

# Luscious

Paintings and drawings by **WENDY EDWARDS**





Fig, 1991

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Curated by **Jo-Ann Conklin**

Essay by **Ruth Fine**

David Winton **Bell Gallery**, Brown University

# Introduction

Wendy Edwards was the first person I met when I came to Brown in 1996. I was impressed then as now by the exuberance of her life, her art, and her teaching. Color is, arguably, the most apparent manifestation of her enthusiasms. Her artworks are branded by sophisticated strains of bright, deep, and pastel hues—in combination with lively gestures and a deep engagement with material pigments. Color infuses the quotidian details of her life, as well — seen in the chartreuse leather chair, the turquoise and pink vases, and the bright yellow eyeglasses that were her signature for a number of years, and have, sadly, been retired.

A retrospective exhibition, *Luscious* includes fifty-six paintings and drawings created since Edwards joined the faculty of Brown’s Department of Visual Art in 1980. Representing four decades of large-scaled work within the limited space of Bell Gallery was challenging; some difficult choices were made and striking works excluded. The exhibition is augmented by a sensitive essay by Ruth Fine that delineates important moments in Edwards' life and places her work within contemporary art history and practice. My sincere thanks to Ruth for the enthusiasm she expressed for her subject.

Over the years I have observed Wendy's dedication to teaching, to forging long-term and meaningful relationships with her students. In preparation for the exhibition, I asked alumni for their recollections; excerpts from our email conversations follow:

I was a student representative on the committee that selected Wendy; right from the start, her boldness, determination, and sense of possibility impressed me. You can see this in her painting, but also in her encouragement. . . she instilled in me a sense of fearlessness, professionalism and aspiration.

Jennifer McGregor ’81

There was a lot of excitement when we all met Wendy, with her openness, intelligence and warmth. . . . What has struck me about Wendy . . . is her effusive energy and encouragement for students. She's genuinely on their side, wanting them to take chances and find their own artistic voices, to cut through what is generic and find something unique and their own.

James Barron ’80

I would not have become a painter were it not for the encouragement and support of Wendy Edwards. . . . Wendy’s personality was forged in the collision between the hope, freedom and idealism that the Women’s movement fostered in the 1970s and the reality of a male-dominated art academic complex. That she persevered, and went on, not only to create ever more stunning paintings but also to educate and propel future artists on the path, speaks to her perspicacity and the depth of her commitment to political and artistic freedom.

Elise Ansel ’84

Wendy Edwards changed my life. The complete and total space of permission she created defined my relationship to artmaking. . . . She instilled in me that joy is at the heart of making, and this lesson was perhaps the greatest gift I have ever received.

I have so many treasured memories of seeking her counsel on things inside and outside the studio, her unending generosity, the moment she led our class in a cheer on the morning of Obama’s first election, eye-opening tours of NY galleries, and eagerly awaiting her response to a new painting after an all-nighter in List.

Words fall short in expressing what she has done for me as an artist and a person.

Sophia Narrett '10

My sincere thanks to the many individuals who have contributed to the production of *Luscious: Paintings and Drawings by Wendy Edwards*. Pivotal works were generously lent by Joseph Lattuada and Charles Edwards. The handsome catalogue was designed by Malcolm Grear Designers, with photographs by Winnie Gier and text editing by Gail Parson Zlatnik. At Bell Gallery the staff played essential roles; they are Terry Abbott, Ian Budish, Murphy Chang, Naushon Hale, Kate Kraczon, Lewis Turley, and Nicole Wholean. Thanks also to Bow Bridge Communications and our colleagues at the Brown Arts Initiative, and finally, for support from the Offices of the President and Dean of the Faculty at Brown.

**Jo-Ann Conklin**  
Director, David Winton Bell Gallery





Urchin, 2013

## Passages

**PASSAGES:** *throughout a lifetime, changes that are consistently rooted in curiosity about the physical and metaphysical worlds.*

**PASSAGES:** *transitions from one motif to another and back again, repeatedly over decades.*

**PASSAGES:** *visual and tactile incidents that occur across surfaces of canvases and sheets of paper to populate an invented universe.*

All these passages are at the heart of Wendy Edwards' dialogue with herself and with viewers of her art. Tense, opposing, humorous, elegant, vigorous, rhythmic, meditative, hypnotic, decorative — such words come to mind while observing Edwards' work. Materiality, lightness and darkness, stasis and speed, repetition, tracks of process: all affect the diverse symbols and signifiers embedded in her practice.

Many of Edwards' paintings and works on paper lack titles, yet in the titled works the verbal language with which she is keenly concerned is both referential and provocative, often evoking a double entendre. (As an aside, *Daniel Boone*, for example, takes its title from the brass plate on its frame, which was a found object that previously housed an illustration of this legendary American woodsman and now, humorously, houses an abstracted image of a penis.)

Whether labeled "Untitled" or otherwise, Edwards' oeuvre, as it developed sequentially, is rooted in landscape and other nature-based forms: these works include *White Mountains*, 1986, and *Tulip Growing*, 1993 (p.7); bodies and their parts, as in *Breast Grab 2*, 1982, and *Daniel Boone*, 1994; and objects that encompass an organic vocabulary, such as *Gathered*, 2012, and *Urchin*, 2013 (p.44 and left).

The list above is not intended to suggest that Edwards' categories are isolated from each other. Quite the opposite is true. Over her fifty-year career, she has consistently combined these motifs, one leading to the other and back again, in a circular enterprise that includes the circle form itself: in body parts and in references to the moon, to spherical fruit such as peaches and figs, and to rounded ceramic vessels. Her work employs a brilliant palette, vigorously layered regardless of medium, to create her distinctive color world. She suggests an evolution of form within the natural universe while offering a parallel reading in the development of individual works of art and her artistic practice overall. Her canvases and works on paper employ rhythmic use of linear elements and convey strong emotional content. All of this is powered by the artist's abiding commitment to a feminist vision.



The third of four siblings, Edwards spent her childhood rambling around a Virginia farm named Cloverdale, not far from Washington, DC. It had belonged to her paternal great-grandfather Edmund Howard Flagg, whose father was Edmund Flagg, a writer and diplomat.<sup>1</sup> Edwards' experience of southern life was peppered by summers in Manhattan with her maternal grandmother, Margaret (Peg) Jolly. Edwards' father, Charles Taylor Edwards II, a Navy pilot during World War II, worked at the federal government's Atomic Energy Commission, after which he served in a voluntary capacity as president of the Fairfax County Council on the Arts. Her mother, Marjorie Ann Jolly Edwards, called Marni, loved acting and other creative endeavors. Once her four children were in school, she worked at the National Archives on the Kennedy Oral History Project, transcribing tape-recorded interviews.

Edwards loved the outdoors and life on the farm:

We had chickens, geese, cows and a bulldog. My younger brother and I spent time in the creek catching salamanders and building dams. We had gardens and a peach orchard — still my favorite fruit. I have many rich memories of the farm; my mother covered all the walls with wallpaper and I memorized the patterns in every room. I remember sitting in a field and painting with my watercolor set frequently, so *plein air* was a natural given. And there are many other dreamy memories, summer smells, learning how to drive the tractor, taking long walks through the woods. I loved the rose bushes...that lined our lane, and the violets, the wildflowers, goldenrod, Queen Anne's lace and japonica bushes. I had a playhouse, swings and a jungle gym — we were always active outside until evening....When the farm was sold to make way for route 66 we moved to a normal [Falls Church, Virginia] neighborhood development.<sup>2</sup>

Memories of her New York grandmother suggest the importance of this strong woman in Edwards' introduction to a diverse world, and to her artistic beginnings.

[She worked] in a private hospital [Doctors Hospital, now closed] and had a beautiful office overlooking Carl Schurz Park, on a floor that functioned as a hotel for guests of patients. My grandmother worked as Head of Housekeeping, but in addition to overseeing maids and porters, she did the interior decorating and oversaw the upholstery/seamstress operation.

