

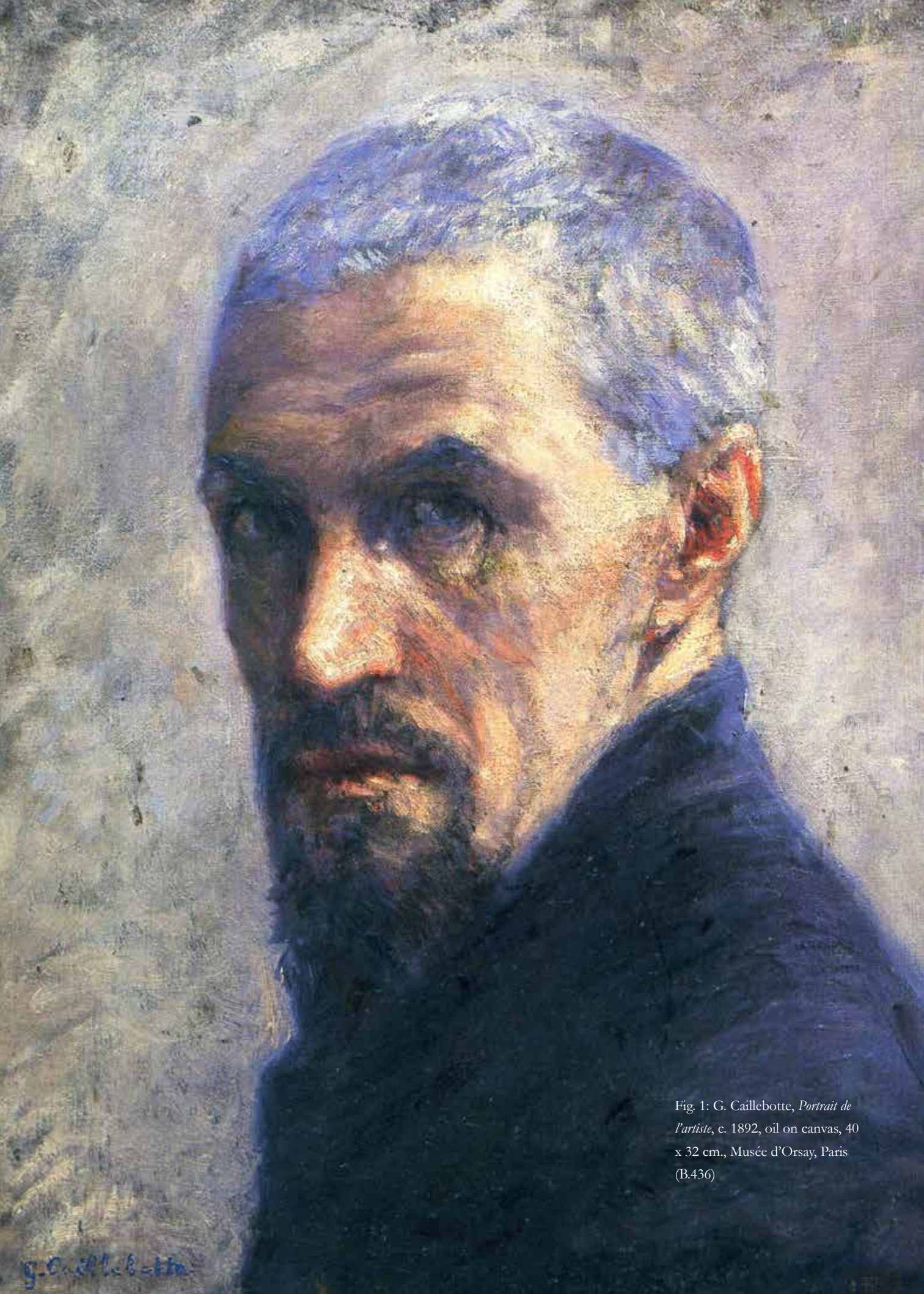


GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE

1848–1894

Voiliers sur la Seine à Argenteuil, 1886





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Fig. 1: G. Caillebotte, *Portrait de l'artiste*, c. 1892, oil on canvas, 40 x 32 cm., Musée d'Orsay, Paris (B.436)

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GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE (1848 - 1894)

Voiliers sur la Seine à Argenteuil, 1886

signed and dated lower left *G. Caillebotte/1886*

oil on canvas

65 x 54 cm. (25 ½ x 21 ¼ in.)

#### PROVENANCE

(Probably) Chardeau Family, France, by descent from the artist.

Anon. Sale; Palais Galliera, Paris, 1 Dec. 1969, lot 7 (for 145,000 ffrs).

Peter Matthews, London, by 1970.

Private Collection, London, acquired from the above *circa* 1973; and by descent to Private Collection, London and USA.

