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Coming home

A town in Antwerp province takes care of its mentally ill in a manner that has inspired the world

Lisa Bradshaw

Sint-Dimpna reigns supreme in Geel, a town of about 35,000 inhabitants in southeast Antwerp province. There is a Sint-Dimpna hospital, a Sint-Dimpna college and a Sint-Dimpna church, all located right next to Sint-Dimpnplein. Until about 30 years ago, every girl child born in Geel was given Dimpna as a first, second or third name.

Known as Saint Dymphna in English, the patron saint of the mentally ill has so inspired the residents of Geel that they have built a legacy caring for those vulnerable members of society. Though many places in Europe can claim innovative facilities for the care and treatment of psychiatric patients, Geel is unique in the world – because it's been doing it since the middle ages.

Saint Dymphna was the daughter of an Irish king who was driven insane by the death of his wife, Dymphna's mother. In about the year 600, the story goes, he turned to his teenage daughter, who bore a striking resemblance to the dead wife. She refused his proposal of marriage and fled with the parish priest, Gerebernus, settling in the area now known as Geel. Her father pursued, caught up with them and, in a mad rage, beheaded them both. And then the sick and insane began coming to Geel.

"Geel became a place of pilgrimage," explains Lieve Van de Walle, who manages the Rehabilitation Division of OPZ Geel, the town's world-class psychiatric hospital. "The clerics started developing rituals which were supposed to heal the sick."

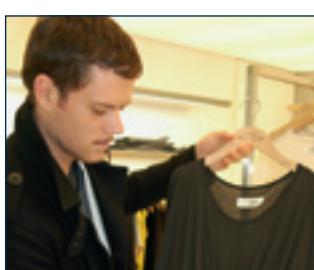
The housing of the mentally ill and the supervision of rituals took place in the 15th-century Sint-Dimpna church. Though the treatments were questionable, they were not cruel. During a time when the mentally ill were killed, locked up or put through extreme physical torture to rid them of their "demons", Geel was asking them to walk a circle around the church and collect grain from the neighbours.

Continued on page 4

Lisa Bradshaw



Armand, who cannot live on his own, has found a home in Geel



Business

Ever felt the need for a personal guide to take you around the fashion boutiques of Antwerp? We have just the person to show you the best addresses.

Living

Muslims and Jews face similar problems of discrimination in everyday life. Saffina Rana visits an organisation that encourages them to work together.

8

13

Interview

Patrick Huvenne is a forestry worker who looks after the beech woods east of Brussels. He tells us about forest management and the bluebells near Halle.

16

Zeebrugge Raid heroes named

War graves identified after 90 years

Alan Hope

Two unidentified bodies buried in Zeebrugge churchyard have finally been named, almost exactly 90 years after the raid in which the men died. The identities of the two men were announced last weekend at a special St George's Day event organised in the town.

The Zeebrugge raid took place on 23 April, 1918 with the aim of blocking the Bruges sea canal and trapping German ships and U-boats which had been inflicting damage on Allied shipping. To draw enemy fire and allow three old cruisers loaded with concrete to be scuttled across the canal entrance, an

attack was mounted on the breakwater, or mole, where the German guns were positioned.

According to Johan Ryheul, who has spent the last 20 years researching the question, one of the graves belongs to Wing Commander Frank Arthur Brock of the Royal Naval Air Service. A member of the Inventions and Research Board, Brock developed an anti-Zeppelin bullet and a device called the Dover flare. He died in a hand-to-hand fight with a German torpedo-boat sailor while trying to take out German machine guns which were turning on the destroyer HMS North Star.

Continued on page 3

EDITOR'S CHOICE

portofantwerp.com

Our Port of Antwerp correspondent, Marc Maes, writes this week about a container ship that is currently on the high seas carrying the rusted remains of a yacht once owned by the singer Jacques Brel.

Brel, who was born in Brussels in 1929, made his name in the 1950s singing powerful songs in French and Dutch on themes like love and death. After a hectic career, he abandoned his fans in 1973 and set sail on a private yacht that took him eventually to the Pacific. More than 30 years on, the yacht is now sitting in an iron container bound for the port.

The Port of Antwerp has recently launched a new website which has extensive information in Dutch, English and Chinese. The site includes four clocks showing the time in Antwerp, London, Shanghai and New York. You can also track the movements of big ships in and out of the port.

As you click through the site, you soon come to realise that the port isn't just about ships. The site

also has a section on the harbour authority's efforts to protect the environment, including a determined bid to save the natterjack toads. There is also a useful history of the port that dates its origins back to the 12th century.

You also learn about the Kerk-schip, a seaman's church located in a concrete barge built by the German navy in the Second World War to supply U-Boats. After being acquired by the Bishop of Mechelen, the ship was fitted out with two chapels, a restaurant and a museum.

The port is also a place where unskilled labourers often work long hours for low wages. Alan Hope reviews a new book by a local doctor, right, that exposes the hard conditions faced by the docklands workers. Some might argue that the port authority is spending too much time worrying about the welfare of toads.

Derek Blyth

Online

www.portofantwerp.com

**Correction**

In the issue of *Flanders Today* dated April 16, an error crept into a review of a new exhibition at the Erasmus Museum in Anderlecht. The text stated that all the paintings in the museum are copies, whereas it should have read that all the portraits of Erasmus are copies. The other paintings in the collection are genuine Flemish works from the 15th and 16th centuries.

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**FACE OF FLANDERS****Karel Van Bever**

Workers in the docks at Antwerp are being exposed to unknown dangers, and the practice of cost-cutting by enforcing "intolerable" flexi-working conditions is a risk to health and safety. That's according to a new book published last Friday by Flanders' new folk-hero, Dr Karel Van Bever.

Van Bever is 30 and a GP in Zelzate, a town on the Ghent-Terneuzen canal reputed to have the worst air quality in Belgium. In 2006, having been confronted with the illnesses and chronic conditions of his mainly working-class patients, he made up his mind to find out for himself what their lives were like.

The doctor signed up as an unskilled dock worker with a temp agency, going to work in the Port of Antwerp for Katoen Natie, a logistics company that deals in, among other things, fine and specialty chemicals. Without telling anyone involved, he became a dock-worker for nine months and has now published a diary of his experiences, *Dokter in overall* (*Doctor in Overalls*).

Van Bever follows in the footsteps of other impostors: he notes the influence of Günter Wallraff, whose 1985 book *Ganz unter* told of his experiences posing as a Turkish *gastarbeiter* in Germany. In the US, Barbara Ehrenreich worked in low-paying, blue-collar jobs to write her 2001 book *Nickel and Dimed*. And farther back, John Howard Griffin darkened his skin and went to the Deep South of the US in 1959 to document racial discrimination in *Black Like Me*.

Van Bever began his experiment in November of 2006 and ended in July, 2007, during which time his partner gave birth to their first child. It seems like a long time to keep up a false front, but it was a personal investigation as well as a professional one. Van Bever works in Zelzate for what is called the People's Group Practice, and he considers himself politically engaged.

"Scientific research shows that educated people remain relatively healthy until they are about 75, whereas uneducated workers have health problems from about the age of 50," he says. "They get heart, lung and joint problems much earlier. I wanted to experience the work for myself to see why that is."

The author began as a casual labour on day-long contracts. The day contracts he describes as "inhuman": often one shift follows another for a 16-hour day. Sometimes a worker doesn't know when (or indeed if) he'll be working tomorrow. That makes domestic life difficult and adds to work-related stress.

However, he soon moved on to a more permanent contract as a team leader, something he saw happen regularly with Belgians, but rarely with immigrant workers. "Racism is never far away," he claims.

Even as team leader, Van Bever was only netting €1,280 a month, including weekends and night shifts. "Workers are being exposed to dangerous products with risks they don't know about," he says. "I was involved in packing, loading and unloading powders for the plastics industry." Dust was ever-present, and corners were cut on protective clothing. He suffered various conditions: skin problems, blisters and joint and back pain. Who knows what else? "In nine months time, you can't tell what the long-term effects of those working conditions might be," he says.

Fernand Huts, chairman of Katoen Natie, has commented: "Clearly this man wasn't called on to do anything impossible because he did manage to hold out here for nine months, after all."

Alan Hope

Online

www.epo.be

TALKING DUTCH**notes on language****getallen**

If you grew up speaking English, the chances are that you will have learned the nursery rhyme about the four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie, an 18th-century coded verse, now sung innocently by children.

Similarly, those familiar with the King James Bible published in 1611 will know that the numbers contained in it are in the same format as the blackbirds: who could forget the giant of Gath with "six fingers on every hand, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number".

In Dutch the giant *had zes vingers aan zijn handen, en zes tenen aan zijn voeten, vierentwintig in getal*. Thus *vierentwintig* equals four and twenty. Modern Dutch still numbers in this way; English does not.

So Dutch *getallen* sound, if not biblical, then old-fashioned to English speakers. Since counting is the thing that we nearly always do in our mother tongue irrespective of which language we are speaking, it should come as no surprise that learners of Dutch often get their numbers in a twist.

However, up to twenty, Dutch and English numbers are very close. So one to twelve runs: *een, twee, drie, vier, vijf, zes, zeven, acht, negen, tiend, elf, twaalf*. Then follows thirteen to twenty: *dertien, veertien* (not *vierentien*), *vijftien, zestien, zeventien, achtien, negentien, twintig*. Dutch now continues with this "three and ten" order; so twenty-one is *eenentwintig*. Sometimes you will see accents on *één* to distinguish it from the word *een*, meaning "a" or "an".

If we proceed in tens we get *dertig*, then *veertig* (not *vierig*), *vijftig*, *zestig*, *zeventig*, *tachtig* (not *achtig* for some reason) *negentig* and then *honderd* (with no word for "a" hundred or "one" hundred).

Cheques have gone the way of the telegram in Belgium, so we seldom write out impressive numbers like 33 *drieëndertig*, 141 *honderdeenenviertig* or 1517 *vijfienhonderdzeventien*. Note the two dots in *drieëndertig* to tell you to pronounce *en* separately from *drie*.

It's not always so precise. If you vaguely want to indicate that there were about ten men present, you could say *er was een man of tien aanwezig* – "a man or ten". So three or four weeks ago is *een week of vier geleden*.

Some numbers are worth committing to memory: if someone has a heart attack or you see flames leaping from a window, dial *honderd* for *een ziekenwagen* or *de brandweer*, *honderd en een* will put you through to the police.

