

Melanie Meekhof

Doris Caesar's, *Young Girl With Upraised Arms*

One of the few sculptures in the KIA collection is Doris Caesar's, *Young Girl With Upraised Arms*, done in 1955. This bronze piece spoke to me with a powerful voice in the expressive manner in that Caesar chose to portray the young girl. I question why are her arms raised? Is she reaching for womanhood, possibly raising them in despair? The use of texture verse a smooth bronze finish to me suggest the bumpy road we as women often encounter. As stated in my reading about her female pieces the question her sculptures put out there is what it is to be a woman or what it is to be.

More than the female form itself, as an interest is the tension of bone, flesh and muscle. The play of light and shadow, smooth and rough create rhythm with strong motions stopped abruptly or turn back upon themselves. The elongation of the figure creates a paradox of grace and angularity. Quintessential to femininity is the swelled hips and breast of her female sculptures. It appears as if the figures were drawn out of their proportions not by the artist but a force within themselves creating a spiritual impression. There is aesthetic pleasure of the attenuate forms themselves is seen in the mass against brittle support, of the sharp angle against sinuous curve. The surface treatment relates to the act of creating the figure and the figure's existence.

It was not until the existence of Doris Caesar that the idea of a female sculptor was known in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She was born on November 8, 1892 in Brooklyn, New York and died in 1971. At the age of eleven she lost her mother to pneumonia. The loss of her mother brought her close to her father who was a brilliant young lawyer. In the fall of 1909, Doris entered the Art Students League where she studied for about four years. In

1913, she married Harry Caesar and the two had three children. In 1924, one year after the birth of her daughter, her father died. It was during her recovery from her loss she directed her thoughts to art. With Modern art, sculpture specifically in mind she enrolled in Alexander Archipenko's School on 57<sup>th</sup> street in New York. She spent day and night working for five years on the 3-d form. Jumping ahead twenty years later in 1948, she joined the "New York Six," a group of sculptors, who were members of the Nation Association of Women Artists. The women joined together for group show at the Argent Galleries getting the attention of Andre Chamson, director of Petit Palais in Paris. The fifties brought about change for Caesar, she abandoned the use of male figure, her story telling technique, portraiture and eliminated facial expressions moving toward primarily female figures. Caesar claimed other artists did not have any direct influence on her work, but critics disagree. It is said the solidarity of the silhouettes of her figures are reminiscent of Alberto Giacometti; the rippling exaggerated surfaces of the bronze shadow Emile Antoine Bourdelle, and her simplification of form reflect the teaching of Alexander Archipenko. She brought her knowledge of the female heart transcending femininity through her creative powers.