



# FLANDERS TODAY



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Adam Denech/Smurfstock

The company that brought Chevrolet to Belgium is still driving forward

## Dropping down a gear

General Motors has been in Antwerp for the past 80 years and has survived worse times than these

Anna Jenkinson

This isn't the first time Eric Van Landeghem and his family have experienced an economic slowdown hurting

the auto industry. His father and grandfather also worked at General Motors Belgium, and, between the three generations, have weathered the Great Depression, World War

II and the oil crisis of the 1970s.

"In 1973 it was a very similar situation," the production manager of GM Belgium tells me while strolling through the company's

plant at the Port of Antwerp. "Then the market started booming again, and the company was flying aeroplanes with banners saying 'GM is hiring again.'"

The car company will be hoping for a similar turnaround this time, too, especially as it lost the

*Continued on page 3*



### Cracking up

A defective thermostat is blamed for extensive damage to works by Flemish masters in the Museum of Fine Art in Brussels. The works were being kept in the museum's reserve collection, where humidity should have been strictly controlled.

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### Queen closed

The most beautiful restaurant on the Flemish coast has closed. The Ostend Queen was a stunning venue with a superb sea view, but the bills have been piling up, and its owners have finally called it a day.

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### Come hear the band

Every town and village in Flanders boasts at least one community band – and some have several. We look into a social phenomenon that seems to effortlessly bring together different generations.

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## Dismay at Islamophobia study findings

Minister invites authors "to clarify"

Alan Hope

Politicians, academics and social workers have reacted with shock to the report released last week that shows that half of all Flemish people think that Islam represents a threat to Europe's cultural values. The report, based on research carried out by the Institute for Social and Political Opinion Research (ISPO) at Leuven University, also found that 37% of Flemings think that Muslims living here have no respect for local values and that 46% believe that Islam has no positive contribution to make to Western culture.

Flemish integration minister Marino Keulen immediately invited the two authors of the study to clarify the figures. "We're talking about an important social problem, and the results of the study intrigue me," he said. He went on to blame the media: "People feel unsafe because of what they see and hear in the media about major terrorist acts, whereas ordinary Muslims are just as repelled by them."

Groen! party chair Mieke Vogels welcomed the finding that young people are less hostile towards Muslims than their

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## EDITOR'S CHOICE

## The Museum of Museums

Johan van Geluwe is possibly the most intriguing artist at work in Flanders today. He sends out envelopes filled with odd bits of paper, programmes for apparently imaginary museums, manifestoes from strange political movements. He calls himself the director of A.R.T., the Art Recycling Terminal. He is at the same time director of M.A.O., the Multinational Art Office, and the M.O.M., Museum of Museums, in Waregem. It all makes very little sense.

An exhibition in the Arentshuis in Bruges might help to explain. Or might not. Van Geluwe has been given several rooms in this neoclassical building to set out *The Museum of Museums*. The main part of the show is an installation of hundreds of postcards illustrating museums across the world. These were sent to Van Geluwe in response to a crude typewritten request he sends out to museum curators, asking for a picture of their museum and an official stamp of the institution. His aim, he says, is to revive the art of communication through letter writing.

Van Geluwe was born in Waregem, West Flanders, in 1929 and lives there still. He studied

as an architect but later turned to art, and so calls himself an ARTchitect. Over the years, he has gained considerable international standing because of his cabinet-of-curiosity installations and impressive artistic integrity (he sells nothing). They admire him in Germany, while Belgian critics began to take him more seriously following the *Visionary Belgium* exhibition put together in 2003 by the late Swiss curator Harald Szeemann, in which Van Geluwe was given an entire room.

The Arentshuis exhibition shows off his various obsessions: collecting silver trophies, corresponding with far-flung people, creating mock official documents, assembling fictitious museums. He's a bit old-fashioned, perhaps, for today's overheated art market, but he is a generous, curious, always probing artist. He leaves you smiling, even if you are not exactly sure at what.

Until 27 September, Arentshuis, Dijver 16, Bruges

online  
[www.museabrugge.be](http://www.museabrugge.be)



Visionary Belgian: Van Geluwe's mysterious museum

## Flanders Today

## independent newsweekly

Editor: Derek Blyth  
Deputy editor: Lisa Bradshaw  
News editor: Alan Hope  
Agenda: Sarah Crew, Robyn Boyle  
Picture research: Esther Bourrée  
Prepress: Nancy Temmerman  
Contributors: Marie Dumont, Stéphanie Duval, Sharon Light, Alistair MacLean, Marc Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Monique Philips, Saffina Rana, Leander Schaerlaeckens, Steven Tate, Christophe Verbiest, Denzil Walton  
Project manager: Pascale Zoetaert  
Publisher: VUM  
NV Vlaamse Uitgeversmaatschappij  
Gossetlaan 28, 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden  
Editorial address: Gossetlaan 30  
1702 Groot-Bijgaarden

Tel.: 02.373.99.09 – Fax: 02.375.98.22  
E-mail: [editorial@flanderstoday.eu](mailto:editorial@flanderstoday.eu)  
Subscriptions: France Lycops  
Tel: 02.373.83.59  
E-mail: [subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu](mailto:subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu)  
Advertising: Evelyne Fregonese  
Tel. 02.373.83.57  
E-mail: [advertising@flanderstoday.eu](mailto:advertising@flanderstoday.eu)  
Verantwoordelijke uitgever: Derek Blyth



## FACE OF FLANDERS



## Jan Raes

In December, the Amsterdam-based Concertgebouw Orchestra was voted top orchestra in the world, just at the moment that its management was being taken over by a Fleming.

Jan Raes, 48, has been in the Netherlands since 2003, when he took up the helm of the Rotterdam Philharmonic, while the turbulent Valery Gergiev was principal conductor. The Rotterdam Phil is considered the second-best orchestra in the Netherlands, so it was only natural Raes should step up when the Amsterdam orchestra's previous director reached retirement. Gergiev has also left Rotterdam, for London.

Raes has the reputation as something of a crisis manager. He studied at the Antwerp Conservatory and performed as a flautist and soloist with various orchestras, including De Filharmonie, before moving on to teach at his alma mater, eventually leading to the job of artistic director. In that job, he had to steer the conservatory through difficult times. He left in 2000 to go back to run De Filharmonie but two years later left again, for Rotterdam. Both Belgian orchestras had to be brought through choppy waters.

The Concertgebouw Orchestra is a pinnacle: critics in a poll organised by *Gramophone* magazine voted it the best orchestra in the world. With guest conductors like Nicolaus Harnoncourt and Bernard Haitink, the Concertgebouw is so highly regarded by the Dutch, it is immune to cuts in subsidy and sponsorship. Every year long waiting lists form for the few available *abonnements* for the Thursday concert series. It's said the only way to get one is to inherit it.

Raes was appointed manager last summer and just took up the post in December. He said in an interview that the job for him is closing a circle: "As a boy, I heard the Concertgebouw Orchestra with Haitink in Sint-Baafs cathedral [in Ghent]. I was very lucky to be able to listen to top quality music. My father is a music fanatic, and my mother and uncle were themselves musicians."

Raes is married to violinist Olga Beloborodova. His older brother Frank, on the other hand, is a sports reporter and commentator with the VRT.

Though by no means crisis management – the 120 musicians were last month given a pay increase of no less than 16% – Raes' job will still be a challenge. The orchestra has to retain its prestigious position and its public support; concerts in the home base on the Museumplein draw about 120,000 people a year, and the orchestra's Friends organisation numbers 13,000 paying members.

But at the same time, the Concertgebouw has to avoid becoming stuffy, frozen in time and fixated on the Romantic/Late-Romantic repertory audiences love so much. Musical challenges are needed to attract musicians and conductors, not to mention critical attention.

"The public isn't as old and grey-haired as people sometimes think," Raes told *De Standaard* last month. "However that doesn't mean we don't still have some work to do on our image. Making sure the orchestra avoids becoming a museum piece will be one of my priorities."

Alan Hope

TALKING DUTCH  
notes on language

## ontslaan

Desperate times require desperate measures. It makes no difference whether you're a player or a pawn, there may be a C4 lying in a locked drawer waiting just for you. The C4 form is the dreaded document you are handed in Belgium when you've been dismissed.

Of course, if you think you've got stars directing your fate, then you can pray you will be unscathed as the cruel winds take their toll. But it's not something you can turn a blind eye to. Even this morning you could read about an aircraft maintenance company's plans to sack a third of its employees: *Het vliegtuigonderhoudsbedrijf wil zowat een derde van zijn 1.100 medewerkers ontslaan*.

The word *ontslaan* – dismiss has the noun form *ontslag* – dismissal. It can be used in the sense of release: *iemand uit het ziekenhuis ontslaan* – release someone from the hospital. The same goes for *de gevangenis* – the prison. But with the expression *iemand uit zijn ambt ontslaan* – release someone from their duties, we are back to the letting go of people.

Painful as it is to be given your cards, perhaps we should spare a thought for the person who has to do the sacking. On second thought, let's not; I imagine once you've done it a couple of times, it just becomes part of the job you're lucky enough to have.

Rather, let's distract ourselves by examining some other words beginning with ont.

*Ontsnappen* means to escape: *een gevaar ontsnappen* – escape from danger. *Ontbreken* means to be lacking: *er ontbreekt een lepel* ("there lacks a spoon") – a spoon is missing.

*Ontdekken* means to discover: *een nieuwe ster is ontdekt* – a new star is discovered.

Perhaps the one we need most these days is *ontspannen*, meaning to relax; of course, you can relax something like the rules, but if it's yourself that you relax, Dutch needs to mention "yourself": *ik probeer mij te ontspannen* – I'm trying to relax.

If you haven't committed some sort of serious offence, you cannot be sacked on the spot – *iemand op staande voet ontslaan* ("on standing foot"). You should be given a *ontslagbrief*

– dismissal letter, which sets out your *opzeggingstermijn* – period of notice. More commonly, you will be given *een ontslagpremie* – severance pay in lieu of being forced to work out your notice.

Now a word of advice from *vacature.com*. If you do get sacked don't panic: *weerstand de verleiding om direct te gaan solliciteren* – resist the temptation to apply immediately for another job. Use a test such as the Competence Indicator developed by Vlerick Management School to identify your strong and weak points. *Sta even stil* – Stand still for a moment to evaluate yourself and your capacities. If you are unfortunate enough to be sitting at the kitchen table with a C4 form in front of you, when you get over the shock, do prepare well and good luck with the interviews.

Alistair MacLean

online

[www.vacature.com/art1167](http://www.vacature.com/art1167)



# GM down, not out

Continued from page 1

right to call itself the world's largest auto maker just a couple of weeks ago. Global sales dropped to 8.35 million against Toyota's 8.97 million. In Europe, GM sales fell 6.5% in 2008, as rising unemployment and falling consumer confidence hurt demand.

The auto maker is also in the midst of restructuring after announcing that it might run out of operating funds by the end of 2008, resulting in emergency loans from the US government. "The entire industry worldwide is impacted by the weak demand," says Arnaud Goossens, head of Belgian research at ING. "If consumers are spending now, it's on staples, not on luxurious, big-ticket items."

Leo Wiels, GM Belgium's new managing director as of 1 February, has his work cut out for him. He told *Flanders Today* that his first objective is to bring stability to the Antwerp plant.

GM Belgium has already introduced several changes in the last few months. The company shortened its working week by introducing "economic unemployment" measures, where workers take a day's leave that is paid at a much lower rate and is partly compensated by the government. The car maker is now working at 80% capacity, after getting rid of the night shift, going from three to two shifts.

Wiels is ready to take further steps as needed. "As a manufacturing plant, we have to act and react fast and with flexibility, in line with demand," he says. "Our recent change in the shift schedule shows we're able to do that."

The latest cuts at GM Belgium come on top of a restructuring started in 2007, which lowered the plant's capacity from 250,000 Astra

tion, Febiac. The number of new car registrations fell by 7.8%, and the federation forecasts "a more difficult period" ahead, with 2009 figures probably falling by at least another 10%.

It's not only the domestic market, though, that is of interest to GM Belgium, since 96% of its output is exported. The European picture for the industry is not looking any brighter. In Europe, new passenger car registrations dropped by 17.8% in December and recorded their biggest decline in 15 years for 2008 as a whole, according to ACEA.

The biggest single export market for GM Belgium is the UK, which accounts for 21%, followed by Germany at 13% and then Russia at 12%. While most of the production stays in Europe, there are also sales to Australia, the US and Canada. This geographic diversity means that all five Astra brands – Opel, Vauxhall, Chevrolet, Holden and Saturn – are made in Antwerp.

## The village of GM

The factory may well be down to two shifts, but during those periods it is a hive of activity, with forklifts and electric pallet transporters moving parts from one area to another, assemblers and technicians spinning around work floor on bicycles or scooters, and bells ringing out to indicate a shift change, lunch or time to go back to work. It's like a mini town, with pedestrian areas, traffic lights and the twice-daily trains that bring parts directly into the plant.

