Images in practice images

**Title** Main Street East [photograph].
Photographer/Artist Stone, Albert R., 1866-1934.
Date 1903-1910?
Physical Details 1 photograph: b&w; 5 x 7 in.
Collection Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center
Summary The ladies promenading along Main Street East wear large hats and wasp-waisted dresses. Horse-drawn vehicles and bicycles outnumber automobiles on the street. Two streetcars are in sight. The Postal Telegraph Cable Co. can be seen at right, across the street at 41 Main Street East. Next to it is a mostly vacant building. The only sign still visible on the facade is for Loavenbruck Signs at 37 Main Street East.
Notes Postal Telegraph and Loavenbruck Signs both appear in the 1907 City Directory. Subjects Loavenbruck Signs.
Postal Telegraph Cable Co. (Rochester, N.Y.)
Streets New York (State) Rochester.
City & town life 1900-1910. New York (State) Rochester
Main Street (Rochester, N.Y.) 1900-1910.
Image Number sct02688
Retrieval Information RMSC Library - F1345; Streets - Main Street East: 2001.
Format Picture

**Young inmates at the State Agricultural and Industrial School.**
NYS Archives and Records Administration
Description: Young inmates at the State Agricultural and Industrial School, Monroe County, ca. 1910. New York State Agricultural and Industrial School (Western House of Refuge). Photographs of inmates, staff and facilities, ca. 1904-1930.
Date_Original: ca. 1910
Date_Digital: 07/18/2003
Who_Scanned: STUCKER
Type: Unknown

**Joining of the rails, Transcontinental Railroad, Promontory Point, Utah** - 1867
http://www.ice.org.uk/knowledge/library_image_gallery.asp

"Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way."
Frances F. Palmer (hand colored) lithograph, 1868
Thomas Hart Benton
American (1889-1975)
*Boomtown, 1927-1928*
Oil on Canvas

*Boomtown* captures the moment when a new town is “born,” a view full of the optimism and energy of Texas in the 1920s.

**The Art:**
*Boomtown* is Benton’s first Regionalist (or American Scene) masterpiece and the result of a 1926 summer sketching trip which took him to Borger, Texas. Early in 1926, oil was discovered in the Panhandle of Texas; real estate promoter “Ace” Borger purchased land and created the town whose population soared from zero to 30,000 within days!

Benton wrote of Borger:

> Out on the open plain beyond the town a great thick column of black smoke rose as in a volcanic eruption from the earth to the middle of the sky. There was a carbon mill out there that burnt thousands of cubic feet of gas every minute, a great, wasteful, extravagant burning of resources for momentary profit. All the mighty anarchic carelessness of our country was revealed in Borger. But it was revealed with a breadth, with an expansive grandeur, that was as effective emotionally as are the tremendous spatial reaches of the plains country where the town was set. One did not get the feeling, in spite of the rough shacks and dirty tents in which the people lived, of that narrow cruelty and bitter misery that hovers around eastern industrial centers. There was a belief, written in men’s faces, that all would find a share in the gifts of this mushroom town…..Borger on the boom was a big party….where capital…joined hands with everybody in a great democratic dance.

Arthur Strawn, “An American Epic”
*Outlook & Independent*.
March 26, 1930

Benton’s verbal description of Borger is confirmed by photographs taken that same year: swarms of cars, the “theatre” and hotel, the billboards and telephone poles, the lines of oil rigs and billowing black smoke. However, Benton’s painting, *Boomtown*, is not a realistic “photograph” of Borger taken directly from his sketches. Despite his desire to develop an American voice Benton was influenced by European styles; the tipped-up viewpoint, the angular shapes of the buildings, and the flatness of the composition reflect the Cubists’ influence. To enhance the drama of the scene, Benton combined the background billowing smoke and the foreground fight, events he had sketched on two different days in Borger! To further increase the scene’s energy and vitality, Benton exaggerated the vertical elements and intensified the color palette in a manner he had admired used by Tintoretto. To achieve the three-dimensional impact similar to that of Michelangelo’s paintings, Benton molded all his human figures first in clay and studied their poses, shadows and musculature. The result is a study of energetic rhythm, rich stimulating color and dynamic objects, the essence of a “boomtown.”

