

**Rembrandt again** ..... 3

Scholar Horst Gerson took it away from us in the 1960s, but, in the end, the portrait of Eleazar Swalmius in Antwerp's Fine Arts Museum, has been confirmed to be a real Rembrandt


**Water babies** ..... 10

Flanders is home to some of the most architecturally beautiful swimming pools in Europe. We'll tell you all about them, plus point you to top outdoor swimming holes to while away the rest of the summer


**Fish finding** ..... 11

Next in our food sellers series: where to buy the freshest fish in Flanders. Find out what's in season and how much you should pay for it. Plus, one of Ostend's long-time fish sellers explains why the industry won't last another two decades



# Elixir of life

Water has played a crucial role in shaping the history and culture of Flanders

EMMA PORTIER DAVIS

**W**ater, water, everywhere: bustling trade ports, a network of canals and world famous bathing spots have all been invaluable in the development of Flanders. It has permeated almost every aspect of people's lives, making it one of the region's most treasured resources.

This special relationship goes right back in time to when the territory's first inhabitants needed to grow crops. Low-lying and boggy, Flanders was hardly conducive to agriculture. Farmers had to figure out how to make the land fertile.

"Belgium, like the Netherlands, needed to evacuate the water and was compelled to fight against it in order to cultivate the land. It needed to drain the water from the fields," explains David Aubin, a professor at the Catholic Univer-

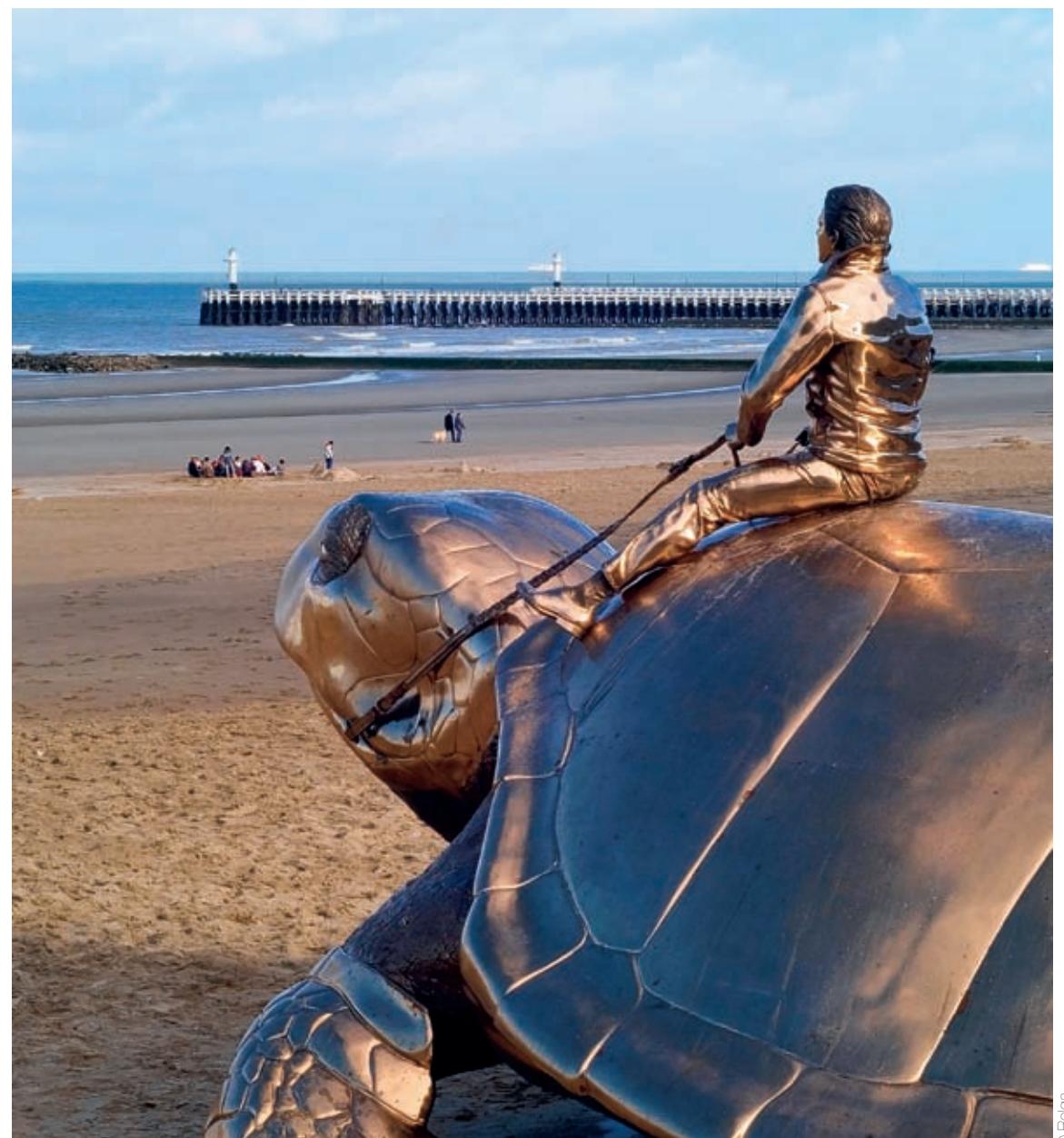
sity of Louvain.

A specialist in the relationship between water and political systems, Aubin says that the need to construct canals was instrumental in creating communities.

While it might have been a fight in the early years to win land from the water, Flanders' network of canals became one of the territory's greatest assets, helping turn it into an economic powerhouse. By the Middle Ages, Bruges had become a world-leading commercial city.

"There was a process of industrialisation. People needed to transport goods and sell them abroad," says Aubin, adding that this was another reason for the construction of the hundreds of kilometres of canals that run through the region.

→ *Continued on page 5*



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## Forest occupation ends with a handshake

The occupation of the Lappersfort forest just outside Bruges by green activists ended peacefully last week. But not, as you might expect, with the protestors being led away in handcuffs, as happens most often in such cases. Instead, both protestors and the owners of the land have agreed to put pressure on the Flemish government to find a way of keeping the woodland in its current state without splitting it up.

The Lappersfort forest shouldn't be there at all. It's actually an overgrown piece of industrial land owned by the French conglomerate Suez. But for the activists of the *Groen Gordel Front*

(Green Belt Front) it's a much-needed lung for the city. When Suez said it wanted to develop the land, quite in keeping with the zoning regulations, front members moved in, took to the trees and determined to stop the development.

Only 2.3% of West Flanders is woodland, making it the poorest province of a poor region: Flanders is 10.8% woodland, well below the European average. About one-third of the whole, or 40,000 hectares, is *zonenvreemd*: in other words, it grows on land intended for other purposes. The biggest threat is faced by woods on industrial or residential land, some 10,000 hectares.

The rest is on agricultural land.

Farmers, under a scheme introduced recently by the Flemish government, can be compensated for the loss of land to woods. Now the aim seems to be to figure out something similar for cases like Lappersfort. Green Belt Front has invited new nature minister Joke Schauvliege for a visit to the wood later this month. Activists and Suez executives will call on planning minister Philippe Muyters in September. All parties expect a positive response from Flanders in time for Week of the Forest, which begins on 18 October.

→ [WWW.WEEKVANHETBOS.BE](http://WWW.WEEKVANHETBOS.BE)

## Escaped convicts apprehended

Three break out – only one returns

ALAN HOPE

The three convicted robbers who escaped from Bruges prison last month have all been caught – but two of them will not be returning to Bruges.

Last week, police in Morocco arrested Mohamed Johri, the youngest of the three, whose girlfriend, Lesley Deckers, had helped organise the rental helicopter the trio used in their daring jailbreak. Since Johri has Moroccan nationality, the Rabat government will not extradite him to Belgium. Instead, he will be tried in Morocco on charges of car-jacking and armed robbery.

Decker and another man rented

the helicopter in Diksmuide on 23 July and forced the pilot to land in the exercise yard of Bruges prison. The three gangsters boarded the aircraft, but it was too heavy to take off, so one of the hijackers was left behind. He remains in custody. Escaping from prison is not in itself a criminal offence in Belgium, but aiding and abetting someone else is.

The second of the three, Abdelhaq Melloul-Khayari, was arrested last week in Molenbeek in Brussels, apparently on the point of fleeing to Morocco. He is back in Bruges. But Johri, together with ringleader

→ *Continued on page 5*



## CONTENTS

### News ..... 2-3

- ♦ News in brief
- ♦ Nine die in rest home fire
- ♦ Antwerp portrait is a genuine Rembrandt

### Feature ..... 4-5

- ♦ Flanders' special relationship with water

### Focus ..... 6

- ♦ Water quality leaves a lot to be desired

### Business ..... 7

- ♦ Karel Vinck cleared on manslaughter charge in asbestos case
- ♦ Delhaize shows progress but remains number two

### Arts ..... 8-9

- ♦ Graphic artists come together in Antwerp
- ♦ Culture news in brief
- ♦ The Knokke Biennale is small but packs a punch

### Active ..... 10

- ♦ Swimming pools in Flanders: relics of a bygone age

### Living ..... 11

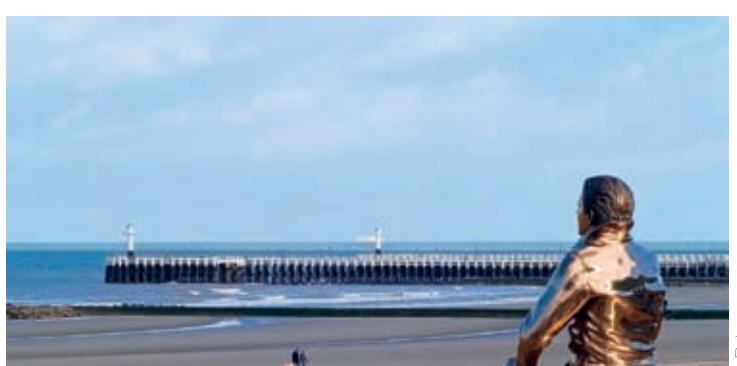
- ♦ Special food buying series: the freshest fish in Flanders

### Agenda ..... 13-15

- ♦ Three pages of arts and events

### Back page ..... 16

- ♦ Face of Flanders: Rik Torfs
- ♦ Talking Dutch: our language expert looks at sfeer
- ♦ The Last Word: what they're saying in Flanders



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Flemish artist Jan Fabre's "Searching for Utopia" on the boardwalk at Nieuwpoort perfectly illustrates the Flemish attraction to the waters that shaped its land and its people

## FLANDERS TODAY

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## News in brief

This time of year – known in Flanders as *komkom-mertijd*, or cucumber time – is typically a bad time for serious news, with newspapers filling their columns with light-hearted stories that otherwise wouldn't make the cut. This week we present a selection of some of the more amusing stories from Flanders this *komkom-mertijd*.

The Zwalm-based sculptor Johan Tahon is to give sculpting lessons to an admirer – Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. The queen is a keen amateur sculptor and was so impressed by Tahon's work for the Dutch finance ministry, she decided to ask for lessons. The sessions will take place in the palace in the Hague "in the near future", the artist said.

Men spend roughly a year of their lives checking out pretty women, according to research by Kodak. The average man spends 43 minutes a day looking at women, or 11 days a year. "Men's brains are simply pre-programmed to look at women," said biologist Dirk Draulans. "It's stronger than we are."

Parents who put too much pressure on their children to perform well in sports could be exacerbating injuries, according to sports injuries expert Luc Vanden Bossche. "Children are made to be brave and to struggle through injury," he said. "But that is harmful and often leads to relapses or new injuries." The best way to avoid injuries: eat well, keep fit and get enough rest.

The Haspengouw area of Limburg province is the Tuscany of Flanders, according to regional authorities, who aim to attract tourists by pointing to similarities with the Italian region. Initiatives include signposted Vespa routes and the planting of olive trees among the area's traditional apple and pear orchards.

Thieves broke into a gun shop in Brasschaat with a concrete block to the window and made off with seven handguns. But the weapons are all plastic replicas, as clearly noted in the shop.

Organisations representing the catering trade at the coast have demanded "correct" weather forecasts from the meteorological

### Fire reveals inadequacy of safety rules



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Interior minister Annemie Turtelboom visited the scene

More than one in five rest homes in Flanders is not in line with fire safety regulations, according to the region's health-care agency. On 6 August, a fire in a home in Melle near Ghent caused the death of nine residents.

Critics of the current fire safety regime stress that Melle was fully up to date with the latest rules, including the fitting of smoke alarms and sprinklers. But the responsibility for fire safety in Belgium lies with the federal government, working from a law that dates back to 1974, in which such things as smoke alarms are not mentioned. Flanders has its own rules, which are more modern, but the fact is they have little legal basis.

