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NEWS • BUSINESS • ARTS • ACTIVE • LIVING • AGENDA • INTERVIEW

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Passersby at Antwerp's left bank beach on 22 September were in for a shock when a dead finback whale of nearly 20 metres was pulled from the water



Insider trading arrest 6

The business community was shocked last week when Luc Vansteenkiste, CEO of Recticel and former director-general of VBO-FEB, was arrested on insider trading charges



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China is the guest country of the phenomenal biennial Europalia festival this year. Our culture critic chats with the director and tries to convince sceptics of the charms of Chinese Opera


INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERIES – PART I: BRUSSELS
> SPECIAL PULL-OUT GUIDE INSIDE! <

Baring more than soul

Truth is stranger than fiction in the new film *De helaasheid der dingen*, based on the best-selling novel by Dimitri Verhulst

LISA BRADSHAW

Although the naked cycling scene in *De helaasheid der dingen* only lasts for about 30 seconds, it has become the film's calling card – on posters, promo materials and cinema trailers from Cannes to Toronto. And now Ghent.

The new Flemish film by director Felix van Groeningen (called *The Misfortunates* in English) will open the 36th edition of the Flanders International Film Festival on 6 October, a splashy red carpet evening of movies, champagne and celeb spotting. Although the opening film is always chosen for its broad appeal to both a general audience and critics, this year the excitement is mounting a bit higher than usual.

Helaasheid has everything: it's a local production by a very exciting young director; it's based on the uproariously popular 2006 novel by Flemish literature's bad-boy Dimitri Verhulst; it's a mixture of humour, drama, tragedy and hope; it features an excellent cast of well-respected actors; and it is Flemish through and through.

And there's the bicycle race – a singular image that combines pure Flemish folk tale with the thrill of victory. Even we could not resist it.

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Global engagement

As the academic year begins, more than 15,000 international students arrive at Flemish universities

ALAN HOPE

The new academic year began last week with parades of gowned professors, traditional speeches and the news that the number of young people electing to go to university in Flanders is up by about 6%.

What the figures also show is an increase in the number of students coming from professional and technical secondary schools, arousing fears in some quarters that university admission standards may be dropping. In the long run, that could have a negative effect on the level of university education.

As student numbers in general rise, so do the numbers of those taking part in Erasmus international student exchanges. In 2007-2008, more than 162,000 students across Europe took advantage of the programme, as well as 27,000 academics. Another 20,000 took advantage of the new Erasmus programme that allows students to spend time in a business or organisation abroad.

Flemish institutions are pro-active in recruiting exchange students, with every university running a fully equipped international office. The

number of incoming students to Flemish institutions is also rising, by about 5% in the case of Ghent, according to the head of their international office, Valère Meus.

In 2007-2008, Ghent attracted 782 Erasmus students, while in 2008-2009, the figure was 805. This year's number is already standing at 656, with the September crop typically representing two-thirds of the annual total, suggesting a final figure of about 980.

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Businessman escapes Qatar

Home again after daring boat trip

ALAN HOPE

Philippe Bogaert, the Flemish businessman held "hostage" in Qatar for more than a year, is back home after escaping by boat under cover of darkness.

Bogaert went to Qatar in October of last year to work for the local subsidiary of a Belgian company, Dialogic, to develop media coverage of the Qatar Marine Festival. Although employed as a media specialist, he took over as CEO of the subsidiary when the existing CEO was sacked. When the Qatari partners pulled out of the contract, Dialogic Qatar became bankrupt, and Bogaert resigned.

Under Qatari law, he was only allowed to leave the country if a release form was signed by his sponsor, a former business partner. He refused, leaving Bogaert without a job, without an income, and with no way to leave. When his apartment lease ran out, he was given shelter in the Belgian Embassy and made some money playing piano in hotels.

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News in brief

The members of the **Sint-Niklaas association**, which promotes the saint celebrated by children throughout Flanders on 6 December, have protested at plans for a film in which Nicolas is portrayed as a serial killer. The film is the brainchild of director Dirk Maas, whose credits include *De Lift* and *Flodder*, and shooting could begin within weeks. The association called it "tasteless sensationalism" and lamented that while other children's figures like Samson and Kabouter Plop were protected by trademark legislation, "anybody can abuse the legend of Sinterklaas".

Antwerp port representatives last week snubbed the annual Zeeland oyster festival in protest at the Dutch government's failure to meet its obligation in dredging the Westerschelde ocean approaches. Antwerp's port affairs alderman Marc Van Peel, however, was present to give a speech.

Antwerp's Sterckshof Silver Museum closed last week for renovations which are expected to last three years. The museum is housed in a neo-Gothic castle in the Rivierenhof park in Deurne. The work will cost €8.5 million

Police in Ostend last week initiated extra patrols following the break-up of a migrants' camp in Calais, during which 300 people were detained. The foreigners' office and local police now fear that the migrants will move to Ostend in the hope of crossing the channel to Britain.

Journalists' representatives last week accused the courts of "pure censorship" after the court of first instance in Antwerp prohibited the publication of an issue of *TV Familie* magazine containing an article on the Pfaff family of TV celebrities. Banning an article prior to publication is practically unheard of in Belgium, where it is considered in breach of Article 25 of the constitution. Normally the courts only consider cases after publication of the offending article. The journalists' union said the ruling was "a dangerous precedent".

Members of the **Citizens' Commission on Human Rights** demonstrated outside the Catholic University of Leuven's Sint-Jozef psychiatric institution last week in protest at the excessive

Dead whale draws crowds

MARC MAES

A giant finback whale was discovered on 22 September in the Scheldt River. The dead whale was first spotted by a Dutch tugboat that was towing the fruit carrier Summer Flower. The tugboat reported "an unidentified object" in front of the carrier's bow.

The Summer Flower, which was positioned in front of the Berendrecht lock at the Port of Antwerp, manoeuvred to release the creature, which had remained unnoticed, although the ship's log revealed a slightly reduced speed of about one knot since the vessel entered the English Channel on its way from Santa Marta to Antwerp.

The staff at the Antwerp Coordination Centre (the port's supervision and crisis centre) notified the river police and port authorities, and the 20-metre long cadaver was towed to the Berendrecht lock's south quay.

Later that same day, the whale was taken to the Antwerp left bank beach where it was inspected by staff from the North Sea Mathematical Models and the Scheldt Estuary (MUMM), a department of the Royal Institute of Natural Sciences.

Hundreds of people lined the river bank to watch the whale be towed to the Sint-Anneke beach at high tide. Scientists from the University of Liège and the National Botanic Garden of Belgium took samples for further research, after which the cadaver was cut up and transported to a specialised waste site. The whale's jaw and bones were taken to the Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences.

→ www.mumm.ac.be



EXHIBITION

Whales and Dolphins

From 14 October
Museum of Natural Sciences
Vautierstraat 29, Brussels

→ www.naturalsciences.be



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Businessman escapes Qatar

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In the meantime, Bogaert was sued for €3.2 million in damages following the bankruptcy of the company, sentenced to three years in prison for writing bad cheques, and finally sued for €10m for defamation.

Last week, he was reluctant to reveal details of his escape, in case he exposed those who helped him to reprisals or legal action. He stressed that his flight was not a sign of guilt. "I had the choice," he said. "I could escape, or I could wait for an unfair trial. I might have waited until my whole life had gone by."

The escape took about four months to plan. Two of Bogaert's friends flew from Belgium to Mumbai and chartered a yacht which they sailed to Qatar. Bogaert was taken on board, and the three travelled back to Mumbai over a period of three weeks, with little food or water and a constant fear of being pursued and brought back to Qatar. They even constructed an emergency hiding place in case customs should investigate the boat.

The voyage was a catalogue of disasters: the engine gave out; the GPS stopped functioning for a time; and half of the 200 litres of fresh water taken on board in Qatar leaked away.

During this time, messages kept appearing on Bogaert's Twitter page, which he used to communicate with the outside world, giving the appearance that he was still in Qatar.

The last message is dated 19 September. It reads: "Looking forward to celebrate Eid with my Qatari friends (yes, I still have some). Back for more on Tuesday." In fact, his boat docked in Mumbai on Tuesday, and the three men took the first flight to Europe. But Bogaert's troubles weren't over yet. "I'd flopped down in my seat on the plane and was feeling great. Ten minutes later as we still stood on the tarmac, some security people came on board and made directly for me. I thought that was it. I had to get off and point out my luggage. It seems they were look-



© Boga

ing for something suspicious. But then they let me go back to my seat. That feeling I had as we took off – simply fantastic, really."

Though the lawsuits against him are still active, Bogaert will only have to appear in court if he goes back voluntarily, as Belgium does not have an extradition treaty with

Qatar and, in any case, does not extradite its nationals. "Would I go back to Qatar? Maybe in another life," Bogaert said. "I had to wait for a year in Qatar, let them wait for me now." ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

354,562

payments made in the first half of the year to people who have taken time off work to care for a sick or elderly family member

1,593

cases involving palliative care for the terminally ill

1,500kg

hashish uncovered in a joint operation of the Dendermonde judicial police and the Antwerp customs service. The drugs were contained in packs of coffee hidden inside a container full of textiles

500th

lung transplant operation carried out last week in the university hospital in Leuven, which ranks among the world's top lung transplant centres

€60,000

contents of a handbag snatched by a thief from a 65-year-old woman in Berchem near Antwerp. The victim was said to distrust the banks with her savings, which she carried with her everywhere

3,148

applications for subsidies from the Flemish government in 2008 and the first half of 2009 for home renovations aimed at accommodating the handicapped. About 40% were approved, at a cost of €5.6 million

€58

annual charges for the average bank account in Belgium, according to figures released by the EU Commission. In France the average cost is €154 a year, while in the Netherlands it is €46. But the Commission said the charges, while low, were difficult to understand and lacked transparency

1/20

letterboxes are not in order, being either too narrow, too low, too high or too far from the street, according to the postal service

23cm x 3cm

the regulation size of a post box opening, which must be 70cm-170cm from ground level



VRT discriminated against Vlaams Belang

The public broadcaster VRT was discriminating when it refused to allow representatives of the ultra right-wing Vlaams Belang (VB) party to take part in a televised debate in 2007, the Council of State has ruled. The debate, in the run-up to federal elections, featured the leaders of Open VLD, CD&V and SPA. The part Groen! was also excluded, but only VB filed a complaint.

The VRT claimed the debate was only part of its entire election coverage

and that VB was properly represented when considering the coverage as a whole. But the Council of State, like the Flemish Media Regulator previously, found that the broadcaster had breached its duty of impartiality.

The VRT said it accepted the ruling but described it as "pretty irrelevant". Since last June when the debate took place, the VRT has operated a more inclusive policy. The VB took part in that debate – and suffered an electoral setback in the elections. ♦

Magritte nude stolen in Jette



Thieves last week held up the René Magritte museum in Jette at gunpoint and stole the most valuable painting in the collection, a nude entitled "Olympia" dating from 1948. Police believe the men were acting on commission.

The Magritte museum in Jette – not to be confused with the recently opened museum on Brussels' Koningsplein – is housed in the Esseghestraat, where the painter lived and worked in the last 24 years of his life. Normally the museum is only accessible by appointment, but last week the two men rang the bell and were allowed to enter.

They then they pulled a gun and threatened the member of staff on duty and two Japanese visitors. They stole the painting and made off in a car.

The painting shows a naked woman lying by the sea with a large shell on her stomach, and the title refers to the controversial painting by Edouard Manet, itself based on a number of classical portrayals of Venus, who legend says was born from a seashell. Although atypical of Magritte's work, it is considered valuable – but unsalable. Police are assuming the painting was "stolen to order" for a collector who intends to keep the work.

The thieves remain at large, however, they were not masked, and witnesses were able to give police a good description. They also did not wear gloves, raising the possibility of a fingerprint identification. ♦

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

The kid

Over the last 30 years, Guy Verhofstadt has been his party's main ideologue. The former prime minister has shaped the Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD), now Open VLD, with his own hands. While its predecessor PVV traditionally defended employers' interests, Open VLD focused on the individual – or rather, in Verhofstadt's words, the citizen.

