



Geoffrey Enthoven, p.16

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Photo News



Guilty pleasures: fill up on Flemish fast food

The future of *frietjes*

Is the nation's favourite food in danger?

Steven Tate

Everyone in Belgium loves *frietjes*, fried potatoes. They love them more than the national anthem or the royal family or the country's flag. In fact, nothing unites the Flemish and Walloons more than the unofficial national food. "Not particularly

Flemish, not particularly Walloon – but Belgian," says Paul Ilegems, retired professor of art history at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp.

But *frietkoten* – the ramshackle sheds, converted caravans and DIY constructions on roadsides and public squares serving the Belgian

speciality – are increasingly in danger of being regulated out of existence. "On the national and European level, there is an increase in regulations that favour larger eateries," says Bernard Lefevre, president of Navefri, the association representing more than 5,000 *friet*-sellers around the nation.

The *frietkot* "exemplifies the Belgian spirit: small but industrious, adapting to their surroundings, standing proud despite their humble appearance – and being able to improvise and thrive in whatever situation," explains Ilegems, author of several books on *frietkoten*. He first became inter-

ested in them as architectural curiosities. But his fascination grew until, a few decades ago, he started gathering memorabilia, photos and artefacts that will form the collection of his Potato Museum, scheduled to open in Bruges in May.

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Interview

Frank De Winne is the second Belgian astronaut to go into space. Lisa Bradshaw talks to him about the life of an astronaut as he prepares for his second flight next year.

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Business

IMEC is a modest research centre outside Leuven, but it has produced some major scientific breakthroughs. Our report focuses on a chip implant that could offer hope for epilepsy sufferers.

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Active

Get a different view of Flanders by climbing a tower this weekend. We pick out three where the views are superb.

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Terror suspect was "in the pay of the state security service"

Government orders inquiry

Alan Hope

Abdelkader Belliraj, the Evergem man in custody in Morocco accused of being the leader of a terrorist cell, was for years a paid informant of Belgium's state security service, it was alleged last week. Belliraj has reportedly confessed to carrying out six murders between 1986 and 1989.

Belliraj was apparently an informer from the mid-1990s until his arrest on 18 February. There is therefore no question of protection at the time of the murders. But if reports are true, details of state security's contacts with Belliraj were not passed on to the federal police or the anti-terrorist services. Nor were they received

by the threat-assessment office, which was set up specifically to counter the tendency of other operational services to keep information from one another. The state security agency itself refuses publicly to confirm or deny the identities of informers past or present.

Justice minister Jo Vandeurzen has ordered an inquiry by the R Committee, which oversees the activities of the intelligence services. The main focus of the inquiry will be on how Belliraj was apparently able to take part in the organisation of a terrorist cell in Morocco while he was in the pay of state security here, without anyone knowing his plans.

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EDITOR'S CHOICE



Shack at Wijgmaal

Filip Dujardin

In this week's issue of *Flanders Today*, Steven Tate takes a look at the ramshackle world of *frietkoten*, those grease-soaked semi-permanent eateries that are dotted around Flanders. They may not do much for Flanders' international image, but they are a much-loved feature of the landscape, offering a warm fug of conviviality on a cold winter night.

As it happens, Bozar is hosting an exhibition of photographs by Filip Dujardin that show another type of Flemish shack. Dujardin takes photographs of the odd wooden sheds that Flemish farmers build in their fields using salvaged bits of wood, sheets of corrugated iron and fragments of twisted metal salvaged from car wrecks. In an interview with *DM Magazine*, he described them as primeval forms of architecture from which everything else is derived.

Dujardin said that he once drove into a ditch because he was so busy looking at a shack in a field. He went on to describe the

kot as the most honest form of architecture. "Pure minimalism," he argued.

Other countries don't have *koten*. You won't see any untidy shacks as you cross the neat Dutch landscape. Dujardin believes it has to do with the Belgian passion for *bricoleren*, setting things up for themselves. "In the Netherlands you'll never see an old bath sitting in a field," he says.

Like belfries and begijnhofs, shacks are an essential part of the Flemish identity. They suggest a country that refuses to be tidy, goes its own way, defies the rules. That's why any attempt to close down a *frietkot* arouses such a passionate reaction. It's a national treasure under attack, even if it looks like an old shack.

The Filip Dujardin exhibition runs at Bozar until 31 March, entry free.

Online

www.bozar.com

Filip Dujardin



Shack in Beervelde by Filip Dujardin

FACE OF FLANDERS



Frank De Winne

Very few people get to travel into space, but Frank De Winne is one of them. Born in Ghent in 1961, De Winne is Belgium's second astronaut – but will be the first to go into space more than once. The European Space Agency recently announced he will join five others as part of the "Expedition 19" manned flight to the International Space Station (ISS) next year. Together with a Russian and a Canadian astronaut, he launches from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan in May 2009.

After a two-day space flight, De Winne and his two comrades will join two NASA and one other Russian astronaut, who will already be onboard the station. The crew will spend six months on the ISS, partially on scientific experiments and research in the several laboratories attached to the station. That includes Columbus, which the European Space Agency just launched last month. "The rest of the work is mainly maintenance of the station," De Winne explains. "That's why astronauts have to be skilled at working with their hands. It's a combination of scientific engineering, medical skills and operation skills. As astronauts, we are operators – we literally operate the space station."

De Winne has been a back-up for French astronaut Léopold Eyharts for the ongoing Columbus mission and already spent 11 days onboard the ISS in 2002, so he's well prepared for the mission. Still, he'll spend most of the next 14 months training at space agencies around the world: Houston, Russia, Canada, Japan and Germany. He lives in the Netherlands but "in training, I'm almost permanently away from home," he says.

Long-term stays on the space station make it a home-away-from-home for astronauts. "Most of the time, we work," admits De Winne, but, when they're not, they watch movies and exercise – "the normal things that people do on the ground to relax," he says. The crew can also keep in touch with family members via email and phone calls through special satellite connections. "They can't call us, but we can call them."

But, says De Winne, "one of the nicest things to do is to look out of the windows. You see the earth, and the biggest impression is the awareness of the vulnerability of the planet. From down here, it looks like the sky and the air goes on forever, but from up there you see that our earth is preserved by this little eggshell of an atmosphere." The astronaut notes that you can see more stars from that high up, too. "You don't have the atmosphere or all the light pollution that you have on the earth," he says.

Living in a confined space for six months with several other people, though, can create stressful situations. "It's not like we get on each other's nerves, but it's for sure a psychological element," says De Winne. "There is very little privacy." He also explains that the space station itself, though fitted with comforts like a DVD player and a stereo, is missing "a lot of normal things". For example, he expects to miss "taking a shower or a bath and having nice, fresh food and cold water. Everything is room temperature. And it's never quiet because you have ventilators that are always running. So there are a lot of issues that make space travel not such an easy thing to do."

Still, he's not giving it up anytime soon. "Astronauts are very excited about their profession and the jobs they are doing. You feel it suddenly at the launch – it's very exciting to do this job."

Lisa Bradshaw

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



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kunst

Why can I not draw although I am a dab hand at cryptic crosswords? And why are Flemings so artful with a crayon but don't go further than simple word puzzles? Why indeed. What is certain is that Flanders abounds with etchers, painters and sculptors. The visual arts have for centuries been rooted in the make-up of the people here. Just think of Van Eyck, Rubens and Ensor.

Well, I've just discovered a great website that brings together the works of Flemish painters. It's a collaboration between *het Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen*, *het Groeningemuseum Brugge* en *het Museum voor Schone Kunsten van Gent*. These three museums have a treasure trove of paintings, drawings and sculptures but most are buried away in their vaults: 6,750 schilderijen, 40,000 tekeningen en 2,000 beelden. On the website 6,500 ervan zijn van nu af te bewonderen. This initial effort is mostly made up of drawings: *de schetsboeken van George Linne en de tekeningen van James Ensor*.

I like the handy timeline: *die begint met de Vlaamse primitieven en eindigt met de Cobra-beweging*. The Cobra movement, which brought together Belgian, Dutch and Danish painters in the 1950s, had its own philosophy: *alles is mogelijk, alles moet geprobeerd worden*. The Brussels artist Pierre Alechinsky is perhaps the most famous proponent of this everything-is-possible, everything-must-be-tried motto.

Seeing these masterpieces online will surely spur you on to visit the museums. The three cities are so close that you should consider buying *een combiticket die toegang geeft tot de vaste collecties van de drie musea en kost €12. Het is te koop aan de infobalies van de drie musea en is drie jaar geldig*. That means that after buying the ticket at one museum you have three years to visit the other two.

The Ghent Fine Arts Museum is the oldest in the country: it was set up on the orders of Napoleon to house paintings that went on public view in 1811. The recently-renovated building has its vast collection *verspreid over 40 zalen*.

As for my inability to draw, action is needed. I have laid my hands on a brochure about the local *kunstacademie*. It runs what looks like a tailor-made course for me: *appelen en peren* – *schilderkunst voor beginners*. Perhaps painting for beginners is just what I need: *aan de hand van eenvoudige en alledaagse voorwerpen zoals appelen en peren leer je een stilleven opbouwen en schilderen*. Well, apples and pears are certainly simple, everyday objects and it would be quite an achievement to learn to paint such a still life.

Another course is *portrettschilderen: schilderkunst voor gevorderden*. It's a shame that portrait painting is too advanced for me. But it would be more interesting than painting pears: *het menselijk gelaat met al zijn karaktertrekken overbrengen op canvas en papier*. Being able to put on canvas the features of the human face would be quite an achievement.

Perhaps I'll visit the museums first for the inspiration I need to sign up. But first, let's take a look at *The Times* crossword.

Alistair MacLean

Online

www.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be
www.expo-alechinsky.be

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FEATURE

Belp



Last orders: Josée De Vos prepares her final batch of *frietjes* before closing down shop in Sint-Agatha-Berchem due to a decision by the municipal council

The future of the *frituur*

Continued from page 1

Friet have been part of Belgium even before the country's existence – although originally they were prepared at home. The first *friet* stands popped up at fancy fairs in Belgium and France in the early 1800s, "but, even then, they had areas where people could sit and eat," says Ilegems. The *frietkot* as an independent structure appeared in the early 1900s, as savvy entrepreneurs set up stands on squares to serve students and workers on the move. The first *friet* were eaten with just salt – sauces became a craze in the 1960s, as the *frietkot* phenomenon gained ground.

Apart from some limited areas in France, the *frietkot* has historically existed only in Belgium. The reason: "zoning regulations," Ilegems says. Although Germans, Britons, the Dutch and other Europeans appreciate the deliciousness of a well-cooked *friet*, "they were more advanced in environmental law," Ilegems continues. "One couldn't just pull up to a roadside, take out a few planks, hammer them together and build a *frietkot*." Belgium and France were the only countries that permitted the wild growth of roadside shacks.

Until now, that is. Environmental and food safety regulations are putting a squeeze on the free-standing *frietkot*. "One example is freshly cut potatoes," says Lefevre. *Friet* aficionados prize the fresh-cut over the frozen, "but regulations state that all establishments that cut their own potatoes must

have water-purification systems to make sure bacteria don't multiply in hotter months. While this is no problem for a restaurant, for a *frietkot* in the middle of Ghent, this is difficult."

In response to new laws, *frietkot* owners are seeking shelter in brick-and-mortar *friet* stands, snack shops and restaurants. But it is still tough going. "Laws try to be uniform for eating establishments, but the business ranges from Michelin restaurants to fast-food places and *frietkoten*. A one-size fits all set of rules does not work," says Lefevre. He notes the regulation that requires at least one person on staff responsible solely for hygiene conditions and cleaning of the premises. "For a larger establishment, this isn't a problem. But *friet*-sellers are often two-person operations, with perhaps a third person brought in on Friday nights or at the weekend. Employing a separate person to handle hygiene alone is something most *friet*-sellers can't afford to do."

