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The waiting is over

Amid a huge celebration and an excited neighbourhood, the square at Flagey is nearing completion

Alan Hope

On both sides of a concrete structure in the middle of the new Flageyplein, a graffiti vandal has sprayed the words "C'est moche" (It's ugly).

It won't be by this weekend, when the last of the rubble is carted away, the ground is swept and the long, snaking wooden benches given a quick buff-up. By the time festivities begin on Saturday, 5 July, Flageyplein will be, according to Pascal Smet, public works minister for Brussels region, the second-most beautiful square in the city (after the Grote Markt).

Like the Grote Markt, it will be the transformation of an abused space into a distinctive public area, meeting-place and venue for arts and entertainment. Like the Grote Markt, what was once a giant parking space will be handed back to the strolling public. Flagey promises to be a grand piazza in the southern European style: a place to meet and hang out, to bring the kids, to see and be seen.

For Charles Picqué, minister-president of Brussels region, who learned to ride a bike around Flagey, the square is "emblematic" – a point of contact between different areas: the bosky, well-appointed blocks near the Elsene ponds between Flagey and Louisalaan; the somewhat grimy commercial area of Elsensesteenweg and Lesbroussartstraat; and the immigrant area on the western side of the square towards Kroonlaan.

The genesis of the new square was rather more prosaic: the city needed somewhere for floodwaters to run in times of severe weather. So the plan was hatched to build an enormous storm-control reservoir under the square. That offered the opportunity of installing underground parking, thus liberating the surface.

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Vlaams Radio Koor, based in Flagey, performs on Sunday



News

The four ports of Flanders are holding an open day on 5 July. The aim is to show the public around the vast installations that serve some of the world's foremost shipping companies.

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Art

The thriller *In Bruges* finally comes to Flemish screens, but is it any good? Lisa Bradshaw reviews the film we've all been waiting to see.

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Knokke on heaven's door. Denzel Walton launches our summer season at the sea by taking a look at the coast's most sophisticated resort.

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Russian billionaire snaps up Fortis shares

Bank hit by financial crisis in wake of US sub-prime crisis

Alan Hope

Russian billionaire Suleiman Kerimov has stepped in to help save the Belgian-Dutch banking and insurance group Fortis after a disastrous week on the stock market. The bank was forced last week to launch an emergency rights issue to raise capital, issuing 150 million new shares at €10. According to reports in the *Wall Street Journal*, Kerimov bought 40 million of the new shares, boosting the 2% stake he already owned.

Kerimov is best known in this country as a former patient of the military hospital

in Neder-over-Heembeek, where he was treated following a serious car accident in the south of France in November 2006. Two full-time male nurses specialised in burns are detailed from Neder-over-Heembeek to treat him at his home in Russia, but Kerimov pays all expenses, including the nurses' travel costs.

Kerimov, aged 41, was listed at Number 35 in *Forbes* magazine's list of the world's richest, but his ranking is disputed because of his debts (the level of which is unknown, although thought to be substantial). He

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EDITOR'S NOTES

July 11

July 11 is the Flemish Community Holiday. It's not an official public holiday, so your local baker will probably be working as normal. Civil servants in Flanders get the day off, but for many it's a day like any other. So what does this semi-holiday mark? Some Flemish people know. Others haven't much of an idea.

The date is the anniversary of a battle that happened more than 700 years ago, a long time before the battle for independence that Americans celebrate on 4 July or the revolution that the French recall on 14 July. The Flemish, clearly, have long memories.

In 1302, the French king Philip IV sent an army of elite knights and infantry to punish the citizens of Bruges for rising up against their French governor. The Flemish resisted with some 9,000 men, many of them weavers gathered from the towns of Bruges, Ghent and Kortrijk.

The two armies met in a Flemish bogland outside the walls of Kortrijk. The French knights, who were among the best in Europe, charged across the field towards the Flemish, but the soggy ground gave way under the heavy horses. The Flemish then attacked, slaughtering the

cream of the French aristocracy and gathering some 700 golden spurs, which were later hung up in a church in Kortrijk.

The battle marked the beginning of what the American historian Barbara Tuchman called "the calamitous fourteenth century." It showed, almost for the first time in history, that knights on horseback could be defeated by disciplined infantry. It meant that events could be shaped by poor workers armed with nothing more than wooden pikes. A kind of democracy was born in that muddy field outside Kortrijk, proving that the aristocracy was no longer in control of events.

For most people, however, the Guldensporenslag, or Battle of the Golden Spurs, is a day of celebrations. There are free concerts and parades in all the big cities as well as 200 smaller towns and villages. It's like the Fourth of July, only a little bit more Flemish.

Derek Blyth

online

www.vlaanderenfeest.be
www.deguldenontsporing.be

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Flanders Today

independent newsweekly

Editor: Derek Blyth
Deputy editor: Lisa Bradshaw
News editor: Alan Hope
Science editor: Saffina Rana
Agenda: Sarah Crew
Picture research: Esther Bourrée
Prepress: Nancy Temmerman
Contributors: Marie Dumont, Stéphanie Duval, Sharon Light, Alistair MacLean, Ian Mundell, Monique Philips, Leander Schaeferlaeckens, Steven Tate, Denzil Walton, Rory Watson
Project manager: Pascale Zoetert
Publisher: VUM
NV Vlaamse Uitgeversmaatschappij
Gossetlaan 28, 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden
Editorial address: Waterloosesteenweg 1038
1180 Brussels



Tel.: 02.373.99.09 – Fax: 02.375.98.22
E-mail: editorial@flanderstoday.eu
Subscriptions: France Lycops
Tel: 02.373.83.59
E-mail: subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu
Advertising: Evelyn Fregone
Tel. 02.373.83.57
E-mail: advertising@flanderstoday.eu
Verantwoordelijke uitgever: Derek Blyth

FACE OF FLANDERS

Photo: N. News



Jan Creve

Last week the bulldozers moved into Doel, and seven villas were razed to the ground. The houses, according to the Scheldt Left-Bank Company (MS), which demolished them, were "uninhabitable". According to Jan Creve, coordinator of the group Doel 2020, that's "a blatant lie. Short of a good clean, they were perfectly fit to live in."

It might seem like a small matter, the demolition of unoccupied houses by the owners – the Flemish government. But for the people of Doel, the move is a provocation – and even "intimidation," Creve says. "The tourist season is about to start," he told *Flanders Today*, "and there are more than 10,000 people expected to visit. This is a message to them and a message to us."

It's a message, if he's right, on a par with a horse's head in the bed. It says: Your village will disappear in the end, and this is how it will happen. Because Doel, a village on the left bank of the Scheldt just north of the Liefkenshoek tunnel and just south of the border with Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, is under a death sentence. The East Flanders village dates back to the 13th century when it was known as De Doolen, probably meaning "excavated sand-hills". The modern name means "target", but that's coincidental.

Since the 1960s, it's been accepted wisdom that expansion of Antwerp harbour would mean that Doel would eventually disappear. It may seem strange – and slightly Stalinesque – to simply wipe a village off the map, but it's not the first time: the Flemish towns of Oosterweel, Lillo, Wilmarsdonk and Oorderen have all gone the same way.

But Doel refuses to go without a fight. "There wasn't much we could do to hold up the demolition," said Jan Creve, a historian and author. They did make a token resistance attempt with some vehicles blocking the road, but the police soon convinced them to move.

"We still have a case lodged with the Council of State," Creve said. The demolitions are a breach of the agreement reached with MS to suspend further steps before the results of court action. "They're also illegal," asserted Creve. "Doel is officially still a residential area, and they can only move on with compulsory purchases once the area is declared industrial. But that doesn't stop them putting pressure on people to sell up voluntarily" – as happened with the owners of the seven houses affected last week.

In the meantime, Doel 2020 puts its faith in the courts and the growing number of people unwilling to see the village wiped out. "There's no reason whatsoever for them to begin demolition now. We're not holding anything up. There are no works scheduled, and there are in fact no concrete plans for works of any sort."

The group has a viability study on its website showing that, despite the nearby Deurganckdok, whose arrival was supposed to put the village in jeopardy, there's no reason for Doel to be depopulated, let alone destroyed.

Alan Hope

online

www.doel2020.org

TALKING DUTCH

notes on language



tweetalig

Years ago we were having a drink in the *Chagall*, one of our favourite haunts on the promenade of the coastal resort of Nieuwpoort-Bad. The next table was occupied by a group from Brussels and their dog. I assume they were from Brussels because they were speaking both Dutch and French.

My young sons were taken by the dog and spoke to it in Dutch, at which point one of the group said, "Sorry, maar de hond is eentalig Frans." In other words, it was a monolingual mongrel. It struck me that there are few places where you'd apologise that your dog is not bilingual.

Once newcomers to Belgium have worked out that there are two languages spoken, they often assume that the country is bilingual – *tweetalig* – that everyone speaks Dutch and French.

In fact, Belgium has three official languages: Dutch, French and German. The 60,000-odd German speakers are to be found in a small area up against the German border in the Walloon Region; most of them speak German and French. In the rest of the country,

there are the happy few who are at home in Dutch and French. Most of those are Flemings who live or work in and around Brussels, which is officially bilingual.

But even with Flemings, things are changing, with the numbers of Dutch speakers that speak good French dropping.

There are, however, places in Belgium where a knowledge of more than one language is a must. Our local supermarket has ladies at the checkouts who do their job in four languages! Another example is *de Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers*, the House of Representatives, where the deputies expect to be helped in their mother tongue, which means that staff members have to be fluent in both languages.

Debates are rendered in the other national language by "oral translators" and not by interpreters. The Clerk of the House made the difference clear when simultaneous translation equipment was installed in the 1930s: "An interpreter translates into a foreign language, which is not the case here. The oral translators repeat in the one or the other national language what was delivered in another of these languages." A nice distinction!

In my own family we've developed our own bilingualism, but with me holding the short straw. My wife and children speak Dutch with each other, which I must say I have no difficulty following, and English with me. Easy for me you might think, but they're the ones who can switch with ease from the one language to the other.

So if you have the chance to bring kids up bilingually, go for it – this may entail finding a non-English speaking partner first. Don't listen to the jeremiads who warn of dire linguistic confusion, which admittedly may occur if an individual parent mixes languages with the child. And with the withering of foreign-language teaching in English-speaking countries, if you're an English speaker, what a trump to put in the hand of your child: *een tweede taal*.

