

5-MINUTE ART HISTORY

VOL. 1, ISSUE 1: AFRICAN-AMERICAN ARTISTS

ROBERT SELDON DUNCANSON

B. 1821, Fayette, NY

D. December 21, 1872, Detroit, MI



"LOVE IS MY PRINCIPLE, ORDER IS THE BASIS, AND PROGRESS IS THE END" ⁴

- Robert Seldon Duncanson, June 29, 1871

Find A Grave: [tinyurl.com/1025166m](https://www.findagrave.com/monument/1025166m)

Early Life

Duncanson was born in Fayette, Seneca Cty., NY., a descendant of freed slaves from Virginia. John Dean's father, Charles Duncanson, was a former slave from Virginia who was freed from bondage by his owner. His grandfather's knowledge of carpentry and house painting was passed down, later allowing him to develop as an artisan and later as an artist.¹ In about 1840, moved to a community of abolitionists and free black men north of Cincinnati called Mount Pleasant (later renamed Mount Healthy).²

Friends and Colleagues

James Presley Ball
James H. Beard
Charlotte Saunders Cushman
Nicholas Longworth
William Miller
Richard Sutton Rust
Junius R. Sloan
William Louis Sonntag
Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Training

He taught himself to draw and paint by copying prints and engravings, sketching from nature, and painting portraits.¹ He became known for his landscape paintings, in the genre of The Hudson River School.

Personal Life ⁶

Married:

1: Rebecca P. Graham*

b. 1826, d. 1850. Married aft. 1840

Children:

Reuben b. 1844, d. 1875 Mary
b. 1846, d. unknown Berta S. b.
and d. unknown

2. Phoebe Ann Taylor**

b. 1836, d. after 1872. Married bef. 1860

Children:

Milton Taylor b. 1860, d. 1888
Roberton b. 1868, d. unknown

* Rebecca may have been the daughter of Reuben Graham. Upon moving to Ohio, RSD lived with Graham and his family in Mount Healthy.¹

** Phoebe was the daughter of white slaveowner Milton Taylor and an unknown woman enslaved by him, with whom he had two other children.⁷

Collections

Amon Carter Museum of American Art (Fort Worth, TX), Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), Birmingham Museum of Art, Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati Museum Center, Cleveland Museum of Art, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (Bentonville, AR), Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens (Jacksonville, FL), Dayton Art Institute, Detroit Institute of Art, Five Colleges and Historic Deerfield Museum Consortium, Greenville County Museum of Art (SC), Hunter Museum of American Art (Chattanooga, TN) Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Milwaukee Art Museum, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, National Gallery of Art, National Gallery of Canada, Newark Museum of Art, Newfields Indianapolis Museum of Art Galleries, SCAD Museum of Art, Smithsonian American Art Museum, St. Louis Art Museum, Taft Museum of Art (Cincinnati, OH), Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Wadsworth Atheneum, Williams College Museum of Art



Landscape with Waterfall
1853

Oil on Canvas

Cincinnati Art Museum, First Floor, Gallery 108

Image source: Larissa A. Cullen, Jan 22, 2021; IMG_7456.HEIC

Take A Deeper Dive - Sources and Further Reading:

- 1: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_S._Duncanson
 - 2: <https://www.wcpo.com/news/insider/black-history-month-robert-s-duncanson-life-landscapes-were-sweeping-and-complex>
 - 3: <https://americanart.si.edu/artist/robert-s-duncanson-1353>
 - 4: <https://dailyjstor.org/marking-the-grave-of-the-first-african-american-landscape-artist/>
 - 5: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parker_Academy_\(Ohio\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parker_Academy_(Ohio))
 - 6: <https://www.ancestry.com/genealogy/records/robert-seldon-duncanson-24-pt9zpb>
 - 7: <https://cite.case.law/la-anny/28/367/>
- <https://www.artnews.com/feature/robert-s-duncanson-landscape-painter-who-was-he-1234582541/>
<http://library.cincymuseum.org/topics/l/files/longworth/hpsobull-v13-n3-rob-203.pdf>
<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/15/arts/design/painter-robert-s-duncanson-and-2-jewelry-exhibitions.html>
<https://parkeracademy-nsfreu.weebly.com/phoebeanntaylorlordduncansonhistory.html>

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