



Eugeen Van Mieghem, p.10

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Developers are making waves in Napoleon's docks

Ripples on the waterfront

Antwerp has ambitious plans for transforming the northern docklands

Derek Blyth

A white Rolls Royce Silver Shadow is pulled up on the Bonapartedok quayside. The chauffeur waits patiently while a photographer takes shots of a newlywed couple standing on the waterfront, holding up champagne glasses. The harbour behind them is filled with luxury yachts,

many of them flying foreign flags. Owners are relaxing on the decks, drinking wine in the late autumn sunshine, almost as if they're on holiday in Cannes. Welcome to Antwerp's Riviera.

Gilbert van Schonebeke planned the northern docks in the 16th century. He called it the Nieuwstad, or new town, but it didn't come to much. It didn't really

develop until Napoleon created the present complex of stone quays and deep docks. His aim was to turn the port of Antwerp into "a pistol pointed at the heart of England". King William I of the Netherlands made further improvements, but the biggest building boom came after the Scheldt was opened to Belgian shipping in the 1860s.

The area became known as 't

Eilandje, or the little island, because it was surrounded by docks. It was a romantic district, where steamers left for the Congo, boats arrived filled with bananas or American cars, stevedores wore strange hoods to protect their heads, and foreign sailors spent their wages in harbour bars.

The docks went into decline after World War One, when the

port moved downstream, leaving behind vast empty warehouses and deserted quaysides. It remained a marginal area for decades, derelict and slightly sinister. But now it's one of the hottest districts in town.

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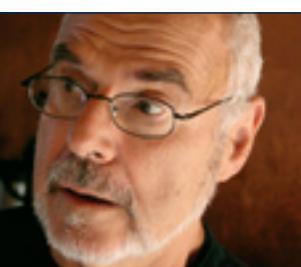
Arts

Stephan Vanfleteren takes poetic black-and-white photographs of landscapes and people. We look at his latest works on show in Antwerp.



Active

Four hundred years ago they burned witches in the village of Laarne. Now they encourage women to put on black hats and cook up weird potions.



Interview

Harry Kümel has been scaring the wits out of movie audiences for more than 50 years. We ask him about his art and life as the Halloween fest approaches.

Alderman resigns as road signs scandal grips Mechelen

"Bad for our image," says mayor

Derek Blyth

Mechelen's alderman for finance, Leo Stevens, resigned last Saturday following a police investigation into alleged corruption. The alderman was arrested last week in connection with the investigation into the East Flanders company Janssens, which supplies the city with its road signs.

Stevens is accused of accepting bribes from Janssens, including air travel tickets and restaurant meals, in return for awarding contracts. He is also accused of accepting €11,000 from Janssens and another

company to pay for printing election posters. The alderman insists that he has done nothing wrong. "I wasn't manipulated, and I wasn't promised anything," he said in a VRT radio interview.

Janssens is run by the charismatic businessman Glenn Janssens. He has contracts with many Flemish municipalities and is nicknamed "the emperor of the road signs." The mayor, Bart Somers, cancelled the city's contract with Janssens following the alderman's arrest.

Continued on page 5

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Vic Gentils at De Notelaer

Vic Gentils described himself as a painter, but his most successful works were eccentric wooden assemblages created from odd bits of driftwood, broken piano parts and charred table legs. In 1970 he moved with his family into an abandoned neoclassical pavilion overlooking the River Scheldt and set up a studio in an old Rhine barge.

His daughter, now a gallery owner, remembers her father at work in the barge surrounded by bits of old furniture bought at local junk markets. He lived here with his family for eight years and produced some of his most famous works in the floating studio.

The pavilion, known as De Notelaer, stands in a haunting location, surrounded by wooded bogs and silent stretches of the Oude Scheldt. The building was originally used by the d'Ursel family as a hunting lodge and has some fine parquet floors (so fragile that visitors must put on oversized slippers to cross them), faded neoclassical murals and a beautiful painted dome. A steep staircase leads up to a rooftop terrace with a sweeping view of the river Scheldt.

The spot is particularly impressive when a fog blows in from the North Sea and the place reverts

to a mediaeval silence. This might partly explain the brooding melancholy of Gentils' sculptural works. Some are currently on show in De Notelaer, while others are displayed nearby in the d'Ursel family's 18th-century summer castle in Hingene. The castle is only open on Thursdays, but it's worth taking a day off work to see inside this classical gem, which has rooms wallpapered with wistful Chinese scenes of birds sitting on branches. The best of Gentils' work is here, including a lifesize wood sculpture titled "Great Ray Charles" that fits neatly in the library, and a bizarre "Giant Chess Set" that fills another room of the stately home.

Gentils came from Ilfracombe in England, but he is generally regarded as a Belgian artist. He lies buried alongside Flemish artists and poets in Antwerp's Schoonselhof cemetery under an odd sculpture shaped like driftwood.

Exhibition until 11 November at Kasteel d'Ursel in Hingene (Thursdays only), and De Notelaer on the Scheldt (every afternoon except Friday).

online

www.kasteeldursel.be



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FACE OF FLANDERS



Rik Wouters' "Self Portrait with an Eye-Patch"

Rik Wouters

The dejected "Self Portrait with an Eye-Patch" was painted by Rik Wouters in 1915. The portrait shows the artist, aged 33, dressed in a plain hospital gown like one of the wounded of World War One. The young artist was in an Amsterdam hospital at the time, receiving treatment for eye cancer. One year later he would be dead.

Wouters was one of the great early 20th-century Belgian artists. Born in Mechelen in 1882, he studied sculpture at the academies in Mechelen and Brussels and later took up painting. The Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp has just brought out a new book titled *Rik Wouters: alle werken uit het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, which covers the 110 works by Wouters in the museum's collection. The museum also owns his death mask, used paint brushes and the last cigar he ever smoked.

Wouters' death seems all the more tragic when you look at the paintings he did in the 1910s while living in the Bezemhoek district of Bosvoorde village, on the southern edge of Brussels. One work, painted in the bright colours of Brabant Fauvism, makes the red-tiled rooftops of southern Brussels look almost like a village in Provence.

The Antwerp museum also owns several paintings of Wouters' wife Hélène Duerinckx, or Nel. He met her in 1904 when she was working as an artists' model. They married in 1907 and moved to Watermael. After a few months, they left Brussels and moved in with Wouters' parents in Mechelen. This was an unhappy period in their lives; Rik was forced to share space in his father's workshop, and Nel fell ill with tuberculosis. They eventually returned to Brussels and settled into a house in Bosvoorde.

The final years in Bosvoorde were their happiest. Wouters discovered the works of Cézanne and Van Gogh and began to paint in the vivid colours of Brabant Fauvism. Nel posed for him in numerous works, sometimes lying on a bed, other times doing a routine domestic chore. The light fills the rooms of their Bosvoorde home in these tender, affectionate works, creating a mood of perfect contentment. Looking at these joyous paintings, it is hard to imagine that the happiness would be so short-lived.

When war broke out, Wouters was sent to the front and taken prisoner near Liege. He was sent to a Dutch internment camp, where his eyesight began to deteriorate. A Dutch couple found out about the artist and put pressure on the authorities to release him. He moved with Nel into an apartment in Amsterdam, but his eye condition steadily worsened. He painted the portrait with the eye-patch following an operation that removed one eye and part of his cheek. The disease continued to spread, and he died in a clinic on the Prinsengracht canal in the summer of 1916, not long after smoking his final cigar.

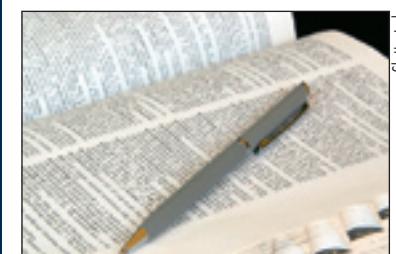
Derek Blyth

online

www.kmska.be

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



Spookrijder

Nowhere in Flanders are you far from the hum of a motorway. Of course, it is a compact region – you can drive from one end of the country to the other in under three hours. Belgian *autostraden* or *autosnelwegen* are much like motorways anywhere; however, they are special in two unusual ways. For one thing the *autosnelwegen* are lit up at night. Astronauts report that they can make out the Great Wall of China in daylight and Belgian *autostraden* at night. You soon get used to driving on well-lit motorways, so much so that it is a bit of a shock when occasionally you are plunged into darkness along a section where the lights have failed, and you have to try to remember how to use your full beam.

The other oddity about *autosnelwegen* is what you occasionally hear when your radio programme is interrupted by the travel news. *Er is een spookrijder gesigneerd op de E40 ter hoogte van Aalter richting Brussel*. This is bad news if you are motoring from Brussels towards the coast along the E40 motorway and are approaching the exit for Aalter. A *spookrijder*, or 'ghost rider', has been spotted coming your way. *Spookrijder* sounds rather apocalyptic and is in the sense that the driver is heading your way on your side of the motorway, and a fatal head-on collision is looming.

The wise advice that usually follows is *hou dan uiterst rechts!* – keep well to the right. I have never met a *spookrijder*, but I can imagine it must leave you slightly shaken. Hundreds are reported each year and probably many more are not, so I suppose there is a chance that one day I will have such a wheel-gripping experience.

In driving, as in most things, it is always the other guy who is at fault. Yet, if you ignore the drunk, the criminal and suicide cases who make up some of the *spookrijders*, there are a sufficient number of 'ordinary' drivers who drive on to a motorway via the exit to make you wonder where all the *spookrijders* come from.

You might expect some of them to be British or Irish visitors whose reflex is to drive on the left. Yet they do not even figure in the statistics. In fact, the term 'ghost rider' is not one I have ever come across in the English-language press.

Perhaps it has to do with the configuration of the junctions which might tempt the unwary on to the *autosnelweg*. And it is only a couple of years ago that no-entry signs were placed at the end of each *afrit* to warn off the would-be *spookrijder*.

If I must one day face a *spookrijder*, let it be in a situation like the one recently reported of a man *die te veel gedronken had* – who had drunk too much – who was stopped on the E40 heading towards Ostend on the wrong side of the motorway *op zijn fiets* – on his bike!

Alistair MacLean

online

www.vandale.be

FEATURE

Tourism Antwerp



Going places: Antwerp's Riviera

the cranes at work and put questions to a council staff member.

The official I spoke to was clearly excited by the new project. She showed me the architectural model and pointed out that the façade would be decorated with 3,185 life-size stainless steel hands. The hand is the symbol of Antwerp, based on an old legend of a Roman soldier who threw a giant's hand into the Scheldt. Hence, the name Antwerp, which comes from the Dutch words *hand werpen*, or hand throwing.

"The hands are for sale," she explained. "You can buy one for €1,000, and then you get your name on the building." She had bought one herself, at the very top of the building, so that she can see it from her apartment.

The city has also renovated a huge 1863 warehouse complex on the nearby Godefriduskaai as a contemporary home for the city archives. Named Sint Felix, the complex has vast storage rooms with cast-iron columns, hydraulic cranes and an impressive covered street. When completed, the building will contain the city's rich collection of maps, photographs and documents, along with a covered street market designed in "oriental souk style" by Jan Hoet junior (son of the famous Flemish museum curator).

