



# Oaxaca Times

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## Raíz de la Imagen Secures Basque Funding

Late last month, CLACPI (Consejo Latino Americano de Cine y Comunicación de los Pueblos Indígenas) received full funding from the Basque Government of Spain for the 8th International Film and Video Festival of Indigenous Peoples, to be held in Oaxaca this spring.

Known in Mexico as 'Raíz de la Imagen,' the festival aims to promote the social, political and cultural recognition of indigenous peoples, highlighting the value of these productions in celebrating a multicultural world as well as creating a

meeting ground where indigenous film and video makers can unify and strengthen the bonds.

"The Basque government have always had a strong relationship with Mexico, but we weren't expecting to receive the maximum grant of 200,000 Euros," says Roberto Olivares president of Ojo de Agua Comunicación, the chief organisers.

"In a way, we're both fighting for the same cause - autonomy, and the Basque government has always had sympathy for the Latino American indige-

nous cause."

Ojo de Agua Comunicación, a Mexican company who specialise in training indigenous communities in video production, will take responsibility for the coordination of the project, which will be a collaboration between organisations from around the Mexican republic, most of which are involved in video production and training.

The festival, which is due to take place from the 27th of May until the 9th of June, will exhibit over 50 films carefully whit-

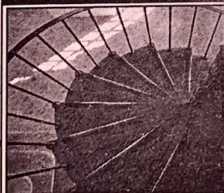
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## Water Blues

Susan has just moved into her dream apartment in San Felipe del Agua; a small house with a view and all the trimmings. After an exhausting day of moving boxes in the heat, the only thing on her mind is a cool shower. Unfortunately, the faucets produce nothing but a few futile squeaks. Furious, she seeks out her landlord to demand an explanation. He regards her with a mixture of bewilderment and embarrassment. "But didn't you know," he finally stammers, "this isn't a problem with the house. There

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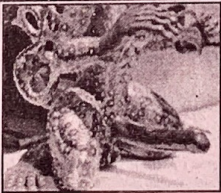
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Learn Spanish at the ICC: Oaxaca's Best Language School



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tled down from 200 entries by a team of 15 judges (indigenous and non-indigenous) bringing expertise from fields as wide ranging as cinematography, anthropology and farming.

"The last festival was in Santiago de Chile in 2004. The difference is that we have more resources for organisation and there is a more international character in 2006. We already have videos from 22 different countries as far flung as Peru, India, Algeria and New Zealand. The Chilean festival was much more Latino American," says Olivares.

The festival, which has also received funding from the Mexican government at the federal level via CDI, FONCA and Culturas Populares amongst others, is expected to draw an audience of 1500 film lovers and is estimated to cost 3,000,000 pesos in total.

"The majority of the films will be for everybody. This is the reason for having a free festival for all who want to go, but besides the incredible variation of films from many different continents and the guests who will be presenting them, there will be cultural events including music and dance."

It's important to note too that the filmmakers are receiving no pay for the exhibition of their films and the prizes will not be money, but works of art (made by indigenous and non-indigenous artists) with a commercial value, but above all a symbolic value.

"The idea of the festival is to allow indigenous people to communicate their problems as well as about their culture and history. At the same time, we hope to educate non-indigenous people about things happening in their own country which they are not aware of for whatever reason," says Juan José García Ortiz, president of CLACPI.

Cohen named 'Two Cars, One Night,' (New Zealand, 2003).

"However, the problem with this is that even though the film is great and the director has become rich and famous, the film no longer belongs to the community and therefore the community can no longer make all the decisions. It's an export of the government and that's one thing that we'd like to avoid. Maintaining a certain degree of independence is essential."

"People often ask why we're accepting help from the Basque government who so actively support terrorist units such as the ETA and separatist groups such as the Zapatas, but this project is precisely the opposite of terrorism or separatism. We're helping the indigenous communities to communicate the injustices they suffer not by resorting to violence, but by talking. What better way can there be?" says Olivares.

