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Tom D'Haene/ANP Holland



The Shipping News

“Antwerp has big plans for its port – including the idea of developing it as a “soft seaport”

Marc Maes

Antwerp wants to become the first port of call from the Far East and to increase its market share of Asian traffic,” says Marc Van Peel, president of the Antwerp Port Authority and alderman for the port. He can

look back with some satisfaction on a successful year of business – port traffic grew from about 167 million tons in 2006 to just over 180 million tons in 2007. But he now wants to ensure that Antwerp remains a leading world seaport by responding to competition from

other European ports and attracting new clients through state-of-the-art infrastructure and hinterland developments.

“One of the main issues is the Liefkenshoek rail tunnel,” explains Van Peel, “which should become operational by 2012-2013. At pres-

ent, the Deurganckdok has a capacity of 1.5 Million TEU per year. But we expect that the dock will have reached its full capacity, some seven million TEU (container units), by 2013. It’s crucial that we provide an intelligent modal split where rail traffic takes on an increasing part

of transport from the Deurganckdok to the hinterland. So the new rail tunnel, alongside the existing Liefkenshoek road tunnel, is an essential element in the growth of the port on Antwerp’s left bank.”

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Business

Flanders minister-president Kris Peeters and economy and science minister Patricia Ceysens have approved an €11.5 project to build a new research ship. It's named Simon Stevin in honour of a 16th century Bruges scientist.

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Arts

A new exhibition in Knokke-Heist celebrates a generation of Impressionist painters drawn to the windswept Flemish dunes. Some of the works on show have hardly been seen in a hundred years.

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Active

Music, maestro: young people can enjoy classical music if the mood is right. We find out about some organisations that strike just the right note with younger listeners.

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Political crisis puts reforms at risk, EU warns

The cost of the stalemate could be high

Derek Blyth

Belgium received a warning last week from the European Commission on the wider economic consequences of the current political deadlock, which has left the country without a federal government since the 10 June elections. In its annual progress report on Belgium, the European Commission said that the crisis was slowing down the pace of national reforms and threatening the goals set down in the Lisbon strategy for growth and job creation.

The seven-page report referred several

times to the negative impact of the political crisis on the pace of Belgian reforms. “The continuation of such a situation is likely to delay the implementation of further necessary budgetary measures and thereby jeopardise targets for 2008,” it said.

This is the first time that the European Commission has commented on the Belgian crisis. Up until last summer, Belgium had been making reasonable progress towards achieving the targets set by the European Commission.

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Omega Minor

One week after *Time* magazine declared that French culture was dead, the respected US newsweekly turned its attention to a Flemish novelist – Paul Verhaeghen – and decided he was one of the hottest kids on the block. *Time* was reviewing Verhaeghen's weighty novel *Omega Minor*, published in Flanders and the Netherlands in 2004 and now available in an English translation.

Time describes Verhaeghen's book as a "sprawling, provocative, nuclear nightmare of a novel" – just the sort that it claimed French writers were no longer producing. The Koksijde-born author, who has lived the past 10 years in the United States, was ranked by *Time* alongside Günter Grass, WG Sebald and Thomas Pynchon.

Verhaeghen tells the story of a Flemish postgraduate called Paul Andermans who is doing research in Berlin when he meets an old man claiming to be a Holocaust survivor. In a sprawling story that spans 50 years,

Andermans also encounters a Nobel Prize-winning scientist who helped to develop the atom bomb and a sexually provocative Italian physicist.

Verhaeghen has an amused eye for details. Writing about canteen food in a US university, he says: "Friday's pizza was not a food item but a search engine, topped with the mercilessly burnt memories of everything that had been on the past week's menu."

Verhaeghen did the translation himself – all 640 pages – with the help of a subsidy from the Flemish literary fund. "Their external reviewer thought my English was better than my Dutch," he confessed to *Time*.

Verhaeghen won the Flemish Culture Award for Fiction in 2006 but turned down the €12,500 prize money because he would have paid US taxes that went towards financing the Iraq war. "When I was writing *Omega Minor*, I would never have guessed that the country I live in, the United States, would ever resemble Germany in the 1930s. Now there are concentration camps for presumed enemies of the regime... There are torture rooms, and eager torturers, and the architect of the legal underpinnings of torture is now attorney general."

In its criticism of French culture, *Time* magazine had complained about the absence of politically engaged writers like Sartre and Camus. Maybe Flanders has come up with the answer.

DB

Omega Minor is published by Dalkey Archive Press.



Paul Verhaeghen

Cover photograph

Our cover photograph was taken by Ghent-based photographer Tom D'Haenens for his new photo book *The Port of Antwerp*. D'Haenens, who also took the photo of containers, opposite, was commissioned by Antwerp port authority, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. The book, is on sale in bookshops across Flanders.

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FACE OF FLANDERS

Kris Van den Bossche



There's no rest for cathedrals in Flanders this month. On top of regular services and tourist visits, there are, of course, the biggest days of the year: Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. "For many people, Christmas is a very unique moment in the whole year," says Kris Van den Bossche, one of the priests at Sint-Rombout Cathedral in Mechelen, which is one of Flanders' most visited buildings and the seat of the archbishop of Brussels-Mechelen.

Indeed, even those who don't attend services regularly come through the door for one of the Christmas services. "It's a little like celebrating a birthday of someone in the family," says Van den Bossche. "This church is actually like a big family. Perhaps this is what attracts people to the cathedral: the experience of this huge space, the home of a big family, a family that extends on earth. This mystery is always evoked in our cathedral. On a day like Christmas, one can feel even stronger this universal dimension of the church – or the Kingdom of God."

Van den Bossche began serving Mechelen churches seven years ago and works with eight other priests at Sint-Rombout, considered one of Europe's most awesome cathedrals. Three hundred years in the making, it was completed in 1520 with a 97-meter tower and houses two tons of carillon bells and Anthony Van Dyck's 1630 painting *Christ on the Cross*, a splendid example of Flemish Baroque. "I am very grateful that I can celebrate here," says Van den Bossche. "On the day of my ordination, which took place in this cathedral in the summer of 1999, I realised the number of generations of Christians that came before us. The cathedral is like a monument that represents all those people with their own strengths and weaknesses. With their own struggles in life and in faith, they left us this monumental cathedral."

Van den Bossche will participate in the *kerstkinderviering*, or children's celebration, at 15.00 on 24 December. The cathedral began a children's service about 10 years ago, and it became so popular that they now offer two on Christmas Eve day. He will also assist at the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve in Sint-Rombout, when the local choir Gregorianum will sing Christmas songs and Gregorian chant. On Christmas Day, he's off to serve other churches in the district before celebrating with his own family.

Van den Bossche sees a bit of a generation gap in modern Catholicism – plenty of older people and children, but few young people. Parents (or grandparents) do bring their children to special Sunday services at the cathedral where Pepino (a wooden puppet) has a conversation with the presiding priest about the sermon they have all just heard. The kids gather around and, of course, are encouraged to chime in. But teenagers and 20-somethings, notes Van den Bossche, "have adopted a different way of life." Regular participation in Catholic churches in Flanders is not increasing. Still, "it's not so easy to measure," says Van den Bossche. "Who can measure the hearts of so many men and women of today?"

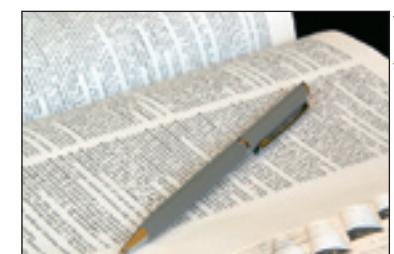
Lisa Bradshaw

online

www.kerkmechelen.be/sintrombout

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



Shutterstock

Kerstmis

Sinterklaas has come and gone; now Santa reigns supreme. Gone, too, is the sticker campaign against the premature arrival of Santa at the expense of *de Sint* – *In godsnaam: geen kerstgedoe voor 15 december*. Shops are allowed to open on two *koopzondagen* before *Kerstmis* – Sunday closing is the norm. The frantic search for presents is under way, though you won't need to buy much wrapping paper as most shops will *uw cadeautjes inpakken*.

A Belgian Christmas is much the same as elsewhere: *kerstmannen, cadeautjes, een boom en overal lichtjes*. The *kerstboom* will be decorated with *ballen* and *slingers*, though no one now risks real *kaarsjes*. If you don't like all those *naalden* on your carpet you can go for a *kunstkerstboom*, though I always think the real thing is the best.

Kerstverlichting used to be confined to fairy lights on the *boom*; now, come December, neighbours vie with each other to illuminate their roofs and hedges, anything to drive away the darkness. Though these probably are nothing compared to the transformation of *de Grote Markt* in Brussels by an electricity company into *het mooiste theater ter wereld*; of course, you can only tell if it is the most beautiful when night falls! This forms part of *Winterpret*, which aims to bring winter fun with *een reuzenrad en een ijshaan*, so you can freeze either on the big wheel or on the ice rink.

As in all kingdoms, the monarch broadcasts a Christmas message; no doubt the King's words this year will be listened to with more than the usual attention. Christmas cards are usually sent between Christmas and New Year. This year stamps for abroad are cheaper: *Kerstzegel van De Post voor het eerst goedkoper* – €7.20 in plaats van €8 voor tien.

Yet there are differences. Children get presents even if *de Sint* has been – but from the family not from Santa. December 24 and 26 are normal working days, though this year many will make *een brugdag* and take *kerstavond* off.

New Year's Day is spent visiting *oma en opa* so that their grandchildren can read them their *nieuwjaarsbrieven*. All over the country children under the age of 12 are now busy preparing these letters in their best handwriting and practising reading them aloud. They will contain several verses like this:

*Op mijn kleine voetjes,
kom ik zacht en zoetjes,
ik wens je graag
heel kort en klaar
een gelukkig nieuwjaar!*

These are solemn moments as little kids stand in front of a living room full of relatives to read out their *brieven* to a hushed audience. The reading is of course always praised and the sentiments rewarded with *nieuwjaarsgeld*. The whole ritual is gone through again with the *meter en peter*, the godparents.

In some Flemish villages, the last morning of the year is brightened up with children going from door to door singing in the new year for biscuits: *Oud jaar, nieuw jaar, twee koeken is een paar, wij wensen u een gelukkig nieuwjaar*, which I wish you too, but first *ik wens u een zalig Kerstmis. Tot volgend jaar!*

Alistair MacLean

online

www.vandale.be

FEATURE



Continued from page 1

Van Peel realises that it is important to act before the Deurganckdok reaches full capacity in 2013. "We must anticipate and plan the necessary investments well ahead," he says. "We have commissioned experts to study how and where the expansion of container traffic would be possible – and economically viable. We also need to take account of the decision by the Flemish government to build a new lock alongside the existing the Kallo lock, to serve the port on the left bank. Given that traffic will continue to grow, we have to plan ahead and consider the options that will take the port up to 2020 and beyond."

