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Going Dutch

Lisa Bradshaw

Belgium has six million Dutch speakers out of an estimated 21 million worldwide. But with French spoken across the capital and English taking over the world, is there still a reason to learn it?

If you live in Brussels, you may not hear a lot of Dutch being spoken. If you live in Flanders outside of the capital, you're surrounded by it – but you might find that the locals want to practice their English with you rather than let you try out your Dutch on them.

Dutch has been around for more than 1,500 years, having its origins in Old Frankish, a West Germanic language, around 450

AD. A "consonant split" led to the formation of Old Dutch at about the same time as Old English was taking hold in Britain.

But it's English, of course, that eventually emerged as the world language. And, as we've seen in the press lately, English is encroaching more and more into everyday life and business – both on a local scale and at the EU level.

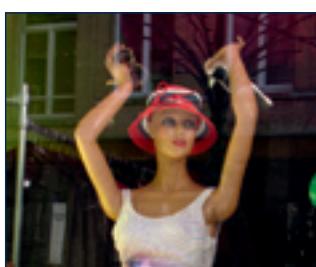
With the growing number of young people in Belgium want-

ing to learn English as a second language – rather than Dutch or French – locals are worried that their native language is in danger. Parents of students in Wallonia, for instance, report that their teenagers are choosing to study English over Dutch.

Even in Flanders, it seems that students are much more interested in their English grammar than their Flemish. "Flemish students have more interest in English than

in their own mother tongue," says Marian Vervinck, a language teacher in Ghent who has taught both Dutch grammar and English as a foreign language to Flemish students. "Dutch literature, for instance, is really not popular. They also find studying English more useful than their mother tongue."

Continued on page 3



Shopping

Looking for something unusual to buy your best friend? Need inspiration for a distant aunt? Four writers have walked the streets of four Flemish cities to pick out the best addresses around.

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Business

Belgians used to have to buy their mussels from the Netherlands, but they are now starting to cultivate their own in the cold waters off the Flemish coast.

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Interview

Shopkeepers howled in protest when Ghent council decided to turn the city centre into a vast pedestrianised district. But it all worked out in the end, explains mobility expert Yves De Baets.

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Verhofstadt cabinet back in the limelight

Caretaker PM could focus on "urgent business"

Derek Blyth

The search for a federal government took a new direction on Monday when the caretaker prime minister Guy Verhofstadt met with King Albert II. The aim of the meeting was to find out whether Verhofstadt could play a role in solving the political deadlock, which has left the country without a federal government for the past six months.

The meeting was called after Yves Leterme, the Flemish Christian Democrat leader, finally abandoned months of efforts to form a new centre-right government. His efforts

were hampered because Dutch-speaking and French-speaking parties could not agree on a package of state reforms. Leterme met King Albert at the palace on Saturday to say that he wanted to step down.

Verhofstadt emerged from his regular Monday-morning meeting with the King with a possible new proposal on the table. This would involve the caretaker government sitting down to tackle some urgent government business that can't be put off much longer in policy areas such as the 2008 budget, security and justice.

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Brussels cultural guide

On any night in Brussels, you may well be able to find a theatre group performing Brecht, a Japanese animation showing to a filmhouse packed with manga fanatics, a contemporary dance production that has been praised by *The New York Times*, a concert of Italian renaissance music in a cold baroque church, an upcoming rock band from the Sheffield suburbs, a visiting writer from Morocco reading poems in one of the Berber languages or a jazz band from Finland.

The population of Brussels hardly touches one million, yet the city's cultural programme is as diverse as Paris or Rome. So how do you keep in touch with what's going on? You can find some of the information in the Agenda section of *Flanders Today*, but if you live in Brussels or the Rand it's also worth picking up a copy of the annual Brussels Cultural Guide for a deeper insight into the artistic life of the capital.

This hefty guide lists all the coming exhibitions, festivals, heritage days, processions and concerts in Brussels. So if you have visitors coming in February, and you're wondering what on earth to do with them at such a dismal time of year, you can take a look in the cultural guide. And, hey, there's an exhibition on the 1958 Brussels World Fair at the Museum voor Architectuur. Problem solved.

You can get a lot of culture for your euro in Brussels thanks to the cheap ticket deals and the generosity of the Flemish authorities. The guide describes some of the ways you can enjoy culture on less than €10, including last-minute tickets at the Munt, Film Museum screenings and the one-day ticket that get you into all the venues on the Kunstberg for just €11.

The guide also provides a list of cultural venues where you can go with small children, such as the lively Sunday morning sessions at Bozar and behind-the-scenes tours at the Munt. Some of the possibilities are truly inspiring, such as the Saturday morning dance workshops for teenagers organised by the acclaimed PARTS dance theatre.

There are also useful tips on booking concerts that are likely to sell out months ahead. So if you want to see the Flemish choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaker performing in Brussels next March, you should be doing your online booking order this very minute.

Brussel De Culturele Gids 2008, with texts in Dutch, French and English, on sale in most Brussels bookshops, €19

online

www.agenda.be

Peter Nijhuis



No Dice at Kaaitheater

Flanders Today

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FACE OF FLANDERS



Tony Le Duc

Tony Le Duc has been photographing food for more than 20 years now. You can't pick up a Flemish magazine or newspaper without seeing his name alongside a masterfully framed photo of cheese-drenched cauliflower or fresh berry tarts. He's won a number of awards for his work and been featured in more than 20 books – five of them in collaboration with Flemish journalist Filip Verheyden. The latest, published this autumn, is *De keuken van ons moeder* (Our Mother's Kitchen), which features 40 Belgian mothers talking about their home cooking.

Why do simple preparations like tomato soup or stews taste so much better when mum cooks it? Le Duc and Verheyden asked themselves this question and then headed into the homes of mothers across the country for answers. The result is not just a journal of Belgian cuisine but also an affectionate portrait of Belgian women and the way their values shine through in their food. *De Keuken van ons moeder* serves as a record of old family recipes to take into the future and includes Belgian classics like *witloof met kaas en ham* (endive with cheese and ham), *stoofvlees* (meat stew) and *stoemp* (potatoes mashed up with vegetables). Whatever differences might exist between Flanders and Wallonia, these dishes can be found in kitchens across both regions.

The old favourites do, however, offer the occasional surprising variation, and many recipes reflect the women's various ethnic backgrounds or influences. Did the authors find out why mum's food tastes better? It's simply because you grew up with it, and it became the benchmark for comparing the same meal throughout your life. And you find it never tastes better than when it's made with you in mind. The authors also emphasise that a mother's kitchen is free from trends – it's a well-known place where modernity takes second place to comfort.

Le Duc photographed each mother in her own kitchen where she stands every day preparing meals – from families of just two to extended families of 20. Stepping back to allow the roomy kitchens to shine, the photos look as if they could have been taken 100 years ago – bursting with a sense of tradition and timelessness.

The massive 320-page book includes stories about the women and their favourite recipes, plus photos of their creations. From chervil soup to meatloaf with cherry sauce, Le Duc makes every plate look almost as scrumptious as the mums.

Lisa Bradshaw

Published by Homarus, in French and Dutch versions, €29.95

online

www.homarus.be



TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



Zwarte Piet

Children are getting restless. *Sinterklaas* is in the country, and on 6 December he visits each home with presents and oranges. You might think that *de Sint* is just a Continental version of Father Christmas. Far from it. If anything, it is the other way round: Dutch settlers took *Sinterklaas* to America, and Coca-Cola gave us Santa Claus. *De Sint* sails all the way from Spain in his steamboat. If you were in Antwerp in mid November you would have seen him being welcomed by the mayor and thousands of kids at the riverside. They sang as they saw his boat near:

Zie ginds komt de stoomboot uit Spanje weer aan.

Hij brengt ons Sint Nicolaas, ik zie hem al staan.

Hoe huppelt zijn paardje het dek op en neer.

Hoe waijen de wimpels al heen en al weer. On deck his horse, whose name is for some reason a secret, prances impatiently up and down as the banners flap in the wind. Besides him is his helper, *Zwarte Piet*. Together they pass through the crowds distributing sweets to the children. In the meantime, *de Sint* has been busy collecting wish lists, which he notes in his big red book.

De Sint and Santa have their similarities, but what really sets *de Sint* apart is *Zwarte Piet*. Black Peter, who delivers presents to children by slipping down the chimney while *de Sint* waits above on his white horse, has always been a controversial character. He is black, but is he African or is he black from soot? In the past, children were told that *Zwarte Piet* is so clever that he sees everything; he cannot make mistakes: *Alles ziet die slimme Piet/ zich vergissen kan hij niet.* So be good or *Zwarte Piet* will drag you off to Spain! *Zwarte Piet* is still smart but is no longer portrayed as a bogeyman. Children get so many presents these days that *pieten* have been cloned to help him. Some people see *Zwarte Piet* as a symbol of racial oppression. This was brought home to a group of Belgian students at an American university last year when they innocently blacked up to re-enact *Sinterklaas* and were hauled up in front of the dean.

The town of Sint-Niklaas not far from Antwerp likes to claim *de Sint* as its own, since he is their patron saint. The town's website tells us that *het Huis van de Sint* is a nice big house in the heart of the town. *Stationsstraat 85*. A visit to his house will answer all those questions about his eating and sleeping habits that have been niggling you. *Wanneer en wat eet de Sint? Waar slaapt de Sint?*

To ensure that *de Sint* knows what to bring you, write him at the new address De Post has dreamt up: *Sinterklaas, Spanjestraat, 0612 Hemel*.

Flemish children address their letters to Spain while French-speaking kids send theirs to heaven. Even if this Belgian compromise will not please everyone, at least the postcode will help you remember the date.

Alistair MacLean

online
www.vandale.be

FEATURE

Huis van het Nederlands



Dutch for beginners

Continued from page 1

If we can't even get Belgian kids interested, is Dutch in danger of dying out as a language? Willy Smedts, a Dutch linguist at KU Leuven, dismisses this notion. "Out of 6,000 languages in the world, Dutch is number 37 on the list," he says. "Thirty-seven is not bad at all." He adds that there is no sign of declining numbers – the number of Dutch speakers and the number of people learning Dutch outside Belgium and the Netherlands has been steady for more than 10 years. "There is no immediate threat to Dutch," he says emphatically. "It is not a language that will disappear in this century."

His opinion is backed up by statistics: there are 21 million Dutch speakers in the world, and it's taught in more than 35 countries outside Flanders and the Netherlands. Ten thousand students are studying Dutch as a main course subject in 240 universities outside the Low Countries. "Those are good numbers," says Smedts, who also notes that there has been no drop-off over the last decade.

