

A new beginning.....5

Votes were cast last Sunday to elect a new Flemish government. So who were the winners and what are the likely changes?



Women on top9

Women tend to be forgotten in the history books, but an intimate and revealing exhibition across three venues sets out to put the record straight.



Schmear test10

New Yorkers complain themselves blue that you can't find a decent bagel in Belgium. Well, we prove you can in the first of a new column on the tastiest experiences in Flanders.



A slice of life

A Flemish organisation is working to preserve the heritage of the “people’s cafe”

MON PHILIPS

You pass by them in the regular course of your day. There are people there from opening to closing, and they seem friendly, too. But you never go in. It always seems like you’re an outsider.

You have volkscafe phobia.

Volkscafes, literally “people’s cafes”, are populated by locals who’ve usually been going there since they were old enough to hold a beer. They’re not big on décor, and they’re certainly not on any tourist maps. They run the gamut from looking like your grandma’s dining room, with laughing old guys playing darts, to appearing worn out and bleak, the first and last stop for the lonely, who’ve nowhere else to be.

A project launched by Volkskunde Vlaanderen (Folklore Flanders) called Hart voor Volkscafes aims to preserve and recognise the heritage of this particular kind of pub. They have just published the book *Volkscafés: Vrouwentongen en Mannenpraat*, which lays out the social history and contemporary use of the volkscafe.

Although mainly designed to promote the Hart voor Volkscafes project, the book includes essays that raise some difficult questions. How do you salvage the everyoen charm or the unspoken rules of a particular volkscafe? Will the project establish some of these cafés as protected monuments?

→ *Continued on page 4*



© Jimmy Kels

Big changes, but Kris Peeters set for second term

Election results change the political landscape of Flanders

ANJA OTTE

Every election brings a surprise, as former Belgian prime minister Wilfried Martens used to say. Sunday’s election brought two: N-VA’s victory was much larger than expected and Open VLD lost much more than was predicted. There is no longer such a thing as a large party in Flanders. The political landscape now consists of a set of medium-sized parties. Last Sunday’s regional election has two clear winners, CD&V and N-VA, and two major losers, Vlaams Belang and Open VLD. Bart Somers resigned as president of the latter on election night.

And the winner is...

With nearly 23% of the votes, the Christian Democrat CD&V achieved its goal of becoming the largest party in Flanders. This means that it gets to take the initiative in forming the next regional government, with another term for Kris Peeters as minister-president. Peeters himself seems to have been a major asset for CD&V, as he has become a favourite with the voters. Observers describe this victory as a typical case of a leader swallowing its coalition partners – in this case Open VLD and SPA.

Back in about 2000, some observers predicted that the traditional CD&V would melt away “like ice”. This has not happened. In fact, this is the fourth victory in a row for CD&V, following the regional elections of 2004, the communal of 2006 and the federal elections of 2007. In addition, this was the first time since 2003 that CD&V presented itself at the ballot box without forming a cartel with N-VA. Remarkably, the combined results of the two former partners last Sunday was higher than ever.

→ *Continued on page 6*

Investors abandoned Belgium in 2008

Foreign investment projects cut by one-fifth

ALAN HOPE

Inward investment in Europe stayed stable last year – but not in Belgium. According to the latest report from accountancy giant Ernst & Young, the number of new investment projects in this country fell by nearly 20% last year, thanks largely to the lack of political stability.

There were 175 new foreign direct investment (FDI) projects in 2007, falling to only 142 last year. As a result, Belgium drops down the list from number five to number eight, behind the UK, France, Germany and Spain (as in previous years), but now also

behind Poland, Romania and Russia.

The biggest change came in projects from the United States, which fell from 49 to 38. But the factor the report found “most worrying” is that only one-half of the projects are genuinely new; the other half are extensions to existing projects.

At the same time, the number of jobs created by FDI projects also fell, down 23% last year on the 2007 total of 3,391 jobs. In Europe as a whole, job-creation was

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FLANDERS TODAY

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FLANDERS TODAY

JUNE 10, 2009

News in brief

The Beast is behind bars

Wanted killer extradited from Serbia

A most-wanted criminal suspected of having been a member of the Brabant Killers in the 1980s has been returned to Belgium from Serbia. He was tracked down to Belgrade by the Fugitive and Active Search Team (FAST) of the federal police.

Eric Lammers, known to his underworld associates as The Beast, was sentenced to life in 1991 for the murder of two Antwerp jewellers. He was released on probation in 2002 and fled the country in 2007 when he was about to go back to jail for helping a friend bury a dead body.



eric lammers © photowm

Lammers remains a suspect in the case of the Brabant Killers, who left 28 people dead after a spree of attacks and supermarket robberies in 1983-1985. He was known to be a member of the extreme-right Westland New Post movement, and took part in shooting exercises in woods where loot from the robberies was later found. Police even found a bulletproof vest known to have been stolen by the gang in Lammers' house. Nevertheless, he was never arrested.

When he fled in 2007, he was under suspicion of having molested his girlfriend's daughter, a charge which still awaits him. He went to Serbia, where he was arrested in July last year after negotiations between the Belgian and Serbian authorities. He was finally returned to Brussels last week, and imprisoned in Vorst prison in Brussels.

Researchers at the faculty of bio-engineering science at the University of Ghent have created a new laboratory which will allow them to produce **small quantities of chocolate**. The lab is capable of producing up to 4kg of chocolate while maintaining a high standard of quality – something that is normally extremely difficult in small quantities. As well as chocolate, the lab can also produce praline filling.

A campaign offering subsidies to encourage drivers to **fit soot-filters** to older diesel cars has attracted precisely one applicant since being introduced in March, the Flemish environment ministry said. The government offers up to €400 to pay for fitting the filter, but this does not cover the full cost.

Flemish people make by far the most **requests for euthanasia**, according to an article by two VUB professors in the journal BMC Public Health. Flemings represent 82% of the candidates, compared to only 18% French-speakers. In addition, more Flemings die as a result of a medical decision; more die by the ending of a treatment or the refusal to begin a new treatment; and more die as a result of an increase in pain medication.

About 40 beer lovers turned out at the weekend at the warehouse of gueze brewer Armand De Gelder in Halle, to help **pour away 55,000 litres** of the amber nectar. The beer was ruined after a thermostat broke down two weeks ago and allowed the brew to go higher than its maximum temperature. But all is not lost: the gueze will now be used as a basis for the distillation of a batch of genever. The brewer was less than delighted: "It hurts

that I have to make something as worthless as genever from such a noble drink as gueze – the best beer in the world, though I say so myself," he commented.

The **Antwerp diamond industry**, which two weeks ago was pleading for government help, will be giving away free diamonds at the World Exhibition in Shanghai next year, the man in charge of the Belgian pavilion has confirmed. "Every week we'll raffle off a diamond after a contest with questions about Belgium," said Leo Delcroix, the former defence minister. The Antwerp diamond industry will pay." The industry will have its own stand at Shanghai, complete with a diamond-cutting workshop.

of an **ancient oak tree** – because it interferes with their witchcraft rituals. Witches were once burned by Catholics in the vicinity of the tree, referred to locally as the Thousand-Year Oak, the protesters say. The shrine was constructed and put in place by another local man. The town council meanwhile has rejected the witches' complaints.



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This week

at www.flanderstoday.eu: an exclusive web-only interview with jazz prodigy Jef Neve, following the world premiere of his first piano concerto. We talk about inspiration and creation, musical control and free expression. Including a link to the full performance of the concerto, recorded live in Ghent. Only available online at www.flanderstoday.eu, with a full archive of past issues, breaking news and more.

Investors put off by lack of political stability

Belgium falls three places in “attractiveness” table

→ *Continued from page 1*

down 16%, and Belgium dropped from 12th to 14th place on that measure.

The crisis did not affect all business sectors equally. There were substantial increases in jobs in machinery and equipment, food, transport equipment and transport services. The machinery sector saw growing demand for wind turbines and fuel cells, while the food sector in Russia and Poland provided new market opportunities, the report says.

At the same time, there were catastrophic declines in job provision in software, financial intermediation,

computers and retail. Financial remediation and fabricated metals were areas where the number of projects fell hardest. Chemicals, on the other hand, registered a rise of 24% in the number of projects. Projects in computers went up 36% despite a 65% fall in jobs created, from 6,346 to 2,200.

Over and above the effects, felt across the board, of the economic crisis, Belgium's problems stem from the perception in 2007-2008 of a continuous political and institutional crisis, according to a survey carried out by Ernst & Young among 800 business leaders worldwide. Lack of stability and transparency were the



The Russian food retail sector provided investment opportunities.

main stumbling blocks to inward investment, though respondents also mentioned the tax burden – that perennial complaint – and the general lack of an enterprise culture.

Belgium's economy is unusually vulnerable to a fall in investor confidence, because it relies so much on foreign investment, said the report. Flanders took 52% of the inward

investment projects, or 74 of the total of 142, compared with 28% for Wallonia (40 projects) and 20% for Brussels (28 projects).

Last year, the Financial Times' magazine fDi voted Flanders the second-best region in Europe for attracting inward investment, after Scotland. The study cited the region's central location, good ports and productive workforce. ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

186,005

unemployed people in Flanders in May, an increase of 23.2% on May of last year, according to figures from the labour ministry



27.3%

increase in unemployment in Limburg province, which saw the sharpest rise, followed by West Flanders on 26.8%. Flemish Brabant was the lowest on 17.5%

2,071

bankruptcies in Flanders in the first five months of the year, an increase of 31.24% on the same period last year, according to figures from the research bureau Graydon, which tracks bankruptcies

1,200

bankruptcies in Wallonia, up 23.64%

847

bankruptcies in Brussels, only 2.79% more than last year. The increase nationwide was 22.5%

37,976

new vehicles registered in May, a fall of 21.6%, according to the motor industry federation Febiac, and nearly 10,000 fewer than in April

1,078

new HIV infections registered in 2008, the highest annual total since the disease first appeared in the 1980s

2.7 million

People who took part last year in a home-party, more than a quarter of the population. The sector grew by 7% to a value of €147 million in 2008, with jewellery and textiles generating the most income. The idea of the home-party was started by Brownie Wise for Tupperware in the 1950s

3 in 4

workers who thought a large part of their job could be done from home, although only 40% actually do work from home, according to a survey by Ollygos, a new company which organises home-working. Some 21% would work full-time from home if allowed

54.7 km/h

the average speed of motorists in a 50km/h-zone, according to the Belgian Institute for Road Safety. Two out of three drive over the speed limit, with one in four going over 60 km/h. In the 30km/h-zone, meanwhile, 96% of drivers fail to respect the limit

23mm

width of the new opening on a Coca-Cola can, 6mm larger than before. The company will save 3g of aluminium on each can, enough to build 14,700 barbecues

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Too many Flemish?

Elections make people say funny things. Take Didier Reynders, the federal deputy-prime minister and president of the French-speaking liberals. A week before the regional elections, he stated that there are too many Flemish representatives in the Brussels regional parliament. “After all, there are only about 15% Flemings in the capital, so why should they have 17 out of 89 representatives”, he said.

Well, he should know, because he was one of the people who decided that this should be so. Eight years ago, the “fixed representation” of Dutch speakers in the Brussels Parliament was agreed as part of the Lombard agreement, named after... the seat of the Brussels Parliament. This was part of a larger package on state reform negotiated by, amongst others, Didier Reynders.

