



GUSTAVE
Caillebotte
The Painter's Eye

Gustave Caillebotte, *Paris Street; Rainy Day* (detail), 1877.
The Art Institute of Chicago, Charles H. and Mary F.S. Worcester Collection

Kimbell
Art
Museum

EDUCATIONAL
RESOURCES

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PREPARING STUDENTS IN ADVANCE

We look forward to welcoming your school group to the Museum. Here are a few suggestions for teachers to help to ensure a successful, productive learning experience at the Museum.

LOOK, DISCUSS, CREATE

Use this resource to lead classroom discussions and related activities prior to the visit. (Suggested activities may also be used after the visit.)

REVIEW MUSEUM GUIDELINES

For students:

- Touch the works of art only with your eyes, never with your hands.
- Walk in the museum—do not run.
- Use a quiet voice when sharing your ideas.
- No photography is permitted in special exhibitions.
- Write and draw only with pencils—no pens or markers, please.

Additional information for teachers:

- Backpacks, umbrellas, or other bulky items are not allowed in the galleries. Free parcel check is available.
- Seeing-eye dogs and other service animals assisting people with disabilities are the only animals allowed in the Museum.
- Unscheduled lecturing to groups is not permitted.
- No food, drinks, or water bottles are allowed in any galleries.
- Cell phones should be turned to silent mode while in the Museum.
- Tobacco use, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes, electronic cigarettes, snuff, and chewing tobacco, is not permitted in the Museum or anywhere on the Museum's grounds.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

PEOPLE:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Gustave Caillebotte | goos-tahv / kai-ya-BOT |
| Paul Cézanne | pol / say-zahn |
| Edgar Degas | ed-gahr / duh-gah |
| Georges-Eugène Hausmann | jorj / oo-jhen / ooss-mahn |
| Edouard Manet | ehd-wahr / mah-nay |
| Claude Monet | kload / moh-nay |
| Pierre-Auguste Renoir | pee'air / oh-goost / reh-nwah |
| Alfred Sisley | ahl-fred / sees-lay |

PLACES:

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Argenteuil | ahr-jhan-tay |
| Petit Gennevilliers | peh-tee / juhn-nuh-veal-leay |
| Pont de l'Europe | pohn / duh / luhr-ohp |
| Rue Halévy | roo / ah-lev-ee |
| Saint-Lazare | sahn / la-zahr |
| Seine River | sehn |
| Yerres | yehr |

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

In 1875, Gustave Caillebotte (1848–1894) submitted a painting of floor scrapers to the official exhibition of the Academy of Fine Arts in Paris. The work was rejected, but Edgar Degas and Auguste Renoir encouraged him to exhibit it with the impressionists. Caillebotte’s canvas, depicting shirtless laborers finishing a wood floor, became one of the sensations of the second impressionist show in 1876—admirers praised its “truth” and “frank intimacy,” while critics deemed it “crude” and “anti-artistic.”

Caillebotte was thrilled by the impressionists’ fresh, radical vision. Over the next six years, he participated regularly in their exhibitions. Featuring skewed perspectives and modern subjects, his paintings reflect the visual drama of the capital. An artistic force in the group, Caillebotte was a vital organizer who gave both shape and support to their exhibitions. He also became a significant patron, amassing a collection of more than seventy works, including masterpieces by Degas and Renoir as well as Paul Cézanne, Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro, and Alfred Sisley.

All the same, Caillebotte remains the least known of the French impressionists. Because his family was wealthy, he had no need to earn an income from his art. He kept most of his best works for himself: only a few entered private collections. His collection of paintings by his friends, bequeathed to the state, became the cornerstone of impressionist art in French national museums—but the impressive bequest overshadowed his own achievements as a painter.

In the mid-1900s, more than a half century after his death at age forty-five, interest in Caillebotte’s art began to revive. *Gustave Caillebotte: The Painter’s Eye* continues this rediscovery, gathering his best work for a fresh look. The exhibition presents his most famous cityscapes and interiors, but also shows his artistic range with a selection of portraits, nudes, still lifes, river scenes, garden views, and landscapes. Together, they portray an artist deeply interested in his surroundings, preoccupied with the ways that the act of looking could lead him to a new understanding of his world: “I imagine,” wrote Caillebotte to Monet, “that the very great artists attach you even more to life.”

