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All the pretty horses

The Flemish passion for horse breeding rides waves of changes

Steven Tate

“There are more Belgian draught horses in the US than in Belgium,” says Dietrich Verzele. The disappearance of

small Belgian farms – where these massive beasts were once indispensable – has led to a declining need for the breed. But the passion for stallions (and colts, fillies and

mares) is booming in Belgium, with Flanders leading the way. “There are probably over 200,000 horses in the country, with 75% of those in Flanders,” says Rudi

Eerdekkens, the Secretary General of the Belgische Warmbloedpaard (BWP), the Belgian Warmblood Horse Association. Horses were once all business – now they are

pleasure.

The first-ever Flanders Horse Expo this weekend brings together

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Business

The Flanders Fashion Institute has been taking Flemish designers to Paris for the past 10 years. Fashion critic Stéphanie Duval finds out about the hottest new names to reach the French capital.

Arts

Flemish conductor Ben Haemhouts explains why classical is more like rock 'n' roll than you think. We talk to him ahead of the premiere of his new chamber orchestra.

Active

We wander through Ghent's Sint Pietersabdij and learn more than we ever expected about monasteries from the ghost of an 18th-century monk.

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Housing minister replies to UN rebuke

Language test “favours the disadvantaged”

Alan Hope

Flemish housing minister Marino Keulen has hit back at a committee of the United Nations that criticised Flanders' policy on applying a language test to applicants for social housing. The UN ought to be congratulating Flanders for a policy that favours the disadvantaged, Keulen said.

The *wooncode*, or housing code, was criticised in a report by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which claimed it discriminated on the grounds of language. The code, which came into force in January, requires any candidate tenant for social housing in a

Flemish commune to speak Dutch. Failing that, the applicant is required to follow a free course in basic Dutch. Those who do speak the language need to provide a reference letter from a Dutch language school attesting to basic competence. Native speakers who have no access to such a letter can be required to take a quick speaking test by telephone in order to obtain a certificate of competence from the Huis van het Nederlands language school. Non-speakers, however, are not required to take a test at any point; they simply need to show a willingness to learn.

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Cantillon Brewery

One of the world's great small breweries is hidden away in a side street near the Zuidstation in Brussels. The Cantillon brewery in Anderlecht hardly looks promising from the outside, but push open the door and you enter a world of traditional brewing that dates back several centuries.

The first thing you notice is the rattling of a thousand bottles moving along a cranky conveyor belt. Then your eyes fall on an informal drinking area where upturned beer keys have been converted into makeshift tables. You are offered a glass of beer at the end of your tour, but first comes the brewery visit.

Cantillon began operating back in 1900 when Brussels was dotted with family breweries, many of them hugging the valley of the River Zenne. Most of the brewing companies owe their existence to a peculiar biological phenomenon known as spontaneous fermentation which occurs in the Zenne valley and nowhere else in the world. Rather than using yeast, the fermentation process is kicked off by micro-organisms that drift through the Zenne valley. The microbes drift through gaps in the brewery roof and land in vast copper tanks containing an unfermented mix of wheat and barley.

Then the miracle begins. On days when the conditions are favourable – barely a dozen every year – the liquid reacts to the microbes and fermenta-

tion begins, leading to the production of a flat beer known as *lambic*. This is then stored in wooden casks for a year or more, blended with other *lambics* and fermented a second time in the bottle. The end result is one of the world's last authentic Gueuze beers. You can taste it in the bar at the front of the brewery. But be warned: most people are initially shocked by the tartness. This is beer as it tasted in Bruegel's day, before the big industrial brewers started to add sugar to their brews. It takes time to get accustomed to the taste.

Enjoy it while it lasts, because traditional Gueuze is under threat. The dusty cobwebs in the attic alarm health inspectors sent by the European Commission – they think it means sloppy management, whereas the cobwebs are in fact an eco-friendly way to control the swarms of summer flies.

The biggest threat comes from Belgian indifference to this unique beer. Hardly any cafés in Brussels sell Cantillon (although you can pick it up in specialised beer shops and bigger branches of Delhaize). So the company has to find its market elsewhere – some 12 bars in Helsinki stock it, compared to just eight in Brussels. Try it once before it vanishes – like the River Zenne.

Derek Blyth

Online

www.cantillon.be

BITC – O.van de Kerck



FACE OF FLANDERS



Women are Heroes!

The woman in the photo is someone no one in Brussels knows, but who everyone will feel they do by the end of the month. Her portrait, several metres high, is mounted between two buildings above the roaring traffic on Bisschopstraat, not far off Anspachlaan. Her name is Cecilia, and she lives in Monrovia. You won't hear her story in Bisschopstraat, but you can hear it in Sint-Gorikshallen, where a film is playing in which she and seven other African women share the defining stories of their lives. Those women's portraits, too, dot the Brussels landscape until 8 April in an open-air exhibition by the French photographic artist known as JR.

When Cecilia was 15, there was a curfew in the capital of Liberia, but she was sent out to beg anyway, and she was caught by a Nigerian soldier. He took her to a remote location and raped her. He held her overnight and when she arrived home the next day, she got in trouble for not having earned any money. It was 15 years later before she told a Doctors Without Borders psychologist what happened to her.

Women Are Heroes! is the third part in a series of portraits by JR, who uses a camera he found in the Paris metro. He posts his large-scale photos in impromptu, unauthorised exhibitions in urban areas, which has made him famous. His first in the series known as *28 millimetres* focused on the inhabitants of the Montfermeil ghetto, his second caused a stir worldwide: *Face2Face* found identical photographs of strangers in the same pose or doing the same job next to each other. One was Israeli and one Palestinian. JR hung them in unavoidable places on both sides of the infamous border. "They are like twin brothers raised in different families," JR says. "We must put them face to face, and then they will realise."

Meanwhile, *Women Are Heroes!* should have a similar impact in Brussels. Regardless of the harrowing situations these women have found themselves in, they continue to work, love, raise children and make homes for themselves in sometimes desolate and often violent places. Cecilia, now 31, has three children and a small business. "I find myself a strong woman," she told JR. "My children go to school, and I can feed them every day. I want absolutely to avoid that they end up like beggars in the streets of Monrovia. It makes me happy every day when I wake up and see them in top form."

JR asked the women to make funny faces in their photos, a testament to their ongoing sense of hope after lives of extreme poverty and violence. The exhibition, film and a corresponding outdoor video project in De Brouckèreplein (until 24 March) should serve to remind the people of Brussels that life isn't as easy everywhere as it is in the capital of Europe and that sometimes just getting through the day is a heroic undertaking.

Lisa Bradshaw

Online:

www.womenareheroes.be

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



huisvuil

The weeks have their rhythms between which the interesting things in life occur. Adjusting to new surroundings requires you to get your head round all sorts of such mundane matters. And none is more basic than putting out the rubbish.

Don't think for one moment that you can just stuff everything in one bin. Those days have long gone; in fact, Flanders is the recognised world leader in *sorteren en recycleren*. You will need *huisvuilzakken* – ordinary rubbish bags that you can buy in your local supermarket but produced by the *gemeente* and costing about one euro each. They are for the *restafval* – the rubbish that remains after you have finished sorting.

Then you will need three – yes three – wheelie bins. One is for *GFT*, or *groenten-, fruit- en tuinafval*, in other words all the compostable rubbish from the kitchen and garden. Then another for *glas*, and a third voor *karton*. As if that were not enough, you need to buy another type of bag for *PMD* – *plastic-, metal- en drankverpakking* for all those cartons. Don't mix up *karton* with carton: the first is cardboard.

Now you might think that you can smuggle some ordinary rubbish out in your *PMD-zak*. Don't risk it – you'll come home to find it lying there with a big red sticker for all to see.

So far so good. Now, what about your used *frietolie*? Surely you're not thinking of pouring it down the sink. No, there is only one place for that: *de containerpark*. A visit to *de containerpark* opens up all sorts of sorting possibilities you may only have dreamt of. Lopped off some branches? Then dump them in the *takken* container. Any old iron? Look for the container marked *ijzer*. It soon becomes addictive. You'll find that you need the occasional visit just to keep your hand in.

It was in the early 1990s that *containerparks* first appeared. The parliamentary bill that heralded their introduction begins with these ominous words: *we dreigen stilaan bedolven te worden onder een gigantische afvalberg*. And it's true: we were in danger of being submerged under a gigantic mountain of rubbish. It then poses the question: *waar moeten de mensen met hun opgestapelde afval naartoe*? Where indeed, since there was nowhere for people to go with their piles of rubbish. That's why it was proposed: *de gemeenten te verplichten een containerpark op hun grondgebied in te richten en te onderhouden*. And today each municipality has its very own *containerpark*.

The red-letter days for the seasoned *sorteerder* are those three or, if you're lucky, four times a year that *grof huisvuil* is collected free from your *stoep*, an opportunity to get rid of an old mattress or sofa.

The result of all this *sortering* is that Flanders now produces about a quarter less rubbish than it did 10 years ago. Is this not enough for you? Then sign up for *een composteerworkshop* and get the advice of your local *compost-meester* – each *gemeente* has one; then you can *laat de natuur haar werk doen*.

Alistair MacLean

Online

www.vandale.be



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FEATURE

Photo News



Horses in the landscape

Continued from page 1

breeders nationwide, as well as riders, trainers and other equine enthusiasts. Riding and jumping competitions, dressage demonstrations, information about horse tourism, clinics and a riding arena are just some of the attractions that will inform and entertain horse fans.

With Germany's Equitana as the largest horse fair in Europe and France's various horse fairs drawing crowds, Belgium often gets lost in the shuffle. But the country is still an important player in the horse arena. Brazilian riding champion Nelson Pessoa and his son Rodrigo – 50 times a Grand Prix winner – both have their

stallions: the state buys them and keeps them in state stables," says Verzele, one of the organisers of the Expo and owner of Zarafa, a horse-training and riding school in Oudenaarde. "Belgium doesn't have that infrastructure."

