

THOMAS COLE

NATIONAL
HISTORIC
SITE



2020 ANNUAL REPORT



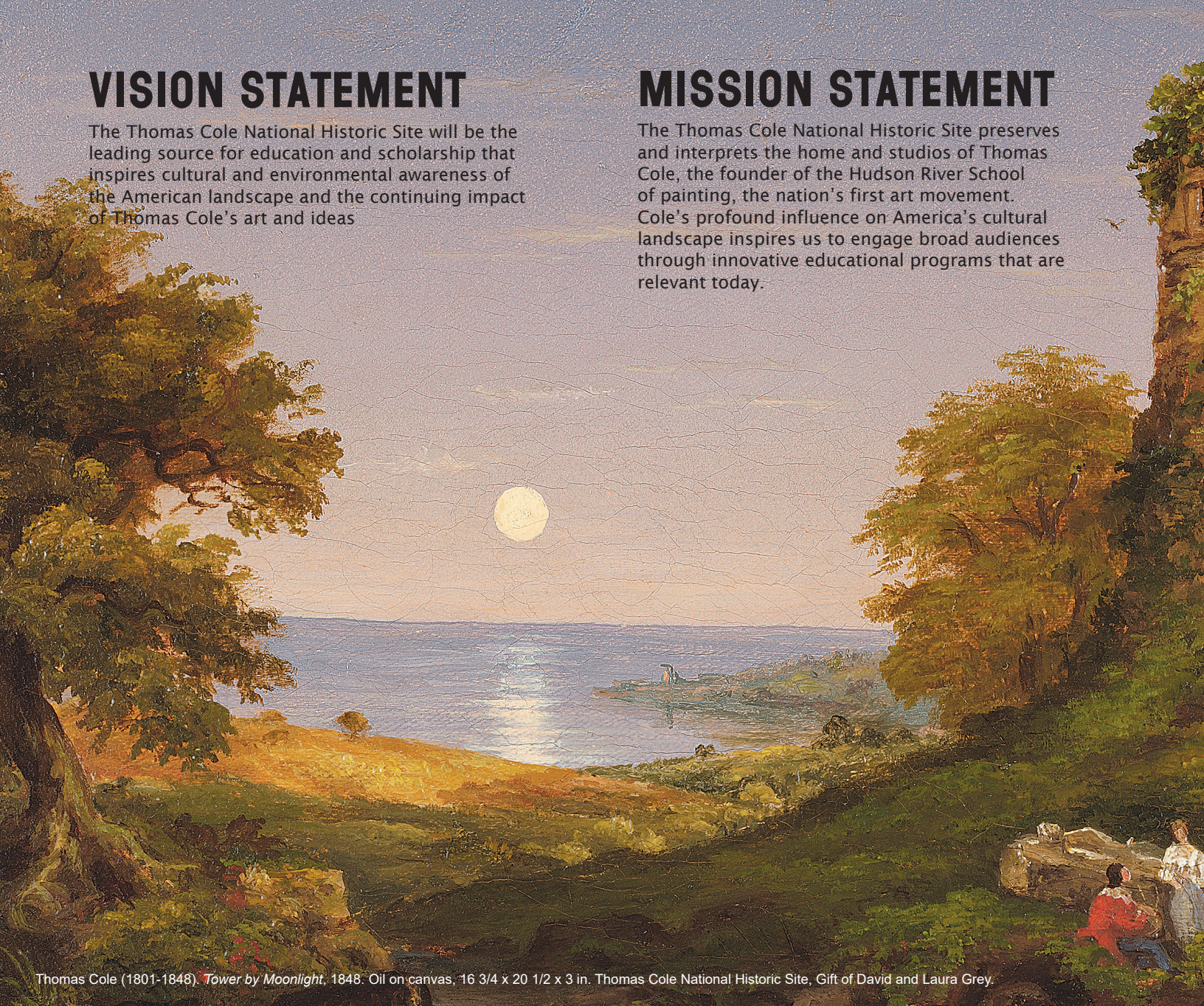
thomascole.org

VISION STATEMENT

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site will be the leading source for education and scholarship that inspires cultural and environmental awareness of the American landscape and the continuing impact of Thomas Cole's art and ideas

MISSION STATEMENT

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 art movement. Cole's profound influence on America's cultural landscape inspires us to engage broad audiences through innovative educational programs that are relevant today.



