

Virtual reality 6

Many social networking websites, such as Facebook, get you back in touch with those you'll never see. But activist groups in Flanders find they are actually improving communications between group members in the real world.



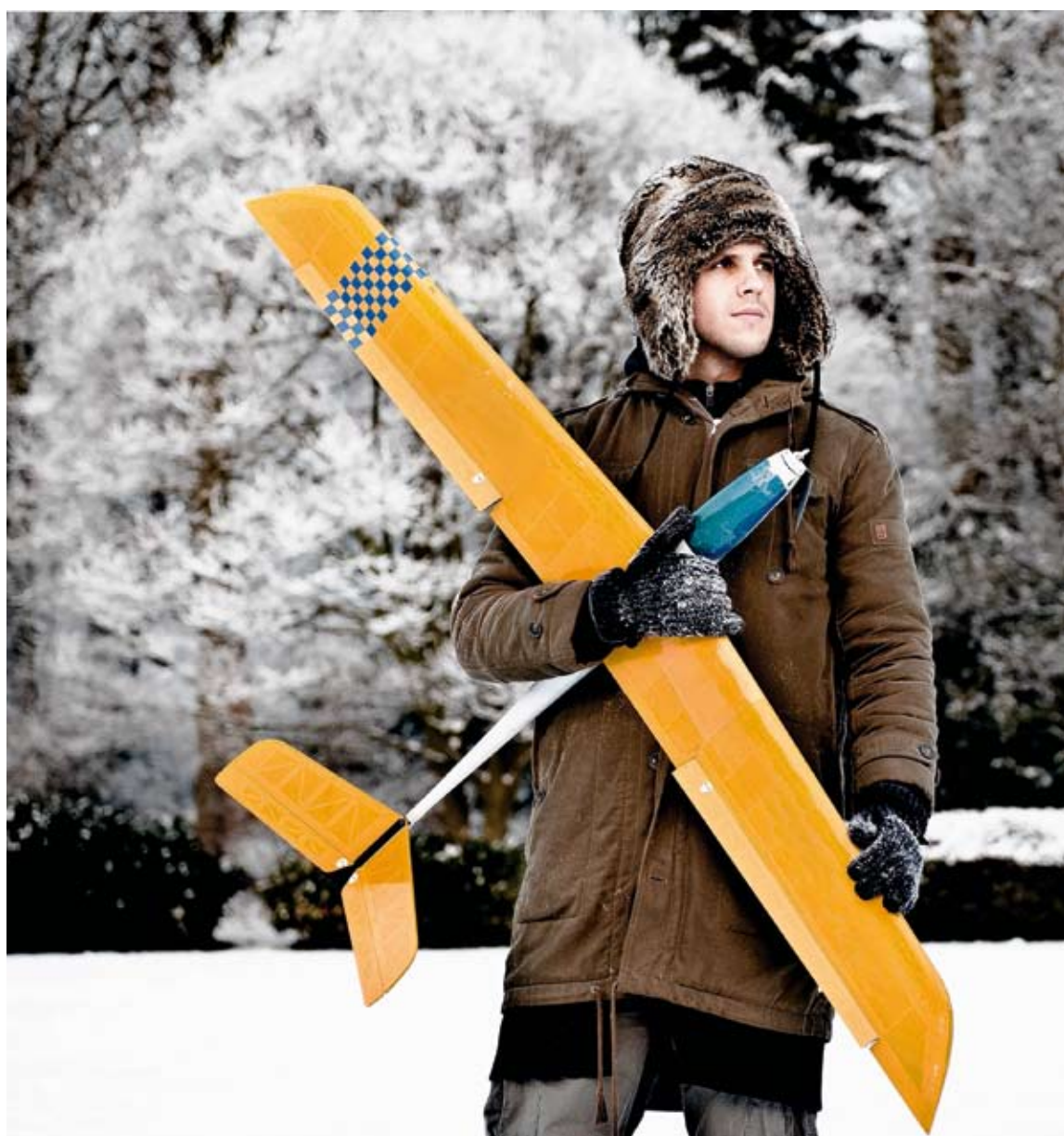
Picture perfect, finally..... 9

The Knokke-Heist International Photo Festival has leapt out of obscurity this year, attracting international curators and competitors, plus multiple avant-garde exhibitions. What happened?



City of style under scrutiny 11

The dynamic duo of fashion visited Antwerp last week to plug their line of undies and – of course – hand out advice to the fashionably-challenged. It's Trinny and Susannah vs Belgium's most fashionable city.



“Baby this a new age”

Milow breaks out of Belgium with a rap song that suddenly sounds grown up

SAFFINA RANA

“Milow” is a household name in Belgium. It's the stage name of Leuven singer-songwriter Jonathan Vandenbroeck, and it's also the title of his new compilation album – his first to be released outside the Benelux.

It might sound strange that an artist with only two albums is putting out a compilation, but Vandenbroeck is striking while the iron's hot: his single from last year, “Ayo Technology”, has already topped the charts in six European countries and just went gold in Germany. You'll find it on the album *Milow*.

A reworking of a song by American rapper 50 Cent, “Ayo Technology”, involves a fantasy about a lap dancer and has some pretty sexually explicit lyrics – a far cry from Vandenbroeck's own songs about coming to terms with life. He took some time out from his tour of sell-out concerts to tell me all about it.

“My mother only realised the song was about sex when she saw the video,” Vandenbroeck confides. “I was actually not sure how my mum would respond. She liked the song – but she wasn't really listening that closely,” he laughs.

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New mosques get government seal of approval

Flanders' total jumps to 15

Eight new mosques received official recognition last week from Marino Keulen, Flanders' minister for home affairs. That brings the total number recognised by the authorities to 15. Four applicants in this round were rejected, and in four more cases the decision was postponed.

The Belgian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but some religions are more equal than others. For the six official religions – Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, Anglicanism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism – the federal government is prepared to pay for priests or the equivalent. The law also allows for other authorities, such as provinces or municipalities, to provide

support for the upkeep of buildings and for denominational schools, depending on the religion concerned.

Islam has been a recognised religion since 1974, but the first official mosque – what the law calls a “local belief community” – was not registered until the end of 2007. In that round of applications, there were seven successful candidates. To date, though, no imam has come forward seeking payment, which for all religions is handled through the ministry of justice.

The recognition of clergy is a matter for the regions: Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. Wallonia and Brussels are

content to let a background check by the State Security services suffice. Flanders goes further, looking, for instance, into whether there is a need for the new facility, based on existing provisions. The region also insists on the use of Dutch in contacts with the authorities. A spokesman from Keulen's office stressed that the Flemish level of scrutiny is the same for all religions.

The new mosques – two Moroccan, one Pakistani and the rest Turkish – are in Ostend (West Flanders); Sint-Niklaas (East Flanders); Leuven (Flemish Brabant); Mol (Antwerp); Genk, Houthalen-Helchteren and Heusden-Zolder (Limburg). ♦

“A very foolish guy”

Cycle star Tom Boonen in therapy after second cocaine bust

ALAN HOPE

Flemish pro cyclist Tom Boonen faces the possibility of missing another Tour de France after it was revealed at the weekend that he tested positive for cocaine at the end of last month. Police carried out a search of the cyclist's home in Turnhout last Friday, with his cooperation. Magistrates at the Turnhout prosecutor's office refused to say what if anything had been found.

The revelation comes almost exactly a year after Boonen first tested positive for cocaine in an out-of-competition test. On that occasion, his QuickStep team stood by him, declined to fine him and

signed him up to a new two-year contract to start when the present contract runs out. Since that test, too, was out of competition, there were no official sanctions from the sport's governing bodies. But the organisers of the 2008 Tour of Switzerland and Tour de France made it clear he would not be welcome as a participant.

Boonen was found guilty of possession of cocaine earlier this year by a court in Turnhout, but the judge decided the 28-year-old cyclist had been punished enough and did not hand down a sentence.

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News in brief

Belgian money might be made abroad from next year, if finance minister Didier Reynders decides to follow a recommendation from the board of the National Mint to send production overseas to a low-wage country. According to the opinion given by the board a year ago, the government has failed to invest in the mint, and both machinery and management are no longer up to date enough for the job. Staff last week held a silent protest during a visit by the king and queen calling for an end to the uncertainty.

Brussels cemeteries were placed under extra surveillance last week after a number of valuable bronze and marble **grave ornaments were damaged or stolen** from the cemetery in Laken. Police suspected metal thieves, but a local organisation specialised in funerary art pointed out that the missing pieces showed that the thieves knew very well what they were taking. "They clearly picked out the best pieces, the ones they would most easily be able to sell," said Marcel Celis of Epitaaf.

Ghent mayor Daniel Termont has invested €100,000 in a **new TV police series** to be shown on VTM in the autumn. Code 37 refers to the article of the penal code dealing with sex crimes, and the show promises to be darker than the popular *Flikken*, which finished last month after shooting in Ghent for 10 years. The new series stars Veerle Baetens, star of last year's TV soap series *Sara*. The mayor, recalling the tourist income generated by the popularity of *Flikken*, also supplied police officers as consultants to the production and let them use a disused school as police headquarters.

A **new TV channel** called *Acht* takes to the airwaves on 18 May for digital TV viewers in Flanders. The channel promises a range of programmes bought in from HBO in the US, which produced series like *The Sopranos*, *Six Feet Under* and *The Wire*. *Acht* is owned by Concentra, which publishes *Gazet van Antwerpen* and *Het Belang van Limburg*.

Ghent city council will introduce veggiedag from next year – **vegetarian-only school meals** every Thursday. "We want to teach our children that you don't have to eat meat every day," said education alderman Rudy Coddens. School meals already offer a vegetarian

Verhelst and Cneut win Golden Owl prize

This year's Gouden Uil, or Golden Owl, prize for the best Children's Literature has been awarded to writer Peter Verhelst and illustrator Carll Cneut for *Het geheim van de keel van de nachtegaal* (*The Secret of the Nightingale's throat*), their new version of Hans Christian Andersen's 1844 fairy tale *The Nightingale*. The prestigious Golden Owl is awarded every year to the best new Dutch-language book and children's book.



Peter Verhelst

Verhelst and Cneut's book, according to jury chairwoman Jelle Van Riet, is a thing of "disturbing beauty". The text is a new, more musical version of Andersen's fable, while the illustrations are a twist on traditional Chinese print-making. The pair share prize money of €25,000 and a trophy designed by world-renowned illustrator Ever Meulen.

