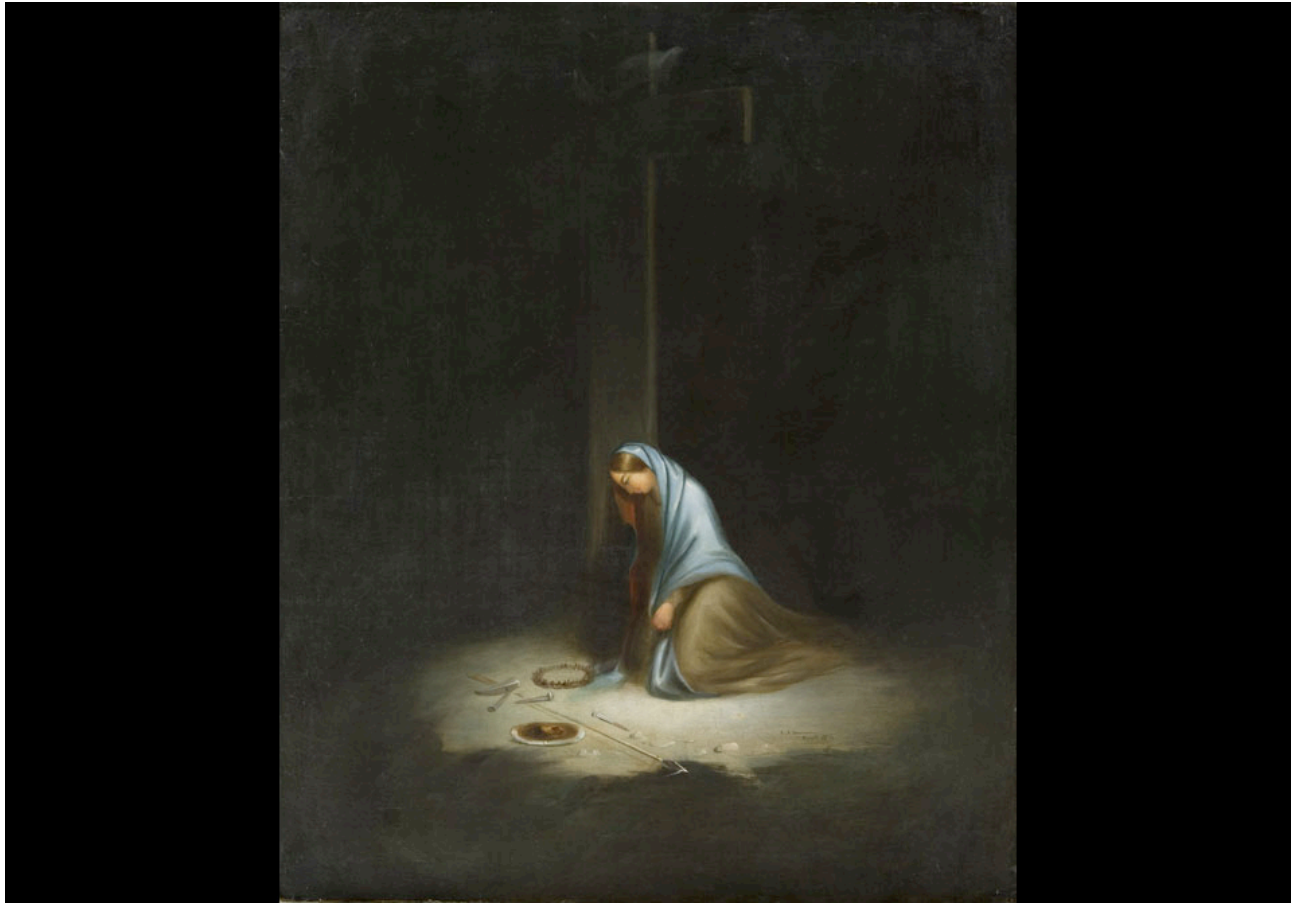


Rare Treasure Found in Basement now Hangs at Detroit Institute of Arts



At the Foot of the Cross, Robert Scott Duncanson, 1846, oil on canvas.

DETROIT, MI.- The [Detroit Institute of Arts](#) (DIA) recently put on display a rare biblical painting by 19th century African American artist Robert Scott Duncanson. The painting was unknown to scholars of work by the internationally acclaimed artist until its discovery approximately five years ago in a basement at University of Detroit Mercy (UDM). The painting is owned by the Jesuit Community at UDM, and is on long-term loan to the museum.

"When we found an old damaged painting in our basement a few years ago, I could never have imagined that today it would be hanging on a wall at the DIA, said Rev. Gary Wright, S.J., rector of UDM Jesuit Community and director, University Ministry, UDM. "The Jesuit Community at UDM wanted to be able to share this treasure of our city's African-American heritage with the whole community. This has been a great experience of two venerable Detroit institutions working together so that the whole community can now enjoy this piece of our history."

Duncanson (1821-1872) is considered one of the best landscape artists of his time, but he also painted portraits and genre paintings. In 1845, he came to Detroit in search of commissions and painted portraits of prominent Detroit citizens, such as Henri Berthelet and his young grandson, William. He maintained a studio in downtown Detroit and advertised his talents in the Detroit Free Press. Before his departure in 1846, the Detroit Daily Advertiser remarked favorably on Duncanson's skills as a painter. The artist would return to the area many times in his life, making Detroit and Cincinnati his primary residences.

The recently discovered painting, in which he explores a religious subject, was executed by the artist during his formative years when, like many emerging artists, he went through a period of experimentation. It is signed by Duncanson and dated 1846, a year when he is known to have worked in Detroit.

"The General Motors Center for African American Art is delighted that the Jesuit Community at UDM has loaned the painting to the DIA," said Graham W. J. Beal, DIA director. "This new addition to the museum's 19th-century African American art gallery, alongside Duncanson's portrait, still-life, genre, and landscape paintings, enriches the DIA's presentation of this important artist with significant ties to Detroit."


Much research remains to be done on At the Foot of the Cross. The discovery of this rare painting will provide further insight into the development of Duncanson's analytical, technical, and stylistic skills. It is relevant to American art history in general because it reveals Duncanson's exploration of Christian art, for which there was no distinct American tradition in the 19th century.

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