

Gustave Caillebotte vs. Vincent Van Gogh

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Left: Paris Street; Rainy Day, Gustave Caillebotte, 1877 (Art Institute of Chicago Building). Right: The Cafe Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles at Night, Vincent Van Gogh, 1888 (Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo)

Streets of Paris are the subject of many paintings, photographs and art work since the city was built centuries ago. Beginning in 1851, the government of Napoleon III transformed the old streets of Paris into a new system of grand boulevards. One of the many artists, who painted the Paris, was the French Gustave Caillebotte. Caillebotte was born in 1848 to an upper-class Parisian family whose father was the inheritor of the family's textile industry. Caillebotte earned a law degree in 1868

and a license to practice law in 1870. Shortly afterwards, he was drafted to fight in the Franco-Prussian war. After the war Caillebotte began visiting the studio of painter Léon Bonnat, where he began to seriously study painting. And this would be the birth of 'Paris Street; rainy day', one of the most unforgettable works of art in French history.

Not long after Caillebotte, Vincent Van Gogh was born in 1853. Van Gogh spent

his early adult life working for an art dealing firm. After a brief spell as a teacher he became a missionary worker in a very poor mining region. He did not embark upon a career as an artist until 1880. Most of his best known works were produced in the final two years of his life during which time he cut off part of his left ear following a breakdown in his friendship with Paul Gauguin. After this he suffered recurrent bouts of mental illness, which led to his suicide. 'The Café Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles at Night' is the one painting that was created only eleven years after the birth of Paris Street by Gustave Caillebotte.

Streets of Paris in both painting look so attractive, glamorous and civilized as both artists have successfully pictured the luxury of the city and the cosiness of the streets by somehow providing evidence for the modernity of the city. Van Gogh and Caillebotte have both pointed at the sky showing the weather change and the starry night in the city. The crowded street in the Caillebotte painting so as the cosy cafe in the van Gogh's provides information about the population of the city and the busy neighbourhoods, which were some populated by wealthy Parisians and workers of various sorts. It seems as the both artists clearly intended these elements to underscore the power of painting to

capture the momentary quality of everyday life. The stone carpeted street imitates Parisian style warmth and comfort.

The art of using Perspective is clearly obvious in both paintings but perhaps more unique in van Gogh's work. Caillebotte uses bold perspective to create a monumental portrait of a Paris intersection on a rainy day. He selected a complex intersection near the Saint-Lazare train station for his subject, distorting the size of the buildings and the distance between them, to create a wide-angle view that reflects the sweeping modernity of this capital city. The highly crafted surface, monumental sizes, geometric order and elaborate perspective of Paris Street all make the Rainy Day more academic than Impressionist in character.

Meanwhile, Van Gogh is using a magnifying glass, focusing on a smaller piece of the big pictures and using a less geometric order by freely moving the brush over the canvas to create a less picture like painting where there is more texture and colour involved. The style of the painting is unique for Van Gogh with the warmth of colours and the depth of perspective. Van Gogh uses beautiful blues, violets and greens to show more life and beauty as it was one of his main purposes in painting; Caillebotte as a

realist artist is showing darker colours and more of the serious side of life in Paris. In Caillebotte's work, people and their faces are pictured perfectly but in Van Gough's they are more of the coloured shadows with less perfection in showing off the details. Nonetheless both artworks create a memorable image of Paris, the one that stays with you until the day you visit this beautiful city.