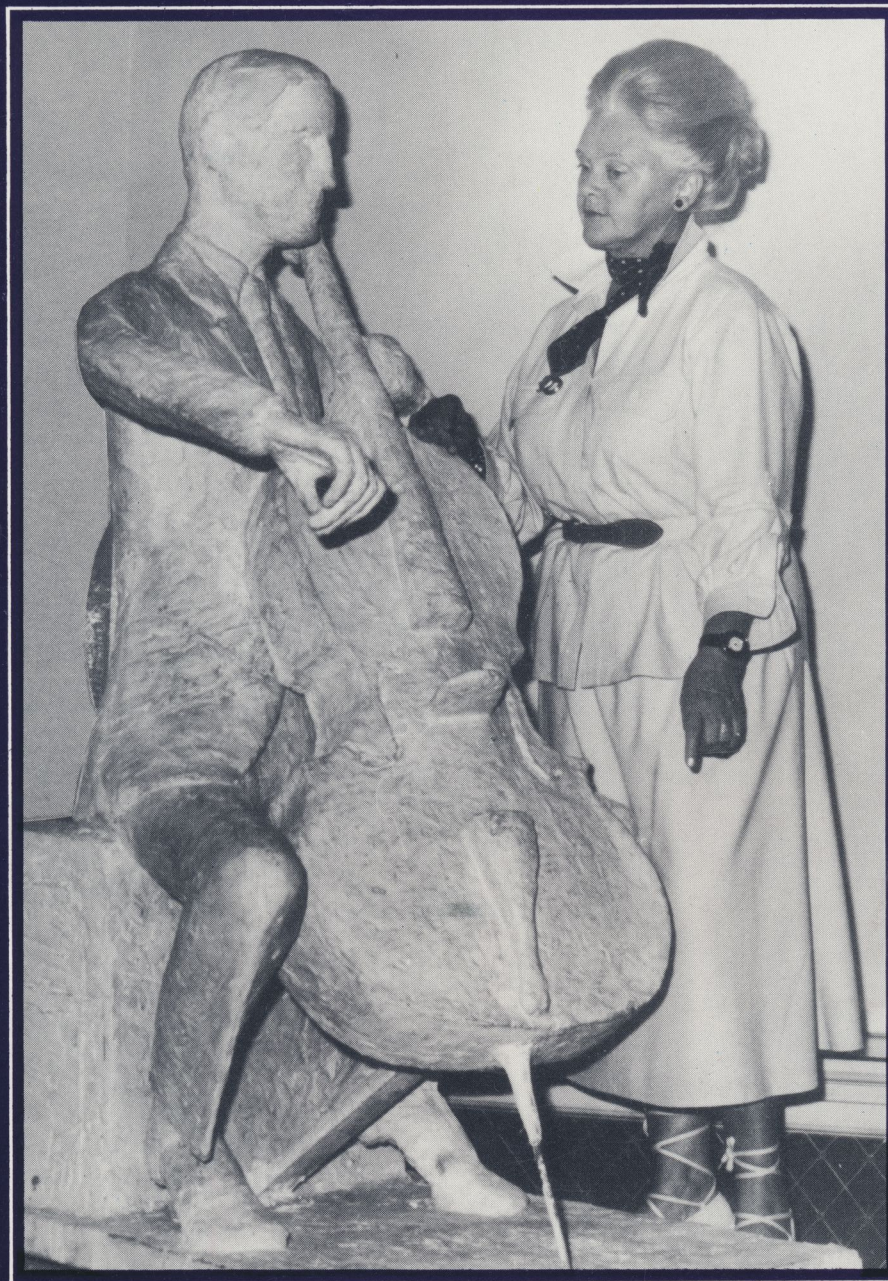


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**New Libyan Embassy in London
Latest appointments
Ted Rowlands and the Ivory Coast
At the Court of St. James's
The Atlantic Ocean . . . or Sea of Africa?**

A sculptress of distinction

by Vanessa Peet

"IT'S NOT very diplomatic of me," says Ólöf Pálsdóttir, wife of the Icelandic Ambassador in London, "but if I am honest I would say that diplomatic life has harmed my family life and my art."

Ólöf Pálsdóttir is a sculptress. Several of her works in plaster can be seen in the Embassy residence in Park Street, while the basement there is being turned into a workshop. But you can also see bronze casts of most of these works in Iceland, Denmark, Italy and Canada. The city of Reykjavik and the Town Council of Aarhus in Denmark own sculptures by Ólöf Pálsdóttir; the Canadian Embassy in Oslo has bought her work, and so have many public institutions in Iceland and Denmark. One of her best known figures, *Son*, a young man sitting with his arms outstretched, can be seen in the National Art Gallery in Iceland.

