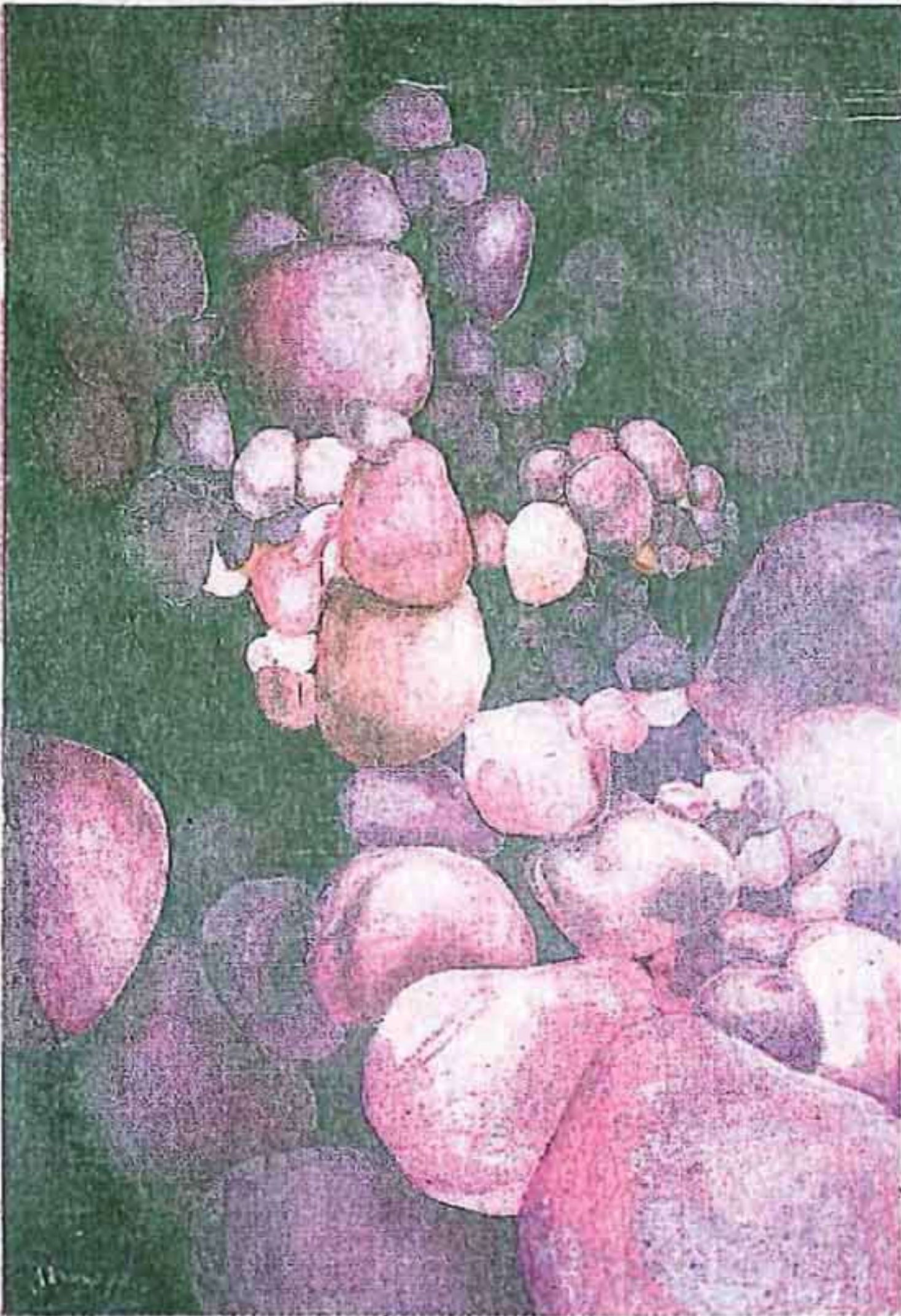


# Art Crosses



Untitled, acrylic on canvas, Monique Lofters (2009)

**T**heresa Roberts loves living with beautiful things. The walls of her Cadogan Square home in London are adorned with vibrant works of art, pieces that enchant her as she moves from room to room.

She wanted to share this love and at the same time promote the art of her birthplace, Jamaica. And so it came to be that the walls of the New Hall Art Collection at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge University, came alive with rich, vibrant textures and colours that transported the viewer 5,000 miles away to Jamaica, as they recalled the Jamaican experience.

