

ARCHIVES AS ARTIFACT FOR ART ANALYSIS: A STUDY OF THE BENEFITS OF
INCLUDING ARCHIVAL MATERIAL IN ART EXHIBITS

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Archives as Artifact for Art Analysis:

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Upon examining definitions of Cultural Heritage as proposed by some of the discipline's primary scholars, one can derive the necessary classifications and objectives that make certain institutions examples of cultural heritage institutions. By virtue of promoting the education of art history and art analysis, the objectives of art museums and exhibits align with the objectives of cultural heritage institutions, thus making art museums and exhibits examples of cultural heritage institutions. This paper proposes that the incorporation of relevant archival material into art exhibits can promote art history and art analysis, thus aiding art museums and art exhibits achieve the status of cultural heritage institution. This proposal is supported by two case studies exhibiting the art of Thomas Cole and other artists associated with The Hudson River School of American landscape painters. One case study is on the Thomas Cole National Historic Site which incorporates archival material into its gallery spaces and the other case study is on the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts' exhibit on the Schuylkill River School of American landscape painters which does not incorporate archival material into its gallery spaces. Comparing and contrasting the effectiveness of both exhibits' ability to provide comprehensive art analysis reveals that an art exhibit with information from archival

material better promotes the objectives of the exhibit, thus elevating the exhibit to the status of a cultural heritage institution.

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Introduction:

Since the inception of the academic discipline known as cultural heritage there has never been one definitive definition of cultural heritage for all other study to be based on. Founding and pioneering scholars of cultural heritage have presented various concepts and proposals that, while not offering a strict definition, have narrowed its academic focus. The writings of David Lowenthal present cultural heritage as a discipline simultaneously connected and divorced from the discipline of history, stating that “heritage is not a testable or even plausible version of our past; it is a declaration of faith in that past.”¹ Barbra Kirshenblatt-Gimblett adds to this understanding by clarifying that cultural heritage becomes cultural heritage when history is “transvalued from the obsolete, mistaken, outmoded, dead, and defunct” into something that has value for the present and future.² What can be gleaned from these loose definitions is that one aspect of cultural heritage is the act of placing value on past objects, places, or practices for the present and future. From this understanding, cultural heritage explodes into documenting, collecting, exhibiting, looting, archiving, and recording buildings, archaeological objects, landscapes, traditions, and works of art.

This introduction will focus on how art and art history is cultural heritage. According to the definitions above, art is cultural heritage based on the fact that it is historical, collected, exhibited, and placed with some sort of value for a modern population. Since the emergence of the modern understandings of art museums and the practice of curation, predating the postmodern concept of cultural heritage, art museums

¹Lowenthal, David. “Fabricating Heritage.” *History and Memory* Vol. 10 No. 1. 1998 Pages 7-8.

² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Theorizing Heritage." *Ethnomusicology* Vol. 39 No. 3. 1995 Page 369.

have become emblematic institutions of cultural heritage. Modern understandings of the purpose and value of art and art museums began in the mid nineteenth century with writer Charles Baudelaire's "Salon of 1846" and painter Edouard Manet. Baudelaire claims that the function of a museum should be to evoke the memory of traditions, that art should be presented in such a way as to remind one of the past both in terms of context and artistic style.³ In a similar vein, Manet takes this structure a step further insisting that the function of a museum should be to showcase the development of art in terms of subject and style across history (though for Manet, he was concerned only with European art, and so his model based on the historical change of subject and style becomes more easily traceable).⁴ Fast-forward a few years to the turn of the century and writer Marcel Proust proposes an additional function to the modern museum from the perspective of a museum audience member. For Proust, the museum becomes a place where the outmoded, dead, and defunct objects discussed in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's definition become reanimated, where the old and possibly outdated are given value by an audience on the grounds of being physical markers of the shifts in art history.⁵ These understandings of the functions and practices of art museums would prevail in the study of art history until the first discussions of cultural heritage emerge.

The point of this brief history is to relate the traditional art museum to the definitions of cultural heritage. From the examples discussed above, one can deduce that the objective of an art museum is to display art that showcases shifts and changes based on key artistic elements such as subject matter, interpretations, styles, and context so as to

³ Foster, Hal. "Archives of Modern Art." *October* 99 (2002): 81-95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/779125>. Page 82 – 83.

⁴ Ibid. Page 83.

⁵ Ibid. Page 85 – 86.

ascribe value to art both in the present and future.⁶ Given that cultural heritage is essentially the placing of value on past historical objects for some purpose in the present or future which corresponds to modern conceptions of the purpose of art museums, it becomes evident that objectives of art museums mesh well with the proposed definitions of cultural heritage.

With all of this being said it becomes the art museum's responsibility to uphold its determined functions in order to function as a cultural heritage institution. These responsibilities can be boiled down to one job; the education of art history. The value of the art in art museums comes from an ability to understand and apply methods discussed by Baudelaire, Manet, and Proust; namely the subject matter, interpretations, styles, and historical contexts of the art displayed. Add in the method of emotion and those five aspects represent the fundamentals of art analysis and art history. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of art exhibits to educate the audience using artworks and other relevant materials.

It has been my experience in art museums that the educational responsibilities have been lacking. In typical art exhibits, the extent of education is a paragraph panel that describes who the artist was, what year the painting was created, and a brief undetailed description of what the painting is. By ignoring or not going into greater detail about the art and its history, the art exhibit denies the education of the value of the artwork, which denies the art museum's status as an institution of cultural heritage.

I believe that a possible solution to this problem would be the inclusion of archival material, primary records that educate the exhibition audience on the

⁶ Jason, H.W. and Jason, Anthony F. "A Basic History of Art." 5th ed. *Harry N. Abrams Books*. Upper Saddle River, NJ and Prentice Hall, NY. 1997. Pages 57-58.

aforementioned fundamentals of art history and analysis integral to the functioning of an art museum as an institution of cultural heritage. Archival material such as letters, rough drafts, news articles, and many other records can shape the necessary aspects of art history in informative and pleasurable ways. Through my own experiences viewing archival materials incorporated into smaller art museums, I can see how certain primary source documents and artifacts from archives can help a common audience member understand art analysis through the five fundamental aspects of subject matter, interpretation, style, context, and emotion. In addition, the incorporation of archival material adds to the exhibit because archival objects themselves are empowered with cultural heritage value. For these reasons, incorporation of archival material can help an art exhibit achieve the status of a true cultural heritage institution.

The concept of the inclusion of archival materials into museum exhibits is as old as the post-modern concept of cultural heritage that resulted from WWII. The concept was introduced to the western world in 1949 by a subcommittee of the British Records Association which noted the value of archival exhibitions as a means of arousing public interest in preservation and demonstrating the educational capacity of such records.⁷ Two key concepts can be gleaned from this proposal by the subcommittee; firstly that, according to the wording of their conclusion, the committee's initial intention was exhibitions of purely archival material not mixed with traditional objects found in art or history museums and, secondly, the point of the exhibits was to demonstrate to an audience the importance of archival record keeping and maintenance. Both concepts exemplify the uniqueness of archival institutions for their own ability to craft heritage

⁷ Allyn, Nancy, Shawn Aubitz and Gail F. Stern, "Using Archival Materials Effectively in Museum Exhibitions. *The American Archivist* Vol. 50 No. 3 (Summer, 1987). Page 402.

from primary source documents, maps, photographs, and other record media. Whereas other heritage institutions, primarily museums, have visual history in the forms of art or natural history diagrams, archives have documents with writing that allow a wholly new perception on history through the words and depictions of those who were living at the time.

The subcommittee's conclusion did not come from a vacuum. Shifts in the understanding of cultural heritage institutions brought with it dramatic changes to the interaction between scholars and the general public. The origins of these shifts begin when museums were first introduced as institutions specifically for the upper classes and scholars. Gradual changes which allowed for more public access, such as staying open during weekends and organizing museum holding around themes such as dates and geographical location meant the nature of exhibition was shifting as well.⁸ Whereas before the conversational aspect of exhibition was one-sided, due to curators creating exhibits primarily for other curators, now the inclusion of a general audience meant that exhibitions had to be reorganized to better tell a heritage story. These changes essentially made museums the modern institutions we know them as today, and once archival institutions realized how inclusivity could educate a wider audience, it was not long before archives joined in exhibiting their collections for the public.⁹

In a way this development of archives having exhibitions marks a crossover between cultural heritage institutions, because exhibitions have historically been the practice of museums but here archives are adopting the method in order to promote their

⁸ McLean, Kathleen. "Museum Exhibitions and the Dynamics of Dialogue," *Daedalus* Vol. 128 No. 3 (Summer 1999), Page 84.

