Bolivian Express

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Magazine

Deconstruction #90

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Sponsored By: VIVA

Editorial #90: Deconstruction

By: Caroline Risacher

Paceño writer Jaime Sáenz aptly referred to the Choqueyapu River, which runs through La Paz, as 'the city in liquid state.' Trash, dead animals, organic and chemical waste, rubble, heavy metals: the detritus of the city is unrelentlessly churning through the waters of the Choqueyapu. The contaminated water carries bacteria such as *E. coli* and salmonella which end up in vegetable crops downstream. But until the river is stopped being used as an open sewer, an alternative for this wasted water is to use it to produce flowers, like the **florerías** do in the **Valle de las Flores**, in the south of La Paz, transforming something vile into something beautiful.

We began 2018 with our chaos-themed issue, and how even though something seems confusing and chaotic, there can be a controlling order behind it. Similarly, we are ending the year by deconstructing what is around us in order to understand it better. Bolivia is a land of contradictions – a place where spirituality and capitalism have created a unique setting, where the modern **teleférico** and old **micros** coexist, and where all the seasons seem to take place within a day. Inexplicably, it's also a country with a capital city that doesn't have a proper sewer and water-treatment system.

There are things that we see every day but take for granted because they are part of our routine, and because sometimes we are just too shy to ask. Why is **helado de canela** red (and why doesn't it ever seem to melt)? Why are there so many dentists in La Paz and El Alto? Why do you never (or very rarely) see a **cholita** wearing glasses? And why do you *never* see a *cholita* without braids? And what is the actual spelling: Abaroa or Avaroa?!

We've tried to answer questions like these for the past nine years – in all 90 issues of *Bolivian Express*. Month after month, we deconstruct the ordinary and make sense out of this apparent chaos. We've been deciphering Bolivia's secrets and its people, looking at what connects us and at all the nuances which define Bolivia and every part of it: the highlands, the rainforests, the Chaco and the foothills.

Ultimately, one of the things that characterises Bolivians is their perseverance and determination. Their unwillingness to stop fighting and to keep living in the harshest conditions – from the **palliris** in the mines of Potosí to the women selling cheese in the street whether it's pouring rain or burning under the hot sun. Understanding Bolivia is an ambitious and arduous task, a testament to its richness, beauty and complexity.

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

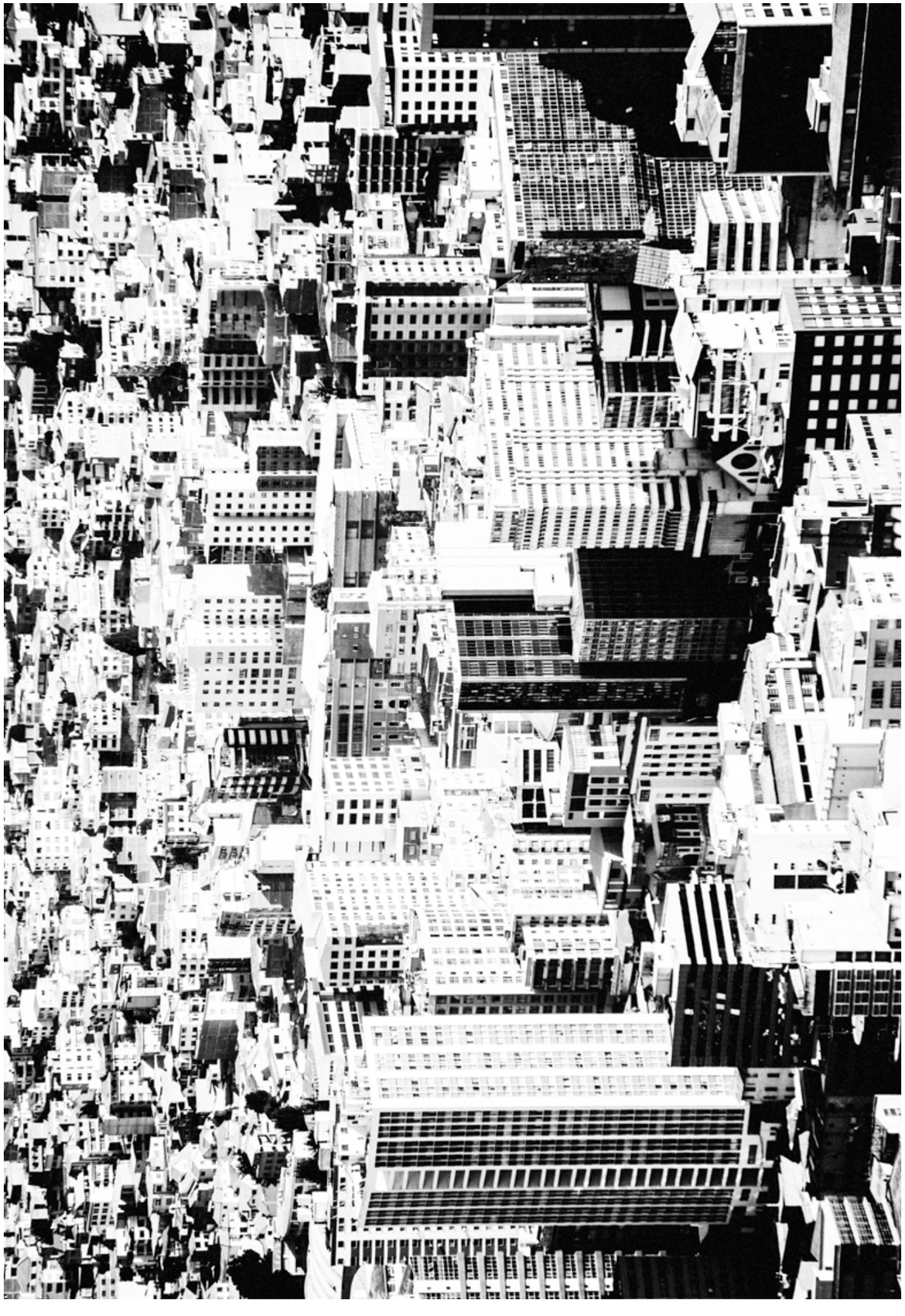


Photo: Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic

WHO ARE THE PALLIRIS?

SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE WORK OF WOMEN IN THE BOLIVIAN MINING INDUSTRY

TEXT: SOPHIE BLOW

PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

A Bolivian mine can be a tough place to earn a living, especially for a woman. All miners suffer from periodic injuries, but women must frequently contend with physical and sexual assault. Oftentimes, women turn to working in the mines after their miner husbands are killed in work accidents. Someone has to provide for the family, and as dangerous as it is, the mine allows them to scratch out a living as long as they accept the risks of the job. These women form a near-invisible workforce, often working more than 10 hours a day for only US$70 to US$100 a month, less than half the national minimum wage. In 2001, women miners were finally able to join FENCOMIN, the national miners' syndicate, but their fight for safety and economic independence has not yet been won. They still lack pensions, education and guaranteed access to health care. Also, in Bolivia's western highlands, superstition still prohibits the entrance of women into the mines.