Verzele calls it a misconception that horses are a pastime of the rich. "You don't have to own a horse to ride one," he says. Indeed, hourly rates for a riding session can cost as little as €10. "In the last 20 years, a few things have happened," Verzele continues. "There's been a democratisation of horse riding: it used to be only for the wealthy or for people who grew up with horses on the farm. But the average person now earns more and wonders what to do with

a good distraction, so he organised riding clubs. At first, he used Belgian draught horses, but their temperament was incompatible with jumping or any of the more complicated riding that the teens wanted to do. So Father De Mey started breeding 'double duty' horses: horses that would work during the week, then work out with riders at the weekend," says Eerdeken.

Up until the 1950s, horses were the backbone of the agricultural industry, although sports enthusiasts on the countryside had a soft spot for them. "Soldiers returning from the First World War learned to ride side saddle when they couldn't ride otherwise because of their injuries," says Verzele.

Tractors and other farm equipment might have replaced horses at work but not in the leisure sector. Warmbloods began to flourish as draught horses waned. The Belgian Warmblood Society started in 1955 to make sure that breeding standards were followed. Warmbloods are, logically, in the middle of the spectrum between hotblooded horses – or thoroughbreds – and coldblooded horses. Hotblooded horses have the most red corpuscles in their blood, while coldbloods have the least. "Hotbloods are more temperamental, more excitable – but also more motivated," says Verzele, "which makes them better for racing, jumping and dressage." Coldbloods are steadfast and even-tempered, which is why they are the workhorses. (Breeding a hotblood and a coldblood does not produce a Warmblood). One of the greatest show-jumping legends ever was a Belgian Warmblood, Darco, who lived until aged 26 – before being put down because of a broken leg two years ago.

The BWP works with other horse-breeding associations in representing horse-owners to the

government. "Horses are a special category: they can be both pets and food," says Eerdeken. This means regulations are complicated. A recent law has come into effect in Belgium requiring micro-chips to be implanted in horses for identification. The main reason behind the law is to separate horses that might one day enter the food chain from ones that will not. "This is important in knowing what medical treatments can be given to a horse in its lifetime," says Eerdeken.

Because the horse population is small compared to that of dogs and cats, there isn't as much profit incentive for pharmaceutical companies to develop drugs for horses. So, there are fewer medications formulated specifically for them." That means when a sick horse fails to respond to horse medication, drugs developed for other animals – or even humans – might be tried.

There are far greater restrictions on what can be administered to horses that will end up on dinner plates than on those that won't, "so it's important to make the difference," says Eerdeken. Still, some Belgian breeders have complained that it is an undue expense – less than €50 for the chip itself, plus the cost of the visiting horse doctor to implant it. But considering the expense of other medical treatments and care for a horse, it really isn't a huge amount to pay.

Germany, which doesn't eat horse as a part of its national cuisine, has been resistant to requiring micro-chips, and Britain, which also does not eat horse,

lags behind in animal identification in general. "But micro-chips are also important in controlling the spread of horse diseases," Eerdeken says. With a micro-chip, each horse has a passport listing its medical history – along with a list of drugs it has been administered. Whenever one horse comes down with a contagious disease, owners of other horses with which the infected horse has come into contact recently can be notified – and steps taken to limit the spread.

The last reason for micro-chipping is surprising. "Yes, people do still steal horses," Eerdeken says, citing cases in the Limburg region a few years ago near the Dutch border. "Victims get very upset because when someone owns a horse today, it's usually for sentimental reasons, not for work. So the attachment is very emotional." Like a painting stolen from a museum, a hot horse is hard to sell... so it usually ends up being eaten.

At the Flanders Horse Expo, it is doubtful that horse burgers will be on the menu. But horseball, a centuries-old sport from Afghanistan best described as a mix of polo and basketball, will be on display. And you can always grab a Big Mac afterwards.

Flanders Expo, Maaltekouter 1, Ghent, 22-24 March

Online
www.flanders-horse-expo.be



"Horses are a special category:

they can be both pets and food"

stables in Belgium, and the country's central location gives it a special place in the horse world. Lommel-born dressage champion Jeroen Devroe is bringing the international spotlight to Flanders, as are breeders who quietly turn out some of the finest horses in the world. The Flanders Horse Fair hopes to confirm Belgium's position.

Unfortunately, as in many cases, the best of Belgium ends up being co-opted by other nations. The world's tallest Belgian draught horse – at one ton and 2.02 metres – is Radar, who lives today in Iowa. And *Jumpy des Fontaines* is the offspring of the legendary Olympic gold-medal-winning Belgian Warmblood *Jus de Pomme*. But he was recently sold to an entrepreneur working for the Chinese, for whom he will compete against the Belgians in the Olympics. "Countries like France keep their best



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ING 

Minister defends Flemish housing code

Continued from page 1

On his personal website, Keulen sets out several reasons why this policy is required. It makes contact between tenants and landlords easier and provides a common language to cement relations between residents in social neighbourhoods, he argues. In addition, a basic knowledge of Dutch provides an opportunity for the disadvantaged among social tenants to improve their chances of finding work in Flemish areas.

The policy, he said, represents an "extension of the basic social rights for non-Dutch speakers that is unique in the world. It is an outrage that a committee under the UN flag should pillory Flanders, rather than holding us up as an example for others," he said.

Flemish politicians reacted angrily when it was revealed that the CERD report was based on a complaint from the French-speaking League for Human Rights. The CERD responded that it had also received documents from the government, but foreign affairs minister Karel De Gucht told deputies his department had played only an administrative role in the report. "It's not my place as foreign affairs minister to say what I think of the housing code," De Gucht said.

In the Flemish parliament, only Groen! leader Vera Dua took sides with the UN. A language requirement for access to social housing was, she said, "aimed at particular groups, and so is potentially discriminatory," she said. Keulen pointed out, however, that both the constitutional court and the Council of State had dismissed claims of discrimination.

Later, taking questions in the federal parliament chamber, De Gucht pointed out the report was not issued by the UN itself, but by one of the separate treaty committees within the organisation. In addition, the report has no force of law, he said.

The CERD report also criticised Italy for hate-speech by politicians aimed at foreigners. It also attacked discrimination in the US against Arabs and Muslims, and discrimination against Roma in Moldavia.

Belga



Marino Keulen defends the housing code



Dries Van Noten's latest collection showcased in Paris last month

Regions are important, Van den Brander tells EU

Rory Watson

The European Union's Committee of the Regions (CoR) raised its profile last week when its President, Luc Van den Brander, presented a report on economic strategy to EU leaders at their Brussels spring summit. Based on input from over 100 regions and cities across Europe, the report emphasises the important role that local and regional authorities can play in stimulating economic growth and creating jobs as part of the EU's Lisbon Strategy.

"The voices of Europe's regions and cities need to be heard. They deliver more than 66% of all public investment in the EU, they are key actors in innovation, research and education policies and must play a bigger role in the Lisbon Strategy," Van den Brander said.

The report examines strategic priorities for regions and cities, highlighting their demands for better regulation and less red tape in order to improve the overall business environment, especially for small firms. It also draws attention to the discrepancies between government promises and actual delivery on the ground.

Mr Van den Brander handed over on Friday the 40-page analysis, which had been requested by EU leaders two years ago, to Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša, who chaired the summit meeting. The event was the first time that a CoR President had been involved in a European summit and reflects the determination of many regional leaders to increase their influence on the European stage.

Overloaded lorries costing €15 million a year

Lorries carrying more than their legal weight in goods are causing damage to Flanders' roads worth €15.5 million a year, according to estimates from the motoring organisation VAB. It has called for

the installation of ten WIM (weighing in motion) systems on the region's roads to allow overloaded trucks to be taken out of circulation immediately they are detected, to limit the damage they cause. According to a Dutch study, an overloaded lorry causes as much damage to the road surface as 245 ordinary cars. They also present a problem for road safety. Each WIM system, costing about €2.3 million, would earn its price back in fines in a single year, VAB said. Police plan increased checks on lorries from now until 17 April, an action the VAB described as "extremely urgently needed".

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NEWS FLASH



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Flemish community building inspectors last year closed down a record number of 956 construction sites, and started an unprecedented number of prosecutions. The sites closed down were mostly in Antwerp (280) and East Flanders (261).

Philanthropic organisations like the Gates Foundation of Microsoft founder Bill Gates are disrupting the front-line health provision in developing countries by paying health-care workers up to four times the going rate, according to an article in the British Medical Journal by Professor Jan De Maeseneer, professor of general practice at Ghent University.

Drivers of cars with Luxembourg number-plates can breach speed-limits with impunity following the refusal of the Grand Duchy's authorities to pass registration details on to Belgian police. Luxembourg claims the problem lies in a lack of capacity in its computer system. From September, however, Belgian police will have direct access to the Luxembourg database.

Thieves have emptied the fuel-oil tanks of Scherpenheuvel KV football club – for the second time in less than three months. The 2,000 litre tank was apparently emptied in broad daylight, before staff made the discovery when trying to turn on the heating. The theft brings to 28 the number of cases of fuel-oil theft in Flanders this year.

A comfortable armchair and a TV are the two things patients look for most to make their stay in hospital tolerable, according to a poll of 800 patients in 17 Flemish hospitals. The chair scored 87%, with the TV one point behind. Some 78% want an en-suite shower, while 70% want a fridge.

Women's organisations opposed to the spread of a ban on the Muslim headscarf for municipal civil servants this week handed out Easter eggs in Brussels, Ghent and Antwerp. "The necessary neutrality of institutions is not the same thing as uniformity for personnel," a statement said, calling the ban "absurd and paternalistic". The Easter eggs, the group said, represented the trend towards banning "anything that in any way carries a suggestion of religion".

Belgacom CEO Didier Bellens was paid a total of €3.7 million in 2007 – an increase of €900,000 on the previous year. Bellens, who is seeking a renewal of his mandate when it expires in little less than a year, is Belgium's highest-paid boss of a government-owned company, and one of the highest-paid of all Belgian CEOs.