Thomas Cole (1801-1848). *Tower by Moonlight*, 1848. Oil on canvas, 16 3/4 x 20 1/2 x 3 in. Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Gift of David and Laura Grey.

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Dear Friends,

This year was full of uncertainties and shifting circumstances, but I was blown away by the continued support behind this organization. The community at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site persevered through the first year of the pandemic and continued working on projects that propel the organization and its mission forward.

We opened a new art installation, *The Pollinator Pavilion* by Mark Dion and Dana Sherwood, on the historic grounds. The site-specific, public artwork provides a place for visitors to enjoy the grounds at the site in the company of nature's pollinators.

While the buildings on site were closed to the public this year, we took the opportunity to do important preservation work. We restored and preserved newly uncovered decorative wall paintings by Thomas Cole in his Library Gallery and worked to restore the finishes and furnishings to the family Sitting Room on the second floor.

We celebrated our annual Summer Party together virtually on Zoom. Our staff delivered festive picnic baskets for guests to enjoy from the comfort of their own homes, and we all raised a glass to our featured speaker, Tim Barringer.

Thank you for being an important part of this community and helping to make everything this organization achieves possible.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth B. Jacks
Executive Director

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View from the Main House Porch



Photo by Adam T. Deen

THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site in Catskill, NY, marks the birthplace of the major art movement known as the Hudson River School, as it was founded by Thomas Cole (1801-1848). The nationally recognized historic site is an affiliate of the National Park Service and operates as a forward thinking nonprofit organization embracing change and continually pursuing authenticity and resonance. Thomas Cole's profound influence on America's cultural landscape inspires us to engage broad audiences through innovative educational programs that are relevant today. Our programming and operations are continually evolving under our initiatives for Greening and Diversity, Equity and Access.

EXPRESSING OUR APPRECIATION

In March of this year, it became clear that the organization would experience significant losses in revenue from admissions, shop sales, and events in 2020. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all the organizations and individuals who supported us this year and made everything we achieved possible. Thank you to those who went above and beyond to provide crisis funding. Major support provided by the Bay & Paul Foundations, Willow Springs Charitable Trust, the Henry Luce Foundation, the Enoch Foundation, the U.S. Small Business Administration, New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, Art Bridges Bridge Ahead Initiative, the Brown Foundation, the Gilder Foundation, Humanities New York CARES Grant with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Federal CARES Act, Terra Foundation for American Art, and the Kindred Spirits Society of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. Thank you to all of our important supporters that allowed us to persevere this year.



Hunters in a Landscape in the Main House

MAJOR PAINTING GIFT & PUBLIC ART

This year, the Thomas Cole National Historic Site was gifted a major Thomas Cole painting by Dr. Susan Warner, Chairman of the Board of the Warner Foundation and Trustee at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. The artwork entitled *Hunters in a Landscape*, is a gift from Dr. Warner's private collection and is one of Cole's earliest paintings, dated approximately 1824-25. Dr. Graham C. Boettcher, the

R. Hugh Daniel Director of the Birmingham Museum of Art in Birmingham, Alabama, delivered our annual Beecher Lecture in the fall on Zoom and presented new research on this fascinating painting. It is an early work, likely inspired by Cole's first hikes in the Catskills. The painting is featured in a new installation and reinterpretation of the collection-based exhibition *Thomas Cole's Creative Process*, supported by

the Henry Luce Foundation.

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site persevered through the first year of the pandemic and reimagined nearly all aspects of our programming and operations to continue serving audiences through the shifting conditions. We opened a new large-scale public artwork on the grounds of the historic site for visitors to enjoy safely outdoors. *The Pollinator Pavilion*, a new site-

Left: Thomas Cole, *Rip Van Winkle*, ca. 1825. Ink and pencil on paper. Albany Institute of History. Gift of Mrs. Florence Cole Vincent, the artist's granddaughter



Graham C. Boettcher giving the annual Beecher Lecture on Zoom



Staff meeting outside with the *Pollinator Pavillion*



Young visitors enjoying the *Pollinator Pavillion*

specific public artwork by the internationally renowned and locally-based artists Mark Dion and Dana Sherwood, opened at the site this summer. The interactive artwork provides sustenance to pollinators and a place for visitors to encounter these enchanting creatures. Local resident Mabel shared, “It is like a gift in this time and a place of sanctuary and beauty. I love coming to see the sun set from this beautiful spot.” Her

neighbor Suzanne Bernstein said, “I feel lucky and blessed to live close by *The Pollinator Pavillion* - I was just taken by it!” *The Pollinator Pavillion* was made possible by the Henry Luce Foundation.

