts, called the Watts Repertory Theater. That was a year before the Watts Rebellion. She grew up in Watts so she understood the community and its needs. We didn't know each other then, our relationship started later in New York. What I'm getting at is that the whole cultural scene for black people was expanding, but not art exhibitions. By 1962 I had gradually gotten to know people [from the art scene], but by January 10 of 1967 I was in my station wagon headed East.

**CF:** You didn't live close to Watts at the time, but you were aware of the Rebellion pretty much as it happened, and you went to the neighborhood with your camera to document the streets (fig. 3). How did the visual landscape of the city change because of and after the riots?



Fig 3 Central Avenue, after the Watts Rebellion, Los Angeles, CA, 1965  
Photo: Melvin Edwards



Fig 4 Watts Festival, Los Angeles, CA, 1966  
Photo: Melvin Edwards



Fig 5 Melvin Edwards, 209 East Second Street Studio, New York, February 20, 1970  
Photo: Fred McDarrah

**ME:** Well the Rebellion was all over South and Central L.A. Most of my photographs are not in Watts but are along Central Avenue, which was the important black cultural corridor of Los Angeles. From WWII onwards, it was very famous for music and culture. In the early 1960s I would go to the east of Central Avenue to buy steel at scrap yards, and then I'd stop for breakfast on Central Avenue and visit the Gordon Bookstore, which specialized in Black Culture. It was like Harlem for New York. Watts was more residential. The old heart of L.A.'s black community was between 40th and 50th street on Central Avenue, which at the time was growing and became a symbol. When the Rebellion happened, Watts symbolically became the center that Central Avenue had been. The year after, in 1966, I took photographs at the Watts Festival. Those photos turned out to be very good for me and for my memories of history. There's one photograph of these three or four young women in a car and the politicians. They were the beauty queens, "Miss Watts." As it turned out, one of them, Tamu Harper—who was a young actress at the time—was one of Jayne's students, I didn't know this until I showed the picture to her years later (fig. 4). In some of the photographs, people were trying to get the police and the youngsters together, so you see a police man with a young black man, or people just standing . . . it was a beautiful day. Very different from the dynamics of the year before. Jayne had grown up in Watts since 1943. She knew its cultural dynamic, and she remembered the Mexican community and the Gypsies that came every year to open fields and lots and parked their trailers. There were a lot of interactions that are not talked about. When you just say "black and white" it sounds simple, but it was much more complex than that.

**CF:** You mentioned you moved from Los Angeles to New York City in 1967. Your first house/studio was on Avenue B and Second Street (fig. 5). I believe you were living in close proximity to other artists. Describe how

the neighborhood, city, and artistic community to which you arrived impacted your work?

**ME:** The artistic community that I knew were the people around Park Place Gallery: David Novros, Bob Duran, Bob Grovesnor, Mark DiSuvero, Richard Van Buren, Paul Mogensen. Several of them were California migrants, like Ron Miyashiro, Danny Johnson, and Virginia Jaramillo. In fact, everybody I just named lived in California at one point and came east. I started meeting with people who came to Tamarind Print Center in California because they often were a part of the New York art world. I was also friendly with George Sugarman, Peter Bradley, Leon Golub, Nancy

Spero, Tom Clancy, and Sal Romano. By then, my work was changing anyway. I had already started to play with a geometric framework. That led to the idea that maybe color was applicable and I did some experiments. The first summer after I got to New York, the summer of 1968, I was invited as the Artist-in-Residence at the Sabanthi Community Center in Minneapolis and there I just really cut the cord, and decided to work with geometric forms and colored paint, and it worked (fig. 6). That was also the period when I met William T. Williams and Jack Whitten and a whole group of people they referred to in *Spiral*,<sup>5</sup> starting with Bill Majors the printmaker. I met him at the Museum of Modern Art. He was a guard there and I went up to him and said, "Hey man, are you an artist?" He looked at me, although he was always wearing dark glasses, and said, "Everybody asks me where's the restroom or where's the Picasso, and you ask me, am I an artist." We became

good friends. It turned out that his studio was a meeting place for Romare Bearden, Norman Lewis, and others, so I met a great number of people there, most of them generationally much older than me.

