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Fair Beliefs

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EDITORIAL

It's February, and it's time for Alasita. Welcome to the toy-town of Bolivian beliefs, and a uniquely Andean New Year festivity. Alasita, the annual miniature models fair in La Paz, is a joyous and lively celebration that both encapsulates Bolivians' diverse past and, many believe, holds the key to their future. The word 'Alasita' derives from the Aymara language, meaning 'buy me', and, as Patrick Dowling investigates on p10, the fair is characterised by commerce in miniatures of all kinds. But it doesn't end there. Eating well is an equally important festival feature, which Helena Cavell indulges in on p18. Nevertheless (and not unlike Christmas), beyond the consumption of all things material and culinary there is a deeper spiritual tradition at work. The festival's origins are in part symbolised through the Santa Claus–like figure of the Ekeko, an Andean god whose significance is explored by Matthew Grace on p8.

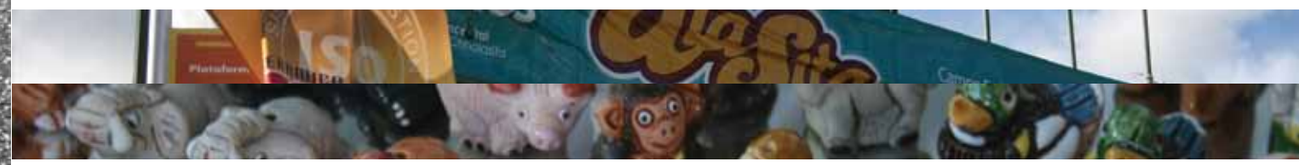
But is it really just Andean belief? Controversy surrounds the interpretation of contemporary Bolivian customs that are the result of Andean and Catholic syncretism. Alasita and the **Ekeko** legend would not be complete without reference to the role that the Spanish invaders played in shaping these traditions. The extent to which the belief systems have become amalgamated is illustrated by Patrick Dowling's investigation into the Bolivian Virgin Mary on p6. Some post-colonial cultural theorists are worried by that fact that many modern practices, which today are simply accepted as Bolivian, are in fact the result of a legacy of suppression that has quashed the original Andean customs. Camilla Swift takes a look at one these practices, that of the Bolivian **Kallawayas**, or traditional healers (p4), who only recently have been able to live a fragile revival.

Nonetheless, it seems simplistic to reduce modern Bolivian culture to 'pure' or original beliefs versus bastardised customs. Bolivia today is a country that has developed away from the inferiority complex of the colonised: Alasita and the Ekeko are not Spanish traditions. In Spain, New Year's resolutions are made whilst eating 12 grapes at each clock stroke of midnight. In Bolivia, the purchasing of miniature models at Alasita Fair gives material reality to people's hopes for the year to come. Alasita is not about squabbling over entangled origins, but about new resolve and faith in the future.

HAPPY ALASITA, and Happy New Year, from Bolivian Express.

By Xenia Elsaesser

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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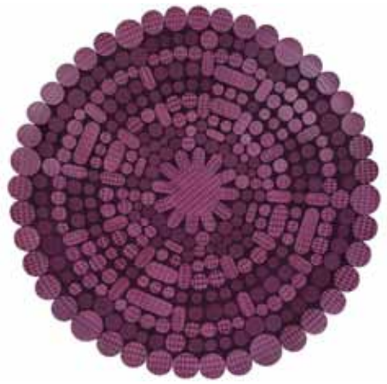
GLOSSARY

ALTIPLANO	The Andean high plateau surrounding La Paz
API	A thick, wheat-based drink
CARNAVAL	Bolivian Carnival
CHUSPA	Colourful woven medicine bags
EKEKO	Andean god of abundance and fertility, represented as a miniature figurine bearing gifts
FRITANGA	Thick, slightly spicy pork stew
FUTBOLÍN	Table football
INCENSARIO	Pot used by a Yatiri in religious ceremonies and to burn incense in.
KALLAWAYA	Nomadic Andean healers
MATE	Herbal tea
PACEÑO	Person from La Paz
PACHAMAMA	Aymara and Quechua Mother Earth
WAKA	Sacred hill where spiritual energy is concentrated
YATIRI	Aymara religious figure, or shaman



SCATTERING SEEDS

Pachamama Has Provided Fertile Ground for the Growth of Catholicism in Bolivia

TEXT: PATRICK DOWLING

Coming from a Catholic high-school background, I thought I'd find plenty of common ground with the people of Bolivia. After all, about 95 percent of Bolivia's population professes the Catholic faith. But 85 percent of Bolivians are of indigenous descent, with ancestors who worshipped Aymara, Quechuan, and other pre-Hispanic deities. The influence of indigenous belief still reverberates today, even in the Catholic Church. It's particularly evident in the Bolivian portrayal of the Virgin Mary.

