

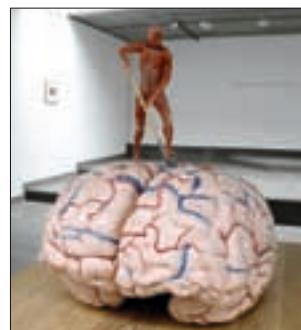
Crowds gather at port 7

The world's largest container ship pulled into the Port of Antwerp last week to the delight of residents. Officials, though, complained that its load had to be lightened because the Scheldt River has not yet been deepened



Size matters 8

Art Brussels is the biggest contemporary art fair in the country, showcasing the best of local and international modern artists. Don't forget your credit card



Tattoo you 10

Europe's first tattoo school is now open in Antwerp. Our dedicated journalist pulls up a pant leg and lets the inking begin



Art in your swimsuit

The third edition of the playful outdoor exhibition is back on the Flemish coast

IAN MUNDELL

There's stimulation for the mind as well as the body on Flemish beaches this summer, thanks to Beaufort03 contemporary art exhibition. Thirty works are installed from De Panne in the lower west to Knokke-Heist in the upper east, some in sight of the sea, others tucked away in more unusual places. And for those (odd) days when the sun doesn't shine, there's Beaufort Indoors at the Kunstmuseum aan Zee in Ostend.

Beaufort takes place every three years, and for this third edition it has a new curator in Phillip Van den Bossche, director of the Kunstmuseum aan Zee. He had no desire to change the basic concept, but he has introduced a new element.

"I invited the artists to come over

and talk about the history and heritage of the Belgian coast," he explains. "I also talked with them all about the place of art and artists in society, and this translated into a dialogue with the locations. That can be a dialogue with the heritage of a place, but it can also be with a landscape and the place of art within that landscape."

One result is that there are a number of works that span across the visual arts and architecture divide, toying with building forms or presenting variations on the beach pavilion. Another is that almost all of the 30 works are new productions made for Beaufort, rather than being brought in from other contexts as in previous editions.

→ *Continued on page 5*



© Koen de Waal

Sacking lands TV chef in hot water

Employees' rights not to be trifled with, say unions

As the economy enters the doldrums, bankruptcies increase, factories stand on the brink of collapse and unemployment seems set to soar, this week's industrial relations headlines were filled with one thing: how rude is a chef allowed to be when sacking a waiter?

In the spotlight: Claudio Dell'Anno, the young, tempestuous and charismatic chef of Restaurant Dell'Anno in Kortrijk. And also, not incidentally, one of the contestants in VTM's spring reality television series *Mijn Restaurant!*. In one of last week's broadcasts, Claudio lost his temper and gave head waiter Benjamin his marching orders. As we watched, Claudio berated and

browbeat the man, called him names and forced him to show the contents of his backpack on his way out to ensure he wasn't stealing anything. In Benjamin's absence we had already heard Claudio express the fear that the man might "clean the joint out".

It's called reality television because you couldn't make this stuff up. The next day's media carried protests from unions representing catering industry workers, pointing out that the law requires more of an excuse for sacking a man than "not wanting to see his face again," and threatening Claudio with a possible custodial sentence should a complaint ever be made. "Employees are not tools,"

thundered the socialist union ABW. Labour law professor Roger Blanpain called Claudio's behaviour "completely unacceptable".

By Friday, the bosses had joined the fray. Unizo, the organisation representing the self employed, promised to stand by Claudio if there should come a judicial procedure, the slightest hint of which had still not been given. As a safety measure, Unizo sent its human resources management coach to Kortrijk. Claudio, meanwhile, apologised "in front of the whole world" and blamed TV producers Kanakna for making him re-enact his sacking of Benjamin with a little extra spice. ♦

Antwerp and Leuven are smartest cities

New guide to the cleverest cities ignores Brussels, Paris, Rome

ALAN HOPE

Antwerp and Leuven are among the 50 cleverest cities in Europe, according to a new book published last week. Antwerp is praised for its fashion, diamonds and port industry, and Leuven for beer and biotechnology. Both cities, like the other 48, "have a very creative population, outstanding entrepreneurs and an attractive reputation," the book says.

Slimme steden: van Antwerpen tot Zürich (Smart Cities: from Antwerp to Zürich) was written by the editorial team at the Dutch newspaper *Het Financieele Dagblad*. The principle derives from the work of American urban studies theorist and economist

Richard Florida, who proposed the idea that cities with large numbers of information workers, creative artists, lesbians and gay men – and a group he calls "high bohemians" – would show higher levels of economic development. A creative city would attract not only businesses and investment, he suggested, but also more creative people, and so the circle would continue.

Antwerp and Leuven are the only two Belgian cities on the list, which, incidentally, doesn't bother with rankings within the 50. Perhaps more surprisingly, the list neglects world-class cities like

→ *Continued on page 3*

CONTENTS

News 2-3

- ◆ News in brief
- ◆ Fifth Column
- ◆ Students election demands rebuffed

Feature 5

- ◆ Beaufort03: cool art at the coast

Business 7

- ◆ French buy controlling interest in BNP Paribas
- ◆ Antwerp welcomes world's largest container ship

Arts 8

- ◆ Art Brussels seduces with size

Active 9

- ◆ Museum of Natural Sciences

Living 10-11

- ◆ Europe's first tattoo school
- ◆ Old age ain't no place for sissies

Agenda 13-15

- ◆ Three pages of arts and events

Back page 16

- ◆ Face of Flanders: Raymond van het Groenewoud
- ◆ Talking Dutch: beledigen – our language expert takes offence
- ◆ The Last Word: what they're saying in Flanders

Correction

Last week in Flanders Today (8 April edition), we stated in the article "Lost and found" that Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, lost his booty in 1477. The correct year is 1476. We also stated that he died at Grandson, Switzerland, when in fact it was during the Battle of Nancy in France. Flanders Today regrets both errors.

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 Schaeclaekens, Steven Tate, 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
Subscriptions: France Lycops
Tel: 02.373.83.59
E-mail: subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu
Advertising: Evelyne Fregonese
Tel: 02.373.83.57
E-mail: advertising@flanderstoday.eu
Verantwoordelijke uitgever:
Derek Blyth

Breaking news

Get the news from Flanders online in English and French at www.flanderstoday.eu



FLANDERS TODAY
APRIL 15, 2009

News in brief

Federal mobility minister Etienne Schouppe has called for a report by the road safety institute (BIVV) into the safety or otherwise of **MP3 players on the roads**. The report will look at the dangers to drivers, cyclists and pedestrians of listening to personal music players in traffic. Although personal stereos have existed for 30 years, the danger is increasing as more people use the devices, the government said.

Asylum-seekers with TB are walking around free instead of being kept in medical isolation, according to the professional doctors' magazine *De Artsenkrant*. The Sint-Elisabeth hospital in Turnhout, situated near the Merksplas asylum centre, has reported cases of infected patients who used to be isolated by centre staff.

An increasing number of holidaymakers are taking out **cancellation insurance** to cover their losses in case a change in job situation forces a holiday to be cancelled, according to travel organisations. The number of temporary policies has gone up by 6%, with an even larger increase in annual travel insurance policies, which also include cancellation insurance.

Ghent police had banned a **planned game of "Gotcha"** due to take place this week because the outdoor game, in which players shoot each other with water pistols, could cause distress to members of the public who may think real attacks are taking place. Some 700 people had signed up via Facebook to take part in the game. "We will not take the risk that a police officer overreacts," Commissioner of Public Order Patric Joos said. "After recent stabbing and shooting incidents, our force is on the alert."

French movie legend **Jean-Paul Belmondo** last week celebrated his 76th birthday in Ostend in the prestigious Marina restaurant on the seafront. Belmondo was accompanied by his regular companion, Flemish Playboy model Barbara Gandolfi. After a meal of asparagus with ham and osso buco, Belmondo left for Paris to celebrate with his daughter Stella, aged 5.

Not a single case of **insider trading** has yet reached the courts, despite files being opened against

Jewish outrage at Samson opera



The Jewish community in Belgium last week lashed out at Flanders Opera – over a production that will not take place until the end of the month.

The bone of contention is the production of *Samson et Dalila* by French composer Camille Saint-Saëns, directed by Israeli-Palestinian duo Omri Nitzan and Amir Nizar-Zuabi. Although details of the exact plans for the performance are not yet known outside of the company, they have already said that they regard the Samson story as an allegory for the current situation in the Middle East. The opera production will also be accompanied by debates and film screenings.

In the latest issue of the Flemish magazine *Joods Actueel*, editorialist Guido Joris attacks the inclusion of films he says are anti-Israeli, such as *Arna's Children*, which describes the 2002 attack on the Palestinian refugee camp Jenin as "a bloodbath". He also expressed concern that the décor and costumes of the opera might be provocative, including the burning of an Israeli flag "as has happened before in Belgium".

"Flanders Opera is absolutely not an anti-Israeli organisation," said opera spokesman Wilfried Eetezonne. "We are very disturbed by this premature criticism." The company manager, Aviel Cahn, who is Jewish, said in a statement: "It is the duty of art in our time to look at trends and society in a critical manner. Our challenge with the production of *Samson et Dalila* is to cast a critical eye on an extremely complex situation in which the struggle between oppressors and oppressed provokes an explosion of violence."

The production (photo above) has the support of the EU's commissioner for foreign affairs, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, and will also be presented in Tel Aviv. Cahn invited *Joods Actueel* to a performance and to take part in a debate. The magazine has yet to reply.

38 suspects in 17 cases over the last four years, according to the justice ministry in response to a parliamentary question. Five of the 17 were immediately dropped due to lack of evidence. Others saw the charges dropped at a later stage, while some have still to be investigated.