The new developments make a walk through this area a must for anyone interested in architecture or urban archaeology. The district is a mixture of industrial buildings, harbour bars, empty quaysides, nautical stores, import-export companies, car parks and parquet-floored loft apartments. What more could you ask for in a city?

online

www.museumaaandestroom.be
www.felixarchief.be

New life on the waterfront

Continued from page 1

The city initially tried to renovate the district in the early 1990s, along with the Scheldt waterfront and the Zuid district, when Antwerp was preparing for its year as culture capital of Europe. The first two projects were a success, creating vibrant new neighbourhoods, but 't Eilandje remained off limits for another decade.

Now the area has taken off. Property developers have moved in, and the Bonapartedok has been turned into a stylish district with waterside apartments, a marina and chic restaurants. The biggest new devel-

opment is the Royal Warehouse complex overlooking the Willem dok marina, built by the Antwerp company Project2 and designed by German architect Hans Kolhoff. "Young people and the elderly are particularly attracted by the combination of complex city life and comfortable spaces," the architect explains.

The prices aren't for everyone. The cheapest apartment costs €230,000, while one luxurious space recently sold for €1.5 million, which is the same price as the most luxurious penthouse flat in London's former St Pancras Station.

The city government now has an ambitious catalogue of projects for the northern docklands. Some are still in the planning phase while others are already under construction. The biggest project is the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), or Museum on the River, a new city museum that will bring together the collections of three existing museums.

The museum, designed by the architects Willem Jan Neutelings and Michiel Riedijk, will be a 60-metre high building faced with rusty-looking stone. The style is intended to look like ten shipping containers piled on top of one

another. It will display a changing selection from the 400,000 items currently held by the city museums of shipping, ethnography and antiquities. The plan also includes a café, shop and rooftop restaurant.

All that is in the future. The MAS isn't due to open until 2010, and there's not much to see at the moment apart from the concrete lift shaft. But the city is keen to get locals interested in the project, so it has set up a webcam and opened a temporary information centre next to the construction site (Wednesdays and Saturdays from 10.00 to 16.30). Locals can watch

Caffè latte on the quayside

Six towers project will transform the northern skyline

Derek Blyth

"We're going to create a piazza on the water," says Alon Amar, the property developer behind the Project2 development on the Kattendijkdok. "It's going to be a unique experience involving six delicate towers with glass walls that rise from the ground."

Amar is talking about the Westkaai project, which is set to transform the northern edge of the Eilandje quarter. The project involves the construction of six 16-floor towers along the quayside. "This is the biggest real estate development in decades," says project development manager Sofie Rédelé. "It's going to create an entire new city quarter."

Project2 won the competition for this development after the successful completion of Het

Koninklijk Entrepot, or the Royal Warehouse, an apartment complex on the nearby Willem dok. The developers are keen to repeat the success and create a vibrant quarter with a mixture of apartments, offices, shops and cafés.

"You need a certain critical mass of people and activities for the Eilandje to work," Rédelé explains. "You can either cover the surface with single-family houses or you can build towers with public spaces in between. The city has chosen the latter."

Amar admits that tower blocks have a bad reputation in Belgium. "That's because architects built cheap and ugly towers in the 60s. But Antwerp has a long tradition of building beautiful towers, such as the Cathedral tower or the Boerentoren, which was one of



Westkaai: high life on the waterfront

the tallest skyscrapers in Europe in the 30s."

"Project2 wants to create quality buildings using the best materials," Rédelé says. The six towers will be the same height, but slightly

different in style. "We have brought in three international renowned architects, including David Chipperfield of London. They will create a uniform and still diverse ensemble."

Work began last August on the first two towers, designed by Swiss architect Roger Diener. These are due to be completed by the end of 2009. The other four – designed by Chipperfield and the Swiss partnership Annette Gignon/Mike Guyer – will be finished a few years later. The open spaces between the towers will have public gardens laid out by Parisian landscape designer Michel Desvigne.

There is not much to see on site at the moment apart from pile drivers, cranes and mud. But the developers have an inspiring vision of the future. "I would describe the atmosphere at Westkaai as 'caffè latte' rather than 'champagne,'" explains Amar. "It will be fairly trendy, but relaxed and not elitist. It will be a place where cosmopolitan people will feel right at home."

online

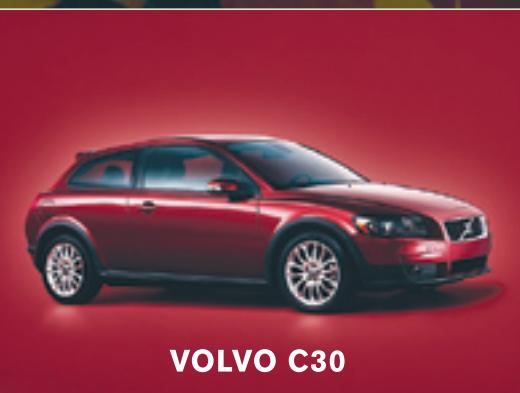
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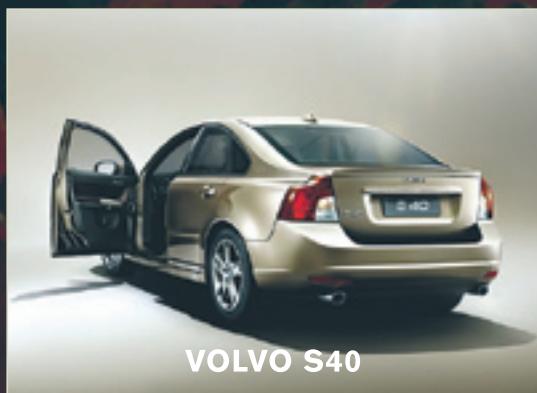
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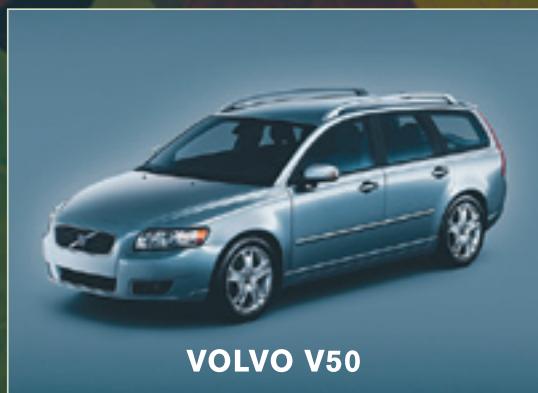
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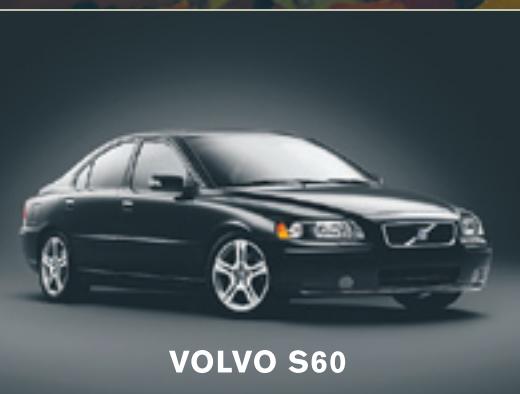
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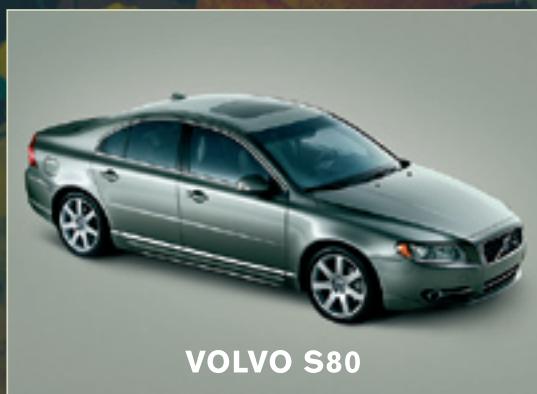
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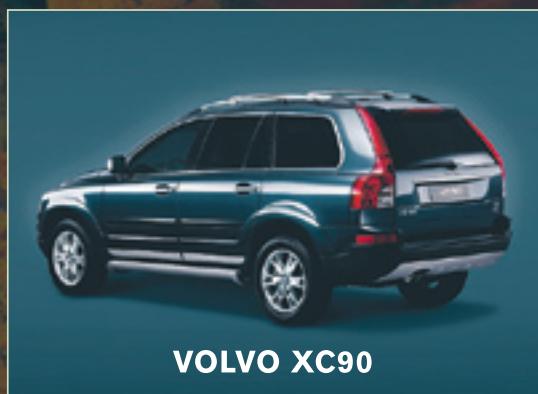
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Road sign scandal

Mechelen's image "tainted"

Continued from page 1

Some city aldermen already suspected Stevens of corruption. "I'm not at all surprised that they've arrested him," said Jowan Lamon, alderman for personnel, in an interview with the *Gazet van Antwerpen*. "He had municipal employees working in his garden a few years ago."

The corruption investigation is now expected to spread to other cities that have signed contracts with Janssens. A judicial investigator told journalists that the road sign market in Flanders was controlled by a cartel of three companies. He added that companies regularly fixed prices and that several dozen aldermen were suspected of accepting meals and gifts in return for awarding lucrative contracts.



State pension chief warns of retirement bomb

Gabriel Perl, head of the state pension service, says that the national pension system could face a cash crisis in the coming years unless it is urgently reformed. He told *De Morgen* that the government needed to hammer out a "pensions pact" with unions and employers to tackle the problem of an aging population. He said that people earning high incomes would want to opt out of the system if it failed to offer them a high enough pension on retirement. He added that some people on top salaries found that their pension was only one-third of what they earned before retirement. One of Perl's proposals is to scrap the rules that make private pension schemes tax deductible, since these only benefit employees who can afford to contribute to such schemes. He also called for a widespread debate on the future structure and financing of state pensions.



A WEEK IN THE CRISIS

Still no government, but progress is being made

Tuesday 16 October

The week began with Bart De Wever, chairman of the Flemish nationalist N-VA party, offering French-speaking parties "a spoonful of sugar" in return for allowing the split up of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde constituency. "But will it be a teaspoon, a dessert spoon or a soup ladle?" asked *De*

Morgen. The offer left a sour taste in the mouths of some Flemish politicians, who argued that there should be no concessions.

Meanwhile, in the Wetstraat, negotiators from the main Flemish and French-speaking parties had agreed on a package of legal reforms that would be implemented by the future government.

The measures include tougher treatment of youth offenders and changes to the controversial Lejeune Law, which allows prisoners to be released after serving one-third of their sentence.

Thursday 18 October

Eric Van Rompuy brought gloom to the negotiations when he spoke in the Flemish parlia-

Turkish protest in Brussels

About 30 Turkish youths were involved in clashes with police last Sunday night in the Brussels municipality of Sint-Joost-ten-Node. They were protesting at the killing by Kurdish rebels of at least 12 soldiers in southern Turkey on the border with Iraq.

The youths marched through the streets waving flags and attacked an Armenian-owned café. They began to throw stones inside the café until the police arrived and dispersed the crowd with water cannons.

The disturbances in Sint-Joost came after Kurdish rebels ambushed a military convoy near Turkey's border with Iraq. The incident led to increased pressure on the Turkish government to send in troops against guerrilla camps inside Iraq. The Turkish government has called on the United States to launch an urgent crackdown on Kurdish rebels based in Iraq.

