

MR PRESIDENT



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Herman Van Rompuy, Belgium's reluctant prime minister, has been chosen by the leaders of the 26 other member states of the European Union as the first president of the Council of Ministers. Following weeks of speculation and competing bids from the likes of Dutch prime minister Jan Peter Balkenende and former British prime minister Tony Blair, Van Rompuy was selected at a meeting of European leaders over dinner last Thursday, 19 November. The leaders also chose Catherine Ashton, who stood in for EU Commissioner Peter Mandelson when he returned to Westminster politics, as the new High Representative, a job roughly equivalent to foreign minister.

Van Rompuy was born in 1947 in Etterbeek into a staunchly Catholic and politically engaged family. He studied at the Sint Jan Berchmans College in Brussels and at the Catholic University of Leuven, before working his way up the party organisation of the former CVP party, now CD&V – the Flemish Christian Democrats. An intellectual known for a slightly monkish demeanour, which masks a sometimes acid tongue, Van Rompuy's main claim to fame was his reining in of Belgium's debt in the early 1990s. He had spent barely a year as chairman of the Chamber of Representatives when former prime minister Yves Leterme resigned, throwing the country into constitutional chaos. As a senior figure viewed as a safe pair of hands,

at arm's length from political bickering, Van Rompuy was the choice of King Albert himself to take over as prime minister: it is said the monarch took 90 minutes to convince him to take the job.

He echoed that reluctance following the outcome of last week's meeting, stressing that he had not sought the post of president but would carry it out with "enthusiasm and conviction". The job of EU president carries a term of two-and-a-half years, with the possibility of being renewed in office once for a maximum total of five years. The president chairs EU summits, drives forward the work of the Council of Ministers and represents the EU to the world. ♦

► [more on page 3](#)

CLEVELAND MOFFETT

The sick building

The Joseph Lemaire Sanatorium in Tombeek has been listed as one of the world's 100 most endangered building. Can anyone save it from demolition?

There's nothing like a good grey and rainy day to bring out all the unutterable gloominess of the Joseph Lemaire Sanatorium in Tombeek. The only reason I took the trouble to find the place (not easy) and to ignore the warning not to enter it was because an eminent body of international architects – the venerable World Monuments Fund – has concluded that this wreck of a building is worth salvaging. It has in fact been listed for the year 2010 as "One of the 100 Most Endangered Sites in the World."

Endangered it may well be, or what's left of it. After examining it on the Save the Sanatorium website, I decided I had to see it firsthand. The address is more than a little vague – about 20 kilometres southeast of Brussels, just beyond Tombeek. When I

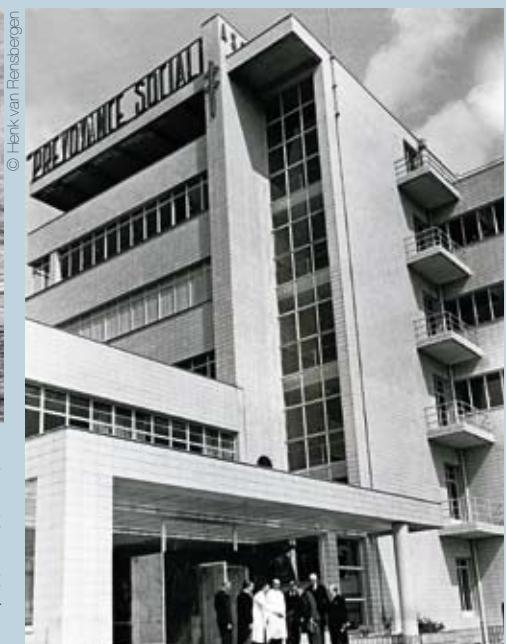
stopped for directions at a *friterie*, they said I should go up the hill when I saw the sign for Acacia, a rest home.

The approach to the sanatorium today will give you a rough idea of just what an impressive institution it must have been. Two long, straight roads, one in, one out, separated by an overgrown traffic divider, lead you between two rows of towering pines to the once-upon-a-time hospital for dying or surviving tuberculosis patients.

I can't claim I didn't know I was trespassing. The tall mesh fence stretched forbidi-

dingly before me, and a black-on-red sign said it in so many words: *Gevaar – Verboden de site te betreden*. You would get the message even if you didn't know the language. But I interpreted it to mean that the proprietors were concerned about my welfare, and so if I chose to take the risk, the responsibility would be mine.

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Robot refrain 6

A foundation in Ghent not only makes robotic instruments, they've constructed an entire robot orchestra. Composers from around the world write for it, and you can see it perform in a specially designed concert hall



Sick as a swine 7

Businesses in Belgium are taking a financial hit due to the record number of employees out sick with the swine flu. Absences hit a record high in October, topping 3% for the first time ever



Polar plight 10

A new exhibition mixing art and science, put together by polar explorer Dixie Dansercoer and several Flemish artists, tries to get across the severity of global warming in the days leading up to the big climate conference in Copenhagen





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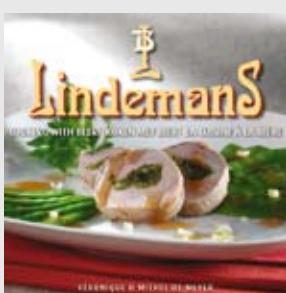
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Cookbook giveaway



Nearly 150 readers emailed hoping to win a free copy of *Lindemans Cooking with Beer*. The 10 winning names are posted on our Facebook page. To become a fan of our page and receive updates and previews, search for "Flanders Today" on Facebook.

FLANDERS TODAY

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News in brief

A man found guilty of **robbing an ABN Amro bank** in Antwerp's diamond quarter was sentenced to five years in prison last week. Yehuda Mishali carried out the raid in March 2007, though the prosecutor said he had been planning the robbery for six years. Mishali was sentenced in his absence, as he is still a fugitive. No trace of the stolen diamonds, worth an estimated €21 million, has ever been found.

Dirk Brossé, the Ghent-born conductor who has composed many works including the musical *Daens!* is to take over as musical director of the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia from the start of the 2010-2011 season. Brossé, a former star trumpet player who has written works for brass band, was chosen by film-score composer John Williams to conduct during an extensive tour of the music of *Star Wars*, composed by Williams, which is still going on.

Five new companies have been awarded contracts to **supply the royal household**. The newcomers are shoemakers Ambiorix, Brussels Airlines, antique dealers Galerie Louis-Pierre, jeweller Wolfers and pest-control company Rentokil. Existing warrant-holders include Sony, Belgian Railways NMBS, Jules Destrooper, Canon, Godiva and Alken-Maes brewers.

Researchers at the University of Ghent last week revealed their newly developed "**intelligent textile**" – fabric in which electronics have been implanted. Among the possibilities, according to researcher Frederic Bossuyt, is a jacket made of LED lights to increase visibility on the roads, or leisurewear incorporating GPS functions. The Ghent group claims to be the farthest-advanced of several research teams working across the world on wearable technology. Intelligent textile garments could be in the shops within two years.

Belgium has slipped three places, from 18th to 21st, in the **corruption rankings** drawn up every year by think-tank Transparency International (TI). New Zealand heads the list as the least corrupt of the 180 nations studied, with 9.4 points of a possible 10, while Somalia is at the bottom. TI criticised Belgium for the lack of protection for whistle-blowers within the civil service and the complete absence of an investigative agency for them to report offences. Last week the International Chamber of Commerce issued a booklet called *RESIST*,

Traffic signs up for revision



The news will come as no surprise to expat drivers: 60% of Belgians admit to not understanding some road signs. That's part of the reason why mobility minister Etienne Schoupe wants to undertake a thorough overhaul of traffic rules, to be completed by 2011.

Some of the changes have already been revealed and have met with widespread approval from expert groups. Thus, the principle of *ritsen* will become obligatory: that's when two lines of traffic merge into one, each alternate vehicle taking turns, like the teeth of a zipper (*rits*).

Along the same lines of transforming the bleeding obvious into legislation, motorcyclists will in future have legal permission to ride up the side or the centre of a traffic jam, which each and every one of them already does. However, it took until 1994 in Belgium before the law was changed to make it illegal for drivers not to stop for pedestrians on a marked crossing; prior to that date you were taking your life in your hands every time you crossed the road.

The rule whereby parking is allowed on some streets on one side at the start of the month and on the other side at the end of the month, will be scrapped. "I can think of no reason to keep this in place," commented Stijn Daniëls, a researcher in traffic science at the University of Hasselt. Instead, streets will be marked with parking places left and right, creating a sort of slalom effect which, it is hoped, will slow traffic.

On the road signs issue, some of the more confusing models will be replaced by a European variant: signs warning of road works ahead, of mist and of slippery road surfaces, for example. And there's even a proposal to scrap the bugbear of all foreigners: priority to the right. Instead, all major roads would automatically become priority roads. But that's still under discussion.

→ www.verkeerscentrum.be

aimed at helping businesses deal with solicitations to corruption.

→ www.iccwbo.org

Researchers at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) have succeeded in growing **embryonic stem cells** into epithelial lung tissue, the first time this has ever been done. Epithelial tissue lines the lungs and makes possible the transfer of oxygen to the blood. Scientists have previously managed to grow individual lung cells in the laboratory, but this is the first time the exact mix of cells as found in the lungs has been created. The process has implications for the future of transplants, as well as other treatments, the VUB said.

Yodelie!

Yodelling superstar Laura Omloop, 10, from Berlaar came fourth in last weekend's Junior Eurosong Festival in Kiev with 113 points for her song "Zo verliefd (Yodelo)". The contest was won by the Netherlands' Ralf Mackenbach with 121 points



Lukewarm reactions to Van Rompuy's arrival as EU president

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What the papers said

The Belgian press gave full coverage on 20 November to the appointment of Herman Van Rompuy as "President of Europe," but barely mentioned the new High Representative, the socialist baroness Catherine Ashton. Outside Belgium, most media shared the honours out fairly equally – not that there was much praise on offer.

China

The Chinese news agency Xinhua said Van Rompuy had "shown great skills in resolving conflicts and brought political stability to the linguistically divided country" since taking office a year ago.

United States

The New York Times, distracted by the competing news story that Oprah is to give up her chat show, claimed Van Rompuy "likes bowl-

ing duckpins and writing haiku, [and] has earned respect for calming ethnic tensions in Belgium in his 11 months as prime minister. Someone who met him recently described him as intelligent and humorous, but timid." A duckpin, apparently, is shorter and squatter than a tenpin.

France

In Paris, *Libération* had little warmth for the new president, whose selection, together with that of High Representative Ashton, "shows that the 27 [EU leaders] have seriously lowered their ambitions".

Spain

El Mundo called the new arrivals "two unknowns without experience". Also in Spain, *El País* described the two as "lacklustre, low-profile figures". Euronews called Van Rompuy "more pragmatic than charismatic" and claimed he "hides a certain cynicism behind his cool exterior". CNN's Jim Bittermann told how the new president is often caricatured as a priest "and that's not just because he's a Catholic".

Britain

The Daily Telegraph, which had attacked Van Rompuy as a federalist extremist while getting his name wrong (they called him Herbert), chose to open its article by describing the new president as "balding, short in stature, slight of build and self-effacing". They also quoted Flemish writer and theorist Kristien Hemmerechts, who "compared his looks to the Extra-Terrestrial film character made famous by Steven Spielberg. I can't look at a picture of him without thinking ET", she wrote recently.

The Daily Express, which had previously responded "You must be joking" to the idea of being "ruled by a Belgian," claimed that Van Rompuy was "furious" at the paper for having described him as a clown. "Herman Van Rompuy has been enraged by our crusade against the undemocratic stitch-up," the paper said. Still in Britain, the waspish commentator Michael White in the *Guardian* condemned the whole selection

process as a "third-rate shambles", which would at least pull the teeth of those who claim Europe is a threat to the British way of life. "On this evidence, the EU couldn't threaten the skin of a rice pudding. What it deserves is a belly-laugh and drinks all round at the bar," he writes.