**America:**
Regionalist artists wanted to establish a genuinely American art by using local themes and repudiating avant-garde European styles. They reflected a nostalgic desire to glorify, or to at
least record, rural and small town America. Flourishing during the Great Depression and at this
time of profound national doubt, they reasserted America’s faith in itself, giving the public
pictures with which they could readily identify. Their work was often produced under the
auspices of the Federal Art Project (1935-1943) of the WPA.

Benton's oil painting, *Boomtown*, illustrates the thriving economic growth and expansion in Texas
during the 1920s. He has captured Borger, Texas in 1926, the evidence of its rapid growth in the
electric lines, the automobiles, and the oilrigs. The crowded streets, the active people, and the
looming signs of the oil industry in the background evoke a mood of prosperity. While the town
seems to exist isolated in space, a train in the distance links it to the rest of America. The various
people suggest the variety of occupations springing up in the new town. Texas’ engine of growth
was the petroleum industry which rapidly replaced the agricultural economy. By 1928 Texas had
become the nation’s largest producer of crude oil. By 1930 Texas ranked fifth in population
nationally as its population grew by 24.9% in the decade since 1920. Mexican immigrants
flooded into Texas and by 1930, 38.4% of the population was foreign born. During the 1920s,
the Ku Klux Klan was very active in Texas with programs attacking local law breakers –
bootleggers, gamblers, wife beaters and community troublemakers – as well as immigrants,
Catholics, Jews, and Communists.

**The Artist:**
Thomas Hart Benton, painter, illustrator and lithographer, was dedicated to portraying American
themes and values. A student of art and of American history, Benton’s background included
formal art training in Chicago and Paris, but he also spent years observing Indian territory in
Oklahoma, the coal fields of Pennsylvania, the tobacco farms of Virginia and the oil boom towns
of Texas. In 1926 and again in 1928, he traveled throughout the American heartland sketching the
people and small towns of America, sketches which he would draw upon for the rest of his career.
Benton rejected the modernist’s view of art for art’s sake, and was committed to art for a human
purpose – to make the American people alive to their own reality. A Regionalist, Benton recorded
rural and small town America, particularly the “heartland” region. Criticizing the snobbish
atmosphere of the American art world, he once declared he would rather his paintings hang in
saloons, where normal people could see them, than in museums!

By the 1930s, Benton had left New York City and was living in his native Missouri, teaching at
the Kansas City Art Institute and painting large-scale murals, often with very political and social
messages. As a child and the son of the US congressman, Maecenas B. Benton, Thomas Hart
Benton had seen the murals in Washington’s public buildings and understood the power of the
visual to inform and inspire the viewer. Using images from popular culture such as Hollywood
films, pin-up posters and commercial advertising, Benton wanted to create art that appealed to the
general public. When Regionalism declined in popularity in the 1940s, Benton began his murals
of epic scenes from American history; again his goal was to depict the story of the American
people, not that of famous political or military events. However, his work was scorned by the
New York art world which by then preferred the Abstract Expressionism of Jackson Pollock,
ironically once a student of Thomas Hart Benton.

**Learning to Look: Observation and Description**
- What do you see? What can you identify?
  What do you think the people are doing? What are they looking at?
  What sounds would you hear? What odors would you smell?
- Where is this? What clues can you find in the painting?
  How big is this town? How far away are the background details?
  What is happening in the background? How far away are these objects and events?
- Where do you think the artist is? From what vantage point did he paint this scene? Is anyone paying any attention to him?
- What time period does the scene depict? What clues do you have?
- What colors does the artist use? What do these colors tell you about the season or time of day?
- What is missing in the painting? What details has the artist left out?
- If you could put yourself into the painting, here would you be and what would you be doing? What would you see from your vantage point?