The Catholic Church has always portrayed the Virgin Mary as chaste, of course, and Jesus Christ as being born without sexual corruption. But in Bolivia, far from being simply the remote and largely silent figure portrayed in European Catholicism, the Virgin Mary is often seen as an active and beneficent divine being. It is not uncommon to see a student ask the Virgin for a good grade on a test, or to hear a helpless romantic ask the Virgin for intercession in a star-crossed romance. The Virgin Mary is not just a distant religious figure whose only role in Catholicism was giving birth to Christ; here, she takes center stage and 'acts as the Mother of the People', says Father Ivan Bravo, the vicar of the Montículo parish in La Paz.

But why is that? The answer can be traced back to the introduction of Catholicism in Bolivia. When the Spanish invaded the Americas, they brought with them their Catholic religion, forcing it upon the indigenous people. But the people, devout to their own gods, resisted these advances. 'The Spanish were able to eliminate the natives' temples, but they couldn't eliminate their beliefs,' asserts historian Dr. Fernando Cajias. The Aymara and the Quechua, the dominant tribes in the Bolivian highlands (the **altiplano**) based their faith on the natural world, holding the sun, the earth, and the water as sacred, and worshipped deities that represented them. The earth provided for them, so they had a strong connection to it. And the Spanish, even at the height of their power, were never quite able to stop the sun from rising, or the earth from producing food.

So the Spaniards had to adopt a different plan of attack. As Dr. Cajias says, 'The missionaries realised they couldn't completely destroy the indigenous belief after struggling to force Catholicism on the people. They then decided to mix Catholic beliefs and figures with native beliefs and figures.' At the center of this syncretism are **Pachamama** and the Virgin Mary. *Pachamama* is an Aymara and Quechuan word loosely meaning 'Mother Earth.' The Andean people saw Pachamama as a mother who gave them food, water, and all of nature. She was considered a fertile mother because of the fertile land. And the Catholic figure most resembling a caring mother? The Virgin Mary.

With this the new strategy in place, Catholicism slowly took root. Outside Cochabamba, in the town of Quillacollo, the Festival of Urkupiña is held every August, celebrating the fusion of the Virgin Mary and Pachamama. The story of this mingling of two cultures dates back to pre-colonial times, when the indigenous people of the Cochabamba Valley would make offerings to a **waca**—a sacred hill where spiritual energy is concentrated—where Quillacollo now sits. This particular *waca* was revered for its female energy, and devotees would make offerings to the Pachamama there.

Then, in the late 18th century, when Spanish colonialism was in full bloom and the Catholic Church was trying to make inroads among the native population, a young indigenous shepherd girl was approached by an apparition of the Virgin Mary on the *waca*. The next day, when she returned to the hill with her parents, the Virgin appeared once again. The girl shouted, *'Ork'hopiña! Ork'hopiña!*'—'She's already on the hill,' in Quechua. Since then, the Festival of Urkupiña is held every year, celebrating not only the Virgin and her Pachamama predecessor, but also national integration, the combining of Spanish and indigenous culture.

It is, though, an uneasy synthesis, with plenty of disagreement as to how the Virgin and Pachamama actually fit together. Dr. Cajias maintains that although indigenous belief is superimposed on Catholicism in Bolivia, the two systems are still distinct. 'It is not a fusion. There is not a temple for the Virgin Mary *and* Pachamama,' Dr. Cajias says. 'It is simply a symbiosis, because each has its own role in society.' And for the most part, the two have remained separate. 'People in Bolivia believe in Jesus Christ and follow Catholic teachings, but they also adhere to their ancestors' original Andean beliefs.'

But Father Bravo disagrees with the separate but equal belief. 'The Church in Bolivia has presented Mother Earth as a creation of God,' he says. 'Pachamama is so important in the people's belief that it can not be ignored, but Pachamama was created by God, and is not a separate goddess.' In other words, the Church accepts the people's love of Mother Earth because being grateful to Mother Earth is being grateful to God. 'The Second Vatican Council recognised that we have to reach people in different ways,' Father Bravo continues. 'Bolivian priests are able to understand the traditions because we come from them, and are able to reach the people because of it.' Open-mindedness and creativity are helping Catholicism stay strong in Bolivia.

Father Bravo uses the Parable of the Farmer Scattering Seed, from the Book of Mark, to illustrate Pachamama's significance to Catholicism. Jesus tells the story of a farmer who throws seeds on different surfaces. The seeds thrown on rocky soil sprout but then wither in the sun, and the seeds thrown among thorns are choked out from the sunlight. Only the seeds sown in fertile soil grow and yield crops. In Bolivia, the seeds of God's message must combine with the fertile, fecund, and ancient Mother Earth—like Jesus in Mary's womb—in order to yield a successful crop of Catholic Bolivians.

EKEKO

Text: Matthew Grace
Photo: Terrance Grace

Cast a look into many Bolivian homes, and you'll likely spot a small, moustachioed ceramic figurine called an **Ekeko**. These jolly-looking statuettes resemble small men in Andean attire with enormous smiles, and they usually bear accessories that represent goods people want to obtain in the coming year. They represent a pre-Colombian god of fertility and abundance, and they're typically given to newlyweds and people who are moving into a new house, in order to bless them and ensure prosperity in the future.

