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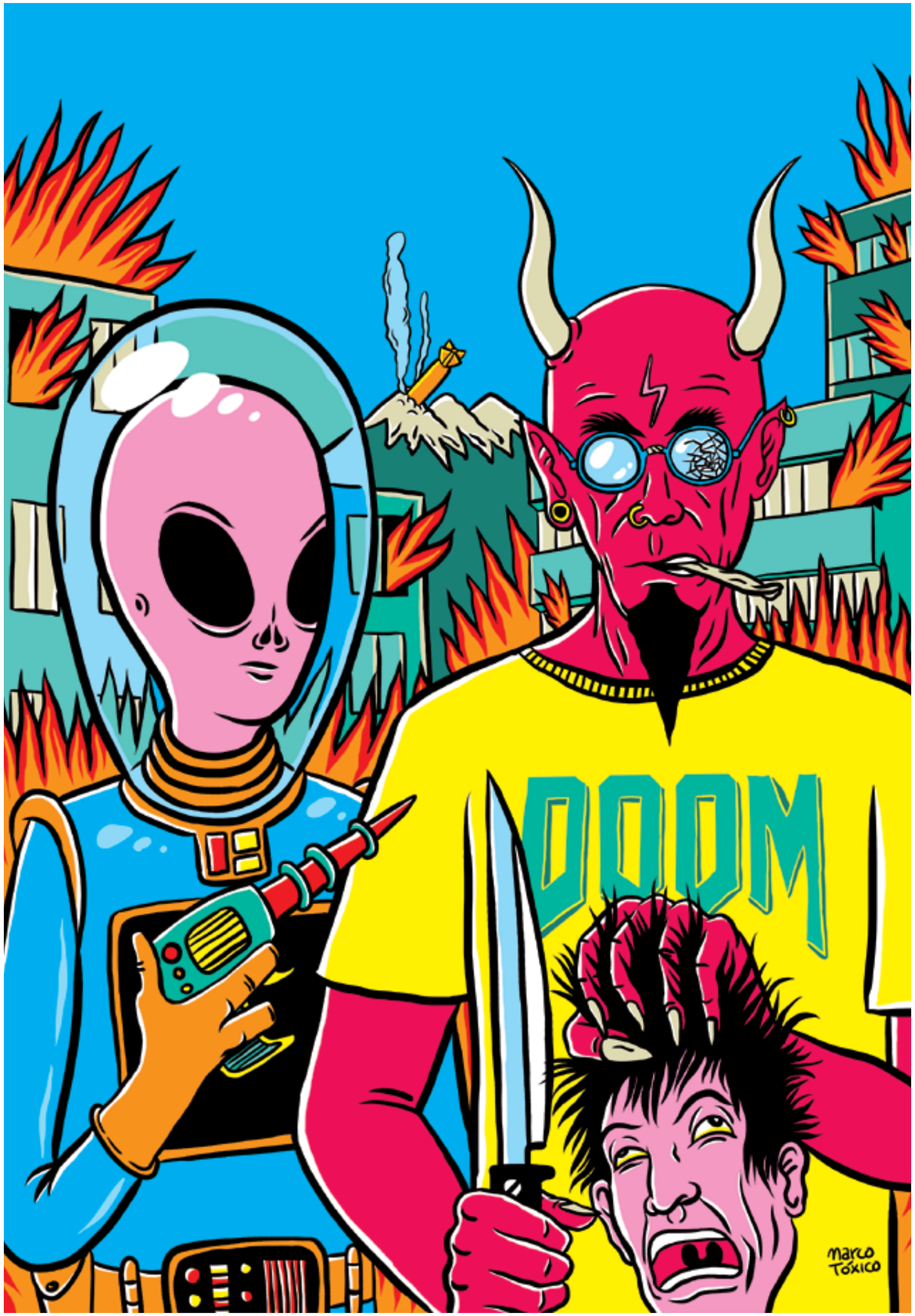
MIGRATION

PHOTO: MICHAEL DUNN / TEXT: OLLIE GOLDBLATT

Our 22nd issue, published in October 2012, focused on migration. Arguably one of the greatest transitions migrants experience in life, this issue explored the logistics, benefits and potential disappointments of leaving ones home country in search of a better life.



THE END OF THE WORLD

ILLUSTRATION: MARCO TÓXICO / TEXT: MARION JOUBERT

Back to our 24th issue in January 2013 - How Bolivia Is Going to Survive the Apocalypse – we reached the conclusion that the « end of the world » predicted by the Maya was rather the end of the « Coca-cola era », and then the start of a new cycle. Lucky you, you weren't destroyed by a meteor strike and got the chance to live in this new « vivir bien » period.

An era in which humans will be more respectful of the environment and each other. So as this new way of living will postpone for one more time the apocalypse and allow you to live longer and enjoy a few more paceñas.

Bolivia unlimited

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La Paz – Bolivia
May 2018

Thanks to: Jimmy Calla,director of Artistica BDB

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#83 *Longevity*

Editorial #83: Longevity

By: Caroline Risacher

'The New World', a term coined by Amerigo Vespucci in the 16th century to refer to the Americas, carries the idea that history on this side of the globe started when Columbus arrived to this 'undiscovered' continent. There is still a lingering misconception that there is not much history here in the Americas, that all is new here. However, the pre-Columbian civilisations have left a rich legacy behind that one can experience in the food, such as **chuño**, quinoa and **anticuchos**; the traditional dances of **Gran Poder**; the work of artists such as Roberto Mamani Mamani and Joaquín Sánchez; and the ruins of the Tiwanaku, Aymara and Inca cultures. Even the landscape tells a million-year-old story: the footsteps of dinosaurs imprinted in the sedimentary rocks of Torotoro National Park, where one can see the natural history of the world itself.

This issue of *Bolivian Express* wants to challenge this notion of 'the New World'. We want to embrace the past that surrounds us, whether we realise it or not. History binds us and survives in the customs and conscience of people, but history is also being written and shaped by the difficult and continuous struggles that the indigenous peoples of Bolivia have faced against wave after wave of colonisers.

One of these long and harrowing fights was the recognition of the victims of the 2003 Bolivian Gas War. It took 11 years of long judicial procedures to have their pain and suffering recognised. On 3 April 2018, a US court, under the Torture Victim Protection Act, declared former Bolivian president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and his minister of defence, Carlos Sánchez Berzaín, responsible for the violence that left 60 people dead and nearly 400 injured in El Alto. But 11 years is nothing compared to the centuries-long indigenous struggle to be acknowledged, and in this context, the **Goni** trial represents a huge step forward. It's the beginning of the end of impunity for foreign leaders who escape abroad from their crimes.