⁹ Morgan, Robert C., "The Exhibition Catalog as a Distancing Apparatus: Current Tendencies in the Promotion of Exhibition Documents," *Leonardo* Vol. 24 No. 3 (1991), Page 342.

own unique brand of cultural heritage. But that was 1949, and it would not be for another forty years until discussions began regarding the incorporation of archival records in museum exhibitions. This discussion would be brought about by members of the Society of American Archivists who admit that cultural heritage institutions are only starting to consider the potential of the blending of museum exhibition and archival records, but this consideration is the farthest extent of the matter so far.¹⁰

The reason for the relatively little consideration for the inclusion of archival material in museum exhibitions comes from the challenges outweighing the benefits. Before discussing the possible challenges with such incorporation, it would be prudent to discuss the major benefit most scholars agree upon. Including archival material produces an effect that has come to be known as historical intimacy, something unique to archival records as mentioned above. Private letters, source documents, drafts of famous pieces of art or literature, journal entries, etc. help shape a historical world, a past that feels inhabited and tangible.¹¹ On their own, exhibitions featuring art alone fall short of providing enough material for world building on the level archival records can accomplish. Natural history exhibits tend to showcase a progression of knowledge of a subject which often sends the message that the exhibition is to be viewed from a present perspective rather than from the past. In all cases of exhibition, the greatest method of creating a historical intimacy between the viewers of the exhibit and said history can only be archival records.

¹⁰ Allyn, Nancy, Shawn Aubitz and Gail F. Stern, "Using Archival Materials Effectively in Museum Exhibitions. *The American Archivist* Vol. 50 No. 3 (Summer, 1987). Page 402.

¹¹ Leisinger Jr., Albert H., "The Exhibit of Documents," *American Archivist* Vol. 26 (January 1963), Page 77.

That is the main benefit for the inclusion of archival material in exhibits, but scholars have pointed out the complexities of such inclusion could outweigh the benefits. A few of the challenges that archival materials pose include the accessibility of the exhibition to the general public, the value of the exhibit, how much material is necessary, the fear of losing intellectual high ground, and the split between public perception and curatorial intention.¹²

The main goal of any exhibit is to make knowledge of the past easily accessible to a broader public, and thus materials that are simple yet profound are valued greatly. For art exhibits, paintings and sculptures are often enough of a visual stimulus to elicit a response in exhibit audiences and the main organizational feature is aesthetics. Other history exhibitions, such as natural history museums, use visuals and information to inform knowledge of a subject where a historical connection to the time period in which said knowledge was grasped is unnecessary. In both cases, visuals are meant to construct an exhibition story, so the written word holds little value in these displays.¹³ Examples of text being included in an exhibit is limited to the necessary paragraph long panels that are used to inform audience members of general information in a timely fashion. Archival material disrupts this model because suddenly the exhibit has to include both visual and textual elements that might be difficult to integrate. In an exhibit designed to be viewed in a short time, archival material only hinders this by presenting museum goers with long complicated texts to read rather than view, which disrupts the time it takes to view an

¹² McLean, Kathleen. "Museum Exhibitions and the Dynamics of Dialogue," *Daedalus* Vol. 128 No. 3 (Summer 1999), Pages 85, 86, 87, and 88.

¹³ *Ibid.* Page 85.

exhibit and causes the need to find compromise between the conflicting visual and textual exhibition material.¹⁴

Another challenge facing the inclusion of archival material in museum exhibits is the quality and interest of the archival records and whether or not they have enough historical value to be included into an exhibit designed for a general audience. Though most archival institutions do not lack archival material by any stretch, it does become a problem when one must sift through the archival collections to find material that is relevant enough to warrant inclusion into an exhibit, which often times results in an insufficient amount of records to the point where it would be more practical to allocate exhibit space for more visuals than try to incorporate the small amount of relevant archival records.¹⁵

I mentioned earlier how there is an emerging idea of exhibition as dialog between curators and the general public. Though in modern times this dialog has become the accepted norm for most institutions, there are still those who believe in an intellectual high ground that being an exhibitor or curator brings with it intellectual advantage over the common public who view their works. Curators may believe that pandering to the needs of the public to insure total public understanding will devalue their status as trained professionals. In the dialog between exhibitor and public, it is the exhibitor who is showcasing new knowledge or a new interpretation of knowledge through their professional exhibition development and it is the public's responsibility to gain knowledge from the exhibit. If the dialog shifted power dynamics so that the public

¹⁴ McLean, Kathleen. "Museum Exhibitions and the Dynamics of Dialogue," *Daedalus* Vol. 128 No. 3 (Summer 1999), Page 85 – 86.

¹⁵ Leisinger Jr., Albert H., "The Exhibit of Documents," *American Archivist* Vol. 26 (January 1963), Page 78 – 79.

chose what is to be exhibited or had greater understanding of what is being exhibited, the fear is that the duty of the curator becomes obsolete. For those who subscribe to this philosophy, they see the inclusion of archival material as harmful to their exhibits on the grounds that their interpretation and presentation of an exhibit would be worthless if the public had access to historical primary sources that provide too much information.¹⁶

Though these challenges are cumbersome and have merit, there is a benefit that I think will help even out the unbalanced argument for or against the inclusion of archival materials in museum exhibitions, one which is exclusive to art exhibits. I believe the inclusion of relevant archival material to form a historical context for artworks in an exhibit can serve as a tool for critical analysis, which in turn can be translated into a theme of an exhibit. Through this employment of archival material, most if not all the previously aforementioned issues can be resolved or, in a sense, ignored. For accessibility, the archival material may be trimmed to be short; excerpts from primary documents, for example, could exemplify the theme or encourage deeper analysis. With the archival aspect limited to only short page excerpts that may be transcribed and reprinted, the balance between visual and textual material would favor the visual in regard to exhibition space and physical material. In regards to the visual arts, sketches, letters, journal entries, and other primary source documents about the artist or work tends to be ample enough to not only be enough to be included in the exhibit but also to provide a lens for analysis that exemplifies the theme of the exhibit. In terms of the fear that too much information could hinder the point of the exhibit, highlights can be made of what archival passages are most relevant towards the theme the exhibitor wishes to promote.

¹⁶ McLean, Kathleen. "Museum Exhibitions and the Dynamics of Dialogue," *Daedalus* Vol. 128 No. 3 (Summer 1999), Pages 87 – 88.

These are a few examples of how an approach to archival inclusion can overcome some of the established fears in the profession.

The remainder of this paper will be analyzing two case studies, two art exhibits displaying works of the Hudson River School of American painters where one exhibit incorporates archival material and one does not. The first case study is an example of a museum that incorporates archival material into its exhibits: the Thomas Cole National Historic Site. The purpose of the site is not that of a typical museum, displaying critical examples of artworks for the purpose of charting art history; it functions, rather, as more of a cultural marker, given that the famous artist lived, worked, and found inspiration on the site. It does, however, serve an exhibitionary function akin to a museum by displaying rotating art pieces by the titular Thomas Cole and his Hudson River School followers, which are dispersed throughout the main buildings of the site. In this example, recreations of archival documents from Thomas Cole's letters and journals are strategically placed throughout the site so as to highlight aspects of Cole's works and his personal life as well, building a historical context for the painter and his paintings. The second case study will be on the Hudson River exhibit at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts museum which showcased examples of early Hudson Rivers school predecessors and does not incorporate archival material. In contrast to the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts' exhibit is a standard art museum model with the curatorial emphasis on the artworks themselves and not on the historical significance of location or the artists' biography. Despite using model methods of art exhibition such as chronologically displaying their artworks and providing text panels with historical background, the ability of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts

to present their curatorial goal can be further enhanced by the inclusion of archival material. The principle reason for why PAFA would benefit from the inclusion of archival material is because certain archival records can provide an understanding of historical context and artistic perceptions better than the text panels throughout the exhibit.

Once the case studies are discussed, if it is necessary the paper will discuss possible drawbacks to the inclusion of archival material, such as danger to the material itself, a lack of interest from the public, or financial and special restrictions. The paper will also go into depth on why archival material would be a solution for the problem of why art exhibits are failing in their duties as cultural heritage institutions. By the conclusion, the benefit of archival records in art exhibits to promote art analysis will become apparent.

