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The Van Beirendonck way

Antwerp's Fashion Museum stages a retrospective of a member of the Antwerp Six for the very first time

STÉPHANIE DUVAL

It's been more than 25 years since Walter Van Beirendonck presented his very first collection, Bad Baby Boys, for autumn/winter 1986. Season after season, he has continued to surprise and often unsettle the fashion world with his off-beat vision, always pushing the limits of aesthetic convention and refusing to create anything that isn't "him".

Today, Van Beirendonck (pictured) is still considered the most controversial of Belgian designers, but the title comes with a great deal of respect. Antwerp's Fashion Museum (MoMu) chose him to be the first of the famous "Antwerp Six" – the group of fashion graduates that collaborated to put Belgium on the fashion map in the 1980s – for a retrospective, which opens this week.

The decision to invite Van Beirendonck wasn't made lightly, says Karen Vangodtsenhoven of the Fashion Museum: "Any museum has to be careful not to be elitist. Anyone should be able to enjoy the exhibitions we create. I think that Walter, with his unique style and very present personality, is very accessible. Everyone has at least heard of him, and many have already met him."

Especially in Antwerp, that statement rings true. Van Beirendonck is a fixture in his hometown, where he has his workshop and offices, runs his boutique

W.A.L.T.E.R. and is head of the fashion department at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. His appearance is striking, to say the least: a big man with a fierce beard, often wearing much jewellery and bright, colourful clothes.

Van Beirendonck, 54, is not a sheltered, mysterious designer, like, say, Martin Margiela, who also came out of the Antwerp school. Instead of holing up in an ivory tower, Van Beirendonck spends most of his time among the people who share his passion and never-ending drive to create. That's why he doesn't avoid working with commercial brands. He's the designer behind the ZulupaPUWA kids collection for Flemish retail chain JBC, and for five years he was creative director of Scapa Sports – the younger, sporty line of the Flemish label.

Van Beirendonck: "I'm happy I have so many facets, and I wish to use them all. But people will always try to label you. I can understand why some want to call me provocative or controversial, even though I don't see myself that way. To me, my thoughts, my associations and the way in which I use my fantasy feel completely normal."

→ continued on page 5



© Libella De Splinter

Havenlaan residents protest renovations

A court decision last week to freeze renovation works on the Havenlaan in Brussels, a long cobble-stone lane that trails the canal with overarching plane trees, marks the latest in a series of confrontations between the Brussels government and local residents. Plans include the removal of both the cobblestones and the trees, the roots of which have damaged the surface of the road, to make way for asphalt and paths for bicycles and pedestrians. Local residents have been staging sit-ins and other protests for weeks to save both the cobblestones and the trees.

The court decision came hours after complaints were filed by environmental groups claiming that the government's

permits are not in order. Brussels minister for public works Brigitte Grouwels (CD&V) dismisses such claims and hopes to continue the works as soon as possible. Both the Flemish and French-speaking green parties – Groen! and Ecolo – are accused of mutiny now that they've publicly sided with the protesters, although they voted in favour of the project not one year ago, when it was unanimously approved in parliament. Grouwels, in the meantime, has been receiving death threats and other unflattering commentary. "The protests are really getting out of hand," she said, after she had received an envelope at her home address containing a piece of tree bark.



© Beiga

Federal government talks in final stage

Caretaker prime minister Leterme willing to draw up budget for 2012

ANJA OTTE

Optimism prevailed with the negotiators for a federal government, as the talks reach a final stage – again. As *Flanders Today* went to press, an agreement on community matters was imminent, according to some negotiators.

More than one year after the federal elections of June 2010, eight parties (CD&V, Open VLD, SP.A, Groen!, PS, CDH, MR and Ecolo) are attempting to finalise an agreement on matters such as the split of BHV, budgetary matters and the finance laws, which regulate the

division of the budget between the federal state and the regions and communities.

The optimistic statements came after yet another week full of drama, in which an agreement seemed as far off as ever. Wednesday, 7 September, was the absolute low point, as SP.A party president Caroline Gennez was photographed with a hand-written note seeping of pessimism, and as the talks had to be suspended because of the sudden death of *formateur* Elio Di Rupo's eldest brother.

→ continued on page 3



FACE OF FLANDERS

PHILIP EBELS



© VRT 2011 / Philé Deprez

Rudi Vranckx

War correspondents are a special breed, and Rudi Vranckx is no exception. The 51-year-old television journalist has not only become known for his daring reporting from conflict zones around the world but also for his signature shawl, which has its own fan page on Facebook.

His newest series, *De vloek van Osama* (Osama's Curse), about the aftermath of 9/11, is now showing on Canvas. And he recently published a book of the same title.

Vranckx was educated as a historian at the Catholic University of Leuven but soon after began his career as a journalist at the then BRT, now the VRT, the Flemish public radio and TV broadcaster. His first assignment as a war correspondent was in 1989, in Bucharest, covering the fall of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu. Since then, he's covered armed conflicts in the Gulf, former Yugoslavia, Israel and Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. His latest assignment was in what has come to be known as the Arab spring in northern Africa, including Libya.

The series, airing on Mondays at 21.15, has been widely welcomed as a strong piece of journalism. Vranckx has not only managed to speak on camera with an impressive list

of important people related to 9/11, such as former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf and former White House chief-of-staff Andrew Card, but also with less princely but intriguing people, such as a former guard at Guantánamo or a would-be suicide bomber whose plans were sidetracked when she was arrested.

It is difficult to imagine any other Flemish journalist doing the same. "It was clear from the beginning," writes *Knack Focus*. "*De vloek van Osama* is more than a study in how the attacks have changed our daily lives; it's also the culmination of a decade of maintaining contacts, moulding relationships and doing research. Journalism in its purest form."

Vranckx's talents undoubtedly lie in making TV, not books. The printed version of *De vloek van Osama* received a less warm welcome, criticised for concentrating too much on the emotions of the author, rather than analysing and contextualising the subject. Regardless, Vranckx is one of those craftsmen who receives nothing but respect from his colleagues – not self-evident in the trade of journalism.

→ www.tinyurl.com/vloekvanosama

News in brief

Antwerp football club Beerschot was **fined €16,400 by the Sports Committee**, the Belgian football league's tribunal, after its supporters chanted "Fukushima" at Liekeke's goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima from Japan. The chanting was considered offensive, and Beerschot was also ordered to apologise to Kawashima and to the Japanese ambassador.

Traffic in Brussels hit a low point last week, as congestion caused by multiple road works made normal commuting nearly impossible. Automobile organisation Touring complained of a lack of co-ordination, but the Brussels administration states that there are no more road works going on than usual. Meanwhile, the renovation of the Havenlaan, a principal road leading into the city, has been ordered to stop by the court after a citizens' protest. The citizens, supported by the green parties Groen and Ecolo, do not want to see the characteristic cobblestones and plane trees go (*see p1*).

The organiser of Pukkelpop, the rock festival hit by a freak storm last month, leaving five people dead, will answer all questions regarding **refunds of festival and food and drink tickets** by 15 November. "We want to avoid sending out incomplete or wrong information," said Chokri Mahassine, the festival director.

Lawyer and politician **Ergün Top (CD&V)** suffered **head injuries** last week after he was attacked outside his Antwerp office by two neighbours using a wrench. Top claims the attack was inspired by his complaints over drug-related nuisance in and around the Memo café, run by the assailants.

However, the prosecutor considers the fight an ordinary quarrel between neighbours and has ordered a procedure of reconciliation between the attackers and their victim.

In her first official public appearance ever, **nine-year-old princess Elisabeth**, the eldest daughter of crown prince Filip and his spouse Mathilde, opened a new children's hospital in Ghent, named after her. The new Prinses Elisabeth Hospital is a wing of the Ghent University Hospital.

Kaastaart, or cheesecake, from the Druivenstreek, around Hoeilaart in Flemish-Brabant, is **officially recognised as a Flemish regional product**. The cake, made of apple compote, fresh cheese, eggs, almonds or macaroons and rum, can therefore use the label streekproduct.be.

In the future, **ads for mobile phones** will be obliged to mention their radiation value. Shops that sell mobiles will also have to advertise these values, a number between 0 and 2 Watts. "This means that the public can opt for a safer phone," says the spokesperson for Paul Magnette, federal minister of Consumer Protection. Scientists believe that it is safer to use ear plugs on a high radiation phone than to use a low radiation model for hours on end.

Ronald Janssen, who has confessed the **murder of three youths** and a number of rapes, will not stand trial for a fourth murder he confessed to, after police were unable to trace a victim and no-one fitting Janssen's description was reported missing.

A number of **PCs throughout Flanders have been hacked** by a so-called botnet, based in Russia. A botnet uses hacked computers to allow anonymous surfing, a service the Russian AWMproxy.net offers for just €25 a month. After *De Standaard* reported of the hackings, the AWMproxy website was taken offline, apparently by its owners.

Heavy thunderstorms caused **floods in Assenede, East Flanders**, last Saturday, 10 September. Big hail stones damaged verandas, porches and windows. A number of families were left without electricity.

The number of **suicides in Flanders is on the up** "due to the economic crisis," says public health minister Jo Vandeurzen. In 2009, 1,102 people put an end to their lives, 792 men and 310 women. That's 7% more than the year before. Suicide figures in Flanders are 50% above the European average. "Flemings find it hard to discuss psychological problems," Vandeurzen explains. Professional football player Davy De Fauw of SV Zulte Waregem, meanwhile, has agreed to be the face of a new suicide prevention campaign. People seeking help or information, can visit the website www.zelfmoordlijn.be (in Dutch).

Letter to the editor

The article regarding Touring's proposal to move accidents off the motorway ("Offside", 7 September) spurred me on to thinking that the real problem lies in the level of dangerous driving on the Belgian motorways – in particular, aggressive tailgating at high speeds. I would also state that one of the reasons for this type of driving seems to be the complete lack of visibility of any police presence on the Belgian motorways.