But why so much interest in Dutch outside the Dutch-speaking countries? There are three major reasons, explains Smedts: cultural, historical and economical. "Some students want to understand the Dutch better in order to study Dutch art or the Flemish Primitives," he says. And then there are the former colonies of both Belgium and the Netherlands. "Indonesia was a long-time colony of the Netherlands, and a great deal of the law and texts are in Dutch,"

he says. "So many people study Dutch there because they want to read those kinds of texts." The third reason is the most common for countries that border Belgium and the Netherlands – speaking Dutch makes you more employable. "Northern France is a relatively poor area, and the southern part of Flanders is strong economically, so people study Dutch so they can work in that area" he explains.

Plenty of expatriates in Brussels and Flanders are adding to the statistics by learning Dutch. Sharon Light is an American taking Dutch classes at VUB in Brussels. She speaks French but wants to learn the language of her partner, who is from the Netherlands. Aside from her class, she sees a Dutch tutor once a week. Like many English speakers, she says it's easier to learn Dutch if you speak English. Since Dutch is a Western Germanic language (as opposed to Northern Germanic languages like Swedish and Danish), this holds true for most English and German speakers.

Other students have it a little tougher. Hsiao Chung-Chen is from Taiwan and studies Dutch in Ghent. "We indeed encounter more difficulties than European speakers because so many words in Dutch come from French, German, English and Latin." She notes that Asian learners have an especially tough time with structure and grammar. "I can't imagine that somebody who's from my culture – who doesn't speak English, German or French – could learn Dutch easily."

What makes Hsiao's experience even more difficult is that locals immediately switch to English when they sense her Dutch is less than perfect. In fact, all Dutch learners have this problem in Flanders because the Flemish are so keen to speak English. Smedts admits it is a big problem, especially now that many Masters degree courses in Flanders are taught in English, attracting students who may not be seriously studying the language. "We quickly change to English when we meet people who are not native speakers," he laments. "If we want to communicate, it's easier for us." But he suggests that foreign students learning Dutch should fight it rather than give in. "You should say, 'speak Dutch, please'" Smedts suggests the best way to

learn Dutch is to enrol in a course and then start watching television. "Our programmes are subtitled, which really helps you to understand what is being said," he explains. "If you speak English or French, watch films in those languages with Dutch subtitles. It's a great help in learning the language."

Good old fashioned submersion is also invaluable. Vervinckt, who now teaches both beginners' and advanced Dutch to foreigners in adult education, knows this from experience. "When I studied English at university, my father would send me to stay with English-speaking families during the vacations. I learned more in a month than I had in three years of secondary education!"



Learning Dutch

There are many ways to learn Dutch in Flanders. You can listen to FM Brussel at 98.8 as you drive to work, watch Witse on Flemish TV or read our own correspondent Alistair MacLean in *Flanders Today* every week. Here are a few other ways to get to grips with the language.

Huis van het Nederlands

With locations in Brussels and other cities across Flanders, Huis van het Nederlands, or House of Dutch, provides information on all Dutch-language courses in your area. It's a good place to begin your search for the perfect course. Several locations also offer socialisation courses in English, French and other languages to help you settle into living in the region.

online

www.huisnederlandsbrussel.be

De Rand

De Rand organises Dutch language courses in several community centres in the Flemish belt. The emphasis is on teaching everyday Dutch and introducing newcomers to Flemish culture.

online

www.derand.be

Oefen hier je Nederlands

This scheme tries to encourage foreigners living in Flanders to speak more Dutch in local shops. Flemish shopkeepers are asked put signs in their window inviting customers to: "Oefen hier je Nederlands" (Try out your Dutch here).

online

www.oefenhierjeNederlands.be

Babbelut

Babbelut language cafés are relaxed places where you can talk Dutch with other foreigners. They are organised by Bru-taal at the Elzenhof Flemish centre in Elsene and five other cultural centres in Brussels. No need to book. Just turn up on the night and start babbling.

online

www.bru-taal.be

Taalblad

Taalblad is an online magazine run by Koen Van Kelekom that has short news stories in Dutch and helpful translations of selected words into English. It's a very well-constructed site with a friendly grammar guide and some useful insights into Flemish life.

online

www.taalblad.be

Café Combinne

Foreigners can talk to Flemish people in Dutch at one of the Café Combinne evenings organised by the province of Flemish Brabant. Language cafés take place in 10 different locations across the province.

online

www.cafecombinne.be

CLL

CLL runs a range of language classes in Brussels and Wallonia, including Dutch classes taught by experienced native speakers. Not the cheapest option, but classes are small and friendly, and attract a mixture of European civil servants, French-speaking Belgians and international students. Click on the French version on the website, not the English, to get full details of Dutch classes.

online

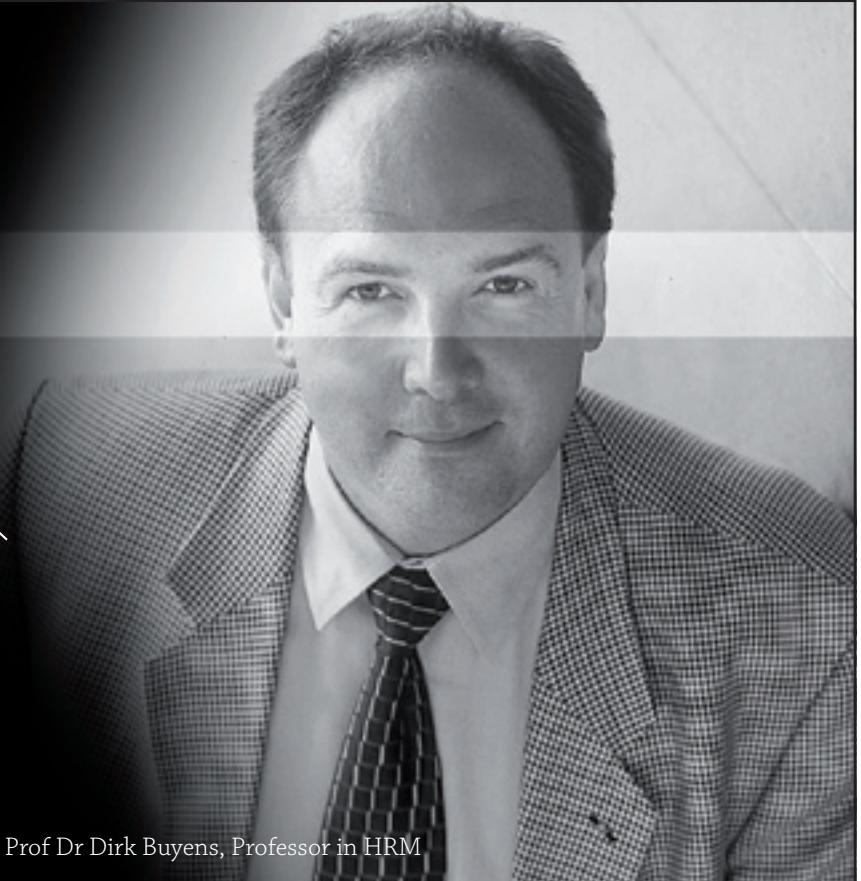
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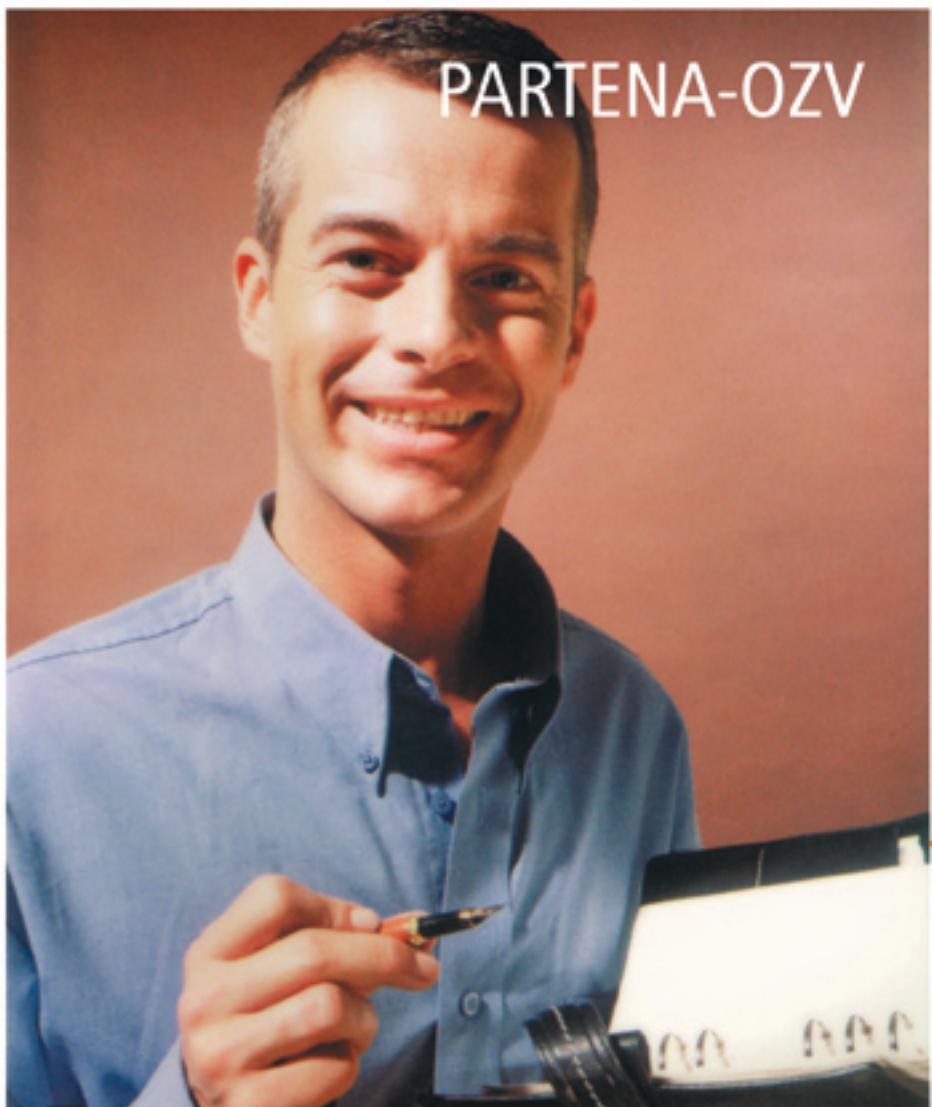
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Verhofstadt back in the limelight



Continued from page 1

The outgoing government would deal with the backlog of urgent cases one by one in parliament in the hope that they could secure a majority of votes.

