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Out of the cage

Geike Arnaert's first solo outing proves there's life after Hooverphonic

CHRISTOPHE VERBIEST

“The time to kill is now / Before the page is full”, Geike Arnaert sings in “This Page”, the final song on her first solo album *For the Beauty of Confusion*. It's difficult not to think that she's singing about leaving Hooverphonic. Having joined the seminal Flemish band at 17, she was the frontwoman for more than 11 years.

In the autumn of 2008, she called it a day. A year ago, Hooverphonic, the brainchild of lyricist Alex Callier, released its first post-Geike album *The Night Before* with their new singer Noémie Wolfs.

Since Geike's decision to leave, she has kept a low profile, only recording a few benefit singles and collaborating with Dutch-Flemish band Dorléac.

With *For the Beauty of Confusion* she's dropped her surname and passes, *cum laude*, her entry exam as a solo artist. But it has cost her some sleep. “Some nights I couldn't sleep because the adrenaline was racing through my veins. Other nights, I lay awake fretting about my decisions. Or about my inability to make up my mind.” Laughing, she adds: “Because doubting is my middle name.”

Keep your collaborators close

She could have chosen music that's radically different from Hooverphonic's: jazzy standards, for instance, maybe folky ballads, or, why not, guitar-infected rock. Instead she's stayed close to what she's known. Although there is definitely a difference between *For the Beauty of Confusion* and Hooverphonic's music, she still pens pop songs infused with electronics.

“I looked in different directions,” she tells me. “I've discarded loads of things. The music you hear on the album suited me best. That's also due to my working process. I play some piano and a little bit of guitar, but mostly I start with some electronics on my computer.”

She admits that her first drafts “are mostly quite cold,” so she looks “for other musicians to warm them up. I can understand you pointing out the parallel with Hooverphonic. But the songs grew quite differently from how the band worked.”

 ➤ *continued on page 5*

Michelin stars rain down on Flanders

Flanders has its third three-star Michelin restaurant. On Monday this week, the famed French culinary guide announced this year's top restaurants in Belgium. Joining chef Peter Goossens' Hof van Cleve in Kruishoutem and Geert Van Hecke's De Karmeliet in Bruges is Gert De Mangeleer's Hertog Jan, also in Bruges. Since Comme Chez Soi in Brussels lost its third star, all of the country's three-star establishments are now in Flanders. At the two-star level there was more good news for Bruges:

Restaurant De Jonckman moved from one star to two. Le Chalet de la Forêt in the Brussels commune of Ukkel also added a star to reach two, and Viki Geunes, holder of two stars for his 't Zilte in Mol, held onto both of them after the restaurant's move earlier this year to the top of the MAS museum in Antwerp.

Twelve new restaurants join the one-star ranks, including Jaloa in Brussels, Komnilfoo and Kasteel Withof in Antwerp, Innesto in Houthalen, Limburg province, and De tuinkamer in Beerzel, Antwerp province.

 ➤ www.michelinguide.com


Thirty-four-year old chef Gert De Mangeleer earns three stars

Let it snow!

Flemish mobility minister announces improved winter road plan

ALAN HOPE

Flanders is better equipped this year going into winter than ever before, mobility minister Hilde Crevits announced last week in her presentation of the Winter Plan 2011-2012.

The last two winters in Flanders have been harsh, bringing the consequent troubles on the roads as snow hit unexpectedly, leaving road-clearing services unprepared and in some cases suffering shortages of road salt used to melt ice on frozen roads.

This year, the Flemish agency for roads and traffic, AWV, has ordered in a “maximum” stock of rock salt – an initial order of 42,000 tonnes, or 10,000 tonnes more

than last year. In the course of the winter, the agency also has an option for the delivery of a further 60,000 tonnes, compared to a stand-by stock last year of 30,000 tonnes. Last year, local municipalities ran out of salt, and the crisis team – made up of police, AWV and the Flemish traffic centre – came together on nine occasions.

Last year's winter was less of a disaster than 2009-2010, but the measures taken were still not enough to avoid chaos in some places. “At times of heavy snowfall, people don't want to hear about salt shortages,” Crevits said. “We learned that over the past two years.”

 ➤ *continued on page 3*



ALAN HOPE

You!

Do you live in Flanders or Brussels? Were you born on 7 December? If so, you might be invited to a very special party. If you are celebrating your 40th, 30th, 20th, 10th or very first birthday on that date, the Flemish parliament would like to invite you and your family to a party. Not on the day itself (when you'll doubtless be otherwise engaged), but on 3 December.

The reason for the festivities is simple: The Flemish parliament is celebrating its 40th birthday, and they don't want to do it alone. On 7 December 1971, the Culture Council of the Dutch Cultural Community was established, to discuss the interests of the Dutch-speaking people in Belgium and the residents of Flanders. The participants were Flemish members of the national parliament. In 1980, it changed its name to the Flemish Council, and in 1996, following the first ever direct elections in 1995, it became the Flemish Parliament as we know it today.

The invitation for 3 December is extended to anyone living in the Brussels or Flemish regions with the right birthdates. But family members are welcome, too. Youngsters can bring the whole family; adults get to bring the children, as the case may be, and one adult guest.

On the day, there'll be broadcasts on Radio 2 all day from 8.00 and a VIP tour of parliament for those celebrating a birthday from 10.15, including the architecture and artworks, as well as an explanation of how the parliament works. Kids taking part will be treated to a concert by Kapitein Winokio, a trip to the visitors' centre De Loketten and drama, sound, photo and video workshops, depending on the child's age. Then, from 12.15, there's a walking buffet lunch for everyone.

If the invitation applies to you, you might already know how to sign up. The parliament has sifted through the national register to find everyone born on those days, according to organiser John Thielemans, and has contacted those affected. Of more than 1,200 eligible residents, more than 300 have already RSVPed. With families included, that's more than the parliament premises can handle. In the meantime, alternative arrangements have been made for the overspill.

If you don't fit the birthday profile, not to worry. The parliament is organising a series of events in the days around the anniversary. Go to the parliament's website and follow the link in the left-hand column.

→ www.vlaamsparlement.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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



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

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FLANDERS TODAY
NOVEMBER 23, 2011

News in brief

Flemish polar explorers Dixie Dansercoer and Sam Deltour (see *Flanders Today*, 16 November) have been forced to **change their plans for crossing the South Pole** by kite, after severe weather caused heavy snowdrifts that posed a threat to their itinerary of 60 to 80km a day. The pair will now be flown to a base close to the Novo scientific research station to begin their trek. They still plan to aim for the record for the fastest autonomous, non-motorised crossing of the Antarctic.

The governor of the National Bank, Luc Coene, has **declined an invitation to appear before the finance committee** of the Flemish parliament, which is currently investigating the collapse of Dexia Bank and the Municipal Holding. Coene said an appearance "would not be useful" and pointed out that his responsibility as bank governor is a matter for the federal government. Jean-Paul Servais, chairman of the finance industry watchdog FSMA, also declined to appear.

The municipal council of Kalmthout has started legal action to overturn planning permission granted by the province of Antwerp for a building project that would mean the **destruction of 1.5 hectares of woodland** bordering the heathland severely damaged by fire earlier this year. The area is zoned as residential property, but the woods are home to deer. The company in charge of the development of 11 new houses has agreed to suspend work until the court rules sometime in the new year.

Drugstore chain Kruidvat has issued a **recall notice for Sesame Street music boxes**, after a defect was reported; part of the underside can come loose, presenting a danger

to small children. Customers can return the music box, manufactured by Globetrade and carrying the code number 871733555665, to Kruidvat for a refund.

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege last week broke ground on the new phase of **repair work in the Zwin nature reserve** on the northern Flemish coast. The €4.1 million project, run by the Nature and Woodland agency and the Dutch province of Zeeland, will extend the reserve by 120 hectares, and restore both salt- and freshwater pools important to the area's function as a breeding place for water birds.

The **Flemish film Rundskop** (known as *Bullhead* in English) continues to win awards across the world, with the latest coming from the AFI Fest in Los Angeles, where it won the Public Prize and crowned Matthias Schoenaerts with the Acting Award. Schoenaerts also received this month the Award for Special Contribution to Northern Cinema from the Noorderlyk Film Festival in the Netherlands. *Rundskop* is Belgium's entry for consideration for a foreign-language Oscar nomination and has been picked up for distribution in North America.

The **linden trees lining the De Keyserlei** near Antwerp's central station were last week felled despite protests from environmental activists. Police made 35 arrests. The felling took place after a report commissioned by the city showed that the 96 trees were in poor condition. They will be replaced by smaller ash trees.

The archbishopric of Mechelen-Brussels has agreed to **convert part of the church of St Catherine in**

Brussels for a secular purpose, most likely to create a fruit and vegetable market as proposed by the Brussels city council. The church said the decision was "difficult" but agreed to the change because the church is no longer used by the numbers it once was. Opponents have launched an online petition to protest against the deconsecration.

VRT radio this week started to broadcast **traffic reports based on real-time data** supplied by tracking systems in 250,000 vehicles, including taxis, lorries and company cars across Flanders. From now on, traffic reports compiled by the VRT and motoring organisation Touring will be based on transit times between destinations, rather than reporting tailbacks.

New rules on school registrations agreed last week by the Flemish parliament will put an **end to co-schooling** – where children attend two different schools at the same time as a consequence of custody arrangements agreed by parents. Following a survey of schools carried out by education minister Pascal Smet, it was found that 17 children in the region last year were involved in such an arrangement. "Not a great many, but a growing trend to which we want to put a stop," Smet said.

Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege announced the start next year of **Kunstendag voor Kinderen** (Arts Day for Children) to encourage an early start in taking part in culture. The first event will be on 18 November, 2012, and take place every year on the third Sunday of November. The minister called on all cultural organisations to take part in the event.

OFFSIDE

Lock up your bling

The mayor of chic coastal resort Knokke, Count Leopold Lippens, has reacted angrily to advice issued by the public prosecutor of Bruges for women in the town to leave their expensive, eye-catching jewellery at home. Prosecutor Jean-Marie Berkvens was reacting to a spate of recent thefts in which nine women were robbed of rings worth between €100,000 and €200,000. The thieves appear to follow a pattern. "First the victim is carefully screened," said Berkvens. "There hasn't been a case where the target wasn't wearing expensive jewellery. They only strike when they're sure of what they're going to get." The women are then followed home, their car is blocked

and the robbery takes place. Necklaces and watches have been snipped off with pliers, and rings taken off of fingers. "Women in Knokke would do better not to wear expensive rings and jewels for the time being," Berkvens advised.

