



Jaap van Zweden, p.9

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ANIG Architecten



Holocaust Museum plans unveiled

Museum will reflect on human rights and fight racism

Alan Hope

The planned Holocaust Museum to be built in the Dossin Caserne in Mechelen in 2011 will be a design by the Antwerp architect Bob Van Reeth,

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters has announced. The project was the subject of an international competition.

The Dossin Caserne has mostly been turned into apartments, but it

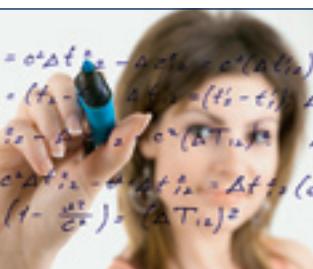
still contains the Museum of Deportation and Resistance. During World War Two, the Caserne housed the *Sammellager* (collection camp) from where, between 1942 and 1944, the SS depor-

ted 24,916 Jews and 351 gypsies to camps in the East – including Auschwitz. Six out of 10 deported – mainly women, children and old people – were gassed immediately on arrival. Of those who were put

to work, only 1,221 survived to the liberation.

Plans for a new museum have been on the table since 2000, when

Continued on page 3



News

He's already been awarded a prize in San Francisco for his efforts to create Flanders' first national park. Now Ignace Schops has been praised in the European Parliament for his visionary work.

Business

Students take note. The Flemish government has launched a new plan to attract foreign undergraduates and turn the region into a knowledge centre that can compete on a world level.

Living

Hang out your flower baskets. Fifteen villages are competing to be the prettiest village in Flanders. And your vote counts.

Electricity suppliers accused of "cheating customers"

Electrabel overcharged €1 billion, report says

Alan Hope

Two Belgian electricity suppliers have been accused of cheating business customers by charging them for environmental credits that should have been free, the gas and electricity market regulator said last week. In the latest report from the Commission for the Regulation of Electricity and Gas (CREG), Electrabel (which supplies some 90% of the country's electricity) is accused of overcharging customers by as much as €1 billion between 2005 and 2007, while another much smaller company, SPE, overcharged by some €200

million.

The issue surrounds carbon dioxide (CO₂) credits, under which consumers pay a surcharge for the amount of power they use to compensate for the CO₂ produced in its generation. Electrabel and SPE applied these charges to their customers in the period concerned, CREG alleges, although the system had not yet come into force. The two generating companies, in other words, charged customers what appeared to be a tax but kept the money themselves.

Continued on page 5

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Bozar

The Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, now abbreviated to Bozar, is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year. When it opened back in 1928, it was one of the world's most innovative cultural institutions, bringing dance, theatre and exhibitions together under one roof.

The building was designed by Victor Horta, the Ghent architect who transformed Brussels in the 1890s with his Art Nouveau houses and department stores. By the 1920s, when he was working on the Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, he had settled into a more sober Art Deco style.

Just two weeks after it opened, with the smell of fresh paint still hanging in the corridors, Diaghilev's Les Ballets Russes performed amidst the marble statues. Two weeks later, the centre hosted a major exhibition devoted to the acclaimed French sculptor Emile Antoine Bourdelle.

Over the past 80 years, Bozar has produced an astonishing range of cultural events, moving confidently between art and architecture, music and film, performance and theatre. The building is now going through a major renovation that means dust in the street, cranes swinging overhead and power drills vibrating in remote corners of the building.

Some of the work has already been done – the main hall was cleared of a lot of tacky add-ons from the 1970s and the complex of exhibition halls have been restored to their original cool aesthetic. Many rooms that were previously abandoned have been reopened to the public, creating unexpected spaces for a range of off-beat free exhibitions. All that remains now is to complete the restoration of the film museum and re-open the restaurant, and one of the world's great cultural centres is reborn.

Many people find Bozar a confusing building. It could hardly be otherwise, standing on a sloping site that links the lower and upper town. You get something of an idea of the layout from the rooftop viewing platform reached by the steps next to the Koningstraat entrance. But you have to wander around the interior to fully understand Horta's ingenious design.

Later this year, Bozar is putting on a programme of 80 different events to mark the anniversary. That's 80 good reasons to take another look at this exceptional arts institution.

Derek Blyth

Online

www.bozar.be



FACE OF FLANDERS



Barbara Sarafian

The glamorous actress in the photo above is barely recognisable as the lead in the recent romantic drama *Aanrijding in Moscou*. Her character, Matty, was meant to be a tired, frustrated, 40-something mother of three who feels – and looks – worn out. But most of the people who saw the film thought she looked good, anyway. "I hear that! Especially from women," says Barbara Sarafian, who played the middle aged woman who falls in love with a much younger man. "They say 'you were beautiful and so powerful. I think that's a compliment. And there were two men fighting over her."

The Flemish film, known abroad as *Moscow, Belgium*, was picked up by a distributor for international release and was chosen to open the International Critics' Week of the Cannes Film Festival last week. It's only the second Flemish film to ever be included in the prestigious event's 47-year history, (the first was *Manneken Pis* in 1995), which features first and second features by filmmakers. The movie, which released in Belgium last January, was a hit here, too, with 150,000 ticket sales – an incredibly high number for a Flemish film.

Sarafian thinks this has to do with a subject matter many people can relate to. "It's a story about despair and love in a certain circle, a family, which is very common," she tells me over the phone from Cannes. "Everybody knows what it is." It also skilfully skirts the line between pure romantic comedy and dark drama – drawing in crowds who like both. "We worked really well together," Sarafian says of the cast and the director, Christophe Van Rompaey, "and I think that magic is coming out."

Speaking of Cannes, Sarafian admits that the glitz and late nights are not really her thing. "I was up until midnight last night, and that is late for me," she says. "I don't like to be in the crowd so much." While talking to me, she's getting ready for the launch of Critics' Week. "It's going to be run, run, run. My biggest concern is my feet."

She seemed much more at home in *Aanrijding*, where she plays a mom in Ghent – which is what she is. She was born in the city, grew up in different places in Belgium and abroad and settled back in Ghent after her son was born. In fact, her real-life pre-pubescent son plays her son in the movie.

Shot on location in Ghent, *Aanrijding in Moscou* has the distinction of being the first Flemish feature ever to employ Ghent dialect for its dialogue. The young truck driver who Matty falls for has a heavy accent, so Sarafian toned hers down a bit so all Flemish audiences could understand her. Having acted on TV and in films in Dutch as well as English, it was a unique experience to speak the dialect of her hometown. "I enjoy every kind of accent or language where I need to transform my voice, my face, my body, just to get into that character," she says. "You really have to become somebody."

The last time Sarafian was at Cannes was almost exactly 10 years ago, when British director Peter Greenaway's *8 1/2 Women*, in which she played a scheming servant, was nominated for a Palm d'Or. Looking to the future, she'll be spending the summer developing a television comedy.

Lisa Bradshaw

Online

www.moscow-belgium.com

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



thuiswerken

I have apparently been fooling myself for years. Like most husbands, I've always thought that I shared the household chores equally with my wife. Admittedly, *mijn echtgenote* is the much better cook, but I'm happy to do the washing-up when the dishwasher is having a rest. And I'm a dab hand with *de stofzuiger*, the "dust-sucker", or vacuum cleaner to you and me.

Then I read somewhere: *De nieuwe man* (that's me) *bestaat misschien wel*. Well, either he exists or he doesn't. *Maar* (and here I bristled) *hij laat zich leiden door de vrouw: hij is de huishoudhulp die zij kan inschakelen*. Of course I listen to my wife but "lets himself be led by the woman"! And to be described as the "household help" that my wife can "call on" when needed is really too much! *Trop is te veel!* as they say.

The article went on: *Zij is de dirigent en dat is ook de meest stresserende rol vooral omdat zij ook nog verschillende taken moet uitvoeren*. At this point I began to realise that perhaps there might be some truth in all this. Someone has to direct – *de dirigent* – and my good lady does have all these different chores – *verschillende taken* – to take care of.

This article also contained the profile of the person who works the hardest in Flanders. It was a perfect description of my mother-of-three, full-time-working, university-qualified, 40-something wife: *De prijs voor de hardst werkende Vlaming gaat naar de hoogopgeleide vrouw die volledig werkt, kinderen heeft en tussen 30 en 50 jaar is*. Perhaps we could think about getting *een poesvrouw*, but then you really need to be around when she's cleaning. Now, and this is a thought, we could have *een poesvrouw* if one of us could *thuiswerken*, but which one would want to work from home? I'm sure Mrs MacLean would pooh-pooh the idea. I doubt that I'd have *de ijzeren discipline*: even as I'm writing this now at the kitchen table, I'm surrounded by too many distractions.

But then I came across another article titled *Wie thuis werkt, best werkt*, which listed the benefits of working from home. Obviously, *de tijdwinst*, saving time getting to the office; and *het is gemakkelijker om een goede balans te vinden tussen mijn werk en mijn privé-leven* – striking such a balance is important.

The main benefit is that you would be more autonomous: *Ik heb de organisatie van mijn werk veel meer in eigen hand*. It all seems good news: *Ik sta een stuk rustiger in het leven*, so it allows you to lead a less hectic life, *en het feit dat ik thuis mag werken, bewijst dat mijn werkgever mij vertrouwt* – certainly if your boss didn't trust you, you probably wouldn't be allowed to work from home. It's all very tempting. Perhaps *deeltijds thuiswerken*, you know, two days at home and three at the office. Or maybe I should try out some recipes.

Alistair MacLean

Online

www.vandale.be

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FEATURE



New extension for Holocaust Museum

Continued from page 1

it became clear that the existing museum was short of space and could not expand within the premises it occupies. A committee of academics reached a consensus view that the museum ought to be more than a memorial to the past. The new title reflects that aim: "Caserne Dossin: memorial, museum and documentation centre on the Holocaust and on human rights".

The new building will face the Caserne itself, on the spot of the former detention house, which has since been used as a crafts school. It will consist of three floors, and windows on the side facing the

street will be bricked-up. The top floor will house an auditorium and a visitors' centre with an open-air space. The existing deportation museum will move to the new building, with the old barracks building being given over to storage and a place where people can consult a database to find out what happened to family members. There will also be a meditation space.

In addition to the Holocaust memorial, museum and documentation centre, the new Dossin complex will serve as a monument to human rights and tolerance and against racism and ethnic divisions.

Van Reeth is the most prominent member of the Antwerp-based Architects' Working Group (AWG),

which has carried out many diverse designs such as the Catteau Aurore primary school in Brussels and the Gasthuisberg university hospital complex in Leuven. His plan uses remaining fragments of the detention house in the construction of the new building, which will partly integrate the city walls. At other places, the building will be supported on cast-iron pillars engraved with texts in favour of human rights and tolerance.

"The great thing about this project is that we will finally be able to make a building which is a work of art. And it's something that will bring the development of the rest of the area on track," Van Reeth says.