Alistair MacLean

online

www.vandale.be

FEATURE



Flageyplein gets a facelift

Continued from page 1

The works went ahead in 2002, but the part of the plan concerning the surface square was, according to Smet, "Very classical, not ambitious, very much an engineer's vision, and took no account of the views of the residents." So two years in, he launched an international competition for ideas for the piazza, which was won by Latz & Partner and D+A International. Their design picks up the motifs of the Elsene ponds, carrying them over to the square in the form of trees and fountains, as well as the

tree-like structures holding up the glass roof of the giant tram shelter. "I think of the square as the third lake," Smet says.

Long wooden benches echo the wood of the trees and the sweeping curves of the lakes. They also, more importantly, invite people to come and sit, and stay a while. "Flageyplein will become the living room of the quarter," Smet comments, while also acting as "the anteroom for the Flagey building."

To make it more like a living room, there will be a giant TV screen installed, which will be

used for relaying major events, such as sports matches or concerts – perhaps even, Smet suggests, providing some overflow for concerts in Flagey (an idea he apparently hadn't discussed with Flagey director Hugo De Greef, to judge by the look on the latter's face).

The completion of the square will bring to an end six years of construction misery for the residents of the area – though too late for those whose businesses closed because it was impossible for customers to reach them. As a reward, the region is spending €350,000 on a festival to mark the

opening of the square.

"This is a great consolation," says Elsene mayor Willy Decourcy. "It is a time for turning the page and moving forward." But he warned the area might now be a target for gentrification, as richer homeowners will be attracted to the area, pushing prices up and forcing out the people who have lived here for so long. The point was echoed by French-community culture minister Fadila Laanan, who happens, like the other ministers involved in the launch, to be a socialist: "The new Flagey is not for an élite," she says.

A bit of rain on the parade

Mid the boosterism of the opening of Flageyplein, there remain some problems. The underground part of the square was originally intended to house a parking garage, but that will remain closed for the time being. The problem is that, although the storm reservoir is in place, when it fills up, it overflows right into the space where the parking places would be.

Nobody wants to contemplate the likelihood of lawsuits for damage to property, let alone injuries – even if the chances of such a thing happening are, according to public works minister Pascal Smet, extremely small. It's not yet known when a solution will be found, though Smet assures that there will be one.

The other cloud over the sun is more of a grudge and concerns the stone used to floor the entire piazza. The intention there, as so often in public works in Belgium, was to use *blauwe steen* – Belgian blue stone – a limestone quarried in Hainaut.

But the contractor, conscious of the tight budget, sourced his stone in China instead, arousing the wrath of the Belgian industry. Asian blue stone is less resistant and more vulnerable to pollution, they argued. That makes a difference to the stone's longevity and, as important, to its aesthetic quality. On the other hand, the difference in price is not negligible: about €160 per square metre for the Belgian stone and €60 for the Chinese, for an area of around 8,000 square metres.

And while EU law forbids any public works contract to specify a local material, protesters used an environmental argument: the transport of 1,000 square metres of blue stone from China uses 11,400 litres of fuel more than if the stone came from nearby, according to Caroline Persoons, MR-FDF deputy, questioning Smet in the Brussels parliament in January. According to Decourcy, speaking in the same debate, the floor of the Heilige Kruisplein, which has been finished for some time, is already showing indelible marks of wear after only one Christmas market.

It's not open until the Brusseleers sing

The grand opening of Flageyplein is a week-long affair, starting on Saturday, 5 July at 17.00 with a parade of marching bands from all corners of Belgium, not to mention the majorettes that go along with them, and the odd circus act. At 20.00, the square will be officially inaugurated, after which the music continues, culminating after dark in a *son et lumière* show, followed by fireworks. From about 23.00, the Heilige Kruisplein in front of the church will be the scene of the projection of a silent film. Alternatively you may wish to make your way to the Théâtre Marni for a concert by Mamano, a singer from Cape Verde.

On Sunday from 10.00 to 14.00, there's a mega-brunch for all the family, the tables being laid with whatever you buy yourself from the local weekly market around the square. You'll also find workshops, music and storytellers to keep kids busy. There's a special kids' ball on the Heilige Kruisplein from 15.00, while the grown-ups enjoy a performance of Allegri's *Miserere* inside, courtesy of the Vlaams Radio Koor. There's a ball for everyone from 17.00 to 22.00, with the Galician dance ensemble



Mafalda Arnauth sings at Flagey on Friday

Pesdelan, tarantella group Officina Zoe and music from Brazil and Congo.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday are time for guided tours, sport and exhibitions, including one by the students of La Cambre architecture school showing their ideas for the square.

On Thursday, there is an open day at the Museum of Elsene, but the bill-topper is Vaya Con Dios in an evening concert on the square, which also includes guests from the Brussels

music world: Marie Daulne of Zap Mama, Philippe Catherine, Geike Arnaert from Hooverphonic and Myriam Fuks, among others.

Friday is Portuguese night, in salute to the many Portuguese people and businesses that surround Flageyplein. Mafalda Arnauth is the star from 21.00, bringing a new dimension to fado. At the same time, the mayor of Lisbon and the Portuguese ambassador to Belgium will take part in the inauguration of the new Pessoaplein, named after the Portuguese writer and poet.

Finally, the big day is Saturday, 12 July, when the Orchestre d'un Jour, which met in the morning for the first time and has been rehearsing all day, takes the stage at 18.00 for a performance of a surprise work. At 19.00 the Vlaams Radio Orkest, like the Koor a resident of the Flagey building, takes over with a performance of film music, followed by a second half consisting of the *Symphony from the New World* by Dvorak.

Online

www.placeflageyplein.eu



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Fortis chairman predicts US "meltdown"

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made his fortune largely by heavily-leveraged buying of former state-owned companies, which he then asset-strips and sells off.

The capital injection caused Fortis' share to plunge 19% in a single day, wiping €5 billion off the company's pre-slump value of €27.8 billion. The bank was reduced at a stroke to less than the €24 billion it paid for ABN AMRO, after shareholders voted with their feet on a plan to raise €8 billion in capital to strengthen the bank's financial position.

A rights issue such as the one just carried out dilutes the holding of existing shareholders, who in turn can only maintain their stake if they take up the option of buying new shares. In addition, Fortis had announced that the interim dividend would not be paid out, but the annual dividend would be paid in 2009 in the form of shares instead of cash.

While some shareholders chose to decline, others, such as Chinese insurer Ping An, signed up, with reports estimating an uptake of 5% of the issue, to match the 4.99% Ping An already owns as Fortis' biggest shareholder. Institutional investors in Belgium and the Netherlands also took up the new shares, as did government investment funds in some Arab countries, financial newspaper *De Tijd* reported.

Fortis CEO Jean-Paul Votron immediately came under fire, but received the support of the board, particularly bank chairman Maurice Lippens. He argued that the credit crisis in the US made it essential for Fortis to strengthen its capital now, before things got worse. "It was a difficult decision, but we were under stiff pressure from the financial markets," Lippens said.

He now predicts "a tough 18 months" on the way, caused by "complete meltdown" of financial markets in the US. "Things are going much

badly



Fortis CEO Jean-Paul Votron

worse than expected," Lippens claims. Among the worst effects of the crisis: bankruptcies among smaller US banks with insufficient resources and possible repercussions for larger groups like Citicorp and General Motors.

On the home front, meanwhile, Lippens admitted that Fortis could now, thanks to its drastically-reduced share price, be the target

for a takeover. "You can always be taken over," he said. "But most other banks and insurance companies are having a difficult time right now as well. And those who are in a position to take us over know they'd be better not doing it in the coming 18 months, since we'll have our hands full with the difficult task of integrating ABN AMRO."

Inno faces fines for early sales

The department store chain Inno was ordered last week to pay €5,000 for every article it sold at sale prices in the run-up to the official start of the sales period this week. The commercial court in Brussels found the store in breach of the so-called block-period – the one month preceding the official opening of the sales, during which no price reductions are allowed. This year many larger stores, including Inno, arranged for their summer clearance sale to fall just before the start of official sales, which began on 1 July.

The court's ruling is unlikely to be enforced, but may act as a warning to shops to remind them of the rules. It was welcomed by Unizo, the organisation for the self-employed, which represents independent retail businesses and which, together with the retail fashion organisation Mode Unie, filed a complaint with the court. The organisations consider the block-period a protection for small businesses and oppose plans suggested recently by minister of the economy Vincent Van Quickenborne to scrap it in the interests of administrative simplicity.

Flemish kids are out of shape

Nine out of 10 Flemish youngsters are not as fit as they ought to be, according to tests carried out on 34,300 schoolchildren in 49 secondary schools across the region. But boys are in better shape overall than girls, particularly as they get older.

The fitness test was administered by FitClass School Challenge and consisted of a running test of increasing speed. When a child reached maximum speed, his or her heart-rate and the distance covered were measured to give a score of up to seven, with a score of five considered a pass. But only 14% of children scored five or better. After a first attempt, those who failed were given fitness and nutrition advice and, when tested again 12 weeks later, the pass-rate rose to 19%, with 70% in all achieving an improvement of at least one point.

Anciaux pays €4.5 million for dance studio

Culture minister Bert Anciaux last week agreed to pay €4.5 million for the dance studio in Vorst commune used by Rosas, the dance company of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker. The former royal laundry in the Van Volxemlaan will, Anciaux said, "make Brussels into the dance centre of the Flemish community". At present the premises are occupied by Rosas itself, which has offices and rehearsal space, as well as the P.A.R.T.S. dance school, which also makes rehearsal space available to other dancers.

The sale will come as a welcome boost to Rosas' finances, following the loss of around €500,000 in annual subsidy since it is no longer the in-house dance company of the Muntschouwburg. Right now the company pays some €258,000 a year in rent. Under Flemish region ownership, that bill will be cut to €20,000. The current owner of the premises is a property company owned by Dutch businessman Kees Eijrond and Belgian industrialist Piet Van Waeyenberge. Anciaux said the price was "fair" and less than the estimated value put on the property by his acquisitions committee. "And it is in a developing area, where we will be able to reinforce the Flemish presence."



