



Jonny and Sybil, p.2

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Kris Deville

Fighting for our lives

Scientists at the Institute of Tropical Medicine struggle to combat new strains of tuberculosis in Europe

Saffina Rana

Think tuberculosis is a disease of the 19th century? Think again. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) there were nine million new cases worldwide in 2006, resulting in 1.7 million deaths. Controlling the disease represents an immense global challenge, and it's keeping the scientists at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp very busy.

The bacteria that spread tuberculosis (or TB) are carried on the tiny drops of moisture that shoot into the air when someone with the infection coughs, sneezes or even talks. Breathe these drops in, and the bacteria can lodge in your lungs and start multiplying.

"If you have good nutrition and your immune system functions properly you normally don't develop TB," explains Professor Juan Carlos Palomino, a tuberculosis specialist at the institute. But if you are in poor health the disease can take hold.

The symptoms develop slowly and at first are difficult to distinguish from those of a heavy cold

or the flu. A persistent cough lasting more than three weeks can be a giveaway, particularly if there are traces of blood in the phlegm. Other symptoms are weight loss, fever, fatigue, night sweats and shortness of breath.

My own brush with TB came in a language class in Brussels. One of my classmates returned after a prolonged absence and explained he had contracted the disease while on holiday in Argentina. We were all packed off to be tested at a local clinic; luckily for me, the result was negative.

If I had picked up the disease in the course of wrestling with tricky verb forms, I would probably still be alive. The standard treatment of taking a cocktail of antibiotics for six months is effective in treating most cases and is definitely preferable to the alternative. "Fifty years ago, they would take out your lung," says Palomino.

The problem is that the various drug-resistant forms of the disease have appeared and are spreading, pushing up the number of

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Flanders goes Africa

Flanders is host to not one, but two African film festivals this month. The Afrika Film Festival in Leuven is in its 13th year and is credited with putting black actors on the map in Belgium. Emile Abossolo Mbô and Tella Kpomahou, above, are both guests of the festival this year. In Brussels, meanwhile, the fourth annual Festival des Cinémas Africains celebrates women, documentary and hip-hop music.

Meanwhile, our cover story this week is about the work being done at Antwerp's Tropical Research Institute to fight tuberculosis, a disease that still kills 1.7 million people worldwide each year. With some

of the highest risk populations located in Africa, the institute works in cooperation with scientists on the continent.

The Tropical Research Institute was established during King Leopold II's colonisation of the Congo, and Leuven's festival focuses on film from Central Africa. Belgium's history in Africa has led to a modern relationship that is particularly complex and to the establishment of institutions and events that continue to explore and debate African society, history and current affairs.

Welcome to Africa.



Business

A unique collective of creative types pooled their resources to create Lillie Polka, a brand of cool, handmade clothing for kids.

Arts

Art Brussels is one of the most prestigious contemporary arts fairs in Europe. We tell you what to expect and meet one of the Flemish painters on show.

Living

Brothers Decap have been making magnificent mechanical organs in Antwerp for more than 100 years. We'll tell you where to find a vintage one in a neighbourhood cafe.

Belgium is "safe haven" in real estate market

But house prices are overvalued, says IMF

Alan Hope

Brussels has shot up from 16th to fifth place in the international league table of cities ranked according to their attractiveness for business investors in the property market, according to a study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Urban Land Institute. Brussels owes its rise to the feeling of safety felt by investors, the study says. Brussels has failed to fall victim to the excesses in the property market experienced by other major cities.

The table is headed by Paris, taking over from London which drops to ninth place. Munich is second, followed by Zurich and Hamburg. The PwC study was carried out

among 500 property experts in 27 countries. Brussels was also given a high "hold" score by the property experts surveyed – meaning their advice to owners is not to sell.

However, Belgian house prices are said to be 17 percent too high, according to a study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) released last week. The Belgian over-value is five points higher than was seen in the US house market before that collapsed into a credit crisis. The IMF warned a "correction" was inevitable, but other experts said it was unlikely prices would fall by as much as 17 percent.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Kaas

If I had to pick one Flemish novel to take to a desert island, it would be Willem Elsschot's *Kaas* (Cheese). It's perhaps a bit slim to last a prolonged period of isolation, but it is possibly the funniest book in the Dutch language (and, in Paul Vincent's 2002 translation, one of the funniest books in English).

When *Knack* magazine published its list of the 50 best Flemish books last week, I assumed that *Kaas* would be near the top. The list was based on a poll by writers, academics, teachers, librarians, publishers and booksellers, so it seemed more than likely that Hugo Claus would bag the top spot with *Het Verdriet van België*. But *The Sorrow of Belgium* reached only third position, with Louis Paul Boon (writer and obsessive collector of risqué photographs) taking number one slot with his novel *De Kapellekensbaan*. Elsschot managed to bag second place, but not for *Kaas* – literary Flanders preferred his short story *Het dwaallicht*, translated in 1965 as *Will of the Wisp*.

Having not read *Het dwaallicht* yet, I'll stick with *Kaas* for my desert island book. The novel is set in Antwerp and tells the story of Frans Laarmans, a hopelessly inept businessman who takes delivery of a vast consign-

ment of Dutch cheese and then fritters away his time searching for a name for his company. He then organises his desk obsessively before setting off to sell his products – but he fails to sell even one round, red cheese.

The Dutch illustrator Dick Matena recently published a graphic novel based on *Kaas* (following his comic strip versions of Gerard Reve's *De Avonden* and Jan Wolkers' *Kort Amerikaans*). The Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp is currently exhibiting all 219 illustrations from the book as part of its Elsschot year celebrations (although you can save yourself a journey to Antwerp by reading the whole book online at the museum's website).

Matena's black-and-white illustrations capture something of Laarmans' sad intensity as he walks the dark streets of the Flemish port with his bags bulging with cheese. But you may need to read the original novel to appreciate the subtle humour of Elsschot's writing. Take it with you the next time you head off to an island.

Derek Blyth

Online

www.kmska.be



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independent newsweekly

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FACE OF FLANDERS



Jonny and Sybil

Let it be known: I love street theatre. It could be juggling, magic or stupid jokes, but street theatre always seems like a bit of a surprise. Popping up out of nowhere right there on the pavement – an intrusion of colour, motion and music.

Add tap dancing and puppets to that list, and you get an idea of the talents of Saskia Thijs, who presents her funny and captivating show *Jonny and Sybil* on 13 April at De Kroon cultural centre in Brussels.

De Kroon will take Thijs off the streets, but she's performed the two-person show (or, rather, one person, one puppet) in street theatre festivals across Belgium and the Netherlands since creating it last year. It's actually just one of the many performances she's put together with her partner under the moniker Miaow Productions. The two have converted a double-decker bus into a theatre and are constantly on the road doing acts with names like *Shady Dopperfield* and *Sinful Cindy* and *Madame Rosa's Incredible Flea Circus*.

Thijs went to art school in the late 1990s and practiced makeup in theatre and movies. That's how she learned to make puppet faces. "Puppet theatre always fascinated me," she says. Thijs' parents, in fact, practiced the ancient tradition of *poesjenel* or rod puppetry. Then a puppet festival in Neerpelt several years ago convinced her to take it up. "There are a lot of new techniques in puppetry these days," she says. "Shadow play, huge puppets, working with live actors. It's not like in the old days when you just had Punch and Judy."

Thijs makes all her puppets and has more than 20. "Puppetry has a lot more possibilities than regular theatre to me. You can make puppets fly or go on little journeys. You can make them really big and then really small. There's so much more to express with puppets."

In *Jonny and Sybil*, there is a whole lot of expressing. Thijs and her puppet play a couple who are old hands at putting on a 1920s vaudeville act. The only dialogue in the 35-minute play is in the form of intertitles – like those used in silent movies – and they're in English. "They are a performing couple, this woman and the slightly older man," says Thijs. "They get ready and go onstage. But when they start doing their tap dance act, the man falls for a woman in the audience. Of course, Sybil gets jealous, and they have a big fight." This leaves plenty of room for audience participation. "Sybil looks for another partner to dance with – a man from the audience – and he has to audition," explains Thijs. "But he's not really the same. He's not like her Jonny."

Of course, I'm sure it turns out all right in the end. Street theatre so often does.

Lisa Bradshaw

Online

www.miaowproductions.be

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



bus

Driving any distance these days is getting beyond a joke. The roads are clogged up at even the most unlikely of hours. So more and more people are taking to the bus – not that you get there any faster, but it is much less stressful. And in Flanders the bus means just one thing: De Lijn, which is the commercial name of de *Vlaamse Vervoermaatschappij*, the public utility company that runs all the bus and tram services in Flanders. This means you can hop on and off buses and trams all over Flanders with the same ticket.

De Lijn is *decentral georganiseerd* with its headquarters in Mechelen, where general policy is mapped out: *De hoofdzetel in Mechelen coördineert de werking en stippelt het globale beleid uit*.

You can buy a ticket on the bus, but it's cheaper if you buy one in advance at one of *de voorverkooppunten* – try your local newsagent. If you live in Ghent or Antwerp, you can buy your *vervoerbewijs* via your mobile phone. *Hoe werkt het?* Well, it's dead easy: *in Antwerpen stuurt u een sms met de boodschap DLA naar 4884*. For a ticket in Ghent the message should be DLG. And then? *Enkele seconden later krijgt u een sms terug. Deze sms is uw sms-ticket en geldt als vervoerbewijs*. So no paper, just an sms ticket that's valid for the next hour.

But what if you live in the sticks? Then you can call *de belbus!* There are 120 of these small buses, each with its own roaming area and, although *de belbus geen taxi is die van deur naar deur rijdt, kunt u kriskras doorheen het hele belbusgebied*. To order a bus, *moet u de belbuscentrale 2 uur vooraf contacteren*. So a little forward planning is required before you can crisscross the belbus area.

Concerned about the effect of bus emissions on the environment? Then you should remember that by opting for public transport, you are choosing mobility that takes the environment into account: *openbaar vervoer = milieubewuste mobiliteit*. De Lijn even has the world's first *hybride bus op waterstof* on trial, powered by electricity and hydrogen. To try it out, go to Antwerp and take *lijn 422* to Lier, where you can admire *de Wonderklok* in *de Zimmertoren*, or of course vice versa. You could go so far as to sell your car and just move around by bus. If so, you might still find that you need a car on certain occasions. De Lijn has even thought of that with *Cambio autodelen*, and parking is not a problem: *uw auto heeft gegarandeerd een vaste cambio-parkeerplaats*.

Letting the bus take the strain is certainly popular: last year 483 million passengers travelled on the white buses and trams with their distinctive broad yellow stripe. This is all down to the growth in season tickets and the *uitbreiding van het aanbod*. And it's this expansion of services which De Lijn claims will result in *een half miljard reizigers in 2008*.

Alistair MacLean

online
delijn.be

FEATURE



"Who will win, the bacteria or us?": The tuberculosis department of the Institute for Tropical Medicine

The battle against bacteria

Continued from page 1

cases in regions like Europe and North America, where doctors thought the disease was defeated. "It's become a continuous fight," says Palomino. "The TB bacteria is smarter than us; it adapts and becomes more and more resistant. People ask 'who will win, the bacteria or us?'"

