



BENTON'S BENTONS

BENTON'S BENTONS

Selections from The Thomas Hart Benton and Rita P. Benton Trusts

Catalogue and essays by Elizabeth Broun, Douglas Hyland, and
Marilyn Stokstad

SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

LAWRENCE

Published in conjunction with the exhibition of Benton's Bentons at the Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, July 13 – September 13, 1980. The exhibition was coordinated by Douglas Hyland.

"Benton's Bentons" will be toured under the auspices of Mid-America Arts Alliance beginning in Fall, 1981.



Mid-America Arts Alliance, headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri, works to bring arts and audiences together in mid-America. M-AAA is a regional partnership of private citizens, corporations, the five state arts agencies of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

*Charles C. Eckardt
Director*

CONTENTS

7 PREFACE

Charles C. Eldredge

8 INTRODUCTION

Lyman Field

10 BENTON AND EUROPEAN MODERNISM

Elizabeth Broun

22 BENTON'S IMAGES OF AMERICAN LABOR

Douglas Hyland

32 EL GRECO IN THE OZARKS

Marilyn Stokstad

49 COLORPLATES

57 CATALOGUE

70 ILLUSTRATIONS

PREFACE

RARE IS THE ARTIST WHO, in his lifetime, enjoys the adulation which was Thomas Hart Benton's. And rare is the artist who suffers such vilification as did he. Benton's flamboyant personality and his (sometimes outrageously) candid views on all manner of subjects insured that the debate about the artist would survive as long as he was with us. Now, five years after his death, it is perhaps time to review his artistic achievements, and to revalidate his position as one of the major personalities in the annals of American art.

The present exhibition includes only "Benton's Bentons," that is, artworks which remained with the artist and his family throughout Benton's long lifetime. Some were retained because of their singular importance and accomplishment, others because they were preliminaries for other projects now in numerous museum and private collections or on public walls. In both cases, however, Benton's Bentons provide new insights into a remarkable and prolific career.

This exhibition could not have resulted without the full cooperation of the Thomas Hart Benton and Rita P. Benton Trusts. I am particularly grateful to Lyman Field, Esq., a long-time friend of the painter and the personal trustee of the Benton estate, who has generously assisted in this venture from the outset. The gracious introduction which Mr. Field provided for this catalogue was drawn from the eulogy which he delivered for his friend in 1975. The generous cooperation of the United Missouri Bank of Kansas City and its Trust Department is also gratefully acknowledged. Douglas Gilmore was particularly helpful in coordinating the many aspects of the exhibition. The exhibition and this publication were generously funded by a special grant from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and by the Corporate and Business Members of the Spencer Museum. Both the lenders and the donors share my hope that in studying Benton's Bentons a new appreciation may be gained for one of the most exceptional careers in the history of American painting.

Charles C. Eldredge
Director

CATALOGUE

*From The Thomas Hart Benton
and Rita P. Benton Trusts*

- 1 SELF-PORTRAIT, 1909
Oil on canvas, 50.8 cm. x 40.9 cm. (20" x 16 1/8")
Signed, lower right: Benton
Inscribed, reverse: Painted winter of 1909-10 in Paris
Benton
(page 66)
- 2 CHATAIGNIER-CONTRE SOLEIL, 1910
Oil on canvas, 41.3 cm. x 50.8 cm. (16 1/4" x 20")
Inscribed, reverse: This impressionist study painted by
me in August 1910 near Tulle in the south of France
(MIDI) Thomas H. Benton
- 3 LANDSCAPE, 1912
Oil on paper, 12.7 cm. x 14.2 cm. (5" x 5 5/8")
Signed, lower center: Benton
Inscribed, reverse: Oil on paper Spring of 1912 Neosho,
Mo. Mounted 1971 Benton
- 4 SELF-PORTRAIT, 1912
Oil on canvas over masonite, 80 cm. x 58.4 cm.
(31 1/2" x 23")
Signed, lower right: Benton 1912
- 5 STILL LIFE WITH FRUIT, 1916 or 17
Oil on cardboard, 24.5 cm. x 25.8 cm. (9 5/8" x
10 1/8")
Signed, lower right: B
Inscribed, reverse: Painted 1916 or 17
- 6 STILL LIFE, 1917
Oil on canvas, 46.3 cm. x 45.4 cm. (18 1/4" x 17 7/8")
Signed, center right edge: B.
- 7 CONSTRUCTIVIST STILL LIFE, 1917-18
Oil on cardboard, 31.5 cm. x 20.3 cm. (12 3/8" x 8")
Signed, lower right: Benton
Inscribed, reverse on tape: Constructivist Still Life 1918
oil, Winter 1917-18
(page 10)
- 8 STUDY FOR "EMBARKATION," ca. 1918
Oil on masonite, 17.8 cm. x 26.4 cm. (7" x 10 3/8")
Signed, lower right: Benton

