

THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Fall 2019 Newsletter



"THERE'S A COLE REVIVAL UNDER WAY"



Executive Director Betsy Jacks & Chairman Lisa Fox Martin

Photo by Adam T. Deen

A Local Landscape Made Iconic

The 2019 exhibition entitled *Thomas Cole's Refrain: The Paintings of Catskill Creek*, marked the first time that Cole's paintings of Catskill Creek, created from 1827 through 1845, have been considered as an integral series. The exhibition is based on new scholarship developed by H. Daniel Peck, the exhibition's curator and the John Guy Vassar, Jr., Professor Emeritus of English at Vassar College, in his book of the same title, published by Three Hills, an imprint of Cornell University Press. Professor Peck notes that "the paintings contain mysteries—enigmatic figures, evocative human structures, and symbolic landforms—that tell stories of their own."

Cole's Catskill Creek paintings show close observation of a landscape over time and reveal Cole's proto-environmentalism. *The Wall Street Journal* noted in their August 10, 2019, review, "we bear witness to Cole's joy in unblemished natural beauty and his profound sorrow over its creeping devastation." As Professor Peck observes, Cole's deep connection to Catskill Creek can be compared to Henry David Thoreau's relationship to Walden Pond, as both transcend a local place. Peter Schjeldahl's June 3, 2019, review in *The New Yorker* called the exhibition "sublime," and declared "There's a Cole revival under way."

NEW DISCOVERY:
COLE'S HOME ART GALLERY
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Thomas Cole & Frederic Church leading the parade of paintings on the Hudson River Skywalk

Photo by Zio & Sons

Grand Opening of Skywalk

The Hudson River Skywalk is now open, creating a new scenic walkway at the place where American landscape began. The three-mile walkway connects the homes and studios of the major Hudson River School artists, Thomas Cole and his student Frederic Church, over the Hudson River across the Rip Van Winkle Bridge, offering sweeping views of the Hudson Valley and the Catskill Mountains. The project also reconnects Cole's historic home and property to the Hudson River waterfront for the first time in over a century.

The Skywalk was developed over many years with many partners, and the grand opening ceremony on June 1 was a celebration of our joining together the two counties, two towns and a village and two great historic sites. The festivities began with a parade of paintings from each historic site, led by none other than Thomas Cole and Frederic Church. Members of the community carried their favorite Hudson River School paintings and both sides met at the center of the Bridge over the Hudson River. The New York State Bridge Authority hosted the Skywalk ribbon-cutting at the Rip Van Winkle Bridge Park with state dignitaries and a musical performance by students from Catskill High School who sang "River of Dreams," an original song by

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THE ART OF EMILY COLE AND NEW WOMEN'S TOUR



Emily Cole, *Untitled (Ladyslipper)*, n.d.

and porcelain, revealing her exquisitely painted botanicals.

Emily studied at a New York City art school, was a charter member of the New York Society of Ceramic Arts, and exhibited her work in Catskill and New York City. A nineteenth-century newspaper review of an exhibition of Emily's porcelain calls her work "unrivaled" for its "delicacy, purity of color, and transparency." WAMC Northeast Public Radio reviewed our exhibition and observed that Emily Cole "was ahead of her time ... earning her own place in American art."

This year we presented a new collection-based exhibition entitled *The Art of Emily Cole* that opened during Women's History Month, March 2019. Emily Cole (1843-1913) was Thomas Cole's daughter and the only one of his children to become a professional artist. The show marked the first solo exhibition of Emily Cole's artwork on both paper

The exhibition was curated by Amanda Malmstrom, 2019 Cole fellow, in conversation with Kate Menconeri, Cole Site curator and director of exhibitions and collections, with research conducted by Rowanne Dean, 2018 Cole fellow. Amanda also developed a special guided tour that was offered throughout the 2019 season, sharing the stories of five women who lived at the Thomas Cole Site in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