The latest development is the

appearance of "extensively resistant" forms of TB. "Patients have a strain of bacteria that is resistant to almost all antibiotics," explains Palomino. This makes the standard six-month treatment useless. "They have to take less effective drugs for up to two years. This is more expensive and has a more toxic effect on the body."

When the WHO surveyed TB patients around the world, it found

this virtually untreatable form of the disease in 45 of the 81 countries examined. Drug resistance presents a particular problem for poorer countries, which do not possess the necessary diagnostic tools. This is one of the major challenges that Palomino and his team are working on. They are just starting a new four-year project to develop fast methods of detecting drug resistant TB with partner

research organisations and hospitals in Germany, Sweden, Latvia, Argentina and Colombia.

"Commercially-available kits are not specific enough for drug resistant strains," he explains. Instead, you need to isolate the bacteria from sputum samples and test all the different antibiotics on it to see which will work. "The big problem is that the laboratory detection takes one or two months. It takes six to eight weeks for the bacteria to grow and form colonies. We will look at ways to increase the speed of detection."

Faster diagnosis is possible with the use of new technology. The budgets of most small hospitals, however, will not stretch that far, especially in poorer countries. "There are machines that can give results in eight to 12 days and can also be used to test the antibiotics. At €50,000 to €100,000, they are not easy to get a hold of for most hospitals dealing with TB," Palomino says. "Since TB is still prevalent in poor countries, you need a fast method that can be used without big machines." The institute is seeking to develop simple and portable rapid detection lab kits.

Meanwhile, more sophisticated molecular biology approaches are being developed for countries that can afford them. "We can use these to give a diagnosis in one or two days, but the gene sequencing



Professor Juan Carlos Palomino was awarded €3 million to fight TB

machines cost over €1 million," says Palomino. This part of the project will be conducted with German and Swedish partners who possess the necessary facilities.

Professor Palomino has been awarded €3 million of public funding for the project from the European Union's research budget. The team's results will be tested in Argentina and Latvia. If successful, Palomino wants to run clinical trials in Africa and India among high-risk populations.

Antwerp's involvement with TB dates from its time as a major colonial port. The Institute's imposing Art Nouveau building on Nationalestraat was built close to the Congo docks so that patients – predominantly Belgian sailors – arriving from the tropics by boat on the river Scheldt could be easily transferred to the clinic.

After the Belgian Congo became independent in the 1960s, the institute's role in developing countries slowly shifted to include scientific support and research. In collaboration with the Belgian Ministry of Development Cooperation, the institute has established a programme of capacity building involving scientists at 23 institutes in 20 countries in Africa, Asia and South America. Work includes research on TB, leprosy, HIV, sleeping sickness and Ebola, amongst other diseases.

For Professor Palomino, there's a more personal reason for working on TB. "I come from Peru; I've seen how poverty can affect disease. Of course I wanted to do something about it."

He has been inspired by developments in medical science from an early age. "My first dream was to become a medical doctor, but, when I was 14 or 15, I changed my mind. To improve my English I was reading articles about scientific discoveries, and I clearly remember thinking: I want to be a researcher. I want to be like these guys doing these things."

Online
www.itg.be

The Institute of Tropical Medicine

A story that reflects the history of Belgium and the Congo

The Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) was set up in Brussels in 1906 as the School for Tropical Diseases. Its original purpose was to train doctors and nurses to treat the Belgian community in the Congo Free State, at that time the personal property of Leopold II.

After the country became a Belgian colony in 1908, the institute's remit widened, and greater efforts were taken to treat the African

population. The school was moved to Antwerp in 1934, partly to be closer to the docks but also as a result of political wrangling between Belgium's language communities.

Once the Congo became independent in 1960, the focus changed again, with greater emphasis being placed on training doctors and nurses from Africa and other developing countries. Research into treatments for trop-

ical diseases also took on a greater importance.

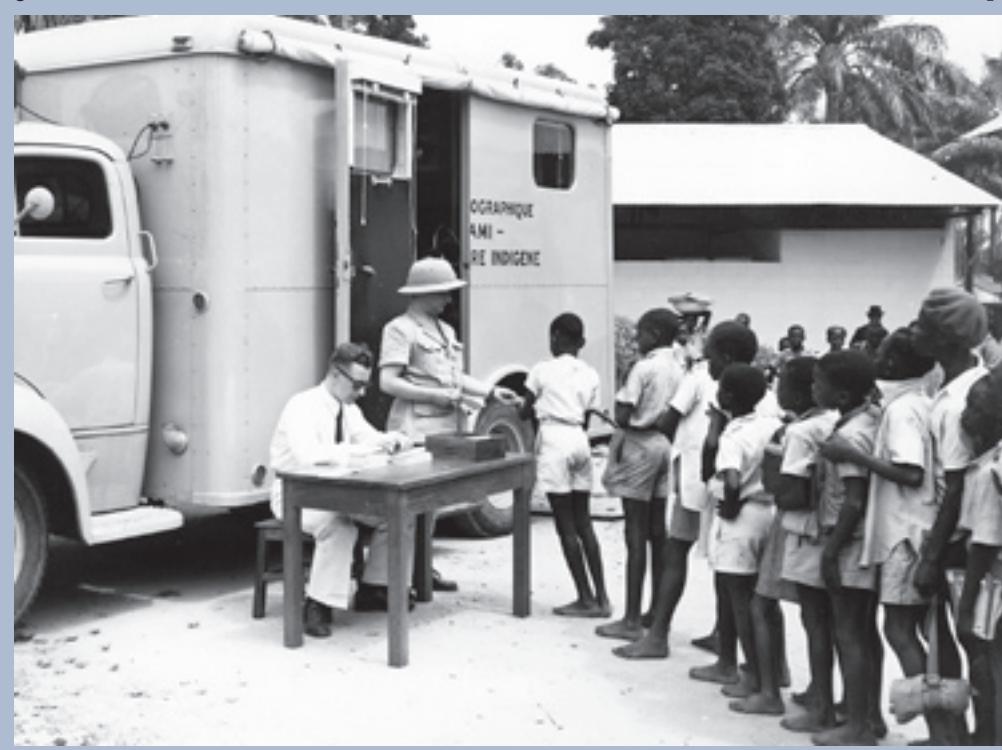
Over the last 10 years, the institute has reformed its degree and masters courses and established an extensive PhD programme. The number of scientists has tripled and, in a study funded by the European Commission on the impact of research, ITM ranked 15th in Europe.

The institute is still housed in the Art Nouveau building that was specially commissioned when it took up residence in Antwerp in the 1930s. It sits serenely at one end of Nationalestraat, a stone's throw away from the Fashion Museum and the upmarket chic of Antwerp's designer boutiques.

The arboured walkways and flower beds of the ITM's interior courtyard give it a contemplative air, and it's hard to imagine that behind the yellow brick walls researchers are working on deadly viruses and bacteria in its ultra-secure clean rooms and laboratories.

A reminder of its colonial history remains in one corner of the black marbled foyer: a statue of a large African man dressed in nothing but a loin cloth, his head bowed, his arms hanging to the ground. Called "Tired Porter" by the Belgian sculptor Arthur Dupagne, it serves as an uncomfortable reminder of the journey that the institute has made to reach its current aim of championing health care for everyone.