P A I N T I N G S

- 9 RHYTHMIC CONSTRUCTION, 1919
Oil on canvas, 71 cm. x 55.8 cm. (28" x 22")
Signed, upper right: Benton
Inscribed, reverse: "Rythmic [sic] Construction" First
painted 1919—Distemper Remounted and repaired
1933-34 (winter of) Old varnish removed 1959 some
scratches then repaired Benton '59
(*Colorplate III, page 51*)
- 10 THE DRILLERS, 1921
Oil on canvas, 61 cm. x 45.7 cm. (24" x 18")
Signed, lower right: Benton '21
(*page 28*)
- 11 LUMBER MILL, 1928
Tempera glazed with oil on masonite, 61 cm. x 76.2 cm.
(24" x 30")
Signed, lower left: Benton
Inscribed, reverse: 1928
- 12 INDUSTRY, ca. 1930
Oil on varnished paper, 26.7 cm. x 22.9 cm. (9" x
10 1/2")
(*page 26*)
- 13 STRIKE, ca. 1931
Oil on tin on masonite, 39.1 cm. x 33.7 cm. (13 1/4" x
15 3/8")
Signed, lower left: Benton
(*page 30*)
- 14 TWELVE PLANES AND A SILVER EGG, 1934
Egg tempera on board, 28.9 cm. x 19 cm. (11 3/8" x
7 1/2")
Signed, lower right: Benton
(*page 13*)
- 15 THE FLIGHT OF THE THIELENS, 1938
Oil on canvas, 65.7 cm. x 93.7 cm. (25 7/8" x 36 7/8")
Signed, lower right: Benton
(*Colorplate V, page 53*)
- 16 STILL LIFE WITH ONE RED ROSE, 1943
Tempera with oil glaze on panel, 69.2 cm. x 49.5 cm.
(27 1/4" x 19 1/2")
Signed, lower left: Benton 1943
Inscribed, reverse: Rita's birthday 1943

- 17 SUGAR CANE, 1943
Oil-tempera on canvas, 81.3 cm. x 123.2 cm. (32" x 48 1/2")
Signed, lower left: Benton '43
(*Colorplate 1, page 49*)
- 18 CUBIST STILL LIFE, 1944
Oil on panel, 17.2 cm. x 10.8 cm. (6 3/4" x 4 1/4")
- 19 AFTER MANY SPRINGS, 1945 (first version)
Oil and tempera on masonite, 76.2 cm. x 56.5 cm.
(30" x 22 1/4")
Signed, lower left: Benton '45
- 20 FANTASY, 1945
Oil and tempera on board, 55.2 cm. x 38.1 cm.
(21 3/4" x 15")
Signed, lower right: '45
(*page 68*)
- 21 THE APPLE OF DISCORD, ca. 1948
Tempera glazed with oil on mahogany panel, 85.4 cm. x 109.8 cm. (33 5/8" x 43 1/4")
Signed, lower left: Benton '49
- 22 HIGH PLAINS, 1953
Oil on canvas, 48 cm. x 67.7 cm. (18 7/8" x 26 5/8")
Signed, lower right: Benton '53
- 23 SHEEPHERDER, 1955-60
Oil on canvas, 121.9 cm. x 167.6 cm. (48" x 66")
Signed, lower right: Benton
- 24 CARL SANDBURG, 1956
Tempera on board, 81.3 cm. x 55.9 cm. (32" x 22")
Signed, lower left: Benton '56
(*page 67*)
- 25 THE DESERT, 1956
Tempera on panel, 53.3 cm. x 72.4 cm. (21" x 28 1/2")
Signed, lower left: Benton '56
(*page 69*)
- 26 STUDY FOR "JESSIE PLAYING THE GUITAR,"
1957
Oil on masonite, 38.1 cm. x 30.5 cm. (15" x 12")
Signed, lower left: Benton