Experts said there was very little that could have been done to prevent the Melle fire. "You can never make a rest home completely fire safe," said Eddy Letour, chief prevention officer with the Ghent fire service. "It has to be somewhere you can still live comfortably. And it has to remain affordable. Sprinklers, for example, are really expensive."

Now the Flemish minister for health, Jo Vandeurzen, has promised to work on regional regulations which would fill in any gaps left by the outdated federal law. Among the issues to be addressed: the evacuation of a large number of residents with a minimum number of staff, such as during night shifts. Also: the danger of leaving doors and windows open, as happened at Melle because of the heat. That allowed the fire to spread more quickly, as well as providing the flames with a source of oxygen. The fire service recommends self-closing doors and windows. "Some measures will cost money," Letour said. "But set that against the possibility of saving human lives."

► [www.fireforum.be](http://www.fireforum.be)

authorities and the media to help tourism. Bad weather forecasts discourage day-trippers, while a good forecast brings the tourists in the thousands, they explained, calling for a special forecast for the coast alone that takes the special features of the area's micro-climate into account.

A Leuven priest has attacked the policy of Leuven mayor Louis Tobback that forbids mourners from throwing a handful of soil onto a coffin in a grave. Father Luc Versteylen claims his colleague, Ben Van der Schueren, who died last week, was not buried correctly as a result. Tobback claims the measure is a safety precaution now that mechanical diggers are used to dig graves. No-one has yet fallen into a grave, he admitted, but the possibility exists.

CD&V deputy Roel Deseyn plans to introduce a measure to combat "bill shocks" – when people

receive unexpectedly high bills from telecoms providers. In the last couple of weeks, a woman from Leopoldsburg was charged almost €10,000 for chatting on her mobile phone from France, and a man who watched the Tour de France on the internet while holidaying in France came home to a bill for over €6,000. The bill would force telecoms providers to warn users when their usage was becoming "abnormal". It stands next to no chance of ever becoming law.

The parents of children taking part in summer play classes organised by the Leuven city youth service have been asked not to dress their kids up in their Sunday best because fear of mud and grass stains is hampering playground activities. Children from Heverlee seem to be terribly well dressed. "Nothing is worse for children than not being able to take part in what their friends are doing," said one youth worker.

More than 4,000 visitors a day are coming to the Royal Palace in Brussels, which is open to the public until 13 September. Among the attractions: a selection of science-related games imported from Technopolis in Mechelen

→ [www.monarchie.be](http://www.monarchie.be)



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ANJA OTTE

## Gangsters back behind bars, but accomplice is missing

→ *Continued from page 1*

Ashraf Sekkaki, 26, already has a formidable record of armed robberies, as well as a previous escape. He was discovered staying with family in the town of Al Hoceima, a port city set among the Rif mountains. On 6 August, he was involved in a road accident in the area. Police gave chase, but he escaped on foot, despite an injury, into the mountains.

Johri was also picked up on 6 August, living with relatives in the town of Berkane, further to the east. Both men are suspected of having taken part in at least four armed robberies during their brief flight from justice, which netted them an estimated €100,000.

Both Johri and Sekkaki are thought to have entered Morocco by ferry from Spain at the port of Nador, just south of the Spanish enclave of Melilla. Moroccan

police say that the two men went to Berkane and stayed overnight in a hotel; in the morning, Johri was arrested and Sekkaki fled. It is not clear why Sekkaki would not go immediately to where his own family lives, but, according to some reports, his mother is currently on holiday.

The Bruges prosecutor will deliver case files to judicial authorities in Morocco, where both men will be tried. Johri had about three years left to serve in Bruges. "A Moroccan judge will try him for the hijacking of the helicopter and the four bank robberies in which he is alleged to have been involved," said the prosecutor's spokesperson. That's likely to earn him a sentence far exceeding three years – which he will also still have to serve if he ever sets foot in Belgium again.

The Moroccan Prisons Observatory (OMP) has described Morocco's prisons as overcrowded and unsanitary, paying little attention to human rights of prisoners or to international incarceration standards. Staff are underpaid and prone to corruption, buildings are run-down, and institutions are mostly indifferent to complaints.

Now that the three men are back under lock and key, the only remaining question is, what has happened to Lesley Deckers? As Flanders Today went to press, the Flemish-born, 24-year-old from Hoboken, who converted to Islam in 2004, was still at large, and police admitted they had no trace of her whereabouts. They did, however, express confidence that she was still alive and unharmed. ♦



Ashraf Sekkaki will be tried in Morocco

## FIFTH COLUMN

### A hell of a job

In 1988, when child rapist Marc Dutroux escaped from the Neufchâteau courthouse in Wallonia, Stefaan De Clerck (CD&V) and Johan Vande Lanotte (SP.A) resigned immediately. Leaving the locks open for Dutroux was not their personal fault, but, as the ministers for justice and internal affairs, Dutroux's little walk in the woods fell under their responsibility.

Today Stefaan De Clerck is minister for justice once again. Dutroux is safely behind bars, but over the last couple of weeks there have been three jailbreaks. When a TV journalist pointed out that De Clerck once resigned because of just one escape, he reacted angrily, calling her comment "ridiculous" and "inappropriate".

It's hard not to get cynical though. "What's the similarity between the Tour de France and Belgium? Everyday someone escapes, but it is hardly ever a Belgian," one joke goes. Or "Belgium-Holland 37-1", showing the score of escapees in 2009.

De Clerck is responsible for the prison system. What a job! Many of the facilities are outdated and overcrowded, while investing in them is expensive and unpopular. When two of the three Bruges escapees were caught in Morocco, which will not deport them back here, there were cheers on internet forums. Now they are off to a real prison, not one of our "five star hotels", people wrote. (See story, page 1)

A few years ago, just when you thought things couldn't get worse for him, De Clerck was pitchforked into president of the CVP, the party he renamed CD&V in 2001. Someone had to do it, and De Clerck was the unfortunate.

The injured Christian-Democrats found themselves in opposition for the first time in 40 years. Their president, blabbering away, seemed just as off-balanced. It ended in humiliation in 2003, when Guy Verhofstadt (Open VLD) tore away at an aggrieved De Clerck in a televised debate. CD&V lost the elections there and then.

After that, De Clerck seemed mostly content to be the mayor of Kortrijk. Last year he was rehabilitated, though, and he became minister for justice once again. Only for this to happen. One almost has to pity the man.

In case you wonder: yes, he has apologised. For publicly lashing out at the TV journalist, that is. Not for the escapes. ♦

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

### 1,197,000

households in Flanders – more than half – have a subscription to digital TV



### 854,000

are subscribed with Telenet, by far the largest. Belgacom has 231,000 subscribers, with TV Vlaanderen and others sharing the rest

### 138,416

complaints of lost mail to the Post Office in 2008: 0.0043% of the total mail carried

### 3,448

GSM mast sites in Flanders, up from 3,074 two years ago. In Belgium as a whole, there are 6,819 sites, each of which may have one or more antennas

### 13,295

police in Flanders, 23 per 10,000 inhabitants, a lower ratio than Wallonia (27) and Brussels Region (48)

### 91

Brussels city has more than twice as many police per 10,000 inhabitants than Ghent (45), Antwerp (44) and Bruges (40)

### 39

prisoners have escaped from custody so far this year, close to the record of 2006, when the total of 40 included 28 from a single jailbreak in Dendermonde. There were 22 escapes last year

### €134 billion

taken in by the federal government this year in taxes, social security contributions and duties, of which only €8 billion remains after social benefits, subsidies to the regions and interest

### €18.6 billion

actually needed by the government to run itself (wages, costs, etc), producing a structural deficit of €10.6 billion. In 2007 the deficit was zero

### 45

emergency calls to rescue services for swimmers along the coast in July. There were also 40 interventions for kitesurfers and windsurfers in trouble, and 10 injuries on beaches and breakwaters

### 223,532

unemployed in Flanders at the end of July

### Disputed portrait is a real Rembrandt

The portrait of Eleazar Swalmius in the Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp is a genuine Rembrandt. Confirmation of the painting's origins was given last week by Rembrandt authority Ernst van de Wetering.

The painting of Swalmius, a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church who may have come to the Netherlands from Portugal in 1612, was for a long time listed as "Portrait of a mayor". Then attributed to Rembrandt, it formed part of the collection of the Duke of Orléans, brother of Louis XIV, housed in the Royal Palace in Paris. After the French Revolution, it passed through the hands of a number of British owners before being bought, for 200,000 francs (€5,000), by the Antwerp museum in 1886.

In 1969, scholar Horst Gerson revised the catalogue of Rembrandt works, reducing the number of confirmed works from 639 to only 419. The Swalmius was one of Gerson's victims: it was attributed to Govert Flinck, a pupil of Rembrandt. The work was taken down and stored in the depot.

Then in 2006, a businessman offered to pay the cost for a restoration, and a team set about removing the thick layer of yellow varnish that had obscured many original details. The original layers of paint proved to be in excellent condition.



© swalmius

Once cleaned up, the painting was submitted to the scrutiny of Van de Wetering, chairman of the Rembrandt Research Project. "This is a Rembrandt, I thought to myself excitedly," he said later. "And right away I was ashamed of myself, because a scientist ought not to behave that way." He explained what convinced him: "There is that magic, that short distance in which paint becomes illusion, and illusion seems to be paint."

The Swalmius portrait is one of two genuine Rembrandts in a public collection in Belgium. The other is the "Portrait of Nicolaes Van Bambeeck" in the Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels. The Antwerp painting, now rehung, is on permanent view to the public. ♦

→ [www.kmska.be](http://www.kmska.be)

### Professor killed at train crossing

An 87-year-old former professor of the University of Ghent was killed when his car was hit by a train at an accident black spot near Ghent. Robert Derom was a professor of gynaecology and a world-renowned expert on twins. Over the years he had built up a database of up to 10,000 pairs of identical twins in East Flanders, with some of whom he maintained personal contact.

The level crossing, situated at the border of Destelbergen and Ghent, is known as a dangerous spot. Locals said the half-barrier, together with the situation of the road, made it possible to drive across when the

barrier was closed.

That appears to be what Professor Derom did. Police said it was possible he had been blinded by sunlight at the moment of the accident. His son, Pierre, said that his father was familiar with the crossing but may have become confused. Passengers on the train, meanwhile, were evacuated and given alternative transport. The train driver was treated for shock.

Professor Derom leaves behind a wife with whom he last month celebrated 60 years of marriage, as well as four children, 13 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. ♦

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*"I'm  
a student,  
sign me up  
now!"*

# Elixir of life

Forced to create canals out of necessity, the waterways are now one of Flanders' top attractions

→ *Continued from page 1*

**B**ruges' connection to the sea brought traders from all over Europe, eager to snatch up its beautiful textiles. Because of its network of canals (which still delight tourists today), it became known as the Venice of the North. The period from the 12th to the 15th centuries was dubbed "The Golden Age".

Italians, who arrived in the 14th century, exchanged goods via innkeepers on the square known as the Beursplein (named after the Van der Buerse family), which fast developed into a thriving stock exchange, the most important of the Low Countries at the time.

But water was not always everyone's friend. The harbour silted up, and Bruges' golden age was over. Antwerp, now Europe's second-largest harbour, was ready to take up the gauntlet.

"The decline of Bruges was instrumental in the rise of Antwerp in the 16th century," explains Tim Soens, a history professor at Antwerp University. "You could describe this as environmental determinism."

Antwerp's harbour has made what would otherwise be an average-sized city in a tiny country a global trading hub. Among its many accolades, it is home to one of the world's largest petrochemical industries and handles 80% of the world's rough diamonds.

While its Golden Age may have drawn to a close, Bruges' fortunes were far from over. The inhabitants' struggle with water helped them develop new skills – for which they would become world famous.

"Bruges needed to do a lot to improve its accessibility to the sea. There were major canal works, and dredging activities were developed by the early 14th century," says Soens. "There are not many regions with documented evidence of that activity as early as this."

That Flemish expertise was demanded far and wide. "The water management know-how was internationally famous," continues Soens. It was a time of huge emigration of Flemish to marshlands in England and Germany.

This emigration could even account for the prevalence of Cistercian abbeys. "The Flemish had a tradition for settling in areas that were more remote and on reclaimed land. They had to have certain technical skills to do this."

In fact, even on home territory, there are examples of where the Flemish settled in what would have seemed to many to be inhospitable land with not much going for it. The monks of Koksijde, for example, constructed the Abbey of the Dunes on reclaimed land.

Having to deal with silt in commercially crucial waterways such as the Zwin in Bruges and the River Scheldt, which flows through Antwerp, helped the Flemish develop an expertise, which they deftly turned to their commercial advantage. Today, Flanders' dredging companies have a world-class reputation and operate all across the world in places such as Singapore and Dubai.

