

William Turner's sensibility for ecological changes

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Abstract: The so-called environmental turn in art historical research (since around 2010) is a reaction to the crises of the present. One of the tasks of art history since then has been to ask whether art illustrates the historical anchoring of current crises. Do historical paintings provide science-informed knowledge of nature and/or do they suggest that the artists were sensitive to ecological changes? Romantic landscape painting in particular is increasingly interpreted as a reflection on the changing appearance of nature in times of industrialisation; it is particularly suitable as a central object of investigation within the so-called Environmental Art History. This view contrasts with the earlier interpretation of some Romantic painters, such as Joseph M. W. Turner, as abstract and thus detached from the world. This article asks whether Turner's expressive use of colour is science-based and ecologically motivated, and whether this is tantamount to an interpretation of his paintings as repositories of climatic conditions.

▷ [Click here](#) to read the full article in German.

Details of the cover photo: J. M. W. Turner: *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844). Photo: ©Wikimedia Commons.