Not that Navefri believes that hygiene isn't an issue. The organisation has set up schools in Kortrijk, Hasselt, Leuven and Oudenaarde to provide courses in proper food handling, maintenance and management of a *friet* establishment. "The law is inconsistent in one respect at the moment: you have to go to school before you can run a kitchen in a restaurant," says Lefevre. "But anyone can start selling *frietjes*."

There are also other battles to fight. Lefevre cites the increased

interest in bio-fuels. "Petrol prices have gone up, so people turn to alternative energy – which has driven up the price for cooking oil."

Lefevre is not seeking protectionism for his members; he just wants standards, he says. But he argues that a traditional prejudice against *friet*-sellers makes it difficult to lobby the government. Despite the love shown for *friet* at all levels of society in Belgium, "the *frietkot* proprietor is considered almost as an untouchable. People think no one with a university education would ever consider

working in a *frietkot*. In the beginning, when I was trying to lobby a government official on behalf of the business, I could never get an appointment – unless it was at the end of the day. The official thought talking with this illiterate, low-class *frietkot* owner would only be good for a laugh."

That prejudice has even flared up in Lefevre's personal life: when he decided to leave his career in interior decorating to run *Frituur Max*, the landmark *frietkot* in Antwerp, his friends were aghast. "My mother even refused for months to tell people what I did,"

he remembers.

But, just as Belgian beer has attained a connoisseur status internationally, the Belgian *frite* is gaining friends abroad; there are now countless Belgian-themed eateries around the world trying to recreate the magic of the *friet*. "But so many factors go into the *friet* – not least the quality of the potato," says Navefri's Lefevre. "Just as a good wine depends on soil quality and a good harvest, there are good potato seasons and bad potato seasons – and areas that produce better potatoes than others." Creating *friet* appreciation could work wonders in raising the *friet* sellers' image.

Michel Meubus is part of the new wave. He opened *Haute Frituur* in Antwerp last September with the intention of giving the humble *friet* an upgrade. In a sleek interior featuring wall stencils of cutlery and *Wallpaper* magazine-style cafeteria décor, the former interior designer serves delicious *frietjes* with homemade tartar sauce, *balletjes* (meat balls) in tomato sauce, his grandmother's *carbonnade flamande* and other *frietkot* mainstays a stone's throw away from shops that have made Antwerp a fashion mecca. Featured recently in *The Financial Times*, *Haute Frituur* draws in trendies, students, professionals working the area and locals. "We're trying to bring the *friet* into the 21st century," he says.

Whether *frietkoten* survive or not, the *friet* will remain a staple of Belgian life. "After all, *friet* existed before there ever were *frietkoten*," potato specialist Paul Ilegems says. And, just as Belgium has survived invasions ever since the time of Julius Caesar, the traditional *friet*-seller will survive – because people in this region of Europe prefer to leave everything to the experts.

online

www.potatomuseum.com

The Potato Museum

"The potato made the Industrial Revolution possible," says Professor Paul Ilegems. "Bread was too expensive for the masses, and potatoes – brought to Europe from Peru by the Spaniards in 1570 – were also considered a good source of vitamin C." Spanish sailors found potatoes good for fighting scurvy on long ocean voyages, and in 1590 a bishop presented them to the Governor of Mons, praising their medicinal properties.

This – and a wealth of other information – will soon be on display at the Potato Museum in Bruges. Up until now, Professor



Ilegems' collection of potato paraphernalia and artefacts were only seen in temporary exhibitions. Now a home has been found a few steps from the city's famous belfry.

Ilegems debunks some common beliefs, such as the idea that Belgians were the first to slice up potatoes and double-fry them in animal fat. "In fact, the exact origin of the *friet* is unknown. The reason Americans called them 'French fries' is because 'to French' used to mean 'to fry' in America," Ilegems explains.

So *frietjes* aren't Belgian? Try telling that to your local *frietkot* owner.



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ING 

Did Belgian state security employ "terrorist" informer?

Continued from page 1

In Morocco, Belliraj is accused of being the leader of a terrorist group. Some alleged 35 members of the group were recently arrested in a nationwide swoop. They are accused of forming a terrorist organisation and other crimes, including murder. For terrorist crimes, Morocco retains the death penalty. Although it has been handed down in the recent past, the last time it was actually carried out was in 1994.

In Belgium, Belliraj's name has come up in connection with up to six unsolved murders committed in the 1980s. According to Moroccan investigators, Belliraj admitted the murders while he was being questioned in Rabat. Only three of the alleged victims have been named: the imam of the Brussels mosque, Abdullah al Ahdal, shot dead in the mosque in March 1989; the mosque's librarian Salem ben Mohamed Bahri; and university lecturer Dr Joseph Wybran, a leader of the Jewish community in Belgium, in October of the same year. Police investigating the murder knew of a link at the time: the gun used in all three killings was a 7.65 calibre pistol. Belliraj was interviewed in connection with the killings, but no evidence was found to go further.

Meanwhile last week a police search of Belliraj's home in Evergem near Ghent, where he moved from Brussels in 1997, turned up nothing significant, police said. Belliraj's wife and three sons are receiving psychological counselling.

Crime in Antwerp schools up 20 percent

Incidents of crimes in Antwerp schools increased by nearly one-fifth, from 119 in 2006 to 139 in 2007, according to the latest figures from Antwerp police. The incidents – all of which were serious enough to warrant a report to the youth court – took place in a total of 36 schools in the area. Ten other schools reported no incidents. According to 2006 figures, 40% of incidents involved violence, with about 7% involving a weapon of some sort. Seven out of ten cases took place in the school or immediate surroundings. In Ghent, meanwhile, 300 incidents were reported over the year.

Leuven rejects headscarf ban for city workers

The city council of Leuven has rejected a proposal to introduce a ban on the wearing of the Muslim headscarf by staff who come in contact with the public. The proposal, introduced by Vlaams Belang members, was defeated by 36 votes to nine, with Open VLD abstaining. Bans have been introduced in Antwerp, Ghent, Lier and other areas. In Leuven, however, the coalition of SPA-Spirit had been joined by Groen! in opposing the ban, meaning the proposal never had a chance. In the end, CD&V and N-VA also voted against. There are no members of Leuven city staff at present in post who wear the headscarf. Vlaams Belang said the ban was "preventive".

More networking needed to get women into top jobs

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Women need to network

Women who apply for senior posts in the Flemish government are not being kept out by discrimination, according to a study for the Institute for Government. But they do suffer a disadvantage because they don't network as much as men, analysis shows. Whereas half of the 30 top managers nominated for posts in 2006 were women, only 20% of female candidates made it through selection. The results showed the "ideal" candidate was over 40, had experience of working in a ministerial cabinet, and had already had a job in the Flemish government. Women fell behind in all three categories.

Hospital worker sacked for leaking Leterme dossier



Back in business: Yves Leterme leaves Gasthuisberg hospital in Leuven

A hospital worker who consulted the medical files of deputy prime minister Yves Leterme has been sacked by the Gasthuisberg university hospital in Leuven. Head physician Dr Frank Rademakers revealed last week that he monitors the case-files of all "high-profile" patients to keep track of who is consulting the documents. This is done for various reasons – such as to protect against leaks

to the press. The worker who was detected has not been identified, except to say that it was neither a doctor nor a member of the nursing staff. Leterme was admitted to intensive care in February suffering from internal bleeding from intestinal varicose veins. Leterme left hospital last week looking paler and thinner, declaring he was ready to get back to work this week.

Parents camp out for school places

This week saw an end to nine days of camping for some parents keen to reserve places for their children at the Flemish school of their choice. Registrations were being accepted from Monday for children in two second-priority groups: homes where Dutch is spoken and disadvantaged households living, for example, from social security benefits. The first priority group, siblings of current pupils, were registered in January. Some schools had few places left to fight for: Maria Boodschap in Brussels centre, for instance, had only three.

Brussels' regional education minister Guy Verhagen promised two new Flemish schools would be built soon in Schaerbeek and Brussels-City. This week, Flemish education minister Frank Vandebruck proposed a ticket system, such as the kind used in shops, to rule out the need for queues and camp-beds.

EU abandons VRT financing probe

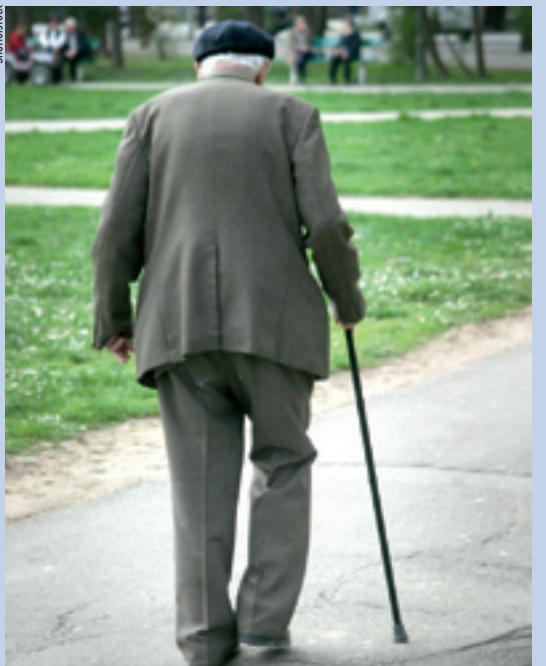
The EU commission has given the Flemish government's financing of the VRT a clean bill of health. The competition authorities, who approve all forms of state aid to industry, began an investigation in 2004 following complaints from the Flemish media company VMM, which runs the TV channels VTM and 2BE, as well as Q-Music. VMM accused the public broadcaster of selling advertising space at dumping prices and so using state subsidies to distort competition. But the commission found that the subsidies did not exceed what was necessary to "fulfil the role of public broadcaster". Competition commissioner Neelie Kroes also expressed satisfaction with a series of new measures to be introduced by Flemish media minister Geert Bourgeois in May on merchandising and budgetary questions.

Leuven professor wins Alzheimer's prize

Leuven University researcher Bart De Strooper has been awarded the prestigious international Alzheimer's Prize for his body of work on the illness. Professor De Strooper, who heads the university's Molecular Genetics department, most recently made a breakthrough in the understanding of the development of amyloid plaques in the brains of Alzheimer's patients, which could lead to new ways to prevent the disease (see article in *Flanders Today*, 19 December 2007). The Alzheimer's Prize is awarded by the MetLife Foundation, created by the Metropolitan Life insurance company.

MetLife gave out grants worth a total of \$8.5 million (€5.6 million) last year to health-related projects. The Alzheimer's Prize is worth \$200,000 (€130,000). "I am happy and proud that my contribution to the solution of this illness is considered worthy by the colleagues and scientists I myself have always looked up to," Professor De Strooper said.

