

# AVENUE 12 GALLERY

Review by Dewitt Cheng of our current exhibition:

*David Edwards: Biomorphic.*

DeWitt Cheng is a freelance art critic and curator covering the San Francisco Bay Area. He has written for Artweek, Art Ltd, Artillery, Art 21, Huffington Post, San Francisco Art Magazine, Sculpture, and Visual Art Source, among others. He has also curated Stanford Art Spaces, the Peninsula Museum of Art and others.

## **David Edwards: Biomorphic**

at Avenue 12 Gallery San Francisco

By Dewitt Cheng

[ArtOpticon.us](http://ArtOpticon.us)

*The word 'biomorphic,' in art-history-speak, means organically shaped, not geometric. The term originates in the Surrealism of the 1920s and 1930s, which advocated ambiguous, organic forms deriving from the unfiltered subconscious. The Surrealists' interest in bypassing conscious intent with its limitations in search of le merveilleux produced art as well as literature (automatic writing) that exploited chance and instinct; the unpremeditated painterly gesture was one of Surrealism's legacies to Abstract Expressionism. David Edwards' exhibition comprises four bodies of work:*

- 1) *abstract calligraphic paintings on paper and plaster, made with ink and tools fabricated by the artist, resembling manuscripts written in some archaic, unknown language;*
- 2) *metal drawings, enlarging these pictograms into wall reliefs in steel, cut with a plasma cutter, and painted in brown and black acrylic;*
- 3) *sculptures similarly based on the pictograms, but built into three dimensional bas-reliefs with styrofoam, Bondo car-body filler, epoxy and wax; and*
- 4) *4) botanical-looking structures resembling stems bedecked with seed pods, made from, of all things, black trash bags made of LDPE (low-density polyethylene) transformed with heat and, one would suspect, skillful manipulations like a glassblower's.*

*Painting #2 and Painting #4 display Edwards' asemic (nonliteral) writing in square blocks of characters that suggest simplified human figures (as in cave paintings), sometimes seemingly in costume, flowers, eyes, fruit seeds, and even microscopic flora and fauna. Edwards began drawing with a wooden rod dipped into India ink, then moved with a cast-glass dip pen before finding a more flexible solution by casting his own dip pen in polyurethane.*

*The Metal Drawings, made from painted, cut steel, isolate and enlarge the characters. Edwards used a slide projector, decidedly old-school, to transfer the ink sketches to the steel after which the high-tech plasma cutter comes into play. The dialogue between the artist's materials and the impulses controlling his hand—the ch'i, or life force, in Chinese calligraphy—yields images of unpredictable yet compelling poetry. Fossilized primitive*

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*life—egg cases, tentacles, seed pods—though not expressly invoked by the artist, will certainly come to mind in these untitled ‘drawings’ that are reminiscent of the indeterminate living shapes in the paintings of Joan Mirò materials and the impulses controlling his hand—the ch’i, or life force, in Chinese calligraphy—yields images of unpredictable yet compelling poetry. Fossilized primitive life—egg cases, tentacles, seed pods—though not expressly invoked by the artist, will certainly come to mind in these untitled ‘drawings’ that are reminiscent of the indeterminate living shapes in the paintings of Joan Mirò and the sculptures of Jean Arp.*

*More three-dimensional are Edwards’ wall reliefs and sculptures, built up and out into the viewer’s space, but still fundamentally conceived of as wall-hung objects, like trophy tools or weapons of unknown purpose. These mysterious artifacts could populate a Parisian ethnographic museum, as could the 1930s Surrealist works by Giacometti with whom they share esthetic DNA. Edwards’ Plastic Forms sculptures [below], again wallmounted, are symmetrical structures suggestive of seed pods, spines, thistles, and egg cases, technical tours de force that have been magically or alchemically wrought from lowly garbage bags, a battery of specialized tools (tubes, spray bottles, misters), and practice, practice, practice. The artist, who has a degree in Plastics Technology: “I always want to try out new things.”*

*David Edwards has always gravitated to abstract art made from compulsion and necessity, and ad-libbed, rather than preplanned: he likes to “not have any idea what [he] was doing; to just dive in and make marks.” At the same time he has a love of materials, from the thick oil paint used by Van Gogh, when he was beginning his career, to Winsor Newton India ink, which combines intense pigment with just the right viscosity; a choice rather than preplanned: he likes to “not have any idea what [he] was doing; to just dive in and make marks.” At the same time he has a love of materials, from the thick oil paint used by Van Gogh, when he was beginning his career, to Winsor Newton India ink, which combines intense pigment with just the right viscosity; a choice made after considerable experimentation, which eliminated sumi ink because of its preparation time, a ritual that some artists, of course, embrace. His work combines an artist’s interest in instinct and gesture with a scientist’s curiosity about materials to create “drawings from the subconscious come to life,” “living shapes,” and darkly mysterious artifacts suggestive of amulets, charms, fetishes, fossils, weapons and tools.*

- DeWitt Cheng, July 2021