And from politicians...

Politicians were more gracious than the editorialists. Nicolas Sarkozy, who had taken part in the "stitch-up" to install Van Rompuy, said he was "one of the strongest personalities in European politics". US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton called the appointments "a milestone for Europe and for its role in the world." President Barack Obama, meanwhile, said the new posts would "strengthen the EU and enable it to be an even stronger partner to the United States". Trying out Van Rompuy's new title for size, Obama said, "I look forward to working closely with President Van Rompuy." ♦

ANJA OTTE

FIFTH COLUMN

Wise men

Congratulations to Herman Van Rompuy on becoming the first European president. Although under his leadership the federal government had mostly come to a standstill, Van Rompuy is now accredited with almost saint-like qualities in the Belgian press. For some reason, this country always looks back mildly on its former leaders.

Take Jean-Luc Dehaene, who is considered one of the country's greatest prime ministers. At the time though, he was often called "the plumber" for the way he constructed (often ugly) compromises. He was also infamous for his rather blunt manner. These days, he is admired for his accomplishments, such as state reform and getting budgetary policies back on track. And his ill-refined behaviour? We love it!

Or take Guy Verhofstadt. By the end of his second term as prime minister he had lost all credibility. All talk and no action. Verhofstadt seemed finished, over and done with. He retired to his Tuscan home and came back only to talk about art and inner peace. Soon enough, he was well respected again.

Or Wilfried Martens, who was prime minister of no fewer than eight consecutive governments in the 1980s and early '90s, during which the state budget spiralled out of control. The times were hard in those days, and to many people Martens symbolised everything that went wrong. Today, people are sincerely happy that he has found love in his third marriage to a former sweetheart, minister of state Miet Smet.

These former prime ministers, some of respectable age, are these days even called upon as "wise men" to help shape new governments. Last week, Martens was asked by King Albert to pave the way for Van Rompuy's successor. It has been the second time this task was handed to Martens: he was also called in after Yves Leterme's resignation last year. Verhofstadt and Dehaene, too, have been asked to perform similar missions in the turbulent times since the federal elections in 2007. Verhofstadt even acted as prime minister for a couple of months, before Leterme took over.

So now it looks like Leterme, who has become a deeply divisive figure in Belgian politics, gets a second chance as prime minister. With 800,000 votes, he is one of the most popular Flemish politicians ever. But French speakers, who (mistakenly) see him as separatist, revile him. Maybe Leterme should not worry about that all that much. Who knows how we will look back on him in a few years?

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



180,000

breath tests planned by the federal police over the holiday period to 11 January, in a tough campaign against drink-driving

€15,412,870

spent by political parties on campaigning for elections held earlier this year, according to research by the Catholic University of Leuven. Christian Democrats CD&V spent most (€3,047,803), but the marginal Social-Liberal Party spent €9.37 for each vote gained

76

staff to be made redundant at Sanoma, publishers of *Story* and *Humo* magazines, among many others. The company, which employs 520 people, is aiming to make savings of €12.5 million

€110 million

expected to be recovered this year by social fraud inspectors – €40 million more than in 2008

€2,837

average gross monthly salary in Belgium, according to the economy ministry. Business leaders make most: 168% more than the average. Woodworking machine operators earn least: €2,117, or 75% of the average



Work starts on new Hasselt campus

Flemish investment minister Ingrid Lieten recently joined Limburg governor Herman Reynders and Hasselt mayor Hilde Claes to officially lay the first stone in the construction of new university buildings in Hasselt, on the site of the former prison on the Martelarenlaan. Construction includes new buildings but also the complete renovation of the 19th-century prison, keeping as many elements of the original structure as possible. The city also organised a neighbourhood party with drinks and music.

"The university is maintaining close contact with local people during and after the construction because we know that the building of a new university campus will cause a lot of changes," said university spokeswoman Ingrid Vrancken. The new campus will be home to the law faculty, a rectorate and the post-academic education department. ♦



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ING 

Sick building

Although it has been ransacked for anything useable or sellable, the old sanatorium is still a fascinating place

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The fence runs several metres to the left and right of the gate before coming to an end in a sparse wood where the way across the muddy grounds leads to any one of several wide-open entrances to the sanatorium. From the outside, you see the hundreds of wide windows that allowed the rooms to be flooded with light and that are now nearly all smashed, jagged shards of glass still clinging to the frames. The walls are, of course, covered with graffiti, some elegant, most crude. Many of the light-yellow ceramic tiles have fallen off or soon will.

Many of the fears and folklore that have always haunted TB victims were still current when the hospital was built; some believed it was akin to vampirism

It is only after you have gone inside the building – greeted by puddles of water where linoleum used to be – and crunched or splashed your way around a bit that you realize just how huge it is. Because of its odd geometry – the wings at right angles going off in different directions – you can't see the whole of it at a glance.

It was the Belgian Labour Party in 1933 that commissioned the young architect, Maxime Brunfaut (1909-2003) to design a sanatorium for 150 male tuberculosis patients. The party bought up a large parcel in Tombeek, near Overijse, as the site for what was to become a state-of-the-art medical institution. Joseph Lemaire, a pioneering socialist health-care advocate, was its first director. From the laying of the corner stone to the opening day in September 1937, the project took no more than 13 months – a record building time. Later, Maxime Brunfaut, one of several Brunfaut architects for three generations, went on to build or help build many major projects, including Brussels

Central Station and Brussels Airport.

Photographs from the period show us an appropriately austere, though not oppressive, five-storey building with its giant “Prevoyance Sociale” sign on the roof, clearly visible from afar. Indoors are gleaming medical facilities, a solarium and immaculate rooms for dining, relaxation or gentle recreation, together with individual accommodations for patients.

Tuberculosis today still kills or disables just under two million people a year, 80% in the developing world. If you are one of the 13.7 million active cases, you will have a chronic cough, suffer high fever and find blood mixed with spit in your handkerchief. In the pre-antibiotic 1930s, treatment was long and terribly uncertain. Many of the fears and folklore that have always haunted TB victims and their relatives were still current then; consumption, they called it, and some believed it was akin to vampirism. As the infection spread, others in the family lost blood, convinced that it was being sucked out of them at night.

Much of the atmosphere and many of the superstitions that the word tuberculosis evokes were turned into lasting fiction by German Thomas Mann in his 1924 novel *The Magic Mountain*. The dead were quietly “spirited away” and nothing more said about them. The hospital, as Mann describes it, held a morbid fascination for some, like the woman who faked illness so she could stay on.

Brunfaut's hospital on the heath is a far cry from Mann's sanatorium high in the Swiss Alps. No record of daily life and death at the Tombeek institution has come down to us. All we have are the memories of Brunfaut, interviewed near the end of his life by author Johan Wambacq for his new book *Het paleis op de heide* (*The Palace on the Heath*). Brunfaut lived long enough to see his building abandoned in 1987 and left to decay – to be used by squatters, vandalised and ransacked for anything at all usable or sellable, from medical equipment and filing cabinets to beds and mattresses.

I soon found out why I found no signs that squatters had taken advantage of this vast if leaky roof over their heads; the place was



© Sint-Lukasarchief VZW



© Sint-Lukasarchief VZW

Before and after: the state-of-the-art rooms at the once magnificent Joseph Lemaire Sanatorium have been ransacked for anything usable or sellable

guarded. As I passed by an open window, a voice from outside called to me in English: “Hey, you in there, it's forbidden, come out.” Caught in the act, I gave myself up, went to the window and started to explain that I only wanted to.... A young woman with a very serious-looking dog on a leash, she beckoned to me to leave the property at once.

Once we began to talk, she was ready to accept my excuses. She's from South Africa, her name is Lauren Harrys, and she lives in a trailer-like cabin on the grounds with her boyfriend and their dog. “I like the quiet,” she says. It turns out we share an appreciation for some of the highly-skilled graffiti on the interior walls. When I said I was sorry I couldn't visit the rest of the building, she gave me her boyfriend's mobile number and suggested he might know who could show me around.

Will anything ever be done with this amazing place? Imaginative architects have converted many abandoned buildings – factories, warehouses, railway stations – into museums, art galleries, hotels. But this? The World Monuments Fund has a few schemes up its sleeve, but it will take political will to make any of them happen.

As for where Belgium stands on the 100 list, we find it alphabetically, if not culturally, between Bahrain, where the colourful and crowded Suq Al-Qaysariya in Muharraq is in danger of losing its market stalls to a shopping mall, and Bhutan, where the Phajoding meditation centre in Thimphu is losing monks and in need of maintenance. The world is full of emergencies. It doesn't look from here as if the crumbling sanatorium in Tombeek stands much of a chance of resisting demolition. ♦

→ www.redhetsanatorium.be

Meanwhile, in Brussels

The rooster on the roof is still crowing its symbolic identification of the **Pathé Palace** cinema in Brussels' Anspachlaan. But beneath its claws, the building is empty of moving images and eager audiences. Converted more than once to other uses – first as an electrical appliances shop, then a temporary home for the Théâtre National – this rare example of late Art Nouveau, built in 1913 by architect Paul Hamesse, is getting a second chance. In September, the French Community drew up a plan to restore it. Trouble is, it's only “partly classified” meaning that they may well “partially” disfigure it. Fingers crossed.



© Henk van Rensbergen

A view from inside the beautifully designed circular portion of the Joseph Lemaire sanatorium

Orchestrations

Experimental music, robotic instruments and naked dancing in Ghent

MELISSA MAKI

After two years of publishing *Flanders Today*, none of the extraordinary things people do in Flanders surprises us anymore. Until now.

Flanders, I recently discovered, is home to the world's largest robot orchestra. Godfried-Willem Raes, founder of the Logos Foundation in Ghent, has assembled an array of robotic instruments, which are not only impressive to behold in terms of design and engineering; they also play extraordinary music.

The Logos Foundation is run by a small but dedicated group of composers and artists. They hold weekly concerts in a silver, tetrahedron-shaped concert hall – a space designed by Raes for optimal acoustics. Each concert is distinctive – the featured material could be avant-garde sound poetry one night and robotic renditions of tango music the next.

Raes has been dedicated to the promotion and performance of experimental music and sound art for more than 40 years. He and partner, Moniek Darge, were named "cultural ambassadors" to Flanders in 1997 for their pioneering performances and extensive travels as the Logos Duo.

Logos was initially conceived at the Royal Conservatory of Ghent in the late 1960s. Frustrated with the lack of opportunities to compose or even play contemporary music while studying at the conservatory, Raes and his colleagues formed an alternative ensemble.

"At that time in the conservatory, music was only considered worthwhile if it was at least

100 years old," says Raes. "We started questioning this attitude and – in the revolutionary spirit of the time – decided to form a group of our own that would refuse to play music of the past. We would only do contemporary pieces." The ensemble of five started composing their own music and holding concerts. Raes wrote a piece titled "Logos" that required each musician to play in a different metre. The piece was so technically challenging that he had to construct a sort of conducting machine – what would be his first robot – to help coordinate the musicians.

Many considered this performance, as well as the philosophy and actions of the ensemble, scandalous. Ultimately, all five musicians were thrown out of the conservatory, but by then they had attracted a following. The group continued to organise concerts and started inviting artists from other locations and disciplines to collaborate and exchange ideas.

Raes soon realised that in order to truly create new music, new musical tools were required. "Why do we still play historic instruments if we are to play contemporary music?" he asks. "My idea was to create our own instruments."

And so, Raes became an instrument builder. In Logos' first 20 years or so, he focused on the promise of the time: electronics. He built instruments such as synthesizers to perform this experimental music.