The **celebrated Minimes church** in central Brussels is looking for funding of €75,000 for the construction of a new stage, after being ordered by Brussels region to break down the old one, which has stood since 1964. The stage was required after the Second Vatican Council made all priests celebrate Mass facing the congregation but is also used for choir and orchestra in the church's many highly-regarded concerts. Brussels City, meanwhile, is about to start work on restoration of the roof, upper passages and staircases, at a cost of €1 million.

to protest at the conditions in which rabbits are kept before being sent to slaughter. According to GAIA, which filmed conditions in one breeding place with hidden cameras, the rabbits suffer even worse conditions than battery hens, sustaining injuries to ears and feet, respiratory infections and digestive problems. One in four dies before reaching maturity.

Belgian **vocal trance band Milk Inc** will perform at Rock Werchter, it was announced last week, completing the bill for the four-day event. At the same time, organisers announced the confirmation of Belgian acts Arsenal, Triggerfinger, Lady Linn and Jasper Erkens, as well as US band Metro Station. All combi-tickets are now sold out, as are tickets for Friday 3 and Saturday 4 July. Other acts already announced include Oasis, Coldplay, Metallica, Grace Jones and Kings of Leon.

→ www.rockwerchter.be

Animal rights organisation GAIA has launched a campaign

Creativity key to cities' prosperity]

→ *Continued from page 1*

Paris and London.

France, for example, provides Nice (conventions, technology), Marseilles (music and port) and Lille (art and, oddly, train connections). The United Kingdom sees four cities generally considered old-industrial: Liverpool, Glasgow, Newcastle and Manchester. If you had to ask, the reasons are, respectively: music, media, biotechnology and football.

Just as on the school playground, so on the world stage: when it comes to cleverness, the little guy often leaves the bigger ones behind. Among the less-celebrated cities on the list

are Essen in Germany (mining history), Torshavn in the Faroe Islands (fisheries and roof insulation technology), Cagliari on Sardinia (ceramics) and Väckjö in Sweden (green tech). The cutest of the whole list must be Billund in Denmark, home of Lego, tinder for the fires of so much creativity.

There is no shortage of capitals, but mainly in central and eastern Europe: Tallinn (technology), Tirana (architecture), Budapest (art), Bratislava (building), Vilnius (art) and Sofia (film). Helsinki (technology) gets in, as do Oslo (graphic design), Stockholm (fashion) and Copenhagen (design).

Least surprising choice for a clever city? Athens, selected for its archaeology and shipping. Some things never change. ♦



© Reporters

The INIBAP banana biodiversity lab in Leuven has the largest banana gene bank in the world

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

3,603

telephone taps installed by police in 2007, according to the latest annual report on Special Investigative Methods (BOM) compiled by the federal department for penal policy. The total is 600 more than the previous year.



615

paid informants currently maintained by police in 2007. Each received between €250 and €6,000, leading to more than 1,000 arrests and the seizures of 166 cars, 2.7 tonnes of hard drugs, 50 tonnes of soft drugs, 569,000 ecstasy pills, 76 firearms and 8.6 million cigarettes, as well as €8 million in cash.

1,334

warrants to investigate bank accounts in 2007, 424 of them in Bruges alone. The warrants concerned 664 investigations involving 813 suspects in cases of money laundering, fraud and drugs. In 70% of cases the search turned up useful evidence, with only 27 giving no result.

47

bank accounts frozen in 2007 belonging to 45 suspects in 23 investigations of criminal organisations. But three out of four were later reckoned to be pointless. All of the above figures come from the BOM report cited above.

11,600

signatures on a petition against the further development of petroleum refining in Antwerp's port area. The petition was delivered last week to Flemish planning minister Dirk Van Mechelen.

2,140

lightning conductors containing radioactive material removed under the supervision of the Federal Nuclear Safety Agency since its campaign started several years ago. Another 1,040 were investigated but found to be safe.

592

fines for human traffickers who brought illegal immigrants into Belgium in 2007, up from 530 in 2006. The total value of the fines reached €980,500, according to figures from the migration ministry.

€300 million

loan from the European Investment Bank to the Belwind wind-power park 46 kilometres off the coast of Zeebrugge, the first such windmill park the bank has supported

€370 million

in uncut diamonds will be brought to market with 15 Antwerp traders by the Russian producer Alrosa, breaking radio silence for the first time since January, according to a deal struck last week with the Antwerp World Diamond Centre.

1,258

complaints in 2008 about railway timekeeping, twice as many as in 2006 and 163 more than 2007. The rail ombudsman described the figures as "an unfortunate business".

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

A presidential campaign

The campaign for the regional elections has yet to start in full, but already some of the story lines are becoming apparent.

One of those is the liberal Open VLD claiming the concept of *goed bestuur* (good governance). This is remarkable, because *goed bestuur* are the exact words Yves Leterme (CD&V) used in 2003 and 2007 to present himself as an alternative to governments lead by the liberals. Partrick Dewael, Open VLD member and now president of the federal chamber of representatives, nicknamed Leterme "notary" for this, implying that the former prime minister had no vision.

A much-discussed television documentary about Guy Verhofstadt this week fit wonderfully this new image of liberals as good governors. It showed him during the long and painful formation of the federal government. At one point, Verhofstadt is asked to do the job Yves Leterme is unable to. King Albert is even seen greeting Verhofstadt with the words "the saviour of our country" – although there might have been some irony in that.

Another element which will certainly pop up throughout the campaign is "the presidential aspect". Even though the Flemish minister-president (or the prime minister, for that matter) is not elected directly, there is often one party that tries to turn the election into a "presidential" vote.

This time it is the Christian Democrats. CD&V party president Marianne Thyssen recently stated that her party is the only one with a candidate for the post of Flemish minister-president: Kris Peeters, who already holds the post. Who is the liberal candidate? Thyssen asked rhetorically. Is it party president Bart Somers? Somers headed the Flemish government for one year in 2003-2004, but that was not a great success.

Then there is vice-minister-president Dirk Van Mechelen, who has been a member of the Flemish government for 10 years. Though well respected throughout, he is not a suitable candidate for the simple reason that he has no charisma at all. The socialist SPA also prefers to keep quiet about its candidate, which is probably wise, as its prospects at the ballot box are pretty poor.

This presidential element is again a reversal of previous campaigns. Before, it was mostly the liberals who tried to put the emphasis on personal leadership, with Verhofstadt as their glowing beacon. After all these years, he still is, even though he focuses on the European rather than the Flemish elections.

And maybe that is where the real "presidential" election will take place. Not only Verhofstadt, but also the former prime ministers Leterme and Jean-Luc Dehaene, as well as the outsider Jean-Marie Dedecker, will take part.

No extra day off exams

Universities are largely ignoring requests from politicians for an exam-free Monday

Higher education establishments all over Flanders have been asked by the region's education minister Frank Vandenbroucke to take account of elections in their exam planning in June.

Sunday, 7 June is the day of regional and European elections, and organisations representing students at the region's universities and colleges (hogescholen) have demanded the right to vote in peace, undisturbed by the stress of exams the next day.

"On 7 June we have to be able to carry out our civic duty," said Klaas Keirse of the Union of Flemish Students (VSS). "A student who carries out his civic duty on Sunday should be able to get down to work on his courses on the Monday, and then only on the Tuesday take an exam."

In Wallonia, Vandenbroucke's counterpart has also asked for an

exam-free day on 8 June so that those students who spent the day ticking several boxes on ballot papers on the 7th are not forced to spend the 8th ticking boxes on exam papers. The Federation of Francophone Students claims many students need the extra day to travel back to their place of study from their place of official residence, in most cases their parents' homes.

A spokesman for Vandenbroucke said the ministry "doesn't want to dictate to the institutions. Exams on the 8th ought to present no real problems." The authorities at the Catholic University of Leuven appear to agree. "On 8 June our exams start, so the students ought to be able easily to work out that the previous day may require them to lose a few hours because of the elections," said the university's vice rector Ludo Melis. ♦

Limburg launches lips logo



© Province Limburg

LIMBURG

province of Limburg, the logo was launched last week in Maastricht and will be used for promotions on both sides of the region's very permeable border.



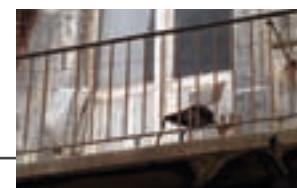
***All you need to know
about banking services
on arriving in Belgium***

Take advantage of our ING Expat Convenience Services
+ 32 2 464 66 64 - expat@ing.be - www.ing.be

Many banking services are available to expatriates living in Belgium but there is nothing you need to know about making such arrangements. That's a task for the ING Convenience Services experts. Your bank accounts and cards can be ready for you the moment you arrive in Belgium. ING's Expat Services have 40 years of experience to help make your stay in Belgium as financially smooth as possible.

ING 

"It doesn't look like a work of art. It looks like a building in urgent need of renovation. It's a blot on the cityscape." Blankenberge mayor Luc Monset is not happy with the Beaufort 03 contribution of Robert Kusmirowski



Art in your swimsuit

Beaufort03 makes architecture art – and vice versa

→ *Continued from page 1*

Also new is the idea of a single indoor exhibition, rather than a series of separate shows along the coast. It is "one large historical exhibition here in the museum, talking about artists, writers, architects and composers who lived and worked along the Belgian coast from 1830 to 1958," explains Van den Bossche. "There again you have this very strong line of history in the inside, which is in a dialogue with the outside."