In the UK, you invariably see Motorway Patrol Police on any long motorway journey; I can honestly say that in over 30 years of driving on Belgian motorways, I could count on one hand the number of Patrol Police I have seen.

Cory Carver-Grenside
Petersfield, Hampshire

PHILIP EBELS

FLANDERS TODAY



Flanders Today, a free weekly English-language newspaper, is an initiative of the Flemish Region and is financially supported by the Flemish authorities.

The logo and the name Flanders Today belong to the Flemish Region (Benelux Beeldmerk nr 815.088). The editorial team of Flanders Today has full editorial autonomy regarding the content of the newspaper and is responsible for all content, as stipulated in the agreement between Corelio Publishing and the Flemish authorities.

Editor: Lisa Bradshaw

Deputy Editor: Philip Ebels

News Editor: Alan Hope

Agenda Editor: Robyn Boyle

Art director: Michel Didier

Prepress: Corelio P&P

Contributors: Rebecca Benoot, Laurens Bouckaert, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz, Sabine Clappaert, Courtney Davis, Nicholas Hirst, Stéphanie Duval, Andy Furniere, Anna Jenkinson, Katrien Lindemans, Marc Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Monique Phillips, Christophe Verbiest, Alice Voz, Denzil Walton

General manager: Joske Plas

Publisher: Corelio Publishing NV

Editorial address:

Gossetlaan 30

1702 Groot-Bijgaarden

Tel.: 02.373.99.09 – Fax: 02.375.98.22

editorial@flanderstoday.eu

Free subscriptions:

subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu

or sign up online at www.flanderstoday.eu

Advertising: Evelyne Fregonese

02.373.83.57

advertising@flanderstoday.eu

Verantwoordelijke uitgever:

Lisa Bradshaw

OFFSIDE

Too cool for school

This may come as a shock to you, but Belgium has officially been declared uncool. Even worse, Belgian is the least cool nationality to have, according to some 30,000 users of American social networking site Badoo.com who, naturally, voted American coolest of them all. The press didn't take it lightly. *Het Nieuwsblad* sought the advice of stand-up comedian Bert Kruysmans, who told his fellow countrymen not to worry: We're uncool only because we're small and nobody knows us.

The newspaper even suggested that the government step in to make us cooler. This was not intended to be a joke.

De Standaard was also not having any of it. It needed a couple of days, but, after long and laborious brainstorm sessions, came up with 10 reasons why Belgium is cool. The coolest in the world, even.

Belgium is cool first and foremost because it is. Temperatures this summer were one full degree lower than normal. Belgium is also cool, the newspaper continued, because it is home to the ugliest city in the world – Charleroi, which was voted (again!?) ugliest a couple of years ago. And Belgium is cool because it has been without a



government longer than any other country ever has and not collapsed into anarchy. Only Belgium can argue its coolness by pointing out its negatives. Perhaps that is why it may just be the coolest country in the world: It's cool, after all, to be uncool.

→ www.tinyurl.com/belgiumuncool



Appointment of mayors still a sticking point

→ continued from page 1

Meanwhile, the French-speaking liberals, who were invited to the talks only recently, proved the hardest to convince. MR party president Charles Michel stated repeatedly that he would "not tolerate that Wallonia should be impoverished" and that "he refused to let go of Brussels". MR has within its ranks the FDF, a small radical party headed by Olivier Maingain, which has its stronghold in Brussels and the Flemish periphery around the capital.

However, the Flemish, too, have strong objections to some of the proposals, especially concerning the finance law, as Flanders would get far less fiscal autonomy than it wants.

Last week there were plenty of rumours about the way Di Rupo want to compensate the split of the BHV constituency, which the Flemish have been requesting for years. The appointment of three recalcitrant French-speaking mayors of Linkebeek, Wezembeek-Oppem and Kraainem, which the Flemish government refuses

because they have repeatedly broken the language laws, is one such compensation.

Under the new rule, the mayors would be "presumed" as such awaiting a decision by the Flemish government. Should they not be appointed, the idea went, they could turn to a bilingual chamber of the Council of State – rather than a monolingual Dutch-speaking one. The idea did not live long and caused hilarity rather than outrage.

A leaked note from *formateur* Di Rupo on Monday showed that BHV would only be split in the long run – in 2013, or later still. N-VA, Flanders' largest party, which refused to negotiate on the basis of Di Rupo's proposals, is indignant about some parts of the document. That the bilingual chamber of the Council of State should be responsible to rule over language conflicts in Flanders "indicates that they don't trust the Dutch-speaking judges and even suspect them of ethnical jurisdiction," Ben Weyts of N-VA said on Monday.



Acting prime minister Yves Leterme, right, took time last Sunday to honour the victims of 9/11 at the St Michael and St Gudula Cathedral. Also pictured are American ambassador to Belgium Howard Gutman and his wife Michelle Loewinger

Government imminent?

As *Flanders Today* went to press the talks seemed about to reach their conclusion, with Di Rupo shuttling between the representatives of the two language groups. In spite of the negotiators' optimism, many commentators find it hard to believe that an agreement – and a new federal government – is just around the corner, as the matter of the three mayors is still on the table. Moreover, an upcoming decree by the Flemish government, which states that mayors whose

appointment has been refused cannot be nominated again, might prove a new obstacle.

Over the weekend, caretaker prime minister Yves Leterme (CD&V) turned up the pressure by demanding to know whether Di Rupo's team of negotiators will draw up next year's budget. If not, Leterme declared himself willing to do the job. "If there is a problem, I need to know. The efforts should be taken seriously, as we are short €7 or €8 billion." ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



700,000

antidepressants taken every day in Belgium in 2009, or 4% more than the year before. One in 10 people have taken an antidepressant drug over the course of that year, but only one in 20 are said to actually suffer from depression

€100

penalty per person for not showing up at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Belgium after having reserved a table – something that apparently happens around three times a week

55%

of Belgians experience some sort of stress at work, making them the most stressed out Europeans, whose average work-related stress level is 44%

10%

of Belgians trust the punctuality of the country's railroads more than any other means of transport. Half believe the car to be the safest choice to arrive on time

750,000

Flemish households have compared prices of energy providers with the help of the so-called V-test, since its launch on 1 February this year. About 20,000 change providers every month
www.vreg.be

Farmers criticise expansion of "veggie day"

For many decades Flemish families and caterers stuck to the rule of "Friday fish day". Friday fish day is on the way down, though: Thursday Veggie Day is now the talk of the town.

Donderdag veggiedag, or Thursday Veggie Day, is a campaign launched by the Ghent-based Ethical Vegetarian Alternative (EVA). The campaign promotes one day without meat every week. According to EVA's website, this is good "for your health, for the environment, for the animals and for other people".

Ghent was the first city in the world to join the campaign: All schools, day cares and the city's canteens serve only vegetarian food on Thursdays. Mechelen, Hasselt and Eupen followed suit.

That other schools and organisation

should follow this example comes, therefore, as no surprise, but when the province of East Flanders announced that it would introduce Thursday Veggie Day in all its secondary schools, it caused an uproar.

The announcement by Peter Hertog (SP.A), provincial education deputy, that "a vegetarian meal is not only sustainable, it is also healthy," enraged the Farmers' Union. "As if meat is unhealthy," Peter Van Oost, regional responsible, wrote in a letter of complaint to the provincial government.

Most people found the reaction exaggerated, and it was up to Piet Vanthemse, president of the Farmers' Union, to explain. "We eat more meat than is good for us; I do not argue with that. But it is wrong to polarise and picture meat

as something bad or something we should feel guilty about," Vanthemse told *De Standaard*.

→ www.donderdagveggiedag.be

• In a separate action, animal welfare organisation Gaia asked all Belgian males to "let them hang" – as in, wear no underpants – on Friday, 9 September, as a show of solidarity with five million piglets that are castrated without sedation every year. The Farmers' Union called the action "one sided", as Gaia asks that vaccination serve as an alternative. "We want farmers to have freedom of choice between vaccination, sedated castration and non-castration," the organisation stated in a press release. Exactly how many men "let them hang" last Friday remains unknown. ♦

Special classes for children with autism

Flemish education minister Pascal Smet (SP.A) has announced a new type of special needs education, specifically aimed at children with autism. Autistic children are now often grouped with children with behavioural problems or hearing deficiencies. Special needs education in Flanders is organised along eight types, ranging from children with serious mental handicaps to those with learning disabilities. As of September 2012, the new type for autistics will be added.

Parents of children with autism have reacted overwhelmingly positively to the decision. Among them are the parents of Thomas Claerhout, 12, from Ghent. Thomas wrote a desperate open letter to the minister because he could not find a school suited to his needs. Thomas is a gifted student, who had to abort his studies in Latin and Greek because of his autism.

A wider decree on "learning care" for children with special needs in regular education was shelved because of lack of support from the education field. ♦



FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Lap note

Wetstraatees, the jargon used in the Brussels *Wetstraat*, the heart of Belgian politics, is full of archaisms, but every now and then a neologism pops up. One of those is "lap note": quite literally a note sitting on someone's lap.

The term was coined in the summer of 2007, when then prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene was photographed in his car at the gates of the Royal Palace. On his knees was a note outlining a way out of the political deadlock, which continues to this day. One short phrase stood out: *Quid N-VA?* What was to become of N-VA, which still formed a cartel with Dehaene's CD&V at the time, should the Christian-democrats enter a government under the terms described in the note.

Dehaene, who calls himself "a politician of the previous century" was furious at the way the note was photographed and blown up so that it became legible to all. "Do politicians here need to put up curtains in their cars, like in Russia?" he snorted.

Well, maybe they better had because, shortly after, another lap note was photographed, at the exact same spot. This time it was Elio Di Rupo's knees the note was on. It called for a government of national union, including all major parties, a scenario N-VA dreaded at the time. Therefore, there was a lot of speculation about how unintentional the shots were, especially since Di Rupo is known to be a control freak.

