

BolivianExpress

Gratis Magazine





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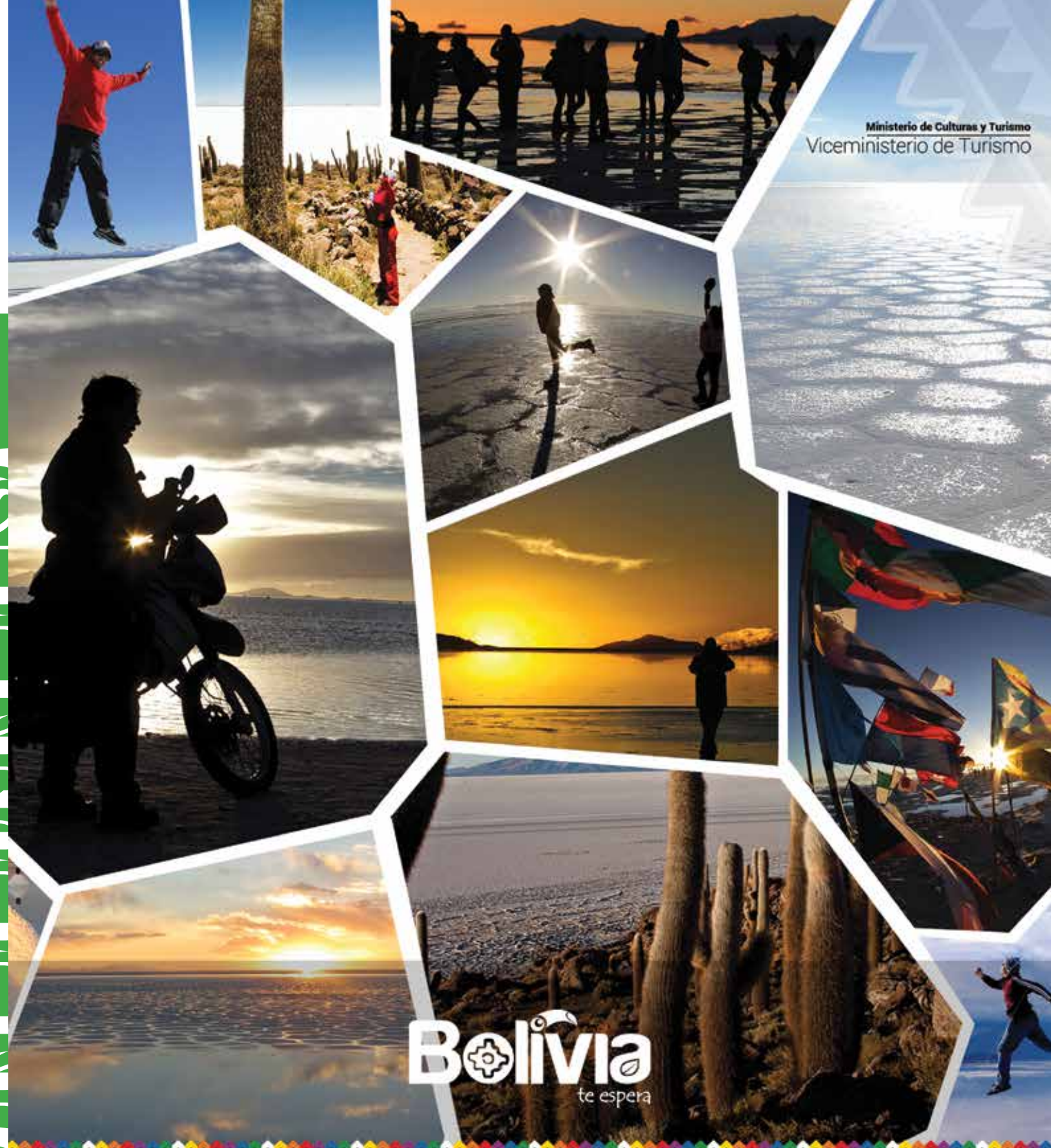
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ÚNICO Y BOLIVIANO



Canon or Nikon? Flashback to 1990. Witness the rise of the digital SLR. The mainstream recording medium and consequently, the photographic process, transforms. Analog photographers trade photographic chemicals for memory cards, negative records for hard drives and the darkroom for Adobe Photoshop. Enter the digital age. Photography is now as easy as 1-2-3; watch a YouTube tutorial, make a Flickr account, and design a flashy watermark. Social media and photo-sharing networks, Facebook and Instagram, make it possible for everybody with a cell phone camera to become a photographer. Android, or iPhone? ... Stop.

ISO, shutter speed, and F/STOP.

REWIND. "Shoot in manual," says Michael Dunn, Bolivian Express Head of Photography.

