

# THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## The Thomas Cole National Historic Site Announces “Emily Cole: Ceramics, Flora & Contemporary Responses” – A New Exhibition, Opening on May 3.

The Exhibition Places the Art of Emily Cole (1843-1913), Daughter of Thomas Cole (1801-1848), into Conversation with Eight, Internationally Celebrated, 21<sup>st</sup>-century Artists Within the Cole Family’s Historic Home and Studio in Catskill, NY.

*Emily Cole: Ceramics, Flora & Contemporary Responses*  
May 3–November 2, 2025: Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Catskill, NY

**Catskill, NY – March 24, 2025** – The Thomas Cole National Historic Site announced today that a new exhibition titled *Emily Cole: Ceramics, Flora & Contemporary Responses* will open on Saturday, May 3, at the historic site in Catskill, NY.

The exhibition and accompanying publication illuminate the life and work of **Emily Cole** (1843-1913), daughter of transformational artist **Thomas Cole** (1801-1848), and place her work into conversation with eight, internationally celebrated, 21<sup>st</sup>-century artists within the Cole family’s historic home and studio. The contemporary artists whose work is included in the exhibition are **Ann Agee, Jacqueline Bishop, Francesca DiMattio, Valerie Hegarty, Courtney M. Leonard, Jiha Moon, Michelle Sound, and Stephanie Syjuco.**



Emily Cole, *Untitled (Plate with Blackberry Blossoms)*, ca. 1910, painted porcelain, 2¼ x 11 in., Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Gift of Edith Cole Silberstein, TC.2002.3

Emily Cole was an esteemed professional artist in her own right, who painted dynamic botanicals on porcelain and watercolors on paper. She exhibited and sold her art in New York City and the Hudson Valley, received critical acclaim, traveled internationally, studied at the National Academy of Design, and was a founding member in 1892 of the New York Society of Ceramic Arts, an organization that advocated for ceramics to be

exhibited in museum galleries. Emily Cole was the third child of Maria Bartow Cole (1813–1884) and Thomas Cole and was a lifelong resident of her family’s home in Catskill, now known as the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. She was an active artist for over 40 years.



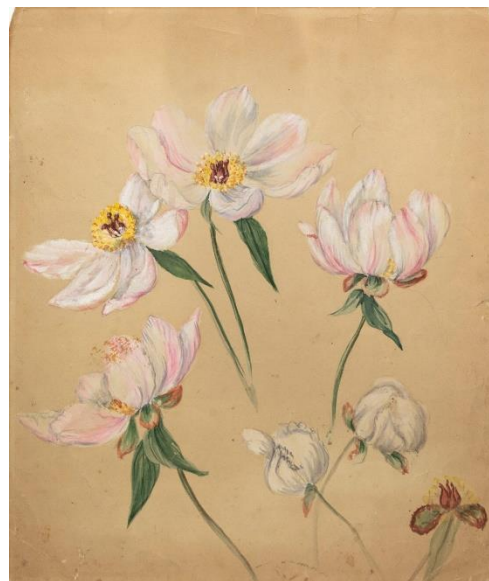
Valerie Hegarty (b. 1967), *Emily Cole and Her Father, My Mother and Me (Thomas Cole’s Lake with Dead Trees, Blackberries, Sparrow, and Wallpaper)*, 2025, canvas, wood, cardboard, paper, wire, glue, air dry clay, foam, acrylics, Courtesy the artist

The exhibition will be on view at the Thomas Cole Site from May 3 to November 2, 2025. It will include the largest display of original painted porcelain and works on paper by Emily Cole ever shown since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Her work will be presented alongside, and in conversation with, contemporary works that span ceramics, sculpture, installation, painting, and photography.

Emily Cole created a striking body of painted porcelain and works on paper that depict the flora of her Hudson

Valley home, flowers, and plants she could observe first-hand across seasonal cycles by simply stepping outside her front door. She produced hundreds of works of painted porcelain, many of which are in the permanent collection of the Thomas Cole Site, which holds the largest-known collection of Emily Cole’s surviving artwork.

A 19<sup>th</sup>-century newspaper review of her work declared, “Her careful studies from nature leave nothing to be desired in the way of truth.” Unlike many botanical paintings of the period that depict flowers in full bloom, her paintings demonstrate a meditation on the cycle of life, a theme for which her father is well known. His allegorical series “The Voyage of Life” resides in the collections of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and the Munson in Ithaca, NY. The oil studies for the series, on loan from the collection of the Albany Institute of History & Art, hung on the walls of Emily’s studio while she worked there and will be displayed again as part of this exhibition.



