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Michael Marrinan, *Gustave Caillebotte: Painting the Paris of Naturalism, 1872-1887*. Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2016. xi + 390 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$69.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-6060-6507-5.

Review by Marnin Young, Yeshiva University.

In the growing literature on Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894), Michael Marrinan's monograph stands tall. Rooted in groundbreaking research and sustained visual analysis, it offers the most detailed panorama yet of the artist's career. Moving from the artist's family background in the posh quarters of the French capital to his retreat from the Parisian art world, *Gustave Caillebotte: Painting the Paris of Naturalism, 1872-1887* functions on the one hand as the definitive English-language biography of the painter and collector. Deliberately limited to his period of full immersion in artistic practice, the book also tracks his stylistic and pictorial concerns, more or less painting by painting, from the early 1870s to the late 1880s. These concerns are, somewhat puzzlingly, grouped under the aegis of Naturalism, a potentially productive concept and term that Marrinan only haphazardly develops. Nonetheless, the book provides new biographical and contextual material that both complements and generates persuasive readings of key works.

Caillebotte has long offered a problem for accounts of nineteenth-century art. In his lifetime, critics declared he was "an Impressionist in name only," but also that he was the "revered chief" of the movement.^[1] His major works of the mid-1870s—*Raboteurs de parquets*, 1875 (Musée d'Orsay, Paris); *Le Pont de l'Europe*, c. 1876 (Petit Palais, Musée d'Art Moderne, Geneva); and, *Rue de Paris; Temps de pluie*, 1877 (Art Institute of Chicago)—have persistently been understood in terms of a mid-century Realist or even academic style of detailed rendering and perspectival space. Although he later modified his technique to approach the art of friends like Claude Monet, his role as financial supporter and collector of Impressionism increasingly stood out—his collection now forms the core of the Musée d'Orsay. As a consequence, his artistic star fell quite far in the twentieth century. Only with the trailblazing 1976 exhibition and monograph by the late Kirk Varnedoe did Caillebotte begin his return to the canonical fold.^[2] Major and minor exhibitions of his work have subsequently been mounted on a regular basis, most notably in Paris and Chicago in 1994-1995 and more recently in Washington D.C. and Fort Worth in 2015-2016.^[3] In this forty-year period, the painter's stature has continued to waver, and for many he remains more or less an unknown. He is almost always situated most closely to Monet and company, but many of us share Marrinan's conviction that Caillebotte cannot fully be assimilated to Impressionism.^[4] Part of the significance of his book is the argument, perhaps overly subtle at times, that the painter must be understood apart from his chosen peers.

Gustave Caillebotte responds to and moves beyond the existing accounts of the artist. It was conceived and written in the same decades of the artist's revival, and the lengthy germination of the project is likely the source both of its strengths and weaknesses. As Marrinan acknowledges, his work on Caillebotte dates back some years. In 2002, he published a major new account of the artist, much of which reappears here.^[5] In the intervening decade and a half, no one has surpassed Marrinan's knowledge of the artist's

biography, and this book will almost certainly remain definitive in this respect for some time. It is a model of careful research and admirably slowed-down scholarly reflection. The result is a beautifully conceived and executed book; the Getty's design and production is simply first rate. And yet, the massive amount of information and detailed visual analysis of a wide range of works—the book tops out at 400 pages—makes it sometimes difficult to see the forest for the trees. This is partly the result of any attempt to make sense of a largely uncategorizable and inconsistent artist, but it also indicates the absence of a strong, overarching argument in Marrinan's account. Instead, he provides a series of powerful and provocative arguments about select works and moments in the artist's career, the totality of which suggests, but does not quite state, a conclusion.

Gustave Caillebotte offers at least three ambitious and subtly interlocking arguments. The first concerns the relation of class and power in Caillebotte's representation of workers and the bourgeoisie. Building on revelatory discoveries about the artist's inheritance and derived in part from the work of Michel Foucault, Marrinan argues for a certain consistent domination in Caillebotte's controlled depiction of laborers and class-division in post-Haussmann Paris. Such an argument stands apart from most art historical accounts, which seem determined to find a Communard under the skin of an impeccably bourgeois *rentier*. (It is an argument that also helps explain why Valéry Giscard d'Estaing chose to hang the *Raboteurs de parquets* above his desk in the Palais de l'Élysée). At the same time, the argument folds into Marrinan's later account of Caillebotte's homosociality, which acknowledges the painter's distinctive concern with masculinity and the laboring body. Another argument explains Caillebotte's peculiar pictorial concerns by situating him in relation to literary developments of the period. Émile Zola was, importantly, one of the key critics of the painter at his first exhibition in 1876. Marrinan builds on this detail and demonstrates, quite convincingly, how Caillebotte sought something like the pictorial equivalent of *style indirect libre*: "to make a picture speak in a voice that is neither an impersonal camera nor driven by his personal biography" (p. 230). Although Marrinan does not fully play out the correlation of Caillebotte's framing and point of view and narrative depictions of the same, he does ultimately mount a suggestive argument about the way the artist consistently moved between total, externalized control (photography is the model for this) and a kind of "immersion within the scene" (p. 166).