A scene from the Rosas production *Keeping Still*, in the Van Volxemlaan studio this August

FIFTH COLUMN



Vilvoorde City

Ask any Fleming what Vilvoorde stands for and this is what you will get. Vilvoorde used to have a huge Renault factory, which closed in 1997. Vilvoorde is also the hometown of former prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene. Vilvoorde, furthermore, is where the commercial television VTM broadcasts its programmes. And "Vilvoorde City" is a 1970s song by Kris De Bruyne that amusingly seemed to locate the town in the Far West (which, coincidentally, is the name of one of Vilvoorde's quarters). All of these have given Vilvoorde the reputation of a no-nonsense working man's town.

These days, Vilvoorde is known for an entirely different matter, as the council has decided that potential buyers of one of 15 social housing units have to prove they know Dutch, either by providing Flemish diplomas or by successfully completing a Dutch language test.

This decision goes one step beyond the Flemish government's Housing Code, which demands of non-Dutch-speakers wanting to rent social accommodation a *willingness* to learn the language, by enrolling in one of the many courses available. The difference with Vilvoorde is that there is no compulsory language test.

The Housing Code was originally inspired by the housing estates in Antwerp, where immigrants of dozens of different nationalities live together, often without a minimum of mutual communication possible. Having a *lingua franca*, it was hoped, would reduce friction. Hence the motivation for the Housing Code was a social one in the first place. However, in the municipalities around Brussels, French speakers, though they were not the original target group, felt victimized if not excluded. Soon the language aspect overshadowed the original social one.

In Vilvoorde, again, social reasons are given as a motivation. A good number of those unemployed in Vilvoorde are so only because they do not speak the language of the region where they live. Moreover, speaking Dutch is the easiest way of becoming part of the community.

In the background, though, there is the issue of the urban exodus from Brussels: city residents who would rather live in the leafy suburbs have for many years been driving out the original population with rising property prices. Moreover these city people bring their own language – usually French – with them, adding insult to injury. Add to this the fact that Vilvoorde, unlike Kraainem or Wezembeek-Oppem, does not attract a wealthy population, but a more underprivileged group, and you have a messy situation.

Prime minister Yves Leterme had pleaded for calm on both sides. At the same time, there is still some doubt as to whether the Vilvoorde decision will stand the test of the courts. Whatever the judges decide, Vilvoorde will have to follow the rule of law. Because no matter what Kris De Bruyne has been singing for years, this is not the Far West after all.

Anja Otte

Anja Otte is a freelance Flemish journalist whose work regularly appears in *De Standaard*.

A U-turn on the Antwerp viaduct?

The Flemish regional government has bowed to increasing public pressure and ordered an independent study into the viability and effects of the Lange Wapper bridge planned for Antwerp, reported in last week's *Flanders Today*.

The decision offers a glimmer of hope to opponents of the scheme, which is aimed at bringing freight traffic from the left-bank area of Antwerp harbour to the Ring, and improving access to Germany, the Netherlands and the south. Until last week, the government had been immovable in its attachment to the bridge, with three ministers claiming in the Flemish parliament that it was too late for alternatives.

But the protests would not go away: when the Mobile Antwerp Management company BAM revealed its plans to the public, the leading group of opponents, Straten-Generaal, made a renewed effort to make its alternative known. At the same time, a group of handicapped students from the Sint-Jozef Institute in Antwerp, whose school will lie directly under the double-decker bridge, joined in with protests to great effect.

The plan consists of two parts: a tunnel under the Scheldt river and a viaduct over a central part of the city. Critics oppose the viaduct on the grounds of environmental damage and noise and emissions pollution. Straten-Generaal, whose plan is the most viable alternative, proposes an extended tunnel and a road through the port area which would avoid residential areas and rejoin the Antwerp ring at a more northerly point.

The details of the government's brief were still unclear as *Flanders Today* went to press. Who will carry out the study and its terms of reference are not known. It seems clear that the study's tacit aim is to confirm what



ministers have been saying all along: that the current plan is the best option available. "I have no doubt about the choices we made in the past," minister-president Kris Peeters said. "But I want an answer to the question whether the alternatives were sufficiently examined. An objective and independent investigation is the only way to ensure transparency."

Meanwhile an investigation by *De Morgen* newspaper at the weekend revealed that the whole idea of a viaduct was a late addition to the plans. Initially, the paper said, a plan for a bridge over the river itself had been ruled out because of technical difficulties, with five alternative options unanimously in favour of

the use of tunnels. However the authorities, including former provincial governor Camille Paulus, were adamant in their support of a bridge, and so the study bureau in charge of viability studies was given a new option to look into, almost at the last minute. That was the Lange Wapper option, now the favourite and, until last week, the only surviving option.

One argument in favour of the bridge, in any case, has since vanished: the cost. At the outset, a tunnel was considered too expensive compared to the viaduct, whose price was set at €500 million. Since then the estimated cost has risen fivefold, to €2.5 billion. And not a stone has yet been laid.

NEWS FLASH



Nearly 2,000 people gave up farming in Flanders in 2007, according to figures calculated by the newspaper *De Streekrant*. The area hardest-hit was West Flanders, which lost 339 farmers, although this province also has the highest number of active agricultural businesses. While the number of farms being taken over by large businesses is increasing, the number of new entries to the industry is minimal, despite subsidies from the Flemish region for new farmers under the age of 40.

Belgian families owe a total debt to non-bank lenders of €1.37 billion, according to government figures. The largest share of the total is held by in-store credit cards, operated by chains like Kréf and Carrefour, which carry high rates of interest and are commonly used by poorer people whose credit ratings limit their borrowing options. A spokesperson for the banking federation Febelfin stressed that a financial institution is always involved in administering store-card systems, which need to meet the same strict lending standards applied to banks.

Schoolchildren and staff at a municipal school in Zele last week underwent medical tests after a pre-school teacher was diagnosed with tuberculosis. The tests were carried out by the Flemish Care and Health Agency and will be repeated after the summer holidays to check on the progress of the disease. TB is only infectious long after the person concerned has been infected, the agency said.

A Flemish software company based in Heverlee near Leuven has won a Design Award given by computer manufacturer Apple. Orbicule produces Macfinification, a programme designed for the Mac OS X Leopard platform to analyse and manage images produced by electron microscopes in biology, metallurgy or industrial laboratories.

"With Macfinification, we wanted to prove that scientific software does not need to be confusing or hard to use," said company CEO Peter Schols.

Antwerp-born David Kitai has won \$250,000 after beating off 604 contenders at the World Series of Poker in Las Vegas. Kitai, 28, who works in Brussels as a financial analyst for a bank, also takes away a coveted solid-gold WSOP bracelet. He was one of a small number of amateur players ranked highly in the tournament.

First bio-ethanol production starts in Aalst



The Aalst-based Syral plant last week came onstream with Belgium's first production of bio-ethanol. The plant, owned by French sugar cooperative Tereos, cost €20 million and has a capacity of 40,000 cubic metres.

The factory runs on plant residue from the production of starch, which normally would go into animal feed. However Syral is not a competitor for the feed sector, chief executive Pierre-Christophe Duprat said. Once the residue has been fermented, it is ready at that stage to go to animal feed. The industry is sensitive to accusations – hotly disputed by scientists – that the production of bio-fuels has been responsible for large price rises in basic foodstuffs such as wheat and maize.

Syral has been given a production quota of 32,000 cubic metres a year by the federal government. That's considerably less than two competitors, Biowanze in Wanze (125,000) and Alco in Ghent (90,500), but those are not due to come onstream until later in the year.

Syral production will go to the Total refinery in Antwerp, where an anti-knocking agent known as ETBE is added to allow the bio-fuel to be added to petrol. Later next year, the company hopes, when Alco and Biowanze come onstream, it will be possible to switch to direct mixing of bio-ethanol with gasoline.

Syral Aalst, formerly known as Amylum, was sold last year by Tate & Lyle to Tereos, the fourth-largest sugar producer in the world. Every year the factory processes 420,000 tonnes of wheat and 450,000 tonnes of intermediate products into starch derivatives, glucose and sucrose. The plant employs 367 people, including seven in the bio-ethanol division.

Voka proposes slimmer civil service

Belgium needs to get by with fewer civil servants, according to Flemish employers' organisation Voka. By the year 2019, the core personnel in the civil service should be reduced by 70,000, the organisation said. That's half the number of staff expected to leave naturally over the same time-frame, so extraordinary measures need not be taken, Voka said. A reduction in the number of departing civil servants being replaced would also free up more workers to fill the vacancies going unfilled in the rest of the jobs market, according to Voka.

The proposal, announced last week, forms part of Voka's programme for a slimmer, more efficient government, the cost of which the organisation estimates should not exceed 43.7% of GDP. At present spending on administration alone is standing 5% higher. And wages make up a large portion of spending.

Voka is also calling for an overall freeze on government spending programmes for this legislature and the next. That would still allow for some investment programmes to go ahead, or even be increased, so long as spending was balanced elsewhere with cuts. "The government is going to have to make choices and establish priorities on the basis of the main social tendencies," said Voka vice-president Philippe Vlerick. "Every change causes pain for a certain time, but not making changes in a changing world causes more."

Online
www.voka.be

Plans unveiled for Machelen tower

Developers promise a “lifestyle destination”



The Uplace Machelen complex by night (architect's impression)

Alan Hope

Property partnership Uplace has launched plans for the construction of a “lifestyle destination” almost directly under the Vilvoorde viaduct in the Machelen canal zone. The project, which the company refers to as a “city within a city,” will include a hotel and office tower, sport and leisure facilities and shops, spread over a

190,000 square metre area.

Uplace is an initiative of three Belgian managers, two of them graduates of Leuven and one of Ghent. Bart Verhaeghe, chairman, was CEO of logistics property developer Eurinpro before it was taken over by Australia's Macquarie Goodman, and now serves as partner at Vlerick Management School. CEO Jan Van Lancker was

general counsel at Eurinpro, while CFO Francis Hendrickx was also chief financial officer there.