According to the country's national mining corporation, COMIBOL, there are around 3,000 female mining employees today in Bolivia, 600 of whom work inside the mines. These women are called **palliris**, a Quechua term meaning 'to harvest' or 'to collect', but used exclusively for the female miners who have the gruelling task of sorting minerals extracted from the mines.

Without work contracts, health insurance or the right to maternity leave or holiday time, women miners are often the greatest victims of abuse in the mining industry. Even though men work under the same extreme conditions, female workers find themselves the most vulnerable. Working in bitter winds and torrential rains and at much higher risk of tuberculosis and rheumatism than workers in any other industry, the average life expectancy of mine workers is only 40-50 years, according to Al Jazeera. For more than 10 hours a day, *palliris* have the task of pulverising rocks taken from the mines and sifting through the remains to separate the dust from valuable materials such as silver and zinc. What is discovered of value is then washed using toxic substances such as mercury, a practise that takes a severe toll on the health of the workers.

Even though women have had a presence in the Bolivian mining industry since the Spanish colonisation, according to Pascale Absi, author of Los ministros del diablo – an examination of the mines in Potosí – until recently the idea of women working in a mine in Bolivia was considered taboo, with strong resistance from the male-dominated mining community. In fact, women were often forbidden from entering mines for fear that the female presence would 'bring bad luck' and dry up all the gold, according to Absi.

Absi notes the common belief that a woman entering a mine will make **Pachamama** jealous, resulting in a poor mineral harvest that year. She writes about the mines of Llallagua, in the Potosí department, where it's thought that the minerals disappear following the end of the next menstrual cycle of the woman who entered the mine.

'IF WE WANT TO LIVE IN LIBERTY ON OUR LAND, UNDER THE SAME SKY, WE NEED TO BE DEDICATED TO WORKING TOGETHER.'
—DOMITILA CHUNGARA

In addition to these superstitious beliefs, sexism is also a prominent stumbling block which holds women back from pursuing a career in the mines – for example, many people believe that mining is too physically challenging to be performed by a woman. Additionally, the exploitative and dangerous nature of the work is cited when justifying the exclusion of women from the workforce, as if it were more acceptable for men to work in these conditions rather than unacceptable for all to be subjected to this work environment.

Despite these prejudices against females in the workforce, women have played a vital role in the mining industry, especially during the 1932-35 Chaco War against Paraguay, when Bolivian women took to the mines to replenish a workforce depleted by conscription. 'How difficult can it be?' Doña Paulina, a *palliri* from the Ckacchas Libres mining cooperative, is quoted in Absi's book when asked whether women were capable of performing as well as their male counterparts in the mines.

Lately, though, solidarity within the Bolivian and international communities for the work of the *palliris* is stronger than ever. There was a clear demonstration of strong public support for *palliris* at a recent book presentation for the latest edition of *Si me permiten hablar* (Let Me Speak), on 28 November 2018 in El Alto by the Biblioteca del Bicentenario de Bolivia.

Written by Moema Veizzer and translated into 14 languages, *Si me permiten hablar* is a biography of the late Domitila Chungara, a *palliri* who played an essential role in supporting the mining-syndicate movement in South American mines. Since its publication in 1978, it has shined a light on working conditions in the mining industry and exposed the issue to an international audience.

Born into a mining family in 1937 in Potosí, Chungara was raised in a house without running water and electricity for only a few hours a day. Following her mother's death when she was only 10 years old, Chungara helped to raise her five siblings despite suffering extreme poverty. She became a prominent member of the Union of Miners' Wives during 1960s and survived the San Juan massacre in 1967, when soldiers shot at protesting miners and their families, killing 20 and injuring 70. She was even imprisoned and tortured during the 1970s dictatorship of Hugo Bánzer as a result of her determination to secure better rights for the mining community. Her ill-treatment by that government resulted in a miscarriage and lifelong injuries. In 1978, Chungara organised and carried out a hunger strike in protest against the Bánzer government. Thousands of Bolivians joined her, pressuring the government to release political prisoners and allow her and her compatriots' husbands to return to their jobs in the mines. In her later life, Chungara focussed her efforts on improving political education for the younger generations in deprived neighbourhoods. She passed away in 2012 due to lung cancer, an illness that afflicts many workers in the mining community.

Si me permiten hablar, having been continually in print since it was originally published and having been translated into many other languages, has made Chungara a national hero – so much so that at the celebration for the latest edition, an auditorium overflowed with audience members. Greeted with an applause and cheers that shook the auditorium, panellists – including the biographer Viezzer as well as the president of the Biblioteca del Bicentenario de Bolivia – gave heartfelt tributes to the heroine. However, despite the international publication of accounts describing the horrific exploitation and countless accidents within the mining community, there is still so much to be achieved in order to secure a safer future for mining families and women. The latest edition of Veizzer's book is another important step in achieving greater rights for Bolivia's oft-overlooked workforce. And it is instructional in how to change the future for the better. In the words of Chungara herself: 'If we want to live in liberty on our land, under the same sky, we need to be dedicated to working together.'

HIP HOP IN LA PAZ

THE CREATIVE MOVEMENT BRINGING BOLIVIAN CULTURE TO AN INTERNATIONAL STAGE

TEXT: SOPHIE BLOW / PHOTOS: SOPHIE BLOW & ADRIANA MURILLO

La Paz is a city renowned for its urban anarchistic creativity. From **malabaristas** who perform acrobatics for cars stopped in traffic, to the sprayed cursive script of the **grafiteras** of **Mujeres Creando** and the increasing popularity of hip hop tracks in the city's club scene. Although hip hop culture emerged as an afro-american artistic movement in New York during the 1970s, it is now gaining momentum in Latin America. More and more artists, like the Bolivian girl group from El Alto called Santa Mala, are using the power of hip hop to convey cultural, political and social messages on an international stage.

Hip hop is a culture made up of four elements: break-dance, rap, graffiti and DJing. Nano, a local graffiti artist, explained that each element is a way of sharing Bolivian culture, be it through smart rap lyrics, synchronised edgy body movements or controversial imagery gifted to the streets. Through these four media, it is possible for these artists to share their vision of culture and society.

Street art is perhaps the most prominent display of hip hop culture in La Paz, a city known for the dominance of coloured murals. La Paz attracts visitors from across the world, who are eager to see how graffiti artists and muralists have intervened in public spaces to communicate Bolivian culture in the streets. Having seen how graffiti has enriched the streets of La Paz, art student Indira Zabaleta Inti enrolled in a new graffiti school called Las Wasas, while Silvia Bernal Lara and Isabel Illanes Aguilera joined a *grafitero* collective, to transform their passion for graffiti art into a career.

According to these *grafiteras*, it is important not to confuse murals with graffiti. To the naked eye they may look the same, but there is one crucial difference: one has permission from the government, while the other is illegal. 'Because [graffiti] is illegal, people don't respect it' in the way they respect murals, Aguilera says.

