

All nature *here* is new to art.<sup>1</sup> The mists were resting in the valley of the Hudson— The tops of mountains were visible on the other side – you might imagine them in another world. The fields in shadow were a most beautiful fresh green, the mountain side was brilliant though dark.<sup>2</sup>

I am now in the village of Catskill with the intention of spending the Summer here. Retired from the noise and bustle of the city and surrounded by the beauties of Nature, I shall have every opportunity of improvement I can wish.<sup>3</sup>

I have just returned from the mountain, where I have spent two of the happiest days that I remember. Dark forests, rugged rocks, towering mountains encompassed me. It was sublime.<sup>4</sup> I have found no natural scenery which has affected me so powerfully as that which I have seen in the wilderness of America.<sup>5</sup> Yet I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes is quickly passing away.<sup>6</sup> The copper-hearted barbarians are cutting all the trees down in the beautiful valley on which I have looked so often with a loving eye. This throws quite a gloom over me.<sup>7</sup> The ravages of the axe are daily increasing.<sup>8</sup>

I have been dwelling on several subjects and looking forward to the time when I can embody them on the canvas.<sup>9</sup> My desire is to undertake a work on which I may hope to establish a lasting reputation. I will create a series of pictures that illustrate the history of a natural scene affected by man, wherein we see how nations have risen from the savage state, to that of power and glory, and then fallen again and become extinct.<sup>10</sup> I have had some difficulty in finding an appropriate title for this series, but now I think I have a good one: The Course of Empire.<sup>11</sup> To my great surprise the series seems to give universal pleasure.<sup>12</sup>

What's more, I have found a congenial spirit to mingle soul with my soul.<sup>13</sup> Since I have been married, my happiness is augmented.<sup>14</sup> I often look at our house and think how wonderful that so much of happiness should be comprised in that little spot.<sup>15</sup>

I am as usual engaged in painting.<sup>16</sup> Among American scenes, many a mountain, stream, and rock has its legend, worthy of the painter's pencil.<sup>17</sup> But the wayside is becoming shade-less, and another generation will behold spots, now rife with beauty, desecrated by what is called improvement.<sup>18</sup>

In this age, when a meager utilitarianism seems ready to absorb every feeling and sentiment, may we at times turn to the pure enjoyment of rural nature. We are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out of the garden is our own ignorance and folly. Nature has spread for us a rich and delightful banquet. Shall we turn from it?<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry July 6, 1835, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.

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- <sup>2</sup> Thomas Cole, "Catskilliana," New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Notebooks, Box 8 Folder 2.
- <sup>3</sup> Thomas Cole to Daniel Wadsworth, July 6, 1826, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, CT, Manuscripts.
- <sup>4</sup> Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry July 6, 1835, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas Cole to Robert Gilmor, January 29, 1832, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Correspondence between Thomas Cole and Robert Gilmor 1826-1837, Box 3 Folder 8.
- <sup>6</sup> Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836) 1-12.
- <sup>7</sup> Thomas Cole to Luman Reed, March 6, 1836, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Box 1 Folder 2.
- <sup>8</sup> Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836) 1-12.
- <sup>9</sup> Thomas Cole to Daniel Wadsworth, February 9, 1844, quoted in Merritt, "A *Wild Scene*: Genesis of a Painting," in Rosenthal, et al., *Studies on Thomas Cole*, 19.
- <sup>10</sup> Thomas Cole to Luman Reed, September 18, 1833, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Box 1 Folder 1.
- <sup>11</sup> Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry July 28, 1835, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry October 29, 1836, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.
- <sup>13</sup> Thomas Cole to Francis Alexander, September 1, 1834, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Box 1 Folder 1.
- <sup>14</sup> Thomas Cole, "Thoughts and Occurrences," Journal Entry May 14, 1837, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1.
- <sup>15</sup> Thomas Cole to Maria Cole, undated letter from the Mountain House, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Cole Family Letters, Box 4 Folder 4.
- <sup>16</sup> Thomas Cole to William A. Adams, July 29, 1839, New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Box 1 Folder 4.
- <sup>17</sup> Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836) 1-12.
- <sup>18</sup> Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836) 1-12.
- <sup>19</sup> Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery" in *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (January 1836) 1-12.