Art Jamaica, the name of the exhibition and also a website, is the creative result of Jamaican-born Roberts, a real estate professional with a passion for art. Although her

obsession began with European art, a trip back to Jamaica introduced her to the diversity of Jamaica's visual culture, as she added artists such as Edna Manley, David Boxer, Carl Abrahams and Alexander Cooper to her collection. She says that while she believes Jamaican art can be appreciated internationally, the pieces she acquires resonate specifically with her. "I identify with many of the images in the way that only a Jamaican can," Roberts says. "They give me a feeling of belonging to a time, place and culture."

Roberts was not only the inspiration and driving force behind the exhibition, but she also loaned a number of the pieces from her private collection. In the late 1990s, she rediscovered a love for Jamaica through the canvases of Jamaica's great visual history. Having left when she

was only eight years old, her memories of the island were not idyllic. No, it wasn't the island she had left as a child, but it still intrigued her. "Jamaica had changed in so many ways when I came back that I found it hard to recognise the place I had left as a little girl," Roberts says. "But I realised that the spirit and character of the Jamaican people had not changed at all, and I fell in love with the country again."

The exhibition, which opened in October, gave her an opportunity to share her passion with the UK's art community, exposing them to the intense and diverse quality of Jamaican art, and aspiring to create the same status usually saved for Jamaica's neighbours, Haiti and Cuba. It showcased the



Chair, colour photograph, Keisha Costello (2010). (Photos courtesy of <http://gallery.me.com>)



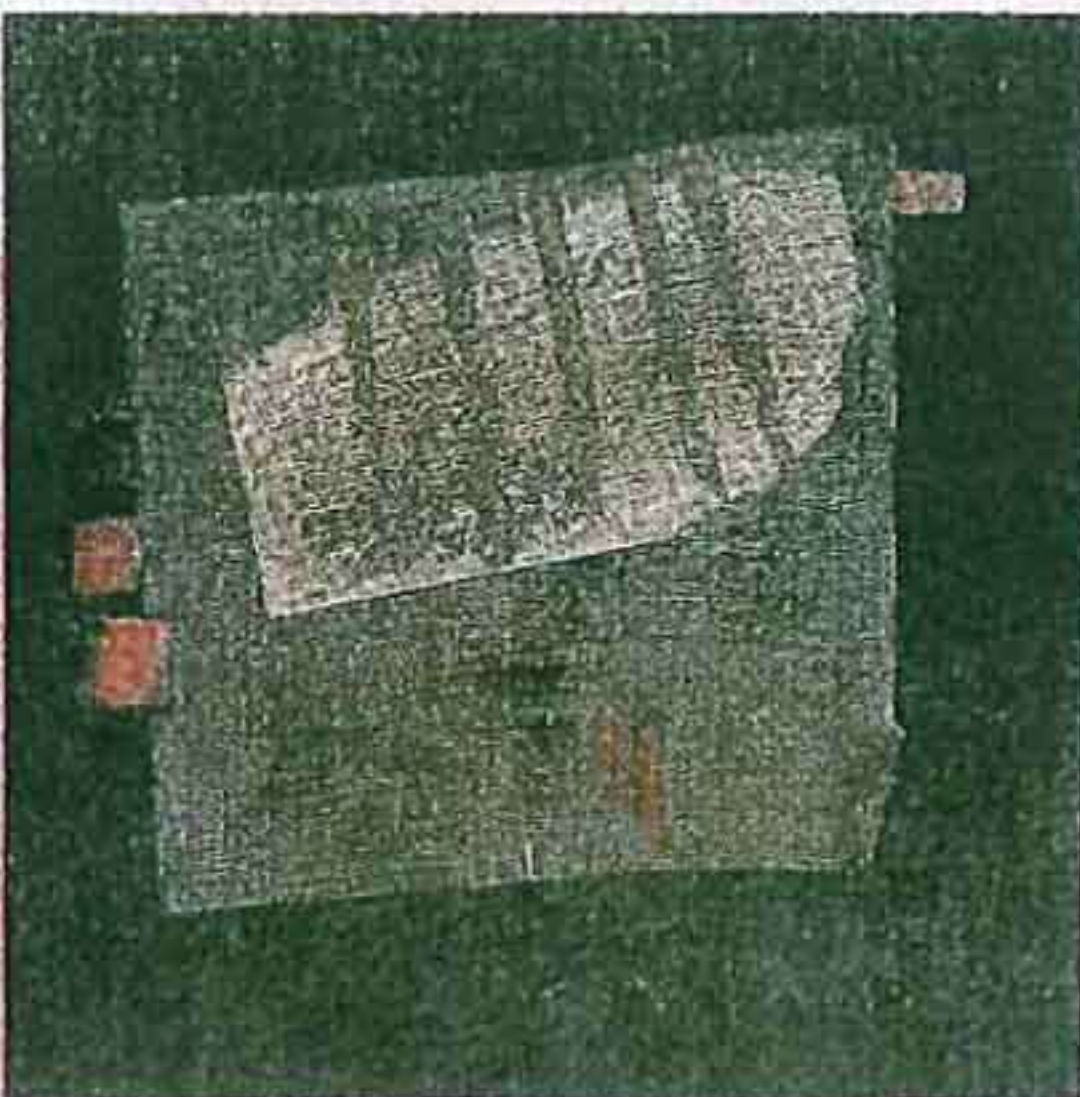
Director of The Centre of the Arts at the University of Technology (UTech), Pat Ramsay, delivers remarks at the exhibition's opening. To her right is renowned Jamaican art critic Edward Lucie-Smith.



