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1008 / Ken Broos

An open book

How will we experience Flanders' libraries in the coming decades? Differently

Leander Schaerlaeckens

It used to be that when you gave a service away for free, people would be queuing at the door. But libraries today find themselves

having to recruit their customers. They conduct consumer research, devise marketing strategies, promote user-friendliness and even offer free gifts to those

who register, so desperate are they to boost visitor numbers.

Still, it's a misconception – and a common one – that the library is a dying institution. The recent *Sex*

and the *City* movie perhaps best captured the *zeitgeist* when John (better known as Mr Big) marvelled at Carrie reading a library book. “You’re the last person in the world

reading a library book,” he said, his voice creaking under a heavy load of sarcasm. “I like their smell,” she

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Mamma Tia!

Gold medallist bows out with a smile

Alan Hope

Tia Hellebaut, who took gold in the Beijing Olympics in the high jump, brought a sudden and unexpected end to her sporting career last week with news that she is expecting a baby in six months. She now becomes the fourth top Belgian sportswoman to quit in favour of a personal life, following Kim Clijsters, Justine Henin and Kim Gevaert.

The news came as the Antwerp-born Hellebaut had convened the press to announce her “competition programme for 2009” – a programme that will now

be more honoured in the breach than the observance. Hellebaut took to the stage with her partner, Wim Vandeven, a former athlete turned physiotherapist. “Over the last few days, I have noticed that there are rumours, and I can now confirm that I will give up athletics and that I am expecting a baby,” she announced.

The news – which she described as “a real dream scenario” – soon left the sports pages and went mainstream, as the papers devoted double-page spreads to the departure of one of the last remaining stars of

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Christmas markets

It's coming up to that time of year when people want to visit a traditional Christmas market, buy some cute wooden presents and sip from a cup of hot spiced wine. The only question is where to go and the answer, at least for the British, seems to be: "Flanders".

The London daily *The Times* recently published a list of the 20 best Christmas markets in Europe. The top five places were occupied by German cities, but Bruges came in at number six and Brussels gained seventh place, ahead of Lille, Paris and Strasbourg.

The Times praised Bruges for its "idyllic old town centre", while Brussels scored points for its skating rink. The article also noted that both cities were easy to reach by Eurostar, so the people of Bruges and Brussels should be braced for floods of British tourists this month.

It's not just readers of *The Times* that appreciate the charms of a Belgian Christmas. Readers of *The Guardian* also appear besotted by these two cities, at least judging from the readers' online tips on where to spend Christmas. Out of 37 suggestions for a Christmas break, four recommended Bruges and three praised Brussels.

"I'm British through and through," wrote one reader, "but nothing says Christmas more passionately than Bruges does each December. The city streets

are beautifully decked out with twinkling lights and window displays, and the main and smaller squares have their stalls selling all kinds of gifts, food and drink specialities."

The same reader praised the culture and food available on the other side of the Channel. "Now don't forget those chocolates, those fresh cream pralines. Much, much cheaper than in the UK and guaranteed to produce sounds of delight (and quiet munching noises). I also buy gingerbread, chocolate figures and honey waffle biscuits."

The Bruges tourist office has a special winter deal at 40 local hotels, giving you three nights for the price of two if you begin your stay on a Sunday, Monday or Tuesday. The comments on the tourist office website suggest that most people have a good time in Bruges. "My son and I had a lovely stay at Martin's Orangerie Hotel," wrote one British visitor. "We enjoyed the Dali exhibition and the ice sculptures and enjoyed eating out at some great restaurants. We love visiting Bruges and do so very often and will continue to do so."

So be it. *Flanders Today* will be devoting a special issue to Bruges on 24 December.

Derek Blyth

online

www.brugge.be/winter
www.winterpret.be



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FACE OF FLANDERS



The Flemish 20-something

He's 24, single, working hard, playing harder – and living with his parents.

More young Flemish people than ever before are staying at home with their parents for longer. At the same time, young adults are less likely to live with a partner and an increasing number are married to a partner of the same sex.

Those are some of the conclusions of a wide-ranging study just published by the Flemish government's research service. "Changing Lifestyles in the Flemish Region 1990-2007" is based on data from the State Register, in which every Belgian is included.

Young Flemish women aged 20 to 24 are most likely to live at home in greater numbers. In 1990, a bit more than half still lived with their parents, but now the figure is close to two in three. For young men, the figure is a massive 78%: just over one in five *doesn't* still live with his parents.

The percentages go down as the age increases: at 25-29 the figures for men are down to 33% and to 20% for women, while at age 34 they stand at only 13% and 7%. But that still means that one in five Flemish people of 34 is still living with Mum and Dad, or what the report itself calls living at "Hotel Mama".

The reason young people stay at home longer, the report says, is because they are studying for longer – but that's not the whole story. Other reasons they decline to fly the parental nest include the financial attraction. In some countries, such as Italy, property prices have been shown to be a major cause, but that's the case here only in small villages and at the coast. In the cities, rented accommodation is plentiful and affordable. But the impetus to move out needs to be there.

Other factors identified as playing a role in keeping kids from moving out: (1) smaller families in general and larger houses, which makes it less of a burden if children stay on, and (2) more tolerance between parents and children, in both directions. The desire for independence, the report says, is "no longer in conflict with living at home" (something that might seem strange to anyone who has moved out).

A large part of this tolerance may be a result of the amount of goods young people today own. It must be a lot easier to live at home when you have your own TV, MP3 player and mobile phone.

Most of those concerned, at least in the 20-24 year range, are unmarried. In older segments, a greater proportion are returning to live with their parents after a period of independence, many following divorce or bereavement.

Although the percentage of young people living with their parents has gone up, the absolute numbers have come down, simply because there are fewer young people in the age group concerned, as a proportion of the population. In 2007 there were a total of 397,000 young people living at home, well down on the 424,000 there were in 1990.

Looking towards the future, the study expects no increase in the number of young people living at home in the 20-24 year age group by 2021, but the number of 25-34 year olds will go up, from 142,000 now to 170,000. And because of the general ageing of the population, that will represent an even greater percentage increase.

online

www4.vlaanderen.be

Koen Broos

Photographs for the cover story were taken by Flemish photographer Koen Broos. He has also produced photo series on the theme of "reading" for the organisations Stichting Lezen and Iedereen Leest. His work can be seen at www.koenbroos.be.

TALKING DUTCH
notes on language

haver

The 18th-century lexicographer Samuel Johnson defined it as what an Englishman feeds to his horse but sustains the population of Scotland. This barb fails to prick me (though we Scots aren't loth to take offence) because Sam was talking about oats.

Start the day with a full stomach and the best way to break your fast is with porridge. In the absence of oatmeal, I enjoy porridge made from *havermout* – rolled oats. And, as with any packaged food, there's plenty to read at the break of day, though some of it's not new: *het ontbijt is de belangrijkste maaltijd van de dag* – breakfast is the most important meal of the day. But why porridge in the morning? *Havermout bevat ingrediënten die er voor zorgen dat energie langzaam wordt vrijgegeven* – Rolled oats contain ingredients that ensure that energy is released slowly. That explains why I'm so bouncy as noon approaches. The box then tells me that *havermout is ook erg lekker* – rolled oats are also very tasty. Well, that's for me to decide. It then asks: *Waarom is havermout zo gezond?* – Why are rolled oats so healthy? *Havermout bevat unieke voedingsvezels die oplosbaar zijn* – rolled oats contains unique food fibres that are soluble. And these can contribute to a reduction of our cholesterol level, but only: *in combinatie met gevarieerde voeding die weinig vet bevat* – in combination with a varied diet that contains little fat.

Needless to say, porridge is not universally loved, certainly not in this household. Across the table I see a small, dark, brown box of *hagelslag* ("hailstorm") – chocolate confetti or sprinkles. I know I can read on with little danger of succumbing to the temptations of chocolate. It lists the uses of *hagelslag*: *bij het ontbijt op uw boterammen met een beetje boter* – at breakfast on your sandwiches with a little butter. *Vergeet de hagelslag niet bij uw zeer romige cappuccino* – Don't forget the chocolate confetti with your very creamy cappuccino. I fear the reading alone fattens the arteries.

Beside the teapot is a box of chocolate cereal from a company that I'll just refer to as K. This claims to be *lekker voor je lijn* – tasty for your figure, whatever that means. Its blurb starts with: *Wetenschappelijk onderzoek toont...* – Scientific research shows... What a way to start the day! It then lists the benefits of a K breakfast. I think I prefer the direct approach on the *hagelslag* box: *een plezier voor het oog en voor de lekkerbekken* – a pleasure for the eye and for gourmets. I'll now have some bread and marmalade with some proper tea; yes, I have a tea dealer who supplies me with the leaf that soothes when he returns from the island. Fellow Scots may think I'm hawering, though I'm not sure there's a connection with *haver*. However, there is with the haversack carried on a shoulder: its original purpose was to feed the Englishman's horse.

Alistair MacLean

A good read

Continued from page 1

answered, exposing a previously unexplored selling point.

Libraries in Flanders, which count more than 1.5 million members and 18 million visits per year, are most certainly not becoming a thing of the past. But after having offered more or less the same service for many decades – and in some cases centuries – there is a very noticeable shift in their approach. As they put it: they are “repositioning themselves in the market”. So what does that mean for the library-goer of the future?

There are obvious changes already happening. Some libraries in the Netherlands have started giving away classic books for free. Flemish libraries offer new members and returning patrons an agenda or book bag. “That’s not bribery,” insists Jan Braeckman, director of the Flemish Centre for Public Libraries (VCOB). “That’s marketing. Because people just want to be spoiled by the institutions they have joined.”

These gimmicks are necessary if the library is to stay competitive, he explains. “There’s a big turnover of library users. Membership numbers are staying the same, but one third is made up of new members, which means that one third leave.” The number of loans has also fallen. “By offering a gift to anyone who renews their membership, we hope to hold onto people,” Braeckman adds.

The DigiLeen (DigiLoan) function on www.bibliotheek.be allows you to access the music collections of Flanders’ six biggest libraries and download tracks from 10,000 digitised CDs to listen to for seven days. Some libraries have a much appreciated text-message service that tells their members when they are about to be fined for an overdue loan.

Soon, libraries’ digital catalogues will offer readers a venue to review books, much like online stores, in combination with a more personalised service which will alert members to newly available books in genres they have previously loaned. It will also tell them about books that other borrowers with a similar loan pattern have liked.

These services and a sophisticated marketing apparatus have kept attendance in Flanders steady. Research shows that most people give up visiting the library when they reach the in their teens or 20s but come back between ages 30 and 45 when they have children of their own.

“Then at 45 people leave again,” says Maja Coltura, who manages press and promotions at VCOB. “These people are very satisfied

[with our service] and enjoy reading and watching DVDs, but they leave anyway. This is intriguing. We found out that these people leave unconsciously. The vast majority does so not because they’ve had a bad experience or have no use for the library, but simply because they’re not stimulated enough and forget about it. So libraries have to be more proactive in keeping people involved.”

Research from the Netherlands has shown that if libraries send a friendly letter to people who haven’t visited for the past six months, reminding them of what the library has to offer, some 20% come back. Only six percent come back by themselves.

“We don’t stigmatise, saying ‘Hey! You haven’t been here enough!’” Coltura says. “We don’t want to stalk people. We just want to be a reliable institution, but, at the same time, actively approach our public. I don’t think it’s strange that we have to go out and sell a free or cheap service. People these days expect to be approached, that’s our culture. There’s so much to do, and people have limited leisure time. If libraries don’t use modern technology to maintain the relationship with their customers, they will inevitably sink because other sectors do use it.”