Rwina, a new comedy sketch show written and performed mainly by young people of immigrant origin, started its five-week run on één this week. The show is a spin-off from the theatre group of the same name – *rwina* is Arabic for chaos – based in Mechelen. Performers – who have Armenian, Turkish, Moroccan, Algerian or Flemish ancestors – were all born in Flanders. Music is provided by the bi-cultural group Djamel.

Mediaeval parchment contains erotic poem



Brussels water among best in EU

Brussels waste-water will be among the cleanest in the EU, following the completion of a new purification plant last week. The new Brussels-North plant, which will process about 325,000 cubic metres of water from 1.1 million residents every day, joins the Brussels-South station which came onstream in 2000 dealing with 360,000 inhabitants. The development means Brussels now joins the select club of European cities which purify all the waste water they release into rivers and canals. Some of the capacity of the two plants is used by residents in Flanders, which pays 12% of the running costs of Brussels-South, and 16% of Brussels-North. The bill for the new station came to €360 million.

Antwerp sex workers moving out of town

Antwerp's sex-workers are steadily moving from the centre of the city to the suburbs, according to a study carried out for the city by Rotterdam University sociologist Marion Van San. The report – which looks at services and care for sex workers – blames the renovation of the Schipperskwartier, the traditional waterfront haunt of prostitutes, for pushing the problem to other areas. In one controversial recommendation, the report suggests the city introduce a designated solicitation zone where prostitutes could ply their trade, keeping them from going underground and making it easier to provide help and carry out health checks.

Leuven named international disease centre

Leuven's university hospital has been designated an international centre of reference for porphyria, a rare illness which affects the nervous system. The best-known sufferer of the disease was the Hanoverian King George III, who was considered to be mad, although he was in fact suffering from the neurological effects of porphyria. The designation was granted by the European Porphyria Initiative, which receives EU funds to improve patient care by agreeing upon diagnostic protocols and maintaining a website for the public and health-care professionals.

Online

www.porphyrria-europe.org

Hasselt students develop anti-theft device

Electronics students at the XIOS college in Hasselt have developed a new anti-theft device designed to combat pickpockets and purse-snatchers. The i-Control consists of two elements joined by a wireless connection. One is worn around the neck or in a secure place about the person, and the other attached to valuables such as a wallet or handbag. When the distance between the two elements exceeds that decided by the owner, an alarm is sounded. The device can also be used to keep track of children in a busy shopping centre, for example. The students plan to launch the product on the market at a retail price of around €40.

A 14th-century parchment unearthed in the city archives of Mechelen contains over 200 verses of a poem filled with topical political allusion and erotic double-meanings, according to a city official. The text contains references to the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV (also mentioned by Dante) and the French king Charles IV. "The author of the poem must have been an intellectual who was familiar with French culture and politics," said literary historian Remco Sleiderink of the HUB university college in Brussels. "The anti-French tenor of the text is remarkable. This discovery puts Mechelen on the map in a literary sense," he said. The parchment was found by accident, where it had been used by a 15th-century bookbinder to reinforce envelopes containing tax files. The document itself was dated by the Royal Library in Brussels to about 1325.

NEWS FLASH



Smoking while driving disturbs the concentration, and could be both dangerous and illegal, according to Leuven University's legal professor emeritus Roger Blanpain. A spokesman for the office of mobility minister Yves Leterme said smoking could lead to criminal charges of careless driving or civil liability in the case of an accident.

Liautte Onkelinx, the federal health minister, is ready to take legislative measures if the food industry will not take steps of its own to reduce the amount of salt in processed food. Eighty percent of our daily salt intake is contained in processed foods, in quantities that cannot be determined by the consumer. At present Belgium considers the recommended daily intake to be 8.75g, which is 2.75g more than the World Health Organisation figure.

Inspectors discovered 15 cases in which child-labour laws were breached in 2006, with five cases leading to legal proceedings, according to labour minister Josy Piette in a written answer to Parliament. In the same year, the authorities granted 444 exemptions to rules preventing children from working, mainly in the entertainment and advertising industries.

Alcohol should not be sold to young people under 18, according to more than 53% of Flemish adults, with 32% setting the limit at 16. According to a poll carried out for Radio 1, there was no majority in favour of a ban on alcohol advertising, or an increase in prices – two other measures aimed at tackling the problem of youth alcohol abuse.

Belgian Jews have received €35.2 million in compensation for property stolen from them by the Nazi occupier in World War Two. The figures were given in the final report of the Restitution Committee set up after prime minister Guy Verhofstadt promised in 2000 to pay damages. The compensation fund was financed by the federal government, financial institutions and the insurance industry. A total of 5,210 cases have been settled.

Schools in the Brussels municipality of Jette will be the first in the capital to be equipped with digital blackboards. The administration last week took delivery of three, each valued at €3,300. Measuring 1m by 1.5m, the screen shows images that can be controlled by the teacher, as well as websites and other Internet content.

Small independent shops have fallen in number in Brussels from over 46,000 half a century ago to only 23,800 now, according to the latest figures from the Brussels Labour Market Observatory. The number of pharmacists', by contrast, has doubled since 1950, while the number of butcher's shops has plummeted 88% from 2000 to only 249.

Vooruit gets €200,000 for renovations



The Vooruit cultural centre in Ghent, which last month won a Culture Prize from the Flemish community, has been given a grant of €200,000 for renovations to the building's fabric, heritage minister Dirk Van Mechelen announced. The grant is the first to be handed out under a new policy aimed at ensuring the maintenance of buildings that the Flemish region has helped to renovate. The Vooruit, a former trade union meeting place now classified as a monument, has recently completed a major renovation project. "We now have to focus on maintenance," a spokesman for Van Mechelen said. Vooruit meanwhile has a three-part maintenance plan – covering day-to-day repairs after a concert, for instance, upkeep of the monumental aspect of the building, and the introduction of new systems such as air-conditioning and security.

First, we take Paris

Flanders fashion takes to the stage

Stéphanie Duval

For the past ten years, the Flanders Fashion Institute (FFI) has functioned as an 'ambassador' of Flemish fashion. Three years ago, the FFI went one step further and launched Showroom Antwerp during the Paris fashion week to provide Flemish design talent with an international platform. This year, six very different designers were taken to Paris to present their new collections to the fashion world.

Gunhyo Kim graduated from the Antwerp Academy in 2007 and showed his first, conceptual, men's collection named *Il Galantuomo*. Fellow graduate Heaven Tanundiredja displayed his ingenious jewellery, while Els Proost made her first appearance in Paris with a

shoes and accessories collection.

The other designers were more experienced. Carolin Lerch has been designing her own collection, Pelican Avenue, for some years now. The same goes for jewellery designer Karin Nuñez de Fleurquin, whose boutique has now become a favourite among Belgian fashion aficionados.

But David Flamée of the FFI insists that Showroom Antwerp is not purely an initiative to show off new or young talent: "The showroom is meant to highlight exceptional talent," he explains. "The FFI selects the participants, judging them on their creativity as well as their professionalism." They form a very diverse group, which means that every designer attracts a different crowd. A recent graduate will

gain a lot of media attention, while a more established name will pull in the buyers.

Sometimes a designer is invited to join again during the following season. Mikio Sakabe, for example, graduated in 2006. This season was his third as a delegate of the FFI Showroom Antwerp. "By offering designers the chance to participate several times, they can develop their talent," Flamée explains. "Sometimes a buyer will only check in to have a look the first time, but the next season he will buy from the collection."

The FFI selects a different venue every year to show off new talent. This season they chose the fashionable Galerie Baudoin Lebon, which offered enough space to allow the different designers to



Conceptual clothes for men: Gunhyo Kim's *Il Galantuomo* collection.



Paris passion: Mikio Sakabe is back for the third time.



Cool jewels: Karin Nuñez de Fleurquin's jewellery is hot

create their own little universe, while the location in central Paris guaranteed a respectable turnout. "The location is perfect," says Edith Vervliet, manager of the FFI. "We were only steps away from the shows and showrooms of Dries Van Noten, Bruno Pieters and Véronique Branquinho. We are determined to hold the next show in the same venue."

Not a bad idea, according to participating designer Karin Nuñez Fleurquin: "I think it's important to have continuity. If you're always in the same place, the fashion crowd will learn how to find you."

The designers were each given their own space to present their collection in the context of a creative installation. They had to come up with an original idea, but could count on the support of the FFI for the execution. "Our goal is to help the designers present themselves", explains Flamée. "We provide them with a location, invitations, a press release, and a PR agency. We take care of everything, so that they can focus on selling and promoting their label."

The FFI is able to finance this concept because of a cooperation agreement with Flanders Investment and Trade, which takes on some 50% of the total cost of the project. The designers only have to pay a small amount. For many, this is the only possible way of being present at the Paris fashion week, as renting a showroom in the city at this time is prohibitively expensive.

Flamée is satisfied with the most recent edition of the showroom: "It was especially successful in terms of media attention," he says.

Nuñez de Fleurquin agrees, but thinks there is room for improvement: "Commercially, I think the concept could be improved upon. It would be a good idea to launch a partnership with a Parisian fashion fair, so that participants are also confronted with the commercial circuit."

Flamée realises the showroom has a lot of potential, but explains it is not their aim to compete with the commercial fairs. However, he is also thinking of expanding the concept: "We are looking for a way to enable designers to develop into the commercial circuit."

The FFI Showroom Antwerp might be a work in progress, but the reactions of the participating designers are unanimously positive. "The FFI was helpful and accommodating, and the ambience between the designers was very friendly", says Proost. "We have even promised to help each other out, so I'm placing their business cards in my own shop."

"We were always cheering each other on, and if anyone had a question, we were all there for each other", confirms Nuñez de Fleurquin. "Being among friends when you're far from home is a nice feeling."