The Uplace Machelen site promises to bring new economic life to a former industrial area. It was designed by architects Benoy, who were responsible for the Bullring redevelopment in Birmingham, England, as well as the Tuen Mun Town Plaza in

Hong Kong and Market City in Pune, India. And while Verhaeghe promises “the spectacular hotel and office tower will be an eye-catcher in the Brussels skyline,” it will nonetheless have to compete with a desolate post-industrial landscape and the eyesore that is the Vilvoorde viaduct. “We’re not building Disneyland,” Verhaeghe said, “but a place that reflects the history and identity of the region”.

The site was chosen as much for its planning permission as for its historical importance. A key factor was permission to build up to 163,000 square metres of office space as well as the high-rise, which though it isn’t on a direct approach still lies very close to the airport. The height of the tower has yet to be decided, but the working proposal is 100 metres. And in addition to the tower, the site will be divided up into various quarters featuring streets, plazas, roof gardens, an amusement park and indoor playground, radio and TV studios and a museum.

The office space is something that can be started immediately, explains Lorin Parys, Uplace spokesman. However the final total will be much less than the 163,000 square metres allowed: the 190,000 square metre area will be divided into 25% each of office, shopping and public space, 15% entertainment and culture and 10% hotel accommodation. The plan does not include residential space, at least in the first phase, but a completely separate housing project not far away will bring 1,500 families into the area, on the waterside opposite Vilvoorde park some 300 m away.

The entire project will cost €600 million, part of which will consist of “a sizeable contribution towards mobility solutions for the entire region” – including a regional rail network station, on and off ramps for the Ring and a new tram line. Parking will be provided for 7,200 cars, and the site served by various buses.

Construction is due to start in 2010, assuming the necessary permits are obtained. “We’ve had very constructive talks with the town of Machelen,” Parys says. “And the mayor has given his support for the project.” The project should be ready by 2012.



The 100-metre tower overlooks the viaduct in the foreground

BUSINESS FLASH

Guylian

Guylian, the Sint Niklaas-based chocolate manufacturer, best-known for its shell-shaped pralines (sold in Europe, the US and Australia), has been acquired by the South Korean Lotte company for €105 million. The move will open the Asian market to Guylian’s products while Lotte gets new opportunities in Europe.

ABX

ABX, the transport and parcel delivery company, formerly owned by the Belgian NMBS national railway company, has been acquired by the Danish DSV logistics group for some €750 million. The company was sold off by the Belgian state for €80 million two years ago to the UK-based 3i venture capital fund.

Van de Velde

Van de Velde, the lingerie manufacturer from Schellebelle, has acquired the Spanish Andre Sarda lingerie company for some €15 million. The move gives Van de Velde a stronger presence in a more upmarket and sexy lingerie market.

D'Ieteren

D'Ieteren, the Brussels-based car distribution and rental company, has paid some €30 million to acquire Diamond Glass, the second-largest car windows distribution and replacement company in the US. The move will give Belron, D'Ieteren's affiliate trading under the Carglass brand, a more than 20% share of the US market.

Philips

Philips, the Dutch lighting and electronics group, may close its television production unit in Bruges and transfer capacity to its Hungarian plant. The move, which would affect 154 jobs, follows a worldwide reassessment of the company's operations following lower than expected results.

Barbara Gladstone

Barbara Gladstone, considered one of the most prestigious New York contemporary art galleries, is to launch an affiliate in the Brussels' Zavel area in October.

Chinese investments

Chinese investments in Flanders have overtaken the €1 billion mark, according to the Flanders Investment and Trade office.

Labo Eco

Labo Eco, the Aartselaar-based company specialised in water processing to meet special requirements, has been acquired by Germany's Siemens Water Technologies.

Ixina

Ixina, the fitted kitchens distributor, has opened two new stores in Merksem and Turnhout. The company already operates 13 outlets in Flanders and plans to open an additional 10 over the next three years.

Colruyt

Colruyt, the Halle-based discount retailers, is investing €30 million in three distribution centres in Lot, near Brussels. The facilities, to open in 2010, will supply non-food products to the chain's stores.

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FILM

Think you know Bruges? Think again.

The film we've all been waiting for finally opens in Belgium



Trouble in paradise: Brendan Gleeson (left) and Colin Farrell hide from demons of the very-recent past in *In Bruges*

Lisa Bradshaw

The Bruges tourist office has been working hard for months now to promote *In Bruges*, the new British film that was shot in the historic city early last year. Nothing has injected more life into the capital of West Flanders than this major production – the first to be shot in Bruges in nearly 50 years – that showcases its most beautiful sites. They have published *In Bruges* tour maps and convinced several local businesses to include movie tie-ins to their products or services.

This is a pretty ironic thing when you discover that the anti-hero of *In Bruges*, played by Colin Farrell, completely despises the city. From the first frame to quite literally the last, he insults its scenery, its history, its medieval buildings, its accommodations and every person there he meets. Being a man of simple words, he evokes his favourite time and again: Bruges is, he says, "a shithole".

Indeed, throughout the film, the best of Bruges is put in difficult circumstances. A peaceful canal boat? Someone is shot on it. A charming hotel room? A party of cocaine and hookers. The beautiful tower with its winding staircase? A perfect place to plunge to your death.

But it's just these contradictions that make *In Bruges* a much more intriguing film than it would otherwise be. With every shot of the cathedral or windy, cobblestoned street or velvety pub interior, you are waiting to find out which dark underbelly of the medieval city the movie is going to show you next. *In Bruges* is practically the antithesis of Bruges itself

– and that makes it a much more interesting place.

Farrell plays Ray, who arrives in Bruges with companion Ken (Brendan Gleeson) on a cold December day. The two hitmen have been ordered to lie low in the Flemish city by their crime boss (Ralph Fiennes, gleefully overacting) after Ray's first-ever job took a turn for the worse. Based in London, they are both a little confused by the locale, but Ken takes the opportunity to play tourist, constantly reading from guides and encouraging the ever-bored Ray to climb the tower or to touch the vial that holds Christ's blood. ("Do I hafta?" asks Ray.)

Ray, indeed, is the "worst tourist in the world" and not taken in by 12th-century architecture or horse-drawn carriages. He shuffles and pouts, only ever wanting to drink beer (but not the "gay" kind). Finally, he spies a small film shoot taking place in the city, a dream sequence starring an American dwarf actor. "They're filming midgets!" he exclaims to Ken. "It's the best part of Bruges so far."

The relationship between the older, wiser and much more refined Ken, brought off easily by Gleeson, and the younger Ray is the film's highlight and salvation. However annoying Ray is, his recent experience in London has left a dark shadow over him from which he cannot emerge, and Ken watches over him like an older brother. When the call from their boss finally comes, and Ken finds out exactly why they're in Bruges, it's this empathy that guides him to make decisions that could cost him his life.

Irishman Martin McDonagh makes his feature film debut with *In Bruges*, after authoring several award-winning plays and winning an Oscar for his 2004 short film *Six Shooter*. Some of what we see in *In Bruges* could indeed work onstage, and the director falters with this switch of medium. Wanting to use the kind of violence you can't pull off in the theatre, he injects it at odd times and at levels that seem out of place.

McDonagh also stumbles with his desperation to be "quirky" – throwing oddball characters in your face out of nowhere. The kind of dark humour that Quentin Tarantino, for instance, handles superbly, has to come naturally and be dialogue or situationally driven. *In Bruges* is simply trying too hard.

Still, it comes very close. McDonagh's command of clever dialogue is evident. He also has a keen understanding of the difference between "Britain" and "Europe" and obviously grasps the paradox of Belgium's "famous anonymity". The crime boss, for instance, is glad that Bruges is in Belgium, he says, because "if it were somewhere good, there would be too many people coming to see it."

The Belgium jokes fly fast and furious, which makes *In Bruges* particularly appealing to those of us who live here. I laughed out loud several times, as did everyone in the press screening. They may be Belgian, but they can take a joke.

Ultimately, *In Bruges* is a mixed bag, but it's worth sampling. You'll come out of it with a smile – albeit a nervous one. And you'll never look at Bruges the same way again.

FILM FREAK

Écran Total

Those people who think that the arts shut down during the summer have obviously never been to Brussels. Aside from Bozar's big rock & roll themed exhibition and its Summer of Photography, movies are coming out of the capital's ears. Just as the Brussels Film Festival comes to a close this week, you'll find open air cinema sprouting up across the city. And then there is Écran Total.

This 11-week annual movie extravaganza is a gift for film lovers from Cinéma Arenberg, which calls it a "place for film from yesterday, today and tomorrow". This is explained through its categories: Classics, reprises and as-yet-unreleased films. A treasure for cinephiles, many selections also reach gently out to pull in the casual movie goer. "It's been a long time since you've seen the gay serial killer flick *Cruising...*" Écran Total gently whispers from the programme.

Among the classics are the ever-present Fellini and Bergman, plus *Metropolis*, Fritz Lang's 1927 silent masterpiece about a futuristic dystopia. Not exactly an original selection, but it's a new copy, so don't hesitate. Not all the films in this category, though, are so obvious. Ken Loach's second-ever theatrical film *Kes* you wouldn't expect to find in a "classics" category, though it certainly deserves it. The quiet 1967 movie about a troubled boy who trains a young kestrel hawk arguably remained the British director's best film for the next 20 years.

Reprises are recent releases you're being given a second chance to see. You'll find Dutch director Anton Corbijn's *Control* about the tragic Ian Curtis, lead singer of British post-punk band Joy Division (who had an intense extra-marital romance with an Antwerp girl that figures heavily in the movie). Also on the bill is David Cronenberg's exuberantly violent *Eastern Promises* and Tamara Jenkins' often-hilarious *The Savages*, starring Philip Seymour Hoffman and Laura Linney.

But what about the films you've never had a chance to see because they haven't been released in Belgium? There is Jacques Nolot's stark yet amusing *Avant que j'oublie* (Before I Forget), the story of an aging gay man with HIV who defiantly continues his amorous lifestyle; Jaime Rosales' brilliant *Le Soledad*, in which three women in Madrid are all affected by the same terrorist bombing; and the award-winning *Le Libre Arbitre* (the French translation of German director Matthias Glasner's *Der Freie Wille*, or *The Free Will*), an intelligent study of an ex-con trying to fight urges to commit the sexual violence that put him away nine years earlier.