#### LITERATURE

*Apollo*, Nov. 1970, p. 45 (illus.)

*Realités*, June 1973.

M. Berhaut, *Gustave Caillebotte: Sa vie et son œuvre; Catalogue Raisoné des Peintures et Pastels*, Paris, 1978, p. 189, no. 319 (illus.)

M. Berhaut, *Gustave Caillebotte: Sa vie et son œuvre; Catalogue Raisoné des Peintures et Pastels*, Paris, 1994, p. 202, no. 347 (illus.)

J. Cosandier, *Caillebotte: Au Cœur de l'Impressionnisme*, exh. cat., Fondation de l'Hermitage, Lausanne, 2005, no. 72 (illus. p. 153).

#### EXHIBITED

Lausanne, Fondation de l'Hermitage, *Caillebotte: Au Cœur de l'Impressionnisme*, 24 June – 23 Oct. 2005, no. 72.





‘Gustave Caillebotte was Impressionism’s anomaly, in his life as well as his art...’

(K. Varnedoe, *Gustave Caillebotte*, New Haven, 1987, p. 1)

### Introduction

Responsible for some of the most innovative and original canvases to emerge from the Impressionist movement, Gustave Caillebotte remains one of the less widely-known members of the group, liberated from any obligation to sell his work during his lifetime by his wealth and status as a gentleman. In his temperament he was driven and competitive, pursuing diverse interests in painting, boating, gardening and stamp-collecting with a level of dedication most of his contemporaries reserved for painting alone. Caillebotte championed Impressionism as a collector as well as an artist, bequeathing his remarkable collection of works by his friends Monet, Manet, Cézanne, Degas and others to the French state – only to have half of them rejected by authorities still sceptical of anything that did not reflect traditional Academic taste.

Caillebotte’s paintings of sailboats on the Seine near his home at Petit Gennevilliers, across the river from Argenteuil, were among his most personal, combining as they did his great passions for painting and yachting. They were never exhibited during his lifetime and rarely come onto the market, making this example – hidden in a private collection for nearly half a century – a remarkable opportunity for collectors.



## Early life

Gustave Caillebotte was born on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1848, the son of a wealthy manufacturer of military textiles and his third wife Céleste Daufresne. He had two younger brothers, Martial, his father's namesake, and René (fig. 2). Beginning in 1860, the Caillebotte family spent most of their summers in Yerres, a picturesque provincial town in Seine-et-Oise some 12 miles (20 kilometres) south of Paris, where they had a large property with extensive landscaped grounds on the Yerres river (fig. 3). The young Gustave studied law and engineering before he was drafted to fight in the Franco-Prussian war, ultimately serving from July 1870 to March 1871 in the *Garde Nationale Mobile de la Seine*. It was only after his release from duty that Caillebotte embarked on a serious study of painting, first in the atelier of Léon Bonnat and subsequently at the École des Beaux-Arts, where he passed the entrance exam in 1873.



Fig. 2: *Martial and Gustave Caillebotte*, c. 1886, photograph



Fig. 3: G. Caillebotte, *Le Parc de la propriété Caillebotte à Yerres*, 1875, oil on canvas, 65 x 92 cm., Private Collection (B.25)

Fig. 4: C. Monet, *Régates à Argenteuil*, c. 1872, oil on canvas, 48 x 75 cm., Musée d'Orsay, Paris (Caillebotte bequest, 1894; W.233)



Fig. 5: G. Caillebotte, *Les Raboteurs de Parquet*, 1875, oil on canvas, 102 x 146.5 cm., Musée d'Orsay, Paris (Caillebotte bequest, 1894; B.34)



## Caillebotte and the Impressionists

In 1874, Gustave's father Martial Caillebotte died, leaving Gustave as the eldest son in charge of a considerable fortune amounting to over 2 million francs, as well as property holdings. That same year, Caillebotte was introduced by his neighbour Henri Rouart to Edgar Degas, and attended the first Impressionist exhibition held from April 15<sup>th</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup> at 35 Boulevard des Capucines. This occasion marked the coining of the term 'Impressionism', derived from a critic's derogatory comment about Monet's *Impression, soleil levant* of 1873 (W.263; Musée Marmottan, Paris); the artists had advertised themselves under the unremarkable collective *Société Anonyme des Peintres, Sculpteurs et Graveurs, etc.* Two years later, the ambitious young Caillebotte was invited by Renoir and Rouart to show his work at the Second Impressionist exhibition, to which he contributed eight paintings – as well as funds to underwrite the costs of staging the show. (Caillebotte went on to subsidise the third, fourth and seventh Impressionist exhibitions, held in 1877, 1879 and 1882 respectively.) Having been rejected by the official Salon in 1875, Caillebotte was pleased to be offered the opportunity to show his work elsewhere. He began putting together his own art collection, out of genuine interest and to help support his frequently impoverished artist friends, preferring works by Cézanne, Degas, Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir and Sisley. In his ledger for April 1876, the month the second group exhibition took place, Monet noted three purchases by 'M. Caillebotte painter' totalling 1000 ffr. – a not insignificant sum (fig. 4).