- 27 BANANAS, PEANUTS AND APPLES, 1961
Oil on canvas, 23.2 cm. x 31.1 cm. (9 1/8" x 12 1/4")
Signed, lower right: Benton '61
- 28 STANTON MACDONALD-WRIGHT, 1961-62
Oil on canvas, 102.2 cm. x 89.5 cm. (40 1/4" x 35 1/4")
Signed, lower right: Benton '61-62
(*Colorplate II, page 50*)
- 29 STILL LIFE WITH SILVER VASE, 1962
Oil on canvas board, 60.6 cm. x 40.6 cm. (23 7/8" x 16")
Signed, lower right: Benton '62
(*Colorplate VIII, page 56*)
- 30 FIRE ON THE TRACKS, ca. 1965
Oil glazes and egg tempera on pressed board, 67.1 cm. x 88.6 cm. (26 7/16" x 34 7/8")
(*Colorplate IV, page 52*)
- 31 COUNTY FAIR, 1967
Egg tempera on watercolor paper, 61 cm. x 81.3 cm. (24" x 32")
Signed, lower right: Benton '67
Inscribed, reverse: County Fair West Tisbury, Mass.
- 32 SELF-PORTRAIT, 1970
Polymer tempera on canvas, 101.6 cm. x 76.2 cm. (40" x 30")
Signed, lower left: Benton '70
(*Cover*)
- 33 FANTASY, 1971
Oil on board, 22.9 cm. x 17.8 cm. (9" x 7")
Signed, lower right: Benton '71
- 34 THE OLD PRESIDENT, 1971
Tempera on panel, 68.6 cm. x 54 cm. (27" x 21 1/4")
Signed, lower right: Benton '71
- 35 STUDY FOR "POTIPHAR'S WIFE," 1971
Oil on canvas, 40 cm. x 49.5 cm. (15 3/4" x 19 1/2")
Signed, lower right: Benton 1971
- 36 BLUE AND WHITE VASE, 1972
Oil on masonite, 74.9 cm. x 49.5 cm. (29 1/2" x 19 1/2")
Signed, lower left: Benton '72
Inscribed, reverse: Gayhead Still Life first version 1972

- 37 JON BOAT, 1973
Egg tempera and acrylic on canvas board, 70.3 cm. x
93.2 cm. (27 5/8" x 36 5/8")
Signed, lower left: Benton '73
Inscribed, reverse: "Jon Boat" Buffalo River, 1973
(*Colorplate VII, page 55*)
- 38 YOUTH MUSIC, 1974
Oil on masonite, 38.7 cm. x 47.6 cm. (15 1/4" x
18 3/4")
Signed, lower right: Benton
Inscribed, reverse: Youth Music no. 1 '74
(*page 19*)
- 39 DEMONSTRATION No. 3, 1974
Tempera on masonite, 23.5 cm. x 15.6 cm. (9 1/4" x
6 1/8")
Signed, lower left: Benton '74
(*page 18*)
- 40 SELF-PORTRAIT, 1974
Oil on canvas, 76.2 cm. x 63.5 cm. (30" x 25")
Signed, lower right: Benton '74
- 41 ABSTRACTION (MACHINE)
Oil on masonite, 24.1 cm. x 16.5 cm. (9 1/2" x 6 1/2")
Signed, lower left: Benton
- 42 ABSTRACTION No. 7
Oil on tin, 17.6 cm. x 10.8 cm. (6 15/16" x 4 1/4")
Signed, lower right: Benton
- 43 ADAM AND EVE
Oil on masonite, 18.5 cm. x 14.5 cm. (7 1/4" x
5 11/16")
Signed, lower left: Benton
(*Colorplate VI, page 54*)
- 44 CONSTRUCTION
Oil on board, 55.2 cm. x 50.8 cm. (21 3/4" x 20")
Signed, upper right: Benton
- 45 DEATH AND THE WOODCUTTER
Oil on canvas, 66.7 cm. x 78.5 cm. (26 1/4" x 30 7/8")
Signed, lower right: Benton
(*page 41*)

