

More English on VRT?

Flemish public broadcaster looks at international market

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Van de Velde Awards

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View from the couch

A recent controversy in the media questioned Ghent University as a stronghold in the study of psychoanalysis in Flanders

Senne Starckx

Last month academics from Ghent University crossed swords in the opinion section of the newspaper *De Standaard*. At the heart of the dispute was the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. The key question: Does the brainchild of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan deserve a rightful place at a university in the 21st century?

An in-depth article in the Flemish daily newspaper *De Standaard* on 3 December put the cat among the pigeons. It covered the lawsuit that has been filed by a few psychoanalysts in France trying to stop the release of a new documentary called *Le Mur (The Wall)*. The film documents the psychoanalytic therapy of autistic children in France, which focuses on the mother as being either too distant or not distant enough. The controversy has stirred up international interest in

journalist Sophie Robert's 52-minute film, which is easy to find online with English subtitles.

Freud and Lacan

The theory of psychoanalysis is more than a century old and has become almost a synonym for the work of Sigmund Freud, the famous neurologist from Vienna. But psychoanalysis has always felt right at home in France because of Freud pupil Jacques Lacan, who became the most important psychoanalyst of the 20th century after Freud. Lacan adapted Freud's theories to make his own theory of psychoanalysis, dubbed Lacanism. And he spread the word. The result is that there are more than 5,000 Lacanians – adepts of Lacan – in France.

However, psychoanalysis has been heavily criticised during the second part of the 20th century, and now both the teaching of the theory and the practice has greatly diminished – except in France, "homeland" of psychoanalysis and Lacanism.

But these weren't the facts that set fire to the powder keg in the Flemish academic world last month. In the article about the documentary, Ghent University was mentioned as the last bastion of psychoanalysis in Flanders. Unlike other Dutch-language universities, Ghent still has an extensive psychoanalysis department.

That was a little too much for some sceptics from the philosophy

department of the same university. According to them, it's a disgrace that their employer is still supporting a "pseudo-science" called psychoanalysis.

A castle in the air...

Because that's what psychoanalysis is, writes Maarten Boudry, a philosopher who just completed his PhD with a thesis on the lack of a scientific foundation of psychoanalysis. "The theory of psychoanalysis is a castle in the air that is doomed to come down," he wrote in an opinion piece in *De Standaard*. "Freud's theories in psychology were quite invulnerable until the 1960s, but since then their dominance has slowly but surely been declining. At British and American universities, psychoanalysis is only mentioned as an historical curiosum. The presence of a proper department of psychoanalysis in Ghent is therefore becoming an anachronism."

... or an effective way of treating patients?

Boudry spoke his mind as a reaction to an opinion piece in *De Standaard* by professor Stijn Vanheule, sent in as a response to the article about *Le Mur*. "There is no such thing as the theory of psychoanalysis," wrote Vanheule. "Psychoanalysis has changed and evolved since Freud formulated the first pieces of his theory.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Bart Swings

Some talent takes years of training, and some is just natural. What other explanation is there for a young man who has achieved stunning international success in a sport rarely seen in Flanders and does so after barely a year's experience?

When the Dutch MEP and political commentator Derk-Jan Eppink was introduced to Bart Swings last week on the VRT programme *Reyers Laat*, his mouth literally fell open. Swings, who hails from Kessel-Lo, had just come in 10th in the European Speed Skating Championships in Budapest – a performance no one from the region has ever equalled. Swings, 19, has been speed skating for just over a year.

Not that he's a sporting rookie, exactly. He's won 32 medals in his first sport – inline skating – including four times world champion. Last year he decided to switch over. "There are still plenty of titles to be won in inline skating," he told the programme. "But ice skating is an Olympic sport, and inline skating isn't. That's why I made the switch."

His eyes are now set on the Winter Olympics in South Korea in 2018, by which time "I think I'll

be among the best in the world," he said.

Physically, he said, he's in "super form", but the demands of ice skating compared to inline are enormous: "Technically, it's incredibly difficult," he admitted. "The first time I was on the ice it went really well, and every day it got better. But the most important thing for me then was that I enjoyed doing it. I moved over to ice skating to be among the best in the world, but I still need to lose a few seconds. On a technical level, I'm far behind."

Fresh from his eye-catching performance in Budapest, he turned from the ice to the books, with a four-week break to study for exams in civil engineering.

"This is someone to look out for in the skating world," commented Bart Veldkamp, the Dutch-born skater who took Belgian nationality and skated for Belgium from 1996 to 2006. Veldkamp held the Belgian record for the 10,000m until February last year, when it was won by Swings on his first ever attempt. At the time, he had been ice skating for only eight weeks.

► www.bartswings.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Joske Pias

News in brief

The port of Antwerp last week welcomed its **longest-ever container ship**, the 398-metre Edith Maersk. A previous attempt by the ship to enter the newly deepened Scheldt channel was called off in December because of adverse weather conditions. The ship was also carrying the biggest load to enter Antwerp: 15,500 standard containers.

year. The couple are due to record a final album of country songs in Texas this spring before embarking on a farewell tour in Flanders.

Brussels public transport authority **MIVB will hire 2,000 new staff** between now and 2014, mainly to replace employees due to retire who were hired in the 1970s when the metro opened. Most of the jobs – 800 this year – will be drivers and technicians. The number of passengers is increasing by 7% to 10% annually, while staff grows by only about 2% a year.

Matías Suárez, the Argentinean forward who plays for Anderlecht, has won this year's **Golden Shoe for the top player** in Belgian football. Chosen by a panel of sports reporters, football officials and former winners, Suárez beat Axel Witsel of Benfica and goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois of Genk. In fourth place was Club Brugge's Vadis Odjidja, who commented: "Suárez is a deserving winner. When he isn't playing, Anderlecht loses 20 to 30% of its strength." Days after the ceremony, Anderlecht beat Club 3-0, with one goal from Suárez.

The **Flemish green party** has discarded the exclamation point at the end of its name as part of a new image, which also includes a new logo and the slogan "Groen works for everyone". The typographical element was first adopted in 2003 when the party changed its name from Agalev following a severe election setback.

The popular Flemish crooner duo **Erik and Sanne** will retire from performing in September as a result of the health problems of Erik Van Neygen, 60, who suffered a stroke last

A buddy system for psychiatric patients that has been on trial in 13 projects in Flanders is to be extended to all 20 mental health care centres in the region, Flemish minister of public health Jo Vandeurzen announced. The system pairs patients with volunteers to help prepare them for life outside of institutions. Volunteers can find information about taking part on the website.

► www.buddyproject.be

The national rail authority NMBS last year carried a **record 221 million passengers**, an increase of 2.9%. The number of international passengers was up 3.8% to nearly eight million. CEO Marc Descheemaeker also announced the authority is now "several million euros ahead" of its plans to reduce operating losses and break even by 2015.

Television pioneer **Paula Sémer will be awarded an honorary doctorate** in March, Ghent University has announced, for her work in the early days of Flemish television and radio and her efforts to popularise science. Sémer, now 86, began on the radio in the 1940s, writing scripts for young people. She was then one of the first presenters on the new NIR television service in 1953. She became famous to a generation as "Tante Paula" (Aunt Paula) on children's TV before going on to head the science service of the then BRT.



OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Where everybody knows your name

The Belgian Family Brewers (BFB), a group of 16 traditional brewers of local beers that includes De Koninck, De Halve Maan and Duvel Moortgat has re-launched its website under the coveted name of belgianbeer.com, thanks to a friendly bar owner from the US city of Baltimore.

In 1996, when the internet was still a vague concept in most people's minds, Volker Stewart, owner of The Brewer's Art, a bar in the centre of Baltimore, registered the domain name. By the time the family brewers came to think of the idea, the name was already taken and well on its way to becoming, understandably, a favourite place on the web for beer lovers.

Stewart recently decided to use the name of his establishment as a url instead and put belgianbeer.com on the market. He received some

very lucrative offers, but in the end handed the name over to the BFB for free.

"I didn't have a good feeling about them," he says of those who came calling. "They were all these companies that didn't give me the feeling that they cared for authenticity or had a family spirit. And those are things that, for a beer-lover, rate pretty highly. I wanted to turn the name over to an organisation that represented the uniqueness of Belgian beer."

The Brewer's Art is something of a temple for beer drinkers. It was voted second place nationwide by the readers of the magazine Esquire and won Best Bar in a poll by Baltimore Magazine. They serve Belgian beers, which are steadily making inroads in the export market, and also their own "Belgian-style" brews, including

the Ozzy (similar to Duvel) and the abbey-style Resurrection. They also serve food like mussels, croque monsieur and fries, which they diplomatically decline to describe as "French".

► www.belgianbeer.com

View from the couch

Attitudes to criticism about psychoanalysis could be part of the problem

► continued from page 1

Earlier ideas were judged upon their scientific value, in correspondence with other scientific disciplines. And Jacques Lacan was undoubtedly the most important innovator. In modern psychoanalysis, it's our habit to perform studies about the effectiveness of psychoanalysis as a clinical method. Recent studies have clearly proven that psychoanalytic therapy can endure the comparison with other therapies, and, therefore, it's an effective way to treat patients."

Scientific, or not?

So is psychoanalysis a sound scientific theory, or not? According to Filip Buekens, a professor of philosophy at the University of Leuven and co-author of the French bestseller *Le livre noir de psychanalyse* (The Black Book of Psychoanalysis), it's definitely not. "I consider the so-called schools of psychoanalysis as highly pseudo-scientific organisations that, for me, clearly display sectarian features. In Flanders, only Ghent still has a proper psychoanalysis department. At the other universities, Freud and Lacan are only mentioned in one or two psychology courses."

According to Buekens, "many independent psychoanalysts are just messing around with the minds of their uninformed patients" because "anyone in Flanders can become a psychoanalyst; you don't even need a proper psychology diploma. One of the reasons that this situation is possible is that a visit to a psychiatrist in Belgium is not compensated by our health insurance."

In fact, that claim doesn't only apply to psychoanalysts, points out Lieven Jonckheere, a Ghent psychoanalyst with a PhD in psychology, who has lobbied for better regulations in psychotherapy. Although one needs to have a degree in psychology to call oneself a psychologist, anyone can practice psychotherapy without a degree in Belgium.

A little bit of nuance

"It's important that we make a clear difference between the original psychoanalytical theories, as they

were formulated by Freud and his adherents, and the present theories and practices," says Nady Van Broeck, a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Leuven. "I know that my colleagues in psychoanalysis these days are highly motivated to base their theories on scientific foundations and to evaluate their treatments scientifically."

Because of this, several key elements in psychoanalysis have proven themselves under scientific evaluation, says Van Broeck. "Freud's assumption, for example, of our 'subconscious mental capacities' playing an important role in our behaviour – even if we are not aware of it – has been confirmed in experimental psychology. Another element that has survived scientific testing is the psychoanalytic view on the importance of early attachment to the primary caregiver in children's development. Other psychoanalytical concepts, however, like the Oedipus complex, are much less reliable and don't really contribute to a better understanding of human functioning or malfunctioning."

