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ALEJANDRO FOGEL'S

THE INCAS ROAD

EL CAMINO DE LOS INCAS

AF4

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30 AUGUST 1992

SACRED SANCTUARIES



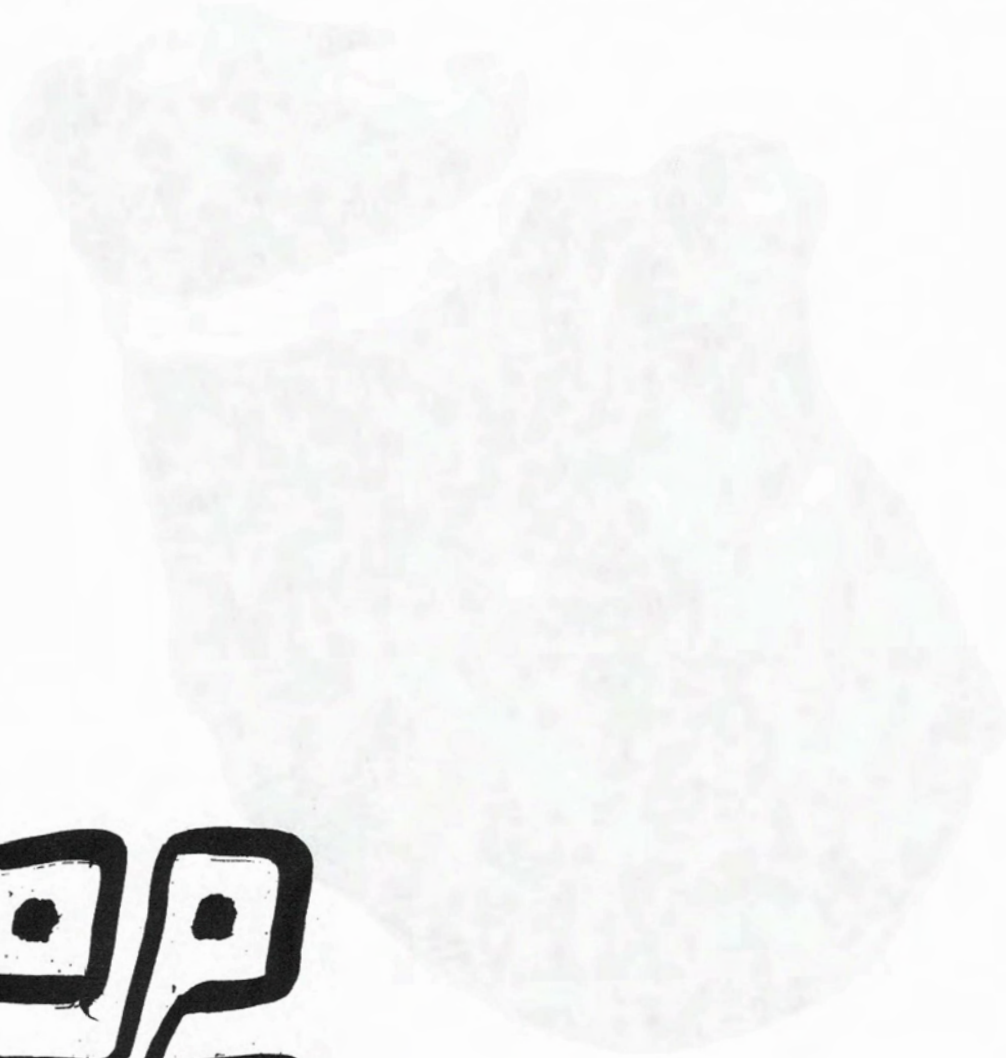
ICWA FELLOW ALEJANDRO FOGEL IS AN ARTIST EXPLORING THE INCAS ROAD

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, The Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

Cover: Mummy of the Cerro Aconcagua

THE INCAS ROAD

SACRED SANCTUARIES



*“The
nations
who
offered
human
beings in
sacrifice
to their
gods had
attained a
more
noble and
worthy
estima-
tion of the
gods ...”*



Bartolomé de
Las Casas
“Apologetic
history of the
Indias” (1552-61)

W

e are at the Regional Center for Science and Technical Research of the Province

of Mendoza. The two men are waiting for us in an office in the main building. Shelley and I are sick with a very intense viral flu but we couldn't miss this

opportunity. It's cold and the sun is so intense... It reminds me of Iowa in winter. I get homesick when I am sick.

