

Zinneke Parade, p.2

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To Cannes, with love

Winner of the Grand Rail d'Or:
Moscow, Belgium mixes visual style
with urban blight

Flemish movie collects three prizes at the world's most prestigious film festival

Lisa Bradshaw

You're sinking your first movie. That's what friends and colleagues told Christophe Van Rompaey when he announced he would shoot his film *Aanrijding in Moscou* in Gents, the dialect of East Flanders' capital.

Even the Flemish don't always understand each other's dialects, and films are always made in proper Dutch so that no subtitling is required. Nobody shoots a film in dialect. *Nobody*. Let alone a filmmaker with no features to his name.

"It had to be authentic," insists Christophe Van Rompaey, the director of the film, now known internationally as *Moscow, Belgium*. "The Ghent dialect is so juicy and full of little nuances. I come from there, the scriptwriters come from there, and I cast actors from there.

We know exactly what we're talking about and exactly what we mean."

But does anybody else? Apparently so: the film, which opened in January, has so far garnered more than 180,000 tickets sales in Flanders, more than any other Flemish film this year. That's in spite of

local industry types claiming that nobody would go see it. After local success, they changed their tune but still insisted that, like most Flemish films, it would never make it out of the country. "And here we

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Business

Whether you're aware of it or not, you know Studio 100. Ian Mundell meets the guys who gave us *Bumba*, *Mega Mindy* and *Kabouter Plop*.

Active

The 19-century prison in Hasselt has been closed for a few years now, but an exhibition makes innovative use of the space before the building is renovated and changed forever.

Living

From gambling den to spa to cultural centre, the Ostend Casino has had a turbulent history. Steven Tate takes us through 175 years of architecture, high society and German invasion.

Spending down as economic crisis deepens

Savings fall to lowest level in 20 years

Alan Hope

Fear of reduced purchasing power has caused nine out of 10 families to cut their spending, according to a report by Citibank released last week. The main areas of belt-tightening, the report says, were heating, recreation, clothing and household articles. The perceived fall in purchasing power is a result of higher food and fuel prices, experts explained.

Faced with headlines stressing a deepening crisis, only 12% of Belgians are putting more money into savings. One in three families is saving less now than before the

crisis started. Last month, the governor of the National Bank said the nationwide level of savings had fallen to the lowest point in 20 years.

There are regional differences in the figures: more Flemings than Walloons choose to economise on household goods (35% compared to 24%), while more Walloons than Flemings turn down the heating (49% as against 39%). Fewer Flemings chose to reduce spending on food – just 17% compared to 27% for French-speakers. Meanwhile, 12% of people across

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Zinneke

Brussels has hardly swept up the mess of the Gay Pride Parade when another spectacle takes over the city streets around Anspachlaan. This weekend, it's the Zinneke Parade, held every two years since 2000, in which the city celebrates its multicultural roots.

"Zinneke" is an old Brussels word that refers to one of those mangy dogs that slouch around the urban alleyways feeding on scraps and bones. It's also an endearing term for the murky river that once meandered through the ancient quarters of Brussels, bringing pestilence and bad smells, until it was buried underground. So a Zinneke parade is different, that much is sure.

The event involves dozens of different groups that work away

on their costumes and dance routines in cultural centres and workshops scattered across the city. There's a special language that has developed around the whole event. The 23 groups are called Zinnodes. They meet in Zinnopoles. And they form bigger groups called Zinnagoras.

The end result of all this Zinnergy (their word) is a fabulous series of parades featuring 2,500 people dressed in the strangest costumes you've ever seen. The theme this year is water. You have to wait until 31 May 31 to see what the groups make of that.

Derek Blyth

Online

www.zinneke.org

**FACE OF FLANDERS**

Stephen Vanfleteren

**Bobbejaan**

It's a major event when one of the country's most famous entertainers releases a new album. It's even more notable when it's his first in 35 years. And when the star in question has just turned 83, there's probably only one person in the whole world who fits the bill.

Bobbejaan Schoepens' birthday was on 16 May. On his MySpace page, he received birthday greetings from pop star An Pierlé, classical singer Elise Caluwaerts and jazz legend Toots Thielemans. On 18 May, he released his latest album, featuring duets with Axelle Red and Geike Arnaert of Hooverphonic, plus a guest track by admirer Daan Stuyvens – an A-list line-up most Belgian recording artists would give their eye-teeth for, reserved for a former singing cowboy from Limburg called Bobby John, who left show business to run a theme park.

Bobbejaan was born Modest Hippolyte Johan Schoepens in Boom near Antwerp in 1925. His father was a blacksmith, but Modest soon found he had a talent for singing, yodelling and whistling. He and his half-sister Liesje formed an act, which played locally. Then Modest was asked to sing on the radio in Brussels, and his career was born.

He seems to have been willing to turn his hand to almost anything. He sang in French and in Flemish, and later in German and English. He was locked up by the German occupier in 1944 for singing a South African song that refers to Germans as "pork", but his popularity in Germany was second only to Flanders.

Bobbejaan is credited with being the only non-British European to perform at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, where he went by the name of Bobby John. He performed in a cowboy outfit for one song and in a 1960s sweater for another. At the time, he was by far the most successful Flemish performer outside of Flanders.

On archive footage, available on YouTube and MySpace, he comes across as a quaint novelty act, strictly of his time, which was the 1950s and 60s. But he was taken seriously. He gave a young guitar player called Jean-Baptiste Thielemans a start in his band. For one week in 1955, his support act at the Ancienne Belgique was a skinny young singer named Jacques Brel.

He represented Belgium in the Eurovision Song Contest in 1957, and achieved eighth place. Then he decided to take control over his own appearances, first by touring with a circus tent, then by building a theatre to perform in, on some drained marshland at Lichtenart in the Kempen of Limburg.

That grew into the (still-popular) amusement park Bobbejaanland, and the performances were slowly pushed into the background. Variety shows were on their way out, and in 1986 he had a quadruple bypass, followed soon after by an operation on his wisdom teeth which accidentally damaged a nerve, leaving him unable to whistle. He's also been through bowel cancer.

But now he's back, 60 years after his first hit and 35 years after his last, accompanied by some big names from another generation. He sounds remarkable for a man of his age. The album, called simply *Bobbejaan* and recorded at his home studio, features a mix of French, English and Dutch, old songs and very old songs. The big hit is likely to be the duet with Arnaert, a poignant love-song called "Le temps des cerises", which dates back to the Paris Commune.

Online

www.bobbejaan.be

TALKING DUTCH**notes on language****ritsen**

When people move to Flanders, they can choose not to learn Dutch. Many live cocooned in expat communities with their homeland television on tap. That, as I say, is their choice. Yet, as soon as you take to the wheel in Erps-Kwerps or in Steenhuffel, survival comes into play, and you have no choice. Of course, the pictogram of a puffing train takes away any need to know that you are approaching *een overweg*. Some signs take on special importance: the red triangle with a black cross signifies a junction with priority from the right, which may come as shock when a car shoots out from a dirt track in front of you. Many signs are the same throughout Europe, all of which is of no comfort if you don't reduce your speed when you pass a *moeilijke doorgang* sign because you don't realise that something is going to make driving difficult.

A good way to learn a language is by driving. You just need to end up in roadworks once to learn that *omleiding* means detour. Yet if you are thinking of pulling off the road, it would be a shame to learn the hard way that the sign *zachte berm* means soft verge.

Some signs are less vital. Just about every village in Flanders has a rusting *u rijdt te snel* sign, which I always thought of as a strange generalisation, or perhaps a recognition that everyone does in fact drive too fast. But now that *snelheidscamera*'s are bursting from the ground like mushrooms, keeping to the limit is advisable.

With increasing pressure on the roads the concept of allowing traffic that doesn't have the right of way to join the flow is being promoted with a *ritsen* campaign. *Een rit* is a zip, which creates the neat image of cars melding in turn into one line of traffic.

The fact that a campaign is necessary suggests that Flemish drivers don't casually wave cars in ahead of them. This is perhaps not surprising when the highway code is such that there's priority to be taken at every junction, and courtesy doesn't apply. *Ritsen* seems more established in the Netherlands, where you see *geef de ritser ruimte* signs on urban motorways encouraging you to give the *ritser* room.

Here, strange posters along the motorways show arrogant-looking individuals who say such things as *Ritsen? Achter mij, ja* – Let someone in? Behind me, yes. Below you can read *die moet naar www.wordweermens.be*, which directs such a driver to the become-human-again website.

I have been searching for the English equivalent of *ritsen*. Nothing springs to mind – are the British such polite drivers that it just comes naturally? Yes, right. But the *ritsen* germ has been planted. In the Channel Islands, the term filter-in-turn is radically being used to replace traffic lights.

Now that's something to dream of: courteous after-yous at every junction.

Alistair MacLean

online

www.wegen.vlaanderen.be

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FEATURE

Continued from page 1

are," says Rompaey.

Where they are is Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival, which came to an end last Friday with three awards given to Van Rompaey's movie, including the SACO for screenwriting and the ACID/CCAS, which helps fund distribution of films. *Moscow, Belgium* is only the second Flemish film to ever be selected for Critics' Week in its 44-year history. Journalists and industry are both crazy about the movie, which, as one Flemish photographer emailed from Cannes, is "the talk of the town".

This is good news for German-based distributor Bavaria Film, which had already bought the rights for international distribution. After initial screenings at Cannes, they were immediately able to sell the film to four territories covering six countries, including France, Germany, Brazil and Canada. They are also in talks with both the United Kingdom and the United States. A Flemish film even getting picked up by an international distributor is already beyond what most of them achieve.