I believe the lab was one large room for specimens in jars on shelves, and it smelled like formaldehyde. I'd occasionally stop into it. The hospital was located between East 87 and 88 on East End Avenue in Yorkville, a few blocks from a delicious Konditorei [German] pastry shop. Many memories — learning how to roller skate in the park with Pat the policeman/guard at Gracie Mansion, feeding the pigeons and squirrels with special seeds Grama Peg would buy in an old store on the way to Bloomingdales. I LOVED NY. Grama Peg was friendly with amazing characters, a Russian antique dealer named Sergei who came calling at the hospital, a Greek florist, and Brother Richard who was based in Chinatown. He gave me a tour of Chinatown at night. She was a great cook, painted and decorated elaborately themed Easter eggs, and was involved with all sorts of creative



Tulip Growing, 1993



projects — oh, she made movies and I learned how to splice film! Trips on cross-town buses to the Met and the Guggenheim were always memorable. She gave me 15 cents for the bus and I'd go on my own when I was fairly young, and I knew every corner of the Met.<sup>3</sup>

These early experiences on the Virginia land and in New York — the vibrant capital of the art world at the time — including stops in the specimen room at Doctors Hospital, continue these many years later to generate or contribute to Edwards' ideas.

“Luscious” (a word Edwards uses frequently and I shall as well) pools of paint — as color-shapes and lyrical strokes, broadly and vigorously applied — and multilayered, friable hues are essential to the rich materiality of Edwards' methods. On canvas she works primarily with oil paint, occasionally employing acrylics for initial layers, glazing, and specific details. Rarely does she lay in a drawn composition before starting to paint. In that sense, she has extended the ethos of her abstract expressionist forebears of starting and responding, and, similarly, the improvisational call and response of the blues and jazz music to which she is also indebted.

On paper, Edwards has explored a diverse array of materials: graphite and liquid graphite, charcoal, watercolor, inks, dyes, and, in an extensive 2018 project in collaboration with Janis Stemmerman at Russell Janis studio in Brooklyn, monoprint.<sup>4</sup> Hefty, inch-thick Sennelier pastels have been her drawing staple since about 1980. Edwards' method is to alternate layers of pastel with coats of fixative, building up color areas of both density and nuanced color. Many hues intermix optically, as in Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painting, to create luminous fields and contained color-shapes. The linear containers of these color-shapes are often black, although recently color-containing lines have played a larger role both on canvas and on paper. As part of her process, regardless of motif, Edwards' series on paper come after the related oils on canvas, as a method of continuing a thought, one that frequently leads to another series of canvases.

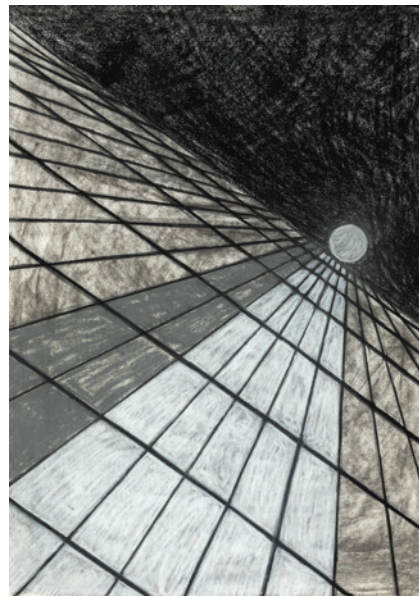
Throughout her career, Edwards has created a significant body of work employing black, white, and gray, but in numbers far fewer than her color essays. Her more somber works, such as *Night Out*, 1985 (**FIG. 1**), confirm that the power of her art is not based solely on her supreme inventiveness with a full and joyful palette.

Edwards' parents preserved a portfolio of drawings and watercolors from her high school art classes that reveal her as an ambitious, committed practitioner and a large talent, even at this early time.<sup>5</sup> These works further suggest that she had already intuited her devotion to the organic forms that are the essence of her visual vocabulary.

Dominant among the high school drawings are carefully crafted studies of the human figure and of landscapes, sometimes dotted with architectural structures, that shift from deep vistas to close-up clusters of foliage (**FIG. 2**). During these high school years, Edwards was also introduced



**FIG 2**  
**Untitled, 1967**



**FIG 1**  
**Night Out, 1985**

to the concept of abstraction and to the importance of experimentation, in classes at the Corcoran School of Art (now closed) with the renowned Washington-based painter Sam Gilliam. Even today she looks back at Gilliam's teaching, as well as her evolving knowledge of his lyrical canvases (among the earliest to function independent of stretcher bars), as essential to her grounding as an intellectually curious and technically experimental, highly thoughtful painter.

Perhaps most prescient among the early works preserved by Edwards' parents are three sheets of watercolor swatches modulated in a variety of ways and labeled as to how they were produced. They document physical actions and material additions, often in multiple variations, including India ink, crayon, dry brush, lines thick and thin, wash, folded, burnishing, chalk, wet on wet (both multiple colors and variations of a single hue), and brush line. Undoubtedly an assigned project, these test sheets nevertheless illustrate the concern for process Edwards carried forward throughout her career.

As an undergraduate at the Philadelphia College of Art (PCA; now the University of the Arts), Edwards' few female instructors included Lily Yeh, who introduced her to Asian art, and Cynthia Carlson, her freshman-year two-dimensional-design instructor. As with Gilliam, Carlson's experimental approaches to teaching, as well as to her studio practice (which incorporated the use of cake-decorating tools), influenced the young artist. Carlson's presence was especially important because Edwards encountered so few professional women artists personally, even at what was a high point in the second wave of the feminist movement. Carlson's friend Ree Morton, recently celebrated in a solo show at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, was important to Edwards as well, although they never met.<sup>6</sup> Other slightly older women artists whose work and thinking mattered to Edwards early on (and still) include Eva Hesse, Elizabeth Murray, and Pat Steir, the last of these particularly for “the inclusion of text, the stroke, not unlike Joan Snyder, who I also admired.



The diagrammatic in Steir’s paintings pulled me in.”<sup>7</sup> Steir later was a visiting artist at the University of Wisconsin when Edwards was teaching there (1978 – 80); she generously suggested that Dart Gallery in Chicago take on Edwards’ work, in an example of the best support available to young artists. Given her strong feminist bent, Edwards focused her reading while she was a student on women authors, including all of Jane Austin and Charlotte Brontë.

Edwards’ strong feminism, however, didn’t prevent her from working well with the male artists who dominated the faculty at PCA. Undergraduate teachers she recalls with appreciation are Eugene Baguskus, who created vigorous, lyrical landscapes; Sidney Goodman, with whom she studied the figure; Harry Soviak, whose studio setups, with and without figures, totally transformed the spaces they inhabited; and Larry Day, who brought Persian and Indian miniature painting to Edwards’ attention.

When she entered graduate school at the University of New Mexico, her introduction to the dramatic southwestern landscape and the brilliant light that defines its forms and spaces was perhaps of more profound importance to her than most of her instructors; the exception was the *plein-air* landscapist Charles Field (**FIG. 3**).

Charles’ paintings were luscious landscapes. Mostly I learned about glazing techniques, layering and light from Charles. That was evident in my master’s show at UNM where the paintings were based on Canyon de Chelly. Charles must have known [Richard] Diebenkorn, another abstraction/landscape connection.<sup>8</sup>

Aware of the importance to her art of place, light, and diverse life experiences, Edwards has taken superb advantage of many residencies and has taught in Pont-Aven in Brittany, France, and in Comillas, Spain, as well as throughout the United States. Her travel opportunities began between her junior and senior years at PCA, when she attended the inaugural year of a summer program in the Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania, called Artists for the Environment, in association with the National Park Service.<sup>9</sup> Over time, these experiences of new places led her to discover novel forms in nature and in regional cultural symbols, such as the *coiffe* caps associated with the fishing village of Pont-Aven. Curiosity led to opportunity, leading to expanded formal challenges, and then to new imagery.

