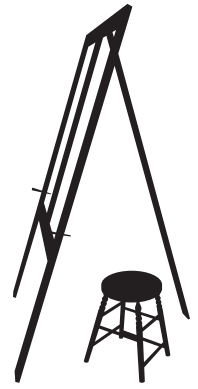


# THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

December 2017 Newsletter



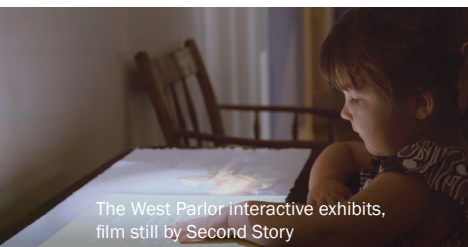
The East Parlor © Peter Aaron/OTTO



Installation view © Peter Aaron/OTTO

## THE PARLORS OPENS AND CAPTIVATES VISITORS OF ALL AGES

This season we unveiled a project that was over a decade in the making. *The Parlors* is an immersive installation combining multimedia experiences with historic restoration of Thomas Cole's own interior designs throughout the first floor of the artist's home. The technological exhibits are blended seamlessly into the authentic historic spaces, and they invite visitors to step into the story rather than stand behind velvet ropes. The experience includes paintings that "come to life" featuring Cole's own words, given voice by the acclaimed actor Jamie Bell, as well as letters between Cole and his contemporaries that "magically appear" on desk surfaces to tell their story. The installation has captivated visitors of all ages and exposes both the driving force behind Cole's revolutionary creativity as well as the realities he faced as a professional artist with patrons to please.



The West Parlor interactive exhibits, film still by Second Story

*The Parlors* was developed with a team of scholars and specialists in the fields of art

## SANFORD R. GIFFORD IN THE CATSKILLS

The second annual exhibition in Thomas Cole's recently reconstructed New Studio brought Sanford R. Gifford's (1823-1880) masterful landscape paintings to the region that inspired them. Hailed as "an intimate, beautifully curated exhibition" by the press, the show explored Gifford's paintings of the Catskills. A leading member of the Hudson River School, Gifford credited Cole's works with stimulating his interest in landscape painting. The exhibition was curated by Kevin J. Avery, Senior Research Scholar at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and consisted of 20 paintings - loaned by both private collectors and institutions including Yale University Art Gallery, Harvard University Art Museums, Portland Museum of Art, and Albany Institute of History and Art.



Visitors on opening day  
Photo by Veronica Chewens

*American Fine Art Magazine* enthused that "One of the many cool aspects of *Sanford R Gifford in the Catskills*...is the 'walking-and-driving experience' that allows visitors to



## THE HEALING POWER OF ART

This fall, we celebrated the unveiling of a unique set of 66 paintings and murals at Columbia Memorial Health featuring the work of artists Thomas Cole and Frederic Church. Our board member, Hudson Talbott, took the lead in working together with representatives from Columbia Memorial Health, The Olana State Historic Site, and The Olana Partnership to plan and curate the exhibition entitled *The Healing Power of Art*. The paintings are spread out across the three wings of the hospital's 6th floor and a large mural is located in the waiting room, which looks out to a spectacular view of the Catskill Mountains. The view from the Hospital is of the very same landscape that so inspired Cole and Church. The paintings were reproduced by local print shop, ProPrinters, with assistance from representatives from The Thomas Cole Site and Olana.



Board member Hudson Talbot with Chairman Lisa Fox Martin at Columbia Memorial Health

## THINKING ABOUT BECOMING A MEMBER?

Join or renew your membership online at [thomascole.org/membership](http://thomascole.org/membership)



On the Thomas Cole Site Grounds  
From left to right: Madeline Conley, Michael Quitisaca, Rowanne Dean and Adam Grimes

## INTRODUCING THE 2017 COLE FELLOWS

Now in its seventh year, the Cole Fellows program gives four talented recent college graduates the opportunity to develop their careers in the museum field. The Fellows are given free housing here at the historic site while becoming part of our staff. They participate in meetings and decision-making, meet museum professionals at other institutions, give tours for the public, and conduct new research about Thomas Cole that is used to enrich the historic site. This year, we have an inspiring group that quickly became central to the organization and enthralled with the area. As a result, we have decided to extend the fellowship program from the six months that was traditionally offered, to a full year.

