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Thomas Cole's Role as a Proto-Environmentalist is Featured in *National Geographic's* Special Issue for the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day

Cole is Highlighted Both for His Painting and His Writing

Catskill, NY – April 9, 2020 – Thomas Cole's role as an early environmental advocate – termed a proto-environmentalist because he preceded the modern environmental movement – is featured in *National Geographic's* [Special Issue for the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day](#) (April 22, 2020), now on newsstands. The issue highlights Cole's painting and his writing in an article on the emotional impacts of environmental degradation by writer and photographer Pete Muller.

Thomas Cole (1801-1848) is renowned as the artist who founded the nation's first major art movement, now known as the Hudson River School of landscape painting. The movement celebrates the American landscape, but Cole's paintings also lament the industrialization of the American wilderness, with trees being cleared and railroads and factories encroaching on the land. These changes were especially alarming to Cole, who emigrated in 1818 from northern England, which was rapidly transformed by industrialization in the early 19th century.

The Special Issue of *National Geographic* prominently features one of Cole's iconic paintings, known as "The Oxbow," which depicts a bend in the Connecticut River viewed from a mountaintop – with the valley stripped of trees. Cole's advocacy of the natural landscape extended beyond his paintings to his writing, and the Special Issue also contains an excerpt from his 1836 "Essay on American Scenery." In it, Cole writes: "Yet I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes are quickly passing away – the ravages of the axe are daily increasing – the most noble scenes are made desolate, and oftentimes with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation."

Cole also writes about the restorative power of nature, which is more relevant than ever in this difficult time: "And rural nature is full of the same quickening spirit – it is, in fact,

the exhaustless mine from which the poet and the painter have brought such wondrous treasures – an unfailing fountain of intellectual enjoyment, where all may drink, and be awakened to a deeper feeling of the works of genius, and a keener perception of the beauty of our existence.”

The full Cole essay is [available here](#).

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is a National Historic Landmark that presents Cole’s home and studios and the themes that Cole explored in his art and writings—such as landscape preservation and our conception of nature as a restorative power. Those themes are both historic and timely.

For more information on Thomas Cole, his art, and his writing, contact Jennifer Greim at jgreim@thomascole.org

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.

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