It seems that the hardest criticism is coming from outside the psychology community, from philosophy and social science departments. Van Broeck: "In the university departments of psychology and medicine, things have changed a bit in recent years. For the moment, one question is predominant: Which theoretical concepts stand up after scientific research, and which treatments are based on empirical evidence? From which model or theoretical framework these concepts or treatments originate is less important. That is why potential violent discussions about conceptual frameworks have been replaced by discussions about the availability of scientific research, valuable publications and clinical trials to see if a treatment works or not. I understand that this view is quite different from the perspective of philosophers of science. They are used to evaluating psychoanalysis as it has developed from a theory."

► www.psychoanalysis.ugent.be

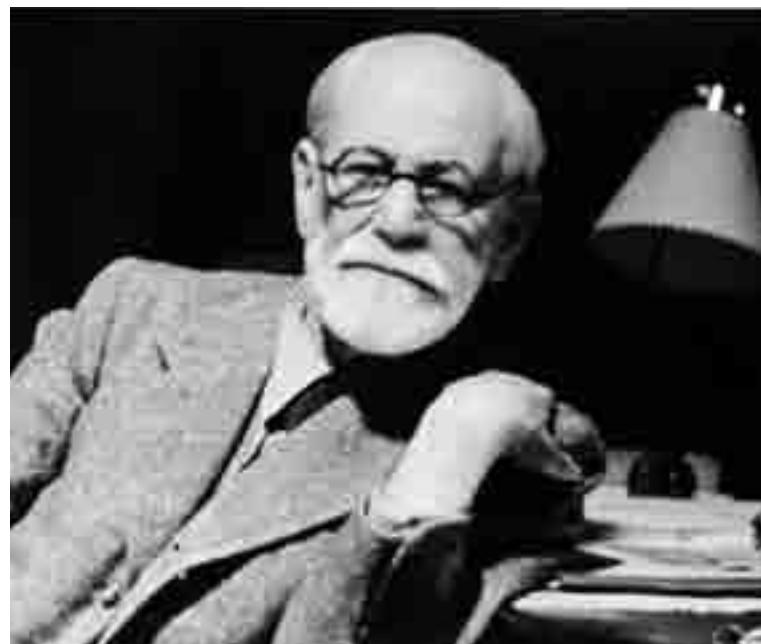
Press Association / BELGA



"The so-called schools of psychoanalysis are highly pseudo-scientific organisations that clearly display sectarian features"

SO, WHAT IS PSYCHOANALYSIS ANYWAY?

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was the founder of psychoanalysis. He emphasised the influence of the unconscious on our behaviour and believed that the human mind is composed of three elements: the id, the ego and the superego. Freud's theories of psychosexual stages, the unconscious and dream symbolism remain quite a popular topic among both psychologists and laypersons, despite the fact that his work is viewed with scepticism by many today. Many of Freud's observations and theories were based on clinical cases and case studies, making his findings difficult to generalise to a larger population. Regardless, Freud's theories changed how we think about the human mind and behaviour and left a lasting mark on psychology and culture.



WITNESS

Lieven Jonckheere, psychoanalyst



Lieven Jonckheere is a psychoanalyst and teaches psychology at the University College in Ghent: "As a convinced Lacanian psychoanalyst and member of the New Lacanian School, I'm not very surprised by the criticism of my discipline because the only way to approach the theory and practice of psychoanalysis is with a sufficiently critical attitude – as Freud himself said. One simply has to accept that this attitude can change into a positive one, subject to one's own personal experiences with psychoanalysis. With some people, this attitude towards psychoanalysis swings in the other direction, to become hate. The only thing that actually surprises me in this debate – and in the recent dispute in *De Standaard* – is the ease by which the least-founded and nastiest criticism can appear out of nowhere. It seems to be very difficult for psychoanalysts to get their opinions in the newspaper."

Nady Van Broeck, clinical psychology coordinator



Nady Van Broeck is the coordinator of the research unit of Clinical Psychology and the director of the postgraduate programme for psychotherapy at the University of Leuven: "Psychoanalysts' aversion to giving their discipline a scientific basis, their reluctance to accept criticism and their construction of a jargon that outsiders can't understand – all this feeds the bad reputation that psychoanalysis has. It's understandable that these attitudes create suspicion in a scientific context. Sadly, this damages the reputation of psychoanalytic psychotherapists who are trying to do their jobs in a very serious manner."

New channel will include English programmes

Flemish public broadcaster VRT reaches out to international audience

Alan Hope

A new third channel for the Flemish public broadcaster VRT will come on air on 1 May, the authority's CEO, Sandra De Preter, announced last week. On that day, children's channel Ketnet will go out on a separate channel. Two weeks later, Ketnet and Canvas, which currently share one channel, with Ketnet airing in the daytime and Canvas in the evening, will go their separate ways with one channel each. The transition is intended to allow younger viewers to find their way to the new Ketnet frequency.

The new channel will bring changes for foreigners living in all of Belgium. (The VRT is carried by law on all cable systems in Brussels and Wallonia.) The VRT has promised to include English-language programming on the third channel, which presumably means home-produced content, since much of the existing VRT drama and movie scheduling is already in English.

"After 20.00 there will be room to serve other specific groups, such as young people, and foreigners who live in Flanders," said board chairman Luc Van den Brande (pictured), speaking at the broadcaster's New Year reception. "As the largest cultural institution in Flanders, the VRT has the duty to contribute to the culture by improving its output online, as well as with new English output on TV."

For children, Ketnet will broadcast until 20.00 every evening, now without the sports coverage by Sporza interfering with their transmissions. From September 2013 there will also be programming for older children. The exact content of Canvas are still to be announced. The existing digital channels Een+, Ketnet+ and Canvas+, will disappear on 1 May. VRT will also review its English-language services, which largely consists of the website

flandersnews.be. That site contains reports and some voiced-over video fragments from the VRT's main news output. On 1 January, Radio Vlaanderen Internationaal, the VRT's service for Flemish people living abroad, closed down on medium wave. The service is now available worldwide by satellite and via the internet.



Eye-witness: attack on reporters in Syria

The French public prosecutor is carrying out an investigation into the grenade attack in the town of Homs in Syria last week, which killed French TV journalist Gilles Jacquier and eight members of the public. VRT television correspondent Rudi Vranckx was on the spot when the attack took place and spoke to Flanders Today on his return to Brussels.

"We were taken there by people from Assad's regime for a tour of

the area. There was a small crowd demonstrating at a certain point, and then suddenly there were shells coming down. All together I counted four; I can't be sure, it may have been five. One fell a distance away on a building, then one close to a school, maybe 150 metres away, and then the third one was getting really close, so I went into a house. My camera crew was filming on the roof at that time. Just as I went in, the fourth grenade fell. My French colleague was still outside. I was just in front of him at the beginning of the tour, and he took the blast.



TV correspondent Rudi Vranckx arriving at Brussels Airport after a bomb attack left one journalist dead in Syria

So you missed it by seconds.

Yes. I was about three, maximum four metres away. But the blast was on the pavement outside, at an angle to the entrance, and when I turned around I saw a bleeding girl being carried in. It was chaos. I went up quickly to look for my crew. They came down because they thought maybe I was one of the victims, and a few minutes later I saw all of the victims.

There has been a suggestion that this was an attack by the authorities on journalists?

That's just speculation. There has to be an investigation for sure, but I can't speculate. What you have to ask of course is, who wins by this? I don't know, it's like Sarajevo in the '90s, everyone blames the other. It's very dirty.

Would you consider going back?

Yes. Why not? It's important to show as many angles as possible. But I've been doing this quite a long time, so I'm always cautious. This might make me a bit more cautious. I've been in real danger before, but coming this close to being killed in such an indiscriminate way ... it was a very close call.

Don't you think to yourself, stay home now, enough is enough?

(laughs) No, not really. Statistically speaking, the next grenade should be further away.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

8,117

traded in their cars for a free year-long pass from the Flemish government for public transport on De Lijn in 2011, slightly down on the 8,924 in 2010. Antwerp province accounted for 43% of the total

3.09%

increase in the cost of drinking water for the 2.8 million customers of the Flemish Water Supply Agency (VMW). The fixed charge goes up to €46.79, with the price per cubic metre varying from province to province

1m84

of classics ordered by a customer from Brussels bookshop Passa Porta as an 18th birthday present for her son. The selection of about 200 books included Russian authors, Jorge Luis Borges, Louis Paul Boon and W F Hermans

249

students lodged complaints in 2011 with the Council for Examination Disputes, 67% more than the year before. The council accepts about four in 10 objections to exam results lodged by students

€3.12 million

in compensation paid out to fruit growers who lost up to 70% of their crop in storms last summer. About 10,000 tonnes of apples and 4,000 tonnes of pears were lost to damage from hail

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Simply green

Confident, bordering on arrogant. That is how one observer described the atmosphere at the New Year reception of the Flemish greens. How did that come about, for a party that was all but wiped out less than 10 years ago?

In 2003, Agalev (which stood for Anders Gaan Leven, or Live A Different Life) changed its name to Groen! Punctuation marks were all the rage those days – with a dot in SP.A and an ampersand in CD&V – but with an exclamation mark at the end of its name, Groen! outdid the rest.

But Groen! was in trouble. Having been in both the federal and Flemish governments since 1999, the electorate turned its back to the ecologists, blaming them for all that went wrong with both. Groen! was left with no seats in the federal Parliament, as it failed to meet the electoral threshold. Something needed to be done, and the exclamation mark was a start.

Since then, a new generation has stood up, with Wouter Van Besien as party president and Meyrem Almaci as forthright federal opposition speaker. This party renewal has taken quite a few years, during which even old-time legend Mieke Vogels – known as Moeke, or mum – took over the party presidency for a while. But now the greens are back: confident, bordering on arrogant.

Things do look good for them, too, as one of only two winners in the last federal elections. Van Besien took part in the institutional talks to end the deadlock between the language communities and promised to support the agreement reached in parliament. His party was then chucked out of the talks, as Open VLD en CD&V preferred to leave them out of the federal government. Officially, Groen! was incensed, but the truth is that opposition mode suits the party. It makes it stand out as a left-wing alternative, which has always been the key to its success. In fact, the greens even feel confident enough to drop the exclamation mark from their name, which is now simply Groen.

Only one party feels better about itself these days: N-VA, which won the 2010 elections convincingly. Like Groen!, it remained in opposition, preparing itself for this year's local elections. Like Groen, it was all but wiped out in 2003. And like Groen, it is confident, bordering on arrogant. But then who wouldn't be with polls predicting election results of over 30%?

Pioneering operation a success

Surgeon says Belgium's first face transplant is an "unbelievably important" breakthrough

Alan Hope

"If another patient were to come to us tomorrow, as far as I'm concerned we could start all over again." That's the confident assertion of Philipp Blondeel, of the clinic for plastic, reconstructive and aesthetic surgery at University Hospital Ghent, and coordinator of Belgium's first face transplant. "We now have the know-how to give people a new meaningful life, where they don't have to breathe through a tube in their throat and eat through a tube in their stomach."

