

INTRODUCTION

Edna Manley: Sculptor. A Retrospective is a joint presentation of the Edna Manley Foundation and the National Gallery of Jamaica.

The exhibition presents a chronological overview of the work of *Edna Manley* (1900-1987). Spanning a period of 67 years, it affords the opportunity of insight into Edna Manley's oeuvre, and through her work the birth and development of the Jamaican Art Movement.

A total of 205 sculptures, paintings and drawings is on view. Apart from the works belonging to the National Gallery of Jamaica and the Edna Manley Memorial Collection of the National Gallery, many of the works in the exhibition are borrowed from private, corporate, and public collections in Jamaica and abroad. The present exhibition is hence a unique opportunity for the public to see works which are normally not accessible.

The retrospective is presented in six galleries:

- GALLERY I : *The Twenties;*
 GALLERY II : *1930-1941;*
 GALLERY III : *The Forties - The Dying God Cycle;*
 GALLERY IV : *The Fifties and Sixties ;*
 GALLERY V : *1969-1974-A Period of Mourning;*
 GALLERY VI : *The Final Years*

Preceding these galleries, is the introductory lobby space with "recreations" of major works, the best known being the series of silk screen prints after major drawings which was produced in 1980 and the third version of *Negro Aroused*, 1982. In addition, there is a small documentary exhibition, featuring photographs, original letters, diaries and other documents on the artist's life and work.



GALLERY I: THE TWENTIES



Beadseller, (1922)
National Gallery of Jamaica

Ape (1924). *Beadseller* was inspired by the artist's observation had on the artist. *Wisdom* and *Ape* are Edna Manley's earliest woodcarvings and represent a phase of experimentation with the new medium.

In 1924, also, Edna Manley made a number of portraits, of friends and family members. The sole representative here is the portrait of her husband, *Norman* (1924), which is the most realistic work of the group. The others show varying degrees of stylization which illustrates the artist's involvement in modernist developments in art (see documentary exhibition).

The second half of the 1920's is marked by a new development: the rigid geometrical forms of her Cubist phase gave way to bulbous, curvilinear shapes, which is in keeping with the monumental, neo-classicist trend

The nine sculptures in this gallery document Edna Manley's early career in Jamaica. The bronze *Beadseller* (1922) is not only Edna Manley's first Jamaican sculpture, it is also the earliest major work in the retrospective. Decidedly modernist in approach, the work represents the first major breakthrough in the artist's career. It initiates a Cubist inspired period in her work which is also represented here by *Wildcat* (1924), *Wisdom* (1924) and



Norman, (1924). Estate of Edna Manley (Photograph Maria La Yacona)

in the work of major European artists of the time such as Picasso, Maillol and Dobson. The most important work from this period is the over lifesize *Eve* (1929), which is unfortunately not available for this exhibition. Edna Manley's "neo classicist" phase is represented here by *Demeter* (1925), *Torso* (1926), *Adolescence* (1927) and *Boy With Reed* (1928). The woodcarvings of this period testify to the artist's rapidly developing mastery of her new medium, wood.



Boy With Reed, (1928)
Private Collection

GALLERY II: 1930-1941

The first work in this gallery, *Adam and Eve* (1931) represents an extension of the ideas and styles of the 1920's.

Many of the major works of the transitional period of the early 1930's are lost, however, several fine bronze maquettes have survived and are on view here, namely: The studies for *Seventeen* (1932), *Sixteen* (1932), *Rachel* (1934), *Sun and Earth* (1934), and *Mountain Girl* (1935). Contemporary photographs of the lost works accompany the maquettes and these along with two major surviving works, the rare stone carving *Beulah* (1933)



Beulah, (1933) The Wallace Campbell Collection



Negro Aroused, (1935) National Gallery of Jamaica

and *Man With Wounded Bird* (1934), amply illustrate the stylistic and thematic developments of the period. Rounded forms are now tamed by a geometrical structure reminiscent of the artist's cubist period, while themes continue to be highly symbolist with references to the artist's personal life.

Negro Aroused (1935) is the first and most famous carving of the next phase of work which is almost fully represented here by *Prophet* (1935), *Pocomania* (1936), another rare stone carving, *Diggers* (1936), *Prayer* (1937) and *Strike* (1938). These works are intimately linked with the social and political developments of the time, the growth of Jamaican Nationalism and the Anti-Colonial Movement. Except for the naturalistic bronze *Strike*, the series is stylistically related to the works of the early 1930's, although they are more vigorous and monumental in character.

The late 1930's are represented by *Mask* (1938), *Youth* (1938) and *Sawyers* (1939), as well as a number of drawings, some of them related to lost works such as *Idyll* (1939). Edna Manley was closely involved in the political developments of the time and this is reflected in the optimistic, even ecstatic quality of the works of 1938/39.

