

ENGLISH

Ostend, 8 February 1967

Dear Friend,

My wife and I had just returned from Ghent when we found your missive in our letterbox. That clear writing of yours was a giveaway. Normally, I don't care how I open letters, but I took the scissors this time and cut a fine edge. Those few words thrilled me. It was as if you'd sent me a little bit of luck in a package. I'd be delighted to show you my works. We await you.

Joseph Willaert

Gistel, 23 September 1970

Dear P...,

Your letter and the books have safely arrived. You've made me very happy with them. You can't believe how pleased I am to have met you. You've said so many wonderful things. I've become humbler. The internal stress of 'being great' has disappeared. I feel calm. I've searched endlessly for the cause of my illness. I'd long since lost my faith in God. And for that reason, and quite recently, I reread the Bible. I wish that I'd been alive when Jesus Christ walked upon the earth, then I too would have touched his robe and been cured. I feel as though you've been sent by God, to come and say that everything can be found 'in sich' [in itself]. I almost dare not write it, but I'm healing fast. When you say that my museum job does me good, it's true. I start at 9.30 in the morning, and I finish at 5.00. Every day is the same. Tuesday is my day off. But I don't look forward to it. I'm always slightly worried that I won't be able to fill the time. I'd be delighted if you'd keep me informed of everything you're doing. It was lovely to see you.

Joseph Willaert

Gistel, 22 December 1971

Dear René,

I've been invited to have a solo exhibition at the Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels. And I'd like my painting 'Window with Flag', which you own, to be included in my eksposition [sic]. At least, that's if you agree. Will I see you at the opening? How can one say it? Take care, René, with the women. You don't want to have to get married. We're all well, the five of us. Our Lies has just turned six and she's already starting to make overtures to a young boy from her class. We're somewhat worried because the little guy's parents are riff-raff. I've had my tonsils removed. I don't have to swallow when I drink. It's convenient, though.

With warmest wishes.

Joseph Willaert

Düsseldorf, 10 October 1972

To the Director of the 'G...' gallery, a non-profit organisation

Dear Sir,

Is that what it's all about now, chasing the artists just to cheat. Just go quietly to your employer's office each day. On Sundays, to your football match. Take care of your wife and baby. But for God's sake keep your filthy hands off our pure soul.

Yours

Joseph Willaert

Gistel, 3 February 1973

Dear Sir,

I didn't know that naive art is 'in'. That's the first I've heard of it. Do I have an opinion? I'm not sure. But one thing I do know, is what art is, and what art isn't. I don't think there's a lot of difference between my work and that of Vermeer and Van Gogh and Mondrian [sic]. I've been asked to write 50 lines. But I'm not a writer. After all, it's impossible to do everything, and painting and writing. But what I can still do is magic. Can I do a magic trick? I assure you, there's no need to worry. See the page number, here at the bottom. I'll make it disappear. One, two, three. It's not done yet. And now I'll make the number reappear. Behold. Did you see it? It takes a bit of practice, of course. But it took a long time to master, I'll have you know. And if you'd like to know more, then you'll have to pay, because it really can't go on like this. That I'm forever working and writing and always for nothing.

I'm done with it.

Joseph Willaert

Gistel, 17 February 1973

Dear Burglar,

I was delighted to hear about your successful break-in in the capital's Nieuwstraat. Jewels worth three million they said on the radio. What an achievement. Keep up the good work, Paul. There's still a lot of work to do. How strong you are. No one can match you. I'm full of admiration. You're an angel.

Joseph Willaert

Gistel, 12 May 1973

To the biggest thief,

You can't believe how thrilled I was, when I heard that your bank robbery was such a success.

Keep going, lad, because you can't ever steal too much. I have high expectations of you. Long live Marcel, the biggest thief in the land. My thoughts are forever with you.

Joseph Willaert

Gistel, 5 September 1973

Dear Marcel and Nicole,

I heard on the radio that the discord between Marcel Van Maele and his wife has reached its pinnacle. It bothers me and I hope it blows over soon. Of course, we got home alright, at least up to about 10 km from our house. We were very lucky, to have broken down right before a garage. My father didn't make it. He's already been buried. My father was an exceptional man. Carpenter by trade. From his 55th to his 70th year, he worked for his children for absolutely nothing. He was an inventor and a great comedian. It's still the height of summer at our place here in Gistel. Don't wait too long to come. We haven't forgotten the wonderful days that we spent with you.

Many greetings from the five of us.

Joseph Willaert

LABELS

Joseph Willaert
Window with Flag, 1968
oil on canvas, with applied object (Belgian flag)
200 x 150 cm
Private collection

Wall

Exhibition poster for Joseph Willaert, Regina De Gruytere and Kristien De Witte
Galerie Kaleidoskoop, Ghent, 1968
Thomas Defoer collection

Display

Joseph Willaert exhibition
Galerie Kaleidoskoop, Ghent, 1968. Unknown photographer
Willaert family archive

René Heyvaert
Joseph Willaert
Unknown date
Willaert family archive

From left to right: Kristien De Witte, Suzanne Caura, unknown, René Heyvaert
Opening of the Joseph Willaert, Regina De Gruytere and Kristien De Witte exhibitions
Galerie Kaleidoskoop, Ghent, 1968. Unknown photographer
Willaert family archive

From left to right: unknown, Joseph Willaert, René Heyvaert
Opening of the Joseph Willaert, Regina De Gruytere and Kristien De Witte exhibitions
Galerie Kaleidoskoop, Ghent, 1968. Unknown photographer
Willaert family archive

Exhibition invitation for Joseph Willaert, Regina De Gruytere and Kristien De Witte
Galerie Kaleidoskoop, Ghent, 1968
Thomas Defoer collection

Walter Derave, *Oostendse exposant revelatie in Gent* [Ostend exhibitor a revelation in Ghent]
In: *De Standaard*, 23 March 1968
Thomas Defoer collection

Letterlijk en Figuurlijk [Literally and Figuratively] catalogue
Zeeuws Museum, Middelburg, 1970
Art Library archive, Ghent

Joseph Willaert catalogue
Les Contemporains, Brussels, 1969. Unknown photographer
Willaert family archive

Exhibition invitation for Joseph Willaert, with a personal message from Anton Herbert
Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels, 1972
Private collection

Installation view of the Joseph Willaert exhibition
Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels, 1972. Photographer: Paul Bijtebier
Bozar archive, Brussels

Joseph Willaert exhibition catalogue
Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels, 1972
Private collection

Wall

Joseph Willaert
Schilderij K. Desmidt, 1971
[K. Desmidt painting]
Screen-print
Friends of S.M.A.K. collection, Ghent

Display

Joseph Willaert exhibition announcement
In: Periodical 1, Grafiek 50, Wakken, appendix Revolver 3
Thomas Defoer collection

Joseph Willaert exhibition
Periodical 1, Grafiek 50, Wakken
Thomas Defoer collection & Willaert family archive

Letter from the *Vlaanderen* journal to Joseph Willaert, 1973
Willaert family archive

De Naieve Kunst [Naive Art], March-April 1973
Vlaanderen: tijdschrift voor kunst en cultuur
[Flanders: journal for art and culture]

Wall

Poster for the Letters Project by Joseph Willaert
Elsa von Honolulu Loringhoven, Ghent, 1974
Screen-print, designed by Frans de Jonck
Thomas Defoer collection