From the *Sin Motivo Photography* studio in downtown Sopocachi, you borrow *Sara Juana*, a Canon Rebel XTI, named after a pistol-carrying, cartoon horse, emphasizing her shooting capacity. Through a lens, you observe photogenic La Paz, curiously looking for the decisive moment coined by Henri Cartier-Bresson, father of photojournalism. You walk from *Avenida 20 de Octubre* to *Calle Jaen*, climbing a cobblestone street at a 45 degree angle. Breathlessly, you admire el Illimani. Hooked, you buy your first DSLR from *Calle Eloy Salmón*, an electronic goods street market: the paceño amazon.com. When the lens cracks, you are gifted a vintage 1960's *Asahi Pentax Spotmatic* from the camera repairman on *Av. 20 de Octubre*. After a few hours in the darkroom, you develop two black and white *Kodak TRI-X 400* films and make contact sheets. You frown at an overexposed print left in the developer too longer and mutter, "this is part of the process," before you do it again.

In this issue, the Bolivian Express looks beyond the tacky watermarks to discover Bolivian professional photographer Juan Estellano developing film and making prints in *L'obscurita* from the perspective of Bolivian journalist Alex Ayala. Bolivian Express photojournalist intern Vicky Roberts explores the contrast between diverse Bolivian landscapes in her first photo essay. Adriana Murillo investigates the history of photography in Bolivia, from analog to digital, finding the value of photographic archives. Bolivian professional photographer Alejandro Loayza critically examines the sustainability of Bolivian city landscapes during an age of visual contamination. Bolivian professional filmmaking-photography collective, Sin Motivo, shares how a collaborative space for creative audiovisual artists and photographers was formed. Bolivian Express photojournalist intern Sophia Vahdati interviews professional Bolivian photographer Alvaro Gumucio Li, aka 'Gumo'. Photojournalist Jonathan Mccarthy documents the rural, artisan weaving women of Huancarani. Featured photo essays include the work of professional Bolivian photographers Michael Dunn and Carlos Sanchez Navas.

Inevitably, any photo issue will invariably only be able to cover a limited selection of what it means to be a photographer in Bolivia. So of course, this will have to be the first of several future editions exploring this neverending world of pixels, celluloid, silver nitrate, shutters and broken lenses. ✕

By Alexandra Meleán Anzoleaga

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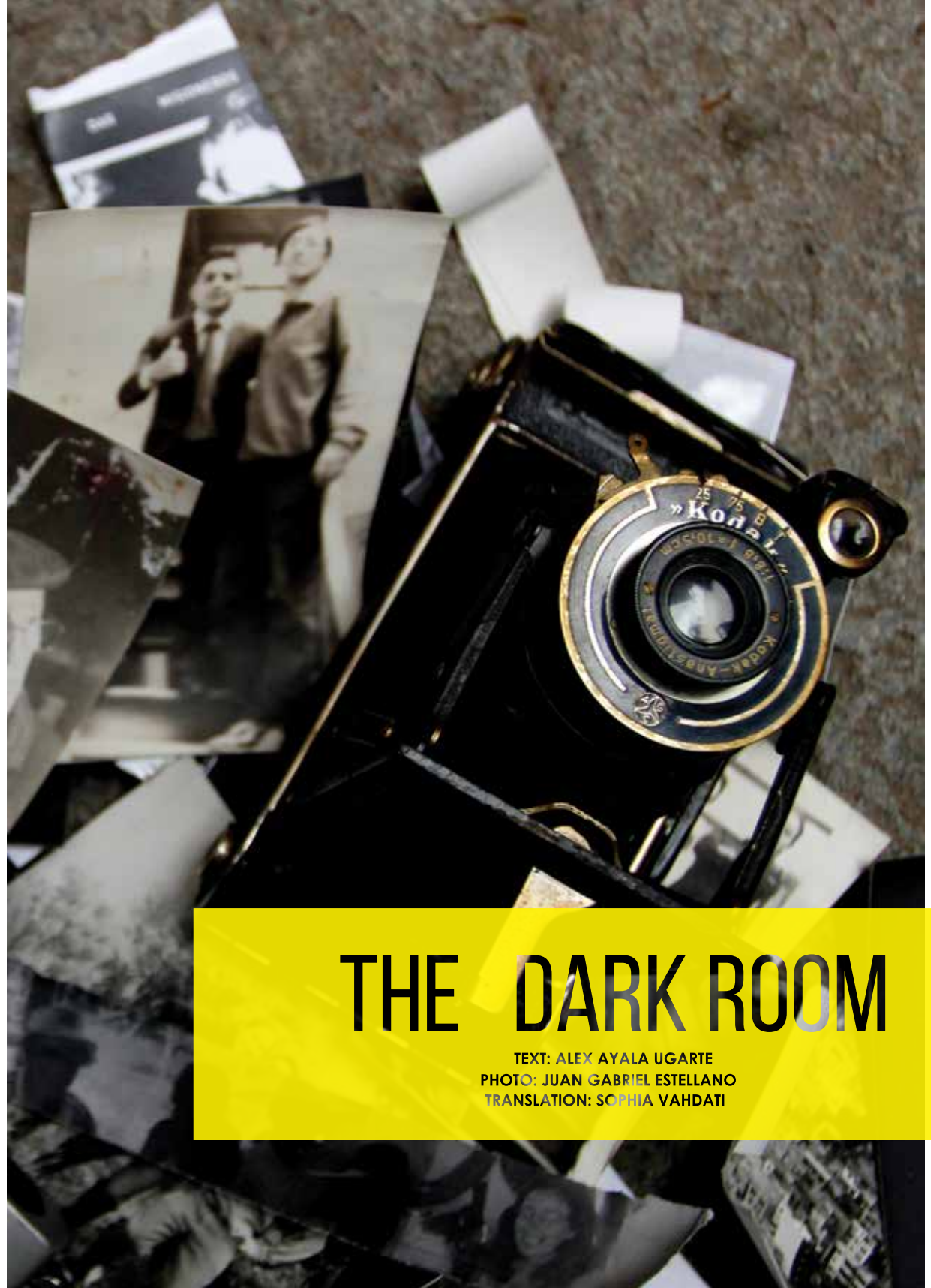


