



Jefferson David Chalfant

Title

Which Is Which?

Medium

Oil on wood panel with printed paper

Date

ca. 1890

Dimensions

3 5/8 × 5 3/8 in. (9.2 × 13.7 cm)

Accession number

97.17

Credit Line

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard M. Scaife and the Allegheny Foundation, 1997

Web Description

Part of the artist's intention in creating a trompe l'oeil still-life painting is to fool the viewer into thinking a painted object is real. In this painting, J.D. Chalfant challenges the viewer directly by including a real stamp next to its painted image. His title asks us to decide Which is Which? The illusion was so complete at the time the work was created that the owner of a similar painting by Chalfant wrote the following letter to the artist: "Dear Sir: I own a picture by you of two postage...stamps... I have forgotten which is the real stamp and which is the painted one and would feel obliged if you will kindly inform me which is the painted one." With the passage of time, the actual stamp in this painting has faded, making it easier to distinguish between the two. Although Chalfant painted trompe l'oeil still lifes for four years, he produced only about a dozen known works due to his meticulous working methods. He turned to other genre subject matter at the end of the nineteenth century when still life lost popularity, and still later to portraiture.