

OBJECT of the month

February 2022

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to February's "Object of the Month" series. My name is Fabienne. I am a Museum Guide at the Dayton Art Institute. This is a painting by Robert S. Duncanson titled, *Mayan Ruins, Yucatán*, painted in 1848. What do you think might have inspired this painting?



Many artists were not able to travel widely so they depended on photographers and engravings of other artists who were able to travel. This engraving by Frederick Catherwood is believed to have inspired *Mayan Ruins, Yucatán*. Notice the similarities between the two. The practice of copying an engraving was and still is an acceptable form of inspiration.

Notice the classical treatment of the composition: the Mayan ruin being the center focus; the palm trees and the building, on each side in the foreground, frame the center image.

How would you describe Duncanson's use of scale? Perspective is a way artists help viewers understand scale. For example, the two figures in the foreground and the group of figures at the base of the temple help give us a sense of scale and perspective within the painting. The closer the figures, the larger they appear; the farther away, the smaller they are.

Duncanson's use of atmospheric perspective also help by giving a mood and a sense of depth to the scene. The horizon fades into a bluish foggy haze which lends a bit of mystery to the painting. Right away we intuitively know it is either morning or evening. You can sense the warmth of the golden sunlight washing over the temple stones.

Robert S. Duncanson is a self-taught artist born in Seneca County, New York to an African American mother and a Scottish father. Duncanson moved to Cincinnati, Ohio around 1840. Here, he worked with and was supported by abolitionists in Ohio. By the 1850s, Cincinnati was a major regional arts center with many cultural opportunities for artists. By the 1860s, the American Press had proclaimed Duncanson to be the, "best landscape painter in the West". His paintings rivaled those of Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand and Frederick Kensett. These renowned painters were part of the original Hudson River School, a group of artists who focused on romanticizing nature of the new America.

Duncanson's pastoral landscapes demonstrate his belief in nature's harmony and beauty, full of peace and wonder. Making Him one of the most famous Midwest romantic realist painters of his time.

DAYTON ART INSTITUTE

I'll leave you with a fun fact: *Landscape with Rainbow* by Robert S. Duncanson was recently selected as the 59th Inauguration Painting. If you'd like to discover the majesty of this artwork in-person, you'll find it in the Dayton Power and Light Gallery of 19th Century American Art, Gallery 207. Thank you for tuning in and be sure to check back soon for a new "Object of the Month".

END TRANSCRIPT

Click [here](#) to access the video presentation.

FEATURED ARTWORKS*

Frederick Catherwood (English, 1799–1854), *Kabah*, 1843, etching. The New York Public Library, NY. Rare Book Division, b12660131

William Notman (Canadian, born in Scotland 1836–1891), *Robert S. Duncanson, artist*, *Montreal, QC, 1864*, 1864, silver salts on paper mounted on paper – Albumen process. McCord Museum, QC. Purchase from Associated Screen News Ltd., I-11978.1 © McCord Museum

Edward Beyer (American, 1820–1865), *View of Cincinnati*, 1853, oil on canvas. Dayton Art Institute, OH. Museum purchase with funds provided by the James F. Dicke Family, 1999.89

Artist unknown, *Cincinnati in the 1880s* via miamioh.edu

Thomas Cole (American, 1801–1848), *The Return*, 1837, oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, D.C. Corcoran Collection, Gift of William Wilson Corcoran, 2014.79.12

Asher B. Durand (American, 1796–1886), *Chocorua Peak*, 1855, oil on canvas. RISD Museum, RI. Gift of Rhode Island Art Association, 52.104

John Frederick Kensett (American, 1816–1872), *Summer Day on Conesus Lake*, 1870, oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. Bequest of Collis P. Huntington, 1900, 25.110.5

Robert S. Duncanson (American, 1821–1872), *Ellen's Isle, Loch Katrine*, 1871, oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts, MI. Gift of the Estate of Ralzemond D. Parker, F80.215

Robert S. Duncanson (American, 1821–1872), *Landscape with Cows Watering in a Stream*, 1871, oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence A. Fleischman, 1974, 1974.359

Robert S. Duncanson (American, 1821–1872), *A Dream of Italy*, 1865, oil on canvas. Birmingham Museum of Art, AL. Collection of the Art Fund, Inc., at the Birmingham Museum of Art, AFI, 10.2009

Robert S. Duncanson (American, 1821–1872), *Landscape with Rainbow*, 1859, oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, D.C. Gift of Leonard and Paula Granoff, 1983.95.160

Screenshot taken from "WATCH: Sen. Roy Blunt presents painting to Biden in honor of inauguration". YouTube, uploaded by PBS NewsHour, January 20, 2021, https://youtu.be/o_uUkT-yqG4

MEDIA CREDITS*

nypl.org
musee-mccord.qc.ca
miamioh.edu
nga.gov
risdmuseum.org
metmuseum.org

dia.org
metmuseum.org
artsbma.org
americanart.si.edu
youtube.com

**Images used for educational purposes only*

QUESTIONS?
edu@daytonart.org