



Antwerp is the new Paris

Forget Paris. Give Milan a break. Antwerp is confirming its status as Europe's capital of cool

Stéphanie Duval

When you look at Antwerp closely – filtering out the tourist attractions and construction sites – you'll probably

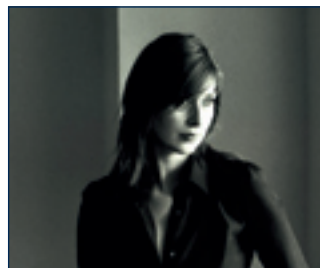
reach the same conclusion we did. Antwerp really is the new Paris. This is not just a slogan that sounds good (though we think it does). There's more to it than that. When

people think of Paris, they think of romance and history, culture and good eating, and probably also of fashion. Antwerp has all that, and more.

The city has long been labelled the fashion capital of Belgium, but we reckon you could just as easily call it the fashion capital of Europe. Of course Paris and Milan have a

much longer history when it comes to prestigious houses of fashion – a rich heritage that can't be ignored.

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Arts

A new exhibition in Antwerp's Fashion Museum profiles the designer Veronique Branquinho. Stéphanie Duval looks at an edgy talent whose influences range from *Twin Peaks* to fairy tales.

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Living

Henk van Rensbergen spends his weekends photographing abandoned buildings. Monique Philips finds out about the fascination of ruins.

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Interview

Lene Kamps edits the magazine *Feeling*. Her readers are intelligent 30-something women who know what they want, she tells Steven Tate.

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IMF criticises Belgium over cost of ageing

Government "far from prepared," says report

Alan Hope

Belgium is "far from prepared" to meet the challenges of the rising costs of an ageing population, according to a report for the IMF prepared by the head of its regional studies division, the Fleming Luc Everaert.

In Europe in general, one in four of the population by 2050 will be over 65, compared to one in six at present. In Belgium the population is expected to rise by 5% by mid-century, but the number of over-65s will grow by 63%. Meanwhile, the old age dependency ratio – the number

of workers required to support one retired person – will grow from one worker for three retired people to one-to-one.

At the same time, while technological advances produce an increase in demand for health care, they do little, the IMF says, to reduce costs. By 2050 again, it estimates, "every worker will need to contribute an extra €8,000 per year (in 2008 prices) to the social security system" to pay for increased demand.

The problem Belgium faces, the Everaert report says, is a result of its present-day

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Hotsy Totsy

While plenty of people sat in cafes last week and discussed the life, work and death of Hugo Claus, Flanders' most famous writer, perhaps nowhere were the emotions quite so high as in Hotsy Totsy. Because it was the Claus brothers who opened the Hotsy Totsy Jazz Club 35 years ago.

It was Guido Claus, an actor and Hugo's younger brother, who actually owned the Ghent bar. But it was Hugo who transformed it into a literary cafe. In 1983, almost 25 years to the day before he died, Hugo introduced what would be his masterpiece – *The Sorrow of Belgium* – during a reading at the Hotsy Totsy. By that point, the private club was well known as an artists' hang out, and membership cards bore names like Jan Hoet and Piet Van Eeckhout. Though jazz continued, poetry readings and intellectual debate became the cafe's main draw.

The famously nomadic Hugo actually lived in Ghent for 10 years from the 1950s to the 1960s. He then moved back in the late 1970s after Guido – and the rest of the Claus family – settled in the city. Biographer Guido Lauwaert claims that Hugo lived in no less than 14 different Ghent addresses over the years. (The city should seriously consider a Claus Walk.) But even when he moved on, Hugo's family, close ties to the theatre community – and the Hotsy Totsy – always kept him coming back.

Though it's been under the ownership of a different family for more than a decade, the

Hotsy Totsy is still an artist's cafe, and it stills keeps the crowds coming in. This owes something to the ongoing readings, performances, exhibitions and musical acts, but I'd guess it's even more due to the atmosphere. The Claus brothers (there were two more besides) had a rather obsessive interest in the American gangster world of the 1920s and 1930s. The era's star, Al Capone, graces the walls in large-size posters, and surrounding him are the red plush trappings of a 1930s Chicago jazz joint.

Lamps dripping velvety fringe hang low over the bar, while customers line the benches along the mirrored back wall. You can see the Claus penchant for the seamier side of life in the other cultural icons that cover the walls: Rocky Marciano, Mata Hari, Muhammad Ali. The owners of Hotsy Totsy haven't changed a thing – it's all as it was under the Claus brothers (minus the membership cards).

Motte Claus, Guido's widow, ran the Hotsy Totsy with her husband for 25 years. She recently told a reporter that Hugo "was Guido's best friend. Guido would rather see his brother than anyone else. Hugo even let Guido read his manuscripts. The two together did a lot of laughing, eating and drinking."

Much of that in the Hotsy Totsy.

Lisa Bradshaw

Online

www.hotsytotsy.be



The Hotsy in full swing: on the left is a photo of a jolly Guido Claus, taken by his brother Johan

FACE OF FLANDERS



Jan Cox

You cannot cross the street in this country right now without finding a connection to Hugo Claus. Painter Jan Cox, though, had the honour of being one of the Flemish writer's dearest friends. One wonders if, when Claus, who suffered from Alzheimer's disease, decided to end his life last week through euthanasia, he thought back on his friend the artist, who committed suicide in 1980. The Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp presents the exhibition *Jan Cox* until 15 June.

Cox grew up in Amsterdam but left at 17 to study at the Institute of Fine Arts in Antwerp. He split the rest of his life between the Flemish city and the United States, where he headed up the painting department at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston for nearly 20 years until his return to Antwerp in 1974. It was there that he lived out the rest of his life and painted the best work of his career.

Before America, though, there was Belgium. He helped found the group *Jeune Peinture Belge* in the 1940s with other avant-garde artists and soon fell in with the Brussels COBRA movement of the early 1950s (which was where he met Claus).

Though Cox was a fan of the surrealists, he rejected the pure form in favour of painting as a kind of storytelling that combined the surreal with meticulous composition and solid, if strange, forms. Much of Cox's work actually reflects the broad brush strokes and use of a colourful palette that is common to COBRA artists. But he was altogether different from them in his choice of subjects: mythical, magical and philosophical.

His need to recreate myths as representations of modern-day tragedies was so strong that he made several series. His first, from the 1960s, explores the Greek myth of Orpheus. Later, Cox's *Iliad* depicts war between the Greeks and the Trojans. The empathetic Cox was severely affected by the Second World War and painted several works splashed in red representing his feelings. The 10 works in *Iliad* were painted in the mid-1970s just at the end of the Vietnam War and form the most ambitious series of his career in terms of size – some of the works are two metres in length. Cox worked in large format to create details missing from typical war scenes, such as the image above: "Priam on His Way to the Archaean Camp".

In the last year of his life, Cox produced a number of works based on the Passion of Christ. He leaves out some parts of the story and adds altogether new scenes. Religious art was certainly not a favourite of the avant-garde, but Cox pointed out that he was more interested in "what is done to man" than in "the son of God".

The show in Antwerp is thematic and includes all the series, plus some works from private collections that have never been on show before.

Lisa Bradshaw

Online

www.kmska.be

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



Kust

Unless you come from Hungary, you would probably never consider going anywhere near the Belgian coast. By any standards, it's tiny – 60-odd kilometres in an almost straight line of sand with no rocky cliffs or shingle beaches to add variety – and man-made in the sense that it is the result of centuries of land reclamation. And when you are there, all you see are blocks of flats lined up along a promenade facing dunes and wide beaches.

Yet for Belgians, *de kust* has a strong attraction. You have to see it from the other side: the endless buildings hold what most Belgians desire: *een appartement met een zee- en duinenzicht gelegen pal aan het strand en op enkele stappen van de dijk*. What more do you want: your own flat overlooking dunes and sea right on the beach and a few steps from the promenade.

So, off to the seaside to get away from all the hustle and bustle of city life. Not at all! Most of the 13 resorts *langs de kust* have all the shops you need, and the high density of flats means you are most likely to bump into someone you know. Cafes and restaurants are in abundance – Belgians do enjoy their food. But there is little in the way of noisy seaside attractions.

On *de dijk*, a favourite pastime is to hire a pedal car: some can hold up to 10 people! If that's too strenuous, you can take *de kusttram*, which connects all the resorts: "*de tramchauffeur brengt je vlot tot het hart van elke badplaats*". It is certainly a great way to get a feel for *de kust* and revise your first impressions. The names of the stops may arouse your curiosity: *Casino in Middelkerke*; *Sealife Floreal in Blankenberge*; *Raversijde* outside Ostend with its warren of German war defences; and *Manitoba in Wenduine*, liberated by the Canadians in 1944.

But back to the beach *op enkele stappen van het appartement*. The sands are expansive with no need for sunbathers to be packed like sardines even in high summer. So with plenty of room you can build *een zandkasteel* or just *zonnebaden*. *Zwemmen* in the summer is under the watchful eye of the thousand or so *kustredders*, who patrol *de bewaakte zones*, which make up about one third of the coast.

You may want to escape the masses and head into the dunes. *De duinen* are amazing features: *een dynamisch natuurverschijnsel dat dagelijks aangroeit of afneemt* – a natural phenomenon that increases or decreases daily. In *Koksijde*, you may come across *het Abdijmuseum Ten Duinen 1138*, where 12th-century abbey life in the dunes comes alive. The coastal area was opened up with the arrival of the train in 1839. If you choose to drive on busy summer days, you may experience the joys of driving in the future: *blokrijden* involves one police car in the middle lane doing 80 kilometres an hour. The thousands of cars behind have to follow at that leisurely pace. *Zalig!*

Alistair MacLean

online

www.dekust.org

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FEATURE



See and be seen at Lucy

Capital of cool

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But where do you go if you're looking for something new? You turn to Antwerp.

Talented international design students are desperate to secure a place at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts so that they can study under Antwerp's leading fashion designers. Other fashion cities may have a head start on us, but we're catching up fast.

In the beginning were the "Six": The fashion world went wild over six Antwerp designers with difficult names: Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, Marina Yee and Dirk Bikkembergs. Almost overnight, the port city became known all over the world for its fresh, avant-garde designer talent.

The six paved the way for subsequent generations, and new Antwerp designers have emerged to claim the attention of the international fashion crowd. The designer duo behind AF Vanderhorst, for example, recently celebrated their 10th anniversary on a Milan catwalk. Last year, Bruno Pieters became the artistic director at Hugo Boss, while Kris Van Assche holds the reins at Dior Homme. The head offices might be situated in the capital of France, but we all know where the talent is coming from.