Some newspapers reported that Verhofstadt would be given extended powers to lead an emergency cabinet, but this proposal was rejected in favour of a milder solution in which the cabinet would focus on urgent business.

The idea of a crisis cabinet was rejected by the Flemish liberal party Open VLD chairman Bart Somers. "It would be too easy to call on Guy Verhof-

stadt now to solve all the problems that have been building up over the past weeks and months," he said. He argues that the country needs a government that can deal with ongoing business under the control of the parliament. Somers pointed out that Verhofstadt's caretaker government would have to seek a broad consensus within the parliament since it no longer held a majority of seats.

Some constitutional experts have already argued that the proposed new arrangement may be incompatible with Belgian constitutional law. Further news updates can be found on the website www.flanderstoday.eu.

Ghent bans city officials from wearing headscarves or crucifixes in the workplace

Alan Hope

A majority of Ghent council members voted last week to forbid the wearing of headscarves by city employees who come in contact with the public – a proposal originally tabled by the far-right Vlaams Belang. The decision, however, split the ruling coalition in the city, with socialists opposing the ban and liberals voting in favour. The vote was carried by a majority made up of the liberal VLD, Christian democrat CD&V and Vlaams Belang. Socialists and Greens voted against.

Two women who opposed the headscarf ban have vowed to fight on against the measure: Fatma Pehlivan (sp.a), who is of Turkish origin, and former nun Monica Van Kerrebroeck (CD&V). Ms Pehlivan said it was "the darkest day of my political career". "I am wounded to the very depths of my soul," she said after the vote.

As city alderman for personnel affairs, Ms Pehlivan will now have to put the decision into practice. There are currently three women in the city administration who will be affected, and five working in city daycare facilities. But the ban also extends to all "outward signs of religious, ideological or political belief". "I don't know how many people wear crucifixes or other signs," Ms Pehlivan said. "But they won't be allowed to any more either."

However there were signs that the ban might not be strictly enforced. Speaking on radio, Ms Pehlivan said staff members had the right to ignore the rule. When challenged whether she would sanction anyone who did, she replied, "That's not my job. I cannot punish individual members of staff. The head of service compiles a dossier which I then bring before the college of aldermen. The person concerned has the right to be heard."

One Muslim woman, unlike Ms Pehlivan a wearer of the headscarf, said she had no intention of leaving her scarf at home. "I am in the union and I have rights," the woman, who works for the city's integration service, told one newspaper.

Supporters of the ban tried to draw a line under the ruling. Francis Van den Eynde (VB) took delight in the split in the Ghent coalition. "That was not the reason for our proposal, but from an opposition standpoint of course it's always a pleasure to see," he said. "The vote on Monday evening torpedoed the image of left-wing Ghent."

Moral philosopher professor emeritus Etienne Vermeersch called for the ban, which now exists in Lokeren, Antwerp and Ghent, to be adopted throughout Flanders. "Every time Vlaams Belang brings the proposal forward it gathers the public to its side," he said. He recognised that Muslims would be the most apparent victims, but pointed out that his own position has always been one of principle. "Twenty years ago I called in an article for a ban on crosses in the courts, to retain the appearance of impartiality." While claiming the ban was "not about Islam" he went on, "I hope this discussion about clothing rules out of the seventh century can finally be dropped."

Sister Monica also voted out of principle, she said, this time in opposition to the ban (and her party whip). As well as the right to free expression and the woman's right to self-determination, she also found as a person of faith that it was impossible to vote for the measure. "We no longer live in the time of the catacombs," she said. "Religious belief is played out in public these days, and that's a good thing."

Belga



Coast battered by storms

Many regions of Flanders were battered by storms last Sunday, with winds of up to 100km/h and torrential rain. People were warned to stay indoors and avoid wooded areas because of the risk of falling trees. The storm blew off a roof in Ostend and demolished a partly-built warehouse in Bruges. Some ships were guided into port by helicopter after pilot services were suspended. But no one was seriously injured.

Dutch end Belgian border checks

Dutch authorities have lifted checks on traffic on the border with Belgium, imposed as a measure to combat the import of illegal fireworks in the run-up to New Year. The judicial authorities will now turn their attention to large-scale dealers. However local police will continue to stop and search vehicles they suspect may be carrying fireworks.

New Year is the traditional time for the Dutch to let off fireworks, but the size and strength of those sold in The Netherlands is strictly limited by law. More powerful fireworks are freely available in Belgium, leading to much cross-border smuggling at this time of year. Dutch plain-clothes police had been keeping dealers on this side of the border under surveillance and passing details of suspicious customers to border patrols.

Scala sings with José Carreras



Scala, a Flemish girls' choir from Aarschot, has been invited by Spanish tenor José Carreras to join him in a special German gala concert on 13 December. The choir of about 60 girls, led by the Kolacny Brothers, shot to fame a few years ago with a mixed repertoire of classical songs and pop arrangements. They will perform one of the songs from their recent CD *One Winged Angel* during the show, which will be broadcast live on the German channel ARD in front of an estimated 10 million viewers.

HIV tests to be offered in Antwerp gay haunts

A programme of HIV-testing in popular nightspots frequented by Antwerp gays is to be launched from March next year. The project – run jointly by Antwerp University, the Institute for Tropical Medicine and the sexual health organisation Sensoa – aims to tackle the growing number of HIV infections within the gay community, now reckoned to be one in three. The test programme will concentrate on one sauna and a fetish-bar and will offer the full HIV test rather than the quick test. Not only have the numbers of HIV infections doubled in six years, but cases are being discovered later in the progress of the infection towards full Aids.

Flemish school students see no reason to strike

School student representatives in Flanders last week appealed for calm in reaction to an email calling for students to strike in support of their Dutch counterparts. As thousands of Dutch students demonstrated against an increase in class hours to 37 per week, Jef Bortels, the 15-year-old chair of the students' representative body VSK said, "I don't see what we have to strike over." Meanwhile an email was widely circulated calling for "all school students in Belgium" to go on strike at the first morning break and gather by the local town hall. The appeal, in the end, was ignored with only a few exceptions, most notably in Oudenaarde, where about 400 took part in a peaceful march.

Cost puts poor off doctor visits

Six out of ten Flemish people on low incomes have no hospital insurance, and 17% have been forced to postpone a visit to the doctor because they could not afford to pay, according to a study carried out by the University of Antwerp. Poor families in general, despite having more medical complaints than average, say that coping with the rising costs of medical care is "difficult to impossible". The report said that poverty is a direct cause of not only physical but also mental ill-health, leading to increased stress, sleep disorders, depression and anxiety.

Self-employment is "exciting but tiring" study says

The self-employed are motivated by their work but suffer problems of stress and pressure of work, according to a poll of 2,400 self-employed in Flanders carried out by the Social-Economic Council (Serv). Nearly half find pressure of work "problematic", but two-thirds said they had a good balance of work and private life. Half of all self-employed people work more than 50 hours a week. The problems of work pressures were worse in the restaurant industry and least serious in the professions.

Labour rules aimed at improving the work-home balance for employees, such as the chance to take leave of absence to pursue education or training, have had a negative effect on the self-employed, according to the head of Unizo, the union for the self-employed. "They leave a gap which, because of the tightness of the labour market, has to be filled by the employer himself," said Unizo head Karel Van Eetvelt.

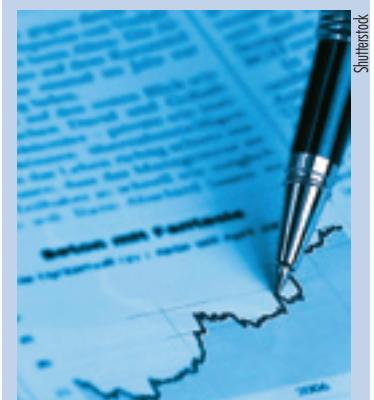
Two more diamond thieves behind bars

Police in Turin in Italy have arrested two more members of the gang accused of carrying out the diamond robbery in Antwerp in February 2003, in which diamonds worth at least €100 million were stolen. The detention of Pietro Tavano and Ferdinando Finoto on a request from the Antwerp prosecutor means all four gang members are now in custody. Two weeks ago, an Italian court gave leave to hand over computer expert Elio d'Onorio, while gang-leader Leonardo Notarbartolo is already serving a 10-year sentence in Hasselt prison. No trace has yet been found of the stolen diamonds.

Telenet takes over last slice of Flanders' cable operation

Flemish cable operator Telenet last week became the region's sole provider, with the takeover of Interkabel for €170 million cash and €150-190 million in compensation. Interkabel was a consortium of four intercommunal networks covering some 800,000 homes, mainly in Hasselt, Bruges and Antwerp. Their subscribers had been able to buy Internet and telephone access from Telenet, but not digital TV – the thing Telenet most wants to push. The move means the whole of Flanders is now split between two mammoth operators in the lucrative digital TV market: Telenet, which controls the cable, and Belgacom, which has 100 percent of the phone-lines.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



10,000

Candidates applying this year to sit the entrance exam for admission to the federal police force. The figure was 600 more than 2006, according to Rudy Cosyns of the police recruitment service. "We are communicating better," Cosyns said.

10

Number of restaurants in Flanders awarded their first star in the Michelin 2008 guide. Only two Belgian restaurants received the coveted three-star rating: the Hof van Cleve in Kruishoutem and De Karmeliet in Bruges.

2,144 hectares

Area of land in Flanders classified as nature reserves in 2007, according to the 2007 Nature Report. The figure is the largest area ever classified in one year. Flemish minister for the environment and nature, Hilde Crevits, is praised for her policy, which is aimed at protecting endangered plants and animals.

250

One-day-old chicks left in three cardboard boxes in the Zoniënwoud woods outside Brussels. They were found by a couple who were out on a Sunday walk in the woods. A fourth box with 62 chicks was found the following day in a park in Watermaal-Bosvoorde, southern Brussels. The police launched an investigation after dozens of other boxes were found dumped in Brussels parks. They came from a plane that was due to transport 5,000 live chicks to Ethiopia. The boxes were dumped on the tarmac and distributed among ground crew.

30,000 litres an hour

Rate of leakage from drinking-water pipes after a break in the 116-km network under Oudenaarde. The leak took 12 days to find but only hours to fix. The water will eventually return to the water-table, according to Leuven University hydrology expert Lean Berlamont. He added that Flemish businesses alone consume 547 billion litres of drinking water a year – more than 80,000 times the amount lost to the leak. The cost to the municipality will be €5,000 - €6,000.