Looking In: Caillebotte at Home

Caillebotte quietly dramatized images from his daily life, painting the interiors of his parents' Parisian town house and, after their death, the nearby apartment where he lived with his youngest brother Martial. Faithfully represented, the family home is ornate, with tasseled curtains, decorative wallpaper, and bourgeois accessories. The brothers' apartment, furnished with overstuffed sofas and a gaming table, is somewhat less stately. Yet gilded picture frames and paneling indicate that the denizens of this bachelor pad were men of means.



A Game of Bezique
Oil on canvas, 1881
Louvre Abu Dhabi

Many of these paintings feature the people closest to the artist—his mother and younger brother René sharing a wordless meal; Martial playing piano; Martial gathered with friends to play cards; family members or close friends in silence, absorbed in reading or in thought. Despite the intimacy of Caillebotte's interior paintings, they reflect an undercurrent of loneliness and isolation. The palette is subdued, even somber, and social interaction among figures is rare. Tilted perspectives—which he would use with equal enthusiasm in a garden or looking out a window—amplify the unsettling mood and psychological tension of these scenes.

Looking Out: View from the Window

Artists have been attracted to painting views from windows ever since the Renaissance, when a painting itself was described, metaphorically, as a window onto another world. Caillebotte frequently painted people gazing out windows, providing a glimpse of the outside world through the frame. By showing viewers these interior spaces and the world beyond, he contrasted private and public spheres, domestic intimacy and urban spectacle. Often, however, Caillebotte implied but did not depict the window, showing surrounding architectural details such as sills, casement jambs, and decorative iron balconies.



Interior, Woman at the Window
Oil on canvas, 1880
Private collection

In the more radical compositions, Caillebotte eliminated all evidence of the window, save for the plunging perspectives that alone suggest an elevated vantage point and the window through which the scene must have been observed. In these paintings, which hint at the cityscapes for which the artist is best known, Paris itself emerges as the main subject.

Parisian Perspectives

In 1877, Caillebotte was the major force behind the third impressionist exhibition, assuming the role of primary organizer, financier, and curator. In the grand salon of the apartment he rented for the occasion, he hung a trio of his paintings—*The Pont de l'Europe*, *Paris Street, Rainy Day*, and *The House Painters*. The placement of these paintings, particularly the largest one, strongly asserted Caillebotte's presence as a leader. "[He] will certainly be one of the boldest of the group," declared Émile Zola after viewing the exhibition.



The Pont de l'Europe
Oil on canvas, 1876
Association des Amis du Petit Palais,
Geneva

Other views of the capital, including the [Kimbell's *On the Pont de l'Europe*](#), painted a bit later, demonstrate the artist's commitment to modern life. Set on different boulevards in central Paris, such images respond directly to the modernized capital, which was in the latter stages of a comprehensive urban redesign. Begun in the 1850s under the direction of Baron Haussmann to address a host of city ills, the so-called Haussmannization of Paris implemented stringent codes that unified building design, improved urban infrastructure, widened streets, and added sidewalks and streetlamps. Caillebotte's paintings capture the visual transformation of Paris into the city as it is known today.

Viewing Others: Portraits

With his finances secured by his family's profitable investments, Caillebotte had no need to derive an income from his art. The portraits he painted, therefore, were not commissioned works that prioritized a client's desires or commercial considerations over artistic ones. He gave equal weight to his sitters and their setting. Elaborate armchairs and wildly patterned divans threaten to overwhelm the individuals, but their sturdy postures, penetrating gazes, and deep concentration impart a commanding presence that stands up to the brash decor.



Portrait of Henri Cordier
Oil on canvas, 1883
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Representing upper middle-class Parisians—editors, scholars, painters, and collectors—seated in either the artist's or the subject's apartment, these works give a sense of Caillebotte's private life, which in the absence

of letters or diaries remains largely unknown. Because Caillebotte's friends served him as models, sometimes the boundary between a portrait and a scene from daily life is not clear. These intimate depictions were often given to the sitters as gifts.

River Views

Caillebotte grew up between his family's home in Paris and their large country estate in Yerres, fifteen miles south of the capital. With its house set in a large park, Yerres offered respite from the city and ample opportunity for outdoor pursuits, including those on the river. Boating was especially popular, and Caillebotte frequently painted Sunday visitors from Paris, as well as more serious club rowers dressed in uniform. The river pictures are notably freer in their handling than his Parisian works: paint application is thicker, brushstrokes are more rapid, and the palette is bolder.



