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## Waiting for my child

**New legislation will bring more transparency to parents wanting to adopt in Flanders**

Anja Otte

The number of Flemish signing up to become adoptive parents has dropped dramatically in the past few years, and the release of figures regarding waiting periods are largely to blame. Although it's difficult to decrease the waiting time, the Flemish government has recently passed new legislation that makes the process easier for both parents and adoptees

**E**ight to 10 years. That's how long prospective adoptive parents in Flanders have to wait for a child to arrive in their family.

When the adoption agencies made these numbers public last year, it sent a shockwave through the adoption landscape. The number of candidates fell drastically, put off by the waiting time. Kind & Gezin, the government agency responsible for family issues, including adoption, recently came up with new numbers. The average waiting period is four years, the agency said. Ten years is really a worst-case scenario.

But four years is still quite a while to wait. Why does it take so long?

"There are a number of steps candidates have to go through," explains Else De Wachter, a Flemish MP for the socialist party and one of the driving forces behind the new legislation. "They have to be investigated by an agency, and a judge has to declare the parents suitable, which also takes some time." Where the child is coming from can also make a difference. "The countries of origin often need plenty of time to declare children eligible for adoption and appropriate them," says De Wachter.

And most adoptions in Brussels and Flanders are indeed international. Cases of Flemish children being adopted are usually familial – a stepparent or grandparents adopting a child. Few Flemish children are put up for adoption to outside families, and the conditions to adopt a Flemish child are even more difficult to meet.

### Interests of the child above all

International adoptions often deliver children with special needs, but De Wachter says this is generally not a problem for local parents. "On the contrary," she says. "What those needs are depends on the country of origin – they all use different definitions. The child may have a small disability or bigger problems. Either way, the parents have to make a conscious decision. We have to be careful that people do not apply for children with needs they cannot cope with simply because they believe they are easier to adopt."

Rather, what causes the shortage of children is a greater awareness in many countries that children are best raised within their own communities. For this reason, the number of adoptees dropped by 16% in 2010, with sharp decreases from Ethiopia, Russia and Kazakhstan (which stopped its co-operation altogether).



## FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

## Brigitte Grouwels



Last week, Brigitte Grouwels, one of the two Flemish ministers in the Brussels regional government, celebrated 20 years in politics with a simple post to her blog. The achievement is notable, but the figure doesn't tell the whole story. Brigitte Francine TJ Grouwels was born in Hasselt in May 1953, into a deeply Christian and political family. Her father, Armand, was a family doctor, a member of the wartime resistance, and councillor and later first alderman in nearby Diepenbeek. Her mother, too, was politically active, and in her own words, she "took in politics with mother's milk". She went on to become active in the Christian-democratic youth and student movements. After studies in Limburg, Leuven and the Sorbonne in Paris, she served as an intern at the EU Commission, before going on to work for the Christian Democrat research department, and for a development NGO for 10 years. Only then did electoral politics beckon, and in 1989 she was elected to the Brussels parliament as a candidate-successor, finally taking the seat vacated by Marie-Jeanne Schoenmaekers in 1992 – hence last week's anniversary. Grouwels became a secretary of state in the Brussels government in 2004, with responsibility for the administration, equal opportunities and the port. She also handled health and welfare

within the Flemish community commission. With the change of coalition at the 2009 elections, in which Pascal Smet lost his post in Brussels but took up one in the Flemish government, Grouwels was promoted to minister, with the portfolios public works, mobility, informatics and the port, all of which have managed to keep her in the public eye, though not always in a good way. The most recent problems involved her plan to make Brussels taxis adopt a livery against the opposition of the drivers themselves; and her support for the renovation of the Havenlaan, which runs alongside the canal in Brussels, where local people and environmentalists protested the removal of old cobblestones and the felling of 150 or so plane trees. That protest went all the way to the courts, and the work has still to begin. "People these days are often cynical with regard to politics, and some in politics are also cynical," Grouwels wrote on her blog. "But if I look back on the last 20 years I see no reason to be cynical. Of course, not everything is sunshine and roses in politics, but in what other sector is it? More than anything I'm happy and grateful that I was given the time, the opportunity and the space I had to make a contribution."

