

B/N - MANLEY, Edna

In her earliest work in Jamaica, Edna Manley's sculpture is based on cubist forms - planar and rectilinear. "The Beadseller" and "The Ape" are examples from this period. Her work was sometimes cast in bronze, as for example "The Beadseller", but unable to find facilities for casting in Jamaica, Edna Manley turned to carving. As a carver, she is self-taught.

By 1925 she had abandoned the rectilinear for more massive bulbous forms. Her work was done in Jamaican wood and shows a deep feeling for the material.

Structurally the works are well balanced - upward sweeping areas counterpoised with downward moving forms. There is a tendency to distort certain areas of the body for emphasis, for instance the arms. A marked economy is seen in her treatment of surface features.

A point of special interest is that Edna Manley judged the feelings of the Jamaican people well, and three years before the riots of 1938 she carved "Negro aroused". "The Prophet" also belongs to this period. Carved in 1937, it shows the negro, arms now freed and with head tilted slightly downwards suggesting suppressed anger.

From this phase of art Edna Manley moved into her "Dying God" series of sculptures. Here she explores the universal cycle of youth and age, innocence and experience. Naturally occurring phenomena, for example The Sun and The Moon, are in human form. "Horse of the Morning", though not of "Dying God" series, belongs to this period. In this carving we see a symbolism, frequently discernible in Edna Manley's work, close to that of poetry. Her work, particularly of this period, is reminiscent of that of the poet/artist Blake.

Along with sculpture, Edna Manley has done many drawings. Some are studies for sculptures, some were done to illustrate books.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF JAMAICA

For display, Jan-84.