## Water fights

The neighbouring Netherlands was to overtake Flanders in the 16th century when it came to water management. Arguably, the Dutch had had a tougher fight for land, and their military prowess would have given them an edge on the world stage.

Flanders did not share the Dutch penchant and talent for seafaring and suffered as a result. The luxurious city of Ostend, known as the Queen of the Belgian coast, was taken over in turn by the Dutch, the French, the Germans and the Spanish.

But, while its waters and land were of almost constant interest to Europe's military heavyweights, the Flemings' deep understanding of river management gave them many occasions to turn the tables, most famously during the First World War.

Chased down the River Ijzer to its mouth at Nieuwpoort, the Belgian army was fast losing ground to the German advance. Karel Cogge, a Fleming who worked for the water board, suggested opening the sluice gates to flood the plains and drown the enemy.

It was a decisive point in the war, and, while it is the best-known incident, it was not the first time. "This tactic of using inundation as a weapon was practiced on a large scale during the Eighty Years' War," says Soens.

## Heal me

At the same time that Flanders' waterways were making it a trading centre of Europe, Europeans were cottoning on to the healing and recreational benefits of water. Ostend and the city of Spa in Wallonia started to attract the wealthy from across Northern Europe.

Aristocrats from Britain would make the voyage across the channel to either the coast or further inland to the city that owes its name to water treatment centres, stopping in Bruges en route to pick up some lace or tapestries.

The joys of bathing were soon to reach the masses. In Brussels, residents would bathe in the Zenne, which used to run through the centre of the city. After an outbreak of cholera in the 19th century that killed more than 3,000, city authorities decided to cover it over.

Brussels is a very low-lying region, and water quality was a big problem. "It was very difficult to get hold of clean water. It took a long time before public water facilities could function well," says Soens. "The search for clean water was a major issue."

But this was not an end to the Brusseleers' relationship with water. It was not long before municipal swimming pools sprang up across the city. The Baths of Brussels in the Marollen were opened in 1854, providing individual tubs for the district's residents to wash away the city grime.

Many more of these bath houses opened up across the region, although they fast became dens of iniquity, frequented by prostitutes and riddled with sexually transmitted diseases. Hardly a place to get one-self clean.

"Every major Flemish city had these bath houses, but they were also red-light districts," explains Soens. "You can find miniatures of these kinds of houses, and



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**Beauty and business:** Bruges' canals (top), built to siphon water off the land, are now one of the city's biggest tourist draws. Flanders' world-famous dredging companies (above) also grew out of historical necessity

there is often some kind of erotic activity going on in the background."

Despite some qualms in the moral establishment, the bathing houses with their elaborate architecture (many of them are listed buildings) were mostly kept open and are still used today by locals as swimming pools. (See related story on page 10.)

## A pool in every village

Flanders is not an obvious region for pursuing water activities outdoors with its whimsical weather and poor water quality – one of the worst in Europe (see page 6). Yet many recreational activities are built around water, be it kayaking or trundling along the extensive network of cycle paths.

As well as being crucial to this trade-dependent economy, it has become close to the hearts of the Flemish. In the 1980s, there was a programme for every village to have

a swimming pool, and the Flemish flock to outdoor bathing spots whenever there is a glimmer of sunshine.

The territory has had a constant struggle throughout history to control this abundant natural resource (to make its beer – the other Belgian elixir – Antwerp had to ship clean water from the River Rupel).

But all of this history might go some way to explaining the Flemish love of water and the fact that many recreational facilities today are built around this theme. "People are used to living around water. It's a very old practice," says Aubin.

"It's a low-lying region, and the use and control of water has always been very important," agrees Soens. "That creates a lot of opportunities – but also a lot of risks. All of this has given water a very special place in Flemish society." ♦



# Wishy-Washy

Flemish coastal waters leave a lot to be desired when it comes to water quality

**F**aeces, nitrates and salmonella. These are just some of the scary pollutants found in Belgian bathing water. In a recent survey by the European Commission, the Flemish coastline was found to be one of the dirtiest in Europe.

Here's an even more shocking fact: three out of 10 households in Flanders are not connected to a waste water treatment facility and dump their sewage straight into the rivers. Nitrates from manure and fertiliser also get washed into the water system whenever it rains.

It doesn't help that Flanders is an incredibly flat region that floods easily. Nor that it's densely populated with many farms (there are more pigs than people). Also, many residents live in isolated areas where special pipelines need to be built to link them to waste water treatment plants.

Adding to the geographical challenges, are technical problems. Waste water treatment plants in Flanders currently take in a lot of rain water, which does not require the same treatment as sewage. These processes need to be separated into two facilities to keep the overall cost of the plants down.

Then there are the political obstacles. It was not until the late 1980s that the competence for water was passed from the federal government to the regions. Both levels now blame the other for the lack of progress, but it's fair to say the Flemish region was starting at this late date from scratch.

## Show me the money

It also had to deal with the delicate issue of funding. When the

competence was given to the region, Belgium had bid to join the euro and was having a tough time meeting economic criteria, given its mounting national debt. All government bodies had to tighten their belts.

Today, funding is no easier to come by, especially with the financial crisis eating into everyone's budget. And imposing costly regulations on businesses and households that are already feeling the pinch is hardly going to boost government popularity.

"The authorities should stop people from building houses by major river beds, and there should be drastic action taken against farming," says David Aubin, a professor of political science at the Catholic University of Louvain. "But it's difficult politically."

In its inauguration declaration, the new regional government, which took office in June, pledged

an integrated policy.

"We will strive towards a maximum connectivity for household sewage," reads the declaration. "Where this is not possible, we will make a strong policy for individual water purification. The separation of rain water and waste water circuits would also improve the water quality."

While environmentalists have welcomed the declaration after years of stagnation of the region's water policy, they suspect the new government will come up against the same obstacles when it comes to enforcement.

"What absolutely needs to be done is for the Flemish authorities to force the municipalities to apply the legislation. But the problem is that if they don't do it, nothing happens to them," said Jan Turf, water policy expert from Bond Beter Leefmilieu Vlaanderen (Federation for a Better Environ-

## ***Drastic action should be taken against farming; but it's difficult politically"***

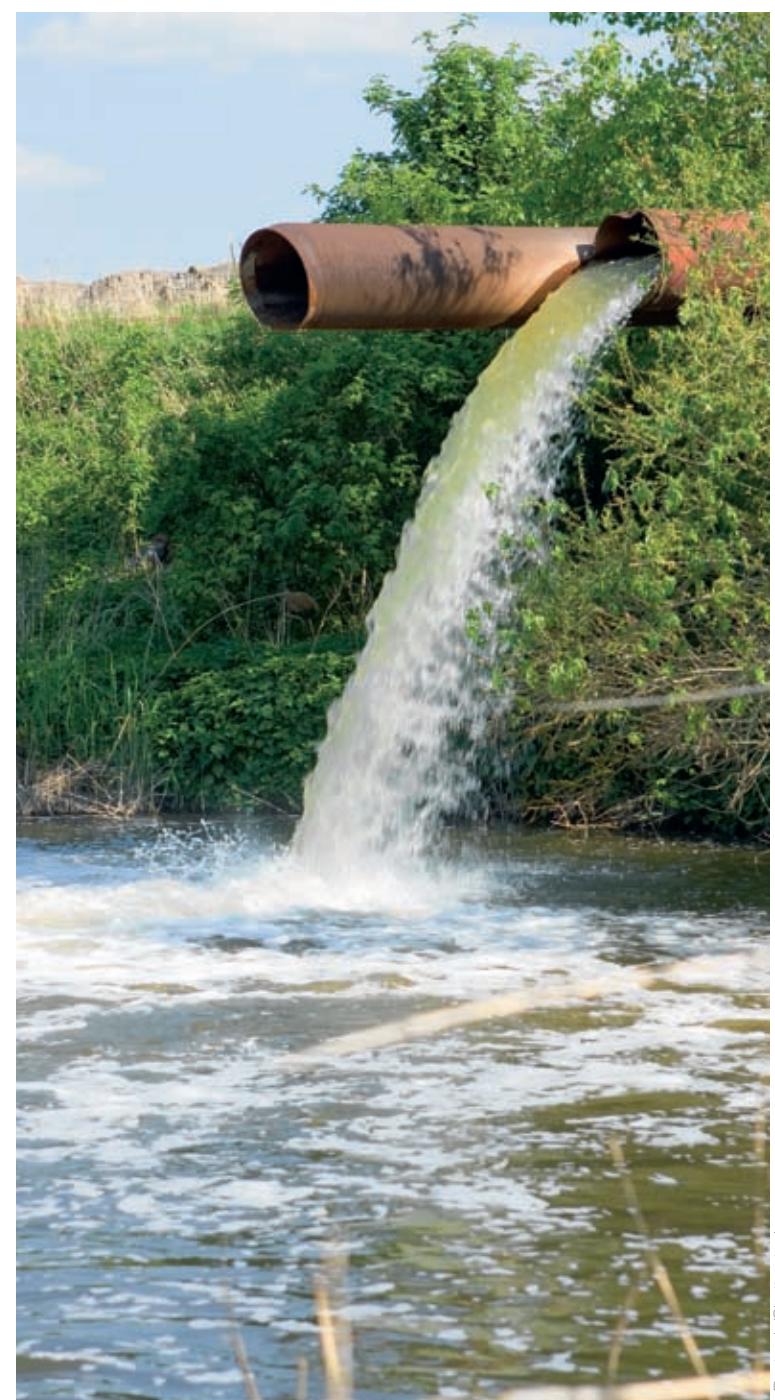
to bring in a long-term investment plan for an integrated water policy that would see most Flemish waters meeting "good" ecological standards by 2020.

The Flemish government acknowledged that it needed to do more on legislation for waterways and polders (low-lying land reclaimed from rivers or the sea) and promised it would exploit local knowledge and ensure the participation of local actors to pave the way for

ment).

Turf says he expected the financial crisis would delay plans to modernise the plants. "They acknowledge that the situation is bad, but nothing has happened yet. The government is looking to cut the budget, and all of the easy investments have already been made."

Environmental lawyer Wim Vandenberghe from DLA Piper agrees. "One of the biggest issues



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*Thirty percent of Flanders' raw sewage goes straight into the rivers*

is nitrates in the ground water. There is always talk of reducing the number of permits granted to pig farms but it never really happens. The local communes want the farmers to stay and be happy."

Latest data on nitrate levels from the environmental agency Vlaamse Milieumaatschappij (VMM) show a marginal improvement for the region as a whole. In 2007-2008, only 37% of samples from rivers exceeded the norm compared to 42% in the previous period. But in West Flanders, where the concentration of farms is high, this figure was more like 60%.

## **Flanders under pressure**

Belgium as a whole has been under immense pressure to improve its record, especially given the onslaught of European Union water legislation. The Flemish government has already acknowledged that it will not meet the latest standards required by the waste water directive on time.

It is also, according to Turf, unlikely to meet tighter bathing water standards that take effect in 2015, even if its coastal waters are meeting the standards today. "This is nothing to be proud of," he says. "The standards are not that high."

Given that waste water gets into the rivers, it inevitably ends up in coastal waters. "Our infrastructure cannot take it, and so it goes into the sea untreated. We always have background pollution in the North Sea," says Mie Van den Kerckhove of VMM.

Flanders' 67-kilometre coastline faces particular problems. "It's very actively used," explains Van den Kerckhove. "There are apartments over almost the whole line and not much nature. The rivers bring a lot of pollution out to sea, especially on rainy days."

She argues, however, that Flanders has the strictest checks in Europe on its bathing waters and regularly publishes information on which waters are safe.

Turf retorts that monitoring "doesn't change the quality of the water".

"I remember when water quality was so bad that people would not live by rivers," he continues. "There have been improvements, but these stopped in the early 2000s. We have to put more money into water management. It's a question of biodiversity. This is where fish swim and people want to jump in."



© Daniel de Keyser/Reporters

Swimmers might want to take to the pools instead of the North Sea

→ [www.bondbeterleefmilieu.be](http://www.bondbeterleefmilieu.be)

# Karel Vinck cleared of asbestos charges

## Local lawyer calls businessman's ignorance excuse "nonsense"

ALAN HOPE

Top Flemish businessman Karel Vinck has won his appeal in an asbestos-related court case being conducted in Catania, Italy. Vinck had been sentenced to three years suspended for failing to protect employees against the dangers of asbestos when he was manager of a factory in Sicily owned by Eternit, the roofing materials company, in the 1970s.

Eternit manufactured concrete tiles, among others materials containing asbestos fibres. "At that time, I was not at all aware of the dangers of asbestos," Vinck claimed in an interview with Trends magazine.

