

Diamonds
downturn 7

The mood in Antwerp is gloomy as world demand for diamonds goes steadily downwards. Unions are warning that thousands of jobs are at risk as exports fall by about one third.



The great
race 6

The Tour of Flanders is one of the biggest races in the cycling calendar. We take a look at the gruelling course over Flemish cobblestones and talk to one of the cyclists gearing up for the event.



Poetic
architecture 8

Ghent architects Robbrecht & Daem have designed everything from a log cabin in the woods to a concert hall. We meet one half of the team to talk about the state of architecture in Belgium.



Weird science

Visit Technopolis and marvel at what you don't know

On a recent afternoon in Mechelen, a group of children on a school trip were soaking themselves with water, others were finding out how farting sounds are made, and even more were investigating how much snot the human nose makes in a day. It's all in the name of learning, and it's what keeps kids coming to Technopolis in ever-increasing numbers.

The centre was opened in 2000 and was intended as the permanent face of what was then Flanders' bi-annual science and technology fair. It is described as an "activity centre" because, although it has many of the attributes of a museum, it's not exhibiting any sort of collection.

The idea is a hands-on experience in learning the basics – and the fun – of science and technol-

ogy. "The original purpose was to bring science and technology closer to the people in general, not only to children," explains Sonja Truijen, communications director. "Of course we get a lot of children, but we also like to create an environment where children and adults are mixed. It's very important for adults to be involved in investigating Technopolis together with their kids."

The centre is built on several levels within a gigantic hangar-like structure, with levels linked by sloping gangways, making it not only accessible for wheelchairs and baby buggies, but also for Segway scooters, which the staff roll around on.

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Ban on smoking in presence of children proposed

"A bridge too far," says privacy commission

ALAN HOPE

Adults should be forbidden from smoking in the presence of children, even in their own homes, according to a proposal launched last week by Open-VLD senator Patrick Vankunkelsven, who is a doctor. According to the senator, about 116,000 children in Flanders live in households where one or both parents smoke. "I know I'm bringing up a sensitive point," he said. "But I think it's the job of the government to protect those children. Smoking in an enclosed space in the presence of children should be outlawed, and there is one reason: because it is mortal."

The proposal was welcomed by the Flemish League against Cancer. "Everyone has the right to damage his own health, but not the health of others," said director Erwin De Clerck. "I'm not saying it's going to be easy, but banning child labour also took a long time. Parents who smoke when the children are around are holding their kids hostage."

But the League criticised the timing of the measure, while accepting there could be widespread support. Launching such

► *Continued on page 3*

Smart cameras learn to recognise pain

System can improve treatment of dementia patients

This week a team of researchers from Leuven University (KUL) and the Catholic University College Kempen (KHK) in Geel will travel to Singapore to explain a new way of monitoring dementia patients which could revolutionise the way their experience of pain is treated.

The team, working on a project financed by the Institute for Innovation through Science and Technology (IWT), has developed a smart camera which can be taught to recognise the signs of pain on a patient's face and in his or her body language. The conventional wisdom on the pain suffered by dementia patients

appears to be based on underestimates.

The main problem is that patients in an advanced state of dementia are unable to explain where and in what situations they are experiencing pain. Facial expressions and body language can be revealing, but care workers spend relatively little time observing patients directly, so that many of the signs go unseen.

The system developed by the team, which has been running on a trial basis for two years at the De Wingerd care centre in Leuven, involves two cameras acting as pain sensors, and relaying their observations

to a computer. To help differentiate expressions of pain from other expressions, the cameras are "taught" to distinguish by experienced health care workers.

As a result of the technology, researchers have found that dementia patients suffer more often and sometimes more intensely than nursing staff realise, meaning they are also under-treated. Even in the final stages of the illness, when it was thought they no longer experienced pain at all, the cameras have shown this not to be the case.

► www.painvision.be



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News in brief

Road safety campaigner Luc Beaucourt has been caught speeding at 174 km/h by police at Lille near Antwerp. Beaucourt, an emergency room doctor who spent more than 20 years touring and lecturing on road safety, said he was "deeply ashamed".

Two Belgians are among the 83 candidates at the start of this year's **Queen Elisabeth Music Competition**. Jolente De Maeyer and Lorenzo Gatto will begin the first round of the violin competition on 4 May. In all, 26 nationalities are represented, with 42 women and 41 men taking part. (See *Face of Flanders*, next week.)

Regional business airline VLM is to offer daily flights from Antwerp to London during the 2012 Olympic Games in London, promoting the port city as a sleepover for visitors to the Games put off by high prices in the British capital. According to the company, a trip from central Antwerp to one of the Olympic venues could also be faster than a trip across London from hotel to stadium.

The city of Antwerp has launched its own bottled water, straight from the tap. The city is to sell special carafes which can be filled at home to take the place of energy-hungry plastic bottles. The A-Water carafes cost €5, and cut the daily cost of drinking water to 25c, according to mayor Patrick Janssens.

Publicly-owned building land in 67 Flemish municipalities will be sold first to people with a "strong link" to the area, under a new land and housing regulation agreed last week in the Flemish Parliament. Flemish Brabant with 28 participating municipalities, and Antwerp with 24, lead the region. Limburg so far has no communes taking part. The measure has provoked the ire of French-speaking residents of the areas surrounding Brussels, who argue it is discriminatory.

A former bank manager in Bruges has been charged with forgery and breach of trust after it was alleged he stole money from the accounts of people he thought could afford it, to help pay off the loans of more disadvantaged customers. The latter-day Robin Hood is thought to have disposed of about €1 million in clients' money.



The city of Mechelen launched its cultural festival *Stadsvisioenen* (City Visions) at the weekend with a spectacular show of fireworks and the opening of a "Skywalk" at the top of the tower of St Rombout's cathedral. The festival, which will go on for three months, marks Mechelen's 450th anniversary as an archiepiscopal see, and the religious aspect is prominent in one of the two main exhibitions in the festival: *Heaven with Backlighting*, which gathers together some 300 religious artworks. The Skywalk offers tourists who brave the height of the tower an unprecedented view over the city and the surrounding area.

New tax form is "step backwards"

Trade unions have criticised the new model tax form for being too complicated. "People already have enough trouble filling in their declaration correctly," one union representative said. "We can expect this to lead to more mistakes."

In previous years, the tax codes for each section were already printed on the official declaration, but tax-payers will now have to fill in not only the sums, but also the correct codes.



The reason for the change is the arrival in the tax regulations of some 30 or so new codes, which it would have been impossible to fit onto the form in its preferred A3 format. The codes concern such esoteric matters as the new tax status for sports profession-

als, and royalties for artistic producers.

Consumer organisation Test-Aankoop has joined in the chorus of disapproval. "By making it so complicated, the finance department is pushing people towards Tax-on-Web. It makes it more difficult for people to fill in their own tax forms. They're forcing people to call in accountants, or turn to a tax advice centre to fill in their forms."

The new form is "a step backwards," according to Flanders' finance minister Dirk Van Mechelen. "Is this the customer-friendliness [federal finance minister Didier] Reynders has been going on about? More than anything else it will lead to increased costs for people with no internet who can't deal with their tax declaration online," he said.

Last year the number of people using Tax-on-Web passed one million for the first time. But the internet option can only be accessed by tax-payers with an electronic ID, which excludes many foreigners.

Smoking around kids "pure abuse" says senator

→ *Continued from page 1*

an initiative in the middle of a pre-election period made it unlikely it would pass. "We'll see how much political courage there is," De Clerck said.

Vankunkelsven's proposal would begin by banning smoking in the car, which he called "pure child abuse". Rather than sending inspectors into people's homes, he called for tougher "social control": "People should have the courage to speak to their neighbours if they see them lighting up with the children in the room," he suggested. "We have to be able to discuss these things so that people are almost obliged to think about them."

The Privacy Commission, meanwhile, recognised the difficulty of bringing the law into the living-room. "Smoking in the car can be detected and action taken, for the simple reason that it takes place on the public road. But a ban in living rooms? Then you really are entering into the personal living space of people. That

seems to me a bridge too far," said commission chairman Willem Debeuckelaere.

• Meanwhile a new study shows that one in three children aged 10 has already tasted alcohol – and blamed parents for introducing their own children to drinking. "Parents have to realise that that first glass is not as innocent as it seems," said Marijs Geirnaert of the association for alcohol and drugs problems VAD. "Even if it's only a sip, as a parent you're giving your child the wrong signal. The danger of alcohol must not be underestimated," she said. Federal health minister Laurette Onkelinx has announced the introduction next year of a total ban on the sale of alcohol to children under 16. At present, under-16s may not be served alcohol in catering or drinking establishments, but they can buy beer and wine from retail outlets including supermarkets. Stronger drinks are forbidden to anyone under 18 in all cases. The new law will also ban the distribution of free alcohol to under-16s as promotions – a common practice at festivals and concerts.



FIFTH COLUMN

No more purple love

Coalition governments are always difficult for those involved. Even though they belong to the majority, they cannot do as they please, as there is always the collation partner to take into account. Still, some coalitions work better than others.

Take the first federal government with Guy Verhofstadt as prime minister, and its Flemish counterpart with minister-president Patrick Dewael. They called themselves "a friends' club". Even though they were made up of no less than three political groups – liberals, socialists and greens – there was a sort of chemistry between them. The times were prosperous, of course, which always helps, and the Christian Democrats were in opposition for the first time in decades.

Still, there was something odd about these 'purple' (blue and red) coalitions. Economically speaking, liberals and socialists are each other's opposites, as liberals want less state intervention and socialists want more. A combination like that only works when there is enough money around, so that no tough choices have to be made.

With the economic crisis and new Flemish elections on the way, all of that has changed, and the ideological antagonism between liberals and socialists has surfaced again. Liberals and socialists collided recently about the Oosterweel, a road connection to improve traffic flow in Antwerp. Open VLD, led by public works minister Dirk Van Mechelen, wants the project (including the controversial Lange Wapper viaduct) to begin as soon as possible, whereas SP.A hesitates as the project is not popular with its Antwerp electorate.