"I believe that the indigenous world is slowly succeeding in asserting its legal rights throughout the continent. I would like to think that Mexico is going to continue increasing peoples' awareness on this topic. We hope that the festival too contributes in its own particular way."

For more information about the 8th International Film and Video Festival of Indigenous Peoples (Raiz de la Imagen) visit [www.clacpi.org](http://www.clacpi.org)



Photo courtesy of Ojo de Agua Comunicación

"My personal dream is that one day, a boy from an indigenous village will have the confidence to pick up a camera and make a film about his community. It might take 5 years or 20 years to reach this goal, but time is not important, as long as we're moving in the right direction."

"The community is very important here. Other countries have provided lots of funding for indigenous projects and consequently there have been some great films produced, for example, the film by Taika

## ¿Which School?

I learned to speak Spanish in just a couple of weeks - and it was fun!

Just off Alcalá, tucked away in a peaceful courtyard, is the ideal setting in which to start sussing out your verbs from your pronouns *en español*.

The teachers are inspiring, switched on and know their language inside out. You can really tell they've been carefully selected for the ICC rather than just shown how to follow a text book. The learning approach is very hands-on, emphasizing the importance of actually speaking Spanish from day one. The teaching technique focuses strongly on the functional and communicative aspect of the language leading you carefully through the various aspects of grammar.

You also get the chance to meet Mexicans and reinforce what you've practiced in class by getting involved with the cultural integration component of the programme. Taking advantage of the optional home stay placements, field trips and lectures will help you build up your vocabulary at the same time as learning about life and culture in

Mexico.

I got to make the most of my stay in Oaxaca through the organised workshops; weaving with indigenous women, Mexican cooking classes and salsa dance lessons. The staff are on hand with advice about where to get a good lunch locally to the best beach resorts. They are so helpful and friendly - you'll hardly need make use of the free internet access.

It's always difficult trying to find the right school in a country or even a city to which you have never been before, and even though the ICC charges 50 cents more than the average school, I want to emphasize average, it really is the quality you're paying for.

The ICC is also impressively linked with a number of enterprising community initiatives: 'OTZoom' photo competition and the 'Mano de Obra' short story contest. It truly does live up to its name of being the Instituto de Comunicación y Cultura

[www.iccoax.com](http://www.iccoax.com)

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### ICC Dance



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are water problems in the entire region."

Somewhere nearby, Ted, a vacationer who has just endured a 12-hour flight, is checking into his luxury hotel. The first thing he wants to do is freshen-up. As soon as he gets to his room he begins ... 30 minutes of showering, teeth-brushing and styling later, he feels like a new man. It's amazing what 100 litres of water can do.

What these two people have in common is that they have both experienced the disparity of water availability in Oaxaca. In some places, water seems to flow freely, whilst in other days go by without a single drop.

"The big problem with the water isn't that there is no water," explains Miguel Gutierrez, director of ADOS-APACO, the local state-level water agency. "The problem is that we do not have a culture of water-awareness. People are used to having free water - and what they don't pay for, they don't value."

Where does the water come from before it mysteriously appears running through the tap? In Oaxaca city and its municipalities, water is drawn from deep wells, from San Augustin de Eila and from the Atoyac River (pictured). It is processed and purified, then pumped directly into the city three times a week. *Piperos*, city-funded trucks filled with water, also make rounds, providing water to those willing to pay for it (0.63 centavos/litre). Places that use a lot of water, such as hotels, sometimes supplement the water they receive from the city with water bought from independent *piperos*, who bring water from other regions at lower prices.

Certain government projects, such as the 1994 Libramiento Norte, have put a strain on local water resources. Leaks in city pipes, which date back to 1940, contribute to even more water loss. Most often, however, water shortage has more to do with a lack of storage than a lack of water. Buildings with underground cisterns (which can hold up to 15,000 litres) generally don't have trouble. Many buildings, however, are equipped only with *tinacos*,

units that store from 300-3000 litres. The average person uses 150-250 litres a day; two people could easily drain a single, small *tinaco* before the day was out. In an apartment building with many tenants, the tank might need refilling several times a day.