Case Study #1: The Thomas Cole National Historic Site

The Thomas Cole National Historic Site is an 1815 federalist property located in the town of Catskill in upstate New York where Thomas Cole lived and worked.¹⁷ Cole first visited the site, then called Cedar Grove, in 1825 on a sketching trip and returned every summer, making the site his permanent home in 1836 when he married his wife whose uncle was the property's owner before Cole. He remained in the house and in the town of Catskill until his death in 1848.¹⁸ Today the buildings and grounds located on the site have been restored to the original conditions in which they would have appeared when Thomas Cole lived and worked there. The purpose of the restoration projects and the overarching goal of the site are to recreate the living space of Thomas Cole in an attempt to provide context for his artworks.¹⁹ A crucial method implemented to achieve the site's goal is the inclusion of reproduced archival records such as letters, journal entries, and sketches that were either by or addressed to Thomas Cole. The records shed light on Cole's thoughts and personality and provide firsthand historical context for his life and times. Furthermore, the archival material is also crucial for the analysis of Cole's artworks because many of the letters and journal entries reproduced offer insight into Cole's paintings and what inspired them. For example, the archival material provided by the Thomas Cole National Historic Site explains in the words of Thomas Cole his love for the natural landscape of the Catskill Mountain region of New York State and his disdain for industrialists, two key elements that influenced and shaped Cole's landscape paintings.

¹⁷ Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. *Where Art Was Born, Visitor's Pamphlet*.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *I Remain Yours Very Truly, Thomas Cole: Excerpts from the Journals, Essays, and Letters to and from Thomas Cole*. Edited by Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. Page 2.

The first building on the property is the Main House, the living space for Cole along with his family and friends. Conservation efforts in the recent past have restored the house to a historically accurate state with Thomas Cole's own furniture and house décor original to the home. The first room is the restored Entry Hall, where the walls have been painted in their original puce color, the floor is hand-painted cotton canvas which existed in the house and was a popular decorative fixture during the early nineteenth century, and Cole's personal top hat and coat is displayed in an exhibition case.²⁰ From there is an East parlor and a West parlor in which the archival material makes its first appearance. The East Parlor was used as Cole's office and has been furnished with original desks and tables, but the room may also be converted into a digital presentation room with screens that display his artworks and a voiceover narration of some of Cole's journals and letters about his love of the site's surrounding landscape and his contempt for encroaching industrialization.²¹ The West Parlor was a sitting room for greeting guests and has also been furnished with original furniture such as a long dining table, benches, chairs, and small tables. The West Parlor also has a restored border finish Thomas Cole painted on the walls nearly two hundred years ago and has framed recreations of some of Cole's work to illustrate how he would have decorated his home with some of his artworks which are now in other museums or private collections.²² Unlike the East Parlor, the West Parlor does not convert into a digital media room with videos or narration. Instead, physical copies of reproduced archival material such as letters and journal entries are lying scattered on the surfaces of tables and benches. The

²⁰ Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. *Explore at your Own Pace Guidebook*. Page 8-9.

²¹ *Ibid.* Page 10-11.

²² *Ibid.* Page 12-13.

reproductions are two-sided sheets of paper with one side being a photocopy of the archival record in its original script and the other side being a readable transcription with highlighted lines that often exemplify the purpose of the site. For example, lying on one of the home's original tables is a reproduced entry from one of Thomas Cole's journals. In it Cole writes about miscellaneous subjects such as the passing of Summer into Autumn and about how the morning then is particularly beautiful.²³ Then, there is a highlighted portion that reads, "I took a walk up the Catskill above Austin's Mill where the Rail Road is now" followed by "If men were not blind and insensible to the beauty of nature the great works necessary for the purposes of commerce might be carried on without destroying it."²⁴ This line by Cole not only provides historical evidence that a new railroad was constructed sometime around when the letter was written, but also insight into the artist's disdain for industrialists and his desire to show them the beauty of the landscape. The upstairs portion of the house emphasizes Cole less as an artist and more as a typical man in the early nineteenth century. A second sitting room in addition to having original furniture showcases Cole's personal instruments, a collection of decorative dining plates, and a desk overlooking a view of the Catskill Mountains with reproductions of some of Cole's poetry.²⁵ Most of the other rooms on the second floor are the bedrooms with original beds and drawers. Unlike the rest of the upstairs, one bedroom has been converted into a gallery dedicated to Cole's creative process which

²³ Thomas Cole. *August 1st, 1836 Journal Entry*. New York Library Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1, "Thoughts and Occurrences – November 1834 – February 1848."

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. *Explore at your Own Pace Guidebook*. Page 16-17.

houses some of Cole's paintbrushes, rough drafts, and his own personally designed color wheel.²⁶

When it comes to the Main House, the building emphasizes the patron's freedom of exploration, allowing visitors free roam and access throughout. Though the patrons are not allowed to excessively interact with the fragile historical furniture, the purpose for the exclusion of roped off areas and guiding mechanisms is to present the illusion that the house is still actively inhabited as it was in the nineteenth century. The way the archival material is presented throughout the home enhances this exhibit style in two primary ways. The first way is that the physical placement of the scattered papers on old desks and tables reinforces the illusion that the house is still inhabited, as if someone was reading or writing those letters or journal entries just before the next visitor. The second is that the subject matter of the archival material relevant to the site and surrounding landscape provides additional historical context so that the site's history is not presented as a lecture or a secondhand account but rather as an in-real-time story from the people who inhabit the home.

The second main building on the site's property is Thomas Cole's studio. The Studio is a one room converted barn decorated, much like the Main House, with period artifacts and objects either owned by Cole or that exemplify the era. The exhibit scene recreates what the layout of Cole's exhibit might have looked like, with original drafting tables, easels, paintbrushes, pigments, and other art-making tools.²⁷ While the Studio as a workspace is obviously different from the Main House as a living space, the two buildings as exhibits spaces are presented differently as well, with the Studio's level of

²⁶ Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. *Explore at your Own Pace Guidebook*, Page 22-23.

²⁷ *Ibid*, Page 24-25.

interaction being significantly more reduced than that of the Main House. On the one hand, visitors are allotted less physical space. While all the rooms of the Main House are totally open to the public to allow for free movement, the Studio is designed with a chain-link barrier that creates a path from one entrance to another and blocks visitors from moving around the Studio space. This layout presents the Studio exhibit as a still scene not to be interacted with which is in stark contrast to the layout of the Main House where free movement from room to room was designed to sustain the illusion that the house is still inhabited. In addition, the way the barriers connect one entrance to the other implies the illusion of a destination, as if to say to the visitors that the path is meant to move you along and into the next exhibit. This sense of needing to follow the path marked by the barriers encourages visitors to keep moving rather than taking time to stop and examine the exhibit's every detail. The other way in which access of the Studio is limited is in the exclusion of relevant archival material, again in contrast to the Main House. This deviation from the inclusion of archival material makes sense, as it relates to the changes to the physical layout of the Studio in contrast to the Main House. Nevertheless, this exclusion denies access of historical context and the illusion of historical presence. But even with the change in design, the potential to incorporate information from archival material was still possible. In the Main House there is a letter from Thomas Cole addressed to his friend and contemporary artists Asher B. Durand explaining, "do you know that I have got a new painting room? – [it] is somewhat larger than my old one and being removed from the noise and bustle of the house is really charming."²⁸ This insight

²⁸ *I Remain Yours Very Truly, Thomas Cole: Excerpts from the Journals, Essays, and Letters to and from Thomas Cole*. Edited by Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. "Letter from Thomas Cole to Asher B. Durand, December 18th, 1839." Page 20.

by Cole himself addresses his excitement with the Studio, its construction by a “Mr. Thomson,” its physical appearance with exposed brick and wooden support beams, and the fact that Cole worked previously in the Main House which he found to be full of “noise and bustle.” This letter and all the subsequent information it provides about the studio, however, is omitted due to the nature of the change in exhibit layout.

The third and final main building on the site is the New Gallery, a gallery space designed by Cole in 1846. On Christmas day in 1846 Cole wrote in his journal commemorating the gallery’s completion and his enthusiasm stating, “I am now sitting in my New Studio which is about completed though the walls are not quite dry. I have promised myself much enjoyment in it and great success in the prosecution of my art.”²⁹ The original New Gallery building was torn down in 1973 but underwent a reconstruction and restoration project in 2015 with historically accurate architectural features designed by Cole.³⁰ The building itself is one large scale room specifically designed for presentations of art much like any other gallery space. The New Gallery acts as the Site’s traditional museum space, with interchanging art exhibits about Thomas Cole and other painters associated with him and the Hudson River School. The New Gallery takes its layout as an exhibit space from both the Main House and the Studio, with the main difference being that the Gallery exhibit focuses on the paintings rather than the actual space. From the Main House, the Gallery takes both the openness, or the freedom for the visitors to wander through the exhibit room and exhibit space free from barriers, and the incorporated archival material, with the same reproduced records laid out on sitting couches in the exhibit which provide historical information on the paintings. From the

²⁹ Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. *Explore at your Own Pace Guidebook*. Page 2-3.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Page 2-3.

