



**Gustave Caillebotte**  
(1848-1894)

**Arm of the Seine,  
Autumnal Mood**

(Le petit bras de la Seine,  
effet d'automne)

1890

*undated*

*signed bottom right:  
"G. Caillebotte"*

*Oil on canvas*

*h 65.0 cm x b 54.5 cm*

*WRM Dep. FC 689*





## Gustave Caillebotte – Arm of the Seine, Autumnal Mood

Brief Report on Technology and Condition

### Brief Report

According to Berhaut, this autumnal scene, with its blues, greens and yellows, shows the view of an arm of the Seine from the Île Marande looking towards the village of Bezons [Berhaut 1994, p. 225]. That Caillebotte might really have painted this picture on site is indicated by an unpainted patch on the bottom edge, whose form and size suggest it is due to the fastening of a field easel typically used for open-air painting (fig. 12). The canvas, pre-primed in white, is the popular F 15 size and, as we see from a stencil verso, was obtained from Caillebotte's Parisian art-supplies dealer Dubus [Lewerentz 2008 pp. 274-275] (fig. 2). Without any compositional lay-in in the form of an underpainting or underdrawing, the artist executed the work probably in one or two sessions. To start with, he filled the parts of the picture with semi-transparent undercoats of paint in the respective local colour, before covering the surface with directional brush-strokes applied largely wet-in-wet. In so doing, he placed large-areas of paint in the region of the sky and the water, applied thinly,

right next to impasto dabs in the foliage and the reflections (figs 7, 8). A curious feature of this painting is the presence of two signatures both reading "G. Caillebotte", although the one in the bottom left-hand corner is now covered by a later overpainting and is only revealed by infrared reflectography (figs 5, 6). Both signatures were applied to the painting long after its completion, when the paint-layer was not only already dry but also showing signs of craquelure in places. The handwriting of the two signatures evinces considerable parallels, but no similarity with Caillebotte's own. In both cases, as so often in the work of this artist, we seem to have signatures applied posthumously either by his brother Martial or his executor Auguste Renoir [Berhaut 1994, p. 60]. Why a (presumably) first signature was rejected and a second then added in the bottom right-hand corner is unclear. Purely aesthetic motives may have played a part.



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### Picture support canvas

Standard format	F15 (65.0 x 54.0 cm), vertical
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	vertical 21, horizontal 23 threads per cm; very close, fine weave with very variable thickness in both weft and warp yarns, occasional knots; slight Z-twist
Stretching	not original; the current stretching is the third, with strip-lining and tacks; original stretching with round-headed nails at intervals of 3.0-7.0 cm
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with cross-bars, not original, machine-made (fig. 2)
Stretcher/strainer depth	1.8 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	–
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	stencil on the top half of the canvas <i>verso</i> (largely obscured by the present stretcher): «60 Bould Malesherbes Paris / DUBUS / COULEURS FINES & TOILES A PEINDRE / RENTOILAGE & RESTAURATION / DE TABLEAUX», h 9.5 x b 15.0 cm (fig. 2)



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### Ground

Sizing	not determined
Colour	off-white
Application	thin, smooth and even ground applied before the canvas was cut to size and stretched; canvas structure remains visible, although the elevations are covered (figs 7, 8)
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	the ground is homogeneous and even; the microscope reveals fine black and red pigment particles (fig. 11)

### Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	–
Extent/character	none discernible
Pentimenti	–



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### Paint layer

Paint application/technique  
and artist's own revision

brisk, loose manner of painting; predominantly two-layer structure: a first semi-transparent underpainting of broad areas in most of the regions (e.g. sky in pale blue, water in medium blue, shaded areas and banks in dark greenish blue) was followed by more detailed depiction of the motifs in impasto applications, mostly wet-in-wet (fig. 9); the brushwork is largely oriented to the shapes of the motifs (e.g. long, and wavelike in the water, exhausting the load of the brush, but crosswise in the greenish-yellow foliage) (figs 7, 8)