The artwork is a part of our forthcoming collaborative exhibition *Cross Pollination: Heade, Cole, Church, and Our Contemporary Moment*, which will now open in the Hudson Valley in 2021. The

major traveling exhibition was created by the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, The Olana Partnership at Olana State Historic Site, and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Brentonville, Arkansas. The exhibition tour is organized by Crystal Bridges. Support for the exhibition and its national tour is provided by Art Bridges and additional major support is provided by the Henry Luce Foundation.



 Amanda Malmstrom, Education & Curatorial Program Coordinator, leading live virtual programming

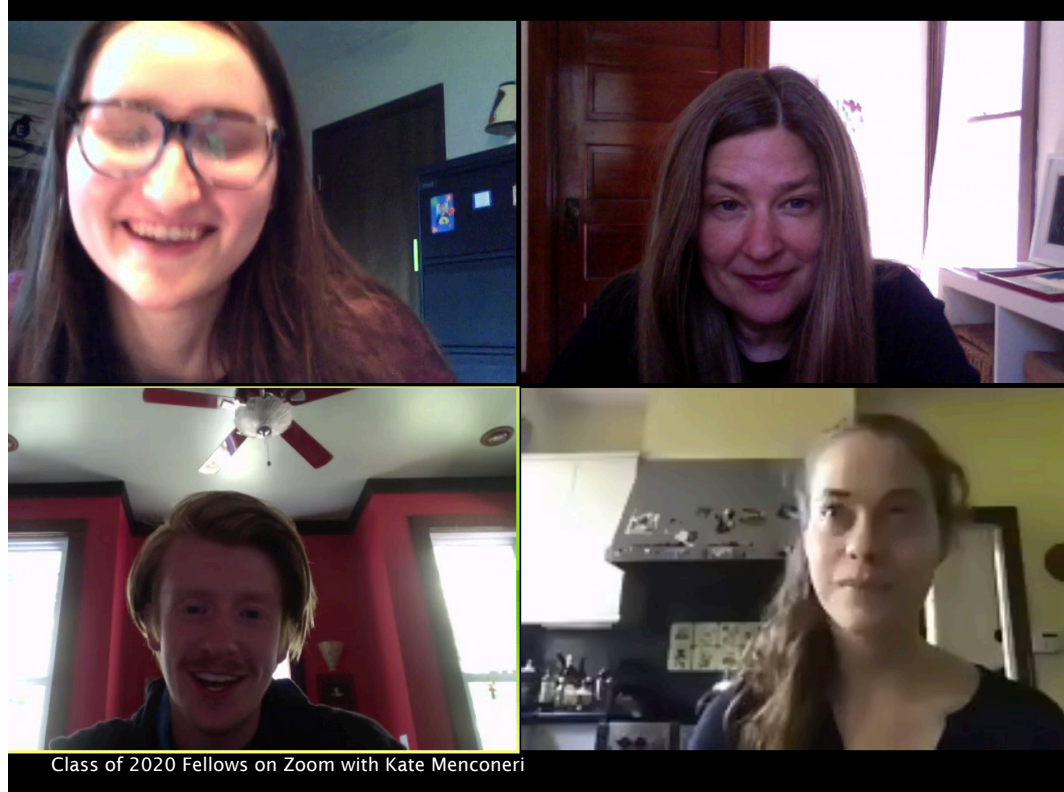
EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING AND GREENING

This year, the Class of 2020 Cole Fellows worked with staff to adapt and innovate in the new environment. In the Spring, our 2020 Cole Fellows presented their research to an audience of over 100 people over Zoom. The Cole Fellowship program is a full-year residency at the Thomas Cole Historic Site for exceptional emerging Scholars. Congratulations to Hampton Des Smith, Marissa Hamm,

Alex McCarty, and Anne Comer. Their research topics included the Indigenous figures in Cole's paintings, digital education games, life at Cedar Grove in the first 125 years after Cole's death, and Thomas Cole's legacy as a proto-environmentalist. They each pursued work or studies in art history or museums.