The cars start their lives in the noisy area of the press shop, where music blares and machines make a regular thudding sound as steel sheets are pressed into doors and other parts. Then off they go to the body shop, which includes "weld-

## The plant gives birth to new cars through "marriages", the term used when the body and engine are brought together

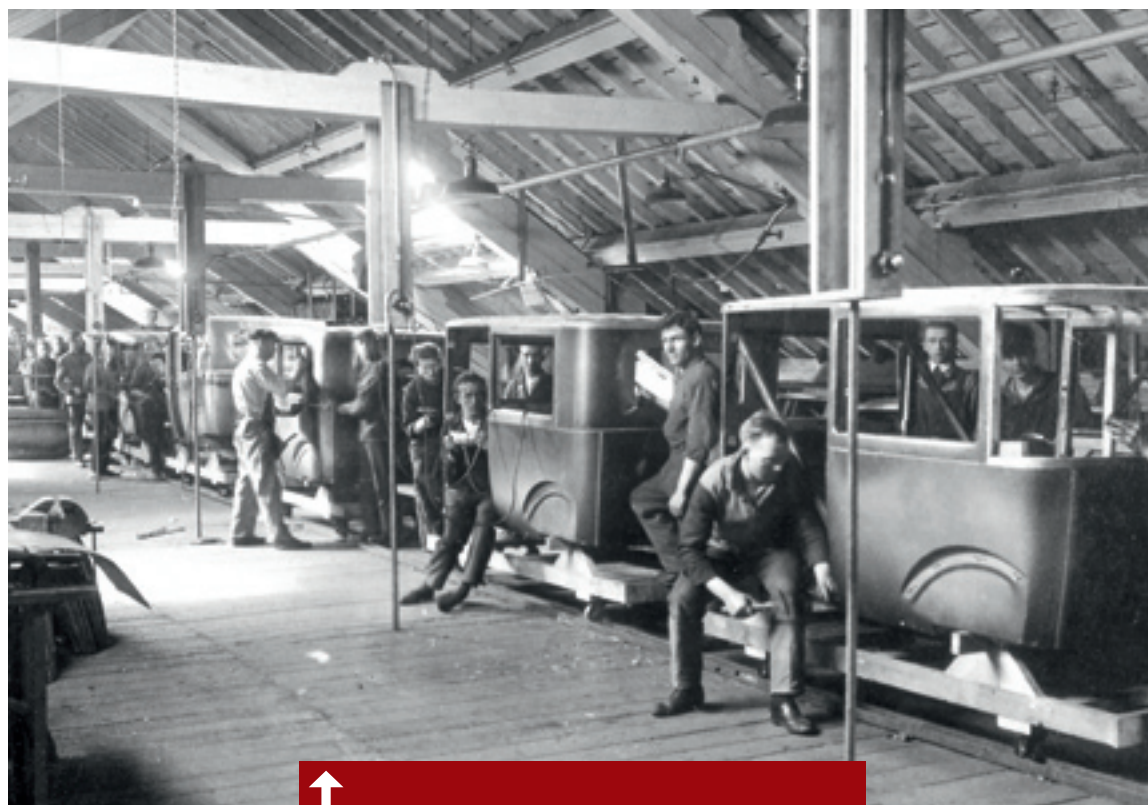
cars to 125,000. There were also job losses, with nearly 1,900 employees taking voluntary redundancy between April 2007 and November 2008.

The automotive industry accounted for 6.1% of Belgium's gross domestic product in 2006, according to the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA). The other major car plants in Belgium are Ford Genk, Volvo Ghent and Audi Brussels.

In Belgium, auto makers ended last year "amid uncertainty and a feeling of crisis, with orders and sales down," according to the national automobile federa-

ing street", so called because the car drives onto the line, where robots peer into both sides and weld parts into place. The most colourful area is, of course, the paint shop. (There's also a paint hospital if a car needs to be resprayed.)

But the plant doesn't just give birth to new cars, see them grow and send them off to the hospital when needed. There are also "marriages", the term used in assembly when the body and engine are brought together. Once assembled and given a final check, cars go into storage and then, hopefully before too long, are delivered to local distributors or exported.



↑ Man vs machine: In the 1920s, workers put General Motors' cars together with their own two hands in the attic of an old abbey. Today, they programme the robots in a manufacturing facility at the Port of Antwerp ↓



Stock levels have been a concern among industry observers. GM Belgium has been focussing on this issue and since October has only been building to customer orders. This means that "stocks are going down fast," says Van Landeghem, who is responsible for the operational side of the business. GM Belgium has also been running a promotion called "Choose and drive", which is focused on selling cars in stock.

In its attempt to stimulate demand, the automaker is also offering special prices and financing as well as premiums for exchanging your old car. As is the case with all carmakers in Belgium, it is hoping that last month's Brussels Motor Show will encourage consumers. "We hope to see the first signs of recovery soon, but this is highly dependent on the return of consumer confidence,"

Wiels says.

The Antwerp GM plant launched in 1924 and is this year celebrating its 80th anniversary of its move into the Antwerp port area in 1929. The site's reception area boasts a 1925 Chevrolet, similar to the one Van Landeghem's grandfather used to drive to the carpenters to have fitted with wooden parts. At that time, the car plant was located in a former abbey on Fortuinstraat, ideal at the time because it was well-equipped, had large storage spaces and was close to the water.

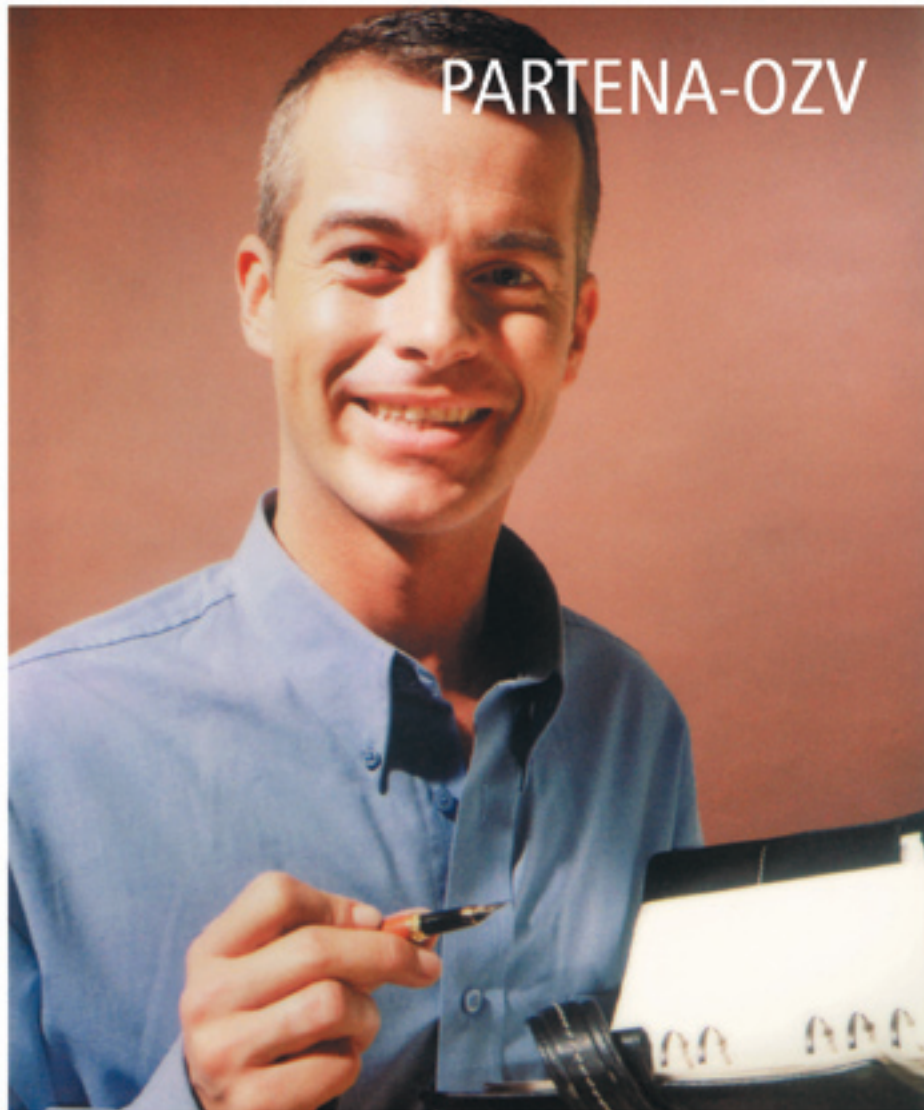
The plant moved from the abbey to an old velodrome, then to what is now a cinema complex and finally its current location among the maze of companies that make up the Antwerp port area. Each move has gone hand-in-hand with the port's development and expansion.

Since Van Landeghem started working for GM Belgium in 1975, one of the biggest changes he has seen is the introduction of automation. When robots were first used in 1984, they just did welding work. Today, there are more than 700 robots doing all sorts of tasks, including paint applications, lifting car bodies and installing windows.

It's not yet clear whether more changes will be needed to overcome the current slowdown. One thing is for sure, though: Van Landeghem will be expecting GM Belgium to overcome this downturn just like it did for his father and his grandfather.

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**PHOTO OF THE WEEK** ● This canvas from the collection of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels is one of more than 800 which may have suffered damage caused by loss of control of atmospheric conditions in a depot where the works were being stored. The paintings from the 15th to 17th centuries require a temperature of 20°C and humidity

of 55%, but, because of the breakdown of a sensor, the humidity dropped to 25%, drying out some wooden panels and causing the paint to crack and peel away. The paintings were being stored off-site during renovation works in the building. None of the museum's major works, which hang in the permanent collection, was affected, a spokeswoman said.

## NEWS IN BRIEF: Dendermonde babies laid to rest, convicted criminal gains multiple access to nuclear facility; brand new diamond cut in Antwerp

● Governing party Open-VLD is proposing an increase in the statute of limitations for crimes of sexual abuse of minors, from the current 10 years to 30. The proposal is the idea of deputy Sabien Lahaye-Battheu, a practising lawyer, who has represented adults clients who were sexually abused as children. Under current law, victims must file a complaint before their 28th birthday. "Many of these abused men and women are damaged for life, not only physically and psychologically, but also in their relationships and sexually," she said.

● The victims of the knife attack in the Dendermonde creche Fabeltjesland were buried at the weekend in private ceremonies closed to the media. Dendermonde mayor Piet Buyse had threatened to lock up any journalist who invaded the privacy of the families of babies Korneel and Leon and creche worker Marita Blindeman.

● Three out of four Belgians think they and their compatriots are good drivers, according to a poll carried out by insurance company AXA. Belgium is fourth on the list of self-rating European countries, behind Sweden, Luxembourg and Great Britain. But the truth is somewhat different: when asked which practices they considered dangerous, most named using a GSM, speeding in

a built-up area and driving under the influence. But at the same time, 31%, 53% and 34% respectively admitted to doing just that.

● One million euros raised by a Temse father for his sick daughter's medication will now be donated to the King Boudewijn Foundation, since the company that produces the experimental drugs has refused to supply it to the girl. William Massart raised the money to pay for Metazym for his daughter Sandra, 7, who suffers from a rare metabolic disorder. The drug was developed by a Danish company, which quoted the €1 million price. But they are now out of business, and the drug was sold to Shire, a British pharmaceutical company. That company has now told the Massart family that they cannot sell them the drugs. The company's production capacity for Metazym is limited to the quantity needed for the 12 children currently taking part in clinical tests. In addition, the drug is not licenced for sale to the public, the company said.

● Oscar hopeful Kate Winslet, Nicole Kidman and Catherine Zeta-Jones will attend the Berlin Film Festival this week wearing a new shape of diamond invented by two Antwerp cutters. Bernard Van Pul and Koen Van Ishoven have created the Blue Flame diamond, which has 89 facets, causing it to sparkle more than



Anja Hermans

the traditional brilliant, which only has 57 facets. The number 89 was chosen because the numbers stand for good luck and eternity in Chinese numerology. The diamond will be marketed mainly in China.

● A 29-year-old convicted criminal has been able to enter the grounds of the nuclear power station at Doel near Antwerp a dozen times since the summer of 2007. Anja Hermans was sent to prison for criminal damage in 2001 as a member of the Animal Liberation Front, a group of animal-rights protestors who figured for a time on the government's list of terrorist organisations. Hermans told *De Morgen* she had got as far as the nuclear

perimeter. Her entries were made via sewer pipes, holes in the fence, the Scheldt and the main entrance. On several occasions she announced what she was planning and still the entry went off without problems. Hermans was later able to leave the installation without being challenged, although on four occasions she was detained and reported. "I just let them take me," she told the paper. "In fact that was the whole idea." Electrabel, which runs the power station, said it was well guarded. "Ms Hermans was at no time able to breach the nuclear perimeter," a spokeswoman said. "She caused a certain amount of disruption for staff." Hermans admitted she had not breached the perimeter. "But I could have," she said. "The photos prove it."

● The federal government is considering a plan to extend the country's prison capacity from 8,449 places to 10,000 by 2016. The plan involves the construction of seven new prisons and the renovation of existing facilities. But opponents have criticised the plan, which would cost about €150,000 per new cell, as unaffordable and unrealistic.