Emily Cole, *Untitled (Peonies)*, n.d., watercolor and pencil on paper, 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 10 1/<sub>8</sub> in., Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Gift of Edith Cole Silberstein, TC.2002.2.19.45

The exhibition will explore Emily Cole’s practice from both historic and contemporary frameworks. This major presentation of her work will be



Thomas Cole, *Studies for The Voyage of Life: Childhood*, 1839, oil on wood panel, 12 1/16 H x 13 3/4 W each, Albany Institute of History & Art Purchase, 1942.56.1-4

installed across the site with special focus in the New Studio, the building that was originally designed and used by Thomas Cole as his studio from 1846-48 and later became the studio of Emily Cole. She worked and exhibited her artworks in this space during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The display of Emily's painted watercolors and porcelain objects in this space will honor and illuminate the expansive history of the site as an historic artists' home and studio museum and will bring Emily's work "home" and into context within the place where it was originally created and seen. Emily lived on this property from her birth in 1843 until

her death in 1913 but spent some time living in New York City in the 1870s as a student at the National Academy of Design, co-founded by her father. She had a kiln on the Catskill property to fire her painted porcelain as well as the work of other china painters.

Activating the legacy of the site as an historic artists' home and studio, Thomas Cole Site curators invited eight, internationally celebrated, contemporary artists to present their own work in a call-and-response to generate conversations around the continued relevance of Emily Cole's work, as well as the enduring relationships among the natural world, flora, ceramic arts, and women's labor today. Each artist was invited to collaborate with the curators to select or create new work that will be presented in unique site-responsive installations within the artist's 19<sup>th</sup>-century home and studio, and the landscape that inspired it. In various ways, the contemporary work engages with Emily Cole's life and practice and connects it all to the complexities of our own moment. The contemporary work is as follows:

**Ann Agee:** On the occasion of this exhibition, Agee is creating a room-sized installation of porcelain vases and flower garlands within Emily and Thomas Cole's historic home. This site-responsive installation ties directly to Emily's fascination with flora, while engaging new conversations about the relationships between fine art and craft, and public and private space.

**Jacqueline Bishop:** For this exhibition, the curators worked with Bishop to select ceramic work from her resonant series *Fauna* and *The Market Woman's Story*, on loan from the Williams College Art Museum, that will be presented in a site-responsive installation within the West Parlor of the artist's historic home. Bishop's work was

selected as it celebrates the healing power of plants and challenges conventional motifs, and colonial narratives often found on treasured, fine china tea and dinnerware sets.

**Francesca DiMattio:** For this exhibition, DiMattio is creating a dynamic installation of life-size ceramic caryatids, papier-mâché furniture based on that in Emily's home, and painting directly on the gallery walls of the reconstructed New Studio, in conversation with Emily Cole's 19<sup>th</sup>-century work and in the studio where it was originally made. DiMattio's work honors Emily's rich history at this site and offers an exploration of the feminine associations of ceramic painting and floral decoration, while asking us to consider women's labor and the global history of ceramic arts.

**Valerie Hegarty:** For this exhibition, Hegarty is creating two new sculptural installations that will be sited within the Sitting Room of the artist's 1815 historic home, in which the Cole family spent many hours together. The epic works bring together Thomas Cole's iconic paintings *Lake with Dead Trees* and *The Oxbow*, Emily Cole's painted flora, and decorations from Hegarty's childhood home. The works elucidate connections between Thomas Cole and Emily Cole, father and daughter artists who shared practices of close observation of the natural world and cycles of life, spanning flowers to trees, and connecting to the local ecology of their shared home in Catskill.

**Courtney M. Leonard** (Shinnecock): Like Emily Cole and Thomas Cole, Leonard's work focuses on our relationship to place, environmental stewardship, and the natural world. Leonard uses ceramics and clay, intentionally tied to earth and place, to engage conversations about the changing climate and its impact on Shinnecock homelands in Long Island. For this project, the curators worked with the artist to present a site-responsive installation of her ceramic works *Breach*, *Longbook 21*, *CONVOKE*, which responds to the rising pollution and water lines of the Hudson River.

**Jiha Moon:** For this exhibition, the curators worked with Moon to select a group of her jubilant and deeply thoughtful porcelain teapots, vases, and plates that illuminate global histories of ceramics and bring together Eastern and Western art histories, and popular culture. Simultaneously, Moon's painted ceramics draw upon plant motifs and cultural symbols to communicate the artist's personal and lived experiences of her contemporary moment.

**Michelle Sound** (Cree and Métis, Member of Wapsewsiipi Swan River First Nation): The show will feature five works from her *Medicine Print Drums* series. Like Emily Cole, Sound focuses on plants found near her home in the territory of Northern Alberta. The artist prints cyanotypes of medicinal plants onto elkhide that are assembled with sinew into heads of wooden drums. Highlighting uses of certain plants and flora as medicine, this work illuminates a deeper relationship between plants and animals within the context of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

**Stephanie Syjuco:** The exhibition will feature photographs from Syjuco's *Neutral Orchids* series to engage a critical lens around flowers and their ties to global extraction and movement. In these works, the artist focuses on flowers to explore the entrenched history of exoticism and colonialism associated with certain plant and flower species.

