

Death of a statesman

Willy De Clercq remembered across Flanders

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Education diplomats

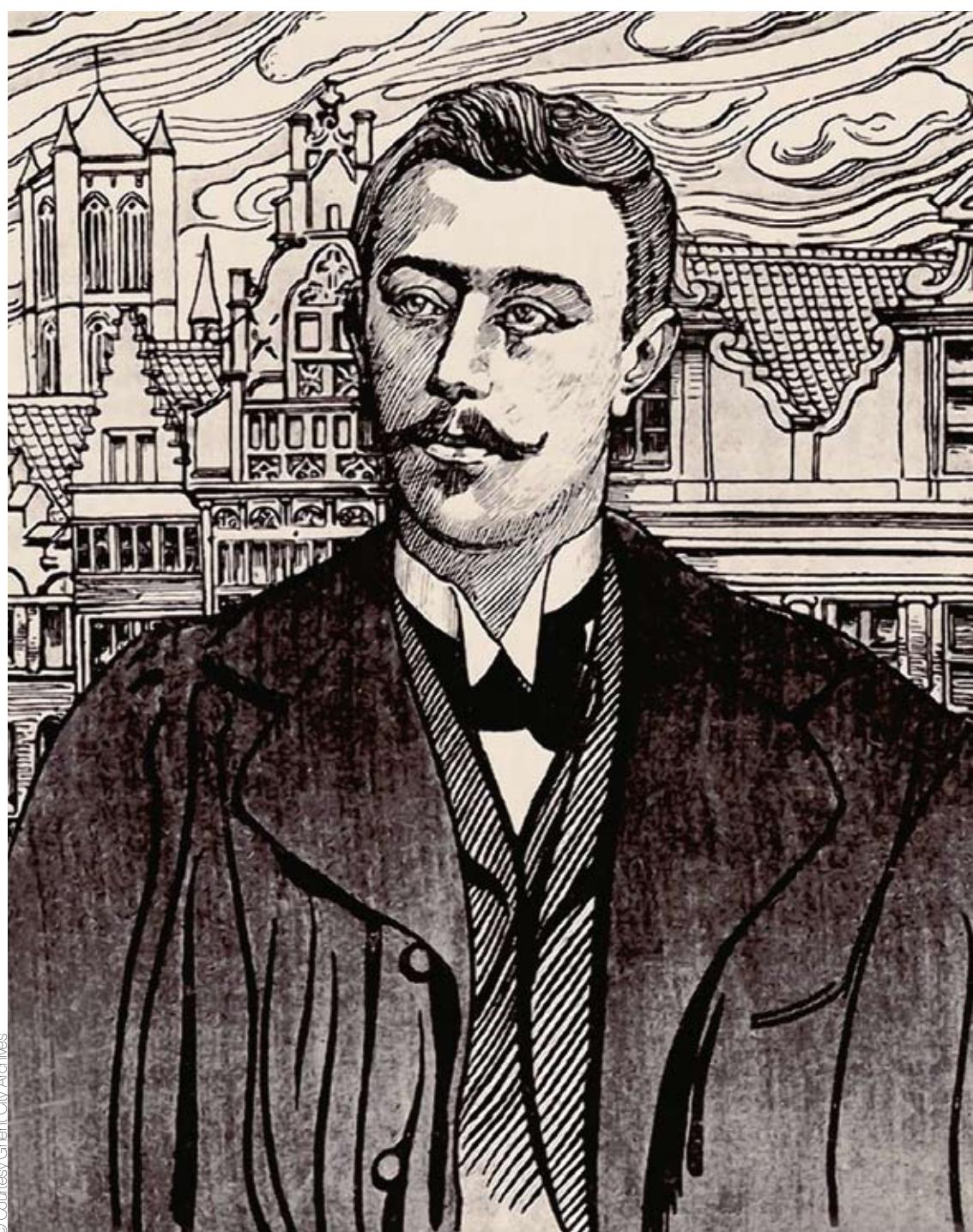
Academics to join Flemish economic missions

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© Courtesy Ghent City Archives

Drawing of Maurice Maeterlinck with Ghent monuments in the background by painter and printmaker Charles Doudelet

The many sides of Maeterlinck

Ghent celebrates the centenary of Flanders' sole winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature

CLEVELAND MOFFET

The trouble is that there's more than one Maurice Maeterlinck. There's the writer of lush fairy tales like *Pelléas and Mélisande* or *The Blue Bird*; there's the amateur naturalist who studied *The Life of the Bees*; there's the popular philosopher who wrote such uplifting treatises as *The Treasure of the Humble*, and finally there's the underappreciated genius of those eerie one-act plays, *The Intruder* and *The Blind*. Not to mention the poet and his simple, almost monosyllabic, volume *Hothouse*.

But now the city of Ghent, where Maeterlinck was born in 1862, is making an impressive effort to create a more coherent picture of their famous son as they celebrate the 100th anniversary of the year he won the Nobel Prize for Literature – the only Belgian to ever do so to this day.

In December of 1911, he was awarded the highest literary honour in the world, the Swedish judges said, mainly for *The Blue Bird* – its "charm and poetic fancy". The story of two children who travel through space and time in search of the elusive bluebird, it has been translated

and performed many times as a play and marionette theatre for audiences around the world. Several film versions also exist, including Flemish director Gust Van den Berghe's African folkloric *Blue Bird*, showing now in select cinemas.

The contemporary relevance of Maeterlinck's work only emerged with the plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter where silences – the unspoken – have a dramatic purpose in the development of character and atmosphere. In several of the Maeterlinck's pieces are meaningful, and sometime sinister, pauses in the dialogue, a device familiar in plays like Pinter's *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*.

And action, too, is reduced to a minimum in Maeterlinck's *The Blind* where the stage is divided in half, with six old blind men on one side and six blind women on the other. The theme of anxious waiting, so central in more than one of Beckett's plays, creates much of the tension and suspense in these works created half a century earlier.

 ➤ *continued on page 5*

Heritage subsidies rescue prize-winner

The organisation Tapis Plein, which won the Flemish region's Prize for Cultural Heritage two weeks ago after giving six of its staff provisional notice, has been reprieved in this year's round of cultural heritage subsidies. Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege announced that the Bruges-based group will receive a subsidy of €140,000 on top of the prize value of €12,500.

Tapis Plein is a centre of expertise for heritage, folk culture and oral history and travels around Flanders collecting information and staging exhibitions and workshops. Among its recent projects was a census of collectors in Flanders, which unearthed varied collections, including uniform buttons, snow globes, Liquorice Allsorts memorabilia and cuddly Dalmatians. The organisation was praised by

the prize committee for its "fresh and modern" approach to folk culture.

Other recipients of cultural subsidies announced last week: Volkskunde Vlaanderen (€200,000); the Expertise Centre for Technical, Scientific and Industrial Heritage (€190,000); figure theatre heritage group Het Firmament (€190,000); digital heritage group Packed (€285,000); the Centre for Agricultural History (€285,000); the Centre for Flemish Architectural Archives (€293,000); and the Centre for Religious History and Culture (€400,000). Two other groups, Family History Flanders and Local History Flanders, receive €260,000 and €350,000 respectively.

 ➤ www.cjsm.vlaanderen.be/cultuur

Extra year of teacher education being considered

More academic training aims to tackle staff shortages in Flanders

ALAN HOPE

Candidates for jobs as teachers in schools in Flanders could soon be required to study for an extra year, under a scheme being considered by Flemish education minister Pascal Smet. At present, schoolteachers follow a Bachelor's degree lasting three years, while teachers of classes in the upper levels of secondary schools train for four years. Under Smet's proposal, all teacher training would be extended to a four-year Master's degree within the next five years.

The idea has not yet attained the status of a government proposal. According to reports, Smet has been carrying out consultations in recent months with the education sector on career matters, and the

idea of extending teacher training arose out of that. Other countries in Europe have already introduced the change, but some questions the results.

Supporters of the project believe that extending the studies of teachers will lead to more professionalism, higher status and higher earnings, as well as attracting more young people into the profession and reversing the chronic shortage of teachers in Flanders' schools. A more academically oriented training, it is believed, could also help attract more men to teaching.

 ➤ *continued on page 3*

ALAN HOPE



© Rob Stevens/Kill eleven

Stephen Hawking

There are not many professors who can fill a university auditorium beyond capacity for an evening lecture; fewer still who can also hold spellbound the 3,000 or so watching the same lecture on a giant screen in a nearby city park. But Stephen Hawking is no ordinary professor. Last week's event at the Catholic University of Leuven was an occasion for excitement. The number of tickets was always going to be insufficient – the auditorium seats about 1,000 – and in the end, some of those who were unsuccessful were reduced to tears. Others who had better fortune attempted to sell their free tickets on the internet. Hawking first made a name for himself as a professor of mathematics at Cambridge University in the late 1970s. A formidable theoretical cosmologist, the British professor had a particular genius for the physics of black holes and quantum gravity. Before that, after graduating from Oxford and starting a PhD at Cambridge, he began to show signs of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a degenerative form of motor neuron disease. By 1974, Hawking had lost virtually all muscle power, and in

1985 a tracheotomy made it impossible for him to speak. A colleague at Cambridge built him a device to communicate using eye movements, which are deciphered by a computer and transferred to a voice synthesiser. Now 69, Hawking is an academic celebrity and arguably the most famous scientist in the world. His accessible books have sold very well, particularly *A Brief History of Time* (1988), which was a best-seller. The sense that the Leuven event was a once-in-a-lifetime occasion brought students, staff and others out in their thousands, even if it meant sitting for an hour in the October cold, under the kind of starry sky that is Hawking's area of expertise. "It was interesting, but a bit short," one student complained to the VRT later. Another agreed: "But this man obviously has so many ideas that it's impossible to lay them all out. I've seen some of his clips on YouTube, but I've heard a lot of new things here that I never knew before." A video of Hawking's lecture can be viewed online at <http://dagkrant.kuleuven.be/?q=node/10169>

Don't forget

Get the news from Flanders online in English and French at www.flanderstoday.eu



FLANDERS TODAY
NOVEMBER 2, 2011

News in brief

Flemish ministers Pascal Smet (education) and Geert Bourgeois (integration) last week launched a new website aimed at making it easier for foreigners learning Dutch to practice the language outside of the classroom. The website gathers tips from associations like De Rand and Het Huis van het Nederlands to give learners the opportunity to speak Dutch in real life without, as many so often complain, the person they face switching immediately to English.

→ www.taalboulevard.be

The cost of sending a letter will rise on 1 January from 61c to 65c, if stamps are bought in packs of 10. Individual stamps go up from 71c to 75c. International stamps for postage within Europe go up from 93c to 99c if bought in fives, and from €1.03 to €1.09 if bought individually. Postage outside Europe will cost €1.19 or €1.29. Ninety-percent of all stamps are bought in multiples.

The federal police and the financial sector association Febelfin have issued a warning to bank customers against "shoulder surfing" – where criminals spy on customers at ATMs to find out their PIN code. The card is then stolen and used to withdraw money. Most victims are women, usually over 55 years. Vulnerable spots are supermarkets and withdrawal spots inside bank entrances. Customers are advised to be vigilant and to ignore all distractions while doing business at an ATM.

A new system of electronic voting machines was tested last week in

Flanders and Brussels, involving 6,000 volunteers in 22 locations. The machines, according to federal interior minister Annemie Turtelboom, presented no technical problems and the testers found them easy to use. Two Brussels municipalities are likely to bring the new machines into use at the next local elections in October of next year.

Mechelen mayor Bart Somers found himself faced with a bill for €6,000 for the use of his official iPad on a family holiday to Canada, as he had been unaware of the cost of data roaming charges. He has repaid the surplus from his own funds.