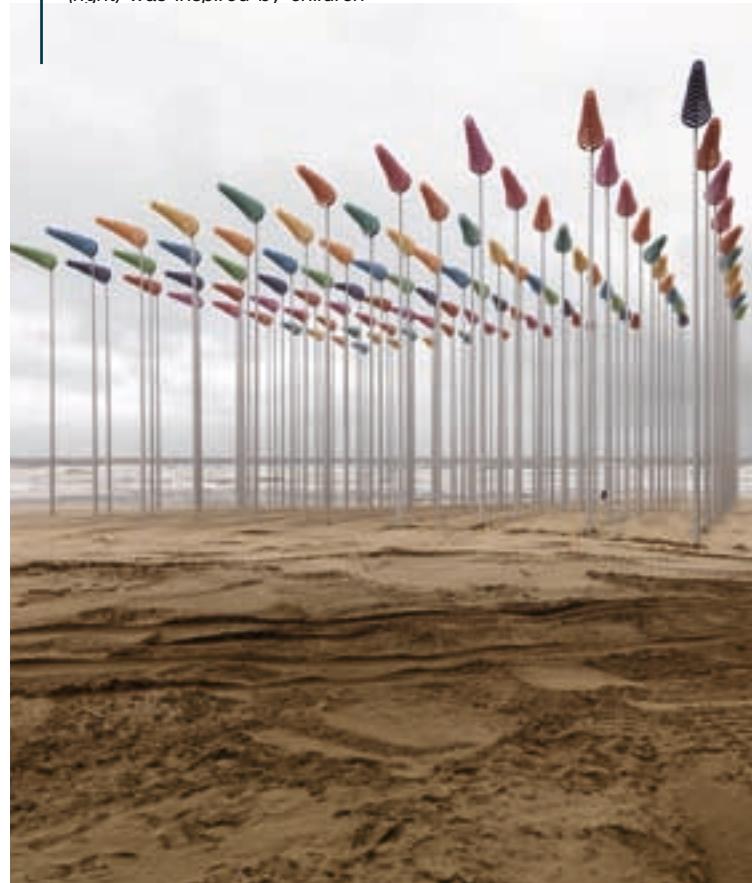
He thinks these lines of dialogue have worked particularly well in the case of work such as "Le Vent souffle où il veut" ("The Wind Blows Where It Will") by French artist Daniel Buren, which places a forest of 100 brightly coloured wind socks on the beach at De Haan. Another is "Saqueando nuestra historia" by the Chilean collective Brigada Ramona Parra, bringing the Latin American tradition of mural painting to a tunnel beneath the sand that leads to the sea at De Haan. "It's a very special location, and I think the only tunnel that still exists on the Belgian coast," says Van den Bossche.

Beaufort also includes a strong selection of local work. "I think it's important to give a platform to young Belgian artists," Van den Bossche says. "It's a chance for them to be in this international project and to make a large-scale work for the first time."

Among these he particularly likes Sven 't Jolle's "Holiday in Melsbroek (127)" at Nieuwpoort. Inspired by the picture of a children's play area at a centre for asylum seekers, he has placed large, brightly coloured plastic toys behind a high security fence, right on the beach. "It's a work that is artistically but also socially very important," says Van den Bossche.

The same mix of art and politics can be seen in another Belgian work – "Gaagui" by Philip Aguirre Y Otegui. This large sculpture, also at Nieuwpoort, was designed and constructed in collaboration with craftsmen in a Senegalese coastal village, its form recalling the fishing boats used by migrants to reach the Canary Islands. The work doubles as a pavilion, containing information on the question of migration, with the added twist that you have to cross a small river by boat if you

Robert Kusmirowski's artificially aged house (above, right) should be one of Beaufort's biggest attractions this year; Daniel Buren's wind socks (above); Sven 't Jolle's piece (right) was inspired by children



want to reach it from the beach.

Van den Bossche thinks the artistic dialogue that he has introduced into Beaufort will be the beginning of something big. "I see this as a very important step, and we still have further to go," he says, "I think it will help Beaufort reach a higher international level."

One possibility for the future is to develop further the idea of pavilions. "One of my dreams is to have maybe 10 really large pavilions all along the Belgian coast that, in the tradition of the 19th century, are a kind of temporary architecture you can place on the beach, made by an artist or by an artist and an architect," he says. Then his imagination really takes off. "One of my dream-like images is that there would be a pavilion like that and inside, for one day, under high security, you could go and see a painting of James Ensor in your swimsuit." ♦

→ www.beaufort03.be

A day (or two) at the beach

Our guide to a slice of Beaufort

If you are really dedicated and drive from site to site, you can probably do all of Beaufort in a single day. But it's much more fun to take it easy and allow yourself to be distracted by the other sights along the way.

If you only have a day rather than the whole summer, Blankenberge is a good place start for a flavour of the whole project. Between the station and the boardwalk you can see "The Façade" by Polish artist Robert Kusmirowski, a house in Weststraat that the artist has artificially aged so that it looks like something out of an East European ghost story. He's even given it a Polish address.

Once on the coastline you can turn left and head for Thomas Houseago's "Untitled (Red Man)", a large sculpture looking out to sea, which can only be reached by crossing a river in a small ferry. If you arrive when the service isn't running, the effect is a bit underwhelming, at which point it is safer to turn right and walk towards the pier.

On the way, you will pass David Černý's famous "Babies" climbing the front of the casino, one of several works from past editions of Beaufort that

have found a permanent home on the coast. The pier now also hosts "Ikarus", a deceptively simple work by German artist Lothar Hempel in which an image of a dancer in mid-jump appears to float over the sea and sand, even over the bank of apartment blocks that line the sea front. (See photo, page 1) The effect is surprising and very pleasing.

Next, take the coastal tram northeast and step off in Zeebrugge for Giuseppe Gabellone's "Untitled", a series of photographs tucked away in derelict sheds behind the old town hall. It's a fantastically eerie setting if you are there alone. The nearby port area is also a fitting home for Belgian artist Luc Deleu's "Orbino/Orban Space", a pavilion made of shipping containers.

If you find this too industrial, press on to Knokke-Heist, where, at one end of town, Peter Rogiers' monstrous sculpture "A Fisherman's Friend" stalks through a sedate group of villas, and at the other, Leonor Atunes has sketched the outline and architectural elements of a long-gone coastal mansion with 15 white beach huts.

→ www.dekusttram.be

CLEARLY NOT MOVED BY GOSELIN



The items you treasure most deserve the greatest attention when you move. They are treated with the utmost care by those meticulous men sent by Gosselin, who wrap them in that specific Gosselin paper and move them in accordance with the Gosselin master plan specially drawn up for you. Gosselin has over 70 years' experience in VIP treatment. Their service is so impeccable that you will be moved when you see their specialists at work.

Gosselin was the first moving company in Belgium to have achieved FAIM/ISO, the international moving industry's most prestigious accreditation. With their 32 own branches across Europe, Central-Asia and the Caucasus, you will no doubt receive the service you have always been looking for.



lacma



AMSA



WE KNOW HOW TO MOVE PEOPLE

Belcrownlaan 23 | B-2100 Antwerp - Belgium
T +32-3-360 55 00 | T +32-2-772 34 87 | F +32-3-360 55 79

WWW.GOSSELINGROUP.EU | INFO@GOSSELINGROUP.EU



GOSSELIN MOVING

BELGIUM - MEMBER GOSSELIN GROUP

French stake in BNP Paribas “pure scandal”, says economist

The acquisition of a major 17% stake in Paris-based bank BNP Paribas by the French state is a “pure scandal”, according to leading Flemish economist Paul De Grauwe.

BNP Paribas is still in line to take over the remains of Fortis Bank in Belgium, under a deal which would have provided the Belgian state with enough BNP equity to make it the majority shareholder. The deal was brought to a grinding halt last December through legal action brought by a consortium of small shareholders in Fortis, who considered the sale price too low and protested at not being consulted.

The latest move by the Sarkozy government has spread discontent in the takeover even further. Now opposition parties intend to grill the government as soon as parliament resumes after Easter. One of the main questions will be: how much did prime minister Herman Van Rompuy know about the impending French acquisition when he met with Sarkozy at the end of March?

The French stake means Paris will now be the major shareholder in BNP Paribas, not Brussels – with all that entails for the defence of national interests. The Belgian stake will be diluted by 7% of its original

value through the creation of new shares.

Belgian opposition parties Groen! and SP.A fear that the Belgian government will not be able to counter attempts by Paris to direct policy. Even though the new shares are not voting shares, pointed out Meyrem Almaci of Groen!, “Sarkozy will know very well where he wants to go. Our position will be superseded by French interests.”

De Grauwe, meanwhile, a professor at the Catholic University of Leuven, does not mince words: “We’ve once again let ourselves be rolled

over by the French. They dilute the shareholding, and we stand by and let them get on with it.”

To add insult to injury, he pointed out that the French are paying only €27 per share, while the Belgian deal puts a nominal value on the same shares of €68 – meaning the Belgian government is paying more than double. “Our ministers let themselves be handled like toddlers,” De Grauwe said. “I don’t know whose interests are being defended here, but it’s certainly not the country’s.” ♦



The MSC Beatrice, the world's largest container ship, floated into Antwerp harbour last week. Built by Daewoo Shipping in Korea earlier this year, the Beatrice is 366 metres long and can carry 14,000 containers. The arrival of the Beatrice was an occasion for cheering crowds lining the approaches to the port, as Antwerp wants to attract this sort of super-carrier to compete with Rotterdam.

On the other hand, the Beatrice had to cut her cargo to 10,000 containers; a full load would have made her draught too low for the difficult Antwerp channel. “The deepening of the Westerschelde in Dutch waters remains critically necessary,” commented Marc Van Peel, the Antwerp alderman responsible for the port. “If the Scheldt isn't deepened everywhere, ships have to sail within a very tight ‘window’. They are absolutely forced to wait for high water.”

Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters, whose responsibilities include the four Flemish seaports, will travel to the Hague soon to bring up the subject with the Dutch government

Bosses took home 16% less last year

As the remuneration packages of some top executives, such as the former board of Fortis, continue to raise concern and anger in equal measure, the average boss of a Bel-20 quoted company last year took home 16% less than in 2007, according to a survey by the Flemish financial daily *De Tijd*. The biggest drop came in the case of Carlos Brito, CEO of Leuven-based AB InBev, for whom 2008 was the year of world conquest, with the takeover of Anheuser-Busch and the promotion to the top of the world brewery rankings. His package of salary plus bonuses fell 75% from €4.08 million to €1.06 million because

he failed to meet targets for internal growth. He did, however, receive share options worth €10.32 million for the takeover of AB.

Brito was the best-paid boss in Belgium last year, ahead of Albert Frère of holding company GBL, who this year earned €3.49 million, 11% less than 2007. He came out narrowly ahead of Roch Dolineux of chemical company UCB at €3.39 million.

Only three CEOs earned more in 2008 than the year before. In two cases, *De Tijd* made estimates; neither GDF-Suez (a French company quoted on the Bel-

20) nor Colruyt have published official figures. The two CEOs are thought to have earned 16% and 25% more respectively.

The third winner had the highest increase. Marc Coucke of Omega Pharma saw his pay increase by 30% to €620,000 after he returned to the top spot following a year's sabbatical. It's notable that Coucke, even with a rise of almost one-third, is still a very long way behind most of the rest of the field. Only two companies surveyed, Cofinimmo and Befimmo (both real estate), paid less – €400,000 in the case of Befimmo's Benoit De Blieck. ♦

paid out by Fortis to nine top managers in 2008 and the start of this year, including 239,000 shares and 74,000 options, according to the company's annual report

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Apparel • Bellerose

The upmarket apparel producer and retailer plans to open its 20th store in Kortrijk later this month. The company will also relocate its Antwerp outlet and open a store in Nieuwpoort early next year.

Air • Hewa Bora Airways

The Congo-based airline is going to re-launch a twice-a-week Brussels-Kinshasa service. The carrier had been labelled by the European authorities as unsafe but has received flying rights for the new service.

Alcohol • Champagne

Exports of champagne to Belgium were stable last year with some 9.9 million bottles drunk by revellers. Belgians are the second biggest guzzlers of the bubbly in the world per capita after the French.

Electronics • Barco

The Kortrijk-based electronics group will supply up to 100 additional digital film projection systems to the China Film Group Corporation. The move will strengthen Barco's market share for the equipment to 80%, with over 500 systems in China.

Home furnishings • Heytens

The home furnishings and decoration retail chain founded in Overijse in 1974 will open eight additional stores in France and one in Switzerland. The company operates 160 outlets in Europe, which includes 30 in Brussels and across Flanders.

Metals • Umicore

The non-ferrous metals and technology group has sold two of its packaging affiliates in Germany and Singapore to the German Heraeus company. The firm will also part with its stake in the South Korean Duksan Hi-Metal company.

Supermarkets • GB

GB, the country's leading supermarket group, which was acquired by the French Carrefour company in 2000, is to be rebranded as Carrefour Markets. The brand GB (Grand Bazar), founded in the middle of the 19th century, developed supermarkets in Belgium from 1959 but has faced sales declines and changing shopping patterns in recent years.

Telecommunications • Telenet

The Mechelen-based cable and telecommunications company plans to open a call centre in St Truiden in the early summer to develop its customer-care operations. About 90 people are expected to be hired. Telenet has also taken over the activities of the Geel-based Sitel call centre with 100 employees. ♦



Show stopper

Find out who's who at Art Brussels, the mother of all contemporary exhibitions

SAFFINA RANA

Despite the recession, over 32,000 people are expected to descend on Heizel this year for Art Brussels, the capital's annual contemporary art fair that showcases both the established and the up-and-coming.

Trudging around chilly exhibition halls has never really been my idea of fun, but if you can put up with the sheer size of the place, then, like me, you will ultimately be rewarded by finding several pieces you like, insightful conversations with artists and a smoking hole in your credit card.

But it's not all about finding something to hang over your mantelpiece. Even if you have no intention of buying anything, with its solo shows, presentations of new works, debates and prizes, Art Brussels provides an opportunity to discover both the national and international contemporary art scene and the buzz that surrounds it.

For its 27th edition, the show features 172 galleries from 23 different countries. Although the mainstay of these come from Belgium, followed by Germany and France, galleries have also been selected from China, Cuba, South Africa and the United States. The figure represents less than half of the 427 galleries that applied to participate.

"Only those demonstrating an innovative vision and promoting their artists internationally were chosen," according to exhibition director Karen Renders. "The quality of the galleries and the works is of the utmost importance, even more so than in recent years – especially considering the present economic situation."



The well-known can also be found at Art Brussels, such as the infamous tattooed pigs of Wim Delvoye

The City of Brussels is set to be one of the fair's top buyers this year. Officials are looking for a sculpture for Avenue de Stalingrad in the Zuid district, and a selection of 10 that have been shortlisted will be on display at Egmont Park during the fair. One of those is by 26-year-old Belgian artist Xavier Mary, fresh from his success at the



Un-Scene group show of young artists hosted by Wiels.

His works are often transformations of functional mechanisms, such as motorway lights and industrial units. Displaced from the environments they were specifically designed for, they are a sudden jolt of science-fiction, the new machinery of unknown worlds, operating on the rhythms of their former incarnations.

Mary has also been chosen for a solo show at Art Brussels, where Brussels gallery Baronian Francey has given him free reign to create new work in 25 metres of space.

Young Flemish artist Fia Cielens transplants the makeshift housing of a marginal Ghent neighbourhood to Art Brussels (above); photographer duo Kahn & Selesnick's "King of Birds" from Brussels gallery Aeroplastics (right)

and galleries from all over the world will be there," says Mary, "so I hope to make contacts and get some proposals."

Mary's new piece is inspired by rave culture. Hexagonal PVC and mirrored panels will sit in tessellating clusters on the wall and the floor of the room. The movement of passers-by will trigger stroboscopes embedded in the hexagons, showering the room with pulsating lights. "It's an effect you can feel in dancing – at raves," he explains. "I like to create a physical effect in my work."

As a separate feature of Art Brussels, eight women artists living and working in Brussels have been invited to create site-specific works. Renders was adamant about creating a focus on women artists in a male-orientated market. "In the 1970s, women artists emerged, mainly within the conceptual art field," says Renders. But there is something clearly amiss in their promotion, she argues. "Almost 40 years on, the percentage of women artists is still lower than that of male artists. There is, however, no lack of talent."

The women include new and established Flemish artists. Fia



Cielens graduated from the Higher Institute for Fine Arts in Ghent last year. Her installation for the show, "Wunder der Schöpfung!" centres around the makeshift housing she found at the overgrown industrial site in the Parallelweg neighbourhood in northern Ghent. Her work is inspired by elements of deterioration and raises questions about natural and artificial metamorphoses in society.

In comparison, Els Opsomer has enjoyed much critical acclaim over the last decade. As a widely travelled video artist, photographer and graphic designer, her works often capture the feeling of

alienation and compromise in cities across the world. In 1995 she embarked on archiving her perspectives of urban landscapes, architecture and interiors. Today, the archive contains thousands of photographs and forms the basis of her installation at Art Brussels. Some of these will be appearing on walls around the exhibition, accentuated with a series of messages serving to expose and challenge reality.♦

Art Brussels

Brussels Expo, 1 Belgiëplein
24-27 April

It's evolutionary, my dear Belgians

A new wing and the extension of a wildly popular exhibit at the Natural Sciences Museum

ALAN HOPE

In our house we always refer to it as the Dinosaur Museum, but there's so much more to the Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences in Brussels. While the giant iguanodons are without a doubt the single most impressive exhibit, the museum contains everything from narwhal bones to living tarantulas.

It's also a proper institute: attached to the museum is a 13-storey building where scientists work. Recently, researchers have been busy finding the causes and cures for a plague of mosquitoes in Vilvoorde, a rare appearance by the ocean sunfish (*Mola mola*) off the coast of Nieuwpoort and the sudden appearance of barn owl chicks (*Tyto alba*) in a communal nesting box in Schoten.

This being the year of Darwin, it's only right and proper that they've now opened a dedicated Gallery of Evolution, this being the year of Darwin. The gallery takes as its motto the words of geneticist and evolutionary biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky: "Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution".

The gallery is housed in a just-opened wing of the museum, reached by a series of lifts and staircases. The whole gallery is in one space, which is as huge as the main hall of a

grand railway station and feels as monumental as a cathedral.

It's a monumental task: to tell the story of evolution from about the Cambrian era (540 million years ago) to the age of the mammals, or Holocene era, which is what we're living in now. It even attempts to forecast what sort of wildlife there might be 50 million years in the future.

I went around the Gallery of Evolution with a 10-year-old, and it's the work of a whole visit. The layout is impressive, with exhibits ranging from fossils to virtual displays to good old-fashioned stuffed animals. The accompanying documentation is kept on the light side, presumably to allow for further study at home on the computer or in the library.

I wonder, though, if the whole thing isn't a little bit too dry and linear to keep the attention of children. It's missing that engaging interactive quality found elsewhere in the museum. But as a starting-point for finding out more, it's a worthwhile effort.

Incidentally, one creature you won't find covered in any detail is Man. That's a deliberate decision of the institute not to present humans as any sort of culmination of the evolutionary process.

X-TREME

While the Evolution Gallery is overtly didactic and not terribly hands-on, the temporary exhibition downstairs – extended until 30 August – is the kind of exhibit kids would plan for themselves, as you can see from the way they swarm all over everything in a fervour of excitement as if someone had shot Coca Cola right into their veins.

The museum has a way with exhibitions of this kind, which generally revolve around an aspect of biology or biodiversity. In the past, they've had success with subjects like forensic science, wildlife in the cities and courting behaviour, and even with less promising subjects: exhibitions on water and on mussels had unexpected nuggets.

