GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE

Painter and Patron of Impressionism

Nationalgalerie
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

HIRMER

CONTENTS

ON THE EXHIBITION

Gustave Caillebotte – Painter and Patron of Impressionism

Gustave Caillebotte (1848–1894) was one of the central figures of Impressionism, yet is still relatively undiscovered, for he was initially known more for his role as patron. As the driving force within the group, he organized and financed its first exhibitions. Moreover, he generously supported his painter colleagues and bought many of their paintings. On his death Caillebotte bequeathed to the French State his important collection, which today forms the core of the Musée d'Orsay's Impressionist holdings. His own painting, however, would find widespread recognition and appreciation only much later. Study of Caillebotte's œuvre, which began in the second half of the twentieth century, is closely associated with Marie Berhaut, who wrote the first monograph on him and later his catalogue raisonné.[1] Whereas Caillebotte was first rediscovered mainly in France, the art historian J. Kirk T. Varnedoe noted a new interest in the artist on the part of the American public once the Art Institute of Chicago acquired his *Paris Street; Rainy Day* in 1964.[2] International attention was focused on Caillebotte at the latest in major exhibitions in Paris, Chicago, and Los Angeles in 1994 marking the 100th anniversary of his death, all of which emphasized his importance as a painter.[3] Significantly, even the notable London retrospective in 1996 could still be titled *The Unknown Impressionist*.[4] And in Germany, as well, he was considered an unknown until the exhibitions in Bremen in 2008 and Frankfurt in 2012.[5] Now, at last, Caillebotte is numbered among the Impressionists as a matter of course, and his art is duly recognized. So our exhibition is able to focus on both of his ties to the movement, his contributions as both painter and patron.

The Alte Nationalgalerie houses one of the earliest museum collections of Impressionism in Germany, one that dates back to the years when Hugo von Tschudi was director (1896–1908). It includes works by all the artists who form—largely thanks to Caillebotte—the Impressionist canon, but nothing by Caillebotte himself. But despite his absence from the collection, Caillebotte is closely associated with its history. And now, thanks to the extraordinary loan of *Paris Street; Rainy Day* from the Art Institute of Chicago, we are able to present a special assortment of works that both shed new light on our own holdings and in three respects provide a new understanding of the Impressionist movement in general. For one, the exhibition introduces the painting of Caillebotte, with his own particular interpretation of Impressionism, thus proving that the group's style was by no means as uniform as is frequently assumed. For another, engagement with Caillebotte, a man who stood in close contact with all the French masters that are represented in the Nationalgalerie, provides a sense of the Impressionists' professional network. The multiple links between Caillebotte and his colleagues, such as as Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, and Claude Monet, are explored in detail. And finally, this exhibition illustrates how Caillebotte's bequest helped his Impressionist colleagues, despite intense resistance, find the acceptance in public collections that was previously denied them. The parallel with Tschudi's pursuit of this same goal in Berlin at the time becomes obvious.

Caillebotte's masterpiece *Paris Street; Rainy Day* can be understood as a manifesto of the "new" Paris.[6] The forward-looking painting with its almost life-size figures and unconventional perspective was presented at the third Impressionist exhibition, and has lost none of its enormous appeal.[7] It represents an appropriation of urban motifs from modern Paris with new artistic approaches. The painting's monumental size and the sense of vast space created by the placement of the individual groups of figures can hardly be grasped in their entirety at a glance. The viewer's gaze wanders from one figure to the next, as if he were himself a participant in the street's activity. One of the composition's effective features is its seemingly arbitrary cropping, suggesting only a momentary perception and introducing into the motionless scene a sense of pacing, as in the unexpected entrance of the man at the left edge. Caillebotte's city views play with various viewpoints—from the street, from a balcony, or across rooftops. These suggest the observations of different types of figures—from the flaneur being carried along in the flow of pedestrian traffic, a definite part of the scene, to the detached apartment dweller looking down on the public urban space from the privacy of his balcony. With them Caillebotte devel-

oped an imagery of his own with at times radical perspectives that correspond to the new feeling of the *vie moderne*.

It is this urbane Impressionism that is the focus of Karin Sagner's presentation of the painter Gustave Caillebotte in the catalogue. We were fortunate in being able to win her over to the project; an expert on Caillebotte, she not only wrote the first German-language monograph on the artist,[8] but also curated the most comprehensive Caillebotte exhibition in Germany at Frankfurt's Schirn Kunsthalle in 2012.[9] Against the background of Georges-Eugène Haussmann's radical redesign of Paris, she explains the attraction for Caillebotte—as for his painter friends Monet and Renoir—of its juxtapositions of old and new. The cityscape's changes in the 1870s and resulting modern lifestyle were a major inspiration. Her essay places Caillebotte's painting in context and points out the artist's characteristic features in this early phase of his career.