The operation took place "several weeks ago", but was kept quiet in order to monitor the results before making an announcement. The identity of the patient is not being released, nor is the specific trauma that caused the facial disfigurement.

"We can consider it a success," Blondeel said at a recent press conference. Three days after the operation, the patient wrote "congratulations" on a note for Dr Blondeel, and six days later he was able to speak his first words and take a few sips of water. "That was a very special moment. This is someone who couldn't previously breathe independently as a result of a severe

trauma, let alone speak or drink."

It is the 19th time a face transplant has been carried out in the world, following the first partial transplant in Amiens, France, in 2005 and the first full transplant in Spain in 2010. After France and Spain, Belgium now becomes the third country in which surgeons are able to offer the procedure.

The operation was first and foremost a massive task of organisation. From the moment a donor became available, it took 11 hours to go through the protocols and another nine before the two operations could start: one on the

donor to remove the tissue, the other on the recipient. At hour 20, the team in the donor's hospital began, while the Ghent team stood ready to begin transplanting. The second operation finished 10 hours later.

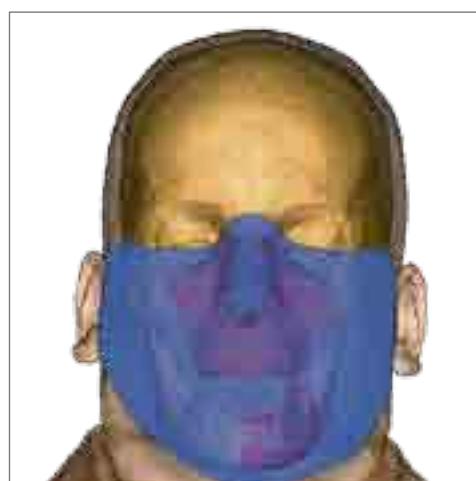
Prior to that, the team had undergone three years of preparation involving 65 specialists from 29 disciplines: not only surgeons but also radiographers, psychologists and specialists in prosthetics, anaesthetics and rehabilitation.

The operation concerned mainly the middle and lower parts of the face. The surgeons had to first remove

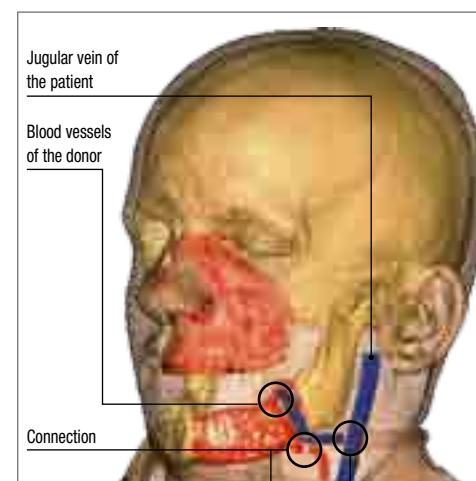
the vestiges of previous attempts at reconstructive surgery, including plates and screws in places where the trauma had resulted in the loss of bone tissue. For both donor and recipient, exact 3D measurements had been made using a CT scanner, so the pieces fit together like a puzzle.

While the recipient was having a new face constructed, the same was happening to the donor. Out of respect for the deceased and his family, a team specialised in the manufacture and fitting of soft tissue prostheses made a mask to replace those parts that had been removed. The operation involved not only skin

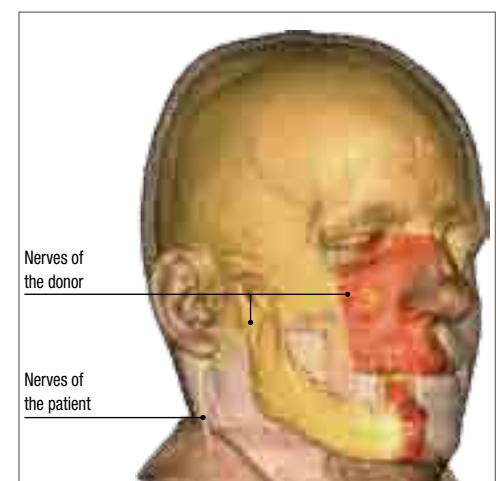
and muscle but also bone and is one of the most complex of any of the face transplants carried out so far. "This breakthrough is unbelievably important," Blondeel said. "We look on this not as a prestige project, but as a breakthrough in giving people back their lives. Until now, patients have had to make do with classic reconstruction techniques, and, after 15 or 20 difficult operations, the results were still disappointing. Now, with one operation, albeit a marathon one, all of the facial functions can be restored with very promising results."



The damaged facial tissue and remnants of previously performed reconstructive surgeries are removed



The blood vessels of the new face and of the patient's jugular are connected



The nerves are connected

Designs for life

Innovation and ecology were key at this year's Henry van de Velde Awards

Katrien Lindemans

On 17 January, the region's finest designers gathered at the Flemish Parliament for the presentation of the Henry van de Velde Design Awards & Labels. The awards have been presented every year since 1994 and honour the work of young Flemish talent, established designers, companies, eco-design and extraordinary products.

The Henry van de Velde awards, named after the innovative Flemish painter, architect and interior designer who died in 1957, are highly coveted by local designers and were issued in the presence of Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters and minister for culture Joke Schauvliege.

A jury composed of designers from different disciplines chooses the winners. "For the 2011 awards, the ecological aspect of the products and designs was important," says Leen Depoorter, jury member for five years. The award for the best design company went to the Antwerp-based BuzziSpace, which specialises in multi-functional products for homes and workspaces. The company emphasises an environmental approach in production and packaging.

As always, innovation is vital. "I'm pleased the jury chose Sara De Bondt for the Young Talent award," says Depoorter. "She's a graphic designer based in London, who constantly adds new content to the graphics

discipline. She has a very cutting-edge way of working."

De Bondt says she is "very happy and honoured" with the prize. "I was planning to publish two books via my publisher Occasional Papers and will now be able to do so thanks to the cash prize. The timing could not have been better."

Not in it for the money

Next to new products and talent, established designers also get recognition. This year, the career award went to Sofie Lachaert. "She's such a talent," Depoorter says. "Even though the jury members all have their own subject of interest, the work of Lachaert was praised by all of them. She's been analysing and re-inventing herself throughout the years, which continually resulted in fresh creations."

"It's a positive message that stimulates me to go on without looking back," says Lachaert, who also has a few words of advice for budding creators. "Work as hard as you can and don't just scratch the surface. Look out for more; investigate your branch of knowledge. Don't become a designer

for the money or the fame, but make it your way of life."

Flemish public waste agency OVAM, partner of the Henry van de Velde Awards, also issued two Ecodesign Pro Awards. The award for a product on the market went to Hegge ID for its LWD project, which develops lighter and more sustainable materials for automobiles. The award for a product in development went to Raf Van Hulle for its Solarwind electric bicycle.

As well as the awards, eight products received a Henry van de Velde label in recognition of their authenticity, innovation, finish and added value. Winners include Christophe Vervaeke's Cyclo Rug, made of used bicycle tyres, and the BuzziBooth acoustic cocoon workplace by Alain Gilles. All projects and designs that received awards will be on free public display this month.



A BuzziBooth acoustic cocoon sits in an open workspace, allowing you to shut yourself off for a time-out. A removable barrier provides solitude or the ability to chat with a workmate across the way

18-25 JANUARY

Henry van de Velde Awards exhibition

De Loketten, Flemish Parliament, IJzerenkruisstraat 99, Brussels

► www.designflanders.be

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESSAir •
Brussels Airlines

Flagship carrier Brussels Airlines is investing €30 million to renovate the cabins of its long-haul A330 Airbus fleet, including new seats and state-of-the-art entertainment systems. The company which lost some €80 million last year saw its passenger traffic rise by 17%.

Banking • Citibank

The local retail activities of US-based Citibank have been sold to the French Credit Mutuel Nord Europe (CMNE) for some €200 million. Citibank's corporate and institutional clients are not affected by the deal. The bank's 500,000 retail accounts and 198 branches will be operated by the local CMNE affiliate, the BKCP bank which has until the end of 2013 to rebrand the network.

Banking • NIBC

The Dutch financial institution NIBC, headquartered in The Hague and owned by the US JC Flowers investment fund, is launching on-line operations in Flanders. The bank is seeking to attract savers with higher than average interest rates.

Construction • Besix

The Brussels-based group Besix has won a €630 million contract to build the Great Egyptian Museum next to the Pyramids in Cairo. The facility, to open in 2015, will show up to 100,000 artefacts, including the famed Tutankhamun sarcophagus. Besix also recently signed two contracts for €230 million and €90 million respectively in Australia and Azerbaijan.

Petrochemicals • Total

France's Total oil group will acquire the 35% it doesn't already own in the Fina Antwerp Olefins petrochemical unit from US-based ExxonMobil. The facility, opened in 1951, is Europe's second largest in the field.

Ports • Ghent

The Port of Ghent's traffic passed the 50 million tonnes mark for the first time last year, prompting the port's management to ask for a second lock in Terneuzen, located in the southwest of the Netherlands, to facilitate access of larger ships to the docks.

Disputes on handling of tax fraud case

Antwerp must decide on prosecutions or settlements in diamond industry

Alan Hope

Two legal actions have been filed within the Antwerp justice system over the handling of a case of possible fraud worth more than €1 billion involving the city's diamond industry. The actions concern disputes between the prosecutor-general's office and the prosecutor's office.

The internal struggle concerns documents from the Swiss branch of the British bank HSBC that were passed on to French investigators by a former employee. The papers contained hundreds of names of clients alleged to be using Swiss accounts to evade tax. The French passed the relevant sections of the file to other national jurisdictions, including the Antwerp prosecutor.

Under Belgian law, each appeal court in the country, of which there are five, has a prosecutor-general who heads the court. This person stands above the royal prosecutors, of whom there is one in each judicial area. The prosecutor-general of Antwerp's court of appeal, for instance, covers the provinces of Antwerp and Limburg, and within that area there are royal

prosecutors in Antwerp, Mechelen, Hasselt, Tongeren, Turnhout and Veurne.

The HSBC case was assigned to Peter Van Calster, a magistrate who used to be a policeman and has experience investigating the diamond industry. Opposing him is Yves Liegeois (pictured), the prosecutor-general, who has accused Van Calster of "mishandling" the investigation and whose office has opened legal complaints of falsification of documents and breach of professional confidentiality.

At issue is whether the diamond industry, hundreds of whose members could be involved in the case, should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law or whether more effort should be made to reach a settlement, as the law allows in cases of tax evasion. The latter course, which Liegeois seems to favour, would be cheaper for the justice system and would bring in millions in tax.

Magistrates invited to Jain Temple

The controversy coincides with reports that Antwerp magistrates were the guests at a dinner given in



the new Jain temple in Wilrijk, many of whose congregation are Indians involved in the diamond industry.