He combined this with a strong belief in the free market economy. This includes strict budgetary orthodoxy. So strict, in fact, that Verhofstadt, 32 at the time and the youngest and most ruthless budget minister ever, earned himself the nickname "baby-Thatcher". Because of this, the leader of a major trade union vetoed "the kid" from the government for some time. It was a blow to Verhofstadt, but one that made him the politician he was to become.

Verhofstadt has always been Open VLD's natural leader. Whenever he felt like it, he took over the presidency. Internally, he rarely met with opposition. In fact, within Open VLD, being close to Verhofstadt was always the cleverest of career moves.

Patrick Dewael, a buddy dating back to student days, made it to Flemish minister-president and later federal minister of interior affairs. Guy Vanhengel, Marino Keulen and Bart Somers all acted as Verhofstadt's spokesperson at some point and all were rewarded with ministerial posts. The same goes for the many people from outside the party, who Verhofstadt wooed to illustrate his party's "openness". One of the few people Verhofstadt never really controlled was Karel De Gucht, who he made party president after he became prime minister in 1999. Verhofstadt and De Gucht clashed bitterly in 2004 on the issue of the migrant vote. But before the rift, they formed a formidable troika with Patrick Dewael, which marked Open VLD's high point.

Now it's time for the younger generation to take over, Verhofstadt says. Open VLD has lost the Flemish elections. It no longer moves people like it used to do. Verhofstadt has promised not to meddle in the upcoming vote on the party presidency. Except for one thing: he has called for candidates to have two running mates. Together they can form a troika, just like the old days.



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ING 

Global engagement

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But, however successful Flanders may be at bringing students from across the world to study here, Flemish students are less convinced of the benefits of a period abroad. Across Europe, about 11% of students spend some time abroad, but in Flanders, the figure is barely 10%. In May, ministers from 46 countries meeting in Leuven set a target of 20% to be reached by 2020.

Just under 3,000 Flemish students went abroad in 2007-2008, more than half of them from colleges or academies, which tend to attract a more professional rather than academic type of student. More women (1,815) took part than men (1,130), and Spain is the most popular destination, accounting for about a quarter, followed by France at just under one-fifth.

In the same year, 711 lecturers took

advantage of Erasmus to teach at a foreign institution, with the most popular countries being Finland, Spain and the Netherlands.

One of the main causes of the lukewarm response in Flanders to the offer of Erasmus is cost: spending time studying abroad can be expensive. So Flemish socialist MEP Said El Khadraoui has proposed not only an enlargement of the present system of bursaries but also a new system of "social loans". Pilot projects are currently running in Italy and Hungary under which the European Investment Bank guarantees loans made by banks (in Italy) or by the government (in Hungary). Students pay the loans back later, when they are financially more secure.

"With a system of social loans, we can give young people who are finding it difficult to finance a foreign experience a helping hand," El Khadraoui says. "A share of the interest could be paid by the community. Or even by the banks: they could also make a gesture of support."

At present, grants are made only partly on the basis of income. Just as important is the destination country, with minority language states and the countries of former Eastern Europe being more highly subsidised than the likes of France and Spain, although the latter two are still far and away the most popular among Flemish students. The money for grants comes from the Flemish region, which has budgeted €2 million for the coming academic year to cover grants ranging from €110 to €240 a month. The EU also contributes.

Two Open VLD politicians, mean-

while, have argued for a relaxing of the language laws to allow languages other than Dutch to be used in Flemish universities. That is already happening in practice, with increasing moves at least to introduce English as the language of courses at Master's level.

Students coming to Flanders from abroad are offered language courses for everyday use, but that doesn't equip them to understand course material. The universities, Meus said, are increasingly offering courses and modules in English. They are even moving towards offering courses in English for their own students at Master's level.

That's less to do with a small number of students than with the internationalisation of the education world. Flemish universities have to become more international to attract researchers and academics, who, in turn, raise the institution's profile on the world stage in publications and at conferences, leading to increased funding from the private sector and foundations. ♦



© Tim Draven, Reporters

International students signing up at the five main universities

University	2008	2009
Ghent	5,826	6,134
Leuven	5,399	5,766
Antwerp	2,104	2,266
VUB (Brussels)	1,341	1,475
Hasselt	741	732
Total	15,411	16,373

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Top businessman jailed

Arrest of Luc Vansteenkiste leads to protests

ALAN HOPE

The jailing of one of the country's top businessmen last week has led to widespread outrage, with commentators lashing out at everything from the investigating magistrate's heavy handedness to conditions inside Vorst prison in Brussels.

Luc Vansteenkiste (pictured) is CEO of auto parts manufacturer Recticel in Wetteren. He used to be the director-general of the VBO-FEB, the organisation of the country's top entrepreneurs and bosses, which earned him the rank of baron granted by the King. This week it was revealed that he is being held in Vorst prison, which is described as "filthy and overpopulated", without being allowed a visit from his wife, even to bring him clean clothes.

Vansteenkiste is accused of insider trading. In October last year, Bois Sauvage, the holding company of which he was CEO, dumped 3.6 million Fortis shares just before it was announced that the bank was in trouble and shares were heading into freefall. Vansteenkiste was at the time also an independent, non-executive director of Fortis.

Last week he was picked up for questioning and held in custody by the investigating magistrate. The decision sent a shock wave through the business world and galvanised the pundits.

The ability to hold suspects in custody is intended, in Belgium as elsewhere, to protect society from dangerous suspects, to prevent them from influencing witnesses and to stop them from destroying evidence. As every commentator pointed out, there could hardly be less of a desperado. And, since the alleged offences took place a year ago, Vansteenkiste would presumably already have put the frighteners on witnesses or destroyed evidence.

This use of the power of remand is particularly galling in the case of insider trading. Belgium has had a law against insider trading since 2005. In that time, there has been only one conviction. In the particular case of Fortis and Bois Sauvage, three other company officers have been declared suspects but none was considered fit to be remanded.

The protests ring slightly hollow, given the fact that the conditions in prisons like Vorst are well known but didn't cause much upset until one of the Establishment's own got to experience them first hand. The same goes for the remand system. Yes, it seems clear that the investigating magistrate is using his power to put pressure on Vansteenkiste to confess. But that is also not news: four in 10 prisoners in Belgium, or about 3,700,



vansteenkiste © belpress

are awaiting trial, and therefore not yet considered guilty of any crime. Some of them have to wait years, only to find themselves acquitted and free again, or convicted, but not considered suitable for a custodial sentence. ♦

Power companies investigated for price fixing

A team of 50 investigators from the competition authorities last week executed search warrants at the headquarters of power companies Electrabel and SPE. The two utilities are suspected of price fixing.

Electrabel and SPE dominate the market for large power users, who have repeatedly complained to the power industry regulator CREG about anti-competitive practices. Most recently, their complaints focused on the amount Electrabel was charging its customers for CO2 emissions rights – rights that the company had obtained from the government for free.

Electrabel is owned by the French-based group Suez. SPE, the second-largest player on the market, is majority owned by Electricité de France (EDF). One of the complaints was received from

Lampiris, based in Liège, which has no electricity production of its own, but buys its electricity and gas for onward sale from the large producers.

According to industry watchdog CREG, Electrabel and SPE together charged their customers €328 million last year for carbon dioxide emissions rights, which the power companies had obtained for free. Since 2005, the CREG said, that income amounts to some €1.5 billion.

Electrabel denied the charges and welcomed the investigation. "This might finally bring some clarity to the situation," said managing director Jean-Pierre Hansen. Both companies said they would cooperate fully. The results of the investigation are not expected until next year.

Foreign companies "considering leaving"

Some foreign companies are considering pulling out of Belgium, under pressure from their home offices, according to Scott Beardsley, chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in Belgium (AmCham).

Businesses are being forced to face up to "fundamental choices," he said, as a result of the economic crisis. This includes an assessment of the economic utility of maintaining operations abroad. For companies based in Belgium, companies face deterrents such as high wage costs and in partic-

ular the automatic indexation of wages. This led to a sudden hike in costs at the beginning of the year, just at the moment when the banking and economic crisis was beginning to bite.

AmCham took the liberty of offering some tips on a "well-run Belgium". Its suggestions included lowering the employer's portion of social security payments to 20%, cutting company tax to 25%, pruning back administrative procedures and increasing worker participation, particularly for older workers.

All change at the top

Peter Leyman and Jo Libeer are the new managing director and general manager, respectively, of Voka, the association of Flemish employers. The duo replace Philippe Muyters, who was parachuted into a job as a minister in the new Flemish government of Kris Peeters. Muyters, who was not elected, is minister of budget. Libeer has worked 25 years for Voka Kortrijk and Voka West Flanders. Leyman, meanwhile, has worked almost his whole career for Volvo Ghent.

Luc Hindryckx is the new chair-

man of the Belgian Institute for Post and Telecommunications, the industry regulator. Hindryckx previously worked for Telenet.

Rudi De Becker has been appointed as the new managing director of fruit and vegetable marketer Univeg. De Becker replaces Hein Deprez, founder and chief shareholders, who takes over as chairman. De Becker was formerly CEO of electronic goods wholesaler Hagemeyer.

Ghent votes down capital increase

The city authorities of Ghent last week voted against a capital increase for the Gemeentelijk Holding (GH), the investment company of the municipalities. The GH is the second-largest shareholder in Dexia, the troubled bank, and suffered a severe blow last year when the bank nearly went under.

The federal and regional governments then came forward with €800 million in loan guarantees to prop up Dexia, as well as a new chairman in the shape of former prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene. But this arrangement ran out at the end of September and the proposal now is to increase GH's capital by €480m, with the 600 or so municipalities due to vote as Flanders Today went to press.

Ghent, however, has already said no to the idea. According to

the city's alderman for finance, Christophe Peeters, the burden of promised "superdividend" of 13% on new shares will make it impossible to pay out a dividend on normal Dexia shares. Meanwhile the Groen! party has called on all parties to vote against the proposal, arguing that municipalities that do not subscribe to the capital increase will be "penalised financially". But CEO Carlos Bourgeois of GH said he remained "cautiously optimistic" that the proposal would pass.

• Elsewhere, Dexia announced it would be cutting some 1,500 jobs over the next three years, including 795 in Belgium. The jobs affected would be mainly in the IT division. The bank had previously announced 900 cuts this year, 350 of them at home; it has now added a further 600 jobs over the next two years, 445 of them in Belgium.

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Airport • Brussels

Brussels Airport has postponed the opening of its low-cost terminal to the summer of 2011. The decision follows protests from airlines based at the airport, who criticised the terms and operating conditions of the new terminal. The dispute led to the resignation of the airport's CEO Wilfried Van Assche.

Construction • CFE

French-owned building group CFE has acquired a majority stake in Elektro Van de Maele, the Meulebeke-based specialist in electrical installations.

Design • Fritz Hansen

Danish home decoration and design company Fritz Hansen has opened a showroom in Antwerp.

E-commerce • Ogone

Brussels-based online payments specialist Ogone has opened a subsidiary in the UK to capitalise on the fast-growing British e-commerce sector.

Insurance • Fortis

Fortis Holding will pay some €120 million for a majority stake in the Italian UBI Assicurazioni in partnership with France's BNP Paribas Assurance. UBI is one of Italy's leading insurance companies four million customers.

Lighting • ADB

ADB, a Belgian subsidiary of Siemens specialised in lighting at airports, has been sold to the British venture capital group Montagu for a sum thought to be in the region of €70 million. ADB, named after founder Adrien De Backer, is considered a world leader in its field, providing lighting for more than 2,000 airports in 190 countries.

Pharma • Nycomed

Swiss pharmaceuticals company Nycomed is expected to make a €4 billion offer for the pharmaceutical activities of Solvay, the Belgian chemicals and plastics firm.

Property • Regus

Regus, the international office space services company, will open a business centre in Ghent next week. The company already operates business centres in Antwerp, Zaventem, Diegem and Brussels.

Venture capital • GIMV

The Flemish venture capital fund GIMV will invest a further €5 million in the Lint-based Alfacam, a world leader in digital TV programmes and services.



