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**Thomas Cole National Historic Site Publishes, for the First Time, Cole's
Lecture on Art – on the 175th Anniversary of its Writing**

**In the Lecture, Cole Makes the Case for Public Art Available to Every Citizen –
With Drawing Taught in Every School**

Catskill, NY – March 31, 2020 – The Thomas Cole National Historic Site announced today that it has published, for the first time, Cole's *Lecture on Art* – on the 175th Anniversary of its writing. Thomas Cole (1801-1848) is considered the founder of America's first major art movement, the Hudson River School of landscape painting. The latest research indicates that he wrote the text in 1845 and intended to present it as a lecture; however, there is no record of his ever delivering it.

The *Lecture on Art* – now published as a 26-page paperback – is exceptional and timely. Cole does not simply reflect on art and its inherent values; he eloquently makes the case for art as a public entity, advocating for public art, for teaching art in all schools, and for the industrial arts as well.

Cole writes of art's role: "Art—the Atmosphere which encircles the sphere of our humanity—kindles the dead soul and raises it above the dullness of mere animal existence to intellectual acquirement." "Thus Art becomes the exponent of Nature's highest qualities; she seizes the transitory forms of beauty, (for truth and beauty—in their highest sense identical—are but the passing visitants of this world) and embodies them in permanent forms for our contemplation."

Regarding the teaching of art, Cole writes: "Drawing ought to be taught in all our Common Schools. It is not merely an agreeable accomplishment, but is positively useful; it gives precision to the eye and strengthens its perceptive powers. But as all cannot be Artists let those whose inclination leads them to the admiration of the beautiful be lovers of Art and by studying Nature and the works of Genius—by esthetic culture take her to their arms with an abiding love. Thus they will open to themselves fountains of unalloyed pleasure. Art will be advanced through their knowledge..."

He advocates both the fine arts and the industrial arts: “The commercial value of the Fine Arts is one which in our community can scarcely avoid being recognized. ... In England, France and Germany Schools of “Industrial Art” as it is called, are established under the patronage of Government. In these Schools, Design and Color, as applicable to manufactures, are taught and any one who has observed the vast improvement that has taken place within a few years in the beauty of Furniture, Vases, Chandeliers Earthenware and in the patterns of draperies of all kinds cannot but be astonished; and all this is owing to the establishment of Institutions where Art is taught on true principles.”

Near the end of the text he asserts, “My earnest desire is ...that Art shall be exposed—free as air—to every Citizen, high or low, rich or poor. Will it not readily be perceived that Public Art could be made the means of lifting the mind...?”

He ends with a call to action: “Let us endeavor then to lift up the prostrate standard of Art and make a stand against this headlong Utilitarianism which prevails. Let us try to convince our fellow Citizens that the pursuit of the beautiful is as essential to our well being as that of Gain. Gold can purchase food, raiment, property, but Taste is that Gentle and refined Spirit which bestows on life its serenest pleasures and most exquisite delights.”

Elizabeth B. Jacks, Executive Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, states: “In these uncertain times, it is clearer than ever that art is a cornerstone of our society, enriching our personal lives, our communities, and our economy. Thomas Cole’s *Lecture on Art* is extraordinary in advancing a public vision for art becoming that cornerstone. While Cole is renowned for his paintings and his role in founding what we now know as the Hudson River School of painting, he is remarkably eloquent with words. Whether advocating for public art or the preservation of nature, his words are as timely today as they were 175 years ago.”

The text for the new publication, *Lecture on Art*, was transcribed by Peter Fedoryk, a member of the 2019 class of Cole Fellows, as part of his fellowship program at the Thomas Cole Site. The book is the second in an ongoing series of Thomas Cole’s writings published by the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. The first in the series is Cole’s *Essay on American Scenery*, which underscores his role as a proto-environmentalist – a role that is increasingly recognized in exhibitions such as “Thomas Cole’s Journeys” (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018) and in recent publications, as the world confronts climate change and marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day (April 22, 2020).

Both books are available for purchase online [here](#). Media interested in receiving a free copy of either book should contact Jennifer Greim at jgreim@thomascole.org.

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 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 Thomas Cole Site's activities include guided and self-guided tours, special exhibitions of both 19th-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 enable people to visit the places in nature that Cole painted – and the Hudson River Skywalk – a new 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.

Visit www.thomascole.org/events for digital content and outdoor experiences that you can enjoy now. We are evaluating our 2020 touring schedule on an ongoing basis in light of concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Keep in touch on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter at [@thomascolesite](https://twitter.com/thomascolesite).