In the months after, lap notes became somewhat of a joke: N-VA's Bart De Wever was spotted at the palace with a note that read *curieuzeuseusemoterdpot* (which translates roughly as "curiosity killed the cat"), while minister of state Gérard Deprez mockingly advertised himself as "repair man" and Herman Van Rompuy put a book on his knees: *Courage* by the then British prime minister Gordon Brown.

Last week, another lap note made the news. This time, there is little question about how unintentional this was. "These discussions are pointless," read the note held by Caroline Gennez (SP.A), on her way to another round of endless negotiations for the formation of a federal government. In the same note she worried about the rising popularity of N-VA. In this respect, lap notes have become somewhat of a metaphor for the political crisis that has paralysed this country for years. You can try what you want, throw N-VA out of the talks if that seems right, but somehow the Flemish nationalists always remain firmly on everyone's lap.

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The Van Beirendonck way

Retrospective is no sign of retirement for this designer

→ continued from page 1



Van Beirendonck through the decades: 1989's King Kong Kooks



... 1993's Wild & Lethal Trash!



...and this year's autumn/winter collection, Hand on Heart

But perhaps it's not such a bad idea to give a platform to this designer, who became known as "the one who puts little guys with penises" on his clothes (it's his logo) and stirred up the fashion scene when he debuted his S&M inspired collection on the runway back in the 1980s.

The people of the Fashion Museum want not only to showcase the work of the very talented menswear designer, they also want to show you what is behind the crazy prints and outrageous creations. "It truly is all about Walter; he is the main curator of the exhibition," explains Vangodtsenhoven. "The MoMu team simply helped him create his universe in our museum."

Dreaming the World Awake presents 100 pieces from Van Beirendonck's collections throughout the years in little groups, linked to different themes. Those themes will be illustrated on "Walter's Wonder Wall".

"It is a gigantic wall of inspiration, with images, words, quotes, objects, artefacts and works of art by designers who have influenced me. It will be a wall of respect, an ode to people who have changed the way I think, but it will also be a wall of fantasy, filled with my toys," he tells me.

The starting point of the exhibition was Van Beirendonck's portfolios: books in which he pasted photos and images, jotted down quotes and assembled the inspirations for each new collection. Vangodtsenhoven: "You can really tell they are all made by the same person – the same things turn up time and again. If you put all portfolios of the past 25 years together, it just makes sense."

The designer himself was pleasantly surprised to

discover this: "It was nice to see how my designs all came together, as if they were part of one big collection."

Van Beirendonck knew that putting together a retrospective would be a lot of work; what he didn't realise was how emotional he would feel. "All my life, I've kept everything", he says, "but I've never had my archives arranged in a way that I could just walk through it. With every box that I opened, memories of pretty intense moments and periods have come up. A lot has happened, and much of it I very consciously experienced: I did everything, from communication to mailings and fittings. It's like you are transported back to those moments, with the good and the bad memories."

The good, the bad and the taboo

Every designer's career is a roller coaster of ups and downs, but especially for a designer as eccentric and uncompromising as Van Beirendonck, life in fashion can be hard. "I am free-spirited and very spontaneous, and it poses a risk. I've always created my collections the way I wanted to, and, luckily, I've had a very loyal following throughout the years. But I still have this image that can scare away new customers. So commercially, it's not that easy."

And of course there are those who see the word "retrospective" as some kind of nail in the coffin. "People have asked me whether the time has come for me to call it quits," he says. "But I don't feel like stopping, not for a long time. I think it's a feeling stronger than rationale, an urge to make a new collection, every time again. It's an adventure, and it doesn't always go as

planned, but I feel like I am much more respected than I used to be. Especially the professional audience sees the depth to my creations, the research I put into it, and the language I have built for myself. It's still worth every effort."

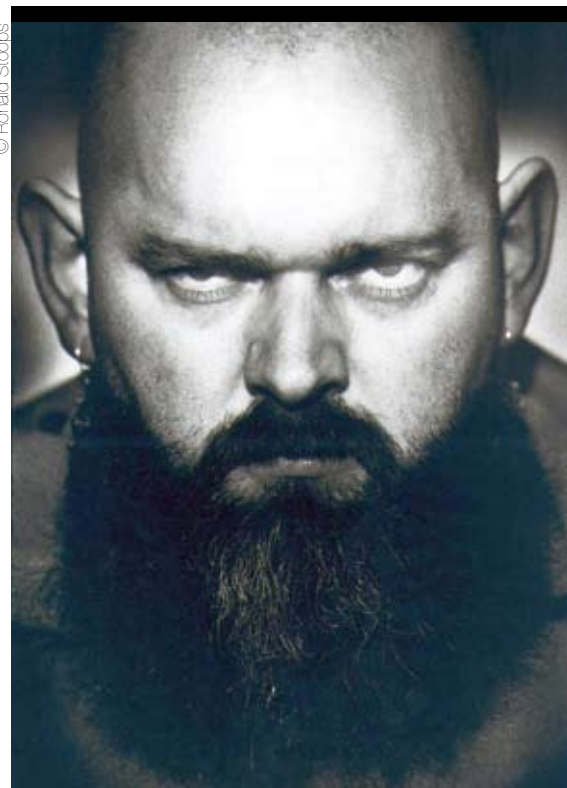
Van Beirendonck is also not quite ready to throw in the towel because of his conviction that, as a public figure, it is his responsibility to make the heavier things in life the subject of discussion. To those who glance at his designs, it might seem like the thread running through is sex and violence. But those who look carefully can easily find the hidden message. "I always try to communicate through my collections, but in a breezy, accessible way. Even when I handle topics like AIDS – which has been a recurrent theme for me – I never want it to be heavy and gloomy."

Dreaming the World Awake is neither heavy nor gloomy, but rich in associations, interpretations and cross-references. For those who haven't already had a chat with the designer, here's your chance. ♦

→ www.waltervanbeirendonck.com

Walter Van Beirendonck:
Dreaming the World Awake
14 September – 19 February
Fashion Museum (MoMu)
Nationalestraat 28, Antwerp

→ www.momu.be



Don't let the look fool you

Walter's Wonder Wall

Before my interview with the famously bald, bearded designer, I was asked to wait inside Van Beirendonck's office, where everyone was in full preparation mode for the exhibition. Against the wall loomed a large bulletin board, papered with slogans, pictures and quotes. One quote read: "People who date me think they are going to get pierced and beaten up and fisted. They can't imagine I just want to love somebody."

Van Beirendonck later explains that it is a quote from American performance artist Ron Athey, who famously lacerates and punctures his own (and others) bodies in his pieces. "It's a quote that has been in my portfolios for a long, long time," says the designer, who admires Athey's work, but also fully recognises the sentiment.

It's a man's world

Walter Van Beirendonck is the first of the Antwerp Six designers to present a retrospective of his oeuvre at the city's Fashion Museum, but there's a second reason why this exhibition is such an important milestone for the museum. Says curator Karen Vangodtsenhoven: "It's the first time the focus has been so heavily on men's clothes."

Van Beirendonck is a menswear designer, and, for the museum's staff, this enterprise has been a challenge. It's at the same time proof of their evolution during the past five years under general director Kaat Debo. "Five years ago, we might not have been ready to do something like this, but now we've garnered the necessary experience and expertise to be able to approach this subject," says Vangodtsenhoven.

Opening doors

Healthcare Belgium's robotic surgery could find doctors operating on patients in the Middle East and Russia from right here at home

ANDY FURNIERE

The doors to the Middle East, Russia and Kazakhstan are opening up to Belgian healthcare companies, thanks to non-profit organisation Healthcare Belgium. "We have one of the best health-care systems in the world," says Rudi Thomaes, the organisation's president. "It's about time the world starts to realise this."

Based in Brussels, Healthcare Belgium is an association of hospitals and companies specialised in health-care services. It was set up in 2007 by the Federation of Belgian Enterprises (VBO), of which Thomaes is also CEO. The goal is to position Belgium as an international centre of medical expertise.

After four years of building contacts through diplomatic meetings and royal missions, mostly in the Middle East, Russia and the former Soviet Republics, the work is starting to pay off. In July, the association signed a deal with Saudi Arabia for half a million euros per year. In return, Belgian hospitals and companies will train specialists, help patients that require specialised treatment, give second opinions and advise on the organisation of hospitals. There are even plans to build a Belgian hospital in Djeddah, the second-biggest city in Saudi Arabia.

"They have a lot of resources, and we have the guarantee that we'll receive a fair reward for our services"

Partnerships had already been sealed with Kazakhstan in October of last year and with Kuwait in April this year. In Kazakhstan, the main goal is to set up a nuclear medical centre that specialises in cancer diagnostics and therapy through radiation techniques. In Kuwait, plans for fertility and breast-screening centres are in development. With Russia and Abu Dhabi, negotiations are reaching the final stage.

Surplus in radiology

Radiology is a Belgian speciality and, unlike most countries, Belgium has a surplus of radiologists. Flemish companies Agfa HealthCare and Radiomatix, for instance, are world leaders in the area. Agfa is specialised in high-tech solutions, while Radiomatix offers radiology services through the Belgian Radiology Group, a network of more than 250 radiologists.



Rudi Thomaes of Healthcare Belgium (right) and the Kuwaiti minister of health aim to boost cooperation

For these companies, the contacts of Healthcare Belgium are instrumental in broadening their network. They often have centres in many parts of the world, but still doors have been opened that otherwise would have remained shut. "Thanks to their neutrality as a non-profit organisation, it's easier for them to reach the higher political levels than for commercial players like us," explains Herman Raats, export manager at Agfa. Radiomatix provides training of radiologists in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Kazakhstan but, in the meantime, also helps out via tele-radiology. This means that images such as X-rays, CTs and MRIs are sent to Belgian radiologists who then interpret them and give advice on the treatment.

No medical tourism

"The reason why we focus on the Middle East and the former Soviet Republics is that their health-care systems often lag behind," says Herwig Fleerackers, general manager at Healthcare Belgium. "They not only need more hospitals and medical staff but also better education."

