

French Paintings and Pastels, 1600–1945

The Collections of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Aimee Marcereau DeGalan, Editor



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Gustave Caillebotte, *Portrait of Richard Gallo*, 1881

Artist	Gustave Caillebotte, French, 1848–1894
Title	<i>Portrait of Richard Gallo</i>
Object Date	1881
Alternate and Variant Titles	<i>Portrait de M. Gallo</i>
Medium	Oil on canvas
Dimensions (Unframed)	Original frame: 45 x 52 7/8 x 1 1/4 in. (114.3 x 134.3 x 3.2 cm) 38 1/4 x 45 7/8 in. (97.2 x 116.5 cm)
Signature	Signed and dated lower right: G Caillebotte, 1881
Credit Line	The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust through the generosity of Mrs. George C. Reuland through the W. J. Brace Charitable Trust and through exchange of the bequests of Mr. and Mrs. William James Brace and Frances Logan; the gifts of Harold Woodbury Parsons, Mr. and Mrs. Henry W. Bloch, and the Laura Nelson Kirkwood Residuary Trust; and other Trust properties, 89-35

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Gustave Caillebotte's *Portrait of Richard Gallo* is a puzzling composition. The subject sits slightly left of center, arms crossed, on a boldly patterned sofa that appears to defy perspectival logic. The way in which Caillebotte curves the left end of the sofa—with a bold black line where the backrest and bottom cushion meet—is subtle yet unsettling. The right end of the backrest recedes in size, creating a distortion between the viewer's world and the one Caillebotte creates. This kind of ocular manipulation appears frequently in Caillebotte's work, but the decorative elements of this painting set it apart. The rich gold, green, and red pattern of the sofa alongside the highly pigmented pillow, created with more thickly applied paint, compete with the figure for the viewer's attention and almost overshadow him. Caillebotte challenges traditional concepts of portraiture by utilizing such decorative elements in innovative and psychologically impactful

ways. In *Portrait of Richard Gallo*, Caillebotte carefully selected every component of the composition, creating a complex painting that explores modern life in late nineteenth-century Paris.

Richard Gallo (1849–1936), a lifelong friend of the artist, frequently sat for Caillebotte and appeared in at least seven paintings.¹ The son of a French banker, Gallo attended school with Caillebotte in Paris² and later became the editor of *Le Constitutionnel*, a liberal Parisian newspaper.³ Caillebotte cleverly alludes to Gallo's profession by including the rival conservative newspaper *Le Figaro*, seen resting across his lap. In this tightly cropped view of the room, the audacious patterning of the sofa demands the viewer's attention and occupies a majority of the canvas. Gallo is engulfed in the sea of color and, with his rigid posture and folded arms, appears uncomfortable. The red and green stripes, overlaid with a gold arabesque pattern, are in stark contrast to the room's muted color and minimal décor. In choosing a piece of furniture as the focal point of the portrait, Caillebotte explores new ideas around the role of interior design and the psychology of space.

Contemporary art critic and novelist Edmund Duranty argued in his essay "La Nouvelle Peinture," published in 1876, that the interior space of a portrait should reflect a sitter's identity:

*What we need are the special characteristics of the modern individual—in his clothing, in social situations, at home. . . . Surrounding him and behind him are the furniture, fireplaces, curtains, and walls that indicate his financial position, class, and profession.*⁴

In *Portrait of Richard Gallo*, however, few trappings of bourgeois life are visible. Instead, Caillebotte uses minimal⁵ decorative elements for maximum impact, and each element deserves close examination.

First there is the sofa on which Gallo sits. Caillebotte often featured the same pieces of furniture in his paintings, most frequently a taupe divan embossed with small florals and narrow stripes.⁶ In *Nude on a Couch* (Fig. 1), Caillebotte provides a nearly full view of the divan and its versatility, as the woman in the painting uses a large support pillow under her head, while the other two cushions lean against the wall. In nineteenth-century France, furniture became mass-produced and lower in cost, and items became lighter and more mobile within the home.⁷ With its bed-like base and loose back pillows, Caillebotte's divan could easily be shifted around a room, creating specific vignettes for the artist.