The exhibition's curators are **Kate Menconeri**, Chief Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, Contemporary Art, and Fellowship at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, and **Amanda Malmstrom**, Associate Curator at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. The project was developed in conversation with the featured artists and the following advisors: **Jenni Sorkin**, PhD, Professor of the History of Art and Architecture, University of California, Santa Barbara, specializing in contemporary art and material culture; **Amy Meyers**, PhD, former Director of the Yale Center for British Art, specializing in art and science in the transatlantic world; the artist **Kiki Smith**; **Lisa Sanditz**, artist and Bard College teaching faculty; and **Nicole Hayes**, practicing ceramics teacher and graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Thomas Cole Site will produce a fully illustrated full-color publication that will be released in June 2025. The publication, edited by exhibition curators Kate Menconeri and Amanda Malmstrom, will include an in-depth essay on Emily Cole by Amanda Malmstrom; an essay conversation with the contemporary artists by Kate Menconeri; and a critical essay by Jenni Sorkin that focuses on ceramics and women's labor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to offer a deeper historical context around ceramic practices and the moment in which Emily Cole lived and worked. Additionally, the publication will include text by Misty Cook, a member of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans, about the medicinal power of plants. Full-page color plates of individual artworks and installation views of the site-responsive artworks within the 19<sup>th</sup>-century house, studio, and landscape will also be featured.

In 2024, the Thomas Cole Site published *The Art of Emily Cole*, the first book dedicated to Emily's life and work. It is authored by Amanda Malmstrom and co-edited with Kate Menconeri.

"Emily Cole's artistic achievements illuminate yet another aspect of Thomas Cole's expansive legacy," said Maura O'Shea, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. "Where he made famous his sweeping landscapes, she focused close-up and in fine detail. Where he focused on oil painting, she mastered ceramics and watercolor. Though Emily defined her own career as a renowned artist, she shared with her father a fascination in depicting the cycle of life, a testament to the enduring themes in both their works. It is a privilege now to present her art in conversation with eight internationally celebrated artists, who cross generations to react to her work and bring it into contemporary discussion."

"This exhibition engages many layers of significance found within Emily Cole's artwork and meaningfully expands and illuminates the history of this artist's house and studio

museum as a place of ongoing and rich artistic innovation,” said Kate Menconeri. “Concurrently, it brings these critical and creative conversations forward through the work and vision of the eight contemporary artists who, like Emily, activate flora and ceramics to engage complex conversations about place and the world in which we live today.”

“The curatorial work of illuminating Emily Cole’s oeuvre in a major public exhibition is a feminist endeavor that presents a rich, colorful portrait of a woman artist who responded artistically to her natural world and navigated the networks of both the Hudson River School and American ceramic arts,” said Amanda Malmstrom. “Emily Cole’s art is still speaking, if we choose to listen. A single painted plate—a visual representation of the earth’s flora, but also physically made of earth itself—is a call to look closely, to pay attention to the details and cycles of life, and to honor and steward the gifts that our natural worlds provide. Her legacy compels reaction by these extraordinary artists of today, and it continues to inform and inspire us more than a century later.”

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**Hudson River Valley**  
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**Council on  
the Arts**



## **The Thomas Cole National Historic Site**

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is an international destination presenting the original home and studios of the artist and early environmentalist Thomas Cole (1801-1848). Cole founded the influential art movement of the United States, now known as the Hudson River School of American landscape painting. Located on six acres in the Hudson Valley, the site includes the 1815 Main House where the artist lived; Cole's 1839 Old Studio; the reconstructed 1846 New Studio building, which now features a museum gallery of rotating exhibitions; a new visitors center called the Cole Center, designed by AD100 Stephen Shadley; and gardens and grounds with panoramic views of the Catskill Mountains. It is a National Historic Landmark and an affiliated area of the National Park System, operating as an independent 501c3 nonprofit organization. Activities include special exhibitions of both 19th-century and contemporary art, print publications, lectures, extensive online programs, school programs, the Cole Fellowship, free community events, and innovative public programs such as the Hudson River School Art Trail—a map and website that enable people to visit the places in nature that Cole painted—and the Hudson River Skywalk, a scenic walkway connecting the Thomas Cole Site with Frederic Church's Olana over the Hudson River. The goal of all programs at the Thomas Cole Site is to enable visitors to find meaning and inspiration in Thomas Cole's life and work. The themes that Cole explored in his art and writings—such as landscape preservation and our conception of nature as a restorative power—are both historic and timely, providing the opportunity to connect to audiences with insights that are highly relevant to their own lives.

## **Visitor Information**

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