Belgian SS guards stood trial in Mechelen in 1946 and were executed by firing squad in 1947 in the Caserne Dossin

Passchendaele centre praised



Tyne Cot Centre "conveys the barrenness of death"

The Tyne Cot Centre near Ypres was recently selected as one of the world's best buildings, in a survey by *The Independent* newspaper. The political commentator Anthony Seldon, author of bestselling biographies of Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher, singled out the building for praise, describing it as "one of the most stunning buildings I've ever seen".

The visitor centre opened in 2007 close to Tyne Cot war cemetery, the largest British and Commonwealth war cemetery in the world, located on the slopes below Passendale village where thousands died in World War One. "It's the simplicity of it that strikes the visitor," Seldon wrote. "Plain black and glass of the modern centre contrasts with the whiteness of the cemetery that was put up 90 years ago. It conveys the barrenness of death in a way that sympathises with the stark white cemetery against which it is located."

The Flemish government has already begun working on plans to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War One in 2014-18. Geert Bourgeois, Flemish minister of foreign affairs, recently announced that he wants to develop a major project on the theme of "peace" which will involve all the countries that were involved in the war. The aim is to develop a "humanitarian tourism" in the region over the coming years.

Derek Blyth

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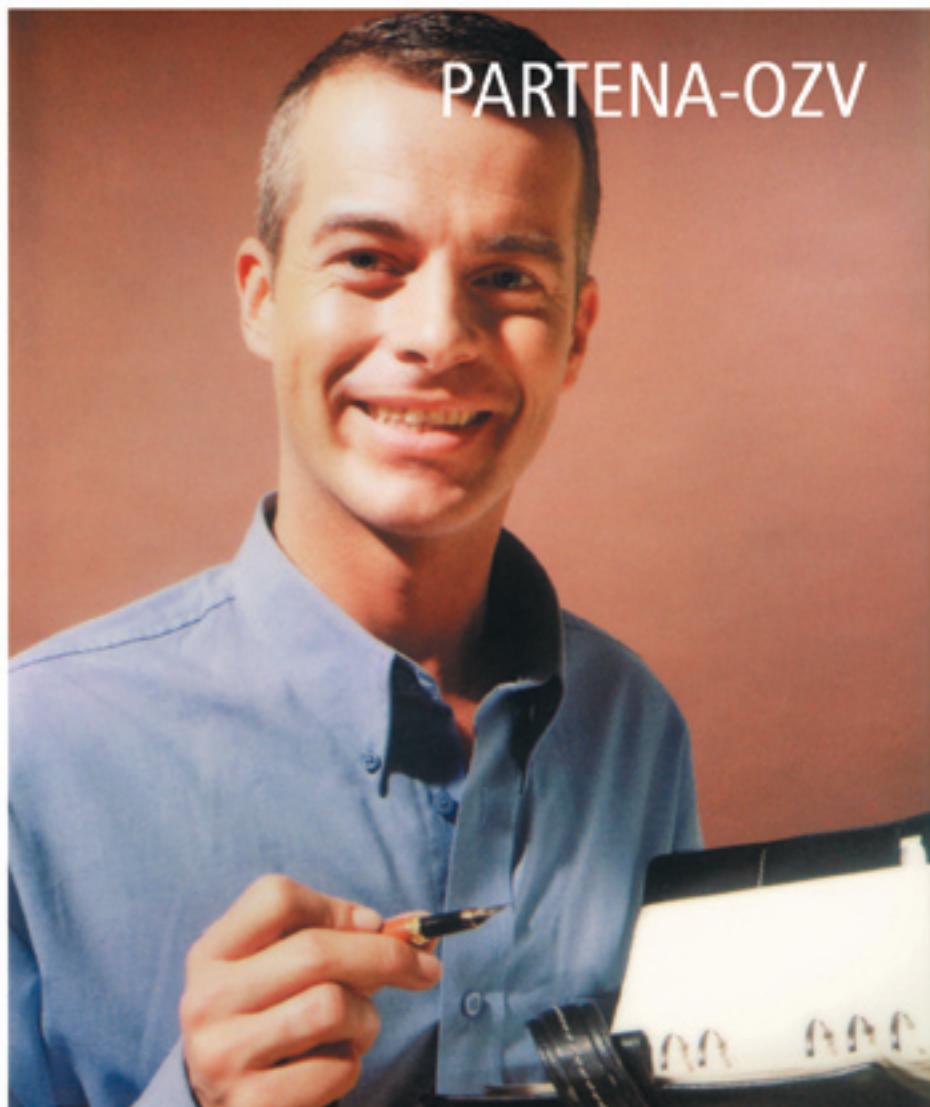
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Minister threatens punitive measures

Continued from page 1

Electrabel denied the charge and accused CREG of misinterpreting the figures. "We demand an objective analysis by the competition authorities," a spokesman for the utility said. The energy market in Europe is free, Electrabel said in a statement, and prices have been moving upwards not only in Belgium but also in France, Germany and the Netherlands. Yet only in Belgium is an alleged overcharging reckoned to be the cause, the company complained.

The CREG report, meanwhile, unleashed a storm of criticism aimed at Electrabel's near-monopoly on the market and the consequent lack of competition in Belgium. "For a major consumer in Belgium, it is almost impossible to obtain stable supplies from anyone other than Electrabel," said Peter Claes, deputy chairman of Febelie, the federation for major electricity users, which represents about 70 corporate members in industries like steel, chemicals, paper and food-processing.

Those companies, Claes said, will have passed on the new charges to customers

where possible, making them less competitive compared to companies where CO₂ rights are still free. The negative effect on the Belgian economy might therefore be greater than the €1.2 billion involved.

Where the companies are unable to pass on increased costs because of international pressure on prices in a world market, the brunt of the damage will have been felt by investors. And while the costs are mainly felt in Belgium, the benefits, in Electrabel's case, flow straight over the border to France, where the parent company Suez is based.

"I invite the energy producers to enter into a dialogue with the companies involved to look at ways of rectifying this mistake," said federal energy minister Paul Magnette. "If they cannot come to an agreement, then the government will be forced to take measures similar to those adopted in the United Kingdom" – a reference to a similar case in the UK where producers were forced to pay £225 million (€282.6m) from overcharging into a social fund. "The liberalisation of the market does not give the right to do what you choose," he said.



Antwerp takes on truant officer

Antwerp last week became the first Flemish authority to employ a civil servant purely to tackle the problem of truancy in schools. Kaat Everaerts will this September begin work with education alderman Robert Voorhamme and the city's central information line on truancy to tackle all aspects of the problem. Thirteen percent of Antwerp's school students – more than one in eight – had 10 or more unexplained half-days off school last year, which is the city's threshold for considering a student truant. In the rest of Flanders the bar is set at 30 half-days per year. Meanwhile, fears that truancy is beginning earlier led Antwerp to begin registering truancy in primary schools from the beginning of June.

Party animals are sad loners – official

Users of so-called "party drugs" like ecstasy and cocaine are sad and lonely and experience identity disorders, according to Jan Overmeire, 30, whose Ghent University doctoral thesis is entitled *I was in Ecstasy – An ethnographic study of drug use in a recreational setting in relation to ecstasy and perceptions of identity*. Overmeire spent six years mixing with drugs users in Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels as research for his thesis. Users have identity problems, cannot form relationships, are immature and suffer from depression, disturbed sexuality and antisocial behaviour. However, he writes, the values of the subculture – "the search for kicks, the cult of the body, the longing for immediate gratification" are being spread into mainstream society.

Second church fire suspect freed



A man suspected of causing the fire which destroyed Sint-Pieters church at Galmaarden near Geraardsbergen has been freed. The man was one of two fairground workers who are accused of unintentionally causing the fire by setting off illegal fireworks, one of which started the blaze. The church dates back to mediaeval times and was rebuilt and extended in 1772 by the Abbot of Vorst. It is unusual in being oriented from East to West, unlike most classical churches. The church contained vestiges of the original 13th-century bell tower and 14th-century fragments. It was restored and classed as a monument in 1995.

Following the fire, only the walls remain, and inspectors from the monuments commission of Flemish Brabant were inspecting the ruins last week to see what action could be taken.

The two men accused of starting the fire were stall-holders at the Pentecost fair in the town. They have admitted setting off rockets in the vicinity of the church. One firework is thought to have landed on the roof, where the fire began. They have been charged with unintended arson and damage to a protected monument. In addition, they seem set to receive a hefty bill for damages. "That will come to at least €1 million," the church's insurer said.

Vedett turns white

Brewer Duvel Moortgat is to launch its own Vedett witbier at the end of June or beginning of July. The beer is the latest marketing push by the Vedett brand, which for years was only sold in local bars in small quantities, but which has lately become a fashionable Flemish marque. The witbier, named Vedett Extra White, will be marketed initially in the same outlets as Vedett Extra Blonde is now, said Moortgat marketing manager Johan Van Dyck. It will also go to Vedett outlets abroad, including London, where interest in wheat-based white beers has increased in recent years. The new beer, based on an older recipe, will be bottled in the same distinctive dumpy bottle as Vedett.



NEWS FLASH



Mobile telephone operator Mobistar will bring the iPhone to Belgium, it was announced. The agreement with Apple, the iPhone's manufacturer, was part of a deal with Orange, a subsidiary of France Telecom. Mobistar represents Orange in Belgium. Apple's restrictive deals in the US and elsewhere – whereby the phone can only be used with a designated operator – have led to both criticism and widespread hacking of the phones, most recently by government minister Vincent Van Quickenborne, who was photographed using an iPhone before the deal with Mobistar.

More than 10,000 people took part in the Lesbian and Gay Pride parade through the centre of Brussels last weekend, according to the police. Organisers said there were closer to 20,000. The parade was followed in the evening by a concert featuring Kate Ryan and Milk Inc.

Antwerp had a record year for the export of cut diamonds, according to the annual report by the Antwerp World Diamond Center. The total sales figure was €42 billion – more than Israel, India and Dubai. Of that total, export of cut stones rose 13% to €10.74 billion, while imports were up to €9.99 billion.

Siemens will subcontract part of an order to build 305 new electric locomotives for the rail authority NMBS to Belgian companies, it was announced. The €1.4 billion contract for trains for the new Regional Express Network (GEN) caused consternation in carriage-builder Bombardier in Bruges when it looked like the work was going out of the country. But Bombardier, as well as possibly Alstom in Charleroi, will now be brought in to carry out work worth €300 million, or just under a quarter of the total, representing one million work-hours, or 650 full-time jobs for a year.

Brussels city council has banned the use of plastic chairs by bars and restaurants in the area on and around the Grote Markt, a neighbourhood classified by Unesco as a heritage area. Trade alderman Jean De Hertog has ordered the removal of plastic garden chairs in an effort to maintain the standards of the area. Previously, the city passed a police order making it illegal to solicit restaurant customers on the street, a practice common in the tourist area round the Beenhouwersstraat.