But eventually, the electronic music performances posed a philosophical problem that Raes couldn't ignore. In a typical concert setting,



© Melissa Maki

Godfried-Willem Raes, composer, musician and robot orchestra builder

there is an intimate connection between the audience and the performer. With a visible performer, the audience is able to perceive the process of music making. The effort it takes a trumpet player to hit the highest note, for instance, or the finesse a percussionist uses in soft dynamic ranges is readily apparent. But with electronic music, there are not often visible gestures that allow spectators to make this connection. The audience is left to stare at an inanimate set of speakers.

"We are expanding possibilities for composers and new music, which is what new music is all about"

This dissociation troubled Raes and caused him to reconsider the use of acoustic instruments. Ultimately, he decided to combine traditional acoustic instruments with his knowledge of electronics and began to construct programmable, musical machines.

Today, Logos is home to 42 such instruments – an entire robot orchestra that includes everything from organs and percussion to string and wind instruments.

While machines can get better with each advance in technology, humans have limits, explains Raes. "The real idea is to go with these machines beyond what is humanly possible, to extend the possibilities," he says. Raes' robotic piano, for instance, can play much faster than a human. And it can hit many more than 10 keys at one time, each at a different dynamic level.

The robot orchestra is a composer's dream – it can be programmed to play just about anything imaginable. Its repertoire is extensive because the foundation's members are all active composers, and they invite guest artists to write for the orchestra, too. There is even a composer's guide for the robots available on the Logos website.

The robots are typically controlled through a computer interface, but they are also capable of perceiving their environment and responding to it. They are dubbed the Man and Machine (M&M) Orchestra because they can respond to human interactions – such as viola playing. The robots can also respond to movement, like dancing. Through extensive research into gesture, using both radar and sonar technology, Raes has created an "invisible" instrument that allows dancers to control the M&M Orchestra through the movements of their bodies. There's just one catch: the dancers have to be naked. Though unorthodox for a concert setting, the nudity is essential, according to Raes, because clothing obscures the tracking system's ability to detect subtle movements.

This counter-culture mentality translates to Raes' robot designs. He is anti-copyright and doesn't patent anything. All of his designs are open source and are published on the Logos website.

This unparalleled research and prolific instrument building have gained him much recognition in the field of experimental music technology. This past year, electronic music artist Aphex Twin contacted Raes to see if he could buy one of the robots. Raes refused but agreed to design and build a robot specifically for the musician. After seven months of work, the percussive "Hit Anything Robot" (<HAT>) made its debut at a recent Logos concert.

Though this project may bring the foundation popular recognition, not to mention valuable funds, Raes says he's finished with building instruments for others. For one thing, he's busy: he's currently working on harmonium, bassoon, and cello robots. But, more importantly, he wants to keep his new progeny with their kin. That way, more composers have the opportunity to explore the bounds of this one-of-a-kind, ever-expanding orchestra.

Raes' hope is that Logos and the robots will continue to serve as catalysts for the development of avant-garde techniques for innovation in music for years to come. "We are expanding expressive possibilities for composers and new music," he says, "which is what new music is all about." ♦

► www.logosfoundation.org

The next M&M orchestra concert, <Winter>, is on 17 December, 20.00, at the Logos Tetrahedron concert hall, Bomastraat 26-28, Ghent



Piano and drum set: part of Logos' self-playing robotic orchestra

Antwerp port authority freezes tariffs

ALAN HOPE

The Port of Antwerp is to freeze its tariffs for 2010 in an effort to counter the effects of the financial crisis on its customers in the shipping industry, it was announced last week. In addition, for some labour-intensive cargoes, prices will actually fall by up to 10%.

The port authority reviews its tariffs annually, which typically involves an increase of 2% to 2.5%. Last year, as the crisis began to make itself felt, the port decided to raise tariffs by only 1.75% for 2009. Tariffs will now return to their 2008 level.

In the case of cargoes of products like fruit, steel, paper and wood, which are considered to be more labour intensive, tariffs will be reduced by 10%. Antwerp is the leading port in Europe for this type of cargo, the port authority said in a statement. The cut in tariffs aims to ensure that traffic is not diverted elsewhere. But the tariffs reduction is dependent on employers and trades unions in the port making improvements in workforce efficiency.

"Nobody can deny that the port of Antwerp has lost some trade in past years due to the overly rigid work organisation in freight handling," commented Marc Van Peel, the city's alderman for port affairs.

"We expect to see clear signals from both sides of industry before 1 January on their willingness to make significant improvements in the efficient use of dock labour," added port CEO Eddy Bruyninckx. ♦



THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Auto • Volvo

Volvo Ghent, the assembling affiliate of the Swedish car group, has received a €198 million credit guarantee by the Flemish government to launch the production line of the new S60 model.

Brewing • AB InBev

Leuven-based beer group AB InBev is said to be considering a bid of up to \$7 billion to acquire the 50% percent it doesn't already own in Mexico's Grupo Modelo, brewer of Corona. AB InBev, which acquired the US brewer Anheuser Busch nearly two years ago to become the world's leading beer group, has already significantly reduced the debt it incurred in the acquisition.

Energy • Electrabel

Electrabel – the country's leading energy group and an affiliate of the French GDF Suez company – is a candidate to acquire Oxxio, the fourth-largest domestic gas and electricity distributor in the Netherlands. Oxxio is presently owned by Britain's Centrica.

Energy • Enfinity

Wageningen-based Enfinity, which produces renewable energy equipment, has signed a contract with India's Titan Energy Systems to build a solar panel park with a capacity of some one million megawatts. Meanwhile, Patrick Decuyper, the company's CEO, has just won the award for the world's most Creative Young Entrepreneur.

Medical • Tigenix

Leuven-based medical technology company Tigenix is to acquire the US Orthomimetics medical implants producer for some €16 million.

Metals • Umicore

World-leading non-ferrous metals group Umicore is to invest some €25 million in its Hoboken plant to build a rechargeable batteries recycling unit with a capacity of 7,000 tonnes a year. The company, already active in the recycling business to recuperate precious metals, sees big potential to develop hybrid and electric powered vehicles. The new facility is expected to come on stream in early 2011.

Printing • Agfa Graphics

Agfa Graphics, the printing technology affiliate of Mortsel-based Agfa Gevaert, is to take over the North American activities of Canada's Ganti Innovations. The company specialises in large format inkjet printers.

Retail • K

Kortrijk's K shopping centre has been sold by its developer, Holland's Foruminvest, to the German Union Investment Real Estate company for some €200 million. The shopping centre is expected to open next spring.

KBC gets green light

KBC Bank, Flanders largest financial institution, received the go-ahead last week from the European Commission for its restructuring plan. The bank – which was bailed out by the Flemish authorities last spring with some €7 billion of public funds – will have to divest from a range of activities that together represent some 17% of the institution's balance sheet.

The bank's CEO, Jan Vanhevel, claimed he was seeking up to €14 billion of new funds between now and 2013. Divestments are at the forefront of the strategy, with the sale of two of its local affiliates – Centea, a network of some 700 independent brokers in financial services, and Fidea, specialised in insurance services.

Abroad, the bank will sell its Russian and Serbian subsidiaries and will float up to 40% of its Czech affiliate CSOB bank. The future of KBC's Hungarian branch

is uncertain at this point. Within the merchant banking division, KBC will sell Antwerp Diamantbank and the UK Peel Hunt affiliate, while KBC's private banking network will be severely cropped. Many of its activities will be sold off, including well-known activities such as Luxembourg-based KBL European Private Bankers, Puilaetco Dowaay and other branches based in Switzerland, Monaco and France. Other assets, such as the bank's private equity department, is also said to be on the block, while some of its property interests are being sold, such as the landmark Concert Noble in Brussels. Vanhevel said that he expected that the bank's return to profitability would help fund the restructuring programme and hoped KBC would be strong enough to pay a dividend on its 2010 results. ♦

Record high number of sick days in October

Absences from work due to illness reached a record high in October, topping 3% for the first time ever for that month, according to a survey by the human resources organisation SD Worx. The surge in sick-leave is largely caused by swine A/H1N1, the company said.

Absences were up from August through October, compared to previous years: 1.7% in August, which is usually a month of low sickness rates. September also saw a high of 2.7%, but October almost went off the scale.

Short-duration sickness leave, defined as any absence due to illness lasting less than one month, is always the most difficult for employers because workers' pay is guaranteed for 30 days, meaning employers are obliged to pay full salaries for zero performance. Sick leave is estimated to cost the employer €784.26 per worker per year, according to SD Worx. The A/H1N1 virus is largely to blame. Not only are more people

falling ill than would be the case with normal seasonal flu, but a precautionary principle is also at work in that employees are more likely to take time off work for fear of infecting their colleagues, whether or not they in fact turn out to have the flu. Such precautionary measures are generally approved by employers.

This finding contradicts the news given out a few weeks ago by the association of general practitioners, which reported that workers were now more likely to go into work when sick, because the financial crisis makes them fear they will lose their jobs. But this claim is not borne out by the figures, SD Worx said.

SD Worx surveyed 423,301 employees in 14,476 workplaces. ♦



→ www.sd.be

No dominant players in media market

The Flemish media market has no overall dominant player threatening competition, according to the annual report of the Flemish media regulator, VRM.

The report, the second to be produced under new rules, looks at 10 media companies: TV services provider Alfacam; publishers Concentra, Corelio (publisher of *Flanders Today*), De Persgroep, Rouwarta and Sanoma; TV broadcasters VRT and SBS; and the two telecommunications companies Belgacom and Telenet, who provide not only internet access but also digital TV.

While there is no dominant player in the market as a whole, the various sectors are often dominated by one major interest. In

radio, for example, the VRT has a 64% market share, and it takes 40% of the TV market – figures which are particularly important since the VRT is a public concern funded by taxpayers.

The newspaper market, on the other hand, is fairly evenly divided between Concentra (30%), Corelio (31%) and De Persgroep (38%). The issue here, which is not one the report dwells on, is not so much domination of the market as the difficulty of smaller operators competing with the three majors.

Internet is the most diverse sector, with six companies present. De Persgroep leads with 35.5% against Corelio's 24.5%. The figures relate to the market share claimed

by the companies' websites, rather than internet service provision, where of course Telenet and Belgacom would tower over the rest.

In figures released last week by the Internet Service Providers' Association, it was revealed that there are 3,048,260 internet connections in Belgium, a slight rise on the previous quarter. Telenet has 1,085,000 internet customers, to Belgacom's 1,057,000. Broadband connections now account for 97% of all internet set-ups, but there are still more than 65,000 people who go online using old-fashioned dial-up at home, and 9,500 more who still use dial-up in their business. ♦

State of Dogs

Peter Brosens' trilogy of films shot in Mongolia in the 1990s has just been released on DVD
www.imaginefilm.be



From 30 below to 4,000 above

Filmmaking couple goes to the high Andes for their new film *Altiplano*

LISA BRADSHAW

The French media were not kind to *Altiplano* at its premiere in Cannes last May. Aside from the slate of bad reviews, the film's directors were grilled by reporters during their press conference. Set in a small village in the Peruvian Andes, the film follows the story of local alpaca farmers who are, one-by-one, poisoned by mercury from nearby mining activities.

"They were very suspicious," says Peter Brosens, half of the husband-and-wife directorial team. "An American and a Belgian, they thought, doing hocus pocus shamanism in Peru. Quite a few of them just considered us as this arrogant fantasy of Westerners playing around in the mountains with ponchos, llamas and pan flutes."

