



Newsletter
Volume

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Edition

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December 2009

NEWSLETTER JOE ENGLISH, ARTIST

Dear art friend,

On request of so many and with the holidays coming up, we are offering you the possibility to order art cards illustrating eight of Joe English's paintings.

Set I:

- Self-portrait
- Tribute to Peter Benoit
- Chrysanthèmes
- Bethlehem's stall (study)

Set II:

- L'Art et La Paix (Art and Peace)
- Marguerite
- Still life with delft vase
- The mystical city - Veurne, Handboogstreet

The paintings on the cards were especially selected so they can be used throughout the whole year.

We give special discounts:

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We are really looking forward to sending you our exclusive greeting cards and we'd like to thank you in advance for your order,

Piet De Baere,

Co English,

Chairman

Secretary

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Attachment: An overview of eight art cards

Colophon

Responsible editor:

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Rodestraat 53, 8000 Brugge

www.joe-english-kunstschilder.be

The evolution of Joe English's work in eight art cards

Piet De Baere

The sets of art cards we are offering you give you a brief overview of the evolution in Joe's 20-year career as an artist. For every card we'd like to give you a short clarification of the context and meaning of each painting. As a way of illustration I'd like to advise you to take your exhibition catalogue "Joe's art" with you in order to look up the number of each work of art (cat. = catalogue + number of the painting).

Where possible we have completed the texts from the catalogue with new insights. In the attachment you find a photographic overview of the eight art cards. In that way you can enjoy both the text and the object of art at the same time. We wish you plenty of reading and viewing delight.

1. *Self-portrait*, (without date, oil paint on canvas, clung on cardboard, 20x17)

Joe English was born in Bruges (1882) and died behind the Yser Frontline in Vinkem-Beauvoorde (1918).

There are four self-portraits on canvas of Joe of which we know off. They are neither signed nor dated. This small-sized portrait is clung on cardboard. On the backside there are two printed drawings of house fronts. In which context did he use this base? Was it because of a shortage of proper materials? Further study into the life and work of Joe will hopefully clarify in which period he painted this work of art.

What was Joe's image of himself?

Remarkable is his melancholic look. With his left hand he is closing the collar of his jacket. Could it be because he was cold? Or maybe he was ill?

This intimate portrait was used as the icon of the exhibition "Joe's Art" in 2008 in Diksmuide. It was printed on the backside of the catalogue and the leaflet.

2. *Tribute to Peter Benoit*, (1911/1912, cat. 43, oil paint on canvas, 70x99,7)

This painting received its title when it was selected for the exhibition "Continue Quietly" ("Doe stil voort"). It has a symbolical contents that reminds us of F. Knopff. It is one of Joe's works in which he combines the art of painting and music.

In that period, Elisa Goedemé and Joe were just married and lived at the Verwersdike (Verwersdijk) in Bruges. "*We were invited to join them to the concert at the neighbour's, in the house of Doctor Raphaël Rubbrecht in the Molenmeers.*"

Among the guests is Sister Leonie, who is the sister of Peter Benoit. Elisa knew Peter Benoit as the principal of the Music Academy

in Antwerp from the time she used to take piano and singing classes. On the wall above the piano, there's Benoit's death mask (+1901) with a laurel wreath. We may presume that she was performing one of Benoit's songs together with Bertha Van Oye (spouse of Dr Rubbrecht). Observe the Art Nouveau-style in the ladies' dress.

This masterpiece is a tribute from both Joe and Elisa, two Flemish artists, to Peter Benoit, the Prins of the Flemish music *who taught his people how to sing*.

3. *Chrysanthèmes*, (1913, cat. 50, oil paint on canvas, 58x73)

Godelieve English (1912-1934), Elisa and Joe's little girl, is standing in front of a chair with white azaleas (!) on it. This scene is probably from her first birthday. This conclusion we derived from the title "Le premier cadeau" ("The first gift") with which this painting was exhibited in Brussels. Observe the little back support and the clothes of the toddler in Art Nouveau-style.

In his early years Joe enjoyed his brothers and sisters posing for him. After his marriage in 1910 he preferred the same for his wife and daughter. It were four happy years of marriage in which ... "*his technique evolved to a romantic, more intimate interpretation of reality.*"

WWI abruptly ended their family happiness. Maybe that's why the title "Chrysanthèmes" might be correct after all.

(also have a look at cat.: P. Eyskens about [Joe English's painting technique and vision](#), p. 52-57).

4. *Bethlehem's stall*, (study, 1909-1910, cat. 38, 54-68)

Joseph and Mary, Jesus and Saint Janneke on Christmas Eve.

Joe sent the masterpiece "The Little Stall of Bethlehem" (cat. 40) when he participated for the third time to the Romeprice. It is kept in Bruges in the Groeninge-museum. It has big measures (121-152) and has a different style that refers to the clair-obscur of Rembrandt.

In this study the static positioning of the different characters in the barn is remarkable. They are pictured with very plane and contrasting colour surfaces. This composition reminds us of the style of Puvis De Chavanne.

Original in both versions is that Joe has included a dual symbolical meaning. On the one hand there's the miraculous event on Christmas Eve: the aura around mother Mary and the new-born baby lightens the whole barn (and the whole world). It refers to the divine dimension of this birth. On the other hand there's a special relationship between John and Jesus. The little John kneels in front of mother and child and confidently puts his hands on her knees.

This gesture refers to the familiar and prophetic relationship between Jesus of Nazareth and John the Baptist. He was the predecessor and baptised him later on in the river Jordan at the beginning of his calling as the Messiah.

(also have a look at Newsletter 1: P.C. De Baere, Joe English and Christmas).

5. *L'Art et La Paix (Art and Peace)*, (1904, cat. 8, oil paint on canvas, 114,5x145). In a wooden Art Nouveau-frame with patterns taken from the painting.

