

BolivianExpress

Gratis Magazine





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Bolivia is a country of physical wonders. The Valle de la Luna, the mines of Potosí, the depths of the Amazon – the appearances of these places can collectively best be described as otherworldly. Even the altitudes at which many of its citizens live, and the climates they face, reach extreme levels not found anywhere else. Being in Bolivia can often be confusing and dissonant, as the mind can sometimes struggle to take in what is before the senses. In Bolivia, the very real world can seem surreal.

For her article 'The Unearthly Beauty of the Salar' (see pg. 22), Flossie Wildblood visited the vast expanse of the Salar de Uyuni, the strangest physical region in Bolivia, and arguably in Latin America. This place, the world's largest salt flat, has more curiosities to offer visitors beyond vast, white, grainy plains. A railroad graveyard, volcanic landforms and thermal lakes provide equally curious locales. The Salar is also home to the Salvador Dalí Desert, a small area with rock towers reminiscent of images from the painter's work. The resemblance of this place to his work has led some to believe that the Spanish surrealist was inspired by these Bolivian formations.

In this issue of Bolivian Express, our team used the idea of the surreal as a lens to explore many corners of Bolivia. In addition to the Salar, we traveled into the unconscious, showing connections between the ideas of Sigmund Freud, no stranger to coca and cocaine, to Bolivia's most important crop. We look into what can be described as Bolivian altered states of consciousness, from the experience of taking sedentary journeys with ayahuasca and absinthe to the horrifying practice of entombing oneself in an elephant cemetery, where the darkest of alcoholics condemn themselves to a death by drinking.

We discovered in our work the prevalence of surrealism in Bolivia's creative endeavours. Although there may not be a large, formal surrealist movement here, there are in fact examples of this approach across literature, cinema, theatre and the visual arts. We talked with artists who are quietly toiling across the country to introduce aesthetics of the subconscious and the absurdity of life into their work.

Surrealism is a complex idea. It can take you to strange and wonderful new places within your own mind. Seeing our surroundings in a new way, in a manner that is perhaps more internal than external, can lead to new understandings of ourselves and our connections to the world. Whether it is through visiting strange physical spaces, seeking out understandings of the seemingly strange ways people navigate their lives, or through the breaking down of artistic inhibitions, seeing the surreal inevitably leads to self-reflection. One just needs to begin the journey. Come with us and see what we discover. ♦

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

By William Wroblewski

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After 17 hours of hairpin bends, I arrive in the northern Bolivian town of Rurrenabaque, situated on the banks of the Rio Beni, which separates the La Paz and the Beni departments. I'm on the trail of ayahuasca, the legendary medicine renowned for its psychedelic and healing properties that has been used by indigenous cultures for thousands of years.

Rurrenabaque, a popular entry point to the jungle, is considered the best place to search for an authentic ayahuasca experience in Bolivia. People say it is less commercial than Cusco, Peru, another popular destination for those looking to expand their consciousness. I step into the humidity of the jungle air, dodge the speeding motorbikes, and trudge through the muddy streets into what I assume is the centre of town. Imagine my surprise when I am accosted by a middle-aged Frenchman who takes me to his Parisian bakery. Unfortunately, the pre-ayahuasca diet prevents me from trying the pain au chocolat, but the name of the washing machine in his bathroom summarises my days to come: the Fuzzy Logic.

I had read decent reviews of shamans online, comically on Tripadvisor, but I had been discouraged by the commercial nature of their practice. I found my answer in a group of dreadlocked artisans who were selling their wares and

drinking Paceaña on a street corner they affectionately named la oficina.

The next day, two of my new friends take me across the river to the agricultural town of San Buenaventura. Inquisitive looks come our way as we hike up the hill to Don Alfonso's cabins. Unlike the businesses across the river, they insist, Alfonso is not in it for the plata.

Soon, Don Alfonso ascends the hill for his lunch, visibly tired from his morning's work. 'I never believed my parents when they said my strength would decline at age of 55,' he says. 'Now I'm 63 and I finally believe them.' But, claro, we can proceed with the ceremony tonight.

I'm woken up from my pre-ayahuasca nap by voices shouting, '¡Propiedad privada!' This isn't exactly what I'd expected. When I exit the cabin, a policeman and an immigration officer demand that I present my identification. I return with a photocopy of my passport, which is deemed insufficient, and I'm whisked away back across the river to an immigration office on the edge of Rurrenabaque.

Apparently I'm not in the system. I text friends in La Paz and ask them to send me my visa number, while the officer alternates between amicably showing me how to get the most out of my phone credit and threatening to deport me. At first, my visa number changes nothing. Either

I'm going to have to pay a multa of 210 Bolivianos or someone is going to have to fly my passport down to the jungle. In the corner of the room, a tiny TV set blares a chat show where a couple argues over whether their hypersensitive 4-year-old daughter should be treated with a marijuana sandwich. I slyly mention that my colleagues in La Paz will be contacting a lawyer. Within minutes, I'm legal again. 'The system was slow because of the rain,' the officer explains.

Within an hour, I'm back across the river in another of Alfonso's cabins. I sit back in a deck chair while Alfonso sprinkles pure alcohol on four piles of coca leaves as an offering to Pachamama. He prays before

handing me a ceremonial wooden bowl, filled with an ayahuasca infusion poured from a two-litre Coca-Cola bottle. I meditate. I've been told it takes at least forty minutes for the ayahuasca to take effect, but almost immediately brightly coloured fluid patterns swirl behind my eyelids.

As is custom, I drink a second cup a little later and am greeted by the stereotypical psychedelic tunnels of light, rotating fractals, images of my mother kissing and then strangling me. The Buddha. But I open my eyes to the world I have always known. Alfonso says I may not have 'broken on through' - to use Jim Morrison's words - as I didn't throw up after drinking the liquid. 'The purge,' as it is known, is a crucial part of the ceremony as it symbolizes the body's expulsion of evil.

'Sometimes it just isn't your time,' Alfonso explains. I realise that I won't be leaving the cabin a changed man and that the experience will not transform me into the Buddha or Jesus Christ. I realise that perhaps another cup would allow me to delve further into my psyche, but I can see that Alfonso, who is furiously munching handfuls of coca leaves, wants to call it a day. My sense of compassion asks him if he'd like to go to bed. 'Yes,' he says. 'It's 2am.' I hadn't realised that.

If you are interested in experiencing Ayahuasca, I thoroughly recommend Don Alfonso Pariano in San Buenaventura. Phone: 72065727



FILMING BOLIVIA

FOREIGN AND LOCAL FILMS ABOUT
A SURREAL COUNTRY

TEXT : OLIVIA ROGALA

IMAGE: SCREENSHOT FROM 'VOLIVIA' BY SERGIO PINEDO

Four friends hang out, laugh, fool around. They travel to a desert. They visit farms. They get drunk and take drugs. They go out, party, dance. They throw up. They suffer from a hangover. They procrastinate.

Procrastinacion is a film by Bolivian director Sergio Pinedo. It was shot in a span of about five years, but it was assembled in 2015. It is Pinedo's first feature-length film, composed of videos of friends hanging out together, almost like a family VHS collection. It might sound quite normal, but the composition and technique of the film shocks and surprises the viewer. It can only be described as 'surreal'.

Surrealism usually makes people think of Salvador Dalí, and surrealist films bring David Lynch to mind. Bolivia, a country in itself very surreal, has no formal surrealist film movement to speak of. One would think that a country with hundreds of ethnic groups and thousands of local traditions, would inspire experimental motion pictures. But perhaps

Bolivia, a country in itself very surreal, has no formal surrealist film movement to speak of.

this diversity is normal and evident in everyday life for Bolivians and they simply do not see anything surreal about it.

