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## Editorial #97: Neighbourhoods

By: Caroline Risacher

By looking at streets and avenue names in much of Latin America, one can learn about historical figures and dates. But we tend to not think about these too much, as they are such an integrated part of our routine that they lose their meaning. That meaning can be literal or historical, but, inevitably, the more comfortable one is with one's surroundings, the less one actually knows about them. Which is why this 97th issue of *Bolivian Express* is dedicated to the neighbourhoods of La Paz, and to the residents and the history of each one. It's a history of violence, love and modernisation.

Miraflores takes us to the Tiwanaku empire, where ancient ruins were excavated. Back in the 16th century, Garita de Lima was an area where travelers from Peru could rest; Calle Jaen used to be the market for camelid goods. An important moment of the 1952 National Revolution took place in Villa Victoria, which became known as **Villa Balazos**, or Villa Gunshot, after its residents, most of them workers, managed to stop the army from progressing any further. More recently, **Gran Poder** started in Chijini in the 1960s. It's also in Chijini that the trans movement started gaining visibility in the 1970s with the participation

of trans icons Barbarella, La Pocha, Rommy Astro and La Verónica in Bolivian folkloric dances.

The names themselves also tell us much. In Achachicala, a monument shows us the meaning of its name – a place where ancient, giant stones can be found. Calacoto comes from Qala Qutu, which also means 'a lot of stones.' There were at least three lagoons in Cota Cota/Quta Quta, which means 'lake' in Aymara. Munaypata is the heart of the city: **munay** means 'to love' and **pata**, 'place.' According to tradition, couples have been going there since colonial times. La Florida was named after the Orange State in a desire to emulate the idealised Miami lifestyle by building eccentric villas with large gardens.

La Paz is now expanding vertically in its center – Casco Viejo, Sopocachi, San Jorge, Calacoto – and horizontally in the south. The expansion of **Zona Sur** is fairly recent, but it has an interesting story as well. In the early 1950s, President Víctor Paz Estenssoro had a hippodrome built, where 'glasses of milk were sold instead of soda. Horses were brought from Chile and Peru, but many died because of the elevation,' wrote Bolivian historian Mariano Gumucio. The hippodrome proved to be a financial disaster, and the San

Miguel residential urbanisation, with its streets in concentric circles that outline the failed venue, was born out of its failure. Los Pinos is one of La Paz's first planned neighbourhoods where, according to its residents, the first **trufi** line started. Today, new suburbs are popping at the edge of the city moving its centre of gravity southwards.

This urban expansion doesn't come with a cost. Pampahasi was part of the 2011 'mega' landslide where 400 homes were destroyed. Neighbourhoods like Següencoma or Llojeta – which can be translated as 'which sinks' in Aymara – experience regular landslides; the latest one, in Bajo Llojeta, took place last April. Despite the fact that large sections of the city are in high-risk areas, unregulated and unsafe constructions are still being built. At the city's frontier, **loteadores** cut trees and burn vast parcels of land to prepare the terrain for future construction projects without following regulations or taking the environmental consequences into consideration.

Next time you take the **teleférico** or bus or drive across town, make sure to pay attention to the neighbourhoods around you; each has a story to tell. Maybe even stop to read what a statue is about or what a sign has to say.

**N.B.**

Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue. Their meanings can be found in our glossary.



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# A SACRED SPACE

THANKING **PACHAMAMA** AMONGST THE SCULPTURES OF FRANCINE SECRETAN  
TEXT & PHOTOS: LOLA NEWELL



**T**hroughout the month of August, **Pachamama**, the Andean earth-mother goddess, will receive thousands of offerings as gratitude for keeping fields fertile and life thriving. The traditional way to make an offering is through a **mesa**, and after purchasing one from the **calle de Las Brujas** in La Paz, I went to the sculptor Francine Secretan's spectacular **Espacio Ritual** in Achocalla, a small town about an hour south of La Paz, to make my own offering. For Secretan, this ritual space is one of her most important creations, because it gives her sculptures a function beyond aesthetics. She described how 'throughout history, sculptures had always been a part of people's daily lives' and through her *Espacio Ritual* in Achocalla and her earlier ritual space in **La Cumbre**, she has given her art a higher purpose.

Inaugurated in 2015, this area consists of four large sculptures creating a circular space for performing traditional rituals. Secretan described how her objective was 'to create a sacred space, a transcendental site, a viewpoint on the edge of the abyss, whose unlimited spectacles are accentuated by the sculptures found there.' Raised up above the town of Achocalla, with the white peaks of Huayna Potosi and Illimani piercing the clear blue sky in the background, this ritual space lives up to Secretan's objective.

The four large sculptures that make up the space are *La Puerta* (The Door), *La Chakana* (Andean Cross), *El Guardián* (The Guardian) and *El Recipiente de Energía* (The Recipient of Energy). In the centre of the space there is a stone table on which rituals are performed. Secretan explained how each sculpture has a specific purpose and meaning as part of the space. *La Puerta*, which is a doorway made of stone, 'opens communication, delimits the space and gives access to another dimension.' *La Chakana*, a red cross, is the 'union of the past and present' and signifies 'bridge, transparency and passage.' *El Guardián* helps 'to protect the rituals and the sacred.' And finally, *El Recipiente de Energía*, a circle without start or finish, 'is a symbol of the eternal and the absolute.' These four combine to create a sacred space perfect for giving thanks to *Pachamama*.

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*Pachamama* comes from Incan mythology, something that had always interested Secretan. Originally from Switzerland, she has been fascinated by South American and pre-Columbian culture from a very young age. She moved to Bolivia 50 years ago after finishing school and has lived in La Paz and worked as an artist ever since. She described how initially she found the prominent use of rituals and appreciation Bolivians have for nature as a complete culture shock. In Switzerland, rituals no longer exist, she says, and she found it profoundly touching when discovering them here.

'WE THINK THAT HUMAN BEINGS ARE THE OWNERS AND MASTERS OF THE EARTH, WHEREAS IT IS THE COMPLETE OPPOSITE, WE ARE JUST INHABITANTS AND WE HAVE COMPLETELY BLASPHEMED NATURE.'