Caillebotte's participation in the Impressionist exhibitions attracted the attention of critics, who recognised that he did not fit the typical profile of a bohemian painter. One review of the 1879 show noted both his acceptance by his peers and his modest and un-showy demeanour: 'Mr. Caillebotte, the youngest of the good men. Barely thirty years old...The Impressionists welcomed him enthusiastically, like a precious recruit...he had another sort of courage, which is not the most common, hard-working riches. And I know few men who have forgotten to the extent he had that they are persons of independent means, in order to remember that they must devote themselves above all to being famous. Famous or not, Mr. Caillebotte is a brave man. His apartment on Boulevard Haussmann, which could have been luxurious, has only the very simple comforts of a man of taste. He lives there with his brother, a musician' (M.-J. Poignard, 'Chroniques Parisiennes: les Indépendants', *Le Gaulois*, 18 April 1879). Critical opinion of his paintings themselves was, on balance, negative, although his talent as a draughtsman was acknowledged; the journalist Louis Énault observed of Caillebotte's *Les Raboteurs de Parquet* (fig. 5): 'The subject is doubtless vulgar, but we understand how it might tempt a painter....The floor-scrapers of M. Caillebotte are certainly not at all badly painted, and the perspective effects have been well studied by an eye that sees accurately. I regret only that the artist did not choose his types more carefully, or that, from the moment he had accepted what reality offered him, he did not claim for himself the right, which I can assure him no one would have denied him, to interpret them more freely....Do the nude, gentlemen, if the nude suits you....but either make your nude beautiful or leave it alone' (L. Énault, 'Mouvement Artistique – l'Exposition des intransigeants dans la galerie de Durand-Ruelle [sic]', in *Le Constitutionnel*, 10 April 1876).

Caillebotte's earliest exhibited works took the Parisian boulevards, bourgeoisie and working class labourers as their subjects, often depicting them from a dizzyingly tilted perspective that may have drawn inspiration from the work of his friend Degas (figs. 6-7). Contemporary critics compare



Fig. 6: M. Caillebotte, *Gustave Caillebotte and his dog Bergère on the Place du Carrousel*, Feb. 1892, photograph



Fig. 7: G. Caillebotte, *Rue de Paris, temps de pluie*, 1877, oil on canvas, 185 x 239 cm., The Art Institute of Chicago (B.37)

Fig. 8: *Map of Argenteuil*, 1898, Archives Municipales de la Ville d'Argenteuil



the steep orthogonals to those seen in the Japanese prints that were in vogue at the time – although, unlike his friend Monet, Caillebotte is not recorded as having taken an interest in *japonisme*, so the degree to which this applies is debatable. What is clear is that, because he was not compelled to earn a living from the sale of his work, Caillebotte was freer than his Impressionist compatriots from the demands of public taste, and thus at liberty to experiment.

### Caillebotte and the Country

Caillebotte began exploring the rural landscape as a subject at his family's home in Yerres. Just twelve years old when his father acquired the property, Caillebotte spent most of his childhood summers there, engaging in river sports and exploring the twenty-nine acres of parkland surrounding the family's neoclassical house in the Yerres valley. Those views of Yerres that are among the artist's earliest exhibited works can be seen as pendants to the Parisian scenes, with their representations of bourgeois leisure activities. The compositions tend to focus on *canotiers* (a term for non-professional boatmen), and rowers in particular; a photograph taken in 1877 or 1878 shows Caillebotte dressed for the sport with several friends and their oars. In paintings such as *Canotiers* (fig. 9) he adopts a perspective from inside the boat itself. The Yerres property was sold in 1878 following the death of Caillebotte's mother, and it was not long before Caillebotte began searching for an alternative escape from the city, which ultimately led him to Argenteuil and Petit Gennevilliers.