Antwerp also outshines other cities in terms of culture, romance and history: just take a long walk along the River Scheldt or a stroll through the older parts of the city. Traditional gables hide hundreds of years of history, and small cobblestone streets lead to picturesque squares with benches and old trees.

But this doesn't mean that Antwerp is old-fashioned. On the contrary, it leads the way in contemporary architecture designed to blend in with the historical surroundings. The "Eilandje" – the hip docklands neighbourhood – is the place where small creative businesses thrive. And where the number of trendy cafes is growing exponentially.

The city has cleaned up some of the seedier quarters of the Eilandje, such as the Falconplein, which has been transformed into an attractive square where people from two different parts of the city meet one another.

The Royal Ballet of Flanders, meanwhile, chose Antwerp for its head offices, and it's here that they perform most of their productions, while scintillating operas are staged nightly in the beautifully refurbished Flanders Opera building.

It's almost impossible to describe all the ways in which Antwerp lives up to the description of "the new Paris". It's best to find this out for yourself, so we've put together a list of some of the best places to go in Antwerp. You won't find most of these places in the standard tourist guides, but trust us. We know Antwerp. And it's just like Paris.

DAWN

Locals living in Het Zuid district like to eat breakfast at Farine's Food (Vlaamse Kaai 40), where guests all sit at one big table, creating an instant family feel. There's a lot more to discover in this area, including the boutique of Antwerp jewellery label Atelier 11 (Scheldestraat 32). Expect original designs that exude that typically Antwerp sense of extravagant fun.

MORNING

A little further down on the Nationalestraat, Sien (Nationalestraat 91-95) is the new kid in town when it comes to world-class designer fashion. Proenza Schouler, Givenchy, Alessandro Dell'Acqua and Hussein Chalayan are just a few of the names Marie-Josine van de Water offers in her luxurious boutique. If your budget doesn't stretch quite that far, you can head down to the equally chic boutique LXP (Hopland 53), short for Luxperience, where you can rent gorgeous designer outfits, accessories and jewellery. There's even a secret entrance in case you want to enter and leave unnoticed.

AFTER WORK

Antwerp locals know Man Chi as the place to go for a quick massage. Right next door, the neighbourhood's new wellness salon Sukha (Ijzerenwaag 11) offers an ayurvedic treatment for every ailment. Beauty aficionados will also be thrilled to discover the little Italian shop Santa Maria Novella (Augustijnenstraat 39). Following the ancient traditions and recipes of herbal care, this luxurious brand offers perfumes and skin care products.

LUNCH

For a glimpse of Antwerp's hip crowd, book lunch at Hungry Henrietta (Lombardenvest 19). Who knows, you might find yourself rubbing shoulders with Dries Van Noten or Walter Van Beirendonck. However, if it's organic food that makes you tick, you'll love Lombardia (Lombardenvest 78). Its extravagant interior harbours a health-food restaurant serving Antwerp's best vegan salads, sandwiches and home-made iced tea.

DINNER

Fiskebar (Marnixplaats 12) is something of a culinary newcomer, but it's already known as the best place for fish in the entire city. Insider's tip: order several appetisers instead of one main dish, and eat them like tapas. After dinner, take your pick from the various options Antwerp's nightlife has to offer. In any case, don't even think of going to bed before you have visited the best cocktail bar in Belgium. The head bartender at Sips (Gillisplaats 8) is a true genius. Though not exactly spacious, this place is hotspot central.

SUNSET

Want some dancing to take you into morning? Cross the river and head to Club Cabane (Jachthavenweg 1, Linkeroever) to join the city's jet set. This is also the place to catch the last rays of sunlight while sitting on a beautiful terrace overlooking the Scheldt. There's even a swimming pool for those long summer days. For the less Bling-Bling crowd, there's Lucy (Solveynstraat 2). The restaurant and bar on top of the Arthur building offer an amazing view of the city skyline. During the day, it's an art gallery featuring experimental and creative projects. Get there while you can though – Lucy is a pop-up concept that could disappear without warning.

LATE NIGHT

Music buffs will love Trix (Noordersingel 28). This cultural platform offers lesser-known bands and upcoming DJs the chance to showcase their skills and build up an audience. If it's the dance scene you're looking for, the best place to go is the newish club Noxx (Straatsburgdok – Noordkaai 3). The glamorous location offers a different experience in each of its rooms. The LED ceiling and dance floor provide the perfect backdrop for your favourite dancing moves.

AND SO TO BED

In the small hours of the morning, you can return to the recently-opened hotel Matelote (Haarstraat 11A). Each room has its own unique and stylish design, and the bathrooms are perfect for unwinding after such a long day in Antwerp.

online

www.antwerpisthenewparis.com



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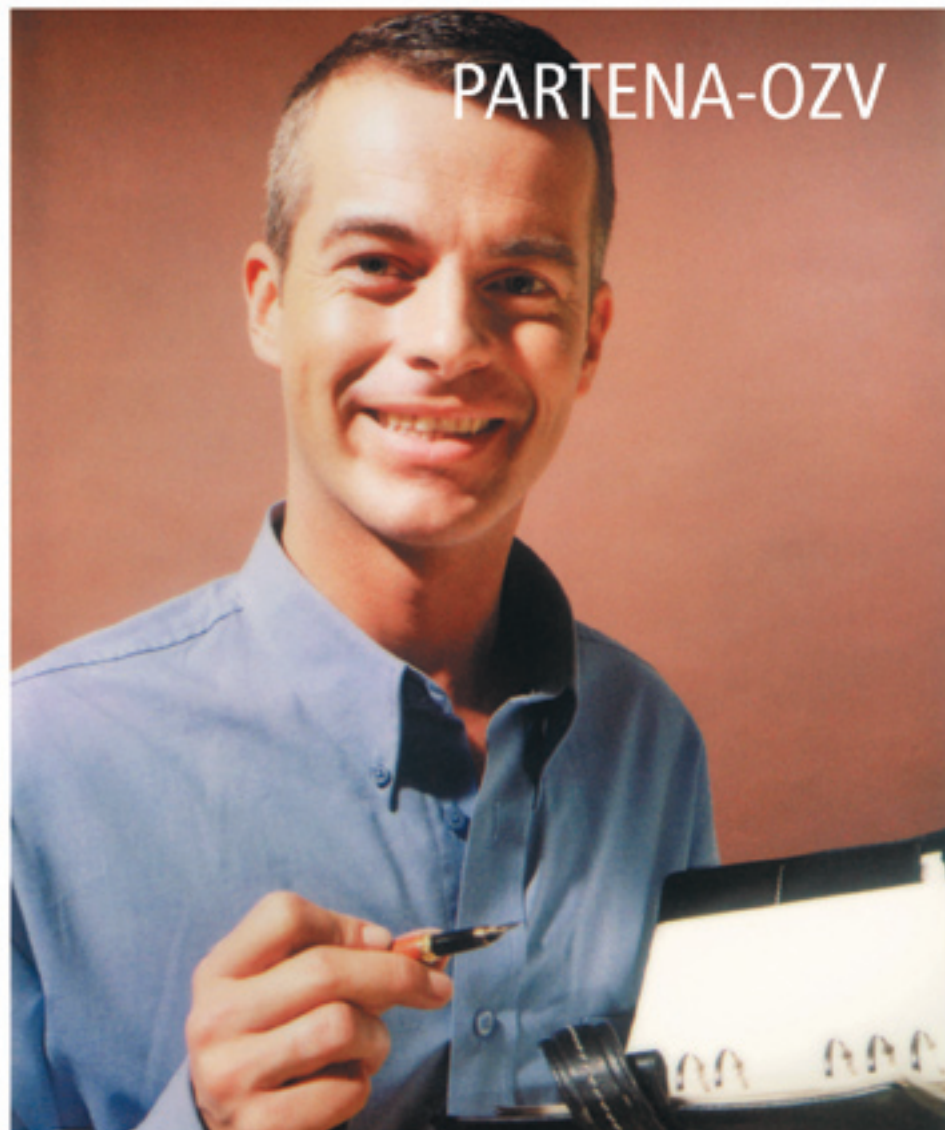
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Belgium needs to face up to aging crunch, warns IMF

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policy of depending too much on fiscal pre-funding – whereby resources are transferred from the repayments on the declining public debt – to cope with the cost of an aging population. The Belgium government, in addition, adheres to a policy of “intergenerational fairness”, which entails tax policies that do not place too high a burden on the present generation for the benefit of future generations – namely the coming wave of retired people.

But the fault with that policy is that existing tax policies will lead to rising deficits, which in turn generate higher interest rates, along with an increase in the sums the government has to pay to service its own debt. And that is precisely where the funding comes from to finance the cost of aging. Overall, the net reduction in debt interest will amount to three percent of GDP, where the costs of an aging population will grow to six percent of GDP.

“Insufficient adjustment today will need to be

corrected by more-than-proportional adjustment tomorrow, either through tax increases or drastic spending cuts,” the report concludes.

The report offers three suggestions to meet the future challenges. The first is that government policies aimed at balancing the budget need to be changed to achieve budget surpluses of about 1.5 percent by 2011 and 2.5 percent by 2015, which would then be sustained for several years.

Secondly, employment needs to be raised by about 7.5 percentage points, which is two points higher than current policies are expected to provide. Finally, the report argues that labour productivity growth needs to rise from its current level of 1.25 percent to 1.75 percent.

Other suggestions include cutting the value of pensions for those who retire early, which could provide 1.25 points toward the cost of aging, and raising the retirement age for all to 67, which would contribute a further quarter-point.

Jan Decler honoured by American film festival



Jan Decler, the grand old man of Flemish actors and star of the international hit *De Zaak Alzheimer* (titled *Memory of a Killer* in the US), has been named Best Actor for his role in the film *Man zkt vrouw* (*A Perfect Match*) by the International Film Festival in Tiburon, near San Francisco. Decler plays a retired

headmaster whose Romanian housekeeper goes back home, leaving an unexpected gap in his life which he fills by looking for a wife on the internet. The film, directed by Miel van Hoogenbemt, won another award last month at a festival in Paris when co-star Maria Popistasu was named best actress.