SR

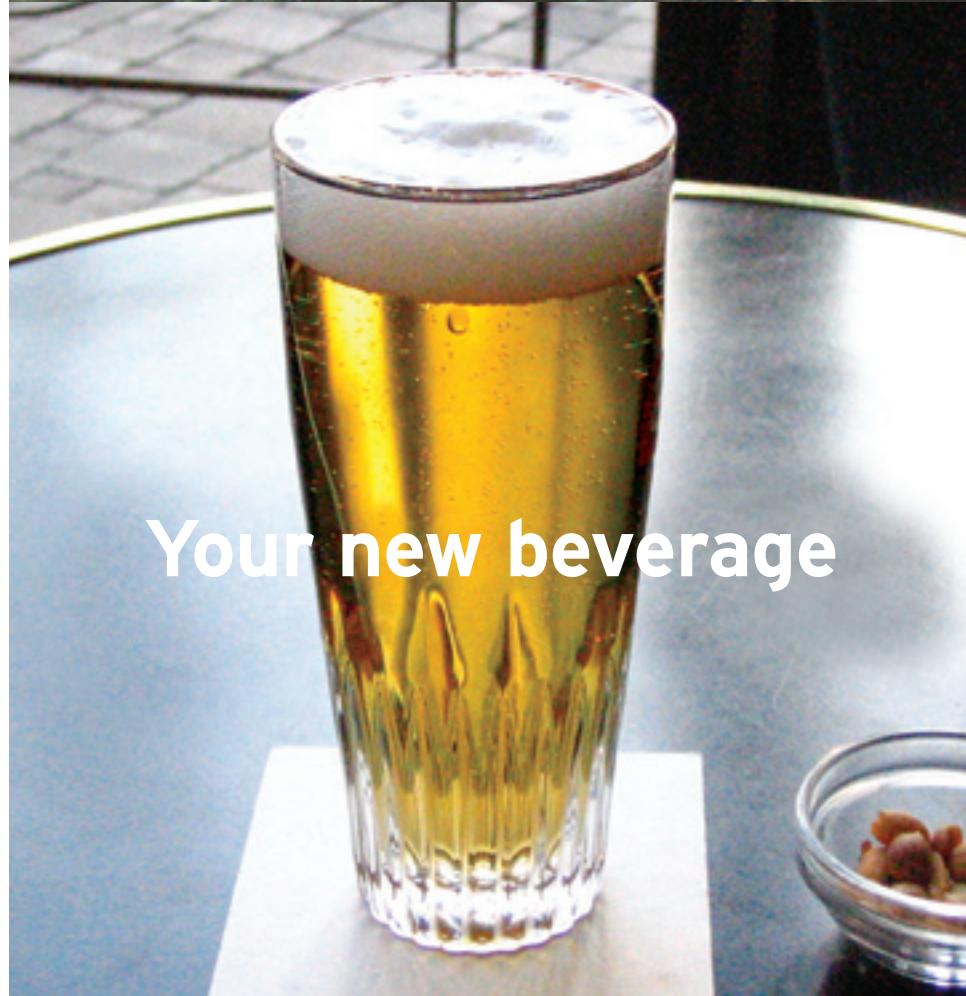




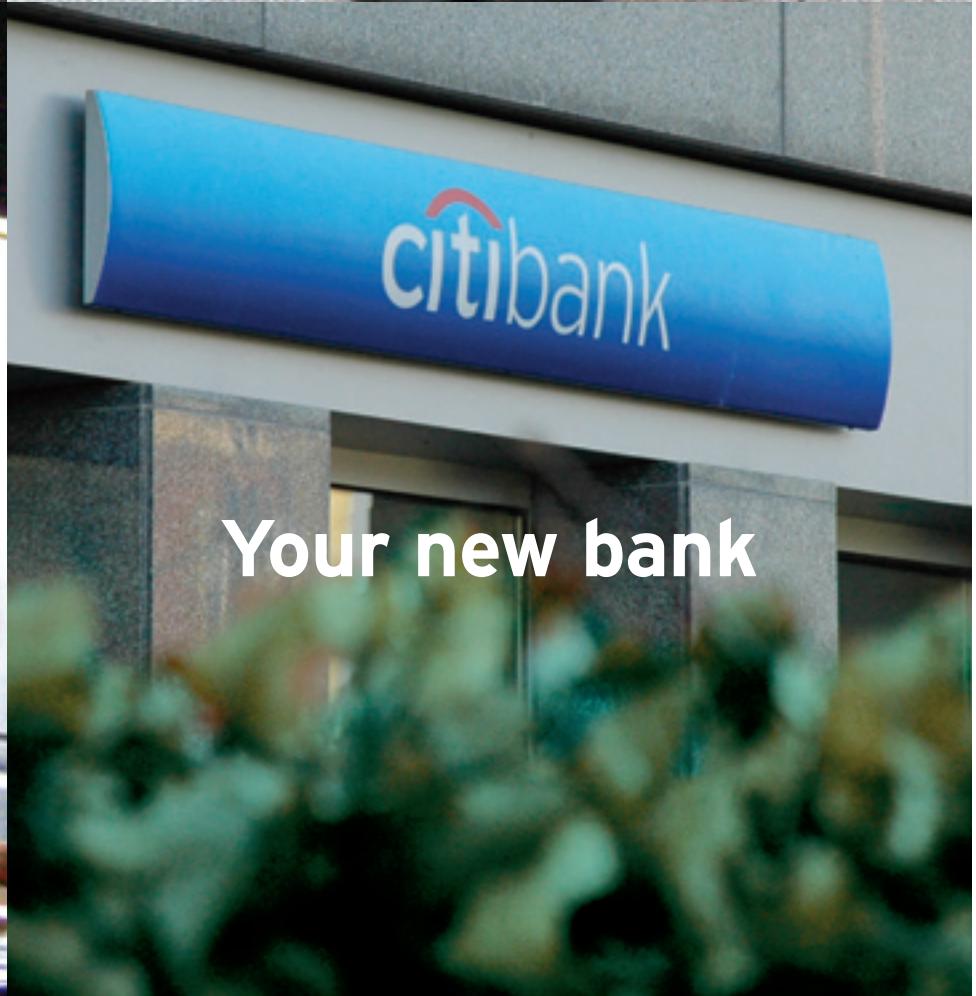
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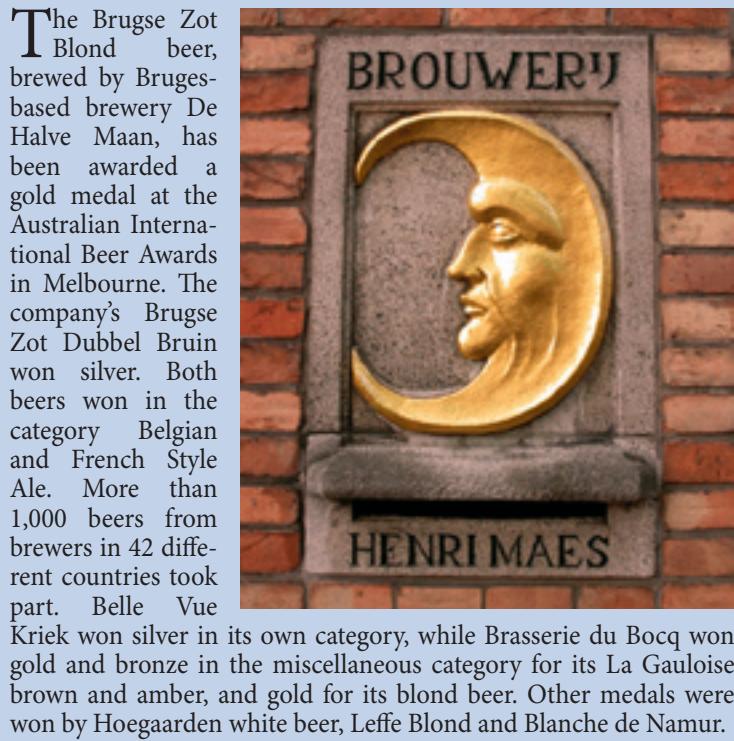
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Security fears over idle port scanners



Brugse Zot beer win award in Oz



The Brugse Zot Blond beer, brewed by Bruges-based brewery De Halve Maan, has been awarded a gold medal at the Australian International Beer Awards in Melbourne. The company's Brugse Zot Dubbel Bruin won silver. Both beers won in the category Belgian and French Style Ale. More than 1,000 beers from brewers in 42 different countries took part. Belle Vue Kriek won silver in its own category, while Brasserie du Bocq won gold and bronze in the miscellaneous category for its La Gauloise brown and amber, and gold for its blond beer. Other medals were won by Hoegaarden white beer, Leffe Blond and Blanche de Namur.

De Lijn proposes using youths to police bus routes

Bus drivers should be accompanied on more dangerous routes by volunteers from the immigrant community, as a response to continuing violence, a citizens' group has proposed. The call comes after a 62-year-old security agent was beaten and seriously injured in Antwerp. The system would echo one in place in Rotterdam, where 800 volunteers ride with bus drivers to deter violence. "It won't be the answer to everything, but it might provide a piece of the puzzle," said Luc Groffy of *Samenlevingsopbouw Antwerpen* (Antwerp Community Development). The transport users' group BTTB, meanwhile, called for a central number for passengers to report acts of violence.

Church renting out unused buildings to poor

The Catholic church is renting out some of its empty properties to house the poor. The move, partly a result of a fall in church attendances which has left much of the church's real estate holdings superfluous, was called for last year in a speech by supreme prelate Cardinal Godfried Danneels. In Brussels alone, some 27 former priests' houses or meeting places have been handed over to social housing authorities to provide a roof for those too poor to find rented accommodation on the private market. The social housing authorities' own housing stocks are drastically below the level required to cope with demand.

Freight containers entering and leaving the Port of Antwerp are not being scanned because there are too few customs officers on duty, according to unions. The scanners are the latest state-of-the-art detection devices, able to spot illegal cargo – ranging from human beings to contraband cigarettes and alcohol. The port's equipment – one fixed scanner and a mobile scanner – forms part of a package of new measures agreed on by the federal government in 2004 at a cost of €32 million.

The mobile scanner, however, requires properly-trained customs staff to operate it, and there are not enough of those on duty at any one time, unions say.

The port handles three million containers every year. Of the 183 million tonnes of freight shipped in 2007, more than 78% was containerised.

The advanced device was built to meet the tough security standards of the United States, who require containers entering their territory to come from a port where advanced scanning takes place. The US authorities are worried about the shipping of strategic goods such as military materials, for which export licences are required. These can be detected by scanners.

NEWS FLASH



Belgians looking for work tend to apply only for jobs for which they fully or mainly fit the required profile, according to a survey by human resources consultants StepStone. Only nine percent of Belgian job-seekers would go for a job without fitting the profile, a more conservative result than the Dutch (43%) and Danes (18%).

Five building contractors have admitted paying bribes to Leuven city officials. Two officials have admitted the charges, while another continues to deny involvement. He remains the only one of the eight accused to be in detention, after a court decision last week. The contractors are also accused of fixing prices to carve up city works contracts among themselves.

Antwerp Zoo has announced the birth of twin Cape buffalo to mother Yuma and father Husjan. The sex of the twins is not yet clear, but keepers are guessing that they are girls. The birth of twins is a rare occurrence, and this is the first in the Zoo's history. The calves have been named Jip and Janneke, after the distinctive silhouetted characters in children's books by Annie M. G. Schmidt. At the same time, the Zoo also announced the birth on Easter Monday of Jet, a baby Humboldt penguin.

De Munt is to open its doors to the public outside of stage productions, with a new café, bookshop and reception area. The aim of the project is to bring the Brussels opera house closer to the public, management said. Renovations have been carried out by B-architects, who also worked on the Beursschouwburg. The central entrance hall will have a new desk for information and tickets, and the theatre plans to stage small concerts and meetings with artists there in the future.

The bankruptcy of two Genk-based construction companies has left hundreds of home-owners stranded as work remains unfinished. ARB Woningbouw and ARB Vloer were declared bankrupt by the commercial court in Tongeren, despite open invoices worth €2.8 million. The contractors achieved public prominence through their involvement with the VTM make-over programme De Werf, in which contestants on a tight budget had to renovate a house.

Two Ghent entrepreneurs have started a business offering package trips to Kiev in Ukraine for single men. Dick Verhaeghe and Giacomo Apers came up with the idea after a trip to Kiev left them impressed by the city's nightlife, and its young women. "The women are all at least 1m77, perfect size and well groomed. It's Heaven on earth for the single man," said Verhaeghe.

Dehaene joins anti-Blair campaign

Former prime minister and European "sage" Jean-Luc Dehaene has joined a chorus of criticism at the prospect of Tony Blair taking up the job of president of the European Council when the job is created next year. At present, the presidency rotates among member states, but from 2009 it will be held by one person for a 2.5 year term. Earlier, foreign minister Karel De Gucht, speaking in Lisbon, said the president of the Council "could not come from a member state which has not adopted the euro, the constitutional charter or the Schengen agreement". While careful not to mention Blair by name, the description does fit him perfectly. Blair is, together with Luxemburg prime minister Jean-Claude Juncker, one of the leading candidates for the post. De Gucht also called for a new European diplomatic service to be set up to better handle EU foreign policy. And member states should agree to scrap the right of each of them to veto important proposals, he said.

Ghent honorary doctorate for Nelson Mandela's wife

The University of Ghent on April 21 will award an honorary doctorate to Graça Michel, the wife of former South African president Nelson Mandela. Mozambiquan-born Ms Michel was her country's education and culture minister after independence in 1975. She also worked on peace and reconciliation projects following Mozambique's war with Rhodesia and South Africa. She is currently Chancellor of Cape Town university, and a goodwill ambassador for the children's charity Unicef.

Fabre exhibition opens in Paris



Umbraculum

Jan Fabre's exhibition *The Angel of the Metamorphosis* opened last weekend at the Louvre as the third in the museum's Counterpoint series. Fabre is the first living artist ever to have his own show within the Louvre's permanent collection. "A shining star of the Flemish new wave in the 1980s, he is above all a skilled draftsman, visual artist and designer, but also stages unusually free and unrestrained performance pieces, placing the body at the heart of his approach," the Louvre said.

Belga



Bumpy ride: the "Wall of Geraardsbergen"

Devolder wins Tour of Flanders

Flemish cyclist Stijn Devolder won this year's Tour of Flanders cycle race on 6 April in a contest that kept onlookers excited until the finish in Meerbeek. Devolder fought off strong challenges from Nick Nuyens and Juan Antonio Flecha, pushing into the lead during the Oudenaarde to Geraardsbergen stretch.

NEWS FLASH

Animal rights organisations Blid and Gaia last week protested at the office of Flemish environment minister Hilde Crevits, calling for an end to the practice of hunting stray cats and the introduction of an "animal-friendly, preventive policy". Hunters regularly use firearms to hunt down and kill stray cats as a means of controlling populations. The protestors asked the government instead to work with sterilisation and castration as a means of control.

