

THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



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Thomas Cole National Historic Site Announces Major Initiative for Nation's 250th

"Thomas Cole: Painting the Nature of America" Will Present Three New Exhibitions and Related Programming



Thomas Cole, *Catskill Mountain Landscape*, n.d., Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Gift of Richard T. Sharp

Catskill, NY – January 20, 2026 – Maura O'Shea, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, announced today a major new initiative in celebration of the nation's 250th anniversary in 2026. The initiative – titled "Thomas Cole: Painting the Nature of America" – will highlight the crucial role of Thomas Cole (1801-1848) in projecting a visual identity for the young nation. It will include three new exhibitions reflecting his historic role and ongoing influence, as well as additional programming.

In the early 19th century, Thomas Cole transformed the landscape of the United States into an iconic symbol of the country, giving rise to its national identity of "America the Beautiful." Cole emblazoned his canvases with vast forests, towering mountains, and sublime skies, and in doing so formulated a unifying emblem for the young country. As we mark the nation's 250th anniversary, Cole's vision of this place in all its natural beauty continues to inspire and engage generations today.

The three new exhibitions are as follows:

Thomas Cole: An American Visionary

April 25 through December 2026

This dynamic installation of Thomas Cole's landscape paintings, painting objects, and easels will be unveiled in the new Richard T. Sharp Gallery in the 1815 Main House. It will provide fresh insights into Cole's work, his love of nature, and his presentation of the

landscape in a way that catapulted him to overnight international fame, conveying a visual identity for the nation that still resonates today.

Circles of Influence: Thomas Cole and the American Landscape Movement

June 20 through December 2026

This exhibition – to be presented in the historic Library Gallery in the Main House – will explore the rapid influence that Thomas Cole and his work had on other 19th-century artists, including Frederic E. Church, Asher B. Durand, Jasper Francis Cropsey, Albert Bierstadt, Susie Barstow, Mary Josephine Walters, and more.

Contemporary Vistas: “Light Atlas: Cynthia Daignault”

June 20 through November 1, 2026

This exhibition – to be presented in the reconstructed 1846 New Studio building – will feature an immersive work by Cynthia Daignault, inspired by Thomas Cole, of 360 landscape paintings created on a road trip across the United States.

Alan Wallach, Ralph H. Wark Professor of Art and Art History Emeritus and Professor of American Studies Emeritus, William & Mary, and Nancy Siegel, Professor of Art History, Towson University, serve as advisors to the project. They will be among the renowned curators and artists, who will be featured speakers in the Thomas Cole Site’s Sunday Salon speaker series, augmenting the three exhibitions. The other speakers will be Kevin Avery, Graham Boettcher, Terry Carbone, William Coleman, Cynthia Daignault, Elizabeth Kornhauser, and Erin Monroe.

The Sunday Salon Series begins on March 29 and runs through December 13. The dates of the lectures are available at www.thomascole.org/events. Additional programming is designed for K-12 students, teachers, and visitors of all ages.

“Thomas Cole is central to America’s visual identity around the world – historically and today,” said Maura O’Shea, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole Site. “We’re excited to present these exhibitions and much more in the context of the nation’s 250th anniversary and to engage Americans in the beauty of American art and nature.”

Thomas Cole: Painting the Nature of America at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site is supported in part by The National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.

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Thomas Cole National Historic Site

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site showcases the life and work of Thomas Cole (1801-1848), whose American landscape painting defines an enduring visual identity for the nation. Inspired by the natural beauty that surrounds the site, Cole founded the influential Hudson River School art movement. The site's six-acre campus in Catskill, NY, includes Cole's home and two studio buildings; the Cole Center, a new visitor center designed by Architectural Digest 100 Stephen Shadley; gardens and grounds with panoramic views of the Catskill Mountains; and a scenic walkway over the Hudson River connecting the site with Olana, the historic home of artist and Cole student Frederic Church. The Thomas Cole Site hosts exhibitions as well as art-making activities and innovative school and public programs. Visitors experience first-hand the themes that Cole explored, from the power of art to landscape preservation to the restorative properties of nature. The Thomas Cole Site is a National Historic Landmark and an affiliated area of the National Park System, and it operates as an independent 501c3 nonprofit organization.

Visitor Information

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is open year-round and hours vary by season. For details see: 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).