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THE DARK ROOM

TEXT: ALEX AYALA UGARTE
PHOTO: JUAN GABRIEL ESTELLANO
TRANSLATION: SOPHIA VAHDATI

The dark room where Juan Gabriel Estellano manually develops some of his photos is much more than a humid and stagnant place where someone could turn out the lights at any given moment. It's a room - in the courtyard of a creaking mansion - with a wardrobe covered in dust, a few straggling hangers, newspapers stacked up in a pile, a precariously-fixed water tap and other small objects that are easy to overlook or trip over as one moves around the space. It's a five-by-three-metre hideout filled with borrowed items.

Estellano shares this space with the filing clerk and cultural director, Cristina Machicado. The room was baptised as *L'obscurito* and it is littered with tools, machines and utensils that are capable of transporting an idle visitor to another time period. These tools have been recycled, reworked or restored by Estellano.

'We set up a light table on which to view negatives thanks to an ordinary table that we modified', explains Juan Gabriel, as he shuffles boxes and folders to uncover the table's surface. 'We have two antique enlargers that work perfectly. One came from Cristina's grandmother and the other from a Japanese man named Toshi Fujimoto who lets us use it. We use the enlargers with expired film and paper that Fujimoto has also given us and which we value dearly.'

Some of these rolls expired in the early 1980's, when Juan Gabriel hadn't even been born yet. 'It's really crazy because you never really know how exactly time will affect the film. Sometimes, the shots are far too overexposed and on other occasions the opposite happens', he says. Something similar occurs with the expired paper they use to immortalise certain scenes of day-to-day family life. 'The resulting texture, in this case, is similar to that of an old shot,' Estellano explains. 'It is like holding a photo from thirty years ago in your hands, something very surreal. These are photos that you've taken today,

the day before yesterday, or two weeks ago, but they remind you of your grandparent's house. They draw you into thinking about the subjective nature of time.'

TEST STRIPS

On top of some bookshelves less than two metres away from where Juan Gabriel is standing, there is a handful of varied silhouettes on paper in black and white. 'These are some of the test strips we have used to experiment with exposure and contrast', he tells me as I approach the strips of paper. In the first one I see, a couple of Estellano's friends are posing. In the second, it's his father with a beret and a mate container that is nearly touching his mouth. 'People move on,



people change', he philosophises later on, after he puts together a collage of them on the floor. 'A photo is a single moment that we rescue, that stays with us, but that will never happen again.'

Sometimes, Juan Gabriel uses some of the outdated cameras that he brought from France when he worked there for a season as a volunteer: a Kodak Anastigmat from 30 years ago, an Agfa from the 1960's, a Regula Picca from the 1970s, a transparent Vivitar from the 90's and an analog Nikon from the same decade that looks very similar to the digital cameras of today.

All of the cameras were discarded: impeccable artifacts that didn't draw the attention of their owners anymore. They had become wasted material, waiting to be thrown into the bin. All of them, before Estellano got his paws on them, used

to be in the depths of the Rag and Bone collection of Emaús, an organisation that supports illegal immigrants, beggars and the unemployed. Emaús is a community that specialises in the use of refurbished items and whose members believe that some people substitute their furniture as often as they refashion their hairstyle. The organisation remind us that no object should be considered waste until it has been given a second chance.