The Oosterweelverbinding, or Oosterweel Link, is another important strategic measure that will complete the Antwerp Ring and improve traffic flow between the two ports on the left and right banks of the River Scheldt.

Van Peel is now looking East to generate more business. While

Antwerp already handles a major part of traffic to and from Singapore, he wants to see it as the first port of call for the entire Far East, attracting traffic from Japan, China, India and Korea. "The port of Antwerp has everything it takes to attract a larger market share from the Far East," he says, "but our position is not yet strong enough – in spite of trade missions and publicity campaigns. That's one of my main concerns for the near future."

The deepening of the River Scheldt – the result of the 2005 Scheldt Treaty signed by Flanders and The Netherlands – is another big challenge for the port. "By the end of this year, we will be able to

give the green light for major dredging operations to begin, opening up the port of Antwerp to seagoing vessels drawing a 13.1 meter draught," says Van Peel. "This will

really create new opportunities for shipping companies and carriers."

Van Peel is not just interested in the hard business of logistics and infrastructure expansion. He is

Bike trail links natural sites

In 2001 the port of Antwerp and the non-profit organisation Natuurpunt launched a joint environmental project called *de Antwerpse haven natuurlijker*, or "the port of Antwerp more naturally". The aim is to ensure a balance between the port and nature and create protected areas where even the most endangered species of animals and vegetation can survive. "The project so far has resulted in breeding areas for common terns, sand martins and peregrine falcons, as well as puddles for natterjack toads," says Kathleen Quick, project assistant at Natuurpunt Antwerpen Noord. "One of our priorities now is the introduction of more breeding grounds for Mediterranean gulls, together with the completion of a network of bicycle routes to connect the different sites in the port of Antwerp."

online

www.natuurpunt.be/antwerpenoost

also concerned with "the look and feel" of the port and wants to make the public aware of the importance of Antwerp as one of Europe's main seaports. "We have to attract people to the port, show them what we have. This is also important as part of our employment policy, because many people are unaware of port-related jobs and vacancies."

The port is organising a range of activities on Vlaamse Havendag, or Flemish Port Day, on 5 July, along with the other Flemish seaports. "This will allow us to increase public awareness and support for the future expansion of Antwerp port," Van Peel says.

One of the main issues in present-day port management is how to improve the public image of seaports and make people aware of their contribution to prosperity. Eric Van Hooydonk, a professor at the University of Antwerp, considers this aspect of ports in his new book *Soft Values of Seaports*. He begins with a historical survey of seaports and goes on to consider measures to increase public support for seaports and port-related activities.

"The public image of the port of Antwerp, like any seaport, is a bit ambiguous," Van Hooydonk explains. "While many people in Antwerp are proud of 'their' port – the second-biggest in Europe – people outside the city have a negative perception of it. This is reinforced by the problems linked to the construction of the Deurganckdok – a highly-successful yet environmentally-controversial project, involving the construction of the biggest container terminal in Europe." He argues that this negative image is exacerbated by the media – particularly by the recent re-run of the highly popular TV series *Terug naar Oosterdonk* on the Flemish channel Canvas, which deals with a fictional polder village destroyed during the port expansion in the 1960s.

Van Hooydonk is convinced that ports need to take notice of public opinion because they need public and political support in order to expand and develop new activities. "Ports should do something about this problem," he says. "A lot of port authorities are already making efforts in this respect – by producing TV series on port activities, publishing photo books like the recent one by Tom D'Haenens and bringing out various promotional publications. But more should be done – and in a comprehensive, structural way, based on a master plan. They need to develop and exploit the non-socio-economic assets and functions of ports – in other words, the spiritual and tangible 'soft values' of ports."

Van Hooydonk's book, published just a few months ago, has already had an impact on port policy. "A number of my proposals have been adopted in the new Communication of the European Commission on Seaports Policy. They are organising a European Ports Open Day and issuing interpretative guidance

on how to reconcile tourism and recreation with security requirements."

The 11 September terror attacks in the United States led to a number of new security regulations in Antwerp's port area. This represents a major challenge to Antwerp, which used to be a very open port, with quays, locks and port facilities open to the public. "More and more port installations have become fenced off," Van Hooydonk observes, "but this should be balanced by measures such as the creation of public vantage points where people can watch port operations and shipping activities. A number of these places already exist, but additional investments need to be made. They could, for example, create a public viewing area with a restaurant on the top floor of the future Vessel Traffic Service tower, overlooking the river Scheldt and the container terminals."

With its extensive historical heritage, the port of Antwerp has a large number of interesting sites for the public to visit. They include village churches from the vanished communities of Oosterweel and Wilmarsdonk (which were swallowed up by port operations), military strongholds such as Fort St Filip, Fort Liefkenshoek and Fort Lillo, and the surviving village of Lillo. "These are already signposted as historical places, but there is more heritage in the port area which should be exploited," Van Hooydonk continues. "In addition, many port authorities have spent time and money on green policies. While environmental concerns should not be given undue attention, they ought to be part of a management plan based on soft values."

Van Hooydonk is now working on a book about the identity of Antwerp as a port city. "Antwerp is Europe's second port and is incredibly rich in port-based heritage and art. Yet a lot remains to be done to promote Antwerp as a world-class centre for business, tourism and the arts. My book, which was written on behalf of the port authority, will contain over 200 concrete proposals on waterfront development, port recreation and tourism, cruises, maritime museums, publications and events. These proposals will require investment, but they can also generate new activities. Take Hamburg, for example, where the busy container handling operations on the river Elbe have attracted residential apartments, office buildings, restaurants and recreation areas on the opposite bank of the river. The mix of port operations and urban lifestyle has become really trendy in Hamburg."

Soft Values of Seaports, a strategy for the restoration of public support for seaports, Eric van Hooydonk, Garant Publishers, 2007, www.garant-uitgevers.be

online

www.portofantwerp.be

THE PORT OF ANTWERP IN FIGURES

63,000

Number of people directly employed in port activities in Antwerp.

7 million

Number of TEU handled by the port of Antwerp in 2006. TEUs are the standard measurement for containers, with one TEU equal to a container measuring 20 feet by eight feet by eight feet.

10,061

Capacity in TEUs of the biggest container ship to enter the port of Antwerp, the Cosco Asia. It moored in the Deurganckdok earlier this year on its maiden trip to Europe.

150

Number of countries that ship goods through the port of Antwerp.

60

Number of docks in the port of Antwerp, although 18 are no longer operational. The Hansadok is the biggest dock in the port area, but the Deurganckdok is the busiest.

74,000

Number of homes that could be supplied with green energy as a result of the Port of Antwerp's proposed wind farm. The project, begun in 2005, involves the construction of 30 wind turbines which will treble wind power capacity in Flanders.

€8.9 million

Cost of excavation of the Paarden saltmarsh, north of Doel power station. This is one of several conservation projects carried out by the port authority in recent years. The aim is to create new bird breeding grounds to compensate for marshes and shores lost to industry.

4

Vanished villages that once lay on land now occupied by the port of Antwerp.

€7,870

Cost of renovation of the Wilmarsdonk church spire, which stands in the middle of the Port of Antwerp industrial zone. The port funded the renovation of the church roof and spire.

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National Bank issues warning as crisis continues

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The Commission said it was satisfied with the reduced tax burden on labour and noted that Belgium was one of the most productive countries in Europe. But it criticised Belgium for failing to tackle unemployment among low-skilled workers. The country also came under attack for its low overall employment rate, with just 61% of the active population in employment in 2006 – well below the European average.

Meanwhile, Luc Coene, vice-governor of the Belgian National Bank, warned last week that the economic repercussions of the political crisis were becoming apparent in the world markets and that foreign brokerages were beginning to advise their clients not to invest in Belgian government bonds. "Once the effect of that negative advice starts to show, it is too late," Coene told a parliamentary finance and budget commission.

The governor of the National Bank, Guy Quaden, had already issued a stern warning about the financial implications of the crisis, suggesting that it would cost the country some €2.5 billion (reported in *Flanders Today*, 28 November). Coene now says

that the Belgian economy will see a more marked slowdown in 2008 than previously expected. "You can throw away the old figures," he said, suggesting the forecast of 2.2% growth will not be reached, and the 1.8% inflation forecast will be raised.

Yet Coene wasn't too pessimistic about the situation. "So far, the Belgian economy has been able to weather the storm relatively well," he said. He forecast economic growth for the fourth quarter of 2007 at 0.4%, which would result in 2.6% growth for the year as a whole. This was slightly below the 2.9% of 2006, but still a decent result, the vice-governor said.

The mood in London is apparently still relaxed with regard to Belgium. There is no proof that London-based brokers are rejecting Belgian government bonds, says the financial daily *De Tijd*. "There is no question of fear or panic," a KBC banker said.

The signs at present are that the country will come out of the crisis relatively unscathed. The country may even have a government by Christmas, according to a report in last Monday's *De Standaard*. For online news on the evolving political situation, see our website www.flanderstoday.eu.

Flemish films see box office boom



The year's top earner: *Ben X*

Flemish films have had a record year in terms of ticket sales, according to the Flemish Audiovisual Fund (VAF). More than 1.3 million tickets were sold for Flemish films last year, compared to the previous record of just over one million in 2003, when Erik Van Looy's *De Zaak Alzheimer* was a box office hit. This year's figures were boosted by Nic Balthazar's debut film *Ben X* on the problems of an autistic teenager, which accounted for 250,000 ticket sales, *Firmin*, which sold 219,721 tickets, and *Vermist*, which netted 175,696 sales. The VAF says that one quarter of box office hits in Flanders are home-grown movies.

Sint Felix Warehouse wins award

Geert Bourgeois, the Flemish minister for administrative affairs, awarded the St Felix Warehouse in Antwerp with an award for the best re-use of an existing building. The 19th century docklands warehouse was converted for use by the city archives. "This is a shining example of sustainable renovation," the jury said.



Sint Felix after the transformation

Belgian professor at Yale calls for a single national university

A Belgian professor currently teaching at Yale University in the US has called on Belgian universities to work towards the creation of one top university to attract students from across Europe. Emile Boulpaep, a member of Yale's medical faculty, said last week that Europe had the capacity for about 30 world-class universities, which leaves room for only one in Belgium. "But the risk is that there will be none at all," he said, hinting that students would go elsewhere.