Edwards likewise has responded contextually to exhibition invitations. While developing site-specific ideas for certain shows, she has explored motifs with unique regional connections to institutional venues. One such instance occurred in 1993. For an exhibition at the Dana Gallery at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, her paintings



FIG 3  
Charles Field  
**Late Afternoon Light**, 2005  
Oil on canvas  
17 7/8" x 6 1/8"  
Courtesy of the Ballinglen Arts Foundation, Ireland

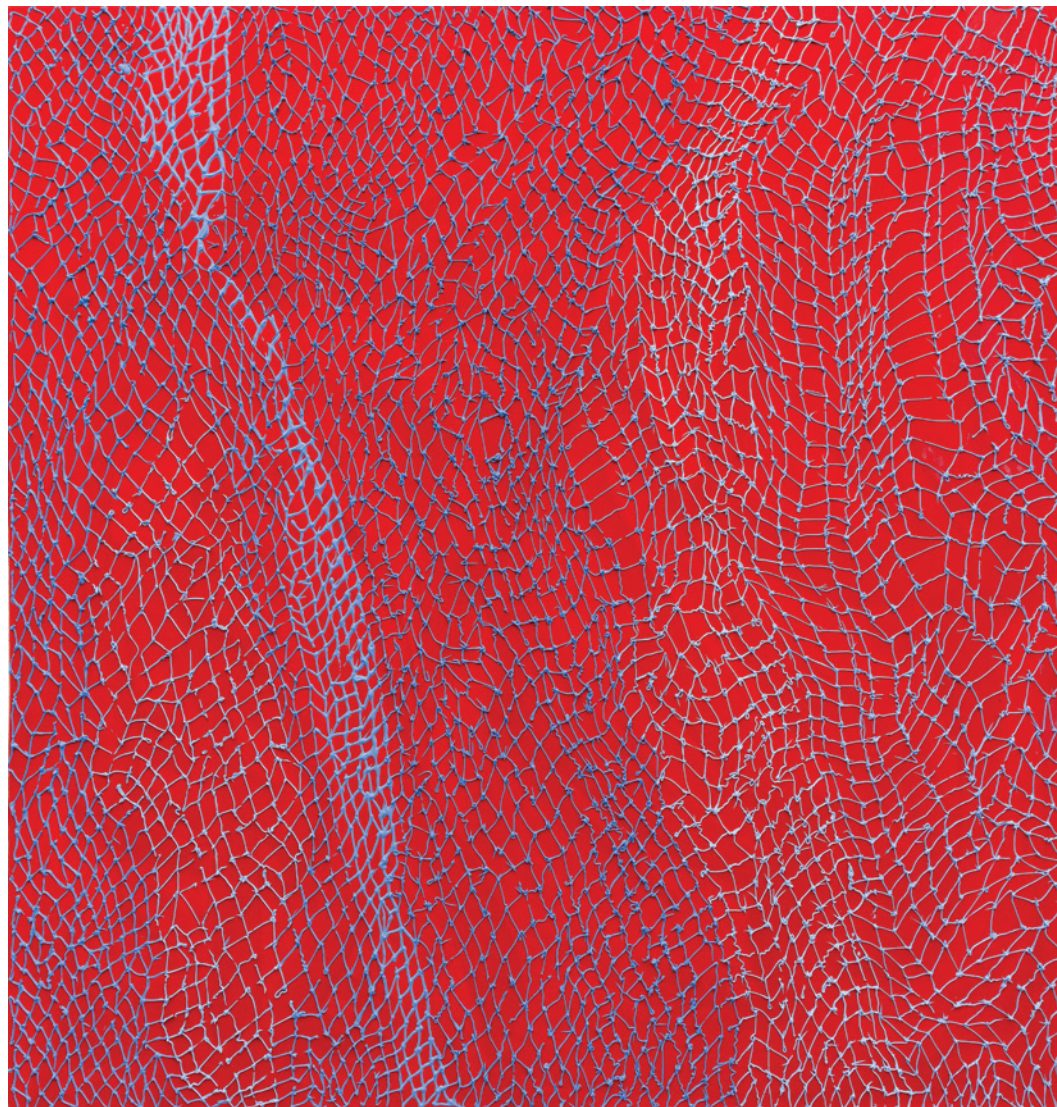
and works on paper embraced and expanded upon forms derived from Pennsylvania German painted furniture and ceramic designs prevalent in Central Pennsylvania, where the college is based.

Edwards generally works in series that respond to three circumstances that both blend together and create tensions: where she is; events in her own life and the lives of family and close friends; and the physicality and manipulative possibilities of materials. Some of her series are completed during a concentrated time period and associated with a single place; they are homogeneous in both size and vertical or horizontal orientation. Other series develop over many years, with consistency of neither site nor format of particular relevance.

Exemplary of the former is the two-part Newfoundland Series, created during a June 1998 residency awarded by the Pouch Cove Foundation. The series includes one group of related pastels and one of related watercolors, with works in each medium radically different from the other in their style and visual impact, even though all are horizontal compositions on 22" x 30" paper. They are based on the view from Edwards’ Pouch Cove home and studio, which overlooked the Atlantic Ocean and the icebergs moving across the water. The series is thus an early documentation of global warming and follows up on Edwards’ environmental concerns during her undergraduate summer at the Delaware Water Gap.

The monochromatic linear pastels, drawn in red (see *Iceberg I*, p.14), while clearly organic in reference, are less tied to nameable natural forms than the watercolors from this residency, such as *Pouch Cove, Newfoundland 1*, and *Pouch Cove, Newfoundland 2*, which employ a full palette of warm and cool colors. The latter are suggestive of the powerful watercolor landscapes Georgia O’Keeffe





Blue Net, 2001



Georgia Peach, 1989





Iceberg 1, 1998

painted at the start of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Edwards' other series type, open-ended in time, varied in format yet related, includes her *Veils*, aka *Nets* (p. 4, 12, 13, 32, 33, 44), which began in 2001 with *Net Drawing* and continue to the present. (This group is discussed below.)

Coming of artistic age when Pattern and Decoration was a prevalent style, Edwards has embraced structures and imagery associated with this approach: vibrant color, which she emphasizes as foremost among her passions; Persian and Indian miniature painting; Northern Caucasian rugs, and indeed textiles of all sorts from many sources; and repetitive patterns in general.<sup>11</sup> Over the course of her career she has explored geometric abstraction, as in the 1998 circular series that includes *Pink Thrill* (p. 26) and *Butter*, among several on view. But more prevalent in her oeuvre is a free-form abstraction, sometimes termed "funky abstraction."<sup>12</sup> This approach is also associated with Elizabeth Murray's radical multipart canvas structures and daring eccentric forms rooted in the visible world. An example is Edwards' oil on canvas *Kiss*, 1989 (p. 31), which incorporates at the left a series of curved lines relating to the nets/veils that became pervasive in her work more than a decade later.

Edwards also has explored organic repetitions, lusciously painted, often in combination with selections from her earlier ideas. Many of them stem from motifs like flower clusters, as in *Dreamboat*, 2013 (p. 13). Her close study of diverse painters is evident when she discusses the materiality of her own work and the range of tensions her ideas address. For example, she admires Alfred Jensen "because he combined the diagrammatic with 'the decorative' and used the substance of paint in excess," and Philip Guston, "who used the physicality of paint to carve his images."<sup>13</sup> The "physicality of paint" has, from the start, been at the heart



Vibrate, 1997

of Edwards' practice, and the most recent paintings in this exhibition, *Flourish* and *Mounting*, both 2019 (p. 42, 43), confirm that this love of paint as paint, and commitment to enhancing her understanding of how it can best be used to create something "luscious," remain essential to her.

But Edwards has also been influenced by more austere conceptual and minimal art practices originating in the 1960s, and the use of words and phrases. Her drawings, especially the spare, reductive, but hardly simple character of forms (for example, *Moonblob*, 1981, and *Vibrate*, 1997, **above**) make this association worthy of consideration when approaching her art.<sup>14</sup>

Edwards' use of words is more evident in her paintings than in her works on paper, and is in part indebted, as suggested earlier, to admiration for Steir's early work. In keeping with Edwards' feminist bent, much of her word content embodies sexual innuendo: "I like it hard" is written across a canvas of that title, painted in 1980. So do many of her titles, for example, the large and powerful oil *Dickhead*, 1993 (p. 23). While Edwards doesn't count Jasper Johns as a primary influence, her incorporation of words and phrases in which the verbal functions visually, her extensive use of body parts, and the tension in her art between representational and abstract form together suggest that, if only by osmosis, his pervasive presence in artistic circles throughout her career has established a connection. In the case of body parts, however, the more personal association might be the formaldehyde specimens at Doctors Hospital that Edwards saw as a child when visiting her grandmother.