For mayor Lippens, the advice is an insult to his town, which above all Flemish resorts has a reputation for attracting the well-to-do. It's the most expensive municipality in Flanders to buy a house, and all year round Knokke is the place to see and be seen on the seafront, where designer labels abound and the café terraces glitter with bling. Count Lippens, brother of former Fortis chairman Maurice and grandson of the former governor-general of Congo, once complained about



"frigobox" tourists – those who bring their own picnic instead of visiting one of the town's many restaurants. He also proposed moving the railway station several kilometres further down the coast. He dismissed Berkvens' concerns as "the media selling bad news. Maybe the prosecutor should make women take off their wedding rings, too."

ALAN HOPE

Iris' eyes are smiling

Laura Van den Bruel, 16, from Herentals, otherwise known as Iris, has been selected to represent Belgium in this year's Eurovision Festival in Azerbaijan, the youngest Flemish candidate ever



Buses, trams and cyclists to benefit from road-clearing plans

→ *continued from page 1*

Stocks have not only been increased, they will be used more efficiently, she said. Flanders' roads will be serviced by 180 trucks equipped with an automated gritting system, which adapts the amount of salt strewn to the width of the road.

The winter plan also provides for special measures in emergency situations, including a system of priority roads that will be sprayed first in extreme weather. It also allows police to hold up traffic on motorways to allow salt-spreaders priority. "We'll spray all lanes when it's icy," said Crevits. "As a driver, you can't see when it's slippery, which can be dangerous, if you don't know which lanes have and have not been covered. When it snows, you can see that, and then we'll cover only the middle and outside lanes."

Planning also extends to public transport. Flemish transport authority De Lijn will equip most buses with all-winter tyres. On tramways, some trams will circulate at night to keep overhead cables free of ice and snow. And together with the AWV, De Lijn will also nominate a number of routes and junctions as priorities for gritting to keep public transport flowing. Even cyclists are catered for, with a pilot project in Kortrijk that provides for a snowplough and brine-sprayer to service cycle paths.



© Sébastien Pirlet/Reuters

The Royal Meteorological Institute and the defence department's meteorological wing will provide weather information to the agencies concerned, with warnings of bad weather going out at least an hour in advance to allow, for instance, motorway lighting to be switched on. The various services have agreed a winter protocol to ensure fast and accurate

communication in emergency situations. "As a child, I used to long for snow in winter, but as a minister, I hope it stays mild," Crevits said. "Although I fear the worst, the aim is to be well prepared and able to step in quickly when the weather becomes severe." ♦

→ www.hildecrevits.be

Half a million for creativity

The Flemish government will spend half a million euros to promote the "cross-pollination" of ideas between scientists, creative thinkers and innovative businesses, innovation minister Ingrid Lieten announced last week, during the two-day Creativity World Forum in Hasselt. The forum itself is a hotbed of infectious creative ideas, and Lieten's proposal is to pave the way for more such events, in the hope that bringing together creative minds will help in the search for solutions to today's pressing problems. "Climate problems or the situation of an ageing population, mobility and energy supply are not to be solved in a laboratory full of professors," she said. "There has to be a dialogue between companies and creative people, artists, people from the worlds of fashion and the media. The solutions that arise out of this cross-pollination can then be marketed and sold across the world." ♦

Culture prize for Daan

Rock musician Daan Stuyven (pictured) has been awarded this year's Flemish Culture Prize for Music. Daan, as he is billed, started in the late 1980s with the band Citizen Kane, but only broke through in 1997, after a period designing album sleeves, with Dead Man Ray. He later worked solo and had a hit with the dance number "Swedish Designer Drugs".

"It's only music, just vibrations of the air. But if it sounds good and comes over well, it can brighten up any moment of your day," according to the prize jury's citation. It also praised him as a "real, full-time artist" who had mastered "every aspect of his craft".

"I've rarely seen anyone who can switch genres so easily as Daan," commented culture minister Joke Schauvliege. "And he always does it with conviction, strong lyrics and compelling numbers."

Daan himself said he was "shocked" by the announcement of his win. "It's a great compliment,



© Géraldine Jacques

a confidence-booster, especially since I haven't exactly taken the most direct route to winning this sort of prize. On the contrary, I try to take side-roads as much as possible. I've always tried to mix high and low culture. In one way it's great to get a prize like this. In another, it's a challenge for me, too. What am I going to do now?" ♦

→ www.daan.be

Changes for Week van de Smaak

Culture minister Joke Schauvliege has announced that future editions of the month-long Week van de Smaak (Week of Taste) will be more wide-ranging than previously and more independent of the government. In previous years, when the week featured "Cities of Taste" like Hasselt, Kortrijk, Lier, Leuven and Aalst, the event was run principally by Faro, the government agency for cultural heritage. This year the 10-day event, which normally takes place in November, took a break this year

and an evaluation requested by Schauvliege came to the conclusion that the Week ought to reflect more facets than heritage and involve more partners from various sectors: agriculture, the food and drinks industries, education. The report also concludes that after five years, the event is strong enough to stand on its own, with support from the various actors involved. However, Schauvliege stressed, the government will continue to provide support, including financial. ♦

Ikea bombers confess

Two men arrested in October in Poland have admitted taking part in bomb attacks on Ikea stores in Germany, France, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Belgium, including an explosive device which went off in Ikea in Ghent. The plot was an attempt to extort €6 million from the company to prevent further attacks. In all, eight explosions took place, and two people were injured in an attack in Germany. ♦



© Shutterstock

2,384,378
days lost to illness by teachers in Flanders in 2010, slightly fewer than in 2009. Almost half of all teachers – 48% – took no days off

120
exotic animals stolen from a pet shop in Dilbeek last week by burglars. The animals, worth a total of €10,000, included chameleons, turtles and baby parrots

€632,000
requested by Antwerp province from Walloon Brabant towards the renovation of the St Rombout's cathedral and archbishop's palace in Mechelen, according to the terms of an agreement signed under Napoleon in 1809

26.9%
of votes went to former Flemish education minister Frank Vandebroucke in a mock presidential election carried out among readers of De Standaard online. Herman Van Rompuy came second with 22.9%

€4,900
paid by the Brussels Region for a promotional film considered by the Brussels parliament to be electioneering. The cost will be accounted as an election expenses for the 2014 regional elections, members decided

FIFTH COLUMN

ANJA OTTE

Pulling the plug

As this publication went to press, Belgians were still waiting for a federal government to take shape. To refresh your memories: In June 2010 elections were held after the government of Yves Leterme collapsed on the issue of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV). Depending on the source, a solution on this disputed constituency was in the make. Even if this was the case, however, things were not going fast enough for Open VLD president Alexander De Croo, who, in political lingo, "pulled the plug" on the government.

Eighteen months later, the Flemish politician is still a central figure. With BHV sorted, there are still budgetary and socio-economic policies for the negotiators – socialists, Christian-democrats and liberals – to agree on.

De Croo is the exact ideological opposite of Elio Di Rupo, the French-speaking socialist who is set to become prime minister. While Di Rupo believes in more income (read: extra taxes) to get Belgium out of its budgetary pickle, De Croo is all for budgetary cuts. Neither of them have shown themselves flexible on the matter so far, although Di Rupo's ultimate proposal, which he made last Sunday, surprised many. Still, De Croo said no.

That Open VLD is intransigent on budgetary issues should not surprise anyone: They are the party's core business. Moreover, N-VA, Flanders' largest party, which will be in the opposition federally, holds down views that often seem more liberal than those of the liberals. Also, Open VLD argues, a price should be paid by the party that gets the prime minister. That's the way it has always been in Belgium.

These arguments are understandable, but De Croo's attitude still irks many of the negotiators. Meanwhile, Leterme, caretaker prime minister *ad infinitum*, is preparing a temporary budget for 2012, in the knowledge that the definite budget will probably not be agreed and voted on by the end of this year.

The public at large has become even more irritated by the endless negotiations, especially as it is often warned about imminent attacks on this country by the financial markets. Why, some people ask, are the talks always held at night? Is that just another manifestation of the machismo that is holding back an agreement?

Maybe, some people say, it is time we "pull the plug" on these talks. Unfortunately, that does not bring a government – let alone a budget for 2012 – any closer.



BRUSSELS

One of the nicest view over Brussels, 15th floor, close to Brussels centre and European institutions by Métro, 2 minutes from Métro Yser, 2 balconies (one with south view on a farm Brussels centre, one with north view on the canal and the Atomium) quiet neighbours, surrounded by parks.



SCHAERBEEK

exceptional house at 2 min walking distance from the Rogierplace, near all type of transportation, at 5 min from the Dansaertstreet. Large livingroom, 2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, separate storage/laundry room, 1 toilet, fully furnished kitchen. Nice view and access to large garden.



WATERMAEL-BOITSFORT

In a very calm street, a beautiful house from 1999 with very big garden.



MERQEN

BRUSSELS



Centre Brussels near Dansaert area: Nice apartment DUPLEX 135m², 2008 + parking place 1 car. Livingroom +/-30m²- separate diningroom + 16m². fitted kitchen - 3 bedrooms (20m²;12m²;12m²) bathroom - showerroom - 2wc. Individual gaz heating. Apartment with a lot of light. In good condition. Excellent situation near shops, Dansaert area, metro(Yser) and ring.

WOLUWE SAINT-LAMBERT



ANDERLECHT

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- 1 apt 1 bedroom of 66 m² and 1 flat of 30 m²
- 1 apt 1 bedroom of 66 m² and 1 flat of 30 m²
- 1 apt 1 bedroom of 66 m²

SAINT-GILLES



Luxurious 1 bedroom apartments for sale with a view over Brussels. All the apartments have been completely renovated and are equipped with a wooden floor, fully equipped kitchen

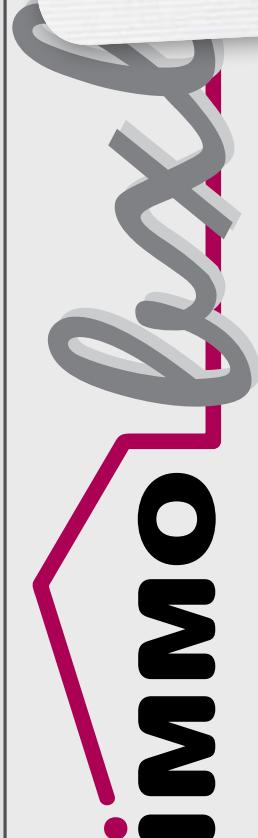
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neighbours, surrounded by parks. A lot of light. In good condition. Excellent situation near shops, theatre,...