The current exhibition is called *Survivors of the X-TREME*, and it



The new Gallery of Evolution at the Natural Sciences Museum in Brussels includes fossils from 40 million years ago

features animals that live in extreme conditions – heat, cold, airlessness, drought, darkness. It's a challenging premise for several reasons: it covers a lot of the planet; it invites children to imagine themselves in strange situations; it passes on a lot of information about anatomy and physiology.

But most importantly, it's hands on – literally. At every stop are things to push, pull, squeeze or lift. Blow into nozzles to test your lung capacity. To get a feel for the heat of the desert sand, take off your shoes and step onto a heated pad.

The effect is remarkable: it's like setting light to the fuse of children's curiosity. You can see why they don't adopt this approach more in schools. There's literally no controlling them once they get started. Kindling that enthusiasm is probably the best return a scientific institution could possibly provide. ♦

Making movies



© EGPar/Shutterstock

Star in your own evolution movie

From now until 30 August, the museum is inviting entries for Making Movies Goes Darwin. Both children and adults are invited to make a film of up to five minutes in length on a subject related to evolution. Entries are divided into age categories and can be individual or group efforts. A professional jury will judge entries on creativity and originality, though films also have to be in line with evolutionary orthodoxy. Prizes include weekends to Paris and Panasonic video cameras.

→ www.makingmoviesgoesdarwin.be

Tips for the perfect visit

When to go: The first Wednesday of the month is free for everyone from 13.00, but the downside is that it's extremely busy. On other days, it's best to go early. The museum opens at 10.00 on weekends, at 9.30 weekdays except Monday.

How much? Admission is €7.50 for adults and €4.50 for children over six (under-six gets in free). The temporary exhibition is €2 more. A season ticket is only worthwhile if you come five times or more in a year. The NMBS offers a combined rail ticket and entry: www.b-dagtrips.be

Getting there: Parking is extremely limited both in and around the museum. Luxemburgplein (with bus, metro and train stops) is only a five-minute walk away.

Natural Sciences Museum
Vautierstraat 29, Brussels

→ www.naturalsciences.be

The eye of the needle

Step right up for a free tattoo at this unique new school in Antwerp

ALAN HOPE

Maybe I've watched too many Dennis Hopper films or listened to too many Lynyrd Skynyrd albums, but when I imagine a "tattoo school", it's dark and threatening, with Harleys parked outside and a junkyard dog, and the lady who runs it chews tobacco and has 85 piercings, and that's just the ones you can see.

In Antwerp, Not a bit of it. The Education Centre for Tattoo Art is, owner Ingrid De Quint claims, Europe's first dedicated tattoo school. It's about as central as you can get, on the majestic Frankrijklei right on the corner of Meir, the main shopping street. Not a Harley to be seen. Step inside, and the place is spotless – this is the sort of clean you find at the dentist.

I've come here to have the art of tattooing demonstrated on my own all too solid flesh, and the smell of antiseptic calms me better than Xanax. There's a reception area and five cubicles where the tattooing takes place, which are sterile. Ingrid watches me closely to be sure I don't leave inky journalist fingerprints all over.

Ingrid De Quint (pictured right) is sensibly dressed, blonde hair neatly tied back. She started as a beautician before deciding to branch out into tattoo art, only to find the doors closed against her. "To learn to be a tattoo artist, you have to learn from an established tattoo artist, and they're very wary about letting strangers into the circle," she explains. "Only if you're really lucky and find someone to take you on, can you do a sort of apprenticeship."

Even then, many artists are reluctant to give away their secrets, including to pupils who will one day be competitors.

Ingrid went instead to Thailand, where

she studied with a master of whom she speaks in almost mystical terms. "In Thailand and the US, I learned the technique," she says. "But Albany, New York is where I learned how to pass it on to others and how a tattoo school is set up."

Students pay €1,500 for a week's tuition at the Antwerp school (€3,000 for two weeks, with a free tattoo machine thrown in), and they're already tattooing on the third day. But first they learn some basic theory and hygiene.

A tattoo consists of thousands of puncture wounds going 1.5 mm into the skin up to 150 times a second, so everything has to be rigorously cleaned. That means wrapping everything in cling film: chair, table, instruments. The tattoo artist wears a mask and paper hood like a surgeon, as well as surgical gloves.

The students then learn how to manipulate the equipment, which works like a sewing machine, the needle going in and out thousands of times a minute. To make the learning curve a little easier, they practice on pigskin: hunks of bacon rind, essentially, which I'm rather disturbed to discover is an almost exact replica of human skin.

Then it's on to real people, all of whom are volunteers, who receive their tattoos for free, and who sign away the right to complain if they don't like the results. These are students, after all, and mistakes can happen. But Ingrid hovers ever-near, like a violin teacher in a room full of Stradivariuses, keeping an experienced eye on what's going on.

At the first week, a student will have done six live tattoos; in the second week 10 more. Volunteers are always welcome. ♦

→ www.ec4tattooart.net

5 tattoo facts

- 1 Ötzi the Iceman, the Neolithic mummy found in the Alps in 1991, has about 57 simple tattoos over his body
- 2 The word "tattoo" comes from the Samoan *tatau* meaning "open wound"
- 3 Tattoos have often been used to identify dead bodies – one reason they were so popular with sailors like Popeye, who has an anchor tattooed on one of his giant forearms
- 4 The first electric tattoo machine was invented by Samuel O'Reilly in New York in 1891, based on an engraving machine
- 5 Brad Pitt got a tattoo in May 2007 of Ötzi the Iceman

Inked

Your intrepid reporter proves he'll do anything for a story

I'm the world's biggest softie, so when I tell you about the pain of being tattooed you can believe it: it doesn't hurt a bit. Okay, it does hurt a bit, but only in the beginning. After a short time, your endorphins kick in and those, together with the boredom of keeping still for a long procedure, push the whole thing to the back of your mind. I went into the room expecting to faint, or at least to cry like a girly-man. But it was a breeze.

But first, you have to pick your design. Mine was a lizard, chosen from a book of hundreds of lizards. The design is photocopied and then traced onto old-fashioned carbon paper, which allows it to be transferred onto your skin. The positioning is important, since it's going to be permanent, so make sure it's to your satisfaction.

After you've been prepared, shaved if necessary, wiped down with an alcohol swab and your drawing lined up, it's time for the moment of truth. "It'll feel like a razor blade," Ingrid warned me, and that was vaguely encouraging because I'd been expecting more of a Hilti nail-gun. But it is like a razor blade: you can feel the cut, but it isn't all that painful because it's so very sharp.

After the outline is done, the tattoo artist switches from a single needle to a cluster of nine for the filling-in, and that's less sharp and less intense. My tattoo took less than an hour, by which time I was much less worried about being pierced with needles than about lying immobile on a table.

When the job is done, the after-care begins. The tattoo, which bleeds remarkably little, is covered with some antibiotic cream and a layer of cling-film to keep it protected in the first couple of hours. You're supposed to use the cream for two weeks, but I decided not to because there are enough antibiotics in the world.

You're advised not to scratch at any cost, which can be difficult. Regular rubbing with Vaseline soothes the itch (the tattoo site is not like an open wound; it's more like a bad dose of sunburn) and also helps with sloughing off the top layer of skin to reveal the pristine image beneath. (Be warned: the skin tends to come off in big black chunks, not discrete single cells.)

Now two weeks later, the redness has subsided, the dead skin is gone and the itching has all but disappeared. Now my only thought is where my next tattoo is going to go. ♦



© Photos by Nora Nikomiz

Generation gaps

An Easter essay from a pondering niece in Knesselare

INGE FRYE

Digging around the garden on my hands and knees, I hear Kenzo, my Bernese Mountain Dog let out a yelp of greeting. Aunt Lieve and "nonkel" André live next door to us. Aunt Lieve always manages to have a kind word for my poor, undernourished dog whilst feeding her garage full of stray cats. She stood at the gate, telling me she was off to the "elderly people" who live down the street to bring them some Easter eggs and fresh baked bread.

I put down my shovel and got to thinking. I am getting close to 60 so sort of thought that I was getting elderly. But if Aunt Lieve is going to the elderly, what is she at age 77? I would have thought "elderly", but, nope, she is a "retired person". So off she goes down the street with eggs and bread.

Nonkel André was a baker. Here in Belgium, his generation of bakers was the very hard-working type. We called them "warm bakers". They started their careers when they were 16 and usually got married early to a good, equally hard-working girl. André found his in the countryside. Lieve was the daughter of a farmer in Knesselare, with seven brothers and sisters.

André got up in the mornings around 2.00, drug the heavy bags of flour to the workshop and started to make dough. By the time most people in Ghent woke up, he had worked four or five hours, and the city was filled with the smell of fresh-baked bread. After cleaning the kitchen and ovens, he would jump on his bike and ride the 26 kilometres to Knesselare to see Lieve.

The two married and, in 1957, started their own little bakery in Ghent. Lieve worked the counter, and André baked. He began to specialise in cakes and pastries, then in the difficult art of making Belgian pralines. In those days, they were still made by hand.

Their success brought them to a bigger shop with a coffee room in Knokke. The pralines were famous, as were some of his cakes, and often you would get to the shop in the early afternoon to find that all of it was sold out.

After a long career, they sold their last shop and "retired". Hah! André began giving lessons at the famous Hotel School Ter Groene Poort in Bruges. Many in his baking class gave up when they saw how hard it was and the hours you had to put in. André also taught the old method of praline making, until the faster, industrialised methods



Lieve Poelman in the couple's bakery and coffee shop, 1970s Knokke (above); André gives a recent demonstration in a bakery museum

took over. The cost of making pralines was just too high when done by hand.