The end of the decade coincides with the beginning of World War II and the stringent social commentary which is seen in the drawings *Dispossessed* (1940) and *Study For Hunger* (1940) was soon replaced by a symbolic response through Biblical references. This period is illustrated by *Fiery Furnace* (1940), *Father Forgive Them* (1940) and *Cain and Abel* (1940).

GALLERY III: THE FORTIES - THE DYING GOD CYCLE



Horse of the Morning, (1943) Edna Manley Memorial Collection, National Gallery of Jamaica (Gift of the Rt. Hon. Michael Manley) (Photograph Maria La Yacona)

This gallery is dominated by Edna Manley's famous *Dying God* cycle. We are led into the series by a number of drawings of 1941 which were inspired by Nomdmi, the Manleys' mountain retreat, and which introduce some of the key images of the *Dying God* iconography: The Sun and the Horse.

The *Dying God* cycle represents a move away from modernism and the social commentary of the previous period in favour of a highly personal, romantic symbolism. Inspired by the intimate dynamics within her own family, each symbol has its counterpart or complement: The Horse of the Morning/Day versus the Horse of the Night; Sun versus the Moon; the Sun versus the Land; the Old versus the Young; the New World versus the Old World. Except for the horse most of these symbols appear in an antropomorphic form.

The *Dying God* cycle is almost completely represented in the retrospective by such major works as *Forerunner* (1941), *The Sun Goes Down* (1942), *New World, Old World* (1942), *The Generations* (1943), *Moon* (1943), the famous *Horse of the Morning* (1943), *New Moon* (1944), *Morning* (1945), *The Land* (1947), *Night* (1948) and *Rising Sun* (1948) (exhibited in the lobby space) as well as a number of important drawings.

The *Dying God* cycle also marks the consolidation of a new stylistic development: less rigidly stylized, more realistic forms and an almost impressionistic surface treatment with visible chisel marks. Most of the major works of the 1930's were carved from dark mahogany, while during the 40's, in keeping with the symbolism of the *Dying God* cycle, the artist experimented with a variety of more luminous types of mahogany as well as other woods.



New Moon, (1944), Collection: Mr. & Mrs. George Cumber (Photograph Maria La Yacona)

Hills of Papine (1941) is the last work of the forties, and continues the development of the *Earth* theme.

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GALLERY IV : THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES



Brother Man, (1961) Collection: Mr. & Mrs. Peter Green

Despite the decrease in sculptural activity (a consequence of the artist's obligations that accompanied Norman Manley's increasingly active political career), the 1950's and 60's are a crucial period in the development of Edna Manley's iconography. We find many codas to the *Dying God* cycle, such as the mahogany relief *Growth* (1958) and the drawings *Inuo The Sun* (1954) and *None but the Brave* (1960), as well as the antropomorphic mountain imagery of *The Mountains* (1952), and the Earth Figure of *He Commeth Forth* (1962).

Womanhood becomes once again a major theme in the terracottas *Mountain Woman* (1956), *Gossipers* (1963), *Two Women* (1963), *Nude* (1965), and the carvings. *Psyche* (1966), and *Eve with Serpent* (1967). The latter, which is accompanied by a maquette, was presented by the University of the West Indies to the visiting Prime Minister of Canada, the Hon. Lester Pearson in 1967.

Edna manley had been trained as an animal sculptor and this interest now resurfaces in a number of drawings and fine terracottas of animals: *Tyger* (1963), *Goat* (1963), and *Owl* (1963). The drawings *Owl* (1961) and *Owl with Hand* (1961) were done as illustrations for Carmen Manley's story *Land of Wood and Water*.

With *Brother Man* (1961) and the *Moses* drawings of 1965 two other themes emerged: Rastafarianism and the concept of the visionary leader, although this has its antecedents in the *Prophet* (1935). The *Moses* theme which ties in with the biblical references found throughout Edna Manley's work, refers to Norman Manley's political leadership.

The large sculpture of the period include four major commissions, namely: *Crucifix* (1951) (All Saints Church, Kingston), *He cometh Forth* (1962) (originally for the Jamaica Sheraton Hotel, Kingston), the *Bogle* monument (1965) (commissioned by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust) and *Grief of Mary* (Holy Cross Church, Kingston). *Crucifix*, her first commission is most unfortunately not available, while the two versions of *Bogle* are permanently mounted as monuments in front of the Morant Bay Courthouse and at the Paul Bogle shrine at National Heroes Park, respectively. Fortunately two fine maquettes are now on view which document the development of the Bogle image.

