



Gustave Caillebotte

(1848-1894)

Laundry Drying on the Banks of the Seine (Linge séchant au bord de la Seine)

c. 1892

no date

*signature stamp bottom left:
"G. Caillebotte"*

Oil on canvas

h 105.5 cm x b 150.5 cm

WRM Dep. 447





Gustave Caillebotte – Laundry Drying on the Banks of the Seine
Brief Report on Technology and Condition

Brief Report

The *Laundry Drying* is the largest of a total of five paintings devoted by Caillebotte to this motif between 1888 and 1892 not far from his home in Petit Gennevilliers [Berhaut, cat. no. 366-370]. A smaller oil painting relates directly to the large composition and may have served as a preliminary study [Berhaut, cat. no. 367] (fig. 12). Pace Berhaut, the picture in Cologne was painted not in 1888, but, according to a catalogue in the Durand-Ruel archive, in about 1892 [Caillebotte 1994, p. 304]. Caillebotte used a canvas pre-primed in light grey; it was not in any standard French size, but cut to order by the Paris dealers Benoit/Deforge-Carpentier [Constantin 2003, p. 123], who presumably, as suggested by a stamp verso, also performed the stretching (fig. 2). The size of the picture would lead us to believe at first that Caillebotte painted it in the studio. However a stereo-microscopic examination reveals considerable evidence that it was in fact painted in the open air. This evidence includes not only scratches and smears, but also small embedded stones and vegetable matter, not least a small leaf-bud which can be botanically identified as coming from a poplar (fig. 11). This creates an immediate relationship with the motif, the trees appearing to be poplars. The first lay-in of the picture was done in two stages, first in charcoal and then with a few brush-strokes in various colours which establish only the most important lines of the composition (figs. 5, 6).

The subsequent execution was predominantly wet-in-wet, presumably in a single session. The picture is dominated by pale linen drying in the breeze on a line along the tree-lined bank of the Seine. Caillebotte restricts himself to just a few dominant colours, largely various blue, grey and white tones contrasting strongly in brightness, with a few colour accents in red and yellow blends. There are numerous indications that the painting was not completed, as has already been assumed at various times in the past [Caillebotte 1994, p. 187; Caillebotte 2005, p. 147]. Compared with other paintings from Caillebotte's late period, the *Laundry Drying* is, from the point of view of its painterly technique, very sketchlike in character, with conspicuously long brush-strokes and numerous areas where the pale-grey ground was left unpainted (figs. 4, 6, 8). A further clue to the incomplete nature of the picture is the blue signature stamp in the bottom left-hand corner, which was added posthumously (fig. 7), although it is true that in Caillebotte's œuvre we find other paintings which were left unsigned but can still be proved to have been exhibited in his lifetime [e.g. Caillebotte 1994, cat. no. 34].



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Picture support canvas

Standard format	not a standard size
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	20 threads per cm vertical and horizontal; fine, close, even weave
Stretching	the present stretching, already the third, dates from a lining process; stretchmarks indicate that the nails were originally 4-7 cm apart; individual additional nail-holes without any trace of corrosion are also present: they may date from a temporary stretching on a provisional stretcher; the breadth of the foldover varies from 1.5 to 2.0 cm
Stretcher/strainer	original stretcher with cross-bars, chamfered
Stretcher/strainer depth	2.3 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	the joints of the cross-bars with the surrounding frame take the form not, as is more frequent, of a mortise-and-tenon, but of a cross-lap
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	<p>a black stamp, framed in a stylized belt, is present twice on the horizontal cross-bar:</p> <p>"DEFORGE CARPENTIER/A. BENOIT SF /10, Rue Lafayette, PARIS", h 4.2 x b 5.9 cm (fig. 2)</p> <p>owing to the lining, no further manufacturer's or dealer's marks are visible on the canvas</p>



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Ground

Sizing	undetermined
Colour	pale grey (presumably similar to <i>gris clair</i>)
Application	very thin, smooth and even application; ground was applied before the canvas was cut to size or stretched; while the elevations are covered, the canvas structure remains visible (fig. 10)
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	the ground is extremely homogeneous and even; microscopic examination reveals large white irregular filler or pigment particles along with black, and occasional gold-ochre and russet pigments