**Breaking news**  
for breaking news, see  
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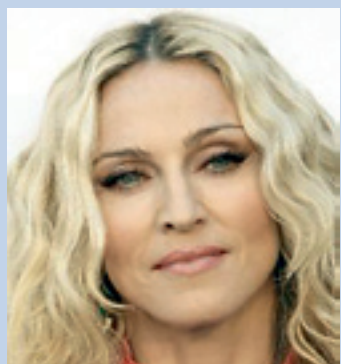
## FIFTH COLUMN



### MEP for LDD

Whenever elections approach, Flemish parties start looking out for well-known candidates to put on their lists. They are called BVs, short for *bekende Vlamingen* (famous Flemings). Lijst Dedecker (LDD), the party founded by ultra-liberal Jean-Marie Dedecker, now has its own BV for its European list: Derk-Jan Eppink. Although, to be fair, as an intellectual he is not all that famous and, in fact, not all that Flemish, either. Eppink is what is known hereabouts as a *Nederbelg*: a Dutchman who has spent so much time in Belgium that he is considered one of us. Eppink made a name for himself in Flanders as a political journalist for the newspaper *De Standaard*. He had a sharp pen, and his right-wing views got him noticed – since right-wing politicians always complain that the media is dominated by the left. His polemic style still gets him invited onto a good number of TV talk shows. Eppink left *De Standaard* to work with the Dutch European commissioner Frits Bolkestein. He continued to write columns, though, which resulted in a clash with the leadership of the liberal party VLD – Guy Verhofstadt and Karel De Gucht. This is where Jean-Marie Dedecker comes in: the former judo coach, a BV in his own right, also clashed with Verhofstadt and De Gucht at the same time. This resulted in Dedecker being thrown out of the VLD and, eventually, after some false starts, launching his own party. So Eppink and Dedecker share a common grudge against Verhofstadt and De Gucht, but this is more than a story about people. They also share the same political beliefs. They are liberals who feel that (Open) VLD has, as a result of its coalition with the socialists, strayed away from its adherence to free market principles. Eppink and Dedecker are kindred political souls, as became evident when Eppink wrote the foreword to Dedecker's book *Rechts voor de Raap* (*Straight from the Shoulder*). It therefore shouldn't come as a complete surprise that Eppink has become involved in LDD. But there was one obstacle. For the last few years, Eppink has been living in New York, where his wife works at the UN. But the prospect of becoming an MEP has convinced the *Nederbelg* to move back here. So now there is nothing in the way of a career in the European Parliament. He has to get elected, of course, but no one doubts that LDD will manage to win a European seat, especially with the immensely popular Dedecker campaigning for it. For LDD there is an extra bonus as well: Eppink's arrival shows that the party not only attracts disgruntled politicians from other parties, it also attracts intellectuals. **Anja Otte**



CULTURE  
NEWS

**Pop icon Madonna** will play the Werchter Festival on 11 July, she announced last week. The date is part of the second leg of her Sticky and Sweet tour, currently the biggest grossing tour ever by a solo artist. The appearance will be the first time she has ever played in Belgium.

**The Museum of Fine Arts** in Ghent could lose one of its most prestigious paintings, after the family of a Jewish banker who once owned the work claimed it back. The painting is by Oskar Kokoschka, the Austrian expressionist and lover of Alma Mahler. Deemed "degenerate" by the Nazis, it depicts the distinguished Vienna gynaecologist Ludwig Adler and was painted in 1914. The painting was sold by banker Victor von Klemperer in the 1930s, but the family now claims this was done under duress from the Nazis. The museum argues it bought the painting in good faith. But if the family's claim can be proven, under internationally-agreed laws on Nazi plundered artworks, Ghent would be obliged to give the work, worth around €300,000, to its rightful owner.

**The city of Mechelen** has withdrawn from the race to become European City of Culture 2015, after a decision between the city's mayor, Bart Somers, and his counterpart in Mons, Elio Di Rupo, to support Mons' bid jointly rather than to compete. The two cities have already embarked on a seven-year programme of cultural cooperation, which would culminate in Mons' year as City of Culture – if its bid is ultimately successful.

**Shooting has finally begun** on the long-awaited *Kuifje* (Tintin) film directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Jamie Bell (*Billy Elliot*) as the intrepid young reporter, Andy Serkins (*Lord of the Rings*) as Captain Haddock and Daniel Craig (*James Bond*) as Rackham the Red. The film is a two-part, 3D adaptation of the story of an ancestor of Haddock and hidden treasure. Spielberg, who will direct the first part, originally optioned the rights in 1983. Peter Jackson, who made the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, will direct the second part.

**The city of Leuven** is to subsidise this year's Marktrock Festival for the first time in the event's 26-year history. According to mayor Louis Tobback, the €100,000 subsidy is needed to allow the festival to survive. This year's event lasts two days instead of the usual three and features a bill made up entirely of Belgian acts. Marktrock runs from 15-16 August.

## One in two find Islam a threat, says Leuven study

*Continued from page 1*

elders. "That's because young people come into contact with other population groups in education," she said. According to socialist party chair Caroline Gennez, the figures are a cause for concern, but understandable because of the link in the popular mind between Islam and terrorism.

The findings of the survey of 1,084 Flemish voters chosen at random between September 2007 and January 2008, was welcomed by Vlaams Belang, whose parliamentary leader Filip Dewinter described himself as "pleasantly surprised". He congratulated everyone who spoke out about the violent nature of Islam "despite politically-correct thinking, brainwashing and intimidation."

Elsewhere, Pascal Debruyne, from the department of third-world studies at Ghent University, called the research itself into question, principally for its tendency to set up two monolithic entities – Islam and "Western values" – in opposition to each other. "No one is asking to what extent such research helps to create the reality we are discussing," he said. "The research questions force people to think in terms of homogenous blocs of people, helping, in the name of science, to construct these blocs in the heads of the people being interviewed – and the readers of the newspapers."

For Faoud Gandoul, a Christian activist with the ACV trade union, the conflict could be traced to the West's turning its back on the church since the time of the Enlightenment, which leads to hostility and suspicion of religious Muslims. "For a majority of Muslims, it's important to take part in society in conformity with their beliefs, but that hasn't worked in Europe so far," he said. "Too often, Muslims



Immigrants and natives live together, but not in harmony

associate Western morals with sinfulness and religious and moral dissolution. Many Muslims shut themselves up in a mental fortress, too anxious to look out with open eyes over the walls of their own dogma."

Mohamed Ridouani, alderman for diversity in the city of Leuven, meanwhile, noted that "native-born Flanders has to realise it cannot deny the reality: immigrant Muslims are here and they're here to stay. We have no other option but to live together."

online

<http://tinyurl.com/ispo-study>

## Other results from the Leuven study:

- 47.2% would put a stop to further immigration, even if this caused problems on the labour market
- 21% said immigrants (not only Muslims) were not to be trusted, down from 26.8% in 1991
- 44.9% said speakers in public or in the media ought to be able to express themselves as they wish, although 50.3% said racist remarks should be prevented
- 81% thought Muslim men control their wives too strictly

## Government takes stock of the poor

If you're a poor person in Belgium, the chances are you're not an EU citizen, you're probably unemployed, you're more likely to live in Brussels or Wallonia than Flanders, and you have only a basic secondary education. Those are the findings of Belgium's first official poverty barometer, produced by the government's social integration agency.

One in seven people – just under 15% – lives below the poverty line. "Poverty is often identified with insufficient income," explained Jean-Marc Delizée, Belgian secretary for the fight against poverty. "In reality, poverty means more than just a lack of money and has an effect on all aspects of the lives of our fellow citizens. Because of their vulnerability, basic rights and fundamental needs such as health care, work, education, housing and so on are forever out of their reach."

The indicators of poverty are mostly obvious: low educational level, unemployment, immigrant status. Brussels has more poor people (27%) than other parts of the country; Wallonia (18%) is in turn poorer than Flanders (11%), which, with six million inhabitants, has exactly the same number of poor people (27,000) as Brussels with a population of only one million.

Some 13.8% of young people who leave education early are living in poverty (they are also more likely to come from a poor background), and one in eight children lives in a household where no adult is in paid work.

Current social benefits are too low, the agency concludes. The benefits paid to a single person, for example, only provide 71% of the amount estimated to be necessary to escape poverty. For a couple with two children, benefits provide only 65% of what they need. And while a couple on a pension and a single unemployed man receive 84% of the money that would lift them above the poverty line, an unemployed couple with two children get only 64%.

## Antwerp can damage your health



The average resident of Antwerp has a life expectancy around two years shorter than in other cities in Flanders, according to figures collected by the city council and a social aid agency. According to recent estimates, a boy born in Flanders in 2006 has a life expectancy of 77.7 years and 82.9 for a girl. The life expectancy in Antwerp is currently 76.4 years for a man and 81.2 for a woman.

The research contains a number of other worrying figures: infant mortality is 10% higher than elsewhere; men and boys between 14 and 25 suffer from more cancers; cases of tuberculosis are higher in the city as a whole and in some inner-city areas in particular. Antwerp accounts for one in three cases of carbon monoxide poisoning, and more cases

of HIV are detected in Antwerp than elsewhere in Flanders, especially among gay men and women from Central Africa.

"We have to take the question of public health seriously," said health alderwoman Monica De Coninck. "But let's not cause a panic. These figures are averages. Each neighbourhood has to be looked at individually."

Not surprisingly, the worst results come from poor areas and parts of the city with a high concentration of immigrants. "Poor people eat less healthily because fresh food is more expensive, they exercise less and delay seeing the doctor," De Coninck said. Immigrants, meanwhile, are reluctant to report illnesses or to come forward for screenings, either for cultural reasons or to avoid contact with official organisations.



# Ostend Queen is bankrupt

Spectacular restaurant calls in the administrators



Off the menu: landmark restaurant has gone bust

Alan Hope

Ostend Queen, the fish restaurant in the Ostend Kursaal that was praised by Michelin before it was even open, is to close. Marc De Vooght, CEO of the company that runs the restaurant, informed the 50 staff of the decision last week.

The restaurant was opened in 2004, having already been the centre of controversy after the prestigious Michelin guide gave it a glowing report – even though the doors were not yet open. The guide was apparently influenced by the founding company's coup in engaging as consultant the three-star chef Pierre Wynants of Comme Chez Soi, perhaps the country's most respected chef.

Wynants withdrew from the relationship several weeks ago. His wife and partner Therèse last week commented: "We saw this coming a long time ago."

The restaurant made a positive impression on critics with its location, offering spectacular sea views. The interior was designed by Antoine Pinto, who has given shape to some of the country's most successful restaurants, including La Quincaillerie and Belga Queen in Brussels, Dock's

Café in Antwerp and Pakhuis in Ghent.

Wynants' participation assured the restaurant the full attention of the media. But the business was another story. The founding company brought together entrepreneur Fernand David and the Ostend municipal agency AGSO. This allegedly led to clashes between the views of the entrepreneur and the government agency. David left in 2005, and Peter Hoogland, TV personality and head of the Kursaal management agency EKO, took over the business. Two years later, he was replaced by Flanders Catering, led by chef Wim Vandamme and businessman De Vooght.

Business never picked up, and Flanders Catering decided only months ago to change the menu from fine dining to simpler brasserie food in an attempt to attract customers. Last week, the day after the closure announcement, the restaurant was offering a four-course menu on its website for €55 and a two-course lunch menu at €27. But by then the doors were closed.

Staff and creditors will now have to wait while an administrator works out a plan for the takeover of the catering and restaurant sections of the Kursaal, which still have a magnificent design and location to offer.

# 10,000 jobs to go in technology

The economic crisis could cost Belgium 10,000 jobs in the technology sector this year, according to forecasts from the industry federation Agoria. Green energy is the only sector where growth is expected, the federation said.

Agoria carried out a survey of 266 of its member companies, representing almost half of all jobs in the sector. The results suggest a drop in production of 5%, leading to a reduction of 3.3% in employment, or the loss of 10,000 jobs. The sector's last dark period following the dotcom crash of 2002; the next year saw a drop in production of 3%, with the same effect on jobs. The Belgian technology industry employs just over 300,000 people.

The recession will affect virtually all sectors, the federation predicts, with cars and metals the worst affected. Technology jobs in the car industry are set to fall by 11.2%. IT may be able to hold to zero growth, while investments in green technology could lead that sector to be the only sector showing positive growth this year.

January had already started showing signs of the trend, Agoria reports. In 44.5% of companies, no jobs were lost, although temporary contracts were often left unrenewed. In 37%, some limited measures such as reduced working days had already been taken.

"A lot of businesses with innovative and future-oriented technologies risk becoming the victims of a financial crisis not of their own making," said Agoria director-general Paul De Soete in a statement. Referring to the banks at the root of the crisis, he said that "it is time policy-makers also took action to help other businesses get through the economic crisis."

online  
www.agoria.be

# BUSINESS FLASH



## Auto • Car Show

This year's Brussels Car Show attracted some 325,000 visitors, a much better than expected result in the present economic climate.

## Banking • Dexia

Dexia, the ailing Belgo-French bank specialised in the financing of local authorities, is believed to be holding talks with the French Banque Postale to shore up its finances.

## Clothing • H&M

H&M, the Swedish clothing retailer, is planning to open an additional store in Beveren later this year.