The theme and mood of *Grief of Mary*, which is accompanied by two maquettes prepares us for the next period in Edna Manley's oeuvre.



Bogle (Maquette D.), (1965), Edna Manley Memorial Collection, National Gallery of Jamaica (Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron Matalon)

GALLERY V: 1969 - 1974 - A PERIOD OF MOURNING



Angel (1970). Kingston Parish Church (Photograph Maria La Yacona)

In 1969 Norman Manley died and the tragic, intense works the artist produced during the five years after her husband's death are all expressions of her grief and anguish: Each work of the group conveys a particular stage in her attempt to come to terms with the loss of her husband.

Already during Norman Manley's illness the artist had made sketches in which the image of *Angel* (1970), the first of the mourning carvings, began to emerge. *Angel*, the artist said, symbolizes her desire to convey Norman into "safe hands" but ambiguously ponders on her desire to hold on to him as well. The next carving *Adios* (1971) is not in the exhibition but is represented by a maquette. A movingly tender image, it represents the final embrace, the farewell and acknowledges the finality of death. *Phoenix* (1971), a traditional symbol of death and rebirth implies the hope of resurrection, the return of the lost one. Then follows the tragic *Woman* (1971), a gripping expression of the anguish of the woman alone.

Faun (1972), a return to the realm of myth, is symbolic of the frightened inner self, and was inspired by listening to Debussy's *L'Après Midi D'Un Faune*. In 1972 the first studies were made for *Journey* (1974), the last



Woman (1971). Edna Manley Memorial Collection, National Gallery of Jamaica (Gift of Mr. Aaron Matalon)



Journey (1974). National Gallery of Jamaica

major mourning carving and a tragic counterpart of the ideas imparted by *Angel*. It is an image of the soul departing, the "second birth", but again there is the reluctance to let go. The terracotta *Grief* (1974), was the last work directly related to the death of her husband.

GALLERY VI: THE FINAL YEARS



Ghetto Mother (detail), 1981, Edna Manley Memorial Collection, National Gallery of Jamaica (Gift of Dr. Paul Chen-Young)

After *Journey*, Edna Manley decided to stop wood carving and focussed instead on modelling and casting techniques, drawing and occasionally painting.

The 1970's were among Edna Manley's prolific years. After the intense interlude of the *Mourning Carvings*, she returned to concerns of the 1950's and 60's. However, in some works the ideas of the mourning period linger on, as in the *Creation of Adam* and *Expulsion from Eden* drawings, paintings and sculptures, in which the Adam and Eve figures refer to Norman

and herself. The bronze relief, *The Wave* (1977) presents a more liberal adaptation of the Expulsion theme which is in keeping with Edna Manley's earlier treatment of the couple as a theme: the First Couple stands united against the threatening wave.

The theme of womanhood persists in Edna Manley's oeuvre and works such as *Market Woman* (1975), *Washerwoman* (1977), and *The Mountains* (1977) illustrate this continuity. The theme of the grandmother, the ancestor, which emerges during the 70's is an extension of this thematic interest, reflecting her own status as mother and grandmother. *The Message* (1977), *Ancestor* (1978) and *The Mother* are among the best known works in this category.

Works such as *Jamaica 1976* (1976) reveal her concerns about the turmoil of the period, but perhaps the most dramatic example of social commentary in Edna Manley's work is found in *Ghetto Mother* (1981), her response to the electoral violence of 1980. *The Voice* (1980), also reflects on the period and refers to Bob Marley's music and philosophy.

Music and dance are the themes of several other works of the period, such as the ecstatic *The Trees are Joyful* (1976), *Dancers* (1980) and *Drummer and Dancer* (1981).

During the early 80's the artist also produced several sculptures depicting the typical Jamaican animal, the goat, among them: *Once Upon A Time* (1980), *Goat* (1984) and *Small Goat* (1984). *Jacob and the Angel* (1982) initiates the last period of Edna Manley's work, which is marked by a heightened spirituality.

During her final years, Edna Manley re-created several older works, some of which are on view in the introductory lobby. Perhaps the finest re-creation is *Tomorrow* (1985) which is based on one of the major examples of the ecstatic carvings of the late 1930's. The same ecstatic, spiritual atmosphere prevails in most of Edna Manley's last works and several ponder on the subject of death and rebirth. This is movingly illustrated by such works as *The Listener* (1984), *Future* (1983), the painting *Birth* (1986) and the studies for *Raising of Lazarus* on which the artist was working until the day before her death on 10th February, 1987.



Market Women, (1936)
Collection: Spelman College

EDNA MANLEY: SCULPTOR A RETROSPECTIVE

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