Four new fellows joined us virtually for the class of 2021. The new fellows are Isabelle

Bohling, Adaeze Dikko, Brooke Krancer, and Oriana Tang. The new class visited the site this fall for a distanced in-person orientation, followed by an interim remote period. Their research covers a wide range of topics and projects that will help advance the site closer to its goal of becoming the leading source for education and scholarship of the American landscape. Through the shifting



Class of 2020 Fellows on Zoom with Kate Menconeri



Class of 2021 Cole Fellows visit with staff

circumstances of the pandemic, we reimagined our educational programming for K-12 students. At the historic site, we offered free Outdoor Explore Kits to children from the Greene and Columbia County school systems. For Digital programming, we offered virtual programming with Thomas Cole Site educators. We also created free lesson plans and activities for K-12 remote learning.

This year, the Thomas Cole National Historic Site announced a new electric vehicle charging station as completion of Phase I of the site's new Greening Initiative, inspired by Cole's early environmentalism. The Level 2 ChargePoint dual station is installed in the parking lot and allows two cars to charge at the same time. By installing the public charging station,

the Thomas Cole National Historic Site is providing the local community and visiting audiences with an important resource to support electric vehicle drivers, and in turn support clean air in the Hudson Valley. The charging station was made possible by a gift from local residents and environmentalists Sara and Tom de Swardt.



George Jones, *Interior of Turner's Gallery: The Artist Showing His Works*, ca. 1852. Oil on millboard, 5 1/2 x 9 1/16 in. The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Presented by Mrs. George Jones, the artist's widow, 1881

Conservator Margaret Saliske uncovering Cole's original decorative painting

PRESERVATION

Last year we discovered Thomas Cole's art gallery hiding in plain sight. New paint analysis supported by the National Park Service revealed a third hand-painted decorative border in the artist's home in a first-floor room between the two parlors. Historic interiors expert Jean Dunbar conducted additional research and confirmed that "Thomas Cole's decoration of his home suddenly emerges as an artistic whole... with a gallery at its heart."

With major support from the Henry Luce Foundation and the Gerry Charitable Trust, the conservator Margaret Saliske was able to work safely alone in the house and completely uncovered the decorative hand-painted border beneath layers of modern paint. She restored sections of the border to its original vibrancy through a process called inpainting. Cole painted a Greek key design around the entirety of the room using a red and black Pompeian

color scheme above red walls. The design and colors were associated with the display of art during his time and bear a strong resemblance to J. M. W. Turner's red-walled art gallery, which Cole visited in London. The restoration creates a unique experience, allowing visitors to see Thomas Cole's paintings in the environment designed for their display.

The restoration of Thomas Cole's art gallery is part of Phase III of a comprehensive



TBD working on the updated decor in the Sitting Room



New decor details in the Sitting Room of the Main House

restoration and reinterpretation of the historic Main House informed by over a decade of research. In addition to the border restoration, Phase III will transform the second floor of the artist's home into an interactive space for visitors to learn more about Thomas Cole, his family, and his life at home.

Phase III will also reveal the design of the artist's private family rooms on the second floor of the historic home and employ interactive story telling

to explore the last decade of the artist's life, a time when the nation was experiencing rapid cultural and political changes not unlike today. The wall coverings, furnishings, and finishes will be restored in the sitting room and Cole's bedroom.

Collection items will be restored and reinstalled with new interpretation and creative display cases throughout the house. The collection-based exhibition *Thomas Cole's*

Creative Process, which now features a major new painting gift from Susan Warner, has been completely reinstalled with new interpretation. We plan to open Phase III in 2021.

The project is made possible by the Henry Luce Foundation, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the National Park Service, the Gerry Charitable Trust, and the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area and the Hudson River Valley Greenway.