Studio, the Gallery takes the more traditional aspects of an exhibit that limit interaction, so while archival material is there to provide historical context and some level of interaction with the paintings on display, the exhibit is set up as a scene to be viewed.

The three main attraction buildings of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site and their exhibit layouts are all designed to promote the mission of the Site, which is to offer insight and context into the life and inspirations of Thomas Cole as both a person and an artist. In the introduction to one of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site's publications, a booklet of the collected archival material scattered throughout the site's buildings, Executive Director Elizabeth Jackson proposes two questions that preface the mission of the site; first, what information can be discovered about Thomas Cole, along with how and where this information can best be discovered, and second, how can one understand Cole's work without knowledge of his life and knowledge of the landscapes that acted as the model scenery for the majority of his works.³¹ To answer these questions, the site employs four methods: location, restoration, exhibit style, and archival material. The location primarily addresses Jackson's second question as it is located in the Catskill Mountains which acted as the model scenery for the majority of Cole's artworks. The connection between the location of the site and the inspiration behind Cole's decision to paint the surrounding landscape is so transparent that two of Cole's landscapes, *Valley of the Catskills – Early Autumn* (1837) and *River in the Catskills* (1843), are the direct views from the Main House's front porch.³² Though the location of the Site primarily addresses the second question, it does partially address the first

³¹ *I Remain Yours Very Truly, Thomas Cole: Excerpts from the Journals, Essays, and Letters to and from Thomas Cole*. Edited by Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. Page 2.

³² "Site #1; View from the Thomas Cole Site." Hudson River School Art Trail pane.

question in that the location of Thomas Cole's personal home would be a logical place to learn about his personal life. After the location comes the recent restoration projects on the site. The restoration aims to answer the first question about Thomas Cole as a person, the rational being that learning about the man who inhabited the Site would be made more practical if the Site was restored to the state it was in while Thomas Cole still inhabited the location. Seeing the Site furnished with Cole's belongings and decor along with alterations he made to the house such as the puce colored walls and the West Parlor's hand-painted ceiling boarder provides a lot more context to Cole's life than had it been in disrepair or altered from the original. The exhibition style of the Main House specifically which emphasizes openness follows in the restoration's attempt to address the first question. Viewing the Site's restoration from the standpoint of a scene recreation much like the Studio's exhibition layout limits the potential intimacy between visitors and the life and times of Thomas Cole. But in the exhibit style of the Main House where the design allows for free access throughout the rooms and interaction with the historical material, a level of the time barrier is broken allowing for a closer observation of the historical context the site wishes to promote.

But for all that these three methods accomplish in trying to answer the original questions presented by Elizabeth Jackson, there is still room for misconception and misunderstanding. How is the understanding of a landscape painting affected only by looking at the model scenery? What can an original armchair say specifically about what Thomas Cole thought about his family or patrons? To fill in these gaps, the site implements one last method to answer the proposed questions and achieve the mission of the site and that is the inclusion of archival material. Along with examining the

landscape that inspired many landscape paintings, observing the restorations made to recreate the historically accurate look, and being immersed in history through exhibits that encourage interaction, the use of archival material provides knowledge about both the artists' life and his works. The following excerpt from Cole's "Essay on American Scenery" offer insight into Cole's admiration for and preference to natural landscapes over landscapes that have been transformed by human development: "scenes of solitude from which the hand of nature has never been lifted affect the mind with a more deep toned emotion than aught which the hand of man has touched."³³ A portion of a 1841 letter from Cole to his wife reading "but how can I paint without you to praise, or to criticize, and little Teddy to come for papa to go to dinner" expresses in Cole's own words his missing his family while abroad in Rome.³⁴ Through these articles, journals, and personal letters, the visitor is given context from Cole himself on his thoughts and feelings towards his home, his family, his patrons, and his contemporaries. The archival material implemented in this way is the final piece of the puzzle that, when fitted along with location, restoration, and exhibit style, answer's Elizabeth Jackson's questions. Through relevant archival material, the freedom of exploration through the exhibits, the restoration of the buildings, and the location being in the heart of the Catskills, the site promotes their mission to provide context and information about Thomas Cole.

A derivative of this mission relates to the broad mission of all art exhibits that can be classified as cultural heritage, which is providing an education of art through formal analysis of selected artworks. After all, a key element of the mission of the Thomas Cole

³³ Cole, Thomas. "Essay on American Scenery." *American Monthly Magazine* 1. January, 1836.

³⁴ *I Remain Yours Very Truly, Thomas Cole: Excerpts from the Journals, Essays, and Letters to and from Thomas Cole*. Edited by Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. "Letter from Thomas Cole in Rome to Maria Cole, November 11th, 1841." Page 13.

National Historic Site is to provide context for Cole's art. But in this regard the mission of the site seems vague based on the conclusion that the site does not explicitly state what analysis the context on Cole's artwork is intended to produce. The mission provides the context but leaves the analysis of the art open-ended. But despite the site not addressing a desired formal analysis, that does not mean an analysis cannot be formed based on the aforementioned methods used to promote the site's mission, specifically the method of including archival material into the exhibits. The majority of the artwork relating to Thomas Cole that is displayed on the site is in the New Gallery, where there is a current exhibition of Cole's artworks of Catskill Creek from the 1820's, 1830's, and 1840's.³⁵ In this gallery space the exhibition has elements common of most art exhibits, such as mounted artworks with accompanying panels that provide information such as title, artist, and a brief summary of what is depicted in the piece. Where the exhibit begins to diverge from other art exhibits is in its inclusion of archival material, with reproductions of selected letters and journal entries found on the tables and sitting areas in the middle of the exhibit room.

The majority of the paintings depict the same view looking out towards Catskill Creek. The foreground is the creek, almost always with a small human figure in a boat, with trees overhanging the banks of the creek extending into the middle ground where the creek ends and a thick forest begins, and from the forest the background extends to reveal a distant mountain (Blackhead Mountain or Kaaterskill High Peak depending on the angle) and a large sky almost always with clouds and a setting sun.³⁶ Based on these

³⁵ "Thomas Cole's Refrain: The Paintings of Catskill Creek." Exhibition Panel, Thomas Cole National Historic Site, New Gallery.

³⁶ Ibid.

superficial characteristics alone, forming an analysis is difficult. The implementation of typical methods for starting art analysis such as lines, coloring and shading, and symbols are more or less obsolete given that the landscape is a scene taken directly from nature, meaning that any artistic decisions to create shapes and light are not inspired by artistic agenda but rather by the preexisting scenery the painting is based on. To an educated artist or art historian, the superficial elements of the artwork alone might be enough to form a base artistic analysis, but to the general public the surface of the painting being simply a recreated scene from a natural landscape would be the extent of their understanding, so it becomes necessary for additional aids to help form an analysis that will elevate the appreciation of the art.

This is where the archival material interspersed throughout the gallery space comes into play. An excerpt from Cole's 1836 *Essay on American Scenery*, originally published in *American Monthly Magazine* 1, lies in the gallery space which reads "and what is sometimes called improvement in its march makes us fear that the bright and tender flowers of the imagination shall all be crushed beneath its iron tramp, it would be well to cultivate the oasis that yet remains to us."³⁷ Another passage from the same article reads, "I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes are quickly passing away – the ravages of the axe are daily increasing – the most noble scenes are made desolate, and oftentimes with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation."³⁸ In a letter addressed to Cole's patron Luman Reed, Cole continues his lament by complaining that "the copper-hearted barbarians are cutting all

³⁷ Cole, Thomas. "Essay on American Scenery." *American Monthly Magazine* 1. January, 1836.