Verhelst was born in Bruges and works in the theatre, especially with the NTGent company. He has published five novels, two novellas and eight volumes of poetry. He won the Golden Owl for Literature in 2000 with his ultra-postmodern novel *Tongkat*.

Cneut was born in Wervik, also in West Flanders, and studied in Ghent, where he now teaches at the Fine Arts Academy. He has illustrated more than 20 children's books. Both he and Verhelst have already picked up numerous awards.

The Golden Owl for Literature, meanwhile, was won by Amsterdam-based Robert Vuijsje for his debut novel *Alleen maar nette mensen* (*Just Nice People*). He also receives €25,000 and a trophy.

option every day, which will not change with the new initiative.

Germain Daenen, who was sentenced to 25 years in prison in June of 2002 for the **murder of government hormones inspector** Karel Van Noppen, was released on parole last week. Livestock trader Daenen was found guilty of acting as messenger between Alex Vercauteren, the dealer who ordered Van Noppen killed, and Albert Barrez, who fired the fatal shots. Daenen is forbidden to work in any company related to the food industry and still has to pay sizeable damages to Van Noppen's family.

The **HTC Magic** with Android operating system (the so-called iPhone killer) will be available in Belgium from June, to be sold exclusively via the Proximus network. The HTC Magic supports wifi and 3G and offers instant access to Google applications like Gmail, Google Maps and YouTube.

The **new rector of Leuven**

University is Mark Waer, who won 54% of the vote in a second-round ballot against Koen Geens, former cabinet head of Flemish minister president Kris Peeters. Waer, a kidney specialist and immunologist, was vice-rector under outgoing rector Marc Vervenne, who received a negative evaluation in December, which meant his term could not be renewed.



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Boonen could miss Tour de France and face charges



Boonen looking repentant last year as a first offender

→ Continued from page 1

The new offence has already caused a different reaction. Quick Step lost no time at the weekend, as soon as the news became public, in suspending Boonen pending an investigation. It has also ordered him to seek addiction therapy.

A number of other problems loom. Boonen was due to take part next week in the Tour of Catalonia, part of the run-up to the Tour de France. As Flanders Today went to press, the reaction of the tour's organisers had not yet been received. Also expected to react are Boonen's sponsor, the California-based cycle manufacturer Specialized. Meanwhile, it is estimated that Boonen's participation in the Tour de France is worth some €3 million to his team.

The International Cycling Union (UCI) might consider Boonen, as a recidivist, to have brought

the sport into disrepute, which could carry a penalty, whether the test was in competition or not. UCI chairman Pat McQuaid called Boonen "a very foolish guy. Last year he received a warning because of the same behaviour. And yet he seems to have learned nothing. For the damage done to the image of cycling, he could be called before the disciplinary committee," McQuaid said.

This week it was reported that this is in fact Boonen's third offence. In November 2007 he tested positive for cocaine and ecstasy. But since those substances are only banned in competition, the laboratory in Ghent delivered a negative report suggesting Boonen was clean.

Finally, the justice system is unlikely to be as lenient towards a repeat offender as it was earlier this year. Use of cocaine is punishable by a fine of between €1,000 and €100,000, as well as up to five years in jail. ♦

Driver who killed two children to sue bereaved parents

A 77-year-old man who ran through a give-way sign and caused a road accident in which two children were killed plans to sue the parents of the victims because they were not belted in properly.

The accident happened last July in Mechelen at a junction where the traffic lights were out of action. The driver, known only as EV, ran into the car driven by Danny Vermeiren, travelling with his wife and four children. The impact sent the Vermeirens' car rolling onto its roof, killing nine-year-old Thibo and one-year-old Ina.

According to accident experts, all of the children were fastened with seat belts. But the closure of the baby's child-seat was internally damaged and gave way

on impact.

EV admits causing the accident by ignoring the rules of priority at the junction but is claiming damages from the family for the mental and physical suffering the crash has caused him. If the children had been better fastened in by their parents, his action claims, he might not have their deaths on his conscience. Thibo's death, too, is being investigated. The booster-seat on which he was sitting is for children up to 32 kilograms, said EV's lawyer, Gert Beulens. "We now want to find out if the boy wasn't heavier than that."

Danny Vermeiren, meanwhile, described the legal action as "a knife in our hearts. This document is accusing us literally of causing our children's deaths." ♦

Previous murder attempt by crèche killer

Kim De Gelder, the young man who attacked a crèche full of children in Den dermonde last January, killing a nurse and a baby, may have tried to kill a few days before and failed only because of the vigilance of a family dog.

Since the bloody attack on the Fabeltjesland crèche, detectives have become convinced that De Gelder is also responsible for the fatal stabbing of a 72-year-old woman in her farmhouse in Vrasene. Now reports say De Gelder has admitted the intention of killing a neighbour of the dead woman two days earlier. But he could not find a doorbell, and then heard the sound of the family's two dogs, one of them a Bernese Mountain dog.

The family of Peter Van der Westerlaken

was not home at the time of the first visit and, when De Gelder came back, instead of trying again, he went to the home of Elza Van Raemdonck, stabbing her multiple times.

Prosecutors have failed to discover any link between De Gelder, who lived alone in an apartment in Sinai, and the Galgstraat in Vrasene, where the Van der Westerlakens and Van Raemdoncks lived. However, one report last week pointed out that both the Galgstraat and the Fabeltjesland crèche are exactly 18 kilometres from De Gelder's parents' house in Eksaarde, where he lived until a few months before the killings. That could be a sign that the murders were planned longer in advance than was previously thought. ♦

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

A perfect plan

Last week, this column talked about the near escape of Jean-Marie Dedecker, the former judo coach who started his own party after he was kicked out of Open VLD. When federal member of parliament Dirk Vijnck turned his back on Dedecker's LDD, the party risked losing a good number of staff and financing worth €250,000. It was quite a blow.

After a couple of days, though, Vijnck changed his mind. He defected again, returning to LDD from Open VLD, which he had just joined. In Dedecker's words (Vijnck himself has gone completely silent), the MP did not feel very welcome in Open VLD after all. The fact that some parliamentary aides got the sack because of him struck his conscience, too. So he returned to LDD, bringing the number of times he has switched between the two parties to no less than three.

Dedecker welcomed him back with open arms - understandably, as he now gets to keep his staff and financing. Moreover, this prodigal son story gives Dedecker the chance to triumph, once again, over his former party Open VLD.

By making public the "contract" Open VLD offered Vijnck, Dedecker has rubbed salt in the wound. This agreement, which was not legally binding, proved very damaging to Bart Somers, the Open VLD president whose name is underneath it. In the agreement, Vijnck is promised another term as a member of parliament. Should this not be possible (after all, only elections can decide this), then Vijnck could count on "a cabinet post or a different job with a similar income". Either way, he would have been paid with taxpayers' money.

All of this is bad enough, but last week also made clear that Vijnck is simply incompetent. Dedecker himself said that he would not let Vijnck say a word in parliament. He described him as "a nice guy, who hands out the sandwiches during party meetings". Dedecker originally recruited the working-class Vijnck during a meeting in a pub by shouting out: "Who is willing to invest €5,000?". Vijnck put up his hand.

So Somers found this guy good enough to become MP again, or - which is worse? - be given another job at the expense of the taxpayer. This is unworthy of any party president, but it is even worse for a liberal who believes in a minimal state. Somers has come to this conclusion himself, calling the contract "a mistake".

The damage has been done, though, for Somers, who already lacks credibility and has a hard time shaking off his reputation as "Playmobil man" in the hands of Guy Verhofstadt.

Dedecker could not have planned it more perfectly.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

804

businesses went bust in April, 12% more than in the same month last year, according to figures by industrial research bureau Graydon. That brings the total for the year so far to 3,374.

1 in 5

young people aged between 12 and 21 think gay people should not have the same rights as others, according to a survey by the Universities of Antwerp and Hasselt. Girls are slightly more positive: 7% said they would rather not be seen with a homosexual, compared to 22% of boys.

1,039

people have so far volunteered for polling station duty for the elections on 7 June. This is the first time volunteers have been admitted: normally people are called up for duty and have to serve or face a fine. About 10,000 scrutinisers are required in all.

175 kg

of dumplings seized by police in a raid on a food factory found to be unhygienic in Sint-Agathe-Berchem on the outskirts of Brussels. The haul of food, intended for sale to restaurants, also included 180 cans of bamboo shoots and 75 litres of oil.

18%

level of public trust in politicians in the run-up to the June elections, according to market researchers GfK. Trust in advertisers came in at 24%, bankers 45%, the police 71% and fire fighters, at the top, 97%. Journalists scored 41%.

29,294

more people unemployed in April this year than during the same time last year. That's an increase of 18.4% in Flanders for a total of 188,906.

38%

of Flemish workers think their pay is too low in comparison with others doing the same work in the same company, according to a survey by Antwerp management school UAMS. When it comes to similar workers in other companies, 49% think they are underpaid.



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Coming of age

Milow fuses first two albums in new compilation

→ Continued from page 1

In fact, nobody has taken Vandenbroeck up on the political correctness of the song's lyrics. "It still freaks me out, this song, that someone is watching a girl and wants to take her home and do – um, yeah, whatever, I don't know," the 27-year-old says. "Younger people know that 50 Cent and other rappers are singing about explicit sex. But I'm not really sure that most people in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany actually understand what I'm singing about. In Belgium, I've sung it on live television."

He was even asked to sing it on a children's television programme, but his sense of propriety overtook him. "I had to say no to that," he smiles.

But for Vandenbroeck, the song is satire. "Everytime I sing it, I almost start laughing," he explains. "But it's also about loneliness; there's a bit of melancholy in there. I like that it's a little bit confusing."

But how did a young man who writes lyrics that *Humo* once described as "too pretty and too polite" come to record such a song? "It started as a joke," he admits. "I did it for a radio station in the Netherlands over a year ago. My album was about to come out, and I was doing interviews. They asked for a cool, alternative version of a song. I was looking for a song that was a complete opposite of my own style. I can't really explain, but I had heard 'Ayo Technology' once and thought it had a great melody, that there was another song hidden in it somewhere."

So he sat down with his guitar and gave himself 30 minutes to see if it would work. "I changed the structure and came up with a new vocal melody so I could sing the rap. I had a lot of fun doing it."

Not only did he never expect the song to go gold anywhere, he never even intended to release it. "But the reaction was so good, I recorded it for a compilation. When we finished, I had such a good feeling about the recording that finally we released it."