It is a great understatement to say that nothing could be further from the truth. Born in Leuven, Brosens' first degree from the city's university was in geography. For his thesis, he spent six months in Lima studying the integration of invasion settlements into the texture of the city. "Very fascinating," he tells me. His Master's degree was in social and cultural anthropology. For a project between the University of Guayaquil in Ecuador and the Catholic University of Leuven, the institutions needed someone who spoke Spanish and was versed in both urban geography and urban anthropology. "There weren't many candidates," smiles Brosens. "That's how I ended up in Ecuador for two years."

Then he decided he wanted to make films. Why not? Going to film school with teenagers did not really appeal to him, so he went to Manchester to do another MA, this time in visual anthropology. Then it was back to Ecuador to do an in-depth study "on a very peculiar form of suicide in a small region in the Ecuadorian highlands called revenge suicide, or protest suicide."

Those were the building blocks that led to *Altiplano*. In the film, shot on location at 4,000 metres, villagers are at first intrigued by shining silvery puddles springing from the earth, then outraged when they begin bleeding from their noses and going blind. When the young Saturnina's fiancé dies, she turns her anger toward Western doctors working in an area clinic, including the Belgian Max (played by Olivier Gourmet).

Brosens also visited mining territory in his first film *Khadak*, which finds rural Mongolian herders being displaced by mining corporations. After his third (and final) degree, the director got a call from a friend who wanted to begin a documentary project in Mongolia. Would Brosens go and do some research for him? "I said 'are you out of your mind?'. I didn't know *anything* about Mongolia."

But curiosity drove him to travel to a country that was in the middle of historical upheaval following the Democratic Revolution. The Russians had left overnight, and Mongolia was in a state of economic and social confusion. But it was still beautiful. "I was blown away," he says.

He met the American Jessica Woodworth "in a bar in Ulan Bator". She had been working as a news stringer in China and decided to explore next-door Mongolia. Soon after their stay in Mongolia, she made her first documentary, *The Virgin Diaries* – about one Muslim woman's attempt to get answers to questions about sex and Islam. The couple got married and lived in Germany before eventually settling in the small town of Falaën in Wallonia.

Taken in by the lonely beauty of snow-covered horizons that never end and by stories that never get told, Brosens made three documentaries about Mongolia, and the two returned together to make *Khadak* (2006), which finds a young herder shunted



The possibilities of film imagery are celebrated in *Altiplano*

by the government from his yurt on the plain to a mining village, where his whole family must now learn to survive – by working for the mine. His calling to be a shaman leads the film into surreal, David Lynch territory, where the psychology of destroyed indigenous tradition is told through a series of dreamlike images.

For both *Khadak* and *Altiplano*, the couple engaged themselves in mountains of research: books and articles, certainly, but also living in the area with the locals, consulting the authorities, discussing the projects with anthropologists. For *Altiplano* (which is based on one of a number of mining protests in Peru) aside from Brosens' already extensive background, they consulted visual archives, watched "every Peruvian film" and made friends with Claudio Llosa, the Peruvian filmmaker whose *The Milk of Sorrow* won the Golden Bear award in Berlin this year and who has also made the only film set in the Andes in the last 30 years.

Take that, Cannes.

"We are not Mongolian, and we are not Peruvian, and we cannot afford to make silly mistakes," states Brosens. "When you are an anthropologist, you do not fool around with these things." This was especially true because both films show in the countries in which they were made. Cultural pillaging is something that Brosens and Woodworth would never allow themselves to be guilty of.



Belgian-based directorial team Peter Brosens and Jessica Woodworth

© Bart Dewaele

With both films, the duo is also known as much for their style as for their subject. Although *Altiplano* (the title means "high plateau") is slightly more straightforward with its narrative than their first film, it slips into near-documentary imagery at times, Bergmanesque meta-reality at other times. They use photographic archives to set up some of their shots, whereas other shots are more reflective of paintings. It's a film where imagery takes centre stage, both with landscapes and with specific reference to the power of images. A sub-narrative in the film finds a war photographer named Grace (the wife of the doctor Max) losing her faith in the meaning of imagery after a violent incident. Her experience becomes entwined with the dying Peruvian village.

"What is happening in South America is in effect an invisible war," says Woodworth. "Earlier on in the trend of war photography, one image could become famous and have a tremendous impact. But we're so saturated with imagery now that we don't take the time to absorb them. We're a little alarmed by the way people consume images today in a kind of nonchalant way. Images are sacred; they really are."

Altiplano is playing now across Brussels and Flanders; **Khadak** is available on DVD with English subtitles

Coming up

Now that they have travelled to the icy rurals of Mongolia and to the high altitude Andes, Brosens and Woodworth are setting their next film in Wallonia. "People always say: 'You always have to go so far!' Well, ok, now we're shooting in our own back yard," laughs Brosens.

But that doesn't mean the film will be any less Dante-esque. Called *Silent Spring*, it's about a village where, one year, spring never comes. It will be a psychological journey into the darkness of winter. And also, says Woodworth, "into dark Belgian humour."

Song for a mad director

Dismissed by local audiences 15 years ago, Muziektheater Transparant has since blown the doors of music theatre wide open

ANNA JENKINSON

Guy Coolen still recalls the booing in the audience the first time Muziektheater Transparant performed Peter Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King*. It was 1994, and he had just taken over at the company. Not long out of university at the time, Coolen wanted to make a break with Transparant's old-fashioned operatic repertoire and create something far more contemporary and experimental.

Not everyone liked his changes. "I was accused of destroying 'our chamber opera group'. Of course I was!" Coolen tells me from the theatre's headquarters in Antwerp.

The critics loved the performance, however, and the combination of rave reviews and the fuss it provoked in more conservative circles was exactly what Coolen needed to launch his new company.

The most visible change is perhaps the name: he got rid of Chamber Opera Transparant, with its old-fashioned associations with German chamber opera companies, and opted for the more modern Muziektheater Transparant.

The company's long-standing relationship with Maxwell Davies is another example. Coolen turned to the British composer – "one of the iconic names" in music theatre – in order to create a more international profile for the Flemish company. Coolen didn't know Davies personally at the time, but knew he was just the kind of provocative composer with whom the company should be connected.

So he simply called him up. The bold move paid off: Davies came over for Transparant's premiere, became the company's honorary chairman, and, to this day, Transparant still stages his work.

The board members that Coolen chose 15 years ago are also still with him today. No sooner had the old board appointed him, than he was told he had to kick them all out and make a fresh start. As Coolen explains, he basically had to go to them and say: "Thank you for the job, but now you have to leave!"

But the shake-up proved to be a success. The company secured government subsidies, which have grown from one million Belgian francs, or €25,000, to about €1 million today, and started to attract new audiences and new artists.

Transparant now has partnerships with deSingel in Antwerp, Concertgebouw in Bruges and the Flemish Opera and is often asked by other opera houses and theatres to work on co-productions with them. Youth projects have been developed since the appointment of Wouter Van Looy as artistic director a few years ago. The company also travels the world to take part in international festivals, such as Edinburgh and Sydney. In fact, Coolen estimates that he spends more than half the year abroad.

"We are no longer this weird thing in the corner somewhere," he smiles. "We have put music theatre in the middle of the artistic world."

Music theatre, but not musical theatre

Music theatre, as the name suggests, is a combination of words and music. The term can refer to such a wide range of art forms that it can be problematic, Coolen acknowledges. For him, though, music theatre functions at three levels: the musical dramaturgy, the dramaturgy of the text, and the staging. Many of Transparant's works involve a contemporary rethinking of old music, as is the case



Guy Coolen shook up Muziektheater Transparant in 1994 – and has never looked back

© Eric Fecken

with *A New Requiem*, which premieres on 26 November and is a response to Mozart's *Requiem*.

Transparant places a lot of importance on working with its composers, musicians, actors and theatre directors, seeking their input and getting them involved as much as possible. "The artists make us who we are," Coolen says.

As well as developing long-term relationships with composers, such as Flemish classical composer Wim Henderickx, and theatre directors, like Josse de Pauw, the company also encourages new talent. Flemish composers Annelies Van Parys and Joachim Brackx are working as composers-in-residence. Van Parys' *An Index of Memories* and Brackx's *Die Entfuehrung aus dem Paradies* are both part of this season's programme.

Coolen finds it notable that the artists stay with Transparant and that there is "a sense of belonging" in the company. "I'm half-married to a lot of the artists," he says, adding that on several occasions he has received an emotional and distressed telephone call from an artist unable to make progress with a creation. "They can't see beyond the art. I can see the larger perspective and can take the pressure away," he says.

For a man who has spent most of his working life so far creating and developing the company – as both an artistic and now the general director – it is perhaps unsurprising that he gets so involved and is so passionate about what he does.

"I get a kick out of it," he says. "I don't know what I'd prefer to do more than this." ♦



© Herman Sorobos

Last year's *A girl a boy and a river* was a production between Muziektheater Transparant and the Italian children's theatre group Teatro di Piazza o d'Occasione

A New Requiem



Muziektheater Transparant's latest production, *A New Requiem*, is a classic example of how the company works: the piece is a contemporary response to old music and a collaboration between various artistic disciplines.

The central inspiration is Mozart's *Requiem*, a mass for the dead, and Transparant's reinterpretation was to bring together a number of artists in different disciplines: Belgian wind ensemble I Solisti del Vento, Dutch author Jeroen Brouwers, German composer Christian Köhler and Flemish artist Roger Raveel, to name a few. The work is directed by Flemish actor and director Josse De Pauw.

The text to *A New Requiem* is mainly in Dutch, rather than the original Latin of Mozart's *Requiem*. Brouwers was chosen to write this literary response to Mozart's piece because death has been a recurring theme throughout his work. "In my view, the whole of literature is about nothing but death," Brouwers has said.

The new text in turn inspired Raveel, now in his late 80s, to start drawing, and the resulting set of sketches form part of the production (*pictured*). As for the music, Köhler rescored the original work for a "harmonie", an ensemble of mainly wind instruments popular in Mozart's time and for which the *Requiem* had never been adapted. It will be performed by I Solisti del Vento.



26-28 November, 20.00

deSingel - Desguinlei 25, Antwerp
Tours across Flanders until 17 March
→ www.transparant.be

What matters

On the sidelines of the annual Bruges ice sculpture festival is *(Ant)Arctic Matters*

EMMA PORTIER DAVIS

There's a feverish excitement at the entrance to the grand marquee outside Bruges station as hundreds of punters wait for the doors to open on this year's ice sculpture show, featuring the lovable Ice Age movie characters. But I'm here to see something with a little less commercial appeal.

Just the other side of the road is a series of non-descript white shipping containers placed in a circle. I'm led there by world-renowned Flemish polar explorer Dixie Dansercoer, who's chattering away eagerly about the show and how he hopes it'll bring an important message about the fragility of our environment.

