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Thomas Cole National Historic Site Receives \$180,000 Grant from Henry Luce Foundation to Complete Phase III of Restoration of the Artist's Home

Phase III Will Unveil a Major New Discovery: Decorative Wall Painting in a First-Floor Room That Research Suggests Was Cole's Home Art Gallery

The Completed Project Will Enable Visitors and Scholars to See Original Thomas Cole Paintings in the Gallery Space That Cole Designed for Their Presentation

Catskill, NY – February 3, 2020 – The Thomas Cole National Historic Site announced today that the Henry Luce Foundation has awarded it a grant of \$180,000 to complete Phase III of the reinterpretation and reinstallation of the artist's home, the Site's 1815 Main House. Phase III builds on the successful completion of Phases I and II that resulted in the discovery and restoration of original decorative wall painting by Cole in the first-floor parlors, the restoration of his interior designs in these rooms, and the creation of digital story-telling installations within the historic rooms that explore Cole's passions and ambitions, his proto-environmentalist views, and the societal forces that shaped his art.

Phase III will continue the initiative on the second floor to reveal Cole's design of his private family rooms and explore the last decade of the artist's life, a time when the nation was experiencing rapid cultural changes not unlike today. Phase III will also unveil a major new finding: newly discovered decorative wall painting in a first-floor room that research suggests was Cole's home art gallery. The completed project will enable visitors and scholars to see original Thomas Cole paintings in the gallery space that Cole designed for their presentation.

"We are enormously grateful to the Luce Foundation for this transformative support and everything they do to advance American art," said Elizabeth B. Jacks, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. "This important support will allow us to complete the interpretive arc guiding the visitor experience at the artist's historic home and further illuminate Thomas Cole's influence on American culture."

"More than a decade of detective work has revealed that Thomas Cole transformed his home's rather ordinary interior into a dramatic three-dimensional work of art," said historic interiors expert Jean Dunbar, PhD, who has been researching and overseeing

restoration of the 1815 Main House for the entirety of the project. “We began this project hoping to learn more about Cole’s life on the Hudson. In the process, we discovered the only surviving interior decoration by the artist and his life-long passion for design, born of experiences in England. This ensemble of decorated rooms is a previously unknown work by the artist, and one which reflects transatlantic influence on American culture. As such, it’s a thrilling discovery of both national and international importance.”

The project is based on new research on the 1815 Main House regarding its usage, contents and arrangement after 1836 when Thomas Cole (1801-1848) married into the family that was living there, made it his permanent home, and completely reimagined the interior. In restoring the interior, the project team is incorporating a fresh approach to the presentation of collection objects within the historic home by integrating the artist’s own words and other primary sources into the visitor experience, using digital technology.

The project also provides curatorial training opportunities with research fellowships and continuous mentorship from senior scholars. Each year Cole Fellows, who participate in a year-long residency at the historic site, join the Interpretive Committee working on this ongoing initiative. Cole Fellows conduct primary-source research that is applied directly to the project. In addition, the project will support the reinstallation of the Thomas Cole Site’s most important fine art objects in the second-floor gallery, incorporating additional Thomas Cole paintings that have been acquired in recent years.

As technology advances at a rapid pace, museums and historic houses grapple with how best to employ new resources and enhance but not take away from the experience of original artworks and authentic spaces. At the Thomas Cole Site, the Interpretive Committee has worked to enable the visitor to get as close as possible to actually interacting with the historic figure, through the faithful use of primary sources. Instead of creating the impression that the historic inhabitants “just stepped out,” the installation is designed to create the impression that Thomas Cole and his family have “just stepped in.”

Over the last decade, the site has been meticulously researched and restored as an authentic stage set for an engaging narrative. The staff have found ways to remove the velvet ropes and invite visitors in as guests. In addition, through the subtle introduction of technology, the interpretation allows Cole’s own words to speak for themselves.

The Interpretive Committee overseeing the restoration of the Main House includes historic interiors expert Jean Dunbar; Chairman of the Thomas Cole Site’s Board of Trustees and former Adjunct Professor at Brooklyn College Lisa Fox Martin; Trustee and historic interiors expert Carrie Feder; Trustee and award-winning theater director Warner Shook; the Cole Fellows, and a team of scholar advisors including Alan Wallach, Ralph H. Wark Professor of Art and Art History & Professor of American Studies Emeritus, The College of William & Mary; and Nancy Siegel, Professor of Art

History, Towson University. The Committee is working with the digital design firm Potion, LLC. Additional funders of Phase III include 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.

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is an international destination presenting the original home and studios of Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School of painting, the nation's first major art movement. Located in the Hudson Valley, the site includes the 1815 Main House; Cole's 1839 Old Studio; the recently reconstructed New Studio building; and panoramic views of the Catskill Mountains. It is a National Historic Landmark and an affiliated area of the National Park System. The Thomas Cole Site's activities include guided and self-guided tours, special exhibitions of both 19th-century and contemporary art, printed publications, lectures, extensive online programs, activities for school groups, the Cole Fellowship program, 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 new 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.

Hours of operation vary by season. For more details, see www.thomascole.org. Keep in touch on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter at @thomascolesite.

The Henry Luce Foundation

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