³⁸ Ibid.

the trees down in the beautiful valley on which I have looked often with a loving eye.”³⁹

The page of Thomas Cole’s personal journal that reads “If men were not blind and insensible to the beauty of nature the great works necessary for the purposes of commerce might be carried on without destroying it” which was found in the Main House is also reproduced alongside these other archival pages.⁴⁰ This treasure-trove of insight into Cole’s thoughts and feelings is placed here with the intention to aid visitors in forming a critical analysis of Thomas Cole’s difficult to interpret works. First, what information does these records tell us? From his journal entry he believes that men are blind and insensible to the natural landscapes around and from his essay Cole expresses his fears that improvement will cut out and crush the scenery he loves, and thus he desires to cultivate the wilderness while it is still natural. These two bits of information shed light onto why Cole painted his landscapes; he wanted to show the landscape in the beautiful way he saw it so that the blind industrialists might see it similarly, or at the very least preserve the raw nature of the land because he feared that the wilderness would soon be destroyed. With this goal in Cole’s mind, and now in the mind of the visitors who read the records, the rationale behind Cole’s painstaking attention to detail suddenly becomes clear. Further inspection of the paintings show that Cole detailed everything, from individual leaves on trees in the foreground to submerged rocks closer to the surface of his riverbanks to the accuracy of how the sunlight catches the clouds in the sky. Now take this note and apply it to another artist showcased in the gallery, Frederic Edwin

³⁹ *I Remain Yours Very Truly, Thomas Cole: Excerpts from the Journals, Essays, and Letters to and from Thomas Cole*. Edited by Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. “Letter from Thomas Cole to Luman Reed, March 26th, 1836.” Page 9.

⁴⁰ Thomas Cole. *August 1st, 1836 Journal Entry*. New York Library Manuscripts and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821-1863, SC10635, Journals, Box 4a Folder 1, “Thoughts and Occurrences – November 1834 – February 1848.”

Church, who was a friend and pupil of Cole. In a letter addressed to Cole, Church writes about his excitement on hearing the news that Cole will accept him as a pupil, saying that he will exert himself into Cole's art and style to the best of his abilities.⁴¹ Upon seeing Church's own work titled *Catskill Creek* (1845) with the knowledge that Church revered and wished to follow in Cole's artistic footsteps, one can see that he puts in the exact same attention to detail in all elements present in his own landscape paintings. So with knowledge of Cole's fears and desires, one can deduce that the emphasis on detail to underscore the scene's realism was planned to showcase in the most clearest of ways the beauty of the landscape in hopes that it would dissuade encroaching industrialist endeavors or, if damage becomes permanent, preserve an image of the beauty of the land as it once was. Furthermore, with the information that Church was an avid pupil and admirer of Cole's work and style, inspection of Church's own decision to paint realistic detail affirms the analysis that said hyper realism is an aspect of the Hudson River School. In addition to determining the inspiration behind the realistic elements of Hudson River School landscapes, the records accompanying the exhibit offer further analysis for the presence, or absence, of human figures in Cole's works. All of Cole's works on display have human figures within them, or signs of human presence such as homes or gardens. In a letter addressed to Cole from art collector Robert Gilmor, Gilmor writes to say that he "differs however with [Cole] in approving the omission of figures."⁴² This tells us that Cole does not like human figures displayed in his landscapes, which

⁴¹ *I Remain Yours Very Truly, Thomas Cole: Excerpts from the Journals, Essays, and Letters to and from Thomas Cole*. Edited by Thomas Cole National Historic Site Staff. "Letter from Frederic Edwin Church to Thomas Cole, May 20th, 1844." Page 21.

⁴² "Letter from Robert Gilmor to Thomas Cole, December 13th, 1826." New York State Library, Manuscripts, and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821 – 1863, SC10635, Box 3 Folder 8.

makes sense based on the other records explaining his dislike of human presence in natural landscapes. But this letter draws the viewers' attention to human figures when they are present in Cole's works. After inspection, a recurring trend is that Cole's human figures, when present, are absolutely dwarfed by the landscape surrounding them. In some cases, the shading of where the figure is or the color of their cloths makes it almost impossible to see they are present in the painting. With this information, an analysis can be made that a motif of Cole's work and the work of the Hudson River School is that nature takes dominance over human presence.

Returning again to the mission of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, which is to provide historical context for Cole's work, the inclusion of archival material tremendously aids this goal. Through the implementation of archival material along with the artworks displayed, the site was able to provide visitors with relevant historical information about the artist which lead to formal analysis of the artists' works. Whereas the superficial nature of landscape paintings would make it seem that there is little room for analytical formulation, the knowledge provided by archival records helps to deduce elements of Cole's work such as attention to detail and the inclusion or exclusion of human figures. It is through the inclusion of the archival material that the mission of the site regarding the promotion of knowledge and understanding about Cole's artworks is complete.

Case Study #2: The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts

From the Schuylkill to the Hudson: Landscapes of the Early American Republic is a Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) exhibit by PAFA's own curator of historical American Art Dr. Anna O. Marley. The exhibit is presented in a traditional art gallery form, walls with mounted paintings are displayed in PAFA's Fisher Brooks Gallery space, a single room in the campus' Samuel M.V. Hamilton Building.⁴³ Marley's essay titled *The Schuylkill River School* opens with the mission statement that the goal of the exhibit is to present the existence of a stylistic tradition of landscape art that developed with early American republic painters affiliated with the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and the influence of the Schuylkill River.⁴⁴ The essay explains that the evidence for this existence can be traced through how the history of the Schuylkill River and environmental concerns for the health and beauty of Philadelphia encouraged landscape painters to diverge from British landscape norms.⁴⁵ The resulting landscapes formed from the gradual changes, Marley argues, had a direct influence on PAFA student Thomas Cole, who would assimilate the characteristics of these new landscape paintings into his Hudson River School style.⁴⁶ To prove this argument Marley curates the exhibit chronologically with turn-of-the-century landscapes presented in the beginning of the gallery space leading toward final examples of fully realized Hudson River School landscapes from the mid to late nineteenth century. Curating based on the

⁴³ "PAFA Museum Map, Fall 2019."

⁴⁴ Marley, Anna O., "The Schuylkill River School: Landscape Representation in Philadelphia from the American Revolution to the Centennial Exhibition." In *From the Schuylkill to the Hudson: Landscapes of the Early American Republic* Exhibition Book. Published by Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2019. Page 10.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Page 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Page 15.

paintings chronological order is logical for an art exhibit when the mission is to showcase change over time, but it becomes crucial that those changes are prominent and emphasized throughout the exhibit. If the public leaves without being able to identify how the landscape paintings changed over time, then the mission has failed. This case study is to present an exhibit of Hudson River School and other related artworks where the accomplishment of the mission is hindered by a lack of supportive material, and to explain how archival material would help present the exhibit's mission.

Though the Fisher Brooks Gallery space where the exhibit was showcased was essentially one massive room, temporary walls were erected to make five distinct spaces for the purpose of separating the artworks based on time and theme. The first room is dedicated to British born or British influenced landscape painters of the early nineteenth century, primarily Charles Willson Peale, William Russell Birch, and Joshua Shaw.⁴⁷ From there an archway leads to the second room dedicated to the Schuylkill River, with the emphasis in this room being less about the artists and more about the variety of artworks and artifacts where the Schuylkill was depicted; along with paintings, porcelain products such as bowls, cups, and plates all had print transferred decorations of the Schuylkill River and Fairmount Water Works to display how predominant the landscape images of the river were in the early republic and other parts of the world.⁴⁸ The third room is a winding hallway that acts as a continuation of the second room showing the prints by Joseph Cone and Robert Campbell after landscape paintings by Birch and others which were used as models for the porcelain objects in the previous room. Also included in this room is a space for a few women artists active in Philadelphia at the time, more

⁴⁷ "Country Seats and Picturesque Views." Exhibit Panel.

⁴⁸ "Water, Health, and Civic Pride in Centre Square." Exhibit Panel.

examples of the Schuylkill and Fairmount Water Works on porcelain, and a video screen showing the process of creating the porcelain objects by using the aforementioned prints. The third room hallway leads into the fourth room where artworks by Thomas Doughty and Thomas Birch are presented.⁴⁹ Finally, another archway leads into the final room of the exhibit where artworks are presented by those artists most often identified as being affiliated with the Hudson River School, such as Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Frederic Edwin Church, Sanford Robinson Gifford, Albert Bierstadt, and John Frederick Kensett, among others.⁵⁰

The mission of the exhibit, along with its supporting evidence and train of logic is exclusively found in Dr. Marley's essay *The Schuylkill River School*. The essay begins by stating the mission, then moving into a brief history of early American artists working with landscapes in and around Philadelphia, most notably Charles Willson Peale, William Russel Birch, and Joshua Shaw.⁵¹ The brief historical background about these painters discusses how they were trained in British styles of landscape painting but incorporated American scenes such as the Schuylkill River.⁵² During the rise of this first generation of British-trained landscape painters, Philadelphians became concerned with the environmental degradation of the Schuylkill, blaming periodic bouts of yellow fever on pollution in the river. To combat this, the city commissioned the creation of a "watering committee" that built a water treatment facility and later the Fairmount Water Works

⁴⁹ "Vessels of Water: The Schuylkill River in the Home." Exhibit Panel.

⁵⁰ "Hudson River School Artists at Home." Exhibit Panel.