Skiffs
Oil on canvas, 1877
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.

In these paintings, Caillebotte captured the play of color and light through its reflections on the water—a subject of great interest for many impressionists, but absent from Caillebotte's urban paintings. After the family estate at Yerres was sold in 1879, Caillebotte bought his own suburban retreat north of Paris on the Seine in Petit Gennevilliers, where he continued to paint the river.

An Eye for Display

Still life is not usually associated with the impressionists, who are better known for landscapes and scenes of Parisian life. But every member of the group—Cézanne, of course, but also Monet and even Degas—experimented with the traditional genre. Caillebotte, too, became seriously interested in it and painted a variety of still lifes in the early

1880s. Many depict foods sumptuously arrayed in Parisian markets to lure passersby into opening their wallets.

Each of the still lifes here depicts objects in a commercial setting—mostly on the premises of specialists in meat, poultry, or game, but also at greengrocers, pastry shops, and restaurants. Caillebotte took equal pleasure in the brightly colored fruits and sugary confections and more provocative cuts of beef, plucked chickens, or animal parts—where beauty and brutality commingled. His revolutionary still lifes complement his better-known cityscapes, taking viewers from sweeping scenes of Parisian streets to close-up views of objects, glimpsed not in the home but in public, in shops and restaurants.



Fruit Displayed on a Stand
Oil on canvas, c. 1881–82
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Suburban Views

Caillebotte settled in Petit Gennevilliers permanently in 1887. In this retreat from city life, he more fully explored the impressionist landscape. A series depicting the fields near his new home explores changing seasons and was influenced by the works of his close friend Claude Monet, who painted a single subject in varying light conditions.

As Caillebotte's connection to artistic currents in Paris waned, he devoted himself to other pursuits. He shared with Monet, who had also left Paris for the country, a passion for gardening. In Petit Gennevilliers, Caillebotte also became a passionate boat designer and competitive sailor. In *Regatta in Argenteuil*, completed shortly before his death in 1894 at age forty-five, he portrayed himself sailing with a partner.

Caillebotte's impressionist colleagues mourned the premature loss of their friend. "If he had lived . . . he would have benefited from the same

turn of fortune as us,” wrote Monet, “because he was full of talent . . . when we lost him, he was still only at the beginning of his career.”



Self-Portrait, 1888–89
Oil on canvas
Musée d’Orsay, Paris



The Floor Scrapers
Oil on canvas, 1875
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)

The Floor Scrapers

Oil on canvas, 1875

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

In 1875, Caillebotte submitted this painting to the jury of the French Salon. The canvas was rejected, but it caught the eye of some of the impressionists, who invited Caillebotte to show his work the following year at their second exhibition. There, hanging alongside works by Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley, and Claude Monet, *The Floor Scrapers* garnered considerable attention. Some critics praised the work's depiction of shirtless urban laborers for its startling realism, while conservative reviewers found the unidealized figures offensive: "Do nudes," wrote one, "but do beautiful nudes, or don't do them at all!"

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

What you notice about this setting? How would you describe this scene to a friend?

What kind of work are the men doing? Does this look like easy or difficult work? Why? Why do you think the artist decided to show men scraping floor planks? What ideas do you associate with this kind of labor?

What types of lines does the artist emphasize in this picture? Where do they lead your eye? Where do the tools on the floor direct your eye? What lines or shapes contrast with the ruler-straight lines?

Describe what you see outside of the window. Where does Caillebotte show contrasts of light and shadow?

During Caillebotte's lifetime, his hometown of Paris underwent tremendous change. What other kinds of laborers do you think the artist witnessed? How is this subject different from a story from history or mythology?

COMPARE this with a painting by one of the other artists associated with the impressionists. Consider possible differences in style, subject, and perspective.



Paris Street, Rainy Day
Oil on canvas, 1877
The Art Institute of Chicago

Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)

Paris Street, Rainy Day

Oil on canvas, 1877

Art Institute of Chicago

When this canvas was exhibited at the 1877 impressionist exhibition, it elicited numerous comparisons to photography, specifically the wide angles, deep focus, and severe cropping of figures seen in the new medium. Like a modern snapshot, the composition captures a haphazard moment, as if the artist had stumbled upon this scene. Yet Caillebotte carefully composed the picture and painted it with precision: the lamppost bifurcates the canvas; lines of perspective draw viewers' eyes from the foreground into the deep recesses; and the strategic positioning of the figures beneath umbrellas emphasizes their isolation within a crowd. The uniformity of the umbrellas and clothing underscores the anonymity of the modern city. The size of the canvas—the largest Caillebotte is known to have painted—suggests the painter's artistic ambition.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

What do you find most interesting about Caillebotte's depiction of life on Paris streets? Which details seem especially important?