Even though there is not a surrealist film movement in the country, there cer-

tainly are surreal filmmakers in Bolivia. Film students here like to experiment, but they rarely get a chance to screen and distribute their films. Only independently funded filmmakers get their shot at screenings.

The opening scene of Pinedo's *Procrastinacion* shows a man wrapped in tape and woman who is moaning under a tree. The film uses rapid cuts between scenes to create

tension. There are shocking images of a girl masturbating under the covers or of the main characters throwing up, either in the room or on the street. The scenes are mixed with videos of TV ads. The music contrasts with the images on screen.

Heavy, noisy music accompanies shots of sunny fields and rainbows. All of these unexpected effects make the viewers feel uncomfortable and tense.

Volivia is Pinedo's short film, made completely of found footage. The film is quite difficult to understand. The images are pixelated and lack a meaningful order. The mesmerizing imagery and the arbitrary shots in irrational order (football match, naked woman, tarot TV ad) create a parallel 'reality' that is at times more real than what is usually perceived as such. Through the use of pixels and very bright colours, Pinedo creates a psychedelic dream world. The viewers remain in a sense of mystery and suspense throughout the whole 6 minutes, which is what surreal films tend to do to their audience.

Even in Bolivia, surrealism is used as humour. The music video *Bolivia te espera Papa Francisco*, by Saxoman y Los Casanovas, is a perfect example. The Pope appears repeatedly on different parts of the screen (sometimes even floating) either by himself or with President Evo

Morales, as the main singer, Saxoman, flies through Bolivia and outer space. Badly edited, this video creates a hilarious effect with the use of the sky and clouds on which the band appears to be singing. Perhaps it illustrates the band's dream to fly in the sky or to sing to the Pope.

Bolivia's surreal landscape is very attractive for foreign filmmakers, especially the Salar de Uyuni, which is one of the most surreal places on Earth. *El Regalo de la Pachamama*, a film by Japanese director Toshifumi Matsushita, tells the story of a 13-year-old boy named Kunturi, who lives in Uyuni, where his family works at the salt flats. His family cuts the salt with their bare hands and he travels with his father to exchange it for other goods. In the film, normal Bolivian life becomes surreal because of a location. Wide-angle shots of the salt desert create a dreamy atmosphere in true Dalí-style.

Uyuni is also a location for the music video 'La La La', by Naughty Boy, which features the British singer Sam Smith. The

video in itself is surreal. It is about a boy who travels to Uyuni with an old dusty man, like in the story of 'The Wizard of Oz'. The dusty man is handed a real, beating heart from an ice cream man. Then there is a man dressed as a puppet, dancing in the middle of the street, looking like a scarecrow. There is a chow-chow dog that resembles a lion. The Salar and the characters make the video look like a bedtime story. There are imitations of a dream world; disorientating, irrational and juxtaposed images that make the film surreal and are inspired by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and his theory of the unconscious mind.

Even though Bolivia does not have a formal surrealist film movement, there are films that certainly fall into this category. Unless the local film industry is supported by the government, there will hardly be enough resources for young, talented filmmakers to create a cinematic work for global audiences, like the foreign films that have been made in Bolivia. At this point, one can only imagine how Bolivians would capture this surreal and beautiful location.





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COCAINE AND LITHIUM

TWO DRUGS THAT CHALLENGE THE COUNTRY

TEXT AND PHOTO : OLIVIA ROGALA

Coca leaves are deeply rooted in Bolivian history and tradition. There is evidence that suggests they've been used for centuries. Miners use it to boost their energy and it helps with altitude sickness, headaches and hangovers. The leaves contain more than 10 different vitamins and minerals, such as calcium and protein. They can be drunk as mate, chewed or made into

From coca leaves to lithium, Bolivia is rich in beautiful and dangerous resources.

sweets. Beyond its health benefits, coca leaves are also used in different rituals while praying to **Pachamama**. It also used to be an ingredient in Coca-Cola.

Coca leaves are also the main ingredient of the hard drug cocaine. Bolivia was and still is involved in the production of the drug, especially after the cocaine boom in the United States in the 1980s. It is responsible for many deaths around the world, not just through overdoses but also through the violence of drugs cartels. Just over a century ago, cocaine was considered medicine. In 1884, just

before Sigmund Freud became famous, he wrote a book, 'Über Coca', in which he described his experiments on the effects of cocaine. It started with his willingness to treat his friend's morphine addiction using cocaine. The friend unfortunately died, yet Freud continued this method with other patients who were struggling with addiction. He tested effects of cocaine on himself, completely unaware of its addictive properties. He sent it to his sister and father as something 'to cheer them up' in low moments.

He also worked with doctors at his local hospital, where they injected cocaine into the patient's body to numb it before the operation. After two years of experimenting, Freud completely cut his drug use and hardly ever mentioned it again.

After that, Freud became famous for his psychoanalytic theory and for his discovery of the unconscious mind, which inspired the surrealist move-

ment across all art platforms, including the paintings of Salvador Dalí. According to Freud, human attitude, behaviour, thoughts and manners are all deeply rooted in the unconscious mind. We discover them through free associations, fantasies and dreams, which Freud considers 'the royal road to the unconscious'. Today, many psychologists argue that Freud's psychoanalysis is hardly influenced by cocaine, but his book, Interpretation of Dreams, suggests the contrary. His invention of 'the talking cure', which is a form of talking therapy, stems from the cocaine effect of wanting to talk about feelings and thoughts that we normally don't share. His famous Freud-

Bolivia was and still is involved in the production of the drug, especially after the cocaine boom in the United States in the 1980s.

ian slips are also an example of that, as they represent thoughts of the unconscious mind that we usually don't think about. Furthermore, Freud's theory on dreams, in which he argues they are a mirror to the unconscious, is also influenced by cocaine which ends to gives its users unusual, or even surreal, dreams. Of course, today cocaine is not con-

sidered medicine anymore but lithium is, and Bolivia has more than 50% of the world's lithium resources stored in the Salar de Uyuni. The country is sometimes called 'the Saudi Arabia of lithium'. This chemical element is used as psychiatric medication to treat bipolar disorder and depression. It prevents suicide and allows ill people to live normal lives without mania or psychosis. Since its long term use is damaging to the health of its users, lithium is used less and less to treat psychiatric disorders. However, lithium is found in tiny amounts in drinkable tap water. Studies show that these small concentrations can affect human behaviour. High lithium concentration in an area's water supply, leads to lower rates of crime, suicide and rape. Many studies suggest that small amounts of lithium are actually beneficial for humans, as it creates new neurons in the brain and helps prevent dementia. Lithium was even an ingredient in the drink 7-up until the 1950s. The number seven referred to element's mass number.

'Bolivians still do not trust Western medicine,' she told me. 'They prefer to talk to their family and friends about their problems and deal with them themselves.'

However mental health is still a taboo subject in Bolivia. According to Geraldine O'Brien Sáenz, a former psychoanalyst in La Paz, psychiatric medication is unpopular in the country. 'Bolivians still do not trust Western medicine,' she told me. 'They prefer to talk to their family and friends about their problems and deal with them themselves.'

Although the use of lithium to treat mental disorders is declining, the metal remains quite lucrative today. The element is being used to manufacture batteries for electric cars as well as smartphones and laptop computers. The global need for more eco-friendly means of transport has helped Bolivia become the number one interest of many international companies. Consequently the prices of lithium have increased, giving Bolivia a big economic opportunity that could raise the standard of living for Bolivians and therefore improve their mental health. However, the Bolivian government is concerned about the extraction of the resource and what it could mean for the country's economy. Still, many scientists worry that given the growing demand for the resource, Bolivia might not have any lithium left by 2050.