Last year, "Ayo Technology" spent two weeks at number one in the Belgian Top 50 and four weeks at number one in the Dutch Top 40. This week, it's in the top five in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and the top 10 in Sweden. The video has passed the 10 million viewer mark on YouTube.

Vandenbroeck isn't perturbed that his first big European hit is not his own work. "People are starting to ask, 'is it a blessing or a curse?' You need a single that brings people to your concert, so I think it's a blessing."

Rappers aside

Vandenbroeck's real influences are rooted in classic and indie American rock. "Growing up in the 1990s I was listening to Radiohead, Nirvana, Bruce Springsteen. It was only when I was 18 and started listening to Ryan Adams [not to be confused with the Canadian Bryan Adams, he notes] that I started to go to the back catalogue of Bob Dylan and Neil Young and singer-songwriters of the 70s."

At this point, his musical interests have expanded, although he still feels "most at home" with traditional singer-songwriter stylings, like those of Americans Steve Vai and Ray LaMontagne. They've inspired him to write narrative songs that tell stories. In last year's album *Coming of Age*, all the characters are at different stages of growing up. They include an 11-year-old boy, a 68-year-old priest and a 21-year-old cancer patient.

"Most of the time, I have a melody in my head, which is enough to start," he explains. "I know the title; I know the theme; I know how I want to start the song, and where I want to go. In my last album, the most important verse is always the last one."

Going Ayo

"The sound and the vocals are the most important thing. If people like this song, they will like the rest of my album."

Though mostly fiction, two songs from his 2006 debut album *The Bigger Picture* reflect on his own passage into adulthood. "There's a 20-year-old Milow in 'You don't know' and me being 23 in 'Born in the Eighties'. When I write a song, I really like to hold a camera up to life," he says.

Generation Control

Vandenbroeck was born in 1981, growing up in the 1990s. "I feel like there are not really songs written about us," he says. "I was looking at my friends of my age and wondering what is it that really defines us as a generation?"

homerun then."

Vandenbroeck still doesn't have a manager, and he still releases his own albums. "I negotiate my own record deals, and I'm about to start negotiating in London. I'm obviously a control freak," he says. "It's also a matter of pride and independence. I have total artistic control over every aspect of Milow and never have someone telling me what to do."

He's planning his next studio album for 2011. "It's already taking shape in my head. The growing up thing is getting a bit old, I've done that now. I've tried to write about true, non-fiction events – that's something I might try further. I would not object to writing about politics – but I would do it in a subtle way."

Vandenbroeck feels let down by Belgian politics. "The least talented generation of politicians is actually in charge right now – the least talented in a very long time," he states. "I hope that at one point people will notice that."

With the rest of Europe looking outwards, Belgium, he feels, should be doing the same. "You

have to make compromises, but they are getting so populist. When we are making steps towards internationalising and thinking about a bigger Europe, I think it's narrow minded to talk about 'typical Flemish'. I'm really sick of it. I think it's boring and a waste of time."

Living in America for a year when he was 18 brought this home to the Leuven-born Vandenbroeck. "I don't feel Flemish. I feel European, continental European," he says. "Ok, there's something typically Belgian about my views, but nothing typically Flemish. What's so great about being Flemish? What's great about Belgium is that there's such a mix of everything." ♦

Milow on tour

17 May, Vooruit, Ghent
→ www.vooruit.be

19 May, de Roma, Antwerp
→ www.deroma.be

20 May, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels
SOLD OUT



© Pieter Jelle De Brue

Caught up in the web

Online networks help Flemish groups connect in the real world

ALAN HOPE

It's impossible to blow your nose these days without the news showing up on some online social networking site or other. Facebook, the most popular among adults, had one million members in Belgium last October and topped the two million mark last March, or 20% of the population.

If Facebook was a country, it would be, with its membership of about 200 million, the fifth largest in the world.

Aside from sheer numbers, Facebook is becoming more a part of people's online lives: you can join a group to support your favourite couples in the TV show *Mijn Restaurant!*; politicians of every stripe have fan clubs in the run-up to the June elections; the facility municipalities around Brussels all have their supporters' groups on Facebook.

Other social online media are also overwhelmingly part of the culture: MySpace has created a thriving market in independent music out of the reach of the big

labels; Susan Boyle went from karaoke in the pubs of Blackburn, West Lothian, to international stardom thanks to YouTube. When Oprah sent her first update to Twitter, it made headlines across the world (though Stephen Fry has been doing it for ages).

The use of social networking websites can strengthen the cohesion of offline community organisations, according to research carried out by a team from the Interdisciplinary Institute for Broadband Technology (IBBT). A three-year, Europe-wide research project, Citizen Media also involved researchers from the Free University of Brussels' (VUB) Studies on Media, Information and Telecommunications (SMIT) lab.

According to Bram Lievens of SMIT, the goal of Citizen Media was to see if the wealth of technology available today could be used to improve the social participation of ordinary people and groups, making it faster and easier for them to access and share information.



The online community brought neighbours closer together



The gay men's network was mainly concerned with group activities



Facebook is now the port of call for any organiser

"The focus at present is always on online communities, but online groups have to go offline to meet for real," Lievens says. "In the meantime, there exists a whole world of offline groups – and Flanders is rich in associations – so we wanted to turn the question around and see what the online world could do for them."

The research looked at two contrasting interest groups and compared their organisation and activities before and after the creation of a dedicated networking website for each of them. The results show a marked influence of the online network on the offline group, and, in both cases, a majority of members found that influence to be positive.

One group was a neighbourhood organisation in Hasselt made up of about 85 families living in three adjacent streets and described as having an informal structure with no prominent leader. This group was defined by its geographical location, since all members were neighbours living in one particular area.

The second group was wholly different: an organisation of about 50 gay activists in Brussels, who take part in activities together, like hiking, cooking and weekends away. Action oriented and with a membership based on identity, this group has a strong committee structure with office-holders and clearly-defined duties.

Both groups set up websites with the social-networking site www.ning.com, which allows anyone to create their own network similar to Facebook or MySpace.

Members can upload photos and videos, exchange messages and post announcements, but access can be restricted to group members only.

Research results show that the reaction of members of the groups to the new networks was largely positive. "I don't know how it happened, but all of a sudden I've got friends," commented one member of the gay group to researchers. A member of the Hasselt neighbourhood group, meanwhile, explained how the network had an influence on everyday life: "Now, whenever I see a video-clip from my neighbour on the website, I've immediately got something to talk to him about when we bump into each other. The barrier to conversation has been lowered."

"The website shows what's going on within the organisation," said a member of the gay group. "You can see photos and videos of activities, and that encourages members to take part themselves."

The online network responds to several concrete requirements of the social group, the researchers found. The website is personalised to reflect the group identity and "social heritage" is built up from photos and videos. "The community website is an entity that gives me identity," a member of the Brussels group commented. "It gives me the chance, while sitting at home, to participate in something."

The different natures of the two groups is reflected in what is considered heritage: for the gay group, people and events, and for

the neighbourhood group, views of the area from the past.

Although the online network will influence the offline group, it first has to win support from members, depending on how well it mirrors their offline experience. What members look for most are sub-groups of like-minded people within the membership as a whole; updates keeping members apprised of what is going on offline; and technologies (like mass invitations) that can be used to enhance offline activities.

The research found that using online networks actually improved bonding between the members of the groups, as well as a degree of social bridging – in other words, people created new social links with each other as a result of online interaction. The effect was less marked in the Brussels group, simply because the members were socially more similar to begin with.

Finally, the use of the online social network had an effect on the limited hierarchy of the Hasselt group, as the authority of some members was challenged, and new leaders emerged. This effect was less marked in the Brussels group, the researchers point out, where there was a more formal and structured hierarchy already in place.

In fact, there may even be a tendency for the online social network to reinforce the existing hierarchy in real life. ♦

⇒ <http://smit.vub.ac.be>

Fiat has “no intention” of closing Opel

**Car manufacturer CEO
gives pledge to Kris Peeters**

Italian car manufacturer Fiat has no intention of closing Opel Antwerp, should it succeed in its bid to take over the European activities of Opel's parent company, General Motors (GM). Fiat CEO Sergio Marchionne last week spoke by telephone with Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters to deny reports in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper that Antwerp might be under threat of closure in 2011.

The fate of Opel Antwerp and its 3,000 workforce is of concern to the government as elections approach. Whether the owner remains GM or becomes Fiat, it is likely that there will be cuts in European operations, as the global economic crisis has cut deeply into demand for cars. Antwerp is only one of a number of

European factories, and the concern of the government is to present the best case possible for the Flemish city in the hope that the axe may then fall elsewhere.

But others have the same idea. Germany has four Opel plants in four of its *Länder*, or regions, and each of them is being defended by its regional government and by the federal government of Angela Merkel. Antwerp, meanwhile, has the full backing of Flanders – Peeters travelled to Detroit in February with labour minister Frank Vandenbroucke and economy minister Patricia Ceysens to talk to GM on their home ground. The federal government, however, remains distant. The reason for that is particularly Belgian: if money is found from the treasury to



Fiat CEO Sergio Marchionne

shore up Antwerp, an equivalent sum will have to be found for Wallonia, regardless of economic merits.

So far, Peeters' government has tried to win favour by offering to buy the land Opel Antwerp occupies for €200 million and lease it back to the company. It will also provide investment guarantees of up to €300 million. The lease-back offer has aroused the interest of EU competition commissioner Neelie Kroes, who polices illegal state aids to industry. In the meantime, Germany

has put together a war chest worth nearly €3 billion.

Marchionne assured Peeters that it “is not the intention” of Fiat to close Opel Antwerp, but unions remain sceptical about selling out to a competitor. “Marchionne didn't say the plant will be sure to stay open,” said union representative Rudi Kennes. There are about half a dozen other potential takeover candidates, including the state fund of Abu Dhabi and the Canadian auto supply manufacturer Magna. ♦

Port of Antwerp has “enough storage space”

The Port of Antwerp is not facing a shortage of warehouse space, unlike the majority of major ports worldwide, a spokesman for Antwerp dockers union ABAS said last week. The main goods traded through Antwerp – coffee, cocoa, tobacco, fruit, electronics, toys and other consumer goods – are still moving through the port and out to the market as quickly as last year. However, there has been a slow down in the movement of parts and components, such as parts for the motor industry.

