



On the Europe Bridge
Gustave Caillebotte, French, 1848-1894
1876-77, Oil on canvas, 41 1/2 x 51 1/8 inches
Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

About the Artist

Gustave Caillebotte was born in Paris on August 19, 1848. His father's family had been well established in the textile business for some time, and Martial Caillebotte, Gustave's father, moved to Paris in order to expand the family business. By 1850, the business was very prosperous, in part because it was supplying bedding to the French army, and the Caillebotte family moved to a large home with a garden. Gustave was the oldest of three sons, and he was still a teenager when he began to work on a law degree.

As far as we know, Caillebotte had not planned as a young man to become an artist. While a student from age 9 to 14, he excelled in literary subjects, and he did so well studying the law that he received his degree in 1869 at the young age of 21. He served for a time in the army and planned to return to his studies for an advanced degree in law, but when Napoleon declared war on Prussia, France entered a period of turmoil. Prussia overcame the French army, entered Paris, and took Napoleon prisoner. Life for the French people underwent many changes, and it was during this period of upheaval that Caillebotte became an artist. His first major painting was completed in 1875.

Caillebotte was a close friend of other Impressionist painters, and he helped to fund their first public exhibition in 1874. He exhibited his work with theirs in 1876. He was not only friend of the Impressionists, but he also purchased many of their works. Since he was independently wealthy, he was able to acquire a large and important collection of their works, which he later bequeathed to France. These paintings are in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris today.

About the Art

On the Europe Bridge shows a scene from the modern life of Paris. The bridge is a powerful example of the technological advances of the time and of their impact on the people of Paris and the world.

Caillebotte shows the viewer modern city life with some of the dramatic changes that were affecting the lives of its people. The subject matter, urban Parisian life, is what made this painting such an innovative work for its time. Caillebotte did a very daring thing when he chose to depict contemporary life. Historical scenes were still the most accepted and traditional subject matter for painting.

Additional Information

The train station in the background of *On the Europe Bridge* is the Gare Saint-Lazare. The train station represents the industrial age that Paris and Europe were experiencing. We do not actually see the trains, but we see the smoke from the busy terminal where people arrived in the bustling city from the suburbs. The bridge on which the figures stand is above the rail yard.

The Europe Bridge is the point where six major avenues crossed leading out in all directions. The names of these avenues are the Rue de Berne, the Rue de St. Petersburg, the Rue de Constantinople, the Rue de Madrid, the Rue de Vienne (Vienna), the Rue de Londres (London), and the Rue de Berlin. The configuration and the names of the six crossing roads can represent for us the idea that the changes of the time both entered the city of Paris and spread to all parts of Europe.

About the Time and Place

Great Britain led the Industrial Revolution because the British had iron and coal resources that helped them to develop an excellent transportation system to move goods from one place to another. Also, Britain had been a major international trading nation since the 1500s and 1600s because of the tobacco, sugar, tea, and slaves from her colonies. British merchants had gained much wealth from trading and had money to invest in industries such as textiles, mines, railroads, and shipbuilding.

In the United States, on May 10, 1869, at Promontory Point, Utah, the railroad that spanned the nation was completed when the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific railroads met. The nation celebrated as travel time from New York to San Francisco became just eight days. The trip had previously taken at least three months, and often two or three times that long. Railroads brought rapid economic growth to the country.

By the second half of the 1800s, other European nations challenged Britain's leadership in the Industrial Revolution. Belgium also had coal and iron resources and a tradition in textile manufacturing. France had a strong textile industry and produced important inventions. In the early 1800s, Joseph Marie Jacquard developed the first power loom to

weave complex fabric patterns. The French government encouraged the textile industry by imposing high tariffs on cloth imports from other countries. The government also backed projects for the improvement of transportation, especially the building of railroads.

The Eiffel Tower was completed for the Paris exposition of 1889, and it became a symbol of the industrial and technological progress of the time.