He feels that Belgium has a good reputation in these regions. "Belgians are seen as being rather modest and open to other cultures. The fact that we're a kingdom also plays to our advantage in the Middle East"

Fleerackers admits that the countries of the Arabian Peninsula,

such as Saudi Arabia, are interesting from an economic point of view. "They have a lot of resources, and we have the guarantee that we'll receive a fair reward for our services." For the same reason, patients of these countries are interesting to treat in hospitals here because they also spend their money outside the clinic: at the airport, in hotels and at restaurants.

It is important, though, not to promote Belgium as a medical tourism destination, Fleerackers says, where foreign patients would receive priority treatment. But he does think that foreign patients could bring in some much-needed cash. "Hospitals are in need of extra funds, especially in this difficult economic period. It's a shame that there is no political will in Belgium, in contrast to Germany for example, to attract more foreign patients."

Being self-sufficient

Still, the long-term goal of Healthcare Belgium is to make sure that their partners can take care of their own patients all by themselves. "We train their doctors, but also upgrade their medical education programmes and organisation so that in the future they will have the staff and the methods to work independently," says Fleerackers. He feels confident that within three years, for example, local staff will be able to take over the Belgian hospital in Saudi Arabia.

Radiomatix also says it wants the radiology services in the Middle East to eventually be self-sufficient. "We will not deny the economic potential of these markets," says radiologist Stefaan Gryspeerdt of the City Hospital in Roeselare, "but equally important for us is to reduce the unnecessarily high mortality rates in these countries due to a lack of radiology services. A correct and precise diagnosis is vital for saving the life of a patient."

Telesurgery

One of Healthcare Belgium's more ambitious projects is the Robotic Surgery Institute (ORSI) of the OLV Hospital in Aalst. It is a training centre for surgeons to learn to operate from another location with robotic arms. The hospital has signed a deal with Qatar to help setting up a robot surgery centre there. They regularly receive patients and doctors from Saudi Arabia. Thomaes even envisions providing partner countries with telesurgery in the not-so-distant future: surgery with the use of a robot over the internet. "Technically, it's already possible."

Fabian Laeveren, manager of ORSI, agrees but thinks it will take some time before it can become daily practice. "There are definite risks because you rely on the stability of the internet connection," he explains. "There would also be the need for a legal framework that defines the accountability of the specialist who works from a distance and the team that is at the patient's side. This is a delicate problem that will not be solved tomorrow."

→ www.healthcarebelgium.com



Doctors in Belgium can assess a patient's condition and then give advice on treatment to doctors in the Middle East and Russia

Good news in harsh times

Belgium climbs to unseen heights on competitiveness ranking

PHILIP EBELS

In spite of the ongoing political stalemate, Belgium's competitiveness has never been better, according to this year's Global Competitiveness Report published last week by the World Economic Forum (WEF). Belgium is now the world's 15th most-competitive economy, compared to 19th last year, leaving behind Norway, Saudi Arabia and France.

The WEF praised Belgium for its health care and primary education, the

second best in the world (see table), its higher education and training, business sophistication and technological readiness. The quality of its management schools are the highest of all 142 countries researched.

Less praiseworthy are the country's labour market efficiency – 44th place – and macroeconomic environment, which comes in 60th place. Among the "most problematic factors doing business" are its restrictive labour regulations, high

tax rates and inefficient government bureaucracy.

Leading the list of most competitive economies is, like last year, Switzerland. Runners-up are Singapore, Sweden and Finland. The US falls to 5th place. A general trend can be observed of emerging economies, increasingly claiming their place high on the list. China continues its ascent and now occupies a solid 26th place.

The Global Competitiveness Report

was first published in 1979 and ranks the world's countries according to their ability to convey a certain level of welfare onto their citizens, measured along levels of innovation and productivity. It does so with the use of publicly available information as well as a survey among some 14,000 business leaders worldwide. ♦

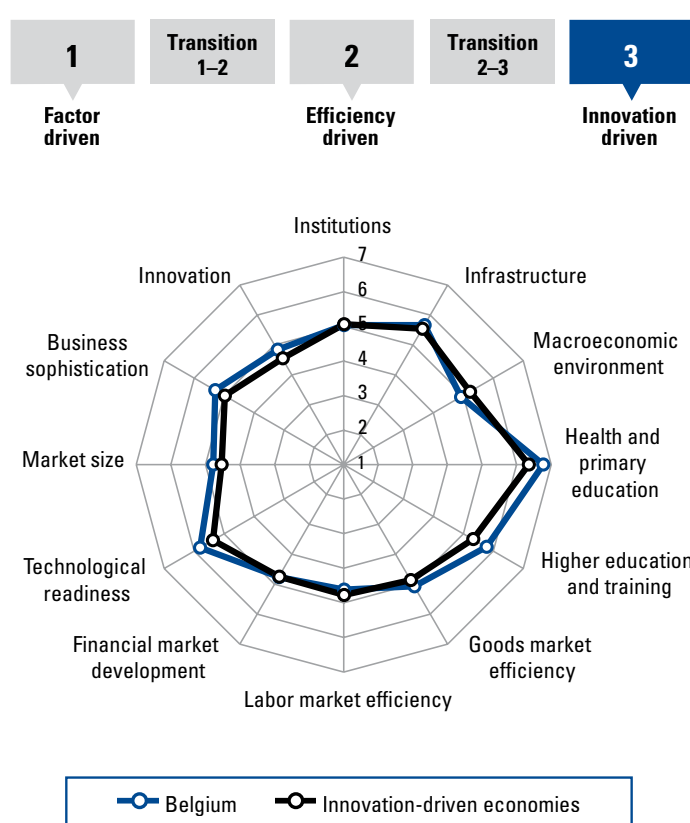
→ www.weforum.org

Global Competitiveness Index

	Rank (out of 142)	Score (1–7)
GCI 2011–2012	15	5.2
GCI 2010–2011 (out of 139).....	19	5.1
GCI 2009–2010 (out of 133).....	18	5.1
Basic requirements (20.0%)	22	5.6
Institutions.....	27	5.0
Infrastructure.....	17	5.6
Macroeconomic environment.....	60	4.9
Health and primary education.....	2	6.8
Efficiency enhancers (50.0%)	15	5.1
Higher education and training.....	5	5.8
Goods market efficiency.....	14	5.1
Labor market efficiency.....	44	4.6
Financial market development.....	28	4.8
Technological readiness.....	11	5.8
Market size	26	4.8
Innovation and sophistication factors (30.0%)	14	5.1
Business sophistication	11	5.3
Innovation.....	15	4.8

From The Global Competitiveness Report 2011–2012 / World Economic Forum

Stage of development



Most Belgian websites “illegal”

Only one in 100 professional websites registered in Belgium are fully in order, according to a survey of some 650,000 sites by marketing company Email-Brokers. The law requires businesses to provide a minimum of information, such as name, address and contact details, but also a VAT-number, for example.

The explanation of the astoundingly poor result is that businesses just don't know what the requirements are, said William van de Wiele, founder of Email-Brokers. Part of the blame goes to the federal government, he said, who should make it clearer to businesses what is expected of them. In The Netherlands, for example, 84% of websites are fully compliant with Dutch law.

It is the interest of companies themselves to be as transparent as possible, Van de Wiele said, because customers these days increasingly expect to find reliable information. “Companies shouldn't remain anonymous. It should be clear that there is an actual company running the website,” he said.

Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed, is eager to put the finding into perspective. “According to our statistics, 26% of websites of self-employed and SMEs are fully in order,” a spokesperson said. Unizo further stressed that it has developed an e-commerce audit for web shops, which, when successful, will be able to post their e-commerce label, which links to “correct and complete information about the company and the people behind it.” ♦

Record number of job openings

The Flemish employment and training service VDAB has registered a record number of job openings, it announced last week. It received a total of 302,219 job openings over the last 12 months, or an increase of more than one-quarter compared to the same period the year before. It received 26,134 in August alone, or 22.5% more than in August last year.

“These figures clearly point at economic recovery,” explains VDAB spokesperson Anneke Ernon. “The month of March 2010 was a turning point. We came from a very low point, which partly explains the big jump ahead. All the same, we've never received as many job openings as in May of this year.”

Unemployment in Flanders has been falling steadily over the same period, resulting in

scarcity on the labour market. At the end of August, there were a record number of 60,554 job openings still to be fulfilled. Engineers and information technology experts are among the most wanted, as well as security guards, the sector with the biggest increase in job openings.

“Most are due to replacements of people who retire or who no longer have the appropriate profile,” spokesperson Alain D'Haese of market leader G4s told *Het Nieuwsblad*. “We used to hire security guards for their tough look, but today we ask for more. The security guard of today must also know how to work with a computer, for example.” ♦

Belgians cross border for groceries

One in four Belgian households travels abroad at least once a year to do grocery shopping, the Belgian umbrella organisation of distribution companies Comeos said last week. It is a structural problem, it said, that costs the Belgian economy as much as €2.5 billion per year.

“Half of Belgians live within 50 kilometres of a national border,” Comeos director Dominique Michel said. “Dutch and French supermarkets

have a comparative advantage due to high labour costs and all kinds of taxes in Belgium. They actively target the Belgian consumer, advertising as far as in Brussels. Cross-border spending has increased 10% over the last three years. Belgian households today spend no less than 3.5% of their income abroad.” ♦

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Autos • BMW

German-based car manufacturer BMW is investing €25 million in a new distribution and service centre in Brussels. The Belgian market has become the brand's eighth largest worldwide, and the new facility, to open in 2013, is expected to help the company find additional customers in the northern part of the city.

Autos • sales

New car registrations increased by less than 1% to 37,788 in August compared to the same period in 2010, taking the total increase for the year to 0.5%. Best-selling models for the first eight months is Renault followed by Volkswagen and Peugeot.

Engineering • G&G

Engineering and construction group G&G International, based in Willebroek, Antwerp province, has won a €55 million contract to build and supply equipment for the sub-structures of 30 windmills to be build offshore near Riffgat in Germany. First deliveries of the 250 tonnes structures are expected for early 2012.

