



Newsletter  
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NEWSLETTER JOE ENGLISH, ARTIST

**Dear art friend,**

In this 6th newsletter we'd like to hand the floor over to some active Friends. They wrote about their discoveries concerning life and work of Joe English. We're also having a look at some current art historical events: the exhibitions on Symbolism and Joe's contemporaries. We'd like to know your answer to the question: How is it possible that Joe, who was an artist, was forgotten in the history of the Flemish art of painting?

Furthermore we are proud to present the symbolical portrait of Elisa Goedemé. As you probably know it was not shown at the exhibition because it was seriously damaged. It has been restored under the professional guidance of one of our Friends, Peter Eyskens. You can have a look at this wonderful painting in Diksmuide, by appointment.

We deliver our newsletters for free by e-mail. If you'd prefer to receive them by regular mail, please let us know. If you aren't registered as a Friend we ask a small annual contribution. We'd like to wish you plenty of reading and viewing delight and we are looking forward to your answers on some of our questions.

Piet De Baere,  
Chairman

Co English,  
Secretary

**Colophon**

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[www.joe-english-kunstschilder.be](http://www.joe-english-kunstschilder.be)

**Joe English and Symbolism**

Piet De Baere

If you take the time to visit some of this year's exhibitions on Joe's contemporaries in Ostend, Ghent or Brussels you will notice that Joe's art can be situated in the context of Symbolism.

**1. Belgian Contemporaries**

The exhibition "Bij Ensor op bezoek" (*Visiting Ensor*) in Ostend reminds us of the dozens of cartoons and caricatures that Joe drew for the first editions of the magazine "Ons Volk Ontwaakt" ("*Our people wake up*") in 1911-1912. Joe must have known Ensor's work (1860-1949). In July 1912 the works of both artists were exhibited, together with some other artists on the fair in Brussels "Doe Stil voort" ("*Continue quietly*"). Maybe he has met the artist of Ostend during this occasion?

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Lady with the big hat  
2 flags

## Joe English and Symbolism (continuing from pag 1)

Also the exhibition in Ghent on "Gustave Van De Woestijne" (1881-1947) reminds us of Joe. The different themes in which his paintings are grouped can be applied to Joe's work: the portrait painter, the intimate family painter, religious art, the print collection, still lives, the landscape as a symbol. The following question comes to our minds: if Joe would have emigrated to England during WWI, like Van De Woestijne and other Flemish painters, would he also have integrated modernistic traits in his art?

The different painters that were presented on the exhibition "Symbolism in Belgium" were known to Joe (8). We're thinking about Fernand Khnopff (1858-1921) who lived in a house at the St. Annarei in Bruges from 1860 till 1866, where later on Joe and Eliza, the family Rubbrecht-Van Oye and the family of Huib Hoste lived. The symbolical painting "Hommage aan Peter Benoit" ("*Tribute to Peter Benoit*") (cat nr.43) is clearly influenced by Khnopff.

And what about the influence of Xavier Mellery (1845-1921) on Joe's art? He was the chairman of the jury of the Rome prize for painting. It was that jury who in 1907 awarded the First second prize to Joe for his work "Les Victorieux dans les temps primitifs" ("*The conquerors in primitive times*") (cat nr.23). Isn't there a connection between the pencil-charcoal drawing of the Bruges interiors of Joe and Mellery? But the naked characters in his works "Les Victorieux" ("*The conquerors*") and "De mensheid op zoek" ("*Humanity searching*") (cat nr. 25) refer to George Minne's work (1866 - 1941).