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	<p>the lay-in was a two-stage process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. charcoal; microscopic examination reveals that the particles are highly irregular in size and shape, some have sharp edges and are not bound in any medium (fig. 5) 2. flat-ferrule brush and paint, mostly black (fig. 6)
Extent/character	<p>1. stereo-microscopic examination reveals very fine and short charcoal marker lines of varying length as well as dots over the whole surface of the picture (fig. 5); all in all the underdrawing is sparse, presumably only intended as the general outline of the composition; surplus charcoal may have been brushed off by the artist or else smeared by the subsequent paint application (there are some charcoal particles bound into the paint)</p> <p>2. a sketchlike lay-in of the composition with a few fleeting, if anything linear, brush-strokes in different colours; thin, presumably quick-drying application of paint</p>
Pentimenti	–



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Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision

sketchlike, loose painting technique, with lively brushwork; predominantly wet-in-wet, possibly in a single session; at first a thin application of paint, then increasingly impasto, especially in those areas with an admixture of white; brushstrokes often applied cross-wise in layers; the tree-trunks and foliage were painted first, followed by the pale blue sky and the further development of the house-boats, banks, lawns and footpath, and ending with the light and shade in the foreground; the degree to which the primed canvas has been left unpainted is unusual for Caillebotte; this, together with the often long, brisk and open brushstrokes suggests that the painting is incomplete

Painting tools

brushes varying in width from 0.3 to 1.5 cm

Surface structure

varying from very thin, if anything dry, paint with little body on the one hand to very impasto on the other, such as in the areas with admixture of white, as well as in the greenish-yellow highlights in the laundry, the foliage and in the foreground lawn

Palette

visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, ochre, yellow, orange, red, medium blue, dark blue, pale green, dark green, black; VIS spectrometry: chrome yellow, cadmium yellow(?), vermillion, rose madder(?), cobalt blue, copper-based green, viridian

Binding mediums

presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition

the present varnish is not authentic; around impasto areas there are slight remains of an older, yellowed varnish



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Signature/Mark

When?	the signature stamp 'G. Caillebotte' in blue paint was applied to the dry paint layer, presumably only after the artist's death (fig. 7)
Autograph signature	–
Serial	numerous pictures by Caillebotte have a signature stamp, including some like this in blue paint; it is not at the moment clear whether there were different stamps, as for example in the case of Claude Monet, or who exactly applied it; Berhaut presumes the artist's brother Martial, or else the artist's executor [cf. Berhaut 1994, p. 60]

Frame

Authenticity	not original
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State of preservation

The painting has been lined, presumably using paste; around the former nail-holes the canvas is in some places seriously corroded and torn, particularly along the bottom edge; there are only isolated losses in the ground and the paint layer.

Additional remarks

The painting provides evidence that it was painted in the open air (see above, Brief Report/Special Features).



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Literature

- Berhaut 1994: Marie Berhaut, *Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels*, Paris 1994, entry 368, p. 209, with ill.
- Constantin 2003: Stéphanie Constantin, *The Painters of the Barbizon Circle and Landscape Painting: Techniques and Working Methods*, PhD, Courtauld Institute of Art, London 2003
- Czymmek 2000: Götz Czymmek, *Caillebotte im Wallraf-Richartz-Museum*, Kölner Museums Bulletin, 3/2000, p. 51-61, with ill.
- Caillebotte 1994: Anne Distel et al., *Gustave Caillebotte, 1848 - 1894*, Ausst.-Kat. Paris, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, 12.9.1994 - 9.1.1995, Chicago, The Art Institute, 15.2.-28.5.1995, Paris 1994, cat. no. 101, p. 303, with ill.
- Caillebotte 2005: *Gustave Caillebotte, L'oeuvre de l'impressionisme*, Ausst.-Kat. Lausanne, Fondation de l'Hermittage, 24.6.-23.10.2005, p. 155, with ill.
- Lewerentz 2008: Katja Lewerentz, Gustave Caillebotte's Maltechnik und die Praxis der Freilichtmalerei, in: *Zeitschrift für Kunsttechnologie und Konservierung*, vol. 2 (2008), p. 274-286

Source of illustrations

Fig. 11: collage using an illustration from *Flora von Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz*, 1885 (in internet: www.BioLib.de),

fig. 12: own archive;

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



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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 | ✓ Botanical determination of the poplar bud |
| – False-colour infrared reflectography | by biologists |
| – X-ray | |
| ✓ Stereomicroscopy | |