And *Cruising?* It's part of the seven films that make up the homage to Al Pacino. There is also a portrait of Delphine Seyrig, the Lebanon-born actress famous for her ability to play German, French and English roles with equal aplomb. Finally, there are several films from the Japanese Nouvelle Vague, including three by the genre master Nagisa Oshima.

Every movie repeats, and there are eight screenings every day all summer long. So no whining about the crappy weather. Find a programme and pick your flick. **LB**

online

www.ecranton.be



An almost unrecognisable Donald Sutherland is the title character of Federico Fellini's *Casanova*, showing during Écran Total

The bitters and the sweet

A museum, distillery and cafe in one, the National Jenever Museum celebrates a Belgian tradition

Lisa Bradshaw

“Jenever,” says a guide to the National Jenever Museum “is like an old lady who is still very much alive.” Not terribly sexy, perhaps, but a completely appropriate description of Belgium’s national distilled drink. Jenever has been around for 500 years and is a traditional staple of the Flemish pantry – yet it refuses to go out of style.

Hasselt’s National Jenever Museum, housed in a 17th-century farm-turned-distillery, takes you through the history of the juniper berry-based alcohol and also of distillation in Europe as a whole. Its preserved malt house is a rarity, and its continued production of the drink, served in its own pub, bring the past and present deliciously together.

First thing’s first: When you pay your €3 admission to the museum in Hasselt’s inviting Witte Nonnenstraat, you are given a little plastic disc along with a simple guide. There was no explanation, but we soon discovered that the disk can be exchanged in the cafe at the back of the museum for a jenever! That’s what I call money well spent.

The cafe’s gracious servers sell hundreds of different varieties of the drink, including the museum’s own production of the official Hasseltse Jenever, which must be made according to special rules set down by ministerial decree. Only 1,000 bottles are produced annually, and the city hosts a Jenever Festival every October to share a taste with residents.

This year, the museum distillery also produced Sint-Lambertus-

drèpke, a wonderful concoction of coriander, hyssop, mint and other herbs mixed with dark berries and, of course, juniper berries, which every drink able to be called jenever must contain. My guest and I enjoyed this museum-made jenever so much, we left with a whole bottle. Okay, a few bottles, to be honest. But we had no choice – you cannot buy this jenever outside of Hasselt.

Aside from the juniper berries, anything goes with jenever, which is why there are so many varieties. To its base of either grain distillate or malt spirit (grain *eau de vie*), any number and volume of fruits, herbs, nuts or even vegetables can be added. Since settling in Flanders, I’ve had (among others) strawberry, blackberry, cherry, chocolate, vanilla, coconut, lemon, cactus, almond, endive, blood orange and violet jenever. That doesn’t include the non-flavoured varieties, of which many local cities have their own versions.

Juniper berries were used as early as the 13th century in the region of the Low Countries for its medicinal properties – boiled in rain water for stomach ache and in wine for cramps. It took nearly another century for distillation of fermented solutions to become a practice in Europe and another century before the distilled liquid known as “brandy” was in widespread use as much for its euphoria-inducing properties as for its medicinal ones.

The first recorded evidence of juniper berries being used in distillation processes is from the 16th century. Because of the rich availa-

bility of the berries in the regions of the Netherlands and Belgium, it became a speciality, and when the Archduke Albert and Infanta Isabella prohibited the distillation of grain into alcohol in the 17th century, many Flemish and Dutch producers moved south or east – you can still find companies making Jenever in Germany and France stemming from this exodus.

Interestingly, the city of Hasselt belonged to the domain of Liège at the time and could continue its distillation of brandy and jenever, which probably makes it the longest-running (legal) Jenever distiller in the world. The city continues to be world famous for its Jenever production.

The museum is a wonderful trip through time, particularly as it contains some original production machinery from the distillery which began operating here in the early 19th century. The distillation of the fermented mash of malted grains to create the “malt wine”

that makes up the base of most jenevers is only performed at nine locations in Belgium – the Jenever Museum is one of them.

You’ll see the old germination loft, as well as the still-used distillery hall and bottling room – hundreds of bags of sugar and empty bottles are sitting around waiting for the next batch of jenever to be produced. You can also put your nose over bottles of distilled jenever additives (caraway and coriander were my favourite scents) and run your hands through buckets of dried juniper berries or angelica root.

An animated touch screen allows



Photos: Lisa Bradshaw

you to see the entire process of jenever production, from germination of the grains to drying, grinding, saccharification, fermentation, rough distillation, rectification, ageing and, finally, bottling.

Other sections of the museum have historical artefacts, like old bottles and shot glasses, jenever advertisements and public posters warning against alcohol consumption. The museum hosts rotating exhibitions, and until 31 August you’ll find *Orange Bitters*, focusing on the origins and rising popularity of the liqueur developed in the Netherlands and consumed with relish on Queen’s Day. Colour-

ful vintage advertisements of upper-class women enjoying a bit of the tipple are a lot of fun and, of course, the museum has produced its own version, available in the café.

Speaking of which, don’t forget to end your visit to the museum by visiting the friendly women behind this bar and sampling from a few of the bottles that line the wall from floor to ceiling. Consider it educational.

online

www.hasselt.be
www.jeneverfeesten.be

Olfactology Lab

Along with the special Orange Bitters exhibition, the Jenever Museum in Hasselt hosts *Olfactology Lab: The Orange Bulb Alambfleurics* through 31 August. Unlike the rest of the museum, which is firmly rooted in social and production history, this is an art installation.

Peter De Cupere, though, refers to it as a “smell installation”. The Flemish artist has been creating such work for years, challenging viewers to incorporate his sharp odours into what is usually a purely visual medium. This adds a dimension of difficulty because of how directly smells are related to memory and, therefore, are never experienced objectively.

For this installation, De Cupere has made several “orange bulb alambfleurics”, which require a double-take to convince yourself they’re not naturally occurring. Made out of a sort of heavy foam, he’s “planted” them in soil, and each huge piece is distilling its own perfume through a tube that curls around like a stem with a bloom at one end.

Another part of the exhibition contains dozens of Petri dishes, each with a piece of orange – either fruit or peel – at some level of decay. Dried or mouldy, sliced or split, it’s like a complete autopsy of an everyday fruit.

Both sections and also a little greenhouse of smaller seemingly organic bulbs in soil question the nature of creation and how whether something is still “living” after its chemistry has changed. I think De Cupere’s answer is “yes”. **LB**

Smell Peter De Cupere’s “alambfleurics” this summer at the Jenever Museum



Walk into my parlour

Antwerp celebrates the spider in its soul

Monique Philips

2008 is the year of the spider in Antwerp. The city's slogan is, after all, "the city belongs to everyone", and the spider is a very useful inhabitant.

Since 2004, the Belgian Arachnology Association (Arabel) at the University of Ghent has been inventorying Antwerp's spiders (or *spinnen* in Dutch). The population was broader than expected: no less than 240 different species were recorded, which is about a third of the known species in Belgium.

Arabel has been checking parks, gardens, cellars and sewers, which is exactly what you can do if you sign up for one of the free "spider safaris" organised by Antwerp's EcoHuis. Every field trip explores one particular part of town: the northern neighbourhoods' closed-in hospital garden and abandoned cloister patches, the trendy south's many parks. The city centre, with its botanical greenhouses, keeps Jump Spiders warm.

Yours truly, an arachnophobe at heart, bravely went along on a spider tour in the inner city. Our own hairy spider hunter, Nobby Thys, brought along a water sprayer to make hidden webs more visible and some test tubes so we could gaze at the little critters at ease through a magnifying glass. Also on hand was *Spinnensafari*, a spider guidebook, for easy identification. We went to a park, a shopping street and a private little garden. ("We were specifically asked not to cut the grass," the owner quickly replied to our raised eyebrows.)

Spiders aren't insects by the way – they're arachnids (a group that also includes scorpions, mites and ticks) – and very diverse in shape, colour and lifestyle, even just among the species that live in Antwerp. It was surprising to discover that exotic species have recently become so thick on the ground here in the north.

The *Clubiona leucaspis* is, for instance, new to Belgium, having migrated from further south. And one of the larger outdoor invaders arrived in Antwerp by boat in the 1950s: the one-centimetre *Steatoda grossa*, a variation of the Black Widow. Harmless to people, it feeds mainly on cockroaches, often near – ahem – restaurants. (Some claim the *Steatoda grossa* is the reason why Antwerp has no cockroach infestations while Brussels has.)

The historic Vlaeykensgang near the Grote Markt in Antwerp is one of this spider's favourite hangouts. Look for them under loose stones. They look a bit like a Coffee Bean spider but without white specks.

This is the stuff around which city legends are woven. Koen Van Keer, an agricultural engineer and spider expert, will tell you all about

those during one of his lectures during Spider in the City, a celebration of our eight-legged friends until November in Antwerp. Van Keer will also do talks on Antwerp spiders and exotic spiders. Last spring, he spoke on arachnophobia, which, he claimed, can be cured quite easily in a five-hour therapy session. Strangely enough, Belgians are more afraid of spiders than, for example, Brazilians, who have a lot more spiders to deal with.

Spider in the City also includes exhibitions, readings and workshops for kids (apparently only with spiders made of paper). In the Permeke city library, a special corner is dedicated to Anansi, a famously clever spider in traditional African and Caribbean storytelling.

In Dutch literature there is a famous arachnid, too. Brought to life by the late author Annie MG Schmidt, who wrote the most imaginative and rebellious books and poems for children, Sebastian Spider met a quick end. Though discouraged by his friends, the garden spider stubbornly climbs through a window to build a web in the dreaded *inside*. Many a Dutch and Flemish pupil struggled to recite this 1951 poem with the dramatic effect it required: "A little later, without pardon, this simple message reached the garden. A murderer was in the room. Sebastian S just met the broom."

Speaking of which: if you have friends who pride themselves on mercifully putting spiders "back outside", you can assure them that they've killed them. Spiders

in Belgium don't come from the outside. Out intrepid safari guide Nobby hits the panic button: "It's amazing how reluctant people are to acknowledge the fact that spiders live in our houses. Each house, from corner to corner, has about 100 spiders. Always and at all times. Kill some, and they'll just reproduce."