That’s why libraries aren’t just getting up to speed technologically – downloading books from your library online could be a future option – they’re also being tailored to the local community. “In Genk, where the population is young and ethnically diverse, you’ll see a different library than in Middelkerke, where most of the residents are retired people,” Braeckman explains. Libraries in commuter belts will be geared towards small children, whereas towns with high unemployment rates will have job-search departments.

“Many Muslim girls are only allowed out of the house to go the library.”

“We’re investing in good reading rooms where people can work together,” continues Braeckman. “City libraries are heavily occupied by ethnic youths. Many Muslim girls are only allowed out of the house to go the library. Other young people have no other space where they can study. The library can cater to that.”

Marnix Paesbrughe, coordinator of the West-Flemish Information Network of Public Libraries (WINOB), is busy putting all of these issues together. “Librar-

ies are due for renewal in how they work, how the customer is served and how the collection is put together,” he says. Paesbrughe is also a member of the Delphi project, which aims to make libraries more customer oriented.

“The idea is have the entire library staff work together on the

design of a new library, where the user comes first and decides what the library will look like,” Paesbrughe explains. “Libraries have to become the middlemen of information, to try to answer people’s questions and to refer them to specialised information services that don’t always reach people because they’re less known.”

Books used to be central to libraries, says Paesbrughe. But not anymore. “A library was good if it had a lot of books, but they were

classified scientifically, which is of little use to the consumer. Under Delphi, books will be ordered by topic, the way bookstores do, so that the consumer can find his own material.”

Following an example set by American libraries (which have miraculously survived the Bush administration) several Flemish libraries are now experimenting with game rooms in which popular video games are installed for young visitors to play. Some even stage competitions.

It might seem that the video game is the nemesis in the battle for children’s attention, but the library doesn’t look at it that way. “You can’t simply argue in favour of books over games; they’re not enemies,” says Stefaan Froyman, a WINOB consultant. “It’s a shame they’re portrayed as such because they can co-habit and even complement each other. Studies have shown that time spent gaming doesn’t come out of time otherwise spent reading. It comes out of watching TV, and some people are convinced that gaming will lead to more reading because

gaming can be educational, too. So why wouldn’t we make sure that people can get in touch with gaming through the library?”

Braeckman doesn’t accept the argument that violent games will find their way into the library. “Libraries set criteria for quality,” he says. “You won’t find a porn book either. With video and DVD, we also control the market. We carefully pick out what’s suitable.”

As a product of culture, libraries are keen to be allowed to lend video games, but they’re facing stiff resistance from the gaming industry, which argues that profits from expensive games will be dented. But the libraries say that loans often lead to purchases. According to De Standaard bookshop chain, more books are sold in communities with a good library.

The possibilities for the future library are myriad. But change is imperative, or it’s definitely game over.

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www.vcob.be



Libraries in Flanders are becoming cool places to hang out

VCOB/Aleen Broos

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Jimmy Kees



PHOTO OF THE WEEK • ANTWERP Professional cardstacker Bryan Berg, 33, is carefully constructing a model of Gotham City out of playing cards in Antwerp's Stadsfeestzaal. Berg has been building houses of cards since he was eight and has

developed his own construction system that allows him to reach unprecedented heights. He's hoping to break the world record by the time he finishes on 10 December. The public is welcome to take a look. Just don't sneeze.

THE WEEK IN FLANDERS

Wednesday 3 December

● At its meeting in Brussels, Fortis shareholders refused to confirm Etienne Davignon as the new chairman of the bank because of his connection to outgoing chairman Maurice Lippens. Two other board members were also voted down, as shareholders jeered and shouted. New proposals to fill the board posts will be presented by shareholders' representatives later. ● The Congress of Local and Regional Governments of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg found against Flemish home affairs minister Marino Keulen in his decision not to nominate the mayors of three municipalities bordering Brussels – Wezembeek-Oppem, Linkebeek and Kraainem. The congress, made up mainly of mayors from across Europe, called for the three to be nominated immediately. But the congress has no power to enforce its decision. ● Photocopies of music scores made for educational purposes will no longer be subject to the payment of royalties. A similar exception to the law already exists for the copying of photos, poems and newspaper articles in schools.

Thursday 4 December

● Almost one half of all the restaurants inspected in the first half of the year received an unfavourable verdict, according to the federal food safety agency (FAVV). Only 10% received an unqualified "favourable" report, with 41% being judged favourable but with qualifications. ● Prime minister Yves Leterme last week received

the Dalai Lama in a private meeting at his official residence in Brussels. The Buddhist spiritual leader is in Belgium at the invitation of the European Parliament. ● Supermarket chain Colruyt has again been voted the best shopping chain in Belgium by a poll of 200,000 consumers, organised by Q&A Research and Consultancy. ● The Flemish government issued 399 compulsory purchase orders in 2007, forcing the sale of land to allow for roadworks. In 2006, the figure was 315, according to a parliamentary answer by public works minister Hilde Crevits. The total cost of the orders came to €14.73 million. ● The Ghent-based comedy-drama *Aanrijding in Moskou* has made the long list for this year's Golden Globe awards, given out by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. The shortlist will be released on 11 December, and the award announced on 11 January 2009.

Friday 5 December

● Some 30% of Belgians smoke, the highest figure in six years, according to the Foundation Against Cancer, which blamed the fact that tobacco prices did not rise in 2008. The effect of shocking images, compulsory on packaging since December 2006, is beginning to wear off, the foundation said. ● A mother of five who offered her services as a surrogate mother for several childless couples could face imprisonment for up to seven years. According to a statement given by the woman to a Dutch TV channel, she collected fees for

insemination from the couples. She later gave birth to twins but sold them for €10,000 to a Belgian friend. ● The research department of the KBC bank forecast 0.5% negative growth next year coupled with the loss of about 20,000 jobs. The OECD recently predicted shrinkage of 0.1%, while the federal government recently forecast actual growth of 1.2%. ● Flanders is on the lookout for a new children's rights commissioner, as current incumbent Ankie Vandekerckhove prepares to leave her post after two five-year terms. About 11,000 requests were made to the office in the last 10 years: 45% complaints, 39% questions and 16% in connection with school work.

Weekend 6 and 7 December

● Pop legends Clouseau began their traditional series of year-end concerts at the Antwerp Sportpaleis with the first of 10 concerts, all sold out. ● The Russian intelligence services are as active now as they were during the Cold War, according to the head of Belgium's state security in an interview. Russia's spying is increasing across Europe, Alain Winants said, but particularly in Belgium because of the presence here of Nato, Shape and the EU Commission. ● Ford Genk is to cut 813 of the 1,113 jobs at its plant, the company announced. "We have our backs against the wall," a union representative said. "Industrial action is pointless."

Monday 8 December

● The federal food safety agency denied that Belgium was at risk from Irish pork contaminated with 80 to 200 times the legal levels of dioxin. The contamination is thought to have come from motor oil in pig feed and has led to the closure of nearly 50 farms in Ireland. ● A woman from Sint-Niklaas who staged her own kidnapping to be with her lover has been charged and could face two years in jail. She is also likely to receive a bill for the massive police mobilisation. ● Spot checks for drink-driving will take place daily over the holiday period on the motorway network, interior minister Patrick Dewael said, denying claims by police unions that the federal police would not have sufficient manpower to carry out checks. ● Existing and new blood donors have been invited to give blood as a New Year gift to someone who needs it, in a new campaign for donations from Red Cross Flanders. All transfusion and donor centres will be open this Saturday, 13 December, to receive blood to build up stocks for the holiday period.

online

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Breaking news
for breaking news, see
www.flanderstoday.eu
under "press room"

FIFTH COLUMN



The minister and the barmaid

Pieter De Crem, the Belgian minister for defense, wants our troops to play a more active role on the international front. He wants Belgium to be a "small but loyal partner" in Nato. All of this makes for an abrupt policy change, which has earned De Crem the nickname "Crembo". Last week, however, none of this made the headlines. But De Crem's visit to a New York bar did.

Our defense minister entered the bar in an obvious state of drunkenness. He got himself noticed by singing own versions of well-known Flemish folk songs. *Zie ik de lichtjes van de Schelde* ("I see the lights of the Scheldt") became *Zie ik de lichtjes van defensie* ("I see the lights of defense"). How do we know all this? Because an observant Dutch barmaid described the scene on her weblog – and the Flemish newspapers picked it up.

So far no real problem. Everyone has the right to have a drink every now and then. But the story gets hotter. According to the barmaid, one of De Crem's aides informed her that there really was no reason for the minister's official visit to New York, since his most important appointments had been cancelled. "But Brussels is so quiet these days, we might as well visit New York," the barmaid reported the man saying. This reeks of a minister wasting government money.

Then the story gets even better. Shortly after posting her blog, the barmaid lost her job. She reported this on the internet. Apparently someone from De Crem's office had called the bar and informed the barmaid's boss about the commotion she had caused. De Crem first denied, then admitted, the phone call. Someone from his office had phoned New York, he said, but this person had not insisted on the barmaid being sacked.

The story made it to the parliament, where De Crem had to sum up exactly what appointments he had in New York. "And now to the bar scene." With these words, the dry-humored chamber president Herman Van Rompuy prompted the minister to provide an explanation. De Crem chose to attack, rather than defend, in his response. Weblogs and the unchecked information they offer, he said, "can be dangerous".

How right he was, especially when it comes to keeping his own reputation intact. By now, numerous Flemish blogs have commented. A Dutch website, geenstijl.nl (no style), has gone the furthest, announcing that it will stalk Pieter De Crem. It started by composing a song about our minister of defense: *De Crem, we gaan je slopen* (De Crem, we will tear you apart), to the merry Christmas tune of *Deck the Halls*. De Crem's musical creativity seems to have been inspirational after all.

Anja Otte

THE WEEK
IN FIGURES

The *Wall Street Journal* last week released the findings of a large-scale survey of drinking habits across Europe, which showed that Belgium comes second only to the Netherlands for the number of people who consume alcohol every day. Below are some of the figures that concern Belgium, including Flanders.

- 22%**
never drinks alcohol at all
- 20%**
drinks once a week
- 11%**
drinks one measure a day, every day
- 3%**
drinks two or four drinks a day
- 0%**
drinks more than five drinks a day
- 35%**
favourite drink is beer
- 50%**
favourite drink is wine
- 5%**
favourite drink is cocktails
- 12%**
becomes more friendly after drinking alcohol
- 22%**
becomes more funny
- 2%**
becomes amorous
- 0%**
becomes belligerent
- 41%**
doesn't change
- 9%**
gets tired
- 20%**
worries that alcohol may adversely affect personal relationships
- 12%**
worries that alcohol may adversely affect their job
- 30%**
worries that alcohol may adversely affect their physical health
- 20%**
worries that alcohol may adversely affect their budget

online
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122842679622780557.html>

Hellebaut career ends with happy event

Continued from page 1

Belgian sport.

"This was certainly no accident," she explained. "I have never made a secret of the fact that I wanted to become a mother. We let nature decide if I would be high-jumping next year. Sometimes I prefer not to think so much and just to get on and do it."

The first indications came when Hellebaut cancelled a planned appearance at the Golden High Jump Gala in Antwerp in January. Then she accepted a number of invitations to attend



Flanders Today in August predicted Tia's triumph

sporting awards events, all of which fuelled the rumours.

