

## OTHER NEWS

## EASTER ISLAND MOAI FOR SALE

The Chilean Government launched an investigation after it was discovered that a Miami art gallery has a collection of Easter Island artifacts for sale. The gallery claimed that the carvings are up to 1,000 years old. Authorities in Chile claim the artifacts were not authorized to leave the country and they are asking how two one-ton *moai* sculptures managed to make it all the way from Easter Island to a small art gallery in Miami, Florida – where they are for sale for as much as US \$1,000,000 each. According to Miami's Cronos Art Gallery, the hefty artifacts (680 kg and 952 kg respectively) are part of a private collection owned by Hernan Garcia Gonzalo de Vidal, a former high-ranking official during Pinochet's military dictatorship. Garcia apparently shipped the items to the United States in 2001. The Gallery's website claimed that one carved head is 1,000 years old and the other 700, but these age estimates have since been withdrawn and the ages now are listed as "unknown". There has been speculation that they could sell for \$600,000 each. In addition to the *moai*, the gallery is also selling 14 other items from Garcia's collection, including a stone tablet – one of only 24 in existence – that contains samples of the Rapa Nui people's now-lost *rongorongo* writing.

Garcia's collection, claimed Cronos Art Gallery owner Jose Manuel Perez during a recent interview with *El Mercurio*, is the world's most important private collection of archeological and artistic Polynesian antiquities. Garcia claims that his family has owned the *moai* since the early 1900s, before they were declared to be national heritage property in 1925, and over the years he simply bought many of the other artifacts. Others were supposedly given to him by island residents and by the former regional governor during the Pinochet-regime, Sergio Rapu, who offered the gifts in recognition of Garcia's demonstrated record as a benefactor to Easter Island and the Rapa Nui people. More than 14 years ago Garcia shipped his collection to Santiago with permission from the Rapa Nui people. However, then-governor Rapu told *El Mercurio* that he does not recall approving the transfer of the items.

According to other gallery documents, before sending the objects to Miami in 2001, Garcia "obtained administrative permission from the Council of National Museums as required by Chilean law." However, no such council exists, and the organization that the documents may have meant to refer to, the Council of National Monuments (CMN), insists vehemently that it never authorized the items – considered national treasures – to be removed from Chile. "We have never authorized a private collection of original pieces from Easter Island to leave the country. Never! We've only allowed pieces to be loaned abroad with specific dates of exit and entry stipulated," CMN Executive Secretary Angel Cabeza told *El Mercurio*.

According to Cabeza, the statues for sale in Miami are either fakes or were removed from Chile illegally. "If it's true that Mr. Garcia ...took the pieces in question and if these pieces really are what they are supposed to be, they couldn't have been taken from the country without our authorization. We, furthermore, have never received a request of that type," he added. CMN plans to launch an investigation to determine if the *moai* and other items are forgeries, in which case the issue would likely become a matter for authorities in the United States, or

whether they were illegally removed from Chile. Garcia, who was described in 1989 by the magazine *Que Pasa* as one of the infamous "Group of Ten" – powerful figures who opposed constitutional reforms and worked hard to keep Pinochet in power – currently resides in Miami. However, following all the recent publicity, he has "disappeared", claiming a "family emergency".

The latest word, direct from Angel Cabeza, is that Rapanui artisans made these most of these years ago and that their creators recognize them. It is possible that a few items may be original; Dr Adrienne Kaeppler of the Smithsonian Museum will go to Miami to study the objects. However, at this time, the art gallery is closed, the gallery's owner is out of touch, and Garcia is not to be found. Cabeza adds that, "These people have real legal problems: if the objects are authentic, there was illegal traffic in both Chile and the United States. If they are not authentic, the art gallery is guilty of false advertising."

## REVIEWS

## BBC TV: Horizon: The Mystery of Easter Island

Review by Paul G. Bahn

BRITISH TELEVISION HAS JUST SCREENED a new Easter Island documentary from BBC's "Horizon" stable, which had already made a double-program on the subject more than ten years ago. When I was first contacted by the new program makers, I was told that (a) they wanted to focus on the new work and new ideas that have arisen in the intervening years, and (b) in particular they wanted to assess three conflicting theories about the island's downfall – i.e. the manmade ecological disaster model, the natural ecological disaster model, and the theory that it was European impact which caused all the trouble. What we get in the finished show, however, is somewhat different from these early intentions.

For a start, and the source of greatest disappointment, is that the second of these theories is not even mentioned! Although Michel and Catherine Orliac were contacted at an early stage, their hugely important work and their theory have been completely ignored, which is astounding. Similarly, most of the interesting recent work by other specialists is absent: there is no Fischer, no Stevenson, and Love's work – despite his occasional presence on screen – is likewise passed over in complete silence.

Instead, what we get is a fairly pedestrian, generalized canter through the island's story. There are some new touches here and there – for example, it was good to see Hagelberg discussing her DNA analyses, Steadman with his bird bones, Owsley with his evidence for violence in human remains, and Rapu telling the story of the discovery of the eyes. There is a particularly nice scene of Love standing in one of the holes on top of Rano Raraku.

One of the silliest wasted opportunities is a passing reference to the debate concerning how the statues were moved; brief snatches of Van Tilburg and Love are intercut, with each arguing their corner – Van Tilburg still claiming that the statues were moved horizontally, and that her way is best, while Love,

on the other hand, argues for vertical transportation. But just as one expects the narrator to explain that Love's excavations of the roads, probably the most exciting and important piece of work on the island in years, have rendered this debate completely redundant, we are whisked off to another topic. No mention is made at all of this crucial development.

