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The Dutch are coming



As the Netherlands increases its fees for higher education, Flanders is looking more and more appealing to Dutch students

Alan Hope

The numbers of Dutch students at Flemish universities has more than doubled over the last five years. Although alarm bells are not yet ringing, the Netherlands' fee changes of this year could cause an additional influx of Dutch students looking for an affordable education. The problem, though, say some university administrators, is not one of quantity – but quality.

*"I've been mulling over Belgium,
Because everyone there laughs.
I've been mulling over Belgium,
Because the language is so soft."*

So sang the Dutch pop group Het Goede Doel in 1982, in a very odd song called "België". And in fact, more and more young Dutch people are mulling over their neighbour to the south – for the purposes of higher education.

Students from the Netherlands are coming to Flanders in ever-growing numbers, and fee changes in Dutch higher education that will be implemented this year could lead to an even bigger increase. The Rutte government is increasing the cost of education, as well as implementing a loan system instead of its traditional grants. It will also charge more to both graduate and undergrad students who take longer than the allotted time to complete their degrees.

Kris Van Dyck, a member of the Flemish parliament, explained the situation to the education committee. The "tough policy", he said, means that "the study cost for a second Master's could reach as high as €14,000. ... penalties for study delays could push the price of tuition alone up to €5,000. That is also the reason why more students from the Netherlands are making their way to Flanders."

In Flanders, tuition for a year of university – both undergrad and Master's – is €564.30.

Over the last five years, the number of Dutch students at Antwerp University has gone up 117%; at the University of Leuven (KUL) 105%; at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) 76% and at Ghent University 25%. According to the Dutch office for international cooperation in higher education, last year 4,327 students crossed the border to study in Belgium. Of those, about 3,000 were enrolled in the five Dutch-speaking universities, including the University of Hasselt. That's compared to a total student population over the five institutions of more than 90,000.

Leuven attracts the highest number of Dutch students, with about 1,400 this year, followed by Antwerp with 913 and the

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



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Phil Bosmans

Father Phil Bosmans, the co-founder and face of the Bond Zonder Naam (Union Without a Name), has died in hospital in Mortsel, near Antwerp, from complications of bronchitis, at the age of 89. Father Bosmans had long suffered the after-effects of a stroke in 1994, and spent his last years living in a convent in nearby Kontich.

Bosmans was born into a Limburg farming family in 1922 and entered a monastery in 1941. He was ordained in 1948 and a decade later asked to help with the creation of the Bond Zonder Naam (BZN), an organisation that over the years has set up and run social projects for children and young people and the disadvantaged. Bosmans led the BZN until 1991, when he handed over the leadership, though he remained active in the organisation.

For most people in Flanders, however, Bosmans was best-known as the source of countless uplifting and inspiring aphorisms, later collected into books with titles like *Best Wishes* and *Happy Together*, which became best sellers in Flanders, the Netherlands and Germany. His collections were translated into 26 languages and sold more than 10 million copies worldwide.

Among Bosmans' words of wisdom: "Big people keep their egos small"; "A good mood is infectious"; "Be yourself: There are enough others around"; "One day today will also be the good old days".

"Like no other, Father Bosmans had his finger on the pulse of society, and like no other he was able to translate social changes into his always hopeful, sometimes critical, messages," said Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege last week. "His books and his sayings remain a gentle weapon against the coarsening of society and inspire many people each day to soldier on."

During his final years in Kontich, revealed Patrick Hanjoul, current director of the BZN, Bosmans continued to write and even composed texts for his own funeral, which will take place on 25 January. He wrote: "Just as a wave slowly fades out in the sea from which it was created, so am I in silence returned to the great ocean of God's love, with on my lips this final prayer: Dear God, You gave me everything. Give to me this one last thing – a grateful heart."

News in brief

Brussels Region last week approved a grant of **€2.6 million for a series of 12 *wijkcontracten***, or neighbourhood contracts, in Schaarbeek, Koekelberg, Anderlecht and Brussels City. Neighbourhood contracts are intended to promote urban regeneration in disadvantaged areas. "This is almost double the €1.4 million handed out last year to eight contracts," said Brussels public works minister Brigitte Grouwels. The projects include the extension of a day care centre in Anderlecht, renovation of a school in the Bloemenhof area of Brussels, employing local youth to renovate houses in Koekelberg and Schaarbeek and a sport and fitness project for young people in Koekelberg.

The Flemish government is investing €2.2 million to **merge three heritage organisations**, based on the example of the National Trust in Britain, heritage minister Geert Bourgeois announced. The new organisation, which will be based in Antwerp, will group together Heritage Flanders, the Forum for Heritage Associations and Open Monument Day Flanders.

Sihame El Kaouakibi, who founded and runs the Let's Go Urban dance school for young people, has been voted **Antwerpenaar of the Year** by the *Gazet van Antwerpen* and listeners of Radio 2 and ATV. The school featured prominently in last year's Antwerp European Youth Capital events. El Kaouakibi came ahead of other well-known Antwerp residents like actor Matthias Schoenaerts and singer Bart Peeters.

The Belgian football union is considering introducing a **mandatory medical check-up** for its 400,000 youth players, following the collapse of a 16-year-old caused by heart problems during a match last week. An estimated five players

in 100,000 could be at risk of similar problems, the union said. Belgium's cycling union introduced mandatory testing some years ago.

A court in Dendermonde last week postponed a decision on whether to send **Kim De Gelder for trial or have him committed to a psychiatric institution**. De Gelder, 23, is accused of the knife attack on the Fabeltjesland nursery in Dendermonde in January of 2009, in which a care worker and two babies died, as well as the murder of a 73-year-old woman in Beveren one week earlier. The court asked for more psychiatric reports. The relatives of the victims expressed disappointment at the delay.

Brussels City mayor Freddy Thielemans has called on the Brussels Region to provide **three new sites for the caravans of travellers**, to ease the pressure on the city and to avoid tensions between different traveller groups forced to camp together. Brussels opened its first permanent camp in Haren last October, where travellers can stay a maximum of three weeks and are provided water, electricity connections and sanitary facilities. But the site has a capacity of only 25 places.

The Flemish public TV channel Ketnet is looking for young singing talent to represent Belgium at the **Junior Eurosong Festival** in the Netherlands later this year. Kids aged between 10 and 16 can apply via the channel's website before 17 February.

► www.ketnet.be/node/294232

Antwerp Zoo last week bade a warm welcome to **Nuru, an aardvark born to mother Curly**. Curly has given birth three times before, but the babies all died within their first month. The aardvark being

nocturnal, Nuru has yet to be seen out of doors, but he or she – the sex has not yet been determined – can be seen live on security cameras at the nesting box in the zoo.

► <http://flande.rs/91>

Flemish housing minister Freya Van den Bossche is introducing a proposal to make **smoke detectors obligatory in all rented accommodation**, she told the Flemish parliament last week. Since 2009, all new constructions and renovations are required to include smoke detectors, and the measure would extend that to existing premises offered for rent. In practice most insurance companies already insist on detectors when writing policies.

The city of Antwerp will this week inaugurate its **first six electric cars** as part of its municipal fleet. The cars will be used by the city's administrative services and will be followed later this year by three for the use of subscribers to the Cambio car-share system. At the same time, the city will unveil the first public recharging post on the Steenplein close to the Flandria boat dock.

The Sunday market in the Brussels commune of Molenbeek said farewell last week to the man known as **Bompa Flamand**, who had a vegetable stall there for 40 years. Louis Van Mulders from Asse, Flemish Brabant, will now devote his time to looking after his sick wife. Van Mulders was something of a pioneer in restoring interest in "forgotten" vegetables such as parsnips and white carrots. "It's a shame," he told brusselnieuws.be, "but now I have other responsibilities".

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Return our relic

N-VA president Bart De Wever, who also happens to be a historian, last week called for the return to Antwerp of a relic alleged to be the foreskin of Jesus. In the interests of full disclosure, the relic is one of 18 alleged to be the Holy Prepuce, and De Wever was not being entirely serious.

The relic, supposedly the vestige of Christ's circumcision as recounted in Luke 2:21, was brought to Antwerp in 1100, a gift from King Baldwin of Jerusalem, who bought it in Palestine. The relic achieved some prominence when the Bishop of Cambrai saw blood issuing from it during Mass, and a chapel was built to cater for the host of pilgrims that followed.

Although the chapel still stands, the prepuce went missing in 1566. Its whereabouts have been unknown until recently, when *P-Magazine*, a periodical more usually associated with the doings of media personalities than with remnants of the *corpus infantis sancti*, claimed to have tracked it down to the town of Pitigliano in Tuscany.

De Wever, in the course of an interview over more mundane matters, was asked the same question: *P-Magazine* asked Antwerp's mayor and bishop: Should the relic be returned to Antwerp? The two



Pitigliano: home to Antwerp's vestige?

Antwerp authorities replied in the negative. De Wever, ever the contrarian, agreed the prepuce should be returned.

"This has nothing to do with the religious significance of the foreskin, but with an object that was displayed for hundreds of years in Antwerp cathedral" said De Wever. "It would be a historic sensation to bring it back. Of course I will work to help it happen."

The Dutch are coming

Primary and secondary schools at Dutch/Flemish border also seeing more Dutch students

► continued from page 1

VUB with 411. “The large influx that was expected as a result of certain measures that were taken in the Netherlands has not really happened,” says Kristiaan Versluys, director of studies at UGhent. A similar response comes from Nele Custers of the student relations office of the VUB. “At this point, we have absolutely no problem with the numbers of Dutch students. The VUB has sufficient capacity to accept these students and provide them with a quality education. We even recruit in the Netherlands at education fairs in Rotterdam and Eindhoven and at the Master’s fair in Utrecht.” Flemish education minister Pascal Smet agrees that “the figures are not such that we have to panic or take drastic measures. I want to make it clear that the quality of Flemish higher education is not and cannot be dependent on a small minority of Dutch students who come here to follow courses,” he says.