A second clash came when the socialist employment minister Frank Vandenbroucke proposed government support for people who are forced to work less because of the crisis. Open VLD objected, stating that this would cost too much. Liberals also find it hard to digest the idea of people being paid to do no work. In the end, the Flemish government agreed to the contribution, much to the relief of Volvo Ghent.

All of this may just be electoral play acting. Both parties' electorates enjoy fights like these. With elections on the way, liberals will always portray socialists as big spenders who will derail the budget. Socialists, on the other hand, will always warn that liberals will eat away at our social security system. Does that mean the love affair between liberals and socialists is over? Hard to tell, but for now it certainly looks that way.

Calls for better police training in the handling of psychiatric patients have followed the shooting dead of a 67-year-old man in Ghent who had attacked three police officers with a kitchen knife. The police were at the home of Amallar Hamza to escort him to the University hospital when he lashed out. Although the man has a history of dangerous outbursts, the officers were "completely taken by surprise," according to the local police chief.

SCIENCE NEWS

The **switch to summer time**, due to take place next weekend (29 March), increases the number of heart attacks, according to the Belgian Association against Summer Time. The group points to a study carried out in Sweden and published in the New England Journal of Medicine, which showed a 5% increase in heart attacks when the clocks go forward, and a 5% drop when they go back again.

Flemish public transport authority De Lijn last week brought its first **diesel-electric hybrid bus** into service – the first such bus in the Benelux. In July, another 34 hybrids will come into service; 19 in Ghent, ten in Leuven and five in Bruges. Brussels public transport authority MIVB, meanwhile, will take delivery next year of 70 buses running on natural gas.

One in four Belgians suffers from **some sort of allergy**, according to the asthma and allergies umbrella organisation, whereas twenty years ago the figure was only one in ten. The organisation blamed the increase on allergens in the environment, especially from new sources like air conditioners and copy machines. An excess of antibiotics has also compromised immune systems, the organisation said. Nevertheless, the main causes of allergies remain the same as always: house dust mites, pollen and pet hair.

Researchers at the University of Leuven may have found a way of preventing **Alzheimer's disease**. Publishing in the American journal *Science*, the team, working in conjunction with the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology, describe how they "switch off" a particular protein, gamma-secretase, in the brains of mice, which stops the development of dementia.

A tough winter, a flu epidemic and high levels of particulate pollution caused the **deaths of 2,200 more people** in Belgium this winter, compared with a normal year, according to figures from the federal government. In all, more than 30,000 people died during the winter months.

Belgian still believe in some tenacious **myths about sleep**, according to research carried out by the Belgian Association for Sleep Research and Sleep Medi-

cine. Some 61% thought people need a minimum of eight hours sleep a day to function well; 48% believe a lack of sleep can be recuperated by napping or going to bed earlier; and 40% thought insomnia could be combated by trying harder to fall asleep. Needless to say, all three beliefs are false.

→ www.belsleep.org

Parents of **children with Duchenne's disease** are being forced to go to other countries to buy medication because the manufacturers will not sell it here because they consider the Belgian market too small, according to an article in *De Apoteker* magazine. The drug, deflazacort, marketed as Calcort by Shire Pharmaceuticals, is registered here but not sold, which means that it can be ordered by hospital pharmacies, but will not be reimbursed. Duchenne's is a severe form of muscular dystrophy.

IMEC, the Leuven-based **research centre for nanotechnology**, will organise an academic symposium in Brussels in April to mark its 25th anniversary. The conference will deal with the social, scientific and technological challenges of the 21st century.

→ www.imec.be

Methods for **analysing soil samples** for the presence of nitrates are to be refined and standardised, following the discovery of serious anomalies, Flemish environment minister Hilde Crevits announced. In 2008 the number of sampling sites which exceeded EU limits fell from 42% to 32%, but discrepancies were found in the results of some laboratories. At the same time, Crevits has scrapped fines on companies and farms which exceed the limits for nitrate residues, while fines already handed out in 2007 will be repaid.

Ghent University last week inaugurated its **new supercomputer**, which at a cost of €1 million is the most powerful in the country. The computer will form the backbone of the Flemish Supercomputing Centre which joins the computers of Flemish universities together in a distributed network, at the disposal of any faculty anywhere in the region.

Belgians are not particularly racist, but not especially tolerant either, according to a study conducted by the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism. Dutch-speakers were highly regarded, not surprisingly, in Flanders and Brussels, but also in Wallonia (71.3%) and Belgium as a whole. Wallonia felt negatively towards people of Western European origin and Asians, and both Wallonia and Flanders had negative views on black Africans, North Africans, Turks and Eastern Europeans. Only Brussels felt good about everyone, ranging from 54.8% in favour of North Africans to 88.7% in favour of French-speaking Belgians. Some other key figures:

- 24% of women would cross the street to avoid a man of a different ethnicity
- 79% would accept a person of another race as a co-worker
- 33% think some races are more gifted than others
- 42% think long-term unemployed minorities ought to be deported
- 68% think racist statements in public should be banned

CORRECTION

In our article on the Oosterweel link in Antwerp (*Flanders Today*, 11 March, p. 1), we stated that the planned Lange Wapper is a "bridge" over the Scheldt river. It is in fact a viaduct which passes over the river at one point. We also stated that the study bureau engaged to evaluate the various proposals was ARUP. It is in fact called ARUP/UK SUM Research. We apologise for any confusion caused.

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Wednesday afternoon is the only day of the week when there are no school visits at Technopolis, so it's the time with the least crowds



Weird science

A successful approach, even for adults

→ *Continued from page 1*

There are basically three types of exhibits at Technopolis. There's the permanent collection of gadgets and gizmos illustrating various aspects of science and technology: air and wind, structural engineering, water, the house and everyday mechanics. Then there's the theatre downstairs that shows an animated movie on the human body. Finally, there's the temporary exhibit, which at the moment is called *Van snot tot prot* (*Grossology* in English), which explores everything that's most disgusting about the human body.

The exhibitions are dreamed up by the Technopolis scientific committee, which includes senior academics from the main Flemish universities. "Their job is to make sure they're as innovative as possible," Truijen explains. "And they really do supervise the work very closely." *Grossology* started last September and was supposed to run until the end of June, but it has been prolonged until 31 August because it's so popular.

The most important feature of the whole layout is that it is completely open to children: everything is hands-on, and most exhibits

involve some level of manipulation, whether it's creating giant soap bubbles or building a hump-backed bridge or firing balls into a giant human nose. That's an aspect too many museums restrict – or lack entirely – but of course it's an essential part of a child's enjoyment.

Be prepared as an accompanying adult to have your own knowledge of physics, chemistry, anatomy, fluid dynamics, optics and biology tested to the limit. Luckily, there's a fair amount of information to help, and it's all in three languages. Also, there's a staff of educators who carry out demonstrations and experiments on the floor, as well as monitors who help answer questions. And if the constant questions get too much, you can always send your kids off to slide down a pole or cycle on a bike across a cable five metres above the ground.

For kids aged four to eight, there's a separate area where they can do their own thing without fear of being elbowed aside by bigger children – which is a real concern. Something about all that available experimentation turns children into maniacs (not that there's anything wrong with that).

Technopolis organises technical clubs for girls aged 10 to 12. The clubs have been running in Mechelen and Leuven; this year one was added in Brussels. The groups come together every two weeks in a laboratory for 10 two-hour sessions. Tutors are women scientists because of course good role models are essential.

The centre also leads visits for "active and curious" people of 55 and over, coupled with tours of the Toy Museum in Mechelen and the Sportimoniun.

→ www.technopolis.be



Filthy facts

from *Technopolis' Grossology* exhibition

The **sound of someone vomiting** was voted the worst sound in the world in a survey conducted by Salford University's Acoustic Research Centre. The sound alone can cause other people to throw up, probably an effect left over from the days when we were all hunter-gatherers, and the act would have alerted others to the presence of tainted or poisonous food.

St Augustine's ***City of God***, written in the fifth century, speaks of men who could fart at will and produce a sound like singing. Many professional farters appeared on music hall stages in the 19th century, most famous of them Joseph Pujol, known as Le Petomane, who could imitate musical instruments and blow out candles.

Civet coffee beans are fed to the civet cat then recuperated when they re-emerge partially digested. The coffee is considered a delicacy. The British actor Stephen Fry gave a packet of civet coffee to Prince Charles on his wedding to Camilla Parker-Bowles.



Poo snacks free for the taking during Grossology at Technopolis

Some **types of poo** have special names. Seabirds and bats is "guano"; otters is "spraint"; leaf-eating insects produce "frass"; deer generate "few-mets" and earthworms create "casts".

The condition of finding it **difficult to pee** while someone else is present is known as "paruresis".

Cow-farts are not **responsible for global warming**, as many people think. Most of the methane expelled by cows is burped out or exhaled through the mouth, to the tune of 500-600 litres a day, with only about 5-10% coming from the other end.

If you want to **belch politely**, call it "eructation". The Guinness world record belching noise, set by Londoner Paul Hunn in 2008, was 107.1 dB, louder than a chainsaw one metre away.

Most **words for toilet** are euphemisms referring to something else: restroom, lavatory (from the word meaning "to wash"), bathroom (whether or not a bath is present).

Technopolis in brief

Opened: February 2000

GPS setting: N 51° 00' 09" E 4° 28' 12"

Increase in visitor numbers, 2008: 20% to 340,333.

Increase in sales of season tickets, 2008: 27%

Percentage of Flemish schools that visited in 2008: 38%

Peak visits: more than 3,000 visitors a day

Tour de force

Pros, amateurs and thousands of fans come out for Belgium's big cycle race

ANNA JENKINSON

The Tour of Flanders isn't just one of the biggest races in the international cycling calendar, it's also a major Belgian tradition. Almost one-fifth of the population is expected to see the race, either cheering along the course or watching it live on television.