Antwerp has about five million cubic metres of warehousing space, and the number of ships entering the harbour has gone down as a result of the economic crisis. For the time being, ABAS said, there is plenty of storage space.

The shortage of oil storage facilities is most urgent worldwide and is caused mainly by a fall in demand and no reduction in supply from the Middle East. Also, speculators are buying up large quantities at the current low prices and then stocking the oil, in the hope of making a profit when prices rise later. The OECD countries are



currently sitting on reserves of about one billion barrels of oil, compared to 940 million a year ago. In some cases, faced with the shortage of storage space on land, speculators are pressing old tankers into service and keeping their stocks lying at anchor off the coast.

In Zeebrugge, meanwhile, the excess number of cars – which

last year had to be kept lined up bumper-to-bumper on the quays because there was nowhere to put them – has eased as production has fallen off to take account of reduced demand. An oversupply of empty containers, meanwhile, which were seen everywhere in January and February, have been shipped to China. ♦

Daems appointed Fortis chairman

Herman Daems has been confirmed as the new chairman of Fortis Bank. He will take office after the bank has been taken over by BNP Paribas. Currently the chairman of the board of investment company Gimv and professor of strategic management at the Catholic University of Leuven, Daems also chairs the government's corporate governance committee.

The 62-year-old was born in Wijnegem and went to school in Antwerp, where he excelled in science and debating. He later studied at Leuven, earning a degree in theoretical physics and later a PhD in economics. He has been a visiting professor at Harvard Business School and the University of California (UCLA and UCD).

Daems' appointment is the first step in a charm offensive aimed at reassuring Belgian shareholders, who have seen the country's biggest bank falling into French hands. This gives rise to concerns that the interests of Paris will now take precedence. But friends and colleagues warned that Daems is not the sort of person to serve as a figurehead. He is a “strong and honest personality who will not let himself be used as the *flamand de service*,” said fellow Gimv board member Marc Stordiau. ♦

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Airlines • VLM

The Antwerp-based airline VLM, controlled by Air France-KLM, has inaugurated a three-flights-a-day service to Frankfurt. Meanwhile, air traffic in Belgium increased 2.8% in March compared to the same period last year – the first increase this year after the 12.8% and 18.8% drops of January and February respectively.

Banking • Bank of New York Mellon

The US banking group will centralise the bulk of its European operations in Brussels with the transfer of its Amsterdam-based asset servicing operations. Local employment is expected to grow to 1,500 against some 1,000 today.

Bio-tech • Devgen

The Ghent-based Devgen has signed a further partnership agreement with Monsanto that allows the US-based firm to access Devgen's technology on hybrid seeds.

Brewing • AB-InBev

The world's largest beer group has sold its South Korean Oriental Brewery subsidiary to the US-based investment fund KKR for \$1.8 billion. The move is part of the Leuven-based company's plan to sell up to \$7 billion in assets to help finance its 2008 acquisition of the Anheuser Busch beer group. AB-InBev last week announced the sale of its Chinese affiliate Tsingtao to Japan's Asahi group.

Cars • sales

New car sales plummeted nearly 23% in April, compared to the same month last year, down to 47,641 vehicles. The steepest drop of the year to date, April's figures brings the total drop to 17%. Analysts, however, point out that last year's results were boosted by the January Car Show and that the 2009 figures are only moderately down on 2007 numbers.

Energy • RWE Innogy

German energy company RWE Innogy has signed an agreement to acquire up to 27% of C-Power, the company developing the Thorntonbank wind park, 28 kilometres off the Belgian coast. Meanwhile, Dutch energy group Nuon is seeking to develop its activities in Flanders with the development of a wind farm in the Antwerp area and a bid for one of the additional projects planned off the coast.

Office space • Regus

The office space rental company Regus has plans to develop its activities in Flanders with the opening of facilities in Ghent, Mechelen and possibly Knokke during the summer months. The company is also considering other cities such as Aalst and Kortrijk.

Seeing the light

Ghent celebrates the master of Belgian Impressionism

REBECCA BENOOT

When we think of Impressionism, our minds naturally wander to Monet, Renoir and Pissarro...the frontrunners of this suggestive and often delicate art movement. But, although it originated in France, we don't have to cross the border to witness one prime example: Belgium's own Emile Claus was a master Impressionist in his own right.

Born in 1849 West Flanders, Claus started out painting portraits and realistic genre pieces, but, after encountering the work of Claude Monet on a trip to Paris, his style changed from naturalistic realism to his own interpretation of Impressionism. His new approach wasn't just a turning point in his own career but also in history: he became the leader of Luminism, a style in which natural light is emphasised by using breaks and shadows that create an authentic and vibrant atmosphere.

The Fine Arts Museum in Ghent is housing the spectacular exhibition *Emile Claus and Rural Life* that mainly focuses on Claus' interpretations of his own countryside. You'll find not just the painter's best work, ranging from sketches to oil paintings, but also an exceptionally clear overview highlighting the central themes of his oeuvre, plus an accompanying collec-

tion of other Belgian artists of his day, including expressionist sculpture and painter Constant Permeke, painter Valerius De Saedeleer and painter and architect Henry van de Velde. Experiencing them all side-by-side sheds light on the artistic and social influences on Belgium during the late 19th century.

Claus occasionally made portraits of family and friends, works that are clear representatives of his early and more classic style. But his enduring fame rests on the landscapes.

The paintings from Astene, on the banks of the river Lys, where Claus moved in 1882, establish nature as a primary element in his work. Represented with soft watercolours, nature itself is almost romantic. Cities didn't really catch his fancy with the remarkable exception of a series of views of the Thames that he painted in London as a refugee during the First World War. Here especially, Monet's influence is visible.

Rural society is also predominant, and his fascination with the ordinary man is illustrated in countless representations of farm labourers and villagers. Hard labour wasn't the focus of Claus' paintings, but rather the farmers' harmonious presence in nature. He often contrasts this lower social class with the gentry



by isolating certain figures and depicting their hardships or pleasures in great detail.

Later, he evolved to more general pieces where man becomes subordinate to the overall lustre of the landscape, which was enhanced by stunning light effects. These effects become the soul of his work and make paintings like "Cows wading the River Lys" literally come to life. Fragile light breaks and a unique use of shadow make the waves almost tangible.

Another highlight is his most famous painting, "The Skaters", in which he refers to the old Flemish and Dutch tradition of winter landscapes. This particular landscape may be bare, but look closer and you'll find a symphony of light and colour that perfectly captures the authenticity of a cold winter day.

The exhibition ends with Claus' pure landscapes, a mixture of Impressionism and the then-revolutionary Pointillism. Although his technique was evolving, his passion for atmosphere still prevailed – a passion that, combined with Luminism, became the essence of Emile Claus.

Emile Claus and Rural Life

Until 21 June
MSK Gent, Citadelpark

→ www.mskgent.be

CULTURE NEWS

Flemish artist Jef Geys has been selected to represent Belgium in the Belgian Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale. *Quadra Medicinale* is a multi-disciplinary project in which four of Geys' acquaintances who live in large cities in different countries each searched for 12 wild plants that grow in the street. The result is made up of descriptions, photographs, maps and artistic interpretations of the plants. The project emphasises survival in a metropolis, as well as latent sources of knowledge. The Venice Biennale is one of the best known and most prestigious cultural and arts festivals in the world. Belgium was the first to build a pavilion for the biennial in 1907. Now 29 countries have a special pavilion to showcase their own talent at the biennial.

Hans Geybels, the spokesperson for Belgian Cardinal Godfried Danneels, has sent an **angry letter to the magazine Goedele** in protest at the May issue, which features its publisher and namesake Goedele Liekens on the cover in a nun's habit and sexy lace blouse. The cover was actually not Geybels' biggest problem, however, but rather the freebie attached to the cover – three communion wafers with the note: "Take, eat. This is my body."

Brussels only professional English-language theatre company, **Accent Productions**, opened its second production last week to a sold-out house and favourable reviews. Liz Merrill directs Irish playwright Frank McGuinness' *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, a drama based on the famous kidnapping of teacher Brian Keenan in 1986 Beirut. Ticket sales have far surpassed the company first production last year of Edward Albee's *The Goat*. "The word got around and is still going around," says company co-founder Michel Didier. "As with any other 'start-up', one has to build one's reputation, keep delivering good product and eventually succeed." Didier also noted that half of the audience so far has been Flemish. The production runs until 16 May.

If you have found yourself receiving a relaxing massage while being told a quirky story at the Anneesens metro station this week, enjoy it while it lasts: It's **Brussels Rainbow Week** until 16 May, the day of the capital's Gay Pride parade and festival. Anneesens, one of the stations closes to the event's epicentre, was also the place to find a buffet feast last Friday and hosts a special exhibition all week. Other exhibitions can be found around town, plus conferences and parties.

→ www.blgp.be



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Moving still

The nostalgic rattle of a slide projector welcomes you to the International Photo Festival

Veerle Devos

Seaside resort Knokke is not exactly the most swinging place on the Belgian coast; it's best known for its self-indulgent, posh crowd and for the exploits of its eccentric mayor Maurice Lippens.

But with the revamped International Photo Festival, there's now a very good reason for the rest of us to get to Knokke. Suffering from a lack of direction since its first edition in 1979, the city-wide event seems to have finally made its mind up: it's an arts festival. And a good one at that.

Among the numerous exhibitions and competitions are three main attractions: the largely-unknown photography of poet and journalist Marcel Broodthaers, an exhibition that examines the history and current relevance of the slide and the return of the World Press Photo tour.

For the last few years the Photo Festival, first held exactly 30 years ago, has had to fight off a persistent image as corny, rigid and increasingly at odds with the spirit of the age. No freshness, no eye for the artistic, no openness to a changing world.

The emphasis was on technically perfect pictures, which mainly drew the attention of photo clubs. This year, new curator Christophe De Jaeger and his team went for a clean break, resolutely determined to inject all of the above into a new arts festival.

The World Press Photo 2009, an annual world tour of last year's winners of the prestigious journalism photo award, is a mainstay of the festival, and still takes place in the familiar cultural centre. Knokke's own photo contest, also a tradition, is still on – but the focus has clearly shifted to more contemporary visual art.

The Photo Festival has opened up its curatorship to several international guest curators, which is responsible in no small part for its renewed energy and sense of credibility.

