

FREDERIC
CHURCH
GLOBAL ARTIST

Introduction

The year 2026 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Frederic Church (1826–1900), the most renowned American landscape artist of his time, whose life and work was indelibly shaped by global travel. Unlike other American artists who took a European “Grand Tour,” Church followed the path of scientists, journeying twice to South America; in 1853 at the young age of twenty-seven, and again in 1857. He would also travel across the northeastern United States as far north as Maine, then to Jamaica, and to the icy waters of the North Atlantic. He later visited Europe and the Middle East, and in his final decades made fifteen winter sojourns in Mexico. The many worlds through which Church traveled are reflected in the designed landscape, striking architecture, and global collections at Olana, the home he created with his wife Isabel, overlooking the Hudson River.

Frederic Church: Global Artist examines the artist in his own time and demonstrates his continuing relevance for today’s audiences. Widely exhibited in the United States and Europe during his lifetime, Church’s paintings earned a new level of respect for American art. This exhibition brings together examples of the broad range of media he mastered, including drawings and oil sketches from his travels, and examples of his large, extravagantly detailed paintings produced for public exhibition. It reveals Church as an artist whose works engage with questions of industrialization and environmental destruction, the rise and fall of empires, the construction of national identity, and the cataclysmic effects of slavery and civil war.

Elizabeth Kornhauser, Tim Barringer, and Jennifer Raab
Exhibition Curators



Frederic Edwin Church, *Horseshoe Falls* (detail), December 1856–January 1857. Oil on two pieces of paper, joined together, mounted on canvas, 11½ × 35⅝ in. (29.2 × 90.5 cm). New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Olana State Historic Site. Gift of Olana Preservation, Inc. and Museum Purchase, OL.1981.15.a

Español:



Early Career and North America



Frederic Edwin Church, *Sunset, Bar Harbor*, c. 1854. Oil on paper mounted to canvas, 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (25.7 × 43.8 cm). New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Olana State Historic Site. Gift of Olana Preservation, Inc. and Museum Purchase, OL.1981.72.a

In 1844, Church left his family home in Hartford, Connecticut to spend two years in Catskill, New York, as the pupil of Thomas Cole. At eighteen, he demonstrated remarkable skills as a draftsman, accompanying Cole on sketching outings in the region.

In 1850, inspired by Cole, Church embarked on his first of many trips to Maine, shortly after the publication of Henry David Thoreau's essay, "Ktaadn and the Maine Woods" brought popular attention to the region. The inland region of Mount Katahdin and coastal Mount Desert Island would draw Church back to Maine throughout his lifetime.

Following Cole's death in 1848, Church struck out on his own, traveling to many of the country's great natural wonders to depict them in new and innovative ways. Between 1856 and 1858, Church made four trips to Niagara Falls, where he executed dozens of pencil drawings and oil studies. Painted in a panoramic format, his "Great Picture" *Niagara* (1857), was a pioneering example of the American sublime. *Niagara* achieved enormous success, touring throughout the United States and Great Britain.

South America

The writings of German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt deserve the greatest credit for inspiring Church to travel to South America. In his multivolume text *Cosmos*, copies of which remain in the library at Olana, Humboldt encouraged landscape painters to find aesthetic material on the American continent rather than reverting to familiar European landmarks. In 1853, at age twenty-seven, Church followed the path of Humboldt, journeying through Ecuador and Colombia for nearly seven months. Taking detailed sketches as he traveled, he returned to his New York studio to create paintings of towering waterfalls, vast mountain ranges, tropical flora and fauna, and the Magdalena River waterway.

Church returned to the Andes in 1857, and afterward painted monumental canvases including *Cayambe* and perhaps his most famous painting, *Heart of Andes* (1859). In April 1859, he orchestrated the display of that celebrated work in a massive and elaborate frame designed to look like a window. Church chose to display his “Great Pictures,” as they were called at the time, as individual showpieces which received rapturous receptions by critics and the public in the United States and Great Britain. He had hoped to send *Heart of the Andes* to Berlin for Humboldt to see, but the renowned naturalist died later that year, before plans could be made.



Frederic Edwin Church, *Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador*, September 1853 or June 1857. Oil and graphite on tan paperboard, 13½ × 20½ in. (34.2 × 52.2 cm). Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York. Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-1296-b

The Arctic



Frederic Edwin Church, *The Iceberg*, c. 1875. Oil on canvas, 22 × 27 in. (55.9 × 68.6 cm).
Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago. Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1993.6

In June 1859, Church embarked on a trip north along the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador to sketch icebergs. He was accompanied by the Reverend Louis Legrand Noble, who would later publish a book about the excursion, *After Icebergs with a Painter*. Church and Noble chartered a schooner to take them as close as possible to the imposing structures of ice. Church produced a great variety of sketches that he later relied on to complete his monumental painting *The Icebergs* (1861).