WWW.USE-IT.BE

1 FREE ORGAN

(Mon / 12.45-13.30) Typical Brussels: in the middle of this ugly shopping street, lies the **FINISTERRAE-CHURCH**. Every Monday local music lovers, lost shoppers and homeless looking for shelter gather here – with their backs to the altar and their feet on the little chairs – to enjoy some church-organ. Be warned: sometimes the pieces played can be very avant-garde and seriously heavy.

2 DRINK WITH THERESE

(Every day, only open during daytime) In summertime, the terrace of **AU LABOUREUR** is the best place to catch the last rays of sun in the evening. The hot-blooded Thérèse has been standing behind (and in front of) the bar of this old-style neighbourhood place for decades. No danger of tourists here, unless they're all using this map.

3 EATING STREET

Dinnertime! Start early with moules parquées (raw mussels), a typical Brussels appetizer from the red-and-green tent on the Sint-Katelijne / Sainte-Catherine square. Afterwards, pick a restaurant in Vlaamsesteenweg / Rue de Flandre. The choice is as wide as a Lebanese snack, a veggie lunch place, a truly Belgian meat sandwich specialist and much more... Because of the living mix of restaurants, bars, small local shops and normal houses, the street is alive day and night. Bonus points if you also find these: a shop that sells only student hats, one with only umbrellas, a religious living room and a pet shop with mice that run loose at night.

4 MEET MARTINE

(Tue to Sat) On the benches of **AU DARINGMAN**, everybody talks to everybody, and barkeeper Martine talks most of all. She knows how to handle the heavy drinkers, eternal students and bar philosophers. Unfortunately, the best regular customer died in 2005: Martine's blind bar dog Oscar. Pay your respects in front of his picture at the bar.

5 SUMMER TERRACE

(Every day) This is one of the best terraces to write your postcards, sipping a cappuccino. If you want to know what's happening tonight: good selection of flyers at **DE MARKTEN**.

6 PISS AGAINST A CHURCH

In Italy or Poland, you might end up in jail if you would pee against the church, but we installed a public urinal here to 'drain the potatoes'. Welcome to Belgium!

7 360 DEGREES VIEW

The top floor of **PARKING 58** offers a 360° spectacular view of Brussels in open air. It's free to enter, just take the elevator to the 10th floor. Bring a windproof jacket and a bottle of wine. You can see as far as the Atomium 68.

8 FIVE STARS FOR €3,70

Go and sleep at the Hotel Métropole! We heard the Toscanini suite is quite ok, for €950 per night (breakfast included). If not, you can also enjoy some of the old-day grandeur in the bar. Wear clean shoes, glasses and a newspaper and pay €3,70 for a coffee in a plush seat.

9 COMICS MUSEUM

(Tue to Sun 10.00 to 18.00 / €7.50) Los Pitufos, As-Sanafir, die Schlümpfe, Smerfy, Sirinler, Smrcki, the Smurfs... Whatever you call those little blue dwarfs, les Schroumpfs were invented by the Belgian comic artist Peyo in 1958. And NOT by some French guy like everybody seems to think. Other Belgian classics include Tintin, Suske & Wiske and Gaston Lagaffe. 2009 is the Year of the Comic Strip in Brussels. This means that even 'serious' museums are preparing comic exhibitions this year, but the centre will still be the **BELGIAN COMICS MUSEUM**, located in a beautiful building designed by Victor Horta.

TOURIST FAVOURITE!

10 CATHEDRAL

(Every day / Sun only afternoon / free / treasure room €1) Most cities have their cathedrals located in a beautifully preserved neighbourhood. Not in Brussels, though. Walking from the central station to the gothic **ST.GOEDELE-ST.MICHEL'S CATHEDRAL** you'll have to pass some of the most shamelessly ugly architecture you can imagine. The worst insult is probably the modern building right next to the church, tastelessly 'echoing' the two towers. The building of the cathedral started in the early 13th century and even though it took us almost 300 years to finish it, it has remained pretty basic. No masterpiece paintings, here. But if the sun manages to get in through the stained glass windows, that makes for a pretty sight.

11 BRUSSELS BEER

(Every day) This bar is called **MORT SUBITE**, or 'sudden death'. Why? The workers of a nearby bank used to come here to gamble with dice. If time was short, they only got one chance to play: a 'sudden death'. The place is classified as a monument, but it's the waiters who make it a real Brussels experience: no messing with those guys. Try a Mort Subite Lambic Blanche: a beer especially brewed for this bar.

12 ARTHOUSE CINEMA

(Thu to Sun / €3.50 with student card / €5) Don't come to **CINEMA NOVA** for popcorn and a comfy seat: this is an arthouse cinema without any fuss. The documentaries, world movies, horror B-movies and experimental classics go further than what you expect. The nicest dump in town.

13 JEANNEKE AND ALCOHOL

Manneken Pis has a sister: Jeanneke Pis. She was invented by a restaurant owner to attract more tourists to this tiny street, but now the restaurant is closed she doesn't pee anymore. **DELIRIUM BAR** attracts more people. This bar got into the Guinness Book of Records with 2004 kinds of Belgian and international beer. They've lost count in the meantime, but the list is like a phonebook. 25 beers on tap. Live jam sessions every Thursday at 22.00. The rum and absinthe bars on the other side follow the same strategy: all varieties in one place.

TOURIST FAVOURITE!

24 PEEING STATUE N°3

What is it with Brussels and peeing statues? We had Manneken 10, then came Jeanneke 15, and recently they added ZINKEKE. This little peeing dog is supposed to be Brussels' new mascot. Most Brusselsers don't like the city-marketing idea behind the dog, but when he got stolen, in 2007, we all missed him like crazy.

25 CHEAP NOTHINGS

(Wed to Sat, 12.00 to 18.30) Watch your step! This could be the smallest shop in Brussels. **LUCIEN CRAVATE** honours two rules: he only sells stylish things that nobody needs, and he sells them cheaper than other vintage shops. Twenty-five recipes for fresh eggs, one green earring, a Goldorak comic... The guy also has a good collection of 1958 World Exposition-stuff. Pink teacups and Atomium-prints on anything!

26 CHEAP VIETNAMESE RESTO

(Every day / Lunch and dinner) Everybody who is short of cash knows the Vietnamese **DA KAO II**: €5 for the daily special!

27 NIGHTLIFE HOTSPOT

You haven't been in Brussels if you didn't go out. Only a few tips. Cocktails and free WiFi at PP café. Get in every Sunday at 20.00. Even if this is just a bar, big local here after midnight. Go see a free concert at **BIZON** (Mon) above the bar. Then try a few bars for yourself, have a w quietly next to the vintage jukebox in **BOOZE & BLUES**. remember much the day after.

31 LIVE ROCK

(Closed Sun / concerts usually Thu and Sat) The rebels of **DNA** introduced new wave and punk in Brussels in the 80s. The public today is a mix of the old crowd and younger people, and it's still one of the best places for live rock and late drinking.

32 BRUSSELS CUISINE

(Every day / Lunch and dinner) If you want to eat local food the way old-fashioned Belgians make it at home, try the daily special at **PLATTESTEEN**. A classic, for example, is 'stoemp saucisses'. This restaurant lies in the middle of the gay neighbourhood, and some of the boys come here before going out. €9,50 for the daily special.

33 TOURIST CENTRE

The **GROTE MARKT / GRAND PLACE** is the touristic heart of Brussels. A fifteenth-century Town Hall (in fact rebuilt after a French bombardment in 1695), a statue that is rubbed for good luck and pricy terraces. Same as always. Been there, done that.

TOURIST FAVOURITE!

39 GAY, WIRELESS, HAPPENING

(Every day) **FONTAINAS** is definitely happening. During the day, you will notice many MacBooks (because of the free WiFi) and people who drink carrot juice as if it's normal. After sunset, a colourful and mostly gay crowd takes over for cocktails and bubbles mixed with syrup.

40 MANNEKEN PIS

"Is this it? He's much smaller than I thought!" Indeed, the peeing boy called **MANNEKEN PIS** is the ideal national symbol for a country that is also very small and absurd. In 2007 he did not pee for one day, with a sign warning for prostate cancer. His suit is changed a few times per month, always by a guy called Jean-Marc. Go see the City Museum on the Grote Markt / Grand Place for the last 804 costumes, from Mozart to Mandela.

41 SECONDHAND CLOTHING

(Mon to Sat) **SUSSIES** is a must for vintage shoppers. Colourful cocktail dresses, baseball shirts, leather boots and biig sunglasses (boys and girls), all quite sharply priced.

42 KEBAB STREET

No time to lose and no time to be curious what you're eating? Ready – set – go: get kebab or cheap Chinese in this street.

43 PRETTY POSTCARDS

(Mon to Sat) Let your loved ones know you're still alive: send them a postcard. Don't send an ugly one with a Brussels' waffle, but choose an old-style black-and-white one at **PLAIZIER** (€0,90).

44 YOU CLUB

(Thu to Sun) **LE YOU**: busy club from easy beats to deep elektro. Entr drink always included). Thursday's 'You' and Saturday are regular club nights. O early for the 'Gay & Friendly Tea Dance' at 21.30 La Diva is on stage. She's a sty who can actually sing. Half a minute aft dancefloor is whirling as if Monday wi

48 MUSIC MUSEUM PANORAMA

(Tue to Fri 09.30 to 17.00, Sat and Sun 10.00 to 17.00 / €4 with student card / €5) The view from the top floor of the **MUSEUM OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS** is why most Brusselsers go there. But first visit the museum! This is actually the biggest collection of instruments in the world. And now you finally know that the saxophone was invented by a Belgian called Adolphe Sax.

49 ROYAL PARK

Parklife includes: jogging, picnicking on Sunday morning and cooing over each other's dogs and babies. But also gay sex at night... and this so close to the Royal Palace! Bizarre detail: as you see on the map, the **ROYAL PARK** was designed in 1774 in the shape of the freemasons' logo. The Palace itself can only be visited in the summer, from the end of July to the beginning of September (Tue to Sun / free). The red-yellow-black flag is hoisted? That should mean the king is at home, but he probably isn't. Our royal family prefers their other palace, in the green outskirts of the city. Spoiled? You said it.

50 FINE ARTS FROM BELGIUM

(Mon to Fri 10.00 to 17.00 / €3,50 with student card / €5 without / extra €3 for temporary exhibitions) You probably don't want to leave the country without seeing at least a painting of Memling, Bruegel or Magritte. The **ROYAL MUSEUMS OF FINE ARTS OF BELGIUM** contain a huge national collection.

51 ROMANTIC PARK

The **ZAVEL / SABLON** park is ideal for you and your lover: a fountain, roses, and lots of small corners. The 48 little guys on the fence depict old professions. The two big guys watching you are Egmont and Hoorn, local heroes who got their heads chopped off for being brave enough to protest against the catholic oppression by the Spanish Duke of Alba, 440 years ago.

- SIGHTSEEING
- BAR
- SHOP
- FOOD
- GOING OUT
- 🏠 HOSTEL
- 📍 TOURIST OFFICE
- 📖 COMIC STRIP WALL
- 💰 24/24 MONEY
- 🍟 FRIES
- 🧺 LAUNDRY
- 🛒 SUPERMARKET

5 MINUTES WALK

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COPENHAGEN, WARSAW, LJUBLJANA, DRESDEN...**

TOURIST FAVOURITE!

14 A MILLION TOURISTS

The Beenhouwersstraat / Rue des Bouchers is a brightly lit area full of restaurants where only tourists come. Go there if you want to see how it works. Watch out: the food is often cheap, but then they get you on the expensive drinks. One of the reliable options is **CHEZ LEON**, for mussels (650 grams) with fries and a beer for €16.50. A slightly more expensive legend is **AUX ARMES DE BRUXELLES**. Ask for table n° 225, which used to be Jacques Brel's favorite place. Yes, the best singer of all time was a real Brussels'ér. He's not the only famous client, but Laurel&Hardy and Danny De Vito are talentless nobodies, compared to Le Grand Jacques. Aux Armes is very expensive, but their brasserie – next door – is more affordable.