Quality, not quantity, is problem

“If there is a problem – and there is a problem – it’s more because most of the [Dutch] freshmen are not successful in the same way as students from Flanders,” says Ludo Melis, vice-rector in charge of education policy at KUL. “There are multiple reasons for that. It could be that the best students prefer to remain in their own country. The other possibility is that there’s a huge difference in school culture between Flanders and the Netherlands, and bridging that gap is not easy for young people. When we look at the success rates of students coming in from the Netherlands, there is no difference at Master’s level, but for 18-year-old Bachelor students, there is a very striking difference.” UGhent’s Versluys agrees. “That is a remarkable phenomenon,” she says. “Their success rate is lower than that of the average Flemish student, but I think that has to do with the fact that the Dutch students who come to Flanders haven’t found a spot in the Netherlands”. He points to the low success rate



Overcrowded Flemish universities could see more Dutch students coming over the border once the new fee structure has had time to take hold in the Netherlands

for Dutch students in veterinary medicine. “The ones who don’t get into Utrecht come to us, and the drop-out rate is very high; only about 10% make it through the first year. For Flemish students, that rate is 30 to 35%.” (Ghent is

the only Flemish university to offer Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in veterinary medicine.) Antwerp University, meanwhile, “has also recorded below average scores for Dutch students,” confirmed a spokesperson. “From figures for

last year, it appears that just under half give up during their Bachelor studies. For Flemish students, the figure is around one in four”. Post-graduate students, on the other hand, are a different story. “Dutch Master’s students are enriching for

us,” according to the spokesperson. “They often have a fresh outlook, and they’re more forthcoming than [Flemish] students. We could learn a lot from them here in Antwerp.”

SCHOOLS AT BORDER ATTRACTING DUTCH CHILDREN

It isn’t only universities that are experiencing a growth in the numbers of Dutch imports. The same thing is happening in primary and secondary schools in parts of Flanders close to the Dutch border. An article in Flemish daily *De Morgen* early last year claimed that nearly 22,000 Dutch children were attending Flemish schools. That led to a rapid nuance of the situation from the Flemish education ministry, pointing out that, while the figure was accurate, more than 16,000 of those children, or 73%, were from Dutch families living in Flanders. The growth is especially noticeable in primary schools: from 4,235 in 2002 to 8,329 in 2009. Parents in the Dutch border region are increasingly attracted to Flemish schools, and indeed some have been known to move there specifically for the purpose. The reasons are indeed compelling. Children in Flanders can attend school from the age of

two-and-a-half years, compared to four years in the Netherlands. Flemish *basisscholen* (“basis schools”) typically comprise a pre-school and primary school. The choice of a Flemish school therefore allows Dutch parents the advantage of 18 months of free child care. The Flemish school system is also highly regarded for its serious approach to learning and stricter discipline than schools in the Netherlands, whose more progressive methods are often seen by Dutch parents as being lax and too child-centred. They see an educational advantage in Flemish schools, where the children can still be taught in their own language. Finally, the Flemish government’s policy of capping the amount of money schools can ask parents to pay annually for extra activities, like school trips, is appealing. That total is currently set at €25 to €35 for pre-schoolers and €40 to €65 for primary pupils, depending on age. For Flanders, this interest from the Dutch –

whether they live here or not – does not yet seem to be a problem, although some schools now report up to 50% Dutch children in their classes. Speaking to education departments of border towns like Dilsen-Stokkem, Brasschaat, Essen and Hamont-Achel, we were unable to find anyone who thought the problem was out of control. With only 5,665 children of all ages attending schools along a border of some 360 kilometres, the schools are not overcrowded. While increasing numbers of Dutch schoolchildren are not now a problem for Flemish schools, it is of concern to the Dutch. “We don’t want our schools standing half empty because the children are all in Flanders,” says Frank Van Driessche, alderman for education in Hulst, Zeeland province. “We are investigating what the attraction of Belgian schools is and what we can do to make our schools just as successful.”

WITNESS

Boudewijn Boeckart, law professor



Boudewijn Boeckart is a professor of law at Ghent University and a member of the Flemish parliament: “People in Flanders pay for higher education through their taxes, but it could be paid for via tuition fees. We’re seeing a trend across Europe towards increased tuition fees. I think the principle of equality in education has to be discussed at a European level; otherwise, countries where education is paid for by taxes will have to raise tuition fees as a result of the inflow of foreign students, which seems to me not a very motivating idea. It’s only fair to ask something extra from students from other countries, who do not contribute through taxes to the cost of education. I’m not from Ghent, so if I want to visit the Gravensteen [castle], I have to pay, while residents of Ghent don’t. Their taxes are already paying for the Gravensteen.”

Tessa Heitmeijer, editor at studenten.net



Tessa Heitmeijer is the editor of the Dutch student advice website studenten.net: “Studying in Flanders is harder than you might think. A lot of Dutch students don’t make it and are forced to give up. That’s a result of the Flemish school system: From an early age Flemish children are sent home with huge piles of homework. It starts in secondary school and goes on until university. The lessons are also not the same as in the Netherlands. Here we’re used to asking the professor questions and working independently. In Flanders, they have mainly lectures.”

Mortgage tax break will continue

Homeowners across Flanders are assured fiscal relief

Alan Hope

Homeowners with existing mortgages will continue to receive tax benefits even after the federal government hands responsibility for the system over to the regions in 2014, the Flemish government has promised. And anyone who takes out a mortgage to buy, build or renovate a home after 2014 in Flanders will also receive "fiscal support".

The changes come as part of the package of measures agreed by the main parties when the long-awaited federal government was formed at the end of last year. Several responsibilities were transferred from the federal government to the regions, including housing policy.

Until last year the system allowed tax relief worth €3,000 to each member of a legally defined couple buying a home. Under the new government accord, that will be replaced by a tax credit of 45% of interest, deducted from taxable income. According to one calculation, that works out at a benefit of €2,700 instead of €3,000. That change will take place before the responsibility is handed

over to the regions.

There has been confusion, however, over how the regions were to administer the system. Income tax remains a federal matter, and the regions have no authority over tax relief. Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters told VRT radio it was too soon to know: The regions have until 15 February to present their proposals. Homeowners in Flanders, meanwhile, were increasingly anxious about a huge change in their tax bills.

Peeters called on homeowners not to be concerned and pledged his government would continue to encourage home buying. "I understand that people want certainty as quickly as possible. I understand the worries of the people of Flanders, but there is nothing to worry about," Peeters said. A continuing question is whether the money from the federal government intended to cover the new regional responsibilities will be enough. According to federal finance minister Steven Vanackere, the total is €1.4 billion, of which €929 million would go to Flanders. However,



research carried out by Nancy Huyghebaert of the University of Leuven suggests the cost of the total package ought to be €4.87 billion, or €3.23 billion for Flanders.

Fish of the Year a rare treat

The Flemish Centre for Agriculture and Fisheries' (VLAM) Fish of the Year for 2012 is the tub gurnard, known in Dutch as the *rode poon*.

The selection of a fish of the year is a campaign aimed at highlighting one of the many species of fish available to customers in Flanders. The gurnard is relatively little-known here, with only 300 tonnes landed every year at Flemish fishing ports, and most of that as a by-product of boats out to catch something else. Only about 2% of families report having eaten it. The fish is described as having firm flesh with a deep flavour, suitable for frying, baking, stewing, poaching and even barbecue. The season lasts from October to April, with the peak in the first three months of the year, after the shoals pass through the English Channel from the Atlantic to the North Sea.

VLAM is organising a competition to find the most original recipe using gurnard. Leaflets with recipe ideas will be available at fish sellers and supermarkets.

► www.vlam.be



Clijsters makes quarter-finals

Flemish tennis player Kim Clijsters overcame searing pain, tears and four match points against China's Li Na as she booked her place in the Australian Open quarter-finals. Clijsters received treatment after twisting her ankle midway through the first set against Li Na, who had lost to the Fleming in last year's final. But she dug in, and her doggedness paid off: it was her Chinese opponent who made a tearful exit as Clijsters secured a 4-6, 7-6, 6-4 win. Clijsters arrived in Melbourne having played only two tournaments since last June, retiring from both mid-match after suffering injuries.



Kim Clijsters twisted her ankle mid-game but still made it to the quarter-finals of the Australian Open

New home for VRT?

An announcement that the Flemish public broadcaster VRT is considering a move out of Brussels to Vilvoorde or Mechelen caused one prominent Brussels politician to be "disconcerted". As it turned out, the announcement, from Mechelen mayor Bart Somers, was somewhat premature.

The VRT is currently housed in purpose-built premises in the Brussels commune of Schaarbeek, which it shares with its French-

speaking counterpart RTBF. The buildings on Reyerslaan, however, are in a sorry state, and the VRT confirmed that it is considering a number of options for the future. "We will decide in June," CEO Sandra De Preter said.

Mechelen and Vilvoorde have already begun lobbying, though the VRT has not called for proposals. If re-housing is an option, it is one of several, which also include renovation of the existing buildings

or building a whole new complex on adjoining land.

Mechelen, meanwhile, is looking for occupants for a massive piece of land near its main train station and offers the advantages of cheaper land prices than Brussels, as well as a location in Flanders. Vilvoorde has the advantage of an existing media nexus of companies, including VTM, 2BE and Vitaya, independent production house Woestijnvis and media service supplier Videohouse.

Both Flemish minister for Brussels Pascal Smet and Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten have expressed their personal preference for the VRT to remain in Brussels, which is home to the Flemish as well as federal governments. Bruno De Lille, culture minister for Brussels, spoke for many when he said: "If Flanders wants to withdraw its most important institutions out of Brussels, how long will Brussels remain as capital of Flanders?"

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

55%

of places in Flemish schools in Brussels will still be reserved for children who speak Dutch at home, a rule upheld by the Constitutional Court last week following a challenge from the French Community

€44.6 billion

trade in raw and polished diamonds through Antwerp last year, an increase of 47% over the previous year

8th

place in a ranking of the world's most pleasant shopping streets goes to Louizalaan in Brussels. Orchard Road in Singapore came first

2,500

new beech trees to be planted in the Sonian Forest in the Brussels commune of Watermaal-Bosvoorde, financed by the Lions Club as part of a plan to plant one million trees worldwide

10

days loss of a driving licence for a man from Flemish Brabant after he was caught by police riding a skateboard that was being pulled along by a dog. He was also fined €330

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

A broken man

Some phenomena seem to repeat themselves endlessly in Flemish politics. One of them is successful business people, who feel that they are much more competent than politicians, decide to go into politics – and fail. A business background does not guarantee success in politics. Quite the opposite: business people find it hard to adjust to the (rough) mores and the (slow) pace of political life. Media scrutiny is just one of things they are not used to. Last week, Philippe Muyters, budget and finance minister and former head of the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka, fell victim to this seemingly inescapable rule. During the weekend, he was dancing at the his party's New Year reception, and by Monday, the opposition was asking for his resignation. And that was just the start of the week from hell for Philippe Muyters.

