



## THE TRIP THAT CHANGED AMERICAN ART



### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Thomas Cole National Historic Site Announces an Already-Transformational Donation by Leading Cole Collector and Donor Rick Sharp to Enhance the Visitor Experience in the Art Gallery of the 1815 Main House.**

### **The Donation, Which Comes Amid the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Cole's First Visit to Catskill, NY, Reflects Sharp's Desire to Engage and Inspire New Generations.**

**Catskill, NY – July 29, 2025** – The Thomas Cole National Historic Site announced today that leading Cole collector and long-time supporter Rick Sharp has donated \$175,000 to enhance the 2<sup>nd</sup>-floor gallery in the 1815 Main House of the Thomas Cole Site. The funding will be used to create a new visitor experience, including redesign and physical upgrades to the space, as well as future programming to engage and inspire new generations.

Sharp's donation continues and extends his longstanding support of the Thomas Cole Site. He has gifted to the Thomas Cole Site the largest amount of artwork and objects by Thomas Cole from a private individual outside of the artist's family. The objects include Cole's guitar and guitar case, reflected in the artist's painting "A Pic-Nic Party" (1846). In addition, Sharp has made long-term loans of still more Cole artworks, including the earliest artwork known to be painted by Cole.

Sharp's donation has already proven transformational – not only in concept but in practice. At the Thomas Cole Site's summer fundraising event in June, an announcement of the donation inspired others present to donate a comparable amount, doubling its financial impact to just over \$350,000.

The donation is also inspiring leading experts to become involved in the gallery project. Helping envision the new space are such nationally renowned authorities as Betsy Kornhauser, Curator Emerita at The



*1815 Main House, courtesy Thomas Cole National Historic Site*

Metropolitan Museum of Art; Stephen Shadley, the acclaimed New York City-based interior and architectural designer, who is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Thomas Cole Site and is best known for creating homes for Hollywood stars including Jennifer Aniston and Diane Keaton; and Dan Kershaw, the Senior Exhibition Designer at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The newly envisioned gallery space will be dynamic and inviting. It will exhibit most of the Thomas Cole Site's collection of original artwork by Cole, as well as such cherished objects as Cole's paintbox, paintbrush, mineral collection revealing his deeper engagement with the landscape, and the herbariums that he created. Prominent in the new space will be Thomas Cole's iconic "Color Wheel" – a painting and tool that he used as a diagram of contrasts to guide him in shading objects and complementing colors. The "Color Wheel," itself a unique work of art, is on loan to the Thomas Cole Site from Rick Sharp.



Thomas Cole, *Diagram of Contrasts*, 1834, oil on panel, 23 ½ x 35 in., On loan to the Thomas Cole National Historic Site from the Collection of Rick Sharp

The new gallery space will be formally named The Richard Sharp Gallery. It is already affectionately known simply as "The Rick," a light-hearted takeoff on a prominent museum in New York City. The space will open in April 2026 with a major exhibition of Thomas Cole's work.

Rick Sharp, a retired Milbank partner who lives in New York City and Chatham, NY, is the majority owner of *The Magazine Antiques*. He is the former Chairman of the Board of The Olana Partnership. Sharp has been a benefactor of major initiatives in the arts, including donating the "Sharp Family

Gallery" at Olana and funding for several years the Traveling Fellowship of the Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation. He is also the Lead Sponsor of *Church 200*, the international celebration in 2026 of the birth of Frederic Church, Thomas Cole's famous student.

Sharp first became fascinated with art as a teenager, when he discovered on canvas a school of landscape art that captured his youthful experience of hiking with his father. He used to skip classes at school to drive from his home in Syracuse, NY, to the Munson (then known as the Munson-Williams-Proctor-Arts-Institute) in Utica.

There he experienced great art and learned, in his words, "to educate my eye." He saw for the first time original works of Thomas Cole, which fascinated him, including Cole's four-painting series "Voyage of Life," with its provocative images of the passage of the human condition. He then began to study Thomas Cole as well as Frederic Church and other Hudson River School artists.

That early fascination proved a lifelong one that is now further enhancing Thomas Cole's family home, the 1815 Main House at the Thomas Cole Site. The newly enhanced gallery will present the work of Thomas Cole in new ways to create a vibrant, enticing experience, designed to engage new generations in contemplating and enjoying art.

"What I'm trying to do," says Rick Sharp, "is to share that experience of educating one's eye, and to spread the joy – the feeling of discovery – that comes from 'slow looking,' taking the time to study a work of art and become absorbed by it. I'm still fascinated by the fact that an artist can face a blank canvas and create a work so extraordinary that I want to spend hours looking at it."

"The Thomas Cole Site is enormously grateful to Rick for his longstanding support and his latest major donation," says Maura O'Shea, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. "These are challenging times for arts institutions, and Rick Sharp is showing that the support of private individuals can not only energize new experiences but also inspire others. In that way, the gift becomes transformational on many levels. We look forward to opening "The Rick" next Spring and watching as children, teens, and their families become newly absorbed by the stunning and thought-provoking work of Thomas Cole."

"Rick Sharp has long been a force in preserving and illuminating the work of Thomas Cole and the Hudson River School artists that he inspired," says Kate Menconeri, Chief Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, Contemporary Art, and Fellowship at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. "This new transformative gift to the historic artist's home and studio museum honors Cole's legacy and ensures that future generations will continue to find relevance, connection, and inspiration in his visionary work."

Rick Sharp's donation is presented in conjunction with COLE 200, this year's 200<sup>th</sup> 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."

## **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](http://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).