2019 Cole Fellow Amanda Malmstrom installing the exhibition

PROGRAM ENDOWMENT CHALLENGE ACHIEVED



School programs at the Thomas Cole Historic Site

Over the last five years, many generous people and institutions joined our effort to establish a new endowment here at the Thomas Cole Historic Site, to ensure that everything we've accomplished is here to stay. We are thrilled to announce that we met our five-year goal to establish a \$1.2 million Program Endowment with matching funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Thank you to everyone who has joined us in protecting educational arts programming for generations to come. Our new endowment supports all of our educational programming, including art exhibitions, school programs, hikes & paddles, free community events, the Sunday Salons, the Cole Fellowship and more. The list of all the wonderful donors to the Program Endowment is at thomascole.org/programendowment.

WE BELIEVE THE LANDSCAPE IS IMPORTANT

Join the group of inspiring people who care about this region's magnificent natural beauty. Become a member and support the birthplace of American art. Learn more at thomascole.org/membership or call (518) 943-7465 ext. 7.



Installation view © Peter Aaron/OTTO

GIANT LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHS DEBUT IN HISTORIC HOME

The fourth annual exhibition in the series *OPEN HOUSE: Contemporary Art in Conversation with Cole* opened on September 22, featuring new work by the internationally acclaimed artist Shi Guorui. The exhibition, *SHI GUORUI: Ab/Sense-Pre/Sense*, debuts a series of large-scale landscape photographs inspired by Thomas Cole and installed throughout the historic Main House where Cole lived and

worked. *The New York Times* observed the photographs are “like staring into the soul of the Catskills.” Shi Guorui visited the places in nature that Cole painted and captured these magnificent landscapes today using the ancient camera obscura process. Transforming box trucks and twenty-five-foot tents into cameras, Shi Guorui created giant photographic prints of iconic views, including Kaaterskill Falls. For the exhibition, Shi Guorui converted a second-floor room in the historic house into a walk-in camera obscura. Cole used that same room as a studio before moving his painting operation to the “Old Studio” in 1839.

Originally based in Beijing, China, Shi Guorui now has a studio and home in Catskill, NY. The Exhibition Curator and Cole Site Director of Exhibitions Kate Menconeri observes that the project “explores landscape, history, and art in a cross-cultural exchange. It is the first time an artist from China is presenting work within the American artist’s home. In doing so, Shi Guorui connects two landscape traditions that each redefined how a nation was seen and offers a chance to consider our relationship to the natural world today.”

Supported by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, Empire State Development’s I LOVE NEW YORK program under the Market NY initiative, The Bay & Paul Foundations, the Enoch Foundation, The Educational Foundation of America, Joan K. Davidson through the J. M. Kaplan Fund, and the Kindred Spirits Society of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.



Shi Guorui and Kiki Smith at the opening

Photo by Niva Dorell

A VISIT WITH PETER SCHJELDAHL

By Elizabeth B. Jacks



From the porch of the New Studio, I saw the unmistakable figure with black glasses and white hair coming down the path. Peter Schjeldahl, the senior art critic at *The New Yorker*, would meet me that spring morning to review our new

exhibition. He came with his wife, the actress Brooke Alderson, who introduced herself only as a gardener. Peter's white hair had a warm, golden tone, and it was long enough and unruly enough to cover most of his face if you were looking at him from the side. His posture was strong but bowed permanently forward, as if he leaned in to look closely at a painting one too many times and got stuck that way. He spoke so softly that I found myself leaning forward too. I thought he would want to look at the exhibition in silence, but after glancing around the room and asking me for a checklist, he looked at me searchingly and asked, "What does it all mean?" I wondered for a moment if he was asking me in jest, but there was no trace of irony in his expression. What do you say when the most revered art critic living today asks you such a thing? I had an answer that I hoped would suffice, that Catskill Creek was for Cole what Walden Pond was to Thoreau, a spiritual center of gravity, and a place where he could uncover the universal by exploring the specific. He repeated the word "Walden" and scribbled something in his notebook.