Putting things in order is mostly done by adding *-de* or *-ste*: *de tiende* is the tenth; *de derde*, the third; *de vijftiende* is the fifteenth. And the first is *de eerste*; *de achtste* is the eighth; *de vierentwintigste* is the twenty-fourth. And so on. Now you should have an idea of how to count in Dutch. Just to test you, what is the Dutch for 65, and 32, and 87? Just think of the blackbirds! Did you get your units before your tens? *Vijfenzestig*, *tweeëndertig* and *zevenentachtig*. All correct? *Tien op tien!*

Alistair MacLean

Online

www.vandale.be

First World War fallen officers named



Identified: Commander Frank Arthur Brock

Continued from page 1

CMG

Until now, it had been thought that the grave was occupied by Lieutenant Commander Arthur Leyland Harrison, who was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously for his part in the raid, when he led a party of men against a machine-gun post, despite having already had his jaw broken by shrapnel. Only two of the men survived the attack.

However it now appears that Harrison is buried in the other nameless grave, one of 30 graves in all maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Zeebrugge churchyard.

Eight years ago, local people erected a monument to Lt Comm Harrison, a former England rugby international, at Roundham Head in Paignton in southern England.

There was some question as to whether that grave might not be occupied by Lieutenant Claude Hawkings, who died while trying to tie up the passenger ferry Royal Iris, used as a troop transport for the raid. But according to Ryheul, Harrison's distinctive chin, as well as his uniform, pointed to him being the occupant of the nameless grave.



Zeebrugge Churchyard

Hawkings, it is thought, may have fallen into the sea.

Ryheul's evidence has now been sent to London, with a request that the Ministry of Defence carry out any further research needed.

Station ban considered for train troublemakers

A ban on entering train stations and the withdrawal of train season tickets could be two of the measures introduced to cope with troublemakers on the railway system, according to proposals being examined by government affairs minister Inge Vervotte. Security and punctuality are the two main goals contained in the policy document being prepared for the sector.

A ban on individuals to stop them entering railway property is already possible under a 2004 law, and all that is required is for the mechanisms to enforce it to be placed on the statute book. Vervotte also plans to empower some members of NMBS staff to issue on-the-spot fines for certain categories of anti-social behaviour.

Punctuality, meanwhile, is an area where the NMBS has been slipping of late, and Vervotte intends to tie time-keeping to the pay of senior managers. They will in any case see their salaries capped and linked to a variety of performance targets.

Traffic on Ring-E19 faces chaos

Traffic on the Brussels Ring faces chaos for the coming year as a result of major roadworks. From 5 May, the junction with the E19 motorway from Antwerp in the direction of Zaventem will be closed to allow bridges and viaducts to be reinforced to carry a planned new third lane. The new rail link between Brussels and Mechelen will also be worked on. Traffic coming from Antwerp to Brussels on the E19 will be diverted via the Machelen exit and Diegem. The works also include resurfacing and are expected to be completed by April 2009.

The Brabant roads and works authority said that although the detour traffic will have full use of the two-lane road, delays were inevitable. At present, tailbacks can last until 10.00 around Vilvoorde and Zemst for traffic going towards Zaventem. The diversion, as well as speed limits as low as 50 km/h, will make that situation worse. "However it could just as easily happen that people leave the motorway earlier and everything goes fine," a spokesperson said. The cost of the works is estimated at €5.7 million.

Geuze wins American medal



Oude Geuze, from the Boon brewery in Lembeek, has been awarded a gold medal in the World Beer Cup organised by the American Association of Brewers. The beer, made of 100% pure sweet lambic, won in the traditional beers category against 28 other entrants. The brewery, still in family hands, won a silver medal four years ago for another gueuze beer. "But this is the cherry on the cake," said boss Frank Boon, whose company also brews Kriek.

Writer has change of heart

Jeroen Brouwers, the Dutch-born writer living in Flanders who last year rejected a literature prize because the €16,000 prize money was insufficient, has changed his mind. Since the controversy, Flemish culture minister Bert Anciaux and his Dutch counterpart Ronald Plasterk have decided to increase the prize to €40,000, with a further €20,000 for promotion of the winner's work. But Brouwers will not receive an increase in his own prize: the increase comes into force next time the prize is awarded in 2009. And he is ruled out for the future, too: the Dutch Letters Prize can only be awarded to a given writer once. Brouwers said he felt "victimised". "I'm being punished because I brought the matter up," he said. "I don't need a handshake from the King. They can put the money in my bank account right away."

NEWS FLASH

Four students from the Catholic High-school Kempen in Geel have developed a new intelligent spoon which measures the temperature of the contents of the pot or casserole. The "Smart Spoon" contains an electronic sensor in the bowl and a digital readout in the handle. An alarm goes off when the desired temperature is reached. The development and commercialisation of the Smart Spoon was carried out by the students themselves in cooperation with local businesses.

Stijn Vermeulen, 17, has been voted Belgium's best junior hotel maître d' in a competition in Koksijde. Stijn is a student at the Bruges hotel school Ter Groene Poorte, which took part in the competition against five schools from Wallonia. According to the judges, Stijn distinguished himself in particular in his pouring of drinks. He plans to continue studying.

Two of the world's largest cruise ships paid a call to the port of Zeebrugge last week. The P&O ship Ventura, at 116,000 tonnes the largest ship ever to enter Zeebrugge, was only delivered at the end of March and was on her way to Southampton for her launch. The 290-metre long ship has a restaurant run by bad-boy chef Marco Pierre White and lays on talks for passengers by art experts from Tate Modern. The Jewel of the Seas is a mere 90,000 tonner and was calling at Zeebrugge on her way to Amsterdam.

Companies who make computer games need the same kind of tax incentives for investment as those given to the film sector, according to a proposal for a new law introduced by opposition party Groen! Generous tax credits offered to the film industry for money put into an investment fund have turned the fund into the number one source of film finance in the country. Now Groen! member Jos Stassen wants the same advantages passed on to the games industry.

Around 40% of all Belgian airline pilots are now working for a foreign company, according to figures from the pilots' union BeCa. The reason for the massive drain of pilots is higher salaries available elsewhere, the Sabena Flight Academy – the only part left of the former national airline – explained. A report in the *Wall Street Journal* last week warned that the inability of flying schools to cope with the worldwide demand for pilots would lead to a slowdown in growth in the industry and push up wage costs.

A Flemish film, *Aanrijding in Moscou*, has been selected to appear as part of Critic's Week at the Cannes Film Festival, which takes place in May. The film, the debut feature by Ghent-born filmmaker Christophe Van Rompaey, is a dramatic comedy which begins with a car accident in a Ghent car park in the area known as Moscou. The film, the first from Flanders since *Manneken Pis* in 1995 to take part in Critics' Week, is also in the running for a Caméra d'Or prize.

FEATURE

Meet the family

Foster care providers in Geel carry on an old tradition

Jos Meynen has been a nurse in the foster family programme of OPZ Geel for 21 years. He has 36 patients in 30 families, and he visits them all at least once a month. When he walks into a house, the patients greet him enthusiastically. The more patients, the bigger the welcome, so at the home of Andre and Christiane Belmans, he gets a huge response.

The Belmans, a retired couple, have been caring for three psychiatric patients for 22 years. All three were previously living with Andre's mother before her death. When she became sick, Theo, a young-looking 75, asked: "What's going to happen to us when she dies?"

A fair question, and one that faces many patients, who find so much stability in foster homes in Geel that they tend to live out their lives in them. The Belmans did what many families in Geel do – they inherited the patients. "When someone dies or becomes too old to care for a patient, other family members take them in," explains Meynen. "It's a very old tradition." The Belmans, though, moved themselves into the house where the patients had already been comfortable for years.

Though it seems like a huge

responsibility, families are quite casual about it. "When I married into the family, I always knew it was a possibility," say Christiane. "They just live in the house normally like members of the family."

Down the street, Yvonne Geukens, a widow of four years, hosts Armand, who came to Geel a few years ago when his own mother had to move into a nursing home. Armand is very sociable and was happy to lead me through one of his regular chanting rituals while staring out the front door. "I've lived here for 11 centuries," he tells me.

Geukens has been hosting patients for 53 years. Her last boarder was with her for 41 years until he died. She says she has to keep close watch on her home's doors and windows because Armand "opens them and leaves them. You have to be very aware." Though Geukens is advancing in years, she wouldn't dream of giving up being a foster family. "I would miss him if he wasn't here," she tells me. "I would suggest to other people who are alone to take in a patient. If you don't have children at home or you don't work, it's someone to take care of, and it's company. I don't regret any of it." **LB**

Lisa Bushell



From left: Pieter, Marcel and Theo have lived with the Belmans for 22 years

Geel Revisited

The new book *Geel Revisited: After Centuries of Mental Rehabilitation* is a follow up to Flemish anthropologist Eugeen Roosens' original 1979 book on psychiatric care in Geel. He and Lieve Van de Walle, manager of the OPZ Rehabilitation Division, cover the history of the facilities, the changes of the last quarter century and the day-to-day operations of the foster care programme. The foreword was penned by Dr Oliver Sacks, the US-based British neurologist made famous through his book *Awakenings*, which was later made into a film.

Geel Revisited is in English and comes with a DVD of the 2006 documentary *Geel*, in which Flemish filmmaker Arnout Hauben follows three families over the course of a year. It can be ordered at www.maklu.be; the DVD can also be viewed at the Argos media centre in Brussels by appointment.



Coming home to Geel

Continued from page 1

Eventually so many were bringing mentally-deficient family members to Geel that the clerics paid local farmers to house them. Often the patients just stayed on – particularly when their families didn't come back to claim them.

The farmers gained a helping hand, and Geel became a sanctuary for the mentally ill.

The earliest found record of this situation is from 1500, "but we're sure it's older than that," says Van de Walle, "because in 1500, it was already an established system." For the people of Geel, there was, from

the very beginning, a method to the madness: "It was an economical factor," explains Van de Walle. "This whole area developed its wealth because of the extra hands available – the free labour."

A level of pragmatism still exists in host families, who have never stopped taking in patients. In the

In the city of a saint

Understanding Geel's roots

The Gasthuis Museum in Geel is a perfect small museum: its collection is varied but selective and doesn't include a lot of bric-a-brac. Everything has a purpose.

It must have been so, too, for the Augustine nuns who lived and worked in this 13th-century building, which served as the city's hospital until 1918. The entire collection, which spans centuries, belonged to the nuns, who left it to the city when they moved from the building in 1970. As you wander through, you'll see how they cooked food, washed linen, dispensed medication and nursed the sick.

There are also several 17th- and 18th-century paintings from the Flemish school, the most striking being "Ziekenzorg in het Geelse gasthuis" ("Sick Care in the Geel Hospital"), an unsigned oil on canvas from 1639 (see photo above). The figures in the painting were, in fact, the actual nuns who worked in the hospital that year, and computers tell the story

of each one (in multiple languages) based on historical records. These nuns even lead you through the museum via the rather entertaining audio tour.

