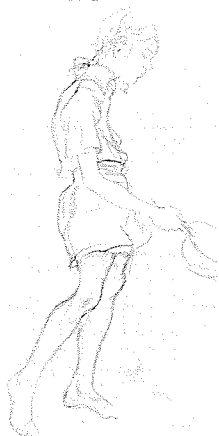


**TOM BENTON AND HIS DRAWINGS: A Biographical Essay and a Collection of His Sketches, Studies, and Mural Cartoons**

by Karal Ann Marling  
Univ. of Mo., 1985  
224 pp. \$48



Marling's sympathetic study of selected drawings by Thomas Hart Benton, a Midwestern American muralist active from the 1920s until his death in 1975, defies several art-historical conventions. Marling, an art historian at the University of Minnesota, shows us Benton's drawings but not the murals in which they appear. She analyzes his work in relation to popular culture rather than in terms of artistic style. She identifies Benton's vision as American rather than as Midwestern. And she presents her ideas in a springy vernacular. While most people think of Benton's life work as the murals painted for places such as the New School for Social Research, the Missouri State Capitol, and the Truman Library, Marling argues that the heart of his work can be found in the more lively drawings and studies, almost all of them made on the road. Following a biographical essay that cuts back and forth across time (starting with the day of the artist's death), Marling writes with affectionate detail about 20 groups of thematically related sketches, their subjects ranging from farmers to churchgoers to city gangsters to Midwestern businessmen. Indeed, she makes clear that Benton had no restricted regionalist vision, that his topics are more properly understood as, in his own words, "a conglomerate of things experienced in America."

*Science & Technology*

**THE WOODS HOLE CANTATA: Essays on Science and Society**

by Gerald Weismann  
Dodd, 1985  
256 pp. \$14.95

**THE FLAMINGO'S SMILE: Reflections in Natural History**

by Stephen Jay Gould  
Norton, 1985  
476 pp. \$17.95

What accounts for the growing popularity of science writing—of books by, among other scientist-authors, John Gribbin, E. O. Wilson, Lewis Thomas, Peter Medawar, and the two under present consideration? Perhaps it is because the best of such prose, by depicting the play of reason, offers intellectual solace in a world much beleaguered by conflicting, irrational "isms." Weismann, a physician at Bellevue Hospital in New York City, works in the same essayistic vein as Thomas, his more widely known colleague. Often opening with an anecdote (a visit to the criminal ward of the hospital, a medical conference in Berlin, the treatment of a "bag lady"), he proceeds to some larger point about medi-