► [www.brigittegrouwels.com](http://www.brigittegrouwels.com)

## News in brief

A call centre set up to handle registration applications for 12 secondary schools in Brussels received more than 18,000 calls last week as the application period opened. The most popular schools were the Maria-Boodschap Lyceum and Sint-Jan-Berchmans college, both in the city centre. The telephone system was intended to avoid long queues of parents lining up to register, which was still the case at the Royal Atheneum in Etterbeek, where more than 100 parents spent the night in a sports hall hoping for a place.

The province of East Flanders has relaunched its project to distribute free packs of flower seeds to residents to encourage flower growth to support bee populations. Residents can reserve their packs, each containing enough seeds to cover 10 square metres, via the website:

► [www.oost-vlaanderen.be/bijen](http://www.oost-vlaanderen.be/bijen)

A number of classic Flemish artworks are on their way to Mexico, Florida and Tokyo, on loan to exhibitions there while the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp is closed for renovations. The beneficiaries include an exhibition on Flemish art in Mexico City, a Rubens show in Sarasota, Florida, and an exhibition on James Ensor in Japan.

The Brussels regional government has agreed a procedure to appoint a new director-general of the public transport authority MIVB, after months of impasse which prevented a successor to Alain Flausch, who resigned in September, being sought. Kris Lauwers, currently deputy DG, will be in acting charge until a replacement is found. The animal welfare department of the Flemish health ministry has called on the public to adopt a horse

from the Old Horses Lodge refuge centre in Laarne in East Flanders, to make room for the increasing number of cases of abuse discovered by animal welfare inspectors. Horses available for adoption, all of which are recovered residents of the centre, are posted on the Lodge's website.

► [www.tohl.be](http://www.tohl.be)

Booking a taxi in Antwerp is now simpler and free with a new app for smartphones developed by Antwerp Tax, available for Android, iPhone and PC. The app makes a connection with local taxi companies at no cost, and shows exactly where your taxi is and how long it will take to arrive. It also automatically connects to taxi services in 50 other European cities including Amsterdam, Geneva, Rotterdam and Vienna.

► [www.antwerp-tax.be](http://www.antwerp-tax.be)

Flemish public transport authority De Lijn is to announce ticket inspection operations in advance, a spokesperson has confirmed. The authority plans a 5% increase in ticket inspections this year, in an effort to raise an extra €200,000 in fines to reinforce the budget. According to spokesperson Astrid Hullenhoven, De Lijn will use the press to make known which bus and tram lines will be affected, though spot-checks on other lines are always possible. The rail authority NMBS already posts planned inspections in the free *Metro* newspaper.

Ghent is currently in first place on the Creative City Index, compiled by urban consultant Charles Landry. The index rates cities according to the presence of, and support for, creative industries, for which Ghent achieved a score of 66.4%, ahead of Bilbao in Spain, Freiburg in Germany, Perth and Canberra in Australia and Oulu in Finland. Landry's report, based in part on

interviews with residents, described Ghent as "an unusual mixture of the intimacy of a small town and the openness of a metropolis".

► [www.charleslandry.com](http://www.charleslandry.com)

Jan Vandeveldel from Veldegem in West Flanders last week received the first ever Leek Jewel prize for his leeks, handed over by former prime minister and West Fleming Yves Leterme. The prize rewards leek growers for sustainability, ecological care, social engagement and profitability. Vandeveldel is a third-generation leek grower, working 12 hectares and growing leeks under glass and in the open ground for 11 months of the year. He also has a purpose-built accommodation block for seasonal workers.

Victims of bicycle theft in Brussels are invited to post their details on a new blog started last week by a group of cycling organisations including the Fietzersbond, Gracq, the European Union Cyclists' Group and the Belgian Union for Cycle Tourism. "When your bike is stolen you feel powerless," a spokesperson for the group said. "When you report it to the police they shrug their shoulders. Cycle theft in Brussels seems to be a necessary evil: unimportant, unavoidable and unsolvable." The group is calling for a special police taskforce and protected bicycle parking in the city.

► <http://byebyebicycle.wordpress.com>

Polar explorers Dixie Dansercoer and Sam Deltour, fresh from breaking the world record for the longest Antarctic distance covered without assistance (*Flanders Today*, last week), have been forced to give up their expedition because of severe weather. The pair had intended to go as far as possible in 100 days, but had to abandon after 74 days and 5,000 km.