The opposition – in a rare show of unison – was incensed by a leaked mail from Muyters' cabinet in which his spokesperson blamed said opposition for the belated introduction of the traffic tax reform. This, the opposition felt, showed the utmost disdain for the workings of the Flemish Parliament.

Muyters also left a bad impression when confronted with the fact that the federal government will scrap the traditional tax deduction on mortgages, as this is devolved to the regions. Although Muyters' party, N-VA, has demanded this for years, the minister seemed rather unprepared for it.

Days later, a new email popped up by another Muyters' aid. This mail claimed that the minister lied in Parliament about the 2009 budget. Although these words were accompanied by a ☺, and upon closer scrutiny turned out to be incorrect, the damage was done. Especially as the mail spoke derogatively about other Flemish departments.

Muyters apologised. Twice. In a TV interview he was reduced to tears, calling himself "a broken man". "I have given up so much to do this," he said, echoing many a business person who went before him.

So are they all doomed? Well, no. One man did make it to the other side successfully: Kris Peeters, Flemish minister-president, who headed another business organisation, Unizo, before he was appointed minister. Peeters, too, had some problems adjusting, but, when it comes to politics, he is like a fish in water now. Still, he must get frustrated sometimes. If only looking at what trouble his ministers get themselves into. (☹)

Feel-good architecture

Blind people reveal how the sense of touch influences their perception of buildings

Andy Furniere

Architects and designers tend to be preoccupied with the way a building looks. Jasmien Herssens, a researcher at the University of Leuven (KUL), now offers them a framework to create constructions that also feel good. During the development of her PhD, she relied on the judgement of people born blind, including children. After working as an architect for three years, Herssens realised that architectural firms were neglecting a whole world of experiences by focusing only on visual aspects. “Architects think with their pen and paper, with which they compose designs that please the eye,” the 33-year-old says. “But unfortunately they often forget the four other senses.” One of which is touch, which takes centre stage in her thesis, *Designing Architecture for More*. Herssens finished her PhD at the architecture faculty of the University of Hasselt, the Provincial University College Limburg and KUL, with a grant from the Flemish Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology.

When seeing is feeling

Inspired by a period of blindness during her own childhood, Herssens called on the expertise of people born blind, who depend greatly on their sense of touch. She let blind adults guide her around their

houses and filmed their movements as they found their way. Herssens observed children as well, which posed some challenges. “Children react very spontaneously, but the information they offer is often abstract,” she explains. One child put her on to the idea of giving everyone a camera, with which they took photos of the spaces they liked or disliked. She also asked for the opinions of those who work with the blind, but they did not always correspond to the testimonies of the blind people themselves. “Many supporters thought that blind people always preferred spaces full of right angles because these provide them with a clear structure. But it turns out that this only applies to places where they come for the first time,” explains Herssens. “In a familiar environment, blind people actually appreciate rounded corners and certain irregularities. These give them a relaxed feeling of freedom, as long as they can rely on orientation points.”

Let buildings breathe

Apart from such geometric parameters, Herssens discovered how crucial building materials are. Wood, for example, is often preferred over stone by blind people because it is a warmer, naturally breathing material. “It feels more pleasant and thus creates a cosier atmosphere,” she says.

The texture of manufactured materials can also serve as a direction indicator for blind people. “Although it’s a useful material in many contexts, it’s a pity that a lot of buildings are constructed almost totally in neutral concrete without considering the effect on our feelings,” she declares. These parameters do not only apply to the visually impaired, as was revealed by tests on people who can see. An autistic boy had the same need for clear structures as blind people do, while one person complained about a conference room closed off in glass where he felt he could not breathe comfortably after an hour. With air-permeable materials, this problem would not have occurred. Herssens hopes her framework helps architects and designers to be aware that buildings are more pleasant and practical for everyone when all the senses receive equal attention from the start of the design process. She feels architecture schools need to instil this insight into the new generation. “I don’t want to impose standard rules, only to inspire an attitude of inclusive design, which young architects should acquire during their education,” she concludes. In the meantime, she supervises Master’s students who are exploring design possibilities for other senses – for example, improving the acoustics of buildings.



Contrary to popular belief, blind people prefer rounded interiors in their homes because it offers a sense of freedom

Of farm and fox

Both sides weigh in on a new government proposal that would allow fox hunting out of season

Alan Hope

Nature conservation groups in Flanders have criticised a new rule that would allow an increase in the hunting of foxes, claiming it will not achieve its purpose. Meanwhile, hunting representatives have said the new rules do not declare open season on the fox. “I don’t understand what the fuss is about,” said one hunter. On 13 January, the Flemish government approved a proposal to allow fox hunting out of season. The normal season runs from 1 October to 14 February, with hunting not permitted within 50 metres of a fox’s den. The new rule allows the Nature and Woodland Agency to permit hunting outside those dates for a particular area if they feel it’s necessary to control damage caused by foxes. Hunting would be restricted to an area 500 metres from the scene of the damage using only firearms only; a permit will be given only if the keepers of animals or poultry affected have already taken other precautions to protect them. According to supporters of the

measure, the extension of hunting is needed to tackle the growth of fox populations. According to the Institute for Nature and Woodland Research, there are an average two foxes for every square kilometre in Flanders – about 30,000 in all. And where there are foxes, there is damage to livestock. This month alone have been reports of foxes attacking chickens in Zomergem, East Flanders, and in Assebroek, a district of Bruges, as well as signs of fox activity in the Zwin nature reserve at the coast. In both chicken attacks, the fox killed nine birds, eating some and leaving the rest behind. One couple in Hamme, East Flanders, were given a summons for setting traps after suffering eight visits from foxes in recent months in which they lost geese, peacocks and chickens.

“Won’t solve the problem”

But Natuurpunt, the conservation organisation, pointed out that killing foxes was not an efficient way

of preventing damage to livestock. “An extension of fox hunting will not solve the problem,” said Wim Van Gils. “If you want to protect your chickens, you have to invest in a closed coop, preferably backed up by a strong fence.” The fox, opponents of the hunting rules point out, is a territorial animal whose numbers depend on the availability of food. Shooting one fox simply leaves a space for another to fill, and the numbers will be made up naturally come breeding time. Some 10,000 foxes are shot every year in Flanders, yet the numbers do not go down. Numbers in fact are increasing as previously rural foxes encroach on urban areas where food is plentiful and provided by humans. Natuurpunt’s position is defended by the bird protection society Vogelbescherming Vlaanderen. “I find it remarkable that a great many politicians have learned nothing from the debate we’ve had over recent years in Flanders,” said Jan Rodts. “The expert opinion of fox specialists and other scientists is being completely ignored.”



The measure introduced by environment minister Joke Schauvliege has the support of the majority parties in Flanders, with opposition coming from Groen and N-VA. “It is bad policy making because, scientifically, it is nonsense to think an extension of the hunt will solve anything,” said N-VA member of parliament Mark Demesmaeker. Schauvliege defended the proposal

as limited, strictly controlled and preventative. “The exception to the hunting law ... is a temporary and local measure that aims to keep the growing fox population under control, for the benefit of other animals and people.” The proposal will now go to the Council of State for an opinion before coming back to be amended or passed.

THE WONDERS OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM

The latest developments in solar energy are very close to home

Solar energy is a key player in lowering the CO₂ emissions related to the generation of electricity and in reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. The largest share (90%) of the solar energy market belongs to solar cells based on crystalline silicon. How will this kind of cell evolve in the future? Read here how they are becoming cheaper, smarter – and more beautiful.



SILVER ON YOUR ROOF

Maybe you wear silver rings, you dine with grandma's silverware or you admire yourself in a silver-framed mirror. But did you know you may have silver on your roof? Specifically, in the solar cells.

The majority of solar cells in roof-top solar panels contain silver as the main electrode. You can recognise this electrode as the fine, shiny lines on the blue surface of the cell. As beautiful as they may be, engineers want to get rid of them. The reason is that the silver mines in Mexico, Peru, China and elsewhere can't supply enough metal for the huge number of solar cells that will be produced in the future. Experts predict a shortage of silver within 10 years, dramatically increasing the price of solar cells with silver contacts.

Engineers wouldn't be engineers if they hadn't come up with ways to solve this problem. The first plan is to recycle old solar panels. For example, the German company SolarWorld recycles all the silver and silicon (the main material in solar cells) from old solar panels. However, recycling alone will not be sufficient to prevent the depletion of silver supplies.

Therefore, the solar industry and research communities have come up with a more ambitious plan: to replace the scarce silver in solar cells by a cheaper, more common material. The research institute imec in Leuven, for example, is working out a process flow for silicon-based solar cells in which the silver electrode is replaced by a copper one.

However, this is not as simple as it sounds. One of the problems is that the copper tends

to diffuse into the silicon, which reduces the lifespan of the solar cell. For this reason, a diffusion barrier is developed to keep the copper and silicon separate. Another problem is that the copper oxidises, so a cap is needed to protect the copper electrode. And, last but not least, applying copper to the silicon is more difficult than depositing silver. Extra steps in processing are needed to achieve this.

Despite all of this, solar cells with copper contacts will be cheaper than those with silver contacts. And the best thing about solar cells with copper contacts is that they are more efficient than their silver counterparts. So in the future, there will be no more silver on your roof.

A TECHNICIAN ON YOUR ROOF

"A chain is only as strong as its weakest link," the saying goes. And that applies to solar panels today. One bad cell can bring down the panels' electricity production significantly. The reason is that the cells are connected in a series, making a malfunctioning cell a huge resistive link in the chain.

Imagine, for example, that lightning or hail storms damage part of your solar panel, or bird droppings contaminate it, or your neighbour's satellite dish casts a shadow on some of the solar cells. What can you do then, other than cursing the manufacturer's brochure showcasing the "ideal" power output for your solar panels? Today, researchers (among them from Leuven's imec) are developing a more "life-proof" concept. It makes use of miniaturised components that are integrated during solar cell or panel production. These chips act like the eyes and

hands of a technician, constantly present at your roof, controlling your solar panels.