Universities need to compete with each other more vigorously, "but that does not fit with the democratic education system in Belgium," he argues. "It's forbidden to say you're better because you went to the University of X; all degrees are of equal worth." He also criticised the growing fusion between universities and other tertiary educational establishments – the so-called high schools. "The high schools get better as a result," he said. "But the universities don't." Too much time, money and energy will be lost as a result in the coming years.

Belgian university leaders reacted coolly to Professor Boulpaep's calls. A proposal to create a single top Flemish university has already been rejected by the academic community, said Antwerp rector Francis Van Loon. "This is a wild idea from someone who is a long way from Belgium," he said. Leuven University's research coordinator Paul De Boeck saw no reason why Flanders could not have two or three top universities. "Scotland is smaller than we are, and they have several top universities. Riches come from variety, not from monopoly," he said.

Rail chaos makes daycare difficult

The number of complaints from rail users over the new NMBS timetable has doubled in the second week since it was introduced, from 630 to over 1,200, according to the rail ombudsman Guido Herman. Most complaints concern delays and lack of information, with the Turnhout-Brussels line hardest-hit. Last week staff on the Ghent-Brussels line staged a wildcat strike, throwing services further into disruption. Meanwhile the rail chaos has had an unexpected effect on daycare, where untrained help has had to be drafted in to cope as parents are forced to drop children off earlier than usual (or pick them up later) because of changes to train timetables. The situation is aggravated by the introduction of a new flexible daycare system by Kind & Gezin, which has put pressure on already stretched resources, particularly in Antwerp, where there are now 4,000 children under the age of three years waiting for daycare places. The city council is due to vote this week on a new five-year plan to extend city-run facilities.

Dialect disappears from the screen as Limburg soap launches

The public broadcaster VRT has defended its decision not to have characters in the new TV drama *Katarakt* speak the dialect of the region where the series is set in Limburg province. "Dialogue," said spokesperson Diane Waumans, "needs to be as average as possible, so that everyone can follow without needing subtitles." According to voice-coach Gert Terny, Flanders is not only too small a market to support dialect specialists, but the use of dialect is too fragmented. "In some villages the people on the north side speak differently to the people who live on the south side," Terny said.

NEWS FLASH



The wrong Lille

About 50 British tourists are to sue their coach operator after the driver taking them to the famous Christmas market in Lille, Northern France, made a mistake with his satellite navigation system and ended up 140 km away in Lille, near Antwerp. The tourists, who were on a works outing from Lloyds TSB bank, complained that the detour costs them seven hours in the bus and left no time for shopping at their real destination. The burgomaster of Lille in the Kempen region, Jef Van Duppen, explained that such mistakes are not uncommon. "There isn't a week goes by without some truck driver from Poland or ex-Yugoslavia standing in front of the Stadhuis with his map in his hand, looking for the Hôtel de Ville. We're used to it."

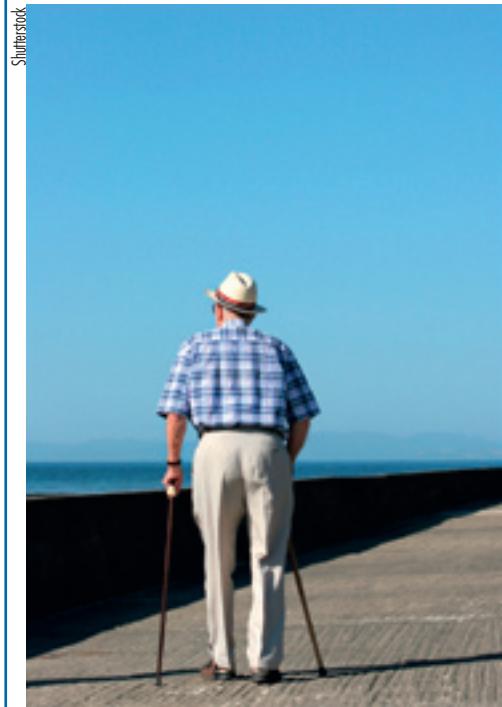
Antwerp University tackles student drinking

Antwerp University plans to introduce a system from the next academic year to tackle drugs and alcohol abuse among students. Next month the university will launch a pilot project to make students aware of their drinking habits in an effort to combat so-called binge-drinking. A recent study showed that one male student in 10 showed signs of alcohol problems, with one in six binge-drinking at least once a week. "Just about every secondary school has a plan to fight drug and alcohol abuse," Professor Guido Van Hal of the Public Health faculty. "In higher education the view was that students were old enough and independent enough to take responsibility for themselves. The research suggests that's not actually the case, and there's an urgent need for counselling and advice."

Ghent opens new forensic institute

Ghent University last week opened a new forensic science institute, which will handle all forensic matters for the judicial district. The institute will carry out not only autopsies in cases of suspicious death, but also investigations on living persons – which accounts for about 50% of a forensic lab's work. The popularity of TV series such as *CSI* and *Witse* have led to an increase in students signing up for courses, said Professor Michel Piette, who heads the institute. "But most of them drop out," he said. "Too many bloody crime-scenes, along with the salary and the working hours. Even I'm on standby two nights a week."

Flanders team announces Alzheimer's breakthrough



A new treatment for Alzheimer's Disease could be on the horizon thanks to a breakthrough announced by a team of researchers from the University of Leuven and the VUB in Brussels. The research, carried out under the guidance of the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB), opens the way for drugs that could prevent or arrest the disease, which is the leading cause of dementia and affects

about 100,000 people in Belgium at any given time. Best-selling British author Terry Pratchett announced last week that he is suffering from a form of the disease, and the Flemish investigative journalist Walter De Bock died last month at only 61 after being diagnosed in 2002.

The research focuses on the composition of amyloid plaques found in the brains of Alzheimer's patients – these are protein clumps which are thought to form years before symptoms start to show. Researchers at the Riken Brain Science Institute in Japan have only recently managed to detect these plaques in healthy brains through magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and through tests developed by researchers in Innsbruck, Austria, on cerebrospinal fluid. Previously these could only be detected at the autopsy stage. The plaques themselves are not particularly harmful, however, as they are insoluble and stable. One problem with the theory that they were a cause of Alzheimer's was the poor correlation between amyloid plaques and cell destruction.

The KUL-VUB-VIB team may have cracked that problem with their discovery that certain fats (lipids) in the brain can cause the plaques to break down into tiny microscopic fibres called fibrils, which can then dissolve into protofibrils which are extremely toxic to the nerve cells in the brain. In the beginning, the protofibrils affect the proper electrical and chemical functioning of nerve-pulses, explained

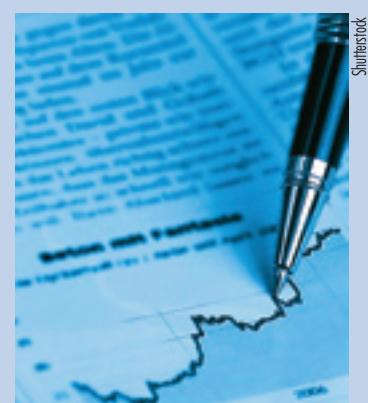
Professor Bart De Strooper of the KUL. This is the basic stuff of which all thoughts, ideas and actions are made. Left untreated, they then go on to destroy the very cells themselves. The brain scan of a typical advanced case of Alzheimer's reveals large areas where the brain cells have simply disappeared.

The team reproduced the dissolution of fibrils into toxic protofibrils in mice, which were then subjected to memory tests. This confirmed the damage, Professor De Strooper told *Flanders Today*. "This is caused by lipids which are present in the brain – diet is probably not a major factor." More importantly, he said, they were able to recreate the same phenomenon in vitro in the laboratory. "This is important because the ability to generate these toxic protofibrils in vitro also gives us the opportunity to find compounds which bind to them and make them less dangerous," Prof De Strooper said.

The results could clash with a new direction in Alzheimer's research which aims to use so-called "plaque-busters" (a term more common in heart-disease jargon) to break down amyloid plaques. In one recent case, a team at St Louis discovered an enzyme which breaks down the fibrils that make up the plaques. If Professor De Strooper's team's results are correct, that could in fact cause the very damage it seeks to prevent. "These results could be the warning not to mess with the amyloid plaques as some therapies now do," he said.

Alan Hope

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



4 tons

Weight of copper wire stolen from Vertronics, an optical fibre manufacturer based in Gavere, East Flanders. The price of copper wire has recently increased sharply on the world markets because of surging demand from countries like China and India. Thieves also stole 1.7 tons of copper wire from the Fabricom industrial site in Ghent.

8.2%

Increased sales of prescription medicines in the first half of 2007, according to figures from the national institute of health insurance Riziv. Sales of cholesterol-lowering drugs increased the most, putting added strain on the health insurance funds.

9 hours

Average time taken by a judge to deal with a legal case, according to a study by the Public Management Institute in Leuven. Environment cases are the most difficult, taking an average of 20 hours, whereas adoption cases can be concluded in five hours on average. The Belgian legal system is currently bogged down with a backlog of cases.

80%

Ghent students taking medicines to cope with stress, according to a survey of 1,000 undergraduates.

185,039

Work-related accidents in Belgium in 2006, of which 99 were fatal. The number of deaths has decreased from 118 in 2005, but overall the number of accidents rose.

24

Stand-up comedians taking part in the Comedy Casino Festival in Ghent. Gags ranged from plastic surgery to Antwerp local politics to doping in the comedy circuit.

Towns get breathing space over pollution norms

Flemish cities and municipalities have been given until 2012 to meet EU norms on the safe levels of polluting particles in the air, after an extension was granted by the European Parliament last week. The decision recognises the difficulties experienced by heavily urbanised areas and central regions (where pollution is often produced elsewhere), as is the case in much of Flanders. Municipalities will be required, however, to show that they have clean-up plans underway. Environmentalists were disappointed at the derogation, calling it a "blank cheque for polluters".



Boonen and Henin voted "athletes of the year"

Flemish cyclist Tom Boonen (left) has been voted Belgian male athlete of the year, while tennis champion Justine Henin has won female athlete of the year. The winners were announced at a sports gala in Ostend Casino following a poll of sports journalists. Boonen, who takes the award for the second time, beat cyclist Sven Nys and basketball star Axel Hervelle. Henin takes home her trophy for the fourth time.