**CF:** We talked about the early time in New York and you mentioned Minneapolis in 1968. You also spent just a few days in Chicago in 1968, and returned in 1972. Can you talk about the projects you undertook there?

**ME:** In Chicago I was working on an exhibition of three French artists, including [Jean] Tinguely.<sup>6</sup> I was in charge of making the Tinguely's function as I had done in Los Angeles in 1966 at Dwan Gallery. Always, my focus in Chicago was Richard Hunt, who was my friend. We had met in 1964 in L.A., he also worked in the Tamarind Workshop and taught at Chouinard Art School.



Fig 6 Clipping, *The Minneapolis Star*, August 14, 1968; featuring Edwards' project at the Sabanthi Community Center in Minneapolis

**CF:** In the late 1960s and early 1970s in New York we see the emergence of exhibitions thematically focused on African-American artists, including some group shows that you made a point to turn down. Can you talk about the museum landscape of the time and maybe some of your frustrations?

**ME:** I was new to New York and I guess I was meeting the right people at the right time in some respects. When you're new, whatever's going on when you get there, as far as you know, has been going on 100 years. I knew better than that when it came to race. The galleries wouldn't do anything. I didn't have a gallery show until I was over 50, even though I arrived to the city at age 29. I've never believed, in relation to race, that begging gets you anywhere. Especially when it comes to your own character. It doesn't help the way that people perceive you. I don't want anyone to feel sorry for me. My father and mother lived and fought. His father lived and fought . . . you know they struggled with their realities. There's nothing wrong with an exhibition being all black. But what's the real reason for the exhibition? We're all black. Okay, *now* what? In other words, what about the art, does it have something in common or something distinct to say? Either in relation to the general history of art, or the topical recent history, or the local state or neighborhood. Nobody calls an exhibition of all white artists a "white" exhibition. There is a reason for saying you're doing a "black" exhibition: it's because you haven't done any before. After you've done three, you don't have to say it anymore. I'm not immune to knowledge. It's not about me, it's really the history of all of us. I'm the one who may be pointing out these facts, and others may not want to talk about it, and that's fine. But we just have to keep understanding what's happening and try to do things in a better way.

**CF:** You mentioned William T. Williams with whom you collaborated with as part of the Smokehouse Collective. Can you describe your relationship and the collective?



Fig 7 Art work created by Smokehouse Associates, William T. Williams, Melvin Edwards, Guy Ciarcia and Billy Rose. Photo: Robert Colton, New York, NY; Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY

**ME:** Smokehouse was initiated by Williams in 1968, within a year of when we met (fig. 7). It started with him and then it became a collaboration . . . and we thought it should be a collaborative creative process; that's why none of our names were ever on anything. The name "Smokehouse" came from William's North Carolina experience. That's where you smoke the meat to preserve it for the year. It was an idea of cultural preservation and preparing for the future. Conceptually, we

quickly got to the notion of the difference between preaching and doing. Ours were wall paintings, not murals to tell people what was wrong or what to do, but to actually create something that changed the area physically.

**CF:** This leads me to ask, how does architecture inform your art?

**ME:** In Oklahoma, I enjoyed meeting the architect Rand Elliot, we hit it off because of our shared interest in Le Corbusier, I had been interested in him since the late 1950s. My interest in relating to architects has been there for some years as with the architects Joe Black and the late Max Bond, with whom I visited Gabon to attend an art and architecture conference. I also took some architecture classes in high school. I guess through the years there's been a thread in my head that has to do with architecture.



Fig 8 Melvin Edwards and Jayne Cortez, Ibadan, Nigeria, 1970

**CF:** You mentioned Gabon, you took your first trip to Africa in 1970 with Jayne Cortez, and have since traveled around the continent, and to other countries around the world with significant black communities (fig. 8). Tell me about your interest in the larger African diaspora, beyond the United States, and how that has informed your view of disparate parts of the world as intrinsically connected.