But since coming to London, Ólöf Pálsdóttir has done little sculpting. Diplomatic life has taken its toll. As Mrs. Bjarnason, wife of the Icelandic Ambassador, Ólöf Pálsdóttir finds that social duties take up much of her time. Yet she enjoys meeting people from other countries and cultures, and although the diplomatic social whirl does distract her from her sculpting, it is really the household worries and the difficulties caused to

her family life she finds most disruptive.

"We came late into diplomatic life," Mrs. Bjarnason says, "luckily, because during their early childhood my son and daughter had a settled family home in Iceland. "Her husband was an established politician, and although during the sixties he was closely involved with the Nordic Council, and so travelled rather a lot, the family were settled together in Iceland. Then in 1970 Mr. Bjarnason accepted the appointment of Ambassador in Copenhagen, a posting that lasted until 1976, when he came to London. Their daughter, Hildur-Helga (who is now 20 years old and is studying in Iceland) and son, Olafur Pall (now 17, and in public school in Devon) found, like all diplomatic children, that their family life and their education was disrupted. And their mother finds she has much to regret about the impact her husband's career has had on their children's lives.

In Copenhagen however, Mrs. Bjarnason found that she could work. The Embassy residence was large and set in a lovely secluded garden. She had a studio in the garden, and was able to arrange a peaceful settled atmosphere in which to sculpt. Also since she had trained at the Danish Academy of Art before marrying, she had many Danish friends, especially among the artistic community. She achieved much, and in 1970 and 1972, participated in sculpture and painting exhibitions in Denmark.

Here in London it is different. The Embassy residence is an historic Georgian building, storey above storey, set in the heart of London. "Sometimes," Mrs. Bjarnason says with a laugh, "I feel as if I am spending the whole day in the lifts." Traffic noise disturbs the peace of the front rooms, and although the back overlooks a walled garden, one can never escape the pervading and oppressive din of Park Lane and Oxford Street. Running this household takes up a considerable part of her time. "London is much more difficult than Copen-



Ólöf Pálsdóttir, wife of the Icelandic Ambassador.

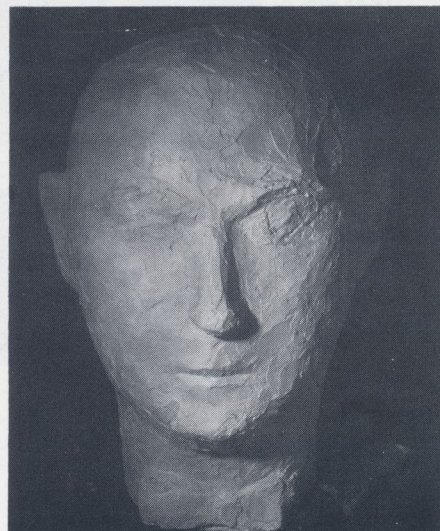
hagen," she says, "there are always difficulties in getting things done." Finding well trained staff to assist is a problem as well, "though I feel happier now we have a good Italian cook," she says, "he used to work for Jacqueline Kennedy."

So although the Bjarnasons have been in London over a year (during which time they became well established in the diplomatic community) Ólöf Pálsdóttir has found it impossible to arrange peaceful working surroundings for her sculpting.

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The wild horse.



Politician.

(Continued from page 33)

"To move around when you are a sculptress," she says, "is very difficult!" And indeed for sculpting, more than for painting, the artist needs space and a well tried working environment. Nevertheless, she hopes soon to feel able to work again. Her sculpture has a strength and simplicity of style that has often been remarked upon by the critics. In much of her work form is secondary to the volume and bulk of the object; but always it is the dynamic of the relationship between form and volume that makes her sculpture interesting.



Ballerina.

On the main landing of the residence, towering over the staircase, is one of her finest pieces, a cellist. The work is in plaster, a bronze cast is in Iceland. The cellist is monumental. He is solid and immovable. Yet the intensity of his playing is so powerfully conveyed by the sculpture that one does not notice immediately that he has no bow.

Although Mrs. Bjarnason has a varied collection of art objects from Egypt, Greece, China, Nigeria and other countries and although she is fascinated by artistic forms developed in other cultures, her own work is quite individual. She has built on her own experience and goes her own way.