## FLANDERS TODAY

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## OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

## Kicking up a stink

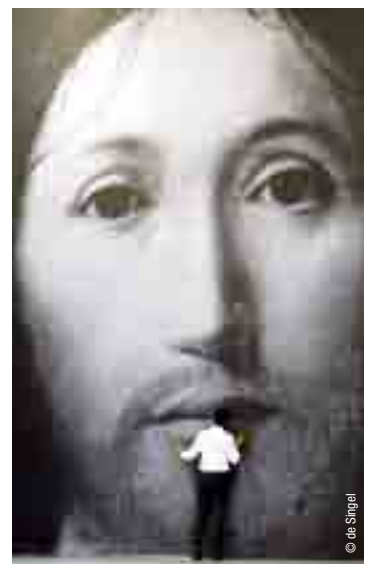
A stink-bomb in the theatre may not be much compared to the overthrow of a foreign monarchy, but a protest last week in de Singel in Antwerp against the theatre presentation *On the concept of the face, regarding the son of God* by Romeo Castellucci held up the premiere by three hours, and continued a fine old Belgian tradition. Theatre-goers sometimes turn nasty. The premiere in Paris of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in 1913 led to fistfights in the aisles, and the composer Saint-Saëns stormed out over the misuse of a bassoon. A performance of Steve Reich's *Four Organs* at Carnegie Hall in 1973 led to catcalls and jeering, and caused one woman to bang her head repeatedly on the stage, begging for the music to stop.

The most notable theatre protest of all happened in Brussels on 25 August 1830, when opera-lovers

emerging from a performance of Daniel Auber's *La Muette de Portici* joined rioters in an uprising that overthrew the rule of the Dutch king William I and brought about Belgian independence. That sort of success would not be seen again until the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989, started in the Realistic Theatre in Prague, spurred on by the students of the Academy of Performing Arts and led by dissident playwright Václav Havel.

The stink-bomb protest at de Singel may or may not have been the work of some Catholic protestors (police are investigating) but their distaste for the work, in which a giant image of Christ (*pictured*) is stoned, led them to march singing and praying on the theatre, and to write angry letters to the management, sponsors and the minister of culture. The Catholic students' union called it "shock for shock's

sake". Castellucci, meanwhile, said the protests were "an attack on artistic freedom". The production went on to play to full houses, and closed its run last weekend.





# Waiting for my child

Trend for children to remain in their home countries is growing

► continued from page 1

At the same time, it is hard to find new countries of origin – or “channels”, as they are known – because of the high ethical demands by the Flemish authorities. De Wachter: “Above all, we respect the Hague Treaty, which states that the child’s interests prevail. This means that children are best looked after by their own families, in their countries of origin. In case of orphaned or abandoned children, an investigation has to be launched to find relatives.”

With over 600 candidates deemed suitable as adoptive parents and only 120 adoptions in 2011, long waiting periods are unavoidable. The new legislation, which was voted in the Flemish Parliament last month and will come into effect as of 2013, aims to offer more transparency to prospective adoptive parents. “If they know from the start a procedure might take up to 10 years, they can make a more informed decision,” says De Wachter.



Flemish MP Else De Wachter, a driving force behind the new legislation, is waiting for a child herself

## The waiting game

De Wachter is in fact a prospective parent herself. “I was told that the procedure takes an average of one-and-a-half to two years, but I’ve been waiting now for six. The adoption should be in its final stages right now, but, with so many obstacles, you can only be sure once the child has arrived in the family.” You have to be realistic, she continues. “When you start a procedure, you should know that the international context changes all the time. Not everything can be predicted, but some things can be taken into account. Therefore, the new legislation introduces an intake control: Everyone can still apply for adoption, but the procedure starts only when there is a prospect [of getting a child] in, say, three years.” Flanders will also become more pro-active in opening more channels through which children arrive. “Flanders does not co-operate with some countries that Wallonia does. Surely there must be some possibilities there,” says De Wachter. “The procedure to recognise new channels was previously not very clear. Adoption agencies would spend a lot of time and effort to find new channels, only to see them rejected. The new legislation will provide a set time period for this investigation, with motivations to come to a conclusion.”