"We thought the film was very accessible to different audiences and of a high quality in general," says Stefanie Zeitler, head of sales at Bavaria. "The selection committee at Cannes might have picked it to watch early as it was wrapped in bright yellow artwork."

Though that may be true, a movie still has to be pretty good to get into Critics' Week, which is a subsection of the Cannes Film Festival reserved for first- and second-time directors.

"We felt it was a warm and human movie that can connect to any audience," says Alex Masson, a French film journalist on the committee that selects films for Critics' Week. "And we have proof here. Aside from film professionals, it also showed to a regular audience, and it received huge applause. Part of that regular audience is a group of railway workers, who every year since 1994, have awarded the Grand Rail d'Or for their favourite film at Critics' Week. Thirteen years ago it was the Flemish film *Manneken Pis*. This year it was *Moscow, Belgium*.

That splash of bright yellow in the film's packaging is seen right at the start of the film itself – in the form of a giant, yellow semi-truck driven by Johnny, its bearded, undershirt-wearing, beer-guzzling driver, whose beloved truck (where he works and lives) is dented in a parking lot by middle-aged mother of three Matty. A battle of wits ensues, and Johnny's interest is piqued.

Johnny, in his late 20s, then pursues Matty, in her early 40s, relentlessly, until she finally agrees to date him. They hit it off, but there's a problem: Matty is still married to her estranged husband, who left her a few months earlier for a younger woman. When he



The cast and crew of *Moscow, Belgium* had a much busier week than anticipated. From left: sound editor Dirk Bombe, director Christophe Van Rompaey, actress Barbara Sarafian, executive producer Dries Phlypo, scripwriter Jean-Claude Van Rijckeghem and actor Jurgen Delnaet

finds out about Johnny, he has second thoughts.

The rivalry between the two male leads make up the film's funniest moments. Johnny is played by Jurgen Delnaet, his first film role in 10 years. His macho-on-the-outside, tender-on-the-inside persona is a perfect foil for Matty's husband, played by Johan Heldenbergh, a great physical actor, whose facial tics and wounded victim act begin to rub Matty the wrong way.

But Matty is really the star of this show. TV and film actress

Barbara Sarafian embodies both the desperation of a broken heart and the giddy feeling of new – not to mention taboo – love. She tells a co-worker: "My husband is going through a mid-life crisis, my oldest daughter is in puberty, my youngest daughter thinks she's in puberty, and my son can't find his way into puberty. And my car needs a repair. My life is all dents and bruises."

"It's about somebody whose life is in flux," explains Van Rompaey. "She's not going forward. And then she bumps into this person who's

life is also in pause. They need each other to get on with their lives."

Moscow, Belgium was submitted to Critics' Week by the Flemish Audio-visual Fund, a government-funded programme that supports film production. But Rompaey never expected the film to be chosen. "When I got the phone call, I thought a friend of mine was pulling a prank on me," he laughs.

Besides the Ghent dialect, the film is also difficult to classify – anathema to international distributors and, often, audiences. "They are trying to put it in

a box, and they don't know how," says Rompaey. "Is it art house, commercial, comedy or tragedy?"

Though both critics and audiences are appreciating the clever one-liners, the core of the film is rather dark. Matty is a lonely woman who only has the local laundrette to escape to in Ledeburg, a suburb of Ghent laden with concrete apartment blocks. Johnny is not just a breath of fresh air in her life – he's also a drunk who turns violent when provoked.

Rompaey owes the story – and those one-liners – to writer Jean-Claude Van Rijckeghem, who also wrote the popular Flemish films *Man zkt vrouw* and *Verlengd weekend*. Though Rompaey had won awards for his short films and directed television, long-time collaborator Van Rijckeghem had never been able to show him a feature film project he was interested in. Until *Moscow, Belgium*. "It came to me at the right time in my life," explains the 38-year-old director. "Earlier, I don't think I would have been mature enough myself to really understand every character in this piece."

Moscow, Belgium (*Aanrijding in Moscou*) is still playing locally in Ghent, Antwerp and Leuven

What's next?

Two more highly anticipated Flemish films are coming up

Erik Van Looy, who made the gritty crime drama *De Alzheimer Zaak* (released internationally as *Memory of a Killer*) in 2003 has just finished shooting another dark psychological thriller. Again starring Koen De Bouw, *Loft* follows five friends as they share a secret loft apartment where they can take their various lovers and one-night stands. When a girl winds up dead, they all start looking askance at each other. Written by Bart De Pauw (*Team Spirit*), the film will open this autumn.

It's been an even longer absence for Patrice Toye. Ten years ago her film *Rosie*, about a teenager struggling to survive a dreadful home, couldn't stop winning awards at international festivals. The critics loved it, and she was showered with praise. "Life is important to me, too," she told *Flanders Image*, the

magazine of the Flemish Audio-Visual Fund, in explaining her decade-long absence. "I am also the kind of person who doesn't think it's just necessary to have another movie made. I really want to have something to tell."

She has found that in *Nowhere Man*, which she co-scripted with a Norwegian writer. It's the story of 40-something Tomas (Frank Vercruyssen) who, terrified that his wife is going to leave him, beats her to the punch – by staging his own suicide. The film opens this August. **LB**

Online

www.flanders-image.be

Online:

www.moscow-belgium.com

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Families "putting less aside", says report

Continued from page 1

the country claimed that nothing has changed for them.

There are also differences among age groups. Older people economise more on health-care costs, although in general they spend far more as a group. The under-40s save on clothing, and middle-aged people conserve on home renovations, heating and recreation.

Meanwhile, a study published last week by ING bank and *De Tijd* newspaper revealed that nearly one in three considered their financial situation had deteriorated in the past three months. And only half as many thought things might improve in the coming three months.

The study also revealed that 60% of people over 70 still have not made a will or otherwise organised their own succession. For those aged 65-69, the figure is 77%. And 30% of those aged over 65 have never even spoken about their will, let alone taken action.

A report prepared by the government's own planning bureau shows a reduction in the proportion of income that families are putting into savings. In 2007, the average family saved 12.4%, a figure forecast to go down to 11.5%



in 2008. The report puts the blame on "the slowed-down growth of purchasing power" – stopping short of admitting there has been a reduction. Growth in purchasing power in 2008 was expected to be 0.4%, largely as a result of higher oil prices and minimal growth in real incomes.

However, families will still want to enjoy the finer things in life, like holidays, the report predicts – the very area where 43% of the respondents to the Citibank poll said they were already making cut-backs. The planning bureau report puts growth in consumption at 1.4%, a tiny increase, but still an increase.

Chef in the soup over forbidden birds

Bird-protection agency Vogelbescherming Vlaanderen (VV) is to file a criminal complaint with the Bruges prosecutor over a restaurant in Zeebrugge that has woodcock on the menu. The bird is a protected species, but chef and owner Danny Horseele was seen last week on a TV programme taking several dead birds from a cardboard box and beginning to pluck them. Onscreen, he advised viewers that "This cannot be sold in Flanders, but if it's lying on your doorstep, you obviously can't throw it in the bin". Horseele claims he came by the birds legitimately. "This could cause problems for the third star he wants to win," VV chairman Jan Rodts said. "And possibly also for the second one which he already has."

Biggest Tuymans in the world for MAS



Luc Tuymans, Flanders' most expensive living artist, is to lay a mosaic on the square before the MAS – Museum aan de Stroom, Antwerp's huge museum project that will complete in 2010. The work, which the artist has already designed, would immediately become the largest Tuymans in the world. Speaking on local TV-station ATV, Antwerp's culture alderman Philip Heylen said that "Tuymans wants to make the square into one giant artwork".

The plans are thought to be based on a 2002 painting by Tuymans, "Dead Skull", showing three Antwerp shields and a skull. Tuymans' gallery, Zeno X in Antwerp, would not confirm or deny the plans. The artist himself was in Warsaw and not available for comment.

Heylen will meet with Tuymans shortly to examine the idea in more depth, he said. Later, the project will have to get the approval of the city council.

NEWS FLASH



Night-flights are to be stopped from Zaventem as of October under a package of measures proposed by federal mobility minister Etienne Schouw. All flights would be banned between 1.00 and 6.00 on Saturday and Sunday nights, the curfew would start at midnight. On other nights, aircraft would be forced to meet new lower noise limits – a measure that would take at least until 2009 to come into force. The new rules are certain to provoke opposition among airlines.

The tax authorities paid each Belgian an average refund of €267 in 2007 – representing an interest-free, two-year loan of €1.74 billion to the government. The sum, which represents an over-payment of taxes in 2005, was slightly higher than the average refund of €240 in 2006. The savings to the treasury of using over-payments as a free loan are reckoned to be in the region of €70 million a year.

Finance minister Didier Reynders has called for more transparency over the remuneration of top executives and the severance packages they enjoy – the so-called golden parachute – after it was revealed that Didier Bellens, CEO of Belgacom, would be entitled to three years pay, or €8 million, if he were ever sacked. And if the company were to enforce a contract clause preventing him from working for a competitor, he could count on another year on top of that. Reynders promised "measures" by the end of the year, possibly including an obligation on companies to publish directors' salaries.

Ghent students have protested at a decision by the University authorities to buy 1,000 graduation gowns for the use of graduating students. A "waste of money" on a "ridiculous American tradition," wrote the editorialist of the university paper *Schamper*. Rector Paul Van Cauwenbergh denied that the idea had come from America. "Historically, all universities know this tradition," he said. The university had planned to give all graduates a gown, but instead they will now be loaned out for the day.