Reynders' remarks were obviously no more than a last-minute effort to gain some extra votes in Brussels, using an old recipe: demonising the Flemish. Still, it raises an interesting question: why are Dutch speakers over-represented in the Brussels Parliament?

First of all, because they are a protected minority. In the same way, French-speakers are a protected minority in the whole of Belgium. Because of this, half of the federal government consists of French-speaking ministers, although francophones definitely make up less than half the population. Another clear case of over-representation, then. When you question one, you question the other too, which might ultimately bring down the federal state that took so many years to construct.

So how many Dutch speakers are there in Brussels? This is impossible to tell, as official counts based on language are outlawed. The number of Brussels votes received by Flemish parties has been going down steadily. Still, the influence of Dutch is on the increase in Brussels. Even though few speak it in their homes, more and more people in the capital know and use Dutch. The main reason lies in the excellent quality of Flemish schools, which are as a result becoming increasingly popular with people from all backgrounds. French, on the other hand, is losing its dominant positions, as languages such as Arabic and English are on the rise.

Brussels is therefore no longer a city with a (French-speaking) majority and a (Dutch-speaking) minority, but rather a city with different minorities. Maybe it is time for Reynders to get to know this new reality. ♦

Reality TV fraudster foiled

A man has been arrested and charged with extortion after he allegedly attempted to get Mijn Restaurant competitors Claudio Dell'Anno and Gaëlle Six to pay €35,000, in return for which he said he would manipulate the public vote to their advantage. The couple (see p. 9) last week won the reality-show competition.

Steven Quipor, aged 32, approached a Kortrijk businessman and fan of the restaurant and said he was in a position to affect the SMS-voting for the programme's final. He also claimed to have ensured the result of last year's final by similar means. Last year's competition was won by the underdog team from Leuven, but Restaurant Dell'Anno has been firm favourite to win since the very first episode.

The businessman finally made a com-



plaint to police after Quipor began issuing threats. The man was questioned by magistrates and his phone and computer seized. He claimed the businessman had agreed to pay for a certain number of SMS votes, and even promised a deposit. ♦

Report paints teachers' portrait

Teachers are slightly more satisfied with their jobs than the average worker, according to a survey carried out for the education ministry, details of which were leaked last week. Research by the Free University of Brussels (VUB) and Antwerp University also showed that a teacher's household income is higher than average, partly because the hours make it easier to arrange daycare while both partners work.

But teachers in Flanders work more unpaid hours than elsewhere, because only lessons are paid and not other work. On the other hand, working hours are more regular than in most other jobs, and work and family combine more easily (male teachers perform better than any other male worker on helping with household tasks).

Women are more present in the profession than elsewhere: 60% in teaching compared to 40-45% elsewhere. There are few immigrants (2% North African compared to 4-5% elsewhere) and fully half of all teachers do not expect to be promoted in their career. Few, as a consequence, consider promotion and competition to be important factors; instead, most value aspects such as creativity, family-work balance, autonomy and job security.

Despite what are described as “flat” career prospects, teachers are reluctant to quit: in the decade from 1991 to 2001 only 12% left the profession, compared to 29% in other fields of work. At the same time, however, the influx of new teachers from other work sectors is “worryingly low,” the report said. ♦

A slice of life

Jimmy Kets infiltrates the world of *volkscafes*

→ *Continued from page 1*

Volkunde Vlaanderen hired no less a figure than world-class photographer Jimmy Kets to bear visual testimony to the *volkscafe* phenomenon. He was, he fully admits, reluctant. But, wary of using black-and-white-photographs to create some kind of timeless look, Volkunde Vlaanderen wanted to opt for the young photographer's colourful, flashlight-flooded approach.

But Kets wasn't all that keen. Although one of his photos in the book shows a half-hidden Dimitri Verhulst novel, he has no similar childhood café experiences. "I'm not even a fanatic pub person," he tells me. "At my first meeting – in a pub – with Volkunde Vlaanderen, however, I did suddenly see some visually enticing details. So I went to a *volkscafe* in my hometown of Dessel [Antwerp province] as a test. I was welcomed by a jukebox and some old ladies and took some pictures that reflected my ideas. The publishers gave me carte blanche."

In two short months, the 30-year-old photographed 50 drinking holes all over Flanders. "You can't just go in and start clicking away," he explains. "People have to be put at ease and have the project explained to them. However, when you start off by photographing a plant for half an hour to get it just right, by the time you've finished you've been pegged as a fool anyway, and you can continue taking pictures at leisure."

Gust De Meyer, a professor of popular culture at the Catholic University of Leuven warns in the book of the romantic image of a place where social classes don't matter, and everybody knows your name. Instead, he says, regulars would rather stare in their glasses than welcome outsiders, the point of the place being to seek refuge from home and/or jobs.

Nostalgia, Meyer suggests, might be misguided, a hype "created by so-called cultural omnivores, who in fact prefer to go to Art Nouveau cafés themselves, which they falsely believe to be 'volkscafes'."

In Kets' experience, the atmosphere depended on the moment and the location of the *volkscafe*. "The smaller the hole, so to speak, the friendlier the people," he says.

Apart from serving as a press photographer for *De Standaard* and other assignments, Kets is regularly featured in exhibitions based on his personal portfolio. The FotoMuseum in Antwerp recently hosted Brightside, a collection of photos of people involved in recreational activities. He has also published a photo book of the same title.

Like many Flemish photographers, Kets is known for being honest and unpretentious. "In my personal work, I strive

to make pictures that are timeless, less dependent on an article or a caption. You need to constantly remain inspired, even if there's no such thing as the perfect picture. I am perhaps more enthralled by imperfect ones that show emotion and make me wonder 'how'."

Volkscafes aren't a typical Kets subject, but, then again, he doesn't want to commit to just one subject or mood. "I can be affected by any number of things, whether they make me smile or make me

funny. You're constantly processing. It involves much more than mere luck."

Volkscafes portrays people but also inert objects, like tiled floors and ash trays. Kets is in general focusing more and more on the material traces people leave behind. How they've created their own space for their own enjoyment. "Like when you see garbage bags piled up a certain way, almost like modern art," he muses. "Someone must have made the effort to put them exactly so."

"When you start off by photographing a plant for half an hour, you've been pegged as a fool anyway and can continue taking pictures at leisure"

dream." Last year, he produced a series on the city of Las Vegas. "I had gone to photograph the erotic, the sleazy side of the town. But by leaving the casinos and walking off the end of the strip, I discovered the light and the things I really wanted to shoot."

The *Volkscafes* series records the sometime bizarre activities that take place there (in one case, an agricultural show of chickens, in small boxes attached to the wall) but also men simply looking bored or women applying their lipstick. "To me, photos are a way to register slices of life and show the emotions I've experienced witnessing them, be they sad or

Kets finds some countries emotionally – and thus photographically – more appealing than others. "Ten days in Vietnam didn't bring me a click," he says. "I'd take lots of photos in America, but maybe none in Germany. And of course when you aren't feeling well, you shun happy people, so to speak, and feel more drawn to the sharp edges and dark corners. Because you follow your emotions."

Kets can find this country super alluring too, photographically speaking. "Sometimes Flanders is so hideous, it becomes beautiful again," he laughs. Driving to an assignment down a *steenweg*, for example, between Lier and Aarschot, I could

Glossary

Understanding the language of the *volkscafe*

Café: initially denoting a fashionable 18th-century coffeehouse, this general term currently equals the UK pub or the American bar. It encompasses all the haunts listed below.

Herberg: mediaeval term for a café dating from a time when major thoroughfares offered the perfect location for meeting places. Beer was rich in calories (hence: a liquid lunch) and cleaner than water. Even kids drank it. Weary travellers could sleep in a *herberg*, too. If horses could rest there, it was known as an *afspanning* (un-harness).

Staminee: initially offering a separate room for closed meetings. Short-lived term supposedly based on the 16th-century Spanish phrase *Esta minéta?* meaning "Are there girls?"

Bruine kroeg: in the Netherlands, a *kroeg* equals a café, but in Flanders the bruine *kroeg* is a specific type of dimly-lit city café, in which 1960s intelligentsia gathered and saved the world.

Taverne: serves food. The dawn of the 20th century saw the bourgeois and clergy frequenting their own establishments, preaching against the lower class *volkscafe*. Commercial opportunism has "taverned" many cafés since, refurbishing them with shiny wood and red velvet upholstery.

stop every five meters to take pictures. One day I might." ♦

Volkscafés: Vrouwentongen en Mannenpraat by Volkunde Vlaanderen, Davidsfonds publisher, €22.50

Help Volkunde Vlaanderen register worthwhile *volkscafes* on their website

→ www.volkscafes.be



© Photos by Jimmy Kets

You know you're in a volkscafe if:

- 1 There are old ladies in front and behind the bar. These cafes have supplied generations of families with extra income, and often the women have spent their lives running them while the men worked other jobs. They are indestructible. "I'm 90, but I'll never quit. Why would I? I would rather talk than watch TV." They own the joint and are the undisputed bosses. "You have had enough."
- 2 Only beer is served. No tap, just bottles from the fridge or cellar. Soda for kids. Asking for coffee is being fussy. There's no till, and prices are kept low and simple. "I multiply by seven best."
- 3 The name of the establishment refers to its location ('t Hoekske) or sports (De Sportduif). Some refer to its former doubling as a cattle farm (Den Bonten Os), a grocery shop (De Koophandel) or a blacksmith (In De Oude Smidse). Names are usually simple (Welkom) even if sometimes weird (Trouwe Lassie). Regardless of the sign above the door, locals will use the name of the owner (Ik ben bij Jef en Marie – I'm at Jef and Marie's).
- 4 No food. A hard-boiled egg or dried sausage at most.
- 5 Open every day and all hours. Or not. "I only open when I feel like it."
- 6 Iconic Sansevierias plants (or vrouwentongen) in pots adorn the windowsill (supposedly to purify the air).
- 7 The toilet is a ditch or a primitive wooden seat with a hole. "Where is the *koer*?" is a regular question. Looking for it will take you on a tour through the proprietor's private quarters until you end up outside again. Try the backyard or behind the shed.
- 8 The consistently unchanged 1930s to '50s interior usually consists of a bar, a wooden bench against the wall, red Formica tabletops and kitchen chairs. White neon lighting.
- 9 Silences are important. Minor gestures signal for another pint or a round. Rarely a TV. No music. The occasional vintage jukebox only plays the landlord's favourite songs.
- 10 Stray kids accompany their drinking fathers. They're probably plotting to write a book later on this bonding but horrifying experience, like Dimitri Verhulst did.



Can you get your hair cut there? Then you're probably in a volkscafe

Cost-cutting panic or investments in human capital?

In times like these, where we have to do more with less, there are two types of managers. **Those who cut costs** across the board, and **those who even now choose to continue to invest** prudently. Which type are you? The financial crisis and the uncertain economic situation are confronting managers with new challenges, but all too often they are also driving them to take decisions that are infused with panic and doom-and-gloom. But the ones who are forward-thinking and keep to their own course don't slam on the brakes – instead, they invest in the future.

Knowledge determines your competitive power

An organisation that wants to maintain and strengthen its competitive position in the global economy must be powered by a well-oiled knowledge engine. Your workforce is your greatest capital and lifelong learning is an absolute necessity. The acquired knowledge flows back into your company and your knowledge capital grows larger and larger, increasing your competitiveness. This will keep you competitive in the rapidly changing economic context. We call this 'learning with impact'.



