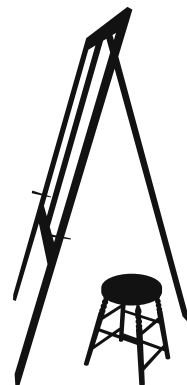


THOMAS COLE

NATIONAL
HISTORIC
SITE



Fall 2016 Newsletter



Painted frieze, East Parlor, Thomas Cole's home. Exposure by Margaret Saliske.

*This newsletter contains two articles about the discovery of decorative painting on the walls of Cole's parlors. The restored rooms will open to the public in 2017 as part of a new installation entitled *A Guest in the Home*, which will engage visitors in a high-tech interactive experience in the very rooms in which Cole interacted with the artistic and cultural leaders of his day.*

BURIED TREASURE: THOMAS COLE'S DECORATION

By Jean Dunbar

For well over a century, Thomas Cole's home kept a huge secret, very, very well—long after the house opened to the public, and well after study of its interior began in 2008. Then, in 2015, a close look at a purported wallpaper border revealed something utterly unexpected: paint. Under the interior's bland carapace of modern latex paint lies an extravaganza of trompe-l'oeil painting—folds of blue bunting, crimson drapery dripping with knotted white fringe, bold Greek keys, sculptural dentil-work. In the parlors and an adjacent pantry, the walls themselves glow with shades of lavender and green—and Pompeian red.

The astonishing trompe l'oeil effects, motifs, and glowing colors evoke the ruins of ancient Pompeii. Long ago, someone redecorated this c.1815 house to resemble ancient

»continued on page 4»



Installation view in the New Studio. Photo by Peter Aaron.

NEW STUDIO OPENS TO GREAT FANFARE

The grand opening of Thomas Cole's New Studio and our 2016 exhibition, *Thomas Cole: The Artist as Architect*, was one for the history books! Hundreds of Cole enthusiasts braved the rain on May 1 for the ribbon-cutting of the newly reconstructed New Studio, designed and built by Cole in 1846 but demolished in 1973. They also came to see the exhibition inside its new state-of-the-art gallery, featuring Cole's masterpiece, *The Architect's Dream* (1840), on loan from the Toledo Museum of Art.

Thomas Cole: The Artist as Architect is the first exhibition to focus on Cole's architectural achievements. The exhibition, curated by noted scholar Annette Blaugrund with the assistance of associate curator Kate Menconeri, includes 29 paintings and drawings, as well as a scale model and the artist's books about architecture. Accompanying the exhibition is a new 120-page hardcover book of the same title, available at thomascole.org/shop.

Following its presentation here in Catskill, the exhibition travels to the Columbus Museum of Art in Columbus, Ohio, where it will be on view just a few blocks from the Ohio Statehouse that was built from Cole's architectural design.

NEW HIRES

Heather Paroubek

Heather Paroubek, who joined the Thomas Cole National Historic Site in February, is our Education Manager responsible for managing our touring operation, school programs and special events. Heather also oversees the implementation of our innovative Parlors Project, the permanent exhibition in the Main House which opens in 2017. Heather worked previously at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. She received her M.A. from Syracuse University, and taught art history at SUNY-Cortland.



Heather Paroubek

Jennifer Greim

We are happy to welcome Jennifer Greim to the Cole House staff as Operations Coordinator, beginning October 3. Jennifer comes to us from *Vogue* magazine, where she was Senior Art Producer. She graduated magna cum laude from Colgate University where she majored in Art & Art History with a concentration in Studio Art. She has also worked for the photographer Annie Leibovitz, and served as a docent at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Jennifer Greim

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2016 THOMAS COLE FELLOWS



Claire Pohl, Leila Farrer, Casey Monroe, and Kathleen Brousseau

On May 31 we welcomed the sixth annual class of Thomas Cole Fellows: Claire Pohl, B.A. in Art History, the University of Miami; Leila Farrer, B.A. in History, Skidmore College; Casey Monroe, M.A. in Art History, Tufts University; and Kathleen Brousseau, M.A. in Art History, Syracuse University. The Thomas Cole Fellows is a

program for recent college graduates and graduate students that runs through early November. Begun in 2010, the Thomas Cole Fellows program gives talented new college graduates the opportunity to develop their careers in the museum field. The Fellows become part of the Thomas Cole staff for five months, meet museum professionals at other institutions, give tours for the public, and conduct new research about Thomas Cole that is put to use in making the site better. Interested candidates for 2017 should send a letter and resume to the Thomas Cole Historic Site, attention Kate Menconeri. Details can be found at www.thomascole.org/internships.