ANDERLECHT
Godeaux - Bemel area, house 3 façades of +/- 240m*, completely renovated in 2004, living room 42m*, fully equipped kitchen (microwave oven / dishwasher / fridge / ...), breakfast corner, 4 bedrooms, closets, wooden floors, bathroom, toilet, Jacuzzi, 2 shower rooms, garage + space in front of the house, garden, terrace, alarm system, security door, airconditioning.



FOREST
villa 4 facades of 300m*, completely renovated in 2000, living room, wooden floors, fireplace, separate dining room, fully equipped kitchen, breakfast area, laundry room, 4 bedrooms, wooden floors, office area, bathroom, shower room, cellar, garden 5 acres, nice terrace, garage 2 or 3 cars, alarm system.

Out of the cage

Taking a new-found independence seriously, Geike released her first album herself

► *continued from page 1*

When Geike left Hooverphonic three years ago she already had some song ideas, but it took a year before she started working on her debut. "I worked with different musical collaborators," she says, adding that Belgian writer and comedian Sam Touzani helped with some of the lyrics. By the autumn of 2010, the songs were written and she went to record them with producers Frank Duchêne and Yannic Fonderie.

The former was once a member of Hoover, as the band was called when they formed in 1995. Geike: "And he worked on the second album, *Blue Wonder Power Milk*, as well, which was my debut with Hooverphonic. We always got along very well, and I knew what he was capable of."

In fact, the list of collaborators for *For the Beauty of Confusion* are mostly people Geike knows quite well. "It's no coincidence. It's difficult for me to let other people enter my world. I need to feel very close to them. I felt I couldn't do that in Hooverphonic."

But don't get her wrong! "This is no complaint about how the band worked. Both Alex and I tried to change the inner dynamics of Hooverphonic, but it was difficult to alter what felt like the natural course."

Not feeling comfortable writing songs for Hooverphonic – was this the reason she left the band? "There were plenty of reasons, and that was certainly one of them," she says. "I was also tired of my public image of being someone reserved and unapproachable." She smiles: "To a certain degree, it suited me well, since I'm not good at making contact with other people. But it felt like a cage."

Another reason for calling it a day: "I didn't have the feeling I could grow anymore artistically, although I knew I still had a lot to give."

Partner in crime

Touzani, an all-around one-man show, wasn't just a musical collaborator. The two are romantically involved. He's also acting as her manager. The line between professional and personal life must be blurred, surely. "That's a fact! It is not always easy; it's a very intense life. We don't have children; I suppose a relationship with offspring would be as intense as ours. But it's an effective combination – we complement each other very well. His openness balances my introversion. He's my partner in crime."

"I was tired of my public image of being reserved and unapproachable"

Other familiar faces that helped Geike complete her album were her younger sisters Kaat and Anne. Especially the former seems to be as creative as her sister: She just



Geike Arnaert with Hooverphonic in 2002

got finished a degree as an actress, and she's playing in bands Sutrastore and tommigun.

So, I wondered: were the Arnaert children stimulated to be creative? "No television and every night forced to draw?" Geike laughs. "No, that wasn't the case. But we were sent to music school. I studied violin for three years and really enjoyed it. That's where I got my taste for music."

She was only 17 when she joined Hooverphonic in the spring of 1997. The band had already established an international career and she was soon, still a minor, touring Europe. Loads of parents would have vetoed such a life for their daughter. "Mine didn't," she states. "On the contrary: I was slightly afraid for the life that was looming in front of me, but they stimulated me to grab the opportunity."

Independence is sweet

As a solo artist, Geike has more freedom, but her obligations, too, must feel heavier. "We have invested a lot of money in this album, and I have taken quite some risks commercially," she admits. "It's not a record with obvious singles. I'll have to labour hard ... but that's a positive thing!"

For the Beauty of Confusion is self-released. With her reputation, Geike could have chosen to release it on one of the major labels. "We talked to them and to some independents, too. In the end, it was more interesting to have a distribution deal with Bertus [a Benelux company], who helped us a bit financially, and to release it ourselves. This way, we pull the strings."

"Other companies immediately tried to pair me to producers they like to work with, which were not necessarily the ones I wanted to choose. I was afraid to land in a strait-jacket again. That is not the price I wanted to pay for commercial success." And probably they would not be signing Geike, but the former singer of Hooverphonic? "Indeed!"

On the other hand: A major label could have helped her to launch her career internationally. "We're negotiating with companies about different territories, though no contract has been signed yet. My own name isn't very

well known abroad; it's going to be a tough job. But I'm not afraid to canvas in small clubs again."

Last year, Thomas Blondeau, Geike's ex boyfriend, published the novel *Donderhart* (Thunderheart) in which the main character, journalist Max, meets an old flame, Eva. It's difficult not to see the similarities with Geike. "He had warned me a few years ago that I resembled one of his characters, but he stressed that she wasn't a copy of me. I thought he meant a character from his first novel *eX*. I even bought *Donderhart*, without knowing that was the novel for which he used me as a template."

In fact, they were a couple as teenagers, so "he had to use his imagination to portray Eva at a later age. But I don't hold it against him," – she laughs for the umpteenth time, with that smile that makes glaciers melt in a day – "because he doesn't portray me as an impossible creature." She ponders a few seconds. "He has made me even more naïve than I really am. But I can live with that."♦



13 December

Botanique

Koningsstraat 236, Brussels

► www.botanique.be

14 December

Het Depot

Kapucijnenvoer 47, Leuven

► www.hetdepot.be

See website for a complete schedule of shows

► www.geike.be

Feeling the spirit

Delegates from Flanders are flying the flag for cutting-edge design in Hong Kong

STÉPHANIE DUVAL

On a mission to conquer the Asian market for design, product development and architecture, two Flemish organisations are working with other agencies in Belgium to present the best of the country's creative talent at the ninth edition of Hong Kong's Business of Design Week (BoDW).

Design Vlaanderen and Flanders Investment & Trade have joined forces with Brussels Invest & Export, Wallonie-Bruxelles Architectures and Wallonie-Bruxelles Design/Mode to present an installation called Belgian Spirit.

Carl Destoop of Flanders Investment & Trade stresses the growing importance of Hong Kong: "Not only has China become the world's factory, it is also becoming increasingly influential for its design, innovation and creation. Hong Kong quite literally is a gateway to China, and it certainly functions as its design hub."

Presence at the most important design event in Hong Kong is therefore a must for a region like Flanders, which thrives largely on innovation and creativity. "China doesn't have a culture of product development yet, so it's a market with high potential for us," says Destoop. "The development of the country as a design powerhouse will happen anyway, so it's best to get involved."

BoDW is the flagship annual event of the Hong Kong Design Centre (HKDC), a non-profit organisation funded by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to promote

good design and establish Hong Kong as a centre of design excellence in Asia. The week long event beginning on 28 November is well known for successfully combining creativity with economic development. It consists of a trade fair geared towards industrial design, an international forum, the presentation of the HKDC Annual Awards and a number of exhibitions, workshops and design-centred activities.

Destoop describes BoDW as the perfect opportunity to put Flanders on the world map as a creative region, but he emphasises that their mission is not just about image. The exhibition will be linked to a commercial mission during which 10 Belgian designers will meet potential partners and clients in Hong Kong.

For each edition of BoDW, one European country is chosen to be a partner country and invited to provide roughly one-third of the speakers and participants. "It would mean a lot of good publicity and interesting opportunities," says Destoop. This year – Belgium's first at the event – the goal is to learn more about the event and the region so the partners can introduce Belgium as the partner country for the 2013 edition.

"This year, the initiative is being handled by the export organisations, but in future it should be include a wider variety of players," says Destoop. "More organisations should get involved with this project to build lasting and valuable partnerships."♦

Live from Hong Kong



© J.Vanden Eeckhoudt-Creyf

Belgian Spirit at the Hong Kong Business of Design week includes 30 designers, architects and fashion designers – a balance of disciplines and of Belgium's regions. Three curators – journalist Marie Pok and architects Li Mei Tsien and Sébastien Cruyt – selected the participants via the institutional partners of the initiative.

"It was a challenge to present three domains that aren't always easily linked," explains Pok. "We couldn't use traditional ways of showcasing their disparate work, so we asked every designer to make an original sketch or drawing for the event,

and we printed those on very basic 'Made in China' T-shirts [pictured]. The T-shirts are meant to be a neutral medium to carry the message."

Fifty copies of each T-shirt will be sold in an on-site shop – a way for us to refer to the hugely important shopping culture of Hong Kong," says Pok. "Visitors can also try on the T-shirts and take pictures of themselves, which will be broadcast live on screens in the Atomium – another nod to Chinese culture and a way to create a direct liaison between Hong Kong and Belgium."

→ www.bodw.com

Gimme shelter • A tax investment scheme has changed the face of Flemish filmmaking

Lisa Bradshaw

Critics and filmgoers alike have noticed the significant improvement in the quality of Flemish films over the last decade. Where regional cinema used to be largely ignored in favour of movies from the US, the UK and France, now Flemings are responding to Flemish productions in much greater numbers.

During the recent holiday weekend, 80,000 people went to one of the Flemish movies playing now in cinemas – *Code 37*, based on the TV series of the same name; *Hasta la vista*, an extremely popular comedy/drama; and *Het varken van Madonna*, the new movie by director Frank van Passel. That's a number that 10 years ago no one would have believed (let alone that there would be three Flemish films in the cinemas at the same time).

Certainly the marked change in both the quality and quantity of films by Flemish directors has something to do with the establishment of the Flemish Audio-Visual Fund (VAF), which supports both new and seasoned directors and helps promote their work. The other reason, put simply, is money.

Private investors in the now eight-year running Belgian Tax Shelter System have made a huge difference in film funding. "It has really improved the situation," says Hans Everaert, financial director of the VAF. "It has sped up the financing process spectacularly."

