



Thomas Hart Benton

Title

Still Life

Medium

Tempera on canvas mounted on panel

Date

1951

Dimensions

25 1/2 × 18 1/4 in. (64.8 × 46.4 cm)

Accession number

2019.8

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Purchased with Museum funds, 2019

Web Description

Thomas Hart Benton is recognized as one of the leading American Regionalist painters. From prints, to easel paintings, to epic mural cycles, Benton selected his subjects from the everyday lives of average people—with a great emphasis on rural America. Trained at the Art Institute of Chicago early in the century, and then in Paris, Benton created his own distinctive style, drawing on influences from realism and abstraction alike. Like many artists working in the 1930s and 40s such as N. C. and Andrew Wyeth, Benton adopted tempera painting, a technique of the Renaissance that was revived in twentieth-century America, lending a cosmopolitan aspect to populist forms of painting. Even in a straightforward still-life painting such as this, Benton's characteristic expressive tendencies are recognizable. In the background, the yellow drapery vibrates with ripples, while the flowers writhe in the vase, appearing as if to wilt before our eyes. The still life, particularly the apple on the tilted tabletop bring to mind the modern still life paintings of the French artist Paul Cézanne, who was also focused on the physical forms of the objects he painted, rather than on creating an illusion of realistic textures. Cézanne, Benton, and even members of the Wyeth family were all part of the enduring tradition of still-life painting.