Where did this theme come from? It was ten years before the war broke out?

And why was this long French title "*L'Art et la Paix qui embellissent la Vie valent mieux que la Gloire brutale de la Guerre*"

(The art and peace that make life beautiful are more valuable than the brutal victories of the war) given to this work of art? The most probable reason is that the assignment for the genre "work of history" for the Romeprice was defined in French.

Rome only gave Joe the second price. He was only 22 years old back then and was still busy studying at the Academy of the Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp. His style is obviously influenced by a painting that was well-known to Joe: *The mystical marriage of the H. Katharina of Hans Memling (Bruges)*.

His symbolical presentation of the theme 'War and Peace' is clearly suggested by contrasts. In the front there's the blooming garden with the personifications of Life, the Arts (4) and Peace. In the back the Brutal Conqueror and the Sad Glory are staring at the landscape spread with corpses and ruins.

6. *Marguerite*, (1906-07, cat. 21, oil paint on canvas, 60x50)

In the times of rising photography, painted portrait art remained important. When Joe was following a training in Antwerp as a young painter, he needed cheap and willing models to practise. During his stay in Bruges, his many family members were grateful subjects. Especially his youngest brothers and sisters. The English family counted thirteen children. They posed at different ages between 1900 and 1910, both for individual portraits and bigger works with different characters like "*L'Art et la Paix*" (cat. 8) and "*The little stall of Bethlehem*" (cat. 40).

The portraits give us a good image of the evolution in style and the talent of the young artist. Marguerite was the tenth in line (°1893) and later, as Sister Gonzalve "Aunt Petite", she taught at the Sisters of Love in Eekloo (+1972). Here she is sitting on a chair and her red-blond hair is falling over her shoulders. On this canvas there are grey green tints sparkling in her clothes and on the wall. This enforces the melancholic mood of most portraits. The genre clung to Joe. Also from his later caricatures we know him as a sensitive observer.

7. *Still life with flowers in delft vase*, (1899, cat. 1, Oil paint on canvas, 60x74,4)

This is a key work in understanding Joe's art. He was only seventeen but he knew what he wanted. With this piece of work as a sample, he could continue his studies in Antwerp with recommendations of Edmond Van Hove,

teacher and principal at the Academy of Bruges.

What did Joe want to express in this first painting unknown to us? The pyramidal construction points to a triple message. The flowers (dahlias) in the delft vase (in impressionistic tints) on the in leather bound closed book, the gold yellow canvas and the laurel wreath on the table, clearly illustrate his skills. In the palette with the brushed oil paint colours and the bunch of brushes he clearly communicates the message: "I want to be a painter". What does he mean with the plaster head? During the exhibition it became clear to us: this is the head of one of the slaves of Michelangelo. Joe indicates that he will always be an apprentice of the great masters of plastic art.

8. *The mystical city – Veurne*, Handboogstreet, (1971-18, cat. 57, oil paint on canvas, 50x60)

The devastated city as a piece of art in WWI. If today, you walk back from the cemetery towards the centre along the Handboogstreet, you will be walking in Joe's painting. The flattened St.-Nicholas Church towers above the low houses. At the end the street narrows

in a vaulting part that with a little arch ends in the East Street. There's not a living soul to be found. The devastation caused by the shootings is recorded by the artist. The beauty of the ugly.

This painting belongs to Joe's elaborate documentary work that he realized in 1917-18 as a member of the "Section Documentaire Artistique de l'Armée Belge en Campagne" (the section of artistic documentaries of the Belgian army and the countryside). Thanks to Miss Belpaire, the "mother" of the Flemish soldiers behind the Yser Frontline, he was adapted in this "newly founded circle of artists behind the frontline", together with Bastien, Van Sassenbrouck and others. Like in the Handboogstreet there's a mysterious atmosphere in all these paintings. There aren't any characters in the city landscape. The threatened city itself is the hurt character. The used techniques picture an atmosphere of desolation. Thanks to Sam De Vriendt and his many friends in Veurne these "quiet witnesses" were saved and preserved. Because Joe died two months before the end of World War I.

(also have a look at cat.: P.C. De Baere, The Mystical City (Veurne), p. 80-90 and L. Vandeweyer, Soldier and artist, p. 78-86)

In Newsletter 5 the following topics are dealt with ...

- Part 3 of the bibliography on Joe English,
- Did you know?
- And information on the restoration of the painting "Lady with the big hat" (Elisa Goedemé).

We appreciate your reactions and suggestions.



Joe English's friends

Friends who subscribed after Newsletter III:

Gevaert Hans, Brugge
Huys Leon, Tielt
Neels Michiel, Brugge
Withofs Cornil, Deurne

Friends who passed away:

Dinneweth Jan, Brugge
We offer our sincere condolences to the family.

Would you also like to be a supporting "Friend"?

This is possible after a one time deposit of €50,00 into the account nr. 121-0405563-84 of the non-profit organization Joe English. You will receive our catalogue, Newsletters and an invitation for our next gatherings.

Our handy and presentable book on "Joe's art" printed by Lannoo, Tielt, 2008, 98 pages with colour illustrations can be ordered after a transfer of €20,00 (forwarding charges included) on the account nr. 121-0405563-84 of the non-profit organization Joe English, with the notice "cat.xx.ex." We will deliver your order by mail.



Order form eight art cards

A set of art cards contains 4 double cards. There are two sets. I'd like to order the following sets:

Set	Number	Price x €6,00 or x €5,00
Set I: Self-portrait, Tribute to Peter Benoit, Chrysanthèmes, Bethlehem's little stall (study)
Set II: L'Art et La Paix, Marguerite, Still life with delft vase, The Mystical City - Veurne, Handboogstreet
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