The invitation came from India's honorary consul in Antwerp and not, according to Antwerp judge Jacques Mahieu, from the diamond industry. Reacting to a report on the event on VRT television, Mahieu said: "Our independence is not in question. We can't be bribed, and we can't be corrupted."

Federal justice minister Annemie Turtelboom has asked the High Council for Justice to review the code of ethics for magistrates. "Some magistrates now don't dare to join a club or serve on the board of a football club, while others think that makes you out of touch with the world," Turtelboom told ATV news. "I think we need to extend the code of ethics that now exists. There has to be a broad debate, and every hint of partiality is to be avoided."

Voka questions its role in advisory bodies

The mechanisms for consultation in Flanders between workers, government and employers are "obsolete" and need to be re-organised, according to Luc De Bruyckere, chairman of Voka, the Flemish chamber of commerce. Speaking at the New Year's reception of his organisation, De Bruyckere suggested that Voka might withdraw from some of the various consultation and advisory bodies to give the organisation more time and resources to make its impact felt.

"The transfer of responsibilities [from the federal government to the regions] is the right moment to organise a re-engineering of the system," De Bruyckere said. With that goal in mind, I have asked the management of Voka to make up a critical evaluation in the coming weeks of the value to us of the dozens of councils and advisory bodies we take

part in. And we will withdraw our participation from any we consider to have made little or no contribution in the last few years to positive change and true guidance. We intend to be very consistent in our approach."

In a question to minister-president Kris Peeters, Flemish MP Ivan Sabbe laid out the extent of the problem: "I have been able to find out that your government calls on a total of 224 advisory and consulting bodies. A number of them give good advice, but...If they give useful advice, we mostly don't listen to it. That is unfortunate." Sabbe later claimed he had calculated a cost to the government of €18 million for all bodies together, which advise the government on every area where it has responsibility for policy, from farming and youth policy to health and the media.

In his reply, Peeters pointed out that there are indeed a great many bodies concerned, but that they were all at one time or another approved by the parliament. "I am for efficiency," he said. "These advisory bodies have to operate efficiently; they have to give good advice. I have sat on many advisory bodies of which Flanders and Belgium are rich. When people put their energy into their advice, the idea is that it should bring some value. And that has to be listened to."

Peeters was previously managing director of Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed. He said he was in communications with Voka. "Meanwhile I, with the parliament, will keep watch on the efficiency of the advisory bodies and, where savings are possible, they will be implemented."

People in the news

The Manager of the Year for 2011 is Duco Sickinghe, CEO of Flanders' largest television and internet provider Telenet, based in Mechelen. The Dutch-born Sickinghe has an MBA from Columbia University in the

US and worked for Hewlett Packard and NeXT before becoming a partner in Callahan Associates, which took a controlling stake in Telenet in 2001. Voted by readers of *Trends* magazine, Sickinghe was praised for his "sustainability" in remaining for 10 years at the top of a company that goes from strength to strength.



Duco Sickinghe

Steven Dessein has been named director ad interim of the National Botanic Garden in Meise, just outside Brussels in Flemish Brabant. Dr Dessein studied biology at Leuven, earning a PhD for his research into various members of the coffee plant family, which includes quinine, madder and jasmine. He has published more than 50 papers and has led botanical expeditions to Congo, Zambia, Cameroon and Gabon. Dessein's appointment comes



Steven Dessein

at a difficult moment for the garden, as it is severely in need of investments held up by delay in transferring the institution from the federal to the regional governments.

The province of East Flanders

has honoured seven local people and companies for "remarkable performances" in 2011. The seven are **Brouwerij Huyghe** in Melle, which won a gold medal for its La Guillotine beer at the Brewing Industry International Awards; former gendarmerie colonel **Willy Bruggeman** from Moerbeke who was awarded the Order of Orange-Nassau by the Dutch queen; **Barbara Buyse** of Beveren, named self-employed businesswoman of the year; **Cindy Declercq** of Assenede, voted "prettiest farmer of the year"; **Denis-Plants** in Beervelde, named Decorative Grower of the Year; **Engelendael Farm** in Sint-Jan-in-Eremo, which won the InBev-Baillet Latour environment prize; and **Resilux Group** of Wetteren, which won an Edison Best New Product award for its dispenser technology.

Lessons for the future

Ghent University historian wins award for thesis about failure of food aid during the First World War

Andy Furniere

What does the Flemish bourgeoisie in the First World War have in common with Somalian clan leaders? With this daring comparison, historian Giselle Nath of Ghent University has won the Vlaamse Scriptieprijs, or Flemish Dissertation Award, for 2011.

From 260 submissions, a jury of six journalists chose Nath's Master's thesis *Food scarcity and food distribution, tactics and strategies: Two episodes in occupied Belgium during the First World War* as the winner of the 10th edition of the award, worth €2,500.

Her thesis reads like history as investigative journalism. Candidates must write a snappy article about their dissertation, and in hers Nath compared the food crisis in occupied Belgium during the First World War to the situation in Somalia today. In both cases, local authorities impede efficient distribution of food to ordinary people.

Jury president Sam De Graeve, former editor of the Flemish weekly magazine *Humo*, praised the relevance of Nath's work: "She has done what the best historians do: look to the past through contemporary eyes, to provide lessons for the future."

Nath focuses on the "amateurnish" food distribution by the *bourgeoisie* in Aartrijke, a rural village in West Flanders, and in Ghent, the capital of East Flanders. Through diaries, folk

sources, "because the official archives of food committees hide the suffering of ordinary people," she says.

Colossal robbers' gang

When the German army occupied Belgium in 1914, the country was home to the fifth largest economy in the world but imported 80% of its food supply. The Allied powers of France and the UK placed an embargo on exports to territories occupied by Germany and its allies, so Flanders soon faced a terrible food shortage. But a group of prominent *Brusselaars* quickly convinced their influential connections in the US to establish a food aid organisation for "poor little Belgium", as it was sympathetically named. "Of course, the US was also interested in forging strong ties with an industrial power like Belgium," says Nath. Later, US president Herbert Hoover became the leader of the Commission for Relief of Belgium (CRB), which saved millions of people from starvation.

Still, the CRB was often referred to as Colossal Rovers Bende (Colossal Robbers Gang) by the Flemish people. "While the American coordinators hoped for a business-like approach, the Flemish elite was keen to claim the credit for the aid and regularly used food distribution as a propaganda tool. As a result, the allocation was done in a disorderly way: Much of the food didn't reach the most hungry or there were months of delay," explains Nath.



© Vincent Calot

Giselle Nath compared war-time Flanders to present-day Somalia to win the coveted Dissertation Award

"Women took matters into their own hands and demanded more food"

songs, cartoons, memoirs and private archives, she reveals the miserable living conditions of the majority of citizens and how women in Ghent revolted against the continuous hunger. Nath used alternative

Female revolt

The upper class was deprived of luxury articles but suffered considerably less than the working class. What struck Nath was how this inequality was considered self-evident by the *bourgeoisie*. At the same time, the elite was frightened to death that this class-based society would be turned upside down by revolution.

Although fears of such an event were largely unfounded, ordinary people did complain and protest. In rural areas, such as Aartrijke, disgruntlement was mostly manifested in talk about the corruption of food committee

members. In cities, people took to the streets. Often the demonstrators were women, as Nath points out in her thesis.

"Many men were absent because of military service or forced labour, so women took matters into their own hands and demanded more food for themselves and their children. Sometimes they forced small raises of the food rations, but they especially made hunger visible to the authorities. This role of female protesters has been underexposed."

Nath admits that the Flemish elite cannot of course be completely equated with Somali clan leaders, but points to the similarities. "Both misuse and abuse food support – provided in Somalia by humanitarian NGOs – for their own benefit. With my dissertation, I ask people to pay more attention to the influence of local powers. Blaming only NGOs for the failure of food aid in the Horn of Africa is unfair."

► www.scriptieprijs.be

Q&A



Frederik Leys of the University of Leuven is the winner of the Agoria Award, the Flemish dissertation award for technology and innovation

What is your invention, the Kulibrie?

It's a micro airplane with a wingspan of 10 centimetres and the weight of a few sugar cubes, about four grams. What's special about the Kulibrie is its flapping wings, which are based on the air acrobatics of the Rufous hummingbird. By flapping approximately 40 times per second, the Kulibrie can perform more complex flight manoeuvres than ordinary micro

airplanes or helicopters. For example, it could land upside down.

What can it be used for?

The size and manoeuvrability of the Kulibrie means it can fly around in cramped spaces that other devices cannot explore. It's my intention to equip it with a camera, so it can serve a variety of purposes. The American army invests in similar devices for spying schemes, but I feel it can be of better assistance in disaster scenarios. If a building is on fire, the emergency squad could send in a group of Kulibries to find people. During the nuclear catastrophe of Fukushima, the Kulibrie

would have been valuable to assess the origins of the problems. It should be a convenient device for scientists as well, for research in forests, jungles or caves.

What are the challenges that lie ahead?

Right now, the Kulibrie cannot stay in the air by itself. One year should be enough to perfect the wing movement and develop a prototype that flies independently. It also needs a better power supply, to extend the duration of its flight from 15 to 30 minutes. All said, there could be a finished Kulibrie flapping around in Flanders in two years' time. AF

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Micro-electronics specialist ICsense and nanotechnology institute imec, both based in Leuven, have joined forces to achieve **automatic cancer detection**. They are developing a lab-on-a-chip, a miniature laboratory on a chip of a few square millimetres or centimetres, to isolate and detect tumour cells in blood. This device would constitute a big step towards a faster and cheaper diagnosis of cancer. In a few hours, and without sending blood to a lab, tumour cells could be detected. The research is part of the European project Miracle.

Scientists of the Belgian Nuclear Research Centre in Mol have **successfully coupled a reactor to a particle accelerator**. This is a world first and a new step towards faster processing of highly radioactive waste. With this system, radioactive waste would have to be disposed of underground for hundreds of years, instead of 10,000 years as is now the case. The development of the demonstration model, Guinevere, should lead to a fully operative research installation in 2023. Use on an industrial scale will only be possible from about 2035.

Flemish education magazine *Klasse* declares 2012 **"the year of the man"**. During the past seven years, the number of male teachers in Flemish primary education has dropped to one in seven. In secondary education, four out of 10 teachers is a man. *Klasse* challenges schools to come up with creative campaigns to attract male teachers.

The University of Leuven has kicked off its "German year". In 2012, the university will make special efforts to **attract more German students** and hopes to encourage more Flemish students to spend an Erasmus year there. With the help of the German embassy, KU Leuven will put certain key research results in the spotlight in Germany. Cultural activities include a musical-historical project about Leuven and Dresden and a photo exhibition on Berlin.

Liberal Party Open Vld has called into question the pre-pension scheme of *terbeschikkingstelling* for teachers. Teachers now can retire at 58, some at 55, while keeping 70% of their wages. The normal pension age is 60. This system was installed in the 1980s, when there were too many teachers, to provide more chances for young teachers. Since then, Flanders has struggled with a shortage of teachers, and the yearly costs amount to €210 million. Open Vld feels that as the age for early retirement in other sectors is raised to 60, the education system should fall into line.