CONTEMPORARY SERIES IS LAUNCHED

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is pleased to announce the start of a new series of contemporary art installations entitled *OPEN HOUSE: Contemporary Art in Conversation with Cole*, spearheaded by the site's curator, Kate Menconeri. The inaugural exhibition opened on August 13 featuring the artist Jason Middlebrook. Each year the Thomas Cole staff will invite one or two contemporary artists to create a site-specific project that engages with the art, home and story of Thomas Cole. The goals of the project are to enable visitors to access the historic spaces from a new angle and to provoke new ideas about the meaning of the art and history of the mid-19th century. In 2015, the Thomas Cole site, in partnership with the nearby Olana State Historic Site, presented an exhibition of contemporary art curated by Stephen Hannock and Jason Rosenfeld featuring work by 28 artists including Chuck Close, Maya Lin and Cindy Sherman, whose work was integrated into the two historic sites. The exhibition brought unprecedented attendance and drew attention to the story of this part of the Hudson Valley as the place where American art was born in the early 19th-century, a place that continues to spark creativity and innovation among artists working today.

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 contemporary times.



2016 installation view of the exhibition
Nature Builds / We Cover by Jason Middlebrook



Matthew Mosca at the Thomas Cole Historic Site in 2014

A CHAT WITH MATTHEW MOSCA

By David Barnes

I spoke recently with Matthew J. Mosca of Artifex, Ltd. who, for over 40 years, has been a nationally recognized consultant in the field of historic paint research and restoration. He completed his initial paint analysis report on the 1815 Main House at the Thomas Cole site in 2010, and with Jean Dunbar, led the discovery of Cole's decorative painting. Using micro-chemical testing, Mr. Mosca makes his living identifying the constituents of paint finishes. He was a major contributor in developing a program for paint research which was devised at the National Trust for Historic Preservation during the years 1973-1975. Since then, Mr. Mosca has developed expertise in the examination of pigments using polarized light and UV fluorescent microscopy.

Matthew, in your long experience looking beneath layers of paint to determine original paint colors, have you ever made a discovery like this one?

Yes, David, there have been some other exciting finds, such as finding the graining at Mount Vernon and Woodlawn early on, and more recently the extraordinarily decorated interior of Clifton, the summer villa of Johns Hopkins, here in Baltimore (decorations ca. 1852), but the discoveries in

Thomas Cole's house are even more exciting because the decorations were done by Cole himself, and can be related to so much information found by Jean Dunbar and others. The closest for me was the discovery of painted decoration in the Loggia of Chesterwood, in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, that might have been painted by Daniel Chester French. While I made that discovery over 20 years ago, it is just now being followed up - we'll see where that leads.

Veteran of this type of work that you are, how did you react when you realized it was not a solid color, and that it might be Cole's work?

The story of the discovery is interesting, even a bit comical. The small room known as the Pantry was not part of the original scope, so I looked at the exposed Greek Key decoration there from the floor, and took everyone's word that this was a wallpaper border. It struck me as odd that a pantry would be painted a classical red ochre and have a black Greek key border, and we now know that Cole outfitted the room as a "collector's cabinet." At the beginning of the second phase (which we all thought was going to be "wrap up!") Jean asked me to look closely at that

border. As soon as I was on the ladder and close to it (without magnification, even), I realized that it was paint, not a wallpaper border. Once I started examining it on site I realized that it was the first painted finish, directly on the plaster: it had to be Cole era.

Finding decoration in a small room means that you must look for decoration in the major rooms. This meant looking in the West and East Parlors. The first discovery was in the West Parlor, which showed that there was indeed a painted frieze at the top of the wall. While damaged, it was possible to discern the diagonal bands that Cole painted to suggest flat drapery. That lead to more and more discoveries, leading to the superb work that Margaret Saliske has done, uncovering and restoring the painted friezes. I realized that the new ceiling in the West Parlor that was installed when the house was first opened to the public, would have to come down (the frieze passed behind the dropped ceiling) in order to discover the entire frieze, and Margaret has found that it is a dentil molding in trompe-l'oeil! The entire frieze is fantastic (in every sense of that word).

