

# THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site Announces a New Exhibition:  
“Marc Swanson: *A Memorial to Ice at the Dead Deer Disco*”

The Exhibition Draws Inspiration from Thomas Cole and is a Companion to the Show of the Same Name at MASS MoCA

“Marc Swanson: *A Memorial to Ice at the Dead Deer Disco*”

*Two companion exhibitions curated by Denise Markonish*

*March 12, 2022–January 1, 2023: MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA*

*July 16, 2022–November 27, 2022: Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Catskill, NY*



Detail: *A Memorial to Ice at the Dead Deer Disco*

Photo credit: Sofia Taylor

**Catskill, NY – March 8, 2022** – The Thomas Cole National Historic Site announced today that the exhibition “Marc Swanson: *A Memorial to Ice at the Dead Deer Disco*” will open on July 16 and run through November 27, 2022. The exhibition is a companion to the show on view at MASS MoCA in North Adams, MA, that runs from March 12, 2022, through January 1, 2023. Both exhibitions are curated by Denise Markonish, Senior Curator and Director of Exhibitions at MASS MoCA.

*A Memorial to Ice at the Dead Deer Disco* is a new series of installations by Catskill, NY-based artist Marc Swanson, being jointly presented at MASS MoCA and at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.

The companion exhibitions are Marc Swanson’s most ambitious installations yet and consist of sculptures and environments in a diverse array of materials that look at the relationships between humans, culture, and the natural world. The works exist as both memorial and monument aligning climate change with the AIDS crisis. Swanson is interested in the fact that we seem to be living in the ruins of our future – mourning a world that will no longer exist as we know it, resulting from the impending loss and inevitable results of climate change, alongside the inability to control or change this outcome. For Swanson, nature and the disco have been the two places he has associated with letting go and freedom, but through the lens of loss and fear.

The exhibition is presented in two dramatically different settings: the expansive former-industrial spaces of MASS MoCA, where a large multi-disciplinary installation has been

designed, and the intimate setting at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, the home and studios of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century artist and early environmentalist Thomas Cole (1801-1848), whose work and writings inspired the exhibition. At the Thomas Cole Site, Swanson's new work will be specifically sited within the historic interiors, and in conversation with Thomas Cole's own work.

Thomas Cole, the artist best-known today as the founder of the first major art movement of the United States, now known as the Hudson River School, created art and wrote extensively about the negative effects of development along Catskill Creek and in the Catskill Mountains in New York. Shortly after moving to the area, Swanson realized that his property along Catskill Creek in Catskill, NY, was a favorite painting spot for Cole. Cole was a proto-environmentalist who advocated for balance between the built and natural worlds. He used his paintbrush and pen to speak out against escalating development and deforestation that was clearing the way for railroads and expanding industries, such as the tanneries, iron foundries, and mills that were proliferating throughout the Catskill Mountains in the 1830s.

For both exhibitions, Swanson is creating a series of sculptures based loosely on dioramas and nature displays, as well as old Hollywood glamor, gravestones, and memorial monuments. At the Cole Site he was particularly inspired by Cole's use of pastiche and creative compositions, in which Cole inserted or removed people and buildings to support an overall conceptual framework of spirituality and environmentalism; Swanson sees this methodology as a very postmodern tactic. Taking these series of inspirations, Swanson turns nature into memorial, covering taxidermy mounts and tree branches with draped white plaster, as well as creating an icy world from plaster bandages. The result will be a memorialized landscape frozen in time, where the ice will never melt. Swanson connects these ideas to his own relationship with the Catskill landscape, creating an entwined narrative between Cole and Swanson; past and present; conservation and memorial.

"It's amazing to consider and experience the connection between Marc Swanson's work today and Thomas Cole's art and writings of almost 200 years ago," said Kate Menconeri, Chief Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs, Contemporary Art, and Fellowship at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. "Both artists share a deep connection to this place and wrestle with poignant and urgent issues around history, loss, and the natural world. Their works resonate with a moving unison, sharing the same space in the historic artist's home at the Thomas Cole Site."

