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American Epics: Thomas Hart Benton and Hollywood on view this summer at Milwaukee Art Museum

*Reveals film industry's influence on artist's legendary artistic career; First retrospective
in more than 25 years*

Milwaukee, Wis. – May 23, 2016 – The Milwaukee Art Museum is excited to share this year's summer exhibition, *American Epics: Thomas Hart Benton and Hollywood*, on view from June 10 to Sept. 5. This is the first major exhibition on Benton in more than 25 years, and will portray the connection between his film industry experience and artistic career through approximately 100 works. Visitors to the exhibition will be transported as they step into a gallery filled with screen-worthy melodramas, war sagas and western spectacles.

American painter Thomas Hart Benton (1889-1975) was influenced by Hollywood's motion picture industry and reinvented 20th-century American narratives by incorporating cinematic production techniques with an Old Master European style. Benton became acutely aware of the motion picture industry's rising influence and was sent by "Life" magazine to work in Hollywood on commission, where he discovered visual and thematic artistic inspiration.

"This exhibition is really the first to cohesively connect Benton's cinema experience, from subject matter to techniques, with his paintings," says Brandon Ruud, Abert Family Curator of American Art at the Milwaukee Art Museum. "His fusion of traditional painting and contemporary, larger-than-life storytelling fueled by Hollywood is really extraordinary, and we are so pleased to share it at the Museum this summer."

Themes of cultural identity, westward expansion, tolerance, prejudice and the American Dream were given epic treatment on the silver screen, and Benton harnessed those dramatic portrayals in his paintings. Perhaps Benton's most notable work, *American Historical Epic*, is a series painted between 1920 and 1928 and runs more than 60 feet in length. Through this, he depicted the nation's past in unconventional ways to engage controversial issues such as race relations and national identity.

Like Hollywood, he recognized typecasting as a way to transform individuals into a cast of American characters and personalities. Between 1937 and 1954, Benton painted five major works for projects related to motion pictures, including John Ford's film adaptation

of John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath."

Among these nearly 100 works, there will be 50 paintings and murals along with a selection of his drawings, prints and illustrated books. In addition, rare archival photographs and related ephemera, film clips and stills will also represent this quintessential American artist.

More information can be found at mam.org.

The exhibition National Tour Sponsor is Bank of America.

American Epics is organized by the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, in collaboration with the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, and the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas. The exhibition was made possible in part by Bank of America and a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Celebrating 50 years of excellence, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Additional support provided by the Milwaukee Art Museum's Friends of Art.

About the Milwaukee Art Museum

Home to a rich collection of more than 30,000 works of art, the Milwaukee Art Museum is located on the shores of Lake Michigan. Its campus includes the Santiago Calatrava-designed Quadracci Pavilion, annually showcasing three feature exhibitions, and the Eero Saarinen-designed Milwaukee County War Memorial Center and David Kahler-designed addition. The Museum recently reopened its Collection Galleries, debuting nearly 2,500 world-class works of art within dramatically transformed galleries and a new lakefront addition.

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