Her retirement deprives her of the one main goal left to her: a gold medal at the world championships in Berlin next August. But she will not be leaving sport behind altogether. She

becomes account manager at the sports marketing company run by her manager Bob Verbeeck, and she intends to play a role in bringing up a new generation of potential top athletes. When asked if Hellebaut would ever consider a return to sport, Vandeven said, "Never say never, but the way I look at it now, the chance is extremely small."

Hellebaut came to the fore in the high jump only in 2006 with a surprise win in the European championships against strong competition from Venelina Veneva and reigning champion Kajsa Bergqvist. She soon followed that victory with a jump of 2.0m at the Golden High Jump Gala in Brussels, and a 2.05m in the European indoor championships in Birmingham in 2007. In Beijing, she cleared 2.05m again at her first attempt, beating Blanca Vlašić, who took two attempts to clear the same height.

"Finishing with the Olympic gold makes me happy," she told the assembled press. "After Beijing I had the feeling that next year wouldn't be quite the same on a sporting level. Your drive decreases, and if you can't give it 200%, you're better off stopping."

Belgium's last Olympic athletics gold medalist, Gaston Roelants (Tokyo, 1964, 3,000m steeplechase) paid tribute to his successor. "I



hope we don't have to wait another 44 years for a new gold medal in athletics," he said.

No second term for Leuven rector

Leuven University is to elect a new rector after the university's governing body last week declined to renew the mandate of Marc Vervenne, the sitting rector. The decision came after a negative evaluation given by the Special University Council, which decided that he did not show the leadership skills the university would need in the coming four years.

"Our university faces enormous challenges, such as the creation of an association with the high schools, a project which requires a great deal of organisational talent," commented Jef Roos, vice-chair of the governing authority. "The next rector will need to have the same qualities as the CEO of a major company, such as management and communication skills, clear leadership and social support."

Vervenne is the first rector to be evaluated by the governing board in a new procedure dating from 2004, when he was first elected. That set up a special committee to evaluate the sitting rector's performance – a process that took three months to complete. The committee's opinion was confirmed by a straw poll of professors and deans taken by the student newspaper *Veto* in the week before the decision was announced. A major-

ity of those polled by the paper also expressed doubts about Vervenne's leadership capacities. "According to insiders, Vervenne comes across as very weak in external meetings," explained Ken Lambeets, the editor of *Veto*. He would never take the lead in discussions."

Vervenne, 59, is a theologian and a specialist in the Old Testament and has taught at Leuven since 1994. Prior to becoming rector, he was vice-rector of "human sciences," a mainly Flemish category of disciplines that includes law, letters, philosophy and psychology. In the election, which went to three rounds of voting, he narrowly defeated canon law professor Rik Torfs, who has since gone on to stardom on TV in the popular quiz show *De slimste mens* and in the press as a commentator.

Vervenne's reaction was one of disappointment at the "one-sided picture" that had been presented of him. "Nobody is perfect. Every rector has his good and bad points," he said. "I have my own style, which is what got me elected three years ago. I may go to work more slowly, but that means my decisions are thought out. Unfortunately, people looked at things another way," he said.

Papers declare truce to fight cuts

The editorial departments of *De Morgen*, *De Standaard* and *Het Nieuwsblad* this week declared a truce in their competition with each other in order to publish a common call for action addressed to Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters to prevent the collapse of the written press in the region.

Last week *De Morgen*, owned by Persgroep, announced it would be cutting 26 jobs from its editorial department – 16 journalists and 10 executives, or one-quarter of all staff. That news followed an announcement by Corelio, which publishes *De Standaard* and *Het Nieuwsblad*, as well as *Flanders Today*, that 60 jobs would disappear, including journalists and management.

On Monday, the papers concerned published an open letter from editorial representatives of all three papers, reminding Kris Peeters of his recent promise to give aid to the written press in the current crisis, on the day when he was due to meet with senior executives from the media groups concerned. "We are asking you in this discussion to stress the importance for democracy of a quality press, its staff and its editors," the letter reads. "Serious, balanced and reliable news costs manpower and, therefore, money. But newspapers are more than just products: they are an indispensable part of the good working of a democracy."

Also on Monday, publishing unions and journalists were due to meet to decide on a common strategy against the job losses. "We cannot accept the media companies' way of working," said one union representative. "We need to take care that press freedom does not come under threat."



Children from a Dutch-speaking school and a French-speaking school will be spending the night of next Monday to Tuesday camping out in the Wiels arts centre and former brewery, as the culmination of a 10-week project under the guidance of two artists, Patries Wichers and David de Tscharner, on the subject of housing. The following morning, parents and friends can join the children for breakfast and a tour of the installation. The project, the organisers say, is to bring children from the two communities together through the universal language of art. It is organised by Wiels in conjunction with Mus-E, an offshoot of the International Yehudi Menuhin Foundation.

Government promises help for car manufacturers

The car industry is to receive support from both the federal and Flemish governments to help it recover from the current crisis. The Flemish economy minister Patricia Ceysens said that the industry had suffered "severe blows" over the past year.

Car production in Belgium this year is expected to be 12% down on 2007 as the recession and the credit crisis continue to bite. Many assembly plants have had to put workers on temporary lay-off as a result. According to the technology industry federation Agoria, employment this year is expected to fall by 9% to 15,226 workers.

As a result, the governments have approved the following measures:

- Raising the existing tax-break for shift work and night work from 10.7% to 15.6%;
- Extending the buyer's discount on energy-efficient cars, now set at €4,000. Last year some 27,000 car-buyers received the discount, which applies to cars with emissions lower than 105g of CO₂ per km;
- A premium for ecologically-sound investments;
- Measures to stimulate environmental education.

Flemish finance minister Dirk Van Mechelen will work out with municipal mayors how to abolish the current municipal tax on energy used by factories – which hits the car industry hard. A spokesman for Van Mechelen said the municipalities are ready to find a way of reducing or scrapping the tax, which the government regards as a barrier to competition. The tax is worth about €73 million a year to the 100 or so communes that apply it.

Meanwhile an optimistic view was taken by former GM vice-chairman Eddy Geysens, now chairman of the motor



Workers at Ford Genk are among those hardest hit (see also p5)

industry task force, which represents the industry's interests to the government. The fact that Belgian plants tend to make small and mid-sized cars rather than the more profitable larger vehicles used to be considered a disadvantage, he said. "Since then it's become an advantage, because it is

precisely the larger models which are hardest-hit by the present crisis. At the same time, small, efficient and environmentally-friendly models are suffering relatively less from the collapse of demand. That could turn out to be a benefit in the coming period," he said.

Construction industry feeling the pinch

One in four building companies in Flanders has fewer jobs booked now than usual for the time of year, with a further one in three expecting orders to drop off in the next few months as a result of the economic crisis. The situation, revealed in the newest survey by the Construction Union, is today at its lowest point for five years, and represents a steep decline from a peak in March.

The Union, together with the Flemish Building Confederation, is now asking the government for a series of measures to help stimulate demand, including lowering VAT to 6% across the board. At present the low rate only applies to renovation work on houses above a certain age. Another demand, which the Flemish government is already considering, is a public insurance against loss of earnings. This would cover mortgage repayments, making it more attractive for first-time buyers to take on a home-loan, even in a precarious employment climate.

Still, the news is not all gloomy. "The sudden reduction in orders doesn't take away from the fact that construction activity in Flanders is still at a very high level," said Marc Dillen of the Confederation. There are no job losses expected as a result of



the situation. The construction industry still suffers a shortage of skilled labour, and is unlikely to let any of it go.

Crisis puts brakes on Christmas spending

Consumers are anxious about their job prospects, and are feeling the effects of decreasing purchasing power, resulting in more cautious spending patterns in the run-up to Christmas this year, according to a consumer study carried out by consultancy Deloitte.

But not too cautious: while the average budget last year for year-end festive spending was €624 per household (covering food, gifts and other special expenses), the corresponding figure this year was barely down at €598. Deloitte surveyed over 18,000 people across Europe for its study.

About 87% of Belgians consider the economy to fit the criteria for a recession, about the same level as in France, and more gloomy than the Germans, British and Dutch. Just over half – 57% – are secure about their job future, down from 66% last year. Two out of three feel their purchasing power has diminished in the past year – again more than in neighbouring countries. (Only in Portugal was the feeling of lost spending power stronger.) And within Belgium, older people and people in Flanders felt the effect more than the young and Walloons.

Few expect any improvement in the situation in 2009: 70% think things will get worse, and 75% think purchasing power will continue to fall. Half think the financial situation of their families will deteriorate.

Three out of four intend to spend less on year-end festivities, whether Christmas or New Year or both. Although the average spend is going to be down about 4%, most of the money will be saved on gifts, with food (including restaurants) staying almost the same at €226 compared to €229 last year. Those who can expect to go without a present are colleagues, friends and the shopper him/herself, according to those polled. Children and partners can relax for the time being.

Nearly half have a specific budget planned for the period: 45% for and 55% against. That suggests a desire not to fall into the trap of impulse buying, which can send spending out of control. Other ways people plan to save money include:

- choosing shops' own-brand labels when food shopping (17%)
- cutting down on luxury goods (such as champagne and lobster) (26%)
- choosing useful presents such as clothing and shoes (46%)
- watching out for price deals (54%)
- using Internet to shop around for the best price (63%).

Netmining bought up by New York marketer

Diegem-based Netmining, a company which develops software to help predict the purchasing decisions of Internet users, has been taken over by New York-based Innovation Interactive, the holding company behind digital marketers 360i and SearchIgnite (which organises online job ad campaigns on search engines Google and Yahoo). "Netmining now becomes the third division of Innovation Interactive, and our technology can be integrated into the SearchIgnite platform," said Netmining CEO Toon Vanparys. The price of the acquisition has not been revealed.

Netmining's technology uses web-surfers' past choices to help determine – and even influence – future choices. By surveying surfers' behaviour on a website in real time, the Netmining soft-

ware can present the potential client with the most convincing sales pitch, tailored to his own expressed wishes. "The Italian website of Fiat had seven to ten customer contacts a day before installing our software," Vanparys explains. "After the website came into Netmining's hands, the figure rose to 75 to 100, and the number of closed sales coming out of those contacts has doubled."

The Flemish company recently made tentative first steps to enter the Chinese market and the acquisition by Innovation Interactive will give them a foothold in the US and Japan. The company is reaping the benefits of the current economic crisis. "Marketers and salespeople are increasingly looking for solutions that bring immediate results on the marketing investments made," Vanparys said.

BUSINESS
FLASH**Banking • BNP Paribas**

The French banking group BNP Paribas has acquired Aberdeen Property, one of the largest property management companies in Belgium. The move strengthens BNP's position in the Belgian market where it will manage some 2.2 million square metres of property. Meanwhile, the French bank has won approval from the European authorities on its controversial acquisition of Fortis. The only condition is that BNP must sell its Cetelem consumer credit affiliate because it would otherwise have a dominant position on the local credit card market because of its association with Fortis' Alpha Credit affiliate.

Cars • Ford Genk

The Genk-based production unit of the US car group Ford is to invest €70 million in its plant to prepare assembly lines for producing the new S-Max, Galaxy and Mondeo models from 2010. The news comes in stark contrast to the November new car sales figures which show a 16% drop in registrations. The total for the year so far shows a 2.6% increase and Febiac, the industry's federation, still hopes to break the 2006 record.

Chemicals • Solvay

The Brussels-based chemical and pharmaceutical company Solvay is to invest €1.5 million to acquire a 13% stake in the UK-based Acal Energy company, the world's leading developer of fuel cells.