While the provenance of the Ekeko figure is obscured in history, some scholars date it back to the Tiwanaku culture, which was dominant in southern Peru, northern Chile, and western Bolivia over a thousand years ago. The Ekeko god was revered as a phallic symbol, responsible for male fertility. Later, the Incas adopted the Ekeko, whom they called Iqiqu. He wandered the **altiplano**, bringing harmony and abundance wherever he roamed. Then the Spanish arrived. According to legend, they were wary of the Ekeko's power and the devotion he inspired in the people, so they captured him and cut him into many pieces, which they scattered across the land so that the Ekeko could not come back to life.

But the Ekeko didn't die. In fact, his beneficence toward all, even toward the Spanish, would provide his lasting legend. In 1781, during an indigenous insurrection led by Tupac Katari, an Aymara army surrounded La Paz and laid siege to it for six months in order to force the hated Spanish occupier out. A young soldier in Katari's army snuck across lines into the city to visit his paramour, who was a servant in a Spanish officer's household. While everyone else in the city was starving, the young soldier delivered food to her daily in secret, laying it in front of the girl's Ekeko figurine. The Spanish officer, witnessing the appearance of food every day in front of the Ekeko—and perhaps willing to cast a blind eye to it as long as he received a cut of the food—popularised the legend of the Ekeko when the siege was finally lifted, and he's now known to help provide for people in need.

While the Ekeko is now largely denuded of his religious connotations, his cultural significance abides. He's the star of the Festival of Alasita, and now some are appropriating the Ekeko's traditional macho aspect and giving it a feminist spin. Mujeres Creando, a women's collective located in La Paz's Sopocachi neighborhood, has introduced a female Ekeka to be debuted at this year's Festival of Alasita. This figure is a representation of the cholita, the indigenous female archetype that dominates the altiplano. It shows the burdens that women carry—including, in some depictions, a drunk male—in addition to the material goods they provide.

But far from being a radical reinterpretation of folklore, the Ekeka might be a rediscovery of ancient beliefs. Some researchers have recently unearthed legends that indicate there was once a female Ekeka god, one also worshiped for fertility, abundance, and prosperity. It would make sense, as Aymara belief typically emphasises duality in nature, stressing the importance of both the female and the male.

But even as the Ekeko has changed throughout the centuries, one thing remains the same: you should never purchase an Ekeko for yourself. In the true spirit of his mythological spirit of giving, the Ekeko only blesses those who receive him as a gift.

HONEY,

TEXT AND PHOTOS: PATRICK DOWLING

'Bolivianos! Dólares! Euros!' shouts the street vendor directly in front of me, as similar cries ring throughout the Sopacachi district of La Paz. At 11:55 the street is swarming with festival goers rushing to buy miniatures for the 12:00 start. To my left, a crowd of people surround a one-stop shop for everything tiny: cars, pots of gold, houses, graduation certificates, alcohol bottles, luggage and of course, stacks of money. To my right, there's another stand selling what appear to be newspapers the size of napkins and a doll smoking cigars. Did I enter an episode of the Twilight Zone? I step back from the bustling crowd to catch my breath, only to fill my lungs with burning incense. Trying to find the source of the smell, I encounter men and women sitting in the middle of the street hunched over **incensario**s, flower petals, coca leaves, hand bells and bottles of alcohol. At the centre the **Yatiris** chant blessings. These wise men are dressed in traditional Bolivian garb, some displaying crosses from their necks. Suddenly from above I hear a booming noise and jerk my head upwards to see a small firework show marking the midday hour. Alasita has begun.

I wander about to find out what else this festival has to offer, only to find more miniatures for sale. The crowd consists of mainly adults. How many Hot Wheel cars do grownups need? I come across another store selling assorted animal figures. I ask around and find that stands sell frogs for good luck, chickens to find a mate and owls to gain wisdom. To my surprise, the miniature nature of the festival doesn't stop with the food. Tiny baguettes and palm-sized cakes occupy the pastries section of Alasita. I can't resist trying the mini-deserts, and find that they taste as good as the normal-sized ones. My stomach satisfied, I step back into the bustling street and collide with a birdcage. The owner informs me that, for a small fee of 2 Bs –about $0.30— the birds will pick out your fortune from a drawer beneath their cage. While the little birds work, my eye spots the first life-sized article of the day: a rotund man with tools, a miniature car, a flute, and other items associated with wealth and good fortune hanging from his neck as pots of gold sit at his feet. I read a gold sign with the word '**Ekeko**' (see p8).