"The Tour of Flanders is part of our genes, our culture, our soul," says Geert Vandebon, one of the event's organisers. "Normal races attract cycling fans, but at the Tour of Flanders you see everyone: housewives, grandparents, doctors. That's the difference."

The 93rd Tour of Flanders, or Ronde van Vlaanderen, takes place on Sunday, 5 April. In addition to the historic men's competition, there is also a women's race, which is part of their World Cup series. Races for serious amateur cyclists and mountain bikers take place the day before.

Starting in Bruges, the main 260-kilometre route will wind through the Flemish countryside, passing through Ghent and taking in 16 climbs before ending in Ninove. The race is one of the cobbled cycling classics, with cobble-stone paths making up 28 kilometres of this year's route, a whopping seven more kilometres of bumpy terrain than last year.

The Tour of Flanders and the Paris-Roubaix (which takes place the following Sunday) are the "kings of the cobblestones," according to Alessandro Tegner, spokesman for Belgium's Quick Step team.

Last year's Tour of Flanders was won by Belgium's own Stijn Devolder, who will be defending his title this year. There will be 25 teams taking part, from countries including Spain, France, the US and Belgium.

"It's something particularly special for the Belgian riders because it's in their country. And they know the route and the climbs so well that they really want to be there. It is a dream to win it," says Herman Frison from Silence-Lotto, another Belgian team.

While spectators will line the streets along the entire route, one village that will attract more than most is Wetteren, this year's "Tour Village", which lies on the river Scheldt about 10 kilometres east of Ghent.

Choosing one town as a focus for the tour and related celebrations started a decade ago. Wetteren has several historical links with the Tour of Flanders. It lays claim to two winners: Jef Dervae, who took the title in 1929, and Achiel Buysse, who won the race three times in the 1940s. The finishing line was also in the village for many years.

While the Tour of Flanders started back in 1913, the women's competition only began in 2004. The women cover a total distance of 130 kilometres, 100 kilometres of which is the same route as the men's. This year's women's race starts in Oudenaarde and finishes in Ninove.

To fully appreciate how challenging the route is for the pros, many amateur cyclists try their hand at the course the day before. Last year some 3,000 riders attempted the full distance. If that sounds like a bit too much to handle, there are also 140-kilometre and 75-kilometre options – which nonetheless include many of the steep climbs and cobblestones.

→ www.rvv.be



© Belga

In punishing weather, Tour of Flanders cyclists have to shower off the mud before anyone can tell who the winner is

The ride of your life

Dominic Hill, a London bike shop manager and keen cyclist, is coming to Belgium next week for his third go as an amateur in the Tour of Flanders

Flanders Today: What first made you decide to take part in the Tour of Flanders?

Dominic Hill: In 2005, I did a bike race south of London with some club mates. As we were arriving back home in the car, the radio gave the result of the Tour of Flanders. A quick bit of maths told us that those guys had been racing for more than twice the time and distance we had. I wondered aloud what that must be like. About nine months later, one of the guys told us he had looked into it, and we were doing the amateur version, "so get training"!

How well known is the Tour of Flanders outside of Belgium?

There are a lot of cycle races in the world, but it's right at the top. The general public may only know the Tour de France, but every keen cyclist in Europe knows the Tour of Flanders.

What do you remember most about the course?

The first time, I remember that I almost made it up all of the climbs without getting off and walking. The second time, I was massively pleased that I hit my own personal goal and made it up every climb without having to put a foot down. Another memory is the jarring, organ-rearranging sensation you get when trying to keep your speed up on the flatter sections of cobbles. Just when your hands go numb from the vibration, a local pro will whiz past at twice your speed.

How much training do you do ahead of the race?

The fear of the hills is something to get you out of bed on a cold winter's morning. I do small bits of



© Nicola Robinson

Dominic Hill after a Tour of Flanders

training on my way to and from work, so I need to make sure I also get in some good long rides of four or five hours. That way, the 10-hour day in Flanders is a bit less of a shock to the system. But nothing quite prepares you for such a punishing feat of endurance. You just have to keep pushing the pedals around kilometre after kilometre, hour after hour.

You live in London, so why do you come to Belgium for a cycling race?

Cycling as a sport is quite marginalised in the UK, so it's wonderful to see so much space given over to cyclists. It's a terrific weekend – suffering through the course on the Saturday, followed by the opportunity to see the pros close up making a mockery of your efforts on the Sunday, with a few beers in between for those with any energy left.

Nothing quite prepares you for such a punishing feat of endurance

And the winner is...

Belgium men bring home the trophy more than half the time

Men's winners

| | | |
|------|--------------------|---------|
| 2008 | Stijn Devolder | Belgium |
| 2007 | Alessandro Ballan | Italy |
| 2006 | Tom Boonen | Belgium |
| 2005 | Tom Boonen | Belgium |
| 2004 | Steffen Wesemann | Germany |
| 2003 | Peter Van Petegem | Belgium |
| 2002 | Andrea Tafi | Italy |
| 2001 | Gianluca Bortolami | Italy |
| 2000 | Andrei Tchmil | Belgium |
| 1999 | Peter Van Petegem | Belgium |

Women's winners (since women's race began)

| | | |
|------|----------------------------|-------------|
| 2008 | Judith Arndt | Germany |
| 2007 | Nicole Cooke | Britain |
| 2006 | Mirjam Melchers-Van Poppel | Netherlands |
| 2005 | Mirjam Melchers-Van Poppel | Netherlands |
| 2004 | Zoulfia Zabirova | Russia |

Demand for diamonds in freefall

Jobs at risk in Antwerp as Americans cut back

Antwerp's diamond industry is in near-collapse, with drops of up to 70% in trade, according to monthly figures from the Antwerp World Diamond Centre (AWDC), which represents the industry.

In February of this year, exports of polished diamonds fell by 32% in quantity to 577,144 carats, compared with the same period in 2008. In value terms the drop was even greater, down to €758.7 million, or a fall of 36.4%. Imports of polished diamonds fell by 40% by volume and 37.9% by value, down to €541.3 million and 493,290 carats.

At the root of the problem is the decline in demand from the US, which accounts for half of all world diamond sales. The US lost its first place as a destination for Antwerp exports in the January-February period to Hong Kong, although the AWDC allows that this may have been a blip caused by traders sending polished stones to the former colony in advance of the International Jewellery Show earlier this month.

Exports to Hong Kong came to €255.4 million, a decline of 27.6%. By contrast, US exports dropped by 41.1% by volume and 43.3% by value, to €223.8 million. Other main destinations, such as Switzerland, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, India, Japan, Italy and France saw similar falls. The UK, meanwhile, saw a smaller fall in volume than other importers, and in fact a 12.16% increase in value terms to €42.5 million.

The situation with rough diamonds is even worse, with exports in January-February down nearly 70% to €478 million. At the same time, imports of rough diamonds were down 63% in value.

The worry in Antwerp now is, what effect will the catastrophic collapse of demand have on jobs. The sector employs 8,000 people – 7,000 traders and 1,000 or so polishers. Indirect employment – jobs in areas like insurance, security and transport linked to the diamond trade – is nearly four times greater at about 26,000. As a representative of the union ACV-Diamant pointed out, the number of jobs under threat could be as many as at Opel Antwerp, but the media attention is unlikely to be as great.

A sign of the malaise in the industry is the decision by major producers to stop mining or cut back drastically, while demand remains low. This also allows companies such as De Beers and Russia's Alrosa to keep prices high. At January's first "sight" of the year in London – the name given to sales to selected customers – De Beers brought out rough diamonds worth about €59-€110 million, the lowest figure for a January sight in 25 years.

• A full account of the audacious 2003 robbery of the strongroom at the Antwerp Diamond Center, which netted the gang at least €100 million, is published in the latest issue of *Wired* magazine.

→ <http://tinyurl.com/wirediamonds>



The sector employs 8,000 directly and 26,000 more depend on diamonds for their jobs

Changes in diamond market Jan-Feb 2009 compared to Jan-Feb 2008

| | Difference in volume | Difference in value |
|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Polished stones export | - 34.96% | - 37.40% |
| Polished stones import | - 42.08% | - 38.04% |
| Rough diamond exports | - 65.59% | - 69.89% |
| Rough diamond imports | - 42.36% | - 63.45% |
| Hong Kong imports | - 7.34% | - 27.57% |
| US imports | - 41.10% | - 43.30% |
| UK imports | - 13.50% | + 12.16% |

Roularta to publish more magazines

Roularta Media Group

- Founded in 1954 in Roeselare by Willy De Nolf with two weeklies
- *Knack* founded in 1971, *Le Vif* in 1983
- In 2004 freesheet *De Zondag* becomes Flanders' most popular paper with 1.5 million readers
- Invests in setting up VTM in 1989, now owns 50% share with Persgroep
- Other media holdings: 2BE, Kanaal Z, 4FM, Q-Music

Publishing group Roularta closed 2008 with profits down 13.7% to €13.8 million, with the magazine division showing especially poor results. The company's reaction? More magazines! From June this year, the company's flagship news magazine *Knack* will appear twice a week instead of once, on 18 different weeks throughout the year. The same strategy will apply to the company's French-speaking equivalent *Le Vif-L'Express*, starting in September.

The new issues will avoid holiday periods, and will each follow a theme such as science or health, and be published on Fridays (weekly *Knack* appears on Wednesday). The price of a subscription goes up €18 a year.

Roularta's sales fell 1.9% over the year, with the printed press division, which accounts for three-quarters of sales, suffering from the widespread decline in advertising. Job advertising suffered particularly badly. Elsewhere the company's French activities were restruc-

tured, which affected the balance sheet negatively for last year. The printed press sector saw profits fall to €1.15 million from €8.8 million the year before.