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Shopping in style

a guide to holiday shopping in Flanders

Monique Philips

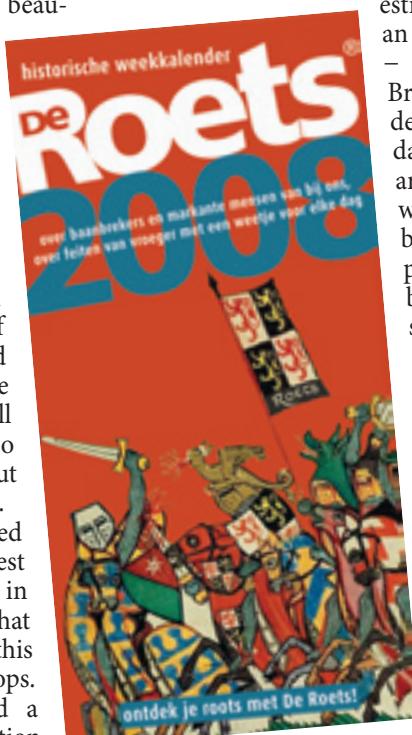


The intelligent shopper

Let's face it: gift giving can be hard at this time of year. But you have several things on your side if you live in Flanders: you have some of the best shopping in Europe, some of the most beau-

tiful cities in the world – and our guide to tell you where to go. Welcome to the first-ever Flanders Today Gift Guide. Tear it out and take it with you when you visit one of our four featured cities, where we've already done all the footwork, so you don't miss out on the best places.

We have focused on four of the best shopping areas in Flanders and what you can find this season in the shops. But if you need a simple suggestion for something you can give to anybody (someone you don't know very well, the girl who has everything), there are two absolutely perfect gift choices.



Roets 2008 has hits the shelves at Standaard Boekhandel and Fnac, and its fourth edition is the nicest looking yet. This snappy little wall calendar has an interesting European historical fact – mostly about Brussels or Flanders – on every date. The pages are arranged by week, and the back of every page has a biography of some famous (or at least highly interesting) Flemish person.

Roets began publishing a few years ago to introduce both Belgians and foreigners to the Flemish scientists, writers, sportspeople, opinion makers and others who made Flanders what it is today. The language has been kept simple in order to be readable to those who don't speak Dutch as

a first language, and it provides a great day-by-day history lesson. The short, anecdotal biographies are utterly engrossing, so you end up reading through the calendar as if it was a book.

Roets costs €10.95 and can also be ordered online at www.roetsinfo.eu.

Bongo cadeaubons, or gift vouchers, allow the recipient to choose the gift they get. You buy a



voucher for one of 46 different categories on offer, and your chosen one gets a sleek little box with the voucher and a book describing all the possibilities. Dozens of businesses in Belgium and The Netherlands have now signed up to Bongo. Our favourites are the Sauna for 2 (€34,90)

Tip: The price you pay for the Bongo gift vouchers is always cheaper than the normal rate

– so you can buy one for your self as well without breaking the bank.

Lisa Bradshaw

Speculoos

Speculoos (photo, above) is a type of shortbread biscuit traditionally baked in the Low Countries for children on St Nicolas' Eve, 5 December. The biscuits are thin, slightly browned and flavoured with a variety of spices such as cinnamon, ginger, cloves and cardamom. The surface is normally decorated with a distinctive figure, such as Saint Nicholas, which is moulded into the mixture before baking.

The word *speculoos*, or *speculaas*, possibly comes from the Latin *speculum*, which means a mirror – since the biscuit is a mirror image of the mould.

You can find shops selling speculoos in Brussels, Lille and Ghent, but Hasselt claims to have the best *speculoos* (see our shopping guide). Many cafés in Flanders serve a thin *speculaas* biscuit with coffee. Those that don't may find that their customers soon drift off to another establishment.

The little cellophane-wrapped biscuits that are served in cafés are produced by Lotus Bakeries in Lembeke, East Flanders. Founded more than 70 years ago by a Flemish family, the business has grown into a major enterprise that supplies one in five biscuits eaten in Belgium.

Derek Blyth

Style cities: Antwerp and Hasselt

Antwerp



Nadine Wijnants Kloosterstraat Akotee Melkmarkt Huis A Boon Lombardenvest Stadsfeestzaal

Antwerp is the shopping capital of Flanders, and we could write a book on the subject. But here are a few places to mark down on your must-visit list. Jewelry designer Nadine Wijnants on Kloosterstraat 26 has been creating exquisite, eclectic baubles for almost two decades. Inspired by flora and fauna and the Far East, her cuffs, chokers and rings walk the line between bohemian and esoteric. The floral ring with star ruby comes in white or yellow gold and starts at €1,800, while a silver oak leaf choker is €190.

Kitsch is king at Akotee (Melkmarkt 30), which sells affordable guilty pleasures that amp up the camp. Plastic tablecloths and laptop bags are covered in fruits, flowers and other dizzying prints. Rubber ducky lamps and mushroom stools right

out of *Alice in Wonderland* are the perfect gifts for the person who has everything – but wants more. Our favourites? The “Boss Lady” lunchbox and the “Kitsch Kitchen” laptop bag.

It has been around for over 120

peek-a-boo leather, and from fur-trimmed to zebra print or even crocodile. A modest pair of black leather gloves is €98, while you can splurge out on the waffle-weave leather pair at €155.

Belgium is, believe it or not, the world's leading producer of aramith, the material used to make billiard balls. Hubert Verstraeten works aramith into a selection of cufflinks, earrings and other jewellery that makes a whimsical fashion statement. Brit fashion phenomenon Paul Smith is such a fan that Verstraeten does a special line of cufflinks just for him. A simple pair of cufflinks starts at €60, but special orders can bling it up with gemstones starting at €180. Verstraeten cuff links can be bought at Ilse de Keulenaer, Schuttershofstraat 38, Antwerp.

Steven Tate



Hasselt



Donum's Noëlla Vangeel: "Black is back"

Denis Van Esser Jeurissen Cools Donum Design Bakkerij Wertelaers Maastricht terstraat Stijn Helsen Kapelstraat

Hasselt is an island of upscale shopping in the otherwise casual and modest Limburg province. It advertises itself as the “City of Good Taste”, and there are several fashionable hubs where you can experience this sense of style straight away. To immerse yourself in the smell of perfume, walk down the Kapelstraat where all the established family businesses line the street. Eat tasty patisserie at Cools, a fine bakery since 1883, while eyeing the fashionable shoppers on the opposite side of the street, at Jeurissen (motto: “fun shopping with a glass of champagne”). Don’t look for price tags at the new Helsen flagship store – high-class fashion retailers since 1939 and home of designer Stijn Helsen – there aren’t any. Feeling priceless yourself? In Hasselt, you’ll find exclusive jewelry and Belgium’s only mechanical watch, the A-ONE, by designer Denis Van Esser. Other fine jewelry designers are clustered on the Maastrichterstraat, known to the locals as “Silver Alley”.

At number 52, you’ll find Bakery Wertelaers, famous hereabouts for its home-made cakes, waffles and big hearts of *Hasseltse speculoos*. Around the corner, at Walputstraat 2, is the enchanting if some-

what disorderly shop of hat designer Jeanne Reekmans.

The huge Donum interior design store, located in the grand former post office at Havermarkt 31, is an absolute delight, and so is its owner Noëlla Vangeel. “Black is back”, she insists. Expect everything in black and white – except perhaps the funny Alessi porcelain nativities. The Chilewich place-mats and the delicate-looking yet sturdy tableware by designer Piet Stockmans all withstand the dishwasher effortlessly, she assures her customers.

Donum is perfect for gifts: you

can pick up good-looking, utilitarian objects, such as Eva Solo thermoses, Stelton bread bags and the super-soft Italian Missoni day robes. Kids might hate scarves, but they’ll love the animal-shaped “I strangle you” by Linde Hermans. The Belgian Baobab candles are inspired by South African smells, and the Belgian Gardeco ceramic “Cores da Terra” collection by Brazilian fruits. Black might be back, but I just adored the huge red apples, which would keep you snug all winter long.

Monique Philips



All the latest in porcelain nativities

Best buys in Bruges and Brussels

Bruges



Everything old is new again at Ark van Zarren

You'll find no lack of shops in Bruges – and that can sometimes be the problem. With so much to choose from, where does one start? Well, if Bruges is your destination, you might just find everything you need in three simple stops.

Ark van Zarren at Zuidzandstraat 19 is a Bruges classic – and for good reason. The owners, who also run a bed and breakfast in West Flanders, stock it with their personal style: contemporary romantic country. You'll find gorgeous iron hardware for the home and a multitude of housewares that look antique but mostly aren't. Water pitchers, lamps and dishes combine with cheekier products – polka dotted umbrellas by Lisbeth Dahl and Kama Sutra notecards (that are more stylish than sensual). Don't miss the linens and the large selection of personal care products by Le Père Pelle. I could buy myself presents here for the rest of my life.

I never thought I would be the kind of person to recommend a museum shop, let alone to buy a tie as a gift – but here I go. I was taken in by the Groeninge Museum shop on Dijver, which is strategically located outside the fine arts museum. It has its own entrance so you can go in anytime without having to buy a museum ticket. It has all the usual gift shop stuff, but it also has an excellent collection of art books – from the modern, gender-bending *The Eighth Square: Gender, Life and Desire in Art since 1960* to the more wholesome *The Flemish Primitives*. Most of the art books have texts in both English and Dutch. I was also taken with the selection of Robin Ruth ties selling at a mere €12. They're surprisingly sophisticated; my favourites were the deep red and blue versions decorated with musical notes or composers.

If you're looking for something a little more personal, let Dino or Griet over at De Zilvermijn help you out. Their shop at Sint-Amandstraat 39 sells a dazzling collection of semi-precious and native American jewellery for both boys and girls. For simpler tastes, take a look at the cute little coral-beaded bracelets.

ArkvanZarren Dijver GroeningeMuseumShop Zuidzandstraat DeZilvermijn

For something more shiny, check out the beautiful silver necklaces with garnet, crystal and other glittering stones. They have a particularly good selection of amber in stock. Prices range from under €20 to many hundreds.

Lisa Bradshaw



Mining for silver (and jade and crystal) in Bruges

Brussels



**Stijl PierreMarcolini NewDeWolf Zavel
What? ArtShop Brüssel Wittamer
Kolenmarkt**

Brussels has several shopping districts, but you nearly always have to climb a hill to get from one to the other. That's half the fun of shopping in this city. The other half is finding strange little places in unexpected streets.