These miniaturised components use electronic sensors to monitor the output voltage of each cell. If one is underperforming, the electronic "hands" spring into action: ultra-low-loss switches are able to reconfigure the network of solar cells within the panel. In this way, malfunctioning cells can be bypassed, cranking back up the output of the panel.



© SOLAR IVY

ON YOUR ROOF?

But why stick with traditional roof-top solar panels? Why not design solar cells that stick to the side of your house, like so many vines of ivy? Brooklyn-based start-up SMIT (Sustainable Minded Interactive Technology) has, in fact, used this image to develop leaf-like solar panels, dubbed Solar Ivy. The leaves are available in different colours and shapes and can be applied to any building by installing a steel wire mesh to which the leaves are attached. A great way to give your house a facelift!

► www.imec.be



A death of one's own

A new film about the country's first euthanasia patient comes at the 10-year anniversary of the legislation

Anja Otte



Actor Koen De Graeve (*De helaasheid der dingen*) lost 20 kilos to portray Mario Verstraete, the country's first euthanasia patient, in Nic Balthazar's new film *Tot Altijd*

Tot Altijd, the new film by director Nic Balthazar, might be best known for actor Koen De Graeve's feat of losing 20 kilos to portray Multiple Sclerosis patient Mario. It's also a reminder that Belgium has one of the most liberal euthanasia legislations in the world, with hardly any controversy surrounding it

"I have chosen the music for my farewell. The words for my obituary are ready. At the end I have left one line blank. I hope the words 'With thanks to the Belgian Parliament' can be written there."

This is what Mario Verstraete of Ghent told the Belgian Senate in 2001 as it was debating the euthanasia legislation that has been in force since 2002. In a long list of experts, doctors and professors, Verstraete, on whose story the film *Tot Altijd* (with the English title *Time of My Life*) is based, was the only patient to be heard.

One year later, at age 39, Verstraete died, the first person in Belgium to whom euthanasia was administered under the newly adopted law. His final months were well documented, as he was one of the most outspoken supporters of legalised euthanasia.

Euthanasia is the deliberate ending of a person's life, at that person's request. This should not be confused with ending medical treatment ultimately resulting in death or with sedating the patient until death.

Euthanasia is legal in Belgium under strict circumstances only. The patient, who has to be over 18 and capable of making decisions, must submit an articulate and repeated request in writing. His or her medical condition should be incurable, with continued and unbearable suffering which cannot be adequately relieved.

Contrary to what most people think, the patient does not have to be terminal. This was one thing about which Verstraete was particularly concerned. Multiple Sclerosis (MS), the condition from which Verstraete suffered, does not itself lead to death. In a 2001 TV documentary, Verstraete described his situation: "I cannot stand up for very long and – one of the most annoying things – I have incontinence problems, typical for MS patients. All of that is a mess. But my personal limit would be if I could no longer have a social life because of these problems getting worse. Then there would be nothing left for me."

Verstraete also did not want to wind up languishing in a coma or living with dementia. "I know some people can, but personally I could not accept becoming demented. ... I would be a different person, and that I do not want. Or if I were to slip into a coma. People tell these stories of how they know of someone who woke up from a coma after 10 years. That's fine, but I do not want those 10 years. I don't want to be put on display in a glass coffin like Snow White. I don't want to live like that."

Peaceful and serene

The fact that non-terminal patients can be eligible for euthanasia is little known, says Marc Cosyns, the doctor who treated Mario Verstraete. An advocate of dignified dying, he made his own documentary about the euthanasia of two elderly patients. One of them, Roger, seemed quite healthy at 87, but without medication he would face what he called an undignified death. "Why should I wait until I lie in bed, peeing? Is that living? Who should I be accountable to?" Roger says.

In a moving scene, we see Roger's

last moments, in his bedroom. Dr Cosyns hands him the drink that induces death. "The pharmacist said it tastes of mint. He says hello, by the way," the doctor says, chatting calmly as his patient takes his final drink. When Roger is finished, he makes a sign with both hands, indicating that everything is fine, and he lies down.

Patients die within minutes of being administered a drink or a drip by a doctor. The reports that have to be filed according to law often mention that this happens "peacefully" and in the presence of the patient's friends or family. "Serene" is another word that is often used.

Acceptance and controversy

Despite strong opposition by the Catholic Church, euthanasia is hardly controversial in Flanders. That people with severe afflictions, such as author Hugo Claus and actor Carl Ridders, take the decision on their time of deaths has become widely accepted. In fact, there is even some outrage when euthanasia is refused, such as in the case of 93-year-old Amélie Van Esbeen, who

felt "tired of life".

The death of Claus, Flanders' most prominent writer, did cause somewhat of a stir after clergy criticised the way it became a media circus. "By ending life like this, one does not answer the problem of suffering and death. One walks around them in a large circle and avoids them," said then archbishop Godfried Danneels in his Easter homily. "Avoidance is not a feat, nor front page news."

In an open letter to the negotiators for the federal government, the driving forces behind the euthanasia legislation express their gratefulness for the wide acceptance it enjoys. They also point out some areas where the law could be refined. They would like to scrap the five-year limit on the declaration of will, in which people declare under what circumstances they would like euthanasia should they no longer be able to express this. They would also like to extend the current law to people who are no longer capable of acting, such as the demented, and to minors.

► www.euthanasie.be

TWO CASES EVERY DAY

In 2008-2009, the most recent data available, an average 63 cases of euthanasia per month were reported in Belgium, most of them in Flanders. This number remains quite stable.

A large majority of cases concern terminal cancer patients, with terminal neuromuscular disorders a far second.

Euthanasia of patients who are not expected to die in a relatively short period of time are rare, although there are cases involving evolving neuromuscular disorders as well as neurological effects of pathological disorders or accidents.

Most patients are middle aged: Euthanasia is rare in people under 40 or over 80. In 44% of the cases, euthanasia is carried out in the patient's home, while 8% take place in a home for the elderly.

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Researchers at the University of Leuven have identified the part of a rhesus monkey's brain that is responsible for 3D vision, which could be good news for visually impaired people. The researchers stimulated specific cells in the temporal lobe with short electrical impulses while monkeys decided whether a 3D structure was concave or convex. If brain cells with a preference for convex structures were stimulated, the monkeys saw a convex figure, even if it was actually concave. The human brain has a similar function, which should also be important for the perception of depth, and it is hoped the results mean that brain manipulations could in future help visually impaired people.

The LumiLab group at Ghent University has found a way to create materials that glow in the dark for approximately half an hour. By adding a certain type of impurity based on silicon and nitrogen, which are used in LED lighting, they can prolong the material's orange-red glow. Light-emitting particles of a few nanometres could be used in medical science to observe the spread of medicines. Similar techniques exist already, but until now they have required radioactive particles or harmful UV radiation.

The chemical sector and the education system will work together to make a career in the chemical sector more appealing to young people. In Flanders, about 60,000 people are employed in the industry, and because approximately 16,000 will retire in the next 10 years, the sector hopes to attract new talent through education. The industry will provide internships for students and teachers, with educational materials that they hope will stir interest among students in secondary education.

Ghent University and University College West Flanders (Howest) have agreed a collaboration as part of the Flemish integration of academic college studies in universities. UGent and Howest will collaborate to build an innovative and creative research institution in East and West Flanders. Studies in industrial sciences should get a prominent position at UGent.

High doses of Vitamin D have no effect in easing the symptoms of severe lung disorders like emphysema and congestive obstructive pulmonary disorder, according to a study by the university hospital of Leuven. Vitamin D had been thought to ease lung disorders, but the study found high-dose vitamin supplements had no significant effect. The study was published last week in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

► <http://flande.rs/90>

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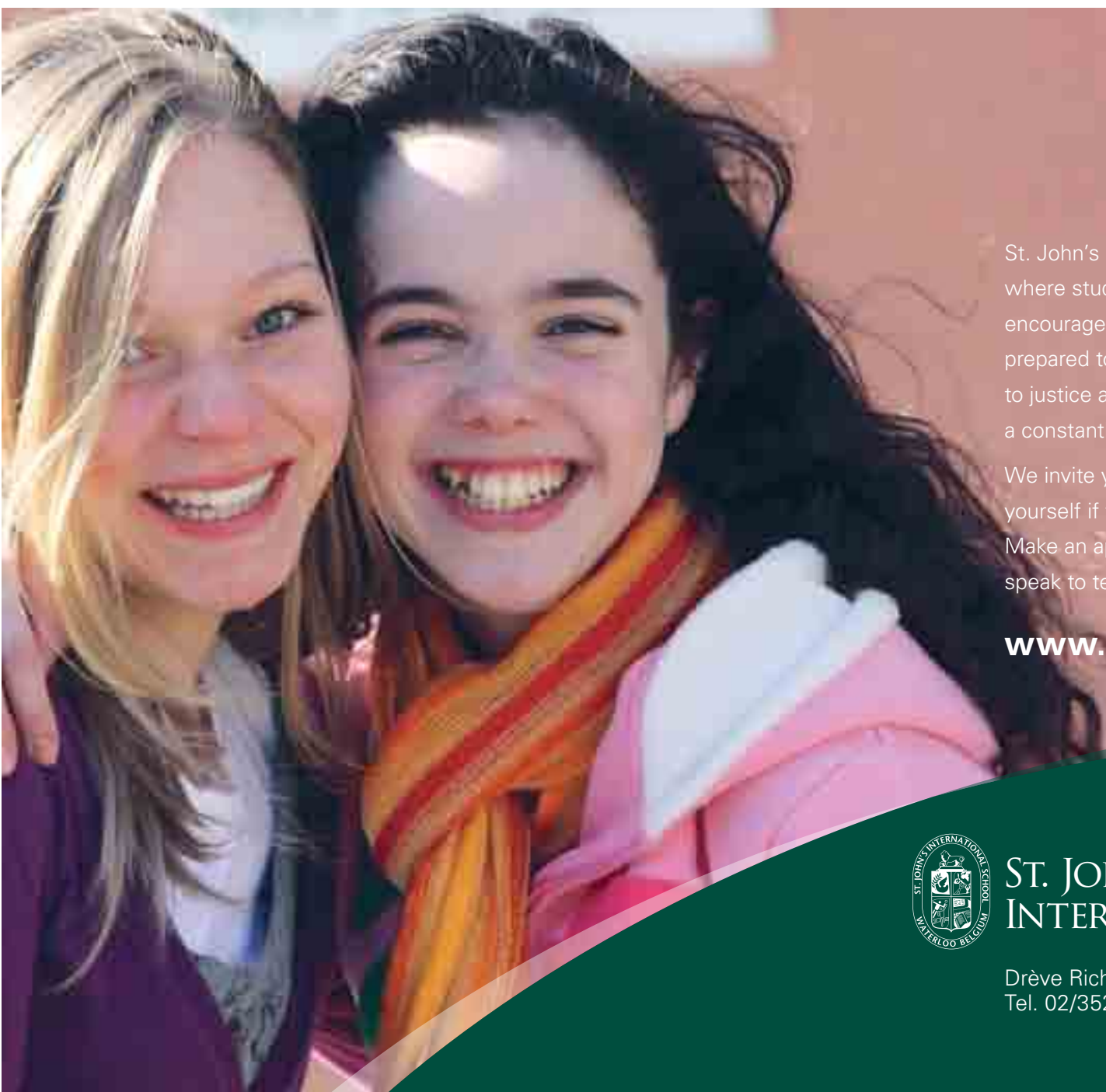