Fibreglass • Lanxess

Antwerp-based Lanxess, an affiliate of the German chemical products group, is to invest €15 million to replace two of its fibreglass production ovens and increase capacity.

Pharmaceuticals • Arseus

Pharmaceutical products and components distributor Arseus, an affiliate of quoted Omega Pharma, has acquired the Brazilian DEG and Pharma Nostra companies, its first venture outside of Europe.

Retail • Antwerp

The Meir shopping street in Antwerp has caught up with Brussels' Nieuwstraat as the country's most expensive location for stores with prime rents of some €1,800 a square metre a year. The worldwide Cushman & Wakefield survey ranks New York's Fifth Avenue as the most expensive, with rents of €16,700 a square metre a year. The Nieuwstraat and Meir are in 31st position.

Steel • Bekaert

The world's leading steel wire producer, based in Zwevegem, West Flanders, has acquired the South Korean Qingdao Hansun company to strengthen its position in Asia. Bekaert already operates several production units in nearby China.

Supermarkets • Delhaize

The Brussels-based supermarket group will invest a total of €190 million in Flanders over the next five years. Some €50 million is earmarked for a new distribution centre for fresh products in Zellik, a municipality of Asse, while up to €140 million will be used to renovate 70 of its supermarkets in Brussels and Flanders. Up to 100 new jobs will be created when the distribution centre opens in early 2014.

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THE
Bulletin

When you do dance

Even Shakespeare would have been proud of Ghent's Venetian Ball

COURTNEY DAVIS

Having left their house separately, a couple arrives individually at the Handelsbeurs concert hall in Ghent – incognito. Decked out in fancy dress and face-hiding masks, they enjoyed the thrill of seeking each other out in a crowd of costumed strangers.

"It's stories like these that I like to hear," laughs event organiser Ilse Wachtelaer as she recounts the tantalising proof of what turned into the highlight of Ghent's portion of the region-wide Festival of Flanders last year. So 1 October marks the second edition of the Venetian Ball.

Coordinator of all the concerts and events during Ghent's Festival of Flanders for the past five years, Wachtelaer and her team of creatives brainstormed ways on how to make a baroque musical concert more interesting. They wanted to bring the music to light from a different perspective, to make the evening more than just a single concert. They touched on the idea of dance classes, a popular thing these days, and finally came up with the concept of a ball with baroque music.

It proved so successful that this year's ball sold out weeks ago. "Everyone was enjoying themselves so much," says Wachtelaer, who hadn't expected the inaugural event to be responded to with such fervour. "We couldn't get them out. We close at 1.00; it's the rule of the venue, and we actually had to push the people out."

Equally unexpected was how fully people took to the dress code. "On the invitation, we suggested that people dress up and wear masks," says Wachtelaer, "but we never anticipated the 500



© Olivier Deschrijver

attendees to arrive fully decked out with feathered masks, hoop skirts and so much colour."

Ages ranged from the 20s to the 60s. "Some guests were familiar with historical dance and others had never dressed or danced that way before. It was a very mixed, curious audience." At the ball, a professional teaches three historical dances. The dances are relatively easy, so everyone can follow, and there's a short demonstration prior to each of the advanced style of the dance performed.

"We also have a musical surprise," Wachtelaer reveals. "Last year, we had a rolling stage pushed

into the room adorned with sparklers and an opera singer. This year will be similar, except that there will be even more surprises coming from all over the venue. People won't know where to look to find out what happens next."

As if music, dancing, costumes and surprises weren't enough, the icing on the cake is, well, cake. There's a competition among 50 entrants who will present their own baroque cake with stars, gold, and glitter. All of these will be for the eating, along with a dessert buffet. ♦

Avignon on the Leie

The Festival of Flanders comes home to its birthplace Ghent

MARIE DUMONT

After rather straight-laced programmes in Antwerp and Brussels, the Flanders Festival hits Ghent and lets its hair down. It's a homecoming of sorts: Ghent is where the mighty institution began when its visionary founder Jan Briers, Sr, launched the first handful of concerts over half a century ago. Today, the Ghent Festival (which, unlike other stopovers, hasn't bothered to re-brand itself under a new name) is a genial, unpretentious affair that fills the city's streets and venues with wonderful music and a party atmosphere.

The tone is set on day one with Ode Gand, a one-day extravaganza that sweeps over the city's winding streets and waterways. It is as joyful a celebration of music as one could wish for, with tango jostling jazz and classical sounds, a giant bonfire and a bustling flotilla of boats to ferry you from one event to the next. The programme claims that on that day, the city on the Leie looks a little like Avignon. We think it looks like Ghent, which is every bit as glamorous.

The following days bring classical concerts that wouldn't look out of place on the star-studded programme of Brussels' Klara Festival: the Rotterdam Philharmonic in Bruckner's eighth, the BBC Symphony Orchestra in Mahler's fourth, the Hofkapelle und Kammerkor Stuttgart in Mozart's Requiem. The one concert I wouldn't miss for the world, though, is Swedish mezzo-

soprano Anne Sofie Von Otter's poignant recital of songs by Viktor Ullmann, Pavel Haas and other composers from the Second World War. All were composed in the Terezín concentration camp near Prague, where many Jewish artists were sent and continued to create as one would cling to a lifebuoy.

Not everything on the programme is strictly classical: There's a sizzling flamenco show featuring Sevillian dancer Isabel Bayón, music from Japan and Tibet as well as an upbeat mini-festival for children. The more athletic among us, meanwhile, will enjoy pedalling around the lovely East Flanders countryside as part of Avanti!, an ever-popular cycling tour that rewards tired limbs and sweaty brows with delightful concerts in churches and country cafés.

The prize for wackiness, though, must go to Carrington-Brown, a double act by Rebecca Carrington, a British classically trained cellist turned stand-up comedian, and her singer partner Colin Brown. Carrington uses her 18th-century cello to ape a flamenco guitar and Scottish bagpipes and turns out uproarious impressions of Madonna and Jacqueline Dupré. Subtle she isn't always, but the cheek and freedom she uses to mock the establishment of which she is part feels utterly refreshing. She looks to become a regular guest to the festival, and it couldn't dream of a better mascot. ♦



The Carrington-Brown duo takes a few playful pot shots at its own genre

Ghent Festival of Flanders
17 September - 9 October
Across Ghent

→ www.gentfestival.be

CULTURE NEWS

The **Flemish Film Prizes** were announced last weekend at the Ostend Film Festival. Not surprisingly, *Rundskop* raked in the statuettes, with seven wins, including Best Film, Best Director (Michael Roskam) and Best Actor in a Leading Role (Matthias Schoenaerts). Best Actress honours went to Agnieszka Grochowska for *Beyond the Steppes*.

Matthias Schoenaerts, who this year wrapped shooting on the American re-make of the Flemish smash hit film *Loft*, has been tapped to play the lead role in French director Jacques Audiard's new movie *Un goût de rouille et d'os* (Rust and Bone). The film is based on the raw, macabre group of stories by Canadian writer Craig Davidson, published in 2005. Schoenaerts will play opposite French actress Marion Cotillard (*Inception*). Shooting will take place in the area of Paris, in the north of France and also possibly across the border in Wallonia.

The sixth edition of **Music for Life**, the popular end-of-year charity event that finds Studio Brussel DJs spinning your requests from a glass house in a public space, will this year give proceeds to the Red Cross' programme to end deaths from diarrhoea, the leading cause of death worldwide in children younger than five years old. The event, which Studio Brussel says will be the last edition, will take place in three cities this year – Leuven, Ghent and Antwerp – for three days each between 17 and 23 December (with some cross-over days).

→ www.stubru.be

Last weekend saw the opening of OPEK, which has nothing to do with oil, but with art. The Openbaar Entrepot voor de Kunsten, in a renovated custom's house at the port in Leuven, lodges seven local cultural organisations, including the music theatre company Braakland/Zhebuilding. It was that company that just received the annual **Flemish Culture Prize for Performing Arts**. The jury praised the storytelling qualities of artistic directors Stijn Devillé and Adriaan Van Aken. *Luide Muziek* (Loud Music), their newest play, is a collaboration with the social artistic project De Figuranten. Another Flemish Culture Prize was announced last week: **Gust Van den Berghe**, the young director of feature film *Little Baby Jesus of Flandr*, loosely based on an old Flemish play by Felix Timmermans, won the prize for film, announced at the Ostend Film Festival. It was busy days for Flemish minister for culture, Joke Schauvliege, who handed out the prizes worth €12,500 each.

→ www.cultuurprijzen.be

Driven by vengeance

Tom Barman on 20 years of dEUS and a brand new album

CHRISTOPHE VERBIEST

I meet Tom Barman in Tune Up, a vinyl store in his hometown of Antwerp, situated above a huge press shop. With still some left before the interview, I'm browsing the magazines. Suddenly, I feel someone rushing past me. It's Barman. Another journalist has told him the French *Rolling Stone* has run a review of the new dEUS album *Keep You Close* in its latest edition.

"They didn't get it!" he shrieks, after reading the three-and-half-star (out of five) review. "Just joking," he quickly adds with a big smile.

I suspect, though, that he partially meant it. And I can understand it.

Keep You Close received a long and raving four-star (out of five) review in the British monthly *Q*, but some of the critic's remarks made me wonder if he'd heard the same album I did.

Since their ground-breaking debut *Worst Case Scenario* in 1994, dEUS has been the pride of the indigenous rock scene. A few artists might be more popular, but dEUS' courage and recklessness have inspired a whole generation of young musicians and made them the most commented-on rock band of the past two decades in this country.

Two decades and counting

dEUS has had some personnel changes throughout its 20-year history, although the present line-up, operating together since 2005, is the most productive. Barman, Klaas Janzoon, Stéphane Missegheers, Mauro Pawlowski and Alan Gevaert have played on the last three of the band's six albums.

Barman, unsurprisingly, doesn't have a favourite line-up. "All periods had their great moment, and their despairing ones," he tells me. "It's different from the first years, though. It's a brotherly vibe now, which makes it also fragile."