Not only that has changed, but there are more and more bakers who do not bake anymore and just have bread delivered to their shops. We call them the "cold bakers". Those who do bake get their mixtures delivered, ready-mixed, by the big mills. Just add water and bake. No reason to get up at 2.00. Problem is, it tastes just like the bread in the next shop and in the next neighbourhood and in the next village. No more improvisation, no more individuality. André goes nuts when he hears about that.

André suffered a heart attack a few years ago and is supposed to be taking it easy. Well, he still gets up at 5.00 when he has decided to do some baking. There is a chalet-style garden house in the back yard that is his bakery. He has a professional oven or two and big wooden counter on which to knead his bread and shape his fabulous cakes and tarts. He made me one of my favourites for my birthday: the Javanais – a heavenly layer cake with dark chocolate glazing and mocha-flavoured butter-cream.

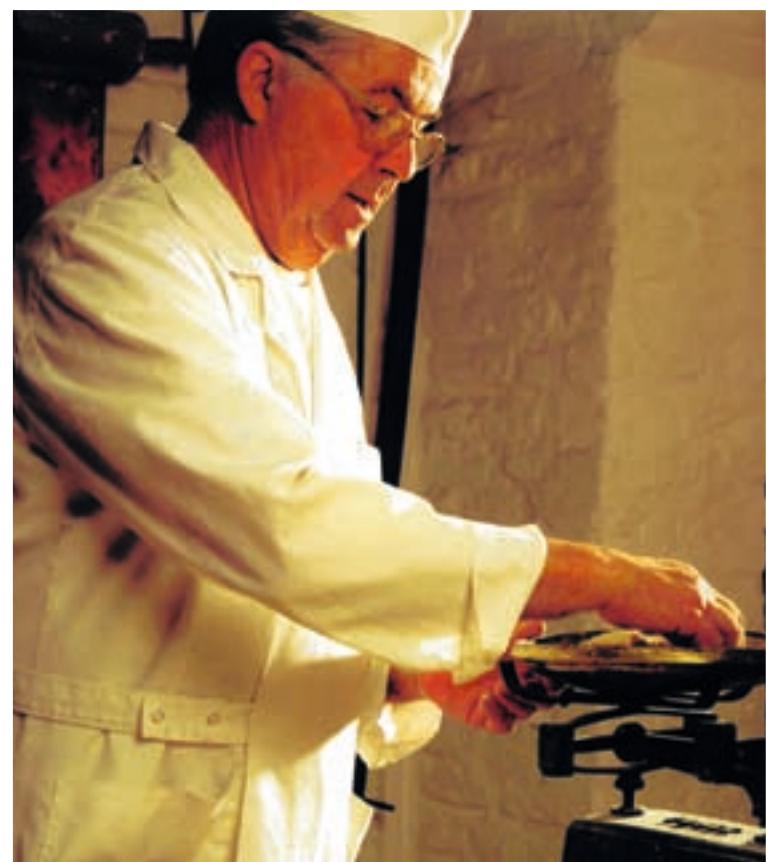
And André still makes his own bread – for family and friends. The first thing you hear when you poke your head onto their veranda

is: "Want some coffee?" It is as if Aunt Lieve is still in their bakery and coffee shop. She will putter around the kitchen and come up with a piece of pie or cake. Then you must sit down and have a chat.

There are usually others sitting at the little coffee table in a small, cosy room warmed by the wood stove, cluttered with photos and souvenirs. It is just the place to be.

And then they tell their stories about the times when they had their bakery or the shameful way that bakers now make bread. The people they met, the things they saw, the lessons they learned. And then you think, well, these must be the "elderly". But they do not consider themselves to be old yet and talk about the elderly down the street, who are probably not more than five years older.

My own mother is the same. At 93, mostly blind, three-quarters deaf, survivor of 17 operations and an official status of "highly handicapped", she admits that she is "getting on". Her eldest sister, Claire, died at the age of 101. Mom says that "Claire was getting old". She just told me on the phone that she is having an absolute blast with her new wheelchair. Her husband, Hans, takes her on long walks whenever the sun comes out. She's having a good time



talking to neighbours she never met. She thinks that this is so much fun that they have decided to take a week's vacation in the German Westerwald and go on long walks.

Will we have the courage of the "elderly" that I see every day? I do hope so. Maybe we will learn to ignore the aches and pains and be grateful that there are still others who need us. We should remember that there are people

who we consider old who are baking and doing nice things for the "elderly", while we lay in our beds groaning about sore muscles and stiff joints.

Maybe we still have a lot to learn about what it means to become old and about the joy it brings to make others happy, no matter what your age. ♦

Live! We take care of the rest!

**Euromut
welcomes you
to Belgium.**

It is essential that you receive the best health care advice and customer service. We'll make your administration as easy as possible and have solutions for every request.

More than 4,000 expats choose Euromut every year. They can't be wrong!

Contact the Business Customer Care by mail: expats@euromut.be, by phone: +32 2 44 44 700.



euromut
health insurance

Live! we take care of the rest!

www.euromut.be/expats

• Agenda •

Big M

Don't let the bizarre name put you off: this travelling art gallery is a sight to behold indoors and out. It's home to the exhibition *At Home in Europe* on Jean Reylein in Brussels only from 20-22 April → www.isisarts.org.uk



FLANDERS TODAY
APRIL 15, 2009



Swan Lake

MARIE DUMONT

How does one stage *Swan Lake*, this most quintessential of classical ballets? Over the years, choreographers have either chosen to go down the conservative route and pretend that time has stood still since the late 19th century or opted for more daring interpretations that turn the work on its head and gleefully subvert its codes: take Matthew Bourne's 1995 production in which the swans were interpreted by male dancers, or Jan Fabre's infamous take from 2002, which featured a live owl and a manic dwarf.

Marcia Haydée's new version for the Royal Ballet of Flanders is a lot tamer than both of those, but it's no passéist indulgence either. All the ingredients that make *Swan Lake* the icon that it is are there, from the romantic moonlit scenes to the dainty ballerinas in quivering white tutus. But there are also plenty of quirky, personal touches, too, not to mention an astonishing new ending.

Composed by Tchaikovsky and choreographed by fellow Russian Lev Ivanov and Frenchman Marius Petipa, *Swan Lake* tells the tale of a young woman turned into a swan by an evil sorcerer and of the prince who spies her as she temporarily slips back into her

human guise – but proposes to another who usurps her identity. Haydée's production is quite a lot shorter than the original, to accommodate for both the troupe's limited size (around 50 dancers) and the short attention spans of modern audiences. The result is a dense and gripping drama full of tension and ambiguities that destroys none of the work's fragile grace.

The princely duo is danced by Wim Vanlessen and Aki Saito, a Japanese ballerina who's a miracle of charm and precision. But the pick of the bunch is Alain Honorez in the role of the sorcerer. Haydée has taken great pains over the role, convinced that he is the central figure on which the story hinges and portraying him as a slithering, menacing creature that's at once repulsive and strangely seductive. The Flemish Radio Orchestra, conducted by Benjamin Pope, provides the musical backing.



Vlaamse Opera
3 Schouwburgstraat, Ghent
23-26 April

→ www.kbvv.be

MORE DANCE THIS WEEK

Gezeiten → *De Munt, Brussels*

What You Want? → *Theatre 140, Brussels*

Origine → *De Spil CC, Roeselare*



Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be
APR 22 20.00 Christian Tetzlaff, violin; Lars Vogt, piano: Bach, Brahms, Bartók



Brussels

Charliermuseum
Kunstlaan 16; 02.218.53.82, www.charliermuseum.be
APR 21 12.30 Robin Verheyen/Aki Rissanen Duo

Espace Senghor

Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be
APR 22 20.30 Jean-Louis Rassinfosse, double bass; Jean-Philippe Collard-Neven, piano/Rhodes Fender; Fabrice Alleman, saxophone/clarinet; Xavier Desandre-Navarre, percussion: Collard-Neven

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
APR 23-24 20.15 Louis Sclavis and Piet Van Bockstal

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193-195; 02.733.13.78
APR 15 20.30 Chris Joris Experience
APR 18 18.00 Corpo
APR 23 20.30 Raf Debacker Trio

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37
APR 23 20.00 Fabien Degrise Trio & Peter Hertmans Ensemble conducted by Bart Bouckaert

Sass'n Jazz

Koningsstraat 241; www.sazznjazz.be
Concerts at 20.30:
APR 15 Antoine Gueuning Trio APR 16 LM3 + Jam Session APR 17 Sazz Ground APR 22-23 Darwin Case

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, www.soundsjazzclub.be
Concerts at 22.00:
APR 15 Chamaquindo, salsa APR 16 Julien Tassin Quartet APR 17 Olivier Colette Quartet APR 18 21.00 Brussels Rhythm'n Blues Club: The Witness APR 20 Master Session APR 21 Laurent Doumont Soul Band APR 22 Chamaquindo, salsa APR 23 Basic Borg with Ricardo Luppi

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
APR 15 Sara So Far Quartet APR 16 Elle Yana Band APR 18 Ronald Douglas & the New Look Trio APR 21 Natasha Kelly - Stijn Wauters APR 22 Dès Andras Trio APR 23 Guillaume Ledent

Ghent

De Centrale
Kraankindersstraat 2; 09.265.98.28, www.decentrale.be
APR 19 20.00 Mahieu-Vantomme Duo

Minardschouwburg

Walpoortstraat 15; 09.267.28.28, www.minard.be
APR 18 20.00 Marjolein Deckers & Senne Guns: de laatste nootjes...!