We say hello, sit down and chat for a few minutes and drink Cachamai, an herbal digestive tea. The Center is impeccably clean and nice. We are in the outskirts of Mendoza City on the southern part of an enormous park that also encompasses a botanical garden, zoo, two museums and the major provincial university.

"Are you ready?", one of the men ask.

"We certainly are", I say.

We walk outside to a nearby building. The older man opens the door and we enter a

dark hallway.

Against the wall there is a white freezer, with a lock. The younger man has the key. He slowly opens it. The boy is inside. Naked.

Mummified from the extreme cold of the Andes, where he was found curled up at an Incan shrine. I stop breathing for a few seconds. I look at Shelley and her expression has changed from looking pale and tired; now it is glowing. The two men leave us alone for a few minutes with the mummy, the child.

The high fever I have is helping me in my dream.

I can see the child walking through the mountains, enjoying some time alone with his favorite llama. He had a long walk from Peru, a couple of thousand miles away. He slept every night in a different tambo(see AF3) after having potatoes and his favorite corn, for



Mummy of Cerro Aconcagua in laboratory (Foto: R. Barcena)

which he thanks the divinities Inti and the Pachamama. He learned how to preserve potatoes so they would keep for years. He enjoyed wrapping them in straw bags, wetting them in a lake near his house and letting them dry under the altiplano sun. He knew that the hot and cold combined together dried them in such a way that they would keep their flavor and nutrition power for years. He is going down The Incas Road with some members of his ayllu, or extended family, enjoying the walk. He is very proud to see how his people have created such a wonderful fertile land from a region of

deserts through the irrigation channels that span the Road. He has been learning from his ayllu how to dig holes in the desert to plant canicula, whose roots disallow the desert from absorbing the water from the irrigation channels. He remembers when he was four years old and he got his first job in the ayllu. He loved to collect seeds and separate them by color and size, like a game, the same way he felt when he was a little bit older and had to feed rabbits and birds. But his main treat was learning music like everybody else. He had so much pleasure growing up, learning, being able to help the