Helping make movies

The Tax Shelter System is an investment fund specifically for film production. Businesses based or with branches in Belgium can invest up to €500,000 annually in Belgian film productions or co-productions. The federal government provides a tax exemption for investors. Between 2003 and 2009, €310 million found its way into productions across the country, including to those that became some of the most popular Flemish films of all time, like *Loft* and *De helaasheid der dingen*.

"In the past, it was always like the last 20 or 30% of the financing that was always so difficult to find," explains Everaert. "The tax shelter provides exactly that – it is gap financing."

Not only does the financing allow more films to be made, it has professionalised the sector. "Because of the tax shelter, producers were obliged to become more professional, certainly in terms of financing skills, but also, they have to convince investors, they have to provide reports, they have to work with the tax authorities. The shelter made the situation better as far as film production in Flanders is concerned."

The scheme is also responsible for Belgium being made a co-producer of international projects. The BBC drama series *Parade's End* is filming in Flanders now. "They are actually shooting here rather than somewhere else that just looks like Ypres," says Everaert, "and they came here because of the tax shelter. Almost every film made in Flanders now is made with tax shelter money."

The tax shelter also covers quality, fiction TV series. But the scheme, admits Everaert, "is not clear enough. It takes a long time for investors to understand how it works."

Getting advice

That's where a good investment advisor comes in. It is not required to work through an intermediary to take advantage of the tax shelter – businesses can contact production companies directly and avoid brokerage fees – but a good adviser can clarify the process and the technical aspects of the scheme, plus cut the workload involved for the investor.

De Witte-Viselé Associates in Wemmel have become specialists in the tax shelter scheme. Partner Rolf Declerck says that businesses often don't even look into the possibility of the shelter because they think it's only for media businesses or that it's too risky. In fact, the production companies have a whole

© Jorge Díaz/BELGA
Most films made in Flanders are now partially funded by the tax shelter, including 2008 blockbuster *Loft*

set of guarantees, so "there's no risk at all," he says. "You get a minimum 4.52% net profit on your investment, guaranteed. This is more than you'll get from any bank."

The 4.52% is the minimum return on investment; of course, if a film does well, an investor could earn more. The government, for its part, earns back the tax break it provides businesses that invest in the shelter through additional tax revenue from increased employment in the sector.

Investors can choose the film or TV series they'd like to support, and some do it with an eye for more than money. Product placements, tickets for their staff to film festivals and marketing opportunities are also motivators. Declerck once assisted a businesswoman who very much wanted to meet Flemish actor Matthias Schoenaerts, "so she invested in *Rundskop*."♦

→ www.locationflanders.be

→ www.dwva.be

India on the agenda

Flanders to host international business meeting with a focus on India

ALAN HOPE

Flanders will be the host of a meeting of international business leaders interested in India next year in Antwerp, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters announced last week during a trade mission to Delhi. The two-day meeting will take place next June, with €150,000 of Flemish government support. Peeters hopes to attract 300 industrialists from Europe and India.

The meeting is the annual Horasis Global India Business Meeting, which is often described as a regional version of the World Economic Forum. The Indian minister for industry, Anand Sharma, as well as the founder and chairman of Jet Airways, Naresh Goyal, have already confirmed their attendance.

"We need to strike while the iron is hot"

The event will be supported locally by the governor of Antwerp, Flanders' chamber of commerce Voka, the Port of Antwerp, Antwerp World Diamond Centre and the

Belgo-Indian Chamber of Commerce of Industry.

"During my economic mission to India I saw that the Indian market offers a great many opportunities to Flemish businesses," Peeters said. "At the same time, a number of Indian companies have expressed an interest in investing in Flanders. We need to strike while the iron is hot."

At present, 80% of Flemish exports to India are diamonds, and the government would like to diversify exports to the subcontinent.

During Peeters' visit, Goyal was awarded the Order of Leopold II on the instructions of King Albert, for his services to Belgian-Indian relations. Jet Airways uses Brussels National airport as its hub for European flights, with inward flights from Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai, with Bangalore expected to be added next year.

Peeters pledged to the company's CEO, meanwhile, that he would discuss with federal government negotiators about the €60 carbon dioxide tax proposed for business- and first-class air tickets, something the CEO described as "a



© Belga

Jet Airways chairman Naresh Goyal was knighted for his services to Belgian-Indian relations

serious competitive disadvantage". Peeters fears such a tax could lead Jet Airways to move their operations from Brussels to Amsterdam or Paris.

Also during his visit, Peeters had meetings with the acting director of the National Aerospace Laboratories, a vice president of IT company WIPRO and the CEO of ASE Structure Design. Aquaplus, a

subsidiary of Aquafin, the wastewater treatment company wholly owned by the Flemish Environmental Holding, signed a joint venture with ASE Structure Design to develop water projects in the area around Chennai.♦

Sonic Angel moves into movie financing

Online music platform Sonic Angel, a crowd funding enterprise set up by Flemish entrepreneur Bart Becks and pop musician Maurice Engelen, will extend its efforts from music to TV and films.

Crowd funding is an internet phenomenon that allows artists to gather financing from interested members of the public, who effectively buy stock in the artist or album and later share in any profits. Sonic Angel is one of the pioneers of the technique and scored their biggest success when shares in Eurovision contestant Tom Dice's single "Me and My Guitar", bought for €10 each, brought a return of €26 in 2010.

Now Banks (pictured) and Engelen have set up a sister project, FilmAngel.tv, which aims to help new directors of film and TV works to round up financing outside of the traditional sources. The artists use every means at their disposal – with a heavy emphasis on social media – to find investors, while the platform provides professional management of the project. Shareholders are then rewarded with exclusive film-related products.

"You can feel there's an enormous demand here," Becks said last week. "A lot of young people came to Sonic Angel asking if we could help finance film projects." The company has enlisted the help of cable company Telenet, which will provide financial backing and broadcasts on the company's digital channels. "When it became clear that the idea was also arousing enthusiasm within the industry,



we didn't hesitate," Becks said. "We're delighted that Telenet was keen to support FilmAngel right away."

"FilmAngel is an interesting platform, not only in the areas of new technology and social media but also in the way the public is directly involved in its projects," said Benny Salaets, vice president of content management at Telenet. "We are happy to support innovations that allow us to provide our customers with new experiences. And in this way we can broaden our commitment to the local media sector. FilmAngel is a perfect fit for the Telenet DNA: innovative, Flemish and audacious."♦

The agriculture committee of the Flemish parliament last week unanimously agreed to a series of measures aimed at publicising the problem of the **decline of bee colonies** (see *Flanders Today*, 27 July) and bringing stakeholders together to combat the causes. Bees are dying off from a combination of pesticides, varroa mites and loss of habitat. Measures proposed would include public education, training for beekeepers, development of medical solutions and encouragement for farmers to maintain hedgerows and varied crops.♦

Food industry: AB-InBev launches cafes in US; fruit & veg auctions merge

Leuven-based AB-InBev, the largest brewer in the world, will open a chain of **10 Belgian Beer Cafes in the United States**, bringing the company's range of local beers to American customers in typically Belgian surroundings reminiscent of the 1930s and 1940s. There are currently 60 Belgian Beer Cafes across the world, including Dubai. The first US spot will be at Newark airport.

The fruit and vegetable auctions Brava in Zellik and Kampenhout (Flemish Brabant) and Greenpartners in Sint-Katelijne-Waver (Antwerp province) have **merged under the name Coöbra**. The merger between the two auctions, which have more than 1,000 members and employ 100 staff, was

announced back in August, but no name had yet been chosen. The joint venture will be chaired by Brava chairman Josse De Baerdemaeker.



© Roger Mortelmans

From left: Coöbra general director Filip Fontaine, chairman Josse de Baerdemaeker and vice-chair Rudy Croket

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Banking • KBC

Flanders' largest financial institution, rescued by public authorities in the wake of the 2008 banking crisis, has sold 17 of its affiliates in the last 20 months to meet conditions set by European authorities. Other assets still to be sold include its Polish Warta insurance subsidiary and the Antwerp Diamond Bank. KBC has also announced plans to return some of the bail-out funds it received to the state coffers.

Communications • Ceran Lingua

Up-market language course specialists Ceran plan to open a branch in Brussels to meet growing demand from the international business community. The company already operates one branch in the south of Belgium, plus in France, Spain and the UK.

Flooring • Unilin

Waregem-based flooring specialist Unilin, known for its Quick-step brand, is investing €22 million in a production facility in France. A subsidiary of the US Mohawk Industries, Unilin is Europe's leading producer of flooring and roof insulation.

Lead • Nyrstar

Metal mining and refining company Nyrstar, based in Balen, Antwerp province, has sold its stake in the Australian Refined Alloys lead producer for some €60 million.

Petrol • Esso

US-based Exxon-Mobil is selling several Brussels-area Esso filling stations. The company, which operates 265 outlets across the country, said it is seeking a more competitive business model.

Retail • Ikea

Swedish home furnishings retailer Ikea has plans to open two additional stores in Flanders over the next 15 months. One is expected to be located in Hasselt and the other near Antwerp.

Retail • Marks & Spencer

British retailer Marks and Spencer is considering opening a 2,000 square metre store in Brussels or Antwerp in the second half of next year. The company, which closed its four local outlets in 2001, has announced plans to redevelop its operations in continental Europe. Brussels is Europe's 15th best shopping city according to the latest Economist Intelligence Unit's Globe Shopping index. The list is headed by London and Madrid.

Software • Callataÿ & Wouters

The world leader in banking software, Callataÿ & Wouters, has been put up for sale by its historic shareholders. The company, based in Brussels and employing some 600 people, launched 25 years ago as a developer of IT applications for the financial services industry.

Special Edition

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

BRUSSELS BELGIUM EUROPE AUTUMN 2011 €5

Welcome home

LEISURE Bars, books and what's on the box

WORK Employment and retirement

HOME A guide to moving, finding a place and settling in

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.

Preparing . Formalities

Getting legal

Before settling in Belgium for more than three months, it's important to make sure all the right paperwork gets filled out. This can be the most complicated part of the move.

visas

To simplify travel in Europe, 13 countries, including Belgium, have signed the Schengen Agreement, which allows for free movement across borders. However, there are still documents to be obtained and rules to be followed if you plan to stay in Belgium for substantial periods of time.

For European Union citizens who come to Belgium for a period of less than three months (90 days), obtaining a visa is not necessary. Non-EU citizens, however, based on their national passport or identity card, provided they report their presence to the local municipal administration within 24 hours of arrival, do not need a visa. This is only necessary if they are not staying in a hotel, hostel or similar lodging. Certain EU citizens – such as those from Canada, the US and Japan – do not need a visa for stays under 90 days in any six-month period.