After sleeping on the unique festival, I decided to sit down with a Bolivian historian, Fernando Cajías, to get a better picture of Alasita. Still very confused about the meaning and purpose of the festival, I asked him, 'What is Alasita?' to which he responded, 'Alasita is the festival of desires and energy. Everyone has desires.' And there it was, the heart and soul of the festival in less than ten seconds. He went on to explain that the miniatures are used to represent desires that people have. Whether you want money or love, luck or wisdom, you can pursue your desires at Alasita by getting your miniatures blessed by a **Yatiri** in hope that they will become real, life-sized possessions within the next year. This is achieved by offering your miniatures to Ekeko, the Andean god of abundance, whose existence dates to the pre-Colombian era. The concept of this festival, offering miniatures to a god of abundance, dates back even further to the Incan period. However, the original practices were eradicated during the Spanish colonisation and introduction of Catholicism. The history of the fair's development as we know it today is cloudy, but we do know that it has been taking place in La Paz for the last 240 years. It started when Segurola, the mayor of La Paz, converted the feast of the god of abundance into a Catholic celebration. The festival is now devoted to Nuestra Señora de La Paz.

Today not only do people buy the miniatures in hopes of receiving good fortune from the Ekeko, but the festival has expanded into a larger cultural institution. Dr. Cajías went on to describe the artistic language of the fair: "The artisans compete to have their work prized and recognised. The miniatures are not just amulets and often become works of art.' The festival transgresses simple-minded material desires. Newspapers sold at Alasita (miniatures, of course) are openly allowed to criticise the government. Dr. Cajías also emphasised the ludic language of the fair. 'There is an air of fun and games during the festival and within the people. It's not only buying the miniatures anymore; there are fake weddings and other performances as well. I've even had students make me sign their fake marriage certificates.' Fully armed with the knowledge of a Bolivian historian, I returned to Alasita the next day to indulge in my own desires. I quickly set out to buy a miniature new car, stacks of fake money and a full set of tiny luggage. I took my finds to the nearest Yatiri to bless with coca leaves, incense and alcohol. Now I had a year to make these things a reality.

Next I set out to experience the carnival part of the festival. In the rides section, a bit further away from the entrance, I saw more children than at the shops on the first day. I encountered a Ferris wheel, merry-go-round and other rides that involved some sort of spinning, all classic staples of a fair anywhere in the world. In the games area I came across a gathering of **futbolín** tables, a popular section. Having years of experience playing foosball in my grandparents' basement during holidays, I thought I would try my luck against a couple of locals. It was a mistake to say the least, as I was easily defeated 4-1, twice. The experience, humbling as it was, felt like I was reliving part of my childhood all the way in Bolivia. This crazy festival was suddenly making me homesick.

After hearing the ideology behind Alasita and experiencing the fair firsthand, I couldn't help but question the tradition. You buy small, fake money with life-sized, actual money in hopes that you will become rich? Am I the only one not lost in the irony? At first it seemed to me like a childish display of human ignorance. But why then where the streets filled with so many adults, many of whom were clearly educated business people on their lunch break? The answer lies in the communal spiritual tradition. Bolivians don't buy these miniatures because they are cool looking or funny; but because amulets are a way of setting goals for the future. Alasita allows Bolivians to acknowledge their desires in an exciting, communal event. Unlike Catholicism, which preaches the repression of worldly desires, here, in this crazy festival of miniatures, people are able to voice their worldly desires without reprimand or guilt. Today's festival may be devoted to a Catholic Virgin in name, but in spirit it remains a celebration of energy, desire, and Andean abundance.

> 'YOU BUY SMALL, FAKE MONEY WITH LIFE-SIZED, ACTUAL MONEY IN HOPES THAT YOU WILL BECOME RICH? AM I THE ONLY ONE NOT LOST IN THE IRONY?'

EVERYONE HAS DESIRES

NOMADIC HEALING

Travellers only usually encounter Bolivia's traditional medicine wares at the Mercado de Hechicería, or the Witches' Market, near Plaza San Francisco in La Paz. The stalls lining Calle Lineras are heavily laden with a cornucopia of ritual items, including dried llama fetuses and various boxed herbal remedies used to treat everything from rheumatism to stomach pain. However, traditional indigenous medicine in Bolivia dates back millennia, extending far beyond the tourist-laden confines of the Witches' Market.

Text: Camilla Swift
Photo: Michael Dunn

Travellers only usually encounter Bolivia's traditional medicine wares at the Mercado de Hechicería, or the Witches' Market, near Plaza San Francisco in La Paz. The stalls lining Calle Lineras are heavily laden with a cornucopia of ritual items, including dried llama fetuses and various boxed herbal remedies used to treat everything from rheumatism to stomach pain. However, traditional indigenous medicine in Bolivia dates back millennia, extending far beyond the tourist-laden confines of the Witches' Market.

The **Kallawaya**, a nomadic group of Andean healers, have a cosmovision that incorporates ancestral medical techniques with a view of humankind and its place in the universe, grounded on devotion to the **Pachamama**, or Mother Earth. The members of this indigenous ethnic group, based in the mountains north of La Paz, were the official doctors of the greater Inca state. Their privileged position continued through the Spanish conquest, as the foreign invaders respected their healing skills and medical knowledge.