Painting tools

various brushes ranging in breadth from 0.3-0.7 cm;  
probably bristle

Surface structure

brushwork clearly discernible: thin and covering broad areas in the sky and water, impasto and relief-like in the foliage and reflections (figs 3, 8)

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: medium yellow, yellow lake (fig 10), medium orange, pale red, red lake (pink fluorescence under UV, fig. 4), medium blue, two dark blues, pale to medium green, dark green, white and black in blends  
VIS spectrometry: chrome yellow(?)/cadmium yellow(?), vermilion, cobalt blue, ultramarine blue, Prussian blue, copper-based green(?), viridian

Binding mediums

presumably oil

### Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

now varnished, however the varnish is not authentic; around impasto areas there are remains of an old yellowed coating



## Signature/Mark

When?

there are two signatures on the painting:

- 1.) visible signature: bottom right “G. Caillebotte” applied in black paint with a pointed brush on a paint-layer which had already completely dried and was showing signs of age-related craquelure and early shrinkage cracks (fig. 5)
- 2.) bottom left “G. Caillebotte” applied in black paint (or maybe ink or India ink) with a pointed brush to the dry paint-layer; this signature has been overpainted completely and is only visible by means of infrared reflectography (fig. 6)

Autograph signature

–

Serial

- 1.) Berhaut wrongly judged the visible signature to be a stamp [Berkhaut 1994, p. 225], but it is in fact handwritten, albeit bearing no resemblance to Caillebotte’s autograph signatures
- 2.) manual inscription with a marked similarity to (1); the overpainting does not belong to the original work; presumably both signatures were executed by the same hand, probably by one of the executors, Martial Caillebotte or Auguste Renoir after the artist’s death [Berkhaut 1994, p. 60]

## Frame

Authenticity

not original

## State of preservation

The turnover edge of the canvas was strip-lined with greyish-brown edging-tape in the course of a fairly recent restoration; original stretcher (probably with horizontal centre bar) was removed for unknown reasons and replaced by the current one; minor losses in the paint-layer especially in the corners, large loss within one impasto area in the right of the foliage of the trees (fig. 11); the whole picture shows marked age-related craquelure and occasional early shrinkage cracks; remains of old varnish and embedded cotton-wool fibres in the present coat suggest that at least one coat of varnish has been removed.



### Additional remarks

The painting bears signs of having been painted in the open air (see above, Brief Report). The actual canvas shows marked deviations in its tonal values from the monochrome illustration in the *catalogue raisonné*, particularly conspicuous in the reflections and as a result of the absence of any signatures in the latter [Berhaut 1994, p. 225]. This reproduction is presumably based on a very early photograph whose tonal and contrastive effects have undergone major changes.

### Literature

- Berhaut 1994: Marie Berhaut, *Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels*, Paris 1994, cat. no. 414, p. 225, with ill.
- Bourgeois Aîné 1888: Bourgeois Aîné, *Catalogue général illustré*, Paris 1888
- Budde/Schaefer 2001: Rainer Budde, Barbara Schaefer, *Miracle de la couleur* (exhib. cat. Cologne Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, 8 September – 9. December 2001), Cologne 2001, no cat. no., p. 406, with ill.
- Czymmek 2000: Götz Czymmek, “Caillebotte im Wallraf-Richartz-Museum”, *Kölner Museums Bulletin*, 3/2000, 51-61
- Lewerentz 2008: Katja Lewerentz, “Gustave Caillebotte’s Maltechnik und die Praxis der Freilichtmalerei”, in: *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung*, 2 (2008), 274-286

### Source of illustrations

Fig. 12 uses an illustration taken from Bourgeois Aîné 1888, p. 109

All further illustrations and figures: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud



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### Examination methods used

- ✓ Incident light
- ✓ Raking light
- ✓ Reflected light
- ✓ Transmitted light
- ✓ Ultraviolet fluorescence
- ✓ Infrared reflectography
- ✓ False-colour infrared reflectography
- ✓ X-ray
- ✓ Stereomicroscopy
- ✓ VIS spectrometry
- Wood identification
- FTIR (Fourier transform spectroscopy)
- EDX (Energy Dispersive X-ray analysis)
- Microchemical analysis