Roularta CEO Rik De Nolf had two contributions to make to the States-General of the media which took place last week, organised by Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters. The government could best support the media by advertising rather than by giving subsidies, he said. And support could also come in the form of changes in the tariffs charged by the post office; Roularta is currently the post office's biggest single customer.

The States-General was called by Peeters following a wave of planned redundancies at major media organisations including Corelio (*De Standaard*, *Flanders Today*) and Persgroep (*De Morgen*). The latest meeting included representatives from all sides of the debate: companies, journalists, academics and others.

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Airlines • Aviapartner

The Brussels-based airlines servicing and handling company Aviapartner has won a contract to supply ground assistance for the Amsterdam airport operations of Malaysia Airlines, Onur Air and Turkuz Air. Meanwhile, in Brussels, the company recently signed new agreements with Malev, the Hungarian airline, and Aegean, the Greek carrier.

Beer • AB InBev

The Leuven-based beer group AB InBev has finalised the sale of its US affiliate Labatt as part of an agreement with the US competition authorities that allowed it to acquire Anheuser-Busch. Meanwhile, the company is to inaugurate shortly a new €150 million brewery in Irkutsk, Siberia.

Buses • VDL Jonckheere

The Roeselare-based bus and coach constructor VDL Jonckheere has won a €63 million contract to supply the Jamaican Urban Transport Company with 200 city buses. The company has already supplied some 450 buses to the Caribbean island since 1995. Last year, VDL Jonckheere won a €150 million contract to deliver 525 buses to Dubai.

Cars • Midas

The car servicing and supplies company MIDAS (Muffler Installation Dealers Associated Services) is to open 10 new franchised operations in Belgium over the next three years. The company already operates 45 dealerships in the country.

Construction • Siemens

The German industrial group has won a €320 million contract to build a new gas fired power station in Tessenderloo.

Fashion • Strelli

The Brussels-based fashion group Olivier Strelli has taken over 22 of its retail stores in France to accelerate the development of its French activities.

Telecom • Base

Base, the country's third largest mobile phone company, is to change its name to KPN Group in June.

Telecom • Belgacom

Belgacom, the country's leading telecommunications company, is to acquire Tunz, a small-scale company that has developed software for paying via mobile phone text messaging. The technology is being tested by Flemish public transport company De Lijn as a means of paying bus tickets and parking.

Textiles • Veritas

Veritas, a chain of shops selling fabrics and fashion accessories, is planning to open 19 stores in the next four years. Four are to open this year in Beveren, Diest, Zottegem and Ninove. The company already operates 58 stores in Flanders and Brussels.

No mock-ups

Robbrecht & Daem treat architecture like life itself

VEERLE DEVOS

Simplicity, without minimalism, is what we aim for," says Hilde Daem. Until 19 April, *Pacing Through Architecture*, an intimate and revealing exhibition at Bozar in Brussels, offers a glimpse into the work and the world of renowned Ghent architects Robbrecht & Daem.

From log cabin to concert hall, from art gallery to city archive, from dovecote to urban square, the work of R&D is a miscellany of many disciplines. "Our firm works like a composer writing a sonata," Daem muses, "which then might flow into a symphony."

But one thing is fixed: the link between architecture and art. "My mother was a gifted pianist; my father took great interest in the arts and architecture – and beauty in general. Art was always part of my life."

What else matters to R&D is shown in five short films at Bozar on 26 March: simplicity, nature and... family life. As we talk, Daem, the eldest girl from a family of 13, searches her handbag for pictures of her grandchildren and, surprisingly, her parents' marriage. One of the films about R&D stars the family dog, Bachus, in the woods, joyfully rolling around in the dirt. Human, poetic, subtle. This is where Daem goes for inspiration. She quotes Cesare Pavese: "It's like seeing the orange colour of the sun through your eyelids. Our work is as discreet as it is sensorial."

Brussels filmmaker Maarten Vanden Abeele made the documentary shorts about R&D's key projects, such as the Bruges Concertgebouw, a cabin in the woods in Ronse, a former milk factory in Gaasbeek, the Rubens Square in Knokke and the firm's own office in a former wood depot in Ghent. These portraits show how people interact in the buildings and squares and how they, in turn, interact with their environment.

Sketches and plans in *Pacing Through Architecture* show the couple's creative process. What's striking is that although everything revolves around architecture, there are no 3D-models on display. "In one of the films you see the Rubens square altering under the influence of the weather, the light, the people who use it," says Daem. "You can never catch that in a mock-up."

If you need a little 3-D to enliven your visit to the architectural exhibition, you can walk next door to the Cinematek, Brussels' just-reopened film museum, to see how R&D redesigned the entire space, allowing in natural lighting and



© Veerle Devos

creating a new cinema space underground.

Though based in Ghent, Daem holds Brussels close to her heart: "How I would love to redesign that city! The border zone between the upper town and the lower town is filled with monstrosities. And just look at the new plans for the European quarter and Wetstraat! They always think they should turn Brussels into Rotterdam or New York, and on paper that might look great. But it often comes down to comic strip architecture: a two-dimensional architecture, badly translated in three dimensions."

Architecture, she insists, has "turned into a throwaway product, a consumer good like TVs and mobile phones." But she hastens to add: "Just hear me going on... I am actually a positive thinker."

That is fairly evident at Bozar, which highlights some projects of which Daem is particularly fond.

The cabin, for instance, is a structure in the midst of nature – and right on the Belgian language border. She found inspiration in France's Le Crotoy nature park in the Somme valley, where ornithologists in small huts study birds. "But you can also read a book there or fire up the stove. We dream a lot, and we make dreams come true," she smiles.

One very ambitious dream: to overcome the linguistic divide. "I



© Kristien Daem



Clockwise from top: Knokke's Rubens Square; the cabin in Ronse; Hilde Daem carries a wedding photo of her parents

would like to break through the cultural Iron Curtain that cuts Belgium in two." The firm, therefore, regularly works in the southern half of the country. "I feel Flemish, but have a lot of respect for the Walloons, who have a different way of life that is interesting to me. We also crossed the language border with the Brussels Cinematek. The project may be small, but, if only for that reason, it's very important to me. It is our log cabin in the centre of Brussels."

The firm works on both public and private projects. They are now heading up the long-term redesign of the Antwerp Zoo – "a mega project," Daem acknowledges. "But, whether we're working on an animal nest, a city square or a concert hall, we always work side by side with the client. First, we create an entire world; then we narrow it down, until we arrive at that one little gemstone."

Public projects, though, inevitably court criticism, as R&D experienced with Bruges' Concertgebouw – downright hated by many vocal critics. "What sometimes gets to me is how this happens," says Daem. "The inhabitants of Bruges, for instance, never had a chance to form an opinion about the concert hall. Our adversaries in the competition for this project actively stirred up negative feelings."

Still, she thinks it's normal for people to be apprehensive. Antwerp's Leopold De Wael Square initially met with protests because trees had to be chopped down. "But what you see today is that residents have made the square their own," says Daem. "We always aim to involve residents in the thought process: they think with us, become enthused and help carry the project."

Sometimes R&D must even convince clients to commit. At this moment, the plans for the Brussels city archives are in limbo. "Today, politicians are often afraid to put money into something like a city archive when cities are faced with so many problems," she says. "Maybe there will be a breakthrough in this case now that the Cologne city archives have collapsed, destroying a large part of the records. A society should invest in the conservation of its history."

Daem says that her tenacity stems from her youth. "In our big family I had to learn to live with others and be resourceful, while shielding a certain introversion. Paul [Robbrecht] is the same way: an introvert that becomes extroverted when he gets to designing. This is reflected in our architecture."

Pacing Through Architecture

Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels

Until 19 April

► www.bozar.be

Paper dolls

The exuberant pop art designs of the 1960s may get the most attention, but this delicate fashion has been around for centuries

While the word "paper" might not conjure the most fashionable of associations in your mind, MoMu (the Antwerp fashion museum) makes clear that the material we use to write on has had an elaborate style history. And even – if you check in with the Belgians – a very recent one.

Paper Fashion is curated by Vassilis Zidianakis of the Atopos Greek Cultural Organization in Athens, which combines innovative fashion, design and art in new and surprising ways. For their Art and Technology in Fashion project, they collected more than 400 paper dresses from the 1960s, when the American Scott Paper Company kick-started the trend of producing disposable frocks as a promotional gimmick.

Scott Paper's (still an industry leader today) creative marketing soon extended its influence all the way to Europe, where paper dresses turned into a hype that forced companies to develop materials that looked like paper, but were stronger. Enter Tyvek, which had been developed by DuPont in the mid-1950s. With a look and feel of paper but still water resistant, the synthetic soon made its way into the fashion industry.

The collection of dresses in *Paper Fashion* is a wild, colourful free-for-all, but the exhibition goes further to trace the origins of paper in fashion: Japanese paper garments from the Edo (1603-1868) and Meiji (1868-1912) periods and some historical Chinese examples. They prove that the link between paper and

fashion is longer and stronger than any 1960s consumerist craze.

The original version of this exhibition debuted in Athens two years ago. When Kaat Debo, director of MoMu, was invited to write a contribution for the exhibition's catalogue, she was pleasantly surprised to find Belgian designers among the participating artists.

Designer duo AF Vandevorst, for instance, was inspired by so-called "poor" materials such as paper and cardboard for their fall 2003 and spring 2004 collections, while Dirk Van Saene's spring 1999 collection held several skirts and dresses in crepe paper. For fall 1997, Walter Van Beirendonck turned to Tyvek to create his imaginative ensembles. And Antwerp designer Anne Kurris started her career creating paper dresses for children.

In fact, from the Cyprus-born experimental designer Hussein Chalayan to the classic Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel, and from minimalist Helmut Lang to the king of pleats Issey Miyake, all have used paper to create their fashions. Back in the States, paper dresses seemed made to order for pop icon Andy Warhol, who couldn't resist transferring his iconic Campbell's Soup design to a line of them. Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, meanwhile, lent his poem *Uptown NY* to graphic designer Harry Gordon for its very first printing on a paper dress.

