



Isaac Kerlow

M.S. Communications Design '83

Artist-in-residence at Earth Observatory of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University; former Pratt professor and founding chair, Department of Computer Graphics and Interactive Media. Photographed on the island of Luzon in the Philippines, near the Mayon volcano.

Describe your first documentary, *People-Coral-Mentawai* and how the scientists featured in the film may help predict earthquakes.

Earthquake research in the Mentawai Islands is uncovering the cyclical nature of earthquakes and tsunamis in Southeast Asia. *People-Coral-Mentawai* shows how scientists extract information from coral reefs, allowing them to build a timeline of earthquakes going back several centuries. The deadly 2004 earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia had been expected, but the local governments failed to prepare. The documentary is being distributed to schools, community centers, and government agencies, and we believe it is raising awareness. Some of the Mentawai Islands are just 80 kilometers from Padang, the city in West Sumatra where a big earthquake is expected.

How has being an artist-in-residence and the only non-scientist at the Earth Observatory at Singapore influenced the way you work?

Most scientists and engineers find it easier when projects are planned and executed in a methodical way. I like planning, but, as any artist knows, I also discover things along the way that often have a huge influence on the final results. In my opinion that is half the fun of being an artist. In working with scientists, I just need to make sure I share my discoveries as they come up. Sometimes, however, I just do my art thing, then come back to the team and find a way to make it work. At the same time, many of the researchers seem to appreciate the different points of view I bring to the institute.

Describe the documentary you and the Earth Observatory scientists are currently working on in the Philippines.

Mayon: The Volcano Princess is about the people who live around the Mayon Volcano, the most active and destructive volcano in the Philippines.

What do you bring to documentary-making from your years of working in animation?

The basics of how you tell a story are very much the same. I have also brought animation itself to documentaries. For the Mayon Volcano documentary, for example, I created an animated sequence based on the legend of Princess Magayon, who is believed to be buried under the volcano.

How did your experience at Pratt as a student prepare you for the work you're doing now?

Studying at Pratt exposed me to teachers and professionals who taught me a lot more than I realized at the time. Recently, while editing my documentaries, I remembered a guest lecture by a professional writer and sound editor who created commercials. He played a commercial for the Jamaica Tourist Board. The sounds were so powerful, you craved to go to Jamaica! In addition, graduate students at Pratt were required to write quite a bit, and that developed my writing abilities.