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'Understanding volcanoes and society: the key for risk mitigation'



3.7 million years and counting (?): The art and science of volcano observation and changing climates

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This presentation takes the form of a theorized meditation on human perceptions of monumentality and threat when viewing the geophysical planet and its changes. I frame volcanoes and volcanism as an exemplar of these changes that humans have experienced over the long term. Using archaeological, ethnographic, and volcanological data from my own fieldwork and my ongoing contemporary art collaborations, I critically query what the study of past volcanic activity and predictions of future activity can contribute to discussions of climate change writ large. Does volcanic eruption in the 21st century mean the same to our species as it did when witnessed by hominins at the site of Laetoli 3.7 million years ago? My response to this self-posed question is filtered through Amitav Ghosh's 'The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable' (2016), contemporary art that uses the volcano as an observatory via James Turrell's iconic 'Roden Crater', Romantic literature inspired by Tambora's 1815 eruption, orchestral music such as Jon Leif's 'Hekla', rock bands such as the Icelandic group Kaleo or performer Björk, and tephra that I collected on Anak Krakatau from the 1883 eruption that was heavily admixed with plastics.