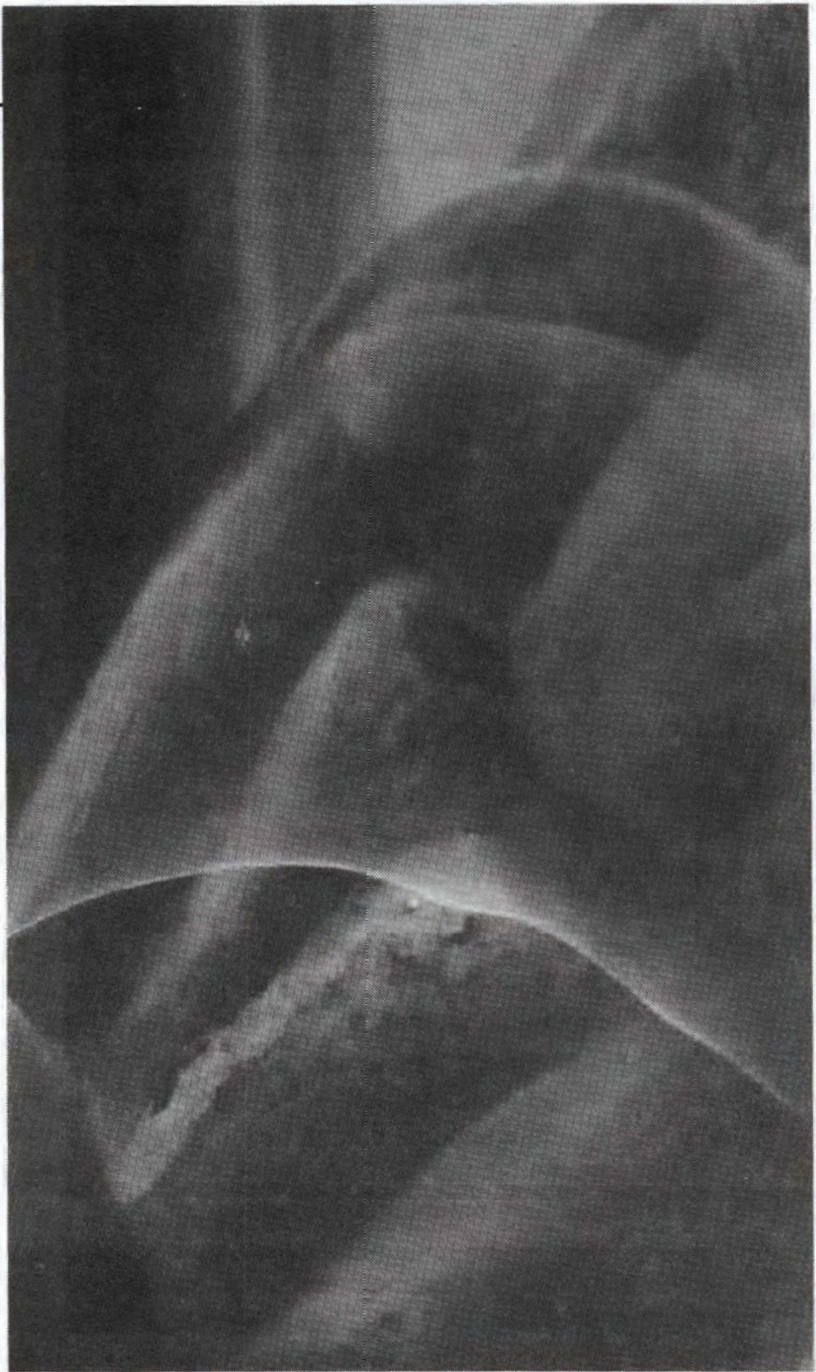
"Untitled", ink on paper, 8x12 in., 1992

ayllu prosper.

T

he two men
come back.
The freezer
has to be
closed for a
while to
keep the

temperature constant. The white door is coming down and his tiny reddish body, getting darker. Dizzy, I have to sit down. Shelley is already sitting on a chair, exhausted. We have another of our usual



"Study for the Mummies Series 2", oil on canvas, 33x20 in., 1992

Cachamai and Tylenol cocktails. I can't wait to see him again. After ten minutes the door opens and I am going back with him to his long walk to the southern Andes.

He is finally there. He feels the immensity of the Aconcagua, the tallest mountain he has ever seen. So huge, so white and blue. He heard the word "Capacocho", offering, a few times

The Mummy of Aconcagua

by Shelley Berc

In the freezer where he has lived since the mountain climbers found him in 1985, the mummy lies on a rubber baby mattress, that is illustrated with whimsical pink and white sheep and ducks. He lies on his side with a white cardboard band around his head, keeping it together.

The top of his skull missing, scooped out, makes me think of the main campo in Siena, where the horses run the paolo and the sky is the shape of an egg.

This mummy doesn't look like a mummy in the typical egyptian shrouded in mystery sense or the pompeii dry as agony drift wood sense. This shape is so full of fluid energy, alive-- but what kind of life-- How could this ever have been flesh? Yet it has the most human peaceful spirit I've ever seen.

He still has some eye lashes left. Looks like they're twitching. Then he must be dreaming. What would a five hundred year old child sacrifice be dreaming?