15 COFFEE + TICKETS FOR TONIGHT

If you wonder what Brussels looked like 150 years ago, have a look in this gallery. It was — and still is — a shopping area for people with money to spend, but the daily soup at **MOKAFÉ** is cheap (€ 3,80) and yummy. Have a look at the **TROPISMES** (in the smaller Galerie des Princes) bookshop's beautiful ceiling. At n° 26 (in Arenberg cinema), you can also get last-minute concert and theatre tickets for all over Brussels at a 50% reduction (Tue to Sat, 12.30 to 17.30, tickets for Sun and Mon available on Sat).

16 BELLE EPOQUE CAFE

(Every day) Girls and boys, don't come here in your ripped jeans. **CIRIO** is classy. Grand mirrors, dark varnished chairs, medals on the wall and golden decoration. Down to the porcelain urinals, everything remained in the 'belle époque' style of the early 20th century. Try a 'half en half', a mix that was invented here, and that you find all over Brussels now (spumante and white wine for €3,20).

17 FOOTBALL & BEER

(Every day) A fact is a fact: **CELTICA** sells the cheapest beer in town. Before midnight it's €1 for a regular beer, and €2 for a Duvel or a trappist beer. They show sports games on a big screen too, so you get the picture.

18 MEETING POINT

Everybody meets on the stairs of the stock exchange Beurs / Bourse. We don't care that these stairs are always dirty and sticky with the spilled beer. So have a seat and get to know the locals. The stairs also serve as a speaker's corner for every protest march through Brussels: against the war, for animal rights, anything. The bars attract a mix of tourists and locals: football addicts in the **O'REILLY'S IRISH PUB**, a hipper crowd in **LE COQ**, and older locals in **LES BRASSEURS**. And everybody loves a sandwich from **AU SUISSE**.

19 DANCE FRENCH

(first Friday of the month) **METRO VALDI** is a wonderfully strange place. It's a basement, decorated with glued puzzles and the waiters are older than your grandpa. But every last Friday of the month, on the Dansez-vous Français?-nights it gets taken over by the colourful gay bunch. Dress up eccentric, get ready to sing along to Daft Punk and Dalida and let loose!

20 1930'S JAZZ BAR

(Every day) You have to ring at the door of this jazz bar to get in. Sounds like an exclusive club, but the bouncer will usually let you in — unless you're behaving like a drunk Englishman with a football hat. **ARCHIDUC** really has it all. It stays open every day and much later than most bars (until around 5.00), and has enough 1930's style to justify the extra fifty cent for a beer. Free jazz concert on Sat at 17.00 / concert on Sun at 17.00 (then usually around €10).

21 CHESS IN STYLE

(Every day) No music, only the sound of quiet conversation and moving chess pieces. Sounds boring? Then don't go to **GREENWICH**. In this 'grand café' with a fabulous marble-and-wood interior, oldies and rookies play chess, all the time. Even the famous Belgian painter Magritte used to come here for a game.

22 BELGIAN FOOD

(Every day) Tasty and affordable Belgian food at **FIN DE SIECLE**. Stoverij, kotelet and stoemp saucisse are some of the Belgian specialties that are being served here at very strange prizes. When the Belgian Frank was replaced by the Euro, the owners of Fin de Siècle refused to round off their prizes. That's why you'll pay €11,27 for a plate of stoemp-saucisse (sausage and mash).

23 FASHION STREET

Antwerp is still the fashion capital of Belgium, but Brussels comes second with the Dansaert street. Look for Stijl, Idiz Bogam, Comme des Garçons, Martin Margiela, Mademoiselle Jean and Christophe Coppens. You will probably stick to window-shopping, because these places are real price. Just follow the street away from the city centre for the sparkling white **WAFFLES** sneakerstore. Maybe you'll find that one limited edition pair of kicks you've always been looking for. Cross the street and pay A.L.I.C.E. Gallery a visit. It's all about Artists Living In Constant Elevation here, one big gallery in the basement and 'The Hub', the art space on the ground floor. Cross again to **WALVIS** Café. Here, by the canal, several neighbourhoods meet and you'll notice the clientele is very diverse, Moroccan tea drinkers brotherly hanging at the same counter with the Belgian beer lovers, the vibe is always nice. Now finish off in style with a fresh juice or hot chocolate under the beautifully restored rainshelter of **CAFE MODELE** (free WiFi).

30 BELGIAN MUSIC VALHALLA

When are you hot and when are you not in Belgium's music scene? Simple, if you have played at **ANCIENNE BELGIQUE**, you're in. Also check the AB Club in the same building. It's cheaper (usually €12) and ideal to discover new unspoiled bands.



DOLORES (PEANNE FATALE, 26)

37 CHEAP AND HEALTHY

(Every day / 12.00 - 23.30) Perhaps the smallest snack in town, Mr. Falafel puts three balls of falafel in a piece of pitabread, you do the rest. Load on vegetables and sauce at the small dinner. Watch out: the red sauce ain't ketchup, it's hot!

38 CULTURE CLASH

The **PLACE ROUPE** is one of those wonderful strange places in Brussels where cultures meet. In one corner of the square is **COMME CHEZ SOI**, one of the most famous restaurants in the country. You'll pay € 198 for the seven course menu — wine not included! If you're not that rich, go across the square to **HOUTSIPLOU**, they serve good salads and pastas with a view on a nice mural painting with the history of Belgium. Their hamburgers are good as well. It's € 9,50 for the classique, but you'll taste the difference with the styrofoam-boxed chain-burgers. Across the square lies the **AVENUE STALINGRAD**: tea, pastry, a haircut, fresh fish... Whatever it is, you can buy the Moroccan version here.



MAYA (18, FILM STUDENT)

47 MOVIE & LIVE PIANO

(Every day / movies from 17.00 or earlier/ € 3) **CINEMATEK** is the Brussels film museum. This place is known all over the world for its enormous archive. Even Martin Scorsese called it 'one of the best in the world'. So they have tons of classics to show every day, for only €3. If you're really lucky it will be a silent movie with live piano.

TOURIST FAVOURITE!

around the halls of Sint-Goriks / Saint-Géry. the mood at **CAFE CENTRAL** (with free movies heroes like dj Djerinano also play dance sets and check out the enormous dusty bison-head d party at the **COASTER** cocktailbar, and end The name of this bar says it all — you won't

28 DOCTOR VINYL

(Mon to Sat) Brussels in the eighties was the city with the highest density of music shops in Europe. Now only the true ones survive and **DOCTOR VINYL** sure is one of them. Supplying clubs like Mirano and Fuse with vinyl since a decade, these guys don't have to be afraid of the internet.

29 PARTY ON A WEEKDAY

(Every day) At **BONNEFOOI**, they try to make every night into a little fiesta. Monday is **GIRLY MONDAY**, for girls who like girls and doing a little dance. There's deejays on Thu, Fri and Sat, movies on Tue and concerts on Wed and Sun. And if you ask friendly, they'll let you play the piano in the front.

36 SECONDHAND VINYL

(Mon to Sat) Secondhand vinyl shop **JUKEBOX** is not cheap (usually over €20) but a reference in the whole country when it comes to old stuff. Jean-Pierre will tell you stories about crazy collectors who travelled around the world to come to his shop. It is said that the really obscure records are hidden underneath the counter. Have a look in the streets on the other side of the Boulevard Anspach, because there's lots of other vinylshops there as well.



BARBARA (24, STUDIES MEDICINE)

45 PINBALL STATION

Brussels is the capital of Belgium and the political capital of Europe. And this is the **CENTRAL STATION**?! Six railway tracks in a dark and smelly cellar? Well, yes. The recent renovation works didn't change much, either. Search for the recently re-opened but well hidden Horta-exit: feels like walking through a giant pinball-machine!

46 OLD & MODERN ART

(Tue to Sun 10.00 to 18.00 / Thu till 21.00 / €1 under 26 / €7 with student card / €9) Modern Korean art, one of Haendels pianoconcertos, a painting Pete Doherty made, with his own blood: the museum of **BOZAR** usually shows so much at the same time, that they have an info desk at the entrance just to show the way. Afterwards, cross the street and take the steep stairs down to the **RAVENSTEIN** gallery. You can really feel the difference between the upper- and lower city here. The gallery itself is a pearl of late 50's architecture. It used to be the smoky hangout for after-work drinkers on their way to the station, but the bars are leaving one by one because of renovations.

52 BELGIAN CHOCOLATE

It is true that Belgians make the best chocolate in the world, but we only buy the expensive small ones as a gift for boring family members, tourists and people in a hospital. Otherwise, we go to a supermarket for the big pieces. But if you can't resist it, the chocolates from **WITTAMER** or **MARCOLINI** (other side of the square) are traditional high quality: around €30 for half a kilo.

TOURIST FAVOURITE!

53 A BAR OR A MUSEUM?

In the old days, nicotine dripped from the walls in **HET GOUDBLOMMEKE IN PAPIER / LA FLEUR EN PAPIER DORÉ**. Today it's not allowed to smoke anymore, but the 408 frames on the wall speak of the past, when famous artists like the painter René Magritte and Hergé (who drew Tintin) were regular customers. A few houses next door, follow the night birds through **LA PORTE NOIR** (the black door). There are no windows in this basement between Brussels' old city walls, but the lack of light is compensated by nice selections of whisky (+60) and Belgian beer (+100). Live concerts on Thu (blues and rock).

54 SKATE + ART + PARTY

In 1997, the train station called Kapellekerk / Chapelle changed into a graffiti and party hotspot with a skatepark: **RECYCLART**. It's still a station during the daytime. During the night you may expect movies, noise performances, concerts or parties. During the day, have some soup at the bar (Tue to Fri / 11.00-17.00 / free WiFi).

55 UPPERCLASS PITA

(Every day / Lunch and dinner) It's roast meat in bread, yes, but not as we know it. No sticky tables at **LE PERROQUET**, but woodwork and century-old windows. €5,90 for pita cesboncomlabadi (with merguez).

DID WE MISS SOMETHING?

ARE WE TOTALLY WRONG? LET US KNOW!

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BRUSSELS... ➡

Here's all you need to know about living and studying in the capital of Europe

So you've chosen

FIRST A LITTLE HISTORY

Paul De Knop, the rector of the Free University of Brussels (which in Dutch is Vrije Universiteit Brussel and is always referred to as **VUB**), was one of a number of rectors invited by Cambridge University to write a letter to their successor, 100 years from now.

"What I wrote is not so important," he told one of the Flemish daily newspapers, *De Standaard*. "My biggest worry is that 100 years from now, there might not be an address where the postman can deliver the letter. I hope that there is still a thriving university in Brussels in 100 years."

The financial crisis has hit academic life in Belgium, along with every other sector. Even though **VUB** has 10% more students than last year, their budget stays the same. In addition, competition with other universities has increased.

The original university was founded in 1834 in the municipality of Etterbeek by Pierre-Théodore Verhaegen, a Brussels lawyer and member of the liberal party. Initially known as the Université Libre de Bruxelles (**ULB**), it was designed to be academically independent, free from both state and church.



Students from both the French- and Dutch-speaking universities come together in November to celebrate their founder, Pierre-Théodore Verhaegen

In 1970, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (**VUB**) was created as the Dutch-speaking spin-off of **ULB**. The universities are separate entities but share the same ideology of "free inquiry", and they collaborate in many ways. Every year on 20 October, for instance, students from both **ULB** and **VUB** still honour their founding father.

With almost 10,000 students, the **VUB** is a middle-sized university. As well as the Etterbeek campus, it has a second hub in Jette next to the Brussels University Hospital. While Flemish students tend to prefer other Dutch-speaking student cities such as Leuven, Ghent and Antwerp, international students are often attracted to the Belgian capital.

The VUB has 1,400 international students, including 150 Erasmus exchange students. Twenty-two years ago, **VUB** created Vesalius College (VeCo), an American-style undergraduate liberal arts school with English as the official teaching language. The college is located on the **VUB** Etterbeek campus and has approximately 270 students representing 40 nationalities. In addition, there are about 6,000 international students at **ULB**, and 80 students taking a masters' degree at Boston University in Brussels, adding up to a dense international student community.