On a lighter note and facing a different type of oppression – but roaming now freely on the **altiplano** and experiencing a recovery in numbers since the 1960s, from 13,000 to 112,000 specimens – vicuñas are a fitting symbol of longevity despite long odds. The wool from this wild camelid, when properly processed, is one of the warmest and most water-resistant natural fabrics in the world, and it is highly coveted in the international market. The challenge is now to find sustainable ways for Andean communities to maintain and increase the population of this gracious relative of the llama.

But perhaps the secret to longevity is the menthol-based ointment called Mentisan, beloved by generations of Bolivians. Since 1938, this same recipe has been curing Bolivians from burns, bruises and afflictions of all types that they may suffer. After 80 years, Mentisan's longevity in the Bolivian market can be attributed to a long-lasting recipe and the loyalty of a people who, in all aspects of life, don't give up easily.

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

¡El Alto de Pie, Nunca de Rodillas!

TEXT: MATTHEW GRACE PHOTO: JOSE LUIS QUINTANA

In October of 2003, El Alto, La Paz's sister city on the edge of the altiplano, exploded in protest in response to the announcement of then–Bolivian President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada's government that it would begin exporting natural gas through Chile to the United States. When the dust settled, some 60 people would be dead and hundreds more wounded; Sánchez de Lozada would resign his presidency and flee to the United States; and the political foundation of Bolivia would undergo a profound transformation, in which indigenous **cocalero** leader Evo Morales would succeed to the presidency just two years later. The gas deal with the United States would die after the uprising, and a new, indigenous-led political landscape would begin to take shape. But the bereft families of 60 dead **alteños**, and the wounded survivors who had to begin new lives with debilitating injuries, would wait over a decade before seeing some form of justice – that is, until earlier this year, when Sánchez de Lozada and his former minister of defence, Carlos Sánchez Berzaín, were finally held accountable for the violence and deaths during those fateful days.

On 3 April 2018, a US federal jury found Sánchez de Lozada and Sánchez Berzaín to be responsible for the deaths of nine protesters during the Gas War, and they were ordered to pay US $10 million to the victims' survivors. The case was brought about by lawyers from Harvard Law School under the US Torture Victims Protection Act, which allows for civil suits in the United States against individuals who, acting in an official capacity, commit torture or extrajudicial killings. Thomas Becker, who initiated the case in 2005 as a student at Harvard Law School and is now an attorney at Harvard's International Human Rights Clinic, explains how he inadvertently stumbled onto the case: 'I came [to Bolivia] in May 2005…before I started law school, just to learn more about Bolivia and practice my really bad Spanish.' Demonstrations had erupted in El Alto to protest the presidency of Carlos Mesa, Sánchez de Lozada's successor, and La Paz was cut off by blockades. Becker was forced to walk to La Paz's Sopocachi neighbourhood, where he was staying. 'The city was shut down,' he says. 'I had to walk from the airport with my gringo backpack, and I had to walk through tear gas and blockades. And truthfully, that's where I first learned about what happened in 2003.'

Bolivia has a history of protests. As even travellers quickly learn, blockades, in which demonstrators cut off access to cities and towns by obstructing roads with large rocks or felled trees, are a way of life here. Reasons can vary from the prosaic (though still unjust), such as landowners limiting grazing rights to tenant farmers, to the critical, such as when Santa Cruz, the country's largest city and the seat of its industrial base, was blockaded in late 2008 for weeks due to clashes over the **Media Luna**'s attempt to achieve greater autonomy.

Historically, these blockades have been a response of the powerless minority to hold some sway over the political elite. Nearly 300 years ago, indigenous revolutionary Tupac Katari led an uprising against the Spanish colonial occupier. His siege, centred in El Alto, lasted six months and blockaded La Paz completely before Spanish reinforcements crushed the insurrection.

And so this spirit of protests, demonstrations, even insurrection is commonplace in the Bolivia of today, and certainly it was 15 years ago, as Sánchez de Lozada's neoliberal reforms were confronted on the edge of the altiplano.

In 2003, Mónica Apaza was a youth leader of the Federation of Neighbourhood Councils-El Alto (FEJUVE), an *alteño* social-justice organisation. She's now part of the Jach'as collective at Radio Pachamama, a radio station in the La Ceja neighbourhood of El Alto whose reporters covered the Gas War extensively. She remembers the events leading up to the conflict: 'So **Goni** [Sánchez de Lozada's nickname] wanted to export gas via Chilean ports… We decided that this shouldn't happen. We convened all the presidents of the FEJUVE of El Alto and we organised an assembly. We discussed that declaration from *Goni*, and we agreed that we wouldn't let this happen.' The protesters started with three days of blockades, and the demonstrations soon grew to include much of El Alto.

The Bolivian government immediately reacted. It didn't want a replay of the 1999-2000 Cochabamba Water War, in which protesters managed to expel from the country the US company that was charged by the Bolivian government with privatising Cochabamba's water company.

Sánchez de Lozada and Sánchez Berzaín ordered the military to contain the protests in El Alto. According to witness testimony at their trial, in meetings they discussed mass killings to suppress protests. 'They needed to send the military, bring in the military from the east, because the people from the altiplano wouldn't kill their own people,' Becker says. And, as a witness said at the trial, 'They need to kill a thousand people to send a message to the social movements.'

And thus the killings began. The military fired blindly into crowds. One of the first killed was an 8-year-old girl. David Inca, a human-rights activist who is also a member of the Jach'as collective, was helping the injured as the military started its attack. 'People were screaming: "There's a fatality! There's a fatality!"' he said. 'It was a [another] kid that had died... The neighbours took me to where the kid had died. The boy wasn't there anymore, but I met his siblings and the grandma and they showed me where it had happened... There was a lot of blood. I never saw the boy, but they showed me from where he had been shot, from a bridge, Puente Bolivia. What shocked me is that it was very far away, the boy's house was really far away from the conflict. It was strange, why did they shoot the boy?'

Casualties started to add up: A pregnant woman was gunned down in her house. Even soldiers were attacked by their fellow conscripts. Ela Trinidad Ortega was brutally beaten by the military after she witnessed a high-level officer execute a conscript who refused orders to shoot upon the unarmed crowd in the Río Seco neighbourhood. Another officer ordered her to be executed, which she only narrowly survived because a distraught, crying conscript, not wanting to kill her, begged her to play dead. Fifteen years later, she told her story in the US court as Sánchez de Lozada looked on impassively.