The Kallawaya use animal and mineral resources to heal, as well as plants, talismans, good-luck charms, and music therapy. Dr. Walter Álvarez Quispe, a fully trained modern medical doctor, is also the executive director of INBOMETRAKA (the Bolivian Institute for Traditional Kallawaya Medicine) and a Kallawaya with years of healing experience. He says that a Kallawaya can diagnose someone by studying the patient's eyes and hands. In addition to addressing a patient's physiological symptoms, a Kallawaya will also treat psychological and social ailments and the environment, including animals, plants, and the patient's home.

The Quechua and Aymara people of the Andes see themselves as inhabiting a supernatural universe in which all natural entities—from people and animals to plants, mountains, and the earth itself—are powerful spiritual beings intertwined in a complex network of mutual obligation. 'Every one of us lives bound by nature', says Dr. Quispe. 'Modern medicine may seem to heal quicker, but natural medicine is still the most pure. It heals slowly but lasts forever.'

The Kallawaya distinguish themselves from other Andean ethnic groups by their constant travelling. From their isolated homeland of Bautista Saavedra, north of La Paz, the Kallawaya have ventured all over Bolivia and into parts of Peru, Argentina, Chile, and Ecuador, even as far as Panama. With their **chuspa**—colourful woven medicine bags—and the blessing of the gods to protect them on their journey, they set off on ancient Inca trails to treat those in need.

Bolivia, with its high altitude, rugged landscape, and isolated areas of human settlement, offers a unique topography and widely varying ecosystems from which Kallawaya healers have been able to extend their considerable knowledge of medicinal plants. With some 980 plant species in the Kallawaya pharmacopeia, it rates as one of the most bountiful in the world.

From the age of four, young Kallawaya learn about plants at home. At 13, they begin to help in the preparation of medicines and remedies and, shortly after, they start travelling, taking their prepared medicines with them and learning different languages along the way. Young Kallawaya are always accompanied by older, more experienced mentors, who teach them and guide them along the way. Between the ages of 23 and 25, these young Kallawaya are tested, and, once certified in the healing arts, they can teach and pass on their knowledge to others.

Dr. Quispe travelled from the age of 13 until he was 22, when he started to study modern biomedicine. 'Since a child, I was obliged to be a Kallawaya because my grandfather and great-grandfather were also Kallawaya healers', he says. 'First I am a Kallawaya, and then a [modern] medical specialist.'

Kallawaya women—K'awayus—also teach the children, and they participate in a number of rites, weave textiles, and act as midwives, caring for pregnant women and babies.

Until quite recently, centuries of repression—by both the church and state—drove the Kallawaya's healing arts underground. For years, the Bolivian government wouldn't allow the formation of traditional medicine institutions. Only trained doctors and biomedics were allowed to practise medicine, while traditional medicine was considered witchcraft and healers were imprisoned for practising it. However, the legacy of traditional medicine continued throughout those dark days, especially in Bolivia's isolated rural communities, where patients were treated clandestinely.

In 1984, traditional medicine was officially recognised in Bolivia and a governmental ministry of traditional medicine was formed. And in 1987, traditional medicine supporters were able to gain passage of a law that led to the creation of INBOMETRAKA.

In 2003, UNESCO declared the Kallawaya cosmovision as an 'oral and intangible cultural heritage of humanity.' This award created public recognition of the value of Kallawaya knowledge and their worldview. But with rapid urbanisation and a population shift toward Bolivia's cities, modern medicine is increasingly in use, and the Kallawaya are slowly diminishing in number as fewer of their sons learn the traditional skills.

Still, in remote areas throughout Bolivia, when someone becomes ill, he or she will likely turn to traditional medicine. In fact, according to Carmen Beatriz Loza, the research director of INBOMETRAKA, 80 percent of Bolivians have called on a natural healer at some point in their lives, and 40 percent of Bolivians practise only traditional medicine. The reason is a practical one: traditional remedies are affordable; modern medicine is not. A typical Kallawaya prescription may be the preparation of a **mate** infusion made from plants that a farmer most likely already grows on his land. But even more importantly, the Kallawaya visit their patients' homes. Rural villages rarely have their own doctors or nurses, and travelling miles into a city is rarely possible for a poor campesino. For now, despite a decline in Kallawaya practitioners, their services are still in much demand.

' Every one of us lives bound by nature. Modern medicine may seem to heal quicker, but natural medicine is still the most pure. It heals slowly but lasts forever '

But even small villages are becoming increasingly connected to far-away places and ideas, and very soon acculturation of the patients will be another threat to the Kallawaya tradition. And that's where INBOMETRAKA sees its mission: 'We must work to bring back the neglected knowledge of traditional Andean and Amazonian medicine to the service of public health', says Ms. Loza.

As Dr. Quispe says, 'It is not just medicine, it's a way of life.'

VOICES FROM THE FAIRGROUND

A selection of interviews documenting the Alasita fair as lived by **paceños**.

