

SUNY exhibit likely to cause a favorable chain reaction

By **Georgette Gouveia**
Staff Writer

One of the motifs in the sculpture of Melvin Edwards, currently enjoying a superb retrospective at SUNY Purchase's Neuberger Museum of Art, is the chain. Chains can signify oppression and limits. But they can also represent security and unity. What is good can also be bad — usually all at once.

The relativity of objects and the way context can transform them has always been a significant theme in art, and it is central to Edwards' work. In the stunning barbed wire installation "Pyramid Up/Down Pyramid" (1993), a series of barbed wires, strung between two walls, climbs to the ceiling forming a pyramid. On the other side of the wall, another series of barbed wires forms an inverted pyramid.

Taken separately, they're the

two sides of life: You have your up days. You have your down days. But step back from them so that you can see both sides at once, and you'll notice that they form a kind of fluid rhomboid. It's so visually satisfying that you'll just stand there, drinking it in.

"Pyramid" is one of the best works in the show, which is titled "Melvin Edwards Sculpture: A Thirty-Year Retrospective 1963-1993." This is really saying something when you realize it's competing in the same gallery with approximately 80 welded-steel wall sculptures from the "Lynch Fragments" series, made in the 1960s through the '80s. These sculptures consist of found objects. You'll recognize chains, of course, locks, scissors and railroad spikes that, strategically placed, take on phallic connotations.

Knowing that Edwards is an African-American and seeing the word "lynch" in the title, you can't help but think of the lynching of black men in our nation's history. But the spiky sculptures also seem to be about union and transcendence. The objects are recognizable as objects, and yet they've been made new by becoming part of something else.

Edwards' sculpture is also about movement. Combining angles and curves and squiggles, the pieces seem to breathe and dance. In "Dancing In Nigeria" (1974-78), a large-scale steel work painted yellow, the angles shoot off in every direction. It's as if Edwards has been able to reduce dance to its skeletal essence. Or maybe what he has captured is the memory of how it feels to dance.

One thing is certain: In Ed-

ART REVIEW

"Melvin Edwards Sculpture"

► Museum: Neuberger Museum of Art, State University of New York College at Purchase, Anderson Hill Road between Purchase and King streets.

► Dates: Through June 27.

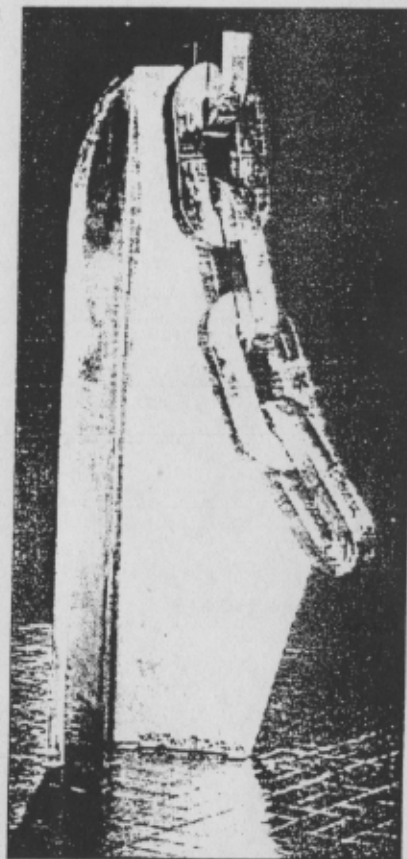
► Hours: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesdays-Fridays, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays.

► Suggested admission: \$4; \$2 for students with IDs and senior citizens; free for children ages 12 and under any time and for all the first Saturday of every month.

► Phone: 251-6133 or 6100.

► In brief: An excellent retrospective that captures the energy in Edwards' work and the way he transforms found objects.

wards' work, the whole is sure to be even more thrilling than the sum of the parts.



'To Listen,' a stainless steel sculpture created by Melvin Edwards in 1990, is on view at the Neuberger Museum of Art.