

SHORT HILLS, NEW JERSEY
"Art in Nature"

Greenwood Gardens

Art and nature coexist very well amid the sumptuous scenery of Greenwood Gardens. Once under private ownership, Greenwood has been made available as a public site since 2003. Originally home to two wealthy families, the grounds of the house were decorated first with lush annuals and perennials, later with evergreens and sculptural flourishes, and now with native plants and new, low-maintenance greenery. In the midst of this exquisite natural collection, noted critic and curator Karen Wilkin, with the help of Studio Montclair, put together the group show "Art in Nature." Some 32 artists were included, their work ranging from the figurative to the abstract, and all the pieces were carefully sited among trees and plants.

Some of the pieces merged perfectly with their settings, while others stood out in contrast. The relations between art and nature thus developed an ongoing conversation. Wilkin's placement of the works made it possible to think about how outdoor sculptures might be integrated with vegetation nothing short of spectacular. The brightly colored *Modern Dance* (2014), by



Above: Paige Pedri, *Animal*, 2011. Wire mesh, fiberglass, and resin, 62 x 43 x 66 in. Below: Elizabeth Knowles and William H. Thielen, *Modern Dance*, 2014. Wire fencing and poly flagging tape, dimensions variable. Both from "Art in Nature."

Elizabeth Knowles and William H. Thielen, consisted of wire fencing covered with poly flagging tape; the partial circles of tape, whose pastel hues varied widely, meandered over the ground and through a line of trees, close to the drive leading to the house. *Modern Dance* highlighted both its own construction and its vernal surroundings. Many of the other works were also steadfastly abstract, but exceptions did exist, such as Bruce Gagnier's *Eddie* (2009) and *Rose* (2010), bronze works located in a small circle of grass. The figures, paunchy renditions of a naked man and woman, are full of bulges and crevices, making them memorable versions of physical vulnerability.

Paige Pedri's remarkable *Animal* (2011), roughly constructed in wire mesh, fiberglass, and resin, balances on two points. The whiteness of the piece strengthens its informal abstraction based on curves and hollows, but it nonetheless remains recognizably a creature. In contrast, John Clement's *Hot Tamale* (2012) is purely nonrepresentational; the bright red sculpture circles tightly, giving the impression that industrially welded steel-pipe can indeed be made elegant. Lisa Sanders's *Anamorphosis* (2014), made of bronze, works both abstractly and as a rough presentation of some imaginary stick-like creature. In contrast, John Monti's neon-yellow resin *Flower Cluster VI* (2014) forms a highly realis-





Top: Melvin Edwards, *Homage to the Poet Léon Gontran Damas*, 1978–81. Steel, five elements, dimensions variable. Above: Melvin Edwards, *Kasangadila: For Francisco Romão de Oliveira e Silva*, 2004. Welded steel, 15 x 15 x 6.75 in.

by a mess of stalks and flowers whose energies are close to surreal in their silky intensity.

William Tucker's *Horse X* (1986), a large, robust bronze, seems nonrepresentational when looked at one way, only to appear horse-like when viewed from another angle. Its massive clumsiness is its greatest strength. Karin Malpeso's steel *Helixptirix* (2014) recalls David Smith's "Voltri" series with its geometric forms and frontality; it is an elegant work that felt particularly at home in the gardens. *Eminence* (2006), Mia

Westerland Roosen's gray, resin-coated industrial felt work, could be a prayer shawl or an entryway to a sacred space; its spirituality made it memorable. Finally Don Porcaro's *Talisman 2* (2012) asserts itself as distinctively figurative; its composition of marble rings bulges and diminishes, looking nearly human. Porcaro has always used humor to capture the viewer.

As these works suggest, "Art in Nature," which was Greenwood's first foray into presenting sculpture, was a terrific and intelligently

planned show. One hopes that Greenwood Gardens will continue this program of placing art on its grounds with future exhibitions.

—Jonathan Goodman

NEW YORK

Melvin Edwards

Alexander Gray Gallery

Melvin Edwards's head-size, welded metal abstractions draw you in like black holes, revealing themselves gradually. Out of the darkness, individual elements emerge, some menacing—knives, broken forks, machete parts, and chains—others innocuous—horseshoes, locks, bolts, and drill bits. All the common detritus of industrial civilization makes an appearance, mirroring commonly used items in everyday life. These found objects are absorbed into an informed aesthetic in a manner that is reminiscent of, but distinct from, that of David Smith, in part due to Edwards's expressive use of welding drips, which often add a vital element. In *MMOZ* (2005), for instance, the welds look like thick keloid scars, while the drips spreading over the surface of the dense *Libya* suggest hair.

African titles ground the works in Edwards's personal experience, which has been deeply affected by his first journey to Ghana and Nigeria in 1970, with his wife, the poet Jayne Cortez. *Ibadan Oke* (1992) honors the artists and artisans whom he met in Nigeria, while *Wayou Tugge* (2014) refers to Edwards's studio in Dakar, Senegal (since 2000), and to the tradition of metalworking there. *Kikongo si* (1992) has darker associations, based in the language of the Congo and its role in the international slave trade. The extended "Lynch Fragments" series, which was initially sparked by the racial conflicts of the 1960s, retains its urgently relevant voice. Visual tensions between instruments of violence and oppression could not look more contemporary and important.