TEXT: PATRICK DOWLING
PHOTOS: IVAN RODRIGUEZ P. AND PATRICK DOWLING

Name: Andrea Vera

Age: 11

Occupation: Student, 6th grade

I have been coming to Alasita with my sister for 4 years. I love everything about the festival, especially the miniatures. I can't wait to buy bags and bags of money, and a suitcase for travel because it definitely works

Name: Christian Quispe

Age: 18

Occupation: Student, 12th grade

This is my second year working at Alasita, but I have been taking part in the festival since I was a kid. I work the ***futbolín*** *station because it was always my favourite game at Alasita. I may buy some miniatures this year, but I always spend money on the games so I get a lot of surprise prizes. I like the surprise prize carts because I got these wristbands from them*

Name: Teodora Sillo

Age: 60

Occupation: Housewife

I love everything about Alasita. I've been coming for 10 years now and I don't plan on stopping. I'm going to buy a house and a car this year

Name: Iba Delgado Arana

Age: 57

Occupation: Cook

My earliest memories of Alasita are from when I was 15 years old when I would come with my friends. Now I get to experience it every year because I come to cook. My specialty is Fritanga, and the mayor even awarded me a prize for this dish. I also love to make Plato Paceño, a festival trademark. I am going to buy some more kitchen items and some miniature food stuff because I love to cook

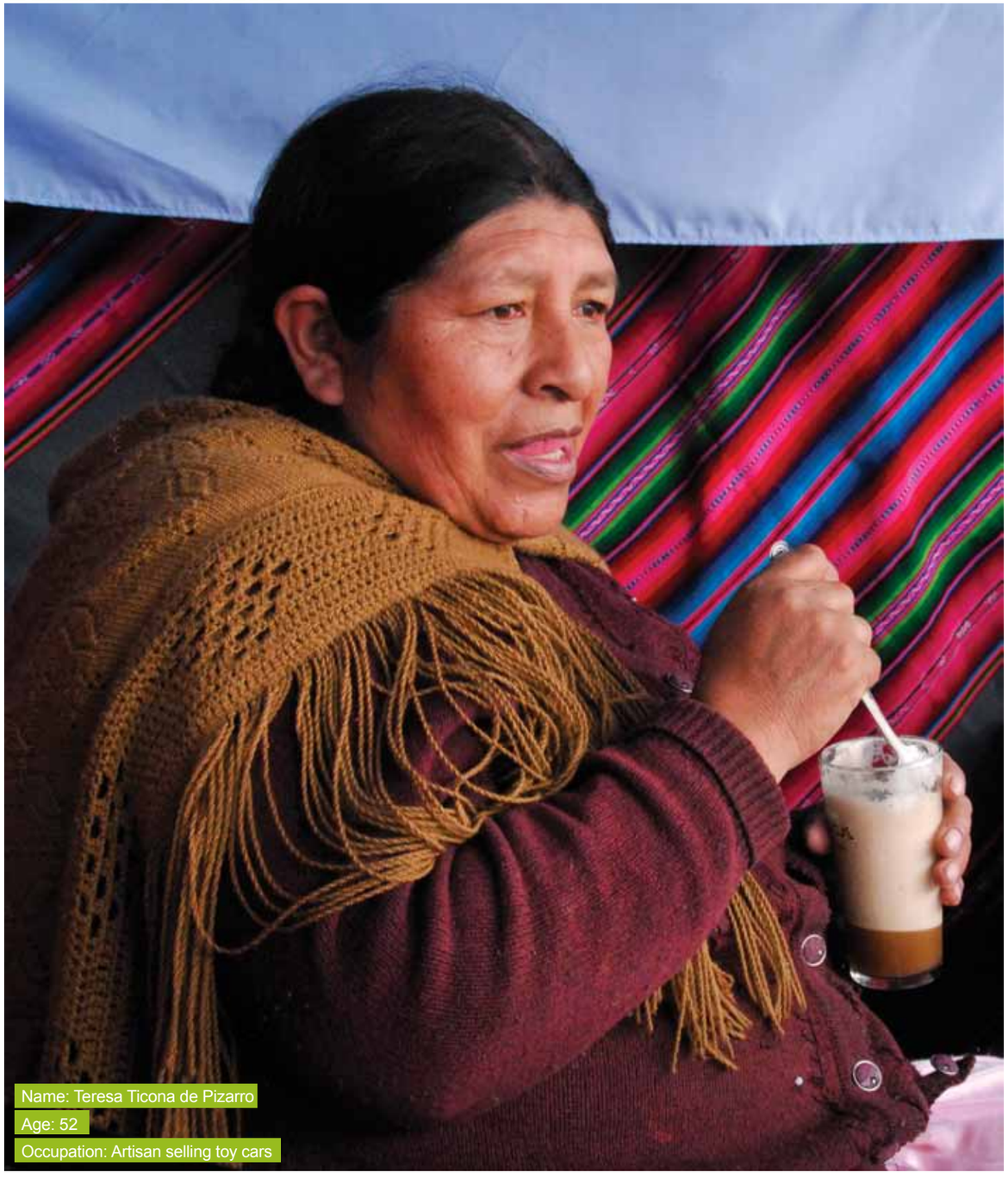
Name: Fabricio Barrientos

Age: 20

Occupation: University Student - studying Engineering

I have been coming to Alasita ever since I can remember, but this year I am going to buy my university degree in Engineering and a license to practice. I really enjoy the miniatures and decided to make this model ship

VOICES FROM THE FAIRGROUND



Name: Teresa Ticona de Pizarro
Age: 52
Occupation: Artisan selling toy cars

I have been an artisan at Alasita for 20 years. I keep coming back because I love the idea of buying for the desire of having. Unfortunately, I have to sleep in the stand because I'm scared that someone will break in and steal all my car models. I sell meat during the other times of the year. My favourite drink here is Batido

Bolivian Express
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Cultural Calendar

Cultural Calendar February - March 2012

Carnaval Season is coming up... If you're in La Paz for Carnaval 2012, be in the right place at the right time with the help of our cultural calendar.