Investing in training: costs versus benefits

Too often, training is still regarded as a cost instead of an investment. However, companies that view their personnel policy from a strategic standpoint continue – even when the economy becomes a serious challenge – to invest in training programmes for their most strategic employees. Investing in talent and training now guarantees you a significant jump on the competition when the economy gets going again.



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The political puzzle

Forming a new government won't be easy

→ *Continued from page 1*

The nationalist N-VA is the biggest winner of this election. Just a few years ago, there were doubts about whether it could even survive on its own, but it has now grown into a medium-sized party, with no less than 13% of the vote. Party president Bart De Wever, who the public got to know as a dry cynic, a sharp wit and a clever debater, played a large part in this victory. The electorate obviously appreciated his uncompromising attitude on Flemish demands for greater autonomy.

As the big winner, N-VA is expected to enter the Flemish government. It will be interesting to see how it will go about reaching its goal of more Flemish autonomy, as it has to depend on the federal level and the goodwill of the French-speakers to achieve this.

Another winner is Lijst Dedecker, although LDD suffers from what has become known as "defeat in victory": a result of 7% is actually quite good for a newcomer, but so much more was expected of LDD, which dominated a large part of the campaign. Founder Jean-Marie Dedecker, a former Olympic judo

coach, had hoped for 10%. In his own words, he got "only a bronze medal" and his LDD is destined to become an opposition party.

Those who lose

With a loss of no less than 9%, the far right Vlaams Belang is the biggest loser. With 15% of votes, it is still the second-largest party in Flanders, but it is no longer that formidable bloc it was four years ago. With this defeat, one of Bart De Wever's dearest wishes – "regaining the nationalist aspect from the extremists" – comes true. It might also lift some of the extreme-right odium from the image Flanders sometimes projects abroad.

The reason for Vlaams Belang's beating? With N-VA and LDD both doing well, the competition was simply too strong. N-VA is just as nationalist as Vlaams Belang, but more respectable, while LDD appeals to anti-establishment voters in much the same way, but without the racist undertones. With this blow, the party of Filip Dewinter will remain in opposition, where it has spent all its life.

Open VLD had expected some losses, but not on this scale. With slightly less than 15% of the vote,



The winners: minister president Kris Peeters and CD&V chairwoman Marianne Thyssen celebrate in Brussels last Sunday as the final results were announced, but they still have to form a government

it is now only the fourth party in Flanders (although that gives them the second-highest number of seats in parliament). Though hyperactive during the campaign, the liberals were at a loss when CD&V asked them to name their candidate as minister-president. In the end, they decided on deputy minister-president Dirk Van Mechelen, after party president Bart Somers was weakened by having made outrageous promises to an LDD defector. Bart Somers pays the price for this defeat and has resigned as party president, leaving its natural leader, former prime minister Guy Verhofstadt, in charge.

It was Guy Verhofstadt who pulled off the biggest stunt in these elections. With more than half a million votes in the European elections, he is still Flanders' most popular politician. This lifts Open VLD's result for the European Parliament up by 5%, to 20%. This difference, created by voters switching their votes from the Flemish to the European Parliament, is unprecedented. Before the election, the former prime minister stated he was "ready to help where needed".

It looks like his own party needs him the most.

Although it received quite a blow, the socialist SP.A seemed rather relieved to get 15%, which was not as bad as they had feared. Over the last few elections, SP.A has become mostly the party of city residents, as it has been virtually wiped out in the countryside. The beleaguered party president Caroline Gennez now hopes to rebuild her party to its former strength. She can count on the help of Steve Stevaert, its popular former leader, who announced on election day that he is quitting as governor of the province of Limburg. He will not re-enter political life, he has said, but by leaving this largely ceremonial function (which requires strict neutrality), he can at least speak out freely.

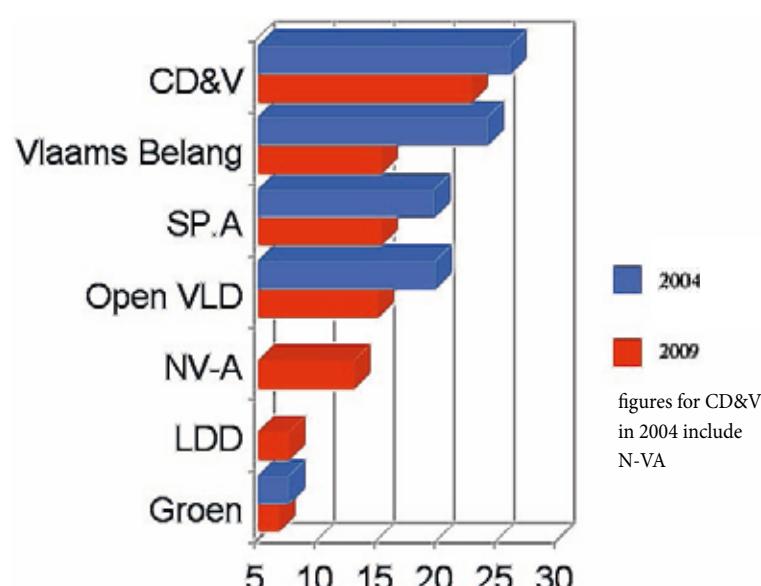
The ecological Groen! got a disappointing 6%. This is about the weight of its traditional electorate, but the greens had expected a much better result, especially since its French-speaking counterpart Ecolo scores around 20%.

And what now?

Minister-president Kris Peeters

(CD&V) now has to form a new government. This is a daunting puzzle, with a plethora of medium-sized parties, winners and losers alike. He could continue with the current coalition, working with Open VLD en SP.A, but that would be seen as going against the voters' will. More likely he will try to include the winning N-VA. In that case, he will also need either SP.A or Open VLD, both of whom are licking their wounds at this moment.

Meanwhile, life has not become any easier for federal prime minister Herman Van Rompuy (CD&V), who heads a government of Christian democrats and liberals, along with French-speaking socialists. As the Walloon and Brussels regional governments will probably leave out liberals and include greens, there will be no symmetry at all between the federal and regional level, on both sides of the language border. To make matters even more complicated, the victory of CD&V and N-VA has rekindled the Flemish demands for state reform, which will no doubt result in more arm wrestling between the language groups of this country. *



Electrabel could face tax on €1.5 billion overcharge

The electricity market regulator CREG has called upon energy minister Paul Magnette to find a way to force power generators Electrabel and SPE to reimburse profits they made from charging business clients for carbon emission rights. The power companies did not themselves pay for the rights, issued by the government under a European Union programme to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases. But they passed a notional cost on to industrial customers, with the total since 2005 now reaching €1.5 billion.

Belgian producers are not alone in selling off free rights at a price. According to figures produced by the EU Commission at the request of Groen! MEP Bart Staes, the total of

what are being called "windfall profits" will by 2012 have reached €71 million in only five member states: Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland and the UK.

Electrabel maintains it has done nothing wrong, claiming that administering the system of emission rights costs money and that someone has to pay. While business clients were billed, ordinary households paid nothing – although of course businesses pass the cost on to consumers in the end. Greens, together with the CREG, are now pressing the federal government to levy a windfall tax on the rights money, which would then be reinvested in alternative energy sources and power-saving measures. ♦

Metris board approves Nikon bid

The board of Leuven-based measurement-technology company Metris last week came out in support of a takeover bid by Nikon. The Japanese company is offering a total of €71.5 million for 85% of the shares, which represents a 100% premium on the value according to last week's price of €2.66, just before trading was suspended. Taking the average price over the last month, Nikon's offer of €5.50 represents a premium of 150%.

Metris was named Enterprise of the Year in 2006, but has been hard-hit by the economic crisis, and earlier this year was forced into talks with its creditors on debt-rescheduling. The takeover by Nikon will give the Leuven-based company an opening in Asia and Japan for its micro-metrology range of products, which are used in the automotive industry, engineering and aerospace. Nikon, while best-known as a camera company, also oper-

ates in the nano-metrology sector, where it is not in direct competition with Metris. While Nikon provides markets in Asia, Metris brings with it a strong position in Europe and North America.

When Nikon was founded in 1917, it brought together three major optical equipment companies, which went on to produce the celebrated Nikkor lens. The company is still made up of three major divisions. Consumer products led by cameras make up 70% of Nikon's €6.4 billion turnover, and the company sells just over one in every three digital reflex cameras sold. Precision instruments like scanners and steppers for the manufacture of LCD screens and computer chips make up 25% of turnover. Nikon Instruments also produces microscopes for medical and industrial applications, as well as measuring equipment capable of working down to a sub-micron level. ♦

Techno-gap could wreck competitiveness

Belgium is so far behind other countries in the provision of broadband internet that the country's economic growth, innovation and job creation could all suffer as a result, a report by Cisco Belgium warned last week.

A decade ago, Belgium stood at the forefront of Internet services: in such a heavily-cabled country, the provision of ADSL was a simple matter. But now Belgium is slowing down and even moving backwards, Cisco says. The basic infrastructure is not keeping up with the requirements of the



knowledge economy. "This is not something that only specialists care about; this could have a major social impact," said the company's Pol Van Biervliet. ♦



THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Airlines • VLM

VLM Airlines, the Antwerp-based carrier owned by Air France-KLM, will be rebranded as City Jet from 2010. The move forms part of the French carrier's plan to reorganise its short-haul operations and develop its hub at London City Airport.

Digital • Barco

Barco, the Kortrijk-based cinema and TV equipment company, has signed a contract to supply up to 80 digital projectors to Cap Cinema, one of France's leading cinema operators.

Energy • Enfinity

The Waregem-based Enfinity, which specialises in alternative energy equipment, has been hired to install solar panels on all Lidl distribution centres in seven European countries. The German discount retailer expects the move to drastically cut its electricity bill.

Fast food • Quick

The fast food chain Quick has launched a new "Giant Bar" concept based on smaller restaurants aimed at customers in a hurry. The range of products is limited, and there are a maximum of 18 seats. The first outlet opened in Brussels Central Station last week, and more are planned in other railway and metro stations. Meanwhile, the company is pursuing expansion of its regular restaurants in France and Russia, with the scheduled opening of some 30 outlets this year.

Insurance • Fortis

Fortis Corporate Insurance, a former Dutch affiliate of Fortis, with offices in Brussels and Antwerp, has been sold to the UK-based Amlin insurance group for €350 million.

Shipping • CMB

CMB, the Antwerp-based shipping group, is believed to have sold two of its bulk carrier ships for up to \$100 million to Asian interests.

Clean-up begins at asbestos blackspot

The removal of asbestos from polluted industrial sites in Flanders is being undertaken on a scale not seen anywhere else, according to the agency in charge, the Flemish Public Waste Products Agency (OVAM). Last week the organisation began recycling 25,000 tonnes of waste, half of it asbestos, from the site in Mol of the former Balmatt Industries, a cement manufacturer that went bust in 1998.

The site covers 6.5 hectares along the Herentals-Bocholt canal, and aside from asbestos contains PCBs, toluene, mineral oil and heavy metals. The work will take until 2011 and cost €6 million. After the Carcoke plant in Zeebrugge, which cost €20 million, the Balmatt site is the second-biggest job the OVAM has undertaken. "It will be a mammoth task," an agency spokesman said.

Several attempts have been made to clean the site in the 11 years since the plant closed, but the scale

of the job made it economically impossible until it came into the hands of the Flemish region. Once cleaned up, the site will be the home for new industries, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters has unofficially revealed, including the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO).

