

## 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website claimed that one carved head is 1,000 years old and the other 700, but these age estimates have since been withdrawn and the ages now are listed as "unknown".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,