—FRANCINE SECRETAN

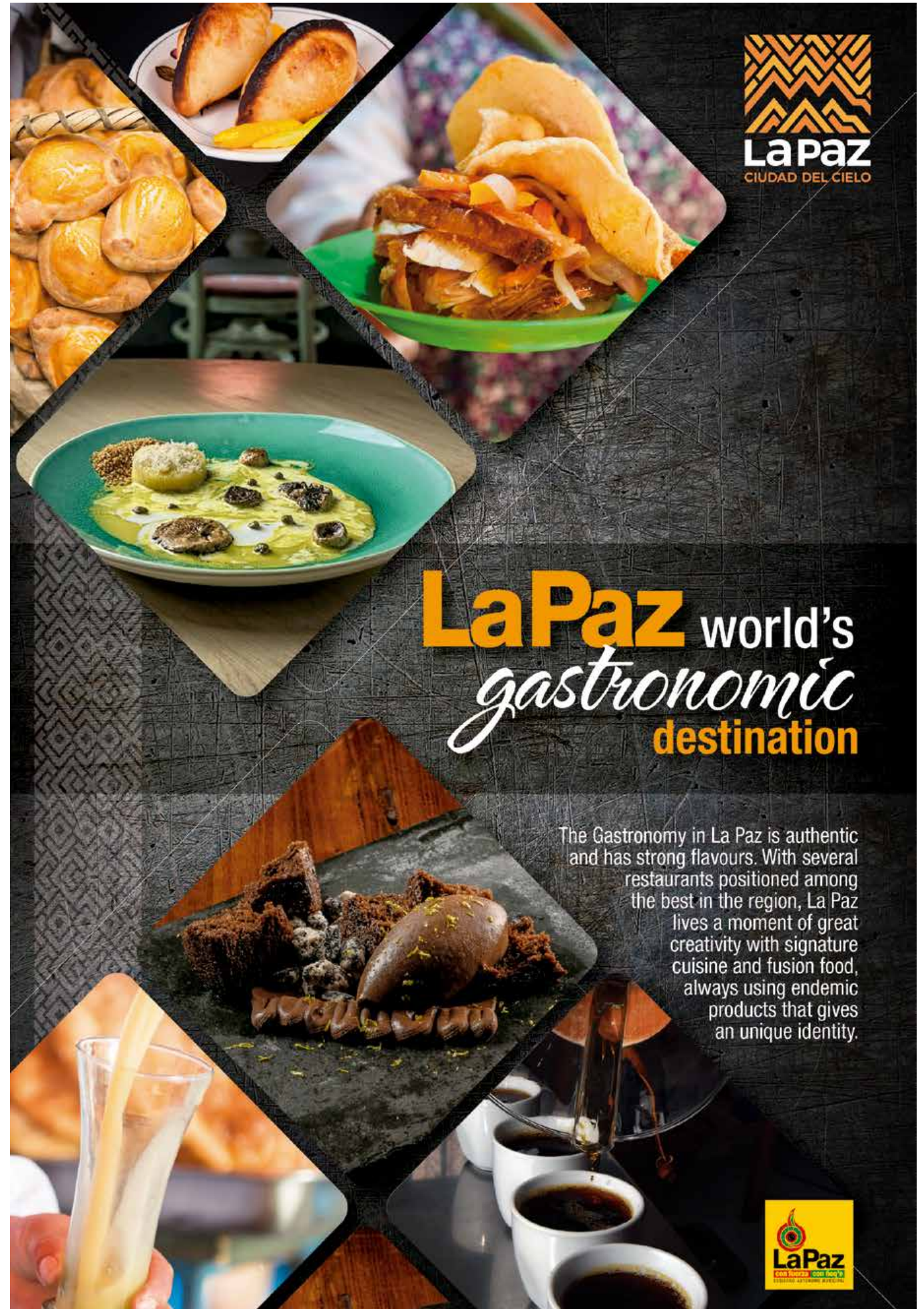
The appreciation of *Pachamama* is even more relevant today, with increasing global warming and widespread environmental destruction. 'We think that human beings are the owners and masters of the earth,' Secretan says, 'whereas it is the complete opposite, we are just inhabitants and we have completely blasphemed nature.' The month of *Pachamama* is an annual ritual that reminds people of the importance of nature and how we must do all we can to look after it.

In order to make an offering to *Pachamama* a *mesa* is traditionally required, I bought mine from a *chiflera* on the *calle de Las Brujas*. These *chifleras* will prepare the *mesa* according to a person's wants and budget. Mine was quite small, costing just 30

bolivianos (plus 10 for alcohol). Some *mesas* cost as little as 20 bolivianos, but others can cost up to a thousand, depending on what is required. A *mesa* usually consists of multiple sweets, some with specific images relevant to what the person wants; mine had one for good exam results and a frog which is meant to bring good financial fortune. It's also very common to include herbs, honey, fruits and coca leaves. A llama foetus, known as a *sullu*, will often be the main offering of the *mesa*, and these can vary greatly in size and are priced accordingly. When I bought my *mesa*, the *chiflera* topped it with some tinsel and wrapped it in packaging so that it would be ready to be offered to *Pachamama*.

The offering itself was quite simple. Once I arrived at Secretan's *Espacio Ritual*, I unpacked and placed the *mesa* on a stone table in the centre of the space. After dousing it with alcohol, I set it alight and watched it burn while reflecting on what I had to be grateful for. I thought of my family, friends and the amazing opportunities I've had to travel over the past year, but I also thought of *Pachamama*, the embodiment of the earth mother herself, and for the life she continues to give, even as humanity is determined to destroy it. Being in the space, surrounded by Secretan's sculptures and the snow-capped mountains was, to repeat the words of Secretan, profoundly touching. Although a little off the beaten track, this is a real must-see in La Paz that definitely deserves to be experienced by more people.

For more information on Francine Secretan, her art and her *Espacio Ritual*, visit [fsecretan.com](http://fsecretan.com).



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# CHUALLUMA

URBAN ART ILLUMINATES LA PAZ NEIGHBOURHOOD

TEXT & PHOTOS: JACK CURSON



**W**hen travelling on the red **teleférico** line towards El Alto, you cannot help but recognise the brightly coloured homes that make up the neighbourhood of Chualluma. Amongst the brick and adobe buildings that dominate the landscape of La Paz, the freshly painted neighbourhood is a striking burst of colour. Its vibrant buildings are some of the beneficiaries of the 'My neighbourhood, my home' programme, and are also the latest project of one of Bolivia's most innovative contemporary urban artists, Knorke Leaf. The Chualluma community, led by neighbourhood president Tomasa Gutierrez, presented a unique proposal to illuminate the neighbourhood with a range of colours and murals as part of the programme, which was launched in 2018 to strengthen urban infrastructure across Bolivia. After winning government funding, the transformation of Chualluma was carried out between March and July of 2019.

Under the leadership of designer and painter Knorke Leaf, the neighbourhood of Chualluma has been transformed into a picturesque setting that illuminates the landscape of La Paz today. Alongside the aesthetic transformation in Chualluma, key work has been carried out to strengthen the previously unstable infrastructure of the neighbourhood. More than 90 construction workers were involved in strengthening the foundations of the buildings, replacing the former foundations of adobe and bricks with cement blocks. Bannisters and stairs were also brought to Chualluma for its residents, who face the steep climb towards the **altiplano** from the lower, central areas of La Paz everyday.

The most striking aspect of the project is the distinct focus on resident involvement. Whilst professional urban artists from outside the neighbourhood were involved in painting the homes, the people of Chualluma were crucial to the project's success. Locals carried construction materials to each house to create the foundations upon which Knorke's team of artists painted the art that exists today. The neighbourhood people also chose the colours that would adorn their homes from a palette of ten colours. For Knorke, the involvement of the residents was essential 'It was really important,' she says, 'that it was never something that was imposed.' Knorke came to Chualluma almost a month before carrying out the design to understand the neighbourhood so that the urban art could reflect the people who inhabit it. 'All the murals, all the lettering that is here in Chualluma represents what they do, who they are and what kind of people live here. That was the most important part of the project – not just the touristic aspect, but to keep the neighbourhood happy and represent their culture.'