### 2. French and English symbolists.

When Joe in 1907 was also awarded with the Godecharle prize he received the finances to make study travels abroad through some sort of scholarship. He travelled to Italy (Rome), France (Paris), England (London), Ireland (Dublin), and the Netherlands (Den Haag and Amsterdam). He visited most well-known musea. Each time he had to report to Marchal from Bruges, who was "secrétaire perpetual" of the Commission of the Royal Academy of Belgium. Marchal followed up the young awarded artist. (4)

From the reports of this commission it seems that Joe was impressed by Puvis De Chavannes (1824-1898) at the Panthéon and the Sorbonne in Paris, who would also influence Gauguin. In the National Gallery in London the symbolists Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), Georg Frederick Watts (1817-1904) and Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) left a big impression on Joe.(6)

In his reports Marchal expresses his amazement for the enthusiasm of the 25-year-old Joe for these modern symbolical painters. "*Everything that he (Joe) had seen in Italy was erased from his memory after his journey to England, it was like a dream that disappears after waking up...*" Marchal reacted rather conservative and he found that young and talented painters had to be protected from this renewing art of painting. "*Symbolism and the literary art of painting that seem to tempt him (Joe), are full with dangers especially for a young painter with a pronounced Flemish and Dutch (!) nature.*" "*But, he concluded, "he will find his way."*"(4)

It's a pity Marchal's report doesn't say which painting Joe had seen. Luckily the catalogue Joe used during his visit of the National Gallery has been well-kept. (1) One of the paintings of Rossetti he saw was the famous portrait "Beata Beatrix" made after Dante's work. He got his brother Father Michel a reproduction of this painting. Michel put it in his study above his desk. But mostly the series of works of Watts (28 paintings) left a big impression on Joe. It was especially "the dweller in the innermost" that impressed him. Watts stated "*I paint ideas, not things or people but important thoughts that speak to one's heart and imagination and awake the best and most noble in people*" (1,p.305) In his youthful enthusiasm Joe witnessed to Marchal: "*the English Pre-Raphaelites are more understandable and poetic to me than the products of impressing and famous art that I have seen in Rome.*"(4)

### 3. Symbolism in Joe English's painting.

After his education at the art academies of Bruges and Antwerp and his study travels, Joe discovered that there is an art of painting that refers to a contents hidden behind the drawing or painting, that can represent an idea. Jozef Muls was the first art historian who already in 1920 recognized this symbolical dimension in Joe's painting: he called him "*the Flemish reincarnation of an English Pre-Raphaelite*"... "*What would Joe have realized in that direction if the war hadn't stopped him abruptly*" (5, p.249). P. C. De Baere proves in his research that "Calling English the Flemish version of an English Pre-Raphaelite, is slightly hurting the truth" (2). On the one hand he refers to the Flemish literary sources on which Joe's symbolism was based. On the other hand he refers to Joe's interest for the 15<sup>th</sup> century art of painting of the "Flemish Primitives" with which he was brought up in Bruges. (2, p.114 v.v.)

How is it possible that 90 years later, Joe English isn't mentioned in any name index of the catalogues of the exhibitions mentioned above? And how come that there isn't even one of his paintings or drawings that has been taken up in the exhibitions on Symbolism in Belgium? Although Joe himself wrote little about his aesthetics, it is a fascinating challenge to study his work from the context of Symbolism. Both his paintings and many drawings from before and during WWI can be better understood from the perspective of Symbolism.(2) It is partially because of this dimension in Joe's art that he was posthumously adopted by the Pilgrim Movement as their inspirer and predecessor between WWI and WWII. (9, p.39)