The festival has spread itself around the Knokke-Heist area, diversifying its offerings while unifying the region's institutions. Four large exhibitions, smaller shows and other activities fall under one general theme: the relationship between still and moving images. The exhibition *Still/Moving/Still* in the Lagunahal is the centrepiece. Curated by Berlin professor and art critic Marc Gloede, the nostalgically rattling slide projectors remind viewers (of a certain age) of family slideshows in the living room and explore the role of projected images in museums.

Text and Photos, meanwhile, charts the photography of Marcel Broodthaers, up until his death in 1976. Born in 1920s Brussels, he nearly starved to death as a poet before turning, with greater success, to the visual arts and journalism. He began submitting his own creative and often drolly amusing photos to illustrate his articles, much of which you'll find here.

"Dramatic reactions"

Results of the 30th anniversary re-launch of the Photo Festival are already starting to show: art students and young photographers from all over the country and abroad are showing up in much greater numbers. Buyers, too, are being attracted by the opportunities international curators are offering.

"We've had really dramatic reactions," says De Jaeger, an art historian who is the visual arts coordinator for the region of Knokke-Heist. Before that, he worked for the Ghent non-profit X=10c, a platform for young artists and curators, and for BAM, the Flemish institute for visual and media art.

Interestingly, not all of those dramatic reactions have been good. "Photo clubs are interested in technically perfect pictures; they miss the traditional attention to nature photography," he explains. "They often find art photography too conceptual and are not interested in a documentary exhibition on the photographic oeuvre of an artist like Broodthaers. In short, they wanted things to remain the same."

Some of it has remained, such as the World Press Photo exhibition, which, he notes, "is snubbed by people interested in art photography."

De Jaeger is no iconoclast and is rather enjoying the whole experience. "I find this difficult cohabitation of two worlds very interesting," he says. "There certainly is controversy, but that is normal when anything traditional changes. And, thankfully, the local population is satisfied."

That the average *Knokkenaar* takes the restructured Photo Festival to heart certainly helps to ensure continuity. And a new crowd coming to explore the coastal towns is, of course, always welcome.

The festival's parcourse takes them from *Still/Moving/Still* in Duinbergen's Lagunahal to the Broodthaers exhibition and World Press Photo in Knokke-Heist Cultural Centre. In between, are a number of smaller

exhibitions in galleries and site-specific locations, like the area's water tower for Veronica's. A beautiful group show, *Veronica's* is, according to De Jaeger, "the absolute treasure of this festival." It has been well received, he says, "by the most incurable 'art nerds' and the absolutely uninitiated."

Put together by Erik Eelbode, a Flemish photography critic, and presented in a side building of the Duinbergen water tower, *Veronica's* asked contributing artists to illustrate "the primal image", using as a reference the story of Saint Veronica, who wiped the face of Jesus during his march to Calvary and forever held his image in her cloth – thus making the first photographic print in history. Here, artists explore the concept of the "real" or "true" image.

Finally, the Photo Festival provides an ideal alibi for a day or weekend trip to the coast. Combine it with the outdoor exhibition Beaufort, which runs along the entire Flemish coast, and take in Knokke-Heist's many public artworks – like the Flemish architects Robbrecht & Daem's Albertplein, and you'll discover that, maybe to your surprise, Knokke, with its many public works of art is a sort of coastal Middelheim. ♦

International Photo Festival

Until 7 June
Across Knokke-Heist

→ www.fotofestival.be



© Arnold, Martin



© Dan Zolman

From top: Belgian photographer Marcel Broodthaers' photo of René Magritte; the exhibition *Veronica's* searches for the "true" image; the winner of the festival's own photo competition

Bozar goes Baroque

Learn the dance of 500 years ago at this year's Party Time

SHARON LIGHT

Every year, Bozar Studios – Bozar's arts education department – binds together the centre's many artistic strengths into one giant, family-friendly extravaganza appropriately called Party Time. This year's theme: Baroque Italy. Where last year featured Flamenco dancers, 2009 will take Italy by storm with a masked ball, Italian food (gelati and pizza and espresso, oh my!), storytelling and a theatrical production of Pinocchio.

But the festivities this 17 May are hardly limited to sitting and watching. Create your own mask to wear to the ball. Dress up in Baroque costume and have your picture taken. Or join a class to learn a 300-year-old dance technique, taught by Gent's own Instituut voor Historische DansPraktijk (IHDP), or the Institute for Historical Dance Practice.

Lieven Baert founded the IHDP in 1992 with the aim of researching, preserving and performing both social and theatrical dances. Baert still runs the institute – in fact one could say Baert is the institute – which covers Western European dance from 1450 to 1920.

IHDP is Baert's full-time job (and he is the sole employee), where he researches, creates, administrates, trains dancers and develops costumes.

He has focused on Renaissance and Baroque dancing in the past but now tries to add one new dance style each year; 2009 is the year of the Polish Mazurka.

Although he began his career in acting, "the world of dance was fascinating," he tells me from Moscow where he is busy researching and teaching. "I love history and classical music, so the combination of dancing, history, music and, in fact, acting was perfect."

In addition, Baert is spending 2009 setting up a professional company of dancers. Recruiting across Europe, he has found dancers with historical dance backgrounds, allowing them to quickly put together new choreography for performances. This fall they will be touring the Netherlands, using Hieronymus Bosch's painting "The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things" as their jumping-off point in recreating 15th century dances.

Meanwhile, the institute is busy with its usual activities: teaching classes, performing at both public and private functions, working with schools and museums and giving advice on historical costumes and settings – the last of these including to the upcoming Bozar festival.

Indeed, Baert and his company are a



The gang from Ghent's historical dance institute lead Bozar's costume ball

large part of Party Time – teaching a dance workshop, leading the masked ball and performing in period costume with live musical accompaniment.

But IHDP is not the only part of Party Time 2009. An Antwerp-based group is performing Soapopera, which allows for children as young as four to participate in their 20-minute mini-opera. Dexia Classics prize winners and students of Brussels' Royal

Conservatory will also perform.

"It covers a wide range of disciplines and touches all your senses – you can hear, see, touch, taste," says Tine Van Goethem, head of Bozar Studios. "It's a way to attract new people, which is one of our main concerns in the education department. And it's always a huge success."

With 4,000-5,000 participants over

the day, "success" certainly sounds like the right word for it. Although all are welcome, plan ahead for workshops with limited space and note that this year's events will be held in Dutch, French and, of course, Italian – but no English. But with this many disciplines and the international language of the arts, don't let that stop you. ♦

➔ www.bozar.be

Tyre tracks

DEVE MEYER



Tour of Flanders

Ronse

For all the flat, paved riding Flanders offers, its most famous cycling comes on the cobbles and hills of the classic cycle race the Tour of Flanders. Held last month among the normal dirt-caked bicyclists and raging fanfare, you will find a quieter time of it now for your own ride.

Though the full route is beyond the space

of this column, this route gives at least a sample of the hills. If you want to get the real feeling of competition, just repeat this ride...17 times.

Beginning at the Ronse train station in East Flanders, turn left, up a slight hill away from the town centre, following signs for path 29. After the roundabout, turn left away from the busy road. The hills to the right are our goal here.

Turn left at the dead end, then head straight through a small commercial area following paths 29 and then 24. The road becomes a country lane, and if you have never been in the Flemish Ardennes before you might not know you are in Flanders: a dilapidated farm lounges alongside the road; a white brick windmill stands at a slight distance; at the foot of the approaching hills, a small village sits, the red brick spire of its church visible from afar.

At junction 24, take path 23 along a short residential section. Here, the climbing

begins, following the narrow right-of-way between two farms, past a solar-panel-lined house built into the side of the hill.

At the T-intersection, pause for breath and take in the view. Turn left along the side of the hill past more farms. Another road breaks off to the left; turn right at the fork just beyond, climbing uphill through the woods past the small pond to the right. The climb here is even steeper, reaching a 25 % grade. The woods to the right are a nature preserve.

At the summit, there is a café if you need a break. Otherwise, turn right along the ridge towards path 28. Don't be surprised if you're passed here by groups of uniformed cyclists trailed by a support vehicle – training for the Tour takes place year round.

Head straight, through the intersection with the windmill. In a short distance, there will be another white windmill; just beyond that, turn downhill on path 34. The road winds along the open pastures

of south-facing hillside farms.

Back in town, turn left at the roundabout, uphill once again, following 34 along a series of short turns, eventually through a small park. On the other side, turn right, following signs for LF6 and then 29, along the stream through downtown Ronse, past the canal-lined textile museum, the Grote Markt and the red brick Sint Martin's Church, back to the train station. ♦

Distance:

15 kilometres

Difficulty:

Difficult. You'll definitely break a sweat

Time:

60 minutes



Meeting Trinny & Susannah

At no other time have fashion writers and badly dressed women shared the same space

STÉPHANIE DUVAL

Admit it, you watch them, too. The success of Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine has long crossed the borders of their native UK, with the couple appearing on television screens everywhere from the United States to Belgium. Having moved on from the star-making series *What Not to Wear*, they now impart style wisdom to thousands of women via their newest programme *Trinny and Susannah Meet Their Match* (seen in Flanders on the Vitaya channel).

Trinny and Susannah's shows are an ambivalent kind of entertainment. Do we watch them because we actually want to learn how to dress ourselves or do we sneakily enjoy the duo's snappy and often tear-inducing remarks about other people's style (or lack thereof)?

Last week, the answer became very clear when hundreds of women gathered in the Antwerp Stadsfeestzaal to watch Trinny and Susannah live on stage. Surprisingly, when the style gurus asked who in the audience was in need of help, dozens of women put up their hands and feverishly tried to reach the stage.

To them, it didn't seem to matter that hundreds of people were staring from the audience while

Trinny was taking a peek under their blouse to check whether they were wearing the right bra, and Susannah was lifting their T-shirt to show a belly spilling over a too-tight pair of jeans. Some seemed a little nervous, but all of them were listening intently to the advice of the British ladies, nodding and agreeing with their remarks.

The two were brutally honest, as always, but, to be fair, they took pains to highlight the positive attributes of every woman who got up on stage. Every remark about faulty style was set off by a compliment. Never mind your belly, when you have youthful looks to be proud of, and don't worry about your pear shape, when you have gorgeous legs to show off...

Of course, Trinny and Susannah didn't come to Belgium just to help these women. Rather, they are stumping for their new collection of "Magic Knickers", a collaboration with Belgian company Cette. The names of the different styles in the collection don't leave much to the imagination: The Bum Lifter, The Tummy Flattener and The Bum, Tum and Thigh Reducer. Each is designed to make you lose a dress size when you wear it. Everyone cheered when Susannah lifted her skirt and proudly showed off her pair.



