

THE SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE PRESENTS A COMPREHENSIVE RETROSPECTIVE
DEDICATED TO THE FRENCH IMPRESSIONIST GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE

GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE AN IMPRESSIONIST AND PHOTOGRAPHY

October 18, 2012 – January 20, 2013

Press preview: Wednesday, October 17, 2012, 11 a.m.

The Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt presents a comprehensive exhibition featuring about fifty paintings and drawings by the French Impressionist Gustave Caillebotte from October 18, 2012 to January 20, 2013. Consistently rounded off with one hundred and fifty outstanding photographic positions of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the show conveys a clear idea of Caillebotte's pioneering role in the development of a new way of seeing. While this extraordinary artist has already assumed his rightful place next to great Impressionists like Auguste Renoir, Édouard Manet, or Edgar Degas in France, Great Britain, and the United States, a critical examination of Caillebotte's production is still in its early stages in Germany. Caillebotte's oeuvre offers new, fundamental, and complementary approaches to French Impressionist painting: his radical, highly modern, and photography-related solutions very convincingly elucidate the close connection between photography and painting. Numerous of Caillebotte's works anticipate a photographic perspective – especially in their particular angles of view and the way the images are cropped, but also in their approach to themes like movement and abstraction – that does not emerge in the medium of photography itself until later.

The exhibition is sponsored by Friends of the Schirn Kunsthalle e. V. Additional support has been granted by the Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung.

Gustave Caillebotte (1848 Paris – 1894 Gennevilliers) was rather known as a patron and collector of as well as a groundbreaker for Impressionist art throughout his life, though he produced more than five hundred paintings, pastels, and drawings himself. Raised in the upper-middle-class milieu of Paris, he first studied law. After only little more than a year the independent mind left the Parisian École des Beaux-Arts, where he had enrolled after, in 1874 and joined the Impressionist "partisans" around Edgar Degas, Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, and Édouard Manet. Coming into a large fortune after his father's death, Caillebotte henceforth supported the painters of the new movement as "patron of the Impressionists." He presented his own works at the second Impressionist exhibitions in Paris (1876) and the following six shows. In 1881, the enthusiastic sportsman retired to his summer house in Petit-Gennevilliers on the banks of the River Seine, where he, next to his activities as an artist, became one of the best yachtsmen of his day and designed more than twenty models of such vessels. Gustave Caillebotte died from the consequences of a stroke aged forty-six on February 21, 1894. Already during his lifetime he had stipulated in his will that his important collection of Impressionist works should pass into the hands of the French government. Today, a large part of it ranks among the key assets of the Musée d'Orsay.

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Encompassing numerous of his major works such as *The Pont de l'Europe* (Musée du Petit Palais, Geneva) and *Floor-Scrapers* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), additional loans from the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, The Art Institute of Chicago, and the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, as well as rarely shown paintings from private sources, the exhibition at the Schirn is chronologically organized in three thematic groups which were decisive for Caillebotte: cityscapes and architectural views, portraits and interiors, still lifes and landscapes with garden and sports scenes.

Particularly Caillebotte's urban views dating from between 1875 and 1882 impressively document the French artist's unique position among the emerging group of Impressionists by portraying the fundamental transformation of the city of Paris known as Haussmannization in a groundbreaking manner. From the 1860s on, the erstwhile narrow and winding lanes of the city had been replaced with spacious squares and wide boulevards furnished with new urban elements – making Paris the metropolis of the modern age. Though many of the French Impressionists had discovered the changed urban space as a subject for their art and tried to capture the dynamics of contemporary life as faithfully as possible, it was Gustave Caillebotte who came closest to rendering the new experience of life in the city with his daring perspectives and his realism that went far beyond that of the Impressionists' works – a fact which his *A Traffic Island*, *Boulevard Haussmann* or *View through a Balcony Grill* presented in the show strikingly reveal.

Caillebotte's attack on people's viewing habits becomes equally manifest in his scenes of private life. Painted mainly between 1880 and 1882, all his interiors of the Parisian upper middle class, such as *The Piano Lesson* and *Interior, Woman Reading*, communicate an impression of interhuman tensions and alienation and, like the artist's portraits of individual subjects or groups of persons from the years 1875 to 1883, prove to be psychograms of his era. Caillebotte's break with traditional still life painting also leaves no doubt about the artist's unusual approach to his compositions. Dating from 1881 and 1882, the series of food and flower arrangements, which comprises almost thirty works – from which the Schirn shows *Pheasants and Woodcocks on a Marble Table* or *Calf's Head and Ox Tongue*, for example – is characterized by original, strictly symmetrical compositions and can be associated with contemporary photographs of the emerging consumer culture's window displays.