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Recipe for a better life's end

Flanders first supportive day care for terminally ill patients celebrates 10 years.
If only there were more like it

Monique Philips

It might seem odd that a clinic offering end-of-life care has published a cookery book for its 10th anniversary. But thumbing through the unique mixture of stories, quotes, full-page photos and recipes, you get a genuine feel for the place and its people: Vulnerability is allowed, humour is essential, and everyone is welcome.

Patients are guests at Topaz. The first centre in Flanders to offer "supportive" day care (a term they prefer to "palliative"), it bases its work on the understanding that it's not because you have a life-threatening disease that your life is over. Part of Brussels UZ, the main focus of Topaz is to offer patients complementary help that can't be offered at home – medical and psychological – and that doesn't really require hospitalisation. Some people who are at an end-of-life stage don't want to spend it in a hospital and don't have partners who can take care of them full time. Home help cannot be solely responsible, either, and Topaz fills the void.

Guests can come three days a week to take baths, have their hair done, eat a meal or take a stroll in the garden. It makes a huge difference for patients, of course, but also for their support networks. Both guests and families can break free from the sometimes distressing and more expensive hospital and from social isolation. Patients remain at home much longer, preferably until the end of their lives. Although 70% of Belgians would prefer to die at home, 70% die in hospital.

Most of the guests at Topaz are from the Brussels area, and half are younger than 50 years old. Some suffer from cancer, others from Aids or multiple sclerosis.

But usually they don't dwell on those things around the big dining table. "On some days I come to Topaz with a need to talk about my problems, and, by the end of the day, I realize that I haven't thought about them for a minute," smiles Hetty D'Hyghe, 55. The atmosphere in the low building on



Meal time at Topaz, which is celebrating 10 years of offering out-patient care to the terminally ill

the outskirts of Brussels amid the lush fields of Wemmel is homey and warm. A psychologist and doctors are on hand to visit with privately – but often just sitting in the living room. Chatting openly with the guests reduces the taboos for everybody.

But the busiest room is definitely the kitchen. Volunteers and guests cook all kinds of international dishes together. Guest Rudi Bekaert, one of the editors of the new book, is grateful for the hearty food prepared by the incomparable volunteer Marie-Jeanne. "I used to be so skinny. Now I just love the sound of the little bell. Dinner is ready, and we all sit together," he says. "Sometimes with visitors, family, friends or politicians. And when somebody brings a dog, it gets a bowl too."

Guests also feel immense satisfaction at having a say in their own treatment, an environment Topaz works hard to create. "It's so comforting to be taken seriously,"

says Bekaert. This is not a feeling commonly inspired in a traditional hospital setting. Petra Claes, an HIV-doctor, elaborates: "In the clinic I have a HIV-consultation, but at Topaz I have a people consultation. People. With HIV. With a life and a past. Here it doesn't smell like hospital but like bath foam and soup. No beeps, but music and laughter. Patients aren't confined to their sick beds; they relax in a comfy sofa or lie in the sun watching the clouds, rather than the ceiling of a hospital room. Clichés like 'add life to the days rather than days to a life' become real here. To be terminally ill is still part of life not of death."

Staff, visiting personnel and volunteers are screened for open-mindedness, a sense of humour and their ability to put things into perspective. Respect for the cultural individuality of each guest is important, too. The group of 25 to 30 volunteers on which the centre relies, organises the cooking, transport and painting sessions.

But the ongoing comfort of each guest is the central focus of attention at Topaz. "Quite unique in our system is that all the volunteers are included in staff meetings and in the professional privacy code, so everyone is aware of the problems of each patient," says Wim Distelmans, the driving force of Topaz and a professor of Oncology and Palliative Medicine at Brussels university VUB. Awareness is very important, he explains, because some guests are too shy to say when they're in pain.

With such proven benefits to patients, it's all the more outrageous

that financing is so low. "When you can hospitalise 50 patients for two weeks less every year by helping them in an out-patient clinic, the whole yearly cost of such a centre is paid for," says Distelmans. Topaz receives some funding, but, in order to meet its annual budget, it holds fundraising events. It also receives some supplementary funding from Brussels VUB, the province of Vlaams Brabant and the town of Wemmel (which paid for the bathroom).

Currently, there are only five supportive day care centres in Flanders – or one for every 1,200,000 people – instead of the 50 Distelmans says are needed. In comparison 250 such facilities exist in England – one for every 204,000 people – with long waiting lists.

Helga Baert, an intern nurse at Topaz, wrote a piece called "Café Terminus" in the 10th anniversary book Topaz: *recepten voor een beter levens einde* (Topaz: *Recipes for a Better Life's End*), which was put together by patients, as well as staff. She relates countless times she laughed out loud, but also about the times that broke her heart. A young woman her own age dies within weeks. An estranged husband combs his wife's hair. Marie from Congo has no family left and lives in a shelter for the homeless. In fact, there are several patients like Marie – far from their home countries and facing miserable social and financial circumstances – who can't find their way through the red tape. Often those who need help the most don't know what's on offer.

They're fortunate to have found

Topaz, as most Flemish doctors don't even know it exists or what it does. On average, a Belgian doctor only sees about five terminally ill patients a year. And even when a doctor does make a referral, patients often react with strong prejudices, thinking that "palliative care" equals "dying soon". Here is an educational task for Belgium's medical schools. Until doctors become more aware of Topaz and other day facilities like it, the help that is so readily available reaches patients much too late – or not at all.

online

www.dagcentrum-topaz.be



Topaz: recepten voor een beter levens einde can be ordered for €15, plus €5 postage, from 02.456.82.02 or topazvub@skynet.be. All proceeds go directly to Topaz, which also accepts donations.



Topaz offers facilities for cooking, eating, socialising, resting – and bathing

RESEARCH

Flanders to build new research ship

The Flemish government is to invest some €11.5 million in a new research ship named *Simon Stevin*. The vessel, which replaces an aging ship from 1977 called *Zeeleeuw*, is expected to be ready to launch in 2010. It will be used for scientific research and to take samples of coastal waters. It will also be used to investigate alternative sources of energy.

The *Simon Stevin* will be a purpose-built research vessel, whereas the *Zeeleeuw* was a converted pilot boat. Unlike its predecessor, the *Simon Stevin* will be designed to navigate the shallow waters of the Flemish coast and the Scheldt estuary – where much of the research work will be done.

The ship is being built for the Flemish Maritime Institute (VLIZ), which is based in Ostend port. Some 750 research scientists from universities and research institutes across the country will be able to use the ship.

The new research vessel is named after a Flemish mathematician born in Bruges in 1548 who invented a sand yacht and devised new methods of maritime navigation. He is commemorated by a statue on the Simon Stevinplein in Bruges.

online

www.vliz.be

ENERGY

Port of Antwerp goes green

Solar panels could be installed in 2008

Antwerp has ambitious plans to install solar panels on warehouse roofs in the port area. The project, which was unveiled last week, involves some 450 hectares of panels, equivalent to 960 football pitches. "We basically want to supply the whole city with green electricity," explains Tom Wassenberg of the Antwerp port authority.

The city is also looking into the possibility of installing solar

panels on school buildings, hangars along the Scheldt waterfront and on top of the high-speed train tunnel that runs along the E19 motorway.

The German energy consortium E.ON recently submitted a plan to build a new €1.5 billion coal-fired power station in the port of Antwerp, which would use two million tons of coal annually to supply 10% of Belgium's energy needs. But environmental

groups have criticised the plan, saying it would add to Belgium's carbon emissions.

Wassenberg points out that solar panel technology has advanced in recent years. "Twenty years ago you could only use solar panels in the Sahara, but the quality has improved so much that the sun doesn't need to shine at all to produce energy."

HIGHER EDUCATION

Leuven launches buddy project

Higher education has to be open to underprivileged young people

Leuven city council has launched a new project to get more young people from non-Belgian backgrounds into higher education. The Buddy Project, as it is called, is aimed at young people from deprived backgrounds, including many from immigrant families, who regularly fail to go on to higher education.

The initiative was launched last week by Mohamed Ridouani, 27, alderman for education and integration in Leuven city council. "Higher education has to perform its social role and make more effort to attract students from non-Belgian backgrounds," he explains.

Ridouani, born in Leuven of Moroccan parents, says that more than half of the children from immigrant families drop out of secondary education without getting a diploma. His answer is to recruit 150 undergraduates on teacher training courses in Leuven to act as "buddies" for young people from deprived backgrounds.

The buddies will be drawn from

courses at the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL), the Catholic College of Further Education and Groep T college. The trainees will help some 300 students in their first year of secondary education to get to grips with homework, as well as teaching good study methods and motivation, explains Stefaan Fiers, head of the teacher training department at KUL.

The KUL sees this project as fitting in with its policies on integration. "I think it's important for future teachers to be confronted with the problems faced by people from non-Belgian backgrounds," says Vice-President Karen Maex. "If they are going on to teach, they will increasingly have to deal with children from these backgrounds."

The trainee teachers generally build up good relationships with their struggling students. "They don't look on us as teachers who are out to drill them," one trainee told the Flemish daily *De Standaard*. "We are their buddy, their friend, someone they can talk to about anything. What's more,



Mohamed Ridouani

we're young and we're students. That means that they can trust us."

The project is currently limited to Leuven, but other cities such as Ghent and Antwerp are studying the idea closely.

Derek Blyth

online

www.kuleuven.be

BUSINESS FLASH

**Galapagos**

Galapagos, the Mechelen-based biotechnology company, has signed an agreement with British pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline to develop new antibiotic and antiviral drugs. The deal, which could be worth up to €1 billion if several products reach the market, follows another contract barely one month ago between Galapagos and US-based Johnson and Johnson for rheumatic research.

IJsboerke

IJsboerke, the Tielen-based ice cream producer controlled by financier Albert Frère's NPM holding company, has acquired the Frisa/Artic brand to create the Belgian Icecream Group (BIG), the country's largest producer in the sector. Also part of the group is the country's oldest ice cream company, Mio, founded in 1898.

Mercedes-Benz

Mercedes-Benz, the German automotive group, is investing some €22 million in its Brussels headquarters to centralise its administration and marketing operations in Belgium and Luxembourg. The company, which has sold its stake in US-based Chrysler, is forecasting record sales this year in the local market and has high hopes for an equally successful 2008.

Thenergo

Thenergo, the Antwerp-based developer of renewable energy using biomass, has acquired a controlling stake in its German competitor Enro. The move will allow the company to develop its activities in central and eastern Europe.

VPK

VPK, the Oudegem-based cardboard and packaging products manufacturer, has sold its Dutch affiliate Twinpack to the Noorderhuys private equity company. VPK will use the proceeds of the sale to develop increased capacity in its recycled paper products lines and to build a new plant in Rumania.