Inspired by his experience with Emaús, Juan Gabriel filmed a documentary: *La vie des choses* (The life of objects). 'I understood that objects often have many meanings', he underlines. 'I felt really curious. I wanted to listen to people speak about their objects.' In Estellano's short film, a guy relates his rolling tobacco to his time in the war in Afghanistan. Another guy becomes emotional seeing an old sewing machine that reminds him of the one his mother used. Many of the items featured in the film are domestic treasures: books with annotated margins, guitars that were restored and now sound the same as they did on the day they were first played. Keyboards, nuts and bolts used to pin up

random pieces of junk. Surely, amongst these are some of the objects that ended up in Estellano's workshop.

Today, while he shows me his rescued items, Juan Gabriel tells me that the dark room (in which he whiles away his free time) was a storage room he had to clean up thoroughly before it was fit to use and enjoy.

'Some people believed that we would never be able to get it ready', he smiles. Sometimes the blindest man is not the one who can't see, but the one who simply doesn't want to. ✕

This text was originally published in the magazine 'Escape del diario' La Razón, in Bolivia

Juan Gabriel Estellano, photographer and director. His web page can be found at www.estejuanga.com



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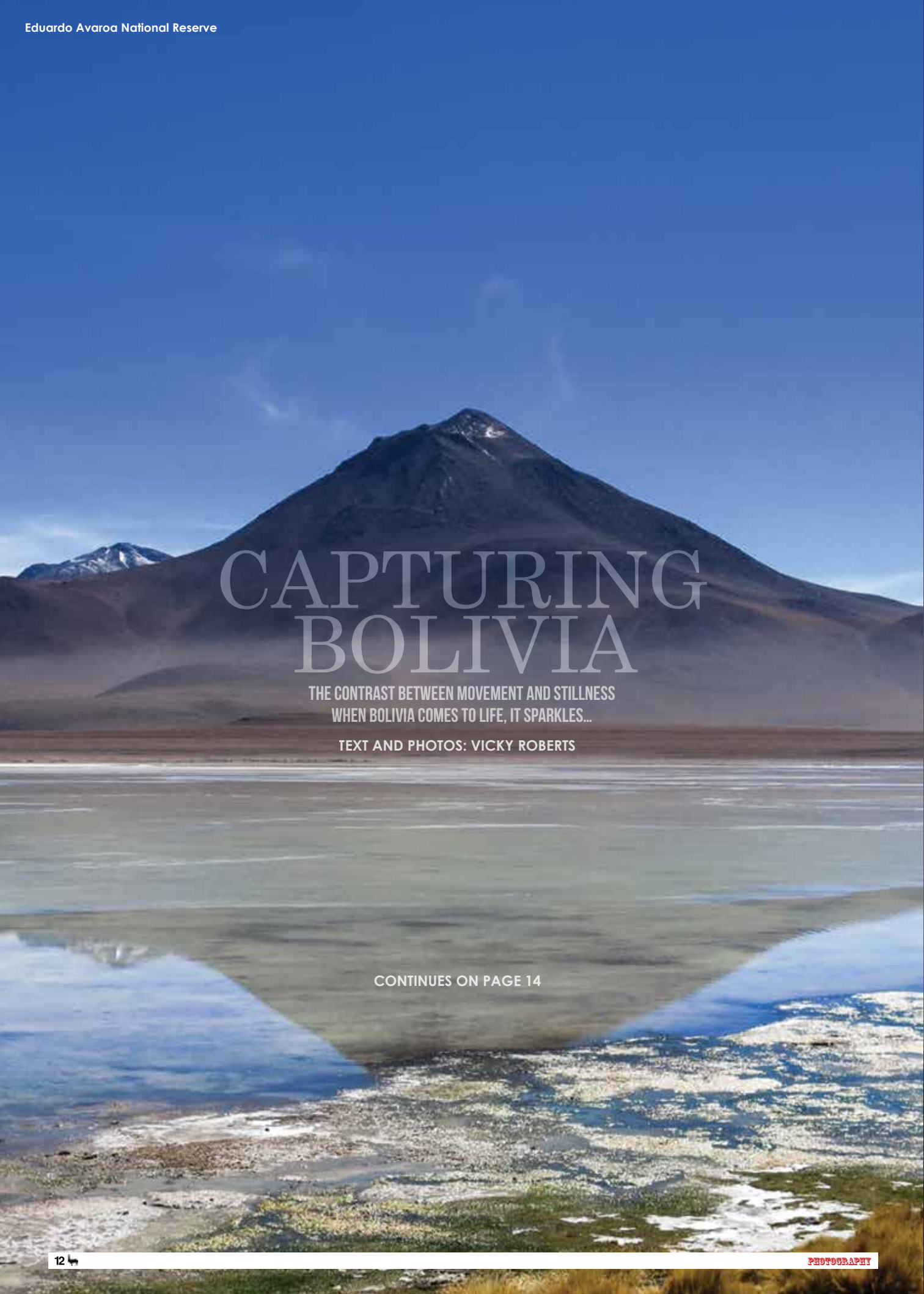


CAPTURING BOLIVIA

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN MOVEMENT AND STILLNESS
WHEN BOLIVIA COMES TO LIFE, IT SPARKLES...