A man known as a "living statue" on the streets of Antwerp has been accused of the murder of his ex-girlfriend, whose body was found buried two weeks ago in the garden of a villa in Bekkevoort. Yugoslavia-born Drazen Zabek makes a living as a street performer dressed as a statue of the painter Anthony Van Dyck. The dead woman, 31-year-old Renata Jonkers, also performed as a living statue of the Madonna and Child.

Flemish environmentalist wins praise in EU Parliament

Eco-friendly national park a model of creativity

Martin Banks

The European Parliament has praised a Flemish environmentalist for his efforts in helping to establish Flanders' first national park. It follows the award on 7 May (reported in *Flanders Today*) of the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize to Ignace Schops, director of Natuurpunt Vlaanderen and the prime mover behind the Hoge Kempen National Park in the province of Limburg.

Schops was presented with his award at a ceremony in the European Parliament attended by Kris Peeters, Minister-President of Flanders, EU environment commissioner Stavros Dimas, the assembly's president, Hans-Gert Pottinger, and Belgian MEP Frieda Brepoels.

Schops, a biologist, first began his campaign to create Flanders' first and, to date, only national

park back in 1990. He lobbied the Flemish government and managed to convince the authorities that he was capable of overseeing the ambitious project. "There was just one problem," said MEP Brepoels. "While the authorities told him they would provide some funding, he still had to raise about €60 million through his own efforts. That he was able to do this is a wonderful achievement and testimony to his determination and powers of persuasion."

The park has proved a big hit since it opened in 2006. "Limburg may be a small province in a small country but, as this project shows, there is an awful lot of creativity out there," Brepoels added.

Dimas said Schops had been "instrumental in transforming a region's vision from coal to conservation by bringing together

private industry, regional governments and local stakeholders."

In receiving his award, Schops said the 6,000 hectare reserve, once the site of heavy industry, including coal mining, is now used by 800,000 cyclists a year and provides "substantial" benefits for the local economy. "It has been good for the economy, but the overall aim is to help protect the environment for future generations," he said. "I hope my own daughter and other children can grow up in a more environmentally-friendly world."

The prize is one of several given annually by the San Francisco-based Goldman Fund, and Schops is the 127th winner. Winners are selected by an international jury from confidential nominations submitted by a worldwide network of environmental groups and individuals. The €95,000 prize



money is earmarked for furthering the winner's work in environmental protection.

online

www.nationaalparkhogekempen.be

Minister describes Council of Europe findings as "absurd"

Delegation failed to consider language laws, Keulen says

Rory Watson

The Flemish Interior Minister Marino Keulen strongly rejected the findings of a delegation from the Council of Europe, led by a French local politician, which implicitly criticised him for blocking the appointment of three mayors almost 20 months after their election.

The two-person fact-finding team from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities met various federal, regional and communal politicians during a two-day visit to Belgium last week.

They will only reveal later this month whether they believe that the decision not to allow the mayors of Wezembeek-Oppem, Linkebeek and Kraainem to take

up office was on the grounds that campaign literature violated language legislation. The mayors-elect distributed election leaflets in French, contravening the European Charter of Local Self-Government (which Belgium signed in 1985 and ratified four years ago).

But comments from the delegation's leader, Breton mayor Michel Guégan, who was accompanied by Serb politician Dobrica Milovanovic, at a packed press conference in Brussels last Wednesday, gave a clear indication of his thinking. Speaking in French, he complained that he had heard "a lot of inaccuracies" about the mission's purpose and maintained that Keulen "appears to have been

ill-informed" by suggesting it had been requested by the three mayors themselves.

It was members of the Belgian delegation to the local authority congress who had raised the matter, he said, adding: "Our mission is on the non-appointment of the three mayors and not on the linguistic problem itself."

Guégan insisted that the mayors had been correctly and democratically elected in October 2006. Their election had not been challenged and, given the importance of local democracy, it was not permissible under the Charter for a commune to be deprived of its mayor.

He also pointed out that, after a similar mission in 2003, Belgium

had been asked to allow all elected mayors to take up their posts without requiring formal appointment – a move which even a centralised state like France has adopted. The recommendation has been partly implemented in Wallonia but not in Flanders or Brussels. "If this had been followed, today's problems would not have arisen, as Keulen would not have needed to nominate the mayors," he said.

Aware of the political sensitivity, Guégan had earlier gone out of his way to emphasise how cordial the various meetings had been and to emphasise that Belgium was not being singled out. Similar fact-finding missions were carried out every year, he said, pointing to recent examples in Turkey, Latvia

and Portugal. He also insisted the team had not come "to give lessons, but to try to reflect", using the local government charter as its compass, and had studiously avoided becoming embroiled in internal Belgian politics. In a final appeal, he called for some flexibility, explaining: "I sometimes feel a little common sense would help".

In an interview on Flemish TV immediately after the press conference, Keulen described the delegation's comments as "absurd". The minister argued that the linguistic laws should be taken into account in any assessment of the situation. Some Belgian newspapers expressed surprise that a French-speaker had been chosen to head the delegation.

Griffin vultures make a comeback

Four large birds of prey were spotted in the Boskamp area of Oudenaarde last week, leading bird watchers to believe that griffin vultures, last seen in the summer of 2007, are returning to the country. The four birds were described by witnesses as "flying high". "I am about 90% certain these are griffin vultures," said Guido Tack, chair of Natuurpunt Vlaamse Ardennen, who was first to report last year's vulture visit. The birds are thought to come from Spain and Portugal, where their food supplies are dwindling and where local laws make it impossible to feed them by laying out dead animals.



Leuven students develop car of the future

A group of students from the Group T industrial college in Leuven last week unveiled their design for the car of the future. The Vision, which should be ready for production in 2011, consumes 1.5 litres per 100 km, seats six and weighs only 600 kg. Its lifecycle cost – taking into account the materials and energy consumed – are estimated to be 20 times lower than its next-best rival, the Toyota Prius. The Group T students have worked on both the engine and the frame, built out of high-tech composite materials for lightness. The vehicle will be built and sold in India, where the demand for new cars is rising rapidly and where the impact of a clean car is likely to be most felt. The electric engine, equipped with an auxiliary power unit, can be replaced by an engine run on other locally-available fuels, such as biodiesel.



New plan to attract foreign students

Flanders has to become “a knowledge centre on a world level”

Alan Hope

Opening up Flemish higher education to the outside world is “enormously important,” both for the quality of educational institutions themselves and for the region’s overall welfare, according to education minister Frank Vandenbroucke. Last week the minister launched a new initiative to try to attract more foreign students to Flemish universities and colleges.

“Foreign students bring knowledge, attitudes and contacts that enrich our higher education scene,” says Vandenbroucke. “Flemish students with experience abroad stand stronger in an internationalised labour market. Student mobility is also important for networking between institutions and for showing our higher education system to advantage.”

The Study in Flanders programme changes nothing in the current system under which foreign students come here to study, but it will increase the effort by the government and other organisations to attract candidates. To do that, the Flemish Inter-University Council (VLIR) has launched a website and published a brochure, both of which go to great lengths to explain how a foreign student can study here, what courses are available and what else they will find in Flanders.

Meanwhile, Ghent university rector Paul Van Cauwenberge, who is also deputy chairman of VLIR, said the active promotion of Flemish higher education was “of economic and scientific importance. We must adopt an intensive international orientation,” he says. “Flanders is rapidly becoming a knowledge centre on the world level.”

Some 6,000 foreign students

studied in Flanders in 2006-2007, less than 4% of the total number of undergraduates. Two-thirds came from other EU countries, and almost half (2,893) were Dutch. In other words, Vandenbroucke says, only about one foreign student in 12 comes from outside Europe. This academic year, however, Ghent alone has 3,438 foreign students registered, a spokesperson said.

Moving in the other direction, 2,845 Flemish students in 2005-2006 took advantage of the Erasmus programme to study in another member state – a percentage still well under the 10% target envisaged when Erasmus was set up in the late 1980s.

Both ministers acknowledge the problem that most foreign students face when thinking of studying at a Flemish higher education institution: the language, which is a barrier to many, and accounts for the huge percentage of Dutch students in the figures. So the Study in Flanders programme lists only those accredited courses taught at Flemish universities and university colleges (*hogescholen*) in languages other than Dutch. At present, 37 institutions are listed, from the Antwerp Maritime Academy to the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Leuven.

The list of courses goes on for page after page. Three are in French and one in Spanish, while the rest – 175 in all – are taught in English. There are bachelor’s degrees in philosophy, industrial sciences and theology; master’s degrees in American studies, management science, astronomy and astrophysics and earth observation. And there are advanced Masters degrees in human settlements, finance, e-media, endodontics and nanophysics.



Ghent's beautiful university attracts 3,438 foreign students

The brochures will be sent to all higher-education establishments in Flanders, as well as embassies in Brussels. They will also be distributed at the many educational congresses and fairs that Flemish institutions visit in a year – not least the international ministerial conference on the Bologna process (the agreement signed in 1999 that aims to create a European Higher Education area by, for example, mutual recognition of degrees and improving student mobility). The ministerial conference will be held in Leuven and in Louvain-la-Neuve in April 2009.

“Students and teaching staff are, above all, an important target group,” points out Geert Bourgeois, Flemish minister in charge of foreign policy. “These are well-educated people and major

opinion-formers in their own countries. A stay in Flanders creates bonds that last a lifetime. The impressions made on them here last forever. And, of course, many of these students are the tourists, business executives, politicians and journalists of the future.”

In addition to setting out the academic stall of the various institutions taking part, the brochure also gives contact details for the many funding bodies that provide scholarships to visiting students depending on their situation. There also is information on living in Flanders, where we learn that: “Flemings want to advance in life. Their aim is prosperity and well-being for all, and they are hard-working entrepreneurs and initiators.”

According to one student at the

launch, Alon Sariel from Jerusalem, without the help of the VLIR, his studies would quite simply have been impossible. “I am a music student, studying early music at the Royal Conservatory,” he said. “I play the lute, and there just aren’t so many places to go to study music from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Staying in Israel wasn’t an option.”

Another student, Palestinian Sami Shaheen, enjoyed his stay in Ghent studying engineering geology so much that he stayed on after graduation to do a doctorate at the Brussels Free University VUB.

Online

www.studyinflanders.be

Vlerick in top 20 of Europe's business schools

Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School has been ranked in the top 20 business schools in Europe by an annual survey carried out by the *Financial Times* newspaper. The school, which has campuses in both cities as well as a recent addition in St Petersburg, Russia, was ranked 34th in the world overall, behind world leaders like Harvard and Stanford business schools, Insead near Paris and the London Business School. On European rankings alone, Vlerick took 14th place, a slight slippage compared to 11th place in 2006 and 12th in 2007.

Surveying the whole field, the paper forecast a growth in open-enrolment programmes offered by business schools, where business leaders attend classes with their peers. In Europe, the *FT* said, the trend is also toward company-specific programmes tailored to the clients’ requirements. This is something Vlerick already offers, with a client list that includes major companies like Fortis, InBev, Manpower and Colruyt.

