



William Holbrook Beard

Title

Five Bears

Medium

Oil on canvas

Date

1869

Dimensions

14 1/8 × 20 5/16 in. (35.9 × 51.6 cm)

Catalogue Number

2016.11.1

Credit Line

Richard M. Scaife Bequest, 2015

Web Description

William Holbrook Beard is widely known as a painter of animals endowed with human characteristics, and was particularly fond of using bears and monkeys. He made clever observations in his paintings about human nature, often with the implication of an underlying political or social statement. In this work, the bear standing on his hind legs wears a collar with a broken chain, suggesting he may be a dancing bear, escaped from a circus sideshow. Painted soon after the Civil War, Beard may be commenting on Reconstruction policies related to formerly enslaved people.