Old Studio with Thomas Cole's son Theodore and three unidentified farm workers, c. 1910, Thomas Cole Site Archives

EXPANDING DIVERSITY, EQUITY & ACCESS

The Thomas Cole Site launched a Diversity, Equity, and Access Initiative in October 2019, guiding the staff to develop a list of commitments, take thoughtful actions, and engage in frequent discussions with stakeholders both inside and outside of the organization.

An important part of this work is a major project we are calling Full House, which will bring to light the underrepresented

voices in this nation's history by illuminating the perspectives of the large and diverse household, including female family members and workers who lived here during Thomas Cole's residency from 1836 until his death in 1848.

In 2019, our Executive Director, Betsy Jacks, attended a conference with the leading art historian Liz Prettejohn, who is conducting cutting-edge

research in the field of historic house museums. Dr. Prettejohn asserts that house museums have the opportunity to "break down the patriarchy" by deconstructing the myths that the artist acted alone; instead, it took a whole household to make the art happen. Timely topics related to the property's historic household members include racial justice, women's rights, immigration, economic



Facilities Manager, Matt Alexander, doing construction for the elevator lift installation

disparity, and more.

The first step in this project is meticulous research that we plan to incorporate into new interpretation. Additional work and conversation under the Diversity, Equity and Access Initiative includes featuring more prominently the work of BIPOC artists, implementing diverse board recruiting and hiring practices, identifying more Black-owned businesses

to work with across operations, and continuing our own education as individuals and as an organization. We are committed to anti-racist work.

As part of our efforts to expand access at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, construction is underway and almost complete on an elevator. New York State approved our elevator lift design, which has very little impact on the historic

structure and will bring guests to the first floor of the artist's home. The lift provides access to the digital story telling experiences in the east and west parlors, the artist's gallery that is in the process of being restored, and magnificent views of the Catskill Mountains. Thank you to everyone who made this important project possible.



Lisa Fox Martin with Kallie & Betsy Jacks by Geoff Howell

COMMUNITY OF SUPPORTERS

The community came together behind this special place in a particularly difficult year and we are so grateful to you for making everything we achieve possible. Since we could not celebrate the Scholars' Dinner in person, we shared written remarks from the scholars and summaries of the latest projects of all of the American art scholars who were planning to attend. The featured scholars were

Morrison H. Heckscher, Curator Emeritus of the American Wing at The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Graham C. Boettcher, R. Hugh Daniel Director of the Birmingham Museum of Art; and Shannon Vittoria, Senior Research Associate in the American Wing at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, alongside our Class of 2020 Cole Fellows. You can find written remarks in the digital event

program at thomascole.org/scholarsdinner.

We continued the tradition of our annual Summer Party, hosted by our fantastic Chairman, Lisa Fox Martin, for eleven years running! We celebrated online with more guests than ever. We delivered lovely custom picnics designed by Geoff Howell to each guests' home. Tim Barringer from Yale gave a virtual talk and delighted

THE 2020
SCHOLARS' DINNER
DIGITAL PROGRAM



THOMAS COLE NATIONAL
HISTORIC SITE

us with insights on Cole's *A Pic-Nic Party* painting. The artist Brian Kenny orchestrated a virtual fireworks performance to cap off the evening. Thank you for coming together with us in spirit. Your support helps make everything we achieve possible. We are so very grateful for the continued support behind this organization. Thank you for continuing to work toward a bright future with us.



