

# THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Director of External Relations, Jennifer Greim, [jgreim@thomascole.org](mailto:jgreim@thomascole.org)

*Thomas Cole's Refrain: The Paintings of Catskill Creek* – a New Exhibition Now Open at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site – Explores, for the First Time as a Series, Cole's Extraordinary Paintings of the Captivating Catskill Creek Landscape, Created Over 18 Years.

Cole painted Catskill Creek more than any other landscape, elevating a local scene to an iconic American image. The exhibition reveals the importance of this specific place to Cole's pioneering commitment to the environment.

May 4 - November 3, 2019

Curator's Talk: Sunday May 19, 2 pm

Catskill, NY – May 7, 2019 – *Thomas Cole's Refrain: The Paintings of Catskill Creek* – a new exhibition at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site – explores, for the first time as a series, Cole's extraordinary Catskill Creek landscapes, which he created again and again during 1827 to 1845 – virtually the whole course of his mature career. His fascination with Catskill Creek, which enters the Hudson River at Catskill, NY, speaks volumes about his artistry and his commitment to the environment. These iconic images – as timeless and timely as ever – are essential to understanding this pioneering artist and proto-environmentalist, who captured nature's beauty and underscored the essential need to protect the environment.



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The exhibition considers these paintings as a series unified by place as well as their stable composition and recurring motifs, even as they exhibit variations reflecting changes in the artist's life and times, including intrusive development of the landscape. During Cole's lifetime, Catskill Creek was increasingly threatened by industry, which is represented in the paintings by significant details. Cole's repeated attention to Catskill Creek signifies his deep attachment to it and illustrates his development of a profound sense of place.



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Created during an 18-year period that spans Cole's mature career, the artist's completed paintings of Catskill Creek constitute the most sustained sequence of landscapes he ever made. The views in the paintings are all anchored along a stretch of Catskill Creek near the Village of Catskill, where

Thomas Cole lived and worked. Cole's view of the Catskill Mountains that frame Catskill Creek can still be enjoyed today from the porch of the Main House at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. A stretch of land along Catskill Creek, located less than a mile and a half from the historic site, has been preserved as a public park by the land conservancy groups Scenic Hudson and Greene Land Trust.

The exhibition is based on new scholarship developed by H. Daniel Peck, Exhibition Curator and John Guy Vassar, Jr., Professor Emeritus of English at Vassar College, in his book of the same title, published by Three Hills, an imprint of Cornell University Press.

"The exhibition tells the story of Cole's discovery of Catskill Creek, with its Catskill Mountain background, and his ever-deepening attachment to it over the course of 18 years. The paintings contain mysteries – enigmatic figures, evocative human structures, and symbolic landforms – that tell stories of their own," notes H. Daniel Peck, Exhibition Curator and John Guy Vassar, Jr., Professor Emeritus of English at Vassar College.

"This is a unique opportunity to immerse yourself in Cole's stunningly beautiful paintings of Catskill Creek and visit the very place that Cole fell in love with nearly 200 years ago. The stretch of land depicted in the paintings is preserved as a public park – just a few miles from the historic site – and continues to remind us of Cole's important environmental message," said Elizabeth Jacks, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.

### **Exhibition Overview**

The exhibition follows Cole's Catskill Creek paintings from 1827 to 1845 – almost the full course of his career – and includes 12 original oil paintings by the artist. Represented, as well, are paintings of the Catskill Creek scene by leading nineteenth-century artists who were inspired by Cole: Asher B. Durand, Frederic Edwin Church, and Charles Herbert Moore. The exhibition features Thomas Cole paintings from private collections that have rarely been seen in public: *Crossing the Stream*, 1827, *View Near Catskill*, 1828-29, *Settler's Home in the Catskills*, 1842, as well as major works from the collections of the New-York Historical Society, Yale University Art Gallery, The National Gallery of Art, Albany Institute of History and Art, Olana State Historic Site, the Frances

Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College, Detroit Institute of Arts, and The Currier Museum of Art.

*Thomas Cole's Refrain: The Paintings of Catskill Creek* is presented in the Thomas Cole Site's reconstructed "New Studio" – a building designed by Cole at his home in Catskill, NY. After its debut here, the exhibition will travel to the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, NY, where it will be on view from November 21, 2019, to February 23, 2020.

### **Catalogue and Programs**

The exhibition is accompanied by a 186-page publication written by H. Daniel Peck, John Guy Vassar, Jr., Professor Emeritus of English at Vassar College, with forewords by Elizabeth Jacks, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, and Masha Turchinsky, Director of the Hudson River Museum. With new scholarship and interpretations of both Cole's major and little-known works, the publication also features maps and aerial photography identifying the artist's vantage points along Catskill Creek for the various paintings. Professor Peck is the author of books about writers Henry David Thoreau and James Fenimore Cooper and has published on painters Asher B. Durand and Georgia O'Keeffe. His work on this project was supported by an Andrew W. Mellon Emeritus Fellowship. The recipient of several NEH and ACLS fellowships, Professor Peck has chaired the Modern Language Association's Division on Nineteenth-Century American Literature and has served as director of Vassar College's American Studies Program.



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*Thomas Cole's Refrain: The Paintings of Catskill Creek* is published by Three Hills, an imprint of Cornell University Press, and is available for purchase at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site and online at [www.thomascole.org](http://www.thomascole.org).

A series of outdoor educational programs at Catskill Creek presented in the landscape preserved by Scenic Hudson and Greene Land Trust will complement the exhibition. The Thomas Cole Site will offer guided canoe trips on Catskill Creek in July and September, and the Greene Land Trust is hosting programs including a Spring Songbird and Native Wildflower Walk in May. For more information, visit [www.thomascole.org/refrain](http://www.thomascole.org/refrain).

On May 19 at 2 pm, Professor Peck will deliver a Curator's Talk at the Lumberyard Creekside Studio in Catskill, NY. Tickets are available for purchase at [www.thomascole.org/events](http://www.thomascole.org/events).

*Thomas Cole's Refrain* is curated by H. Daniel Peck, John Guy Vassar, Jr., Professor Emeritus of English at Vassar College, with the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.

Supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, Wyeth Foundation for American Art, Marshall Field V, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, Empire State Development's I LOVE NEW YORK program under the Market NY initiative, Greene County Legislature through the County Initiative Program of the Greene County Council on the Arts, The Bank of Greene County, The Bay & Paul Foundations, the Enoch Foundation, The Educational Foundation of America, Joan K. Davidson through the J. M. Kaplan Fund, and the Kindred Spirits Society of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.

### **Ongoing Exhibitions in the Thomas Cole Site's 1815 Main House**

- + *The Art of Emily Cole* (through July 7), the first solo exhibition dedicated to Thomas Cole's daughter, Emily Cole, revealing her exquisitely painted botanicals.
- + *The Parlors*, a kaleidoscopic immersive experience with the artist's own decorative painting on the walls and multi-media installations that convey his passionate concern for the environment.
- + *Mind Upon Nature: Thomas Cole's Creative Process*, an exhibition featuring Cole's original paintings, sketches, palettes, and other unique objects.

### **Visitor Information**

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is open weekends in May, and Tuesday through Sunday from June to November 3. For details see: [www.thomascole.org/visit](http://www.thomascole.org/visit). Keep in touch on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter at @thomascolesite.

### **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 on 6 acres 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 Cole Site's activities include guided and self-guided tours, special exhibitions of both 19<sup>th</sup>-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 enables people to visit the places in nature that Cole painted. 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.