



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

VOLUME ONE

Edited by Sarah Lees

With an essay by Richard Rand
and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber

With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,
Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House,
Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley,
Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán,
James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Curtis R. Scott, Director of Publications
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Gustave Caillebotte

French, 1848–1894

39 | The Seine at Argenteuil c. 1892

Oil on canvas, 54.3 x 65.1 cm

Lower left: G. Caillebotte

Gift of George Heard Hamilton and Polly W. Hamilton, 1973

1973.35

Hailing from a wealthy Parisian family, Gustave Caillebotte turned to painting after obtaining a law degree in 1870 and serving in the Seine Garde Mobile during the Franco-Prussian War. Although he was accepted into the École des Beaux-Arts in the spring of 1873, he gravitated toward the avant-garde art scene, eventually exhibiting with the Impressionists at their independent exhibitions.¹ Many of Caillebotte's early paintings—indeed, those for which he is best known—celebrate the vitality of France's capital city. *Young Man at the Window* of 1875 (private collection), *The Pont de l'Europe* of 1876 (Musée du Petit Palais, Geneva), and *Paris Street; Rainy Day* of 1877 (The Art Institute of Chicago) highlight the spectacle of the boulevard in Baron Georges Haussmann's newly rebuilt Paris.² Disorienting perspectives, the depiction of modern buildings and materials, and the study of the dichotomy between public and private space characterize these and other works from this period.

While justly labeled an “urban Impressionist,” Caillebotte was also drawn to rural subjects from early in his career. The Caillebotte family owned a country house in Yerres, a small town southeast of Paris, which gave the young artist an opportunity to depict boaters on the Yerres River, the family garden, and the nearby landscape. After this retreat was sold, Caillebotte, with his brother Martial, purchased a house in Petit Gennevilliers, a small cluster of houses on the bank of the Seine, in 1881. Caillebotte was initially attracted to this area fifteen kilometers (9 miles) northwest of Paris because of its excellent sailing prospects. The Seine was almost two hundred meters wide between Petit Gennevilliers and Argenteuil, the town on the opposite bank of the Seine, and the prestigious sailing club, the Cercle de la Voile de Paris, which Caillebotte joined in 1876, was headquartered there. By 1887, Caillebotte had given up his apartment in Paris and lived full-time in this small village, spending his time painting and, increasingly, designing and building boats for sailing, then racing them.³

Caillebotte painted this location many times, his canvases revealing the natural beauty of the landscape, the excitement of sailing regattas, or the sleek lines of newly built yachts, as well as the smoke-belching factories along the river. In *The Seine at Argenteuil*, Caillebotte celebrates the dichotomy of this area's natural beauty and its growing industrialization, combining, in one canvas, the themes of rural timelessness and urban modernization that he had explored separately in the 1870s. Through a V-shaped frame of lush shrubs and verdant grasses, the artist highlights, from across the Seine, a series of buildings and two tall smokestacks that belong to Argenteuil's factories. The long rectangular building is easily identified as a factory structure: it is probably the Chantiers de la Seine, a shipyard for building iron boats, founded in 1874.⁴ In depicting this scene, Caillebotte set up his easel near the île Marante or Marande, a lozenge-shaped island which, in the nineteenth century, divided a wider portion of the Seine from a smaller branch tributary known as the Petit Bras.⁵ In Caillebotte's picture, the île Marante, dense with poplar and other trees, forms a striking contrast with the factory town visible beyond it. Here, pristine nature, seemingly untouched, stands apart from the mechanized, modern world.

In formal terms, Caillebotte both emphasized and blurred the distinction between the natural and human-made throughout this canvas. The shrubs on the bank in the foreground are circular, the poplars on the island ovals. These organic shapes—while not necessarily composed of circular brushstrokes—contrast with the rigidly geometric buildings of Argenteuil. The smokestacks are thin vertical rectangles, and the factory buildings and houses of the town are composed of rectangles and squares, with sharply articulated triangular roofs. Caillebotte does not sustain the formal distinction between the natural and the manufactured, however. Industry and nature meld where chimney smoke rises to meet white cumulous clouds. The lavender-gray smoke from the factory smokestacks floats into the atmosphere, its fluid, organic shape echoing the curved edges of the clouds. Caillebotte even used the same paint to give definition to the mass of clouds, the lavender-gray pigment indicating the shadows on the undersides of the clouds, particularly in the upper left corner. In Caillebotte's canvas, nature and industry are both distinct and symbiotic entities.

Caillebotte's handling of paint is vigorous and varied throughout the painting. The grassy banks in the



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foreground are quickly painted in short, crisscrossed daubs of pigment. Multiple layers of paint have been built up in this portion of the canvas—army and apple greens layered over emerald greens, with cranberry, blue, and white accents throughout the lower third of the painting. The river is made up of cobalt blue of varying hues; here white and blue paint are not thoroughly mixed, the unblended white suggesting foaming water near the riverbank. The clouds in the sky are painted with a circular gesture, the loose strokes emphasizing their immateriality. While some clouds are heavily impastoed, paint is thinnest in this region of the painting, where the artist allows the off-white ground of the canvas to stand for both clouds and pollution.