Just as he was preparing the painting to go on view at Goupil Gallery in New York, the gun batteries of South Carolina opened fire on Fort Sumter; upon hearing the news, Church changed the title of the painting to *The North*, and directed that all monies raised from the exhibition be directed to the Patriotic Fund in support of the Union soldiers. The work failed to find a buyer, and two years later Church added a broken ship's mast in the foreground that provided a reference to the dangers of Arctic exploration. He changed the title of the painting to *The Icebergs*. Following its successful exhibition in London, the picture was purchased by Sir William Edward Watkin, a British railroad magnate.

Jamaica

Church and his wife Isabel traveled to Jamaica in 1865, departing on April 22 in the wake of both personal and national loss. In March of that year, the Church's two-year-old son Herbert Edwin and five-month-old daughter Emma Francis died of diphtheria. On April 9, the Civil War ended, but five days later President Lincoln was assassinated.

In a frenzy of activity, Church directed his attention to the topography, botany, and meteorology of the tropical landscape, producing exquisite *plein air* oil sketches, many of which he framed and hung at Olana. During the five-month stay, Church traveled the island by train, horseback, and on foot to gain elevated views from atop Mount Diablo looking across Saint Thomas in the Vale Parish and into the Blue Mountains. Referring to many sketches and oil studies, he created the major works *Rainy Season in the Tropics* (1866), and *Vale of St. Thomas, Jamaica* (1867), an important commission he received from his friend Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt. In the latter painting, Church's stormy landscape with the sun struggling to break through speaks to the end of the American Civil War and the brutal legacies of slavery that remained. Just weeks after the Churches departed Jamaica, an armed protest by formerly enslaved people was violently suppressed on the orders of the British colonial governor Edward Eyre, who the Churches had encountered during their stay. The incident, known as the Morant Bay Rebellion, ignited fierce debate about colonial rule in the Caribbean.



Frederic Edwin Church, *Fern Walk, Jamaica*, July 1865. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 12¼ × 13¼ in. (31.1 × 33.6 cm). New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Olana State Historic Site. Gift of Olana Preservation, Inc. and Museum Purchase, OL.1981.73.a

Europe and the Middle East



Frederic Edwin Church, *Parthenon at Night, Athens, April 1869*. Oil and graphite on tan paperboard, 13 × 16¼ in. (32.9 × 41.4 cm). Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York. Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-671

With Isabel, their infant son Joseph, and his mother-in-law Emma Carnes, Church crossed the Atlantic for the first time in November 1867. Over the next nineteen months they traveled throughout Europe and the Middle East, with the artist making several arduous trips alone. After short periods in Paris and London, the party landed in Alexandria, Egypt, on January 4, 1868.

Church planned their journey to visit what he, like other Western travelers of the time, knew as “The Holy Land.” The region was part of the Ottoman Empire, a vast and loose-knit Islamic realm centered in Istanbul. During Church’s lifetime, European and American attitudes to the Islamic world were ambivalent but often hostile. The term “Orientalism” is used today to describe what theorist Edward Said explained as a habit of mind that became common among Europeans in the nineteenth century, by which the “East,” seen as a single entity, was identified as the West’s “other.” Considered to be backwards or even barbarous, this fictitious entity the “East” nonetheless remained aesthetically appealing to westerners. However, the Ottoman Empire was engaged in a process of modernization in the mid-nineteenth century, with industrial projects like the building of the Suez Canal impacting global trade and the economy.



Olana

In the months before his wedding in 1860, Church purchased a 126-acre parcel of land near Hudson, New York, where he had sketched as a young student of Thomas Cole. The property included an eighteenth-century farm, near which he and Isabel constructed a new house for themselves, which they called “Cosy Cottage.” Church immediately began to make changes to the landscape. By 1867 he had purchased another eighteen acres, including the summit of the nearby hill where, three years later, he would break ground for a new house shaped by his global travels.

Upon the family’s return from Europe and the Middle East in 1869, Church began planning the new house. While he had not visited Persia in his global travels, Church decided to build in a “Persian” style, consulting sketches from his recent trip to the Middle East, as well as illustrated books on Persian architecture in his library for ideas. He worked with his friend, architect Calvert Vaux, who served as Church’s advisor and helped translate his designs into workable plans and provided construction drawings for contractors. Still preserved today in the Olana collection are hundreds of Church’s architectural sketches, color swatches, and stencil designs, many evoking Islamic architecture. The Churches filled the house with decorative arts from the Middle East, paintings thought to be by European Old Masters, and an array of objects collected across continents.