### 4. Bibliography (with Joe and Symbolism)

- 1) Catalogue British Art, the National Gallery. London, 1908 (16<sup>th</sup> ed.) 366 blz., illustraties.
- 2) De Baere, Paul, Joe English (1882-1918), Leven, werk en betekenis, lic. verh. RUG, 1972, D1, 169 blz.
- 3) Gibson, Michaël, Symbolisme. Taschen, 2006, 256 blz., illustraties.
- 4) Marchal (sé), Appréciations de Mr. Joe English, lauréat du concours Godecharle (peinture, 1907), 2e rapport (3blz.), 3<sup>e</sup> rapport (4blz.), 4<sup>e</sup> rapport (2blz.), zonder datum (tussen 1907 en 1910). ( 1<sup>e</sup> rapport niet in Joe English archief)
- 5) Muls, Jozef, Het Rijk der stilte. De Kunst en de oorlog. Amsterdam, Vlaamse Bibliotheek, 1920, 266 blz., illustraties.
- 6) Rutter, Frank, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter and man of letters. London, zonder datum.(+-1904),158 blz., illustraties. Joe kreeg dit boekje als geschenk toen hij aan het front was van een zekere "Leo", waarschijnlijk Dr. Leo Ghesquiere uit Veurne.
- 7) tentoonstellingscatalogus, Joe's Kunst. Lannoo, Tielt, 2008, 96 blz.
- 8) tentoonstellingscatalogus Het Symbolisme in België, Mercatorfonds, 2010, 350 blz., illustraties.
- 9) tentoonstellingscatalogus, Pelgrimkunst, Religie en Moderniteit, 1910-1940, Kadoc, Leuven, 2008, 64 blz.
- 10) Van Fernand Khnopff tot James Ensor. Symbolisme en Idealisme. De Standaard kunstbibliotheek n° 5, Lannoo Tielt, 2007, 120 blz.

### 5. Definitions

- A symbol has 3 aspects: (1<sup>e</sup>) it is a sign (2<sup>e</sup>) it refers to an idea or a content, (3<sup>e</sup>) that is interpreted by someone. The "Heldenhuldezerkje" (*The "Little Hero Tribute Tombstone"*) is a nice example of this.
- Symbolism in the art of painting is not a style with rules like for example "Academism". It is an approach of what the art of painting can or should be". The presentation of characters and objects invites us to search for the suggested meanings. A painting is a way to get through to "something" it refers to, to what's behind it (worldly or spiritual).
- A symbolical painting is like a "visual poem". Colour and drawing work in such a way that an emotional atmosphere is created.

## Lady with the big hat (K.I F 41)

Paul C. De Baere

May 2010

This painting pictures Elisa Goedemé (1876-1926), Joe English's wife (x 14.6.1910). The work is signed (r.u. in red brown, Joe English), but not dated. We situate it at the end of 1910, the beginning of 1911. The painting was in a very bad condition. Because of humidity the paint peeled off at the bottom in a zone of 34 to 5 cm x 85 cm. It was first restored injudiciously. Finally it was restored properly.

There's a study of this work (K. II H. F 48), known by a picture (in the Archive and Museum of Flemish Cultural Life in Antwerp). This drawing (probably in pencil) hardly differs from the final work.

Elisa is sitting in an interior. On the table with carpet behind her there's a vase in pottery from Torhout (still existing), and on the wall there's a painting: so there's a painting in the painting... This is an ancient artist procedure to refer to something out of the presentation and out of the reality of the presented. It's not just hanging there as an ornament. It's illustrating the dune landscape from the big Gudrun-painting (K.I B 6) of 1908.

During their long engagement the artist compared his and Elisa's situation to Albrecht Rodenbach's drama "Gudrun". He elaborately writes about it in a letter (6<sup>th</sup> of Aug. 1908). The play, in those days quite popular, played a great part in English's life. Professionally because he made the illustrations for the drama for the occasion of the Rodenbach festival in Roeselare (1909). In his personal life he recognized the situation the character Herwig is in: Because of duty the man stays unreachable for his beloved for a long time. Also English followed his calling, although he wasn't leading his men at sea, but as an artist of the urgent social duty of those days who had to provide for his family. English came from an environment where civil values were highly valued. It was unimaginable that his fiancé would have been forced into a bohemian existence, something some of his contemporaries regarded as normal. (Rik Wouters, some of the Latem painters, Paul van Ostaeyen, and others).

He blamed himself for having Elisa Goedemé waiting so long. The longing for Herwig's homecoming is the emotional motive that's echoed in the Gudrun-painting. The Lady in the big Hat is the image of the dream of both lovers coming true.