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

Date: 5/2003
Date: 5/2008



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Fig. 1
Recto



Fig. 2
Verso with
Colourman Stamp



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Fig. 3
Raking light



Fig. 4
Transmitted light



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Fig. 5
Mapping of the charcoal
underdrawing, with
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

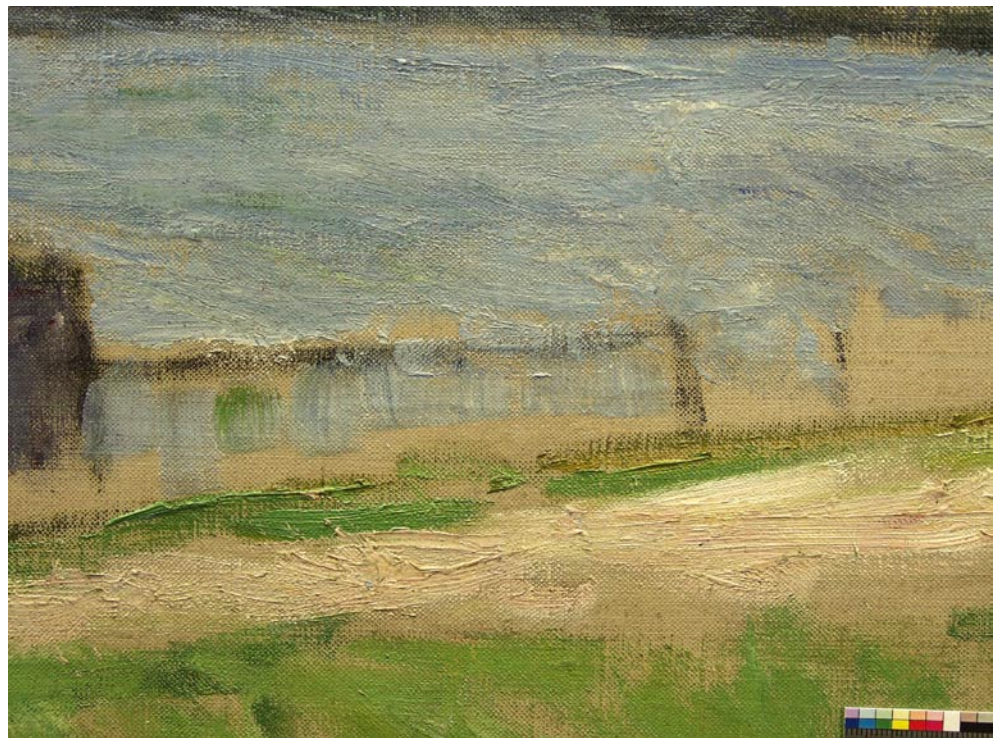


Fig. 6
Detail, brush
underdrawing in the
area of the houseboats



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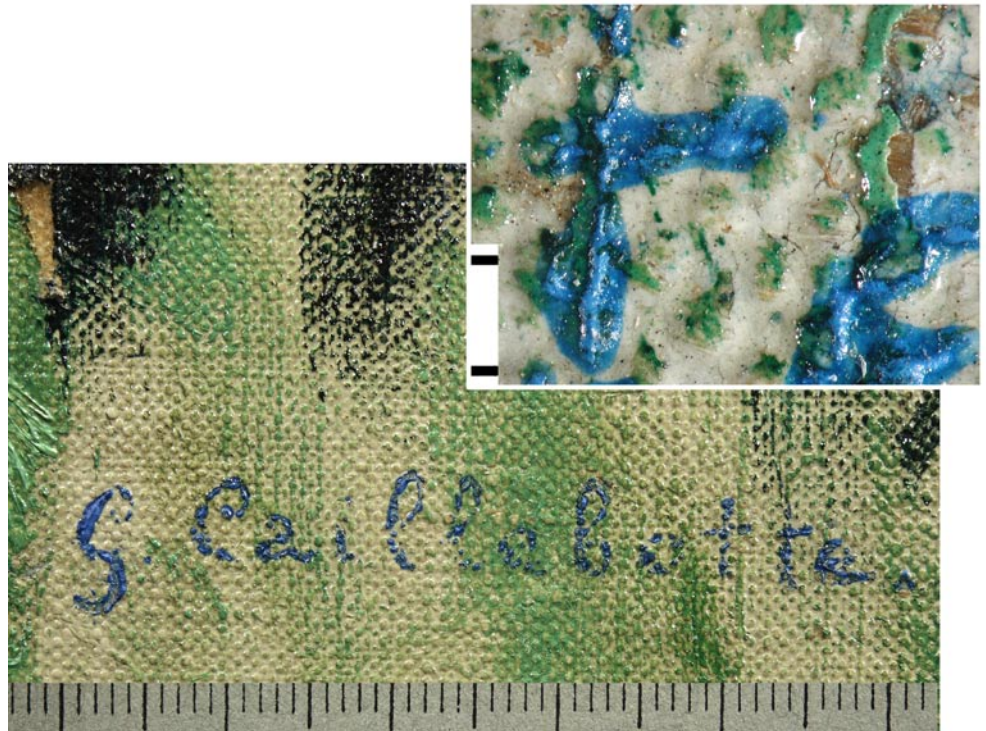


