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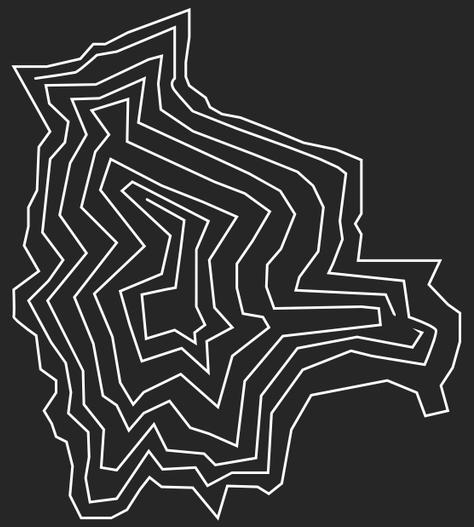
Surfaces



Editorial/#69

Surfaces

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

By William Wroblewski

If you spend time on Lake Titicaca, you have the opportunity to experience one of Bolivia's most serene and beautiful sights. As fisherfolk pull their nets out from the depths of the water, **totora** boats with their majestic sails and bows adorned with proud animal faces skim across the surface, taking their passengers on adventures across the world's highest navigable lake. Much activity happens on this water, but below is an ecology all its own, with species of fishes and aquatic animals only found there, swimming in and out of legends of lost cities and civilizations believed to be submersed below the waves.

Our writer Julia McGee-Russell travelled to Huatajata, on the road to Copacabana, to work alongside master builder Máximo Catari, to learn the craft of reed boat building. For centuries, residents here have used these techniques to build vessels of all sizes to traverse the lake, providing opportunities for trade and exploration. These living practices continue to be passed on today, and offer a way to dig deep into the culture and history of the area.

In this issue of Bolivian Express, we are exploring the theme of 'Surfaces'. We are taking a wide look at initial appearances of this diverse country and examining the details that give it the colour and life it has when viewed from the outside. We are also digging deep to see what is below the surface, to understand the inner workings hidden from first glances – the history, the structures, and the motivations of the people that make everything here move and come to life.

We visit Oruro to experience the **Diablada**, one of the most popular dances of Carnaval, which gives the opportunity for the devil to come out from his subterranean domain to perform for the masses. We explore Bolivia's historical heritage through unearthed and recovered artefacts and once-hidden cave paintings that provide a window to the ancient past. Bridging the past with the present, we visit Huanuni, a mining centre on the **altiplano** recently featured in the award-winning Bolivian film *Viejo Calavera*, to see for ourselves the place portrayed, and to understand the motivations of those involved in the film – the director as well as the stars and residents of the town itself.

There is much history in Bolivia below the surface, but exciting and deep changes are constantly making the country a new place year after year. We examine the new distances covered by new lines of the **teleférico**, the cable car system in La Paz and El Alto, that will allow residents of far reaches of the metropolis to reach the city centre in record time. And we look to the future through the vision of restaurateurs who are changing spaces, re-envisioning both physical surfaces and Bolivian cuisine to create new experiences for the gourmands in La Paz. We examine the very present struggle for wildlife conservation, particularly the protection of wild **quirquinchos**, or Andean hairy armadillos, whose hard shells are prized for their usefulness in making musical instruments and ornaments and for generally bringing good luck.

Initial impressions of Bolivia are astounding enough. Anywhere you go in this country you will see nothing but the amazing. From the jungles of the Beni to the high peaks of Illimani and Sajama, there is so much to explore here. And this includes the boats and their builders on the shores of Lake Titicaca. As you take in all Bolivia has to offer, don't forget to dig, to look under the surface to see the true inner workings of this wonderful place. The stories you will find can only enlighten your senses and offer you the full Bolivian experience.

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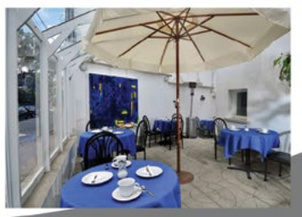

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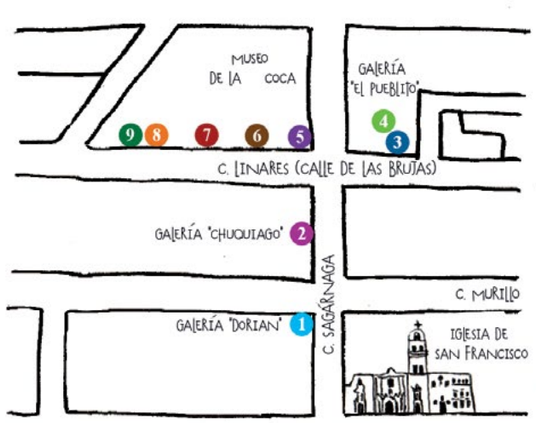

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A SMUGGLER'S LOOT

A NEW INVESTIGATION INTO ANDEAN HERITAGE

Text And Photo: Marianthi Baklava

At the National Museum of Archaeology in La Paz, historian Alvaro R. Fernholz Jemio is opening cardboard boxes labelled with stickers from BoA, the Bolivian airline. He has put on rubber gloves and donned a navy lab coat. 'There are 13 pieces in this particular box,' he tells me. 'Are you ready?'

The objects command a transfixing power over the viewer. Is this power truly Bolivian?

The items include pots, plates, and fabrics that were confiscated at the Buenos Aires airport in December 2016 on the point of being sold on, presumably around Europe. The recovered loot consists of 55 pieces in total. 'Some of them are Peruvian and Argentinian, but the majority are Bolivian,' says Sonia Aviles, Director of Patrimony at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in La Paz. 'Their origin was determined by specialists at the Archaeological Institute of Buenos Aires.'

'Recovering these items is important to the people of Bolivia,' says Jose Luis Paz, the head of the Archaeology Unit at the ministry. He believes their rarity is what makes them important. 'There is little left and we need to protect it,' he says. 'Protecting it means protecting our identity and culture.'

The recovered artefacts have been lying around untouched in the museum's storage space for two months. According to Paz, the objects will remain there after they are conserved by the museum's team over another two months.