Coffee shops in Terneuzen, Goes and Vlissingen, located in the Netherlands just over the border from Flanders, will no longer sell marijuana to customers coming across the border, in an attempt to tackle the problem of drugs tourism. Customers will now have to show a Dutch ID card and a special "weed-pass" to be served. Maastricht recently introduced a similar measure aimed at French tourists, though Belgian nationals are still served there.

Flemish public waste agency OVAM last week found traces of asbestos in the silt and bed of a stream on the border between the municipalities of Kapelle-op-den-Bos and Willebroek, Antwerp province close to the site of the factory run by Eternit, which is currently involved in a court case brought by victims of a cancer linked to asbestos. The stream water itself tested negative. The concentrations

of asbestos still needs to be determined. A verdict in the court case, meanwhile, is expected on 28 November.

The Flemish government has laid in an initial store of 42,000 tonnes of road salt for the coming winter, mobility minister Hilde Crevits told the Flemish parliament last week. Last year the region used a total of over 64,000 tonnes of salt, at a cost of €13.5 million. The region also has a fleet of 180 trucks equipped with an automatic GPS system that allows drivers to clear roads with which they are not familiar. The automatic system is more responsive and uses less salt.

The crisis centre of the federal interior ministry last week announced it was lifting some of the special measures it had imposed for the protection of Knokke mayor Leopold Lippens, following kidnap threats made several months ago by a man who is now in prison. Lippens, 69, will continue to receive extra police surveillance. Details of the alleged plot have not been given.

Planckendael animal park in Mechelen last week welcomed a new arrival. Mégane is the new offspring of the park's Poitou donkey Baudette, a species known for its long, tangled hair similar to dreadlocks. Unlike her mother, who is brown, Mégane is entirely black apart from a white spot on her muzzle. The pregnancy lasted 12 months.

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Chance of a lifetime

If you haven't been thinking recently about dying, now's the time to start because an opportunity like this may not come along again soon.

Last week, the city council of Antwerp published a catalogue of graves in the famed Schoonselhof cemetery in the district of Hoboken, which are now available for occupancy on a temporary basis. For as little as €1,000, you could have a really impressive headstone among some very distinguished company.

The Schoonselhof cemetery is named after a nearby castle and was acquired by the city in 1911. After a 1784 decree by Emperor Jozef II putting a stop to burials in churchyards, cities and towns were obliged to bury their dead outside the centre, and the Hoboken site seemed perfect. The first person to be buried there was a German soldier, in 1914. Since then, the cemetery has established a Jewish section as well as memorials for more than 1,500 soldiers of the British Commonwealth. Among the other residents are Flemish writers Hendrik Conscience, Herman De Coninck, Willem Elsschot and Paul Van Ostaijen.



Many of the graves are now being made available for re-occupation, as the remains of previous tenants are moved to an ossuary. Antwerp has published a catalogue of what's on offer, which is also online.

There are 64 graves available, some of them holding up to six coffins, or more in the case of cremation urns. The simplest is probably a polished granite slab and headstone with a vase at the foot: a one-time payment of €1,000 and €500 for each 25 years of use. In return, you have to commit to some simple maintenance.

Further up the scale, the choice is dizzying. All manner of decoration: reliefs of angels, crosses and the face of Christ; obelisks, sidestones and cornerstones, wreaths, doves, scrolls, swags and even photo frames. At the top of the range is a chapel for urns complete with neo-Classical facade and wrought-iron door.

The catalogue can be downloaded at www.antwerpen.be/overlijden (look for "grafmonumenten").



Additional training could help with language teaching

→ continued from page 1

Critics argue the longer study period will in fact turn prospective teachers away from the profession, making the deficit worse. In addition, quality will suffer, with teachers coming out of training as educational theoreticians rather than dedicated teachers of children. Roger Standaert, professor of comparative educational science at the University of Ghent: "France recently extended its training, but the fourth year turns out to be more of the same. And four-year training in Germany and the Netherlands also demonstrate very little added value compared to the three-year bachelor's we have."

But he says that there is certainly room for improvement. "French in primary schools cannot any longer be taught to the standards required without an additional training," he said. "In particular, the competence of teacher trainers could be a lot higher."

Among the other ideas being considered by Smet's office is the creation of schools of education, which would group together various forms of training (primary school,

secondary school and technical school), as well as carrying out research, training school directors and taking care of continuing education for working teachers.

Tackling truancy

Meanwhile, the Agency for Education Services last week sent out letters to more than 15,300 parents of schoolchildren in Flanders, warning them that they could lose their education allowances as a result of their children's persistent truancy. The children – about evenly split between primary and secondary school – have been absent from school without a valid excuse for more than 30 half days during two consecutive school years. Families on low incomes are eligible for education allowances of up to €400 a year for each secondary school student and €120 for a child in primary school. In some cases, allowances already paid out could be recouped. "A few too many parents shove the responsibility for their children's upbringing off onto the schools," minister Smet told VRT radio.



© Shutterstock

The last time such a letter was sent out – to 4,000 homes in 2010 – only 351 parents had their allowance withdrawn. "We don't go into it blind," Smet said. "We

warn the parents; we show them what could happen, and hopefully that's enough to get them to take responsibility." ♦

THE WEEK IN FIGURES



€150,000

pledged by the Flemish government to aid efforts following last week's earthquake in Turkey. The money will help provide the Red Cross and Red Crescent with winter materials

50c

more for a ticket for the buses, trams and metro of the Brussels public transport authority MIVB, a price increase of 25%. A day ticket for tourists goes up from €4.20 to €6

€27,500

fine for aluminium smelter Malvè for building a concrete warehouse on a Neolithic archaeological site in Hoogstraten, Antwerp province, the oldest site in the country. The company also pays €5,000 damages to the Flemish Region

€1,000,000

set aside by the Brussels Region for the shelter of homeless people this coming winter, adding 400 seasonal beds to the 193 in permanent use

3

people died and 77 were injured in accidents involving the coast tram so far this year, mobility minister Hilde Crevits said

Willy De Clercq dies at 84

Willy De Clercq, one of the most distinguished Flemish politicians of the second half of the 20th century, died last week. De Clercq not only changed the fortunes of his liberal party, he also played an important role on the European stage.

Willy Clarisse Elvire Hector De Clercq was born in Ghent in 1927. He studied and then lectured in law at the university before starting a career in politics that saw him occupy almost all of the posts available to a politician: city council, member of parliament, minister, vice-premier, member of the European parliament and EU commissioner. In an interview in 2004 he regretted never having been mayor of Ghent, for which he would have been prepared to give up his ministerial post. Though his party had enough votes to put him in the post, other parties formed a cartel to keep him out.

The other post that escaped him was prime minister, though he was to pave the way for the first liberal in a generation to move into Wetstraat 16: fellow *Gentenaar* Guy Verhofstadt, who last week described the elder statesman as "my political father". De Clercq's legacy also continues in his grandson Matthias, who is an alderman in Ghent and a member of the federal parliament.

In 1985 De Clercq was named Minister of State. He retired from politics "with pain in my heart" in 2004, and in 2006 he was ennobled by the King as *burggraaf*, or viscount. In 2007 De Clercq suffered a head injury in a fall, which led to memory loss. He spent his last years in a rest home and died last Friday after a long illness.



© Beoga

"Willy De Clercq was in a class of his own as a man and as a politician," said Alexander De Croo, president of the Flemish liberal party Open VLD. "He had the gift of words like no other. His charisma enabled him to inspire others to dream of the impossible, and to achieve the possible."

"I'm especially grateful to him," said Verhofstadt, "for his courage, his conviction, his tirelessness, his statesmanship, his role as a builder of bridges and the fact that he put liberalism on the map in this country."

Jose Manuel Barroso, president of the EU commission, said that De Clercq was "a brilliant politician who played an important role in the public life of Belgium and Europe."

And he paid personal tribute to De Clercq's role in helping bring about his homeland Portugal's entry in 1986 into the then European Economic Community. ♦

Dutch supermarkets could start price war

Food shopping in supermarkets in Flanders and Brussels is on average 10% more expensive than it is in the Netherlands, according to a study carried out for economy minister Vincent Van Quickenborne. The regions are also more expensive, by a smaller margin, than France and Germany. But for Flanders, relief could be on the way.

The study looked at the prices of what the trade calls A-products (generally internationally known brands that allow comparisons across borders) and B-products (own-brand products manufactured on licence for the supermarket). The price differences measured ignored

two important factors: money-off offers were not taken into account, whereas coupons are extremely popular here; and the price difference between A and B products was not considered, although the gap in Flanders is larger than elsewhere.

Among the reasons for the difference are the structure of the Dutch market, which is monolingual and dominated by one major player; and the Dutch labour force, which for supermarkets includes a great many young people working part-time at less cost to employers.

The situation in Flanders could be about to change, with the announcement, also last week, that the Dutch supermarket chain Albert Heijn, by far the market

leader north of the border, is to open eight new stores in Flanders, to join the two already in Antwerp province. Like those stores, the new branches will be franchise operations, one of them in central Antwerp.

The new stores are expected to provide 500 jobs and attract about 250,000 customers a week. Albert Heijn has been responsible in recent years for a savage price war with its competitors, which forced prices down in the Netherlands. With the news of an increased push into Flanders, the main players here – Carrefour, Delhaize and Colruyt – will now be arming themselves for a similar struggle. ♦

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Fighting federalism

Some people think that this country is divided by a conflict between the Dutch and the French speakers. If it was only that, how simple our politics would be.

A new type of conflict has emerged, which has to do with the way Belgium is organised. A little constitutional lesson: Federalism in Belgium means that the country consists of communities (Dutch, French and German speakers) and regions (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels). Between these entities and the federal state, there is no hierarchy. They are all equal in status and, in theory, peacefully co-exist.

Where this can lead to in practice became clear some years ago when the Brussels Region introduced noise level regulations that made it impossible for Brussels Airport – located in the Flemish Region – to function. Without hierarchy, there was no higher authority to arbitrate between the two. In the end, the conflict was only settled years later – in silence, after all the commotion had died down. Recently, there were similar cases in which the federal entities found themselves at opposite sides. When the Communal Holding was liquidated just a couple of weeks ago, there was a bitter debate about who should bear the bulk of the costs involved: the federal state or the regions?

Last week, Charles Michel, the federal negotiator for the French-speaking liberals, demanded that the regions should contribute more to the budgetary efforts Belgium has to make. His party not being part of any regional government obviously makes it easy to make such demands. He looked to Flanders first, it being the richest region.

Unsurprisingly, Flanders refused to make more cuts, seeing as it is the only region that sticks to budgetary norms already. We cannot be punished for that, minister-president Kris Peeters argues. However, the Walloon region, too, begged to differ with Michel, arguing that it is in dire need of money already.

Neither of these incidents boil down to Dutch and French speakers arguing. Rather, they are all conflicts between the federal state and its so-called federated entities. Fighting federalism this is called, where the peaceful co-existence seems to have been traded in for begrudging and adversity. Part of this is because different parties are in government at different levels. It makes people forget that all these levels represent the same people: us. And it turns our country even more into what Bart De Wever calls "a permanent diplomatic conference".

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Banks • Lloyds**

The Brussels affiliate of British bank Lloyds TSB will close with the loss of some 30 jobs. Meanwhile, Deutsche Bank has announced plans to develop its local activities in response to a doubling of customers this year. It will open several new locations in the next few months, including branches in Mortsel, Lommel and Wemmel.

Food • GIMV

The Flanders regional investment fund GIMV, in partnership with Monaghan Mushrooms of Ireland, has acquired Walkro, the leading European producer of mushroom bedding and compost, based in Maasmechelen, Limburg province.

Furniture • Cassina

Up-market Italian furniture designer and upholsterer Cassina will open its first flagship store in the Benelux countries on Louizalaan in Brussels on 3 November.