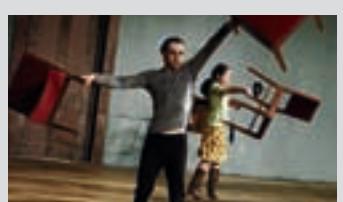


Brussels

Koninklijk Circus
Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15, www.cirque-royal.org
Until APR 28 15.00/20.00 Lucia di Lammermoor by Donizetti, with De Munt Symphony Orchestra conducted by Julian Reynolds and choirs conducted by Piers Maxim; staged by Guy Joosten

Lokeren

Lokerse Jazzklub
Gasstraat 27; 09.348.32.78, www.lokersejazzklub.be
APR 18 21.00 Sugar Free Big Band



• Agenda •

FLANDERS TODAY
APRIL 15, 2009



Antwerp

Noxx
Straatsburgdok 3, www.noxxantwerp.be
APR 17 20.00 Busta Rhymes

Sportpaleis
Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060
APR 18 20.30 Simply Red (waiting list only)
APR 19 20.30 Lenny Kravitz (waiting list only)

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.292.97.40, www.deroma.be
APR 17 20.30 Tom Vanstiphout

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24, www.abconcerts.be
APR 15 20.00 Creature with the Atom Brain + Birds That Change Colour

APR 19 20.00 Monno + Zeni Geva

APR 21 20.00 Swamp Gas Booger Men + Slim Cessna's Auto Club

Le Botanique
Koningsstraat 236; 02.218.37.32, www.botanique.be
APR 18 20.00 Little Axe with Bernard Fowler

APR 22 20.00 Second Sex

APR 23 20.00 Priscilla Ahn + Willoughby. Starving

Recyclart
Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34, www.recycleart.be
APR 17 22.30 Stainage

VK Club
Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07, www.vkconcerts.be
APR 15 20.00 Black Heart Rebellion + Kiss the Anus of a Black Cat + A Storm of Light

Ghent

Charlatan
Vlaamse Markt 6; 09.224.24.57, www.charlatan.be
APR 19 22.00 The Whodads

Handelsbeurs

Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01, www.handelsbeurs.be

handelsbeurs.be
APR 18 20.00 Kraakpand #3.3

Vooruit

St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be
APR 15 20.00 Ghinzu

APR 16 22.00 Monsters of Cockrockdisco

APR 17 20.00 Tom Pintens + Gorki

Hasselt

Muziekodroom

Bootstraat 9; www.muziekodroom.be
APR 22 20.00 The Spirit That Guides Us

APR 23 20.30 Watermelon Slim & The Workers

Kortrijk

Concertstudio

Conservatoriumplein 1, www.dekreun.be

APR 22 20.15 Olla Vogala & Soetkin Baptist

De Kreun

Jan Persijnstraat 6; 056.37.06.44, www.dekreun.be

APR 16 20.00 Tom Helsen

Leuven

Het Depot

Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03

APR 18 20.00 Alice Russell



Antwerp

Zuiderpershuis

Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.zuiderpershuis.be

APR 16 20.30 Laïs Lenski

APR 17 20.30 Daby Toure (Mauritania)

APR 18 20.30 Huong Thanh (Vietnam)

Borgerhout

De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.292.97.40, www.deroma.be

APR 23 20.30 Alvaro Paños y cuadro, flamenco music and dance

Brussels

Espace Senghor

Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40, www.senghor.be

APR 23 20.30 Ensemble

Shanbehzadeh, music from Boushehr

Antwerp

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be

APR 22-25 20.00 Bouge B #2, mini-festival of choreographies by young artists including new and international works

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera

Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be

APR 23-26 20.00 The Royal Ballet of Flanders in Swan Lake, choreographed by Marcia Haydée, music performed by



Antwerp

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be

APR 23-25 20.30 Abattoir Fermé in Index 1: May You Live to be a Hundred/Snuff (without dialogue)

Brussels

Bozar

Pozzani Voor Schone Kunsten Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

APR 22 20.00 Material for the Spine: Dance video/talk by American choreographer Steve Paxton, inaugurating Phantom Exhibition

Ghent

Schouwburgstraat 3

070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be

APR 23-26 20.00 The Royal Ballet of Flanders in Swan Lake, choreographed by Marcia Haydée, music performed by



Brussels Philharmonic conducted by Benjamin Pope

Antwerp

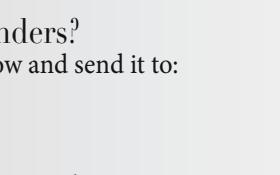
Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00

Until JUNE 7 Erwin Olaf: EyeCandy, retrospective of the Dutch

photographer's cutting-edge work

Until JUNE 7 Yang Fudong: East of



Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900, www.sherpa.be

Until APR 19 Elisabeth, the musical (in Dutch)

Brussels

Café Trepunt

Bij Sint-Jacobs 18; 09.225.36.76, www.trepuntvzw.be

APR 19 19.00 Feest van de Folk: DJ Klaas

Ghent

De Centrale

Kraankindersstraat 2; 09.265.98.28, www.decentrale.be

APR 17 21.00 Bassekou Kouyate & Ngoni ba - Segu Blue(s)

Kaaistudio's

Onze-Lieve-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81; 02.201.59.59, www.kaaitheater.be

APR 23-25 20.30 Theatre and dance critic Pieter T'Jonck in lecture demonstration on theatricality (in English; free entrance, reserve in advance)

Kaaitheater

Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59, www.kaaitheater.be

APR 23-25 20.30 Abattoir Fermé in Index 1: May You Live to be a Hundred/Snuff (without dialogue)

Tour & Taxis

Havenlaan 86C; 0900.69.001, www.africa-africa.com

Until APR 26 Afrika! Afrika!, circus performances from Africa

Bruges

Arentshuis

Dijver 16; 050.44.87.11

Until SEP 27 The Museum of

Museums 2009, installation by contemporary Flemish artist Johan van

Geluwe

Bogardenkapel

Katelijnestraat 86; 050.44.30.40

Until APR 26 Manor Grunewald: Believe it or not, paintings by the

contemporary Belgian artist

Groeningemuseum

Dijver 12; 050.44.87.43

Until JULY 21 Charles the Bold: The Splendour of Burgundy, Flemish Primitive paintings, armour, tapestries, manuscripts, fine gold and silverware that were stolen from the Burgundian

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!

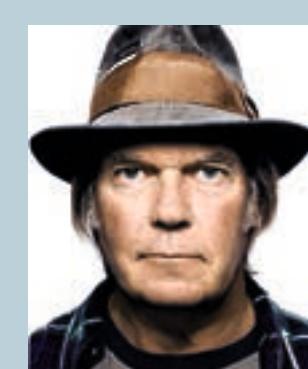
Neil Young

6 June, 20.30

Sportpaleis, Antwerp

The phrase "living legend" is much-too-much bandied about but, in this case, go right ahead. Coming back every decade to win the hearts of a new generation, the 63-year-old acoustical guitar genius has just released a new album, *Fork in the Road*. A political activist and environmentalist, Young wrote the 10 songs in dedication to his 1959 Lincoln Continental, which has been re-tooled to run on electric power. There are still some decent seats left for this show; don't hesitate to snap some up.

→ www.sportpaleis.be



GET FLANDERS TODAY IN YOUR LETTERBOX EACH WEEK



Want to keep in touch with Flanders?
Simply fill in the subscription form below and send it to:

Flanders Today
Subscription Department

Gossetlaan 30 – 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden – Belgium

Fax: 00.32.2.375.98.22

Email: subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu

The newspaper version will be mailed to subscribers living in any of the 27 countries of the European Union. Residents of other countries will receive a weekly ezine.

**Free
subscription!**

Name:

Street:

Postcode:

City:

Country:

e-mail:

court in the 15th century

Brussels

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

Bibliotheca Wittockiana

Bemelstraat 23; 02.770.53.33

Until MAY 30 Bibliotheca Durantiana: Bookbinding by Modern and Contemporary Artists

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

Until MAY 3 A4 - Louise Herlemont: Sans object, installations and photographs

Until MAY 17 Monumental installation by contemporary Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan (part of Turin Festival)

Until MAY 17 United Artists of Italy, 150 portraits of Italian artists by 22 photographers (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

Until SEP 13 Portraits of Artists: 80 Years of the Centre for Fine Arts in Pictures, portraits of Victor Horta, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Magritte, Braque and Léger, among others

CCNOA (Centre for Contemporary Non-Objective Art)

Boulevard Barthélémylaan 5; 02.502.69.12, www.ccnoa.org

Until APR 19 Things 1. # 3/4, works by contemporary artists from the Hisk in Ghent: Ruth Sacks, Bastiaan Schevers, Joris Van De Moortel and Frederik Van Simaey

Until APR 19 Paintings, murals and installations by Esther Stocker

Until APR 19 Paintings by Gracia Khouw

Costume and Lace Museum

Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50

Until JUNE 21 Carmen Hoyos-Hoy: Virevoltante/Wervelend, installation

Until DEC 29 Van new look tot Expo 58, fashion from the time of Belgium's 1958 World's Fair

Creative Space Kreon

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.768.25.10

Until APR 30 Thalen & Thalen with Meil Lee: Living Silver, contemporary silverware and jewellery

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60, www.designflanders.be

Until APR 26 Zilveren Sterckhof opdrachten 1996-2008, silver works by 13 Flemish designers commissioned by Antwerp's Silver Museum

Until APR 26 Krehky, Design from Tsjechië, works in glass and porcelain by contemporary Czech designers

Espace Architecture La Cambre

Flageyplein 19; 02.642.24.50

Until MAY 31 Tel Aviv's White City, early 20th-century architecture in the Israeli capital, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site

Flemish Parliament - De Loketten

IJzerenkruijsstraat 99; 02.552.40.43

Until JUNE 13 The World of Roger Raveel, paintings by the contemporary Belgian artist

Folklore Museum

Eikstraat 19; 02.279.64.36

Until JUNE 21 BrusselSe Orgels, didactic exhibition on the theme of the organ

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70

Until APR 18 Buildings Extension, installation by Sylvie Macias Diaz

Until JUNE 6 Dorothée Van Biesen, textiles

Until JUNE 6 Romina Remmo, paintings

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

Museum van Elsene

Jean Van Volsemstraat 71; 02.515.64.22

Until MAY 30 Paul Delvaux, a selection of works on paper by the 20th century Belgian artist (1897-1994)

Until MAY 30 L'Oeil de la rue, drawings and prints by Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen

Until MAY 30 Jacques Guilmot, sculptures by the late Belgian artist (1927-2008)

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 AUG 30 Vegetal City: A Vision for a Sustainable Future, scale model, drawings and animated films by visionary Belgian architect Luc Schuiten

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

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

Until JUNE 30 Brussels Comics: Frames of Reference, 20 contemporary Belgian comic strip artists and works by those who have influenced them

Sint-Gorikshallen

Sint-Goriksplein 25; 02.502.44.24

Until MAY 14 MicroMega, the Art of Wonder: works by contemporary Italian artists

Stadhuis

Grote Markt; 02.279.43.50

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

Deurle

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens

Museumlaan 14; 09.282.51.23

Until MAY 31 Wade Guyton, monochrome images on canvas by the contemporary American artist

Until MAY 31 Peter Buggenhouts, sculptures and installations by the Belgian artist

Until MAY 31 00 Picture This!