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National strike on 30 January

Unions “playing with fire” warns minister

Alan Hope

The unions ABVV (socialist), ACV (Christian) and ACLVB (liberal) have called a general strike on 30 January to protest against “imbalances” in the government accord reached at the end of last year by the majority parties. The unions are concerned at the measures in the social-economic package agreed, including changes to pension entitlements and the possible scrapping of the annual indexation of pay. A one-day strike took place in December, and rail unions have also held protest actions of their own. Marc Leemans, newly installed as general secretary of the ACV, recognised that there is little public support for the action. “I admit the unions are confronted with the pressure of public opinion,” he said last week. “We have a problem with explaining why we are striking.” The rail unions have pledged they will strike from 22.00 on Sunday night. Although civil servants generally do not take part in strike actions, the lack of train services often causes a knock-on effect.

Among those definitely affected will be students of the Free University of Brussels (VUB), who have been told exams due on that day will go ahead as normal. A Facebook group has been organised to help students find accommodation in and transport to Brussels. The main problem for the unions, Leemans said, is the lack of a government response to possible negotiations, despite promises made when the package of measures was first announced. “Di Rupo promised that we would be involved in the implementation of the social-economic measures, but there is no-one in the government working on that.” Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed, said that the strike was “completely incomprehensible and irresponsible”. The unions are taking their action against the federal government, but at the expense of companies and anyone who wants to work, a statement said. “Our businesses are having to pay for government decisions over which they have no control,” said



Off the rails: Trains will stop running for 24 hours beginning at 22.00 on Sunday

Unizo director-general Karel Van Eetvelt. “By bringing the country to a standstill, we are shooting ourselves in the foot in our attempt to fight the crisis.” An anti-strike petition organised by Unizo has gathered more than 61,000 signatures. Federal minister for pensions Vincent Van Quickenborne, whose proposals to increase the retirement age are one of the main points of

contention, said the strike was no longer necessary. “We have been negotiating intensely with the unions since 2 January,” he said. “There is the possibility for an agreement. Last week the private sector unions presented a list with their main problems, and we have agreed on solutions to 80% of those. The talks will go on; I want to solve this. But the unions need to realise they are playing with fire.”

Government support for short food chain projects



Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters has announced seven “quick-win” projects aimed at supporting the so-called short food chain – a strategy to keep the distance between food producers and consumers as short as possible. The call for projects went out only in October last year, and already seven projects have been selected to share nearly €50,000 in subsidies.

- The development of a starters’ package to help producers start

- direct sales of beef on the farm
- Discussion and information events to help producers who are part of the community supported agriculture (CSA) network to deal with their particular problems
- Recruitment efforts to bring producers of organic food together in an organisation
- A step-by-step plan to set up a preparation and sales area for on-farm shops to keep them in line with the law, as well as training days

- A pilot project to create three state-of-the-art farm shops, which would then serve as models
- A new service to allow workers in companies to order farm products online and have them delivered to their workplaces
- Publication of a series of six “biographies” of short food-chain producers to act as an inspiration to others

“The short food-chain strategy plan aims at stimulating initiatives that reduce the distance between producer and customer,” Peeters said. “By supporting projects that can be quickly implemented and that give rapid results for the consumer, we hope to give substance to that strategy.”

Q&A



Professor Herman Van den Broeck of Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School has just published the English-language book *Beyonders: Transcending Average Leadership*.

What exactly is a Beyonder?

My co-author David Venter and I were thinking about leaders who are better than average because the last couple of years and the financial crisis have shown us that we need much better leaders than we have today, for companies as well for countries. A Beyonder is someone who, as the subtitle of the book says, transcends average leadership.

How common is it to find someone who fits that description?

It’s not that common. What you find in a lot of companies are Beyonder moments, and even leaders who have Beyonder characteristics, but you don’t often come across people who are Beyonders all the way through. We see that some leaders are quite excellent when it comes to one, two or even three of the seven

characteristics we consider, but then they fail on others.

Is the idea of the Beyonder applicable to political leaders as well as business leaders?

We don’t see any reason why a leader in a for-profit or non-profit organisation, or even a political organisation, shouldn’t take into account those seven attitudes.

The book considers Beyonders as those who follows their vision regardless of the opinions of others. But aren’t leaders under as much pressure as those they lead? If you look at a country like Belgium, with a small population but with splintered parties and groups fighting for their own turf, you pay a very heavy price when it comes to the economic soundness of the country. Yes, there is pressure, but

it’s not because there is pressure that you have to go along with it. Otherwise Nelson Mandela would never have had the courage to do something about Apartheid.

Who stands out as good leaders in Flanders?

We interviewed the head of the VDAB [the Flemish employment and training agency, headed by Fons Leroy], and there you see people really trying to do their best. Also Jef Colruyt, who is not that visible in the media; but this guy is doing a very good job for the kind of organisation he leads. So yes, if we open our eyes and look around, we can see a lot of good examples of leadership but most of the time they are quietly getting on with it, doing a fantastic job without inflated egos.

► www.tinyurl.com/beyonders

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Chemicals ► Taminco

The Ghent-based world leading producer of alkylamines and derivatives has been sold to the US Apollo Global Management investment fund for some €1.2 billion. The deal is another milestone in the history of Taminco, which was part of the chemical division of the local UCB group before being sold to CVC Capital Partners in 2007. Taminco was elected Flanders Enterprise of the Year in 2010.

Insurance ► P&V

Brussels-based insurance company P&V has acquired a 4.5% stake in the French Inter Mutuelles Assistance (IMA) company and will develop an assistance activity jointly with IMA next to its traditional insurance business. The French firm is specialised in assistance services for the automobile, medical, travel and expatriation sectors.

Mining ► Nyrstar

The Brussels-based Nyrstar mining and zinc smelter group will invest up to €2 billion over the next three years to acquire new mines to boost the vertical integration of its activities and increase self reliance for its supplies.

Property ► WDP

The Antwerp-based industrial property group will build a €14 million, 10,000-square metre logistics hall close to Amsterdam’s Schiphol airport as part of the expansion of its property interest in the Netherlands.

Transport ► Van Hool

Coach manufacturer Van Hool, based in Lier, Antwerp province, has won a further contract in the US, bringing the total to some 510 coaches. While 210 of the buses will be built locally, the company is considering setting up an assembly line in a country with lower production costs for the rest of the order.

Wind energy ► Vestas

Danish group Vestas Wind Systems will supply 72 windmills for the €650 million Northwind wind farm to be built off the Zeebrugge shore from 2013. The company, which earlier won a contract for 55 windmills for the Belwind park, has opened a subsidiary in Brussels.

Waterway to go

Following the river offers a new perspective for visitors to Ghent

Courtney Davis

Ghent gives an inaccurate first impression if you arrive by train. Construction and more modern buildings around the Gent-Sint-Pieters train station hide a university town with cobblestone streets and impressive mediaeval architecture.

Most visitors hop on a tram from Ghent's main train station to get straight to the heart of the centre. But the mere three kilometre trip can be done on foot using the Leie River as your guide. It's a great way to discover another beautiful side to the historic city.

The walk follows the river most of the way and makes for a relaxing weekend walk. Before leaving, be sure to appreciate the station itself, now 100 years old. It was designed by Louis Cloquet in time for the World Exhibition in 1913 with a unique style; in 2010 the interior murals were restored, highlighting prominent Belgian towns, part of the 10-year renovation project that you can't miss as you exit out the front.

To start, cross the roundabout across from the train station and head left down Koning Albertlaan until you reach a bridge. This is the least interesting section: once you reach the canal, the scenery gets progressively more varied.

Take a right on to Noorderdoorgang and follow it all the way to town. Its name will change several times before ending at a bridge as Ajuinlei. As long as you simply follow the canal, don't worry about the street names.

Your best bet is to stay on the left-hand side for the stroll along a hedge-lined path. At your first bridge, go underneath along the footpath to arrive at the other side. Directly across the street is Ghent's city museum STAM. Part of the gorgeous 13th-century Bijloke campus, this museum tells the story of the town, complete with interactive multimedia displays.

Benches facing the backs of apartments and occasional grand homes are scattered on the walk, should you need a rest, with ducks swimming past to keep you company. In the spring, rental boats filled with day-trippers putter slowly by.

Poetry & advocaat

After crossing the street again, keeping the bridge and canal to your right and veering left, cross a small drawbridge next to a smaller, secondary canal. Here you can rent these small motorboats to explore the waterways. Keep heading straight, past a small dock with about 15 houseboats. Coming up on the left, the imposing Justice Palace sits on the water and in the distance, a clock tower spire juts into the skyline.

You're about halfway. Nearly in the



1

centre of the old town, cafés are now abundant. You can stop at the traditional Brasserie Midi in front of the Justice Palace for a coffee, served with a small glass of *advocaat*.