“Company-specific programmes are a very important part of our portfolio,” says Alexander Segers, who runs that aspect of the school’s activities. “Last year we organised about 90 different programmes for 50 or so companies, mainly for middle and senior management.”

Vlerick has already organised a course in “finance for non-financial managers” for metals and coatings manufacturer Bekaert; a training programme on “leadership and people management” for Campbell’s Foods; and a leadership programme for top managers at banking transactions clearing house Swift, whose participants not only designed aspects of their own course, but were involved in helping to teach it as well.

Last week, the *FT* nominated a recent Vlerick graduate, 27-year-old Kris Kippers, as number nine in its world ranking of stock market analysts. Kippers graduated in 2003 and took on positions at KPMG and Petercam.

AH



MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS

Face value

Karen Sammon finds a niche market in speciality skincare

Lisa Bradshaw

Like many expatriates, Karen Sammon started her own business because she couldn't find the service she was looking for in Belgium. "I've always gone for facials, and I've gone to loads of different places," she says. "In Belgium, I wasn't impressed with the level of service. A lot of places hire students, and they don't give you any advice."

She was working in marketing but stopped to pursue a beautician diploma and then began doing course after course in dermatology and skincare. Three years ago she opened Karen Sammon Skincare Centre on Franklinstraat in the Schuman district of Brussels. Noting a lack of personal care in the area of facials, she has made it her speciality. And the people came. She has "hundreds" of clients she says, so many she has finally decided to hire an assistant to cut down the waiting-time for an appointment, which can be as much as six weeks.

From marketing to skincare might seem like a strange leap, but Sammon was always interested in it. "I come from a big family with a lot of girls, and we were obsessed with skin and makeup." Sammon's background in marketing has been invaluable, though, in promoting her business on her own and also in her side project as the only Belgian distributor of Fake Bake, an artificial tan. "Belgium is traditionally a sun bed country, so it's really important to try to pull them around to using a good alternative."

The sun is, in fact, one of the two biggest destroyers of the skin. The other is sugar. "What you eat comes out in your face," she says. "If you eat rubbish, your skin will be irritated. And if you don't drink enough water, you can really see it." Other bad habits don't help, either. "When I look at someone, I can immediately see if they are healthy or unhealthy."

Sammon comes from Western Ireland and



"Fluffy towels and scented candles don't guarantee a good facial": Karen Sammon knows skin

moved to Brussels in the early 1990s to study for a year. She fell in love, decided to stay and has settled in Leuven. She strategically chose the Brussels location for her business: it's easy to get to by car from home, there is plenty of street parking, and it's close to Schuman without being "too close," she says.

Sammons prides herself on personal, informed service for clients – whether she sees them every month or only once. She has them fill out a detailed questionnaire with more

information than your doctor probably has – Do you smoke? Do you wear contact lenses? Do you suffer from sinus problems? "It's getting to know the person, getting to know their lifestyle," she explains. She then goes over the questionnaire with them to determine the best possible facial for their kind of skin. "Everybody who comes in gets a different treatment." That includes men – facial care isn't only for women.

In general, a facial consists of cleansing the face, an exfoliation (taking away dead skin cells), a face, neck and shoulder massage, a serum, a mask and then a day or night cream. Though the massage part is, of course, very enjoyable for clients, it also "stimulates the blood flow to the face, which makes you look younger," Sammon explains.

Sammon didn't find the process of opening her own shop to be terribly difficult. She speaks Dutch and followed the business course required to start your own business, which covers the documents you need, the timeline, how to do your accounts and taxes and the laws around hiring and retail. "If you do that course, it's very straightforward," she says.

Many elements of Sammons' business have lead to early success: expertise, location, her ability to speak all three language fluently and, especially, the personal service. Nobody ever gets tired of that. "This is a job where human contact is hugely important. At other salons, it's like you're a piece of meat, not like you're an individual. Why cheat people like that? Don't do the job if you don't love it."

Get a mini-makeover and ask any questions you might have during Open Day at Karen Sammon Skincare on 24 May from 9.00 to 17.00

online

www.karensammon.be

BUSINESS FLASH

Univeg

Univeg, the Sint-Katelijne-Waver-based fresh fruit and vegetable distributor, has taken over the German Atlanta company, an affiliate of the US Chiquita group. The move turns Univeg into the world's second-largest fresh products distributor, after the US Dole group but ahead of Fyffes and Chiquita itself. The Flemish firm is now expected to develop its activities in the French and UK markets.

Rand Corporation

The Rand Corporation, a US-based non-profit research organisation, has opened an office in Brussels to develop its research work with local policy institutions, including the EU.

Solvay

Chemicals and pharmaceuticals company Solvay has been chosen by the Egyptian government as the preferred partner in the privatisation of Alexandria Sodium Carbonate. In addition, the Brussels-based company is expected to inaugurate plastics production units in China, Russia and India, and is building a chemical plant in Thailand. Solvay is also constructing a €150 million power station near its Bernburg unit in Germany in partnership with the German waste management company Tönsmeier. The station is fired by refuse-derived fuel.

Renmans

Renmans, the independent butchery chain with some 350 stores in Belgium, France and Luxembourg, is seeking to develop its activities in the French market in association with the German Aldi discount retailer.

Belgacom

The Belgian telecommunications company is considered by the US magazine *Business Week* to be Europe's ninth best performing company. It is the only Belgian firm in the list's top 50.

Pro-Duo

The Ghent-based beauty and hair care products distribution company has been acquired by the US-based Sally Beauty Holdings. The company has some 40 supermarket-type stores in Europe.

The Phone House

The Phone House, Belgian distributor of telecommunications and electronic equipment, has become 50% owned by Best Buy, the largest firm in the field. The US-based company, which already operates 84 stores in Belgium, is expected to open up to 15 new outlets within the next two years.

Wall Street Journal

The *Wall Street Journal* is transferring the bulk of its Brussels-based back office operations to London and laying off some 40 employees from its pre-press, layout, accounting and marketing departments. The Belgium-based editorial staff is unaffected by the decision. The move follows the *Journal's* acquisition by press magnate Rupert Murdoch.



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MUSIC

To be precise

Take heed deFilharmonie: your new conductor is watching



The main course: Jaap van Zweden leads three concerts in Flanders this month

Marie Dumont

Back in the early 1990s, Dutch violinist Jaap van Zweden was touring in Berlin with Leonard Bernstein and the Amsterdam Concertgebouw orchestra, of which he was concertmaster. "Leonard wanted to hear how

the concert hall sounded," van Zweden remembers, "so he asked me to conduct the first movement of Mahler's First. I was shocked at the request – I'd never conducted before. But I did it."

And then he knew immediately his life's calling, right? Well, not

quite. "I can safely say that it was pretty bad," says van Zweden. "But Leonard quite liked it and told me I should continue."

Van Zweden took up the challenge, studying the techniques of great conductors and reading reams of scores. "As an orchestra violinist, I was already familiar with some of the repertoire," he explains, "but that was quite a different job – from reading just one line to reading 20." Now

47, he hasn't played the violin for eight years, and his career has fully veered to conducting – to critical acclaim.

There are several opportunities for us in Flanders to hear him at work over the next few days, as he's recently been made principal conductor of the Royal Flemish Philharmonic, Antwerp's flagship orchestra, also known as deFilharmonie.

The Dutchman's tenure officially starts next season and will only keep him busy for six weeks a year. It's one of many engagements on his chock-a-block schedule: he's also agreed to become Music Director of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and plans to continue conducting the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic back in Amsterdam.

This is not to mention the work he does for autistic children – one of his own four children, Benjamin, has autism. Van Zweden firmly believes in music's power to break these kids' isolation and has set up a foundation, the Stitching Papageno, to provide music therapy. "The children stay in their own environment, which makes them feel secure. Some of

them don't communicate at all – they've never talked – and it's so wonderful to see them finally open up, thanks to music."

His first contact with deFilharmonie, he says, took place two years ago. He describes the event as a "nice click", yet makes no attempt to hide the orchestra's shortcomings. "It's a very good orchestra, but what they need is a lot more discipline and a lot of hard work to bring out their potential. Right now the fluctuations in quality are just too large."

A bull of a man with massive shoulders and fiery eyes – a critic once likened him to a boxer entering the ring when he walks onstage – van Zweden is, by his own admission, a formidable workaholic. He took up the violin aged seven and, as a teenager, travelled to New York to study at the Juilliard School with the late Dorothy DeLay, a pedagogue as legendary for her informal, sugar-aunty ways as for her exacting demands on students.

Aged only 19, he returned to Amsterdam and was asked to replace the Concertgebouw concertmaster, who'd had an accident. He stayed on, becoming the orchestra's youngest ever first violinist. "It was an interesting time," he says. "I worked with all the legends: Bernstein, Solti, Jochum – all those great guys who are gone now. I see myself as a keeper of that tradition."

His conducting is often described as energetic, electrifying and terribly efficient. A good conductor, he feels, is someone who "knows exactly, from one note to the next, what they want to say and how. And who doesn't just play for the first two rows." He likes to describe a season's programme as "a very good meal with appetisers, champagne, a main course and dessert – some Mozart and Beethoven, but also Romantic and Russian music, and some contemporary works."

But the programme of his upcoming concerts, he says, has "two main courses": excerpts from Prokofiev's orchestral suite *Romeo and Juliet* and Sibelius' beautiful violin concerto, with former Queen Elisabeth winner Sergey Khachaturyan as soloist. "We're very lucky to have him," he says. "He's a very good violinist." Coming from someone like Jaap van Zweden, you can believe every word of it.

VISUAL ARTS

The artist's mind

Georges Vantongerloo on show in Ostend

The Museum of Modern Art in Ostend, PMMK, is devoting an exhibition to the multi-talented artist-architect-thinker Georges Vantongerloo. Born in Antwerp in 1886, he studied at the Fine Art Academies in both Antwerp and Brussels but then left the country in 1914 and sat out the war years in the Netherlands, where he worked mainly as an architect.

That's where he ran into Piet Mondrian, Bart van der Leck and Theo van Doesburg, founding members of the enormously influential De Stijl group. Under their influence, the Flemish artist began to produce works based on pure geometrical forms and blocks of primary colours.

Vantongerloo was briefly back in Brussels at the end of the war but soon gravitated to the South of France, where he began writing pamphlets on the future of art. But he was also beavering away on architectural designs for bridges and even an airport. These were of a high enough quality to earn him an exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris in 1930.

His career as an artist was advancing at the same time, and he joined cubists and abstract artists in a 1936 exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. By 1938 he was beginning to break with the strict geometrical style of De Stijl and introducing sensual spirals and curves. This experimental urge continued into the 1950s, as he began to work with motifs derived from atomic science and physics.

The Ostend exhibition offers a chance to look at the extraordinary mind of an artist who spent his whole life searching for fresh forms.