Engineering • Fluor

The US-based engineering company Fluor has acquired Unec, the Antwerp engineering firm specialised in the energy and chemical sectors.

Pharmaceuticals • Merck

The German pharmaceutical company Merck has acquired the Brussels-based Bio-Fyt company, which focuses its activities on consumer health care products.

Post • DHL

DHL, the courier company owned by Deutsche Post, has sold and leased back three of its Belgian logistics facilities in a deal with the WDP property fund. The deal, worth more than €23 million, follows DHL's decision to transfer part of its handling facilities to Leipzig, Germany.

Property • Trammel Crow

The Texas-based shopping centre developer Trammel Crow is considering an investment of up to €75 million in Brussels to construct a shopping centre at Heysel.

Retail • Ixina

The fitted kitchen distribution and installation company Ixina has opened a new store in Ostend, its 40th in Belgium and fourth in Flanders. The company will inaugurate a fifth Flemish outlet in Hasselt next week and has plans for 10 additional stores over the next three years.

“They aimed their guns at our kneecaps”

Belgian ship owners lobby the government to fight piracy in foreign waters

Marc Maes

With a merchant marine fleet of 226 vessels and more than 12.5 million tons deadweight, Belgium is in the world's top 20 when it comes to sea transport. With the piracy plague off the Somalia coast continuing to escalate, Belgian ship owners are taking measures to prevent and stop pirate attacks.

Until a few years ago, the waters of the Chinese Sea, Malacca Strait and Singapore coasts were the hunting grounds for all kinds of piracy. But joint actions by the nearby states have ensured that this kind of banditry has diminished substantially in these regions.

“The clans operating in the Gulf of Aden are much more audacious, highly professional and well organised,” says Marc Nuytemans, managing director of the Royal Belgian Shipowners Association, “and the situation is changing rapidly. With one Belgian ship per week in that perimeter, we have to safeguard our merchant marine fleet.”

A major incident with pirates attacking a Belgian vessel happened in the early 1980s when Captain Patrick Blondé, now director of the Antwerp Maritime Academy, lost part of his cargo in Nigeria. “Our ship was moored alongside the quay in the port of Lagos when a gang of young men with machine guns stormed the gangway,” he remembers. “It's the master's duty to prevent unwanted people boarding the ship, but when they started aiming their guns at our kneecaps, we barricaded ourselves on the bridge. Luckily, the pirates were only interested in the cargo – milk powder.”

Today, the Maritime Academy includes a special course on crisis prevention on seagoing vessels. “We go into different aspects of crimes,” Blondé explains. “Ship owners also issue special guidelines, but the bottom line always reads ‘don't try to be a hero!’”

Captain Claude Maerten, director of crew operations with the Exmar shipping company which operates 25 ships worldwide, says the crew is briefed and trained to deal with criminal attacks. “Our security system and procedures are included in each ship's manual,” he



Belgian dredging company Jan De Nul Group operating near Dubai

says. “We also call on military vessels patrolling the Gulf of Aden. In fact, we just had our gas tanker ‘Brussels’ – passing through Somalia coast waters – escorted by a French navy ship.”

Belgian dredging company Jan De Nul, which carries out world-wide dredging and land reclamation assignments, makes use of so-called corridors in the Gulf of Aden area. “In addition to international security codes, ships make pro-active contact with coalition force navy vessels, who continuously monitor and survey these corridors,” says the company's senior shore captain Nico Verbraeken.

The Royal Belgian Shipowners Association would like the Belgian navy to issue detailed instructions for merchant vessels entering danger areas, like reporting their position to the Belgian Maritime Information Crosspoint, which coordinates efforts to fight pirates off the Somali coast. “The problem is that these pirates cover a vast area and are professionally organised,” explains Nuytemans. “They have evolved from gangs with Kalashnikovs to local warlords with fast boats and rocket launchers.”

Somalia, too, has been without a functioning government since 1991 and, says Nuytemans, “is suffering a huge humanitarian crisis. At this point, no foreign military force has a mandate to intervene on Somali territory. Although the position of a ship can be located, it's difficult to judge the situation on board. Merchant ships are forced to go to the port of Eyl with their

crew under gunpoint; no country will decide on a military intervention in the case of a ship in Somali waters, even knowing there's a crew taken hostage.”

Captain Jozef Cuyt, secretary-general of the Royal Belgian Merchant Officers Association, wants the government to put the problem on the international agenda. “Now that Belgium has a seat in the Security Council, we pleaded with foreign affairs minister Karel de Gucht to deal with the matter,” Cuyt says. “We also sent a letter to defence minister Pieter De Crem; he promised to send a Belgian frigate to the Somali coast by September...2009! Our government must realise that the piracy problem is becoming the problem of the man in the street: when ships no longer use the Suez Canal, the round-trip via Cape Horn will result in extra cost for the consumer.”

Until structural measures are taken, ship's crews are instructed to take preventive action so that pirates are dissuaded from attacking the vessel. “In high risk zones, bridge accommodation should be sealed off hermetically and fire hoses hung near strategic ship entries,” concludes Nuytemans. “A round-the-clock watch and overnight searchlight scans are also recommended.”

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EXHIBITION

Young, hung and unsung

Belgium's emerging artists have the floor and the walls at Wiels



Saffina Rana

I generally feel rewarded enough if I can find one piece in a group show of young artists to rave about. But the new Wiels showcase boasts a generous handful that is well worth the trek to Vorst. *Un-Scene* is a diverse collection of the painting, photography, sculpture, film and digital work of emerging Belgian artists that avoids classification in a particular movement, region or language.

The only thing that the artists have in common is that they are active in Belgian cities – Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent and Liège – or commute between them and abroad. “In Belgium, there is always a reduction from individuality to cliché,” explains Dirk Snauwaert, the show’s co-curator and director of Wiels. “There’s a problem, and we know what it is. It’s the question: is it Belgian, or is it Flemish or is it Walloon?”

But that’s a national agenda Wiels is trying to avoid in *Un-Scene*. “There are artists here from the same region and generation whose work is completely different,” Snauwaert continues. “Our idea is to form a cluster and really show – at a local but also international level – what’s happening in the country.”

The 20 artists on show were chosen from a list of 280 that the show’s three curators felt had developed over the last 10 years. It’s an entirely subjective but unanimous choice, says Snauwaert. “Lots of artists that are missing are hated by one of us,” he laughs.

Geert Goiris is one Antwerp-based artist who

isn’t missing. His photographs are poetic and thought-provoking encounters. A kitchen sink, filled and bubbling with water, seems to be on the brink of overflowing. Move closer and you see that the water is frozen.

In another piece, a dead bird lies in the middle of a newspaper clipping with a photograph of young people, their hands pressed against a window in anguish. It’s a clever juxtaposition: at first sight, their anguish is connected to the dead bird. But this piece also makes one wonder what coincidence of life led to the bird and the clipping coming together or whether Goiris has constructed an image lurking in his head.

With each of the works, in fact, it’s hard to say how much of the content has been set up for the shot and how much is naturally occurring.

Standing in front of work by

Above: Video collages reveal Aline Bouvy and John Gillis’ opinion of the beauty industry.
Below: emotionally explicit multi-media by Geert Goiris

Stephan Balleux and Xavier Mary has an immediate visceral effect. Balleux takes hyper-reality to another level in the “The Midsummer Marriage”. He doesn’t emulate real life but another art form entirely. What are you looking at – a vast swirling mass of oil painting on canvas? No. It’s surprising to find it is pastel on paper.

The periodic flashing on and off of Mary’s sculpture made from motorway lights is hypnotic. Displaced and transformed from their suburban environment, the metamorphosis of the lamps is disturbing. They become the new machinery of unknown worlds operating on the rhythms of their former incarnation.

Tucked away in the basement, Aline Bouvy and John Gillis’ film is a mesmeric feast. Made entirely of collaged images from fashion magazines, the vibrant animation takes a swipe at the beauty industry. Set to a pulsating soundtrack, it takes apart the vision of women in glossy periodicals and re-assembles them into bejewelled, multi-armed, multi-eyed aliens with varnished fingernails. The creativity and attention to detail pays re-watching.

In comparison, Heidi Voet’s delicately crafted origami flowers seem like they are going to be quite a docile experience. At closer inspection, parts of nude bodies become recognisable. They are in fact made from the pages of pornographic magazines featuring Asian women. Depending on the folds, the peek-a-boo played out on the petals and fronds has opposing effects. With some sprays it subverts the explicit nature of the images and adds a sensual layer of ambiguity. In others, it dismembers the bodies of the women, adding a further twist to pornographic fantasy.

Snauwaert intends to hold such a showcase every three years, which is good news for young Belgian artists. If the 20 up-and-comers here weren’t part of an art scene before, they certainly will be now.

Until 22 February, Wiels Centre for Contemporary Art, Van Volxemlaan 354, Brussels

online
www.wiels.org

Papa Copyright

The work in *Un-Scene* that demands the most attention but is the most rewarding lurks at the back of the third floor. Kobe Matthys, the artist behind Agency (a Brussels-based “agency for quasi creations”) is fascinated by the power struggle that goes on over who owns words and images – and even the art itself.

His current collection focuses on legal battles that have grown out of this conflict, which brings up how the law sees the act of creation. This raises questions about when a work is a result of collaboration. For example, in the 1960s, Ernest Hemingway’s widow tried to prevent the publication of a biography that quoted conversations her husband had had with the biographer, claiming it as the literary property of Hemingway.

“The judges had to decide whether the non-stop utterances of Hemingway are all literature,” says Matthys. “Everything he ever said – is it possibly literature? But also he had a dialogue with the biographer. Isn’t the dialogue a collaborative thing? Aren’t his words shaped by the questions the writer asks?”

The court ruled that AE Hotchner, the author of *Papa Hemingway*, did not infringe the common law copyright of these conversations by including them in a book on Hemingway’s life.

What makes Matthys’ work engaging is that, having researched and collated over 900 cases since 1992, he has also collected the artefacts. These fragments, such as the *Papa Hemingway* book; *Young at Heart*, a number one hit for Scottish pop group The Bluebells in 1993; or the DVD and clip of Spike Lee’s film *Malcolm X* playing in the exhibition, take on a new life as you read their potted history that sits alongside (in English, French and Dutch).



BOOKS

Speaking volumes

Flanders' oldest bookshop celebrates 120 years

Chris Spriet

To cut a long story short, the phrase goes. But some stories are worth hearing in full.

Take De Reyghere bookshop, which you will find smack in the shade of the belfry on the Grote Markt in Bruges. Not long after securing the only month a Belgian bookshop has ever gained on the International Booksellers' Association popular annual calendar, it's now celebrating its 120th anniversary, making it the oldest bookshop in Flanders.

In 1888, when Maupassant and Ibsen were the order of the day and Franz Kafka was a toddler, the main foreign magazines and dailies were available here. Edmond De Reyghere ran the shop with his wife, and she continued it after his death with her two sons, Lucien and Maurice.

After the First World War, the Dutch publishing business expanded and, in 1922, a "Fair of Dutch Scientific Books" was organised at De Reyghere. These kinds of events helped the De Reyghere family amass a number of notable customers and personal acquaintances.

Their guestbook boasts such signatures as Albert Einstein (April 1933), the prolific Flemish authors Ernest Claes and Stijn Streuvels and French novelist Marguerite Yourcenar. The latter struck up a close friendship with the De Reygheres in the 1970s when Lucienne De Reyghere, the daughter of Lucien, ran the shop. In Yourcenar's *Souvenirs Pieux* (*Dear Departed: A Memoir*), she compliments her hosts warmly.