The project was not without certain issues. For example, Benita Choque, a resident of Chualluma for 40 years, commented that despite the neighbourhood meetings some residents were unaware of the project before the construction materials and paint were brought in. However, the prevailing atmosphere in Chualluma is one of satisfaction. When speaking to the residents, the overwhelming expression is one of gratitude towards the painters who have brought happiness and colour to their neighbourhood. For Rafael Quispe, a resident of Villa Fatima but who has worked for a La Paz public health company in Chualluma for eight years, the impact of the urban art has been dramatic. 'The work done here has changed people's outlook. Your surroundings impact your attitude and now people are more happy and motivated. Before people threw their rubbish outside the front of their houses, but now they care for Chualluma more.'

The Chualluma community is mostly comprised of migrants from rural provinces who live in La Paz to access the local economy. Many of the women sell food and produce in El Alto or La Paz, whilst residents work as tailors, construction

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workers and drivers in the city. With so many residents from rural areas, Aymara is the dominant language in Chualluma. Knorke was eager to represent this linguistic trait through the Aymara lettering that adorns many of the buildings. 'It is a revindication. Visitors can come and learn. Yes, we are in La Paz, a multicultural place, but people here still speak Aymara. It is a beautiful and elegant language – it has a different way of thinking.'

Asencia, a rural migrant who speaks Aymara lived in the final house of Chualluma before the ascent to the *altiplano*. She has to leave the community at 5:30 am each morning to make the long descent towards **Zona Sur** where she sells street food. Asencia has faced a difficult life. She lost her husband and has a son who has struggled with severe mental illness. When Knorke asked what colour she wanted to decorate her house she chose orange – a colour that brings happiness. Struck by Asencia's story of hardship and resilience, Knorke decided she would embellish Asencia's home with a mural of a hummingbird. In Andean culture, hummingbirds have a spiritual quality, representing an individual's ancestors when they appear. Knorke painted the hummingbird on Asencia's house 'so that they will take care of her and her family.' For Knorke, 'every mural is a story' and the urban art that now decorates Chualluma is a representation of its inhabitants.

Knorke's previous projects, such as her work on the #TimeToAct campaign against sexual violence, are evidence of the transformative power of urban art and Chualluma, her biggest project to date, is no different. During the five-month transformation process a micro-economy emerged in Chualluma, with local women cooking for the construction workers and painters. With continued organisation, there is potential for an enduring local economy to be established. Tourists, attracted by the radiant neighbourhood and its stunning panoramic views of the city below, have already asked about the possibility of creating a hostel or a restaurant in the neighbourhood to cater to visitors. The project led by Knorke has given the people of Chualluma a unique opportunity, and though the residents are not accustomed to the influx of tourists, Knorke hopes 'it is a process that will happen.'



Alongside its touristic elements, the project has had a pertinent impact on the residents, construction workers and other people involved. According to Knorke, 'It was a really special exchange of knowledge, food and views.' Since construction, like urban art, is a sector dominated by men, Knorke found it difficult to get the male construction workers to respect what she was saying in the first two months of the project. 'They were not used to having a female boss,' she says, 'but Tomasa and the women of Chualluma are also strong women, so it was a nice experiment to show our capabilities, strength and determination as women.'

Looking back on the project, Knorke says her work in Chualluma is 'the biggest and most intense experience I have had, but also the most beautiful.' For her, the project 'is not just drawings on the wall, it is public art. It is a way to decentralise art and bring it to everybody.' Although the brightly coloured houses are striking when seen from the teleférico approaching El Alto, the true beauty of the murals can only be seen from inside Chualluma. To witness the stunning artistry of the murals and appreciate the local culture, one must explore firsthand what Knorke describes as 'a truly special neighbourhood.'

## THE TITANIC SCULPTURES OF VICTOR HUGO BARRENECHEA

BOLIVIAN AND AMERICAN HISTORY SET IN METAL AND STONE

TEXT & PHOTOS: JOSHUA NEAMAN



**A** new exhibition of the works of Victor Hugo Barrenechea at the Museo de la Revolución in La Paz, the first major retrospective of his work since his death in 2016, confirms the sculptor's place on the highest pedestal of Bolivian arts.

Best known for his large-scale monumental works commemorating great figures and events from across the continent, Barrenechea was born in Sucre in 1929. Art was ever present in the Barrenechea household from Victor Hugo's earliest years. His father was a notable sculptor in his own right, and helped to nurture his son's artistic talent. During Victor Hugo's formative years, his father would become his first and most important mentor, teaching and advising him as he began to explore artistic possibilities and eventually helping him take his first tentative steps down the path to becoming a sculptor.

By his teenage years it was apparent that, under his father's eye, Victor Hugo had developed a precocious talent for sculpture. However, he also received a formal artistic education, studying at the Academia de Bellas Artes 'Zacarias Benavides' in Sucre, and also spending time at a sculpture and pottery school in Cochabamba.

When he was 17, Victor Hugo travelled to La Paz to continue his studies and set up in earnest as sculptor, receiving the patronage of the wealthy Patiño family. At 20 he received recognition for his talents in the form of a national prize and the offer of a scholarship to study in Italy from then Bolivian President Enrique Hertzog.

However, at this point in the trajectory of Victor Hugo's career, history intervened. Since a defeat to Paraguay in the Chaco War in the early 1930s, Bolivia had been in turmoil as popular dissatisfaction with the criollo elites began to spill out into open opposition. Matters came to a head in 1951 when President Urriolagoitia handed power to a military junta instead of to the opposition Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), which had just won the elections. This set the stage for a full-scale uprising the following year. In what became known as the Revolución Nacional, the MNR, backed by prominent figures in the police force, overthrew the military in 1952 and began a period of radical reform.





The events of 1952 had a great impact on the young Victor Hugo. The unrest prevented him from going to Europe, but it had a lasting impact on his artistic outlook. It is perhaps fitting that the exhibition displays Victor Hugo's works in the museum commemorating the Revolución Nacional, since the revolutionary spirit of the time, with its promises of universal suffrage, land redistribution and education reform, provided the key inspirations for his early works, which attempted to express this newfound hope through art. For example, his first major commission, obtained shortly after the revolution in 1952, was the creation of a monument to the miners of Siglo XX, a tin mine in the Department of Potosí, who had played a key role in the opposition to the sexenio.

That work, carried out that year, features a miner standing atop a semicircular mineshaft. One foot is slightly forward and the head is raised, as though the miner is setting out for a distant goal. In his right hand he carries a drill, the symbol of his work, but the left hand carries a rifle raised in a defiant pose, encapsulating the revolutionary fervour of the age. Victor Hugo would later create similar monuments to the miners' struggle across the country, most notably in Oruro, and develop a reputation as the country's leading monumental sculptor.