Eventually, the demonstrations subsided in El Alto, and the extrajudicial killings by the Bolivian military slowed and ceased. But the country was in chaos. Popular outrage over the killings eventually forced Sánchez de Lozada to resign his presidency and eventually flee the country. Carlos Mesa, his vice president, continued to have difficulty with mass protests throughout the country, led by one ascendant *cocalero*. Soon, Evo Morales would be elected to the chief executive position, and a new indigenous-led government would grab the reins of power.

And here we are today. The Bolivian state, despite having weathered several more fractious political confrontations, seems relatively stable, given its past. Justice, in part, has been served to Sánchez de Lozada and Sánchez Berzaín. They remain free in the United States, but they have been found culpable by a US jury in the killings of nine people during the Gas War of 2003, and they are now legally compelled to pay out US $10 million to the survivors. But, as Thomas Becker says, 'Money isn't justice.' Justice would mean that that those that were killed would still be alive, and of course that cannot happen. Frankly, *Goni* and Sánchez Berzaín should be here, and they should be tried in front of Bolivians,' Becker says. 'And the Bolivian people should decide whether they are responsible or not.' But that isn't an option, at least for now, as the United States has refused to extradite the two despite repeated requests from the current Bolivian government. Sánchez de Lozada and Sánchez Berzaín 'chose to go to the United States and use the United States as a refuge,' Becker adds. 'So the victims followed them there, which I think is a powerful message, that OK, you can run away, but we're never going to let you rest.'

SAVING THE VICUÑA

TEXT: NIAMH ELAIN / PHOTOS: DANIEL MAYDANA

THE CREATURE WITH PRECIOUS WOOL THAT ALMOST WENT EXTINCT

With Bambi eyes and neat, pointy ears, the slender, tawny vicuña is noticeably more elegant than its shaggy llama and alpaca cousins. It's hard to believe that this ostensibly delicate creature, robust enough to roam the oxygen-starved altiplano, was once almost a bygone species. In the 1960s, when the number of vicuñas in the world dropped to less than 10,000, the Bolivian and Peruvian governments made an attempt to save the creature. The two governments signed an agreement that made it illegal to hunt the animal and designated protected areas for the vicuña in the form of national parks and natural reserves. The effort certainly succeeded in recovering its numbers. A 2009 census confirmed the existence of around 112,000 vicuñas, up from 13,000 in 1969. The challenge now is not only to maintain its population but to find sustainable ways to benefit from this potentially lucrative resource.

It is no secret that the vicuña's value is as much ecological as it is economic. the silky-softness of the fabric yielded from its wool, treated and conditioned, is as coveted as cashmere in the textile industry. Untreated wool is priced at between US $350 and US $600 per kilo, and a finished product, like a scarf or a poncho, can sell for anything between US $2,000 to a whopping US $50,000.

Indeed, the rusty-hued hairs of the vicuña may very well be mistaken for threads of gold. This is why the vicuña has historically been a highly-revered creature and, naturally, highly in-demand. In the Pre-Columbian era, its luxurious wool clothed figures of high social status and was treated with a quasi-religious respect. Back then, the method used to obtain vicuña wool consisted in a ritual, called 'chaku', that involved gathering and shearing the creatures before returning them to the wild. The arrival of Spanish colonists, however, gave rise to a hunting trend that spelled the vicuña's gradual demise. With no respect for indigenous beliefs but a fervent desire for the animal's supple coat, they hunted the vicuña without control nor restriction, with a ruthless frequency that brought the species to the brink of extinction.

The vicuña cannot be raised because it resists domestication. The sheer effort of capturing them in the wild was, and still is, enough to encourage hunters to prefer shooting and skinning them over the traditional 'chaku' method. Admittedly, the cost of assembling, hiring and feeding a team of 50 to 60 able-bodied people (which is the necessary number for a successful capture) is undeniably high. Added to this, months of careful observation are required in order to determine the best time and place to seize them. Prior to the attempted round up, one must monitor the migration and grazing habits of the elusive camelid herd. The use of the traditional method, however, although demanding, is key not only to protect the country's biodiversity, but also to diversify its economy. This is because the vicuña shares the Andean highlands with some of Bolivia's rural and poorest communities.

Daniel Maydana, who runs a sustainable tourism programme in Potosí, has been working for the conservation of the species. His programme, which is sponsored by the Embassy of Canada, supports indigenous communities that inhabit the vicuña's protected areas to shear the creature at a certain time each year, encouraging the integration of these communities to form cooperatives and stronger corralling teams. The promotion of this method is essential to establish a law-abiding technique to obtain vicuña wool and allow locals to profit from this resource in a sustainable way.

Though it's a Bolivian resource with great economic potential, Bolivia doesn't have its own efficiently-functioning vicuña wool industry. Selling it with value-added rather than as a raw material would greatly increase its economic value. Since the country's colonisation, however, the techniques for treating the wool have been gradually lost over the centuries. Without any government support the industry cannot thrive. Maydana's project, for example, receives no support from the Bolivian government. 'We receive no public funding,' he says. 'Not a single person from the ministry has even paid our communities a visit, to see the work that we do.'

Due to this local loss of technical know-how, the vicuña wool that is sold in Bolivia has been previously exported, woven into a product, and then imported back into the country, making it impossibly expensive. The high prices for these goods encourage the existence of a black-market that serves wealthy backpackers or **cholitas** who don vicuña wool for occasions such as the festival of **Gran Poder** coming up this month. According to Maydana, most vicuña wool products sold in Bolivia are made from illegally sourced material. Although the punishment for illegal traders is three to six years in prison, criminals somehow seem to slip through the legal net, circumventing the wool certification process. This uncertified wool is smuggled across the border to Peru, where it is often mixed with wool from other camelids to make a cheaper piece of clothing. As a result, there is no guarantee as to the quality and purity of most garments sold locally.

'IT'S A STRANGE THING THAT HAPPENS HERE IN BOLIVIA, THIS LACK OF RELIANCE ON, OR EVEN AWARENESS OF HOW TO BENEFIT FROM, OUR RESOURCES AND THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET... IT'S A COUNTRY THAT'S CLOSED TO THE WORLD.'

—DANIEL MAYDANA

In addition to internal distribution issues surrounding vicuña-wool products, there are also significant obstacles when it comes to accessing the international market. Although the majority of the wool collected in Bolivia is shipped to manufacturers in the United States, China and Europe, the wool must first pass a complex certification procedure to be declared legal and thus exportable. The certification process can be slow and arduous. From the moment of closing a sale to receiving payment for the wool, a merchant could be waiting for up to 20 months. The processing time was recently reduced to seven months, but last year it climbed back up to 14 months. By contrast, the median waiting time in Peru is no more than three weeks.