⁵¹ Marley, Anna O., "The Schuylkill River School: Landscape Representation in Philadelphia from the American Revolution to the Centennial Exhibition." In *From the Schuylkill to the Hudson: Landscapes of the Early American Republic* Exhibition Book. Published by Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2019. Page 10-11.

⁵² *Ibid.* Page 11.

facility.⁵³ The city's own concerns for the wellbeing of the Schuylkill along with the incorporation of American scenes used in first generation Schuylkill River School paintings both would impact the distinct features of the second generation of Schuylkill River School painters, helmed by Thomas Birch, Thomas Doughty, John Lewis Krimmel, and Jacob Eichholtz, all of whom had contact with the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art either as students or contributors to early exhibitions.⁵⁴ The style of the second generation of Schuylkill River painters was informed by Philadelphia's river conservation efforts and landscape painting techniques, two elements that gave their paintings a uniqueness that was popularized by the efforts of printer Robert Campbell. Campbell's prints of paintings of the Schuylkill were printed onto porcelain cups, plates, bowls, and a number of other objects, making the images of the river, Fairmount Water Works, and the artists famous.⁵⁵ It was around this time by the 1820s when a Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art student named Thomas Cole began to notice and take inspiration from these landscape scenes, most notably scenes from Thomas Doughty.⁵⁶ The essay continues to its conclusion by briefly discussing the rise of the Hudson River School when Cole began using the Catskills as the scenery in his landscapes and the subsequent followers his paintings inspired.⁵⁷ In this essay, the mission of the exhibit, to establish the existence of a Schuylkill River School of landscape painters as distinct from other landscape traditions at the time and as a precursor to the Hudson River School, is clearly stated and supported

⁵³Marley, Anna O., "The Schuylkill River School: Landscape Representation in Philadelphia from the American Revolution to the Centennial Exhibition." In *From the Schuylkill to the Hudson: Landscapes of the Early American Republic* Exhibition Book. Published by Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2019. Page 12.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Page 12 – 13.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Page 13.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Page 15.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Page 15 – 16.

by a historical tracing of shifting artistic trends and the influence of attitudes of the importance of the conservation of the Schuylkill River.

To promote this mission, the exhibit relies on two primary methods: layout and panel descriptions. First, the layout of the exhibit is designed to guide visitors from one section to the next offering little to no option to deviate from the exhibit's established path. Each of the five exhibit rooms have an entrance and an exit, making the layout a strict course where there is a strict order in which the rooms and artworks need to be viewed. In this case, the decision to restrict the movement of visitors makes sense because a major factor for understanding the mission of the exhibit is to see the chronological change between landscape styles, so the exhibit should be structured where the passage from one exhibit space to the next mirrors the passage of time. Second, there are panels throughout the exhibit intended to describe the theme of the room. For example, the second room dedicated to the Schuylkill River has a large panel that discusses the history of how Fairmount Water Works was constructed between 1812 and 1815 after Philadelphians believed that outbreaks of yellow fever were caused by pollution in the Schuylkill.⁵⁸ These panels offering general information are present to explain not only the history of the early nineteenth century around the Schuylkill River but also provide some context as to why the exhibit rooms are divided the way they are.

While these exhibit materials are intended to promote the mission of the exhibit, their ability to effectively perform this task is impaired because the mission of the exhibit is never explicitly stated in any other exhibit material. Without a clear understanding of the exhibits' desire to present a style of landscape paintings that diverged from

⁵⁸ "Water, Health, and Civic Pride in Centre Square." Exhibit Panel.

preconceived norms of European styles and influenced the Hudson River School, the public would likely not understand the rationale behind the chronological and thematic separation of the exhibit rooms. The only way a visitor could know and understand the mission of the exhibit and how the artworks and the layout of the exhibit upholds the mission is through Dr. Marley's essay *The Schuylkill River School*, which is only available on sale at the PAFA giftshop. So, without the mission being included into the exhibit, the rationale for the other methods of curation become harder for the public to realize. The layout of the exhibit to showcase paintings in a chronological order is logical for an exhibit that is designed around the concept of shifting art styles over time, but there should be some material or indication to the public about what specific styles or changes to the art they should be looking out for, which is another major aspect of the exhibit mission. Otherwise, an uninformed public will be relatively ignorant to how and why various elements of landscape paintings subtly changed. Text panels are utilized to explain the themes of each of the exhibit rooms, which are divided to follow the logic of Marley's argument for the mission of the exhibit presented in her essay. But without prior knowledge of Marley's essay or the arguments presented in it, the logical division of the rooms becomes difficult to deduce. And there are many examples where these text panels come close to offering insight as to how the exhibit layout is connected by a larger argument, but, again, without proper indication the subtleties of the argument's presentation are elusive. For example, the first room has a panel on the commercial flop of William Russel Birch's series titled "The County Seats of the United States," crediting the reason for the failure as "Americans who were self-consciously rejecting British

aristocratic practices in a period of emerging democracy.”⁵⁹ This line of reasoning holds in accordance with the overall argument that landscape styles were shifting from British influenced to a different American style, but the panel fails because nothing indicates the specifics of what style is defined as. Though it indicates that there was a change, not outright explaining the change will make noticing it more difficult. It’s also worth mentioning that without the knowledge of the mission, the public would not know that change in style would be an important aspect to observe when viewing the exhibit. Further examples of panels providing information on the themes of the rooms without information on the mission of the exhibit include the panel found in the second room related to the changing image of the Schuylkill River. In this panel, a brief history of the Waterworks Committee in Philadelphia in the early nineteenth century is provided, with background information such as the outbreaks of yellow fever being blamed on the pollution in the Schuylkill and the construction of two waterworks plants, one being the Fairmount Waterworks.⁶⁰ Again, this information provides viewers with historical facts about water treatment in Philadelphia but does not outright state how the erection of such facilities became mainstay pieces in landscapes of the Schuylkill as well as how the city’s passion about the Schuylkill’s conservation was what inspired many landscape artists to use the Schuylkill as a model. The only other material given to the public is two brochures, one, a museum map detailing the whole Samuel M.V. Hamilton Building rather than the specific *From the Schuylkill to the Hudson* Gallery space and the other, an explorer’s guide pamphlet that includes a map of the greater Delaware River Valley area and interactive space for writing down names of paintings and space for drawing, in all

⁵⁹ “Country Seats and Picturesque Views.” Exhibit Panel.

⁶⁰ “Water, Health, and Civic Pride in Centre Square.” Exhibit Panel.

likelihood intended for children.⁶¹⁶² Without stating what the viewers are intended to take from the exhibit, the public will most likely overlook the exhibition methods used to promote said intention.

Before further discussing the possible improvements that could be made to the exhibition material to better address the mission of the exhibit, it would be prudent to discuss what artistic analysis the mission and layout of the exhibit wishes to promote. Following the logic of the argument in Dr. Marley's essay *The Schuylkill River School* helps one understand that the mission and layout of the exhibit is designed to showcase change in landscape styles and helps one discover what changes to the artworks should be focused on. Marley starts in both the essay and with the layout of the exhibit examples of British-influenced landscapes in early republic America. Specifically, Marley emphasizes William Russel Birch's "The County Seats of the United States (1802)," an attempt to use newly constructed republican imagery in depicting elite suburban homes, a direct tactic used in many British landscape paintings.⁶³ Despite Birch's desire to promote American imagery, his series of paintings were financial failures due to, as Marley argues, his employment of the established British landscape technique of incorporating man-made structures such as suburban homes or farmsteads into the landscape space.⁶⁴ For evidence of this general opinion, Marley uses Joshua Shaw's later series "Picturesque Views (1820)" in which he moved from traditional landscapes in the British style Birch implemented to a more open sublime style that deemphasized the

⁶¹ "PAFA Museum Map, Fall 2019."

⁶² "Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art From the Schuylkill to the Hudson: An Explorer's Guide."