Trinny & Susannah dress the women of Antwerp

And that is the reason why women around the world are not afraid to face these style mavens: they're only human. And they'll make sure you know that. Why else would Susannah break the ice with an anecdote about losing her virginity while she was studying in Brussels over 20 years ago?

However, journalists did witness just a smidgen of diva behaviour

when the ladies arrived fashionably late at the press conference. Trinny mentioned she adores Belgian designer Martin Margiela, and her personal shopper was sent to grab a couple of items from the nearby Louis boutique for her to have a look at after all the interviews.

Will Margiela, I wonder, get an honourable mention in Trinny & Susannah's latest style guide *Who*

Do You Want To Be? The Belgian release is planned for August.

As for Antwerp, they may not have seen the last of the dynamic duo. During their visit, Susannah spills the beans: "We definitely want to return to Belgium with an entire team: make-up, hair and everything. We're not done with you yet!"

Hide those sweat pants. ♦

Fashionista

STÉPHANIE DUVAL



Fashion serious: *Coco avant Chanel*

Fashion at the movies

A few days ago, someone asked me how I felt about fashion being oft-ridiculed as a frivolous and superficial subject to analyse. It was a couple of days after I had had a heated discussion with an old teacher, who insisted there are only two subjects worth writing about: politics and economics.

Ironically, fashion is all about politics and economics. It's a world where everyone knows each other, where alliances are built to survive in a cruel climate, and where everything revolves around money. Because – and put it however you want – designers want to be able to live from their profession.

In the last year, this fashion condescension has been given a fresh burst of ammunition: the movies. We've been bombarded with fashion-themed films of late – most of them rather uninspiring chick flicks.

Fashion played an important role in the *Sex and the City* television series and last year's film. So important in the movie, in fact, that half the audience didn't notice the dull dialogues and predictable story lines, busy as they were staring at those Manolo Blahniks and revolving, outrageous outfits put together by costume designer Patricia Field. Unfortunately, the critics did notice.

Is that the reason why Pat is no longer on the payroll of the SATC sequel? Maybe the makers want to shift attention from clothes to substance? We – film lovers and fashion lovers

alike – can only hope so.

The Devil Wears Prada did a little better as a fashion flick, though at least it delivered a somewhat accurate portrayal of the fashion magazine industry. Which can't be said of the more recent *Confessions of a Shopaholic*: so contrived and shallow that it can only be regarded as a truly escapist form of entertainment.

It seems that, in order to be taken seriously, films about fashion have to masquerade as a biopic. No less than two new films zoom in on the legendary Gabrielle Chanel: *Coco avant Chanel*, which focuses on her life before she became famous, and *Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky*, about her passionate relationship with the Russian composer.

Valentino: The Last Emperor, which played the festival circuit last year and opened in March in the US, is a documentary about the life and work of the famous Italian designer that proves there is a pure and simple formula to make a film about fashion: without pretence, without resorting to brainless plotlines or over-the-top styling. An honest and moving film, perhaps it can help change the minds of a few critics who still believe fashion is only for compulsive shoppers or naive young girls. ♦

→ www.valentinomovie.com

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Lobster festival

SARAH CREW

After 10 years of being confined to Brussels' eateries, the whole of the country is now joining in the annual Atlantic Canada Lobster Festival, which celebrates the taste of new season lobster.

The nearly 50 restaurants participating in the feast have all designed a menu around the delicacy, sometimes replacing the starter with Canadian scallop. Lobster may be the unifying theme, but restaurants range from traditional bistro and seafood to Italian, contemporary and gastronomic.

In Brussels most of the special meals are to be found in the former fish market area of Sint-Katelijneplein and Vismarkt, while in Flanders they are spread along the coast and in and around Ghent and Kortrijk.

Chefs have free rein to exercise their creativity, and diners can expect a diverse array of dishes – from minimalist preparations that allow the distinctive flavour and texture of lobster to sing to playful associations and fusions that seek to surprise.

Despite a recent survey that revealed a Flemish preference for prawn over lobster, each year

Belgium imports one million live lobsters from the fishery fields of the Canadian Atlantic, making us the area's top European customer.

The crustacean is Canada's culinary ambassador and its largest seafood export. A traditional fishing industry that originated with the spearing of swarms of lobsters by native Americans has been transformed into a high-tech business that provides live and frozen lobster worldwide year-round.

Investment in the fisheries of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia has created inshore seawater holding tanks, ensuring a continual supply of fresh "wild" lobster.

Tight regulations over size and the harvesting of egg-bearing females and soft-shell lobsters reinforce the claim that this is now a sustainable industry. With the cold, clear waters of Canada responsible for half the world's consumption of *Homarus americanus*, this had better be the case.

New season lobster is the spring harvest of the hard-shell invertebrate when its white meat is at a premium. In Canada, in more plentiful times, this was pauper's

food. A school lunch of lobster sandwich was to be derided. Even now, a seasonal "lobster boil", with lobster served only with melted butter or chips is culinary practice in the region – almost a sacrilege to European palettes.

Atlantic Canada Lobster Festival

15 May to 15 June
across Flanders

→ www.lobsterfish.be



Antwerp

deSingel

Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be

Concerts at 20.00:

MAY 13 Nederlands Blazers Ensemble with Jordi Savall, rebab: early Sephardic music **MAY 16** Ictus & Kryptos Quartet conducted by Georges-Elie Octors: Follin, Ligeti **MAY 18** Boris Berezovski, piano: Chopin, Liszt **MAY 20** Concerto Italiano conducted by Rinaldo Alessandrini: Monteverdi's *Vespro per la festa dell' Ascensione*

Bruges

Concertgebouw

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02, www.concertgebouw.be

MAY 13 20.00 Psallentes vocal ensemble conducted by Hendrik Vanden Abeele: music from the Burgundy court **MAY 14** 20.00 La Morra ensemble: music from the Burgundy court **MAY 15-17** 20.00 Danel Quartet: Shostakovich complete string quartets

Brussels

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten) Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

MAY 13 20.00 De Munt Symphony Orchestra conducted by Hartmut Haenchen, with Eva-Maria Westbroek, soprano: Webern's *Im Sommerwind*, R Strauss

MAY 14 20.00 Liège Philharmonic conducted by Dmitri Jurowski, with James Ehnes, violin: Marsick, Dvorak, Mendelssohn

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be

MAY 15 12.30 Malibran Quartet: Dvorak, Janacek

Minimienkerk

Minimienstraat 62; 02.511.93.84, www.minimes.net

MAY 15 20.00 Huelgas Ensemble conducted by Paul Van Nevel: Renaissance polyphonic songs by Lassus

Musical Instruments Museum

Hofberg 2; 02.545.01.30, www.qeimc.be

MAY 19-22 10.00-16.30 Queen Elisabeth Violin Competition 2009: master classes with Lewis Kaplan, Boris Kuschner, Mihaela Martin and Gérard Poulet

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37

Until MAY 16 15.00/20.00 Queen Elisabeth Violin Competition 2009 with the Royal Wallonia Chamber Orchestra conducted by Paul Goodwin: semi-final

MAY 20 20.00 Ensemble Baroque de Limoges conducted by Christophe Coin: Marais



Brussels

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.be

Until MAY 16 18.00/20.00 House of the Sleeping Beauties, new opera by Kris Defoort, staged by Guy Cassiers, conducted by Patrick Davin with choreography by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera

Schouwburgstraat 3; 070.22.02.02, www.vlaamseopera.be

MAY 17-26 15.00/20.00 Samson and Delilah by Saint-Saëns, with the Flanders Opera Symphony Orchestra conducted by Tomáš Netopil and Choir conducted by Yannis Pouspourikas



Antwerp

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900, www.sherpa.be

MAY 20 20.00 Big Band concert with Els de Schepper

Borgerhout

De Roma

Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.292.97.40, www.deroma.be

MAY 17 20.30 Paul Bley, piano

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!

Seal

14 July
Vorst-Nationaal,
Brussels

Remember way back when Seal was known more for his soul-inflected pop than for being married to super-duper-model Heidi Klum? Hark back to that time at this concert, where the deep baritone voice that manages to take crooning to orchestral heights will compete only with that famously toweringly sexy physical presence. Who can blame Heidi?

→ www.vorstnationaal.be



Bruges

De Werf

Werfstraat 108; 050.33.05.29

MAY 15 20.30 Michael Pierre Vlatkovich

MAY 17 20.00 The Vintage Jazz Cats

Brussels

Archiduc

Dansaertstraat 6; 02.512.06.52, www.archiduc.net

MAY 16-30 17.00 Bai Kamara Jr with Valve

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be

MAY 16 20.15 Paul Bley, piano

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193-195; 02.733.13.78

Concerts at 20.30:

MAY 13 Stéphane Mercier Quartet

MORE FOOD THIS WEEK

Veggie-dag → *Groentenmarkt, Ghent*

Asia-Pacific bazaar → *Indonesia Embassy, Brussels*

Wild asparagus festival → *Koksijde*

MAY 20 Kristen Cornwell 5tet

Sass'n Jazz

Koningsstraat 241; 0475.78.23.78, www.sazznjazz.be
Concerts at 20.30:
MAY 13 EU Quartet **MAY 14** Jam Session **MAY 16** Moyera T'Chavera **MAY 19** Joona Toivanen Trio

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, www.soundsjazzclub.be
MAY 13 22.00 Chamaquiando, salsa
MAY 14 21.00 The Singers Night **MAY 16** 21.00 The Witness **MAY 19** 22.00 Laurent Doumont Soul Band **MAY 20** 22.00 Caribe Con K - Los Soneros del Barrio

The Music Village

Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
MAY 13 The Brussels Vocal Project **MAY 14** Varia Quintet: A tribute to Astor Piazzolla **MAY 15** Charles Loos-Bernard Guyot **MAY 16** The Swing Dealers + Gino Latucca **MAY 19** Brussels Royal Conservatory Jazz Section Exam Concerts

Ghent

Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be
MAY 15 20.00 Paul Bley, piano



Antwerp

Queen Elisabeth Hall
Koningin Astridplein 26; 0900.26.060
MAY 19 20.00 Angelo Branduardi