The OVAM is currently employed in cleaning up no fewer than 525 sites across the region, mostly of much smaller size. The agency's aim is to have the soil in Flanders clean by 2036.

Meanwhile, it was revealed last week that soil contaminated with asbestos and other pollutants was supplied by a recycling firm to the site of a new electricity generating station in Tessenderlo. The recycling company claims error, but the prosecutor of Mechelen has opened an investigation following testimony from two former employees that pollutants were regularly mixed with recycled soil. ♦

Half as many passengers for De Lijn

Flemish public transport authority De Lijn has overestimated the number of passengers using its services by 100%, according to researchers from the University of Leuven. According to De Lijn, in its annual report released last week, the authority provided the equivalent of 508 million journeys last year. But the Leuven research suggests that the numbers used by De Lijn are wildly inaccurate. De Lijn claims season-ticket holders make an average of 90 bus and tram trips a month. Instead, the survey suggests, the true figures are only 52 for people living outside of towns, and no more than 21 for city-dwellers. According to their

figures, only 226 million journeys were actually made, instead of 508 million.

The difference is important. The number of journeys delivered is used as the justification for the subsidy De Lijn receives from the Flemish government - €943 million in 2008, or more than 80% of the authority's budget.

De Lijn has rejected the research as "not serious". The sample size is too small, the authority says: pollsters from the Namur-based Notre-Dame University Faculty interviewed 717 people in Ghent between the ages of 22 and 75, only 207 of whom had a season



ticket. It also includes a group of over-65s who are not relevant to the discussion. In 2001 De Lijn will introduce a chip-card similar to the Mobib card now in use in Brussels, which will register every single actual journey in real time, and put an end to discussion once and for all. ♦



The story catcher

Peter Verhelst is used to crossing genres, and now he's jumped the generation gap

REBECCA BENOOT

Peter Verhelst has been a bright star in the Flemish literary scene for many years now. Although some readers find his poetic and often sensual language inaccessible, this novelist, poet and playwright stirs up strong emotions in fans of Dutch-language literature.

Last month, Verhelst received his third Golden Owl – Flanders' much-coveted annual literary award – for his adaptation of the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale *The Nightingale*. He won his first Golden Owl in 2000 for *Tonguecat*, which he says was one of the most important events of his entire career.

"It gives you enough freedom to do whatever you want," the 47-year-old tells me from his home in Nazareth, a small town in East Flanders near Ghent. Not only did *Tonguecat* win the Golden Owl that year, it was also awarded the Golden Owl young readers public prize. Verhelst said he was moved by the enthusiasm of such a wide audience when he accepted both awards. "It was only then that I realised that the book had meant something to so many people," he says.

At that point, Verhelst was teaching language and history in a secondary school in Bruges, the town where he was born. But "*Tonguecat* became quite popular in Belgium, so I stopped teaching and started living as a writer," he says. "Money means time; you can buy your freedom."

He discovered he wasn't a teacher who wrote, he was a writer in every fibre of his being. "I wrote *Tonguecat* in some kind of fever... and I loved it. I really love to write... It's a way of life for me. During those moments, I'm at my best."

His work – the novels in particu-

lar – have always been tough for critics to label. More aesthetic than your average Postmodernist, his language is startlingly beautiful. In *Tonguecat*, Prometheus flees the violence of his own world and descends to earth, only to find himself in an underworld of junkies and prostitutes. By frequently using myths and symbols, Verhelst creates magical environments in which the artificiality and chaos of modern life still prevail. Readers must find their own way through a vast labyrinth of inter-textual delights.

"It's strange that my books became popular, because I don't write normal books," he admits. "In a normal book, you have a story from A to Z. I really don't write that kind of book. There are a lot of black holes in my work that you can only fill in with your own experiences. My way of writing offer readers the opportunity to projecting their fears or desires in the language and images I use – which makes it personal."

Sing sweet nightingale

Bearing in mind Verhelst's love for an elusive, fairytale-like atmosphere, it isn't a big surprise that he chose to adapt *The Nightingale*. "When my kids were younger, I always told them stories every night. I promised them that one day I'd do a book for kids. When they asked me to adapt this fairy tale, I thought, 'Well, here is my book.'

And this story in particular – about a Chinese emperor who prefers the sound of his mechanical nightingale to the real one outside his window, only to be brought back from death's door by the real bird's authentic song – appeals especially to Verhelst.

"I like the story very much. It's an ode to art and what art can do to us – how it can change our

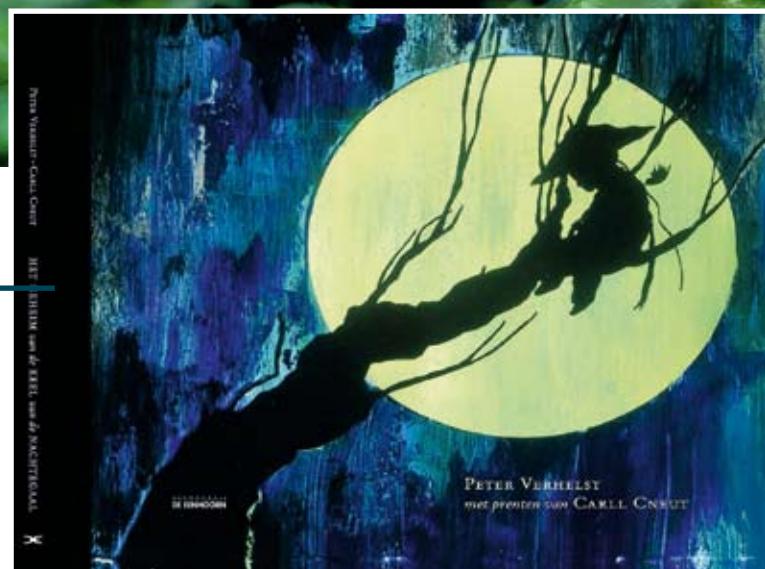


Worlds of myth: Peter Verhelst combines non-narrative prose with fantastical imagery

way of seeing and living."

Verhelst is also planning on writing more children's books since it's "not that different from writing for adults". Although he did have his doubts at first: "I had never done it, so I was really not sure it would work because I use a lot of images and a very poetic language, and that means you have to listen to it two or three times or re-read it to find all the possibilities."

And the story allowed him to keep the surreal atmosphere of his adult novels. "By using mythology and fairy tale, you



can really do anything you want as a writer; it gives you an incredible freedom to use your imagination. Every single thing I'm writing is about imagination. It's about history, the way people have always been dreaming of better places. It's about longing – and what people do to get what they long for."

Verhelst is in fact fascinated by people who are longing. "Because then they are at their best. They do things you can't believe – the most beautiful and horrific things you can imagine. And even when they are doing these horrific things, it's still human. It's one of the most beautiful aspects of human nature, this longing."

Influenced by contemporary American novelist Thomas Pynchon, Verhelst admires authors who create their own universe without worrying what readers will think of it. The Flemish novelist doesn't want to guide his readers too much, either, but rather let them

discover their own feelings. "The only thing you can do as a writer is to use words we all use and to put them in sentences that make a reader think: 'Oh, that's what I always wanted to say – or just the opposite.'

Not only does Verhelst frequently shock or confuse his readers, he seems to have the same effect on Ghent's city council. When they

asked him to be the next city poet, he told them he would be – but only if he didn't have to write poems. "I don't like it that you have to write about things in the city itself," he says. "The opposite would be more interesting: to ask the people of Ghent for stories, to be a real story catcher. I think it would be great to hear their stories and to put them into a nice work. Then you have some kind of dream book of Ghent. What are the people of Ghent dreaming about?"

At the time Flanders Today went to press, the city of Ghent was on the brink of appointing Verhelst as city poet.♦

The best of Verhelst

Het Geheim van de keel van de nachtegaal (The Secret of the Nightingale's Throat)

Based on the fairy tale *The Nightingale* by Hans Christian Andersen, this new adaptation earned Verhelst his second jury-selected Golden Owl. The poetic and magical story about an emperor who wants to confine nature was turned into a true work of art thanks to the beautiful illustrations by Flemish illustrator Carll Cneut.

Tongkat (Tonguecat)

Verhelst's 1999 breakthrough novel, the pinnacle of his sumptuous language and mythical atmosphere. In his multi-layered tour de force, Prometheus descends to earth to encounter horror, decay and, eventually, humanity. Verhelst's only work to be translated into English.

Nieuwe Sterrenbeelden (New Constellations)

The writer's most recent excursion into poetry landed him this year's Herman de Coninck Prize. Seemingly simple language conveys striking imagery and complex ideas.

Zwerm (Swarm)

Verhelst's biggest and boldest work to date, this 2005 novel is infested with numerous themes and countless characters that cross each other's paths yet never seem to connect. Political and criminal syndicates both hunt down and protect war survivors and other psychological vulnerables in this apocalyptic novel that is in constant flux, like it's on a voyage where the destination is still unknown.



A woman's touch

An intimate exhibition reveals 700 years of female history

LISA BRADSHAW

In 856, the king of the West Frankish Empire, Charles the Bald, gave his 12-year-old daughter Judith in marriage to the King of Wessex, who was about 56. Two years later, the Anglo-Saxon king died, and Judith married his son, the new king. This marriage was considered sacrilege and annulled, but it didn't really matter, because this husband soon died, too.

The still-teenaged Judith went back to her father in France, and he put her in a monastery to await her next marriage.

And then Judith took matters into her own hands.

The 17-year-old ran off to Rome with a man named Baldwin, whom she loved, and married. Very little is known about him up until this event, which probably means he wasn't very well placed to marry the daughter of a king.

Judith's father was furious, but, after she pleaded her case to the Pope himself, Charles eventually approved the marriage and let the couple return to France. He put the now Count

Baldwin in charge of fighting the Vikings in an area below the Scheldt River. Some historians believe that he was hoping Baldwin would be quickly killed, but Baldwin surprised everyone by doing remarkably well, quelling the Viking threat. He was put in charge of the area, which then became known as the County of Flanders.

And Judith, although she died young, apparently died happy. The first Countess of Flanders and mother of four, she is the common ancestress of a long, long line of rulers in this now-Belgian region. Judith is, quite literally, the mother of Flanders.

So it is with Judith that *Vrouwen van Vlaanderen*, or *Women of Flanders*, begins. This exhibition of 700 years of history of royal women is spread between three locations in West Flanders. It sounds ambitious, and it is – but it's also so simply done that it's not remotely intimidating.

When the venues came together with the idea of creating an exhibition on the history of the County of Flanders, they were worried it would come off dreadfully dull. "We wanted

to be a bit sexy with the theme," admits Véronique Lambert, curator of *Women of Flanders* and also of Kortrijk's 1302 Museum. "So we chose women."

Aside from a promise of discovering illicit love affairs, illegitimate children and feuding sisters, the triptych show uncovers a social and political history completely unknown to most Flemings, let alone foreigners and tourists. "When we go to school, we learn about wars and what the men did, but not about the women," explains Lambert. "But these women played invaluable roles in history as governors, mothers and wives. They had very important roles in transferring property, in education and in religion."

There are a lot of women (and girls) to choose from between 863 and 1555, so curators whittled it down to 17 countesses or wives and daughters of counts. They also looked at who during the 700-hundred-year history were particularly strong in three specific areas: politics, family, and religion and culture. Some are well known, others not at all. So, where you'll meet Margaret of Austria, the famous inhabitant of Mechelen responsible for extraordinarily successful treaty negotiations and for raising Charles V, you'll also meet Margareta van Brabant, whose husband was so furious with her for not being able to bear children, he locked her in the cellars of Male Castle.