HVAC • Daikin

Japanese air-conditioning specialist Daikin has invested €13 million in a new appliance development centre in Ostend, where the company already employs 1,500 people at its European headquarters. Research staff will now be doubled from 75 to 150.

Ports • Antwerp

The Port of Antwerp is planning to build a biomass-fired power station in partnership with the local Solvay chemicals and plastics company. The new facility would meet most of the port area's energy requirements. Meanwhile, traffic at the port increased 7.5% for the first nine months of this year compared to the same period in 2010.

Property • Retail Estates

The Ternat-based Retail Estates property group is investing up to €55 million to develop shopping centres in Tongeren, Bruges and Namur. The new 32,000 square-metre facility in Tongeren will include more than 25 stores, including Delhaize, Hubo, Vanden Borre and Dreamland. In Bruges, the 12,000-square-metre retail park will have 10 stores, including Lidl and Hubo.

Supermarkets • Albert Heijn

Dutch supermarket chain Albert Heijn of parent company Ahold, has opened its second store in Flanders last week, in Stabroek, Antwerp province. By far the largest supermarket chain in the Netherlands, the company plans to open eight more stores in Flanders in 2012, which will bring the total here to 10.

Taxes • Company cars

New directives on deducting the value added tax imposed on company cars are to come into force before the end of the year. In most cases, it will become more expensive for companies to own cars.

→ 120

jobs lost when the FBFC plant in Dessel, Antwerp province, which makes uranium rods for reactors, closes in March of next year

FLANDERS TODAY
NOVEMBER 2, 2011

Uplace wins planning permission

Opponents considering legal challenge to shopping complex

ALAN HOPE

The Flemish government last week approved planning permission for Uplace, the giant shopping and leisure complex in Machelen, Flemish Brabant. The decision comes soon after the province of Flemish Brabant refused to grant an environmental permit.

Uplace will be situated on the site of the former Renault car plant just outside the Brussels Ring. It will overtake Wijnegem in Antwerp province to become the largest shopping centre in Brussels or Flanders, with a total area of 200,000 square metres. After opening in 2015, Uplace expects to attract up to eight million visitors a year to shops, eateries, offices and a hotel.

Flanders had already approved the complex under the terms of a "brownfield covenant" under which permission would be granted in return for the cleaning-up of a former industrial site. However Flemish Brabant objected on the grounds that the site would cause unprecedented traffic problems.

The municipality of Machelen is in

favour of Uplace, but neighbouring Vilvoorde is against it. So, too, is the organisation for the self-employed, Unizo, which fears for the future of local businesses. They, along with environmental organisation Bral, are considering legal steps. "We will continue to do anything we can to prevent this project from happening," Unizo said in a statement.

Filip Watteeuw, fraction leader for Groen! in the Flemish parliament, criticised the approval for the project, claiming that it ignores the objections of local residents, representatives of the local economy and environmental campaigners. He also said that it goes against the government's policy on the retail industry, which supports local shops against the arrival of commercial "mega-fortresses".

Uplace COO Lorin Parys said: "It is incomprehensible that a country with so many rainy days has so little to offer in the way of covered shopping centres. Organisations like Unizo are holding back the arrival of 3,000 extra jobs. In any case, we don't need the support of Unizo. We have passed



through the democratic process. We don't have to defend ourselves against an organisation that represents a particular lobby."

In terms of the environmental permit, Uplace has appealed the

province's refusal to grant it to Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege, who is expected to announce her decision in the new year.♦

→ www.uplace.eu

Space Agency to invest in Flanders

The European Space Agency (ESA) will invest €250,000 in the development of a Business Innovation/Incubation Centre (BIC) in Geel, Antwerp province, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters announced last week, following his visit to the ESA in Paris.

The new BIC will help support the recognition of Flanders as a knowledge region and will receive the cooperation of the Flemish space industry, technology centre IMEC in Leuven, the study centre for nuclear energy and the Flemish Institute for Technological Research, both in Mol. There are currently five other BICs in Europe: two in Germany, and one each in the Netherlands, Italy and the UK.

"Flemish companies and research institutes have achieved impressive technological and commercial success in the space industry," Peeters said. "We can now travel further along this road. The support for the BIC is welcome assistance for our excellent technology and enterprises to achieve further success."

During talks with ESA director-general Jean-Jacques Dordain, Peeters made the case for an increased role for small- and medium-sized businesses in Flanders in ESA projects. He also pressed for more openings for young graduates from Flanders in internships at the agency. "This is in the interests of our young engineering students and of the ESA, who can provide young talent with the experience needed to allow them to move on into the space industry," he said.



The European Space Agency's Galileo satellite project

The ESA talks were part of an official visit to the United Nations educational and cultural organisation Unesco. Peeters took part in the assembly's debate and later spoke at the organisation's first-ever leaders' forum on peace and sustainable development, as well as opening an exhibition on the effects of climate change on the world's heritage. He also expressed his support for the reforms planned by Unesco secretary-general Irina Bokova, while repeating the priority issues of the Flemish government: the commemoration of the First World War, education towards sustainable development, water and biodiversity.♦

Flemish beers take home nine World Beer Awards

Flemish beers from five breweries have won nine prizes at this year's World Beer Awards, held in London last week. The Palm brewing group from Steenhuffel, Flemish Brabant, won four medals: Best Ale and Best Dark Ale went to the Rodenbach Grand Cru; Best Speciality Dark Ale went to Rodenbach Vintage; and Steenbrugge Wit won the category of white beers.

Oude Geuze, brewed by Oud Beersel in Beersel, Flemish Brabant, won in the category Lambic Beers, Tongerlo Prior 9 by Haacht brewery in Boortmeerbeek, Flemish Brabant, won best Abbey Pale Ale, and Kriek Max by Bockor in Bellegem, West Flanders, won best Kriek.

Also in West Flanders, Bavik from Bavikhove took away three medals: Petrus Dubbel Bruin as best Abbey Dark Ale, Petrus Aged Pale as best Speciality Pale Ale, and Wittekerke Rosé as best Fruit White Beer.

Meanwhile, the recent trade mission to China has secured market access for Corsendonk brewery of Turnhout, Antwerp province, for the next 10 years, under an agreement signed with the Chinese brewery Zhengyuan. The deal will see Zhengyuan distribute 5,000 hectolitres a year of Corsendonk abbey beer.♦

→ www.worldbeerawards.com



Budget can carry Dexia losses this year

The Flemish government will carry the losses associated with the liquidation of the Municipal Holding (GH) in its budget for this year, minister-president Kris Peeters told the Flemish parliament last week, following hints to that effect from budget minister Philip Muyters a week ago.

Because of the liquidation of GH – the savings and investment organ of the country's municipalities – as a result of the collapse of Dexia bank, the three regions lose the guarantees they had put up to keep it operating. They also pay a share of €120 million in debts. For Flanders, the total loss comes to €265 million. The exact mechanisms the government plans to use to cover the losses have not yet been explained, but one option could be for Flanders to take over some of the GH's outstanding loans.

Peeters (pictured) also told the parliament that Flanders region will not be making any new budgetary savings in order to help the federal government make good its own share of the Dexia losses. Flanders had already done enough to take care of its own budgetary affairs, he said. His counterparts in Wallonia and Brussels were "standing together in one line" on the subject, he said.♦



© Bruno Ferty

The many sides of Maeterlinck

The playwright is explored from every angle in Ghent's anniversary bash

→ *continued from page 1*

One of the first Symbolists, Maeterlinck turned his back on the theatre of eloquence and gesticulation, the realism of his day and, in the words of British theatre historian Eric Bentley, introduced "the nuance, the half-tone, the sigh, the whimper, and the wistfulness".

It is not a theatrical prescription that has survived outside of a few masterful hands. Other dramatists who came strongly under the Flemish writer's influence – Yeats, Synge, Wilde, Strindberg and, in the United States, Eugene O'Neill – were able to make use of his materials, to create enduring works from his fragments.

Maeterlinck the man was a complex combination of mystic and martinet. He grew up in Ghent in a well-off bourgeois family, studied law, made only a brief and half-hearted career out of it and might well have done little noteworthy with his life if he had not been propelled to instant fame by a Parisian critic.

In his spare time, the disgruntled lawyer wrote poems and a play – *Princess Maleine*, another of his ethereal heroines. With no prospect of producing it, he published the text himself and gave copies of it to his friends. Somehow, one of them landed on the desk of the theatre critic of *Le Figaro* in Paris. He read the play by this completely unknown author and the next day told the bemused readers of his paper that he had discovered a masterpiece, adding with a touch of hyperbole that it was "more beautiful than Shakespeare".

No one could have been more startled at this response than Maeterlinck himself. But he always had an eye for an opportunity and did not hesitate to exploit his sudden celebrity. He soon became the darling of Parisian high society.

Later, it was in Brussels that he met the



Georgette Leblanc and Maeterlinck at the English-language premiere of *The Blue Bird* at Haymarket Theatre in London in 1909

woman who would make a significant difference in his life, Georgette Leblanc, an actress, singer and dancer, as ambitious as she was glamorous. She took the reclusive playwright in hand and in time inspired some of his best work. Indeed, after more than 20 years, their liaison came to end at least partly because he refused to give her credit for some of the key ideas, she claimed, in one of his philosophical works. He did not deny the charge of virtual plagiarism but thought she should be honoured that he had borrowed her thoughts.

Local boy to the end

By producing a steady flow of books that reached international best-seller status, Maeterlinck became a very wealthy man indeed. He had a taste for palaces and immense mansions in France and, for all his reputed timidity, he had a Hemingwayesque streak. He liked fast cars, motorcycles, swimming, fishing and boxing.

He could be cruel, too. In Leblanc's biography of him, she tells us that when her cat got on the irritable author's nerves, he pulled out his revolver and The Nobel



© Frederick Cayley Robinson, 1909 / Courtesy Ghent City Archives

laureate was ennobled by Albert I in 1930, the beginning of a stultifying respectability. Count Maeterlinck lived another 19 years before his death in France in 1949. Near the end of his life, he wrote one more book, one unlike any of his others. *Bulles Bleues* (Blue Bubbles) is his memoir of growing up in Ghent, a fond evocation of Flanders and his family. Urged repeatedly to become a French citizen so that he might be elected to the French Academy, the Fleming who created a new language for the French theatre, lived and died a Belgian.♦

Links to Maeterlinck • Discover Ghent's Nobel son in a months-long celebration

LISA BRADSHAW

Ghent is going all out to promote the anniversary of Maeterlinck's Nobel prize win in Maeterlinck100. You can take a two-hour **walking tour** of the city with anecdotes about the literary celebrity, plus an optional **marionette version** of *The Blue Bird*. Or sink your teeth into a **gastronomic tour** that encourages you to taste some of the great man's favourite dishes in restaurants featuring "Maeterlinck menus".

Finding Maeterlinck sites in Ghent is in fact a bit of a trick because both the house in which he was born and the house in which he grew up have been demolished. (The former is Peperstraat 6, where a bronze plaque marks the site. The latter is Hubert Frère-Orbanlaan 65 near the city's Zuidstation.)

Fortunately still standing is the **Rijvissche Castle** in the Ghent municipality of Zwijnaarde, which was home to Maeterlinck's maternal grandmother. Maeterlinck stayed here often, especially during summer holidays. It's a beautiful piece of 16th-century architecture, with 18th-century renovations, which could easily have influenced both the Symbolist magic and the naturalist texts for which he would become famous.

There is must-do right in Ghent, however: a visit to the newly renovated **Maeterlinck Room** in the Museum Arnold Vander Haeghen (Veldstraat 82). Based on its previous less-than-exciting arrangement and being completely hidden from

view, it was once only a realm for Maeterlinck enthusiasts who made the effort to seek it out. Due to re-open on 9 November, the Maeterlinck Room is undergoing a complete renovation both to modernise the layout and to, according to the city, transform its "unconditional admiration" to a more "objective" approach. Visitors will be led through the life story of Maeterlinck through photos, books, newspaper clippings and interactive displays, under the moniker "An Odyssey Towards Silence", emphasising the Flemish writer's lifelong anxiety and fear of being disturbed. Individuals can visit on Fridays and Saturdays from 14.30.