Lotto Arena

Schijnpootweg 119; 0900.26.060
MAY 17 20.00 James Last

Trix

Noordersingel 28; 03.670.09.00, www.trixonline.be
MAY 13 20.00 Ben Kweller + The John Henry Orchestra
MAY 16 22.00 Stealth Bombers

Ardoorie

Cultuurkapel De Schaduw
Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82, www.deschaduw.net

MAY 15 20.30 One Vision, party coverband

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 286; 03.292.97.40, www.deroma.be
MAY 19 20.30 Milow
MAY 20 20.30 Radio Modern with Laura B & The Moonlighters

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Ansapachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24, www.abconcerts.be
Concerts at 20.00:
MAY 14 12.30 Steppe **MAY 15** Psy4 De La Rime **MAY 18** Kytman + Ghostface Killah. Cherbourg + Larkin Grimm + DM Stith **MAY 19** Olivia Ruiz

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15, www.cirque-royal.org
MAY 13 20.00 La Chanson du Dimanche + Anaïs
MAY 14 20.00 Sleepy Sun + Pink Mountaintops. Toumani Diabate Mali
MAY 16 20.00 Christophe and Mons Orchestra with Erik Truffaz and Pascal Charpentier

Le Botanique

Koningsstraat 236; 02.218.37.32, www.botanique.be
Concerts at 20.00:
MAY 13 Belgian Night: Les Vedettes Disque N°1 + K-Branding + Daan + Sharko **MAY 14** Fujiya & Miyagi + Bonobo + Ez3kiel. Sleepy Sun + Pink Mountaintops. Nervous Nellie + A Hawk and a Hacksaw + Troy Von Balthazar **MAY 15** Luciole + Spleen + Emily Loizeau **MAY 16** Thunderheist + Kap Bambino + Autokratz Live + Yuksek. Akron/Family + The Acorn + Great Lake Swimmers. Soap&Skin. This is The Kit + Soy un Caballo with Sam Genders

Recyclart

Ursulinenstraat 25; 02.502.57.34, www.recyclart.be
MAY 16 23.00 Kunstenfestivaldesarts after party with Kap Bambino DJ Set, Huoratron, Partyharders

Stekerlapatte

Priestersstraat 4; 02.512.86.81, www.stekerlapatte.be
MAY 14 21.00 Holden

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07, www.vkconcerts.be
Doors open at 19.30:
MAY 20 20.30 Kong + Dub Trio

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseaulaan 208; 0900.00.991
MAY 13 20.00 Tryo

Ghent

Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be
MAY 13 22.00 Karkwa **MAY 17** 20.30 Douglas Firs + Milow **MAY 18** 20.30 Team William **MAY 19** 20.00 Madiha Figugui - Guigui's Mad + Soplarie, jazz/world music **MAY 20** 21.00 Madensuyy with Frans van Isacker, Peter Vermeersch & Jan Mast

Hasselt

Muziekodroom
Bootstraat 9; www.muziekodroom.be
MAY 15 21.00 Limburgse release party
MAY 16 from 14.00 10 years Muziekodroom with concerts and music workshops

Leuven

Het Depot
Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
MAY 13 20.00 Buraka Som Sistema
MAY 14 20.00 The Black Box Revelation
MAY 16 20.00 Tosca

Stuk

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20, www.stuk.be
MAY 14 20.30 Believo! + Toman



Antwerp

Zuiderpershuis
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.zuiderpershuis.be
MAY 14 20.30 Hasan Yarimdundia, clarinet: Turkish and Roma
MAY 15 20.30 Magic Malik Orchestra

Brussels

Art Base
Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20, www.art-base.be
MAY 15 21.00 Trio Tincho, Argentinian tango

DON'T MISS

10 Years Muziekodroom

15-16 May Muziekodroom, Hasselt

If you are fond of "best of" albums, then you need to get yourself on over to Muziekodroom just north of the ring road around Hasselt. The hub of Limburg's rock and pop music scene – and especially the vibrant garage band culture – it celebrates 10 years of concerts, music workshops and supporting young talent with a weekend of musical mayhem. Benny Zen, The Syphilis Madmen, Daktari and Velcronic (photo), to name a few.

➔ www.muziekodroom.be



© Ann-Katrien Van De Velde

Atelier 210

Sint-Pieterssteenweg 210; 02.732.25.98, www.atelier210.be
MAY 13 21.00 Melody Dalton, folk
MAY 15 20.00 La Scana del Domingo + La Varda + Les Caricoles

Atelier de la Dolce Vita

Liefdadigheidstraat 37a; 02.223.46.75, www.atelierdolcevita.be
MAY 15 20.00 Osvald Arcady, Maghreb music

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.flagey.be
MAY 14 20.15 Junko Ueda, traditional Japanese music



Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.desingel.be

MAY 20 20.00 Le Kwatt/In Situ Productions in More Mouvements für Lachenmann, choreographed concert by Xavier Le Roy

Ghent

Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060, www.vooruit.be
MAY 13-14 20.00 Damaged Goods & Mumbling Fish in Maybe Forever, choreographed by Meg Stuart and Philipp Gehmacher

Leuven

Stuk
Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20, www.stuk.be
MAY 13-14 20.30 Specchi, choreographed by Manuela Rastaldi



Antwerp

Sportpaleis
Schijnpootweg 119; 0900.26.060
MAY 16 20.30 Abba: The Story (in Dutch)

Zwarte Zaal Fakkelteater

Reynderstraat 7; 03.232.14.69, www.capricornarts.com
MAY 13 20.30 The Crumbs, Canadian improvisation duo (in English)

Brussels

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be
Until MAY 27 Mort de chien (The Hair of the Dog) by Hugo Claus, directed by Philippe Sireuil (in French with Dutch surtitles)

Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis

Broekstraat 107; 070.660.601, www.ticketnet.be
Until MAY 16 20.00 Accent Productions presents Someone Who'll Watch Over Me by Frank McGuinness, directed by Liz Merrill (in English)

Kaaitheater

Saintelettesquare 20; 02.201.59.59, www.kaaitheater.be
MAY 19-22 18.00/20.30 Yo en el futuro, performance/film by

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Federico León (in Spanish with French and Dutch surtitles, part of Kunstfestivaldesarts)

Theatre National

Emile Jacqmainlaan 115; 02.203.41.55, www.theatrenational.be
MAY 14-17 15.00/20.15 Societas Raffaello Sanzio in Purgatorio, based on Dante's La Divina Commedia, staged by Romeo Castellucci (in French with Dutch surtitles)

Jezus-Eik

GC De Bosuil

Witherendreef 1; 02.657.31.79, www.bloc-brussels.com
MAY 14-17 15.00/20.00 Brussels Light Opera Company (BLOC) in Crazy for the Music, directed by Valerie Barton De Coninck, musical direction by Steven De Mesmaeker (in English)

Leuven

Stuk

Naamsestraat 96; 016.32.03.20, www.stuk.be
MAY 20 20.30 Needlapb, theatre lab by Needcompany



Antwerp

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 0484.42.10.70
Until JUNE 20 Sergei Eisenstein: The Mexican Drawings, 1930s sketches by the master Russian filmmaker during his stay in Mexico

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 Que Village, video installation

Plantin-Moretus Museum

Vrijdagmarkt 22; 03.221.14.50
Until JULY 19 In the Wake of Columbus: Antwerp Books and Prints around the World, early books, maps and illustrations printed in Antwerp

Royal Museum of Fine Arts

Leopold De Waelplaats; 03.238.78.09
Until JUNE 14 Goya, Redon, Ensor: Grotesque paintings and drawings

Zilvermuseum Sterckshof

Cornelissenlaan; 03.360.52.52
Until JUNE 21 Van Kempen, van zilversmid tot fabrikant (from Silversmith to Manufacturer), silverware by the Dutch designers since the 19th century

Bruges

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 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, 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

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

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 17 Monumental installation by contemporary Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan
Until MAY 17 United Artists of Italy, 150 portraits of Italian artists
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
Until JUNE 30 N.i.c.h.e. 360 architecten, scale models by Jan Mannaers and Stéphane Beel

CCNOA

Blvd Barthélémy 5; 02.502.69.12, www.ccnua.org
Until MAY 24 Eric Tillinhast, installation
Until JUNE 14 Terence Haggerty: wall painting by the British artist

Costume and Lace Museum

Violettestraat 12; 02.213.44.50
Until JUNE 21 Carmen Hoyos-Hoy: Virevoltante/Wervelend, installation

DVC Gallery

Burgstraat 20-22; 09.224.14.40, www.dvc.be
Until MAY 14 Exhibition and auction of over 750 works of art from the extensive collection of the late Ghent professor Jacques Schotte

Design Flanders

Kanselarijstraat 19; 02.227.60.60, www.designflanders.be
Until MAY 30 Je suis dada: Tussen droom en realiteit (I am Dada: Between Dream and Reality), design with a Surrealist touch by contemporary Flemish 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

IJzerenkruisstraat 99; 02.552.40.43
Until JUNE 13 The World of Roger Raveel, paintings by the contemporary Flemish artist

Folklore Museum

Eikstraat 19; 02.279.64.36
Until JUNE 21 Brusselse Orgels, didactic exhibition on organs

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

ISELP

Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until JUNE 6 Dorothée Van Biesen, textiles
Until JUNE 6 Romina Remmo, paintings

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 (1859-1923)
Until MAY 30 Jacques Guilmot, sculptures by the recently deceased

Belgian artist

Royal Museum of Art and History

Jubelpark 10; 02.741.72.11
Until AUG 30 Vegetal City, how to reconcile city and nature, the vision for a sustainable future by 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-Gorikspein 25; 02.502.44.24
Until MAY 14 MicroMega, the Art of Wonder: works by contemporary Italian artists

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33
Until MAY 31 Bruno Serralongue, photographs
Until AUG 2 Luc Tuymans: Against the Day, 20 new paintings by the contemporary Flemish artist

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 Picture This! Francesco Gennari, installation by the Italian artist

Ghent

Caermersklooster

Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10
Until JUNE 14 Wouter Rawoens: Roest. IJzeren Gordijn, photographs
Until JUNE 14 Frank Steyaert: Het teruggevonden verhaal, Ceramics

Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99
Until JUNE 1 Connections, a selection of 100 textile objects from the 15th century to today
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 JUNE 30 Burland Toyland, works made from recycled materials by Swiss outsider artist François Burland