Sport minister Bert Anciaux has declined to support the *Sport naar School* programme run by top athlete Kim Gevaert, because he finds the content of the programme "weak," his office said. Gevaert's programme aims to get children between the ages of six and 12 to go to school in a sporty way – cycling, walking or even jogging. According to Anciaux, the initiative has little to add to an existing programme in which the Region has just invested €10 million.

Schilde is best place to live

Schilde, near Antwerp, is the most pleasant commune to live in, according to a survey of all 588 communes in Belgium by *Knack* magazine. Schilde achieved its ranking – knocking previous winner Tervuren into eighth place – thanks to its socio-economic condition and the availability of services. Other factors taken into account were housing quality and the environment. The lowest-ranked commune in the country is Sint-Joost in Brussels, and the worst Flemish commune is Ronse. The major cities all scored badly, although the top-scoring communes were, like Schilde, often in immediate proximity to cities.

Property prices were on average highest in Lasne and lowest in Colfontaine. Building land, however, was most expensive in Edegem and lowest in Vresse-sur-Semois.

Schilde mayor Yolande Avontroodt gave credit to the commune's workers and residents, "who make the effort to keep the commune nice". The commune's attraction for many people, she said, was its proximity to Antwerp. "There's also the greenies of our commune, which we'd like to hold on to," she said.

Online

www.knack.be

All-out smoking ban in cafes comes closer

Health inspectors have added their voice to growing parliamentary pressure for the smoking ban in restaurants to be extended to include all cafes. At present the ban only operates in premises where a substantial part of their business involves serving food.

But the difference between the two establishments is causing confusion, inspectors said, with the result that six out of 10 premises are not following the rules to the letter. Inspectors checked on 25,000 premises, looking for ashtrays (forbidden) and no-smoking signs (required), as well as testing the presence and functioning of extractors in those places where separate smoking areas are permitted. Fewer than four in 10 were in line with the law. In a report submitted last week to parliament, the federal health inspection service comes out in favour of removing exceptions and extending the smoking ban to all public places.

€1000 gift for first-time buyers

The Flemish government were due last week to agree a proposal to make a one-off gift of €1000 to young couples buying their first house with a mortgage. The proposal counters a plan by sp.a member Michèle Hostekint to scrap registration costs on mortgage purchases – which amount to 1% of the sum borrowed. But the proposal proved "unworkable" according to Flemish finance minister Dirk Van Mechelen. "It is not only legally difficult to put into force, but would bring too much administrative confusion," he said. The measure should come into force at the beginning of next year.

Plane breaks apart on take-off from Zaventem

The authorities at Brussels National Airport were this week making an urgent review of safety after an accident at the weekend in which a freight aircraft overshot runway 20 on take-off and came to rest overhanging the railway line. The Boeing 747 belonging to Kalitta Air broke into three pieces. No-one was injured, and the aircraft did not catch fire. Traffic was disrupted on the other two runways, as well as on the railway. Four crew members of the five on board were taken to hospital for examination.

Kalitta Air is a US company that operates military transports as well as commercial freight. According to Amnesty International, the company's flights are regularly used by the CIA, allegedly for the controversial programme of "extraordinary rendition" of terrorist suspects to secret prisons where they are allegedly tortured.



NEWS FLASH



Shutterstock

Secondary schools will next year start a pilot project to provide **pre-police and security training** to young people to allow them to enter an industry suffering an acute shortage of staff. Both private and public security services are seriously short of well-trained personnel; only one in eight applicants to join the police makes it through the selection procedure. The programme will start next academic year at the St Vincentius Technical Institute in Turnhout.

Filmmaker Jan Bucquoy last week made his annual attempt to **stage a coup d'état** by climbing over the wall of the Royal Palace in Laken. He was arrested by police, but not before planting an anarchist flag. He plans another attempt next year "with zeppelins or tanks or something," he said.

Flanders is once again making world headlines, this time over the **Place to Pee** – a video game made to be played while standing at a urinal. The invention narrowly missed a place in the finals of the één TV programme for new inventions, *De Bedenkers*, but has since gathered interest from gamers in Romania, Australia and the US. Women may also play, thanks to the use of a funnel device similar to the P-Mate, designed for use at music festivals.

A delegation from new political party *Lijst Dedecker*, led by former judo international Jean-Marie Dedecker, left last weekend for Benidorm to canvass among the many **elderly Flemish expats** living on the Costa Blanca. "Benidorm is the rest home of Flanders," said press spokesman and Antwerp list-leader Jürgen Verstrepen. "There are a lot of votes to be picked up there."

The city of Antwerp will this year celebrate a **car-free weekend** from 19 to 22 September. Cars will be banned from the city entirely on the Sunday, with traffic restricted in other parts of the centre all weekend long.

The city of Tongeren is to apply to the Flemish government for the status of **archaeological site of special importance**, according to acting mayor Carmen Willems. The city will also be asking minister Dirk Van Mechelen for financial support for archaeological exploration. Tongeren was already a settlement when Ambiorix rose up with his Eburon people against Julius Caesar. The Basilica has produced rich archaeological finds, and more can be seen in the Gallo-Roman museum, currently closed for renovations.

Online
www.galloromeinsmuseum.be

Abu Jahjah case comes to appeal

Former leader of the Arab European League (AEL), Dyad Abu Jahjah, this week began an appeal against his conviction for stirring up riots in Borgerhout in Antwerp in November 2002. The rioting followed the deadly shooting of a young Moroccan man by an elderly resident. Youths smashed windows and damaged cars. Images showed Abu Jahjah in head-to-head dispute with then police chief Luc Lamine, and prime minister Guy Verhofstadt momentarily forgot his constitutional place by calling for his arrest. Jahjah claims the arrest and conviction – he was sentenced to one year – were politically motivated. Evidence shows he arrived on the scene hours after the disturbances had started and began discussions with police, not with rioters. Lamine himself has been called by the defence; he has described the arrest as "unnecessary, futile and risky".

American investment fell in 2006

American inward investment in Belgium fell in 2006 to only \$4.5 billion, compared to \$8 billion the year before, according to a report produced by Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School for the American Chamber of Commerce in Belgium. Most of the investment (\$3.4 billion) was in the services sector. The total puts Belgium in sixth place among EU nations as a target for US investment. Belgium's biggest competitors were France and the Netherlands. The report puts Belgium's slipping fortunes down to the costs of putting people to work here, political and economic instability and the weight of government regulation. On the other hand, infrastructure improvements and tax reform were factors in Belgium's favour, the report said.

Online
www.amcham.be

Molenbeek man behind Christmas alert

A Molenbeek man arrested in Morocco on suspicion of terrorism could have been behind the heightened security alert in Brussels at Christmas, which led to the cancellation of the New Year fireworks and curtailed the Winterfert fair in the city centre.

Abdellatif Benali, 25, is in custody in Morocco, where he was one of a group of suspects rounded up by police investigating an Al Qaeda cell. Benali was arrested as he got off a plane in February, while other members of the group were found up in the towns of Fez and Nador. Their arrests were only made known by Moroccan investigators last week. According to them, the suspects have admitted planning terrorist attacks in Belgium against EU targets, but no details are yet available. Nor is it clear whether a link exists with the group allegedly headed by Evergem man Abdelkader Belliraj, also arrested in Morocco in February.

Antwerp goes to Avignon

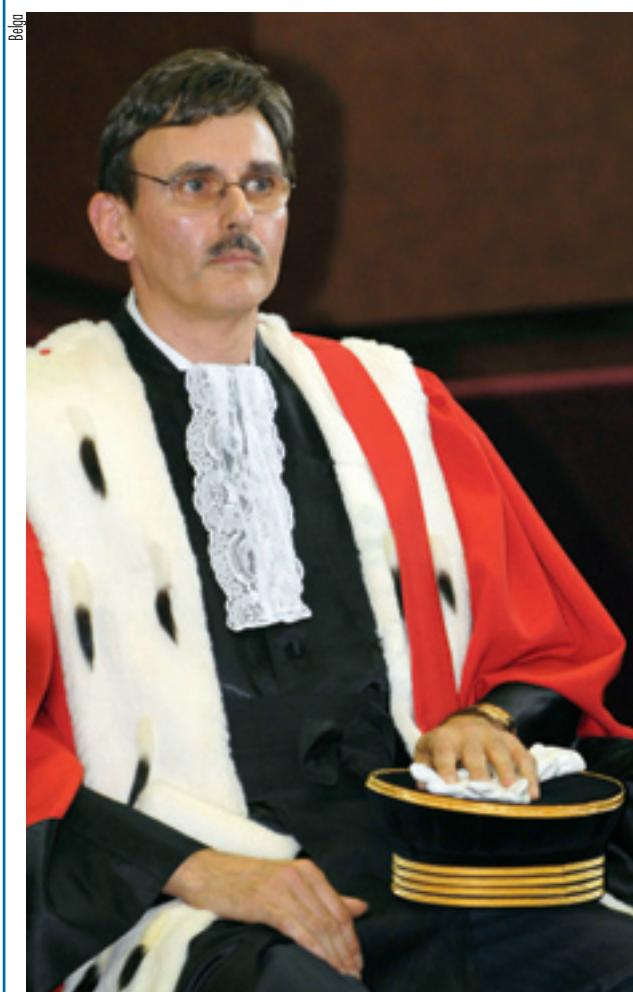
This year's annual Festival of Avignon will welcome a number of Antwerp theatre artists, it was announced. As well as three productions from the city's Toneelhuis, shows will also be staged by Jan Fabre and Benjamin Verdonck.