The illegality of graffiti gives this art form a temporary role in a community, unlike murals that can occupy spaces for decades. When someone enters a space illegally and produces graffiti on the wall, the work is no longer theirs. They are gifting a community with a message. As a result, the artwork is often destroyed due to its anarchistic presence: 'Yes, [my graffiti] is a reflection of my identity,' Aguilera explains, '[but once I have finished] it's no longer mine.'

The anarchistic nature of graffiti art, which usually conveys a violent or controversial message, sets this creative movement apart from that of mural art, which seems to prioritise aesthetics over promoting a social cause. 'Graffiti isn't there to look aesthetically pleasing,' Lara says, who became fascinated by how graffiti can make people question their society and culture. 'It is really important. It's what we need to do,' she adds. 'Sometimes we need to do more, we need to make people a bit uncomfortable.' Rap is another core element of hip hop culture that involves sharing Bolivian culture through words rather than visual imagery. 'Every country has its own hip hop culture,' Nano says. There are local songs performed in indigenous languages, such as in Aymara. This unique fusion between Bolivian and American influences is attracting international attention, including foreign documentary makers who are keen to explore this up-and-coming urban scene. According to Nano, even though the lyrics may sometimes be in English, a language that doesn't represent Bolivia, the social messages are always the same. That is what really represents our culture.'

Another component of hip hop culture is breakdance. Five years ago, Nano was part of a break-dance group called 'New Voice', which combined elements of the hip hop movement to create a Bolivian twist on American hip hop culture. Beyond the breakdancers, the group features DJs that mix Bolivian music with an American hip hop

'GRAFFITI ISN'T THERE TO LOOK AESTHETIC, **SOMETIMES WE NEED TO DO MORE, WE NEED TO MAKE PEOPLE A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE.'**

influence. 'It's a way of identifying with your own culture,' Nano explains.

Rodolfo Alarcón, otherwise known as DJ Rodo, has embraced another another aspect of hip hop that allows young people to share their views to an international audience. Rodo fell in love with the art of rap at church and discovered the versatility of hip hop as a medium for sharing important social messages. His passion for spreading a valuable message led Rodo to pursue a career as a DJ, originally in people's homes, but now at festivals around Europe and South America.

'There are two sides to hip hop,' Rodo explains, 'the commercial and the social,' even though the commercial side of this culture is often seen as something negative. 'When someone has an event that is sponsored by a brand, people think of them as someone who has sold out,' Rodo says, 'someone who doesn't understand hip hop.' But Rodo doesn't see it this way. 'It's a platform to show what we do. If I just do hip hop on the street, no one will see what I do,' he says.

The other side of the coin, the social side, involves sharing a message and, thanks to online live streaming, Rodo can share his passion with a global audience. This is something that all hip hop artists aim to achieve: to share their views through the medium of this anarchistic cultural movement.

Hip hop is a culture in perpetual evolution, a movement that is continuously adapting and finding innovative ways of pushing the boundaries. As a result, Rodo isn't content with all that he has achieved so far. 'My last event was disappointing,' he says. 'When I was a DJ for Red Bull, the venue was packed with people.' Just like the culture of hip hop, Rodo feels the need to keep evolving. 'It's time for me to deconstruct what I've achieved so far,' he says, 'and reconstruct something better.'

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE BLIND

DECONSTRUCTING THE CHALLENGES OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE IN BOLIVIA

TEXT & PHOTO: JOSEPHINE ZAVAGLIA

The world view of visually impaired librarian Olga Mendoza affords insights into human nature and the kindness of strangers. 'People in the city help a lot, they are very nice,' Mendoza says. Crossing roads without audible signals, knowing which bus to take or where you are once you're on the bus, all require the help of other city dwellers. However, as Mendoza explains, 'In El Alto people can be indifferent... I think it is because many of the people in El Alto are from the countryside and lack awareness.'

'Sometimes even if we would know the place, we [still] have to ask and ask, but like this we can find the place,' Mendoza says. 'The government is increasingly talking about inclusion,' which is one of the keys to justice and dignity for blind people in Bolivia.

Mendoza was in the sixth grade when she had a fall that caused serious visual impairment. Apart from going to school, she remained in her house for six years after her accident because of the lack of information and resources her and her family had about navigating the world as a visually impaired person. It wasn't until 'someone said to my mother that there was a rehabilitation centre [for the blind], so I enrolled,' she says.

La Paz's Institute of Blindness (Instituto Boliviano de la Ceguera) is located in the neighbourhood of San Pedro. It is a government organisation that facilitates the 'rehabilitation' and 'readaptation' for visually impaired people in the country. From where the centre is located (near the Plaza San Pedro) to Avenida Mariscal Santa Cruz, the sidewalks and traffic signals are equipped for the visually impaired – in the rest of the city these aids are sparse.

There are 1,323 visually impaired people affiliated with the IBC in the department of La Paz. These are people with irreversible blindness, whose condition cannot be improved with treatment or optical aids. Those who are not affiliated with the organisation do not receive any entitlements from the state. In 2002, the president of Bolivia's Society of Ophthalmology, Joel Moya estimated the population of the country's visually impaired to be around 40,000.

In IBC centres throughout Bolivia people learn the system of braille and how to live independently. 'They taught me how to organise a kitchen, we have to have everything in its place,' Mendoza explains. 'While people who can see do it all quickly, [we have] a spot for the salt, the pasta, the vegetables, etc. Everything is well organised.' Many visually impaired people remain unaware of their entitlements through the IBC, or live in remote areas far away from a centre and are therefore not taken into account by national data.

The IBC began in Bolivia in 1957 after the government passed a law to improve and support the livelihoods of the visually impaired. Since then, conditions have been improving thanks to several pieces of legislation. A recent policy of the Morales government outlines that the state will provide the necessary adjustments to homes of people who are visually impaired. In 2012 the government also passed Law 223 for the protection of rights and equal treatment of people with disabilities, it was described as a first-of-its-kind for Bolivia by the Minister of Health at the time.

Through the IBC identification card, the state provides health insurance, legal support and approximately 5,000 bolivianos in financial support per year to each visually impaired person in the country. Many find an additional form of income through a wide range of jobs, including working in the public or private sector, or playing instruments and singing on the street, though the latter is not necessarily a source of steady nor secure income.

After Mendoza lost her vision, she continued in the mainstream schooling system and undertook the same work as her peers using braille. 'I learnt [braille] in three months. My teacher was very good and I also had a lot of motivation.' Now, many years later, Mendoza is grateful she continued her education in the mainstream school system.' Above all, you meet more people and make more friends,' she says.

That said, there are still many barriers for visually impaired children in Bolivia's education system, including the lack of braille learning materials available in classrooms. However, three highschool teachers from La Paz's mainstream school system in Achocalla are deconstructing these barriers and advocating for inclusion.

Rodrigo Durval and his colleagues Laura Rolando and Efraín Tapia created the initiative 'Braille Para Todos' [Braille For Everyone], through which they have successfully developed the first Bolivian-made braille printer, utilising 3D printing technology. They launched their printer publicly on 7 December 2018 in Achocalla.