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 MAY 31 Kunst Nu (Art Now): Where I'm Likely to Find It, installation by Satoru Eguchi
Until AUG 2 Dara Birnbaum retrospective: The Dark Matter of Media Light, installations by the world-famous media artist
Until AUG 23 Beyond The Picturesque, interpretations of landscape in contemporary art
Until AUG 23 Extra: Meteoriti, sculptures by Bizhan Bassiri

Hotel Approach

Kustlaan 172; 0496.62.50.00,
Until MAY 24 Kunst ontmoet Kunst 14 (Art Meets Art 14): group show of paintings and sculpture

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

Ypres

Ikob

Loten 3; 087.56.01.10
Until JUNE 21 Angebot + Nachfrage: Bring It All Home, paintings by contemporary Dutch artist Loek Groothans and installations by 20th-century Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers



Brussels

20th Strip Festival: International comic strip festival including exhibitions, book signings and children's activities
MAY 17 11.00-18.00 at Koekelberg Basiliek
www.stripfestival.be

Belgian Lesbian & Gay Pride: Annual event with stands, food, entertainment, parade and after-party at Ancienne Belgique
MAY 16 in the city centre, around Anspachlaan
www.blgp.be

Dring Dring - Bike Week: Bicycle activities in the Brussels Region, including workshops, tours and information on cycling in and around the capital, plus Velo-city conference
Until MAY 17 at Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan 86C
www.dringdring.be

Jam'in Jette Festival: World music festival with fair trade stands, children's village, street-theatre artists, Thai and Indian food
MAY 16 noon to midnight at Jeugdпарк, Graafschap Jettelaan
www.jam-in-jette.be

Jette Organ Festival: Series of organ concerts by international musicians
Until JUNE 21 16.00 at Sint-Pieterskerk, Kardinaal Mercierplein 0478.28.31.02

Kunstenfestivaldesarts: International festival of contemporary performing arts, dedicated to reflecting the world in which we live via performances, installations and films
Until MAY 23 across Brussels
www.kunstenfestivaldesarts.be

Son del Sur - Flamenco Festival: First of two weekends of music and dance featuring Dorantes y Arcangel, María Pagés and Rumba Party
MAY 14-16 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

Stadskriebels: Annual day with over 40 sports and other activities, plus family entertainment
MAY 17 11.00-17.00 around the Oude en Nieuwe Graanmarkt, car-free for the event
02.413.04.54, www.stadskriebels.be

Knokke-Heist

International Photo Festival:

Photography festival with World Press Photo tour, exhibition on 20th-century Belgian photographer Marcel Broodthaers and installations on the relationship between still and moving images

CAFE SPOTLIGHT

STÉPHANIE DUVAL



De Muze

Melkmarkt 15, Antwerp

Just as every proper artist needs a muse, he or she also needs a place to hang out amongst like-minded creative souls. Are you picturing such a place in your mind? Chances are it will look a lot like De Muze in Antwerp.

Celebrating its 43rd anniversary in 2009, De Muze is one of the best known cafés in the city. And though its name and atmosphere are decidedly arty, one of the best aspects of the place is that it attracts so many different kinds of people.

Philosophy and literature students are known to make the café their hangout of choice because the discreet surroundings of the mezzanine are the perfect backdrop for existential conversations – or gossip about professors. Tourists on their tour of the historical parts of Antwerp are lured in by the cosy ambience during winter or by the large and sunny terrace in summer.

But young or old, whether from Antwerp or abroad, everyone keeps coming back, not just for the delicious hot chocolate or tasty croque monsieurs, but for the fantastic live jazz performances every night. Established local names like Marc Patterman and Ben Fluys perform here on a regular basis, but lesser known jazz bands and young talent are equally welcome at De Muze.

And honestly, what could be better than to spend an evening enjoying a cold beer, good conversation and great music? De Muze might have its roots in the '60s, but it's still as swinging as ever.

Until JUNE 7 across Knokke-Heist
www.fotofestival.be

Mechelen

City Visions: Large-scale programme of events, exhibitions and projects devoted to the question of spirituality in contemporary society and the future of the city in recognition of the 450th anniversary of the seat of the archbishopric
Until JUNE 21 across Mechelen
www.stadsvisioenen.be, 070.22.28.00

FACE OF FLANDERS

ALAN HOPE



Thomas Vanderveken

The Queen Elisabeth Competition is once more upon us. The annual event that brings pianists, singers or violinists – depending on the year – from around the globe to Brussels proves nail-biting for the young competitors and audience alike. A win at the prestigious Queen Elisabeth is a guarantee of a future in classical music.

It's also a marathon session for the media, with live broadcasts

a three-master to an unknown destination. The series found Vanderveken flitting from port to port on planes while the contestants suffered on board – even though he found he was immune to seasickness and they, decidedly, weren't. "The doctor said my balance organ must be broken," he told a radio audience in February.

The "balance organ" is in the inner ear, but there's clearly nothing wrong with Vanderveken's ears. Born in 1981, the son of prolific TV actor Ugo Prinsen, Vanderveken was given a violin at the age of four and put in front of a piano at

don't rule out the possibility that I might appear on the stage one day."

Partly as a result of his dark good looks and partly because of his easy and natural style, he's in big demand in the entertainment sector of the VRT, where he moved in 2003. As well as Mercator, he's been a regular on *Vlaanderen Vakantieland*, a travel show and was co-host of Steracteur Sterartiest, in which celebrities turned into singers for charity.

It's a long way from the intricacies of the Rach Three or the Hammerklavier, but Vanderveken doesn't see the conflict. "If you ask me, the typical Klara listener doesn't exist. Someone who loves classical music will still want to watch *Vlaanderen Vakantieland* in the evening, don't you think?"

In his free time, he likes to go to concerts at Jazz Station on the Leuvensesteenweg in Brussels, near where he lives, and spend time with girlfriend Véronique Leysen, herself an actress. He teaches TV presentation at the Artesis college in Antwerp, part of the Herman Teirlinck Institute (the Flemish equivalent of London's RADA) and boasts that it was he who sent home Freek Braeckman, this year's eventual winner of TV quiz show *De Slimste mens ter wereld* just as he was about to break the record number of appearances.

"Up to now I've taken on assignments on the basis of two criteria. One: does it amuse me? and two: will I learn something? Other than that, I have no career plan. I do things one day at a time." ♦

→ www.canvas.be

"Someone who loves classical music will still want to watch Vlaanderen Vakantieland in the evening, don't you think?"

from the Royal Conservatory of the semi-finals (which started this week) on digital channel Canvas+ and a live transmission of the final evening for everyone on the regular Canvas channel.

The face of the competition for Flemish viewers is VRT television's Thomas Vanderveken, also a presenter on Klara radio. He's only 27, which means he's the same age as some of the contestants. Unlike them, he's done this all before. If his half-time interviews with the musicians seem a little rushed, it's probably him who needs to be somewhere else.

At the moment, he can be seen presenting *Mercator*, a 13-week series in which contestants sail

five. After school, he was ready for a year-long world trip, when he heard he had passed the entrance exam for the Brussels Conservatory. There he studied piano and earned a Master's degree in music theory.

Thanks to his family's contacts, in 2000 he turned up as an actor in the hospital drama *Spoed*, where he stayed for four years. In 2001, meanwhile, he was taken on as a presenter with youth channel JIMtv.

"Some people find it odd that I do so little these days with my master's in music," he says. "But I never studied music to be able to win the Queen Elisabeth Competition. I only wanted to learn to play piano well. But I

TALKING DUTCH

ALISTAIR MACLEAN



bierbuik →

Sometimes you don't know what to believe. Until recently, eggs were to be treated like health grenades: eat more than two a week, and you were asking for trouble. Now the boffins tell us that eggs have little effect on your cholesterol. Shake iodised salt on your fish, and it's goodbye Mr Chips. But crunch sea salt on your fries, and you will be freed from most of life's ills.

One of those petty concerns that linger in the back of my mind was to be assuaged when I picked up a magazine from a seat on the bus to work. Instead of squeezing it down the gap between the seats, I flicked through it. It was a health-shop freebie, and the morning traffic meant that I had time to thumb my way through to the last page, which was titled *Ronder boven de vijftig is gezonder* – Rounder over 50 is healthier.

This seems to be addressed to me, not that I am in any way a roly-poly. But it told me that I could extend my life by carrying a bit more weight once I had passed 50.

Some weeks ago, my daughter Kirsty had been paying special attention in her biology class and during dinner worked out that my Body Mass Index was 26, which condemned me to the ranks of the overweight. I have long tried to take such

pronouncements with a pinch of salt, but you always wonder that perhaps there may be some truth in them. Now, thanks to this article, I find that my longevity is assured by my age and being slightly overweight.

Yet the article did contain some words of warning: *de bierbuik is gevaarlijk voor mannen* – a beer belly is dangerous for men. There followed all sorts of dire consequences of having such an apple shape. For women, on the other hand, being pear shaped is good for you: *vet op de heupen en achterwerk is gunstig* – fat on the hips and bottom ("after-work") is beneficial. So again, women come out winners.

Another article has the same theme: *Hoe gezonder eten en langer leven* – How to eat healthier and live longer. There follows a list of bullet points beginning *Vermijd* – Avoid. Then I see the word *Alcohol* and the advice: *één glas rode wijn per dag; niet méér, maar ... ook niet minder* – one glass of red wine per day; not more, but ... also not less. The trouble is, I have all sizes of wine glasses at home.

Apart from that, it half-recommends potatoes (*niet slecht* – not bad) and fish oil, which brings us back to fish and chips. Pass the sea salt.

The last word →→→

In all modesty

"I am the loveliest, the most loving, the sweetest. I am the chosen one, the angel, the Muse. I am the princess, practically perfect in every way."

Jelle Van Riet reads her wedding speech to crowds in Antwerp after marrying Flemish crooner Helmut Lotti

The lucky winner

"Dozens of times a day I have to answer the question if the winner has been found yet. And I always have to say 'No' until I'm sick of it." Lottery spokesperson, ruminating on mounting tension as the holder of a lottery ticket worth €1.17 million remains unknown after 10 weeks

Back in business

"It was easy to find investors. A group of 15 Flemings together put €1 million into MiaMia. Those people believe in our story, and that makes me glad."

Jo Lernhout, whose Ypres-based software company went bankrupt in 2001, launches a new venture

Royal rave

"Princess Mathilde has an unbelievably good figure. You know, it's really hard for all these young princesses to be trendy, but in an appropriate way. She's succeeded perfectly."

British fashion guru Trinny Woodall of Trinny & Susannah gives her views on Mathilde's dress sense