In fact, the dangers of exposure to airborne asbestos fibres in the air have been widely known since the 1930s, with the first proposal for warning labels being raised in the 1950s. The main problem is the inability of the body to expel the tiny fibres once they have been inhaled. The main effects are asbestosis, where scarring is caused by the

body producing acid in an attempt to dissolve the fibres; mesothelioma, a cancer of the lining of the lungs; and cancer of the lungs, digestive tract and larynx.

Vinck headed metals and materials group Bekaert before moving to Union Minière (now Umicore) in 1995, where he still sits on the board. From 2002-2005 he was chief executive of the rail authority NMBS. Last year he was called in as a trouble-shooter to head the Antwerp Mobility Agency (BAM) in its attempts to drive through its plans for the Oosterweel viaduct in Antwerp.

Vinck was in charge of the factory, located in the Sicilian city of Syracuse, from 1973 to 1975, when protection against asbestos was minimal. The factory closed in 1995, by which time hundreds of affected former workers or their surviving relatives had come forward with damages claims. Vinck and other top Eternit executives were charged with



© Belga

involuntary manslaughter and found guilty, the court ruling that they had disregarded the risks of handling asbestos. No information was given to workers, and no measures were taken to protect them, the court said.

The court of appeal in Catania has now overturned that verdict.

Vinck's defence of ignorance is "nonsense", according to Jan Fermon, lawyer for a Belgian family that is also bringing an asbestos case against Eternit. The link between asbestos and mesothelioma was already suspected at the end of the Second World War, Fermon said, and had been confirmed in the medical literature by the 1960s. ♦

## Delhaize reveals show-stopping results

Supermarket chain Delhaize last week delighted the stock market with the announcement that sales for the second quarter were up by 14.6% to a very respectable €5.1 billion. A large part of the rise is attributable to the rising dollar (Delhaize has a major American interest in the form of Food Lion), while Easter (which this year fell in the second quarter) and the American 4 July holiday are also responsible for a large part of the chain's good performance.

The year-on-year increase for the first half of the year was 15.4% as a result. "We're happy with such results in this difficult economic climate," said CEO Pierre-Olivier Beckers. Analysts said the position was helped by promotions stressing low-price ranges and by cost cutting. The public's attention to price cutting was also drawn by a dispute with Unilever which

saw some products withdrawn by the supplier from the supermarket shelves because Delhaize insisted on lower prices.

According to one measure, Delhaize moved into first place in Belgium, with a 25.37% a market share narrowly outstripping Carrefour at 25.19%. But those figures from market research company AC Nielsen do not include brands other than the main parent brand, and ignore, for instance, the GB Express franchise chain owned by Carrefour.

"We still consider ourselves as number two," Beckers remarked. "The question of who's first or second is meaningless: it all depends on how you count. The important thing is that there are three retailers that each have a 25% market share. That relative market share is what counts." ♦

## Authorities slower to respond to email

Government authorities are more likely to respond to business-related questions put to them by phone than by email, according to a survey carried out by Unizo, the organisation representing the self-employed.

Unizo sent questions to 30 government departments ranging from provincial to federal governments. Telephone queries were answered adequately in 95% of cases, with Brussels and the provinces doing better than Flanders and the federal government. That figure fell to 65% when the question was put by email to the federal govern-

ment, and only 55% when put to Flanders region. The provinces scored 75%, and Brussels region gave a faultless performance at 100%.

"Obviously government services are not yet sufficiently accustomed to working with new communications media," Unizo commented. ♦



## Courier staff strike over sackings

Staff at the air courier firm European Air Transport (EAT), a subsidiary of DHL, were this week ending their first week of strike action aimed at forcing management to come up with a social plan for 180 workers whose jobs are to disappear as a result of the parent company moving its European hub out of Brussels Airport.

EAT plans to follow its parent company to Leipzig, where DHL moved its European hub operations after the government imposed night-flying restrictions in response to an avalanche of complaints of aircraft noise.

That move means that 180 staff will lose their jobs on 1 January 2010. Unions are demanding

the same deal for those staff as was applied for the redundancies caused when DHL moved the majority of its operation in 2004. So-called retention premiums were paid then to stop workers jumping ship and to keep them on payroll until the scheduled move. In this case, however, the premiums would be cut by the equivalent of two months' salary because of the timing of the sackings.

"EAT staff, who have done everything possible to make the move go smoothly – training people in Leipzig, commuting back and forth – are now getting a slap in the face for their trouble," said Frédéric De Clerck, general secretary of the ACLVB union. ♦



ETA provides the aircraft for DHL's remaining Zaventem operation

## THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Air travel • Airlines

European airlines are ignoring laws on transparency of pricing and still exercising hidden charges, according to consumer organisation *Test-Aankoop*. Administrative and other charges are often not shown on online sales sites until the transaction is well under way. The magazine has called for a blacklist of offending airlines.

### Investment • Gimv

Flemish investment company Gimv has entered a €30 million cooperation with Finnish venture capitalists CapMan, which includes a 4.3% equity stake. Gimv said it wanted to strengthen its activities in Scandinavia, where CapMan is strong. The stake is expected to eventually grow to 10%.

### Materials • Umicore

The Brussels-based materials company saw turnover fall by 23% in the first half of the year to €860 million, while profits nose-dived by 84.6% to only €21.3 million. The company blamed falling demand from consumers and from B2B clients. Among the operations hardest hit were catalytic converters, batteries for computer and mobile phone manufacturers and abrasives for the building industry.

### Media • De Morgen

Daily newspaper *De Morgen* was alone in seeing its sales figures rise slightly in the second quarter, with a 1.4% rise to 55,500 copies. Financial daily *De Tijd* dropped 3.4%. Flanders' top-selling newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws* stayed unchanged at 281,500 copies a day.

### Natural gas • Creg

Belgium will obtain 16% of its natural gas from Russia by 2020, according to the power supply regulator Creg. At present, the figure is 6.6%. The regulator estimates that demand will increase by 1.74% a year, largely because of new gas-fired power stations, with most of the growth being met by supplies from Russia.

### Pharmaceuticals • Solvay

Swiss pharmaceuticals company Nycomed will announce a bid for the pharmaceuticals division of Belgian chemicals giant Solvay in September, Reuters news service reported. Nycomed is thought to be planning for finance the bid – worth €4 to €5 billion – from a rights issue and a bond issue. Solvay announced in April it would be carrying out an investigation into the strategic position of its pharmaceuticals divisions, which led to bid speculation.

### Tobacco • Gryson

Gryson Tobacco, a manufacturer of rolling tobacco based in Wervik, West Flanders, forecast turnover this year would top €100 million for the first time, despite the recession and the smoking ban in cafes. The company, which claims 5% of the European market for rolling tobacco, expected to produce 3.5 million kilograms this year, an increase of 15%.



# Art Trek: The Sixth Generation

Fourteen graphic artists from around the globe join forces above the renowned comic book store Mekanik in Antwerp for the sixth edition of an intriguing exhibition that gives us a glimpse at the future of this contemporary art

REBECCA BENOOT

**G**iving a new generation of graphic artists the opportunity to show their work to a larger audience is the goal of *Art Trek*, a unique annual concept launched by *Antwerpnaar* Eva Cardon. "We started *Art Trek* as an art show because we felt there was a void in the art landscape for young illustrators who don't work around conceptual art but prefer to draw," she explains. "I just felt there was something missing. So we decided to do our own exhibition, and it snowballed into an annual event."

*Art Trek* turned out to be a vibrant and interesting exhibit, aided by an eclectic combination of styles and techniques. A playful touch was added to the mix, emphasised by the title, a play, of course, on *Star Trek*. "Because the exhibition is above a comic book store with a lot of memorabilia, we thought it was an appropriate title," explains Cardon, 30. Also, it's a 'trek' through the young art scene. One of the *Star Trek* series is called *The Next Generation*, and we show a new selection of artists every year."

The organisers want to attract a broad audience and make this kind of work accessible to everyone, especially those who don't normally venture into comic strip shops. The historical relegation of graphic art found in comic strips to the "low arts" is slowly fading due to these kind of inspiring collaborations that feature often very impressive work.

Cardon has selected 14 artists from all over the world: "Through MySpace and Flickr you get to know new artists and their work but also through friends of friends. When you're interested in a certain type of visual art, it's easy to connect." And to make one exhilarating show.

Cardon is often more recognised by her artist name *Ephemeron* and is one of the featured artists in *Art Trek*. Her work suggests vulner-

ability and often resemble snapshots of very personal moments. "I try to express what I feel when I see certain types of images," she says. "I work a lot from photography and pictures that I take myself or that I find on the internet. I try to translate them into lines and colours and even shapes. It's something natural; I don't really think about it."

The wood panels that she has created for *Art Trek* are suggestive and graceful, exuding the emotive qualities that characterise her work. "It's always people with feelings or a very quiet or loving moment. But, on the other hand, I also like drawing houses and animals. Sometime you don't know why; it's just the imagery that attracts you."

She isn't the only featured Belgian artist. Fellow *Antwerpnaar* Ward Zwart's eerily evocative drawings are on view, as well as the work of Ghent-based Brecht Vandenbroucke, who tells me that he "looks at everything, even if it's bad. I just love discovering new things. I look at movies or music to make drawings; it's all input."

This combination of inspirations is visible in his chaotic works – a mish-mash of figures and pop culture references topped off with a slightly melancholic atmosphere. The main theme is life's little absurdities. "There is nothing more confusing than reality. I look at the world and see things, and it gets mixed in my brain."

The mixture sometimes comes out in intricate black-and-white drawings steeped in ironic awareness or big, colourful blocks in the shape of monsters, robots or aliens.

"I sometimes wake up with an image in my head, and think I have to do it. But I also try to control what I do because often I see certain routines forming. I remind myself that much of this has been done in the past and that I should make something differ-

ent. It's a world you create with your characters, and you have the power."

Other highlights in *Art Trek* are British illustrator Marcus Oakley, whose figurative ink drawings are realistic and to the point but with a whimsical 1960s twist. New Yorker Marc Todd, meanwhile, creates slightly satirical works based on comic book covers filled with vibrant colours and Americana.

A bit more straightforward and with a dash of innocence is Brazilian-born Pacolli's work, whose drawings simply burst with colour and humour. Louis Reith of the Netherlands prefers geometry, simplicity and elegance. His work is slightly reminiscent of Malevich but with a more refined complexity.

"The Unusual Child" is both a literary and pictorial series – a touching short story about a little girl and her cat that hits all the right notes. Gemma Correll's tale is illustrated with simple black-and-white drawings with a splash of red.

Offering an international and inspirational mix of eye candy, *Art Trek* is definitely worth a visit. This experience will once again reassure you of the bright future of contemporary graphic art. ♦

## Art Trek 6

Until 12 September  
Galerie Mekanik  
Sint-Jacobsmarkt 73  
Antwerp  
→ [www.art-trek.be](http://www.art-trek.be)

Eva Cardon, otherwise known as *Ephemeron*, illustrates vulnerability (top); a detail from one of the intricately mixed-up worlds of Brecht Vandenbroucke (middle); the edgy, imperfect style of Ward Zwart (right)



# Playful in pink

## The Knokke Biennale is an art exhibition that is small but international, serious yet tongue-in-cheek

ANNA JENKINSON

Jan Hoet Jr and his partner Delphine Bekaert returned home from this year's Venice Biennale and the Art Basel festival with an idea as to how they would use their new gallery space in Knokke this summer: they would organise their own biennial.

First: a colour theme (pink, mostly shocking pink). Second: a newspaper (with wacky comments from participating artists). Third: invitation packs for opening night (replete with VIP cards). Fourth: table decor (pink flowers, pink marshmallows). Finally: stocking their gift shop with everything from sweets in pink bubble wrap to pink fly swatters (with Knokke Biennale business cards attached).

In short: the Hoet-Bekaert gallery in downtown Ghent has brought its frisky attitude and funky methods to the beach.

"The aim is to bring national and international art lovers together at the smallest, but best organised biennial ever – in a playful way," according to the gallery. Hoet Jr, the son of famous Flemish artist and curator Jan Hoet, and Bekaert founded their gallery (with accompanying quirky bed & breakfast) in 2003 and have moved operations to Knokke for the summer.

"Small" would indeed seem to be an understatement, and this biennial has not made *quite* the same impact as its Venetian counterpart. Knokke's tourist office hadn't even heard of it, suggesting that I'd perhaps got the dates wrong and looking sceptically at the address I had given them. "It's a very small street. Are you sure?"

Map in hand, I headed away from the seafront towards a decidedly unglamorous cul-de-sac. I was beginning to have my own doubts. Then as I reached the bottom of the street and turned the corner, I saw a pink sign pointing to "The Biennale Knokke 2009: Better Biennale Better Life".

"Playful" is also an understatement. As Julie Mys, who is working there for the summer, kept telling me: "It's ironic" – from the black entrance booth with the words PRESS INFO VIP in shocking pink across the top, to the minuscule gift shop, which you have to climb a wooden ladder to reach. Its tiny windows have signs saying "Shop Till you Drop" and "Blondes have more fun." (When I ask Mys why the signs are in English, she gives a mock exasperated look and replies, "It is an *international* biennale."