'Banal things such as administrative obstacles and judicial insecurity are holding us back,' Maydana says. Another bureaucratic hurdle is that sellers have to register as exporters, and their registration (which takes weeks to finalise in the first place) can be annulled for reasons such as not making a sale in a given amount of time. In Peru, this registration is valid for life, regardless of sales activity. 'All they need is a piece of paper,' Maydana says. 'Instead, it's a torture here.'

Maydana points out that, 'It is a strange thing that happens here in Bolivia, this lack of reliance on, or even awareness of how to benefit from, our resources and the international market. Unlike Peru,' he explains, 'which has an established an alpaca wool industry and is a country known for its alpacas, this is a country that's closed to the world.'

Although there is faith that the number of living vicuñas will climb to 400,000 by the next census, it remains to be seen whether administrative improvements will have been made so that the people of Bolivia can benefit from this thriving recuperation.

TOROTORO

TEXT & PHOTOS: NIAMH ELAIN

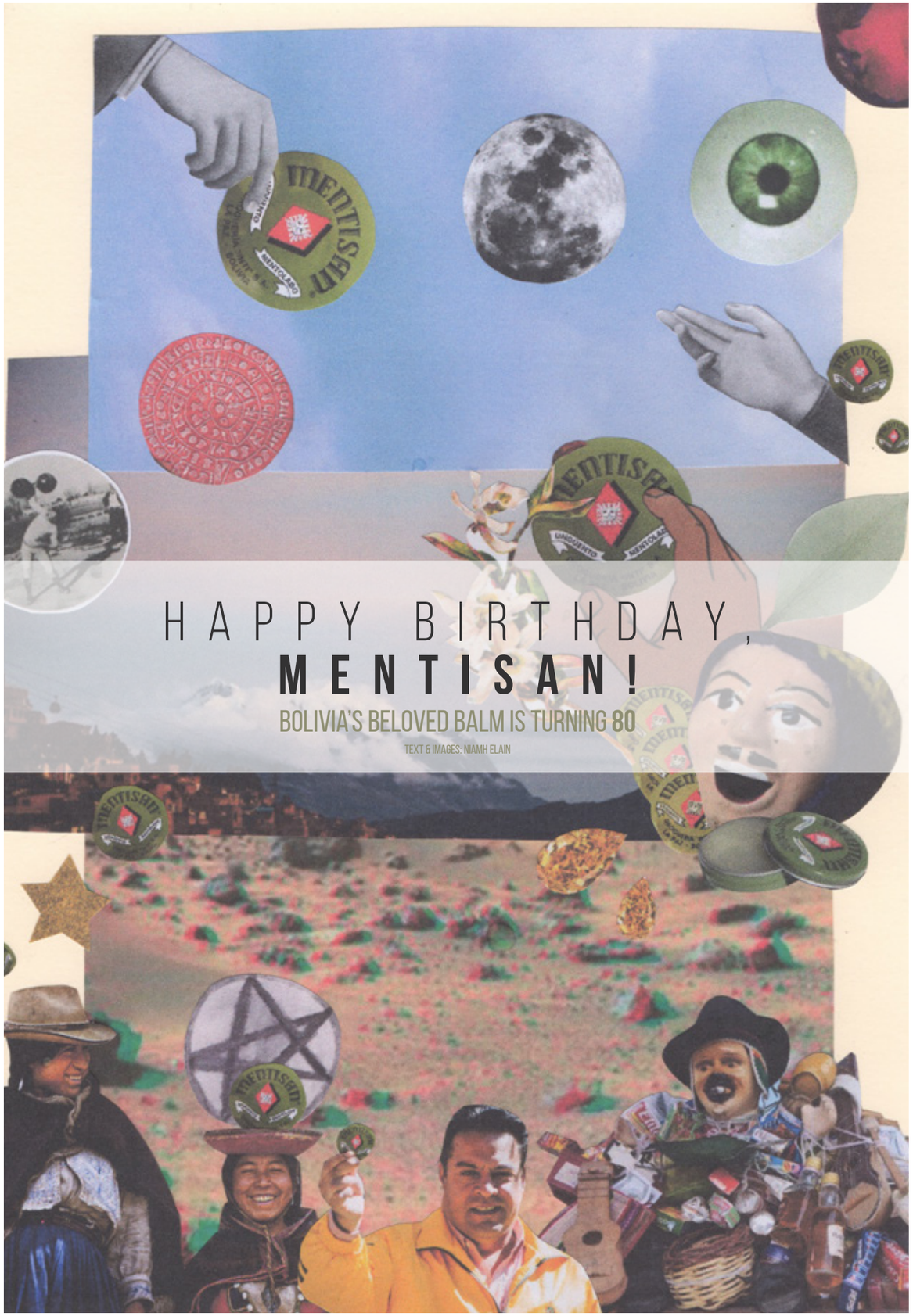
We clamber, bleary-eyed, onto the minibus that will take us from Cochabamba to our final destination. On the bus's sliding door, an enormous picture of a roaring Tyrannosaurus rex identifies our destination. We discover that Torotoro, a small village in the centre of the national park with which it shares its name, really capitalises on this brand: giant plastic T. Rexes lurch out from roofs and tower over park benches; one even bursts through the glass doors of the town's council hall.

A new day dawns and our guiding light is Redi, who will show us the El Vergel route. Behind his sunglasses lie a wealth of Cretaceous knowledge and dinosaur puns. He informs us that dinosaurs roamed the site that is now known as Torotoro sometime before Christ. We ask him when did Torotoro as a village come to exist. Again, he says, sometime before Christ.

After two hours of trekking, we are huffing and puffing. It is time for another break. It is definitely time for more snacks. The next 40 minutes of walking bring us through the canyon and to a misty waterfall cascading down onto enormous rocks, etched with the names of past ***toroteño*** *tourists. We stare for a bit, we eat another guava each ('dinosaur snacks,' Redi calls them). The bravest of us wades into the edenic pool into which the waterfall pours. Redi comes to sit very close and starts reading facts about dinosaurs to me from what can only be an illustrated children's book. It is time to leave.*

Near the trail's end, we have a beer ('dinosaur fuel,' Redi calls it) in a lone ramshackle café atop the canyon cliff. We take in the breathtaking panorama before heading back to the village.