By the end of the year, Arabel hopes to be able to present the city council with tips on how to preserve and stimulate the spider population in Antwerp. While my thoughts wander towards safe crossings between parks, like for frogs and other wildlife, Nobby explains: "We'll advise them to cut the grass on road verges less often."

The next spider safaris take place in September. To participate, call 03.217.08.20 or email leen.aertsen@stad.antwerpen.be

online

www.eha.be
www.arabel.ugent.be



Monique Philips



Above: Nobby Thys leads a spider safari in Antwerp. Below: the *Steatoda grossa*, also known as the cupboard spider or the brown house spider, eats up Antwerp's cockroaches



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Welcome to the first in a seven-part series on the best of the Flemish coast, north to south. You'll find out the highlights of visiting each town but also what makes each place its own quirky, historical or fashionable self on this unique stretch of land at the border of mainland Europe.

The riches of the sea

Home to a world-class bird refuge and designer fashion, Knokke-Heist is an intriguing blend of nature and culture

Denzil Walton

Knokke-Heist, one of Belgium's most fashionable and popular coastal resorts, extends from Het Zoute in the east to Heist in the west, with Knokke and Duinbergen sandwiched in between. The quality of the sand, the saltiness of the water and the strength of the sunshine may be the same all along this six-kilometre North Sea coastline, but a walk or cycle ride from one end to the other will uncover a great many differences.

But how can these differences be best observed? During sunny summer weekends the roads into Knokke are a nightmare. Arriving by train is a good alternative. At Knokke railway station, bicycles can be hired for €15 per day. (You can even reserve ahead at 050.60.33.14). But before immediately jumping on your bike and heading north up Lippenslaan to

the coast, take an excellent diversion.

Turn east along Magere Schorre and then north along Boslaan to admire the huge, elegant villas so beloved by Belgian's aristocratic and wealthy families over the years. Many of these are within an easy swing of the Royal Zoute Golf Club, which is frequently listed as one of the top courses in Europe. (Nick Faldo said it was a "hidden gem".) The green fee for the par 72 championship course is €95 if you're already a member of a golf club.

Via Konijnendreef and Bronlaan you will arrive at the Zeedijk-Het Zoute and will get your first sight of the sea. Don't expect to see hordes of children, ice cream vans and inflatable air-beds. Instead, as the day warms up, out from immaculate white sea-front residences pour hundreds of elderly residents, most of them accompanied



J. De Bie - Toerisme Vlaanderen

More little dogs, less screaming children: Knokke-Heist on the northern Flemish coast is a sophisticate's beach town

by little dogs.

If you jog over to the parallel road, Kustlaan, you'll find a higher concentration of exclusive boutiques, jewellers and art galleries than in any high street in Brussels, London or Paris. A pair of designer sunglasses here can set you back €300; a plain white polo shirt won't leave you much change from a €100 note.

Another way to spend your money is to visit Knokke casino. In keeping with the locality, it houses original paintings by Magritte, Keith Haring and Paul Delvaux, as well as Europe's largest chandelier. This weighs 7,000 kg and consists of 22,000 pieces of glass. The rooms holding these treasures are not open to the public except in July and August when guided tours are organised each Thursday morning.

Continuing your trip down the promenade, as you leave Het Zoute behind you will notice the

appearance of the more familiar seaside sights: shops selling postcards and plastic beach toys; stalls frying *frietjes* and baking *wafels*; Australian ice-cream kiosks; clothes at budget prices. The omnipresent Andean pan-pipe buskers are here too, these days with an impressive array of state-of-the-art mixers and PA systems, transported in new Chevrolet or Chrysler people-carriers. There must be money in pan-pipe busking.

By the time you reach Duinbergen, you could be in any normal family-oriented seaside town. Finally, Knokke-Heist ends in Heist. Here, the sea is quite a distance from the promenade, so the beaches are consequently less packed. If the wind is from the west, you can hear containers being loaded and unloaded in the nearby port of Zeebrugge. Het Zoute could be a million kilometres away, not just six.

Whatever your budget, interest and time available, there is plenty to see and do in Knokke-Heist.

The Sincfala Museum of the Zwin Region is well worth a visit. Here you can find out about the reclamation of the polders, the emergence of the villages and the various wars that have ravaged the region. Particularly interesting are the scale model of the village of Sluis in the 15th century and the shrimp boat from the 1930s that you can walk around in. Along the same theme, this old school building on Pannenstraat displays the tough life of local fishermen. Various wonderful models of fishing boats, along with authentic maps, compasses, sundials and flags add to the experience. The museum is designed with children in mind, with a number of old puzzles and café games available to play.

If you happen to be in Knokke-Heist on a rainy day and need



Religious folklore

For an hour or two of quiet meditation, until 11 November the Sincfala Museum has an exhibition on pilgrimages and processions, both in Knokke-Heist and to destinations such as Lourdes. It also displays photos of the many chapels in the Zwin region. A cycle route is available that includes a selection of chapels in the area.

Pirates and mermaids

Until the end of August, children between six and 12 are invited to participate in the *Pirates and Mermaids* exhibition at the Sincfala Museum, which includes interesting and fun "think and do" tasks and a treasure hunt.



Belgium's first nature preserve, the Zwin has been a model for the rest of Europe

cheering up, then the International Cartoon Festival is undoubtedly for you. This annual event started in 1962 and displays the best cartoons from all over the world. This year 785 cartoonists from 70 countries submitted 2,850 cartoons. The jury selected 240, awarded prizes to the best, and they're all on show at the Lagunahal in Duinbergen and the Scharpoord Library in Knokke.

This year's overall winner of the Cartoon Festival is Paweł Kuczynski from Poland, with Brazilian Moacir Gutteres coming second and Pol Leurs from Luxembourg getting third place. You will also be able to snigger at the Public Prize, chosen by visitors to the 2007 festival, which was won by the Belgian cartoonist Jean Uytterelst. Also on display are the works of German painter Sebastian Krüger, who is famous for his ironic portraits of stars from the music business.

For a morning or afternoon away from the beach, the Butterfly Garden on Bronlaan is highly recommended. Over 300 types of the little winged creatures breed

here, and you can follow their life-cycle from egg through caterpillar, chrysalis to adult. It's like walking through a tropical jungle full of exotic plants and multi-coloured butterflies, and there is something fascinating to see around every corner. A café and shop round off your trip.

Also for the environmentally minded, a trip to the Zwin Nature Park is a must. The Zwin was Belgium's first nature reserve, established in 1952 by Count Léon Lippens, local company director, eventual Mayor of Knokke and enthusiastic nature-lover. Lippens fenced off 150 hectares of salt marsh and placed the area under the watchful eye of a number of wardens. A local villa was converted into a restaurant, and footpaths were constructed.

This combination of an expanse of wild nature that was protected for wildlife and yet accessible to the public was quite revolutionary back in the 1950s, and the success of the concept led to its introduction throughout Europe. Over the years, the Zwin has grown in

importance. The number of visitors increases annually, and hundreds of school parties visit for an educational day out.

Thousands of birds are ringed for scientific purposes at Zwin, and various research projects are conducted within its grounds. In the bird park, visitors can see birds close up; the nesting storks in particular are always a great attraction. The nature reserve itself is described as an "international bird airport", with thousands of waders and geese visiting during the winter or breeding in the spring. The visitor centre displays the arrival and departure times of major influxes of migrants and even points out possible delays due to weather circumstances. Entrance to the Zwin is at Graaf L Lippensdreef 8 in Knokke-Heist.

As Knokke-Heist incorporates such vast differences, choosing hotels is very much linked to your budget. For example, a standard seafront room for two at a four-star hotel in Duinbergen is likely to be around €140 per night, while an equivalent room in a

four-star hotel in Het Zoute could be twice that. When I made enquiries for renting a two-bedroom seafront apartment for two weeks in August, I was quoted €900 in Heist and €1,300 in Knokke.

Restaurants of Knokke-Heist are even more diverse, with 190 establishments ranging from Michelin

rated to self-service snack bars. As with everything in Knokke-Heist, it's not just a matter of taste, but budget, too.

Online
www.knokke-heist.info



A night out in Knokke

For an evening's entertainment with a difference, Cavalia will fit the bill, particularly if you love horses. It's described as a magical encounter between man and horse – a spectacular show that blends the talents of 60 horses from 11 breeds with over 30 acrobats, dancers and riders. The concept was developed by Normand Latourelle, one of the co-creators of Cirque de Soleil, and has been staged by famed "horse whisperer" Frederic Pignon and his wife Magali Delgado, an award-winning rider and trainer. Cavalia opens on 18 July and continues until 30 August under the big top at the Knokke train station.

online
www.cavalia.be



Knokke has more than 70 art galleries dotted around the resort where top money is paid for works by Old Masters and contemporaries alike

Classical & new music**Alter**

Kasteel van Poeke
Kasteelstraat 26
JULY 6 11.00 Ruth Van Killegem presents "Der Fluyten Lusthof", after 17th century block flute music from J. Van Eyck

Brussel

Miniemenkerk
Miniemstraat 62; 02.511.93.84, www.minimes.net
JULY 2 Twee generaties Kuijken (Two Kuijken generations): Veronica Kuijken, violin; Sigiswald Kuijken, violin; Sara Kuijken, alt viola; Wieland Kuijken, cello
JULY 7 Indra Bose, violin, Sandip Banerjee, tabla: traditional Indian music
JULY 8 De Caelis Ensemble: La Messe de Tournai
JULY 9 Les Buffardins: Handel cantatas and sonatas

Royal Music Conservatory
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
JULY 3 Arpae Ensemble: Debussy, Jongen
JULY 4 Rideau Rouge Trio with Laurence Mekhitarian, piano: Lekeu, Fauré
JULY 10 Rosamunde Ensemble: Servais

Saint Michael and St Gudula Cathedral

Sinter-Goedeleplein; 02.217.83.45
JULY 6 10.00 Schola Cantorum Gent conducted by Filip Martens: Haydn
JULY 8 20.00 Edward De Geest, organ

Ghent

Gravensteen
Sint-Veerleplein 11; 09.225.93.06
JULY 3 19.00 Ensemble Chordae Freybergensis

Get your tickets now for...**All-English Comedy Night**

25 & 26 July, 20.00, JOC Rabot, Opeëistenlaan 455, Ghent.
Tickets from 09.233.77.88 or www.uitbureau.be

This night of comedy has become a wildly popular mainstay during Ghent's big annual Gentse Feesten festival this month. It attracts top comics from the US, Britain and Australia and some from other countries who perform in English. The headliner this year is the devastatingly funny Scott Capurro (photo), an American comic and actor well known for his deadpan delivery, sharp improvisation and letting the vulgarities fly. He's backed up by, among others, Jovanka Steels, who headlined last year and was so successful, the event has begged her back. The American actually lives in Belgium, which adds local flavour to an otherwise international mix.