Derek Blyth

Until 31 August, PMMK, Romestraat 11, Ostend

Online
www.pmmk.be



FLANDERS EYE



West, so far

Thank God for the United States of America. Where else would European photographers go to capture the complete unreality of reality? Their objectivity combined with a sense of awe (at the vastness, the diversity and, occasionally, the sheer audacity of its people) continues to produce outstanding, quirky photo series. This one, by Brussels photographer Phil Van Duynen, is one of the best we've seen: each lovingly-framed shot embodies a nostalgia for a place not even home. The title suggests there could be more of this road trip across the American west. Let's hope Van Duynen shares the next batch, too.

Lisa Bradshaw

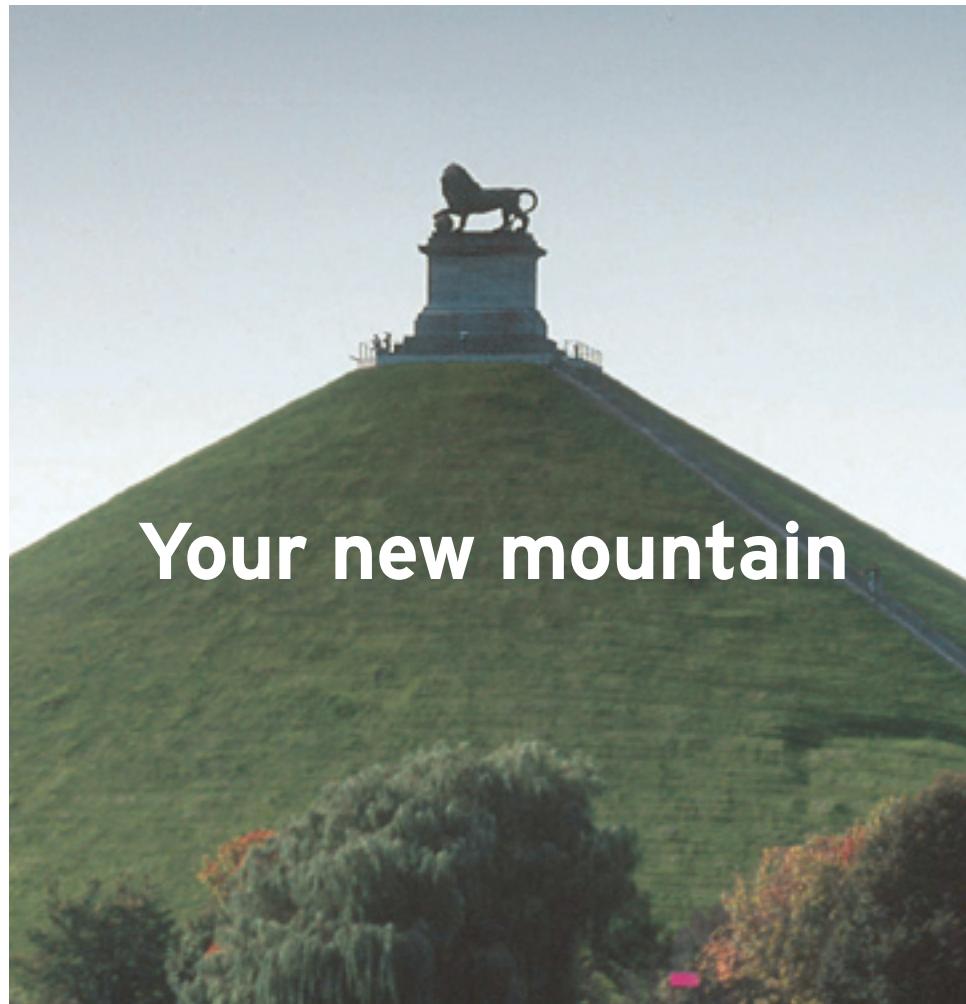
Until 8 June, FotoMuseum, Waalse Kaai 47, Antwerp

Online
www.fotomuseum.be

22 May, CC Hasselt, 5 Kunstlaan, Hasselt, 011.22.99.33 or www.ccha.be

23 May, deSingel, 25 Desguinlei, Antwerp, 03.248.28.28 or www.desingel.be

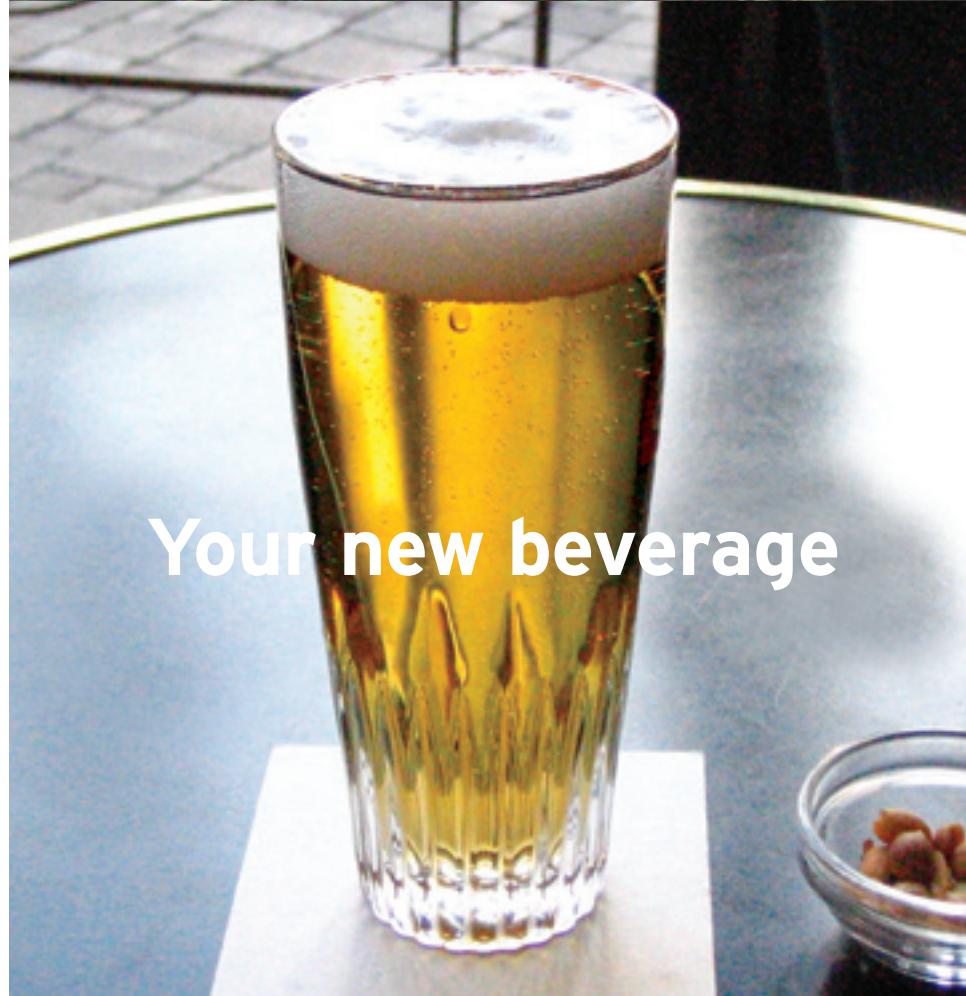
24 May, de Bijloke, 2 Jozef Kluykensstraat, Ghent, 09.269.92.92 or www.debijloke.be



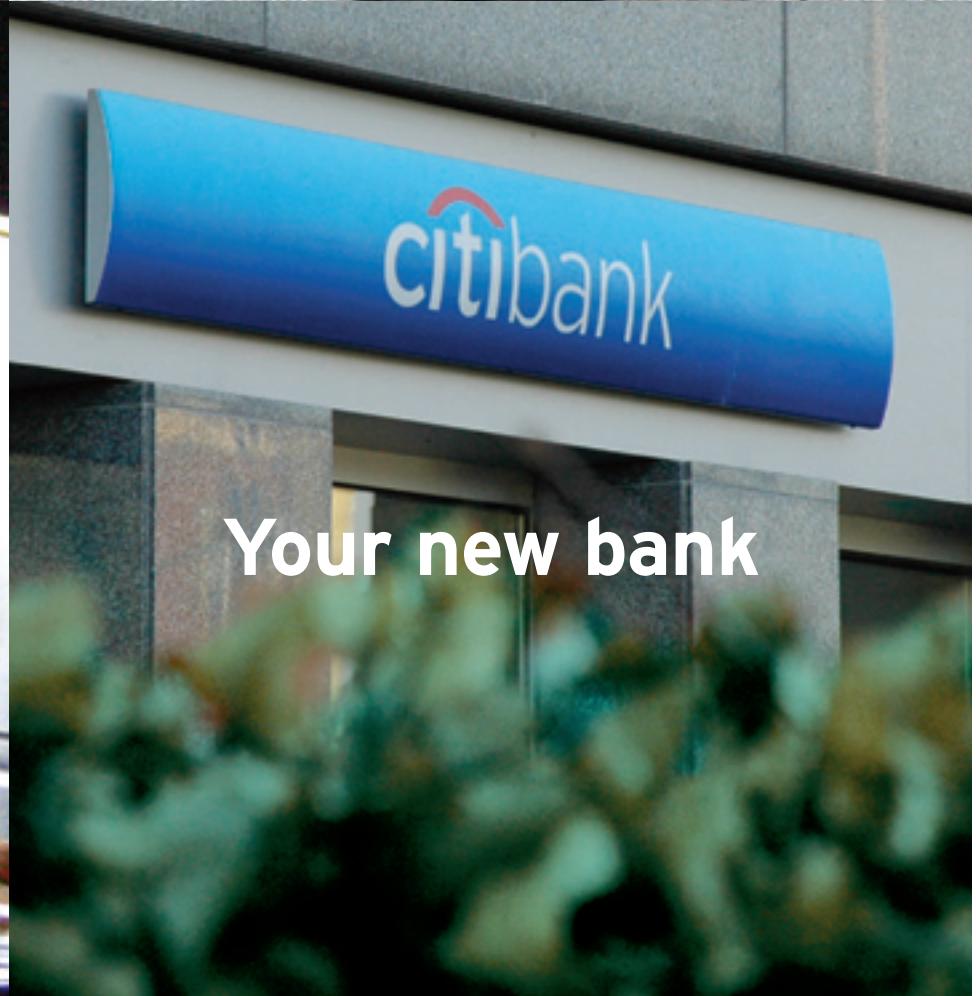
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For the birds

New nature reserve opens to visitors in Port of Antwerp

Marc Maes

On Sunday, 27 April, Natuurpunt Antwerpen Noord, together with the Antwerp Port Authorities and railway operator NMBS, officially opened the Kuifeend en Grote Kreek nature reserve.