AMERICAN HISTORICAL EPIC, 1925

(Installed in the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, Missouri, 1976)

46 *Preliminary Study*

Oil and tempera on paper, 48.2 cm. x 51.4 cm. (19" x 21 1/4")

Signed, lower right: Benton '25

AMERICA TODAY, 1929-30

(New School for Social Research, New York City)

47 *Preliminary Study A*

Oil on masonite, 38.1 cm. x 59.7 cm. (15" x 23 1/2")

Signed, lower right: Benton

48 *Preliminary Study B*

Oil on masonite, 38.1 cm. x 59.7 cm. (15" x 23 1/2")

THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF INDIANA, 1933

(Indiana University Auditorium, Bloomington, Indiana)

49 *Cubist Study of Volumes in Space*

Pencil, ink, and wash, 26.7 cm. x 53.4 cm. (10 1/2" x 21 1/4")

Signed, lower right: Benton

ACHELOUS AND HERCULES, 1946-47

(Harzfeld's Department Store, Kansas City, Missouri)

50 *Finished Study*

Oil on pressboard, 11.5 cm. x 43 cm. (4 1/2" x 16 7/8")

Signed, lower left: Benton

OLD KANSAS CITY, 1955-56

(The River Club, Kansas City, Missouri)

51 *Finished Study*

Acrylic emulsion on pressed wood, 22.5 cm. x 37 cm. (8 7/8" x 14 9/16")

Signed, lower left: Benton '55

FATHER HENNEPIN AT NIAGARA FALLS, 1959-61

(Power Authority of the State of New York at Niagara Falls)

52 *Preliminary Study*

Oil on board, 16.5 cm. x 50.8 cm. (6 1/2" x 20")

TURN OF THE CENTURY JOPLIN, 1972
(The Municipal Building in Joplin, Missouri)

- 53 *Finished Study*
Oil on masonite, 40.2 cm. x 91.3 cm. (15 3/4" x 36 1/8")
Signed, lower right: Benton
Inscribed, reverse: Joplin Mural '72

THE SOURCES OF COUNTRY MUSIC, 1974-75
(The Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum, Nashville, Tennessee)

- 54 *Finished Study*
Tempera on board, 37.1 cm. x 61.5 cm. (14 5/8" x 24 1/4")
(*frontispiece*)
- 55 *Preliminary Study, 1974*
Oil on watercolor paper, 45.7 cm. x 61 cm. (18" x 24")
Signed, lower right: Benton '74
- 56 *Compositional Sketch*
Pen and wash on tracing paper, 20 cm. x 31.4 cm. (7 7/8" x 12 3/8")
- 57 *Squared Compositional Sketch*
Pencil on paper, 43.8 cm. x 66 cm. (17 1/4" x 26")
- 58 *Study of Guitar Player*
Pencil on paper, 57.2 cm. x 35.6 cm. (22 1/4" x 14")
Inscribed, lower right: Old Joe Clark Streets of Laredo
- 59 *Compositional Model*
Oil-based modeling clay, H. 49 cm. x W. 84 cm. x D. 47.5 cm.
(19 1/4" x 33" x 18 5/8")
(*page 13*)

- 60 LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES, 1907
Pen on paper, 31.4 cm. x 16.5 cm. (12 3/8" x 6 1/2")
Signed, lower right: T. H. Benton '07
- 61 NEGRO, 1926
Watercolor on paper (watercolor on verso), 35.6 cm. x
27.6 cm. (14" x 10 7/8")
Signed, lower right: Benton
- 62 TROUBLE ON THE PICKET LINE, ca. 1930
Ink and crayon, 28.4 cm. x 38.6 cm. (11 3/16" x
15 3/16")
Signed, lower right: Benton
(page 30)
- 63 THE ARMY OF LABOR, ca. 1930
Ink and crayon on gray paper, 18.3 cm. x 27.5 cm.
(7 3/16" x 10 3/16")
Signed, lower right: Benton
(page 28)
- 64 FACTORY INTERIOR, ca. 1930
Pencil and ink on newsprint, 25.4 cm. x 20.3 cm. (10" x
8")
Signed, lower right: Benton
- 65 FACTORY INTERIOR, ca. 1930
Pencil, ink and wash on paper, 30.2 cm. x 22.9 cm.
(11 7/8" x 9")
Signed, lower right: Benton
(page 29)
- 66 STUDY FOR "PERSEPHONE," ca. 1938
Pencil on paper, 85.7 cm. x 62.2 cm. (33 3/4" x
24 1/2")
- 67 IMPROVISATION – "THE OTHER SIDE OF
NOWHERE," 1969
Watercolor on paper, 29.9 cm. x 36.5 cm. (11 3/4" x
14")
Signed, lower right: Benton
(page 72)
- 68 ABSTRACTION
Oil on paper, 21 cm. x 15.9 cm. (8 1/4" x 6 1/4")
Signed, lower left: Benton
- 69 STUDY AFTER EL GRECO
Pencil and ink on paper, 42.6 cm. x 34.9 cm. (16 3/4" x
13 3/4")
(page 36)