One of Edwards' large body-parts canvases, the horizontal *Brain*, 1989, measures 72" x 80", confirming her belief that "the brain is the sexiest organ." Ever engaged with issues of feminist sexual affirmation, however, Edwards has completed several series on both canvas and paper



Jerry Mischak, Georgia Mischak and Wendy Edwards, 2005

that feature hugging and intercourse; some are relatively literal, others quite abstract. Among the former is *Late Night*, 1983, measuring 136" x 66" and depicting a deep ultramarine-hued couple holding each other. Edwards was told that this painting was controversial, and it was removed from a group exhibition, *Rhode Island New Talent: Painting*, at the nearby Newport Art Museum the year after it was painted. Edwards was already making her mark on a community she had only recently joined, and the notion of controversy is almost impossible to understand, given the painting's essentially benign suggestion of lovemaking. At about this time, however, one of her galleries refrained from showing her more explicit work, such as *Night Flight*, 1982 (FIG. 4), oddly suggesting it was meant for museums rather than appropriate for a commercial gallery.<sup>15</sup>

The figures in *Late Night* and the presence there of the round "moon" relate this painting to a much smaller 1985 canvas titled *China Hold*, painted after Edwards had visited China, and about the time she and Jerry Mischak were celebrating the arrival of their only child, Georgia Madeline Edwards Mischak, born 5 April 1985 (they married on Thanksgiving Day in 1984). Georgia was conceived on a full moon and born on the April full moon, called the Pink Moon (aka the Sprouting Grass Moon, the Egg Moon, the Fish Moon), giving the presence of the circle significant meaning.

Edwards became fascinated with astrology in the summer of 1969. The moon motif, however, parallels her use of the circle in other contexts.<sup>16</sup> Edwards and Mischak's single collaborative project, in celebration of Georgia's birth, is a circular relief sculpture that was started in 1984 but enhanced in 1985 by a calendar (FIG. 5), with the April 5 page as its central content.<sup>17</sup>

Edwards' figurative works, some more narrative than others, are concentrated in the early to mid 1980s. Several of them share characteristics with German Expressionist figuration. Edwards admires the art of Ernest Ludwig Kirchner, with its elongated forms marked by exaggerated gestures and modest



FIG 5  
Calendar, 1984



FIG 4  
Night Flight, 1982





FIG 6  
Acoma 3, 1973



FIG 7  
Initial Reaction (detail), 1973

use of precise modeling. Apart from heterosexual couplings, in her work female figures dominate those of males. Suggestions of breasts and vaginas, however, seem about equal with those of penises, but all appear frequently in the work, sometimes in clear suggestions of individual body parts and sometimes secreted within Edwards' formal patterning. Indeed, suggestion is more apparent than forceful description throughout Edwards' work. Rarely does precise articulation take primacy over abstracted implication.

Large black-and-white compositions from Edwards' New Mexico years, such as the 35" x 24" drawing *Acoma 3*, 1973 (FIG. 6) often employ graphite, as here, or graphite dissolved in alcohol and shellac. As her attention to black and white diminished, she turned to Caran d'Ache water-soluble crayon-pencils and then shifted to watercolor. The image areas of these early color works on paper were relatively small, in contrast to the previous black-and-white subjects, but they were surrounded by a substantial unworked area of paper in homage to the borders of Persian and Indian miniatures that Edwards so admires. Their sheets are smaller than the New Mexico landscapes, but still substantial, for example, 22 ½" x 30".

Changes in Edwards' approach to working on paper generated changes to the way she worked on canvas. About 1978, the year of her MacDowell Colony residency, she added the use of extruded paint to her toolbox for working on canvas, creating thick squiggly shapes that enhance the luscious painted areas and glazed fields previously dominating the work (FIG. 7). These areas of extruded paint created with cake-decorating tools are the origins of the veils that appear in much of her work on both canvas and paper beginning twenty-five years later, in 2001.

By 1981, Edwards was recording some of her ideas as diagrams, reimagining places she had lived and considering the passage of time that, in part, gives this essay its title. The moon took on an increasingly vital role, enhanced by her first trip to China, in 1984. While she has returned to China three times, her 1984 response to its foreignness led to painted landscapes of imbalance, with rice



Serenade, 1988





Elephant Trunk, 1985

paddies shifting diagonally to mimic the angled walls of skyscrapers. The nature of the landscape itself, most insistently represented by peaked mountains, appears in *Elephant Trunk*, 1985 (left). The image of a baby in both paintings references Georgia's birth. The circle appears to hover, suggesting another galaxy as much as it does a sun or a moon in earth's orbit or the importance of the moon to Georgia's conception and birth.

Edwards' first "net drawing" in 2001 originated in a desire to draw an image of breaking glass. "The nets began by encapsulating depression, hiding, and fear, but quickly evolved into a huge body of work based on undulating lines, that held positive references for me."<sup>18</sup> She has since incorporated this open, linear over-structure as netting or veiling in many works (it first appeared in the 1989 canvas, *Kiss*). While Edwards has associated the net with both seepage and collection, when it functions more as a veil than a net it is also a metaphor for muting by layering. A major force in her work for almost twenty years, the nets/veils both obscure elements and enhance them by demanding attention. Sometimes both functions are apparent in a single work, as, for example, *Gathered*, 2012, or *Urchin*, 2013.

Around 2006, Edwards began to transform flower "doodles" — which she has made throughout her life — to bona fide formal elements. Their incorporation calls to mind Edwards' admiration of Steir's flower subjects. By 2008 Edwards had incorporated sensuously voluminous floral abstractions into her layered net/veil structures. She became increasingly energetic, adding complexity to her visual panorama of the world.

In 2006 and 2011, however, two major challenges presented themselves. In 2006, Edwards underwent carpal tunnel surgery on her hands, that for the most part caused her to abandon the extruded-paint elements that characterized many works on canvas; the cake-decorating tools that had formed them required the use and strength of both hands.

In 2011, Edward's mother, Marni, with whom she had always maintained a close relationship, died suddenly, three days after a fall. Marni's death set off a period of deep grieving that affected Edwards' ability to work for many months. When she began again full tilt, it was by embracing collage, a new art-making approach she had used only as a student.

Edwards had been observing collage techniques for decades, however, and at close hand. Mischak is a master of collage, possibly one reason it had been a territory Edwards hadn't explored. But when she entered it in 2013, it was with different intentions, needs, and methods than those associated with Mischak's sculpture and works on paper. Edwards' use of collage was marked by the clarity, skill, and enthusiasm she had brought to all of her previous work.

Among the components of Edwards' collages are photographic images she shot specifically for this purpose. Her photographs depict the ceramic vases she has collected since about 1980, the year she settled in Providence as a new faculty member at Brown University. Embedded in these



ceramics, which she usually buys at yard sales, are vivid associations with organic forms, especially voluptuous female bodies. Edwards describes them this way:

The vases [probably produced by McCoy Pottery] are not particularly valuable collectible pieces. I think they are from the 40s and 50s. Some may have been used in florists' arrangements. I started collecting the pink first, then the blue and then the yellow. I just went crazy over their shapes.<sup>19</sup>

These rounded shapes — some relatively modest, some quite baroque — may function for Edwards as Jim Dine's bathrobes have for him, as stand-ins for the artist herself, metaphorical self-portraits. She has also depicted necktie-like shapes (neckties are another subject associated with Dine; see *Beaked*, 1974, p. 36), although for her these may serve not as self-portraits, but as portraits of male associates. Shortly after introducing the vases into her work, Edwards began to combine them with her nets/veils and flowers to initiate new series (see *Urchin*, 2013). The other new element in Edwards' materials world, and the second distinctive contribution to her collages, was patterned Mexican oilcloth, which has been important to many of her subsequent series. She used it on one occasion, in the summer of 2012, as the substrate for a group of paintings completed in Comillas, Spain. They preceded her incorporation of collage fragments cut from the patterned oilcloth. See, for example, *Tipper*, 2012, and *Dreamboat*, 2013 (p. 33, 13).

Edwards' art-making has always been in dialogue with earlier art. She particularly remembers Larry Day's discussions of structure in Piero della Francesca's frescoes, as well as her introduction through him to Persian miniatures. She has since been drawn to such diverse work as the art of Eduard Manet and of Giorgio Morandi, improbably coupling these two radically different artists in a series of small flower paintings exemplified by *Arrangement*, 2008, and *Monsieur Ed*, 2009 (p. 28). Edwards distinguishes them through palette more than paint quality, leaning more toward the rich surfaces of Manet's approach rather than toward Morandi's more austere surfaces.

Since 2015, flower paintings by Vincent van Gogh have likewise served as inspiration for an extensive series on both canvas and paper. Numbering approximately forty to date, they include *Silk*, 2015, just 10" x 10", and others, such as the recent *Flourish* and *Mounting*, each measuring 78" x 72". Several incorporate netting.