One in seven missing out on health benefits

Only one in seven people with low incomes take advantage of health-care cost reductions available to them, according to health insurer Riziv. The so-called Omnio statute was brought in a year ago in April to give low-income earners the right to reductions in health-care costs by increasing the level of reimbursements for visits to physiotherapists, doctors and hospitals. But in its first year of operation, only 112,000 people have taken up the Omnio opportunity out of an estimated 800,000-850,000 who should be eligible, says Riziv. Insurers had taken on extra staff to cope with the expected demand, but they remain idle for much of the time. The main problem, Riziv said, is that most people simply do not know about the change to the system. In addition, a large number of young people who would otherwise qualify have not applied because they are not yet concerned about the state of their health-care coverage.

Museum Prize nominees announced

The five nominees for this year's prestigious Museum Prize for Flanders have been announced: the Museum of Fine Art in Ghent, Antwerp's Museum of Contemporary Art, the Provincial Museum for Modern Art in Ostend, In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres and the Dhondt-Dhaenens Museum in Deurle



are all in the running for the €10,000 award. Five museums were also nominated in Wallonia, led by the Museum of Photography in Charleroi, and in Brussels, led by the Royal Fine Arts Museums. The awards will be announced on 24 April in the Natural Sciences Museum in Brussels.

Heiress leaves fortune to King Baudouin Foundation

Marie-Antoinette Carlier, heiress to the Petrofina fortune, has left some €200 million to the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF). Ms Carlier, who died in October last year aged 74, left half of her estate to the Belgian foundation and the remainder to other charities. The KBF will take possession of the family chateau in Kalmthout, a 1200-hectare nature reserve in Belgium, 400 hectares of farmland in the Netherlands, as well as a package of shares in the companies Total and Fortis. Under the terms of the bequest, the proceeds will go to support water-supply projects in Africa, as well as educational projects in Belgium. Marie-Antoinette's father, Hector Carlier, was one of the founders of the Compagnie Financière Belge des Pétroles, set up in 1920 and later known simply as Petrofina. Another branch of the family, now living in Brazil, is expected to contest the will.

Rogge breaks silence over China protests

Jacques Rogge, chairman of the International Olympic Committee, spoke out last week for the first time over calls that he take a stand on the issue of human rights in China, host of the summer Olympics. “The IOC is not a political organisation, and so it is not our job to campaign for the improvement of human rights,” he said in an interview with *De Morgen*. Rogge was responding to protests by athletes, led by Dutch swimmer Pieter van den Hoogenband, calling for him to speak out. “I don't see why I should speak from the IOC on behalf of 10,500 athletes who are all adults, intelligent and able to speak for themselves, and who may not all agree with the line taken by Van den Hoogenband,” he said.

US televangelist comes to Sportpaleis

Controversial US televangelist Benny Hinn is scheduled to bring a mixture of gospel preaching and flamboyant faith-healing to Antwerp's Sportpaleis on 9 and 10 May. Hinn has caused controversy by claiming to heal the sick and the lame, while his attendants scour the hall to raise donations. The evangelist lives in a luxury mansion worth \$3.5 million, with a garage full of cars and a private jet. Antwerp deputy Maya Detiège has called on the city and the interior ministry to screen Hinn and his entourage, but the ministry made it clear he would be treated like any other American citizen entering the country. The Sportpaleis, meanwhile, commented: “It's a mystery to us why he's coming here. But as long as he's doing nothing illegal, we have no problem with him.”



NEWS FLASH



Flemish authors wins children's book prize

Three Flemish authors have won the prestigious Golden Owl prize for youth literature, awarded in Antwerp last weekend. *Linus*, by Mieke Versyp, Sabien Clement and Pieter Gaudesaboos, was described by the jury as a tale of loss told without "tear-jerking misery". The main prize was won by Dutch author Mark Reugebrink for his novel *Het grote uitstel*.

Sara and Slimste Mens share top TV honours

TV soap *Sara* – the Flemish version of *Ugly Betty* – won three awards at the weekend in the first edition of the *Night of the Flemish TV Stars*. The programme won best show, while star Veerle Baetens took the award for most popular personality and best actress. The quiz programme *De slimste mens ter wereld*, presented by film director Eric Van Looy, won two prizes, for best presenter and best entertainment show.

More pension for self-employed, demands Unizo

Half of all self-employed people worry about the size of their pensions after they stop working, with nine out of 10 saving extra during their working lives to supplement it, according to a study carried out among members of the self-employed organisation Unizo. This week independent workers received an increase in child benefits of €10 for the first child. "Good, but not enough," said Unizo president Karel Van Eetvelt.

Apartment construction slumps in Flanders

Building permits for apartments in Flanders fell by 15% last year, according to a survey by the Flemish Construction Federation. The number of new apartments rose steadily, from 17,500 a year in 1993 to 29,000 in 2005. There followed a fall in 2006 of 1,000, while last year the total dropped further to just over 21,000. Supply now exceeds demand: sales of existing apartments fell from 39,000 in 2004 to 30,000 in 2006 – a fall of 21% – with the trend expected to be confirmed in 2007.

Ghent patisserie recipes online

Ghent's celebrated patisserie Bloch closed its doors at the weekend for the last time. However, former customers pining for its products can now try making their own: the owners plan to put all their favourite recipes online with the help of the Ghent University library and the Cultuurstad organisation. At present there are only photos to whet the appetite.

Online

www.patisseriebloch.be

Friends bid farewell to Hugo Claus

Friends and admirers, including some members of the public, gathered in the Bourla theatre in Antwerp at the weekend to bid farewell to Hugo Claus, who died last week. In an entirely non-religious memorial, Claus' coffin was brought onstage to stand beneath a giant photo of the writer (pictured). Earlier, some 750 people had filed past the coffin, standing on a plinth of roses in the theatre foyer.

Guests included writers Harry Mulisch and Connie Palmen, politicians Guy Verhofstadt and Patrick Janssens, and artists Jan Fabre and Pierre Alechinsky. Five of his closest friends and associates addressed the gathering from the stage, including the Dutch writer Cees Nooteboom who described his feeling upon hearing of Claus' death: "It was like an oak tree had been chopped down: suddenly there's an open space in the forest. Farewell, old friend, and may I ask one thing – please come back and do some haunting".

Jef Lambrecht described Claus as a sort of parakeet – "A bird with a strong libido and the sense of a child of four". Suzanne Holtzer, his editor for 15 years, described how she had investigated his life story and found one of his earliest brushes with fame, when he was voted nicest boy in the class by his classmates and paraded around the school in a goat-drawn cart.

Yet there was some bitterness aimed at Cardinal Godfried Danneels, who last week criticised the media coverage of Claus' death by euthanasia, claiming that leaving life deliberately was not "an act of heroism".

"Here they come again, crawling out from under their paving stones to spit up their cowardly gall," said Erwin Mortier in his address. "Celebrating your own moral superiority over the body of a dearly departed one is no act of heroism. Cardinal, you should be ashamed." A spokesman for Cardinal Danneels denied that the prelate had spoken about the particular case of Hugo Claus.

Following the ceremony, Claus' body was taken off to be cremated (on an unannounced date). His ashes will then be scattered in the North Sea off the coast at Ostend.

Rail authority has "a good year" in 2007

The national rail authority NMBS looks like it will break even this year, following a steady increase in turnover over the last three years to €1 million a week, according to chief executive Marc Descheemaeker. He said that 2007 was a good year for all three divisions – the NMBS group itself, the holding company and infrastructure division Infrabel. Domestic train traffic grew by 35% over the year, far ahead of the government's target of 25%, leading to an expected small profit. International traffic made a profit of €9 million, with plans to increase sales from the current €200 million to €350 million over the next five years. Freight division B-Cargo, on the other hand, lost €20 million, though Descheemaeker compared that to losses in previous years of up to €200 million.



Four Flemings in Queen Elisabeth singing competition

Six Belgian candidates, including four from Flanders, were among 83 entrants for the 2008 Queen Elisabeth Music Competition, which this year is devoted to singers. The six are sopranos Magali de Prelle, An De Ridder, Iris Luypaers and Britt Truys, tenor Stefan Cifolelli and baritone Sébastien Parotte. Of those chosen to go forward, the largest single national group comes from South Korea, with 15 candidates, followed by French (8) and Canadian (7). Other nationalities represented include Sri Lanka, Argentina and Uzbekistan. The competition begins on 8 May, with a jury that includes top international baritone José Van Dam.

Online

www.cmireb.be

Belgium tried to rent prison cells in Netherlands

Belgium is desperately short of prison cells and tried to rent about 300 from the Netherlands in Breda or Maastricht, it was revealed last week. But the Dutch could only suggest their prison boats, of which they have two for sale, a proposal which Belgium found unsatisfactory. The current Belgian prison population of 9,631 is being housed in facilities planned for a maximum capacity of 8,358, while the Netherlands has a surplus of spaces.



Not with a bang, but a whimper

DHL leaves Brussels Airport after being refused the right to expand its services

Brussels Airport



Alan Hope

Courier service DHL last week closed its international sorting office at Zaventem to move operations to Leipzig. The company's decision to move its headquarters was taken in October 2004 when the various governments (federal, Flemish and Brussels-Region) were unable to agree on DHL's plans for expansion – which would have brought between 6,000 and 10,000 new jobs, but at the cost of a doubling of night-flights to 34,000 a year. That plan exacerbated ongoing protests by resi-

dents of neighbouring municipalities over aircraft noise, which led to the courts and fines for the government.

The move, however, turned out to be less cataclysmic than once predicted. Some 1,200 of the 2,000 jobs at Zaventem will remain, with the airport continuing to act as the regional hub for Belgium, Luxembourg, northern France and the southern Netherlands. One union representative called the result "a social drama, but not a disaster." Some 580 employees took the severance package offered by

DHL, said to be generous, leaving another 380 to be laid off. All of DHL's 230 pilots remain in service but now based at Leipzig.

The number of nightly air movements, meanwhile, will fall from 60 to 20, with 10 of those being take-offs – a greater source of noise pollution for residents.

The issue of noise nuisance will not go away. During the recent interim government, when he was minister for mobility, prime minister Yves Leterme floated a proposal that all flights be scrapped between the hours of midnight and

4.00. That provoked a combative response from DHL spokesman Xavier de Buck: "When we see that even our slimmed-down activities are being criticised, we have to wonder if this country's leaders realise how necessary night-flights are. Belgium would like to position itself as a logistical centre but underestimates the importance of an express courier service in that picture. Belgian businesses need our activities to go on."