Novotel

Novotel, the three-star French hotel chain owned by the Accor group, is to open a 239-room hotel opposite the Brussel-Zuid railway station in September 2009. The new hotel will have a fitness centre, bar and two restaurants.

Eldepasco

Eldepasco, a recently-created partnership of several wind-generated energy producers, is investing €600 million to develop a 36-turbine wind farm in the North Sea, off the Belgian coast, from 2009.

Katoen Natie

Katoen Natie, the Antwerp-based logistics company, is to invest some €110 million to build a container terminal in the port of Montevideo, Uruguay. The company has received the backing of the European Investment Bank for the project.

Besix

Besix, the Brussels-based building group, has won a €350 million contract for its share in the construction of a water treatment and purification plant in Dubai.

Pierre Marcolini

Pierre Marcolini, the upmarket chocolates manufacturer, has signed a strategic partnership with Swiss-based food giant Nestlé. The move will allow publicity-conscious Marcolini to develop the brand and open new franchised outlets.

Unemployment drops

Unemployment in Flanders was 16% lower last month compared to November 2006, reports labour minister Frank Vandenbroucke. Some 166,444 people are currently looking for a job, or 5.87% of the working age population.

EXHIBITION

Hugo Martens



Henri Permeke, "Boats on the Beach at Heyst"

Paradise lost

Flemish Impressionists at the sea

A major exhibition in Knokke-Heist has brought together 250 paintings by Belgian artists who were drawn to the quiet fishing villages of Knokke and Heist (then spelt Knocke and Heyst) at the end

of the 19th century. The artists began arriving in the 1870s when the coastline was still a wild area of dunes and little fishing villages, and they were still coming up until the beginning of World War One, when much of the North Sea

coast had been developed with hotels and villas.

The exhibition captures an idyllic moment in Belgian history when artists painted appealing landscapes and village scenes using the techniques of

the French Impressionists. The Belgian artists were familiar with the latest schools and movements in art, but their paintings were a little old-fashioned, just a tad too comfortable.

Anna Boch is one of the most interesting of the artists on show. She came from a rich Walloon industrial family, manufacturers of Boch porcelain, yet was radical enough to buy a Van Gogh (the only work he sold in his lifetime). Despite her adventurous tastes, her own paintings were quiet works that would hang comfortably in a Belgian house.

The exhibition organisers, Danny Lannoy and Frieda Devinck, spent 10 years tracking down elusive works for this show. Their hard work has turned up Impressionist paintings that have been forgotten for decades, hidden in private houses or neglected in municipal archives. The artists include the notorious Félicien Rops, famous for his erotic works but seen here painting gentle seascapes. There are also paintings by Théo Van Rysselberghe and Willy Finch (but none by Camille Pissarro, who painted several works in Knokke).

The organisers have

added to the show's appeal by assembling a collection of letters, period photographs and diaries. They have also managed to locate the exact spot where some of the works were painted. But anyone who goes off in search of these idyllic locations is likely to end up disappointed. Almost nothing has survived from that era.

Derek Blyth

Impressionists in Knocke & Heyst, at the Scharpoort cultural centre, Knokke-Heist, until 20 January

online

www.ccknokke-heist.be

C.C. Knokke-Heist



Anna Boch's gentle study of village life

EXHIBITION

Dream on

Visions of a better world

Over the past 20 years, the Modern Architecture Archives in Brussels (AAM) has built up one of Europe's most extensive collections of architectural drawings, photographs, plans and models. Stored in a former Masonic Lodge in a suburban street of Elsene, the collection has grown to some two million items that chart the history of Belgian architecture from the mid 19th century to the present day.

The researchers at AAM have delved into this vast resource to produce a new exhibition of 200 drawings and models that show Belgian architecture at its most visionary. The architects – almost 100 of them – cover just about every style in the book, from Paul Hamesses languid Art Nouveau to Renaat Braem's powerful modernism.

Many of the buildings never got beyond the drawing board. And when you see some of the proposals, you might not be too surprised that they remain in the realm of paper dreams. The architect Jean Hendrickx produced an extraordinary plan for an airport land-

ing strip on top of four connected skyscrapers. That was in 1918, when airplanes were barely able to land on firm ground, never mind 10 floors up in the air.

This exhibition teaches you just how many extraordinary buildings have been planned in Belgium, often down to the smallest detail. The Flemish architect Renaat Braem seems to have spent more time than most designing buildings that were never realised. He drew a detailed plan for a town hall for Amsterdam, another for a new Central Station in Brussels and no less than four designs for a town hall in Boom, near Antwerp.

You begin to realise that disappointment is a professional hazard. Even when an architect wins a competition, he might never see the building completed. Braem won the Boom town hall competition in 1952, for instance, with a futuristic building of glass and steel, but it was never built.

The exhibition raises the question of architect's motives – do they sometimes design fantasy buildings knowing they will never see the light of day? The exhibi-

tion includes a number of beautiful drawings that are more like works of art than practical building plans. The architect-artists sometimes conceive entire cities, even though most professional architects, at least in Belgium, barely get more than a single narrow building plot to exercise their creativity.

Towards the end, the exhibition seems to be hinting that utopian architecture is maybe a bad idea. The final room contains a gigantic scale model of the Manhattan Quarter in Brussels, a mighty three-by-six-metre layout designed to sell the idea to investors. It is accompanied by a promotional film from the 1970s in praise of this New-York-inspired business district. It was promoted as a brave new world, but turned into one of the biggest planning disasters in Belgian history. It seems that visionary architects can't always be trusted to get it right.

DB

Exhibition at the Architecture Foundation, 55 Kluisstraat, Brussels, until 20 April.

online

www.fondationpourlarchitecture.be
www.aam.be



Flight of Fancy: Jean Hendrickx's 1918 skyscrapers

New life at the party

Beursschouwburg adds an additional spark to its novel salon series

Lisa Bradshaw

How would you like to sit down on your sofa for a one-on-one with world-famous choreographer/photographer/director/actor Wim Vandekeybus? Or perhaps you'd prefer an intimate chat over coffee with Tine Van Den Wyngaert of the avant-garde theatre troupe Abattoir Ferme and TV series *Het geslacht De Pauw*? These were the first two guests of the Agape series, a unique opportunity to meet and break bread with Flemish artists outside their normal performance spaces.

Beursschouwburg in Brussels previously presented the series under the title *Salon Magnétique*. The monthly event is free, as long as you bring some food to share. After a buffet meal, the audience settles in around the art centre's cafe to listen to the guest of honour talk about their work, play music they love, show snippets of films they find meaningful or present other aspects of their personalities – whatever they want.

This year, they've changed the name (*Agape* is a Latin term meaning "friendship meal") and added a hostess – Maria Tarantino, an Italian expat based in Brussels. The freelance journalist has presented a weekly programme on TV Brussel about the city's cultural diversity and a documentary series on Canvas called *The World of Tarantino*. She took part in the salon last year as a guest artist and apparently impressed Beursschouwburg's artistic director so much that he invited her to host it this year. "He thought it would be nice to have an interaction to drag out the human who is behind all that art," says Tarantino. "I have a certain capacity to get in touch with a person, to open them up." It's a testament, in



And it's all in English: video artist Sarah Vanagt is the next guest at Agape, an intimate multi-media talk show

fact, to how much Beursschouwburg believes in her that the conversations are all in English instead of Dutch, the first language of all of the guests.

Judging by the first two evenings, the formula is a huge success. Tarantino meets the artists ahead of time to find out what interests them and what ideas they want to share, then she builds her interviews (which she calls "encounters") from there. "We try to make it into a personalised conversation instead of just fact finding," she says. Still, there's plenty of improvisation and surprises. Vandekeybus, for instance, is a nervous type, always moving about. But Tarantino was a grounding presence – he talked to her while playing music he brought along. "It's during this talk that we really create some-

thing," she says. "The spirit of the salon is to break down barriers. We try to be part of the crowd, to establish the feeling of all being in the same living room." Vandekeybus also chose to show images while people ate – from a film about cannibalism.

There should be plenty of provocative images at the next Agape, too, which features Brussels-based documentary filmmaker and video artist Sarah Vanagt. Her short films of children in Africa mimicking political and social events around them are at once shocking and endearing. Still, it will be a completely different experience from the other salons, insists Tarantino. Part of the magic of the series is the diversity of the artists. "It's a kaleidoscope," she says. "The guests really show a lot

of their own personalities."

Agape also tries to introduce a surprise guest. Van Den Wyngaert, for instance, is deeply interested in outsider art. Lo and behold, at the end of the evening, Tarantino welcomed Patrick Allegaert onto the stage – the head curator at the Museum Dr Guislain, which showcases this genre of art.

Food, film, music, readings, talk, surprises. Says Tarantino: "It's the best free cultural event in Brussels."

Agape features Sarah Vanagt at 19.30 on 9 January and electronic artist Buscemi on 13 February, Beursschouwburg, Auguste Ortsstraat 20, Brussels

online

www.beursschouwburg.be

FILM FREAK

Belgian Film Festival

A quick look at the programme for this month's Belgian Film Festival, and it's immediately apparent that the Flemish have had a good year. All five Flemish features on offer have either impressed audiences on the international festival circuit, delighted Belgian critics – or both. If you've missed them, this is most certainly the moment to catch up.

Now in its third year, this Brussels festival is the only one in Flanders that focuses purely on Belgian film. Its smattering of features and shorts over five days isn't overwhelming, as some film fests tend to be. The focus on the local gives it a homely feel, while its setting in the 1913 Art Deco Pathé Palace lends a bit of splendour.

On the bill are films from both the north and south of the country: the Flemish features include *Man zkt Vrouw*, *Ex-Drummer*, *Dagen Zonder Lief*, *Ben X* and *Irina Palm*. All are recommended by your critic, and most will be shown with English subtitles (though you should check before buying your ticket). *Irina Palm*, though, is a British co-production and filmed in English.



Hanneke tries hard to conform in *Kroeskop*

Features are paired with short films, and the best of these is *Kroeskop*, which opens for *Ben X*. It follows newly-adopted teen Hanneke at her first day of school, where she decides she must rid herself of her lush afro after being laughed at by three identical straight-haired blondes.

The fest hosts directors and actors for each screening and works to encourage viewers to see Belgian movies they might have missed this year. "Belgians don't actually go to Belgian films much," says Maxime Feyer of the festival. "Belgian cinema is not considered entertaining, but more social or heavy. Here, you can have fun and meet people involved in the productions."