Fig. 7
Detail, signature, with
microscopic photograph
(M = 1 mm)

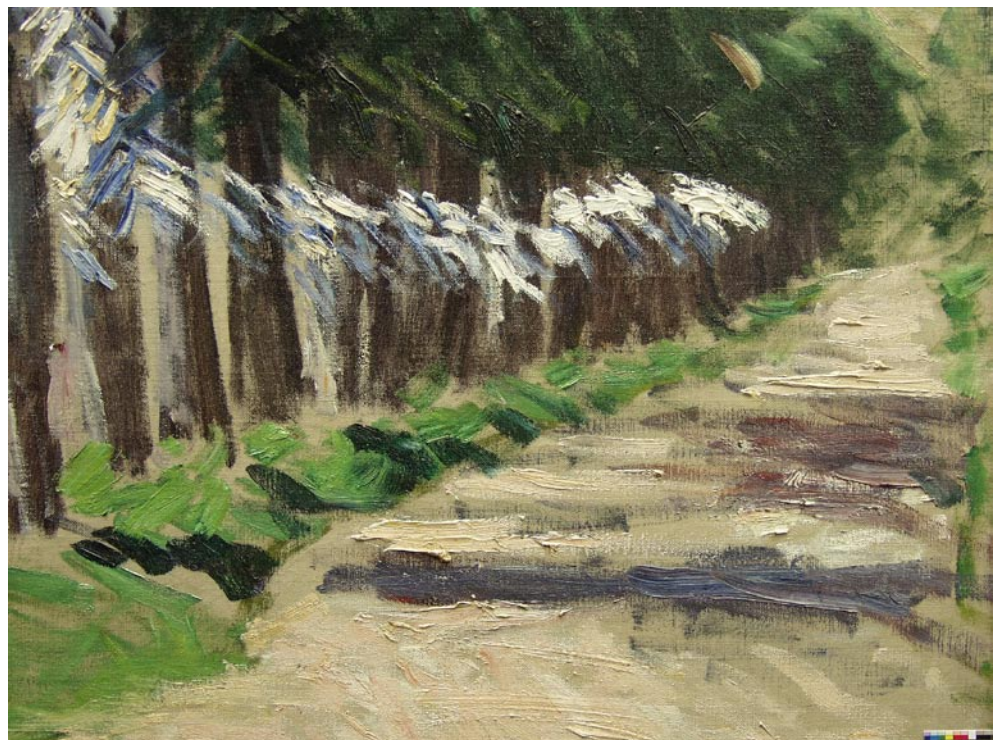


Fig. 8
Detail, path, open
sketchlike painting
technique



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Fig. 9
Detail, washing, impasto