The De Reyghere family also befriended noteworthy members of the British community, which had established itself in Bruges in the heyday of the 19th-century Flemish poet Guido Gezelle. Prominent among these was the Welsh artist Frank Brangwyn, who was born in Bruges and has a museum devoted to him in the city's Arens House.

In the post-war years, when the craze of the paperback was gaining ground, De Reyghere became known as "The English Bookshop". As the College of Europe gained a foothold in Bruges and ties with the bookshop grew, an interesting selection of Italian, Spanish, French and English fiction was – and still is – on sale.

Foreign visitors, obviously, benefitted greatly from these developments. Scads of the rich and famous visited the bookshop – the Princes Baudouin and Albert are known to have hidden behind the counter to escape supervision of their escorts.

These days, Yvonne Stein-

berger, the niece of Lucienne and president of the International Bookseller's Association since 1986, is an ardent champion of a fixed book price. "Controlling the price of retail books helps independent bookshops," she insists. "It offers benefits to bestsellers while allowing us to stock less commercial works and provide quality service."

On any given day, De Reyghere is bustling, with locals on a first-name basis with the expert team of employees, who contribute to that certain *je ne sais quoi* unique to independent bookshops. With so many tourists, De Reyghere opened a specialised travel bookshop next door, full of backpackers in every season. The shop also hosts numerous literary meetings and book signings, making it the hub of international literature in Bruges.

At a time when everyone is shopping for books on the internet and the downloadable book is right around the corner, it's heartening to see so many customers. "Not everyone orders their books online, or bookshops would have already been wiped out," says Steinberg. She notes that 60% of customers want to browse and don't realise yet what they will end up buying. Many customers also "need assistance and want to be helped immediately."

When entering the realm of the 17,000 or so titles on offer in the beautiful interior of De Reyghere, the book buff should bear in mind Oscar Wilde's adage: "I can resist everything but temptation". It's not for nothing that De Reyghere has lasted into its third century. With both a knack for safeguarding tradition and keeping a proactive eye on modern literary developments, De Reyghere has been – and remains – the heart of a cultural metropolis.

online
www.dereyghere.be



Longevity in loyalty: Customers still pack the Bruges bookstore De Reyghere, which has been in the same family for more than a century. "Not everyone orders their books online," says current owner, Yvonne Steinberg (right)



Sander Gheerts

FILM FREAK



French short *Au Pays des Glaces* (*In the Land of Ice*)

online
www.bozar.be

Satie, Cage and Ensor

Bozar's series Music and Silent Film charges a well-known personality with the task of choosing his or her favourite silent movies from the Belgian Royal Film Archive. Then they are paired with music, which is played live. This amounts to completely original fusions of sound and image that can create modern, new interpretations of each work.

On 16 December, writer/director Eric de Kuyper presents his selection – all short films from France, Portugal and the US. The music, meanwhile, includes cabaret and short dances by French composer Erik Satie; *Jazz Study*, *Ad Lib* and other work by American avant-garde composer John Cage; and sections from James Ensor's ballet *La gamme d'amour*, a rare musical composition by the Flemish painter.

All musical selections are performed by pianist Jean-Luc Plouvier of Ictus ensemble, accompanied by Belgian soprano Capucine Meens on the Satie compositions.

Lisa Bradshaw

16 December, 20.00, Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels. Find more Ensor next week in Flanders Today when we review the new James Ensor/Roger Raveel show at the Raveel museum.

Sandy Claus

Guess what? The coast is open during the winter, too

Denzil Walton

A trip to the Flemish coast during the Christmas holiday season combines the familiar with the unexpected.

You return to your favourite resort where you spent some time in the summer, and the seafront looks exactly the same as you left it in August. Kids are still tearing around uncontrollably on pedal cars; kites are still being flown by eager dads as their bored offspring look on; and teenage couples still wander around sharing an iPod and a pair of earphones. Yet at the same time, everything is different.

Instead of tucking into an ice cream, you munch a warm waffle. A cold beer on a terrace is replaced by *glühwein* in a sheltered café. Your children aren't interested in candy floss; they want *poffertjes*. Instead of watching the sand surfers you observe the ice skaters. And you delve into your pocket not for suntan lotion, but for salve to protect your lips from those chilly coastal blasts.

Amongst all the coastal resorts, Ostend has got its Christmas act together the best. The weekend of 13-14 December is Queen of Proms, when the restaurants on the Albert I promenade will present their Christmas specialities. As you amble along the seafront, you are invited to sample their seasonal delicacies. Not a bad way to discover the ideal restaurant for your Christmas or New Year's dinner.

After all those titbits, you might feel like a workout. For €5 you can rent ice skates and spend an hour losing your balance on the 1,000-square-metre ice rink on Wapenplein. (If you have already been shopping in Ostend, you might have saved enough points to qualify for free entrance.) Hungry again after all that? Then top up at the nearby Christmas market on roasted chestnuts, a steaming mug of cocoa or a glass or two of *glühwein*.

Father Christmas has even taken time out of his hectic global schedule to visit Ostend. He can be found every day outside St Joseph's church on Pieterslaan from 8 to 23 December. However, don't tell him about the competition: over the weekend of 19-21 December at the Ostend Tennis Club, the "genuine" Father Christmas from his Finnish hometown of Rovaniemi will be in attendance. His appearance is part of a huge lifestyle event called Winter Warmth at the Sea, which includes ice sculptors, craft workshops, a falconry display, wood carvers and some kind of evening spectacle involving a lot of fire.

If that is simply too much excitement, over at Leopold Park, you can simply gaze in wonder at the illuminated trees, bandstand and floral clock during Magic Lights in the Park.

For the truly brave (or extremely foolish), the new year's swim in the North Sea takes place on 3 January on the Ostend seafront near the Thermae Palace. Last year more than 6,000 enthusiasts took part. If you prefer, you can watch the event and shout your words of encouragement above the sounds of the local jazz band. Here are my personal words of support: "Don't worry, the sea isn't even freezing, it's a pleasant 4 degrees Celsius!"

Everyone with a bright spirit wants to see snow at Christmas. If that includes you, then head for Nieuwpoort market place between 23 December and 4 January, where you will be guaranteed a carpet of snow. And it's not



Koksijde's rink opens on 12 December with ice-skating demonstrations

Keeping it quiet

Whichever coastal town you decide to visit this winter, finding a restaurant to suit your palate and budget will not be difficult; you are spoiled for choice. However, you might like to get away from the crowds and seek a quieter table.

The picturesque village of Stene is on the outskirts of Ostend – you can actually walk there from the centre in a pleasant 10 kilometres that takes you along Visserskaai, through the Maria Hendrika Park and along the Gistelsesteenweg. Once in Stene, you can look around the old mill and St Anna's church with its 18th- and 19th-century furnishings and paintings. Both Gasthof Vossenhol and De Vlasschaard are recommended restaurants.

On 3 January at 19.00 on the Kerkplein in Stene you can enjoy *glühwein* and hot cocoa while they announce the prettiest front garden in the village. This will be followed by a light spectacle provided by The World of Pyro.

If you want to make Stene your base for a weekend visit to the coast, the farmhouse bed and breakfast 't Kruishof is ideal for children, who can even help the farmer milk the cows each morning.



You might get lucky this Christmas, but January is an even better month to expect snow on the coast

artificial; it's the real thing. And it's not just a pathetically thin sprinkle; children will be able to have heaps of fun on a big snow slide. Also in Nieuwpoort is the Kids' Winter Club, where those between 4 and 12 can sign up for an afternoon of clowns, magicians, face painting, a movie and a disco. It takes place in the Ysara Centre between 29 December and 2 January.

In Koksijde, events include a Mediaeval Winter Event on 23 December in the Ten Duinen Abbey Museum. Expect lots of food, drink and activities involving people dressed up as knights, monks and serving wenches.

Koksijde also has its own ice rink, on the Theaterplein, which opens on 12 December with a demonstration by ice skating groups, while on Christmas Day at 19.00, Fernand Fedronic, four-time French national champion and world silver medallist, will perform.

If you consider ice skating somewhat passé, you might like to drop in at the Hazebeek sports centre in Oostduinkerke on 21 December. During the Music for Life charity event of Studio Brussel, there will be a demonstration of "skiking", a combination of skating and biking. Developed in Austria, it is becoming popular both on- and off-road. Many beginners say that skiking is easier to learn than rollerblading or skiing. Now's your chance to find out.

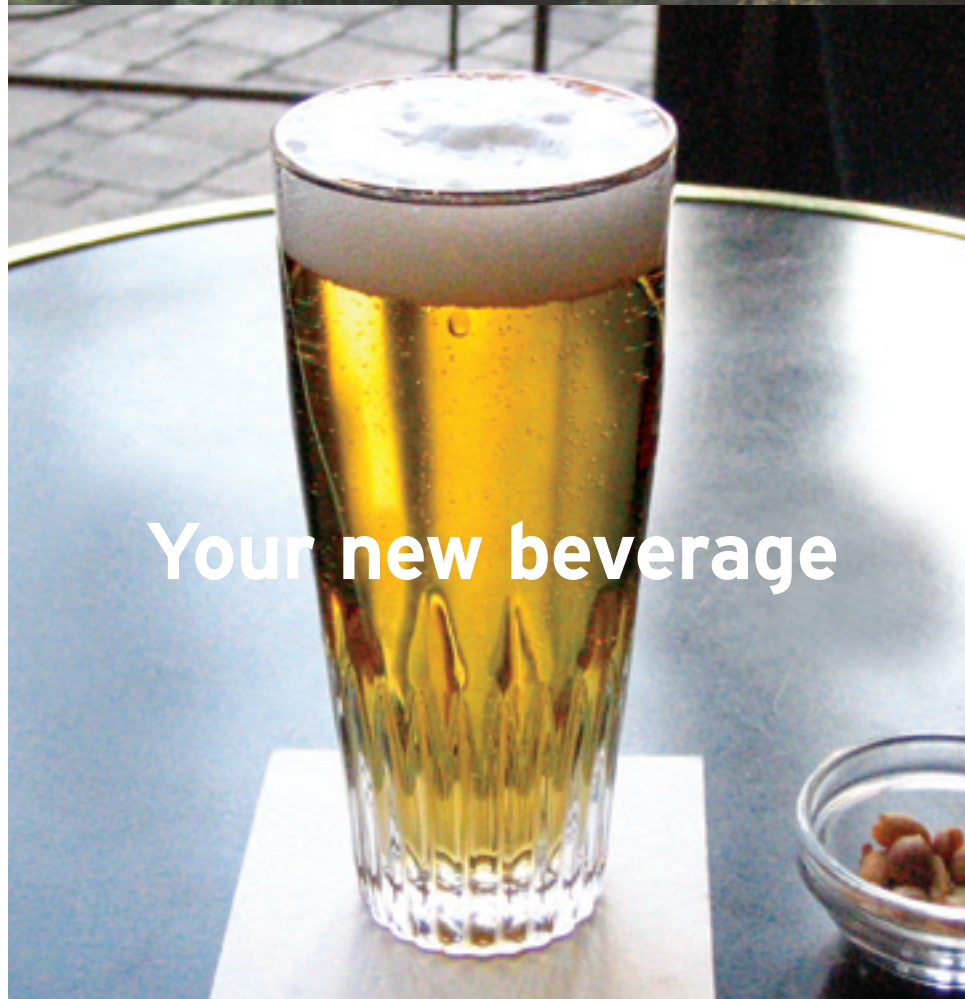
A final suggestion is to turn up at the Rotonde in Wenduine at 14.00 on 26 December. Here, members of the local coastal angling club will be catching sprats, grilling them in front of your eyes and offering them with a glass of jenever. Even the oldest traditions can still be surprising.