From coca leaves to lithium, Bolivia is rich in beautiful and dangerous resources. It is one of the poorest countries in the region, but it paradoxically sits on a golden trove of natural resources. The government is trying to monitor the production of coca leaves in order to curtail the cocaine business and improve the lives of common farmers. It is also trying to exploit its lithium reserve with little or no help from foreign corporations. Both of these endeavors might seem surreal because they are very hard to accomplish, but these difficult roads to success could help change the future of the country.



THE SURREAL ISSUE

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Judging from his recent loss in Bolivia's constitutional referendum, President Evo Morales' belief in his popularity may not be in line with reality. However, if the gifts he has received from countrymen and international organisations are any indication, he is extremely popular.

El Museo de la Revolución Democrática y Cultural de Orinoca, set to open very soon, displays this dichotomy perfectly. At a cost of 47 million bolivianos and sprawling over 3,858 square metres in the mainly agricultural region of Orinoca that President Morales once called home, it is a vision of modernity and power in an otherwise uninspiring town.

The museum is advertised as serving a dual purpose: both as a repository of Bolivian cultural history, told through the numerous gifts Morales has received throughout his presidency, and as a storage facility for the many more that are either duplicates or are not deemed significant enough to display. Within the collection, the gifts range from the banal to the bizarre. And with llama figurines constructed of salt and plastic helmets, the museum truly has it all.

According to Lidia Cuevas, from the Ministry of Tourism, 'each object tells its story' of Morales as a character and as a president. The copious amounts of football memorabilia showcase one of his major passions. All the major football teams in Bolivia have given him jerseys, and major overseas clubs such as Ajax, Real Madrid and Chelsea are also represented in the collection. Similarly, front and centre within the musical instruments' case is a trumpet – apparently the instrument Evo played as a child, though unfortunately not the



REVOLUTIONARY KITSCH

TEXT: HUGH OLLARD

ILLUSTRATION: NIKOLAUS COX - FLOSSIE WILDBLOOD

original. In the international section, the understated (when compared to some other countries' gifts) model of the White House, gifted from the United States, illustrates the cool relations between the two countries.

The sheer volume of the collection is overwhelming; incomplete statistics of the gift totals show President Morales to have received 2,660 football shirts. One case is dedicated to figurines representing each region and community of Bolivia, whilst another holds the ceremonial sceptres that he has received. In the 'fiesta' section of the museum, there are **altiplano** carnival masks such as the famous **Diablada**. Furthermore, the international section is a treasure trove, with tea cups from China, multiple sets of Russian dolls and various lavish gifts from Cuba.

There are also some certified treasures. UNESCO has identified some of the

costumes originating from the jungle areas of Bolivia as having special cultural significance. They are joined by countless amounts of **tejidos** and **plumas**.

Despite the curious nature of this collection, the museum stands as a paradox. According to Agencia de Noticias Fides' María José Ferrel Solar, in a town of 243 households, of which 80 have access to running water and 12 to a sewage system, copious funds have been spent on the museum. It is a hulking example of city-building in something barely more than a hamlet, a glass marvel in a town of corrugated iron.

This has led to some criticism of the museum. Although Minister of Culture Marko Machicao has said the museum will

benefit Orinoca through tourism, there have been questions raised in Bolivian newspapers such as *Página Siete* that it is a colossal misallocation of funds to build something ultimately unnecessary in the middle of a town in need of so much.

The museum is a testament to President Morales' tenure: grandeur in humble surroundings, the energy and joviality of the *fiesta* section, the focus on indigenous culture a marker of his successes in promoting the rights of the long oppressed. However, it has its flaws. It is out of place in its surroundings, far outshining any other museum in the country in a town a tiny fraction the size of La Paz. Whilst the inhabitants struggle to get clean water, tourists will be bussed in to visit the shiny new toy dominating the village. Many criticisms against President Morales can be explained away through inherent racism, misunderstanding or his larger-than-life personality. However, this multimillion-dollar shrine cannot.

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LA PAZ'S LUNAR SPACESCPE

THE OTHERWORLDLY BEAUTY AND STRANGE MYTHS OF THE VALLE DE LA LUNA

TEXT : CLARA BUXTON
PHOTO: KIT FRETZ

Picture this: it is 1969 and you are American astronaut Neil Armstrong. You have recently gotten back from the moon. Whilst in space you caught a glimpse of the Salar de Uyuni, one of the only natural phenomena visible from outside the earth's atmosphere, and you decided that you had to visit Bolivia. You have just attended a football match in La Paz between The Strongest and Bolívar. You fancy a game of golf afterwards and come across a bizarre rocky valley close to the golf course. To you, the spires of weathered stone and the numerous gaps, holes and craters remind you of walking on the moon. Naturally, you suggest that this surreal landscape should be named 'Valley of the Moon', and its name has remained the Valle de la Luna ever since.

Are you convinced? Perhaps not.

It's one of the most common stories passed on by local guides recounting the tale of how Valle de la Luna got its name. Perhaps there is a shred of truth to the story after all, but if not, upon visiting the valley, it is not hard to see why someone thought the name appropriate. The crumbly earth creates a pockmarked effect on the ground throughout the area and the

The legendary lost city of Atlantis could be buried somewhere in the region.

entire length of the valley is peppered with cosmic craters, eerie chasms and ominous-looking pits.

The twisting spires of the valley have occurred naturally. They are the by-product of thousands of years of powerful erosion caused by strong winds and heavy rains. The mountain that originally stood where the modern-

day valley is situated was composed mostly of clay and gradually melted away to reveal the harder rock formations underneath. As the wind and rain continued to sculpt the crumbly sedimentary rock into ever-more interesting shapes, the weirdest and wackiest formations were given specific names by local guides. Walking along the treacherously narrow paths in the valley today, you come across wild shapes christened 'the **viscacha's** jump', 'the turtle shell' and 'the **cholita's** hat'.

However, the potent erosion that sculpted this remarkable landscape acts as a double-edged sword. Having shaped and moulded the dramatic formations of the valley for thousands of years, the same processes of erosion could eventually destroy them. The valley's high-altitude location subjects it to high-force winds and an annual average of 22 inches of rainfall. Moreover, the combination of heavy rainfall with La Paz's harmful levels of air pollution presents a serious problem for the soft, sedimentary rock that makes up the valley. Being battered by acidic downpours during the rainy season is causing change at an alarming rate. These environmental factors, intensified by increasing contamination and the effects of climate change, pose a very real threat to the longevity of the site.

In the meantime, the beauty of this peculiar landscape lies in this very same process of constant transformation. The vibrant colours of the valley rock and the surrounding mountains create potent optical illusions. Everything seems both near and far. It is dazzling, as if you had just opened your eyes into direct sunlight, or peeked into a kaleidoscope. The spattering of red, blue, violet, gold and deep brown throughout the rock serves as a chronicle of the area's fascinating geological history. The diversity of the mineral content in the stone, causing the variation in colour, is a common feature of sedimentary rock, usually located on the seabed.

According to local guides, this sedimentary rock found in the valley indicates that the whole area once formed part of an ancient and enormous inland sea, of which Lake Titicaca, to the north of La Paz, is the only remaining part. Thousands of years of climate change and subterranean geological shifts may have caused the sea itself to recede, but the sediment it left behind has been credited with lending the Valle de la Luna region a surprising biodiversity. *Viscacha* and various species of small birds and lizards are a common sight lurking in between the stony steeples. In addition to the fauna, the valley is also known to house more than 32 different species of cacti, including an abundance of the well-known local hallucinogenic, the San Pedro cactus.