Frederic Edwin Church, *Olana from the Southeast*, c. 1872. Oil and graphite on paperboard, 12 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (30.9 × 24.3 cm). Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York. Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-666

Mexico

In the final decades of Church's life, he journeyed to various parts of Mexico making fifteen trips beginning in 1881 and continuing until his death in 1900. He was in search of warm weather during the cold winter months in the Hudson Valley to ease the effects of his rheumatoid arthritis. At the same time, he gained a deep appreciation for Mexico's art, architecture, history, and landscape, which was reflected in the design and furnishings of the studio he added to his house in 1888 to 1890. Church's travels on the Mexican National Railroad brought him across the country, resulting in a highly accomplished and fascinating series of drawings and oil sketches of the diverse topography and architectural landmarks of Mexico. The skill and deft draftsmanship shown in these studies thoroughly debunk the notion that he abandoned his artistic practice in old age.

In 1892, Church purchased a pair of carved stone Toltec relief panels, and convinced of their aesthetic and historic importance, offered them as gifts to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of which he was a founding trustee. He would also advocate for the creation of a Department of Ancient American Art at The Met. The Toltec panels can be seen today in The Met's newly renovated Michael C. Rockefeller Wing.



Frederic Edwin Church, *The Church of San Francisco, Cuernavaca, Mexico*, January–February 1898. Oil paint on board, 7¾ × 11½ in. (19.7 × 29.2 cm). New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Olana State Historic Site. Gift of Olana Preservation, Inc. and Museum Purchase, OL.1977.226

