

PAINTING NATURE RUNNING AMOK

THE AFFECTIVE POTENTIAL OF WESTERN
REALISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY JAPAN

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January 15, 14:50-16:20
East Zone C-419

Following the massive volcanic eruption of Mt Tambora in Indonesia in 1815, atmospheric changes across the northern hemisphere provided ample inspiration for painters for decades to come. The event conveniently coincided with the sublime turn in nineteenth-century European painting.

As William Turner captured strange cloud formations and stormy seas in nineteenth-century Europe, some Japanese painters also took an interest in strange phenomena in the sky, heavy weather, storms and lightning. This paper argues that these painters did not simply use elements of Western realism such as light, shade and perspective to capture these phenomena, but they also used these techniques to explore emotional responses and new subjective positions towards observed forces of nature. Through selective case studies, this paper will inquire into the affective potential of elements of Western realism in painting in nineteenth-century Japan.