Fig. 1. Gustave Caillebotte, *Nude on a Couch*, ca. 1880, oil on canvas, 51 x 77 in. (129.5 x 195.6 cm), Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The John R. Van Derlip Fund, 67.67

Previously, scholars thought that the sofa in *Portrait of Richard Gallo* was unique in Caillebotte's oeuvre⁸; however, this author believes it to be the same divan used in *Nude on a Couch*. At the bottom left foreground in *Portrait of Richard Gallo*, Caillebotte shows where the back of the sofa meets the base. Rather than a separate pillow, there appears to be a crumpled fold where the two parts come together near Gallo's legs. It is not a clean partition typically found on a manufactured piece of furniture; instead, it appears that Caillebotte laid a piece of fabric over the divan. The sofa lacks any clear vertical separation between the cushions resting behind Gallo, which are typically found on this type of sofa. The divan often pictured in Caillebotte's compositions had three back pillows, a common number with this style, which would mean at least two creases would be visible on the back of the sofa, but here it appears as one continuous cushion. Although it is possible Gallo blocks a crease with his body, it is more likely that Caillebotte is not using a new piece of furniture but refashioning one he already owned. This also may explain what looks like an armrest at far right, which could be excess fabric held up by the pillow, although this is unclear.

A deliberate choice by Caillebotte either way, the green and gold material alongside the pillow adds to the visual noise and unsettling composition for the viewer. A photograph from inside the home of Caillebotte's brother Martial, once the shared home of the two brothers (Fig. 2), features curtains whose patterns and stripes bear a resemblance to the divan in *Portrait of Richard Gallo*.⁹ Unfortunately, Caillebotte's brother and the piano obstruct the view of the bottom of the curtain. It is therefore impossible to know if the curtains

themselves had fringe, which would align with the style of the time, or if Caillebotte might have added a painted fringe as a visual element to guide the linear perspective and ground the sofa within the composition.



Fig. 2. Martial Caillebotte, *Martial Caillebotte at Home, 9 rue Scribe (Petit Salon)*, gelatin silver print, 1895–96, private collection

In addition to the bold fabric on the divan, Caillebotte creates more visual noise by including two colorfully tasseled pillows: one partially hidden behind the sitter's back and the other placed at the far right side of the sofa, seemingly truncating the couch. Caillebotte adds visual weight to the pillows' surfaces using thickly applied paint, in stark contrast to the more refined elements like the smooth walls and black suit worn by Gallo. The slanted position of the pillow at right almost mirrors that of Gallo and feels out of place as it clashes with the divan's pattern. Just like the curtains, this pillow also appears in a photograph of Martial Caillebotte's home (Fig. 3). The other pillow, positioned behind Gallo's right arm, has a white background with gold, pinks, blues, and purples swirling in an arabesque pattern similar to that in the sofa's stripes. The tassels are made up of all the colors seen in the pattern and fall softly around the square shape of the pillow's body.



Fig. 3. Martial Caillebotte, *Martial Caillebotte in Front of his Fireplace, 9 rue Scribe (Petit Salon)*, gelatin silver print, ca. 1895–96, private collection; repro. in Serge Lemoine, *Dans l'intimité des frères Caillebotte: peintre et photographe*, exh. cat. (Paris: Culturespaces, 2011)

While one might assume the pillow was placed there for Gallo's benefit, it does nothing to relax him; his posture is controlled and firm. While the sofa and pillows vie for the viewer's attention, the luxurious fabrics provide little comfort to Gallo. Caillebotte places him slightly off-center, and his solid black suit disrupts the pattern. The visual chaos constructed by contrasting decorative elements, intertwined with the sitter's austere attire, produces a sense of disjunction within the canvas.