**ME:** You know, one of the things that I've mentioned about L.A., there's a picture of the football team and just the ends: six of us. Three of us were black, one was Italian, one Asian, and one was Mexican. Sometimes, when you're looking at things for one reason, like I look at that picture

for sentimental reasons, you also realize other [things]: this diversity really is Los Angeles. It truly represents the United States. It's what keeps happening in the world. And if you look at world history, this has happened over and over again. Any country that has a name now did not have those borders 200 years ago. It doesn't matter where you go. [Donald] Trump is saying "make America great again," when was it great? What's greatness? Nobody defines what is greatness in a society. Maybe we don't need that question or that answer. Maybe what we need is to ask how do we make life better for human beings. I take the term aesthetics and I don't limit it to painting and sculpture, but to the quality of human life. So if you have that notion, then apply it to everything. Anything that human beings have invented, we were usually trying to do something that was an improvement. I don't know of any society that's worked perfectly. Well, art as made by individuals is one thing, art as a focus for a society can be many other things. Maybe things like that are conceptually significant in the aesthetics of human beings. And if it is, which I believe it is, I don't think there's a point

where you can say "okay we can stop, we're perfect now." That's nowhere near the case.

**CF:** All of this leads me to your 2015 retrospective *Melvin Edwards: Five Decades*,<sup>7</sup> which first opened at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas. What was it like to return to Texas with five decades of work, so much of it informed by your family history and personal experiences?

**ME:** It felt very good to be there, and interesting things happened, for example one of my high school classmates, J.E. Franklin, who is a writer here in New York, bought a ticket and came. My friend from Benin City, Daniel Inneh, whose father was chief of the bronze casters, he and his daughter and her family who were living in Houston at the time, they came to the opening. That was incredible. In my sense of what art history is, what genealogical history, my personal involvement there, the opening at the Nasher was extraordinary. Memories came back, for example, I had played against a high school football team across the street from Booker T. Washington High School, which is down the street from the Museum. I had relatives who grew up and went to school in Dallas. It just felt wonderful to tell the truth. And then it turned out that all three places that the show travelled to were relevant to my history. The Columbus Museum [of Art in Ohio] was 50 miles from Dayton, and then came the Zimmerli [Museum of Art at Rutgers University],<sup>8</sup> I can't get away from my 30 years in the neighborhood. The retrospective made me think about those experiences. The next retrospective will be somewhere else . . . some other part of the world!

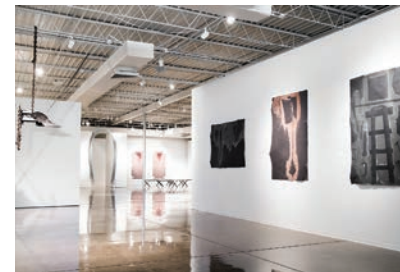


Fig 9 Melvin Edwards: *In Oklahoma*, Installation View, Oklahoma Contemporary, 2016  
Courtesy: Oklahoma Contemporary  
Photo: Quit Nguyen

**CF:** Let's close by discussing your time in Oklahoma this past fall where you created new work that is featured in the exhibition *In Oklahoma*, both at the Oklahoma Contemporary in the fall of 2016, and currently at Alexander Gray Associates (fig. 9). Your residency at the Contemporary was a return to a region familiar to you. Can you speak to what your time in the city meant? Were there any experiences or relationships that stood out?

**ME:** I was very comfortable there. The truth is, if I had another month there, instead of bringing back scrap metal, I would have made more art. It was a comfortable environment. The only thing I missed was the friends



that I have here [in New York]. One of the disks [that I made in Oklahoma] might be titled *Home? Home!* The reason for that is, right across from the studio where I worked, was this set of trees where some homeless people always rested. There is a shelter down the street, but a group of men also slept there under the trees. I'm not picking on Oklahoma; this is a human situation that society has not resolved. I think one of the reasons we have not resolved it is financial; we don't see other people that are not intrinsic to society as far as we're concerned. I can't remember the politician who said, "in war there is collateral damage." Well, [homelessness] is collateral damage in our society. I remember one day I happened to be outside the studio in Oklahoma, and I guess I was in my work clothes, and some ladies drove-up in a van and said, "can I give you a meal?," and I said, "I beg your pardon?" They couldn't figure out that I wasn't one of the homeless guys. We live in a complicated world, and we easily forget about other people, even when they're right here where we are. At the same time, the street where the studio is located is named Ellison Street. One of the most famous black writers of the 20th century was Ralph Ellison. I don't know whether the street was named after him or not, but I am struck by those connections. Another interesting thing during my stay were the conversations about the local history of Native American people and what was happening in different parts of the state. I wished I had more time there . . . I enjoyed all the people there, and liked what they're trying to do at the museum.

