

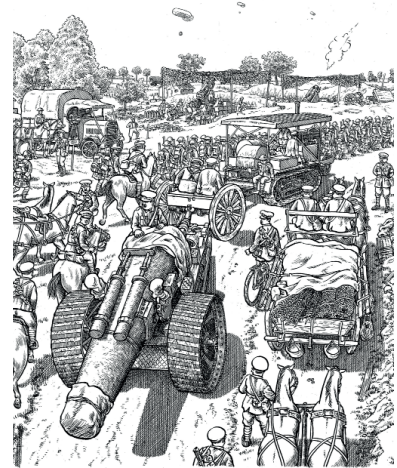
JOE SACCO

TEMPS DE GUERRES

September 19th — October 31st, 2026
Chaussée d'Ixelles 337 | 1050 Bruxelles

Opening in the presence of the artist
Saturday, September 19th from 6pm

Signing session by reservation
Saturday, 19th September from 3pm



For the first time, Joe Sacco's works devoted to the Great War and the war in Gaza will be presented side by side at Galerie Martel Brussels. Emmanuel Guibert, a keen reader of Sacco's work, offers us his perspective :

« I do not think that three emails exchanged with Joe Sacco and a five-minute conversation in St Petersburg fifteen years ago entitle me to speak knowledgeably about him. But I have read many of his books.

“Un sacco,” in Italian, is an expression meaning “a lot.” Joe's work is marked by abundance. If I knew him better, I could no doubt venture a few hypotheses about the sources of this river Sacco. His bibliography suggests a few to me.

War on Gaza brings us face to face with his elderly mother, whose memory remained partly trapped beneath the rubble of the bombing of Malta during the Second World War. I associate this with my own father's stories of himself as a small child, emptying his guts into his chamber pot during the shelling of the nearby Cognac airfield (Charente) in those same years. We European sixty-somethings are the sons of children who were bombed and miraculously survived. Every living person is both a survivor of slaughter—we exist only because our lineage made it through history's unending charnel houses—and a potential future victim. It is therefore far from irrelevant to ask questions about these matters: they concern us closely. Joe and I will have asked *un sacco* of questions and never obtained enough answers about the reasons for, circumstances of, and consequences of man's subjugation and murder of man.

Joe is also:

- *un sacco* of scrutiny of the sources available to him in order to educate himself on a subject.

- *un sacco* of adventurous journeys and remarkable encounters, as befits a field reporter.

- *un sacco* of doubts to carry around, *un sacco* of tenacity to summon in order to overcome them, *un sacco* of endurance to achieve the goals he sets himself. Let us say the word: *un sacco* of courage.

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What moves me most about him is the care. Joe must return from his reporting deeply shaken by everything he has seen, by all the conversations he has had. The studio is the place of care. He must both relive what has been lived—an added ordeal—and tend to all those people, all those houses, all those trees that have entrusted their wounds to him. And, in the process, tend to Joe as well. For this, he has a grammar that has grown more refined over time but has served the same language from the beginning. An astonishing lifelong fidelity to hand-drawn hatching, cross-hatching, stippling, to the patterns of shirts, dresses and scarves, to faces speaking to us straight into the camera.

The crowds in Joe's work are staggering. He is never done with crowds. Every individual has their own bearing, clothing, physiognomy. No one is dispatched in two strokes of the pen. Executioners, victims, soldiers, rioters, ordinary passers-by: all are characterised with the same degree of attention. His fresco on the Battle of the Somme is, in this respect, exemplary. It bears witness to an insane ambition from which no figurative artist is entirely free: to catalogue all of humanity, past and present, in his drawings.

Most practitioners of graphic reportage take photographs and serve them up again in their books virtually raw. Joe digests, interprets, recreates everything. He is never a prisoner of his documentation, preserving the freedom to say and show things as he sees fit.

I claim that we want to know the ins and outs of the horrors of war. Yet it seems that our contemporaries increasingly feel a kind of satiety bordering on indifference, and giving rise to the most abysmal ignorance. We are no longer in the realm of *sacco*, but of *troppo*. Too many horrors piled up, too much suffering still to come, too many images, true or false, too much cynicism and too many blatant lies. The absurdity of it all shakes reason itself, neutralises the desire to know, undermines faith in experience, learning and transmission. Not to mention that everything we write and debate on this subject, as on others, now circulates on immaterial media whose permanence is anything but assured.