Stéphanie Duval is co-publisher of the fashion website www.antwerpisthenewparis.com

online

www.ffi.be/showroomantwerp

VENUES

Lotto Arena

How the gamble paid off

Marc Maes

It all began back in 1996, when Jan Van Esbroeck and his colleague Jan Vereecke were appointed by Antwerp Province to revamp the bankrupt Sportpaleis. They launched a plan to upgrade the venue and make it economically viable. But it didn't stop there. The partners began to toy with the idea of adding a multipurpose second hall and, in 2004, they started to hunt around for a public-private partnership. The dream finally became a reality in September 2005 when Antwerp city decided to invest in new sports infrastructure, and the Lotto Arena was born.

"The initial business plan for the Lotto Arena included a target of some 95 events per year after three years," explains Jan Van Esbroeck, managing director of the Sportpaleis. "I'm happy to say that we have reached that goal in our first year of existence." The new venue opened on 10 March last year and has already posted attendance figures of just over 347,000 visitors at 103 events.

The project has been jointly financed by Sportpaleis nv and the city of Antwerp, each agreeing to invest €6 million in the project. The Sportpaleis share comprises a 75% stake for Vereecke and Van Esbroeck, along with other shareholders including Ahoy in Rotterdam, concert promoter Mojo (now Live Nation Holland) and promoters Herman Schueremans and Kris Verleyen.

The name is the result of a 10-

year naming rights deal between the Belgian national lottery and the Sportpaleis. The aim is to give the 'Lotto' brand a more dynamic profile by linking it to both sports events and big names from rock and pop.

"The crucial thing about the Lotto Arena, looking back over these twelve months, is that the venue is highly appreciated by both users and visitors," argues Van Esbroeck. "We hear from insiders that the Lotto Arena is one of Belgium's finest sports arenas, second only to the Charleroi Spiroudome. And we get the same positive feedback from concert promoters and event organisers."

Van Esbroeck adds that the venue's multi-functionality is one of its strengths, rather than a shortcoming. He cites the example of the acoustics, which give the right atmosphere during sports events without influencing the live sound during concerts.

But the Lotto Arena, like all big venues, has a problem with traffic congestion. With a total capacity of 7,500, it can create monster traffic jams. The company has to prove to the authorities by the end of the year that the Sportpaleis site can provide 4,000 parking places. It also has to prove that 30% of the visitors will arrive by public transport or shared cars to avoid traffic chaos during events.

"With 9 months still to go, we now have the 4,000 parking places ready, and some 28.3% of the visitors are using public transport," claims Van Esbroeck. "We have now created an 'event-net'

Luc de Winkel



— where we stimulate the use of public transport by adding €0.50 to the ticket rates for free transport. We're also helped by the fact that De Lijn has now three important transport lines passing underneath the Sportpaleis."

Van Esbroeck now plans to boost the quality of activities rather than increasing the number

of events. "We hope to continue the current situation and maintain the 'feel-good factor' by offering people some exceptional events and concerts," he concludes.

online

www.lottoarena.be

A tale of two ports

Antwerp links up with Liège

Marc Van Peel, chairman of the port of Antwerp, recently met Willy De Meyer, his counterpart in Liège, to discuss ways in which the two ports could work together on developing the Trilogiport multi-modal platform in Liège.

Both port authorities are keen to develop the existing transport corridor between the two economic hubs. They want to transform the Antwerp-Liège axis into a "Logistics Valley" and develop a "maritime logistical" partnership between the two ports.

The multi-modal platform Trilogiport is located less than 15 hours away from Antwerp by river barge and forms a crucial element in the further development of the two cities. For Liège it offers an opportunity to strengthen its position in the container shipping sector. For Antwerp it provides the chance to develop its port area further and attract partners in the 'hinterland' for new business activities.

M. Maes

RAIL

Bombardier faces job cuts

Rail contract worth €1.5 billion goes to Siemens

Alan Hope

As many as 850 jobs at the Bombardier Transportation construction plant in Bruges are under threat after a decision by the national rail authority NMBS to place its largest-ever order for new locomotives with the German manufacturer Siemens.

The NMBS contract covers 300 electrical locomotives of various types, worth some €1.5 billion. The first locomotives would be delivered in 2011 for use on the new Regional Express Network (GEN), a rail network serving the capital. The new trains will be designed to stop and start faster, with wider doors to allow a smoother flow of passengers.

The last stage of negotiations involved four competing companies: Canadian-owned Bombardier and French-owned Alstom — both of which have production facilities in Belgium, Alstom in Charleroi — Construcciones y Auxiliar de Ferrocarriles (CAF) from Spain, and finally Siemens. The news leaked out last week that the NMBS was in exclusive talks with Siemens, whose production will be carried out in Germany. The NMBS later confirmed the news. According to one trade union source, Bombardier's bid was 10% higher than the price quoted by Siemens. But Bombardier's package offered a better product and more comfort for the

passenger, the union said.

"The engines for the GEN are a matter of life or death for Bombardier," the company's spokesman Guy Hendrix said. Not only are the 850 employees at the plant affected, he said, but also some 500 suppliers. "Without this order, the continuing existence of Bombardier Brugge is under threat."

Bombardier has enough contracts in its order book to last until 2010. At present they are constructing double-decker trains for the NMBS, as well as working on the Large-Capacity Autorails (AGC) for the French rail operator SNCF. Later in the month, work will start on an order of trams for the Brussels public transport authority MIVB, which will keep the assembly lines concerned turning over until 2013. Bombardier had hoped the GEN contract would cover the period 2011 to 2016.

Bombardier's presence in Belgium dates from the Canadian company's takeover of BN (the old Bruggeois & Nivelles), which together with ACEC (now owned by Alstom) was assured of all NMBS contracts in the days before the EU brought in new rules on the award of public contracts in 1992. Now the company faces tough competition for every new order, even on home territory. Siemens has previously taken contracts for rail rolling stock and trams for De Lijn.

BUSINESS FLASH

DHL

DHL, the German-owned express courier and transport company, will open its new European hub in Leipzig, Germany, next April. The move, which relegates the present sorting centre at Brussels Airport to a regional hub status with slightly less than 2,000 employees, involves far fewer job losses than expected when the transfer decision was announced in 2004. Some 300 workers will be made redundant compared to the worst-case scenario of 1,500 and many companies operating in the Zaventem area are keen to hire the former DHL staff.

Honda Belgium

Honda Belgium's European car body parts distribution centre starts operations on March 17 in Aalst. The new €15 million facility will supply distributors in Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

Demeyere

Demeyere, the kitchen utensils and equipment manufacturer located in Herentals, is to be taken over by the German Zwilling company.

Dixons

Dixons, the UK-based electronics and home appliances group, is to close its four remaining Flemish stores in Aalst, Genk, Ninove and Sint-Niklaas.

Luresa

Luresa, the Spanish property investment company, has acquired the 36,800-square-metre Astro office tower in St Josse, Brussels, for some €100 million. It is the most expensive property deal so far this year.

The Heating Company

The Heating Company, formerly known as Vasco-Thermic, is to be sold. The firm, located in Dilsen-Stokkem, near Genk, is owned by the US-based Masco group. It is one of Europe's leading heating equipment producer and employs some 400 workers.

Distrigaz

Distrigaz, the Belgian gas importer and distribution company (owned by the French Suez group), is up for sale as part of an agreement from the European authorities for a merger between Gaz de France and Suez. The deadline for bids is nearing and three companies, France's EDF, Italy's ENI and Germany's E.ON are believed to have made detailed proposals. Other offers, however, are said to be under consideration, including Belgian interests and the German energy group RWE in association with Qatari investors.

Jet

Jet, the 150-strong filling stations network previously owned by the US-based Conoco oil group, is to be rebranded as Lukoil from April this year, following their 2007 sale to the Russian oil company. Jet is one of the country's leading retailers. Lukoil also announced that it may consider investing in a new petroleum refinery near Antwerp to cope with demand in Western Europe.

EXHIBITION

Art at the frontier

Exhibit explores the borderlines of European existence



Young artists spring their thoughtful, intense and altogether weird views of Europe on Brussels in *No Borders: (Just N.E.W.S.)*

Saffina Rana

It's horrible! I like it," says Fabienne Dumont, art director of De Elektriciteitscentrale, pointing to the image of a girl on a TV screen whose facial features have been filled in. Smooth skin covers the place where her eyes and nose should be. She wears a beauty queen tiara and serenely combs her long hair.

Dumont didn't hesitate when I asked if she had a favourite piece in the exhibit, but it made me wonder what I was letting myself in for. I had already cringed on the way in, edging past a piece involving dozens of glass eyes wedged in a mound of Vaseline.

No Borders: (Just N.E.W.S.) is

a mixed-media collection by 29 recent graduates from art schools in 22 European countries. Conceived by the International Association of Arts Critics (AICA), it aims to raise the profile of young artists in an already crowded European arts scene. "Out of the 170 shortlisted submissions, the final 29 were a hard choice to make," says Dumont, who was also one of the curators. "It was completely subjective."

Each piece transcends the artist's own culture and society, raising global questions about identity, migration and the reconstruction of lives. Take *Magic Carpet* by Lala Rašić: a wooden carpet hangs in the middle of a room, like a swing

from the ceiling. Approach it, and you hear the call to prayer from a mosque, mingled with the swirling sounds of traffic, bird song and indefinable clanking. The sounds are streamed from several cities across Europe.

Rašić was born in Sarajevo, and her art often reflects her experience as a witness of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and, ultimately, as a refugee from it. It's about escapism. "We do not need to belong," she says. "We can live in fiction; we can get lost, never to be found again. I create such relations with my art; that is the reason I make art in the first place."

In the largest hall of the exhibition, your eye is immediately caught by a colourful array of dolls, toy animals and plastic figurines crowded onto six large, white shelves. The work, by Swedish-born artist Kristina Müntzing, is entitled "New Swedes". As you move closer, you see that the hundreds of figures have swapped their body parts with each other. Fluffy bunny and monkey heads appear on the bodies of dolls wearing national costumes from across Europe, while small wind-up birds and animals sport plastic heads with flowing hair and twinkling eyes.