#### Notes

- 1 When the city of Houston, TX was founded (1837), it was divided into six geographic districts called "wards." The Fifth Ward is historically black.
- 2 The Watts riots or Watts Rebellion took place in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles from August 11 to 16, 1965.
- 3 *Melvin Edwards* opened on April 1965 at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA
- 4 Jayne Cortez was a renowned musician, poet, and activist (b.1934–d.2012). She and Melvin Edwards married in 1975.
- 5 *Spiral* was a collective of African-American artists initially formed by Romare Bearden, Charles Alston, Norman Lewis, and Hale Woodruff on July 5, 1963.
- 6 Melvin Edwards worked on *Jean Tinguely* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, IL, March 2–April 17, 1968, that followed the exhibition *Jean Tinguely*, which opened at Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, May 13, 1963.
- 7 *Melvin Edwards: Five Decades* curated by Catherine Craft opened at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, TX (2015) and traveled to the Zimmerli Museum of Art, Rutgers University, NJ (2016) and the Columbus Museum of Art, OH (2016).
- 8 Edwards was a professor of sculpture at Rutgers University from 1972 to 2002. He established a studio near the school in Plainfield, New Jersey in 1976, which he still maintains.



Melvin Edwards, Oklahoma City, 2016





*Chain Breaker*, 2016



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2017



*Homage to Amílcar Cabral, 2016*



Top: *Homage to Sony Lab'ou Tansi Poet, 2016*  
*Homage to Almamy Samory "Keletigui" Toure, 2016*



