

# Celebrating Edna Manley's life and work

BY DONNA MARIE

**Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the life of renowned Jamaican artist, Edna Manley, the National Gallery of Jamaica officially opened the Edna Manley Galleries on Wednesday in honour of the artist who inspired a generation to cultural artistic expression.**

She would have been 100 years old on Wednesday, March 1. Had she lived to that ripe age, Edna Manley would have been proud of the country's new generation of artists who, like herself, identify with the struggle and aspirations of a people through their work. Many of them were among the large gathering that packed the Gallery to view her work and honour her.

Painting a picture with words, guest speaker, UWI Vice Chancellor, Professor Rex Nettleford talked about the late artist's human and artistic spirit.

"This twin gallery is a timely addition to the patrimony of this land Edna Manley loved so well

and spent her life helping us to understand why we, too, should love it as much. She had consummate faith in the creative potential of the Jamaican people — her people," he said passionately.

Indeed, her artistic legacy has touched many a life with its social, political and biblical themes as depicted in the pieces that now form a permanent Edna Manley exhibition at the gallery.

"Behind the power exuded by the aroused Negro, The Bread Seller, that Horse of the Morning, New Moon and the Rising Sun, Brother Man and Pocomania, Bogle, Angel and Phoenix, the Ancestor, Ghetto Mother and her many other masterworks, lies a complex weave of history, existential realities, and reflections on a society in transition and therefore in crisis," the professor noted.

Some of her works on exhibition include the carving "Prayer", which represented one of a series of her early work that focused on anti-colonial, nation-

alist, political themes. "Negro Aroused" was the first of these works during the colonial period of the '30's.

Her earlier pieces of the 1920's are also on display including the artist's first venture into woodcarving, "Wisdom", and the infamous bust of her husband Norman Manley.

Art lovers also see another side of Edna Manley in her 'Mourning Carvings' after her husband's death in 1969. During the period, from 1969 to 1974 her work cried out in sadness for her dearly beloved who was no longer with her. These intensely emotional pieces such as the 1971 wood carving, "Woman", "Faun" which she did in 1972, and "Grief" (1974), among others, were representative of this five-year period.

The 70's, however, was considered her most prolific years. The sculptor produced pieces that dealt with the social and political turmoil of the time. One of the most moving, "Ghetto Woman" still speaks volumes about a mother's desperate

attempt to shield her frightened and emaciated children from the ravages of the times.

She saw the political process as a creative process bearing strong resemblances to her special form of art — sculpture. For what is a nation if it is not the figure moulded out of clay rich in possibilities in the hands of the sculptor as nation builder?" Professor Nettleford insisted.

Edna Manley turned to

painting in the 1980's until her death in 1987. Her paintings, like her sculpted pieces, imparted messages of spirituality, life, death, suffering, and redemption.

Indeed, we give her credit for not only imparting a truly culturally rich experience, but for leaving a legacy of art as founder of the School of Art that teaches the next generation the expression of life through the art that she lived.