This being Geel, the museum has an entire room dedicated to Saint Dymphna, the patron saint of the mentally ill and the inspiration for Geel's world-famous psychiatric care. There are three sculptures of the saint, including a very fierce version of her beheading. In every one, a gruesome, animal-like creature crouches at Dymphna's feet. "That's a devil," explains Frieda Van Ravensteyn, the museum's conservator. "It's a symbol of the insanity of the king, who was said to have been possessed by the devil."

The room also contains photographs from the Saint Dymphna procession, which the town stages with much pomp and circumstance every five years. (The next is in 2010.) Townspeople re-enact her flight and her murder in Geel and carry a huge silver shrine, on

show in the museum. They used to put the bones of Saint Dymphna inside when they carried it through town.

The bones? Does this mean that Saint Dymphna is more than a legend? "There are bones buried in the Sint-Dimpna church, and we've examined them," explains Van Ravensteyn. "They are dated around 700 and belong to a young woman and an older man. That doesn't prove that they are Saint Dymphna and Gerebernus, but they do fit the time period."

The church is almost directly across the street from the museum, but it's best to wait a year before you visit as it is currently undergoing major renovations. When you do, don't miss the gorgeous 16th-century oak retable depicting in 21 sections the birth, life and death of Saint Dymphna. **LB**

Online

www.gasthuismuseumgeel.be



1930s, there were 3,000 people in foster care families in Geel, which at the time was 30% of the population. Says Van de Walle: "Before the war, you only had two options in Belgium. Either you were locked up for the rest of your life, or you came to Geel and lived with a foster family."

But it isn't just Belgians who wound up in Geel. Patients were sent from around Europe and even from the US to become part of a system that was deemed healthier than living in an asylum. After the Second World War, when facilities elsewhere began to improve, the numbers dropped. Now Geel families house 400 patients, who are nearly all Flemish. But there appears to be no end in sight: "People still knock on our door and ask to become a foster family," says Van de Walle.

Van de Walle's department over-

sees the foster family care system, which has become a shining example to other countries, some of whom copy it, while others implement its core values in other creative ways.

When patients arrive at the psychiatric hospital in Geel, they are assessed to see if a foster family is a possibility. They then spend a couple of months in a day programme at the Observation House near the hospital, where they are given a variety of tasks: preparing food, washing clothes, interacting with other patients and with staff. There is a garden where they grow food and look after chickens. Here, the staff find out more about their ability to communicate and capabilities in general.

Then the department seeks a match. "It's necessary to have a mix of all kinds of families because the patients are all different," says

Van de Walle. Some of them are psychotic, some suffer serious clinical depression. A few have Korsakoff's syndrome, usually caused by long-term alcoholism. But a large number simply have some level of mental retardation.

After a patient moves in, a nurse visits at least once a month, and the department is on-call 24 hours-a-day. Some families have two or three patients living with them, but three is the maximum allowed.

As in the middle-ages, foster families are paid to cover the costs of the patients. "Even when people take on a patient because they want a bit of extra money," says Van de Walle, "they develop a bond. They'd rather die than bring a patient back to the hospital. Even if they weren't paid, they'd still do it."

Which is a good thing, since the pay barely covers the expenses. Families receive €450 per patient per month, "and that's not enough," Van de Walle says adamantly. The rehabilitation division is funded by the federal government, which allots it €41 per day per patient. After payments to the families, the department is left with a deficit of nearly €2 million per year, which the hospital has to cover to continue running the foster care programme. "A hospital bed costs €220 per day, and we have to run these expensive services on €41 per day," Van de Walle questions. "Politicians we talk to always say it's absurd, but nothing changes."

The system, though, is changing the lives of patients. The rehabilitation department also runs independent living facilities on the hospital campus for patients who can live alone. But the foster families have a special effect. "You have a normal living situation with role models," Van de Walle points out. "You're forced to be active. You have a family that acts as your engine, and it means you have neighbours, a social network. That's the therapeutic aspect."

Patients in foster care often need less medication. They also benefit from the regular behaviour patterns they find in average homes. But this begs the question: if these patients do so well in families, why can't their own families care for them?

The reasons, explains Van de Walle are numerous and complex. "If you have a son or daughter, it's very natural to have expectations, and often these people can't meet expectations. A foster family is different. They can deal with the deficit." Other times, the illness has caused the patient to act in destructive ways, and the relationship with the natural family has completely broken down. "Here, they get a new start," says Van de Walle. "For people with psychiatric illnesses, that can be very important."

Online

www.opzgeel.be



Letting in the light: new adult psychiatric hospital unit in Geel



Ellen Baxter as an inquisitive student in 1975 Geel. The locals liked to chat with her, and the patients plied her with gifts

From Geel to the Big Apple

Ellen Baxter is a champion of the homeless in America's largest city. Geel was her inspiration.

In 1975, Ellen Baxter won a fellowship to embark on independent studies overseas. The American could go anywhere she wanted, and she didn't hesitate. She went directly to Geel.

"All I knew was that I was going to bring what I had seen in Geel and make it happen in the United States."

When she moved to New York just after her time in Geel, "I was completely horrified," she says. "I got off the bus and went into the bathroom at the station, and there were women living in it – lying on cardboard to sleep and washing their clothes in the basins. People were coming and going to use the toilets in the middle of it all."

Today, Baxter is the director of Broadway Housing, which provides 400 private residences to the homeless of New York City. "What Geel presented to me was a model," she says. "People will always need extra help to live decently and safely – every village needs a way to incorporate that."

It was a long haul for Baxter, who is now famous in New York and with homeless activists across the country for being the first to obtain public funds for housing projects for poverty-stricken adults and families. "Geel is still what I think about, where I get my bearings when I have to make decisions." **LB**

online

www.broadwayhousing.org



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ING 

Technical education "not a last resort," bosses declare

One in three candidates for first jobs is over-qualified, with too few school students opting for a technical education more suited to the jobs market, according to research carried out at Ghent University and confirmed by the employers' organisation Agoria.

Belgian schools offer a choice of three educational streams at secondary level: ASO, or general education, including humanities; TSO, or technical education, including applied science; and BSO, or job-oriented education, which includes welding, woodwork and heating engineering.

But despite most job vacancies requiring a level of TSO or BSO training, most children still opt for ASO streams in school. When they go for their first job, about one-third find the only openings available are below their educational level, according to Dieter Verhaest, who carried out doctoral research at Ghent. From a sample of 9,000 23-year-olds, he discovered that the most suitable jobs went to those who had done well at school without having to repeat a year. The next most important factor seems to be a father who is himself educated and has a network of professional contacts to whom he can appeal to help the child.

Of those who do end up in jobs below their capacities, however, two out of three find it was the fault of the selection criteria. While companies ask for educational qualifications, the study and schools support unit SSL said, in many cases no such level is required. In other cases, however, the child has simply taken the wrong path through school.

"Most parents start by aiming as high as possible and don't look at their child's talents," said Michiel Thiebaut of the Flemish training service VDAB, which recently organised a weekend to allow 12-year-olds to sample a range of technical jobs. "But a technical job is not just something for when all else fails."

"Companies are begging for people to fill technological and scientific functions," commented a spokesman for Agoria. Students who opt for a humanities-based education need to recognise the possible consequences. "It should be obvious that society doesn't have enough suitable places for all those pedagogues, psychologists and art historians," said Wilson De Pril of Agoria.

In another open-day at the weekend, this time organised by Unizo, the organisation representing the self-employed,

shutterstock



109 small businesses from Antwerp and East and West Flanders provinces played host to more than 1,000 young people from late primary and early secondary classes, in an attempt to sell the TSO and BSO options to children who still have time to decide. More than 44% of businesses in Flanders with open vacancies are looking for someone with a technical background.



Royal greenhouses open to the public

The Royal Greenhouses in Laeken have begun their traditional annual opening to the public, from now until 12 May. The *serres*, as they are called, were constructed between 1874 and 1902 under architect Alphonse Balat, using new construction techniques for the first time and were considered an inspiration for the Art Nouveau movement. The entire complex consists of 2.5 hectares under glass, thought to be the biggest greenhouse in the world built for a single individual – King Leopold II. The *serres* are open daily, except Mondays, including 1 May.

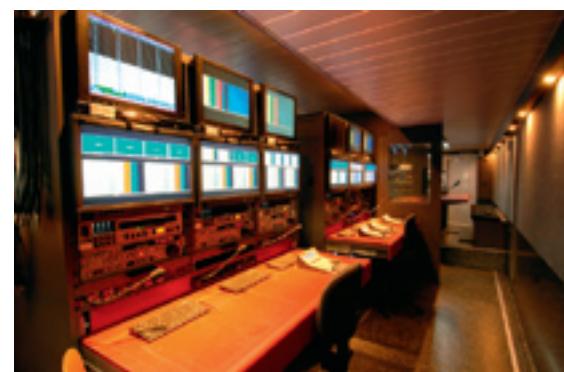
Online
www.monarchie.be

Alfacam wins contracts for Winter and Summer Olympics

Int-based television production services provider Alfacam has been awarded the rights to service the Winter Olympics in Vancouver in 2010, as well as the Summer Games of 2012 in London, the company announced this week. The two contracts will bring Alfacam some €24 million. The deal with Olympic Broadcast Services was agreed at the weekend in Madrid. Alfacam has been recording Olympic sports for high-definition television (HDTV) since 2002.

"Alfacam is one of the few companies with enough equipment to record monster events like the Olympic Games," a statement said. The company has 17 trucks fitted with HDTV recording equipment for outside broadcasts. Each truck is capable of handling the input of 36 cameras.

The company is still looking for ways, however, to even out the peaks and troughs caused by major contracts coming in even-numbered years – not only



the Games but also World Cup and European Championship tournaments. Other options include rugby world championships, other sports and large-scale pop concerts.

Leuven just says "no" to cigarette laboratory

Leuven city council has refused a permit to cigarette giant Philip Morris for the extension of its research laboratory, following protests that the lab will carry out tests on animals. The council said it was not against animal tests in principle, as long as they were necessary and medically useful. However, said public order alderwoman Karin Brouwers, "in this lab animals will be used to test the health effects of new cigarettes, which are damaging to human health". According to the Coalition Against Animal Experiments (ADC), the lab already kills 4,000-6,000 animals testing cigarettes. This is the first time a permit has been refused on ethical grounds, the coalition said. The company will now appeal the decision to the Flemish environment minister Hilde Crevits, who will determine if it is legal to refuse a permit on the grounds given by Leuven.

Online
www.stopdierproeven.org

Poland tries to lure its workers home

The Polish government will soon launch a publicity campaign aimed at attracting Polish workers back home, where their skills are sorely needed. Polish workers in certain so-called bottleneck sectors – where there is a severe shortage of local talent – have been able to work in Belgium for some time. Others work here illegally, but all are here because the pay is better than it was in Poland. Now that wages for specialised workers like welders and skilled construction workers are rising closer to the Belgian level, the Warsaw government wants to entice the two million or so working abroad to come back, and advertising has started in the UK and Ireland. Belgium has about 100,000 Polish workers. "The Flemish construction workers will be delighted if their unfair competition goes away," said a spokesperson for the Construction Union.