While women's fashion in the 1880s saw the introduction of a wide range of clothing styles and colors, promoted by haute couture houses and fashion publications, the bourgeois male subscribed to uniformity and muted tones in the form of a suit.¹⁰ The suit's rise in popularity began after the Industrial Revolution, when the processes of making both fabric and clothing became mechanized, democratizing fashion and making it accessible to people of varied economic classes.¹¹ The suit's muted color palette appealed to the Parisian flâneur because its uniformity offered anonymity, and its universality rejected aristocratic aesthetics. For politically progressive individuals such as Gallo and Caillebotte, visually aligning with the middle and working classes by wearing a suit became a mechanism for renouncing the old, aristocratic culture of France. Consider here another portrait of Richard Gallo (Fig. 4) from 1878, in which he sports similar bourgeois attire. The long black overcoat and gray pants, with his top hat resting atop the piano by the door, are the signature outerwear of the flâneur. Again, Caillebotte creates tension between Gallo and his interior with his uncomfortable pose and overpowering red Voltaire chair. Instead of filling the room with objects

to explore the sitter's identity, Caillebotte engages key furnishings that create a discussion around contemporary life and interior spaces.



Fig. 4. Gustave Caillebotte, *Portrait of Richard Gallo*, 1878, oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 25 9/16 in. (80 x 65 cm), private collection

Caillebotte's interest in the decorative extended beyond the confines of the painting itself. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art is fortunate to have not only this impressive portrait but also its original frame (Fig. 5). Probably designed and created by Caillebotte, the frame features a bronze finish and clean lines created by grooves set into the painted wood. The minimalist design defies the contemporaneous taste for gold and highly decorative frames, often carved with an arabesque pattern similar to what appears on the divan. In the frame's design, Caillebotte mirrors the gold wall molding within the scene, demonstrating an innovative and progressive aesthetic.¹² It is one of the few original frames in the museum's collection, made even more exceptional when conservators located a lone fingerprint in its finish.¹³ It is unknown if the fingerprint belongs to Caillebotte, though it is tantalizing to think that he left his physical as well as creative mark on this portrait.



Fig. 5. Gustave Caillebotte, *Portrait of Richard Gallo*, 1881, in its original frame

By identifying, isolating, and expanding on the decorative elements in *Portrait of Richard Gallo*, an argument could be made that this painting is not really a portrait, but rather a genre scene, despite Caillebotte exhibiting it as *Portrait de M. G.* at the Seventh Impressionist exhibition in 1882. Few, if any, elements point directly to Gallo, except perhaps the newspaper, which only hints at the sitter's identity. Even then, the featured newspaper is *Le Figaro* and not Gallo's paper, *Le Constitutionnel*. The painting elicits a strong sense of interior discomfort as Caillebotte rejects Duranty's call for the interior to reflect its occupier. Rather than providing understanding of an individual, he generates a snapshot of interior life in the broader sense.

The trappings of bourgeois comfort, albeit minimal, are disquieting in juxtaposition with the restrained sitter. Gallo's folded arms, rigid posture, distant gaze, and slanted pose demonstrate Gallo's discomfort but also transfer that discomfort to the viewer, who oscillates between being drawn into the space and rejected by it.¹⁴ The viewer feels forced into the space, and yet Gallo's position leaves little room for receiving a second individual. His gaze, just to the right of the viewer, provides no hint of personal acknowledgment. With these elements, Caillebotte creates a peek into the anxieties of everyday interior life, a defining feature of a genre scene.

Although *Portrait of Richard Gallo* does not mirror Duranty's directive to populate interiors with an array of decorative items that remind one of the sitter's station,

Caillebotte's own sense of interior decorating did. Photographs show that he filled his home with artwork and other possessions that reflected his interests. One scholar suggests that *Portrait of Richard Gallo*, with its minimal décor, is an example of Caillebotte "thumbing his nose" at the decorative trends of the time, but this theory neglects Caillebotte's own maximalist decorative taste and, in a way, dismisses the artist's clever and deliberate use of the ornamental in his oeuvre.¹⁵ Rather than seeing Caillebotte's sparse room as a commentary on decorating taste, it seems more prudent to interpret what *was* included and how those elements impact the viewer.