After we look at the sample, Alvaro Fernholz wraps up each piece and gently places it back into its box. His hands move with the utmost dexterity. He is held so firmly in the moment that he seems to have forgotten I am there, watching, unable to touch. The objects command a transfixing power over the viewer. Is this power truly Bolivian? All of a sudden the final box is shut and we are done exploring them. The figurines and plates are out of sight once more, patiently awaiting their uncertain future.

In the next four to five months, the National Museum of Archaeology hopes to open a room exclusively for these ancient pieces, which cannot be displayed before they are properly cleaned and conserved. This phase will be time consuming, but the items would perish at the hands of time without it.

Although the museum only receives around 7000 tourists annually, it is clear that Bolivian authorities will do anything in their power to preserve the country's heritage, and to ensure that what is rightfully Bolivian remains in Bolivia. Meanwhile, I am left wondering about the real origin of the objects, asking myself whether I will ever know the truth about their story.

THE SACRED CAVE PAINTINGS AT CALA CALA

ANCIENT RITES IMBEDDED ONTO A ROCK FACE

Text And Photo: Marianthi Baklava

Cala Cala, a small, nondescript **pueblo** 21 kilometres south-east of the city of Oruro, boasts an extremely rich archaeological inheritance. Two kilometres outside of town is a geological site adorned with cave paintings. Also named Cala Cala - Aymara for 'Rock Rock' - the site, at an altitude of 4,050 metres, was declared a national monument by the Bolivian state in 1970.

The paintings at Cala Cala are depictions of llamas and human figures, and it's generally accepted that sacrificial rites were performed at the site, which comprises a small cave and rock shelter. The style of painting that the ancient artists used to portray humans and llamas is systematic: the same shades of colour are used for each corresponding type of figure. All the colours are presumably created from minerals available in the surrounding area: the red shades are possibly derived from haematite or limonite, black from manganese and white from kaolin or ground calcite. Freddy Taboada Tellez of the Bolivian Rock Art Research Society, however, asserts that chemical analysis has not yet been performed to determine the exact composition of the paint.

As is usual in cave art, there are no ground lines representing the earth, nor a painted background. Their absence means that the viewer cannot ascertain if the figures are flying in midair or arranged in narrative sequence. Nevertheless, we can still read and understand the images. A white llama dominates one of the figure groups and has been identified by the Bradshaw Foundation, an online archaeological learning resource, as playing a sacrificial role in indigenous rites. Taboada also explains that the other, smaller llamas surround the white llama because it is a superior being, that the white llama holds a sacred power.

In 1976, the Bolivian National Archaeological Institute fenced in a small area of land in order to protect the cave and rockshelter. After the construction, the National Anthropological Museum in Oruro took on the maintenance of the archaeological park, with the duty later being passed on to the town hall of Surakachi.

Although both archaeologists and scientists alike cannot be certain who made the cave paintings, carbon-14 dating, along with studies performed by archaeologists Carlos Ponce Sanginés and Gonzalo Figueroa García Huidobro, has revealed that they were most likely made by the Wankarani. These people lived approximately from 1800 BC - 500 AD, with their culture ending when it was absorbed into the Tiwanaku empire.

Discovered by the archaeologist Luis Guerra Gutiérrez in 1967, the paintings adorning the Cala Cala site have not yet been confidently attributed to a specific culture. The white llama panel is suspected to be Inca, while the human figures on another section of the basin (often connected to animals by a line perhaps indicating a rope), may be a self-depiction of **caravaneros**, according to Taboada. This aligns with the Wankarani, whose economy was based on llama herding and whose civilization predates both the Inca and Tiwanaku.

'This is the Uturunco, a great jaguar, and a type of god of the llamas.'

– Freddy Taboada Tellez

The *caravaneros* would have followed a route from the **altiplano** all the way to Cochabamba, making stops at sacred sites along the way to perform rituals. These rituals would have been a form of praying for good fortune along their travels (which often lasted up to three months), and exchanging maize, **coca** and other produce which could not grow on the *altiplano* itself.

In the paintings, a jaguar is depicted, not chasing after the llamas as it would in real life (if they would ever meet; their respective habitats are and were quite different); instead, they cohabit the pictorial space. Taboada explains, 'This is the Uturunco, a great jaguar, and a type of god of the llamas. Besides this, the Uturunco is also the god of light, el **rayo**.' He says these images are infused with magic, and that for the ancient people who created them, the god was present in the image itself.

Tourist offices in Oruro offer buses and guides to visit the cave paintings at Cala Cala. The site is open daily from 10 AM to 5 PM, with the exception of Mondays and Thursdays, when it opens from 10 AM to noon. Entry is 10Bs.

BOAT BUILDING IN THE ANDES

A WORKSHOP WITH LAKE TITICACA'S MASTER REED-WEAVER

Text and Photo: Julia McGee-Russell

Bringing with me the skills of finger-knitting, hair-braiding, and a solitary workshop in willow-weaving, it is clear I was grossly unprepared for the difficulty of creating anything out of reeds. Upon my arrival to Huatajata, a small town of 300 people on the southeast shore of Lake Titicaca, I was welcomed by Máximo Catari and his family, basking in the early evening sunshine and chatting in Aymara. Huatajata has been known around the world for its expert boat builders since 1969, and the Catari family, led by Máximo, has certainly contributed to this.

Máximo was meticulously cutting the bundle of **totora** in his hands, and miniature boats lay littered around him. While watching him precisely slice the reeds of his creation, I had the overconfident thought of, 'I could do that.' I would soon be proven wrong.

I overconfidently thought: 'I could do that.' I would soon be proven wrong.

It quickly became clear to me that no amount of hair-braiding could have prepared me for this: literally smashing reeds with a rather large rock. One could use the term 'reed weaving' in only the loosest sense, because when 'weaving' together a boat the reeds themselves are scarcely bent, only curved upwards to form the shape of the hull. Nevertheless, much work goes into making even the smallest of structures, and I can only imagine the effort that goes into the full-scale boats Máximo has made.

The basics of boat building without nails, wood, or bolts involves binding three bundles of reeds together. The outer bundles each consist of a **cuerpo** – a handful of reeds tied together with each end cut to a point – surrounded by more reeds cut to tapering points which match that of the *cuerpo*. The smaller centre bundle, the **chuyma**, is wound spirally to the other bundles.