NEWS FLASH



Child focus marks 10 years

The European centre for missing and exploited children, Child Focus, marked its 10th anniversary last week. Child Focus was set up in 1996 following public outrage at the Dutroux case, in which four Belgian children were abducted and murdered. The organisation was set up by the Belgian prime minister at the time, Jean-Luc Dehaene, after he was approached by several parents of the child victims. Child Focus runs a missing children helpline and organises widespread publicity campaigns when a child goes missing. The centre has received 350,000 calls and searched for 15,000 children since it was created.

Alexander leaves Antwerp zoo

Alexander, a male elephant, was taken home to the Netherlands last week after spending several months in Antwerp Zoo. The elephant had been brought from Rotterdam's Blijdorp Zoo in the hope that he would mate with one of Antwerp's three female elephants, Dumbo, Yu Yu Yin and Khaing Phy Phyo. The ovulation window for elephants is just a couple of days a year. It's not yet clear whether Alexander had any success, a zoo official said.

Good news for kid's teeth

Free dental care has been extended to children up to the age of 15 as part of the government's latest round of healthcare reforms. Parents previously had to pay dental bills for children over the age of 12. The reform package also cuts the cost of physiotherapy and treatment for the chronically ill and promises more money for doctors and nurses.

Caroline Gennez to lead bruised Flemish socialists

Caroline Gennez was chosen last week as the new leader of the troubled Flemish socialist party SPA. She won 66.4% of the votes cast, compared with her rival Piet De Bruyn's 33.6%. Gennez replaces the former Flemish socialist leader Johan Vande Lanotte, who took a bruising in the recent federal elections. She is the first woman to lead the Flemish socialist party.

Tangiers Hell driver dies

The bus driver whose life story inspired the 2006 Flemish film *De hel van Tanger* died last week in Antwerp. Pierre Stukken spent two years in a Moroccan prison for drugs found in his tour bus in 1996. He faced miserable conditions and came home to Flanders unable to walk and afflicted with tuberculosis. The 63-year-old announced earlier this month that he had terminal cancer, saying "I want to enjoy every day that is still granted to me in rest and serenity."

Bob Geldof criticises diamond trade



Geldof meets Princess Mathilde in Antwerp

Bob Geldof attacked the diamond trade at a gala dinner held in Antwerp last week. The rock singer and founder of Live Aid criticised the Kimberley process, set up to stem the trade in "blood diamonds" used to finance African wars. He claimed that diamond dealers were not doing enough to implement the process or tackle poverty in Africa.

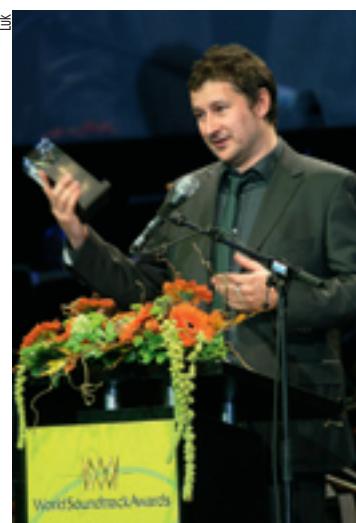
The dinner came at the end of a two-day conference organised by the Antwerp World Diamond Centre

to focus on changes in the global diamond market. Antwerp is currently the world centre for uncut diamonds but faces stiff competition from emerging centres such as Tel Aviv, New York and Dubai, as well as from African producers who are beginning to cut and trade their own diamonds. The Antwerp diamond trade is concentrated in a small quarter close to Central Station and currently accounts for 4% of Belgium's gross national product.

"Exemplary" immigrant policy

Belgium is praised for its immigration policy in the latest report by the Migrant Integration Index. The country gets high marks for anti-discrimination measures and employee rights for migrants but scores less well in offering opportunities for political participation. The survey, which covered 28 countries, ranked Belgium in overall third place, after Sweden and Portugal.

Clint Mansell wins soundtrack prize at Ghent filmfestival



The French composer Alexandre Desplat won the top prize at the World Soundtrack Awards on October 20 in Ghent. Desplat won Composer of the Year for his arrangements for the movies *The Queen* and *The Painted Veil*. Clint Mansell also did well at the ceremony, which is part of the Flanders International Film Festival, winning both Best Original Soundtrack of the Year and the Public Choice Award for his work on *The Fountain*. The grand prize for Best Film at the festival, which ran from 9 to 20 October, went to Stefan Ruzowitzky's holocaust movie *Die Fälscher (The Counterfeiters)*. Italian filmmaker Saverio Costanzo won the Best Director award for his new movie *In Memoria de me (Memory of Myself)*.

Verhofstadt sets his sights on Europe

Guy Verhofstadt, the acting Belgian prime minister, said last week that he would like to stand for a seat in the European Parliament in the next elections. He made the announcement at the end of his final European Summit, held in the Portuguese capital Lisbon.

Verhofstadt, whose Flemish Liberal party suffered defeat in the recent federal elections, spoke with European Commission President José Barroso on a possible change to Belgium's carbon quota. He was hoping for a deal that would allow the steel group

Arcelor-Mittal to open a new incinerator near Ghent, its third in Belgium, and reopen another incinerator in Wallonia. But the plants would lead to a significant increase in Belgium's carbon emissions.

Verhofstadt told Barroso that the current carbon emission quotas have a major impact in Flanders, which has a high concentration of industry compared to most other EU regions. He argued in favour of a reshuffle of quotas within the EU to allow the Flemish industrial sector to expand. Barroso has agreed to study the proposal.



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Flanders action plan gets new boss



Karel Vinck

Karel Vinck has been appointed to inject new energy into the Flemish government's *Vlaanderen in Actie* project. The plan was launched under the previous Flemish government to make Flanders one of the most dynamic regions of Europe. Similar to the EU's Lisbon Agenda, which set out to make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010," the Flemish plan had high ambitions but failed to realise many of its targets.

Flanders minister-president Kris Peeters now wants to relaunch the project and involve "captains of society" such as business leaders and university experts. The main aims are to improve education, encourage creative enterprises, cut down traffic jams, streamline ports and airports, and modernise the government. In addition Peeters also wants to raise the profile of Flanders abroad.

Vinck has worked as CEO for several key Belgian companies, including the metals group Umicore, the industrial coatings company Bekaert and Belgian railways. He was voted Manager of the Year by *Trends* business magazine in 1994.

Foreign investment doubles in one year



Foreign investment fuels growth in Antwerp's port

Belgium is fourth in the world for foreign investment, according to figures released by the United Nations trade and development organisation UNCTAD. Foreign companies invested some €50 billion (\$72 billion) in Belgium last year. This represented more than twice the amount invested in 2005, putting Belgium ahead of China for foreign investment. The only countries with higher ratings are the US, Britain and France. Analysts say the sharp rise in investment is due to a series of tax breaks introduced by the previous government, including notional interest deduction.

CEO quits troubled biotech firm

Frank Morich last week stepped down as CEO of the Ghent-based biotech company Innogenetics. He has been replaced by Christiaan De Wilde, currently financial director.

The company was plunged into crisis after it called a halt to an expensive research programme on developing a hepatitis C vaccine. The decision was made following "disappointing results".

Morich, who previously worked for Bayer, joined Innogenetics in 2005. Shares in the company have dropped in value by about 50% since his arrival.

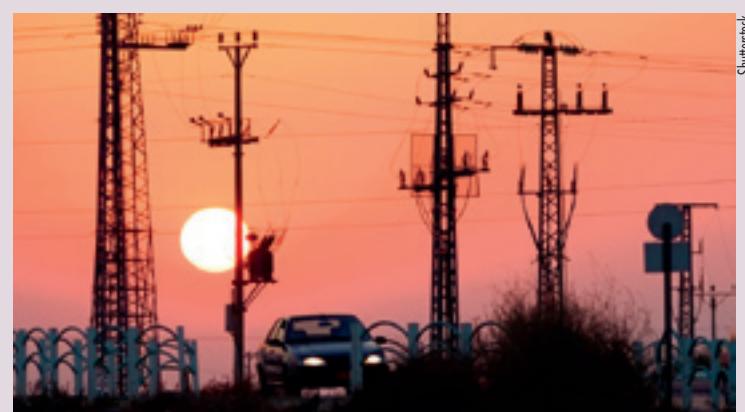
Insurance hike threat for women drivers

Belgian insurance companies have warned that women drivers face an insurance hike if the federal government fails to obtain an exemption from the European Commission. Women currently pay lower premiums than men because they are less likely to be involved in accidents, but the EU has ruled that this amounts to discrimination. Women might face a 20% price rise next year unless the Belgian government obtains an exemption from the EU, according to the insurers federation Assuralia. Women might also be charged more for life insurance and hospital costs, Assuralia warns. Twelve EU countries have already applied



for an exemption, but Belgium has so far failed to do so because of the political deadlock in form-

BUSINESS FLASH



Shutterstock

Hansen Transmissions

Hansen Transmissions, which manufactures gear box and transmissions systems, is to be floated early next year on the London stock market by its Indian parent company, Suzlon, a pioneer in wind turbines. The move values Hansen, which has plants in Edegem, Lommel and Schoten, at up to €800 million.

Nyrstar

Nyrstar, a world leader in the production of zinc, is to be launched next week on the Brussels stock market. The firm's initial public offering valued the company at some €2 billion. The move follows the merger earlier this year of the zinc activities of the Belgian Umicore non-ferrous metals company and the Australian Zinifex.

Robeco Bank Belgium

The Belgian private banking affiliate of the Robeco group is to be acquired by the Kaupthing Bank Luxembourg, an affiliate of the Iceland-based financial institution specialised in investment banking services. The move is part of Kaupthing's development strategy in Europe.

Delta

The Dutch energy group Delta has plans to build a 400 megawatts gas-fired power station in Beveren on ground owned by Indaver, the Flemish waste management company.

Tourism

The Flemish coast suffered one of its worst years of the decade due to the wet summer. The sector's turnover for the period June to September was 3.6% lower than in 2006. Worst affected were camping sites, down 7% on the previous year, while cafes and restaurants sales dropped 6.4%.

Alken-Maes

The Waarloos-based brewer of Maes lager and Grimbergen and Mort Subite special beers may be taken over by the Dutch Heineken group as part of the merger discussions between its owner, the British Scottish and Newcastle group, and a consortium formed by Denmark's Carlsberg and Heineken.

All Crump

All-Crump, the Antwerp-based producer of chocolate spreads marketed under the brands of Pralinuta and Crumpy, has been acquired by the Spanish Natra company for some €45 million.

Deloitte Belgium

The Belgian affiliate of the US audit and tax advice group Deloitte will hire 600 new staff next year to meet the growing demand for its services. The company already employs some 2,200 people locally.

Agfa-Gevaert

Agfa-Gevaert share prices plummeted by 20% last week after the company issued a profits warning. Shareholders lost faith in the Mortsel-based imaging and technology group after weak results in the third quarter. Analysts also warned that there were "too many uncertainties about the future of the group".

Ford Genk

The Ford factory in Genk was in a festive mood last week as the 13th million car rolled off the production line. The Limburg-based factory opened in 1962 and currently produces 1,200 vehicles a day, including the Mondeo, Galaxy and S-MAX lines.