Theresa Roberts with Home Secretary Theresa May.

work of 13 female artists that spanned five generations, covering a variety of art styles, from modern to contemporary. Renowned Jamaican art critic, Edward Lucie Smith, in his written introduction to the exhibition, explained the importance of a show such as Art Jamaica. "The show asks 'Who am I?', 'What is art?', and 'What is my relationship to its contemporary

manifestations?'" Smith wrote. He added that the pieces in the exhibition answer these questions from both a personal perspective and a collective consciousness, offering discussions on expressions of the self, the female body, race, and gender. "The artists whose work is shown in this exhibition have had to think hard about who they really are," he noted.



Untitled, porcelain enamel and jewellery, enamel on steel and copper (2009) and Silent Noise, Porcelain enamel on steel, mounted to wood (2008). Both by Helen Elliott.



# the Pond



Theresa Roberts and HRH Prince of Wales at a Prince's Trust function, held at Buckingham Palace.

Curator of the show, Amanda Rigler, also felt that it was important that the pieces expressed what it was to be Jamaican. She explained that the works represented a cross-section of Jamaica's culture, as well as artistic styles and media. "I was very taken by the idea that Jamaica is one nation made from many," she said. "Each work was taken on its own credit, and as a result there is a lot of personality and individuality in the works." As the exhibition was to be housed at the prestigious Cambridge University, it was also important to Rigler that the pieces were able to stand against the entire New Hall Art Collection — a permanent collection of contemporary art by women that has been inspiring female artists since 1986; there are currently more than 350 pieces in the collection. She was not disappointed. "The hardest part of this job was not being able to display more. Perhaps this will spur the hope of further shows that build upon 'Art Jamaica'," she said.

By spanning the generations, the work illustrated the cycle of art. Works by younger artists like Ebony G Patterson, and Monique Lofters seem to be a continuance of those of their predecessors such as Edna Manley and Laura Facey. Jamaican art advocate, cultural maven and director at



Hobnobbing with the British Prime Minister David Cameron at a political event.

the Centre for the Arts at the University of Technology (UTech), Pat Ramsay, in her written introduction to the exhibition noted, "Jamaican art is organic, constantly evolving, and with each evolution it seeks to challenge conventional understandings of the art form and format." Speaking of evolution, it seems she too is part of this circle. Ramsey shared that the first exhibition she produced more than 30 years ago also featured 13 female artists. "We as women are the true nurturers, and we must take up the baton and nurture this incredible creative force," she said. She believes that Roberts is the perfect woman to lead the charge. "Theresa is a wonderful addition to the Jamaican art scene, looking on it with fresh eyes, and she