The overall structure of the book allows these arguments to appear only sporadically. Organized into five separate sections, which follow a loose biographical and chronological logic, the individual chapters (twelve in total, plus an epilogue) tend to focus on iconographic themes. With a few exceptions, most chapters treat particular geographic locales, and except for the twelfth chapter, "Excursions," all would appear to be located in Paris. The subtitle of the book reaffirms the presumption that the focus of the book is Caillebotte's Paris, if not the "Paris of Naturalism." In fact, however, Marrinan regularly follows Caillebotte outside the capital, to his family's summer home in Yerres and later to his own property in Petit-Gennevilliers. Given the inclusion of non-Parisian pictures, the title is misleading at best, and similarly the dates 1872-1887 do not reflect the inclusion of works from the 1890s in the epilogue. Indeed, given the breadth and scope of the book, it is a bit puzzling why Marrinan did not just write an all-encompassing life-and-art account; another chapter or two would have covered the entirety of Caillebotte's career. I can only think that his explicit concern to avoid a reductively biographical approach steered him away from such a production.

Part one of *Gustave Caillebotte* is aptly titled "Caillebotte's World." The three chapters build very effectively from a detailed account of the origins of the Caillebotte family wealth in the Faubourg Saint-Denis to the context of Parisian transformation in Haussmannization and on to the family's occupancy of a large *hôtel particulier* in the rue de Miromesnil. Along the way, we get new accounts of Caillebotte's artistic origins in the studio of Léon Bonnat, his possible interest in the art of Johannes Vermeer and the cultural theories of Hippolyte Taine. (His fairly obvious debt to mid-century Realism is almost a footnote, by contrast). A revisionist account of Haussmanization follows. Marrinan persuasively insists on the Baron's concept of the *percement*—metaphorically cutting through the forest—something directly modeled on classical French gardens. In turn, he completely undoes the standard view that Caillebotte's

generation shared an earlier hostility to the urban transformation of Paris. In fact, he shows that even previously critical voices had changed their tune by the 1870s, and very few openly negative views can be found when Caillebotte started painting modern Paris. In chapter three, Marrinan begins a series of detailed readings of the artist's individual paintings. Here he treats the artist's numerous depictions of the interior of the family home, including the *Raboteurs de parquets*. The attentiveness of his visual analysis integrates the biographical and contextual background elaborated in the previous two chapters and lays the ground for the rest of the book.

The second part of the book, "Walking the City," consists of two chapters that take Caillebotte out of the orbit of his family and into the streets of Paris. The first of these treats one of Caillebotte's most problematic, and thus emblematic, pictures: *Le Pont de l'Europe*. The canvas brings together several crucial elements that run through the artist's work: the coexistence of classes in post-Haussmann Paris, the distortions of conventional perspective, the use of photography in painting, the spectator's relation to the picture, and Caillebotte's own relation to Impressionism. Marrinan deftly weaves these elements together, effectively establishing the most convincing account we have of the work. The next chapter treats the painter's most famous work, *Rue de Paris; Temps de pluie*, although the account is deflected by other works and by the more compelling revisionism of the previous chapter. Indeed, Marrinan's slightly different treatment of the painting in the 2015 catalogue, *Gustave Caillebotte: The Painter's Eye*, is arguably more compelling. Put together, however, they point to one of the absolutely crucial insights in his account of the artist, one that emerges most powerfully in the Chicago painting: the spectator of this painting is meant to feel as if she is entering into the world depicted. This is distinctively different from the Impressionist presumption that the spectator of a painting occupies a position identical to the painter who earlier perceived the motif. For example, in the *Pont de l'Europe*, Caillebotte depicted himself as one of the pedestrians in the picture *approaching* the picture plane, thus *not* occupying the position of a viewer of the scene. And yet, the spectator is also not excluded from this scene of representation as standard academic and Realist practice in France typically dictated: a dog entering the painting at lower right corresponds to the spectator's own implied mobile entry into the picture space. This logic continues in later pictures, and Marrinan effectively demonstrates this spectatorial immersion as the consistent, almost defining, problematic of Caillebotte's career.