Fabre, who is currently wowing art audiences in the Louvre in Paris, will present a production on the theme of suicide through the medium of movement – the artist shuns the use of the word "dance" in his programmes. Fabre last visited the Provencal city in 2005, where his production *The Crying Body* caused something of a stir. *Le Figaro* called it a "disastrous artistic and moral train wreck".

Antwerp alderman for culture Philip Heylen promised funding to support Antwerp artists abroad, on top of support already given to Flemish participants in Avignon by Flanders region.

Online
www.festival-avignon.com

Prosecutor attacks law "made to order" for diamond industry



Dont tread on my law: Yves Liégeois

Antwerp's public prosecutor, Yves Liégeois, has hit out at a proposed new change to the law which, he claims, was "made to order" to suit the diamond industry. "The fundamental rule of law is being trodden upon," he said.

The new law concerns the seizure of property by a magistrate in the course of the investigation of a crime. At present, an investigating magistrate can order goods to be seized if they belong to an individual or company being investigated and could be the proceeds of a crime. The new law, however, would remove the magistrate's power in relation to businesses. Instead, the approval would have to be sought from an independent expert taken from the business world.

According to Liégeois, the proposal was the result of lobbying by the diamond industry, reeling after a magistrate seized diamond stocks from dozens of firms while investigating the Monstrey Worldwide Services fraud case in Antwerp.

He also lamented the removal of the independence of the investigating magistrate, who is supposed to have a free hand in all matters relating to a criminal investigation – something that would be lost if the proposal becomes law.

The bill's sponsor, CD&V deputy Servais Verherstraeten, denied the change was a result of lobbying by the diamond industry. "But why shouldn't we, just like any other sector, be allowed to lobby?" asked Philip Claes, spokesman for the Antwerp World Diamond Center.

Leuven scientist gets lifetime achievement award

Pioneering research on three viruses that affect 600 million lives



Dengue: an old virus makes a comeback

Matt Williams

Erik De Clercq, Professor Emeritus of Biology at the University of Leuven, was recently honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the European Inventor of the Year 2008 ceremony, held in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Throughout his career, De Clercq has studied the majority of known viruses in order to treat them and to develop anti-viral agents. But perhaps his most significant contribution was the discovery of the compound tenofovir disoproxil fumarate, an antiretroviral drug which is now used as part of a "drug cocktail" for treating HIV.

At present, there are an estimated 35 million people living with HIV, 180 million with Hepatitis C and almost 400 million with Hepatitis B. When one considers that these diseases are the three major viruses worldwide, it is not hard to appreciate the significant nature of De

Clercq's work in developing antiviral agents.

De Clercq did not know the award existed, let alone that he had been nominated. He is proud that his scientific discoveries have brought scientific honour to Belgium.

"I was, of course, happy to be chosen for the award. It truly was a total surprise," he says. "It is an honour for a small country like Belgium and for myself."

Professor De Clercq started his career at the University of Leuven, under the supervision of Professor Piet De Somer, who went on to become the first layman Rector of the university and founded the Rega Institute for Medical Research, where De Clercq still works.

"When I decided to pursue research after medical school, I was an exception because most doctors went into practice," De Clercq says. "Normally, I would have begun by practising medicine, but my tutor at the time persuaded me to pursue research instead." De Clercq

then won a scholarship to Stanford University in California. He returned to Belgium after his studies "because my tutor asked me back but also because my parents wanted to see me again."

Receiving such a prestigious award has encouraged De Clercq to pursue new challenges and to continue his work on viruses around the world.

"Recently there has been a steady increase in cases of the Dengue virus," he explains. "I personally believe that this is the most important emerging new virus. At the moment, we don't have any vaccines or any drugs for Dengue. For me, this is a tempting challenge to take on."

De Clercq is very proud of Leuven, the city where his work first began. "Leuven is the home of illustrious figures such as Vesalius, Erasmus, Dodoens and Mercator. Since my days as a student in Leuven, I have never left, having pursued my whole career at the Rega Institute for Medical Research."

After discussing science, our conversation turned to Belgian beer. Here too, the professor was happy to share a little of his experience.

"As it happens, I have taught in two of the major beer cities in the world: Leuven, famous for Stella, and Ceske Budejovice, also known as Budweis, which is famous for Budweiser," he notes. "As well as the so-called 'monk' beers such as Westmalle, Leffe and Affligem, there is also the famous beer from Melle called Delirium Tremens. But the most famous beer still produced in limited by real monks comes from Westvleteren, a small village located in the vicinity of Poperinge in West Flanders."

Online

www.kuleuven.ac.be/rega
www.sintsixtus.be

BUSINESS BRIEFS

Ford Genk

Ford Genk, the assembling affiliate of the US-based car maker, is again increasing capacity at its Limburg unit to cope with high demand for its Ford Mondeo model.

Alfacam

Alfacam, the Lint-based High Definition TV services and equipment company, is considering the launch of an HDTV station later this year in Flanders. The move could be linked to RTL's plan to launch its own TV station in Flanders this year.

Eric Salmon & Partners

The headhunting company Eric Salmon & Partners has established a new office in Brussels. It is affiliated to the network created by Eric Salmon, with offices in London, Frankfurt and New York.

CMB

Antwerp-based shipping group CMB has sold three of its ships to the US Genco Shipping and Trading company.

Antwerp Airport

Antwerp Airport, home base of regional airline VLM, is to get a new lease of life with a €28 million agreement from Flemish public authorities and private interests to finance its development. The airport, located in Deurne, is VLM's hub and one of the world's busiest airports for the diamond trade. Included in the investment is a runway extension, a tunnel to divert a nearby road and the construction of some 120,000 square metres of industrial and office space.

First Data

First Data, the leading US electronic financial transfers company, has acquired a stake in Brussels-based Eufiserv, the European interbank transfers operator.

Colruyt

Colruyt, the Halle-based discount retailer, has decided to curtail its development plans in the Netherlands until it can find a suitable acquisition opportunity. Meanwhile, the group's projects in Luxembourg are confirmed with a store opening in June and another one later this year.

Belcolade

Belcolade, the Erembodegem-based chocolate producer, the country's second largest after Swiss-owned Barry Callebaut, is to invest €15 million over the next five years to develop its capacity. It exports the bulk of its production to Japan, Ireland and Chile.

Fortis

Fortis, the Belgo-Dutch financial institution, is negotiating with Delta Lloyd the acquisition of a 51% share of ABN Amro Verzekeringen, the insurance branch of ABN Amro. The move will allow Fortis, which recently acquired ABN Amro, to develop its bank insurance activities in the Netherlands.

Efico

Efico, the coffee handling and trading company, is to transfer its activities from Antwerp to Zeebrugge and will build a €38 million storage and distribution centre in the port area.



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Big kids: Hans Bourlon (top) and Gert Verhulst are taking their multi-million euro studio global

Toying with success

The two Flemish guys who built an entertainment empire out of bouncy dogs and dancing clowns

Ian Mundell

It began with a puppet dog called Samson, sitting alongside Gert Verhulst while he introduced children's TV programmes over the Christmas holiday in 1989. "It wasn't very original, but we saw immediately that the dog was really successful," says Hans Bourlon, who was also working at the Flemish TV station BRT, now VRT.

"We started making songs with the dog and fictional programmes; we put him in a house, and then there were neighbours, and after a while we were making comedies," Bourlon says. "Now we have something like 750 episodes of *Samson*, which are still broadcast."

You can also buy *Samson & Gert* CDs, DVDs and merchandising, read about the pair in books and comics, see them perform on stage and catch them in cinemas. Their debut feature film, *Hotel op Stelten*, is edging into the top 10 most popular films released in Belgium so far this year.

But the most amazing consequence of the Samson story is Studio 100, the company Verhulst and Bourlon set up in 1996 with Danny Verbiest (the original voice of Samson) to exploit the series. It has become the most successful entertainment company in the country, with its own studios, dance school and three theme parks. It is responsible for the creation of Flanders' most recognised icons: Kabouter Plop, Mega Mindy, K3 and Bumba the Clown. Its ambition now is to go international.

While Studio 100 has grown dramatically over the past decade, from five people to a staff of 550, its approach has changed little. "Samson went his own way, a bit," Bourlon recalls, "but in fact what we did at that time is what we are

still doing. We have strong characters, with a strong visual element. They are acting in a fictional programme for children because children like stories. And because they are actors, not animated characters, they can look you in the eye, they can sing songs, they can go on stage."

New characters are chosen by identifying gaps in the Flemish cultural landscape. "For example, in Flanders there isn't really a magician, so we are starting to think of our own magician," Bourlon explains. "There is no one really Flemish clown, so we will create three new clowns. We are working on that now. In the future, when a child draws a clown, it will be ours. That's a little bit what we are aiming for."

In doing this, Studio 100 doesn't carry out much market research, preferring to rely on experience and instinct. "There's a lot of trial and error," Bourlon says. "When you see the characters on stage, and you see the reactions of the children and the families, then you learn a lot. That's how we do it."

A Flemish identity is important for the characters Studio 100 creates in collaboration with local TV channels. This helps explain their success at home but makes it difficult to sell them abroad. "If you make a programme more general, then you have more possibilities in other cultures or language areas," Bourlon says, "but if you depict a really Flemish world you can be more successful here."