## Distribution • Geodis

The French logistics and distribution company Geodis is to launch a joint venture with the Antwerp-based Nova Natie handling group.

## Energy • Lampiris

The green energy supplier Lampiris has won a two-year contract to supply electricity to the Atomium in northern Brussels, replacing Electrabel as supplier. The contract allows Lampiris to use the landmark 1958 structure in its advertising.

## Food • Fresh Mama

The Brussels restaurant Fresh Mama won the Golden Palm in Lyon in a competition to find the best restaurant concept in Europe. Fresh Mama is a combination restaurant and produce market.

## Insurance • Allianz

The German insurance group Allianz is to invest up to €56 million to renovate several of its buildings on De Brouckereplaats in downtown Brussels. The move will require the temporary transfer of 900 staff to other locations in the city and Antwerp.

## Pharmaceuticals • UCB

The Brussels-based pharmaceuticals company UCB has sold some 50 of its affiliates in the Middle East, Asia, South America and Africa to GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) for €515 million. The affiliates contribute some 4% to UCB's total sales. The company has held on to its strategic outposts in Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Korea and Mexico.

## Property • Fortis

Fortis Real Estate, the affiliate of the country's largest financial institution, has run into legal problems after winning a tender last year to rebuild or renovate more than 200 schools in Flanders. One of the other competitors, Barclays Capital, has lodged a complaint alleging unfairness. The matter may go to court.

## Property • WDP

The property investment fund WDP is paying some €30 million to acquire three local distribution centres from DHL, the German-owned express courier company. The move is part of a sale and lease-back operation and involves 85,000 square metres of storage space.



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## HOTELS

# Different is better

A hotel chain where no two look alike is moving into Belgium's smaller cities

Steven Tate

During Julius Caesar's time, what is now Tongeren was a hot piece of real estate. The emperor fought against fierce local soldiers to make it part of his empire, and now, a few millennia later, Tongeren is losing its status as Flanders' best-kept secret.

The city is again the centre of attention, thanks to major investments by the Limburg Reconvertiemaatschappij (LRM). Through its €10.5 million, the regional authority is a 38% investor in Different Hotels, the Belgo-Dutch group responsible for Tongeren's Hotel Eburon. Housed in a 13th-century cloister, the hotel opened last summer to welcome both business travellers and leisure visitors looking to take advantage of the natural and historical charms of Tongeren, the oldest city in Belgium.

Before 2007, LRM was adamantly against getting involved in hotels. "They thought it was too volatile a business," says Rachida Naya, general sales manager of Different Hotels. "LRM's mission is to bring jobs and business to Limburg, but they didn't want to invest in an industry dependent on tourism and business travel."

But Different Hotels had, well, a different approach to the hotel business – as well as the track record to prove they could deliver. "The reason why we chose to name our group as we have is because each hotel in our stable is different," Naya notes.

In Genk, for instance, the Hotel Atlantis welcomes families and travellers wanting a cosy atmosphere near the lush, verdant Hoge Kempen National Park. Genk's Eurotel, on the other hand, has 80 rooms with facilities to accommodate wedding parties of 300, sports teams and busloads of tourists.

Then there is the Carbon Hotel, a boutique-style facility that has not only made the Forbes Travel list of the best hotels in the world, but also is home to the 2008 winner of the European Design Award for best restaurant interior. "The LRM was willing to partner with us, but only if we had plans to grow," says Naya.

"The region has exploded recently with activity," adds Lidia Paletta, Hotel Eburon's general manager. "Being only 15 minutes from Maastricht and also close to Hasselt, Aachen and Liège, the hotel benefits not only from the overflow of business travellers looking for accommodation in those cities, but also out-of-towners working in Tongeren's industrial zone."

Although Tongeren's business side is well-appreciated, much of its cultural aspects have gone unnoticed. "Other cities in the region, like Hasselt and Maasmechelen, have been well publicised for their shopping," says Naya. "Only recently has there been a push to promote Tongeren as the oldest city in Belgium." A UNESCO World Heritage site since 1998, the city owes its name to the *Tungri* tribe, who replaced the fierce Belgic Eburonen tribe, who in turn defeated Caesar's forces in the first century BC.

Then called Atuatuca Tungrorum, it



A home-grown chain: Hotel Eburon was drawn and delivered by Limburg designers

became one of the largest administrative and military towns in the Gallo-Roman empire at the dawn of the first millennium AD. Various invasions continued until the fourth century AD, when Tongeren became one of the earliest Christian dioceses of the Low Countries. Its religious significance continued over the centuries, leading to the construction of the basilica in the 13th century, which still stands today. That in itself is a miracle: almost the whole town was destroyed by fire in 1617, courtesy of France's Louis XIV.

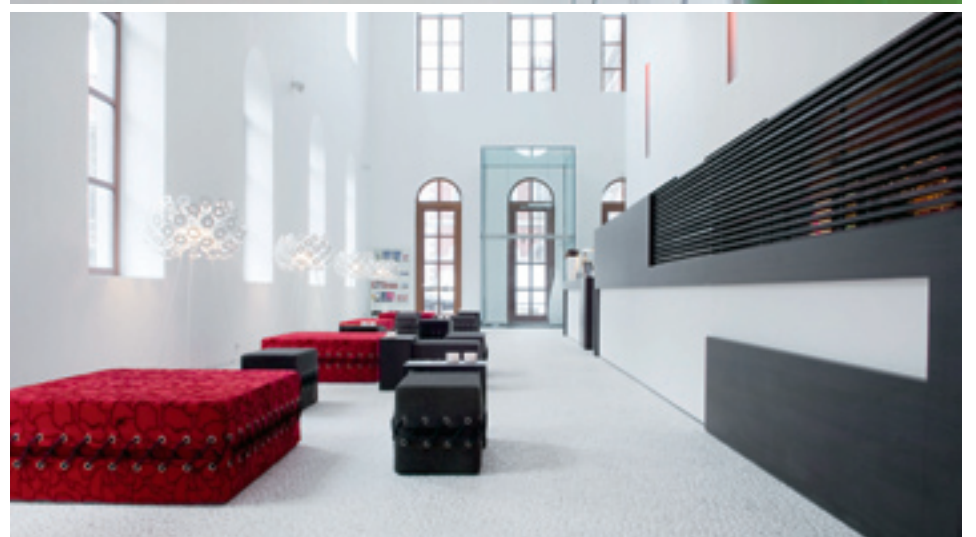
Tongeren retains much of its flavour of antiquity: mediaeval towers and part of the original Roman wall are still visible. The Gallo-Roman Museum, which reopens in March after two years of renovations, houses 18,000 relics from the Roman period, but also pieces from the prehistoric and Merovingian times.

Despite its eventful past and its impressive remnants, Tongeren is not hidebound by history. Although the local population falls just shy of 30,000, major retailers such as H&M, Esprit and Vero Moda have all set up shop in the Julianus Forum. Adjacent to the Hotel Eburon, this shopping complex features 23 retailers and will celebrate its first anniversary next month.

A joint project between property developers Heijmans Vastgoed and Intervest Retail, the construction cost €17.4 million and took three years to build. Julianus Tongeren hopes to achieve the success of its sister operation in Genk, which welcomes 40,000 visitors every week.

This marrying of something old, something new is also evident in Hotel Eburon. "The idea was to keep the spirit of the old architecture alive, while bringing in the 21st century," says Paletta. "We wanted to maintain the building's history while evoking a sense of mystery."

The renovations, which took two years, were overseen by Genk-based PCP Architects. The high ceilings were maintained, along with an ageless monastic serenity in the décor. Arched windows welcome visitors in the alabaster lobby, but modern artistic flourishes are provided by furnishings from Limburg design companies. Krion, for instance, handled the stylishly retro mini-



malist lighting, and Le Cochon supplied the whimsical but iconic seating in the hotel lounge. "We tried to work with Limburg-based designers in every aspect we could," notes Paletta.

The result is a peaceful place to lay your head, featuring top-notch modern design and practicality: each room has free Wi-Fi and iPod docking stations, complementing the sleek, unfussy design that blends sobriety with humour. Raspberry sherbet-coloured floors, blizzard white walls and chartreuse and tangerine accents give a *Space Odyssey* meets convent chic vibe. Although part of a chain that includes five other locations in Flanders, Hotel Eburon – like Tongeren itself – maintains its own spirit and character.

Beyond history aficionados and business folk checking in for the night, both the city and the hotel offer a wide range of activities. Club kids looking for the next hot rave might find the area wanting, but cyclists, hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts take

advantage of the lush environment. The Tumulus mountain bike path wanders the gently undulating Haspengouw region. And a good number of walks through the countryside can also be found. Treasure hunters from around the world, meanwhile, flock to Oude Veemarkt for the internationally famous Sunday antiques market, the largest in the country.

"Stamina" best describes Tongeren's mode of progress, despite the flagging economy. Hotel Eburon plans to renovate the adjacent chapel, which also dates back to the 13th century. "It still has not been decided exactly what will occupy the space – perhaps conference facilities or a café," says Paletta. Whatever the final result, it's clear that the Hotel Eburon, like Tongeren itself, means business.

online  
www.differenthotels.be



## EXHIBITION

# Vertical flow

Israeli artist's alter ego is a feminist force to be reckoned with at Extra City

Saffina Rana

Roe Rosen likes dressing up, and his dressing-up box is the history of art.

One of his costumes is Justine Frank, a Jewish artist born in Antwerp in 1900, who first became a Surrealist and then an anti-Zionist maverick, painting in Tel Aviv. In 1943, so the story goes, she mysteriously disappeared. Only now is her life and work being "rediscovered".

Everything about the fictional Justine Frank tells you that Rosen, 45, is out to provoke. On the one hand, the Israeli artist joyfully manipulates the themes and characters in the French Surrealist movement, while on the other, he builds a body of work that attacks the symbols of Judaism in the same way that the Surrealists attacked the Catholic Church. Even the name has dangerous associations: "Justine" suggests the heroine of the Marquis de Sade's eponymous novel of sexual transgression, while "Frank" evokes Holocaust icon Anne Frank.

The exhibition *Justine Frank: A Retrospective* in Antwerp's Extra City begins (or ends, depending on how you approach it) with a selection from Frank's "Stained Portfolio", an early collection of sketches that seems to prefigure her entire oeuvre. The paper has accidentally, or intentionally, been stained brown – the cause excremental or menstrual, take your pick.

Of the completed works, the Surrealist phase of Frank's career is the easiest to negotiate, since it deals in relatively familiar images and motifs. For instance, the Surrealists were obsessed with the character Fantômas, an arch criminal and master of disguise created by French writers Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre in 1911, made famous in stories and later films. Surrealist writers and painters adopted the character, with famous French art critic Guillaume Apollinaire calling it one of the richest works of imagination ever created.

Frank, however, gives us "Frankômas", the iconic image of the master criminal adjusted with a woman's curves, an Orthodox Jewish hat and, in place of a cane in the hand, a large croissant or perhaps a shrivelled root vege-

table. (The notes that go with the painting suggest that it may also be a giant turd, a gesture intended to enrage the traditionally coprophobic Surrealists.)

The works using the symbols of Judaism and Zionism are harder to appreciate if you are outside the culture. For example, a series of word paintings with Hebrew letters fashioned out of mutilated bodies and grotesque animals doesn't register as strongly when the words hold no meaning for you.