With the sun flooding the cold, blue mountains the next morning, we start on the long road back home. Or the 'dinosaur road,' as Redi would have called it.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY, **MENTISAN!**

BOLIVIA'S BELOVED BALM IS TURNING **80**

TEXT & IMAGES: NIAMH ELAIN

A tin of Mentisan is as common in a Bolivian household as a bible in a hotel room. The menthol ointment was invented here back in 1938, which is why this special Bolivian concoction is turning 80 this year. Taking a queue from its name, a combination of 'menta' (mint) and 'sanar' (to heal), this product does exactly what it says on the tin. Actually, it does a little more than that too.

Its German inventor, Ernesto Schilling, migrated to Bolivia in the 1920s. His aim was to create a product that would alleviate the symptoms of the common cold, an illness that is rife in the Andean altiplano; and what he came up with has certainly been successful. Massaged directly onto the chest or onto sore, rubbed-raw noses, or vaporised to decongest the respiratory tract, Mentisan's effectiveness made it an instant hit in the country. Not long after its conception, Bolivians started using the ointment for other ailments. The cherished product is now used to calm rheumatic as well as neuralgic pains, and to relieve burns caused by flames and sun rays alike. It's also said to have the power to heal insect bites, moisturise cracked heels, and even fade bruises. In short, it serves as a multi-purpose, miracle, cure-all product.

Its healing abilities are so well-known here that, although it is sold on a prescription-free basis, even doctors recommend Mentisan as a kind of home remedy. 'People know that Mentisan cures everything and that if they apply it, everything will be OK,' claims Ronald Gutierrez, who works at the business department of Inti Laboratories, the sole manufacturer of the product. According to Gutierrez, since the ingredients of Mentisan are all natural, you can even use the paste on an open wound. It may not heal the wound, he says, but it won't aggravate it either. In its long history producing Mentisan, Inti Laboratories has never received a formal complaint about the product failing to deliver the palliative results it promises. The only issues that have emerged in the past involved people who were having trouble opening the tin container. With the can's new design, however, it's even easier now for people to get their hands on, and fingers in, the stuff.

Given Mentisan's success in the Bolivian market, there have been attempts to launch knock-off products in the country. There was once a reddish-tinted Chinese ointment circulating in the pharmaceutical market and there is, of course, the commercial giant, VicksVapoRub. But both threats were short-lived. 'Vicks', and other similar products fail utterly to enter the Bolivian market because Bolivians are already so committed to Mentisan,' says Gutierrez. Inti's only factory situated in El Alto is exclusively dedicated to producing the balm and manufactures around six million units annually. Some of them are exported to Peru, Germany, Macau, the United States, and Denmark. The rest are sold in pharmacies and supermarkets across Bolivia.

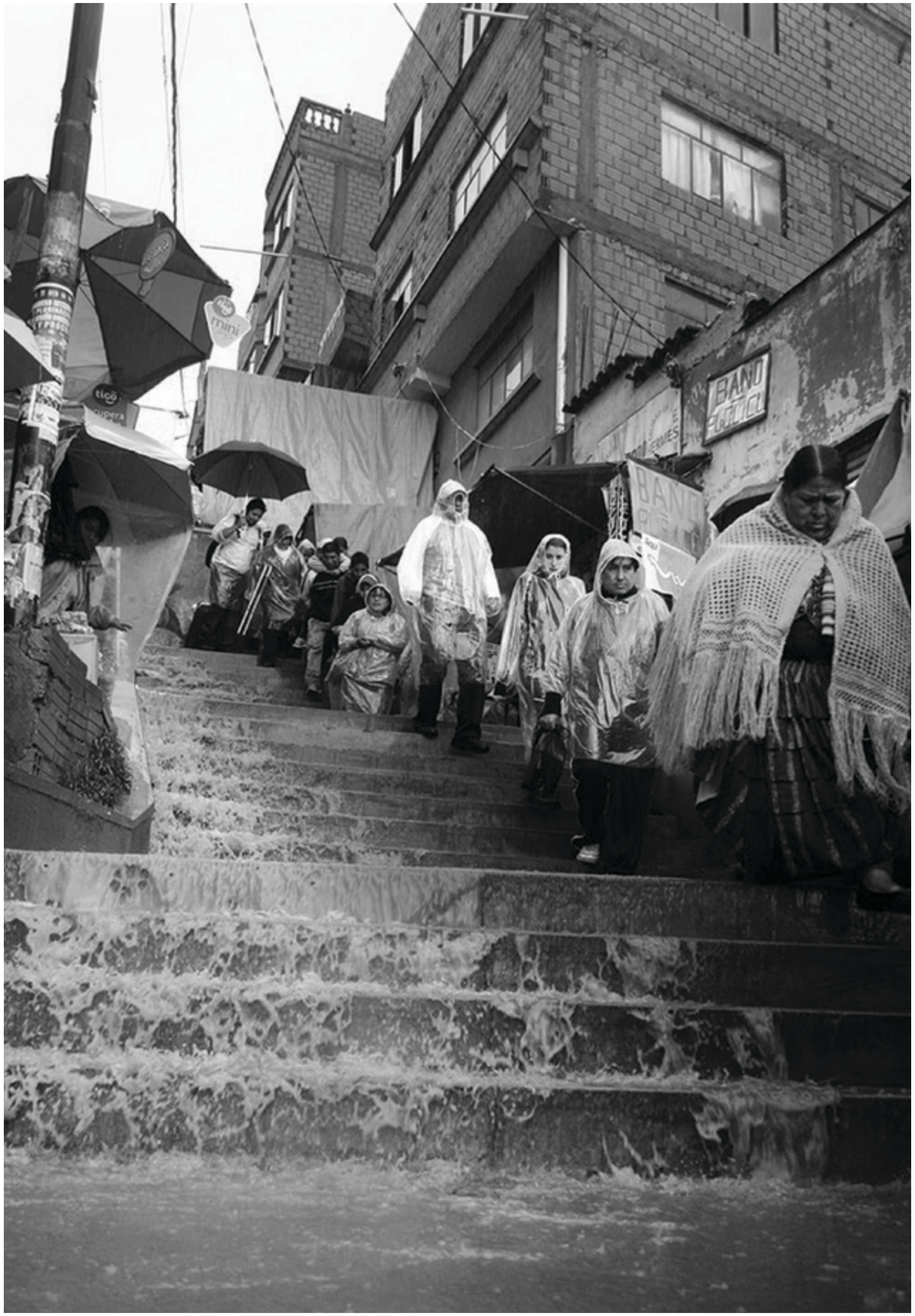
So, what's the winning formula? Emollient petroleum jelly, to soothe and hydrate; essential oils of eucalyptus and pine, to calm and clear the throat; and menthol, which

works as a light antibacterial. Despite being well into retirement age, Mentisan's recipe has barely changed over the years. Perhaps it is the recipe's simplicity that makes Mentisan such an effective and timeless product. Quality and consistency are the most important factors in Mentisan's production, says Gutierrez, meaning Bolivians come back to it time and again. It's dependable, like a backbone. But slippery.