MUSEUM COLLECTIONS WITH WORKS BY FREDERIC CHURCH

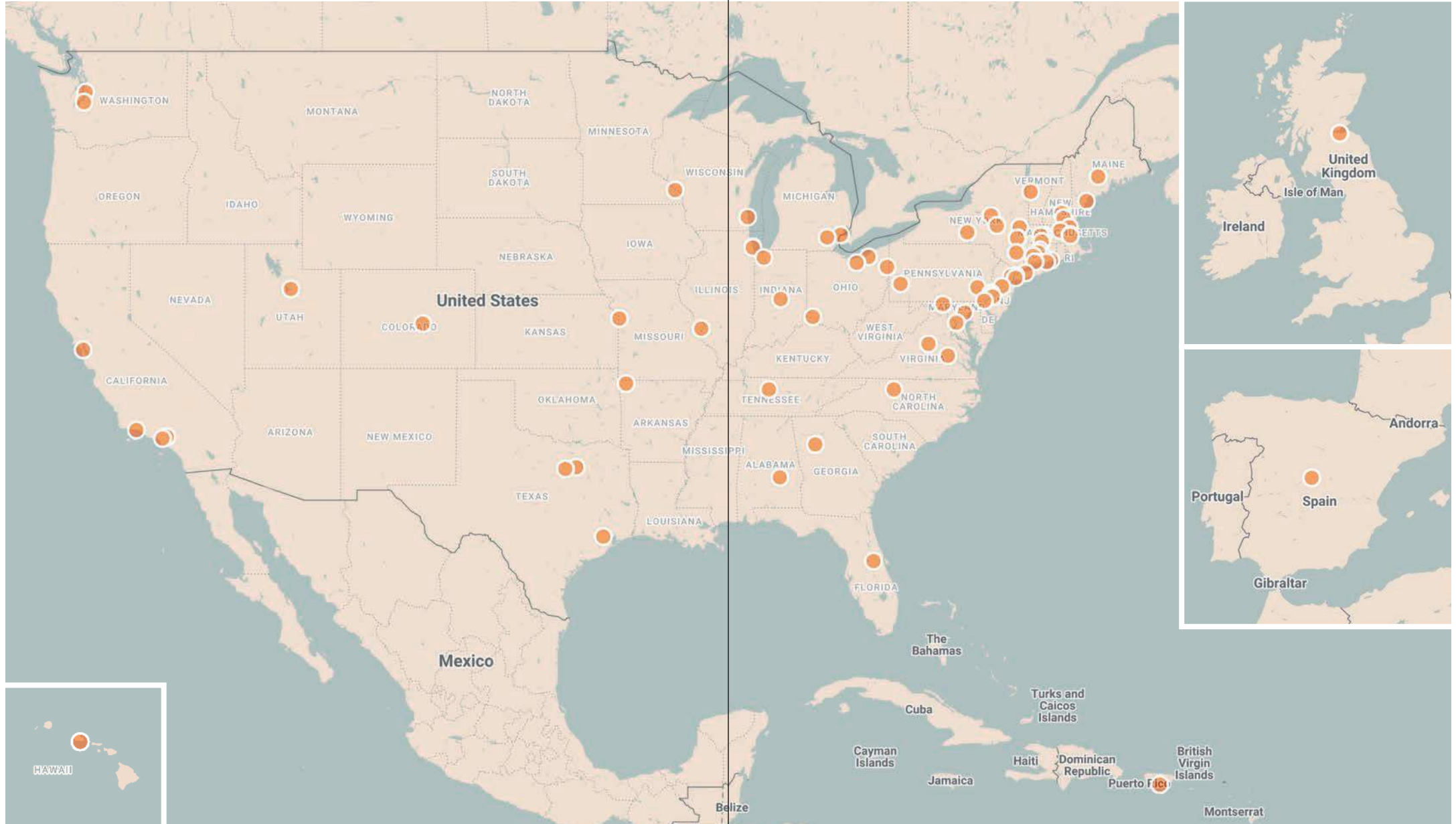


More than seventy museums and public institutions worldwide hold works by Frederic Church in their collections. In 2026, many of these institutions will mark the bicentennial of Church's birth with exhibitions, installations, and programs highlighting the artist and his legacy. For a complete list of 2026 projects, visit OLANA.org/fc200

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass.	Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Ark.
Albany Institute of History & Art, Albany, N.Y.	Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, N.H.
Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio	Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Tex.
Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Tex.	Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, Del.
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.	Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Mich.
Brigham Young University Museum of Art, Provo, Utah	de Young Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, Calif.
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, N.Y.	Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, N.Y.
The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio	Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme, Conn.
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pa.	The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.
The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, Winter Park, Fla.	Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.
Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio	Fruitlands Museum, Harvard, Mass.
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio	Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, Mass.
Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine	The Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, N.Y.
Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colo.	Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.
Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York, N.Y.	High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Ga.
	Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu, Hawai'i
	Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, Calif.
	Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Indianapolis, Ind.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, Calif.	Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pa.
Lyman Allyn Art Museum, New London, Conn.	Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pa.
Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury, Conn.	Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine
Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, Mass.	Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, N.J.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y.	Reading Public Museum, Reading, Pa.
Middlebury College Museum of Art, Middlebury, Vt.	Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Winston-Salem, N.C.
Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, Mo.	The Richard H. Driehaus Museum, Chicago, Ill.
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wis.	Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, Calif.
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Ala.	Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Wash.
Munson Museum of Art, Utica, N.Y.	Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.
Museo de Arte de Ponce, Ponce, Puerto Rico	Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, Spain	Springfield Museums, Springfield, Mass.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, Mass.	Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, Wash.
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston, Tex.	Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Catskill, N.Y.
National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK	University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, Mich.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.	Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Va.
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo.	Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Conn.
The Newark Museum of Art, Newark, N.J.	The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Md.
New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain, Conn.	Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Hagerstown, Md.
New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, N.H.	White House Historical Association, Washington, D.C.
The New York Historical, New York, N.Y.	Woodmere Art Museum, Philadelphia, Pa.
The Parthenon, Nashville, Tenn.	Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.

MUSEUM COLLECTIONS WITH WORKS BY FREDERIC CHURCH





Frederic Church: Global Artist is presented in coordination with *Frederic Church 200*, an initiative led by The Olana Partnership to mark the 200th anniversary of the artist's birth in 2026.

The exhibition *Frederic Church: Global Artist* presented in the Sharp Family Gallery at Olana State Historic Site is organized by The Olana Partnership in collaboration with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. It is curated by Elizabeth Kornhauser, Curator Emerita, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Senior Curator and Chair, Frederic Church Bicentennial Committee, The Olana Partnership; Tim Barringer, Paul Mellon Professor of the History of Art at Yale University; and Jennifer Raab, Professor of the History of Art at Yale University.

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The Olana Partnership is the 501(c)(3) not-for-profit cooperative partner of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation at Olana State Historic Site.