KATRIEN LINDEMANS

THE LANGUAGE ISSUE

Welcome to Brussels, home to 19 municipalities and about 300 languages. But Dutch and French are the official ones. This language situation has its pros and cons, but here are a few basics to help keep you from going crazy.

1 The northern half of Belgium is called Flanders, and they speak Dutch

2 The southern half of Belgium is called Wallonia, and they speak French

3 Brussels is geographically located in Flanders but largely French-speaking and officially bilingual. In practice, you'll hear mostly French, unless you are in a pocket of town that is largely Dutch-speaking (the area around Sint-Katelijne for example). However, English is also widely spoken.

4 Road signs, street names and printed information follow the language regions, which means that in Brussels, everything is in two languages. So don't get confused if you can't find Sint-Katelijne on your map. It's Sainte-Catherine in French! All the streets (and many of the municipalities) in Brussels have two names - one in Dutch and one in French. (*Flanders Today* always uses the Dutch names of streets and municipalities.)

5 Some cities also have two names, which can certainly be confusing at the train station. "Luik" is Dutch for "Liège", for instance, and "Gand" is French for "Gent" (and in English, we stick an "h" in it: Ghent).



"Registrations" - good word to know for international students

© Danny Gys/Reporters

KATRIEN LINDEMANS

STUDENT HOT SPOTS

(all in Elsene, a youthful and cultural part of the city)

Draftbar · Kroonlaan 23

Urban Café · Boondalsesteenweg 456b

Le Tavernier · Boondalsesteenweg 445

NewsCafé · Generaal Jacqueslaan 263



NEXT WEEK:
STUDENT GUIDE
TO GHENT!

OUT AND ABOUT IN BRUSSELS

Most local students go home to Mom and Dad's on the weekend. Sometime that means they're at least still in Brussels, but lots of them scatter about the country. What do the international students do?

And furthermore, what do international students think of Brussels? Where do they live? Where do they hang out?

Stefan Blaesen arrived in Brussels from Germany as an Erasmus exchange student, just a few days before the start of this academic year. The 23-year-old chose Brussels because the VUB is a partner of his university in Germany and because he wanted to improve his skills in Dutch and French: "I gathered most of the information I needed on the internet - via the VUB, discussion boards and Facebook. There are many groups you can join even before the term has started, so you can meet other students and discover the city."

Greek/Irish student Naomi Clear-Vekinis, meanwhile, studies International Affairs at Vesalius College and is an active member of Vesalius Student Government. "We organise events for new students so they get to know the Brussels lifestyle," the 19-year-old explains. "We take them to the places we like to go. VeCo is affiliated with VUB, so we also mingle with the local students in their university bars."

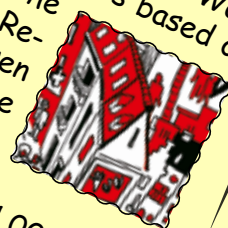
Student organisations also help international students find a place to stay. Most students rent a room (anywhere from €250-€450 a month) or share an apartment with friends. "Small but cheap" is how Stefan describes his shared flat in the Sint-Gillis municipality. Facebook groups and housing websites, such as www.appartager.be, are good sources for apartment hunting. International students staying for a short period sometimes chose to live with a local family, to make the most of their Belgian experience.

Vesalius Student Government organises a range of activities on Friday nights, and many of the students get together during the weekend. "It's easy to get from the campus to town, but coming back on a week night is impossible because there's no transport," Naomi says. "At the weekend, we can take night buses, so that's when we tend to go downtown to party. Brussels is such an international city, and it has a great atmosphere. That's probably why there are so many international students here."

KATRIEN LINDEMANS



The **cover** for the first in our four-part student series was designed by Brussels-based illustrator Wauter Mannaert. The design is based on the shape of an iris, the symbol of Brussels Region since 1991 - chosen because it reflects the city's origins in low-lying marshland, where the iris has been growing for 1,000 years. Mannaert can be contacted at wauterm@hotmail.com



De helaasheid der dingen opens the Flanders International Film Festival

→ continued from page 1

Director Felix van Groeningen could also not resist the temptation to take what does not amount to more than a few lines in the novel and make it part of the story of four unemployed brothers who sleep all day, drink all night and, in between, half-heartedly raise a circuspect 13-year-old boy.

Having read Flemish writer Dimitri Verhulst's first few books, Van Groeningen knew he wanted to do something with *De helaasheid der dingen* before he even read it. "I bought it with the express purpose of making a film out of it," he says. "And then half-way through I thought, no way, this is not possible."

Helaasheid is made up of anecdotal stories from Verhulst's childhood with a drunken, violent father and three boorish uncles. With a very loose narrative structure, its power is in the language. Finally, Van Groeningen reached the page in the book where an adult Verhulst tells his senile grandmother, living in a nursing home, how much he appreciates how she took care of him. "I just started crying, and I thought, ok, I get it now," says Van Groeningen. "This story is big enough to make a film."

Verhulst sold the director the rights to the story, "but it became a bit difficult, and I think he was sorry that he said 'ok' that fast," admits Van Groeningen. With a difference in opinion about a key element of the film, Verhulst finally gave up and left the director to it. But Van Groeningen was a bit disappointed. "I wanted his approval, you know? But he just couldn't do that."

However, Verhulst is happy with the final project, to everyone's relief. Although the novelist sticks by his original opinion, he still "loves the movie and is proud of it," says Van Groeningen.

Helaasheid is a career-making movie, which is remarkable considering that the director is just 31 years old. It was obvious with his first film, 2004's *Steve + Sky*, about a reforming thief who meets a young prostitute, that he was a talent to watch. Then two years ago, his *Dagen zonder lief* (*With Friends Like These*) charmed the critics again, with its story of youthful angst set in Sint-Niklaas.

But it's *Helaasheid* that was accepted at five international festivals, including Toronto and Cannes, where it screened as part of the Directors' Fortnight and received a Special Mention in the Art Cinema Award category. It is the Belgian entry to be considered for an Academy Award nomination, and it is poised to be one of the most popular films in Flemish history. Although it would be optimistic to say that it will meet the million tickets sales of last year's crime-thriller *Lof*, it certainly deserves to knock that film off its record-breaking pedestal.

Van Groeningen is one of very few directors making first-rate films about young people in Flanders. "I'm interested in social environments and in the tone and style of films. That's what drives me," he says.

In the meantime, he's riding high in the weeks that lead up to his film's release – and from the publicity stunt at Cannes earlier this year when he and the cast of *Helaasheid* rode naked on bicycles. Although he wasn't really looking forward to it, "I loved it!" he enthuses. "I got such a kick out of it. It was really liberating." ♦

→ www.dehelaasheidderdingen.be

The boys, all cleaned up for the French Riviera. Director Felix van Groeningen is on the left

The Flemish *Reservoir Dogs*: from left, Koen De Graeve, Johan Heldenbergh, Wouter Hendrickx, Kenneth Vanbaeden and Bert Haelvoet in *De helaasheid der dingen*

REVIEW



De helaasheid der dingen

It's a typical grey afternoon in the fictional Reetverdegem, a tiny town outside of Aalst in East Flanders, when a man arrives to repossess the television. It seems that Uncle Breejen has amassed quite the gambling debt. The four unemployed brothers of the house beg the official to reconsider. Take something else, *anything* else! He looks around at the broken-down furniture, holes in the wall and hairy, unkempt men. He takes the TV. Meet the Strobbe brothers.

Potrel gets into a lot of fights. Breejen drinks himself into a coma (in addition to the gambling). Koen crawls around under tables to look up women's skirts (and he also drinks himself into a coma). Celle, well, Celle just drinks, period.

But Celle has good reason to try to avoid getting into all this trouble: he has a 13-year-old son. And this is the tragic centre of *De helaasheid der dingen*, the new film by Flemish director Felix van Groeningen, based on the autobiographical novel by Dimitri Verhulst. Celle wants to

be good. But he simply isn't capable of it.

Fortunately, the (surprisingly) sensitive boy, Gunther, has a grandmother (Gilda De Bal), who looks after his basic needs, as she does all four of her useless grown sons. She has, after all "a heart bigger than her pension."

Helaasheid is full of such wonderfully rich narration and dialogue, some of it taken directly from Verhulst's book of the same name. Keeping the autobiographical nature of the book intact, the film goes back and forth between Gunther's childhood and his adult self, struggling with the demons of his past. Van Groeningen superbly juggles it all, blending the comic elements of the novel with its stark reality, much like in his first two films, *Steve + Sky* and *Dagen zonder lief* (*With Friends Like These*).

Wouter Hendrickx from the TV drama *Witse* is a stand-out as the youngest brother Potrel, who beds girls, shoots pigeons and picks on his family with unpredictable menace. Johan Heldenbergh, so excellent in *Aanrijding in*

Moscou, is Breejen, sporting the giant handlebar moustache he grew for his current stage show *The Broken Circle Breakdown*. Though you wouldn't necessarily want to find yourself in their company, the brothers do at one point prove that, when the chips are down, taking care of Gunther is a primal instinct.

But it's Koen De Graeve as Celle and Kenneth Vanbaeden as Gunther who steal the show. De Graeve seems to have been working his way up to this part, drinking his way through movies *Dagen zonder lief*, *Los* and *Lof*. This is easily his best role: a good-old-boy drunk, occasionally swallowed alive by his own self-hating rage.

Vanbaeden makes Gunther thoughtful, while avoiding making him seem like a victim – useful when Gunther is eventually forced to face the decision of whether he will head down the same road as his family or an altogether different one.

"Everything beautiful has to leave our town," Gunther says silently to himself as a boy. Indeed.

★ See the next issue of *Flanders Today* for more coverage of the Flanders International Film Festival in Ghent ★

It's all Chinese to me

Europalia offers the chance to get to know every side of the world's most baffling country (besides Belgium)

ANDREW MCILROY

Kristine de Mulder, director of Europalia, is always very welcoming and enthusiastic – but now she's also very tired. You can see why.

Europalia China may be the biggest festival of events from China ever, standing on a par with the France China exhibition in 2007, and De Mulder has been responsible for pulling it all together. A mammoth task in anyone's book.

The Chinese love nothing more than monstrous statistics, and Europalia does not disappoint: 1,500 artists, 450 events and 50 exhibitions, partnered with 58 Chinese museums and several Chinese provinces, in a programme spanning five countries.

"It only took three years", says De Mulder, flipping through the massive catalogue. "Actually, given that the performance part could only be done after the Olympics were over, some of it was done in a year. What a team I have!"

A biennial event that brings the arts and culture of one country (and last year all of Europe) to Belgium, Europalia indeed has a history of teamwork. The list of international cultural events taking place across the country under their direction is more than just impressive, it gives a new meaning to the term "cultural diplomacy".

"In the wake of the festival, there are of course economic opportunities and delegations," says De Mulder, "but the real goal is to explain, to help people to understand, to create a sense of connection."

I'm not sure that Belgium (or indeed the International bodies based here) are really aware of what a treasure Europalia is; I cannot think of anything similar in its scope and intellectual ambition – Edinburgh plus exhibitions, perhaps, or Avignon plus all the French and European towns in a 500-kilometre radius?

This festival is a treasure house of learning, ideas and cross-cultural viewpoints, and without it the capital of Europe would be immeasurably impoverished. It is always a success, but China is going to be real high point in its history.

One almost hesitates to cite must see's, so I let Kristine do it for me: "Oh, Lin Zhao-hua's *Hamlet* at the National Theatre, that's unmissable... and Yan Jun, a lovely man, poet and musician and right at the edge of the electronic music scene in China... and the *One Man Operas*, they are simply sublime, with three artists interpreting their own stories through opera... and the *Silk Road* exhibition! That is one of our

key events, a journey across Northern China."

The festival is a clever mix of blockbuster events (such as the monumental *Son of Heaven* exhibition on the importance of the emperor in Chinese thinking) and the eccentrically appealing (like the *Shanghai Modern* exhibition of poster and iconography from the 1930s or the Lu Xun/Frans Masereel woodcut exhibition).

The music line up in particular is outstanding. Lang Lang, China's first real international piano prodigy, plays Beethoven and Prokofiev, and the fabulous Qing Mei Wei Hu quartet of traditional instruments stages a performance. But I also recommend the less obvious stuff; I'll be getting tickets for Liu Sola, Chinese avant-guard artist and jazz musician.