This is one of the reasons why *Samson & Gert* has not been so popular in the Netherlands, where characters such as the burgemeester are not recognised. But other concepts, such as Plop the Gnome and girl-group K3 are more general and, therefore, travel better. Both have been huge in the

"In the future, when a child draws a clown, it will be ours."



Come dancing

When you visit Studio 100 headquarters in Schelle, between Mechelen and Antwerp, it feels like you're walking onto a film studio lot. The hangar doors of the buildings open to reveal props and rails of costumes, and somewhere in the interior you can hear the sound of singing.

Even so, it's still a surprise when the door to the dance studio opens, revealing row upon row of girls in identical leotards running through ballet exercises.

Young performers in particular cannot be worked too hard, so Studio 100 needs a large pool of talent to draw on for its shows and theme parks. Setting up its own dance school was the obvious solution, and it also helps nurture future actors and dancers for its films, music videos and TV programmes.

"Now we have 630 people, and the youngest dancer is five years old," says Ijvi Hagelstein, who is in charge of the professional dance school, where students train for between six and 15 hours a week. "We have classical ballet, which is the most important thing," says Hagelstein. "You need that if you want to become a good dancer. Then we have modern jazz, hip-hop, tap dance and singing."

Competition to enrol is tough, and Hagelstein says that it is not for everyone. "You have to have a good physique, and the technique of your dance is very important. And your smile, your personality." But if you are a budding Billy Elliot, your chances are much better. "We have ladies, ladies, ladies, but it's very difficult to find men!"



There's one near you: Studio 100 operates three Plopsa theme parks in Belgium

Netherlands.

Sometimes the characters lend themselves to dubbing, which is how Plop and super-heroine Mega Mindy have appeared in French-speaking Belgium, while others need to be remade for other languages and cultures. For example, the K3 format has been recast and exported to Germany and Austria as Wir3.

Studio 100's international ambitions go further than this, however, and last year it opened an international division in Munich. Rather than launching a new range of characters, this initiative started with distribution. "We know that it is very difficult to go into the world with a product," Bourlon explains. "If you just create a product and then think about how someone far away will discover it, that's a bit too late."

The new division, Studio 100 Media, was set up with a team who had previously worked for specialist distributor EM TV, which subsequently decided to contract out its children's catalogue to the new company. This is a massive resource of programmes: 20,000 half-hour shows going to 250 broadcasters around the world, including classics such as *Pippi Longstocking* and *Vicky the Viking*.

Studio 100 has added some of its own programmes to this international catalogue, but is also working on a new range of characters for the international market. The first two, the puppet show *Big & Small* and the animated quiz *Kerwhizz*, are being developed in collaboration with the BBC. "Although the first episodes have yet to be realised, they have already been sold in a lot of countries," says Bourlon. "A

name like BBC stands out very well in the world."

Developing characters for the international market is a slightly different proposition from the search for gaps in the Flemish iconography. "It must be a good, clear main character that you, as a child, want to put in your bed and go to sleep with," Bourlon says. "That's the standard."

Turning Studio 100 from a Benelux company to a European or even a global concern is a challenge. With a mixture of modesty and humour, Bourlon suggests that it may even run against the national character. "As Flemish people, we are not used to looking at the world. The Dutch, originally, are people from the sea, always looking out, but we were always looking at the ground because we were farmers. It's still a bit in our minds. We are not really good at exporting things. But with our company, we will try it."

Who's who at Studio 100



Plop

Plop and his gnome friends (*kabouters*) live in a small toadstool village in the middle of the forest, where big and small adventures happen every day.

Samson & Gert

Small town life and a host of characters, catchphrases and running gags, orchestrated by Gert and his bouncy, puppet dog Samson.

Piet Piraat

Piet is not a bad Pirate, he just wants to find the treasure that his grandfather buried and forgot to mark on the map.

Bumba

Colourful circus adventures for toddlers, with Bumba the clown and his friends.

Wizzy & Woppy

Two small mice have fun after hours in Mr Bram's pet shop.

K3

Karen, Kristel and Kathleen sing bubble-gum pop, selling over 3.5 million CDs and scoring 18 number one hit singles. As well as live concerts and recorded music, K3 appears in stage shows, on TV and in films.



Spring

Teen soap set in a dance studio, where the boys practice with their rock band Spring, and the girls take dance lessons.

Het Huis Anubis

Spooky action soap about a group of teens living in a student house that contains a dark secret waiting to be discovered.

Mega Mindy

Mild-mannered Mo works in a village police station, but her colleagues don't know she is also the mysterious superheroine Mega Mindy, fighting crime with the aid of crazy gadgets.

Online

www.studio100.be

DANCE

Intimate suggestions

East meets West, and fire meets water in the new dance by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

Sharon Light

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui is getting back to basics. In his latest creation, *Origine*, which will close Bozar's performing arts season on 3 June, the contemporary choreographer looks at the four elements and at relationships between North, South, East and West. He has sought dancers from literally the four corners of the earth – Iceland, South Africa, Japan and the United States – and has further diversified through three musicians who hearken from Sweden, Lebanon and Bulgaria.

Origine premiered at Antwerp's Toneelhuis in February. "I wanted to go for something basic," Cherkaoui says. "We're trying to simplify, even when there are intricate movements or complex dance sequences. I was afraid that people would find it too simple, but the audience has been incredibly supportive."

The intimate structure of a quartet has allowed the audience to get to know each character and to appreciate them as individuals. Cherkaoui senses that people are pleased to see each of them as they return to the stage for a new segment.

Origine follows on heels of highly successful and prize-winning projects. Cherkaoui's first piece in 1999, called *Anonymous Society*, was to music by Jacques Brel and brought him several awards, including the Fringe First at Edinburgh. The following year, *Rien de Rien*, his first piece as a member of Les Ballets C de la B, employed six dancers with an age range of 16 to 60. Soon after, D'avant combined Medieval songs and contemporary dance. The choreographer himself danced in his *Zero Degrees* in 2005, together with Akram Khan, another dancer with mixed heritage.

When Cherkaoui choreographs any piece, it all starts like homework. "I ask certain questions or give the performers little tasks to work with as an exercise. Then scenes get created," he explains. "When an emotional value comes out of that, we develop it into a theme, and those work together to create a story."

The Antwerp dancer and choreographer never works from a script, rather looking at "the elements that grow and die in the process." He's quick to explain that much material falls by the wayside.

For *Origine* in particular, he was going for something compact, and he is confident that the product is successful.

The outcome is a piece that explores globalisation, politics, consumerism and more. In one duet, the Western dancer uses the Eastern dancer in a variety of ways, such as an umbrella, a door and a watch. "almost like a 'Made in Japan' dancer – or object," says Cherkaoui.

The duets in *Origine* comment particularly on the East/West and North/South relationships. Each dancer also embodies one of the four elements – Earth, Air, Fire and Water – and the show features solos from each dancer on these themes. Cherkaoui, born to a Flemish mother and a Moroccan father, worked with each of the dancers on these sections, but the solos especially reflect their individuality.

writings of eighth-century Iraqi Rabia of Basra. *Origine* further draws on the religious repertoire of the Arab-Byzantine tradition and the Maronite rites. The music is performed live by the German Sarband Ensemble, made up of musicians from Europe and the Middle East. With each performance, the music becomes more integrated with the dances, and Cherkaoui says that the work is increasingly one of seven artists working together.

Cherkaoui's interest in dance grew from a love of drawing, which began at an early age. His Belgian roots had their impact, through the work of Magritte and

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (right) has his eye on the four corners of the globe in the beautiful new piece *Origine*



dual interpretations.

As a soundscape, Cherkaoui has again turned to various, particularly female, voices from the Middle Ages. First among them is 12-century German mystic Hildegard von Bingen. Second are the

other visual artists. The 32-year-old now describes himself as a bit of a surrealist, in that the reality he presents on stage is twisted or turned upside down.

His father's Moroccan heritage has weighed equally heavily, notably for what Cherkaoui calls "a lyrical influence". He strives to retain both cultural references in his work, and he also remains open to new forms of expression and other cultures. He recently spent three months in China and

looks forward to spending time in the US in the coming months. "I'm always evolving, always emptying my teacup and getting new tea all the time."

Yet Belgium, in a unique way, keeps him rooted. "It's a very humble country; it doesn't perceive itself as being big or important in the wrong way. I like that people doubt here. It is good to question yourself. We are never stuck in the old ways here because we don't have any really old ways." This

includes in dance, he says. "We had no real tradition to uphold. Maybe that in itself is our tradition – that we are always looking for transformation."

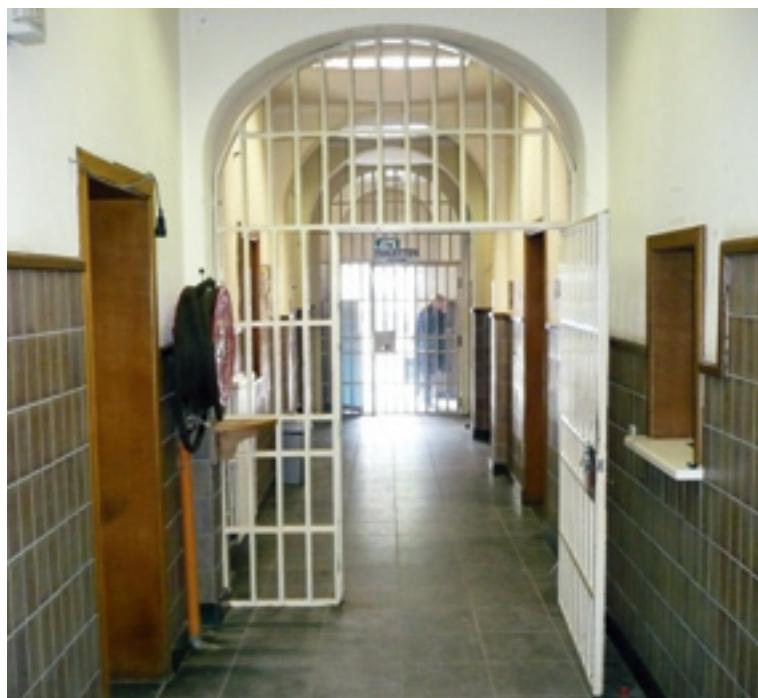
Origine, 3 June, Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels. Tickets from 02.507.82.00 or www.bozar.be

"I'm always evolving, always emptying my teacup and getting new tea all the time."

