

West Parlor, “Hidden Stories”

GILMOR + COLE



THOMAS COLE, *Landscape Scene from “The Last of the Mohicans,”* 1827, oil on canvas, Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York, Gift of Stephen C. Clark, N0194.1961, photograph by Richard Walker

Gilmor commissioned Cole to paint a scene from the novel The Last of the Mohicans.

Gilmor to Cole, December 13, 1827

In your composition, the arrangement of rocks is artificial...It strikes the eye as something forced, & not ordinarily seen in nature.

Cole to Gilmor, December 25, 1827; Cole, December 12, 1829, London Journal

The pictures of all the great painters are something more than mere imitations of nature as they found it. He who has no power of creation is no real painter.

Gilmor to Cole, December 13, 1826

Above all things, however, truth in drawing the scenes of our own country is essential.

Cole, Journal, May 19, 1838; Cole to Gilmor, Dec. 25, 1827

I am not a mere leaf-painter. [Journal] If the imagination is shackled, and nothing is described but what we see, seldom will anything truly great be produced in either Painting or Poetry.

Cole’s vision of America combines the real and the ideal.

Can imaginary views tell the truth?

STURGES + COLE



THOMAS COLE, *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn*, 1836-37, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA, Gift in memory of Jonathan Sturges by his children, 1895 (95.13.3)

Sturges commissioned Cole to paint the valley you can see from this room. The view was changing rapidly, as railroads and factories arrived.

Cole to Sturges, February 1837; Cole, Journal, August 1, 1836

This picture is a view in the valley of the Catskill near this place. It was a favorite haunt of mine, but its beauty has passed away. Where the rail road is now, the charm of quietness and solitude is gone.

Sturges to Cole, March 1837

I can imagine what your feelings are when you see the beauties of nature swept away to make room for avarice—we are a truly destructive people.

Cole, Thoughts & Occurrences [Journal], August 1, 1836 (NYSL)

If men were not blind to the beauty of nature, commerce might be carried on without destroying it. But it is not so - They desecrate whatever they touch.

Sturges later helped finance the construction of the very railroads he condemned in his letter.

Can development be balanced with preservation?

TOWN + COLE



THOMAS COLE, *The Architect's Dream*, 1840, oil on canvas, Toledo Museum of Art, Photograph by Michael Fredericks

Town commissioned Cole to paint a landscape.

Ithiel Town to Cole, May 20, 1840

Your picture is a fine Architectural painting but I was desirous of a Landscape from your brush...I regret to state, that you have greatly misunderstood. I wish the landscape to predominate – the Architecture, History, etc., to be various and subservient.

Cole to Town, May 25, 1840

The picture which I have painted was executed in such a manner as to meet your expressed desire—I have taken upmost pains with it and it is one of immense labor.

Town to Cole, July 4, 1840

The subject is not at all what I described—it cannot be termed a landscape.

Cole to Town, May 25, 1840

If I were to paint pictures to be refused at the option of those who gave the commission, my profession would be both anxious and precarious...I am grieved and disappointed but I cannot undertake to paint another subject in place of it.

Town ultimately rejected the painting, and Cole kept it here in his home for the rest of his life.

Is this painting a landscape?

MARIA + THOMAS



THOMAS COLE, *Maria Bartow Cole (1813–1884)*, c. 1838, pencil on paper, Albany Institute of History & Art, gift of Mrs. Florence Cole Vincent, 1958.28.18 (left); FREDERIC CHURCH, *Thomas Cole*, 1846, pencil and ink on paper, National Portrait Gallery (right)

Maria and Thomas frequently corresponded about his negotiations with patrons.

*Luman Reed commissioned *The Course of Empire*, then suddenly died.*

Thomas to Maria, December 9, 1843

Mrs. Reed would not let me have “Course of Empire” to exhibit which, you know, is a great disappointment, as it diminishes the effect of my Exhibition.

Maria to Thomas, January 6, 1844

I feel sorry that there should be any unfriendly feeling from so respectable a source. Would it not be well for you to see some other member of the Reed family?

Another frequent patron was Daniel Wadsworth.

Thomas to Maria, January 15, 1844

Mr. Wadsworth has a desire for a series of mine. I am going to propose to him “Sowing and Reaping,” or “Life, Death, and Immortality.”

Maria to Thomas, February 12, 1844

Why need you propose either of your subjects for Pictures? Tell him that you have subjects, and what price you will paint them for. And be sure you have it in the bargain that you may exhibit them if you wish to.

Maria and her family provided Thomas with a household of support.

How many people does it take to make a successful artist?