

## The Room of Wakes

27 July 2008

For 391 years no outsider walked the passageways.

For 391 years no outsider touched the walls.

For 391 years no outsider saw the interior.

For 391 years the sisters of the Convent of the Siena Santa Catalina Dominican Monastery, the Sala de la Orden Dominica, lived in silence, completely cloistered from the outside world.

Once they took their vows there was no further direct contact between the sisters and the outside world. They spoke with their families through screens, separated by nearly a meter of space. They received goods from the outside world through a blinded turntable. They lived in a city within the city, walled off and separated in every way from the vulgarity, distractions and temptations of the secular world.

For 391 years their purpose and mission was the salvation of souls in purgatory. Their methods were prayer, meditation, physical deprivation and devotion to their lifelong pursuit of perfect union.

For 391 years they were alone in their silence.

But now, others are inside.

We were inside.

We wandered the pathways, rooms, kitchens and gardens, still perfectly intact after 391 years of isolation.

As we walked through the cloisters that defined their entire world for 391 years I couldn't help but wonder about the lives of the sisters who lived their entire lives there.

## The Room of Wakes

Was it a life of shades of gray, where there was always something calling from above?



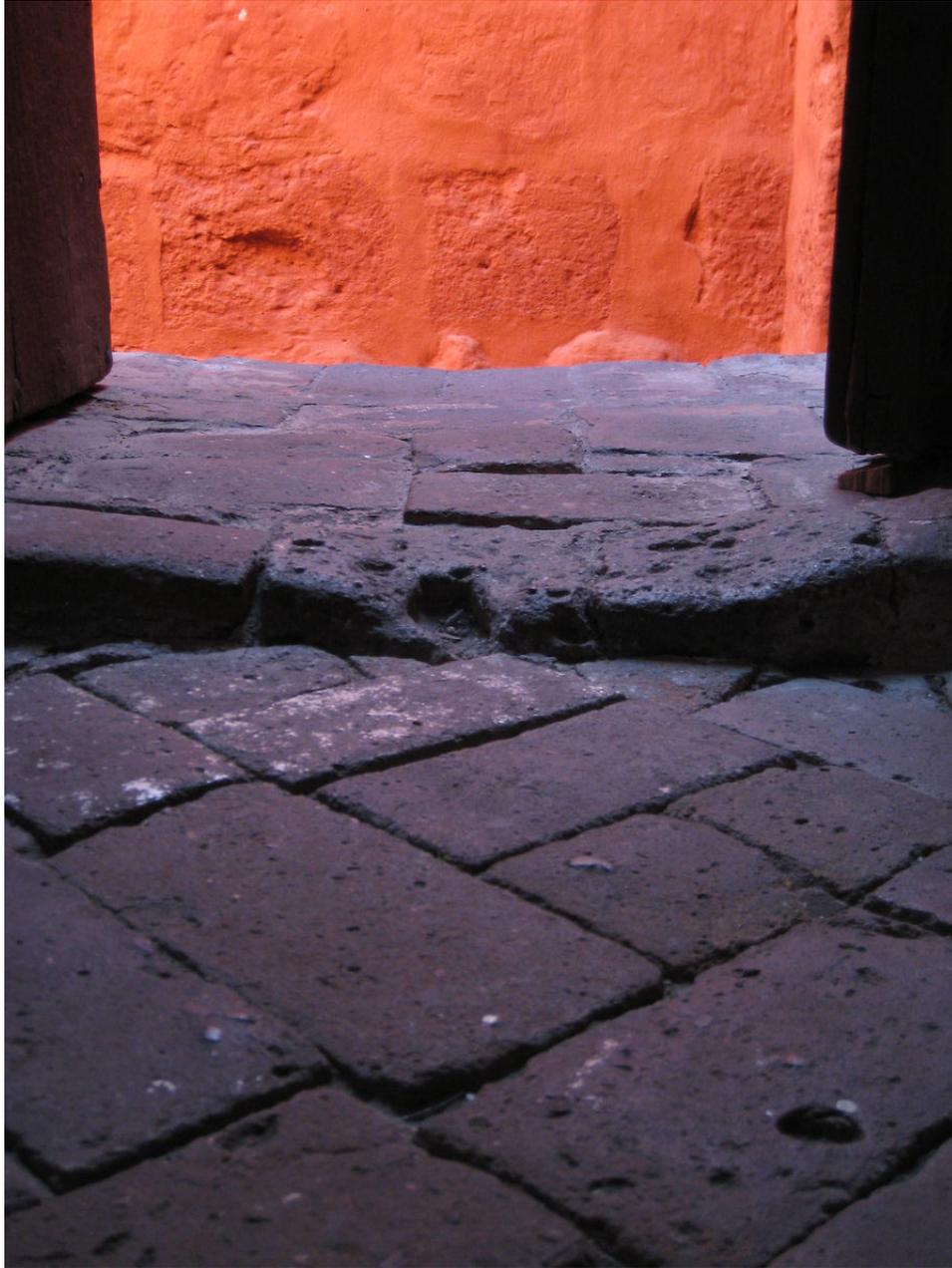
## The Room of Wakes

Was it one where the smallest pleasure, even color, was always many barriers, many hurdles, many doorways away?