Whether this will result in more adoptions in a few years’ time is hard to predict. Clearly, adoption is not the answer for all families hoping for children, so the only message to prospective parents is that they should think an application through. De Wachter: “An adoption is not something you decide on at the age of 20. Most adoptive parents are 30 or more before they apply. This means the parents might be 40 by the time the child arrives. Will their families still be capable of raising a child at this stage? Personally, I believe they are, but that is a decision everyone has



“Really, it’s wonderful”: International adoptions are usually successful if the parents know what to expect and accept that integration into the family can take up to a year

to make for themselves.”

Finally, the legislation offers more rights to the adoptees themselves: They are more closely followed up and have easier access to their files should they want to trace back where they came from. “We wanted to offer more legal security to prospective parents, but also to the adoptees,” says De Wachter.

► [www.adoptievlaanderen.be](http://www.adoptievlaanderen.be)

## REUNITED IN ZEDELGEM

Teena and Wine were best friends in an orphanage in Calcutta before they were both adopted and lost touch. In an unlikely stroke of luck, both girls ended up with parents in Zedelgem, West Flanders. The parents had no idea of the girls’ special bond, until they fell into each others’ arms four years ago on Wine’s first day at the school Teena had attended for some months. The girls, then five and six, picked up their friendship, even though Teena had learned Dutch by then and mostly forgotten Bengali, the language Wine still spoke. Now they are inseparable, and are much like sisters.

## WITNESS

### Lieve Van Bastelaere, adoptive parent



Journalist Lieve Van Bastelaere writes a weekly column for *Het Laatste Nieuws* on life with her newly adopted son, Tamru. She had to wait five years for her son to arrive, but her experience with adoption was mostly positive.

“My husband and I already had a son when we decided to adopt. In the application, we put no preference as to the sex of the child. That means you will probably get a boy, we were told, because most candidates prefer girls; apparently they suffer less racism here. We preferred a child younger than five-and-a-half years old, so that he could attend preschool for at least one year before going to first grade. Children who are older often have to remain in the orphanages because adoptive parents prefer babies. We wanted to give one of those children a chance, too. We also said that the child could have a minor disability – which in the end he did not.

Our son’s country of origin is Ethiopia. We did not have much of a choice, for multiple reasons.

Some countries ask for a medical certificate proving the parents’ infertility – hardly a possibility in our situation. Others require that the adoptive parents be religious, which we are not. Ethiopia has some advantages, though. At the time, for instance, you only needed to travel over once for an adoption.

“How can you possibly find out if someone is fit to raise a child?”

I have mixed feelings about the suitability of the screening we underwent. I firmly believe that screenings are necessary. An adoptive child is difficult to cope with, and parents need to be strong, especially when the child is older or has special needs. Still, I wonder how any screening

can be adequate. How can you possibly find out if someone is fit to raise a child?

I especially disliked the questions they asked my other son, who was five at the time. ‘What do you not like about your mother and father? Can you show us the house?’ What questions to ask a five-year-old!

We got a positive result straightaway, though. Once you have a positive court ruling, there is not much you can do but wait. Our name was put on a list – on the bottom of page three.

Our son has been here for one year now. When he first arrived, he was very anxious, which we had expected. For months, he did nothing but scream and hardly slept at night. He was very aggressive towards his brother and towards me, all of which stems from fear of abandonment. Now Tamru is a normal five-year-old and doing well at school. Gradually, the screaming stopped. Now we get plenty of hugs and kisses. Really, it’s wonderful.”



# New industrial dialogue needed

## Flanders-only negotiations in future, Peeters proposes

Alan Hope

Flanders needs its own mechanism to carry out social dialogue involving employers and workers, separate from existing contacts on a federal level, minister-president Kris Peeters said last week. But he stressed that the new framework, arising from Flanders' new responsibilities under the government accord of 2010, does not represent a fault line in relations with the other regions.

Peeters' plan was revealed in an interview with *De Morgen* concentrating mainly on foreign trade. However, Peeters also raised the question of the new responsibility for the labour market, part of the state reforms agreed by party leaders in arriving at last December's government accord.