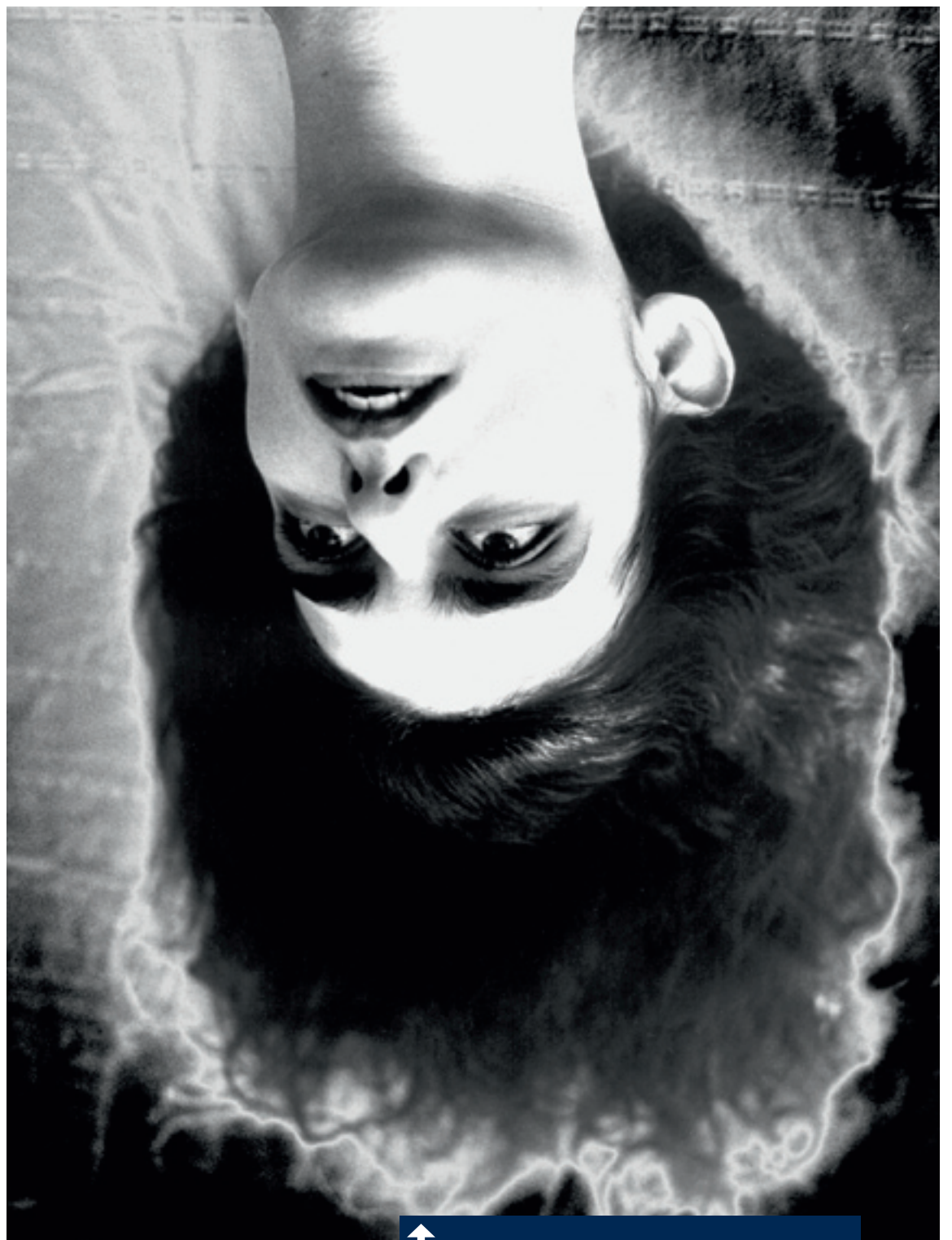
Similarly, I can't help thinking that I am missing some of the less obvious Jewish iconography. There is a marvellous sketch taking off Goya's "Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters", with Frank herself taking the place of the sleeper and the circling monsters replaced by menorahs. But I know I don't really get it.

Sometimes the notes explain, but this usually just emphasises the distance. It's different, of course, when the notes contribute to the game – like in a brilliant explanation of how Frank's drip paintings differ from the forceful, forward, male spattering of Jackson Pollock because of their more vertical flow.

The notes are part of Rosen's construction, weaving Frank even more tightly into the history of art with their academic explanations and background detail. (For instance, he gives her a brief affair with the writer George Bataille, arch enemy of Surrealist theorist André Breton). Frank is presented as an artist up for re-appraisal, a forgotten icon of feminist art.

One of the most enjoyable parts of this critical apparatus is the short documentary *Two Women and A Man*, in which feminist art critic Joanna Führer-Ha'sfari talks about Frank's work and deplores Rosen's involvement in promoting it. She even accuses Rosen of ripping off Frank's style in his own exhibitions, most notably a controversial installation in 1997 that invited spectators to share the intimate home life of Eva Braun and Adolf Hitler in the bunker. This was at an Israeli gallery, so you can imagine the fuss.

"Rosen will always find a sympathetic audience among left-wing intellectuals," Führer-Ha'sfari complains, "whereas Frank was



↑ Justine Frank, as portrayed by an unknown photographer in 1928

Frank's own "Stained Portfolio" ↓

a real outsider." Look closely, however, and you might find that the critic looks like Rosen in drag. In fact, there is something familiar about the rare photographs of Frank, as well, from a snapshot which has been folded in quarters and a large portrait in the style of Man Ray, to a final shot of Frank and a friend on a beach in Israel.

So, yes, Roe Rosen likes dressing up. But what about him?

It's a tribute to the strength of his creation that it is easy to talk about Justin Frank as an artist, with a history and a style. There's no denying that this show is inventive and amusing, but the back-dating of Frank also dates Rosen. Being transgressive according to the norms of the past is playing safe, and Rosen may be hiding behind Frank rather than working through her.

Until 8 March, Extra City, Tulpstraat 79, Antwerp. Roe Rosen will deliver a public talk in English at Extra City at 18.00 on 14 February

online  
www.extracity.org





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## DISCOVERING SMALL CITIES

# Living in the past

In the first of our four-part series on unique Flemish towns, we discover two thousand years of history in Tongeren

Denzil Walton

When a town promotes itself as the oldest in Belgium, it's tempting to wonder how much evidence of this claim is still visible. Visit Tongeren, and its credentials are right in front of you: city walls that date from the first century; a Roman archaeological site from the fourth.

Moreover, this attractive town in Limburg boasts its antiquity. Streets have names like Caesarlaan and Pliniuswal. A car park is called Praetorium. So you don't need a guide book to tell you that Tongeren dates back to the time of Christ and that it takes great pride in its connections to the Romans.

Until, that is, you enter the market square, when you begin to have doubts. Here there is no bust of a Roman Emperor or legionnaire. Instead, there's a three-metre bronze statue of a wild-eyed warrior, who looks like something out of World Wrestling's Hall of Fame. His long hair billows in the wind. He wields an axe. Tucked into his belt is a vicious sword. He sports a rippling six-pack and a Germanic moustache.

This is no citizen of Rome, but the legendary Gallic chieftain Ambiorix. In the winter of 54-53 BC, Ambiorix led his tribe, the Eburones, to a resounding victory over one of Julius Caesar's legions. Clearly, Tongeren is delighted with its history, no matter who wrote it.

Still, while recognising Ambiorix's noble efforts, Tongeren gives pride of place to the Romans. It's to be expected – without them, the town wouldn't exist. Arriving in this fertile part of Belgica, they put down roots at a place they called *Atuatuca Tungrorum*. Ambiorix rose up and enjoyed his moment of glory, but the Romans weren't going to be driven away by a six-pack with an axe. They fought back, the Eburones were wiped out, and Ambiorix fled.

Thanks to its strategic position at the junction of a number of important Roman roads, *Atuatuca Tungrorum* grew into one of the largest military and administrative towns in northern Gaul. In mediaeval times, churches, monasteries

and a *begijnhof* (beguinage) were added. Later it was appointed the judicial capital of Limburg.

## Checking it all out

A pleasant way to explore Tongeren is via the "Ambiorix route". This city walk of 4.5 kilometres takes you to all the interesting sites with the help of a folder from the tourist office in Dutch, French and German. (English version coming up later this year.) Your kids might be interested in the Ambiorix tourist train; from 1 April, it will regularly run past the key attractions.

Dominating the town (aside from Ambiorix) is the Basilica of Our Lady, with its 64-metre high bell tower. Constructed between 1240 and 1544, it is one of the finest religious buildings in Flanders. Of course, as it's located in the oldest town in Belgium, it might be expected that its Christian heritage goes back much further than the 13th century. It does. Archaeological discoveries prove that a church existed here as early as the fifth century. It was established by Saint Servatius, Bishop of Tongeren, who presided over one of the earliest dioceses in the Low Countries. His church would have been the first one north of the Alps to be dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Hence Tongeren is also known as the cradle of Christianity in northern Europe.

The basilica's treasury is one of the richest collections of church art in Belgium, including objects of inestimable value from the Merovingian period (fifth to eighth centuries). The most prized possession is a delicate walnut statue of the Virgin Mary and Child from 1479 that is paraded through the streets every seven years (see sidebar).

Also valuable are a 16th-century retable (or screen) depicting scenes from Mary's life, a vast array of reliquaries and an 11th-century portrayal of the crucifixion, notable in that Christ is depicted as still alive; his eyes are open.

"The basilica only displays one-third of all the town's treasures," says Stephane Nijssen of Tourism Tongeren. "Due to lack of space and unsuitable environmental



Photos © Tourism Tongeren

## It's your lucky year

In a country renowned for its religious processions, to promote Tongeren's Kroningsfeesten as the grandest could be considered over-hyped marketing. However, statistics suggest it might just be true. This week-long religious event in July continues 1,600 years of tradition, involves 3,000 volunteers (one in 10 of Tongeren's population) and attracts 700,000 visitors. It includes processions and evening performances that focus on the town's venerated 15th-century statue of the Virgin Mary. It only happens every seven years, and this is one of them.

online  
[www.kroningsfeesten.be](http://www.kroningsfeesten.be)

## The new Gallo-Roman Museum

In just 10 years, annual visitor numbers to Tongeren's Gallo-Roman Museum rocketed from 20,000 to 150,000. The existing building simply could not cope. A six-year building project finishes in May with the opening of a brand new museum. Expect bold themes, state-of-the-art multimedia, a full educational programme, dynamic workshops and unusual events.

online  
[www.galloromeinsmuseum.be](http://www.galloromeinsmuseum.be)

conditions, the rest is in storage. But the basilica's Roman cloisters are being renovated and the treasury expanded, so we'll be able to display all of Tongeren's religious treasures."

One of the most picturesque parts of Tongeren is undoubtedly the beguinage. Founded in the mid-13th century, it's one of the oldest in Flanders and is particularly charming because it's not enclosed, like many other beguinages. The open plan extends over a number of narrow streets. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1998, it's like discovering a village within a city.

to 1632, offers good value pasta, salads and traditional Flemish dishes.

If antiques set you buzzing, then Tongeren on any Sunday morning is the place to be. For the past 35 years, its weekly antique market – the biggest in Belgium – has attracted dealers and enthusiasts in the thousands. It's easy to see why. The town's streets are packed with 350 stalls and no fewer than 24 antique shops, all of which open their doors on Sunday mornings.

Professional antique dealers flock here from all over Belgium, as well as from the Netherlands, France

and Germany. Coaches regularly arrive from the UK (thanks partly to coverage on the BBC's *Antiques Roadshow*). Their sharp eyes and knowing glances flick over clocks, porcelain, furniture, chandeliers, silverware, paintings and baubles. To compete with them, you'll have to set your alarm clock. "The keenest treasure hunters start at 5.00," says Nijssen. "If it's still dark, they simply get out their torches."

online  
[www.tongeren.be](http://www.tongeren.be)

## Fresh food, old antiques

If you have been following the Ambiorix city walk, by the time you reach the beguinage you may have worked up an appetite. The quaint Herberg De Pelgrim in Brouwersstraat, which dates back

Above: The fierce Ambiorix watches over the Basilica of Our Lady in the cradle of Christianity. Right: Tongeren's open beguinage is one of Flanders' most appealing





# I'm with the band

In a tale of politics, society and shooting stars, we meet Flanders' local brass

Denzil Walton

In cities, towns and villages the length and breadth of Flanders, the sounds of their rehearsals emanate from cafés, from cultural centres, from sports halls. Their concerts are frequently sold out, and they compete at – and frequently win – European and global competitions.

They will strike up “We are the Champions” when their local football team wins the league and Chopin’s “Funeral March” when one of their members enters his or her final resting place. They will hold up traffic as they march past and cause little children to gaze at their gleaming instruments and neatly pressed uniforms.

They are Flemish community music bands.

So popular are they that there is scarcely a municipality in Flanders that does not have at least one – and often two or three. In fact, there are 308 municipalities in Flanders, yet the Flemish Association of Music Bands and Musicians (Vlamo) has a membership of 1,180 community bands.

The first were established as far back as 1750. But their proliferation can be traced to a patent submitted in 1846 by a largely unknown clarinetist and musical instrument maker from Dinant. His name was Adolphe Sax. “Sax’s inventions, the entire saxophone family of instruments, were easier to play than other wind instruments,” explains Filip Santy, CEO of Vlamo. “This, coupled with the fact that the sax was a Belgian invention, made it very popular in Flanders and encouraged a lot of people to join their local band.”

At the same time, the increasing industrialisation of 19th-century Flanders led to the introduction of informal but far-reaching educational reforms. Community bands were identified as an excellent means of encouraging factory workers to improve themselves.

## Verzuil me

But even these factors don’t really explain why even a small Flemish village may have more community bands than bakers. The explanation, rather, lies in the Dutch word *verzuiling*. It describes the segregation of Belgian society into *zuilen* (pillars), according to religious, political and social ideologies.

*Verzuiling* resulted in Catholics, liberals and socialists having their own political parties, schools, newspapers, trade unions, hospitals, insurance schemes, sports clubs and yes, music ensembles. Hence, a village could easily end up with three different community bands, each beating the drum for their own particular political party. It must have been noisy around election time.



No guesswork involved as to where these three proud tubists are from

“A lot has changed in the last 20 years,” notes Santy. “*Verzuiling* has largely been abandoned, and a number of smaller community bands have merged.” Vlamo was formed in 2002, thanks to revised legislation by the Flemish government, with the goal of ending the ideological differences between Flanders’ then five different music federations and to promote a more professional way of supporting amateur music.

Vlamo offers artistic and technical support to its members by organising educational courses, camps and competitions, providing access to sheet music and recordings and just generally improving the image and quality of amateur music. Most of its members are traditional wind bands (*harmonieorkesten*), brass bands and fanfares, but there are increasing numbers of symphonic orchestras, big bands, drum and percussion bands, accordion ensembles, guitar ensembles and pipe bands.