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FASHION

Handle with care

Fragile has reached number one because of its simple philosophy: treat pregnant women like everyone else

Stéphanie Duval

Eighteen years ago, Nathalie Vleeschouwer repeated the mantra many new business owners subscribe to: I could do better. She opened up her own boutique for maternity clothes, and now her own brand Fragile is the leader of its kind in Belgium. But it is also increasingly worn by women long after their pregnancy, or women who weren't even pregnant to begin with.

In less than 20 years, Fragile has established itself as a brand of quality and luxury combined with that Flemish knack for unique fashion and is looking beyond country borders.

"Fragile started out small. In the very beginning, there was only me," smiles Vleeschouwer. Eventually, she began hiring women who worked from their homes, and after that switched to small ateliers, "which were soon traded in for bigger ateliers," she says.

The 40-year-old was able to profit from the technical know-how that was present in Sint-Niklaas in the early 1990s, of which today almost nothing is left. "I liked working with these factories, and then they had to close down because we were one of their three last customers left," she sighs.

At one point, Fragile was produced in Belgium at just one atelier, the rest of the production having moved abroad. "Because I didn't want to lose this last atelier, which we have been working with for over 10 years, I decided to come to an informal agreement with them," says the Antwerp-based designer. "We make sure that each season we place enough orders for them to be able to continue, so that they don't have to worry every year whether they'll still exist the next."

This promise of loyalty is an important guiding force in Vleeschouwer's business. These days, it's considered unconventional for a fashion designer, but unconventional is the keyword for Fragile. In Belgium, the line is steadily broadening horizons and combating taboos by creating collections for pregnant women that are not only comfortable but beautiful. "My biggest inspiration always was and always will be the challenge to make a woman, whether pregnant or not, feel comfortable and sexy at the same time," says Vleeschouwer.

Fragile is sold in numerous shops in Belgium and also has two of its own boutiques – in Antwerp and in Lier. In March of this year, the brand also opened a boutique in the Dutch city Den Haag, and September saw the opening of one in Moscow. "When I noticed that my clothes made pregnant women coming to my little shop really happy, I wanted to spread that feeling all over Belgium," Vleeschouwer says. "From the moment Fragile was present in so many Belgian boutiques, I started wondering whether I could spread to other countries. Franchising allows us to go further so that we don't just make some pretty clothes, but we can also influence the way it is presented to the consumer."

Opening shops internationally, though, has not been an easy process, especially in a niche market like maternity clothes.

"We hired a company to guide us through the process, but the plans they had for our brand were not realistic," Vleeschouwer says. "We're too small and specific to open 20 shops at once on the Dutch market." Goals and targets had to be adjusted. "We always have to figure things out for ourselves because we don't fit in the regular fashion company profile."

Two years ago, the company began concentrating on the Japanese market. "It's been very pleasant doing business with the Japanese, but they are very strict and correct." They couldn't call the line Fragile, for instance, because that name was already taken by another company. So Vleeschouwer decided to label the collection for the Japanese market after her own name, much to the delight of the Japanese fashion industry, which has a thing for unpronounceable, exotic names.

But what started as a solution to a problem, soon got her thinking: "I've been designing this collection for the past 18 years," she says. "Fragile hasn't had a different stylist every year, like some other brands. It really is my brand." Industry reps coming to her fashion shows pointed out that, though the collection had evolved throughout the years, you could still very clearly see her signature. "So I decided I would like to tell the world that I am a designer, and that Fragile is not just a commercial collection," she states.

The result is a small capsule line, next to the regular Fragile collection, labelled "Nathalie Vleeschouwer." It's a selection of "slightly more daring and dressy designs," she says, that will be for sale in boutiques next summer.

Just in time for future moms to show off those gorgeous round shoulders.

online
www.fragile.be



Fragile, where sexy and comfortable are not mutually exclusive

MUSEUM

To catch a thief

Museum invites you to steal diamonds

Alan Hope

What better way could there be to end a trip to the Diamond Museum in Antwerp than by wiping out some security guards, breaking into the strongroom and stealing a priceless gem?

That's what visitors to the museum are finding these days, thanks to a unique collaboration with local youth.

It started last year when the museum staged a small exhibition on the current rage for "bling" – flamboyant and extravagant hip-hop jewellery (not always genuine diamonds, it has to be said). About 20 young people involved in the arts group Piazza dell'Arte were consulted, and, thanks to their input, the *Bling Bling* exhibition grew into a major event.

This year they all collaborated again,



and the result is *Grand Theft Diamond*, a computer game in five languages that offers a bit of larcenous fun while teaching

about diamonds and security. "The idea came from them," explains Maarten Gillis, education assistant at the museum. "We took care of the technical organisation, and Piazza dell'Arte covered the artistic side."

The Diamond Museum is an institution of Antwerp province and also receives subsidies from the Flemish region. "Most of the partners worked for virtually nothing," Gillis says. "The game itself cost about €7,000, which is peanuts."

Without giving too much away, *Grand Theft Diamond* comprises three stages: take out the security system, gain entry to the stronghold, then pick out the only valuable diamond from the many flawed ones. There's a prize for successful robbers. Average playing time is 15 to 20 minutes.

Until 31 December, Koningin Astridplein 19-23, Antwerp

online
www.diamantmuseum.be

Classical & New Music

Antwerp

Amuz

Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28

DEC 14 15.00 Brussels Philharmonic, conducted by Bo Holten: Rossini's Petite messe solennelle

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,

www.desingel.be

Concerts at 20.00:

DEC 10 Sabine Meyer, clarinet with Ensemble Collage: Beethoven, Brahms
DEC 12 Collegium Vocale Gent, conducted by Peter Kooij: Schütz, Bach
DEC 13 Cappella Amsterdam & Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, conducted by Daniel Reuss: Handel's Messiah
DEC 14 15.00 Symfonieorkest Vlaanderen, conducted by Henrik Schaefer: Respighi, Martin, Schubert
DEC 17 Quatuor Ysaye, with Pascal Rogé, piano: Franck, Fauré

Bruges

Concertgebouw

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02,

www.concertgebouw.be

DEC 16 20.00 Symfonieorkest Vlaanderen, conducted by Henrik Schaefer: Respighi, Martin, Schubert
DEC 17 20.00 Brussels Philharmonic, conducted by Bo Holten, with Claire Chevallier, piano, Joris Verdin: Rossini's Petite messe solennelle

Brussels

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,

www.bozar.be

Concerts at 20.00:

DEC 11 Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, conducted by Simon Rattle: Berlioz' King Lear overture op 4, Schumann's Symphony No 4, op 120 & Symphony No 2, op 61
DEC 12 Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, conducted by Simon Rattle: Berlioz' Les Francs-juges overture, Schumann's Symphony No 1, op 38 & Symphony No 3, op 97
DEC 13 Cecilia Bartoli, mezzo; Sergio Ciomei, piano: Rossini, Bellini,

Donizetti, Viardot, Garcia, Malibran
DEC 14 SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg, conducted by Sylvain Cambreling: Messiaen's Eclairs sur l'au-delà
DEC 16 Film concert: short films selected by Eric de Kuyper set to music by Erik Satie, John Cage and James Ensor, performed live

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39,

www.demunt.be

DEC 12 19.00 De Munt Chamber Music Ensemble with Dame Felicity Lott, soprano: Hahn, Kern, Messenger, Offenbach (The Friends of De Munt 20th anniversary concert)

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,

www.flagey.be

DEC 11 20.15 Ictus 'One.Only.One': Jérôme Combier

DEC 12 12.30 Armide ensemble (Piknikmusik). 20.15 Brussels Philharmonic, conducted by Marc Soustrot: Messiaen's Des canyons aux étoiles

DEC 14 14.00-20.00 Five concert series: Fabian Fiorini and Jan Michiels, piano: Baudouin de Jaer's works for violin

Kaaithheater

Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59,

www.kaaithheater.be

DEC 11 20.30 European Saxophone Ensemble, classical, improvisation, avant-jazz and new works

Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 0475.76.23.32,

astoriaconcerts@skynet.be

DEC 14 11.00 Het Collectief: Jongen, Messiaen's Le Quatuor pour la fin du temps

Royal Library

Kunstberg; 02.519.57.51, www.kbr.be

DEC 12 12.30 Thibaut Lenaerts, tenor; Mariano Ferrández, piano: Gevaert

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37

Concerts at 20.00:

DEC 10 B'Rock with Vittorio Ghielmi, conductor and viola da gamba; Julien Martin, flute: Telemann, Uri Caine

DEC 12 Concert anniversaire Gevaerts: Le Petit Sablon Ensemble and vocal students, conducted by Thibaut

Lenaerts
DEC 15 Concert by violin students
DEC 16 Tasto Solo ensemble: Conrad Paumann and the 15th-century German keyboard school

Sint-Marcuskerk

de Frélaan 72; 02.331.37.14 or

www.32sonates.be

DEC 12 20.00 Olivier De Spiegeleir, piano: Beethoven sonatas

Wolubilis

Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30,

www.wolubilis.be

DEC 15 20.00 Charlemagne

Orchestra for Europe, conducted by Bartholomeus-Henri Van de Velde, with Michèle Losier, mezzo: Mora, opera extracts, Mozart, Haydn

Hoeilaart

Maison de la Musique

Edgar Sohiestraat 41; 02.657.96.52

DEC 13 20.00 Made in US concert: Gershwin, Bernstein, Copland, Barber

Wezembeek-Oppem

Sint-Pieterskerk

Sint-Pietersvoorplein; 02.731.36.24,

maaikensteens@hotmail.com

DEC 13 20.15 Christmas cantata: Joy in Art and Laudato Si, conducted by Jaak Gregoor: Schubert, Rheinberger's Der Stern von Bethlehem op 164

Opera

Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera

Frankrijklei 3; 070.22.02.02

DEC 14-30 20.00/15.00 Falstaff by Verdi with Flemish Opera Symphony Orchestra and Choir, conducted by Enrique Mazzola

Brussels

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39,

www.demunt.be

Until DEC 21 15.00/19.00 Rusalka by Dvorak with De Munt Symphony Orchestra

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera

Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02,

www.vlaamseopera.be

DEC 13 20.00 From Rossini to the French operetta

Jazz & blues

Brussels

Archiduc

Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52,

www.archiduc.net

DEC 13 17.00 Egon (free concert)

Charliermuseum

Kunstlaan 16; 02.218.53.82,

www.charliermuseum.be

DEC 16 12.30 Sofia Ribeiro with Marc Demuth Duo

De Maalbeek Cultural Centre

Hoornstraat 97 ; 02.734.84.43

DEC 10 20.00 Jazz Cat Rally

Espace Senghor

Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40,

www.senghor.be

DEC 12 20.30 Kolo Barts

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,

www.flagey.be

DEC 13 20.15 Yaron Herman & Avishai Cohen Trios

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193-195;

02.733.13.78

DEC 10 20.30 Saxkartel with Tutu Puoane
DEC 12 20.30 NU:BE Nights
DEC 13 18.00 4 in 1
DEC 17 20.30 Guillaume Palomba Quartet. Egon