At present, consultations between employers and unions take place on a federal level in the Group of Ten, made up of five union representatives and five representatives of business organisations, including the Farmers' Union. Peeters' proposal is to set up a separate Group of Five, presumably involving the same organisations from the Flemish side: the socialist, Christian and liberal unions (ABVV, ACV and ACLVB)

and self-employed organisation Unizo, the Farmers' Union and the Federation of Belgian Enterprise VBO. That brings a total of six, not counting the chamber of commerce Voka, who Peeters suggested might also have a place – something that will presumably have to be ironed out if parity is to be achieved.

"The idea is not for the social partners to split away from the Group of Ten, that would have no value," Peeters said. "But the new responsibilities mean we have to move towards a clear social consultation that works as well as, if not better than, the federal system." One stumbling block, according to Peeters, who was director-general of Unizo for years before entering politics and therefore knows the system inside and out, could be the unions. "For them the same is true as for Voka and Unizo: The role of social partner in Flanders and Belgium has a number of advantages, but also responsibilities. You have to negotiate, and that has to produce a result. If there's no result, the government has to decide. In my experience, an agreement reached between social partners who understand each other is a lasting

one. But they have to understand each other, obviously."

The legislation necessary to implement the reforms is expected to take until 2014 to make its way through, by which time the new body could have been set up, as both

Flemish and federal governments face elections in that year. "I assume the unions and the employers in Flanders will see this as a unique opportunity to make a difference," he said. "If they do not grasp it, that would be most regrettable."



Karel Van Eetvelt of Unizo, a member of the Group of Ten

## Castle murder mystery deepens

A pool of blood in a castle hall, some discarded shell casings, but no body. Not the opening of a new TV detective series, but the real-life mystery facing police in Wingene in West Flanders, after the discovery of an apparent shooting last week in the Carpentier Castle, but no sign of either the castle's owner Stijn Saelens, aged 34, or any trace of a body.

Last weekend, five suspects in the case, four Chechen nationals and a man from Aalter, were arrested and later released for lack of evidence. Their involvement in the affair is as complicated as any detective story plot. Last October, the four men were stopped by police performing a routine traffic check. In their car police found a map of the castle grounds, and the name of Pierre S from Aalter. He is known to the police for his prior involvement in hormone trafficking. The four men were allowed to go on that occasion. Pierre S is also, however, a friend of Dr André Gyselbrecht, Saelens' father-in-law. The two were known, according to witnesses, to be at loggerheads over Saelens' desire to move to Australia, taking with him his children and his wife, Elizabeth, who is also Dr Gyselbrecht's partner in a medical practice in Ruiselede.

Dr Gyselbrecht and his son were questioned by police over two days, before being released. Police developed the story of a contract killing after the blood found in the castle's entrance hall and a trail leading to the door were determined to be Saelens'. In that narrative, the hired assassins were among the Chechens, with Pierre S, as the go-between. Police even found traces of blood in the car of one of the Chechens, but forensic tests showed it was animal in origin.

At the weekend, Pierre S was released, and his lawyer told reporters he had seen the Chechens on his way out, and confirmed he had never set eyes on the four men before. They, meanwhile, were also released for lack of evidence to hold them. A search for traces of Saelens' whereabouts goes on.

## Battle for top spot among Flanders' birds

Once again, the house sparrow and the chaffinch (pictured) are running a neck-and-neck race to see which is the most common bird in the gardens of Flanders, following last week's volunteer census organised by Natuurpunt. The organisation asked members of the public to spend half an hour on Saturday and Sunday counting the number of birds in their garden, noting the species where possible. About 3,000 people have reported back so far, with more to come. The final results will be announced on Wednesday, as *Flanders Today* appears, but as we went to press it was already clear that the sparrow, for many years the undisputed champion, was facing stiff competition from the chaffinch, which took last year's top spot.

Meanwhile, Natuurpunt advised the public to set out some extra food for the birds in the continuing cold weather. Sparrows favour a mixture of grains such as wheat and maize, while finches are partial to mixed seed. Woodpeckers and tits, on the other hand, like peanuts, sunflower seeds and fat-cakes, and the blackbird and the robin will eat anything.



