

THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



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Thomas Cole Site Announces Opening of *Thomas Cole: An American Visionary*

The Inaugural Exhibition in the New Richard Sharp Gallery Explores the Artistic Evolution of Cole, Whose Paintings Conveyed a Visual Identity for a Young Nation and Continue to Inspire Artists to This Day

The Exhibition Features an Iconic Cole Painting Recently Gifted by Richard Sharp

Catskill, NY – April 28, 2026 – The Thomas Cole National Historic Site announced today the opening of the exhibition ***Thomas Cole: An American Visionary*** – a dynamic installation of landscape paintings, painting objects, and easels of Thomas Cole (1801-1848) that explores his evolution into an artist of international renown. Cole’s paintings conveyed a visual identity for a young nation and continue to inspire artists to this day.



Thomas Cole, *Catskill Mountain Landscape*, n.d., Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Gift of Richard T. Sharp

The exhibition illuminates Cole’s beginnings as an artist, his creative process and inspirations, his deep connection to the Catskill Mountains and the Hudson Valley, and his emergence as an international artist. The exhibition also explores Cole’s role as teacher and mentor to Frederic Church (1826-1900), the 200th anniversary of whose birth is being celebrated this year. The exhibition includes 16 original paintings by Thomas Cole and one by Frederic Church (painted while a student of Cole), plus drawings and sketches, painting objects, easels, and sources of inspiration. It will run through December 2026.

This is the inaugural exhibition in the new Richard Sharp Gallery on the second floor of the 1815 Main House of the Thomas Cole Site. The



Photo Credit: Peter Aaron/OTTO

gallery is already affectionately known simply as “The Rick,” a light-hearted take on a prominent New York City museum.

Rick Sharp’s substantial contribution to redesign the gallery space and support related programming inspired leading experts to become involved in the project. The gallery is designed by Architectural Digest 100 Stephen Shadley, the acclaimed New York City-based interior and architectural designer, who is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Thomas Cole Site and best known for creating homes for Hollywood stars including Jennifer Aniston and Diane Keaton.

Helping to envision the new space are such nationally renowned authorities as Betsy Kornhauser, Curator Emerita at The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Dan Kershaw, the Senior Exhibition Designer at The Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Carrie Feder, the Independent Curator who spearheaded the restoration of the interiors of the Main House alongside Jean Dunbar.

To commemorate the opening of the Richard Sharp Gallery and inaugural exhibition, Rick Sharp has donated the iconic Thomas Cole painting *Diagram of Contrasts* to the permanent collection of the Thomas Cole Site. It has previously been on long-term loan to the Site. Now famous as Cole’s “Color Wheel,” this painting was a “tool” that he created as a diagram of contrasts to guide him in his studio to shade landscapes and complement colors. Over the years it has become, in effect, the “Rosetta Stone” of the Hudson River School of landscape painting, used to decipher the visual harmony and relationship of colors in many 19th-century American landscapes.



Thomas Cole, *Diagram of Contrasts*, 1834, oil on panel, 23 ½ x 35 in., Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Gift of Richard T. Sharp, TC.2025.5

“I first saw the “Color Wheel” when an issue of *The Magazine Antiques* arrived in my mail in 2006. I was immediately captivated by it,” said Rick Sharp. “I asked myself how it was that Thomas Cole could have painted this work in 1834, when it has the visual impact of a modern abstract painting, so unlike his landscapes. When I was fortunate to acquire it, I knew that it was a masterwork that I could not selfishly hang on my wall. It had to be seen and in no better place than its home, where Cole used it in his studio. I am now thrilled that it is featured in the inaugural gallery exhibition and is part of the historic site’s permanent collection.”

Rick’s donation of the funds to redesign the gallery and of the “Color Wheel” continues and extends his longstanding support of the Thomas Cole Site. Rick has gifted to the Site

the largest number of artworks and objects by Thomas Cole from a private individual outside of the artist's family. In addition, he has made long-term loans of still more Cole artworks, including the earliest work known to be painted by Cole, which is also featured in the exhibition.

Rick Sharp's vision for the gallery is that it be a refuge where visitors can contemplate original works by Thomas Cole and other artists in an inviting, comfortable setting that will engage everyone, particularly new generations from diverse backgrounds. "My hope," Rick says, "is that the Gallery will open the eyes of young people to the beauty and joy that Cole's art has brought to my life."

"We are enormously grateful to Rick Sharp for funding this gallery design and related programming and for his extraordinary donation of the "Color Wheel" to our growing collection of Cole paintings," said Maura O'Shea, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. "Rick is a major force in preserving and illuminating the work of Thomas Cole and the Hudson River School artists whom Cole inspired. Rick has now brought that commitment to enhancing the visitors' experience at the Thomas Cole Site. We look forward to engaging new generations through Rick's extraordinary generosity and passion."