Since 2009, dEUS has been working in its own recording studio in Antwerp. *Keep You Close* isn't the only result of that hard labour. The next six months will see two EPs released: one with "pop-y material", the other with "groovy stuff influenced by Can and LCD Soundsystem."

It has been suggested in the press that Barman wasn't satisfied with the previous album *Vantage Point*. He's glad he can rectify that. "Everything we have done is an essential part of the whole story, so I'm certainly not disavowing that album. I do think, though, that that album sounds a bit too distant. But what *really* disappointed me was the lack of concerts afterwards. We toured only seven months, and we were – I'm exaggerating, but even so – cold-shouldered. After having spent two years in the studio, that was hard. On the other hand, it's sometimes good to receive such a blow. It keeps you focused."

And that was clear from the first day dEUS started working on *Keep You Close*. "We were driven by vengeance," he admits. And they had a new plan: Write all the music with the five of them together in one room. "We had done that before, but not for a whole album. They always contained songs I'd written on my own, too. Working so intensely together makes this a better album, I think."



© Photos: Alex Varhee

"Something has to change"

There's a lot of regret and sorrow in the lyrics of *Keep You Close*, I remark. "And self criticism and remorse", the dEUS singer quickly adds. In "Twice (We Survive)" he sings: "Cause twice I set my mind on you / And twice I gave you nothing".

"I shied away from too many metaphors; I wanted my lyrics to be more direct than they were before," Barman reveals. "Which isn't the same as anecdotal, since that doesn't interest me. That chorus of 'Twice' – it can't get any more direct than that. But I'll have to write differently in the future. I've reached a limit."

The limit wasn't induced by a desire not to open his heart anymore. He will always do that, he says, since it's a defining part of his persona as an artist. Rather, it's probably because he hasn't *lived* enough lately. "I have been in the studio for two years, almost daily."

With a grim smile, he continues: "I went to a behavioural psychologist once, and he told me something that I intuitively knew, but it was good to hear it from someone else: I need external impulses." Barman stated he'd have to write differently, but maybe he'll have to live differently? "That's right. Something has to change, the future will tell what it'll be."

A second film?

Finally, and unavoidably, cinema! Twenty years ago, Barman was thrown out of film school because he cheated during a science exam. Though his teachers, like director Marc Didden, afterwards clarified that he was a talented student. Barman delivered proof of this in 2003 with his much-appreciated film debut *Any Way the Wind Blows*.

Three years ago, he told me he was working on a new screenplay. So, when can we expect that second feature?

"Honestly, I don't know," he admits. "I'm not in a hurry. I've three ideas that I'd like to see turned into a film at some point. One of them I have already developed into a 40-page synopsis." The camera won't be rolling soon, though. For one, filming will force dEUS into a sabbatical, and he surely doesn't want a band that has been going strong for six years in a row – a record in its bumpy history – to come to a halt.

"True, but on the other hand – a new movie will take less time than the first one. Making *Any Way the Wind Blows* was very informative. I had the tendency to do everything myself, but I've learned that was not the wisest decision. Now I know my strengths and weaknesses. For instance, I'll work with a screenwriter to turn that synopsis into a screenplay." The next year will find him doing a lot of touring with dEUS and finishing a new album of Magnus, the electronic duo he forms with CJ Bolland. "And we'll see after that. But there'll be a new movie one day. That's a fact." ♦

From left: Mauro Pawlowski, Klaas Janzoon, Tom Barman, Stéphane Missegheers and Alan Gevaert are dEUS

"We were cold-shouldered. After having spent two years on the album, that was hard"



Tom Barman living it up on stage at Rivierenhof

dEUS

16 December, 20.00
Lotto Arena
Schijnpoortweg 119, Antwerp

→ www.lottoarena.be

17 December, 20.00
Vorst Nationaal
Victor Rousseaulaan 208, Brussels

→ www.vorstnationaal.be

Close encounters of the Spanish kind

Three Flemish guys make the trip of a lifetime in *Hasta la vista*

LISA BRADSHAW

When the cast and crew of Geoffrey Enthoven's new film *Hasta la vista* went to the Montreal World Film Festival last month, the festival organiser was going out of his mind to find the right restaurant for the meet & greet. The film is about three young Flemish men – one blind and two in wheelchairs – who go on a road trip to Spain, so the festival had to find somewhere nearby that was completely accessible to them. But Gilles De Schryver and Robrecht Vanden Thoren do not use wheelchairs. And Tom Audenaert isn't blind. The actors are not handicapped, but they are so convincing in the movie that the festival director literally wouldn't believe them. *Hasta la vista*, which releases in Brussels and across Flanders this week, is based on the documentary *For One Night Only*, which details the experiences of the England-based Asta Philpot. Philpot, who was a close consultant on the film, journeyed in 2007, together with two friends, to a special brothel in Spain that caters to the handicapped. Because, as Gilles De Schryver says: "Everyone wants sex".

None of you have the physical handicap that you portray in the film. The character of Philip (played by Robrecht Vanden Thoren) must have been especially difficult as he has no ability to move his arms or his legs. How did you all learn to play the roles so convincingly?

Tom: I visited a Flemish organisation for the blind and visually impaired. They showed me how I had to walk with the stick; they have a parcours for it. They also have different glasses that you can wear to show you how people see; there are different levels of blindness. In the film, my character can see a little bit.

Robrecht: I had a friend when I was young who was in a wheelchair, so I had a little experience there, but Asta helped me the most. He did exactly what we were going to do. I also practiced in a wheelchair; I went to shops and discovered the everyday difficulties, like getting through doors and not being able to use stairs. But the worst thing was the looks of pity. People don't actively think to themselves: 'I'm better than that guy'. But they feel it. They think they are empathising with you, but they shouldn't. You shouldn't assume that just because someone is in a wheelchair that he isn't as successful or as happy as you.

Gilles: I quickly realised that my character's biggest problem was not being handicapped but being sick. I mostly researched how people deal with the pain and sorrow of having to deal with cancer.

Did any challenges crop up that you didn't foresee?

Gilles: When I would lay down in bed or something like that, I moved my legs a lot. Even when you are sitting down, you



From left: Gilles De Schryver, Robrecht Vanden Thoren and Tom Audenaert in *Hasta la vista*

are constantly shifting your weight, without even knowing it. You think that if you are sitting in a wheelchair that you're not using your legs, but it's not true. You're using your legs all the time.

Robrecht: For me, it was actually easier. Gilles had to move his upper body, but I sat back, twisted my arm and froze. At first, I thought maybe the character should be able to bend his head, but the moment you start moving one thing, you see how it's connected to another movement. So I chose to not move anything to make it more credible.

Were you worried about the reactions from the handicapped community because you're playing them without actually being part of them?

Gilles: Yes, we were very worried. But immediately after the screening [at the Montreal World Film Festival last month], people came to us and said it was really like their lives we were portraying. It was very positive very quickly.

Robrecht: A lot of people came to tell us about their own personal stories taking care of people who were sick. You could really see that they understood the situations in the film.

You two (Gilles and Robrecht) acted together before in the 2007 film *De laatste zomer*, which in fact, has some mild similarities with this film...

Robrecht: In both movies, I was a selfish, ego-centric guy who want to have sex! I think in that movie Geoffrey saw that I could play that kind of person well [laughs].

And your good friends in real life. Did that help you make the decision to take on these roles?

Gilles: It did. It was a dream. When I had the phone call, and they said they were thinking about Robrecht for the other part, we decided we really want to do this together.

Is it easier to play friends in front of a camera if you're friends in real life?

Gilles: It's easier to mimic situations that we know from everyday life, but it's not easier to "play friendship". With Tom, we had to do the same thing, and we only met him at the first rehearsal, and he blended in that chemistry perfectly. ♦

FILM REVIEW ★★☆☆

Hasta la vista

Gentenaars Jozef, Lars and Philip plan a holiday in Spain. They're young, they're single, and they're best friends, so nothing unusual about that. But the trip entails an enormous amount of preparation and parental convincing, even though the guys are in their 20s and 30s.

That's because Jozef is blind, Lars is in a wheelchair, and Philip is a quadriplegic. And, unbeknownst to their parents, the friends are on their way to a brothel that specialises in "guys like them".

The set-up sounds trite, and the film's poster – the obligatory woman with her legs spread – doesn't help any. But, thankfully, Flemish director Geoffrey Enthoven and screenwriter Pierre De Clercq, focus on attitudes, emotions and beautifully realised physical comedy, making the tired road trip genre into something unique and surprising.

In *Hasta la vista*, the trip of a lifetime is disrupted at the last minute by very bad news. Lars (Gilles De Schryver) is terminally ill, and his condition has progressed.

His doctor says he shouldn't go, and his overprotective parents agree.

But he doesn't. So the three sneak away, with a down-on-her-luck former caregiver in a rickety old van that looks like it won't make it to the French border, let alone all the way to the den of girls in El Cielo (The Heaven).

Philip (Robrecht Vanden Thoren, sinking his teeth into a character not so far off from his Tim in *De laatste zomer*) is the ringleader and immediately clashes with the heavy-set, French-speaking caregiver Claude (Isabelle De Hertogh). But Claude has a few secrets she deliciously releases one-by-one, until she wins their trust. In fact, she wins more than trust from Jozef (Tom Audenaert), who is not all that excited with the idea of the brothel in the first place.

Hasta la vista is honest and refreshingly lacking in self-consciousness. It's jokes, for instance, come off well, such as when Jozef and Lars taunt Philip with the idea that a bear could tear into his tent and bite off his limbs. But,



notes Lars, "that wouldn't make any difference to Philip". The director, who brought us the maudlin *Meisjes* and the shocking denouement in *Happy Together*, ultimately can't resist bringing all the fun to a screeching halt. But this time, he leaves us with a sense of hopeful longevity that is still firmly rooted in reality, and the film won the grand prize last month at the Montreal World Film Festival. Nice one, Enthoven. (LB)

➡ www.hastalavistadefilm.be

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Can Flanders come outside to play?

