

THOMAS COLE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



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Thomas Cole National Historic Site Announces First Staff Leadership Change in 21 Years

Founding Executive Director Will be Succeeded by Deputy Director

Catskill, NY – November 13, 2024 – Lisa Fox Martin, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, announced today the first staff leadership change in 21 years. Elizabeth B. Jacks (known as Betsy), who became Executive Director in December of 2003, will step down at the end of 2024 to devote more time to furthering her accomplishments as an artist and writer. She will become Executive Director Emerita and a consultant to the Thomas Cole Site. Succeeding Betsy Jacks as Executive Director will be the Thomas Cole Site's current Deputy Director, Maura O'Shea. She will become Executive Director on January 1, 2025.

"The Thomas Cole National Historic Site has been dramatically transformed during Betsy Jacks's long tenure," said Lisa Fox Martin. "When she arrived, there was one building, the 1815 Main House, restored and opened by volunteers. The Old Studio had been abandoned, and the New Studio was completely gone. There was no other paid staff, no endowment, no collection, and no programs. Under her leadership, the six-acre campus grew to include seven buildings including the rebuilding of Thomas Cole's New Studio and the construction of a new Cole Center, all in recognition of Thomas Cole's pivotal role in American artistic history. During the last 20 years, the innovative award-winning programming and widely respected national exhibitions have resulted in the site's operating budget and visitation growing by a factor of ten (1000%). The Site has become a catalyst for artistic exploration and economic activity, helping to redefine the Catskill region and the Hudson Valley for the 21st century."



"It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve this community and the legacy of Thomas Cole," said Elizabeth B. Jacks, "and, even more profoundly, to have worked with the most thoughtful, intelligent, and deep-down good people I have ever encountered. These 21 years have been some of the most fulfilling of my life. The organization now is so far beyond what I could have imagined on my first day in 2003, I feel sometimes that I am walking in a dream. It is thrilling to think about where it can go from here, in ways unimaginable to me now. To the leading academic experts, professors and curators who have shepherded this site; the innovative contemporary artists, dedicated volunteers, and passionate and brilliant staff; the generous supporters and philanthropists at all levels who believe in our mission; and most of all to the extraordinarily dedicated Board of Trustees; thank you for being with me, behind me, as well as out in front, all

along this magical journey. After more than two decades, I am excited to move in new creative directions and fulfill my lifelong desire to write and paint full-time. I look forward to remaining steadfastly involved in supporting the Thomas Cole Site and the next phase of its evolution under the care of its next Executive Director, Maura O'Shea. I recruited Maura to be my Deputy, knowing that she would be exactly the right person to lead the Thomas Cole Site to even greater heights. We are extraordinarily fortunate to have her superb skills and leadership in the years to come."

Maura O'Shea has been Deputy Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site since January 2023. She has 25 years of experience working in museums and cultural organizations with expertise in audience development, community engagement, and project management. Prior to joining the Thomas Cole Site, she held leadership positions at The Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, CT, and the Westervelt Warner Museum of Art in Tuscaloosa, AL, and spent 15 years at the New Britain Museum of American Art in New Britain, CT, where she served as Deputy Director and Curator of Education. She has served on the boards of several charitable foundations and arts organizations and is currently Vice Chair of the Warner Foundation in Tuscaloosa. In 2011, Maura co-founded The Art Truck, a mobile art studio that brought creative celebrations to more than 45,000 children and adults in Connecticut.

"The Board of Trustees of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site is honored to appoint Maura O'Shea the next Executive Director, who after two years as Deputy Director has a deep understanding of the organization building on her rich and extensive experience in arts management," said Lisa Fox Martin. "Maura's keen vision for the next phase of creativity and innovation at this extraordinary art institution will ensure a smooth transition, as we welcome her to her new position and look forward to supporting and working with her in the future."

"I'm excited about the opportunity to build on the extraordinary legacy that Betsy Jacks and the Board, staff, and volunteers of the Thomas Cole Site have built," said Maura O'Shea. "It's been an enormous pleasure to work with Betsy these past two years, and I look forward to taking all that she has accomplished and move the Thomas Cole Site forward in new, dynamic, catalytic ways."

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 6 acres in the Hudson Valley, the site includes the 1815 Main House; Cole's 1839 Old Studio; the reconstructed 1846 New Studio building; a new visitors center called the Cole Center, designed by Stephen Shadley; and, panoramic views of the Catskill Mountains. It is a National Historic Landmark and an affiliated area of the National Park System. 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 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.

Visitor Information

The hours of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site 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 Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at [@thomascolesite](https://twitter.com/thomascolesite).