

From Copper to Solar

Chile's economy is largely based on the export of natural resources, from copper alone the state draws a quarter of its revenue. The industrialized extraction of raw materials from the Earth not only invokes the country's long history of harsh labor conditions and uneven distribution of wealth, but also the human impact on landscape. In the extreme dryness of the Atacama Desert everything remains preserved, as evidenced by the ghost towns of the saltpeter rush, or much older, by the longevity of ancient geoglyphs: huge ground drawings created by indigenous peoples through the scraping away and piling of rocks and stones. Many believe that the geoglyphs were made to worship Andean deities, and to sacralize the land. Recent scientific research relates the figures to early migration routes, guiding the travelers and their herds across the desert, both in terms of nourishment and story-telling.

Without copper, no electricity. Without electricity, no modern life. Michelle-Marie Letelier's artistic work deals with issues of energy production and mineral economy. Her mixed media installation *The Prediction of Tarapacá* therefore combines the image of one of the world's largest and oldest anthropomorphic geoglyph, The Giant of Tarapacá, with an electric circuit made of copper wires. With each electric impulse, discharged periodically, a compass shows the momentary deviation of the sculpture's magnetic field. *The Prediction of Tarapacá* is a work of memory: a reminder of the age-old human conflict between standing in awe of nature and exploiting nature. The fact that the ritualistic mechanism of the installation is activated through photovoltaic panels carries a somewhat hopeful "prediction" of the future. Only recently Chile started to invest in solar energy, a truly infinite (economic) resource in Atacama.

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