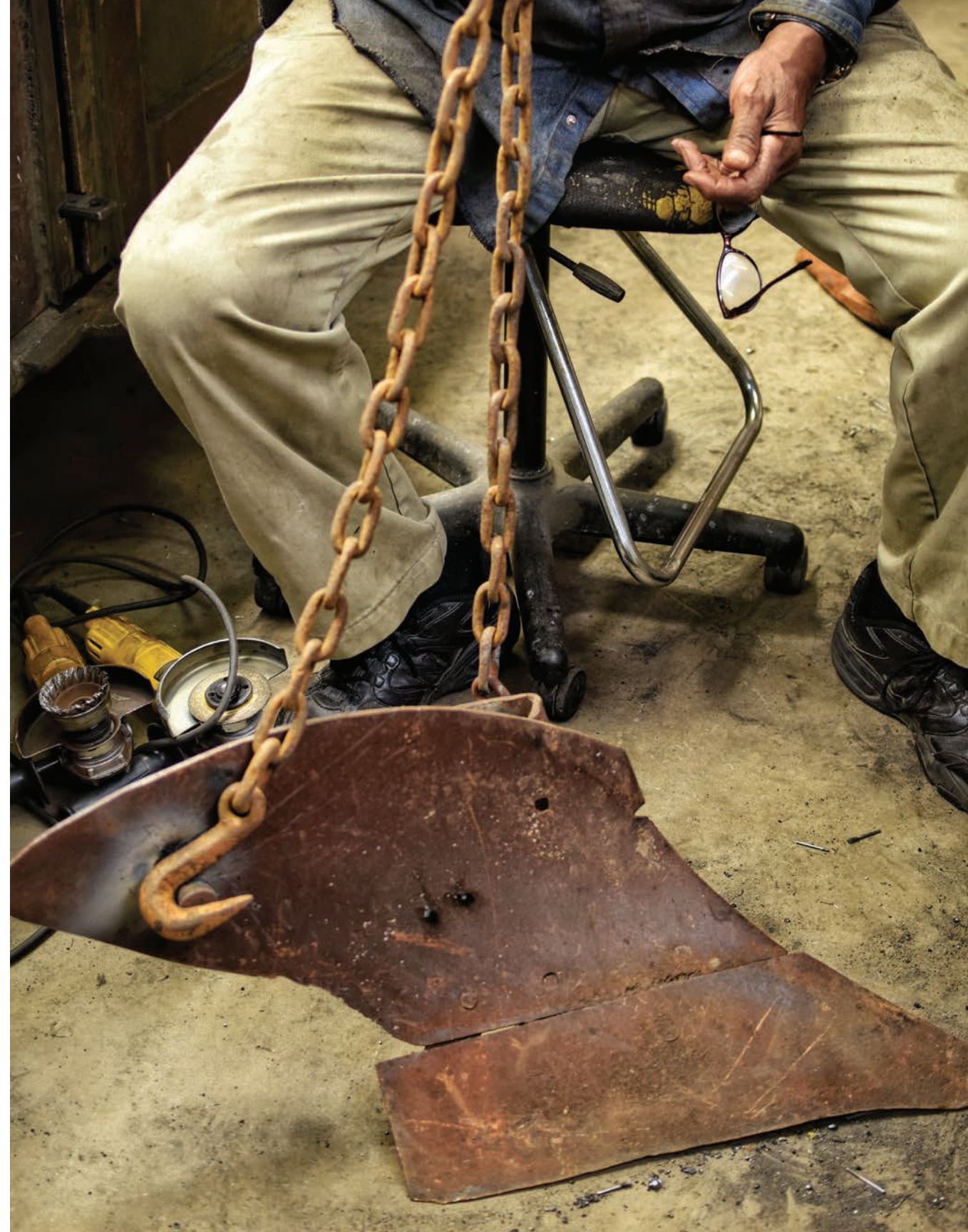


Above: Long, 2016  
Left: Melvin Edwards, Oklahoma City, 2016



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2017





Melvin Edwards, Oklahoma City, 2016





*Agricole*, 2016



*Steel Life (Spring Again), 2017*

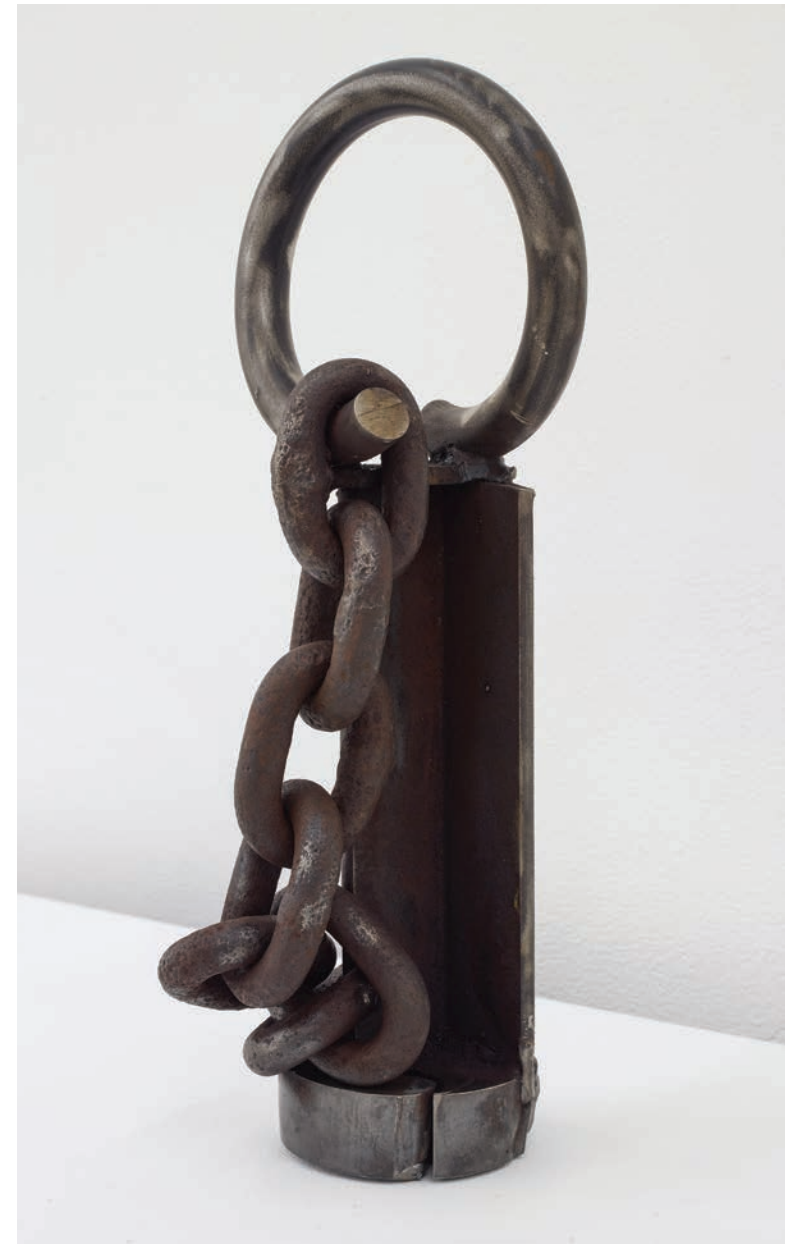


Above: *Homage to Oba Ewaure II of Benin City, Nigeria, 2016–17*  
Left: *Steel Life (Spring Again), 2017*





Melvin Edwards, Oklahoma City, 2016



See, 2016



*Lines in the Mind of*, 2016



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2017





*Page of History, 2016*



*Steel Life (After Winter), 2017*





Above: Melvin Edwards, Oklahoma City, 2016  
Right: *Off*, 2016





*Suspended Afterthought, 2016/17*





Melvin Edwards, Oklahoma City, 2016







*Edouard Glissant Along the Way, 2016*



*For Miyashiro, 2017*



Installation view, Alexander Gray Associates, New York, 2017





Melvin Edwards Studio, Oklahoma City, 2016

## Melvin Edwards

Melvin Edwards (b.1937) is a pioneer in the history of contemporary African-American art and sculpture. Born in Houston, Texas, he began his artistic career at the University of Southern California, where he met and was mentored by Hungarian painter Francis de Erdely. In 1965 the Santa Barbara Museum of Art organized Edwards' first solo exhibition, which launched his professional career. He moved to New York City in 1967, where shortly after his arrival, his work was exhibited at the then newly created Studio Museum, and in 1970 became the first African-American sculptor to have works presented in a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum.

Edwards' work reflects his engagement with the history of race, labor, violence, as well as with themes of African Diaspora. Making welding his preferred medium, his compositions are studies in abstraction and minimalism. Edwards creates sculptures by welding metal objects such as tools, knives, hooks, and machine parts, to construct objects distinguished