

Miami-based Eugenia Vargas is Chile's official entry into Venice's high-profile 50th Biennale — and nobody is more surprised than she



a dream made real

BY ELISA TURNER
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Miami's Eugenia Vargas was shocked to learn how much certain people knew about her in her native Chile. Especially when curators there chose Vargas to represent the country in the prestigious Venice Biennale next month.

Her nomadic artistic career started to unfold a lifetime ago. It was 1975 when she and her brother — both blacklisted — fled Chile following the brutal coup that toppled President Salvador Allende's Socialist government.

Yet last summer when she entered the Santiago office of Luisa Ulibarri Lorenzini, a prominent curator, she saw a tall stack of papers on Ulibarri Lorenzini's desk, all about Vargas and her art. "It was like the FBI," Vargas laughs. "They had this file on me. I always thought nobody there knew my work."

After all, when she left Chile she became a 20-something student of photography at the University of Montana, and then moved on to Puerto Rico, and by 1985 was in Mexico City.

In Mexico she crafted spare, melancholic performance art, like the one within a niche of an abandoned monastery. It played off the grandiose excesses of church architecture, and was prompted partly by her memories of the overbearing cathedral to which German nuns shepherded her as a schoolgirl.

Vargas also began photographing herself in an allegorical style etched with personal

▶ PLEASE SEE ART, 8M



Right, Eugenia Vargas' dreamlike images of dolls and toy horses (top, center and above) invoke myths and clichés, but don't 'talk about specific political issues in Chile.'



C. W. GRIFFIN/HERALD STAFF

COMMENTARY



Max Strang photographed this house on Plaza Street that is typical of the shotgun style of architecture found in parts of the West Grove.

Saving West Grove's history

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ARCHITECTURE

The two little houses sparkle, mint green and sky blue stucco above gleaming white wood, bright fresh paint that stands out in a neighborhood where most of the color has weathered away. They're little houses, side-by-side twins — mirror images really — but they have symbolic value well beyond mere architecture.

Not two blocks down is another new house, this one pale yellow stucco with a double-story porch and broad overhangs, another simple dwelling that is also more than it might seem. Here in the

West Grove, on Charles and Thomas avenues respectively, are signs of new life in a neighborhood that has long hung in the balance between hope and despair.

This is Miami's oldest historic neighborhood, settled by seamen and navigators, carpenters and homemakers who more than a century ago made the short trip across the Gulfstream from the Bahamas to work at the Peacock Inn or with Commodore Ralph Munroe as he built his house, The Barnacle. On a street then called Evangelist (and now Charles Avenue), the Bahamian settlers built frame houses with architecture

▶ PLEASE SEE WEST GROVE, 9M

ART BEAT

▶ **Arnold Newman: One World, One People — Portraiture in Art**, with 48 portraits of such figures as **Leonard Bernstein, Golda Meir** and **David Ben Gurion**, continues through June 1 at the Jewish Museum of Florida, 301 Washington Ave., Miami Beach. Call **305-672-5044**.

▶ **Rocket Projects**, an alternative arts space, presents its inaugural show **Customized**, with sculpture by **Daniel Arsham, Martin Oppel**,

David Rohn and **George Sanchez**, and **Assembly of an Allegory**, a mixed-media installation by the collaborative trio of artists called **FeCuOp**, with a free reception 7-11 p.m. June 7 at Rocket Projects, 3440 N. Miami Ave., Miami. Call **305-576-6082** or visit **www.rocket-projects.com**.

▶ **Past and Pending**, recent work by **Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova**, opens with a free reception 7-10 p.m. Friday at Leonard Tachmes Gallery,

817 NE 125th St., North Miami. Call **305-895-1030**.

▶ **Honey Combs**, steel sculptures by **Carolina Sardi**, opens with a free reception 7-11 p.m. Saturday at the ArtCenter/South Florida, 800 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach, in conjunction with the ArtCenter's Open Studios Night. Call **305-674-8278**.

▶ Grammy nominee **Ira Sullivan** performs with his **Inter/Outer**

Continental Quintet at 8 p.m. Friday at Jazz at MOCA at the Museum of Contemporary Art, 770 NE 125th St., North Miami. Free. MOCA will be open by donation 7-10 p.m. May 30; exhibits are **Frankenthaler: Paintings Paper** and **new work by Pablo Cano** and **Trenton Doyle**. Call **305-893-6211**.
▶ **The Human Comedy: Portraits by Red Grooms** runs through Aug. 24 at the Norton Museum of Art, 1451 S. Olive Ave., West Palm

Beach. Call **561-832-5196**.

▶ **Masters in Motion**, with works on paper by **Picasso, Miró, Rembrandt, Chagall** and **Renoir** and video projections of films about the artists, opens with a reception 7-10 p.m. Friday and 7-10 p.m. Saturday at the Bal Harbour Gallery, Bal Harbour Shops, 9700 Collins Ave., Bal Harbour. It's also open noon-5 p.m. June 1, with a portion of sales that day donated to the Miami Rescue Mission. Call **305-864-5800**.