CAR-FREE DAY

PHILIP EBELS

"I want to live," a Brussels friend once responded when asked why she didn't ride her bicycle to work. She didn't look like she was kidding.

Not all European cities are as bicycle-friendly as, say, The Hague, where until not very long ago the Dutch prime minister would pedal to work. Most are car-infested, and Brussels is surely one of them. More than half of motorised movements are shorter than five kilometres. A quarter are shorter than one kilometre.

But not on Sunday, 18 September, when the streets of Brussels and many other cities in Flanders belong to the non-motorised. It is *Autoloze Zondag*, or Car-Free Sunday, part of the European Mobility Week, when more than 1,000 municipalities across Europe organise all kinds of events in order to promote "sustainable mobility". Local governments in Brussels and Flanders encourage commuters to carpool or use public transport. Parents are encouraged to find a different way to bring their kids to school.

In Brussels, this is the 10th edition of a festival that is growing more popular every year. More than 85% of people polled said they were happy with the initiative. They take the opportunity and cruise the wide lanes that are normally reserved for noisy, fuming traffic

jams. Research shows that during a car-free day, it is six to eight times quieter and the air is three to four times cleaner. Makes you understand a bit better why some Japanese tourists wear surgical masks when they visit our fair city. The idea of a car-free day was born during the oil crisis of the 1970s but wasn't institutionalised until the year 2000, when the European Commission declared 22 September to be European Day of Sustainable Urban Mobility. Brussels and Flanders joined the movement one year later and have banned all non-essential traffic from city centres ever since on the Sunday before.

Weather obliging, Car-Free Day is always a lot of fun. You can test out a "go-cart train" in Antwerp, enjoy some *hapjes* on the city of Mechelen and dig into a 10th anniversary cake in Brussels Central Station. With more than 30 municipalities taking part, the possibilities are endless. Take the kids and discover the city like you've never seen it before. You'll live. ♦

18 September
Across Brussels and Flanders

→ www.autolozezondag.irisnet.be
→ www.weekvandemobiliteit.be



Antwerp prides itself on many things, and one of them is Zita Swoon. The rock group lives up to its name's meaning – intense desire – thanks in part to the passionate lead of Stef Kamil Carlens, formerly of *deUS*. After putting out more than 11 albums, Carlens decided it was time to blend his indie rock sound with

that of musicians from all over the globe. And so he stopped in Burkina Faso and met singer Awa Démé (pictured with him above) and balafonist Mamadou Diabaté Kibié (the balafon is a typical West African percussion instrument). About a dozen songs were the result of this fusion, compiled in the album

entitled *Wait For Me*. The laid-back and happy sounds of Démé and Kibié balance out the intense, tending-towards-sullen, Flemish rock. Get your tickets now for this fascinating marriage of two music genres.

(Robyn Boyle)

→ www.theatre140.be

Zita Swoon Group

17 October, 20.30
Théâtre 140, Brussels



MORE WORLD THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Noite do fado: Double concert by Fado singers Raquel Tavares and Ana Sofia Varela with the Paolo Parreira Trio
SEP 15 20.30 at De Roma, Turnhoutsebaan 286
www.deroma.be

Brussels

Musiko Metro: Live music in metro stations, as part of the Week of Mobility (see p13). Concerts by Bruxelles-Aires Tango Orchestra, Patrick Ouchène, Sarah Carlier, Rey Cabrera "orquesta yo", The Human Jukebox and more
SEP 17 14.00-17.00 in Brussels metro stations Graaf van Vlaanderen, De Brouckère, Centraal Station, Beurs and Anneessens
www.musikometro.be

Omar Souleyman: Free concert on Car-Free Sunday by the Syrian musician and Middle Eastern beats master
SEP 18 15.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110
www.abconcerts.be

Ghent

Djengui N'gara: Traditional music from Mauritania
SEP 17 20.00 at De Centrale, Kraankindersstraat 2
www.decentrale.be

EXHIBITION

Two years ago, when the archaeological department of the mediaeval city of Mechelen started digging up the cemetery in the shadow of the imposing Sint-Rombouts Cathedral, their work was met with repeated criticism from the press. But all controversy fell still when researchers uncovered no less than 4,166 skeletons, spread over some 3,700 graves, making it one of the most significant archaeological digs in Western Europe. Their fascinating finds, now on display, include a 1798 mass grave filled with peasant warriors, the result of their revolt against the French occupation. (RB)

→ www.mechelen.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Bruges

Uit goede bron (Reliable Sources): The history of Bruges and how it grew to be one of the richest mediaeval merchant cities
Until OCT 16 at Bruggemuseum Gruuthuse, Dijver 17
www.uitgoedebron.info

Brussels

Beyond the Document: Works by 14 contemporary Belgian photographers examining the fine line that separates documentary and fine art photography
Until SEP 25 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
www.bozar.be

Gaasbeek

Sleeping Beauties: A selection of works of contemporary art from the past 30 years that was specifically inspired by sleep and dream, including Michael Borremans, Sophie Calle and the photo series by American photographer Spencer Tunick that was shot at Gaasbeek this summer
Until NOV 13 at Gaasbeek Castle, Kasteelstraat 40
www.kasteelvangasbeek.be



LITERATURE

ZuiderZinnen
 18 September, 12.00-20.00
 Het Zuid, Antwerp

This Festival of Word is back in Antwerp with a flurry of activities, including concerts by Flip Kowlier (unplugged), De Allerlaatste Showband, poet-musician Frank Boeijen and readings by Flemish authors and poets, including Herman Brusselmans, Peter Verhelst and Jeroen Olyslaegers. And it wouldn't be a literary festival without a book market; come and thumb through hundreds of novels, anthologies, biographies and autobiographies. The theme this year is *ZuiderZinnen gaat vreemd* (goes abroad), so expect readings that focus on the writer's roaming spirit, such as excerpts from Ingrid vanderVeken's experiences in Bali and some funny words from British stand-up comedian Nigel Williams (*pictured*) about life in Flanders as a *vreemde* (foreigner). (RB)

→ www.zuiderzinnen.org



© Clapin/flickr

MORE LITERATURE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

David Vann: Reading by the Alaskan author of *Legend of a Suicide*, from his new novel *Caribou Island* (in English)
SEP 20 20.00 at Border Kitchen, Arenberg, Arenbergstraat 28
www.borderkitchen.be

Brussels

Erik Vlamincx: Reading by the Flemish writer from his new novel *Brandlucht* (Burning Smell), about uprooted Flemish and Dutch immigrants living in Canada (in Dutch)
SEP 14 20.00 at Passa Porta, A. Dansaertstraat 46
www.beschrijf.be

Ostend

IM Eric de Kuyper: The unique *In Memoriam* series, which spotlights writers who are in fact alive and well, continues this week with Flemish director/writer Eric de Kuyper, specialised in the philosophy behind film and performing arts (in Dutch)
SEP 18 15.00 at Vrijstaat O, Zeedijk 10
www.vrijstaat-o.be



OdeGand

17 September, 13.30-24.00
Across Ghent

The new cultural season opens with a bang this week, and nowhere louder than in Ghent. OdeGand, the enchanting forerunner to its part of the region-wide Festival of Flanders, features personal transport to concerts of your choosing via a boat on the Leie canal. Make your one agenda through a number of options. There's a whirling act by Spanish flamenco dancer Alfonso Losa, breathtaking percussion by Scottish virtuoso Dame Evelyn Glennie, a heart-warming concert by jazz-harpist Edmar Castaneda and even an Austrian orchestra with vegetables for instruments. When night falls, a podium spanning the canal between the Korenlei and Graslei sets the scene for a spectacular classical concert complete with a colourful light display and fireworks. One ticket gives access to all the boats and more than 50 concerts at a dozen unique locations. (RB)



MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Het Noord Ontspoor: Free world and folk music festival in featuring Balkan folk rock by Camping Sauvach, gipsy swing by Budzillus, ska and reggae by La Kinky Beat and more
SEP 17 12.00 at Park Spoor Noord, Damplein 27
www.hetnoordontspoor.be

Brussels

Folklorissimo: Brussels heritage festival featuring a procession through the city centre, folklore village, performances and tastings
SEP 17-18 on the Grote Markt
www.brupass.be

Dendermonde (East Flanders)

Scheldefeesten: Festivities on and around the Scheldt River featuring a boat parade, concerts, old-timer cars, a flea market and more
SEP 16-18 at Feest tent Driehuizen, Baasrode
www.scheldefeesten.be

CAFE SPOTLIGHT

LAURENS BOUCKAERT

White Cat Drongenhof 40, Ghent

Being the home of many students, the fair city of Ghent has a vibrant nightlife. Many places get overcrowded, as the weekly emigrants look to dance off the stress accompanying exams and dissertations.

The incredibly relaxed White Cat bar, however, is so well hidden, it mostly attracts dedicated night owls with exquisite taste in music. This gem of a cocktail bar is located in the heart of mediaeval Ghent: Patershol, the district of small streets near the Gravensteen castle.

Though the neighbourhood is popular for tourists, this gem of a cocktail bar isn't. It's also way off the beaten track of the rest of Ghent's nightlife. Even when the clock strikes midnight, there's no queue, and you're guaranteed a spot... somewhere. Let's keep it our little secret.