Railways profit again after 12 years in the red

The national rail authority NMBS made a profit in 2007 for the first time since 1995, according to figures released last week. The whole group made a profit of €12.9 million, or almost the same as the last time the results were written in black – then it was half a billion Belgian francs, or about €12.5 million. This year's result, though, comes after a loss last year of €171.6 million. Sales were up by 5.2% to €2.9 billion. And the group's debt stayed more or less stable at €2.58 billion.

The NMBS has come a long way since that last profitable year, with the loss of many jobs and other efficiency measures forced by an opening up to competition. Passenger numbers rose constantly, leading to an increase in productivity since 2002 of 32%. Now the time has come to increase manpower: the group employed 36,763 people in 2007, slightly up on 2006. And the railways are still looking for at least 1,800 new workers.

Online
www.b-rail.be

Shopping made simple

Need a chauffeur-driven limousine to tour the shops of Antwerp or perhaps just someone to hump your bags? Anything is possible when you hook up with a personal shopper

Stéphanie Duval

Antwerp is a fashionable city; that much is clear. But not everyone finds it easy to navigate its shops. "People often come to Antwerp to discover our designer talents,

but they don't know where to start", says Edith Vervliet, manager of the Flanders Fashion Institute (FFI). That's the reason that FFI joined forces with travel agency DN Travel and Events to set up a personalised Antwerp shopping service.

The service is designed as a luxury weekend break. The package includes a night at the Hilton, dinner in a stylish restaurant and three hours of escorted shopping in the city. The four personal shoppers are introduced on the agency's website, along with their special interests and a few words on their favourite designers. Customers can choose which one they would like as their guide.

The personal shopper tries to find out which shops would interest the customer. They keep personal style and special demands in mind when making appointments with various Antwerp boutiques. Shop owners are notified of the visit so they can welcome clients with a drink and help them with purchases. Some personal shoppers will also offer styling advice to assemble the perfect outfit.

Tanguy Ottomer, one of the personal shoppers, explains his routine: "Everything starts with communication. I listen to what people want and try to provide them with just that. My

specialty is variety. I like to introduce clients to the best of what Antwerp has to offer, in every price category." Ottomer doesn't like to limit himself to visiting the big names in Belgian fashion. "Sure, some people will want to see Dries Van Noten, Véronique Branquinho or Walter Van Beirendonck, but I also try to guide them in less obvious directions."

With his profound knowledge of Antwerp, Ottomer is also the perfect city guide. He can point out interesting architecture or tell a funny story while escorting clients from one store to the next. He is welcomed in every shop like an old friend and, whenever he can, introduces the client to the shop owner or boutique designer. This makes the trip more than just a random bout of shopping. At the end of the day, you feel as if you have discovered a different part of the city.

The personal shopping experience might be focused on fashion, but it can also lead to other types of stores. "Suppose a woman asks me to find her a new dress for a big night out," Ottomer says. "I can also point out a really good beauty shop for make-up or body lotion, because it's those things that make for a complete experience."

That's why personal shoppers often take their clients to visit In Fine Parfums, where they can choose their personal favourite from some 52 possibilities. "I think that's the most important thing," states Ottomer. "I want to take my clients to places where they feel welcome and at ease, and where they are guaranteed a very personal shopping experience."

online

www.dn-travel.be



Tanguy Ottomer knows the best shops in town

BUSINESS FLASH

General Electric Seaco

General Electric Seaco, one of the world's leading container rental companies, will set up its Europe, Russia and Africa headquarters in Antwerp. The decision comes one week after Chiquita, the bananas importer and distribution company, announced plans to transfer its European headquarters to Switzerland.

UCB

UCB, the pharmaceuticals company, has won approval from the US Food and Drugs Administration to distribute its Cimzia medicine in the United States. Cimzia, used to treat patients with Crohn disease, is expected to become one of the company's blockbuster drugs. UCB shares rose 20% after the news broke.

Commerzbank

Commerzbank, Germany's second largest financial institution with branches in Brussels and Antwerp, will strengthen its position on the Belgian market by launching private banking activities. The company currently employs 50 people in Belgium and expects to hire an additional 20.

Air Energy

Air Energy, the local affiliate of the Dutch Eneco renewable energies company, is seeking a permit to build a €1.5 billion wind farm off the Belgian coast, some 30 kilometres from land. Several projects have already been announced in the area, which could become the largest concentration of wind farms in the North Sea.

Fedis

Fedis, the federation of the retail industries, has appointed Jean de Leu de Cecil, general secretary of Halle-based Colruyt discount retailing group, as its new chairman.

Vedior

Vedior, the local temporary work group owned by Holland's Randstad company, is to be renamed Tempo-Team.

Ernst & Young

Ernst & Young, the audit, accounting and tax consultancy group, will merge its Belgian and Dutch offices as part of the company's worldwide restructuring. The new Belgo-Dutch entity will employ some 6,000 people.

ABX Belgium

ABX Belgium, the small parcels delivery company owned by the Dutch GLS transport group, will be renamed GLS Belgium. ABX was previously an affiliate of the national railway company NMBS.

BKCP

BKCP, the local subsidiary of the French Credit Mutuel bank, has taken over the six branches of the Bruges-based West-Vlaamse Bank.

KBC

Flanders' largest financial institution is entering the Romanian consumer credit market through its KBC Consumer Finance affiliate. The bank has already established leasing and securities trading activities in the country.

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Suspicious financial transactions on the rise

New rules on notification

Alan Hope

The federal government's Financial Information Processing Unit (CFI) received 30% more notifications of suspicious financial transactions in 2007 compared to the year before, according to the latest annual report issued last week. From just under 10,000 in 2006, which led to 3,367 case files being opened, the CFI took in over 12,800 notifications in 2007, which led to 4,927 cases.

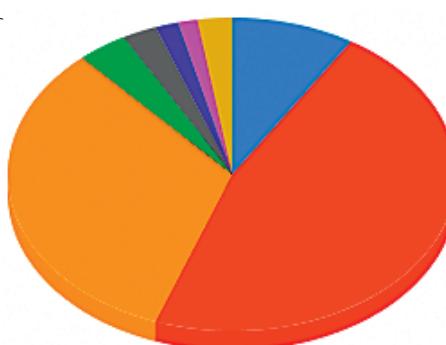
In September last year a new article of the law on financial institutions came into force, which obliges institutions to notify the CFI of any transaction which they know or suspect could be connected with money-laundering or the gains of tax fraud. Previously, banks and other institutions were only obliged to notify if there was clear evidence of money-laundering or if the sums involved exceeded €10,000.

As a result of the new provision, notifications shot up in October from an average of about 1,000 a month to 1,595, with the monthly figure staying high for the present.

Of the cases investigated by the CFI and passed on to local prosecutors, tax fraud was by far the main area concerned, with transactions of a value amounting to €228.9 billion. Other criminal areas investigated included false bankruptcy, misuse of company property and illegal trading in goods.

Another of the Unit's responsibilities is investigation of terrorist financing, which takes place largely via charities real and fake, and shell companies set up to muddy the audit trail. The Unit handled 32 cases of suspected terrorist financing in 2007.

Flanders Today



Suspicious transaction reports by source

- Casinos
- Bureaux de change
- Credit institutions
- Foreign authorities
- Notaries
- Post Office
- Customs authorities
- Other

One of the major sources of notifications, with almost half, was currency exchange agencies. Before the introduction of the euro in January 2002 it was expected these traditional resorts for the laundering of criminal cash would become less important as the sector shrank as a whole. But that appears not to be the case. Criminals still like to launder money by passing it through currency exchange agencies, often several times and in several countries. Most reports of suspicions came from Brussels, at 48.5% far ahead of second-place Antwerp at 15.6%.

BUSINESS FLASH



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Koen Verlaeckt, formerly head of Science and Innovation at the economics ministry, has been appointed as new secretary-general of Internationaal Vlaanderen, the agency which looks after business, trade and external policy for the Flemish government. Verlaeckt is a historian and archaeologist by training. He replaces acting secretary-general Freddy Evens.

The Brussels stock exchange is to begin a campaign aimed at attracting up to 4,000 small businesses to the stock market, in particular the Alternext listing. Brochures explaining the advantages of a stock-exchange listing will be sent out in French and Dutch. Helping choose possible Beurs candidates will be Voka, the agency charged with small-business affairs. Alternext was set up in 2005 to allow small and medium-sized enterprises simplified access to a stock market listing. The system also includes businesses from France and Luxembourg.

A parliamentary commission investigating the collapse of a number of **major fraud trials** because of time delays could be headed by former Brussels burgomaster Francois-Xavier de Donnea, it was rumoured last week. Another suggestion for the job, Open-VLD deputy Luc Van Biesen, was said to have been vetoed by finance minister Didier Reynders. De Donnea stressed that the commission would need to "keep its hands off" of cases which are still *sub judice*. The commission is expected to begin its work in May.

Brussels Airlines has ordered its pilots to cut their airspeed slightly in an attempt to reduce the company's kerosene bill. Planes will now fly at an average speed of 0.69 Mach (345 knots) instead of 0.70 Mach, a reduction that could save the company as much as €1 million. As far as passengers are concerned, the delays involved will only be a matter of minutes. Elsewhere, other companies are cutting costs in the air. Fortis will only pay for business class for its managers if the flights concerned are longer than five hours, and InBev if longer than six hours.

Businesses may only collect **biometric data** from workers if staff have given permission and if there is a clear need, according to an opinion from the commission for the protection of privacy. More and more Belgian businesses are using biometrics – fingerprints, iris-scans and so on – as a means of identifying staff as well as keeping track of movements. But the data may not "be used as a time-clock," the commission's chairman said.

Companies increase use of "grey" water

More and more industrial companies are making use of "grey water" for production processes instead of using ground-water, one of the country's largest drinking-water producers said. According to VMW, Flanders' biggest water processor, 10% of sales by 2012 will come from the sale of grey water – that is, water which has not been purified to the level of drinking water, but which is still suitable for most industrial processes, such as textile manufacture and industrial washing. This represents an income of €30 million, or three times the current value of the grey water sector. A new water processing plant in Herelbeke will soon begin pumping 4,000 cubic metres of grey water a day to 28 companies in West Flanders that have signed up for the scheme – one billion litres a year in all, which will no longer need to be taken from the water-table.



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UCB gets good news from US

Shares in pharmaceuticals company UCB rose 23 percent last week on news that the US Federal Drugs Administration had given its approval to Cimzia, a UCB treatment for the immune system disorder Crohn's Disease. One year ago the FDA ordered UCB to carry out further trials on the drug, which have not yet been completed. The unexpected approval comes, according to general manager Roch Doliveux, as a result of "continuous good relations and contacts with the US medical authorities". Cimzia has been rejected by the European Medicines Agency (EMEA) because it did little for Crohn's patients. According to the company, the drug may also have applications in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis. UCB shares were hit recently by a string of misfortunes including the EMEA decision and the recall of a patch to combat Parkinson's disease.