Author of examination: Katja Lewerentz  
Author of brief report: Caroline von Saint-George

Date: 11/2002

Date: 12/2008





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Fig. 1  
Recto

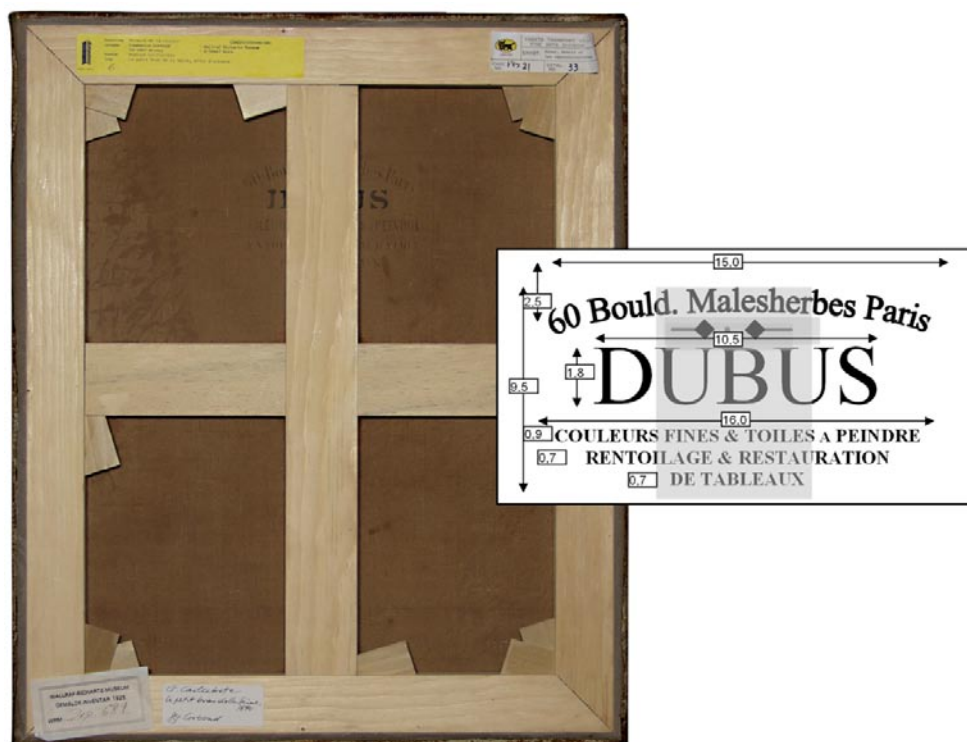


Fig. 2  
Verso with graphic  
reproduction of the Du-  
bus dealer's mark with  
measurements



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Fig. 3  
Raking light



Fig. 4  
UV fluorescence





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Fig. 5  
Details of the visible signature in the bottom right-hand corner, manual inscription is superimposed on early shrinkage cracks in the underlying paint-layer, microscopic photographs (M = 1 mm)