⁶³ Marley, Anna O., "The Schuylkill River School: Landscape Representation in Philadelphia from the American Revolution to the Centennial Exhibition." In *From the Schuylkill to the Hudson: Landscapes of the Early American Republic* Exhibition Book. Published by Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2019. Page 10-11.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Page 10 -11.

buildings and focused more on the Schuylkill as a natural symbol of the prosperity and power of Philadelphia and the new nation.⁶⁵ Shaw's shifting focuses came during a time in Philadelphia's history when the value of the health and conservation of the Schuylkill River was immense, and the popularization of the image of the Schuylkill along with Shaw's works inspired the second generation of Schuylkill River artists to fully commit to emphasizing nature over human presence or symbolism, in particular Thomas Birch and Thomas Doughty.⁶⁶ Birch pushed Shaw's concept of minimizing buildings further in his "Fairmount Water Works" painting where the field of view is expanded to show the entirety of the river's width while subsequently dwarfing the buildings on the shore and in the distance.⁶⁷ Thomas Doughty exploded this new style by abandoning the presence of buildings or any human presence in his paintings entirely, as is evident in "Landscape with Curving River (1822)" and "View on the Susquehanna near Harrisburg (1830)."⁶⁸ It was at this point that a young Thomas Cole was influenced by both Birch and Doughty, to the point where American art historian William Dunlap would recall that "his [Cole's] heart sunk as he felt his deficiencies in art when standing before the landscapes of Birch."⁶⁹ This line of reasoning presented in Marley's essay revolves around the presence of estate homes and farmsteads found in traditional British landscape paintings, how their incorporation into American landscape art was discouraged during the time of the first generation of Schuylkill River School artists, how the sudden interest in the

⁶⁵Marley, Anna O., "The Schuylkill River School: Landscape Representation in Philadelphia from the American Revolution to the Centennial Exhibition." In *From the Schuylkill to the Hudson: Landscapes of the Early American Republic* Exhibition Book. Published by Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2019. Page 11.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Page 12.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Page 12 – 13.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Page 13.

⁶⁹ Ibid. Page 15.

conservation of the Schuylkill River during the rise of the second generation of Schuylkill River School artists inspired landscape paintings practically or all together void of buildings or human structure, and how this new style of the second generation influenced Thomas Cole during his tutelage at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and why his artworks focus on the dominance of nature over humanity visually represented by how Cole's and other painters of the Hudson River School's human figures or constructions are dwarfed by the massive scene of wilderness. Therefore it becomes apparent that the specific change made by the Schuylkill River School that diverged from British norms and inspired the Hudson River School was the stylistic shift from landscapes that evenly distributed canvas space between natural scenery and human construction and development to landscapes that vastly favored untouched wilderness and nature over human presence.

This change becomes apparent when presented in Marley's paper, and the change is mirrored in the paintings present in the exhibit and how they are curated with thematic and chronological separation. That being said, the success of the exhibit material to emphasize this change is hindered because of the fact that the exhibit mission is never explicitly stated anywhere other than in Marley's essay, making discovering the desired changes in the presented landscape art difficult. Because of this, the exhibit could greatly benefit from inclusion of additional exhibit material that not only states the exhibit's mission, but also provides information that makes the changes Marley wishes to emphasize more apparent. It is in this regard that the inclusion of archival material would be beneficial in providing historical evidence and support for the mission's claims. Afterall, quotes from historic documents are used throughout Marley's essay to support

her argument, so it would make sense that the visual translation would benefit from the showcasing of these quotes and documents. For example, to establish the first Schuylkill River School generation's devotion to traditional landscape paintings of Britain and Europe, Marley includes an excerpt from a letter written by Charles Willson Peale to his patron explaining how Peale "would do a Claud Lorain or a Salvator Rosa," two prominent landscape painters during the seventeenth century.⁷⁰ Marley also uses archival evidence to exemplify concerns about the conservation of the Schuylkill by quoting a letter from Continental Congress delegate Francis Hopkinson in which he states "look towards the banks of the Schuylkill. Where are now those verdant groves that used to grace the prospect? – Alas, not now remain but lifeless stumps, that moulder in the summer and winter frost."⁷¹ Previously it was mentioned that Marley included an excerpt from William Dunlap regarding how Thomas Cole was influenced by Thomas Birch, stating that "[Cole's] heart sunk as he felt his deficiencies in art when standing before the landscapes of Birch."⁷² Though those are just some of the examples Marley uses in her essay to support her argument, further evidence to support the overarching mission of the exhibit can be found in other archival sources, such as the letter from art collector Robert Gilmor to Thomas Cole saying that Gilmor "differs however with [Cole] in approving the omission of figures."⁷³ While it might be true that these examples of archival material do not outright explain the mission of the exhibit and might need more context to fully

⁷⁰ Marley, Anna O., "The Schuylkill River School: Landscape Representation in Philadelphia from the American Revolution to the Centennial Exhibition." In *From the Schuylkill to the Hudson: Landscapes of the Early American Republic* Exhibition Book. Published by Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 2019. Page 12.

⁷¹ Ibid. Page 12.

⁷² Ibid. Page 15.

⁷³ "Letter from Robert Gilmor to Thomas Cole, December 13th, 1826." New York State Library, Manuscripts, and Special Collections, Thomas Cole Papers 1821 – 1863, SC10635, Box 3 Folder 8.

understand, such as knowing who Lorain and Rosa were, they can still offer definitive historical evidence that Charles Willson Peale followed established European landscape painting styles, there was concern for the health of the Schuylkill River, Thomas Cole appreciated and was inspired by Thomas Birch, and art collectors were surprised about Cole's decision to exclude or downplay figures in his landscape paintings. This information provided by archival material, while maybe not sufficient for presenting the mission of the exhibit on its own, is vital for providing context into the curator's logical process and for aiding with the analysis of the styles the Schuylkill River School painters deviated from and created.

Conclusion:

After discussing these two case studies the time now comes to coherently compare and contrast the collected data. The point of this exercise is to examine how the presence or omission of archival material effected the delivery of the exhibit's mission to the public. In the case of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, the mission of the Site was to present a historical context for the life of Thomas Cole and for the analysis of his art. Though the Site uses other exhibition material to accomplish this goal such as an open access exhibit design encouraging exploration and being located where Cole lived and worked to partially deconstruct the time barrier, archival material is also utilized. Selected letters, journal entries, and essay excerpts from or addressed to Thomas Cole address both aspects of the Site's mission. First, the archival material with passages that relate to Cole's personal life with his friends, family, and colleagues along with Cole's musings and accounts of historical developments all aid in shaping a historical context about the life and times of Thomas Cole. Second, the archival material that addressed Cole's lamentation over industrial encroachment into wild nature and passages that explain some of Cole's decisions to omit human figures and focus on the massiveness of nature in his landscape paintings provide the foundations for an analytical approach to Cole's work where the emphasis on the grandeur and scope of nature over the puny representations of human development is meant to express the beauty of wilderness and the futility of human progress in its presence. In these ways the inclusion of archival material is proven to be an effective method in presenting the mission of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site.

Continuing this comparison, the focus now shifts to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art's exhibit *From the Schuylkill to the Hudson*, where the mission of the exhibit is to present the existence of a Schuylkill River School that was defined by stylistic changes that deviated from established British traditions of landscape paintings and influenced the style of the Hudson River School. This exhibit is at a disadvantage because nowhere in the actual exhibit is this mission clearly defined or presented, leaving the public void of the meaning of the exhibit and unlikely to discover the importance of the changes in the presented landscapes and how the exhibit layout and material addresses those changes. This being said there is potential for incorporation of relevant archival material that would aid in promoting the mission were it clearly stated. In the exhibit's accompanying essay that describes the mission, the author includes passages from archival material that indicate key elements in the argument for the mission. These examples include passages on first generation Schuylkill River School painters' devotion to European landscape traditions, letters addressing the need for conservation of the Schuylkill River, and Cole's admiration of the stylistic changes made by second generation Schuylkill River School painters. This information, along with other examples of archival material that detail the specific stylistic differences between European landscape paintings and the landscapes of the Schuylkill River School such as Robert Gilmore's letter to Thomas Cole addressing his opposition to the omission of figures and constructions, forms the basis for the analysis that the shifts in landscape styles were from the prominent display of human development such as homes and farms to the dwarfing of such development in comparison to the natural landscape. Were the mission of the exhibit presented to the public, these excerpts would brilliantly act as supportive evidence and guides for artistic analysis.

While comparing these two case studies, some considerations surface as to how the subtle differences between each exhibit may skew the ability to make a clean comparison between an art exhibit that provides archival material and one that does not. First is the differences with the missions themselves, how one is fairly open ended while the other is more specific. The Thomas Cole National Historic Site's mission is to present a historical context for the life and work of Thomas Cole which is a non-argumentative mission. The exhibit makes no challenging claims or new arguments about Cole's life and works, the exhibit is simply there to present the history of the Site and the man who lived and worked there. The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts on the other hand has an argumentative mission, that there existed a Schuylkill River School that influenced the emblematic style of the Hudson River School and everything in the exhibit from the layout to the material is geared toward proving that argument. The second difference regards what analysis of the art the public is intended to form. Since the mission is simply to present context about the art, The Thomas Cole National Historic Site offers no specifics as to what the analysis of the presented art should be, so the results of analysis can be open ended. Meanwhile, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art wants to promote an analysis of the art based on the stylistic changes American landscape paintings underwent during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century and how said changes reflect a desire to form an American style of landscape art, a concept Thomas Cole incorporated into his works. But despite the existence of these differences, their presence has no effect on the ability to compare the two institutions because both in some way employ curation methods that offer the public the ability to form art analysis. It is this similarity that makes the two comparable for research that is

based on how art exhibits that promote the capacity for analysis and education can be considered institutions of cultural heritage, and how such consideration can be strengthened when relevant archival material is exhibited to provide additional information about subject matter, interpretation, style, historical context, and emotion.