'Where we teach in Achocalla [about 11 km. south of La Paz's centre] it's provincial and in schools like these that are away from the city, materials for visually impaired students just don't exist and these students are excluded. That is why our objective is inclusion by means of appropriate tools,' Durval explains. 'Imported braille printers cost upwards of US$7,000,' rendering them unaffordable for most Bolivian schools, 'whereas our printer costs around US$200, making them accessible.'

Most of the financial support for 'Braile Para Todos' has come from its three founders. '[The government] knows what we are doing and the printers we are developing,' Durval says. 'In fact, they have already made an order for five of our printers.' The group hopes that in the future learning materials in braille will be readily available (or printable) in all Bolivian classrooms.

Julia Santa Maria, a social worker at the IBC in La Paz says, 'what we look for is that [visually impaired] people are included in the mainstream education system... and have the same opportunities as anyone who can see.' As Santa María explains, 'This means they must be given the tools and materials necessary so they can be included... [for instance] in the universities [visually impaired students] complete the same work as those who can write...because they can record [their classes].'

Technology has the power to equalise. Next to the IBC is the library where Mendoza has worked for the past 25 years. '[The computers] are the same, they aren't special, the only thing is they have software installed that narrates the screen. This way we can use the internet and download things, etc.' Through her work, Mendoza provides a wealth of value for her community, 'I like helping people as well as teaching.'

'Even though we are blind, we are still people who deserve respect,' she says. 'We still have to do the same everyday stuff, like buy food and run errands. Sometimes things are more difficult for us, like walking, for example... But what we want is that people have consideration for us, nothing more.'

DESMADRE

DE-STRESSING WITH CRASH THERAPY IN LA PAZ

TEXT: SOPHIE BLOW
PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

Your heart beats faster and faster in your chest, your palms become clammy, your head starts to pound. Stress is an illness that affects all of us at one time or another, especially here in La Paz, 'the most stressed-out city in Bolivia' according to Jaime Fernández Hervas. Be it the result of a demanding workplace environment or an overwhelming personal life, stress can be extremely damaging if it is not dealt with effectively. That's why Carla Calvimontes Sánchez and Jaime Fernández Hervas decided to open their crash therapy centre in La Paz, called 'Desmadre', meaning 'chaos' in Spanish. Having experienced the pressure of working in both the public and private sectors, they found the most effective method of stress-relief was through this unusual form of therapy.

Their alternative method for de-stressing is a new and increasingly popular technique that involves releasing negative emotion through the destruction of objects. You can scream, shout, graffiti walls and even smash glass bottles in this safe space, equipped with safety uniforms and health and safety precautions. Exploring your anger and anxiety in a healthy way is encouraged. 'In your home, you can't smash objects, you can't scream,' Sánchez notes. At Desmadre, however, this extreme display of emotion is not off limits.

Clients may be driven to explore crash therapy for a variety of reasons, including partners who hope to resolve a dispute, office workers who want to release pent-up frustration or even children with too much energy. 'A mother phoned me crying,' Sánchez recalls, 'because her daughter was experiencing terrible bullying at school and had to leave school half way through the year because she couldn't sleep, she couldn't eat.' After a session of crash therapy, she slept well for the first time in weeks.

According to Sánchez, psychological studies conducted in Spain support these results as 'a way of easing hypertension, depression and stress' he says. 'De-stressing is the same as having fun' and with crash therapy, destressing couldn't be more exhilarating. You can even choose from 'rock or electronic music' to set the ambience for your ten minute stress-relief session.

At present, the only objects you can destroy at Desmadre are glass bottles, but this wasn't always the case. According to Hervas, it's the visual impact of smashing a glass bottle that makes this object superior in this form of stress relief . 'We used to have glasses, glass bottles and plates,' he says, 'but now we only use glass bottles. All the objects destroyed during the therapy end up in a recycling centre where they are sustainably disposed of.'

In this bustling Bolivian city, 'road blockades, marches and protests are almost a daily occurrence,' Hervas explained. These are symptoms of a 'stressed-out city' in need of an effective cure. According to an article by *Página Siete*, '70 percent of Bolivians suffer from work stress.' After its success in Spain and the United States, Hervas believes crash therapy could be the answer La Paz has been looking for.

For this reason Desmadre hopes to move to a new location in the centre of La Paz and provide therapy to city workers. Hervas believes his future clients will be able 'to leave the office and in ten minutes be at their crash therapy session' at the end of a stressful day at work. Although it is important not to confuse crash therapy as a replacement for traditional psychological help from a trained professional, it can definitely be a stress-relieving addition to complement psychological treatment.

The rules: you can't bring any form of weapon into the therapy room; you can't be under the influence of alcohol or drugs; you must wear closed toes shoes and sport their safety uniform, which includes a jumpsuit, gloves and safety visor. Apart from that, let loose!

Scrawled across the white brick wall of the reception are hundreds of signatures from clients who have already benefited from this therapeutic experience that opened only a few months ago. One message read: 'We are deconstructing ourselves in order to reconstruct ourselves again.' At Desmadre, you can too begin to break down your negativity in order to construct a new stress-free life.

LITTLE JUNGLE **IN THE BIG CITY**

SANTA CRUZ GIVES NATURE ROOM TO BREATHE IN ITS BOTANICAL GARDEN

TEXT: AUTUMN SPREDEMANN

Mention that you're travelling to Santa Cruz de la Sierra and most Bolivians – mainly people who live in the smaller, quieter parts of Bolivia, like myself – will promptly inquire about your reason for visiting the 'big city.'

This sense of wonder is not overstated.

The busy yet friendly residents of Santa Cruz, which is home to well over a million people and tens of thousands businesses, manage to balance the hectic pace of daily life in this literal urban jungle and still make time for the little things – like playing sports in Parque Urbano on the edge of the **segundo anillo** or mixing it up with friends and family while somehow keeping cool on a shaded sidewalk in **el centro**.

But a mere eight kilometers from downtown's hustle and bustle lies a sprawling natural gem where one can find some more precious shade from the Amazonian sun: the **Jardín Botánico**.

An emerald haven in the midst of the vast metropolis, the *Jardín Botánico* raises the bar for green spaces in urban areas with an astounding 186 hectares of well-preserved forest and six kilometres of groomed hiking trails.

This urban forest currently thrives in its new location, after a catastrophic flood washed away the original garden (and part of the city itself) along the banks of the Río Piraí in the early 1980s.

The garden offers myriad opportunities to learn about a diverse array of Bolivian flora and fauna – from its orchid house, which boasts a stunning variety of flowers in bloom, to educational lectures and self-guided nature walks. And for those who are brave enough to spend a night in the jungle, there's a campground (just be sure to make arrangements in advance).

Sharp-eyed visitors, or those who have an experienced guide, may spot an occasional sloth or caiman. During my visit, I almost tripped over a baby caiman while hiking on the garden's trails, so be sure to watch your step!

However, even if you don't have the expert eyes of a guide, you´ll be able to spot numerous species of birds chattering away in the trees. The garden's observation tower will also give the visitor an up-close view of these lively birds, along with a panoramic view of the city's urban maze stretching toward one horizon while a living canopy of green stretches into the other.