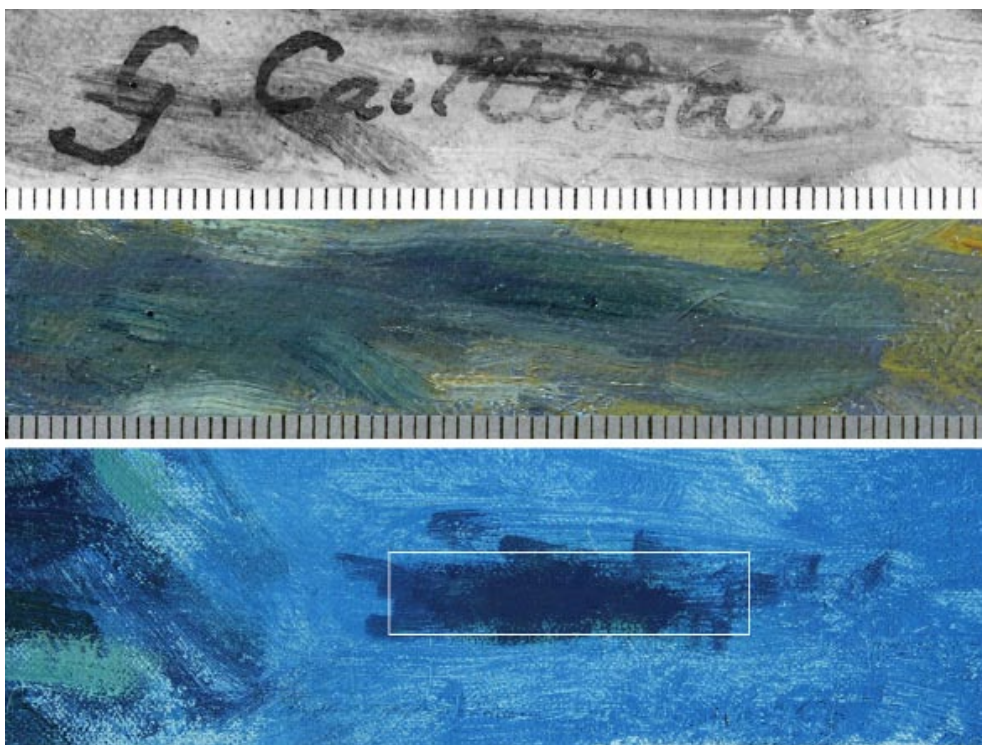


Fig. 6  
Details of the overpainted signature bottom left in the IR reflectogram (top), in incident light (centre) and under UV (bottom)





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Fig. 7  
Detail, brushwork is oriented to the shape of the respective motif

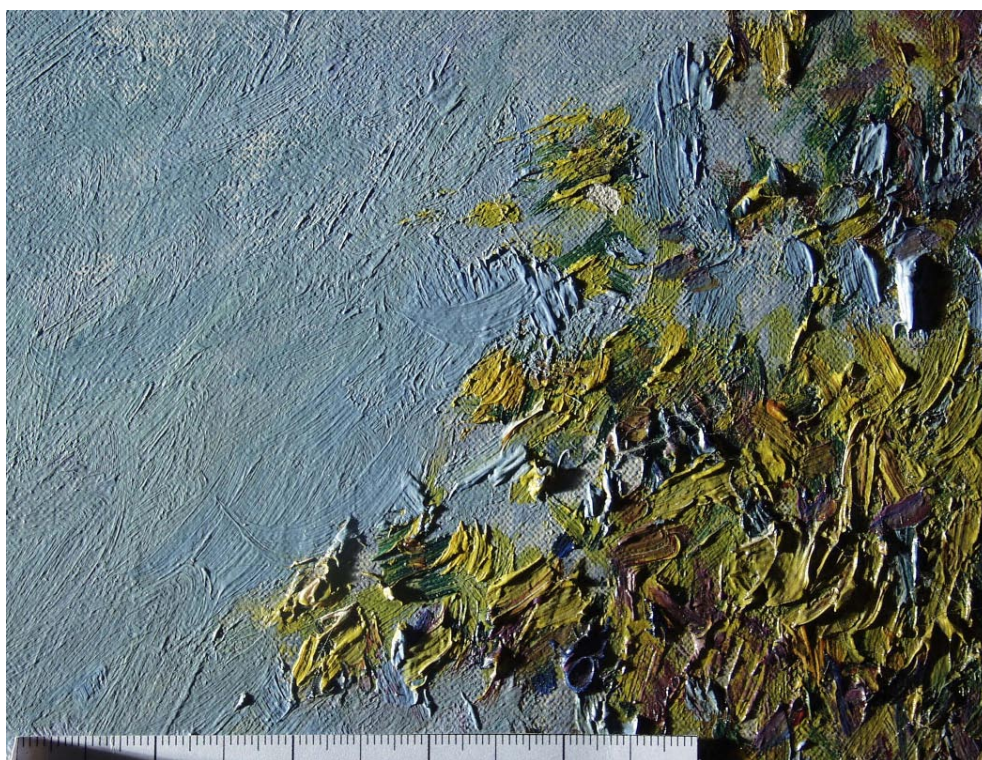


Fig. 8  
Detail under raking light, paint application varies from broad areas in the sky, using the whole brush-load, to short impasto dashes in the foliage