His hair, black, scattered sleep on a pillow. There are seeds in his hair--five hundred year old seeds from the Andes. He doesn't look cold, he looks happy, curled up as he is, lazy n, he looks like he's been travelling, rolling like a wheel over anything we could say about. Surely he passed the summit of the mountain into the sky. I'm sure that's where we'd find him if we could enter his dreaming; walking the cloud bridge that appeared when the priests left him with a bag of cooked beans and a golden llama for the journey.

His mouth is open, no lips but shadow, as if he just had been kissing someone when they took the lips away.

His body is red dark red inside and out...they painted him, then made him drink the pigment, the experts say. Did they do this before or after they reached the extreme cold in which the boy was to die? Did they kill him or did he die from exposure? Why would the gods of the sky want a child the color of blood; what does blood have to do with sky? His white teeth are, though some red stained, too, and set like clouds in the mouth that is not there. If teeth are clouds, then in this equation, blood must be mountains.

No eyes no top of head. Its the absence of features that gives the impression of depth of vision.

Think of him there, 18,000 feet in the air, sleeping. Skull dreams open, lazy

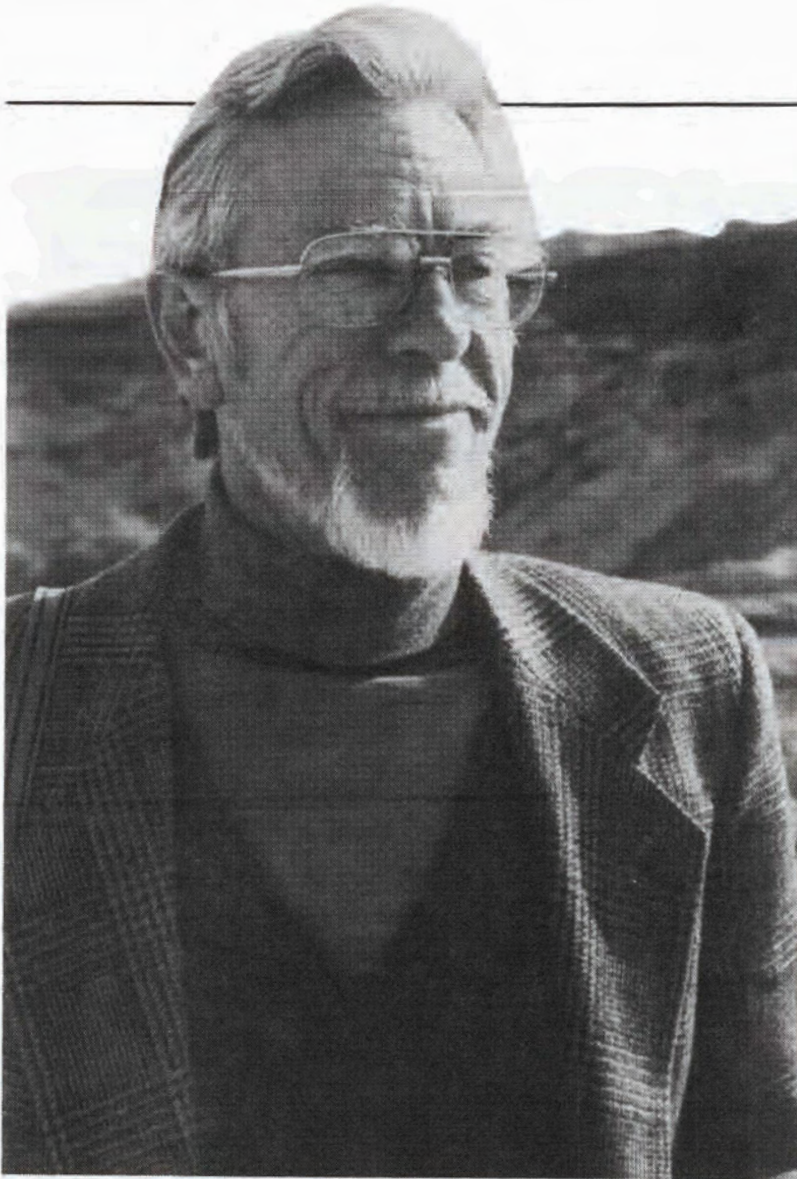
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Shelley Berc is a writer. This is part of her journal of the Incas Road.