> IT'S A PERFECT ESCAPE FOR THOSE WHO FANCY A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE WITHOUT THE HASSLE OF LEAVING THE CITY.

The garden also functions as an important oasis in the ongoing uphill battle of preservation that faces the entire Amazon River basin. As industrial expansion reaches ever deeper into the 'lungs of the world', places like the *Jardín Botánico* will become much needed refuges for more than just city dwellers looking for a weekend hike.

Long before the city of Santa Cruz occupied the Amazonian plains, the seasonally flooded Chaco region and the subtropical forests of the area met in this same location, creating a unique ecosystem of rich biodiversity that can still be enjoyed today, although urbanisation encroaches more and more every year.

The lasting imprint of this merger is amazingly well preserved in the *Jardín Botánico*. It serves as the a perfect escape for those who fancy a walk on the wild side without the hassle of leaving the city. But be sure to bring bug spray, sunscreen and, above all else, a sense of adventure.

CHARLENE ECKELS

ARTIST BIO:

Bolivian-American Charlene Eckels was born and raised in North Carolina. She has a bachelor's degree in studio art from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and mainly resides in Los Angeles, California.

Eckels has travelled extensively and lived in several different countries, including Bolivia, Dubai, Bahrain, Ireland, New Zealand, London and South Korea, which has proven to be an incomparable asset in her ability to grasp diverse cultural concepts. She's even survived a plane crash in the Amazon jungle.

Currently, Eckels is an internationally recognised Bolivian artist and a member of the Sindicato Boliviano de Artistas en Variedades. She creates works geared towards promoting Bolivian culture, the most recent of which is a bilingual colouring book, from which you can colour yourself a few pages in this issue of Bolivian Express.

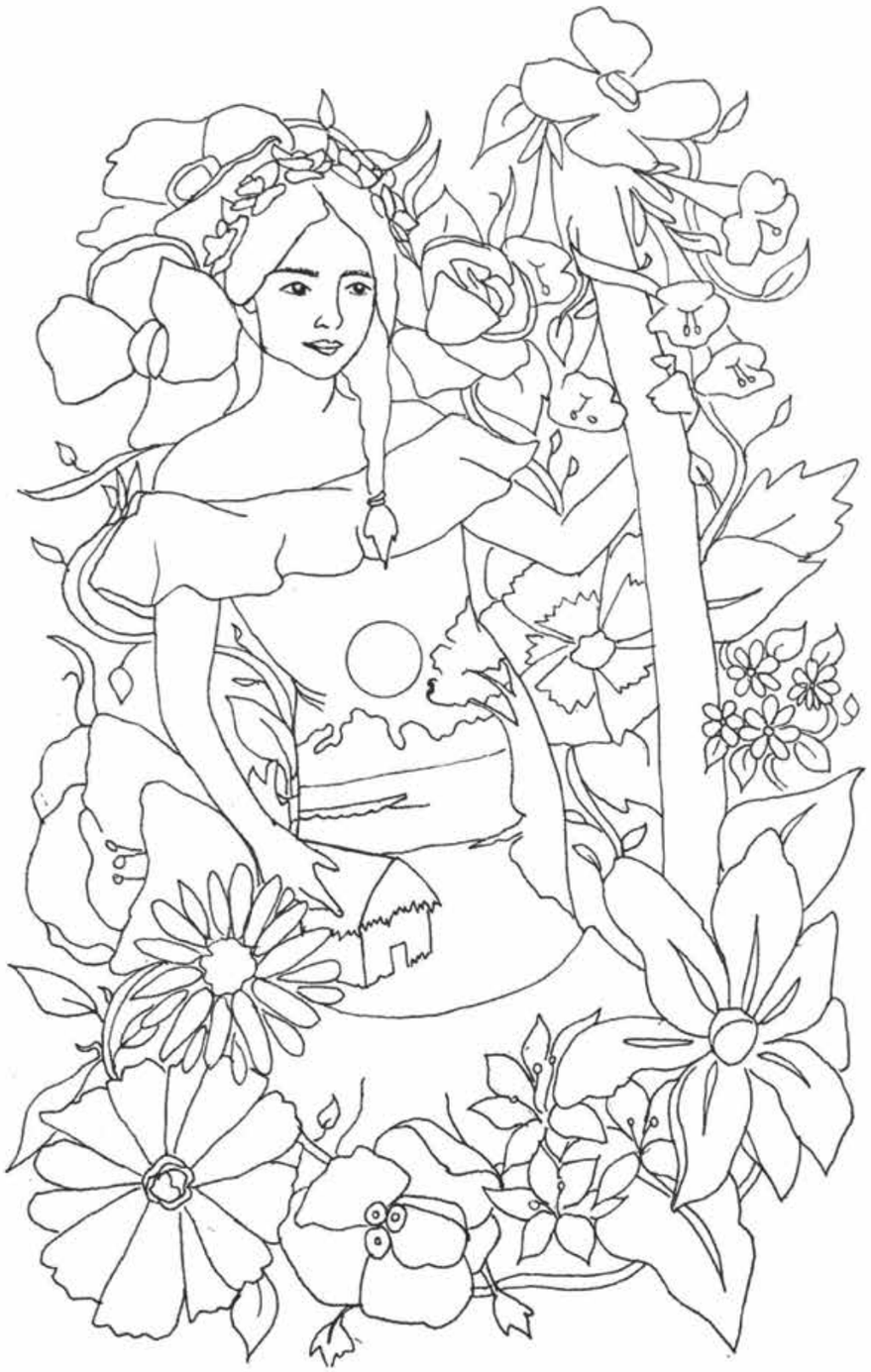
RECENT EXHIBITIONS

2018	Mayfly 17 Guerrilla Play Exhibition, Seoul, South Korea
2018	Busan International Environmental Arts Festival, Busan, South Korea
2018	Yongsan International Arts Festival, Seoul, South Korea
2017	Illustrated Women in History Exhibition, Swindon, UK

Jukumari

The "Jukumari "in one of its version is the myth of a half human, half bear. It is said the Jukumari was born and raised high up in the Andean mountain surviving off llama milk.

El ' Jukumari' en una de sus versiones es el mito de un ser mitad humano, mitad oso. Se dice que el Jukumari nació y se crió en lo alto de las montañas Andinas sobreviviendo solo de leche de llama.



Tipoy

A traditional folk dress from the lowland region of Bolivia. This hand painted dress is light and tropical, correlating with the hot climate of the region displaying typical scenery from Beni.

Un vestido popular tradicional de las tierras bajas de Bolivia. Este vestido pintado a mano es ligero y tropical, en correlación con el clima cálido de la región que muestra un paisaje típico del Beni

A MOUNTAIN CREAMERY COMES OF AGE

THE CHEESE IS SUBLIME – BUT THAT'S JUST ONE PART OF THE STORY

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER / PHOTO: GUIDO OBLITAS

Flor de Leche is known in La Paz for its high quality, locally produced cheeses and yoghurts. Back in 1998, it was the first local **quesería** to produce fine aged cheese, elevating the standard of cheese-making in Bolivia. Flor de Leche produces 42 products, ranging from cream cheese and butter to yoghurts and specialty cheeses, including Vacherin, Tilsit, Edam and Raclette, all produced and aged on site.