Chocolates are the obvious thing to buy in Brussels at this time of year, or any other time for that matter. Join the long queue at Pierre Marcolini on the Zavel for the most stylish black box imaginable or step over to the other side of the square for Wittamer's more traditional nibbles.

But maybe you're looking for something a little less obvious. You must then take a stroll down the Kolenmarkt as it meanders between Grote Markt and Anspachlaan. Between the gay bars and wood-lined cafés, some of the city's most creative shops can be found. One of the maddest is What? at number 74, which is currently stocked with a huge assortment of international airline bags. Across the street, Incontrì has Christmas decorations, wooden figures and cards. A few doors down, Lezarts du Cirque is a surprising little shop where you can pick up circus gadgets for small children.

Still not found anything? Take a deep breath and start climbing

Kunstberg. On your left, about half way up, you will see a music store called La Boîte à Musique. Push open the door and step inside the hushed interior, which is more like a private home than a shop. La Boîte has a royal warrant, which means that King Albert II buys CDs here. So mind your manners.

Not convinced about the CD idea? Then head up the hill a bit further and you come to the Museum of Fine Arts. Its Art Shop on the ground floor is full of creative gifts, like books on the Flemish Masters, Bruegel notepads, Warhol coffee mugs and Magritte mousepads.

Still searching for the perfect gift? Then it's back down the hill

and left along Hoogstraat until you come to the shop at number 91. It's called New De Wolf, and it's been around for decades. They stock everything you could possibly need in a warren of small rooms furnished in different styles. One looks like a castle dining room, another resembles a Knokke seaside villa. There are lots of odd little things that you don't find anywhere else. Nothing is too expensive, which makes it the perfect place to take young children if they want to buy something for a grandmother. Just give them a five euro note and let them loose.

Derek Blyth



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PORTS

The battle of the ports

Antwerp takes on Rotterdam

Shutterstock



Antwerp means business

Marc Maes

The ports of Antwerp and Rotterdam are locked in a new battle to provide safe container transport. The struggle for supremacy has intensified as the January 2008 deadline approaches for implementation of a new European regulation on the safety of international container transport. European ports have already been put under strain because of the need to implement the International Ship and Port Facility Code (ISPS) issued in July 2004 following the 11 September attacks. The new regulation is another challenge to keep the port management awake at night.

The European Commission set the fuse burning when it decided to compile a list of certified logistic port operators equipped to offer a "green container line service," or green container lanes. This requires ports to providing a rapid turnaround time by customs and port authorities, saving shipping operators up to four days. "In our 'just-in-time' driven business model, four days is an immense gain," explains Patricia Ceysens, Flemish minister of Economic Affairs, in an interview with the Flemish daily *De Standaard*. "To get on that certified list is crucial for many Flemish port

operators."

The European Union's customs administration is charged with the task of certifying the logistic service providers. It will use a uniform methodology across all European ports which was developed by the Vlaams Instituut voor de Logistiek, or Flanders Institute for Logistics (VIL).

The EU has now launched an official tender procedure, inviting organisations to submit project proposals for computerised exchange of security data on suppliers, shipping agencies, clients and traders. A Flemish consortium called 'Smart Container Chain Management' (SCCM) has put in a bid to win this €12.5 million contract.

The SCCM consortium is an ambitious undertaking that brings together some 37 partners, including the ports of Antwerp and Zeebrugge, the IT company Porthus and the VIL. But it faces serious competition from the Port of Rotterdam, which was recently recognised by the United States as one of the most secure ports in the world.

Patricia Ceysens argues that winning this project is of vital importance to the logistics sector in Flanders. The Flemish government has already invested €3 million in a bid to get the Flemish "green

container project" established as a European standard.

Eddy Bruyninckx, general manager of the Port of Antwerp (Gemeentelijk Autonomo Havenbedrijf Antwerpen) confirms that Antwerp and Rotterdam are competing for this project. "Both ports are fighting for a share of the enormous container flows coming from the Far East. The big advantage of Antwerp compared to Rotterdam is that it can handle large volumes in a congestion-free port. The Deurganckdock, the new container dock, adds a capacity of some seven million TEU (container units) to the existing seven million."

Another advantage Antwerp has up its sleeve is that it offers a congestion-free transport network into the heart of Europe. The authorities are constantly improving the road and rail infrastructure and increasing the handling capacity for barges. But they also have to be able to guarantee maximum security without slowing down the container flows. To achieve these aims, Belgian customs officials are now drawing up a list of Authorised Economic Operators and negotiating the creation of "green lanes" with China, Russia, the United States, Korea and India. The battle of the ports has only just begun.

Flemish Mussels catch on

Long queues lined the quayside to taste the first Flanders Queen Mussels of the season. The mussels were bred in cages off the Flemish coast by the sustainability department of the Flanders Marine Institute in an experimental project that involves "hanging cultivation." Once they had been brought ashore, the first batch of some 3,000 portions of mussels was distributed free of charge. Experts from the Flemish Marine Institute said the new mussels had a very rich and intense briny flavour and the Federal Food Agency awarded the mussels an A certificate.

Up until now Belgians have had to rely on *Zeeuwse mosselen* bred in the waters of Dutch Zeeland to satisfy their almost insatiable appetite for mussels. But there have been complaints in recent



years about Dutch growers artificially inflating the price of mussels.

The Flemish have tried in the past to grow their own mussels, but efforts have always failed. This time experts are more confident that they can create a sustainable Flemish mussels industry that will fill the pots of Belgium. Some 200 kg of mussels was produced this year, but breeders are predicting a yield of at least 14 tons next year. This will make a sizeable dent in the

Dutch mussel industry, which sends about 29 tons of mussels to Belgium every year.

The Belgians are expected to welcome the home-grown product. Says Ivan Victor of the Association of Sustainable Fish Farming: "We did a trial with various people, offering them both *Zeeuwse mosselen* and Belgian mussels – and 80% preferred the Belgian variety."

BUSINESS FLASH



Shutterstock

Coopernic

Coopernic, the association of discount retailers partly owned by Halle-based Colruyt (in partnership with the French Leclerc group, Switzerland's Coop, Italy's Conad and Germany's Rewe company), has acquired an 80% share of Iki, the leading retailer in the Baltic States.

Ping An Insurance

Ping An Insurance, a leading Chinese insurance company, has become the largest shareholder of Fortis, a major Belgian financial institution. The Shenzhen-based firm has acquired a stake of some 4.18% and could buy additional shares to reach 4.8% of the capital. It has been offered a directorship on the Fortis board. Meanwhile, Fortis has been named "Bank of the Year" in Western Europe by the UK-based magazine *The Banker*. It was also elected Belgium's bank of the year for the fifth time in six years.

E.ON

German energy company E.ON has plans to build a €1.5 billion coal-fired power station in the Antwerp Port area to produce up to 1,100 megawatts. It would be the country's largest power plant, accounting for some 10% of total consumption. The facility is expected to come on stream by 2014.

Telenet

Telenet, the Mechelen-based cable and telecommunications company, has signed a €170 million agreement with Interkabel, Flanders leading cable operator, to offer digital TV and services to some 800,000 households in the area. The move allows Telenet to develop its activities and to pre-empt Belgacom's move into the "triple play" (television-internet-telephone) market. Meanwhile, the company has launched cooperation talks with Voo, the association of francophone cable operators, after losing a court case against them.

Belgian Railways

NMBS, the Belgian railway company, is spending €90 million on 50 new double-decker carriages for its domestic services. The Bruges-based Bombardier Transportation, a major railway rolling stock manufacturer, will get half of the contract, while the French Alstom will supply the rest of the equipment.

Levi's

Levi's, the jeans and clothing manufacturer, has opened a flagship store in Antwerp to experiment with new distribution methods for the European market. The company already operates seven stores in Belgium.

Conrad Hotel

The Conrad Hotel in Brussels was ranked in 69th position in the 2007 list of the World's Best hotels. The list is published by *Institutional Investor*, a UK-based magazine.

European Union

The European Union spends some €89.2 million a year on cleaning its buildings and offices, significantly more than the €60 million it spends on its foreign and security policies, according to the German finance ministry in response to a question from MPs.

Electrawinds

The Ostend-based renewable energies developer and wind-farm operator Electrawinds has acquired Adeol, a French company operating four wind-farms in Brittany with a capacity of 35 megawatts.

De Post

Johnny Thijs, head of the Belgian postal service, told a parliamentary committee last week that the future of De Post was threatened by the liberalisation of the market in 2011. Thijs had come under fire for recent cost-cutting measures such as closing small post offices. But he argued that only 300 out of 1,000 post offices across the country were profitable. "I feel frustrated, sometimes verging on anger," Thijs told the Belgian MPs. "The future of the company is at stake!"

PROFILE

Still Mad About You



With their new album, Belgium's most famous pop band continues to create strange sounds that haunt the airwaves

An Gydé

Stylish yet passionate, cool yet vulnerable. Hooverphonic's distinctive sound has made them Belgium's most famous band. Their unique style is embodied in the shy beauty Geike Arnaert, who miraculously seems to come alive on the stage when she is delivering her torch songs cum string quartets.

The three-person band, which plays in Brussels on December 13 and 14, is one of Belgium's most successful musical exports. They've toured the globe extensively – spotted with big-name bands like Moloko and Massive Attack but also in the company of quality singer-songwriters Fiona Apple and Beth Orton.

Hooverphonic's style is distinctive, if hard to explain, and might be described as "retro-futurism": based on the tacky optimism of 1950s kitsch and a preoccupation with the future that was so hot in those days. The new album, *The President of the LSD Golf Club* (just released in October in Belgium and The Netherlands), perfectly symbolises this sense of a past and future in a love/hate relationship – particularly the final haunting tune "Bohemian Laughter".

The band recently broke off with record company Sony/BMG. To mark the end of an era, they released a "best of" album last year, which includes the hits "Mad About You", "Vinegar And Salt",

"Wake Up" and "You Hurt Me". The collection neatly demonstrates the way Hooverphonic have evolved from their own brand of trip hop to electronic pop and finally to the atmospheric psychedelic pop of *The President of the LSD Golf Club* – a record bathed in luscious, warm sounds, rigorously stripped of the superfluous. No strings, no bells, no samples – all you hear is 10 timeless, first-rate pop songs. The trio now has a distribution deal with PIAS, but no label contract – which means they are free to do as they want artistically.

Hooverphonic is made up of three Flemish musicians: Alex Callier plays bass, writes the songs and produces the records. He invariably dresses in style, with a clear penchant for the 50s and 60s. Geike Arnaert sings the songs. Hailing from Westouter, a small village near the Belgian-French border in West Flanders, she started with the band in 1998 at the tender age of 17. Torment is her middle name, the combination of restraint and slight madness her strong point. Then there's Raymond Geerts on guitar, one of those guys who prefers to stay low-profile but makes his mark on stage.

