

Disaster Passed: a singing, flashing and sobering glimpse into coping with volcanic eruptions

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We all experience and understand volcanic eruptions differently. It is in the intersection of these experiences that the most effective knowledge for future disaster risk reduction is generated. Scientific responses to eruptions have the potential to improve understanding of subsurface magma movement and anticipate volcanic impacts on communities and the environment. Social and cultural responses have the potential to help communities learn, respond and adapt to the eruption. As a mechanism to bring together and celebrate these different knowledges the Disaster Passed Project created three interactive mobile exhibits designed to convey the lived experience, scientific monitoring and cultural responses to past eruptions on St. Vincent and Montserrat. This partly consists of two volcano-shaped mobile exhibits ('Soufrière Blow' and 'Mountainaglow') covered with panels that display images and information about past eruptions, including poetry, calypso lyrics and prose. For MountainAglow we pushed this concept further by creating a ~2m length tube of some 2,000 LEDs to create the audio-visual experience 'FLOW' and a smaller breakout exhibit 'NEST'. FLOW has seven audio-visual modes designed to recreate the gentle incandescence of the lava dome, visualise the movement of hot batches of magma within the volcano, contrasted by periods of songs and interviews that relive the experiences of different phases of the eruption of Soufrière Hills Volcano on Montserrat. NEST uses three ash-strewn communication devices (a telephone, a walkie talkie and a radio) to play on demand memories of the eruption as both spoken word and calypso. Soufrière Blow has been exhibited in multiple sites on St. Vincent, and MountainAglow was previewed at the Norwich Science Festival, and exhibited at the Little Bay Museum and National Trust on Montserrat. Disaster Passed was a dynamic design process, and at the time of writing, the primary schools of Montserrat are re-designing the panels and audiovisuals of MountainAglow in collaboration with the Montserrat Volcano Observatory; to reflect their own learning about the volcano. In this presentation we propose to explore how the visual arts combined with other disciplines can act as a mechanism to entwine critical risk messages with lived experience, and in so doing further enrich everyone's understanding and actions towards disaster risk reduction. We will also use this presentation to reflect on the challenges and successes of this dynamic design and collaborative approach. We will share how it influenced our own disciplinary ideas and the outcomes of our evaluation of the process.

Envisioning the future by learning from the past: arts and memory in interdisciplinary disaster risk reduction research