

# A MOST HISTORIC EXHIBITION

Stephen Hannock gives contemporary American art a new perspective.

BY SABRINA WIRTH

**When Stephen Hannock found** out he would be the first visual artist to win the Frederic Edwin Church Award in May 2013, he asked his best friend Sting to present it. Suddenly, The Olana State Historic Site, the 250-acre property designed by Frederic Church in Hudson, New York, experienced a resurgence of attention as did Hannock. "Following the award ceremony, Sarah Griffen, the former director of Olana, asked me to curate an exhibition," recalls Hannock. "I was intrigued and had the idea of incorporating the neighboring property, the Thomas Cole National Historic Site."

Considering that Thomas Cole, together with his student Frederic Church, were the founders of the Hudson River School, the first American art movement, it seemed a natural pairing. Hannock—whose own monumental, atmospheric paintings are reminiscent of the Hudson River School—invited art historian Jason Rosenfeld to be his co-curator and the "River Crossings: Contemporary Art Comes Home" exhibition was born.

The two-venue exhibition includes work by more than 25 contemporary artists—among them Chuck Close, Will Cotton, Gregory Crewdson, Lynn Davis, Cindy Sherman, Sienna Shields, Kiki Smith, Don Gummer, Duncan Hannah, Valerie Hegarty, Maya Lin, Frank Moore, Rashaad Newsome,

Thomas Nozkowski, Jerry Gretzinger, Stephen Petegorsky, Martin Puryear, Joel Sternfeld—as well as Hannock's own paintings.

All of the artists included in the show have a personal connection with the same geographic regions as their 19th century counterparts, and nearly all have made an appearance in one of Hannock's paintings. Like a living version of his compositions, the exhibition is full of vignettes that allow viewers to discover, explore and connect with the art at an individual level.

In considering the artwork, Hannock says he imagined himself in a Kurt Vonnegut, time-traveling scenario: "I'd see myself sitting on Thomas Cole's back porch with the sun going down over the Catskills, trying to tell them about the work that might be hanging on their walls in the third millennium," explains Hannock. "How would I blow their minds? How would I just completely knock these guys onto their heels? Well, you show them work by Gregory [Crewdson], and Cindy [Sherman] and Jerry Gretzinger, who's been making an imaginary map for 50 years. . ."

"River Crossings: Contemporary Art Comes Home" will run for six months beginning on May 3, during which time visitors can explore the grounds, picnic alongside an Elyn Zimmerman installation and absorb some truly American art history.

PHOTOS BY MELANIE HARBROOK, SON REEL, DAVID LACHMAN



Curated by artist Stephen Hannock (at left) and art historian Jason Rosenfeld, The Thomas Cole National Historic Site and the Olana State Historic Site present a groundbreaking exhibition of contemporary art. *River Crossings: Contemporary Art Comes Home* invites 28 contemporary artists into two historic settings in upstate New York.