I watched Máximo in horror as he cut the reeds, angling the handleless scalpel blade towards himself. The words of my mother to 'never cut towards yourself' flashing like neon lights in my brain. The plasters on his fingers and the large blood blister under his thumbnail served to remind me to be especially cautious. Yet the hardest part was still to come.

After I finished slicing the *totora* (and Máximo corrected it), it was time to tighten the thread that bound the reed bundles together. Using a small metal hook, with a wooden handle (a specialized tool called a **huakjala**) to pull the string taut one loop at a time, it had to be even and straight. This proved to be difficult, and Máximo even admitted that it could be a tiring task, though easier with practice.

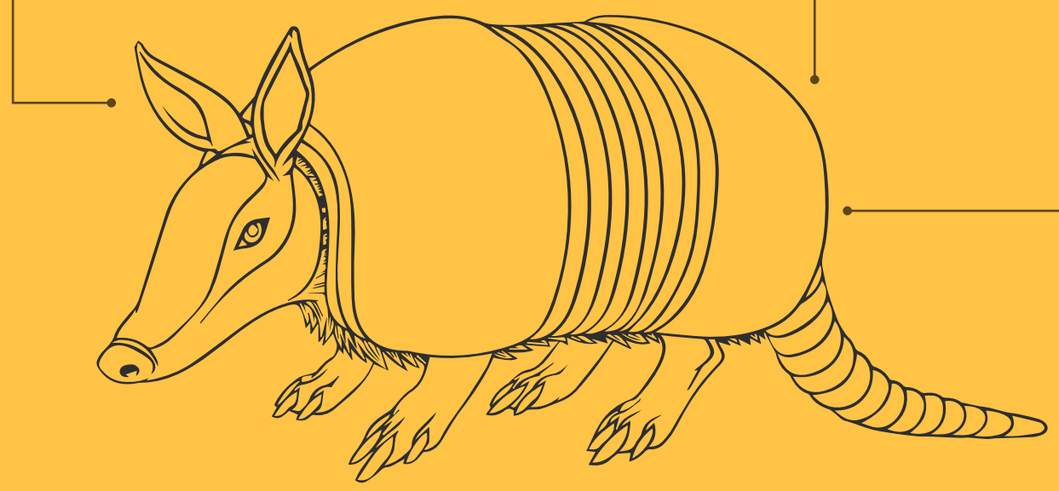
During my short experience it never did become easier. My mind numbed to the rhythm of hold, hook and pull, and I never found peace in the activity as Máximo seemed to. Nonetheless, pounding reeds with a foot-sized rock - making them strong when tightened and bending the hull into a recognisable boat shape - was satisfying.

As I finished my slightly uneven, imperfect reed boat - as stark a contrast to Máximo's grand creations as a sardine is to a shark - I was satisfied nonetheless. There is something profound in holding in your hands the result of your work, lopsided though it may be. This is the joy I found in my experience of a traditional art: looking at my asymmetrical boat and thinking, 'I made that!'.

QUIRQUINCHO CONSERVATION

DEEP INTO THE PROTECTION OF THE HAIRY ANDEAN ARMADILLO

Text And Photo: Louise Lacourarie



They have pointy noses and hairy shells, and they live in sand dune burrows in the harsh, high-altitude conditions of the **altiplano**. 'They're not tigers or white rhinos, but they're still important,' urges Julia Quiroga, a conservationist from Cochabamba. She is talking about the humble **quirquincho**, one of the 20 species of armadillo indigenous to Bolivia.

A symbol of **orureño** identity as well as a fairly undocumented species, Quiroga's subjects are more complex than your average conservation work. For hundreds of years, the *quirquincho* has been a trinket of good luck, its body traditionally used to make **charangos**, a stringed, guitar-like instrument used in traditional Bolivian music. Their empty carapaces can also be seen during Carnaval as rattles, and even stuffed, as souvenirs for tourists. The animal's population had sunk so low that by 1996, an agreement was made with CITES, an international wildlife protection agency, to prohibit the hunting and trafficking of *quirquinchos* across international borders, dead or alive.

But recent developments have changed the status of this armadillo, casting uncertainty on its future as a protected species. Argentinian researchers published findings in the Journal of Mammalogy in June 2015 arguing that there nearly identical genetics between the *quirquincho* of the *altiplano* and that of another armadillo type in the southeastern region of Chaco, effectively increasing the distribution and population size of the species; as a result the species was removed from the list endangered animals the following year.

'They're not tigers or white rhinos, but they're still important.'

– Julia Quiroga

'This link isn't impossible,' says Quiroga, clearly frustrated, 'but the process of adaptation of the *altiplano quirquincho* makes it unique. Not a single armadillo from Chaco would be able to survive for more than a week in the *altiplano*, even if they are genetically related.' Her latest project will be to meticulously track, locate and chart the distribution of *quirquinchos* in the region as basis for need of conservation.

Ricardo Céspedes Paz, director of the Natural History Museum of Cochabamba, stresses the gravity of these findings and the declassification of the species. 'We have been stripped of our legal recourse to stop people from over-hunting and trafficking these animals,' he says. 'The only thing we have to rely on is that attitudes towards animal rights have changed over the past few decades, and hopefully people won't immediately return to killing *quirquinchos* en masse.'

The threat of hunting isn't the only concern for conservationists interested in the *quirquincho*, whose habitat is distinctive. The armadillos dig holes in sand dunes, foraging for some indigenous plants – so little attention has been paid to the species until now that it isn't even known exactly what their diet consists of. But the recent boom in quinoa farming, a crop that cannot grow in sandy soil, is leading to the reduction of the natural habitat of *quirquincho*. Quiroga explains: 'When you look at maps charting the terrain over the past 20 years, it has completely changed: we are now only seeing isolated islands of dunes around the area, which is worrying for the *quirquincho* population. This is one of our main arguments for increased conservation.'

The current issue at stake is how to prove to the international community that the *quirquincho orureño* deserves its own consideration. 'This specific species, or rather population from the *altiplano*, is unique and deserves extra protection,' says Quiroga zealously. But what might be fairly straightforward work in some countries is a mammoth task here in Bolivia, which, along with Paraguay, is the only South American country to not have a state-funded organization to promote science and research. This means that any projects undertaken have to rely on external funding from abroad and an extremely proficient level of the relevant foreign language, discouraging for even the most passionate scientists.