The effect is freaky. Is the artist questioning the schizophrenic nature of society in Sweden today? Or is the grotesque metamorphoses of the figures a comment on the growing homogeneity of culture in Europe?

The exhibition features several witty visual jokes by Danish-born

Kristoffer Akselbo that give a nod to pop art. You have to dodge a larger-than-life runaway Campbell's soup can, and there's a plastic bag that rustles as you walk through another. For a moment you're not sure whether it has been dropped or planted there.

Dumont's favourite is a video mockumentary by Canadian-born Erica Eyres, on the face-erasing plastic surgery of a fictional beauty queen. Myself, I'm torn between a documentary and a silver Russell Hobbs toaster. The documentary by Portuguese-born Maria Lusitano explores Portugal's colonial history by juxtaposing those stories and current photographs of her circle of friends. This brings a personal, sometimes comic dimension to a tragic history that has shaped both modern Portugal, Africa and Asia.

It's thought-provoking stuff, but so is the toaster. Kristoffer Akselbo has added aluminium plates with cut-out images. Pop in the bread, and out comes toast with a burnt but recognisable image of the "Mona Lisa". Akselbo has taken Andy Warhol's idea of a factory mass-producing commodity images one step further, turning it into a household appliance. Now everyone can be Leonardo for 15 minutes – and dunk the results.

Until 27 April, De Elektriciteitscentrale: European Centre for Contemporary Art, Sint-Katelijneplein 44, Brussels.

Online
www.brupass.be

Power art

De Elektriciteitscentrale was built in 1901 as part of the first electric power station in Brussels. But you'd be forgiven for walking straight past it. Its unassuming entrance is tucked neatly away down a small alley to the side of Sint-Katelijne's church. It gives way to an airy 1,000 square metres of industrial space, leaded windows and high ceilings. Sporting tall metal racks characteristic of late 19th-century industrial buildings in Belgium, its facade and roof made the listed buildings register in 1998.

Having provided Brussels its very first electricity, the building has also served as an office for unemployment and as the city's department of culture. In 2006, it reopened as the European Centre for Contemporary Art. A five-minute walk from Grote Markt, it sits at the intersection of De Markten, Beursschouwburg and Passa Porta, three Flemish centres of contemporary culture. As part of the Kunstenfestival des Arts in May, De Elektriciteitscentrale will host the young German artist Noah Fischer, whose work is often concerned with electricity.

CLASSICAL NOTES

A little bit of Beethoven

A new chamber orchestra is taking music to the people

Marie Dumont

Classical music rocks," says Flemish conductor Ben Haemhouts, "much more so than rock 'n' roll." He'll have ample opportunity to put this motto to the test as head of the Belgische Kamerfilharmonie, a new chamber orchestra he's founded and which is about to perform its first ever concert at Antwerp's deSingel.

The Kamerfilharmonie is made up of 35 mostly Belgian musicians split more or less evenly between seasoned performers and rising young talents. "In my experience, it's a great combination," says Haemhouts, a trombonist by training who previously worked with the Rotterdam Philharmonisch and Bamberger Symphoniker. "The older musicians already know the pieces, and they have plenty of know-how and inner quietness. The others bring their youthful spirit."

The ensemble's repertoire ranges from classical and early romantic works to contemporary sounds – the deSingel concerts will include Symphonies by Mozart and Beethoven as well as a new piece by a young Belgian composer called Steven Prengels, which was commissioned especially for the occasion.

"The concert's byword is 'energy,'" Haemhouts tells me.

Beethoven was 30 when he composed his first symphony – he poured a lot of strength and intellect into it, and it opened up a whole new era. There's also plenty of energy in Schubert's second symphony, which was composed when he was just 17, but it is much less controlled and balanced. As for Prengels' piece, it is a dense and bristling affair inspired by Beethoven's first. "It only lasts seven minutes – short enough even for people who can't stand contemporary music. Prengels uses string instruments to produce entirely new sounds. It's extraordinary how much tension and energy are released in this way, and in such a short time."

The Kamerfilharmonie's mission is as much social as it is musical. "We're more than just an orchestra that plays concerts," Haemhouts explains. "We like to see ourselves as a 'house of music' that brings music to people, and people to the concert hall." Aside from its support to young performers and composers, the ensemble also works hard at introducing children to the joys of the classical repertoire. It recently launched its programme "A bit of Beethoven", in which half a dozen musicians from the orchestra went to meet school kids in the Borgerhout district of Antwerp. "We play a few things and explain that



Ben Haemhouts will conduct the first-ever concert of the Belgische Kamerfilharmonie in Antwerp on 8 April

Beethoven was deaf but still managed to produce this fantastic music," says the conductor. "Children are very open-minded. They're just waiting to be convinced."

8 April, 20.00, DeSingel, 25 Desguinlei, Antwerp. Tickets from 03.248.28.28 or www.desingel.be

Online
www.belgischekamerfilharmonie.be

Sex, secrets and forgeries

A tour of Sint Pieter's Abbey in Ghent suggests that the life of a mediaeval monk wasn't always devoted to God

Lisa Bradshaw

What's still standing is but a shadow of what the abbey once was – a semblance. You should have seen it in all its glory!" Alison, an 18th-century monk, is very passionate about Sint Pieter's Abbey, from where he was stripped of his robe and evicted in 1796 by the French. "More than 1,000 years of abbey history gone with one stroke of a pen."

You won't find the Benedictine monk's considerable opinions of 18th-century monastery life in a historical record or diary; you hear them rather through an actor who plays him on a digital video tour of the grand abbey and church on Sint-Pietersplein in the south of Ghent.

Though the French revolution did put an end to this monastery – as well as many others in Flanders and elsewhere – the thousand years that went before were wrought with troubles. By the time the French quite literally kicked the monks into the street (on All Saints, of all days), almost all of the original 7th-century abbey had already been demolished and rebuilt. Still, though Affligem lays claim as the home of Flanders' oldest remaining abbey, there are traces of the original mediaeval foundations in the rectory at Sint Pieter's that predate it by at least 200 years.

Your tour guide, though, sticks to the last century of the monastery in the digital tour, which is a one-of-a-kind experience in Belgium. You play the hand-held device as



The church and gardens of Sint Pieter's abbey (above); follow an 18th-century monk down wide, vaulted corridors (right)

you wander from stop to stop in the abbey and adjoining church, obediently following Alison's directions. But Alison (who is based on a real monk who lived in the abbey and is now buried in



Between heaven and earth

Sint Pieter's Abbey serves as a cultural centre, hosting temporary exhibitions and its own permanent exhibition titled Between Heaven and Earth. Tucked into a cellar room between the church and the garden, the permanent exhibition provides a history of the social and political relevance of the abbey and the lives of monks in general (in Dutch). It contains some artefacts – medieval wine bottles and crystal, a herb cupboard, a row of pipes – and paintings, including the wonderfully detailed "Fire in the Tower of the Former Church of Our Lady in Ghent" (1733) by Jan van Doorselaer, which depicts the burning of a nearby church.

Beginning on 21 March, works by the Ghent artist Jean Bilquin will be on show. His paintings and drawings often depict shadowy figures in transitional poses – crouching down or standing up or crossing a threshold. In some way suggesting idolatry, they are a fitting choice for the space.



nearby Zwijnaarde) doesn't just deliver a dry history of the building and its functions – he plunges you in a mystery involving illicit love affairs and suicide.

You follow Alison down the lengthy corridors and up the steep stairs of various parts of the abbey, most of which now dates from the 17th and 18th centuries. Meanwhile, he weaves a fictional story involving anecdotes about abbey life and the evil-doings of the French. But the history of the

abbey and its magnificent Baroque church is much longer and more complicated than even Alison would have you believe – its economics, politics, purges and ravages reflecting the history of the entire region.

There has been an abbey on this site in Gent – atop Blandijnberg hill, the city's highest point – since the mid-7th century. Pre-Benedictine, the abbey and church were originally called Blandinium, and its first order of monks was a

community established by Amandus of Aquitaine. This Christian missionary also founded the Ghent community of Sint Baaf's Abbey (known in English as Saint Bavo) at about the same time. In fact, the two abbeys had a nasty and, from a current perspective, terribly amusing rivalry that extended to both institutions forging documents – and even burial epitaphs – in later centuries, each trying to prove it was the oldest. (Historians generally agree that the building

on Sint Pieter's was begun first.)

Both abbeys were built by King Dagobert I of the Merovingian dynasty – a family responsible for establishing more than 300 monasteries in the 7th century. The Carolingian monarchy that followed began using the monasteries more to their advantage, appointing their own abbots to head them and provide a sense of unity in the vast regions of western Europe.

The Normans then plundered Sint Pieter's in the winter of 879-880. A few years later, the monks returned under the watchful eye of Arnulph I, whose support eventually made Sint Pieter's the wealthiest abbey in his county. During this golden period, the abbey engaged in new building projects and established its famous vineyard, which began producing wine – largely drunk by the monks themselves.

Sint Pieter's continued to be prosperous, buying up swathes of agricultural land and setting tax and property allocations in the name of reigning princes. It soon became the abbey of choice for the burial of Flemish counts. (This made Sint Baaf's none too happy, and they set about obtaining religious relics from saints – sometimes fictitious ones.)

Throughout the 12th century, though, abbeys in general were losing their grip on civic matters, as cities grew and developed economic structures, asserting their domination of trade and taxation. By the 13th century, Sint Pieter's was nearly bankrupt – the proof being that the abbey actually began to sell its wine.

It was in the 1500s, though, that the abbey and church suffered its first real tragedy in centuries. Calvinism and the Reformation tore through what is now Flanders, and Sint Pieter's was ravaged – large portions of both the abbey and church were demolished, stained-glass windows smashed and valuables stolen. The monks again fled, and by the end of the century the entire institution was in ruins.

Following the end of the Refor-



mation, a major rebuilding of both the abbey and church took place in the 17th and 18th centuries. The church in particular was completely rebuilt atop the remains of its medieval predecessor. Pieter Huysens designed a central dome and colossal Corinthian pillars, which beautifully contrast with the fine ribbed vaulting.