TEXT AND PHOTOS: VICKY ROBERTS

CONTINUES ON PAGE 14



La Paz: Minibus traffic



La Paz: Teleférico Línea Amarilla



Isla del Sol: Young boy

For myself and many, one of the most fascinating things about Bolivia is the juxtaposition of tremendous natural beauty with the chaotic culture that manifests itself in everyday life. From a photographic perspective, capturing the contrasts that make this country so unique makes life behind a lens a joy; never predictable, never boring and never failing to amaze.

Stillness and peace can be observed in every corner of the country; dramatic landscapes and views that make you question the scale of your existence on Earth. But don't be fooled; below the surface, there's an energy that bubbles, and you need look little further before you find yourself thrown amidst the thumping beat of Bolivian culture, witnessing movement, alive like electricity, that sparkles in every direction. x

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PHOTOGRAPHY IN AN AGE OF VISUAL CONTAMINATION

TEXT: ALEJANDRO LOAYZA GRISI
TRANSLATION: SOPHIA VAHDATI
PHOTO: COURTESY OF ESTUDIO GISMONDI

ables, advertisements, meaningless graffiti; posters, billboards and political propaganda: these are only some of the things that mark our urban landscape in La Paz. Practically every wall or street that you position in front of the camera is overpopulated, overwrought with elements that an artistic director would hardly place within the bounds of an optic frame; especially if the subject of the shot is something other than the streets themselves.

La Paz continues to be beautiful, a city that is highly interesting in terms of photography. But if we look at the past and contemplate photographs of the city taken at the start of the last century, it is inevitable to feel sad or ashamed about the rundown state of our city. One feels sad over the irresponsible way in which we have managed our visual environment, failing to recognize the importance that it truly deserves.

Like we do with other things in Bolivia, we take our urban landscape for granted. We think that it will always

In our day-to-day in La Paz we see the type of coexistence that marks our city, the syncretism that defines it. The things that make it unique and bestow upon us invaluable photographic material, which is why the goal cannot be to Europeanise or Americanise our streets and urban landscapes. Wanting to take pictures here like the ones people take in Paris would be a big mistake. We need to maintain the essence and personality of our city, but a minimum standard needs to be urgently established if we want to maintain the attractive features of our city.

You don't have to go far to find good examples. In the historic centre of Sucre, in Bolivia, all commercial posters follow a certain style and the houses are all painted in white. The city of Cuzco, Perú, has preserved the esthetic of its historic buildings and forced McDonalds and Starbucks to operate without billboard ads. We need to establish premises such as these in La Paz, where we actually have a big advantage in our favour: the city is enormous.

If we look at the past and contemplate photographs of the city taken at the start of the last century, it is inevitable to feel sad or ashamed about the rundown state of our city.

be beautiful, that it is one-of-a-kind, that it will always be that way. We are overly confident in our topography and we comfortably sit on a bench with our arms crossed, waiting for tourists to come, who will always be eager to photograph our Oh Linda La Paz.

Everything verges on contradiction and contributes to the debate because the neon-coloured posters, after all, have their own esthetic and personality; and the buildings that have been erected practically without height restrictions add personality to the city. The freedom to do things at will, without obstacles or regulations, has shaped our city, a city that grows and is only defined naturally, by the inexorable laws of space and time.

As an exercise, we could focus exclusively on the historical district of La Paz, which urgently needs to be revitalised, and needs to have all wires switched underground as a priority. The influx of cars needs to be further restricted in the city center. The courthouse needs to be relocated and with it all of the lawyers and photocopy shops. We need to restore the houses, the doors and the streets.

Cities definitely enter more through the eyes than through the other senses. For this reason, from the perspective of photography in times of visual contamination, I have given myself the space to reflect on an issue that every urban specialist, photographer, artist, tourist, citizen and authority should be considering. ✕

NIDA-TARAPACA-LA-PAZ
(BOLIVIA)

MICHAEL DUNN

TEXT: SOPHIA VAHDATI
PHOTOS: MICHAEL DUNN

In 2006, Michael Dunn had left Bolivia and was studying business in New York where he enrolled in a photography course. His life then changed its course as he quit his business career to pursue photography and design. After graduating as a graphic designer with a minor in photography in New York he decided to return to La Paz where he founded the magazine *Diafragma*, a publication that promotes and supports art and photography throughout the country.