JULY 5 18.00 Les muffatti, conducted by Peter Van Heyghen

Logos Tetraëder
Bomastraat 26-28; 09.223.80.89
JULY 2 20.00 Piano recital by American Jenny Chai

Leuven

Sint-Pieterskerk
Grote Markt
JULY 9 De Caelis Ensemble: La Messe de Tournai

Opera

Ghent
Vlaamse Opera
Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be
Until JULY 9 Götterdämmerung, the final opera of Wagner's Ring cycle, conducted by Ivan Törzs, staged by Ivo van Hove

Jazz & blues**Brussels**

Bizon
Karpelbrug 7; 02-502.46.99, www.cafebizon.com
JULY 7 Andrew Mavin

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
Until JULY 5 Rey Cabrera Cuban Combo

JULY 9-12 The Swing Dealers**Antwerp**

Cafe Mambo
Vlaamsestraat 3
Wednesdays until AUG 27 21.00 Marcelo Moncada Quartet

Boom

Provinciaal Recreatiecentrum De Schorre
Schommelrei 1
JULY 2 19.00 Divan Express and Sindicato Sonico

Deurne

Openluchttheater Rivierenhof
Turnhoutsebaan 232; 070.222.192, www.openluchttheater.be
JULY 9 20.30 Branford Marsalis Quartet

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

Art Base
Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20
JULY 4 21.00 Asad Qizilbash, sarod, Carlo Strazzante, tabla, oud: classical Indian music

Café Dada

Violettestraat 34; 0484.50.83.80
JULY 2 20.00 2 Dollar Bash

JULY 3 20.00 DJ Dave & Steve Riot

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89

JULY 5 23.00 Raudive Pär Grinvik

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34
JULY 3 20.00 Comets on Fire + Creature with the Atom Brain

Théâtre Marni

Vergniestraat 25; 02.354.43.68
JULY 4 21.00 Barbapapa, Bao, Morning Glory & DJ Le Pat

Antwerp

Kelly's Irish Pub
Keyserlei 27; www.kellys.be
JULY 3 22.00 Live music by Kadul, Antwerp rock cover band

Deurne

Openluchttheater Rivierenhof
Turnhoutsebaan 232; 070.222.192, www.openluchttheater.be
JULY 2 20.30 Off the Record + Monza
JULY 6 20.00 Beres Hammond + Queen Ifrica, reggae JULY 8 20.30 Death Cab for Cutie JULY 10 20.30 Riders on the Storm

Ghent

Muziek & Theatercafé Trefpunt
Bij Sint-Jacobs 18, www.trefpuntvzw.be
JULY 6 19.00 DJ Marinus

Volkshuis

Sleepstraat 33
JULY 3 21.00 Reena Riot

Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 09.267.28.28
JULY 5 23.00 Beats of Love party

World, folk**Brussels**

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
JULY 6 17.00 Bal Flagey - world music event to celebrate the opening of Flageyplein: Cumbia Ya! (Colombia), Orquesta do Fuba (Brazil), Officina Zoé (Italy), Odemba OK Jazz All Stars (Congo)

L'Alphabet

Waversesteenweg 1387; 02.662.23.00
JULY 5 20.30 Jeanjou & Dieudonné, African evening

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Until JULY 5 20.45 Rey Cabrera Cuban Combo

Antwerp

Het Oude Badhuis
Stuivenbergplein 38, 03.272.31.40, www.hetoudebadhuis.be
Concerts at 18.00:
JULY 2 Orchestra Hafid
JULY 9 Bournemouth University Big Band

Zuiderpershuis

Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.zuiderpershuis.be
JULY 6 11.00 Aperitief concert with classical guitarist Fernando Gonzalez of Chile

Brecht

Festivalweide Papbosstraat
Papbosstraat
JULY 5 20.30 Brazilian fest: Cintia Rodriguez Bem Brasil Batuqueria, DJ Joãozinho Brasil Uruz

Ghent

Muziek & Theatercafé Trefpunt
Bij Sint-Jacobs 18, www.trefpuntvzw.be
JULY 10 20.00 Aardvark, 21.30 Djamelike, 'Ze kwamen van het zuiden' (They came from the South)

Leuven

30CC-Wagehuys
Brusselsestraat 63
JULY 3 21.00 Rideau Rouge Trio with Laurence Mekhitarian, piano: Lekeu, Fauré
JULY 4 21.00 Arpae Ensemble: Debussy, Jongen
JULY 10 21.00 Het Collectief: Schönberg's Verklärte Nacht op 4

Sint-Pieterskerk

Grote Markt
JULY 8 Indra Bose, violin, Sandip Banerjee, tabla: traditional Indian music

Dance**Antwerp**

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02
Until JULY 5 Royal Ballet of Flanders in Return of Ulysses, choreographed by Christian Spuck, music by Henry Purcell by the Royal Flemish Philharmonic, conducted by Benjamin Pope

Theatre

Stadsschouwburg
Theaterplein 1; 077.37.38.39
Until JULY 13 Fame, dance musical (in Dutch)

Visual arts**Brussels**

Arts en Marge
Hoogstraat 312; 02.511.04.11
Until JULY 26 Overvloed (Abundance), outsider art show with work by Carol Bailly, Anacleto Borgui and Marcel Hecquet

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)

Belgian Comic Strip Centre

Zandstraat 20; 02.219.19.80, www.stripmuseum.be
Until NOV 16 Smurf for All, All for Smurf, original drawings and documents celebrating the famous characters created 50 years ago by Belgian comic strip artist Pierre Culliford, known as Peyo

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
Until AUG 8 Sony World Photography Awards, a selection from 70,000 photographs from 178 countries (part of the Summer of Photography)
Until AUG 24 Architecture in the Pictures/Flanders Architectural Yearbook, photographs of 37 projects offering an overview of architectural developments in Flanders in 2006 and 2007

Until SEP 14 It's not only Rock 'n' Roll, Baby!, art works by musicians, including Alan Vega, Brian Eno, Laurie Anderson, Patti Smith, Pete Doherty and Yoko Ono, among others

Until SEP 21 Sioux in Paradise, sculptures, installations, video, models and drawings by Johan Muyle

Until SEP 21 Mapas abiertos/Opening maps, overview of contemporary Caribbean, Central and South-American photography (part of the Summer of Photography)

CIVA

Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.71, www.civa.be
Until SEP 19 Documents on the gardens designed by René Pechère and Jacques Boulanger-François for Expo 58

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

Until SEP 30 Profiel, textile creations by Isabelle Marquet

De Elektriciteitscentrale European Centre for Contemporary Art

Sint-Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.31
Until SEP 28 Fables, photographs by Karen Knorr

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 JULY 11 Lucas Jodogne and Eric Aupol, photographs

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60
Until AUG 17 De Nieuwe Oogst (The New Harvest), contemporary Flemish design

Erasmus House

Kapittelstraat 31; 02.521.13.83
Until JULY 13 Anatomie van de Ijdeldeden (Anatomy of the Vanities), the museum's 75th anniversary show, with works 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 SEP 21 Voyage Out, photographs by Chantal Maes

Fondation pour l'Architecture

Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80, www.fondationpourlarchitecture.be
Until AUG 17 Gevers Design: Inventaris van een uitvinder (Inventory of an inventor), retrospective of work by Belgian designer Christophe Gevers (1928

Until SEP 14 Jeanne d'Arc, the Myth and the Image, visual representation of Joan of Arc in France from the early days of photography (part of the Summer of Photography)

Until SEP 14 Vudoptik, young photographers' views of their favourite Brussels' monument (part of the Summer of Photography)

Until SEP 21 Expo '58 through the lens of Gérard Castello-Lopes, photographs of the World's Fair (part of the Summer of Photography)

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 Jozef 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

Until SEP 28 Naabas Traditional Chiefs of Burkina Faso, outdoor exhibition of large-scale photographs by Jean-Dominique Burton (part of the Summer of Photography)

Stadhuis

Grote Markt; 02.279.43.50

Until SEP 28 Oriental Fascination, Japanese etchings from the Feliks Jasinski collection in Krakow, shown alongside works by 19th and 20th-century Belgian artists influenced by Japanese graphic art, including Fernand Khnopff, Théo Van Rysselberghe, Rik Wouters, Leon Spilliaert and Henry Van de Velde

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 by the American artist

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)

Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60

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

Until AUG 31 Visual art and sound installations by British artist and composer Cornelius Cardew

Until SEP 9 Fantasy, intervention by Koen van den Broek

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70

Until JULY 27 Blow Job, site-specific installation by Berlin-based Peter Friedl

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00

Until SEP 14 Focus on sports, a selection of the best sports photographs from the Belga agency (part of the Summer of Photography)

Until SEP 14 Guy Bourdin, retrospective of work by the French photographer (1928-1991), famous

for his contributions to fashion and advertising (part of the Summer of Photography)

Until SEP 14 Summertime, photographs by Verne

Middelheim Museum

Middelheimlaan 6; 03.827.15.34

Until 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 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

Until SEP 7 Circus or Science: The Roca Collection, anatomical wax models 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 the late Flemish artist Marc Maet

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMaK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03,

www.smaak.be

Until JULY 6 Guillaume Bijl, retrospective of the Flemish artist

Until JULY 27 Hors de soi (Outside oneself), installations by Benoît Félix

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 (Beguinage) 33; 011.29.59.60

Until AUG 17 Bridge, installation by Michael Cross

Until SEP 29 1% Water, art and design relating to global water issues

Mechelen

Congres en Erfgoedcentrum Lamot

Van Beethovenstraat 8-10; 015.29.49.00

Until SEP 14 Van Pijl tot paviljoen, 20 models of the pavilions at Brussels' 1958 World's Fair