For all the joking, mocking and irony, this is an exhibition of artists' work hoping to attract collectors and casual buyers who come to Knokke for the summer holiday period. It also wants to be a place where people come to talk about art, be it on display here, in the town's numerous other galleries or on show in Venice, Basel or elsewhere on the contemporary art circuit.

The actual exhibition space is not much bigger than a single garage and so only has a small selection of works. The first piece is a donkey's head by Thai artist Surasi Kusolwong, who has exhibited at London's Tate Modern and for whom the interaction between art and spectator is central.



A corner of the Knokke Biennale: furniture by Hannes Vanseveren, paintings by Fien Muller

Hoet explains how Kusolwong often works performance art. "The leftovers from performances are a piece of art." In this case, the donkey's head, linked with the idea of burden, was originally worn on stage by a man who would go into the audience and carry a woman on his back. This performance can also be re-enacted by visitors. "If you wear the donkey's head, you can look for the most beautiful girl in the room and carry her on your back," says Hoet.

One of the matchbox series by Irish artist Caroline McCarthy, meanwhile, is mounted on the white-washed brick wall. A canvas the size of a matchbox, she has painstakingly painted it with oil so that it actually looks like, yes, a box of matches. Each one takes about a week to create. The idea is to "mislead the visitor," Hoet explains. "People often comment in contemporary art that it is something they can do as well, but this work is very technical and takes a lot of time."

Amanda Ross Ho, who lives and works in Los Angeles, is "really crazy about cats," confirms Hoet, as we stand in front of her photograph of a girl splashing paint on herself in Jackson Pollock style – mounted on two large drums of cat food.

In addition to the artworks, the gallery has also organised performances ranging from "firework and everything" for the opening – it was one firework that they let off during the day – to music and dance. Another performance was given by Marten Spangberg, a Swedish choreographer and performance artist who was, in another game-some move, named as the biennial's chairman. In fact, the gallery decided that Sweden would be its "Guestland".

If contemporary art is your scene, then the Knokke Biennale should be in your diary.

It's open Thursday to Sunday; for the other days of the week, the calendar is marked with "Find us on the beach", "Closed due to personal reasons" and "Might be open, not sure yet".

As Hoet Junior tells me, "Art has to be fun. We only live once." ♦

### Knokke Biennale

Until 6 September  
Oud Zoute 13, Knokke  
➡ [www.thebiennale.be](http://www.thebiennale.be)

## CULTURE NEWS

A 15th-century reliquary stolen in 1980 from the church of St Peter in the Wallonian city of Lessines has been recovered in Limburg. The piece had been bought by an antiques dealer for €40,000. The man said he knew it had been stolen but assumed it had by now been found and returned to the market. The man was acting in good faith, a spokesman for the federal police art and antiques squad said.

The Flanders International Film Festival, which takes place in October in Ghent, will give a lifetime achievement award to Marvin Hamlisch. In a long career, the American composer has gathered Grammys, Tonys and a Pulitzer Prize, and he made history by winning three Oscars in one year in 1974 for the score and title song for *The Way We Were*, plus the score for *The Sting*, in which he single-handedly resurrected the music of rag composer Scott Joplin. During the awards show, the Flemish Radio Orchestra will play a selection of Hamlisch's music.

Following the success of the film version of the Flemish novel *De helaasheid der dingen* at Cannes this year, a new theatre adaptation of the book by Dimitri Verhulst opened last week in 's Hertogenbosch in the Netherlands. "Verhulst's words may sound Flemish, but the marginal world he describes is universally recognisable," said director Yvonne van Beukering. The film, meanwhile, opens in Belgium in October but not before screening at the Toronto International Film Festival next month under the international English title *The Misfortunates*. It will be joined by the new Flemish film *My Queen Karo* – the first time in the history of this influential festival that two Flemish films have been invited in the same year.



It's a book, it's a film, it's a play. *De helaasheid der dingen* is on stage in the Netherlands

Two Flemish bands took first places in the **World Music Championships** in Kerkrade, the Netherlands, which finished its three-week run on 2 August. Brass band Kempabloei from Achel in Limburg won first prize in the category Brass Band Concert. The band is chaired by Flemish member of parliament Philippe de Coene. The percussion orchestra Willen is Kunnen (WIK) from Zemst, Flemish Brabant won the category for percussion ensembles.

# Water babies

## Swimming pools boast some of the region's most beautiful architecture

EMMA PORTIER DAVIS

Just about every town in Flanders has swimming facilities, and most have that little extra something, be it an elaborately decorated, Art Nouveau bath house, a scenic outdoor bathing spot or the world's deepest diving pool.

When it comes to leisure time, the Flemish can usually be found diving headlong into the nearest pool, lake or sea-water as soon as the temperatures edge just a teeny bit above freezing.

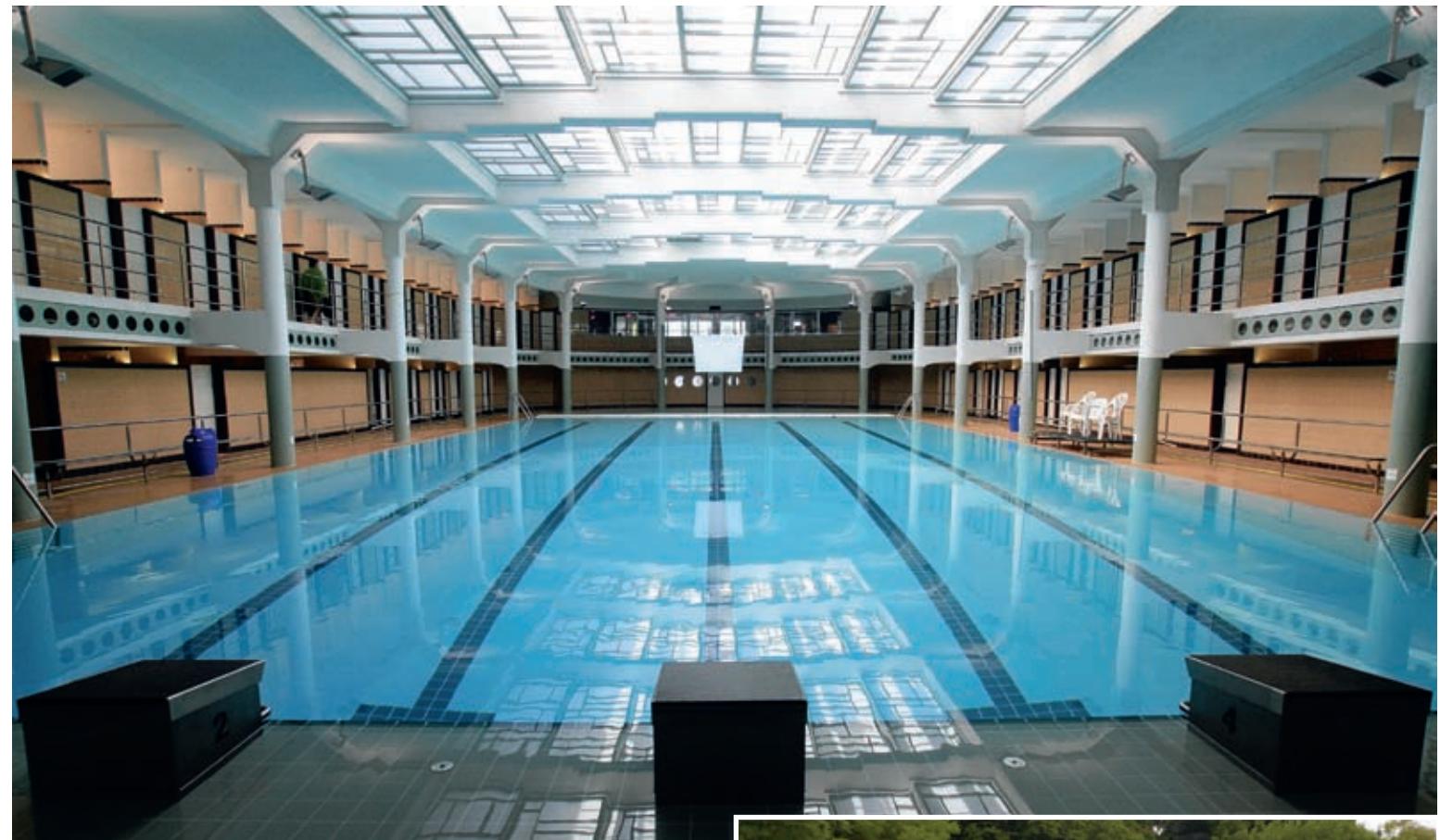
A tour of the region's pools is like taking a step back in time as many of them have retained their original architecture. These are places to relax and soak up the beautiful atmosphere rather than just functional swimming pools.

The Van Eyck swimming pool was built in 1886 and was Flanders' first covered bathing spot. It's a mixture of architectural styles and was originally built so the people of Ghent would have somewhere to wash. In the 19th century, the water in the canals and rivers was unsanitary, especially given the dense population of Flemish cities. "This was a place where people could go to take a bath. That was the main purpose," explains Danny Lamont from Ghent's sports promotion division.

Even today, the Van Eyck pool retains its Zen atmosphere. "The purpose now is to keep it quiet and for swimmers to enjoy the environment," says Lamont. "It's a place for people to search for some tranquillity."

Over in Brussels, citizens were also struggling to find clean water in which to bathe, so in 1854 the Brussels Baths opened in the Marollen district. Like the Van Eyck complex, it was originally a bath house, an essential after the city's river Zenne was covered over following a cholera outbreak.

The city authorities agreed in 1946



© Photos by Monique Philips

to build a sports complex on the site, which is just off the Vossemplein (site of the famous flea market). It is now home to an elegant swimming pool, dubbed at the time the most modern building in the area, which has a view over the city from its ample windows.

Aside from the older bathing houses, a bunch of new swimming pools were opened in the 1980s when the Flemish government launched a campaign to have one in every village.

As well as the indoor treasures, there are many purpose-built outdoor bathing spots, including the Hofstade-Plage in Zemst between Brussels and Mechelen. It was built as a holiday destination for those who couldn't afford to travel abroad. During the 20th century, while Belgium's rich headed to the coast to fancy hotels and apartments, the working classes were given these cheaper

alternatives. The complex is closed at the moment for renovations.

Aside from taking a dip in the region's many artificial lakes and coastal spots, some foolhardy Flemish have been known to swim in Limburg's gravel pits, a dangerous venture which is now prohibited by the authorities as many people have been killed in these unpredictable waters.

There have also been many deaths over the years in the quarry lakes where scuba diving enthusiasts trained. But in May 2004, Nemo33 opened in the Brussels commune of Ukkel, offering divers a safe alternative to the disused quarry lakes where they had previously honed their skills.

"The only deep places in Belgium are the stone quarries which are muddy. To dive in these conditions is very dangerous. Before Nemo, there used to be one or two deaths a year," ex-



plains Nemo founder and diving aficionado John Beernaerts.

He explains his love of diving: "To be like a fish, of course. And to be disconnected. All the senses you have in the water are very particular. But as well as doing it for the feeling, the science and technology are both very interesting."

Belgium looks set to benefit commercially from its expertise, as Beernaerts says there are about 1,000 projects for diving pools in other cities around the world that are being modelled on Nemo33.

Considering the architectural heritage of Flanders' indoor pools, it's a shame they are not really utilised by tourists. Explains Jan Turf of the Flemish Federation for a Better Environment: "Swimming in natural water is what you do when you are on holiday." ♦

⇒ [www.isbvzw.be](http://www.isbvzw.be)



The gorgeous Art Deco Veldstraat pool in Antwerp (left) reopened last spring after a three-year renovation project. It sports a hamam, gymnasium, Jacuzzi, herbal baths and brasserie. The Van Eyck pool in Ghent (top) was Flanders' first covered bathing house, while the outdoor pool at Boekebergh Park in Deurne just says no to chlorine, solely purifying its water with plants



# Something fishy

People come from across Belgium and even neighbouring countries for the freshest fish possibly, sold in Ostend. But for how much longer?

COURTNEY DAVIS

Christelle Dewaele handles the fish deftly, picking up mackerel, kingfish, sole with ease, all the while beckoning the meandering crowd to come a little closer. A fishmonger at Den Vistrap, an outdoor stall on the Visserskaai, or Fisherman's Quay, in Ostend, Dewaele has been hawking freshly caught fish since she married her fisherman husband five years ago. But knew she would end up in this stall, cleaning, weighing and selling fish, since she was a child.

"I was born into this life. My father was a fisherman," she explains, laughing at the thought of any other ending to her story. "But this is the case for everyone else here, too."