WORK PERMITS

Obtaining a visa is important if you are going to be working and living in Belgium. Non-EU citizens, including EEA citizens, EEA nationals and those of Switzerland and similar countries, work permits are required. These can be obtained through the local municipal administration, and a detailed explanation of Belgium's regions on p.92. □

Top: Spire of Brussels' town hall; bottom: Saint-Gilles' town hall

Non-EU nationals must have a visa if they intend to stay in the country for more than 90 days. The specific type of visa to apply for is a "temporary residence permit" or "type D". There are also small numbers of exceptions which non-Belgians and non-EU citizens can obtain a visa. These are to study, for employment (or self-employment), family reunification, cohabitation and more. The documents required are a passport valid for at least 15 months, a certificate of good conduct, a medical certificate, a birth certificate, a medical certificate and a work permit or other documentation explaining why a visa is necessary.

FLANDRE www.work.be
AALST www.gosp.wallonie.be
HASSelt www.legis.be
GEMER-SPEAKING COMMUNES www.gemerspeaking.be

RENOVATION

If you settle on a property that needs renovation, familiarise yourself with the taxes and costs involved. □

Settling down . Moving in

Renting and buying property

The lease will require you to put down a security deposit, normally equal to two months' rent, against any damage caused to the property during your lease. On moving in, the landlord is responsible for a detailed examination of the property, called an *état des lieux* (state of the house). Be sure to point out all defects in the property so you don't get charged for them when moving out.

If you want to renovate a rented place, it's possible to draw up a 'renovation lease', where the landlord agrees to let the property being renovated paid by 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 notary, as they will need to spring into action the second you find a property. This is a legally binding document to be signed by the buyer and the seller. Upon signing, the buyer becomes responsible for the property, and therefore must insure it. At this time, a deposit is paid to the notary, which the buyer (usually about 10 percent of the total cost). Closing follows within four months' time.

The transfer of the money changes hands at this point. Unfortunately, the price agreed upon in the contract and the amount you end up paying can 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 you don't own any other properties in Belgium, you are eligible for a rebate.

Mortgages

Mortgages can be fixed for the term of the loan, varying annually, or reviewed every six months. It's best to consult with a broker on the type of interest payment. The fairly common practice of using a mortgage broker can be helpful. □

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 British have landed

Flanders' fields are the authentic setting for a big-budget British TV drama series

LEO CENDROWICZ

It's a biting cold day as a British military brass band marches up and down a parade ground in front of the neo-classical castle of Sint Flora, near the Flemish coastal town Koksijde. With their stiff woollen khaki uniforms, bushy moustaches and patrician English accents, the soldiers are immediately dated to the First World War.

The illusion is almost perfect until a voice rings out with "Cut!", and one of the soldiers reacts by fishing in his pocket for an iPhone.

The action is part of a lavish €14 million, BBC/HBO mini-series. The five-part drama is an adaptation of *Parade's End*, a 1920s four-book series by British author Ford Madox Ford about love and duty between the twilight of the Edwardian era and the end of the First World War.

Scripted by acclaimed British playwright Sir Tom Stoppard, it chronicles the love triangle between English aristocrat Christopher Tietjens (Benedict Cumberbatch), his beautiful but cruel wife Sylvia (Rebecca Hall) and Valentine Wannop (Adelaide Clemens), a young suffragette with whom he falls madly in love. The series, which also features superstars Rupert Everett and Bill Nighy, is expected to hit TV screens in a year's time.

Just a stone's throw from the makeshift parade ground, another scene is being shot: the soldiers' quarters behind the front line, a collection of some 20 tents in a field that computer wizardry is expected to multiply many times over. Crowded around one of the tents is a busy film crew, capturing a moment where Cumberbatch and his commanding officer, played by Roger Allam, inspect the kitchens. The director, BAFTA-winning Susanna White (*Generation Kill*), is watching the action on one monitor, while producer David Parfitt (*Shakespeare In Love*) watches another screen.

"Not a First World War drama"

Between takes, Parfitt explains that Ford's story offers a broad tapestry of life, love, death and drama. "But it's not a First World War drama. It's more a romance against the backdrop of the war, and other events like the suffragettes," he says. "It's also very funny. There are some great comedy moments, some ludicrous situations about the way the war was carried out." Parfitt admits that *Parade's End* could benefit from the surge in interest in the Edwardian era that the hugely successful *Downton Abbey* series has stoked, but insists it is a very different sort of drama. *Parade's End* is also a raw reflection of the very real upheaval and confusion of the era: Ford himself was involved in the British propaganda effort after the war broke out, and then enlisted at 41 years of age into the Welch Regiment in 1915.



© Photos: Tim Diven

Meanwhile, skulking through the muddy field and enjoying a cheeky cigarette is playwright Stoppard himself, who is also executive producer. He hadn't read the books before the BBC approached him, and he spent 18 months turning about 900 pages into five 60-minute episodes. Ford was known for his literary ingenuity, a quality that added to the challenge for Stoppard. "The structure of the book is non-linear," he says. "It's complicated, and you have to unscramble it. But those are enjoyable problems. It just takes time."

Stoppard's role on the shoot is ill-defined. "I'm here to help adjust if I'm needed," he says. "Frankly, it's completely arbitrary as I'm not here every day. I've been about six times for a few days at a time. One is just trying to help, to answer questions from actors."

Filming in Flanders

In all, there have been seven weeks of filming in Belgium, including scenes at the St Michael and St Gudula Cathedral in Brussels, the De Borrekens water lock in Vorselaar (serving as

a Scottish castle, hunting lodge and German spa resort) and a field near Namur for the trench scenes. Some €4.5 million of the total budget is set aside for the Belgian shoots.

Parade's End also benefited from a €150,000 grant from the Flanders Audiovisual Fund, but the most important financial contribution has been provided by the Belgian Tax Shelter System, which annually channels about €60 million into audiovisual productions and has transformed the rather artisanal local film sector into a solid professional economy (see p6).

Flemish producer Martin Dewitte was enlisted, along with broadcaster VRT and the BNP Paribas Fortis Film Fund as a local producer, helping find many locations. "It's a major circus organising this," says Dewitte, who runs his own company, Anchorage Entertainment. "I've never been involved with anything like it."

The trench shoot was particularly tricky to arrange, he says. "We needed a No Man's Land with two to three kilometres of nothing. We found a place near here, but found that once you dig, it quickly fills with seawater." The eventual venue near Namur featured 300 metres of British and 100 metres of German trenches.

Dewitte became involved through a chance meeting with Parfitt at the Cannes film festival, when he let slip his own plans to produce *A War Of Their Own*, another war-time drama about two British nurses. As Dewitte enthused about the filming prospects in Flanders rather than the planned Ireland and Canada, he was brought on board to co-produce. "It does make it more authentic to actually film in Flanders," he says. He points to Sint Flora itself, which is in a small corner of Flanders that was never occupied by the Germans during the First World War. "We have photos of King Albert I meeting colonels in this very castle," Dewitte says. The production is also using many Flemish extras for the shoot, as well as a few Flemish actors, including Jurgen Delnaet (*Aanrijding in Moscou*) and Hilde Heijnen (*Witse, Code 37*).

As night falls, members of the crew race to get their shot. Stoppard is occasionally pulled aside for advice but keeps a respectful distance. "On the whole, you are working together continually, so you don't get many ambushes from the director," he whispers. "But you are working within the conventional norms. Right now we are running out of light, for example." And with that, a voice bellows: "Quiet on set!" Stoppard is silent, but a dog barks in the distance. And then the scene is run again. ♦

→ www.tinyurl.com/parades-end



Flemish extras await the next scene on the set of *Parade's End*

Fly, drive or dive

A fascinating cross-section of Panamarenko's work is on show at the sea

CHRISTOPHE VERBIEST

In 2005, Panamarenko shocked the local art world. Just at the moment when the most complete retrospective of his work was on show at the Royal Museums for Fine Art in Brussels, he announced his retirement.

He was 65 – a pensionable age, of course. But every part of his life had been strung together by his art. Panamarenko, who was born Henri Van Herwegen, worked in the house he lived in – or was it vice versa? – in Antwerp's Biekorfstraat. His move to the countryside – swapping his Antwerp house for one in rural East Flanders – matched his most characteristic trait: He always stubbornly did what he wanted to do, regardless of what others would think.

The Antwerp house is now under the aegis of contemporary art museum M HKA and will be opened to the public next year. Real artists die in their studios, or so the romantic myth goes. That may be so, but let no one doubt Panamarenko's status as a real artist.

If you want a taste of Panamarenko, the coastal town Knokke-Heist this winter is the place to be. The Scharpoord Culture Centre hosts *The Panamarenko Paradox*, a small but quite beautiful cross-section of his work, organised by long-time Flemish curator Jo Coucke.

Panamarenko's work gives the impression that he has remained a 12-year-old boy, seeking adventure, be it in the air, underwater or on the road. So he builds objects to fly, drive or dive.

And no, they don't really work, but that's not the point, as Coucke explains. "He's perfectly capable of building a plane that really works, but that's not his goal." Rather, his goal is to let his imagination run wild and materialise his dreams, turning those desires into objects. His dreams, essentially, come true.

At the exhibition, these large-scale objects are complemented by smaller ones, as well as drawings. These drawings at first look like technical plans for the objects he builds, but in the end are beautiful achievements in their own right.

Hello, crabs

The Panamarenko Paradox coincides with the appearance of a new permanent site-specific work by the artist in a pond between the culture centre and the coastline. "Wuivende krabben" ("Waving Crabs") is a large-scale ensemble of crabs made of metal perched atop bright silver domes that act as fountains, all surrounded by a whirlpool of moving water. On the first floor of the centre, you'll find a few binoculars mounted on heavy bases, of the type that line the coast to look at the sea, to get a closer look at the whimsical installation.

"Waving Crabs" is the artist's only public work since retirement, but it's actually the realisation of an old idea. "It's based on an experience Panamarenko had when visiting Victoria Falls [in southern Africa] in the 1970s. He worked on drawings and a scale model in 1985 and '86. He told me that earlier on he didn't find anyone interested. It's also an enormous work, which made things more difficult. It was finally Knokke-Heist that proposed doing it."