Never a museum for remaining static, MoMu invited the conservation and restoration depart-

ment of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp to demonstrate its work live. Every Tuesday in March, April and May, their studio in the centre of the exhibition demonstrates how rare objects from the Atopos Collection, such as a Japanese paper kimono and paper flight attendants' uniforms from the 1960s, are restored to their original glory.

And because all paper creativity tends to be contagious – not to mention affordable – MoMu has organised workshops for both students and adults. Explore Paper! first inspired participants so they can move on to the atelier of the MoMu for the Paper workshop, where you can make your own paper dress or T-shirt.

And then there's an unlikely collaboration: Since its beginnings in the 1920s, the French mail order company La Redoute's battle cry has been: "Play with fashion". Paper dresses fit right in with its proclamation that fashion shouldn't be taken too seriously and should be accessible to everyone.

So for this occasion, the fashion outlet asked both Van Saene and Van Beirendonck to each

The swinging '60s: *The Eye*, one of Harry Gordon's many poster dress designs (left); *The Big Ones*, a Universal Studios paper dress with portraits of its biggest stars of the decade



© Panos Davis/ATOPOS Collection, Athens



design a special paper dress. Limited editions of both are for sale on the website of La Redoute and at MoMu. For €60, you get a unique souvenir of this extraordinary exhibition. And, unlike many of the throw-away designs of the 1960s, they're made from washable materials, so you can enjoy them again and again.

MoMu
Nationalestraat 28, Antwerp
Until 16 August
→ www.momu.be

Shut up and sing

Antwerp radio station cuts out the chatter

For something completely different on your radio, web stream or iPhone: music, and only music, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Launched in 2003 by radio veterans Frank Leysen and Koen De Bruyn, Croozefm is dedicated to smooth jazz sounds, which are easy to listen to first thing in the morning, during business hours or as you drift off to sleep at night.

Keen observation taught the pair that an audience that prefers music instead of "blah blah" does exist in Flanders: no talk, no news, (no language barrier!) but an all-music station aimed at an adult audience.

The line-up combines jazz, soul, funk, R&B, chill, bossa and other Latin genres and can be found only in Antwerp on 104.2 FM. It's extremely low on advertising but manages to survive thanks to commercial partners who endorse parts of the 24-hour roster and the Croozefm website. "A lot of the information that 'average' commercial stations put on the air can be found on our web pages, including news," explains Leysen. "There is a 'lifestyle' aspect in the station's image and website, which proves attractive to both audiences and sponsors."

Leysen adds that Croozefm's web-stream has spread the station's popularity abroad, with reactions from round the

world pouring in. "The audience may never have heard of many of the tracks we play, but when they register on the website, they get to see the play list and information about the artists. It's a great barometer to check out audience involvement."

→ www.crooze.fm

New station JOE fm debuts

Meanwhile, on 1 April, audiences across Flanders will be able to tune in to a brand new radio station. JOE fm, aimed at the 30 to 40 year age group, will play hits from the 1980s, '90s and today, with decades split up into different time spans throughout the day.

Sporting the catch-phrase "the smile, the music", JOE fm is rising from the ashes of recently defunct commercial station 4FM. Both the re-branded station and the highly popular youth oriented Q-Music are owned by the Vlaamse Media Maatschappij, or Flemish Media Company, the parent company of TV stations VTM and 2Be.

"Contrary to 4FM, which was more of a laid-back channel,



Catch the morning show with Raf and Alexandra on JOE fm

combining news and interviews with sort of 'background' music, JOE fm is poised to become an active station, very up tempo," says Peter Bossaert, general manager of Qgroup, the radio arm of the Flemish Media Company. "We have plenty of room for improvisation and personality."

Bossaert says that the new station and Q-Music will complement each other, with the new station playing artists from REM to Shakatak to ABBA. Where to tune in depends on where you live, but JOE fm's main frequencies are 104.1 FM and 103.4 FM.

→ www.joefm.be



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putting people first

A whole story on the top of your head

A history of hair in Sint-Niklaas

LISA BRADSHAW

For those of you in dismay at the amount of crap you have to carry around – cellphones, Mp3 players, blackberries, laptops – you can rest assured it was no different 200 years ago than it is in the modern world.

The upper class in 18th-century Europe not only had to sport a wig half a metre high, they had to carry a special comb to remove the weevils and other insects that made the wig home – dusted with flour and kept together with lard as they were. In another concealed pocket, meanwhile, a woman carried a fan, plus a box in which to keep the fan. She also needed a special device to remove her gloves, which were so tight-fitting that her delicate fingers could not possibly remove them.

Don't think you were any better off if you were not a member of the fairer sex. Men had to pack all of their shaving equipment, which required a large case for the mirror, bowl and seven blades – one for every day of the week. A century later, they couldn't leave home without their moustache wax, band and special cup – the band protected the waxed and dyed moustache during sleep, and the cup kept liquid from harming it.

How do I know all of these fasci-

nating truisms of personal care history? Because I visited the hair museum in Sint-Niklaas.

Until last autumn, the hair museum was a separate exhibition in a dusty corner of a city building. But in November, Sint-Niklaas re-opened the SteM Zwergshoek museum after three years of extensive renovations. The result is an integrated collection representing a part of Flanders' social history and heritage, plus a bit of archaeology, in a beautifully sunlit open-floor plan.

The history of hair figures heavily because the city bought the collection in the 1980s from a local stylist and hair products manufacturer who culled the pieces over many decades and ran a private museum for hair stylists in his factory.

Many of the pieces are outstanding, such as the large collection of ceramic shaving bowls used in barber shops. Sporting a variety of designs, one of them has this charming phrase in French: "All the best wives are in the cemetery" – emphasising the barber as a men's club where no women were allowed. The museum also has several 19th-century barber stations of wood and marble, each with dozens of little drawers. Because men had to visit the

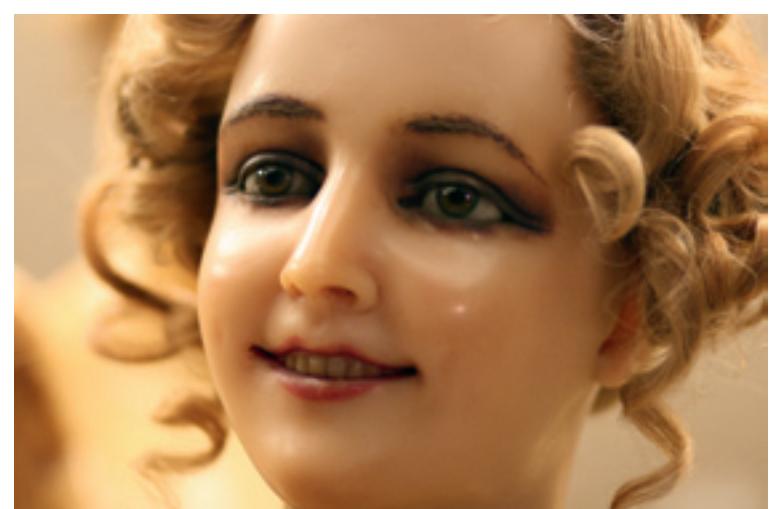
barber every week or even every day, each customer had his own drawer for his specific products.

The museum also covers the surreal history of barber surgeons – when barbers were also dentists and pseudo-doctors. The small but pristine collection of blades used for bleeding a patient, bowls used to catch the blood and glass vessels used for fire cupping are an unsettling reminder of this mixing of trades.

The museum contains some devices that require explanation: the sewing-machine like contraption, for instance, that a wig-maker used to untangle and roll up human hair, and the round, two-handled brush with incredibly coarse bristles that was used to rid a man of dandruff (temporarily). Info cards are in place but in Dutch only.

One of the museum's centrepieces is a collection of female wax busts found in the windows of early 20th-century salons. Wigs were pulled on and off of them to illustrate the new styles of the day like photographs do now. (See photo, above)

The final part of the hair tour shows the evolution from barbers as a male domain to the modern female-oriented salon of the 20th century. We have American busi-



nessman King Gillette to thank for that – his safety razor infiltrated the homes of men across the western world, making it necessary for barbers to bring women into the shops. A very fun part of the collection is headphones with readings from Flemish barber magazines of the 1920s. It seemed that the flapper style bob was creating a scandal across Europe – with one barber in France being fined for giving the style to a woman "without her husband's permission". Still, the industry was upbeat: "I am sure that short hair is not going away," wrote one stylist in 1926. "It's more practical and better for women who work. And

it's profitable."

Just as you leave the museum, you pass four hair dryers, under which you can take a seat and listen to personal stories of people whose portraits hang on the wall in front of you. Average citizens, they talk about themselves and their relationship with their hair. One has dreadlocks, for instance, and another is a Muslim woman who wears a hijab. It sounds very simple, but, like the rest of the collection, it's an immensely effective way to learn something very revealing about a generation or a culture.

► musea.sint-niklaas.be

restaurant

DUSTIN BENNER

De 3 Biggetjes

Centrally located in Ghent's historic Patershol district, De 3 Biggetjes (The 3 Little Pigs) serves *haute cuisine* at appealing prices. As proof, Chinese-born chef Ly Chi Cuong, former student of the famed Ter Groene Poorte school in Bruges, has earned the coveted Bib Gourmand from the Michelin Guide every year since 2003: a recommendation worth checking out.

Snug in a 16th-century town house, the restaurant retains some of its original elements. Behind the protected monument of a façade, with its crow-stepped gable, the interior follows suit. The front room houses a light, wooden bar, offset by maroon walls and rust-coloured tiles. The back room is all eggshell and beige, with a view of the courtyard.