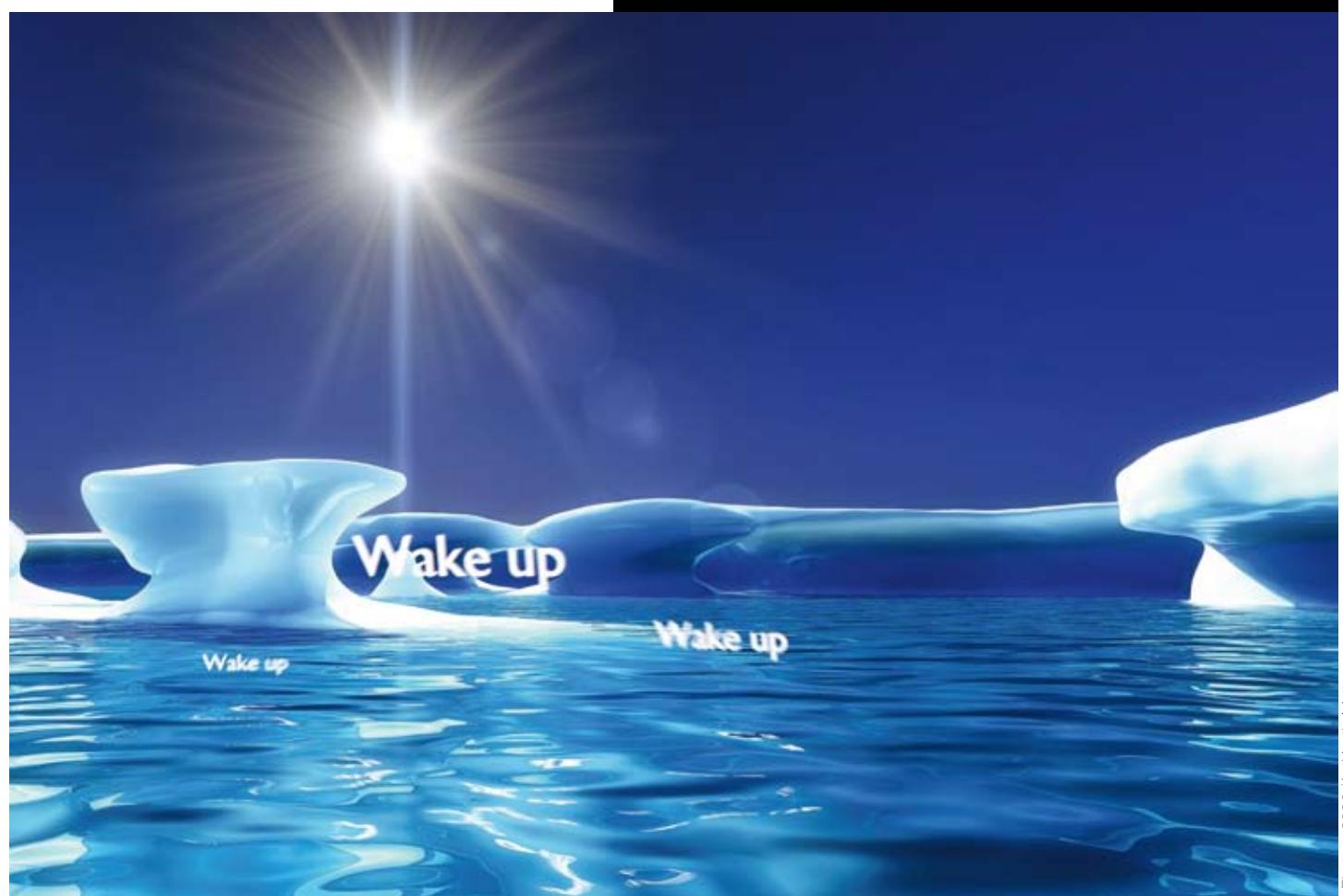
He's already told the throngs of guests, who have finally been allowed to descend on the adjacent exhibition, to make sure they come and have a peep inside these containers afterwards, adding that it is "not too late" and it is "absolutely up to us to take action – not for ourselves, but for our children" to save the climate.

Meanwhile, he tells me how he was inspired during a contemplative moment on a previous polar expedition to use art as a call to action on climate change. "We never have time in our daily lives to just sit and think. Only then is there maximum creativity. When you see all the pristine snow, it forces you to respect nature and Mother Earth."

But the message on climate change is already out there so much so that people are despairing. "We are constantly bombarded with so much information and worrying prognoses, that people are just giving up," says Dansercoer. It was time to find a new way of reaching out to the masses about the perils we face if we don't take action.

Dansercoer commissioned a series of Flemish artists to make a display in each of the containers to highlight the beauty of the polar regions. "We want to reach the soul of people and touch them in a significant way so they take one image, one

"When you see all the pristine snow, it forces you to respect nature and Mother Earth"



© Photos: 2009 (Ant)Arctic Matters

Art installations bring polar cap emergencies to the public's attention in Ant(arctic) Matters

sound, or one line that makes them willing to change and do something."

The exhibition, dubbed *(Ant)Arctic Matters*, will move to Brussels next year for the European Union Green Week before touring Europe for five years, notably Eastern Europe, where, it's safe to say, environmental action has yet to gain popular momentum. Next port of call is Prague where I wonder out loud if Dansercoer will meet hard-line climate sceptic president Vaclav Klaus. "In Belgium, it's much easier," he admits wincingly.

During this tour, Dansercoer and his team, including his wife Julie Brown (also an ardent polar explorer who cheerfully told me it was too

sunny in Belgium and she needed to be back in the snow), will attempt to meet decision makers to persuade them to sign a charter to reduce their environmental footprint. There's one for regular citizens and one for companies.

Dansercoer has already lobbied Bruges mayor Patrick Moenaert to adopt the charter that calls for measures such as a 10% reduction in an organisation's carbon footprint, and sourcing goods and services from environmentally sound suppliers. Individuals are asked to avoid unnecessary emissions, source goods locally, recycle waste and lobby governments.

But what average citizens want to know is: what can I do? "Everyone knows what to do," Dansercoer replies. "You turn off the faucet, you consume less. It's the next step that's needed to use all that readily available information and put it into practice."

After the first visitors arrive, fireworks are set off and the containers I have been itching to explore are finally opened. I enter one and crunch along fake snow to a pair of boots on skis. As I stand by those looking at a tent blowing in the noisy breeze, I suddenly imagine myself as a polar explorer and wonder how many kids will get inspired by such an evocative scene. Another container has beautiful sculptures of Inuit peoples, indicating their precarious existence, and another is in darkness with just echoing sounds of the polar regions.

The next one can only be seen by generating energy: turn a handle at the side of the display and peer through an old-fashioned view-finder (reminiscent of my youth) to see stunning photographs emerge. My favourite is the penguins, brought into focus with the help of a small visitor who was clearly having the time

of his life with this simple demonstration of sustainable energy. That's before this grownup played on the energy-generating bicycles.

With its serious overtones and stark warnings woven into the text introducing each container, it might not be as accessible as cartoon figures made of ice, but there's plenty to learn for both kids and adults and fun demonstrations with a clear message about how we can lead more environmentally sustainable lives.

The exhibition is open just ahead of negotiations in Copenhagen for a global deal on climate change. Dansercoer said his biggest wish for these crucial talks that are meant to reach an international agreement on cutting global warming gas emissions is that everyone respects it. He noted wryly that with the economic crisis on everyone's minds, "treaties are not top of the list." ♦

Until 3 January

Koning Albert Park
Bruges

→ www.antarcticmatters.org



Flemish explorer Dixie Dansercoer takes measurements of snow cover and brings back scientific samples from both the north and south poles



The eel-good factor

In the second of our Flemish food speciality series, we checked out 22 tonnes of eel in Ternat

COURTNEY DAVIS

Along with mussels and *stoverij*, Belgians have another culinary surprise somewhat akin to Dr Seuss' green eggs and ham. *Paling in 't groen*, or eels in green sauce, is a speciality found in many restaurants and homes across Flanders. And wow, is it ever green.

The dish developed as many fisherman caught eels in the Scheldt River, with folklore stating that the dish should be prepared with whatever fresh herbs were found on the riverside. But to many connoisseurs, the sauce is what makes the dish unique.

Consisting mainly of the popular leafy green herb chervil as well as sorrel, it is important that these ingredients are added at the last moment of cooking so that sauce retains a bright green colour and the flavour is strong and fresh. The fish itself is white and meaty, with a pronounced flavour. Served chopped into five-centimetre chunks with the spine intact, one must eat slowly and carefully to avoid the many small bones.

The dish is found all over Flanders, but the eel itself is not. While Flanders, a notoriously damp, flat, canal-filled country, used to be ideal territory for eels, pollution in the Scheldt means any eels found in it are unfit for consumption. Eels eaten here are either imported or raised on an eel farm, such as the one you find, a bit surprisingly, in the industrial park of Ternat.

In between large corporate offices sits the Aalvis company, one of the original eel sellers in the country. The families of Van Overstraeten and Van Gaever opened a shop selling eels in Brussels in 1952, but before that they had a stall in the city's fish mar-

ket. Prior to that, they brought freshly-caught eels in from their small river town of Bassrode, now part of the municipality of Dendermonde.

Today the company is still family run, with Ronny Van Gaever, his brother-in-law Henk Ver Linde and younger brother Luc Van Gaever at the helm. "Baasrode, where my great grandparents came from, has a nickname for the people who live there: *palingbotters*, or eel catchers," says Ronny. "We've been doing this for so long, that in the 1980s the company was recognised as having been eel sellers for over a century."

The eel farm has 65 cement water reservoirs with a capacity for a whopping 22 tonnes of eel. Aalvis imports its eels from all over the world; they arrive in tanks or in special aerated, waterproof boxes. When moved to the cold, constantly running water, the fish will lose up to 10% of their body weight while waiting to be sold over the next one to three months, as eels won't eat in captivity.

Anywhere from 100 to 150 tonnes of eel is processed at this plant every year. With an average of six to seven eels per kilo, a possible million eels are sold to restaurants, individuals and organisations that restock local rivers and lakes. Even though the 2,500 square-metre warehouse space is very much a working farm, Ronny and his brothers act like it's a small shop, happy to sell a single kilogramme to a customer or provide cooking advice. "Winter eels can be more fatty and should be boiled for 30 seconds to get rid of any greasy residue," says Ronny. "Bigger eels are better for baking, smaller eels for frying."



Aalvis proprietors Ronny Van Gaever (right), his brother-in-law Henk Ver Linde (middle) and younger brother Luc Van Gaever know their eel

©Julie Van Schooten

In addition to regular eel, Aalvis sells smoked eel, plus its homemade version of *paling in 't groen* in one or one-half kilo portions. The sauce is so vibrant that the container is nearly glowing. When asked about the recipe, Ronny can barely understand the question, as it is not so much a recipe as a part of his history. "I know it by heart. I grew up with it. I don't need to think about it."

Aalvis only imports and sell wild adult eels. "Farmed eels are tougher and have a lot more fat," explains Ronny. "Not only does wild eel taste better, farming eels is not sustainable." Since eels don't reproduce in captivity (the reproduction of eels is still a bit of a mystery), eels are caught young for aquaculture (or aquafarming).

Eels begin their slippery baby life as

flat, transparent larvae, which then turn into "glass eels", before evolving into young eels known as elvers, then finally into adult eels.

Eel aquaculture became necessary in 1997, as the European demand for eels could not be met, for the first time ever. The problem is that glass eels are harvested along the Atlantic coast in river estuaries and placed in captivity, never being returned to the wild. Because they are taken before they're able to breed, this is an unsustainable long-term practice. However, there doesn't seem to be an end in sight because glass eels fetch a price comparable to caviar on the market. From 1995 to 2005, the EU estimates that a half billion baby eels were exported to Asia. In 2007, the European eel was classified as a protected species by CITES (Conven-

tion on International Trade in Endangered Species).

Aalvis is working with Friends of the Sea and the Marine Stewardship Council to create consumer labels that indicate that the eel is wild and farmed in its natural season. "All fish have a season, so it is imperative that each country stops fishing for wild eel for a few months of the year," explains Ronny. "That's why sometimes we have eels from Ireland and other times from New Zealand. We follow the natural cycle of the eel."

Wild eel imported by Aalvis can be ordered at a number of Flemish restaurants, or you can stop by the farm and meet one of the friendly proprietors – and perhaps get a sneak peek at the hundreds of thousands of eels waiting to be dinner. ♦

→ www.aalvis.be

Eating eel out



Several restaurants in Flanders use Aalvis-imported wild eel

De Groenendijk in Bornem, in the far west of Antwerp province, is a white brick restaurant on the banks of the River Scheldt. The building dates from 1672 and the fourth generation of the Joos family now runs the restaurant, which has been operating since 1920. The bric-à-brac filled interior is pure Belgian, and the menu is replete with classics such as wild rabbit, partridge, pheasant and, of course *paling in 't groen*. If you're not quite ready to commit, you can order a half serving as a starter.