Close-up of the Mummy of Cerro Aconcagua



Professor Hans Schobinger

in his life. He is getting ready.

P

rofessor of Prehistoric Archeology Hans Schobinger became interested in archeology in high school, where he informed me, there is almost no information on Argentina's past before the nineteenth century war of independence. After receiving his degree in Buenos Aires, he got his first job at the University of Cuyo in Mendoza City, where he has lived for the past 36 years. He later became Director of the Institute of Archeology and Ethnology, the very

same place at which, in the summer of 1985, Erico Groch, his friend and fellow of many adventures in the Andes, came with unexpected news:

"We found a mummy in the Aconcagua and we want you to help bring it down," he said.

W

e met Erico Groch in his house in the province of San Juan. He is 77 years old

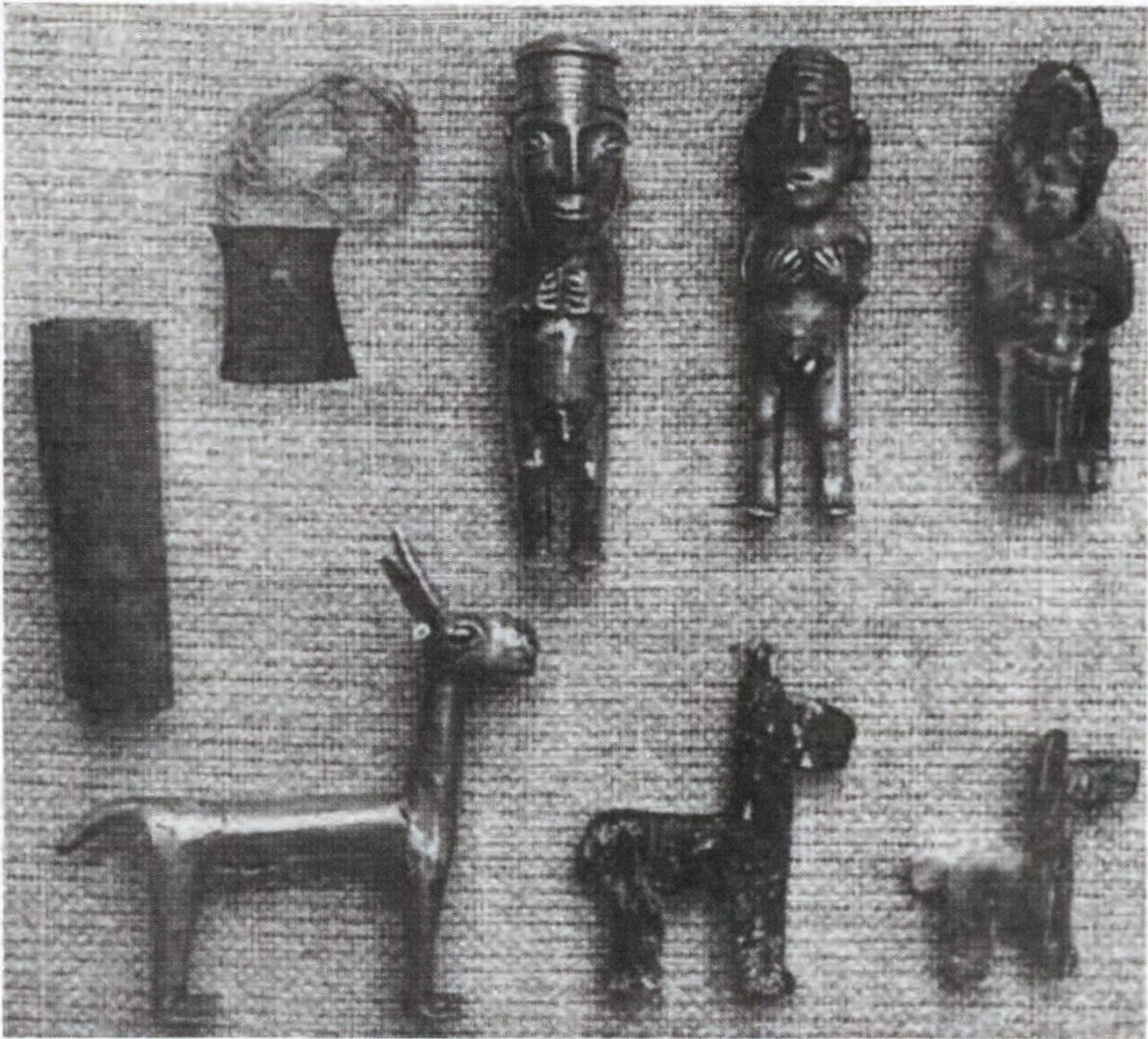
and retired from his printing shop. He made us the best coffee we had in Cuyo and offered us unforgettable chocolate alfajores from San Juan. He has a pho-