From an emotional point of view this work has a key meaning. It also illustrates the way in which English's symbolism can be understood. It's about the unambiguous relationship between sign and meaning, between work and lived reality, without mystifying and with little philosophical or metaphysical aspirations. In that way his ideas of different tendencies differs from late 19<sup>th</sup> century (French and German) and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Russian) Symbolism.



Also have a look at the attachment in colour.



## Treasures on the attic

### Discoveries by Friends of Joe English

1. Chris Vandewalle (Reninge) enthusiastically reported us that he found an original pencil drawing at his family's home. It illustrates the house that Joe had built in the Veldstraat 1 in St.-Michiels (Bruges). The drawing was made by Maurice Monballieu, a neighbour of the English family. It is iconographically interesting because it shows the house as it was designed by Huib Hoste before WWI.

2. Hugo Notteboom (Adegem) got us a copy of the article on Joe as it was published in "'t Getrouwe Maldeghem" of Sunday September 5<sup>th</sup> 1920. The author of the piece is Victor De Lille, the Publisher of 't Getrouwe. On that day there was a reunion at 10.30h in Steenkerke, Veurne. It was for the unveiling of the memorial designed by Karel Lateur that is now at the Paxpoort in Diksmuide. Later on this reunion was called the first Yzer Pilgrimage.

3. Ridder Godfried Lannoo (Tielt) reported to us that the book "Voor moeder en zuigeling" ("*For mother and infant*") was the work of four frontliners: Fr. Daels, C. Verschaeve, Joe English and Joris Lannoo. This publication is very dear to me. (+ copy of the front page of the 3rd edition, 11 – 20 thousand, Lannoo, Tielt).

4. Leon Huys (Tielt) proudly wrote to us : "last year on the 28th of September I went to the exhibitions in Diksmuide. There was the logo of the firm Lannoo, it was designed by Joe English in bas relief. It was brought about three times by my father-in-law Maurice Van der Meeren (°Tielt 20.05.1903 - +Tielt 01.10.1983) for the Lannoo family.

5. In January Marc Rubbrecht (Leuven) sent us a copy of the postcard written by Joe (in +- 1908/09) to "Mad. Van Oyen" (Marc's great-grandmother) Sint Annarei n° 11, Brugge. Joe wrote to her:

Firstly that the portrait she had posed for was accepted to an exhibition: "...When I come to visit you, you will surely conclude that I worked really well. I will send it back to Bruges" (cat.28)

Secondly he is informing her that again he's "working on something. What's your opinion about the draft on the back? It should become the image of the Good Spirit giving and bringing peace, and the image of the Bad Spirit bringing restlessness and destruction. I'd really like it to work out well." (on the back there's an original draft in preparation to a new painting), also have a look at the article: Joe and Symbolism.

6. Michel Vernimme (Bruges) discovered a brochure with the first "Call for the realization of the Yzer memorial of Flanders", Temsche, April 1926, 8 pages, with two of Joe's drawings, six photographs of the annual memorials up till then, and a draft for the first Yzer tower, a design by R. and Fr. Van Averbek.

Among the 28 members of the "Committee of the annual pilgrimage to the Graves at the Yzer 1926" Eliza Goedemé (Mrs wid. Joe English) and Mrs Dr. H.Gravez (Aalst) were the only women.

7. "We discovered two 'English' flags!"

-Herman Demoen (Diksmuide) enthusiastically reported to us. Together with Bert Manhaeve he's working on an inventory of the movable patrimony of the parish Diksmuide and surroundings. There's no coincidence: on March 17<sup>th</sup> "Saint Patrick's day", we could admire the two flags that are kept in the St.-Nicholas Church with great care.

