

# NON-ALPHABETIC AND SUBJECTIVE GLOSSARY FOR THE EXHIBITION *LA HUACA LLORA*

## THE HUACAS

*Huaca* is a term derived from the Quechua and Aymara word *wak'a*, which, in modern Peruvian usage, refers to Pre-Columbian ruins, temples, pyramids and necropolises. Before the Spanish conquest, the word designated any sacred space or object, whether a temple, mountain, lake or boulder, but could also denote certain categories of objects, such as *huacos* (ceramic pieces used for rituals) and ancestral or other mummies. *Huacas* are considered people, “beings other than humans”, with which Andean peoples maintain a reciprocal relationship, thus expanding the Western ontology of the sacred and undermining the modernist separation between nature and culture, human and non-human, animate and inanimate, etc.

## THE HUAQUEROS

The term *huaqueros*, derived from the word *huaca*, can be translated as grave robbers. Traditional *huaqueros*, as opposed to pillagers from big cities, are usually members of a rural community with direct access to pre-Columbian ruins. Their practice is inscribed in a web of relationships such that they are considered special intermediaries between the community and its ancestors, the living and the dead. They are considered “local experts about the past” who possess an alternative knowledge about archaeological sites and the artifacts they seek, as well as ritual practices meant to obtain the favour of a *huaca*, which is considered a living being itself, one that can be generous but also potentially dangerous. Most *huaqueros* have other, often temporary, day jobs, as field hands, construction workers or fishermen. *Huaqueo* is not their sole means of subsistence. Sometimes they sell the artefacts they dig up to dealers who resell them to big city collectors. After their illicit excavations, often *huaqueros* seek to have themselves “cleansed” by a local *curandero* (shaman). In

exchange for his or her services, they give the *curandero* one or two *huacos* to use as part of their practice as healers. The excavated and exchanged object thus recovers its agency<sup>1</sup> in the circuit of rituals that arose in the centuries after it was buried, an alternative to the circuits of anthropology museums and illegal trafficking. Furthermore, it's not unusual for *huaqueros* to accumulate small-scale collections, called *huacotecas*, whether personal or belonging to the community.

## THE HUACOS

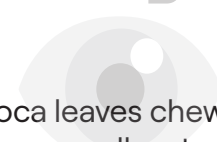
The term *huacos* refers to pre-Columbian ritual ceramics that anthropologists have extensively studied and historically sequenced. Pre-Columbian Peru had a rich tradition of making fabrics and ceramics now found in museum anthropological collections and private holdings. Along with other precious artifacts (like metal pieces and fabrics) they are the contents of pre-Columbian tombs that attract *huaqueros* and archaeologists alike. They are also coveted by dealers and pre-Columbian art collectors. As a result of their complex “social life”, they are sometimes included in *mesas curanderas* (group healing ceremonies) held by *curanderos* (shamans) where they are prized for the agency arising from the “cumulative charge” acquired in the *huacas* and their connectivity with the pre-Hispanic past.

## THE BAQUETA

A *baqueta* is a tool wielded by *huaqueros* to probe the ground in a search for pre-Columbian graves and the artifacts buried in them. It is a long, tapered steel rod with a t-shaped handle, made by local metalworkers from repurposed construction materials.

## THE BOLO DE COCA

A *bolo de coca* is a cud of coca leaves chewed by *huaqueros* as an energizer as well as to re-



duce hunger and thirst while doing difficult labour in a desert climate. The leaves are chewed for a long time until they form a kind of ball. The *huaqueros* also use coca leaves for divination, to find the graves in the *huacas*. The leaves are consumed along with tabaco, another plant considered sacred in the Andean tradition. People have also utilized coca for medical purposes since pre-Columbian times.

## THE CURANDERO, OR CURANDERA

In Andean societies a *curandero* (or, if a woman, *curandera*) is a traditional healer or shaman. Their therapeutic practice takes into account the patient's place in the community. This approach is deeply rooted in pre-Columbian traditions involving the worship of *huacas* and the use of "master" or sacred (psychotropic) and medicinal plants. The Catholic Inquisition repressed the *curanderos* in the name of "eradicating idolatry" among the Andean peoples, and this practice is still somewhat clandestine in Peru, relegated to isolated rural communities and urban shantytowns. Contemporary *curandero* practice has absorbed Catholic culture and continually recasts it. This makes it an example of the syncretic forms produced by Andean peoples resisting colonial repression, an anthropophagy<sup>2</sup> (or cultural cannibalism) in which colonized peoples absorb the culture of the colonizers in order to keep their own culture alive, giving birth to a syncretic culture.

## THE MESA CURANDERA

A *mesa curandera* is a secretly-held group healing session. It is an all-night affair led by a *curandero* (healer) who practices a vernacular variety of medicine rooted in pre-Columbian knowledge and based principally on the use of psychotropic plants (San Pedro cactuses, coca leaves), tabaco, fragrances and objects endowed with magic powers, whether *huacos*, stones taken from certain *huacas*, or images of particular Catholic saints such as Saint Cyprian and Saint Anthony. The term *mesa* (table, in Spanish) also designates the ensemble of objects activated by a San Pedro cactus during the ceremony. Archeological excavations have revealed that in Andean cosmology this interspecies relationship between the San Pe-

dro cactus (*huachuma* in Quechua) and human beings extends back more than 3,000 years.

1. The term "agency" is here used in reference to Alfred Gell's posthumous work *Art and Agency* (ed. Oxford University Press, 1998). The publication was translated into French as *L'art et ses agents, une théorie anthropologique*, ed. Alexandre Lamontier and Stéphanie Dubois, 2009.

2. See Oswaldo de Andrade, "Manifiesto Antropófago", in *Revista de Antropofagia*, volume 1, 1929.