Young job-seekers prefer companies with generous pension plans, according to a study carried out by insurer Swiss Life, with two-thirds of those polled thinking that an employer-contributed pension scheme ought to be compulsory. Some 57% of the Flanders workforce contributes to a pension scheme with employer support.

A baker's wife who vanished without a trace in 2006 has re-emerged, living in Haarlem in the Netherlands. Annie Ritzén, 50, was discovered safe and well after an acquaintance searched for her name on the internet. Her husband, whose business went bust as suspicion hung over him of involvement in her disappearance, is considering legal action.

A man caught web-surfing on his neighbour's wireless internet signal has been charged with computer hacking. The man was using a laptop in a car parked outside his neighbour's home. Police could not say if the wireless network was secured, which would aggravate the offence. Experts advise anyone who uses wireless internet at home to secure their connections.

Sales and shop service is the largest job sector in Belgium, according to figures from the finance ministry, with some 4.2 million people employed, 46% of them women.

I think therefore I am Belgian, it appears. The country has more professional philosophers than textile workers – 9,321 compared to 8,778. Nearly seven out of 10 philosophers are women.

Belgium's publicly-traded companies last year paid out €10.2 billion in dividends – 46% more than in 2006. At the same time, their total cumulative net profit fell for the first time in five years to €19.14 billion, or less than double the amount passed on to shareholders.



Bumba goes global

Studio 100 signs deal with BBC

Studio 100 – the TV producers responsible for Kabouter Plop, Samson and Gert and K3 – have signed a deal with the BBC to produce an interactive children's TV series called *Kerwhizz*. Studio 100 currently works on the series *Big and Small* for the BBC, along with two other production houses. The new series, which features three-dimensional animations for toddlers, will consist of 26 episodes of 22 minutes each with the first being ready in 2009.

At the same time, Studio 100 has won sole rights to distribute three successful BBC properties – *Beat the Boss*, *Trapped* and *The Slammer* – on the international market. The news comes as Studio 100 executives were planning for this week's MIP TV television fair in Cannes. As well as their new BBC properties, Studio 100 will be pushing *Bumba* – the yellow clown series bought by Al Jazeera, as well as stations in Spain, Canada, India and Israel.

Munt musical director sacked before he starts work

The new musical director of De Munt, British-born Mark Wigglesworth, will not be taking up his post after all, the opera house announced last week. The decision follows unrest within the orchestra over the appointment and the fact that Wigglesworth, due to start work in August, was to sign a five-year contract with no trial period. A union representative said there was "no chemistry" between the conductor and the orchestra, based on previous experience. However, Wigglesworth will still conduct two concerts and three opera productions in the coming season (which was presented to the public this week), but he will not be taking up any administrative functions. Wigglesworth, 44, made his conducting debut at Covent Garden and has worked with Welsh National Opera, English National Opera, the Metropolitan Opera and Glyndebourne. His appointment to De Munt was announced in April 2006 by the newly-appointed general manager Peter de Caluwe.

Polish workers in Flanders have trouble with Dutch

The major problem facing Polish workers who come to work in Flanders is the language, according to the organisers of last weekend's job fair in Antwerp aimed at Poles. More than 2,000 job seekers attended, with most of the 600 jobs on offer being filled. "We're trying to help people find legal jobs," said organiser Jowita Sokolowska. Although Poland is a member state of the EU, its citizens can only obtain permission to work here legally in so-called pressure-point jobs, where Belgian manpower is not enough to meet demand. Two busloads of job seekers made their way to Antwerp from Poland, but the organisers deny Poles are intent on taking Belgian jobs. "Ask any of the employers here," said Sokolowska. "They simply can't find any workers for their vacancies. And if they have to choose between an unmotivated, unemployed Belgian person and a motivated Pole who has trouble with the language, the choice is easily made."



Belga

Filip Claus wins press photo award

The winning photograph in this year's awards by the Belgian Photo and Film Press was taken by *De Morgen* staff photographer Filip Claus. The photograph illustrated an article on Belgian patriotism with a flag being hung in an apartment window. Other winners were Thomas Vanhaute and Jimmy Kets.

Breaking news

Want to know what the Flemish Region is doing to speed up the construction of cycle paths? Curious to find out what is going to happen to diesel cars? These are just two of the topics covered recently in the daily news section on www.flanderstoday.eu. Subscribe to the Press Room to receive daily breaking news stories in English based on a selection taken from the Flemish press.

CEOs take big pay rises at Fortis and UCB



Jean Paul Votron gets 73% pay rise

Jean Paul Votron, CEO of Fortis bank, is to receive a pay rise of 73%, bringing his basic pay from €750,000 to €1.3 million, or €25,000 a week.

However Votron's salary is only a small part of his total package. His total remuneration last

year included a basic salary of €750,000, a bonus of €2.5 million and miscellaneous items worth €660,800 (pension contributions, incentives, expenses). It also included shares worth €660,000 at today's value and nearly 50,000 share options, bringing the total

to an estimated €4.57 million.

The bank said that the package – including a bonus which was 25% up on 2006 – was intended to reward Votron for his “exemplary leadership” in a year in which Fortis formed a consortium with Bank of Scotland and Banco Santander to take over ABN-AMRO.

Votron's pay is slightly less than the CEO of competitor ING, Michel Tilmant, who takes home €4.81 million. But it is above the earnings of Carlos Brito, CEO of brewing giant InBev, who last year earned €3.57 million.

Fortis chairman Maurice Lippens also benefitted from a 75% increase in his pay, from €400,000 to €700,000. Meanwhile at pharmaceutical company UCB, top man Roch Doliveux saw his salary increase by eight percent to €1.1 million, in a year when the company's share price plunged by 40%. Doliveux also received a bonus in 2007 of €800,000, as well as equity and options.

BUSINESS FLASH



Shutterstock

Flightcare

Flightcare, the Brussels Airport handling and ground services company, is seeking an additional 500 staff this year to cope with fast-growing traffic at the airport. The company is organising a Job Exchange on 19 April.

Novotel

Novotel, the hotel chain owned by the French Accor group, has confirmed plans for a 239-room hotel near the Zuid railway station in Brussels. The city has plans for an additional 600 rooms to be opened in the area over the next five years, as high-speed TGV traffic expands. Meanwhile, the Ibis chain, another affiliate of Accor, has opened a hotel in Kortrijk and has plans for another in Sint-Niklaas next year. Other projects include new hotels in Ghent and Antwerp.

Quick

Brussels-based fast-food chain Quick has opened its first two hamburger restaurants in Moscow. The company is to invest some €100 million in Russia to open 100 outlets over the next five years.

Mitiska

Mitiska, the Groot-Bijgaarden-based holding company specialising in the retail sector, has acquired a 4.5% stake in the Danish BoConcept furniture distribution group for some €5.9 million.

Vosta Stahlhandel

German steel group Vosta Stahlhandel is investing €27 million in Bree, Limburg province, to set up a steel conditioning and distribution facility. First shipments are expected later this year.

Plopsaland

Plopsaland, the theme park located in De Panne, is investing €7 million in new attractions for the coming summer season. Other projects on the site include a hotel.

Nostalgie Vlaanderen

Nostalgie Vlaanderen, a new radio station launched recently in Flanders based on the successful French model, is expected to become the third largest private broadcaster in Flanders and the market leader in the 35-55 years segment.

Merrill Lynch

The Belgian affiliate of the US bank Merrill Lynch has opened an office on Tervurenlaan in Brussels. The new institution expects plans to develop its private banking activities to cater to customers with minimum assets of €500,000.

Dexia

Dexia, the Belgian bank specialised in the financing of local authorities, is to inject a further €200 million in Turkey's Denizbank, which it acquired two years ago. The move will allow the Turkish institution to grow faster and open an additional 80 branches this year. Meanwhile, Dexia is to provision an extra €1 billion to meet potential damages linked to its ill-fated acquisition in 2000 of the Dutch Labouchère Bank.

Besix

Brussels-based construction group Besix is in the running to build a new neighbourhood in Monaco on land reclaimed from the sea in the shadow of the casino. Up to 2,000 apartments and several new streets are expected to be built over a 10-year period at a total cost of some €8 billion. Other bidders include the French Bouygues and Vinci groups and the Dutch Van Oord.

Clearwire

The American wireless broadband operator Clearwire has acquired the Brussels company MAC Telecom. Clearwire currently operates in Brussels, Leuven and Ghent.

Liefmans brewery bankrupt

Liefmans was last week declared bankrupt by the Ghent commercial court. Last year the brewer of fruit beers made a €5 million loss on sales of €7 million, leaving it with an overall deficit of €22 million. The company was the subject of a €4.5 million takeover offer from Duvel Moortgat, which was allowed by the company's administrator to carry on Liefmans' business for one year. The bankruptcy declaration, which was opposed by the owners, makes an eventual successful takeover by Duvel Moortgat more likely, although the administrator has said he wants to see new bids.

Belgian dredger signed up to deepen Panama Canal

Belgian company Dredging International, a division of Deme, has been awarded a contract worth €113 million to carry out works to deepen and broaden the Panama Canal. The contract from the Panama Canal Authority involves work on the Pacific side of the canal, between Panama City and Balboa. The dredgers will remove nine million cubic metres of material from the canal, most of it hard rock, which will be dislodged using explosives. The authority plans eventually to construct a new lock complex built according to Belgian plans. Parent company Deme was involved in the initial construction of the Suez Canal.

Businesses pay too much tax, says report

Companies are burdened with almost 100 different taxes

Businesses in Belgium have to cope with a burden of 63 different taxes and charges levied by the various governments, while acting as tax-collector on the authorities' behalf for a further 32 taxes. The full weight of tax on Belgian business is laid out in a report by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) for the employers' federation VBO.

The aim of the PwC Total Tax Contribution report is to provide “a standardised approach to quantifying a company's overall tax contribution by looking at all direct and indirect taxes and other payments to governments”. More than three-quarters of business executives said they would like to know what their total tax burden is, while virtually all agreed that this would help them put in place tax strategies acceptable to their major stakeholders.

The survey covered a mixed group of 61 companies active in various sectors, employing a total of over 100,000 staff

and with total turnover of €90.5 billion. That group paid a total of €1.5 billion in company tax, or 13% of their profits. Along with employer social security contributions, this makes up over 84% of the total amount handed over to the government. The remaining 16% is composed of small amounts paid under 61 different tax headings. Such taxes are relatively small, PwC said, “but there is a heavy compliance burden”.

In addition, companies take in 4.6 times as much tax for the government as they pay out on their own account. The main example is VAT, which companies collect from customers to pay to the government. Others include excise duties (from the sale of alcohol or petrol), import duties, stock exchange taxes and employees' social security payments.

According to the VBO, not only do companies have to pay too much tax, they are in fact the government's main collector of tax revenue – the government

introduces taxes, then outsources the collection of the money involved to the private sector, on an unpaid basis.