The World of George Minne and Maurice Maeterlinck One of the cornerstones of the Maeterlinck anniversary, this exhibition illustrates the close working relationship and spiritual affinities between the author and the Ghent-born sculptor, George Minne. Minne designed some covers of Maeterlinck's works, which are on show, along with work by artists the pair influenced, such as Léon Spilliaert and Fernand Khnopff. Until 19 February, Museum of Fine Arts, Fernand Scribedreef 1, www.mskgent.be

L'Oiseau bleu: The Pursuit of Happiness An exhibition devoted to *The Blue Bird*, the play specifically cited by the Nobel committee when they awarded Maeterlinck the Literature Prize in

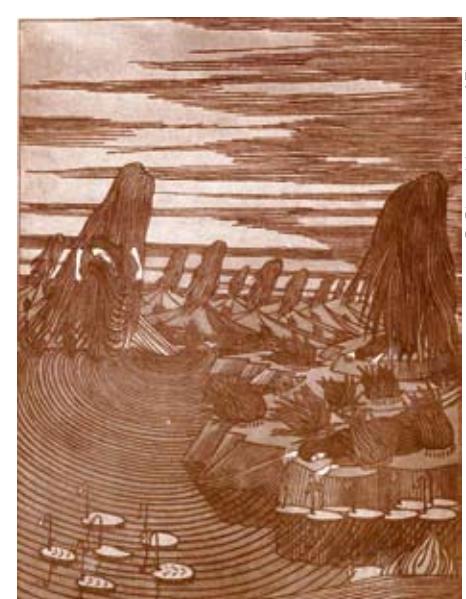
1911 and one of the most enduring stories of the 20th century. 9 December to 22 April, Sint-Pieters Abbey, Sint-Pietersplein 9, www4.gent.be/sintpietersabdij

Maeterlinck Concerts A series of concerts inspired by the author's work. Don't miss The Brussels Philharmonic perform Arnold Schoenberg's symphonic version of *Pelléas and Mélisande* or Ghent-based composer Joachim Brackx's new work inspired by the sense of fate in Maeterlinck's plays. January through May, De Bijloke, Bijlokekaai 7, www.debijloke.be

Douze Chansons Twelve of Maeterlinck's poems put to music by the Ghent-based Spectra Ensemble. 3 February, 20.00, Pacificatiezaal, Town Hall, Botermarkt 1, www.spectraensemble.com

Maeterlinck Colloquium Literary academics and writers come together to lecture and debate the place of the Flemish Nobel Laureate in the modern theatre. 4 February, Royal Academy of Dutch Language and Literature, Koningstraat 18 (In Dutch and French)

Maeterlinck mania continues in Ghent through April. Check back next spring for further highlights
→ www.maeterlinck100.be



George Minne's design for the frontispiece of Maeterlinck's play *Princess Maleine*, 1890

Assertively passive

Eco-friendly school in Lozen is one of 20 being built across Flanders

ANDY FURNIERE

In 2008, then Flemish minister of education Frank Vandenbroucke visited so-called passive schools in Germany and wondered why Flanders didn't have any. Now 20 passive schools are being constructed all over the region. One of them, in the small village of Lozen, should be finished by the start of the 2012 school year.

Passive schools are constructed to require only a minimum of heating or cooling thanks to special insulation and a sophisticated ventilation system. Windows are oriented so as to catch the heat of the sun.

Passive schools are more expensive to build than traditional schools, so the 20 pilot projects have received funding from the Flemish Agency for School Infrastructure, which covers up to 70% of the costs. "Besides," explains spokesperson Peggy De Tollenare, "extra costs are quickly recovered as passive schools consume 75% less energy than traditional schools."

De Tollenare says the investment is justified because of its additional role of raising awareness. "It broadens the interest for sustainable building and helps architects, design studios and contractors gain experience."

"Passive schools consume 75% less energy than traditional schools"

One of the first projects to be completed will be the primary school with kindergarten in the village of Lozen, a district of Bocholt in Limburg province. Lozen was selected because the school board had already made similar plans in 1998, which means the project could be executed in a short time span.

"A member of the school committee lived in a passive house," says Jean Segers, the chairman of the school board and the school's principal at the time. "After visiting passive schools in Luxembourg, we drafted a proposal and applied for grants."



The future passive school in Lozen is the first of many planned in Flanders

The school wants to educate the region. "We will give guided tours to interested schools or groups," says the school's current principal Monique Knevels. "We want to be an information point for the area." Segers adds: "We also hope to raise awareness for sustainable living among our own children, as they study and grow up in eco-friendly classrooms."

Rainwater reservoir

The project in Lozen will cost more than €6 million, around €4 million of which is paid for by the Flemish government. The municipality of Bocholt is investing some €2 million and the school board about €150,000. This budget includes the building of a gym and a dining hall and the renovation of two monuments: the former schoolmaster's residence and rectory.

The concrete walls of the passive school are built as to let almost no heat escape. The building is conceptualised

to use the warmth of the sun as efficiently as possible. "Ventilation is also key," says Segers. "We can guarantee excellent air quality all day."

Rain water will also be drained in an eco-friendly way. Through green roofs covered with grass and moss, some of the water will evaporate back into the atmosphere. The rest will be diverted to a reservoir for use in the buildings.

Since April, 50 pupils of the school in Lozen have had their lessons in modular classrooms. "It's not ideal," admits Segers, "but this inconvenience will soon be forgotten when the children move to our new building."

Other passive schools already in the building phase are located in Kruishouten and Zwevegem.♦

→ www.passief.be

Academic diplomacy • Higher education is to play a bigger role in Flanders' external relations

PHILIP EBELS



VUB rector Paul de Knop and his colleagues will be more involved in economic missions

Flanders has no real natural resources, but it does have one of the best research and education systems," says Paul de Knop, rector of the Free University of Brussels (VUB). "All Flemish universities come in the top 205 of 17,000 worldwide. That is why Kris Peeters had the idea to ask us to promote Flanders abroad – something I gladly take part in."

"There are three million foreign students worldwide, and we need them"

De Knop is happy with the recent overture of the Flemish minister-president towards the region's universities. They are to play a bigger role in external relations, according to a recently signed "protocol on academic diplomacy" and will be able to count on the support of the government in their international activities. The new agreement would mean, for example,

that universities will take part in economic missions of the Flemish government. "We used to participate in the royal missions of the federal government," says Knop, "and now we'll do this on a structural basis with Flanders."

Paul van Cauwenberge, rector of the University of Ghent, will also be involved with the missions. "We get in touch with local institutions that we may or may not already know and formalise our contacts," he explains.

Other initiatives include the launch of the website studyinflanders.be, where foreign students can find information about, yes, studying in Flanders; the foundation of the Flanders Agency for Mobility and Cooperation in Higher Education (or Flamenco); the separate foundation of the Flanders Knowledge Area, after the better-known interest group Flanders Port Area; and the organisation of an annual conference to showcase remarkable research in Flanders.

In English, please

The universities are on board but do ask for something in return. "We want to finally be allowed to teach in English," says Knop.

Master's degrees in Flanders may only be in English when the same programme is also provided in Dutch in the same province. Bachelor degrees all have to be in Dutch.

It is the result of a long and tedious struggle for the emancipation of the Dutch language, Knop explains, but it is something that has to change if Flanders wants to remain a front-runner in the world's knowledge-based economy. "There are three million foreign students worldwide, and we need them. There's a shortage of highly educated people – not only in Flanders. There are a lot of vacancies."

Van Cauwenberge agrees. "Compared to our neighbouring countries," he says, "we're lagging behind." But, he is eager to add, "we should be mindful not to let Dutch disappear as an academic language."

Meanwhile, there are already some 14,000 foreign students in Flanders, who are enrolled in a total of 246 programmes in a language other than Dutch. Universities themselves, too, employ a fair amount of foreigners: 2,800, or one in seven. And one-quarter of all research done in Flanders is paid for by money from abroad, mostly from EU funds.♦

→ www.studyinflanders.be

→ www.flamenco-vzw.be

When health means business

Flemish region awards grants to innovative care products

ALAN HOPE

The Flemish government plans to launch two additional invitations for projects bringing together health-care providers and business, following the success of an initial call earlier this year, minister-president Kris Peeters has announced. Last week five Flanders' Care projects were announced, which will share funding of €800,000.

The first call for participants went out early in the year, and by the May deadline, 29 applications had been received. Five were selected, and the winners were presented last week by the four Flemish ministers involved: Kris Peeters (minister-president and economy), Jo Vandeurzen (health), Philip Muyters (finance) and Ingrid Lieten (innovation).

"During the coming months, the selected projects will demonstrate their value in tests with the end-user in the field," Peeters said. The projects will also be accompanied by a specialised panel of experts.

RemeCare is aimed at treating sufferers of chronic heart and lung complaints at home, involving constant monitoring of each patient's critical symptoms by caregivers, in conjunction with the University Hospital of Leuven and the Our Lady Hospital in Aalst. According to Dr Mark Goethals of Aalst, the RemeCare system allows the rapid exchange of information to prevent patients going to the doctor for minor symptoms, while ensuring any serious change in condition is immediately spotted. The result is a savings in both suffering of patients and cost for the health sector.

The idea for **ReSkin** came from the cycling world, as cyclists needed flexible dressing that would allow them to continue training. The adhesive support dressing turned out to be perfectly suited to the needs of the less mobile elderly, for whom pressure sores are a constant problem. The patch was developed with the textile lab of the University College of Ghent and the Flemish Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology (IWT). It is dermatologically safe and impermeable, and the inner layer is non-adherent, allowing it to be removed without pain.

SOET stands for Self-Operated Endovaginal Telemonitoring and is aimed at women going through fertility treatment. In normal circumstances, a woman has to visit a treatment



The Care Lock allows caregivers to enter the homes of the elderly in case of problems, while the Blue Call app helps the mentally disabled to communicate



centre repeatedly to monitor ovulation. Using a simple ultrasound probe and an internet connection, SOET allows that to be done at home. The project also has an international application: it works for women living in remote areas. The project was set up with the help of the Ghent University Hospital. "Once the woman has learned how to use the probe, the rest is as simple as sending an email," said Professor Jan Gerris.

The Zorgslot, or **Care Lock**, allows caregivers to enter the homes of elderly people with limited mobility. The caregiver carries an electronic key that gives access to the patient's home, while the lock itself notifies the resident via a mobile phone that someone is entering. According to Wouter Fransen of Farion, the manufacturer, the system is "simple, flexible and affordable", can be installed in ten minutes and can also be used as a platform for other appliances such as smoke detectors.

The **Blue Call Phone** is an app for a smartphone that gives people with learning difficulties more independence. The phone is in constant GPS connection with the care centre, and, in case of problems, the carrier only has to press the Blue Assist logo to be connected. The phone can also be

pre-programmed with questions for members of the public, such as asking for directions, and contains a calendar with reminders for appointments and a camera, which allows phone contacts to be filed using images of the person instead of names.

Round two

The second call, which will go out soon, follows the same lines as the first: demonstration projects involving health and business partners that innovate to improve patient care in Flanders, while at the same time offering the possibility of spreading Flemish innovation internationally. The third invitation will concentrate on projects that offer social and medical advantages but that may have no initial commercial attraction. In all cases, priority criteria for consideration include patient autonomy, home care, preventive care and the use of technology, and target three priority groups: the elderly, people with dementia and the disabled. Projects in the second call will share a budget of €1 million and in the third call €500,000.♦

→ www.flanderscare.be

Powerfully against violence • Violence against women is the focus of the 40th anniversary of Leuven's annual Women's Day

MONIQUE PHILIPS

The 40th Vrouwendag, or Women's Day, in Leuven will welcome speakers from all over the world to tell their inspiring stories. Rape victims from the former Yugoslavia meet Congolese women who have suffered the same heart-wrecking war crime. How do they live with the threat, the crime and its aftermath? They've not only found the power to survive, but have also turned their victimhood into a force to be reckoned with.