Caillebotte selected this location to set up his easel, just upstream from his home, on many occasions. By turning further to his left, he could focus on the lushness of the Île Marante and the sweeping expanse of the Seine, as he did in *The Seine and the Tip of the Île Marante* (c. 1890–91)⁶ and *The Seine in*

Foggy Weather (1891).⁷ In the former, a sketch-like work when compared with the more heavily brushed Clark painting, Caillebotte barely hints at the presence of factories on the opposite shore. Caillebotte often moved his easel closer to the Île Marante and the Petit Bras of the Seine to focus on the natural world exclusively, as in *The Petit Bras of the Seine* of 1888 (Mr. and Mrs. Trammell Crow collection, Dallas).⁸ No trace of modernization can be found in this canvas, which features lush poplar trees, sun-baked grasses on the riverbank, and the gentle curve of the Petit Bras.⁹

Upon its completion, Caillebotte gave *The Seine at Argenteuil* to his friend Pierre Rabot. A fellow resident of Petit Gennevilliers, Rabot, like Caillebotte, was an avid boatman. In 1892, about the time the Clark canvas was executed, Caillebotte painted Rabot's portrait (Josefowitz Collection, Switzerland).¹⁰ Although little is known of their relationship, the closeness of these men is attested by the fact that Rabot signed Caillebotte's death certificate in 1894.¹¹ AG

PROVENANCE The artist, given to Rabot, 1892; Pierre Rabot, Petit Gennevilliers (from 1892); Michel Benisovich, Paris and New York (sold to Hirschl & Adler, Jan. 1954); [Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York, 1954–56, sold to Hamilton, May 1956]; George Heard Hamilton and Polly W. Hamilton, New Haven and Williamstown (1956–73, given to the Clark); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1973.

EXHIBITIONS Paris 1894b, no. 62 or no. 85;¹² Williamstown 1975, no cat.; Springfield 1988, p. 25, no. 2, ill.; Huntington–Baltimore–Memphis 1990, pp. 23, 60, no. 15, ill.; Portland 1991, pp. 22–24, no. 2, ill.; Lausanne 2005, pp. 157, 186, no. 71, ill.

REFERENCES Berhaut 1978, p. 222, no. 420, ill.; Bachelard 1993, p. 144; Berhaut 1994, p. 235, no. 442, ill.; Christie's 1997b, p. 66, ill.

TECHNICAL REPORT The support is a fine weave canvas (27 x 23 threads/cm), wax-resin lined in 1982 due to the embrittled state of the original fabric and a marked center vertical stretcher crease. A colorman's stamp for Dubus, Paris, is still somewhat visible through the two extremely fine weave lining linens and their attached Mylar layer. An identical stamp, now preserved, was found on a paper layer below the canvas, perhaps an unusual feature of this particular supplier. The original five-member mortise-and-tenon stretcher was replaced with a four-member redwood ICA spring-design stretcher. Due to a slightly expanded stretcher fit, the lower fold-over falls outside of its original location, creating a narrow dished band at the edge of the picture. The artist's tacking margins were retained. There are scattered age cracks, some still displaying cupping in the water and sky, and drying cracks in thicker strokes of paint. There are deep traction cracks in the bluish foliage. When the picture was cleaned in 1982, grime, discolored varnish, and foreign matter caught in the impastos were removed. Some ground layer abrasion is seen in the cloud patterns and the lower right edge. Small brown splatters dot the sky near the far right smokestack. The paint layers are in very good condition, with only minor amounts of the older varnish in the deeper recesses of the green foreground. The present varnish layer is very thin, with a low gloss, except where variations in the paint catch the light.

The ground is a commercially applied off-white layer. Although no underdrawing was found using infrared reflectography, close inspection under low magnification revealed some charcoal particles scattered in the paint near the horizon line and along the flat buildings. The paint was applied in a thick vehicular paste consistency, with separate brushing patterns for the various zones of the picture. The complex paint film structure is up to five layers deep in the landscape areas, with less layering in the sky. There is an odd sprinkling of dark green paint on the far right smokestack, which may be an original accidental deposit of color. The thin purple signature in the lower left corner was applied after the painting had dried.

1. Caillebotte participated in the exhibitions held in the years 1876, 1877, 1879, 1880, and 1882. He was instrumental in organizing the 1877 exhibition.
2. B 32, 49, and 57.
3. For more on his career as a yachtsman, see Daniel Charles's essay, "Caillebotte and Boating," in *Bremen–Copenhagen–Madrid 2008–9*, pp. 109–19.
4. For an annotated historical map of Argenteuil that pinpoints Caillebotte's house as well as the factory Chantiers de la Seine, see *Bremen–Copenhagen–Madrid 2008–9*, p. 86.
5. In the middle of the twentieth century, the Petit Bras was filled in, making the Île Marante part of what is now the town of Colombes.
6. B 417. This painting, formerly in the Josefowitz Collection, Switzerland, was sold at Christie's 2004, no. 210.
7. B 425. This painting was offered at Christie's 1997b, no. 25.
8. B 381.
9. The Petit Bras was a popular subject with the Impressionists: Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Caillebotte all painted it. For examples of these artists' works, see *Washington–Hartford 2000*, pp. 48–49 and 168–71 (Monet), pp. 166–67 (Renoir), and pp. 172–73 (Caillebotte).
10. B 435.
11. Berhaut 1994, p. 281.
12. Nos. 62 and 85 are both entitled *La Seine à Argenteuil*, the first dated 1892 and the second 1890, though neither is identified as belonging to Rabot. Marie Berhaut suggests the Clark canvas was no. 85. Although the catalogue dated this work to 1890, Berhaut gives 1892 as a more likely date. See Berhaut 1994, p. 235, no. 442.

Randolph Caldecott

English, 1846–1886

40 | The Volunteer's Courtship, 1798 c. 1870

Paper or wood-pulp board, mounted on Masonite,
40.6 x 27.9 cm

Lower left: R C / The Volunteer's Courtship / 1798
1955.667

Best known in America as the illustrator who gave his name to the Caldecott Medal, Randolph Caldecott's short career as an artist was marked by the great success of his color woodblock picture books for children, sixteen of which were published between 1878 and