

Thomas Hart Benton (Artist) Collection

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St. Louis Mercantile Library Special Collections
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Summary Information

Repository	St. Louis Mercantile Library Special Collections
Creator - Author	Benton, Thomas Hart, 1889-1975
Creator - Author	Eagleton, Thomas F., 1929-2007
Creator - Author	Fath, Creekmore, 1916-2009
Title	Thomas Hart Benton (Artist) Collection
Date [inclusive]	1951-2000
Extent	1.5 Linear feet 2 boxes: 1 record box and 1 flat oversize.
Location note	Archives.
Language	English
Mixed materials [Box]	M-326 Box 1
Container	M-326 Oversize
Abstract	<p>The Thomas Hart Benton collection contains records from the archive of Creekmore Fath, related to Fath's catalogue of the lithographs of the famous American Regionalist artist Thomas Hart Benton, "The Lithographs of Thomas Hart Benton" (1969), as well as other projects Fath was involved in as a close friend and the most important collector of Benton's prints. The collection consists of original correspondence between Fath and Benton and other individuals and institutions, photographs, research notes, manuscripts, business records. It covers the period of the late 1950's through 2000.</p>

Preferred Citation note

The preferred citation for this collection is "From the collections of the St. Louis Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri - St. Louis."

Biographical/Historical note

Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975) was one of the foremost American Regionalist artists and muralists. He was born in Neosho, Missouri in a family of distinguished politicians. His father was Maecenas Benton, a lawyer and U.S. Congressman, and his great-great uncle was Senator Thomas Hart Benton (1872-1858) from Missouri. His mother was Elizabeth Wise Benton, who encouraged his interest and pursuit of art. Benton studied at Western Military Academy (1905-06), followed by the School of The Art Institute of Chicago (1907-09), and the Academie Julian in Paris (1909-1911). While in Paris he was immersed in the life of contemporary French artists and experienced the modernist styles of the early 20th century, including that of Diego Rivera (1886-1957). In 1912 Benton moved to New York and in 1922 married Rita Piacenza (1896 - 1975), an Italian immigrant who was a student in one of his art classes. They had a son, Thomas Piacenza Benton, and a daughter, Jessie Benton. In the 20's and early 1930's Benton developed his unique Regionalist style characterized by a fluid naturalism that emerged in both his easel paintings and his murals. In 1934 he was featured in Time Magazine along with two other Midwesterners, Grant Wood and John Steuart Curry. In 1935, Benton left New York, the epicenter of American modernism which he came to disdain, and moved to Kansas City to teach at the Kansas City Art Institute. While living in the Midwest he took life in small-town America as his signature subject. In 1937 he published his autobiography, *An Artist in America*, which prompted Sinclair Lewis to say, "Here's a rare thing, a painter who can write." Around that time, Benton started printing limited edition lithographs, which initially sold for \$5 at the Associated American Artists Gallery in New York. After the war, Benton continued to be a prolific artist, a teacher, and a muralist. He died at the age of 85.

Creekmore Fath (1916 - 2009) was born in Oklahoma and grew up in Texas. He was a successful and influential lawyer with a long career in Texas. After obtaining his law degree from the University of Texas, where he co-founded the campus Progressive Democrats, he moved to Washington, DC, to serve in the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and then with the Democratic National Committee. In 1947 he married Adele Hay (1917 - 2007), the daughter of New York socialite Alice Appleton Hay and Clarence Hay, the son of John Hay, Lincoln's private secretary. The Faths moved back to Austin, where he ran unsuccessfully for Congress as a liberal New Dealer. He spent the rest of his life as a sought-after political consultant and champion of progressive politics. During his multifaceted career, Fath amassed remarkable book and art collections. He bought his first Benton print in 1939 for which he paid \$5 after receiving his first fee as a lawyer. His quest of other Benton prints lead to the publication of the catalogue raisonné of the artists' lithographs in 1969. His research on this project comprises the core of the Mercantile Library's collection. It also cultivated a lifelong friendship between him and Benton. Fath's was the largest private collection of Benton prints outside of the artist's family. The Fath collection comprised all but a few of the approximately 100 lithographs that Benton created, including several not listed in the catalogue raisonné.