But, concedes Coucke, "he might not have looked very hard. That's typically Panamarenko. He does what he wants to do; his choices are made intuitively. Some of his works wouldn't even be known if it weren't for visitors to his former house in Antwerp seeing some objects that interested them. Only then would he consider their artistic value."

The idea of the exhibition was to create a context for the introduction of "Waving Crabs". But why did Coucke call it *The Panamarenko Paradox*? "I had the feeling that in the eyes of a lot people, the work doesn't look like a typical Panamarenko. He's mostly known for objects that try to defeat gravity. But if you



Panamarenko's brand new "Waving Crabs" in Knokke-Heist's Zeggemeer pond (top); The artist in 2005 with one of his non-flying flying machines (above left);

The "May Beetle" sculpture from 1975 (above right)



© Collectie Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap / Photo: Dirk Pauwels

delve deeper into his oeuvre, you'll see that, already in the 1960s, he had made some poetic works that have nothing to do with flying."

At the end of the day, continues Coucke, "the typical Panamarenko art work doesn't exist. He has always combined poetic works with technical ones. There's a unity in his oeuvre." But Panamarenko always needs to be challenged technically, Coucke stresses. In the exhibition, for instance, are three backpacks that act as jetpacks, meant to lift someone from the ground. But "they're not variations on each other," says Coucke. "They each represent a different answer to a different technical problem."

To illustrate this point further, Coucke points to Panamarenko's models of *Archaeopteryx*, a bird-like dinosaur. "He fit four of them with an accelerator. It's just a small device, easily overlooked. But he made it at a time when he was looking for a perpetual motion machine, and the accelerator fit that plan. He constructed the accelerator with as much concentration as the *Archaeopteryx*, and for him, each of them contains as much poetry."

The incomparable artist

Panamarenko is without peer: He has never belonged to an art trend, though, "his attitude can be compared to that of [20th-century German artist] Joseph Beuys, one of the few artists he admires," says Coucke.

In Flanders, Panamarenko is an art celebrity, known as much for his distinctive long-haired look and his much-younger wife as for his work. But what about his international reputation? "He's regarded very highly in the art world," says Coucke.

But that hasn't translated to an international audience, among which he is still generally unknown. The fact that he's stopped working won't help his case.

"Most museums or organisations that set up contemporary art exhibitions like to include new work of living artists. If they always have to fall back on the same works, they're less motivated." But the curator stays positive. "This spring, we created an exhibition of Panamarenko's work for Art Cologne, the oldest art fair in the world, at their request. The response was overwhelming."

And Coucke concludes on a sanguine note: "I still expect some exhibitions in famous international museums."♦

The Panamarenko Paradox

Until 15 January

CC Scharpoord

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→ www.panamarenkoparadox.be

The restless reader

While the Flemish continue to devour texts, the book business itself may not survive

REBECCA BENOOT

It was only a decade ago that book readers were lamenting the dissolution of the independent bookstore in the face of corporate chains. But now even the chains are under threat.

In the good old days, when a novel was finished, the author sought a publisher who transformed their words into a book; the publisher would supply the distributor, and the distributor made sure the books landed in stores where these bundles of fictional goodness could find their way to us, the consumer. This seemingly simple road a book has to follow in order to get from the author's brain to our hands is now faced with several pitfalls such as the economic crisis, online sales and digitalisation.

There were less visitors at Antwerp's Boekenbeurs this year than last and certainly less than expected. Digitalisation has already started a revolution in the US, with many authors now publishing and selling their own books through Amazon, cutting traditional publishers out of the equation altogether. eBooks and online sales, finally, are endangering the traditional bookstore. Just two weeks ago, Colibro, an organisation that looks after the interests of Flemish independent bookstores, called it quits after losing money for almost three years. Despite these changes, Flemish organisations like Boek.be and Stichting Lezen (Reading Foundation) are still trying to whet our appetite for books and, of course, reading.

Getting them while they're young

Stichting Lezen's goal is to remind us of the alluring appeal of real books by stimulating reading in everyone – from babies to adults. It is important to be confronted with books and the joys of reading from an early age onward, says Majo de Saedeleer, head of Stichting Lezen, who recently also won the prestigious Filson Steers Mariman Prize of Education.

"Our mission is to improve the reading culture in Flanders," she says. "We want to make people aware of the pleasure and the benefits of reading in order to stimulate their personal development as well as their social emancipation by introducing several projects and initiatives that are based on research and our own experiences in the field."

Based in Antwerp, Stichting Lezen was established 10 years ago by then culture minister Bert Anciaux to try to improve Flanders' reading habits. It has since introduced numerous successful projects, such as Boekbaby's. "Every year 10,000 parents are given a gift box filled with books when their child

is six months old to stimulate reading as early as possible," explains de Saedeleer (*pictured*). "When the child is 15 months old, they can get another gift box at their local library in order to pave the way for future visits."

By doing this, Stichting Lezen tries to inform young parents about the importance of reading, talking and even telling stories in a child's development. Other projects are last week's Voorleesweek to promote the benefits of reading to your children and the Jeugdboekenweek in March, focusing on children's literature.

"Surveys have shown that during the past five years, out of all forms of cultural development such as going to the theatre, concerts, visiting museums, etc, reading is the only one that has flourished," claims de Saedeleer. "Youngsters are interested in reading, and it still has a good image." By the time a child reaches about 15 in Flanders, they read very well. But they no longer want to do it.

The reader's gain

Stichting Lezen is trying to combat this through lectures and bringing authors into schools. Digitalisation and interactive eBooks are also methods that could stimulate children to start reading. But eBooks and the digital format in general are more than just new ways to offer a text. They influence reading habits, causing people to read faster than they do a book, for example.

As the number of literary events show, Flemings still love to read. Thousands every year attend festivals such as Zuiderzinnen, Het Groot Beschrijf and Mind the Book. A recent study on buying, reading and the borrowing of books has shown that reading is popular – but the way people are guided towards books has changed. Consumers used to be more dependent on reviews, whereas now, they rely more on friends and family for suggestions. Mouth-to-mouth advertising is gaining in popularity. The opinion of the common man counts, resulting in popular reading communities such as www.iedereenleest.be.

A new book by Antwerp University lecturer Pierre Delsaerdt, *De winst van de lezer* (The Reader's Gain) is the first that illustrates the inner workings of the Flemish book industry, guiding readers down the long and winding road from the author to the consumer. It discusses typically Flemish aspects of the business, like the structure and relevance of Boek.be and Stichting Lezen.♦

→ www.stichtinglezen.be



"Surveys have shown that during the past five years, out of all forms of cultural development, reading is the only one that has flourished"

Fresh fiction



20 onder 40 (20 Under 40)

Edited by Eva Berghmans & Harold Polis · De Bezige Bij

Two colleagues at Antwerp publisher De Bezige Bij have selected this group of 20 short stories by Flemish authors under 40. It's the perfect mix of upcoming talent and more seasoned authors, including YM Dangre, who won this year's Flemish debut novel prize; Das Pop frontman Bent van Looy, the Flanders-born writer of Nigerian origin Chika Unigwe and author and journalist Tom Naegels. *20 onder 40* shows us both the colourful present and the promising future of the Flemish novel, with its eclectic voices and their daring originality.

Gelukkig zijn we machtelos (Fortunately, We Are Powerless)

By Ivo Victoria · Anthos

Part psychological thriller, part contemporary comedy of errors, this second novel by Flemish author Ivo Victoria is brilliant and sports clear cinematic ambitions. In *Gelukkig zijn we machtelos* (Fortunately, We Are Powerless), girls start disappearing. When Billie vanishes at a garden party, her family is forced to rely on each other for comfort amid the criticism and chaos that ensues. First published as an eBook, the novel provides a crystal clear look at the tension beneath the surface in present-day society.

De man die niet begraven wilde worden (The Man Who Didn't Want to be Buried)

By Rachida Lamrabet · De Bezige Bij

Rachida Lamrabet is a Flanders-born author of Moroccan descent whose previous novels have earned her numerous awards. Her latest tells the story of Moncif, a man who loses everything dear to him because he refuses to compromise. When things can't get any worse, he tries to regain his self-respect with a radical and illegal act of redemption. Lamrabet is merciless in her tantalising and philosophical tale about what happens when we try to avoid life's big questions.

Solo

By Pieter Aspe · Monteau

Flanders' favourite crime author is back with a new novel starring the infamous inspector Van Inn. In *Solo*, the mayor of a Brussels suburb is found decapitated in Bruges. The clues clearly lead to a right-wing organisation, but things are never what they seem, especially when a member of the Vlaams Belang party also loses his head. Coincidence? Or a serial killer who wants to reintroduce the guillotine? Mixing current affairs, politics and nail-biting tension, Aspe once again proves why he is the king of the Flemish whodunit.



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THE
Bulletin

Playing with your expectations

THE INVADER

LISA BRADSHAW

There are so many ways Nicolas Provost's debut feature film could have gone wrong, and it's a testament to his highly stylised, delicately crafted manner of working that it doesn't. From its very first full frontal shot (of Flemish supermodel Hannelore Knuts, no less) to its black man/white woman game of cat-and-mouse to its insistence on avoiding political messages by making its central character completely ambivalent, it's even more than was expected of the 42-year-old whose short films and video art have been winning international awards for several years.

In *The Invader*, which opens this week across Brussels and Flanders, Amadou is truly a specimen to behold. He is washed up on an unnamed European shore with many African comrades, who have mostly drowned. We see him next in Brussels, where he is doing the work of two men so that his seriously ill friend is not thrown out of the thug-controlled warehouse-cum-flophouse that is home to illegal immigrants. His muscles bulge as sweat drips from his brow.

Eventually things go very wrong with the situation, but Amadou – despite his vulnerable position – doesn't take any guff, that's for sure. You're left staring in wonder – and with not a little admiration – at his reckless bravery.

Good looks and an unbridled confidence get Amadou (Issaka Sawadogo, pictured) further in this marginal life than you'd think, and he meets the beautiful, successful business woman Agnès (Stefania Rocca). She is drawn in by this seemingly exotic extra-marital adventure. But as she begins to see through his transparent lies about who he is, that temper Amadou displayed to such cheers early on becomes more and



more sinister. Eventually, you just don't know if Amadou is a good guy, or a bad guy.