And I haven't even mentioned contemporary dance or the acrobats!

The challenge, of course, is to find a guiding line through the richness. Frankly, some Chinese cultural expressions are tough for Westerners without an introduction. I've never managed to get friends to like Chinese opera, for example. Chinese contemporary dance, on the other hand, is in an international vocabulary with which everyone will be comfortable. Other Chinese offerings, such as their rich puppetry tradition, their formal design and their tea culture, are both odd and accessible simultaneously.

Some events are as educational as entertaining. "We have an exhibition dedicated to calligraphy, with nearly 150 masterpieces," says De Mulder. She admits that this is not an easy sell, but she also knows that it is an indispensable key to understanding Chinese culture, uniting its philosophy, learning, teaching and aesthetics.

The festival thus manages to finely tune the choices between the academic (contemporary Chinese poetry) and the animated (the famous National Acrobatic Troupe).

Europalia has also increased its ambitions: The festival will not only play in Belgium but also France, Germany and the Netherlands. "We are bringing China to Europe," explains De Mulder. "The aim is for as many people as possible to get a glimpse of this amazing culture."

The festival this year seems to be as much a personal odyssey for De Mulder and her team as an institutional challenge. "I have never learned so much in the course of developing a festival," she confirms. "Great moments of warmth and achievement, alongside



Get to know Chinese opera through the *Chinese Heroines* trilogy

moments of real misunderstanding! It has been a lesson in communicating and in how important it is for everyone to hold onto our core values. But the end result is testimony to the professionalism of both the Chinese and Belgian programmers."

Europalia has had the best support possible, from Belgium's former ambassador to China, Claire Kirschen, to Fan Di An, director of the National Art Museum of China, who ran the cultural side of the Olympics.

In a sense, all Chinese cultural events now imitate the Olympics and their overwhelming success in putting a different side of China on the world stage.

But a culture as old and contradictory as this one needs a lot of different approaches if audiences are to spot both the similarities and the differences.

There are currently two somewhat opposing philosophical trends about China. The first is represented by European thinkers such as Belgium's Simon Leys or France's François Julien and is all about "otherness" and "inaccessibility", about profound psychological and philosophical differences. The other, more in tune with the zeitgeist, is represented by Professor Jean-François Billeter of Switzerland, who prefers to demystify China by saying: "It's all about the politics."

Where we are different, is that Europe has had a longer tradition of individualism, translated into political organisations. Europalia China, all crammed into Belgium's tiny borders, offers us a rare opportunity to make up our own minds. There is such a comprehensive range of options that anyone who takes the time will be sure to find some half-open doorway into China and its vast, rich, infuriating and energising culture. ♦

Until 16 February, 2010

Across Belgium

→ www.europalia.be

© Ministry of Culture PHC

Avenue Patrice Lumumba

This exhibition in Antwerp's Extra City by South African photographer Guy Tillim examines modern history in several African countries against the backdrop of colonial heritage
→ www.extracity.org



FLANDERS TODAY
SEPTEMBER 30, 2009



Follow the Sound

MARC MAES

"If you think that music can be more than a song, lyrics and a predictable tune and want to witness virtuoso artists creating music on the spot, Follow The Sound is the place to be."

Rob Leurentop is the artistic director of this international music festival in Antwerp, but he speaks the truth. Follow The Sound, named after Ornette Coleman's quote: "Follow the sound, and we'll all be in the same room", was born out of the Free Music festival, an event that was launched in 1973, when a group of Belgian musicians found that Jazz Middelheim had become too mainstream and left little room for experimental music.

"The music was extreme and brutal, aiming to break traditions and conventions," explains Leurentop. "In the US, they called it 'free jazz'; improvisation is the keyword, and we see that today many musicians in classical music, rock and even folk improvise more in their music." The genre has grown from purely raw experimentalism, says Leurentop, "to more subtle forms, open to elec-

tronics, with room for lyricism and even the return of harmony." With Cecil Taylor on the programme, the organisers of Follow The Sound see a long-time dream coming true. The American free jazz pioneer turned 80 earlier this year and will perform at the festival on 4 October. "In the US, the link between jazz and free jazz was quite obvious, and Taylor is a key figure in that evolution," notes Leurentop. "But ahead of anything else, he is a profound artist and one of the significant piano players of all time in any genre. He still keeps refining and developing the language he has invented."

Another historic guest at the festival is Han Bennink (photo above); with a duo of performances – one with a trio and one with a punk band – Leurentop is convinced that Bennink is the ideal musician to introduce this kind of unpredictable music to a new audience. "He's a fantastic drummer – a bit crazy with his absurdism and dadaism – and a great showman." A carte blanche was awarded to Antwerp drummer Eric Thielemans, stressing the importance of

presenting young and new musicians next to long-time artists. "Many people think that improvised music just happens and is without a history," explains Leurentop. "Artists like Cecil Taylor and Han Bennink are part of that history and lead the way for the next generations."

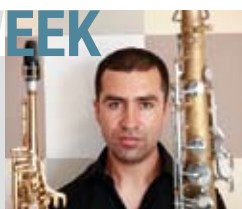
For his part, Thielemans has invited his friends (including Flemish musician and artist Rudy Trouvé, who throws in video clips) to introduce a mix of different disciplines under the title "Struttin' like an iPod shuffle".

"And that's exactly what it is," concludes Leurentop. ♦

**30 September –
4 October**

deSingel & Scheld'Apen,
Antwerp

→ www.followthesound.be



Antwerp

Lotto Arena

Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060
OCT 2 20.00 Natalia
OCT 4 20.00 Tori Amos

Petrol

Herbouvillekaai 21; 03.226.49.63, www.petrolclub.be
OCT 3 20.00 Das Pop

Queen Elisabeth Hall

Koningin Astridplein 26; 0900.26.060, www.proximugoforum.be
OCT 2 20.00 The Dubliners

Sportpaleis

Schijnpoortweg 119; 0900.26.060, www.sportpaleis.be
Until OCT 3 20.30 Milk Inc.

Trix

Noordersingel 28; 03.670.09.00, www.trixonline.be
Concerts at 20.00:
OCT 1 The Tallest Man on Earth + One-Eyed Mule + Holly Throsby + DJ Jan Wygers **OCT 2** Sukilov **OCT 3** Acoustic Ladyland + Codasync **OCT 7** The Dynamites featuring Charles Walker

Berchem

Cultuurcentrum

Driekoningestraat 126; 03.286.88.20, www.ccbe.be
OCT 6 20.30 Hans

Bruges

Stadsschouwburg

't Zand 34; 070.22.33.02, www.concertgebouw.be
OCT 4 20.00 The Spaghetti Western Orchestra

Brussels

Ancienne Belgique

Anspachlaan 110; 02.548.24.24, www.abconcerts.be
Concerts at 20.00:
OCT 1 Jesse Dee **OCT 2** Kartasan **OCT 3** Tinariwen & T-Model Ford **OCT 4** Nils Frahm + Soap&Skin **OCT 5** Yasmin Levy. Ojos De Brujo **OCT 6** Liesa van der Aa + Fredo Viola **OCT 7** Shahkild + Sir Richard Bishop

Charliermuseum

Kunstlaan 16; 02.218.53.82, www.charliermuseum.be
OCT 1 12.30 The John Bon Jovi's (tribute band)

Fuse

Blaesstraat 208; 02.511.97.89, www.fuse.be
SEP 30 23.00 VW Campus on tour: M&M Soundsystem, Red D with Lady Linn, Laston & Geo, Cole
OCT 2 23.00 Hed Kandi
OCT 3 23.00 Mobicel vs Lessizmore

Le Botanique

Koningsstraat 236; 02.226.12.57
Concerts at 20.00:
SEP 30 We Have Band **OCT 1** Au Revoir Simone. Broken Records **OCT 2** William Elliott Whitmore **OCT 3** Bikinians + Noisettes. Fink **OCT 4** Peasant **OCT 5** Revolver **OCT 7** Florence and the Machine. Swanton Bombs + Girls

Ghent

Handelsbeurs

Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01, www.handelsbeurs.be
OCT 3 20.00 The CK Gospel Choir

Hasselt

Muziekodroom

Bootstraat 9; 011.23.13.13, www.muziekodroom.be

OCT 1 19.30 Sights And Sounds + Men Eater + Ye Olde Grim Reap
OCT 3 20.00 Limbomania Voorronde: JH De Mans + Meeuwen-Gruitrode

Leuven

Het Depot

Martelarenplein 12; 016.22.06.03
OCT 1 20.00 Starfucker + Heideroosjes

DON'T MISS

Fairy Tale Special

4 October, 14.00-17.00

Literary Museum, Hasselt

The outrageously imaginative Literary Museum in Hasselt hosts a special day during its Red Riding Hood exhibition with a performance (**Snow White and the 77 Poisons**), a workshop with illustrator Sabien Clement and storytelling focusing on Flemish fairy tales. Best to register in advance for the workshop, which is open to both kids (from age eight) and adults.

→ <http://users.skynet.be/literairmuseum>



Brussels

Jazz Station

Leuvensesteenweg 193-195; 02.733.13.78
SEP 30 20.30 Free surprise concert followed by jam session and Tuur Florizoone **OCT 1** 20.30 Jazz Station Big Band **OCT 3** 18.00 JoJoBa **OCT 7** 20.30 Narcissus

Le Grain d'Orge

Waversesteenweg 142; 02.511.26.47
OCT 2 21.30 Blues Flying Wagon, tribute to Allman Brothers (free)

Maison des Musiques

Lebeauststraat 39; 02.550.13.20
OCT 3 20.00 Khartung

Royal Music Conservatory

Regentschapsstraat 30; 02.213.41.37, www.kcb.be
OCT 7 20.00 Concert by jazz teachers (celebrating 20th anniversary of the conservatory's jazz section)

Sazz'n Jazz

Koningsstraat 241; 0475.78.23.78, www.sazznjazz.be
SEP 30 21.00 Hermia Tassin Quartet **OCT 7** 21.00 **Le Tintamarre du Gros Bruno**

Sounds Jazz Club

Tulpenstraat 28; 02.512.92.50, www.soundsjazzclub.be
Concerts at 22.00:
OCT 1-3 Marc Lelangue Blues Band **OCT 5** Master Session **OCT 6** Tuesday Night Orchestra: Big Band **OCT 7** Caribe con K - Los Soneros del Barrio, Caribbean music

MORE FREE JAZZ & IMPROV THIS WEEK

Marcelo Moncada Space Quartet → Casino Modern, Genk →

European Free Trio → The Music Village, Brussels

Mulatu Astatke & The Heliocentrics → Het Depot, Leuven

The Cotton Club - Grand Casino
Duquesnoystraat 14; 02.289.68.66,
www.gcb.be
OCT 3 22.00 Laurent Melnyk Quartet

The Music Village
Steenstraat 50; 02.513.13.45, www.
themusicvillage.com
SEP 30 20.30 European Free Trio **OCT 2**
1 20.30 Jacques Stotzem solo **OCT 2**
21.00 Jihye Lee **OCT 3** 21.00 Denise
Jannah & The New Look Trio **OCT 7**
20.30 Casual Encounter

Théâtre Marni
Vergniestraat 25; 02.639.09.80
OCT 6 21.30 Benoît Martiny Band

Mol
Muziekcafé Meulenberg
Milostraat 1; 014.32.11.54, www.
cafemeulenberg.be
OCT 2 21.30 **The Wildcards**



Antwerp
Zuiderpershuis
Waalse Kaai 14; 03.248.01.00, www.
zuiderpershuis.be
OCT 1 20.30 Osama Abdulrasol (Iraq)

Bornem
CC Ter Dilt
Sint-Amandsesteenweg 41;
03.890.69.30, www.terdilt.be
OCT 1 20.30 Africa Child Play +
Tho'ulwazi

Brussels
Art Base
Zandstraat 29; 02.217.29.20, www.
art-base.be
OCT 3 20.00 Sandip Ghosh, Indian
classical music

Beursschouwburg
Auguste Ortstraat 20-28; 02.550.03.50,
www.beursschouwburg.be
SEP 30 22.00 William Street