As you continue along the canal, you'll pass an English bookshop filled with used books, from children's stories to First World War history; the walrus-moustached owner can always help you find what you need. This street, Ajuinlei, also has an outdoor used book sale every Sunday until 13.00. Be sure to look at the buildings along the water to see the poem "Serre d'ennui" by Ghent-born poet Maurice Maeterlinck engraved on the wall above the water. Maeterlinck, in fact, is currently enjoying a year-long festival in Ghent, in celebration of the 100th anniversary of his win of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Flannel fashion

At the end of the street, you have to walk on the opposite side of the canal where the streets turn to cobblestone. Before crossing, enjoy your first full view of Ghent's city skyline, with the castle Gravensteen in the distance. Het Pand, a former Dominican monastery, parts of which date from the 13th century,

lines almost the entire length of the avenue.

Up ahead is a bridge; while you can walk under it, don't hesitate to climb the stone steps. Once on top, enjoy a view to the right of the three towers of Ghent – one belfry and two churches – all of which deserve a visit.

From here you can also look out straight ahead at the Graslei, where tourists catch boat tours and locals come to sit on the sides of the canal or in the cafés that line it on either side. Try De Zwarte Zee on the corner, where flannel blankets on the chairs ensure you can sit and chat, no matter the temperature. Their homemade seafood *waterzooi*, a Ghent speciality, comes in huge portions with locally made bread. Following the canal further will lead you to the Vismarkt, Gravensteen and the mediaeval Patershol district of winding little streets. Take your pick of directions and enjoy exploring.

Photos:

1 ▶ A winter stroll along the Leie is a marvellous way to get into the centre of Ghent 2 ▶ browse for second-hand books of all genres in the Ajuinlei 3 ▶ keep warm even outside at De Zwarte Zee 4 ▶ drop in to STAM, the city museum of Ghent



2



3

EXPAT TIP



Gillian Holmes Morrison, who lives alongside a canal in Ghent, is from California. An expat now for two years with her husband and two children, one of her tips for Ghent is the 100-hectare green area with a lake, walkways, sport courts and woods known as the Blaarmeersen.

"I love going to the Blaarmeersen for the great children's playgrounds. There are a number to choose from, so no one ever gets bored. On the east side of the park, there's a large play area with plenty to keep my kids

entertained, including a zip line, climbing wall and separate toddlers' play area. On rainy days, we use the indoor playground in Le Beach House, while I enjoy a cup of coffee or a snack. When the weather heats up, my children enjoy climbing on the wooden pirate ship on the sandy beach next to the large lake. There is even a children's lagoon with shallow water, filled with pulleys, floats and bridges to fuel the imagination."

▶ www.blaarmeersen.be



4

Big style for little people

A new website offers cute kids' clothes without the hassle of the shops

Courtney Davis

Shopping with children seems to be a nightmare for most parents. Repeatedly forcing resistant limbs through impossibly small arm holes, trying to find a public bathroom, little feet that get tired faster than yours... the headache just creates itself.

Eva Devisch, a mother of two girls, understands this and has the perfect solution: online shopping. "Because size is less of a problem for children than it is for adults, kids' clothes sell online easily," she says. "Plus, we know that kids will never try on all the clothes, whether you are in the store or not. Online is just a lot easier."

It's not just her experience as a mum that cements her opinion but years of working in the industry. With an Applied Economics degree and a clothing sector internship, her first job was as project manager for Flanders Fashion Institute, a support platform for Flemish designers. Most recently, Devisch was

marketing coordinator for a children's brand, which was acquired by the Flemish Fred and Ginger label. "It's how I entered this particular category of children's fashion," she says.

And now the 33-year-old has launched Goldfish, a trilingual webshop dedicated to fashion for young girls, boys and babies. "The idea of my own store goes back a long time," she says. "I always wanted to have my own, since I was a little girl. I was hesitating between a physical and an online store. But with two little girls, it seemed a better opportunity to open an online store, so I can work at night and not be bound by opening hours."

Devisch, who lives and works in Mechelen, says she knows that the venture "is a financial risk, but I'm still young, so if it doesn't work out, there are other options. I really had to stop talking about it and start doing it."

The site began operating last September, and Devisch is pleased

with the response. "In the beginning, it was all the people you know and friends of friends," she smiles. "But now there are people I don't know from places I've never heard of!"

Gap in the market

That quick success probably has a lot to do with what Devisch is selling. The concept is an assortment of brands – local and European – with a look that is a bit different from other web shops. "Often these days webshops are all loud prints and exaggerated styles," she sighs. "I did some market analysis – what brands sold on and offline. I discovered a gap between the classic brands that were a bit too expensive and the loud prints at a lower price."

Goldfish aims to sell classy, cool options that aren't too expensive. On the site, for instance, you can find print dresses by Swedish brand Anive for the Minors for under €50 and t-shirts by the UK's Little Duckling for under €30. And just like in the shops, January is sales month

– nearly everything is priced off. The site sports several designs by Aymara, a lovely Flemish brand produced in Peru, thanks to a Flemish/Peruvian couple. "This knitwear is one of my most expensive options, but it is of the highest quality. And," Devisch laughs, "in Belgium you can wear a good sweater all summer."

► www.goldfish.be

Orders from inside Belgium are shipped by Goldfish the next day. If an item doesn't fit, it can be returned within 14 days



Red cotton dress by Swedish brand Anive for the Minors, one of the cool but affordable European labels sold by Goldfish



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

*The Autumn 2011 edition of
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Walking his own path

Antwerp welcomes its new city poet, Bernard Dewulf

Rebecca Benoot

This week Flanders and the Netherlands celebrate Gedichtendag, or Poetry Day, when local libraries and cultural centres organise events to celebrate the genre, bookstores hand out posters with the year's winning poem (voted by the general public) and of course the Herman de Coninck Prize is awarded to 2011's best collection of Flemish poetry.

But this year's Gedichtendag is even more special for the inhabitants of Antwerp; they are getting a new city poet, Bernard Dewulf.

"It's very exciting," says Dewulf (*pictured*). "There have already been five great poets who have held this position." In 2003, author Tom Lanoye became Antwerp's first city poet, followed by Ramsey Nasr, Bart Moeyaert, Joke van Leeuwen and Peter Holvoet-Hanssen.

Dewulf was chosen by city office Antwerpen Boekenstad (Antwerp City of Books) to fill this revered position. "I feel that it's my duty to the city and to the people who have chosen me to do a good job," says Dewulf. "But I will nevertheless be doing it my way."

The long-time poet, essayist and columnist will write at least 12 poems about the little metropolis by the Scheldt during the course of 24 months, focusing not only on the city's grandeur but also on the intimate details that would otherwise vanish into thin air.

"I'm especially interested in footpaths," the 51-year-old says, "their function and the hundreds of people who walk over them every day. But I won't lie; there is a certain amount of pressure, as these poems will be read by a vast number of people and naturally have to be accessible to a large audience."

"I've raised a family here so this is the city where I've put down roots. I've already written a lot about Antwerp in other publications, so you could say that this place has become a part of my soul."

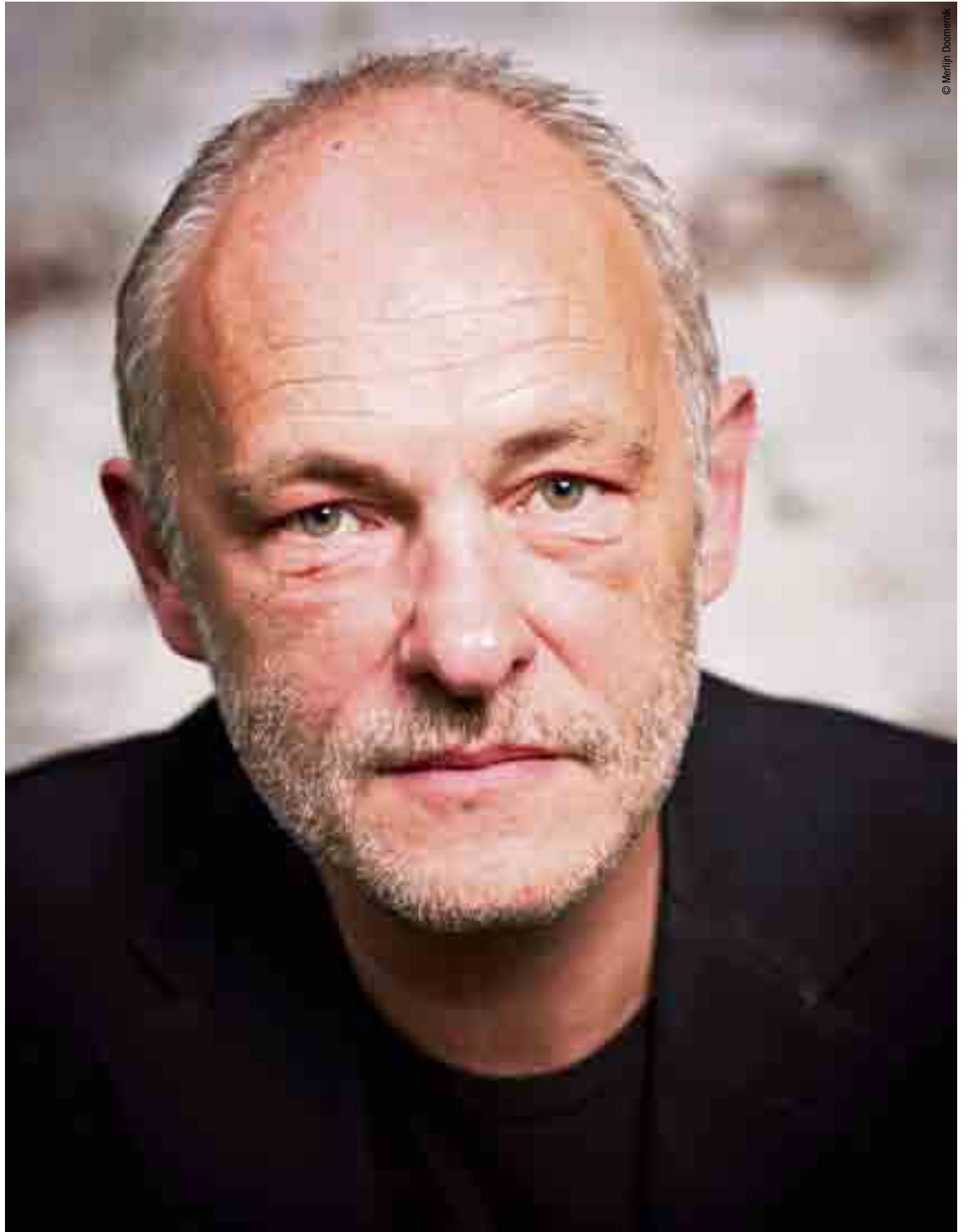
One of the publications is *Kleine dagen* (Small Days), a novella made up of short anecdotes in which he describes his own day-to-day life, his marriage and his children, who are growing up far too quickly. The combination of the book's poignant observations and refreshingly honest yet intimate style landed Dewulf the prestigious Libris Literary Prize in 2010 and the Inktaap, a literary prize awarded by young people, in 2011.