Since Bolivians were frequently using Mentisan as a lip balm Inti Laboratories released an 8g tube applicator designed especially for this purpose. It now appears alongside the tiny 15g and 25g tin containers, but they all contain the same stuff. The underpinning philosophy of 'if it isn't broken, don't fix it' has also been applied to Mentisan's seemingly unwavering branding. The alterations that have been made to its distinctive logo and complimentary colours have been only to adapt the product for sale in foreign markets. The tin sold in Germany, for example, has a more clinical appearance: a dentist-chair turquoise is separated from a marine blue background with a white toothpaste-stripe, curved in the shape of a nose in profile. But the Bolivian packaging doesn't need to be so suggestive of its pharmaceutical benefits since they are already common knowledge. Indeed, keeping the packaging similar to the original only consolidates the staple product's status as a national treasure. It is as charmingly familiar – and stubbornly unchanging – as an old relative. And just as loved.

WHY DO YOU USE MENTISAN? - A STREET SURVEY

- BECAUSE IT CURES EVERYTHING THAT HURTS ME
- MY MOTHER USES IT, AND I TRUST MY MOTHER
- I WAS BORN WITH IT
- MY GRANDMOTHER TOLD ME TO
- IT'S RICH, MINTY STUFF
- EVERY BOLIVIAN USES MENTISAN; IF THEY DON'T, THEY'RE NOT REALLY BOLIVIAN



MOVING HOME

TEXT: NIAMH ELAIN

Our 22nd issue (October 2012) had as its central focus that of Bolivian migration. 'Paradoxically,' Amaru Villanueva Rance wrote in our editorial, 'many of the central questions surrounding migration are more fruitfully explored by examining its reverse process – the Return.' Indeed, the articles, interviews, and stories that featured in the issue, more often than not, were tales of enduring love for the migrants' homeland.

TATA JACH'A DANZANTI

THE DANCE OF DEATH

TEXT: ADRIANA L. MURILLO ARGANDOÑA / PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

'Let him die dancing, so he will pay for his faults.' This is a phrase from the movie *The Clandestine Nation*, made by Jorge Sanjinés in 1989. The film features the ritual tradition of Tata Jach'a Danzanti, a ritual in which a member of a community has to redeem himself with his people for some fault he has committed – by dancing to death.

The tradition of Tata Jach'a Danzanti is practiced in the Aymara culture, specifically in the Pongonhuyo-Achacachi communities of the Omasuyos province of La Paz. Tata Jach'a Danzanti translates roughly to 'Great Lord Dancer', and there is a great deal of mysticism surrounding this ritual. One of the ways in which it is understood is as punishment of the dancer for letting his community down. Another is that the dance is a sacrifice of a member of the community to increase the earth's fertility, regulating the agricultural calendar. In either case, the chosen one is prepared for the feat by being given food, drink and even virgin women. He then dances for three days in a row without rest until he dies.

According to Milton Eyzaguirre, anthropologist for MUSEF (the Museum of Ethnography and Folklore), 'It is a ritualistic phenomenon that is very interesting, because the dance is only the representation of a ritual that has a lot to do with the support that is given to a community.' In a 2007 documentary made by MUSEF, the tradition is presented as a **Preste** festival, related to a celebration organised by a member of the community in honour of a Catholic figure such as San Pablo.

Whatever the true significance of the dance, it shows its syncretism through different manifestations in the Bolivian Andean culture and, in particular, the Aymara culture. On the one hand, we see the figures of saints and virgins linked to the Catholic faith, and on the other the Andean cosmovision that shows the representations of mystical rituals. 'Death, for example, is not something negative in the Andean cosmovision,' says Jimmy Calla professional choreographer and director of Artistica BDB-Ballet of Bolivia. 'Village traditions are different, since death is something symbolic, a part of life.'

Calla explains the characteristics of the dance, El Tata Jach'a: 'The dance has peculiar rhythms with four beats per bar, which are repeated throughout the dance. The instruments used are a pinquillo, a kind of long **quena** [Andean pipe], and a wankara [an instrument similar to a **bombo**]. A colourful costume is worn, comprising a blazer along with a skirt or leggings and brogues. A heavy mask is with an undefined zoomorphic shape is worn – it looks something like a toad, with large ears and pronounced lips. The dance has no strict steps; one must only move to the rhythm of the music, grabbing onto the mask. It's very simple.'

El Tata Jach'a was presented at the festival of **Gran Poder** in La Paz for the first time in 2017. With much anticipation already among the public, this year's festival will be held on Saturday, May 26. This dance will be performed along with many other traditional dances. Bolivian culture in general is enigmatic and mystical, and it is kept alive by the marvellous city of La Paz and the recognition it receives of the value and cultural contribution of the dances of the indigenous population.

THE DEATH OF THE POST OFFICE

TEXT: CAROLINE RISACHER / PHOTO: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

If you've tried to send postcards, letters or packages from Bolivia in the past couple of months, you may have encountered some difficulties – and this for a tragic yet very simple reason: The Bolivian post office has closed.

On 1 March 2018, the government announced via Supreme Decree 3495 that the Postal Company of Bolivia (ECOBOL) would be permanently closed due to massive debt. According to the La Paz–based newspaper La Razón, ECOBOL had accumulated an impressive 37 million bolivianos – about 5 million USD – of debt in unpaid taxes in the last 20 years. And that's just the minimum – some other sources report a debt of 200 million bolivianos. More alarmingly, 30 tons of undelivered parcels were sitting in ECOBOL offices around the country as of 1 March 2018, and over 300 workers were left without a job.

However, the decree also announced the creation of a new agency to replace the defunct ECOBOL, the Agencia Nacional de Correos, which is meant to take over the operations and modernise the service. To date, the new agency has been busy dispatching the undelivered letters and packages to a disgruntled population that has been waiting in some cases for over six months to have their packages merely identified.