Edwards has been a long-time enthusiast of the work of Hilma af Klint, recently on view to acclaim at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.<sup>20</sup> Edwards discovered her paintings much earlier — in the late 1970s, when she was teaching in Madison, and was captivated by af Klint's exploration of abstraction rooted in nature and by the spiritual character of her art. Edwards has a long list of other, earlier, favored women painters also, including



Dickhead, 1993





Upper, 2015

Louise Moillon, who was French and did precious small paintings of fruit, and Dutch painter Rachel Ruysch whom I LOVED. Also Agnes Pelton. And Florine Stettheimer, who I discovered in 8th grade when my best friend gave me a catalogue of her show at MOMA found in a thrift store. Terrible reproductions. I also went to the Museum of the City of New York to see the dollhouse that Florine's sister Carrie assembled over more than a decade, with miniature pieces of art from Marcel Duchamp to Gaston Lachaise. I LOVED it. When the new Whitney opened they hung two of Florine's paintings on the wall you encountered as you exited the elevator. I figured she had finally been acknowledged.<sup>21</sup>

Personal and directly inspirational experiences have added others to this list: a lunch meeting with Louise Nevelson in 1967, as well as encounters with Alice Neel, a visiting artist when Edwards was teaching in Madison. She found Neel a great trouble-maker, with incredible energy, especially for someone her age: "She wore me out."<sup>22</sup> The critical arc of Wendy Edwards' search for a unique artistic voice followed multiple paths: she accepted visual and spiritual guidance from other artists of many times and places as her personal experiences unfolded. Throughout the journey, she often took the more difficult fork in the road, constantly daring herself to find new methods and images as her work called for them. This exhibition summarizes the beauty, intelligence, and experimentation that result from Edwards' open-ended search, which continues today with the vigor that has marked her life and work for some fifty years.

#### Ruth Fine

##### Author's note:

I met Wendy Edwards in 1967, when she attended a summer course for high school students that I taught at the Philadelphia College of Art (now the University of the Arts). We have remained in intermittent contact since then, building a close friendship over the past fifteen years that has included many studio visits. It has been a revelation, nevertheless, to look at a comprehensive half-century overview of Edwards' paintings and works on paper while working on this essay. I would like to express immense appreciation to her for sharing many hours talking about her work in the studio and for her immediate responses to my barrage of email and telephone inquiries that followed. Appreciation is due as well to Jerry Mischak, for his good humor, his art-handling contributions to our work, and the culinary expertise that provided wonderful meals at the end of several intense days of work. At the Bell Gallery, Director Jo-Ann Conklin has been a pleasure to work with. My thanks also to Gail P. Zlatnik for her keen editorial skills.





Pink Thrill, 1998

Endnotes

1 Through the Flagg family, Wendy is also a collateral descendent of the sculptor Daniel Chester French. Thanks to Edwards' eldest sister, Susan McCarthy, for confirming various biographical details, including this information from Melvin Lee Steadman Jr., *Falls Church, Virginia: By Fence and Fireside*, 1964. Another distant relative was Daniel Webster.

2 Edwards, email to author, 17 April 2019.

3 Edwards, email to author, 14 April 2019.

4 Edwards' limited use of edition printmaking has been dependent upon the collaboration of master printers. These have included Wayne Kimball on a 1975 project at the University of Texas, San Antonio, where she had her first part-time teaching position; Lois Johnson, with whom she worked on a screen print when both artists were on the faculty at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; and a woodcut she printed herself and hand-colored at Brown University for a faculty portfolio. She has no experience with etching. Her 2019 monotypes are all reproduced in *Wendy Edwards: Monotypes*, a catalogue published by Russell Janis, 2018.

5 I can attest to this owing to our more than half-century association. Moreover, her father has told the story of the young Wendy's response to a goose who snapped at her diaper-covered butt: not an expression of fear but of anger, and the ability to fight back as needed. (Charles T. Edwards, *One Last Carrier Landing*, self-published, 2018.) This quality of self-care has served her well as a woman in the male-dominated world in which she has developed her successful career.

6 Ree Morton: *The Plant That Heals May Also Poison*, 17 September–23 December 2018.

7 Edwards, email to author, 26 April 2019.

8 Combining several of Edwards' emails to author, 16 April 2019. Diebenkorn had studied at the University of New Mexico (1950–52).

9 <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/08/13/archives/us-helping-artists-record-natural-beauties.html> accessed 4/16/2019.

10 See Ruth Fine, Elizabeth Glassman, and Juan Hamilton, *O'Keeffe on Paper*, National Gallery of Art, exh. cat., 2000. Edwards has said that shortly before she left New Mexico she saw O'Keeffe walking down the street and took it as an omen that it was time for her to move on to her own special territory, or, as it has turned out, territories.

11 Two books Edwards indicated as important to her are Susan Mellor and Joost Elffers, *Textile Designs* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991); and Geoffrey Rayner, Richard Chamberlain, and Annamarie Stapleton, *Textile Designs: Artists' Textiles, 1940–1976* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Antique Collectors' Club, 2012).

12 Michael Bonesteel, "Funky Abstraction in Madison," *Examiner*, October 1979.

13 Edwards, email to author, 29 April 2019.

14 Edwards, email to author, 14 April 2019. Edwards and the author have had many unrecorded conversations over five decades, most recently three intense days, April 12–14, 2019, in her Brown University and home studios. The latter is on the ground floor of the converted fire-house home she shares with her husband. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/20/garden/20firehouse.html>.

15 Edwards, telephone conversation with author, 4 September 2019.

16 Among the books in her library is Rosanna M. Giammanco Frongia's translation of Matilde Battistini's *Astrology, Magic, and Alchemy in Art*, part of the J. Paul Getty Museum's Guide to Imagery series, 2007.

17 Edwards and Mischak are included in Micaela Amateau Amato and Joyce Henri Robinson, *Couples Discourse*, exh. cat., Palmer Museum of Art, 2006, pp. 32–33, 94–97. Their only other collaborations are greeting card collages he makes to which she sometime adds color. Information about these collaborations and Edwards' introduction to astrology are both through email from her to the author, 3 September 2019.

18 Edwards, email to author, 3 September 2019.

19 Edwards, email to author, 17 April 2019.

20 *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future*, October 12, 2018–April 23, 2019, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

