

THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



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Thomas Cole National Historic Site Announces Opening of Exhibition “ON TREES: Georgia O’Keeffe and Thomas Cole” – Presented in Conjunction with COLE 200

Exhibition Juxtaposes How Cole Depicted Trees in the Year of His First Visit to Catskill, NY (1825) with How O’Keeffe Did in Her First Visit to New Mexico (1929)

ON TREES: Georgia O’Keeffe and Thomas Cole

June 21—December 14, 2025: Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Catskill, NY

Catskill, NY – June 23, 2025 – The Thomas Cole National Historic Site announced today the opening of a new exhibition – *ON TREES: Georgia O’Keeffe and Thomas Cole*. The exhibition explores how Thomas Cole (1801-1848) depicted trees in the year of his transformational first visit to Catskill, NY (1825) and how Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1986) did so in her pivotal first visit to New Mexico a century later (1929).

The exhibition is built around two, stunning, American landscape oil paintings that have never been displayed together before:

- “Hunters in a Landscape” by Thomas Cole dates to c. 1825, the year of his first visit to Catskill, a trip that changed the course of American art. It is in the permanent collection of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site; a gift of Dr. Susan Gates Austin Warner, whose late husband Jack Warner was a visionary collector of American art.
- “Dead Tree Bear Lake Taos” by Georgia O’Keeffe dates to 1929, when she visited New Mexico for the first time. O’Keeffe’s trip, like Cole’s, would have a



Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1986), *Dead Tree Bear Lake Taos*, 1929, oil on canvas, 32 x 17 in., Art Bridges



Thomas Cole, *Hunters in a Landscape*, 1824–1825, oil on canvas, 28¼ × 35½ in., Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Gift of Dr. Susan Gates Austin Warner, TC.2019.1

transformational effect on her artistic practice. The painting is on loan from Art Bridges.

These paintings reflect how the anthropomorphic qualities of trees captured the attention and creativity of two iconic painters at the time of their first visits to the landscapes that would define their work thereafter – and have a lasting impact on American art. Additional paintings and drawings by Cole augment the show's exploration.

“These works of Thomas Cole and Georgia O’Keeffe have not previously been presented together, but there are profound connections that this exhibition reveals,” said Kate Menconeri, Chief Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, Contemporary Art, and Fellowship at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. “First, the artists, working about a century apart, share a fascination for trees and animate them with rich allegorical meanings; second, they both depicted trees during their first visits to areas of the country that would go on to shape not only their careers but American art as we experience it today. This intersection is eye-opening, with the work of each artist informing the experience of viewing the work of the other.”

"The link between Thomas Cole and Georgia O'Keeffe is indirect but important," notes the interdisciplinary scholar H. Daniel Peck, the John Guy Vassar Professor Emeritus of English at Vassar College, who has published on both figures. "While O'Keeffe is mainly identified with twentieth-century modernism, both European and American, her work also reflects American nineteenth-century thought regarding nature's organic forms. Cole's art embodied such thought, and the trees in the two exhibited works point to an intriguing relationship between his ideas about nature and those of O'Keeffe."

The exhibition is accompanied by a public program with Dr. Peck on Upstate Art Weekend, a connective annual event, for residents and tourists alike, celebrating the cultural vibrancy of Upstate New York. Join Dr. Peck on Sunday, July 20, at the Thomas Cole Site at 2:00 pm for a discussion on the iconic American painters Georgia O’Keeffe and Thomas Cole. Tickets are available at www.thomascole.org/events.

The exhibition is presented in conjunction with COLE 200, this year’s 200th Anniversary celebration of Cole’s first trip to Catskill, NY, in 1825. The paintings that Thomas Cole made of the Hudson River Valley and Catskill Mountains launched not only his career but the major art movement of the United States known as the Hudson River School of American landscape painting.

Reflecting on that trip, Tim Barringer, Yale University’s Paul Mellon Professor of the History of Art, says, “Thomas Cole’s first visit to Catskill is an event whose significance

resonates through the history of American art to the present day.” Betsy Kornhauser, Curator Emerita at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, states, “When Cole took his first trip up the Hudson River in 1825 and took sketches of the Catskill region, his early wilderness scenes launched a new paradigm for American art.” Franklin Kelly, Senior Curator and Christiane Ellis Valone Curator of American Paintings at the National Gallery of Art, says, “If landscape painting in America can be said to have a ‘big bang’ moment, that was surely it.”

“Seeing the work of Thomas Cole and Georgia O’Keeffe presented together in this way is extraordinary,” said Maura O’Shea, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. “One can almost imagine the conversation that they might have had, if they had lived at the same time, and how much they would have found in common around their life-long fascination with nature.”

ON TREES and **COLE 200** are made possible through support from Art Bridges. They are funded in part by Maurice D. Hinchey Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area.



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 Storehouse 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. 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).