‘The first time I shot with a film camera, I knew I wanted to be a photographer. I remember feeling inspired when my professor remarked how much she liked the majority of the frames in my first roll. Confident, I kept shooting, knowing I could do this for the rest of my life. I considered photography as a career. The more I got into photography, the more I be-

came amazed by the work of talented black and white street photographers, Henri Cartier Bresson and William Klein.’

Since then, he has worked as a designer and photography teacher for the *Bolivian Express* as well as forming part of the professional photography collective, *SinMotivo*. He considers himself a street photographer; ‘I just love walking on the streets, looking for moments’ and believes that photographers are gifted with the opportunity ‘to explore: see contrasts, people, and unique locations.’

His advice to aspiring photographers; ‘know this: photography is not as simple as just buying a DSLR camera. This craft takes a lot of self-observation: learn to observe what goes on around you. Be patient! Try to think too much before shooting. Most importantly, enjoy yourself!’ ✕

B&W La Paz

Black & White La Paz is an ongoing photoseries that portrays places, moments and people from La Paz and its surroundings. To see more of Michael’s work you can visit <https://www.facebook.com/dunnphotography> or <https://michaeldunca.exposure.co/la-paz-by-n>





GUMMO

TEXT: SOPHIA VAHDATI
PHOTO: DANIEL OROS

Alvaro Gumucio Li (Aka GUMMO), a born and bred in Cochabamba, started his professional career as a photographer four years ago. He studied at the Instituto Eduarolo Lareda in Cochabamba where he was surrounded by different artistic disciplines. His father's friend, Eduardo Ruiz Gumiel, who he met while he was still at secondary school gave him his first insight into the world of photography.

Since then, following some lessons from a French photographer friend, Alex Fianstres, he has been constantly searching for more inspiration for his work. He is particularly well-known for his fashion portrait photographs which have earned him national acclaim.

He is currently feeling inspired by the work of Daido Moriyama and his current style of photography, with a focus on staged and produced portraits, enables him 'to navigate fantasies and fiction'. For Gumo, every photograph carries a part of him with it, and if he could photograph anything in the world it would be nostalgia.

Despite not living in La Paz, the spectator often sees more of the game and he has a few observations about the photography scene in La Paz:

'From an external point of view, since I live in Cochabamba, I see various different movements—such as the *Accion Cultural* organisation, the magazine *Diafragma*, or *Punto Estudio*, to name some examples—which are fighting to create space and a place for photography as an art and a profession, and I know that the fruit of these efforts will be reaped over the next decade.'

His advice to aspiring photographers: You have to love and become obsessed with photography. ✖

If you'd like to see Gumo's work you can visit his fb page at <https://www.facebook.com/Gumophotography>



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A PEOPLE WITHOUT MEMORY IS A PEOPLE WITHOUT HISTORY

Photographic archives and their importance in the preservation of historical memory.

TEXT: ADRIANA MURILLO
TRANSLATION: SOPHIA VAHDATI
PHOTO: JOSE MORENO FABRI

‘Bolivia has gone through incredible eras: the War of The Pacific, the Chaco War, and many other dramatic periods. Incredible photographs have been taken of all of these times,’ says Bolivian photographer Moreno Fabbri. ‘You go along putting stories together, perhaps with a certain priority in mind--by date, or by the way in which the pictures were made or by their historical value--but all the photos are worth something, nothing can be discarded. A man poses for a photo on the Prado and thinks that he is the only subject of the shot, but in reality his environment is equally important; everything that surrounds him, the buildings, the people, the manner of dress, the stores, etc.’

Photography can be thought of as more than the simple act of capturing images. With time, photographs can become important artefacts for historical documen-

tation and one of the most reliable ways of retelling a story. Photography is a tangible tool for investigation. Humans have always tried to register and leave a record of what they’ve done or felt, and photography has enabled us to progress in our urge of capturing and registering reality.

With the advent of digitalisation, the way in which photos are filed or archived nowadays has taken a completely different path to what we could have conceived of a few years ago. Entirely digital databases centralised in a computer have practically replaced the archiving methods that were practised no long ago, with simple cards and envelopes.

Analog photography emerged in 1840 and was practised widely until 1995, when analog photographers became digital photographers. This was a very interesting time period because it was considerably difficult to make a photo-

graph at the time. For this reason, photos were highly valued for their visual quality, their material features and for the mastery with which they were taken and later conserved. Rescuing these visual artefacts is important not only because of the process that was involved in developing them or because of their antiquity, but also for documentation purposes. Contemporary notions of reality are different to those of the time when photography was invented, but photographs allow us to see things as they once were. Through pictures, we see the changes in how people perceive their surroundings. Photographs are a record of a country’s development, not only in the case of historical moments but also with regards to common people.