FLANDERS EYE



Stephan Vanfleteren

In 2004 Stephan Vanfleteren took this photograph of an abandoned Mercedes in woods near Meldert, East Flanders. The photograph, like all his work, is in black and white. It was taken on a misty morning in winter, with the trees bare and the ground damp. "My favourite light is dusk," he says. "The coming of darkness is a language I understand."

He might never win a commission from the Flanders tourist office, but Vanfleteren has earned a living working for De Morgen. He takes sober photographs of Belgian politicians, and occasionally goes on the road to find more romantic subjects. He is good at photographing empty Flemish roads, abandoned frituur shacks, barbed wire fences near Ypres, and dank trees in morning gloom.

The photographs look like they were taken twenty years ago, but some are surprisingly recent. He photographed an old man outside Centraal Station in Brussels in 2004, but the figure looks like a 1940 war refugee. The slowly rusting Mercedes is timeless.

His most recent book, *Belgium*, was published a few weeks ago. It sold out within a week. For those who didn't get to the bookshop in time, Vanfleteren's photographs can be seen in Antwerp's FotoMuseum until 6 January. They have a sober intensity that perfectly matches the current national unease.

online

www.fotomuseum.be

CLASSICAL NOTES

Dietrich Buxtehude

The name Dietrich Buxtehude may be a bit of a mouthful today, but at the turn of the 18th century it rolled off the tongue much more easily than that of Johann Sebastian Bach – at least to people living in the northern German town of Lübeck, where the ageing composer and organist reigned supreme over the Marienkirche. Bach at the time was still a rather obscure church composer in Arnstadt and worshipped him from afar, once even setting out on a 200-mile journey on foot just to hear him play.

Buxtehude died 300 years ago this year, and the Flemish Radio Choir is about to join in the anniversary celebrations with several performances of his church

cantata *Membra Jesu Nostri*, an astonishingly beautiful work that lies half way between the religious fervour of Schütz, the contrapuntal complexity of Bach and the whimsical melodic invention of Purcell, his contemporary.

Composed in 1680, *Membra Jesu Nostri* is actually made up of seven short cantatas in Latin that contemplate different parts of Christ's body on the cross, beginning with the feet and knees, then moving upwards to the side, the hands, heart and finally the face "scourged with rods" and "soiled with spit". It sounds morbid on paper, but the music's overriding mood is oddly calm and serene, even sensual at times.

Erik Van Nevel, the Flemish early music specialist who will be conducting the concerts,

has chosen to have parts of the texts read out in Dutch before each cantata. He has also inserted another piece Buxtehude composed after the death of his father immediately after the last but one cantata, which addresses Christ's heart – both share the same brooding tonality of E minor, and the music naturally seems to flow from religious piety to private grief.

Unlike much of Buxtehude's work, *Membra Jesu Nostri* has been receiving quite a lot of attention over the past few decades, and recordings by Ton Koopman, René Jacobs, Konrad Junghänel and other Baroque conductors are now available. This performance will probably sound a lot more modern, as the Flemish Radio Choir is not an early music ensemble (its repertoire extends from the 15th century to the present day). Still, Van Nevel, who also recorded the work nine years ago, has injected as much period colour as possible: "I'm only using half of the singers – 14 in total," he told me, "and I've selected those whose voices fit this kind of music best. Three of them also happen to sing in my own ensemble [Currende]. My mind wouldn't be at peace if I didn't try to stay as close to the original style as possible."

Marie Dumont
online
www.vro-vrk.be



Concerts scheduled for Antwerp, Bruges, Brussels

Breaking the Code

Another false lead in Van Eyck mystery

Police investigators sealed off the St Hubert Chapel in Tervuren last week to search the building for a Van Eyck painting stolen in 1934. The painting, titled the *Just Judges*, formed part of the world-famous "Altarpiece of the Mystic Lamb" painted in the 15th century and now hanging in Ghent Cathedral. The search was launched following the publication of a new book on the theft in which the author analysed a series of ransom letters sent by the thief to the Bishop of Ghent. The writer, who published under the pseudonym Christian Stickx, concluded that the letters contained a secret code that led to the St Hubert Chapel. Police investigator Tony Vermeersch decided to launch a search but came up with nothing. "No panic, the panel is there," the author told his publisher.



Van Eyck's "Just Judges"

The cultural palace

Saved from demolition in 1982, Flanders' most fascinating arts centre celebrates its 25th anniversary



Lisa Bradshaw

Vooruit is the kind of place that seems as if it has always been there. And it has for most of the students sitting in its café on Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat in the heart of Ghent's university district. Or, to be more accurate, practically no one living in Ghent remembers a time when the monstrous building, constructed by the socialist party between 1910 and 1914, didn't exist. But it was 25 years ago this autumn that a dilapidated Vooruit was saved from the wrecking ball by a group of young people, who transformed it into one of the most dynamic modern arts centres in Europe – and the veritable heart of the city.

Flemish architect Ferdinand Dierkens designed the massive building under a commission from the Socialist *Samenwerkende Maatschappij Vooruit*, or Vooruit Co-operative. It served as a community centre for meetings and cultural events. "The socialist movement wanted to show that they had money," says the Vooruit's communications manager Caroline Van Peteghem. "It was really a building for showing off." And that it did well: An eclectic blend of Art Deco and Art Nouveau, the Vooruit boasts no less than 367 rooms.

Vooruit was meant to open in time for the world's fair in Ghent in 1913. Ironically, there was a labour strike and, of course, the socialist labourers stopped work on the building. The outbreak of World War One further hampered efforts, but the centre finally opened in 1918. The cinema programmes and café were especially successful, and many groups took residence there: a women's association, a gymnasiums class, a chess club. There was

live theatre and older people dancing to big band music on Sunday afternoons. Explains Peter Van den Eede, one of Vooruit's several programmers. "It was all organised by the socialists as a gift to the working class, who couldn't go to the opera. This was, as they called it, their 'cultural palace'."

It was also a political palace: at the end of the 1930s, for instance, children fleeing the Spanish Civil War found a home in the concert hall until their adoptive Belgian parents picked them up.

Then came World War Two, and the Germans occupied the Vooruit, along with the rest of the country. They set up their offices in the Majolica room (formerly a pastry shop) and kept pigs and horses in the concert hall. The Vooruit was liberated by the Allied troops in 1944, and the Canadian soldiers were particularly taken with the building – they renamed the bar Café Quebec. But the Vooruit (translated at "forward" or "let's go") never really recovered after the war. "They tried to continue, but the new generation wasn't interested," explains Van den Eede. "They had met the Canadians and the Americans; they had jazz and chewing gum, and they thought of the Vooruit as a place for their parents."

Though it continued to be used here and there through the 1970s, the building fell into disrepair, eventually becoming so dilapidated that it became a public safety hazard, and the city decided to sell it off. Developers considered their options, but several deals fell through. At the same time, the socialist headquarters building in Brussels – designed by the famous Belgian architect Victor Horta – was torn down. Talk was that the

same thing should happen with the Vooruit. "The socialists thought, 'it's over,'" says Van den Eede.

Then, in 1981, two students wandered into the building. They were smitten and photographed it for their final thesis at the University of Ghent. The thesis became an exhibition, and the exhibition became a book. And the citizens of Ghent, not to mention the artists, began to realise what they were about to lose.

Knowing there was nowhere in Ghent for contemporary and avant-garde art, an enterprising young band of students, supported by the socialist party and the city of Ghent, started an arts co-operative. Clean up and renovations began, and a few events were successfully staged. In 1983, the Vooruit was designated as a listed monument. "From that moment on, we knew that they couldn't touch it anymore," says Van den Eede. "Whatever would happen, the building has been saved."

What happened was that the Vooruit's popularity grew exponentially. Renovations weren't complete until 2000, but every possible usable space was always booked even before then. International artists began coming to Ghent based on the reputation of the Vooruit alone.

The labyrinthine building contains four major performances spaces amid (quite literally) hundreds of corridors, open spaces and rooms, both large and small. The Theatre Hall counts 720 seats under a stained-glass ceiling. Above the stage, gold-leaf letters proclaim "Kunst Veredelt" (Art Ennobles). The Concert Hall, in pink and decked with murals, is where Sinéad O'Connor played her first concert on Belgian soil.

The Ballroom is a split personality: chandelier, mirrors, silver leaf and mahogany on one side – a disco, spotlights and mobile stage on the other. The Dom Hall, named for its domed roof, is located right at the top of the front of the building and is used for more intimate, up-close performances. On any given day, you might find a rock concert, a dance piece, a 'silent disco' (everyone wears their own headphones) or a political debate.

But much of the programming, particularly exhibitions, just happen all around the place. "One big advantage of this building as an arts centre is the number of spaces," notes Van den Eede. "We have several studios and stages, but also the corridors and forgotten spaces." That's 367 spaces, of course. Van den Eede has been with the arts co-operative since the beginning 25 years ago. So has he seen all the rooms? "I should say yes, but I'm not actually sure," he admits. He does remember two years after programming began, he and a colleague were arranging one of the smaller rooms as storage for the archives. They moved a cupboard and found a door. They pried it open and discovered a tiny room full of musical instruments. "We just looked at each other," he says.

Though you'd be hard pressed to find another hidden room at this point, the staff is still digging up lost treasures. They recently discovered a film that had been made back in 1981 about the Vooruit building by two other students – Dirk Braeckman and Carl De Keyzer, who are now two of Belgium's most famous photographers. "I knew it like that in '81," says Van den Eede, "but suddenly it looked so sad. You

felt the glory of it, but behind the spiders and the broken glass and the dust."

It's hard to imagine that now, as pretty much anything Vooruit touches turns to gold. Their book discussion programme for instance – a brainchild of Van den Eede – was much maligned in the beginning. Nobody wants to read, book clubs are boring, it will never work, people said. "Uitgelezen", where a panel of selected guests discuss three related books, now draws 300 people a month and travels to two other cities in Flanders.

Though Van den Eede and a few of his colleagues are now well into their 40s, they continue to keep Vooruit edgy and young. In addition to collaboration with younger staff members, 60,000 students at the university of Ghent – the largest student population in Belgium – helps them keep their pulse on emerging art forms. A recent study of reasons why students chose the university found that the school's programmes were first, Vooruit was second and the atmosphere of Ghent itself was third. The centre is a beautiful example of how the past and the present can successfully converge and how youthful idealism can sometimes work out. Vooruit is a microcosm of its city – charismatic, radical and just a little mysterious. "In the old days, they called Ghent 'the red castle' because of the socialists," says Van den Eede. "Now we say it's 'progressive'. And that's due to Vooruit. The Vooruit is Ghent, and Ghent is Vooruit."

online

www.vooruit.be

Coming up in Vooruit

There are more than 20 events happening over the next couple of weeks in the Vooruit. Here's a few of the best. For the complete programme in Dutch or English, visit www.vooruit.be.

Think of One: this eclectic Antwerp-based music ensemble travels the world to ensure authenticity in its world beats. Their latest album, *Camping Shaâbi*, mixes traditional Moroccan songs with Western elements, reggae and a little French lyricism. The band brings three singers from Morocco for this concert at 20.00 on 30 October.