→ www.degroenendijk.be

Right on the Dutch border in East Flanders, you find a number of small towns, such as Watervliet and Sint-Jan-in-Eremo, that have casual cafes serving authentic, classic Flemish dishes. In the latter village, you'll find **Polderzicht**, which serves up an amazing variety of eel – in cream sauce, green sauce, tomato sauce, shrimp sauce, crayfish sauce, Provençal sauce, with Hoegaarden and even *grootmoeders wijze*, or grandmother's way.

→ www.polderzicht.be

Restaurant Siphon near the pretty town of Damme in West Flanders is famous for being one of Flanders' oldest eel restaurants, with more than 100 years of experience. One must book well in advance to get a table overlooking the tree-lined canal. Even better, you can arrive with your own cooking pots, which they fill up with eel to heat at home, a surprising and yet traditional version of take away.

→ www.siphon.be

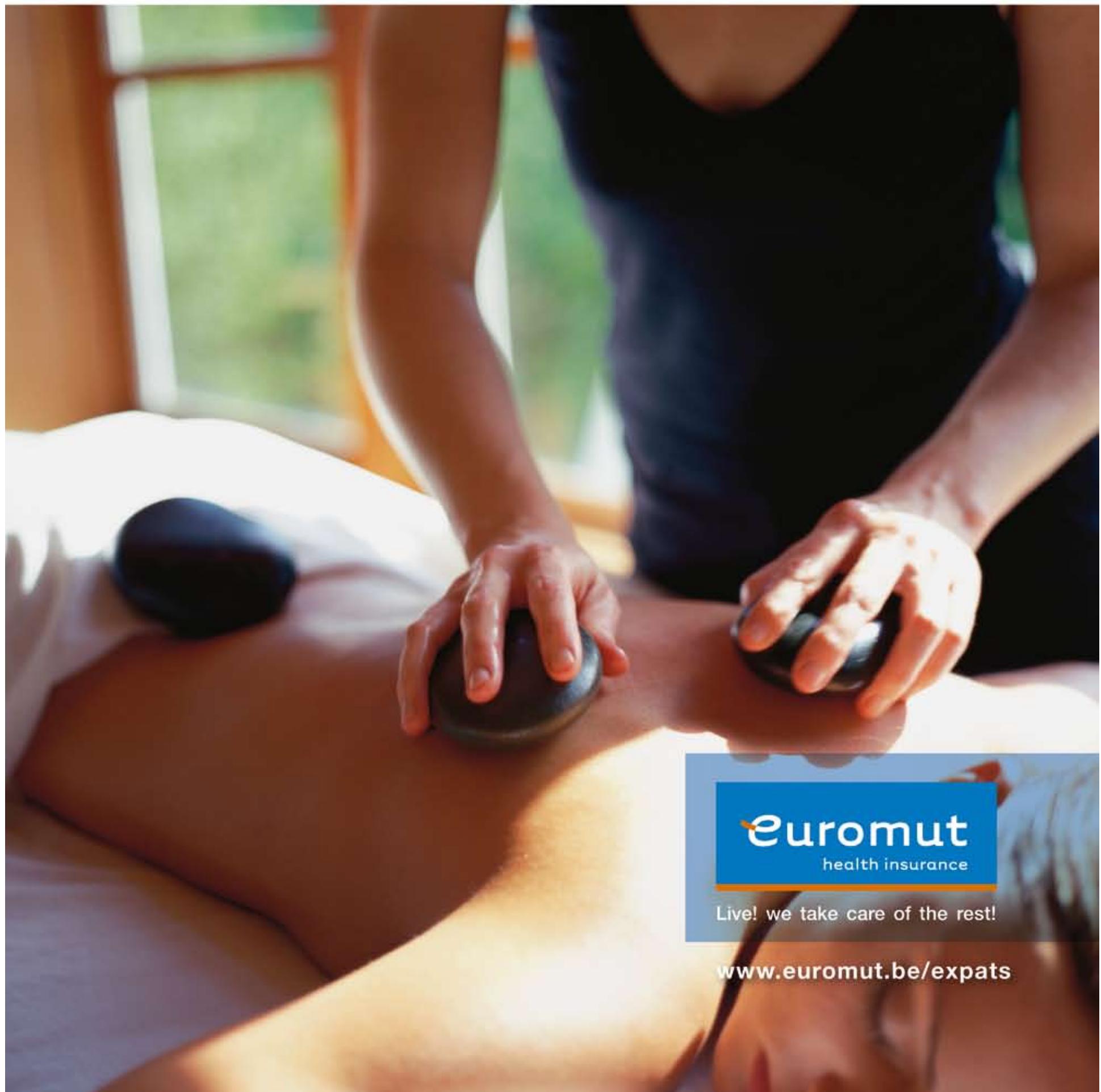
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Light Matter

You'll never see lamps the same way again after viewing this show by lighting designer Isabelle Farahnick at Brussels gallery diito
www.diito.be



FLANDERS TODAY
NOVEMBER 25, 2009



The Seven Last Words

ALAN HOPE

If you were looking for a writer to be inspired by some of the most mystical and spiritual passages from the *Passion* narrative, the first person you would think of would probably not be the author of one of the most profane stories of recent years.

But the Ensor Quartet found just that person. From now until May next year, they'll be touring Flanders with Jozef Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross*, with new texts written and read by Dimitri Verhulst, author of *De helaasheid der dingen*. *The Seven Last Words* was commissioned in 1787 for a Good Friday celebration in Cadiz, Spain. It is a musical meditation on the seven last phrases the Gospels report Jesus to have spoken. The original was for orchestra; Haydn later produced a choral oratorio and a

transcription for string quartet – the version being used by the Ensor Quartet.

"We wanted to cut Haydn loose from the purely religious aspect of the work and place *The Seven Last Words* in a contemporary context," explains cellist Steven Caeyers. "So we were looking for someone who could write from different points of view, and Dimitri came across as the ideal person for the job."

Verhulst (*seated in photo*) has written seven new interventions for the work, and, though he explained in a recent interview that he had a fairly religious upbringing, his texts are entirely secular. In the passage in which Jesus promises the thief that he will join him in Paradise, for example, Verhulst's text tells of

an asylum-seeker in Zeebrugge about to board a container for the UK – the Promised Land. For the passage where Jesus calls on God to forgive his tormentors "for they know not what they do", Verhulst enters the mind of a father whose daughter has been raped and murdered.

"The line running through all of the new texts, which have traditionally been about suffering and death, is now one that represents love," says Caeyers. "For the first time I feel the music and the words actually go together." ♦

Text for The Seven Last Words is in Dutch, with no subtitles

→ www.ensor4.be

The Alasness of Dimitri

There's no denying it, Dimitri Verhulst is the most popular author in Flanders right now. Normally this would be good news for any writer – but fame is weighing heavily these days on the 37-year-old.

His life was already placed under the microscope after his breakthrough novel, 2006's *De helaasheid der dingen* (which literally translates as *The Alasness of Things*), a

brilliant tragi-comedy recounting his childhood in small town East Flanders. Not the stuff of nostalgia: he lived in poverty and suffered abuse at the hands of his alcoholic father. The book won several awards, but Verhulst's family was none too pleased and struck back via the media. *De helaasheid der dingen* opened a lot of doors for Verhulst but, sadly, closed some, too.

And now it's happening all over again. Felix van Groeningen's film adaptation of the book is wildly popular, having sold more than 340,000 tickets in Flanders and Brussels after its splashy opening at the Flanders International Film Festival in October.

But Verhulst was not at that opening. Although he has said that he likes the movie, he doesn't want anything to do with it. The characters' names have been changed, but that didn't stop his family members from speaking out again in the press. Verhulst, in the meantime, is refusing all interviews about the subject and trying to focus on new work.

So, should you meet him milling among the crowd after a performance of *The Seven Last Words*, feel free to tell him you enjoyed it. Just don't mention *De helaasheid der dingen*.



K-NAL
Havenlaan 1; 0479.605.429, www.k-nal.be
NOV 28 23.00 Union Match Rec presents Lee Jones Live

Koninklijk Circus
Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15, www.cirque-royal.org
NOV 28 20.00 'The Musical Box

Le Botanique
Koningsstraat 236; 02.226.12.57
Concerts at 20.00:
NOV 25 Ariane Moffatt, chanson.
Beast NOV 26 Les Blérots de Ravel.
Alberta Cross **NOV 27** Fucked Up.
White Rabbits **NOV 28** Jason Molina/
Will Johnson, Tony Dekker, Micah
Hinson, Shit and Shine, more **NOV**
29 The Black Heart Procession,
Phosphorescent, Deer Tick, more
NOV 30 The Duke & The King +
Julie Doiron. **DEC 1** Mélanie Pain +
Nouvelle Vague **DEC 2** Brightblack
Morning Light. Emily Jane White

Maison du Peuple
Sint-Gillisvoordeplein 37-39;
02.217.26.00, www.maison-du-peuple.be
NOV 27 22.00 Piiit & Luuuk
NOV 28 21.00 The Dodoz

VK Club
Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07,
www.vkconcerts.be
NOV 27 20.00 Kylesa, Kamchatka +
Clutch
DEC 2 20.00 Vernal Veinyard + Living
Colour

Vorst-Nationaal
Victor Roussealaan 208; 0900.00.991
NOV 28 20.00 Simple Minds + OMD
NOV 30 20.00 Bénabar

Ghent
Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060,
www.vooruit.be
NOV 26 20.00 Cryptacize, Finn

Hasselt
Muziekodroom
Bootstraat 9; www.muziekodroom.be
NOV 28 18.00 Limbomania/DJ-mania
final

Kortrijk
De Kreun
Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44,
www.dekreun.be
NOV 26 20.00 Customs: Team William + De Staat
NOV 28 20.00 Westtament final

DON'T MISS

International Short Film Festival

28 November to 5 December

This festival gets better every year, with more and more short films from around the globe, plus plenty of other entertainments. Belgium produces many excellent short films, which are only seen at film festivals, and here you'll find the biggest selection from the last year. There are screenings for kids, a section devoted to American short films and "compilation films", short films strung together to make a sort of feature, including *New York, I Love You* (pictured).