Writing about a city is naturally something very different from that, or from writing about art (*Naderingen*, a collection of essays on painting) or from penning a successful column for newspaper *De Morgen*, which he did until 2009. In a city, there are a vast number of places, quirks and issues begging your attention, not to mention those that have already been covered by his predecessors.

"Every city has urban traits, so the trick is focusing on what makes this particular place so unique," Dewulf explains. "And I don't mean by referring to particular monuments or such but by incorporating the atmosphere and the people."

Dewulf's contemplative yet heartfelt style is appreciated by readers in whatever form it's published. "I love variety, but I do believe that the essence of your writing, your own particular style or tone, is the only constant."

► www.antwerpen.be/boekenstad



"Part of my soul"

Born and raised in Brussels, Dewulf has lived in Antwerp for 22 years.

FRESH FICTION

Breaking News

by Dieter Ceustermans • Contact

The second novel by VRT news anchor Dieter Ceustermans was inspired by his years as a journalist on the evening news analysis programme *Terzake*. In *Breaking News*, Arthur Reiziger is an acclaimed war reporter but, while on a foreign mission, things go horribly wrong, and his cameraman is shot. Plagued by guilt and resentment, Reiziger falls into a pit of despair and starts to question everything he once held dear: politics, ethics and the influence of the media. An interesting, albeit slightly moralising, novel written in Ceustermans' clear, no-nonsense style.



De vroolijke tocht (The Jolly Voyage)

by Michiel Hendryckx • Lannoo

Turn-of-the-20th-century Flemish naturalist author Cyriel Buysse wrote *De vroolijke tocht* about his travels through France by car in October of 1910. Precisely 100 years later, Flemish author (and photographer) Michiel Hendryckx took the same trip, stopping at the same locations as his predecessor to see what has changed. The result is a beautiful new edition of Buysse's texts written in contemporary Dutch and accompanied by some intriguing insights by Hendryckx. *De vroolijke tocht* easily illustrates why thousands of Flemings flock to France every year.

Een ziel van glas (A Soul of Glass)

by Bart Vercauteren • Houtekiet

Bart Vercauteren was nominated for multiple prizes last year with his debut novel *Het graf van de voddenraper* (The Grave of the Ragman), and now this former therapist is back with an acidic commentary on the modern mental health-care system, which appears to "care" less than it should. When mental patient Liesbeth escapes from Sint André's psychiatric hospital, caretaker Martin goes after her. He finds her in an Italian police cell. On their way back to Belgium, he wonders how this once lucid woman was forced to such extreme measures. *Een ziel van glas* is a thought-provoking and brave novel but sadly also very predictable.

De Nederlandse maagd (The Dutch Virgin)

by Marente De Moor • Querido

Dutch author Marente de Moor won last year's AKO literary prize, an award that unites Flanders and the Netherlands as it's given annually to the best novel written in Dutch. The protagonist in this intoxicating and brooding book is a young girl called Janna who is sent to an estate near Aken where she is taught fencing by an old friend of her father. At the brink of the Second World War, she falls madly in love with Herr Egon von Bötticher and slowly starts to unravel her mentor's past, leading to a chilling conclusion. It's easy to see how this beautifully constructed prose and intricate plot won the hearts of the AKO jury.

THEATRE

Catherine Kusters

Stepping out of line: The prints of Jasper Johns

In the polders of West Flanders lies the quiet village of Oudenburg. With a population of 5,000, Oudenburg is not the sort of place one goes looking for art and architecture more modern than the remains of the ancient Roman castellum on which the town was built.

And yet, Oudenburg is home to one of Flanders' most unusual modern art spaces, Foundation De 11 Lijnen (The 11 Lines). It can be found along a narrow road on the site of a historical farm. The name refers to the size of the plot of farmland – a "line" is an old Flemish unit of measurement – as well as to the basic philosophy behind the project. The foundation's founder, Griet Dupont, is fascinated by essence and innovation, and the line, of course, is art's purest starting point.

The exhibition space and family home were integrated into the 17th-century property by renowned Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza Vieira. The challenge was to combine the three functions Dupont wanted to unite: life, agriculture and art. By all means, he succeeded. The gallery is light and open, connecting the art inside to the world outside.

And that world is a step away from the central arts scene. "It is about daring to make fundamental choices, away from the mainstream and common opinions," Dupont explains.

Every year, the founder organises one or two exhibitions; currently on view is a selection of work by American artist Jasper Johns, best known for his mixed-media work



© Jasper Johns, 1991, Untitled, primaries over black

"Flag" (1954), which is housed in New York's MoMA.

De 11 Lijnen's exhibition *Hands in the Prints of Jasper Johns* focuses on that particular motif in Johns' lithographs and intaglios from 1963 until 2010. "Hands to Johns are an important symbol of identity and strength. For children, the first contact with art is when they smear their hands in paint and press them onto a surface," says Dupont, who is also a children's psychiatrist. "The hand is the outward expression of a

mental process."

The work "Savarin" (1982) depicts a coffee can holding the artist's brushes against a backdrop of multi-coloured hands. "Johns never pictured himself in his work," says Dupont. "He says: 'I am a painter', and his self-portraits are his Savarin monotypes."

Hands is made up of 25 prints, carefully curated by the artist and his collaborator, master American printer Bill Goldston. The artists invited to showcase at De 11 Lijnen

have all had a major impact on the field of art. Johns, whose work is often associated with Pop Art and Neo-Dadaism, invites questions about the relationship between image and medium, life and art. "Johns is part of the history of art," Dupont says. "He has caused fundamental changes in the field." The location of the foundation appears to be encrypted in its mission, which is to offer a place for authenticity and reflection outside the mainstream. "We want to give a

stage to artists, both the forgotten and the well-known, the young and the established, who are truly important. Who bring change," Dupont says.

All initial scepticism aside, that seems in fact likely amidst these desolate polders beneath the clear and broad skies of West Flanders. For change, as it so often does, may spring forth from the margin.

Until 11 February | Foundation De 11 Lijnen, Groenedijkstraat 1, Oudenburg

► www.de11lijnen.com

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Rock Werchter

GET TICKETS NOW

Rock Werchter needs no introduction. One of Europe's biggest rock festivals, it pulled down the European Festival Award for Best Line-Up earlier this month. This year is no different. Adding new names every week, the festival's coveted four-day pass will sell out by the spring, so buy now if you want to get one. Justice kicks off the four-day party on from the main stage. The French electronic music duo is best known for its hit dance tracks such as "We Are Your Friends" and a unique, highly danceable sound that involves cut-up bass lines, distortion and indie-rock influences. On Friday, Pearl Jam takes the main stage. The legendary Seattle grunge rock group is celebrating its 20th anniversary since the release of its iconic debut album *Ten* with a Europe/UK tour. Red Hot Chili Peppers promise to delight crowds on Sunday, with punk classics from their almost 30-year career, hopefully not forgetting "Give it Away" and "Californication". Also confirmed for Sunday are British pop darlings Florence and the Machine. **Robyn Boyle**



28 June to 1 July | Festival park, Werchter | ► www.rockwerchter.be

MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Boechout (Antwerp province)

Napapili 2012: Fifth edition of the summer festival in the middle of winter, featuring True Cover, Bandits, Antwerp Gipsy-ska Orchestra and Discobar A Moeder, plus entertainment for kids

JAN 28 16.00-2.00 at Heuvelstraat

► www.napapili.be

Ghent

New Music Week: Festival dedicated to "Music as process", featuring artist-in-residence Christian Fennesz, piano duo Elisa Medinilla and Fabian Coomans, plus students from the Royal Conservatory Ghent

JAN 30-FEB 3 at Zaal Miry, Hoogpoort 64

► www.uitbureau.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Light Festival Ghent

Ghent always looks like a fairy-tale city, but wait until you get a look at it this weekend when its mediaeval façades come alive with ingenious light displays and animated projections. Last year, during the very first edition of the event, more than 200,000 people turned up to see the spectacular show set to perfectly choreographed music. All throughout the historic centre, light will play on the buildings, dance across the waterways and create an utterly magical atmosphere. The old post office on the Korenmarkt forms the backdrop for dancing monkeys and underwater scenes, while the hands on the clock spin round and round as if possessed. Even the belfry will appear ablaze, flames shooting from its clock tower. Print off the five-kilometre route map from the website to take with you, and get ready for an enchanting time. **RB**



26-29 January, 18.00-midnight | Across Ghent

► www.lichtfestivalgent.be

MORE EVENTS THIS WEEK

Bruges

TANK #07: Art festival featuring drawing, painting, music, performances, installations and more by various up-and-coming artists

JAN 27 20.00-2.00 at Het Entrepot, Binnenweg 4

► www.hetentrepot.be

FILM

Belgium LGBT Film Festival

Brussels’ lesbian-gay-bi-trans film fest is always a good time, partly because screenings take place in the already fabulous Vendôme and partly because there are sweaty parties and festive drag shows. The opening film has not just the promising title *Going Down in La-La Land* but also the presence of the director, Casper Andreas, to explain to you the ins-and-outs of making a movie about hot, aspiring actors in Hollywood. It’s in fact a serious step up in quality from Andreas’ other forgettable queer movies, such as *Slutty Summer* and *Violet Tendencies* (the latter of which is also playing during the festival). Another feature to look out for is *Beauty* by Oliver Hermanus, setting the tense story of a closeted middle-aged man in South Africa – a subject not often seen in contemporary cinema of the region. When family man Francois meets his daughter’s new boyfriend, his latent sexuality is set to explode. Also a good bet is the award-winning *Joe + Belle*, billed as Israel’s answer to *Thelma & Louise* – but with lesbians. Darkly humoured and sexy, it finds an unlikely couple trying to hide a corpse while avoiding some very annoying and possibly murderous drug dealers. Those looking for style over substance should check out the decadent Parisian 1960s underground world of girl-on-girl prostitution that is *Gigola*, while those into musical comedies should definitely not miss *Jamie and Jessie Are Not Together*, a refreshing look at the falling-in-love-with-your-best-friend lesbian genre (*pictured*). **Lisa Bradshaw**