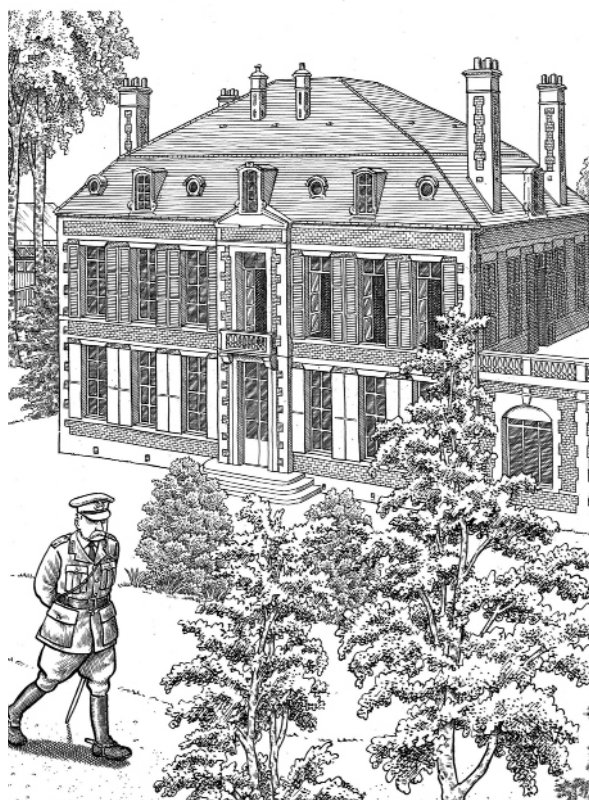
My neighbour on the metro, when faced with any piece of substantial information, much prefers crushing virtual multicoloured sweets or watching groomed dogs on his phone. And my neighbour, after all, may only be my own reflection in the window.

In such a context, Joe's good old pages, scratched out with a pen and bearing stories gathered with the same infinite patience, by a man who puts himself on the line and accepts the discomfort of an ever-itching conscience, deserve our admiration and gratitude. »

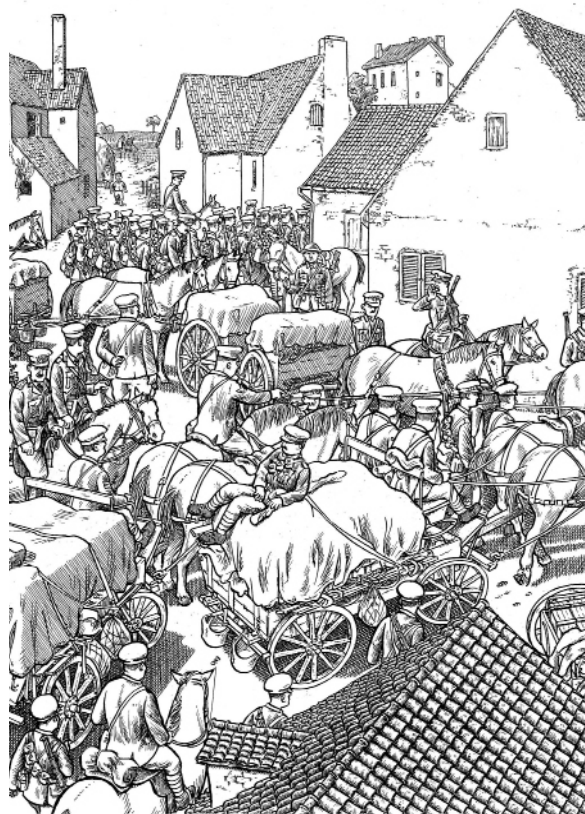
Emmanuel Guibert, *Member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts*



Joe Sacco, *La Grande Guerre*, 2014, ink on paper
 ©Joe Sacco / Editions Futuropolis, courtesy Galerie Martel

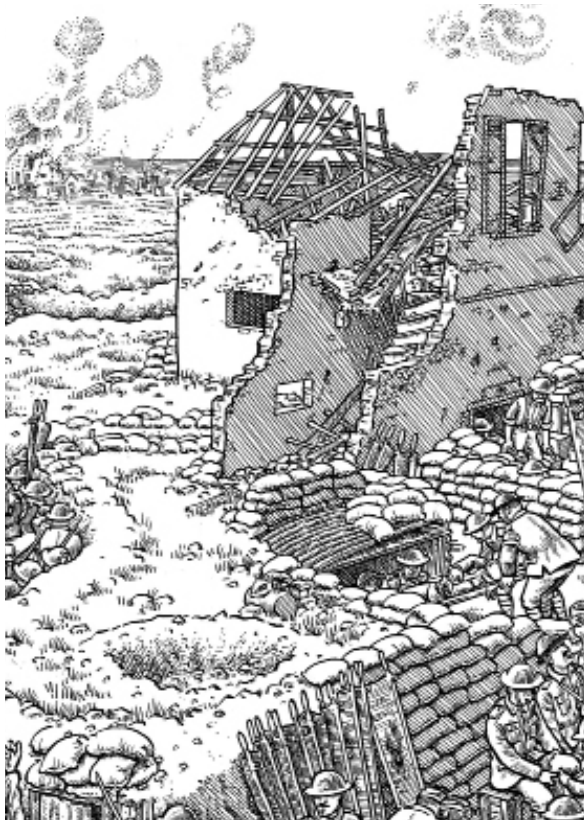


Details - Joe Sacco, *La Grande Guerre*, 2014, ink on paper
 ©Joe Sacco / Editions Futuropolis, courtesy Galerie Martel





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Joe Sacco, *Guerre à Gaza*, 2024, ink on paper
 ©Joe Sacco / Editions Futuropolis, courtesy Galerie Martel



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