Gustave Caillebotte
(1848-1894)

The Hillside at Colombes
(Le coteau de Colombes)

1884

undated, signed bottom right:
"G. Caillebotte"

Oil on canvas

h 60.2 cm x b 73.3 cm

WRM Dep. FC 727

Brief Report

The painting of *The Hillside at Colombes* is one of a series of landscape studies of the open fields near Petit Gennevilliers which Caillebotte painted in 1884 [Berhaut 1994, p. 182-183, cf. Caillebotte WRM Dep. FC 561]. The artist used a canvas pre-primed in white in the standard F 20 size. According to a dealer's stencil *verso* he acquired the canvas from the Parisian art-supply store Dubus [cf. Caillebotte WRM Dep. 828, WRM Dep. FC 561, WRM Dep. FC 689, WRM Dep. 622] (fig. 2). Without any underdrawing, Caillebotte laid in the broad areas of the motif briskly in broad brush strokes. Before he continued with his painting, he appears to have let this underpainting in colour dry out completely, as evidenced by the often vigorous brushwork which is apparent through the visible painting in many places, in some places deviating markedly from the latter, as for example in the left foreground (figs 3, 8, 10). There are also deviations in the coloration: thus the green fields are underpainted in greyish-pink (fig. 11). This suggests that Caillebotte made corrections in this area of the picture during the painting process. The paint applications following the underpainting were probably executed in two or three sessions, both wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry.

As already observed in other paintings by Caillebotte, the present picture too provides clues to its having possibly been painted in the open air: in the middle of the bottom edge, for example, there is a small unpainted area typically resulting from the fastening device of a field easel [Lewerentz 2008, p. 278-279, 282] (fig. 9). Also, there are on the edges pressure marks and traces of paint which do not belong in this picture, suggesting careless handling of the canvas while the paint was still wet (fig. 10). The black signature in the bottom right-hand corner is classified by Berhaut as a stamp [Berhaut 1994, p. 182]. However closer inspection reveals it to be no such thing, but rather a manually applied inscription (fig. 6). Even so, it cannot be positively identified as Caillebotte's own handwriting, and may be due to his brother Martial or his executor Auguste Renoir, who both signed many of the artist's paintings after his death [Berhaut 1994, p. 60, cf. Caillebotte WRM Dep. FC 689, WRM Dep. 622, WRM Dep. 828].

Picture support canvas

Standard format	F 20 (73.0 x 60.0 cm) horizontal
Weave	tabby weave
Canvas characteristics	26 threads per cm vertical and horizontal; particularly fine and dense weave with slightly varying yarn thicknesses and knot-formation; Z twist
Stretching	original stretching with tack intervals of 4.5-7.0 cm; turnover edge varies from app. 3.8 to 4.5 cm in breadth and extends over the stretcher to the reverse, where it was later stuck down with adhesive natron paper; pencil markings along the edges of the canvas as well as the traces left by a stretching tool are indications of the cutting-to-size and stretching process (fig. 2)
Stretcher/strainer	original stretcher with vertical centre-bar, chamfered *verso*
Stretcher/strainer depth	1.8 cm
Traces left by manufacture/processing	–
Manufacturer's/dealer's marks	stencil on the canvas *verso* to the left of the centre bar, rotated through 90° anticlockwise relative to the picture: "60 Bould Malesherbes [Paris] / DUBUS / COULEURS FIN[ES & TOILES A PEINDRE] / RENTOILAGE & RESTAURATION / DE [TABLEAUX]", h 11.5 x b 15.5 cm (fig. 2); evidently the stencil slipped during the application, so that some of the letters of the inscription have a "shadow"; other parts of the inscription are barely legible

Ground

Sizing	not determined
Colour	off-white
Application	very thin, smooth and even application; the textile structure remains visible although the elevations are covered; the priming is presumably commercial, as the ground extends to the edge of the canvas
Binding medium	presumably oil
Texture	the ground is homogeneous and even; no pigment particles are visible under the microscope

Composition planning/Underpainting/Underdrawing

Medium/technique	flat-ferrule brush and paint of different colours
Extent/character	no all-over detailed linear planning discernible, instead, most of the motifs are laid-in over broad areas in local tones applied opaquely and with visible brushwork using a broad brush (e.g. pale blue in the sky, reddish-brown in the right foreground and greyish-pink in the left foreground, fig. 11); the horizontal elevation on the horizon was not included in the underpainting, which Caillebotte allowed to dry completely before continuing with the work (figs 3, 8, 10)
Pentimenti	–