Bed & Breakfast by Heike Schmidt: You can take the title of this show literally. The Vooruit's ballroom becomes a bedroom for kids aged six and over and their parents. Singer Heike Schmidt and cellist Thillo Thomas Krigar perform lullabies and bedtime stories. In the morning, they'll awaken you with music and serve breakfast. It starts the evening of November 1 – but hurry, tickets for the other two nights are already sold out.

Slurven by Hans Van Koolwijk: People who have difficulty finding Vooruit can just follow the wailing noises on 4 November. This Amsterdam-based sound artist built six giant *slurven* (elephant trunks) that emit a smooth, siren-like harmony every half hour from 13.00 to 18.30.

Eugeen van Mieghem

Portraits of Women



Eugeen van Mieghem's "Portrait of Augustine"

READER OFFER

Free film tickets!

Flanders Today has several pairs of tickets to give away to *Paranoid Park*, the new film by Gus Van Sant that releases in Belgium this week. The American independent director revisits the teenagers of Portland, Oregon – as in his 2003 Palme d'Or winner *Elephant* – but this time he gets under their skin to better reveal their motivations and desires.

Based on a novel by Blake Nelson, the film follows Alex, a teenager who has accidentally caused the death of a security guard near the skateboard park he frequents. He spends the movie recalling it in confused

detail for police, while struggling to relate to his girlfriend, his best friend and his divorcing parents.

Van Sant gets a remarkable performance out of Gabe Nevins, one of a group of non-professional locals the director is so fond of casting. Nevins elicits a sympathy that is bittersweet as he rolls through a confusing world and a situation he never fully grasps.

To win a pair of tickets to see the movie, send an email by 27 October with your name and address to editorial@flanderstoday.eu. Put "Paranoid Park" in the subject line. Winners will be notified by 30 October.



Gabe Nevins: a boy with a secret

FILM FREAK

Flemish horror: Harry Kümel



Delphine Seyrig (left) and Andrea Rau in *Les Lèvres rouges*

It's nearly Halloween, and at my house that means settling down for an evening of bizarre movies. Certainly one can rent *Saw* any night of the week, but we try to go outside the norm on that special of creepy nights. In Belgium, one need look no further than the films of Harry Kümel.

Though the Flemish are known for their moody, surreal films, Kümel is the only art-house horror director the region has ever produced. Because his work is highly stylised and sexually explicit, he's what you might call an acquired taste. But the fan base for this kind of work is huge across Europe and the US, and Kümel is regarded as one of the genre's masters.

The writer/director has made 10 cinema features since 1969, of which two have garnered special attention. *Malpertuis* screened at Cannes in 1971 in French under the title *Histoire d'une maison maudite*, but Kümel actually filmed it in English. Orson Wells, of all people, plays the dying patriarch of a big, eerie house in Flanders (the film was shot in Ghent, Bruges and Ostend), who stipulates in his

will that the many members of his family who live there will only inherit if they never leave it. Kümel's always intense use of colour is beautifully defined in the DVD released by the Belgian Film Archives, which includes the original English version, the French version and a longer director's cut, which is dubbed in Dutch.

An even bigger Kümel hit, though, is *Les Lèvres rouges*, known in English as *Daughters of Darkness*. The director also produced this one in 1971 and filmed it in English. French actress Delphine Seyrig was never more disarmingly sultry than in this 1971 film in which she plays Countess Bathory, on holiday with her ravishing young female companion in a deserted Ostend hotel. Desereted except for a newly-married couple, that is, and the countess soon goes about seducing the young bride. The husband disappears amid vampire teeth and long, red nails.

Lisa Bradshaw

See our interview with Harry Kümel on page 16.

Eugeen van Mieghem was an Antwerp artist whose mother ran a bar in the old port area. He grew up, as you would expect, in a rough environment, surrounded by stevedores, emigrants and prostitutes. It's then hardly surprising that he was drawn to the seedy side of Antwerp, capturing the people who milled around the docks in drawings, prints and paintings.

He visited Amsterdam in 1904, at the age of 29, to take part in a series of events held in honour of the Dutch anarchist Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis. While he was there, he saw Rembrandt's paintings, etchings and drawings. The artist returned to Antwerp with new ideas for portraits. His main subject became his wife, Augustine Pautrie, who he met while study-

ing at the Antwerp Academy. She was a painter but gave up her work in 1902 after they married and had a son.

Van Mieghem drew her portrait many times, often posed nude in studies that recall Rembrandt's works. She was diagnosed with tuberculosis in December 1904, but Van Mieghem continued to draw her, recording her wasted body as the disease progressed. These drawings, which are on show at Antwerp's Mayer van den Bergh Museum until 27 January, inevitably recall Rembrandt's supremely tender drawings of his first wife as she lay dying in Amsterdam. Augustine died on 12 March 1905 at the age of 24, and Van Mieghem was so deeply upset that he did not exhibit again until 1910.

Derek Blyth

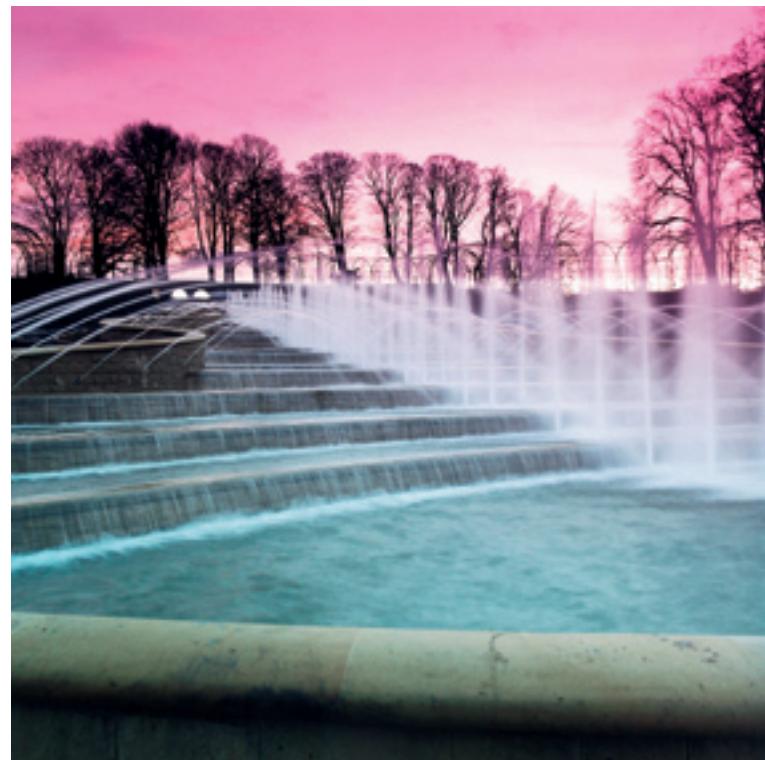
online

museum.antwerpen.be/mayervandenbergh

FLANDERS ABROAD

Garden of delight

Jacques Wirtz garden in Northumberland expected to draw 700,000 visitors a year



Derek Blyth

The Flemish landscape gardener Jacques Wirtz is best known in Flanders for neat geometrical gardens that evoke Italian and French Renaissance models. But he has taken on a much more ambitious project in the north of England, where he and his two sons are slowly transforming a derelict Northumberland hillside into "one of the most exciting gardens of the 21st century".

The project was begun 11 years ago by the Duchess of Northumberland, an engaging and outspoken woman who decided to restore a dilapidated 12-acre walled garden at Alnwick Castle. The ancient castle, where some of the early Harry Potter movies were filmed, is surrounded by an extensive walled estate that was originally designed by Capability Brown. But the garden had been allowed to grow wild for several decades.

The Duchess says that she couldn't find anyone suitable in Britain to do the work. "At the time, the country was dominated by a rather small group of grand lady gardeners," she explains. "I wanted a different style of garden. It needed someone who understood architecture and lighting."

After talking to some of the world's great landscape gardeners, the Duchess travelled to Belgium to look at some of the gardens designed by Wirtz. "I saw what they had done in Flanders, where the topography is dire," she explains. "And I realised that they would do a perfect job at our site."

Wirtz drew up a master plan in 2000 that included a Grand Cascade, water channels, hedges and clipped hornbeam. The overall design put a strong emphasis on structure. "We love structure; we love to feel firmness," explained Peter Wirtz, Jacques' son, in a recent interview with the New York Times. The Duchess agrees with

Green fingers

Considered one of the most inventive garden designers in Europe, Jacques Wirtz was born in 1924 in Schoten, near Antwerp, and studied horticulture at Vilvoorde horticultural school. He began working as a gardener in local nurseries and founded a landscape architecture firm in 1950. His work gained public acclaim in 1970 following his design for the Belgian pavilion at the Osaka World Fair and he went on to design private and public gardens across Europe. In one of his biggest projects, he redesigned the garden of the French President's palace in Paris, and created the Carrousel Garden next to the Louvre. He still lives in Schoten in a plain brick building that was once a gardener's house on an old Antwerp estate. Wirtz has transformed the old kitchen garden into an enchanting space with hedges clipped in strange undulating shapes.

online

www.wirtzv.be

this approach. "It's like a woman," she says. "If she has good bones, then she will be beautiful."

The second phase of the project was completed last month, bringing the total cost so far to £70 million (€105 million). The new areas include the world's largest tree house (designed by a German firm) and a Poison Garden planted with a number of deadly or harmful species that can only be grown under licence from the government.

With one third left to be done, the Duchess remains convinced that she made the right decision in choosing Wirtz. "I can't praise Jacques highly enough," she says. "He has done a perfect job."

But she admits that the project has irritated some people in Britain. "It's a very controversial garden," she admits. "Some people really hate it." She was particularly hurt by a hostile review in the Financial Times following the completion of the second phase. "Anyone who is setting out as a landscape planter and designer should go and have a look, and draw up their list of what is wrong," the critic argued. The Duchess was furious with the review. "I think there was an element of jealousy involved," she explains. "Some people didn't like the idea of a British garden

designed by a foreigner."

She takes comfort from the fact that visitor numbers have crept up steadily in recent years. "We expected 67,000 visitors a year when we designed the garden, but a recent study by KPMG forecasts 700,000 to 800,000 visitors a year."

The Duchess adds that the garden has become one of the main tourist attractions in north-east England, boosting the local economy by at least £43 million (€65 million) a year and raising revenue in local shops by about 30-50%.

She insists that her garden has to be a place where children and old people feel welcome. "I don't have any signs telling people to keep

off the grass," she says. "Children who come here can run around the place and play in the water jets." To keep people coming back, she has cheap annual season tickets, free entry for children and special events such as speed dating for older people.

The Duchess remains convinced that her garden will be seen as one of the great designs of the 21st century. But she knows that some people will never take to it. "The people who hate it now will really hate it when it's finished."

online

www.alnwickgarden.com



THE BITE

Tierenteyn-Verlent Mostaard Fabriek, Ghent

Stepping into Tierenteyn-Verlent is like stepping back in time – not just because of the original 1850s interior but because of how you're served its culinary masterpiece. A friendly shopkeeper opens the fresh barrel of fine-ground mustard and pours it from a monstrous wooden spoon directly into the small opening of your stoneware pot. You'll hold your breath until she's done – not a drop spilled.

