

# Maryon Kantaroff: Alone in her art

By CONNIE RAE

Maryon Kantaroff, sculptor and lecturer, has always lived on the periphery of life. Daughter of Bularian peasants, she was raised primarily in Toronto with the usual strict upbringing and social taboos of the postwar years. Apart from the nationality uniqueness, her affinity to maths, physics, sports and music also made her different.

Before the formal lecture to the Women Here, Women Now group at Sheridan College Wednesday evening, Maryon candidly spoke of her earlier sexual ignorances. When she refused to marry at the age of 17, because she wished to continue with her studies, her boyfriend, in the cold anger of being refused and rejected, raped her.

She is still angry at the experience, because, as she said, "I was crazy about him. He could have easily seduced me. . . what should have been a warm and wonderful experience was ugly and emotionless."

Then there was the aftermath of solitary terror, and fear of pregnancy. "Back then, 23 years ago, a girl didn't dare tell anyone, especially her parents."

Perhaps this experience played an important role in shaping her future and her sculptures. This theme, rejection of man caused by the threatening intelligence of woman, causing him to vent his hostility on her, instead of lovingly uniting, seems evident in all her work. Woman, personified by earth colors, is life-giving, and surrounded by the snake, a fearful, mythological symbol of knowledge, encompassing woman, and through her, seeking to impart fearful wisdom to man, who is less receptive. The egg, symbol of fertility, is ever present in her works.

## BACKGROUND

A rich scholastic background in art, archeology, and etymology, ("girls didn't take physics of architecture then"), led to the hated position of assistant curator at the Art Gallery of Toronto, teaching of ancient religions, and finally postgraduate work in sculpturing. It has brought a very meticulous, mathematical, symbolic quality into her work.

She studied, exhibited, and did commissioned work

in Europe for 11 years. She didn't plan it, it just happened, just as a 1968 showing at City Hall brought her back to Toronto, and subsequent events led her to stay. "I never make decisions," she said. She now has her own studio and casting foundry.

Deciding to devote her life to sculpturing was "like admitting to my parents that I had decided to become a call girl." Henry Moore refused to apprentice her. As he said, "We don't take women. We had one once, and it caused trouble. My wife put her foot down."

At that time, Maryon accepted the rationale. Now she compares it to the recent Israeli suggestion, that since women are currently being raped in Israel, there should be a curfew for women. "Screw that, shy not a curfew for men?" she asked.

Maryon Kantaroff, dressed in earth brown sweater and jeans, covered by a hand-crocheted long jumper in Autumn golds, described her work and artistic progression by means of films and slides. Being very innovative, she devised a cheaper method of sculpturing by carving styrofoam, waxing it, and spraying it with cement.

## BRONZES

Apart from doing massive bronzes for shopping plazas, which she insists on designing to fit the surroundings, she does reliefs for apartment lobbies, and large buildings.

One of her bronze sculptures, Bird of Paradise, is on display at Sheridan Mall. It again is of a powerful sensuous nature, and depicts the blending of man and woman together, entwined by the snake. Together they draw from universal truths to fuse and humanize the world.

"Men are feminists too," she pointed out. Why should man have to be strong and all-powerful? Socialization teaches men to be aggressive."

At this point in her lecture, the huge luminous eyes sparked, and the pixie face came alive under its crop of sleek black hair. "When the world notices that man has a penis, it teaches him to be aggressive. They are taught to be all-powerful, dominant, strong, in control, dispassionate.

"It is man who wages wars. There have been over a hundred wars since 1945. Women don't wage wars, men do. It is man who is responsible for the rape of our lands, our resources. When nuclear power became a reality, women and children suffered the consequences of their terrible power, and it was then that women could no longer afford to sit back and take the passive submissive role.

"Both men and women should be capable of sensitivity, thoughtfulness, aggression and strength. The roles should be humanized and integrated. Men would no longer be forced to vent their inexpressible 'female' emotions in frustrated anger, and women would no longer feel guilt-ridden for being intellectual or creative, traditional male roles.

"We have a split value system. An experienced man is a man of the world; a woman is a slut! If sex is good, it should be good for both."

## FRUSTRATED

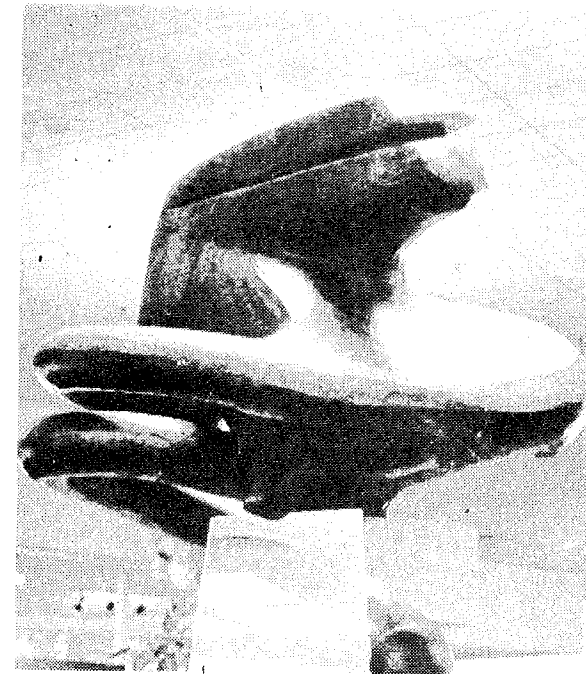
At a feminist meeting at City Hall, Maryon overheard a political figure say that all the women there were sexually frustrated. She was inflamed, and quickly drew the ridiculous parallel that this man was in politics because 'he couldn't get it up'.

Maryon has accepted herself as normal, and shaken off guilt feelings about being an intellectually powerful force in the cultural life of Canada.

A creator, worthy of note, she is. She sees her work as a continuing ongoing process, is totally 'gut involved' when working on a piece, but when finished, feels it is healthy to let go of it, and get on with the next.

Much in the same way, she parallels the idea of a mother giving birth to a child. "When the child is born, it is free, autonomous; and has its own entity and life." She mused that had she been a mother herself, she might not be so preoccupied with the fetus, egg symbolism.

Married once to a man who wanted neither children or sex, and pointing out that "one didn't come without the other," she is now satisfied with a relationship which she describes as very beautiful. "He shares my



Presently on display at Sheridan Mall is the Bird of Paradise, one of Kantaroff's sculptures. She spoke recently to the Women Here, Women Now series at Sheridan College on "Women and Art".

views on life, is very creative himself, and is excited with her own work involvement," — an unusual man in today's stereotyped society.

She is a woman proud of her accomplishments, totally immersed in her creativity, a powerful speaker on 'humanism', and a producer of works of art that are at once powerful, graceful, disturbing, whimsical, but certainly never dull.

Mary Kantaroff — a bitch feminist? I think not. Rather a drop in and have tea type, easily accessible. One of her sculptures represents an ancient definition of love which she feels is very splendid, and characterizes her sensitivity — Two souls meet, and touch, and greet each other.