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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
 TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Robert S. Duncanson - Taft Museum
 AND/OR COMMON
Martin Baum House, Taft Museum

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
316 Pike Street
 CITY, TOWN
Cincinnati
 STATE
Ohio

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION
 CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
001

___ VICINITY OF
 CODE
39

COUNTY
Hamilton

CODE
061

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES- RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES. UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
The Cincinnati Institute of Fine Arts
 STREET & NUMBER
441 Vine Street
 CITY, TOWN
Cincinnati
 STATE
Ohio

___ VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
 REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC
Hamilton County Court House
 STREET & NUMBER
Court and Main Streets
 CITY, TOWN
Cincinnati
 STATE
Ohio

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Inventory and Appraisal of Historic Sites, Buildings and Areas
 DATE
1960
 ___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY LOCAL
 DEPOSITORY FOR
 SURVEY RECORDS
Cincinnati City Hall
 CITY, TOWN
Cincinnati
 STATE
Ohio

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

- EXCELLENT
- DETERIORATED
- GOOD
- RUINS
- FAIR
- UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

- UNALTERED
- ALTERED

CHECK ONE

- ORIGINAL SITE
- MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The site for Robert S. Duncanson is the present Taft Museum. This elegant white frame mansion is a highly refined example of the Federal style. The two-story center unit is fronted with an imposing portico, whose Tuscan Pillars, Greek pediment, curved iron railings leading up the sandstone steps to the handsome entrance provide a fitting terminus to the visual axis from East Fourth Street through Lytle Park. The center unit is flanked by two-story wings, a high basement with grilled windows holds the center section and the two wings a good half story above grade. The entrance portal is flanked by slender sidelights and capped by an elliptical fanlight in which the window mullions form a wheel spoke design. This design is repeated in the seven elliptical windows in the second story of the center unit and in the pediment. Across the rear of the center unit is a long porch which commands a view of a lovely formal garden. Access to this porch is through floor length double hung windows of the drawing room. When transformed into a museum, the house was restored on the basis of an 1857 color print, and the interior colors and appointments were returned to those of a gracious early nineteenth century home.

In 1848, Nicholas Longworth, I selected Robert S. Duncanson to paint eight landscape murals in his palatial home, Belmont, which is now the Taft Museum. The museum has restored the murals which were once covered over with wall paper.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Afro-American History
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES **Robert S. Duncanson (1817-1872)** BUILDER/ARCHITECT **Martin Baum**
Murals (1848)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

To become a black artist under the conditions of the nineteenth century posed great obstacles, largely complicated by racism. No matter how potentially great or even competent, the black artist constantly found himself in the dilemma of having to constantly disprove either cultural, racial or provincially imposed attitudes and restrictions. Robert S. Duncanson was one such individual who met with these same awesome challenges and for a time, succeeded until these conditions contributed to his demise in 1872. History is fortunate in that at least 79 out of a possible ninety-odd known canvases by Duncanson's hand have survived.¹

It was indeed the nineteenth century painter who forged one of the first truly American traditions. In effect the visual imagery they developed through close attention to the details of the American terrain grew into fervent emotional and spiritual relationship to nature. It is within this context that Robert S. Duncanson is to assume his role as a vital contributor to the creation of this unique and individual form of American expressionism.

BIOGRAPHY

Robert S. Duncanson was born in New York State about 1817. His mother was a black woman and his father is said to have been a white Canadian of Scotch ancestry who sent his son to Canada for his primary training. Duncanson seems to have enjoyed from the beginning advantages commonly denied most freeborn black youth in his day. Duncanson was sent abroad to Edinburgh, Scotland to study at the expense of the Anti-Slavery League.

No documentation that we have at present tells the precise nature of the artist's studies abroad prior to 1842. However, to judge by the subjects of his paintings completed before 1862, it is fairly certain that he had picked up a good acquaintance with English literature, if indeed, he had not read considerably too in English as well as classical history. An illustration from Shakespeare's life and a composition based on an episode from one of his plays, three paintings on themes drawn from the poetry of Robert Burns and Walter Scott, and two other works inspired by events in classical history provide evidence for this assumption.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bearden, R. and Henderson H. 6 Black Masters of American Art. New York 1973.

Cavallo, A. S., "Uncle Tom and Little Eva, A Painting by Robert S. Duncanson."
Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts, XXX, 1, 1950-51.

(PARTIAL LISTING)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 10 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	16	715950	4330870
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C			

B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Lynne Gomez-Graves, Historical Projects Director

ORGANIZATION

Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation

DATE

30 June 1976

STREET & NUMBER

1420 N Street, Northwest, Suite 103

TELEPHONE

(202) 462-2519

CITY OR TOWN

Washington,

STATE

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS.

NATIONAL ___

STATE ___

LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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No concrete information concerning his early years of education indicate that Duncanson had any formal academic art training, therefore, we must assume that he was indeed a basically self-taught painter. This in itself was a major accomplishment given the lack of opportunities of that period.

Duncanson came to Cincinnati in 1842 and was advertised as the proprietor of a studio of daguerreotypy. It is therefore quite likely that when he arrived in Cincinnati, he had already acquired some knowledge of how to paint. Between the years 1845 and 1859 Duncanson was busily at work in Cincinnati and Detroit. In these cities he numbered among his patrons some of the first citizens. This was particularly true of Cincinnati, where, about 1848, he began that remarkable series of decorations on the walls of "Belmont," the then Nicholas Longworth mansion (now the Taft Museum), which are justly regarded as among the finest achievements of early Midwestern painting. In addition to that task, he was at work on the portraits of a number of Detroit and Cincinnati patrons. In fact, his commissions in Detroit, beginning in 1846, probably with the Berthelet family of that city, had so far detailed him that he found it necessary to take a studio there in 1849. Notices in Detroit periodicals of the day reveal that the artist participated in public exhibitions of painting and received honors and awards for his work.