Sazz'n Jazz
Koningsstraat 241; 0475.78.23.78,
www.sazznjazz.be
OCT 1 21.00 Sandip Ghosh, tabla;
Carlo Strazzante, percussions

Theatre 140
Eugène Plaskylaan 140; 02.733.97.08,
www.theatre140.be
Until OCT 3 20.30 Maurane sings
Nougaro

Théâtre Molière
Bolwerksquare 3; 02.217.26.00, www.
muziekpublieke.be
SEP 30 12.30 Broodje Brussel:
Shahram Mirjalali & Fallah Safa Arash
(Iran)

Ghent
Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01, www.
handelsbeurs.be
OCT 7 20.00 Yasmin Levy

Vooruit
St Pietersnieuwstraat 23; 0900.26.060,
www.vooruit.be
OCT 1 20.00 Kartasan, Hauschka

Ternat
CC De Plotter
Kerkstraat 4; 02.582.44.33, www.
ccdeplotter.be
OCT 1 20.30 **Perry Rose (Ireland) &**
Bai Kamara Jr (Sierra Leone)



Antwerp
deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.28.28, www.
desingel.be
Concerts at 20.00:
OCT 1 Gavriel Lipkind, cello; Roman
Zaslavsky, piano: Beethoven, Brahms,
Stravinsky, more **OCT 2** deFilharmonie
with Laurent Korcia, violin; conducted
by Mikhail Agrest: Bernstein,
Sjostakovitsj **OCT 3** Antti Siirala,
piano: Bach, Sibelius, Chopin, more
OCT 6 **Gavriel Lipkind, cello: Bach**

Brussels
Bozar
Ravensteinstraat 23; 02.507.82.00,
www.bozar.be
OCT 1 12.30 Jan Van Duffel,
horn; Nico Schoeters, percussion:
Sermiliä, Bodine, Irino, more. 20.00
deFilharmonie conducted by Mikhail
Agrest, with Laurent Korcia, violin:
Bernstein, Shostakovich

OCT 4 15.00 Belgian National
Orchestra conducted by Eivind
Aadland, with Lorenzo Gatto, violin:
Mendelssohn, Sibelius, Tchaikovsky

De Munt
Muntplein; 070.23.39.39, www.demunt.
be
OCT 2 12.30 De Munt piano quintet:
Brahms

DON'T MISS

Beaufort03

Until 4 October

Along the Flemish coast

It's the last weekend to see the 30 outdoor art installations along the Belgian coast before saying goodbye to Beaufort until 2012. Pick a piece of coastline, grab a guide from the local tourist office and set out on foot or by tram. Although every city contains something worth seeing, Knokke-Heist and Nieuwpoort are particularly recommended.

→ www.beaufort03.be



Flagey
Heilig Kruisplein; 02.641.10.20, www.
flagey.be
OCT 3 20.15 Brussels Philharmonic
conducted by Michel Tabachnik, with
Ilse Eerens: Gabrieli, Mahler
OCT 6 20.15 Vlaams Radio Koor
conducted by Kurt Bikkembergs:
Mendelssohn, Brahms, Bach

Kerk van Onze-Lieve-Vrouw ter Kapelle
Kapellemarkt; 02.507.82.00, www.
placedelachapelle.org

OCT 2 20.00 Gesualdo Consort
conducted by Harry van der Kamp,
with Bernard Winsemius, organ:
Sweelinck

Musical Instruments Museum
Hofberg 2; 02.545.01.30, www.mim.
fgov.be
OCT 4 11.00 Johan Schmidt, piano:
Liszt rhapsodies

Ghent

De Bijloke Muziekcentrum
J Kluykensstraat 2; 09.233.68.78, www.
debijloke.be

Handelsbeurs
Kouter 29; 09.265.92.01, www.
handelsbeurs.be
OCT 1 20.15 Renaud Capuçon, violin;
Frank Braley, piano: Beethoven sonatas
(part of Festival of Flanders)

Roeselare

CC De Spil
Spilleboutdreef 1; 051.26.57.00, www.
despil.be
OCT 2 20.30 Tetra Lyre, piano quartet:
Mozart, Fauré, Chausson



Antwerp

Vlaamse Opera
Frankrijklei 1; 070.22.02.02, www.
vlaamseopera.be
Until OCT 3 **15.00/20.00 Wozzeck** by
Alban Berg, directed by Guy Joosten,
with the Flanders Opera Symphony
Orchestra conducted by Martyn
Brabbins, and Choir conducted by
Yannis Pouspourikas



Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.48.48, www.
desingel.be
Until OCT 3 20.00 Apocrifu,
choreographed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui



Antwerp

deSingel
Desguinlei 25; 03.248.48.48, www.
desingel.be
OCT 7-10 20.00 Troubleyn in Orgy of
Tolerance by Jan Fabre (in Dutch)

Stadsschouwburg
Theaterplein 1; 0900.69.900, www.
musichall.be
Until OCT 25 The Sound of Music
(musical, in Dutch)

Bruges

English Theatre of Bruges
Walplein 23; 050.68.79.45, www.
tematema.com
OCT 2-4 20.00 18 Stupid Reasons Why
I Love You Lots and Lots (in English)

Magdalenazaal (MaZ)
Magdalenstraat 27; 050.44.30.60,
www.ccbrugge.be
SEP 30 20.00 Compagnie Gisèle
Vienne presents I Apologize
OCT 1 20.00 Tegen de lamp (Against
the Lamp) by and with Dimitri Leue
OCT 7 20.00 Venizke, staged by Ben
Benaouisse and Lies Pauwels

Brussels

Bronkstheater
Varkensmarkt 15-17; 02.218.20.15,
www.bronks.be
Until OCT 4 Sleutelveld (Field of
Keys), staged by Klaas Tindemans
(ages 10 and up; in Dutch)

KVS Box
Arduinkaai 9; 02.210.11.12, www.kvs.
be

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OCT 3-4 15.00 Marollenopera, musical theatre by Walter Hus for amateur performers (in Dutch and French)

The Warehouse Studio

Waelhemstraat 69a; 0492.64.16.60, www.europeantheatreclub.eu
Until OCT 3 20.00 Fin de Siècle: ETCetera presents three one-act comedies from around 1900: The Bear by Chekhov (in English with French and Spanish surtitles); L'Anglais tel qu'on le parle (English, as Spoken) by Tristan Bernard (in French with English and Spanish surtitles); Manana de sol (Sunny Morning) by Hermanos Alvarez Quintero (in Spanish with English and French surtitles)

Ternat

CC De Ploter
 Kerkstraat 4; 02.582.44.33, www.ccdeploter.be
OCT 2 20.30 Dahlia Pessemiers & Nele Bauwens, featuring Luc De Vos in De Alpenzusjes, comedy (in Dutch)



Aalst

Network: Centre for Contemporary Art
 Houtkaai; 053.70.97.73, www.network-art.be
Until NOV 7 Time as Activity: video art and installations by international artists

Antwerp

Contemporary Art Museum (M HKA)
 Leuvenstraat 32; 03.238.59.60, www.muhka.be
Until NOV 8 Lonely at the Top: A Larger Europe #1, art from republics of the former Soviet Union
Until JAN 3 Textiles: Art and the Social Fabric, installations, sculptures, film, flags and banners
Until FEB 26 Collectie XXIV: presentation of the museum's permanent collection, following the museum's renovation

Extra City

Tulpstraat 79; 03.677.16.55, www.extracity.org
Until OCT 25 Guy Tillim: Avenue Patrice Lumumba, examination of modern history in Africa against the backdrop of its colonial and post-colonial architecture by South African photographer Guy Tillim
Until OCT 25 Lieven de Boeck: Dictionary of Space, Part II, letters and drawings from the 19th century to the present day

Mode Museum

28 Nationalestraat (03.470.27.70)
Until FEB 21 Delvaux: 180 Years of Belgian Luxury, history of the Belgian leather goods house

Rockox House

Keizerstraat 12; 03.201.92.50, www.rockoxhuis.be
 Until NOV 15 **A Gift to God**, private patronage of religious art during Antwerp's Golden Age

Bruges

Bruggemuseum-Gruuthuse
 Dijver 17; www.uitvindingvanbrugge.be
Until APR 25 De uitvinding van Brugge: De stad van Delacenserie (The Discovery of Bruges: The City of Delacenserie), the 19th-century architectural facelift of Bruges, thanks to local architect Louis Delacenserie

Brussels

Archief en Museum voor het Vlaams Leven te Brussel
 Arduinkaai 28; 02.209.06.01, www.amvb.be
Until OCT 31 Herinnering & Migratie: Erfgoed van nieuwe Brusselaars (Memory and Migration: Heritage of New Brusselaars): film, documents, texts and poems record the experience of Brussels' immigrants

Argos: Centre for Art and Media
 Werfstraat 13; 02.229.00.03, www.argosarts.org
Until DEC 19 Actors & Extras, contemporary artists explore the contrast between the work of actors and extras in cinema

Danish Cultural Institute
 Koningsstraat 35; 02.5230.73.26, www.dkibenelux.org
Until OCT 22 Urban DK, graffiti art

Fondation pour l'Architecture
 Kluisstraat 55; 02.642.24.80, www.fondationpourlarchitecture.be
Until OCT 18 De tijd van de boetiek (The Time of the Boutique), 200 years of shop windows and interiors

Horta Museum (Winter Garden)
 Amerikastraat25; 02.543.04.90, www.hortamuseum.be
Until OCT 31 Jean-Charles Detallante, sculpture

ISELP
 Waterloosesteenweg 31; 02.504.80.70
Until OCT 17 Véronique Poppe: Human Capital, paintings; Françoise Joris, ceramics; Bénédicte Monaville, jewellery
Until NOV 14 Flesh, drawings by Dany Danino, sculpture by Hughes Dubuisson and ceramics by Sofi Van Saltbommel

Jacques Franck Cultural Centre
 Waterloosesteenweg 94; 02.538.90.20, www.ccjacquesfranck.be
Until OCT 31 Marc Rossignol: Cacher/Montrer, paintings and installation

Jewish Museum of Belgium
 Minimenstraat 21; 02.512.19.63, www.new.mjb-jmb.org
Until OCT 15 Een geheugen op papier (A memory on paper), Jewish life in Belgium recorded in historic postcards

Le Botanique
 Koningsstraat 236; 02.226.12.57
 Until NOV 22 **Controverses: Een** juridische en ethische geschiedenis van de fotografie (Controversy: A Judicial and Ethical History of Photography)

Musical Instruments Museum
 Hofberg 2; 02.545.01.30, www.mim.fgov.be
Until OCT 11 Alan Lomax in Italy '54-'55, photos honouring the late American ethno-musicologist

WIELS
 Van Volxemlaan 354; 02.347.30.33, www.wiels.org
Until DEC 6 Ann Veronica Janssens: Serendipity, installations by the contemporary Belgian artist

World Bank Brussels
 Marnixlaan 17; 02.552.00.32
Until OCT 31 In the Eyes of a Woman: Roma Portraits, the lives of various Roma communities seen through the eyes of female photographers

Ghent

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 to the present day
Until OCT 11 Ceramics by Raoul Dufy (1877-1904)
Until OCT 11 Schoonhoven Silver Award: Poetry in Silver, competition

with 55 international artists

MIAT
 Minnemeers 9; 09.269.42.00, www.miat.gent.be
Until OCT 18 Ghent on porcelain cards from 1840-1865

Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK)
 Citadelpark; 09.221.17.03, www.smak.be

Until NOV 15 Raphaël Buedts, furniture objects
Until NOV 22 Nick Ervinck, GNI-RI sep2009 EITZOR, installations
Until NOV 22 Sculptural collections by various artists

Hasselt

Fashion Museum
 Gasthuisstraat 11; 011.23.96.21, www.modemuseumhasselt.be
Until OCT 31 In Her Shoes, trends and evolution of women's shoe design, from 1900 to contemporary designers

Literary Museum
 Bampslaan 35; 011.22.26.24, www.literairmuseum.be
Until 20 Feb Zeg Roodkapje, waar ga je heen? (Say, Little Red Riding Hood, Where Are You Going?), the truths and fictions in fairy tales