She's referring to the 10 or so surrounding stalls of female fish sellers. "Only people who are married or born into the industry work here. No one arrives here looking for work."

Besides, to ordinary job seekers, it might seem like a bit of a smelly profession. "When you grow up with it, you're used to it," explains Dewaele. "But other people think it's unclean. We like to say 'there are no strange ducks here.'"

Not only is it full of fish scales and guts, the job also has the burden of difficult hours. The man leaves to go fishing in the late afternoon, usually returning 10 or 12 hours later. The woman then takes his evening's catch and sells it from 7.00.

This happens every day, all year long. If the weather is good, the men are fishing, which means sometimes weeks or months working every single day. In the winter, when the wind blows in the wrong direction and there is less variety of fish, everyone gets a break. But even that can prove hard. "One week without working is a nice reprieve, but two weeks and my husband starts getting a little cranky," laughs Dewaele.

The fish being sold here at each stall is all freshly caught; we're talking only a few hours old. Dewaele, 36, doesn't sell anything other than what her husband caught the night before. The big difference between getting your fish here in

Ostend and a supermarket is that this fish is caught locally and sold immediately. Getting your fish at a supermarket means it can come from anywhere, farm or ocean, caught by any means and has to have travelled, adding hours or days.

"It's not natural to get anything you want at any time of year. That is not the way the ocean works." Says Dewaele. "When you buy in Ostend, you know where it was caught, when it was caught and even who it was caught by. This is natural."

That's a fact that attracts droves throughout Belgium, as well as the Netherlands, Germany and France. Hundreds come by every day. Dewaele yells out to passersby in French because "this is the holiday time for the French. In September, I only speak German."

Dewaele defies stereotyping. While she might have been born into this life, she also chose it. Educated and fluent in five languages, including Arabic, she worked in tourism for a number of years and lived abroad in Morocco before returning to the Belgian sea.

Passionate about the topic of

*The fishing tradition is "fading away, in full view of the public," says Christelle Dewaele (right), who runs a fish stall on Ostend's Visserskaai*

fishing, she sees her livelihood dying out. Her daughter won't be able to follow in her footsteps, she thinks, because in 15 years' time, there will be no more fishermen. "Twenty years ago, there were 17 ships. Now there are only eight. The government is hindering us. We can't use nets that drag anymore, but they won't help us pay to replace the ones we've got. They won't let us fish for more than 24 hours, so we can only go so far in terms of distance. They let other countries fish within three miles of our coast, even though it's illegal. And gas prices have doubled."

She rails against the lack of support and promotion of what she feels is a Belgian tradition that is slowly dying as they put windmills in the seas and raise fish on farms. "It's a pity that there isn't more respect for what we do."

When she ponders what other job she may have, it's no surprise she says she would want to fight for

the rights of fisherman. Looking around her, she says: "There is no one advocating for us. I want to do more for the fishermen's wives. We work hard, all of us."

All around her in the various stalls are other women, selling fish at various prices depending on what their boats brought in the night before. There must be some tension being in competition in such close quarters, and Dewaele acknowledges that this is the most difficult part of the job. "When something goes wrong or times are difficult, we are there for each other. But every day in the selling, that's different. Each person has their own boats, their own bills, their own worries."

This is proven as she and her sales partner covertly whisper, pointing to another fish seller. "She's already packing up her stall," she tells me, eyebrows raised. This is good news for Dewaele, who has between 200 and 300 kilos of fish to sell every day. She stays until all

her fish is gone. On the rare occasion that that is impossible, any remaining fish is sold at a nearby auction, where it's then shipped off to restaurants and food corporations.

Despite the complaints, this hard labour of love she does well, using her language skills and strong personality to win customers and the occasional journalist. "You use what you have, you make the good out of the bad. People think that because we're fish sellers, we're stupid."

One of her regular customers retrieves her bag of fish and says softly but clearly, "No, we don't think that."

Looking at this intelligent, passionate woman, working hard with her hands, striving to maintain a Belgian tradition, it is hard to feel anything other than respect. ♦

⇒ [www.ostend.be](http://www.ostend.be)



© photos by Julie van Schooten



## FRESH FISH 101

**CATEGORIES:** In the summer, there is turbo, herring, bass, plaice, mackerel, kingfish, whiting and Dover sole. In the winter, it's mostly cod.

**STORAGE:** Fresh fish will last about three days in the refrigerator and six months in the freezer.

**COST:** Four pieces of sole to feed two people well should weigh about 800 grams and costs about €10. The cheapest option is three kilos of place for €5.

**BELGIUM:** The specialty here is Dover sole, known all over the world but caught right off the coast of Belgium in the North Sea.

**WARNING:** Those stands that line the walk from the train station to the beach and eventually lead to the fishmongers: they do not sell fresh seafood. As yummy as the calamari and crab meat looks, it is imitation crab from Asia, and most of the seafood is not caught locally, although they are a good place to pick up a local warm snack – snails in a fishy broth.

# 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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experience in training management talent, the School can develop a specially adapted management training programme for every organisation, in each phase of its development, targeting the most diverse aspects of its business.

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**Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School**

**September 10 at 18.00**  
**Radisson Blu Park Lane Hotel**

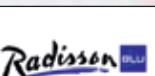
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# Ostend Film Festival

LISA BRADSHAW

There are some choice opportunities for star-gazing at the Ostend Film Festival – the only festival in Flanders that mixes the big three forms of screen entertainment: film, television and video gaming. Members of the cast of two brand new Flemish films, *Meisjes (Girls)* and *My Queen Karo*, will both be in attendance, as will the two stars of the French film *Un Prophète*, which won the Grand Jury Prize this year at Cannes.

*Meisjes* (see photo) is director Geoffrey Enthoven's second foray into the world of the geriatric: his *Vidange perdue* (known in English as *The Only One*), starring the late Nand Buyl as a less-than-pleasant old man, was a big hit across Flanders. The new comedy also has all the qualities to hit the right note in Flanders: co-written by Jean-Claude Van Rijckeghem (whose *Aanrijding in Moscou* just took home its 15th international award), it's about a 70-year-old woman who wants to revive the singing career of her youth. She recruits her music producer son to help her, who, according to the film's promotional materials, "would rather jump into the River Scheldt". Both Marilou Mermans (the mom) and Jan Van Looveren

(the son) will introduce the film at the festival.

Expect even more excitement – and possibly a little swooning – over the presence of rising Flemish star Matthias Schoenaerts, recently seen on the big screen in *Loft* and *Linkeroever* and on TV in *De Smaak van de Keyser*. Cuter than cute, he'll be joined in Ostend by his *My Queen Karo* co-stars Anna Franziska Jäger and Déborah François. The film, which follows the difficult life of a 10-year-old girl living with her free-thinking parents in a 1970s Amsterdam commune, enjoys its world premiere at the festival before screening at the Toronto International Film Festival next month. It opens in Belgium in October.

Actors Niels Arestrup and Tahar Rahim travel to Ostend, meanwhile, to introduce *Un Prophète*, a universally hailed film by Jacques Audiard about a young French-Arab criminal who turns out to be a lot smarter than his fellow inmates bargained on when he first arrives in prison.

Joining in the celebrity fray are Karel Roden and Deana Jakubisková, who star in the Slovakian

film *Bathory*, which has its Benelux premiere at the festival. About the historical figure accused of vampirism, it's Slovakia's most financially successful film to date. The festival also hosts a Gaming Development Day, in-cinema gaming and a free public City Games event, plus several award-winning television series on the big screen. Flemish musician Maurice Engelen, aka Praga Khan, is the guest programmer this year, and he has laid on some fabulously salacious programming: Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*, Ken Russell's *Crimes of Passion* and Michael Haneke's *La Pianiste* are all on his list.

**19-25 August**

Ciné Rialto and  
Kinopolis Ostend

→ [www.filmfestivalostende.be](http://www.filmfestivalostende.be)



## MORE FILM THIS WEEK

**Stephen Frears Cycle** → *Cinematik, Brussels*

**Open-air cinema** → *Sint-Baafs, Ghent*

**Contour: Biennial of the Moving Image** → *Mechelen*



### Antwerp

**Café Capital**  
Stadspark;  
[www.cafecapital.be](http://www.cafecapital.be)  
AUG 13 Bar Jeudi: Art-Expo, DJs  
Prinz, Scaldia, X-ian, VJ Jok Jok Wereld  
AUG 15 Spark: K'Bonus + Trus'me  
AUG 20 Bar Jeudi: Art-Expo, DJs  
Prinz, D'Stephanie, Beatblenderz, VJ  
Ruben Novus



### Brussels

**St Michael and St Gudula Cathedral**  
Sinter-Goedeleplein; 070.22.21.07,  
[www.ticketnet.be](http://www.ticketnet.be)  
AUG 18 20.00 Svetlana Berezhnaya,  
organ: Reger, Widor, Brahms,  
Boellmann, Pierné



### Brussels

**Fuse**  
Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89,  
[www.fuse.be](http://www.fuse.be)  
AUG 15 23.00 Monika Kruse

**Le Bar du Matin**  
Alsembergsesteenweg 172;  
02.537.71.59; <http://bardumatin.blogspot.com>  
AUG 20 21.00 Family Jammin

### Deurne

**Openluchttheater Rivierenhof**  
Turnhoutsebaan 232; 070.222.192,  
[www.openluchttheater.be](http://www.openluchttheater.be)  
AUG 12 20.30 Omara Portoondo  
AUG 14 12.00 Frank Sinatra Big Band  
(free). 20.30 Rocola Bacalao (free)  
AUG 15 20.30 Daan



### Brussels

**Café Bonnefooi**  
Steenstraat 8; [www.bonnefooi.be](http://www.bonnefooi.be)  
AUG 12 22.00 Giovanni Di Domenico  
en duo

**Le Bar du Matin**  
Alsembergsesteenweg 172;  
02.537.71.59; <http://bardumatin.blogspot.com>  
AUG 18 20.30 The Young Sinatras

**The Music Village**  
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45,  
[www.themusicvillage.com](http://www.themusicvillage.com)  
AUG 18 20.30 The Zhulus New  
Orleans Band

### Ghent

**Club Reserva**  
Jan Breydelstraat 32; 0498.54.11.17,  
[www.hotclubdegand.be](http://www.hotclubdegand.be)  
AUG 12 21.00 Trio Deja Nero  
AUG 13 21.00 Emre 'El Turco' Trio



### Antwerp

**Cathedral of Our Lady**  
Handschoenmarkt; 03.213.99.51,  
[www.dekathedraal.be](http://www.dekathedraal.be)  
**Until NOV 15** Reunion: From  
Quinten Metsys to Peter Paul Rubens,  
masterpieces from the Royal Museum  
of Fine Arts return to the cathedral



### Diamond Museum

Koningin Astridplein 13-23;  
03.202.48.90,  
[www.diamantmuseum.be](http://www.diamantmuseum.be)  
**Until AUG 31** HRD Awards 2009 - A  
Fairy Tale: diamond jewellery design  
competition

### Fotomuseum

Waalse Kaai 47; 03.242.93.00,  
[www.fotomuseum.be](http://www.fotomuseum.be)  
**Until SEP 13** Fotografie in België  
tijdens het Interbellum (Photography)

in Belgium Between the Wars)  
**Until SEP 13** Theatres of the Real, contemporary British photography  
**Until SEP 13** Geert van Kesteren: Baghdad Calling + Why Mister, Why?, photos from the Iraq war  
**Until SEP 13** Nick Hannes: Red Journey, photographs from Russia  
**Until SEP 13** De film van mijn leven (The Film of My Life), prize-winners of the Canvas photography contest, plus photographs by Flemish photographer Lieve Blanckaert

**Gallery In-Between**  
 Paardenmarkt 90; 09.225.34.32, [www.nelevancanneyt.com](http://www.nelevancanneyt.com)  
**Until AUG 27** Worlds Inside, Outside, photographs by Nele Van Canneyt

**Mekanik**  
 Sint-Jacobsmarkt 73; 0495.48.74.50, [www.art-trek.be](http://www.art-trek.be)  
**Until SEP 12** Art Trek 6: Exhibition of work by 14 of the most promising young graphic artists from around the world

**Middelheim Museum**  
 Middelheimlaan 6; 03.827.15.34, [www.middelheimmuseum.be](http://www.middelheimmuseum.be)  
**Until SEP 27** Chris Burden, videos, sculpture and installations by the contemporary American artist

**Modemuseum (MoMu)**  
 Nationalestraat 28; 03.470.27.70, [www.momu.be](http://www.momu.be)  
**Until AUG 16** Paper Fashion, garments made of paper and related materials concentrating on the 1960s

**Rockox House**  
 Keizerstraat 12; 03.201.92.50, [www.rockoxhuis.be](http://www.rockoxhuis.be)  
**Until NOV 15** A Gift to God, private patronage of religious art during Antwerp's Golden Age

**Blankenberge**  
**Cultuurcentrum Casino**  
 Zeedijk 150; 050.43.20.43, <http://cultuur.blankenberge.be/>  
**Until OCT 4** Masereel en de zee (Masereel and the Sea), retrospective on the 120th birthday of the Blankenberge-born Franz Masereel, with drawings, wood cuts, paintings and ceramics

**Bruges**  
**Arentshuis**  
 Dijver 16; 050.44.87.11, [www.brugge.be](http://www.brugge.be)

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## DON'T MISS

### Salon Boudoir

**22-23 August**  
**Campo Molen, Asbeek**

"Thanks to my mother I grew up in a world of passion and creativity, which have most certainly stimulated my determination and my sensitivity to beauty," says Rebekka Vanderhaeghen, a photographer who presents under the moniker Salon Boudoir. Her latest selection of work is made up of two series: *Pure sang*, a contradictory interplay between the fragile and the repulsive, and *Blush* (pictured) featuring compositions of women's bodies. Playful, erotic, sometimes disturbing.