Lake Titicaca, 50 kilometers away, plays a part in the valley's mythology. The bottom of the lake, from which the first Incas were supposed to have emerged, is widely viewed as sacred by many local indigenous communities. By extension, the Valle de la Luna, which some believe was originally formed from same lakebed, is also a deeply spiritual location. The majesty of the towering spears of stone and the natural forces that have shaped them have led to the valley being used for numerous indigenous festivals celebrating **Pachamama**.

There have been numerous colourful myths and legends accorded to the Valle de la Luna, including ones featuring evil spirits that dwell in the dark, rocky crags at the bottom of the valley, tricking people into falling into the abyss and another popular story amongst local enthusiasts that asserts that the legendary lost city of Atlantis could be buried somewhere in the region that made up the ancient inland seabed.

Adding to the mystery of La Paz's Valle de la Luna is the fact that some experts estimate that at the current rates of erosion, it may disappear altogether in between 100 to 500 years' time. It is strange to think that this bizarre landscape, a testament to the power of nature that supposedly caught Neil Armstrong's eye in the '60s, could, in all too short a time, disappear without a trace. Perhaps a sudden disappearance would consolidate the legend of the place – a valley of ghosts that in time vanished into thin air and dissolved back into the mountains whence it came. Yet, it's a sad notion that after thousands of years of being chiseled out of the stone by mother nature, the stony spires crawling up into the sky, the Valle de la Luna could eventually be lost forever.

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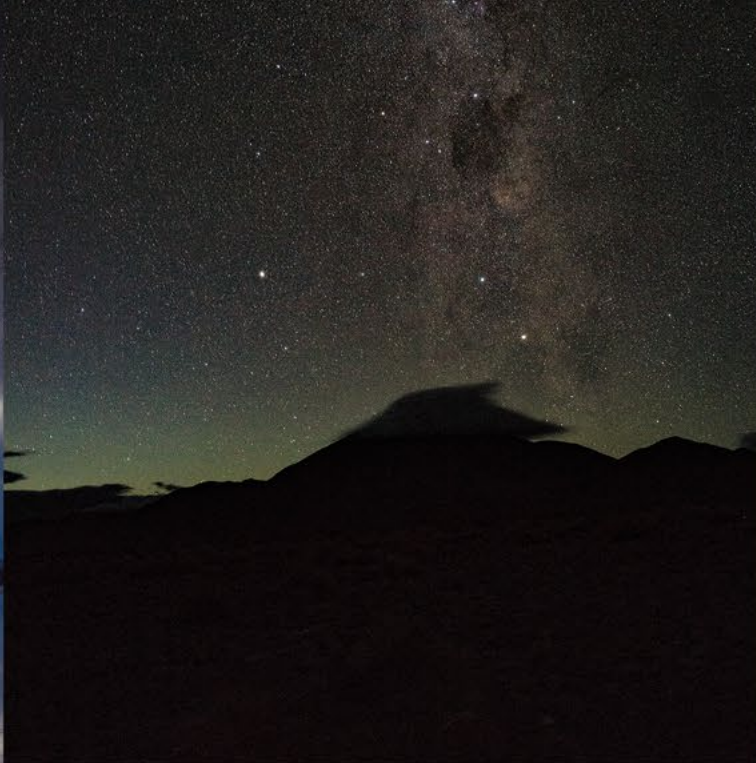


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SURREAL UYUNI

TEXT AND PHOTOS: KIT FRETZ

The Salar de Uyuni is considered one of the most surreal places on earth. And day in and day out, visitors capture photos of its reflections and use its space to create comical distortions of perspective. But the area's surroundings offer so much more: multi-coloured lakes home to thousands of flamingos; a rock shaped like a tree; geysers spewing sulphur into the atmosphere; and landscapes that look as if they were taken by the Mars Rover. ◦

ELEPHANT CEMETERIES

FINDING DEATH IN HIDDEN BARS ACROSS LA PAZ

TEXT: HUGH OLLARD
PHOTO: WILLIAM WROBLEWSKI

The windows are curtained, boarded-up or papered over. A black iron shutter covers the only door at the entrance. In front of the brown brick building a market sleeps its way to closing time. The average **paceño** passing by would barely glance at the seemingly run-of-the-mill house. However, behind the shutters, curtains and boards, in the semi-darkness and filth, purportedly sit unknown numbers of drunkards fulfilling the most macabre of urban legends: El Cementerio de Elefantes.

Made famous by multiple films and books, these cemeteries are places etched in La Paz lore. Across the city, unexceptional buildings house these clandestine bars, often with only one purpose: to offer Guabira (96% proof alcohol) mixed with **yupi** or water to alcoholics until they expire. Since the customers are often afflicted with constant tremors due to long term drinking, they are not even offered bottles or cups. Instead, as detailed in a short story entitled 'Los Cementerios de Elefantes' by Victor Hugo Viscarra, they are given a bucket filled with alcohol and a dipper.

They then sit in their room, often unlit, sometimes communal, and wait for the process to kill them.

Some cemeteries have fronts as normal bars, with an upstairs room for clients who have no wish to leave. Others exist with this as their sole purpose. It can take days or weeks for the end to come. Housed in a room with a straw mattress, given to the clients to try and sleep away the pain, and have a smaller bucket to relieve themselves. When the end does mercifully come, it is often after an agonising experience of destroying an already almost broken liver, with the drunk delirious from dehydration.

Such sites have inspired artists for decades. Depictions of the cemeteries in art are different in style but universal in message. Tonchy Antezana's film 'El Cementerio de Elefantes' is a grim reflection on a drunkard's life, whilst Viscarra's **cuento** on the same theme takes a dispassionate view of the subject but is still no less morbid. Viscarra fails to condemn the actions of the owners, preferring to offer a description of the grisly events within. Manuel Vargas, Viscarra's

longtime friend and editor, says there was some invention in his story, but 'he wrote from experience', having spent a lot of time in the bars and hostelerias in the areas known for cementerios.

In most areas of present day La Paz, knowledge of these establishments is patchy. Near one of the most recently closed cemeteries, known as Putunku, near La Paz's main bus terminal on Calle Montes, a local **zapatero**, Fernando, says he has no knowledge of these things. Pressed, he finally says, 'Go ask the young people about it, keen for me to leave him alone. A local police officer, Humberto Lopez, also seems nonplussed. 'I don't know the real stories,' he told me.

In a different area more renowned for the cemeteries, on and around Avenida Buenos Aires, a **sucrense** taxi driver, Felipe Quispe, told me a cemetery story. 'My friend went and killed himself in one a couple of months ago,' he said, keeping his eyes on the road. Going along the Avenida, near Mercado Felix Hinojosa, he points to a pharmacy. 'There's one of them. Three floors,' he points out.

down, but Felipe is certain that it is still open. A third cemetery lies just off Plaza Garita de Lima and is apparently called 'Las Ventanas' due to the number of windows on its front. There is a certain irony to its location, as it lies opposite a hospital.

When pushed further on his friend, Felipe waxes philosophical: 'It's better that he died. Now his wife doesn't worry about him.' There is a tone of derision in his voice. 'He lost everything: his wife,

ever, when the police go in, they often get it right. As recently as early March the police raided a site near Calle Linaires, finding a cementerio.