The effect on Brussels Airport, meanwhile, is being played down. DHL accounted for half of the airport's 784,000 tonnes of freight movements and half of the nine percent annual growth. A spokesperson for the airport, owned by the Australian company Macquarie Airports, said the move had been predicted well in advance, allowing for new traffic to be attracted to Zaventem. Among recent arrivals are Cargo B Airlines along with increased freight traffic by Ethiopian, Royal Jordanian and Saudi Arabian Airlines. In addition, more passenger flights by airlines like Brussels Airlines and Jet Airways are carrying freight as a means of offsetting their cheap passenger fares.

BUSINESS FLASH

ABX Logistics

ABX Logistics, the transport and parcels delivery company previously affiliated to the NMBS national railway company and now owned by the UK-based 3i venture capital group, is on the block. Several US, Japanese and Kuwaiti investment funds are believed to be interested, but analysts expect the company to be sold to the Swiss Kühne Nagel or the French Geodis transport group, which both seek to expand their activities in Europe. ABX is the world's 15th largest transport group and employs some 8,000 people in 100 countries.

City of Göteborg

The Swedish city of Göteborg has opened a representative office in Brussels. The second largest city in Sweden, it is seeking to develop its profile in the hope of attracting one of the future European agencies.

KBC Bank

Flanders' largest financial institution, which last week elected its first female board member, has acquired the Slovak Istrobanka for some €350 million. The move is part of the bank's strategy to develop its network in central and eastern Europe. With existing affiliates in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, KBC is said to be looking at opportunities in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Russia.

Colruyt

Halle-based discount retailing group Colruyt will partner in the development of a €26 million wind farm near Ath in Wallonia. Colruyt is already involved in wind energy through its stakes in similar farms in Halle and Ypres, as well as the offshore Eldepasco project near Zeebrugge.

Krebes and Juri-Desk

Krebes and Juri-Desk, two local debt collection firms, have been acquired by the Swedish Intrum Justitia company. The move will strengthen the Swedish credit management firm's position in western Europe.

Galeria Inno

The German Metro retailing group is putting Belgium's leading department store on the market. Galeria Inno, which operates some 15 stores in 12 Belgian cities, was previously part of the GIB group.

Fuchs

Fuchs & Associates, the Luxembourg-based private banking and wealth management company, is opening an office on Tervurenlaan in Brussels.

Thenergo

Thenergo, the Antwerp-based company specialised in renewable energies, plans to invest €28.5 million in a new biomass-fuelled power plant in Meer, north of Antwerp. The new 6.5 megawatt facility will contribute to warming the area's greenhouses, which produce most of the country's tomatoes and strawberries.

Telenet can keep football rights



Cable television company Telenet last week gave a guarded welcome to a decision by the Competition Council which scrapped a requirement for the company to share football broadcast rights with third parties.

The requirement dates from Telenet's takeover of Flemish Canal+ in November 2003, which included a package of football rights. The Competition Council approved the takeover on the condition that Telenet shared the Canal+ signal for football matches.

With the rights package up for renewal, Telenet approached the Council requesting the condition be dropped, which the Council agreed to do.

However Telenet was reluctant to celebrate. "An appeal [against the ruling] is still possible, and in the past rulings on appeal have often differed from the initial decision. We are curious to see what Belgacom will do," a spokesman said. Since 2003, Belgacom has become a major player in the digital television field, putting it at odds with Telenet on a number of issues, including possibly this one.

Suez reveals shortlist for Distrigas sale

French holding company Suez has narrowed down to three the list of candidates being considered for the purchase of Belgian gas producer Distrigas. Suez is obliged by EU rules to divest itself of Distrigas as a condition of its merger with Gaz de France (GdF). The shortlist is made up of EDF, the number one French electricity supplier, owned by the state; Italian concern ENI, which currently has no presence in Belgium; and E.ON from Germany, which recently announced plans to build a massive coal-fired power station in the Antwerp port area. SPE, Belgium's second-biggest electricity supplier, failed to make the shortlist, as did UK-based Centrica and the Dutch-Danish partnership Nuon-Dong. The final decision on the sale is expected to be announced in a matter of weeks.

De Rouck suffer big losses on low sales

Map publisher De Rouck suffered "a difficult year" in 2007, with net losses almost equivalent to total sales and far above forecasts made in February. Total turnover was €3.99 million, down from €5.5 million in 2006. Net loss stood at €3.39 million, five times more than 2006's €724,000, and some €390,000 higher than February's forecast. In the 20 months since the company was brought to the Alternext stock market, the share price has tumbled from over €9 to only €1.85.



MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS

True to form

A personal shopper who wants to change your life, as well as your look

Stéphanie Duval

As far as Gwen Kuyps is concerned, style isn't just about looking your best, it's also about feeling good about yourself. "My mother has always been a source of inspiration to me", she says. "I used to spend hours watching her choose an outfit and apply her make-up, even when she had nowhere in particular to go that day. 'You don't want to look good to please anyone else but yourself', she used to say. It's a wise lesson I've always remembered."

Kuyps runs her own business called Personal Change-s, which advises people on clothes and looks. She always felt strongly that she wanted to make a career out of helping people, so she studied physiotherapy. It was a decision she doesn't regret, even though she quickly found out she didn't want to be a physical therapist.

Instead, she started working for a modelling agency, where she was responsible for styling and make-up during photo shoots. "I guided models from A to Z and became a kind of counsel to them. I learned a lot during that period," she says. But when she had her first child, Kuyps decided to leave a world that had become too superficial to her liking.

A sabbatical offered her the opportunity to be at home for her two children and to support the career of her husband. During these years, she found time to study and read about colour theories, spirituality and psychology. She also took up a course in interior design.

When she was ready to return to work, Kuyps and her husband decided to join Pieter Porter's successful interior design business in Antwerp. Together, Porters and Kuyps designed a collection of accessories. "More and more of my clients started asking me for advice about colours and clothing. It felt natural, and that's how I rolled into personal styling", says Kuyps. "Before I knew it, I had turned my

passion into my profession, and it really felt as if I was helping people."

Personal Change-s is as much about feelings as it is about looks. "We work from the inside to the outside," explains Kuyps. Her clients are regular men and women who are often tired of following the latest trends or who don't have the budget to do so. Instead of maintaining the image they have nurtured for many years, they are ready to look for their true nature.

"We try to supply them with answers to very basic questions," says Kuyps. "Who they are, who they want to be, what their characteristics are." By listening to her clients, she works out their type of style and also studies facial features, build and body type. She then brings all these elements together to determine what kind of clothes they should wear, which colours suit wear and what style of haircut is most flattering.

Kuyps wants to go further than just directing people to a certain style. She wants them to understand who they are on the inside and to be able to match that picture to the right exterior. She proudly proclaims: "Clients leave my offices more confident about their own personality. Moreover, they are less tempted to copy styles that just aren't right for them."



Look good, feel good: Gwen Kuyps teaches you to please yourself

Online

www.personalchange-s.com

Second job becoming more common

Over 162,000 people in Flanders have two jobs, a figure more than twice as high as Wallonia, according to figures from the Crossroads Bank for Social Security (KSZ). Brussels accounts for about 20,000 of the total number.

In many cases, the figures concern people with full-time jobs who also run their own business on the side, but 95,000 people have two paid jobs. In some cases, second jobs are temporary work, with agency Randstad reporting that eight percent of their temp staff at any given time is working for a second wage. That phenomenon particularly concerns the restaurant and health-care sectors.

For many people, KSZ says, a second job is the perfect way to combine enterprise with security: the full-time job provides the necessary income, while the second job allows one to pursue different interests or a budding entrepreneur to develop a business without becoming immediately self-employed.

However for most people, money is the prime motive, with the diminution of purchasing power and a virtual freeze on salaries, driving them to take on a second job. There are some oddities tucked away in the figures: in the country as a whole, there are 207 people over the age of 70 with two jobs. And 806 double-earners are aged between 15 and 19 years.

Alan Hope



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EXHIBITION

The naked truth



The Fashion Museum honours Veronique Branquinho in an exhibition that combines fairy tales and fear



Veronique Branquinho (left), together with artist collective Blitz, puts together a dark show of dichotomies

Stéphanie Duval

Veronique Branquinho graduated from the Royal Academy of Antwerp in 1995. Two years later, she presented her first womenswear collection in Paris. In honour of the designer's 10th anniversary, Antwerp's ModeMuseum hosts *Moi, Veronique. Branquinho TOuTe NUe*.

The designer was asked to create her own universe inside the fashion museum, which she did in collaboration with her close friends from the Blitz artist collective, which means an author, an actor and an architect. ModeNatie, the collaboration of fashion institutes that is the foundation of Antwerp's fashion scene, also asked Branquinho to create her own version of the twice-yearly fashion glossy *A Magazine*.

The initiatives offer an exclu-

sive insight into Branquinho both as a designer and as a unique individual. "The exhibition's title can be interpreted in two ways," she says. "*Tot Nu* [until now] means it is a retrospective, while *Toute Nue* [totally naked] means it is a way of exposing myself to the public – like I do with every collection I create."

The designer is no fan of in-depth analysis or lengthy interviews. Oscar van den Boogaard, an author with the Blitz collective, says that "Veronique's clothes are her language. She prefers to let someone else do the actual talking." So that's exactly what van den Boogaard did. He penned the introduction to *A Magazine* and invented a fairy tale that is incorporated into the exhibition. It's about a countess getting lost in the woods and refers to Branquinho's first collection.

That collection was inspired by the image of a girl in a white dress running through a dark forest – a metaphor for the duality in Branquinho's work, which is clearly present throughout the retrospective. The initial space is as close to a real forest as is possible in a museum. Tall birches fill the room, while pebbles crack under your feet. A dozen or so shoes from the designer's past 20 collections hang from the ceiling. One pair is dancing on a glass platform, an obvious reference to the fairy tales which have inspired her.

This fascination with fairy tales translates into a fondness for presenting the ordinary in an eccentric way. *A Magazine* is full of quirky drawings and poems by Tim Burton, and Branquinho has expressed her admiration of David Lynch on numerous occasions: "In

his films, you can discover several dimensions; there's room for interpretation." She feels the same way about her clothes, which she leaves to her clients to interpret, rather than offer a ready explanation.

You'll find a hefty dose of Lynch in *TOuTe NUe*: several rooms are hidden behind red velvet curtains: one of Branquinho's trademarks inspired by her favourite TV series, *Twin Peaks*. In one of them, a vintage jukebox plays her favourite songs, and the titles are replaced with words from the designer, expressing the feelings she associates with each one. It's a personal, intimate installation.