About 80 years after the church's final stone was laid, the 31 monks living in Sint Pieter's were expelled for the last time when the French Republic finally took control of the abbey and all its possessions. The buildings were stripped of

their marble flooring and wooden panelling – which was then sold off – and an iron foundry and army barracks was set up in the abbey. The church was the only building that remained relatively untouched.

About 15 years later, the city of Ghent purchased the dilapidated buildings and continued to use them as a barracks, knocking down entire sections to make way for a military training ground. This continued until 1948, when the city finally decided to make the formerly majestic abbey a cultural centre and set about on a series of



The front of the abbey, the church and Sint-Pietersplein by night

Rectory renovations

The breathtaking painted arch ceiling of the refectory in Sint Pieter's Abbey is an 18th-century treasure that miraculously escaped pillaging or demolition during the French Revolution. During the abbey's time as an army barracks, however, a cement floor was placed halfway up the refectory walls to create a second level, and holes were punched right through the biblical tableaux to make windows.

The author of the series of oil paintings depicting harvests and abundant eating and drinking is unknown but is thought to be a member of Ghent's Van Reyschoot family of painters. The restoration project that began in 1989 first delicately removed the concrete flooring and then began on the paintings, which are made up of wooden slats. Each slat has been removed individually for restoration. After 19 years, the project is now in its final phase and will be complete in 2010.



renovations that continue to this day. In fact, final restorations have begun in the refectory and will be finished in two years.

Over the past 50 years, archaeologists have made a number of surprising discoveries. They have uncovered evidence of the original medieval construction in some of the cellar areas, as well as patterns from different centuries hidden under 18 layers of paint and pieces of sculptures from fireplace hearths used to fill crevices in the walls.

The fictional story in the digital tour of Sint Pieter's actually becomes rather tedious, but it is the only way to make your way around the entire structure. And there is a wonderful sense of the forbidden in opening unmarked doors and descending into the chilly, drippy wine cellar you would never find without Alison's help. He also imparts engaging and strikingly honest facts about the wealth of the monks ("Even during fasting,

we didn't suffer") about nepotism in awarding building projects ("a waste of money") and about secret love affairs ("I was like a school boy!") In one clever scene, Flemish artist Jan Fabre makes a cameo appearance.

In the late 1970s, the vineyards of the abbey were cultivated again. The result is a dry white wine made from Sirius grapes. The gardens have also been restored according to their 18th-century design. Next to ruins from a 12th-century infirmary are fruit and nut trees. The abbey also grows the same herbs the monks cultivated and sells them in the gift shop. The setting is beautiful, with the garden backing onto the river Scheldt and offering plenty of space for contemplation – for monks, or maybe just for random visitors looking for a little peace.

Online
www4.gent.be/spa

These shoes were made for walking

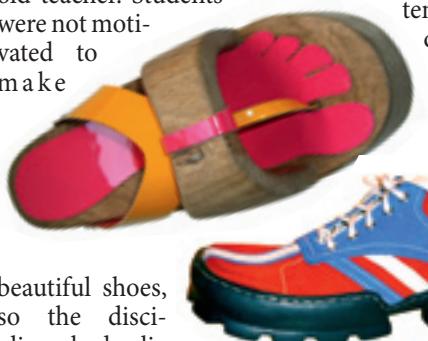
Students are waiting in line to learn shoemaking from an innovative teacher in Lokeren

Steven Tate

Belgian shoes – the sleek loafers favoured by the international jet set – are world-renowned, testaments to the country's fine reputation of making quality footwear. But the tradition is dying: only three major shoe producers remain in Belgium, with Italy and China stepping (pardon the pun) into the forefront of the footwear industry worldwide.

But over in Lokeren, exactly halfway between Ghent and Sint-Niklaas, Roel Willockx is keeping the craft alive in his shoemaking classes that anybody can join. Since 2002, he's been turning the curious into cobblers with expertise earned from making shoes around the world.

"There was already a shoemaking course here, but student membership had fallen to only four people," says the 41-year-old teacher. Students were not motivated to make



beautiful shoes, so the discipline had slipped into a funk. Having taught at the Antwerp Fine Arts Academy, Willockx decided to add some flash to the course, inspiring students to make creative leaps into the fashionable, as well as the functional. "It's important that a

You, too, can make cool shoes

shoe look good – but you also have to be able to walk in it," he notes.

Students in the class at the local PCVO start off making patterns and getting acquainted with the "last" – the moulded model of a foot used to make a shoe. Then they move on to making a sandal, then one proper shoe – not a pair. This can be frustrating: everyone wants to make a pair to step out in right away. And, unless one has lost a foot, one shoe is impractical. "But you have to crawl before you walk," Willockx says.

He notes that another school in Belgium allows students to start off making whatever they want, which often means fancy footwear that nascent cobblers are incapable of finishing. "The technique has to be there first," he stresses. "Only when you've mastered the basics can you really begin to translate a design into a real shoe."

Enrolment has increased tenfold, with students from Flanders as well as Nicaragua, the US, Germany and the Netherlands. "We get emails from Australia expressing interest," Willockx says – which would be quite a commute. There is a waiting list of students wanting to join the two-year course, with the next open enrolment occurring in June.

Along with increased verve in the shoe department, Willockx has been busy updating the school's equipment. Their machine that makes lasts (the foot models) from 3D images

of a foot is so cutting edge that Jonathan Lobb, of the prestigious British shoemaker John Lobb, came to inspect it with a view to getting one for his company. Lobb is no slob when it comes to shoes: a pair of handmade Lobb brogues starts at €3,000.

In the early days at PCVO, Willockx taught courses in handbag making parallel to shoes – attracting his mum Josepha as a student. Last year, she finally made the jump into footwear – so she can make shoes that go with her bags. Filip Cappoen, a former collaborator at posh Belgian leather goods maker Delvaux, now heads the handbag course.

Despite his quarter century involvement in footwear, Willockx finds it difficult to advise how to best choose when shopping. "With big designers, you're often paying for the name," he says. "One famous Flemish designer created a woman's shoe with a heel that curved back behind the shoe: it looked interesting, but if a woman walked normally in it, the heel broke off. So she had to hobble like a dinosaur to avoid destroying the shoe." And even within a brand, some shoes are better made than others. "There are many different qualities of leather – from pigskin to calfskin," he says. "The flexibility of the sole is important."

As for his students, "half take the class out of pleasure, while the other half want to make a career out of it." Shoe design rather than shoemaking seems to be the direction most go – with actual shoemaking concentrated in Italy and China. Although many fashion designers cannot sew or make a pattern, "knowing how to put a shoe together is essential to designing one." If the shoe fits...

For enrolment details, contact the PCVO at 09.340.51.10

online

www.pcvoowd.be



Roel Willockx mixes style and tradition in his popular shoemaking course



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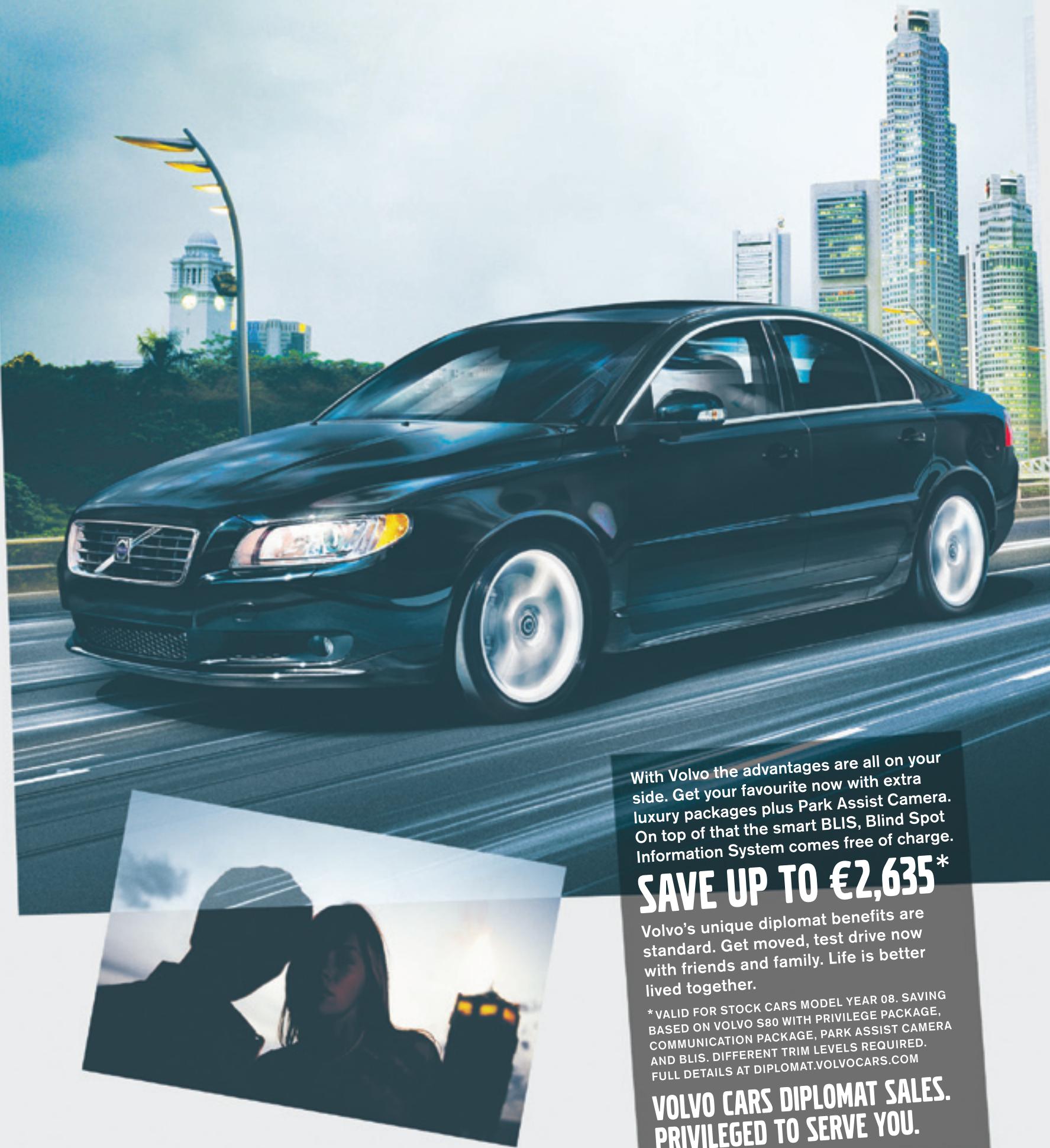
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• 1500 Halle, Mr. Yves Tielemans, Tel: 02/363.15.35, yves@sterckx.be

