



Gustave Caillebotte

(1848-1894)

Boats and Shed on the Banks of the Seine

(Barques et cabane, bord de Seine)

1891

*undated, signed bottom left:
"G. Caillebotte"*

Oil on canvas

h 46.0 cm x b 55.0 cm

WRM Dep. FC 603





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Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Brief Report

Caillebotte's painting *Boats and Shed on the Banks of the Seine* is notable for its luminosity and colourfulness. The law of optics whereby bright direct sunlight can lighten shadows by reflection or indeed give them colour was accorded particular importance here. As a result of the rays of sunshine falling vertically from above, the red and yellowish-green hulls of the boats are reflected in the water with hardly any loss of colour, the contrast being reinforced still further by the direct use of complementary colours (fig. 9). The unmistakable reproduction of these physiological phenomena could point to the picture's having been painted in the open air with the artist paying close attention to natural light effects. The painting was executed on a standard F10 size commercially pre-primed canvas, the outlines of the motifs being first sketched in blue crayon (fig. 12). IR reflectography clearly reveals this underdrawing (fig. 6). In addition, in the sky there are visible lines which clearly derive from a first lay-in of the composition: if the picture is inverted, the strokes can be seen to represent the

hulls of two boats, arranged in echelon, just like the boats in the visible riverscape. It would appear that the artist decided they were too big. Instead of removing these now irrelevant blue crayon lines, he simply inverted the canvas and started again. The partial red-brown underpainting in the sky is very unusual for Caillebotte, and could be connected; it may have served to cover over the rejected sketch lines. In other parts of the picture, we do not find this kind of underpainting. On the contrary, the painting suggests a brisk, largely wet-in-wet execution, which probably required no more than two or three sittings. The authenticity of the signature remains in doubt; it was applied in dilute dark-grey paint on a paint layer that was already dry and in places showing signs of craquelure (fig. 8). The inscription, now somewhat abraded, resembles neither Caillebotte's autograph signatures nor the posthumous signatures often later added by his brother Martial or his executor Auguste Renoir [Berhaut 1994, p. 50, cf. Caillebotte WRM Dep 622, WRM Dep. FC 689, WRM Dep. FC 727].



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Picture support canvas

Standard format	F 10 (55.0 x 46.0 cm) horizontal
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	19 threads per cm vertical and horizontal; weave of medium density with variable yarn thickness, some knots and weaving faults
Stretching	not original; the original turnover edge was presumably removed when the picture was lined; the X-ray reveals weak stretchmarks all round, pointing to a very even original tacking at intervals of app. 6 cm (fig. 7)
Stretcher/strainer	stretcher with vertical centre-bar; the design, a brownish glaze and the fact that the canvas has been lined all suggest that this is not the original stretcher (fig. 2)
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.0 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	–
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	none visible on account of the lining



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Ground

Sizing	not determined
Colour	white
Application	very smooth and even ground, presumably applied before cutting-to-size and stretching (original turnover edge is however no longer present); several layers; the textile structure is barely discernible
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	the ground is homogeneous and even; no microscopic pigment particles are discernible

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	blue, presumably crayon, underdrawing with thin strokes of varying breadth and pressure; abrasion mostly on the highest elevations of the textile structure where the yarns cross (fig. 12)
Extent/character	stereomicroscopy and IR reflectography give a good insight into the extent and character of the underdrawing (fig. 6); sketchy freehand drawing of the outlines of boats, shed and houses (areas of green paint, as e.g. in the trees, are opaque to IR radiation); exploratory lineation can be seen in places
Pentimenti	the two houses at the vanishing point of the river were originally conceived to be somewhat bigger; in the region of the sky, there are underdrawing lines which derive from a rejected first compositional lay-in and depict the outlines of boat hulls evidently composed by the artist before he turned the canvas through 180° and started again (fig. 6)