A corridor is lined with multiple screens showing movie fragments starring lead actresses who have inspired Branquinho. Dubbed "All of them witches", black-and-white images of "dangerous" women are

paired with colourful clips of those more pure or fragile. Corinne Clery in *Histoire d'O*, for instance, appears next to Patti D'Arbanville in *Bilitis*. The mother-whore complex inherent in Branquinho's work comes shining through.

"When we started brainstorming for the exhibition, we started think: 'Who is this woman, and how can we illustrate her personality?'" says van den Boogaard. Branquinho's duality was the main source of inspiration for the décor, as the exhibition evolves from dark into light. A nearly black room at the beginning presents the darker designs, while the walk through Branquinho's universe ends in several lighter rooms. "She is diabolic and sugary sweet at the same time, and we wanted to represent this contrast clearly," explains van den Boogaard.

It's easy to see *TOuTe NUe* as a chronological retrospective, as it starts by showing Branquinho's first collection and finishes with her most recent, *Complice*. But van den Boogaard is quick to point out that the final room unhinges that theory: *Venus of the Rags*, Arte Povera artist Michelangelo Pistoletto's 1960s installation features a copy of a classical Venus sculpture in front of a giant mound of laundry. "It goes to show that the creative process is endless, since every season all is wiped clean again," says van den Boogaard.

It might also be Branquinho's way of emphasising that she doesn't want *TOuTe NUe* to feel like an end-of-career show. At 34, she prefers to look at this moment as the end of a chapter. "But I can't wait to start a new one," she says.

Until 17 August, ModeMuseum, Nationalestraat 28, Antwerp, 03.470.27.70

Online:
www.momu.be

Jan Fabre shows at the Louvre

The Flemish artist is the first living Belgian to exhibit at the Paris museum



The party of the mystic lamb: Jan Fabre's *Sanguis Sum*

Jan Fabre will make history this month – twice. First, as the only living Belgian to show at the Louvre, Europe's most prestigious art institution. Second, and perhaps even more notable, he's the first living artist ever to have his own show within the Louvre's permanent collection.

Fabre's *L'Ange de la métamorphose* (*The Angel of the Metamorphosis*) is the third in the museum's Counterpoint series, which challenges contemporary artists to pair their own work with pieces from the museum's permanent collection, creating a dialogue between the past and present. Fabre is familiar with this approach, which the Louvre refers to as a "mental drama",

having created a similar exhibition at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp, his hometown, two years ago. The first two in the Counterpoint series were group shows.

Fabre has chosen to set up his exhibition in the galleries devoted to the Flemish, Dutch and German masters, and the Louvre has given him no less than 40 rooms to manipulate. "I feel like a little boy in a big playground," he told *De Morgen*. He's incorporating some of the work from his Antwerp show, while also creating whole new installations for Paris.

The relationships between the living and the dead are prominent in *Angel*: in "I Let Myself Drain", a wax figure of Fabre dripping

blood stands before a self portrait of Anthony Van Dyck, a confession of insignificance compared to the great masters, something Fabre has always talked about. "Sanguis Sum", meanwhile, is a pair of gold-plated lambs sporting party hats. A direct reference to the Van Eyck brothers' "Adoration of the Mystic Lamb", paired with religious art depicting sacrifice, it questions the identity – or perhaps need – of a saviour appropriate for the modern world.

The Angel of the Metamorphosis runs at the Louvre from 11 April to 7 July. Fabre, ever the multi-disciplinarian, presents a live performance on 22 April and will be interviewed onstage on 25 April.

Lisa Bradshaw

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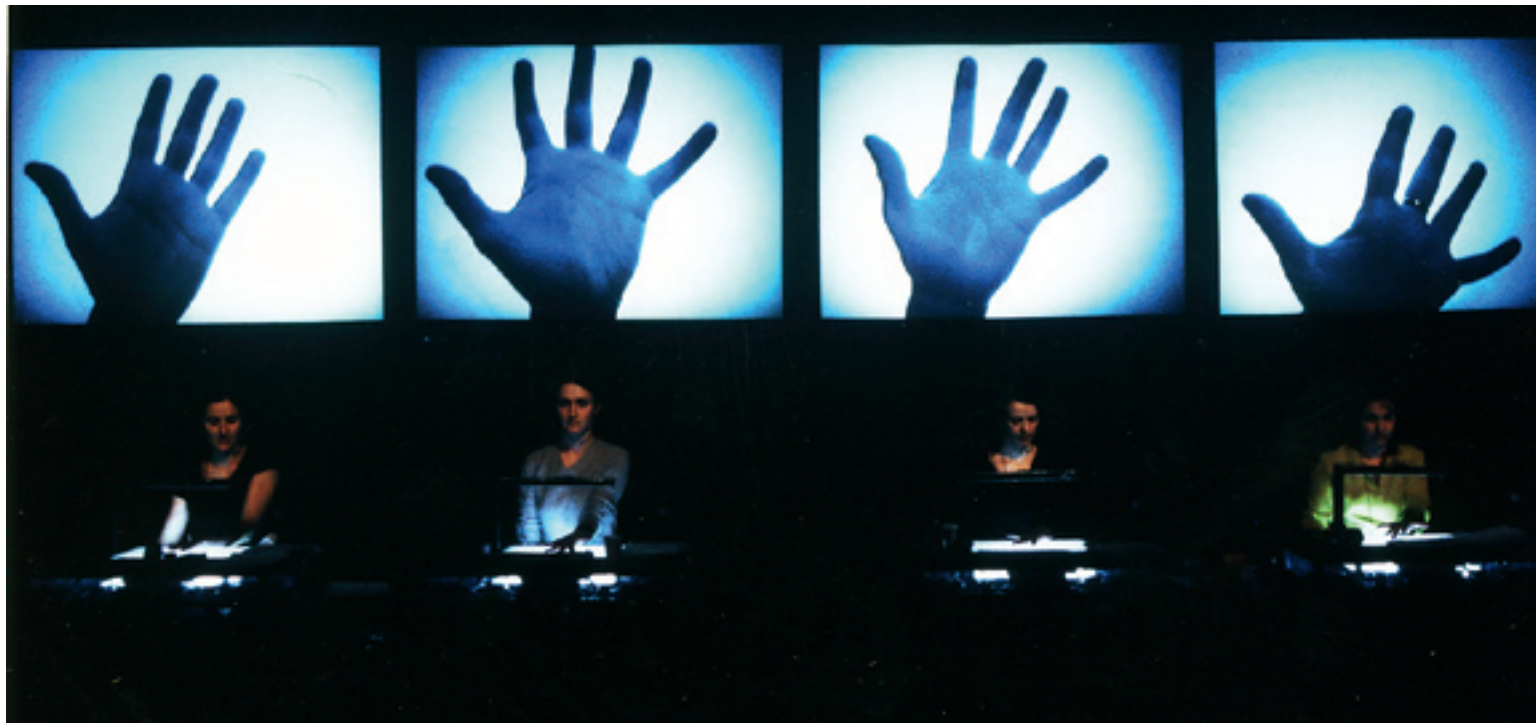
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Volvo. for life



Good musical conduct

The Ars Musica festival injects a little cool into contemporary classical



Woman and machine: a completely updated version of Georges Aperghis' *Machinations* makes its Belgian premiere at Ars Musica

Alan Hope

“To put musical creation, innovation and surprise back at the centre of the well-spring of invention”, says Laurent Langlois, the incoming director of Ars Musica. It’s a beautiful way to describe the mission of the annual festival, which brings together traditional concert forms and new structures, such as music’s relationship to dance, video and other visual arts.

Beginning on 8 April, venues across Brussels (plus Bruges and Liège) host the festival for more than two weeks. Ars Musica was founded in 1989 by three of the country’s major institutions: the Belgian National Orchestra, the Liège Philharmonic and De Munt opera. The idea was not only to create a festival for contemporary music but to provide a platform for new talent from Belgium and Europe. The festival receives backing from both the French and Flemish Communities.

The festival includes a number of commissions and new works, with compositions by artists from home and abroad. The National Orchestra under Patrick Davin, for instance, will perform a concert version of **Kris Defoort**’s opera *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, on 11 April in Brussels and on 12 April in Bruges.

Defoort, the brother of saxophonist and composer Bart Defoort, studied ancient music and flute at Antwerp Conservatory, before moving on to Liège to study contemporary music and jazz. Since his first recording with the quintet Diva Smiles in 1986, he has performed, recorded and composed, collaborating with Vincent Herring and Fabrizio Cassol. He carried on studying in New York and has been working with his own ensemble Dreamtime since 1997. He wrote his first opera, *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*,

based on the novel by Roddy Doyle, in 2001.

The *Sleeping Beauties* concert will be broadcast live on RTBF Musiq3, and De Munt will premiere the full opera next year. Defoort himself will play piano in a jam session with three electric guitarists as part of Ars Musica’s “café” series.

Composer **Bart Vanhecke**, who teaches flute in the music academies of Tervuren, Hoeilaart and Zaventem, wrote the piano quintet *Que l’aube apporte la Lumière*

for the Danel Quartet, which will perform it in Brussels on 21 April. Vanhecke, 34, attended the Royal Conservatory of Brussels before studying composition with André Laporte in Brussels and with Franco Donatoni in Siena, Italy. His work was featured in the book-CD project *Flemish Piano Music since 1950*.

Ingrid Drese, on the other hand, began by studying piano and chamber music, but later moved on to a new course in electro-acoustic music at the Royal

Conservatory, where she won the school’s first prize. Since then she has taken part in several international exchanges with France and Canada, as well as winning prizes, including one from the Royal Academy in Belgium, where she taught piano. Her last work was *Voix de l’Aurore*, which one reviewer described as “sharing with the kaleidoscope its pointillism and diversity of colours”. Drese appears at Ars Musica as a guest of Renaud De Putter in Brussels on 23 April, presenting her new piece *Plis de la nuit*.

And just in case you weren’t quite sure what electro-acoustic music is, there’s a guided tour through 50 years of the genre on 24 April in Brussels’ Kaaithater, with José Manuel Berenguer, Carmen Pardo and the Orquestra del Caos from Barcelona, performing music from Edgar Varèse and Stockhausen to Annette Vande Gorne (Drese’s teacher) and Leo Kopper.

In addition to new works, the festival presents a wealth of Belgian premiers. *Machinations* by Greek-born **Georges Aperghis** was originally created in 2000, but has since been thoroughly reworked. The piece has four women, connected to computers, singing while seated at tables. They manipulate various objects, while a lecture on robotics is broadcast. The performance takes place in Brussels on 22 April.