### Argenteuil and Petit Gennevilliers

The Impressionists' views of the Seine near Argenteuil 'constitute one of the most remarkable bodies of work in the history of art, making Argenteuil synonymous with Impressionism and a touchstone for the development of Western visual culture' (P. Hayes Tucker, in *The Impressionists at Argenteuil*, exh. cat., The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 2000, p. 14). The suburban riverside town of Argenteuil and its environs had played an important role in inspiring the Impressionists since well before Caillebotte first visited (fig. 8). This 'agréable petite ville', as it was described in contemporary guidebooks, was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a growing suburban community of around 8,000 inhabitants. Situated on the banks of the Seine six miles (ten kilometres) to the north-west of Paris, it was connected to the metropolis by a train service running every half hour from the Gare Saint-Lazare. The town occupied a point on the river known as the Argenteuil basin, where the Seine stretched a full 200 yards (183 meters) from one bank to the other, and plunged to a depth of 78 feet – wide and deep enough for sailing and boating. Unsurprisingly, the town became a popular summer destination for the bourgeoisie, 'a well-ordered suburb where nature and humans met in agreeable harmonies...a setting that permits middle-class Parisians to let air, light and river sports soothe away anxieties of the city' (R.L. Herbert, *Impressionist: Art, Leisure & Parisian Society*, New Haven, 1988, p. 234).

Fig. 9: G. Caillebotte, *Canotiers*, 1877, oil on canvas, 81 x 116 cm., Private Collection (B.83)

Fig. 10: A. Renoir, *Au Bord de l'Eau*, 1885, oil on canvas, 54.6 x 65.7 cm., Private Collection (D.103), sold by Simon C. Dickinson, Ltd. in 2016

Fig. 11: M. Caillebotte, *The house, studio, garden, and greenhouse of Gustave Caillebotte at Petit Gennevilliers*, 1891/92, photograph

Fig. 12: G. Caillebotte, *Dahlia: Le Jardin au Petit Gennevilliers*, 1893, oil on canvas, 157 x 114 cm., Private Collection (B.462)

Despite its bucolic riverside setting, Argenteuil embraced development and modernisation in a much more committed way than its neighbouring towns, including Sèvres, Bonnières-sur-Seine, and Petit Gennevilliers. Factories belched smoke into the air while sturdy iron bridges supported steam trains and facilitated the transport of commercial goods. When the Impressionists discovered the region following Monet's move to Argenteuil in 1871, they encountered a landscape defined by contradictions: city versus country, ambition versus relaxation, the future juxtaposed with the past. It was a landscape of ambiguities and nostalgia, and it offered a broad range of motifs to appeal to the *plein-air* painter. Not surprisingly, Monet, Renoir and their compatriots set up their easels along the riverbanks, in gardens and even in boats, ultimately producing some of their finest and most atmospheric views (fig. 10).

Caillebotte was a relatively late arrival, having first visited the region in early 1878, although he was evidently familiar with the landscape from Monet's canvases as early as 1874. In 1881, three years after the sale of the Yerres estate, Caillebotte acquired a property in Petit Gennevilliers, where he constructed a house surrounded by gardens (figs. 11-12). The property at Petit Gennevilliers served as his primary residence from 1883, and his only home after he gave up his Paris apartment in 1887, a place where he could indulge in his preferred hobbies of gardening, philately, painting and yachting.



It was during a time when rowing and yachting were immensely popular among the leisure classes, having crossed the channel from England in the 1870s. As Eugène Chapus declared in 1854, 'The Parisian is first of all a *canotier*'. The phenomenon gave rise to a host of sailing clubs and regattas, and the *Société des Regates Parisiennes* established an outpost in Argenteuil, called *Le Cercle de la Voile de Paris*. This club staged regattas until 1894 before relocating downstream to Meulan, and among its most passionately devoted members was Gustave Caillebotte.