The holiday period seems like a risky time to throw a festival, but it turns out to actually fill a void. Cultural centres tend to shut their doors between Christmas and New Year, so there is no competition. Last year 4,000 people came through the door. "Belgians have time right now, and there are few options," confirms Feyer. "Except for the Christmas markets."

LB

December 26-30, Pathé Palace, Anspachlaan 85, Brussels. Buy tickets in advance or a full festival pass at the venue.

online

www.filmbelge.be

FLANDERS EYE



Carl De Keyzer

The internationally acclaimed Flemish photographer Carl De Keyzer is best known for his extraordinary photos of ordinary people – Belgian youth in detention centres, workers mining for gold in the Gobi desert, New Year's Eve revellers in Edinburgh. Bruges' Concertgebouw, though, proffered a challenge. They wanted landscapes featuring water to display during their special water-themed musical programme that began last month and continues in January. "To our amazement, he was willing to take up the challenge," says a Concertgebouw spokesperson. "He bought a couple of topographic maps, looked for water on them and drove there."

The resulting *Moments Before the Flood* is made up of 28 discrete meditations on liquid Flanders – mostly the Bruges area and the coast. Dike streams trickling beside forest paths are so clean and clear, you can almost touch them, and patches of ponds in bright green grasses offer tenants in the adjoining high rises a bit of nature. Coastal scenes are appropriately dim and moody – suggesting storms are brewing. A theme of man existing somewhere in or around this water in nature is ever-present, though, at the moment, there are no humans in sight.

Seven of the 28 total photographs that make up the series are on view now and seven others beginning in January. It's a shame that you can only view the exhibition before and after performances in the Concertgebouw: They really should be open to a wider public. But you can see them all, plus more of De Keyzer's work at www.carldekeyzer.com.

LB

Holiday cheer

Flanders laughs in the face of the cold with concerts, fireworks, ice sculptures and plenty of mulled wine



Let there be light: Brussels' Grote Markt flashes and glows until 1 January

Lisa Bradshaw

Flanders certainly spoils one for choice this time of year. Whether you're looking for indoor or outdoor activities, there's an event with your name on it. Fancy a market – which one of dozens? Want to sing a few carols? Eat some fresh soup for free? Whip down a slide made of ice? Read on: it might be the dead of winter, but Flanders is alive this week.

First up: the markets. Even if you think you don't like them, I have always found something good about every one. In Bruges, I ate the best waffle of my life. In Ghent, I watched old couples, high on mulled wine, swinging to live Christmas jazz. Both are back this year, and Bruges' market, in two locations, is particularly beautiful. The smaller bit is in Simon Stevinklein (that's where the waffles are), and the larger part on the Markt – bathed at night in a bright blue glow of lights.

But let's face it: Brussels is the grand-daddy of Christmas markets. Did you know that people come in swarms from Britain just to see it? Not capable of containing itself to one or even two squares, the capital city takes up three major areas for its Winter Pret. The Beurs hosts 240 wooden chalets selling stuff. (Every year I come home with a new pair of handmade wool gloves.) The Vismarkt is where the ice rink, big wheel and "Magic Carousel" are – family fun and lots

of it. This is also the best location for deep-fried foods that always taste better outside like *poffertjes* (sugary little balls of dough) and *kroketten*. This year's "guest country" is Ile de la Réunion (Reunion Island), the only European region in the southern hemisphere. So expect lots of fruity drinks on neighbouring Sint-Katelijneplein. This is my favourite area of the market because it's less frantic and home to D'Andréa, a whacky, almost sinister carousel that looks like the remnants of a mad scientist's abandoned laboratory.

All this is best enjoyed in the evening when the lights are lit, particularly if you visit the Grote Markt for the light show – a creative splurge of sound and colour every night. The giant circles of red, green and white over the Stadhuis are truly impressive. On 22 December, live opera will be performed on the square.

Antwerp also hosts a Christmas market in the Groenplaats, but they up the ante on 22 December with Kunst & Vliegwerk over on Sint-Jansplein. This annual winter

ball starts at 16.00 with a children's concert and then features live music ("from Elvis to Madonna") until midnight. There's also stand-up comedy, street theatre and a fire show, plus an international soup buffet featuring entries from the four corners of the globe. While you're in Antwerp, don't miss De Coninckplein, which features 40 inflatable lighted globes, each designed by a different young

if you are an adult, you shouldn't miss the big slide through a tube of ice. Meanwhile, at Plopsaland in De Panne, you'll find Ketnet Freezzz, the TV station's annual winter carnival for kids, with adventure courses, games, a trampoline and other assorted thrill rides. It also features an interactive music installation called Ice Cube by the Brussels contemporary art group Artonaut. Not their usual type of venue, but definitely their usual type of hip multimedia experience. Looks like Ketnet decided to engage the adults this year, too.

Back in Bruges, lighting in the Arentshof and the courtyard of the Gruuthuse Museum make the medieval buildings even more atmospheric. A series of free concerts takes place there, including Gospel Boulevard, inspired by the roots of the African American church, on 26 December, and a DJ lounge set on 2 January. Right in the same area, the Groeninge Fine Arts Museum is hosting special early-evening tours. (The Flemish primitives look even spookier by

twilight.)

Meanwhile, also indoors, Christmas at Bozar is on 23 December. Children's animation and concert, photos with the 13 Yuletide Lads, warm drinks, a chance to see the phenomenal exhibition The Grand Atelier – all wrapped up with a Christmas Concert. Dieleghem Abbey in Brussels also has a Christmas Concert, with opera extracts and Christmas songs on 21 December.

Moving along towards 2008, many cities have fireworks on New Year's Eve, including Nieuwpoort on the Flemish coast, where you'll also find real snow along the beachfront as part of the Snow in the City Festival, until January 2. But if the city is more your scene, Antwerp is the place to be. The display along the Scheldt at midnight is masterful and in Grote Markt a giant screen will show you how people around the world are celebrating. It's New Year every hour on the hour. Plus, the traditional Antwerp harbour foghorn sounding at midnight should really not be missed by anyone living in Belgium.

Also in Antwerp every day from 23 December to 1 January is the Winter Circus in Lotto Arena, plus an old fashioned carnival along the Scheldt from 26 December to 1 January. A New Year's Eve in Antwerp is your precious winter holiday very well spent.

WinterPret spicedwine D'Andréa ReunionIsland Nieuwpoort Snowinthe City fireworks foghorn WinterCircus Scheldt carnival ChristmasatBozar GospelBoulevard Arentshof Kunst& Vliegwerk IceFantasy

artist. All of this is absolutely free.

Other outdoor activities this month and trickling into January include the Snow & Ice Festival in Bruges, where stunning sculptures of ice and snow by a team of international artists lead you through a spooky story. You finally get to relax in the ice bar while drinking your vodka from an ice glass. Even

CLASSICAL NOTES

Striking the right note



How do you get young children to appreciate classical music? A number of organisations in Flanders have thought seriously about this question – and come up with some inspiring answers

Marie Dumont

Babies, according to Flemish conductor Filip Bral, are the best audience. "You should see the looks on their faces," he says of those who attend his musical shows. "I wish I could sometimes witness the same joy and passion in the eyes of adults. Many people think children don't belong in the concert hall, and that's really a shame. Babies perceive the world differently from us: they can hear before they see. Once they start going to school, they lose this wonderful feel for music."

Bral is artistic director of Pantalone, a theatre-cum-production house that was set up in Brussels in 2000 and puts on gentle performances tailored to the impressionable senses and short attention spans of tiny tots. Lasting under an hour and featuring sweet music and bright lights and colours, they've been staged as far off as New York, always to rapturous response.

online

www.pantalone.be
www.bozar.be
www.jeugdenmuziek.be
www.jeunessesmusicales.be
www.defilharmonie.be
www.mim.fgov.be
www.demunt.be

Intrigued? Then take your kids to *Karussell*, a wordless, multi-sensory concert for children aged one and up in which night, day, summer and winter will be conjured up by a cello, a violin, a bandoneon and an actor. The show was premiered in Luxembourg last June and will be repeated at Antwerp's Het Paleis early in January. Another show, *Baby Balloon*, for even younger babies, is scheduled in April.

Pantalone is unusual in that it targets infants, but many more music venues around Flanders have programmes for older children. Brussels' Bozar, for one, is a great place to start if you want to give your kids a gentle introduction to the somewhat daunting world of the classical concert hall. This Sunday, its lofty Art Deco halls will fill up with families as part of a pre-Christmas event called *Christmas@Bozar*. Cocoa will be served and a troupe of Icelandic trolls will be among the attractions, but the high point of the day will be a concert by the Belgian National Orchestra featuring Christmas carols alongside works by Bernstein, Berlioz, Wolf, Carl Orff and Johann Strauss. The concert is open to anyone from the age of four and, for those whose attention tends to wander, a cartoonist will be drawing illustrations which will be projected onto a big screen.

Bozar Studios also organise the BozarSundays series, which starts with a breakfast eaten *en famille*. Parents then make their way to a classical music recital in the Zaal Henry Le Boeuf, while their offspring aged three to five are in the care of storytellers who encourage them to make sounds with their voices, hands and feet. Older children (from six upwards) sneak up to the royal box where they listen to the first few minutes of the recital, then move on to a workshop where they can try out various instruments and compose masterpieces of their own.

Special children's concerts also take place at Bozar, although these are usually organised by Jeugd en Muziek and Jeunesse Musicales, the Flemish and francophone chapters of Jeunesse Musicales International, an organisation set up in Brussels in the aftermath of World War Two to foster a love of music in children and teens. The Sa-Me-Di la Musique series brings in musicians from the Belgian National Orchestra to demonstrate and chat about their instruments, while L'Orchestre à la portée des enfants presents various orchestral works performed by the Liège

under conductor Jaap van Zweden's baton, with a zesty introduction by actor Joris Van den Brande.

Back in Brussels, the Musical Instruments Museum is a great place to snoop around, not only for its fabulous workshops but also because of its Wednesday afternoon concerts, which playfully introduce instruments from its collection.

Meanwhile, behind its forbidding façade, the Munt opera house also tries hard to lower the average age of its public. Its popular *Take a Note* festival, held every year in March, offers a stimulating (and inexpensive) introduction to the opera. This year's edition will be split between several venues and focus on Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* as well as a new dance show by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker – plus all the usual workshops, guided tours and meetings with artists. The festival, according to organiser Els Vanvolsem, is anything but patronising. "Teenagers and young people are perfectly able to attend proper operas rather than short, translated or pre-digested performances," she says. "They often arrive loaded with prejudices about opera, but once they've actually experienced it, they love it."