'Bolivia is light-years behind conservation projects that we are seeing in Africa and Asia,' laments Césped Paz. 'But we need to start with some small projects. The Natural History Museum of Cochabamba itself is supporting these projects so that in the long term we can have much more concise and concrete information on our indigenous species.'

'We're right at the beginning here, and there's a lot of work ahead,' smiles Quiroga. 'But at the museum we work in a very supportive and collaborative environment, so I'm excited for the future.' Although the Bolivian scientific community is fraught with obstacles, both financial and bureaucratic in nature, there is hope that the work of dedicated conservationists and passionate researchers will continue to protect the unique fauna of Bolivia, not least the modest *quirquincho*.

FERIA OF ALASITAS

THE LITTLE FAIR WHERE BIG DREAMS COME TRUE

Text: Julia McGee-Russell
Photo: Nick Somers

Walking around the **Feria** of Alasitas, crowds move together and street vendors shout '¡**Dólares**! ¡**Dólares**!' as the smell of **palo santo** smoke from **yatiris** hangs in the air. The sensations can be overwhelming, but these are the sights and smells every day during late January through February, when **artesanos** sell **miniaturas** during the festival.

There are *miniaturas* of every description here, small figurines that represent the buyer's wishes for the following year. Some are literal: a tiny cardboard laptop, a driving license. Others are more obscure: a chicken or cockerel for a romantic partner, or an elephant for luck. The festival is growing every year, and one **artesana** believes people's dreams are coming true due to the *miniaturas*, that they are returning with friends so they too can benefit from it. 'It's popular because everything is made in miniature, and people have it all within reach,' says Claudia Blanco, one of the vendors.

'It's a tangible heritage,' Claudia continues, and this tangibility is certainly reflected in the changing *miniaturas* available at the festival. Milton Eyzaguirre Morales, the Director of Museum Extension and Development in the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore (MUSEF), believes this development of tradition is important. 'When you take a rural ritual into an urban space it is transformed,' he says, This transformation is present in the changes from the original *miniaturas* of food and cattle, to ones representing every modern desire imaginable. From Milton's perspective, this evolution is a positive turn of culture. 'The *artesanos* represent what is current, what is in fashion,' he says. 'The *Feria* de Alasitas has appropriated modernity; modernity has not taken over Alasitas.'

In some ways this is true. As the hopes of the public change, the **illas** that represent those hopes change too. The word *illas* comes from semillas ('seeds'), representing the dreams that develop from these small representations. Milton mentions that the *miniaturas* of today are in fact *illas* as they are 'elements [the public] want to grow in the future', rather than ornaments.

The artesanos create people's dreams and desires out of clay and ceramic, and the people are in turn responsible for fulfilling the dreams of their artesanos.

However, the move towards selling modern, mass-produced *miniaturas* makes it easier for vendedores to sell *dólares* and toy cars by the score, and at only one boliviano each, this undercuts traditional *artesanos* and their handmade *miniaturas*. According to *artesana* Sonía Catacora, 'We sell them to be able to eat, in order to live.' And it's also detrimental to the state, as the vendedores do not pay taxes for their space. 'We are waiting for the support of the public,' Sonía says.

Sonía loves being an *artesana*. As a girl, she made toys, frying pans, pots, and plates out of mud and clay, baking them in the sun even though they'd break. And all the other *artesanos* I spoke to also love their craft. Like Sonía, they are passionate about their art.

The public has to choose to support the livelihoods of *artesanos* like Sonía and Claudia, who spend all year painstakingly crafting their *miniaturas* by hand, not just by programing a machine. As the artesanos create people's dreams and desires out of clay and ceramic, so the people are in turn responsible for fulfilling the dreams of their *artesanos*.

Dance of the Devils

THE CHANGING TRADITIONS OF THE DIABLADA

Text: Julia McGee-Russell
Photos: Nick Somers

The bells on the spurs of each man's left shoe sound in time with the boisterous music of the band. The Urus, a comparatively young **Diablada** dance troupe founded in 1960, rehearse by marching up and down the street in groups, twirling colourful handkerchiefs. Famed for their exquisite costumes, they dance the *Diablada* at the Carnaval celebrations in Oruro every year. Their dance is a struggle of good versus evil: a fight between legions of devils and angels. It culminates in Saint Michael's victory over Lucifer and his triumph over each of the seven deadly sins.

At the rehearsal along Oruro's Avenida Teniente Villa there are dancers of all ages and abilities. There are small children dancing alongside adults old enough to be their grandparents. 'My dad is the oldest dancer and now he is the president of the Urus. There is a feeling that we practice as a family,' says Alicia Navier Mier, a dancer who performs as a **Ñaupa China** in the *Diablada*. 'Those who have grown up dancing *Diablada* feel something special in their hearts. We live with the music, we hear it anywhere and we dance. It's indescribable,' she says with a smile.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 22

Although there are other dances performed during Carnaval, such as the **Morenada**, the *Diablada* is a favourite for many. With its diverse characters, costumes, and the astonishing athleticism of its steps, this is hardly surprising. Martin Riveros, who is a member of the **fraternidad**, dances alongside others with costumes inspired by lizards, snakes, ants, and other creatures. 'Our block is called the Four Plagues because those are the plagues that have invaded our city,' he explains. 'Our costumes try to show that. We have been innovating without distorting anything.'

On 18 May 2001, the 'Carnaval de Oruro' was recognised as one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. Alicia and many others believe the *Diablada* is the principal contributor to this success. 'Without the *Diablada* there would be no Carnaval,' she says. The Urus, however, believe that without faith there would be no *Diablada*. Their uniforms represent the blue and white colours of the sky and their most important values are faith, passion, and devotion to the Virgin of Socavón, the patron of the mines and miners. 'I dance out of devotion for the Virgin,' Martin says, 'not for people to see me, because we all wear masks.'

Although the origin of the *Diablada* is disputed, some believe it originated as a celebration for the Virgin after miracles such as the legend of Chiru-Chiru, who is said to have been a notorious bandit that stole from the rich and gave to the poor. It is said that Chiru-Chiru became mortally wounded during an attempted robbery and retreated to the mine, where the Virgin appeared to him as he lay dying and repenting his sins. According to the legend, after his death the image of the Virgin was found on the wall above his body.

