



Victor Dubreuil

Title

Barrels of Money

Medium

Oil on canvas

Date

1890s

Dimensions

25 × 30 in. (63.5 × 76.2 cm)

Accession number

80.3.10

Credit Line

Gift of Amanda K. Berls, 1980

Web Description

A fascinating artist whose biography has remained elusive to researchers, Victor Dubreuil's favorite subject as a still-life painter was paper money. Highly realistic depictions of currency were popular among American artists beginning with William Michael Harnett in the late 1870s, but Dubreuil's series of overflowing barrels of money was a unique variation on the subject's presentation. Barrels of Money is one of seven surviving barrel paintings. He made an eighth version (now unlocated, possibly destroyed) which was temporarily seized by the Secret Service from a tavern in 1897 because the currency was so convincing as to elicit fears of potential counterfeiting schemes. The inspiration for the barrel paintings may be found in a newspaper account of this incident that describes the tavern owner as being so busy that he simply put out huge barrels so that customers could just throw in their money. The owner reportedly commissioned Dubreuil to paint the subject and hung the painting in the tavern. Dubreuil's preoccupation with the money theme has also been interpreted by some as social commentary by the artist on American greed and ostentatiousness. According to contemporary newspaper sources, he was born in France about 1840, served in the French army, and later became involved in banking, publishing two texts. He was a known socialist and the founder of the short-lived newspaper La Politique d'Action. The year of his arrival in the United States is unknown, but he was living in New York by 1886. It is believed he left New York, returning to Europe around 1900.