



**IDB Cultural Center**

Inter-American Development Bank  
1300 New York Avenue, N. W.  
Washington, D.C. 20577

**Information Bulletin No. 76**

# Indigenous Presence in Bolivian Folk Art

## Folk Art in Bolivia: Celebration of Everyday Life



***Dolls in Regional Dancing Costumes, 2004***

Calle Los Andes Studio, La Paz  
Fabric and other materials, 30 cm x 30 cm x 27 cm  
Collection of the "Quipus" Cultural Foundation  
Photo: Eric Bauer

Open September 7 to November 19, 2004

**The Cultural Center  
of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)**

announces the opening of the exhibition

**Indigenous Presence in  
Bolivian Folk Art**

**Folk Art in Bolivia: Celebration of Everyday Life**

Open September 7 to November 19, 2004

The exhibition features objects, from traditional “Aymara” textiles to beautiful Potosí silver artifacts, religious and mundane, that reflect the profound influence of indigenous traditions in many aspects of Bolivian life, from pre-Columbian times to the present.

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Washington, D.C., August 12, 2004

***Indigenous Presence in Bolivian Folk Art. Folk Art in Bolivia: Celebration of Everyday Life***, an exhibition of more than 50 artistic and utilitarian objects that reflect the popular creativity and influence of the indigenous traditions in different expressions of the Bolivian life, such as textiles, basketweaving, wood and silver, and community celebrations, will open to the public at the Art Gallery of the Cultural Center of the Inter-American Development Bank, in Washington, D.C., on September 7th.

The exhibit components were personally selected by curator Félix Ángel from the Antonio Viaña and the “Quipus” Cultural Foundation in La Paz, and other locations in Bolivia. Anthropologist and pre-Columbian scholar Silvia Arze, of La Paz, and Inés Chamorro, former OAS and current craft advisor to the Management Council of the Ibero-American Artisan Community, from Washington, D.C., assisted Mr. Angel in the curatorial task. Both have

written essays for the catalogue. Logistical support has been provided by the IDB Country Office in Bolivia and its Representative Mr. Carlos N. Melo, and the collaboration of the Executive Director for Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay at the IDB, Mr. Jorge Crespo Velasco.

In the Andean region and in the valleys and lowlands of Bolivia, different cultures produce folk art of great beauty and extraordinary quality. Folk art in a less industrialized country such as Bolivia is created for use in daily life, and more elaborate objects are also used for rituals, worship, festivals, and celebrations. Although conceptually a line is drawn between these two aspects of life, in reality both are a response to common beliefs, and collective imagination.

Bolivian folk art is created in both urban and rural areas, and like the people of Bolivia, it bears a strong indigenous imprint. Many contemporary works owe their current form to lengthy cultural processes evolved over centuries, during which time local materials were worked, forms took shape, color codes were chosen, and iconographies defined. This cultural treasure is transmitted from generation to generation, and brings us close to the esthetic and symbolic world of cultures of the past and the present. Understanding the folk art produced in Bolivia today requires placing it in its cultural context and tracing its evolution. In other words, the whole in this case is greater than the sum of its parts: folk art objects are very much manifestations of the broader cultural developments from which they arise.

Much of the folk art of the past and present in Bolivia is collective art. The artists display their creativity only within the aesthetic parameters and community codes existing at different times and places. Taken together, these implicit limits constitute tradition, and the folk artists working within them consciously become instruments of expression of their particular group. In some cases the objects carry so much cultural weight and identity that they may only be used within the group itself, as in the case of traditional textiles woven in each community, which would be difficult for other groups to adopt. However, such a restrictive phenomenon has not been a constant in all environments. The success of many cultural centers such as the city of Tiwanaku derived from their having become convergence points for the exchange of experiences and goods between ethnic groups from different places, who then returned to their places of origin with crafts from other peoples.