That castle, frequented by the counts and countesses of Flanders, is now the Sint-Trudo Abbey, and is the final stop on the exhibition tour. *Women of Flanders* is arranged chronologically, with the earliest centuries at

Rumbeke Castle and the middle centuries at the 1302 Museum in Kortrijk.

Along with texts, objects the women owned (or that were common during their reigns) and an occasional portrait, *Women of Flanders* includes a photographic and audio installation at every stop. Large black-and-white portraits of modern-day women by Flemish photographer Lieve Blancaert represent the women from the past. Put on the headphones to hear each one tell a personal story. At Rumbeke, in fact, these photos and stories make up the entire exhibition.

It's obvious why: there is simply nothing left of the women from the 9th to the 13th centuries – no clothes, no jewellery, no portraits. (Oil painting would in fact not even be done until 200 years later.) Stage actress and writer Ruth Becquaert wrote scripts for the models (also Flemish actresses and singers) from what written histories are available.

These photographs and stories were a very good idea; not only do they bring the lives of these women to a contemporary level that most people will find very accessible, they often provide the most memorable experiences of a show whose objects are occasionally questionable. (A stuffed squirrel shows the kind of fur some of the women wore, for example.) Of the 17 stories, one of the most affecting is the only one of a child.

Filippina van Dampierre, the daughter of the 13th-century Count Gwijde, was promised in marriage when she was about eight years old. "But I have to wait until I'm 12," she explains. And then, in a very small voice: "I'm a little scared."

The three locations of *Women of Flanders* are close enough together to easily see them all in one day. Unfortunately, the limited hours at Rumbeke Castle make it impossible to see them chronologically. It's a shame they could not see their way to altering their opening hours for the duration of the exhibition. ♦

CULTURE NEWS



Ray Chen takes his show on the road

The three top winners of this year's **Queen Elizabeth Competition**, which this year featured violinists, will tour Flanders this month with deFilharmonie, beginning with a concert in Hasselt on 11 June. The gruelling competition was won by 20-year-old Ray Chen from Australia. Belgium's finalist, Lorenzo Gatto, came second, with Moldavian Ilian Gârnet third. From Hasselt, the three will move on to Antwerp, Ghent, Leuven, Mons and Bruges, before the final concert at Bozar in Brussels on 16 June.

→ www.cmireb.be

Chris Burden created his third **"Beam Drop"** sculpture live before the public on 30 May at the Middelheim Museum in Antwerp, where a retrospective of his work is showing until September. Using a crane, the American artist dropped a series of steel beams from a height of 35 metres into a bed of wet concrete, in what was described as a performance of gravity and chance.

The restaurant Dell'Anno in Kortrijk won the final of the outrageously popular VTM television series ***Mijn Restaurant!*** For several months, viewers have watched the temperamental chef Claudio Dell'Anno and his long-suffering girlfriend Gaëlle Six compete against four other teams to be allowed to walk away with their own restaurant. In a tense final, Dell'Anno defeated Bigarreaux restaurant in Sint-Truiden with 58% of the public vote. As with the first series last year, some tension was caused when Mobistar reported it was unable to register some votes for Sint-Truiden over the weekend preceding the final. VTM decided to annul all votes for both candidates during that period, but both sides are seeking legal advice. An estimated 1.5 million people watched the final, or 48% of the viewing public – the highest rating for VTM in 11 years.

Studio 100 has asked the Council of State to annul a decision by outgoing culture minister Bert Anciaux to subsidise the organisation Musical van Vlaanderen for three years. MvV is an arm of the private company Music Hall Group, which, like Studio 100, puts on theatre shows across the country. Studio 100 claims the subsidies distort competition. A spokesman for Anciaux pointed out that Studio 100 did not apply for a subsidy in the first place.



Johanna of Constantinople (left) ruled the County of Flanders in her husband's absence – much to the chagrin of her sister Margareta; above, Judith, as portrayed by Flemish singer Liesa Van der Aa

Until 13 September

→ www.vrouwenvanvlaanderen.be

All written and oral texts of *Women of Flanders* are in Dutch

Secret gardens

Kortrijk mixes art and nature – with mixed results

DENZIL WALTON

Ten internationally renowned landscape architects have created oases of green within the city of Kortrijk. It's a great idea, and all the gardens can be visited by following a pleasant walking route through the city. The map is part of a free guidebook available from the tourist office in English, Dutch or French.

However, a couple of warnings before you set off. First, the guidebook has been written by a copywriter who I suspect has spent too much time reclining in a garden chewing poppy seeds. It's my only explanation for phrases such as: "floating cushions sprouting from flowerbeds graft themselves onto the natural reflex to pass through this astonishing space as quickly as possible." We can't even blame the translator; the original Dutch is just as confusing.

Second, don't expect to come across innovative urban garden designs as

displayed at events like the Chelsea Flower Show. Kortrijk's Secret Gardens aren't really gardens at all. I went looking for ideas for my own garden and came away without any inspiration at all.

The inspiration may be intended more for artists than gardeners. A prime example is "The Chaotic Maze" by the American Martha Schwartz, which lies within the Broel Museum garden. It's composed of about 40 giant flower boxes filled with a selection of yews, ornamental grasses and various shrubs. Apparently, the precise positioning of the flower boxes was decided through choreography. A dance performance was filmed, and the film is on permanent display in the museum.

Sorry Martha, the guidebook might call you the Andy Warhol of landscape architecture but watching a video choreographed for flower boxes is



"A Wheat Field for the City" is a highlight of Secret Gardens

more pretension than we earthbound gardeners can handle.

Other creations fare much better. "A Wheat Field for the City" at the foot of the Buda Tower successfully brings agricultural crops into the city. The addition of cornflowers, poppies and scabious makes the small field even more attractive. I also loved the earthy, crunching sound made by walking on the path made of crushed red tiles. One of its designers is the aptly named Denis Dujardin, who was partly responsible for the highly acclaimed redesign of the Maria Hendrika park in Ostend.

I was also attracted by "Criss-Crossed" in the Houtmarkt, which has

great potential as a relaxing place to sit and escape the crowds of shoppers. By mid-July its plants – climbing hops, convolvulus and morning glory – should have spread along a dense network of steel wires between two walls to form a roof of foliage and colourful blooms. It was designed by Berlin-based Atelier Le Balto.

On the other hand, "Stepping Stones" in the Overbekeplein by Jan Bley's design agency Ars Horti didn't work for me. Judging from the bewildered stares of local shoppers, they too didn't get the point of what seem to be giant surfboards covered by artificial turf. Again, the guidebook didn't help. The grass mats, it claims, "give the area a greater sense of fragility".

But maybe that is one of the objectives of Secret Gardens: to ask ourselves "what actually is a garden?" A garden is much more than a lawn, flowerbed, pond with goldfish and some vegetables. It could be any green space, of any size, anywhere, used for a multitude of purposes.

One area in which Secret Gardens definitely succeeds is the use of vacant urban space. Many of the gardens are located in wasteland, derelict building sites or under-used public areas. Introducing any form of green life to these areas is certainly a step in the right direction.

► www.secretgardens-kortrijk.be

bite

SHARON LIGHT



©Robyn Mackenzie/Shutterstock

The bagels of Brussels

Few people have the audacity to complain about Belgium's bakeries: between the croissants, baguettes and wide variety of sweetened delicacies, little is left to be desired. But there are surely many American expats – and undoubtedly every New Yorker – huddling behind closed doors lamenting a couple of key baked goods missing from their Belgian diet.

Obviously, I refer first and foremost to the bagel. Although the Jewish community of Antwerp provides a refuge for some, the bagel battle in Brussels is a bitter one. Most bakers' bagel-exposure seems to have been limited to photographs. Thankfully, a few establishments are doing their homework and saving us all from our bagel-less misery.

Au Pays Des Merveilles, a cozy bagel haven and tea room in Sint-Gillis, has their bagels delivered from Amsterdam. These bagels are respectable, with ample doses of cream cheese, smoked salmon or other toppings (although why anyone would order something other than cream cheese and smoked salmon on a bagel is beyond me). It's a popular place, and a choice destination for a leisurely Sunday morning brunch, including their fine selection of teas and coffees.

Newer still to the Brussels bagel scene is Sens in Elsene. Open only since mid-March, it is quickly developing a loyal following. Those of you looking for a solid H&H bagel with a two-inch *schmear* of cream cheese are going to have to look elsewhere.

Sens offers up a delicious, light, locally-made bagel in four basic flavours: plain, sesame, poppy and multi-grain (as purists will note, "multigrain" is the exotic outlier in that list). Cream cheese is served in moderation – no skimping, but no 1:1 bagel-to-cream-cheese ratio either.

Perhaps most importantly, Sens serves up a pastrami that evokes sighs and eyes-rolled-heavenward from its devotees. While the supplier remains a strict secret, the pastrami (as well as some other meat) is kosher and is even attracting Jews from Antwerp. It's hard to get higher pastrami praise than that.

► www.apdm.be



Between heaven and earth

Mechelen is home to the only church in the world where it's fine to fall asleep

LISA BRADSHAW

When you step into the Martin's Patershof, you'll find ever-changing holograms of stained glass windows on the floor. It's a clever bit of modernity in this Mechelen hotel, which is brand new and 140 years old at the same time.

The Patershof is built into an 1867 church that was once home to Franciscan friars. They lived in the adjoining friary and worshipped in the Neo-Gothic church. But the friars are now long gone, and the church itself was deconsecrated 10 years ago. After establishing that Mechelen was short on hotel rooms, Martin's made their move.