It started 20 years ago, when Stanislas Gilles de Pélichy, a Belgian agronomist, and his wife, Valentina Yanahuaya from the Bautista Saavedra province in the north of La Paz, were looking for their next enterprise after having worked in alternative education projects with several different NGOs. They wanted to start their own social project and, despite not knowing much about milk or cheese, they established Flor de Leche in Achocalla, a municipality 45 minutes south of La Paz.

Flor de Leche began as a small family business; the company had its first breakthrough in 2007, when it began to participate in the Bolivian government's maternity-subsidy-basket programme. Fifty percent of Flor de Leche's income comes from this programme, in which all pregnant Bolivian women receive four baskets of nutritional products. Flor de Leche now works with 180 local producers, processing 3,000 litres of milk daily and distributing its products across the country – although 80 percent of its production is sold in La Paz.

Flor de Leche was born out of the vision to produce high-quality products while respecting the environment and helping the local economy grow by giving opportunities to the people living in the area. And this is precisely what happened in Achocalla.

Flor de Leche's reputation precedes it. The company's Roca del Illimani is the best Parmesan cheese one can find in Bolivia, and its Achocalla is a Gruyére-like cheese which leaves nothing to envy from the Swiss-made original.

Weekend visitors to Flor de Leche can enjoy pizza, fondue or raclette in the on-site chalet, accompanied by Bolivian beer and wine and finished off with desserts created by Chef Ariel Ortiz.

But more important than just being a cheese company, Flor de Leche is an ecologically and socially conscious business. The staff have coined the term 'eco-social' to explain how their work is framed around economical, ecological and social principles. Flor de Leche employs 35 people, most whom are women and between 18 and 35 years old, either from Achocalla or nearby towns. Teresa Gilles, the company's strategic manager, insists that it's about 'revaluing the local workforce' and giving opportunities to young people with internships and apprenticeships, which allow them to receive training at Flor de Leche while completing their studies.

'We want to leave the least impact possible on the environment,' Gilles says, regarding the ecological side of their work model. This starts with the Flor de Leche team, who reduce the use industrial products, and extends to the company's water-recycling system. The acidic water resulting from the cheese-production process is treated with lye, cleaned and reused to irrigate small farms on company grounds. The whey, a byproduct of cheese-making, is rich in protein, and it benefits 65 families in the area who use it to feed their livestock.

Flor de Leche 'is part of something bigger,' Gilles explains. 'People don't know this side, what is behind the cheese... [Making cheese] is almost just a way for the [eco-social] project to live.' That project is **Granja Escuela**, 'a space for people to return to a closer contact with agriculture.' The idea is to train people, mainly locals and youths, in sustainable ways of cultivating the soil using solar heaters, recycled water, bio-digesters and gas produced from compost. Even Flor de Leche's composting toilets contribute to the company's total bioavailability: wetlands and worm farms feed off the nitrogen that they produce.

The philosophy of Flor de Leche is reflected on all levels. Decisions are made horizontally via working groups, and 50 percent of the company's revenue is invested in the community, mostly toward the funding of small social projects. The cheese-production method here has been refined and perfected to a high standard over the last 20 years, contributing to Flor de Leche's fame and luring cheese lovers to Achocalla. But that's just one part of a larger goal, and it is something worth paying attention to.

DECONSTRUCTING STUFF

ALMOST EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW EXPLAINED

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER / PHOTOS: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

LLAJUA

An important part of any Bolivian meal, this hot sauce is made out of tomato, **locoto** – a local and very strong red chilli – and Bolivian herbs. Chefs in La Paz use quirquiña, but huacatay or parsley can be used depending on the area. Everything is mixed together with water and salt to produce this potent sauce.

TULLMAS

Hair-braiding was practiced in the Andes since antiquity, and tullmas, made from camelid wool, are used to hold the braids together. After colonisation, braids and tullmas became a symbol of indigenous identity, and they're now part of the **cholita**'s iconic pack of accessories. Dark-brown or black tullmas are regularly worn to match Bolivian women's natural hair colour.

RELOJ DE LA PLAZA MURILLO

You may have noticed that the clock at the House of Congress on Plaza Murillo runs counterclockwise. This started in 2014, when Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca called it the 'Clock of the South' in order 'to get Bolivians to treasure their heritage and show them that they could question established norms and think creatively.' The rest of the country didn't start buying backwards clocks, though, and this **reloj** remains one of a kind.

PASANKALLA

From Copacabana, this is a variety of giant white corn which is puffed and turned into a sweet snack. Also known as **pororó** in the east of the country, it's a popular snack that aims to compete with popcorn in cinemas, and is even exported abroad, Canada being the first importer of the product.

HELADO DE CANELA

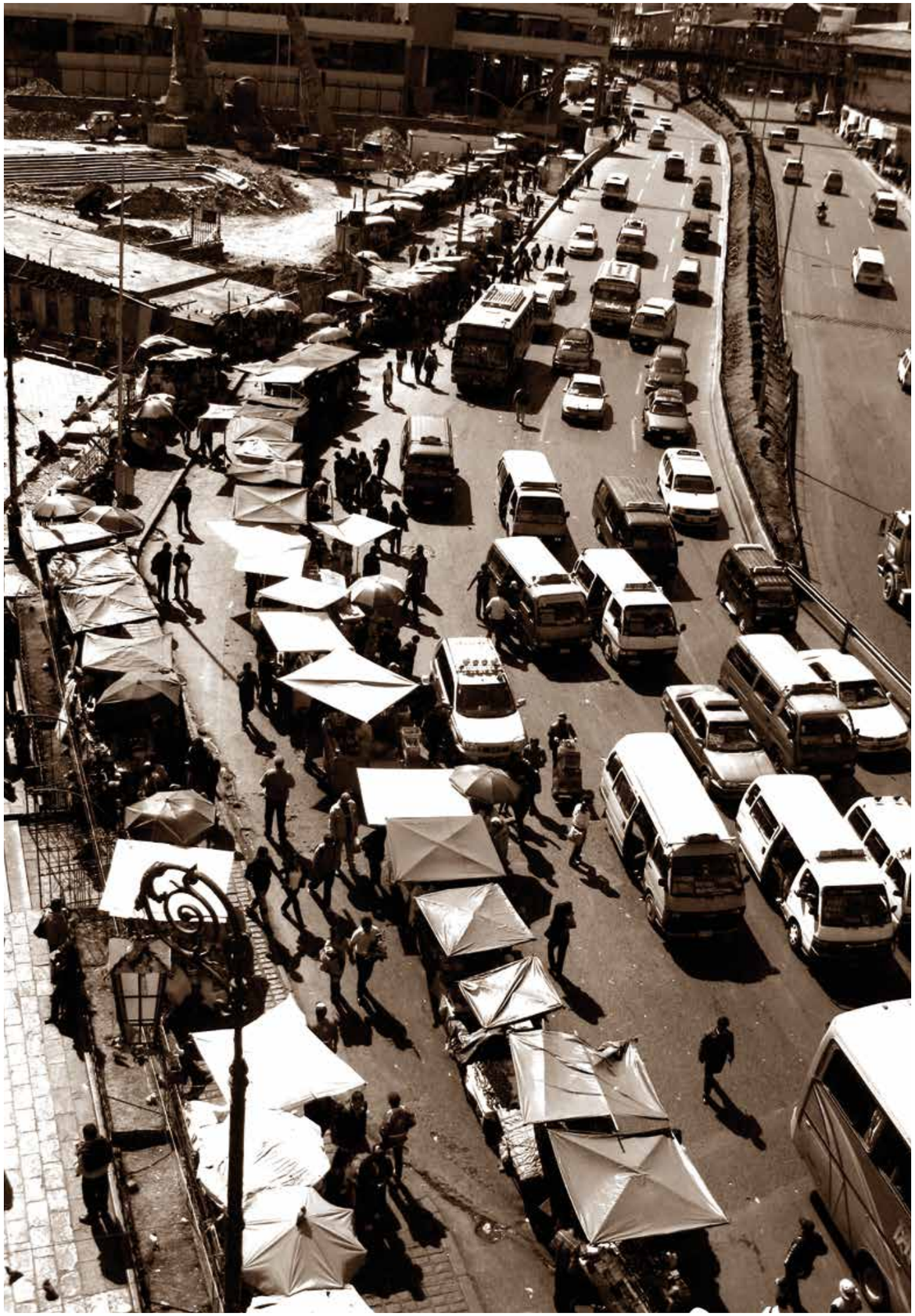
A traditional **paceño** snack, this cinnamon ice cream is one of the the most popular treats when the sun starts to strike in the afternoon. For over 60 years, it has been made artisanally all around the city, particularly around the general cemetery or Plaza Triangular. It was named a cultural patrimony of La Paz in 2012, and it's best enjoyed with a cheese empanada. It is made of cinnamon, sugar, water and a secret ingredient (which may explain its cherry colour).