© François Van Bauwel/Natuurpunt

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

3

elderly people died in the first month of the year during funeral services in Flanders – in Poperinge in West Flanders, and Hoegaarden and Dilbeek in Flemish Brabant. One victim, aged 75, was overcome shortly after carrying the casket into the church

761 tonnes

of road salt spread by the Flemish roads and traffic agency on the first night of last week's cold snap, bringing the total this winter to 8,829 tonnes

40%

of the tickets for this year's Tomorrowland festival in Boom will be reserved for Belgian applicants, organisers said. Tickets go on sale on 24 March, two weeks before open sales to fans in other countries

200,000 tonnes

of grain capacity to be built by Eurosil in the port of Ghent, bringing total capacity there to 850,000 tonnes. The new terminal will be built on the Kluizendok

€50,000

to each of two neighbourhood schemes in the Brussels communes of Schaarbeek and Anderlecht from the Flemish community commission in Brussels, ensuring their continued work with the poor of those areas

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

## The Antwerp experiment

In politics, Antwerp is special. It is a political laboratory, the place where trends that can last for decades are born. It was Antwerp that gave the first break to new parties such as Agalev (now Groen!) and Vlaams Blok (now Vlaams Belang) in the 1980. If you can make it there, you can make it... right. These days, another experiment is taking place in Antwerp: mayor Patrick Janssens' city list. In the hope of securing another term at the local elections in October, socialist Janssens has forged a cartel with the local Christian-democrats. CD&V may be a large traditional party in national politics, but in Antwerp it is but a small player. Moreover, alderman Marc Van Peel forms a veritable team with Janssens. I have yet to find one issue on which our opinions differ, he recently said. Janssens also wants to seduce Open VLD. According to unconfirmed information, he has offered the second place on his city list to Annemie Turtelboom, the Justice minister who is planning to move to Antwerp. If she accepts, the city list will include all three "traditional" parties – an unusual demonstration of unison in a city that is known for being divided. Patrick Janssens has never eschewed experiments. With a background in advertising, he put the A (literally) in SPA, making the socialists "anders" – different. At the previous local elections, he campaigned with celebrity photos. These did not refer to his party, but merely to "Patrick". The campaign was criticised, but it did result in an electoral triumph. In much the same way, the city list focuses on the mayor's personality and the city renewal he stands for. This scenario makes N-VA a real challenger. Bart De Wever, the party president who has made this nationalist party extremely popular, lives in Antwerp, but is yet to speak out on his position at the local elections. It is generally believed that he will head the list, as a candidate for the seat of mayor. In a strange turn of events, N-VA has recruited Ludo Van Campenhout. This liberal alderman has always been charmed by Janssens' project too, which ironically alienated him from his party Open VLD. He will now contest the man he was loyal to for years, sobering up for the occasion. Last week, Van Campenhout proclaimed that, with the help of a fancy Caribbean clinic, his drinking days were over. Now, how's that for a campaigning experiment?



# Heeding the call

## Measures against bullying have been stepped up in schools across Flanders

Alan Hope

On Thursday, 16 February, children will bring their school's TV set onto the playground and dance along with soul singer Brahim and Ketnet presenter Charlotte. Even as I write this, kids across Flanders are busy learning the words and the moves in preparation for the big day. It's all part of a new campaign against bullying in schools, which starts this Friday with the awarding of a prize to Heilige Hart College in Wezembeek-Oppem for actions taken to combat bullying. Seven other schools across Flanders share silver. According to Gie Deboutte, chairman of the Flemish network Kies Kleur Tegen Pesten (Take Sides Against Bullying), the winner showed that they had a working policy against bullying that had already shown results. Heilige Hart received €2,500 and the other schools €500 each.

Last October, 16-year-old Lisa Lejeune took her own life because – according to her brother Thibault, 14 – she was being bullied at her school in Ghent. Thibault posted a message on his Facebook page calling on friends to start an "anti-bullying wave". "My goal with this message is to talk about bullying so that you all know how far it can go, because [Lisa] is not the first and will certainly not be the last," he wrote. "I'm only sorry that I'm starting this now... Help me ensure that for someone else it's not too late." Thibault's appeal reached its target. "The call led to columns and testimony by Flemish celebrities who only then realised what their former bullying behaviour had led to," said Deboutte. "Former victims, too, came forward to talk about their experiences. Some of them even volunteered to take part in initiatives like going around schools to tell their story."