21 Edwards, email to author, 14 April 2019.

22 Edwards, telephone conversation with author, 4 September 2019.





Monsieur Ed, 2009



Budding, 1984



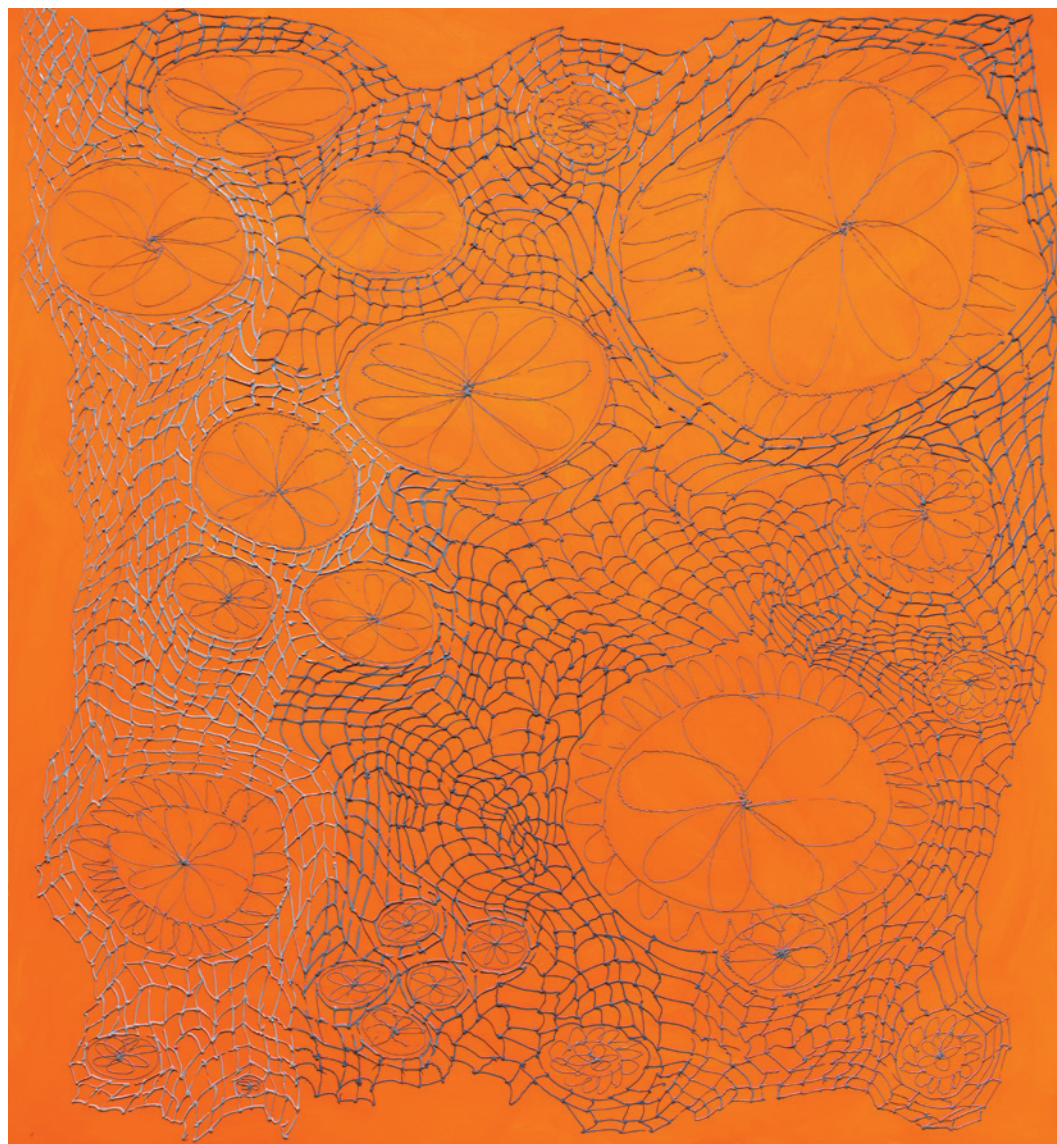


Wishing, 2014

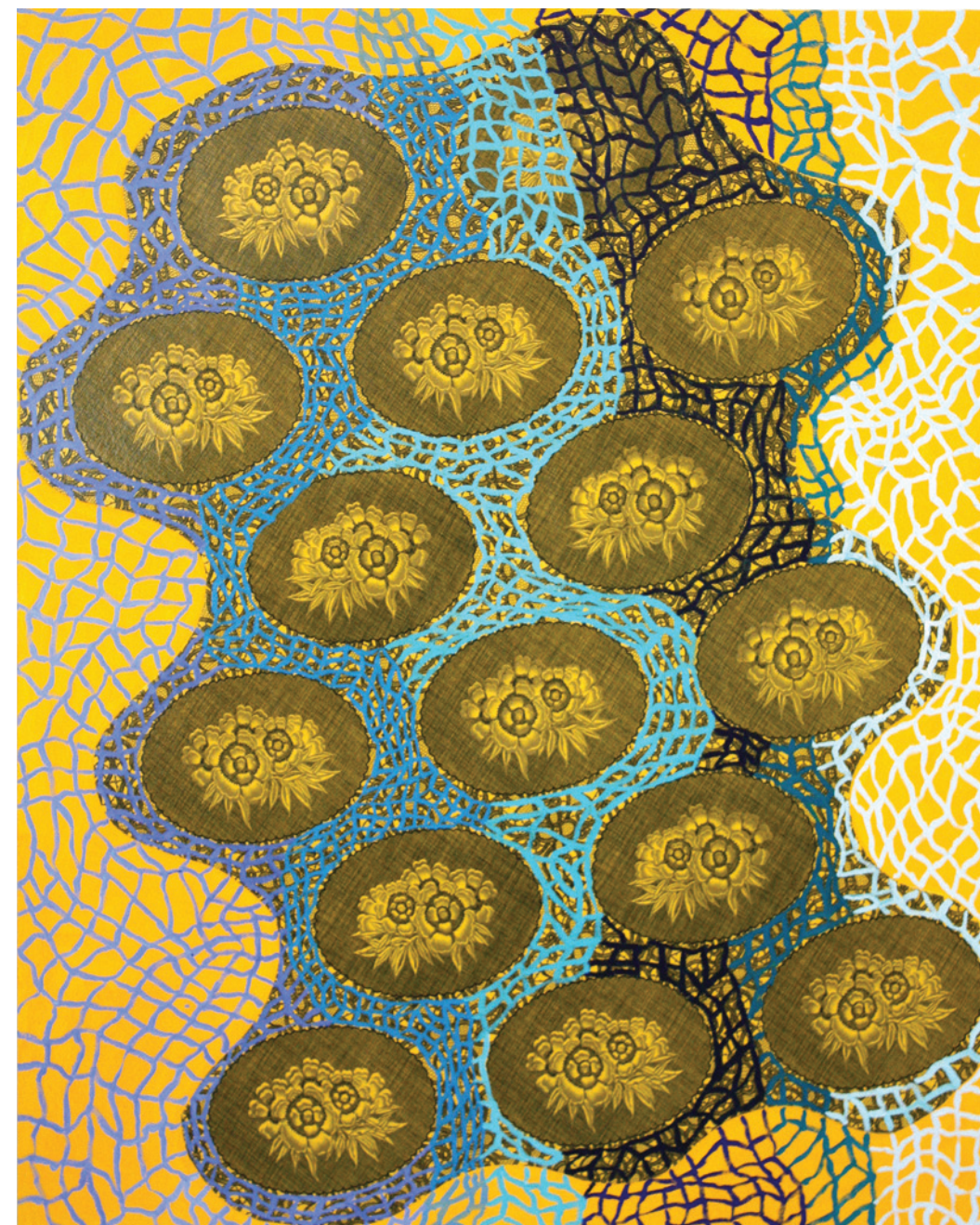


Kiss, 1989





Wake Up, 2006



Tipper, 2012





All Tips, 1997

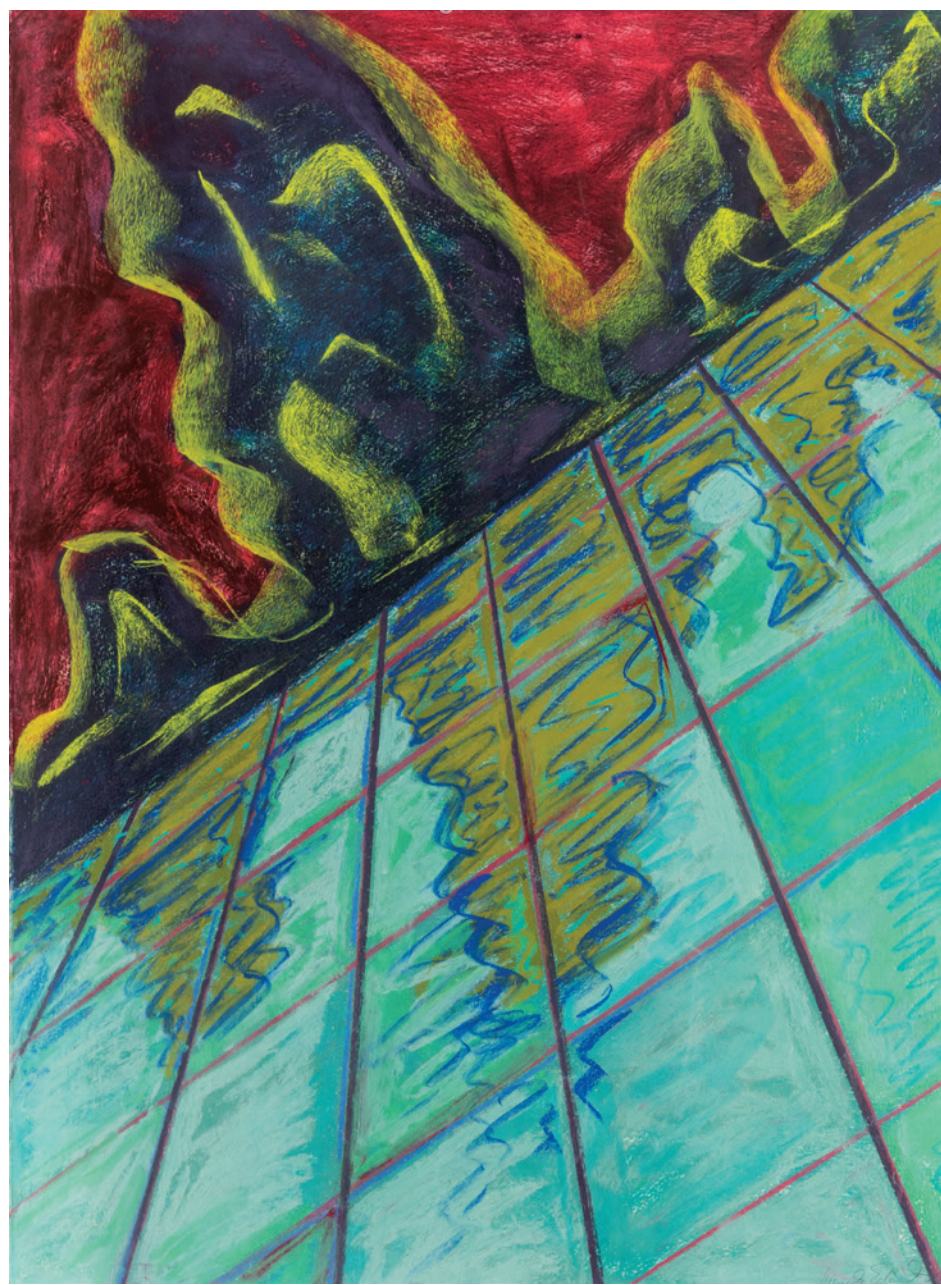


Wonder, 2018



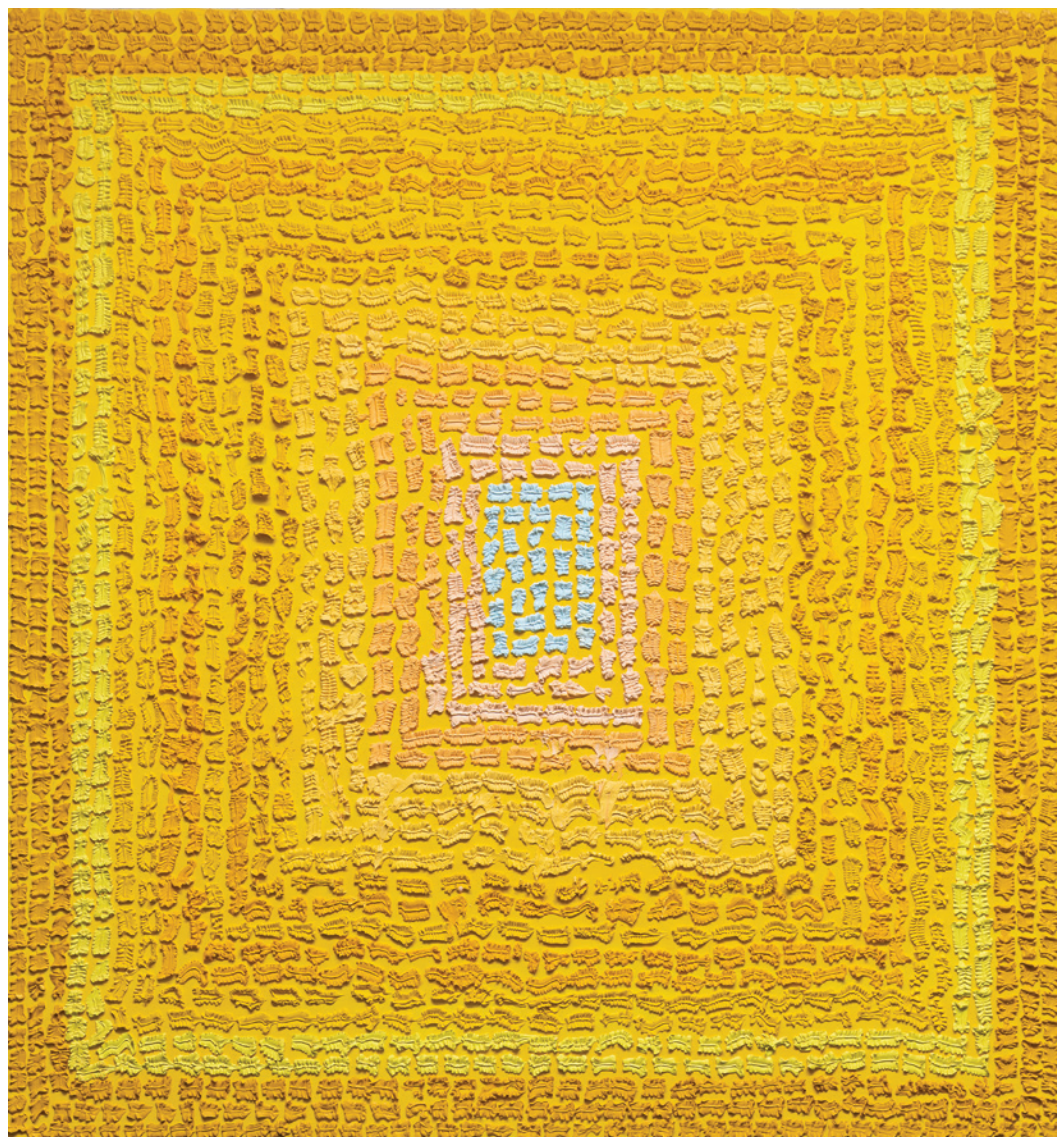


Beaked, 1994



Untitled, 1986





Lucky Charm, 1999



Untitled 2, 2005



## A close-up, vertical image of a red mesh or netting material. The mesh is composed of a series of interconnected, irregular diamond-shaped openings. The material has a vibrant red color and a visible texture, suggesting it might be made of a synthetic or natural fiber. The lighting is even, highlighting the intricate knotting and the way the mesh stretches and contracts. The overall appearance is that of a fishing net or a similar type of fine-mesh fabric.

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width.

	<b>Moonblob</b> , 1981 Pastel on paper 22 ½ x 30		<b>Winter Magnolia</b> , 1989 Oil on canvas 80 x 66