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Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

brisk, loose manner of painting; brushwork is largely oriented to the shapes of the composition: foliage of the trees in dabs, sky and water by contrast linear and covering larger areas (fig. 10); very few areas of the canvas have been left unpainted to reveal the white ground; the paint application was largely wet-in-wet in presumably two or three working sessions: a single layer for the sky and water, several layers in the trees and shrubs (fig. 4); in contrast to other paintings by Caillebotte investigated in Cologne, no large-area semi-transparent underpainting can be discerned, a first dilute paint-layer in the area of what is now the sky probably belongs to the rejected first composition and not to the structure of the painting now visible; it is not clear however why this paint-layer is reddish-brown

Painting tools

flat-ferrule brushes of varying breadth, from 0.3-1.6 cm; possibly Caillebotte also used some scratching instrument (brush-handle?) for the structure of the trees

Surface structure

brushwork is clearly visible; altogether well spread out and not impasto (fig. 3)

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, medium yellow, pale red, dark red lake, dark blue, medium green, dark green; black only in blends;
VIS spectrometry: chrome/cadmium yellow(?), zinc yellow, vermillion, cobalt blue, copper-based green(?), viridian

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

now varnished, but this is not authentic; around impasto areas there are remains of surface dirt beneath the varnish, suggesting that the painting may have been left unvarnished for a considerable time



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Signature/Mark

When?

handwritten signature “G. Caillebotte” in very dilute dark-grey paint, applied with a fine pointed brush after the paint layer had already dried; microscopic inspection reveals clear abrasion and retouching, while the dark-grey paint is in places over the aging cracks, which casts doubt on the authenticity of the signature (fig. 8); The inscription resembles neither Caillebotte’s autograph signatures nor the posthumous signatures often later added by his brother Martial or his executor Auguste Renoir [Berhaut 1994, p. 50, cf. Caillebotte WRM Dep 622, WRM Dep. FC 689, WRM Dep. FC 727].

Autograph signature

–

Serial

–

Frame

Authenticity

not original

State of preservation

Long vertical tear in the middle of the canvas (figs 5, 6); the painting has been lined, and at the same time the stretcher was changed and the original turnover edge cropped and stuck down with adhesive paper (fig. 2); the lining adhesive, applied diagonally, appears light in the X-ray picture (fig. 7); slight deformations in the canvas, the edges of the stretcher are reflected in the canvas and the paint-layer; a pronounced network of aging cracks over the whole paint-layer, which is, additionally, abraded in places; extensive retouching along the tear, the edges of the picture and in the sky (fig. 5); very shiny varnish.

Additional remarks

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Literature

- Berhaut 1994: Marie Berhaut, *Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels*, Paris 1994, cat. no. 433, p. 231, with ill.
- 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, cat. no. 17, p. 54, with ill.
- Czymmek 2000: Götz Czymmek, "Caillebotte im Wallraf-Richartz-Museum", *Kölner Museums Bulletin*, 3/2000, 51-61
- Lewerentz 2008: Katja Lewerentz, "Gustave Caillebottes Maltechnik und die Praxis der Freilichtmalerei", in: *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung*, 2 (2008), 274-286

Source of illustrations

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

Examination methods used

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

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Date: 12/2008

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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso, lined





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Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light





