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For Immediate Release
August 11, 2015

First Melvin Edwards Retrospective in 20 Years Opens this Fall at the Zimmerli Art Museum

New Brunswick, NJ – The Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers is pleased to present the retrospective [Melvin Edwards: Five Decades](#), from September 1, 2015, to January 10, 2016. Melvin Edwards’s career spans crucial periods of upheaval and change in American culture and society, and his socially charged sculptures synthesize a diversity of artistic approaches, ranging from abstraction to minimalism. Over the past five decades, Edwards has produced a remarkable body of work that has not only redefined the modernist tradition of welded sculpture, but powerfully addresses African and American identity and universal ideals such as freedom and individualism.

“It is a rare privilege for the Zimmerli to host this review of Edwards’s career—a career marked by powerful steps forward in the form of contemporary sculpture and by innovation and courage in the presentation of pivotal historical and political issues within the modernist context,” commented Marti Mayo, the Zimmerli’s interim director.

The retrospective’s stop at the Zimmerli represents a triumphant return for the artist to New Brunswick: Edwards was a [professor at Rutgers](#) from 1972 to 2002, teaching sculpture, drawing, and an introduction to Third World artists. His sculpture [Education Is an Open Book](#) (1987) is located on the Livingston Campus as part of the university’s public sculpture collection that spans all campuses.

Richard S. Edwards, Chancellor, Rutgers—New Brunswick, said, “Mel Edwards was an important professor at Rutgers, teaching for 30 years in our Mason Gross School of the Arts, and we are especially proud to be one of the venues on the national tour of this exhibition. The artist’s studios in nearby Plainfield, New Jersey, as well as in Dakhar, Senegal, can be seen to represent both the local and global influences and interests of Rutgers.”

Melvin Edwards: Five Decades bears witness to Edwards's profound commitment, from the very beginning of his career, to an art that is both abstract and deeply engaged with meaning and expression. A truly international artist well before the advent of today's global art world, Edwards has brought his experiences of other cultures and languages, particularly those of Africa, into his work, to explore the varied ways that art can forge bonds of connection and kinship. He is best known for his *Lynch Fragments*, an ongoing series of small-scale reliefs begun in Los Angeles in the early 1960s and born out of the social and political turmoil of the civil rights movement. Incorporating tools and other familiar objects, such as chains, locks, and ax heads, Edwards's *Lynch Fragments* are abstract yet evocative, summoning a range of artistic, cultural, and historical references.

Melvin Edwards: Five Decades features a broad selection of *Lynch Fragments*, beginning with early manifestations, which spoke to the racial tensions and political and cultural struggles of the 1960s. Edwards returned to the series in the early 1970s during the Vietnam War and continued it with a later group, beginning in 1978 and continuing to the present that explores memory, history, and African and African American culture.

Presenting a full range of Edwards's achievements, *Melvin Edwards: Five Decades* – the first retrospective of his work in more than 20 years – reveals that his career has extended far beyond the *Lynch Fragments*. Major large-scale sculptures of the 1960s, such as *Chaino*, *The Lifted X*, and *August the Squared Fire*, are included, as well as his *Rockers* of the 1970s, which incorporate movement and, in some cases, sound.

With the artist's cooperation, the Zimmerli will recreate the groundbreaking 1970 exhibition of his barbed-wire sculptures originally shown at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Several large sculptures have been restored for the exhibition, most notably the first *Rocker*, *Homage to Coco*, which was in the 1970 Whitney sculpture annual. Also on view will be sculpture Edwards made in Senegal over the past decade, a selection of maquettes and prototypes reflecting his long career in public sculpture, and rarely exhibited works on paper, including sketchbooks and collaborations with the artist's late wife, the celebrated poet and performer Jayne Cortez.

ABOUT MELVIN EDWARDS

Born in Houston, Texas in 1937, Edwards attended college in Los Angeles, graduating with a BFA from the University of Southern California. In 1967, he moved to New York, where he continues to maintain a residence. He divides his time between a studio in Plainfield, New Jersey, as well as homes and studios in Accord, New York, and Dakar, Senegal. His work is included in the collections of important US museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Los

Angeles County Museum of Art; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Melvin Edwards: Five Decades is organized by the [Nasher Sculpture Center](#), Dallas, and its Associate Curator, Catherine Craft.

The exhibition is made possible by the Henry Luce Foundation. Additional major support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

The presentation at the Zimmerli is coordinated by Donna Gustafson, Curator of American Art and Mellon Director for Academic Programs. It is supported by donors to the Zimmerli's Major Exhibition Fund: James and Kathrin Bergin; Alvin and Joyce Glasgold; Charles and Caryl Sills; the Voorhees Family Endowment; and the Jerome A. Yavitz Charitable Foundation, Inc.—Stephen Cypen, President. Additional support is provided by the Office of Institutional Diversity and Improvement at Rutgers.

Following its presentation at the Zimmerli, the exhibition travels to the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio.

Melvin Edwards: Five Decades is accompanied by a richly illustrated scholarly catalogue with essays by Craft, scholars Alex Potts and Tobias Wofford, a conversation with the artist, and a catalogue of Edwards's public sculptures by Nasher Assistant Curator Leigh A. Arnold.

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The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum houses more than 60,000 works of art, ranging from ancient to contemporary art. The permanent collection features particularly rich holdings in 19th-century French art; Russian art from icons to the avant-garde; Soviet nonconformist art from the Dodge Collection; and American art with notable holdings of prints. In addition, small groups of antiquities, old master paintings, as well as art inspired by Japan and original illustrations for children's books, provide representative examples of the museum's research and teaching message at Rutgers. One of the largest and most distinguished university-based art museums in the nation, the Zimmerli is located on the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Established in 1766, Rutgers is America's eighth oldest institution of higher learning and a premier public research university.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Admission is free to the Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers. The museum is located at 71 Hamilton Street (at George Street) on the College Avenue Campus of Rutgers University in New Brunswick. The Zimmerli is a short walk from the NJ Transit train station in New Brunswick, midway between New York City and Philadelphia.

The Zimmerli Art Museum is open Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m., and the first Tuesday of each month (except August), 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. The

museum is closed Mondays and major holidays, as well as the month of August.

Z Café featuring the Food Architects is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Friday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., with a variety of breakfast, lunch, and snack items. The café is closed major holidays, as well as the months of July and August.

For more information, visit the museum's website www.zimmerlimuseum.rutgers.edu or call 848.932.7237.

SUPPORT

The Zimmerli's operations, exhibitions, and programs are funded in part by Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and income from the Avenir Foundation Endowment and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Endowment, among others. Additional support comes from the New Jersey State Council of the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts; the Estate of Victoria J. Mastrobuono; and donors, members, and friends of the museum.

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