→ [www.salonboudoir.com](http://www.salonboudoir.com)



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

**WIELS**  
 Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33, [www.wiels.org](http://www.wiels.org)  
**Until AUG 16** Tina Schulz, Alexander Hempel & Hans-Christian Lotz and Eiko Grinberg

**Until SEP 13** Ben Cain: The Making of the Means, large-scale installation by the former artist in residency

**World Bank Brussels**  
 Marnixlaan 17; 02.552.00.32

**Free subscription!**

**Until OCT 31** In the Eyes of a Woman: Roma Portraits, the lives of various Roma communities as seen through the eyes of female photographers.

### Deurle

**Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens**  
 Museumlaan 14; 09.282.51.23, [www.museumdd.be](http://www.museumdd.be)  
**Until SEP 13** When the mood strikes... Wilfried & Yannicke Cooreman's collection of contemporary art, with works by Franz West, Thomas Schütte, Jean-Marc Bustamante and Jan Vercruyse among others  
**Until SEP 13** Robert Devriendt, paintings

### Gaasbeek

**Gaasbeek Castle**  
 Kasteelstraat 40; 02.531.01.30, [www.kasteelvangaasbeek.be](http://www.kasteelvangaasbeek.be)  
**Until AUG 16** Paul & Cie, a look at Paul Arconati Visconti (1754-1821), eccentric resident of Gaasbeek Castle and fervent admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte

### Ghent

**Caermersklooster**  
 Vrouwebroersstraat 6; 09.269.29.10, [www.caermersklooster.be](http://www.caermersklooster.be)  
**Until SEP 13** Delftig vermaak, ijdel vertier (Distinguished leisure, vain diversion), paintings and photographs of Ghent's bourgeoisie from the mid-19th century to the *Belle Epoque*

### Design Museum

Jan Breydelstraat 5; 09.267.99.99, <http://design.museum.gent.be/>  
**Until OCT 11** Yrjö Kukkapuro, retrospective of the Finnish designer, from the late 1950s until the present day

**Until OCT 11** Ceramics by Raoul Duffy, 1877-1904, works by the French artist

**Until OCT 11** Schoonhoven Silver Award: Poetry in Silver, silverware competition with 55 international artists

### Dr Guislain Museum

Jozef Guislainstraat 43; 09.216.35.95, [www.museumdrguislain.be](http://www.museumdrguislain.be)  
**Until SEP 13** Burland Toyland, works made from recycled materials by Swiss outsider artist François Burland  
**Until SEP 13** Unknown Secrets, paintings by Serbian artist Goran Djurović  
**Until SEP 13** De Tentoongestelde Mens: Andere culturen als amusement (Exhibited People: Other Cultures as Entertainment), posters and photographs from carnival shows and asylums that put the physically or mentally handicapped on display

### MIAT

Minnemeers 9; 09.269.42.00, [www.miat.gent.be](http://www.miat.gent.be)  
**Until AUG 23** Felt: From Tradition to Modern Art, work by István Vidák  
**Until OCT 18** Ghent on porcelain cards from 1840-1865

### Museum of Fine Arts

Fernand Scribedreef 1 – Citadelpark; 09.240.07.00, [www.mskgent.be](http://www.mskgent.be)  
**Until SEP 20** Raoul de Keyser, Artist in residence, works on paper (1964-1979) by the contemporary Belgian artist

### Sint-Pietersabdij

Sint-Pietersplein 9; 09.243.97.30, [www.gent.be/spa](http://www.gent.be/spa)  
**Until SEP 6** Walder De Mulder, photos of conductors, photographers and other artists from the 1960s to the 1990s by the Ghent-based photojournalist  
**Until SEP 6** Walter De Buck Verbeeldt (Represents), sculpture and drawings by the Ghent artist, singer and founder of the legendary Gentse Feesten

## Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)

Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03,  
[www.smak.be](http://www.smak.be)

**Until AUG 23** Beyond The Picturesque: Interpretations of Landscape in Contemporary Art  
**Until AUG 23** Meteoriti, sculptures by Bizzhan Bassiri  
**Until AUG 30** Carl De Keyzer: Trinity, photographs on power and violence by the Flemish Magnum agency photographer

## Hasselt

### Modemuseum

Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21,  
[www.modemuseumhasselt.be](http://www.modemuseumhasselt.be)  
**Until OCT 31** In Her Shoes, trends and evolution of women's shoe design, from 1900 to contemporary designers  
**Until AUG 31** Ti + Hann, temporary shop II, installation/pop-up store

## Z33

33 Zuivelmarkt (Béguinage)  
(011.29.59.60)

**Until SEP 27** Werk nu (Work Now), group show on the world of work by 20 international contemporary artists

## Kemzeke

### Verbeke Foundation

Westakkers; 03.789.22.07,  
[www.verbekefoundation.com](http://www.verbekefoundation.com)  
**Until NOV 15** Artificial Nature, outdoor sculpture and installations by contemporary Belgian and European artists

## Mechelen

Speelgoedmuseum (Toy Museum)  
Nekkerspoelstraat 21; 015.55.70.75,  
[www.speelgoedmuseum.be](http://www.speelgoedmuseum.be)  
**Until JAN 3** Thirty-five years of Playmobil

## Tervuren

Royal Museum for Central Africa  
Leuvensesteenweg 13; 02.769.52.11,  
[www.africamuseum.be](http://www.africamuseum.be)

**Until AUG 31** Omo: People & Design, functional objects made and used by the Omo people of southwestern Ethiopia

**Until JAN 3** Persona: Ritual Masks and Contemporary Art, masks from the museum's and other collections, shown alongside works by contemporary African artists

## Ypres

CC Ieper – Lakenhallen  
Grote Markt 34; 057.23.94.80,  
[www.acci.be](http://www.acci.be)  
**Until OCT 4** Wat overblijft (What remains), recycled assemblages by Camiel Van Breedam



**Beaufort 03: Art by the Sea:** Third edition of the contemporary art triennial, with works by 29 Belgian and international artists

**Until OCT 4** at Ostend's Kunstmuseum aan zee as well as outdoor installations and sculptures in various locations on the Flemish coast  
070.22.50.05,  
[www.beaufort03.be](http://www.beaufort03.be)

**Palm Parkies:** Series of concerts in parks, including BBQ and drinks  
**Until AUG 26** from 19.00 across Flanders  
[www.parkies.net](http://www.parkies.net)

**Roller Bike Parade:** Four months of rollerblading in the streets with technical staff on hand to help with equipment rental and maintenance  
**Until SEP 26** in Brussels (every Friday), Antwerp (every Saturday),

Koksijde (every Sunday) and Hasselt (every Monday); all parades confirmed or cancelled by 16.00  
[www.belgiumrollers.com](http://www.belgiumrollers.com)

## Antwerp

**Jackyland:** Concerts every Thursday by local talent, followed by after-parties  
**Until SEP 10** at Magiq Spiegeltent, Oosterweelsteenweg (Noordkasteel)  
[www.jackyland.be](http://www.jackyland.be)

**Jazz Middelheim:** International jazz festival featuring Flat Earth Society, Laurie Anderson-Lou Reed-John Zorn trio, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Philip Catherine, Aldo Romano & Riccardo Del Fra, Toots Thielemans with Danilo Perez Trio, Bert Joris Quartet, Charlie Haden & Kenny Barron, David Murray plays Nat King Cole "en Espanol" and more  
**AUG 13-16** at Park Den Brandt  
[www.jazzmiddelheim.be](http://www.jazzmiddelheim.be)

**Zomer van Antwerpen:** Annual summer arts festival featuring concerts, theatre, circus, open-air film, sunset barbecues and a woodland bar; most events free  
**Until AUG 30** across Antwerp  
03.224.85.28,  
[www.zva.be](http://www.zva.be)

## Blankenberge

**Comedy Summer 2009:** Stand-up comedians  
**Until AUG 14** at Belgium Pier, Zeedijk 261  
0900.00.600,  
[www.comedysummer.be](http://www.comedysummer.be)

**Sand Sculpture Festival:** Annual event featuring sculptures and reliefs by the best sand sculptures in the world; this year's theme is pirates  
**Until AUG 31** in Blankenberge  
[www.zandsculptuur.be](http://www.zandsculptuur.be)

## Bruges

**Nomad: 40 Years of Roland Patteeuw**  
a walking tour of art by one of Flanders' hardest working curators, with work by Roger Raveel, Dan Van Severen, Raoul De Keyser, Jef Geys and more  
**Until SEP 1** at indoor and outdoor locations across Bruges  
050.44.30.40,  
[www.ccbrugge.be/Nomad](http://www.ccbrugge.be/Nomad)

## Brussels

**Bruparck:** Themed family weekends, including music and dance activities, acrobatics, pirate shows, comic strips, Knights of the Round Table and more  
**Until AUG 23** at Bruparck, Eeuwfeestlaan 20, Heysel  
[www.bruparck.com](http://www.bruparck.com)

**Brussels 2009 BD Comic Strip:** City-wide festival celebrating Brussels-based comic strip artists and the rich history of the Belgian comic  
**Until DEC 31** across Brussels  
[www.brusselscomics.com](http://www.brusselscomics.com)

**Brussels Beach:** Urban beach with sand, concerts, sports, family entertainment and 50 straw huts selling exotic food and drink  
**Until AUG 23** on the banks of the Akenkaai (Sainctelettesquare)  
02.279.50.49,  
[www.brusselbad.be](http://www.brusselbad.be)

**Brussels by Water:** Guided boat tours and other activities in the port of Brussels and surrounding rivers and canals  
**Until SEP** with departures from Brussels, Vilvoorde and Halle  
02.203.64.06  
[www.brusselsbywater.be](http://www.brusselsbywater.be)

**Brussels Summer Festival:** Outdoor festival with an eclectic mix of music plus street theatre and cultural activities  
**Until SEP 27** at Lagunahall, Krommedijk 57

**AUG 14-23** 19.00 in venues and squares around the city  
[www.abconcerts.be](http://www.abconcerts.be)

**Bruxellons 2009:** Annual theatre festival featuring popular theatre, music, cabaret and a children's programme, plus buffet and bar  
**Until SEP 26** at Château du Karreveld, Jean de la Hoeselaan 3  
02.724.24.24,  
[www.bruxellons.net](http://www.bruxellons.net)

**Midi-Minimes Festival:** Classical music festival with short, lunch-time concerts grouped according to historical period  
**Until AUG 28** 12.15 at Miniemenkerk, Miniemenstraat 62, and Royal Conservatory, Regentschapsstraat 30  
02.512.30.79,  
[www.midis-minimes.be](http://www.midis-minimes.be)

**Mini-Europe by Night:** Sound and light show with fireworks  
**Until AUG 15** 22.30 at Bruparck, Eeuwfeestlaan 20  
[www.minieuropa.com](http://www.minieuropa.com)

**Royal Museum of Fine Arts family events:** Art workshops for children (ages six to 13; in Dutch)  
**Until AUG 28** at the Fine Arts Museum, Regentschapstraat 3  
02.508.33.33,  
[www.fine-arts-museum.be](http://www.fine-arts-museum.be)

## Ghent

**Parkkaffee:** Activities in the park for the whole family, including live music, magic school, circus workshop, tarot card reading, campfire, plus food and drink  
**Until AUG 31** at Parkkaffee, Groenestaakstraat 37, Mariakerke  
09.227.99.94,  
[www.parkkaffee.be](http://www.parkkaffee.be)

**Patersholfeesten:** Festival in the small maze of medieval streets in the historic centre, featuring antique markets, art exhibitions and folk music  
**AUG 14-16** in the Patershol neighbourhood  
[www.patershol.be](http://www.patershol.be)