While the rest of the world picked 8 March as International Women's Day, Flanders has the monopoly on 11 November, coinciding with Armistice Day. Yet the reason for it is much more mundane. It was the only day Simone de Beauvoir was available to come to Flanders in 1971 for the very first edition.

"Peace and violence always resonate with a large audience," says Ria Convents, one of the event's organisers. "Flemish women can relate to violence, whether it's domestic or global."

One of the day's main workshops deals with the effects of the worldwide economic crisis on women. "The focus is on the power of women. Where do their strengths lie?" Prior to the debate is a series of short films. One tells the story of an all-female Kosovo village that starts a vegetable cannery. Another shows the Columbian organisation Ruta Pacifica, which empowers women to stand up against rape and murder.

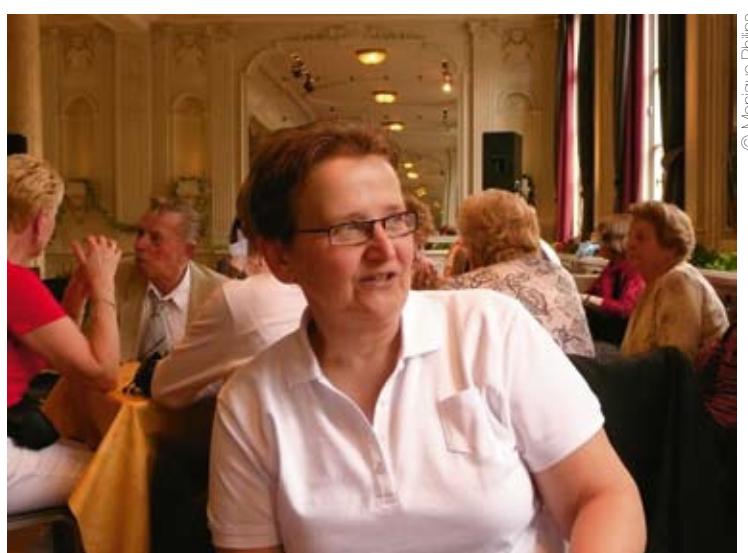
The Unknown War Woman True to another tradition, there will be a parade at the Monument for the Unknown Soldier in front of the city's central train station. "Before the veterans' ceremony, we honour the Unknown War Woman," says Convents. "There are a lot of women in Flanders who have fled one war or another."

International stories play an important role. "When in 2002 an Austrian woman came to speak, the attorney general was present," says Convents. "Soon after, Belgium had a new

law stating that a woman victim of domestic violence has the right to remain in her home, while the man has to leave immediately for at least 10 days."

Convents will be leading the no doubt heated debate on violence against lesbians. When two lesbian women were recently attacked in Brussels, Flanders was shocked. They will be sharing the stage in Leuven with an African asylum seeker, a Serbian advocate for gay pride events in Eastern Europe and a lesbian born in Flanders in an immigrant family.

The Dutch workshop Eigen Kracht Conferentie (Own Power Conference) also finds a spot on the agenda, while assertiveness and confidence will be the focus in others. More controversial will be the discussion on therapeutic assistance for perpetrators. "The fact is that 50% of abused women who leave return to their partners," says Convents. "Some social workers are convinced that it pays



"Many women in Flanders have fled war": Women's Day organiser Ria Convents

to treat couples, rather than women separately."

Women's Day events are in three locations across the city, linked by an art parcours, and the eclectic retro singer Lady Angelina will perform a closing concert.

"With violence touching so many

lives, it's essential to show ways out of it," concludes Convents. "Powerfully Against Violence, that's the slogan. Do you get it?"♦

→ www.vrouwendag.be

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**THE
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His fair share

Brit-born comedian Nigel Williams takes 30+ years of living in Flanders to the stage

ALAN HOPE

As a stand-up comedian, Nigel Williams has been blessed by events. Last year he did a show called *Geloof mij!* (Believe Me!) about religion, just in time to catch revelations of abuse in the Catholic Church. His new show is *Working Class Hero*, just as the world is catching light from the sparks of the Occupy Wall Street movement. We meet in his regular Antwerp haunt not far from the Groenplaats, a couple of hours before Occupy Antwerp, reinforced by some visiting *indignados*, is about to rally there. Last time we spoke, he was still recovering from a pulmonary embolism. Now he's back on form, slightly tired after filming a night shift at a vegetable market for the TV programme *Volt*, but still with the roguish twinkle in the eye that betrays his 57 years and his never-ending schedule.

The new show, which premiered last month and will continue touring into 2012, isn't really about class at all.

"In Belgium, you're not confronted with a class system. We come from the working class, but now we're middle class," he says. "I think everyone in Belgium is pretty much middle class; that's the first thing I realised when I came to live here. Obviously, there are the poor, but there's not that canyon between them and the middle class. You can still see the other side."

"If I see fear in their face, I leave them alone. I'm not there to take the piss out of people"

Williams was born in 1954 and grew up in Patchway, just outside of Bristol in southwest England. Mother stayed at home to look after the 13 children, and Father worked for the railways. He provides the quote Williams uses to launch the show, the encapsulation of his political philosophy. "Mum would cook the dinner, and Dad would put it in the middle of the table and say, tuck in everyone, but remember only to take your fair share."

On-stage *indignado*

Williams left school at 16 and went to work for British Aerospace. When the company started laying people off, he volunteered to go so that those with more need of a regular wage had a better chance. He came to Flanders in the late 1970s on the advice of a friend and worked in a factory in Mechelen and later at Opel Antwerp, where he became a shop steward in the socialist ABVV union.

He learned to speak Dutch on the factory floor, as you can hear when he speaks: fluent vernacular Flemish full of street-slang, the accent a mix of *Antwaarps* and

his original West Country English burr. He's performing *Working Class Hero* in both Dutch and English, depending on the night.

A week previously, Williams travelled to Brussels for a march by the same *indignados*. "I don't know what to think about it," he says. "There's all kinds of people there, hippies and yuppies, a little group of communists and all these Spanish people dressed as clowns. It's certainly confused the politicians because it's not about Left or Right. They've got no slogan about what they want, just what they don't want, which is okay. It's a sort of bucket protest, bring whatever you've got. Just go along and shout some shit and then go home. You feel like you've done something."

Indignado would be a good word to describe Williams' act, which doesn't consist of jokes as such. He's not really a storyteller, either. Instead, he delivers a series of ever-increasing narrative loops that end up completing one giant circle. What seems to be an endless series of digressions, soon all makes sense. This bit has led you up the garden path in order to approach the next bit from an unexpected angle, so you can see it from a new viewpoint.

"I'm not aware of that structure when I'm putting it together, but I am after I've been doing it for awhile," he says. "Once you go on stage – I won't say it's like a trance, but you've got to think so fast, you just do it." Despite how that description sounds, his act is uproariously funny. He's particularly good at interacting with members of the audience; at the premiere were at least three who bounced ideas with him back and forth.

"I always look for a few faces who might be up for it," he explains. "If I talk to somebody, and I see fear in their face, I leave them alone. I'm not there to take the piss out of people. Though sometimes you get people who want to be the centrepiece, and they won't shut up!"

Confrontation is my thing"

The show premiered in the Arenberg theatre in Antwerp in front of a fairly well-heeled crowd of Antwerp urbanites. Williams shares the stage with only a stool, a bottle of water and a microphone for two sets of 50 minutes each. The show is preceded by a video of his rendition of "De gewone werkmens" (The Ordinary Worker), a Dutch version of Britpop band Pulp's "Common People", with lyrics by Flemish columnist Patrick De Witte.

In the show, Williams' targets include: politicians and bankers, Walloons, the British, Dutch cabaret artists (with a killer imitation of Herman Van Veen), people who send hate mail, nationalists of every stripe, celebrity chef Peter Goossens (another hilarious imitation), the Japanese tsunami and the Pukkelpop disaster. The latter two subjects are raised to make a point about comedy: The further away from us a tragic event takes place, the sooner we can joke about it. The Pukkelpop line is more of a wry observation than



a joke, but the sharp intake of breath from the audience suggests his calculus is accurate: It's too soon and too close to home.

Otherwise, the audience is with him all the way – regardless that he's inviting them to laugh at themselves. "Confrontational stuff is my thing," he confirms. "I used to go up and tell loads of jokes. There are formulas for making jokes; it's not that difficult. But it got so boring, I thought I can't do this for the rest of my life. So I stopped doing that. But then you have to create a new audience, and I've only just started doing that."

Flemish Brit or British Flem?

The secret of his success lies in being an outsider. In *Working Class Hero* he makes much of the fact that for many Flemish people he'll always be an outsider, regardless if he's lived here longer than many of his critics have been alive. He also, he stresses, came to live here by choice, unlike most of those who are critical of his act.

And he is grateful to be here. "Maybe I should add to it. Flanders has been like my adopted family, so I know the good things

about it; I shouldn't just be hammering on the bad points. But that's funnier. I should make it clear I also find the Brit mentality very confusing. You see that in Brussels when you get a group of Brits. Do I belong to that tribe? I don't think so."♦

Working Class Hero

4 November, 20.30

CC De Herbakker
Pastoor De Nevestraat 10
Eeklo

12 November, 20.30

CC Palethe
Jeugdlaan 2
Overpelt

→ www.nigelwilliams.be

Both shows are in Dutch. For a complete schedule of shows in both Dutch and English, check the website

Special Edition



THE Bulletin
Newcomer THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO EXPAT LIFE IN BRUSSELS AND BELGIUM

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Welcome home

LEISURE Bars, books and what's on the box

WORK Employment and retirement

HOME A guide to moving and settling

Preparing . Formalities

Getting legal

Top: Spire of Brussels' town hall; bottom: Sante Gobain town hall

Settling down . Moving in

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you don't own any other properties in Belgium, you are eligible for a rebate.

Mortgages can be fixed for the term of the loan, variable annually, or reviewed every three or five years, with options on the type of interest payment. The fair common practice of using a mortgage broker can be helpful.

If you want to renovate a rented place, it's possible to draw up a 'renovation lease', where the landlord agrees to the transformations being made and pays the tenant by reducing the rent. It's best to get legal advice while drawing up this contract.

If you want to renovate a rented place, it's possible to draw up a 'renovation lease', where the landlord agrees to the transformations being made and pays the tenant by reducing the rent. It's best to get legal advice while drawing up this contract.

Buying

Buying a home is another viable option if you plan on settling in Belgium on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. The first step is to find a house in the area you'd like to move to. The next step is to spring into action the second you find your house. This is a legal requirement. It's typically the seller's notary that drafts the sales contract. This is a legally binding document for both the buyer and the seller. Upon signing, the buyer becomes responsible for the property, and therefore must insure it. At this time, a down payment is also required from the buyer (usually about 10 percent of the purchase price). Closing follows within four months' time.

The remainder of the money changes hands at this point. Unfortunately, the price agreed upon in the contract and the amount paid at closing may be quite different. As well as legal fees, most properties require a 12.5 percent registration tax to be paid to the state. However, if

Newcomer is published by The Bulletin twice a year to give you all the information you need to start a new life in Belgium. Our writers know the country inside-out — so we know the sort of questions people ask and the answers that can make all the difference as you settle away from home.

We can help you find the ideal neighbourhood and the right schools, and point you in the direction of where to learn a language, so you can really integrate into Belgian society. We also talk you through the social scene, getting married — or divorced — and finding a bank or health insurance policy. Not forgetting, of course, our guide to TV, books and bars.