**Madeline (Maddy) Conley** is specializing in education here at the historic site, taking a hands-on approach with local school groups and working with staff, board members, and outside consultants to plan a digital education program that builds on the success of *The Parlors*. Maddy earned her BA in History from Connecticut College and came to the site with experience as an intern at the Brattleboro Museum of Art and Bread and Puppet Theater. Additionally Maddy was a Back Country Lodge Manager for the Appalachian Mountain Club in New Hampshire's White Mountains.

**Rowanne Dean** is diving into extensive research on the women artists who lived here at Cedar Grove, focusing on Thomas Cole's sister, Sarah Cole, and his daughter, Emily Cole. Rowanne graduated with a BA in Art History from Barnard College, Columbia University, and has worked as an intern at the JP Morgan Library and Museum, the New Museum, and as researcher for "A Virtual Enlightenment" project created with Barnard, The Met, and The Mellon Foundation.

**Adam Grimes** is laying the groundwork for the forthcoming interactive exhibits on the second floor of Cole's home that will be funded in part by a new grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Adam graduated with a BA in English from Warren Wilson College in Asheville, NC. He has experience working as an intern at the Whitney Museum of Art; Holden Art Gallery; and Asheville's Center for Craft, Creativity, and Design.

**Michael Quitisaca** is researching the recent history of Thomas Cole's home and studios, and documenting the period from when the Cole family sold the property in the 1970s, through its transformation into a professional museum. Michael graduated with a BA in Art History from Marymount Manhattan College. He has worked in public programming and as a curatorial intern with Bruce Weber at the Museum of the City of New York. Additionally he served as a Peer Mentor for incoming students at Marymount.



# "NOT YOUR MOTHER'S HOUSE TOUR"

with Contemporary Artist Kiki Smith



Installation view © Peter Aaron/OTTO



Kiki Smith with artist Jason Middlebrook and Cole Site Curator Kate Menconeri, Photo by Jennifer Morse



Visitors with Smith's Guide, 2012, cotton jacquard tapestry. Edition 4/10. 119 x 76.5 in. Courtesy Pace Gallery and Magnolia Editions

KIKI SMITH / *From the Creek* opened at the historic site on August 12th to exuberant crowds and quickly landed on the front page of the *New York Times Weekend Arts* section. The solo exhibition in conjunction with the series *OPEN HOUSE: Contemporary Art in Conversation with Cole* featured over 27 works by the internationally celebrated contemporary artist Kiki Smith. The artwork was largely inspired by Catskill Creek, and noted American art critic Nancy Princenthal declared that "none has been shown to better advantage." Cole painted the

view of the very same Catskill Creek in at least 10 major paintings, more than any other subject. The fact that these two iconic artists walked on the same land and created art that responded to the experience produces a connection spanning 200 years that came to life in the installation. Kiki Smith worked with the exhibition's Curator, Kate Menconeri, to choose and site the artworks both inside the intimate spaces of Cole's historic home and outside on the grounds. *The Brooklyn Rail* declared the result "a witty and weird 19th/21st

century gloss on the vicissitudes of domesticity and nature" and the *New York Times* affirmed, "Not your mother's house tour."

The exhibition contributed to a 25% increase in visitation to the historic site and was extended by popular demand to include three long weekends in November. *The Parlors* also remained open during this period. This marks the first time that the Thomas Cole Site has extended its season past October and paves the way for additional hours in the future.



Installation view of *Congregation*, 2014, cotton jacquard tapestry, from an edition of 10. 116 x 76 in. Courtesy Pace Gallery and Magnolia Editions © Peter Aaron/OTTO

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: KIKI SMITH in Conversation with Kate Menconeri

The following is an excerpt from a conversation with the artist Kiki Smith and Cole Site Curator Kate Menconeri that took place on August 2, 2017 at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.

KM: We are excited and honored to have the opportunity to work with you on this exhibition, called *From the Creek*. Thomas Cole painted the Catskill Creek over and over, as early as 1827 and into the 1840s, before he passed away. When you look at these paintings together it is like a filmstrip of a landscape in transition. A wild scene along the creek is later depicted as a beautiful pastoral (*View on the Catskill – Early Autumn*, 1836–37), and then he paints the same site with a train running through a now flattened landscape (*River in the Catskills*, 1843). You have said the creek entralls you, too. Tell me about this, and the thrill?

