



Sculpture explores African-American experiences

By MICHEAL POSEY

The renowned African American sculptor Melvin Edwards recently visited the Hood Museum where the first ever retrospective of his work is on view. Edwards has won critical acclaim for "Lynch Fragments," a series of small relief sculptures made of found objects such as chains, railroad spikes and bolts, which, forged together, evoke the more brutal aspects of African-American experiences.

The Dartmouth: Could you explain the impetus behind the creation of "Lynch Fragments"?

Edwards: It was a way of having a metaphorical identity for a body of work. I didn't know when I made the first few pieces that it would turn out to be a long series of things. I realized that after a few vehicle pieces, though, that it was something I might want to pursue. I still felt the need though for directing the interests in the work to something serious.

The Dartmouth: What do you feel you are trying to express through your work?

Edwards: I express life ... I try to be philosophical and think about it. You try to think of life not just as

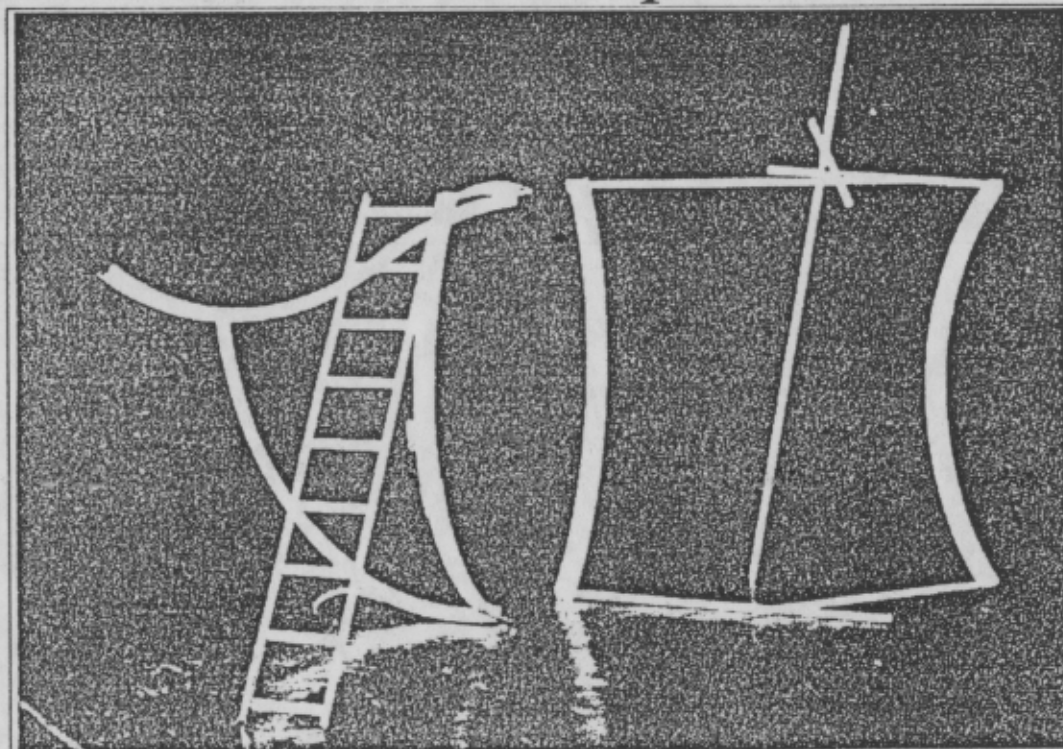
what happens to yourself but as how it relates to the world and your people. Sometimes what I express interests a lot of people and sometimes only a few. For example, I have in the past commemorated pieces to express solidarity with the struggle of people in South Africa. **The Dartmouth:** Do you feel you can express more through the "abstractness" of your work?

Edwards: I'm an artist, not a historian. I'm not just trying to tell a story. I'm trying to explain these words through my work. Abstraction is no more strange than anything else you've encountered. The speech of abstraction is different. Artists make art for all kinds of reasons. People expect musicians and poets not to be straightforward. People want to see where the innovation and ingenuity lie.

The Dartmouth: What made you choose iron and steel as your medium?

Edwards: You have to understand that in the 20th century, more "stuff" is made out of steel than any other material in the world — if you think of "stuff" and not art. In the developments of modern art, it came right along with the new developments of the 20th century and 20th century technologies.

The Dartmouth: You indicated



courtesy CDS Gallery, New York

'Dancing In Nigeria' (1974-78) by sculptor Melvin Edwards is on display at the Hood Museum of Art.

previously that the "Lynch Fragments" series changed your life — how so?

Edwards: They happened right at

the bridge between painting and sculpture. I felt I had to make a decision either to continue as a painter or emphasize sculpture. The

"Lynch Fragments" really set me in motion. I had done something that I recognized as unique in the world of sculpture.