→ www.kortfilmfestival.be

Leuven

Het Depot
Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
NOV 25 Yellow Man
NOV 27 20.00 Patrick Watson
NOV 28 20.00 Rockvonk Finale

Stuk

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20,
www.stuk.be
NOV 27 22.30 Laura Gibson



Antwerp

Arenbergschouwburg
Arenbergstraat 28; 070.222.192,
www.arenbergschouwburg.be
DEC 2 20.15 Bansuricollectif

Buster

Kaasru 1; 03.232.51.53, www.
busterpodium.be
NOV 26 21.00 Buster Jam **NOV 27** 22.00
The Screaming Bitches **DEC 1** 20.00
JazzNight, Jazzstudio students **DEC 2**
21.00 Jazz jam hosted by Natasha Kelly

De Hopper

Leopold De Waelstraat 2; 03.248.49.33,
www.cafehopper.be
NOV 30 21.00 Songs from Ornette

De Muze

Melkmarkt 5; www.demuze-jazz.be
Until NOV 29 Festival celebrating the
venue's 45th anniversary, with concerts by
Philip Catherine Trio, Let's Call Ed, Erwin
Vann, Erik Vermeulen, Eric Thielemans
and many more

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,
www.desingel.be
DEC 2 20.00 Craig Taborn Trio

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 327; 03.292.97.40,
www.deroma.be
NOV 26 20.30 Ian Siegal, blues (UK)

Rataplan

Wijnegemstraat 27; 03.292.97.40
NOV 26 20.30 Massot-Florizoone-
Horbaczewski
NOV 28 20.30 Jazz Plays Europe

Brussels

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193-195; 02.733.13.78
Concerts at 20.30:
NOV 25 20.30 ADKA Group **NOV 26**
The Bundle **NOV 28** 18.00 Darwin Case
DEC 2 Gare au Jazz: There is an Eiffel
There



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Le Bar du Matin

Alsembergsesteenweg 172; 02.537.71.59,
<http://bardumatin.blogspot.com>
NOV 26 21.00 Black Joe Lewis & The Honeybears

Midi Station

Victor Hortapplein 26; 02.526.88.00,
www.midistation.eu
NOV 29 13.00 The Flying Fish Jumps

Sazz'n Jazz

Koningsstraat 241; 0475.78.23.78,
www.sazznjazz.be
NOV 25 20.30 The Screaming Bitches
NOV 26 20.30 na (Palm)T(h)ree
NOV 27 20.30 Farida Zouj Quartet

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,
www.soundsjazzclub.be
Concerts at 22.00:

NOV 25 Chamaquiendo, salsa **NOV 26**
21.00 The Singers Night **NOV 27-28** Chris
Joris Experience with Frank Vagane
NOV 29 Laurent Doumont Soul Band

NOV 30 Master Session **DEC 1** Tuesday
Night Orchestra **DEC 2** Caribe con K -
Los Soneros des barrio, Caribbean music

The Cotton Club - Grand Casino

Duquesnoystraat 14; 02.289.68.66,
www.gcb.be
NOV 28 21.30 White'N'Black Unplugged

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45, www.themusicvillage.com
Concerts at 21.00:

NOV 25 O.A.K Trio **NOV 26** Stéphanie
Blanchoud, chanson **NOV 27** Buster &
The Swing **NOV 28** Rita Reys & Ruud
Jacobs Trio **DEC 2** Dapoerka

Théâtre Marni

Vergniestraat 25; 02.639.09.80
DEC 1 21.30 Jazztrad

Théâtre Saint-Michel

Pater Eudore Devroyestraat 2;
www.brusselsboogie.be

NOV 27-28 20.00 Boogie Woogie Festival,
with performances by Martin Schok,
Rob Rio, Renaud Patigny, Aricia and the
Boogie Jumpers and more



Antwerp

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,
www.desingel.be

NOV 28 20.00 Miguel Ángel Cortés,
guitar; Esperanza Fernández, voice
(flamenco)

Zuiderpershuis

Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00,
www.zuiderpershuis.be
Concerts at 20.30:

NOV 27 Staff Benda Bilka (Kinshasa)

NOV 28 Joel Rubin and his Jewish Music
Ensemble

NOV 29 David Krakauer en Klezmer
Madness! Ensemble

Brussels

Art Base

Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20,
www.art-base.be

NOV 27-29 20.00 Savina Yannatou &
Evgenia Karlafti, traditional songs and
ballads

La Samaritaine

Samaritanestraat 16; 02.511.33.95
Until NOV 28 20.30 Karoline de la Serna,
flamenco, jazz, tango

Piola Libri

Franklinstraat 66-68; 02.736.93.91,
www.piolalibri.be
NOV 27 19.00 Diana Winter, folk (UK)

Stekerlapatte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81,
www.stekerlapatte.be
NOV 26-DEC 17 20.00 Zongora

Théâtre 140

Eugène Plaskylaan 140; 02.733.97.08,
www.theatre140.be

DEC 2 20.00 Zaza Fournier and Claire
Denamur

Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00,
www.muziekpublieke.be

NOV 28 20.00 Nordic Night: Goupa,
Ottar Kaasa + Jam session

NOV 29 20.00 Marwan Abado (Palestine)

Ghent

Handelsbeurs

Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01,
www.handelsbeurs.be

NOV 25 20.00 Eva Ayllón, Afro-Peruvian



Antwerp

Amuz

Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28,
www.amuz.be

NOV 27 21.00 SingerPur: Adrian
Willaert's 16th-century madrigals and
contemporary projects

NOV 29 15.00 Edding Quartet with
Nicola Boud, clarinet: Mendelssohn and
Brahms chamber music

Maison des Arts

Haachtsesteenweg 147; 02.240.34.99,
www.culture103ecoles.be

NOV 27 20.00 Dominique Cornil, piano:
Haydn, Franck, Ravel

Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 02.545.01.30, www.mim.be

NOV 29 11.00 Quartz Ensemble: works
for string instruments and piano by Dring,
Jacques Leduc, Rheinberger

Protestantse Kapel

Museumplein 2; 02.507.82.00

DEC 2 20.00 Lars Ulrik Mortensen,
harpsichord: Buxtehude

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37,
www.kcb.be

NOV 25 20.00 Heinrich Schiff, cello;
Martin Helmchen, piano: Beethoven,
Brahms, Lutoslawski, Debussy

NOV 30 20.00 Thomas Bauer, baritone;
Jos van Immerseel, fortepiano: Schubert's
Winterreise

DEC 2 19.00 Eufonia 2009 lute
competition prizewinners concert



Brussels

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be

DEC 1-22 15.00/18.00 Christoph Willibald
Gluck's Iphigénie en Aulide and Iphigénie
en Tauride, conducted by Christophe
Rousset, directed by Pierre Audi

DON'T MISS

Groot Talent/ Klein Kasteeltje

Until 20 December
Klein Kasteeltje
Brussels

Already known for its lively,
colourful murals, the "Little
Castle" asylum centre in
Brussels' old harbour district
hosts this exhibition of work
by its inhabitants. The creative
educational team at the
Museum of Fine Arts has
been working with both adults
and children in the centre for
several months. The results
are sometimes playful, some-
time surprisingly emotional.



→ www.fedasil.be



Antwerp

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,

www.desingel.be

DEC 2-5 20.00 NieuwZwart,
choreographed by Wim Vandekeybus

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15,
www.cirque-royal.org
DEC 3-4 20.00 National Opera and Ballet of Moldova in Swan Lake



Les Brigitines

Korte Brigittenstraat; 02.506.43.00,
www.brigitines.be
Until NOV 26 20.30 Midnight Blue, multimedia performance by Chris Christoffels and José Roland

Antwerp

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,
www.desingel.be
NOV 26-28 20.00 Muziektheater
Transparent and I Solisti del Vento in Een nieuw requiem (A New Requiem), music theatre based on Mozart's masterpiece, directed by Josse De Pauw (in Dutch, English text available by advance request)

Lotto Arena

Schijnpoortweg 119; 070.345.345,
www.thewaroftheworlds.be
NOV 26 20.00 The War of the Worlds, musical staged by Jeff Wayne with Black Smoke Band and Ulladubulla Strings (in English)

Brussels

KVS Bol

Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.00,
www.kvs.be
Until NOV 27 KVS and Het Toneelhuis present Titus Andronicus by Shakespeare (in Dutch with French and English surtitles)

The Warehouse Studio

Waelhemstraat 69a; 0475.58.54.62
http://theatreinbrussels.com
Until NOV 29 20.00 Irish Theatre Group presents short plays by Samuel Beckett, directed by Roisin Dore (in English)

Leuven

Stuk

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20,
www.stuk.be
NOV 25-26 20.30 Random Scream in Investment, dance/theatre directed by Davis Freeman (in Dutch)



Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (M HKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60,
www.muhka.be
Until JAN 3 Textiles: Art and the Social Fabric, installations, sculptures, film, flags and banners

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09,
www.kmska.be
Until NOV 29 Marcel Maeyer, paintings by the contemporary Flemish artist, former curator at the museum
Until JAN 17 In the Footsteps of Bartók: Lajos Vajda and Hungarian Surrealism

Brussels

Atomium

Heysel Park; 02.475.45.75,
www.atomium.be
Until DEC 13 Africa: Fast forward, joint exhibition at the Atomium and Central

Africa Museum, Tervuren, on the African continent today

Belgian Comic Strip Centre

Zandstraat 20; 02.219.19.80,
www.stripmuseum.be
Until DEC 13 Kazuo Kamimura: Lorsque nous vivions ensemble (When We Lived Together), focus on the Japanese manga artist

Beursschouwburg

August Ortsstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.beursschouwburg.be
Until DEC 19 Out of Bounds, video group show curated by Christel Tsilibaris

Bozar (Paleis voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
Until JAN 3 Portraits of Artists: 80 Years of the Centre for Fine Arts in Pictures
Until JAN 3 Sexties, comic-strip illustrations and texts by Guido Crepax, Paul Cuvelier, Jean-Claude Forest and Guy Peelaert

Costume and Lace Museum

Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50
Until DEC 29 Grada: Mystery Writing by Women, Croatian women's ancestral art of embroidery applied to contemporary fashion and utensils

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193; 02.733.13.78
Until DEC 4 Daniel Detilleux: Digital Vibrations in Music, steel sculptures in collaboration with Jean Kluger and Christian Soete

KVS

Arduinkaa 9; 02.210.11.12, www.kvs.be
Until DEC 17 Nuit Américaine, photographs of the America west by Flemish photographer Peter De Bruyne

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11,
www.fine-arts-museum.be
Until JAN 31 Delvaux and the Ancient World, some 60 paintings and drawings by the Belgian artist
Until JAN 31 The Art of Gaming, works from the collection of the National Lottery on the occasion of its 75th anniversary

Royal Museum of the Armed Forces

Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33,
www.legermuseum.be
Until FEB 28 Aanvalleuh!, works by Belgian comic strip artists
Until APR 11 Dieren in de oorlog (Animals in the War), archive photos and films of animals affected by the First World War

Sint-Gorikshallen

Sint-Goriksplein 25; 02.502.44.24,
www.hallesaintgery.be
Until NOV 29 Neighbours.Friends. Family, paintings by young artists from three recent EU member states

Deurle

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens
Museumlaan 14; 09.282.51.23,
www.museumdd.be
Until NOV 29 Absence is the Highest Form of Presence, work by Robert Gober, Juliao Sarmento and Luc Tuymans

Deurne (Antwerp)

Zilvermuseum Sterckshof
Cornelissenlaan; 03.360.52.52
Until JAN 10 Coral and Bells: A Collection of Rattles, silver and gold rattles and jingle bells decorated with precious stones, shown alongside miniatures and children's portraits

Geel

Gasthuismuseum

Gasthuisstraat 1; 014.59.14.43,
www.gasthuismuseumgeel.net
Until MAR 31 God of Doctoor?, collection illustrating the history of healing in Geel

Ghent

Museum of Fine Arts

Fernand Scribedreef 1 – Citadelpark; 09.240.07.00, www.mskgent.be
Until FEB 7 Max Beckmann, prints and paintings from the collection of the Von der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal
Until FEB 7 Fernand Léger's Le Grand Déjeuner, masterpiece painting on loan from the Museum of Modern Art in New York

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03,
www.smak.be
Until DEC 6 Klaus Scherübel: Mallarmé, Het Boek, installations
Until DEC 6 Coming People 2009: Forwarding backyards, works by graduating students

Until JAN 10 Michel François, Plans d'évasion, retrospective

Until JAN 31 Faux Jumeaux (False Twins), changing exhibition curated by Michel François
DEC 4-FEB 7 Ben Benaouissé – Jan Fabre revisited, performance art

DEC 4-MAR 14 GAGARIN The Artists in their Own Words, a collection of texts by participating artists

Grimbergen

CC Strombeek
Gemeenteplein; 02.263.03.43,
www.ccstrombeek.be
Until DEC 10 Shot by both Sides, video installations by Pieter Geenen and Johan Grimontprez