**Looking to Learn: Questioning and Interpretation**

- What is a “boomtown?”
  - How does Benton capture the sense of a “boomtown?”
  - Where did these people come from and why are they there?
  - Why isn’t anyone in the painting paying any attention to the black smoke?
  - What is going on in America in 1927 and 1928?
- Is this an accurate depiction of the town? If this is a real place, where is it?
  - Why has he drawn the cars in such an unrealistic way? What other details are not realistic?
- Why would Benton want to paint Borger, Texas?
- What is the purpose of a landscape?

**Ideas for Discussion and Activities:**

- Compare Benton’s *Boomtown* with photographs of Borger, Texas in the 1920s. Photographs can be found at http://www.texasescapes.com/TOWNS/Borger/borger.htm
  - Compare and contrast the details you see.
  - What is the difference in purpose between the photographs and the painting?
  (NYS Standards: Art 2; Social Studies 1)

- The billowing smoke is from a carbon mill that burned thousands of cubic feet of gas/minute. Research the history of drilling for Texas oil.
  (NYS Standards: Social Studies 1; Science 5)

- Explore the picture of America portrayed by the Regionalists or American Scene artists? What was the role of art and artists during the 1920s and 1930s, times of prosperity flowed by a depression, international activism but also nativism, social opportunity but also class conflict.
  - An excellent resource is *American Visions*, vol. 6, *Streamlines and Breadlines*, available in the Teacher Resource Center.
  (NYS Standards: Art 1, 4; Social Studies 1)

- Research the Federal Arts Project and discuss the role of the government in financing art and artists.
  - Investigate some of the projects financed by the WPA. What were their themes? What artists were able to find work during this time? What projects were undertaken in Rochester?
  - *Artists at Work: a Film on the New Deal Art Projects*, a 35 minute videocassette is available in the Teacher Resource Center.
  (NYS Standards: Art 4; Social Studies 1)
• Roll the cameras! The movies were America’s most popular entertainment in the 1920s. Benton’s experience painting stage sets and his love of the Hollywood film medium have influenced his painting style.
In what ways is the Boomtown scene similar to a stage or movie set?
Assume the poses of figures in Boomtown; how does the pose feel? How do you think the character would move next?
Prepare a dialogue for the main characters.
What films would people see in the 1920s?
Compare the Boomtown scene with the Texas street scene in the classic western film, High Noon (1952).
(NYS Standards: Art 1; ELA 1; Social Studies 1)

• Compare Benton’s verbal description of Borger with his visual portrayal. How has he translated his specific word descriptions into the painting?
One of his 1926 pencil sketches of Borger can be found at http://www.thebrogan.org/Archives/benton/bent.html, search for Benton,
(NYS Standards: Art 1; ELA 1, 2; Social Studies 1)

• Take a photograph of a special place.
Do a drawing from the photograph in which you capture the important details.
Create a new drawing or painting which “interprets” or expresses your feelings about the place. How would you use lines, color, composition, or other elements of art to express your feelings or ideas?
(NYS Standards: Art 1; ELA 1)

• Describe or sketch the people in the painting.
How does Benton use the body language of pose, gesture and movement to tell a story?
Stand like one of the figures and hold the pose. What does it feel like? Can you tell if the people are tense and angry, or relaxed and friendly, or standing still or moving rapidly?
How does Benton use pose and gesture as well as body physique to reflect the physical environment of Texas’s wide-open spaces?
(NYS Standards: Art 1; ELA 1, 2; Social Studies 1)

Materials available in the Teacher Resource Center:

Thomas Hart Benton.
86 minute videocassette

Thomas Hart Benton: Drawing From Life.

