

Human perceptions of fire expressed through the arts: a science centre's journey (so far) of the art-science interface

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Abstract

There is no one way of understanding anything - this is particularly true for wildfires, with their complex interactions between bio-physical and socio-economic, cultural and political dimensions. We can learn more, and can make greater difference, by bringing those different scientific disciplines together. This logic also applies to bridging science with arts and humanities. Through art and creative approaches we can share diverse voices, especially of those not in the academic world, and do so in a way which connects with people in novel and often profound ways. The Leverhulme Centre for Wildfires, Environment and Society is a globally-focused, scientific research centre which is engaging with the arts and artists to explore and share diverse perceptions of wildfires. In this talk, we will share what we have achieved and learnt so far, working in collaboration with Arts Cabinet, a research platform that functions as a space to experiment with different forms of artistic knowledge production. This includes: (i) our work and editorials connecting artists and scientists - including 'Seeing Fire: Perspectives Through Art and Science' and 'Wildfires (Working Title)'; (ii) our work with Torres Strait Islander artist, Clinton Naina, in collaboration with University of Melbourne and Science Gallery London, and his piece 'Stolen Climate', exploring colonisation, country, climate and fire in Australia; and (iii) our collaboration with Kenyan artist Shadrack Musyoki and Strathmore University (Nairobi), including participatory murals on fire and climate justice. The talk will reflect on the opportunities, challenges, and different ways in which art and science can connect, and its potential role for improving our understanding of wildfires.

Keywords: culture, art, interdisciplinarity, perceptions

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