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COVER

Frederic Edwin Church, *Cayambe* (detail), 1858. Oil on canvas, 30 × 48½ in. (76.2 × 122.2 cm). The New York Historical. Robert L. Stuart Collection, gift of his widow, Mrs. Mary Stuart, S-91

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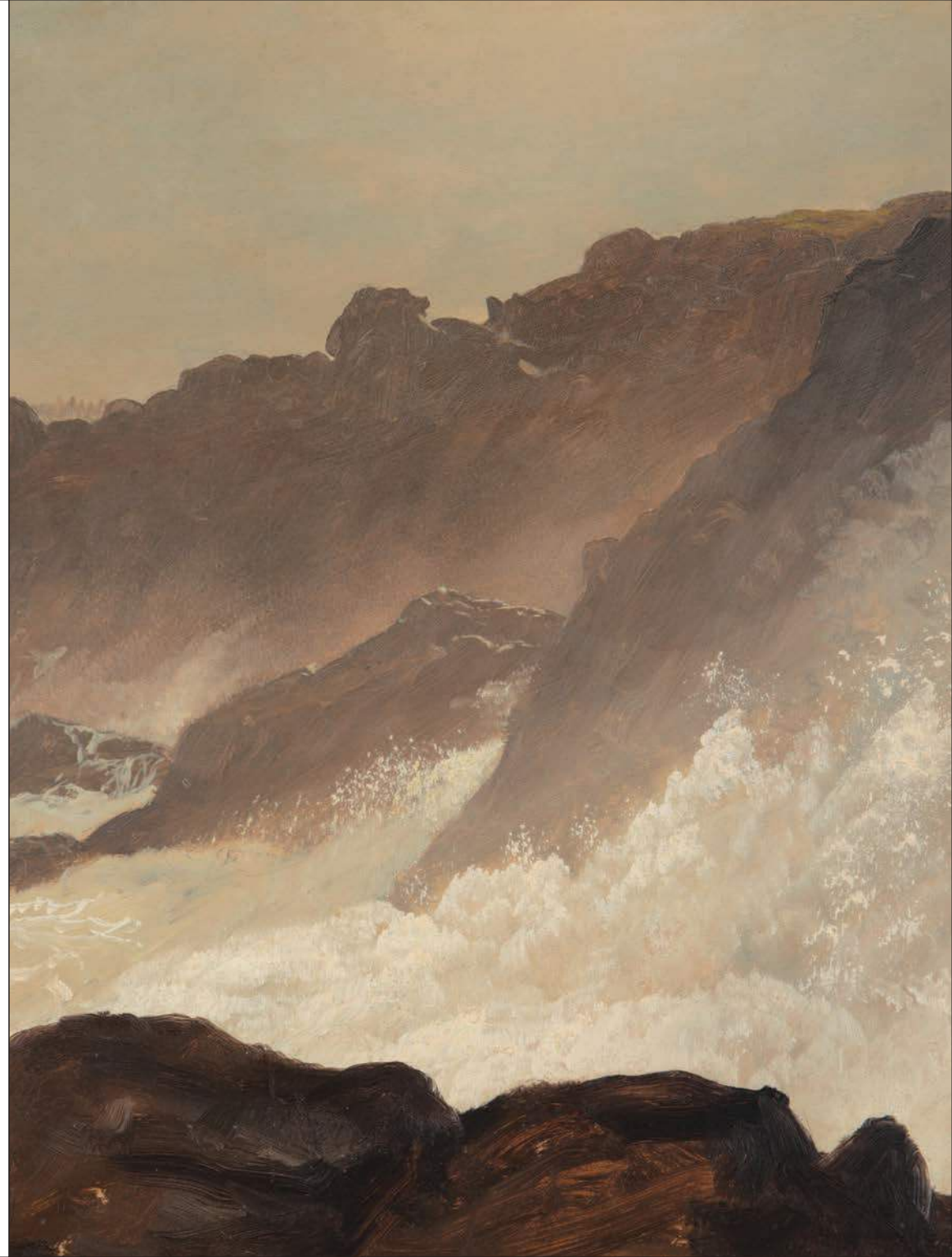
Frederic Edwin Church, *Königssee, Germany* (detail), July 1868. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 13 × 20 in. (33 × 50.8 cm). New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Olana State Historic Site. Gift of Olana Preservation, Inc. and Museum Purchase, OL.1981.42.a

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Frederic Edwin Church, *The Natural Bridge, Virginia* (detail), 1852. Oil on canvas, 38 × 33 in. (96.5 × 83.8 cm). The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Gift of Thomas Fortune Ryan, 1912.1

BACK INSIDE COVER

Frederic Edwin Church, *Surf Pounding against the Rocky Maine Coast* (detail), 1862. Oil and graphite on off-white paperboard, 11⅞ × 20 in. (30 × 50.7 cm). Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, New York. Gift of Louis P. Church, 1917-4-1324



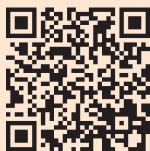
FREDERIC CHURCH GLOBAL ARTIST

May 17–October 25, 2026



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FREDERIC CHURCH ARTISTA GLOBAL



Para leer en español:
olana.org/artistaglobalespanol

Also on view at Olana State
Historic Site:



Through October 25, 2026