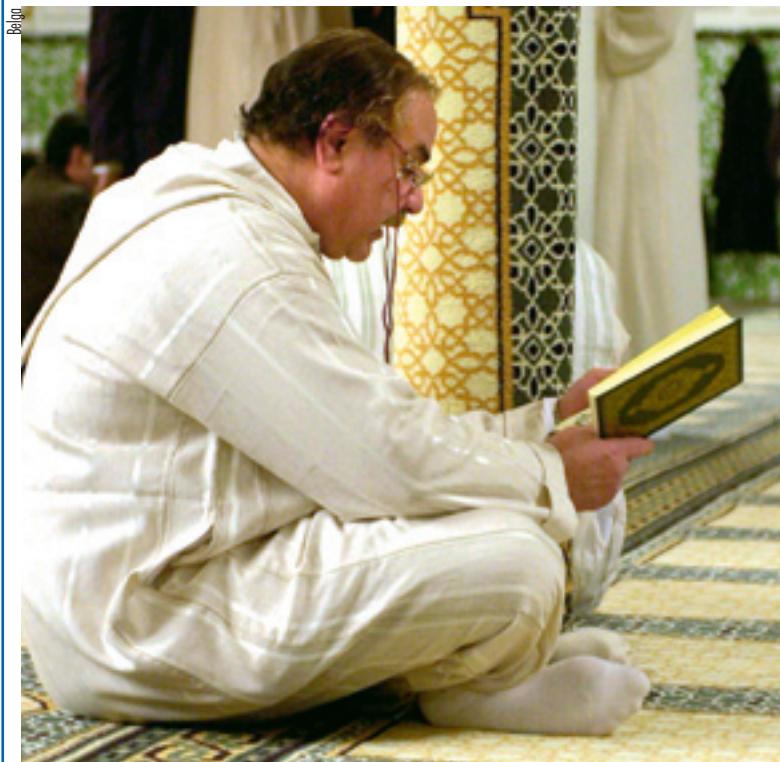
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Online

www.metlife.com

Police to explain anti-terror policy in mosques



Muslims are "the main victims of terrorism"

Top City job for Flemish lawyer

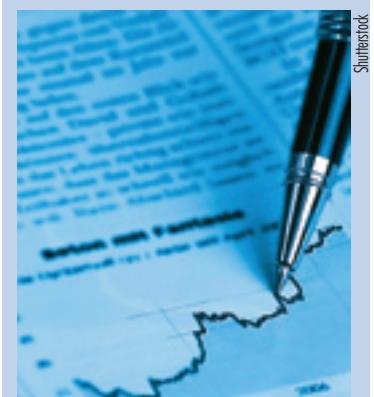
Wim Dejonghe, 47, head of the Brussels office of leading law firm Allen & Overy, has been promoted to take over the company's office in the City of London. He gave credit for his promotion to the performance of the Brussels office and described the choice of a non-British candidate for the first time as a sign of changing times within the company. "It's only logical if Allen & Overy wants to position itself as a global player," he said. For the time being, Dejonghe will be commuting weekly between London and Belgium. "I have five sons between 2 1/2 and 17, and that makes a move as good as impossible," he said.

The federal police are launching a campaign aimed at explaining the government's anti-terrorism policy in mosques and meeting-places for Muslim organisations. The information campaign will be carried out by the head of judicial arm of the police in Brussels, Glenn Audenaert. "I want to reach a hand out to the Muslim community," he said. Muslims, he said, are the main victims of Islamist terrorism worldwide, both in terms of the numbers of dead and injured and in terms of the stigma attached. "We have to get away from stereotypes," Audenaert said. "The vast majority of Muslims reject every form of violence."

Sale of ABX cost government €300-400 million

The government suffered a loss of €300-400 million in 2006 on the sale of state-owned logistics concern ABX to the British investment group 3i. The sale was announced by the former government for a price of one symbolic euro, given the fact that ABX was reckoned – controversially – to be worth nothing. Under the agreement, 3i would pay €10 million and invest a further €70 million. At the same time, charges and debts of €80 million would be bought off by the government. However, according to a new book by investigative journalist Paul Huybrechts, the actual charges paid by the government may have amounted to as much as €110 million. In addition, an Italian bidder for the company who had valued ABX at €340 million was ignored in favour of 3i.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



Flemish school students are more racially tolerant

Schoolchildren aged between 12 and 18 are Europe's worst bullies, according to a study carried out by the British Council. The culprits pick on each other on the grounds of differences in physical appearance, such as weight and height, the study says. However, children in Flemish schools are less likely to be picked on for the colour of their skin than in other European countries. The survey covered schools with a wide range of ethnic backgrounds in Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, England, Scotland, Wales, Germany and Spain.

Plan to improve internet access for the handicapped

Flemish minister for administrative affairs Geert Bourgeois is to spend €500,000 this year on a drive to make government websites more accessible to people with a handicap. At present, only 12% of websites maintained by the Flemish government have the Any-Surfer seal of approval, which signifies that they can be used by the visually handicapped and other people with disabilities. A further 13% is in the running for the label – leaving three out of four considered unsatisfactory. As well as funding, the campaign will include training for web staff, and a new coordination body made up of representatives from each government sector.



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Ghent museum seeks underpants for exhibit

Ghent's Museum for Industrial Archaeology and Textiles (MIAT) has put out a public appeal for men's, women's and children's underwear in synthetic fabrics, as well as corsets and stockings. "We are aware that there have been many exhibitions of lingerie in the past," a spokesperson said. "We didn't want to be just yet another of them, and that's when we had the idea of synthetic fabrics." The curators are particularly looking for underwear from certain periods. "We have no trouble getting hold of lingerie from the 1940s, 50s and 60s, but we do have a problem with women's underwear from the 1980s." The exhibition begins in October and runs until April 2009.

Online
www.miat.gent.be

City of Bruges calls for apology

Bruges city council has called on the Jewish monthly *Joods Actueel* to apologise for an article on an alleged racist incident in the city in which an American professor claimed to have been barred from a restaurant because he was Jewish. The city mayor Patrick Moenaert immediately launched an investigation and discovered that the man was neither a professor nor American. The investigation also failed to find any evidence of anti-Semitism.

Bloomin' easy

Flowers that don't fade fast



Cut flowers fade fast, but Flemish florist Christophe De Smet has come up with a smart solution that stops them wilting on the journey home. It's called the Easyfleur vase, and it recently won a top award for innovation at the Salon du Végétal trade fair in Angers, France.

"I was looking for a way to get our cut-flower selections, primarily chrysanthemums, straight to our customers without a lot of steps in between," De Smet explains. "This would guarantee that our product arrived at its destination much fresher."

De Smet spent some time looking for a solution. "When I started to dabble in the problem, I quickly found out that making a vase

watertight was the real challenge. A small Tupperware kitchen container inspired me to incorporate a plastic pot into it."

The end result is a tall vase with a tear line mid-way down the body. This protects the flowers while they're being carried home. Then the customer can tear off the upper half of the vase to create a smaller vase that can be set on the table.

The cardboard vase is eco-friendly as well as efficient. "In designing the vase, we were careful to use environment-friendly and reusable materials," De Smet explains.

The collection now comprises six different designs, each with a ribbon at the top for carrying the

vase. De Smet believes the product meets the needs of modern shoppers. "We make it easy for consumers to buy flowers on a sudden impulse, with the guarantee that they are buying a quality product," he explains. "In addition, it is a product that's easy to sell in less specialised sales outlets, such as department stores and supermarkets, mini-supermarkets, DIY-outlets and garden centres. The flowers are presented expertly in attractive, bright wrapping, are well-protected and are delivered standing in water, thereby assuring their freshness."

Online

www.easyfleur.be

Flanders Port Area launched

Four ports will work together



The four main Flemish ports met recently with Flanders minister-president Kris Peeters to sign a code of conduct. The agreement stipulates that the four authorities will work together and organise a joint international marketing campaign. In addition, the ports are bound by an agreement that they will not circulate misleading or negative information on the other ports.

The meeting follows the decision last year by the ports of Antwerp, Ghent, Zeebrugge and Ostend to form a single body called the Flanders Port Area.

The new agreement means that the ports will support one another and direct shippers to other Flemish ports if they lack the necessary handling capacity themselves. In addition, a Regional Ports Commissioner will intervene to resolve any disputes arising from alleged breaches of the code of conduct.

Work begins on Ghent container terminal

First containers due in October

Work has begun on a new €6.1 million container terminal in the port of Ghent. Located on the south side of the Kluizen Dock, the Ghent Container Terminal is a joint project by Flemish logistics group Manuport and Finnish shipping company and terminal operator Container Finance.

The new terminal is due to take up a 16-hectare site in the port. The first phase involves constructing mobile cranes on a 7.7 hectare site, while the second phase covers a further 8.2 hectares. The terminal is due to enter operation in October of this year and is expected to generate some 20 jobs.

Online

www.havengent.be

BUSINESS FLASH



Shutterstock

Fortis Real Estate

Fortis Real Estate, the affiliate of the country's largest financial institution, is to merge its Interparking activity with Vinci Park, the French real estate and parking operator. The move is part of a Europe-wide consolidation of the sector and will give the merged company a leading position in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Italy and Spain with well over one million parking bays. Interparking was introduced during the Brussels Expo in 1958.

Puratos

Puratos, the Groot-Bijgaarden-based bakery ingredients and industrial chocolate producer, is to open a production unit in Mumbai, India. The move is part of the company's international development and follows similar openings in Ukraine, Belarus and Iran recently. Puratos is the world's second-largest firm in the sector.

Philips

The Dutch electronics company Philips will invest €23 million in its Turnhout plant to develop capacity of its professional light bulbs unit. The move follows an earlier €41 million investment in a new production hall.

KBC Bank

KBC Bank, Flanders largest bank, is to invest €10 million in a 15,000-square-metre logistics project in Poland.

Savills

Savills, the UK-based property consultant, is to open an office in Brussels to develop its residential and commercial property activities in this region of Europe.

Fortis Bank

Fortis Bank has sold the assets management activities of ABN Amro in Brazil to Banco Santander for €209 million. The decision is part of the restructuring of Fortis' activities following its winning bid for the Netherlands' ABN-Amro in partnership with Royal Bank of Scotland and Santander.

Van Gansewinkel

Van Gansewinkel, the Dutch waste management company, is to take over the Olen-based Milieu & Leven company which specialises in the disposal of industrial waste.

Electrabel

Belgium's leading energy group, now part of the French Suez company, is to acquire half of the Teesside Power natural gas plant in partnership with Gaz de France. Teesside Power is Europe's largest natural-gas-fired power plant with a generating capacity of some 1,875 megawatts.

Agfa-Gevaert

Agfa-Gevaert, the Mortsel-based imaging and film group, is to cut an additional 167 jobs following worse-than-expected 2007 results. The company has already slashed worldwide employment by 1,100 since August 2006, bringing its number to 13,400.

Port of Zeebrugge

The Port of Zeebrugge is expanding its gas terminal facilities to allow docking of liquified natural gas (LNG) carriers to create a total capacity of up to 200,000 cubic metres. The move follows the change of origin of the gas that was previously supplied by the Algerian Sonatrach and is now handled by the Qatari Rasgas company.

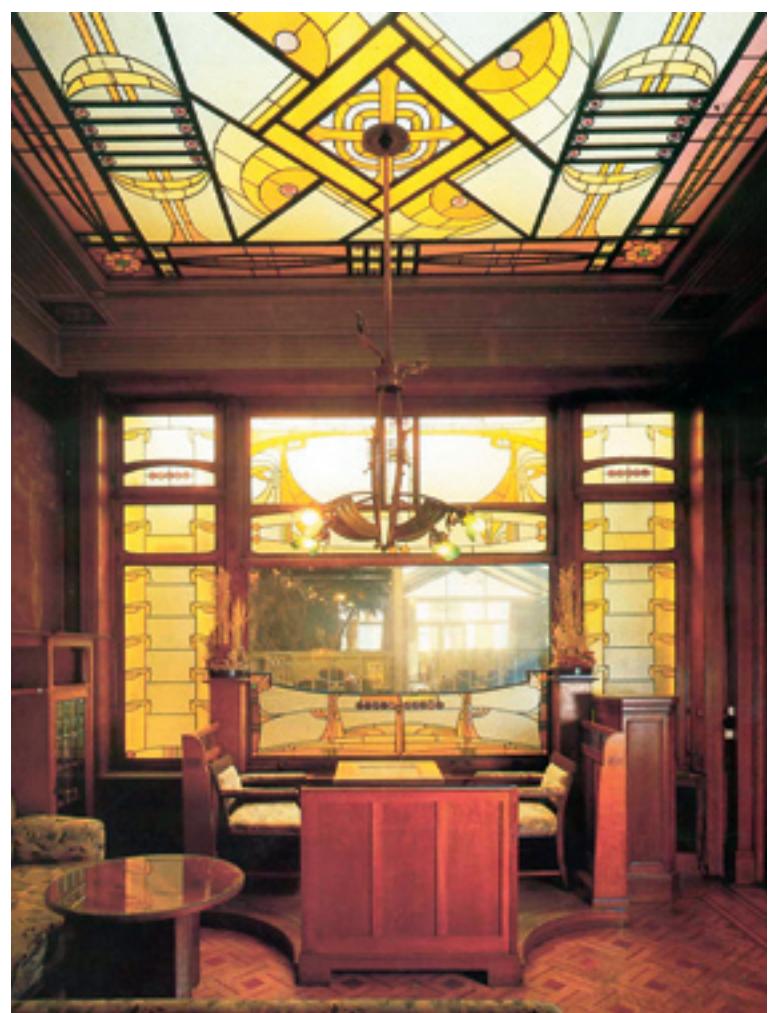


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PROPERTY

The ultimate address

€3 million price tag for Art Nouveau landmark



Derek Blyth

The famous café De Ultieme Hallucinatie on the Koningstraat in Brussels has been put on the market by its owners. Once a grand town house, this landmark building was transformed into an Art Nouveau jewel by Paul Hamesse in 1904. The house was rescued from ruin in 1981 by Fred Dericks and Kriz Haepers, who turned it into a fashionable restaurant. The interior was furnished with old Belgian railway benches designed by Henry van de Velde, while the garden was transformed into a gorgeous conservatory incorporating the original rockery.