"Through his intermingling of culture and landscape, Swanson reminds us that the rituals humans perform in the face of loss aren't much different when enacted in the disco, the woods, or the cemetery," says curator Denise Markonish. "All of these spaces exist as sites of memorial and celebration where loss is just as palpable as survivors' guilt."

Marc Swanson's work is included in many public collections, including those of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; the Whitney Museum of

American Art, New York, NY; and the National Museum of Australia, Canberra, Australia. His work has been the focus of solo exhibitions at, among other venues, the Inman Gallery, Houston, TX (2017 and 2011); Basilica Hudson Back Gallery, Hudson, NY (2016); American Dance Institute, Rockville, MD (2015); and the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX (2011). His work has been exhibited internationally in Sweden and Mexico and was included in the second *Greater New York* exhibition at PS1 in 2005. He has worked collaboratively with choreographer/dancer Jack Ferver to create sets for *Chambre* (2014/15). Born in 1969 in Connecticut, Marc Swanson earned an MFA from the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, Bard College, NY in 2004. He currently lives and works in Catskill, NY.

Marc Swanson's presentation at the Thomas Cole Site is part of the ongoing series, **OPEN HOUSE: CONTEMPORARY ART IN CONVERSATION WITH COLE**, an annual series of curated contemporary artist installations sited within and in response to the historic home and studios of artist and early environmentalist Thomas Cole. Operating from the concept that all art is contemporary, the program activates conversations between artists across centuries and is collaborative by nature. Projects may take the shape of a site-wide exhibition, performance, or other format reflecting the artist's practice and ideas. Installations and artworks have ranged from those that literally reference Cole's iconic works to those that expand on the same issues and themes that Cole addressed in his art and writing, including landscape, history, and balancing the built and natural worlds. Drawn from newly created or newly sited pre-existing works, OPEN HOUSE projects shed light on the connections between 19<sup>th</sup>-century American art and our contemporary moment.

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site and MASS MoCA are partnering to publish a fully illustrated catalogue on the occasion of the joint exhibition. It will include an essay by curator Denise Markonish, installation views from both museums, an interview between Marc Swanson and Kate Menconeri, and new writing by Ed Morris and Susannah Sayler, founders of EcoToolshed, and performer Jack Ferver.

The exhibition at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, a Humanities New York SHARP Grant with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the federal American Rescue Plan, New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, and the Kindred Spirits Society of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.

*Programming at MASS MoCA is made possible in part by the Barr Foundation, Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, Mass Cultural Council, and the Joe Thompson "Yes" Fund. Support for A Memorial to Ice at the Dead Deer Disco is provided by the Artist's Resource Trust (A.R.T.) Fund, a fund of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation. The artist would also like to thank Bridge Street Theatre, the Catskill Center, and Foreland Catskill.*

## 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 Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at [@thomascolesite](https://twitter.com/thomascolesite).

## 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 first major art movement of the United States, now known as the Hudson River School of landscape painting. Located on 6 acres in the Hudson Valley, the site includes the 1815 Main House; Cole's 1839 Old Studio; the reconstructed 1846 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 19<sup>th</sup>-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 new 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.

## MASS MoCA

MASS MoCA is one of the world's liveliest centers for making and enjoying today's most evocative art. With vast galleries and a stunning collection of indoor and outdoor performing arts venues, MASS MoCA is able to embrace all forms of art: music, sculpture, dance, film, painting, photography, theater, and new, boundary-crossing works of art that defy easy classification. Much of the work we show in our light-filled spaces, on our technically sophisticated stages, and within our lovely network of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century courtyards is made here during extended fabrication and rehearsal residencies that bring hundreds of the world's most brilliant and innovative artists to North Adams all year round. For more information about MASS MoCA, visit [www.massmoca.org](http://www.massmoca.org).



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