tographic memory and can recall every detail about January 8, 1985 when, with five other Argentine mountaineers, they found a semicircular pile of pircas and a buried body partially exposed. The old man's eyes are radiant as he looks through the window on that cold afternoon sanjuanina. What was supposed to be a sports climb

turned into a major cultural event. "We found the Incan site because we were trying to reach the summit of the Cerro Aconcagua through a new route." (He uses the Argentine expression 'se me puso la piel de gallina', meaning 'it gave me goose bumps' when I saw it). "We took just a little piece of his clothes and some photographs and I



High-mountain sanctuaries



Figurines found at the Sanctuary of Cerro Aconcagua. (Foro: R. Barcena)

went straight to see Schobinger." Everyone in the Cuyo and most experts of the Incas Road know that Schobinger has been an expert in high altitude sanctuaries since 1964 when he excavated and studied a similar Inca

mummy, a 22 years old man, at Cerro El Toro, north of Cerro Aconcagua.

I

am sick in my room. I can barely move.

Shelley is feeding me, spoon by

spoon. I am sweating a lot. I just had a dream. The young boy was not really an offering to the gods. The capacocha was really the llamas that went with him. He came with his ayllu to venerate the high Cerro, the sacred Aconcagua and together they sacrificed the llamas, then the boy went home to grow up. The Cerro is so tall that it almost

touches the gods. It is close to the deity that the ayllu venerates. They must get to the top of the mountain and leave the capacocha. They must leave there the textiles, the golden figurines, the ceramics and bury the llamas. I wake up again. It's dark and quiet. Was he really buried, sacrificed to the gods? I have been reading about human sacrifices in the Andes and many authors from the conquistadores' chronicles to modern researchers and Bartolome de Las Casas, the sixteenth century Spanish priest who believed in a conquest through love, all coincide in

accepting those sacrifices as a fact. My heart doesn't want to believe this. I know, though, that the boy, himself, would be very proud to be a capacocha. He would believe that he wouldn't die, but would travel to another world. He would be going on a trip to the gods to serve his community. A child was selected as a pure entity, as a messenger, to go beyond reality to a divine world presided over by Inti, the sun, the astral world, which is balanced by the very earth or Pachamama, on which the boy and his ayllu make their home. He is tied to that order of belief