PwC claims the report shows that Belgium is a heavily-taxed corporate environment and that it is wrong to accuse companies of not paying their share of taxes. In all, companies hand over an average of more than 50% of their sales in taxes, even allowing for the so-called “notional deduction” which allows some tax relief for reinvestment. “That is much more than in the United Kingdom or Australia, where we also carried out research,” said Frank Dierckx of PwC. In Australia, the total tax contribution comes to 44% of earnings, and in the UK just 36%.

Alan Hope

Online

www.vbo-feb.be

MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS

Lillie Polka: fashion for the Little Miss Y generation



Astrid-Fia De Craecker and her little miss Y: handmade clothes for groovy kids

Astrid-Fia De Craecker has always been interested in fashion. But while studying her favourite subject, she realised it had all become a little too serious for her. "Fashion with a capital 'F' just wasn't my cup of tea", she says. So she looked for other creative ways to express herself, working as a make-up artist and stylist. "Even then, I was always making purses and accessories for myself, and I loved to customise my own clothing."

She admits she didn't always have the patience for sewing. "But when my daughter Yma was born, I started making clothes for her. Smaller designs take less time." That's how De Craecker developed an eye for detail and a passion for children's clothing. "I was getting compliments all the time from people about the way my daughter was dressed."

When a good friend opened up a boutique, she asked De Craecker if she could sell some of her skirts and dresses. "That's how my label Little Miss Y was born."

De Craecker soon found, though, that she would rather sell

her clothes directly to the customer. "It's nicer, not only because you earn more, but also because you can work on demand, creating custom-made clothes." De Craecker worked like this for three years, coming up with a new collection every season.

Last October, she organised a home sale to present her winter collection. "I had been working for Murielle Scherre, who designs La Fille d'O and sells her lingerie in a special space in her own home. She offered me the opportunity to sell my own clothes there, too."

But the evening didn't go as expected. "I could only offer the what I had made myself – and it takes a while to do that. People were asking: 'Is this it?'" De Craecker realised she had to expand the concept.

She got in touch with other creative people through e-mail and MySpace. "I asked some artistic friends to meet up and talk about the concept." She ended up with nine other designers who all had their own unique vision on crafts and children, and they decided to found Lillie Polka together. "Some

of us sew, others draw, write or crochet." The only guideline for the members is that they have to produce handmade things for little kids.

Establishing a name, a logo and a website very quickly, they soon set a date for their first big home sale party, which took place in Ghent on 1 March. "It was a big success," says De Craecker. "We all sold a lot and immediately decided to set a date for another sale."

The goal of the Lillie Polka parties is to draw people in and get them interested in hosting a home party themselves. "Our small collections are perfect for presenting in the cosy atmosphere of a living room. We want people to feel at ease and have fun while shopping for their kids."

The next Lillie Polka home sale is on 24 May from 11.00 to 18.00 at Prinsenhof, Zilverhof 32, Ghent

Online
www.lilliepolka.com

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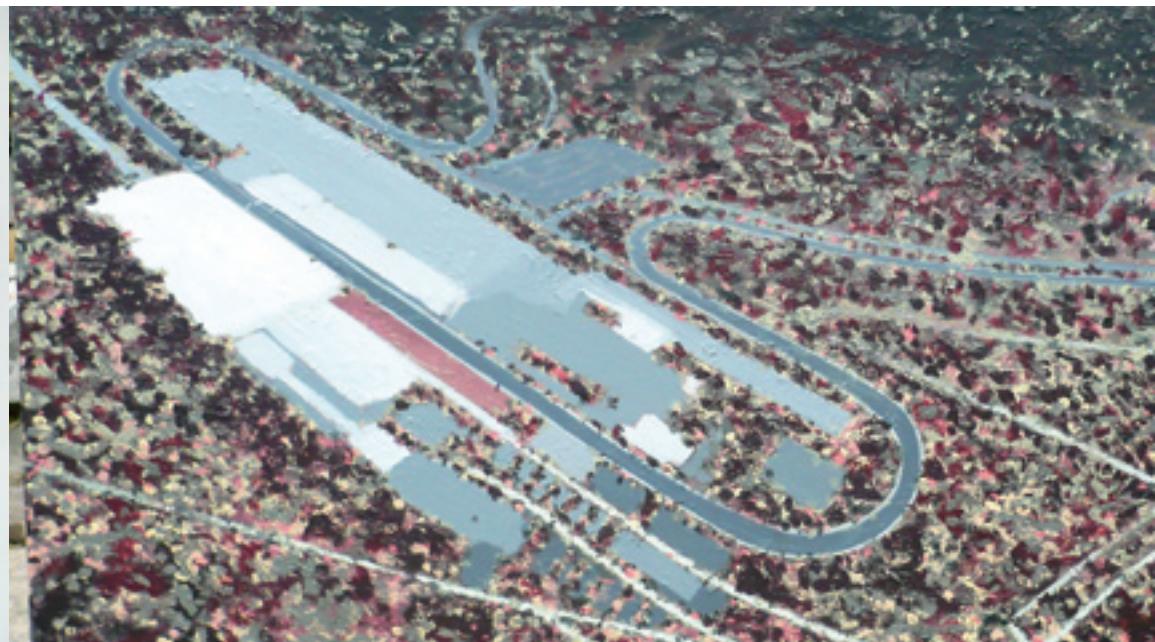
One in ten million

Among the hundreds of artists at Art Brussels, a Flemish painter flirts with notions of national identity

Lisa Bradshaw



"I'm from here": Ghent artist Gery De Smet (above) presents his impressionistic series of racing circuits at Art Brussels



Lisa Bradshaw

Gery De Smet is the kind of artist who has done so much work over three decades that he doesn't know where to begin. He picks a couple of published books of his work off the steel shelving in his massive studio on a quiet street in the Sint-Amantsberg suburb of Ghent, but there are hundreds more I don't see.

But who needs a chronology? With De Smet, it's better to just dive right in. That's generally how he starts one of his seemingly endless series of acrylic and oil paintings. "I just work; it comes out," he shrugs.

Most of it you won't find in his studio because his work is constantly in motion in exhibitions held throughout Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. At the end of this year, he joins five others in a show of Belgian artists in Washington DC. This month, De Smet will have several selections from his new series *In Competition* at Art Brussels, the city's prestigious art fair that welcomes 175 galleries from around the globe, bringing with them some of the most innovative contemporary art in the world.

In Competition conveys a modern impressionism—looking like paintings of highway systems surrounded by great globs of colour. In fact, the curving circuits are replicas of aerial views of famous racetracks that residents of an area would immediately recognise: the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, for instance, and the Silverstone Circuit, home of the British Grand Prix. But, though it's the concrete people might see, "the nature that surrounds it is taking over," says De Smet.

This latest series is in keeping with the artist's ongoing theme of nationalism. "From these paint-

ings, people can say 'it's my country,'" he explains.

In other series of paintings, though, nationalism takes an opposite approach—by not defining itself. *Ways of Living* is a series of houses in differing styles and amid a variety of landscapes that all have one thing in common—flagpoles with no flags. "You could fill in your own flag," remarks De Smet, thereby defining your own nationalism. This is a particularly pointed statement in a country where "nationalism" is a four-letter word.

"Flags are fascinating," says De Smet. "In the United States, so many houses have flagpoles and flags; here you don't see that as often. But we have so many different flags in Belgium. My children play with flags sometimes; they like the colours and the images. But they don't know the history of them. It's the same for tourists who come here. There are no particular

connotations applying to the flags."

This theme returns in a new series of drawings De Smet has just finished. He uses one of the models from *Ways of Living* and paints the same scene over and over, emphasising different aspects in each one—the tree, one side of the roof or maybe the flagpole. Some have phrases written on them, and one has a postal sticker slapped on it casually, a bit upside down. "It's something I just found around my house," he says, offering no other explanation. De Smet doesn't favour explanations—nor much in the way of interpretation, for that matter. Two weeks ago, the Dutch daily newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* ran an article about De Smet's work. "And it was completely wrong," he says. "People talk too much about art sometimes."

When De Smet does paint a single work, it is always site-specific, like a commissioned mural. He

has recreated one of his most intriguing for an exhibition that ran this month in the Dutch city of Roosendaal. The original is painted on glass in a secondary school in Antwerp: a beautiful, somewhat psychedelic group of perfect circles, each one representing a city or town in Flanders. The size of the circle reflects how many students in the school come from that place (as of last year). It's called "Roots". Says De Smet: "Students can look at it and say 'I'm from here'."

This year is De Smet's fourth trip to the capital's annual art fair, the atmosphere of which he likens to a casino. Many galleries have to travel a great distance and decide which of their artists to bring along. "Art Brussels is a gamble," he says. "Sometimes famous artists don't sell, and the young artists sell everything."

Online
www.gerydesmet.tk

When only the best will do

A rigorous selective process ensures quality at Art Brussels

Someone once said to me that if a bomb were to fall on Art Brussels, there would be no CEOs left in Brussels." Whether that outcome would dismay or delight you, Karen Renders' point is clear. Everyone who's anyone goes to the city's annual fair that showcases the best in contemporary art from around the world.

This year, the event at Brussels Expo features 179 galleries from 24 countries. Though Belgium gets the largest share, with 42 galleries present, you'll also find many from France, Germany and the UK. In addition to European galleries, Costa Rica, India, Japan and the United States all make an appearance. Renders, the organisation's director, notes that "the art world is becoming more and more globalised. The

English, for instance, are very insular, but they have to adapt and start moving, too."

About 450 galleries applied to be considered for Art Brussels, and a selection committee whittled it down to a manageable number. This also ensures top quality. "There are quite a few international contemporary art fairs in the world today," says Renders, "so we can't afford to not offer the highest quality."

Besides being a magnet for collectors and curators around the world, Art Brussels serves as simply a whopping show for visitors. In fact, several installations by up-and-coming artists have been set up around the venue solely to serve as an exhibition. The event as a whole "is a unique opportunity to get a comprehensive view of

what contemporary art represents today on an international level," says Renders. "One of our objectives is to open up contemporary art to the general public."

But most of the multi-disciplinary works—painting, collages, photography, sculpture, graphic arts and drawing—is fair game for buyers. Just come lined with pockets in a size that matches your desire. When asked what a €500 budget would afford me, I was told a drawing or a photo.

LB

18-21 April, Brussels Expo, Belgiëplein 1

Online
www.artbrussels.be



IGM Gallery, Paris

The law and the prophets

It's a stellar year for African film, and Flanders has two festivals to prove it

Lisa Bradshaw

Modern Africa is developing a filmmaking culture no different from the rest of the world: it's becoming less and less expensive to make your own movie, and women are getting behind the camera in larger numbers than ever before. Still, in Africa, where many countries are newly experiencing stable economies and where women must deal with more legal and social constraints than in other parts of the world, these represent enormous gains.

These gains are clearly reflected in two film festivals in Flanders this month. Both include features, documentaries and shorts from across the continent, but the 13th Afrika Film Festival in Leuven focuses on films from Central Africa, while Brussels' Festival of African Cinema, now in its fourth year, is particularly strong on documentaries.