These early works exhibit many of the characteristics that would go on to define the artist's oeuvre. They are in many ways both forwards- and backwards-looking. As monuments, they commemorate central figures in Bolivian history, celebrating their role in history, but do not serve as mere paeans to a dead past. Instead, they capture a sense of togetherness and national community that underpins a hope for a better Bolivia.

This goes beyond a political ideology to reflect Victor Hugo's strong sense of public duty, a desire to create art not only for art's sake but to give something back to his country and help bind it together. 'He lived for his work,' his daughter María Julia said. This was even seen in his conduct towards others. 'He was a just man,' she remembers, recalling how he would always look out for his workers, ensuring they received a fair share of the proceeds from a sculpture and making sure that when they left his service they had enough to live off of.

His children also describe his highly meticulous approach to his art. Hugo Barrenechea Cueto, his older son, remembers Victor Hugo as a man 'with a really close attention to detail.' Having received a commission, he would spend months carrying out a minute analysis of his subject, voraciously reading to build

up a complete picture of their life and background and then going into the field to make sketches and plans for every aspect of the sculpture. This is reflected in the subtle manipulations of lines and contours that radically alter the expressions of his subjects, breathing life into the busts on display. Meanwhile, clothes are rendered so expertly that, although in the bronze, they seem to retain their natural texture and dynamism.

In an anecdote that perfectly captures the power that his sculptures had to enthrall and inspire, Hugo recalls that one night burglars managed to break into his father's workshops. Though the sculptures themselves were too heavy to steal, the thieves made off with anything portable they could find, including all the tools in the room. However, so impressed were they by the art they saw that before making their escape they paused to scrawl on the wall in large letters 'good work.'

The exhibition also sheds light on the practical processes involved in creating great monuments. The works on display are drawn from all stages of the creative process. There are small-scale models used to give preliminary outlines of the final works, and larger creations in plaster that represent an experimental phase, as moulds were shaped and reshaped by



Victor Hugo's expert hands, making what Hugo called 'small tweaks through which he was able to give life to his works'. Lastly there are full-scale bronze busts, such as those of **el Libertador** Simón Bolívar and Chaco War hero Germán Busch.

The whole process, from the preliminary miniature models to the creation of the finished product in the foundry, was overseen by Victor Hugo himself. He even took a special course in metalwork so he could participate in the final casting of his statues. As Hugo said, 'He made his works piece by piece.' From start to finish, one statue could take up to six months of dedicated work – 'for equestrian statues, sometimes a year.'

Many of the works on display are merely composite parts of even larger works now displayed in public places. For example, the bust of Simón Bolívar is in fact part of a giant equestrian statue that exists in three separate versions in Caracas, San Francisco and Quebec, a testament to the



international reputation of its sculptor. Indeed, Victor Hugo was so renowned that even in 1976 when the sculpture was made, at the height of a violent military dictatorship, he continued to receive commissions for works that, though devoid of their earlier revolutionary symbolism, continued to memorialise the great figures of Bolivian history.

As he grew older Victor Hugo maintained his passion for sculpture. 'Even in his later life he was still making his sculptures,' Hugo said. 'He felt alive when he was working, it was part of his life.' This passion was transmitted to his children – Hugo, María Julia, Marco Antonio, Miguel Ángel, Norma Rebeca and Haroldo Rodolfo – who learned about the art of sculpture as they were growing up, while Victor Hugo's wife helped him with the administrative part of his work. Although he passed away in 2016, he bequeathed a great legacy to his country, both in the form of his 'titanic work' and the skills he passed on to his many pupils, whom he taught at the Academia de Bellas Artes.

*For more information about the conservation of Victor Hugo Barrenechea's work, call 591-70673300 or 591-72561700, or write to danielasaraimurillo@hotmail.com.*



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# EL MUSEO DE LA MUÑECAS

A CURIOUS EXHIBITION BECOMES A FAMILY TRADITION

TEXT & PHOTOS: LOLA NEWELL

**T**ucked away in Sopocachi, La Paz, the Museo de las Muñecas (Doll Museum) is a unique and curious museum that's much more than a collection of children's toys. It was founded in 2009 by Elsa Paredes de Salazar and her daughter Roxana Salazar in their old family home. The museum was a dream come true for Elsa, who had been collecting dolls her whole life.

Roxana described how her mother 'liked dolls, but it was the traditional dress, the typical clothing, the people from different regions, different countries, different cultures that really grabbed her attention.' For Elsa, these dolls served an almost anthropological purpose because they were representations of how people dressed. The collection upstairs, which is spread over two relatively small rooms, is filled with dolls that represent every corner of the globe. The first room explores the vast history and tradition of Bolivian dress, in particular what's worn for different dances and celebrations. These were Elsa's favourites because, as Roxana described, she 'really loved the clothing of the Bolivian dolls.' Elsa even took a course and learnt how to make the doll costumes herself. The dolls have beautiful and intricate outfits which are worn for dances such as the **diablada**, a dance between the Archangel Michael and Lucifer that represents the triumph of good over evil. More everyday Bolivian dress is also represented, such as what's traditionally worn by **cholitas** – a full skirt, colourful shawl and high bowler hat. The collection gives visitors insight into the vast and rich history of Bolivian clothing, something they'd be hard-pushed to find in such detail in one place anywhere else in La Paz.



The collection then moves on to other American countries. Traditional and colourful clothing from Argentina to Mexico is represented in great detail and precision. It's quite beautiful to see both the similarities and the differences between the dolls' clothing on display. After the Americas the collection heads to Europe, with everything from Spanish flamenco dancers to Scottish kilt wearers. Then finally on to Asia and Oceania. The whole collection demonstrates how much a nation's identity is tied up in its clothing, and visitors will easily recognise which country each doll represents even before reading the description.

Elsa's passion for dolls was described by Roxana as something inherent within her, which materialised when her godmother gifted her one small porcelain doll and two other dolls which were, as Roxana described, 'very indigenous in the most artisanal way.'



For Elsa, it was more than a love of playing with dolls; Roxana described how 'in her child's mind, more than 80 years ago, Elsa saw the differences [in the dolls], she saw the ethnic part, she saw their essence.' This childhood fascination led Elsa on a lifelong investigation into Bolivian folklore and ethnology. She wrote a book on the subject called *Presencia de nuestro pueblo*, in which she explored the history of traditional Bolivian dress and its importance as a form of identity.

Being a researcher of Bolivian folklore and ethnology was just one string on Elsa's bow. After becoming one of the first women to attend university in Bolivia, she graduated as a dental surgeon and went on to work treating employees at one of the biggest mining companies in La Paz at the time. Her father was not enthused about her twice-monthly visits to the mines, but that never deterred her; she travelled there with her mother or sister as a chaperone, and Roxana explained how she soon started earning more than her father. This experience, along with her university education and the many female-equality movements in other countries at the time, led Elsa to become a strong advocate for female equality. Roxana remembered how her mother would say, 'Women are equal

to men; they can and they should [be treated the same].'