Cultuurcentrum

Minderbroedersgang 5; 015.29.40.00,

www.cultuurcentrummechelen.be

Until SEP 14 Happy Days, collector's items and music of the 1950s recreating the atmosphere of Brussels' 1958 World's Fair

Ostend

Modern Art Museum

Romestraat 11; 059.50.81.18

Until AUG 31 Georges Vantongerloo: Pionier van de moderne beeldhouwkunst (Pioneer of Modern Sculpture), retrospective of work by the Flemish artist (1886-1965)

Ypres

In Flanders Fields Museum

Grote Markt 34; 057.23.92.75

JULY 5-NOV 12 Off the record, work by artist in residence Wendy Morris

Until SEP 7 Man, Culture, War: Multicultural Aspects of the First World

War, a panorama of the diverse origins of those who fought in Belgium during WWI

Festivals & special events

Belgium Roller Parade

Until SEP 29 Weekly rollerskating

parades in Brussels and other towns www.belgiumrollers.com

Summer of Photography:

Contemporary photography festival

Until SEP 14 in venues across Belgium 02.507.82.00, www.summerofphotography.be

Wilkinson American Movie Day:

annual film weekend celebrating America's Independence Day, showing 13 American blockbusters in five cinemas across Belgium

JULY 3-4 at Kinepolis Ghent, Metropolis Antwerp, UGC de Brouckère, Imagix Mons and Kinepolis Liège www.wamdb.be

Brussels

Brosella Folk & Jazz 2008: Free annual music festival, this year along the theme of Expo58. Includes a concert by the Flat Earth Society

JULY 12-13 at the outdoor Green Theatre, Atomium www.brosella.be

Brussels European Film Festival:

annual festival of European cinema with a special Belgian selection and free

open-air screenings, plus concerts and DJ sets

Until JULY 6 at Flagey, Heilig Kruisplein www.fffbb.be

Ca rebondit sur cour Festival:

Festival of string and Baroque acoustic music ranging from world and jazz to French chanson, classical and traditional music, all on the theme of water

JULY 5-AUG 30 at Domaine de Rouge-Cloître, Auderghem 02.223.46.75, www.atelierdolcevita.be

Jetsummer Danceweeks:

Dance workshop festival with international artists

Until JULY 11 at Dans Centrum Jette, Edmond van Cauwenberghstraat 55; 02.427.36.56, www.danscentrumjette.be

Midis/Minimes 08:

Festival of classical music performed in a series of weekday lunchtime concerts, exploring music rarely performed and new Belgian and international artists

Until AUG 29 12.15 at Kapel van de Miniemen, Miniemstraat 62, and the Royal Music Conservatory, Regentschapsstraat 30 02.512.30.79, www.midis-minimes.be



Ommegang (photo above):

Historic pageant on the Grote Markt re-enacting the entry into Brussels of Charles V and his court in 1549. The extravaganza includes 1,400 people in period costume, brass bands, horses and falconry displays

JULY 1 & 3 21.00 02.512.19.61, www.ommegang.be

Don't miss



The New Harvest 2007

Until 17 August, Design Flanders, Kanselarijstraat 19, Brussels, www.designvlaanderen.be

This annual exhibition showcases the newest members of the Design Flanders family. Every year the Flemish organisation, which supports and recommends local designers, holds spring and autumn "recognition rounds" in which designers enter their work. The best are chosen to add to the Design Flanders database, and we get to see their designs at this summer show. As eclectic as always, designers include Jean-François D'Or of Loudordesign in Brussels, whose green leaf doorstop strives for harmony between earth and home; Céline Poncelet and Emilie Lecouturier of Brussels' Atelier BLINK, masters in the unexpected (photo); and Lore Ongeae in Damme, whose studded leather objects and furniture are a cross between Paris sophisticate and New York leather daddy.

Flageyplein Opening Festival:

Week of festivities to mark the opening of Flageyplein with concerts, street theatre and outdoor film screenings

JULY 5-12 on Flageyplein, Heilig Kruisplein www.placeflageyplein.be

Plazey, Festival in the Park:

Free family-friendly music festival with concerts, entertainment, gastronomic treats and children's workshops

JULY 5-6 in Elisabeth Park, Koekelberg [www.plazey.be</](http://www.plazey.be)

INTERVIEW

Dani Klein

Dani Klein has been the voice of Vaya Con Dios for 20 years. Gearing up to host the big grand opening concert on Flageyplein, she tells us about two decades of being a Belgian icon

It was 20 years ago this year than Dani Klein, Dirk Schoufs and Willy Lambrecht put out the debut album of their Gypsy-blues trio known as Vaya Con Dios. From the first sexy, sassy hit single, "Just a Friend of Mine", the band became a household word in Belgium. Two years later, with the release of the record *Night Owls* and the Klein classic "What's a Woman", international fame, with its ensuing fortune, was handed to them on a plate.

But instant success can be as burdensome as it is exciting. After bitter conflict, the trio broke up, and Klein struck out on her own, keeping the name, still writing or co-writing most of the songs – deeply felt, poetical lyrics lamenting broken relationships and stubborn denials. Another three albums and two collections later, she still has the power to jar with that powerhouse voice: deep and moody and completely confident, it's a sound that lingers in your head long after the CD is finished.

When I first heard one of your CDs, I thought you were an American blues singer – how does a woman from Belgium sound like that?

I think it has to do with the music that I used to listen to when I was a teenager. It was the golden era of Rhythm & Blues; we listened to Otis Redding and Aretha Franklin. I would sing along with their records. And then we had the hippie time, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix. Also, I lived in Mexico and in Long Beach, California, for a couple of years.

In the 1980s, the Gypsy blues sound of Vaya Con Dios could not have been easy to sell.

When we recorded our first single, a fellow musician said we would never get anywhere. It was the era of New Wave. I don't know why it was popular. Maybe it was because it was different and a combination of different styles. In America, they have never released our CDs. They always import them. They don't want to release them properly because they don't belong to a particular marketing category.

The name "Vaya Con Dios" was also different in those days before world music became so widespread.

We worked on it for months; it was horrible! It's very difficult to give yourself a name. Then one day Dirk and I were watching a documentary about the Cuban area of Miami, and we saw that tag on a wall. We liked it. Dirk had also heard it in cowboy movies, so for him it had something romantic. And it's the title of a very good song, with a famous version by Les Paul and Mary Ford.

You have actually changed your name, right? It used to be Danielle Schoovaerts.

My artist name was Dani Klein long before Vaya Con Dios. I was in a French-sung musical about Jacques Brel in Brussels a long time ago, and the director said that I could not use my name in the programme because nobody would be able to pronounce it – because it was a Flemish name. He said it's not an artist's name. He even told me that the printer wouldn't print it. Of course that wasn't true. But I did have to change it. My boyfriend and I went through the phone book for weeks looking for a name. "Klein" can be pronounced in French. In those days, it was that way. Now, it's the other way around. If I was 20 now,



I would probably be in a Flemish band, and they wouldn't want my first name [laughs].

The band famously split up in only two years. What happened?

Way too much pressure. People deal with fame and money in different ways. And all of a sudden you've got all these people around you telling you anything you want to hear. You have to be a little bit paranoid. Frankly, I don't like to be on my own; I preferred to be with the band. But there was no other alternative. It became impossible to work together.

You put out two CDs but then there was a hiatus for several years until your 2004 album.

I was tired, and everything had become routine, which is the thing that I hate the most! I always thought I would never want to have a regular job because I can't stand routine. I had become a singer, and it had become a routine. I took some time off and finished high school, which I had never done, and studied philosophy at university for a year. I also did a lot of travelling.

Most of your songs are in English – is that because you like the language or so you

can reach a wider audience?

In the beginning, it was easier because most of the stuff I was listening to was in English. And it gives you a certain distance. My references are maybe different in French. The French that I listen to are very great songwriters, like Barbara and Jacques Brel. When I write in French, I'm very, very nervous because I don't want to be below that level. In English, they are not that poetic. Not everyone writes like Leonard Cohen.

So you had a Flemish name, which suggests Flemish roots.

I'm a real *Bruxellois*. We spoke Brussels dialect at home, which is Flemish with lots of French words. I went to school in French. The problem in this city is that people always ask you to choose. Every day people ask me: are you Flemish? When I grew up, we never identified with Wallonia or Flanders – never. We took pride in being *zinnekens*. But you had to speak French to get a job, so all these Flemish people speaking dialect were sent to French schools. Now they send them to Flemish schools. These divisions, these language issues are a pain! When you look at children who go to European schools, they come out speaking several languages. Why doesn't Belgium run bilingual schools?

Brussels is a bilingual city; you need to speak both languages. But there is not one school that will educate you in both languages. How can that be?

Tell me about the Flagey concert next week – you've named it Voices of Brussels.

I wanted to make a political statement. Brussels is not just Dutch- and French-speaking people fighting for their rights; it's a huge international community. *Bruxellois* today are from all over the world. Flagey is symbolically the heart of Brussels. So I thought let's invite singers who are *Bruxellois* but who come from many different cultures. The message is, this is Brussels today. In Brussels, you can travel around the world in one night. You hear all kinds of languages, you find newspapers from all over the world. That mixture is going to produce something new. Instead of looking at it like it's a negative thing, we should be excited about it!

Interview by Lisa Bradshaw

Voices of Brussels, 10 July, 20.30, on Flageyplein, Heilig Kruisplein, Brussels. Free entry.

online
www.vayacondios.be

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

Football fever

"This subject has dragged on for 15 years. Finally we were able to get the Royal Belgian Football Union to agree."

Bert Anciaux
Flemish sport minister announces the creation of a Flemish football league

Safe return

"A strange man stood at the door, naked apart from his underpants. He had a belt in his hand. In broken Dutch he said he had been robbed and asked if he might use the telephone to call his family in Belgium."

Witness statement when kidnapped garage owner Enver Tercan resurfaced after vanishing a week ago

More respect

"It's not appropriate that other drivers cut into a funeral cortège, or even swerve in behind the hearse. Yet it happens more and more often."

Funeral directors' association calling for rules to enforce respect for funeral cortèges

Blankenberge Dranouter Kalmt hout Rivierenhof Zomervan Antwerpen YokoMori
next week in Flanders Today