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Fig. 5
UV fluorescence

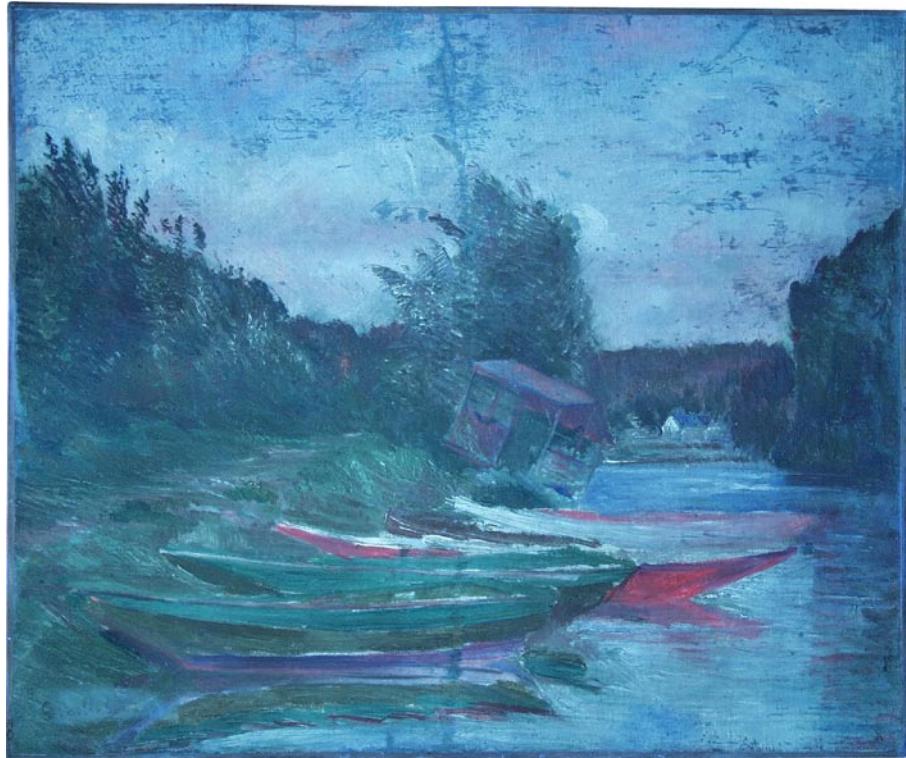


Fig. 6
IR reflectogram reveals, in the sky region, turned through 180°, the first, rejected, compositional lay-in with the outlines of boats moored behind each other





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Fig. 7
X-ray



Fig. 8
Details of the signature
in incident light (bottom),
in UV fluorescence
(middle) and in
microscopic photographs
(M = 1 mm); the
inscription is heavily
abraded, partially
varnished and runs across
the aging cracks in places



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Fig. 9
Detail of a boat with its coloured reflection in the water, showing the use of the complementary contrasts of the colour-pairs yellow/violet and red/green