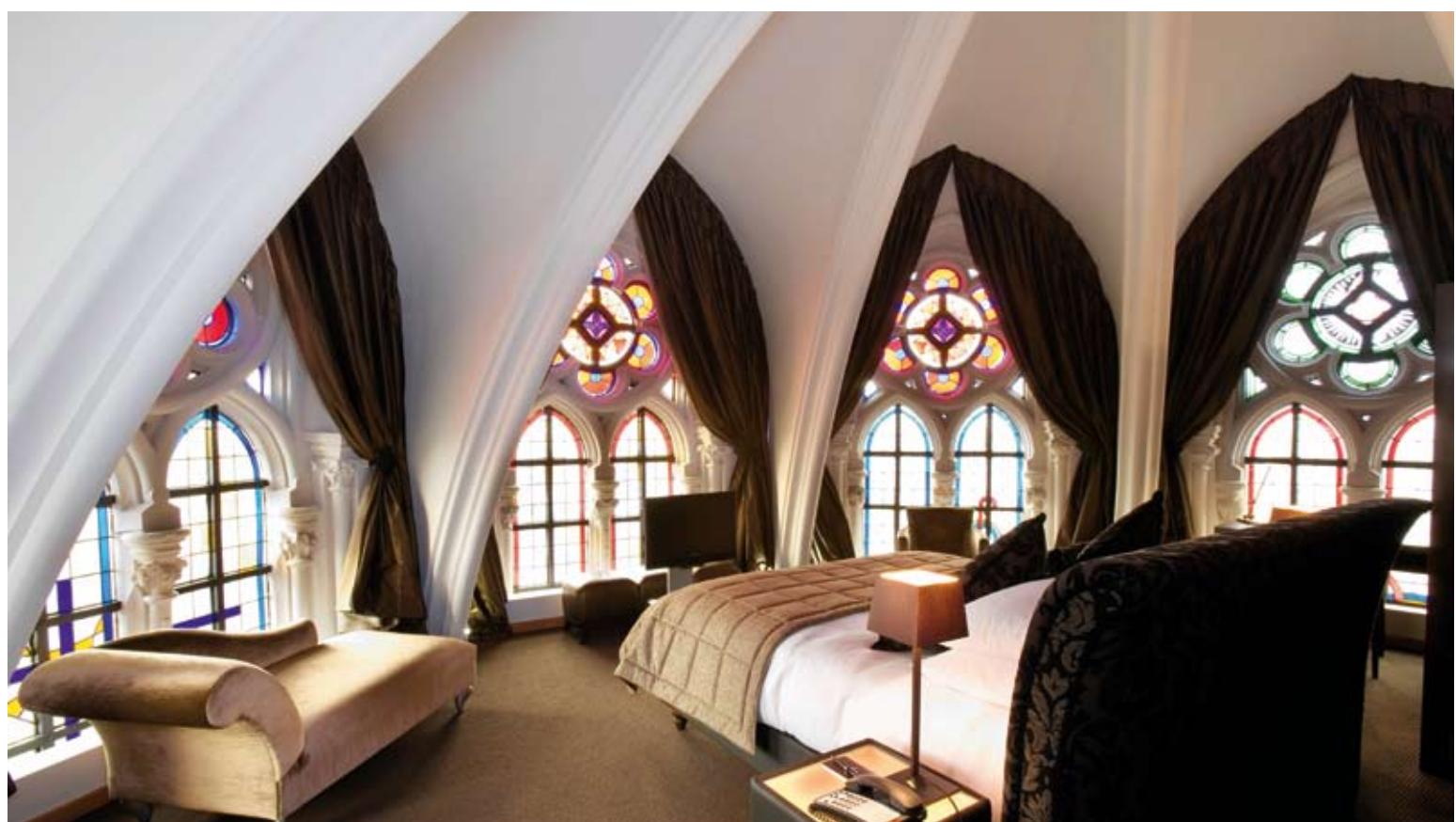
The Martin's Hotel chain is known for placing its extravagant hotels in historical structures. The five-star Château du Lac in Genval in Wallonia was the first; in the 1980s, the Belgian hotel group built a hotel into this 1906 castle. In Leuven, they converted a 16th-century monastery into a hotel, and they did the same in Bruges with a 15th-century convent.

But, although these establishments are beautiful both inside and out, the relationship between the original building and the new interior can be minimal. You might easily forget that you are enclosed within such a traditional structure. The Patershof is different.

In this piece of 19th-century Mechelen, you can never forget where you are. Every one of the 56 rooms has a piece of the church in it – vaulted ceiling or stained glass or ornate columns. Some rooms have all three. In the room I recently stayed in, you could lie in the bed and see in stained glass the pierced foot of a crucified Jesus.

This might seem a bit disconcerting. But in some ways it's actually comforting. Guests tend to speak in hushed tones, and there's a general sense of being protected from the outside world. A sanctuary, you might say, which is what any hotel should strive to be.

"I expected some negative reactions," admits Isabelle Heylen, the hotel's assistant manager. "I was waiting for them. But we haven't had any." Quite the opposite, in fact. During the renovations carried out over the last 15 months, many residents of the neighbourhood poked their heads inside to see what all the commotion was about. They were delighted by the prospect of new life being breathed into the empty church. "Many people said they wanted to stay here," says Heylen. "Although they added: 'It's a little bit stupid, I live in Mechelen!'"



"Challenge" is an understatement

The construction offered challenges never before encountered by the architect or builders, let alone by Martin's. The Catholic Church is actually still the owner of Patershof; the hotel group is only allowed to lease the property. One of the conditions of renovating was that it must be possible, if the church should deem it necessary, to use the building as a church again. This required painstaking planning by Brussels' Sigma Architects and innovative techniques by construction crews. The result is that the entire hotel could, if required, be ripped out without damaging the structural or aesthetic integrity of the church.

Another condition of the sale was that the altarpiece, "Our Lady of the Angels", painted by H de Craey in 1886, be kept. All these conditions are, frankly, good for the customer. They ensure that the church remains a church – and that the vaulted ceilings and stained glass are not altered in any way. Everything you see in Patershof (aside from the hologram) is authentic.

Builders had to face another problem in that the foundations of the church were not strong enough to hold five floors of guest and meeting rooms, plus a dining hall. Standard concrete was too heavy, so they used Argex, a lightweight clay grain normally used as insulation or backfill, to develop a wholly new kind of cement. It's strong enough for flooring but

light enough to keep the foundations from sinking.

Every room in the Patershof comes with typical four-star amenities: access to movies and internet, bathrobes and slippers, mini-bars, room service and air conditioning (the rooms become surprisingly hot without it). But every room is visually unique. All are situated along the walls of the church, so nearly every one gets either a piece of a larger stained glass window or its own single stained-glass window – or both. Other rooms are lined with clear lancet-shaped windows.

Rooms on the top floor contain the vaulted ceilings of the church, and those on the second floor also have vaulted ceilings, from lower ceilings on each side of the build-

ing. If you are particularly enamoured of stained glass, you might ask for a room on the fourth floor. The hallway of the second floor, though, offers an excellent view of the awe-inspiring dining room.

Although the hotel does not have a restaurant (room service is provided by an eatery down the street), breakfast is served in the dining room at the back of the church, in front of the altar. It is suitably decorated in lush reds and browns with ample use of the lancet shape in its furnishings. (You'll also find this on the headboards of the beds – a very nice touch.) The buffet breakfast is included in the cost of the room and is exceptional: the British will be especially pleased with the baked beans, which are served next to sausages and bacon, eggs,

about 15 choices of breads with an equal number of spreads, yoghurt, fruit, cereals, pastries and cheeses.

There are 79 rooms in total in the Patershof, with 23 of them located in the friary. But if you want to stay here for the atmosphere, it's a bit useless to choose any of those rooms. They are the least expensive, but none of them contains a part of the church. Nice as they are, they're just hotel rooms.

As you might expect, accommodation in the only hotel of its kind in the world comes at a price. Rates for rooms in the church are €315 to €400 per night, double occupancy. God may be merciful, but, brothers and sisters, he does not come cheap. ♦

⇒ www.martins-hotels.com



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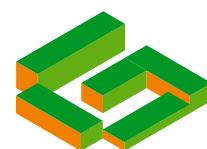
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GOSSELIN MOVING

BELGIUM - MEMBER GOSSELIN GROUP

• Agenda •

Een Gelukkige verjaardag

A new play by De Koe theatre company, based on the 1975 British documentary *Grey Gardens* about a bunch of eccentric ladies living in an old mansion
→ www.vooruit.be



FLANDERS TODAY
JUNE 10, 2009



Sophie Calle

CHRISTOPHE VERBIEST

In 2007, French artist Sophie Calle was the talk of town at the Venice Biennale. With her awe-inspiring installation "Prenez soin de vous" ("Take Care of Yourself") she took revenge on a lover who had ditched her via email. Or had he? Because in Calle's work the border between fact and fiction is a blurry field where the wildest imagination reigns.

It's no coincidence that her exhibition at Bozar is called *Calle Sophie* because, since her beginnings in the late 1970s, she has always placed herself at the centre of her art. Take for instance "La Filature" ("The Shadow") in which she let herself be tailed by a private detective: his report was presented alongside Calle's diary of that day. For "Voyage en Californie" ("Journey to California") she sent her bed to a stranger who had asked her to do so as a cure for his heartbreak. And for "Le Carnet d'adresses" ("The Address Book"),

she contacted all the people in an address book she had found to get a mental picture of its owner.

All these explorations are well documented: Calle's work is a combination of texts, photos, video, drawings and collages – albeit not (always) all at the same time – and are described as, by lack of a better word, installations.

We never know, however, how much of the adventures she documents has really happened. And that's good, since the mystery heightens the intensity of the art. There's a fundamental philosophy of questioning notions of reality, but her work, first and foremost, is about loss and the pain.

This preoccupation culminates in "Soucis" ("Mother"), where she filmed her dying mother. Sound morbid? Rest assured it isn't, because most of her work also has a playful tone. For all the serious subjects, Calle also stays a

little girl watching the world with wonder.

Calle Sophie offers a generous exploration of the idiosyncratic fantasies of one of the major figures of contemporary art in Europe – an exhibition in which you can, if you feel like, drift around for hours and hours. There's no catalogue, but you can buy a series of 19 postcards – already addressed to Calle. Maybe you'll have a part in her next exhibition.

Sophie Calle will be at Bozar to meet the public at 18.30 on 18 June

Calle Sophie
Until 13 September
Bozar, Brussels

→ www.bozar.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Goran Djurović → *Dr Guislain Museum, Ghent*

Artificial Nature → *Verbeke Foundation, Kemzeke*

Stephan Vanfleteren → *La Botanique, Brussels*



Antwerp

Lotto Arena
Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060
JUNE 13 20.00 Anastacia

Sportpaleis
Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060
JUNE 18 20.30 The Eagles

Borgerhout

Trix
Noorderingel 28; 03.670.09.00,
www.trixonline.be
JUNE 12 20.00 The Setup + Kickback

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24,
www.abconcerts.be
JUNE 10 20.00 The Ghost of a
Thousand + Gallows
JUNE 12 20.00 Bibi Tasnga - Anthony
Joseph with Joe Bowie

Le Botanique

Koningsstraat 236; 02.218.37.32,
www.botanique.be
JUNE 16 20.00 Chester French

Recyclart

Ursulinstraat 25; 02.502.57.34,
www.recycleart.be
JUNE 13 22.00 That's a Fact!: Bat, Rem,
The Acid Mercenaries, Gen 303

VK Club

Schoolstraat 76; 02.414.29.07,
www.vkconcerts.be
JUNE 15 20.30 EF + For a Minor
Reflection

Vorst-Nationaal

Victor Rousseauaan 208; 0900.00.991
JUNE 12 20.30 ZZ Top

You Night Club

Duquesnoystraat 18; 02.639.14.00,
www.leyou.be
JUNE 11 23.00 You'niversity, music by
Milo & Fat JUNE 12 23.30 Noisy Boys,
music by Olivier Gosseries, Erick &
Dizzy Jee JUNE 13 23.30 French Kiss,
music by Milo & Mister Cosmic JUNE
14 21.00 Gay & Friendly Tea Dance,
music by Junior Cortez & Simon
Lesaint

Ghent

Charlatan
Vlasmarkt 6; 09.224.24.57,
www.charlatan.be
JUNE 11 22.00 Too Tangled

Hasselt

Muziekodroom
Bootstraat 9;
www.muziekodroom.be
JUNE 18 20.00 Tom Helsen



Antwerp

Buster
Kaasrui 1; 03.232.51.53,
www.busterpodium.be
JUNE 10 22.00 Beep!