The wooden chairs sport old-fashioned backs, while the tables are practically unadorned, putting the focus on the food. The overall feeling is cosy and old European, congruent with the location. As such, a large number of patrons are older, regular customers.

The wine list, though, put together by the chef, is thoroughly modern. Though "world wines" grace most menus, they rarely dominate: here we find South Africa in the majority, with solitary issues from Greece, Portugal, and Australia. According to the chef, he chooses award-winning, top-shelf wines from outside of France for their lower price but excellent quality.

Only a couple of wines are available by the glass, and they are both deeply flavourful: try the full-bodied Stellenbosch red First Lady. To satisfy the Francophiles, an expansion of the French selection is in the works.

On the menu, we find a combination of Flemish classics alongside expressions of the chef's creative side. The Specials menu starts off with a moist filet of tarbot on a bed of tender cauliflower with a perfectly matched, aromatic Noilly Prat sauce. Succulent wild boar cutlets are one of the main courses, the intense flavour accompanied and tempered by a softer note in the side dishes: a copious amount of seasonal vegetables. A pungent mango chutney figures in, as well, for a pinch of zest.

For the *grande finale*, crème brûlée with rich Réunion vanilla – served cold – flows like velvet.

► Zeugsteeg 7, Ghent

● Open: Mon-Tues, Thurs-Fri lunch and dinner; open Sat dinner

● Specials Menu: lunch € 17, dinner € 30

► www.de3biggetjes.com



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Zogezegd in Gent

LISA BRADSHAW

Possibly the toughest art genre for foreigners living in Flanders to get into is literature. The reason is obvious: even if your Dutch is good enough to understand the Antwerp accents of the movie *Loft*, plunging into the metaphors and delicate narrative construction of a Flemish novel is no small task.

This causes many whose Dutch is less than perfect to skip literary events, which is a shame in the case of Zogezegd on 3 April. The stand-out in Flanders' annual lit calendar, it brings together international writers, food, music and more than a nip of free jenever for one big party in Ghent's Vooruit that is as suave as it is heady.

And Radio één, which organises the day- and evening-long event, were no fools getting Dimitri Verhulst to curate. The curator of Zogezegd (or So to Speak) is always the star of the show, lending a personal touch that makes every year different. Verhulst (*pictured above*) is the epitome of cool literature in Belgium, with his comically sardonic tales of his own bleak youth and perpetually stringy hair forever hanging in his face.

Even though the event's venue ensures young people will take an interest, the 30-something author's presence should bring Ghent's student population storming through the doors in even greater numbers. And his last year's win of the prestigious Golden Owl for

Dutch-language literature keeps the mature audiences happy, too. In Verhulst, Zogezegd has found it all.

But it gets better: just a few weeks ago, Verhulst posted to Facebook major complaints about the organisation of Zogezegd and their many rules and regulations. "I'm going to prostitute myself for another month for this noble purpose and then pull my door shut," he wrote, to the delight of the Flemish press, which picked it up and ran with it.

Some visiting authors will present their work in other languages, including French novelist Stéphane Audeguy (*The Theory of Clouds*) and British writer Linda Grant, whose *The Clothes on Their Backs* was shortlisted for the Man Booker prize in 2008.

Alongside literary debates and readings, you can make use of a chapel with confessionals manned by authors, celebrate the 80th birthday of Dutch author and poet Remco Campert and see films on the writers and titles that make up this year's Literary Spring in Flanders, of which Zogezegd is the kick-off event.

A little prayer, a little drink and some controversial friction between a leather-jacketed curator and his establishment. What more do you want from your fiction?

Vooruit
Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23
3 April
→ www.vooruit.be



MORE LIT THIS WEEK

Radioboeken → **AMVC-Letterenhuis, Antwerp** →
Passa Porta Festival → **across Brussels**
Philosophy Cafe → **GC Ten Noey, Brussels**



Antwerp

Amuz
Kammenstraat 81; 03.248.28.28
MAR 25 21.00 Brussels Philharmonic conducted by Ludo Claesen, with Jan Michiels, piano; Koen Broucke, visual artist: Liszt's *Via Crucis* and other works

Concerts at 20.15:
MAR 26 Brussels Philharmonic conducted by Ludo Claesen, with Jan Michiels, piano; Koen Broucke, visual artist: Liszt's *Via Crucis* and other works

MAR 27 12.30 Pikkimusik: Yaron Deutsch, electric guitar: Dufourt, Hurel, Oehring, Romitelli
APR 1 *Anima Eterna* conducted by Jos van Immerseel, with Katerina Chrobokova, harpsichord: Poulen, Tchaikovsky

Kaaitheater
Sainctlettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59,
www.kaaitheater.be
APR 2 20.30 *Ictus Ensemble*

Musical Instruments Museum
Hofberg 2; 0475.76.23.32,
www.astoria-concerts.be
MAR 29 11.00 Olivier de Spiegeleir, piano: Haydn, Franck, Mendelssohn

Royal Conservatory of Brussels
Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
Concerts at 20.00:
MAR 26 *Les Folies Françoises* conducted by Patrick Cohén-Akenine, with Jean-Paul Fouchécourt, countertenor: Couperin's Concerts Royaux, Clérambault cantatas
MAR 27 The European Union Choir and Ensemble Orchestral de Bruxelles conducted by Jacques Vanherenthal: Bach's *St John Passion*, BWV 245
MAR 26 *Les Folies Françoises* conducted by Patrick Cohén-Akenine, with Jean-Paul Fouchécourt, countertenor: Couperin's Concerts Royaux, Clérambault cantatas
MAR 28 *Bruocella Symphony Orchestra* conducted by Jan Steenbrugge: Wagner, Sibelius, Dvorak (www.bso-orchestra.be/tickets)
MAR 30 London Conchord Ensemble: Schumann, Schubert, Bartók, Kurtág, Dohnányi

St Michael and St Gudula Cathedral
Sinter-Goedeleplein; 070.22.21.07,
www.ticketnet.be
MAR 29 16.00 *Regards croisés*: Joris Verdin, organ: Liszt, Goethals, Widor, Ligeti, Tournemire, Verdin 17.30
Regards croisés: Benoît Mernier, organ: De Marque, Foccroulle, Bach, Dusapin, Alain, Mernier

Wolubilis
Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30,
www.wolubilis.be
MAR 31 20.00 XXI Ensemble with Yumiko Kawai, clarinet; Andrew Hardy, violin; Tony Nys, viola; Blandine Waldmann, piano: Mozart, Bruch, Martinu, Bartók

Ghent
Conservatorium
Hoogpoort 64; 0496.52.12.21,
www.bso-orchestra.be/tickets
MAR 29 20.00 *Bruocella Symphony Orchestra* conducted by Jan Steenbrugge: Wagner, Sibelius, Dvorak

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01,
www.handelsbeurs.be
MAR 27 20.00 *Gent Hogeschool Conservatory Chamber Orchestra* conducted by Dirk Brossé, with Judith Ermert, cello; Eddy Vanoochuyse, clarinet: The Circle of Nature, a musical evocation of the four seasons (charity concert)

Ostend
Kursaal (Casino)
Monacoplein 2; 070.22.56.00,
www.kursaalostende.be
MAR 28 20.00 Brussels Philharmonic conducted by Michal Dworzynski, with Augustin Dumay, violin: Wagner, Korngold, Von Zemlinsky

Turnhout
De Warande
Warandestraat 42; 014.41.69.91,
www.brusselsphilharmonic.be
MAR 27 20.15 Brussels Philharmonic

conducted by Michal Dworzynski,
with Augustin Dumay, violin: Wagner,
Korngold, Von Zemlinsky



Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 1; 070.22.02.02,
www.vlaamseopera.be
Until MAR 26 15.00/19.30 Così fan tutte by Mozart with the Flemish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Attilio Cremonesi, directed by Guy Joosten

Brussels

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39,
www.demunt.be
Until APR 5 15.00/20.00 Le Grand Macabre by Ligeti with De Munt Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leo Hussain and Choirs conducted by Piers Maxim, staged by Alex Ollé and Valentina Carrasco

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera
Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02,
www.vlaamseopera.be
APR 1-9 19.30/15.00 Così fan tutte by Mozart with the Flemish Symphony Orchestra conducted by Attilio Cremonesi, staged by Guy Joosten with Maxim Mironov/Alexey Kudrya, Jacquelyn Wagner/Myrto Papatanasiu



Brussels

Archiduc
Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52,
www.archiduc.net
MAR 29 17.00 David Friesen Trio

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
MAR 30 20.00 Matthias Schriefl & Shreepfunk, contemporary jazz

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193-195;
02.733.13.78
Concerts at 20.30:
MAR 25 Al Orkesta MAR 28 18.00
Stéphanie Salkin Trio APR 1 Eve
Beuvens Quartet APR 2 Jazz Station
Big Band

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!

Walking with Dinosaurs

11-13 September
Antwerp Sportpaleis

Although the show doesn't arrive here until September, tickets for the Walking with Dinosaurs arena show, with animatronic dinosaurs, will be the hottest of the season. Booking only opened on Monday, but tickets could well already be in short supply. Antwerp Sportpaleis.