De Ultieme Hallucinatie became a favourite venue for press conferences and book launches, not to mention serving as a location in several Flemish films. It was regarded by business people as a good place to take a Flemish colleague, as the staff spoke Dutch as their working language (though they could slip smoothly into French or English if required). The restaurant section was also popular with Flemish politicians in Brussels, while the noisy brasserie was a place to impress visitors.

What you get for €3 million

The property: The Ultieme Hallucinatie is located in Sint-Joost-ten-Node, the poorest municipality in Brussels with the highest unemployment rate. The neighbourhood is, however, on the rise following the decision by the European Union to locate two EU directorates (communication and IT) in the EU's Madou Tower. The buyer, if one can

be found, will acquire a beautiful Art Nouveau interior with a total floor area of 1,800 square metres and a wine cellar containing some 2,000 bottles of quality wine.

Online

www.ultiemehallucinatie.be

BREWING

InBev profits double



Leuvan-based brewer InBev, which brews Stella Artois, Jupiler and Leffe beers, reported a net profit of €900 million in the fourth quarter of 2007, more than double the 2006 figure. The group – which is the world's largest brewer – saw turnover increase last year by 7.2% to €14.4 billion, while volume sales grew 5.2% to 270.5 million hectolitres of beer.

The group's profits were especially vigorous in

central and eastern Europe, as well as in Latin America, which is the company's strongest region, led by Brazil where InBev sells Brahma beer. The company boosted its market share in every region where it operates except the UK, where sales fell by 10.3% due to drinkers turning away from Stella Artois, and western Europe, where a shift from beer to wine caused sales to drop by 4.9%.

Meanwhile, sales rose in other European regions, and the company saw a growth of 16.5% in Russia. InBev is now the second-largest brewer in Russia after Baltika, but it expects to face tougher competition if Carlsberg succeeds in its bid to acquire Scottish & Newcastle's stake in Baltika. The group warned that the downturn in the world economy could eat into profits in 2008, but analysts say the company is well-placed to withstand higher raw material costs because of the strength of the Brazilian currency compared to the US dollar. A new distribution deal with Anheuser in the US is now getting InBev beers into more US outlets, but supply problems linked to the new distribution network have initially held down sales, the company explained. DB

TECHNOLOGY

The intelligent brain scan

IMEC showcases its latest invention in San Francisco

The IMEC research centre sits inconspicuously among the trees and ponds on Leuven's Heverlee campus. It hardly catches anyone's attention, yet this low-rise building is home to Europe's largest research centre for nanoelectronics and nanotechnology.

IMEC made an impact recently at the annual Solid-State Circuits Conference (ISSCC) in San Francisco. While most of the presentations seem remote from the real world – high-level researchers talking about "third generation 65nm 16-core 32-thread plus 32-scout-thread CMT SPARC" – a team from Leuven was presenting an invention that could have a direct impact on many people's lives.

The researchers from the Flemish research centre IMEC had travelled to the US West Coast to present a chip that would make brain scans much more comfortable. Doctors at present have to use a large body scanner or hook patients up to machines using endless wires, a spokesman explains. But the IMEC chip allows the information to be gathered using ultra-small sensors attached to the head. These then transmit the information to a central computer using wireless technology.

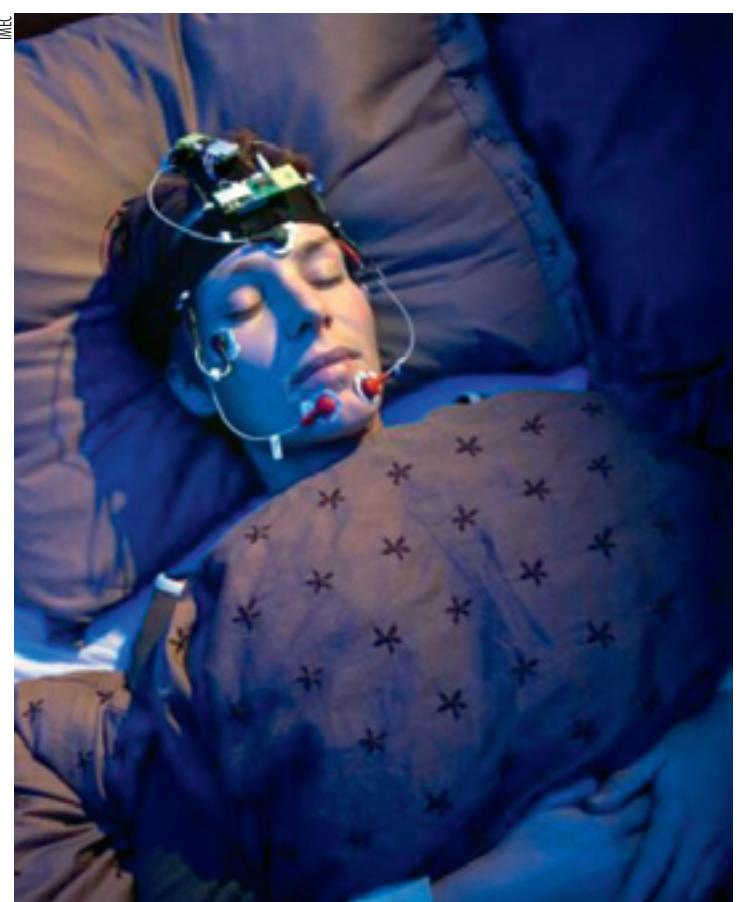
IMEC researchers argue that the wireless system can be used for monitoring sleep patterns, as it allows patients to stay in their own bed, rather than having to spend time in a special monitoring centre. The chip could also be useful in helping people who suffer from epilepsy. It can be fitted permanently without any discomfort, allowing it to monitor brain patterns. This means that the patient could be alerted to take their medicine when an attack was imminent.

The annual ISSCC conference brings together the world's top semiconductor manufacturers and research institutes to present their newest discoveries. IMEC's chip was seen as a unique discovery that could lead to a new product coming onto the market within three to 10 years.

DB

Online

www.imec.be



Sleeping soundly: IMEC's intelligent brain scan

FILM

Rebels of the big screen

Cinema Novo celebrates 25 years of rabble-rousing in Bruges

Lisa Bradshaw

“As far as I am concerned, I no longer support notions of purity,” Ousmane Sembène told an interviewer in 1995. “I constantly question myself. I am neither looking for a school nor for a solution but asking questions and making others think.” But, like with many artists who make such a claim, the Senegalese director’s ideas could lead to change – and to answers – if enough people paid attention.

Sembène, an activist and novelist as well as a filmmaker, died last year after more than 50 years of holding a mirror up to the worsening social situations in post-colonial Africa. Cinema Novo pays homage to him during the 25th anniversary of a festival that celebrates filmmaking in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

That might seem like a broad view, but the Bruges festival began in 1984 as the Third World Film Festival with the goal of offering the western world an alternative view of developing nations. The first festival had four films and 700 visitors. This year it screens 66 films for an expected audience of 20,000. In recognition of its anniversary, it is sending a few films from the programme out to other Flemish cities for the first time, including Ostend, Kortrijk and Ghent, and it has also introduced Focus, a series of the most memorable movies from its 25-year history.

Some of those movies introduced Belgium to now-famous film directors they had never before seen. The quietly poetic *Where's My Friend's House?* (1987) was the



Nature of Japan: Cannes Grand Prize winner *The Mourning Forest* premieres in Belgium at Cinema Novo

first film by master Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami to show in Belgium and was later picked up by several European countries. Similarly, Taiwanese director Tsai Ming-Liang did not get released in Belgium until almost 10 years after Cinema Novo showed *Rebels of the Neon God* to audiences excited by the director’s singular brand of irreverent minimalism. Both of these show as part of Focus.

In keeping with the mission, the festival’s films in competition don’t yet have a distributor in Belgium, and the distributor that agrees to release the winning film will receive funding. Having three continents to choose from, competition is fierce among the nine excellent entries, but the jury

should be paying particular note to the almost stage-like *Dementia* from the Tunisian director Fadhel Jaibi about a young schizophrenic in an institution. Jaibi’s wife, Jalila Bacar, stars as the psychologist who becomes more and more deeply involved in the patient’s life. Based on the couple’s own play *Junun*, it’s radical, but deserving.

Another film Belgians should get the chance to see is *Those Three*, a disturbing psychological study of three new military recruits who get lost in endless snowscapes and eventually come across an abandoned, pregnant woman, similarly unsure of which direction she should take. Gorgeously shot, it’s an impressive film debut by Iranian writer/director Naghi Nemat.

Some films at Cinema Novo will release in Belgium but are premiering at the festival. The best of these are *Breath* from South Korea and Japan’s *The Mourning Forest*. Both Golden Palm nominees last year at Cannes, the first is a typically quirky love story by Kim Ki-duk about a prisoner who falls in love with a woman searching for an escape from her husband’s infidelities. Naomi Kawase’s *The Mourning Forest*, which won the Grand Prize at Cannes, is also about an unlikely pair searching for companionship: a young nurse follows her elderly, wandering charge into the mountains of Japan’s Kansai region.

The third day of Cinema Novo is International Women’s Day, which

the festival recognises with a day full of workshops, activities and screenings. This includes *Ulu*, a new film by Flemish visual artist Fleur Boonman. Filmed together with 15 Bruges women who are foreigners or of foreign descent, it follows their experiences as each discovers her *ulu*, or inner strength. The women tell their stories and then apply symbolic images to them. “Through the sharing and charting of the women’s stories, images come free that are not only important for the women themselves but can also serve a whole society,” says Boonman.

In an entirely different vein, late-night at the festival is *CULT!-uur*, a smattering of films destined for cult status (generally meaning creatively violent). *Sukiyaki Western Django* is by far the most intriguing: a samurai spaghetti western delivered in English (with Japanese accents) by the ever-bizarre director Takeshi Miike. No surprise: there’s a quick cameo from Quentin Tarantino.

Finally, four films make up the homage to Sembène, including *La Noire de...* (*Black Girl*), the first film ever made by a black African. It’s worth seeing for that fact alone, but don’t miss *Moolaadé*, the 2004 multiple-award-winner that was Sembène’s final film. Following the story of several young girls and the woman who protects them from genital mutilation, it’s urgent and frightening – yet also exudes a certain charming humour. *Moolaadé* is Cinema Novo at its best: filmmakers revealing the customs of their own cultures through a fantastic story.