16-23 February
Carnaval Community Exhibition
Location: Room 2, Galeria de Arte 21
Times: 9.00-12.00 and 15.00-18.00

24-25 February
The Students' Concert
Performed by 'Los Olvidados' band in memory of the Anata, La Paz's erstwhile Carnaval.
Time:19.00

26 February
The Burial of the Pepino
A ceremony to bury the La Paz festival harlequin, accompanied by 'Los Olvidados' band.
Location: Plaza Mayor and San Francisco.
Time: 10.00

26 February
Sunday of Temptation: Parade of Ch'utas and Pepinos
Performed by the San Antonio Dance troupe.
Location: Villa Armonía and IV Centenario
Time: 12.00

27 February
Day of our Dear Chocopa
Performed by the Centro cultural, 'Estudiantina Primavera'
Location: Cementerio General Area and Gran Poder.
Time: 11.00

15 March
La Paz Carnaval Awards
Awards Ceremony for the municipal competition in the Anata Parades of Carnaval Paceño 2012. Awarded by the La Paz government.
Location: Casa de la Cultura, 'Franz Tamayo'
Time: 10.30

29 February
Carnaval Seminar
Seminar entitled: 'Changes and Transformations in the Anata—Carnaval Paceño—in the city of La Paz in the Twentieth and Twenty-First century.'
Location: 'Amalia de Gallardo' Room, Tambo Quirquincho Museum
Time: 18.00

8 April
Patak Pollera Festival.
Performed by the troupes: 'Los Cariñosos del Munaypata' and 'Los Rajistas de Munaypata'
Location: Zona de Munaypata
Time: 11.00

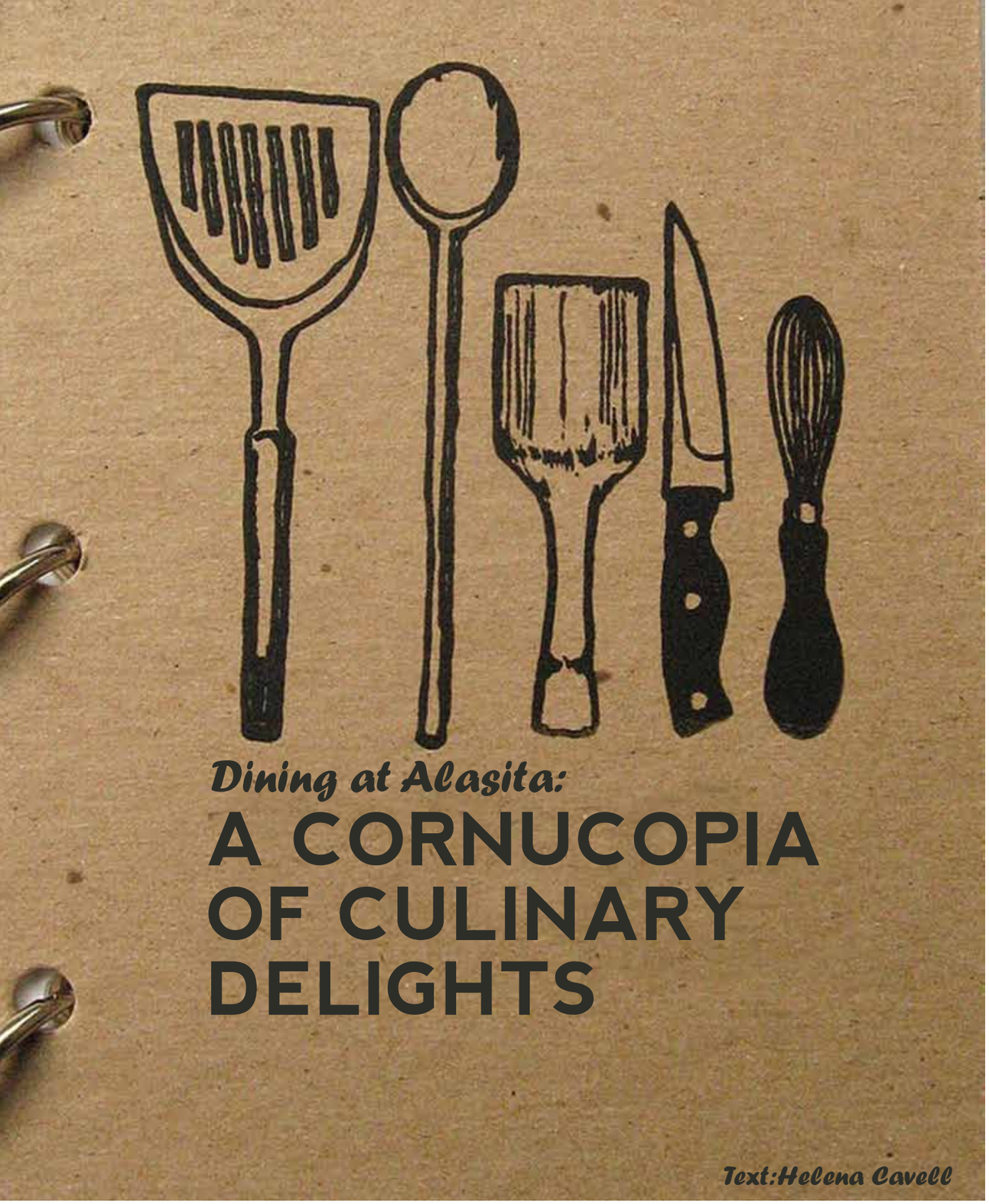
1-29 February
Una mirada por la Alasita y el Carnaval
A collection of photographs by Cordero depicting aspects of both Alasita and Carnaval in the past century.
Location: Museo Tambio Quirquincho, Evaristo Valle, on the Plaza Alonso de Mendoza corner.