Michael Levinas studied at the Paris Conservatory under Messiaen and began a career as concert pianist, winning the Prix de Rome in 1975. His compositions have featured the breathing of soloists and sounds from a building site. His 2007 quartet *Se briser* represents, he says, “the slow process of evolution from homophony to breakdown”. See it performed by Ensemble Musiques Nouvelles at Brussels’ Marni Theatre on 15 April.

Percussions Claviers de Lyon, an ensemble of keyboard percussionists (marimbas, xylophone, glockenspiel, vibraphone) who never fail to amaze with the shape-shifting of their sound, perform **Thierry De Mey**’s *April Suite* in Brussels. De Mey is a Belgian composer and filmmaker, who has worked with choreographers like Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Wim Vandekeybus, as well as his own sister Michèle Anne. The work, which features violinist Jérémie Siot, premieres in Valence on 3 April and is performed in Brussels on 25 April.

This year’s festival will also feature an homage to **Fausto Romitelli**, who died in 2004 at only 41 years of age. He was at the height of a brilliant career, which had seen him featured at Ars Musica seven times. Romitelli, a graduate of the electronic music hothouse Ircam in Paris, was, unlike his more sedate jazz-influenced contemporaries, heavily influenced by psychedelic



The festival honours the late composer Fausto Romitelli on opening night

rock and hallucinatory drugs. This is delightfully reflected in some of his titles: *Acid Dreams* and *Spanish Queens*, *Professor Bad Trip*, *Blood on the Floor*.

The Flemish Radio Orchestra will perform Romitelli’s *Audio-drome* at Flagey in Brussels on opening night. In separate performances on the same night are Romitelli’s video-opera *An Index of Metals* by the Ictus ensemble, conducted by George-Elie Octors, and a double-portrait of composers Raphaël Cendo and Mauro Lanza, both students of Romitelli, by Belgian experimental music ensemble Champ d’Action.

Ostend-born cellist **Arne Deforce** is a member of that ensemble but serves as conductor for the double-portrait. He has a preference for what he calls “unplayable works” by the likes of Iannis Xenakis and John Cage. Deforce has had numerous festival appearances premiering new works, such as the cello concerto by Jonathan Harvey with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra in 2005.

Online
www.arsmusica.be



Morning light: a premiere for Flemish composer Bart Vanhecke’s *Que l’aube apporte la Lumière*

Abandoned

An urban explorer captures on film the beauty of the derelict

Photos: Henk van Rensbergen



In limbo: one of Henk van Rensbergen's most-recognised photographs is this one of Castle Mesen in Lede, which is beyond repair but which the town's municipality is reluctant to demolish

Monique Philips

“Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints” is the motto of the Sierra Club, a leading environmental organisation. They’re talking about nature, but there is another group that applies this sentiment to an altogether different type of

habitat in Flanders – abandoned spaces.

Flanders is full of churches, factories and former state-owned institutions that have been empty for years and offer unending possibilities for intrepid explorers (who are sometimes illegal or, at the very least, unwelcome). One

Flemish man, though, has made it his mission to find and record this vast realm.

Henk van Rensbergen pinpoints the start of his fascination at age 10. He and a friend spotted a derelict villa on top of a dune in Oostduinkerke on the Flemish coast. “I remember it so vividly,” he says.

“The interior was mouldy, but intact. There were alarm clocks, and I found a dusty packet of Superlevure [yeast]. We tiptoed in – and ran out screaming when we encountered other kids, playing in there, too.”

But messing around with his pals in abandoned sites isn’t what

interests van Rensbergen. In fact, rather than grabbing onto an equally scared buddy, he prefers to go alone. “When you take somebody along, you spend more time negotiating about where to go next than effectively exploring,” says the photographer and pilot. “And by going alone and often being under



Van Rensbergen followed the 2002 closure and ensuing deterioration of the century-old Anderlues coke factory in Hainaut province

some pressure, I understand a building better and can take those particular pictures that somehow reflect the site's essence."

Van Rensbergen maintains an abandoned places website that gets 600 hits a day. He's a scholar and a hero to urban explorers across the world. It's no coincidence that the preface of his photo book, *Abandoned Places*, which he published last year, is penned by Dixie Dansercoer, notorious Pole explorer and close friend. It's the call of the unknown that puts a spell on them both.

With a lopsided smile, van Rensbergen admits that his urge to enter abandoned places is uncontrollable. "I get so curious about what it will look like inside. I simply have to go in. Immediately. But on holiday, for instance, I can't leave my wife and kids waiting in the car for hours. Even so, it hurts to leave a place unexplored."

Moreover, for the best results, he needs to go back more than once. He explains, for instance, his first set of photos of the gigantic former coal wash complex Triage-Lavoire de Binches, an Escher-like labyrinth of stairs and corridors. They inexplicably all just looked like snapshots, however hard he tried. "It wasn't until after several visits, during which I just sat, watched and listened, that the building seemed to come alive and allowed me in," the 39-year-old explains. "That's when I saw its calmer elements and could keep the chaos in check: that one staircase, that one ladder. It's only after looking at a place from different angles that you discover its possibilities. You need that insight before you can show its soul: frightening, charming, mysterious or whatever."

Though this solitude is one of the positives of going in alone, a recent accident has rendered van Rensbergen more careful. "I dislocated my knee, which could have happened coming out of the bath, as well, but it didn't. And so I found myself alone in an empty factory. It does make you think about falling into a pit, unable to reach your mobile."



Van Rensbergen captures the essence of abandoned places all over the world: a former asylum in the United States

The spots

Driving through Flanders, you can easily spot empty lots. But extensive complexes attract van Rensbergen more than a singular slum, as do recently vacated dwellings more than tagged and vandalised ruins. "But everything has its charm."

Well, almost everything. The former Lemaire Institute for TB patients on the Tombeek hill in Overijse is more haunted than charming. Even in broad daylight, the surrounding pine trees seal you off effectively from the rest of the world. Urban explorers Europe-wide know about the place and speak about it with some unease. When van Rensbergen ventured there a couple of times at night to

experiment with full moon or flash exposures, the unease crept up on him, too. "My back felt terribly exposed."

But outdoor spaces aren't nearly as frightening to this journalist (and fellow urban explorer) as interiors. The extensive cellars of Tour and Taxis in Brussels, which van Rensbergen at one point crossed in pitch dark, are the scariest empty spaces to me. And no way would I have entered the cellars of the Sint-Elisabeth clinic in Ukkel, however photogenic the slabs in the morgue are rumoured to be.

The shots

The photo of Castle Mesen is a van Rensbergen classic. Where now the park surrounding

this former school for the French-speaking elite in East Flanders is open to the public, 15 years ago it was still very much an enchanted garden. "I walked along the high enclosing wall on a Sunday morning, unable to scale it, and finally just rang the bell of an adjoining house. Eventually, the lady who owned the house reluctantly agreed: 'Okay, you can climb over my garden wall. It was just awesome.'"

For the lucky few who've slipped over garden walls, Castle Mesen is a wonder to behold. "There it was," remembers van Rensbergen. "Like a huge, wrecked ship washed up on a beach." The top of one of its broad staircases was totally overgrown with big ferns.

It would be impossible to remake that same picture now, as Castle Mesen has been degraded by its many visitors – wedding photographers and ghost hunters alike. The castle was protected by law in 1979, but inaccuracies in legal procedures finally left it defenceless. Recently, the square-built complex was declared beyond repair. In the church, the floor is covered by thick layers of pigeon poo. The stained-glass windows remain intact, but its mansard roof is barely hanging on.

The thieves

To keep antique-robbers away, van Rensbergen has decided to only show certain buildings on his website after they've been demolished. But he doesn't mind other people exploring, especially as he considers himself to be partly responsible by putting his discove-

ries on the internet. He believes strongly in that motto that urban explorers share with the Sierra Club. "When you take some object from a wall or a room, you're taking away someone else's chance of seeing it in its original state. Just leave it as it is."

To him the aesthetics of abandoned spaces have become much more appreciated over the last few years. Some viewers of his work are touched by nostalgia while others are horrified by the destruction. Van Rensbergen doesn't see the decline as a nightmare – even when he, as a pilot, climbed into the charred remains of an airplane parked next to the airfield on Curaçao.

"It didn't shock me; I was enchanted by its beauty and peacefulness," he says. "That plane had flown for hours and hours, come hail or high water, through the heat and cold, and finally found its resting place. Planes are usually cut up or, as in this case, used for fire drills. But there it still is, standing tall, wings and engines proud, chin up, watching other planes land. Even gutted, it still serves some purpose."

In fact, van Rensbergen did live through the disastrous demise of his former employer, the Belgian airline Sabena, in 2001. Suddenly, on a Friday evening, its doors were literally sealed off. Now we know why calendars in busted factories remain stuck on a particular day.

Next week: why so many abandoned places in Belgium?

Online
www.abandoned-places.com



Henk van Rensbergen in another tight spot

The website

Henk van Rensbergen's English website www.abandoned-places.com is about 10 years old but hasn't lost any of its attraction to its daily 600 mainly non-Flemish visitors. Click on any of the 55 items on the photo wheels and you'll be able to appreciate his magnificent shots within their various contexts, read the accompanying texts and follow in his footsteps as he extensively explores a site.

Although his is certainly not the only website on the subject, no other photographer manages to capture the tangible atmosphere of each abandoned factory, hospital, or castle so beautifully.