Among those former victims are Flemish pop singer Bent Van Looy and author Saskia de Coster. "It started off with teasing, but pretty soon it became physical violence," said Van Looy. "The low point was when I was fastened to a post by the bike

racks with bicycle locks, and people were standing around watching. That's an image that stays with you. I made myself as small as possible, so as not to be noticed. When I started with pop music, I think it was a sort of subtle exercise in revenge." De Coster, meanwhile, talked about the psychological aspects of bullying. Bullying isn't always "physical violence," she said. "I think of it more as a sort of psychological warfare. Everyone behaves together in a certain way as if you're contagious, turning away from you as if to say...we don't want you here. You walk around with the feeling that you have bird poop on your head that makes everyone else laugh, but you can't see it yourself. That's actually pretty tragic." The anti-bullying prize has been awarded since 1999. Heilige Hart, a combined primary/secondary school, won because of a sustainable policy that set out definitions of what constitutes bullying and implemented actions to combat it, explained Deboutte. "They restructured recess periods to provide a range of activities that encourage and stimulate contact between students. They instituted a card system for students taking part in activities to ensure there would be none excluded by others. They printed a brochure for teachers to let them know what sort of problems they might be confronted with. They also organised a theatre piece on the problem, which then formed part of the class material." The Week against Bullying campaign involves various events within schools and youth groups. "But goodwill alone is not enough," Deboutte said. "Politicians, policymakers, parents' associations and the Flemish schools networks would do better not to wait for the next shocking incident before entering into a dialogue with each other. Let's say yes to Thibault's appeal."

► [www.kieskleurtegenpesten.be](http://www.kieskleurtegenpesten.be)



Brahim and Ketnet's Charlotte are helping lead the anti-bullying charge

# UGent building supercomputer

## The region's most powerful computer will begin operating this year

Ghent University and the Flemish Supercomputer Centre have joined forces with computer firm Hewlett-Packard and chip manufacturer Intel to build the region's biggest supercomputer, which is expected to come on line later in the year. The Flemish Supercomputer will be housed in a new data centre on the Sterre campus, the base of the university's science faculty. It will be open to all Flemish universities and associated colleges, as well as to public research bodies. "In the future perhaps Flemish businesses could also be involved," said project leader Tom Kuppens. Supercomputers allow researchers to either solve problems in a very short time or to tackle massive

calculations. Typical fields in which such calculations are common include weather research, biophysics, materials research, liquid and plasma dynamics and nanotechnology. The new computer, which will cost €4.5 million, will be capable of 155 teraflops – equivalent to one thousand billion (10<sup>12</sup>) floating-point operations (or calculations) – every second. By comparison, the world's most powerful supercomputer, the Fujitsu K in Kobe, Japan, is capable of more than 11 petaflops, or roughly 70 times more than the Flemish supercomputer. At present, the five Flemish universities have, according to Kuppens, a total computing capacity of about 100 teraflops – but it is not all in one place. The new computer, he said, "will be

capable of tackling much larger and complex scientific problems". Financing for the project comes jointly from the economy, science and innovation department of the Flemish government and from the Hercules Foundation, in charge of investment in research infrastructure. The running costs of a supercomputer, however, are considerable. It consumes a great deal of electricity and produces heat, which requires cooling. According to some estimates made when the supercomputer was in the planning stages, the total consumption for running and cooling could reach 10,000 megawatt-hours a year, at an annual cost of nearly €1.5 million. **AH**

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THE WEEK  
IN BUSINESSBanking  
► KBC

Flanders' largest bank is pursuing the restructuring of its eastern European operations by seeking a buyer for its Bulgarian affiliate DZI, one of that country's largest insurance companies. KBC is also said to be close to selling its Polish subsidiary Kredyt Bank.

Chemicals  
► Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics group will enter a joint venture with the French Air Liquide to build and operate fluorine gas production units. The gas, extensively used by producers of flat-panel displays and in silicon thin-film photovoltaic industries, has a market value of €418 million worldwide.

Hotels  
► Sodehotel

The Sodehotel in the Brussels commune of Sint-Pieters-Woluwe is getting a €50 million facelift. Owned by the Chinese HNA hotel and airline group, the renovated facility will have 181 rooms instead of the present 126 and will be rebranded as a luxury five-star Tangla Hotel.

Restaurants  
► Hard Rock Cafe

The Hard Rock Cafe is coming back to Brussels more than 10 years after closing its local franchise. The new restaurant, to open in June, will be on the Grote Markt and will feature the brand's new design style and latest technology.