This was a very exciting discovery and I don't expect that it will be surpassed in my career!

Approximately how many years does your evidence indicate Cole's decorative paintings were displayed before they were painted over? And based on when they were painted over, do you have an educated guess as to who might have painted over the decorative painting?

The decorations were in place and exposed for the rest of Cole's lifetime and probably for the majority of Mrs. Cole's lifetime. There is a photograph that shows the West Parlor wallpapered (I think this is 1880s) and there may have been more than one wallpa-

»continued on page 6»

Roman ruins. But who?

From the start, Thomas Cole was the prime suspect. In 1836, Cole, who had just married Maria Bartow, moved into her home in Catskill, bringing with him a set of home-decorating skills rare in an artist. In England, long before he took up painting, Cole apprenticed as a designer and printer of colorful cotton fabrics. After immigrating to America, he designed and printed fashionable wallpapers and floor cloths. He also worked as a decorator, ornamenting roller blinds, furniture, and household objects with painted motifs. Cole had the expertise—and the educated taste—to create magical painted rooms like these.

And, it turns out, he had the opportunity. Surviving account books with dated entries show that J. Alexander Thomson, the house's owner, immediately delegated redecorating to his niece's new husband. Since Cole contributed toward the household's expenses, both men kept track of purchases he made for the home. A mere two years after moving in, Cole began buying furnishing materials for the house with his own money—including fitted patterned carpeting for both parlors and a stair runner and fashionable floor cloth for the Entry Hall.

Cole's first purchase, in March 1839, was an expensive carpet, a new Brussels carpet for the best room: the West Parlor. Miraculously, scraps of this looped-pile carpet survived for a century and a half, hidden in plain sight: Cole later replaced the seat and back of his studio chair with remnants of it. When pieced together, the fragments form a vignette of peacocks perched on pomegranate branches, above temple steps. This exotic little scene, slightly bigger than a chair seat, repeated over and over again across the carpet's creamy field, like a printed design on a fabric.

Like the colors and painted decoration in the parlors, the carpet's creamy white temple steps, pomegranates, and red peacocks evoked Pompeii, which Cole knew firsthand. In the 1820s, excavation of the Roman city, buried by an eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, uncovered highly decorated houses. Cole visited these colorful ruins during his first stay in Europe, from 1829 to 1832. Obviously fascinated by what he saw, he acquired the first book devoted to colored drawings of Pompeian decoration, Thomas Goldicutt's 1825 work, *Specimens of Ancient Decoration from Pompeii*. Its plates record painted friezes, glowing wall colors, walls ornamented with landscapes and narrative paintings—even a wall featuring a

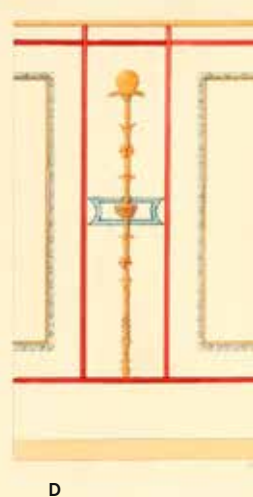
red-tailed peacock.

Cole may have created the pattern and commissioned a mill to translate it into carpet. A note accompanying the account credit for the carpet shows that he paid for it during an extended stay in New York City—where agents of domestic carpet mills did business. Or he may have simply bought a design offered by an American mill. The carpet was woven in an unusual width that marks it as a product of the fledgling American carpet industry, rather than an English import.

Carpet was typically installed after walls were painted or papered. By the time this carpet arrived by boat at Catskill, the West Parlor's painted decoration was probably already complete. Its wallcolor helps date the work and confirms that Cole decorated the room. The West Parlor's walls contain synthetic ultramarine, a brilliant new man-made blue that only became available after 1830. By 1833, Cole was painting skies with it—indeed, he was soon known for doing so. As late as 1836—the year he moved in—he was still one of the few American artists using synthetic ultramarine.

The pigment was also used to paint the Entry Hall's walls, and Cole's *modus operandi* can be seen throughout the home's decoration. The walls in

A – Thomas Cole Papers, New York State Library, Albany, NY. B – Thomas Cole's studio chair with carpet fragments. C – Carpet pattern, reconstructed by John Burrows.



all of the decorated rooms are painted with pigments that Cole routinely used in his art. When completed, the rooms were deft ensembles of painted decoration, patterned carpet, artifacts found in Italy, and decorative objects with Roman designs. Family, friends, visitors, and the artist were immersed in the rarefied Italian atmosphere that Cole and his world associated with art and artists.