Paint layer

Paint application/technique and artist's own revision	brisk, loose manner of painting; brushwork is largely oriented to the shapes of the motifs, e.g. the paint in the fields was applied from the edge towards the middle of the picture, thus enhancing the vanishing-point perspective; the elevation on the horizon is highly impasto and applied mostly in dabs; the paint of the sky was applied mostly diagonally upwards towards the right, with impasto clouds; in the fields the application takes the form of dabs and short strokes; overall the paint was applied wet-in-wet and wet-on-dry in probably two or three sessions (fig. 12); very few areas of the canvas were left unpainted to reveal the white ground; there are suggestions of revision and colour correction in the fields: large areas of the foreground evince differences in brushwork and coloration between the underpainting and the visible picture (figs 8, 10, 11)
Painting tools	brushes, presumably bristle, varying in width from 0.3-1.5 cm
Surface structure	brushwork is clearly visible: highly impasto and structured in the area of the sky and the pink field in the left foreground (fig. 3)
Palette	visual microscopic inspection reveals: white, medium yellow, pale red, pale red lake, dark blue, medium green, dark green; black only in blends; VIS spectrometry: chrome/cadmium yellow(?), vermilion, rose madder, cobalt blue, chrome green(?), viridian
Binding mediums	presumably oil

Surface finish

Authenticity/Condition	now varnished, however the varnish is not authentic; around impasto areas remains of surface dirt are discernible under the varnish, suggesting that the painting may have been unvarnished for some length of time (fig. 13)

Signature/Mark

When?	handwritten signature "G. Caillebotte" in highly dilute black paint or ink, applied with a fine pointed brush or pen after the paint-layer had dried (fig. 6)
Autograph signature	–
Serial	the signature was judged by Berhaut to be a stamp [Berhaut 1994, p. 182]; however it is certainly a handwritten signature, though in all probability not by Caillebotte himself, but added after his death either by his brother Martial or his executor Auguste Renoir (see Summary above)

Frame

Authenticity	not original

State of preservation

Slight deformations, the position of the edges of the stretcher can be discerned through the paint-layer and canvas (fig. 3); pronounced network of aging cracks in the whole paint-layer; retouches in the sky here and there.

Additional remarks

The painting provides evidence of having been painted in the open air (see Summary above).

Literature

- Berhaut 1994: Marie Berhaut, *Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels*, Paris 1994, cat. no. 290, p. 182, with ill. and p. 50
- Bourgeois Ainé 1888: Bourgeois Ainé, *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, cat. no. 16, p. 52, 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

Fig. 9 uses an illustration taken from Bourgeois Ainé 1888, p. 109

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

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

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Fig. 1
Recto

Fig. 2
Verso with detail of the Dubus dealer's mark (inset, top) and details of the turnover edge at the bottom after the partial removal of the adhesive paper (inset, bottom). Under infra-red the b/w picture reveals an indecipherable inscription

