

## **Review of the self-portrait by Thomas Hart Benton.**

Thomas Hart Benton was born in 1889 and died in 1975 he was 86 years old when he died. Thomas Hart Benton was born in a small town in Missouri the town was called Neosha.

When Thomas was 17 years old he went to study at the institute of art in Chicago after two years he then went to study another three years at academic Julian in Paris. He settled in New York in 1912 and in the style of abstract until 1920 where he took up regionalism. He got his reputation from this idiom.

In 1922 he married Rita Piacenza. In 1935 he left New York and moved to Kansas City and stayed there for the rest of his life where he taught and painted.

The painting was painted in 1922, he was 33 years old when he painted it and this was also the year that Thomas and Rita got married. The painting was painted on south beach in Martha's Vineyard, which was in Massachusetts. This is where Thomas and Rita had a little summerhouse, where they spent many summers. Here Thomas forged his own conceived style. In the painting there is a double portrait of Thomas Hart Benton and his wife Rita.

I describe the painting to be a cross between a portrait and a scene from everyday life. The painting's genre is a figure composition because the way he has positioned his characters. In the picture the family on the right side of the picture are pulling a rope but you can see their expression because they are not in focus. Everything else is not in focus except the man and wife, which have a lot of detail.

The painting is arranged with the 'artist' the man in the centre to show importance and his wife off to the right a bit but not too much because she is still important. The rest of the painting is arranged so that the family is the less important thing because they are so small compared with the rest. Behind this family there are rocks and the big blue sea. The artist has shown the husband and wife's importance by making them the largest thing of the painting and for giving them as much detail as possible.

The painting has depth because the artist had used perspective; he has used the perspective very well because it looks like you are looking in to a scene or photo. The picture has background, middle ground and foreground, in the background there is an island, which was Massachusetts Island, there is also a lovely blue sea. In the middle ground you have the family with the rocks and the golden sand also there are the cliffs, In the foreground there is the man and wife with a table and seat.

In this painting I do not think there is any geometric division. There are a variety of colours used for example the artist has used a rich golden yellowy gold/brown for the cliffs and the sand. The rocks have hints of green to represent the algae, which is growing there. Also the man and woman are painted with a bronze glow maybe because they have been tanning in the sun.

The sea and the sky have been painted with a turquoise/blue. In this painting the colours do not represent qualities because there are no qualities at the beach and I think everyone is equal there.

This painting has no patterns, no rhythms and no repetitions. What the painting does have is some flowing lines these lines are found on the white clouds behind the man, these flowing lines give the clouds a fluffy look or a more realistic look. From my postcard I cannot really tell what the surface texture is like but I would expect it to be smooth. There is also no definite paint marks, this would be from the paint that he used.

In this painting Thomas Hart Benton has used tone very well, the tone has been used on the clouds to make the clouds look fuller and stand out. He has also used tone on the two main people by having shadows on their bodies to emphasise shape. He has used continuous lines to achieve a smoother more realistic feel to the whole painting and making the subjects seem more real.

My emotions to this picture are neutral because I do not think it has much to do with me. Although the picture is very life like, without seeing a photo of Thomas Hart Benton and his wife at the time of the painting it is not possible to tell how realistic the painting is. The artist is trying to communicate the closeness of his marriage by the idyllic setting and perfect colours.

I really like this picture because of its photographic appearance by the focus on the two people and not on the rest of the background. It has an appeal to me through his use of vibrant colours and 'pop art' feels.

The painting expresses the skill of the artist by the amount of detail in the painting of the man and woman. To me the purpose of the picture is to capture the moment and preserve it as a memory of the year they were married, a creative alternative to a photo album.

The picture is special because instead of using lithographic print, for which he is more famous, he has painted in coloured oils on canvas. It is also unique in being a double portrait of Thomas Hart Benton and his wife Rita, which makes it more personal. Another difference is that unlike most of his work this was not created in New York as it was painted in Massachusetts at their summerhouse.

Reviewed by Rebecca Hall.