by formal simplicity and powerful materiality. He is best known for his sculptural series "Lynch Fragments," which spans three periods: the early 1960s, when he responded to racial violence in the United States; the early 1970s, when his activism concerning the Vietnam War motivated him to return to the series; and from 1978 to the present, as he continues to explore a variety of themes. Edwards has felt deeply connected to Africa and the African Diaspora since the 1970s, when he and his late wife, poet Jayne Cortez, began visiting the continent. He has taught metal-welding in several countries, establishing workshops and mentoring a younger generation of African welders.

Edwards has had a longstanding commitment to public art, working on projects for public housing and universities since the 1960s, including *Homage to My Father and the Spirit* (1969) at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; *Holder of the Light* (1985) at Lafayette Gardens, Jersey City, NJ; and *Asafokra* (1990) at the Utsukushi-Ga-Hara Open-Air Museum, Nagano Prefecture, Japan. His large-scale public sculptures exemplify his extraordinary range of aesthetic expression as well as his keen commitment to abstraction.

Melvin Edwards: *In Oklahoma* follows a number of significant shows, including: *Melvin Edwards: Five Decades* which opened at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, TX (2015) and traveled to the Zimmerli Museum of Art, Rutgers University, NJ (2016) and the Columbus Museum of Art, OH (2016); *Melvin Edwards: In Oklahoma*, at the Oklahoma Contemporary, OK (2016); *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945–1965*,



at Haus der Kunst, Munich (2016–2017); and *All the World's Futures*, 56th Venice Biennale, Italy (2015). His work is included in the upcoming exhibitions *Space Force Construction* at the V-A-C Foundation, Venice, Italy, and *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*, Tate Modern, London, UK, both in 2017.