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15

DEC 12 20.30 Ivan Paduart, Fay Claassen and the Metropole Orchestra with Bob Malach

Le Caveau du Max

Emile Maxlaan 87; 02.733.17.88

DEC 11 20.30 Michel Mainil Quintet with DJ Landzar

L'Os à Moelle

Emile Maxlaan 153; 02.267.10.90,

www.osamoelle.be

DEC 12 20.30 Jozef Dumoulin

Maison des Musiques

Lebeauststraat 39; 02.550.13.20

DEC 12 12.30 Tuur Florizoone & Anu Junonnen

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,

www.soundsjazzclub.be

DEC 11 22.00 Bart Defoort & Emanuele Cisi Quintet
DEC 12 22.00 Mimi Verderame Quartet
DEC 13 21.00 Brussels Rhythm'n Blues: The Witness
DEC 15 22.00 Master Session
DEC 16 22.00 Da Romeo & The Crazy Moondog Quartet
DEC 17 22.00 Caribe Con K, Caribbean music

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45

Until DEC 13 20.30 The Brussels

International Young Jazz Singers Competition: Voices Now
DEC 16 20.30 Dax-the Man with the Sax
DEC 17 20.30 MDM Band

Theatre 140

Eugène Plaskyalaan 140; 02.733.97.08

DEC 10 20.30 Robin McKelle

Leuven

Het Depot

Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03

DEC 13 20.00 DJ Buscemi & The Michel Bisceglia Ensemble + Kraak & Smaak + Squadra Bossa

Sterrebeek

Gemeenschapscentrum De Maalderij

Walenhof

DEC 13 19.30 Big Band Nothengem

Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul

Antwerp

Lotto Arena

Schijsnpootweg 119; 0900.26.060

DEC 11 20.00 Anouk

Sportpaleis

Schijsnpootweg 119; 0900.26.060

Until DEC 27 20.30 Clouseau

Crescendo

Borgerhout

De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.292.97.40,

www.deroma.be

DEC 11 20.30 Omar Sosa Quartet

Hof Ter Lo

Noordersingel 30; 03.543.90.30

DEC 13 18.30 Asrai + Scepticflesh + Moonspell + Gorgoroth + Cradle of Filth

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24

Concerts at 20.00:

DEC 10 Arno (Amnesty International concert)
DEC 11 Saroos + The Notwist
DEC 12 Montevideo vs Compuphoni
DEC 13 Travis. Café Neon + Wintersleep
DEC 13 Voices Now: singing competition final
DEC 14 Xavier Rudd

Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,

www.beursschouwburg.be

DEC 10 20.30 Diasporasounds #1 & Tirana-Brussel

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89

DEC 13 23.00 Bpitch label night: Ellen Allien, Sascha Funke. Cecille records label night: Markus Fix, Sis

Halles de Schaerbeek

Koninklijke Sinte-Mariastraat 22;

02.218.21.07

DEC 13 20.00 Gotan Project

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15

Concerts at 20.00:

DEC 10 Stanislas

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.218.37.32

Concerts at 20.00:

DEC 10 Austin Lace
DEC 11 Yoav. The Short Straws & Phoebe Killdeer. Soap & Skin
DEC 12 Compilation Jaune Orange Vol 4 Release Party with Hollywood Porn Stars, Superlux, My Little Cheap Dictaphone and more
DEC 13 Finale Concours Circuit/ pop rock: Alpha 2.1, Bikinians, OK Cowboy!, Papa Dada, The Archbishops, The Vagabonds
DEC 14 Black Angels

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34,

www.recyclart.be

DEC 12 20.00 AB@Recyclart:

Wintersleep, Cafeneon

Stekerlapatte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81,

www.stekerlapatte.be

DEC 13 21.30 Polo

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07,

www.vkconcerts.be

DEC 10 20.00 A Jarring Effects label night with Brain Damage & High Tone

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991

DEC 10-11 20.00 dEUS & Expatriate

DEC 15 Madness

Ghent

Handelsbeurs

Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01,

www.handelsbeurs.be

DEC 10 20.00 Pete Murray

Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060,

www.vooruit.be

DEC 10 20.00 Isis & Guapo & DJ SVN

DEC 14 14.00 Les Amis de Louis & DJ

Guy Broeckhove

Hasselt

Muziekodroom

Bootstraat 9; www.muziekodroom.be

DEC 11 20.30 Memo Gonzalez & The Bluescasters

Kortrijk

De Kreun

Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44,

www.dekreun.be

DEC 12 20.00 The Ronas + The Hickey Underworld

Leopoldsborg

CC Leopoldsborg

Kastanjedreef 1; 011.34.65.48,

www.ccleopoldsborg.be

DEC 11 20.15 Black Voices, a capella

Leuven

Het Depot

Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03

DEC 11 20.00 The Ronas + The Hickey Underworld

DEC 13 20.00 Buscemi & The Michel Bisceglia Ensemble
DEC 16 20.00 Sarah Bettens

Stuk

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20

DEC 12 20.00 Displaced Sounds, music and screenings by BJ Nilsen, Tarab and Stan Brakhage

Dance

Antwerp

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,

www.desingel.be

Until DEC 13 20.00 Les Ballets C de la B in Pitiél, based on Bach's St Matthew Passion, staged by Alain Platel with music by Fabrizio Cassol

Don't miss



deUS

11 December, Vorst-Nationaal, Victor Rousseaulaan 208, Brussels. Tickets from 0900.69.900 or www.vorstnationaal.be

Last-minute tickets are still available for the second show, which Vorst Nationaal added after the first one sold out faster than you can say “legendary Flemish band”. If you’ve never seen the Tom Barman-fronted, Antwerp-based group of five, you owe it to yourself. Though they could be called an alt-rock band, they are too big for just one genre and must incorporate pop, folk, prog rock and even heavy metal to get across their mix of perfect melody and experimental riffs. The name means “god” in Latin. Believe it. **Lisa Bradshaw**

Brussels

Les Brigittines
Korte Brigittinenstraat; 02.506.43.00, www.brigittines.be
Until DEC 11 20.30 P.A.R.T.S. in Trust me, choreographed by Mia Lawrence

Théâtre Varia

Scepterstraat 78; 02.640.82.58
Until DEC 13 19.30 or 20.00 V.-Nightmares, choreographed by Thierry Smits, based on and accompanied by Vivaldi's The Four Seasons

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
DEC 30 19.30 Saint Petersburg Ballet in The Nutcracker, with music by the Ukraine National Philharmonic

Theatre

Antwerp

Antwerpen X
Berchem, Antwerpse Ring; 070.344.555, www.daens.be
Until DEC 28 Daens: The Musical (in Dutch with French surtitles)

Het Toneelhuis/Bourla

Komedieplaats 18; 03.224.88.44, www.toneelhuis.be
DEC 13 20.00 De Filmfabriek in De wilde wilde weg (The Wild Wild Way), based on Steve Tesich's On the Open Road (in Dutch)

Zuiderpershuis

Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.zuiderpershuis.be
DEC 14 20.30 Dhakara, written and staged Rudi Meulemans (in Dutch, part of Masarat Palestine Festival)

Ardooië

Cultuurkapel De Schaduw
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82, www.deschaduw.net
DEC 12 20.30 Theater van de fonkelende duisternis (Glowing Darkness Theatre) (in Dutch)

Bruges

De Werf
Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29
DEC 12-13 20.30 Inside Stories, written and staged by Peter De Graef (in Dutch)

Brussels

Scarabaeus Theatre
Hollestraat 19-27; 02.649.79.16
Until DEC 14 15.00 or 20.00 English Comedy Club in A Christmas Carol

Theatre 140

Eugène Plasky laan 140; 02.733.97.08, www.theatre140.be
DEC 12 20.30 Rich Hall/Otis Lee Crenshaw Solo Show, stand-up comedy

Ghent

Theater Tinnenpot
Tinnenpotstraat 21; 09.225.18.60, www.tinnenpot.be
DEC 11-13 20.00 Kent iemand Egide? (Does anyone know Egide?) (in Dutch)
DEC 15-17 20.00 Die zucht zopas (She Just Sighed) (in Dutch)
DEC 16 20.00 Caveman (in Dutch)

Visual arts

Aalst

Centrum for Hedendaagse Kunst
Houtkaai; 053.70.97.73
Until DEC 20 Rocaille/
Gereedschapskist & Le Vase-entrepôt, new sculptures by Freek Wambacq

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.260.99.99, www.muhka.be
Until JAN 4 The Order of Things, group show questioning the use of archival images

Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00
Until JAN 4 Gérald Dauphin, retrospective of work by the Antwerp

photographer (1938-2007)
Until JAN 4 Een wereld zonder einde (A World Without End), retrospective of work by Belgian photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart

Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten/Royal Museum of Fine Arts
Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09
Until DEC 14 Head on Shoulders. Portrait busts in the Low Countries, 1600 - 1800, likenesses of politicians, scientists, philosophers, mythical figures, writers and actresses

Middelheim Museum

Middelheimlaan 61; 03.828.13.50, www.middelheimmuseum.be
Until DEC 14 Rodin: Balzac, story of a masterwork, tribute to the French sculptor's famous work

Modemuseum (MoMu)

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70, www.momu.be
Until FEB 8 Maison Martin Margiela (20) The Exhibition, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the famous fashion house

Zilvermuseum Sterckshof

Cornelissenlaan; 03.360.52.52
Until JAN 18 Fifties Silver, Belgian civil and religious silver design from 1950 to 1970

Bilzen

Landcommanderij Alden Biesen
Kasteelstraat 6; 089.51.93.42
Until DEC 14 Limburg in 't geweer, 300 years of military history in Limburg province, with paintings, drawings, weapons and models

Bruges

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
Until JAN 4 Stradanus: Artist at the Medici Court, retrospective of Bruges-born artist Johannes Stradanus, with paintings, drawings, prints and tapestries

Brussels

Argos Centre for Art and Media
Werfstraat 13; 02.229.00.03, www.argosarts.org
Until JAN 3 Interstitial Zones, 15 artists offer a critical alternative to the mass media's coverage of modern history

De Elektriciteitscentrale European Centre for Contemporary Art
Sint Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.35
Until JAN 11 Réfléchir le monde (Reflecting the World), photographs, video and installations by contemporary French artists on the occasion of the European Union's French Presidency

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25
Until DEC 21 Ware Liefde! (True Love!), group show

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60
Until DEC 31 Design Verpakt, jewellery, home fashion and other objects by contemporary Flemish designers

Flemish Parliament

IJzerenkruisstraat 299; 02.552.40.43
Until DEC 20 Screenworlds, contemporary Flemish photography

ING Cultural Centre

Koningsplein 6; 02.547.22.92
Until MAR 15 Oceania: Signs of Ritual, Symbols of Authority, sculptures, masks, artefacts, weapons and utilitarian objects from Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia

Royal Museum of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11
Until MAR 8 Continental Superstar, mechanical organs from the Ghysels

collection, with recreated dance floor, bar and lighting

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11, www.fine-arts-museum.be

Until JAN 4 Meunier in Séville, 80 paintings made in Spain by 19th-century Belgian artist Constantin Meunier
Until JAN 18 Landscapes and portraits by Belgian artist Lismonde

Until JAN 25 Breuk en erfenis (Separation and Heritage), show marking the European Union's French Presidency, with 1970s works by French artists
Until FEB 15 CoBrA, major retrospective on the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Cobra movement

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49
Until MAR 31 That's Opera: 200 Years of Italian Music, a look behind the scenes of the making of an opera, travelling exhibition by music publishers Ricordi