Welcome to Belgium — we hope you like it here as much as we do.

The Autumn 2011 edition of
Newcomer is on sale at newsstands

THE Bulletin
Newcomer

The roots of a little white tree

Flemish artist famous for his sculpture on the moon shows abstracts

BJORN GABRIELS

Antwerp artist Paul Van Hoeydonck was born in 1925 and debuted with abstract works that continued the search for pure abstract art along the lines of De Stijl artists of the time. In the Interbellum, De Stijl strived towards a "new plastic art" that concentrated on the most minimal means of expression: horizontal and vertical lines, squares and rectangles, primary colors.

As one of the inspirators of the pivotal G58-Hessenhuis movement, formed in the year of the Brussels World Fair in 1958, Van Hoeydonck stood up for abstract art at a time when Belgian Expressionism called the tune. This group of mostly Antwerp painters followed in the footsteps of the first generation of local abstract artists and found refuge in a 16th-century warehouse (*hessenhuis*). They held exhibitions of primarily abstract art and organised various events to promote modern literature, film, theatre and music.

G58 disbanded in 1962, and Van Hoeydonck would later set out on a venture into abstract-inspired figurative art in diverse forms and shapes. Inspired by the embarking space programme in the late 1950s, he produced a series of "space art". He achieved extraterrestrial fame when the Apollo 15 crew placed his tiny "Fallen Astronaut" sculpture on the moon in 1971.

Forever remembered as the only man with a piece of art in outer space, Van Hoeydonck was excited to talk about the works that started it all, now on show at FeliXart in Drongenbos, Flemish Brabant.

In the 1950s, you helped give birth to the second generation of Flemish abstract artists. Did you feel the need to defend abstract art?

Yes, that was our battle. But, of course, one has to fight one's own battle. The artists of the first wave let themselves be pushed aside, unfortunately. We were more active. Jef Verheyen and me, we immediately travelled all over Europe by train or by airplane to make contacts far beyond our local Antwerp scene.

What position do these abstracts occupy in your entire oeuvre?

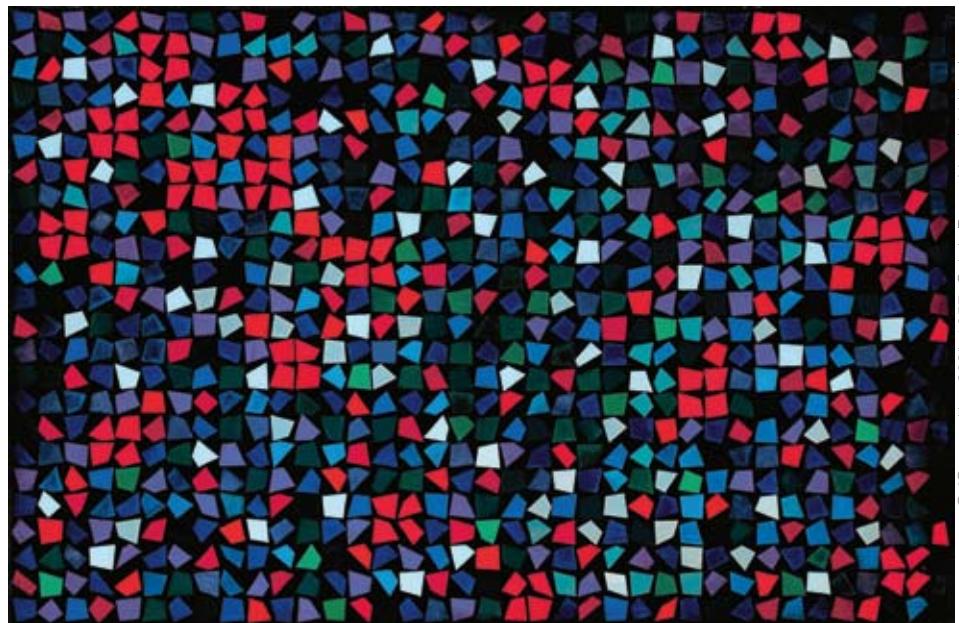
Obviously, you can see many artists in them, and critics have pinpointed this or that influence, but I've never set out to copy anyone. The efforts of those hard-working artists automatically found their way to me and were in my blood. At first, I objected to the idea of exposing the works I made during this period, but when I saw FeliXart's exhibition and the catalogue, I was truly touched.

The works show an exploring artist working towards a pure form of flat abstract art and then introducing depth and movement, like in the remarkable "Composition 888" [pictured].

Some of the works in this evolution had almost slipped my mind. I find it so odd that all those pieces go together so well, while I never tried to force anything. I simply liked working, and I still do.

This evolution grew organically?

Yes, organically is the right word. I've always said that I am a little white tree. On this tree grow many branches, and several of those branches bear no resemblance whatsoever to the trunk, but they always return. I've never wanted to join this or that trend. I couldn't care less. The writer of the catalogue [Jan Ceuleers] describes me as a loner, and that's what I am, up until today. At my age, looking back on my life, I am glad to have made those works.



© 'Composition 888', 1957, Galerie Ronny Van de Velde, Antwerp

The exhibition also shows a transition from colour to white. You said once that white is no longer a colour to you. White is no color for me, it is a spiritual experience. I imagined space to be in white because we knew nothing about it. If we are ignorant about something, white is the apt color. I know that the earth is black when it's not illuminated by the sun, but, nevertheless, my world always had to be white. Although I also made works in black.

Are you glad to be receiving attention for work than your "Man on the Moon"?

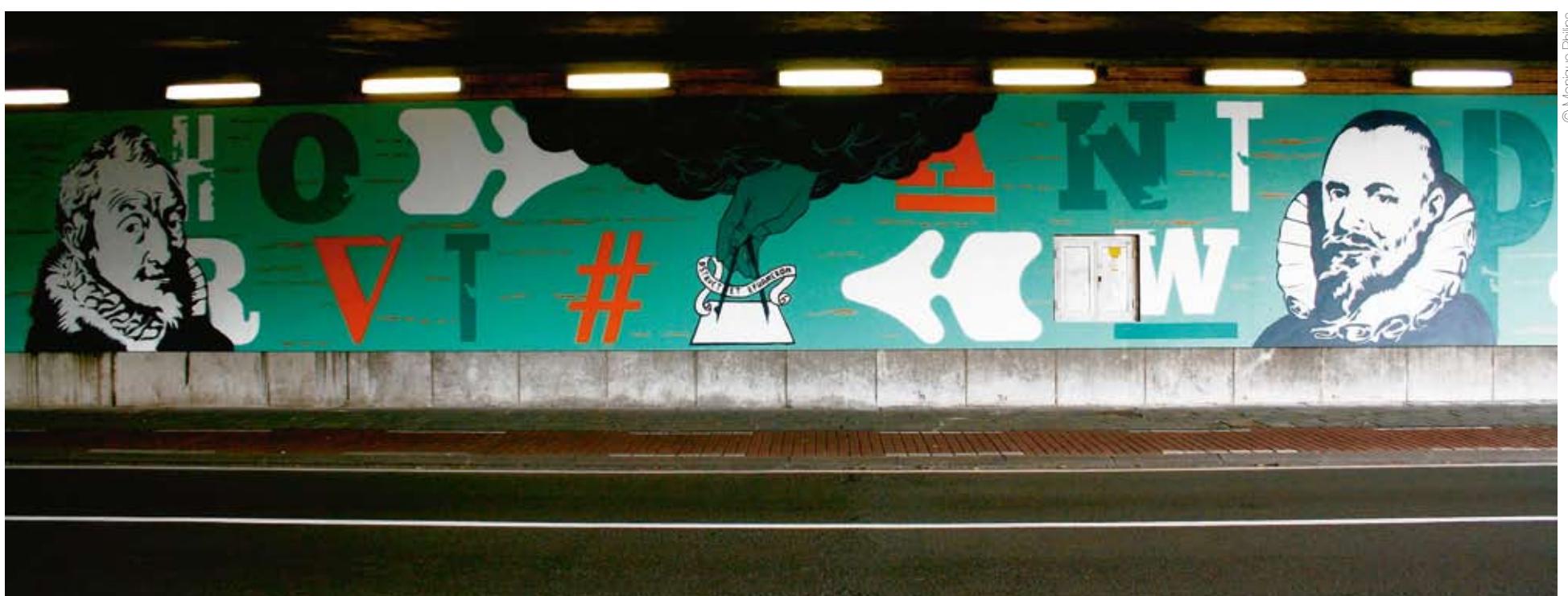
You bet I am! If I had to do it all over, I would do it just the same, but sometimes I can't stand the sight of it anymore. I'm the man standing behind the statuette. It has haunted me. I am really glad they didn't ask me to include it in this exhibition.

Then, what do you think about the wink to your space art through Belgian artist Rémi Tamburini's "Space Project" installation, also at FeliXart?

It's nice to see young people continuing in this line of work because there is currently so little interest in space. That saddens me. I've done my share and I think new generations should keep going on. I've always hoped more artists would do that. It's a good decision to include young artists in FeliXart. They don't outshine the entire exhibition, but their presence is felt.♦

Paul Van Hoeydonck: The Abstract Works

Until 18 December

FeliXart Museum
Kuikenstraat 6, Drogenbos→ www.felixart.org

© Monique Philips

From the page to the street City administrators worried about giving free rein to young artists for projects in public spaces need look no further than the Plantin en Moretuslei in Antwerp. When local artist Ephameron and Dutch artist Thijs Kelder of Studio Ruwe Data were contacted by the organisation Buurt aan de Beurt, which spruces up Antwerp streets, they were told they could create whatever they wanted on the dull and dirty concrete walls of the length of the traffic-heavy Plantin en Moretuslei that passes under the railway

in the Borgerhout district. Far from what you might expect, the pair reached into Antwerp's illustrious past and, inspired by the name of the street, have created a loving monument to the legendary printers Plantin and Moretus. The early publishing company, founded by Christoffel Plantin in the 16th century and later run by the Moretus family, was in business for more than 300 years and is kept in Antwerp's collective consciousness by the Plantin-Moretus Museum. Ephameron and Kelder's colourful mural features images

of Plantin and Jan Moretus, people reading, printing symbols and pigeons (which "stand for the previous inhabitants – and soilers – of the bridge," says Ephameron). The pair also "wallpapered" the concrete pillars with designs inspired by old book covers, and even customised the Plantin-Moretus logo to fit their own signatures. If only all paint on urban walls looked this good. (Lisa Bradshaw)

→ www.tinyurl.com/buurtaandebeurt



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putting people first

Memories for the future

JOHAN GRIMONPREZ RETROSPECTIVE

LISA BRADSHAW

Say one day a giant flying saucer descends from the sky and lands in your street. Then say a hatch opens and green humanoids come out. Naturally, you would be amazed. But you would also probably be terrified. Do you venture out of doors? Watch from behind a curtain? Run away as fast as your legs could take you?

In 1959, a group of anthropologists landed a helicopter in a remote village in New Guinea. Having no world view that included flying machines or white people, this is exactly the situation that the local indigenous people experienced.

When Johan Grimonprez arrived in the village in 1986, the first question he was asked by a local was: "Where is your helicopter?"

These kinds of fascinating anecdotes pepper the screens and the walls of Flanders' first-ever Grimonprez retrospective, on now at Ghent's modern art museum SMAK. Born in Roeselare, West Flanders, the 49-year-old has lived in New York for the better part of his life and teaches at the city's School of Visual Arts.

The exhibition, *It's a Poor Sort of Memory that Only Works Backwards*, has the ambition to be constructed like a giant iPad where you switch from screen to screen at your leisure – watch a few minutes here, listen a few minutes there. (In fact, because of a rather faulty exhibition map and the SMAK's penchant for not labelling individual pieces, that works quite successfully – if occasionally proves frustrating.)