Cinema Novo, 6-16 March, in venues across Bruges

FLANDERS EYE

The Hands of Art

Can you tell anything about artists by looking at their hands? George Wittenborn, an influential New York art-book dealer and publisher, created a multi-media book for artists to insert representations of their hands – photos, drawings, collages, whatever they wanted. The result is a fanciful and intriguing look at how artists see themselves – or how they want others to see them – through the tools they use to create the work that sustains them. The project was continued after Wittenborn’s death in 1974, so many contemporary artists are on show, too, such as our own notorious Flemish artist Wim Delvoye (right). With a signature matching that of Walt Disney, he shows just how he feels about that particular mega corporation.

This is the very first public exhibition of the collection, which now numbers 300 works. Other artists include Andy Warhol, Pierre Alechinsky, Marcel Duchamp and the Flemish artists Jan Fabre and Panamarenko. A new book of prints of the entire collection is available at the museum.

LB

Until 16 March, SMAK, Citadelpark, Ghent

Online
www.artistshandsproject.be



Online
www.cinemanoovo.be

“I had a magazine about photography and a big mouth”

How Christoph Ruys saved a world-class photography collection and transformed the FotoMuseum into a showcase of history, art and pragmatism

Lisa Bradshaw

The FotoMuseum, situated in the star-shaped street plan of Antwerp's Zuid district and surrounded by museum and café culture, is the kind of good idea that can get lost in the hands of political infighting. Its pristine atmosphere, thoughtfully-structured agenda and administrative efficiency neatly disguises the fact that the building was nearly converted to office space and the entire collection put in limbo only five years ago.

“There was a whole political debate about what to do with the museum,” explains Christoph Ruys. In fact, there were ongoing debates during that time at the level of city, provincial and regional governments over who was responsible for municipal-supported museums in Flanders. The FotoMuseum is one of the city's famous four genre-dedicated museums (the others are fashion, silver and diamonds) – all are owned and maintained by Antwerp province. “There were some political parties who

thought that running museums was not the task of the province,” says Ruys. That included the FotoMuseum. “But the politicians didn't realise,” he says, “that the collection is amazing.”

As editor of photography magazine *Obscuur*, Ruys did realise it, and he sent the province one scathing letter. They called him up, entered talks and, in early 2003, appointed him director. The following year, a newly remodelled museum open – double the size of the original. “The camera collection is world-class, and the photo and negative collection is one of the best in Europe,” says Ruys. *Obscuur* is now called *FotoMuseum Magazine*.

The museum's permanent collection has in fact been amassed over more than 40 years. It started in the mid-1960s after the great success of the exhibition *125 Years of Photography*, co-sponsored by the Sterckshof Museum of Decorative Arts (now the Silver Museum) and Agfa-Gevaert, the Antwerp-based manufacturer of film and imaging

products. Agfa-Gevaert had a huge historical archive, which it transferred to Antwerp province and which was housed in a department of the Sterckshof Museum.

Across Europe, artists found out that Agfa-Gevaert had organised a museum, “and they were so grateful, they all sent in their photos,” says Ruys. Famous photog-

raphers, the collection ranges from candids of labourers in India to lounging bullfighters in Pamplona. Several works highlight the humour inherent in catching the perfect moment: in Robert Doisneau's “Regard oblique” (1948), a well-dressed woman gestures towards a painting in a window we can't see, while her husband's eyes are secretly drawn to a nearby painting we can see – a female nude.

The FotoMuseum's collection of equipment and photographs

“One of the most recognisable aspects of Flemish photographers is that they leave Flanders.”

raphers, as well as not-so, sent in photos they had produced with Gevaert products before it merged with Agfa in the 1960s. A veritable European photographic history was falling into Antwerp's hands. In 1986, the collection found its own home on Waalse Kaai within walking distance of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, where it still stands today.

“Forty percent of the photo-

graphic collection comes from well-known photographers, but 60% of the authors can't be identified,” says Ruys. “We're not thinking about photography as a sort of linear, chronological history of facts. There are actually many histories of photographies.”

The FotoMuseum's collection of equipment and photographs



What's on now at the FotoMuseum

device used for drawing that was one of the ancestors of modern photography. The rest of the collection provides an overview of the history of photographic practices and the evolution of equipment as a result of new technologies.

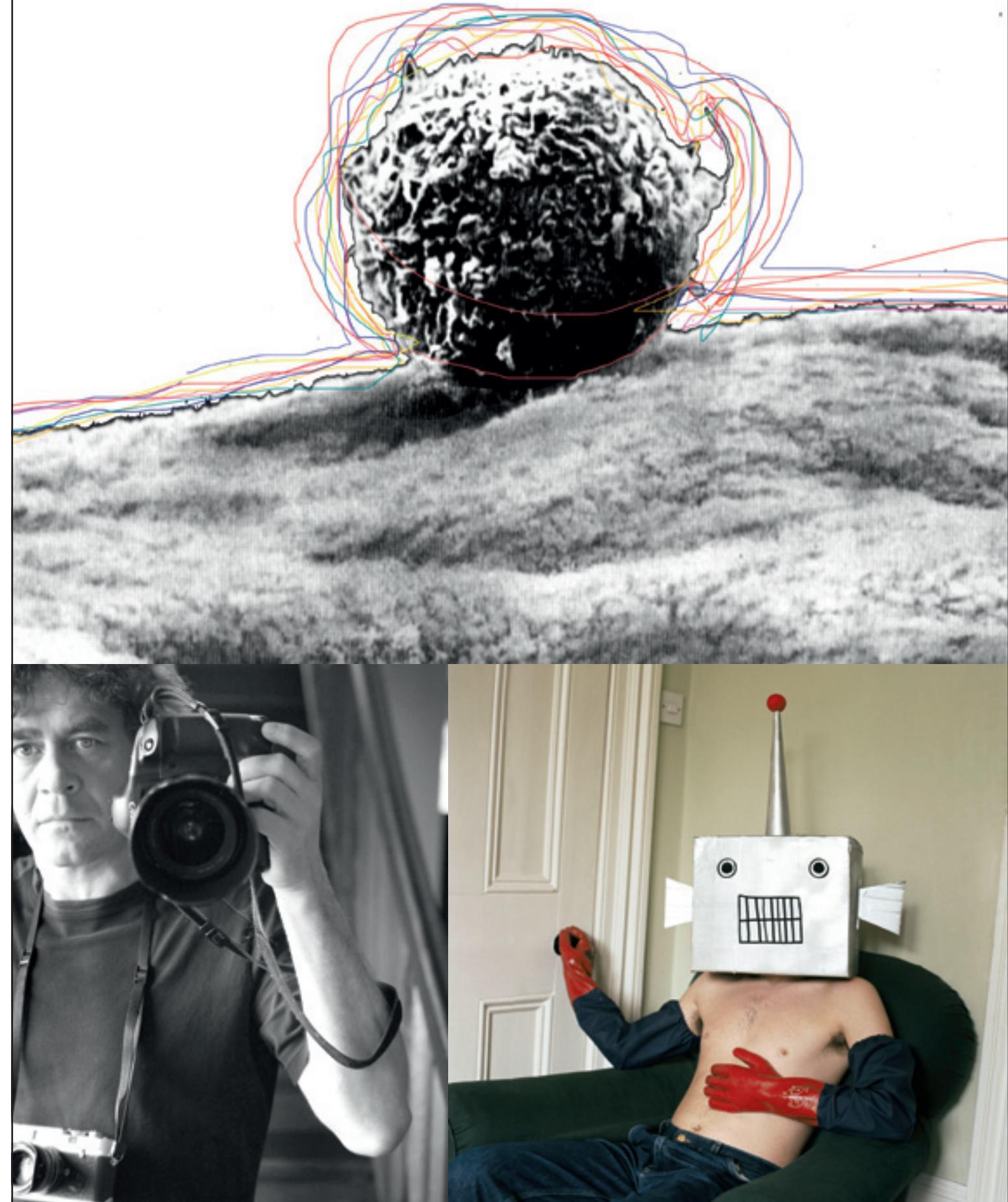
Alongside this are several temporary exhibitions a year. "Photography is part of a larger visual culture," explains Ruys, and the nature of the graphic and thematic exhibitions reflect that. Three very different shows just opened last week, including a retrospective of Patrick De Spiegelaere, the Flemish media and theatre photographer who died suddenly last year of a brain haemorrhage.

The museum's permanent collection – as well as some of the temporary exhibitions – focuses on Belgian photographers. Ruys sees a big difference in styles between the Flemish and Walloons. "Flemish photographers are attached to themes that we recognise from English photographers," he says. "The Walloon style is more introverted, more subjective. But the Flemish are strongly interested in documentary, reporting and portrait photography." He also notes that the Flemish are keen to travel and document the rest of the world. "One of the most recognisable aspects of Flemish photographers is that they leave Flanders."

De Spiegelaere is a splendid example of one of the museum's guiding philosophies. Is there a difference between media and art photography? "There shouldn't be," Ruys says immediately. "There is because of the financial aspect of selling art. Gallery owners say 'this is art, so we'll show it.' But that's not what we do." Because the museum insists on representing photography as a diverse medium, domains such as advertising, family portraits, journalism, holograms, scientific documents and fine art photography all have a place. "If you want to call what we hang upstairs 'art', that's okay with me. But we're not tagging these exhibitions that way." He refers to one of their new shows: Ria Verhaeghe, a retired nurse, cuts images from magazines and newspapers and re-contextualises them in fascinating ways. "Is it art? It's just another way to work with imagery."

In the museum's final exhibition space are large portraits hung high up the walls with empty spaces clearly designated underneath. They are awaiting the outside world to fill them. Anyone can go to the FotoMuseum website and upload a photo they have taken that fits into one of the portraiture themes. The best will be hung up alongside the portraiture style it reflects.

Digital is changing the landscape of photography, which can become much more interactive. "We don't want an institution where the doors are closed,



Provisoria

Bruges artist Ria Verhaeghe cuts images from the media and then places them together in new and revealing ways (top). To these collages she often adds her own bits of drawing or pieces of wire, mostly to link seemingly-disparate images – sometimes with a sense of urgency, sometimes poignantly. The show's title is the Spanish word for "provisional".

Patrick De Spiegelaere

Long-time Flemish media photographer Patrick De Spiegelaere (self portrait, above left) died last year, leaving behind 2,000 photos. They have been bequeathed to the FotoMuseum, and this show offers a retrospective of some of his outstanding work in portraiture, theatre and cityscapes. Making average businessmen look like some kind of celebrities, no one captured the essence of people in quite the same way. "To him, a protest march was just as important a picture as one of Tina Turner," Christoph Ruys says.

Face On

Whether your portrait photo is "fashion", "masked", "unposed" or something entirely different, you'll find a category for it in this interactive exhibit. You can submit your own photo for consideration to hang alongside quintessential examples of portraiture photography (above, right). Visit www.fotomuseum.be to play along.

and we don't have any connection with what is really going on outside," Ruys says. And portraiture holds a special place regard-

less of medium. More than half of all photographs taken are some form of portraiture, both professional and personal. Says Ruys:

"It's how we identify ourselves, but also our identity takes shape through how we see ourselves in images."