Why do you think Caillebotte decided to paint a rainy day? How would this scene look on a sunny day? What would be different?

Describe the couple on the sidewalk. Where are they looking? How else does Caillebotte make us aware of the act of looking? Where is the viewer in this picture? What kinds of sounds would we hear? How would it feel to walk along this city street?

Caillebotte pays attention to the lines and geometry of the "new" Paris. Where is the streetlight in this picture? What do you notice about the buildings and streets? Do you see evidence of the sweeping changes taking place at this time?

How do the umbrellas contrast to the straight lines in this composition? How do they direct your eye or draw attention to interesting details?

CREATE a picture representing your favorite spot in your hometown. Choose a time of day and season; include details that show what it's like to really be there.



A Boating Party
Oil on canvas, 1877–78
Private collection

Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)

A Boating Party

Oil on canvas, 1877–78

Private collection

Wearing a top hat, bow tie, and vest, and with his coat on the seat beside him, the rower is a visiting Parisian enjoying an excursion in the countryside. In the distance, on the other hand, two local men or dedicated boaters are wearing clothing more suited for sport. The city rower is pushed to the very front of the picture plane, revealing the artist's specific point of view from a seat within the boat opposite the subject, whose identity remains unknown.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

What do you see happening in this picture? Where is the viewer in this picture? What do you notice first about the man sitting right in front of our eyes?

Compare the main subject with the other figures in the distance. What differences do you notice? Which outfits seem most appropriate for boating?

Describe the brushwork used to show this outdoor setting. What different surfaces and textures does Caillebotte paint? Where do you notice light playing off materials, such as the rippling water or the figure's striped shirt?

Is this a work or leisure scene? Why? How does this picture compare with Caillebotte's images of the big city?

What sounds would we hear on the river? Where we would notice motion? Is this a place or activity that you would enjoy? Why or why not?

How much detail does Caillebotte show inside the boat? How would this picture change if Caillebotte placed the viewer in a different location, such as on the bank or another boat?

WRITE a paragraph describing your favorite outdoor activity. What special skills are necessary? Do you go to a special place? Is this an on-your-own activity or something you would do with friends?



The Rue Halévy, Seen from the Sixth Floor
Oil on canvas, 1878
Private collection, Dallas

Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)

The Rue Halévy, Seen from the Sixth Floor

Oil on canvas, 1878

Private collection, Dallas

This painting depicts the convergence of boulevards near Caillebotte's apartment. The artist's own building is visible on the right; the recently completed Paris Opéra stands just beyond it. Caillebotte experimented with multiple perspectives of this subject—some canvases, like this one, reflect the artist's gaze into the distance, while others suggest the plunging view toward the street below. Of the three paintings in the exhibition, this is the most meticulously painted. Caillebotte signed it and sent it to the impressionist exhibition of 1879.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

Where did the artist paint this scene? Why do you think he chose this view of the city? What do we see happening on the streets below?

What do you notice on the left side of this composition? Why do you think Caillebotte includes a glimpse of the open balcony window?

Describe the building fronts. What seems similar or different about each one? What helps us to tell the Paris Opéra apart from the other structures? (What is on top of that building?)

What ideas about city life come up as you consider this picture? How would it feel to be down on the street walking on the sidewalk or riding in a carriage?

What colors does Caillebotte use here? Can you guess the time of day?

In other paintings of the same view, Caillebotte includes plantings on the balcony. Why do you think he omitted them here? How does the absence of green affect how we see the city?

RESEARCH and produce a timeline tracing the history of Paris from 1850 to 1900. What major events and changes affected life in Caillebotte's hometown?



At a Café
Oil on canvas, 1880
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)

At a Café

Oil on canvas, 1880

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

A mirror set in the wall behind the central figure creates a complex, almost baffling visual interplay of spaces. It is a game of reflections. The first mirror shows the reflection of two men seated at a table behind the painter/viewer. Above their heads, a second mirror reflects the first wall—the one that the viewer faces—extending out of the picture space to the right, including the café entrance with its striped awning. Other impressionists, especially Edouard Manet and Edgar Degas, favored the theme of the café, though they generally depicted the women seen there. Caillebotte instead inserted a male subject, a recurring substitution in his oeuvre.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

What do you notice happening in this picture? Is this a private home or public space? How do you know? Why do you think cafés were so popular in nineteenth-century Paris?