No-one good enough to head tax office



Jean-Claude Laes and Didier Reynders

The government's head-hunters were due this week to hand back the problem of finding a new head for the federal tax authorities, after an extensive executive search proved unable to come up with any candidates. Selor, the selection bureau for the government, could not give any of the candidates an A or even a B score, according to a report in *De Tijd*. The former head taxman, Jean-Claude Laes, previously the top advisor to finance minister Didier Reynders, saw his nomination struck down by the Council of State because the rules had not been followed. Laes himself took part in the new selection round, along with several highly-placed officials and another member of a ministerial cabinet. None of them has been successful. Reynders is now expected to look more closely at the selection criteria to figure out why not even senior and experienced candidates could pass.

VTI marks 100 years

King Albert II was in Bruges last week to help celebrate the centenary of the Free Technical Institute (VTI), the region's premier technical college. The school was set up in 1908 by priest Achiel Lauwers as an evening-school for local workers. However Lauwers died suddenly in 1911, and then the First World War intervened, and the school's development into a full-time educational establishment did not take place until 1919. The role of the school changed when in 1929 the world's stock markets tumbled: the VTI was seen as the "university for the working man" and increased attention given to classroom-based trade education. The school now has 1,600 students and 350 staff spread over four campuses.

The festival to end all festivals

Kunstenfestivaldesarts brings together the best cutting-edge artists in the world, and something even bigger: French and Dutch

Sharon Light

Kunstenfestivaldesarts, the multilingual, multicultural, interdisciplinary, politically-charged arts festival returns again to the Brussels region for the month of May. For three weeks, dozens of artists, hundreds of performers and thousands of inanimate objects take over Brussels in a deluge of new work.

This year marks the 13th such event since the premiere by festival founder Frie Leysen (who also

founded Antwerp's deSingel). In that short time, it has become one of the most respected contemporary arts festivals in Europe.

The goals are straightforward: first, international ambitions. The festival attracts artists from across Europe and around the world. For some, it is not only their first time performing in Europe but their first venture outside their homelands.

Second, the work must be contemporary. "We look for artists who are speaking about the world

of today, who are developing an interesting artistic language," says the festival's director, Roger Christmann.

Lastly, there is politics. The festival works with both the French and Flemish communities to garner funding, artists and an audience. "That is still a political statement in Brussels," Christmann notes.

Over the years, committed viewers have seen some artists catapulted to international recognition, including Flanders' own Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, as well as watched certain artists return to the annual festival to develop new pieces.

Kunstenfestivaldesarts identifies and approaches artists who seem to fit the profile, and then discussions begin regarding their current activities and what could fit in with the festival's themes. This organic development has led to a programme this year that features a good number of English language works but no Dutch-language performances. Work by Flemish artists is either not in Dutch or is a non-verbal platform.

Koen Theys, the pioneering Brussels-based visual artist whose installations can be found in permanent collections across the world, will participate this year with screenings of several of his videos, as well as a live installation called *PATRIA (Vive Le Roi! Vive La Republique!)*, in which he organises a contemporary rendition of the painting *Tafereel van de septemberdagen 1830 op de Grote Markt te Brussel*, which is housed in the Brussels Royal Museums of Fine

Call Cutta in a Box by Rimini Protokoll

The one person you don't want at the end your ringing phone is a telemarketer – unless you are going to see *Call Cutta in a Box*, in which case you make a *reservation* for a one-on-one, 50-minute phone call to a telemarketer sitting somewhere in Calcutta. Protokoll works with non-professional actors for this piece, as they did in last year's Kunstenfestival. Confronting issues of globalisation and anonymity, these German directors are determined to make us rethink the interconnectedness of the world in which we live.



Rhetoric Machine and Pop Ark by Noah Fischer

The festival welcomes back New Yorker Noah Fischer with two installations. *Rhetoric Machine*, a work from 2005, examines the language of American presidents through light, music and, of course, speeches. "The ancient art of rhetoric has not been lost," says Fischer. "It has been transformed." His latest work, *Pop Ark*, takes aim at global warming, using words drawn from the internet, pseudo-scientific statements and Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*.



Arts. It is his first year working within the Kunstenfestival, but as a fan of past years, he says he always feels a different energy in the city for those few spring weeks. "It is the only event in Brussels where both cultural communities are cooperating."

Online

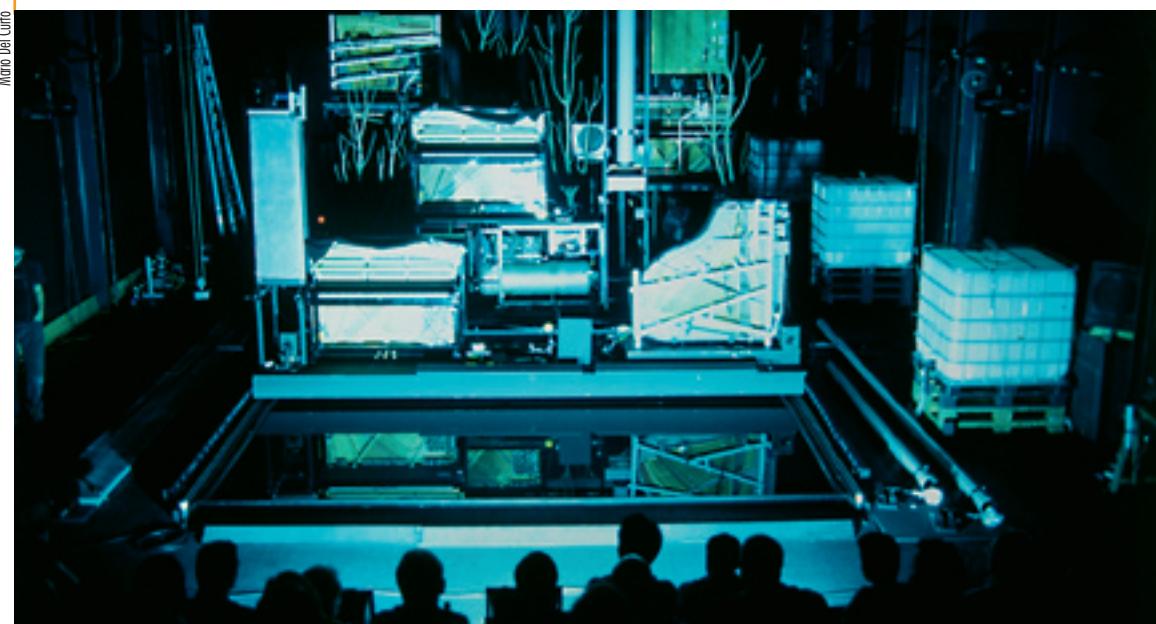
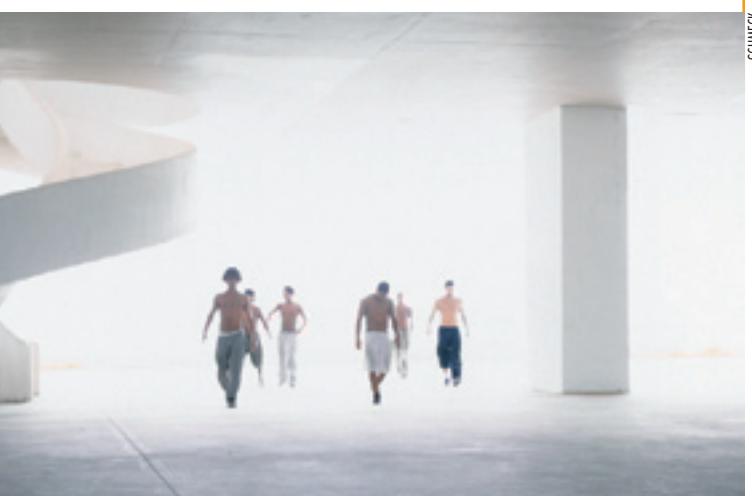
www.kunstenfestivaldesarts.be

Stifters Dinge by Heiner Goebbels

This theatre/music/art blend features five pianos, elaborate effects and no people. "Storytelling without actors," says the festival director. The festival this year questions the nature of community and the human impact on the world, while this piece asks how humans can ignore the impact of their actions on their own environment. The German artist is popular at Kunstenfestival – this is his fourth appearance – and this piece (the title means "Stifter's Things") is being performed this year across Europe from the UK to Turkey.

H³ by Bruno Beltrão

Beltrão has travelled the route from philosophy to contemporary dance to hip hop. Not the most natural progression, but one that has resulted in the fascinating Rio de Janeiro-based Grupo de Rua. Taking teens from the streets and introducing a structure and an education through dance training, he has been reshaping hip hop, to international acclaim. His last piece, *H²*, was co-produced by seven European institutions and festivals, including this one, and earned him the Upcoming Choreographer of the Year award by one of Europe's leading dance publications. This new work focuses specifically on breakdance.



EXHIBITION

The naked eye

Borgloon officials leap into action to censor the local art show (again)



Nipplegate: the interior of Luk Vermeerbergen's "Mobile Seduction Experiment", which sports city-imposed electrical tape in some very delicate areas. Above, right: Mayor Awouters, also slightly censored

Monique Philips

Borgloon's mayor, Eric Awouters, didn't hesitate to appear semi-naked in a recent YouTube video to promote nearby village Gors-Opleeuw, a candidate in the ongoing Prettiest Village in Flanders contest: "We know that nudity sells. But Gors-Opleeuw is pure nature, which should speak for itself," he quipped. So no wonder that eyebrows raised when that same Open VLD mayor recently ordered the censoring of artwork in his town because of nudity.

Of course, with a title like *Vruchtbaarheid en erotiek* (*Fertility and Eroticism*), some hassle was to be expected in the rural town. The general idea of the annual art event Blossom Impressions is to show work that utilises part of the typical Limburg landscape of blossoming orchards to "fragment and recreate reality".

One year the artists were asked to work with big, wooden fruit crates, while in 2005 the works incorporated bathtubs, so often used as water containers for the animals grazing the lush meadows. Follow the walking path along the numerous open-air works, and you end up in one of

the two indoor exhibition spaces, the Stroopfabriek and the Gasthuiskapel, a former chapel.

Blossom Impressions seems to often invoke restlessness in this sleepy town of 10,000. Six years ago a live cow was put on display in a shop window. Local animal-loving art critics liberated the creature, and CNN broadcast the story. During that same period, townspeople also challenged a sculpture by Els Van den Veyver, in which a crucified Jesus was juxtaposed with a naked female. Local debates and surveys were organised in which the religious remained adamant. Mayor Awouters succumbed and agreed to have a cloth installed by municipal workers to cover Jesus' eyes.