Leuven

Museum M
 Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 28; 016.20.09.09, www.mleuven.be
Until DEC 6 Rogier van der Weyden 1400 | 1464 Master of Passions, work by the 15th-century Brussels city painter, the first exhibition in Leuven's new museum

Mechelen

Speelgoedmuseum (Toy Museum)
 Nekkerspoelstraat 21; 015.55.70.75, 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
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
Until OCT 4 Wat overblijft (What remains), recycled assemblages by Flemish artist 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 outdoor locations up and down the Belgian coast as well as in Ostend's Kunstmuseum aan zee 070.22.50.05, www.beaufort03.be

Europalia China: **Festival celebrating** Chinese art and culture, ancient to contemporary, with more than 450 events
Until JAN 30 across the country www.europalia.eu

Festival of Flanders: Major annual event encompassing seven festivals across Flanders, with dozens of cities staging hundreds of classical and contemporary performances and related events
Until OCT 30 across Brussels and

Flanders
www.festivalvanvlaanderen.be

Antwerp

Collecting the 20th Century: Lecture in English by Antique Roadshow expert Paul Atterbury, organised by the Antwerp Decorative & Fine Arts Society)
OCT 5 19.30 at St Boniface Church Hall, Grétrystraat 39
 03.230.39.36, www.adfas.org

Follow the Sound: international experimental and free jazz festival, featuring Han Bennink, Eric Thielemans, Cecil Taylor, plus readings, films and late-night parties
Until OCT 4 at deSingel and Scheld'Apen
www.followthesound.be

Brussels

BookSwap: English-language book exchange
OCT 5 20.00 at The Duke Taverne, Aqueducstraat 111
bookswapclub@yahoo.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

Brussels Museums Nights: Late-night opening of city museums, plus guided visits and workshops, among other activities
Until DEC 17 Thursdays, 17.00-22.00, in museums across the city
 02.512.77.80, www.brusselmuseums.be

Brxlbravo: Contemporary arts festival with more than 120 events that shine a light on lesser-known Brussels' hotspots and unites cutting-edge culture: concerts, theatre, art and dance marathons, parades, workshops and more
OCT 2-4 across Brussels
 070.222.199, info@brxlbravo.be

Design September: Annual festival of contemporary architecture and multi-disciplinary design, with more than 80 events: exhibitions, talks, screenings, urban design trail, design market
Until OCT 2 across the city
 02.349.35.95, www.designseptember.be

ING Brussels Marathon: Marathon, half-marathon and other races
OCT 4 from 9.00, departing from Jubelpark and finishing on the Grote Markt
www.ingbrusselsmarathon.be

Jazz Woluwe: Free jazz rally in bars and cafés, with shuttle between venues
OCT 3 21.00 in 10 venues across Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe
 02.776.82.58

Keep Belgium Working: Job fair organised by Monster.be, including advice and seminars
SEP 30 11.00-19.00 at Arsenal, Waversesteenweg 950
 0800.77.421, www.keepbelgiumworking.be

Nuit Blanche: Free all-night festivities and late-night closing of shops, cafés and museums during this ever-popular annual Brussels event
OCT 3 18.00-7.00 across Brussels
 02.279.64.24, www.3daysand1night.be

Spokenworld: International festival of artists, writers and opinion leaders who will speak about the gigantic "acceleration" in world history that characterised the two decades between 1989 and 2009
OCT 3-11 at Kaaitheater and Kaaistudio's
www.kaaitheater.be/spokenworld



SAFFINA RANA

Brussels' White Nights

When it comes to partying in the big bad city, Brussels may not be upfront about what it has to offer, but it's a heaving moshpit of everything from the underground to the most notorious of international DJs and bands. And you don't always have to pay for the best parties.

Saturday, 3 October sees two free all-night, open-air raves for the yearly Nuit Blanche, when cultural happenings claim the city until daybreak. A line up of Belgian and international DJs brought together by 54Kolaktiv will spin everything from soul and disco to dubstep, grime and house underneath the trees at Warandepark opposite the palace on Paleizenplein.

If reggae, dub and dancehall are more your thing, follow the bass over to Paleizenplein, where the King Shiloh Soundsystem will be headlining the bill of more than 10 live acts at Exodus.

For a happy bar-room experience check out Dali's or Wax on any Friday or Saturday night in October where you'll find infectious electronica with a fat baseline or melodic nu-jazz mixed with minimal techno. The entries are free, the crowds are friendly, and feet start to move around 1.00 at both of these small, DJ-run bars. Dali's is a quirky homage to artist Salvador Dali, while Wax, a first-floor bar, sports a glorious panoramic view over Anspachlaan. When Steph X, Murvin Jay and the Nemo boys take to the decks, the atmosphere is electric.

Along with beer and chocolate, Brussels other legitimate claim to fame is Fuse, the birthplace of techno. Ok, so it may be a bit of a dive up close, but where else in Europe can you experience the best international DJs for €5? Detroit techno guru Jeff Mills will be ripping up the floors there on 10 October, and Sis Live comes down from Berlin on 17 October. Although the bouncers look mean, nobody cares what you wear, and there's hardly ever any hassle to get in.

→ www.nuitblanchebrussels.be
 → www.myspace.com/dalisbar
 → www.fuse.be

bite

SHARON LIGHT

Blind dining

There is a blind man on my block. Sharing a tram with him a couple of times each week is the most time I have ever spent with a blind person. For him, it's just daily life; for me, it raises thousands of questions: Where does he work? How does he decide what to wear in the morning? When he goes shopping, how does he know whether he's paying with a €5 or a €10?

But there is now one question about his life that I can answer for myself: how does he eat?

The phenomenon of "dark restaurants" is gradually sweeping its way around the globe, and it has found homes in Antwerp and Brussels. The concept began in Zurich in 1999 and now counts 30 restaurants worldwide, each featuring different variations on a theme: you are led into a completely pitch-black room where you are served a meal, generally by blind staff. In both Belgian incarnations, the menu is a surprise, leaving you all the more "in the dark".

The fun (and puns) begin with the names – while in Brussels you can enjoy your meal at Only4Senses, in Antwerp you'll be visiting Ctaste, a branch of the successful Amsterdam dark restaurant under the same ownership.

The major difference between the two is that, while Ctaste has a permanent space and operates five nights a week, Only4Senses is open just four nights each month. As a result, the Antwerp operation runs more smoothly and offers a more professional environment.



© Michel Dider

My first "blind dining" experience was in Brussels. Only4Senses takes place in a stunning exhibition space below the Sint-Hubertusgalerijen. You get to enjoy the softly-lit surroundings during the *apéritif*, and again after your meal. Organisers add an additional factor to your experience: they seat small parties together, so you become acquainted with strangers without seeing them.

Becoming temporarily blind brings about certain observations: I hadn't realised how much I talk with my hands, for instance. And since the room gets quite loud (as people compensate for the lack of sight with a surplus of sound), I found myself closing my eyes despite the darkness to help me concentrate on my table's conversation.

Of course you also become much more aware of your food – and your comfort. In Brussels, this unfortunately meant a heightened awareness of hard, unforgiving chairs, and although the food tasted good (with catering by Café de Vaudeville, just above the space), it was far from adventurous. Dessert was perhaps the most interesting, featuring a *crème fraîche* with red berries (although of course we had to "taste" the red).

Although I was assured by the very kind waiters and staff that we came on an off night, slow kitchen service meant sitting in the dark for more than three hours – far too long for any three-course meal, let alone in this environment. In addition, the kitchen confusion left us no time to speak with our blind waiter, one of the other goals of the organisers.

Ctaste was quite a different experience. Owner Bas de Ruiter ran a one-man show during our visit – bartender, waiter and chef rolled into one. He managed it with aplomb and found time to share some of the restaurant's secrets. While Ctaste also has blind waiters, if someone calls in sick, "you can't just call up the employment office and request a temporary blind waiter," de Ruiter smiles. He and his girlfriend have therefore trained themselves to cover these absences.

After inquiring about dietary restrictions or preferences over an *apéritif*, he led us into the basement dining room. On the plus side, the table featured comfortable, cushioned, high-backed chairs. The space does, however, suffer from a mustiness, which they are working to minimise.

Ctaste has given thorough thought to the culinary experience. The ingredients were more unusual and diverse; for example, the vegetables accompanying the main course were only lightly-cooked so that you could still pick out distinct flavours and enjoy their texture, while our dessert of chocolate ice cream, a pancake and berries was complimented with a balsamic glaze. All in all, the quality was excellent, but although I felt full at the end of the evening, my dining companions were not quite so stuffed.

De Ruiter says that the Antwerp restaurant has not met with quite the same success as the Amsterdam branch, citing cultural differences. He finds the Dutch more daring and spontaneous, while the Flemish are much more conservative. Here, reservations are made months ahead of time. "Then they call to reconfirm and to ask 'is it *really* in the dark?'"

I assure you, it's nothing to be afraid of. It gave me a renewed appreciation for the smells, textures and sounds of dining and a slight window into a world I never thought I could truly inhabit. Give it a try; you'll "see" what I mean.

→ www.only4senses.com

→ www.ctaste.be

TALKING DUTCH

ALISTAIR MACLEAN



ontembaar →

Dutch is not a language you would expect to find has been borrowed by other languages. Walk through any Flemish village, and you get the impression that life here has always been so good, you wouldn't want to move, not even to the next village. What about the Dutch, I hear you ask. We'll leave them for the moment.

The Flemish certainly got about in the mediaeval period. They were the mercenaries that enabled the English kings to pacify Wales and Ireland. English and Dutch at that time were so close that it is difficult to say what influence there was.

The wool trade in Scotland was developed by Flemish merchants, mostly from Bruges, and the influence on the architecture is still visible. From Dutch we have Scots words like kirk – kerk (church); golf – kolf (club); keek – kijk (look); and the many sounds that are identical in both languages.

For influence on American English, we have to turn to the Dutch. When New Amsterdam became New York, many Dutch words remained. The name *Jan Kees* gives us Yankees, and you can sit on your stoop – *stoep* and eat coleslaw – *koolsla* and then cookies – *koekjes*. And there are all the shortened US forms, for example, sailboat – *zeilboot* and cook book – *kookboek*, which in the UK would be sailing boat and cookery book.

But the Dutch got to places that English would not reach for centuries. The Dutch East India Company started trading in Japan at the beginning of the 1600s and, until the middle of the 19th century, they were the only Westerners allowed such access to Japan. So not surprisingly, the Japanese have borrowed many words from Dutch.

The Japanese can drink from a bika – *beker* (beaker); it may be made of tin, *buriki* – *blik*. Supoito comes from *spuit* – squirt and means a fire engine; karan is *kraan* – a tap; mesu is a *mes* (knife); masuto – *mast* (mast); and torappu is outside stairs, in Dutch *trap*.

I can just about imagine how these words got into the language but others are more baffling. Take *otenba*, which comes from *ontembaar* – untameable and means a tomboy. Or *dontaku*, which is a day off and derives from *zondag* (Sunday).

At this point I have to apologise to any Indonesians reading this because there is no space to examine the Dutch influence on their language. Come on, you're thinking, he probably doesn't know what to write. And this would be rightly echoed by the Dutch speakers among you who would say, as any New Yorker would, *Kom aan!*

The last word →→→

Clean hands

"I've made mistakes. I've done things I shouldn't have done, for which I was disciplined. But I was never corrupt."

Former prosecutor Dirk Merckx, who has been accused of using a businessman's credit card to enjoy visits to a luxury Amsterdam brothel

More waffle

"You couldn't find much more than pretzels, pizza slices and hot dogs on sale. I felt there was a gap in the market for something else."

Thomas De Geest, Flemish expat in

New York, who won a Vandy award last week for his waffles stand

Not dead yet

"I've known for a long time where they would bury me but hadn't decided how. The church is a bit awkward. There are a few windows in there donated by the De Croos, but if you're not a believer, it's embarrassing. Finally I made up my mind: we could do it in the volleyball gym in Brakel. And my horses have to walk in the cortège."

Herman De Croo, former speaker of the parliament, who is recovering from cancer