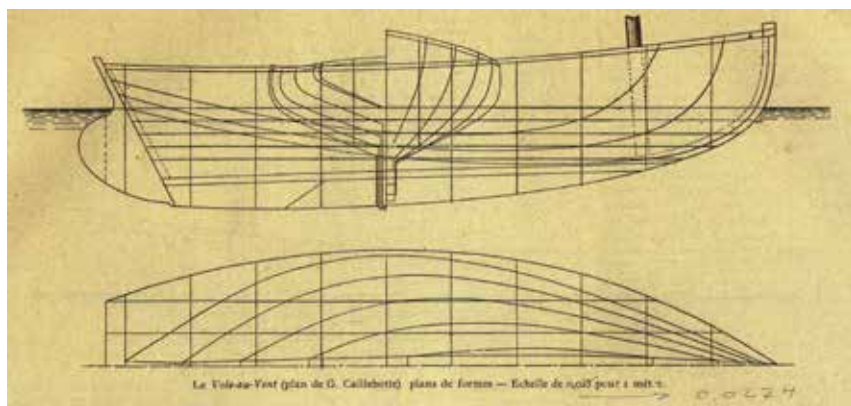
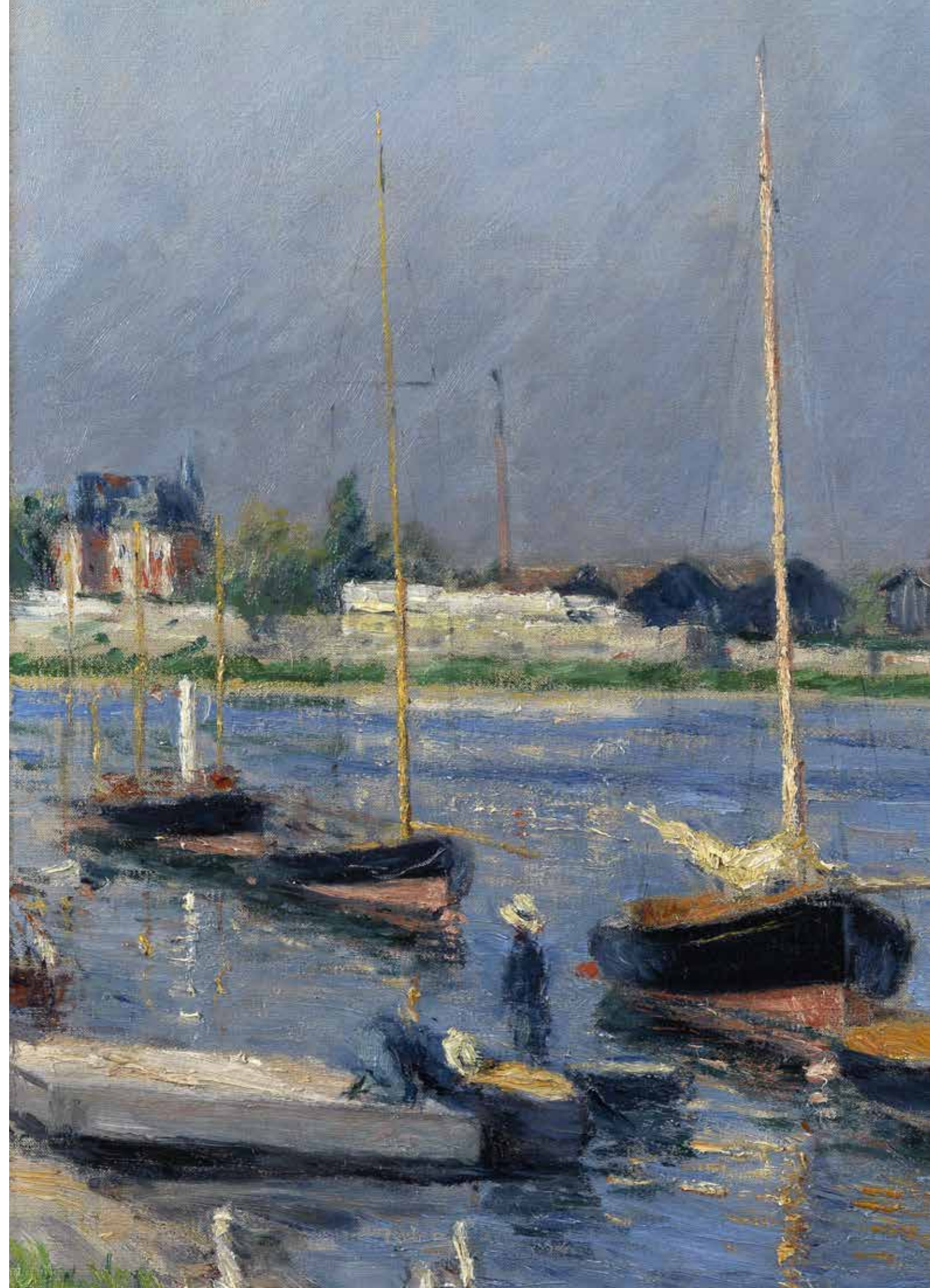


Fig. 13: M. Caillebotte, A typical, light-air race on the Seine, with Caillebotte's *Roastbeef* (centre), c. 1891, photograph

Fig. 14: G. Caillebotte, Plans for *Vol-au-Vent*, published in *Le Yacht*, 2 May 1896

Fig. 15: M. Caillebotte, *Gustave Caillebotte at his naval architect's drawing board*, 1891/92, photograph





## Caillebotte and Boating

Caillebotte was as ambitious and dedicated a yachtsman as he was a painter. Already a keen rower, Caillebotte was taught to sail by Sisley in 1876, and he immediately joined the *Cercle de la Voile* with his brother Martial. Four years later, he was elected one of the club's vice-presidents. His valuable combination of boundless enthusiasm and deep pockets allowed him to climb the ranks of the sport at an enviable pace. In an effort to capitalise on his advantages, Caillebotte enlisted the help of experts in the field, including Maurice Brault, an engineer and former neighbour from Yerres, and Maurice Chevreux, a nautical architect employed at the Texier shipyard, where Caillebotte purchased his first yachts beginning in 1878. Caillebotte became an investor in *Le Yacht*, France's first weekly publication celebrating all aspects of the sport (fig. 16). Thanks to his own training as an engineer, he was able to involve himself in all aspects of the sport, eventually contributing to the design of the boats themselves, as well as testing constant adjustments and improvements to their sails, ballasts and other technical details. When he noticed the English yachtsmen winning races, he analysed their advantages and copied the design of their superior sails. Toward the end of 1885, wishing to oversee the daily progress of construction, he bought the Chantiers Luce shipyard, a short walk from his home, where he appointed Chevreux technical director (figs. 13-15).