Caillebotte debuted *Portrait of Richard Gallo* at the seventh Impressionist Exhibition in 1882¹⁶ and later gave the painting to Gallo.¹⁷ In 1907, Gallo moved to Alexandria, Egypt, and gave the painting to his niece, Marthe Rolland.¹⁸ It remained in the Rolland family until 1988, when they sold it to Paul and Ellen Josefowitz.¹⁹ In the fall of 1989, Roger Ward, then the curator of European art at the Nelson-Atkins, proposed the acquisition, citing the artist's rarity in most museum collections of the day.²⁰ Ward noted that while other museums had great examples by Caillebotte, none were portraits, noting, "The picture under consideration would . . . be unique in the United States."²¹ Ward's foresight in acquiring Caillebotte's portrait provided the Nelson-Atkins with an important piece of the artist's legacy that complicates the discussion around the interior spaces of nineteenth-century Paris.

Megan Seiler
October 2022

Notes

1. Marie Berhaut, *Gustave Caillebotte: Catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels* (Paris: Wildenstein, 1994), 113, 124, 127, 144, 231. Caillebotte painted him in seven paintings: *Portrait of Richard Gallo* (1878; private collection, Paris), *Self Portrait at the Easel* (1879; private collection, Paris), *The Bezique Game* (1880; private collection, Paris), *Interior, Woman at the Window* (1880; private collection, Paris), *Interior: Woman Reading* (1880; private collection, Paris), *Portrait of Richard Gallo* (1881; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art), and *Richard Gallo Walking His Dog Dick* (1884; private collection, Paris).

2. Roldophe Rapetti, "Portrait of M. Richard Gallo, Also Known as Richard Gallo and His Dog Dick, at Petit Gennevilliers," in Anne Distel et al., *Gustave Caillebotte: Urban Impressionist*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1995), 280. Rapetti cites the Gallo descendants as providing this information.

3. Berhaut, *Gustave Caillebotte*, 144.

4. Edmond Duranty, *La Nouvelle Peinture: À propos du Groupe d'Artistes qui expose dans les Galeries Durand-Ruel* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1876), 24, 27-28; English translation from "The New Painting," in *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886*, ed. Charles S. Moffett, exh. cat. (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1986), 43-44. For more on Duranty and his ideas of the interior as a reflection of the man, see Pamela J. Warner, *Interior Portraiture and Masculine Identity in France, 1789-1914* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), esp. 160.

5. I use this term to refer to how many items are in the painting; it is not to be confused with the design style of "minimalism," which was not developed until post-World War II.

6. Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines sofa as "a long, stuffed seat with a back and ends or end," and divan as "a low bed or couch with no back or ends," period descriptions classify a divan as a type of sofa, and I am using the terms interchangeably here. Berhaut, *Gustave Caillebotte*, 124, 127, 144, 150. The paintings *Nude on a Couch*, *Bezique Game*, *Self-Portrait*, and *Woman Reading* include this divan.

7. Elizabeth Benjamin, "The Unhomely Home: Caillebotte's Interior Paris" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2016), 106-7.

8. Elizabeth Benjamin, "All the Discomforts of Home," in *Gustave Caillebotte: The Painter's Eye*, exh. cat. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 94, 261n41.

9. Although this photograph dates from 1895-96, after Gustave Caillebotte's death, it documents the shared apartment they moved into in 1878-1879.

10. Debra Mancoff, *Fashion in Impressionist Paris* (London: Merrell, 2012), 50. The style of suit and coat appear repeatedly in Caillebotte's paintings.