2-11 February | Vendôme, Brussels | www.fglb.org

MORE FILM THIS WEEK

Across Brussels and Flanders

Tot Altijd: New film by Flemish director Nic Balthazar that tells the true story of Mario Verstraete from Ghent (portrayed by Koen De Graeve), the first Belgian to ever use the newly enacted euthanasia law in 2002 (see p7 for story)

Opens JAN 25 across Brussels and Flanders
www.totaltijd.be

Antwerp

FilmHistories: Cinema Zud’s ongoing programme of 100 years of film history. Two classics from 1965 coming up: Richard Lester’s *The Knack...and How to Get It* and Serbian director Dusan Makavejev’s *Man is Not A Bird*

JAN 26 & 31 at Cinema Zud, Lakenstraat 14
www.cinemazuid.be

Ghent

Futile Textile Film Festival: The title sounds a bit strange, but it’s a great idea – five films in which a piece or style of clothing plays a hugely important role. It’s part of the Futile Textile exhibition and includes *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Jailhouse Rock* and *Das weisse band*

JAN 26-29 at MIAT museum, Minnemeers 9
www.miat.gent.be

CONCERT

Wendy Van Wanten

From pin-up to TV personality, Wendy Van Wanten is a Flemish artist with even more up her sleeve. Van Wanten can sing and boasts a magnetic stage presence. For her most recent show, *Intiem* (Intimate), she’ll perform a selection of her most beloved songs from the classical and chanson genres with piano accompaniment by Bart Buyle of the Brussels Conservatory. And you can expect plenty of funny anecdotes thrown in for good measure. She performs in Ostend next month and in Geel in May, but the avant-première this week in Brussels is free and promises to be a heart-warming and, indeed, intimate affair. **RB**



29 January, 15.00 | De Markten, Brussels | www.vpf1980.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Bruges

The Kransky Sisters & Topology: Three bizarre sisters from an Australian village perform incredible covers of Nana Mouskouri, the Eurythmics and the Bee Gees, armed with pots and pans, toilet brushes, a musical saw and a patched tambourine

JAN 29 20.00 at Stadsschouwburg, Vlamingsstraat 29
www.ccbrugge.be

Geraardsbergen

Gewoon Free: Free Souffriau (also known as super-heroine Mega Mindy) covers of songs by late Flemish singer Ann Christy

JAN 27 20.00 at CC De Abdij, Zonnebloemstraat 5
www.de-abdij.be

DUSK ’TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Thé Dansant La Boum

5 February - Vooruit, Ghent

We totally get that you’re not up for a wild party or white night every weekend. Totally. So wouldn’t it be great if you could just go out on a Sunday afternoon, for instance, and dance like it’s Saturday night?

That’s exactly what a group of friends in their 30s thought when they planned the first edition of their new party concept Thé Dansant La Boum: an old-school party on Sunday, 5 February, between 14.00 and 19.00 at Ghent’s Vooruit.

No more waiting until late at night for a busy dance floor, no more spinning around to songs you maybe never heard before, no more looking for a babysitter who has to stay over on a Saturday night. And the entrance is free. How do you like the sound of that?

Music wise, anything is possible. Feel free to post your requests to the DJ on the event’s Facebook page, and you might hear your favourite songs. As you might have guessed, the playlist will mainly include classics from the 1970s and 1980s. Think “You Should Be Dancing” by The Bee Gees, “Let’s Dance” from David Bowie and Sister Sledge’s “Lost In Music”. Or how about some romantic music to snuggle up to your beloved and fill the dance floor with love?

The party is open to everyone, whether you’re 25 and bored with today’s music scene, or 55 and keen to stretch your legs to music you can sing along to. The Sunday afternoon dance will be organised three times this year, and, if all goes well, there will be a party on a Saturday evening as well ... starting at 21.00.



BITE

Robyn Boyle

Burgerij ★★☆☆



Already having witnessed the kind of anxiety my friends undergo when taking their kids to a restaurant, here's a concept they can definitely appreciate. Burgerij is incredibly family friendly, to the point where my dining companion and I find ourselves having to talk very loudly to hear each other. To be fair, we are seated in the part of the restaurant that also doubles as a playroom for kids. The carpeted area right next to our table is filled with games and toys and, well, lots of noisy children. We don't actually mind, as we can see that this concept is a huge success, giving parents the chance to dine out, relax and enjoy a good meal. The specialty of the house is gourmet hamburgers, made with a nice crusty bread, super fresh ingredients and homemade sauces. "We got the idea from similar restaurants in cities like London, Berlin and Amsterdam," says Flemish sports journalist Robin Janssens, who started this venture together with former Dutch professional footballer Björn Meeuwse. They now run a Burgerij in Antwerp and another in nearby Schoten. The menu lists many tempting options with names like Double Decker (two beef patties and barbecue sauce), Dolce Vita (burger with Provolone cheese, tomato, rocket salad, pancetta, grilled veg and basil-mayonnaise) and Funky Tuna (seared tuna steak with fennel, iceberg lettuce, tomato and wasabi-mayonnaise).

It's the Smokey Bacon and Matterhorn Cheezy that win our order. Both are enormous, with no less than 180 grams of freshly ground beef of the Belgian Blue variety. They don't ask you how you'd like it done, so we're pleased to find it just right – pink and juicy. Mine comes with strips of bacon, which add a whole lot of salty, smoked flavour, plus melted cheddar, crispy lettuce, tomato, pickles, fried onions and a spicy-sweet barbecue sauce. On the other side of the table, my friend's tucking into his Matterhorn Cheezy. It only differs from mine in that the cheese is a lovely bitter Swiss Emmental, the red onions are fresh and the sauce is tangy ketchup. While each of these burgers cost €14.50, you get your money's worth. They come served with heaps of fresh-cut fries and mayo and a fresh leafy salad. Burgers ala carte cost less, and vegetarians, take heart, there is both a falafel and a veggie burger option for you. One interesting twist to the Burgerij concept is that patrons are encouraged to suggest their own creations. If you have an idea for a delicious stacked burger combination using up to seven ingredients, then it could very well become Burgerij's next "Burger of the month", and named after you.

► www.burgerij.be

- 📍 Two locations (also take-away): Tramplein 2, Antwerp (Berchem); 03.294.06.68 & Brechtsebaan 298, Schoten; 03.345.12.11
- 🕒 Mon-Fri, 12.00-14.30 & 18.00-22.00 + Berchem Sat & Sun, 17.00-22.00; Schoten Sat, Sun & holidays, 12.00-22.00
- € Mains: €13.50 - €16
- 👤 Popular, kid-friendly joint specialising in gourmet hamburgers

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

What happened to Bart Wellens?

It will be a huge relief to Bart Wellens – and his friends and teammates – that he was able to leave hospital last week after his heart scare earlier this month. He will be home in Vorselaar, Antwerp province, in time for his daughter's birthday, much to his family's delight. Wellens, a former cyclo-cross world champion, was rushed to intensive care on earlier this month after suffering what was described as "life-threatening" heart, kidney and liver problems. The incident occurred on the eve of the Belgian national cyclo-cross

championships in Hoogdele, West Flanders, in which Wellens was due to take part. His condition has now stabilised, and the 33-year-old has returned home to continue his recovery. It is not yet known when or whether Wellens will ride again, but he will not race again this season. So what happened? Wellens contacted his team when his body temperature rose to nearly 40°C and his heartbeat became irregular. "I was afraid," he said at a press conference as he left the hospital last week. "It started with a fever and an attack of flu, then

I threw up, and I was in a lot of pain." He was initially taken to the hospital in Geel, Antwerp province, but, as his condition worsened, he was transferred to the intensive care unit of the University Hospital in Antwerp. "I lost five kilograms, and I was exhausted just coming to this press conference," he added. But why this all occurred is unclear, including to Wellens himself. Inevitably, some media began to draw comparisons between him and Italian rider Riccardo Riccò, who was rushed to hospital last year after allegedly self-administering an illegal blood transfusion. Other doping scandals also sprang to mind, from Floyd Landis, who was stripped of his 2006 Tour de France title over a doping offense, to the drug-taking of the late Flemish cyclist Frank Vandenbroucke. Confirmed cases are assumed to be only a fraction of the actual usage, and rumours swirl about almost every major rider on the circuit. Wellens tried to address the chatter head on. "I understand that some people think bad things because of the image of the sport and the moment at which it happened," he conceded. "But only Bart Wellens knows...how hard I work." But it is also natural to ask questions about the incident. Cycling is rife with dubious medical and pharmaceutical practices, and Wellens himself has failed to offer any satisfactory alternative to the speculation about his heart scare. Until he does, the conjecture will only continue.



Bart Wellens with a get-well card from the staff of *Gazet van Antwerpen*

The last word...

Stationary

"The envelopes were ordered on time, but they weren't delivered on time. Because of that we had to cancel a number of sittings."

The Brussels prosecutor's office came to a grinding halt when they ran out of envelopes with address windows last week

Summer sitter

"A fortnight at the coast is cheaper than day care."

Jonathan Chevalier of the socialist mutuality about the huge demand for places at summer camp

Movie magic

"Take a hip flask with you to help with the boredom."

Oscar-nominated Flemish director Dominique Deruddere offers advice to Michael Roskam, whose film *Rundskop* was, as *Flanders Today* went to press, on the short list for a nomination

Ballet for bedtime

"In these capitalistic times, sleeping is seen as a waste of time. I think that's a pity."

Artist Kris Verdonck has produced a dance piece called *Exit* that encourages the audience to doze off

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

MyMachine is one of the best initiatives we've heard of in a long time: Primary school children invent a "dream machine", which is then designed by college students and constructed by students in technical education. It's good for training, collaboration between the generations and for showing kids just what they can accomplish with a bit of imagination

Education

The University of Leuven has produced a very interesting diversity document, which describes its official stand on a range of issues such as religious holidays, headscarves, prayer and kosher meals. Our reporter visits to find out how decisions are made and how they are implemented in practice

Tourism

The Villa Empain, a treasure of Brussels' Art Deco scene, was empty and neglected for 15 years. We'll tell you who re-opened it, why and how you can visit