Provost was born in West Flanders, spent several years in Oslo and today lives and works in Brussels. His 2004 short *Exoticore* also starred Issaka Sawadogo, as an immigrant in Norway, and he wrote this film with the actor in mind. "I wanted to say something about the climate of the world today, and I didn't have to look very far," he tells me. "I put him in an immigration setting and challenged myself not to make a sentimental political work. I thought it

was more courageous to have an African man as a true cinema anti-hero instead of it being about yet another one-dimensional, suffering character."

The Invader has a similar feel to much of Provost's shorter works. Light is often very bright or very dim, and the neon lights of the city contrast sharply with human vulnerability. Occasionally, it's almost like these are hapless characters in a video game. "I try to achieve a sort of poetic superficiality without adding anything myself," explains Provost. "I never use extra light. I film the reality like it is, but I look

for places or situations that are dreamlike. A good film to me is like the experience of a dream."

Provost uses long takes to build up an almost unbearable tension – which is often no more than a tease. "People have a natural instinct to expect the worst to happen at any minute. We know what people are capable of doing to each other, and we also fight out own demons. I like to play with the expectations of the viewer."♦

→ www.tinyurl.com/theinvader



Urban golf was born in 1999 in – where else? – California. But it's slowly making its way across the European continent. A sport that involves swinging a golf club in the middle of a city naturally attracts informal and slightly rebellious types. The game can take place in a number of urban settings, from parks and squares to streets and industrial zones. The target, instead of a hole marked by a flag, can take the form of a statue, bench, street sign or any other highly visible object. Well worth mentioning is that urban golfers use a special ball, called an almostGolfball, which is soft. So no one should get hurt or break any shop windows.

For the upcoming annual Antwerp Urban Golf Day, you don't need to know a thing about golf. Simply register online for your personal tee time (individual or with a group), then show up to play nine holes on the stunning riverside course around Antwerp's newest museum, the MAS. The cost, €22 per person, includes a golf club and almostGolfball, tee-off mat, tees, score card, course map, initiation lesson, nine-hole game, guidance throughout and plenty of freebies from sponsors. Funky dress is encouraged, but not required. (Robyn Boyle)

→ www.urban-golf.be



MORE ACTIVITIES THIS WEEK

Flemish Antwerp

Atmosphere Walk Rivierenhof: Free guided night walk through the wooded park, followed by storytelling around a cosy fire
NOV 26 19.00-21.00 at Provincial Domain Rivierenhof, Turnhoutsebaan 232
 To register, 03.360.52.18 or wachters@rivierenhof.provant.be
www.rivierenhof.be

Ghent

Six Days of Ghent: Spectacular indoor cycling event
NOV 22-26 19.00-00.00
NOV 27 12.00-00.00 at 't Kuipke, Citadelpark
www.z6sdaagse.be

Agenda

THEATRE

Needcompany director Jan Lauwers' latest masterpiece is a self-portrait with actor Dirk Roofthooft in the lead role. The play unfolds on the set of *De kunst der vermakelijkhed* (*The Art of Entertainment*), a popular reality show in which a chef prepares a last meal for the nearly departed. Needcompany regular Viviane De Muynck (*pictured*) gives another glorious performance as the game show host in this dark and cynical comedy about an artist who loses his short-term memory and, with it, his will to live. It's a story inspired by Flemish man of letters Hugo Claus, who also lost his short-term memory towards the end of his life. "Without that memory, an artist is nothing," according to Lauwers, "because an artist exists via his work." (In Dutch) (RB)

→ www.vooruit.be



© Anna Stöcher / Burgtheater

De kunst der vermakelijkhed

15-20 December, 20.00

Vooruit, Ghent

MORE THEATRE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Hiob: Play based on the 1930 novel of the same name by Austrian-German writer Joseph Roth, directed by Johan Simons (in German with Dutch and French surtitles)

NOV 25-26 20.00-22.00 at deSingel, Desguinlei 25
www.desingel.be

Brussels

Baroque Bodies: Special project on the 17th-century libertine John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, featuring performances, workshops, exhibitions and a late-night programme

Until DEC 3 at Beursschouwburg, A Ortsstraat 20-28
www.beursschouwburg.be

Mechelen

Verborgen Kind (Buried Child): Absurd and tragic drama about an American farming family that falls apart during the economic crisis of the 1970s (in Dutch)

Until DEC 10 at Theater De Peoene, Lange Schipstraat 71-73
www.peoene.be

Els De Schepper

Until 26 May
Across Flanders

PERFORMANCE



You don't consistently sell out 11 one-woman shows without good reason. The Flemish love Els De Schepper – in part because she has a beautiful singing voice, in part because she's extremely amusing. But her biggest draw is that they see her as one of them. She is self-effacing, isn't afraid to poke fun at her (and their) own culture and not afraid to admit her shortcomings – hence the title of her latest show *Niet geschikt als moeder* (*Not Fit to Be a Mother*). Undergoing a number of character transformations, De Schepper's theme this time is choices – whether we've made the right ones, whether we'd do the same things again. She promises that in this show you'll get to know the real her – even more than you already do. She'll perform the show across the region for months, but act fast for tickets to the Brussels performance on 23 November or for Ghent from 1-3 December. (Lisa Bradshaw)

→ www.elsdeschepper.com

MORE PERFORMANCES THIS WEEK

Brussels

Poetic Performances: Be surprised by actor guides in a performance parcours without words throughout the museum

NOV 23, DEC 7 & 11 at Magritte Museum, Koningsplein 1
www.musee-magritte-museum.be

Leuven

Robo a gogo - the trilogy of the end I: Petrus (formerly known as Wayn Traub) re-tells the story of the Apocalypse with a go-go dancers, three robots and a Chinese DJ

NOV 23-24 20.30 at STUK art centre, Naamsestraat 96
www.stuk.be

PHOTOGRAPHY

Seventeen-year-old Dinesh ran away from a holding camp for displaced Tamil refugees in Sri Lanka after his parents were murdered. Now he lives in Geel and is studying to become a warehouse operator. Raza, of the same age, managed to finally escape a family conflict in Afghanistan but not before spending a year-and-a-half on the run. In Guinea, meanwhile, Ibrahim's father was threatening to kill him. So he took a treacherous journey by boat to the Canary Islands and was one of the only passengers to survive the trip. His request for asylum in Belgium denied, he has no choice but to live without

Vroeger is een ander land (The Past is Another Country)

23 November to 29 January
BELvue Museum, Brussels

papers while looking for a way to become legal. These are just a few of the tragic stories of the thousands of children and teenagers who arrive in Brussels and Flanders every year, completely alone. Flemish journalist Catherine Vuylsteke followed eight such unaccompanied migrants, while the Nadaar photography collective and three guest colleagues captured their portraits on film. These riveting photographs are collected in a book and an exhibition. (RB)

→ www.belvue.be

Win a catalogue

The good people of the Nadaar photo collective have 10 copies of the Dutch/French exhibition catalogue to give away to *Flanders Today* readers. Send an email to editorial@flanderstoday.eu with "Vroeger catalogue" in the subject line by Monday, 28 November. Winners will be notified by the following day



MORE PHOTOGRAPHY THIS WEEK

Brussels

Elders oud worden (Growing Old Elsewhere): Photos of African seniors living in Belgium by Fabrice Kada
Until NOV 26 at Galerij De Rinck, Kapittelstraat 13
<http://derinck.vgc.be>

Oostduinkerke

Vissersvrouw (Fisherman's Wife): Portraits of Flemish fishermen's wives by photographer Wouter Rawoens
Until FEB 15 2012 at National Fishery Museum, Pastoor Schmitzstraat 5
www.visserijmuseum.be

Strombeek-Bever (Flemish Brabant)

Barriers - European Neighbouring: Photos on the theme of the wall in the context of borders and current EU migration policy by Michiel De Cleene
Until JUL 10 2012 at CC Strombeek, Gemeenteplein 1
www.ccstrombeek.be



MORE FILM THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Latin-American Film Festival: Features, documentaries and short films from Colombia, Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina and other Latin American countries **Until NOV 27** at Cinema Zuid, Lakenstraat 14 www.latinfilmfestival.be

Brussels

Ben Russell: The American video and performance artist presents his work and provides a stage performance **NOV 24** 20.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23 www.bozar.be

Ghent

Crime Festival: A celebration of Scandinavian crime TV series and films, featuring the entire first season of the Danish/Swedish series *The Bridge*, the new Norwegian film *Headhunters* and more **NOV 26-27** at Vooruit and Sphinx www.lumierecrimeseries.com

No one was more surprised than Christophe Van Rompaey when his first feature film, *Aanrijding in Moscou* (*Moscow, Belgium*) won three awards at Cannes, enjoyed international release and was a huge local hit. It was a mixture of hard realities, simple humour and honest feelings that audiences appreciate, but its secret weapon was really Flemish actress Barbara Sarafian, who played the kind of getting-through-it heroine scriptwriters would sell their souls to duplicate. Van Rompaey's new film *Lena* introduces an altogether different sort of character. Lena is a Rotterdam teenager with an unpaid internship and a situation at home that runs from simply annoying to psychologically abusive. She is large sized, which seems to bother everyone else more than it bothers her. But her sexual behaviour – in alleyways and back rooms with good-for-nothing boys – suggests that she has not been successful at forging healthy relationships.