	<b>Breast Grab 2</b> , 1982 Pastel on paper 42 x 30	<b>inside cover</b>	<b>Fig</b> , 1991 Pastel on paper 30 x 22
	<b>Man on Phone</b> , 1982 Pastel on paper 42 x 30		<b>Stream</b> , 1991 Pastel on paper 30 x 22
	<b>Heaven</b> , 1983 Pastel on paper 42 x 30		<b>Clarification</b> , 1993 Pastel on paper 30 x 22
<b>p. 29</b>	<b>Budding</b> , 1984 Pastel on paper 42 x 30	<b>p. 23</b>	<b>Dickhead</b> , 1993 Oil on canvas 96 x 72
<b>p. 20</b>	<b>Elephant Trunk</b> , 1985 Oil on canvas 96 x 48	<b>p. 7</b>	<b>Tulip Growing</b> , 1993 Pastel on paper 30 x 22
	<b>Likiang</b> , 1986 Oil on canvas 96 x 60	<b>p. 36</b>	<b>Beaked</b> , 1994 Pastel on paper 30 x 22 ½
<b>p. 37</b>	<b>Untitled</b> , 1986 Pastel on paper 30 x 22		<b>Daniel Boone</b> , 1994 Pastel on paper 30 x 22 ½
	<b>White Mountains</b> , 1986 Pastel on paper 30 x 22		<b>Hambidge #17</b> , 1996 Pastel on paper 22 ½ x 22 ½
<b>p. 19</b>	<b>Serenade</b> , 1988 Pastel on paper 30 x 22 ½	<b>p. 34</b>	<b>All Tips</b> , 1997 Oil on canvas 22 x 20
<b>p. 13</b>	<b>Georgia Peach</b> , 1989 Oil on canvas 80 x 72		<b>Oak Cover</b> , 1997 Oil on canvas 44 x 44
<b>p. 31</b>	<b>Kiss</b> , 1989 Oil on canvas 80 x 66	<b>p. 15</b>	<b>Vibrate</b> , 1997 Pastel on paper 19 ½ x 22

