

The Patagonian goddess of wind

Patagonia of the tour guides is a land of majestic mountains, glaciers, unspoiled primordial landscapes; one of the last intact and only partially accessible paradises for adventurous hikers, mountain climbers, and dreamers. All this is true for the small part of Patagonia where the Andes range cross it from north to south and most of it is in Chile. The far larger part of Patagonia including a part of the island of Tierra de Fuego, which is Argentinean, is far different. All of it is a dreadful, featureless, almost tree-less, flat, dusty and stony arid steppe, with 360° vistas of the sky from almost everywhere. It is dotted with sporadic, rustic sheep ranches (estancias), traversed mainly by hundreds-of-kilometer-long dirt roads that continuously tests the patience of travelers to their limits. There is a psychological boundary each person has when it comes to how much nothingness one can absorb after hours of driving on very bumpy roads, where the only potential interest is a flat tire with no tire shop hundreds of km around. The most notable feature of this part of Patagonia is the relentless, howling, strong wind blowing for weeks at the time. You cannot ignore the wind and the wind provides no relief.

The aboriginal inhabitants were Stone Age hunters and gatherers that died out soon after the arrival of the Europeans and before their beliefs were properly recorded. They were noted only for lighting large bonfires on the barren beaches, hence, the name Land of Fire by the Spanish explorer Magellan, very low population density, and going naked despite the cold of their land. It is assumed that in a land where the wind is *the* dominant feature, some deity represents it, as occurred in other native cultures. This is the topic of this painting.

What can be seen in this painting?

The goddess of the wind is depicted as a naked woman, like her worshipers, whose figure is also a tree with its tilted canopy in one direction, forced by the strong wind, as is common to most Patagonian trees. The rest of the painting is dominated by the effects of the wind and the Patagonian landscape. This landscape is painted as a featureless arid landscape with the typical traditional red roofs of estancias, where a line of poplar trees serve as a wind breaker, and endless skies. The common local animals, merino sheep, and two wild animals, the very agile guanaco (a small relative of the camel but a better jumper) and the rhea, the flightless bird “ñandu” (in Guarani) roaming the stark grassland.

The strong wind is indicated by the goddess' tilted tree, by the grass tilted to one direction, by a fully horizontal airport wind sock, by the international symbols for wind velocity and direction (wind barbs, recording velocity of 64 knots) floating in the sky, by the wind chill effect on the cartoon dwarf who is almost freezing, when the real temperature, without the wind chill effect, is a balmy 15 °C. Despite being a local goddess supposedly immune to the cold, the goddess' tree has interior infrared heater coils for the lower body and another, stronger infrared heater for the upper body. The later is anchored to the ground by heavy-duty steel chains to keep the heater from toppling over in the wind. No cheaper heat diffusers can be used in such a wind. In the land of the wind, the heaters are obviously powered by a wind turbine, which is, as everything else these days, made in China. The word painted on the generator house proudly reads in Chinese: “wind”.

The plausible connection of this deity to other established aboriginal wind deities are represented by the Aztec god of wind, “Ehecatl”, and by the symbol of wind in native American cultures (wine-colored diamond). Both hang from the tree and are almost blown away by the relentless wind.

This segment was written as public service.