The effects of such raids on proprietors and clients are unclear. Cynically, Felipe says the owners pay off the police and go on their way to continue their grim business, often at one of their other properties. Paola seems hazy on this subject, saying it is not her purview to oversee the enforce-

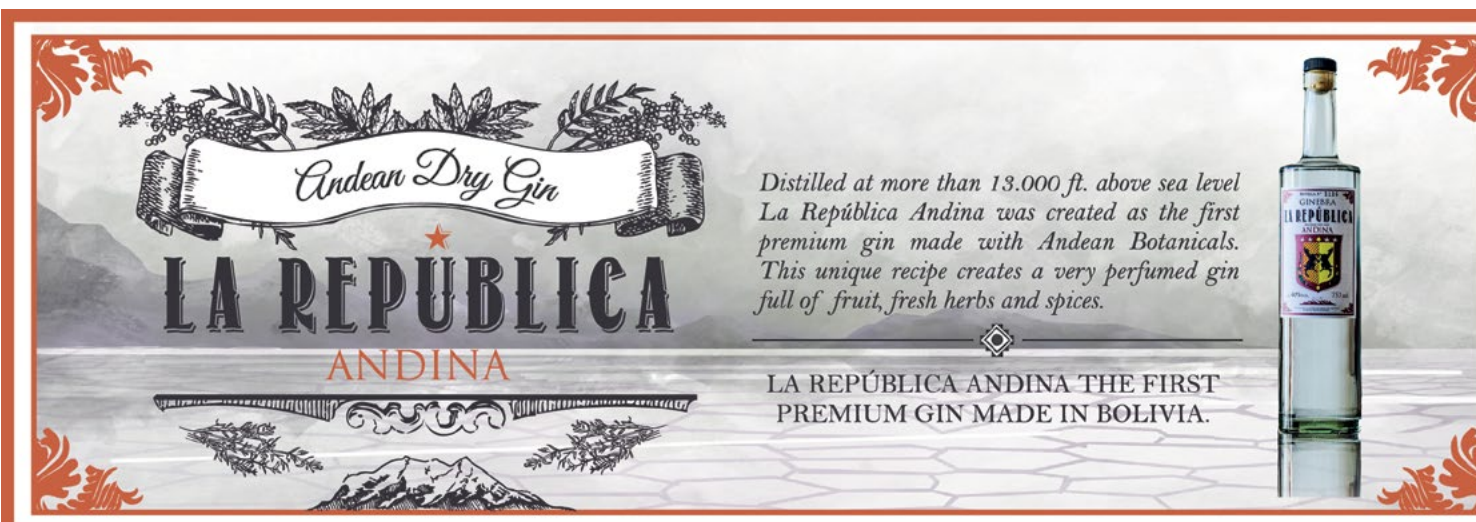
Depictions of the cemeteries in art are different in style but universal in message

his children – his eldest is only 14 – and for what?' This sentiment is not unique. Even Viscarra, who socialised in alcoholics' bars, probably rubbing shoulders with those on the verge of committing themselves to such an establishment, seems to be even faintly critical. In his **cuento** 'Los Cementerios de Elefantes', the author describes the drunks as 'having the shakes of recalcitrant masturbators'.

The police response to these places is limited. 'For the police, these types of establishments provide something like assistance,' writes Viscarra. According to him, this is one explanation for their continued existence. Another, provided by the Intendencia, is that there simply are not enough resources to prevent the emergence of cementerios. 'We have a task force,' says Paola Valdenassi Flores, Manager of the Intendencia's office at Avenida Camacho. 'But this is not the only issue we deal with.' Raids on these establishments are rare. She says that on average the Intendencia tips off the police to shut down a cemetery three to four times a year. How-

ment of justice against the owners. 'The police throw the drunks out on the street,' says Felipe, with disgust. 'We chuck them out,' Paola confirms, 'It's a personal choice to recover.' The onus is on the sufferer to cure himself, with little State support for these suicidal individuals.

Urban legends are often proven to be untrue. They are dismissed as nothing more than sensationalism and speculation. For a while, Los Cementerios de Elefantes were viewed in such a light. Indeed, Viscarra's story was ridiculed as a piece of pure fiction. Travelling around La Paz, you can see why. These places seem to be nothing more than closed storefronts, run down houses, background details in the patchwork architecture of La Paz. However, this only adds to their mystique. Behind every steel shutter, every curtained-off window, there could be more than meets the eye. Elephant cemeteries may inspire artists, but they are more than just fiction. In reality, they are anything but art.



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THE UNEARTHLY BEAUTY OF THE SALAR

THE FAMED LANDSCAPE IS MATCHED IN INTENSITY BY THE NEIGHBORING NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

TEXT AND PHOTO : FLOSSIE WILDBLOOD



We arrive in Uyuni at 6am, with the hesitantly blue morning sky above us and the muddy road beneath us. The four slow hours we spend in this southwestern town are enough to demonstrate that it is, for the most part, defined by the otherworldly landscape that surrounds it. Hordes of uniformly dressed tourists add colour to its bland streets, so much so that they seem incongruous, yet at the same time these streets are lined with tour companies, all advertising the same iconic voyage.

The road is bumpy as we leave the waking city, headed to the village of Colchani, home to an oasis of shops all selling identical tourist paraphernalia. We eat quinoa and muse on how the Salar, our next stop, actually begins: does this 10,500-km salt flat just appear completely out of the blue? Soon enough we're back in the car and it has started. Milton, our guide, drives the 4x4 straight into what appears to be an exceptionally large, grimy puddle and we look skeptically at each other, but are soon semi-gliding through a seemingly indefinite ex-

panse of water. This water sometimes gets so deep that the mountains in the distance, the only real reference point, are totally submerged and drivers en route to the Salar completely lose their way.

The horizon gradually disappears as the ground becomes piercingly white and flawlessly smooth, and the sky and honeycomb tiles of salt below merge together. The toy cars and miniature people in the distance seem suspended in the air; apart from them, there's nothing but luminous blue and white for miles. Luke-warm surface water swirls around my feet as we wander around this ethereal landscape. Later, they are covered entirely by a translucent layer of crystallised salt.

Drops of rain pixelate the view through the front window of the car as we leave the Salar behind us. We drive through seemingly endless countryside, past quinoa plantations and dormant volcanoes shrouded in ghostly mist, and then finally resting llamas and elaborately decorated cemeteries to the town of San Juan. We sleep here for the night, in small rooms built entirely from salt. The floor is piled with large granules, which get in our shoes and our beds, and parts of the ceiling chip off periodically, but we drink cinnamon tea and talk about the idiosyncrasies of Russian cinema with our new travelling companions before sleeping right through the night after a long day.

The next day is also long: dawn is still breaking when we leave San Juan, but sunlight bathes the viewpoint for the Ollagüe volcano when we arrive mid-morning. Its porous, rocky terrain rises and falls like folds of crumpled paper, and there's an unavoidable stillness with no plants to sway in the gentle wind. The only vegetation is a few scattered shrubs and unearthly, fluorescent green moss covering certain boulders. Revitalised by the fresh air, we gaze upwards and into the distance at the volcano itself.

We soon pass through a handful of lagoons – one pastel green, one an immaculate reflection of the mountains that lean over it, almost every one home to more than one species of flamingo, tinted pink by the algae they eat. We tiptoe over marshy ground, which seeps into our shoes, to the edge of the water. Thousands of tiny

flies hover over the spongy grass underneath as we get a closer look at the curious hues within each lagoon and at the entirely oblivious flamingos that wade around the water's surface. The air is thick with sulphur when we get out of the car at Laguna Hedionda, our final stop before a lengthy crawl through the desert. This is a drive which strangely brings both an unshakeable sense of isolation, and also an awareness of the hundreds of others following a similar trail. Ours is just one of the paths etched into the gritty sand; others vary only slightly.