Over the course of his career, Caillebotte owned and raced fourteen boats, including *Iris* (acquired in 1878), *Lapin* (1879), *Inès* and *Condor* (1880), *Jack* (1882), *Le Pou* and *Diver* (1883), *Cul-blanc* (1883), *Bibi* (1884), *Mouquette* (1886), *Thomas* (1887), *Arico*, *Roastbeef* and *Mignon* (1894); their lighthearted names reflected his irreverent sense of humour. He employed two sailors to maintain his fleet, naming the highly experienced Joseph Kerbratt his

captain and serving himself as helmsman. By 1888, Caillebotte had become the most decorated helmsman in France, thereby giving an emphatic answer to any critics who saw him as merely a wealthy dilettante: 'Monsieur Caillebotte serait plutôt un romantique: sa manoeuvre est plus hardie, sa voilure est, en general, une sorte de défi adressé au vent; il laisse porter sur la risée avec une audace que le succès justifie souvent, hâtons nous le dire. Le sympathique peintre impressionniste n'est pas un 'oseur' seulement en peinture. A ceux qui critiqueraient son jeu, il pourrait faire une réponse péremptoire: c'est qu'il arrive le premier' (quoted in *le Yacht*, 11 Oct. 1879).

'He was to become one of France's greatest practitioners of the sport. He developed it to perfection, staked everything on it, sacrificed his time, his money, his organisational talent – just as he had done with the art of painting in his Paris years along with the Impressionist group. In a certain sense one can say that his artistic engagement was channelled into the art of sailing, and the energy that he expended in the creation of "the new painting" found its counterpart in his efforts to revolutionise yachting'

(A.-B. Fonsmark, in *Gustave Caillebotte*, exh. cat., Ordrupgaard, Charlottenlund, 2008, p. 18)





## The Painting

The boat taking centre stage in this composition is almost certainly *Cul-blanc*, or “white-arse” (after the colour of its hull), which Caillebotte built in 1883 as an improvement on the *Condor*. She had an external ballast, a feature derived from the typical British yacht, and the floors of the hull itself were reinforced with steel to support this added weight. Her sails were made of silk instead of the more traditional canvas. Caillebotte was victorious in *Cul-blanc* on a number of occasions, including at the 1884 Trouville-Deauville regatta, held on July 27<sup>th</sup> (where he won the race for yachts between five and ten tons) and at Cabourg the same year. Caillebotte won races in 1885 and 1886 as well, with spring of 1886 representing a particularly successful season. Some of the races were won with his friend Eugène Lamy, a fellow member of the yachting club whom he’d met in 1885, and who featured in several of Caillebotte’s paintings; *Le Yacht* reported in early summer 1886: ‘M. G. Caillebotte et M. Lamy on prouve une fois de plus que non seulement ils menaient deux des meilleurs bateaux d’Argenteuil mais qu’ils sont des équipiers d’élite’ (*Le Yacht*, 26 June 1886). Just under a year later, by May 1887, Caillebotte had sold *Cul-blanc* as he continued to experiment in an effort to produce ever-faster vessels.

Fig. 16: *Le Yacht*, cover, 16 March 1878

Fig. 17: G. Caillebotte, *Château Michelet au bord de la Seine, Argenteuil*, 1890/91, oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm., Private Collection (B.423)

Fig. 18: C. Monet, *Argenteuil, fin d’après-midi*, 1872, oil on canvas, 60 x 82 cm., Private Collection (W.224)



‘If we looked for the symbolic centre of this perfect world, it would be the sailboats that, more than anything else, characterised leisure at Argenteuil...In truth the major changes along these shores had been brought about by the pleasure boats, so the artist was right to give them first place in the modern landscape’

(R.L. Herbert, *op. cit.*, p. 234)





Thanks to Caillebotte's faithful rendering of the topography, which we can compare to contemporary maps of the region, we are able to identify the precise spot from which this painting was executed. Caillebotte was evidently standing on the promenade very near his house, looking across the Argenteuil basin to the opposite bank, where the promenade formed part of the Champs de Mars. Identifiable on the far bank, to the left, is the Château Michelet, constructed in 1871 as a summer home for the wealthy Parisian M. Émile Michelet. It appears in several other paintings by Caillebotte, including *Chateau au Bord de la Seine, Argenteuil* (fig. 17), as well as in landscapes by Monet such as *Argenteuil, fin d'après-midi* (fig. 18). Michelet was a friend of Caillebotte's and a fellow vice-president of the *Cercle de la Voile*; *Le Yacht* referred to him as Caillebotte's 'complice nautique' (*Le Yacht*, 19 April 1884). On April 10<sup>th</sup>, a race between Caillebotte in *Cul-blanc* and Michelet in his boat, *Turquoise*, had to be aborted due to a collision between the competitors.



