Calf's Head and Ox Tongue

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Calf’s Head and Ox Tongue

c. 1882

Gustave Caillebotte
(French; 1848–1894)
Oil on canvas; 73 x 54 cm (28 3/8 x 21 1/4 in.)

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It is surprising and even shocking that the same artist who painted the elegant and monumental Paris Street; Rainy Day (1877; The Art Institute of Chicago) could have conceived, five years later, this image of raw beef hanging from hooks in a butcher’s shop. Gustave Caillebotte made his name with canvases that focused on modern life in the city and suburbs; around 1881, when he quit exhibiting with the Impressionists altogether, he began to paint still lifes. These works included traditional representations of lobsters, oysters, and other delicacies elegantly dressed on the sideboards and tables of bourgeois homes. The artist also, however, undertook a series of extraordinarily direct and confrontational paintings in which he depicted fresh meat on display, reinventing the genre in radical and unprecedented ways. Of these, Calf’s Head and Ox Tongue is arguably the most compelling. In this image, Caillebotte seems to have indulged not only in the process of painting, but also in a wry commentary on the ways in which his contemporaries approached the still life.

Claude Monet, for example, would never have undertaken a subject as brutal and unforgiving as an ox tongue. For Monet and his fellow Impressionist Pierre Auguste Renoir, the still life was appealing because of its accessibility: its mission was to please and to sell. Not so with the wealthy Caillebotte, who, not needing to profit from his artwork, could afford to turn the tables on a genre with a long art-historical pedigree. On the one hand, he drew on the still-life tradition of seventeenth-century Dutch painters such as Rembrandt van Rijn, which was revivified by nineteenth-century artists including François Bonvin, who painted convincingly bloody slabs of beef hanging in modest interiors. On the other, he subverted it: rather than using the dark colors favored by Dutch masters and contemporary realists such as Bonvin, Caillebotte adopted a lively, insouciant palette, setting the fiery, red-and-orange tongue and soft, bluish-mauve head against a pale, blue-gray background. Although the hooks at top clearly underscore the fact that this is lifeless flesh set out for purchase, Caillebotte’s highly decorative choice of colors and juxtaposition of objects goes beyond “dead nature,” inviting comparison with twentieth-century artists such as Chaim Soutine and Lucian Freud.

GLORIA GROOM
Yamantaka, pp. 34–35.
1. This figure, initially published as Yama, the Hindu god of death, was reidentified as Yamantaka by Associate Professor Robert Linrothe, Skidmore College. See New York, Sotheby's, Indian and Southeast Asian Art, sale cat. (New York, Sept. 16, 1999: lot 418); and Robert Linrothe to Stephen Little, Nov. 1, 1999, files of the Department of Asian Art, The Art Institute of Chicago.

2. For more on the Baburnama, see Linda York Leach, Maghul and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library (London, 1995); Pratapaditya Pal, ed., Master Artists of the Imperial Moghal Court (Mumbai, 1997); Ellen S. Smart, “Paintings from the ‘Baburnama’: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Moghal Historical Manuscript Illustrations,” Ph.D. diss, University of London, 1977; and S. I. Tiulaiw, Miniatiury rukopy “Babur-Name” [Miniatures of Babur Namah] (Moscow, 1960).
3. The first edition of the Baburnama had 380 folios that included 193 paintings. Three text folios and 188 paintings are extant, now dispersed. The Art Institute’s folio, a historical narrative, is from this first edition, which was dispersed in London in 1915; see Ellen S. Smart in New York, Sotheby’s, Indian and Southeast Asian Art, sale cat. (Sept. 21, 1995: lot 111).
4. The artists did not sign this painting; they are identified by a later inscription (in Arabic) at the bottom of the sheet, which names two members of Akbar’s atelier. Khanta worked on most of the illustrated manuscripts commissioned by Akbar; while Mansur, a junior artist, achieved fame in the court of Akbar’s son Jahangir (r. 1604–1627); see Smart (note 3).
5. Akbar first met Europeans in 1572 and soon after commissioned art that reflected Western style.

Saint Anthony Abbot, pp. 52–53.
1. The majority of these panels are now dispersed among various museums and private collections. For more on these, see John Pope-Hennessy, Fra Angelico (Ithaca, N.Y., 1974), figs. 22, 27a–d.
2. The Ecstasy of Saint Francis, pp. 16–17.
1. For Caravaggio’s paintings in San Luigi dei Francesi, see Howard Hibbard, Cazanaggio (New York, 1983), figs. 52, 96.

Saint Peter Penitent, pp. 58–60.
1. For more on these works, see Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez and Nicola Spinosa, Josepe de Ribera, 1591–1652, exh. cat. (New York, 1992), where they appear as cat. nos. 17 and 28, respectively.

Two Cows and a Young Bull beside a Fence in a Meadow, pp. 60–61.
1. For an illustration and discussion of this work, see Amy Walsh, Edwin Buijzen, and Ben Broon, Paulus Potter: Paintings, Drawings, and Etchings, exh. cat. (Zwolle, the Netherlands, 1994), pp. 74–75.

