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Thomas Cole National Historic Site Opens 2017 Season with Two Landmark Exhibitions

“The Parlors” – An Installation Combining Technology & Meticulous Restoration of the Parlors of Cole’s 1815 Home, Where America’s First Major Art Movement was Born

“Sanford R. Gifford in the Catskills” – The First Such Exhibition of This Magnitude in the Region That Inspired This Leader of the Hudson River School of Landscape Painting

Catskill, NY – The Thomas Cole National Historic Site today opened its 2017 season with two new landmark exhibitions: “The Parlors” and “Sanford R. Gifford in the Catskills.” Each explores, in a way that has never been done before, the Hudson River School of landscape painting – America’s first major art movement – and illuminates



The East Parlor, © Peter Aaron/OTTO

the relationship between humankind and the environment, which is as contemporary a topic as any. The 2017 season runs through October. Both exhibitions will be on view throughout that period; “The Parlors” is a permanent installation.

“The Parlors” is an immersive installation that combines technology and meticulous historic restoration and features the earliest-known, interior decorative painting by an American artist. Through hidden audio and moving-graphics presentations, visitors can hear the thoughts of Thomas Cole (1801-1848) and the historic conversations that took place in the parlors of his 1815 home, where the Hudson River School of landscape painting was founded. Thomas Cole is given voice by Jamie Bell, the award-winning film and television star, who 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.

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The West Parlor, © Peter Aaron/OTTO

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 floor coverings to wall colors to newly uncovered, elaborately painted borders on the walls of 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 is the first of its kind in the restored rooms of an historic home and features the artist’s own words and artworks. 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 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 core project team also included the Thomas Cole Site’s Board Chairman Lisa Fox Martin, Executive Director Elizabeth Jacks, and staff members Heather Paroubek and Kate Menconeri.

The installation has been made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor, the Institute of Museum and Library Services MA-10-15-0116-15, and Empire State Development’s Market NY program, announced by Governor Andrew Cuomo in the latest round of Regional Economic Development Council awards. The project is supported by the Hudson River Valley Greenway, Herzog’s of Kingston, Eli Wilner & Company of New York City, and Geoff Howell Studio.

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The New Studio, © Peter Aaron/OTTO

renowned institutions as Yale University Art Gallery, Harvard University Art Museums, Portland Museum of Art, and Albany Institute of History and Art, plus private collections.

“Sanford R. Gifford in the Catskills” explores the Catskills paintings of Sanford Robinson Gifford (1823-1880), a leading member of the Hudson River School, who credited Cole’s works with stimulating his interest in landscape painting. It is the first such show of this magnitude to take place in the region that inspired Cole and Gifford and so close to the settings that Gifford depicted and to his childhood home in Hudson, directly across the Hudson River from Catskill. The exhibition is curated by Kevin J. Avery, Senior Research Scholar at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and consists of 20 paintings – loaned by such

In 2003, Dr. Avery co-organized the major retrospective *Hudson River School Visions: The Landscapes of Sanford R. Gifford* for The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art. In the current exhibition, he sharpens his focus on Gifford’s paintings of the Catskills, the mountains and valleys near Catskill that so inspired Cole. Gifford’s enchanting, seductive – sometimes even stark – interpretations of Kaaterskill Clove and Falls, High Peak and Round Top, as well as Hunter Mountain and the Hudson Valley prospect are richly represented. The exhibition is on view in the gallery of the recently reconstructed 1846 “New Studio” building, which Cole designed. The exhibition is made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and the support of Michael Altman Fine Art & Advisory Services. It is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue that is sponsored by the Barrie & Deedee Wigmore Foundation.



The New Studio © Peter Aaron/OTTO



Six of the views depicted in the Gifford paintings in the exhibition can be visited on the innovative walking-and-driving experience called the Hudson River School Art Trail (www.hudsonriverschool.org), which reveals nearby settings in the Hudson Valley where visitors can experience the same views that appear in 19th-century paintings by Hudson River School artists. Those six views are located in Greene, Columbia, and Ulster counties and are represented in 10 of the Gifford paintings in the exhibition.

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. The Site's public programs include guided tours, exhibitions, printed publications, activities for school groups, free community events, lectures, and the Hudson River School Art Trail—a map and website that enable 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 May – October, Tuesday – Sunday. The Site is open in May from 10:30 am – 4:00 pm, and from June – October from 9:30 am to 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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