Melvin Edwards' work has been widely exhibited nationally and internationally, including: *Melvin Edwards Sculpture: A Thirty-Year Retrospective 1963–1993*, an exhibition documenting his artistic development organized by the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, NY, organized (1993); *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*, Brooklyn Museum, NY (2014); *Blues for Smoke*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2013) and at The Geffen Contemporary at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA (2012); *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960–1980*, MoMA PS1, Queens, NY (2012); *African American Art: Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Era, and Beyond*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC (2012) and at Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA (2011); and as a part of the Dak'art Biennial in 2010; among others. Edwards' work is represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; the Dallas Museum of Art, TX; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Alford Collection of Contemporary Art at Rollins College, Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Winter Park, FL; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; among others. Edwards taught at Rutgers University from 1972 to 2002. In 2014, he received an Honorary Doctorate from the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston.

## Checklist

*Homage to Amílcar Cabral*, 2016  
Welded steel  
11.75h x 11.5w x 3.25d in  
(29.85h x 29.21w x 8.26d cm)

*Homage to Almamy Samory "Keletigui" Toure*, 2016  
Welded steel  
11.75h x 11.5w x 6.25d in  
(29.85h x 29.21w x 15.88d cm)

*Long*, 2016  
Welded steel  
11.5h x 11.5w x 5d in  
(29.21h x 29.21w x 12.7d cm)

*Homage to Sony Lab'ou Tansi Poet*, 2016  
Welded steel  
13h x 12w x 6d in  
(33.02h x 30.48w x 15.24d cm)

*Agricole*, 2016  
Welded steel and chains  
Dimensions variable

*Two is One*, 2016  
Welded steel and chain  
Dimensions variable

*Lines in the Mind of*, 2016  
Welded steel, barbed wire, and chain  
Dimensions variable

*ARK-LA-TEX OK*, 2016  
Welded steel and barbed wire  
Dimensions variable

*Chain Breaker*, 2016  
Welded steel  
24.5h x 18w x 8d in  
(62.23h x 45.72w x 20.32d cm)

*Off*, 2016  
Welded steel  
15h x 7w x 7d in  
(38.1h x 17.78w x 17.78d cm)

*See*, 2016  
Welded Steel  
15.75h x 6w x 5d in  
(40.01h x 15.24w x 12.7d cm)

*Edouard Glissant Along the Way*, 2016  
Pigmented cotton on pigmented abaca  
40h x 60w in (101.6h x 152.4w cm)  
Published by Dieu Donne

*Page of History*, 2016  
Pigmented cotton on pigmented abaca  
60h x 40w in (152.4h x 101.6w cm)  
Published by Dieu Donne

*Suspended Afterthought*, 2016/17  
Barbed wire  
Dimensions variable

*Homage to Oba Ewaure II of Benin City, Nigeria*, 2016–17  
Welded steel in 3 parts  
Dimensions variable

*Steel Life (After Winter)*, 2017  
Welded steel  
14h x 12w x 6.5d in  
(35.56h x 30.48w x 16.51d cm)

*Steel Life (Spring Again)*, 2017  
Welded steel  
19.5h x 13w x 7.75d in  
(49.53h x 33.02w x 19.68d cm)

For Miyashiro, 2017  
Welded steel  
15.5h x 7.5w x 6.5d in  
(39.37h x 19.05w x 16.51d cm)

Published by Alexander Gray Associates on the occasion of the exhibition

**Melvin Edwards: *In Oklahoma***

April 13–May 20, 2017

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Through exhibitions, research, and artist representation, Alexander Gray Associates spotlights artistic movements and artists who emerged in the mid- to late-Twentieth Century. Influential in cultural, social, and political spheres, these artists are notable for creating work that crosses geographic borders, generational contexts and artistic disciplines. Alexander Gray Associates is a member of the Art Dealers Association of America.

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