Online
www.toneelhuis.be

Art behind bars

An exhibition makes grand use of Hasselt's old prison before renovations change it forever



Don't let the door shut behind you: visit the old prison of Hasselt in the next few weeks

Lisa Bradshaw

There are two good reasons why you should visit the Oude Gevangenis, or Old Prison, on Hasselt's city ring road straight away. Number one: the incredibly innovative use an art exhibition is making of the 19th-century building. Number two: you only have two more weeks to see the old prison interior before it is closed up for renovations, which will alter it completely.

The Hasselt prison was built 170 years ago. By the time it closed in 2003, it was bursting at the seams with three prisoners spending 20 hours a day in cells that were designed for one occupant. The city has built a new prison further outside of the centre (which is also already experiencing overcrowding).

The old prison was too small but also was deteriorating beyond repair. "There was no ability anymore to assure security," explains Guido Dhert, Director of Engineering at the building department of Limburg. "It would have cost too much to renovate it for such a small number of prisoners."

But the place is fascinating for those with an interest in architecture – or a bit of the macabre. The Hasselt prison was built before the town sprang up, and Limburg's roughest customers were housed there: murders, rapists, arsonists. Over the years, there wasn't a convicted criminal in the province who didn't spend some time in the old prison.

It's an excellent example of early 19th-century prison architecture. Though there have been some renovations over the years, all of the heavy steel doors are in place, and the centre of the panopticon design has been untouched. You can wander down long hallways of cell door after cell door and visit the walled-in prison yard.

The prison has sat empty since

the prisoners were moved to the new facility. But the city has been offering the space for free, and a smattering of events have been held there. But the decision was finally made to sell the building to Hasselt University, who will, appropriately, use it for their new law degree programme.

This decision may be a disappointment for sightseers, but it's a relief to the city, who had a largely empty building on its hands. Protected status is promised for the shell of the old prison, but the interior will change drastically to accommodate the university's needs. The university will take control of the building almost immediately and begin operating from it in 2011.

"The walls and entrance doors will be kept and preserved," assures university director Dr Marie-Paule Jacobs, "and we might keep one or two prison cells to show what it was like." The panopticon "where you can look into different corridors" will be kept, she says, "since it's quite characteristic of a certain period of time for prison architecture. We are trying to be creative and preserve a certain look and feel of the prison." The building will also accommodate some administrative offices and a library. "It will be an open building," Jacobs says. "The public is always welcome to visit."

Still, I suggest you make that visit now so you can see *Pop-Eye: The Art of Music, The Music of Art*, an exhibition that runs in the old prison until 15 June. Flemish journalists Danny Ilegems and Vincent Loosen, together with DEUS guitarist Mauro Pawlowski, have formed a trio called Beauty is Your Duty to organise events that "put things together that normally aren't put together," says Ilegems. The city told them: "We'll give you a small amount of money and old prison."

It turned out to be a great gift. *Pop-Eye* is an exhibition of Belgian musicians who create art and Belgian artists whose work incorporates music. It's rare to find a show so profoundly inspired by its space; prison cells have allowed each artist his or her own little gallery, to often sinister effect. Because the cells will be mostly demolished anyway, artists had free reign in the spaces.

As you might imagine, it's the

artists, rather than the musicians, who provide the most interesting work. Flemish video artist Nicolas Provost's latest film *Plot Point* is on view, with its beautiful ballet of synchronised New York police cars seeming to perform to the music of Moby. Flemish photographer Stephan Vanfleteren's portrait of Belgian blues master Roland Van Campenhout is well known – but hanging alone at the back of an all-black prison cell leaves one with the impression that perhaps all the serial killers haven't quite moved out yet.

In a larger space is work by two Belgian greats: cult rock artist Guy Peellaert and Kamagurka, whose illustrations have been appearing in *Humo* for years. I like his large-scale paintings here much better than I like his cartoons – one

piece in particular is a surprisingly poignant figure where psychedelia meets classical sculpture.

World famous rock & roll surrealist Peellaert, meanwhile, offers large-format prints of some of his best-known paintings, made famous in the books *Rock Dreams* and *21st Century Dreams*. Even if you know the work, it's tough to drag your gaze away from The Rolling Stones in Nazi uniforms surrounded by naked children or a solitary Bob Dylan wrapped in a fur coat, alone in his massive limo save for his little kitten.

Until 15 June, Oude Gevangenis, Martelarenlaan 42, Hasselt

Online

www.pop-eye.be



Anybody home? If you thought this photo of Roland Van Campenhout was creepy before...



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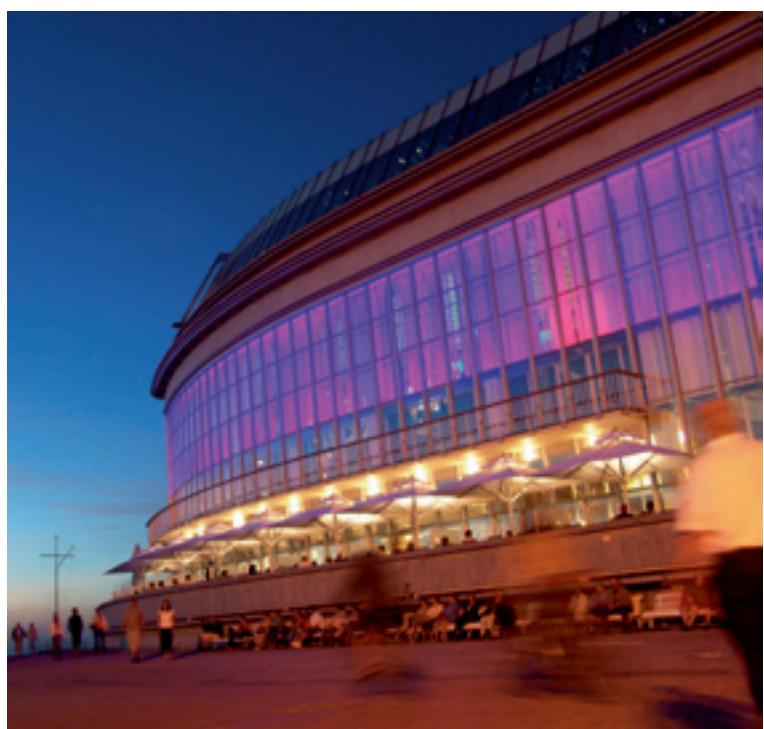
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Past master

Nothing has faced the challenges of being Belgian quite like the Ostend Casino



Before and after: the Ostend Casino in 1875 (top), and the modern building today

Steven Tate

Nostalgia isn't what it used to be," actress Simone Signoret famously said – and the Ostend Casino proves her point.

Old-timers still hanker for the original casino, outfitted in the Belle Époque style in the establishment's golden age. It was a 19th-century gem on the Flemish coast, attracting international attention, Leopold I and II, tsars, kings and the local upper crust. It sprang from an era when ladies wore hats and gloves, men stood when they entered the room, and the Belgian empire was at full throttle.

"But the casino that older people remember isn't even the original casino," says Tom Vanlerberghe, the communications manager. On a sun-dappled Wednesday morning, he points out the window up the coast to where the original Kursaal Casino Ostend was built in 1837. Sitting in a dining hall in the current beach-front casino, decked out in 1950s modern, his unspoken message is that everything must change.

The first version of the casino was a victim of its own success: over the first few decades, its popularity so grew, it was not able to accommodate all the visitors. The UK's love affair with the coastal city began in 1846, when a ferry started running between Ostend and Dover. Ostend's reputation exploded as a place where one could recuperate, thanks to the fresh sea air: even the word *kursaal* means "cure hall".

City elders came together and, realising the need to expand, decided to build a new casino. The current casino was designed and built in 1875 by Ostend-born architects Felix Laureys and Jean-Joseph Naert, calling on the Middle Eastern vogue of that era (photo, above). Since then, the building has benefited from a few makeovers, more by necessity than whim.

Alban Chambon, the architect behind Brussels' art nouveau masterpiece Hotel Métropole, gave the casino a facelift in 1905, transforming the former architects' work into florid extravaganza. Chambon's vision might have survived until this day – except for that pesky little event called the Second World War.

One of the casino's prized attributes – its excellent view of the sea – made it especially attractive to invading German forces, who needed both a bunker and a lookout for approaching enemies from England. They basically gutted the building, erasing all vestiges of the jewel it once was.

Once the war was over, Dutch architect Leon Stijnen was drafted by the city to remake the interior – not in its former image, but into something best described as post-Art Deco meets 1950s modern. Celebrated Belgian artist Paul Delvaux contributed a mural, which still stands, and the building looked more to Belgium's future than the past – finished five years before the World Expo.