But by 2008, it appears that most of the public has no problem with the art on display. When TV Limburg searched for an outraged villager to figure in their report, they couldn't find one. Even the old lady they dragged from the adjacent elderly home to the 12th-century Gasthuiskapel wasn't shocked: "My dear girl, I have had six children," she said.

Some of the more daring pieces are housed inside the yellow-brick

chapel. One is a giant pod, resembling a phallus. This was supposed to go in front of the nursing home, but ended up inside "for its own safety". A huge canvas depicting a hermaphrodite hangs under the

chapel's bas relief of Our Lady of Ascension and above the graves of the Duke and Duchess of Borgloon.

Promotion has done its job, and busloads of tourists are arriving to see the exhibition. Although some locals feel a former chapel isn't exactly the place to show erotic art, one recent local patron said: "If it weren't for its function as an art gallery, the chapel would have been demolished a long time ago."

This year, the trouble started when the police received a complaint about the work of Luk Vermeerbergen. Mayor Awouters was quick to ensure that the piece was altered to avoid offence. Jos Herck, curator of *Fertility and Eroticism*, implies that this was done merely to invoke the media's attention once again. "But in 2002 the conflict was real," he says. "Art and religion were hotly debated. But now, the mayor and his aldermen appear naked themselves on the internet."

The installation in question is called "Mobile Seduction Experiment" and involves a jeep parked on a mound of earth outside. Its boudoir-like interior is covered with 1970s Playboy photos. For a euro per minute, you can dial a phone number and hear an appropriately hushed voice promising you a good time.

After considering their options, the mayor and his team decided – in what seems like a spoof of reality – to cover every nipple with a piece of black electrical tape, reminiscent of the display windows of 70's porn cinemas. The communal worker appointed to check the tape daily has to do some restoring regularly, as spectators remove the tape wherever they can reach it.



Someone, probably tired of lifting up kids for a better view, placed a rock near the car as a stepping stone. A pamphlet has also been added, showing the mayor, his face covered in electrical tape. Next to the vehicle, Vermeerbergen himself has erected a sign showing the before and after of the installation.

"Mobile Seduction Experiment" is actually not representative of Vermeerbergen's other work. "It's a unique piece, conceived especially for the event," he says. "I see it as the two sides that every man embodies: a robust, macho side, and a soft, kitsch, romantic side. Of course, as the theme was 'eroticism', I could hardly work with Lego blocks."

In the meantime, the mayor has been leading a good-humoured campaign to minimise the political impact of the censorship on local and national television.

Fertility and Eroticism runs until 18 May

Online
www.artborgloon.be

MUSIC

Hooverphonic on tour



The locals may all be talking about dEUS right now, but the rest of Europe is gearing up for the arrival of Flanders' other great alt rock band. Hooverphonic begins the first leg of its European Tour next week in support of its latest album *The President of the LSD Golf Club*. First stop is the reconverted abattoir Kulturfabrik in Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg, on 7 May, then it's on to Berlin and Warsaw. The band returns from the 15-show tour at the end of the month and will play again in Belgium on 30 August in Soignies. The three-member band will have more than the usual guitars and snare drums to haul along this time: the album uses organs, mellotrons and harpsichords. If Alex Callier, the band's founder and bass player, is talkative, perhaps he'll tell audiences about the inspiration for the title of the CD – taken directly from the mouth of a San Francisco cab driver. **LB**

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Showing solidarity: CEJI trainings help different cultures with the same problems

Saffina Rana

Flanders' Muslim and Jewish residents face similar sorts of discrimination to each other in all walks of their daily lives. Personal or institutional, it crops up in places of study or work, when travelling, participating in cultural activities or acces-

sing social services. Then there's also anti-Semitic and Islamophobic attitudes in political discourse and in the media to contend with.

This common ground is the starting point for both communities to tackle the problems together, say Ruth Friedman and Hassan Amaghlaou, who lead the new anti-

discrimination workshop taking place in Brussels this month.

The pilot programme has been developed under the auspices of the Jewish-Muslim dialogue activities at CEJI, a Brussels-based Jewish NGO that engages in advocacy and education to foster religious inclusion and diversity in Europe. The workshop is largely funded by the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation, an organisation resourced by the governments of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership (all EU countries plus Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Syria and Turkey). The foundation was created in 2005 to support intercultural exchange.

Open to both Jewish and Muslim men and women, the trainers are hoping to attract people of different ages and backgrounds to the workshop. Working with roughly equal numbers of both communities, they feel that participants will emerge with a range of strategies for raising awareness and dealing with prejudice – wherever it occurs.

The two communities not only share similar contemporary experiences of discrimination but also a common religious and historical base. "Jews have historically been made scapegoats in Europe, and now Muslims are being made scapegoats. We want to show solidarity with Muslims," says Friedman, who is a dialogue coordinator at CEJI.

Both workshop leaders observe that many Muslims and Jews keep

to their own communities. It's that lack of contact between the groups that can foster misunderstandings and stereotypes. In extreme cases, that leads to prejudice and xenophobia. "We are creating an opportunity to meet on an equal basis, share experiences and recognise similarities," says Friedman.

Dialogue is essential, says Amaghlaou, who was a social worker before taking up training and consultancy. "Many prejudices exist between Muslims and Jews about each other. I very strongly believe that if we hold the doors of communication open, it is possible to make a difference in how we think," he says. "That's the main reason I'm working as a Muslim with a Jewish organisation – to build bridges."

The two-day session begins with a period of self-reflection. "How can you begin to understand other people if you can't understand yourself?" asks Friedman. "It will look at identity, how easy it is to pin things on other people and how prejudices are formed." Having discussed best methods for coping with discrimination, there will be a focus on action. "These are the individual steps on what participants can do," Friedman explains. An evaluation of the workshop based on feedback from the participants will determine the scope of future joint activities.

CEJI has been offering diversity trainings for over a decade, working with schools and other NGOs to help educators create inclusive intercultural environ-

ments. Training activities are underpinned by advocacy at European level. Both aspects are crucial defences, claims CEJI, against a surge of support for extremist right-wing views, which bring racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism into mainstream European politics.

The workshop itself has been developed from a set of studies mapping successful practices in establishing dialogue between Muslim and Jewish communities in five European countries with significant Jewish and Muslim populations, including Britain and France. "Although there are many projects on the ground, they are hardly ever brought into the public eye," says Friedman. The reports were published last April at a European conference on Jewish-Muslim dialogue, which also led to the creation of the European Platform for Jewish-Muslim Co-operation.

Although the workshop tackles anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, CEJI notes that these are not issues for Muslim and Jewish communities to deal with alone. Like all forms of hatred, they are problems of the society at large.

Anti-Discrimination Training: Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, 21-22 May, €25, email training@ceji.org by 5 May to register

Online
www.ceji.org

The long voyage home

Jacques Brel's yacht will be on show in Ostend

Marc Maes

The boat on which Jacques Brel, the famous Belgian singer, spent the final years of his life has been brought home after being salvaged on the New Zealand coast. The Askoy II was designed by the Antwerp architect Hugo van Kuyck and built in 1960 by the Vandevoorde Shipyards. With a length of 20 metres and a weight of 40 tons, the sleek vessel was the biggest yacht ever built in a Belgian shipyard.

Brel, born in 1929, bought the boat, named after a Norwegian island, in 1974 and sailed it to the Marquesas Islands, where he spent the last years of his life after retiring from the stage. He resold it in 1976, two years before he died of cancer in a Paris clinic.

The Askoy II was shipwrecked near New Zealand's north-west coast and stranded on Baylys beach, where it was eventually buried by sand. But in December last year, the non-profit organisation Save Askoy II recovered the rusting yacht and prepared it for transport to Europe.

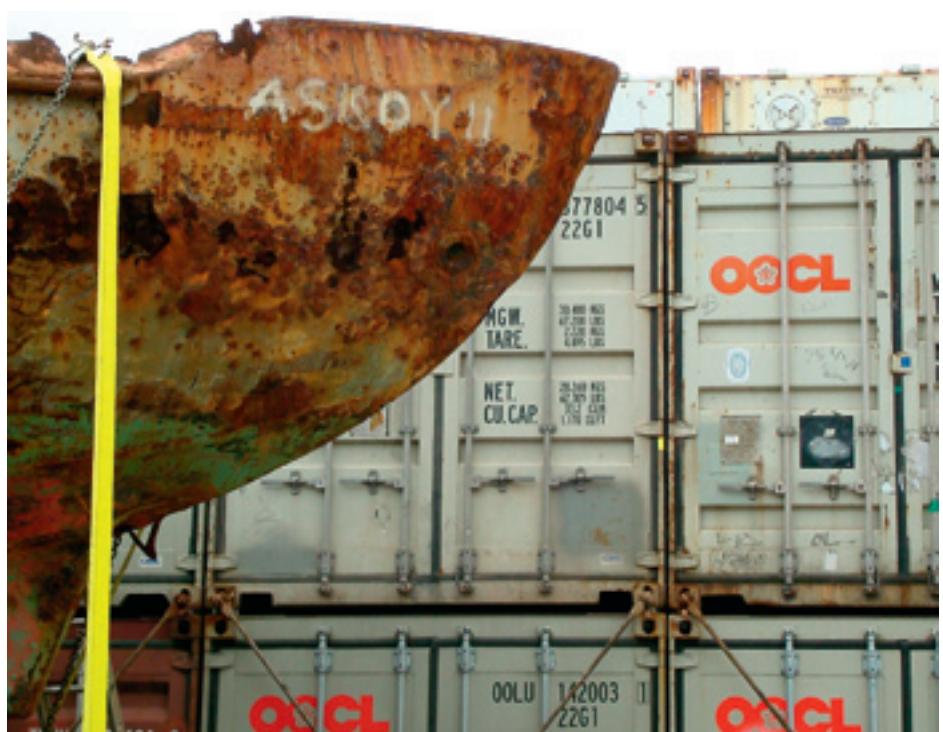
The boat was stored on the container

vessel Ability, operated by the Oriental Overseas Container Line (OOCL), and shipped to Singapore. It was then transferred to another ship, the OOCL Tokyo, which is at this moment bound for the Port of Antwerp. It's due to dock about 13 May.

"The Port Singapore Authority and OOCL supported the project by handling the shipment free of charge," says Jaak Jespers of Save Askoy II. "The ports of Tauranga and Antwerp have also contributed with free logistical support." Customs clearance by Balie21 and insurance by Belgibro are also offering their services for free as a form of sponsorship.

"We're happy to contribute to make this dream come true," says Chris Angwin, managing director of OOCL Benelux. "We believe that containers carry much more than cargo; they are a means of transporting ideas and cultures, as well. We are truly honoured that OOCL is in the position to carry this relic of maritime heritage, which is a part of our culture, around the world."