11. Michael Zakim, "Customizing the Industrial Revolution: The Reinvention of Tailoring in the Nineteenth Century," *Winterthur Portfolio* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 42.
12. D. G. Karraker, *Looking at European Frames: A Guide to Terms, Styles, and Techniques* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2014), 5–6. Edgar Degas (1834–1917) also created his own frames; for example, see Degas's *Junior Milliners*, Fig. 10, in this catalogue.
13. See conservation record of treatment by Kate Garland, June 7, 2016, NAMA curatorial files.
14. Hollis Clayson makes a similar statement about two of Caillebotte's other images in her essay, "Threshold Space: Parisian Modernism Betwixt and Between (1869 to 1891)," in Janet McLean, ed., *Impressionist Interiors* (Dublin: Colorman, 2009), 20–22.
15. Elizabeth Benjamin, "The Modern Interior Stripped Bare: Gustave Caillebotte's Interieur Demeuble," in Anca I. Lasc, ed., *Visualizing the Nineteenth-Century Home: Modern Art and the Decorative Impulse* (London: Routledge, 2016), 131.
16. *Catalogue de la 7me Exposition des Artistes Indépendants*, exh. cat. (Paris: Morris père et fils, 1882), unpaginated [repr. in, Theodore Reff, ed., *Modern Art in Paris: Two-Hundred Catalogues of the Major Exhibitions Reproduced in Facsimile in Forty-Seven Volumes*, vol. 23, *Impressionist Group Exhibitions* (New York: Garland, 1981), unpaginated], as *Portrait de M. G.*
17. Berhaut, *Gustave Caillebotte*, 144.
18. Berhaut (*Gustave Caillebotte*, 138) names a Maurice Rolland as the original inheritor of the painting, but my research shows a marriage certificate between Paul Antione Marius Rolland and Marthe Grandguillot on August 8, 1898, and a death announcement on August 11, 1965, for Marthe Grandguillot, where Maurice Rolland is listed first, indicating that Maurice Rolland was her son. See NAMA curatorial files provenance records for both the marriage certificate and death announcement.
19. Henri Malcor, "Richard Gallo," unpublished manuscript, May 20, 1988, copy in the NAMA curatorial files.

20. See Acquisition Proposal, December 15, 1989, and Board Meeting Minutes, Fall 1989, the NAMA curatorial files.

21. See Acquisition Proposal, December 15, 1989, and Board Meeting Minutes, Fall 1989, the NAMA curatorial files, under "Works in Other U.S. Collections."

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Provenance

Given by the artist to the sitter, Richard Gallo (1849–1936), Paris, probably 1881–1907 [1];

His gift to his niece, Marthe Rolland (née Grandguillot, 1877–1965), Paris, 1907–1965 [2];

By descent to her son, Maurice Rolland (1904–1988), Paris, 1965–1988;

By inheritance to his sister, Jeanne Janette Malcor (née Rolland, 1901–1995), Paris, 1988 [3];

Purchased from Malcor by Paul (1950–2013) and Ellen Melas Kyriazi Josefowitz, London and Lausanne, August

25–November 26, 1988 [4];

Purchased from Paul and Ellen Josefowitz by the dealer David Ramus, Atlanta and New York, on joint account with Hirschl and Adler, New York, stock no. 6852/2, November 26, 1988–1989 [5];

Purchased from David Ramus and Hirschl and Adler by The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, 1989.

Notes

[1] In a statement on the painting's history, dated May 20, 1988, Richard Gallo's grand-nephew-in-law, Henri Malcor, wrote that Gallo collected a number of paintings from Impressionist artists, to whom he was introduced by his friend Gustave Caillebotte. Ultimately, Gallo only kept the five paintings Caillebotte gave to him, three of which represented Gallo. See "Richard Gallo" by Henri Malcor, May 20, 1988, copy in NAMA curatorial files.

[2] The Caillebotte catalogue raisonné indicates that the painting passed to Gallo's nephew, Maurice Rolland, at the time of Gallo's death in 1936. However, Maurice Rolland was actually Gallo's grand-nephew, and according to Henri Malcor's statement on Richard Gallo (see note 1), Gallo gave the painting to his niece Marthe in 1907, when Gallo moved to Alexandria, Egypt. The painting then passed to Marthe's son Maurice Rolland. See Marie Berhaut, *Gustave Caillebotte: catalogue raisonné des peintures et pastels* (Paris: Wildenstein Institute, 1994), no. 182, p. 144, and "Richard Gallo" by Henri Malcor, May 20, 1988, copy in NAMA curatorial files.