Analogous to the urban population's desire for clean air, free nature, and sporting activities making itself felt in the 1880s, Caillebotte decided for spending his weekends in Petit-Gennevilliers from 1881 on – a rural place which was regarded an Eldorado for both Impressionist painters and water sports enthusiasts. He increasingly returned to such motifs as swimmers, canoeists, oarsmen, and yachtsmen, which he had already focused on at his family's summer residence in Yerres – a village on the banks of a little river of the same name twenty kilometers from Paris – in the mid-1870s. This period is exemplified in the Schirn exhibition by the paintings *The Yerres*, *Rain* and *Canoes on the Yerres*. After moving to Petit-Gennevilliers for good and building his studio in 1887, Caillebotte came to discover the art of gardening, which provided him with another fundamental motif. The sixty paintings of landscapes and gardens he produced until his death fascinate us with their reduction of pictorial elements and anticipate abstraction in their rejection of conventional representations of space and their expressive use of color increasingly detaching itself from detailed representationalism.

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Like many of his Impressionist friends, who used the new medium of photography introduced in 1839 for their compositions, Gustave Caillebotte was familiar with this innovation and its manifold possibilities from stereo photography to instant and motion photography. Caillebotte's paintings with their unparalleled steep perspectives, radical top views, distortions, blurs, and croppings that offer only fragments of his subjects actually strike us as bold uses of photographic means of style which, however, had not yet been employed (or could not be employed yet) in contemporary photography. Making the modern individual's perception a key theme of his work, Caillebotte showed himself to be far ahead of his time: it was only in the early twentieth century that comparable photographic strategies began to emerge in the medium itself.

The confrontation with contemporary photographs by Édouard Baldus, Charles Marville, or Eugène Atget and examples of the 1920s' New Photography movement ranging from pictures by André Kertész and László Moholy-Nagy to works by Wols and Alexander Rodtschenko astoundingly discloses the close relationship between Caillebotte's production and the emergence of a new way of seeing. In this juxtaposition Gustave Caillebotte definitely takes shape as a revolutionary talent among the pioneers of the first historical avant-garde.

CATALOG: Gustave Caillebotte. An Impressionist and Photography. Edited by Karin Sagner and Max Hollein in collaboration with Ulrich Pohlmann. With a preface by Max Hollein, essays by Claude Ghez, Ulrich Pohlmann, and Karin Sagner, twenty short texts by Milan Chlumsky, Karin Sagner, and Kristin Schrader, as well as a biography by Gilles Chardeau. German and English editions, 248 pages, 260 color illustrations, Hirmer Verlag, Munich 2012, ISBN 978-3-7774-5921-9 (English edition), ISBN 978-3-7774-5411-5 (German edition), ca. 29,90 € (Schirn), ca. 39,90 € (trade edition).

VENUE: SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, D-60311 Frankfurt.

EXHIBITION DATES: October 18, 2012 – January 20, 2013. **OPENING HOURS:** Tue, Fri–Sun 10 a.m. – 7 p.m., Wed and Thur 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. **INFORMATION:** www.schirn.de, e-mail: welcome@schirn.de, phone: (+49-69) 29 98 82-0, fax: (+49-69) 29 98 82-240. **ADMISSION:** 10 €, reduced 8 €, family ticket 20 €; combination ticket also admitting to the exhibition "Privacy" 15 €, reduced 11 €; free admission for children under eight years. **PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS:** Tue 5 p.m., Wed 11 a.m., Thur 7 p.m., Fri 11 a.m., Sat 5 p.m., Sun 3 p.m. **CURATOR:** Dr. Karin Sagner. **CURATOR PHOTOGRAPHY:** Dr. Ulrich Pohlmann. **PROJECT MANAGEMENT:** Kristin Schrader (Schirn). **SPONSORED BY:** Verein der Freunde der Schirn Kunsthalles e. V. **ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:** Georg und Franziska Speyer'sche Hochschulstiftung. **MEDIA PARTNERS:** Frankfurter Rundschau, Journal Frankfurt. **ONLINE MAGAZINE:** www.schirn-magazin.de.

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