Another factor in the dry-faucet syndrome is that that demand for water has

forced to drill new, deeper wells. The only problem with this, Gutierrez says, is that one never knows what kind of water will fill it. Once they dug a deep well, only to find salt water.

The water dilemma leads some locals to resent tourists for their liberal use of water and their ignorance about the issue. Gutierrez says that this is a misunderstanding.

"The reason tourists use so much water is because they're used to it. The reason they are used to it is because in their countries, the water they showered with today is the same water they used yesterday. It's recycled." He strongly urges us to follow their example, not in the care-free use of water, but in finding a way to recycle it.

At present, Oaxaca's waste water, including sewage, goes straight back into the river. This carries ecological (and sanitational) implications far beyond the issue of water shortage. To address this, ADOS-APACO has proposed a six-year plan to build a water recycling plant, which would include facilities both for storing waste water and for purifying it. Gutierrez feels this is an essential step towards remedying the "water problem." He hopes the public will be supportive of the plan; the estimated cost of the project is \$350 million pesos.

In the end, though, Gutierrez believes everyone is responsible for the water, both the government and the citizens. The reason there is a charge for water, he explains, is to fund maintenance of the system and new developments. He says that because many people have neglected to pay their bills and don't support plans for improvements, the system has deteriorated due to lack of maintenance and strain from over-use.

Ultimately, Gutierrez hopes Oaxaca can develop a culture that pays for, conserves and recycles the water. He says any delay is likely to be even more costly in the long run.

By Elizabeth Wu



sky-rocketed. When the historic centre and many other old buildings were first built, the architects never imagined how many people would eventually occupy the area. The city has grown tremendously, but the infrastructure has not. Even so, as late as 1990, there was enough water to go around. It has only been during the last decade, as the population grew from around 240,000 to 500,000, that water availability has been stretched thin. According to Gutierrez, the daily demand for water in Oaxaca, (including neighbouring municipalities and commuters who work in the centre), is now that of approximately 700,000 people.

During the summer as well as in March and December, Oaxaca also hosts an average of 5,000 tourists each month. July is a particularly difficult time water-wise, because it is a popular time for vacationers, and immediately follows the dry season. Some worry that the climate is changing, causing less rainfall. In the case of a dry rainy season (July-Oct.), the city will be

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# Pornobrije

*Size is everything!*

Claudio Ojeda Morales to his friends and family is known as Black Serpent. Within minutes of meeting him, it is not difficult to discern how and why such a nickname befell him. Morales is tall (for a Mexican), stout, and speaks with a commanding, pleasant self-assurance. On the drive to his studio, Morales directs me to his profile and says, "I have the face of an Indian, do I not? I am pure Zapotec, a direct descendant of the people of Monte Alban." While Morales' stature and presence can be a bit intimidating it is appropriate that he is the creator of alebrijes which are much like he himself—impressive, intricate, innovative, and big and intimidating. Though Morales doesn't exactly look like a man whose passion would be the construction of the traditional Mexican wood-carvings, his are an extraordinary display of the craftsmanship, culture and... well... let's say imagination, invested into the art form.

The immensely visible, fantastic, and colourful creatures adorn artisan market tables throughout the state. To stop and glance at the creatures is to realise that they are unlike anything you have ever seen in your life and that is exactly the point. The subjects of alebrijes can range from dragons with two heads, frogs with elongated limbs, or creatures which in truth defy any naming because they are pure and perfect fiction of the Oaxacan imagination. In the case of the dragon (pictured above) making love to a woman, the imagination of one very special Señor Morales.