Vlamo plays a particularly important role in encouraging young people to take up musical instruments and join a community band. They are helped by Flanders’ firmly established and inexpensive system of musical education, which provides a continual flow of young talent from the music academies. Such a system clearly works: of the 69,000 people who play in

the nearly 1,200 bands, 40% are younger than 25. Often children are encouraged to join the band in which their parents or grandparents play. “I know of community bands containing four generations of family,” reports Santy.

## The great start here

The community band does, of course, have its critics, with classical musicians often looking down their noses at local brass bands. Santy says this attitude is misplaced: “High-brow music-lov-

grown composers. Many, such as Jan Van der Roost and Kevin Houben, have gone on to international fame after composing pieces for Flemish bands.

The bands themselves also enjoy excellent reputations abroad. Wind bands from Harelbeke and Beveren-Leie have been crowned world champions in their divisions. When the Willebroek Brass Band won the European Brass Band Championships, it became the first band to do so under a continental conductor, in a competition heavily dominated by brass bands from

**“Classical composer Dirk Brossé started his musical education in his local community band, as have almost all professional musicians active in Flanders today”**

ers forget that almost all professional musicians active in Flanders today have come out of the community band environment. Dirk Brossé, for example, one of Flanders’ best-known classical composers and conductors, started his musical education in his local band.”

Community bands also provide excellent springboards for home-

the UK.

The internal and provincial competitions organised by Vlamo are a key element in ensuring international success. Vlamo also organises international competitions, including the 2009 European Brass Band Championships in Ostend.

Flanders’ excellence in the amateur music scene is illustrated

by the fact that Vlamo has been asked to form its own symphonic wind band to play as guest orchestra during the Certamen Internacional de Bandas de Música in Valencia, Spain this summer. Last year this renowned competition for wind orchestras attracted 26 bands from across Europe. As guest orchestra, the Vlamo symphonic wind band will give a 35-minute recital that will be broadcast live on Spanish radio. The band will give further concerts in music halls throughout Valencia and will use these opportunities to highlight the repertoire of Flemish composers.

As part of its education mission, Vlamo also partners with the Field Band Foundation of South Africa, an innovative and imaginative organisation focusing on youth development through music and dance. “The Field Band Foundation helps youngsters from South African townships to achieve a better life thanks to music,” says Santy. Vlamo experts have held workshops in South Africa, and the National Field Band has visited Flanders. “It’s wonderful to see how our community bands can transform lives, both in Flanders and elsewhere.”

online  
[www.vlamo.be](http://www.vlamo.be)



Raymond Winiński



It's not all glory: a loyal band member totes his drum across a sludgy Brussels

## Get on the bandwagon

With more than 1,800 community bands to choose from, you'll find a concert any night

### ● Tongeren

The title of the oldest community band in Flanders goes to the Koninklijke Muziekmaatschappij Casino Tongeren, which was formed in 1750. Its first members were musicians from the collegiate church, drama society and archery club. The Tongeren music school was established in 1859 and, to mark its 150th anniversary, the community band is giving a concert on 18 May in the Casino Theatre.

[www.casino-tongeren.be](http://www.casino-tongeren.be)

### ● Roeselare

This West Flanders town is a good example of *verzuiling*. The Koninklijke Stadsharmonie Roeselare was formed by the liberal party and gives its spring concert on 9 May. The Koninklijke Harmonie Het Gilde-muziek Roeselare, meanwhile, was established by the Christian labour movement ACW. It gives its spring concert on 26 April.

[www.roeselare.be](http://www.roeselare.be), [www.gildemuziek.be](http://www.gildemuziek.be)

### ● Willebroek

The Willebroek Brass Band, winners of the 2006 and 2007 European Brass Band Championships, will perform in Hamme on 21 February. If you can't make it, you might like to listen to their CD *Elgar Variations*, which BBC Radio 2 selected as the Brass Band Album of the Year.

[www.brassbandwillebroek.be](http://www.brassbandwillebroek.be)

### ● Harelbeke

The prize-winning Royal Symphonic Band Vooruit is giving a dual concert on 11 April with the Harmonie Sainte-Cécile Eijsden from the Netherlands at Het Spoor Cultural Centre.

[www.vooruit.net](http://www.vooruit.net)

### ● European Brass Band Championships

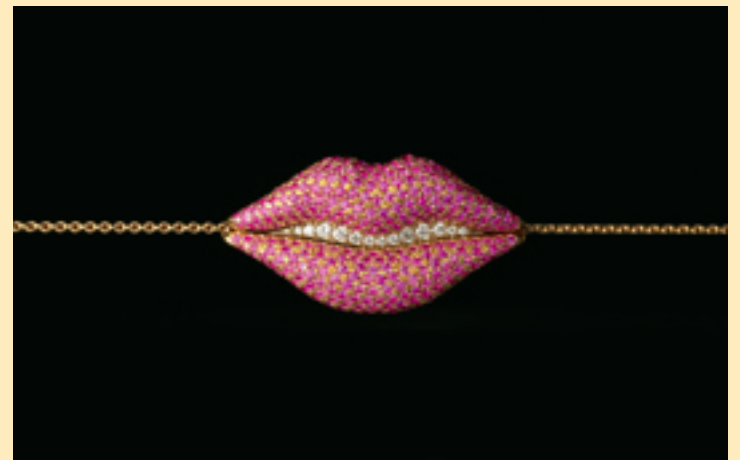
The organisation of these championships is similar to football's Champions League. Every country holds its own national championships for brass bands, then each national champion is sent to compete in the European Brass Band Championships, organised in Flanders. The contest this year closes with a gala concert by the European Youth Brass Band, the Belgian Brass Ensemble and, last year's winner, the Cory Band from Wales. It all happens from 30 April to 2 May in the Ostend casino. Tickets are available from

[www.vlamo.be](http://www.vlamo.be).



Youth make up a whopping 40% of municipal bands

## FASHIONISTA



## Limited Edition Jewellery

You have to be careful not to pass right by the newest jewellery boutique in Antwerp: it's housed on the first floor of a building, right above a clothing shop. Not the most conventional choice of location, but, then again, Limited Edition Jewellery is anything but conventional.

It always pleases me to see originality in jewellery design, and that is exactly what I found in Yossi Israel and Véronique Vingerhoets' brainchild. The owners of Limited Edition Jewellery each have their own collection: Yossi's is inspired by Warhol-esque pop art and Véronique's by her desire to wear diamonds in a different way.

Yossi is not a newcomer to the jewellery scene. He's had more than 25 years of experience working in the Antwerp diamond industry after he moved to the city to learn more about setting diamonds. Last year, the time had finally come for him to start a company of his own so he could make whatever he dreamed.

And Yossi's dreams are interesting, to say the least. Besides pop art, you'll also find influences of tribal signs, graffiti and tattoos. He drafts each one up in a 3D-programme, then a special device "prints" full models of the pieces in wax. It's pretty nifty, and Yossi is having a blast working with it. He's also invited a local graffiti artist to decorate one wall

of the boutique, so that visitors can be inspired as well.

And then there's Véronique's collection. Named Five after her lucky number, it contains bracelets and necklaces with tiny charms encrusted with gems and very small diamonds. These funky beauties are not as expensive as you would think, since Véronique wants to keep her jewellery affordable – so that every woman can wear diamonds. Her designs are often funny or sexy – or sometimes the two combined – with charms in the form of pursed lips or a four-leaf clover, and they're quickly gathering admiration from local fashionistas.

When a friend of Véronique wore one of the bracelets during an interview with Diane von Furstenberg (the queen of the wrap-dress), Furstenberg said she adored the "tiny red lips dangling at her wrist". But it's not only Furstenberg: Limited Edition is negotiating with Harrod's in London and Colette in Paris to sell the collection in these hot spots for new trends.

Lucky for us, we only have to travel to Antwerp to secure our very own it-bracelet.

**Stéphanie Duval**

**online**

[www.limited-edition-jewellery.com](http://www.limited-edition-jewellery.com)



Véronique's parted lips (above) are sexy and playful, while Yossi's tattoo earrings lend funk to your chic



## Classical &amp; New Music

## Antwerp

**Amuz**  
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28  
FEB 8 15.00 Nour Ensemble: Kurdish, Persian and European music  
FEB 13 21.00 Vlaams Radio Koor & Polyfoon Ensemble conducted by Lieven Deroo: Renaissance and contemporary polyphony

## deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be  
FEB 5 20.00 Film concert: Geheimnisse einer Seele by Georg Wilhelm Pabst, with music by Eric Schleim, performed by Bl'ndman Drums  
FEB 6 20.00 Artemis Quartet: Beethoven, Widmann, Schubert

## Bruges

**Concertgebouw**  
't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02, www.concertgebouw.be  
FEB 4 20.00 Academy of Ancient Music conducted by Pavlo Beznosniuk, with Elin Manahan Thomas, soprano: Vivaldi, Purcell, Handel  
FEB 7 20.00 Anima Eterna conducted by Jos van Immerseel, piano with Claire Chevallier, piano: Schubert, Schumann  
FEB 8 20.00 Flemish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Etienne Siebens, with Hendrickje Van Kerckhove, soprano: Schubert, Mahler

## Brussels

**Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)**  
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be  
FEB 8 11.00 Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel Prizewinners: Léonid Smorguner, violin and Dana Protopopescu, piano: Strauss; Amandine Savary, piano: Brahms; Jolente De Maeyer, violin: Ysaÿe, Lutoslawski  
FEB 12 20.00 Liège Philharmonic conducted by Edward Gardner: Haydn, Vieuxtemps, Rachmaninov

## De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be  
FEB 6 12.30 Malibran String Quartet: Haydn, Britten

## Espace Senghor

Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be  
FEB 4 20.30 Lecture concert on the work of electro-acoustic pioneer Francis Dhomont, with Dhomont and Annette Vande Gorne  
FEB 8 11.30 Médicis Trio conducted by Benoît Mernier: Debussy

## Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be  
FEB 6 12.30 Bach's complete Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin: Mira Glodeanu  
FEB 7 14.00 Film concert: Symphonie Bizarre - silent short films (1905-30) with music by Ollivier Leroy and Pierre-Yves Prothais. 20.15 Film concert: Geheimnisse einer Seele by Georg Wilhelm Pabst (1926) with music performed by Bl'ndman Drums

## Miniemenkerk

Miniemenstraat 62; 02.511.93.84, www.minimes.net  
FEB 4 20.00 Ricercar Consort conducted by Philippe Pierlot with Romina Basso, mezzo: Gabrieli, Monteverdi, Bertali, d'India, Castello

## Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 0475.76.23.32, astoriaconcerts@skynet.be  
FEB 8 11.00-15.00 Pianofolia: 15 musicians perform in two concerts

## Royal Conservatory of Brussels

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37  
Concerts at 20.00:  
FEB 5 Atos Trio: Mendelssohn, Shostakovich FEB 6 La Divina Armonia with Lorenzo Ghielmi, conductor and organ: Handel FEB 7 Artemis Quartet: Schubert, Widmann FEB 12 Brussels Wind Ensemble conducted by Koen Dries: Jongen, Ravel, Debussy, Milhaud

## Opera

## Antwerp

**Antwerp Dockshotel**  
Noorderlaan; 03.541.18.50, www.dockshotel.be  
FEB 5 20.30 Nomi Rosenberg Trio

## Vlaamse Opera

Frankrijklei 1; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be  
FEB 7-21 Mazeppa by Tchaikovsky, with the Vlaamse Opera Symphony Orchestra conducted by Dmitri Jurowski, staged by Tatjana Gürbaca

## Brussels

**Royal Conservatory of Brussels**  
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37  
FEB 9 20.00 Les Agréments conducted by Guy Van Waas, with Pierre-Yves Pruvot, baritone: Haydn, Sacchini, Gossec

## Jazz &amp; blues

## Bruges

**De Werf**  
Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29  
FEB 7 20.30 Rabbia/Crispell/Courtois Trio

## Brussels

**Archiduc**  
Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52, www.archiduc.net  
FEB 7 17.00 Ewout Pierreux, Nicolas Thys, Jakob Warmenbol  
FEB 8 17.00 Earl Okin  
FEB 9 22.00 Fris Dane

## Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50, www.beursschouwburg.be  
FEB 5 20.30 Jeroen Van Herzeele Quartet

## Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be  
FEB 6 20.15 Film concert: Piccadilly by Ewald André Dupont (1929), with music by Frank Vaganée performed by Brussels Jazz Orchestra  
FEB 12 20.15 Octurn

## Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193-195; 02.733.13.78  
FEB 4 20.30 Thierry Crommen  
FEB 5 20.30 Jazz Station Big Band: special concert Charlie Mingus  
FEB 11 20.30 Jacques Pirotton Quartet

## Le Caveau du Max

Emile Maxlaan 87; 02.733.17.88  
FEB 5-6 20.30 Tenth anniversary concert

## Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 02.545.01.30, www.mim.fgov.be  
FEB 10 12.30 Tuur Florizoone, Anu Junnonen Duo

## Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, www.soundsjazzclub.be  
FEB 4 22.00 Chamaquiando, salsa FEB 5 22.00 Alexi Tuomarila Quartet FEB 6 22.00 Old Fashioned Trio FEB 7 21.00 Brussels Rhythm & Blues Club: Los Malditos Mojarras + The Witness FEB 9 22.00 Master Session FEB 10 22.00 Da Romeo & The Crazy Moondog Band FEB 11 22.00 Caribe Con K - Los Soneros del Barrio FEB 12 21.00 The Singers Night

## The Cotton Club - Grand Casino

Duquesnoystraat 14; 02.289.68.66  
FEB 7 22.00 Elliot Murphy, Olivier Durand Duo

## The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45  
Concerts at 20.30:  
FEB 4 Benjamin Dubray, Ben Prischi, Lander Gyselinck FEB 5 Steve Houben Trio + Victor da Costa FEB 6 Steve Houben Trio + Quentin Liégois FEB 7 Steve Houben Trio + Jacques Pirotton FEB 10 JVM Project FEB 11 Winchovski Trio FEB 12 Greg Houben/Manu Hermia Quintet

## Lokeren

**Lokerse Jazzklub**  
Gasstraat 27; 09.348.32.78, www.lokersejazzklub.be  
FEB 13 21.00 Amatorski Quartet, Boss Ross, Professor Deaf and his Swingaholics  
FEB 14 21.00 Crystal Feel

## Sterrebeek

**Café Olympia**  
Mechelsesteenweg 181; 02.731.89.41  
FEB 6 21.00 Smell the Glove

## Pop, rock, hip-hop, soul

## Antwerp

**Lotto Arena**  
Schijspoortweg 119; 0900.26.060  
FEB 6 20.00 Novastar

## Luchtbal Cultuurcentrum

Columbiastraat 8; 03.543.90.30, www.ccluchtbal.org  
FEB 7 20.00 Factor 7

## Brussels

**Ancienne Belgique**  
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24, www.abconcerts.be  
FEB 4 20.00 Ayo  
FEB 6 20.00 Elvis Black Stars + Music is Not Fun + The Von Durden Party Project  
FEB 8 15.00 Te Gek concert: 17 bands sing about being mental, including Delavega, Raymond Van Het Groenewoud and Mira

## Art Base

Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20, www.art-base.be  
FEB 6 21.00 Les Øffs

## Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50, www.beursschouwburg.be  
FEB 7 21.30 Mon-o-phone

## Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89  
FEB 7 23.00 Miss Kittin, Geoffroy aka Mugwump  
FEB 13 23.00 Sven Vath, Level Jay - Benoît

## Le Bar du Matin

Alsembergssteenweg 172; 02.537.71.59  
FEB 5 21.00 Lefties Soul Connection  
FEB 12 21.00 CO.tradiction

## Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.226.12.57  
Concerts at 20.00:  
FEB 5 Beep FEB 8 Parts and Labor, Ugly Duckling FEB 9 Puppetmastaz FEB 11 Pigalle, Samamidon FEB 12 Nneka, Pornorama

## Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34, www.recyclart.be  
FEB 6 21.00 Wevie Stonder + Filaria + TEP + DJs  
FEB 7 20.00 Martiensgohome & friends  
FEB 9 20.00 Offonoff with Massimo Pupillo, Terrie Ex, Paal Nilssen-Love + Talibam! + Oren Ambarchi

## Stekerlapatte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81, www.stekerlapatte.be  
FEB 5 21.30 Lluvia  
FEB 7 21.30 Blue Nevski  
FEB 12 21.30 Wakas, Ben au Banjo

## VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07, www.vkconcerts.be  
FEB 8 21.30 Mindless Self Indulgence  
FEB 13 21.30 Dead Prez

## Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991  
FEB 13 20.00 Lady Gaga + The Pussycat Dolls

## Ghent

**Handelsbeurs**  
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01, www.handelsbeurs.be  
FEB 6 20.00 The Stranglers

## Minnemeers

Minnemeers 8; 09.223.22.27  
FEB 6 21.00 Ill City + Zo Moeilijk + Zwart FEB 7 20.00 Fantan Mojah + Perfect + Sky Fire + Pirates Crew FEB 8 20.00 Laibach FEB 13 20.00 Lalalover + Barbie Bangkok

## Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be  
FEB 4 19.30 Islands + Parts and Labor

## Hasselt

**Muziekodroom**  
Bootstraat 9; www.muziekodroom.be  
FEB 7 20.00 Crystal Antlers  
FEB 12 20.30 The Rhythm Bombs

## Kortrijk

**Budascoop**  
Kapucijnenstraat 10, www.dekreun.be  
FEB 7 20.00 Yuko + Ansatz der Machine

## De Kreun

Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44, www.dekreun.be  
FEB 12 20.00 Kurt Overbergh

## Leopoldsborg

**CC Leopoldsborg**  
Kastanjedreef 1; 011.34.65.48, www.ccleopoldsborg.be  
FEB 7 14.00/20.15 The Soul of Motown II  
FEB 12 20.15 Bakelietjes: songs from the 30s, 40s and 50s

## Leuven

**Het Depot**  
Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03  
FEB 5 20.00 Giant Sand

## World, Folk

## Antwerp

**Zuiderpershuis**  
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.zuiderpershuis.be  
FEB 12 20.30 Homayoun Sakhi (Afghanistan)

## Ardoois

**Cultuurkapel De Schaduw**  
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82, www.deschaduw.net  
FEB 13 20.30 Cores Do Mondo (bossa nova, samba)

## Brussels

**Espace Senghor**  
Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be  
FEB 5 20.30 Bako Dagnon (Mali, children welcome)  
FEB 11 20.30 Homayoun Sakhi (Afghanistan)

## Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00, www.muziekpublieke.be  
FEB 6 20.00 Nu:trad: Mogil, Aranis

## Dance

## Antwerp

**Stadsschouwburg**  
Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900, www.sherpa.be  
FEB 7 20.00 Rafael Amargo, flamenco

## Brussels

**Halles de Schaerbeek**  
Koninklijke Sinte-Mariastraat 22; 02.218.21.07  
FEB 6-7 20.00 Compagnie Non Nova in P.P.P, juggling, dance and visual art by Philippe Ménard. 21.00 Compagnie Les Hommes Penchées in Mâtitude  
FEB 12-14 21.00 Flowers, choreographed by Pierre Droulers

## Kaaistudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59, www.kaaitheater.be  
FEB 5-7 20.30 Deepblue in You Are Here

## Kaaithater

Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59, www.kaaitheater.be  
Until FEB 8 20.30 Rosas danst Rosas, choreographed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker

## Don't miss



Alex Vothée

## Arid

On tour until 4 March across Flanders, [www.myspace.com/aridcentral](http://www.myspace.com/aridcentral)

“Is that my man Freddie?” “Who’s playing Queen?” Those are the comments you will get from roommates or co-workers when you fire up Arid’s MySpace website – especially if they are not familiar with Belgian pop music. Those who are, can tell the difference between the voice of the late, great Freddie Mercury and Jasper Steverlinck, lead singer of Arid. But it’s definitely a learned distinction – the tousle-haired Steverlinck practically channels the former Queen frontman, which is intriguing enough to have propelled the band outside Belgium’s borders and into the heart’s of British and American pop fans. Their latest album *All Things Come in Waves* is their third after a number of solo projects by Sterverlinck. It’s a matured sound, but still full of the kind of quiet 1980s rock stylings thousands of local fans line up to hear. Their opening concerts in January sold out immediately, but you can still see them in upcoming gigs in Sint-Niklaas, Leuven and a number of other Flemish towns.

**Lisa Bradshaw**



Wolubilis

Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30, [www.wolubilis.be](http://www.wolubilis.be)  
FEB 11 20.30 Cie Bud Blumenthal in Into the Riff, improvisation, dance and music with Garrett List & the Riffing Society

Theatre

Antwerp

Antwerpen X  
Berchem, Antwerpse Ring; 070.344.555, [www.daens.be](http://www.daens.be)  
Until FEB 8 Daens: The Musical (in Dutch with French surtitles)

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, [www.desingel.be](http://www.desingel.be)  
Until FEB 7 20.00 Bloet vzw & Comp Marius in Wintervögelchen by Jan Decorte (in Dutch)  
FEB 12-21 20.00 Troubleyn in De orgie van de tolerantie (The Orgy of Tolerance), staged by Jan Fabre (in Dutch)

Het Toneelhuis/Bourla

Komedieplaats 18; 03.224.88.44, [www.toneelhuis.be](http://www.toneelhuis.be)  
Until FEB 5 Iqaluit and Bonanza, video installations by Berlin  
Until FEB 5 Jerusalem, film by Berlin

Monty

Montignystraat 3; 03.238.64.97 [www.monty.be](http://www.monty.be)  
Until FEB 7 20.00 De Rechter en de beul (The Judge and the Executioner), staged by Guy Cassiers (in Dutch)

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900, [www.sherpa.be](http://www.sherpa.be)  
FEB 11 20.00 Piaf de musical, based on the life of Edith Piaf (in Dutch)

Brussels

KVS Bol  
Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.00, [www.kvs.be](http://www.kvs.be)  
FEB 11-22 15.00/20.00 Mental Finland, staged by Kristian Smeds (in Finnish and Estonian with Dutch, French and English surtitles)

Kaaistudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59, [www.kaaitheater.be](http://www.kaaitheater.be)  
FEB 10-11 20.30 Wintervögelchen, written and staged by Jan Decorte (in Dutch)

Scarabaeus Theatre

Hollestraat 19-27; 02.649.79.16  
FEB 5-8 20.30 Atelier Théâtre Grec in Le Penalty by Georges Paloumbis (in Greek)  
FEB 10-21 20.00/15.00 Brussels Shakespeare Society in Othello by Shakespeare (in English)

Ghent

La Barraca  
Muinkaai 16A; 09.222.31.64, [www.labarraca.be](http://www.labarraca.be)  
Until FEB 14 20.00 Bloedbruiloft (Blood Wedding) (in Dutch)

Theater Tinnenpot

Tinnenpotstraat 21; 09.225.18.60, [www.tinnenpot.be](http://www.tinnenpot.be)  
Until FEB 7 20.00 De Koning Sterft (The King Dies) (in Dutch)  
FEB 9-12 20.00 Liefdesbrieven (Love Letters) (in Dutch)

Leopoldsborg

CC Leopoldsborg  
Kastanjedreef 1; 011.34.65.48, [www.ccleopoldsborg.be](http://www.ccleopoldsborg.be)  
FEB 5 20.15 Gili, Earl Okin & Hans Davis in Gilicatessen XXL, comedy, magic and shadow puppetry (in Dutch and English)  
FEB 6 20.15 Ashton Brothers in Charlatans: A Medicine Show, cabaret, acrobatics, slapstick and music (in Dutch)

Leuven

Stuk  
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20,

[www.stuk.be](http://www.stuk.be)  
FEB 4 20.30 Naar Medeia, staged by Inne Goris (in Dutch)

Roeselare

Cultureel Centrum De Spil  
Spilleboudreef 1; 051.26.57.00, [www.despil.be](http://www.despil.be)  
FEB 4 20.30 Zoals de dingen gaan (As things go) (in Dutch)

Visual arts

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)  
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60, [www.muhka.be](http://www.muhka.be)  
Until MAR 27 Le[s] moi[s] de Lizène, works by Liège artist Jacques Lizène  
Until MAR 29 Lonely at the Top: Klankeffecten # 5, works by Juan Pérez Agirregoikoa  
Until MAR 29 Insert the Passing of a Perfect Day (Revisited), installations by Katleen Vermeir

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, [www.desingel.be](http://www.desingel.be)  
Until FEB 8 Stellproben, large-scale architectural installations by contemporary Austrian artist Heimo Zobernig (open during performance nights)

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70  
Until MAR 8 Justine Frank: a retrospective, work by the 20th-century Jewish-Belgian Surrealist, who is the alter ego of contemporary American artist Roe Rosen

Modemuseum (MoMu)

Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70, [www.momu.be](http://www.momu.be)  
Until FEB 8 Maison Martin Margiela 20: The Exhibition, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Antwerp designer's Paris-based fashion house

Bruges

Arentshuis  
Dijver 16; 050.44.87.11  
Until SEP 27 The Museum of Museums 2009, imaginary show by contemporary artist Johan van Geluwe

Brussels

Argos Centre for Art and Media  
Werfstraat 13; 02.229.00.03, [www.argosarts.org](http://www.argosarts.org)  
Until APR 11 Language Works: Video, Audio and Poetry, works by Vito Acconci  
Until APR 11 I'm With You in Rockland, video work by Karl Holmqvist

Belgian Comic Strip Centre

Zandstraat 20; 02.219.19.80, [www.stripmuseum.be](http://www.stripmuseum.be)  
Until MAR 8 The New Children's Comic Strips, works by young comic strip artists

Bibliotheca Wittockiana

Bemelstraat 23; 02.770.53.33  
Until FEB 28 25 Years of Passion Shared, hand-crafted bookbindings since the Renaissance

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)  
Until FEB 8 Lava II, installation by French artist Jean-Marc Bustamante  
Until MAR 8 Reality as a Ruin, photographs from Antwerp's photography museum  
Until MAR 15 Image/Construction 3 Cities, Brussels, Bruges and Liège seen in monumental photographic montages