► Andy Furniere



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Comics that leap off the page

Brussels' fantastic new museum of figurines is putting the finishing touches on its Flemish collection

Andy Furniere

Last September, Brussels opened the ultimate playground for lovers of comics. The Museum of Original Figurines (Moof) brings comic heroes to life, from a giant roaring troll to a miniature baby Smurf. It also shows the evolution of Belgian female characters, from men in disguise to liberated women. And to ensure the future of local comics, the museum is doing its bit to encourage young talent.

In Central Station's Horta Gallery, about 1,500 figurines from mostly Belgian and French comics are on show, and soon visitors will even be able to smell their breath, thanks – or not – to the “Odorama” feature.

Moof complements the Belgian Comic Strip Centre, which focuses on the history of local comics. “Moof highlights the artistic side of comics by showcasing the cast of the stories in 3D,” says Geert De Weyer, Moof curator and writer of *100 stripklassiekers* (100 Comic Classics).

Visitors will even be able to smell the breath of comic book characters, thanks to “Odorama”

Nostalgia

“Cast” can be taken literally in the case of three Smurfs standing on top of the yellow suitcase that brought them from the US. They are prototypes used for the Hollywood movie *The Smurfs*, and the producers gave them to the daughter of Pierre Culliford, otherwise known as Peyo,

the Brussels-born creator of the little blue creatures. Véronique Culliford gave them to the museum, where they now form a major attraction. The rest of the exhibition comes mostly from private collections.

The Smurf village is De Weyer's favourite place. “I grew up reading the comic strips and watching the television series. Immediately, I am sucked back into their world.” The camp of the *Blauwbloezen*, a comic about the adventures of US cavalrymen during the American Civil War, had a similar effect on one visitor. “A man in his 40s stood at their display case for half an hour, totally overcome by nostalgia because the *Blauwbloezen* represented his youth,” says De Weyer.

Tintin, or Kuifje in Dutch, is another crowd-puller. The subject of the recent blockbuster by Steven Spielberg, here you can watch him in 3D without special glasses. Large as life in a space suit, he walks on the moon accompanied by his faithful fox terrier Snowy and other

book covers of Batman, Spiderman and Superman on a wall in what is to become the corner dedicated to American superheroes. A manga area is also being prepared. Flemish favourites such as Jommeke, Suske & Wiske and the Kiekeboes should be fully installed in their place by the end of January.

Grrrl power

The museum provides a rare insight into the evolution of female characters in Belgian comics. “The British newspaper *The Times* claimed that Kuifje was homosexual because women don't take part in his adventures, except ‘manly’ women, like Bianca Castafiore,” says De Weyer. “But this absence of female touches is partly explained by the censorship of the French on sexuality in comic strips. It was established to boycott

Belgian comics that grew too popular for their liking. This censorship did not apply to French comics.”

At the end of the 1960s, the ban was lifted, and, in 1970, Japanese electrical engineer Yoko Tsuno and stewardess Natasja became the first female heroines in Belgian comics. Figurines of Castafiore, Tsuno and Natasja are exhibited, followed by femme fatale Jessica Blandy and private detective Caroline Baldwin. The procession finishes with comic pin-up girls.

The next generation

Moof also houses the Raymond Leblanc Foundation, named after the founder of comic book publisher Lombard Editions, the influential *Tintin* magazine and the animation studio Belvision. Images of Belvision's first animated film, *De fluit met de zes*

smurfen (The Smurfs and the Magic Flute), are projected on a screen.

The Foundation tries to ensure the future of local comics with an annual prize for the new generation of “the ninth art”. Moof director Jean-Pierre Vanhemelryck is an enthusiastic supporter of their mission. “All the decoration in the museum is done by young comic artists. We also cooperate with art schools and in time hope to award our own grants.”

Moof is keen to provide tourist services connected to the exhibition. Vanhemelryck: “In the near future, we will open a restaurant and a shop where visitors can start their own collection of figurines, including a ‘Smurf shop’.”

► <http://moof.d2d.be>



STREEKPRODUCT SERIES

Alan Hope

The Ghent azalea

It's the time of year when most people are still recovering from that orgy of over-consumption that is the holidays, so this month we're concentrating on inedible products.

The Ghent azalea (*Azalea indica*), an indoor plant, is currently the only decorative product to be included in the list of streekproducten, or regional products, officially recognised by the Flemish government. Despite being originally an exotic import, it has a long history of association with the city.

Azaleas originate in the Far East, in China, Japan and Taiwan, and the plant was first brought to Flanders in 1774 by horticulturist Judocus Huytens. In Ghent he found the perfect conditions for growing them (there is also the outdoor *Azalea japonica*): acidic soil with good drainage. That was the beginning of the local speciality of growing decorative plants, leading to the establishment of the Agriculture and Botany Society in 1801,

and later the *Floraliën* exhibition, which continues every five years to this day.

The azalea is in many ways the ideal indoor plant: It requires light, though not direct sunlight, needs nothing in the way of fertiliser and only the occasional watering. It's available in a selection of colours, and plants are available pretty much the whole year round. It's also energy-efficient: The cycle of cultivation takes 12 to 18 months, but growers only heat their greenhouses to avoid frost and to force the flowers at a late stage, so the plants only use energy for two or three weeks at most. The Association of Flemish Azalea Growers was formed in 2001, and in 2010 the Ghent azalea received European name recognition. Only plants meeting the association's quality standards and grown in East Flanders, are allowed to use the name.

That same recognition is now the goal of the Flemish laurel or bay tree (*Laurus*

nobilis). Although the tree is native to the Mediterranean region – it once provided the laurel wreath to athletes in the games of Ancient Greece – its cultivation in Flanders goes back a long time, with the typical form now a speciality to the area around Bruges, Tielt and Roeselare in West Flanders, and around Eeklo and Ghent in East Flanders. Growers pay great attention to pruning the tree with the recognisable bay leaves to achieve a well-filled bush that can be trained into various forms.

Nine out of 10 trees grown here are exported, many of them to the UK. In 2009, growers Geert Devriese and Ingrid Luyssen from Wingene, West Flanders, planted a number of their trees – two new varieties they developed themselves – in the famous laurel garden of England's Chichester High School for Boys.

► www.gentseazalea.be



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Sweet relief

Flanders' long history of candy-making proves there's more to the region than chocolate

Toon Lambrechts

Never tasted a *babelutte* or sunk your teeth into a *cuberdon*? Never heard of a *Gents trientje*, a *sneeuwbal* or a *mokatine*? If you thought Flanders had only chocolate to satisfy the sweet-toothed, think again: Flanders has an equally rich tradition when it comes to sweets.

The history of candy goes hand-in-hand with changes in the consumption and production of food in general. Although sugar derived from sugar cane has been around now for centuries, honey was the only sweetener available for a long time before that, combined with small amounts of liquorice.



You'll only find sneeuwballen in winter – they melt in temperatures above 18°C

"It is only after the Middle Ages that the first sugar confectionery emerges," explains Yves Segers, head of the Centre for Agricultural History in Leuven. "Sugar confectionery was in fact nothing more than small forms made of sugar. Antwerp was one of the main ports, so the availability here of sugar cane rose sharply. But it remained a product for the nobility. Nevertheless, the confectionery made in Antwerp appealed to an international public."

During the 18th century, German chemist Andreas Marggraf discovered a method to extract sugar from the sugar beet. It was the start of the slow democratisation of sugar, though it would be the end of the 19th century before candy became available to the wider public.

This period was also the breakthrough for industrial food manufacturing. "From 1890, the purchasing power of the common man rose significantly," says Segers. "But candy remained a

luxury, reserved for special occasions. It is only after the Second World War that sweets become a mass consumed item. A lot of novelties from the '50s and '60s come from the United States. Chewing gum for example, or candy made of gelatine."

Sweet medicine

Mass consumption of sweets may be a recent phenomenon, but many recipes have a long history and are connected with a specific town or region. The *mumbol*, for example, is typical of the city of Hoegaarden, Flemish Brabant. This orange-coloured, square-shaped candy is made of sugar, mint oil and butter. It came into being alongside the sugar industry in the region. The sugar factories in Hoegaarden are long gone, but the *mumbol* remains.

Other recipes have their roots in pharmacy: Many traditional methods to produce candy are the same as those used by 19th-century pharmacists. Like the *zure hosties*, made of edible rice paper with a sharp sherbet filling. Pharmacists used the paper casting to mask the bad taste of medicinal herbs, but medicines have moved on, and the *zure hostie* has become a sweet.

Perhaps the best-known sweet to start out as medicine in Flanders is the *borstbol*, pillow-shaped sweets that bring relief to a sore throat. But most people will know it as a typical candy your grandmother would give you – provided you'd been good, of course.

Holy candy

Other local candy recipes have a totally different story. Some are eaten at special occasions or during specific religious celebrations. A good example is the *suikerboon*, which consists of an almond covered with a layer of coloured sugar glazing. When a baby is born, family and friends receive a decorated packet of *suikerbonen* from the proud parent.

Kerselare, a small village in East Flanders, has been attracting pilgrims for centuries. They all come to visit the chapel on Elendale Hill, where a miraculous statue of Our Lady stands. When returning home, the pilgrims take away not only the blessing of the Holy Virgin, but also a box of *lekkies*. The recipe for these sweets, made from sugar, candied syrup and honey with water, was developed by Maximiliaan Consael. Today, his

offspring run a sweetshop called Jan van Gent, where the *lekkies* are produced. The sweets take their name from the verb *lekkken*, which means "to lick" in the local dialect.

Speaking of names, there are some funny stories behind certain Flemish sweets. What about the *totentrekker* or the *mulentrekker*, meaning something like "face-puller"? These sweets are covered with generous amount of citric acid, enough to make your cheeks pull together when you put them in your mouth. Or the *poeptes*, shaped like half a cherry. A dirtier mind would say it looks like a bum – *poeptek* in the Flemish dialect. Or what about the story behind the *babbelaar*? It is said that workers in a sugar factory chatted for too long and forgot about the sugar on the fire. The result of their neglect turned out to be quite tasty, and the *babbelaar* ("the chatterer") was born.

Intrigued by this lesser-known side of Flanders' culinary traditions? Next time you visit a Flemish candy shop, look beyond the obvious chocolate. Sweet and tasty discoveries await.

LIFE IS SWEET

Is there a particular sweet that takes you back to your childhood? Chances are you'll find it at the Sweet Candy exhibition in Brussels. With the help of artwork and olde-worlde artefacts – think candy boxes, candy dishes, *cuberdon* moulds, engravings and confectioners' tools – the Brussels Museum for Mill and Food is bringing the history of confectionery to life. So whether it's an Asian sesame crepe, Belgian *cuberdon* or *babelutte*, Montargis praline, *cotignac* from Orléans, Brazilian *brigadeiros*, lollipops, liquorice or Flumps that get your mouth watering, learn more with a series of demonstrations and hands-on workshops.