In 1861 or 1862, Duncanson must have sailed once more for Scotland. Two contemporary references support this belief: the first, an article in The Cincinnati Gazette for May 30, 1961, contains a description of his painting, "The Lotus Eaters," based on a poem by Tennyson; while the second, a letter sent from London by Moncure D. Conway, published in the same newspaper, informs readers of Duncanson's successes in Scotland and London. Conway tells of meeting Duncanson by chance in the galleries of the South Kensington Museum and of learning from the artist something about his travels in Scotland where he had exhibited "The Lotus Eaters" and other paintings. Before leaving for Scotland, Duncanson had visited in Canada.²

It is thought that Duncanson was an accepted member of the Cincinnati Art Union if, indeed, he was not also a member of the Cincinnati Academy of Art. In the eyes of many Americans of that time Duncanson was regarded as "... the best landscape painter in the West"³

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Duncanson returned to Detroit in September, 1871, and there put on view several works including the famous "Ellen's Isle, Loch Katrine," a painting in which he did honor to a spot in Scotland made hallowed by the romantic genius of Sir Walter Scott. The exhibition was announced in a Detroit newspaper which gave out that "The celebrated paintings of Mr. Duncanson have arrived and will be on exhibition at the Gallery of the Western Arts Association tomorrow."⁴

Sometime prior to the closing of this exhibition the painter was overtaken by a severe depression. Some months later he died on the 21 December 1872. The artist's obituary published in The Detroit Tribune of Thursday, December 26, 1872. It sums up the main facts of Duncanson's life as given, no doubt, by his widow.

DEATH OF DUNCANSON THE ARTIST. -- One Saturday last Robert S. Duncanson, a celebrated artist of this country, died at the Michigan State Retreat He had acquired the idea that in all his artistic efforts he was aided by the spirit of one of the great masters, and this so worked upon his mind as to affect him not only mentally but physically. He was 55 years of age, a man of modest and retiring disposition, and a gentleman who was greatly esteemed by all who knew him. He was born in New York and for the past 30 years made Cincinnati his home. The honors received by him both at home and abroad were numerous. He painted the "Land of the Lotus Eaters," after Tennyson's poem, and when he visited Europe the poet laureate received him at his residence as a recognition of his appreciation of that great work. He also painted his "Recollections of Italy," an exceedingly complete production, and another of his greatest efforts was his painting of the "Paradise and the Peri," which was sometime since exhibited at the gallery of the Western Arts Association, and greatly admired by those of our citizens who had an opportunity of viewing it. Mr. Duncanson visited Europe several times . . . some of the pictures being purchased by the Duchess of Sutherland. He was an artist of rare accomplishments, and his death will be regretted by all lovers of his profession, and by every American who knew him either by reputation or personally.

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1. Combined information from James A. Parker's "Robert S. Duncanson, Midwestern Romantic Realist," Art in America, October 1951 and Cincinnati Art Museum, Robert S. Duncanson - A Centennial Exhibition, Cincinnati, 1972 gives the most recent and accurate information to date regarding Duncanson's oeuvre.
2. The Cincinnati Daily Gazette, November 24, 1865.
3. The Cincinnati Gazette, May 30, 1861.
4. The Detroit Daily Union, September 16, 1871.
5. The Detroit Tribune, December 26, 1872.

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Cincinnati Art Museum. Robert S. Duncanson - A Centennial Exhibition. Cincinnati, 1972.

Dover, Cedric. American Negro Art. Greenwich, Connecticut, 1960.

Dwight, Edward. "Art in Early Cincinnati," The Cincinnati Art Museum Bulletin (new series), 3, 4, August 1953, pp. 4-11.

Fine, Elsa Hornig. The Afro-American Artist: A Search for Identity. New York, 1973.

Porter, James A. "Robert S. Duncanson - Midwestern Romantic Realist," Art in America. October 1951.

_____. Modern Negro Art. New York, 1969.

The Cincinnati Daily Gazette. November 24, 1865.

The Cincinnati Gazette. May 30, 1861.

The Detroit Daily Union. September 16, 1871.

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Being in the City of Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio, in Section 12, Town 4, Fractional Range 1, of the Miami Purchase and more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at a point on the east line of Pike Street three (3) feet north of the south line of Fourth Street extended eastwardly, thence southwardly along the east line of Pike Street one hundred and fifty (150) feet and extending back between parallel lines from said frontage at right angles to the east line of Pike Street four hundred (400) feet more or less to Butler Street, being the same property Conveyed by Joseph Longworth et. al, to David Sinton on January 19, 1875, by deed recorded in Deed Book 434, page 589.

Also the following described property in the same Section beginning at a point on the east line of Pike Street three (3) feet north of the South line of Fourth Street extended eastwardly, thence northwardly along the east line of Pike Street thirty-seven (37) feet, thence eastwardly at right angles to Pike Street two hundred and twenty-three (223) feet; thence southwardly parallel to Pike Street thirty-seven (37) feet to the north line of the lot firstly described herein; thence westwardly along the north line of said lot two hundred and twenty-three (223) feet to the place of beginning, being the same property conveyed to Anna Sinton Taft by the A. H. Pugh Printing Company by deed dated May 15, 1911, and recorded in Deed Books 1040, page 492, of the Hamilton County records.

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Robert S. Duncanson
CONTINUATION SHEET Taft Museum ITEM NUMBER 11 PAGE Two (Researchers)

Dr. Leslie Hammond
Maryland Institute of Art
Baltimore , Md.