The larger of the two white houses on the right, nearer the centre of the canvas, is the Villa Bouts, next to the Sagewerk Bouts factory (fig. 19). The cluster of trees between the two helps to situate the artist's position, and these can be seen in another work by Monet, *Arbre en forme de boule, Argenteuil* (fig. 20). To the left past the Château Michelet, just outside the bounds of the picture, the Île Marande splits the river into two branches. The smaller of these was known as the Petit Bras, and was another favourite spot for painting.



Fig. 19: G. Caillebotte, *Richard Gallo et son chien au Petit Gennevilliers*, 1884, oil on canvas, 89 x 116 cm., Private Collection (B.305)

Fig. 20: C. Monet, *Arbre en forme de boule, Argenteuil*, 1876, oil on canvas, 60 x 81 cm., Private Collection (W.397)

The existence of pin-holes along the edges of the canvas, faintly but clearly visible, are a strong indication that the work was executed *en plein air*. The canvas remains affixed to its original stretcher bars.



## Style and Influences

In total, Caillebotte painted just shy of forty canvases representing sailboats in motion or at rest. These can be divided into two groups: the first, to which our picture belongs, includes nineteen works executed between 1881 and 1886; the second, comprising a further nineteen works, can be dated to a decade later between 1890 and 1893. To broadly generalise, the earlier pictures are more interested in the relationship between the boats and the river, while the later pictures are more closely focused on specific details of the crafts themselves (fig. 21). And where Caillebotte's early Parisian views owe a great deal to the work of Degas, his Petit Gennevilliers views demonstrate an awareness of the free brushwork in the landscapes of Monet and Renoir. Paul Hayes Tucker's comment about the 'flickering light' and 'broken brushwork' in Caillebotte's paintings is particularly applicable to *Voiliers sur la Seine à Argenteuil*, in which we see a light breeze filling the sail of *Cul-blanc* and ruffling the surface of the river. Thanks to the painting's rare, unlined state, the thick daubs of impastoed paint retain all of their original texture. In the spot in which the water appears roughest, in the right foreground, the waves break the reflection of the sail into an almost purely abstract passage of white, yellow and blue paint.

Of the thirty-eight sailboat canvases in existence, just fourteen are vertical in format, and the same number remain in private ownership. Those of vertical orientation often feature an elevated horizon line, something we also see in Monet's paintings, in order to enhance the importance of the river, with its zig-zagging waves and broken reflections. In our painting, the canvas is divided evenly by the narrow horizontal band of the distant



Fig. 21: G. Caillebotte, *Bateaux sur la Seine à Argenteuil*, 1892, oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm., Private Collection (B.438)

'Everything in the picture is subject to the flickering light that Caillebotte so sensitively renders with his broken brushwork and lively palette, just as everything is vulnerable to the possibilities of transformation, whether through the powers of modern art or those of modern life' (P. Hayes Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 116)

bank. This is contrasted against the rhythmic vertical procession of masts belonging to the orderly line of moored sailboats, all of which have their sails furled apart from *Cul-blanc* at the centre of the composition. Another favourite visual device of the artist's was the triangular foreground wedge, here marking off a stretch of the riverside promenade. Even if Caillebotte did not take a direct interest in Japanese prints, he may have unwittingly adopted some of their conventions through his interactions with the other Impressionists.

Like many of his fellow artists, Caillebotte seemingly preferred painting during the mid-week solitude rather than engaging with the lively crowds attending the weekend regattas – or it may be that he was busy participating in the races. Caillebotte's ability to organise a series of complex forms in space was likely also informed by his brother Martial's ongoing interest in photography, and surviving evidence suggests that the riverscape was equally inspiring to Martial and his camera. In this view, *Cul-blanc* appears unmanned, although the sail is up so presumably someone is preparing to take her out into the basin. It may be that the two men on the jetty are untying the dinghy in order to row out to where *Cul-blanc* is moored.