Suikerbonen are reserved for special occasions

DEEP PURPLE

Conical shaped, with a deep purple colour. A hard shell, with a dark, syrupy filling. Meet the *cuberdon*, currently Flanders' trendiest candy.

The *cuberdon*, also known as *neuzeke*, *tsjoepke* or *Gentse neus* because of its resemblance to a nose, is a typical sweet from East Flanders made by Confiserie Geldhof. The founder of the company, Antoine Geldhof, got the recipe from an old pharmacist named Vinck, who entrusted the recipe to him on his deathbed. Confiserie Geldhof has become famous because of the *cuberdon*, but it also produces a large selection of other sweets.

The *cuberdon* has to be eaten fresh, otherwise the shell

becomes too crispy. That's why the sweet is only found in Belgium, and why Confiserie Geldhof has developed an array of products with the same taste as the *cuberdon*, from syrup to jenever. You can find *cuberdons* in candy shops across Flanders and Brussels, but possibly the most fun is to buy them from the open-air cart piled high with the triangle-shaped candy every weekend in Ghent's Groentenmarkt.



UNTIL 31 AUGUST

Sweet Candy! The sweet history of candy

Brussels Museum for Mill and Food, Windmolenstraat 21

► www.molenevere.be

WEEK IN ARTS
& CULTURE

British translator Paul Vincent has won the biennial **Vondel Translation Prize** for his translation into English of the late Flemish author Louis Paul Boon's 1947 novel *Mijn kleine oorlog* (*My Little War*). This is the first time that the novel, one of Boon's earliest works, has been translated into English. Vincent is the translator of many Dutch and Flemish works into English, including Boon's *Zomer te Ter-Muren* (*Summer in Termuren*) and *Willem Elsschot's Villa des Roses*. *My Little War* is set during the Second World War and follows the cynical Louis as the first-person observer of everyday life in Flanders. This year is the 100th anniversary of Boon's birth, and many events are planned in Aalst, his hometown.

► www.boon2012.be

This may come as no shock, but **Matthias Schoenaerts** is the Flemish Film Personality of 2011, according to voters in the Flemish Audio Visual Fund's annual poll. The 34-year-old actor from Antwerp last year reprised his role in the American remake of the Flemish blockbuster *Loft* as well as putting in a remarkable performance as the lead in Flemish director Michaël Roskam's *Rundskop* (*Bullhead*), which also took Best Film honours. Roskam, in turn, won both Best Director and Discovery of the Year in the poll. *Rundskop* has also been nominated for a whopping nine awards by Belgium's Magritte du cinéma French-language film awards. The movie, which tells the story of a violently troubled Limburg farmer involved in hormone trafficking, is famous for including dialects from Limburg, West Flanders and Walloon Brabant. *Rundskop* is Belgium's official entry to be considered for an Academy Award nomination, which are announced on 24 January.

► www.rundskop.be

Poetry lovers should hurry if they still want to vote for their favourite poem of 2011: The public choice part of the **Herman de Coninck Prize for Best Poem** can be voted for until 20 January. Voters can read all five nominated poems online, and the prize will be announced, along with the winners of the juried Herman de Coninck prizes, on 26 January during the closing ceremony of Gedichtendag (Poetry Day). The one-day event across Brussels and Flanders celebrates poetry in all its varied forms.

► www.tinyurl.com/hdcprize

The conqueror's consort

A new biography sings the praises of Flanders' first lady

Leo Cendrowicz

One of England's earliest queens, Matilda of Flanders, set a golden mean for women in leadership positions. Her power was unheard of in the mediaeval period when the value of royal wives was strictly procreative. A book by Tracy Borman, British author of royal histories, sheds light on one of Flanders' most fascinating historical figures

It was not the most of auspicious of first encounters. After William the Bastard, Duke of Normandy, heard that Matilda, daughter of Count Baldwin V of Flanders, had rebuffed his couriered marriage proposal, he leapt on his horse and rode hard to Bruges. There he found the recalcitrant young Matilda, dragged her outside by her long braids, rolled her in the mud, kicked her and beat her.

Incredibly, this display of raw machismo impressed her so much that she immediately agreed to wed the man known to posterity as William the Conqueror.

That, at least, is the implausible mediaeval legend. But it almost certainly never happened. "It was probably a scurrilous account, written much later, by scandalised monks in the 11th and 12th centuries who did not agree with female power," says British historian Tracy Borman, author of a new book about the much-maligned Matilda. "These were the chronicles of the age, but they were not always reliable."

In *Matilda: Queen of the Conqueror*, Borman aims to give the Flemish royal her due as a pioneer who helped blaze a trail for future women leaders.



A portrait of Matilda as a young woman by an unknown artist

Although time has largely forgotten the first woman crowned Queen of England, she was far from a feeble, forgettable provincial wife. Indeed, as Borman relates, Matilda helped William create a new royal dynasty and rose to become one of the most influential women of the era. Dutiful and pious, Matilda was also well educated, redoubtable, independent and fiercely ambitious, helping her husband build his fleet, and later consolidating his new court in England.

"She was a very inspirational role model," says Borman, who paints a picture of a proto Eleanor of Aquitaine, one who shouldered huge responsibilities and who seems instrumental in William's conquest of England. "She tempered his tyranny and acted as a kind of medieval PR manager, helping him to win the support of the people of his native Normandy and those of his newly conquered territory. In a period when women were usually relegated to the sidelines, this was an impressive feat."

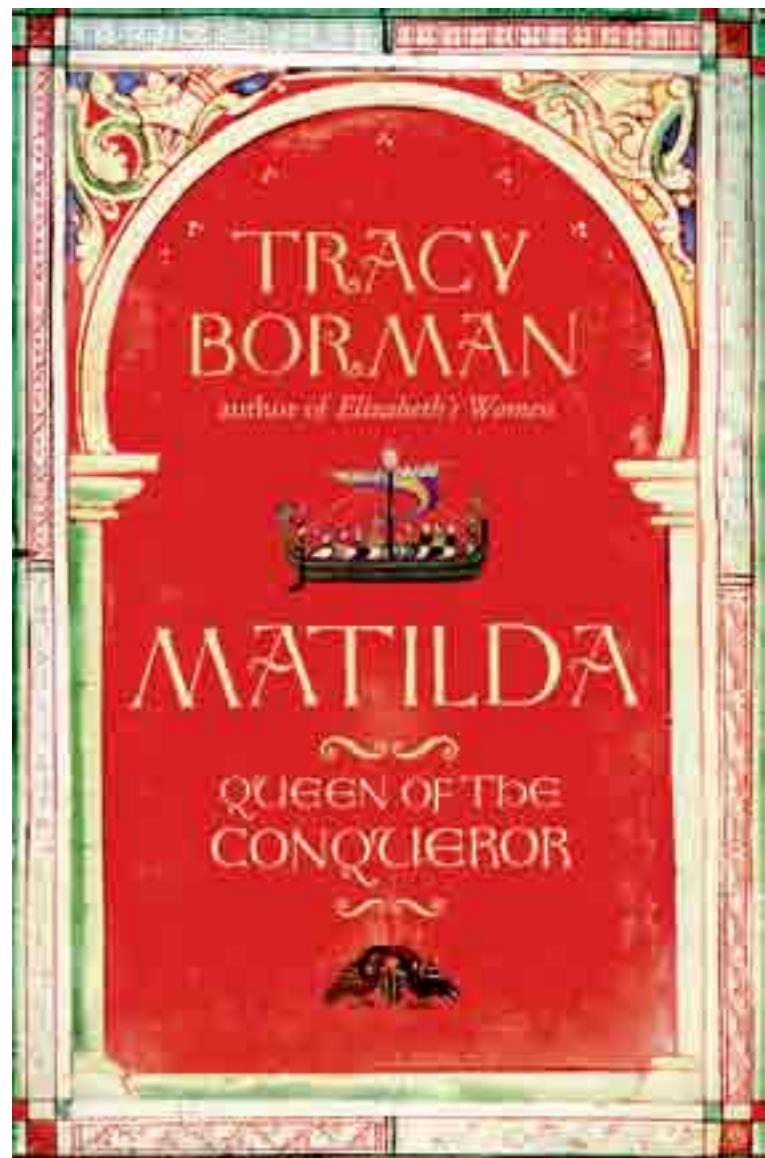
The Bachelorette

So who was Matilda? Born in 1031 and referred to as Lady Matilda, she was one of Europe's most prestigious members of the aristocracy. At the time, the County of Flanders was a very prosperous region, with strategic importance, nestled in the heart of Europe. Matilda's father had extended its territory through campaigns: It was far larger than today's current borders suggest, including parts of the Netherlands and spreading down to the borders of Normandy. And while Flanders, like many principalities, owed fealty to the King of France and the Holy Roman Empire, in reality it had free authority over its own domains. That meant all the male aristocracy of Europe considered Matilda a potential bride.

As his then-nickname suggested, William was illegitimate and was always aware of better claimants to his lands. Matilda's impeccable lineage promised to bestow lustre on him: She could trace her roots back to Charlemagne and King Alfred of England.

Accounts from envoys also attested to her beauty and accomplishments. For example, she was fluent in Dutch, French, English and Latin (unlike William, who was only conversant in French, the international language of courts at time).

Borman, who has also penned books on Queen Elizabeth I and King George II's mistress Henrietta Howard, says Matilda came with her own baggage: She had earlier offered herself in marriage to Britric, a Saxon landholder, ambassador to the Flemish court, and one of the wealthiest men in England. He spurned her. (But she later wreaked revenge: After William became King



of England, she persuaded him to seize all of Britric's lands and have him imprisoned on false charges. He died a year later under mysterious circumstances.)

Matilda married William in 1053, when she was 21, a relatively late age at a time when girls could wed at 12. But although it was conceived as a strategic match, the marriage seems to have been one of genuine love and trust. Unusually for a mediaeval ruler, William took no known mistresses and fathered no illegitimate children once he became a married man. During the next two decades, this happy union produced four (or five – the precise number is unclear) daughters and four sons, including two kings, William II and Henry I.

Pioneer of leadership

But Matilda's real value was as a partner at court. She was William's closest confidante and worked actively on his behalf. "It was very, very unusual for the time for a woman in such a dangerous, brutal world," says Borman. "What you tend to find is that if women are regents, it is because their husbands had died and the children are too young to take over. But William willingly gave Matilda power."