When an attractive young man takes a real interest in Lena, her problems seem solved. She flees from her self-obsessed single mom's apartment to the rambling home of Daan (Niels Gomperts) and his reserved but friendly father. Daan, to the viewer's surprise, turns out to be the real thing. He's decent, and he loves her. Unfortunately, it turns out that Daan's father (Jeroen Willems) wants Lena, too. And then Lena has to make choices that are based more on survival than on self-fulfilment. That is where the difference lies between Van Rompaey's first heroine and this one. And, although this one is not going to appeal to audiences in the same way at all, Emma Levie as Lena is mesmerising, smoothly careening back and forth from admirable self-confidence to blank-faced victim. Though some of the film's situations seem forced and the ending is abrupt, its mood – and its heroine – keep it riveting. (LB)

→ www.lenadefilm.be

Lena

Opens 23 November
Across Brussels and Flanders



With quotes like: "We all silently accept global capitalism is here to stay" and "I am not human. I am a monster", you know that a Slavoj Žižek's appearance promises to be anything but dull. The brilliant Slovenian philosopher is here to share his latest thoughts on the political, cultural and economical future of Europe in a talk titled "The Struggle for European Legacy". Don't miss the chance to see his trademark cultural criticism with a passion bordering on radicalism. The evening is introduced by Flemish philosopher Frank Vande Veire, moderated by philosophy instructor Marc De Kesel and ends with a spirited discussion between Žižek and a surprise "prominent figure in European politics" (in English). (RB)

MORE LITERATURE THIS WEEK

Bruges

De oogst van het seizoen (*The Season's Harvest*): Two top authors are interviewed about their latest works, American Michael Cunningham (*The Hours, By Nightfall*) and Flemish author Erwin Mortier (*Godenslaap, Gestameld liedboek*) **NOV 29** 20.00 at Concertgebouw, 't Zand 34 www.passaporta.be

Brussels

Grand Hotel Europa: Tribute to literary translation, featuring talks by non-fiction writer Alberto Manguel, American author Michael Cunningham and readings of verses authored by the late Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa **DEC 2** 20.00 at Flagey, Heilig-Kruisplein 1 www.flagey.be

CAFE SPOTLIGHT

COURTNEY DAVIS

Herberg de Dulle Griet

Vrijdagmarkt 50, Ghent

Herberg de Dulle Griet stands out amongst beer lovers, which is quite a feat in a region inundated with breweries and bars. Located on Ghent's main square, it's just down the way from the city's famous cannon of the same name – a name based on the 16th-century painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

Bruegel, in fact, wouldn't be out of place in this café, with its beer steins and folkloric witches hanging from the ceiling, its brown stools and its beer barrel tables. Its location attracts the tourists, but it's also full of locals looking out for a beer they haven't tried yet.

About 150 brews appear in an inch-thick menu, listed alphabetically. There are no descriptions whatsoever. To help you choose, you can limit yourself, say, to the beers on tap. With eight options, most with intense alcoholic percentages, you could easily while away a few hours sipping on some freshly poured classics like Westmalle Triple, Delirium and La Chouffe. Lesser-knowns worth trying are the Barbār Honey Ale and the St Bernardus 8°.

Or you can order the beer of the month, which changes and features a buy-one, get-one-free offer. This is tempting, but with such a diverse menu, it feels shameful to stick to one choice.

Another option is to ask the proprietor for his suggestion, if



you can get his attention. For a bar frequented by tourists, the owner is surprisingly lax in customer service. In fact, he can be down right gruff. But the man knows his beer and, naturally, the poor reception is part of the bar's legacy.

Your third option for making a decision is the riskiest. Order a Max of the House. This is 1.5 litres of Kwak beer served in a coachman's glass – a tall, bulbous beaker housed in a wooden container with a handle. Coachmen driving carriages used to use them to have a beer on the road without spilling it.

Brewed by Bosteels in Buggenhout, Kwak is a funky, sweet beer that fosters strong reactions of love and hate (okay, mostly hate). If you opt for this unique beverage at Dulle Griet, consider yourself warned. You will be required to hand over your shoe. The shoe is placed in a basket and hoisted to the ceiling. Perhaps it's to prevent theft of the wholly unique container or perhaps it's a gimmick – but it is always entertaining. Fear not – when you return the glass, you get your shoe.

→ www.dullegriet.be

Ellis Gourmet Burger ★★★★

A good hamburger should be eaten with your hands. Ignore the fork and knife and take a big bite out of one at this relatively new burger joint on Sint-Katelijneplein in Brussels. Open since May, Ellis Gourmet Burger is the applause-worthy initiative of six friends who recognised the lack of quality (read: non-fast food) hamburgers in Brussels. If the success of their first six months continues, we may see more Ellis locations open up in other cities such as Ghent or Antwerp.

The concept of a burger-based restaurant is as simple as the hamburger itself, but making a good one is the real challenge. At Ellis, it's obvious that fresh ingredients take top priority. The interior is sleek and modern yet relaxed. On the walls are mementos from the history of the hamburger, from Germany to the New World via Ellis Island, New York. And finally, following the American example, special attention is given to quick and friendly service. There are plenty of servers hustling about on both levels, and giving our order in English feels somehow natural.

My friends and I enjoy a diner-style booth with a view of the square on one side and the open kitchen on the other. One young client is seated at the bar, his legs swinging under the stool as he happily sips from a chocolate milkshake. There's no lack of 1950s retro nostalgia here.

The menu is refreshingly short, listing few creative burgers in addition to the classics. Know that if you order one of the Louis burgers (classic or cheese), it is served on two slices of toasted white bread rather than the classic bun. (Louis, for the record, is a reference to Louis' Lunch, supposedly the first place to serve hamburgers in 1895 Connecticut.)

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

TALKING DUTCH

Santa's ancestor

Over the last couple of weeks, you must have noticed the sudden presence of a bearded bishop in shop windows across the country, often in the company of his dark-skinned friends.

It is Sinterklaas, Santa Claus' ancestor, and his big day is coming up. He arrived in Antwerp last week, as is the tradition, by steamboat from Spain, where he lives, to the delight and hysteria of thousands of children who welcomed him by singing traditional *Sinterklaasliedjes*, Sinterklaas songs.

"Zie ginds komt de stoomboot, uit Spanje weer aan. Hij brengt ons Sint-Nicolaas, ik zie hem al staan."

Song lyrics really shouldn't be translated, but for the sake of the column: "Look there comes the steamboat, from Spain once again. It brings us Saint-Nicholas, I see him already." (Except in Dutch, it rhymes.)

The singing of songs is an important feature of Sinterklaas folklore tradition that goes back as far as the 15th century. It is meant to lure forth *de goede oude Sint*, the good old Saint, who jumps over rooftops on his white horse on the night before his day, 6 December, to bring gifts, oranges and candy to the

good kids – and stuff the bad ones into his bag.

Not to worry, Sinterklaas said last week that there are no bad kids in Flanders this year. (Something I find hard to believe, by the way.)

Kids grow more impatient by the day, drawing up the ever-so-important *verlanglijstjes*, wish lists, until they finally, before they go to bed, place their shoe at the fireplace – the gifts arrive by chimney – and a carrot for the horse.

Sinterklaas Kapoentje, gooï wat in m'n schoentje. Gooï wat in m'n laarsje, dank u Sinterklaasje!

The lucky contender no older than 12 who knows the translation gets a prize – from me, not from Sinterklaas.

Grown-ups, meanwhile, have grown increasingly uncomfortable with the role of the dark-skinned helper, *Zwarte Piet*, Black Peter. People from abroad are usually astonished and often offended

to see such blatant blackface, a popular form of theatre in early 20th-century America that would have a white man paint his face and act silly. It is now considered extremely racist.

There is no doubt that historically, *Zwarte Piet* represented an African helper, some say slave. Many songs

bite

ROBYN BOYLE



My friend's Louis Cheese looks rather plain and dry, but once the juices from the burger seep through the bread, it's a lot tastier. The meat is topped with melted Cheddar cheese, tomato, red onion and a spicy ketchup-mustard mixture.

All of the other burgers come stacked between soft buns of good-quality bread with a nice outer crisp. And they're not all beef. My friend thoroughly enjoys her chicken "burger", a grilled breast of chicken smothered in tarragon mayonnaise and topped with grilled vegetables, red onion and parmesan cheese.

I order the Ellis Special Bacon: 100% beef, Cheddar, smoked bacon, lettuce, tomato, red onion and pickles. It's tall, but after patting it down I'm able to tuck in. The first thing I taste are the juices running out of the meat. (All of the burgers, by the way, are served medium unless requested otherwise.) My burger is indeed cooked through, but just barely. Inside is very pink and full of flavour. The bacon adds a smoky touch, while the red onion and pickles give it a little kick.

I'm tempted to order another one straight away, probably because I've been spoiled by American sizes to which these portions offer no comparison. But instead I stuff myself on a side of cole slaw and fries with mayonnaise. The creamy red and white cabbage slaw with raisins is on the sweet side, but the fries are thick, crispy and satisfying.

Add in one Bloody Mary, a Duvel and a Vedett, and the bill comes to an even €50 for the three of us.

→ www.ellisgourmetburger.com

→ Sint-Katelijneplein 4, Brussels; 02.514.23.14
🕒 Sun-Wed, 12.00-23.00; Thurs-Sat, 12.00-24.00
€ Burgers: €8-€13
👉 Fresh, juicy hamburgers with all the fixin's



PHILIP EBELS

still refer to him as the servant. Until not very long ago, I can still remember, he used to talk funny and carry a rod for whipping. Kids were terrified of him.

Today, however, he is cast as a friendly assistant, a happy nurse to the ever-forgetful Sinterklaas. His blackness is now attributed to the fact that he goes up and down the chimney. Kids, in any case, often like him more than they do the more intimidating Sinterklaas.

And when it's all over, they sing: *Dag Sinterklaasje, daag, daag, daag, daag, Zwarte Piet!*

Send your best translation of our two lines from Sinterklaas Kapoentje by 30 November to editorial@flanderstoday.eu with your name, address and age

THE LAST WORD . . .

Star scientist

"I look forward to the day when Father Georges Lemaitre gets the honour he deserves from the world."

South African astronomer David Block on a campaign to restore the reputation of the Leuven priest and scientist, whose discoveries predate the more famous Edwin Hubble

Seeing double

"I understand that Ghent wants to avoid that the real Sinterklaas comes across helper-Saints on his travels. That could cause problems."

A spokesman for the St Nicholas Fellowship, on plans by the city of Ghent to prevent fake Saints from confusing children

Having-a-go

"I think the staff here have stuffed me full of pain killers. Just kidding. Write this: outstanding care here. Awesome. I love Belgium."

American tourist Jesse Urban, 29, was shot in the heel trying to stop a bag-snatcher at Zaventem airport last week

False alarm

"I was in the Netherlands all weekend, and I'd asked my secretary to check my mails. When she read about my fatal accident she was in a terrible state. So were my parents."

A campaign by the Belgian institute for road safety to use fake death reports as a warning to potential young speeders seems to have backfired

NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY #208

Feature

China and India are the two most populated countries in the world, and Kris Peeters has visited both of them together with representatives from Flemish business and research centres this autumn. We talk to the minister-president about Flanders' future in the east

News

Happy Birthday Flemish government! The Flemish parliament turns 40 years old this year. Far from a mid-life crisis, members tell us how they've seen the institution grow and flourish over four decades

Business

What is the cost of labour and where is it headed in Flanders in the 21st century? Following a recent debate on the topic, news editor Alan Hope talks to Unizo director Karl van Eetvelt and LBC union head Marijke Persoone