The show also has an unfortunate structure which gives the unwary viewer a wholly erroneous impression about how the island's story was pieced together. We are told at the start that there was no one left on the island who could tell the story, and just a few fragmentary legends survived. So scholars set about figuring out what had happened. Later we are told that Steadman found the first clue about what drove the people to war, as if it was the study of bird bones which first revealed this! The program indicates that it was only later that the tree pollen evidence came to light! Needless to say, this is not just misleading but a travesty of a long and complex learning curve. Flenley's work and his interpretation of the evidence are presented at some length, which is gratifying, but was already done in even more detail in the earlier "Horizon" shows, so one wonders why the chance was not seized here to do something different. The only novel aspect to this show, in fact, was in its somewhat simplistic scenario, presented towards the end, to the effect that the islanders recovered completely from their ecological disaster, as exemplified by the Birdman system! By 1722, when the Dutch arrived, everything was hunky-dory, and the Dutch painted a glowing picture of an island of plenty with healthy people (no mention is made of the fact that the Dutch only landed for a few hours, and saw only a small fraction of the population). So it is claimed that the islanders were doing very nicely again, and it was the arrival of Europeans that did them in. Obviously, one cannot deny that Europeans eventually had terrible effects – though the program goes right over the top when it speaks of the arrival of diseases as "germ warfare", and claims that the ecological disaster on the island "pales into insignificance" when compared to the effects of contact. The two phenomena are not comparable, and each played a crucial role in the island's history.

In short, therefore, this program had some good points – and mercifully, unlike its predecessors from the BBC, it made minimal use of live-action reconstructions, and instead used computer graphics, for example showing the three Dutch ships off-shore. But overall, it was a great disappointment, and above all a wasted opportunity. What could and should have been a first-class account of the very latest work and its implications became a simplistic and often misleading generalized account.



### ***Rapa Nui en los Ojos de Lukas (bilingual edition)***

Fundación Renzo Pecchenino y Universidad Andrés Bello.  
José Miguel Ramírez Aliaga (Translated by William Liller)  
ISBN 956-7618-09-7

This book contains *Rapa Nui, Land of the Ancestors* in both English and Spanish, written by Ramírez. This 19-page essay on the island it is illustrated by Lukas' sketches. The following 36 pages are of Lukas' drawings and cartoons. Lukas was the pen name of Renzo Antonio Giovanni Pecchenino Raggi, who was born in Italy but came to live in Valparaíso. He was famous in

Chile for his cartoons and drawings that appeared in various editorial pages. He first published in 1958 under the name of "Lukas". He died in 1988.



### ***Diccionario Ilustrado: Rapa Nui-Español- Inglés-Francés***

By Arturo Hernández Sallés and Nelly Ramos Pizarro,  
2001. With Profesores del Departamento de Lengua y Cultura  
Rapa Nui del Liceo Lorenzo Baeza Vega, Isla de Pascua.  
Illustrated by Carlos Carcamo Luna. Universidad Católica  
de Tumuco. Pehuén Editores. ISBN 956-16-0338-1.  
152 pages, soft cover. All illustrations in color.

The words in the dictionary are organized in semantic groups, by associated meanings: Useful Phrases, The Home, The Human Body, Life Cycle and Relationships, Agriculture, Fishing and Harvesting Shellfish; Work, School, Games and Sport, Music and Dance, Nature, Colors, Numbers, Beliefs, Customs and Traditions, Crafts, Archaeology, and Place Names. Each section is beautifully illustrated.

To distinguish between the vocabulary used by the elders and the young people, "classic" is used to identify expressions used by the older, more traditional Rapanui speakers; the words originating from Tahiti are used by the younger population.

Pages 126-145 consist of an alphabetical list of words in Rapanui, Spanish, English, and French; Pages 146 to 149 contain a partial alphabetical list of words in Spanish and Rapanui. For anyone wishing to learn Rapanui, this book can't be topped.



### ***Chile. Moon Handbooks. First Edition***

Wayne Bernhardson 2002  
ISBN: 1-56691-405-1

627 pages plus Index, maps, black/white photos; soft cover.

Nestled toward the rear of this massive guide to Chile is a chapter on Rapa Nui (pages 589-620). Bernhardson covers all the island basics: geography and climate, flora and fauna, environmental issues, history, government and politics, economy, population and people, Hanga Roa, plus a feature on The Art and Architecture of Rapa Nui, and the Parque Nacional Rapa Nui. One very useful feature is "The Rapanui Bookshelf". There is a map of both the island and the village of Hanga Roa.

As the bulk of this guidebook deals with Chile, travelers going to the island by way of the mainland will find it to be particularly helpful. Chile, and Chile's islands (including Rapa Nui), are thoroughly covered in this well-researched book.



### ***Voldemārs Matvejs***

***(Pseudonym – Vladimir Markov, 1877-1914)***

*Raksti, Darbu Catalogs, Sarakste.* 2002. "Neputns".

Paper cover, 16 color plates, numerous black/white photographs  
Text in Latvian and Russian. ISBN 9984-729-19-2.

Matvejs was a Latvian artist and a founding member of the St. Petersburg society of artists, "The Union of Youth". In the 1910s, Matvejs made an impact in the Russian avant-garde by publishing a number of works. This volume consists of all of