

ALL WOMAN

Edna Manley as
photographed by
Maria LaYacona.

Edna Manley...

Fingers with a message

ALL WOMAN continues the series "They Made A Difference", profiling 15 most influential women of the 20th Century. Today, we look at sculptor, Edna Manley.

Edna Manley had a famous last name, one that is steeped in politics and the annals of Jamaican public life. But this England-born lady, wife of a premier and mother of a prime minister, carved out a name for herself as one of Jamaica's foremost artists.

As her granddaughter Rachel recalls in her Drumblair memoir, Edna Manley steered clear of the politics that drew the passion of her husband Norman, and their sons Michael and Douglas.

Indeed, in Drumblair, Rachel Manley points out that her grandmother kept her politics to herself; whatever political opinions she held was never made public.

Instead, she chose to make her mark in a much more creative arena. How a gentle, reserved woman could conceive provocative pieces like *Negro Aroused* and the Paul Bogle statue in Morant Bay may have surprised the ignorant but not those who knew the petite Edna whose commitment to the arts was unyielding until her death in 1986.

Edna Manley was born in London and lived there until she married Norman Manley, a distant cousin. She moved to colonial Jamaica in the 1920s with the promising Manley and with him groomed a family dynasty that would fashion modern Jamaica.

Their gentle personalities made for a lasting bond until "NW's" death in 1969, and even when son Michael assumed his father's mantle as head of the People's National Party, her role as the quiet rock of the Manley clan remained intact.

She had been a silent partner as her husband spearheaded the shaping of independent Jamaica in the 1940s and 1950s. At the time she was busy moulding another area of the country's culture.

Edna Manley's fingers were an integral instrument in the crafting of the Jamaican art scene which came of age in the 1950s with the emergence of folklorist Louise Bennett and the formation of the National Dance Theatre Movement in 1962.

If Miss Lou championed the cause of the local dialect and the NDTM brought respect to creative dance, then Edna Manley and Malachai "Kapo" Reynolds sculptures sparked an interest in Jamaican art that will last a lifetime.