Online
www.fotomuseum.be

Towering ambitions

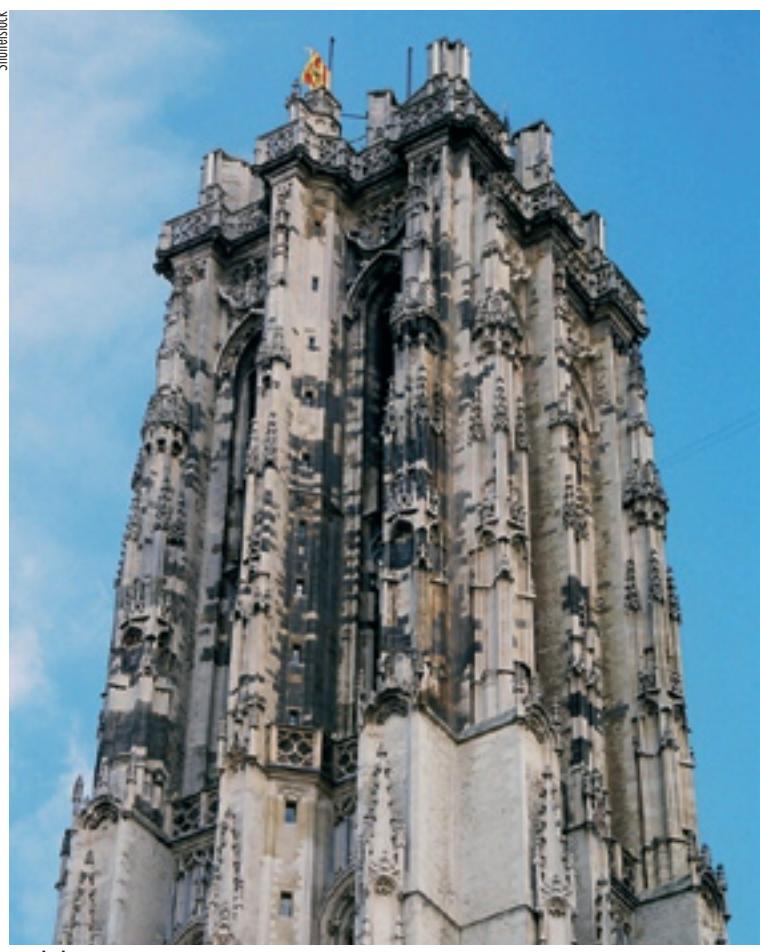
Flanders is one of the flattest regions in the world, but you can get a bird's eye view of the lie of the land from the top of one of the many towers. We guide you to three of the best viewpoints the region has to offer.

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Bruges

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Mechelen

Derek Blyth & Lisa Bradshaw

The Flemish have been building towers since the Middle Ages. These were originally symbols of city pride, designed to be seen from far away. They still poke up above the fields as you drive down the motorways or cross the flat landscape by train. Some of them contain mysterious treasure chests, while others have sets of bells hung at the top. The best way to see them is to climb to the top, but not all of them let you do so. Here are a few that do.

Bruges

Who needs a gym membership when you can climb the 366 steps of the Belfort in Bruges for no more than the price of an admission ticket (€5). The Belfort was built on the site of an older wooden structure that burned to the ground. It used to have a wooden spire at the top, but this too was destroyed by flames after being hit by lightning.

The tower stands on the main square and offers sweeping views of red-tiled rooftops and distant church spires. But first you have to plod up those 366 stone steps carved in 1282-92. While making the ascent, you can pause for breath in a room that once contained the town's treasures. Then it's on to the top, stopping briefly to peer inside the room where the town carillon-ner plays the 47-bell carillon on an instrument resembling a piano. Finally, you reach the upper platform, 83 metres above the cobblestones, feeling as if you have just spent one hour on an exercise bike.

Online
www.brugge.be

Ghent

Ghent's Belfort, or belfry, is both a historical and an architectural gem. Built over 70 years in the 14th century, it served as a showpiece but also as a watchtower where guards kept a vigilant eye over the entire city from a height of 93 metres. Not long after construction, the underground section served as a public records department. Known as the "secrecy room", important municipal papers were kept in a locked trunk that was itself chained to the ground. You can see a reconstruction of this when you visit – the box is protected by a stone guard dating from 1339. Originally, there were three more, but this is the only one left. In the early part of the 20th century, the city replaced the crumbling statues with new ones, which still stand on the four corners at the top of the tower, symbolically watching over the modern city.

There are six levels to the Belfort, most of which you can visit as

you make your way up the seemingly never-ending spiral staircase. (Mercifully, and unlike most towers, there's also a lift for most of the ascent.) On view are artefacts, like old carillon bells and the remains of the original copper-plated dragon that sat at the very top of the spire until it had to be replaced in 1854 (which was in turn replaced in 1980).

Speaking of the bells, they have a whole history of their own: the original bells of the carillon were melted down and recast by the famous bell-maker Pieter Hemeryn in 1659. The largest of these was given the name Roeland and cracked when ringing got a little out of control during the World's Fair of 1914. It now stands in Emile Braunplein near the foot of the tower, while a new giant bell was cast in 1948. After thorough renovations, the Belfort's carillon is considered one of the finest in the world and is played mechanically throughout the day. On the weekends, the bells are played live by a professional Flemish carillon-ner.

It costs €3 to visit the Belfort, and a guided tour is available in English. The tower is open to groups only until 15 March.

Online
www.visitgent.be

Mechelen

At 97 metres above sea level, Mechelen's tower tops that of Bruges. It was originally planned to reach a height of 167 metres, but the city ran into money problems, and it never made it beyond the first tier. The work took several decades to complete under the Keldermans family of architects. According to one calculation, it took one year to add every 1.5 metres in height.

Even in its half-completed state, it's an impressive structure, with the first stones of the second tier still poking skywards. The tower can only be visited on limited dates in the winter. In fact, it's only possible on one day in March (Saturday 15 at 14.15). The visit is by guided tour leaving from the tourist office. The visit lasts about two hours and costs €5.

How about climbing the tower after dark to gaze at the night sky? You can do that on 15 March when the tower is open late as part of the Night of Darkness programme organised by the environmental organisation Bond Beter Leefmilieu. Guided visits start at 18.00 and 20.00, but advanced booking is essential (call Mechelen tourist office on 070.22.28.00).

Online
www.mechelen.be



Ghent

Brussels

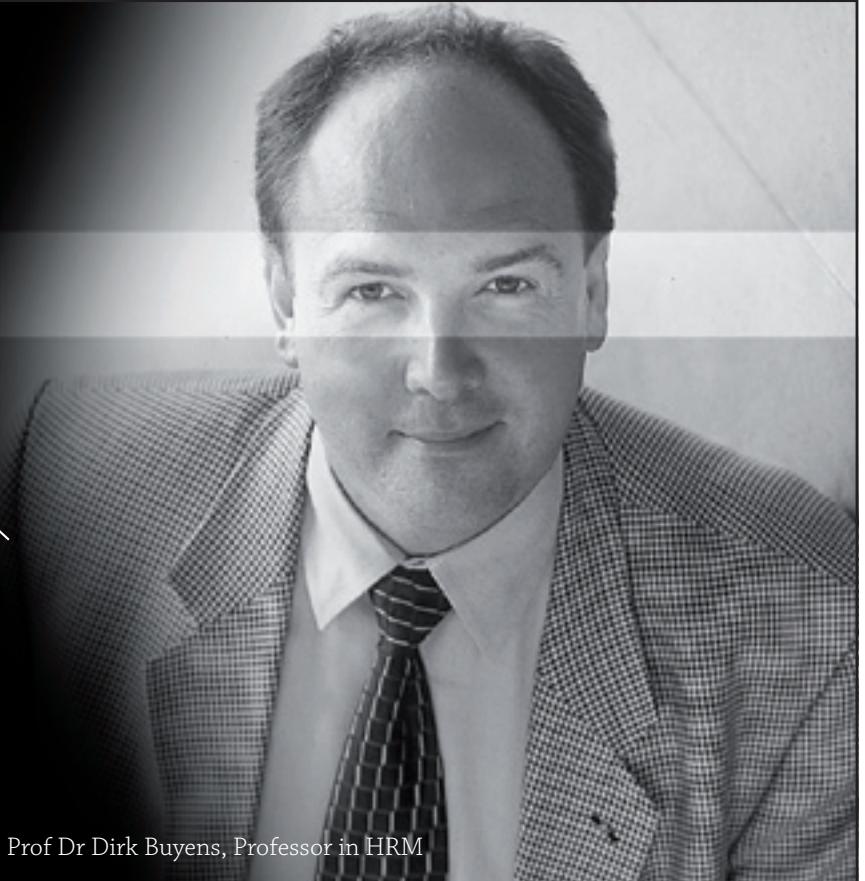
And what about Brussels? The capital unfortunately doesn't offer the tower-climber any possibilities. The Cathedral has two beautiful towers, but they are not open to the public. The town hall has an elegant Gothic spire, but no one gets to climb that, either. The only high spots that can be visited are the Atomium and the triumphal arch in the Jubelpark, both reached by a lift. You aren't going to get fit that way.

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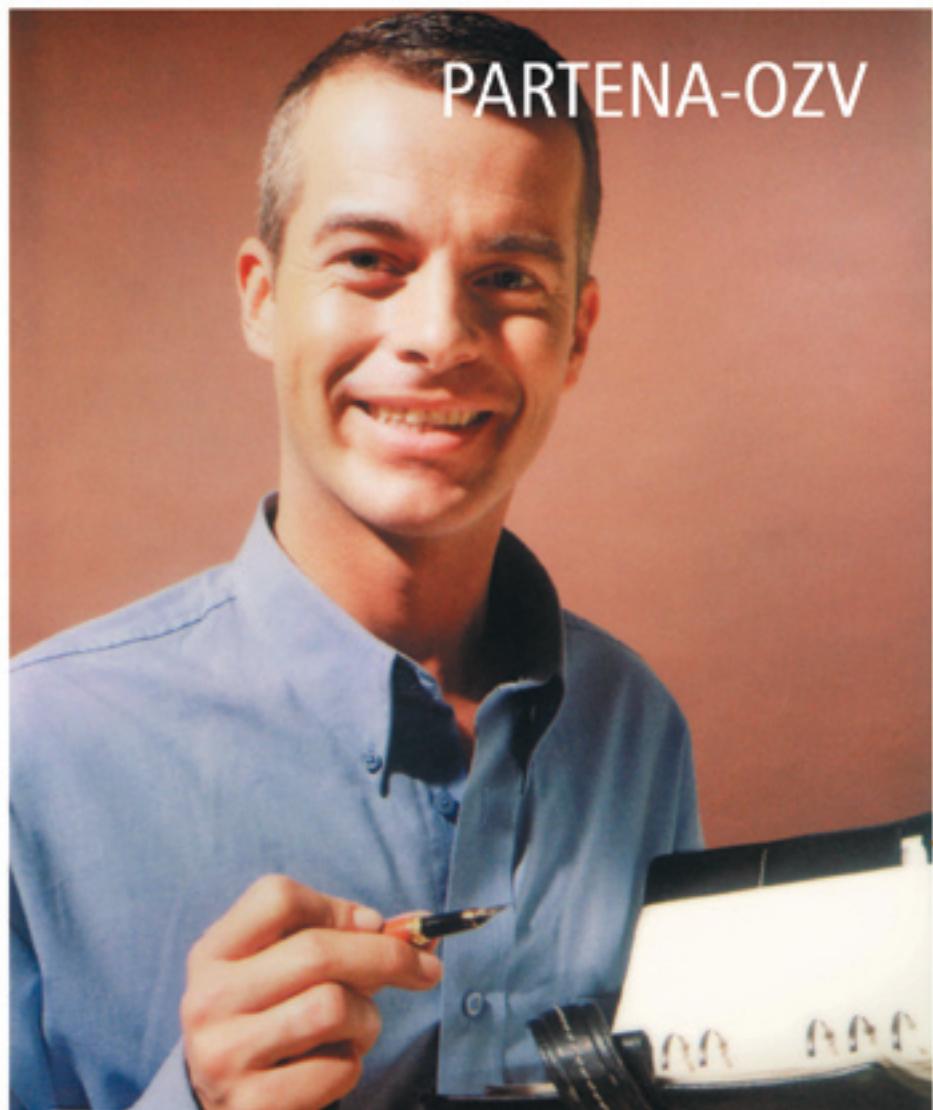
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Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be

MAR 6 12.30 Dimitri Baeteman, Karel Schoofs, Bram Nolf, oboe; Freddy Claeyns, mime: Beethoven. 20.00 dePhilharmonie and Koor Akademie, conducted by Philippe Herreweghe, with Alice Coote, mezzo: Beethoven's *Consecration of the House* ouverture op 124, Brahms' Rhapsody for alto solo and men's chorus op 53, Schubert's *Symphony No 9*, D 944