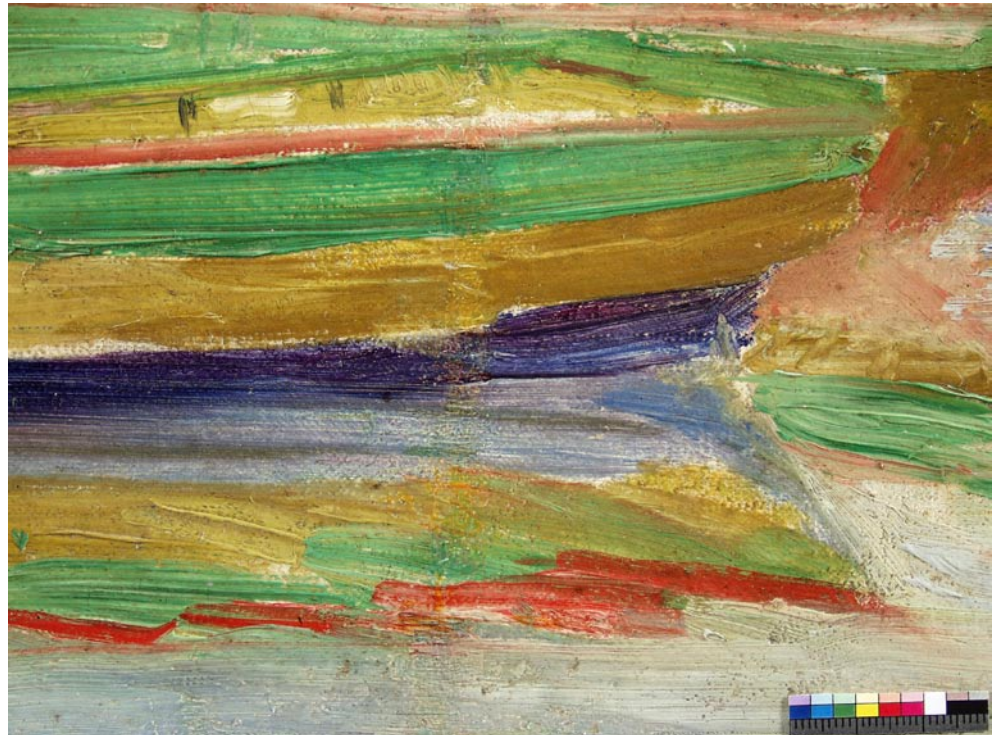
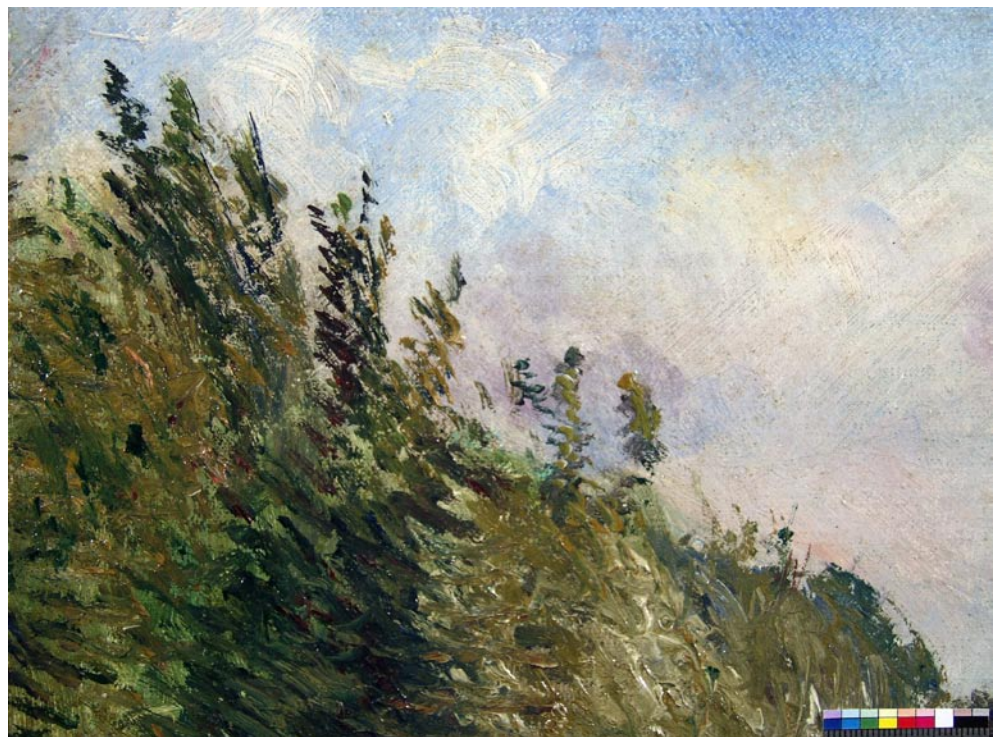


Fig. 10
Detail of the trees, brushwork is clearly visible: thin and well distributed in the sky, modelled and impasto in the foliage





