



Thomas Hart Benton, 1925, *Self Portrait*, oil on canvas  
Collection of the artist's daughter, Jessie Benton Lyman.  
(It was on the cover of *Time* magazine, December 24, 1934)

Tom's first job was as a newspaper artist in Joplin, [Missouri](#). He studied art in Chicago, [Illinois](#), then in Paris, and finally in New York, [New York](#). During World War I, Benton served in the Navy in Norfolk, [Virginia](#). He created camouflage paint designs for Navy ships. After the war, Benton returned to [New York](#) City where he taught art. There he met and married his wife, Rita. The Benton family lived most of the year in New York, and spent their summers on an island off the coast of [Massachusetts](#).

Thomas Hart Benton, 1943,  
*July Hay*, egg tempera and oil on  
masonite, 38" x 26.7/8"  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

## Thomas Hart Benton: Painter of Everyday America

Thomas Hart Benton was born in [Missouri](#) in 1889. Throughout his long life he made thousands of drawings and paintings. He was inspired by his experiences of America. As a boy his mother took Tom, his two sisters, and his brother to visit her family in [Texas](#). He traveled with his father, who was running for US Congress. When his father won, the Bentons lived in [Washington DC](#). They came home to [Missouri](#) in the summers, where young Tom had a pony, took care of a cow, and picked strawberries.



The death of his father was a shock to Benton. He started to take long walks in the Catskill Mountains of [New York](#). In 1926 he took a train to New Orleans, [Louisiana](#). Next, he caught a river boat as it pushed barges up the Mississippi River and then took a train to Little Rock, [Arkansas](#). From there he walked 15 to 20 miles a day north to Springfield, [Missouri](#) drawing the people and places all along the way. In 1928 Benton sketched in western [Pennsylvania](#) and in the Smoky Mountains, where [West Virginia](#), [Virginia](#), [Kentucky](#), [North Carolina](#), and [Tennessee](#) meet. His travels in the 1930s took him to [Nebraska](#), the [Dakotas](#), [Wyoming](#), [Utah](#), and [New Mexico](#).



Thomas Hart Benton, 1931 *Midwest*, murals showing regions of the US originally installed in the board room of the New School for Social Research in New York City, now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Thomas Hart Benton received important **commissions** to paint murals in New York City, Chicago, and Missouri. He died in 1975 in Nashville, [Tennessee](#), where he was completing a mural for the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Thomas Hart Benton, 1947, *Achelous and Hercules*, egg tempera and oil on canvas mounted on panel, 5' X 22", originally installed in a Kansas City department store, now permanently displayed at the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, DC