Soon we've entered the Eduardo Avaroa Andean Fauna National Reserve. Milton chews coca leaves as we ascend higher, eventually reaching the final lagoon of the day, mere minutes from where we'll spend the night. The altitude has already left us in a dazed state, and the fact that Laguna Colorado surpasses the others in both scale and appearance intensifies this. Its banks are home to idle, grass-chewing alpacas, and are so vibrant that their colours appear almost saturated, unreal. Looking down at where the blue water and verdant grass meet is like looking at the earth from space. The varying hues – pink, red, white, blue – within the lagoon itself make it seem as if someone has dropped ink in this huge stretch of shallow water.

The next day we rise at 4am and embark out into the unbroken darkness. The night before was filled with shooting stars and radiant electric storms illuminating the mountains from behind, but this morning is coal-black. After some erratic off-road driving, we see an enigmatic plume of smoke silhouetted against the nearly sunrise in the sky. It's just one of the many billowing natural geysers we meet on our way to swim in the **aguas termales**. We reach these mere minutes before carloads of others, and at this point they are unparalleled in their tranquility. Steam emanates from the water forming a mystical layer over the rocky ground, and the boiling natural heat soothes our weary bodies while the frosty air blows sleep from our eyes.

The Ollagüe volcano's porous, rocky terrain rises and falls like folds of crumpled paper.

Our next stop, the nearby Dalí desert, was named because of its similarity to the one portrayed in Salvador Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory*, but the landscape we see later that day is more like a collage. Mountains and desert share the same space. The shadows of the clouds above provide the only real definition on the sandy ground, a quasi-union of the sky and the earth. We drive through luscious green valleys, and then in no time at all meet landscapes so rocky, misty and desolate that they appear Martian. We see rocks shaped like dogs and parrots in the Valle de Rocas, and drive straight through thick grey cloud all the way to where the national park meets Chile, and back again to the miniature city of Uyuni.

In Uyuni, you drive for hours through immense landscapes, occasionally passing through tiny human settlements, which seem inconsequential compared to their surroundings. Travelling here brings with it the realisation that this is an enormous and varied world.♦

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SURREAL QUESTIONNAIRE

LEVITY AND LUNACY ON CAMPUS

TEXT: HUGH OLLARD
PHOTO: KIT FRETZ



It was a rainy, overcast day when BX descended on unwitting university students at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés to grill them on their views about some of life's most pressing questions: Does the body rule the mind? Are our actions predetermined? What is your favourite sandwich? What follows is a record of what some of La Paz's brightest students said, when put under the ineffable BX microscope.

Our first target, after we were thoroughly rebuffed by what can only be called a veritable party pooper, was Luis Enrique, an engineering systems student. Chilling against a wall, clad in a fetching leather jacket, he wowed us with his clearly well-thought out answers:

BX: I think therefore I am. Discuss.

LUIS ENRIQUE: I don't know... (A long pause follows.) I exist because of my parents.

BX: Thank you, Luis. If a tree falls in a forest with no one around, does it make a sound?

LUIS ENRIQUE: (Appearing deep in thought.) If a tree falls, a tree falls, but we don't hear it.

BX: Again, thank you, Luis. What is your favourite sandwich?

LUIS ENRIQUE: (For the first time, appearing certain.) An egg sandwich.

We then turned to Ivana, also clad in leather, a tourism student.

BX: Does the body rule the mind or the mind rule the body?

IVANA: (With certainty) The mind rules the body.

BX: Are all our actions predetermined?

IVANA: No. I believe we can choose whether to do something or not.

BX: Well put, Ivana, thank you – but what is your favourite sandwich?

IVANA: (Suddenly unsure, put off balance.) Maybe ham and cheese?

BX: Delicious. Did Leo deserve the Oscar?

IVANA: I don't understand. (Pause) Oh no. No, no, no. I don't like him. He's really boring.

BX: Well that's a bit harsh.

Leaving such negativity behind, we crossed the Plaza Estudiantes and met Judith, a medical student.

BX: Does the body rule the mind or the

mind rule the body?

JUDITH: The mind rules the body. The mind chooses what you do, what you like.

BX: Fair enough. Are all our actions predetermined?

JUDITH: No. I think half are and half are not. We can't change some things.

BX: I agree to a point, but what is your favourite dinosaur?

JUDITH: What? Why? (Pauses.) I guess T-Rex. I don't really know.

BX: Would you eat one of my friends?

JUDITH: No. I don't know them.

Having examined the university's finest on the pressing issues of the day, we swiftly exited the plaza, looking back only to see a collection of sandwich-related existential crises. ♦

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A CITIZEN'S EDUCATION

PUTTING THEATRE ON THE MAP OF BOLIVIAN CULTURE

TEXT AND PHOTO: FLOSSIE WILDBLOOD



Diego Aramburo, director and founder of Kiknteatr, is dressed head to toe in black, with a solitary but striking white streak in his ebony hair. As we talk over fruit juice in Alexander Coffee, Diego tells me that, despite the extensive period he spent working internationally, he sees himself as 'an artist of Bolivia'. Indeed, Diego has been labelled one of Bolivia's most influential artists by the national press and has won El Premio Nacional de Teatro on multiple occasions. It's easy to see why: he is a man whose knowledge about theatre seems all-encompassing and whose creativity is apparent even in casual conversation.

Kiknteatr is a Bolivia-born artistic collective that perform their own brand of contemporary theatre both here and internationally. As we survey their influences, Diego moves rapidly from Derrida and de-constructivism to chaos theory and Andean architecture. One concept strikes me as particularly relevant not just to his plays, but to the state of Bolivian theatre in general: Félix Guatarrí's conception of **carencia** (lack) as something positive, as a cause for action. This, it seems, is a defining feature of Bolivia's current theatre scene.

At the moment, theatre in Bolivia just isn't part of what Diego calls 'a citizen's education'. In other Latin American countries, like Argentina and Chile, theatre is an essential cultural artform that exists at popular and fringe levels. In Bolivia, however, 'popular theatre' exists only in the form of rarely used decadent buildings, scattered across the biggest cities in the country. The

'If you don't make up your own rules, you can end up doing nothing'

- Diego Aramburo

scene is almost entirely dominated by a handful of grassroots theatre companies. It was only with the rise of the revolutionary Sucre-based group, Teatro de los Andes, in the 90s, that people started to view acting as a legitimate profession. But to this day there is barely any formal training available. None of the artists I spoke to had a theatre degree.

Because of this, Bolivia has developed an incredibly liberal environment for theatre arts, in which artists are free to

perform without being held to an objective standard. However, Diego advises, 'If you don't make up your own rules, you can end up doing nothing.' It takes initiative and grit to get anywhere in this cultural no-man's-land, where it can seem that 'everything is against you.'

The intimate scale of Bolivian plays and the audience's proximity to the cast is ideal for the small and committed crowd that regularly goes to the theatre, but it is less than ideal for the people involved in the production. According to Diego, Bolivia's theatrical community is endogámica, or incestuous: there are so few people involved that it has become something of a cooperative and a lot of work ends up being voluntary.

Unifying this tiny artistic community is not as easy as one would imagine. Last year, the Premio Nacional downsized to a controversial degree, leaving around 10 groups to share a performing space for very little time, and with very little funding. 'We protested and they told us there was nothing we could do about it,' said Claudia Eid, who has been acting for 20 years and is the founder of the theatre group El Masticadero. There was a choice between resisting and obeying the authorities and the group divided.

This highlights the need for greater government funding to support Bolivian artists. It also highlights the value of organisations such as Cochabamba's mARTadero, where Claudia performed her most recent play, *Princesas*, which is an improvised critique of the 'social

construction of the woman'. mARTadero is a cultural space with seven areas devoted to different art forms that receives no government funds. As evidenced by colourful murals that surround the space and the phrase 'Tu boca convoca a mejorar nuestra calle' (your mouth calls to improve our street) scrawled in duct tape across the office walls, this is a place where inciting change through art is as important as art itself.