José Santiago Moreno Fabbri, a Bolivian photographer, was named Director of Archives at the University of Chile, and remained in this post until his retirement. ‘My uncle taught me how to take photos and use cameras,’ he recalls, ‘but in Chile I also had photography teachers. I wanted to be a painter or printsmen, but it never occurred to me that I was going to be a photographer. I always walked around with cameras, recording items. The 60s was a good time, with Allende and the Unidad Popular party. It came down to us to paint about it, but I always had my camera and later on I would develop the photos I made in my paint workshop’.

What is the value of archived photographs?

‘When you get involved in the archive world--and I think this happens to everyone who restores or conserves old photographs--the more torn-up and the older a picture might be, the more it becomes a treasure,’ explains Fabbri.

Photographs can tell the story of a common family as well as that of big historical events. Family portraits and the emotional connection they hold are crucial. With time, if these photographs are not well conserved, they may lose value and end up destroyed or in the waste bin. Many countries started to see the value of this and viewed these archives seriously in the 20th century.

‘In Bolivia, the institutions that do not own [photographic archives], even if they have catalogs, might have a wider scope. People’s opinions about a picture are not the only things that matter. It is important to keep a record of who took the photos, along with other bits of information, so that one can write a caption for the shot, whether it’s framed or on a postcard. But it’s not about centralising the documentation. What matters is that these visual documents are preserved and, thanks to digitalisation, it has become much easier to preserve the tangible features of a damaged photograph or a torn-up picture. Before digitalization, if the photo was badly kept, most of the time it was simply lost’.

The description of a photograph is also integral to its preservation. With analog photography, conservation costs can be very high. Photo labs have 50 or 60 processes of conservation that range from daguerreotypes, slides and special wrapping paper, to rooms with controlled temperatures. Every type of

‘Since photography was invented, the concept of reality has changed and you get to see things just as they were. We see how the perception of people changes’

photography has its conservation requirements.

UNESCO has tried to make generalised conservation rules for different photo descriptions, but these still haven’t been determined. Nonetheless, there is a standard description that is used in various museums and archives around the world.

The past and the future of the archives

The Municipal Government of La Paz is getting ready to construct and open the first specialised photography museum of Bolivia that will show the history of this art from the 19th century to the present day. It will be called the *Museo Archivo Fotográfico Ciudad de La Paz* and it will be built on a plot of land at the end of Loayza street on the corner of Indabure. The construction of the museum will start in early 2015.

‘It will have seven floors, three of which will be dedicated to the history of photography in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries respectively. There will be exhibition rooms accompanied by photography studios or laboratories that will show the technology used by each century,’ says Leonor Cuevas, the director of the Unidad de Museos Municipales. The ground floor will have a temporary exhibit room, a photography studio and a room to look at the archive, which will be available to visitors and investigators.

The photographic image plays an important role in the transmission, conservation and visualisation of political, social, scientific and cultural events. It is a basic form of social documentation that facilitates our understanding of the evolution of human beings and everything that surrounds them.✕

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SINMOTIVO

TEXT: MANUEL SEOANE AND SAMUEL RENDON
TRANSLATION: ALEXANDRA MELEÁN ANZOLEAGA

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF SINMOTIVO PHOTOGRAPHERS
JUAN MANUEL LOBATON, PABLO PANIAGUA, AND
JUAN GABRIEL ESTELLANO

www.sinmotivo.com



Like most good stories, this project began on a night out. Initially, the objective was to share one photographer's perspective with another. The first step towards becoming a collective was the debut of the SinMotivo photography exhibition, showcasing a chorrellana of photographs reflecting diverse things about daily life.

Following the exhibition, SinMotivo publis-

hed *SinMotivo Vol.1*, a free print magazine promoting the work of the collective. Five more editions followed, each with a different theme. Recruiting new members, SinMotivo transformed into a creative place to view, showcase and discuss photography. The collective began to organize and participate in various audio-visual showcases, festivals, curadurias and workshops. In addition, the collective published two photobooks, *Ensayos*

Fotográficos (2011) and *La Ciudad y la Mirada* (2012). In 2010, SinMotivo also began producing *Revista Diafragma* a Bolivian photography magazine, in order to promote and support the craft of photography worldwide. All of these accomplishments led the collective to be featured in the first Bolivian photography book ever, *Fotografía Boliviana*, edited by Accion Cultural, last year. Outside Bolivia, Sin-

Motivo has been invited to participate in multiple exhibits, from Belgium and France to Australia, Mexico and Canada.

Currently, the SinMotivo photography studio is based in the Sopocachi neighborhood of La Paz. This space is more than an office. It's a place that allows the collective to plan projects and host audio-visual activities, like lectures, presenta-

tions, workshops and exhibitions, as well as focus on commercial projects, ranging from documentaries to advertisements. Many ask: Why sin motivo? The phrase is a pacheño idiom meaning 'no reason'. It is also an oxymoron meaning 'without light': a play on words, similar to the well-known phrase *sin querer queriendo*, coined by the late, beloved comedian Roberto Gomez Bolaños: *Chespirito*.