Correction

In last week's Classical Notes, we erroneously referred to Giya Kancheli as a Russian composer, whereas the article by Marie Dumont made clear that he is a native of Georgia.





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ING 

Classical & new music**Brussels**

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

DEC 23 17.30 Christmas concert:
Belgian National Orchestra, conducted
by Jean-Pierre Haeck, and Choeur
Polyphonia de Bruxelles, conducted
by Denis Menier, with Tania Kross,
mezzo-soprano, Werner Van Mechelen,
baritone: Christmas music by Bernstein,
Irving Berlin, Orff, Berlioz, Wolf,
Gruber, Strauss, Adam

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
Until DEC 19 20.00 Christmas concert:
La Monnaie Choirs conducted by Piers
Maxim: Respighi's *Lauda per la natività
del Signore*, Saint-Saëns's Christmas
Oratorio
DEC 23 20.00 Felicity Lott, soprano;
Lauren Pelly, piano; with the Monnaie
Chamber Ensemble: songs by Hahn,
Kern, Messager, Offenbach, Rogers,
Hart

Dieleghem Abbey

Jan Tiebackxstraat 14; 02.428.71.03
DEC 21 20.00 Christmas concert:
Tonino Carlino, tenor; Eva Nyakas,
soprano, Nadia Verzeen, piano: opera
extracts, Christmas songs

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be
DEC 21 12.30 Les Pastoureaux
children's choir conducted by Philippe
Favette: Christmas songs
Royal Museum of Fine Arts
Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11
DEC 19 12.40-13.30 Christmas concert:
Werner Van Mechelen, baritone; Jozef
de Beenhouwer, piano: Schubert's
Winterreise

Get your tickets now for...**The Smashing Pumpkins**

February 19, 20.00,
Vorst-Nationaal, Victor
Rousseaualaan 208, Brussels.
Tickets from 077 37 38 39 or
www.vorstnationaal.be

The Smashing Pumpkins is a rock band so easy to take for granted. Even if you haven't paid attention for awhile, they're still there for you when you need to travel back to them. They must feel the same way: having gone through multiple metamorphoses and a break up seven years ago, the band's constant leader, Billy Corgan, took out a full page ad in the summer of 2005 in the *Chicago Tribune* announcing their return. "I want my band back, and my songs, and my dreams." We're with you, Billy. He's joined by original member Jimmy Chamberlain and three newbies for their unclassifiable mix of psychedelia and thrashing guitar. Expect plenty from the new overtly political album *Zeitgeist*.

**Saint Michael and St Gudula
Cathedral**

Sinter-Goedeplein; 02.217.83.45
Until DEC 21 20.00 Gospel for Life
with Michy Braden (tickets from
www.sherpa.be)

Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
DEC 23 15.00 Vlaams Radio Koor
conducted by Bo Holten: European
Christmas carols

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
DEC 19 20.00 Akademie für Alte
Musik Berlin and Rias Kammerchor,
conducted by Hans-Christoph
Rademann: Bach's Christmas Oratorio

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02
DEC 20 20.00 Claire Chevalier, Erard
piano; Joris Verdin, Mustel harmonium:
Franck, Lefèbure-Wély, Saint-Saëns,
Guilmant, Widor

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20
DEC 20 20.30 A Theatre of Action,
electronic guitar by Matthias Koole and
Kobe Van Cauwenberghe

Opera**Brussels**

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
DEC 23 Werther by Massenet,
conducted by Kazushi Ono, staged by
Guy Joosten

Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02
Until DEC 23 Le Nozze di Figaro by
Mozart, conducted by Andreas Spering,
staged by Guy Joosten

Jazz & blues**Brussels**

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193-195;
02.733.13.78
DEC 19 20.30 Collapse

Kerk van Sint-Joost-ten-Node

Sint-Joost Plaats; 02.219.39.97
DEC 23 19.00 Sacred Concert by
Duke Ellington with La GIOIA Big
Band and Choir, conducted by Ludwig
Van Gijseghem with Diane Verdoort,
soprano and tap dancers from the Fred
Academy

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50
DEC 19 Chamaquiando, salsa **DEC 20**
Ben Prisch Trio **DEC 21** No Vibrato
Quintet with Jean-Paul Estevenaert
DEC 22 Chris Mentens Jazz Van **DEC**
26 Caribe Con K **DEC 27** The Singers
Night

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
DEC 19 Ancka Parghel-Emy Dragoi,
Romania (Europa.europa) **DEC**
20-21 Katalina Segura & Strings **DEC**
22 Jean-Francois Prins & the New Look
Trio **DEC 26** DelVitaGroup **DEC 27**
Tony O'Malley

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

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
DEC 21 21.00 Exit 07, Etienne De
Crecy, Jerboa, Dizzee Rascal, DJ Mehdi,
Philippe Zdar

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89
DEC 22 23.00 Steve Bug + Aril Brikha
+ Dj Pierre, Level Jay

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32

DEC 20 20.00 Freddy Loco and The
Gordo's Ska Band + New York Ska
Ensemble

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07
DEC 19 20.00 Divine Heresy

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaualaan 208; 0900.00.991

DEC 22 20.00 Gabriel Rios

Antwerp

Sportpaleis
Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060

Until DEC 29 Clouseau

Borgerhout

Hof Ter Lo
Noordersingel 30; 03.543.90.30

DEC 22 from 13.00 Die Krupps:
Fixmer/McCarthy

Bruges

MaZ
Magdalenastraat 27; 050.33.20.14

DEC 22 20.00 The Tarantinos

Kortrijk

De Kreun
Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44

DEC 22 20.00 Fiesta Mestiza: Va Fan
Fahre, AiAIAI, Azzil

DEC 23 19.00 Vito Parade:
Maskesmachine (free concert
Schouwburgplein)

World, folk**Brussels**

Au Stekerlapatte

Priesterstraat 4; 02.512.86.81

DEC 20 21.30 Augusto Piroddi, piano
with Ben Sluijs, saxophone

DEC 22 21.30 Piroddi/Van Herzeele/
Thielemans

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32

DEC 21 20.00 Tribute to Farid El
Atrach, Egypt

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaualaan 208; 0900.00.991

DEC 20 20.30 Agnès Bihl + Charles
Aznavour

Dance**Brussels**

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44

Until DEC 19 20.30 Running Sushi,
choreography by Chris Haring

Kaaitheater

Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59

DEC 19-20 20.30 LOD in Boreas,
choreography by Karine Ponties, music
by Dominique Pauwels, visual art by
Lawrence Malstaf

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 19-22 20.00 Wim Vandekeybus
and Ultima Vez in Menske,
choreography by Wim Vandekeybus

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 077.37.38.39

DEC 20-23 Royal Ballet of Flanders
in Sleeping Beauty by Tchaikovsky,
choreography by Marcia Haydée

Ghent**Vooruit**

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.28

DEC 20-22 20.00 Jan Lauwers &
Needcompany in Le Bazar du homard,
theatre/dance (in Dutch, English and
French)

Leuven**Stuk**

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20

DEC 20 20.30 Damaged Goods &
Mumbling Fish in Maybe Forever
by and with Meg Stuart and Philipp
Gehmacher

Theatre**Brussels**

**Cultural Centre of Sint-Pieters
Woluwe**

Charles Thielemanslaan 93;

02.507.82.00, www.ticketclic.be

DEC 20-23 Tom Sawyer, adapted from
Mark Twain's work by David Miller,
musical comedy (in English)

KVS Bol

Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.12

Until DEC 23 Missie by David Van
Reybrouck, staged by Raven Ruell
with Bruno Vanden Broeck (in Dutch with
English and French surtitles)

Kaaitheteerstudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81;

02.201.59.59

Until DEC 20 20.30 Tristero in AN,
based on Attempts on her Life by
Martin Crimp (in Dutch)

Antwerp**Het Toneelhuis/Bourla**

Komedieplaats 18; 032.224.88.44

DEC 21 20.00 Winterverblijf by Lotte
van den Berg (in Dutch)

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 077.37.38.39

DEC 26-JAN 6 Grease, musical (in
Dutch)

Bruges

Husson Gallery Bookshop

Alsembergsesteenweg 142;
02.534.33.54

Until JAN 31 People in Motion by Michel Dusariez

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until JAN 9 Medieval and Cosmic Creatures, prints by Laurence Gony. Textiles and accessories by Cécile Bertrand and artists' books by Eva Evrard

Until JAN 12 National Parks, by German nature photographer Norbert Rosing

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

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

La Fonderie - Brussels Museum of Work and Industry

Ransfortstraat 27; 02.410.99.50
Until MAY 4 Tout feu, tout flamme! La révolution du chauffage, history and evolution of home heating

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
Until DEC 30 PoliticArt. Political posters and cartoons by Kroll, Kamagurka, Vadot, Kanar, Zak among others

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 Guimarães

Royal Library

Kunstberg; 02.519.58.73
Until FEB 8 Formatting 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 België op kijkdoosprenten, 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 work by 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

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49
Until MAR 23 It's our History!, multi-media exhibition on the development of the EU and the lives of Europeans citizens since 1945

Young Gallery/Hotel Conrad

Louisalaan 75b; 02.374.07.04
Until FEB 16 A.N.A.T.O.L.E and Inside, photographs by Katya Legendre with texts by Yann Quéfellec

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

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

Mayer van den Bergh Museum

Lange Gasthuisstraat 19; 03.232.42.37
Until JAN 27 Facing death, drawings of the artist's dying wife by Eugène van Mieghem (1875-1930)

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

Rockox House

Keizerstraat 12; 03.201.92.50

Until FEB 10 Samson and Delilah: A Rubens Painting Returns, the famous painting shown along with other works of art originally owned by Antwerp's mayor Nicolaas Rockox

Bruges

Groeninge Museum

Dijver 12; 050.44.87.11

Until JAN 6 Brugge-Parijs- Rome: Joseph Benoît Suvée en het neoclassicisme, paintings

Deurle

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens

Museumlaan 14; 09.282.51.23

Until JAN 6 Just A Four Letter Word, works by graduates of HISK (Antwerp's Higher Institute of Fine Arts)

Eupen

Ikob

In den Loten 3; 087.56.01.10

Until JAN 13 La Ricarda, multi-national installation and video project

Ghent

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

Until JAN 13 Christopher Dresser, pioneer of modern design, display of Eastern-inspired minimalist objects by the Scottish designer (1834-1904)

Maaltebruggekasteel

Kortrijkssesteenweg 1023; 09.242.88.22

Until APR 27 Het DNA van de kunst (The DNA of Art), works by Tjok Dessauvage and Katy De Bock