MAR 7 20.00 Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin conducted by Ingo Metzmacher, with Hélène Grimaud, piano: Ives, Ravel, Stravinsky

MAR 9 11.00 Christian Svarfvar, violin; Anders Kilström, piano: Sjögren, Strauss, Salonen, Sinding

MAR 10 19.30 Al Ayre Español, conducted by Eduardo Lopez-Banzo, with Namur Chamber Choir: Bach's St Matthew Passion BWV 244

MAR 12 20.00 The Slovenian Philharmonic, Chamber Choir and Consortium Musicum, conducted by George Pehlivanian: Mahler's *Symphony No 2*

Kasteel Jourdain
Desangelaan 48
MAR 9 17.00 Menno van Delft, harpsichord: Frescobaldi, Froberger, Couperin

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
MAR 5 20.00 Petra Lang, mezzo; Charles Spencer, piano: Brahms, Wagner, Wolf, Mahler

MAR 7 12.30 De Munt Chamber Music Ensemble conducted by Peter Tomek: Brahms' Serenade No 1

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be
MAR 13 20.15 Ictus Ensemble with Natalia Pschenitschnikowa, soprano; Michael Schmid, flute and voice; François Deppe, cello: Helmut Lachenmann's temA, Kurt Schwitters' Ursonate

Kapel van de Miniemen
Miniemstraat 62; 02.507.82.00,
www.minimes.net
MAR 13 20.00 Le Concert Brisé with William Dongois, conductor and cornet: Merula, Battista, Rognoni, Pandolfi Mealli, Gabriei, Castello, Cazzati, Bassano, Storace

Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 0900.28.877
MAR 9 11.00 Trio Elektra: Mozart, Bruch, Debucq, Stravinsky

Royal Museum of Fine Arts
Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11,
www.fine-arts-museum.be
MAR 12 12.40-13.30 Justus Grimm, cello; Daniel Blumenthal, piano: Mendelsohn, Grieg

Royal Music Conservatory
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.507.82.00
MAR 8 20.00 Ricercar Consort conducted by Philippe Pierlot, with Céline Scheen, soprano: Haquart, Huyghens, Kempis, Rosier, van Wichel
MAR 13 20.00 Brussels Choral Society with Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Eric Delson: George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, Bernstein's *West Side Story* Concert Suite, Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, Corigliano's *Fern Hill* (tickets from 02.241.51.48 or bcs.tickets@gmail.com)

Théâtre Saint Michel

Pater Eudore Devroyestraat 2;
02.732.70.73
MAR 7 20.00 Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Roger Bausier, with Roberto Fabbriciani, flute: Tchaikovsky, Vandermaesbrugge, Vilardi, Fabbriciani

Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
MAR 6 21.00 The Rare Fruits Council, conducted by Manfredo Kraemer: vocal and instrumental Baroque music from South America
MAR 8 21.00 Ensemble Explorations, conducted by Roel Dieltiens: Mendelsohn, Spohr

MAR 9 15.00 Cappella Artemisia, conducted by Candace Smith: music for the Holy Week

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
Concerts at 20.00:
MAR 5 Le Poème Harmonique, conducted by Vincent Dumestre: Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*, Durante's concerto No 4, anonymous Neopolitan Tarantella
MAR 8 Natalia Prischepenko, violin; Plamena Mangova, piano: Stravinsky, Beethoven, Schubert

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02,
www.concertgebouw.be

MAR 7 20.00 Ensemble Explorations conducted by Roel Dieltiens, cello: Mendelsohn, Spohr

MAR 12 20.00 Le Carnaval Baroque with Le Poème Harmonique conducted by Vincent Dumestre, musical theatre

Ghent

De Bijloke
Jozef Kluyvensstraat 2, 09.269.92.92
MAR 7 20.00 Spiegel String Quartet with Sayaka Kawaguti, piano: Stravinsky, Janacek, Korngold
MAR 8 20.00 Vlaams Radio Orkest, conducted by Richard Egarr: Stokowski transcriptions of music by Bach, Vaughan Williams, Purcell, Palestrina, Cesti

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20
MAR 7 20.30 Spectra Ensemble: Karel Goeyvaerts

Opera

Brussels
De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
Until MAR 12 De Munt Symphony Orchestra & Choirs in Wozzeck by Alban Berg, conducted by Mark Wigglesworth, with Dietrich Henschel/Werner Van Mechelen, bass-baritones, Claudia Barainsky/Solveig Kringelborn, sopranos

Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02
Until MAR 22 Dialogues des Carmélites by Poulenc, conducted by Jean-Claude Casadesus, with Olga Pasichnyk and Hendrickje Van Kerckhove, sopranos; Christian Tréguier, baritone; Martial Defontaine, tenor

Jazz & blues

Brussels
Archiduc
Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52
MAR 9 17.00 Canaries on the Pole

Beursschouwburg
Auguste Orstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.beursschouwburg.be
MAR 12 20.30 Ultra Eczema: Dennis Tyfus/Eric Thielemans

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
MAR 11 20.00 Barbara Hendricks with the Magnus Lindgren Quartet

Brasserie de l'Union
Sint-Gillisvoordeplein 55; 02.538.15.79
MAR 10 12.00 Carson Barnes & friends

De Krikelaar
Gallaitstraat 86; 02.245.75.22
MAR 7 20.00 Panopticon, jazz improvisation

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be
MAR 7 12.30 Tao with Alexandre Cavalière, Janos Bruneel, Stijn Cools and Bert Cools

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193-195;
02.733.13.78
MAR 5 20.30 Ruocco/Simtaine/Rassinfosse Trio
MAR 6 20.30 Jazz Station Big Band
MAR 8 18.00 Fabrice Alleman/Jean Warlan Duo
MAR 12 20.00 Laurent Melnyk Quartet

Le Grain d'Orge
Waversesteenweg 142; 02.511.26.47
MAR 7 Steppin' Out

Sounds Jazz Club
Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,
www.soundsjazzclub.be
MAR 5 Caribe Con K – Los Soneros del Barrio
MAR 6 Jean François Maljean invites...
MAR 7 Old Fashioned Trio & Friends
MAR 8 Marc Lelangue Blues Band
MAR 10 Master Session

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
MAR 5 Marcelo Moncada Space Quartet

MAR 6 Rey Cabrera Cuban Band

MAR 7-8 Scott Hamilton & the New Look Trio

Antwerp

Luchtbal Cultuurcentrum
Columbiestraat 8; 03.543.90.30

MAR 13 20.30 Wadada Leo Smith

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90
MAR 7 20.30 Free Desmyter Quartet & Chris Potter Underground

Bruges

De Werf
Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29
MAR 5 20.30 Josse De Pauw & Corie van Binsbergen Ensemble

MAR 8 20.30 Peter Hertmans Quartet

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

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

MAR 6 20.00 Olla Vogala

MAR 8 20.00 Skakkamanage + Parachute + Kira Kira + Múm

Stekerlapotte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81,
www.stekerlapotte.be

MAR 6 21.30 Jérémie Calbert Jazz Trio

MAR 8 21.30 MO (France)

MAR 13 21.30 Mon Ame de Lune

Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00,
www.muziekpublieke.be

MAR 6 20.00 Pierre Vaiana & Al Funduq (Italy)

MAR 7 20.00 Silvia Abalos & Te'ome (Mexico)

MAR 9 16.30 Bal & Basta: Daniel Detammaecker & Snaarmaarwaar

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991

MAR 9 20.00 I Muvrini (Corsica)

Wolubilis

Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30

MAR 8 20.30 Amina Alaoui (Morocco)

Woluwe-Saint-Pierre Cultural Centre

Charles Thielemanslaan 93;

02.773.05.80, www.art-culture.be

MAR 13 20.30 Harry Manx, guitar and sitar and Michael Kaeshammer, piano (Canada)

Antwerp**Zuiderpershuis**

Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00,

www.zuiderpershuis.be

MAR 6 20.30 Përmeti Ensemble (southern Albania)

MAR 7 20.30 Trio Adel Salameh, oud (Palestine)

MAR 8 20.30 D'Amé D'Amour, Malgasy songs (Madagascar)

Borgerhout**De Roma**

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90

MAR 8 20.30 Willem Vermandere: Onderweg

Dance**Brussels****Kaaitheater**

Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59

MAR 6-15 20.30 Zeitung,

choreographed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, music by Alain Franco

Les Brigittines

Korte Brigittinenstraat; 02.506.43.00

MAR 12-21 Troubleyn in Quando l'uomo principale è una donna, dance solo choreographed by Jan Fabre

Antwerp**deSingel**

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28

MAR 5-6 20.00 L'Association Fragile in Mon amour, staged by Christian Rizzo

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3-6 July, Werchter, Flemish Brabant.

Tickets from 034.00.00.34 www.rockwerchter.be

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Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20
MAR 6-7 20.30 Zoo in Cows in Space, choreographed by Thomas Hauert

Theatre

Brussels

Beursschouwburg
Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50, www.beursschouwburg.be
Until MAR 8 20.30 SKaGeN in Deurdeurdeur, adapted from Michael Frayn's Noises Off (in Dutch)

De Kam Cultural Centre
Beekstraat 172; 0477.40.87.04, ecctickets@yahoo.com
MAR 11-15 20.00 English Comedy Club in Animal Farm by George Orwell (in English)

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
MAR 8 20.00 Comp. Marius in Sunshine Boys by Neil Simon (in Dutch)

Zuiderpershuis
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.zuiderpershuis.be
MAR 13 20.30 Is.Man, poetical theatre by Adelheid Roosen (in Dutch)

Bruges

De Werf
Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29
MAR 7 20.30 Abattoir fermé in Mythobarbital/Val der Titanen, staged by Stef Lernous (in Dutch)
MAR 9-11 20.30 I Promiscue by and with Philippe Verkinderen and Liesa Naert (in Dutch)
MAR 13-14 20.30 De Koe in Burgerlijke Ongehoorzaamheid by and with Stefaan Degand and Nico Sturm (in Dutch)

Visual arts

Brussels

Atomium
Atomium Square; 02.475.47.72, www.atomium.be
Until MAR 30 Willy Van Der Meeren, furniture from the 1950s by the Belgian architect

Bibliotheca Wittockiana
Bemelstraat 23; 02.770.53.33
Until APR 19 Imprint: Russian artist-publishers

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
Until MAR 30 The Unreal Image: Emblems, Symbols and Metaphors, photographs by Charles Nègre, Achille Quinet, Julia Margaret Cameron, Henry Peach Robinson and many others
Until MAR 31 Image/Construction, photographs of architecture by Filip Dujardin
Until APR 25 Dreams of the Sublime and Nowhere: multimedia installations and photographs inspired by Iceland's natural environment
Until APR 27 Magicians of Nature, paintings by three Icelandic artists
Until APR 27 Water Vocal – Endangered II, video and sound installation by Rúri

CIVA
Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.71, www.civa.be
Until MAR 9 MAXXI Museum Rome: Zaha Hadid Architects, models, photographs and video presenting Rome's future Museum of Art for the 21st century

Crown Gallery
Hopstraat 7; 02.514.01.23
Until APR 12 A Shimmer of Possibility, photographs by Paul Graham
De Elektriciteitscentrale European Centre for Contemporary Art
Sint Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.44
Until APR 27 No Borders [Just N.E.W.S.], works by 29 young European artists

De Loge Architecturmuseum

Kluisstraat 86; 02.649.86.65
Until SEP 28 Belgique/Belgique 58, architectural and decorative forms at the time of Belgium's 1958 World Fair, with drawings, photographs, models, posters and furniture

deBuren

Leopoldstraat 6, www.deburen.be
Until MAR 21 Afghanistan 2007, travel photographs by Pieter-Jan De Pue

Espace Photographique Contretype

Verbindingslaan 1; 02.538.42.20
Until MAR 9 Oog in oog, photographs by Andreas Weinand