It has been observed how archival material can aid these two exhibits accomplish their individual missions, but the question of whether or not the inclusion of archival material can elevate an art exhibit to the level of a cultural heritage institution has not been addressed. As stated previously, an art museum or an art exhibit can be considered an institution of cultural heritage if it is able to address the five main aspects of art history and art analysis: subject matter, interpretation, style, historical context, and emotion. So if the inclusion of archival material is for the purpose of aiding an art museum or an art exhibit achieve the status of a cultural heritage institution, the present archival material should be able to aid in the formulation of art analysis in relation to these five aspects.

In almost every case, the subject matter in the paintings displayed in both the New Gallery at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site and in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts exhibit is easy to identify. For the Cole and the other Hudson River School painters displayed in the New Gallery, the subject matter is entirely wild landscape scenes with vast distant mountains, forests, and water ways of the Catskill Mountains. For the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, though paintings by Cole and other Hudson River School artists are interspersed with landscapes by earlier American and British artists, the subject matter is very similar, with landscape paintings depicting natural scenery with occasional buildings and crowds of people. In both cases, archival records can draw the attention of the public to the inclusion and omission of certain elements of

the landscape paintings' subject matter for the purpose of analysis. For example, excerpts from Cole's personal journal reveal that he had a disdain for industrialists invading the wild landscapes of New York State where he lived and worked, and a letter from Robert Gilmor to Cole addressed how the art critic did not agree with Cole's decision to omit human figures from his landscape paintings. The information gathered from these primary sources can be applied when viewing Cole's works at the New Gallery; the artist's decision to dwarf human activity in the presence of the overwhelming and massive wilderness is done intentionally to symbolize the futility of human endeavors and improvement in the face of the forces of nature. Similarly, though it was not present for viewing with the exhibit, archival records used to support the argument for the existence of a Schuylkill River School of American landscape painters explain how early American landscape painters like William Russel Birch failed to find commercial success because Americans wanted a style of landscape art that was different from British styles that incorporated buildings and people. Furthermore, records relating to concerns over the pollution of the Schuylkill River provide another reason for why landscape styles shifted from visual balance between natural scenery and human development to visual emphasis on nature, health of the river was a paramount concern and many wanted to depict its power and so made the river visually dominant over other structures. In both cases, archival records can aid in creating an artistic analysis of Cole's and others' works based on subject matter.

Primary source documents can present what interpretations artist or viewers at the time formed when viewing or analyzing art, and the works of the Hudson River School and other associated art movements and schools have plenty of sources explaining such

interpretations. As previously mentioned, a letter addressed to Thomas Cole from art critic Robert Gilmor stated that Gilmor criticized Cole's decision to omit or hide human figures, an element that was common in landscape paintings prior to Cole. The justifications for Gilmor's criticism can be traced back to earlier British landscapes that, while not present at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, showcased many human figures or elements of human presence. When this interpretation is coupled with examples of landscape paintings before and after Cole's career, one can make two deductions about art history and art analysis; first, prior to Cole's works, the inclusion of human presence was the norm in landscape paintings, and second, Cole's works were influential enough to break this preconceived interpretation of what a landscape painting was as is evident by how his followers also omitted human presence from their landscape paintings. When discussing how the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts implements information from archival records, again curator Dr. Marley uses archival evidence to support a claim about the interpretations of early American landscapes. Marley notes how William Russel Birch initially thought his paintings in his "County Seats" series would be interpreted as patriotic and emblematic of the pride and prosperity of the new nation, but in actuality his paintings were interpreted as being too relatable to British styles of landscapes.

When it comes to the style of the artworks displayed at both the Thomas Cole National Historic Site and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, it seems as though archival records would not be able to say anything more beyond pointing out the obvious that these artworks are landscapes. However, archival material can in fact address some of the stylistic details that make Thomas Cole's and other Hudson River School painters'

landscapes different from others. For example, the excerpts from Thomas Cole's journals displayed at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site emphasize Cole's love of nature and his desire to capture every minute detail in his landscapes. Cole's desire is realized through his incredible attention to detail, an attention that becomes a stylistic marker of Cole and Hudson River School landscapes. Though archival records are not utilized to showcase this style in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts' exhibit, the style can still be noticed when juxtaposed against other European landscape paintings in the exhibit. The intense attention to detail that is a quintessential style of the Hudson River School is prominent when contrasted with the landscape works of Europeans such as Charles Willson Peale, William Russel Birch, and Joshua Shaw, whose landscapes are not as detailed and are inspired by the vague sublime styles of earlier European artists.

Another aspect necessary to form art analysis is historical context. In the case of the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, the primary use of the present archival records is to shape a historical framework of Thomas Cole as a person and what his life and times were like. This context for Cole's life can also be applied to analysis of his art. For example, excerpts from Cole's journals and letters partially explain the Market Revolution of the 1820s and 1830s, an event that saw the rise of industrial expansion and development. This development discussed by Cole frames his natural landscape artworks in a time period when nature was seen as a commodity and resource rather than a sublime wilderness that should be respected and preserved, so it became Cole's mission to portray nature as such to combat the attitudes of the industrialists he despised. In the case of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Dr. Marley uses archival evidence to put the exhibited artworks in the context of Philadelphia. Marley's use of records and documents

provides a history of a changing Philadelphia as a city that became concerned for its health and prosperity after outbreaks of yellow fever believed to be caused by the polluted Schuylkill River. This historical context explains why the image of a healthy Schuylkill was important to Philadelphian citizens and why the image of the river became a prominent staple in landscape paintings for artists living in or around the city at the time.

The final aspect for art analysis is emotion, and while emotion is subjective to the viewer, archival records can show what emotions the artist was feeling and projecting into their artworks. There are many records throughout the Thomas Cole National Historic Site that provide insight into the thoughts and feelings of Thomas Cole, with his own journals and letters explaining the overwhelming sense of joy he gets when viewing the natural landscapes around his home and his lament for the nature he loves being destroyed by industrialists. These insights into Cole's emotions offers a platform for the viewer to begin forming their own emotional responses when observing one of Cole's artworks; Cole's love of nature and his fear and anger caused by the threat of such beautiful landscape being lost is reflected in his artworks and can be rebounded to any viewer. Though no archival material was used in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts' exhibit to elicit analysis based on emotion, archival material could still be implemented to demonstrate such hopes and anxieties felt by Cole and other artists. For example, while records relating to feelings of sadness about the pollution in the Schuylkill River can provide a context for history and why the Schuylkill was often used as the subject matter in landscape paintings, it can also be an emotional stimulus, and one

can experience pride and joy when viewing a painting of a healthy and powerful Schuylkill River.

In the aforementioned ways, archival material can address every aspect of art analysis. In the Thomas Cole National Historic Site case study, it was explained how the incorporation of archival materials not only shaped an image of Thomas Cole as a person and the times he lived in, but records were also used to form analysis of his paintings displayed in the New Gallery. In the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts case study, archival material was not present, but it was used to frame and justify the argument of the exhibit in the accompanying essay by the head curator, so its inclusion could have aided visitors understand the exhibit's mission while also providing avenues for further art analysis. While this essay has primarily highlighted the benefits of the incorporation of archival material into art exhibits there are drawbacks as well. A glaring problem would be the matter of available exhibit space, that a limited gallery space means there would have to be a compromise between space allotted to art and archival documents. Another drawback could be the interest of the public, perhaps the general population would overlook or be disinterested in text documents in an art exhibit and thus the inclusion of archival material was wasted. But the focus of this paper is not to solve the issues of incorporation or provide a how-to guideline. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate the information archival material could provide when exhibited in art museums by observing an art exhibit that incorporates such archival material and one that does not. In the case studies, not only are the individual mission of each exhibit supported by the information archival material can present, but the information can also be used to form analyses of the art based on the five aspects of art analysis. And it is this ability to

educate the public about the history and interpretations of art that makes an art museum or art exhibit a cultural heritage institution.