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Contemporary coupling in 'Inside & Out'

Artists present eclectic efforts.

'Deposits' delivers complex compositions that capture the eye.

By Catherine Fox
For the AJC

Talk about an odd couple. Melvin Edwards and Peter Saul, the two artists in the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center's "Inside & Out," could not, on the face of it, be more different.

Edwards, a New York-based sculptor, is best known for his lifelong series "Lynch Fragments." Small in scale, hung at eye level on the wall, they are assemblages of found objects — chains, hammerheads and other tools, locks, nails, pointy shards — bent and welded into powerful evocations of African-American history, replete with suffering and hope.

They are dense and contained but also dynamic, with pieces jutting into the viewer's space. Like a beating heart, the sculptures pack a punch out of proportion to their scale.

If Edwards is the dignified griot, Peter Saul might be the canny jester. If Edwards is the superego, Saul is the id. Saul punctures propriety, political correctness and art-world bombast by creating gleefully inappropriate,



Peter Saul's "Portrait in the Style of de Kooning" (2007) is acrylic on paper. Courtesy of Peter Saul and David Nolan Gallery

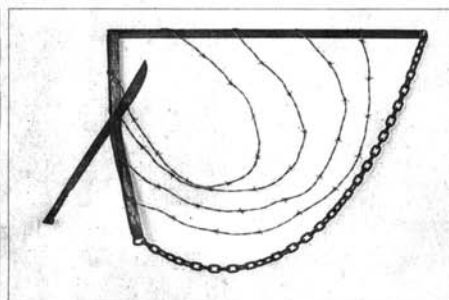
ate, deliberately insulting, genitalia-choked paintings, drawings and prints. Call them Mad magazine meets Freud meets "Bad Teacher."

Executed in exuberant colors and cartoony language, they are deceptively sophomoric; behind the facade lies a mature and deft hand.

The pairing throws their differences into re-

lief — and their commonalities. Both artists make commentaries on political and social issues, though Edwards takes the path of poetic allusion and Saul is always in your face.

Both have mined their chosen forms and vocabularies over long careers, and they have intersected with various art movements and influenced



Melvin Edwards' "Machete for Gregory" (1974) is welded steel and barbed wire.

Courtesy of Melvin Edwards and Alexander Gray Associates

younger artists along the way. As these septuagenarian artists prove, contemporary art is not just a young person's game.

'Material Deposits'

A bundle of branches, tipped with glimmery rainbow Mylar, floats a few feet from the floor. Nearby glass tubes explode as if frozen liquid from the orifices of a tree trunk. New York artist David Shaw's sculptures are strange and Harry Potter-ish things, suggestive of unnatural forces beyond our ken.

Across the room, Los Angeles artist Elonda Billera's sculptures capture the moment that a roll of Pillsbury biscuits pops out of its twist-off container, which she has bronzed as if they were keepsakes, like baby shoes, but nevertheless positions unceremoniously on the floor. If Peter Saul decided to do a

number on Mel Edwards, it might look like this.

Shaw's intimations of the sublime and Billera's exploitation of the ordinary bookend a spectrum of strategies in "Material Deposits," whose core is works by four San Francisco artists who won Artadia Awards in 2009: Leslie Shows, Moses Nornberg, Brion Nuda Rosch and Weston Teruya. (Artadia is a nonprofit that awards grants in selected cities, including Atlanta.)

Atlantan Seana Reilly's ethereal liquid graphite drawing, which requires the artist to relinquish control over her material, edges toward the sublime. Shows' multi-layered, multi-material paintings on Mylar command attention even as they refuse to coalesce into an image you can get your eyes around.

At the other end of the spectrum, Nornberg

Gallery review 'Inside & Out' and "Material Deposits"

Through Sept. 18. \$5; \$3, seniors and students; free for children under 12. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays; until 8 p.m. Thursdays; noon-5 p.m. Sundays. Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, 535 Means St. N.W. 404-688-1970. www.thecontemporary.org. Bottom line: An array of strategies, materials and artists at different stages of their careers makes for an engaging experience.

makes a modernist composition out of music accouterments — record albums, turntable, microphone.

An admirer of Richard Tuttle, Rosch uses cast-off or off-hand materials pulling high art off its pedestal (or putting it on a flimsy one) to call attention to aspects of its presentation.

Teruya is a deconstructor as well. He reduces urban design and architecture into constituent elements — bollards, wood planks, cement blocks — makes drawings, cuts them out and uses them as language in crisp, elegant collages. Teruya takes his vision into three dimensions in a sprawling sculpture that makes the most ordinary things into something strange.

Catherine Fox is chief art critic for www.ArtsCriticATL.com.