KS: Thomas Cole's in-laws' land extended to the Hudson River and also faced the creek. Cole painted and knew the area extensively. The Hudson River is open and majestic, but it was the creek that captured his imagination. Close to where I live is the Mawignack, where the Kaaterskill and the Catskill creeks join together.

KM: Do you find that the term landscape is useful beyond specifying a horizontal format? Does it encompass habitats or the natural world? What is a landscape?

KS: I'm not sure I know what a landscape

»continued on page 4»

»continued from page 3«

is; even as a background it encompasses so many details or individual moments in flux. In my tapestries, images are collaged together and things put in proximity to one another, in very unnatural ways. When I was coming to the Cole house today, there were turkeys on the road. Yesterday I had been thinking about the thistle and the gold finches eating the thistle seeds, and saw for the first time a muskrat swimming in the creek. Today we discovered oak galls at the Cole house, though I never before had knowledge of their existence. They are disparate things, but they all exist in the same place and the same time period of the year, and could become a singular image together. In one of the tapestries I drew the Catskill Mountains, but it became very abstract. [...] I think more about being in a specific place, rather than being in a landscape. A place reveals itself to you over time. [...] There is a large snapping turtle that comes and lays its eggs in our yard. Normally it comes back to the same place each year, but it didn't come this year. I don't know what happened.



KM: You are paying attention to time, cycles, animals. In your tapestry *Congregation* there is a woman, owls, a bat, a deer, and a tree. I love the way they're all connected.

KS: During Hurricane Irene about 150 trees fell down on my land, most of them Black Locusts. The creek rose to about twenty-eight feet, and the trees fell like pick-up sticks, all entangled. That was the beginning of *Congregation*.

The first spring I was here, the water brought many tree roots with stones lodged in them. I was in heaven collecting them. I also found a bottle dump buried under the exposed roots of a tree along the creek. I sat for hours digging them out. I was astonished at one moment to realize that I was playing. That is something so often lost to us in adulthood.

One of the most rewarding things about living in Catskill is recapturing that pleasure of wandering in nature. Here you can find berries to forage and plants you can eat, and it all affords a rich life.

KM: So the natural world connects to play and playing?

KS: Here I've planted flowers and vegetables and learned to can and make syrups, medicines, and wine. We are beekeepers. These are things I never knew about when I was young. Being here has been an entrance into an unexpected life that I appreciate. It is playing a life, until it becomes your own.

KM: I love your etchings of crystals; they make me think of Cole's mineral collection, but also I am interested in how they are something that is solid, but simultaneously growing and changing.

KS: When I was young I made paintings of worms and ants as self-portraits. By young I mean, when I was 28. I made paintings or sculptures of the life cycles of butterflies, moths, and plants, trying to learn about the cyclical nature of life and time.

KM: Well what about titles like *Homecoming* and *Present?* I was reading Cole's journal last week, and he wrote down a quote: "Oh that I had wings of a dove I could fly away and be at rest."

KS: I have a couple of pieces called *Homecoming*. I've given prints that title and then sometimes later I've made sculptures and given it the same name, and then think, "Oh well they're different materials." [...] Sometimes I think to use the names of my father's sculptures, as sort of a joke... but not really.

KM: I'd like to talk about your interest in the house and your practice. You've conversed with history in numerous ways and projects. You made 206 prints for 200 poems by Emily Dickinson in the *Sampler* book; you created installations inside historic houses and palaces in Italy and in spiritual spaces; and I think you made, was it an outdoor ice rink?

KS: We grew up in my grandparent's house. When they died my great aunt took all the furniture. The rooms were about the size of the rooms in the Cole House, but with very little to no furniture in them. We often moved furniture from one room to another. My father made furniture from fruit boxes that we painted different colors. In a way I don't understand domestic life, but it



fascinates me. My sister, Seton, and I have visited many historical house museums to learn how people lived, as I am trying to learn.

I made an exhibition in 2005 at the Querini Stampalia, which is a house foundation in Venice. Their collection is predominantly from the 1700s, which was the beginning of the time when domestic life was being represented in painting, and also the beginning of the colonial American aesthetic. I made a fractured fairy tale or a convoluted marriage between the two. Several years later, in Haus Esters, which is a Mies van der Rohe house in Krefeld, Germany, I made an installation where the rooms of the house represented the passage of time in a lifetime. It was based on a small needlepoint by a woman named Prudence Punderson, who in the 1700s showed the various stages of her life. This later became a very large stained glass piece, called *Pilgrim*.