Hasselt

Cultuurcentrum
Kunstlaan 5; 011.22.99.33,
www.ccha.be
Until JAN 10 Helikon: Intens en divers (Intense and Diverse), works by the 1960s artist group

Leuven

Museum M
Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 28;
016.20.09.09, www.mleuven.be
Until DEC 6 Rogier van der Weyden 1400 | 1464 Master of Passions, work by the 15th-century Brussels city painter, the first exhibition in Leuven's new museum

STUK

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20,
www.stuk.be
Until JAN 24 Matt Mullican, drawings, sculpture, architectural constructions and performances

Tervuren

Royal Museum for Central Africa
Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11,
www.africamuseum.be
Until DEC 13 Africa: Fast forward, the African continent today (see also the Atomium)

Until JAN 3 Persona: Ritual masks and Contemporary Art, 100 masks shown alongside works by contemporary African artists

Until JAN 3 Omo: People & Design, more than 1,000 objects from the Omo valley, south west Ethiopia



Europalia China: Festival celebrating Chinese art and culture, ancient to contemporary, with more than 450 events
Until JAN 30 across the country
www.europalia.eu

Next Festival: Crossborder contemporary arts festival featuring theatre, dance, visual arts, music and debates
Until DEC 13 at venues in Kortrijk, Tournai and Lille
069.25.30.80, www.nextfestival.eu

Take Care Week: A number of initiatives during the week leading up to World AIDS Day (1 December), including Knitting Against AIDS, Swim for Life, info evenings and parties
Until NOV 30 across Brussels and Flanders
www.takecareweek.be

Time Festival: Biennial arts festival with talks, performances, exhibitions and screenings
Until NOV 28 across Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels
0479.69.57.86, www.timefestival.be

Antwerp

Antiques Open House: Tour of 21 specialist galleries
NOV 27-DEC 6 starting from Amma Tribal Art, Wolstraat 16
03.232.01.03, www.antwerpen.be

Finnish Christmas Fair: Decorations, gifts, food, drink and prizes – win an airline or ferry ticket to Finland, Sweden or Denmark
NOV 26-29 at Finnish Seamen's Mission, Italiëlei 67
www.merimieskirkko.be

Brussels

Burning Ice #2: Festival on climate change, preceding the UN climate conference in Copenhagen next month. Debates, performances, exhibitions, mostly in English or without dialogue
Until NOV 27 at Kaaithéater, Sainctelettesquare 20
02.201.59.59, www.kaaithéater.be

Cimatics Audiovisual Festival: Free concerts and parties with DJs and VJs
NOV 26-27 at Recyclart, Ursulinenstraat 25
02.502.57.34, www.cimaticsfestival.com

Humo's Comedy Cup: annual stand-up competition
NOV 26 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110
02.548.24.24, www.abconcerts.be

De gevangen in debat (The prison in debate): a series of activities, particularly film, that take a critical look at the justice system

Until DEC 13 at Cinéma Nova, Arenbergstraat 3
www.nova-cinema.org

Ghent

Aussie Tours Roadshow: travel advice for people bound for Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands
NOV 29 at Flanders Expo, Maaltekouter 1
09.241.92.11, www.aussietours.be

CAFE SPOTLIGHT

REBECCA BENOOT



Borrel Babbel

Nieuwmarkt 2 Mechelen

Tucked away in a picturesque square in the shadow of Sint-Rombout's Cathedral, you will find Mechelen's smallest café. A maximum of 20 people are allowed in this quaint little establishment, where time seems to have come to a halt.

On entering, you are immediately struck by the multiple wooden features and the majestic brick bar that incorporates remnants from the building that previously stood on this site. The café is tiny, to be sure, but what it lacks in size, it makes up in atmosphere. Filled with old photographs, a mediaeval chandelier, antique trumpets and quite a lot of smoke on a Saturday night, the Borrel Babbel is the ideal place for a quiet night out with a few (but not too many) friends.

Either sitting on a stool at the bar or at one of the three wooden tables that hang from the wall, you can enjoy a wide variety of jenevers and some typical Mechelen beers on tap, like the famous Gouden Carolus. Cocktails are also available for the more cosmopolitan crowd, served with a smile by an ever-so-friendly waitress. A beautiful if slightly hazardous cast iron spiral staircase leads you the first floor, also known as the toilets, which take up the same amount of space as the café below.

Even during the day, the Borrel Babbel is the place to be, offering select snacks and homemade soup, ideal for cold winter days. This home away from home is open from 9.00 (free sandwiches for early birds!) until the last customer goes home.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Carposers

For three years in a row, Ghent-based photographer Kris Dewitte asked the composers who had been invited to the city's World Soundtrack Awards (part of the Flanders International Film Festival) to pose in a black, 1982 Mercedes. Some of these photos turned out to be simple portraits of musical masters behind the wheel. But others are slightly more inspired.

Take this photo of David Arnold, for instance, the man behind the music of the last five James Bond films. Like all the other conductors, he was delighted at the idea of posing in the car for the series. Another shot shows Argentinean composer Gustavo Santaolalla with his guitar in the back seat of the car. He is in fact playing his Oscar-winning score from *Brokeback Mountain*.

Dewitte has been making an art of shooting film personalities for many years, travelling from festival to festival and haunting the sets of Belgian film productions. He never stands with the hordes of photographers at the red carpet; he waits somewhere, across the street, say, for the shot of a lifetime.

The photo book *Carposers* has been published in Belgium by Roularta Media, and an exhibition of the series is now on view in the Flanders House Gallery in Osaka, Japan, during the run of the Osaka Film Festival. Alongside it is another Dewitte series called *The Kissing Project*. "I've been travelling the world to ask people to kiss," the photographer tells me from his hotel room in Osaka. "Everybody loves



kissing! They all responded enthusiastically." In keeping with his low profile, many of the subjects are not necessarily world-famous or instantly recognisable. But they are people whose faces he admires for one reason or another.

Some relationships actually blossomed from the kissing photo shoot, while others ended. In one memorable scenario, a Polish girl returned to her home country after the kiss – the last – with her boyfriend of eight years. The nearly 80-year-old American actress Mamie Van Doren kissed her long-time husband; Ghent-based singer Gabriel Rios kissed his girlfriend – model and actress Delfine Bafort; Patricia Arquette kissed her daughter. Dewitte is continuing the series in Japan.

The curator at Osaka's Suntory Museum was so intrigued by Dewitte's work that he arranged a showing of *Still Project* – photos of actors, directors and other film personalities, including Peter Jackson, Michael Moore and Juliette Lewis. "The Japanese tend to respond more to black-and-white photography than to colour," says Dewitte.

► www.flanders.jp

LISA BRADSHAW

ALISTAIR MACLEAN

TALKING DUTCH



overlijdensbericht →

In some countries, your passing is marked by a few words squashed into a column within eyeshot of ads for gardeners and second-hand refrigerators. Not in Flanders. Large *overlijdensberichten* – death notices fill pages in the Flemish press.

It's not where I first turn to, but when the news is about some never-ending political debate or the front page reports about a survey on teenagers' eating habits, I will pause at the *overlijdensberichten* for the details I can glean from such sparse notices. I have such a page in front of me. Jean-Pierre was *lid van de plaatselijke culturele verenigingen* – member of the local cultural associations. Even with his "Flemish" name he was *geboren in Polen in 1944* – born in Poland in 1944. The board of directors of the company he set up *betreurt het overlijden van haar stichter* – regrets the passing of its founder: *hij maakte van haar een bloeiend bedrijf* – he made it a flourishing business.

Often in Belgium, the death of a monk or a nun is announced. *Zuster* – Sister Marie-Bernard: *intrede in de Priorij op 25 maart 1955* – entered into the Priory on 25 March 1955. Such notices are quite simple: *De Priorij meldt u het overlijden van* – The Priory announces to you the death of – followed by a calming verse: *Een leven kwam tot rust, in de palm van Gods hand* – A life came to rest in the palm of God's hand. In others you can feel the pain: *De families melden u met grote*

droefheid het heenga van – The families announce to you with great sorrow the passing of.

Usually the notice is also an invitation to attend the funeral service: *De uitvaartliturgie waartoe u vriendelijk wordt uitgenodigd zal plaatshebben in de parochiekerk* – The funeral service, to which you are kindly invited, will take place in the parish church. Sometimes not: *De begrafenis geschieft in intieme familiekring* – The burial will take place within the immediate family.

The person may be referred to as *de echtgenote* – wife, or *de echtgenoot* – husband, or the surviving *weduwe* – widow, or *weduwnaar* – widower. The rest of the family will also be mentioned: *kinderen en kleinkinderen* – children and grandchildren; *zijn broer, schoonzus, neven en nichten* – his brother, sister-in-law, nephews and nieces.

Occupations are often given. Jean-Pierre unusually was both a *leraar* – teacher and *zaakvoerder* – businessman. François was *een belastingsambtenaar op rust* – a retired tax inspector. André was a professor and Agnes a *lid van het zangkoor* – member of the choir.

Yet life is a circle. Simone died shortly after *de geboorte van haar twaalfde kleinkind* – the birth of her twelfth grandchild, so it's fitting that the topic next week is *Sinterklaas* – Saint Nicholas.

► www.inmemoriam.be

bite

SHARON LIGHT

Mark Silverstein

Mark Silverstein isn't interested in food as art. As he puts it, he just wants to make food that he wants to eat. To my delight, apparently he and I want to eat the same things.

Silverstein began cooking at the age of nine, and by secondary school he was preparing dinner for his family on a nightly basis. After cycling through a series of kitchens (and other jobs) between Boston and New Jersey, he and his Flemish wife moved to Antwerp 10 years ago.

De Broers van Julianne had already been open for more than a decade when Silverstein saw the sign in the window advertising for a *keukenprins* (kitchen prince). He knew he qualified. Eight years later he is still the cook at De Broers, serving up delectable vegetarian cuisine in this well-known Antwerp establishment.

Silverstein has introduced a variety of new recipes, and, with his background as a pastry chef, he has quadrupled the number of desserts on offer (sadly, not all at the same time). The restaurant has a chic design where you can comfortably tuck in for lunch or dinner, enjoying one of their many beautiful quiches or Moroccan cuisine. You can just as easily stop in for a coffee and accompanying (gorgeous) dessert.



One year ago, the American cook starting pitching in at another local venue: 22b-zoet zout & zo. Familiar with Silverstein's skills, Ingrid De Decker knew who to ask when she decided to start her own eatery. He now spends one-quarter of his week as the master behind their baked goods. The speciality is a selection of dessert bars, including carrot cake, lemon squares and "congobars", a butterscotch brownie (my personal favourite and also available at De Broers). He's also responsible for their baked savoury dishes, such as lasagne and moussaka.

22b follows a format similar to the chains Exki or Foodmaker, but with a cosier atmosphere (De Decker and her husband have backgrounds in architecture and designed the place themselves). It's truly a family business – De Decker's mother, a former café-owner, contributes to the menu from time to time. You can find a selection of pastas that De Decker will cook for you, along with soups, salads and a variety of breakfast cereals and viennoiseries.

It's food that Silverstein wants to eat, that I want to eat, and that soon you will want to eat, too.

► www.debroersvanjulienne.be

► www.22b.be

The last word →→→

Faint praise

Van Rompuy is a man of consensus, who gave his country a period of stability following months of uncertainty.

Gordon Brown, British prime minister

Cardinal number

May Herman Van Rompuy become the conductor of a European symphony orchestra in its performance of an authentic Ode to Joy.

Cardinal Danneels waxes poetic

Holding on

His departure from Belgian politics means that shortly we will be getting a new prime minister. As far as we're concerned, the premiership belonged and still belongs to CD&V. Party chair Marianne Thyssen wastes no time on goodbyes

Sore winner

In your face, Britain!
A reader of *Het Nieuwsblad* on the letters page