Soledad Ardaya, who coordinates mARTadero's theatre program, started acting in 1997. As she shows me around the courtyard and perfor-

mance spaces, she explains that the organisation is home to the artists who run it and that it revolves around the 'basic principles of integration and social interaction'. Although Soledad agrees that a desire for change always seeps into Bolivian theatre, she thinks it does so 'as reflection rather than as a message'. For Diego, a strong political conscience is inherent in all Latin American art forms, as well as a preoccupation with colonialism that he thinks must be surmounted. 'There are aspects of this country that annoy me,' he says. 'And when I'm annoyed I try to fight back,' which is why much of his work, including his most recent play, *Morales*, is intentionally political. In Bolivian theatre, realism is becoming less prevalent. Characters are no longer one dimensional. They go beyond conventional Bolivian archetypes – **dueño de la casa, cholita**, etc. – and try to say something novel to an often closed-minded public. 'There is something surreal in who we are,' says Soledad. Since everyday life in Bolivia is surreal, reflecting on the day-to-day has bizarre consequences.

On the floor of a brightly lit room on Cochabamba's Calle Venezuela, I'm sitting with Claudia as she teaches a drama class with twenty students from la Universidad Privada Boliviana. 'They're not interested in becoming professional actors,' she admits. The classes are completely extracurricular, but the lesson culminates in the performance of several short plays that demonstrate the group's dramatic talent. Claudia likes to use '**textos frescos**' by contemporary Latin American playwrights to engage her students. She emphasizes the importance of getting young people involved in theatre. 'The so-called young generation is my generation, and I'm 40,' she bemoans. She says the few theatre schools that exist in Bolivia aren't interested in expanding their reach or evolving to embrace new actors and concepts.

However, things are progressing. All the artists I spoke to insist that the quality of Bolivian plays has vastly improved over the last 15 years. Because of this many groups have managed to go abroad with their projects. But this is certainly not the time for complacency. There's still a long way to go before theatre gains the status it deserves in Bolivia. 'Things are getting better,' Diego says, as our interview comes to a close. 'But we can't stop working.'



SHAMANIC VISIONS

GASTÓN UGALDE:
AN ARTISTIC ODE TO THE ANDES
TEXT: CLARA BUXTON

Only through art and architecture can we transform societies and build a better life.
—Gastón Ugalde

The face is distorted but strangely familiar. The vivid streaks of yellow, orange and blue are set against harsh geometric angles and piercing red eyes. The chamán comes to life through colours and patterns reminiscent of traditional Andean textiles – and it is so much more than just a face on a page.

Upon a first glance at the work of Bolivian artist Gastón Ugalde, its striking diversity is inescapable. Despite being widely known as a pioneer in the field of Latin American video-art in the '70s, Ugalde has spent the time since ex-

perimenting widely with various media, including performance art, land installations, painting, photography and sculpture. His body of work explores various sociopolitical themes, principally focusing on social movements and local agrarian or cultural festivals. It is intriguing, bizarre and modern work, firmly rooted in Bolivian cultural tradition: inextricably bonded with the land of its creator.

With a career that has spanned decades and has included 81 individual and over 160 collective exhibitions, Ugalde's immense artistic success stems from a passion he discovered as a child. 'My first works of art were those that I made the first time I grabbed a pencil,' he says. 'The intention behind my work has always been the same: to capture my experiences. I never stopped being a child.'

Ugalde's ethereal Salar de Uyuni photographic series, set against the landscape of the **altiplano's** salt flats, showcase his concern with the interactions between light and colour in desolate spaces. 'My constant source of inspiration is Bolivian territory and Andean light,' he explains. Asked to describe his work using just three words, he simply responded, 'land, colour and stone.' The result of this cocktail of simple ingredients is an oeuvre composed of truly stunning photographs. Fabrics, geometric shapes and human

figures bursting with vivid colours slice through the cosmic emptiness of the natural backdrop. 'Owing to the temperature of the light in open Andean territories, I can capture brilliant colours,' Ugalde says. 'When these participate alongside objects and people, I'm strengthening my study of the theory of colour and time within these spaces.'

Ugalde's series of collages using coca leaves and his chamanes, surreal depictions of the human face inspired by shamanism, are further examples of his work interacting with its uniquely South American environment. The artist himself says these colourful visages are the product of 'having had close encounters of the third kind with shamans during my Andean and Amazonian travels'. Forming a bridge between ancient traditions and modern artistic techniques, in their own way the chamanes are a true reflection of contemporary Bolivia – combining the best of the old and the new in a riot of colour. The coca leaf art includes images of dollar bills, John Lennon and Coca-Cola, a powerful statement of cultural exchange and interference.

Ugalde's inspiration is limitless and his media varied. By using the photographic lens, amongst other things, to capture what he describes as 'dust and disorder', his diverse art reflects a spectacularly diverse country. •



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- Administrativo
- Financiero
- Tributario
- Laboral (Recursos Humanos)
- Contable
- Aportaciones al Seguro Social
- Importaciones y Exportaciones

CONSULTORIAS

- Revalorización Técnica de Activos Fijos
- Desarrollo de Sistemas Contables
- Sistemas de Inventarios de Almacenes
- Elaboración y Evaluación de Proyectos
- Organización de Empresas
- Entrenamiento y Cursos Actualización
- Evaluación de Personal

CONTABILIDAD

- Externa
- Balances de Apertura
- Balances de Gestión
- Balances de Cierre
- Libros de Contabilidad
- Declaraciones Impuestos
- Libros de contabilidad
- Libros de Compras y Ventas IVA
- Comprobantes de contabilidad

OTROS SERVICIOS ESPECIFICOS

- Tramites de inscripciones y afiliaciones al Seguro Social, Fundempresa, Impuestos Nacionales, Ministerio de Trabajo Gobiernos Municipales y otros.
- Tramites de CEDEIMS, Sector Exportador, Tradicional y no Tradicional.

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GLOSSARY

Bolivian Express

AGUAS TERMALES - Natural thermal baths found in Uyuni

AJENJO - Absinthe

ALTIPLANO - Andean plateau in Bolivia, Peru, Chile and Argentina

AYAHUASCA - A medicinal, hallucinogenic drink brewed from several plants native to the Amazon region

CARENCIA - 'Lack'

CHOLITA - A traditional Amyara or Quechua woman, characterized by her bowler hat and wide skirt

CLARO - 'Of course'

CUENTO - A 'story' or 'tale'; may specifically refer to folk tales and/or legends

DIABLADA - Dance at Oruro Carnaval, originating from the culture of miners and their belief in methods of self-preservation in the mines

DUENDE - Goblin-like mythological creature from Latin American folklore

DUEÑO DE LA CASA - Head of the household

FIESTA - A party or celebration

MULTA - 'Fine' or 'fee'

OFICINA - 'Office'

PACEÑO - A person from La Paz

PACHAMAMA - Mother Earth

PLATA - Money; literally 'silver'

PLUMAS - Soft feathers of birds, used in traditional headdresses from jungle regions

PROPIEDAD PRIVADA - 'Private property'

SUCRENSE - A person from Sucre

TEJIDOS - Andean knitted clothes made from alpaca wool

TEXTOS FRESCOS - 'Fresh texts'; new works by contemporary writers

VISCACHA - A large rodent of the chinchilla family native to the Bolivian and Peruvian **altiplano**

YUPI - Very sweet drink made from mixing water and flavoured powder

ZAPATERO - A cobbler working on the street



LITERATURE AND ABSINTHE

CAFÉ ETNO CONTINUES THE TIMEWORN TRADITION

TEXT: FLOSSIE WILDBLOOD

PHOTO: KIT FRETZ

Nestled between museums and artists' workshops on Calle Jaén, Café ETNO is home to what is arguably the best **ajenjo** you can drink in La Paz. Customers have been sampling the mysterious green beverage from within ETNO's dimly lit walls for over 10 years, and some have even recounted strange hallucinations they've had around the cafe after drinking. I spoke to ETNO's co-owner, Yumi Tapia Higa, to separate fact from fiction and learn more about *ajenjo*'s unique qualities.