This is one of many legends that shroud the origins of the *Diablada*. Another tale is that of a miner who fell asleep in the mine after a **ch'alla**, or blessing, and woke up to the devil dancing in front of him. He followed the devil's dance out of the mine and gave life to the *Diablada*.

Over time, there have been significant changes to the characters in the dance. Some have disappeared and others have been added

Despite the various legends, the *Diablada* has evolved beyond its origin and has become hugely popular throughout Bolivia. With the passage of time, there have been significant changes to the characters in the dance. Some have disappeared and others have been added. In the past, for example, women were not allowed to dance the *Diablada*. Instead, men would perform the female roles such as the **China Supay**. Over time, women began performing as the *Chinas Supay* in addition to other characters like the *Ñaupa Chinas*, **Ñaupa Diablos,** and female angels. The development of new characters 'has opened spaces for social actors to form a part of the *Diablada*,' Morales explains. 'In some cases, there are young women who have to dance, or older women (the *Ñaupa Chinas*) who can't dance at the same rhythm as the rest of the group, but are important to denote their seniority.'

Women have been given space through the character of the **Diablesa**, which was created 18 to 20 years ago as the female counterpart to the *Diablos*, or 'devils'. According to Mildred San Martín Argandoña, a *Diablesa* performer, 'it is very different from the *China Supay* because they are more flirtatious, but we represent the feminine part of the *Diablos* better.' The costumes of the *Diablos* and the *Diablesas* are very similar, with *Diablesas* wearing skirts instead of trousers. 'The dress has changed and evolved, but always in order to improve' Mildred says.

Originally, the *Ñaupa China* was the leading female devil figure, wearing a long skirt. As the *Chinas Supay* developed, the *Diablada* began to feature female costumes with short skirts. '*Chinas Supay* are the sexiest' Alicia says, giggling. But this was not always the case. During the 1910s and 1920s their masks 'had to be terrifying to frighten people. In some cases they had a broken nose, which is a symbol of their relationship with the devil. . . as well as a split tongue. It wasn't such a feminine form, but now that has totally changed,' Morales says. Alicia believes that the *Chinas Supay* appeared 'because everything is evolving. There are new blocks of characters that give space to the girls who want to dance as Chinas and therefore the Ñaupa Chinas are now older people.'

The Urus themselves have also evolved with time. 'When I joined the URUS we were 70 and now we have around 600 members,' Martin says. The dance troupe has instituted a number of new technologies in their *Diablada*, including a small flamethrower attached to the top of some *Diablos* masks. They also use electric lights on headpieces, and large sparklers. These pyrotechnic elements are one of the reasons the public enjoys the *Diablada*. It is a spectacle to behold. Despite the influence of these new technologies, Martin tells me that 'the Urus want to preserve the traditions and the culture of the *Diablada*.' The culture of the *Diablada* is truly important to the Urus, many of them tell me that it represents Oruro, that it represents Bolivia.

According to the dancers, due to its cultural significance the *Diablada* as it is today will never disappear. '**Orureños** are born with a spirit of dancing,' Alicia says. 'Listening to the music of *Diablada* is part of our being.'

HB BRONZE

COFFEE WITH IDENTITY BELOW THE SURFACE

Text And Photo: Marianthi Baklava

The exterior of the boutique hotel, Altu Qala, embodies a 1930s Chicago revival, with two added floors looking ahead over the other buildings on the Plaza Tomás Frías. Crisp and white, the architecture itself envisions a path of modernity for the rest of the neighbourhood. On the ground floor of the soon-to-open hotel is the HB Bronze coffee shop, the latest endeavour of the Hierro Brothers company.

Boris Alarcón has designed the furniture and décor of the café in a style he has dubbed 'urban archaeology'.

The first time I entered HB Bronze, I felt as if I were expected. With newly polished posts gleaming in my peripheral vision, I was enveloped by soft cocoa tones as a barista opened the heavy door for me.

'If you feel as if something is missing, make it happen yourself,' says Boris Alarcón, who owns the coffee shop. Boris opened his first café, The Writer's Coffee, in early 2015, addressing the gap in the gourmet coffee market in the old district of La Paz. Both shops belong to the Hierro Brothers' enterprise, whose business plan is to create a series of hangouts with unique personalities in the city rather than a chain of identical stores. The Writer's Coffee is located in one of La Paz's legendary bookstores, Libreria Gisbert, and HB Bronze is in a boutique hotel.

To create HB Bronze's unique identity, Boris has individually selected and designed the furniture and décor of the interior in a style he has dubbed 'arqueología urbana', or 'urban archaeology'. Each table stand is made from the legs of old sewing machines while the shelving is built out of deconstructed antique bronze beds. The use of bed posts is fundamental to the identity of the café. According to Boris, who considers himself a designer, these antiques have acquired an entirely new purpose while maintaining their practicality and aesthetic.

The adornments come from various locations, notably the famed Mercado 16 de Julio in El Alto. Boris chose to implement bronze in this manner after reading *Raza de Bronce*, a novel by Bolivian historian Alcides Arguedas that, he says, 'presented indigenous society in a very sad light. By using the bronze material, I wanted to bring modernity to the already present indigenous culture without attempting to eradicate it.'

The chairs in the café were selected and imported from Europe. They are made of steel and were designed by the French Tolix company in the 1930s, keeping up with the architectural dating of the hotel´s façade. The table tops are made of wood recovered from the doors of old houses in La Paz.

The café serves paninis with a local parmesan cheese instead of the Italian variety and a gourmet sandwich with jamón de llama.

Although HB Bronze has a Bolivian identity, Boris' passion for travelling is evident in the food that is served at the café. The dishes are designed to please the palate of the hotel's visitors, while featuring unexpected Bolivian twists. In the kitchen, head chef Lucía Trujillo and her sous chef work together to check the quality of each plate before it is served. Since the ingredients are sourced daily from local markets, the plates are often slightly altered depending on the fresh produce that is available. Notably, the café serves paninis with a local parmesan cheese instead of the Italian variety, and a gourmet sandwich with **jamón de llama**.