Elsa founded many organisations to promote female equality and also wrote two books about women: the *Diccionario biográfico de la mujer boliviana*, the first book of its kind, in which she highlighted and celebrated different Bolivian women who had excelled in life, and *La mujer y su época*, which explored the important role of women during different historical eras. Elsa was, as Roxana described, 'a pioneer', and it was her commanding and imposing nature that allowed her to achieve so much. Elsa had 'a very strong mind and always said what she thought, she always spoke directly,' Roxana said, but everyone remembered her with 'a lot of affection and admiration.' Roxana also recalled how Elsa was a strict mother who always wanted the best schooling for her children, because having a good education was so important to her. Roxana explained that it was 'one of the most important examples that [she had] taken from her.'

The passion that Elsa had for dolls was something that Roxana never used to share. It was only when she rediscovered her childhood dolls and felt 'such a strong emotion' that she began to understand her mother's love of dolls. Since Elsa's passing in 2013, Roxana has continued to run the museum and uphold her mother's, and now her family's, legacy.

In November there will be the third instalment of the '100 Years of Dolls' exhibition, focusing on famous brands and wedding dolls. The museum is open Tuesday and Thursday from four until seven.



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## LA PAZ'S 32ND ENTRADA FOLKLÓRICA UNIVERSITARIA

STUDENTS KEEP TRADITIONAL BOLIVIAN DANCE ALIVE

TEXT & PHOTOS: LOLA NEWELL



Every year thousands of university students from the Higher University of San Andrés (UMSA) take to the streets of La Paz to show off their dancing skills in a parade that helps keep alive the many traditional dances of Bolivia. Now in its 32nd year, the first *Entrada Folklórica Universitaria*, in 1988, comprised just eight different folkloric groups; this year there were 73 different fraternities and over 10,000 dancers. On the 3rd of August, the students danced from the Puente Cervecería, near La Paz's bus terminal, to the Parque Urbano Central, in between the Sopocachi and Miraflores neighbourhoods, a nearly three-kilometre route, with the first dancers setting off at 8 am and the last participants dancing along the route nearly 11 hours later.

The yearly parade, a joint effort between UMSA and the La Paz's Office of Culture, was originally founded by Luis Sempértegui Miranda, who wanted to encourage students to engage with Bolivian culture and become fundamental pillars in the defense of their heritage. Taking inspiration from the world-famous Carnival in Oruro, which many students at UMSA had already taken part in, Sempértegui decided to try to create something similar in La Paz, but exclusively with students. It took many years of persuasion, organisation and hard work, but Sempértegui's dream finally became a reality, and the *Entrada Folklórica Universitaria* was born.

Nearly 40 different types of Bolivian dance are performed at the parade, from the better-known **morenada** and **tinku** to more obscure dances like the **auqui auqui**. Tian Inofuentes of La Paz's Office of Culture said, 'This parade is different from others because it includes indigenous dances, which are considered the most representative of the rural areas of our country and don't exist in the other big parades of Bolivia.' Pamala Arana, who was dancing the **saya afroboliviana** in the parade, explained that she took part because it's 'one of the parades with the most diversity.'

One of the most popular and striking dances in the parade was the **tinku**, which means 'physical attack' in Aymara. The dance derives from a ceremonial brawl of the same name that is held annually in the region of Potosí. It's a high-energy dance with a fighting-like quality, featuring lots of strong movements and chanting. The dancers' brightly coloured costumes are equally as striking, with helmet-like feather-adorned hats topping off the look.

Another dance that stood out was the *saya afroboliviana*, from the Yungas region in the La Paz department. A dance originated by enslaved people of African descent who were forcibly taken to Bolivia during the Spanish colonial period, it is characterised by its tenacious drum beat. Dressed in white with colourful trims, the *saya afroboliviana* dancers exhibited a passion and energy that made their dance a highlight of the parade.

For the students, this annual parade is an essential part of their university experience. Janneth Quispe described it as 'renewing Bolivian culture.' Despite each faculty having its own dance, students are free to partake in whichever one they prefer, giving them the opportunity to learn multiple dances during their time at university. And they don't only learn the dance; they are required to research the history and importance of the dance they chose, which encourages them to develop a deeper understanding of its cultural significance. Verence Gutiérrez, who was dancing the **tonada potosina**, said, 'When we don't know [the history of the dance], we just dance for the sake of dancing; but when we understand the importance of the dance we become more excited about dancing it.'

CONTINUES ON PAGE 22

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The students participating in the parade made clear how passionate they were about Bolivian dance. Aurelia Quispe, who was dancing the **llamerada**, said she and her fellow students were 'trying to recover, to prioritise what is Bolivian culture.' Alexander Peñaloza, who was dancing the **tonada potosina**, shared Aurelia's sentiment, stating that, above all, it was 'a cultural expression, showing the dances, our culture, the clothing.' **Morenada** dancer Eugenia Flores said it was a moment to 'show what our culture is.'

But the parade is also an opportunity for the students to have some fun. Estephany Gutiérrez, who was dancing the **rueda chapaca**, described the parade as 'a gathering of young people who want to have

fun and give everything they've got through dance.' Many students talked about how it was one of the happiest and most enjoyable parades that they had ever taken part in. Some also talked about the sense of pride they felt at being able to take part in and show off Bolivian dance and music. Max Mamani, a musician taking part in the parade, spoke of his love for Bolivian music and how being able to play in the parade was 'an honour.'

The passion and love these students have for Bolivian dance is remarkable. The Entrada Folklórica Universitaria is a true celebration of Bolivian culture, and it continues to grow year after year, helping keep Bolivian folkloric dance alive and thriving.



# PORTABLE CHOLETS

FREDDY MAMANI'S CHOLETS ARE BROUGHT TO LIFE THROUGH CINEMATIC ART

TEXT & PHOTOS: JACK CURSON

For two weeks in July of this year, the UK's Architectural Association Visiting School programme called on the La Paz metropolitan region for a fourth consecutive year, with this visit's focus being 'Portable Cholets.' Freddy Mamani's **cholets**, the vibrantly colourful mansions which adorn the hardscrabble streets of El Alto, were used as the inspiration for a piece of wearable performance architecture. With the help of some of the most prominent artistic figures in La Paz and El Alto, the cohort of students sought to transform the works of one of Bolivia's most striking contemporary architects into masks and clothing which would form the basis of a performance exploring anthropomorphism in architecture. For anyone with the notion of architecture as an art restricted to the design of buildings, this innovative project will eradicate any such misconception.

Freddy Mamani's work is distinct in its rejection of the conventional styles generally preferred by Bolivian architects trained in the Western tradition. Instead, Mamani's **cholets** fuse futuristic elements with indigenous symbolism, such as the vibrant colours of the traditional Aymara **aguayo** dress and the geometrics of the ancient site of Tiwanaku, to construct truly original designs. Mamani's architectural style is distinct in its power to express the identity of the Andean people, reifying fundamental aspects of their culture and traditions in the form of the **cholets**.