Scope and Contents note

The Thomas Hart Benton collection includes correspondence, photographs, manuscripts, research notes, business records, clippings, brochures, and printer's proofs related to the publication of a catalog raisonne of Thomas Hart Benton's lithograph prints by Creekmore Fath, "The Lithographs of Thomas Hart Benton" (1969), and to other projects Fath initiated relative to Benton's art – exhibitions, publications, lectures. The most important part of the collection are the letters the author and the artist exchanged in the 1960's where Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975) explains the subjects and history of his prints, as well as his career and growth as an American artist. The correspondence between Creekmore Fath (1916-2009) and numerous individuals, museums and galleries are an evidence of his deep interest in Benton's art and his research skills in locating information on the complete set of prints. All correspondence attests to the wide social engagements the two people had in the time period of the 1960's and 1970's. The photographs of the collection encompass mainly working reproductions of Benton's artwork as well as his greeting cards, a signature type of artifact. There are a few photographs of Benton and Fath. The manuscripts are primarily typed documents of the publications from various stages of work, as well as handwritten research and conversation notes. There are many clippings of print reproductions, a result of the work on the design of the catalog. Business records in the collection are mainly financial statements pertaining to the printing of the catalog by the University of Texas Press.

Arrangement note

The Thomas Hart Benton collection is arranged into three series: 1) Catalog; 2) Other Creekmore Fath; 3) Oversize materials

Administrative Information

Publication Information

St. Louis Mercantile Library Special Collections

Conditions Governing Access note

This collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use note

Due to the rare and fragile nature of this resource, reproduction of the collection's materials must be reviewed by library staff. Please contact the Library at 314-516-7247 for more information.

Copyright Information: The researcher assumes full responsibility for observing all copyright, property, and libel laws as they apply.

Fee Services: Fees associated with staff research time, cost recovery in reproductions processing time and materials, and licensing may apply.

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

The collection was purchased by the library from Creekmore Fath's estate.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

The Mercantile Library has three letters of Benton's personal correspondence, as well as a sizeable collection of his prints. The Mercantile Library also has a collection of Creekmore Fath's political cartoons and illustrations. Some of the major archival resources of Thomas Hart Benton are held at the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution, the Truman Presidential Museum and Library, the State Historical Society of Missouri.

Controlled Access Headings

Genre(s)

- Correspondence
- Illustrators
- Landscape painters
- Lithographers
- Manuscripts
- Muralists

Geographic Name(s)

- Middle West
- Missouri

Subject(s)

- Art - collectors and collecting
- Art, American - 20th century
- Catalogue raisonne
- Lithography
- Painters
- Realism in art
- Regionalism in art

Collection Inventory

Box 1 Catalog

1-1 Correspondence 1965-1968; n.d. Binder

General note

Includes: photograph of C. Fath and THB. "Artist's Delimma" - THB's reflections on his estate and its value.

1-2 Correspondence 1964; n.d. Copies

1-3 Correspondence 1965

1-4 Correspondence 1966

1-5 Correspondence 1967

1-6 Correspondence 1968

1-7 Envelopes 1965-1981

General note

some contain notes inside

Catalog

1-8 Correspondence with publishers, the LOC, people - 1966-68

General note

Includes an article about George Miller and lithography (1943)

1-9 Letter from THB to Creekmore Fath, n.d.

1-10 Thomas Hart Benton to Creekmore Fath, Oct. 2, 1968

1-11 Creekmore Fath to Thomas Hart benton, 1966-68

1-12 Creekmore Fath - correspondence 1965-1967

1-13 Creekmore Fath - correspondence 1967

General note

Includes a letter to John Steinbeck.