## The Room of Wakes

And if you sought that path, and stepped out into the color,



## The Room of Wakes

where would that path lead?



## The Room of Wakes

Would it lead to more shadows of mystery?



## The Room of Wakes

Or would it lead you to another color, a different color?



## The Room of Wakes

Would that new color lead you to a new path?



## The Room of Wakes

Or would it just be more shadows, more mystery?



## The Room of Wakes

Would your path ever lead to anything?



The Room of Wakes

Or would it always be a reminder that you were alone?



## The Room of Wakes

Because regardless of the color,



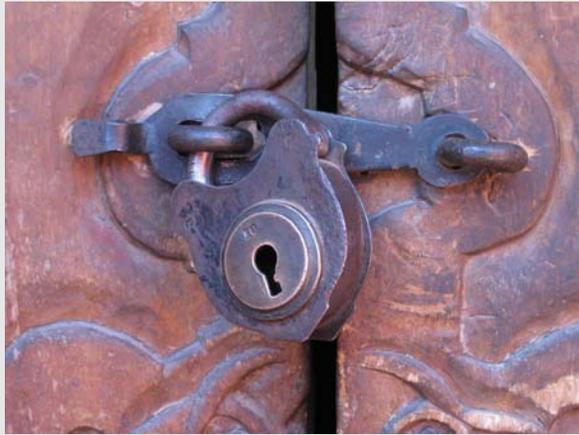
## The Room of Wakes

every window of your world was barred,



## The Room of Wakes

and every single door was locked.



## The Room of Wakes

Would that life be one of torture, surrounded by beauty untouchable,



The Room of Wakes

or one of solace, from the beauty at hand?



## The Room of Wakes

Would that life be one of limitation, defined by the walls that confined it,



## The Room of Wakes

ever longing for the light, the freedom from above?