"African societies are changing," says Aurore Engelen, manager of the festival in Brussels. "There are a lot of women directors right now." In the festival's documentary competition, 10 of the 18 films are by women.

The festival also celebrates Hip Hop music with a number of movies on the theme and hosts an homage to Djibril Diop Mambety, who, despite only making two full-length features before his death 10 years ago, is a legend in African filmmaking. The Senegalese director's *Touki Bouki* (1973) is credited with being Africa's first experimental film, while *Hyènes* – somewhat of a sequel, 20 years later – is loosely based on Frederick Durrenmatt's *The Visit*. "There are not very many African directors who have adapted stories from other countries," notes Engelen.

One contemporary African filmmaker who is following in those footsteps is Mark Dornford-May, whose new film *Son of Man* features in Leuven's Afrika Film Festival. Taking on the Christian world's most classic narrative, the film follows the road to crucifixion of a modern-day South African saviour.

Though it might seem strange to have two African film fests overlapping, you'll find that the Brussels' event is a bit more francophone oriented, while Leuven's is a bit more English – and travels to other cities throughout Flanders. It can also be difficult to get hold of movies with limited copies, and this way the festivals can share them. This is a good thing for audiences, who might miss the riveting new Nigerian movie *Ezra* in Brussels – but can catch it in Leuven, Ghent or Aarschot.

See our interview with Guido Huysmans, director of Leuven's Afrika Film Festival, on page 16.



Ezra

If you only see one film during the African fests this month, make it this brutally truthful offering from Nigerian director Newton Aduaka, which plays in both the Brussels and Leuven festivals. A young rebel from an unspecified land must answer for the hallucinogen-induced crimes he's

committed against his village many years after he was kidnapped and forced to become a child soldier. This was the grand prize winner at Africa's two biggest film festivals last year. (Aduaka's award-winning 2001 film *Rage* also plays at the Brussels' festival.)

As Old as My Tongue

This delightful documentary by British filmmaker Andy Jones shows at the Brussels festival. Bi Kidude is a legend, both on and off her home island of Zanzibar. Probably in her mid-90s (though her exact age is unknown, even to her), she's been a rebel and a singer since the 1920s, and, boy, does she have a few stories to tell.



Munyurangabo

Not long after the genocide, two best friends leave Kigali on foot. One of them passes his old village and wants to stay, much to the dismay of the other. Soon it becomes clear that the boys are on opposite sides of the Tutsi/Hutu conflict. This supremely confident film debut by Lee Isaac Chung is the best instalment to date on the Rwandan genocide, which is remarkable considering that the director is an American – the son of Korean immigrants. Plays at both festivals.



Faro: La Reine des eaux (Faro: Goddess of the Waters)

Director Salif Traoré of Mali makes a masterful fiction debut with this look at modernity showing up to disrupt tradition. A tech-savvy engineer comes back to his village, only to be blamed for the near drowning of a girl. The water goddess is angry, and a sacrifice must be made. Screens at both festivals.



Son of Man

Another highly-original retelling of a foreign classic from Mark Dornford-May, who in 2005 brought us *U-Carmen e-Khayelitsha*, the South African version of the opera *Carmen*. This one comes from direct from the New Testament: a political and religi-

ous leader, who is spied on by Judas via video camera, inspires followers in Cape Town. One of the highlights of the Leuven festival, this powerful version of the life of Christ suggests the outcome of the story would be the same today as it was 2,000 years ago.

Bring on the organ

After more than a century, Decap still rolls out its magnificent mechanical instrument

Monique Philips

Last year the Flemish Community bought the Ghysels organ collection out from under the nose of Sotheby's and several other interested Japanese and American buyers. This collection of instruments, which lost a few small pieces to thieves in 2002, was very sought after indeed.

Ghysels' collection contains the largest and most unique set of player pianos, orchestrions and mechanical organs in the world. Equally exceptional, all of them still function. So, fortunately, Flemish Culture Minister Bert Anciaux has promised that these early 20th century musical beauties will not be stored away in some depot, but put on display and to work.

In 1900 there was only one address to order a large self-playing mechanical organ: Antwerp. With its various famous organ-building families – Mortier, Verbeeck, Burssens and Decap – the city became the centre of the industry. Ballrooms and fairs weren't complete without one of these musical contraptions that could belt out the sounds of a multitude of instruments through its array of pipes. The crowds loved them.

A major innovation was the huge 121-key organ, with its six rows of violins, an invention by the Decap brothers. Logically, the competition was very curious about the technology. The Decaps, though, took the mystery of the "tremulation" of the 635 pipes to their graves.

The Decap business, founded in 1902, is still going strong today – repairing, tuning, selling and renting out their vintage pieces for festivities of all kinds. They are also still making them in all manner



A Decap organ under a Klessens family *spiegeltent*

of shapes and sizes – and names. Every organ has its own distinguishable sound and bears its own name: Magic, Atomic or Splendid, for instance.

A lucky few individuals own their own Decaps: Belgian singer-songwriter Guido Belcanto is currently touring Flanders with his room-size Decap organ, the

perfect accompaniment for the cult blues artist who warbles about red light districts, sailors and roses in his heavily kitsch show *Ballroom of Broken Hearts*.

One of the wonders of Decap is that you can still find the early originals up and running in cafés and clubs across Flanders. They are immediately recognisable:

most of them sport a wooden Art Deco façade and a horseshoe-shaped front.

One of those, a commissioned 92-key piece, takes up the back wall in Antwerp's Cafe Beveren. When this beloved organ celebrated its 70th birthday last year, members of the Decap family were present to have a beer with the merry locals. Be sure to do the same before dropping a coin in this organ. You'll be blown away.

Quite literally, too. An impressive set of wooden pipes provides that typical Decap sound. The score is programmed on cardboard books with punch holes (which have since been replaced by computer systems).

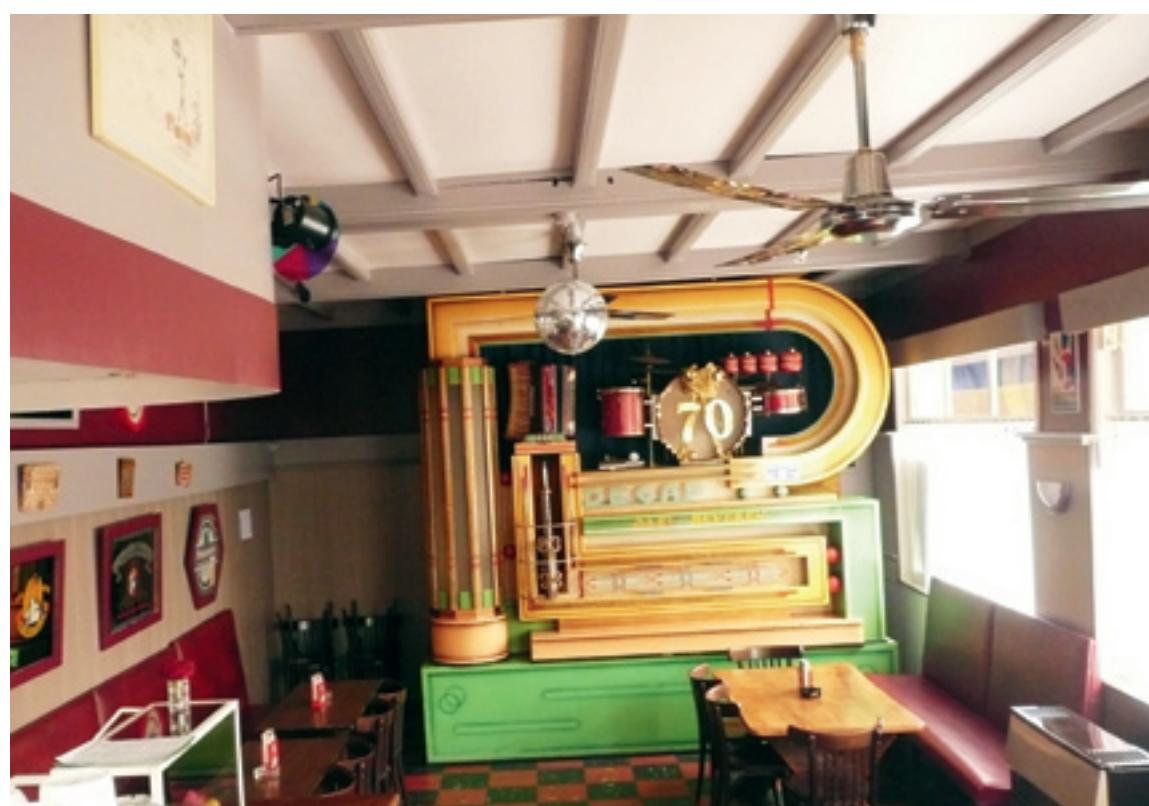
You can place a Decap organ in a timeframe by examining the instruments worked into the machine. The accordion was added in 1933. As the extensive percussion section, with its maracas and clopping wood blocks, became ever more important, additional drums were put in by 1934, playing themselves into a rhythmic frenzy.

In 1935, a saxophone was added (though it doesn't actually play music). At the Decap family business in Antwerp's Essenstraat, you can buy organ books, records and CDs of your favourite mechanical organ.

Related to the mechanical organs are the *spiegeltenten*, or

mirror tents, that were put up for local fairs. It was from the tents that a Decap organ would usually steal the show. Dancers had to pay by song, so those organ's numbers were notoriously shorter. The "book layer" was instructed "not just to put on his own favourite books but take the audience's preferences into account". As it was difficult to see the dancers from his seat, the book layer sometimes removed the side panel of the organ.

Occasionally, you'll see one of these tents back up today and can rediscover and enjoy the nostalgia and craftsmanship of these marvels. Guy Klessens was a master at constructing and decorating these mirrored palaces as part of his family business in Rijkevorsel near Lier. When he was 70, he and his wife started to build a new one to replace the 1920 masterpiece that went up in flames at a fair. Together they made all the doors, floors, windows and stained glass by hand and, seven years later, celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in it.



Antwerp's Cafe Beveren and its 1937 Decap organ

online

www.decap-gebr-antwerp.com
www.spiegeltent.com

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Lost in time

A lack of legislation on abandoned sites leaves many Flemish properties empty for decades

Mon Philips

When looking at Flanders' cityscapes you can't help but notice its mixture of architectural styles. The classical Antwerp Opera House, for example, stands near umpteen floors of golden 70s office tower. Some might call it ugly, but let's, for argument's sake, call it, well, charmingly lawless.

Contrary to popular belief, not everything is permitted. In Dadizele, West Flanders, an abandoned theme park next to the city church is heavily frowned upon. The property's owner has been granted two years to find a solution.

In 1995 a law on *leegstand en verkrotting* (empty and dilapidated) was introduced to stimulate owners of abandoned enterprises, whether it was a factory or a farm, to make up their minds. To avoid hefty fines, a widespread and frantic demolition craze followed. The law had been instigated by the building lobby, which had its eye on the unused and valuable industrial plots on the outskirts of cities. But today, many empty plots remain empty – or have been turned into improvised parking lots or dumping grounds. And still the demolition of sometimes valuable assets goes on.