Volvo. for life



Classical & new music**Brussels****Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)**

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be

MAR 20 20.00 Liège Philharmonic conducted by Pascal Rophé, with Jakub Cizmarovic, piano: Dusapin, Prokofiev, Chausson

Espace Senghor

Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40,
www.senghor.be

Until MAR 20 Tribute to Karlheinz Stockhausen

Protestantse Kapel

Museumplein; 02.332.06.66
MAR 20 20.00 Pierre Hantaï, harpsichord: D Scarlatti sonatas

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11,
www.fine-arts-museum.be

MAR 19 12.40 Spiegel Quartet: Van Hove, Ravel

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.507.82.00
MAR 19 20.00 Alexei Volodin, piano: Schubert, Beethoven, Rachmaninov, Prokofiev

MAR 20 20.00 Brussels Conservatory Historical Instruments Orchestra, conducted by Peter Van Heyghen: Locke, Purcell, Handel

MAR 27 20.00 Jos van Immerseel, fortepiano; Midori Seiler, violin: Beethoven sonatas

Antwerp

Amuz Kammstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
MAR 22 21.00 Akadémia, conducted by Françoise Lasserre: Schütz' Christ triptych

MAR 26 21.00 Gavriel Livkind, cello: Bach and post-romantic works for cello

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
MAR 19 20.00 Oxalys with Bojan Vodenitsjarov, piano: Victor Kissine,

Steve Houben

MAR 21 20.00 Il Fondamento and Vlaams Radio Koor conducted by Paul Dombrecht, with Miriam Allan, soprano; Clint van der Linde, counter-tenor; Robert Getchell, tenor; André Morsch, bass: Zelenka's Miserere, De Profundis and Requiem

Bruges**Concertgebouw**

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

MAR 21 20.00 Symphonieorkest Vlaanderen, conducted by Etienne Siebens: Van Parys, Saint-Saëns, Chausson, Ravel

Hoeilaart**Maison de la Musique**

Edgar Sohiestraat 41; 02.657.96.52

MAR 19 20.00 Quatuor Tercea, Dorinne Mortelmans and Lies

Vanderwege, sopranos; Philippe Riga, piano: Mendelssohn, Wolf, Delibes, Barber

Until MAY 8 Concert series by soloists from the Queen Elisabeth College of Music

Opera**Brussels****Huis van der Culturen (Sint-Gillis)**

Belgradostraat 120; 02.534.56.05

MAR 20 20.00 L'Opéra, interactive student project by Nick Hayes and Veronika Mabardi, staged by Max Lebras

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
MAR 21 20.00 L'Opéra (see above)

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****Brasserie de l'Union**

Sint-Gillisvoordeplein 55; 02.538.15.79

MAR 23 & 30 12.00-15.00 Carson Barnes & friends

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be

MAR 20 21.30 Jacques Schwartz-Bart

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193-195;
02.733.13.78

MAR 19 20.30 Michel Vrydag Quartet

MAR 20 Wonderland **MAR 21** 20.30

Greg Houben Trio **MAR 22** 18.00 Four for Swing **MAR 25** 20.30 Babylone

MAR 26 20.30 Ben Prisch Trio

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15

MAR 20 20.00 Hugh Coltman, soul, folk, blues + Thomas Dutronc, manouche jazz

La Brocante Thoumas

Blaesstraat 170; 02.512.13.43

MAR 22 & 29 12.00-16.00 Carson Barnes & friends

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37

MAR 22 20.00 John Ruocco and Jeroen Van Herzele, saxophone; Tseng Tseng-Yi and Erik Vermeulen, piano; Joris Lindemans and Nicolas Thys, bass; Stéphane Galland, drums; and the Conservatory's jazz choir

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,
www.soundsjazzclub.be

Concerts at 22.00:

MAR 19 Caribe Con K, Caribbean music **MAR 20** Jean-François Maljean

MAR 21 Tetsuro Kawashima & Giovanni Mirabassi "Euro Quartet"

MAR 22 Golden 80s **MAR 24**

Master Session **MAR 25** Antonio Segura "Flamenco Project" **MAR 26**

Chamaquindo, salsa

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45

Concerts at 20.30:

MAR 19 Van Nistelrooy Quintet **MAR 20** Algo Asi, flamenco **MAR 21** Bass Papa, blues **MAR 22** Gilda Solve & the New Look Trio **MAR 26** Dapoerka

MAR 27-28 Natasha Roth & Ivan Paduart Quartet

Borgerhout**De Roma**

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90

MAR 21 20.30 Dre Pallemarts

Rataplan

Wijnegemstraat 27; 03.292.97.40

MAR 20 20.30 Peter Hertmans Quartet

Ghent**Vooruit**

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.28

MAR 19 20.00 Peter Hertmans Quartet

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

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

MAR 21 19.00 Radical Duke label

Night: Prima Donkey's Tune Up Time + Wiget/Lenski + Wild Ox Moan + Dez

Mona + Daau **MAR 22** 20.00 My TV is Dead + Monsoon **MAR 23** 20.00 The XX + Lightspeed Champion **MAR 25**

20.00 Justin Nozuka

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89

MAR 22 23.00 VW Spring Session

Halles de Schaerbeek

Koninklijke Sinte-Mariastraat 22; 02.218.21.07, www.halles.be

MAR 21 22.00 R*ST* 4 Electro

evening with Princess Superstar, Coldcut, Red Snapper, Daedelus, Uffie

+ Feadz, Benga, Mala + Sgt Pokes, Grimelock, Alchemyst, Saviour

Dance**Brussels****De Munt**

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39,
www.demunt.be

MAR 20 Performances honouring the late choreographer Maurice

Béjart: 18.00 Testimonials by the choreographer's former dancers and associates 20.00 D'un soir un jour, choreographed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker

Les Brigittines

Korte Brigittinenstraat; 02.506.43.00
Until MAR 21 Troubleyn in Quando l'uomo principale è una donna, dance solo choreographed by Jan Fabre

Until MAR 29 Troubleyn in L'Ange de la mort, dance, installation, video and performance by Jan Fabre (in English with French surtitles)

Théâtre La Roseraie

Alsembergsesteenweg 1299; 02.376.46.45
MAR 21 20.00 Folk dance lesson with MicheuStef 21.00 Bal Folk by Op Zwier

Théâtre Marni

Vergniestraat 25; 02.354.43.68

MAR 21 13.30 Ebalé Zam, le combat d'un artiste, exhibition and performance

Antwerp**deSingel**

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
Until MAR 21 20.00 Trisha Brown Company in Foray Fôret, How Long and I Love My Robots

Genk**Cultuurcentrum**

Dieplaan 2; 089.653.843

MAR 20 Zoo in Cows in Space, choreographed by Thomas Hauert

Ghent**Capitole**

Graaf van Vlaanderenplein 5;

0900.84.100

MAR 21-23 20.00 Béjart Ballet Lausanne in Firebird, Elton-Berg and Suite de danses

Theatre**Brussels****Beursschouwburg**

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.beursschouwburg.be

MAR 26-28 20.30 Mightysociety5, multimedia project by Eric De Vroedt (in Dutch)

KVS Bol

Lakensestraat 146; 0

Visual arts

Brussels

AmArt Louise Gallery
Dejonkerstraat 34; 0476.53.22.94
Until MAR 30 United Colors of Belgium, group show by 11 Belgian photographers

Arts en Marge
Hoogstraat 312; 02.511.04.11
Until MAY 17 Allemaal Beestjes, outsider art group show on the theme of real and imaginary animals

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

Box Gallery
Maliestraat 88; 02.537.95.55
Until APR 5 Bois dormants, photographs by Hugues de Würstemberger

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
Until MAY 18 Jan Fabre: Borrowed time, photographs of work by the infamous Flemish artist

Costume and Lace Museum
Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50
MAR 20-MAY 27 Weefsel van het absolute, textiles by outsider artists Heide De Bruyne, Fabienne Clossen, Hilde D'Hondt, Aranka Liban, Kenneth Rasmussen and others

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

De Markten
Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25
MAR 20-APR 20 Lumen, works by Yves Beaumont, Iris Bouwmeester, Esther Brugge, Jeanine Cohen, Koen De Vriendt and Pablo Garcia-Rubio, among others

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 APR 27 Rhizome oriental-voyage en ex-URSS, photographs by Philippe Herbet

Fondation pour l'Architecture
Klusstraat 55; 02.642.24.80,

www.fondationpourlarchitecture.be
Until APR 20 Architectuur-landschap, 150 years of Belgian architects' drawings

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

ISELP
Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
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 Lambermont

Jewish Museum of Belgium
Minimenstraat 21; 02.512.19.63
Until JUNE 22 Dicht op de huid, paintings by Brussels-based artist Maurice Frydman

Koekelberg Basiliek
Basiliekvoordeplein 1; 02.420.55.05
Until APR 6 Leonardo Da Vinci: The European Genius, paintings, mechanical models, original drawings and manuscripts

Le Botanique
Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Until MAY 4 L'histoire au présent (History in the Present), over 300 photographs reporting on the world's conflicts and human suffering by Belgian photojournalist Bruno Stevens