To ensure coffee quality, the baristas at HB Bronze employ a range of international coffee preparation techniques, including AeroPress, Chemex, and Fretta. As an added touch, each cappuccino comes with a small chocolate biscuit, which feels personal and comforting, and is also the way coffee is served in The Writer's Coffee. They use a different brand of Bolivian coffee bean each season, through a process that Hierro Brothers has named 'Altitude Selection'. Service is also fundamental to maintaining the high end image of the venue, which turns into a trendy bar in the evenings. The company only hires young people who are trained meticulously to meet a certain standard of quality.

Boris has big dreams for the future. He hopes to expand his business throughout La Paz, opening in locations such as Sopocachi and Zona Sur. To competitors' dismay, he also has his eyes on the Calle Sagarnaga.

Boris laughs when asked about the opening date for the Altu Qala hotel this year and says, 'That's my next surprise.'

DARK SKULL

A CINEMATIC VIEW OF WHAT LIES BENEATH THE MINING COMMUNITIES OF THE ALTIPLANO

Text: Louise Lacourarie
Photos: Nick Somers

Huanuni is a small town in the **altiplano**, an hour's drive from Oruro through the sparse, high-altitude countryside. Its main square is bright and colourful, with families eating ice-cream around a huge miner's helmet statue in the center. Beyond the square, the entrance to the Huanuni Mine, the largest tin mine in Bolivia, can be seen at the top of the hill. And it is in this seemingly sunny **orureño** town that Kiro Russo's new film, *Viejo Calavera*, is set. Yet in the film, we see no sun, nor colourful plazas. Russo's modern and artistic film takes place in dark alleyways rife with drug and alcohol abuse, in the dark, cold nights of Huanuni's rural surroundings and in the mine itself.

'I feel very proud,' says Julio César Ticona, who plays the protagonist in the film, looking down at the floor of the radio station in Huanuni. César plays the young and antisocial Elder Mamani, a young man who is forced to leave behind a life of hedonism, drugs, and alcohol to replace his recently deceased father in the mine at the age of 16. 'I work in construction, and I'd never been so deep into the mine until we made *Viejo Calavera*,' he admits. 'I learned a lot about the miners and their work.' But it is precisely this nuanced portrayal of Bolivian society and mining communities that has split public opinion over Russo's new film so much.

'There was a lot of criticism about why the film shows alcoholism and drug addiction, why not show the lives of miners, how hard they work, how they sac-

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rifice themselves for the work they do,' explains Narciso Choquecallata, who plays Francisco, Elder's godfather. 'The first time I saw it, I didn't really understand it much. But after the second and third time, I began to understand what it was about, what it meant. It is about us, the miners from Huanuni; it shows some of the realities of living here in Huanuni – alcoholism, drug addiction. The reality is that inside of the mine, there are young people like that. So for me there is an important message in the film, especially for young people.'

The film takes place in Huanuni's dark alleyways, rife with drug and alcohol abuse.

'I know myself that the film isn't particularly conventional, but it was all in the search of trying to find something Bolivian in cinema,' says the film's director, Kiro Russo, who won the best Latin American Film for *Viejo Calavera* at the Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival. In a country that some say doesn't have a recognisable national cinematic identity, unlike other South American countries such as Argentina or Brazil, this can certainly be seen as an ambitious project.

But it wasn't the miners that drew Russo to Huanuni, but rather the darkness of the mine. 'I wanted to film in darkness. And it's from that point that I began to understand that I had to film something about miners, no matter what,' he says. 'In every country, there are national icons, and one of the most important icons in Bolivia are the miners.' However, perverting this iconic image of the miner and instead portraying grittier, rawer, and human characters, the film has certainly split public opinion here. 'Bolivia has a lot of folklore, it could even be the country that has the most folklore in all South America, but folklore isn't culture, and this is what people here fail to recognise,' says Russo.

The inhabitants of Huanuni themselves, seeing their own town and an uncomfortable depiction of their lives represented on screen, also had problems accepting this very contemporary, expositional and dark film. 'Many people didn't understand why I was showing drunk people, why wasn't I showing people dancing, the main square. And I think it's because here people are used to understanding culture as folklore, and when you don't give them folklore, people think it's odd,' expands Russo.

Understandably, creating such an avant-garde and consciously artistic project whilst living together with its subjects presents its own obstacles. 'Apart from making the film itself, living alongside these people was incredible, it was the best,' Russo says, who started conceiving the idea of the film and making regular trips to Huanuni in 2009. Many people in the town distrusted the cameras, permits to grant filming in the mine took over a year to obtain, and good friends made over the years visiting Huanuni had to be cut from the film due to a lack of theatrical talent. Yet, the effort of using amateur actors and legitimate miners from the town gives the film an authenticity that may not have been achieved otherwise.

'It was the first time I'd ever acted, so at first it was difficult,' explains César. 'Getting comfortable in front of the cameras in those first scenes wasn't easy, but gradually I got used to it.'

Another huge risk was the set itself, a Bolivian tin mine where accidents and death coexist with the quotidian. Tragedy is so commonplace, in fact, that the title itself – Spanish for 'Dark Skull' – refers to death; interestingly, **calavera** also translates to a hedonist, a clear parallel to the film's main character and its principal themes. Death and injury feature in the film, the catalyst of the narrative being the death of Elder's father and Elder himself almost falling victim to a mining accident later on in the film. César explains, 'The most difficult part was when I have an accident in the mine, I fall and I'm shouting, "Help! Help! Godfather!"' He also recalls the generally difficult shooting conditions. 'It was really loud,' he explains. 'There was dynamite and machinery, and we had to wear earplugs sometimes. There was a lot of dust, too.'

Sometimes in the street people shout "Hey calavera!" But I'll carry on just being me.'

– Narciso Choquecallata

With such a flagship Bolivian film casting a spotlight on the humble town of Huanuni, it's impossible not to wonder what the impact of such a project might be on its participants. Choquecallata says with a smile, 'It hasn't changed my life at all. I'm still the same person, maybe except from the fact that I'm slightly more popular around here. Sometimes in the street people shout, "Hey *calavera*!" to me, which obviously didn't happen before. But no, I am who I was and I'll carry on just being me.'

