

## AGO acquires rare masterpiece by French Impressionist painter Gustave Caillebotte

*Exquisite garden scene of Blue Irises to go on view August 24*

**TORONTO** — The **Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO)** announced today that it has acquired a rare masterpiece by the celebrated 19<sup>th</sup>-century French Impressionist painter **Gustave Caillebotte**. Painted shortly before Caillebotte's death, *Blue Irises, Garden at Petit Gennevilliers* (c. 1892) depicts in cool shades of blue-violet and green a scene from the artist's own garden. In remarkable condition, the painting is the first Caillebotte to be acquired by a major Canadian museum and is a significant addition to the AGO's Collection of European Art. Purchased with funds by exchange from the R. Fraser Elliott Estate, the Bequest of F.W.G. Fitzgerald, and from the Department of Canadian Heritage, the painting will go on view at the AGO on **Aug. 24, 2019**.

"Although he was one of the undisputable leaders of the Impressionist movement, Gustave Caillebotte is underrepresented in museums worldwide," says **Julian Cox**, Deputy Director and Chief Curator of the AGO. "The acquisition of this remarkable painting, made possible with assistance from the Department of Canadian Heritage, is a significant coup for the AGO and our audiences. It will allow us to tell an even richer story about Impressionism, and show visitors how experimental landscapes like this one set the stage for abstraction."

Independently wealthy, Caillebotte (1848-1893) was both an artist and patron, simultaneously funding exhibitions and exhibiting alongside Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Edgar Degas. He had no need to sell his paintings during his short lifetime, a fact that accounts for their relative scarcity. Best known for his highly realistic paintings of urban Paris, including *Le Pont de l'Europe* (1876)—shown at the AGO last winter as part of the exhibition *Impressionism in the Age of Industry*—he moved permanently in 1888 to the Paris suburb of Petit Gennevilliers, devoting himself to the cultivation and painting of his gardens.

A rich portrait of flowers, seen from the perspective of someone seated in the garden, *Blue Irises, Garden at Petit Gennevilliers* features blue irises and a stem of foxglove set against a green patterned background. Using a mixture of brushstrokes—thickly worked impasto for the irises, short dashes for the foxgloves, and long smooth sweeps for greenery—the work reflects how for Caillebotte, the garden was more than just a hobby, but a laboratory, a painting studio, and a work of art in its own right.

The AGO's Collection of European Art is one of the strongest of its kind in Canada, with over 2000 objects. When it goes on display, *Blue Irises, Garden at Petit Gennevilliers* will hang alongside Impressionist artworks by Monet, Degas, Renoir, and Pissarro from the AGO's Collection, as well as two other Caillebotte works on loan from a private collection.

"The intensity with which Caillebotte cultivated and painted his garden is frequently compared to that of Claude Monet at Giverny, and their passion for the subject is captured in the letters that they wrote each other," says **Caroline Shields**, Associate Curator and Head of European Art at the AGO. "Caillebotte's garden paintings mark a crucial moment of collaboration and experimentation, where we see him engaging with avant-garde trends. He died just two years later, and so we can only imagine where his artistic practice may have gone from here."

**ABOUT GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE (1848–1894)**

Born into a wealthy Parisian family, following a law degree and service in the Franco-Prussian War, Caillebotte was attracted by the innovative spirit of the artists who were to become known as the impressionists. At the invitation of Auguste Renoir, he formally joined the group in 1876. A regular participant in the group's exhibitions (1877, 1879, 1880, and 1882), he organized and funded the 1877 presentation. Having inherited a large fortune from his parents, Caillebotte had no need to sell his own paintings and could focus on collecting the work of his artist-friends instead. In 1888, Caillebotte moved permanently to Petit-Gennevilliers, a suburb of Paris. Caillebotte died young and in his will left a collection of 69 impressionist masterpieces to the French government, which in turn formed the core of the Musée d'Orsay's collection of Impressionism

**ABOUT THE AGO**

Located in Toronto, Canada's largest city of 5.9 million, the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) is one of the largest art museums in North America. The AGO Collection of close to 95,000 works ranges from cutting-edge contemporary art to significant works by Indigenous and Canadian artists and European masterpieces. The AGO presents wide-ranging exhibitions and programs, taking special care to showcase diverse and underrepresented artists. Its 585,000 square foot building was most recently expanded in 2008 by Frank Gehry, and attracts approximately one million visits per year. A new pricing model, launching May 25, 2019, offers all visitors 25 and under free, unlimited admission; a \$35 Annual Pass includes entry for an entire year. Visit [AGO.ca](http://AGO.ca) to learn more.

The AGO is funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Additional operating support is received from the City of Toronto, the Canada Council for the Arts and generous contributions from AGO Members, donors and private-sector partners.

-30-

For hi-res images and other press inquiries, please contact:

**Sascha Freudenheim, PAVE Communications & Consulting**  
917-544-6057 | [sascha@paveconsult.com](mailto:sascha@paveconsult.com)

**Caitlin Mori (Coull); Director, Communications**  
416-979-6660, ext. 364 | [Caitlin.Mori@ago.ca](mailto:Caitlin.Mori@ago.ca)

**Andrea-Jo Wilson; Manager, Public Relations**  
416-979-6660, ext. 403, [Andrea-Jo.Wilson@ago.ca](mailto:Andrea-Jo.Wilson@ago.ca)