

Name: Thomas Cole

Years: February 01, 1801 to February 11, 1848

Residence: Catskill, New York

Brief Biography: Painter, poet, and essayist Thomas Cole was born in Lancashire, England, in 1801. He was a child art prodigy and his parents, although strapped financially, encouraged his talents as best as they could. Cole began working as an apprentice engraver for wall covering prints right before his family migrated to the United States in 1818. Upon arrival in America, Cole remained in Philadelphia working as an engraver, painting some portraits, and studying art on his own in the local museums. He had aspired to be an historical painter but this was a difficult discipline to master as it required expensive and lengthy formal training. But his love for nature, combined with a growing fascination for the landscapes on display in the local museum, directed Cole's interest toward nature painting. By 1825 he had moved to New York and acquired a copy of William Oren's *Precepts and Observations on the Art of Colouring in Landscape Painting* (1810) which provided him invaluable details of technique. He had discovered the beauty of the Catskill Mountain wilderness and his paintings of them came to the attention of a prominent New York City art figure, Asher B. Durand, who became a lifelong friend. Cole's talent earned him membership in the National Academy of Art while he was in his twenties. He went on to become famous as a historical thematic landscape artist during the height of the Romantic period of art in the United States. He died at age 47 in February of 1848 from an unfortunate and sudden attack of pleurisy at his home Catskill, New York. Before his death he had been working on several commissioned pieces of art that were large epic works done in series of several paintings; the most memorable is named 'Course of Empire'.

Major Achievements: Thomas Cole's stunning thematic landscapes inspired the beginning of the Hudson River School of painting. Frederick Church, Thomas Moran, and other followers of Cole continued to champion the romantic beauty of the Hudson River Valley and the Catskills after Cole's death in 1848. This artwork became a visual component of the nation's growing nature consciousness that began during the Romantic art period in the United States (1815-1848) and laid the groundwork for the first conservation movement in America that flourished from 1850 to 1920.

More Information: See copies of Thomas Cole paintings at <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/C/cole.html#images>

Sources: Thomas Cole's Cedar Grove National Historic Landmark site at <http://www.thomascole.org/learn/>

By Steve Grim