Photo: Julia McGee-Russell

HOVERING ABOVE EL ALTO

MÍ TELEFÉRICO EXPANDS WITH A NEW ROUTE ACROSS THE FLATS OF EL ALTO

Text: Louise Lacourarie
Photo: Nick Somers

'The **Línea Azul** will definitely improve our lives. It will be much easier for me to travel and sell my products and go down to La Paz more quickly,' says Carlos, a Río Seco resident and kitchenware vendor in the 16 de Julio Market. He seems to see the intended benefits of Mi Teleférico's latest project, a cable car line across the flat city of El Alto. Although this mode of transport is typically designed for cities with severe inclinations, as of March of this year, the new Mi Teleférico line will serve a horizontal city and extend the reach of an integrated public transport system.

The new passengers will be able to travel the length of El Alto in under twenty minutes, an unthinkable journey time at ground-level. 'We saw that there were huge populations in these peripheral **alteño** neighbourhoods,' explains César Dockweiler, executive director of Mi Teleférico, 'areas that are in full expansion and with an increased necessity for transport services.'

The line will provide direct access from the far reaches of El Alto to the centre of La Paz through the Blue-Red Line connection. This could catalyse a change of demographics in the city. Susana, who is an English teacher from El Alto, explains that young professionals could choose to live in more affordable neighbourhoods and commute to the centre of La Paz.

Critics of the project question the exorbitant funds required for the cable car line, compared to more affordable transport solutions for a flat city. Although the city's landscape suggests the need for improved ground level transport, one of the particularities of El Alto is that it houses one of the biggest markets in Latin America, the 16 de Julio Market. When the **feria** comes alive on Thursdays and Sundays, the entire area becomes inaccessible, as the main roads are blocked by stalls, sellers, and customers. The new line would effectively bypass this whole part of the neighborhood, alleviating ground level traffic and making the journey through, or rather over, the area much easier.

Vendors at the *feria* see this new **teleférico** line as an opportunity. 'I'm very excited, I think we will see a lot more business,' says Carmen Rosa, owner of a makeup and second hand clothing stall in the market. 'We already have much more commerce since the Red Line opened, so hopefully we will see even more customers from the Río Seco area', one of the most isolated parts of the city.

It will provide direct access from the far reaches of El Alto to the centre of La Paz through the Blue-Red Line connection.

The Blue Line will end in Río Seco not only to facilitate the commute of local residents, but also to connect the city's transport system to well-trodden tourist trails. As Dockweiler explains, Río Seco is a crossroads for multiple destinations. 'We have Tiwanaku nearby, which is one of the main tourist attractions in the country, and we have exit points to Copacabana and Lake Titicaca. Day to day, it is incredibly difficult to get to these places, and even worse on market days. There is a huge demand for transport.'

With the inauguration of the *Línea Azul* around the corner, it is impossible to not have doubts about its aims. Is it the best use of public resources? Will it actually increase accessibility and social mobility, boost commerce, and reduce traffic and pollution in the area? Although none of this is guaranteed, the intentions of Mi Teleférico seem genuine in trying to improve the lives of *alteños* and **paceños** alike with this novel project.

EDUCATION ON WHEELS

BRINGING THE BLACKBOARD TO THE STREETS OF EL ALTO

Text: Louise Lacourarie
Photos: William Wroblewski

I arrive at the Casa Cultural in Ciudad Satélite, a suburb on the southern edge of El Alto. It's a shabby building that houses some of the city's most vibrant cultural projects, including orchestra programs, a youth theatre, and breakdancing workshops. I was met by equally vibrant COMPA volunteers Anouk, Konstantin, and Lisa, who are affixing colourful laminate sheets with numbers, letters, and pictures onto a large green box on wheels. This is what I have come here to see: the Mobile School.

The **Escuela Móvil** is quite simply a large box on wheels, whose walls can be pulled out to create a kind of mobile blackboard and space for learning. Originating in Belgium and now functioning in 38 countries worldwide, the aim is to uncover talent and self-esteem, and to empower young children, rather than replace a traditional curriculum...

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PROPIEDAD PÚBLICA

THE RESTAURANT THAT WELCOMES EVERYONE

Text: Julia McGee-Russell
Photo: William Wroblewski

'I used to be a girl scout,' Gabriela tells me. 'We did a lot of camps, and I used to love cooking for everyone. I used to cook with my grandma too. . . I just fell more and more in love with it.'

The rustic appearance of the restaurant we are sitting in seems to be a reminder of Gabriela's camping days, as are the bright yellow flowers on the hand-hewn wooden tables, which were crafted lovingly by the father of a staff member. Such home-made details, alongside large, eye-catching portraits of people enjoying their pasta (including a picture of a man amorously staring at the wheel of cheese clutched in his hands that made me smile) represents the values of Propiedad Pública: all are equal, all are welcome.

Propiedad Pública focuses on simple, delicious Italian dishes and fantastic cocktails. It is the creation of Gabriela Prudencio, a young chef who has worked in other popular restaurants in La Paz, including Gustu and vegan mainstay Red Monkey. She decided to open her own restaurant whilst working at Red Monkey, but her love of comforting Italian food began while working in an Italian restaurant in the United States. One of her best experiences at university in New York was sharing a meal with a large group of friends from different countries at the same table. It is the environment of sharing a table, of a cosy welcoming restaurant, that Gabriela believes in.

The idea of having a restaurant open to everyone as 'Public Property' solidified for Gabriela after seeing a sign on a cordoned-off plot of land in El Alto saying 'DO NOT ENTER, PRIVATE PROPERTY.' 'We wanted to create something that was the total opposite, somewhere where everyone was welcome, from every social class, from all cities, friends, family etc.,' Gabriela explains.

Since the staff at Propiedad Pública is so important to Gabriela, she wants them to feel that it is their home. 'If they weren't here, this whole thing wouldn't work,' she says. 'It's a job that requires everyone's involvement.' Her team works well together, moving around with orchestrated ease to plate up food, only stopping for an occasional joke. This does not diminish the work Gabriela puts in herself. She takes on every role, leading by example. Unbeknownst to me and my companions, Gabriela had served our table during a previous visit. When I returned, she still remembered my cocktail preferences.