Both Callier and Geerts have been the core of Hooverphonic since they formed the band in 1995 with two other musicians (who have since dropped out). As early as 1996, they were heard on the soundtrack of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Stealing Beauty* and since then their songs have popped up in countless movies, TV series and advertising (oddly, a lot of carmakers: Toyota, Volvo, Jaguar).

The year of international breakthrough was 2000 with the release of the album *The Magnificent Tree* and the chart-topping hit "Mad

About You". It was no surprise to anyone, really. Hooverphonic may consist of three musicians from modest Flemish towns, but the music is anything but provincial. Last year Hooverphonic played at the notorious Rock Werchter festival in front of a crowd of 50.000. Big in Belgium, too? You bet.

The Magnificent Hooverphonic

1997	A New Stereophonic Sound Spectacular
1998	Blue Wonder Power Milk
2000	The Magnificent Tree
2002	Hooverphonic Presents Jackie Cane
2003	Sit Down And Listen To
2005	No More Sweet Music
2006	Singles 96-06
2007	The President of the LSD Golf Club

Leader of the band

Alex Callier is the band leader and binding force of Hooverphonic. We talk to him about the latest album.

An Gydé: The new record is psychedelic, surreal even.

Alex Callier: Well, the sound is very "organic", and it's inspired by the psychedelic trends in the 60s. But the combination of songs and atmosphere is typical of most Hooverphonic. In the past we emphasised that with big orchestras or electronics, now we try to achieve the same thing using six musicians and a bunch of retro musical instruments.

Isn't it ironic that the "new" Hooverphonic refers to the music of the 60s?

I think it's important to keep evolving, to go looking for new opportunities. But it's just as important not to lose your own personality. It's hard to maintain that equilibrium: you want to move forward, but you don't want to obliterate your own style. It's like, 'Don't throw out the baby with the bath water'.

Have the bands you've been touring with influenced you at all?

I don't think so. We always did our own thing – even in the early days when people said we played trip hop, which wasn't really the case. What may have been an influence was Fiona Apple's use of the cham-

berlain – the American counterpart of the mellotron – which we use on the new record. I've always been very intrigued by it, ever since I heard The Beatles' "Strawberry Fields Forever" when I was a kid.

What about the use of the harpsichord on the new record?

This can also be tracked to my youth. When I was about 10 and learning to play the piano, my uncle took me to an exhibition of old pianofortes and harpsichords. It all seemed rather boring to me, until we saw some guy playing boogie-woogie and blues on one of those harpsichords. It made that instrument look incredibly cool. Since then I've always appreciated the use of instruments that were out of place in pop songs, like celestas or glockenspiels.

The 1950s are all about kitsch.

What's the most beautiful item in your possession?

I do have some kitsch, but not as much as you would expect. My favourite pieces are a couple of plastic pink flamingos in our backyard. Very Las Vegas! In our recording studio I have another plush flamingo.

Geike has been the singer for a decade now. What would happen if she ever left?

That's a very tough question. I assume she won't, but if she does, Hoover-



From left: Alex Callier, Geike Arnaert and Raymond Geerts are Hooverphonic

phonic is just finished. If you asked me who I'd want to record with if Hooverphonic packed it in, I would have to say Hope Sandoval of Mazzy Star. She has one of the most beautiful voices in this world. It's intriguing and pure but not too virtuous, a bit druggy. I heard a rumour that Massive Attack plans to work with her. Those annoying people always get there just before I do.

Hooverphonic plays on 12 and 13 December at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110, Brussels. Tickets from 02.548.24.24 or www.abconcerts.be.

online

www.hooverphonic.com

Spine-chilling

Belgium's colossal Snow & Ice Festival is back in Bruges



Lisa Bradshaw

It's looking a lot like Halloween at the annual Snow & Ice Festival in Bruges this year. Step right in to Ice Fantasy, the massive interactive installation on Stationsplein next to the train station, and you're at once threatened by haunted hedges and a wizard casting spells. Lightning strikes ominously. Don't worry, though, because the whole scenario is based on *Plop and the Penguin*, the latest in the Plop series of children's movies, and you know those always turn out all right in the end.

But Ice Fantasy "has to have a dark side," notes Alexandre Deman, one of the event's organisers. And the artists have gone all out to make them memorable. Giant spiders, trolls, skeletons, prisoners chained in a dungeon – all made from massive blocks of snow and ice. Stylised architectural lighting shines out in multiple colours and flashes in all the right places while your family takes a journey through a magical land of frozen waterfalls, diamond mines and mountain regions. It may be based on a gimmicky story, but Ice

Fantasy is undeniably fantastic.

"It's more interactive this year, and the feeling of snow and ice is bigger," says Deman. That's because that wizard has shrunk unsuspecting visitors to the size of gnomes – allowing sculptors to create gigantic shapes in a supersized forest. You'll take a tumble down an icy tunnel slide, narrowly miss an avalanche and climb aboard a gigantic ice ship.

This is the sixth festival in Flanders where 40 of the top ice sculptors from around the globe gather to create an unimaginably complex

interactive installation from snow and ice. It takes several weeks and 400 tons of snow – not to mention 300 tons of crystal clear ice blocks that were shipped over by boat from the frozen rivers of Canada. (That's in addition to the nearly 200 tons of ice created on site.)

The Snow & Ice Festival has a different theme every year, and the sculptors use it as a basis for creating each ice and snow sculpture by hand. But the theme is less important than the beauty and majesty of the work. Ice sculptors use chisels, spades, drills, chain saws and even machetes to get the cuts just right – and sometimes finish up with a steam iron to "polish" the finished work. Before entering, take a peek at the audio-visual display that shows the artists at work. Ice Fantasy itself is under a 1,200 metre thermal tent where the temperature is kept at -6 Celsius. Wear your wool socks and zip up that parka.

It takes about 90 minutes to wander through Ice Fantasy, and at the end you are rewarded with an "ice bar" where you can step up and order drinks – on the rocks, of course. You'll also have the chance to visit a special exhibition about Princess Elisabeth Antarctica, Belgium's new scientific research station, which is currently en route to the South Pole. The multi-media show looks at Belgium's significant history and crucial leadership in the area of polar research and describes the Princess Elisabeth, which is the first solar base

in history to function completely on renewable energy resources.

The festival runs until 13 January. I couldn't help but ask: what happens then to all the ice? "The bulldozers come in, and we start demolition," Deman says. "We move it to a site nearby, and it stays melting for at least a month." I'm bummed out by that, but Deman isn't. He's got next year.

Ice Fantasy, until January 13, Stationsplein, Bruges. Open every day from 10.00 to 19.00, including Christmas Day and New Year's Day

online
www.icesculpture.be



Perfectly-chiseled icy treasures

FASHIONISTA

LUST FOR LIFE

With Michael Graves designing for American budget retailer Target, and Karl Lagerfeld, Roberto Cavalli, Viktor & Rolf and Stella McCartney turning out collections for H&M, we might want to ask whether designers are sacrificing high style to go high street? Xavier Lust does not think so. The Bruges-born, 38-year-old interior and furniture designer is no snob when it comes to the mainstream: "If Ikea gave me a call to do a collection, I'd definitely consider it," he says.

But unique design often comes at a cost. "Many of my designs are too expensive to produce mass market, so I do limited editions for certain clients," he says. Curved mirrors and swollen cabinets require craftsmanship that is difficult to replicate on a large scale – so don't expect the Swedish furniture megalith to be selling facsimiles thereof in the future.

Still, you need not splash out thousands of euros to have a little Lust in your life. His more repli-

cable creations are produced by influential furniture houses, including De Padova, Extremis and MDF Italia – and they possess the same streamlined, evocative signature that make his work live up to the designer's name. Sleek, 1970s futurism blended with a subtle pragmatism make Lust's furniture epiphanies stylish. His chair produced by Driade – moulded plastic that manages to be austere but warm – looks like something from an especially chic doll house. His PikNik table and bench resemble a matchbook cut and folded into a practical seating arrangement for a cosy apartment balcony. Form follows function in his work, with the lines and undulations playing a part in how the different pieces perform.

This sensibility is the result of graduating from Brussels' Sint Lukas School in 1992 with a very traditional art education – but little in the way of practical skills. "They weren't very open to computer design," he remembers. Trial and error and experimentation led to him formulating his

own method of creation – structural (de)formation. "It's a way of

bending metal and other materials so that the form is actually dictat-



An evocative signature: Xavier Lust

ed by how the material responds. That way, a piece can be replicated many times, because the material always responds in the same way."

Competing for his attention one early November evening in his studio are his Skype, his BlackBerry, a cup of espresso, a Camel cigarette – and this interviewer. He has shows all over Europe (having recently wrapped up an exhibition in Grand Hornu near Mons), so it would make sense for him to install himself in Milan, where so much of his work takes him these days, or another obvious capital like Paris or London. But Lust finds being in Brussels has its advantages. "There's an element of staying exotic," he says. "When I visit a place for work, I'm special, I'm different. If I'm there all the time, it's less so. Besides, there are cheap flights to everywhere I need to go, and I like my life here."