*"Untitled", ink on paper,
8x12 in., 1992*



Study for the Mummies Series 4", oil on canvas, 20x30 in., 1992





Study for the Mummies Series 5", oil on canvas, 20x30 in., 1992



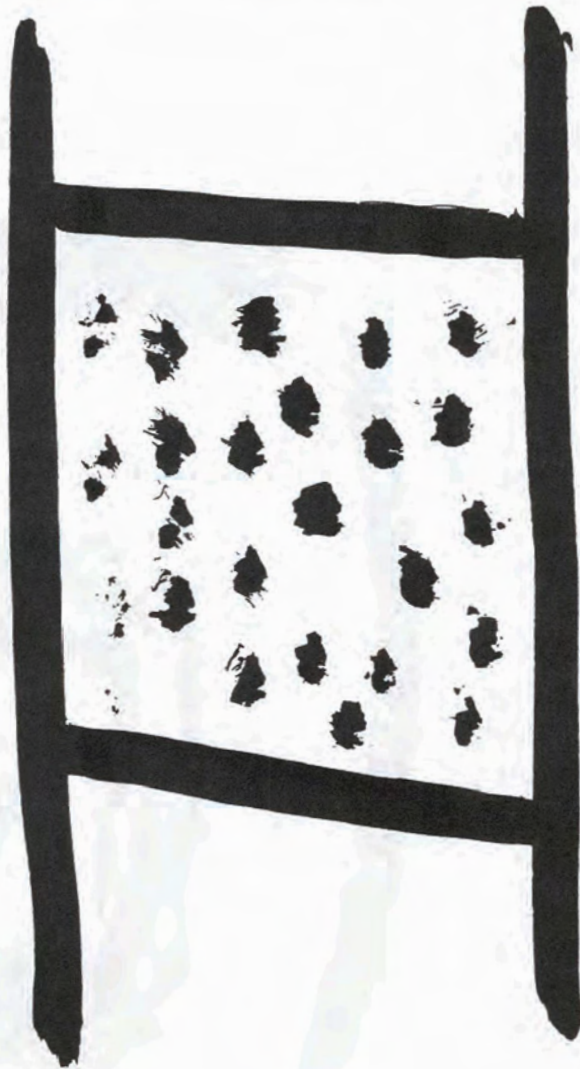
Mummy of Cerro El Toro

and depends on it. Sometimes, the elders tell him, men must give to their divine entities a sacrifice. He knew he wouldn't really be killed. He would be part of a rite through which he would be passing to a superior life, an eternal trip going from east to west,

resembling Inti's path through the heavens, until the final destiny. He would believe that the mountain is the giver of life and fertility and it needs our offering, our soul.

T

wo weeks after Erico Groch's news, Schobinger was on his way to climb the tallest mountain in the western hemisphere, 23,000 foot Cerro Aconcagua. Mr. Groch and two of the five original discoverers of the mummy were in the expedition as well as