He paused for a while in front of *Autumn Landscape*, a large painting with a little figure of Cole lounging by a creek, and commented on the unusual brushwork. I noted that it was uncharacteristically loose, and yet it was completed in the same timeframe as the painting next to it, *Crossing the Stream*, in which the brushwork was comparatively tight. But Peter liked the loose one better. "He was self-taught?" he asked. I explained about Cole's training in the decorative arts and then how he learned composition from a book of prints of European landscape paintings. Peter looked again. "He is genuine in spite of himself, in spite of his training," he said. On the next wall, he was drawn to the large painting from Yale. I pointed out that the two tiny figures are in Colonial-era dress and by looking upstream perhaps we are looking back in time. He tossed that idea away with his left hand. "I don't want to think that hard," he said. He was more focused on the incredible sky of rose-tinted clouds catching the last rays

of sunlight at dusk, with the landscape below already cast into darkness. "Where did he learn this?" he asked. Again, my heart leaped with gladness that I had an answer. "He was great friends with John Constable and together they went outside and made oil sketches of the sky." This pleased him. "Constable is my favorite British artist," he said. "Generally I don't think the English should have taken up painting at all... nor cooking. They can do gardening, but painting and cooking require authenticity, don't you think?" I laughed rather than try to respond with any observations of my own.

"I do like Constable," he went on, "but I despise Turner. What a show-off. He paints a ground of loose colors and then lays a structure on top like a bathroom decal," he said.

"I think the entire British establishment just rolled over in their graves," I said.

He skimmed quickly over the next two paintings and then stopped abruptly in front of the large painting from the New-York Historical Society, *Catskill Creek, N.Y.*, and studied it silently for several minutes. "Had the deforestation not reached this area?" he asked.

"It had," I explained, "and Cole was quite upset about it." Brooke pointed out the cleanly cut stumps and fallen tree in the foreground of the painting, and I told them that those stumps just happened to be along the precise route of the railroad that caused such destruction in Cole's time. He took a few notes, then asked about the wisp of smoke at the base of the mountains.

"We believe it to be from the tanneries that were the cause of the clearing of the forest," I said. "Tanneries," he said, and then made more notes in the notebook.

We looked at the paintings by Asher Durand, Frederic Church and Charles Herbert Moore on the last wall. The small Church painting held his gaze. "That has an extraordinary sharpness," he observed. I told him that Church painted this while studying with Cole and that Church was only about eighteen years old. Peter leaned closer. I think he muttered something like "wow." He then crossed back to the painting he had studied in the beginning, Cole's large self-portrait, *Autumn Landscape*. "He's genuine," he said. "He genuinely wants to paint."

Peter Schjeldahl's review appeared in the June 3, 2019 print edition of The New Yorker.

Ms. Jacks has been Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site since 2003. She was previously Director of Marketing at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

THE COLE FELLOSHIP PROGRAM: THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

The Cole Fellowship program is a full-year residency at the Thomas Cole Historic Site for exceptional emerging scholars. Now in its tenth year, the program addresses an urgent need to steward talented young people into the field of American art by giving them significant responsibilities and by showing them their work can be both rewarding and rewarded. This spring, we graduated the class of 2019 Cole Fellows and welcomed the new class of 2020. Our 2019 Fellows are all pursuing careers in the arts and two proceeded directly to graduate studies: Peter Fedoryk is now a Lois F. McNeil Fellow at the Winterthur Program in American Material Culture and Katherine Pratt-Thompson is a Masters Student in Art History at Columbia University. Maeve McCool is teaching printmaking and exhibiting her art, and Amanda Malmstrom is the assistant curator at the Cole Site.



Photos by Kate Menconeri

Introducing the class of 2020 Cole Fellows

ANNE COMER received her B.A. from Bard College where she majored in Cultural Anthropology and minored in Experimental Humanities. Anne is researching digital education games. Her project will build on the Thomas Cole Site's education initiative using American art to teach American history in school classrooms.