Arnika Groenewald-Schmidt, an art historian who specializes in the transnational artistic exchange of the nineteenth century and a curator at the Belvedere in Vienna, chose to describe the dense Impressionist network, with Caillebotte in its center. She details his multiple ties, for example his close friendships with Renoir and Monet, his admiration for Manet and Pissarro, and his rivalry with Degas. Her careful presentation makes it clear that his engagement with the group went far beyond that of a patron. Like his friends, in the 1880s he was drawn to the countryside, where he could pursue his passions for gardening and sailing, which again linked him with a number of different artists. In addition to modern metropolitan life, favorite landscape motifs of the Impressionsts like those of Argenteuil and Vétheuil are evoked. Thanks to their connection to Caillebotte, the French Impressionists represented in the Nationalgalerie can be seen in a new context and interpreted in new ways.

Caillebotte the patron is of special interest in our exhibition as well as the painter. My own catalogue essay on his collecting traces how Caillebotte's visionary bequest managed to secure Impressionism's presence in both museums and official art history writing. The debate in Paris over the acceptance of his gift shows how far ahead of his time he was in his sponsorship of Impressionism. A similar battle took place in Berlin in the last years of the nineteenth century over the addition of modern art to the holdings of the Nationalgalerie. Both here and there, the opening of museums to modernism posed a threat to traditional academic art. This played out most obviously in the simple assignment of exhibition space; if newer works were to be exhibited, older movements had to give way to them. In this respect the stimulus produced by Caillebotte's advocacy of the new art would also have an effect on the Nationalgalerie.

Following the 2017 exhibition *Rodin – Rilke – Hofmannsthal: Man and His Genius*, this is now the second exhibition on how a major artist relates to the Alte Nationalgalerie's collection of modern French art. This is a new exhibition format, one that is not organized as a major one-man show, but rather as a precisely calculated closeup on a specific theme centered on a single masterpiece. This approach allows for novel combinations and helps viewers experience our own collection in a new way, opening up fresh perspectives on its works. Like the Rodin exhibition, the present one was made possible by generous support from the Friends of the Nationalgalerie.
I therefore owe most sincere thanks to the association, particularly André Odier, Lutz Driever, and Marie Probst. Without the support of all those involved, the project could not have been realized. I am especially grateful to Arnika Groenewald-Schmidt and Karin Sagner for their scholarly researches and enlightening contributions to the catalogue. We are also indebted to Karin Sagner for putting us in contact with Caillebotte's descendants. Among them we found in Gilles Chardeau, president of the Comité Caillebotte, an expert with a profound knowledge of the subject. He not only contributed a detailed biography of the artist to this catalogue, but also made available an important loan. I sincerely thank him as well as the other private and institutional lenders who made our presentation of Caillebotte possible in its present form. And of course it was our wonderful exchange

with the Art Institute of Chicago's Gloria Groom that paved the way for the most unusual loan of *Paris Street; Rainy Day*, providing the stimulus for this exhibition.

Thanks also to Hirmer Verlag for producing the catalogue with its pleasing graphic design and careful editing. At Hirmer I particularly mention Kerstin Ludolph, who immediately took on the project with great interest. And for the successful and insightful design of the exhibition and its graphics, which have provided a suitable setting for our special guest, I am greatly indebted to StudioKrimm.

Ralph Gleis
Head of the Alte Nationalgalerie

1 See Marie Berhaut, *Caillebotte (1848–1894), sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris: Wildenstein, 1951), and *Gustave Caillebotte: Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels* (Paris: Wildenstein Institute, 1994).

2 See J. Kirk T. Varnedoe, "Caillebotte: An Evolving Perspective," in *Gustave Caillebotte: A Retrospective Exhibition*, ed. J. Kirk T. Varnedoe and Thomas P. Lee, exh. cat. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1976), 47.

3 Paris, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, *Gustave Caillebotte, 1848–1894*, September 16, 1994–January 9, 1995; Art Institute of Chicago, *Gustave Caillebotte: Urban Impressionist*, February 18–May 28, 1995; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, June 22–September 10, 1995.

4 See Anne Distel, ed., *Gustave Caillebotte: The Unknown Impressionist*, exh. cat. Royal Academy of Arts, London (Ghent: Ludion Press, 1996).

5 See Anne-Birgit Fonsmark, ed., *Über das Wasser: Gustave Caillebotte, ein Impressionist wird wieder entdeckt*, exh. cat. Kunsthalle, Bremen (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008); and Karin Sagner and Max Hollein, eds., *Gustave Caillebotte: An Impressionist and Photography*, exh. cat. Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (Munich: Hirmer, 2012).

6 The most up-to-date research on the painting is collected in "Gustave Caillebotte: *Paris Street; Rainy Day*," in *Caillebotte: Paintings and Drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago*, ed. Gloria Groom and Kelly Keegan, exh. cat. Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago: Art Institute, 2015).

7 The picture shows the future of photography by painterly means, as was noted by Paul Sébillot in his review of the work's first exhibition at the third Impressionist show in 1877. See Paul Sébillot, "Exposition des Impressionnistes," *Le Bien Public*, April 7, 1877, 2.

8 See Karin Sagner, *Gustave Caillebotte: Neue Perspektiven des Impressionismus* (Munich: Hirmer, 2009).

9 See Sanger and Hollein, *Gustave Caillebotte* (see note 5).