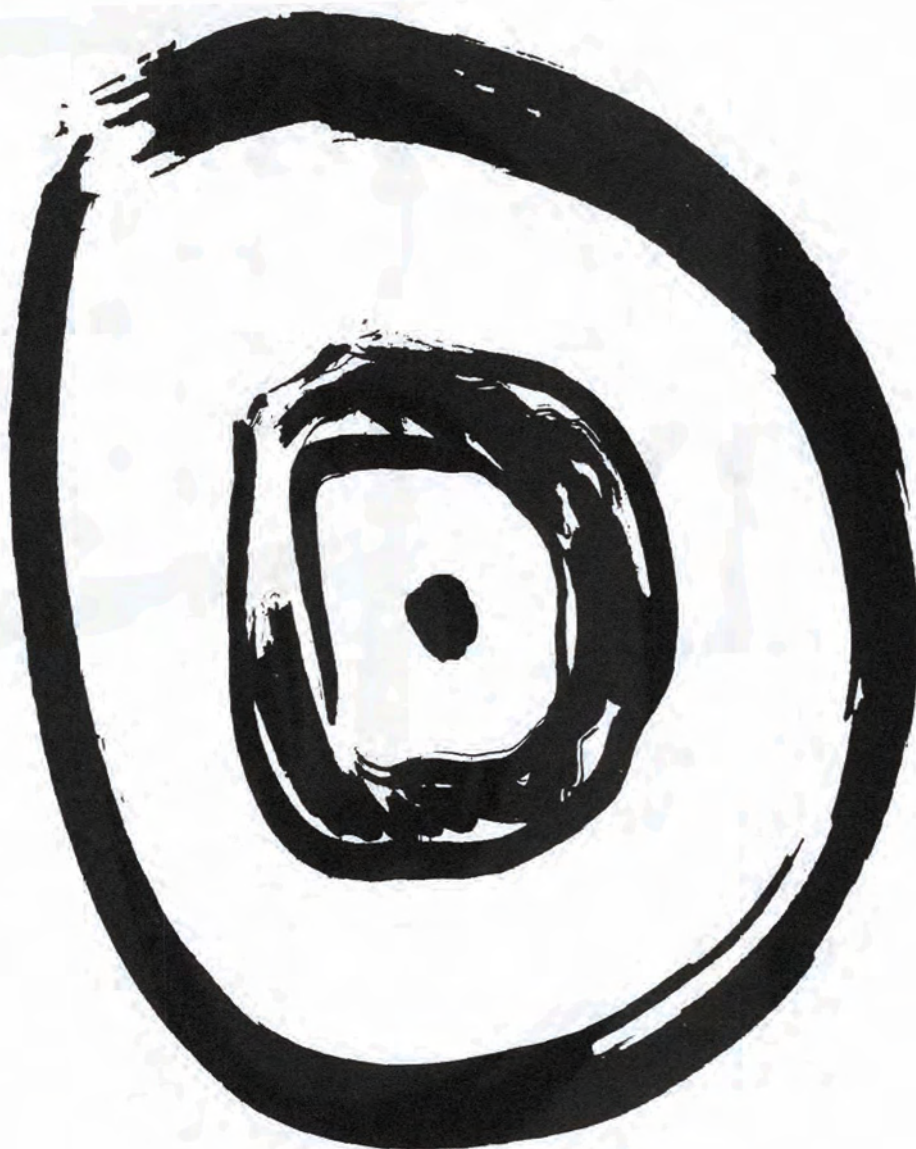


"Untitled", ink on paper, 8x12 in., 1992

a laboratory assistant to help Schobinger and a reporter from Los Andes newspaper. The trip lasted a week starting at Puente del Inca, a natural formation used by the aboriginal people of this region to go across the mountains into

Chile. They did the climb very slowly so as to adapt to the high altitude. They established 4 different camps, the last one at an altitude of 17,000 feet. From Schobinger and Groch's accounts we know that it was a hard climb for their

age; at the time, Groch was close to 70, and Schobinger, nearly 60. When they reached the site of the mummy, the altimeter read 17,400 feet. Schobinger and his aide carefully extracted the body which was wrapped in many pieces of cloth and found his sandals and two bags. One bag was empty and the other one contained cooked beans, his last meal for the long trip to eternity. While the mummy was being wrapped up to begin the journey back down the mountain, Schobinger excavated near the circle of pircas and found three human figurines and three stylized ones in animal shapes, effigies that were to be the boy's companions. They descended the Aconcagua during a storm with their precious cargo. Back in the lab, Professor Roberto Barcena(see AF3), was asked to



"Untitled", ink on paper, 8x12 in., 1992

join a team with many experts in the field to study the

mummy. Meanwhile, the mummy was stored in a white

freezer at the
Research Center in
Mendoza.

T

he boy was
dreaming.
He was
lying on the
floor of the
last tambo
holding his
multicolored stone
necklace, the night
before the ascension
to the huge cerro. In
his dream, members
of his ayllu were car-
rying very high up
pieces of firewood
and, after building a
fire, they created
with the stones they
brought from the
valley a semi circle on
the ground. his body
was coated with a red
pigment, the symbol
of life. At that point
he knew. ●



Glossary

alfajor: Spanish. Sandwich cookie.

ayllu: Quechua. An extended family or lineage.

altiplano: Spanish. High plateau.

canicula: Spanish. Vegetable used by the Incas which captured humidity from the air 9 months out of the year, absorbing it to the ground.

capacocha: Quechua. Sacrifice ceremony.

Inti: Sun god

Pachamama: Mother earth.

Pircas: Spanish. Stone.

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Received in Hanover, NH 9/24/92