Adriaan Linters, 56, retired lecturer on archaeological heritage, co-founder of the Flemish Union for Industrial Archaeology (VVIA) and author of the book

The Roots of Flanders Technology, is the authority on industrial archaeology in Flanders. "We have a very strict museum decree but no museum studies, and my generation of conservationists is retiring," he says. His biggest concerns right now are motivating the public and finding the next generation of conservationists.

So, what does Linters think when he passes an abandoned building? "I try to get in," he admits. "I'm a historian, and I want to figure out where the building fits into our socio-economic and technical history. I'm very interested in the steps of that evolution."

An abandoned building's biggest problem is lack of time. It might take a while before its first window gets smashed, but once that happens, the rest will soon go, and the costs to renovate the place will double yearly. If unprotected by law or brambles, a historic site is often stripped by thieves in no time. Doors, mantelpieces and copper get ripped out and beams sawed away for wood.

Preservationists need time to study the building and its possibilities, figure out a new function and then convince decision makers. It's a complicated process that takes five or more years. Attention on abandoned properties can help, but sometimes it leads to new complications. Says Linters: "The syrup factory in Borgloon that won the Monument Competition

on TV last year has to spend that prize money before this autumn. They're still trying to figure out what hit them."

Flanders lags behind other countries, like the UK, where the value of taking stock and making quick decisions on empty properties is evident and publicly funded. Flemish authorities leave all conservation initiatives to private sponsors. "Because of this, Flanders lets many options slip by, counting too much on private money," says Linters. "In other European countries, authorities take the lead, rather than the back-seat."

In the UK and France, contests are even organised in which architectural agencies compete for the perfect idea for reuse of a particular site. In the Netherlands, the federal organization BOEi focuses entirely on finding the best use for former industrial buildings. EU funds are available, but Flanders has no infrastructure to request them. Linters is adamant that the government should set a better example. "Do you know of any Flemish administrative department located in a reconverted building? There isn't one." OVAM, Flanders' public waste company, with the mantra "recycle, recycle", even bought an old furniture factory in Mechelen that they ultimately didn't reconvert – instead demolishing it and moving into a new building. "What kind of public message do you give out there?" Linters asks.

Still, Flanders does boast some excellent examples of conversion. The city of Antwerp, for instance, offered the former hydraulic power station Zuiderpershuis to a theatre group in 1986 free of charge. The troupe moved their activities into the existing building, which has become the cultural hub for a now thriving neighbourhood.

On the other hand, whole industrial complexes have disappeared. Hamme on the Durme River in East Flanders used to manufacture rope for ships and coalmines. Boom was the centre of a unique



The historical Hofstade swimming pool, once a thriving holiday destination, closed and abandoned since 1978

landscape of brickyards. These industries were active until the 1970s, but now nothing remains.

Where bigger and heavier industries were Wallonia-based, Flanders was an area of KMOs – small to medium enterprises. These family businesses were typically smaller, built with cheap materials and expanded whenever necessary, resulting in jigsaw-like (often unattractive) edifices.

Linters thinks it is a pity that Flanders doesn't see the historical and economical value of these properties. "What better way to profile ourselves within Europe than by showing that our products are excellent? We were the second industrialised country in Europe, and we've never stopped producing state-of-the-art products," he asserts.

"How many people know that Bakelite was invented here, that the metal constructions of the Panama Canal and the bars of the New York Zoo were welded right here in Flanders?"

In this regard, Linters notes the shrill contrast with a region like Catalonia. Proud of their industrial traditions, they reconvert their factories as a matter of positive image-building.

Another challenge faced by industrial archaeology is environmental legislation concerning sustainability. If you assume that "sustainable" means "for generations to come", you're wrong. In post-World War II society, the life cycle of materials is reduced to 25 years. Plastic, which degrades more quickly than wood, is considered sustainable. The legislation was drawn up with new buildings and products in mind but also applies to the old ones. Vintage cars, for instance, might be banned from the road, and if you can't take them out for a spin on a lazy Sunday, who will want to hold onto them?

"We need to recalculate and revalidate those prescribed norms," says Linters. "An old building doesn't need disfiguring double-glazing when, with its thick walls and small windows, it's equally equipped against the climate."

To prevent their estate being protected by complicated laws, some owners welcome an "accident". One owner in France didn't hesitate to dynamite the main building of his mining site. The facade was ripped out of the old Belgacom children's camp in Oostduinkerke because the protection notice on the building was pending. In a former distillery in Hasselt, fires were twice extinguished by vigilant neighbours. These fires were allegedly set by "hippies". Linters is sceptical. "The first hippy in Hasselt is still to be sighted." Now the site, turned into the Jenever Museum, welcomes 60.000 visitors a year.

"In general," explains Linters, "new is considered cheaper than recycled. Wrongly so. In the end, we need more psychiatrists than architects."



Dadipark in Dadizele has seen better days

Temporary use buys time

Some traditional estate agencies in Brussels try to get a hold of abandoned sites to offer temporary cheap housing to those who need it. And there are vigilant organisations like Precare that go even further, negotiating with owners to open up the myriad of unused spaces in Brussels to house the homeless or create studios for artists. By setting up events like the cultural festival PleinOpenAir in those venues, they attract plenty of public attention. Since its inception nine years ago, Precare is responsible for placing organization in 14 Brussels buildings, and the project is being copied in Milan, London and Barcelona.

Online

www.precare.org

Online

www.vvia.be

Classical & new music**Brussels**

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

APR 11 20.00 Belgian National Orchestra Ensemble, conducted by Patrick Davin: Defoort's extracts from The House of the Sleeping Beauties, Adès' Violin Concerto, Hosokawa's Circulating Ocean

APR 12 20.30 Liège Philharmonic, conducted by Pascal Rophé: Tanguy, Dusapin, Fafchamps, Jarrell

APR 13 11.00 Francesco Tristano Schlimé, piano: Berio, Frescobaldi, Busoni, Scarlatti. 15.00 Luxembourg Philharmonic, conducted by Emmanuel Krivine: Ravel, Martin, Dvorak

APR 14 20.00 Free Radicals: film concert with Klangforum Wien, conducted by Jean Deroyer

APR 15 20.00 Leif Ove Andsnes, piano: Bach, Beethoven, Sibelius, Grieg, Debussy

APR 16 & 22 20.00 La Monnaie Symphony Orchestra and Choir, conducted by Julian Reynolds and Piers Maxim: Rossini's Elizabeth, Queen of England

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be

APR 11 12.30 Stephane Ginsburgh, piano: Prokofiev sonatas

APR 13 12.00 Arditti String Quartet: Anton Webern, Sarkissian, Ehlers, Fels, Stravinsky, Baltakas, Felder, Bartók

Kaaitheater

Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59
APR 16 20.30 Ictus & Octurn: Le Grand Gamelan by Bo van der Werf

Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 0900.28.877
APR 13 11.00 André Siwy, violin; Patrick Dheur, piano: Smetana, Leduc, Janacek

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.507.82.00
APR 10 20.00 Beeldconcert: multidisciplinary project exploring

image and sound. 20.00 Freiburger Barockorchester, conducted by Petra Müllejans, with Bernarda Fink, mezzo: Bach

APR 16 20.00 Phantasm violin consort: Bach, Purcell, Gibbons, Jenkins, Lawes

APR 17 20.00 Fauré Quartet: Mahler, Mozart, Brahms

Theatre Saint Michel

Pater Eudore Devroyestraat 2;

02.732.70.73

APR 11 20.00 Antonio Vilardi: Conversing with the piano

Wolubilis

Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30

APR 15 20.00 Les XXI: Schubert's string trios, Messiaen's Quatuor pour la fin du temps, Schubert string trios

Antwerp**deSingel**

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28

APR 11 20.00 deFilharmonie, conducted by Eivind Aadland: Aho's Oboe Concerto, Nielsen's Espansiva Sinfonia

APR 16 20.00 Mosaïques Quartet: Beethoven, Webern, Schubert, Lanner

Borgerhout**De Roma**

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90

APR 11 20.30 Raphaëlla Smits, classical guitar

Bruges**Concertgebouw**

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02

APR 15 20.00 Mosaïques Quartet: Beethoven, Webern, Schubert, Lanner

Ghent**De Bijloke**

Jozef Kluyskensstraat 2, 09.269.92.92

APR 10 20.00 Lorenzo Ghielmi, harpsichord; Vittorio Ghielmi, viola da gamba; Luca Pianca, theorbo: Forqueray de Visée

Hoëilaart**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

APR 14 20.00 Kirke Quartet with Harriet Langley, violin; Dana Protopopescu, piano: Haydn, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Dvorak

Leuven**Stuk**

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20

APR 15 20.30 Frederik Croene, contemporary piano: Bart Vanhecke

APR 16 19.30 Apsara + Suite: music/ performance

Ostend**Ostend Kursaal (Casino)**

Monacoplein; 070.22.56.00,

www.sherpa.be

APR 11 20.00 Budapest Gypsy Symphony Orchestra, conducted by József Lendvai Csócs: Khachaturian, De Sarasate, Brahms, Strauss, Bizet

Opera**Brussels****De Munt**

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39

APR 12-MAY 2 Médée by Luigi Cherubini with the Monnaie Choirs and Les Talens Lyriques, conducted by Christophe Rousset, staged by Krzysztof Warlikowski

Ghent**Vlaamse Opera**

Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02,

www.vlaamseopera.be

Until APR 13 15.00 + 19.30 Dialogues des Carmélites by Poulenc, conducted by Jean-Claude Casadesus, staged by Robert Carsen

Jazz & blues**Brussels****Archiduc**

Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52

APR 12 17.00 Les Archiducks

APR 13 17.00 The Brad Leali/Claus Raible 4tet

Crowne Plaza Hotel

Ginestraat 3; 02.203.62.00

APR 10 20.00 Manuel Hermia Quartet

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78

APR 9 20.30 Fred Delplancq Quartet

APR 10 20.30 Tribute to Paolo Radoni: Guitar Big Band, Guitar Trio, Christine Schaller & friends, Pirly Zurstrassen & Lichel Pieters, Chrystel Wautier **APR 12** 18.00 Après un rêve **APR 16** 20.30 Chrystel Wautier Trio **APR 17** 20.30 Marc Lelangue

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32

APR 17 20.00 Lizz Wright

Le Caveau du Max

Victor Hugo/Emile Max Corner; 02.733.17.88

APR 10 20.30 Jean-François Maljean Trio

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,

www.soundsjazzclub.be

APR 9 22.00 Chamaquiando, salsa

APR 10 21.00 The Singers Night **APR 11** 22.00 Giacomo Lariccia Quintet

APR 12 21.00 Brussels Rhythm'n Blues with The Crawling Kingsnakes and Eric Moen's Jive **APR 14** 22.00 Master Session **APR 15** 22.00 Antonio Segura Group **APR 16** 22.00 Caribe Con K - Los Soneros del Barrio, Caribbean music