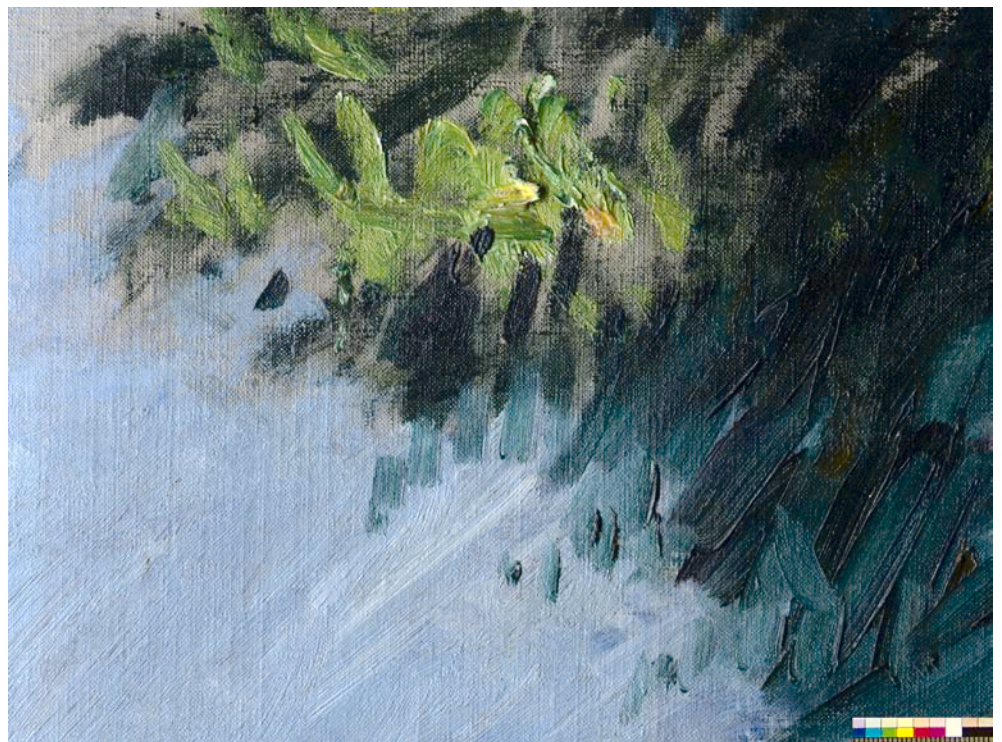


Fig. 10
Detail, foliage, impasto



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Fig. 11
Poplar bud embedded
in the paint layer, detail
(left) and enlarged
(top right, microscopic
photograph, M = 1 mm),
botanical drawing
of a poplar bud for
comparison (bottom
right)

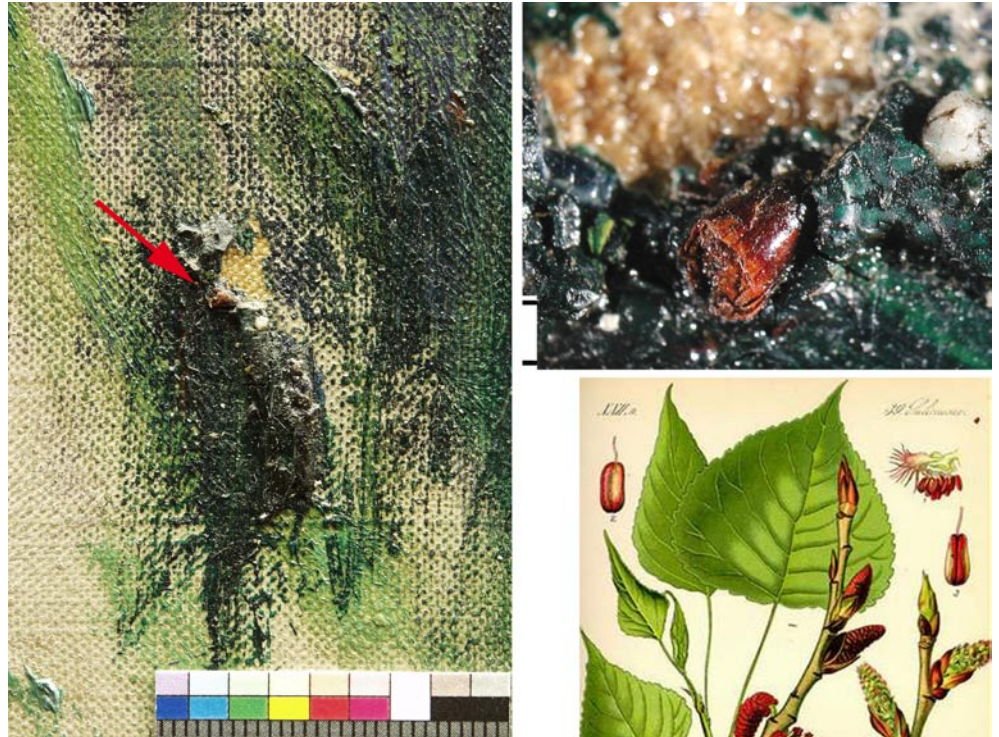


Fig. 12
Gustave Caillebotte, oil
study for *Laundry Drying
on the Banks of the Seine*,
54.0 x 65.0 cm, private
collection