When her husband mustered his forces to invade England, it was

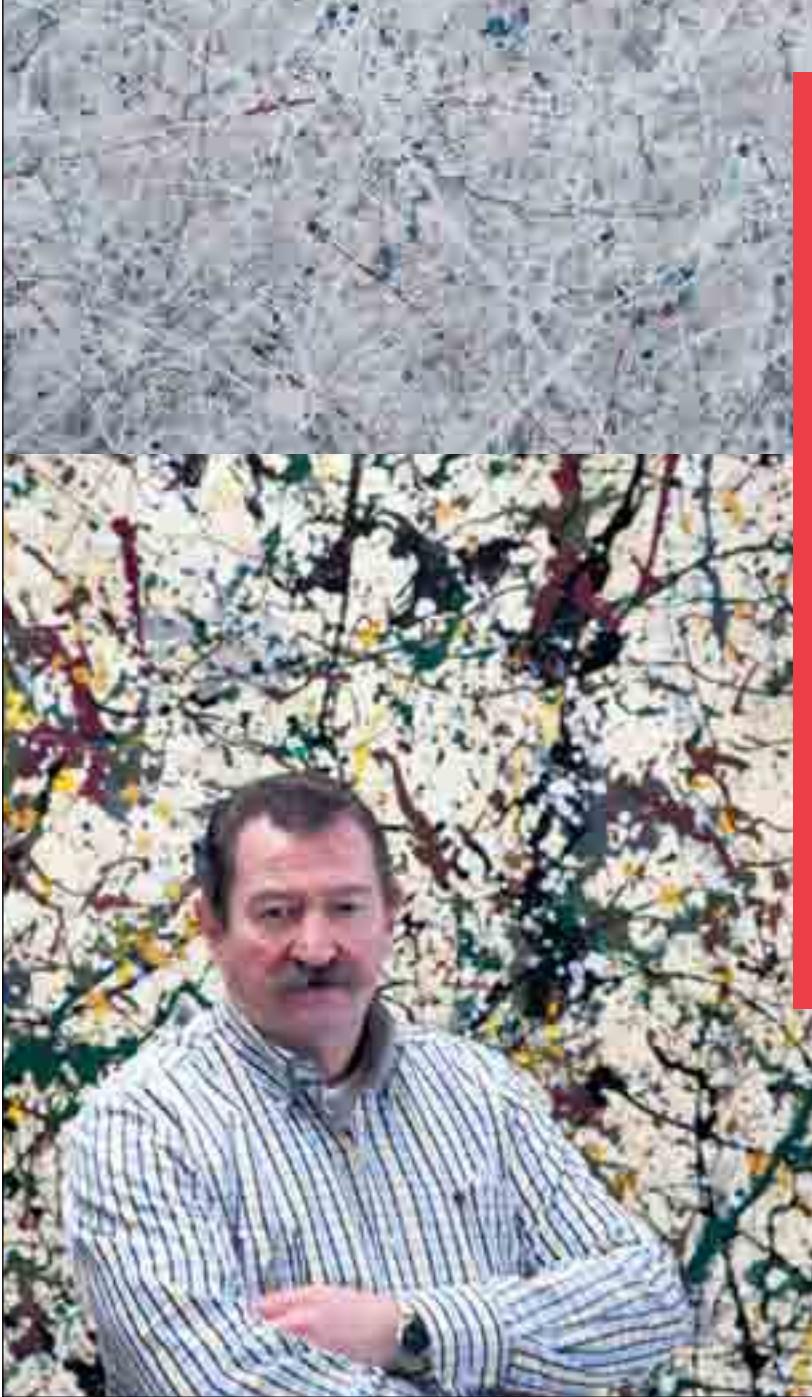
Matilda who commissioned the most spectacular ship that sailed with his fleet: the Mora, a longship, its figurehead said to have been a golden boy blowing an ivory horn. And when William set sail across the Channel, it was Matilda he left as regent to safeguard his Norman duchy in his stead.

Matilda was crowned queen in 1068 in Westminster at a ceremony that declared her to be sharing power with her husband. As queen, she brokered alliances and travelled the country, even making the point of giving birth to the future Henry I in Selby, Yorkshire, to underline her new responsibilities.

After Matilda died, in 1083 at the age of 51, William became tyrannical, and people blamed it on his having lost her.

Borman's book weaves a compelling tale of intrigue, violence, courage and love, revealing a woman ahead of her time. "She carved out a whole new model of leadership for consorts," Borman says. "After Matilda, it became quite acceptable for women to enter the political arena, to act as regents for their husbands in matters of government. She was extraordinary for her time."

► www.tracyborman.co.uk



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THEATRE

Katy Desmond

Messiah Run!

It all began with Simon Says, says Hans Van den Broeck about his new choreography *Messiah Run!*, which premieres this month in Ghent.

"My girlfriend told me about this game where one child tells the other children to move a certain way, and if you don't listen well or you do it wrong, you are out," explains the Brussels-based choreographer and founder of the SOIT dance company. "I said: 'That's not a game, that's crowd control.'

Van den Broeck and his girlfriend laughed about the game – known as "Jantje zegt" in Dutch – but the next morning it was still with him. "I woke up and 'Simon' had become 'messiah': Messiah says. It became a game in my mind to imagine what if there was a messiah, whatever that is. And what if he was a person who ordered us to do things, and we would have to obey him and follow his structure to understand the world."

Out of this came *Messiah Run!* Set on a stage littered with chairs (dance fans may recognise a nod to Pina Bausch here), the piece uses movement to explore humanity's reflex to make order from chaos, the resulting search for some all-powerful guiding force and why we would never recognise such a power if it presented itself.

For the piece, Van den Broeck couples his passion for dance with his educational training in psychology (which he studied at KU Leuven) to investigate the human capacity to take in and hold information, as well as its limitations. Six performers,



coming from the worlds of both dance and theatre, scan their minds like computers, mining for data made up of memories and organising input in the attempt to construct and understand their environment.

"It's a very lonely piece because everyone is wandering through their own personal memories, trying to communicate them to the audience," says Van den Broeck. "But memories are by definition impossible to share." The 47-year-old built the piece with

his performers in a manner not unlike how a psychoanalyst might guide his patients through the exploration of their memories and anxieties, finding new ways to push the boundaries of communication. Rehearsing in the abandoned chapel of an old psychiatric institute where Van den Broeck worked as a student, the group would have silent days during which they had to develop their roles and share their ideas only through the movement of their bodies.

In the piece, the line between sanity and insanity, reality and memory is blurred. Van den Broeck, who spent more than 12 years with the Ghent-based dance collective Les Ballets C de la B before founding SOIT in 2001, suggests that this is because distinguishing between them may be impossible. "I am fascinated by some of these people you see in Brussels: the loners, the crazies. Sometimes I meet these people, and they talk to me like contemporary oracles. I find they have something like a messiah

in them: They put things in front of us that we don't want to see."

Light-hearted? Perhaps not. But the subject is endlessly fascinating: why our cognitive limitations mean we need a messiah and why we can never accept one, all told through elegant, evocative, sometimes startling dance and drama.

Simon says, go see it.

26-28 January, 20.00

Vooruit Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23, Ghent | ► www.vooruit.be

LITERATURE

Gedichtendag 2012

"Flow inspires. Everything flows" is the theme of this 15th edition of Gedichtendag, or Poetry Day, a chance for poets to shine across Flanders and the Netherlands. Hundreds of libraries, book shops, cafés, museums, theatres and other venues have come up with creative programmes to mark the occasion. Even the local media takes on a more poetic tone. And as with every year, one well-known poet is asked to write a collection especially for this day. This year, Antwerp-based Dutch poet, writer and performer Joke van Leeuwen (pictured) presents her collection of 10 new poems entitled *Half in de zee* (Half in the Sea). Find an overview of activities on the website, where you can even enter your own poetry-inspired event [Robyn Boyle](#)



26 January | Across Flanders | ► www.gedichtendag.com

MORE LITERATURE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

The Local Relevance of Human Rights: Human Trafficking: Presentation of the book by George Ulrich (Riga Graduate School of Law) followed by presentations on human trafficking (in English)

JAN 19 17.00-19.30 at Promotiezaal Grauwzusters (University of Antwerp)
Lange Sint-Annastraat 7

► www.ua.ac.be

Poetry Thursday: Readings by poets Peter Ghyssaert, Willem Jan Otten and Erik Spinoy (in Dutch)

JAN 19 12.30 at Letterenhuis, Minderbroedersstraat 22

► www.antwerpenboekenstad.be

FESTIVAL

Cairo Nights

Who couldn't use a little Egyptian sun this month? You'll feel a ray of light during this festival dedicated to the traditional music and dance of Egypt. More than 20 performers and musicians are making the trip from Cairo to Brussels for this unique event, a first in Flanders. Kicking off the weekend is a colourful, rhythmic show on Friday night by the group Etoiles du Nil, featuring musicians, folk dancers, and special guests Eve and De Dans Ruh. And if that leaves you longing for more, come out to one of the workshops and let the performers teach you all about the *tahtib* (martial dance), *tannoura* (whirlers), *horse dance*, *hagalla* (Bedouin dance) and more. RB



© Etoiles du Nil

Performance: 26 January, 20.00 | CC De Westrand, Dilbeek
Workshops: 28-29 January | Sportcentrum La Woluwe, Brussels

► www.caironights.eu

MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

Djangofoillies 2012: Annual tribute to gypsy jazz musician Django Reinhardt

JAN 19-29 in numerous cafés and concert venues

► www.brosella.be

CONCERT

The Walkabouts

Fans had to wait six years for The Walkabouts' latest album. The vintage rock group based in the US city of Seattle already had 12 under their belt, but this last one, *Travels in the Dustland*, was a long time coming – and well worth the wait. Singer Chris Eckman got his inspiration for the new album after ploughing through the Sahara desert in a beat-up old Jeep. It's easy to imagine the scene when listening to songs like "Wild Sky Revelry" and "Long Drive in a Slow Machine" delivered by Eckman's low, gravelly voice, which calls to mind Tom Waits or Johnny Cash. His vocal counterpart, Carla Torgerson, adds a certain brightness to an otherwise melancholic sound. Fans of real rudimentary folk-rock will find very little to complain about. RB

21 January, 20.15 | Handelsbeurs, Ghent | www.handelsbeurs.be



MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Belsele (East Flanders)

Northern Lights: Irish-Scandinavian folk soundscapes

JAN 21 20.00 at 't Ey, Koutermolenstraat 6

www.tey.be

Blankenberge

Shantalla: Traditional Irish folk music

JAN 21 20.00-22.00 at CC Casino, Zeedijk 150

<http://cultuur.blankenberge.be>

Denderleeuw (East Flanders)

Willem Vermandere: Classic Flemish folk singer-songwriter

JAN 22 & JAN 28 at Feestzaal IKSO, Middenstraat 10

www.davidsfondsdenderleeuw.be

ART FAIR

Truc Troc

Ever spotted a piece of art and wished you could rent it for a while before deciding to buy? Around this concept, a group of young artists started Truc Troc in the mid-1970s, essentially a free exhibition of their work and the opportunity for the public to borrow them. Today, Truc Troc has exploded into an annual art lover's dream, and the concept has changed into something altogether unique. When you spy that striking photo or painting that would look great above your settee, all you'll need is a post-it note. Jot down your phone number and a description of what you would be willing to exchange for the work – goods or service but not money. If the artist is interested and deems your offer to be



of sufficient value, you just might get a phone call. Successful exchanges at last year's event included a week-long stay in a Knokke penthouse, a Japanese massage, a cheese tasting for 100 people, the services of a professional web designer and a scooter. RB

