



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

700 Third Avenue · 6th floor · Seattle, Washington 98104 · (206)684-0228

LPB 53/91

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

**Name and Address of Property:** James W. Washington, Jr. Home and Studio  
1816 - 26th Avenue  
Seattle, Washington

**Legal Description:** Yesler's 2nd Addition, Block 45, Lots 5 and 6

At the public hearing held on March 20, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the James W. Washington, Jr. Home and Studio as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following criteria of Ordinance 106348:

Section 3.01(2): It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the city, state, or nation;

Section 3.01(3): It is associated in a significant way with a significant aspect of the cultural, political, or economic heritage of the community, city, state or nation;

### Description

The James Washington Home is a 1918 Craftsman bungalow located near the northeast corner of 26th Avenue and Howell Street, in the Central District. Its setting is residential and reflects sparse development that occurred in this area early in the century as well as rapid mid-century infill. Although modestly scaled, the bungalow is richly detailed inside and out, and except for aluminum siding applied to the exterior in 1962, is virtually unaltered.

The Washington Home is rectangular and measures approximately 25' x 34'. It has a front facing gable roof with an attached partial width gable roof porch. The eaves have a wide overhang with exposed rafter-ends while the rakes are flared slightly and have decorative sawn work at the ends. False beams decorate horizontal members and triangular knee braces embellish the eaves. Windows are double hung Craftsman-style sash with beveled leaded glass panels in

the upper sash. Originally clad in alternating courses of wooden shingles, the Washington Home was re-sided with aluminum siding in 1962; attached to the aluminum siding were black metal security bars, installed over most of the windows. A year earlier, a small rear porch on the northeast corner of the house was enclosed to expand the kitchen. Porch architraves are paneled and arch gently into battered wooden columns which rest on brick piers. The porch and steps are cement and brick. An exterior brick chimney rises on the south side of the house. It is a narrow stack-like chimney decorated at the top with projecting headers.

The interior of the house is also exemplary of the type. It has hardwood floors, panelled walls, a built-in dining room buffet and matching built-in book cases, which in some bungalow pattern books are referred to as china closets. Inside, a small entrance hall is paneled to picture molding height with stained fir. The dining room and a small adjacent study are also paneled. Other walls and ceilings are plaster except the kitchen splash board which was tiled by Mr. Washington. A living room-dining room combination and small study comprise the south side of the house. The entrance hall, a bedroom and the kitchen are on the north side. The living room and dining room are divided by handsome original cabinets with striking beveled, leaded glass doors. Built-in cabinets in the dining room have matching doors. Another striking feature is the living room fireplace surround which is tiled in highly decorative glazed tile atypical of the Craftsman style. It appears that the fireplace and mantel were designed for the tile suggesting that the tile may have been salvaged from an earlier house or may have had some other personal meaning to the builder.

The floor plan is typical of bungalow plans advertised in publications such as Jud Yoho's Bungalow Magazine and characterizes the modest dwellings built in Seattle in abundance between 1910 and 1920.

According to City Directories, the E.A. Gustafsons were living at this location by 1916, and permit records confirm that a frame dwelling was built on lot 6 in 1902. At this writing, we do not know the fate of this house, but on April 5, 1918, Gustafson applied to the City for a permit to build on lot 5. According to the 1918 building permit, Gustafson was both architect and builder of his house which was estimated to cost \$2,000. An old photograph indicates that Gustafson was Swedish and had been a ship's captain, but Seattle City Directories list him as a carpenter. The fine workmanship and detail on Gustafson's bungalow are self-evident; however, there is no information to link Gustafson with any specific architect or builder in Seattle's prolific bungalow industry. Gustafson lived at 1816'- 26th Avenue until his death in 1941 or 1942. His wife, Annie, a seamstress, remained at this address until 1944 when the house was sold to A. N. Sandridge. Sandridge sold to the Washingtons in 1945.

For the first twenty years of his artistic career in Seattle, Mr. Washington's studio was housed in the basement of his home. In 1965, architect William Bain assisted Washington in designing a studio which was built behind his house. Harrison Overturff was the contractor for the studio. Tucked neatly below the house on the steep eastern slope of the lot, the functional studio is essentially a two-story contemporary box cleverly equipped to accommodate Dr. Washington's sometimes monumental sculptures.

The studio is given vertical emphasis by single light fixed windows set in white floor-to-ceiling panels. Flush mounted wood vertical siding covers the balance of the exterior. The north wall consists of seven huge plate glass windows which flood the studio with light.

The east side of the building is equipped with a mechanism for lifting and moving large sculptures. A pair of floor-to-ceiling double doors center the wall. A steel I-beam extends the width of the studio and projects beyond the exterior wall over the doors. Pulleys attached to the beam allow large media to be lifted from ground level and brought inside for sculpting.

The studio is entered from the west side on the second level which is an office/reception area. A balcony along the northern perimeter of the room opens to the work area below. The first level includes studio space and restrooms and is heated by a large "Franklin" stove with brick chimney wall. The basement level has additional work space as well as a single car garage.

The James Washington Home and Studio are united on the site by walkways and wooden steps which link the house, a greenhouse, the studio and an open car shed. Thick plantings, a garden pool, topiary and intermittent displays of stone and wooden sculptures further characterize the site which is delineated by wood and metal fencing on all sides. Mature foundation plantings and an unusually pruned front hedge are notable in the landscape.