41 minute videocassette

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Teaching American History through American Art
Classroom Resources Available in the Teacher Resource Center of the Memorial Art Gallery

http://mag.rochester.edu or (585) 473 7720 x 3022

Books:

*American Art: History and Culture.*
  Excellent survey written for older readers

*The American Eye: Eleven Artists of the Twentieth Century.*

*The Art of America in the Gilded Age.*
  Part of a series of young people’s books illustrating art and culture in America

*Audubon: the Birds of America.*

*Celebrate America in Poetry and Art.*
  The poetry, paintings, drawings, sculptures and photographs create a vivid image of America’s past and present.

*Edward Hopper’s New York*


*Jacob Lawrence: American Scenes, American Struggles.*
  A young people’s book with classroom activities

*Jacob Lawrence: the Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman Series of 1938-40.*
  Beautiful color illustrations and explanatory text written for the older reader

*My Backyard History Book.*
  Projects for learning history from the objects all around you

*Up & Down the River: Art & Geography of the Genesee River*
  Photographs and paintings of western New York
Using INTERNET Primary Sources to Teach Critical Thinking Skills in Visual Arts.


Young People’s History of Rochester.
   144 illustrated pages

Kits and videocassettes:

African American Art.
   Chicago, IL: Department of Museum Education, Art Institute of Chicago, 1997.
   Slides, resources and classroom lessons

African American Art: Past and Present.
   3 videocassettes, 90 min and a teacher’s guide

Against the Odds: Artists of the Harlem Renaissance.

The American Vision: the Development of American Painting from the 18th to the early 20th Century as seen in the United States of America’s National Gallery of Art.

American Visions.
   8 videocassettes, 60 minutes each, a chronological survey of art and American history

Artists at Work: a Film on the New Deal Art Projects

Awareness Series: American Art.


   20 slides, 14 reproductions, text and classroom activities

Land & Landscape: Views of America’s History and Culture.
   1 videocassette, 15 reproductions, a study guide and student workbook
1 videocassette, a teacher’s guide and 10 art reproductions

Posters:
African American Art
  5 posters with teacher’s guide.

Art of the American West
- Glenview, IL: Crystal Productions, 1994
  12 reproductions

Selected American Indian Artifacts
  5 posters and teacher’s guide

Women Artists of the Americas
- Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for Education in the arts, 1994.
  5 posters and a teacher’s guide

Websites:
Memorial Art Gallery
  http://mag.rochester.edu/teachers/classroomResources/

The Albany Institute of History and Art
  Museum educators use objects, images and inquiry-based teaching methods to engage students in lessons that focus on American history and art. Students are active participants in the lesson; they observe, analyze and express their ideas about objects and images presented.
  http://www.albanyinstitute.org/

“A Guide to Building Visual Arts Lessons”
  The J. Paul Getty Museum Education department has created this guide to help teachers and curriculum developers create successful arts-focused lessons. Included are ideas for preparing lessons, a step-by-step guide for teaching visual arts for each grade level, and ideas for evaluation and assessment approaches.
  http://www.getty.edu/education/for_teachers/building_lessons/

Metropolitan Museum Timeline of Art History
  http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/splash.htm?HomePageLink=toah_1
Minneapolis Institute of Art

*ArtsConnectEd* is the Institute's comprehensive educational resource, an online database of images, information, educational tours and materials. Using the power of the Internet to stimulate new approaches to learning, the goal of ArtsConnectEd is to make arts education timely, engaging, interactive, and pertinent for teachers, parents, students and the general public.

Interactive programs for teachers and students [http://www.artsconnected.org/](http://www.artsconnected.org/)

“Art in America”

From a 12th-century Native American ceramic bowl to the work of a contemporary New York artist, this unit includes classroom activities, an illustrated timeline, and postcard images for use in the activities.

[www.artsmia.org/art_in_america](http://www.artsmia.org/art_in_america)

National Gallery of Art

National Gallery classroom for teachers and students includes extensive interactive lessons on a wide variety of curriculum topics.

[http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/](http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom/)

“Teachers’ Guide to American Art”

Developed by the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, this site includes works of art from colonial times to the Civil War that enhance the American history curriculum. The descriptive information about the artworks is accompanied by lesson plans that serve to enhance the 5th-grade American history curriculum.