Grimonprez's 25-minute *Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter* is a perfect jumping-off point to discover his many short- and feature-length films, all of which in some way question, probe or lay flat out bare the cultural manipulation of the media. But he's also fascinated with folklore, with popular legends that most people don't really believe (fish falling from the sky, a little girl's balloon being found thousands of miles away by a girl with the same name).

Through historical footage, home movies and film clips – he's especially taken with Hitchcock – Grimonprez asks us to believe that anything is possible. You don't believe that frogs could fall from the sky? Did you believe that the banks could fail? Did you believe that the American presidential election could be stolen?

The Flemish filmmaker's works are heavy subjects but are peppered with hilarity. His longest works are here: *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, which propelled him into the



international spotlight in 1997, is a study of terrorism and its truths and myths. ("You must have been miserable in that plane for three days." "Oh no, it's a very large airplane; we were quite comfortable.") *Double Take* (2009) is about screen representations and double identities, both in fiction and in the TV news.

Unfortunately, you won't find the short *Looking for Alfred*, about the casting of Hitchcock doubles, but you will find many of his lesser-known shorter works, and a wonderful sound installation transmits an interview with American actress Karen Black about her conversations with Alfred Hitchcock, particularly his concern that, following surgery, he no longer possessed a belly button.

If Grimonprez had been born with a different kind of

brain, he might have been no more than a conspiracy theorist. But perhaps we shouldn't think of that as a four-letter word and accept the idea that to make this kind of work, you have to believe in the impossible first. Only then can you begin to investigate the complicated realities of the world.♦

Until 29 January
SMAK
Citadelpark, Ghent
→ www.smak.be

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Every November, Bruges reminds us that it was once a gateway to the wider world by inviting musicians from around the globe to perform in its Bruges Festival. Held in the glittery setting of the Stadsschouwburg, this small but impeccably programmed world music fest celebrates its 25th anniversary this year with a few living legends mixed in with more confidential figures. The common denominator is their strong individuality, their refusal to be pinned down as museum pieces, their belief that the musical traditions they love and embody must be tampered with and constantly recreated in order to be kept alive.

Festivities will open with Aussie singer-songwriter Janine Maunder (pictured), followed by a mesmerising flute and percussion concert by Chinese and Japanese musicians. Misia,

the quirky Portuguese without whom *fado* would probably be confined to tacky tourist shows, will then present a new programme called *Delicatessen*. With a towering figure recalling the statues of her native Greece, Nena Venetsanou will wrap her warm, powerful voice around songs by Mikis Theodorakis and Manos Hadjidakis.

But the festival's highlight is Clannad, a five-strong family band that started reviving age-old Irish ballads in their Donegal pub in the 1970s, then went on to perform with Bono and even recorded part of the soundtrack for Michael Mann's film *The Last of the Mohicans*. Make no mistake, however: their suave, plangent music-making is nowhere near extinction.

(Marie Dumont)
→ www.brugesfestival.be

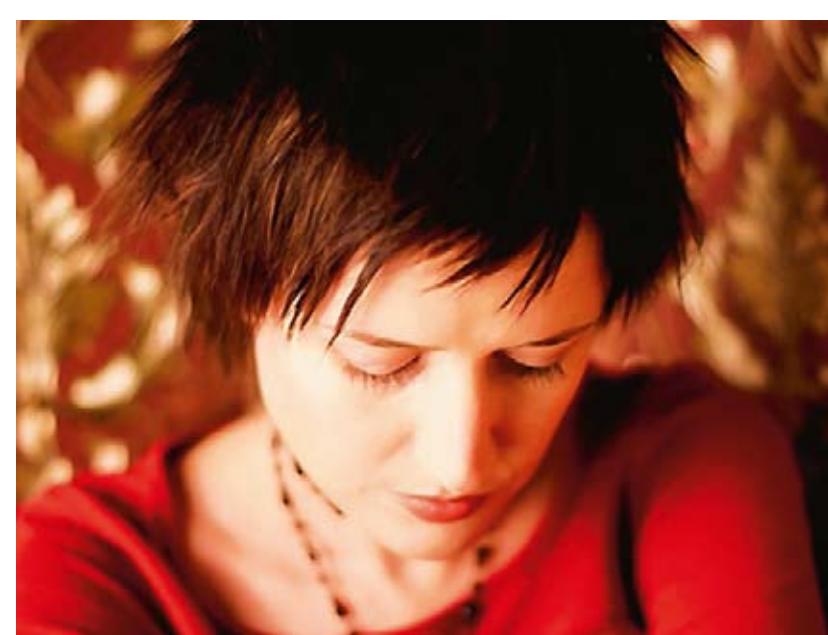
MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Opglabbeek (Limburg province)

Rock Glabbik: Rock festival featuring The Sore Loser, De Staat, Cloon, JFJ, Black 'n' Bones, followed by an after party with the International DJ Foundation
NOV 5 from 17.00 at Zaal Vona, Hoeverkerkweg 7
www.rockglabbik.be

Hasselt

Rednote Festival: Classical, jazz and contemporary music heavy on Limburg talent
NOV 5-13 across Hasselt
www.rednote.be



Agenda

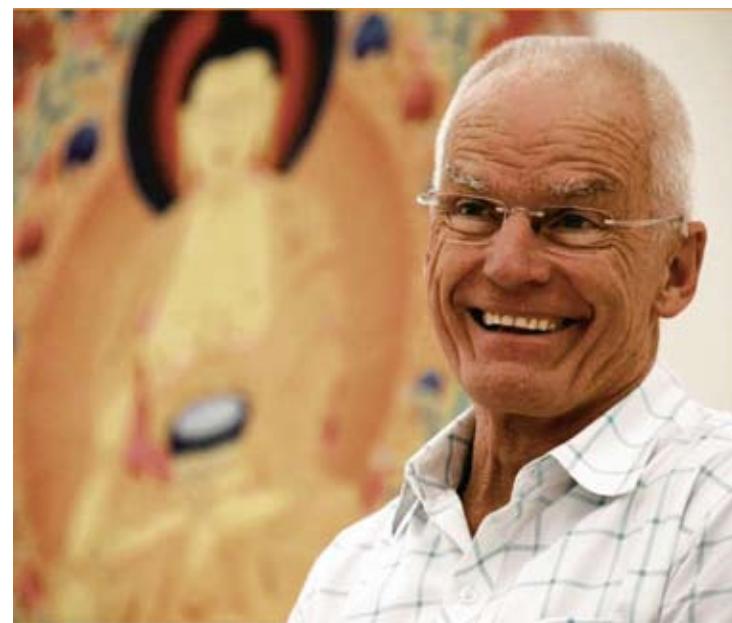
TALK

"We just have to remind ourselves that the source for any happiness is the mind itself," according to Lama Ole Nydahl. The Danish-born spiritual master and his wife Hannah have been hooked on Buddhism since their first contact with the philosophy, during their 1968 honeymoon in Nepal. Since then, Nydahl has been touring the world giving initiations and talks, bringing Buddhist teachings to the western world. He has also written several books on the subject, including *The Way Things Are: A Living Approach to Buddhism for Today's World*.

Nydahl founded the Diamond Way Buddhist Centres now located across Europe, including Brussels and Ghent. More than 200 people are expected to turn up for his upcoming talk, which promises to be an insightful glimpse into the power of the meditative mind and its indubitable link to happiness (in English with simultaneous translation in French).

(*Robyn Boyle*)

→ www.bvdd.be



Buddhism in the West

7 November, 19.30
Goethe Institute, Brussels

MORE TALKS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Our Daily Bread: Enough food for everyone?: Talk and debate on the worldwide food crisis by experts from the plant biotechnology sector (in Dutch)
NOV 3 19.30 at Rits Café, A Dansaertstraat 70
www.deburen.eu

Ghent

Book presentations: American graphic novelist Craig Thompson introduces his new book, *Habibi*, and Flemish illustrator Brecht Evens his new book, *De Liefhebbers* (in English and Dutch)
NOV 6 20.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23
www.vooruit.be

Tongeren

De Belgen in Engeland 1940-1945: The story of Belgian soldiers who fought on British soil during the Second World War by Frank Decat (in Dutch)
NOV 3 20.00-22.00 at Gallo-Romeins Museum, Kielstraat 15
www.davidsfonds.be

FOOD & DRINK

Whisky Puur

8 November, 20.00

Sint-Willibrord Centre, Bruges

For some, whisky is a mystery, maybe even a bit elitist. After all, isn't there a certain way you're supposed to taste it (sniff, swirl, sip)? Is keeping your whisky in the fridge "not done"? Does the best whisky come from Scotland? How is it made? And is older whisky really that much better? Let Flanders' most famous whisky expert, Bob Minnekeer, lay all your questions to rest. He knows his stuff, having led the Glengarry whisky club in

Ghent for the past 15 years, in addition to organising countless guided tours through Scotland and being pipe major in his very own bagpipe group. He's an entertaining and animated speaker, too, who will keep you interested throughout his detailed description of whisky's history, production, types, aromas and flavours, plus how to incorporate the spirit in your cooking. The talk is followed by a tasting, naturally. (RB)

→ www.davidsfonds.be



© Shutterstock

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

Tafelen met een Hart voor Kinderen (Dining with a Heart for Children): Dine in one of the participating restaurants, and they donate part of your bill to charitable organisations such as a school in Niger and Flanders' Wagenschot Centre for disaffected young people
Until NOV 15
www.tafelenmeteenhartvoorkinderen.be

Hasselt (Limburg)

Jenever Tasting: Discover the jenevers produced by Belgium's Radermacher Distillery
NOV 5 13.30-15.00 & 15.30-17.00 at National Jenever Museum, Witte Nonnenstraat 19
www.jenevermuseum.be

Stabroek (Antwerp)

The Quiet Power of Tea: Ann Vansteenkiste tells all about the history of tea, all its different varieties and the correct way to set it, followed by a tasting (in Dutch)
NOV 7 20.00 at Kasteel Ravenhof, Oud Broek 4
03.664.01.69, rafgreet@hotmail.com

JAZZ

Fred Hersch Trio

14 November, 20.00 | 15 November, 20.30

Bozar, Brussels | De Roma, Antwerp



© Mark Niskanen

Say what you want about the US state of Ohio, but it produced one of the world's least boring musicians. Fred Hersch has been electrifying audiences for more than 30 years with his innovative style and phenomenal technique. Freshly crowned Jazz Pianist of the Year by the prestigious Jazz Journalists Association, Hersch is now touring with his Trio to promote

their most recent album, *Whirl*. Expect classic pieces by the likes of Thelonious Monk and Duke Ellington, as well as a few tips of the hat to Brazilian folk music and several of Hersch's own brilliant works. (RB)

→ www.bozar.be
→ www.deroma.be

MORE JAZZ THIS WEEK

Brussels

Emil Viklický en Steve Houben Trio: One of the best known Czech jazz pianists teams up with one of the best known Belgian saxophonists
NOV 7 20.30 at The Music Village, Steenstraat 50
www.themusicvillage.com

Buggenhout (East Flanders)

The Vintage Jazz Cats: New Orleans swing big band
NOV 5 20.00 at Molenaarswoning, Patattenmolensite, Krapstraat 159
www.gcdepit.be

Ghent

Augusto Pirodda: Solo concert by the Italian jazz pianist
NOV 6 20.00-22.30
at De Centrale, Kraankindersstraat 2
www.decentrale.be

 EXHIBITION

The work of Hasselt art photographer Malou Swinnen is known far and wide for its focus on the human body, the pose and the facial expression. More than just naked bodies before a camera, the models in Swinnen's photos are characteristically self-assured and proud, but the emotions behind their invasive looks are hard to read. Attention is drawn to their accessories: tops by well-known fashion designers, a tattoo, a mask. *Le regard de personae* is a follow-up to her 1995 series of portraits *Personae*. This series is much more modern, playful and colourful and focuses on an exclusive collection of textiles and accessories, including works by German designer Bernhard Willhelm and Flemish designers Walter Van Beirendonck and Dries Van Noten. (RB)

→ www.modemuseumhasselt.be



Le regard de personae

Until 8 January
Fashion Museum, Hasselt

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Martin Douven – Leopoldsburg – Jef Geys: Production line paintings by Martin Douven (1898-1973), a self-taught painter from Leopoldsburg who started selling his own small paintings in 1928
Until DEC 31 at M HKA, Leuvenstraat 32
www.muhka.be

Brussels

In the Mood for Love: Erotic-tinted and/or nude photographs by Gilles Berquet, Henry Horenstein and Uma Kinoshita
Until NOV 12 at Pascal Polar Gallery, Charleroisesteenweg 108
www.pascalpharal.be

Turnhout

In Pairs: Photographs of cut-off walls, ceilings and corners of rooms by Flemish photographer Frederik Beyens
Until DEC 4 at De Tweede Helft, Graatakker 5
www.detweedeheft.be

 BLUES

To fans of the blues, Taj Mahal means a lot more than a famous marble monument in India. It's the stage name of Henry Saint Clair Fredericks, the self-taught singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist who's been bringing home Grammys and music awards over the course of his almost 50 year-long career. Needless to say, he's been inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame.