Francesco Gennari, installation by the Italian artist

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)

Museum of Fine Arts

Fernand Scribedreef 1 – Citadelpark; 09.240.07.00, www.mskgent.be

Until JUNE 21 Emile Claus and Rural Life, paintings by the Belgian Impressionist (1849-1924) shown alongside works by his contemporaries,

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03, www.smak.be

Until AUG 2 Dara Birnbaum retrospective: The Dark Matter of Media Light, video installations redefining what it can mean to be a woman in a fast-evolving world

Until AUG 23 Beyond The

Picturesque: Interpretations of Landscape in Contemporary Art, with works by Marcel Berlanger, Damien De Lepeleire and Jan Kempenaers, among others

Until MAY 31 Kunst Nu (Art Now): Where I'm Likely to Find It, installation by Satoru Eguchi

Knokke

Hotel Approach

Kustlaan 172; 0496.62.50.00,

Until MAY 24 Kunst ontmoet Kunst 14 (Art Meets Art 14): Joël De Rore, paintings; Laurent Geers, sculptures; Willy Ketelslagers, paintings; Jos Kuppens, marble and granite

Knokke-Duinbergen

Lagunahal

Krommedijk 57; 050.63.04.30, www.fotofestival.be

Until JUNE 7 Still/Moving/Still, slide projection of photographs by Belgian and international photographers

Knokke-Heist

Cultuurcentrum Scharpoord

Meerlaan 32; 050.63.04.30, www.ckknokke-heist.be

DON'T MISS

Africa Film Festival

17 April to 2 May

Across Flanders

This annual film festival is one of Flanders' most anticipated due to its excellent line-up, particularly in recent years when Africa has produced ever more interesting and diverse movies. Based in Leuven, where its celebrated in all the city's cinemas, it also offers programming across Flanders, in both the bigger cities and the small towns. Opening film Teza (pictured), which won awards at Venice and at several other festivals, is about one Ethiopian's struggle to reconcile his national identity after fleeing to the west. Also don't miss Disgrace, Steve Jacobs' adaptation of JM Coetzee's celebrated novel.

→ www.afrikafilmfestival.be

Until JUNE 7 International Video and Photo Festival

Until JUNE 7 Marcel Broodthaers: Texte et Photos, photographs and documents by the 20th-century Belgian artist (1924-1976)

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

Machelen-Zulte

Het Roger Raveelmuseum

Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00

Until JUNE 14 Objectschilderijen, works by various artists

Mechelen

Speelgoedmuseum (Toy Museum)

Nekkerspoelstraat 21; 015.55.70.75,

www.speelgoedmuseum.be

Until SEP 30 Cowboys and Indians

Ostend

Kunstmuseum Aan Zee

Romestraat 11; 070.22.50.05, www.beaufort03.be

Until OCT 4 Beaufort Inside, the indoor portion of Beaufort03, the contemporary art triennial along 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

FACE OF FLANDERS

Raymond van het Groenewoud

The beloved Flemish crooner marries the popular former newscaster

Romance, you feel, must be easier for poets and songwriters. They have the words to move a woman's heart at their fingertips.

Perhaps not if you're Raymond van het Groenewoud, though. One of his biggest hits (the title is in French but the lyrics in Dutch) is called "Je veux l'amour" ("I Want Love"), which sounds promising, but turns out likes this:

*I want love
I want love
In this hell
If I throw up, in the gutter
Covered in slobber, half dead
I want love.*

Nevertheless, at the age of 59, love has found Van het Groenewoud. He was married last weekend in Bruges to former VRT news anchor Sigrid Spruyt, who sounds charmingly like a character in a children's story. The 45-year-old is known for her good looks but also because she had to quit the news desk last year because of a severe allergy to make-up. Her place was taken by reigning *Slimste mens* Freek Braeckman, who doesn't appear to use make-up at all (not to mention a comb or an iron).

As for Van het Groenewoud, he was born in Brussels in 1950 to Dutch parents. He seemed destined for the world of music: his father, under the stage name Nico Gomez, was a guitarist and bandleader, who left the Netherlands to avoid military service. But success wasn't automatic for Van het Groenewoud. His first group, The Antwerp Boys, played only one gig, at the birthday party of the granny of one of the members. His second group, Why Not, managed to perform in public twice before splitting up.

Van het Groenewoud went on to play covers with his father's band, playing bass. Then he got the lucky break of playing in the back-up band of Flemish crooner Johan Verminnen.

Eventually, with a birthday gift of studio time from his father, he recorded his first single "Maria, Maria, ik hou van jou" ("Maria, Maria, I love you") with his new band Louisette.



ALAN HOPE

Life must have been tough in those days for Dutch-speaking artists in Belgium. Raymond's career path resembled the trajectory of an old-fashioned pin-ball. He played local balls for money; he produced the debut album of his former collaborator; he did a bit of theatre and also Rock Torhout; he made an LP in German; he appeared in a film by Robbe De Hert.

Van het Groenewoud gave up live performances and concentrated on producing and composing music for Flemish film directors. Then in 1989, he launched tour of unplugged concerts, followed in 1991 by a comeback tour – and a number one hit, "Liefde voor musiek" ("Love for Music").

Since then, he's been pretty much permanently at the top of the Flemish music scene, from 10 years as the top of the bill at the annual Gentse Feesten to 144th place in the public poll to choose the Greatest Belgian of all time, Flemish edition (below Tom Boonen but above Will Tura).



→ www.raymondvanhetgroenewoud.be

TALKING DUTCH

ALISTAIR MACLEAN



beledigen →

The trouble with putting someone's nose out of joint is that you may never discover that you've done it. Of course, if you were always afraid that you're going to shock someone's sensibilities, you'd never open your mouth.

Taking offence at the drop of a hat is very much in these days. And many let their words be influenced for fear of treading on someone's toes. However, this column pulls no punches in calling a spade a spade, and hang the consequences.

Well, that's what I like to think. But on examination these articles on Dutch words can only offend if you choose to be offended.

Recently while net-wandering, I came across an exchange about one of my articles of last year where I wrote: "Unfortunately, a national bilingual TV channel is beyond even the innovation of the Belgians." Perhaps my "even" could have been better placed, but certainly I was praising and not belittling.

This was denounced on the website as being anti-Flemish, with aspersions being cast in my direction. I can take it, I told myself, sticks and stones and all that. But then I saw myself described as an Englishman. Well, the bristles of my beard turned even redder, and I started rolling up my sleeves. Now it was my turn to be offended.

When the red cleared, I thought about the writer. Probably he

just assumed that anyone who writes such brilliant English as I do must be English and, even if he knew I was Scottish, thought he could subsume the Scots under the English. I can't imagine he was trying to insult me in that way, so I forgave him there and then.

The Dutch for "offend" is *beledigen*. I type in the word and open the first website, a humanist think-tank in the Netherlands (no offence, Flanders!), which tells me that *mensen hoeven geen respect te hebben voor elkaars opvattingen; tolerantie is genoeg* – people don't need to respect each other's opinions; tolerance is enough.

It goes on: *In een gesloten samenleving zijn er geen polemische columnisten, geen andersdenkenden* – In a closed society there are no polemic columnists, no dissidents. Though polemics are not my strong point, giving offence through this column apparently is my freedom of expression, which is essential for an open society. Well, well. So my getting up some people's noses is keeping us all free.

This makes me feel much more generous towards any critics. But what to do if you feel offended? First, in *dialogt treden* – enter into a dialogue; reply in defence; use satire; and the best advice, *eelt op de ziel kweken* – develop a thick skin ("grow a callus on the soul").

Mails welcome

→ talkingdutch@gmail.com

The last word →→→

"I look with increasing alarm at all these politicians appearing in light entertainment programmes. They would have done better to show some restraint starting from 7 March."

Danny Vandebosch, chairman of the Flemish Media Commission, on the swarms of politicians appearing on TV despite a pre-election embargo

"Shouldn't there also be an urgent investigation into the acceptability of winter caps with ear-flaps?"

De Morgen editorialist Yves Desmet makes light of the plan to ban MP3 players from traffic

"Since January there have been at least 500 pages of new rules for the municipalities. How are my civil servants supposed to absorb all of that? The Flemish parliament spews out decrees so fast they don't even have time to read them themselves." Louis Tobback, mayor of Leuven, on a flood of new legislation

"For the opening dance, obviously I had a problem, so I asked my mother. I've been to a lot of weddings, but this was definitely in my top five."

Johan De Poorter made a promised 10 years ago he would give a wedding party when he reached the age of 40, which he did last week, still without a bride