HAMPTON DES SMITH received his B.A. in Art History from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Hampton is researching the portrayal of Native Americans in Thomas Cole's paintings. His project will expand the conversation about American art at the Thomas Cole Site.

MARISSA HAMM received her B.A. from The College of Wooster where she majored in History and minored in Anthropology. Marissa is researching life at Cedar Grove in the first 125 years after Cole's death in 1848. Her project will inform future on-site interpretation of Thomas Cole's legacy.

ALEX MCCARTY received his B.A. from Santa Clara University where he majored in Art History. Alex is researching Thomas Cole's legacy as a proto-environmentalist. His project will inform the reinterpretation of the second floor of the Main House.

JACK WARNER FOUNDATION SUPPORTS DIGITAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE



Susan Warner, Betsy Jacks & Joyce Mayfield Allen

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is thrilled to announce a new partnership with The Jack Warner Foundation to create a digital learning experience that will continue Jack Warner's passion for fostering an appreciation of early American history through American art. The multi-year project is a collaboration between a team of scholars and experts including Electric Funstuff Inc. and the Thomas Cole Site's Education Committee. A recent study found that eighty percent of teachers wish it were easier to find digital games that align to curriculum standards. The project will address this pressing need by creating an engaging online experience that can be used by teachers in classrooms and by children in their homes across the country.

The Jack Warner Foundation is a private nonprofit organization founded in 2003 by the renowned American art collector, Jonathan ("Jack") Warner. Prior to 2013, the Foundation operated the Westervelt Warner Museum of American Art in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, which showcased Jack's legendary collection, including paintings, decorative art, sculpture and furniture, spanning the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Since the Museum's closing in 2012 and Jack's death in 2017, Jack's wife, Susan Austin Warner, has led the Board of Directors to refocus the Foundation's undertakings on art

and education in keeping with Jack's interests. Dr. Warner has a PhD in Public Health and spent twenty-three years as a chronic disease epidemiologist before becoming Director of Development at the Westervelt Warner Museum of American Art. She founded the docent program there in 2004, modelled after the program at the New Britain Museum of American Art. The Jack Warner Foundation board members also include Vaughn Morrisette (Mobile, AL), Rob Burns (Birmingham, AL), Joyce Mayfield Allen (Tuscaloosa, AL) and Maura O'Shea (New Britain, CT).

Jack Warner's love of American history was derived both from the history of the Westervelt family, arriving in New Amsterdam in 1662, as well as Jack's military service in WWII. Jack's grandfather Herbert Westervelt entered the paper manufacturing business in 1891 and obtained a patent for the first flat bottom brown paper bag machine in 1900. After WWII, Jack succeeded his mother and became the third generation to lead what would become one of

the largest privately owned paper manufacturing companies in the United States, the Gulf States Paper Corporation.

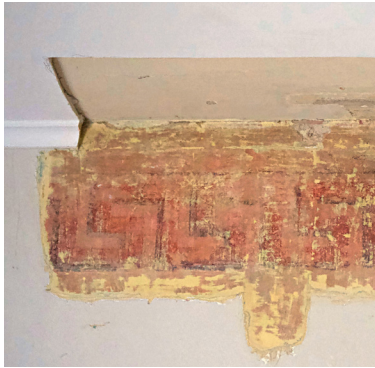
Jack began collecting in the 1950s and continued purchasing an extraordinary number of masterpieces until his death at age ninety-nine. Among their many honors and achievements, Jack and Susan Warner were recognized by the naming of the *Jack and Susan Warner Gallery* of Hudson River School paintings in the American Wing of The Metropolitan Museum of American Art.

In addition to supporting the digital initiative, The Warner Foundation and Susan Warner have lent three significant Thomas Cole paintings from their collections to the Thomas Cole National Historic Site: *A View of the Catskill Mountain House*, 1845-48; *Autumn Landscape (View of Mount Chocorua)*, 1827-28; and *Hunters in a Landscape*, c. 1824-25. We are delighted that our enthusiastic audiences are able to see these masterpieces of American art on view at the Thomas Cole Site.



