

# LE CLAIRE KUNST SEIT 1982

GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE

1848 Paris – Gennevilliers 1894

*Le mur du jardin potager, Yerres*

Pastel on paper.

Signed and dated upper right: *G. Caillebotte 77.*

435 x 590 mm

PROVENANCE: Marie Caillebotte, the artist's cousin (gift of the artist c.1894) – Thence by descent – Private collection, France

LITERATURE: M. Berhaut, *Caillebotte, Sa vie et son oeuvre, Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels*, Paris, 1978, no. 63, repr. p.103 – Pierre Wittmer, *Caillebotte and his Garden at Yerres*, New York 1991, pp.70, 77 and 250, repr. p.119 – M. Berhaut, *Caillebotte, Sa vie et son oeuvre, Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels*, Paris, 1994, no. 76, repr. p.101

EXHIBITION: *Fourth exhibition of Impressionist painting* at 28, avenue de l'Opéra, Paris, 10 April - 11 May 1878, no. 27 (as *Kitchen garden*, pastel; ex-catalogue) – The pastel is requested for loan for the exhibition *Gustave Caillebotte – L'Impressionisme dans la Peinture et la photographie*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt/Main, 18 October – 20 January 2013.

Unusual perspectival views, dramatically truncated motifs and clearly defined linear structures are distinctive characteristics of Gustave Caillebotte's work. Artistic devices like these that might otherwise appear unspectacular create a special dynamic that was highly progressive in Caillebotte's day and are still of great interest today.

This pastel shows the gravel path and the trellis wall enclosing the large kitchen garden at the Caillebotte family's country home in Yerres, a historic village about twenty kilometres south-west of Paris. Set against the whiteness of the masonry, the precisely defined grid of the trellis is lushly overgrown with a profusion of vegetation. Caillebotte was twelve years old when his parents purchased the estate in 1860. It later became their summer residence. The kitchen garden was situated at the southern end of the estate. The extensive grounds were centred on a large neoclassical house built in the early nineteenth century. It is still standing today. A contemporary description of the property mentions ... *a park extending along the river in the English style, planted with large and beautiful trees both indigenous and exotic, a shrubbery, walks, lawns, an island formed by an arm in the river, iron bridges ... A beautiful kitchen garden, with numerous espaliers and a broad lawn beyond ...*<sup>1</sup>

Before 1879, when the residence was sold on the death of his parents, Caillebotte found many of his motifs in the house, in the garden, in the surrounding landscapes and on the banks of the river Yerres. An oil sketch, slightly smaller in size than the present pastel, shows the same masonry wall [fig. 1].<sup>2</sup> Although seen from the opposite angle, the scheme is comparable: a vine is shown growing

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Anne Distel et al., *Gustave Caillebotte, Urban Impressionist*, exhib. cat., The Art Institute, Chicago, 1995, p.56.

<sup>2</sup>The kitchen garden wall features in six oil paintings and another pastel executed in 1877 (Berhaut, nos. 75, 77-82). The painting *Le Jardinier* (Berhaut no. 79) shows the wall from the garden side, in similar perspective.

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up the trellis while luxuriant beds of white flowers with touches of violet line the broad walkway that leads into the dark woods of the park. As in the present work, the painting is dominated by strict diagonal perspective lines. Caillebotte has emphasized the contrasts between nature and hard-edged, linear man-made structures. The extreme straightness of the walkway, its dry, sandy texture brilliantly rendered in pastel tones, is set in contrast to the loosely dispersed clumps of flowers and shrubbery. It is as if their superabundant richness is attempting to escape from the neatly kept flower beds and clipped borders. Caillebotte clearly demonstrates his partiality for the role of human influence and design in the landscape, while showing less tolerance for the uncontrolled abundance of nature, then a more conventional subject for the *plein-air* painter.<sup>3</sup>

The year 1877 was also the year in which Caillebotte painted his two great urban masterpieces, *Le pont de l'Europe*<sup>4</sup> and *Rue de Paris, temps de pluie*.<sup>5</sup> In both, architecture and perspective entirely dominate the composition. Like Degas, Caillebotte was deeply interested in manipulating the spatial structures in his compositions. In transporting unusual subjects from modern everyday life into his paintings, he concentrated on using traditional perspectival techniques in unconventional ways in order to achieve novel and highly original results.

This pastel has remained in the collection of the Caillebotte family since it was executed over a century and a quarter ago. The artist made a gift of it to Marie Caillebotte, his first cousin, around the year 1894. She was the great-grandmother of the former owner.



Fig. 1: *Le Mur du jardin potager*, Yverres, 1875/77, oil on canvas, 27 x 41 cm, Berhaut no. 75, private collection

<sup>3</sup> A pastel titled *Prairie, Yverres*, with softly modelled pigments and executed in subtle gradations of green, is in the Joseph and Deborah Goldyne Collection. See *Judging by Appearance: Master Drawings from the Collection of Joseph and Deborah Goldyne*, exhib. cat., Legion of Honor, San Francisco 2006, p.164, no. 73, repr.

<sup>4</sup> Berhaut, op.cit., no. 49; Musée du Petit Palais, Geneva, inv. no. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Berhaut, op. cit., no. 57; The Art Institute of Chicago, inv. no. 1964.336.