

Tierra del Viento (Land of the Wind)

by Eliseo Miciu



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Commentary

One of my favorite photographic maxims says, “Never trust air you can’t see.” I believe this bit of wisdom came from Jay Maizel, but I’m not certain I remember that correctly. Be that as it may, it is photographic advice I live by. I can’t think of a single one of my photographs that visibly shows the atmosphere that hasn’t been improved because of it.

There are, of course, two ways to do that: show the atmosphere itself (fog, dust, clouds, drizzle, breath, steam) or show the *results* of atmosphere (wind-blown movement, suspension, blur). In this portfolio by Eliseo Miciu, we see numerous examples — which is not unexpected considering the title of the project. In the panorama above, we see the *effects* of the wind as well as a little dust and some clouds. In the bottom photograph we see mostly atmosphere, so much so that it dominates the composition. In fact, all of his images in *LensWork* #132 are great examples of showing atmosphere.

Normally, air is a big photographic *nothing* — just (supposedly) empty space between the lens and the subject. Sometimes we want that clarity. Of course, that space is never really empty. Thankfully, that space is filled with air for us to breathe — and use, if we can, in our photographs. Another of my favorite photographic maxims is “Bad weather makes for great photography.” There is nothing worse than a clear, sunny, featureless, bald sky. Imagine either of these two photographs without the atmospheric conditions that make the air visible. The trees in the

panorama above would still be bent, but without the clouds, the sky would be boring. Combine the two and we suddenly understand *why* the trees are bent.

In the picture below, without the dust we might still have an interesting picture of horsemen, dogs, sheep, a farm building, and a distant hill. Add the dust, however, and we have a photograph that we cannot only see but can practically *feel* in our lungs as we breathe.

Most of us, when we’re out photographing in the landscape, have a sharp eye scanning for interesting subject matter. That’s a perfectly valid strategy. But years ago I attended a lecture in which the speaker recommended developing an extraordinary sensitivity to *everything* related to weather — and by that he meant some things that are not obviously *weather* itself — dew, dust, contrails, even pollution. The key, he proposed, was that all these things are *sensual* and activating those senses in our photographs makes them more visceral, more alive, more convincing. Now, when I’m out in the landscape looking for photographs, about half of my photographic antennae are searching for atmosphere and weather to bring that bodily sensuality into my visual artwork.