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 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 FEB 10 Nr17 Slow: Looking at things differently, video installations by designer Marina Yee and work by artists who have inspired her, including of Léon Spilliaert, Luc Tuymans and Erik Verdonck

Knokke-Heist

Cultuurcentrum Scharpoord

Merlaan 32; 050.63.08.72

Until JAN 20 Impressionisten in Knocke & 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

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 FEB 3 Video works by Keren Cyttar

Lier

Stedelijk Museum Wuyts-Van Campen & Baron Caroly

Florent Van Cauwenberghstraat 14; 03.480.11.96

Until MAR 2 New collection, works by 40 contemporary artists in dialogue with old master paintings

Machelen-Zulte

Het Roger Raveelmuseum

Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00

Until FEB 3 Waterverf, watercolours by Guy Mees, Marc Mulders, Elizabeth Peyton and more

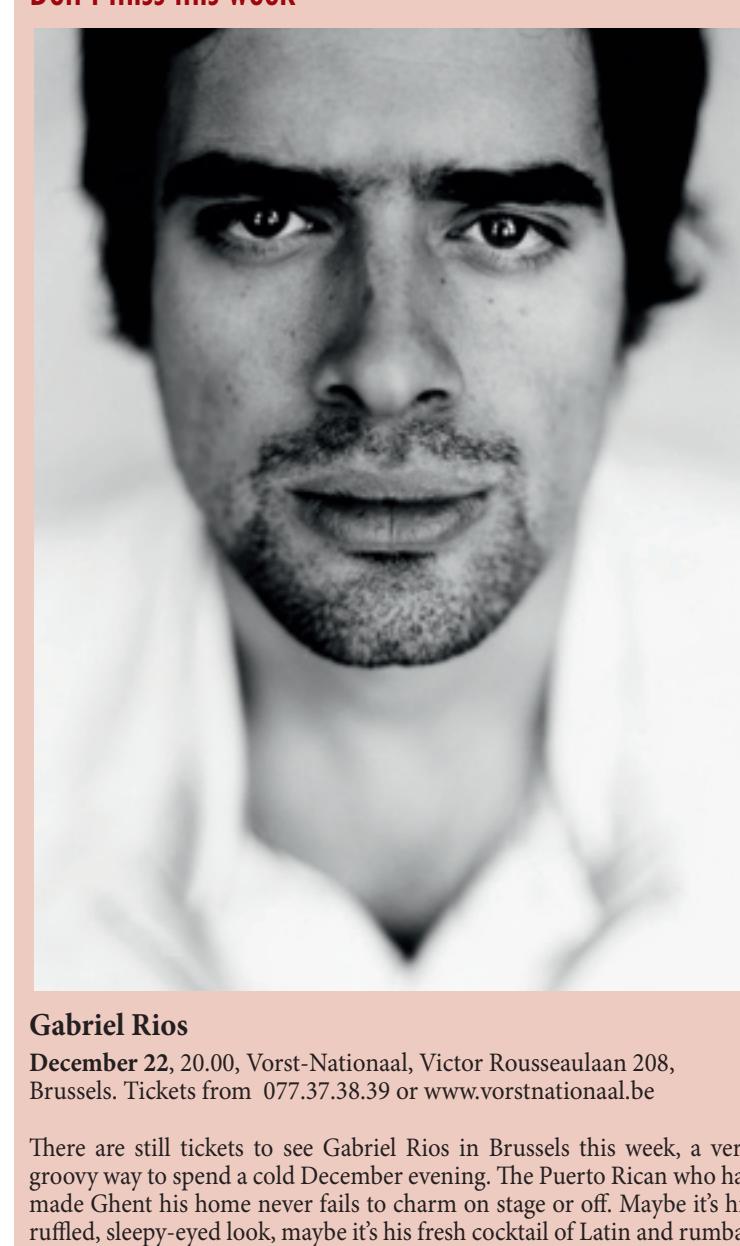
Mechelen

De Noker

Nokerstraat 4; 015.29.06.60

Until FEB 10 The Engineers of the Final Solution, the role of Topf und Söhne, the German firm that designed the ovens at Auschwitz

Don't miss this week



Gabriel Rios

December 22, 20.00, Vorst-Nationaal, Victor Rousseaulaan 208, Brussels. Tickets from 077.37.38.39 or www.vorstnationaal.be

There are still tickets to see Gabriel Rios in Brussels this week, a very groovy way to spend a cold December evening. The Puerto Rican who has made Ghent his home never fails to charm on stage or off. Maybe it's his ruffled, sleepy-eyed look, maybe it's his fresh cocktail of Latin and rumba-inspired pop and hip hop, from the catchy hit single "The Boy Outside" to the silly but somehow sexy cover of "I Wanna Be Like You" (from Disney's *The Jungle Book*). Rios comes to Vorst-Nationaal fresh from shows in New York and Japan, plus a stint in his homeland to film a documentary about his grandfather, who spent time in Brussels in the Second World War. Writes Rios on his website: "He told me once that he partied himself silly, had a great time and then woke up in a tram at a deserted station." Perhaps a foreshadowing of your night out at the Rios show.

Meise

Belgium's National Botanic Garden

Nieuwelaan 38; 02.260.09.70

Until DEC 30 Hard Rain, photographs by Mark Edwards based on Bob Dylan's eponymous song

Ostend

Venetian Galleries

Corner Zeedijk and Parijsstraat; 059.80.55.00

Until JAN 6 Piggy Boards, works by Rik Delrue

Tervuren

MY FLANDERS

Ronny Cuyt

Ronny Cuyt is a nightlife impresario. He plans parties, raves and club nights. He tells us how clubs and clubbers have changed over the years and what makes Brussels different

How did you get into planning nightlife events?

As a teen, I did some acting – I was in *Het Verdriet van België* (*The Sorrow of Belgium*), a mini-series adaptation of the book by Hugo Claus. I was studying cinematography at film school when, on a break, I took a trip to India. I came back broke and decided to organise a party to make some money. It had an Indian theme, and I thought I'd be doing great if 50 people came. Instead, there were 400. So I decided to do it again a few months later, thinking I'd be happy if I got another 400 people – and 800 came. That's when I knew that maybe I could turn this into something.

You're 32 now. How has your business grown since then?

I have two companies: Xebra Media, a graphics and printing firm, and Ironyx Entertainment, which organises and promotes events. I work a lot with Ministry of Sound, the club that is London's new millennium answer to Studio 54, as well as Café d'Anvers, Stereo Red & Blue and other Antwerp clubs. I've recently been doing a lot of work with Noxx, a new club in Antwerp. I now organise a wide variety of party nights: student raves, B2B (Business to Business) events, VIP nights and 30-plus evenings. Our Thursday-night student parties attract 2,000 to 3,000 clubbers. But I also do smaller events.

Not everyone can make such a smooth transition from film student to entertaining thousands of people.

It's sort of in my genes. My father

organised folk festivals, and when I was seven or eight I remember tagging along when he was working. He did events like *Jan zonder Vrees*, a 10-day folk festival inspired by an Antwerp legend. He also did Highland festivals and other events with dancing and weird competitions. So I wasn't completely new to this when I started out.

How has the organisation of party nights changed over the years?

It's both easier and harder. In the beginning, you had to run around putting up posters and handing out flyers: there were no mobile phones, no Internet to get the word out. But there also wasn't the competition that you get today, not only from other parties but also from Playstations, DVDs and other stuff that people have to entertain themselves. The amount kids can spend is shrinking: money they used to use for clubbing is now going for other things, so there's a lot of competition for each Euro.

Have the crowds changed?

The crowd that goes clubbing is a lot more divided than before. There are those who are more into live music, others who are more alternative, and some who are hard dance: It takes more to keep someone in a club than it did years ago. Clubs like Noxx have different rooms with different music to appeal to different clubbers – or the same clubbers, but different moods.

So what do different crowds want?

Students want to spend as little as possible, so keeping costs low is important. For the Wednesday

Stijnla Gammie



night Afterworx parties that we do, the crowd is more exclusive – the quality of the drinks, the food, the entertainment, the organisation – they want the whole package. It takes a lot more effort to impress the professional crowd because they have seen a lot more.

What's your recipe for the right event for the right crowd?

Different events have different door policies. For the after-work crowd, no T-shirts or trainers are allowed. For club nights, we try to have a good balance between guys and girls – that makes for a better ambiance in the club. We never refuse someone because of the colour of his skin: having a good mix is important for a club, and we are totally against discrimination. Before every event, the door staff is briefed about what is expected. If someone's turned away from an

event or party, we always give a reason.

What hasn't changed in nightlife?

The attitude. People are still looking to appeal to the opposite sex – or the same sex, if that's what they're into. They still want to forget about work or school and they still want to have a good time.

Dealing with drugs and fights are both nightlife nightmares. How do you cope?

At the Noxx, we have a team of 40 bouncers, so troublemakers think twice before trying to start something. And there is a police holding room at the club for anyone caught with drugs. There was a mega-club closed 10 years ago because of drugs, so clubs take this very seriously. There are a lot of young people going out for the

first time every weekend, and the last thing any club wants is for something bad to happen.

Does the Brussels crowd differ from crowds in other Flemish cities?

It seems as if it takes a while for people in Brussels to get into the mood. People in Brussels spend a lot of time standing around acting cool – I was at one club where Maxi Jazz, a famous DJ, was spinning. The music was really funky, and I was ready to groove. But people didn't even notice until the end of the set who he was, and then they started reacting. People in Flanders are less uptight.

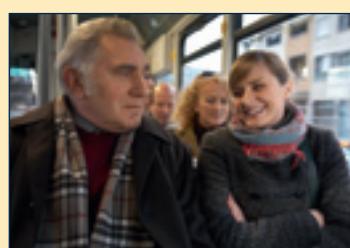
Interview by Steven Tate

online

www.afterworx.be
www.ironyx.eu

THE LAST WORD

Things we enjoyed in 2007



Man zkt Vrouw

A perfect balance of slapstick and heart, this affectionate little story about loneliness and unrequited love is well acted and emotionally effective.



British Vision

An exceptional collection of works on show in Ghent's sublimely restored Museum of Fine Arts. A once-in-a-lifetime show. Until 13 January.



Stadsfeestzaal

Private developers turned a charred eyesore on Antwerp's Meir into one of Europe's most scintillating shopping centres.

FlandersTomorrow **SmallGods** **Flanders**

Asia Expo58Revisited **FlemishinBrussels**

StudentGuide **SummerattheCoast** **Clouse**

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