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique
Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24,
www.abconcerts.be
JUNE 14 20.00 Lisa Ekdahl

Beursschouwburg

Auguste Ortsstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.beursschouwburg.be
JUNE 13 22.00 Sum of R

Bozar
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
JUNE 13 23.00 Statik Dancin' Deluxe
with DJs Nöze, Efemin and Darko

Jazz Station
Leuvensesteenweg 193-195;
02.733.13.78
JUNE 11 20.30 Cycle 'Borderline':
MidBoj
JUNE 13 18.00 Natacha Wuyts Quintet

Sass'n Jazz
Koningsstraat 241; 0475.78.23.78,
www.sazznjazz.be
JUNE 11 20.30 Hasan Yarimduua
Ensemble
JUNE 17 20.30 Green Dolphins

Sounds Jazz Club
Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50,
www.soundsjazzclub.be
Concerts at 22.00:
JUNE 10 Chamaquiando, salsa JUNE
11 21.00 The Singer's Night JUNE
12 Valentine's Day JUNE 13 Brussels
Rhythm and Blues Club JUNE 18 Marc
Demuth Quartet with Sofia Ribeiro

The Cotton Club - Grand Casino
Duquesnoystraat 14; 02.289.68.66
JUNE 13 22.00 Letor/Ekoka Quartet

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45
Concerts at 20.30:
JUNE 11-12 Richard Ruben & Ivan
Paduart Trio JUNE 13 The Swing
Dealers JUNE 17 WiDo JUNE 18
Cachito Pa' Querer

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!

Pukkelpop

20-22 August
Kiewit (Hasselt)

We're probably being a little paranoid about this recommendation, since tickets to this big rock and pop festival (often thought of as the hipster's alternative to Werchter) usually don't sell out until much closer to the date. But when you're talking dEUS, Arctic Monkeys, 50 Cent, Faith No More and Placebo, we feel there's no point in taking chances.

→ www.pukkelpop.be



Ghent

El Negocito
Brabantdam 121; 0479.56.73.95,
www.mi-negocio.net
Concerts at 22.00
JUNE 10 Uki-Yo: Giovanni di
Dominico + Daysuke and João Lobo



Ardooie

Cultuurkapel De Schaduw

Wezestraat 32; 0479.80.94.82,
www.deschaduw.net
JUNE 12 20.30 Lieven Tavernier and
Bruno Denecker

Borgerhout

De Roma
Turnhoutsebaan 327; 03.292.97.40,
www.roma.be
JUNE 13 20.00 The Folklore Orchestra
with Tuur Florizoone, folk music and
dance

Brussels

Art Base
Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20,
www.art-base.be
JUNE 12 21.00 Quinteto Astor, tango

Ghent

Piola Libri
Franklinstraat 66-68; 02.736.93.91,
www.piolalibri.be
JUNE 11 18.00 Beppe Crovella
JUNE 13 18.00 Massimo Volume
JUNE 14 18.00 Il Genio

Théâtre Molière

Bastionsquare 3; 02.217.26.00,
www.muziekpublique.be
JUNE 12-13 Nomad's Land:
programme of events on nomadism:
JUNE 12 19.30 Film: Teshumara by
Jérémie Reichenbach followed by
concert by Kel Assouf (Touareg)
JUNE 13 19.30 Film: Muzika Rom by
Stefano Alpini followed by Ubre Debre
Gipsy Band (Bulgaria)



Antwerp

Queen Elisabeth Hall
Koninkin Astridplein 26; 0900.26.060
JUNE 12 20.00 Queen Elisabeth
Violin Competition 2009, prize winner
concert with deFilharmonie conducted
by Jaap van Zweden: Ilian Garnet (3rd
place), Tchaikovsky & Shostakovich;
Lorenzo Gatto (2nd place), Saint-Saëns;
Ray Chen (1st place), Mendelssohn's
Concerto No 2, op 64

Brussels

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
Concerts at 20.00:

JUNE 10 Queen Elisabeth Violin
Competition 2009 prizewinners
concert (3rd, 4th and 5th place) with
Liège Philharmonic conducted by
Pascal Rophé

JUNE 11 Czech Philharmonic
conducted by Zdenek Macal: Dvorak,
Martinu

JUNE 12-14 15.00/20.00 Belgian
National Orchestra conducted by
Walter Weller, with Camilla Nylund,
soprano: Strauss, Suk

JUNE 16 Queen Elisabeth Violin
Competition 2009 closing prizewinners
concert with deFilharmonie conducted
by Jaap van Zweden: Ilian Garnet (3rd
place), Tchaikovsky & Shostakovich;
Lorenzo Gatto (2nd place), Saint-Saëns;
Ray Chen (1st place), Mendelssohn's
Concerto No 2, op 64

De Munt

Muntplein; 070.23.39.39,
www.demunt.be

JUNE 10-12 12.30 Queen Elisabeth
Violin Competition 2009 concerts
(unranked laureates)

Espace Senghor

Waversesteenweg 366; 02.230.31.40,
www.senghor.be

JUNE 13 20.30 Jean-Pierre Peuvion,
clarinet, with Trio Talweg: Hindemith,
Fourgon, Shostakovich

Flagey

Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20,
www.flagey.be

JUNE 12 12.30 Queen Elisabeth Music
College soloists: Amandine Savary,
piano: Debussy, Dutilleux; Terce
Quartet: Haydn string quartet

JUNE 13 20.00 Namur Chamber Choir
and Les Agrémens conducted by Guy
Van Waas: Handel's Messiah

JUNE 14 10.00 Musical activities
and concerts by Ausonia Ensemble,
Royal Wallonia Chamber Orchestra,
Dali Trio, harpsichordist Julien Wolfs,
pianist Pascal Sigrist, oud player Rahib
Aboui-Khalil. Guest of honour tenor
James Bowman with Guy Penson,
organ and harpsichord: songs by
Handel, Dowland and Purcell. Music
for children by Les Pastoureaux and
Namur Chamber Choir soloists with
Britten's Petit Ramoneur. Fanfare music
plus an English Bar Bus providing
British food and drink

Maison du Peuple

Sint-Gillisvoorplein 37-39;
02.217.26.00,
www.maison-du-peuple.be

JUNE 14 20.15 Brussels Chamber

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14 June Schaarbeek Cultural Centre Brussels

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educational day on the environment,
but it's beautifully disguised as a full-
blown arts festival. Through
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our surroundings. Between
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dance, get the kids making
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circus figures from recycled
material and scrumptious
smoothies.

→ www.culture1030.be



Orchestra conducted by Stijn Kuppens,
with Nana Kawamura, violin:
Hindemith, Martinu, Stravinsky,
Vivaldi

Ghent

De Bijloke

Jozef Kluykkenstraat 2, 09.269.92.92,
www.debijloke.be

JUNE 13 20.00 Queen Elisabeth
Violin Competition 2009 prizewinners
concert with deFilharmonie conducted
by Jaap van Zweden: Ilian Garnet (3rd
place), Tchaikovsky & Shostakovich;
Lorenzo Gatto (2nd place), Saint-Saëns;
Ray Chen (1st place), Mendelssohn's

Antwerp

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900,
www.sherpa.be
JUNE 15 20.00 St Petersburg Ballet in
Don Quixote

Brussels

Kaaistudio's

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

Ghent

NTGent Schouwburg

Sint-Baafsplein 17; 09.225.01.01,
www.ntgent.be
JUNE 17-20 20.30 Olympique
Dramatique in Adams Appels, musical
based on the Danish film, composed by
Dominique Pauwels (in Dutch)

Antwerp

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900,
www.sherpa.be
JUNE 15 20.00 St Petersburg Ballet in
Don Quixote

Brussels

Grimbergen

Strombeek-Bever Cultural Centre

Gemeenteplein;
02.220.30.60

JUNE 17 20.00 Laat mij zingen (Let me
sing), musical by Ingeborg



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Concerto No 2, op 64

Hasselt

Cultuurcentrum

Kunstlaan 5; 011.22.99.33,
www.ccha.be

JUNE 11 20.00 Queen Elisabeth
Violin Competition 2009 prizewinners
concert with deFilharmonie conducted
by Jaap van Zweden: Ilian Gárnét (3rd
place), Tchaikovsky & Shostakovich;

Lorenzo Gatto (2nd place), Saint-Saëns;
Ray Chen (1st place), Mendelssohn's
Concerto No 2, op 64



Until JUNE 13 20.30 in pieces,
performance/dance written and staged
by Tim Etchells, performed by Fumiyo
Ikeda (in English)

Koninklijk Circus

Onderrichtsstraat 81; 02.218.20.15,
www.cirque-royal.org

JUNE 12-13 20.00 St Petersburg Ballet
in Don Quixote

Zinnema

Veeweydestraat 24-26; 02.555.06.00,
www.zinnema.be

JUNE 13 18.00 De laatste dans, closing
of the dance season with performances
and party



Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera

Frankrijklei 1; 070.22.02.02,

www.vlaamseopera.be

Until

JUNE

14

15.00/20.00

Aquarius:

L'Ère du Verseau

by Karel Goeyvaerts,

directed by Pierre Audi, choreographed

by Inbal Pinto and conducted by Sian

Edwards

L'Ère du Verseau

by Karel Goeyvaerts,

directed by Pierre Audi, choreographed

by Inbal Pinto and conducted by Sian

Edwards

Stadsschouwburg

Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900,

www.sherpa.be

Until

JUNE

14

Sunset Boulevard,

musical (in Dutch)

Brussels

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25,

www.demarkten.be

Until JUNE 10 21.30 De Eeuwige

Jeugd van Joseph Haydn (The Eternal

Youth of Haydn) (in Dutch)

KVS Bol

Lakensestraat 146; 02.210.11.00,

www.kvs.be

Until JUNE 19 15.00/20.00

Biedermann en de brandstichters (The

Firebugs) by Max Frisch, staged by

Ruud Gielens (in Dutch with French

surtitles)

Ghent

NTGent Schouwburg

Sint-Baafsplein 17; 09.225.01.01,

www.ntgent.be

JUNE 17-20 20.30 Olympique

Dramatique in Adams Appels, musical
based on the Danish film, composed by

Dominique Pauwels (in Dutch)

Grimbergen

Strombeek-Bever Cultural Centre</

NICC -Nieuw Internationaal Cultureel Centrum

Tulpstraat 79; 03.216.07.71

Until JUNE 21 De Doorgeefshow, curated by Koen Theyx, with works by contemporary artists Felix de Boeck, Nico Dockx, Jodi and Joëlle Tuerlinck, among others

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

Rockox House

Keizerstraat 12; 03.201.92.50

Until NOV 15 A Gift to God, private patronage of religious art during Antwerp's Golden Age

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

Arentshuis

Dijver 16; 050.44.87.11

Until SEP 27 The Museum of Museums 2009, intervention by contemporary artist Johan van Geluwe

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

Bibliotheca Wittockiana

Bemelstraat 23; 02.770.53.33

Until OCT 10 The Premises of Comic Strip, 19th-century comic strips, with works by Rodolphe Töpffer, Caran d'Ache, Benjamin Rabier and Fred Isly, among others

Bozar (Paleis Voor Schone Kunsten)

Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00, www.bozar.be

Until JUNE 30 N.i.c.h.e. 360 architekten, scale models by Jan Mannaers and Stephane Beel

Until SEP 13 Sophie Calle, photographs, audio and video works by the contemporary French artist

Until SEP 13 Disorder, sculptures and paintings by conceptual artist Bernar Venet and comic strips about the art world by Jacques Charlier

Until SEP 13 Portraits of Artists: 80 Years of the Centre for Fine Arts in Pictures

CCNOA

Barthelemylaan 5; 02.502.69.12, www.ccnoa.org

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

Danish Cultural Institute

Koningsstraat 35; 02.5230.73.26

Until JULY 5 Knit: Strik, traditional knitting shown alongside new and experimental designs by young Danish designers