The Marsh, pp. 64–65.
1. For more on these paintings, see Alexandra R. Murphy, ed., Return to Nature: J. F. Millet, the Barbizon Artists, and the Renewal of the Rural Tradition, exh. cat. (Yamanashi, Japan, 1988), pp. 283–89.

Calf’s Head and Ox Tongue, pp. 66–67.
1. For more on Paris Street: Rainy Day and Caillebotte in general, see Anne Distel et al., Gustave Caillebotte: Urban Impressionist, exh. cat. (Chicago/New York, 1991), esp. cat. no. 35.
Notes

2. For Callibotte’s still lifes, see Distel et al. (note 1), pp. 230–33.

Young Woman in a Garden, pp. 68–69.


Girl Looking out the Window, pp. 70–71.


2. For more on these motifs in German Romantic painting, see Joseph Leo Koerner, Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape (New Haven, 1992).

Lovers Surprised by Death, pp. 72–73.

1. See David Landau and Peter Parshall, The Renaissance Print, 1470–1550 (New Haven, 1994), p. 198. The authors characterized this woodcut as “the earliest we know to have been printed in three blocks—two tone blocks accompanying a highly abbreviated line block.”

2. Lovers Surprised by Death was probably intended to replicate the effect of the chiaroscuro drawings of this period, which were made in pen-and-ink and wash on papers prepared with colored grounds. The second color variant of the first state (state ib), of which the Art Institute’s impression is an example, is printed in three subtle shades of brown, giving something of the nuanced effect of a drawing in brown wash.


An Allegory: The Phoenix, or The Statue Overthrown, pp. 74–75.


3. For more on these motifs in German Romantic painting, see Joseph Leo Koerner, Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape (New Haven, 1992).

Jean Joseph and Anne Jeanne Cassanea de Mondonville, pp. 76–77.


The Valley of the Eisek near Brixen in the Tyrol, pp. 78–79.

1. Alexander Cozens’s best-known publication is his New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape (1786). For more on both father and son, see Kim Sloan, Alexander and John Robert Cozens: The Poetry of Landscape, exh. cat. (New Haven, 1986), chaps. 1–3.


Corte del Paradiso, pp. 80–81.

1. The style of the frame is typical of Whistler’s designs of the 1890s, which suggests that the drawing might have been refamed a decade or more after it was created. See Margaret F. MacDonald, James McNeill Whistler: Drawings, Pastels and Watercolors: A Catalogue Raisonné (New Haven, 1991), cat. no. 784.


The Carrot Puller, pp. 82–83.


3. For examples of these studies, see van der Wolk et al. (note 1), cat. nos. 97–98, and van Uitert et al. (note 2), cat. nos. 5–6.


5. Ibid.

Design for a Fan, pp. 84–85.

1. For more on these and Gauguin’s other fan designs, see Jean Pierre Zingg, The Fans of Paul Gauguin, trans. by Simon Strachan (Papeete, Tahiti, 2001).

2. For an illustration of Where Do We Come From?, see George T. M. Shackelford et al., Gauguin Tahiti, exh. cat. (Boston, 2004), cat. no. 144. For Riders on the Beach, see Richard Brettell et al., The Art of Paul Gauguin, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C., 1988), cat. no. 278.


2. For more on this series of works, see ibid.

3. For photographs and paintings of Dora Maar, see ibid., pp. 176, 179–80, 194.


Black and White, pp. 88–89.


2. For illustrations of the surviving 1951 paintings and examples of the cannibalized collage paintings, see ibid., pp. 212–25 and 290–96, respectively.

3. Pollock made collages as early as 1943; see Francis Valentine O’Connor and Eugene Victor Thaw, eds., Jackson Pollock: A Catalogue Raisonné of Paintings, Drawings, and Other Works (New Haven, 1978), vol. 4, p. 97. He subsequently produced variants of the collage technique, often crossing over into paintinglike objects, as did Krasner. Pollock’s collage Untitled (c. 1951; Washington, D.C., Phillips Collection) most closely resembles Black and White because in that work Pollock incorporated cannibalized scraps of drawn sheets, creating an overtly pictorial composition; for a reproduction of Untitled, see ibid., p. 116.

4. Pollock created many works indebted to Picasso; see, for example, O’Connor and Thaw (note 3), vol. 3, cat. nos. 635–66, 716, in which Pollock took inspiration from Picasso’s Guernica (1937; Madrid, Museo del Prado).

5. For the latter interpretation, see Landau (note 1), p. 120.

Alka Seltzer, pp. 90–91.


2. For an overview of Lichtenstein’s drawings from this period, see Diane Waldman, Roy Lichtenstein: Drawings and Prints (New York, 1970), and Bernice Rose, The Drawings of Roy Lichtenstein, exh. cat. (New York, 1987).


4. Benday dots comprise a textured screen that is used in commercial printing as a substitute for areas of continuous tone or color.


6. For an overview of the artist’s paintings, see Diane Waldman, Roy Lichtenstein, exh. cat. (New York, 1993).

Partly on This Side, Partly on the Other Side (Teils Diesseits teils Jenseits), pp. 92–93.

1. See Jutta Nestegard, ”Signature Polke—Appariziones in the North,” in Sigmar Polke: Alchemist (Humlebaek, Denmark, 2001), pp. 9–11.