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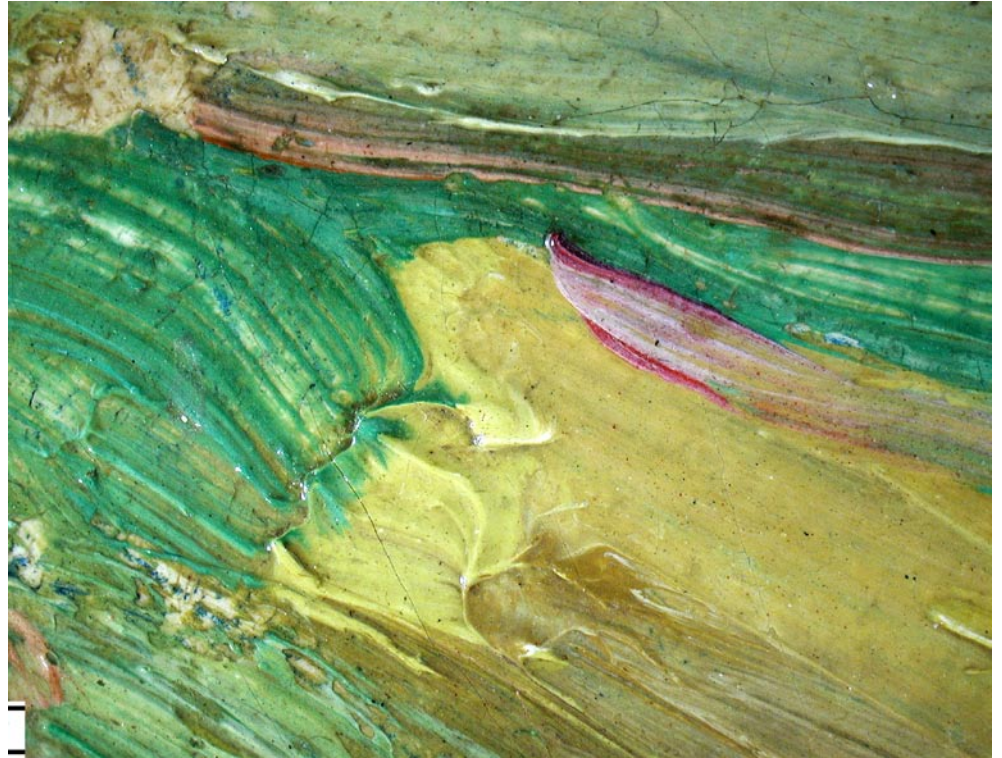


Fig. 11
Wet-in-wet paint
applications, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)

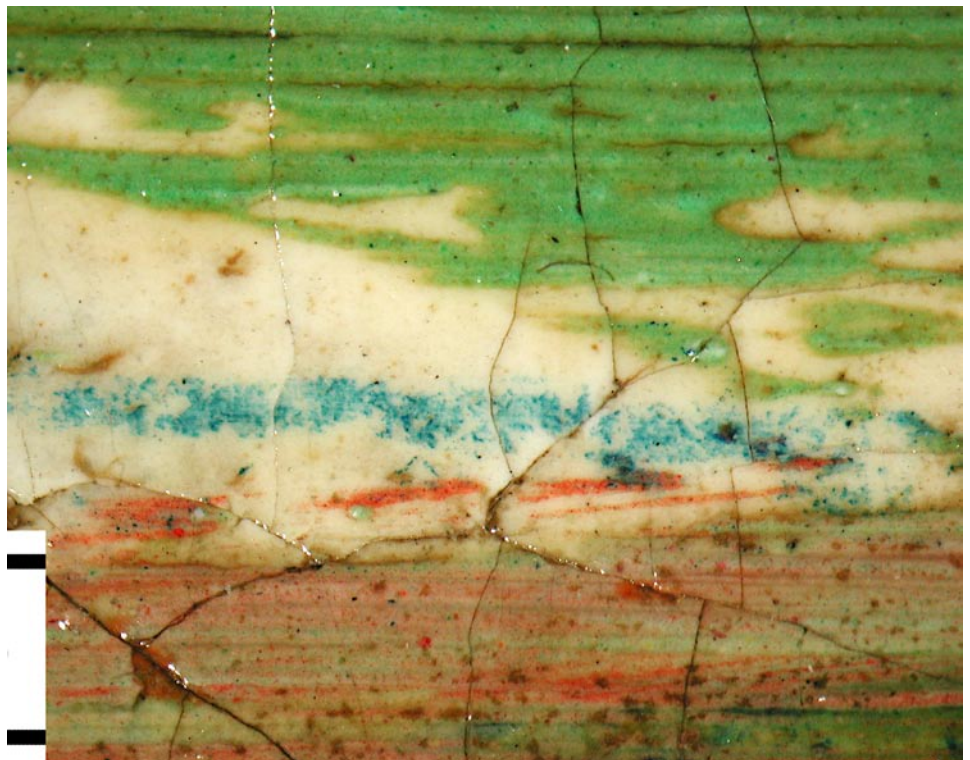


Fig. 12
Blue underdrawing line
in crayon, microscopic
photograph (M = 1 mm)