Fig. 3
Raking light

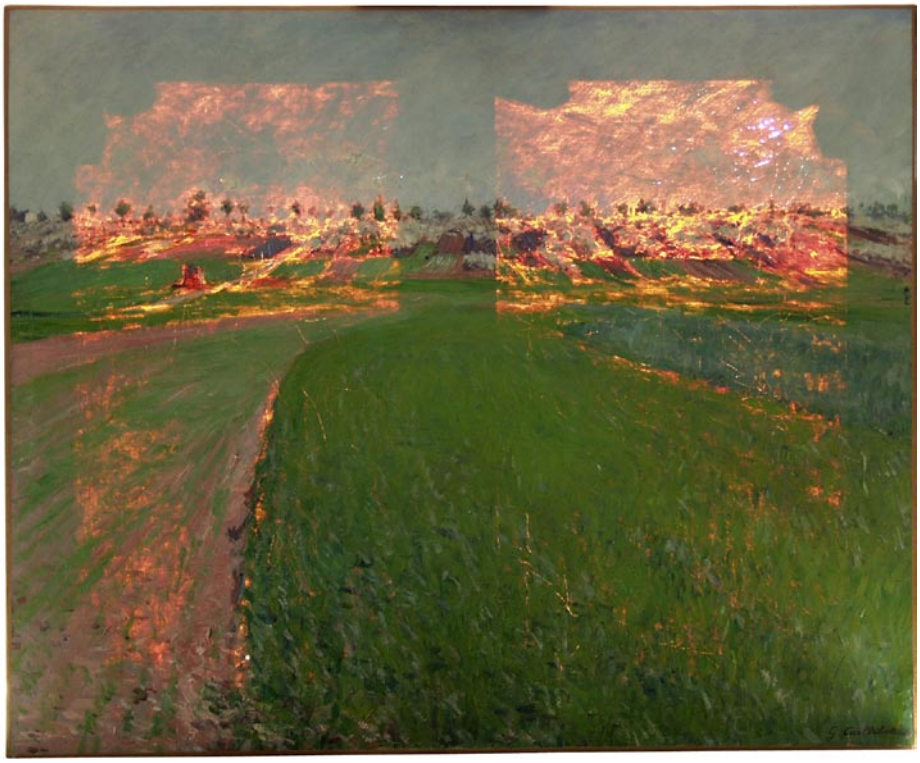

Fig. 4
Transmitted light

Fig. 5
UV fluorescence

Fig. 6
Details of the signature, top microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

Fig. 7
Detail under raking light, clearly discernible brushwork in the region of the crown of the hill

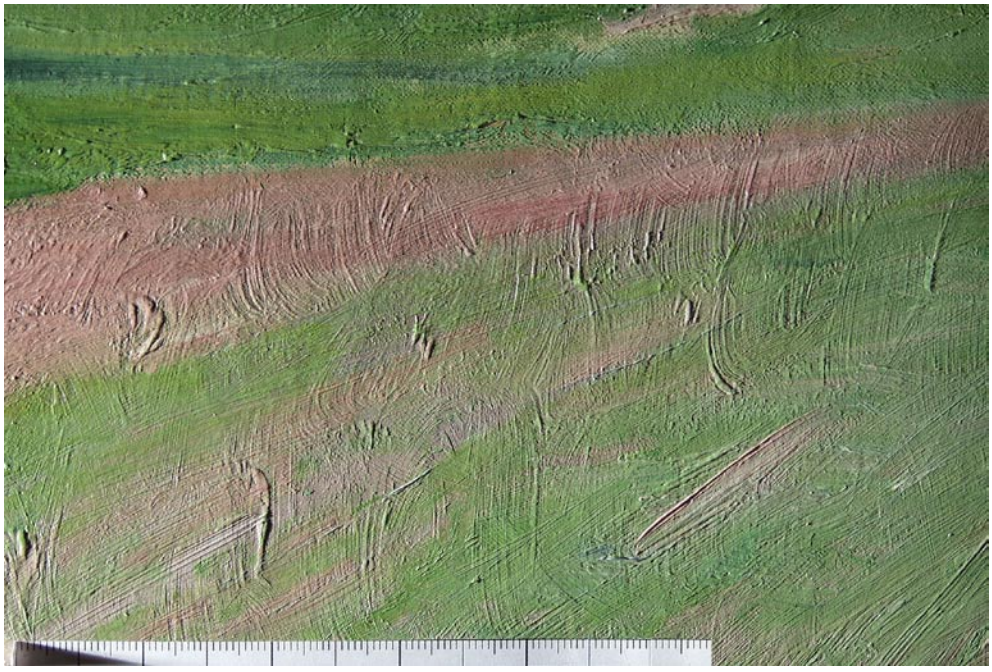

Fig. 8
Detail under raking light: the texture of short impasto brushstrokes of the underpainting is visible through the upper layers of the paint, in places deviating significantly from the latter in rhythm and orientation

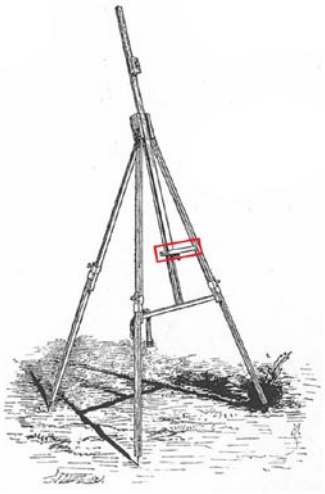

Fig. 9
Detail, bottom edge, showing an unpainted patch probably due to the fastening of the picture to a field easel

Fig. 10
Details of the peripheral regions with evidence of careless handling of the painting while it was still wet: vertical pressure mark (left, under raking light) and strange splashes of blue paint (right, under incident light)

Fig. 11
Pink underpainting in the area of the green field in the foreground, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

Fig. 12
Wet-in-wet blend in a white impasto area in the region of the crown of the hill, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)

Fig. 13
White impasto area in the sky with dark-grey remains of dirt beneath the varnish, microscopic photograph (M = 1 mm)