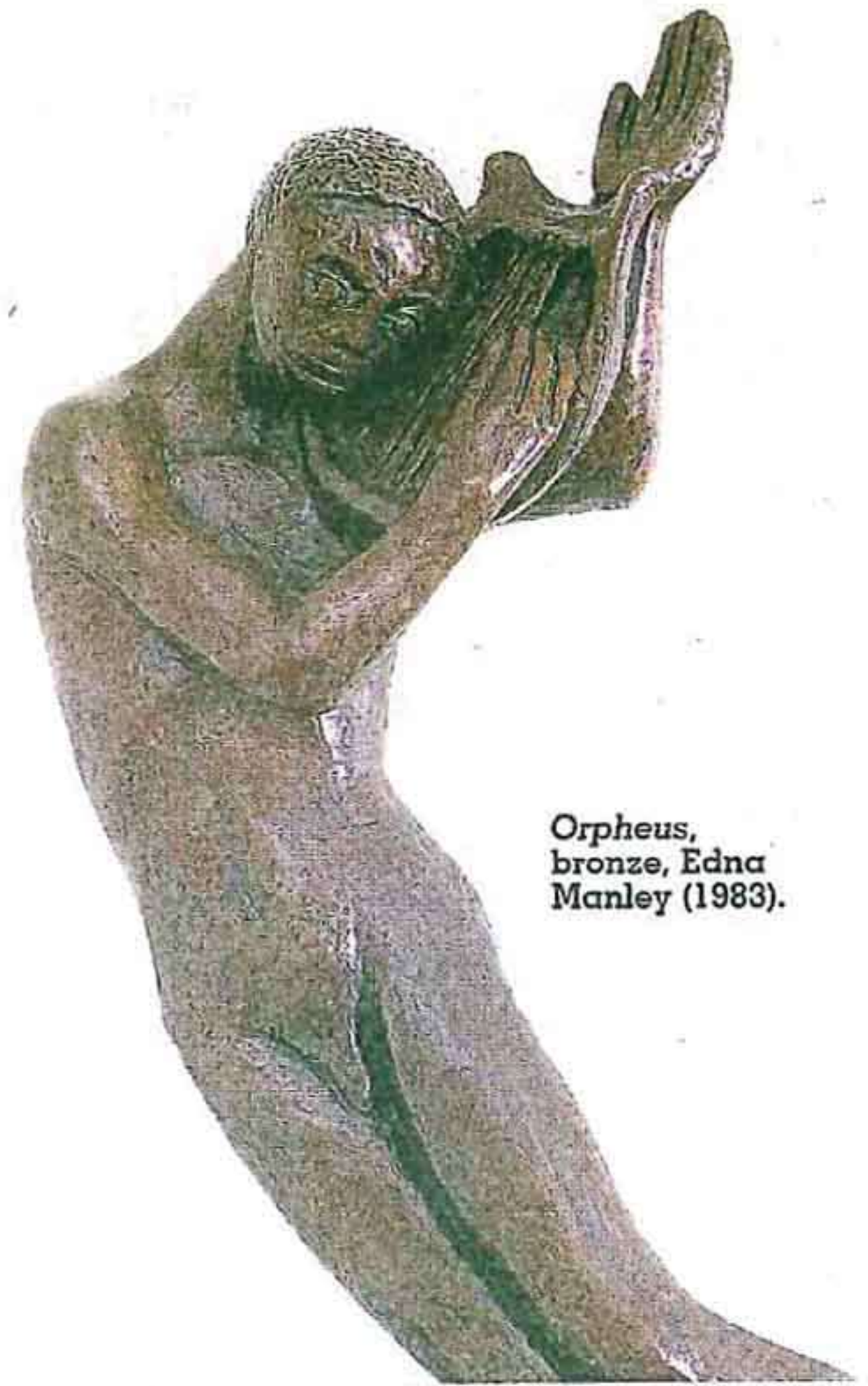


Unearthing, mixed media on canvas, Trudy-Ann Barrett (2010)