Tierenteyn-Verlent Mostaard Fabriek began way back in 1790 on Ghent's Groentenmarkt and is there still – though it's made its way to another side of the square. But the recipe hasn't changed in more than 200 years: mustard seeds, vinegar and salt. The owner, Catherine Caesens, who makes every batch herself onsite in the basement, does not use preservatives. It still lasts several weeks in the refrigerator and is simply the best mustard I've ever tasted.

The secret is the proportion of ingredients and the selection of the mustard seed from many available varieties. Caesens chooses a mixture of locally-produced brown seeds. The flavour refines after it hits your tongue: first sweet, then sour and finally hot – but not too hot.



Tierenteyn-Verlent Mostaard Fabriek

Caesens also makes a coarse grind of mustard. Both are hard to find outside the shop, though you can try your luck at De Boe in Brussels or Vervloet in Antwerp. But Tierenteyn itself offers the best value and is worth a visit. The small shop also sells many other Belgian delicacies, as well as spices in bulk, and stands between a wonderful old bakery and a man selling waffles. It's time well spent on the Groentenmarkt.

Lisa Bradshaw

*Tierenteyn-Verlent, Groentenmarkt 3, Ghent.
09.255.83.36*

WITCHES

Witching hour

Four hundred years ago, they would have been called a coven and burned at the stake. Today, members of the “Witches Guild” are city ambassadors



Lisa Bradshaw

If you thought witches went out with tall wigs and lead goblets, then you haven't been to Laarne lately. The town, a few kilometres east of Ghent in East Flanders, is home to the De Heksengilde Laarne & Kalken, or the Witches Guild, a group of women whose desire to commemorate the persecution of so-called witches in their area succeeded so completely that the entire town has transformed into a witch haven.

Laarne and the neighbouring village of Kalken were the sites of witch burnings in 1607. This marked the culmination of years of persecution of several women and men by local authorities. It was the last year on record that the execution of witches took place in the area and, three years ago, two women working in Laarne's tourist office realised that 2007 was the 400th anniversary of the historical event.

“There are other villages in Belgium that are known for witches. They have walking paths, for instance, but they don't have an actual history. It's all based on tourism,” says Ingrid Vanhercke of the guild. “Here we have a real history, and it was frustrating that our village didn't do anything about it.” So they went to the mayor, who told them the city would stand behind an activity if they organised it themselves. And the Witches Guild was born.

Their goal was to plan the Heksenvuur, or Witches Fire, a huge spectacle that took place last August. A procession marched from the

mayor's house to a market on the magnificent grounds of Laarne Castle, while inside a full dinner was served. After dark, a series of site-specific performances told the story of the unfortunates who were burned alive 400 years ago. One of them was Janne Callens, a midwife who garnered a reputation as a witch through accusations from women whose babies had died. Janne's is one of the more captivating stories: She was tortured and jailed in a tower of Laarne Castle but somehow escaped. She headed towards the Netherlands – where she was caught at the border – and became one of six people who were found guilty of witchcraft in 1607. Two managed to buy their way out of their death sentences – Janne and three other women were not

so lucky.

The Heksenvuur was a huge success, but more surprising is how the women's passion for the history captured the entire town's imagination. After learning from local historians everything they could about witches in the area, the guild convinced more than a dozen merchants to sell their *heksenproducten*, or witches products. Around Laarne and Kalken you'll find *heksenpâté*, *heksen-salami*, “Green Death” *heksen* liqueur and mini *heksen* cookpots. They developed their own line of greeting cards and their own beer, an amber called *Toverhekske*. Made right in Laarne by Walrave Brewery, the label boasts “mysterious herbs”. Vera Bertin, the guild's “head witch” explains: “One of

our witches helped them with the recipe.”

Perhaps most importantly, the guild created a *heksenpad*, or witches' walk, in Laarne with signs (in Dutch) pointing out exact locations of witches' homes and gathering places. “We really need to keep the history alive,” says Vanhercke.

The Heksengilde has a number of duties – from welcoming visiting dignitaries to performing at community events. “When they know that the witches will be there, more people come,” notes Bertin. The Heksengilde has grown from the original five members to nine – but getting in isn't easy. You have to be a woman of 40 years or more and live in Laarne or Kalken. You spend one year being a “novice” – with your witch hat bent to the side – before your initiation as a full witch. Then a ceremony takes place at Laarne Castle, after which your hat is straightened, and you're a witch. You take on the duties and “another few secret things,” says Bertin.

Of course exactly how much of a witch you are is up to you. Most of these women are simply keen to be active in their communities and provide a service. They like to wear the costume, recognise their history and promote the town. But a handful of them have what Bertin calls “feelings” as a witch. “I have spirituality around it,” she explains, “and a sixth sense. Everybody has a sixth sense, but with some people it's stronger – more liberated.”

Of course this is in line with those who were accused of witchcraft in previous centuries. Some of them really were what you might call witches – though rather than casting spells to ruin their neighbours crops, they were involved in pagan worship of the earth.

They worked with herbs as healing medicines and may have danced around a fire or two. But most of the accused were just women who, claims Bertin, were knowledgeable. “A witch was a strong woman who had a keen insight into a lot of things,” she says, “and a lot of men were afraid of her for it.” When women became unofficial spiritual or medical advisors, for instance, “the priests said ‘oh no, everybody is going to this witch’.” Hence, witches – both real and imagined – made religious states nervous for a variety of reasons.

But what made people nervous then is appealing to the public now. “Witches are mysterious, and mysticism attracts people,” says Vanhercke. “Also, people are interested in witchcraft now because they are turning to nature. Everything is ‘bio’ right now – it's very in.”

Autumn is a wonderful time to visit Laarne, which is surrounded by a countryside of farms and leafy trees. If you visit by 5 November, you can take part in the *Heksen Hoed*, or Witches Hat, contest. A short trail that starts directly across the street from the entrance to the castle leads you under trees with witch hats hanging from their branches. Local businesses have decorated them, and you can vote for your favourite on your mobile phone. The 23 entries range from the colourful to the spooky – a local optometrist cut holes in one and filled them with beautiful stained glass, while a beauty salon uses chicken wire and shattered glass to macabre effect.

online

www.heksengilde-laarnekalken.be
www.laarne.be

Visiting Laarne

You don't need a broomstick to fly into Laarne – it's easily accessible from Ghent's R4. Here's how to spend a day – or a weekend.

Laarne Castle This 13th-century castle is one of the best-preserved in Belgium, even with the few additions that were constructed in the 1600s. With three watchtowers and surrounded by a huge moat, this medieval treasure holds paintings, frescoes and a nice collection of silver wares. It's only open for group tours on Sundays until next spring, but the grounds are open every day. *Eekhoekstraat 5, 09.230.91.55*

Sint-Machariuskerk This late-gothic church is dedicated to Saint Macarius of Jerusalem, whose life is depicted in stained glass. The organ dates from 1672 and is in use today thanks to an early 80s restoration. Apart from services, you can visit the church by appointment only. *Lepelstraat 1, 09.369.08.97*

Brasserie 't Steentje One of the witches of Laarne owns this eatery, and she makes a special witch's dish of garlic-sautéed snails, mushrooms and a whole potato left in the peel, served in a cast iron pot. *Steenjestraat 40, 09.366.79.23*

Familie Vanhercke B&B A nice bed-and-breakfast with two cottages in the quiet outskirts of Laarne across from a beautiful pond full of geese. It's owned by a member of the Witches Guild and located on an old farm dating from the 18th century. Ask for the room with the open fireplace. *Meerskant 18, 09.230.41.28, www.vanhercke.com*

Witches Hat contest. Visit Laarne by 5 November, and you can vote for your favourite witch's hat – they're hanging from trees along *Kasteeldreef*.





welcome²

How may we help you?

FORTIS

Putting your skills at the service of a multinational often means moving to a country you know little about. As a leading Belgian bank, Fortis has therefore developed the Welcome Offer Expat.

The Welcome Offer Expat

The Welcome Offer Expat brings together all the services expatriates need thus avoiding any unwelcome surprises when they first arrive. For example, you can open a Fortis account from your home country. Fortis can also assist with your initial expenses when you first arrive in Belgium. Moreover you are given your bank card already the first time you visit your Fortis branch.

The Expat Service Line

Anyone coming to live in a foreign country will be faced with certain practical and administrative problems. Fortis therefore makes an Expat Service Line available to expatriates and their families which they can call for

information on a wide variety of issues: problems of everyday life (e.g. where to find a plumber who speaks English), contracts, legal issues, social security, etc. And it doesn't cost you a cent!

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Fortis Expat Competence Centre

To find out more about the services that Fortis offers to expats, call the Fortis Expat Competence Centre at + 32 (0)2 433 41 00 (Monday to Friday from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.), send an e-mail to expat@fortis.com or surf to www.fortisbanking.be/expatinbelgium

Classical & new music**Brussels**

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be

OCT 26 20.00 Belgian National Orchestra, conducted by Andrej Boreyko with Patricia Kopatchinskaja, violin: Glinka, Prokofiev, Haydn, Bartok
OCT 28 20.00 Anne Sofie von Otter, mezzo; Bengt Forsberg, piano, Pekka Kuusisto, violin: Korngold, Reger, Karg-Elert, von Zemlinsky, Berg
OCT 30 & NOV 1 20.00 De Munt Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Mark Wigglesworth, and Munt Choir, conducted by Piers Maxim: Mozart's Requiem KV 626, Britten's Sinfonia da Requiem op 20

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
OCT 24 20.00 Association Femmes d'Europe Gala: Orquestra Metropolitana Académica de Lisboa, conducted by Jean-Marc Burfin: Beethoven's Concerto op 56, Mendelssohn's A Midsummer Night's Dream op 61, Braga Santos' Staccato brillante op 63 (tickets 02.660.56.96).

OCT 25 20.30 Music Fund Benefit Concert: Augustin Dumay, violin; Saleem Abboud Ashkar, piano; and students from the Queen Elisabeth College of Music: Fiorini, Mozart, Haydn, Ravel

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be
OCT 25 20.15 Vlaams Radio Koor conducted by Erik Van Nevel with Bart Naessens, organ: Buxtehude's Membra Jesu Nostri cantatas
OCT 26 20.15 British Vision: Vlaams Radio Orkest conducted by David Atherton: Arnold's Four Scottish Dances, Delius' two pieces from Hassan, Britten's Four Sea Interludes from Peter Grimes, Elgar's Enigma Variations

Kerk van Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Kapelle

Kapellemarkt
OCT 24 20.00 Collegium Vocale Gent and Bl!ndman perform Isotropes: Renaissance and contemporary works

Get your tickets now for...



Kanye West, 18 November, 20.00, Vorst Nationaal, Brussels. Tickets from 077 37 38 39 or www.vorstnationaal.be

Kanye West is the rap star who almost wasn't – due to having a political conscience while simultaneously lacking the stereotypical hip-hop image record producers go for. Three years, six Grammy awards and millions of dollars later, West has built a reputation for talking big about himself – and taking hip hop into a new era of maturity and creativity. He's smooth, and he knows it. Don't miss him.