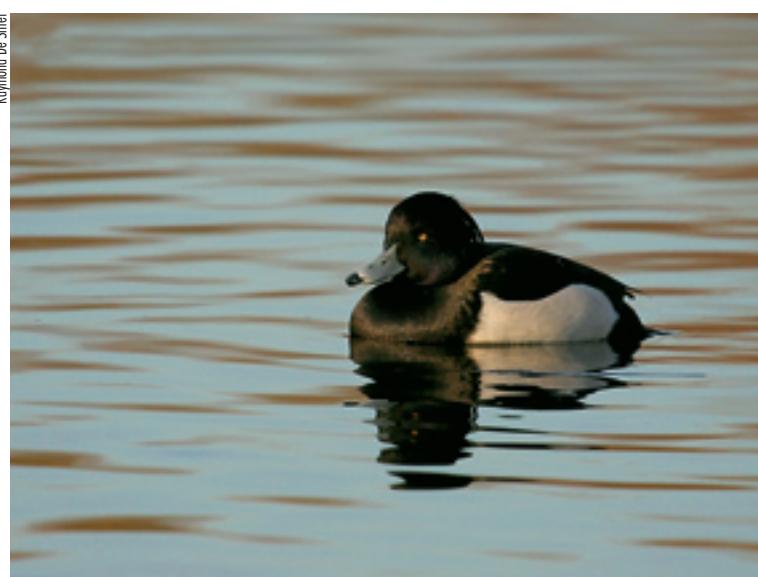
Located on the east side of the Antwerp Port, squeezed between the B1 Kanaaldok and the NMBS hub, the 40 hectares has become a unique man-made bird habitat. It was 26 years ago that the ecological management of the area, initially planned as additional shunting site for the NMBS, was trusted to Natuurpunt Antwerpen. Finally in 2002, the organisation began construction on buffer embankments around the Kuifeend (or tufted duck) and Grote Kreek (or Big Creek) water reserves, making them one of Flanders' prime bird locations.

"This is one of the rare sites in Flanders where nature and port industry have become tied up in

a joint project," says Natuurpunt secretary-general Willy Ibens. The project is "in the spirit of durable

development, where the three Ps – profit, planet and people – go hand in hand. The Kuifeend and Grote Kreek reserves are a big step in strengthening the value of nature in the port of Antwerp."

Antwerp Port alderman Marc Van Peel, meanwhile, announced that there has been an ongoing process of mutual understanding between the port of Antwerp and Natuurpunt with an eye to nature. The port invested some €250,000 in the construction of wooden foot paths and piers and two strategically located vantage points, allowing visitors to see the birds in their natural living and breeding habitat.



A kuifeend, or tufted duck, at the nature reserve in the Port of Antwerp

Raymond De Smet

Monique Philips

From behind his counter, Flor Van Den Eede can hardly take his eyes of the busy town square of Brasschaat, Antwerp's suburb for the super posh. His shop window is a rather low-profile display. You need to actually step inside to find his colourful, quality confectionery.

"Sweets are very delicate and can't take the sun, even with the awning down" Van Den Eede explains. "That's why I keep them nice and cool inside. You won't see sweets out on a market stall in this hot weather."

Surprisingly, his customers aren't local but come from all over the country. Most of them are adults with a fine palate or a taste for nostalgia. Belgium is, after all, sweets capital of the world, and every school used to have its local sweets shop. Many young gluttons learned the value of a franc this way.

Sweets haven't been affected that much by fashion. The classics remain the best, and adults and children, boys and girls, munch on the same yummies. Van Den Eede took De Zoete Inval over from his parents when he was 18 in 1945. "It's a pity there isn't any school nearby," muses the proprietor. "But kids are educated differently regarding sweets now, anyway. Sweets are up for grabs everywhere: at the gas station and news agency, wrapped in plastic bags, which turns them mushy, or sold from open containers in the supermarket, which makes them smell of the soaps next to them. Here I sell quality sweets and

chocolates. Nothing else."

It is indeed strange to walk into his store where there aren't any crisps or cold drinks for sale. The top shelf behind the counter is reserved for personal photos, the one below for the €1 for 100 grams jars: *gewassen fruit, bruine pectors, agent mauves and colaflesjes* (the hard ones, mind you). Even lower you'll find the 60 cents for 100 grams selection.

"The best confectionary is Belgian," assures Van Den Eede. "These *cuberdons*, or *rode neuzen*, are made on Fridays and delivered in boxes – never in plastic – on Mondays. They have to be fresh to stay soft on the inside, whereas the outside has hardened." So no export market for these 18-gram raspberry flavoured cones.

Some sweets are seasonal. You can't devour *sneeuwballen* or *congolzen* in the summer. And if the quality can't be guaranteed, a local supplier might simply not produce. When a drought in Ethiopia caused hungry goats to strip all the acacia bark from the trees, no Arabic gum was available. No gum, no Belgian sweets.

Arabic gum also makes the difference between the hard Belgian liquorice and its soft Dutch counterpart. The Dutch use a salty chemical by-product, frowned upon in Belgian food laws. The sweets industry thrives on secret ingredients and recipes, and, true to his occupation, Van Den Eede is tight-lipped too.

The sweets shopkeeper remained equally unfazed when a robber stole the daily proceeds,

€100, last January. "A nice looking kid, too," he says. He was in the back taking a break when the boy stole behind the counter. "Never mind. I have never closed for a single day in 62 years. I'm not going to stop now."

Monique Philips



Singularly sweet: Flor Van Den Eede has been on the job in Antwerp for over 60 years

FOOTPRINT



Schavaaipad

Arriving at the church in Bierbeek, a rural Flemish village south of Leuven, I was half expecting red noses on the gargoyle and jokes on the notice board. The village church is named after Saint Hilarius. But, despite the name, Hilarius is not the patron saint of humour. He was actually a native of Sardinia and Pope of Rome from 461 to 468. As his papacy was characterised by disputes, hilarity was probably far from his thoughts.

The circular eight-kilometre walk that starts from the church is called the *Schavaaipad*. I first completed it last autumn and was immediately waylaid by a splendid walnut tree that overhung the footpath and which provided an early snack, plus a bag of tasty walnuts to take home.

The first half of the well-marked path takes you through fertile fields full of sugar beet, maize, wheat and barley. A local farmer proved unusually talkative; normally I find farmers to be the most uncommunicative of country dwellers. His main concern was to make me aware of the presence of the Flemish-French language border that dissected the walk. (I think he would have preferred the route to stay within the bounds of Flanders rather than extending into foreign fields.)

The normal farmland birds are present, with good numbers of partridge and yellowhammers. Listen out for the "song" of the corn bunting, which has been described as resembling the rattle of a bunch of keys. After briefly crossing into Wallonia and back, the walk takes you into Mollendaal Forest. At this time of the year, look for the delightful lily-of-the-valley and the smaller and rarer may lily. If you explore the damper areas, you might also catch the pungent smell of wild garlic or ransoms, the leaves of which can be used in salads. The scientific name *Allium ursinum* refers to the fact that bears are partial to the bulbs, as are wild boar in Belgium.

The walk through the Mollendaal Forest is used by local horse riders, and if you take a close look at the ground, you'll see dozens of big, round shiny black beetles – dung beetles. Watch them as they carve up horse dung into spherical balls and roll them away. Kids will especially get a kick out of this, particularly when you tell them that, rather than playing marbles, the beetles are burying the balls as food stores. The dung beetle enjoyed sacred status in ancient Egypt as the scarab beetle, which appears in hieroglyphic images in tombs.

On a sunny day, this walk is a particularly good one for brushing up your knowledge of butterflies. Orange tips, brimstones and peacocks might be easy to identify, but what is that brown one? A meadow brown, a gatekeeper, a wall brown, a ringlet or a fritillary? This could be the time to put yourself to the test.

Denzil Walton

Denzil Walton is the author of *Nature Walks Near Brussels*, a series of pocket guides.

online

www.linxpublications.be



Beauty where you least expect it: Lissewege in West Flanders

Longing to be pretty

Fifteen villages compete to be the nicest in Flanders

Flanders is entering the final leg of a competition so fierce, it puts Belgian football to shame. *Het Mooiste Dorp*, or The Prettiest Village, pits 15 of the region's most picturesque towns against each other to see which can claim the prize for the most charming, green, historical and architecturally inspiring. The 15 have been whittled down from an original 122 by journalists from *Het Nieuwsblad*, authors from Lannoo travel publishers and Flanders Tourism.

Though voting methods have made it a bit difficult to vote for your favourite – you had to vote for certain villages on different days – the top five will be revealed on Saturday, 24 May at www.hetmooistedorp.be. Then you can vote for your top pick via mobile phone anytime until 28 May.

The villages were well chosen and all are, of course, beautiful. But we at *Flanders Today*, wouldn't you know it, have a few favourites.

Oud-Rekem: timeless

This delightful little village in the far east of Limburg gets my vote for one main reason: it hasn't changed for centuries.

The local church, Sint-Pieter's, dates from 1722 and also serves as the town museum, concert hall and tourist office. Here you can buy a guide book which will take you on a 2.5 kilometre walk through the village. The focal point is the moated castle, which was built by the d'Aspremont-Lynden family at the end of the 16th century. Within the castle domain are numerous buildings worth visiting, such as the distillery which has been lovingly restored.

For me the best example of the "no change" rule is the apothecary museum next to the Roomse Keizer herbal shop. Long before the rise of modern medicine, doctors prepared their medications on their premises. This apothecary was established in 1895 by Dr Gerard Humble. It passed to his son, Frans, who amazingly preserved its contents until it was bought by local resident Patrick Donders: "Many of the tinctures, salves, ointments and herbal reme-

dies, as well as various implements and artefacts – including a dentist's chair – are over 100 years old."

Any village worth voting for has to offer suitable watering holes, and Oud-Rekem scores highly in this respect, too. Jan Christofels, the proprietor of one of them – Het Posthuis – took time off to share the history of the place with me. So lengthy were his explanations that I had to order another beer. Some things never change.

Denzil Walton

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-Lombeek: approachable

The best way to approach Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-Lombeek, which nestles in the rolling countryside of Pajottenland to the west of Brussels, is on foot. So first make your way to the village of Lennik, find the town square with its statue of Prins, a giant Brabant work horse. Now look for the markers for the long-distance route, the GR 512, which passes through the town – they look like miniature Polish flags. An hour's walk through countryside reminiscent

of Pieter Breugel's paintings will bring you to the village of Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-Lombeek, Our Dear Lady Lombeek.

The first thing you will see is the enormous 12th-century church, which owes its size to its previous importance as a destination for pilgrims. The walls of the church are remarkable for the heads of people and animals that decorate it, supposedly to ward off the devil. Go inside to admire the breathtaking screen and the life-size representation of the Sint-Hubert legend.

You will see signs to the Hert-boomwindmolen, the windmill that featured in the TV series *Kapitein Zeppos*, beloved by all Flemings over a certain age. It's located, of course, in the Windmolenlaan. From this vantage point, you can enjoy a glorious view, locally referred to as the pearl of Pajottenland.

Have a drink in In den Tap, a real village cafe of the old variety. Or have something more substantial in the restaurant De Kroon, an old post house, before you retrace your steps through the meadows to your starting point.

Alistair MacLean

Lissewege: unexpected

Lissewege shouldn't really be there at all. Rising like a flotilla of sailing barges from the reedy polders reclaimed from the North Sea, it's as though a tiny piece of Bruges has come adrift and become stranded in a creek.