Thomas Cole, *Autumn Landscape (View of Mount Chocorua)*, 1827-28, The Jack Warner Foundation, Tuscaloosa, Alabama

NEW DECORATIVE PAINTING REVEALS COLE'S HOME ART GALLERY



Details of new painting discovery Photo by Jonathan Palmer

Historic paint specialist Matthew Mosca made another remarkable discovery this year in a first-floor room of Thomas Cole's historic Main House: new decorative wall painting by Thomas Cole in a room that research suggests was Cole's home art gallery.

The decorative painting was previously hidden beneath layers of modern paint and represents a Pompeiian red and black design, which was associated with the display of art-work during Cole's time.

The discovery indicates that Thomas Cole created his own gallery space and designed it specifically to complement his landscape paintings. The decorative painting appears to be influenced by Cole's trip to England and Italy, including Pompeii, from 1829 to 1832, and especially by his visit to J. M. W. Turner's red-walled art gallery.

The restoration of Thomas Cole's historic home has been overseen by historic interiors expert Jean Dunbar and Thom-

as Cole trustee Carrie Feder for nearly a decade, including the discovery in 2015 of three other decorative wall paintings by Cole. With the latest discovery, Dr. Dunbar observes that "Thomas Cole's decoration of his home suddenly emerges as an artistic whole, rather than a group of rooms—with a gallery at its heart...Like Cole's painting, the fusion felt both cosmopolitan and distinctively American." We are now seeking support to expose, stabilize and restore the newly discovered decorative painting to restore Cole's gallery.



George Jones, *Interior of Turner's Gallery: The Artist Showing His Works*, ca. 1851, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Local Landscape continued from page 1

The exhibition included twelve oil paintings by Thomas Cole and three paintings of the same scene by leading nineteenth-century artists who were inspired by Cole: Asher Durand, Frederic Edwin Church, and Charles Herbert Moore. The works included Cole paintings from private collections that have rarely been seen in public as well as major works from the collections of the New-York Historical Society, Yale University Art Gallery, The National Gallery of Art, Jack Warner Foundation, Albany Institute of History and Art, Olana State Historic Site, the Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College, Detroit Institute of Arts, and The Currier Museum of Art.

The view of the Catskill Mountains that frames Catskill Creek in Cole's paintings can still be enjoyed from the Thomas Cole National Historic Site to-

day, and a stretch of land along Catskill Creek has been preserved as a public park by Scenic Hudson and Greene Land Trust. After the debut of the exhibition at the Thomas Cole Historic Site from May 4 to November 3, 2019, the exhibition travels to the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York, where it is presented from November 22, 2019 to February 23, 2020.

The project was supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, Wyeth Foundation for American Art, Marshall Field V, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, Empire State Development's I LOVE NEW YORK program under the Market NY initiative, Greene County Legislature through the County Initiative Program of the Greene County Council on the Arts, The Bank of Greene County, The Bay & Paul Foundations, the Enoch Foundation, The Educational Foundation of America, Joan K. Davidson through the J. M. Kaplan Fund, and the Kindred Spirits Society of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. The Curator's Talk that accompanied the exhibition was supported by a Humanities New York Action Grant with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Skywalk continued from page 1

Frank Cuthbert adapted from Hudson Talbott's acclaimed children's book by the same name. The Temple Israel of Catskill, located just off the Skywalk, dedicated a new pocket park as an interfaith place of peace. In conjunction with the grand opening, together with Olana, we launched a new website and branding with support from Empire State Development's I Love NY Program under the Market NY initiative. Learn more at hudsonriverskywalk.org.

The Hudson River Skywalk is presented in partnership with the New York State Bridge Authority, Historic Bridges of the Hudson Valley, Thomas Cole National Historic Site, The Olana Partnership, Olana State Historic Site, New York State Parks, New York State Department of Transportation, Scenic Hudson, Greene County Tourism, Columbia County Tourism, Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, Greene County Chamber of Commerce, Columbia County Economic Development, Empire State Development, Columbia Memorial Health, Hudson Tourism Committee, Temple Israel of Catskill, Catskill Development Corp, Hudson Business Coalitions.