It is fascinating to me how a house holds you, and how people embellish their lives and try to make their environment beautiful, either through their own efforts or through culturally manufactured things. Mr. Cole was very involved in thinking about domestic aspects of life. It is evident in the pleasure and care he took in his own home. I feel the movement, flux, and uncertainty of home.

KM: And you work in your house, right? You don't keep a separate studio?

KS: My father worked at home, so I didn't grow up with the model of having a studio, so I have always worked at home or in workshops. I enjoy working with other people.

KM: What has been interesting about working in Thomas Cole's house?

KS: He knew how to be attentive to the grandeur and the details of his natural surroundings.



KM: Do you have a favorite work by Cole?

**KS:** Well he's interested in light phenomena and color. Color is something that has always baffled me, and part of why I started making the tapestries. His interest in light phenomena in nature is so evident in his work.

KM: You once said you were less interested in art history, because it's a story of the accumulation of power, but more interested in the history of people making things?

**KS:** That's a version of me at a certain stage in my life. I appreciate art history, but I also love the history of material culture. I'm fascinated by the connection of artisans and people making things for their daily lives.

KM: Well, why do you make things?

**KS:** To have an experience, to learn, and then to understand something through making it. Whether or not it looks the same in the end doesn't really matter. It connects you to your forbearers and helps you understand where you are.

KM: What do you hope people who come to visit this project will think about or take from it?

**KS:** I don't know what other people are up to in their brains, but maybe just that one can be attentive to or inspired by the uniqueness of one's own environment. In this exhibition, there are two people living about a mile, and practically two centuries, apart from one another. Each of us has been enthralled by the specifics of the place. If you look out the window from his sitting room, you can see the pinecones on the tree and know that they are something to explore and to discover, and that a place can hold so many different perceptions and meanings manifesting very different aspects of a place.



## PARLORS

»continued from page 1«

history, historic interiors, education and theatrical production including Jean Dunbar, Carrie Feder, Lisa Fox Martin, Elizabeth Kornhauser, Kate Menconeri, Warner Shook, Nancy Siegel, and Alan Wallach, led by the project manager Heather Paroubek and directed by Betsy Jacks. The multimedia installation, including the audio and moving graphics, was designed by the nationally renowned design firm Second Story Inc.



During the restoration process, original hand-painted decorative borders by Thomas Cole himself were discovered in both the East and West Parlors of the artist's home and revealed from beneath layers of modern paint. The discovery marks the earliest known interior decorative painting by an American artist. The restored 1836 interiors include Cole's bold colors and elaborate patterns that surprise visitors today. The walls range from periwinkle to lavender to bright green, and a multicolored striped carpet runs down the main staircase. A floor cloth with a geometric stenciled pattern greets guests in the front hall, and soon a hand woven reproduction of the original West Parlor carpet with a peacock design will be installed. The restoration was directed by leading historic interiors experts Jean Dunbar and Carrie Feder and implemented by historic paint specialist Matthew Mosca and acclaimed conservator Margaret Saliske.

Major funding for *The Parlors* was provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the human endeavor, the Institute of Museum and Library Services MA-10-15-0116-15, and by Empire State Development's I LOVE NEW YORK program under the Market NY initiative. Additional support provided by the Hudson River Valley Greenway, Herzog's of Kingston, Eli Wilner & Company of New York City, and Geoff Howell Studio.

## GIFFORD

»continued from page 1«

see the very views that inspired Hudson River School painters like Cole and Gifford." The exhibition featured six views identified on the Hudson River School Art Trail, 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. One visitor shared in a gallery journal "I LOVE the show! Not only because he is a great artist, but he knows the neighborhood I like to call my own. Gifford is magic."



Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Study for the View from South Mountain, in the Catskills*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 8 1/8 x 15 1/2 in. Signed, lower left: S R Gifford; inscribed, on verso: South Mountain, Catskills, 1873. Portland Museum of Art, Gift of Walter B. and Marcia F. Goldfarb, 2016.22

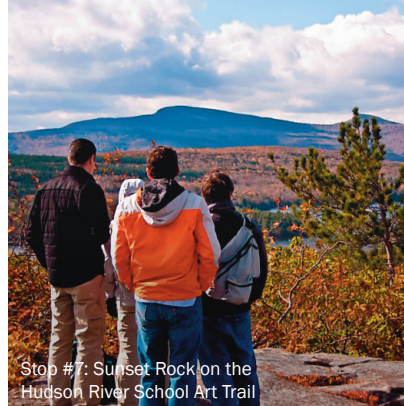
The exhibition was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts as well as Michael Altman Fine Art & Advisory Services, the Bank of Greene County, the Greene County Legislature through the County Initiative Program of the Greene County Council on the Arts and the Kindred Spirits Society of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. The accompanying catalogue, which remains available on our website, is made possible by the Barrie and Deedee Wigmore Foundation.