Classical & new music

Brussels

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
APR 6 11.00 Queen Elisabeth College of Music Prizewinners: Anne-Fleur Inizan, mezzo; Philippe Riga, piano: Ravel, Mozart, Franck, Offenbach; Soumaya Hallak, soprano; Philippe Riga, piano: Debussy; Léonid Smorguner, violin: Bartok, Paganini; Lisa Wastiau, piano: Beethoven
APR 9 20.00 Il Fondamento and Vlaams Radio Koor, conducted by Paul Dombrecht: Zelenka's Miserere, De Profundis and Requiem

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
APR 8 19.30 Ars Musica opening evening: Vlaams Radio Orkest, conducted by Oswald Sallaberger: Fausto Romitelli's Audiodrome 2003. 20.30 Champ d'Action, conducted by Arne Deforce: Cendo, Lanza. 22.30 Ictus, conducted by Georges-Elie Octors: music by Romitelli, texts by Kenka Lèkovich

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.507.82.00
APR 8-10 20.00 Beeldconcert: multidisciplinary project exploring image and sound
APR 10 20.00 Freiburger Barockorchester, conducted by Petra Müllejans, with Bernarda Fink, mezzo: Bach

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
APR 9 20.00 Imogen Cooper, piano: Schubert sonatas, 4 Impromptus

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02
APR 4 20.00 Abdul Rahman El Bacha, piano: Rachmaninov, Ravel, Albeniz, Stravinsky

Ghent

De Bijloke
Jozef Kluykensstraat 2, 09.269.92.92
APR 10 20.00 Lorenzo Ghielmi, harpsichord; Vittorio Ghielmi, viola da gamba; Luca Pianza, theorbo: Forquera y de Visée

Hoeilaart

Maison de la Musique
Edgar Sohiestraat 41; 02.657.96.52
Until MAY 8 Concert series by soloists from the Queen Elisabeth College of Music

Opera

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera
Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be
Until APR 13 19.30 Dialogues des Carmélites by Poulenc, conducted by Jean-Claude Casadesus, staged by Robert Carsen

Jazz & blues

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
APR 5 20.00 Jools Holland & his Rhythm & Blues Orchestra
APR 6 20.00 John Scofield Trio

Archiduc

Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52
APR 5 17.00 Les Archiducks
APR 6 17.00 Alexi Tuomarila Quartet

Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50, www.beursschouwburg.be
APR 2 20.30 Sabin Todorv Trio
APR 5 20.30 Dizzy Mandjeku and Sékou Bembeya Diabaté

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
APR 3 20.30 Jazz Station Big Band
APR 4 20.30 Nu:Be Nights
APR 5 18.00 AJA
APR 9 20.30 Fred Delplancq Quartet
APR 10 20.30 Tribute to Paolo Radoni: Guitar Big Band, Guitar Trio, Christine Schaller & friends, Pirlly Zurstrassen & Lichel Pieters, Chrystel Wautier & friend

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, www.soundsjazzclub.be
Concerts at 22.00:
APR 2 Caribe Con K, Caribbean music
APR 3-4 Michael Blass & Tony Lakatos Quartet
APR 5 EMTB Quartet
APR 7 Master Session
APR 8 Antonio Segura Group
APR 9 Chamaquiando, salsa
APR 10 21.00 The Singers Night

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
APR 10 12.30 Didier François + Gilles Chabenat

Uccle Cultural Centre

Rodestraat 47; 02.374.64.84
APR 3 20.30 Renaud Patigny and his Blue Devils, boogie woogie

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
APR 10 20.00 Spider Monkey Strings with Taylor Ho Bynum, trumpet

Ghent

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01
APR 9 20.00 John Scofield Trio

Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.28
APR 8 20.00 Mike Reed's Loose Assembly/Rempis Percussion Quartet/ Sabin Todorov Trio

Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24
APR 3 20.00 Down
APR 5 22.00 Zeker Weten
APR 8 20.00 Bettye Lavette

Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50, www.beursschouwburg.be
APR 4 20.30 The Rhonda Smith Karma II Band

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89
APR 3 23.00 Mister Slip Kangourou (student party)
APR 10 23.00 I Know What You Did Last Thursday (student party)

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Concerts at 20.00:
APR 5 Asa
APR 8 Calvin Harris
APR 9 The Bellrays + The Experimental Tropic Blues Band. A Silver Mt Zion
APR 10 Zoot Woman. A Fine Frenzy. One Night Only

Phoolan Bar

Luxemburgstraat 43; www.phoolan.be
APR 3 18.00 Petra Jordan

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34
APR 10 21.30 Be Your Own Pet

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07
Doors open at 19.30:
APR 3 20.30 Geoff Berner + Kaizers Orchestra
APR 5 20.30 De Portables + This Will Destroy You
APR 9-12 Emergenza Festival (band contest)

Antwerp

Lotto Arena
Schijnpootweg 119; 0900.26.060
APR 4 20.00 Regi in the Mix
APR 5 20.00 Kelly Clarkson

Leuven

Het Depot
Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
APR 10 20.00 Monza + Rock Am Ring

Ostend

Ostend Kursaal (Casino)
Monacoplein; 070.22.56.00, www.sherpa.be
APR 10 20.00 Arno

World, folk

Brussels

Beursschouwburg
Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50, www.beursschouwburg.be
APR 3 20.30 Kaizers Orchestra (tickets from www.vkconcerts.be)
APR 10 20.30 Diasporasounds

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
APR 2 20.00 Gilberto Gil (Brazil)
APR 3 20.00 James Taylor (US)

Maison du Peuple

Sint-Gillisvoorplein 37-39; www.muziekpublieque.be
APR 4 20.00 Brussels Folk Festival Queimada: Du vrai sirop sur vos tartines + La Machine a contrabanda, folk ball

Stekerlapatte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81, www.stekerlapatte.be
APR 3 21.30 ROM
APR 5 21.30 Reynald
APR 10 21.30 Silent film concert: Le Cameraman by Buster Keaton (US 1928) with music by La Fabrique Illuminé

Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00, www.muziekpublieque.be
APR 8 12.30 Decombel/Decker

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
APR 2 20.00 Yannick Noah

Antwerp

Zuiderpershuis
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.zuiderpershuis.be
Concerts at 20.30:
APR 3 Zedashe, polyphony (Georgia)
APR 4 Tito Paris (Cape Verde)
APR 5 Akiko Fuji, geisha music (Japan)
APR 10 Mugiyoni Kasido & Mugi Dance 'Shinto's Letter' (Indonesia)

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90
APR 4 20.30 Mayra Andrade (Cape Verde)

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02
APR 5 20.00 Mayre Andrade (Cape Verde)

Ghent

De Bijloke
Jozef Kluykensstraat 2, 09.269.92.92
APR 9 20.00 Cantor Moshe Habousha, Jewish music influenced by Islamic countries

Dance

Brussels

Kaaithheater
Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59
APR 3-5 20.30 Damaged Goods and par b.leux in Forgeries, Love and Other Matters, choreographed and performed by Meg Stuart and Benoît Lachambre

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
Until APR 13 Béjart Ballet Lausanne in Soirée Stravinsky

Wolubilis

Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30
APR 8-9 20.30 Dressed to Kill...Killed to Dress, dance and theatre performance by Robyn Orlin

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
APR 9-12 Bouge B: four days of performances by young artists in a programme mixing dance, theatre, spoken word and comedy

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 077.37.38.39
Until APR 6 Béjart Ballet Lausanne in Zarathoustra

Troubleyntheater

Pastorijstraat 23; 03.248.28.28
APR 9-12 20.00 Quando l'Uomo principale è una Donna, dance solo choreographed by Jan Fabre, performed by Sung-Im Her

Vlaamse Opera

Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02
Until APR 6 20.00 Stravinsky Evening: Royal Ballet of Flanders with the Vlaams Radio Orchestra and Choir, conducted by Benjamin Pope

Theatre

Brussels

Comédie Claude Volter
Gebroeders Legrainlaan 98; 02.762.09.63
APR 8-26 20.30 Accent Productions in 'The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?' by Edward Albee (in English)

KVS Box

Arduinkaai 9; 02.210.11.12, www.kvs.be
APR 5-19 20.30 Transquiquennal in 'In het bos' by Oriza Hirata (in Dutch and French with English surtitles)

Kaaithheaterstudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59
APR 3-5 20.30 Tristero in 'Iemand van ons' (in Dutch)

The Warehouse Studio Theatre

Waelhemstraat 69a; 0487.38.06.82; www.irishtheatregroup.com
APR 10-19 20.00 Max Dix, Zero to Six, written and staged by Vincent Eaton (in English)

Bruges

De Werf
Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29
APR 4-12 20.30 Compagnie Cecilia in Soeur Sourire (in Dutch)

Leuven

30CC Schouwburg
Bondgenotenlaan 21; 016.20.30.20
APR 10 20.30 De Roovers in 'Le Dindon' by Georges Feydeau (in Dutch)

Visual arts

Brussels

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

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 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 Rúrí
Until MAY 11 Paul Klee: Theater here, there and everywhere, monographic exhibition on the Berne-based artist (1879-1940)
Until MAY 18 Treasures Old and New from Wallonia: a Curious Land, 12th to 16th-century paintings, sculpture, tapestries and religious objects by Joachim Patinir, Henri Met de Blès, Robert Campin, Jacques Du Broeucq and many others
Until MAY 18 Jan Fabre: Borrowed time, photographs of work by the infamous Flemish artist

Centre de la Culture Judéo-Marocaine

Vander Elstplein 19; 02.343.86.30
Until MAY 15 Freud au Maroc: Regards sur l'identité, the Dahan-Hirsch collection of art, books and objects illustrating Jewish culture in Morocco

Get your tickets now for...



Girls in Hawaii

30 May 30, 20.00, Ancienne Belgique, 110 Anspachlaan, Brussels. Tickets from 02.548.24.24 or www.abconcerts.be

This Belgian indy band of young lads with its ironic name is promoting its second album, *Plan Your Escape*, which one local critic calls “as faithful as your best friend”. That it is. Girls in Hawaii may not be changing the face of music as we know it, but they offer a pitch-perfect blend of acoustic guitar, layered harmonies and pure pop vocals that keeps crowds hopping up and down during energy-laden live shows. Adding harp and zither to the standard rock instrumentals gives them a creative edge, and occasional gritty electronics in the vocals make songs like “This Farm Will End Up in Fire”, the current hit single, more beautifully complicated than they seem.