Over the decades, though, the building again fell into disrepair until the city decided to refashion it not only as a place to gamble but as an entertainment venue. In 2005, the building was overhauled, but efforts were made to maintain much of Stijnen's original interior.

The Kursaal is still the country's largest casino, but conference halls were added, as well as an auditorium and state-of-the-art audio-visual facilities. Today, the building also has businesses operating in it. Ghent-based Flanders Catering runs the Michelin-starred Ostend Queen restaurant and the coffeehouse, where tourists and locals dine and drink.

The casino itself is a major tourist magnet, while the Kursaal is the major venue for theatre and concert events. Even if you've never set foot in it, you probably

know the Kursaal from television: sporting ceremonies, such as football's Golden Shoe and the Belgian Athlete of the Year are held here. Next month alone, it plays host to Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo, the Brazilian street dancing spectacle Bale de Rua and, more importantly for some, the Mrs Belgium Globe pageant, where married women compete to represent the ideal of Belgian femininity past 30.

"The Kursaal does have a cachet of prestige with people in the city, but it's also very accessible," says Vanlerberghe, noting that it's *the* place to party on New Year's Eve. "Last year we had three different dance floors – lounge upstairs, dance and pop mid-level and R&B downstairs. Partiers could go from one floor to another as the mood hit them." Kursaal manages the delicate balance between high and pop culture, while attracting commerce to keep itself (and the city) financially healthy. The dual purpose mirrors its status with Ostend: though owned by the city, it receives no government subsidy.

While at one time the Kursaal Casino Ostend served only the well-heeled, today it serves all residents. It's a landmark building – any renovations must take care to maintain Stijnen's vision – but it's not frozen in history. Though it's easy to bemoan the lost treasures of previous architects, Vanlerberghe prefers to point out what the Kursaal and Ostend have gained by moving with the times.

A golden statue of Marvin Gaye sits in the entry hall of the building, commemorating the soul man's final days in the city, when he wrote his last classic, "Sexual Healing". It was Gaye's comeback hit, and if any place knows anything about comebacks, it's Ostend's Kursaal.

online

www.kursaalostende.be

Classical & new music**Brussels****Basilica of Koekelberg**

Voorplein 1

JUNE 1 16.15 *Cor Sacratissimum*, conducted by Xavier Haag, with François Houtart, organ; Diane Gonnissen, soprano: Terpsichore, Houtart, Mendelssohn, Donizetti, Fauré, Jongen**Beursschouwburg**

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

JUNE 3 21.00 *An Evening with Auguste Orts*: Jean-Luc Fafchamps, piano: Morton Feldman's *Triadic Memories***Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)**

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,

www.bozar.be

MAY 30 20.00 *Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden Ensemble* conducted by Myung-Whun Chung, with Lars Vogt, piano: Messiaen, Mozart, Beethoven**JUNE 1** 11.00 *Trio Carlo Van Neste*: Dvorak, Smetana**JUNE 5** 20.00 *Queen Elisabeth Singing Competition 2008 closing concert*: Royal Wallonia Opera Orchestra conducted by Günter Neuhold**De Munt**

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39

Until MAY 30 12.30 *Queen Elisabeth Singing Competition 2008 Prizewinners***Espace Senghor**

Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be

JUNE 1 11.30 *Focus on composer Benoit Jacquemin*, with Anne Leonardo and Daniel Jacot, violin; Isabelle Scoubeau, viola; Jan Matthé, cello: Jacquemin's string quartet *Hommage à Purcell***Flagey**

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be

MAY 30 12.30 *Trio Horta*: Martin, Ravel**Get your tickets now for...****Krystian Zimerman**17 June, 20.00, *Bozar*, 23 Ravensteinstraat, Brussels. Tickets from 02.507.82.00 or www.bozar.be

A searching, incredibly self-critical pianist, Zimerman has been something of a legend ever since he bagged first prize at the 1975 Chopin Competition in Warsaw, aged 18 and the youngest of the 118 contestants. Fans will likely fight over tickets for this rare Brussels appearance (he notoriously shuns the limelight) with the chance to hear him in Bach's second *Partita*, Beethoven's formidable last sonata, four of Brahms' *Klavierstücke* and *Variations on a Polish Folk Theme* by his compatriot Karol Szymanowski. All these will be performed on his personal grand Steinway – Zimerman never tours without it.

JUNE 5 20.15 *Ictus* – *Trio Basson*: Haydn, Scelsi, Hidalgo**Goethe Institute**

Belliardstraat 58; 02.230.39.70

JUNE 3 20.00 *Ensemble Amarcord*: Schumann, Mendelssohn, Steinacker, Reger**Kapel van de Minnem**

Minnemstraat 62; 02.507.82.00, www.minimes.net

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**JUNE 5** 18.00 *Létzebuerg*

Männerkouer 1989, conducted by Edith Wolter, with Claude Heuschling, piano: Beethoven, Mozart, Grieg, Haydn and music by Luxembourg composers

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37

JUNE 4 20.00 *Prazak Quartet*: Haydn, Dusapin, Dvorak**Saint Michael and St Gudula Cathedral**

Sinter-Goedeleplein; 02.217.83.45

MAY 29 20.00 *Michael Radulescu*, organ: Bach, Radulescu, Reger**Sint Pieterskerk**

Kardinaal Mercierplein; 02.423.13.73

JUNE 1 16.00 *Sébastien Willems*, organ: Boëly (part of International Organ Festival)**Bruges****Concertgebouw**

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02

JUNE 1 17.00 *Family concert*: Vlaams Radio Orkest, conducted by Tan Dun, with Gert François, percussion: Dun's Water and Paper Concertos**Ghent****Handelsbeurs**

Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01

MAY 28 20.15 *Olli Mustonen*, Finnish composer, conductor and pianist**Sint-Niklaaskerk**

Korenmarkt

MAY 31 17.00 *Zilveren Nachtegaal* concerts 2008: Quatre Mains organ music**Tongeren****OLV Basiliek Tongeren**

Stadhuisplein; 012.23.57.19

MAY 31 19.30 *Basilica Festival of Flanders* opening concert with Das Neue Orchester Köln and Chorus Musicus**Jazz & blues****Brussels****Brasserie de L'Union**

Sint-Gillisvoorplein 55; 02.538.15.79

JUNE 1 12.00-16.00 *Carson Barnes & friends***Gemeentehuis Vorst**

Pastoorstraat 2; 02.370.22.11

MAY 29 20.00 *Place du Jeu de Balle***Jazz Station**

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78

MAY 28 20.30 *Peter Hertmans Quartet***MAY 30** 20.30 *Arraka***MAY 31** 18.00 *Anoo***Koninklijk Circus**

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15

MAY 28 20.00 *Joe Satriani***La Brocante Thoumas**

Blaesstraat 170; 02.512.13.43

MAY 31 12.00-16.00 *Carson Barnes & friends***Sounds Jazz Club**

Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,

www.soundsjazzclub.be

MAY 28 22.00 *Caribe Con K*,

Caribbean music

MAY 29 21.00 *The Singers Night***MAY 30** 22.00 *Natacha Wuyts Quintet***MAY 31** 21.00 *Brussels Rhythm'n Blues: The Witness***JUNE 5** 20.15 *Ictus* – *Trio Basson*: Haydn, Scelsi, Hidalgo**Stekerlapatte**

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81,

www.stekerlapatte.be

MAY 29 21.30 *JFK (Contemporary Baroque 'n' Roll)***The Music Village**

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45

Concerts at 20.30:

MAY 28 *Sagome* **MAY 29** *Jazz*Exams: new talent from the Royal Conservatory, Brussels **MAY 30** *Empl* Ibrahim Quartet (Azerbaijan) **MAY 31** *Ronald Douglas & The New Look Trio***Antwerp****Cafe Mambo**

Vlasmarkt 3

MAY 28 21.00 *Marcelo Moncada Quartet***Borgerhout****De Roma**

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.235.04.90

JUNE 5 20.30 *Wolfert Brederode Quartet + Jef Neve Trio***Bruges****De Werf**

Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29

MAY 30 20.30 *Klaus Paier Trio***Ghent****De Centrale**

Kraankindersstraat 2; 09.265.98.28,

www.decentrale.be

MAY 30 22.00 *Kamel Lebbad – Chante Enrico Macias***El Negocito**

Brabantdam 121; 0479 567395

MAY 28 21.30 *El Negocito Trouble and Desire Band***MAY 29** 21.30 *Andreu Martinez Project***MAY 31** 21.00 *Follia***Lokeren****Lokerse Jazzklub**

Gasstraat 27; 09.348.32.78,

www.lokersejazzklub.be

MAY 31 21.00 *Andre Donni Quartet***Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul****Brussels****Ancienne Belgique**

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

MAY 28 20.00 *Pepper + Flogging Molly***MAY 31** 20.00 *Isabelle A* **JUNE 1** 16.00 *Now* Series: Members of Marvelas + Tido Berman + Extince + B Dolan + Sage Francis **JUNE 3** 20.00 *Pete Murray, Cat Power* **JUNE 4** 19.10 *Boozed + Knucklebone Oscar + Dead Elvis & his One Man Grave + Peacocks + Peter Pan Speedrock***Café Dada**

Violettestraat 34; 0484.50.83.80

MAY 29 20.00 *Uncommon Men from Mars + Texas Hold'em***Fuse**

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89

MAY 31 23.00 *Marco Bailey, Ortin Cam, DJ Pierre***Koninklijk Circus**

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15

MAY 31 20.00 *Garou en live.bar***Le Botanique**

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32

Concerts at 20.00:

MAY 28 *A Place to Bury Strangers***MAY 31** *Martha Wainwright* **JUNE 3** *Beach House + Fleet Foxes. The Ruby Suns* **JUNE 4** *Born Ruffians* **JUNE 5** *Tokyo Police Club***Phoolan Bar**

Luxemburgstraat 43; www.phoolan.be

MAY 29 & JUNE 12 18.00 <

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)

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-François 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 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 Elektriciteitscentrale European Centre for Contemporary Art
 Sint Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.31
Until JUNE 1 Rhetoric Machine/Pop Ark, installations by Noah Fischer (part of *Kunstenfestivaldesarts*)

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

De Markten
 Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25
Until 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

Erasmus House
 Kapittelstraat 31; 02.521.13.83
Until JUNE 15 Anatomie van de Ijdelen (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 (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

Instituto Cervantes
 Tervurenlaan 64; 02.737.01.90
Until MAY 30 Flamenco: paysage del alma, photographs by Gilles Larraín

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

La Raffinerie
 Manchesterstraat 21; 02.410.33.41
MAY 30-31 Meinhof, audiovisual installations by Annik Leroy

Le Botanique
 Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32
MAY 29-JUNE 29 Vodoun/Vodoun: Portraits of Initiates, photographs of voodoo priests by Jean-Dominique Burton
MAY 29-JUNE 29 Jérôme Considerant, installations

Museum van Elsene
 Jean Van Volsemstraat 71; 02.515.64.22
MAY 29-AUG 31 The Belle Epoque, sculpture by Alexandre Charpentier and the museum's collection of posters by Toulouse-Lautrec, among other fin-de-siècle works

René Magritte Museum
 Essegemstraat 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 contemporary South Korean artist Lee Ufan
Until SEP 21 The British Royal Collection: From Bruegel to Rubens, more than 50 paintings from the Queen Elizabeth II's collection, with major works by Hans Memling, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Peter Paul Rubens and others, shown alongside masterpieces from the museum's collection
Until SEP 21 Expo '58: Contemporary Art at the World Fair, revisiting the 1958 exhibition 50 Years of Modern Art
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 JUNE 1 Collectie (Collection), installation of "useless" objects, models and drawings by Benjamin Verdonck
Until JUNE 1 Dan Perjovschi: All Over, wall drawings by the Romanian artist

Until JULY 27 Mike Kelley Educational Complex Onwards: 1995-2008, retrospective with large-scale installations, sculptures, paintings and photographs by the American artist
Antwerp
 Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)

Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60
Until SEP 9 Fantasy, intervention by Koen van den Broek
Until AUG 17 Die Lucky Bush, contemporary art show curated by 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

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

Extra City
 Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70
MAY 30-JULY 27 Blow Job, work by Peter Friedl

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, photographs by 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

Middelheim Museum
 Middelheimlaan 6; 03.827.15.34
JUNE 1-AUG 17 Open air installations by Leo Copers

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

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

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
Until SEP 7 Circus or Science: The Roca Collection, anatomical collection from the late 19th and early 20th centuries
Until SEP 7 Jean Rustin, retrospective of work by the French painter
Until 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, www.smak.be
Until JUNE 29 Kunst Nu: Wilfredo Prieto, installation by the Cuban artist
Until JULY 6 Guillaume Bijl, retrospective of the Flemish artist
Until JULY 27 Hors de soi, installations by Benoît Félix

Hasselt
 Modemuseum
 Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21

Don't miss this week



Almuten Giesgo-Andertrecht Academy

Kunstenfestivaldesarts

Until 31 May, across Brussels. Tickets from 070.22.21.99 or www.kunstenfestivaldesarts.be

This week is your last chance to catch some of this annual festival's adventurous programme – a vivid and often disconcerting snapshot of contemporary artistic creation from across the world. *Call Cutta in a Box*, by Berlin's Rimini Protokoll, invites you to reflect on globalisation by stepping into an office in central Brussels and chatting on the phone with a call centre employee in Calcutta; *Freetime* is a weirdly elegant choreography by Toshiki Okada highlighting the fragile preoccupations of today's Japanese youth; and *Finales*, by acclaimed Argentinean director Beatriz Catani recounts the story of a woman whose life veers to existential crisis the day she discovers a dead cockroach in her home (photo). Jolting installations by New York's Noah Fischer, impudent drawings by Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi and a compelling lecture about the recent social upheavals in China by Australian-Chinese William Yang. So much to see, so little time left.

Until AUG 31 Looks: Mode 1750-1958, Two-hundred years of fashion history

DJs

Until JUNE 5 in venues across Belgium www.springsessions.be

Brussels

Family-friendly Environment Day: Discover an ecology area organised by students, a farm and children's entertainment, bike recycling and organic food stands. Music by Neneh Cherry and her band CirKus
JUNE 1 11.00-21.00 at Jubelpark www.bruxellesenvironnement.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 performing and visual arts festival dedicated to new works and dialogue between different communities in the city
Until MAY 31 in venues across Brussels 070.22.21.99, www.kfda.be

Port Festival: Brussels port open to the public with free events for the whole family, including tours of ships, yachts and barges, diving, canoeing, water skiing, sailing and street theatre
JUNE 1 10.00-18.00 at Bassin Béco (Havenlaan and Van Praet bridge) www.portenfete.be

Bruges

Airbag Festival: The second edition of this festival offering a full range of accordion music from the traditional sounds of Rocco Granata and Antonio Rivas to contemporary world artists La Troba Kung-Fu and Otros Aires
Until JUNE 1 across Bruges www.airbagfestival.be

Ghent

't Schoon Vertier Feest: Cabaret fanfare show both inside and on the canal; the first 150 guests receive a free "Vertier punch"
MAY 30 21.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23 09.267.28.28

MY FLANDERS

Bert Mosselmans

Bert Mosselmans is the Dean of Vesalius College in Brussels. We find out what the college offers foreign students and why Brussels is the perfect place to study.

Are you Belgian?

I am Belgian but I was brought up in Germany. I've also lived in the Netherlands and the UK.

Can you tell us about Vesalius College?

It was founded in 1987 in Brussels as a private college and is closely linked with the Flemish and French-language Free Universities, VUB and ULB, as well as Boston University's Brussels campus.

So what makes Vesalius different?

We are one of the few places in Belgium that provide undergraduate classes in English. The language laws in this country are very strict; state-funded universities have to provide 90% of their teaching in either Dutch or French. We are one of the few institutions accredited by the Flemish government, along with the College of Europe in Bruges and the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, that teach all courses in English.

What sort of courses do you offer?

We have a three-year programme. Students can choose to focus on business, international affairs or communications. But all of our programmes have a strong European dimension.

Apart from the beer and chocolates, what makes Brussels a good place for foreign students?

We are based in the capital of Europe, and we make Europe the focal point in all our courses. We

provide an excellent international education for anyone who wants to start his or her career in Europe; if Europe is your focus, then you have to study in Brussels.

Do you work with international organisations based in the city?

We have a strong internship programme. We ensure that the students gain something useful from their work experience and aren't just told to make photocopies. They can see how organisations such as NATO and the UNODC work, or start networking in international companies, for example InBev in Leuven or *The Bulletin* in Brussels.

How many students are enrolled at Vesalius?

We have some 300 students from a wide range of backgrounds. One third are American, and about 15-20% are Belgians. We have a number of students who come from diplomatic and international families in Brussels.

What can you offer in the way of facilities?

We are close to the VUB and ULB, and students can use all the facilities, including both libraries, a swimming pool, restaurant and fitness centre. They can get a year's gym membership for €200, which is very cheap for Brussels.

What about the bottom line. You're a private university so students pay fees. How do the costs compare with other universities?

We are obviously more expensive than Belgian universities because we don't receive any government subsidies. However, we can compete with US universities, even though the dollar is low. We are on about the same level as UK institutions, but the cost of living is much lower in Brussels.

Although you are Belgian, you have lived most of your life outside of the country. Are there any cultural differences you notice?

I live at the moment in the Netherlands, and I see many differ-

ences between the Dutch and the Belgians. The Dutch are much more direct, whereas Belgians are less outspoken. They don't like to express an opinion. And you have to know people in Belgium to get things done.

Do you think the Dutch like living in Belgium?

The food is better, and housing is cheaper. But certain things are more efficient in the Netherlands, like taxation.

What makes Brussels a good place to study as a foreign student?

You find everything here. There's a huge variety of culture – and much of it is available in English. There are also opportunities to travel: by train we are close to Paris, London and Amsterdam. We really are at the heart of Europe.

Interview by Derek Blyth

Vesalius is holding its 18th US-style graduation ceremony on June 1 in the Brussels Marriott Hotel.

Online
www.vesalius.edu



THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

Congo criticised

"Congo has no problem with my tone. I'm just saying things they don't want to hear. Even if I set it to music or performed it as a variety act, they would still not want to hear it."

Karel De Gucht, head of Belgium's diplomacy

Don't count on it

"It's a little too early to celebrate."

Jef Van den Heede of Deurle
hands out genever shots as his
village makes the final of *Het
Mooiste Dorp van Vlaanderen*

Lost for words

"What's next, Belgium?"

De Standaard in post-mortem
mode after Ishtar's song –
based on an invented language
– was ejected from the
Eurovision competition

CityBookshops **Zot Indebanvan**
boeken BestFlemishWines 3Suisjes
SummerReading
next week in Flanders Today