Cocktails at Propiedad Pública are sublime, with interestingly unexpected ingredient combinations such as passion fruit and coffee, or twists on the traditional, such as a kale mojito. On the menu you will find a balanced selection of pastas and salads, well-loved favourites and newer concoctions. I would unquestionably recommend the figs stuffed with light mascarpone cream for dessert, dipped in rich chocolate and sprinkled with orange peel.

'You have to have a lot of passion for what you're doing because it takes a lot of time, lots of personal time especially', she says. 'If I didn't love it, I wouldn't be able to do it. Bit by bit it will blossom.'

'We wanted to create somewhere where everyone was welcome, from every social class, from all cities.'

— Gabriela Prudencio

Although it takes enormous sacrifice and determination to open a restaurant, Gabriela is optimistic about the future of Bolivian gastronomy. 'Our products and our food are regaining worth. We are seeing lots of restaurants that are rebranding Bolivian food in a very authentic way, so I think the time to start is right now.'

Gabriela prizes individuality in restauranteurs, telling me how she believes everyone should do things their own way, 'putting their own personality into their work'. From her perspective, Propiedad Pública represents her as a person. 'It is who I am and what I like,' she says. Comparing her welcoming and genuine smile to the philosophy of her restaurant, I'd have to agree.

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It is a project of the Community Foundation of Producers in Art (COMPA), established in 1989 and supported by the Fundación Munasim Kullakita. COMPA's philosophy is simple: to provide outreach programs with an artistic and creative focus on social transformation. As we assemble the school in a square in La Ceja, a major commercial district in El Alto, and the organisers put on comic hats and clown noses, it is clear that the *Escuela Móvil* is no exception to the COMPA theatrical approach to community service.

As soon as the walls of the school are pulled out of the sides of the box to reveal colourful placards with letters, numbers, and games on them, an intrigued crowd of children and adults alike gather around. For many of the children, this is not their first experience with the school – the school occupies this same spot every Wednesday afternoon. Straight away, the kids are playing matching games, copying the alphabet, completing sums, and watching in awe as they draw their own handprint on a chalkboard.

The main targets for the project are the children of street vendors who work in the district's market, for many of whom the *Escuela Móvil* is their only contact with education. Although the market is less than a hundred metres away, many of the mothers who sell there cannot leave their stalls to take their children to the square. Gaining the trust of these women can be a difficult task, as many of the mothers are reticent to give their children permission to join in, either due to a lack of confidence in the project or valuing their children's help on their stalls too much.

The kids watch in awe as they draw their own handprint on a chalkboard.

Konstantin, a COMPA volunteer from Germany who has been working with the organisation for over five months, explains how hard the project was to get off the ground at the beginning. 'We usually go to La Ceja market and find children to join up there,' he explains. 'At first it didn't work very well because the sellers didn't have much trust in us, even though we tried to explain what we were doing in the *Escuela Móvil*. Now it works really well, and some of the children from the market come every week, and there are more and more each time.' The hard work that COMPA has put in to build a relationship with these women and encourage their children to get involved with the project cannot be ignored; mothers smiled as they recognised the volunteers, who were adorned with their distinctive clown noses.

Speaking to the mother of 8-year-old Daisy, who has been going to the *Escuela Móvil* regularly for four months, it was clear that the project does not only benefit the children who attend. As she fried some mouth-watering fish to sell, she said, 'It seems really good. I enjoy the free time when she goes to the school. It also means I can sell more, and it is more enjoyable for my daughter who gets bored sitting here with me all day.'

Aside from the education component, giving the children an activity to do with other kids is a central part of the project's aim. 'They come here with so much enthusiasm,' Konstantin says as he smiles.

The volunteers say that they have noticed a real improvement in some of the children's abilities, especially those who were coming frequently. 'It's hard to see the improvement with the children that join in with the project infrequently, especially with their writing,' says Hilma, a Finnish volunteer who has been involved in various outreach programs citywide. 'But I think a lot of them have gotten better at maths.'

As the afternoon moves on, the children pack up and get taken back to their mothers in the marketplace. The volunteers fold up the mobile school, collecting rogue pieces of chalk and paper cut-outs off the ground and painstakingly push the school onto the back of a pickup truck. The *Escuela Móvil* and its volunteers leave no trace, but it is clear that the impact they have made is significant.

GLOSSARY

ALTEÑO - resident of the city of El Alto

ALTIPLANO - Andean high plateau

ARTESANA - 'female artisan'

ARTESANOS - 'artisans'

CALAVERA - 'skull'; slang for a hedonist youth

CARAVANEROS - nomadic llama herders

CH'ALLA - a blessing with offerings to Mother Earth

CHARANGO - a traditional, guitar-like instrument often made with the shell of a quirquincho

CHINA SUPAY - a female devil character in the Diablada, performed by younger women

CHUYMA - Aymara for 'heart'

COCA - a sacred plant of Bolivia

CUERPO - 'body'; a bundle of reeds cut to a point at each end

DIABLADA - a dance that represents the battle between good and evil, performed during Carnaval in Oruro

DIABLESA - 'female devil'

DIABLO - 'devil'

DÓLARES - 'dollars'

ESCUELA MÓVIL - 'mobile school'

FERIA - 'fair' or 'market'

FRATERNIDAD - a community-based troupe that performs traditional folkloric dances

HUAKJALA - a hooked tool used to make reed boats

ILLAS - similar to miniaturas, a small representation of people's wishes

JAMÓN DE LLAMA - 'llama ham'

LÍNEA AZUL - 'Blue Line'; the newest cable car line being implemented in El Alto

MINIATURAS - 'miniatures' that are bought during Alasitas

MORENADA - a traditional Bolivian dance performed at Carnaval in Oruro

ÑAUPA CHINA - an old female character in the Diablada, performed by older women

ÑAUPA DIABLOS - an old male character in the Diablada

ORUREÑO - someone or something from the city or province of Oruro

PACEÑO - someone or something from the city of La Paz

PALO SANTO - a sacred wood that is burned and used to bless miniaturas

PUEBLO - 'town' or 'village'

QUIRQUINCHO - a hairy andean armadillo, indigenous to the region of Oruro

RAYO - 'light' or 'light rays'

TELEFÉRICO - a cable car system used for public transportation in La Paz and El Alto

TOTORA - 'reeds'

YATIRI - Aymaran spiritual guide

Photo: Ivan Rodriguez Petkovic