The evolution of Bolivia as an independent nation, from colonial rule to democratic government, however, offers a complicated, and at times contradictory picture. Mirna Liévano de Marques, IDB External Relations Advisor has said that "Vast and complex, Bolivia seduces us today not only with the diversity and beauty of its folk art, but it also impels us to reconsider development from the perspective of history. Can we compare Bolivia to those nation-states that arose out of an ancient common culture within a relatively small and ethnically not very differentiated land, or to states with overseas European transplants like Australia or the United States? Can we think that in the scarcely two centuries that have gone by since Latin American independence, that the challenges of social and regional integration, and those of economic and political development, were similar to those that Europe took over a millennium and a half to solve? Bolivia, whose surface area equals that of France, Italy, and the United Kingdom combined, and which includes jungles, valleys, plains, and one of the rooftops of the world,

areas that are still not fully physically integrated, has a population of many ethnic groups, cultures, and languages. Its colonial past, history of exclusion, Mediterranean character, combined with the outward-orientation of its most dynamic productive sectors have contributed to keeping fragmented the fundamental dimensions of Bolivian society, economics, and politics. Given Bolivia's experience, it cannot seek an identity by viewing itself in the mirror of the more developed countries."

With this exhibition, the IDB Cultural Center pays tribute to Bolivia's Indigenous people by highlighting some of the extraordinary contributions of their old-age traditions which have come to define the character of Bolivian life today. Within this perspective the exhibit includes beautiful contemporary textiles from the Macha, Maragua, Kallawaya, Chuquisaca, Cotagaita, Calamarca, and North Potosí areas, wood carvings from the Chiquitanía region, spectacular religious and secular Potosí silver objects, and masks, headdresses, and costumes for "La Diablada," the traditional carnival dances. The exhibit also features a authentic "Totora" reed raft, a signature object of the highland communities around Lake Titicaca, that go back several hundred years before the arrival of the Europeans, with its function and craftsmanship remaining unchanged.

The IDB Cultural Center joins in the celebration of the Indigenous cultures of the Americas saluting the upcoming inauguration of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. The exhibit is part of the regular exhibit program of the Center, which aims to bring to Washington the more outstanding cultural expressions of the IDB member countries, in a manner that is both educational and enlightening about the importance of culture in any development process.

To complement this extraordinary celebration of Bolivia's cultural richness, the IDB Cultural Center has also scheduled, for **Tuesday, September 21, 2004, at 6:30 p.m.**, a concert for *Quena* (the traditional Andean flute) by renowned Bolivian flutist and composer **Juan Lázaro Méndolas**. He will be accompanied by a Latin jazz quartet.

## *Selection of works in the exhibition*



### ***Devil Mask - Lucifer, Devil Dance, 1990***

Mask Studio in Oruro  
Plaster, cardboard, glass and sequins  
62 cm x 86 cm x 74 cm  
Collection of the "Quipus" Cultural Foundation  
Photo: Eric Bauer



### ***Silver Candelabra, 2002***

Pampahasi, La Paz  
Silver and turquoise, 55 cm x 40 cm x 15 cm  
Collection of the "Quipus" Cultural Foundation  
Photo: Eric Bauer



### ***AQSU (Skirt) JALQ'A, 1987***

Maragua Community, Chuquisaca  
Sheep's wool, 140 cm x 70 cm  
Photo: Eric Bauer



### ***Mirror "Quena Quena" Dance Headdress, 1950***

Sapahaqui Community, Loayza Province, La Paz  
Feathers, cardboard and reed  
107 cm x 74 cm x 1.5 cm  
Collection of the "Quipus" Cultural Foundation  
Photo: Eric Bauer

## Exhibition

The exhibition will run from September 7 to November 19, 2004. A full-color brochure in English and Spanish will be available to the public. Photographs of the artworks on exhibit are available upon request. For photographs, please call 202 623 1213.

The Art Gallery is open five days a week, Monday through Friday, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., free of charge.

For guided tours of groups of ten or more (in English and Spanish) and for additional information about the IDB Cultural Center and its programs, please call (202) 623-3774.

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## Concert



Bolivian flutist and composer **Juan Lázaro Méndolas** will perform original jazz compositions based on ethnic Andean and contemporary music. He is a virtuoso of the *quena*, the South American flute with the haunting sound. He will be accompanied by a Latin jazz quartet.

**Tuesday, September 21, 2004, at 6:30 p.m.**, Andrés Bello Auditorium, IDB main building, 9<sup>th</sup> floor (free admission – photo ID required).

For information please call (202) 623-3558

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**The IDB Cultural Center** is located at 1300 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. The nearest Metro station is Metro Center (13th Street exit). All the events are free of charge.

The Cultural Center home page is located at: [www.iadb.org/cultural/](http://www.iadb.org/cultural/)  
E-mail address: [IDBCC@iadb.org](mailto:IDBCC@iadb.org)

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