1-14 Clippings of THB print reproductions

1-15 Correspondence 1966 - 2000

General note

Includes: correspondence related to the catalog; correspondence related to subsequent projects and exhibitions; correspondence about the nomination of THB for the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Sen. T. Eagleton; the Christmas card project; the second edition of the catalog of lithographs

Catalog

1-16 Working documents - manuscripts, research

General note

Includes the article "The Past Gets a Cleaning" on Benton's murals of 1930-1932 (1968)

1-17 Working documents - manuscript; text only

1-18 Working documents - manuscript for catalog

General note

Includes copies of correspondence

1-19 Working documents - manuscripts for catalog

General note

Includes a chronological autobiography

1-20 Working documents - manuscript of catalog. Printer's proof

1-21 Working documents - manuscript for catalog. Printer's proof

1-22 Working documents - notes

General note

Includes Bulletin of the Associated American Artists (new Benton's prints)

1-23 University of Texas correspondence (1969-) - financial statements; other documents

Other Creekmore Fath

General note

Includes: contract with UT Press for publishing "The Lithographs of Thomas Hart Benton" (1968); correspondence regarding finances (1975); order form for catalog from the Association of American Artists

Box 1 Other Creekmore Fath

2-1 Exhibitions 1973-1976 and other documents

General note

Includes: newspaper page clipping about Benton's murals at the New Britain Museum of American Art (1973); exhibition invitations and events 1973-76; article on Benton's mural "Sources of Country Music" (Smithsonian News, 1976); THB home and studio brochure; manuscript article "THB's Folk Musicians"

2-2 Correspondence 1979

General note

Includes: correspondence with Constable's Gallery in Kansas City about a THB exhibit there (1979)

2-3 Correspondence and working documents on the THB bowls and mugs project, 1983-1986

General note

Includes: reproductions of artwork

2-4 Correspondence 1987-1996

General note

Other Creekmore Fath

Includes: letter from Jessie Benton regarding a cartoon depicting her father, "Painting the Critics" (1987); nominations for the THB Award of the THB Associates (1981); granting permissions for reproduction of THB works

2-5 Correspondence 1966-1985 and other documents

General note

Includes: 13 photographs of THB's Christmas cards; correspondence both related and unrelated to the catalog of lithographs of 1969; correspondence related to the nomination of THB by Sen. T. Eagleton to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1969); letter by Creekmore Fath to NBC in relation to The Today Show's presentation of THB's lithographs; a book review of the catalog - no author, n.d.; poster of the symposium "Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original" (1987); documents and records of the THB Associates at the Kansas City Art Institute (1984-1986)

2-6 Correspondence 1990-2000

General note

Includes: new lithograph found, "Crossing of the Threshold," done for Bell Telephone Co. (1950-1951); article "The Students of Thomas Hart Benton" (including Ed Vogele) by Marianne Berardi (1993)

2-7 Minutes of the Thomas Hart Benton Associates of the Kansas City Art Institute 1984-1986

2-8 Working documents and Thomas Hart Benton - Miscellany

General note

Includes THB quotes and Creekmore Fath's reflections on the Bentons' life on Martha's Vineyard and their connection to its community

Photographs of Christmas greetings and prints

2-9 Truman Library mural postcard (1970)

2-10 Italian Church - Christmas greeting

General note

Includes a copy of Italian Church print - plain; a copy of Italian Church print with message "Merry Christmas"

2-11 Correspondence 1957-1969 and working documents - manuscripts

General note

Includes: some related to the publication of the 1969 catalog; most related to other projects, exhibitions, shows, lectures; gallery pamphlets; envelopes, some with letters inside

2-12 Correspondence 1972-1990 and working documents - manuscripts

General note

Includes: most related to the second edition of the catalog of lithographs (1979); Amon Carter Museum correspondence (1988-1989); envelopes, some with letters inside

2-13 Correspondence with Madelon Umlauf (1986)

General note

Includes an article about Diego Rivera by Lucienne Bloch (1986) and a reproduction of a painting by THB.

Box 1 Photographs of Christmas greetings and prints

Oversize materials

General note

Contains 68 small photographs. Most are photographs of the season's greetings cards the Bentons sent. Some are some photographs of Benton's prints included in the catalog.

Box 2 Oversize materials

General note

Includes working copies of Benton's prints; clippings.