Dr. Heckscher



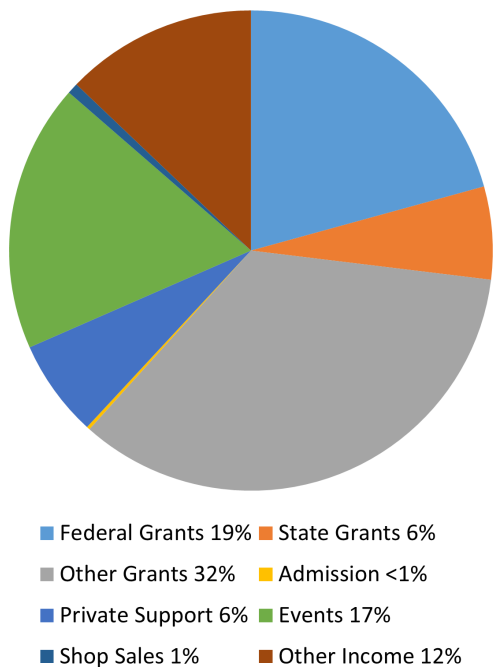
Dr. Boettcher



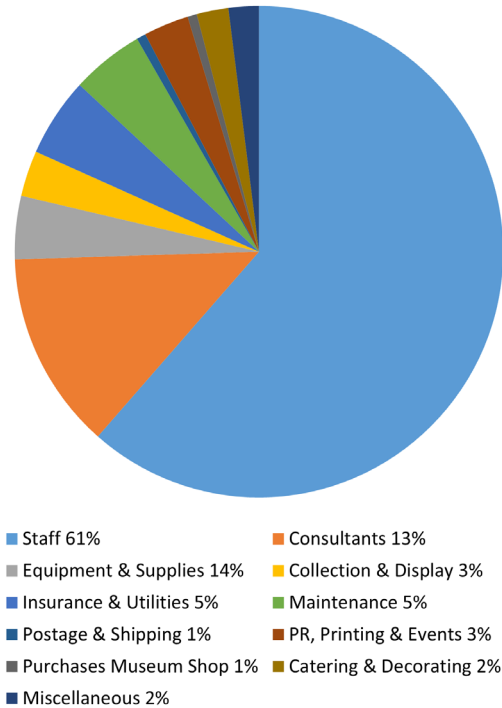
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Total Income \$1,214,741



Total Expenses \$1,090,493



Total income does not include unrealized market gains/losses.

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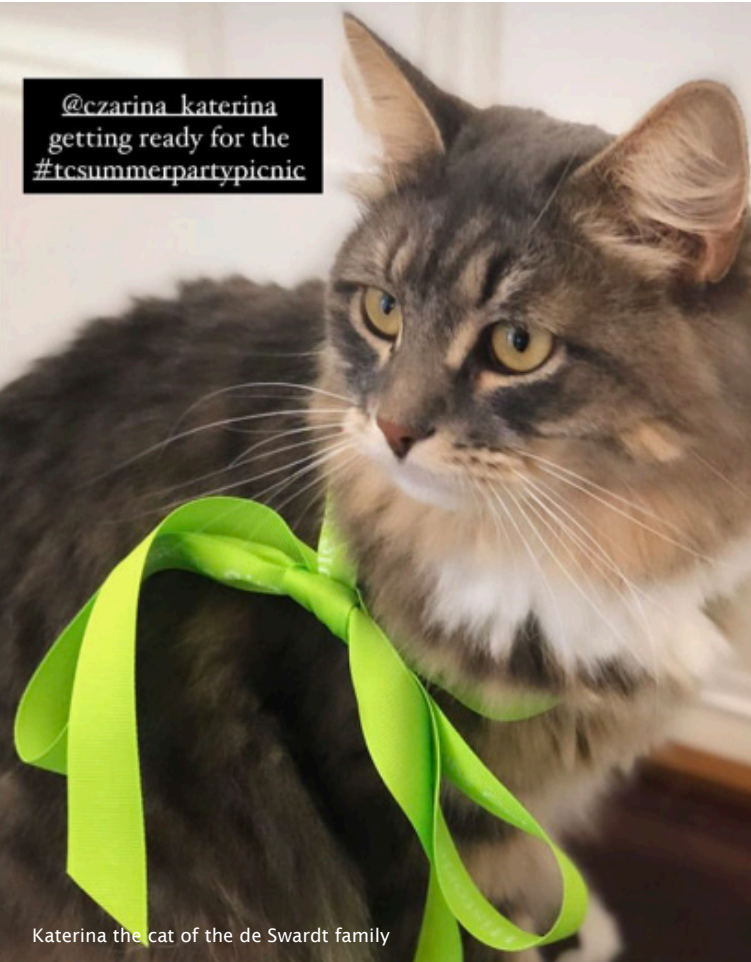


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**"WITHOUT ART MAN WOULD
SCARCE BE HUMAN."**

—THOMAS COLE

Front cover: ©Peter Aaron/OTTO

Back cover: Thomas Cole (1801–1848), *Catskill Mountain Landscape*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 12½ × 15½ in. Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Gift of Richard Sharp.