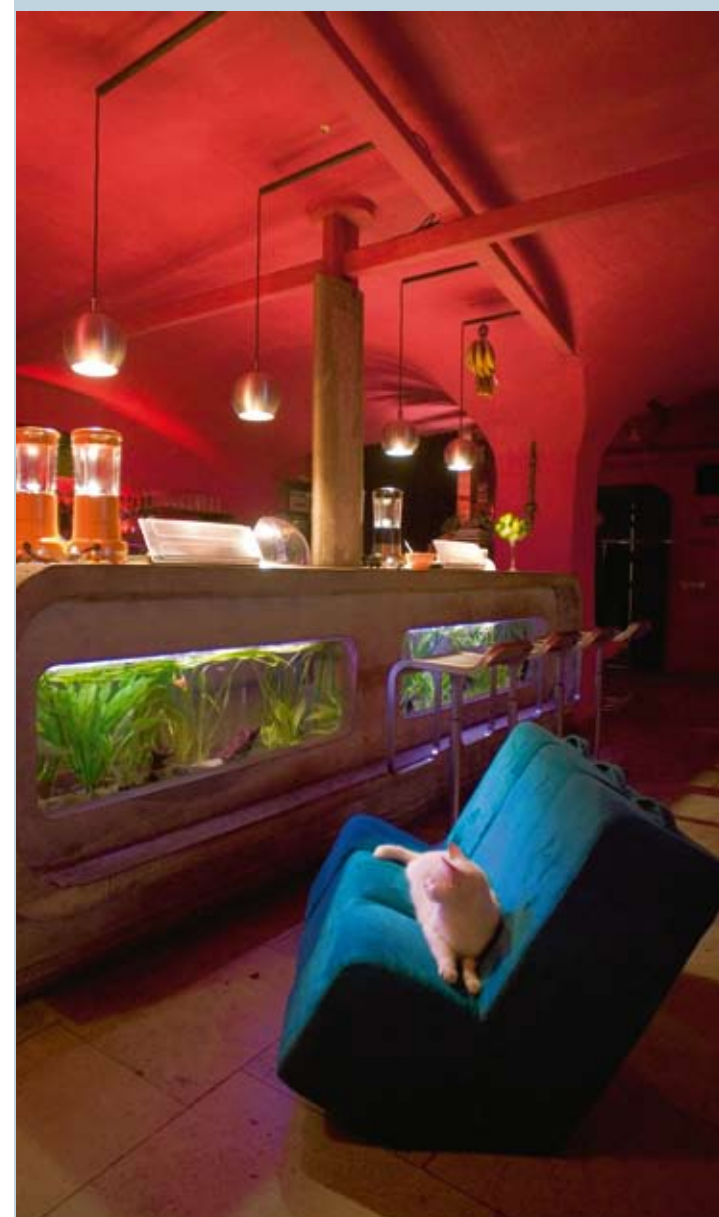
History can often clash with modernity, but in the case of the White Cat, it's a classy collision. After descending from the stairs at the entry, you enter the bar area – further on is the DJ and small dance floor. The 14th-century cellar breathes a 1970s design and could very well have been a secret Bond hideout in *Moonraker*.

The warmth of the deep red interior and the rousing sounds of classic funk, soul and rock 'n' roll, ensure an instant good mood. A great cocktail selection and a very laid-back staff add to the feel-good factor.

White Cat is as much a place to dance as it is to talk and drink. Mixmonster Menno is the house DJ, and after 1.00, the dance floor fills up quickly. The owners book a live gig and a musical theme-night every month or so, so be sure to check out the agenda on the website. On one of those nights my friends and I discovered the obscure genre of '70s Thai funk. I've been playing Thai rocker Sroeng Santi's cover of Black Sabbath's *Iron Man* (Kuen Kuen Lueng Lueng) weekly ever since.

With all the talk, one is inclined to think of White Cat as an exclusive hipster bar. This couldn't be further from the truth. Although the artistic vibe is easily distinguishable, White Cat is also less fashionable barfly territory. So be sure to let this place be the final destination of your visit to Ghent one day. Just don't tell anyone about it.

➔ www.white-cat.be



Oedipus/Bêt Noir

15 September - 1 October, 20.00
KVS Bol, Brussels

The result of star choreographer Wim Vandekeybus' third collaboration with writer Jan Decorte is one exceptionally quirky interpretation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Decorte places the inevitably dark and tragic myth (about a man who ultimately fulfils the prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother) against a surprisingly beautiful and poetic backdrop. Vandekeybus' Ultima Vez dancers and other actors perform untamed, animal-like movements, carried along on a wave of eerie music by Flemish blues man Roland Van Campenhout, among others (in Dutch with French and English surtitles). (RB)

➔ www.kvs.be



MORE THEATRE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Cover Up: Absurd modern dance about aesthetics and superficiality, performed on animal skins and fluffy carpets by the German-based international trio Mamaza
SEP 16-17 20.00 at deSingel, Desguinlei 2
www.desingel.be

Father, Mother, I and We: LOD and Het Paleis present this play for adults and children (ages five and up) about the complex world inside a young girl's head by Flemish director Inne Goris (in Dutch)
SEP 21-DEC 12 15.15/20.15 at Het Paleis, Theaterplein 1
www.hetpaleis.be

Brussels

The Art of Entertainment: Needcompany's new play by director Jan Lauwers, a dark comedy about a suicidal actor's bitter end (in Dutch, French and English, with surtitles in Dutch, French and English)
SEP 15-18 15.00/20.30 at Kaaiteater, Saintelette square 20
www.kaaiteater.be

bite

ROBYN BOYLE

Pineau op Straat 2011

As any Michelin guide inspector will attest, there's no greater cuisine than that of the French. A statement this bold is up for debate, of course, but there's no denying France's long tradition of *savoir vivre*.

The Poitou-Charentes region above Bordeaux is particularly jam-packed with delicacies, from *foie gras* and oysters to cheese and escargots. And Pineau des Charentes, the regional tipple, makes for the perfect accompaniment – a typically deep golden, sweet aperitif made from a variety of white grapes, barrel aged and mixed with cognac.

Thanks to the Belgian Pineau Club, you don't have to make the eight plus hour drive southwest to dabble in the fruits of *la douce France*. This weekend, the club holds its annual festival Pineau op Straat (Pineau in the Street) in Brussels' Jubelpark, where French farmers and wine producers set up shop to entice visitors with their goods of irrefutably superior quality.

The Charentes tastings start on Saturday with both open-air and covered markets. Crack open a fresh, buttery lobster between nips of oaky, fruity Pineau. Or head to the music-filled So City area

(new this year) and learn to appreciate Pineau from a different perspective – on the rocks, for example, or in a cocktail.

Live entertainment and samples continue on Sunday, which also happens to be Car-Free Day in Brussels (see p13). Walk, bike or take the Metro to be sure not to miss the Waiter Race. Amateurs and professionals in the restaurant business compete for the coveted trophy in this spirited event. Loaded with a tray containing three glasses of Pineau and one bottle, each waiter must zip through the 2.5 km parcours, losing as little of the liquid gold as possible.

You'll no doubt join the crowd in cheering them on. Spilling Pineau, after all, would be a great, great shame.

→ www.pineau.be

➔ Jubelpark, Brussels

17 September, 15.00-20.00
18 September, 11.00-18.00

➔ Weekend dedicated to the Poitou-Charentes region of France, its wine and gastronomy, plus the ever crowd-pleasing Waiter Race



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TALKING DUTCH

PHILIP EBELS

Wuk dadde?

The West Flemish are upset. Their dialect, supposedly spoken in the new TV series *Het goddelijke monster* (The Divine Monster), an adaptation of Tom Lanoye's novel of the same title, is being "raped", according to one linguistics professor. "Or *gemassacreerd* as we would say," he continues, massacred. "It hurts the ears of every West Fleming." The governor of the region said he "was having difficulties watching it until the end".

To be fair, the production crew of the show, which is set in Kortrijk, did make an effort to get it right. The actors, most of them not native to the region, studied the dialect for months and were schooled by a dialect coach. To no avail. Pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary: They do it all wrong, according to the natives.

West Vlams, as they say, or *West Vlaams* in standardised Dutch, may very well be Flanders' most peculiar dialect. To the untrained ear, it is utterly incomprehensible and – as I know from experience and to the delight of my West Flemish friends – very difficult to imitate. I've said before that it sounds like something from *The Lord of the Rings*.

Poor *Flanders Today* reader Anna Levenstein, who wrote to ask for some tips about West Flemish phrases "so that I can communicate with my in-laws". But I'm not sure I can be of much help. I often don't have a clue myself. All I know is that they say *jongen*, boy, for *meisje*, girl, and that they use a lot of words of French origin.

But I wouldn't presume to think that when months of intensive training don't produce anything that even remotely satisfies the



natives, this column could. I might have to agree with Anna's husband, who "seems to think that it's impossible to learn".

Newspaper *De Standaard* created an online test – fun! – aptly called *Wuk dadde?*, which I believe means something like *Wat is dat?*, What's that? (West-Flemish readers: correct me if I'm wrong!) There are 10 audio fragments, and the testee is asked to pick the correct translation. One fragment has me in doubt between *een mooie vrouw*, a beautiful woman, and *een boterham met confituur*, a sandwich with jam.

I did worse than I thought I would: four out of 10. "*t I noh nie hjil dadde*," it tells me when I'm done. Het is nog niet heel goed, I'm pretty sure it means: It's not very good yet.

→ www.tinyurl.com/west-vlaams

THE LAST WORD...

Tot de volgende!

"The only good news is that after every meeting, they schedule another one."

Ghent University political scientist Carl Devos shines his light over the ongoing government negotiations

Mutually beneficial

"I'm still alive thanks to a pregnant dolphin."

Bruges veterinarian Piet De Laender found out he had a tumour while doing an echo on a dolphin

How thoughtful

"The weed was for my sick wife, to ease her pain."

Convicted marijuana grower Patrick Lagrou from West Flanders got caught, again, with 60 full-grown plants

Putting it bluntly

"I don't want to be immodest, but I am one the better putters of the world."

Blind Dutch golfer Ronald Boef played in Oostduinkerke last weekend

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #198

Feature

Sixty years ago, the city of Brussels connected its north and south regions with a now-taken-for-granted rail line. As anniversary celebrations of the event get going, we tell you about the historical importance of the line and what it has meant for the capital

Focus

Some citizens are tired of waiting for governments to act on building sustainable cities – so they're taking matters into their own hands. We look at the Flanders branch of Transition Cities

Arts

The National Orchestra of Belgium is 75 years old this year. We'll tell you about the distinguished organisation and how it changed the country's musical environment