Just as Mamani's work defies convention, the project sought to utilise a fresh approach to explore the power of architecture to reflect the culture of the people who inhabit it, and more specifically the questions of identity and folklore that dominate the work of Freddy Mamani. For Sabrina Morreale, the architect that led the project alongside Lorenzo Perri, this method was crucial to success. 'We try to do architecture not through books or studying,' she said, 'but through an intervention on site.'

The fortnight-long programme began with a private screening of the 2018 Bolivian film *Averno*, following which the students were given the opportunity to discuss the award-winning production with the film's writer and director, Marcos Loayza. Just as Mamani's **cholets** explore Andean indigenous identity in structural form, Loayza's film explores Andean indigenous beliefs and conceptions of identity through an immersive, hypnagogic narrative in the setting of La Paz after

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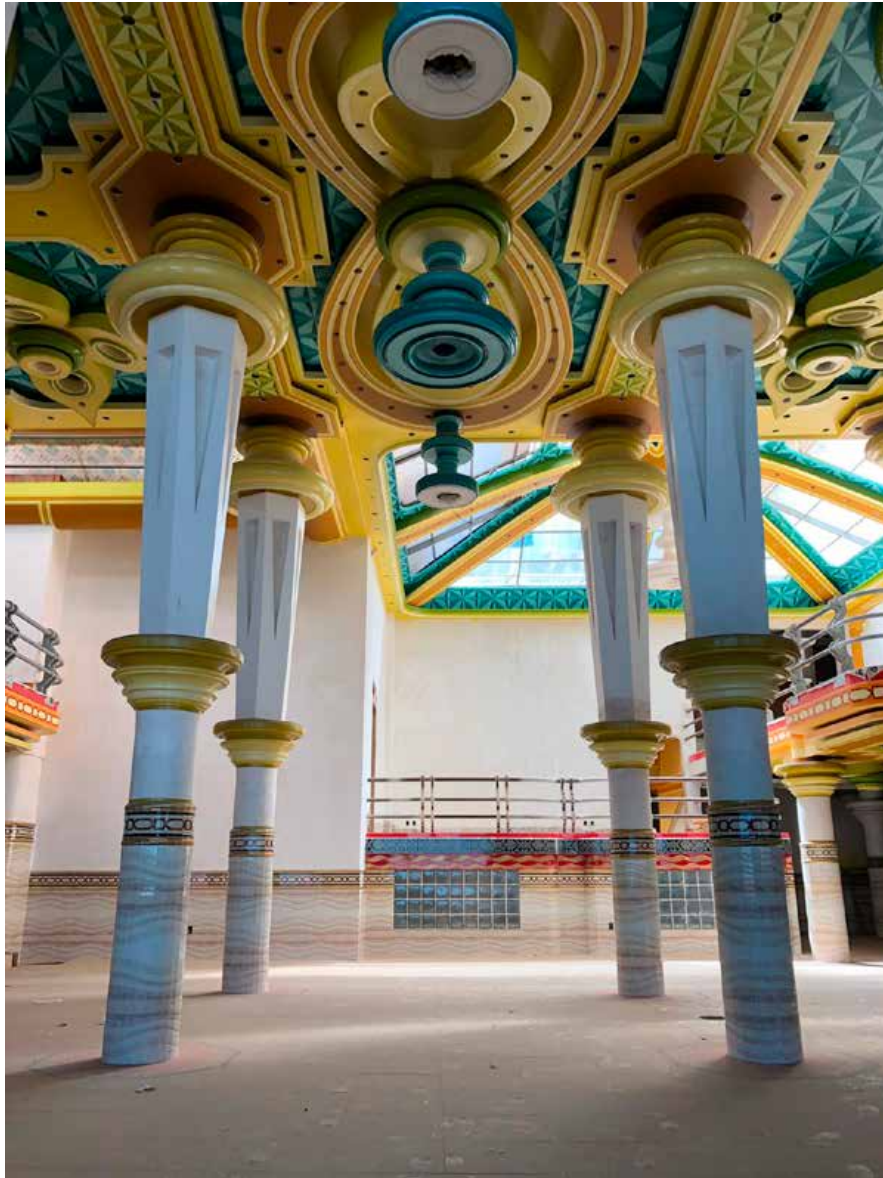
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dark. The meeting with Loayza proved an invaluable opportunity for the students to learn about the meaning behind the symbols which are scattered throughout *Averno* and to find inspiration for their own final production. With the final goal of creating a short film depicting the portable *cholets* in a piece of performance art, the meeting provided a huge opportunity to gain a director's insight into how abstract concepts and symbols can best be captured on film.

When asked where they might seek inspiration for their own short film, Loayza confided to the students that 'there is always a trigger – it could be a drawing, a space, a location, a character or an idea.' For the participants in the Visiting School programme, it was a visit to a *cholet* currently under construction that provided the spark. Having been given a guided tour by Mamani himself, it was this striking location that was chosen as the setting for the performance that would be filmed and finally screened at the end of the two weeks. For Jasmine Abu Hamdan, a current student at the Architectural Association School of Architecture, the incomplete *cholet* 'had a particular charm to it, with the rendered elaborate ceilings contrasting the bare walls.'

With the location settled and a storyboard for the performance created, the craftwork for the masks and costumes for the film took place in the Bunker, an art studio near the La Paz bus terminal which began life as an alternative theatre hall. Using an eclectic range of materials sourced locally in the city – from a rear-view mirror of a car to an inflated disposable glove, among other disparate objects – a collection of surreal masks was created to be used as a focal point for the closing scene. Following the completion of the apparel for the main



character, which included the painting of its sprawling, geometrically patterned dress and the welding together of its pyramidal skeleton, crafting was complete. With just two days to perform and film in the *cholet*, the Visiting School team and guest director Marcos Loayza set to work on the final piece.

The film begins with a stunning overview of El Alto at first light amidst the backdrop of Illimani's towering, snow-covered peaks. Following the journey of the main character from the streets of El Alto up to the heights of the *cholet*, the building's incomplete, glassless structure is manipulated to capture stunning snapshots of the ascending figure. The turning point occurs when the main character, a blank, pyramid-shaped character whose form can be recognised as a symbolic representation of the earth goddess Pachamama, eventually unveils its vibrant dress underneath the lime and gold ceiling of the *cholet*. At this point the film transforms into a surreal spectacle, with the collection of spectacular masks amidst a dimly lit setting appearing to take inspiration from the bizarre and wonderful characters which populate the dark underworld in Loayza's *Averno*.

With a final screening and exhibition of the film and the masks, the Visiting School's fourth La Paz–El Alto residency was brought to its conclusion. For Jasmine Abu Hamdan, the programme was a compelling experience. 'Both La Paz and El Alto are surreal cities with surreal urban and cultural aspects,' she said. 'It particularly interested me seeing how rituals can inform the architecture that a community inhabits.' In its exploration of complex concepts of symbolism and culture through performance, the Visiting School programme stayed true to Mamani's own vision of embodying identity in art.

