

The Prediction of Tarapacá

Tarapacá, also known as Tunupa, Tuapaca or Viracocha, is the central deity of the Aymara people. Across the Altiplano, in west central South America, his image is found in temples and statues, and his name is found in toponyms like the Salar de Tunupa in western Bolivia or the Tarapacá region in northern Chile. In the central figure of the Gate of the Sun at Tiwanaku, Tarapacá is portrayed with a crown of sunbeams radiating from the head, holding thunderbolts in the hands, and crying tears of rain.

In northern Chile, the “Giant of Atacama” is a large anthropomorphic geoglyph carved on the western slope of Cerro Unita, an isolated hill in the Atacama desert. The geoglyph is not merely an artistic representation of Tarapacá, but embodies the hardware link between the celestial bodies of the sky and the earth landscape below. The ancient representations of Tarapacá, either statues or geoglyphs, aim at embracing all the imaginable elemental forces of Nature. The sun, the scorching desert sand, the dark blue waters of the Pacific Ocean, the winds, the fresh waters of Lake Titicaca, the storms, the rain with its associated productivity potential, the blood and semen of animals. All cosmic elements are woven together through visible and invisible interactions, creating a network of flowing energy, the substance of Tarapacá’s body. Oral tradition reports that Tarapacá created all living things by breathing into stones. The primeval breath of life, the first waveform bursting across the circuit. When all parts are connected in balance, energy propagates across the cosmic network, and Tarapacá reveals his sustaining force through the ubiquitous breath of life and existence, the seeds of the Supernatural. With imbalanced or disconnected elements, the circuit opens up, breaking the flow of cosmic energy across the universe: motion stops and death sets in.

Michelle Marie Letelier’s *The Prediction of Tarapacá* celebrates the breath of life and existence through the interwoven fibers of the universe, the living and non-living dynamic elements that powerfully sustain the balance of Nature.

The image of Tarapacá is constructed with thirty-two printed circuit boards: sixteen on the left and sixteen on the right side, connected with copper wires to form an electric circuit. Four solar panels energize the figure, two from above and two from below. When sunlight illuminates the solar panels, a magnetic compass reveals the electrical flow across Tarapacá’s copper body, as the associated magnetic field deviates the compass needle. The solar panels and the printed circuit boards lie on a thin sheet of polished copper suspended from the ceiling.

The artwork encompasses the galactic energy of the Sun (the primeval power source), its manifold and changing ripples propagating across the Earth’s surface (Tarapacá’s copper body and the magnetic needle) and the energy of underground ores that have shaped much of Chile’s ancient and recent history.

Generally perceived as commodity goods traded at the London Metal Exchange and used in the manufacturing of symbols of power and wealth, in *The Prediction of Tarapacá* metals are instead placed in a spiritual relation with all other elements of the natural world, and their purpose is shifted from the material realm, to the sphere of the magic and the sacred. Not simply serving as the substance matter of household and industrial electric grids, the functional role of copper is radically transformed. As the sunlight changes its intensity, as the compass needle flickers, the artwork radiates electromagnetic waves in new directions, in new waveforms. As the rain falls on the Giant of Atacama on the Cerro Unita, water runs off in new patterns. Like in the ancestral Aymara geoglyph, Tarapacá's copper figure serves as a mystic transducer of cosmic energy into sparks of oneness and shamanic wisdom for the inhabitants of the Altiplano and of planet Earth.

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