

Preliminary Studies

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- Preliminary Studies

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The New Britain Museum of American Art is fortunate to own not only five of the Arts of Life in America murals, but also five oil studies for the murals. Benton also created clay models of many of the figures shown in the paintings, but these have not survived.

Arts of the West

Challenge yourself! See if you can find all the changes the artist made between the black and white small study and the final wall-sized version in color. For starters, take a look at the tree in the upper left. Then move to the building, the floorboards, and everything else.

Arts of the South

Take some time to compare these two images. Why do you think the artist started with a small study using only tones of black and white? Consider the challenge of planning a huge wall mural like this. How would such a study help? Notice the changes between the study and the final mural - in the distant church, the man on the wagon, and the addition of the lady visiting the outhouse. Now look for other changes.

Indian Arts

The two small black and white studies shown here give us a rare opportunity to see inside the artist's mind. Observe, for example, the cloud that starts from behind the middle figure and ends up in the sky. Notice how Benton plays with its shape and position. See also how the shapes become clearer as he works his way toward the final large work.

Arts of the City

When Benton enlarged the small black and white study to the final huge mural, what changes did he make? Do you see the lightening bolt that changes to a trumpeting angel? No one knows why he did this. Do you have an idea? Now look at the movie screen. How does the audience watching the movie change in the final version? What other changes do you see?