# BOLIVIAN DRINKS!

SINGANI, THE NATIONAL SPIRIT

TEXT: BK TEAM  
PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CASA REAL SINGANI

*Singani is a drink made from fermented and distilled white Muscat de Alexandria grapes. Despite initially being a spirit drank neat, if one was to go into a bar in Bolivia today, it is highly likely that a number of Singani cocktails will be offered, the most popular one being chufalay which is Singani and ginger ale, but others include yungeño, té con té and sucumbé. Here are some recipes of our favourites Singani cocktails that can be easily reproduced at home.*

## CHUFLAY

The origin of this drink takes us back to the 19th century while the english workers of the Bolivian Railway Co were trying to consume their traditional Gin&Gin, a drink that combines Ginebra and Ginger Ale. But at that moment Ginebra was too difficult to get in Bolivia, so they decided to replace it and used Singani. They were fascinated with the result, and named the drink 'Short Fly' which is a railway term for a temporary rail (Singani was supposed to replace Ginebra temporarily) but then the drink gained popularity and the locals bolivianised the word and started calling it 'Chufalay.'

**Recipe:**

2 oz Casa Real Singani  
¼ oz Fresh lemon juice  
5 oz Ginger Ale

**Method:** Direct

**Glass:** Long drink

**Preparation:** Fill the glass with ice and directly pour all the ingredients in the order mentioned above. Add a slice of lemon for the final touch.



## YUNGUEÑO

Yungas is the subtropical region east side of the Bolivian Andes, in this region a great variety of fruits is produced, among them citrus fruits such as orange. Thus, given the abundance of this fruit, people did not hesitate to combine it with our national spirit and baptize it Yungeño, which means 'from the Yungas.'

**Recipe:**

1 ½ oz Casa Real Singani  
5 oz fresh orange juice  
½ oz syrup

**Method:** Direct or shaken

**Glass:** Long drink

**Preparation:** Fill the glass with ice. Combine the singani, fresh orange juice and syrup directly or in a shaker. Shake very well and serve with a slice of orange, drink it very cold. Cheers!



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# TÉ CON TÉ

'Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.' That's what Hippocrates thought the year around 400 BC, at that time doctors used to mix medicinal herbs with alcohol to preserve the healing properties in a better way and in fact, those are the beginnings of cocktails. Talking about those therapeutic properties, we are sharing with you this recipe to deal with colds or to enjoy at any cold night.

**Recipe:**

1 ½ oz Casa Real Singani  
½ oz Fresh lemon juice  
½ oz honey  
4 oz of hot tea with cinnamon  
Sugar (optional)

**Method:** Direct

**Glass:** Cup or mug

**Preparation:** Prepare the hot tea with cinnamon and honey, pour the singani and add a slice of lemon.



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# SINGRONI

Ok, this is not actually a traditional Bolivian drink but shows how versatile Singani is and how we can use it to revisit a classic cocktail. Honouring the classic 'Negroni', a cocktail that recently celebrated its 100 year anniversary, we share the recipe of 'Singroni' created by the mixologist JP Caceres, brand ambassador of Casa Real Singani.

**Recipe:**

1 oz Don Lucho Aniversario Singani  
1 oz Campari  
1 oz Vermouth (sweet)  
1 slice of fresh orange

**Method:** Direct

**Glass:** Shot drink

**Preparation:** Add the slice of orange and cubic ice in the glass, pour the spirits inside and mix for 10-12 seconds.



# BRIDGING THE GAP

SCENES FROM THE TELEFÉRICO

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER  
PHOTOS: JOSHUA NEAMAN



As the longest cable-car mass-transit system in the world, the **teleférico** not only changed the way people of La Paz and El Alto commute, but also the way they perceive their own city and fellow inhabitants. The topography of La Paz made it difficult in the past to navigate between neighbourhoods. This sense of disconnect has been promoted by centuries of informal segregation that has created a city with very strong cleavages between classes and very little social and urban mobility.

Until now.

It's now possible to travel from El Alto to Irpavi in under 40 minutes – a journey three times as long in a minibus – two worlds as far apart from each other as one can imagine within one metropolis. There are some people from **Zona Sur** who have never stepped foot in El Alto, and vice versa. By linking physical geographical zones, the teleférico connects social, urban and cultural groups and opens a door to inclusion, mixing and a possible structural change to the foundations of a society.



It may seem naive to think that by simply creating a physical bridge between two worlds it is possible to connect them and that everyone will start liking each other, but one has to start somewhere. Unfortunately it didn't take long for the backlash. Back in 2015, pictures of **alteños** sitting on the floor of the **Megacenter** unleashed racial insults and comments on social media.



La Paz is still recovering from the damages done by the colonisation and racial discrimination which created a city with a de facto apartheid structure. It is too early to assess how the *teleférico* is changing the city and how long it will take to overcome these barriers, but it is a first step and, if anything, a space for discussion now exists.





# BX-97 RECOMMENDATIONS

## DESTINATION

### LAKE TITICACA

**DESCRIPTION:** It is a beautiful place to enjoy a weekend with family and friends, there you can visit the Isla del Sol, navigate the lake and enjoy fresh trout among other food. Lake Titicaca is located between Bolivia and Peru and is the highest navigable lake in the world. Sacred for the Aymaras and the Incas, it still has an important value for both countries beyond tourism.

**HOW TO GET THERE:** Take a minibus to Copacabana from the general cemetery, the road is safe and fully asphalted.  
**PHOTO:** Guille Álvarez on Unsplash



## HOTELS

### ECOLOGDE LA ESTANCIA

**DESCRIPTION:** This eco-friendly ecolodge is located on Isla del Sol, offering a breathtaking setting with majestic views of the lake and the Cordillera Real. Working closely with the local communities, Ecolodge La Estancia is a spiritual getaway where you can easily disconnect from the world.

**ADDRESS:** Isla del Sol, Lake Titicaca  
**WEBSITE:** [www.ecolodge-laketiticaca.com](http://www.ecolodge-laketiticaca.com)  
**PHOTO:** Ecolodge La Estancia



## SHOPPING

### MUNAY

**DESCRIPTION:** Munay is a Bolivian fashion brand, specialised in the design and production of clothing and accessories with a Bolivian touch. Thinking of getting a t-shirt with a colourful **cholita** print? Or maybe one featuring an old bus from La Paz? Munay is the place to find the perfect item that will match your style.

**ADDRESS:** Linares street #956  
**OPENING HOURS:** 9:30-18:30  
**PHOTO:** Munay Outfit Design



## RESTAURANTS

### LUPITO COCINA VEGANA

**DESCRIPTION:** Heart warmingly named after a rescue dog, Lupito is more than just a restaurant; it is a community project founded on the principles of 'ethics, love and respect for all species.' They offer a wide range of affordable vegan cuisine fusing global influences and Bolivian flavours. The relaxed atmosphere and friendly staff make this a hidden gem in Sopocachi.