THE FIRST ANNUAL SCHOLARS' DINNER

On April 1, 2019, we launched a new event in New York City bringing together leading American art scholars of today and emerging American art scholars of tomorrow. The first annual Scholars' Dinner was held at the Century Association and all proceeds from the event underwrote our annual Cole Fellowship Program. We were thrilled to see so many American art colleagues coming together to celebrate the strength and vitality of the field. The event featured three scholars in particular who delivered inspiring remarks: John Wilmerding, Christopher B. Sarofim Professor of American Art Emeritus, Princeton University, shared his personal stories as a pioneer in the field of American art; Mark Mitchell, Holcombe T. Green Curator of American Paintings & Sculpture, Yale University Art Gallery, revealed his life-changing encounter with the original art object; and Lauren Palmor, Assistant Curator of American Art, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, brought her perspective on the American story as a first generation American. In addition, our 2019 Cole Fellows showed us that the future of American art is bright. Thank you to everyone who joined us and supported the special evening.

AMERICAN ART TABLE

Lisa Fox Martin

FELLOWSHIP TABLE

Nina Matis & Alan Gosule

Anne J. Miller & Stuart J. M. Breslow

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Event design by Geoff Howell Studio

Photos by Beth Schneck Photography



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Annette Blaugrund & Mark Mitchell



Jay Lesenger, Frederick Beinecke, Lisa Fox Martin & Hudson Talbott



Anne Miller, Nina Matis & their guests



Lauren Palmor & John Wilmerding



Marianne Lockwood & Adam Weinberg

CURATE YOUR LEGACY

Many supporters have left a gift to the Thomas Cole Historic Site in their wills or estate plans to preserve this historic place for future generations, and you can too. Our legacy depends on yours. If you have already included the historic site in your plans, please let us know. We cannot wait to thank you. Call us at (518) 943-7465 and ask for Jennifer at extension 6.

OUR COMMUNITY CELEBRATES AT THE SUMMER PARTY

Thank you to everyone who celebrated with us and to our sponsors of the 2019 Summer Party. We are in awe of the community behind this historic place. Your support has made the Thomas Cole National Historic Site the thriving arts organization and economic driver that it is today. Thank you to our magnificent party host and incredible Chairman, Lisa Fox Martin, for welcoming us to her home on the banks of the Hudson River, and to Geoff Howell for bringing to life the beautiful setting with his masterful event design. The event raised \$225,000, a new record.

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Music by Franklin Micare
Auctioneer Harry Santa-Olalla
Restrooms by Stone Industries
Tent by Cantele Tent Rentals
Fireworks by Fireworks Extravaganza

SAVE THE DATES FOR 2020

Monday, April 6
Scholars' Dinner, NYC

Saturday, June 20
Summer Party, Catskill



Photos by Adam T. Deen



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Pamela King-Belfor, Lisa Fox Martin & Michele Saunders Laine



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Martin Johnson Heade, *Cattleya Orchid, Two Hummingbirds and a Beetle*, c. 1875-1890, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art

CROSS POLLINATION IN 2020

In 2020 we will present a collaborative exhibition entitled *Cross Pollination: Martin Johnson Heade, Frederic Church, Thomas Cole and the Contemporary Moment*, featuring “The Gems of Brazil,” the extraordinary series of hummingbird paintings by Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904), together with masterpieces by Cole, Church, and contemporary artists responding to ecological themes across centuries. This exhibition is jointly organized by the Thomas Cole Site, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, and Frederic Church’s Olana, and will open simultaneously at the Thomas Cole Site and Olana in May 2020. The exhibition marks the five-year anniversary of *River Crossings*, our joint exhibition with Olana in 2015. *Cross Pollination* will be the largest exhibition we’ve ever undertaken. Following its debut here, it will travel on to the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, the Reynolda House Museum of American Art, and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.