Maison du Folklore et des Traditions
Eikstraat 19; 02.514.53.97
Until MAR 24 L'Art et l'Abeille (Art and the Bee Hive), 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, plus contemporary works by Brussels-based artists

Pascal Polar Gallery
Charleroisteenweg 108; 02.537.81.36
Until APR 26 Paintings by Sudanese artist Hassan Musa
Until MAY 5 Des corps de style, photographs by Julien Spiewag

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)erkenning! 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 from 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

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
Gratésstraat 7; 02.662.16.99
Until MAR 30 Corpus et Terra, photos by Daniel Bastin and Jean-Paul Antoine

Antwerp
Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60
Until MAY 4 Santhal Family: Positions around an Indian Sculpture, group show of contemporary art relating to a 1938 sculpture by Ramkinkar Baij

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
Until MAR 22 35m³ jonge architectuur, featuring NOA Architecten, Belgian architecture installation
Until MAY 25 Inside Outside, landscape architecture by Petra Blaisse

Extra City
Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70
Until MAR 30 Mimétisme, group show of contemporary art

Fifty-One Fine Art Photography
Zirkstraat 20; 03.289.84.58
Until MAY 3 USA², photographs by Peter Granser and Kate Schermerhorn

Fotomuseum
Waalse Kaa 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
Until AUG 17 Moi, Véronique Branquinho Toute Nue, retrospective of the Belgian designer marking the 10th anniversary of her fashion 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

Maaltebruggekasteel
Kortrijkssteenweg 1023; 09.242.88.22
Until APR 27 Si le monde..., graphic works by Robert Groslot

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

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

Z33
Zuivelmarkt (Begijnhof) 33; 011.29.59.60
Until MAY 25 Place@Space (re)shaping everyday life, installations by Paul Casaer, Ryoji Ikeda, Limite Azero, Alice Miceli and others

Knokke
Absolute Art Gallery
Kustlaan 285; 050.62.22.40
MAR 22-APR 30 De magie van de regen, photographs by Dalia Nosratabadi

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

Machelen-Zulte
Het Roger Raveelmuseum
Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00
Until JUNE 15 Witte schaduw, drawings by Roger Raveel

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 Oorlogsgeschiede: 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 by photographers Léontine, Maurice and Robert Antony (1893-1930)

Festivals & special events

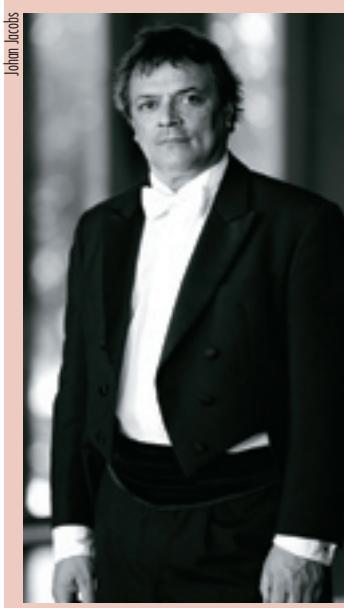
Actie Week Tegen Racisme (Week of Action Against Racism): Hundreds of activities raising awareness of racism includes film, music, theatre, exhibitions and conferences
Until MAR 22 across Belgium
www.contreleracisme.be

Béjart Festival 2008: Dance festival honouring the late choreographer Maurice Béjart featuring early and recent works
MAR 21-APR 13 in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent
www.musichall.be

VW Spring Sessions 2008: Annual festival of jazz, rock, world music and DJs
Until June 5 across Belgium
www.springsessions.be

Brussels
Iceland on the Edge: Icelandic cultural festival with exhibitions, concerts, theatre, dance and film
Until JUNE 15 at Bozar, Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80,

Don't miss this week



Jos Van Immerseel and Midori Seiler

27 March, Royal Conservatory, 30 Regentschapsstraat, Brussels. Tickets from 02.507.82.00 or www.bozar.be. Also on 28 March, Concertgebouw, 34 't Zand, Bruges. Tickets from 070.22.33.02 or www.concertgebouw.be

You don't cook Chinese food using Italian ingredients, says Flemish conductor and forte pianist Jos Van Immerseel (photo). For this reason, his recital of Beethoven sonatas with baroque violinist Midori Seiler will feature precisely the kinds of instruments that might have been available to the composer: a period violin and bow and copies of two Viennese forte pianos, all from the turn of the 19th century. Three sonatas for violin and piano feature on the programme. The middle one (no 9) is the mammoth Kreutzer Sonata, whose red-hot emotions inspired Leo Tolstoy's famous novella of adultery and revenge.

Ravensteinstraat 23
www.bozar.be

Les Etoiles du Cirque de Pékin: Chinese circus
MAR 22 20.30 at Vorst-National, Victor Roussealaan 208
0900.00.991

Live from Broadway: musical hits conducted by David Miller, with Paul Gérimon, bass; Muriel Bruno-Godron, soprano
MAR 20-29 at Woluwe-Saint-Pierre Cultural Centre, Charles Thielemanslaan 93
02.773.05.80,
www.livefrombroadway.be

Norouz: Persian New Year festival celebrating the Iranian New Year tradition of Norouz, including an exhibition, film screening and a concert by the Mezrab Ensemble
MAR 21-22 at Espace Senghor, Waversesteenweg 366
02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be

Ghent
Trouwe Johanna – Een muzikaal sprookje: A musical fairy tale performed by Lien Vermeiren and Lien Van Steendam, graduating students from Conservatorium Ghent (clarinet and piano)
MAR 19-22 at Norbertijnerkapel, Kaatspelplein 09.375.07.52,
trouwejohanna@gmail.com

MY FLANDERS

Mohamed Azhir

Mohamed Azhir is a hip-hop artist in Antwerp. He talks about the rap scene in Flanders and the elusiveness of fame

Hip hop is music and dancing – but it also seems to be a lot more.

It's not just music or clothes – it's a way of life. You never get too old for hip hop: you can be a 50-year-old doctor and still be into it. I first got into it 15 years ago, watching *Yo MTV Raps*. I was playing basketball, and through watching the NBA and Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley, I got into the music. The basketball scene was really hot until about 10 years ago, when things sort of died down. Kids just aren't as inspired to play anymore, so hip hop has taken its place.

How is the hip hop scene in Flanders?

It's mostly an urban phenomenon, and one that's growing all the time. Of course, it isn't as big as in the Netherlands – but, then again, the Dutch population is three times the size of Flanders. We don't have a large Latino or Caribbean or African community in Flanders, which is where a lot of hip hop comes from. Also, hip hop is really a part of the entertainment industry in the Netherlands: there are TV shows, radio stations, record labels... In Belgium, it's still pretty much underground. Groups and rappers have to pave their own through the Internet with MySpace and other sites. Every artist would like a record deal, but the major record companies are having their own problems staying in business.

Graffiti, breakdancing, scratching, rapping: are you into all of that?

I make music, yeah. I have a MySpace page: my MC name

is Lux Ortiz. I rap and sing my own hooks. The thing is, to break through as an artist internationally, you first have to break through in your home country – and there's not the support system here. Ironically, once you make it somewhere else, then you can break big here. I've toured the Netherlands as well as Germany, and I've had my dealings with the industry. I'm not into the other stuff like break dancing and tagging, although I do have my own sneaker shop in Antwerp, which is popular with hip hoppers. A lot of the styles are very 80s, which was the beginning of hip hop.

How is the Flanders rap scene different from elsewhere?

First of all, about 50% of the rappers rap in Flemish, with the other half rapping in English. Then, there are two kinds of rap: one is the old school battles, with MCs bragging about how great they are and how they're better at this and that. Then there is the socially conscious rap about life and society's problems – things on a deeper level.

In the US, there's poverty, high crime rates, discrimination, bad school systems, children growing up in neighbourhoods with gunfire – one might think that Belgium has few social ills to rap about.

But there's still discrimination and racism here. Look, the hip hop community is unified. There are Flemish rappers, African rappers, French rappers, Arab rappers, and they don't have any beefs with each other just based on race. You get

some competition between different cliques, but it's all about being progressive. There's a lot of support in the community, which other people could learn a lot from.

You speak of racism. What is your heritage?

I'm second-generation Moroccan, born in Antwerp.

So what do you consider yourself?

Belgian, but not Flemish.

So... how would your parents feel about having half-Flemish grandchildren?

They would figure that it was God's will.

Speaking of God's will, a lot of US hip hop gets criticised for being



misogynist or homophobic or materialistic. How do you square that with God?

You have to avoid the negative. It is difficult to be a good Muslim and still be into hip hop. You just have to avoid the drugs and the decadent side of it. You have to go toward the good.

But the negative side of it – gangsta rap in the US – has earned a lot of money. Is there a Flemish equivalent?

Of course. That's why the media doesn't want to be associated with it. It's always easier to fill newspapers with negativity, just like selling records with violence. I'm more into the revolutionary aspect of hip hop – how it can change society for the better. My parents have a love-hate relationship when

it comes to me and hip hop. They like that it inspires me, but they are aware of its downsides, too.

Authenticity is an important part of being a rapper, but the older, wiser and more successful you become, it's harder to keep that edge.

Jay-Z, for instance, was a very respected rapper when he was young: now he's a record exec dating Beyoncé. How do you keep it real?

By staying connected to the streets. I'm part of a crew – taggers, rappers, artists. We all collaborate and inspire each other. Flemish, Moroccan, Turkish, whatever: by being together, each of us is stronger.

Interview by Steven Tate

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

Guy Vanhengel
Brussels education minister
on the lack of places in Flemish schools in the capital

Didier Reynders
finance minister
apologising for an ad in which he praises the Philip Stein Teslar watch (which he has now given back)

"Maybe the advertising wasn't such a good idea."

Jean-Claude Daoust
chairman of the Belgian Enterprise Union VBO

"Eleven percent of the Belgian population is illiterate. I find it unthinkable that as a society we tolerate that. There are enough jobs, let's also ensure there are enough quality schools too."

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