It's all there: the rusty, pan-tiled roofs and stepped gables, the provincial shutters, the white-washed walls with window boxes overflowing splashy colour. The houses of this little settlement huddle together as though to resist the winds that sweep across the flatlands surrounding the village with their big-sky sunsets in summer and enveloping, sinister mists hanging along the canals in winter.

And at the centre, the stout tower of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwe-Bezoeking, visible like a thumb held aloft as the walker or cyclist traverses one of the polderland's labyrinth of paths and tracks. You would think you were in the middle of nowhere – the streets can be extraordinarily silent, and the atmosphere of mystery is heightened by the remnants of the Gothic abbey of Ter Doest,

reminding us that the folk here were once god-fearing refugees from the almighty's wrath in an inhospitable landscape.

And yet perhaps Lissewege's greatest achievement is that it is not in the middle of nowhere at all. It is within the sound of a foghorn from the great dockscapes of Zeebrugge to the north, the bustle of Bruges to the south and the seaside capers of Knokke and Blankenberge to the east. For all that, it nestles, quietly, in its exposed watery land.

Paul Stump

Bazel: cool

On the easternmost edge of East Flanders, Bazel has the one thing a village should have: peace and quiet. You'll immediately be taken in by the comfy terraces on its neat and trim church square. Locals are famously laid-back yet totally with it.

One of their revered village characters was "Mevrouwke", whose 90th birthday was celebrated with a huge feast. She was, after all, the last Viscountess of the ancient Vilain XIII family, who had always cared well for the tiny village. One of the Vilain XIII's

received a medal for installing a steam-run milking parlour in the town. Another built a path to take residents over a crisscross of creeks (the site of many will-o'-the-wisps) to the ferry. It takes passengers and bikes to Hemiksem on the other side of the Scheldt for free.

After her death in 1989, the Viscountess donated her delightfully neo-gothic castle, the Heerlijkheid Wissekerke, to the community. Through its gatehouse on the village square, you easily reach the English-style park, a most perfect oasis on a hot summer's day. The manor houses the local arts academy and is open to visitors every Sunday afternoon. An old blue parasol on top completes the homey picture.

The park's circular brick *duiventoren*, or dovecote, with its 700 cubby holes for nests is worth a look inside, too. The castle faces its former farm and has one, last well-hidden terrace behind it. Finally, Bazel's coat of arms shows two keys and a turnip. This unpretentious beauty gets my vote.

Monique Philips

Online

www.hetmooistedorp.be



The neo-Gothic castle left by a Viscountess to the city of Bazel (top); Lombeek should be approached from a distance (middle); chat with the friendliest locals in Flanders in one of the cafes of Oud-Rekem (right); an envious vantage point of the Gothic Ter Doest barn in Lissewege (above)



Classical & new music**Brussels**

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

Until MAY 24 20.00 Queen Elisabeth Singing Competition 2008 Final with La Monnaie Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Kazushi Ono

MAY 25 11.00 Tomoko Honda and Sarah Picavet, piano: Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen*

MAY 30 20.00 Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden Ensemble, conducted by Myung-Whun Chung, with Lars Vogt, piano: Messiaen, Mozart, Beethoven

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39
MAY 23 12.30 Sinéad Mulhern, soprano; Rachel Andrist, piano: songs by Verdi, Rachmaninov, Barber
MAY 28-30 12.30 Queen Elisabeth Singing Competition 2008 Prizewinners

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be

MAY 22 20.15 Vlaams Radio Koor and Musa Herti choir, conducted by Peter Dajans, with Ludo Mariën, accordion: Martin, De Ley, François, Nees, Mahler
MAY 25 11.30 Tatiana Samoil, violin; Claudia Bara, piano: Schubert, Franck, Sarasate

MAY 30 12.30 Trio Horta: Martin, Ravel

Kapel van de Miniemens

Miniemensstraat 62; 02.507.82.00,
www.minimes.net

MAY 25 10.30 Chapelle des Minimes Orchestra and Choir conducted by Benoît Jacquemin, with Anne-Hélène Moens, soprano; Isabelle Everarts de Velp, alto; Thibaut Lenaerts, tenor;

Conor Biggs, bass: Bach's cantata *Die Elenden sollen essen*, BWV 75
MAY 28 20.00 Namur Chamber Choir and La Fenice Ensemble, conducted by Jean Tubéry: Purcell's *Birthday Ode* and funeral music for Queen Mary, works by Thomas Morley

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
MAY 27 20.00 Christian Tetzlaff, violin; Leif Ove Andsnes, piano: sonatas by Mozart, Shostakovich, Brahms

Saint Michael and St Gudula Cathedral

Sinter-Goedeleplein; 02.217.83.45
MAY 29 20.00 Michael Radulescu, organ: Bach, Radulescu, Reger

Sint-Marcuskerk

de Frélaan 72; 02.331.37.14,
www.32sonates.be

MAY 23 20.00 Olivier De Spiegeleir, piano: Beethoven's sonatas No 6, 17, 22, 21

Sint Pieterskerk

Kardinaal Mercierplein; 02.423.13.73
MAY 25 16.00 International Organ Festival: Michel Verheylen, organ and conductor, with Ensemble Musical du Pays Vert: Mouret, Vejanowsky, Françaix, Goemanne, Schumann

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28

Concerts at 20.00

MAY 22 Yossif Ivanov, violin; Itamar Golan, piano: Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms
MAY 23 deFilharmonie, conducted by Jaap van Zweden, with Sergey Khachaturyan, violin: Sibelius, Prokofiev

Bruges

Concertgebouw
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02

Get your tickets now for...**Paul Simon**

15 July, 20.30, Vorst Nationaal, Victor Rousseaulaan 208, Brussels, 0900.69.900, www.vorstnationaal.be

The problem is all inside your head
She said to me

When I think back
On all the crap I learned in high school

Koo-ko-ka-choo, Mrs Robinson

I'm going to Graceland, Graceland

See you, me and Julio
Down by the schoolyard

Still crazy after all these years

And it was late in the evening
And I blew that room away

This and more on 15 July in Brussels. Don't miss it.

Concerts at 20.00

MAY 22 The Naked Writer: music and poetry evening with Stefan Hertmans, poet and narrator; Peter De Groot, counter-tenor; Walter Hus, piano: Francesco's paradox

MAY 23 Walter Hus and Frédéric Rzewski, piano with Het Collectief: preludes and fugues by Hus and Rzewski

Ghent**De Bijloke**

Jozef Kluyvensstraat 2, 09.269.92.92
MAY 23 20.00 Andrew Manze and Richard Egarr: Mozart, Schubert

Jazz & blues**Brussels****Art Base**

Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20

MAY 23 Brussels Jazz Marathon: Screening of historical jazz images, Ben Sluijs, Radabenath

MAY 24 16.30 Promeneurs du Ciel. 18.00 Koralyre. 19.30 Hot Air. 21.00 Radabenath

Brasserie de L'Union

Sint-Gillisvoordeplein 55; 02.538.15.79
MAY 25 12.00-15.00 Carson Barnes & friends

Café Central

Borgval 14; 02.513.73.08

MAY 23 22.30 Määk's Spirit (Brussels Jazz Marathon)

Café Dada

Violettestraat 34; 0484.50.83.80

MAY 25 18.00 Le Comptoir de Desiré

Fernand Cocqplein

www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be

MAY 23 20.00 Wonderland

MAY 24 16.00 XL-Jazz prizewinner, Guillaume Palomba Quartet, Egon, Bansuri Collective, The Dominos

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be

MAY 23 12.30 Määk's Spirit

MAY 23-24 Brussels Jazz Marathon: Christophe Astolfi with Koen De Cauter Quartet, Pierre Van Dormael Quartet, Andreu Martinez Project, Nathalie Loriers Trio

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78

MAY 23-24 Brussels Jazz Marathon: Brazzaville, Les Doigts de l'homme, La Fanfare du commando fête, Fabrizio Graceffa Quartet, Philip Catherine Solo, Peter Hertmans Quartet
MAY 30 Arraka

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15

MAY 28 20.00 Joe Satriani, blues

La Brocante Thoumas

Blaesstraat 170; 02.512.13.43

MAY 24 12.00-16.00 Carson Barnes & friends

Sint-Katelijneplein

www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be

MAY 23 18.30 Groove Thing & Slang

MAY 24 16.00 Andreu Martinez Project, Marc Lelangue Trio + Mongoose

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,

www.soundsjazzclub.be

MAY 22 22.00 symmEtrio
MAY 23-24 22.00 Brussels Jazz Marathon: Rosario

Giuliani Quintet "Anything Else"
MAY 26 22.00 Master session
MAY 27 22.00 Da Romeo's Band

MAY 28 22.00 Caribe Con K (Caribbean)
MAY 29 21.00 The Singers Night

MAY 30 22.00 Natacha Wuyts Quintet

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45

Concerts at 20.30:

MAY 23-24 Brussels Jazz Marathon: Buster and the Swing
MAY 27 21.00 Silverio Pontes, Latin trumpet

MAY 28 22.00 Sagome
MAY 29 Jazz Exams: new talent from

the Brussels Royal Conservatory

MAY 30 20.00 Udo "Soul Sessions on Tour"

Théâtre Marni
Vergniestraat 25; 02.354.43.68

MAY 22 20.30 Marni Jazz Rendez Vous: Gaia Quattro

MAY 23-24 Brussels Jazz Marathon: The KMG'S, Groove Thing

Tropo Bar

Sint-Katelijnepleinstraat 21-23,

www.tropodiscobar.be

Brussels Jazz Marathon:

MAY 23 21.00 Ask

MAY 24 21.00 Léo & The Lunar-Tiki's

MAY 25 21.00 Sat@12

Antwerp**De Muze**

Melkmarkt 1; 03.226.01.26

MAY 22 22.00 Ben Sluijs and the New Yorkers

El Mambo

Vlasmarkt 3

MAY 28 21.00 Marcelo Moncada Quartet

Bruges**De Werf**

Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29

MAY 30 20.30 Klaus Paier Trio

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

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

Concerts at 20.00

MAY 23 Tribute: Dirk Van Esbroeck

MAY 24 The Bear That Wasn't + Bobby Sandal + Kimya Dawson

MAY 28 Pepper + Flogging Molly

De Kriekelaar

Gallaitstraat 86; 02.245.75.22,

http://dekriekelaar.vgc.be

MAY 24 16.00 Oakhurst

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89

MAY 24 23.00 Marco Bailey, Ortin Cam, DJ Pierre

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15

MAY 22 Alain Bashung

</div

Steven De Mesmaeker, staged by Liz Merrill (in English)

Visual arts

Brussels

Argos Centre for Art and Media
Werfstraat 13; 02 229 00 03,
www.argosarts.org

Until JUNE 21 No Place Like Home: Perspectives on Migration in Europa, Belgian and international artists' videos, photographs and installations

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)