Steven Tate

online
www.xavierlust.com

Classical & new music**Brussels**

Astoria Hôtel
Koningstraat 103; 0900.28.877
DEC 9 11.00 Academia Wind Quintet
Prague: Haydn, Mozart, Reicha

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

DEC 6 20.00 Belgian National
Orchestra, conducted by Dirk Brossé,
with Vineta Sareika, violin: Adams,
Bernstein, Brossé
DEC 8 20.00 Les Arts Florissants,
conducted by William Christie: Haydn's
Die Schöpfung
DEC 9 11.00 Yu-Fen Chang, violin: D
Scarlatti, Silvestrov, Tan Dun
DEC 12 20.00 Cecilia Bartoli,
mezzo-soprano: Garcia, Persiani,
Mendelssohn, more
DEC 13 20.00 Il Gardellino ensemble:
Vivaldi, Tartini, Galuppi

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be
DEC 5 20.15 Plamena Mangova, piano:
D Scarlatti, Beethoven, Brahms

Protestantse Kapel
Museumplein; 02.507.82.00
DEC 10 20.00 Nicolau de Figueiredo,
harpsichord: D Scarlatti, Handel, Soler

Royal Museum of Fine Arts
Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11
DEC 5 12.40-13.30 Sophia Jaffe, violin,
Björn Lehmann, piano: Beethoven,
Webern, Suk
DEC 12 12.40-13.30 Olivier De
Spiegeleir, piano: Handel, D Scarlatti,
Leduc

Royal Music Conservatory
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
DEC 9 20.00 Berlin Philharmonia
Quartet: Schumann, Webern, Kurtág
DEC 11 20.00 Ricercar Consort
conducted by Philippe Pierlot: 16th-
century English consort music by
William Lawes (tickets: 02.507.82.00)

Sint Pieterskerk
Kardinaal Mercierplein; 02.423.13.73
DEC 7 19.30 Christmas concert with
Dana Winner (charity concert)

Théâtre Saint Michel
Pater Eudore Devroyestraat 2;
02 732 70 73
DEC 7 20.00 Brussels Philharmonic
conducted by Roger Bausier with
Boyan Vodenitcharov, piano: music

by George Gershwin on the 70th
anniversary of the composer's death

Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
DEC 5 21.00 Huelgas Ensemble,
conducted by Paul Van Nevel:
lamentations by Orlandus Lassus and
Antonio Mogavero; motets by Thomas
Crecquillon, Nicolas Gombert and
Jacobus de Kerle

Turnhout

De Warande
Warandestraat 42; 014.41.69.91
DEC 13 20.15 Liège Philharmonic,
conducted by Kirill Karabits, with
Valery Sokolov, violin: Biaren's
symphonic poem Trenmor, Saint-
Saëns' violin concerto No 3, Dvorák's
Symphony No 8

Opera**Brussels**

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
Until DEC 23 Werther by Massenet,
conducted by Kazushi Ono, staged by
Guy Joosten, with Andrew Richards,
tenor; Ludovic Tézier, baritone; Sophie
Koch and Jennifer Larmore, mezzos

Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02
DEC 11-23 Le Nozze di Figaro by
Mozart, conducted by Andreas Spering,
staged by Guy Joosten, with Paolo Szot
and Tuomas Pursio, baritones; Maria
Bengtsson and Ainhoa Garmendia,
sopranos

Jazz & blues**Brussels**

Archiduc
Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52
DEC 8 Andreu Martinez Project
DEC 9 Michael Moore & Haarmen
Fraanje

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be
DEC 10 20.15 Anouar Brahem
DEC 13 21.30 Tord Gustavsen Trio

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
DEC 5 20.30 My Song Project: tribute
to the European Quartet of Keith
Jarrett **DEC 6-7** 20.30 Octurn **DEC 8**
18.00 Christophe Astolfi Trio **DEC 12**
20.30 Cordes and Vibrations

Get your tickets now for...**Sleeping Beauty**

December 20-23, Stadsschouwburg, Theaterplein 1, Antwerp.
Tickets from 077.37.38.39 or www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be

The Royal Ballet of Flanders revisits this storied masterpiece by Marius Petipa in an electrifying adaptation thought up in 1987 by Brazilian ballerina Marcia Haydee for the Stuttgart Ballet. Featuring lavish period costumes and sets, this version considerably expands the role of the evil fairy Carabosse and has it danced by a man (Alain Honorez) with a menacing androgyny that recalls Kabuki theatre. The company first staged the work to huge acclaim in Bruges last year: "A pièce montée with whipped cream," was *Knack*'s verdict. Tchaikovsky's score will be performed live by the Flemish Radio Orchestra.

Le Grain d'Orge

Waversesteenweg 142; 02.511.26.47
DEC 7 Chico & The Mojo

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50
DEC 6 Andreu Martinez Project
DEC 7 Alexi Tuomarila Quartet **DEC 8**
Brussels Rhythm'n Blues **DEC 10**
Master Session **DEC 11** Da Romeo
Band, Caribbean **DEC 12** Caribe Con
K, salsa **DEC 13** The Singer's Night

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
DEC 5-6 Alina SambaLua **DEC 7**
Charles Loos Trio **DEC 8** Marcia Maria
DEC 9 Garbis Dedeian **DEC 11** Javon
Jackson & Jimmy Cobb Superband
DEC 12 One Trick Po

Borgerhout

Rataplan
Wijnegemstraat 27; 03.292.97.40
DEC 6 20.30 Saxkartel with Tutu
Puowane **DEC 13** 20.30 aRTET

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

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
Concerts at 20.00

DEC 5-6 Stellla **DEC 10** Thurston
Moore **DEC 11** Orishas **DEC 12-13** The
Go Find + Hooverphonic

Belle Vue Café

Henegouwenkaai 43; 02.410.19.35,
www.vkconcerts.be

DEC 13 21.30 Quit Your Dayjob

Biberium

Cantersteen 55; 0476.31.60.17
DEC 8 22.00 Strictly Niceness: resident
Djs

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89
DEC 7 23.00 The Show Must Go On
DEC 8 23.00 Joris Voorn + Edwin
Oosterwal + Dj Pierre, Monoblock +
Mike Shannon + Dj Pierre

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Concerts at 20.00
DEC 6 Saybia **DEC 7** VegaStar,
Windmill + St Vincent **DEC 10** Ed
Harcourt **DEC 13** Laibach

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34
DEC 9 14.00-18.00 Kids Disco:
Messieurs Delmotte & Fils/Zoon Dj
plus performance and screenings (two
to 10 years)
DEC 13 20.00 The Ex & Getatchew
Mekuria and friends + Kill

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07
DEC 8 20.00 Pelican + High on Fire +
Priestbird
DEC 12 20.00 The Weakerthans +
House & Parish

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
Concerts at 20.00
DEC 7 The Heavy **DEC 8** Vanessa
Paradis **DEC 11** Marilyn Manson **DEC**
13 50 Cent

Antwerp

Lotto Arena
Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060
DEC 9 20.00 Dashboard Confessional
+ Maroon 5

Sportpaleis

Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060
DEC 12 20.30 Bruce Springsteen & the
E Street Band
Until DEC 29 20.30 Clouseau (multiple
performances)

Borgerhout

Hof Ter Lo
Noordersingel 30; 03.543.90.30
DEC 13 20.15 The Human League

Ghent**Handelsbeurs**

Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01

DEC 7 20.00 Admiral Freebee
Dec 7-8 20.00 Praga Khan

Hasselt

Kunstencentrum
Burgemeester 54; 011.22.41.61
DEC 9 20.00 Múm

Kortrijk

De Kreun
Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44
DEC 7 20.00 Jeru the Damaja + Mister
J + Dj Boulaone & Grazz
DEC 8 16.30 Vlas Vegas Labelnight

World, folk**Brussels**

Au Stekerlapatte
Priesterstraat 4; 02.512.86.81
Concerts at 21.00
DEC 6 Wang Wei Quartet
DEC 8 Karim Gharbi Trio
DEC 13 Philippe Demian

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
DEC 9 20.00 Tito Paris & Sara Tavares,
Cape Verde

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be
DEC 10 20.15 Anouar Brahem, oud

Sint-Antoni van Paduakerk

Sint-Antoonplein; 02.428.12.50
DEC 8 20.00 Fusion, European
Christmas carols performed with
traditional folk instruments (charity
concert)

Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00
DEC 7 20.00 Emilio Maya & Esencias
des Sacromonte, flamenco
DEC 13 12.30 Paul Takahashi, Eastern
European music

Antwerp

Zuiderpershuis
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00
DEC 5 20.30 José Valencia, flamenco
DEC 6 20.30 Halil Necipoglu, Turkish
Sufi

Dance**Brussels**

La Raffinerie
Manchesterstraat 21; 02.410.33.41
Until DEC 8 20.30 Erase-E(X)1, 4, 5, 6
by Johanne Saunier

Théâtre les Tanneurs

Huidenvettersstraat 75; 02.512.17.84
Until DEC 11 20.30 Les Ballets C de la
B presents Patchagonia, choreography
by Lisi Estarás

Théâtre Marni

Vergniestraat 25; 02.354.43.68
DEC 7-15 15 La Belle au bois de Dandaka,
choreography by José Besprosvany

Théâtre Varia

Scepterstraat 78; 02.640.82.58
Until DEC 22 PLUG by Michèle Anne
De Mey

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
DEC 12-14 20.00 Damaged Goods
& Mumbling Fish in Maybe Forever
by and with Meg Stuart and Philipp
Gehmacher

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't

Until JAN 20 The Grand Atelier: Pathways of Art in Europe, 350 paintings, drawings, sculptures, manuscripts, books, prints, furniture and objects dating from the 5th to the 18th centuries

Centre Albert Marinus
Karrestraat 27; 02.762.62.14
Until DEC 9 Le Temps, representations of time in art from the Middle Ages to today

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

De Electriciteitscentrale - European Centre for Contemporary Art
Sint-Katelijnestraat 44; 02.279.64.31, www.brupass.be
Until JAN 13 Agorafolly Inside, works by 27 young European artists (part of Europaalia)

De Markten
Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25, www.demarkten.be
Until DEC 23 Cf. (Natuur, Nature), multi-media exhibition with work by Klaar Cornelis, Kikie Crêvecoeur, David Delesalle and others

Elsene Museum
Jean Van Volsemstraat; 02.515.64.21
Until JAN 26 All Roads Lead to Rome. Artists' travels from the 16th to the 19th centuries, with paintings, texts and a variety of objects
Until JAN 27 Ontmoetingen: 1997-2007 (Encounters, 1997-2007), photographs by Géraldine Langlois

Espace Parallèle (in Anciennes écuries de l'Abbaye)
Stallingen Roodkloosterstr 7a; 02.675.27.23
Until DEC 16 Abstraction textile, patterns from the Kuba, Mbuti, Ngongo and Shoowa peoples of the Congo

Espace Photographique Contretype
Verbindingslaan 1; 02.538.42.20
Until DEC 30 Variations, photographs by Armyde Peigner

Huis der Kunsten (Schaerbeek)
Haachtsesteenweg 147; 02.218.79.98
Until DEC 21 From Here to There, photographs and installation by Marin Kasimir

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre
Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20
Until DEC 16 Quel beau cadre!, paintings by Filip Denis

Jewish Museum of Belgium
Minimstraat 21; 02.512.19.63
Until DEC 31 Jewish Spaces and Itineraries: The Shoule of Molenbeek, Aspects of contemporary Judaism
Until FEB 24 Sarah and her Brothers, history through the eyes of the Kaliskis family of artists

Koekelberg Basilica
Basiliekvoordeplein 1; 02.420.55.05
Until MAR 15 Leonardo Da Vinci: The European Genius, paintings, mechanical models, original drawings and manuscripts

Le Botanique
Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Until DEC 30 Les Poux et les couleurs, works by Cécile Bertrand, prize winner of Press Cartoon Belgium 2007

