



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Paintings by Ralph Albert Blakelock coming to Thomas Cole National Historic Site

American painter Ralph A. Blakelock (1847-1919), one of the most celebrated artists of the late 19th century, will be the focus of the season-opening exhibition at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.



Ralph Albert Blakelock, *Black and White Forrest Scene*, undated. Pencil on paper mounted on cardboard. 6 1/4 x 4 in. Courtesy Salander O'Reilly Gallery, New York.

The exhibition, in the Catharine Beecher Memorial Gallery on the second floor of the Main House, will begin May 1st and continue through October 31st. More than 20 original drawings, watercolors and paintings will be featured in this new exhibition, as well as rarely seen paintings from private collections, and other unusual items such as Blakelock's palette still covered with the artist's original marks and blended paint.

"To those who know Blakelock as the painter of dark and poetic moonlit landscapes, I invite you to look again," said Elizabeth Jacks, the Director of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. "The objects in this exhibition are quite unusual. Some of them were painted on the proverbial 'back of an envelope' while Blakelock was confined to an institution without

traditional art materials. They tell a story of perseverance. Despite all of the difficulties he encountered, Blakelock was a key figure in the transformation of American landscape painting between the 19th century and the 20th."

"Cedar Grove is a beautiful and interesting setting for this exhibition," said Elizabeth Stevens, curator of the exhibition and Director of Exhibitions and Collections at the Salander O'Reilly Gallery in New York City. "Thomas Cole's home represents the beginning of the Hudson River School, which had a profound influence on Blakelock. With Olana nearby, and Catskill Village being the home of Blakelock's family, this show is an appropriate tribute to an area that has inspired so many artists."

Blakelock, who was from New York City, loved to sketch the wilderness, and when he traveled to the White Mountains, Adirondacks and Catskills, he was following in the footsteps of Cole

and other painters of the Hudson River School. In a recent biography of Blakelock the author Glyn Vincent notes, "Blakelock not only had solid American credentials, he was an artist who, in Whitmanesque fashion, had provided a romantic and poetic vision of America that Americans longed to recapture."

But Blakelock's work came to defy categorization; it was a dramatic departure from his forbearers, and is considered a precursor to the abstract expressionist movement that would follow in 50 years. "It was Blakelock's moody, hallucinogenic landscapes that made his reputation as America's most daring experimental artist of the 19th century," says Vincent. "Blakelock was by nature a dreamer," said Raymond Wyer, a critic in Blakelock's time. "To call him a landscape painter is incorrect. No artist has used the landscape as a means to an end more than he."

By the early 20th century, Blakelock's luminous moonlight paintings were a sensation with the public. A Blakelock landscape sold for \$20,000 in 1916, which was a record price for the work of a living artist. The sale made him famous, and newspapers called him America's greatest artist. Yet at his moment of triumph, Blakelock was struck by personal tragedy. What is now thought to be late onset schizophrenia caused him to spend the later years of his life in a state hospital, away from his family, studio, and the burgeoning New York City art scene.

Besides being a summer visitor to Catskill and painting the Catskill Mountains on several occasions, Blakelock has another connection to Greene County. Six years after Blakelock was first committed to a state hospital in Middletown, his wife Cora and children left New York City for the country hamlet of Leeds, NY, just outside Catskill, and several of Blakelock's descendants live in Catskill today.

Current interest in Blakelock's life and works has increased with the publishing of "The Unknown Night: The Genius and Madness of R. A. Blakelock, an American Painter," by Glyn Vincent (Grove Press 2003). Called the "best book yet" on the artist by *The New York Times Book Review*, the biography details a painting career loaded with exciting successes and harrowing pitfalls.

Public Event: The public is invited to a book-signing with Glyn Vincent on Saturday May 1 at 3 pm. Free Admission. Tours of the house and grounds will be available 10 am-3 pm.

Press Event: A press preview of the exhibition is planned for Thursday, April 22, at 11 am, when Stevens and Jacks will be available for interviews. A selection of images is available on request or can be downloaded from www.thomascole.org/PressOffice/pressoffice.html.

Members Event: Members of the Thomas Cole Associates are invited to a special preview on Saturday, April 24, 4 -6 pm. Non-members are invited to join at the door.

For more information, call Cedar Grove Publicist Barry Henck at 518-943-7465.

Thomas Cole National Historic Site

218 Spring Street, P.O. Box 426 ☞ Catskill, NY 12414 ☞ 518-943-7465

fax: 518-943-0652 ☞ email: pressoffice@thomascole.org ☞ website: www.thomascole.org

Hours of operation: May through October; Friday and Saturday 10 am-4 pm, Sunday 1-5 pm