Flag 1: "Bond van het H. Hert / Dixmude" (Union of the H. Heart / Diksmuide) silk, embroidery, to be restored, 175x165 cm, without date (between 1930 – 1940), r.u. signed H (Henriette) English Bruges. Probably designed by Joz. Speybroeck. In the middle there's the crucified Jesus with a crowned bleeding heart. In the background there's a bright sun and some clouds. Underneath the cross there's the silhouette of the St.-Nicholas Church and the gables from Diksmuide.



At the bottom in a broad line “Union of the Holy heart” and the coat of arms of the city of Diksmuide.

Flag 2: “Congregation of Our Dear Lady”  
silk, embroidery, in quite a good state, 175x165cm, without date (between 1930–1940), r.u. the signature has disappeared because of partial repair with new canvas. Probably designed by Joz. Speybroeck. In the middle there’s Our Dear Lady she is crowned and holding baby Jesus in her left arm. There’s a big mandorla surrounding them. The presentation shows some resemblance with Joe’s design for the flag of Temse (cat.6, page 77). On top there’s the coat of arms (left) of the city of Diksmuide and (right) of the St.-Nicholas Church.

Underneath in the skyline there’s the city with the chapel of Our Dear Lady in Esen, the cavalry cross on the Yzer Dyck, the cave that used to be on the cemetery and the little church of the O.L. Vrouwhoekje ((*Our Dear Lady’s corner*).

Both flags are mentioned in the inventory made by Luc Viérin on September 1st 1940. The inventory was originally made to point out the war damage after the destruction of the city on May 27th 1940.

Hopefully more flags will turn up, kept in the archives of churches, chapels, schools and movements...



## Did you know?

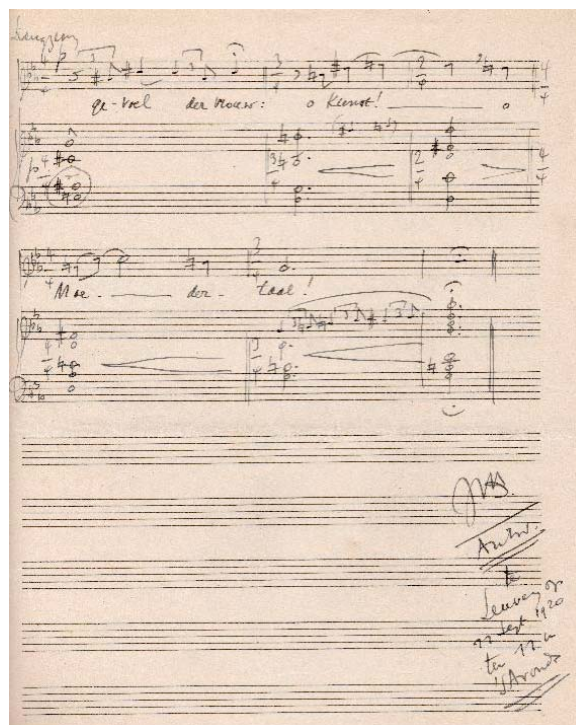
### Eliza Goedemé and Jozef (Jef) Van Hoof

One of the oldest visitors of the exhibition “Joe’s Art” in Diksmuide was Sir Frank Van Hoof (+ 90 years old) cousin of Jozef Van Hoof. When Frank saw the score of “Mijn Moederspraak” (“*My Mother Tongue*”) of P. Benoit at the wing piano in the gallery

Montanus 5, he spontaneously started to sing a song of Jef Van Hoof. On the background: the painting with Eliza Goedemé and Bertha Van Oyen at the piano (cat.nr.43).

Eliza, Joe’s wife, had been a close friend of Jef Van Hoof from her time at the conservatory of Antwerp. Being a singer, she sang on Sunday December 18<sup>th</sup> 1910 “at 5.30h in the evening” under his guidance at the “Song evening” organized by Davidsfonds (*The David Organization*) in the party hall “Victoria”, Bredabaan in Merksem. On the program there were 3 songs of J. Van Hoof: “Three children with three roses” (text G. Van Roosbroeck), “Lullaby” (poem G. Gezelle) and “the Christmas song” (poem A. Rodenbach). Furthermore “Mrs Eliza English-Goedemé, art singer”, also songs of L. Mortelmans and P. Gilson.

