

# ATALAYA CIVILISATION

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## Huanchaco

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Exhibition curated by Giuliana Vidarte

During the 1980s and 1990s, it was commonplace to find huacos<sup>1</sup> and books on archaeology, a fundamental part of family libraries, adorning the living rooms of many Peruvian homes. As a result, several generations have grown up with these objects of the Peruvian past in our most personal imagination; the history of Peru as part of our intimate environment and our closest family ties. Huanchaco's childhood memories recall the archaeological complexes of Peru's northern coast, drawn especially to the history of Huaca del Sol and Huaca de la Luna and to regional museums such as the Cassinelli Museum. I grew up visiting the Museum of the Nation and that fascinating space occupied by the replica of the Lanzón Monolith, which my grandmother and I were both scared by and deeply moved.

Archaeological studies on the objects and buildings of the past construct the foundational narratives of our identity and history. We imagine the societies that preceded us based on hypotheses coined through the objects found under our complex territory. The various 18th and 19th-century European explorers that arrived in search of the relics of past civilisations carried out studies of the flora, fauna and communities' ways of living in different regions, such as the Amazon. Their research contributed to the construction of these narratives. These researchers proposed their visions and consolidated fictions about our country. As a result, they created myths and interpretations, often far removed from an intimate knowledge of Peruvian societies.

The stories of our researchers and travellers' external gazes have nourished the past, but they also lean on close relationships that have shaped us from personal dimensions. Equally close was the bond established between Huanchaco and Mario Poggi, which gave rise to the project presented in this exhibition. Poggi became an infamous media personality due to his involvement in the murder of Ángel Díaz Balbín in the eighties. In 1991, after serving five years in prison, Poggi travelled to the Amazon to carry out community studies and revive the traveller's myth with a desire for discovery. On his way, he came across an underground ruin he named "the lost chucha<sup>2</sup> of the Incas": a vagina-shaped stone in a cavern, which Poggi linked to rituals of origin and fertility. For Huanchaco, in his approach to this building, Poggi uses the same methodologies of the

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nineteenth century by granting functions and meanings to objects through an external gaze charged with a personal ideology.

Some years later, Poggi created a collection of maps that he shared with Huanchaco to direct his return journey to "la chucha". He began the journey to this ruin with these materials as his guide. Unfortunately, Mario Poggi died a few days after his return. This exhibition brings together the documents that account for the journey, the studies of the stone vagina and objects found in that context, and the paintings created by Huanchaco that imagine the life of the human groups that congregated around this underground rock formation several centuries ago. Other elements such as archaeological manuals, huacos and other printed and audiovisual documents form part of this research laboratory. This living logbook establishes connections and thinks about how we build our identity through our civilisations' history. In his paintings, Huanchaco recreates a possible rituality linked to ruins and a series of characters that give life to the "Atalaya Civilisation". In addition, the painter constructs Mario's gaze akin to a 19th-century traveller but linked to his training in psychoanalysis. A "Freudian traveller" who studies this vagina within the earth, and aims to understand images that represent fertility, life cycles and death. "Atalaya Civilisation" unfolds as a dynamic manual that summarises the different stages of research into the ruin and proposes archaeology affirmed as fiction, sustained by the most human narrative, that of the vital expedition of the personal journey.

<sup>1</sup> *Huaco* is the generic term given in Peru to earthen vessels and pottery artworks by pre-Columbian civilizations.

<sup>2</sup> *Chucha* is a slang word meaning vagina, often used in Peru, Chile, Ecuador and parts of Colombia.