Receiving packages and letters in Bolivia has always been an unpredictable affair, due to several factors. First, there are no postmen in Bolivia. ECOBOL used to contract private couriers, and official documents were also delivered via private companies; the profession of postman never quite existed here in the same way as in other countries. Second, Bolivian houses don't have mailboxes. Some residences have a small slit in their doors, allowing for letters to be passed through, but **buzones** are not commonplace. And postal codes? They are just not used. Delivery waiting times vary from weeks to months, and where I live, bills and official documents are usually dropped on the ground on the other side of my front

gate. It's quite easy to overlook the mail as it just lies unattended on the concrete and is exposed to the elements, or the wind blows it into the rose bushes. (Maybe this is how ECOBOL accumulated such heavy debt – it never received its bills!)

It would be easy to blame the advance of online shopping and private couriers such as Amazon and DHL, but it seems that ECOBOL's debt is more than the result of simple financial trouble and poor management. Bolivia's crisis feels more atemporal. The postal system never really quite worked properly here. And the closure of the post office happened quietly, to general indifference from the Bolivian people. No one seemed surprised, nor did they seem to care, and when discussing the topic with other Bolivians, I'd receive confused and intrigued looks from them, as if they were saying, 'Why does she care so much about the post office?'

Perhaps there's a reason for that. The postal service never quite worked here – it's always been a system imposed onto a culture that never really needed it. The main post office was always this odd place that existed, sure, but I would never venture there, unless to show how out-of-this-world it looked like. And maybe modernity did play a role: Instead of sending letters, people now use WhatsApp to get in touch with family and friends, and when sending packages, the most common way has always been the **encomienda**, in which bus companies drop parcels off at corresponding terminals for the receiver to collect.

Eventually, and under a new name but located in the same premises, the postal service will fully resume its activities. Meanwhile, modernisation of the system is overdue and maybe – just maybe – a new postal service could allow Bolivians to be better connected to the world and to each other.

¡JALLALLA!

AN ARTIST'S NEW VISION BRINGS A NOVEL SPIN TO TRADITIONAL BOLIVIAN FOOD AND DRINK

TEXT: MATTHEW GRACE / PHOTOS: IVAN RODRIGUEZ PETKOVIC

Acclaimed Bolivian painter Roberto Mamani Mamani is known for his intensely colourful depictions of Andean pastoral scenes. He's gained fame over his 30-year career by churning out iconoclastic near-psychedelic likenesses of **cholitas** perched atop mountain peaks and the flora and fauna of the **altiplano**. But, no longer content with being one of Bolivia's most recognised contemporary artists, Mamani Mamani has in recent years been carving out a new niche on La Paz's Calle Jaén, a rare stretch of colonial calm in the centre of the hectic city.

Mamani Mamani's new venture, the restaurant and club Jallalla – which shares space in an immense colonial building with the Centro de Artes Mamani Mamani and the Fundación Para Desarrollo Artístico Cultural Mamani Mamani – will have its grand opening on May 25. Already up and running on the second story of Mamani Mamani's house and headquarters, the richly detailed space has been hosting Bolivian and foreign visitors alike in the lead-up to its official opening. Its intimate interior is dominated by an enormous mural painted on the ceiling, depicting what Mamani Mamani calls his 'Andean cosmovision.' Sun and moon figures loom above restaurant-goers, surrounded by stars, an Andean cross, figures of men and, of course, the **Pachamama** gazing down upon the room.

But if it's Mamani Mamani's celebrity that gets patrons in Jallalla's doors, it's the live music, polished service and visionary gastronomy that keeps them coming back. Jallalla is one of the new breed of restaurants that has lately begun to transform La Paz's centre, along with renowned establishments such as Popular, Ali Pacha and HB Bronze. These boîtes are part of a culinary scene in La Paz that was kick-started by Gustu, in **Zona Sur**, in 2013. That celebrated venture, which consistently ranks as one of Latin America's top restaurants, has upped the hospitality game in La Paz, and enriched its sister restaurants throughout the city with a steady stream of its alumni who have gone on to staff kitchens and bars throughout the city. In fact, bartender Gonzalo Guerra and Jhon Montoya and Ricardo Iglesias, who run Jallalla's kitchen, were all graduates of Gustu before working abroad and then returning to La Paz.

Following Mamani Mamani's Aymara/Andean aesthetic, the food and drink at Jallalla are strictly Bolivian, with an emphasis on local and traditional food, the 'food of our ancestors,' as general manager Antonio Taboada Bilbao La Vieja says. **Anticuchos**, the sliced beef-heart dish normally eaten on the street after a night out drinking, have been transformed at Jallalla into haute cuisine. The meat is tender and deeply flavoured; it's accompanied by a rich and spicy peanut sauce and potatoes that soak up the heat. **Queso humacha**, the traditional cheese and vegetable **paceño** staple, is also transformed into a sumptuous meal, with **choclo** and beans giving it a zesty bite. (Jallalla has a limited menu, but Mamani Mamani and Taboada are will soon open a restaurant, Qarma Qatu, with a more extensive food offering, and a wine cellar in the same building as Jallalla.)

But perhaps the star of Jallalla is its drink list. Taboada explained, 'We only use four alcohols that are produced here in Bolivia. We have a whisky called Killa Andean Moonshine, which is produced in the historic centre. Then we have the gin La República, which comes with Andean and Amazonian flavours. We also have the vodka 1825, which is the year of the foundation of the republic. And, of course, our star product, the singani.' The bar staff uses only freshly squeezed, Bolivian-produced juices, and there are no **refrescos** on the premises. It makes for a short drink menu, with each drink expertly crafted and presented.

Jallalla, which means 'for life', features live salsa on Tuesdays and live jazz on Thursdays. Christian Asturrizaga, the director of the National Symphonic Orchestra, books the music, and, according to Taboada, 'he knows everything about jazz.' Indeed, a recent visit to Jallalla found a packed room of guests enjoying standards and bossa nova.

Mamani Mamani and Taboada have created a contemporary establishment that leans heavy into tradition for its menu and bar offerings. Its modern interpretation of Andean staples is sure to attract the new type of restaurant – and music-goers who have a sophisticated palate and a deep appreciation of local food and drink.

According to Mamani Mamani, Jallalla is an **ayni**, a reciprocity. 'If you receive something,' he says, 'you have to give back. So for me, this is giving back all the love that I've received, towards my work and myself.'

'IF YOU RECEIVE SOMETHING, YOU HAVE TO GIVE BACK. SO FOR ME, THIS IS GIVING BACK ALL THE LOVE THAT I'VE RECEIVED.'
—ROBERTO MAMANI MAMANI

JOAQUÍN SÁNCHEZ

TEXT: NIAHM ELAIN / PHOTO: GABRIEL BARCELÓ

THE ARTIST BRINGING THE COUNTRY'S CULTURE TO THE FOREFRONT OF BOLIVIA'S ART SCENE.