→ www.dinosaurlive.be



Sounds Jazz Club
Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,
www.soundsjazzclub.be
Concerts at 22.00:
MAR 25 Chamaquiendo, salsa MAR 26 21.00 The Singers Night MAR 27 symmEtrio MAR 28 Brussels Royal Conservatory Big Band conducted by Fabrice Alleman MAR 30 Master Session MAR 31 Laurent Dumont Soul Band APR 1 22.00 Chamaquiendo, salsa APR 2 FBI Trio

The Cotton Club - Grand Casino
Duquesnoystraat 14; 02.289.68.66
MAR 28 22.00 Trilogy

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
MAR 25 Misstrio hso MAR 26 Adam Rafferty (US) MAR 27 Pascal Mohy Trio with Ben Sluijs MAR 28 Johan Clement APR 1 Paul's 'Thank You' Party APR 2 10 Years 'Grand Jazz' - live from the Music Village

Woluwe-Saint-Pierre Cultural Centre
Charles Thielemanslaan 93;
02.773.05.81, www.art-culture.be
MAR 27 20.30 Thierry Crommen Quartet

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20,
www.stuk.be
APR 2 20.30 Minimal Complexity

Sint-Truiden

Academiezaal
Plankstraat 18; 011.70.17.00, tickets.
cc@sint-truiden.be
MAR 26 20.15 Masha Bijlsma Quintet featuring Bart Van Lier



Antwerp

Sportpaleis
Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060
Until MAR 28 20.30 Marco Borsato APR 1 20.30 Il Divo

Ardooie

Cultuurkapel De Schaduw
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82,
www.deschaduw.net
MAR 28 20.30 Jackie Poo & Dinner Deal

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24,
www.abconcerts.be
Concerts at 20.00:
MAR 25 Julien Doré MAR 27 Arsenal MAR 29 Kenza Farah APR 2 Fatima Spar & The Freedom Fries + Jaune Toujours

KVS Bol

Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.00,
www.kvs.be

MAR 31 20.00 Aka Moon & Black Machine (Baba Sissoko)

Le Bar du Matin
Alsembergsesteenweg 172;
02.537.71.59
MAR 26 21.00 Pc30

Le Botanique

Koningsstraat 236; 02.218.37.32,
www.botanique.be
Concerts at 20.00:

MAR 25 James Yuil + Peter Bjorn and John MAR 27 Musique à la Française Competition: Clandestine, Artémis, Invaderdz, L'Os de seiche, Scylla, La Biur + Carl MAR 28 Dick Annegarn. Deerhunter APR 1 Stuck in the Sound APR 2 Les Fatalis Picards

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34,
www.recycleart.be
MAR 28 23.00 Mort aux jeunes! with Corps mince de Françoise + DJs Hannah Holland + Jean Biche + The Bigger Splashes

Stekerlapatte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81,
www.stekerlapatte.be
MAR 28 21.30 Les Garçons du futur/ L'Ensemble Triadique de Cantor

Theatre La Roseraie

Alsembergsesteenweg 1299;
02.376.46.45, info@roseraie.org
MAR 27 20.30 La Voix est libre with Bernard Massuir

Ghent

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01,
www.handelsbeurs.be
Concerts at 20.00:
MAR 26 Danko Jones APR 1 Yevgeni

Hasselt

Ethias Arena - Grenslandhallen
Gouv. Verwighengsingel 70;
070.34.50.50, www.ilovethe90s.be
APR 2 20.00 Abbamania, disco concert APR 11 23.00-6.00 I Love the 90s - The Party

Kortrijk

Concertstudio
Conservatoriumplein 1,
www.dekreun.be
MAR 25 20.00 Vic Chesnutt with Elf Power

Rataplan

Wijnegemstraat 27; 03.292.97.40
MAR 27 20.30 Flamenco Puro

Brussels

Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be
MAR 25 15.00 Tatake, traditional Japanese percussion APR 2 20.15 Gianmaria Testa Trio, jazz, bossa nova, folk

Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00,
www.muziekpubliek.be
MAR 25 20.00 Broodje Brussel: Aurélie Dorzée (Bel)
MAR 27 20.00 Nu:trad: Iva Bittová (Czech)



Free subscription!

Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28,
www.desingel.be
MAR 26-27 20.00 Needcompany in The Porcelain Project, choreographed by Grace Ellen Barkey APR 1-3 20.00 Sister by and with Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Vincent Dumoyer

Brussels

Auderghem Cultural Centre
Vorstlaan 183; 02.660.03.03,
c.matthée@skynet.be
MAR 28-29 16.00 La Passerelle Dance Studio, school performance

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre
Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20,
www.ccjacquesfranck.be
MAR 26 20.30 Saho + Phax Ahamada, hip-hop
MAR 27-28 20.30 Saho + JC Pambé Wayack, hip-hop

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KVS Bol
Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.00,
www.kvs.be
MAR 26-28 20.00 Les Ballets C de la B in Ashes, new work by Koen Augustijnen, with music by Handel

P.A.R.T.S
Van Vlakemlaan 164; 02.344.55.98,
www.parts.be
MAR 28 10.00 Open House 2009: the acclaimed dance school opens its doors offering master classes, workshops and guided tours in 21 languages

Theatre National
Emile Jacqmainlaan 115; 02.203.41.55,
www.theatrenational.be
Until MAR 28 19.30/20.15 Demain, choreographed by Michèle Noiret, music by Todor Todoroff & Stevie Wishart

Wolubilis
Paul Hymanslaan 251; 02.761.60.30,
www.wolubilis.be
APR 2 20.30 Delay versus trio, performance, dance, music, video by and with Franck Beaubois, Lê Quan Ninh and Patricia Kuyper

Leuven
Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20,
www.stuk.be
APR 2-3 20.30 Les Ballets C de la B in Ashes, new work choreographed by Koen Augustijnen with music by Handel arranged by Wim Selles



Antwerp
Stadsschouwburg
Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900,
www.sherpa.be
Until APR 19 Elisabeth, musical (in Dutch)

Ardoorie
Cultuurkapel De Schaduw
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82,
www.deschaduw.net
MAR 27 20.30 Turbulentie (Turbulence) by Koala theaterbende (in Dutch)
APR 2 19.30 Dromendief (Dream thief) (in Dutch)

Brussels
Bronkstheater
Varkensmarkt 15-17; 02.218.20.15,
www.bronks.be
MAR 29 15.00 Theater Artemis in Ribstuk by Erik-Ward Geerlings (ten and up, in Dutch)

Kaaithéâtre
Sainctelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59,
www.kaaithéâtre.be
MAR 27-29 15.00/20.30 De Versie Claus by Mark Schaevers, staged and performed by Josse De Pauw (in Dutch)

The Warehouse Studio
Waelhemstraat 69a; itg.
theatreinbrussels.com
MAR 31-APR 4 20.00 Irish Theatre Group in Nurse Edith, based on the story of Edith Cavell, written and staged by Loretta Stanley (in English)



Antwerp
Contemporary Art Museum (MuHKA)
Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60,
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 Agirrekoika
Until MAR 29 Insert the Passing of a Perfect Day (Revisited), installations by Kathleen Vermeir

Fotomuseum
Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00
Until JUNE 7 Erwin Olaf: EyeCandy 1984-2009, retrospective
Until JUNE 7 Yang Fudong: East of Que Village, video installation
Until SEP 13 Photography in Belgium during the Interbellum

DON'T MISS

Ik Zeg Adieu

27 March, 20.30

College Don Bosco, Brussels

Medieval and Renaissance polyphony (including the haunting Flemish number after which this choir of 15 women is named) rubs shoulders with contemporary music in this exquisite fund-raising concert for Brussels-based charity Tele-Service. Lucy Grauman, the Brussels-based contralto who founded the ensemble in 2005, composed some of the songs. Reservations: aduroy@swing.be

→ www.guidesocial.be/tele-service

Modemuseum (MoMu)
Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70,
www.momu.be
Until AUG 16 Paper Fashion, the use of paper and related materials in modern and contemporary fashion and 1960s paper dresses from the Atopos collection

Royal Museum of Fine Arts
Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09
Until MAY 10 Camiel Van Breedam: Collages 2002-2008, recent works on paper by the contemporary Belgian artist
Until JUNE 14 Goya, Redon, Ensor: Grotesque paintings and drawings

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

Brussels
Argos Centre for Art and Media
Werfstraat 13; 02.229.00.03,
www.argoarts.org
Until APR 11 Language Works: Video, Audio and Poetry, works by Vito Acconi
Until APR 11 I'm With You in Rockland, video work by Karl Holmqvist

Atomium
Atomium Square; 02.475.47.72,
www.atomium.be
Until MAY 24 Bi-Polar. From South to North, scientific exhibition on current research and expeditions in the Arctic and Antarctic

Belgian Comic Strip Centre
Zandstraat 20; 02.219.19.80,
www.stripmuseum.be
Until MAY 17 Czechriculum Vitae, Czech history and legends in comic strips by contemporary Czech artists

Until JUNE 7 20 years of Manga in Europe, Japanese comic strips

Belvue Museum
Paleizenplein 7; 02.511.44.25,
www.belvue.be
Until MAY 31 Boy or Girl...Destiny for a Lifetime? Belgium 1830-2000, the evolution of perceptions of masculinity and femininity in Belgium over the past two centuries

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
Until APR 19 Robbrecht & Daem: Pacing through Architecture, works by the Ghent-based architects
Until MAY 17 Monumental installation by contemporary Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan (part of Turin Festival)
Until MAY 24 From Van Dyck to Bellotto: Splendour at the Court of Savoy, paintings from Turin's Galleria Sabauda, with works by Flemish masters, including Brueghel, Rubens and Van Dyck (part of Turin Festival)
Until JUNE 30 N.i.c.h.e. 360 architekten, scale models by Jan Mannaers and Stephane Beel

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,
www.designflanders.be
MAR 27-APR 26 Zilveren Sterkhof opdrachten 1996-2008, silver works by 13 Flemish designers commissioned by Antwerp's Zilvermuseum
MAR 27-APR 26 Krehky, design uit Tsjechië, works in glass and porcelain by contemporary Czech designers

Fondation pour l'Architecture
Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80,
www.fondationpourlarchitecture.be
Until OCT 18 De tijd van de boetiek (The Time of the Boutique), window shopping from 1800 to today

Jewish Museum of Belgium
Minimstraat 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

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

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

Ghent
Design Museum
Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99
Until JUNE 1 Connections, a selection of 100 textile objects from the 15th century to the present day
Until JUNE 1 Cool Dozen+, 13 chairs and 13 textile objects by Finnish designers
Until JUNE 1 Henry van de Velde, book designs by the Belgian architect (1863-1957)

Dr Guislain Museum
Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95,
www.museumdrguislain.be

