



Thomas Hart Benton  
*Spring Storm*, 1958  
Tempera on board, 1988.12

## Spring Storm



**Thomas Hart Benton** (1889–1975) Born into a family of entrenched politicians from Missouri, Benton rebelled against his father’s plans for him and enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago, later continuing his studies in Paris. During World War I he served in the U.S. Navy. While stationed in Norfolk, Virginia he was directed to make accurate drawings of shipyard work and life. As a realist painter and muralist, Benton found popular acclaim in the 1930s following the Great Depression. He was at the forefront of the American Scene or Regionalist movement, which also included Grant Wood and John Stuart Curry.

### A product of its time

Post World War II, Regionalism was falling out of favor with the rise of Abstract Expressionism. Benton kept with the belief that artistic content should be realistic. He used landscapes to achieve that realism in his later works.

### Take a closer look

There is an energy of line that is inherent in Benton’s artwork. *TIME* magazine once labeled it as energy with a “nervous electric quality which is peculiarly Benton’s and which his pupils often try but fail to imitate.”

### Did you know?

Some of Benton’s best known artworks are his public murals. The first mural Benton ever made was when he was six or seven years old. Using charcoal, he drew a long freight-train on the brand new cream-colored wall paper that had been installed in his family’s staircase. The train went up the stairs, around the landing and ended on the second floor. They had to use bread crumbs to remove the drawing.

### On your own

Ken Burns’ American Stories on PBS, special on THB: <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/benton>  
University of Virginia Artist Page: [http://xroads.virginia.edu/~am482\\_04/am\\_scene/bentonbio.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~am482_04/am_scene/bentonbio.html)