

# EDNA MANLEY'S LATEST WORK

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## "In The Beginning" Her Best Carving

Touchstone himself would be hard put to it to enumerate all the ways of looking at a work of art. There is, for instance, the "manner airy", with its butterfly-like passing from picture to picture; or the "approach courteous" all on tip-toe with whispered words of commendation in the hushed voice kept for conversations in church; the "gaze earnest" belongs both to the understanding and to those who would seem to be understanding; the "stance dismayed" is in direct contrast to the "advance aggressive", where the beholder incarnates the defence of morals, of tradition and of "the old school tie;" even he is blown away by the whirlwind of the "attack direct"; and finally the "retreat nonchalant" with its battle cry: "I don't know anything about art but I do know what I like, and I don't like this!"

The picture on a chocolate box produces none of these effects, which is one reason why it is not a work of art. Epstein was right when he declared that a good work of art often shocked one at first; he did not claim that what shocked one was necessarily a work of art. And surely the truest method of approach belongs to the beholder with the eye sincere, the nose inquisitive.

**FOR SUCH**, sculpture may be of more than one kind. It may be representational—the attempt to represent or reproduce some person or event living or imagined, to translate into wood or clay or stone the body and being of someone or of some place. Epstein's busts do this; we have Conrad's arrogant head and more—Conrad's shy arrogant character.

But it may also be representational in another sense—in the sense of being symbolic. Here the attempt is to represent, not the concrete but the abstract; to incarnate in wood or stone an idea. If the human form is used, it is not used to show the human form but to show an idea by means of the human form. For this, the artist may take any liberty he pleases with the human body. Thus if Edna Manley wishes to represent or symbolise the idea of the "negro aroused", she carves the torso of a man and deliberately distorts the limbs. The distortion is not accidental but deliberate; just as in print an important word or passage may be distorted or "italicised", just as in our writings an im-

portant word may be distorted or "underlined", just as in speaking an important word or phrase may be distorted or "shouted", just so in sculpture of this type the idea may be distorted or emphasized. The heavy downward thrust of the enlarged arms denotes the effort to rise from the old apathy, the old surroundings; the head looking straight up to heaven, set at an exaggerated angle, symbolises aspiration.

### FINEST PIECE OF WORK

"Tomorrow" is a later work, and to my mind the finest of all Mrs. Manley's work, not only because of its technical perfection but also because of its deep spiritual content. And the finest piece of work that she has done since "Tomorrow" is this latest carving, "In the Beginning".

The artist who draws his inspiration from the artificial and secluded world of fashion will never produce anything but what may for a time be fashionable; there must be insight as well as the ability to portray; and that art is greatest which is rooted in the knowledge of human nature and of the

ways in which the masses of a country, the people, live, move and have their being. Mrs. Manley's work draws its inspiration from the knowledge and love of Jamaica, and here is another evidence of this; for surely the sudden inspiration which produced this work, consciously or unconsciously, was the seeing of a movement, a posture, in a native dance—probably Pocomania. Just as from the whole complicated unity of a symphony we may pick out a single phrase, isolating it and studying its beauty, so from the complicated sequence of the dance, Edna Manley has picked out "this phrase" this attitude. She has taken something that was passing, momentarily, "swift as a shadow" and fixed it for ever. That is the glory of art, to fix and make eternal the passing moment.

### CULMINATION OF PROCESS

This carving then has less spiritual content than "Tomorrow"; it was bound to be so since it is less abstract and since its purpose is the representation of a moment of experience rather than of an abstract idea. This does not mean

that it is less in degree but rather that it is different in quality; whereas "Tomorrow" is the culmination of a process of thought that produced works like "Negro Aroused" and "The Prophet", this work is the culmination of a process that produced "The Diggers" and the "Market Women"; and yet it is somewhat different because it has in it some of the quality of "Tomorrow".

As a piece of carving, it seems to me to be the artist's finest achievement. The two figures are so skilfully related, so different, yet so united. The work has unity and as a study in sculpture, it might well be called "Point Counterpoint"; it is fascinating to see how skilfully the lines of one figure repeat the lines of the other and yet are opposed to them; contrast and repetition are both used to give effect of flowing movement. "Male and Female created He them" and here we find one figure the complement of the other—opposed yet united, contrasted yet complementary. Here is a work that is satisfying in its conception and admirable in its execution.

B/N Manley, Edna