Growing up in Springfield, Massachusetts, Fredericks was exposed to a variety of music styles from a very young age (his mother was in the local gospel choir, his father a West Indian jazz pianist). He experimented with world music to create his own sound – a funky mix of down-south Caribbean grooves, acoustic guitar picking, old-fashioned Delta and Chicago blues and even African rhythms. Combined with a unique voice that somehow manages to be both gruff and smooth, Blues master Taj Mahal and his trio are set to give another legendary performance in Ghent's small and intimate Handelsbeurs concert hall. (RB)

→ www.handelsbeurs.be



The Taj Mahal Trio

16 November, 20.15

Handelsbeurs, Ghent

DUSL
'TIL DAWN

KATRIEN LINDEMANS

Guy Fawkes Night

5 November, 18.00

British School of Brussels, Tervuren

Remember remember the fifth of November? Gunpowder, treason and plot.

We see no reason why gunpowder treason should ever be forgot!

This famous ditty was written in honour of Yorkshire man Guy Fawkes, who lived from 1570 until 1606 and is remembered every year in Britain on 5 November.

Why? Well, Guy Fawkes was caught in the early hours of 5 November, 1605, guarding a huge pile of explosives in the House of Lords. The aim was to assassinate King James I and bring a Catholic monarch back to the throne. The so-called Gunpowder Plot failed, and the good people of London were encouraged to light fires in celebration of the survival of their King.

Fawkes, along with other conspirators, was sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered on 31 January. By some accounts, that's just what happened; by others, he leapt from the ladder leading to the gallows and broke his neck instantly.

Fawkes – for better or worse – is a legend of British history and is remembered on 5 November with fireworks and bonfires across Britain and in British gardens all over the world. A fire is lit, and a rag doll of Guy Fawkes is burned in effigy. Families and friends gather



around the fire for a drink and a bite to eat. The menu on Bonfire Night usually includes parkin (a moist ginger cake, flavoured with black treacle), toffee apples and baked potatoes. (But if you'd rather eat hot dogs or hamburgers, that's fine too.)

To celebrate Guy Fawkes Night, the First Brussels British Scouts organises their own bonfire in the British School of Brussels. (They call it simply "Fireworks", but we all know what the date means.) The event starts at 18.00 and the fireworks an hour later. No need to bring your own sparklers, organisers take care of it all. There will be lots of food and drinks and live music by The Rusty Forks. Tickets are €5 for those under 16, adults pay €7.

→ www.1stbrussels.be

MORE BLUES THIS WEEK

Brussels

Bizon Blues Jam: Weekly acoustic blues session hosted by Matt W Rose
NOV 7 21.30 at Bizon, Karperbrug 7
www.cafebizon.com

Ekeren (Antwerp)

Railroad Blues Night: Blues open-mic
NOV 5-6 20.30 at Cultuurstation Tracé, Veltwijcklaan 222
www.vzwtrace.be

Herent (Flemish Brabant)

Rhythm & Blues At the Attic Festival: Cosy blues and roots festival featuring solely Belgian bands including Tattoo'd Lady, The Rocking Bluesballs, Binger, Deja Blue and Professor Deaf & The Swingaholics
NOV 5 14.00-03.00 at Den Ouden Tijd, Onze Lieve Vrouwstraat 2
www.atticblues.be

© Shutterstock

't Verschil ★★★★

As anyone watching the current series of *Mijn Restaurant* can tell you, it's sometimes tough to separate a "brasserie" from a "restaurant". Some locals from Aalst tried to tell me that 't Verschil was just your average brasserie, but after seeing it featured in a few magazines, I decided to find out for myself.

Having made reservations just hours before for a busy Friday night, my dining companion and I feel privileged to be getting the last available table, a little two-seater in the side dining room. After an *apéritif* of cava (a bit pricy at €7), we order a bottle of Chilean wine with an Italian name. Balduzzi is a robust, 14% cabernet sauvignon that tastes of dark red cherries, leather and spices. It pairs perfectly with all four courses.

We both opt for the Gourmand Menu at €35 per person because we're both in the mood for some proper autumn fare – wild game. The first course consists of thinly sliced venison fillet, bright red with smidgeons of goose liver cream, tart little redcurrant berries and virgin olive oil. This combination in itself is exciting, but then there's rocket salad, freshly ground black pepper and wispy fried onion on top to complete the irresistible dish.

Contact *Bite* at flandersbite@gmail.com

bite

ROBYN BOYLE

It's already apparent that this is not your average brasserie, which explains the name 't Verschil, or the difference. Sure, chef Peter Maertens puts classic dishes on the menu such as lasagne and Irish rib-eye, but there are plenty more refined, creative items as well, such as saddle of hare. The recipes are never too complex, though, because he likes to keep his food pure and simple, allowing the ingredients to speak for themselves. We start to fully appreciate his philosophy as we tuck into the second course. Mine is a bowl of wild pigeon *consommé*, a clear stock rich in flavour and accentuated with bits of lightly pickled pigeon breast, carrot, courgette and floating puffs of parmesan. It's light and delicious, but I am admittedly envious of the other second course at the table: buttery soft scallops that have been lightly crisped on the outside on a teppanyaki grill. Underneath are a rich slice of Duke of Berkshire pork belly bacon – sweet and salty at the same time – and creamy cauliflower puree with hazelnut butter.

Understandably, the third course has a hard time competing with the first two. The pheasant hen is slightly dry, but the surrounding Orval sauce, sprouts, homemade almond croquettes and

velvety orange butternut squash more than make up for it.

On to dessert: I enjoy a mason jar filled with green grapes marinated in Veuve Clicquot Champagne and lemon balm, with a scoop of Veuve Clicquot sorbet and crunchy, caramelised puffed rice.



Across from me, a spoon dives into a long-stemmed glass of caramel-chocolate mousse with white chocolate snow and fresh mint leaves. Apparently the portions get bigger with every course, as we find it difficult to finish off these amazing desserts.

When my dining companion asks for a tea, our smiling server brings over no less than ten tins of loose-leaf varieties from local tea and coffee specialist OR. My coffee is from the same shop and comes served with a brownie, chocolate beads and a silver antique cream and sugar set.

Finally, the €120 bill confirms for us that this is a restaurant, not a brasserie. But we still walk away positively content.

→ www.hetverschil.com

📍 Gentsestraat 70, Aalst
0474.98.16.98
🕒 Mon-Tues, Thurs-Fri 12.00-14.30
Wed 12.00-14.30; Sat 18.00-22.00
💶 Mains: €17-€32
👉 Attentive service and classic brasserie fare mixed with refined, season-inspired dishes

TALKING SPORTS

New dedicated school for sports hopefuls

How does young sporting talent rise to the top? Do the athletes, footballers, cyclists and tennis players of tomorrow simply emerge at random or is an outside push needed to foster a breed of future stars to compete at the highest levels?

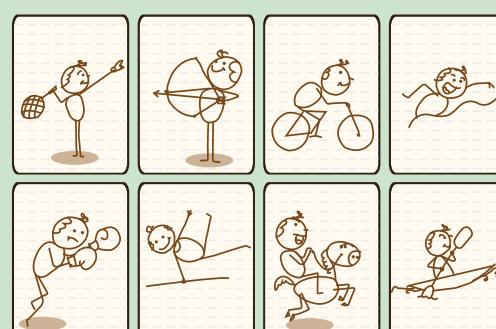
As in economics, the question of state intervention in free markets is also controversial in sport. It raises ethical issues of whether the support represents fair play. It inevitably prompts comparisons with dubious intense sport policies in East Germany or China aimed only at securing glory for the nation.

But not every such measure needs to be so sinister: targeted British aid, partly from the National Lottery, helped bring a sackful of Olympic medals in 2008 in cycling and swimming, yet it was mainly aimed at offering opportunities for communities rather than winning gold.

Flanders is now doing the same: promoting sport above all for the well being of the youngsters, even if a medal or two down the line would not go remiss.

Last week, Antwerp mayor Patrick Janssens, Flemish education minister Pascal Smet and Flemish sports minister Philippe Muyters were in Wilrijk, a municipality of Antwerp, to unveil plans for a new elite sports school. The school, set to open in the autumn of 2014 as part of the Leonardo Lyceum, will be a modern glass structure on a concrete pedestal, carefully arranged around a courtyard.

The €12.7 million complex will focus on swimming, tennis, football and various martial arts. The school "aims to create an environment where young people can grow into true athletes," said Janssens. It will have



space for 116 secondary school pupils, but sports federations, local sports clubs and university students will also be able to take advantage of the new facilities.

Smet also pointed to the broader picture, saying that top sports had to work more with mainstream schools as well. "A flexible approach should also give individual athletes a chance in a regular school," said Smet, who consulted widely with athletes, clubs, federations and professional sports people from the schools themselves.

He pointed to the successful cooperation between the Anderlecht football club and Sint-Guido Institute, which produced Romelu Lukaku, who transferred this summer from the Brussels side to English giants Chelsea. "The elite schools do a great job, but the study and pupil appears no different than at other schools," Smet said.

So, by all means support emerging sports talent. But create a framework where everyone has a basic sports education and the chance to pursue their dreams.

LEO CENDROWICZ

THE LAST WORD . . .

Helping hand

"I find it a little bit peculiar."

Catherine Gernay, CEO of the Belgian Nuclear Research Centre in Mol, on plans to have male executives mentor women to take up executive roles

Food for thought

"As one hype blows over, another one takes its place. I don't think the cookbook hype is going to blow over."

Geert Joris, director of publishing industry organisation boek.be, at the opening of the Antwerp Boekenbeurs

Spendy surfing

"I may have read an article about it, but I wasn't really so concerned. It completely escaped me that you had to pay so much to surf the web in another country."

Mechelen mayor Bart Somers on receiving his data-roaming bill (see *News in Brief*)

Long life

"That's enough. They can come and get me now."

Jan Goossenaerts of Essen is, at 111 years, somewhat reluctantly the oldest man in Europe

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #205

Feature

Flanders Today is popping in on the tri-annual election of the Flemish Youth Council. We'll tell you about the priorities of this representative body of Flanders' young people and how they influence the Flemish government

Focus

Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia is one of many extraordinary guest speakers at this year's Creativity World Forum, hosted by Flanders DC later this month

Business

Not only is Bruges hosting this winter's highlight exhibition, *Imperial Treasures: Masterpieces from the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna*, it's also where you'll find the Choco-Laté Festival this month. Taste and buy chocolate from one of dozens of vendors – or learn how to make your own