MOCOCHINCHI

A popular and refreshing drink that you can recognise by its rusty colour and the dried peach – which is soaked in water overnight, then boiled with sugar and cinnamon – in each glass. Mocochinchi can be found almost anywhere in the streets of La Paz alongside other drinks such as **refresco de linaza** (flaxseed), *refresco* de quinoa or refresco de **cañahua**.

MULTIVITAMÍNICO

More than just a juice drink, the **multivitamínico** contains all that you need for the day (and much more): all the seasonal fruits available, celery, spinach, carrots, *cañahua*, raw eggs and sugar. Its colour can vary, and you can always ask your **caserita** to omit or add an ingredient according to taste. Don't forget to ask for your free refill, the **yapa**.



LIVING LA PAZ

TEXT: DAO AND JACK BROOKER / PHOTO: LORANGE DAO

Experiencing La Paz is to encounter the pandemonium and chaos of its traffic. However messy it may seem, some tacit laws do regulate it, principally: 'follow the flow', a rule which applies not only to the traffic but to life in general: metal music, swimming or comics, whichever might be your passion. Nevertheless, to survive financially all these artists and sportsmen are still obliged to follow a less glamorous occupation, whether that is studying or having a 'normal' job to pay the bills. So here we are with our fourth issue, bursting with La Paz's buzzing, traffic filled ambience. This issue's diverse collection of articles represents to us what the city is all about: an eclectic hub that arouses both locals' and foreigners' enthusiasm, and where people live, not necessarily from their passion, but for it. Get on board and experience living La Paz

Bolivian Express editorial
Issue 4 - 2010
full issue @ www.bolivianexpress.org

THE ART OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE

GALLERY OWNERS FREDY AND JONATHAN HOFMANN SET THE STAGE FOR BOLIVIAN ARTISTS

TEXT & PHOTOS: AUTUMN SPREDEMANN

The doors of Arte y Cultura Galería are open seven days a week, catching the eye of all who walk by with an impressive and colourful display of work by Bolivian artisans. Only a block away from 25 de Mayo Square in the city of Sucre, you'll find this one of a kind place that is uniquely dedicated to local artistry.

Since 2015, Fredy and Jonathan Hofmann, father and son owners of the shop, have been providing a space for local artisans to showcase their work. A far cry from the mass produced tourist tchotchke you find in so many places across the highlands, Arte y Cultura Galería has shined a light on some of Bolivia's most talented crafters, including internationally celebrated painter Roberto Mamani Mamani.

It all started with a backpacking trip in 1976, when Fredy Hofmann, who was born and raised in Switzerland, came to Bolivia for the first time and fell in love with the people and culture of the **altiplano**. In the spirit of a true traveler, he knew the only means of staying among the snow capped jewels of the Cordillera Real was to find a job in the area. Which is why he started working in a textile factory in La Paz.

By 1980, he had developed such an intimate knowledge of Bolivian textiles that he moved to Oruro to open a factory of his own. A few decades later, Hofmann was married and was the head of a growing family that split its time between the Swiss Alps and the Bolivian highlands.