- 70 STUDY AFTER EL GRECO—ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS
Pencil on paper, 33 cm. x 22.4 cm. (13" x 8 13/16")
Signed, lower right: Benton
(page 36)
- 71 STUDY AFTER EL GRECO—THE OPENING OF THE 5TH SEAL
Pencil and ballpoint, 33 cm. x 22.4 cm.
(13" x 8 13/16")
Signed, lower right: Benton
(page 36)
- 72 STUDY AFTER GIOTTO
Pencil and crayon on paper, 35.1 cm. x 42.6 cm.
(13 13/16" x 16 3/4")
(page 16)
- 73 STUDY AFTER RUBENS
Pencil, ink, white tempera on paper, 42.9 cm. x 35.1 cm.
(16 7/8" x 13 13/16")
(page 16)
- 74 UNTITLED
Pencil on paper, 35.1 cm. x 42.6 cm. (13 13/16" x 16 3/4")
- 75 UNTITLED
Crayon on paper, 35.1 cm. x 42.9 cm. (13 13/16" x 16 7/8")
(page 17)

ILLUSTRATIONS

(Unless otherwise indicated, artworks are by Thomas Hart Benton)

- (Cover) SELF—PORTRAIT, 1970
- 2 Finished Study for THE SOURCES OF COUNTRY MUSIC
- 10 CONSTRUCTIVIST STILL LIFE
- 13 Compositional Model for THE SOURCES OF COUNTRY MUSIC
- 14 TWELVE PLANES AND A SILVER EGG
- 16 STUDY AFTER GIOTTO
- 16 STUDY AFTER RUBENS
- 17 UNTITLED
- 17 Study for THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF INDIANA
- 18 DEMONSTRATION NO. 3
- 19 YOUTH MUSIC
- 20 CUBIST STILL LIFE
- 22 Preliminary Study B for AMERICA TODAY
- 26 INDUSTRY
- 28 THE DRILLERS
- 28 THE ARMY OF LABOR
- 29 FACTORY INTERIOR
- 30 STRIKE
- 30 TROUBLE ON THE PICKET LINE
- 35 *El Greco*: ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN
- 36 STUDY AFTER EL GRECO
- 36 STUDY AFTER EL GRECO—ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS
- 36 STUDY AFTER EL GRECO—THE OPENING OF THE FIFTH SEAL

- 38 THE BALLAD OF THE JEALOUS LOVER OF LONE GREEN VALLEY
39 PORTRAIT OF LUCY
39 PORTRAIT OF JACKSON POLLOCK
39 PORTRAIT OF GLEN ROUNDS
40 DEATH AND THE WOODCUTTER
43 *El Greco*: THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN
43 *El Greco*: CHRIST DRIVING THE MONEY CHANGERS FROM THE TEMPLE
44 INDEPENDENCE AND THE OPENING OF THE WEST
66 SELF-PORTRAIT, 1909
67 CARL SANDBURG
68 FANTASY
69 THE DESERT
72 IMPROVISATION—"THE OTHER SIDE OF NOWHERE"

COLORPLATES

- 49 SUGAR CANE (I)
50 STANTON MACDONALD-WRIGHT (II)
51 RHYTHMIC CONSTRUCTION (III)
52 FIRE ON THE TRACKS (IV)
53 THE FLIGHT OF THE THIELENS (V)
54 ADAM AND EVE (VI)
55 JON BOAT (VII)
56 STILL LIFE WITH SILVER VASE (VIII)