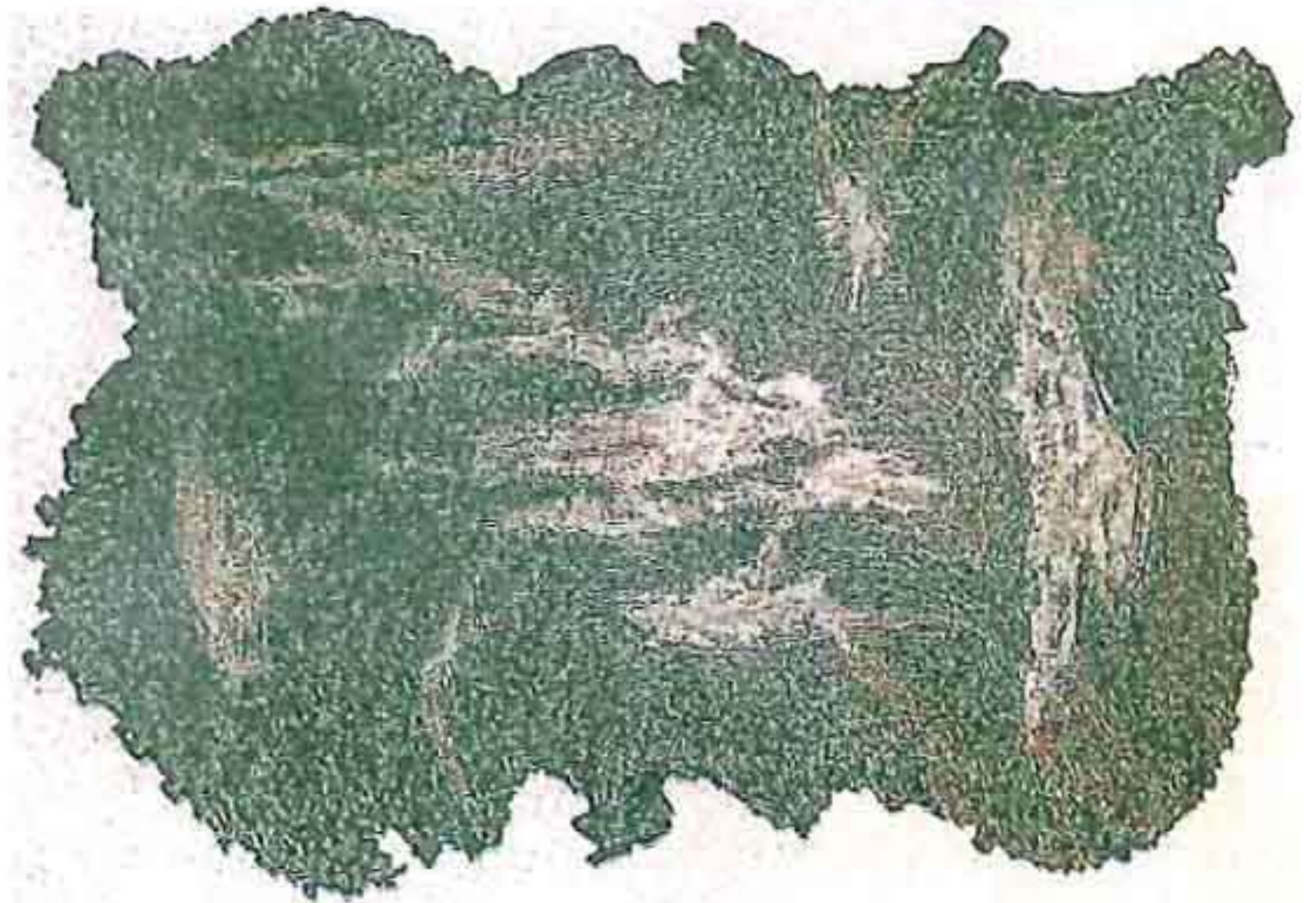
has a strength of conviction to really make it work."

Roberts launched the website [www.art-jamaica.org](http://www.art-jamaica.org) in October 2009, one year before the exhibition opened. Frequent trips to and around Jamaica enabled her to collect pieces that she liked. "I only buy something if I'm really in love with it, not so much as an investment," she says. However, she admits that she is also drawn to an artistic quality and intrinsic merit, which is most often attached to a monetary value.

Although her current drive is to promote Jamaican art, it was her love for European art



Orpheus, bronze, Edna Manley (1983).



Subterrene, oil on canvas and wood, Margaret Chen (1994)

that launched her on the path of becoming a collector. "It was a sculpture of my body in wire mesh, with a hint of pink sprayed on certain areas," Roberts says of the piece that started it all. The artist was David Begbie, and it was this gift from the artist that inspired her collection. It also inspired her to collect the work of living artists, because she liked to forge relationships with those artists whose work she collected. Some other artists who can be found in her collection include award-winning portrait artist Craig

Wylie (who painted a portrait of Roberts), Kurt Jackson, and James Gillick. However, Roberts admits that two on her artistic wish list include Jamaican artist John Dunkley, and the legendary Pablo Picasso. "No two collectors, or collections are the same," she says. "It's such a personal passion. I started my collection with European art, but Jamaican art is something I feel that really represents me, my experience and existence as a Jamaican woman."

— Leisha Chen-Young



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