## Caillebotte's Legacy

Caillebotte died in 1894 at the age of just forty-six. Pissarro wrote to his son Lucien: 'Caillebotte has died suddenly of brain paralysis. He is one we can mourn, he was good and generous and, what makes things even worse, a painter of talent.' In his will, the artist bequeathed his considerable art collection, which amounted to some seventy-three Impressionist works mainly acquired before 1880, to the French public on the proviso that the entire group be hung together for the public to appreciate. This had long been his intention, and his will, drawn up on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1876, presciently declared: 'I donate the paintings I own to the Nation; however, since I want this donation to be accepted, and in such a way that these paintings will not go into an attic or a provincial museum but right into the Luxembourg and later into the Louvre, some time must elapse before this clause is carried out, until the public, I will not say understands, but accepts this [kind of] painting.' He nominated Renoir as his executor, insisting he select a painting for himself as thanks. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, Renoir wrote to Henry Roujon, Director of the Fine Arts Administration, to inform him



Fig. 22: E. Manet, *Le Balcon*, 1868/69, oil on canvas, 170 x 124 cm., Musée d'Orsay, Paris (Caillebotte bequest, 1894; W.134)

Fig. 23: E. Degas, *L'Étoile*, c. 1878, pastel on paper, 58 x 42 cm., Musée d'Orsay, Paris (Caillebotte bequest, 1896; L.491)

Fig. 24: G. Caillebotte, *Autoportrait avec 'Bal du Moulin de la Galette'*, c. 1879, oil on canvas, 90 x 115 cm., Private Collection, Paris (B.132)

Fig. 25: A. Renoir, *Bal du Moulin de la Galette*, 1876, oil on canvas, 131 x 175 cm., Musée d'Orsay, Paris (Caillebotte bequest, 1894; D.211)

of Caillebotte's death and bequest. The Caillebotte collection included such masterpieces as Manet's *Le Balcon* (fig. 22), Degas's *L'Étoile* (fig. 23), Monet's *Gare Saint-Lazare* (1877; W.438; Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and Renoir's *Bal du Moulin de la Galette* (figs. 24-25).

As Caillebotte had predicted, the official Salon culture remained suspicious and disdainful of Impressionism, and his bequest met with a mixed response. Jean-Léon Gérôme, the widely admired Academic painter, spoke for many of his contemporaries when he said 'I do not know these gentlemen and of the donation I know only the title – Are there not some paintings of Monsieur Monet in it? Of Monsieur Pissarro and others? For the state to accept such filth would be a blot on morality' (quoted in K. Mead, *The Impressionists and the Salon (1874 – 1886)*, Los Angeles, 1974, n.p.; and J. Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, New York, 1946, p. 422). In addition to these objections on moral grounds, the Caillebotte bequest raised issues of space – where could seventy-three paintings, many of them considerable in size, be hung together?



Ultimately a compromise was reached when the French authorities agreed to accept thirty-nine of the pictures considered less objectionable (one of which, a Sisley, was later sent to a regional museum), while the rest were to remain with the Caillebotte heirs. Two of the accepted works, *Les Raboteurs de Parquet* (1875; B.34) and *Vue de Toits, Effet de Neige* (1878; B.96), were by Caillebotte himself. Cézanne, upon hearing that his paintings *Cour d'une Ferme* (c. 1879; R.389; Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and *Le Golfe de Marseille, vu de l'Estaque* (1878/80; R.390; Musée d'Orsay, Paris) were to be included in the bequest, announced triumphantly 'Now Bouguereau [the widely-admired painter in the Academic manner] can go to hell!'



Fig. 26: P. Cézanne, *Baigneurs au Repos I*, 1875/76, oil on canvas, 82 x 101 cm., The Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia (R.259)

The Caillebotte bequest was hung first in the Musée du Luxembourg in 1897, then transferred to the Louvre in 1927, to the Musée du Jeu de Paume in 1947, and it finally found a home at the newly opened Musée d'Orsay in 1986. Caillebotte's heirs offered the remaining part of the bequest to the French state again in 1904 and 1908, but their offers were declined. It was not until 1928 that the state thought better of their decision and formally requested the rest of the paintings, but at that point it was too late and they were refused. Many of the rejected works were ultimately purchased by the American collector Albert C. Barnes and are now in the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia.

### Conclusion

Caillebotte did not paint his views of sailboats with a public audience in mind. They were never exhibited during his lifetime, and were only hung together in 1895 at the posthumous exhibition staged at the Galerie Durand-Ruel. With no compelling financial reason to sell his work, Caillebotte simply kept most of it, and it descended in his family until his heirs began selling occasional examples in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason, paintings such as *Voiliers sur la Seine à Argenteuil* – atmospheric and highly personal, both signed and dated, not to mention in an excellent and unlined state of preservation – are exceptionally rare on the market. Having been acquired by a private collector around 1973, our work has remained out of the public sphere for over forty years. With its elegantly ordered composition and lively impasto brushwork, it is an affectionate and accurate portrait of a beloved boat by an original and innovative artist who was also a dedicated and decorated sailor.



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