

DIASPORA

# From Chile, a lesser-known anniversary, so far

BY CELIA WREN

The year 2014 reported for duty with a knapsack full of significant anniversaries. The 450th birthday of Shakespeare. The centennial of the outbreak of World War I. The 50-year mark since the Beatles' first trip to America.

One milestone that has received less attention has been the centennial of the Chilean artist Lily Garafulic. A sculptor whose achievements included creating the 16 prophet statues that loom atop Lourdes Basilica in Santiago, Garafulic spent decades crafting three-dimensional work in marble, terra cotta, bronze and wood. She also composed hundreds of images on paper.

Now, in honor of the anniversary of her birth in 1914, a small exhibit of Garafulic creations — mostly on paper — has landed at the Embassy of Chile. The mysterious swirls and smudges in the prints, watercolors and other framed pieces, and the sleek white contours of the sculptures — vaguely reminiscent of Constantin Brancusi, an associate of Garafulic's — provide a tantalizing taste of the Chilean artist's sensibility.

Garafulic, who died in 2012, was "a master of her craft" and a significant figure in international art, says Rocio Aranda-Alvarado, a curator at New York's El Museo del Barrio who has spent time in Chile and written about the basilica statues. Garafulic's sculpture bridges movements, Aranda-Alvarado said in a telephone interview. "It's a little bit art nouveau; it's a little bit art deco," and it adheres to "a streamlined aesthetic" whereby "the human figure was monumental and powerful, but simplified," she said.

Garafulic's accomplishments are summed up in a new documentary, "Lily Garafulic: In Her Own Words," which has been screened in conjunction with the embassy exhibit. The Spanish-language film, with English subtitles, includes a career overview and many period photos. It also showcases footage of the artist reminiscing about her childhood in Chile; her extensive travels; her meetings with Brancusi; the time she spent studying at the printmaking workshop Atelier 17 when she was a Guggenheim fellow in New York in the 1940s; and other matters.

"She was a pioneer in so many ways," says the documentary's director, Gloria Garafulic-Grabois, noting that Garafulic was, for instance, the first woman director of Chile's National Museum of Fine Arts, in the 1970s. The New Jersey-based Garafulic-Grabois — who is the late sculptor's niece — says that Lily Garafulic chose to be a professional artist at a time when such a path was "unusual for a woman from a good family" in Chile.

Garafulic-Grabois also curated the embassy exhibit, which is scheduled to move from the Chilean embassy to another D.C. outpost: The Organization of American States, where it will be presented by Art Museum of the



EMBASSY OF AUSTRALIA

**AUSSIE-SPICIOUS DAY:** "Sequester," on exhibit at the Australian Embassy features the bookshelves of Patrick Foster and Jen Berean, the sculptures of Rob McLeish and the video of Matthew Griffin.

Americas. Later in the year, the exhibit will return to the embassy, then travel to New York City, where Instituto Cervantes will showcase it, in affiliation with the Consulate of Chile.

If the showings help raise the artist's profile in America, that's appropriate, in the view of Garafulic-Grabois, who spoke by phone just days before a trip to Chile to attend centennial festivities there. For her life of spirited independence, as well as her art, Lily Garafulic "is someone who deserves to be better known, not only in Chile, but in other places," the filmmaker says.

**Art from a land apart**

In the Lily Garafulic exhibit, an individual voice speaks up. A block or two down Massachusetts Avenue, "Sequester," at the Embassy of Australia, represents a colloquy by a group. On view through June 6, the exhibition assembles works by six contemporary artists who hail from Down Under but currently work abroad. (Most reside in New York.)

Several of the pieces are relatively high-concept. For instance, Matthew Griffin's video works "Oh No Momento" (2007) and "Waiting" (2014) use looping images (including a giant hand holding slips of paper) to examine the experience of interacting with technology.

Adopting a socially conscious approach, Patrick Foster and Jen Berean bought shelving units at a big-box store and assembled

"The human figure was monumental and powerful, but simplified," in Lily Garafulic's art.

Rocio Aranda-Alvarado, a curator at New York's El Museo del Barrio

them to create "Conciliation & Compromise," a 2014 piece that looks like . . . assembled shelving units from a big-box store. The goal, Berean said in a phone interview, was to pose questions about consumerism and mass production.

By contrast, Simone Douglas's series of hazy blue-and-white landscape prints — collectively titled "Blind" (2006) — provides a window on Australia. Douglas says the series is based on photo-



LILY GARAFULIC

**CHILEAN GETS HER DUE:** Lily Garafulic's "Self Portrait," 1947, is part of the artist's centennial show at the Chilean Embassy.

graphs she took while stranded in an Australian wilderness area during a flood. "What I was responding to was the enormity of that landscape, and the natural forces," she said in a telephone interview, noting that, in her view, the series also addresses humanity's craving for knowledge and "the idea that a photograph never actually represents a truth."

Obviously, a certain amount of intellectualism has gone into these works. The same goes for the exhibit's title. No, it is not a direct reference to cuts in U.S. government spending that took effect in 2013.

Christopher Hanrahan, who helped put the exhibit together, and who also composed a work for it — "Other Standard Models (Theatre)," an installation of steel bars and a ghost light — said in a phone interview that the title "Sequester" (which also means "to set apart") refers to the "systems of constraint" the artists have incorporated into their

pieces. By "systems of constraint," he seems to mean defined concepts.

"A lot of the show is about introducing what, taken cold, would perhaps seem quite foreign, or awkward ideas and objects and presenting them in a way that is about likeness, rather than difference," he says.

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**Lily Garafulic: A Centenary Celebration** Through June 18, and then July 8-31 at the Embassy of Chile, 1732 Massachusetts Ave. NW. Visit [www.ggarafulicilly2014.wix.com/100lilygarafulic](http://www.ggarafulicilly2014.wix.com/100lilygarafulic). Between the two stints at the embassy, the exhibit will be at the Organization of American States, 201 18th St. NW; visit [www.datesandmoreinformation.com](http://www.datesandmoreinformation.com).

**Sequester** Through June 6 at the Embassy of Australia, 1601 Massachusetts Ave. NW. Visit [www.usa.embassy.gov.au](http://www.usa.embassy.gov.au).

Wren is a freelance writer.

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