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33, www.wiels.org
Until FEB 22 Un-Scene, works by young Belgian artists

Ghent

Caermersklooster
Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10
Until DEC 21 Glans en duister (Glossy and Dark), photographs by Eric Standaert
Until DEC 21 Harold Lloyd, tribute to the famous American actor and director (1893-1971)

Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99
Until JAN 26 100 years Demeyere, stylish cooking utensils by the Belgian manufacturer
Until JAN 26 Retrospective of German Jewellery designer Hermann Jünger (1928-2005)

Kunsthal Sint-Pietersabdij

Sint-Pietersplein 9; 09.243.97.30, www.gent.be/spa
Until MAR 29 Flemish wall tapestries from the 15th and 16th centuries

Museum of Fine Arts

Fernand Scribedreef 1 – Citadelpark; 09.240.07.00, www.mskgent.be
Until JAN 18 Giambattista Piranesi, prints by the Italian architect and artist (1720-1778)

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03, www.smak.be
Until JAN 3 Faux Jumeaux (False Twins), carte blanche to Belgian artist Michel François
Until JAN 18 Anyth_ =, paintings by Werner Mannaers

Hasselt

Modemuseum
Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21
Until JAN 4 Ten dans gevraagd (Invitation to Dance), dance costumes by fashion designers and artists from 1920 to the present day

Z33

Zuivelmarkt (Beguinaage) 33; 011.29.59.60
Until JAN 4 The Great Exhibition Part 1: Europe, a project by Ives Maes linking world exhibitions to science fiction

Machelen-Zulte

Het Roger Raveelmuseum
Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00
Until FEB 22 Ensor & Raveel: Kindred Spirits, drawings and paintings by the Belgian artists

Meise

Kasteel van Bouchout, Meise Botanical Garden

Nieuwelaan 38; 02.260.09. 20
Until FEB 1 Plantenportretten (Plant Portraits), watercolours by the garden's illustrators

Ostend

Kunstmuseum Aan Zee
Romestraat 11; 059.50.81.18, www.pmmk.be
Until DEC 15 In the Cherished Company of Others, drawings, sculpture, paintings and installations by Marc Camille Chaimowicz, shown with works by international artists

Tervuren

Royal Museum for Central Africa
Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11
Until AUG 31 Omo: People & Design, Hans Silvester's photographs of south-western Ethiopia's nomadic tribes and objects from the museum's collection

Festivals & special events

Antwerp

Beurs Voeding & Huiscomfort:
International food and home comfort fair with Belgian specialties, world wines, table, kitchen and house decoration
Until DEC 14 at Antwerp Expo, Jan Van Rijswijklaan 191
03.260.81.22, www.newfacom.be

Christmas Market

DEC 12-28 on Groenplaats and outdoor skating rinks on Grote Markt www.antwerpen.be

Jewish Culture Festival: Exhibitions, theatre, music and film exploring local and international Jewish life
Until DEC 2009 across Antwerp www.joodscultuurfestival.be

Bruges

Christmas Market
Until JAN 4 on Grote Markt and Simon Stevinplein, plus ice skating on the Grote Markt and special lighting and outdoor concerts on Arentshof and the Gruuthuse Museum courtyard www.brugge.be

December Dance 08: The second edition of the festival showcases the Quebec dance scene
Until DEC 14 across Bruges www.decemberdance.be

Kantlijnen: The Face of Lace: A celebration of lace, from ancient art to contemporary art and fashion
Until MAR 14 in venues across Bruges www.kantlijnen.be.

Snow & Ice Sculpture Festival: A glacial fantasy world created by 40 international ice sculptors, with refreshments available from the ice bar
Until JAN 11 at the Bruges train station square www.icesculpture.be

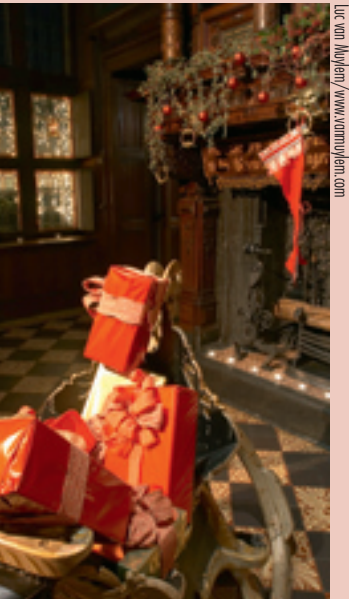
Brussels

Het literaire prijzencircus (The Literary Prize Circus): Debate on the insitution of literary prizes and the state of literature today, with Kevin Absillis, Hans Vandevoorde and Marc Kregting (in Dutch)
DEC 10 20.00 at deBuren, Leopoldstraat 6
02.212.19.30, www.deburen.eu

How Women Can Achieve What They Really Want: Conference with American author and critic Sara Laschever, among other speakers (organised by Food for Thought and Professional Women International Brussels)
DEC 11 10.00-14.00 at Wolubilis, Paul Hymanslaan
0479.24.03.17, www.foodforthought.be

Palestine Festival: Contemporary Palestinian culture with exhibitions, theatre, and multidisciplinary events
Until JAN 11 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

Don't miss



Lee van Mulken / www.vormut.be

Christmas at the Castle

13-14 December,
Kasteelstraat 40, Gaasbeek,
www.kasteelvangaasbeek.be

By this weekend, you will not be able to step out your front door without running into a Christmas market. But this one is worth a drive to Gaasbeek, about 12 kilometres east of Brussels. With an Austrian theme, it is rife with Christmas trees, decoration and musical performances, plus an exhibition of Biedermeier porcelain. Wine and schnapps tasting for warming up and Viennese pastries for filling up. Work-shops and storytelling for kids means they won't get bored. If you need something to get you in the spirit of the season, there's nothing better. **LB**

Wine Fair: Featuring all the wine regions of France
DEC 12-14 at Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan 86C
02.549.60.49, www.tour-taxis.com or www.vignes-terroirs.be

Winter Wonders: Annual Christmas market with ice skating rinks, big wheel and sound and light show
Until JAN 4 on Sint-Katelijneplein, Vismarkt, Beurs and Grote Markt www.winterwonders.be

Ghent

Christmas Market
DEC 12-30 on Sint Baafsplein, plus ice skating on Emile Braunplein
09.221.45.28, www.gent.be

Grimbergen

Christmas Market: Two-day market with a British touch. Procession, concerts, fireworks
DEC 13-14 in Grimbergen centre
02.260.12.91, www.grimbergen.be

Koksijde

Outdoor skating rink
DEC 12-JAN 11 on Theaterplein
058.51.29.10, www.koksijde.be

Leuven

Christmas Market
DEC 12-21 on Monseigneur Ladeuze Square and Herbert Hoover Square
016.23.71.41, www.leuvenskerstmarkt.com

Ostend

Christmas market: Numerous festive stands and outdoor skating rink
Until DEC 24 on Wapenplein www.eindejaarinooostende.be

INTERVIEW

“People still enjoy a good book”



THE
BOOKS
ISSUE

For the past 25 years, Frans Schotte has worked for Standaard Boekhandel, which sells 100 million books a year in Flanders. He has witnessed the Flemish chain's tenfold growth. Today he is their CEO.

The book market is in flux. eBooks, Amazon.com, Bol, Google Books, audio books and a host of other inventions are drastically altering the literature landscape. Yet sales at chains such as Standaard Boekhandel, which represents 38% of the Flemish market, keep growing, despite a demographic downturn that lowers the number of instructional books being purchased. According to Frans Schotte, educational and science books could become rarer as their place on the shelf is taken up by more novels and non-fiction.

What trends are you observing in the book market?

There's a shift to different kinds of books. There's isn't too much growth in anything that's informative and educational anymore because of the internet and everything it offers. Everything that's not educational remains. We've concluded that people still don't like reading off a screen as much as reading off a page, and they still enjoy owning a nice book. So we don't think there's a negative trend away from books.

Who's buying these books?

Lots of books are purchased to be given as gifts. If we don't count educational books, half of all books we sell are intended to be presents. That includes gift-vouchers, too, and that's not about to change. Today books are even more desirable as presents than in the past.

Why are books such popular gifts?

Books have advantages other products don't. Flowers wilt, books never do. You can use a book when it's convenient, whereas tickets to a movie or an event require you to go at a specific time. Plus, a football match is over after 90 minutes, but you enjoy a book for longer than that. And books are relatively cheap goods. I really think that the market for books as a present will keep growing. There's nothing more personal than a book. But you can only give a book to somebody you really know – although you can give a voucher to anyone.

What's business like right now?

We're experiencing growth every year because we're opening more and more stores. But existing stores are seeing growth in their performances, too. Some sub-markets aren't growing, though, like educational books, for example. The number of pupils in schools is falling because fewer children

were born 12 years ago. The arrival of the internet makes certain information easily available and encourages buying at Amazon or Bol. Still, we keep seeing growth in the sale of books.

Three-quarters of our total turnover comes from books with the rest coming from newspapers, cards, DVDs, etc. Of the books, a third sold are educational and 10% are scientific. The rest is equally divided between fiction and non-fiction, which continues to do very well, each selling for €40 million a year. We're growing at five to eight percent a year – 10% when we open more stores. More and more established

writers create best-sellers and do very well. So the book in general is doing very well. The market is growing.

Do you see the eBook as a competitor?

The eBook will probably find its place, but I suspect that it will occupy a relatively small space on the market because they're annoying to read – it's not pleasant. And you lose the charm of nosing around a bookstore. The fun of shopping is lost on the eBook. It is something that we're working on, though, and I can't exclude us getting into them, too.

Are Amazon and Bol.com keeping people out of your stores?

Actually, we're seeing more and more people come into the store. This year, 3.5% more people walked in than in 2006. I don't exactly how that is explained, but it could come from libraries. The Flemish libraries are very successful, and I suspect that people who borrow a lot of books tend to become book buyers, too. There are more and more bookstores everywhere, despite the creation of websites that sell books.

Do you affect the buying habits of your customers – or vice versa?

We're already seeing a disproportionate growth towards fiction and non-fiction against that of scientific and school books. So we buy what our client wants. We tend to stock what they expect to see in our stores. We're not by any means trying to control what our customers buy. That's not our mission.

What's the key to selling books?

As long as your starting point is keeping your customers happy, you'll never struggle to generate revenue in the book market. I think if you start worrying about what products you carry but ignore what your client is after, you're going to run into trouble. At the moment, our customer is happiest when provided with fiction. So that's what we supply. We keep the customers happy by providing what they expect to see when they walk into our stores.

Interview by Leander Schaerlaeckens

online

www.standaardboekhandel.be



Reporters

THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

Bye bye Bert

"The separation has been hard on me. I've been active in this movement my whole political life. This party is a little bit like one of my children."

Bert Anciaux
who quit the Vlaams
Progressieven to begin
negotiations with the SPA

Winning shot

"Unbelievable how football changed my life."

Lucca
from Antwerp
representing Belgium at
the World Homeless Cup in
Melbourne, Australia

Yes, we can

"Last year I saw on TV how the Freis village of Joure was transformed into a fairytale snowy landscape, and I thought, we must be able to do that in Putte too."

Marc Van Leijenhof
from Putte near Kapellen,
which will spray its main street
and two churches with fake
snow for the holidays

Christmas in Paris

Bozar birthday

Dutch for Brussels' shopkeepers

Kortrijk

Ensor & Raveel

Music for

Life

next week in Flanders Today