After its arrival in Antwerp, the Askoy II will be placed on a barge and towed to



Ostend by the towing and salvage company Unie van Redding en Sleepdienst. The yacht will be restored in the Ostend Maritime Site, close to the Fort Napoleon, and will eventually form a key element in an exhibition on sailing heritage and the legacy of Jacques Brel. From 22 to 25 May, the public

will have a chance to look at the yacht for the first time during the maritime event Oostende voor Anker.

Online
www.askoyii.be

Classical & new music**Brussels**

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

MAY 4 11.00 Queen Elisabeth
Competition Prizewinner Quatuor
Kirke: Haydn, Brahms, Puccini

MAY 5 20.30 Marteau sans maître
by Pierre Boulez performed by Ictus
Studio, conducted by Alain Franco:
music and poetry (in French)

MAY 6 20.00 London Symphony
Orchestra conducted by Pierre Boulez,
with Pierre-Laurent Aimard and

Tamara Stefanovich, piano; Bartók,
Schönberg, Stravinsky, Boulez

MAY 7 20.00 London Symphony
Orchestra conducted by Pierre Boulez,
with Michelle DeYoung, mezzo; Peter

Fried, bass and the BBC singers:
Schönberg, Pintscher, Bartók

MAY 8 20.00 Alina Ibragimova, violin;

Alban Gerhardt, cello; Steven Osborne,
piano; Kari Kriikku, clarinet: Ravel's
trio, Messiaen's Quatuor pour la fin du
temps

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39

MAY 4 20.00 Dorothea Röschmann,
mezzo; Magdalena Kožená, soprano;
Graham Johnson, piano: Dvorak's
Moravian duets

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be

APR 30 20.15 International Chamber
Music Week closing concert: Salvador
Dali Trio

Kapel van de Miniemens

Miniemensstraat 62; 02.507.82.00,
www.minimes.net

APR 30 20.00 Concerto Palatino,
conducted by Bruce Dickey and
Charles Toet: Porta, Guami, Grillo, A
Gabrieli, G Gabrieli

MAY 7 20.30 Brussels Chamber
Choir conducted by Helen Cassano:
a capella and contemporary music by
Rautavaara, Messiaen, Tavener, Casals,
Rachmaninoff, Whitacre

Antwerp**deSingel**

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
MAY 8 20.00 Collegium Vocale
Gent Orkest & Koor conducted by
Philippe Herreweghe: Bach's Easter and
Ascension Oratorios

Bruges**Concertgebouw**

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02
MAY 2 20.00 Budapest Festival
Orchestra Ensemble conducted by Iván
Fischer, with Miah Persson, soprano:
Prokofiev, Strauss, Mahler

Ghent**De Bijloke**

Jozef Kluyvensstraat 2, 09.269.92.92
MAY 7 20.00 Collegium Vocale
Gent Orkest & Koor conducted by
Philippe Herreweghe: Bach's Easter and
Ascension Oratorios

Hoeilaart**Maison de la Musique**

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

APR 30 20.00 Lan Cui, piano;
Tatiana Trenogina, soprano; Leonid
Smorguner, violin; Philippe Riga and
Dana Protopopescu, piano: Mozart,
Wagner, Verdi, Strauss

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

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
Concerts at 20.00:

Until MAY 2 Médée by Luigi

Cherubini with the Monnaie Choirs
and Les Talens Lyriques, conducted by
Christophe Rousset

Ghent**Vlaamse Opera**

Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02,
www.vlaamseopera.be

Until MAY 4 Vlaamse Opera
Symphony Orchestra in La
Sonnambula by Bellini, conducted by
Rani Calderon

Jazz & blues**Brussels****Ancienne Belgique**

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

MAY 8 20.00 Jeff Neve Trio

Beursschouwburg

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

MAY 7 20.30 Tutu Puaone Quartet

Brasserie de L'Union

Sint-Gillisvoorplein 55; 02.538.15.79

MAY 5 12.00-15.00 Carson Barnes &
friends

Café Belga

Flageyplein; 02.640.35.08

MAY 4 17.00 Pierre de Surgères
Quartet

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78

Concerts at 20.30

APR 30 Sammy's on the Bowery

MAY 2 Nu:Be Nights **MAY 3** 18.00

Schickentanz New Quintet **MAY 7** Bart
Quartier Quintet **MAY 8** Jazz Station
Big Band

La Brocante Thoumas

Blaessstraat 170; 02.512.13.43

MAY 3 12.00-16.00 Carson Barnes &
friends

Le Caveau du Max

Victor Hugo/Emile Max Corner;
02.733.17.88

MAY 8 20.30 Rony Verbiest/Bart
Quartier Duo

Salle du Maelbeek

Oudergemlaan 90; 0485.50.57.78

MAY 7 20.00 JazzOlive: Eres Dios
Explosion and Djeeboolai

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,

www.soundsjazzclub.be

Concerts at 22.00:

APR 30 Caribe con K - Los Soneros

del Barrio, Caribbean music **MAY**

symmEtrio **MAY 2** Narcissus Trio

with Jozef Dumoulin, piano **MAY 5**

Master session **MAY 6** Tuesday Night

Orchestra **MAY 7** Chamaquiando, salsa

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45

APR 30 20.30 FOURtune **MAY 1** 20.30

Oscar Lorient, Latino-Cuban music

MAY 2 20.30 Johan Clement Quartet

MAY 3 20.30 Claudia Carbo **MAY 6**

20.30 soniCorchestra **MAY 7** 20.30

Asymétrie **MAY 8** 12.30 Anton
Walgraeve

Borgerhout

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90

APR 30 20.30 Mare Nostrum with

Paolo Fresu, Richard Galliano and Jan

Ludgren

MAY 7 20.30 Radiokukaorkest, Stefano

Bollani and Fabian Fiorini

Ghent**De Bijloke**

Jozef Kluyvensstraat 2, 09.269.92.92

APR 30 20.00 Tomasz Stanko Quartet

Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.28

MAY 7 20.00 Jef Neve Trio

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

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

Concerts at 20.00:

MAY 1 Off the Record **MAY 2** Andy

Yorke + Selah Sue + Milow **MAY 3**

16.50 Now_Series: M83 + The Whip

+ These New Puritans + Prinzhorn

Dance School + As In Rebekkamaria +

Foxylane **MAY 7** Udo "Soul Sessions on

Tour" **MAY 8** Kraak & Smaak

Café Dada

Violettestraat 34; 0484.50.83.80

APR 30 19.00 René Binamé - Little

Ballroom

Espace Senghor

Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40,
www.senghor.be

MAY 2 20.00 Tes Yeux Rouges

MAY 3 20.00 Daddy's Girl

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89

MAY 2 23.00 Weekendancer: Marc
Romboy, Spirit Catcher, Marcus, Terry
Toner, Mr Snu & Sir Matthew

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15

MAY 2 20.00 Tindersticks

Place Rouppe

www.fgtb.be

MAY 1 16.30-20.00 Labour Day
concert: Lura + Axelle Red

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34

MAY 2 21.00 Diathroda + Harry
Poppins + Brainsucked + Enkidu +
Knifehandshop + Venetian Snakes +
Sicktronick + Droon

MAY 3 22.00 Institubes Label Night:
Surkin + Bobmo + Das Glow + Jean
Nipon + Orgasmic + Curses! + Para
One

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07

MAY 2 21.30 Knifehand

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Roussealaan 208; 0900.00.991

Concerts at 20.00:

Belgian and international artists' videos, photographs and installations

Arts en Marge

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

Atomium

Atomium Square; 02.475.47.72, www.atomium.be
Until OCT 19 Expo 58: Between Utopia and Reality, documents, plans, objects, films, photographs and scale models of Expo 58
Until OCT 19 Lucien De Roeck's Star, design of the famous symbol of Expo 58
Until OCT 19 The Pavilion of Temporary Happiness, built from 33,000 drink crates to house screenings and exhibitions about World Fairs (near the Atomium on Louis Steensplein)

Box Gallery

Maliestraat 88; 02.537.95.55
Until MAY 17 De la misma carne, photographs by Alberto García-Alix

Boycott Gallery

Darwinstraat 33; 0475.51.99.31
Until MAY 10 Photographs by Mikael Falke

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44
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, work by the Flemish artist paired with photographs from his performances
Until JUNE 15 Skal: drinking horns, richly ornamented drinking horns from the Reykjavík museum's collection

CIVA

Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.71, www.civa.be
Until JUNE 10 Shanghai-Brussels: ARCHITopia 2, recent architectural works in Shanghai
Until SEP 19 Documents on the gardens designed by René Pechère and Jacques Boulanger-Français for Expo 58

Charliermuseum

Kunstlaan 16; 02.507.83.31, www.charliermuseum.be
Until JUNE 20 Landschap en natuur, landscape paintings and drawings, with work by Fernand Khnopff, James Ensor, Louis Crépin, Jakob Smits and Guillaume Vogels, among others

Costume and Lace Museum

Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50
Until MAY 27 Weefsels van het absolute (Absolute Fibres), textiles by outsider artists
Until DEC 30 Van New Look tot Expo 58, women's fashion from the time of Belgium's 1958 World's Fair, with evening gowns, wedding dresses, cocktail dresses, suits, coats and accessories

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

Design Flanders

Kanselrijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60
Until JUNE 1 Furniture design, art and architecture by Frans Van Praet

Embassy of Brazil

Louisalaan 350; 02.640.20.15
Until MAY 23 After School, paintings by Brazilian artists

Erasmus House

Kapittelstraat 31; 02.521.13.83
Until JUNE 15 Anatomie van de Ijdelheden (Anatomy of Vanity), the museum's 75th anniversary show, with work by Hieronymus Bosch, Jan Fabre, Hans Holbein, Marie-Jo Lafontaine, Aida Kazarian and Quinten Metsys

Espace Photographique Contretype
Verbindingslaan 1; 02.538.42.20
Until JUNE 15 Un monde inquiétant, photographs by Julien Coulommier

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until MAY 31 Récits, paintings by Cécilia Shishan
Until MAY 31 Jewellery and ceramics by Axelle Gielen
Until JUNE 21 De Narcisse à Alice : Miroirs et reflets en question, group show on the theme of mirrors and reflection

Instituto Cervantes

Tervurenlaan 64; 02.737.01.90
Until MAY 16 Sin poder dejar de sentir, photographs by Isaac Montoya

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre

Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20
Until MAY 4 Et autres mouvements du temps, paintings by Aurélie Thiolat and Translations, photographs by Catherine Lamberton

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, www.mjb-jmb.org
Until JUNE 22 Dicht op de huid (Close to the Skin), paintings by Brussels-based artist Maurice Frydman