Les Brigitines

Korte Brigittenstraat; 02.506.43.00
OCT 25-28 Radiophonic 2007: radio artists present sound installations, workshops and performances

Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
OCT 27 21.00 Sequentia: medieval music

DeSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
OCT 24 20.00 Cuarteto Casals: Haydn, Ravel, Bartók

Kapel Lessius Hogeschool

Korte Nieuwstraat 33; 070.22.02.02
OCT 26 20.00 Royal Flanders Opera Chorus conducted by Kurt Bikkembergs: Rossini's Petite Messe solennelle

Sportpaleis

Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.45.045
Until NOV 11 20.00, Night of the Proms with Il Novecento Orchestra & Fine Fleur Choir, conducted by Robert Groslot with Macy Gray, Soulsister and Roby Lakatos (tickets 070.34.53.45)

Ghent**De Bijloke**

Jozef Kluykensstraat 2, 09.269.92.92
OCT 28 15.00 British Vision: Vlaams Radio Orkest conducted by David Atherton: Arnold's Four Scottish Dances, Delius' two pieces from Hassan, Britten's Four Sea Interludes from Peter Grimes, Elgar's Enigma Variations

Sint Stefanuskerk

Sint Margrietstraat 11; 070.22.02.02
OCT 25 20.00 Royal Flanders Opera Chorus, conducted by Kurt Bikkembergs: Rossini's Petite Messe solennelle

Grimbergen

Sacristie Abdijkerk
Kerkplein 1; 02.263.03.43
OCT 25 20.15 TrioFenix: Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Beethoven

Opera**Brussels****De Munt**

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
Until NOV 11 Mitridate, Rè di Ponto by Mozart, conducted by Mark Wigglesworth

OCT 25-26 15.00 Cendrillon, adapted from Massenet's work and conducted by David Miller, with Zeno Popescu, tenor; Madeleine Colaux, soprano

Théâtre Royal du Parc

Wetstraat 3; 02.505.30.30
OCT 27 20.00 Anima Eterna, conducted by Jos van Immerseel, with Roberta Invernizzi, soprano; Thomas E Bauer, baritone: Pergolesi's La Serva Padrona

Jazz, soul & blues**Brussels**

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
OCT 31 20.00 Roberto Fonseca

Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortrstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50
OCT 26 20.30 Trio Grande + Matthew Bourne.

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00
OCT 27 20.30 Doctor Gabs Jazz Evening
OCT 31 20.30 Philip Catherine

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be

OCT 28 20.15 Esbjörn Svensson Trio

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193-195; 02.733.13.78
OCT 24 20.30 Patrman/Verheyen/Vermeulen
OCT 27 18.00 Electric Miles
OCT 31 20.30 Tribute

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
OCT 25 20.00 Azian Z + Peuple de l'Herbe (part of Audi Jazz Festival)

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
OCT 24 A Young Talents Jazz Concert: Christian Mendoza Trio
OCT 25 Fabien Degréyse Trio

Théâtre 140

Eugène Plaskyalaan 140; 081.22.60.26
OCT 24 20.30 Stacey Kent

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90
OCT 25 20.30 Maria Joao

Rataplan

Wijnegemstraat 27; 03.292.97.40
OCT 27 20.30 Trio Grande with Matthew Bourne

Pop, rock, hip-hop, techno**Brussels**

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
Concerts at 20.00 unless otherwise noted:

OCT 24 Sharon Jones & The Dap Kings + The Dynamites + Michael Fakesch + The Brown Acid. **OCT 25** Stijn in 4-D.

OCT 26 Uman. **OCT 27** Siouxsie. Elvis Perkins. **NOV 1** from 16.30 Now_Series: Transit + Liars + Apse + 65 Days of Static

Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortrstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50
OCT 24 20.30 Porque te vas Contest

Halles de Schaerbeek

Koninklijke Sinte-Mariastraat 22; 02.218.21.07
OCT 28 20.00 Editors

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15
OCT 30 20.00 Stephan Eicher

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32

Concerts at 20.00:

OCT 24 Nervous Cabaret

OCT 30 Bazbaz

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34
OCT 24 22.00 Dag van de Student & Recyclart present: Nid & Sancy + Sickboy + DJs Darko + Stel-R + Jules X

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07

OCT 27 20.00 Cocoa Tea

Vorst-Nationaal

Globelaan 36; 0900.00.991

OCT 24 20.00 Vincent Baguian + Zazie

OCT 26 20.00 Arno

Antwerp**Lotto Arena**

Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060

OCT 26 20.00 Axelle Red

Queen Elisabeth Hall

Koningin Astridplein 26; 0900.26.060

OCT 29 20.00 Harry Connick Jr

Ghent**Handelsbeurs**

Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01

OCT 25 20.15 Les Rita Mitsouko.

OCT 26 20.00 Marina Celeste & Anton Walgrave

NOV 1 20.00 Mark Ronson

Leuven

Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03

OCT 29 20.00 Cold War Kids

World, folk**Brussels**

Au Stekerlapatte
Priesterstraat 4; 02.512.86.81
Concerts at 21.30:

OCT 25 ARLT, Paris

OCT 27 Benji Lali

NOV 1 Joachim Jannin, voice and guitar with Mimi Verderame, guitar

NOV 1 Film concert: L'Aurore by FW Murnau (US 1926) + Liberty with Laurel and Hardy (US 1929) with music by Eric Bribosia and Quentin Manfroy

Bozar

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
OCT 27, 20.30 The Sufi Path of Love: Sheikh Hassan Dyck, cello d'amore and narrator, with Hey Hussein, voice and percussion; Marvin Dillman, didgeridoo and darabuka; Mario Triskia, violin; AK Schönbohm, sound

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15
OCT 25 20.00 Michalis Hatzigianis, Cyprus

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
OCT 28 20.00 Blanche.

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
OCT 31 20.00 Carlos Leitão & Ensemble, fado

Zuiderpershuis

Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00
Concerts at 20.30:
OCT 25 Ghazal, Iran/India
OCT 26 Cultural Musical Club, Zanzibar
OCT 27 Trio Druk Yul, Bhutan

Dance**Brussels**

Bruegel

Until OCT 26 Das Saarland, eine Europäische Geschichte, photographs tracing the history of the Saar region on the 50th anniversary of its foundation

ISELP
Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until DEC 1 Eves' Phase I: le complot, video, drawings, photographs and installation by Didier Mahieu. Interactions, paintings by Claude Celli and sculptures by Clémence van Lunen

Ixelles Museum
Jean Van Volsemstraat 71; 02.515.64.21
Until JAN 26 All Roads Lead to Rome: Artists travelling in Europe from the 16th to 19th centuries, paintings, texts and objects related to travel
Until JAN 27 Ontmoetingen, 1997-2007, photographs by Géraldine Langlois

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre
Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20
Until NOV 4 Photographier un territoire: le Foyer Saint-Gillois, social housing in the Brussels commune of Saint-Gilles

Jewish Museum of Belgium
Minimstraat 21; 02.512.19.63
Until DEC 31 Jewish Spaces and Itineraries: The Shoah of Molenbeek, Aspects of contemporary Judaism

KVS
Arduinkaaai 7; 02.210.11.12
Until NOV 17 Decors, photographs of Flanders by Peter De Bruyne

De Loge Architecture Museum
Klusstraat 86; 02.649.86.65
Until DEC 23 Vienna-Brussels: the Secession Years, the reciprocal artistic influence of the two capitals at the turn of the 19th century

Huis van de Culturen (Sint-Gillis)
Belgradostraat 120; 0496.08.76.36
Until OCT 28 Sojons.ici, group photography show

La Lettre volée
Barthélémylaan 28; 02.512.02.88
Until NOV 3 The Green(er) side of the Line, photographs by Alban Biaussat

De Markten
Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25
Until OCT 28 group show of contemporary art

Pascal Polar Gallery
Charleroisteenweg 108; 02.537.81.36
Until NOV 3 Une femme, photographs by Claude Fauville and texts by Claude Javeau

Royal Military Museum
Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33
Until NOV 2008 Penseel op het geweer (A Paintbrush in the Barrel), World War One paintings, drawings and etchings by soldiers

Royal Library
Kunstberg; 02.519.58.73
Until NOV 30 Bollandistes, Saints and Legends: 400 Centuries of Research, exhibition commemorating the 400th anniversary of the publication of Héribert Rosweyde's Fasti Sancti

Royal Museum of Art and History
Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11
Until DEC 2 A Princely Hobby, some 150 works from the workshops created by Charles de Lorraine to furnish his palatial residences
Until DEC 31 België op kijkdoosprenten, some 400 views of Belgian cities dating from the 17th and 18th centuries

Royal Museum of Fine Arts
Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11
Until JAN 27 Rubens: A Genius at Work, major show of works by the Flemish master and his workshop

Schaerbeek Cultural Centre
Lochtstraat 91-93; 02.245.27.25
Until DEC 7 Pekin Contemporain, contemporary art from China

Stadhuis

Grote Markt; 02.279.43.50

Until JAN 13 Van't stadt en schoone buytens, drawings and paintings of Brussels and its surroundings by 18th century artists Ferdinand-Joseph Derons and Andreas Martin

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33

Until NOV 18 Dots Obsession, walk-in balloon installation by contemporary Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60

Until NOV 18 Panamarenko's studio, selected contents of the Flemish artist's house donated to the museum

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28

Until DEC 16 The Wrong House: Alfred Hitchcock & Pauhof, exploration of architecture in the films of Alfred Hitchcock with installation by Austrian architectural firm Pauhof

Extra City, Center for Contemporary Art
Klamperstraat 40; 0484.42.10.70

Until DEC 16 Numerous Incidents of Indefinite Outcome, works by Joachim Koester

The Nine Monads Of David Bell, works by Luke Fowler

Fifty-One Fine Art Photography

Zirkstraat 20; 03.289.84.58

Until OCT 27 Los Sabena Club, vintage and modern prints by Malian photographer Malick Sidibe

FotoMuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00

Until JAN 6 Belgicum, Stephan Vanfleteren's photographs of Belgium, with humour and nostalgia

Hessenhuis

Falconrij 53; 03.206.03.50

Until NOV 25 Bivak Gloria, group show by Dwight Marica, Michele Matyun and friends

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Royal Museum of Fine Arts)

Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09

Until NOV 18 MuHKA at the KMSKA, installations by contemporary artists

Mark Manders, Nedko Solakov, Patrick Van Caeckenbergh, Jimmy Durham and Michelangelo Pistoleto, among others, on the occasion of MuHKA's 20th anniversary

Until DEC 31 The Rijksmuseum comes to the Scheldt, 40 16th- and 17th-century masterpieces, including paintings by Spranger and Goltzius plus works by Chiaroscuro painters lent by the Amsterdam museum

Mayer van den Bergh Museum

Lange Gasthuisstraat 19; 03.232.42.37

OCT 27-JAN 27 Facing death, drawings of the artist's dying wife by Eugène van Mieghem (1875-1930)

Middelheim Museum

Middelheimlaan 6; 03.827.15.34

Until OCT 28 Air Born Air Borne Air Pressure, inflatable sculptures by Paul McCarthy

The Dynamite Show, video by Koen Theys

Mode Museum (MoMu)