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45

APR 10 12.30 Didier François + Gilles Chabénat

Uccle Cultural Centre

Rodestraat 47; 02.374.64.84

APR 12 20.30 Renaud Patigny with Alexia Waku

Antwerp**deSingel**

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28

APR 10 20.00 Spider Monkey Strings

with Taylor Ho Bynum, trumpet

Borgerhout**De Roma**

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90

APR 12 20.30 Radio Modern with Lady Linn and her Magnificent Seven

APR 17 20.30 Tutu Puoane

Ghent**Vooruit**

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.28

APR 16 20.00 Tim Berne's Science Fiction

Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul**Brussels****Belle Vue Café**

Henegouwenkaai 43

APR 14 20.15 Smoosh + Peter Moren

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89

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 9 The Bellrays + The Experimental Tropic Blues Band. A Silver Mt Zion

APR 10 Zoot Woman. A Fine Frenzy. One Night Only **APR 12** Malcolm

Middleton **APR 14** Electric Eel Shock + Kid Carpet + The Presidents of the

United States of America **APR 15** Alaska in Winter

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34

APR 10 21.30 Be Your Own Pet

APR 11-12 20.00 Film concert:

VU by Leila Alayat with musical improvisation by Alayat and Arnaud Paquette plus a visual improvisation of the film by Sébastien Koeppel **APR 17** 20.00 Old Time Relijun

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07

Doors open at 19.30:

KVS Box
Arduinkaa 9; 02.210.11.12, www.kvs.be
Until APR 19 20.30 Transquinquennial presents *In het bos (In the Forest)* by Oriza Hirata (in Dutch and French with English surtitles)

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, www.dewerf.be
Until APR 12 20.30 Compagnie Cecilia in Soeur Sourire (in Dutch)
APR 17-18 20.30 TheaterMalpertuis presents *Dooddoener* (in Dutch)

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

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20
APR 16-17 20.30 *Toneelhuis in Stullen*, staged by Lotte van den Berg (in Dutch)

Visual arts

Brussels

Argos Centre for Art and Media
Werfstraat 13; 02 229 00 03, www.argosarts.org
APR 12-JUNE 21 *No Place Like Home: Perspectives on Migration in Europa*, Belgian and international artists' videos, photographs and installations

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
Until APR 27 *Water Vocal – Endangered II*, video and sound installation by Rúri
Until MAY 11 *Paul Klee: Theater here, there and everywhere*, monographic exhibition on the Berne-based artist (1879-1940)
Until MAY 18 *Jan Fabre: Borrowed time*, photographs of work by the Flemish artist

Costume and Lace Museum
Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50
Until MAY 27 *Weefsel van het absolute (Absolute Fibres)*, textiles by outsider artists

De Elektriciteitscentrale European Centre for Contemporary Art
Sint Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.44
Until APR 27 *No Borders [Just N.E.W.S.]*, installations by 29 young European artists

De Loge Architectuur museum
Kluisstraat 86; 02.649.86.65
Until SEP 28 *Belgie/Belgique 58*, architectural and decorative forms at the time of Belgium's 1958 World's 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 Brugge and Pablo Garcia-Rubio, among others

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.fondationpourlarchitecture.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
APR 10-MAY 31 *Récits*, paintings by Cécilia Shishan

APR 10-MAY 31 *Jewellery and ceramics* by Axelle Gielen

Jewish Moroccan Heritage Museum

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

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimstraat 21; 02.512.19.63
Until JUNE 22 *Dicht op de huid (Close to the Skin)*, paintings by Brussels-based artist Maurice Frydman

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
Until MAY 4 *L'Histoire au présent (History in the Present)*, over 300 photographs of 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 Indian and Afro-American culture in Paris, plus contemporary works by Brussels-based artists

René Magritte Museum

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

Royal Army Museum

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

Royal 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 funeral 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

Stadhuis

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 Gratiès 7; 02.662.16.99
Until APR 27 *Expo 58, nostalgie*, photos by Léon Jacques and Fernand Hellinckx

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33
APR 12-JULY 27 *Mike Kelley Educational Complex Onwards: 1995-2008*, retrospective with large-scale installations, sculptures, paintings and photographs

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

Until SEP 9 *Fantasy, intervention by Koen van den Broek*

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
APR 10-MAY 18 *Janssens' Works*, installation by Ghent architects Bavo Gideon Boie & Matthias Pauwels
Until MAY 25 *Inside Outside*, landscape architecture by Petra Blaissé

Fifty-One Fine Art Photography

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

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00, www.fotomuseum.be
Until JUNE 8 *Patrick De Spieghelaere*, 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 Elsschot's Kaas: een beeldroman*, graphic novel adaptation by Dick Matena

MoMu

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70
Until AUG 17 *Moi, Véronique*, Branquinho TOU'TE 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 Ledoux*, 18th and 19th-century drawings

De Bond

Buitenhof 1; 050.44.30.48
Until MAY 5 *Indonésie*, 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

Eupen

Ikob
In den Loten 3; 087.56.01.10
Until APR 20 *The Ikob Collection*, contemporary works by Edmond Jamar, Guillaume Bijl, Ellen Brusselmans, Yves Zurstrassen, Jacques Charlier and Ronny Delrue, among others

Ghent

Design Museum
Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99
Until APR 27 *Challenging the Chatelaine*, contemporary objects by 78 international designers

Until APR 27 *Verleidelijke eenvoud (Seductive Simplicity)*, silver and ceramic works by Nedda El-Asmar, Belgian Designer of the Year 2007

Until APR 27 *Times through Teaware*, 100 years of Taiwanese tea culture

Until APR 27 *20 years Theo-design*, colourful and eccentric eyeglass frames

Maaltebruggekasteel

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

Museum Dr Guislain

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, www.museumdrguislain.be

Until APR 27 *Sick: Between Body and Mind*, multimedia exhibition showcasing the links between mental and physical pain, with work by Félicien Rops, Patrik Vermeulen, Dana Wyse, Léon Spilliaert and many others

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)
Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03
Until JUNE 29 *Kunst Nu: Wilfredo*

Prieto, installation by the Cuban artist
Until JULY 6 *Guillaume Bijl*, major retrospective

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 APR 27 *10th International Triennial of Political Posters*
Until MAY 25 *Place@Space*: (re)shaping everyday life, installations by Paul Casier, Ryoji Ikeda, Limite Azero, Alice Miceli and others

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 Raveel museum
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
leperleestraat 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

MY FLANDERS

Guido Huysmans

Guido Huysmans founded the Afrika Film Festival in Leuven. He tells us about the state of African cinema in Belgium and his work to promote black actors

You founded the Afrika Film Festival 12 years ago. Why?

It was true in '96, and it's still true today. There are almost no African movies in the cinema. The very first event in Leuven was called Vierkant voor Afrika, or Square Deal for Africa, and it was a political debate, music and a few films. We invited four filmmakers, and they talked about their films and the context, and it was very nice to have that historical perspective. And the people liked the movies. We asked the four filmmakers what they thought we should do about getting more African films in cinemas. They said there were not enough productions. Then if you have a production, it's tough to find a distributor. If you find a distributor, you can't find a cinema that wants to show it. Then if you find a cinema, you have no audience! We couldn't do much about the productions, but what we can do in Belgium is create a situation where you show African movies and create an audience for distributors. They weren't earning enough money with African movies, and we needed to change that.

Have you been successful at creating an audience for African films?

Yes. It's a distributor's decision if it wants to take on a movie, but now, after 13 years, they'll ask us if we like a certain movie. If we like it, and they like it, they'll programme it. We have earned that kind of power. There is a lot more distribution of African films than 10 years ago. We're now programming this festival not just in Leuven, but in 16 other cities. And we also have screenings for school students.

Instead of showing an African movie one or two times, we show it 20 or 30 times. There are four films in the festival this year that we've already secured distribution for in Belgium.

Why did you choose to base the festival in Leuven?

We're from Leuven. Guido Convents and I were active in a group called De Andere Films, which promoted quality film, and we were used to organising little festivals.

The festival focuses on Central Africa. But Africa is a huge continent – why limit it?

In Belgium, we have a specific history with three African countries: Congo, Rwanda and Burundi – the former colonies. We have a privileged relationship with them and access to a lot of archives. We have written two books now about film in Central Africa. We try to work together with the countries. We recently showed Belgian films in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, including the Flemish film *Mira*. We think it's important that they also see our films of good quality. They don't travel very much; it's still a very poor country.

Do you think cultural events like this really educate people about Africa or change attitudes?

If you work on AIDS in Africa, you get a lot of funding, but if you do a film festival, you don't get anything. It's frustrating. Governments see Africa as a continent of problems and war. But Africa is a continent with dynamic people. Kigali is so



Sander Ganote

beautiful. If you go there, you see a completely other Africa than you see on television. And that is one of our goals, too, to change the image of Africa. But you have to be realistic. We cannot compete with the daily images on television. But we had 6,500 visitors last year, and I think that we do something. At the very least, we prove that there are professional filmmakers and very good actors in Central Africa.

In fact, you specialise in the promotion of actors, right?

We produced a catalogue listing 100 black actors in Belgium. Flemish television asked us to do it because they wanted black actors and couldn't find them. We know the actors, both French and Flemish speaking. Now the producers are starting to know them, too. That is a side effect of our festival. Africa's biggest filmmaker,

Sembène Ousmane, who died last year, was at our festival 10 years ago for a whole week. We invited the journalists to meet him; only two came, and they didn't know who he was. So we also have to educate the press and then they can inform the public. Everyone is only interested in Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. But Africa's very first filmmaker, they had never heard of. Now they are interested, but we had to work at it.

Did you have a specific interest in Africa before the African Film Festival?

I worked for Doctors Without Borders for years in promotions. I organised exhibitions and theatre performances. We did a huge concert five years ago at Vorst Nationaal to benefit AIDS relief. I began travelling to Africa about six years ago, and now every year

I go to Kenya, Zanzibar and South Africa – to the film festival in Cape town. I've also been to Rwanda and Burundi. Burundi I like very much – I want to go there many more times. Life is good there if you have enough money. Some people from Burundi who live here go back and forth. I think that's the best thing – to live between the two. But it's complicated. Kenya, for instance – in Nairobi, you feel a lot of tension, you feel it can explode. And it did. But if you go 100 kilometres from Nairobi, it's a much better life. Kenya is a huge country. And you see Rwanda really coming along now. The roads are in really good shape – better than in Belgium! The parliament in Rwanda is 50% women; it's the only African country where you see that. And there is very little corruption. Rwanda gives me hope for Africa.

Interview by Lisa Bradshaw

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

In a fix

I'm looking for two technicians who can fix electric motors. You can't find anyone any more in this country who can do it. Our schools don't teach it any more.

Bob Van Loock
employer
speaking at a jobs fair in Antwerp
for Polish workers

Send in the troops

If we don't take part in this international effort, then we don't count on an international level. We are sending extra troops at the request of Nato, but the decision is strictly Belgian.

Karel De Gucht
Belgian foreign minister on the decision to send F16s and troops to Afghanistan

Back together

Another advantage of a temporary split is that it becomes obvious to the partners that they were made for each other. If that is really true, such a split will certainly strengthen the feeling.

Rika Ponnet
Flemish therapist on cyclist Tom Boonen's reconciliation with former girlfriend Lore Van De Weyer

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