"Impresario of Impressionism" is the title of the third part of the book. The two chapters in this section show the painter's professional and personal relations with Impressionist painters around the exhibitions of 1877 and 1879. The latter exhibition gave Caillebotte pride of place, but it was also a critical disaster for him. His painting simply did not seem to make sense in the context of Impressionism. This has been the problem for understanding his painting ever since. Importantly, however, Marrinan here demonstrates how Caillebotte's own pictorial concerns might possibly have made sense next to Monet's. He summarizes the painter's attempted solution to the problem of being "an Impressionist in name only": "a systematic exploration over the next several years of the physical situation of viewers becomes his shorthand trick for direct experience that parallels the perceptual immediacy of plein-air practice" (p. 170). In other words, Caillebotte could never quite adapt himself to the Impressionist model of a painter immersed in the flux of sensorial experience—his bourgeois need for control seems to have been the source of this blockage—but his peculiar attempts at the immersion of the spectator were meant to serve as analogues.

Part four, "A Man About Town," treats several such attempts to triangulate Impressionism. The most prominent and ambitious is an 1880 painting called *Dans un café* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen), a work Marrinan relates to Caillebotte's views from his new home on the boulevard Haussmann. Picture pairs showing views looking down at the street and views of the balcony itself together mark an ambiguous double-consciousness akin to *style indirect libre* in the novel. *Dans un café* seeks to combine this double-view, using mirror reflections and open doors to place the spectator in an indecisive relation to the depiction and the time of spectatorship (the present). The gambit apparently did not quite work, or at least was not recognized at the time. Of course, Caillebotte might simply have lacked the ambitions

Marrinan attributes to him—stronger evidence that the painter read or was familiar with Zola's *Roman expérimental* would obviously help his case. Nevertheless, an account of Caillebotte's painting in these terms helps explain the distinctive qualities of a number of works. Yet, the next two chapters of this section turn to an iconography of pictures done as if in retreat from such ambitions. One chapter on paintings of domestic interiors and masculine sociality is followed by one on the representation of female and male bodies. Interesting and important in their own right—they respond to and build on work by Griselda Pollock and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick—neither one quite develops the argument about spectatorship that the book has built up to this point. These chapters on “Bachelors” and “Bodies” speak most powerfully to the artist's failure to achieve his earlier ambitions.

The fifth and final part of the book, “Upscale Division,” is thus the most obviously revisionist in its attempt to argue for the artistic significance of Caillebotte's still lifes and landscapes. Marrinan contends that the painter's depiction of store-front displays of fruit and meat offers a celebratory replication of a mobile urbanite. “The viewer,” he writes, “cut free of the picture space and distracted by its surface, relives the fleeting attention of a roving flâneur to commodities on display” (p. 298). Likewise, in his later landscape paintings, Caillebotte “betrays an effort to place himself physically within the natural world he is painting, even if that means relinquishing some measure of control over the situation” (p. 333). In neither case, however, could he fully occupy an Impressionist position within this world of changing sensations. The epilogue on the artist's various paintings of laundry drying in the 1890s recapitulates this point. Ultimately, Caillebotte's inability to find a way to satisfy his need to be outside his own picture, to control his picture space, without falling into retrograde convention pushed him outside the practice of painting altogether.

In the end, Marrinan's *Gustave Caillebotte* treats an important, and too-often glossed, problem in our account of modern art. It tells the story of a painter whose social background and disposition instilled an expectation of control—of his visual world, among other things. Various things like organized urban space, deep-focus photography, and propertied wealth, seemed to confirm this habit and predisposition. The countervailing tendency towards sensorial flux and transience—steam trains, pictorial instantaneity, finance capitalism—obviously came to dominate the most ambitious artistic accomplishments of his time. Caillebotte recognized this rising tide and sought to adapt his picture making to it. His failure to do so has been almost universally recognized. Yet, Marrinan's is one of the rare historical accounts of nineteenth-century art that acknowledges how difficult it was for many artists to come around to a full acceptance or understanding of the radical new picture-making Impressionism proposed. Whether or not Caillebotte is an Impressionist, a Realist, or a Naturalist, he emerges in this telling as an exemplary figure, fully embedded in the artistic and social crises of his age.

NOTES

[1] Compare “Exposition des impressionnistes: 6, rue Le Peletier,” *La Petite République française*, April 10, 1877, 2, and, Bertall, “Exposition des Indépendants : Ex-Impressionnistes, demain Intentionistes,” *L'Artiste* (June 1879):397.

[2] The 1976 catalogue was revised and republished as Kirk Varnedoe, *Gustave Caillebotte* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

[3] See Anne Distel, et al., *Gustave Caillebotte: Urban Impressionist* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1995); and, Mary Morton and George Shackelford, *Gustave Caillebotte: The Painter's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[4] For a somewhat different account of Caillebotte and Impressionism, see my *Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

[5] Michael Marrinan, "Caillebotte as Professional Painter: From Studio to the Public Eye," in Norma Broude ed., *Gustave Caillebotte and the Fashioning of Identity in Impressionist Paris* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 22-65.

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