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70

Until FEB 10 Exuberant fashion designs by Bernhard Willhelm

Beersel

Herman Teirlinckhuis

Uwenberg 14

Until OCT 30 Small Stuff Three (Meeting Bernd Lohaus), contemporary art works in three locations in Flemish Brabant. See also Beersel's Frankveld and Drogenbos' Felix De Boeck Museum

Bruges

De Bond

Buiten Smedenvest 1; 050.44.30.48

Until NOV 4 Indefinite Reflections, works by Anneke Eussen

Gaasbeek

Kasteel

Kasteelstraat 40; 02.531.01.30

Until NOV 4 Allemaal ridders: from tough warriors to romantic heroes, medieval knights

Ghent

Caermersklooster

Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10

Until DEC 9 VIPs - Very Important Paintings, portraits by Karl Meersman

Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99

Until DEC 31 Studio Glass, the Alonso glassware collection from Art Nouveau to the 1960s
Until JAN 13 Retrospective covering the 65-year career of architect and designer Ettore Sottsass, with furniture, ceramics, glass, jewellery, architecture and industrial design

Museum Dr Guislain

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, www.museumdrguislain.be

Until APR 27 Sick: Between Body and Soul, the links between mental and physical pain

Museum of Fine Arts

Citadelpark; 09.240.07.00

Until JAN 13 British Vision, Observation and Imagination in British Art 1750-1950, with works by William Hogarth, Thomas Gainsborough, Stanley Spencer and Francis Bacon, among others

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03

Until DEC 2 Kunst Nu: Leaving These Landscapes Behind, monumental sculpture installation by Tim Volckaert
Until JAN 13 Daria Martin, two films by the American artist

Grimbergen

Strombeek-Bever Cultural Centre

Gemeenteplein; 02.263.03.43

Until OCT 31 Looking for the Border, show of recent Belgian and Italian art, with works by Marcel Broodthaers, Alighiero e Boetti, Guillaume Bijl and Cesare Pietrousti

Hasselt

Stedelijk Mode Museum

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21

Until DEC 30 Les Elégantes: Damesmode 1750-1950, two centuries of women's fashion with pieces from private Dutch collections

Z33

Zuivelmarkt 33 (in begijnhof); 011.29.59.60

Until DEC 12 Toegepast 12, works by young designers from Limburg, Wim Buts, Hanne De Wyngaert and others

Ieper

In Flanders Fields Museum

Grote Markt 34; 057.23.92.75

OCT 27-NOV 15 Oorlogsgesluijde, 1914-1918: drawings of war scenes by Henry De Groux

Knokke-Heist

Lagunahal

Krommedijk - Duinbergen; 050.63.04.30

Until NOV 30 Kunst & Wunderkammern, artists' rooms by Eric Angenot, Franck Bragigand, Loek Grootjans and others

Leuven

Park Abbey

016.20.30.20

Until DEC 21 In the name of God: 1000 years of monasticism, from the origins of the first monastic orders to today

Stuk

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20

Until NOV 11 Sculptures by Erwin Wurm

Don't miss this week



Leo van Velzen

King Lear, until 3 November at KVS Bol, Lakensestraat 146, Brussels. Tickets from 02.210.11.12 or www.kvs.be

One of Shakespeare's greatest and most affecting tragedies is given a fresh and appropriately eerie look by Alize Zandwijk of Rotterdam's RO Theater. The Dutch group collaborates with Brussels' KVS for this Dutch-language production starring Jack Wouterse, who skilfully embodies both the arrogance and confusion of a king too easily swayed by bewitching poetry from the mouths of the insincere.

Europalia: Festival of music, literature, dance, exhibitions and cinema celebrating the cultural diversity of the 27 EU countries
Until FEB 3 in venues across Brussels 02.507.85.94, www.europalia.eu

Hors Pistes: European contemporary circus festival. Guest of honour is Johan Le Guillerm with several performances of his show Secret/Cirque ici
NOV 1-28 in venues across Brussels 02.218.21.07, www.halles.be

The King: The Musical: tribute to Elvis Presley
Until OCT 24, 20.30 at Koninklijk Circus, Onderrichtsstraat 81, 02.218.20.15

Las Americas: Latin-American festival with singing competitions, festive music and traditional dance
OCT 24-31 at Théâtre Molière, Naamsepoortgalerij, Bastionsquare 3 02.217.26.00

Oboefest: International oboe symposium on the occasion of the 11th Congress of the French Oboe Association
OCT 24-29 at the Royal Conservatory of Music and other venues across Brussels www.obofest.be

Antwerp:

MY FLANDERS

Harry Kümel

Harry Kümel has been making frightening and stylish movies in Flanders for more than 50 years. His 1970s arthouse horror films are classics in both Europe and North America. He tells us about the Belgian love affair with surrealism and his next project.

Your 1971 film, *Daughters of Darkness*, was a huge success at home and abroad. Did you expect that reaction?

People I worked with said to me, 'why don't we make a good commercial film with your style?' I thought my style was not commercial. But we got Delphine Seyrig to play the lead, and she was experienced with this kind of subject matter – sex and horror – and it did work. It's a very colourful film, and Delphine is marvellous. *Daughters of Darkness* is the only Belgian movie that ever had a real career in the United States. It's a very minor kind of project, but people still like it. When it was shown at New York's Museum of Modern Art three years ago, they invited me.

All these MOMA kind of people, you know, they were gushing. You have to take it with a grain of salt, but it's nice nonetheless.

You made your first short in 1953 when you were only 13.

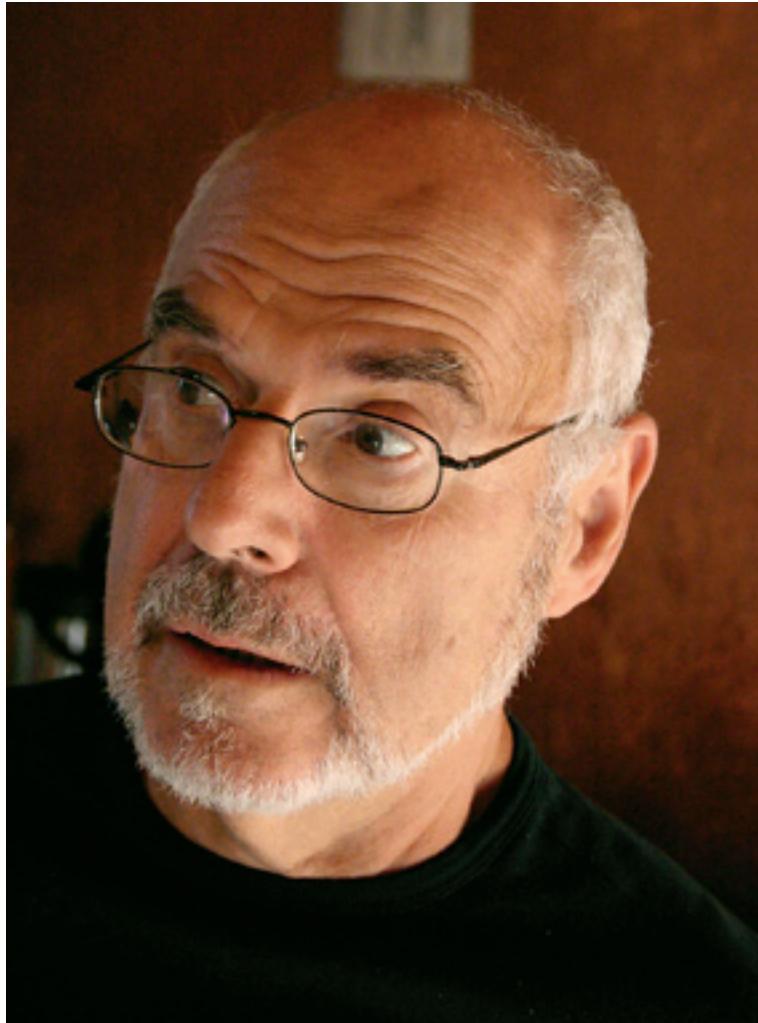
My father had a movie camera. I was a child, and making movies seemed rather spectacular. I became part of an amateur film club and met a lot of people who helped me. There was no industry whatsoever in our country then. Most filmmakers in Flanders are independent because there were no film schools. We went a lot to the cinema, two or three times a week. If you want to make movies, you have to go to the movies. I have taught film, and I see many students who don't even go to the movies!

You also made documentaries for Flemish television at a very young age before going on to make feature films.

Television enabled a lot of us to work. In those days, they experimented and took chances. I was extremely young, and they took a big chance on me. I was given a weekly programme about new films, so I met festival people and filmmakers, and it became my life's work. I made documentaries, too, but I was always more fascinated by the high drama and artificiality of movies. Even my documentaries are kind of reconstructed things. It's a question of style; I've never been interested in the construction of reality.

Is that the famous Belgian surrealism showing through?

The art is surreal because Belgium itself is. Even political life is surrealistic. But you must never forget that Belgium is a country of city states. Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent – they were all little entities of their own. That still weighs on the whole system. There is an underlying surrealism in painting and all the arts – always this twist of reality. Even in a realistic film, it's just an illusion of realism. Film has no realistic value whatsoever. It cannot. From the moment you choose a frame, you depart from reality. That's a big confusion, and I'm always angry at critics who devote most of their review to describing the story. If we are in



focus on style, which is typical for our cinema – relying more on form than anything else. Hitchcock did this, and he was despised for it by the intelligentsia at the time. This is because the form of his films overwhelmed people. Flemish films are more in that direction. When filmmakers try their hand at what is at this moment considered modern cinema – social subjects, hand held camera – it's not authentic, and I find them rather painful to watch. They're trying to make films that don't cost anything, and it doesn't work. That's not the way to make movies. It's style that survives, the rest dies the death of something that is of passing value. Content is temporary, but style is eternal.

You're working on a new film now, right?

Yes, about the questions that Belgians faced in a changing world after World War Two – a far more interesting and dangerous crisis than what they face now. Belgium was almost torn apart; it was a very tense situation. It has some historical figures and also fictional characters.

You were born in Antwerp, and you still live there. That must mean it suits you.

I like Antwerp; it's a nice city. But, you know, the Belgians are quite insular. That has historical roots. They have a tendency to remain in the place where they were born. I used to live in Brussels, but I don't like Brussels very much. I find it an incoherent city. I don't like all these awful European Community buildings. In Antwerp they are also doing terrible things – painting brick and concrete in a yellowish green. Buildings from the 70s are being renovated and put in a kind of Tupperware coating. They are very proud of it, but it's absolutely awful. When bureaucrats get involved with art, there are sad consequences.

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

Talking aid

"This man can talk to you about anything."

Kris Peeters
Minister-President of the Flemish Government
after meeting Bob Geldof in Antwerp

Europe's failings

The business climate in continental Europe is far from ideal. I think that it goes back to our Catholic tradition, which tells us that it's a little suspect to earn money.

Bart van Coppenolle
CEO Metris
Interviewed in *De Tijd*

Just listen

"He talked a lot about his mother, who was dead. We didn't know much about his situation; the only thing he talked about was his mother. I tried then just to listen."

Stien Cox
assistant at Kleine Kasteel centre, on a 12-year-old asylum seeker in Brussels

**Willem Elsschot Affordable Flanders
Boekenbeurs Tomas De Bruyne Verm
ist Bouwgrond Kaaithoater Dansaert
next week in Flanders Today**