

GUSTAVE CAILLEBOTTE, *LE PONT DE L'EUROPE*

Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894) was born in Paris and belonged to the group of painters known as the Impressionists. He was a painter of modern city life. He depicted a realistic Paris, exposing the social tensions hidden in the industrial city and in the modern society. This realistic tension clearly emerges from his work *Le Pont de l'Europe*.

Six boulevards converged at the famous Bridge of Europe, a wonder of technology, near the Gare Saint-Lazare, one of Paris's major railway stations. In this painting Caillebotte depicts an image taken from everyday life, in which two social classes are juxtaposed. On the right there is an artisan/labourer leaning on the rail, while on the left, a man and a woman of higher social status walk toward us. The gentleman, though symbolically and physically separated from the labourer, looks towards him. At the same time, the bridge rail creates a line of perspective from the labourer back to the couple. This visual link may have a symbolical meaning and reflect the artist's personal struggle to bridge two social worlds.

The couple in the foreground walk at the fast pace typical of city inhabitants. The massive steel girders of the bridge, which dominate the painting, recall the very essence of modern, industrial Paris.

Remarkable is the use of perspective. The lines created by the railroad bridge, row of buildings, curb and dog, which repeat the 'X' shape of the bridge girder, draw us into the scene. The lighting is cool and stark.



Gustave Caillebotte, Le Pont de l'Europe; 1876; oil on canvas; Petit Palais Musée d'Art Moderne, Geneva, Switzerland.

PAINTING ANALYSIS

ACTIVITIES



● Answer the following questions.

- ① This is a painting of Paris. What does the artist include in the painting to show you that this is a city and not a country scene?
- ② Can you see any natural elements in the painting?
- ③ What geometric shapes can you see?
- ④ Notice the steam from the train and the clouds. What kind of symbolical meaning do you think they have?
- ⑤ Describe what each person is wearing. What can you understand from people's clothing?