## The Room of Wakes

Or would it be a life that even if a window was unbarred,



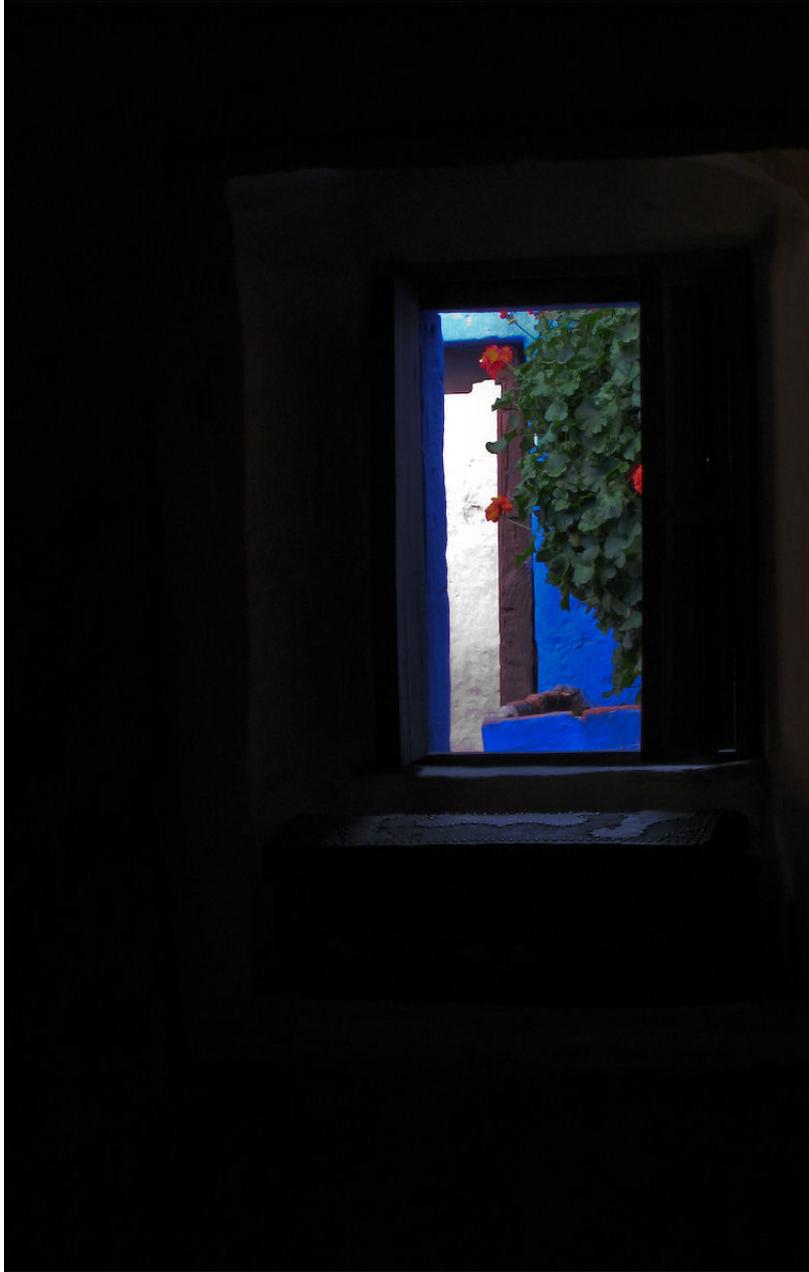
## The Room of Wakes

or a lock left open,



## The Room of Wakes

no matter how enticing the temptation,



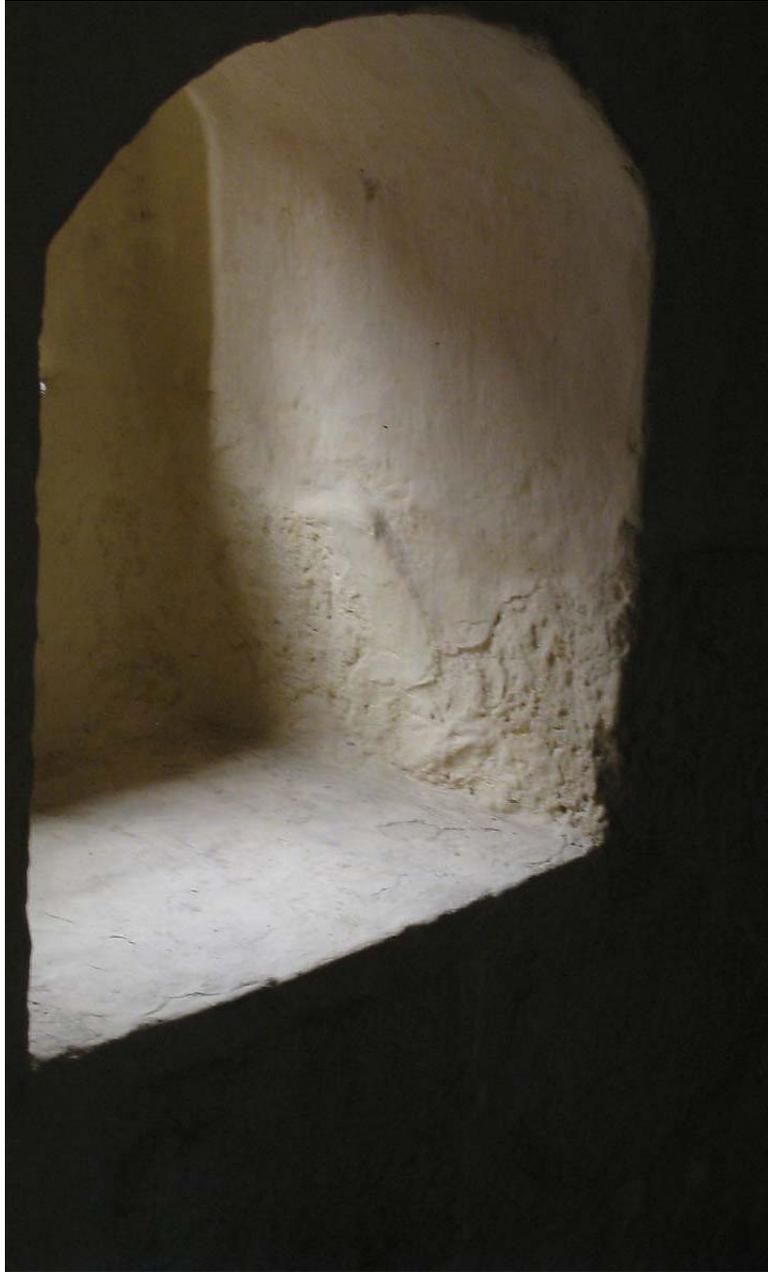
## The Room of Wakes

the only comforting gate was a locked one.



## The Room of Wakes

For in a lifetime of silence and solitude,



## The Room of Wakes

the only path to the ultimate union  
to fulfillment  
to the light  
was through the room of wakes.



## The Room of Wakes

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The Convent of the Siena Santa Catalina Dominican Monastery is located in Arequipa, Peru.

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In response to changing times the convent now includes semi-cloistered and un-cloistered sisters.

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In Roman Catholic theology purgatory is the place where those who have died in a state of grace undergo limited torment to expiate their sins.

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All photos by Douglas Hackney

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Photo by Jorge Valdes

Douglas and Stephanie Hackney are on a two to three year global overland expedition.

You can learn more about their travels at: <http://www.hackneys.com/travel>