27-29 February
Book Festival
A range of events for all ages. Book sale in El Prado in honour of Literature Day and La Paz literature. The 'Cámera Boliviana del Libro' and other book clubs will be part of the programme.
Time: 19.00

28 February
Celebration of Franz Tamayo's Birth
A La Paz citizen, his birth will be honoured by UNI-FRANZ and book clubs in La Paz. The distribution of pieces of his work will be announced.
Location: Municipal Library 'Mariscal Andres de Santa Cruz', Plaza del Estudiante.

28 February
Story Anthology Presentation
A special ceremony to present the XXXVIII 'Anthology of Stories' from the municipal 'Franz Tamayo' literature competition.
Location: Palacio Consistorial.
Time: 10.00

29 February
Taking Marx into the Twenty-First Century
A talk by Juan José Bautista. Ref: 2236656.
Location: Goethe Institut, Avenida Arce 2708 and Calle Campos
Time: 10.00



Dining at Alasita:

A CORNUCOPIA OF CULINARY DELIGHTS

Text:Helena Cavell

As a lover of food, I have tried some of the best (and worst) of market stall food from a variety of countries. At best it is delicious and authentic, giving a peek at life behind the tourist facade; at its worst its a food poisoning nightmare. My visit to the Alasita market, a fusion of traditional Andean food and modern treats, however, did not disappoint.

A BREAKFAST OF API AND PASTEL

Bolivia has over two thousand varieties of corn, and these are made use of in the typical Andean drink **api**. Best described as a warm thick smoothie, this drink lacks the over sweetened sickliness that is present in many of its counterparts. It is usually accompanied by a pastel, a type of pastry bread sprinkled with icing sugar - buttery golden goodness to start your day. At a price of a mere eight bolivianos for both, there's little excuse not to indulge in this tasty breakfast all day long!

9/10 in both attractiveness and taste

PLATO PACEÑO

A plate piled full of carbohydrates designed to beat the cold Andean weather, consisting of corn, lima beans, potatoes, cheese, and, non-traditionally in my case, beef. Although the sight of so much food on one plate was slightly overwhelming (even when shared between two), the variety made for an interesting meal. Initially a bit disappointed by the corn, I was quickly informed that the idea was to eat it in combination with the fried cheese. The addition of the cheese completely changed my perceptions, creating a salty, chewy, more-ish taste. The non-traditional beef was, however, the highlight; thinly cut with a vague hint of spice the steak was tender and delicious!

6/10 in attractiveness and 7/10 in taste

CHURRO

This fried doughy pastry snack differs a little to its Spanish relative in its appearance, but retains all the sugary loveliness that churros should possess. Even after having eaten your body weight in food, this treat is hard to resist. The fact that is it served in a paper bag drenched in icing sugar only adds to its appeal; this snack is a favourite in the Alasita market for tourists and Bolivians alike.

9/10 in both attractiveness and taste

FRITANGA

A thick, slightly spicy, pork stew made with tomatoes and onions, normally accompanied by corn and potatoes. However, unlike the carb-heavy plato **paceño**, the **fritanga** is centred around its meat of choice: pork. In fact the amount of meat that makes up this dish makes it well worth the 25 bolivianos you can expect to pay in any stall around Alasita, as well as being a tasty and unique dish.

9/10 in value for money

THE FINAL JUDGEMENT

In a world full of chain burger restaurants, people could use a little more Alasita food in their diet. Homemade, unpretentious, and quite frankly a bargain, I will be heading back there for dinner as soon as possible to sample a few of the many more dishes Alasita has to offer.


Photo by Helena Cavell