### **Criteria 2 and 3: Association with James W. Washington, Jr. and Cultural Significance**

James W. Washington, Jr. is a celebrated artist whose works are known and exhibited throughout the nation. Born in Gloster, Mississippi, James W. Washington, Jr. began painting and drawing in his early teens, although he had little, if any, formal artistic training. As a teenager he was hired in 1927 as a deckhand on a Mississippi riverboat, beginning over three decades of civilian employment by the U.S. government. His first exhibition of paintings was in 1938 for the WPA in Vicksburg. He moved to Little Rock, Arkansas in 1941, and then worked for the Army's orthopedic division at Camp Robinson. By this time, he had come to view government employment as a means to support his artistic avocation, looking forward to the day that he could devote all of his time to his art. In 1943, he married Janie Miller, and they both moved to Washington State in 1944.

The Washingtons came to Washington State from Arkansas in 1944 because of his employment at the Bremerton Naval Yard. The next year they bought the bungalow on 26th Avenue and moved to Seattle because church and civic work were made too difficult by the commute from Bremerton. They have lived in this house on 26th Avenue ever since.

Washington worked full time at his day job until 1960, but during those 15 previous years established contact with members of the Northwest School and began exhibiting his work throughout the United States. His life took a dramatic turn in 1952 when Washington began exploring granite sculpting techniques and developing specialized tools for the process.

In 1960, Dr. Washington left his day job and for the last thirty years, has devoted himself to reaching his fullest potential and to encouraging others to find "what they are here on earth for; what they have to work with and how to fulfill human potential as proclaimed in the Bible." As he said of one of his monumental sculptures, "it is dedicated to all children who are struggling to find truth in this world of chaos." That is his testimony in stone.

Washington's tender and often symbolic natural forms sculpted from stone have been shown all over the world. Here in Seattle, public examples of his work may be seen at the Odessa Brown Clinic, on Ballard Avenue in Ballard, at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers, at the Seattle Art Museum and at Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

In 1989, the Bellevue Art Museum presented a retrospective exhibit honoring James W. Washington's fiftieth year of art work. The catalog for that exhibit explained in the introduction that while the catalog's essay served to place Washington in the context of 20th Century American and Northwest Art, it "wisely shows that the artist's true visionary gifts make him unique -- that his art illustrates his own spiritual journey rather than any development or trend in the art world." Although Washington's art has been recognized as contributing to the Northwest School of Art, which is rooted in native and eastern philosophy, Dr. Washington has been set apart by the spirituality of his life and work. The varied imagery and content in Washington's artwork includes animals and human figures in naturalistic and symbolic forms, portraits of historical and biblical figures, and his "creation" and "kinship" works containing universal symbols. Washington's work scans a variety of sizes and mediums, from small paintings to large monumental public sculptures in stone.

Dr. Washington has been honored on numerous occasions by awards for his work and by citations for his contributions to the city, state and nation. Always there is mention how his work and his goodness as a person has inspired and enriched the lives of those it has touched. Dr. Washington says that the two are inseparable since his quest in life has been to find his greatest potential as a human being. He discovered that art was his "tangent" and thus the medium through which he could learn about himself and others.

His list of achievements is long. From a prize in sculpture at the 1962 Seattle World's Fair to an exhibit at Expo '70 in Japan; from service on the Washington State Council on the Arts to service in the Artists-in-the School Program, and from international travels advocating the universal language of art to local treks with a Boy Scout troop, Dr. Washington's presence has been felt and honored almost since his arrival in Seattle in 1944.

Twice appointed to the State Arts Commission under Governors Rosellini and Evans, Dr. Washington was also chosen as one of one-hundred Washington citizens selected for the Washington State Centennial Hall of Honor. The Hall of Honor recognized those citizens making the greatest contribution to Washington's 100 year statehood. In 1975, Dr. Washington was honored with a Doctorate of Fine Art Degree from the Center for Urban-Black Studies in Berkeley.

Additionally, Dr. Washington has been cited in numerous publications including the following:

- 1960 American Negro Art
- 1963 International Directory of Arts
- 1963 Who's Who in American Art
- 1968 Dictionary of Contemporary American Art
- 1972 International Who's Who in Art and Antiques
- 1973 Who's Who in America
- 1977 Who's Who Among Blacks in American
- 1977 American Artist
- 1978 Who's Who in the World
- 1981 250 Years of Afro-American Art: An Annotated Bibliography
- 1984 Dictionary of American Sculptors

A special commendation from Governor Evans represents Dr. Washington's many honors. It was given to him "for outstanding accomplishment in sculpture" and recognized that "Washington's works are vivid reactions to life and are complete and unified in his own style, a style which is intimate, captivating and filled with spiritual force."

Representative of his significance to the City of Seattle was the declaration of May 20, 1973 as "James W. Washington, Jr. Day" in honor of his long-standing cultural and spiritual contributions". In making the announcement, Mayor Wes Uhlman remarked that "painter and sculptor, James W. Washington, Jr. is known not only throughout his resident City of Seattle but nationally and internationally as an artist of capability and foresight."

The house and studio at 1816 - 26th Avenue in Seattle are the only structures intimately associated with the life and work of James W. Washington, Jr.

**The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:**

the exteriors of both the house and studio, the entire site, and the following features of the building interiors: the vestibule, living room, dining room and study of the house interior, and the first and second floors of the studio interior.

**Issued:** April 2, 1991



Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: Dr. James W. Washington, Jr.  
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