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Fig. 9  
Wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry paint applications, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

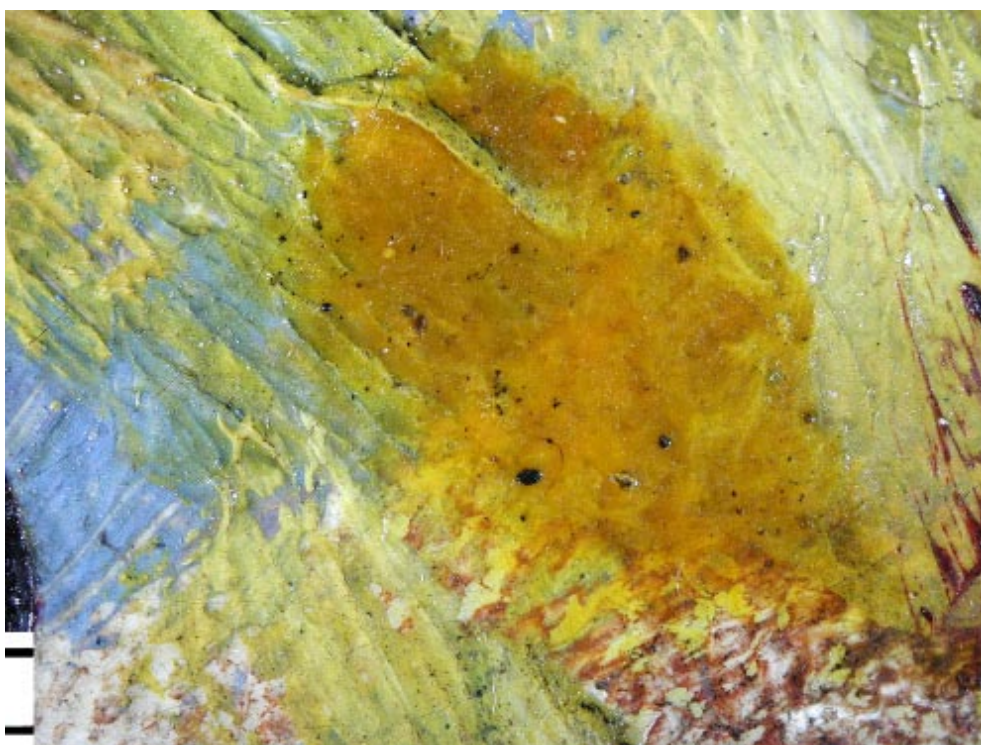


Fig. 10  
Yellow to orange unidentified lake in the area of the yellow foliage, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)





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Fig. 11  
Loss in the paint-layer,  
view of the white  
ground with small  
proportions of black  
and red pigmentation,  
microscopic photographs  
(M = 1 mm)

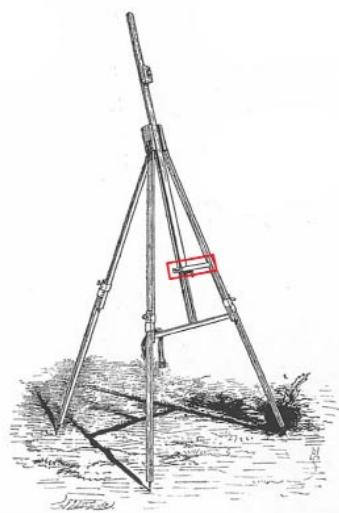


Fig. 12  
Detail, bottom edge of  
picture, unpainted patch  
presumably due to the  
canvas having been fas-  
tened to a field easel (red  
marking)