	<b>Butter</b> , 1998 Oil on canvas 18 x 18		<b>Centered</b> , 1998 Oil on canvas 18 x 18		<b>p. 4 Urchin</b> , 2013 Oil on canvas 60 x 48
	<b>Green Leaf</b> , 1998 Pastel on paper 22 ½ x 23		<b>p. 38 Lucky Charm</b> , 1999 Oil on canvas 60 x 56		<b>p. 30 Wishing</b> , 2014 Ink, crayon, and collage on paper 30 x 22 ½
<b>p. 14</b>	<b>Iceberg 1</b> , 1998 Pastel on paper 22 x 30		<b>Net Drawing (first)</b> , 2001 Ink on paper 9 x 7 ¾		<b>p. 24 Upper</b> , 2015 Oil on canvas 78 x 70
	<b>Iceberg 5</b> , 1998 Pastel on paper 22 x 30	<b>p. 12, 40</b>	<b>Blue Net</b> , 2001 Oil on canvas 44 x 42 Collection of Charles Edwards		<b>Support Gathering</b> , 2018 Oil on paper 30 x 22
	<b>Iceberg 6</b> , 1998 Pastel on paper 22 x 30	<b>p. 39</b>	<b>Untitled 2</b> , 2005 Crayon and ink on paper 22 ½ x 18		<b>Trail</b> , 2018 Oil on paper 30 x 22
	<b>Iceberg 7</b> , 1998 Pastel on paper 22 x 30	<b>p. 32</b>	<b>Wake Up</b> , 2006 Oil on canvas 80 x 74	<b>p. 35</b>	<b>Wonder</b> , 2018 Oil on paper 30 x 22
	<b>Line</b> , 1998 Oil on canvas 18 x 18		<b>Arrangement</b> , 2008 Oil on canvas 16 x 16	<b>p. 42</b>	<b>Flourish</b> , 2019 Oil on canvas 78 x 72
<b>p. 26</b>	<b>Pink Thrill</b> , 1998 Oil on canvas 18 x 18		<b>Mix Up</b> , 2009 Oil on canvas 16 x 16	<b>p. 43</b>	<b>Mounting</b> , 2019 Oil on canvas 78 x 72
	<b>Pouch Cove, Newfoundland 1</b> 1998 Watercolor on paper 22 x 30	<b>p. 28</b>	<b>Monsieur Ed</b> , 2009 Oil on canvas 16 x 16		
	<b>Pouch Cove, Newfoundland 2</b> 1998 Watercolor on paper 22 x 30	<b>p. 44</b>	<b>Gathered</b> , 2012 Oil on canvas 44 x 42 Collection of Joseph Lattuada		
	<b>Rainbow</b> , 1998 Pastel on paper 22 ½ x 23	<b>p. 33</b>	<b>Tipper</b> , 2012 Oil and patterned oilcloth on canvas 60 x 48		
	<b>Select Color</b> , 1998 Oil on canvas 18 x 18	<b>p. 48, inside back cover</b>	<b>Dreamboat</b> , 2013 Oil on canvas 80 x 72		
			<b>Steam</b> , 2013 Ink, crayon, and collage on paper 30 x 22 ½		





Flourish, 2019



Mounting, 2019





Gathered, 2012

Chronology and Biography

1950	born, Falls Church, VA
1966 – 67	art classes at Corcoran School of Art
1972	BFA, painting, Philadelphia College of Art (now the University of the Arts), Philadelphia
1974	MA, painting, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque <i>Southwest Fine Arts Biennial</i> , New Mexico Museum of Art (previously Museum of Fine Art, New Mexico), Santa Fe
1975	Stables Art Center, Taos Art Association, Taos, NM
1978	assistant professor, University of Wisconsin–Madison meets artist and future husband, Jerry Mischak fellowship, MacDowell Colony <i>What's Up in Texas? New Lyricism</i> , San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX
1979	<i>Wendy Edwards</i> , ART PLACE/Center Gallery, Madison, WI <i>Wendy Edwards</i> , Shircliff Gallery of Art, Vincennes University, Vincennes, IN
1980	assistant professor, Brown University
1981	<i>Wendy Edwards</i> , Dart Gallery, Chicago, IL
1984	moves to SoHo, Manhattan, NY, on junior sabbatical first trip to China for research
1985	birth of Georgia Madeline Edwards Mischak
1986	<i>Let's Play House</i> , Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, New York <i>Wendy Edwards</i> , Lenore Gray Gallery, Providence, RI
1989	<i>Wendy Edwards: Paintings &amp; Drawings</i> , David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University
1989	<i>19 on Paper</i> , exhibition traveling to various locations in Russia and New England
1993	<i>Wendy V. Edwards: Pennsylvania German Sources, Paintings and Drawings</i> , Dana Gallery, Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, PA <i>Hybrids</i> , Lenore Gray Gallery, Providence, RI
1994	<i>Rhode Island Women Artists</i> , Lyman Allyn Museum, New London, CT
1995, 97 2000, 03, 09, 11	teaching, summer sessions at Pont-Aven School of Contemporary Art, Brittany, France



1995	<i>Take a Seat</i> , Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence <i>People, Places, Things</i> , Primary Objects Gallery, San Antonio, TX
1996	<i>Reigning Cats and Dogs</i> , Dieu Donné, New York, NY <i>Hambidge Center Centennial Celebration</i> exhibition, King Plow Arts Center, Atlanta, GA <i>Visual Thinking</i> , Plástica Contemporánea, Guatemala City
1997	<i>Wendy Edwards: 1997 Tomlinson Fellow in the Visual Arts</i> , Braitmayer Art Center, Tabor Academy, Marion, MA
1997, 2009–12, 2014–17	chair, Department of Visual Art, Brown University
1998	residency, Pouch Cove Foundation, Newfoundland, Canada <i>Down to Earth: The Enduring Landscape</i> , Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence
1999	fellowship, International School of Theory in the Humanities, Santiago de Compostela, Spain <i>Wendy Edwards: Implants</i> , Wheeler Gallery, Providence, RI
2000	<i>Eye Candy: Contemporary East Coast and West Coast Women Painters</i> , Robert V. Fullerton Art Museum, California State University, San Bernardino; Grand Central Art Center, California State University, Fullerton.
2001	first net drawing residency, Auvillar, France
2002	<i>Generations III</i> , A.I.R. Gallery, New York <i>Holding Pattern: An Exhibition of Paintings, Sculpture, and Textiles</i> , Grimshaw-Gudewicz Art Gallery, Bristol Community College, Fall River, MA
2003	<i>Line Dancing</i> , Islip Art Museum, Islip, NY
2003, 05, 07	teaches painting at Anderson Ranch summer workshops
2004	<i>Wendy Edwards: The Skin Between</i> , Beard and Weil Galleries, Wheaton College, Norton, MA <i>Paintings</i> , OH+T Gallery, Boston <i>Grande Peintures sur Papier</i> , Centre International d’Art Contemporain de Pont-Aven, France
2006	<i>Couples Discourse</i> , Palmer Museum, Pennsylvania State University, University Park
2007	<i>Flora and Fauna</i> , OH+T Gallery, Boston

2009	<i>Persistent Blooms</i> (solo exhibition), OH+T Gallery, Boston
2010	death of the artist's mother, Marjorie Ann “Marni” Edwards
2012–15, 17	teaching at Brown University summer program in Comillas, Spain
2012	<i>En La Red</i> (solo exhibition), Sala de Exposiciones de la Fundación Comillas,Spain
2013	<i>Rhode Island Networks 2012</i> , Newport Art Museum, Newport
2014	<i>Dibujos Wendy V. Edwards</i> , Palacio de Festivales de Cantabria, Santander, Spain <i>Enticing Luminosity</i> , Lesley Heller Gallery, New York
2015	<i>Common Thread</i> , Mixed Greens Gallery, New York
2016	<i>Peter Bregoli &amp; Wendy Edwards: Themes of Gardens, Landscape, Experience and Memory</i> , Russell Janis: Brooklyn Project Space, NY
2017	<i>Wendy Edwards and Jerry Mischak</i> , Mystic Museum of Art, Mystic, CT <i>The Flower Show</i> , Cohen Gallery, Perry and Marty Granoff Center for Creative Arts, Brown University <i>American Genre: Contemporary Painting</i> , Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art, Portland, ME <i>May China 2017 International Expo Tour</i> , China National Academy of Painting, Beijing; The Fine Arts Museum of Karamay; Tian Shan Fine Arts Institute, Urumqi, Xinjiang
2018	<i>Wendy Edwards Monotypes</i> , Russell Janis: Brooklyn Project Space, NY <i>Reimagining Gender: Voices, Power, Action</i> , Fine Arts Center, University of Rhode Island, Kingston <i>May China 2018 International Expo Tour</i> , China National Academy of Painting, Urumqi Painter’s Academy, Urumqi, Xinjiang
2019	100th birthday of the artist's father, Charles Edwards <i>Dot Conference</i> , The Yard, Williamsburg, New York <i>May China 2019</i> , Xi’an Academy of Fine Arts, Xi’an <i>AXxoN N.: A Collective Commentary on David Lynch’s Inland Empire</i> , Essex Flowers, NY; traveling to Rhode Island School of Design Memorial Hall





Dreamboat, 2013





DAVID WINTON **BELL GALLERY**, BROWN UNIVERSITY

A program of the **BROWN ARTS INITIATIVE**

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