## Hasselt

**Muscadet – Aperitiefconcerten:** Outdoor live music ensembles, choirs and orchestras every Sunday morning  
**Until AUG 30** 11.00 at Het Stadsmus, Guido Gezellesstraat 2  
011.23.98.90,  
[www.hetstadsmus.be](http://www.hetstadsmus.be)

**Pukkelpop:** Rock festival featuring Arctic Monkeys, Faith No More, Placebo, Kraftwerk, dEUS, Razorlight, Razorlight, The Offspring, 50 Cent, N\*E\*R\*D, Snow Patrol, My Bloody Valentine and many more  
**AUG 20-22** in Kiewit  
[www.pukkelpop.be](http://www.pukkelpop.be)

**Rimpelrock (Wrinkle Rock):** concert featuring Clouseau, Billy Ocean, Dana Winner and Jimmy Frey, among others  
**AUG 15** in Kiewit, Kempische Steenweg  
[www.rimpelrock.be](http://www.rimpelrock.be)

## Hoogstraten

**Antilliaanse Feesten:** Caribbean and Latin American music festival. The 27th edition includes music by Kassav and Bamboolaz  
**AUG 14-15** at Blauwbossen festival site (Antwerp province)  
[www.antilliaansefeesten.be](http://www.antilliaansefeesten.be)

## Knokke-Heist

**International Cartoon Festival:** highlights the increasing role of internet and television in cartoons. Press Cartoon Belgium features the best cartoons from the local press this year, with guest cartoonist Kevin Kallaugher  
**Until SEP 27** at Lagunahall, Krommedijk 57

050.630.430,  
[www.cartoonfestival.be](http://www.cartoonfestival.be)

## Leuven

**Zomer van Sint-Pieter:** Classical music festival with short, lunch-time concerts grouped according to historical period. Sister festival to Brussels' Midi-Minimes  
**Until AUG 28** across Leuven  
016.23.84.27,  
[www.zomer-van-sint-pieter.be](http://www.zomer-van-sint-pieter.be)

## Lommel

**Lommel Leeft 2009:** Free concerts in parks and public squares  
**Until AUG 27** across Lommel (Limburg province)  
011.39.97.99,  
[www.lommelleeft.be](http://www.lommelleeft.be)

## Mechelen

**Parkpop:** Concerts by pop, rock, blues, salsa, reggae, disco or soul groups every Thursday evening  
**Until AUG 27** 20.30 in Kruidtuin, Bruul 129  
015.29.78.68,  
[www.parkpop.be](http://www.parkpop.be)

## Oudenaarde

**Feest in het Park:** Festival in the park featuring music by Lamb, Arsenal, Danko Jones, Heather Nova, The Wombats, Solomon Burke, Daan and Busy Signal, among others  
**AUG 13-16** at Tenten Donkvijver, Minderbroedersstraat  
[www.feestinhetpark.be](http://www.feestinhetpark.be)

## Ronse

**Bruul 2009:** Free summer music festival with performances every Friday, featuring Raymond Van Het Groenewoud, Sons of Queen, Sois Belle, Paul Severs and Freddy Birset  
**Until AUG 21** 20.00 at Bruulpark, Ronse (East Flanders)  
055.23.27.94,  
[www.bruulronse.be](http://www.bruulronse.be)

## Watou

**Watou 2009:** Annual festival of contemporary art, architecture and poetry. This year's title is Tussen Taal en Beeld: Verzamelde Verhalen (Between Language and Image: Collected Stories), which looks at the relationship between image and language  
**Until SEP 6** in indoor and outdoor venues across Watou (West Flanders)  
059.56.45.98,  
[www.watou2009.be](http://www.watou2009.be)

## Zeebrugge

**Polé Polé Beach:** Festival with concerts by international artist, DJs, parties and exotic vibes  
**AUG 14-16** on the beach  
09.222.99.99,  
[www.polepole.be](http://www.polepole.be)

## Zulte

**Hoeverock:** Free rock and blues festival, featuring concerts every Tuesday  
**Until AUG 25** 19.30 in Het Gouden Hof, D'hoestraat 32, Olsene (East Flanders)  
<http://hoevertrock.wordpress.com>

## DUSK 'TIL DAWN

SAFFINA RANA



## Carl Cox

British techno-legend Carl Cox will be setting Antwerp alight when he headlines at Noxx on 14 August. For over two decades, Cox has lifted the spirits of revellers across the globe and been voted over and over in international music magazines as one of the best DJs in the world.

It's hard not to come away from his set without feeling lit up inside, as I first found out in 2003 at The Ministry of Sound in London. His exuberance flows into his music. He weaves everything from breakbeat, Italian house and rare groove into pulsating beats that keep your feet moving.

Cox began DJing family get-togethers at the age of eight, selecting records from his parents' stack of soul 45s. He loved the buzz of the crowd and started setting up his own parties with his first pair of decks when he was 15.

Giving up the study of electrical engineering to continue DJing, fame finally came to him with the acid house explosion of the late 80s. His big break was in 1988 at the Sunrise rave on the outskirts of London when, at 10.30, he hooked up a third deck and got 15,000 partied-out ravers back on their feet and kicking into action.

Since then, he has played to over a million revellers at Berlin's Love Parade and excelled as a producer and radio DJ. And that third mixing deck has become something of his signature.

www.noxxantwerp.be

presales:

www.labyrinthproductions.be

## FACE OF FLANDERS

### Rik Torfs

When the venerable Catholic University of Leuven was founded in 1425 by Pope Martin V, the church authorities of the day can hardly have imagined that one of the most celebrated alumni of the institution would be famous for dancing the macarena on a TV game show.

Leaving aside eggheads like Erasmus, Mercator and Vesalius, true renown has been brought to the university by Rik Torfs and the hugely popular VRT quiz programme *De Slimste mens ter wereld*.

Henri Maria Dymphna André Laurent Torfs (but known as Rik) was born in 1956 and graduated in law at Leuven, going on to specialise in canon law, the law by which the Catholic church governs itself. His academic credentials are impeccable; he has guest-lectured at Stellenbosch in South Africa, Nijmegen and Strasbourg. He has published on human rights, marriage and the benefits of forbearance. He is known across the world as a formidable critic of the Catholic Church, the current Pope and his predecessor.

At the same time, though, something deep within this thoughtful and serious man hankers for the spotlight. He may have been chairman of the Euro-



ALAN HOPE

pean Consortium for Church and State Research, but he was also a guest at Sports Personality of the Year, and on another occasion was "godfather" to one of the Miss Belgian Beauty contestants.

But it was for *De Slimste mens* that he became a national icon. This show, which airs nightly during its season run and which features famous people who have the guts to tackle its daunting questions, has become a Flemish institution.

It's presented by movie director Erik Van Looy and has a resident expert in über-intellectual Marc Reynebeau. The guests are journalists, politicians and performers. Comedians do remarkably well, with series wins for Stany Crets, Bert Kruismans and Wouter Deprez. *Het Nieuwsblad* journalist Anneliese Rutten won

in 2007.

Torfs' job in the show is to make witty and wise remarks about the questions or the answers or the contestants, or Erik Van Looy. Some may find his waspish wit a little self-congratulatory, but as his demonstration of the macarena showed, he's game for a laugh.

What they'll do without him in the next season, which begins in December, is a complement to his impact. He's only just announced he won't be taking part, but already the VRT has decided it will take no fewer than eight people to replace him, substituting his one-man jury with an entire panel.

Enough, coincidentally, to stand up and give us a pretty reasonable gavotte, should the question ever arise.

## TALKING DUTCH

ROBYN BOYLE



### sfeer →

These last remaining weeks of summer, many people start to complain of a certain aandoening – a condition known as festivalitis. *De symptomen zijn* – symptoms include *droge mond, vermoeidheid en hoofdpijn* – dry mouth, exhaustion and headaches. *Wat zou de oorzaak kunnen zijn?* – What could be causing this? Well, my best friends know good and well that dit heb je jezelf aangedaan – this is entirely self-inflicted.

There are just too many festivals going on all summer long. Try staying home when there's a square nearby, summoning you with the promise of *een rock optreden en een fris pintje* – a rock concert and a cold pint. So you leave the next day's physical consequences for what they are and *geniet van elk moment* – enjoy every moment.

What is it that draws us to the crowds, the hammering beats and excessief gebruik van alcohol en gefrituurd eten – excessive consumption of alcohol and fried foods? As we head outside and close the door behind us, we may think to ourselves, *ik ga gewoon even de sfeer opsnuiven* – I'm just going to have a look around ("sniff up the atmosphere"). Maybe that's just it: being part of the unique energy, or vibe, that can only come from joining a heaving mass of *feestgangers* – festival-

goers.

But you end up not only checking out the sfeer but becoming one with it. *Je wordt weliswaar ondergedompeld in een andere wereld* – you really get immersed in another world. Next thing you know, *de dag-aad breekt aan* – the sun's coming up, and all the gyrating people around you make it all seem perfectly normal. Never mind the fact that everyone's going to spend the next day sleeping off their *kater* – hangover. You're all in the moment, caught up in the *prachtige sfeer* – wonderful atmosphere.

The day after, you comfort yourself in the knowledge that these summer festivals, *zoals alle goede dingen* – like all good things, will come to an end. *Het wordt hoog tijd om de draad terug op te pikken* – time to get back to some semblance of a normal life, meaning *een gezond eetpatroon, vaste slaapuren, alles met mate* – healthy eating, regular bed times, moderation. *Saai?* – Boring? *Zeker en vast* – Most definitely.

All the more reason: *profiteer nu van de zomerfestivals* – get the most out of the summer festivals now! We all know how this kind of sfeer has a tendency to disappear during the winter months. And, as the saying goes, *de kater komt later* – you'll get the bill later.

### The last word → → →

*There is €10 million in the budget for the Brussels justice palace. The question is, are we going to spend it over the next three years on cleaning the façade or on security?*

Justice minister Stefaan De Clerck after three criminals escaped from a courtroom

*What a transformation! I hope Prince Philip keeps it because it looks good on him.*

Royalty-watcher Kathy Pauwels on the new beard of Prince Philip, which hit the headlines last week

*I've done more training than ever before. I scared myself. I've never had the chance to train for seven months at a stretch. Three or four weeks in the winter break, that's all you get as a tennis player.*

Kim Clijsters prepares for her comeback match in Cincinnati against Marion Bartoli

*VJ Ilse Liebens from Jim TV let him hear it. It seems that he liked it, but what else is he going to say when the cameras are on him?*

Flemish band Lady Linn and Her Magnificent Seven won a "Summer Hit" award last weekend for their cover of Eddy Grant's "I Don't Wanna Dance"

*In fact I can do everything: running, swimming, cycling, climbing, wrestling and skiing. Only football is a bit harder, so I usually play the goalie. I'm really used to falling over, so I'm good at that.*

Tomas Klein, 8, took part in the Iron Kid Antwerpen triathlon last week, despite having had both legs amputated above the knee when he was one year old

SHARON LIGHT

## bite



Although born in Brussels, the family's heritage was Italian, and they began with only three flavours: chocolate, vanilla and banana. Their shop now offers a formidable choice (occasionally including a personal favourite, peanut) and has introduced options for diabetics, as well as rice-milk based products.

In 1990, not half a block away, Il Gelato opened, featuring more Italian-style ice cream in an abundance of flavours. Neither shop is afraid of a little adventure. Il Gelato has offered green tea, sesame and buffalo milk ice cream, while a recent trip to Zizi featured kriek or mojito sorbet.

When it comes to décor, Zizi has more of a classic ice cream shop feel – warm colours, a homey ambience and a touch of their original 1950s setting. Il Gelato has squarely taken the "chic" corner of the market. You enter by the freezer, which displays drool-inducing undulating piles of Gelato. The seating area features lots of dark browns and cool greys and funky light fixtures.

Both shops have expanded – Il Gelato more so, with several other outlets around Brussels, including in the Ter Kamerenbos. Glacier Zizi features a branch in Waterloo, or you may be lucky enough to catch their ice cream truck making the rounds of town. But even after years of side-by-side comparison on Vanderkinderestraat, I don't think I'll ever be able to choose a favourite.

→ [www.glacierzizi.be](http://www.glacierzizi.be)  
→ [www.ilgelato.be](http://www.ilgelato.be)

### The ijsjes of Ukkel

When the summer heat strikes, it's time for *een ijsje* – an ice cream. Although it remains a hotly contested title, one might argue that no one knows ice cream better than the Italians. And of the Italian ice cream in Brussels, a certain block in Ukkel pits two top-quality producers against one another.

To begin, Glacier Zizi. Any self-respecting Brussels parents in the past half-century have brought their children here to satisfy ice cream cravings. The family-run shop was established in 1948 and named after its founder, Izzi, who was teasingly called "Zizi" (French slang for a certain male body part).