La Cambre Architecture

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

La Fonderie - Brussels Museum of Work and Industry

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

Le Botanique

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

René Magritte Museum

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

Royal Army Museum

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

Until NOV 30 A Paintbrush in the Barrel, World War One paintings, drawings and etchings by soldiers

Royal Library

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

Royal Museum for Central Africa

Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11

Until AUG 31 Knock on Wood! Forest and Wood in Africa, thematic exhibition on African trees and forests and their need for sustainable management
Until OCT 19 Expo 58, films and photographs, ethnographic objects, plants, artwork and animals that were displayed in the seven pavilions dedicated to the Belgian Congo at Brussels' World's Fair in 1958

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!, multimedia exhibition on the development of the EU and the lives of European citizens since 1945
Until JUNE 1 Star Wars, interactive exhibition with artwork, costumes and objects from the cult science fiction films

WIELS

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

Wolubilis

Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30
Until MAY 10 Saisir l'invisible, paintings by Jacques Zimmermann

Young Gallery/Hotel Conrad

Louisalaan 75b; 02.374.07.04
Until MAY 17 AirCraft, photographs by Jeffrey Milstein

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
Until MAY 18 Janssens' Works, installation by Ghent architects Bavo Gideon Boie & Matthias Pauwels
Until MAY 25 Inside Outside, landscape architecture by Petra Blaisse

Diamond Museum

Koningin Astridplein 13-23; 03.202.48.90
Until JUNE 8 Diamond Divas, prestigious collection of diamond jewellery worn by the rich and famous

Fifty-One Fine Art Photography

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

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaaï 47; 03.242.93.00
Until JUNE 8 Patrick De Spiegelaere, retrospective of the late Flemish photographer (1961-2007)
Until JUNE 8 Face On, portrait photography
Until JUNE 8 Provisoria, multi-media work by Ria Verhaeghe
Until JUNE 22 West, so far, photographs by Phil van Duyen

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Royal Museum of Fine Arts)

Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09
Until JUNE 15 Jan Cox: Living One's Art, paintings by the 20th-century Flemish artist

Until JUNE 29 Willem Elsschots' Kaas: een beeldroman, graphic novel adaptation by Dick Matena

MoMu

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70
Until AUG 17 Moi, Véronique. Branquinho TOuTe NUE, retrospective of the Belgian designer marking the 10th anniversary of her fashion label

Bruges

Arentshuis
Dijver 16
Until AUG 3 Three Bruges Artists: Legillon, Verbrugge and Ledoux, 18th and 19th-century drawings

De Bond

Buitenhof 1; 050.44.30.48
Until MAY 5 Indonésie, works by Emilio López-Mencheró

Groeningemuseum

Dijver 12; 050.44.87.43
Until MAY 12 The Lively Baroque: Bozzetti from Austria, painted sketches

Don't miss



Antwerp = America = Red Star Line

Until 28 December, National Maritime Museum, 1 Steenplein, Antwerp, www.nationaal scheepvaartmuseum.be

Finally, this comprehensive exhibition on the historic Red Star Line, a shipping company that took millions of Europeans across the Atlantic to America, is being staged at home in Antwerp after shows in New York and Luxembourg. The ocean liners full of emigrants set off weekly from the Port of Antwerp beginning in 1873 and continued until passenger numbers fell off in the 1930s. It's a story, in documents, postcards, posters and photographs, of the prosperity of a port and a city in the late 19th century, but it's also a story of the dreams and desires of regular people – many of whom weren't quite so prosperous. It's also your last chance to visit the Maritime Museum before it closes up at the end of this year to move to the huge new Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), which will be located in the former warehouses of the Red Star Line itself.

and models for large-scale paintings

Until DEC 31 Leuven loans, 15th- and 16th-century paintings and woodcarvings from Leuven's Van der Kelen-Mertens museum

Flemish artist (1886-1965)

Ypres

In Flanders Fields Museum

Grote Markt 34; 057.23.92.75

Until SEP 7 Man, Culture, War: Multicultural Aspects of the First World War, a panorama of the diverse origins of those who fought in Belgium during WWI

Municipal Museum

Ieperleestraat 31; 057.21.83.00

Until JUNE 1 Twilight of the Gods over Ypres, the region through the eyes of photographers Léontine, Maurice and Robert Antony (1893-1930)

Festivals & special events

VW Spring Sessions 2008: Annual festival of jazz, rock, world music and DJs

Until JUNE 5

in venues across Belgium www.springsessions.be

Brussels

Iceland on the Edge: Icelandic cultural festival including exhibitions, concerts, theatre, dance and films

Until JUNE 15 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, www.bozar.be

Les Nuits Botanique: Festival of rock, pop, chanson and world music

MAY 7-17 at Le Botanique and Cirque Royal 02.218.37.32, www.botanique.be

Miouzz.com with the Extincteurs: comedy/music/improvisation

MAY 2 & JUNE 24 20.30 at Espace Delvaux, Gratèsstraat 3; 02.663.85.50

Royal Greenhouses of Laeken: the annual open days of the Royal Gardens with thousands of exotic plants on display

Until MAY 12 at Royal Domain of Laeken, Dynastielaan 02.551.20.20, www.belgium.be

Bruges

The Holy Blood Procession: Annual religious pageant with a two-kilometre-long procession behind the relic of the Holy Blood

MAY 1 throughout Bruges 070.22.50.05, www.holyblood.com

MY FLANDERS

Patrick Huvenne

Patrick Huvenne is a forester responsible for the part of the Sonian Forest that is in Flanders. We ask him about the challenges that are facing this magnificent "beech cathedral"

Have you always been interested in the environment?

I have been a nature fanatic as long as I can remember. It probably started in the scouts; I loved hiking and camping in the wild. I decided to work in forests to make a contribution towards preserving the environment. I studied forest management in the department of agriculture at Ghent University and qualified as a bio-engineer. I led the Inverde training and education centre in Groenendaal before becoming Regional Manager for the Flemish government's Agency for Nature and Forests.

How big is the Sonian Forest?

Certainly not as big as it used to be. It was once part of a huge forest that stretched from the Rhine and Moselle rivers in Germany to the North Sea. Its current size is 43 square kilometres, and it extends over the three Belgian regions of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. I cover the Flemish trees and work closely with my two regional colleagues. Between us, we have 15 foresters working throughout the forest – six of whom work in the part of the forest that grows in Flanders. My team are all men, although women foresters are increasingly being employed elsewhere in Flanders.

What do you like most about your job?

The fact that my responsibilities include taking care of such an important ecosystem that encompasses everything from wood ants

to woodpeckers, rare orchids to ancient oaks, Bechstein's bats to Siberian chipmunks. It's definitely a crown jewel amongst the forests of Flanders. It's extremely ancient with rich nature and a fascinating history and is a key recreation area for locals and visitors. Last year we estimated that over two million people visited the forest. I also enjoy the variety of my job; there is no such thing as a typical day. I spend a lot of time in meetings or behind the computer, but I try to spend at least a day and a half each week in the forest and catch up on the paperwork in the evenings.

What exactly does the work entail?

It could involve identifying and marking the trees to be felled, cleaning out a pond, conducting a census of the roe deer, maintaining the many footpaths and cycle routes, planting new saplings or liaising with other government agencies. A lot of my work in recent months has been associated with the new Structural Plan for the Sonian Forest, which should be completed this summer. Once that has been approved, we'll be busy implementing it, which, among other things, involves a complete overhaul of the footpaths and cycle routes throughout the forest.

How many trees do you fell each year?

We aim to sell around 13,000 cubic metres of wood each year. That's about 15,000 trees – mostly beech but also some oak. Top-quality heavy trunks go to veneer board companies in Belgium, The Netherlands and Germany, for conversion into high-quality



Sander Geens

plywood or multiplex. Some of our wood is exported to countries as far afield as Italy, Egypt, India and China, where it is used for decorative sliced veneer to make furniture. Smaller or lower quality trunks are used for furniture, pallets and interior building structures.

Do you replant the same number?

We plant about double the number that we fell. Only a quarter of the trees we plant are beech, about 60% are oak, and the rest are various other trees and shrubs. Reducing the percentage of beech trees in the forest is a deliberate strategy to increase the diversity both in terms of tree types as well as the associated flora and fauna.

What do foresters do in the winter or when it's raining?

Most of the planting is carried out in the winter, so don't think a forester has his feet up in front of a log fire throughout the winter

months! We are out in the forest in all weather – it has to be a very heavy storm to keep us inside!

Your job must bring you into contact with many people who use the forest. Is that a positive or negative experience?

Generally positive. I never cease to be amazed that every year we get telephone calls from as far away as Germany, Finland or even Japan, excitedly asking if the bluebells are in bloom yet, especially in the famous Hallebos. On the other hand, local residents, as well as builders and contractors, regularly use the forest as a dumping ground for their waste. Last year we discovered a container full of plastic insulation that had been stripped from stolen copper wire.

What are the main challenges facing the Sonian Forest?

It keeps getting reduced in size

by the expanding rail and road networks. Increasing road traffic is leading to more air pollution, even deep within the forest. Its popularity is leading to over-use in certain areas. And, of course, the changing climate will have an effect, although it's too soon to say what that will be. It's vital we address all these issues to ensure that the forest is preserved, that its flora and fauna are protected, and that it remains an excellent place for us all to stretch our legs and get some exercise and fresh air.

How do you relax? Go for a walk in the woods?

I think that forestry is definitely in my blood; even on family holidays I try and fit in a trip to an arboretum or woodland museum. And after a busy day I like to jog or cycle in the forest. Otherwise, I relax with my wife, play with our two young sons or work in the garden – which I am desperately trying to prevent turning into a forest.

Interview by Denzil Walton

To our readers

We launched *Flanders Today* in October, 2007 with the aim of promoting lively writing on Flanders for a global readership. We want to offer our readers a broad range of stories covering news, business, culture and lifestyle. Over the past months, we have built up an exciting team of writers specialised in areas like science and business, but also passionate about quirky subjects such as abandoned buildings, folk museums and the Dutch language

in Flanders.

Since starting out, we have received a steady stream of feedback from our readers, which we have used to shape future issues. But it now seems the right moment to conduct a serious survey to find out what our readers really think about this weekly.

We can't write about everything in a 16-page newspaper, so we have to make choices every week. Maybe you would like us to have more on a certain topic or to suggest a special issue on a specific theme. We'll take note of your points and incorporate

them if we can into our long-term strategy.

One of our main goals every week is to encourage readers to go out and discover Flanders for themselves. So we're very pleased that Tourism Flanders-Brussels has agreed to offer our readers five tourism vouchers worth €100 as prizes in our special draw. All you need to do to qualify is fill out the online readers' survey and send it back to us. If you strike lucky, you could soon be enjoying a weekend at Knokke or cycling in the Flemish Ardennes.

Derek Blyth, Editor

Download the survey at www.flanderstoday.eu

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