Last month, the Mérida Romero gallery in La Paz's **Zona Sur** neighbourhood was home to the work of famed Paraguayan-Bolivian artist Joaquín Sánchez. His art has been shown in galleries, museums and exhibition spaces all over the world, from France to Australia as well as almost every country in South America. This particular exhibition, spanning over 10 years of his work, allowed gallery-goers to gain insight into the artist's rich and varied oeuvre. Just as Sánchez's body of work focuses on how things change over time and the relationship they maintain with their past, the way in which the artist's work has evolved over the years is as evident as the aspects which unite each new piece or project.

Born in 1977, Sánchez was raised in the Paraguayan countryside during Gen. Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorship (1954-89). His family frequently moved around as his grandfather was the proud owner of a mobile cinema, something which sparked Sánchez's interest in film. But Sánchez, a multimedia artist who speaks Spanish and Guaraní, the indigenous Paraguayan language, uses video in addition to sculpture and photography. This fusion of methods and media derives from the fact that he comes from 'a unique territory, an amorphous frontier between two countries,' he says. 'I'm very aware of my **mestizo** condition, as well as being bilingual. For me, nothing is pure, and so I must use different languages and resources to express myself and my ideas.'

Growing up during such a turbulent time during his childhood in Paraguay – and of course living in Bolivia as of late – Sánchez is naturally preoccupied with politics. His artistic themes often revolve around both countries' social and political landscapes. 'My artwork arises from a kind of conflict, whether sociopolitical or cultural and personal,' he says. 'And this is expressed through a story, which comes to me either in the form of words or images that tell a certain tale.' Traces of his birthplace's influence can be seen in works such as *Corazón de Ñandutí*, a diagram of a heart encased in glass and rendered in traditional Paraguayan embroidered lace. A nod towards his concern for Bolivian politics is his installation and photographic work involving **polleras**, the skirts worn by **cholitas paceñas**, spread like wings on the dusty **altiplano** ground and scattered with freshly dug-up potatoes.

Sánchez's work not only deals with two countries and their two respective cultures, but with two periods of time, too. He's fascinated by the interface between the past and present, the ancient and the modern. This is clear in Sánchez's tendency to combine and juxtapose history with popular culture. The 'omnipresence of the natural landscape,' as he says, enchants him, the way in which the past is so close to the surface in old buildings and rugged, rural settings. In *ILLA 1*, Sánchez places an enormous, inflatable gold bull on top of a thatched-roof cottage somewhere in the Bolivian *altiplano*. The contrast between the evident remoteness of the hut and its crumbling cow shed and the gaudy, pop-art bull – which has a hint of Jeff Koons' tongue-in-cheek absurdity (Koons' *Balloon Dog* comes to mind) – references the artist's desire to 'erase and rewrite the past, rescue near-forgotten stories in order to return them to the future, injecting them with new, fictitious elements to give old facts a poetic spin.'

The way in which the form of objects can morph over time but still carry historical remnants, and thus memories, fascinates the artist. Whether by placing latex-balloon animals on stacks of hay, making bodily organs from wool or carved wood, or photographing pieces of clothing but not the humans that should be wearing them, Sánchez draws much attention to disparity and absence. And, in doing so, he depicts a country's unique culture by engaging with the present while simultaneously exploring the past.

GLOSSARY

BolivianExpress Magazine

ALTEÑO/A(S)	From El Alto
ANTICUCHOS	Popular meat dishes made from cow's heart
AYNI	Aymara word for reciprocity
BOMBO	Type of drum
BUZONES	'Mailbox'
CHOCLO	'Corn'
CHOLITA	Term used to refer to Aymara and Quechua women in traditional outfit
CHUÑO	Freeze-dried potato traditionally made by Quechua and Aymara communities of Bolivia
COCALERO	Coca leaf growers
ENCOMIENDA	Service provided by bus companies to deliver packages
ALTIPLANO	High plateau
GONI	Nickname for Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, is a Bolivian politician and businessman, who served as President of Bolivia for two non-consecutive terms
GRAN PODER	'Great power' – Festival celebrated in May in La Paz
MEDIA LUNA	Literally, 'half-moon', often referring to the eastern provinces of Bolivia
MESTIZO	A person of mixed race, especially one having Spanish and American Indian parentage
PACEÑO/A(S)	From La Paz
PACHAMAMA	Mother Earth
POLLERAS	Traditional skirts worn by cholitas
PRESTE	Popular festival, with indigenous-religious meaning
QUENA	Andean pipe
QUESO HUMACHA	Traditional Bolivian dish with cheese, potatoes and herbs
REFRESCO	'Soft drink'
TOROTEÑO	From Torotoro
ZONA SUR	Neighbourhood in the south of La Paz

Bolivia ya vive la emoción del deporte

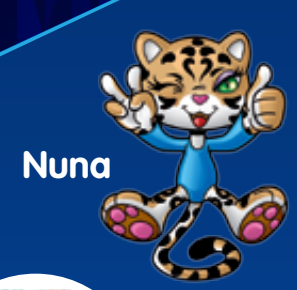
XI Juegos Suramericanos Cochabamba 2018

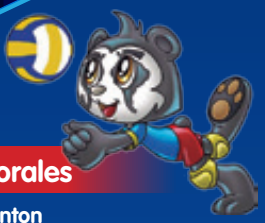
Del 26 de mayo al 08 de junio

Municipio: Cercado

La Villa Suramericana

Disciplinas: Atletismo, ciclismo, futsal, baloncesto, voleibol.





Coliseo Evo Morales

Disciplinas: Bádminton y tenis de mesa

Municipio: Punata

Coliseo Jorge Wilstermann

Disciplinas: Box y karate

XI Juegos Suramericanos COCHA 2018
UN MISMO SENTIR
COCHABAMBA-BOLIVIA

Coliseo José Casto Méndez de la Coronilla

Disciplinas: Fútbol de salón varones y damas

Municipio Villa Tunari

Centro de Alto Rendimiento General Federico Román

Disciplinas: Tenis, fútbol femenino, fútbol de salón.

Coliseos José Villazón Peredo y Gróver Suárez García

Disciplinas: Lucha Olímpica y levantamiento de pesas

Estadio Félix Capriles

Disciplina: Fútbol

Campo deportivo de hockey

Disciplina: Hockey

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