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Sarah Cooper and Nina Gorfer

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Nicolás Consuegra  
Rosario López Parra

## New York

## Melvin Edwards

ALEXANDER GRAY ASSOCIATES  
508 West 26 Street #215,  
September 8–October 16

To say what's timely about a Melvin Edwards survey in 2010, go back to 1958. That June, Arts Magazine published Clement Greenberg's essay "Sculpture in Our Time," which pronounced a change in direction for the medium. Brancusi, the argument went, had effectively capped off the Renaissance tradition of sculpture as a solid, monolithic form—so much so that no one subsequently could add anything further. With that lineage exhausted, the new relevant precedents were Picasso's Cubist guitar constructions and the welded-steel assemblies of Julio González. The standard-bearer became David Smith, who joined sheets of metal into floating planar compositions, as if drawing in the air. This weightless appearance was partly metaphoric: Greenberg had shaken sculpture free from the burdens of history. No longer locked into the role of public monument, sculpture could preoccupy itself with form rather than civic function. This neat trick, however, depended on Greenberg's never considering the industrial character of the new sculpture's chosen materials, on his never heeding Bismarck's martial murmur that history itself was determined by blood and *iron*.

Cue Melvin Edwards, who followed Greenberg's dictates and remedied his omissions. Starting in 1963 with his "Lynch Fragments" series, Edwards welded together dense arrangements of hammers, machetes, scissors, and nails—assertions of steel's capacity to hit, hack, cut, and pierce. Gnarled by heat but nevertheless sharp, the fragments register the moral ambiguity of treating aesthetically a material imbued with violence. As much as steel has many uses, Edwards coaxes a variety of expressive qualities out of his materials, but details like the protruding ax blade in *Weapon of Freedom*, 1986, keeps in check a formalist reading. In *Five to the Bar*, 1973, rows of barbed wire are both a compositional device and a confrontational barrier.

The tradition of welded-steel sculpture that Greenberg championed no longer feels especially prevalent, though a more wide-ranging return to midcentury abstraction certainly does. In 2010, a Melvin Edwards survey agitates for forging links between modernism's historical self-consciousness and its social conscience.

— Colby Chamberlain

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## Sandeep Mukherjee

BRENNAN & GRIFFIN  
120 E Broadway, 6 FL  
September 12–October 9

Six stories above the noisy bustle of Chinatown, Sandeep Mukherjee's first solo exhibition in New York (and the inaugural show of Brennan & Griffin) offers a quiet and beautiful respite. Manipulating various combinations of acrylic and embossed drawing on Duralene, the Los Angeles-based artist presents a suite of fine abstractions that evoke organic landscapes and natural phenomena. But beyond the likeness to dense forests and impressive mountain ranges, or any other suggestive symbolism, Mukherjee's works are a serious exploration of pure form. They also evince a rigorous and laborious technical process, in which the artist reworks and removes acrylic ink from positive, embossed surfaces by hand. Mukherjee's nearly alchemical skills are readily evident in several large-scale examples, including *Untitled* (all works 2010), wherein a multicolored mosaic-like pattern is set dramatically against densely layered planes of black ink. Even more successful are the black-and-white works that appear to defy



Melvin Edwards, *Weapon of Freedom*, 1986, welded steel, 11 x 9 x 6". From the series "Lynch Fragments," 1963–.



Sandeep Mukherjee, *Untitled*, 2010, acrylic, acrylic ink, embossed drawing on Duralene, 60 x 126".

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