Can you tell me a bit about Café ETNO, what you do there, and about your cultural program?

We were the first *ajenjo* bar in the city, first opening in 2005. We involve numerous artists in the café: Café ETNO has a very strong artistic movement. We ran 'los Lunes de la Literatura' [Literature Mondays] for many years. Nowadays, there are various writers from La Paz.

I've heard stories about people who've drunk ajenjo and then seen ghosts on Calle Jaén. What do you know about this?

Concerning *ajenjo* and stories of certain people who've seen things after drinking it, many people have told me that they felt much more lucid. What absinthe does is, more or less, wake up the senses a little bit. Like any other type of alcohol, it makes you drunk, but it also makes you a little more lucid, and awake. This is what various people have told me. Above all, there's a gnome that plays with the little glasses of *ajenjo*, moving them around and throwing them onto the floor. We always leave a glass of *ajenjo* to the **duende**, so that things go well for us and the café.

Many famous writers and artists have been inspired by this drink. Have there been any famous Bolivians?

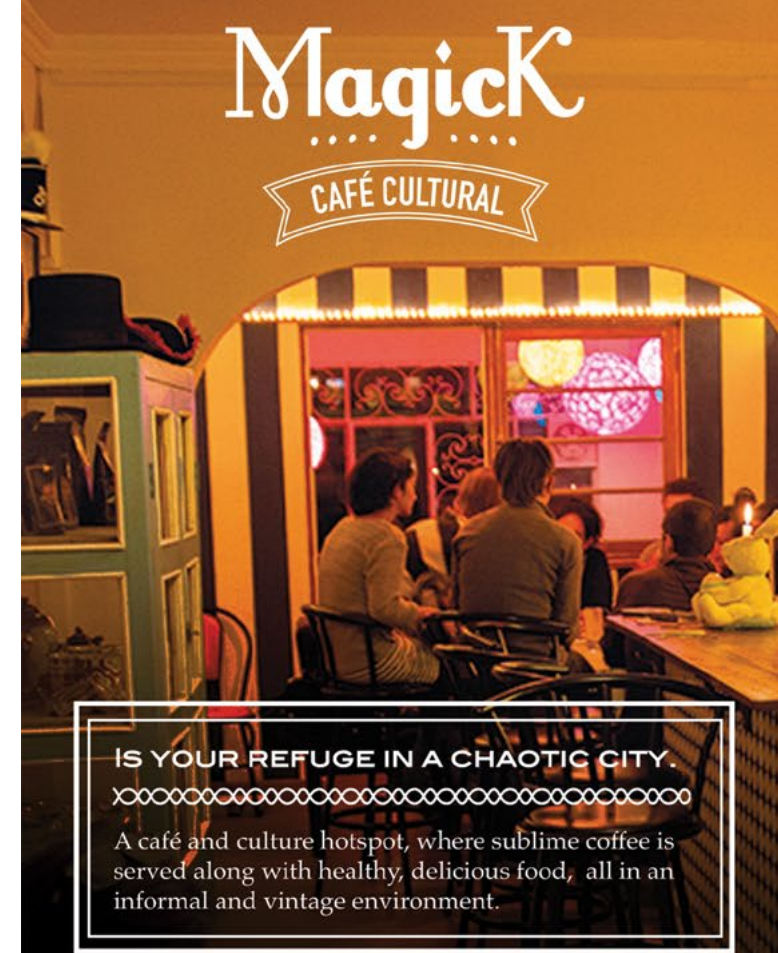
I know that Jaime Sáenz, Arturo Borda, and the circle of writers of that era all met up together, and some of them also drank *ajenjo*.

How do you produce the drink?

At first, we imported *ajenjo* from Sucre, but then we started experimenting with making the liquor ourselves, and now we make our own. It's an artisan liquor, with no additives or preservatives. It's just like the plant.

Does absinthe have medicinal properties?

Traditionally here in Bolivia, it was used medicinally to alleviate stomach aches, and it's drunk as an infusion of tea to deworm intestines. It's also really good for digestion.



Magick

CAFÉ CULTURAL

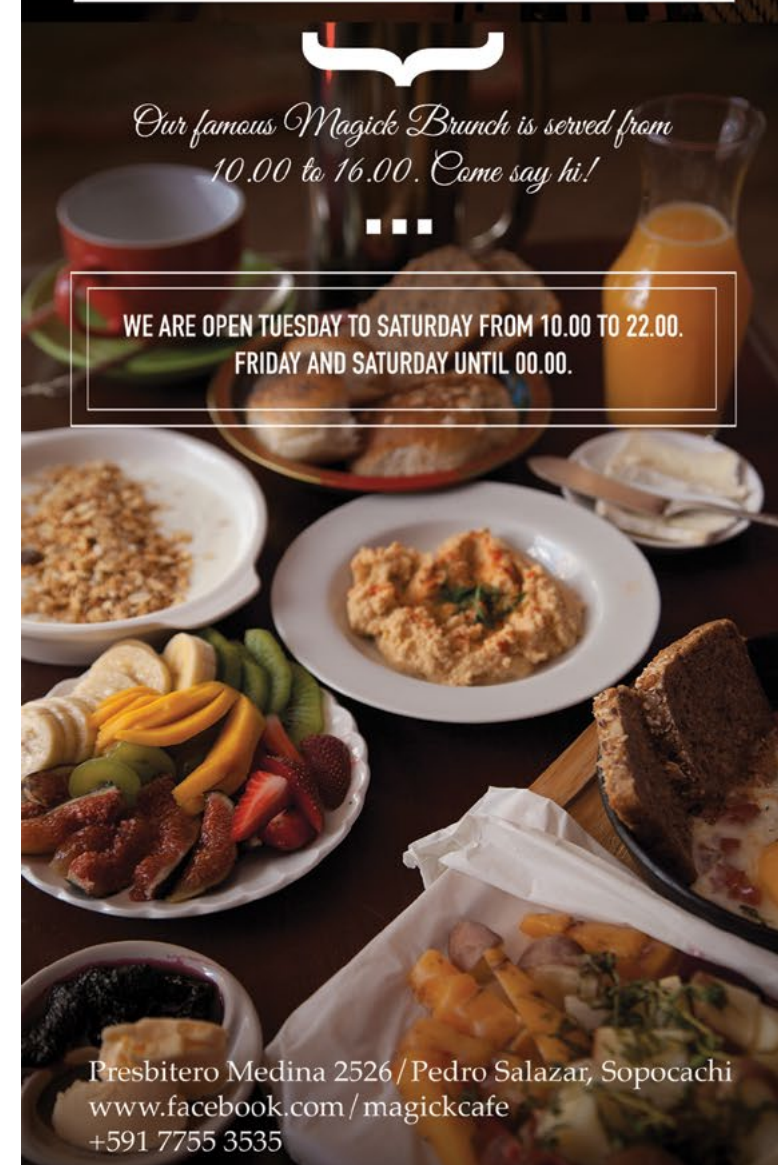
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