



Seminole Child with Bittern

Date

1878

Primary Maker

William H. Beard

Medium

Oil on canvas, mounted on masonite

Description

Best known for his satirical paintings of anthropomorphic, or human-like, animals, *Seminole Child with Bittern* is an unusual artwork for William H. Beard not only because it lacks a satirical subject, but because it centers on an Indigenous child. Beard occasionally painted images of children and people hunting in the 1850s and 60s, but it was only in the late 1870s that Indigenous subjects appeared. In 1981, the art historian William H. Gerdts noted that "Beard painted the American Indian ... sometimes as idyllic figures, sometimes with more poignant meaning," around 1876. The most well-known of these artworks was titled *Lo, The*

Poor Indian, and depicted an Indigenous man with his faithful dog in a windswept landscape, "sunk in despair and staring off into the unknown." Gerdts described the painting as "Beard's contribution to the vast pictorial and literary recognition of the passing away of the aborigine." *Seminole Child with Bittern* may have been intended as an elegiac work that links the Indigenous child to nature. However, the youngster seems oddly disconnected from the dynamic fledgling that they hold wrapped in a cloth, while the other two bitterns seem more defined characters than the child, who appears to be less of an individualized person than a generalized 'Seminole type.'

Dimensions

Canvas: 20 × 17 1/2 in. (50.8 × 44.5 cm) Frame: 25 1/4 × 23 1/4 × 1 3/8 in. (64.1 × 59.1 × 3.5 cm)