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.84.44

Until MAY 25 Paul Klee: Theater Here, There and Everywhere, monographic exhibition on the Berne-based artist (1879-1940)

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 Crémén, 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 58, architectural and decorative forms at the time of Belgium's 1958 World's Fair, with drawings, photographs, models, posters and furniture

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25

Until MAY 31 Exhibitions x 5, multimedia shows on Brussels' Zinneke Parade

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 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

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70

Until MAY 31 Récits (Stories), 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 (Questioning Mirrors and Reflections), group show

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre
Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20
Until JUNE 22 Light my Fire, installations by Djos Janssens

Jewish Museum of Belgium
Minimstraat 21; 02.512.19.63,
www.mjmb-jmb.org
Until JUNE 22 Dicht op de huid (Close to the Skin), paintings by Brussels-based artist Maurice Frydman

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

Royal Army Museum
Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33
Until JUNE 29 (H)erkennung! 175 jaar

Leopoldsorde en Nationale Orden, exhibition on the oldest Belgian military order
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 23 Eugène Ysaÿe, exhibition on the Belgian violinist and composer, with photographs, letters and instruments
Until AUG 24 In de ban van boeken, Belgian book collectors, 1750 to 1850

Royal Museum of Fine Arts
Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11,
www.fine-arts-museum.be

Until JULY 6 Paintings and sculpture by South Korean contemporary artist Lee Ufan

Until SEP 21 The British Royal Collection: From Bruegel to Rubens, more than 50 paintings from Queen Elizabeth II's collection, with major works by Hans Memling, Quinten Metsys, Jan Gossaert, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Paul Bril, Peter Paul Rubens and Antoon Van Dyck

Until AUG 31 Plecnik Project, life and professional achievements of Slovene architect Joze Plecnik (1872-1957)

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

Tour & Taxis
Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49
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

Antwerp
Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60

Until SEP 9 Fantasy, intervention by Koen van den Broek

MAY 23-AUG 17 Die Lucky Bush, contemporary art show curated by British artist Imogen Stidworthy questioning the physical and social impact of language, with works by John Cage, Jimmie Durham, Gary

Hill, Aglaia Konrad and Michelangelo Pistoletto, among others

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28
Until MAY 25 Inside Outside, landscape architecture by Petra Blaissé

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

Fotomuseum
Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00
Until JUNE 8 Patrick De Spieghelaere, 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, photographic series of the American southwest by Brussels artist Phil van Duynen

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (Royal Museum of Fine Arts)
Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09

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

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

MoMu
Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70
Until AUG 17 Moi, Véronique Branquinho 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

Groeningemuseum
Dijver 12; 050.44.87.43
Until DEC 31 Leuven loans, 15th- and 16th-century paintings and woodcarvings from Leuven's Van der Kelen-Mertens museum

Ghent
Dr Guislain Museum
Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95,
www.museumdrguislain.be

MAY 24-SEP 7 Circus or Science: The Roca Collection, anatomical collection from the late 19th and early 20th centuries

MAY 24-SEP 7 Jean Rustin, retrospective of work by the French painter

MAY 24-SEP 7 I live in the painting, work by Marc Maet

Design Museum
Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99
Until JUNE 22 Voices: Contemporary Ceramics Art from Sweden

Until JUNE 22 Glass from the Dirk Schrijvers collection

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)
Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03

Until JUNE 29 Kunst Nu: Wilfredo Prieto, installation by the Cuban artist

Until JULY 6 Guillaume Bijl, retrospective of the Flemish artist

Hasselt

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

National Jenever Museum
Witte Nonnenstraat 19; 011.23.98.60
Until AUG 31 The Orange Bulb Alambiflurics, olfactory installation by Peter De Cupere

Z33
Zuivelmarkt (Begijnhof) 33; 011.29.59.60
Until MAY 25 Place@Space:

Don't miss this week



Nan Whaley

Concertgebouw Open Door Day

Concertgebouw, 34 't Zand, Bruges, 1 June, 070.22.33.02,

www.concertgebouw.be

Contemporary composer Tan Dun was born in a small village in rural China and later moved to New York to study music at Columbia University. His style accordingly merges eastern and western aesthetics and is best exemplified in the wistful, strangely enticing soundtrack he composed for Ang Lee's film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which earned him an Oscar in 2000. He's written much more, though, as a family concert at the Bruges Concertgebouw demonstrates: two concertos – one played for the first time in Belgium – are both inspired by Chinese rituals and require unusual instruments, such as water percussion and paper. Performed by the Vlaams Radio Orkest under Tan Dun himself, the concert rounds off the season at the Concertgebouw and will be part of a special open-door event: several documentaries, guided tours and workshops for children also feature.

Brussels

Asia Pacific Women's Association

Charity Bazaar 2008: Food, handicrafts, fashion show and tombola in aid of an orphanage in Malaysia, the Foundation for Slum Child Care in Thailand and victims of the cyclone in Bangladesh

MAY 24 10.30-17.00 at International School of Brussels, Kattenberg 19 02.661.42.11, www.isb.be

Brussels Jazz Marathon: Some 140 free performances including jazz, Latin, funk, rock and blues

MAY 23-25 in cafés, clubs and public spaces around Brussels www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be

Flamenco Festival "Son del Sur":

Flamenco music, dance, film and poetry

Until MAY 25 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

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

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

Kunstenfestivaldesarts: International performance and visual arts festival dedicated to new works and dialogue between language communities

Until MAY 31 in venues across Brussels 070.22.21.99, www.kfda.be

Strip Festival BD: Comic book art fair featuring design workshops and over 40 European authors

MAY 25 11.00-18.00 at Basilica of Koekelberg, Voorplein 1 www.stripfestival.be

Bruges

Airbag Festival: The second edition of this

MY FLANDERS

Frie Leysen

Frie Leysen founded both Antwerp's deSingel and the Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Brussels' biggest and most innovative arts festival. She tells us why.

Are you an artist?

I'm not an artist. I've never been an artist. I was always on the defence side of the arts, protecting artists from pressures, whether economical, political or market forces.

When sparked this interest in art?

I studied history of art from the age of 18. It was more by accident that I became an artistic programmer. I started at the Time Festival in Ghent but quickly moved on and founded deSingel in Antwerp in the early 1980s. It was built as an extension of the artistic conservatory, but they decided to employ somebody to rent the spaces out. I told them that if they intended to build this huge venue, they should also add some content. After 10 years, it was time for another generation to take over, and I founded the Kunstenfestivaldesarts.

Where did the idea come from for the Kunstenfestivaldesarts?

I wanted to move back to Brussels; I am originally from Brussels but had lived for 20 years in Antwerp. What was on offer in Brussels in the early 1990s in terms of international contemporary art was not up to par for a capital – let alone for Brussels, which is a capital eight times over! It needed an electric shock, so I thought a festival was the thing to do.

What was your mission in the beginning?

My first concern was content. Then came the discussions between the two communities. Verbal violence and aggression was quite horrible

at the time – the same discussions of the country splitting up that you hear now. It was at the same time as the war in Sarajevo, and a lot of the language being used here was the same. I thought that if this city wanted to be a European capital, then there were some obligations. Brussels should try to be an example of how two communities can live together and cooperate. It was clear from the beginning that it had to be international, yet also very local – working with artists, audiences and the public authorities of the two communities. At that time we needed to be careful about Euro-centrism, to think about how Europe will relate to non-European cultures.

How has festival accomplished its goals?

The goals are really long term. When you look at what is going on today between the two communities – between Théâtre National and KVS, plus the Bravo Festival – I think Kunstenfestivaldesarts has contributed to this artistic exchange between the two communities. But it's also risky to say that because, on the other hand, a festival is just a festival. It's clear you are not going to change the world, but you use the weapons you have to try and kill clichés and simplifications. It's still a young project; other European festivals have been around for 60 years. You need time to exist and to make your point clear.

Kunstenfestivaldesarts is a contemporary arts festival. What attracts you to contemporary art in particular?



It's how we express ourselves today. We all dress, think, talk in a contemporary style – it is only with the arts that it is questioned. This gap for me is not healthy. Contemporary art should be obvious; it should be the first thing we understand. Secondly, there were already projects covering the more classical arts in Brussels, but this was missing. Thirdly, with non-Western cultures, I think it's easier to start from what we have in common, which is our daily artistic language, before going back to the history. And lastly, it helps to avoid an exotic folkloristic look at non-Western cultures.

Where do you see the festival fitting in on an international scale?

I'm always surprised to see how many international curators come to the festival. It is unique in that it is always looking for unknown artists to present in Brussels. That's why so many people come here – to discover (I hate that word), to do their shopping for new artists.

Are you satisfied with audience response?

The audience is quite exceptional. They take risks. An artist can have lots of creations, and they are not all successful. But you can still recognise that an artist is interesting, even if it's not his or her best work. When a performance fails, people at Kunstenfestivaldesarts don't ask for their money back. They are a really curious audience. I think this is because of the relationship between the audience and the festival that has developed over the last decade.

What is avant-garde art like in Flanders compared to the rest of Europe?

Flanders is one of the interesting spots. I'm not chauvinistic, but, objectively speaking, there are a lot of things happening in Flanders. In the beginning of the 1980s, it was a desert. But then you had a boom – people with a personal artistic language, an artistic vision. Artists that might have stayed marginal didn't stay marginal because they had places to present.

What has led to that?

It has depended on some strong personalities. Maybe also because the Flemish didn't have a long, strong tradition in performing arts. It was a handicap, but they also didn't have to carry a burden – in France, you cannot touch Molière, for instance. Also the Flemish never had a nationalistic feeling, and Dutch is a language that nobody speaks, so in many ways you were forced to be open to other cultures and other languages.

What path do you see Flemish contemporary art taking?

These past years it's been an evolution of dissolving borders between disciplines – theatre, music, visual art. After working in the Arab region, I saw that the arts there are deeply engaged, politically and socially. The engagement here is more about society, about the role of the arts to take the temperature of society and to reflect human behaviour, not about politics.

Are you working on any new projects?

I just finished organising a festival that took place in nine cities in the Arab region: from Rabat to Cairo, Tunis, Damascus. This week I have to decide on a new project, so I'm not sure what's next.

What are your hopes for the future of contemporary art in Flanders?

When things go well, the danger is that you become too content, and then you close up. If you think you are the best, you aren't open to others. That's the beginning of the end. I hope we won't reach that point.

Interview by Sharon Light

Online

www.kunstenfestivaldesarts.be

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

Rise and shine

"Cycling itself is no problem. But getting up early is always difficult. I leave at quarter to five and get to work at quarter past seven."

Peter Van der Haegen,
Flanders' most committed
bike-commuter,
who pedals 144km a day

French vision

"As long as nothing fundamental changes in Flanders, the foreign press will continue to write negative articles."

Jean-Pierre Stroobants,
correspondent for *Le Monde*,
has his mind made up

Best prof

"Look at my door, it's always open. Anyone can walk in here with a problem or a question. That's the way I've always done it."

Roland Paemeleire, voted
Ghent's favourite professor

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