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Acclaimed Actor Jamie Bell is Performing the Voice of Thomas Cole in a New Immersive Installation at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Opening on May 2nd

Bell Gives Voice to Original Writings of Thomas Cole, Founder of the First Major Art Movement in America and an Early Environmental Activist, in the Meticulously Restored Parlors at the Historic Site

Catskill, NY – The Thomas Cole National Historic Site announced today that acclaimed actor Jamie Bell is performing the voice of Thomas Cole in the new immersive installation that will enable visitors to experience the historic events that took place in the parlors of Cole’s 1815 house. The recordings are entirely created from Cole’s own words from his journals, letters and essays, and will connect visitors with the artist’s passions, motivations and ambitions. It was in those rooms that the first major art movement in America was born – the Hudson River School of landscape painting, which continues to inspire and influence leading artists to this day.

Jamie Bell will give voice to Thomas Cole (1801-1848), who – like Bell – grew up in England before moving to the United States. Bell achieved fame in the title role of *Billy Elliot*, the 2000 film for which he was named Best Actor in a Leading Role by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. He has starred in numerous films since then, including *The Adventures of Tintin*, directed by Steven Spielberg, in which he played the title role; *Jane Eyre*, directed by Cary Fukunaga, and *Film Stars Don’t Die in Liverpool*, co-starring Annette Bening, to be released later this year. This month he resumes his ongoing role as Abraham Woodhull in the fourth and final season of AMC’s *Turn: Washington’s Spies*.

Bell donated his services to the Thomas Cole National Historic Site after being introduced to it by his agent, Brian Swardstrom, a partner at United Talent Agency (UTA) and a supporter of the Historic Site. UTA donated the studio time for the recording.

“When I heard Jamie performing and recording Thomas Cole’s own words, I felt as though I had met Thomas Cole at last,” said Elizabeth B. Jacks, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. “Jamie was masterful in recording each piece of the narration repeatedly, trying out different inflections until each was perfect. We are enormously grateful to him for

THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



this invaluable gift – and to his agent Brian Swardstrom and our Chairman, Lisa Fox Martin, for making it possible.”

“Thomas Cole combined commitments to artistic excellence and environmental activism, which is enormously compelling,” said Jamie Bell. “I’m delighted to be a part of bringing his story to life for contemporary audiences. The issues that Cole faced are as vital today as they were when he was discussing them nearly 200 years ago.”

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site will re-open on May 2nd with a new immersive installation that combines technology and meticulous historic restoration, featuring the earliest-known interior decorative painting by an American artist. Through hidden audio voiced by Bell and moving-graphics presentations, visitors will be able to hear the thoughts of Thomas Cole and the historic conversations that took place in his home.



Artist's rendering of the West Parlor by MK Tan

The carefully researched restoration has transformed the first floor of Cole’s home to his original design, as visitors in his day would have experienced it. It extends from carpets and other floor coverings to wall colors to newly uncovered, elaborately painted borders in both parlors. Those painted borders were designed and painted by Cole himself – revealing another “first” in American art history – and had been hidden for more than a century under layer upon layer of modern paint.

The restoration is combined with the latest techniques in immersive storytelling developed in partnership with some of the leading experts in the nation. The multimedia installation will be the first of its kind in the restored rooms of an historic home and will feature the artist’s own



artworks, and his words brought to life by Bell. Instead of viewing period rooms from behind velvet ropes, visitors will enter the rooms and participate in the events that took place there.

Over a decade in the making, the installation is informed by research conducted by the Cole site staff with distinguished art historians and other experts. They include Elizabeth Kornhauser, Alice Pratt Brown Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture at The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Nancy Siegel, author, curator and professor of American art; and Alan Wallach, considered the foremost Cole scholar in the world.

The restoration has been directed by leading historic interiors experts Jean Dunbar and Carrie Feder and implemented by historic paint specialist Matthew Mosca and acclaimed conservator Margaret Saliske. The multimedia installation, including the audio and moving graphics, has been designed and implemented by the nationally renowned design firm Second Story with the acclaimed theater director Warner Shook, also a Cole Site trustee.

The installation was made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor. It was also made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services MA-10-15-0116-15. The project is supported by a grant from Empire State Development's Market NY program, and was recently announced by Governor Andrew Cuomo in the latest round of Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) awards. The historic paint finishes are sponsored by Herzog's of Kingston, and the exhibition fabrication is provided by Geoff Howell Studio. Additional support is provided by the Hudson River Valley Greenway and Eli Wilner & Company of New York City.

The installation will dramatically enhance the experience of visiting Cole's Main House and will augment the other offerings at the Site. They include Cole's 1839 "Old Studio" building and his majestic 1846 "New Studio" building, which was recently reconstructed, and related displays of Cole's art and that of his many followers who comprise the art movement now known as the Hudson River School.

About the Thomas Cole National Historic Site

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site preserves and interprets the home and studios of Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School of painting, the nation's first major art movement. Located on 6 acres in the Hudson Valley, the site includes the 1815 Main House, 1839 Old Studio, the newly reconstructed 1846 New Studio, and several other buildings. It is a



National Historic Landmark and an affiliated area of the National Park System. Following a restoration of the Main House, the Cole Site opened to the public in 2001. The site's activities include guided tours, exhibitions, printed publications, extensive online programs, activities for school groups, free community events, lectures, and innovative public programs such as the Hudson River School Art Trail—a map and website that enables visitors to see the nearby views that Cole painted. Each year, the Cole Site organizes a loan exhibition of Hudson River School paintings, providing a first-hand experience with the art movement that Cole founded. The goal of all programs at the Cole Site is to enable visitors to find meaning and inspiration in Thomas Cole's life and work. The themes that Cole explored in his art and writings—such as landscape preservation and our conception of nature as a restorative power—are both historic and timely, providing the opportunity to connect to audiences with insights that are highly relevant to their own lives.

Visit the Thomas Cole National Historic Site

Thomas Cole's home, studios, special exhibitions, and grounds are open from May through October, Tuesday – Sunday. The hours in May are 10:30 am – 4:00 pm; from June through October they are 9:30 am – 5:00 pm. For details, visit: www.thomascole.org. For upcoming events, visit: thomascole.org/events.

National Endowment for the Humanities Policy Statement

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