Children's Museum

Burgemeesterstraat 15; 02.640.01.07
Long term show: Rouge, interactive exhibition on the theme of red

Costume and Lace Museum

Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50
Until MAY 27 Weefsels van het absolute, textiles by outsider artists Heide De Bruyne, Fabienne Closson, Hilde D'Hondt and others
Until DEC 30 Van new look tot Expo 58, fashion from the time of Belgium's 1958 World's Fair, with evening gowns, wedding and cocktail dresses, ladies' suits, coats and accessories

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 Architectuurmuseum

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

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25
Until APR 20 Lumen, works by Yves Beaumont, Iris Bouwmeester, Esther Brugginck and Pablo Garcia-Rubio, among others

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60
Until APR 13 Flower Power, vases by 26 Flemish designers

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

Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80, www.fondationpourelarchitecture.be
Until APR 20 Architectuur-landschappen, 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 MAY 4 Et autres mouvements du temps, paintings by Aurélie Thiolat and Translations, 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

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

La Cambre Architecture

Flageyplein 19; 02.640.96.96
Until MAY 17 Corps de Ville, photography and architecture biennial with works by 20 Belgian and French photographers

La Fonderie - Brussels Museum of Work and Industry

Ransfortstraat 27; 02.410.99.50

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

Le Botanique

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

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

René Magritte Museum

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

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
Until NOV 30 Le Pinceau au fusil (A Paintbrush in the Barrel), World War One paintings, drawings and etchings by soldiers

Royal Library

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

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

Stadhuys

Grote Markt; 02.279.43.50
Until MAY 18 Slovenian Painting after 1945

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49
Until MAY 12 It's Our History!, multi-media 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

Rue Gratès 7; 02.662.16.99
Until APR 27 Expo 58, nostalgies, photos by Léon Jacques and Fernand Hellinckx

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 MAY 25 Inside Outside, landscape architecture by Petra Blaisse

Fifty-One Fine Art Photography

Zirkstraat 20; 03.289.84.58
Until MAY 3 USA², photographs by Peter Granser and Kate Schermerhorn

Fotomuseum

Walse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00, www.fotomuseum.be

Until JUNE 8 Patrick De Spiegelaere, retrospective of the late Flemish photographer (1961-2007)
Until JUNE 8 Provisoria, mixed-media collages by Flemish artist Ria Verhaeghe
Until JUNE 8 Face On, interactive portrait installation

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten/Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09
Until JUNE 15 Jan Cox: Living One's Art, paintings by the 20th century Flemish artist
Until JUNE 29 Willem Elsschots Kaas: een beeldroman, display of the graphic novel by Dick Matena of the Flemish author's popular book

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

Bruges

Arentshuis

Dijver 16
Until AUG 3 Three Bruges artists. Legillon, Verbrugge and Ledoulx, 18th and 19th-century drawings

De Bond

Buiten Smedenvest 1; 050.44.30.48
Until MAY 5 Indonésio, works by Emilio López-Menchero.

Groeningemuseum

Dijver 12; 050.44.87.43
Until MAY 12 The Lively Baroque: Bozzetti from Austria, painted sketches and models for large-scale paintings

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

Kortrijksesteenweg 1023; 09.242.88.22
Until APR 27 Si le monde..., graphic works by Robert Grosloot

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

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03
APR 5-JULY 6 Guillaume Bijl, major retrospective
APR 4-JUNE 29 Kunst Nu: Wilfredo Prieto, installation by the Cuban artist

Grimbergen

Strombeek-Bever Cultural Centre

Gemeenteplein; 02.263.03.43
Until MAY 8 How to Paint a Horse, paintings by Antwerp artist Walter Swennen (see also Mechelen)

Hasselt

Modemuseum

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21
Until AUG 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
Until APR 27 10th International Triennial of Political Posters

Don't miss this week



Soni E Studios

Imogen Cooper

deSingel, 25 Desguinlei, Antwerp, April 9, 20.00, tel 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be.

The recent announcement that Alfred Brendel was to end his concert career has upset more than a few lovers of Schubert's piano music, which Brendel did much to bring to the public's attention and of which he is probably the finest interpreter alive. Luckily, a handful of younger musicians, including this brilliant British pianist who was one of his students, seem determined to keep his flame alive. Like her mentor, Cooper specialises in Schubert's wistful and shimmering sound world, and she's just started a series of tours devoted to him. This concert will present the second book of *Impromptus*, sandwiched between two sonatas: the partly completed *Relique* from 1925 and the extraordinary, penultimate Sonata in A, D 959.

Knokke

Absolute Art Gallery

Kustlaan 285; 050.62.22.40
Until 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

Mechelen

De Garage

Onder den Toren 12; 015.29.40.00
Until MAY 11 How to Paint a Horse, paintings by Antwerp artist Walter Swennen (see also Grimbergen)

Waregem

BE-PART

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

Ypres

Municipal Museum

Ieperleestraat 31; 057.21.83.00
Until JUNE 1 Twilight of the Gods over Ypres, the town pictured by photographers Léontine, Maurice and Robert Antony (1893-1930)

Festivals & special events

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

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

Brussels

Brussels Tango Festival: Argentinian tango across the city. Balls, shows, concerts and workshops
APR 3-7 at venues and public spaces across the city, including Louizalaan and Art Deco swimming pool Bains
www.brusselstangofestival.be.

Iceland on the Edge:

Icelandic cultural festival with exhibitions, concerts, theatre, dance and film
Until JUNE 15 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, www.bozar.be

iMAGIEnaire:

Magic and poetry with Carlos Vaquera and Gil
APR 4-20 at Théâtre des 2 Gares, Tweestationsstraat 124b
0475.62.40.35, www.cafetheatredes2gares.be

Maelström Festival #2:

Festival of literary, musical and visual events entitled In Gold We Trust? ou des amériques invisibles... Featuring American beat generation performer Anne Waldman
APR 4-5 at Espace Senghor, Waversesteenweg 366
02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be

Plaats voor de lente:

Spring festival of street and circus arts
Until APR 5 in the Marollen, Hooikai and Warendepark
02.279.64.14, www.brupass.be

Roma Integration in Europe:

Launch of exhibition Chachipe and conference on Roma migration
APR 3 at Espace Senghor, Waversesteenweg 366
02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be

Salon des Antiquaires:

antique fair
APR 7-12 at Woluwe Shopping Centre, Woluwelaan
02.377.91.90

Antwerp

Cirque du Soleil in Delirium:

Multimedia show by the world-renowned Canadian circus
APR 5-6 20.30 at Sportpaleis, Schijnpoortweg 119, 0900.26.060, www.proximusgoformusic.be

Ghent

Littéraire Lente in Gent: Literary festival with exhibitions, readings and children's activities, which opens with Zogezegd in Gent, an evening of literature and debate
APR 4-12 at Vooruite and Caermersklooster
09.269.84.95, www.boek.be

Leuven

Taste Festival: Festival for young playwrights, choreographers and performers
APR 7-10 at STUK, Naamsestraat 96
www.stuk.be

MY FLANDERS

Lene Kemp

Lene Kemp is the editor-in-chief of the Flemish women's magazine *Feeling*. She talks about the stiff competition and why the Flemish don't read the Dutch press

Feeling, the magazine you edit. Who is your audience?

She's Flemish, in her 30s, well-off, informed. She can be single, married or divorced, with or without children. But, whatever her situation, she knows what she wants. *Feeling* is the only women's lifestyle glossy in Flanders. Our reader is sophisticated and mature. She probably has a significant other, children and a career, but in our pages she can simply enjoy the nice things in life and be a woman, not just a mother or a wife. In our pages she can be anything she wants. In fact, we think she's a goddess, and we help her sprinkle some magic in her life.

Has the magazine or the audience changed in any surprising ways since it started eight years ago?

There is more competition now than ever before, so our audience has become very well informed, very demanding and very spoiled – less loyal than they used to be. But that's good; we have to fight for every reader, and it keeps us on our toes. But I work in a bilingual company where we have a French-language sister magazine, and I get the feeling that they have a lot more competition because the francophones will also read French magazines. So at the newsagents, our francophone magazine has to catch the eye of readers who will just as easily pick up a French mag.

But Flemish magazines have to deal with competition from Dutch publications, too, right?

It's really strange: the Flemish share a common language with the Dutch, and we're geographically close to each other, but the Flemish don't read Dutch newspapers or magazines, and the Dutch don't read ours. They tried to sell the Dutch version of *Elle* here, and it did poorly. So now there is a Flemish version of *Elle*, in addition to the Belgian francophone version. The Dutch really do have a different culture from ours: their movie stars are different, their popular culture is different. Maybe it's a bit like the English and the Americans – same language, but they are definitely different from each other.

Interesting. What does a Dutch reader want as opposed to a Flemish reader when picking up a women's magazine?

It's hard to pin down, but I would say that the Dutch are more into experimentation. The Flemish appreciate quality – something that's creative, but well-made. The Dutch like doing something new, the Flemish like doing something well.

You live in Brussels, work just outside Antwerp and were born in rural Flanders. Where do you call home?

Brussels, definitely. But I come from Balen in east Antwerp province – where the champion cyclist Tom Boonen also comes from. There's a famous play by Walter van den Broeck, *Groenten uit Balen* – meaning "vegetables from Balen", but also a wordplay on "Greetings from Balen". It's about workers, very socialist. And there is a well-

known modern artist, Jef Geys, and a rather famous left-wing politician, Jef Smeets, also from Balen. So it's a small place but not exactly unknown. I go back once a month to see my family.

You travel a lot. What do miss of Belgium when you're away?

The longest I've been away was five weeks in India, and I missed the peace and quiet. There, everywhere you looked there were millions and millions of people – and noise all the time. Brussels is the largest city in Belgium, but on a Sunday you can walk around some parts of the city centre, and there's no one on the street. I also miss the traditional cafés, like the Cirio in Brussels: somewhere you can have a coffee and sit for three hours with a book or a friend and not be bothered. Even in the capital of Belgium, you can still find spaces of calm.

There are cultural clichés: the Dutch are known for their business sense, the Germans for their industriousness, the French for their creativity. What are the Flemish known for?

It sounds like bragging, but the Flemish are really good with languages: most Flemish with even a little bit of education are bilingual, which isn't the case with many other countries. We're also known as being hard workers and as generally ambitious – from something as simple as wanting to own our own homes to wanting to be really successful.



Name three things you would recommend about Flanders to someone from abroad.

Well, there's excellent food – especially the seafood. I particularly like the North Sea grey shrimp. There are very nice parks, as well

– not as large as those in London or Paris, but they are very peaceful and well-maintained. And I love the coast: I don't get to go there often enough, but it is one of the nicest I've ever seen. On top of that, there's the Royal Ballet of Flanders, which I really like.

Interview by Steven Tate

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

"Shutting people out is no way to encourage integration."

Marino Keulen
Flemish integration minister
on a proposal to allow only
Dutch-speaking children to use
a playground in Liedekerke

"I want my presence to be a balance between supporting the athletes as minister of sport and yet still staying on my guard so as not to get caught up in the Chinese propaganda machine."

Bert Anciaux
Flemish minister for sport
discussing the possibility of a
boycott of the Olympic Games
in Beijing

"The death of Joe Van Holsbeek was a unique incident. Since then there have been no similar cases reported."

Jacques Deveaux
federal police spokesman
explaining that Brussels is not
an unsafe city

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