"We are excited for visitors to experience the breath-taking moment of entering the newly renovated gallery, where Thomas Cole's vision and artistry are able to shine brightly with renewed impact," said Amanda Malmstrom, Associate Curator of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. "Thanks to the generosity of Rick Sharp and the design expertise of Stephen Shadley, the new gallery allows Cole's paintings to take center stage – inviting visitors to engage with the artist's dynamic vision of American art as a poetic and moral engagement with land and landscape, one that continues to resonate today."

In designing the gallery space, which measures about 22 feet square and was once a bedroom used by Thomas Cole's three sisters-in-law, Stephen Shadley created the engaging space that Rick envisioned, while honoring the historic home. He retained all of the plaster trim and chose to use on the walls the same lavender paint color that Thomas Cole had chosen to use in the ground floor's west parlor where he displayed his paintings for visitors. The color evokes the morning haze over the Catskill Mountains that so captivated Cole.



Photo Credit: Peter Aaron/OTTO

To maximize the gallery's display space, Stephen Shadley designed an innovative bespoke system of 10-foot-high, four-foot-wide, wooden panels that sit directly in front of the two windows. He placed them on a pivot mechanism that allows them to become perpendicular and create niches of additional display space. The windows can be visible, covered up, or can frame the niches of added exhibition space, giving the room flexibility in how it presents art and related objects.

A discreet, recessed, lighting system in the ceiling adds flexibility by allowing for any number of lighting scenarios. The original painted-wood floors are made more welcoming by centering a nine-foot-square hemp rug, on top of which is a large, custom, circular ottoman designed by Stephen Shadley. The ottoman encourages viewers to stay and contemplate the art; it comes in two semi-circular parts, which can be separated and placed in front of the two niches created by the window panels to create still more flexibility in viewing.

"It seemed fitting to create a gallery within Thomas Cole's home, a place where he once displayed his work," said Stephen Shadley. "I wanted the design to feel uniquely modern without altering the 19th-century architectural details and to be a welcoming and contemplative space for visitors. Hopefully, a space Cole himself might appreciate!"

In the early 19th century, Thomas Cole transformed the landscape of the United States into an iconic symbol of the country, giving rise to its national identity of "America the Beautiful." Cole emblazoned his canvases with vast forests, towering mountains, and sublime skies, and in doing so formulated a unifying emblem for the young country.

From 1844 to 1846, Thomas Cole taught Frederic Church. During that period, they often sketched together on the hill where Church later chose to build his architectural tour de force, Olana. Their friendship is one of the most impactful in the history of American art. Their two historic homes are now connected by the Hudson River Skywalk, a pedestrian walkway over the Hudson River.

The exhibition is part of a broader initiative of the Thomas Cole Site titled "[Thomas Cole: Painting the Nature of America](#)." This year, the 250th anniversary of the nation's birth, is an appropriate time to recall the pivotal role that Cole played in creating the visual identity of the young nation. From October 26 to November 4, 1825, the display of three paintings by Cole – in the windows of Colman's bookstore on Broadway near Fulton Street in Manhattan – changed the course of American art. The three paintings became an immediate success when purchased by renowned painters John Trumbull and William Dunlap and engraver Asher Durand. The display launched Cole's career and gave birth to what is now known as the Hudson River School of landscape painting. Cole's work gave America a visual identity reflected in the still-vibrant concept "America the Beautiful."

Thomas Cole: Painting the Nature of America at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site is supported by The National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom. Made possible in part by Hickory Foundation; With public funds from the Greene County Legislature through the Greene County Cultural Fund, administered in Greene County by CREATE Council on the Arts; New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature; Jennifer Krieger and Eric Siegel; National Trust Insurance, LLC; Art Bridges; Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area; The Tryon Family Foundation; Anne and Fred Osborn III / The EASTER Foundation; Bank of Greene County Charitable Fund; Columbia Memorial Health; BST & Co. CPAs, LLP; and Eli Wilner & Company.



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Thomas Cole National Historic Site

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site showcases the life and work of Thomas Cole (1801-1848), whose American landscape painting defines an enduring visual identity for the nation. Inspired by the natural beauty that surrounds the site, Cole founded the influential Hudson River School art movement. The site's six-acre campus in Catskill, NY, includes Cole's home and two studio buildings; the Cole Center, a new visitor center designed by Architectural Digest 100 Stephen Shadley; gardens and grounds with panoramic views of the Catskill Mountains; and a scenic walkway over the Hudson River connecting the site with Olana, the historic home of artist and Cole student Frederic Church. The Thomas Cole Site hosts exhibitions as well as art-making activities and innovative school and public programs. Visitors experience first-hand the themes that Cole explored, from the power of art to landscape preservation to the restorative properties of nature. The Thomas Cole Site is a National Historic Landmark and an affiliated area of the National Park System, and it operates as an independent 501c3 nonprofit organization.

Visitor Information

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is open year-round, and hours vary by season. For details see: thomascole.org/visit. The grounds are open every day for free from dawn to dusk. Keep in touch on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube at [@thomascolesite](https://www.instagram.com/thomascolesite).