Also after WWI Jef Van Hoof and Eliza remained friends. The score “Tribute to Flemish art”, handwritten, based on a poem of E. Hiel and exhibited by P. Benoit is a witness of this friendship. We don’t know for which occasion Eliza needed this song. But it was sent as an urgent delivery. Jef had been writing until late in the evening in Leuven and sent it to her from Antwerp the next morning. It was double folded without envelope. Hopefully the delivery made it in time!



Tribute to Flemish art. Text by E. Hiel, music of P. Benoit. Handwritten score, signed: J.V.H. Antwerp, Leuven on Sept. 11 1920 at 11h in the evening, 8 pages. Folded sent (without envelope) from J. Van Hoof, Edegem, on Sept. 12 1920, as music-copy-print-urgent delivery to Mw. Ww. J. English, art singer, Veldstraat n° 1, St.-Michiels Bruges. Date on stamp unclear.

## Joe English's Friends

Friends who subscribed after newsletter 5:

Claeys Leo-Jozef, Zedelgem

De Taeye Marcel, Wondelgem

Ryckaert Marc, Bruges

Van De Veire-Dinnewet Jozef, Wondelgem

Vandenberghe Godfried, Diksmuide

Vandenberghe Lionel, Zoersel

Verbond VOS vzw., Antwerp

Friend who passed away:

John English

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## In Memory of John English

° July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1922 (Winnipeg, Canada) + February 24<sup>th</sup> 2010 (Pompano Beach, Florida, U.S.)

John was the last male carrying the English name. His father Willy, Joe's brother, emigrated to Canada in 1907 with the "Red Star Line" from Antwerp. He married Stella Burns and together they had 8 children. John was the 5<sup>th</sup> in line. He received an academic degree (B.A.) at Manitoba University. During his military service he was a navigator for the Canadian Air Force. In 1946 he started a music training in New York at the Julliard School of Music. He became a singer at the New York Opera Theatre. In November 1952 he married Eileen O'Connell (° Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup> 1921), they didn't have any children. For 2 years he followed a completion course in Milan but unfortunately he had to end his career as an opera singer in 1959 because of a deviation of the vocal cords. Afterwards John and Eileen stayed in Bruges with the English family for a while. Eileen states: "*all of this was good for John at a time in the music field that was discouraging for him...*"



Afterwards he went to New Jersey and started a career as a singing teacher. First as a tenor and later on as a baritone he preferred the opera and light opera musical repertory but also religious music. Luckily a cassette with his powerful performance has been well-kept. On the recording there are eight classics with piano or orchestra. ("O Carlo, ascolta" from Verdi's Don Carlos; "I Still see Elisa" from Paint your Wagon; "A perfect day", and others)

The English family is holding on to the best memories of this sympathetic cousin from the States who really liked being a performer. The "English" name, his Irish descent and his "uncle Joe" made him very proud. The name English is now still living on in some female members of the family and the non-profit organization. On Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> of August at 18h00 John English and other family members will be commemorated during a sung Mass in the St.-Nicholas Church in Diksmuide.

*Joe English*

## 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.

In Newsletter 004 the eight art cards, which you can order below, are discussed. On the website [www.joe-english-kunstschilder.be](http://www.joe-english-kunstschilder.be) there’s and English version of this newsletter available. That way the comments and the art cards can be of interest to an international public.



## 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	.....	.....
Forwarding charges (only if 1 set is ordered)		x €1,25
I pay: For an order of 1 to 4 sets: €6,00 per set For an order of 5 or more sets : €5,00 per set		

I deposit the total amount of ..... euro into the account nr 121-0405563-84 of the non-profit organization Joe English with a notice of the number of samples per set

Date:.....Name & signature:.....