Czech Centre

Troonstraat 60; 02.213.94.30  
Until FEB 6 The Martinu Phenomenon, life and work of Czech composer Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959), with archives and photographs  
Until MAR 6 The Life and Times of Karel Capek, photographs and documents on the Czech writer and

journalist (1890-1938) on the occasion of the European Union's Czech Presidency

De Elektriciteitscentrale European Centre for Contemporary Art

Sint Katelijneplein 44; 02.279.64.35  
Until MAR 29 Moet elke wreedheid wel gezegd? (Should Every Cruelty be Said?), work by 102 artists on the theme of Belgium today

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60  
Until MAR 8 Austrian Design, innovation and technology

Flemish Parliament - De Loketten

IJzerenkruisstraat 299; 02.552.40.43  
Until FEB 21 Creations by winners of the Henry van de Velde Awards&Labels 2008 design competition

ING Cultural Centre

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

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimenstraat 21; 02.512.19.63  
Until APR 19 Robert Capa, retrospective of the work of the Jewish-Hungarian photo reporter (1913-1954) and founder of the Magnum agency

Kelders van Cureghem

Ropsy Chaudronstraat 24; 070.25.20.20, [www.cavesdecureghem.be](http://www.cavesdecureghem.be)  
Until MAR 1 Body Worlds 4, anatomical exhibition of human bodies by German scientist Gunther von Hagens

Le Botanique

Koningstraat 236; 02.226.12.57  
Until FEB 22 Dark Pool, photographs and video by Belgian artist Marie-Jo Lafontaine (also shown in the Gesù church, in front of Le Botanique)  
Until FEB 22 Angel, photographs by Marie Le Mounier

Natural History Museum

Vautierstraat; 02.627.42.38  
Until AUG 30 X-treme, surviving in the most extreme climates and environments

Royal Army Museum

Jubelpark 3; 02.737.78.33  
Until MAY 3 Tribute to Pierre de Caters, first Belgian aviator who flew over Belgium 100 years ago

Royal Museum of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11  
Until MAR 8 Continental Superstar, mechanical organs from the Ghysels collection, with recreated dance floor, bar and lighting

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Regentschapsstraat 3; 02.508.32.11, [www.fine-arts-museum.be](http://www.fine-arts-museum.be)  
Until FEB 15 CoBrA, major retrospective on the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Cobra movement

Sint-Gorikshallen

Sint-Goriksplein 1; 02.502.44.24  
Until APR 5 Archeologie om de hoek (Archeology around the corner), 20 years of archaeological finds in Brussels

Stadhuis

Grote Markt; 02.279.43.50  
Until MAY 10 DeKadence: The Bohemian Lands 1880-1914, paintings, drawings, sculptures and photographs

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 02.549.60.49  
Until MAR 31 That's Opera: 200 Years of Italian Music, a look behind the scenes at the making of an opera  
Until APR 26 It's our Earth!, interactive exhibition on sustainable development, with interventions by Belgian and international artists

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33, [www.wiels.org](http://www.wiels.org)  
Until FEB 22 Un-Scene, works by young Belgian artists

Deurle

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens  
Museumlaan 14; 09.282.51.23  
Until MAR 1 Large format paintings by Dirk Skreber  
Until MAR 1 Paintings by Albert Saverys  
Until MAR 1 Picture this!, drawings by Benoît van Innis

Ghent

Dr Guislain Museum  
Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, [www.museumdrguislain.be](http://www.museumdrguislain.be)  
Until APR 12 The Game of Madness: On Lunacy in Film and Theatre, show exploring representations of madness in films, plays, paintings and contemporary art

Kunsthall Sint-Pietersabdij

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

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03, [www.smak.be](http://www.smak.be)  
Until FEB 22 The Absence of Mark Manders, installation by the contemporary Dutch artist  
Until FEB 22 Pluto, installations by contemporary German artist Max Sudhues

Maaseik

Maaseik Museum  
Lekkerstraat 5; 089.81.92.99  
Until MAR 31 The Terracotta Army of Xian: Treasures of the First Emperors of China, warrior sculptures from the world-famous Terracotta Army shown with 200 artefacts from the Qin and Western Han dynasties

Machelen-Zulte

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

Mechelen

Speelgoedmuseum (Toy Museum)  
Nekkerspoelstraat 21; 015.55.70.75, [www.speelgoedmuseum.be](http://www.speelgoedmuseum.be)  
Until MAR 31 Gils, Belgische saga van de elektrische trein (Belgian Saga of Electric Trains)  
Until SEP 30 Cowboys and Indians

Tervuren

Royal Museum for Central Africa  
Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11, [www.africamuseum.be](http://www.africamuseum.be)  
Until AUG 31 Omo: People & Design, Hans Silvester's photographs of south-western Ethiopia's nomadic tribes and objects from the museum's collection

Festivals & special events

Artisan Day: Hundreds of artists and craftsmen across the country open their studios to the public, including free demonstrations and guided tours  
FEB 8 across Belgium  
[www.dagvandeambachten.be](http://www.dagvandeambachten.be)

Antwerp

Afair: Antwerp fashion fair  
FEB 8-9 at Antwerp Expo, J Van Rijswijklaan 191  
03.260.81.22, [www.afair.be](http://www.afair.be)

Antwerpse Kleppers: Theatre festival showcasing Antwerp talent, including three premières from tg Stan, De Koe, De Tijd and Berlin companies, plus screenings, comedy and music  
Until FEB 21 in Het Toneelhuis/Bourla, Komedieplaats 18  
03.224.88.44, [www.toneelhuis.be](http://www.toneelhuis.be)

In Wonen: Home and decoration fair  
FEB 14-22 at Antwerp Expo, J Van

Get your tickets now for...



Arsenal

27 March, 20.00, Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110. Tickets from 02.548.24.24 or [www.abconcerts.be](http://www.abconcerts.be)

It's a good month for Flemish rock bands: this duo is wrapping up its triptych of shows in celebration of its latest album *Lotuk*, a cool blend of pop and dance with world influences. American audiences pricked their ears to Arsenal's sound during the final episode of the iconic TV series *Six Feet Under* – like the series, the band's reliably addictive beat was based in a melancholy flow nearly painful to listen to. This show invites the new album's special guests onstage, including Belgian rapper Baloji and Ghent-based Puerto Rican Gabriel Rios. The first concert scheduled in Brussels sold out so quickly – as did the show at Vooruit in Ghent – that the Ancienne Belgique has scheduled another. But buy now. **LB**

Rijswijklaan 191  
03.260.81.22, [www.antwerpexpo.be](http://www.antwerpexpo.be)

Radioboeken: Nadia Dala and Stijn Vranken are the guests for this series in which Dutch and Flemish authors read original stories aloud in a live public recording for the radio and internet  
FEB 12 20.00-21.30 at Letterenhuis, Minderbroedersstraat 22  
03.222.93.20, [www.amvc.be](http://www.amvc.be)

Brussels

Brussels Holiday Show: International tourism fair  
FEB 5-9 at Brussels Expo, Heysel  
02.474.89.81, [www.vosvacances.be](http://www.vosvacances.be)

Being Buddhist in Modern Life: Talk by Wojtek Tracewski (in English)  
FEB 7-8 20.00 at Centre for Diamondway Buddhism, Goedheidstraat 8  
02.538.48.00, [www.bvdd.be](http://www.bvdd.be)

EU Studies 2009: Fair and workshop for prospective students  
FEB 7 10.00-16.00 at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Rogierplein  
[www.eustudiesfair.com](http://www.eustudiesfair.com) to register; free entrance

Ghent

Belgian Boat Show: Fair for watersports and recreation  
FEB 7-15 at Flanders Expo, Maaltekoeter 1  
09.241.92.11, [www.belgianboatshow.be](http://www.belgianboatshow.be)

Kortrijk

Plus Salon 2009: Lifestyle fair for the over-50s  
FEB 6-8 at Kortrijk Xpo, Doorniksesteenweg 216  
[www.50plussalon.be](http://www.50plussalon.be)



## PROFILE

# Flemish strips in France

Angoulême in western France is home to one of Europe's most renowned comic book festivals, and this year Flanders was its guest of honour



**Eva Cardon**

**B**elgium is already on the map of comic book land, but we wanted to put the new generation of Flemish comics in the spotlight!"

Meet Linda Torfs, one of the creative brains behind the Angoulême International Comics Festival and co-owner of Antwerp's Mekanik Strip, a European comic book epicentre. Chairwoman of the comics commission at the Flemish Literature Fund, she helped lay the foundation for the Flemish comics exhibition from 29 January to 1 February at the yearly festival in the southwest of France.

"In Belgium, comic books aren't always taken seriously within the literary scene, whereas in France, BD [*bande dessinée*, French for "comic"] is also a creative adult medium. The festival in Angoulême has distinguished itself since the beginning by inviting excellent publishers and settling itself away from Paris, so they wouldn't drown in the over-exposure of the big city."

With funding from the French government, the festival has grown and grown over the last 36 years, inviting the best international artists, as well as founding a comic book academy and centre. "Flanders is trying to set up something similar in Turnhout, where a bi-annual comic book festival is held," explains Torfs. "It'd be great if it could turn into a major professional event, too."

In Angoulême, the Flemish presence was all over town last week. A "Hall of Fame" showed the history of Flemish comic books with an overview of original artworks by founding fathers Willy Vandersteen (*Suske en Wiske*), Marc Sleen (*The Adventures of Nero*), Bob De Moor (*Barelli* and the number one *Tintin* collaborator) and Jef Nys (*Jommeke*).

This lays the ground for the

evolution seen in the work on view at "Ceci n'est pas la BD flamande", or "This is Not the Flemish Comic", in the courtyard of the town's city hall. Twenty contemporary artists allow us a glimpse into their worlds in full-blown installation spaces. Serge Baeken, for example, constructed a bus stop, complete with a bench, and decorated his own posters with graffiti.

Meanwhile, Pieter De Poortere's main character, naive farmer Dickie, shyly studies a woman in a mini-brothel, where comic books are shown behind the strip-tease curtain. Among the others in the line-up are Luc Cromheecke, Brecht Evens, Reinhart, Olivier Schrauwen, Simon Spruyt, Gerolf Van de Perre, Maarten Vande Wiele and Judith Vanistendael. An accompanying documentary features six of the artists in their personal and professional lives, focusing on the dynamics of the contemporary Flemish art scene.

The gigantic publishers' area at nearby Place New York is also impressive: the main setting is a typical brown cafe called *Chez les Flamands*, bartended by none other than Torfs. The scene was inspired by the stereotypical perception of our region by the French. The site only sells books by Flemish authors, hosts signing sessions and is a meeting space for artists and their audiences.

But what exactly sets Flemish comics off in this international festival where famous people autograph tons of books ever day? Torfs says it's a question of individual potential. "Young Flemish artists are individualists; they work on an international level," she explains. "The common denominator is that they tell stories in their own style, which fans and critics really notice. More than ever before, books are being translated into other languages and young Flemish authors are nominated for international awards, which only

adds to the buzz."

Comics authors have also been given a boost by the creation of a comics division within the Flemish Literature Fund in 2002. The non-profit organisation supports the development of new talent and provides funds for small-press publishers to print less commercial projects. "Since the fund was founded, the number of alternative publications has grown immensely," says Torfs.

Despite being such an important venue for comics authors and publishers, the atmosphere at Angoulême is very relaxed. The townspeople of the picturesque city of about 45,000 are so much a part of the annual event that the whole city bathes in the light of comic books. Exhibitions, meetings and discussions are held in every public space, and the festival is the talk of the town. Students are selling their drawings, trying to find a publisher or asking passers-by for some feedback.

Even on the streets, everywhere sings the tune of visual culture. The festival is embraced here by locals with such authenticity that the city itself is helping comic books to be accepted and nurtured as a serious medium for literary communication. And this year, they put Flanders on the map of international comic acclaim.

online  
[www.bdangouleme.com](http://www.bdangouleme.com)

*The exhibition "Ceci n'est pas la BD flamande" will be on show from 13 February to 19 April in Leuven at the Tweebronnen library, Rijschoolstraat 4*

**Eva Cardon is an illustrator who works under the pseudonym Ephameron. Her second book *Found+Lost* has just been released by Bries publishers**



Impressing them in Angoulême: Flemish comic artists Maarten Vande Wiele (top) and Gerolf Van de Perre (above) show off their individuality at France's biggest comics event

## THE LAST WORD

what they're saying in Flanders

### Dutch for dummies

"The point is not to learn the whole grammar. Just the sentences she'll have to know if she's presenting herself or meeting journalists."

**Kurt Marechal**  
currently teaching Dutch  
to Miss Belgium, Zeynep Sever

### Close to the people

"They can call me if they need me. They know that. If I'm not there for people now, when will I be?"

**Piet Buyse**  
Dendermonde mayor  
in the aftermath of the  
creche murders

### Give peace a chance

"If you don't give me exile, I'm looking at 181 days in a Finnish cell, among rapists and murderers"

**Tuukka Masalin**  
Finnish pacifist refusing  
military service and  
seeking asylum

**Carnaval** **Edward Scissorhands** **Alternative Valentines** **Tielt** **Flemish Culture Awards** **Mental Finland** **Roos Van Acker**

next week in Flanders Today