What is the standing man doing? What words describe his expression? Where is he looking? How many other people do we see in this café? What are they doing?

Does this appear to be a quiet or loud space? Why? Describe how the characters do or do not relate to each other.

Count the number of mirrors. (The hats help to show reflections.) How does Caillebotte use mirrors to play with and confuse the space of the room?

Compare the props in the background. Which objects appear close and which appear farther away? How does that affect how we read the space?

Where does the artist bring a glimpse of the out-of-doors into the interior? How does that work in the “push-pull” of this composition?

CREATE a self-portrait in an interior scene that uses reflections in two or more mirrors to play with perceptions of space and scale.



Interior, a Woman Reading
Oil on canvas, 1880
Private collection

Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)

Interior, a Woman Reading

Oil on canvas, 1880

Private collection

One of Caillebotte's goals was to challenge traditional modes of representing deep space on a flat surface. Here, the juxtaposition of near and far—of a looming woman and a shrinking man—is startling, provoking questions about personal, as well as spatial, relationships.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

Describe what you see happening in this picture. What is the general mood? Which elements seem unusual or unsettling?

Compare the woman and man. What are the most striking similarities and differences? (Pose, reading material, seat, relative scale . . .) Who are these individuals? What is their relationship?

What kind of interior is this? Are they well off? What clues about status do you notice?

From where does light enter the room? Where does the artist use light to show different surface textures—such as the gleaming polished surfaces of the woman's hard, wooden chair or the sheen on the patterned couch pillow?

How does Caillebotte play with tricks of space and scale to imply mood?

WRITE a brief script about a conversation between these two characters that may have preceded this painted scene.



Fruit Displayed on a Stand
Oil on canvas, c. 1881–82
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)

Fruit Displayed on a Stand

Oil on canvas, c. 1881–82

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The fruits at this upscale stand are carefully displayed to lure bourgeois passersby—or their servants—and turn a profit. White paper cradles each fig, pear, apple, orange, and tomato, while dark green leaves frame the arrangement. Caillebotte enhanced the allure by cutting out almost every reference to the setting, so that fruits fill nearly every inch of the canvas and give viewers the sensation of standing directly before the assortment. It is precisely the kind of display that Caillebotte’s neighbors would have encountered in their newly designed neighborhood near the Paris Opéra.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

Name the different fruits. How does this display compare to grocery stores today? What does this presentation suggest to you? What kind of customer would visit this shop?

What is the viewer’s role in the picture? What would be our first action when encountering this bountiful selection?

Describe the space in this picture. How does this up-close perspective—with few distractions—affect how we see the fruit?

Compare the shapes, sizes, and textures of the different fruits. How does Caillebotte use light and color to suggest how they may feel or taste?

COMPARE this fruit display with still lifes by other impressionists or old masters. What are the most striking differences?



Sunflowers, Garden at Petit Gennevilliers

Oil on canvas, c. 1885

Private collection

Gustave Caillebotte (French, 1848–1894)

Sunflowers, Garden at Petit Gennevilliers

Oil on canvas, c. 1885

Private collection

This large-scale garden painting is part of a group of canvases representing the planted areas of exuberant flowers with the paths and buildings of Caillebotte's estate at Petit Gennevilliers, along the Seine River. In this painting, the artist played the flouncing, tilting heads of the sunflowers against the flat facade of the house, punctured by the black rectangles of the shuttered windows.

FOR CLASSROOM DISCUSSION / ACTIVITY

What season is this? What textures do you notice in the garden?

Describe the space in this scene. Where does the artist position the viewer? Does Caillebotte offer any obvious routes for approaching the house? How does that affect our experience of the picture?

How do the various flowers and plants contrast with the structures? What types of geometric shapes appear? Where do you see the most movement?

Compare the size of the sunflowers with the house windows. What does the spatial relationship suggest?

What part of the picture dominates the composition? How would this image change if Caillebotte included a person?

In addition to painting, Caillebotte was an avid gardener and boat designer. Do these interests have anything in common?

LOCATE the small town of Petit Gennevilliers on a map. What natural features and other towns are located nearby? Why do you think this site appealed to Caillebotte?