**ADDRESS:** Cardón street #14  
**OPENING HOURS:** Monday-Saturday 12:00-14:30,  
Wednesday-Friday 18:00-21:00  
**PHOTO:** Amelia Swaby



## CULTURE/EDUCATION

### INSTITUTO EXCLUSIVO

**DESCRIPTION:** They offer language classes from beginner to advanced levels. Classes are individual or in groups of maximum four students. Timetables are flexible, each student can organise their classes according to their times. They also offer immersion courses to learn to communicate in various situations of daily life.

**WEBSITE:** [www.institutoexclusivo.com](http://www.institutoexclusivo.com)  
**OPENING HOURS:** 8:00-21:00 from Monday to Friday  
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**LOCATION:** Yolosa, Nor Yungas. Subtropical region east side of the Bolivian Andes.  
**OPENING HOURS:** 8:00-17:00  
**PHOTO:** La Senda Verde



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## GLOSSARY BX97 BolivianExpress Magazine

AGUAYO	Traditional fabric from Bolivia
ALTEÑO/A	From El Alto
ALTIPLANO	High plateau
AUQUI AUQUI	Traditional dance from Bolivia
CALLE DE LAS BRUJAS	Witches' Market
CHIFLERA	Woman who sells mystical or esoteric items
CHOLET	Colourful mansions of El Alto
CHOLITA	Bolivian women of indigenous descent
CRIOLO	A person from Spanish South or Central America, especially one of pure Spanish descent
DIABLADA	Typical dance from the region of Oruro in Bolivia characterised by the mask and devil suit worn by the performers
EL LIBERTADOR	'The Liberator', it refers to Simón Bolívar
ESPACIO RITUAL	Ritual space
GRAN PODER	Religious celebration paying homage to El Señor del Gran Poder or Jesus Christ
LA CUMBRE	Mountain pass at 4,600 metres, it is the highest point between La Paz and the Yungas
LLAMERADA	Traditional dance from Bolivia
LOTEADORES	A person who unlawfully occupies an uninhabited building or unused land
MEGACENTER	Shopping mall in La Paz
MESA	Set-up used during a traditional blessing ritual
MORENADA	Music and dance style from the Bolivian Andes characterised by a mixture of African and Indigenous elements
MUNAY	'To love', in Aymara
PACHAMAMA	Mother Earth
PATA	'Place', in Aymara
REVOLUCIÓN NACIONAL	'National Revolution', refers to the revolution that took place in 1952
RUEDA CHAPACA	Traditional dance from Bolivia
SAYA AFROBOLIVIANA	A type of music played by descendents of African slaves in the Yungas region of Bolivia
SEXENIO	The six years preceding the 1952 National Revolution
SIGLO XX	'Mine 20th Century', name of a mine syndicate
SULLU	Foetus used during a ritual
TELEFÉRICO	Cable car
TINKU	Type of dance based on a form of ritualistic combat
TONADA POTOSINA	Traditional dance from Bolivia
TRUFI	a mode of public transportation using automobiles
VILLA BALAZOS	'Villa Shotgun', aka Villa Victoria, a neighbourhood in La Paz
ZONA SUR	'Southern Zone', an area in the south of La Paz



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**CARNES A LA PARRILLA**

A VERY RARE STEAKHOUSE WELL DONE

**LA PAZ**  
MEGACENTER LA PAZ, segundo piso Av. Rafael Pabón, Zona Irapavi.  
Calle Tarija N° 243 B.  
(2) 2148864 (+591) 767 51108

**TARIJA**  
Av. Integración, MEGACENTER Planta Baja  
66-58839

# CULTURAL AGENDA

## AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2019

### LA PAZ

#### DUO NEGRO Y BLANCO

19:30  
August 25  
Bs. 40  
Cine Teatro 6 de Agosto

#### HEREDEROS

Almost twenty national charanguistas join for an event of Quechua temples and melodies.  
15:00  
August 25  
Contact: +591 78996107  
Teatro al Aire Libre Jaime Laredo

#### BOLIVIAN MUSIC CONCERT

19:00 - 21:30  
August 29  
Free  
MUSEF - Ingavi street #916

#### CRETACEOUS NIGHT

Presentation of the archaeological sites of Bolivia and Brazil  
19:00 - 21:00  
August 29  
Free  
Centro Cultural Brasil Bolivia - Av. Arce #2808

#### JOAQUINA

20:00  
August 30  
Bs. 40  
Teatro NUNA - Calacoto #8509

#### FESTIVAL COMMUNITIES-KNOWLEDGE-ORIGIN

10:00 - 2:00  
August 31 - September 1  
Free  
Magick Café Cultural - Presbítero Medina street #2526

#### WELCOME SPRING

Crafts, local enterprises and other artistic expressions fair  
9:00 - 21:00  
September 4 - 8  
Free  
Plaza Humboldt - Calacoto, 8th street

#### WARMI CHASKI FEST

National meeting of empowered women  
September 22 - 23  
Contact: +591 73013878  
Coroico, La Paz

#### COCHABAMBA

##### SISAY

Bolivian musicians  
21:30  
August 24  
Info +591 76406505  
El Mesón del Cantor - Adolfo Ballivián #139

##### KACHARPAYA

Music and contemporary dance  
19:30  
August 30  
Bs. 25  
mARTadero - 27 de Agosto and Ollantay street

#### BIKESTAGE MUSIC & ART FESTIVAL

9:00 - 20:00  
September 1  
Free  
Paseo Boulevard - Recoleta #2215

#### LLAJTA ROCK 2019

17:00  
September 13-14  
From Bs. 60  
mARTadero - 27 de Agosto and Ollantay street

#### SANTA CRUZ

##### 'K'OLLA BLUES'- KEIKO GONZALEZ

Art exhibition  
20:00 - 21:00  
August 28 - October 13  
Free  
Casa Melchor Pinto - Sucre street #50

##### AMAZON CEREMONY

Spiritual healing  
19:00  
August 30, 31  
Info +591 77664171

##### CORAZÓN DEL SUR - TATTOO MEETING

11:00 - 20:00  
September 13 - 15  
Bs. 30  
Centro de eventos Bellagio - Velarde avenue #464

##### EARTHDANCE BOLIVIA FESTIVAL

20:00  
September 20 - 22  
From Bs. 100  
Info +591 75364740  
earthdancebolivia@gmail.com



Ec lodge  
**Las Cascadas**

Phone: (591) 76732208

Mail: info@madness-bolivia.com

www.madness-bolivia.com

# MUNAY

outfit design



📍 Linares #880 entre Sagarnaga y el pasaje Melchor Jimenez

📍 Calle Linares #956 entre calle Sagarnaga y Viluyo

📌 Munay outfit design

📷 Munay (outfit design)

Bolivia  
unlimited 



INTERNALS

OVER

95

ISSUES

10

YEARS

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BOLIVIA UNLIMITED EXPERIENCE?**

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