Art-making project at the historic site.  
Photo by Jennifer Morse



School children inside Thomas Cole's  
Old Studio



Stop #7: Sunset Rock on the  
Hudson River School Art Trail



Exhibition programming

## WE'RE ALMOST THERE

### Help Us Spark Creativity In Young People's Lives

In 2014 we received a "Challenge Grant" from the National Endowment for the Humanities for \$300,000 that we must match with \$900,000, resulting in a \$1.2 million endowment for educational programming. The new endowment will not only fund our existing programs including guided tours, exhibitions, printed publications, extensive online programs, activities for school groups, free community events, guided hikes and lectures, but it will also enable us to expand our reach and mission with new initiatives to regenerate Cole's revolutionary creativity so that it touches people's lives today. We are thrilled to share that we have secured over \$915,000 to date through fundraising and matching NEH funds, and have met the matching deadline for the first three years of the five-year grant period. We reached this year's hurdle of raising \$300,000 by July 31st with significant support from the Willow Springs Charitable Trust, the Walton Family Foundation, and an outpouring of donations pledged at the annual Summer Party to bring us over the finish line. Our fourth year challenge is under way to raise \$75,000, which the NEH will match on a 1 to 1 basis. We invite you to take part in this special opportunity to establish a program endowment by making a gift that gives forever by supporting educational programming in perpetuity. Additionally, your gift will also unlock matching funds from the NEH, expanding your impact even further. Together, we can ensure that the Thomas Cole Site is able to provide a window into one of the most profoundly influential periods in American history. We are so grateful to everyone who has risen to the challenge and joined us on this initiative so far: To join the campaign and direct your year-end gift to the endowment visit [thomascole.org/donate](http://thomascole.org/donate).

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Three cheers and a heartfelt thank you to our fabulous 2017 Summer Party Sponsors! The soiree hosted by Chairman Lisa Fox Martin with event design by Geoff Howell enchanted guests who gathered along the banks of the Hudson River to celebrate and benefit this organization. The festivities included cocktails and dinner with a silent and live auction, live music, dancing and even fireworks. We would like to extend a thank you to our sponsors below for your generosity and your excellent company.

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## THOMAS COLE ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE IN 2018

For the first time in history, Thomas Cole will be the subject of a major exhibition organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and The National Gallery, London, entitled *Thomas Cole's Journey: Atlantic Crossings*. The exhibition is curated by Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, Alice Pratt Brown Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture at the Met; Tim Barringer, Paul Mellon Professor in the History of Art, Yale University; and Christopher Riopelle, Curator of Post-1800 Paintings at the National Gallery, London.

The Thomas Cole Site 2018 special exhibition *Picturesque and Sublime: Thomas Cole's Trans-Atlantic Inheritance* was designed to complement the international themes of the Met exhibition. *Picturesque and Sublime* will be presented in Thomas Cole's

New Studio from May 1 through November 4, 2018 and is co-curated by Tim Barringer, Gillian Forrester, Senior Curator of Prints & Drawings, Yale Center for British Art; and Jennifer Raab, Assistant Professor, History of Art, Yale University. The exhibition will draw on the rich collections of Yale University, including works by Turner and Constable, to

examine Thomas Cole's visual inheritance. Cole's radical achievement was to transform the well-developed British traditions of landscape representation into a new, bold formulation, the American Sublime. Sign up today to be invited to the Members' Preview at [thomascole.org/membership](http://thomascole.org/membership) or give us a call at 518.943.7465 x4.



LEFT: Thomas Cole, *View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, After a Thunderstorm (The Oxbow)*. Oil on canvas, 1836, 51 ½ x 76 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1908, 8.228.



RIGHT on view at the Thomas Cole Site in 2018: Thomas Cole, *The Clove, Catskills*. Oil on canvas, 1827, 25 ¼ x 35 1/8 in. New Britain Museum of American Art. Charles F. Smith Fund, 1945.22.