While Oaxaca's alebrijes are wood-based, another type of alebrijes constructed with *papier mache* is said to have originated in Mexico City with a man called Pedro Linares López. According to family legend López is said to have fallen ill and into a coma, and upon waking from his sickness, recalled that in his dreams fantastic creatures accosted him. He proceeded to make these creatures and call them alebrijes. That is one version of the origin of alebrijes. "Alebrijes in Oaxaca," says Morales, "were creatures seen by creators gripped in the haze of drug-induced hallucinations. Many people made them. They are a metamorphosis of monster and human."

Morales stresses that though alebrijes are a post-Conquest form of artistic expression, their flavour and conception have a distinctly indigenous bent. Morales acknowledges that a well-conceived and realised alebrije is almost a tribute to the gone but not forgotten Mesoamerican culture he cherishes. Indeed, some of his pieces erupt with indigenous pride. The points of inspiration for most alebrijes are

alleged to be a combination of dreams, imagination, history, and mythology, but dreams are the most important source, which may explain the logic behind 20-inch alebrije bottle openers in the shape of giant penis (another speciality of Morales). "I see all of my ideas in my sleep, and because my dreams are limitless, my ideas are limitless. I will always have ideas." Morales professes that a bit of mezcal or a magic mushrooms every



"My dreams are limitless and so my ideas are limitless too."

now and then also does the trick to help him churn the creative juices. "The champiñon is more useful for its herbal and curative purposes, but I also get ideas with them."

Claudio Morales has been creating alebrijes for some thirty years. He broke away from the traditional mould early on and decided to expand the scale of his projects. While the alebrijes found in Oaxaca are made with pliable, easily obtained copal wood, Morales frequents lumberyards for finer woods such as pine, cedar, mahogany, and walnut. In doing so he ensures that his grand conceptions are realised without sacrificing the durability and quality for which his work is known. Morales consistently uses the word unique when speaking of his work and it is with due justification. "My pieces are one of a kind. Everything that goes into making them is special. The concept, the wood, the paint—everything—I don't just make alebrijes," Morales insists. "I make art."

Morales sells his work to various galleries and art collectors. Among the museums who have acquired some of Morales' work are the Heffenreffer Museum of Anthropology of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island; the Mexican Fine Arts Centre of Chicago, Illinois; the Museum of Man in San Diego, California; the Mexican Museum in San Francisco, and the International Museum of Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. "I have had pieces shown in museums and galleries in France and all over the United States. A gallery in Hong Kong wanted me to show my pieces there, but they needed twenty in less than two months. That's not possible

for me. Just one of my larger pieces takes two months, at least." One French museum bought ten thousand of Morales' bookmarks, one of the few smaller works he constructs.

Some of Morales' pieces are directly commissioned work. For instance, Morales was sought after by Coca-Cola to produce a piece with an iguana drinking... here comes the surprise... a bottle of Coca-Cola. According to Morales the sculpture resides in Coca-Cola headquarters somewhere in Mexico City. Other works are breathtaking combinations of the fantasy and reality, which makes the art of alebrijes so forceful. Among the more impressive of Morales' pieces are a human-sized cobra snake, a beautiful archangel, a dragon woman and some very realistic erotic pieces, in shape if not size. When I asked Morales if the Karma-Sutra like sculptures came to him in a dream Morales only smiled and said, "What do you think the answer is?"

On the drive back to Oaxaca City, Morales continued to talk about his art and the pleasure he derives from the work. "I have been very fortunate in this life. I have never asked God to give me more than he thinks I deserve, yet somehow I have been rewarded with many things. My children, my wife, my art—they are all gifts. God sees fit to reward me. I know I am fortunate. You see, we all meet the same end. Me, you, Saddam Hussein, Vicente Fox and George Bush, we will all end up the same way, dead. We waste too much time on dreams of money, fame, and sex that we forget the real dream of happiness is just to live. *Life* is the real dream to cherish."

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By Tiffany M. Conner



One of Morales' man size alebrijes