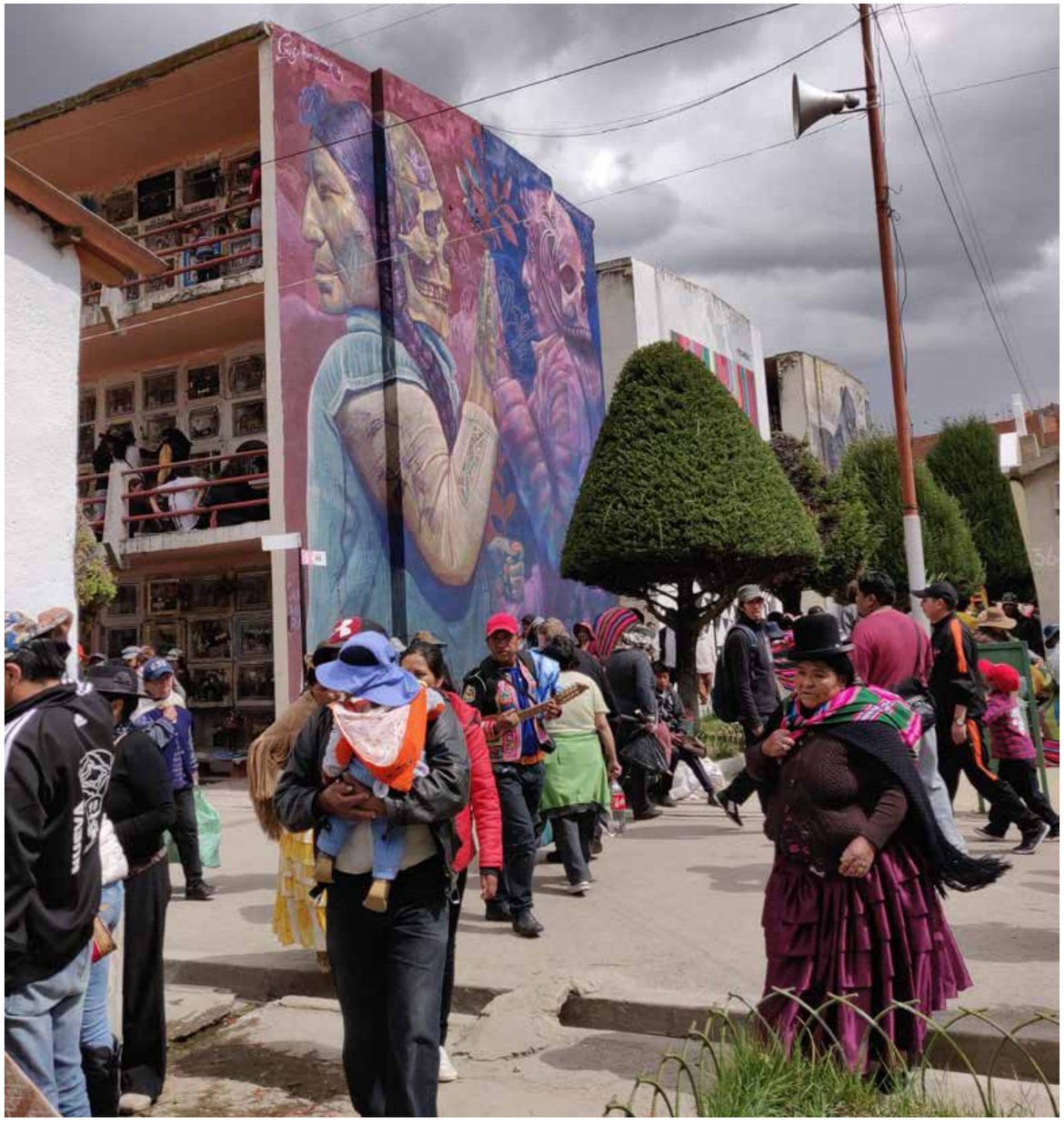
In 2009, however, Hofmann came to Sucre for something more than just a visit. His aim was to settle in the perpetual spring like climate of the high valleys.

Given Hofmann's appreciation and familiarity with Bolivian artistry and Jonathan's shared passion for these unique artforms, it seemed natural for father and son to create a space that properly featured local talent. When asked why he felt compelled to open a gallery in Sucre, Hofmann replies: 'Because we didn't have one here, but we have many talented artists.'

The curatorial vision of Arte y Cultura Galería makes a difference. It offers a way for Bolivian artisans to avoid the trap of reproducing standardised cultural goods for foreign and local clients. As is evident to a traveller of the Andes, there are certain colours and patterns that repeat themselves in local artwork throughout the highlands. Instead of adhering to this standard, Arte y Cultura celebrates individuality.

IT ALL STARTED WITH A BACKPACKING TRIP IN 1976 WHEN FREDY HOFMANN CAME TO BOLIVIA AND FELL IN LOVE WITH THE PEOPLE AND CULTURE OF THE ALTIPLANO.

Every fiber, every brush stroke, every stone or strand used as a medium by a local artist tells a story of its own. It's an expression of heritage and tradition that is as singular as the pattern of a snowflake.



IF THESE WALLS **COULD TALK**

MURALISM AS AN ART FORM TO TRANSFORM THE PUBLIC SPACES OF LA PAZ

TEXT & PHOTOS: JOSEPHINE ZAVAGLIA AND SOPHIE BLOW

Graffiti and street art have the ability to turn a city into a tourist destination. Such is the case of Berlin, Melbourne or Valparaíso. In Latin America, however, this medium not only attracts visitors, but often creates a forum for topics like death, resistance and revolution.

The difference between graffiti and street art is a question of legality. Whilst graffiti can be anything from tags and slurs to feats of efficiency, street art affords artists time to complete their work, as they have permission from either the state or the property owner.

Graffiti as an art form has yet to really take off in Bolivia. In La Paz, graffiti is slapdash, if not juvenile, although there are some interesting pieces along the embankments of the **autopista** entering La Paz from El Alto. Street art, however, has found a vibrant home and a welcoming audience in the city, turning La Paz into an open-air gallery.

The recent 'Meeting of Latin American Muralism' that took place at the Pipiripi children's museum in the Miraflores neighbourhood is a testament to La Paz's ever-growing street-art scene. The third installment of the annual event included over 150 Latin American and international muralists, who gathered at the idyllic vantage point that features one of the city's best views and can be seen from various parts of the city.

The theme of the event was 'Mother Nature', and the result was an awe-striking, colourful and thought-provoking display of enormous murals that transformed the space. In total, approximately 30 murals were completed during the **encuentro**, which took place over a two-week period between August and September 2018.

The General Cemetery, in the centre of La Paz, is another place to see the role that muralism plays in Bolivia. While death is a topic frequently shied away from or ignored in many Western cultures, here it takes on new heights. The murals that adorn the walls of the cemetery deal with this sensitive topic in thoughtful, honest and beautiful displays.

But muralism is not a new phenomenon in the Andes. From as early as the 1500s, evangelists used murals as a tool, although the art form was replaced by oil painting by the late 17th century, as Ananda Cohen Suarez writes in *Heaven, Hell and Everything in Between: Murals of the Colonial Andes*. There was a resurrection of muralism during Bolivia's 1952 National Revolution, and one of the most important artists from this period was Miguel Alandia Pantoja, from Potosí.

In one of the few interviews Alandia made during his lifetime, he said, 'Muralism takes popular myths and legends and the very life of the masses of miners and farmers in their fight… to express a rejuvenated and resounding language of the universal desire of man of our time: the revolution.'

GLOSSARY

BolivianExpress Magazine BX90

ALTIPLANO	Highlands
AUTOPISTA	Highway
CAÑAHUA	Species closely related to quinoa native from the Andes region
CASERITA	Term referring to someone selling or buying something
CHOLITA	Bolivian woman of indigenous decent, also referred to as chola
EL CENTRO	The centre
ENCUENTRO	Conference
GRAFITERO/A	Someone who makes graffitis
GRANJA ESCUELA	School Farm
JARDÍN BOTÁNICO	Botanical Garden
LOCOTO	Type of red chilli
MALABARISTA	A juggler
MICRO	Older three-quarter-sized buses used in La Paz
MUJERES CREANDO	'Women Creating', a Bolivian anarcha-feminist collective that participates in a range of anti-poverty work, including propaganda, street theater and direct action
MULTIVITAMÍNICO	Multivitamin juice
PACEÑO/A	From La Paz
PACHAMAMA	Mother Earth
PALLIRI	Women dedicated to rescuing ore among the waste or clearings
PORORÓ	Type of giant white puffed corn
QUESERÍA	Cheese shop or cheese factory
REFRESCO DE LINAZA	Soft drink made with flaxseed
RELOJ	Clock
SEGUNDO ANILLO	'Second ring', system of radials and rings surrounding Santa Cruz
TELEFÉRICO	Cable car
VALLE DE LAS FLORES	Valley of the Flowers
YAPA	Expression used to when purchasing from a market or a street stall to ask the vendor for a little bit extra

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