[3] Carole Bonzon-Vachette, Jeanne Malcor's great-granddaughter, confirmed the family's sale of the painting following Maurice Rolland's death in correspondence with Megan Seiler, NAMA, May 27, 2020, NAMA curatorial files.

[4] According to Ellen Josefowitz, in an email to MacKenzie Mallon, NAMA, June 8, 2020, NAMA curatorial files.

[5] See email from Gregory Hedberg, Hirschl and Adler, New York, to Nicole Myers, NAMA, May 11, 2015, and email from Ellen Josefowitz to MacKenzie Mallon, NAMA, June 8, 2020, NAMA curatorial files.

Related Works

Gustave Caillebotte, *Portrait of Richard Gallo*, 1878, oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 25 3/5 in. (80 x 65 cm), private collection, France.

Gustave Caillebotte, *Self Portrait in Front of the Easel*, 1879, oil on canvas, 35 3/7 x 45 2/7 in. (90 x 115 cm), private collection, Paris.

Gustave Caillebotte, *Game of Bezique*, 1880, oil on canvas, 47 5/8 x 63 2/5 in. (121 x 161 cm), private collection, Paris.

Gustave Caillebotte, *Interior, Reading Woman*, 1880, oil on canvas, 25 3/5 x 31 1/2 in. (65 x 80 cm), private collection, Paris.

Gustave Caillebotte, *Interior, Woman at the Window*, 1880, oil on canvas, 45 2/3 x 35 in. (116 x 89 cm), private collection, Paris.

Gustave Caillebotte, *Richard Gallo and his Dog at Petit Gennevilliers*, 1884, oil on canvas, 35 x 45 2/3 in. (89 x 116 cm), private collection, Paris.

Gustave Caillebotte, *Paul the Dog*, ca. 1886, oil on canvas, 25 3/4 x 21 3/4 in. (65.4 x 54.2 cm), sold at *Masterpieces from the Collection of Sam Josefowitz: A Lifetime of Discovery and Scholarship*, Christie's, London, lot 3, as Le chien "Paul".

Exhibitions

7me Exposition des Artistes Indépendants [7th Impressionist Exhibition], 251 rue Saint-Honoré, Paris, March 1–31, 1882, no. 5, as *Portrait de M. G.*

Exposition Rétrospective d'Œuvres de G. Caillebotte, Galerie Durand-Ruel, Paris, June 4–16, 1894, no. 81, as *Portrait de M. R. G.*

Gustave Caillebotte: The Unknown Impressionist, Royal Academy of Arts, London, March 28–June 23, 1996, no. 26, as *Portrait of Richard Gallo*.

Gustave Caillebotte: The Painter's Eye, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, June 28–October 4, 2015; Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX, November 8, 2015–February 14, 2016, no. 25, as *Portrait of Richard Gallo*.

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Gaston d'Alq., "Art et bibelots: L'Exposition des Peintres indépendants," *La Liberté* (March 2, 1882): 3.

- Possibly Fichtre, "L'Actualité: L'Exposition des peintres indépendants," *Le Réveil* (March 2, 1882): 1.
- Possibly La Fare, "Exposition des Impressionnistes," *Le Gaulois* 15, no. 901 (March 2, 1882): 2.
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- Possibly A. Hustin, "L'Exposition des Peintres Indépendants," *L'Estafette* (March 3, 1882): 3.
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- Marie Berhaut, *Gustave Caillebotte, 1848–1894: Catalogue des peintures et pastels* (Paris: Wildenstein, 1951), no. 127, unpaginated, as *Portrait de M. G. . . .*
- Marie Berhaut, *Caillebotte, Sa Vie et Son Œuvre: Catalogue Raisonné des Peintures et Pastels* (Paris: Fondation Wildenstein, 1978), no. 167, pp. 110, 125, 138, 179, 249, (repro.), as *Portrait de Richard Gallo*.
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- Victor Volland, "Traveling Impressionist Exhibit," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (May 21, 1989): 2D.
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