SinMotivo is a group of photographers and filmmakers with different viewpoints and perspectives, mutually benefiting one another. By sharing a studio, the members share or absorb ideas and can receive or give constructive criticism. Although SinMotivo may have been envisioned from one perspective, the result is and will always be collective. ✕

SAXOMAN Y LOS CASANOVAS

TEXT AND PHOTOS: CARLOS SANCHEZ NAVAS
TRANSLATION: SOPHIA VAHDATI

'You know that Américo came? He's friends with Superman, Wonder Woman, the Fantastic Four and Iron Man . . .
Saxoman and the Casanovas, that's my boy, brother.'

Forty-three-year old Américo Estevez Román, better known as 'Saxoman', is a beaming character from La Paz, Bolivia, who dedicates his life exclusively to music and taking care of his family.

Américo is the nephew of Fernando Román Saavedra, the songwriter who created the famous song 'Collita' in the 1950s—whom Américo remembers clearly from his youth, and who he says inspired him to follow the path of musical creativity. Nowadays, Américo keeps his name alive on the musical scene with an adopted style and at the location where he gets by: on the street. He says that he started playing there out of necessity, and on it has made a lot of connections.

Américo's children, who call themselves the Casanovas, go to regular school in the morning; in the afternoon, driven by the will of Américo and his wife, Nelly, they go to the *Conservatorio Nacional de Música*. Américo is convinced that they will be great musicians in the future, and he tries to provide them with all the moral and economic support that he lacked during his upbringing.

This photo essay shows the daily routine of Saxoman's family, which has stayed together while Saxoman has plied his craft throughout the years, playing on the street and at private parties.



Saxoman playing his favourite instrument in the patio of his house, in which he has lived since childhood.



Elena Salaza, Américo's grandmother, displays a photo of Américo, David and Gabriel. Américo says that the song 'Collita', written by his grandfather, Fernando Román Saavedra, was dedicated to her.



Saxoman playing in the Palacio del Pescado. His weekends are spent playing in markets and guesthouses with his family.



One of the walls of Américo's house displays souvenirs, in the mirror we see Américo "Saxoman" in rehearsal.



Portrait of Saxoman and the Casanovas in the dining room of the Guzman family household along with the faithful family pet. According to Américo, the dining room is a special place shared by the family where band decisions are made.



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Photo: Alvaro Gumucio II



huancarani

text and photo: jonathan mccarthy

The women from Huancarani have to traverse four hours of mountain to get to Independencia, the nearest town, where you still can't get hold of a refrigerated soft drink. They don't have a Facebook account, they don't use the internet and they're probably better for it. Between two major urban centers, La Paz and Cochabamba, and nestled in the Cordillera de Cocapata, the people of Huancarani cling to a rural existence that is strongly linked to subsistence agriculture, sheep herding, and what they do best: weaving. The age old techniques are richly based in natural dyes, highly complicated patterns, and hours and hours of hard work. By the time they deliver a finished chuspa, a small bag traditionally used to carry coca leaves that stave off hunger for a knock-down drag-out hike or an overtime shift at

the mines, the female weavers have spent around 35 hours coordinating the effort. Time stands still and shucking the fur, or hiking down to the river to wash the wool seems like the perfect way to spend the day.

Every city in Bolivia is comprised of migrants, whether from the altiplano or the oriente, and their reality is not that far removed from that of the women of Huancarani; they maintain the traditions that continue to make Bolivia one of the most unique countries on the planet. x

Learn more about the women photographed above and how to support their artisan weavings at www.pazaboliviablog.com.



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Photo: Ana Catalina Rojas

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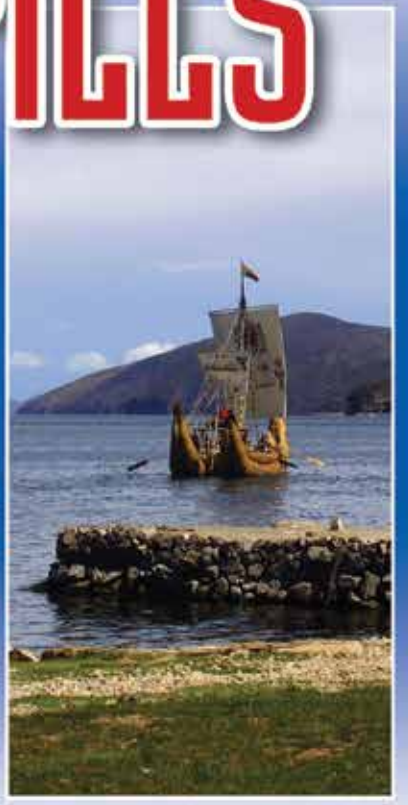
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PHOTO: ALVARO GUMUCIO U