In the 1830s, he painted picture after picture inspired by his travels there, such as *View of the Arno* (1838) and *Italian Coast Scene with Ruined Tower* (1838). Cole hung his Italian canvasses—and many other pictures—on the walls of his home, against the luminous tints that he had created. He chose wall colors that public art exhibitions used to flatter pictures and their gilt frames: green in the East Parlor, lavender gray in the West Parlor, and—in the room adjoining the West Parlor—Pompeian red.

Clearly, the relation of decoration to exhibition was much on Cole's mind. In England, he had visited the painter J. M. W. Turner and seen the red-walled gallery that this highly successful artist had created at his own home. Turner sold painting after painting from his exhibition space, a lesson not lost on a visitor hoping to make a living

from art.

Redecorating Cole's Catskill home offered a priceless and unprecedented opportunity not only to live amidst Italian atmosphere, but also to display pictures in a carefully crafted setting. Cole's painted swags and folds of fabric dip down toward the pictures, mimicking the festoons of drapery used in art galleries. The artist must have easily convinced his in-laws to fill their home with his work—few families owned a painting, let alone purpose-decorated rooms filled with them.

His case—that Pompeii and pictures were made for each other—was already made for him by a rage for everything to do with Pompeii that was sweeping America. In the 1830s, novels and paintings imagined life in the doomed Roman metropolis, and *The Last Days of Pompeii* was the longest-running play in New York. Wallpapers and fabrics referenced Pompeii's distinctive decoration, especially its gorgeous colors. Popular books documented objects, wall-painting, and mosaics unearthed there.

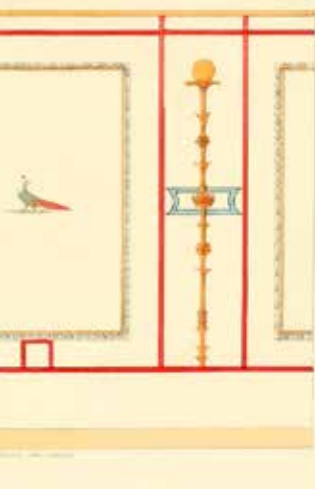
With license to decorate, Cole created complete room schemes for all of the house's important rooms. For the Entry Hall, he mixed a celestial shade of blue and purchased a handsome new floor cloth and a stair carpet. As a

companion for the East Parlor's green walls and red drapery frieze, he chose a luxurious pile carpet with large floral medallions. It remained on the floor until the 1960s, appearing in twentieth-century photographs of the room. In these images, Cole's painted walls are nowhere to be seen.

For 36 years after Cole's death, the magical setting he had created remained untouched, as did his studio, and the art he left behind—all carefully preserved and curated by Maria. She died in 1884, still surrounded by the colors and forms and artifacts of ancient Rome. Her death unleashed her family's pent-up and long-suppressed desire for decorating.

On her children's watch, the rooms acquired Japanesque wallpapers and a new muted color palette. Though Cole's paintings still hung on the walls, most in their long-established places, a new modern carpet replaced the West Parlor's peacocks and pomegranates, and fashionable wallpaper veiled the rooms' painted decoration. Over time, the 1880s wallpaper grew stale, as wallpapers do. Pale twentieth-century paint, in its turn, covered Cole's glowing colors and dramatic friezes, burying them completely, almost without trace, as ashes had buried Pompeii.

D – *Specimens of Ancient Decoration from Pompeii*, John Goldicutt, 1825. E – George Scharf, *Interior of the Gallery of the New Society of Painters in Watercolours, Old Bond Street*, 1834, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK. F – undated photo of the East Parlor, TCNHS collection.



RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE

In 2014, the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded the Thomas Cole National Historic Site a Challenge Grant for \$300,000 that must be matched with \$900,000 within five years, resulting in a \$1.2 million endowment that will fund our educational programming in perpetuity. We are happy to announce that the Cole site has met the challenge for both 2015 and 2016, and the total amount raised has just passed the milestone of \$500,000! Our challenge between now and July 31, 2017 is the highest hurdle of the entire challenge: \$300,000 must be raised in order to receive an additional \$100,000 from the NEH. We invite you to be a part of this historic campaign to create a permanently restricted fund that will support exhibitions, lectures, performances, school visits and community programs. For more information, please visit thomascole.org/challenge. Our sincere thanks to the individuals and foundations below who have helped us so far:

Peter Bakal
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Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation
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Michel Goldberg & Frances Spark
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Johnnie Moore & Ashton Hawkins
Jane W. Nuhn Charitable Trust
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Maynard & Kay Toll
Willow Springs Charitable Trust Foundation

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pering campaign. When the house was restored in the twentieth century (by Florence Haswell Cole Vincent and later Edith Cole Silberstein) the wallpapers were scraped off (damaging the Cole friezes) and the walls were painted.

How unusual was it for an artist to do decorative painting like this?

Cole had a background in decorative painting, and I suspect that unless the artist was very successful he would do decorative painting, particularly in his own home – another famous example is the “Peacock Room” painted by James Abbott McNeill Whistler, which he did for friends.

I’m fascinated that in order to reveal this discovery, you had to formulate a method for uncovering the layers of paint without damaging Cole’s decorative painting underneath. Have you had to do that type of thing before? Until you figured it out, were you concerned that it might not be possible to reveal the decorative painting without destroying it?

Yes, I was enormously concerned about the exposure process, despite or because of the fact that the surfaces had been damaged earlier. Having established which paint finish was directly on top of the decoration, I was able to remove the bulk of the later paint mechanically or with a commercial paint remover. Because of having done this at other sites, I had a good idea as to how to approach the removal process: I used benzyl alcohol which I could control for the first overpaint layer, getting a sense of the time that it would take to soften the over-paint, permitting its removal. But it was Margaret Saliske who perfected and streamlined the process and made it possible to uncover and restore so much.

Believe me, Matthew, your answer underscores how lucky we all feel that you were the person who helped make this discovery! Thank you so much for all you’ve done for the Cole House!

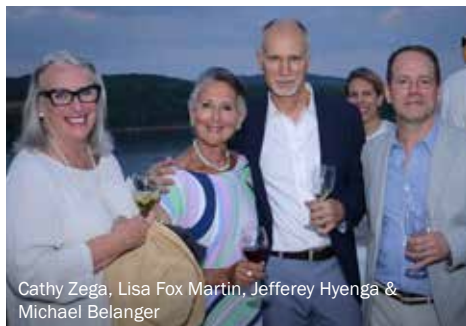
Thank you David, I appreciate contributing to the information on the Thomas Cole Historic Site. I am still rather awed by it all!



Painted frieze, West Parlor, Thomas Cole’s home. Exposure by conservator Margaret Saliske.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2016 SUMMER PARTY SPONSORS

The staff and trustees of the Thomas Cole site would like to thank the many contributors to our annual summer fundraiser event, hosted by Lisa Fox Martin and designed by Greg Feller and Richard Bodin of Hudson Home. The success of the event was greatly boosted by both a live and silent auction made possible by the generous individuals listed below. Save the date for the 2017 Summer Party: Saturday, June 24th!



Cathy Zega, Lisa Fox Martin, Jefferey Hyenga & Michael Belanger



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ANNOUNCING THE 2017 EXHIBITION

We are excited to announce our 2017 exhibition, *Sanford R. Gifford in the Catskills*, to be presented in Thomas Cole's New Studio, April 30 - October 29. The curator is Kevin J. Avery, Senior Research Scholar at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who in 2003 co-organized the major retrospective, *Hudson River School Visions: The Landscapes of Sanford R. Gifford*, for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art. In the mountains and valleys near Gifford's family home in Hudson, New York, the artist perfected his distinctive ability to transform natural landscape features into a vision of light and atmospheric effects. This exhibition will highlight Gifford's creative process and demonstrate this transformation from a place observed to the place transfigured, and it will offer, for the first time, the opportunity to see the original paintings in a venue just a few miles from the sites that inspired them.

MISSION

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site preserves and interprets the home and studios of Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School of painting, the nation's first art movement. Cole's profound influence on America's cultural landscape inspires us to engage broad audiences through innovative educational programs that are relevant today.



Sanford R. Gifford, *Kauterskill Clove, in the Catskills*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 12 7/8 x 11 1/16 in. Michael Altman/Michael Altman Fine Art & Advisory Services.