Goethe Institute

Belliardstraat 58; 02.230.39.70
Until APR 17 Fotoporträts, 50 photographs by winners of the Chamiso Prize

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until MAR 22 Rue de la Comtesse de Flandre, paintings by Bernard Gaube

Until APR 5 Ceramics by Laurence Deweer and textiles by Delphine Grand'Ry

Until APR 5 Serrer les dents, works by François Jacob

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre

Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20
Until MAR 23 Spirales, drawings by Aurélie Thiolat and Huis clos and photographs by Catherine Lamberton

Koekelberg Basilica

Basiliekvoordeplein 1; 02.420.55.05
Until APR 6 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

L'Usine Gallery

Dekenijstraat 40; 02.344.52.45
Until MAR 9 Réfractaires, photographs by Jean-Charles Delange

Maison du Folklore et des Traditions

Eikstraat 19; 02.514.53.97
Until MAR 24 L'Art et l'Abeille, painted bee hives in 18th- and 19th-century Slovenia

Museum van Elsene

Jean Van Volsemstraat 71; 02.515.64.22
Until APR 27 Black-Paris, Black-Brussels, 100 years of African, West Indians and Afro-American culture in Paris and contemporary works by Brussels-based artists

Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 0900.28.877
MAR 8-16 Ilsa, International Lutherie School Antwerp, exhibition of the 25th anniversary of Antwerp's school of stringed-instrument making

René Magritte Museum

Essegemstraat 135; 02.428.26.26
Until JUNE 30 Dreaming of a Future World, paintings and drawings by the Belgian artist Edmond van Dooren

Rodolphe Janssen Gallery

Livornostraat 35; 02.538.08.18
Until MAR 29 Scenarios, photographs by Sam Samore

Royal Army Museum

Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33
Until JUNE 29 (H)erkennung! 175 jaar Leopoldsorde en Nationale Orden, exhibition on the oldest Belgian military order

Royal Library

Kunstberg; 02.519.58.73
Until AUG 24 In de ban van boeken, Belgian book collectors, 1750 to 1850

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11
Until MAR 30 Alechinsky from A to Y, retrospective of work by the Belgian artist

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

Royal Museums of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11, www.kmkg-mrah.be
Until APR 20 Onder dak in China, 2000 years of funerary architecture and furniture from China's Henan museum
Until APR 27 From Gilgamesh to Zenobia, highlights from the museum's collection of Middle Eastern art

Silken Berlaymont Hotel

Karel de Grotelaan 11-19; 02.231.09.09
Until APR 25 Dreams in Dreamland, photographs by Michael Chia, winner of the Silken Photoplate Award 2008

Sint-Gorikshallen

Sint-Goriksplein 1; 02.502.44.24
Until MAR 30 Photography & the Changing Cityscape: Brussels 1850-1880, urban development and the evolution of early photography in 19th-century Brussels

Stadhuis

Grote Markt; 02.279.43.50
Until MAY 18 Slovenian Painting after 1945, works by some 50 contemporary artists

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49
Until MAR 23 It's our History!, multimedia exhibition on the development of the EU and the lives of European citizens since 1945
Until JUNE 1 Star Wars, interactive exhibition with artwork, costumes and objects from the cult science fiction films

Verhaeren Gallery

Gratèrsstraat 7; 02.662.16.99
MAR 5 Corpus et Terra, photos by Daniel Bastin and Jean-Paul Antoine

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)

Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60
Until MAR 9 Lonely at the top: Seamus Heaney, video works by the contemporary Irish artist

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
Until MAR 22 35m3 jonge architectuur, featuring NOA Architecten, Belgian architecture installation

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70
Until MAR 30 Mimétisme, group show of contemporary art, with work by Paweł Althamer & Artur Zmijewski, Elisabetta Benassi, Charif Benhelima, Lieven de Boeck and many others

Fifty-One Fine Art Photography

Zirkstraat 20; 03.289.84.58
Until MAR 8 Interiors, photographs evoking a love for interior spaces by James Casebere, Lucinda Devlin, Andreas Gursky, Abelardo Morell and others

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00, www.fotomuseum.be
Until JUNE 8 Patrick De Spiegelaere, retrospective of the late Flemish photographer (1961-2007)
Until JUNE 8 Provisoria, mixed-media collages by Flemish artist Ria Verhaeghe
Until JUNE 8 Face On, interactive portrait installation

MoMu

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70
MAR 12-AUG 17 Moi, Véronique: Branquinho Toute Nue, retrospective of the Belgian designer marking the 10th anniversary of her label

Provinciehuis Antwerpen

Koningin Elisabethlei 22; 03.240.50.11
Until MAR 22 In Memo Mara: Pol Mara 1920-1998, retrospective of the late Antwerp artist

Ghent

Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99
Until APR 27 Challenging the Chatelaine, contemporary objects by 78 international designers
Until APR 27 Verleidelijke eenvoud (Seductive Simplicity), silver and ceramic works by Nedda El-Asmar, Belgian Designer of the Year 2007
Until APR 27 Times through Teaware, 100 years of Taiwanese tea culture
Until APR 27 20 years Theo-design, colourful and eccentric eyeglass frames by Bruges designer Patrick Hoet

Museum Dr Guislain

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, www.museumdrguislain.be
Until APR 27 Sick: Between Body and Mind, multimedia exhibition showcasing the links between mental and physical pain, with work by Félicien Rops, Patrik Vermeulen, Dana Wyse, Léon Spilliaert and many others

Provinciaal Cultuurcentrum Caermersklooster

Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10
Until MAR 30 Quebec in vorm, works by designers from the collection of Quebec's National Fine Arts Museum

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03
Until MAR 16 The Hands of Art, George Wittenborn's collection of drawings, collages and photographs of artists' hands

Hasselt

Modemuseum
Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21
Until OCT 31 Looks: Mode 1750-1958, Two-hundred years of the fashion history

Leuven

Tweebronnen
Rijschoolstraat 49; 0497.64.94.52
Until APR 13 De Stiel, retrospective of drawings by Belgian artist Ever Meulen

Menen

De Steiger Cultural Centre
Waalvest 1; 050.40.31.20
Until MAR 16 Architecture show with works by prize winners of Actuele architectuur in West-Vlaanderen 2007

Waregem

BE-PART
Westerlaan 17; 056.62.94.10
Until APR 20 Paintings, video and photographs by Helmut Stallaerts

Ypres

In Flanders Fields Museum
Grote Markt 34; 057.23.92.75
Until MAR 30 Oorlogsgeschiedenis: 1914-1918 (War Witness: 1914-1918), drawings by Henry De Groux

Municipal Museum

Ieperleestraat 31; 057.21.83.00
Until JUNE 1 Twilight of the Gods over Ypres, Ypres pictured from 1893 to 1930 by photographers Leontine, Maurice and Robert Antony

Festivals & special events

Brussels

Batibouw: international building trade, renovation and decorating fair
Until MAR 9 at Brussels Expo, Heysel 02.474.89.81, www.brusselsex

MY FLANDERS



Happy Together takes a critical view of the Flemish dream of wealth and shows how vulnerable even the upper classes really are. **Where did this idea come from?**

Our producer was inspired by a newspaper article about a wealthy man who lost all of his money through bank embezzlement and how he and his family reacted to that. You can lose your money from one day to another, and everybody involved says 'it's not my fault'. You cannot trust your bank.

Could the family in the film be from anywhere – or are they a specific sort of Flemish character?

They are a typical Flemish bourgeois family, but it's a universal story. This is a family that could be from anywhere – anybody who suffers from status anxiety and who is searching for happiness. It applies to everybody who takes their responsibility to provide happiness too far.

Where were you born and raised?

I was born and raised in Antwerp and in nearby Brasschaat, which was similar to the environment in the film. All the people in the film are inspired by people I knew. I thought it would be interesting to set it within a social class where you have to question how something so bad could happen. There is so much help around this family, so much money – how can something like this happen?

The notion of elusive happiness is ever-present in the film.

The main character, Martin, is not happy even though he has all this money and status. He thinks he needs it to gain respect – for him, respect is equal to love. You can find true happiness in little things – in people, in trust, in warmth. There is nothing wrong with status and luxury, but you have to be able to enjoy it.

He also feels he is responsible for the status

Director Geoffrey Enthoven's new film *Happy Together* is now playing in cinemas. We ask him about the dark side of Flemish family life and the true meaning of happiness.

and happiness of his entire family and that he has to keep bad news away from them – even from his wife.

He's really afraid of his wife. He thinks she is only with him because of his career, his hard work and his responsibilities. But she proves over and over that she is not naive and that she will be there for him throughout all these problems. But he can't accept that; he is too narcissistic. His wife doesn't need the money; she still loves him. You can understand it; he has qualities to love. But he doesn't want to believe that because he can only admire people, he cannot love them. Love is something that you can't see or touch, so he can't get to it. Martin also takes everything much too seriously and has no sense of humour. I'm really afraid of people who have no sense of humour because that is really the only medicine we have to survive in life. If you don't have that, you never achieve balance.

Do you think a lot of breadwinners feel responsible for the happiness of their families?

Yes, and in the movie Martin takes that responsibility too far. Everyone is responsible for their own happiness, but he thinks everything rests on his shoulders. That's very dangerous.

The movie's ending is shocking. Was there ever a moment when you doubted it?

No, we started with the end and then worked backwards. I wanted to go back and portray the guy who has taken this action at the

end. Martin is full of things we can admire about people: he's charming, he's successful, he's good looking. But I want to show that in everything beautiful, there is a dark side. It forces you to watch life very carefully. You cannot think in black and white.

Some might call this movie a cynical portrait of family life...

I think it's a normal portrait. But you need to reserve your judgement of the film for a few days after seeing it. You have to sleep on it. You have to work through the visions when you watch it and afterwards. It's really dark, that's true, but through all that darkness I want to show something beautiful. Maybe people can be happier with their own lives after seeing the film.

The reviews aren't out yet – do you think the critics will be kind?

My first two films got very good reviews. But it's typically Flemish that if the first two are positive, the third has to be negative. Just to show they are neutral. But it's also the kind of film that you're either for or against.

I've seen a lot of good Flemish cinema in the last year... do you think the industry is improving in terms of quality?

Absolutely. We have a lot of talent, and it's taking off. Our younger generation watches a lot more TV and movies, so there is a new industry growing. Now we have to specialise in storytelling, in script-writing. That could still be better. But for the rest, we are first class,

especially when you realise how little money we have to make films. In other countries, they can't believe how little we are working with.

Do you think that there is a Flemish filmmaking aesthetic?

In every film, we like some sort of sadness – things that are blue and grey. I think it has to do with our really bad weather. But we are a country that is struggling to find what is typically "Belgian" or what is typically "Flemish" because we were always ruled by other countries. We've also become suspicious because of that. Don't believe anything; there is always an ulterior motive.

I hear you are in pre-production on a new movie now.

Yes, it's a comedy, and we just today decided to call it *Staying Alive*. It's about a Flemish granny who starts an R&B hip-hop band. We're still searching for funding, but we hope to start filming at the end of this year.

You also run a production company, right?

Yes, the producer and I started it when we graduated from university. We produce shorts and documentaries, but we focus on feature films. We called the company Fobic Films because the main theme in all our projects is fear and how to conquer it.

Interview by Lisa Bradshaw

Online
www.happytogether.be

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

Solidarity

"It gives me joy to see that there still is a sense of solidarity when things go wrong."

Yves Leterme
deputy prime minister
after leaving hospital
last week

Electric shock

"Electrabel is charging its customers an extra 10% to 15%. This is unnecessary."

Test Aankoop
report on
Electrabel prices

Dark pleasures

"I have always appreciated the contrast between dark and light"

Michiel Hendryckx
photographer
talking about the "Night of Darkness," 15 March

The Irish in Flanders De Schaduw Rockox Huis Patrick Hoet Patrick Foley St Mark's Passion
next week in Flanders Today