De Loge Architecturmuseum

Klusstraat 86; 02.649.86.65

Until AUG 2 Louise Bossut, Nicolas Van Brande and Olivier Thieffry: (reflect)3, photographs of shops, cafés and other commercial venues in

Brussels

De Markten

Oude Graanmarkt 5; 02.512.34.25, www.demarkten.be

Until JUNE 28 The Stone Road, photographs

Flemish Parliament - De Loketten

IJzerenkruijsstraat 99; 02.552.40.43

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

Folklore Museum

Eikstraat 19; 02.279.64.36

Until JUNE 21 Brusselse Orgels, didactic exhibition on organs

Fondation pour l'Architecture

Klusstraat 55; 02.642.24.80, www.fondationpourarchitecture.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 JULY 25 Dress code, clothing JUNE 11-AUG 22 Lucile Stievenard, prints; Morgane Deffense, ceramics; Maëlle Laduron, jewellery

Jewish Museum of Belgium

Minimstraat 21; 02.512.19.63

Until OCT 15 Een geheugen op papier (A Memory on Paper), Jewish life in Belgium recorded in historic postcards

La Fonderie - Brussels Museum of Labour and Industry

Ransfortstraat 27; 02.410.99.50

Until JULY 12 Piemonte industria, archival photographs selected by Niccolò Biddau documenting a century of industry in Northern Italy

Le Botanique

Koningsstraat 236; 02.226.12.57, www.botanique.be

Until JULY 12 Overview: 25th anniversary show, works by 20 photographers in Le Botanique park

Until AUG 9 Stephan Vanfleteren: Belgicum, black and white photographs by the contemporary Belgian artist

Maison Pelgrims

Parmastraat 69; 02.534.56.05

Until JUNE 14 Michel Doutreligne: Gammes et Amalgames, acrylics on paper 2004-2009

René Magritte Museum

Essegemstraat 135; 02.428.26.26,

www.magritte museum.be

Until JULY 31 Paintings by Liège-born artist Francine Holley

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

Until AUG 23 Alfred Stevens: retrospective of the Belgian artist (1823-1906)

Until SEP 6 Art and Finance in Europe: 16th-Century Masterworks in a New Light, works from the museum's collection

STIB Headquarters

Koloniënstraat 62; 02.515.20.52

Until SEP 26 Metro Art Memory, retrospective and genesis of 80 art works in the Brussels' metro, with models, drawings and sketches by Pierre Alechinsky, Paul Delvaux and Hergé, among others

WIELS

Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33

Until AUG 2 Luc Tuymans: Against the Day, 20 new paintings by the contemporary Flemish artist

Ghent

Caermersklooster

Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10

Until JUNE 14 Wouter Rawoens: Roest op het Ijzeren Gordijn (Rust on the Iron Curtain), work by the contemporary Flemish photographer

Until JUNE 14 Frank Steyaert: Het teruggevonden verhaal (The Rediscovered Story), ceramics

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

Until SEP 13 Unknown Secrets, paintings by Serbian outsider artist Goran Djurovic

Until SEP 13 Mens: Andere culturen als amusement (People: Other Cultures as Amusement)

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, including Constant Permeke, Constantin Meunier and Henry Van de Velde

Sint-Pietersabdij

Sint-Pietersplein 9;

www.gent.be/spa

Until SEPT 6 Walter de Mulder: Photographer, work by the Flemish photographer, with emphasis on his portraits of artists and conductors

JUNE 12-SEPT 6 Walter De Buck: Visualises, retrospective of 50 years of work by the Flemish sculpture, painter and founder of the Gentse Feesten

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03,

www.smak.be

Until AUG 2 Dara Birnbaum: The Dark Matter of Media Light, retrospective of the contemporary American video artist

Until AUG 23 Beyond The Picturesque, interpretations of landscape in contemporary art

Until AUG 23 Extra: Meteoriti, sculptures by Bézhan Bassiri

JUNE 13-AUG 30 Carl De Keyzer: Trinity, photographs on power and violence by the Magnum agency photographer

JUNE 13-AUG 2 Navid Nuur: The Value of Void

Witte Zaal

Posteernestraat 64; 09.225.42.90

Until JULY 4 The Ornamental Body: From Inmate Tattoo to Body Paintings, with photographs by Mariette Michaud and works by five artists

Hasselt

Modemuseum

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21

Until OCT 31 In Her Shoes, trends and evolution of women's shoe design, from 1900 to contemporary designers

Kemzeke (Stekene)

Verbeke Foundation

Westakkers

03.789.22.07,

www.verbekefoundation.com

Until NOV 15 Artificial Nature, outdoor sculpture and installation group show by contemporary Belgian and European artists

Machelen-Zulte

Het Roger Raveelmuseum

Gildestraat 2-8; 09.381.60.00

Until JUNE 14 Objectschilderijen, works by various artists

works by various artists

Mechelen

Speelgoedmuseum (Toy Museum)

Nekkerspoelstraat 21; 015.55.70.75,

www.speelgoedmuseum.be

Until SEP 30 Cowboys and Indians

Tervuren

FACE OF FLANDERS

Kenny De Meirleir

A doctor at VUB has developed a test to prove that chronic fatigue syndrome is a physical disease

It's taken 20 years to get here, but a simple test that involves peeing in a cup could make a world of difference to tens of thousands of people, thanks to Professor Kenny De Meirleir of the Brussels Free University (VUB).

Dr De Meirleir announced last week that he has successfully developed a diagnostic test for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), which is more of a breakthrough than it sounds. Now that the disease can be detected bio-medically, it proves that it has a biomedical basis – and not, as has long been assumed by a majority of the European medical profession, a psychological cause.

"I've been ridiculed for years for my biomedical stand, but this test is a victory over my critics," Dr De Meirleir said. "Even the interest groups that were always opposed to our research now have to admit that the test is a major step forward."

CFS, also known as myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), is a debilitating disease characterised by extreme and persistent fatigue and joint and muscle pain, together with other symptoms like hypersensitivity, heart palpitations, headaches,



ALAN HOPE

Meirleir says. "CFS was treated as a psychosomatic complaint. But someone who runs 10 metres after a bus and then has to spend a week in bed recovering has a serious medical problem."

The test, manufactured by Protea Biopharma, in which

system and low white blood cell count. It also leads to retention of mercury by the body, which in turn produces cell death and damage to energy metabolism. The biggest effects, though, are produced on the central nervous system, explaining the main symptoms of CFS.

The test will be sold at €15 and consists of a simple vial of reagent to which one drop of urine is added. In cases of CFS, the urine turns dark blue. While everyone produces H2S, the test shows if it is being produced in high concentrations.

The news on the medical cause of CFS may be a breakthrough, but "there's still a great deal of work to be done" to find a cure, Dr De Meirleir told Radio 1 listeners last week. "CFS is not an illness, it's a condition," he said – a set of symptoms with no single underlying cause, unlike, for instance, tuberculosis, which is a disease caused by a specific bacteria.

That means that the underlying causes of CFS could vary widely and that each would have to be treated on its own. On the other hand, a programme of testing children at an early age for signals of food allergies and higher levels of intestinal bacteria could provide a way to signal those at risk of developing the syndrome later.

→ www.meab.be

"Chronic fatigue was considered a psychosomatic complaint. These people have been mistreated for years."

depressed immune system and cognitive problems. The Belgian association of chronic fatigue patients, MEAB, estimates that there are between 30,000 and 40,000 people in the country with the disease. It affects women more often than men, and often first appears in the 40-50 age range.

Since 2002, the Flemish government has invested over €10 million in five "reference centres" across the region in Leuven, Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels for the diagnosis and treatment of the syndrome. However, sufferers and their supporters complain that the centres only offer cognitive behavioural therapy and physical rehabilitation.

"These people have been mistreated for years," Dr De

Meirleir is a partner, detects the presence of hydrogen sulphide (H2S), which is produced in the intestines when bacteria come in contact with heavy metals. People with CFS have been shown to have higher concentrations of intestinal bacteria than normal, which leads to higher levels of H2S.

H2S is a gas present in minute concentrations in normal people but at toxic levels in CFS patients. The reasons for over-production of bacteria can range from lactose intolerance to viral infection to stress.

According to the draft of a journal article soon to be published by De Meirleir and his team, H2S causes intolerance to light and noise, a depressed immune

TALKING DUTCH

ALISTAIR MACLEAN



bij →

After a hard day in the fields, the labourer has earned his rest. Even more so for office workers with gardens after three days of cutting hedges and trimming lawns. So I rest my weary limbs and pick up a paper to flick through.

The first to hand is **De Gezinskrant De Bond** – The Family Newspaper **The Union**. **De Gezinsbond** – The Family Union – is a handy organisation to belong to. Their aim is simple: **we verdedigen de belangen van de gezinnen** – we defend the interests of families. The articles in the fortnightly newspaper are of interest to parents bringing up children in Flanders: they deal with politics, psychology, activities, book reviews and a diary of the week in the life of a member. There are also handy contacts for baby sitters, and, as a member, you can get various reductions to ease the strain on the pocket of bringing up kids.

I must say I usually only give this paper a cursory glance, but this evening my eye is caught by an article titled **Haal de bijen terug in je tuin** – Get bees back into your garden. The most recent scare heralding the end of the planet has been the dearth of bees as reported by beekeepers. The Dutch for beekeeper is **imker**, which is one of those exotic-looking words I can't get a handle on.

The paper asks **Hebt u dit voorjaar al veel bijen in uw tuin gezien?** – Have you seen many bees in your garden this spring?

Strangely enough I have, but perhaps that's just because I have been looking out for them. Various possible causes of a lack of bees are examined as well as ways in which we can help. Perhaps it depends on the sorts of flower in your garden. Or rather, when your flowers flower.

As the article points out, **in het najaar ontstaat er vaak voedselschaarste voor de winterbijen** – in the autumn there is often a food shortage for winter bees. It recommends sowing phacelia as late as August to provide the bees with food for the winter. It's an ideal **bemester** – fertiliser and **het trekt bijen** – it attracts bees.

The provinces in Flanders have been handing out **gratis zaadzakjes** – free seed packets of flowers, including phacelia. Check out your own **gemeente** – municipality – to see if there are any left.

De Gezinsbond is a feisty organisation that makes its views heard when the authorities plan changes that will affect families: **kinderbijslag** – child allowance, **belastingen** – taxes, **gezin en werk** – family and work, **verkeersveiligheid** – traffic safety, **kinderopvang** – child care, **onderwijs** – education. It has almost 300,000 members and sees **het gezin als hoeksteen van onze samenleving** – the family as the cornerstone of our society.

→ www.gezinsbond.be

The last word → → →

Leterme won

"CD&V's victory is down to one man: Yves Leterme"
Pieter Aspe, crime writer

Sex appeal won

"CD&V won because of Van Rompuy's sex appeal"
Raf Coppens, comedian

Don't say who won

"It's not appropriate to speak of winners and losers"
Ivo Michiels, head of consumer organisation Test-Aankoop

Not everyone won

"The extreme right got a slap in the face, but I'm sorry to say the Greens did too"
Flip Kowlier, singer

Decency won

"The Flemish chose tradition and decency"
Guy Van Sande, actor

TV celebrity won

"Too many voted for Bart De Wever the TV personality, and didn't even look at the party's programme."
Lieven Scheire, comedian