Loge Architecture Museum
Kluisstraat 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

Park Tournai Solvay
Terhulpensteenweg 201; 02.660.99.80
Until DEC 23 Sculptures in bronze, steel and neon by Portuguese artist José de Guimaraes

Royal Library

Kunstberg; 02.519.58.73
Until FEB 8 Formating Europe: Mapping a Continent, maps from the Middle Ages to the 20th century

Royal Museum of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11
Until DEC 31 Belgïe op kijkoosprenten, some 400 views of Belgian cities dating from the 17th and 18th centuries

Until JAN 6 When the Manga Dreams About the West, comic strips by Jiro Taniguchi
Until JAN 6 XPO2π: 50 jaar Jeugd en Wetenschap van België (50 Years of Youth and Science in Belgium)

Royal Museums 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

Until MAR 30 Alechinsky from A to Y, retrospective of the Belgian artist on the occasion of his 80th birthday

Until MAR 30 Quadrum: International Magazine of Modern Art, tribute to Ernst Goldschmidt, curator and publisher

Sint-Gorikshallen

Sint-Goriksplein 1; 02.502.44.24
Until DEC 31 Brussels, urban landscapes and computer-reworked photographs by Georges De Kinder

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

Stadsarchief

Huidevettersstraat 65; 02.279.53.33
Until DEC 31 Zicht op licht: Het licht in de stad, the history of the use of lighting in Brussels and its effect on society, past and present

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33
Until DEC 16 Dots Obsession, walk-in balloon installation by contemporary Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60

Until JAN 6 If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, Edition II: Feminist Legacies And Potentials In Contemporary Art Practice

Until JAN 6 Lonely at the Top #6, Recyclable Refugee Camp TOURISM by Ives Maes

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

Until DEC 16 The Nine Monads Of David Bell, works by Luke Fowler

Fifty One Fine Art Photography

Zirkstraat 20; 03.289.84.58
Until DEC 19 Nude Dune, photographs by Simon Chaput

FotoMuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00
Until JAN 6 Belgicum, Stephan Vanfleteren's humourous and nostalgic photographs of Belgium
Until JAN 6 Oorlogsmaterial by film director Robbe De Hert. Ost.Modern, images from Eastern Europe by Annemie Augustijns

Until JAN 6 Stage fright, thematic exhibition on the effects of the ever-growing presence of cameras in society

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

Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09
Until DEC 31 The Rijksmuseum comes to the Scheldt, 40 masterpieces from the 16th and 17th centuries lent by the Amsterdam museum

Middelheim Museum

Middelheimlaan 61; 03.827.15.34
Until JAN 20 Spomenik: The End of History, photographs of communist monuments in former Yugoslavia by Jan Kempenaers

MoMu

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70
Until FEB 10 Exuberant fashion designs by Bernhard Willhelm

Bruges

Groeninge Museum
Dijver 12; 050.44.87.11
Until JAN 6 Brugge-Parijs-Rome: Joseph Benoît Suvée en het neoclassicisme, paintings

Eupen

Ikob
In den Loten 3; 087.56.01.10
Until JAN 13 La Ricarda, multi-national installation and video project

Ghent

Caermersklooster
Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10
Until DEC 9 VIPS - Very Important Paintings, portraits by Karl Meersman
Until DEC 9 Provinciale Prijs voor Vormgeving 2006 (Design Prizewinners)

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 of the 65-year career of architect and designer Ettore Sottsass, with furniture, ceramics, glass, jewellery and design
Until JAN 13 Christopher Dresser, Scottish pioneer of modern design, display of Eastern-inspired minimalist objects

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 JAN 13 Daria Martin, 2 films by the American artist
Until FEB 17 Head Shop/Shop Head, Paul McCarthy retrospective 1966-2007

Hasselt

Z33
Zuivelmarkt 33 (in begijnhof); 011.29.59.60

Until DEC 12 Toegepast 12, works by young designers from Limburg
Until FEB 10 Nr17 Slow: Looking at things differently, video installations by designer Marina Yee and work by artists who have inspired her, including Léon Spilliaert, Luc Tuymans and Erik Verdonck

Knokke-Heist

Cultuurcentrum Scharpoord

Merlaan 32; 050.63.08.72
Until JAN 20 Impressionisten in Knokke & Heist, more than 200 paintings by Impressionist artists who were in Knokke between 1870 and 1914, including Permeke, Rops and Parmentier

Leuven

Abdij van 't Park (Park Abbey)
Abdijdreef 7; 016.20.30.20, www.parkabdij.be

Don't miss this week



Praga Khan

Dec 7-8 20.00, Handelsbeurs, Kouter 29, Ghent.
Tickets from 09.265.91.65

The man who led techno out of the Belgian underground nearly 20 years ago and pioneered acid house takes it all into the 21st century via a fresh, noisy virtual stage world. Praga Khan set his own gold standard for techno shows three years ago with The Next Dimension but looks set to live up to it in the Frame by Frame tour, a divine spectacle that blurs boundaries between music, technology and visual art.

on Thursday evenings

Until DEC 20
02.512.77.80, www.brusselstmuseums.be

De Frivole Framboos presents

Furioso: a musical/theatre variety show, from chanson to classical to opera
Until DEC 31 at Bozar Ravensteinstraat 23
02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

Direct from Vegas: a tribute to The Rat Pack: musical homage to Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr and Dean Martin
DEC 6 20.30 at Koninklijk Circus, Onderrichtsstraat 81 (also in Ostend Casino on DEC 8)
02.218.20.15, www.koninklijk-circus.org

Les Ailes de l'espérance: Concert in support of Burma and pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Jane Birkin hosts an evening of readings and duets with musicians, including Eté 67, Sacha Toorop and Karin Clercq

DEC 10 20.00 at Le Botanique, Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32, www.botanique.be

Musica Universalis: Polyphony festival with music by composers from Flanders and northern France

Until JAN 11 at Kapel van de Miniemen, Miniemenstraat 62
02.507.82.00, www.minimes.net

Nuits Electrabel: Sound and light show every evening until midnight and live music each Saturday at 19.00 as part of the city's annual Christmas festivities

Until DEC 30 on the Grote Markt www.plaisirsdhiver.be

Peuples du Sahara: Festival devoted to the Touaregs, Maures, Peuls and Toubous of the Sahara Desert, featuring a photo exhibition, concerts, screenings and conferences

DEC 6-9 at Espace Senghor, Waversesteenweg 366
02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be

Hal Crutten & Milton Jones: Stand-up comedy (in English)

DEC 6 20.30 at Theatre 140, Eugène Plaskylaan 140
02.733.97.08

Other towns

Holiday on Ice: mystery ice-skating show
DEC 6-8 at Lotto Arena, Schijnpoortweg 119, Antwerp 0900.26.060
Fire of Anatolia: Turkish dance show
DEC 8 20.00 at Queen Elisabeth Hall, Koningin Astridplein 26, Antwerp 0900.26.060

MY FLANDERS

Yves De Baets

Yves De Baets is deputy director and communication manager of the Department of Mobility in Ghent. The city took a lot of flak when it created the largest pedestrian zone in Belgium in 1997, but now people are flocking there to live.

What does the Department of Mobility do?

We work on plans to make the city more accessible to all citizens. In 1994, a bicycle plan was implemented to promote cycling as a means of transport throughout Ghent, and in 1997 there was the mobility plan. We wanted to make the heart of the historic city centre free of cars. We designated certain areas as 30 km zones. We also set aside the largest public space in Belgium for pedestrians only – 30 hectares. We reconstructed areas of the city so that pedestrians could meet each other and enjoy the city. We also constructed underground parking facilities and a system to guide people in cars to parking spaces.

Why did the city feel the need to adopt such measures?

Ghent had a population of 240,000 in 1976, but by 1997 the number of residents had fallen to 225,000. Ghent is the largest university city in Belgium – 56,000 young people come here every year to study. But the problem was that people did not stay here after graduating and getting married: the city wasn't the kind of place where most people wanted to raise a family. Ghent could not compete with the suburbs for quality of family life. The idea was to make the city more livable so that people would stick around – but there had to be pleasant neighbourhoods and decent housing.

Since the mobility plan was launched, neighbourhoods have improved and the population has increased by 1,300 people every year. We're still not at the population level of 30 years ago, but we're growing now. And that adds to the city's vitality.

What was the reaction of shop owners and other businesses to car-free areas?

At first, not so good. There was a previous plan in the mid-80s that failed because there was lack of communication. We decided to reintroduce the plan in 1997, but we had a lot of convincing to do. We had to deal with a lot of anger from merchants who thought business would suffer if potential customers could not park in front of the shops. But six months into the plan, business was better than they'd thought it would be.

It took a couple of years for them to be totally won over, but now Ghent also has the lowest rate of vacant shops in Belgium. So it seems that the plan has been good for business. Restaurants and cafes have more space to set up pavement terraces, and people in other cities now look at Ghent as a place to come and spend a day or two. The number of overnight visitors has shot up 50% in the last five years, and restaurant and cafe business is doing 30% better than it was a decade ago.

Has banning cars from certain areas helped to improve air quality?



That's difficult to say because Ghent is at the crossing point of the E40 and the E17 – the two major highways in Belgium. Then there's the industrial area in the north and the seaport. There might be a slight improvement, but it's hard to tell. But the air definitely isn't worse because of the plan, and the quality of life in the city is definitely better.

How is Ghent different today than when you first arrived 30 years ago?

It was very grey and somber back then. For a long time, Bruges has had a reputation for culture and the arts – but now Ghent is getting more recognition for those things, too, as well as our respect for the environment. People who visit are amazed at everything that's on offer, and young people are coming here more and more – and not just for school and university. Ghent is more dynamic, forward-looking – but, at the same time, very eager to preserve its heritage.

Natives of every city in Flanders have their reputation: for example, Antwerpers are seen as a bit brash. What are the people of Ghent like?

They're a bit contrary. They love their city, but they would never brag about it. They can be critical of Ghent, thinking it can always do better – but the love is always there.

Interview by Steven Tate

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

"A drop in the ocean that can't even be expressed in percentage terms"

Lean Berlamont
Hydrology expert at Leuven University, after millions of litres of water leaked from Oudenaarde pipes

"We're not euphoric about our chances of success, but there are some hopeful signs"

Bram Claeys
Belgian delegate at the UN climate convention in Bali

"The news that petty local taxes are being scrapped will please international companies"

Dirk van Mechelen
Flemish minister of finance who is doing away with some taxes

Living in Mol Cribs in the Kempen Fle mish Whisky Dutch Spelling Film Fre ak Scala

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