27-29 January | Bozar, Brussels | www.tructroc.be

MORE ART FAIRS THIS WEEK

Brussels

BRAFA '12: The annual Brussels Antiques & Fine Arts Fair specialises in antiquities: silver, antique jewellery, furniture, curiosities, ceramics, ethnic art, tapestry, photography and paintings from the middle ages to the 20th century

JAN 21-29 at Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan 86c

www.brafa.be

Tongeren

Limantica Antique Fair: Fair for refurbished furniture, porcelain, glass, silver, jewellery, paintings and more

JAN 21-22 at Syntra Limburg, Overhaemlaan 11

www.syntra-limburg.be

DANCE

Sleeping Beauty

The Ballet of Flanders starts the new year with a production of *Doornroosje* (*Sleeping Beauty*), with music by Tchaikovsky and choreography by the great Marcia Haydée. Haydée was born in Brazil in 1937 and studied at Sadler's Wells in London before going on to a 15-year career as prima ballerina at the Stuttgart Ballet, considered one of the best companies in the world. Eventually she became its artistic director and choreographed several notable full-length works. Her choreography for *Doornroosje* is notable for its development of the role



of Carabosse, the bad fairy who brings down the curse on *Sleeping Beauty*. Music for the production is performed by the Flanders Symphony Orchestra. [Alan Hope](#)

19-29 January | Stadsschouwburg, Antwerp

17-19 February | Vlaamse Opera, Ghent | www.balletvlaanderen.be

MORE DANCE THIS WEEK

Brussels

danceXmusic2: The annual performance of advanced students in Brussels P.A.R.T.S' dance school. Five pieces utilising work by Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Dvorák and more introduce the dance and choreographic talents of tomorrow

JAN 18-22 at De Munt, Muntplein 6

www.demunt.be

Tongeren

Jérôme Bel: The French choreographer performs the fifth in a series of dance pieces mixed with monologue (in English) dedicated to former French dancers. This production relays the most important events in the career of Cédric Andrieux

JAN 27-28 20.30 at Kaaitheteater, Sainctelette 20

www.kaaitheteater.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Jennifer Jansons

La Porte Noire

Cellebroersstraat 67, Brussels

The spiked iron gate adorned with a Celtic dragon standing guard at the door may cause one to be reluctant to enter at first, but it is well worth descending into this subterranean bar for one of their 100 beers or 70 whiskeys. La Porte Noire in Brussels city centre, almost right next to the café Het Goudblommeke in Papier, has a history just as interesting as – and even longer than – its better-known neighbour.

In the 16th century, La Porte Noire was the kitchen and smokehouse for the nuns of the Alexien convent. Once called the Cellites, they were a subsection within the Catholic Church. In fact, it is not uncommon to find streets all over Flanders and the Netherlands bearing the name of the Cellite brotherhood.

In 1995, the bunker was restored, keeping the integrity of the structure, including a gated-off stone water well in the backroom. Several years later it became what is now La Porte Noire, one of the most unique Celtic bars in Brussels.

If the ambiance isn't enough to persuade one to come back again and again, the drinks menu is. With 10 beers on tap, 90 bottled and a range of whiskeys from all over the world, including Belgium, naturally, but also Japan, it would take a long time to get through the selections.

My friend and I were having trouble deciding, but that didn't last long. The bartender stepped up with a smile and

recommended some Belgian beers that are hard to find elsewhere. We decided on the Jandrain-Jandrenouille IV Saison and the Hop Harvest from DeRanke. He also mentioned that they carry a gueuze from the Cantillon brewery and the Stouterik from Brasserie de la Seine on tap, the only two breweries based in Brussels.

La Porte Noire is also the headquarters for the Belgian LARP Federation. Live-Action Role Play is a popular topic every first Wednesday of the month, when the bar fills up with men and women dressed in their best mediaeval garb. Other events include Irish Jam sessions every second Tuesday and live music, ranging from rock to jazz, every Thursday.

www.laportenoire.be



BITE

Eethuis Alexandre ★★★★

Even with my high expectations, this restaurant managed to impress across the board. Confirming the recommendations of friends with every bite, Eethuis Alexandre is definitely worth the trip out to the sleepy little town of Steenhuize-Wijnhuize in East Flanders.

Alexandre is a concept, named after a famous Burgundian of the same name who enjoyed the odd decadent meal and his fair share of drinks. For the past 10 years, owners Tamara and Tim Ritseveldt (Tim is also the chef) have been spoiling clients with outstanding dishes in a classy atmosphere, minus the haughty attitude of similarly chic places.

My willing dining companion and I enter the stately 18th-century mansion and are immediately made to feel welcome by our smiling server. She shows us to our candlelit table in one of the two dining rooms with high ceilings and soothing fern-green walls.

We order two house aperitifs and they come with long spoons, to

scoop out the fresh peaches at the bottom of the Champagne flute. Soon after, we are presented with a teaser plate on the house: a miniature bowl of fresh tomato soup and one crunchy fried croquette with a velvety pork belly filling and green peas.

The set menus offer three courses at €40 or four courses at €45, so naturally we opt for the latter. The Menu Alexandre comes with paired wines for an additional €18, but we forgo this option in favour of a Tripel Karmeliet and a Geuze Boon. The beers prove to be a good match, at least for the first two courses.

First up is a painstakingly arranged work of art consisting of seared scallops, cream of red cabbage, duck liver pâté and green affila cress. The cress is a lovely herb with its decorative curly shoots and delicate sweet-pea flavour. It lends itself perfectly to the strong – but not overpowering – duck liver. The circles of pâté have a mousse-like texture and a lavish meaty taste. Atop each circle, one little

red raspberry provides an explosive fruity burst to the pâté, almost as if the two were made for each other. The red cabbage cream contributes a slightly bitter, earthy bite to the dish, while the scallops run away with first prize for their buttery soft flavour and texture.

Completely dumbfounded by the first dish, we can hardly wait to see what's next. It's a giant slab of cod, skin-on and barely grilled on both sides in a mixture of spices. A thick and crispy slice of bacon adds some salty smokiness to the dish, while silky sweet potatoes bring a hint of sweetness. Next to this is a carpaccio of Brussels *lof*, thinly sliced leaves of witloof cooked in loads of butter and sprinkled with lightly fried pieces of garlic and sea salt. We both agree that the garlic is too full-on and unnecessary, only taking away from the subtlety of the rest of the dish. Just when I thought it couldn't possibly get any better, the main dish arrives. A thick chunk of springbok (a type of gazelle or antelope) is sliced up into several

pieces revealing a rosy centre. The outside is lightly grilled and coated in coarsely ground black pepper, while the inside is tender and juicy and brimming with beefy flavour. It's propped up against a pile of tender baby carrots, green asparagus tips and sweet-pea puree. I love it when one ingredient appears in different forms throughout a meal, the way sweet peas are the recurring theme on this particular evening.

Thankfully, however, the peas don't resurface during dessert. Instead, we get a scoop of pistachio ice-cream, a white orange peel-infused bavarois and fluffy vanilla cream. The attention to detail is once again astounding, with one candied peanut standing straight up in the vanilla cream as if it were

Contact Bite at flandersbite@gmail.com

made out of glass, and super-thin strands of bright red candy spun into a nest that melts on your tongue. As the last ones to leave, we have a chance to peek at the back patio, a walled garden with ponds and plants and a view of the church tower, idyllic for warmer months. We're almost as baffled by the bill as by the quality of the food itself, as we pay only €57 each.

► www.eethuisalexandre.be



► Kloosterberg 31, Steenhuize (Herzele, East Flanders); 054.50.03.44

🕒 Mon, Fri & Sun, 12.00-15.00 & 18.00-22.00; Thu & Sat, 18.00-22.00

€ Mains: €40-€45

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TALKING DUTCH

Geen goede voornemens

Philip Ebels

I've given up on new year's resolutions. I'm not even that old, but I have enough experience to know that they don't work. They're like rules: they're made to be broken.

Instead, I've decided to follow the advice of Flemish cartoonist Zaza, whose work you may have seen and admired in daily newspaper *De Standaard*.

"Dit jaar géén goede voornemens," says an unwashed man in slacks,

holding on to what seems to be an empty beer bottle. This year, no new year's resolutions. (In Dutch, accents on vowels like in géén don't indicate a change in pronunciation, but rather a hike in emphasis.)

"*Dat is een goed voornemen*," replies his wife. That's a good resolution. The joke, of course, is funnier in Dutch, where *een goed voornemen* literally means "a good resolution" but is also used as "new year's resolution".



© Shutterstock

De weg naar de hel is geplaveid met goede voornemens, according to an old, very cynical proverb. The way to hell is paved with good intentions. Or: You may have the intentions of a saint, but you may still end up in hell.

But we're not all cynics, and some of us may have made some very honest and well-meaning promises to ourselves. Chances are they include one of the following:

Stoppen met roken. A classic. Quit smoking.

Meer sporten. To do more sports. Or: *Meer aan sport doen*.

Vaker koken. To cook more often. (*vaak* = often; *vaker* = more often)

Beter Nederlands leren spreken. You can translate that yourself. No prize involved.

Or, one for me if I made them: *Meer lezen*. To read more.

Zich voornemen is a verb and means, you got it, something like to intend. I say "something like" because it is a reflexive verb, something we have a lot of in Dutch. It means that the action of the subject – the one doing it – reflects on itself and makes for a more personal connotation.

Ik neem me voor te stoppen met roken, means more than just: "I intend to stop smoking". It means something like: "I hereby promise myself to stop smoking".

Ah, the subtleties of a foreign language.

On a lighter note: the holidays are over, and I'd hate to run out of things to blather about. What else would you read on Sunday afternoons? So, please: let me know your beef, your flirts and your misunderstandings with the Dutch language. You know what? Make it a new year's resolution.

The last word...

Mini-menu

"What do I make best? Mashed potatoes. Then I always put different herbs in or make a sauce to go with it. And cookies, of course. That's what I like to do best."

12-year-old Maxime is a candidate for a new series of *Junior Masterchef* on VTM

Protection racket

"When Kim asks you, you don't turn her down. But on a practical level there was a lot to organise."

Stefan Wauters from Sint-Niklaas has travelled to Australia to serve as sparring partner for Flemish tennis star Kim Clijsters

In at the deep end

"I want to go back to work right away. A disaster is all part of the job."

Twenty-four year-old Nicky Eeckhout from Antwerp was a hostess on the cruise ship Concordia, which sank off the Italian coast last week

Prince charming

"What is there that a woman can't do as well as a man?"

Stephanie Daeleman, 25, is the first woman ever to be crowned Prince of the Aalst Carnival

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

cover story

Dutch students are coming to Flanders in ever-greater numbers. News editor Alan Hope looks at the spiralling trend for grad and post-grad students crossing the border for programmes that just aren't offered at home in the Netherlands

news

A fascinating research project at the University of Hasselt is using feedback from blind people to improve the design of architectural interiors

arts

You can always count on Antwerp to choose just the right city poet: We interview Bernard Dewulf, columnist, essayist, poet and the port city's newest scribe