

Edna Manley

BY O'NEIL GRANT

EDNA Manley is dubbed as the mother of the cultural arts in Jamaica. She was a remarkable woman, who was well known as the cousin and wife of Prime Minister Norman



Manley. But she was primarily an artist, who never — in all her years of political campaigning or in the years following Norman's death as her own health became more unstable — lost sight of her true purpose.

The next work of art was constantly in vision. Even in her last years she experimented with new techniques, wrestling with the physical difficulties of sculpture in any medium.

Born in Yorkshire England in 1900, she was the fifth of nine children with a Jamaican mother and English father. After studying at St Martin's School of Art, she married in 1922 and moved to Jamaica where her career as a sculptor was born, creating images that reflected Jamaica's struggle and uprising.

Edna Manley's popular *Negro Aroused* reflects her stylistic abilities and interests during that era.

Created intentionally from dark mahogany, its exposed black upper body supports a head push upwards in search of a better life. Her message was mainly promoting self-dignity for the black race, but never at the expense of personal details.

As part of her efforts to support national development Edna taught art classes and helped to establish the Jamaica School of Art and Crafts in 1950 through which she influenced later generations of artists.

Edna Manley in her later years still played an active role in Jamaica's cultural development as a founder and member of the National Gallery of Jamaica and as one of the country's foremost artists.