Until APR 12 The Game of Madness: On Lunacy in Film and Theatre, representations of madness in films, plays, paintings and contemporary art

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

Leuven
Tweebronnen library
Rijschoolstraat 4; 016.22.65.22
Until APR 19 Ceci n'est pas la BD flamande (This is Not the Flemish Comic Strip), installation by 20 contemporary Flemish comic illustrators and writers

Maaseik
Maaseik Museum
Lekkerstraat 5; 089.81.92.99
Until MAR 31 The Terracotta Army of Xi'an: 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

Mechelen
Speelgoedmuseum (Toy Museum)
Nekkerspoelstraat 21; 015.55.70.75,
www.speelgoedmuseum.be
Until MAR 31 Gils, Belgische saga van de elektrische trein (Belgian Saga of the Electric Train)
Until SEP 30 Cowboys and Indians

Ostend
Kunstmuseum Aan Zee
Romestraat 11; 070.22.50.05,
www.beaufort03.be
Until OCT 4 Beaufort 03 - Art by the Sea: Third edition of the contemporary art triennial, with works by 29 Belgian and international artists as well as outdoor installations and sculptures in various locations of the Flemish coast

Tervuren
Royal Museum for Central Africa
Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11,
www.africamuseum.be
Until AUG 31 Omo: People & Design, Hans Silvester's photographs of southwestern Ethiopia's nomadic tribes and objects from the museum's collection

Waregem
Be Part
Westerlaan 17; 056.62.94.10
Until MAR 29 Steve Schepens: Horror 30, installations and videos



Ars Musica 2009: 20th edition of the contemporary classical music festival featuring emerging musicians and composers, plus tributes to established modernists Ligeti, Dufourt and Pousseur
Until APR 10 at venues across the country
02.641.10.20, www.arsmusica.be

Brussels
Brussels Tango Festival: Swing to the rhythms of Argentinian music and dance at the fifth anniversary of the capital's tango festival. Includes workshops, dance demonstrations and concerts
APR 2-6 in venues across the city
www.brusselstangofestival.be

Passa Porta Festival: Second edition of the international literary event
MAR 26-29 at Passa Porta, A Dansaertstraat 46, and Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
www.passaporta.be

DUSK 'TIL DAWN

SAFFINA RANA

NEMO Bulex, Brussels



Plastic Soul (right) and Piotr in the NEMO DJ box at Bulex

"NEMO nights are all about new music and all about fun," says graphic designer Gil Decuyper, aka DJ and producer Plastic Soul, founder of the New Electronic Musical Organisation. "When it stops being fun, I'll stop doing it."

And so will I. This won't be anytime soon since NEMO parties are reliably some of the best underground nights in Brussels.

My first was five years ago when an artist friend took me to a barge moored at a desolate section of the Brussels canal. Below deck, I found 300 people grinning at me with their arms up in the air to some of the most uplifting and energising music I've ever experienced.

Gil has given a start to now-established Belgian DJs like Cosy Mozzo and Pierre as well as collaborations with international names such as America's DJ ESP, Woody McBride.

This year, NEMO turns 12. It has grown from 300 to 3,000 revellers and established a monthly residency across the canal in a former school for canal watercraft. The classrooms have been converted into separate concert halls, bars and exhibition spaces by non-profit organisation Bulex. It feels like a Berlin squat and is a haven for alternative culture. On NEMO nights, there are often three other parties and a concert or two going on.

The corridors are awash with frenetic energy and sticky with spilled beer as people move from one room the next, discovering what's on offer: anything from breakbeat to gypsy punk. It's not a place to wear your best shoes but when Plastic Soul, Philz and new resident Piotr hit the decks, it's electric.

→ www.underground-adventures.be

Next NEMO: Saturday, 4 April, from 21.00 (to 6.00)

Where: Bulex, Ancienne Ecole de Batellerie, Claessensstraat 10, Brussels

Tickets: Presale only from FNAC or from Bulex on Thursday nights



FACE OF FLANDERS



Catherine Verfaillie

Two recent news stories have put the accent again on stem cell research. In one, a clinic in Cologne was revealed to be offering for sale fake stem cells, which were alleged to be useful in treating a variety of conditions including heart disease, Alzheimer's, blindness and Parkinson's disease. In another, more far-reaching development, US President Obama overturned a ban brought in by his predecessor which cut off federal funding for stem cell research.

Flanders, it turns out, leads the world in stem cell research. It has a researcher of the highest order: Catherine Verfaillie, who is currently professor of haematology at the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL) where she heads the Stem-Cell Institute. Her arrival in 2005 was a coming home: she graduated in medicine at KUL in 1982 before going on to specialise at the University Hospital in internal medicine, and in blood diseases such as leukaemia.

In 1987 she travelled to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and St. Paul as a research fellow, on a trip that was supposed to last a year. "The initial plan was six months in Minneapolis, six months in Seattle, then back to Belgium where there was a faculty position waiting for me at the university," she told an interviewer for

the Minnesota alumni magazine in 2002.

Instead, she got a taste for lab research in the laboratory of Dr. Philip McGlave, who was then doing pioneering work in bone marrow transplants. Verfaillie made such progress that she went after a faculty position in the transplantation programme. "I applied, got my Green Card and stayed," she said.

Research on bone marrow soon led her to specialise in stem cells. Bone marrow contains what are called haemopoietic stem cells, which produce blood – that's what makes bone marrow transplants so helpful for leukaemia patients. Other organs contain stem cells, which are part of the normal process of tissue regeneration. Adult stem cells like these, however, are different from embryonic stem cells, which have the potential to differentiate into any kind of body tissue: muscle, blood-cells, skin and so on. So stem cells in the intestines, for example, help recreate new intestinal tissue as the body continually regenerates. But they cannot be used to generate anything else, such as skin for example.

Verfaillie's laboratory's big breakthrough was in the discovery of a cell which could combine the versatility of an embryonic stem cell with the simplicity of production (or harvest) of an adult stem cell. For one thing, the new cells did not require to be taken from embryos – which thus avoids the main ethical question in the field of stem cell research.

Problems arose in 2008, when New Scientist magazine revealed that some of the data used in certain papers published by Verfaillie's unit in Minnesota had been falsified. Verfaillie herself was not involved in the falsification, but she admitted responsibility as head of the lab for the lack of supervision of a PhD student involved. KUL stood behind her, and she came out of the affair with her reputation intact. More importantly, the irregularities were shown not to have undermined the research's fundamental discovery: the so-called MAP (multi adult progenitor) cells do seem to hold the key to the regeneration of many types of tissue, with the implications that has for degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and heart disease – as well as other conditions like diabetes.

"We're concentrating on basic research," she said in a recent interview (Prof. Verfaillie was out of the country when *Flanders Today* tried to contact her). "Because it was by accident that we discovered that bone marrow cells from an adult mouse or human are able to reform themselves into just about any other kind of cell. And we still don't know exactly how the switch works."

⇒ www.kuleuven.be/scil

ALAN HOPE

TALKING DUTCH

ALISTAIR MACLEAN



stemplicht →

You will all remember the images of endless lines of people queuing in the dusty South African heat to vote for the first time. I also remember shifting slightly guiltily, as I had not voted for years. Like most things, the vote is so easy to take for granted, once you have it.

A letter followed by a leaflet arrived some weeks ago inviting me to register to vote in the European elections on 7 June. Certain non-Belgians resident here can register on the electoral roll before the end of March. There are certain conditions attached.

U moet de nationaliteit van een lidstaat van de EU bezitten – You must "possess the nationality" of a Member State of the EU or, simply, be an EU citizen; you must be registered in your municipality and on the electoral roll; and *u moet minstens 18 jaar oud zijn* – you must be at least 18 years old.

Time is pressing: I have until the end of the month to return the filled-in *aanvraag om inschrijving op de kiezerslijst* – application for registration on the electoral roll.

Yet I hesitate. In a small paragraph in the brochure I read: In België geldt de stemplicht –

In Belgium compulsory voting applies (*stem* – vote, *plicht* – obligation). So if you register on the electoral roll, you are *wettelijk verplicht* – legally obliged to vote on 7 June, and I suppose every four years. What happens if you don't vote? Are

you fined? And what if you're abroad or nursing a broken leg?

Belgium was the first country to make voting compulsory – this was at the end of the 19th century – and is one of the few countries where this applies at all levels of the democratic process. Two years later, in 1894, universal male suffrage was introduced; women had to wait until 1949 for the same right.

Those in favour of compulsory voting argue that decisions made by a democratically-elected government carry more legitimacy where the entire population participates in the elections, while opponents retort that it is not compatible with the principle of individual freedom. The Netherlands followed Belgium in introducing compulsory voting, but abolished the system in 1970.

The requirement ensures a very high turnout, but also a relatively large number of spoilt ballot papers. In recent elections, some 9% failed to vote, while 7% spoilt their ballot papers. And, as you can imagine, abolishing compulsory voting would most likely result in a dramatic drop in participation.

So what to do? Be *wettelijk verplicht* to vote or not vote at all? Well, it's not as if it's every four weeks, and every vote counts. The form seems quite easy to fill in, so here goes!

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The last word →→→

Taken for a ride

"They asked me out of the blue if I wanted to do it. Next day they gave me the number of the photographer, and before I knew it I was sitting naked on a bike."

Joke Eeckhout, sister of top cyclist Niko, after she modelled for a poster for the E3-Prijs race

Last request

"Sir, can you help me? I want to die." Amelie Van Esbeen, 93, who started a hunger strike because doctors will not allow her to end her life unless she has a life-threatening illness

No laughing matter

"Being funny is punished in the literary world. Right away you get the label "not serious" tacked onto you. And if there's one writer who has a laugh about the whole literary industry, at other writers and at himself, that's me."

Herman Brusselmans, publishing his 50th book last week, laments he has only ever won one award – 25 years ago – and even that was shared.