Retail  
► Decathlon

French sport equipment retailer Decathlon is investing €22 million in the Brussels commune of Evere to build a 10,000-square-metre outlet, its largest in Europe. The new store, expected to open in 2014, will employ up to 200 people. The company recently inaugurated a store in Olen, Antwerp province, and plans to open one in Maasmechelen later this year.

## Correction:

Last week in Week in Business, we listed incorrect figures for The Hotel in Brussels. The hotel was purchased from Hilton by the Swedish Pandox group for €29 million, and the renovations are €40 million. *Flanders Today* apologises for the error.

## Bekaert forced to cut jobs

## Peeters vows to help employees find new work as competition and plummeting market hit home

Alan Hope

Steel wire manufacturer Bekaert is to cut 1,850 jobs, 600 of them in Flanders, in a drastic round of restructuring aimed at making savings of €100 million a year. Most of the jobs will be lost in China. In Flanders, the hardest-hit will be the company's plant at Aalter in East Flanders, which loses four-fifths of its workforce, or 387 full-time positions. The company closed down production in Lanklaar in Limburg and Hemiksem in Antwerp province in 2008.

Bekaert's problems involve the manufacture of the wire used to saw silicon into wafers for use in solar cells, in a business that faces overcapacity and increased competition from local producers in China, while the market for solar panels has plummeted following the scrapping of subsidies in several European countries, including Slovakia, Germany and Belgium. In addition to Aalter, jobs will be lost at head office in Zwevegem and at a

plant in Ingelmunster, as well as the R&D centre in Deerlijk, all in West Flanders.

Following the announcement, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters promised his government would do all in its power to find new jobs for the laid-off workers, before going on to speculate whether he might be in a position to recoup €17.7 million in subsidy paid to Bekaert in investment and training support, via the Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology IWT (€16.7 million) and the Enterprise Agency (€1 million). The Flemish government, Peeters said, would look into the possibility of stopping further payments, and recouping money already paid out. Managing director Bert De Graeve insisted his company had adhered to the conditions of the IWT subsidy received, which amounts to €16.7 million over five years. Associated with that subsidy, he said, was the employment of 300 people,



investment of €50 million a year in the technology centre in Deerlijk, and €20 million in infrastructure. The company, he told the VRT, is not considering repaying any of the subsidy received.

The company also strongly contested claims it had paid no tax in Belgium, pointing out it paid €128 million a year in various duties

and charges, including employer contributions to social security and levies on dividends. It also paid €139 million last year in tax on profit. "If zero percent of that was in Belgium," a company spokesperson said, "that's because we made no profit in Belgium." Bekaert made a profit of €3.8 million in 2010, but paid no income tax in Belgium.

## Sportpaleis takes on Grenslanndhallen management

Hasselt city council recently approved the agreement for Antwerp's Sportpaleis to take over the management of Hasselt's Grenslanndhallen expo centre and Ethias Arena.

Hasselt's first exhibition space, called Hexagoon, opened in 1983 and was managed by the city and Unizo, the organisation representing the self-employed. Beginning in 2004, the Grenslanndhallen witnessed a rapid expansion, with the opening of the 13,600-square-metre Ethias Arena and the Plopsaland indoor theme park. "The combination of the venues allowed us to offer an extensive package of leisure possibilities for a broad audience," says Tom Vandeput, chairman of the non-profit organisation Grenslanndhallen, which previously managed the complex.

Children's TV and event producers Studio 100 will continue to run Plopsaland, and the space known as Hall 5 will still be managed by the Versuz nightclub. The Sportpaleis will, meanwhile, invest €12 million in the other venues of the cluster, including a huge expansion of Ethias Arena.

"Turning a 'box' into a multifunctional and efficient event hall will take a substantial part of the budget," says Jan Van Esbroeck, managing director of Sportpaleis. Further, "the Congrestheater will be upgraded to become a full-scale musical theatre space, with a separate entrance and a capacity of 3,000 – a perfect complement to the Sportpaleis's activities and a new entry in the inventory of mid-size venues in Flanders."

Following the success of sports events in the neighbouring Lotto Arena, the Sportpaleis will transform the Grenslanndhallen's "Studio" hall into a basketball court, with room for 2,000 fans. They are aiming for 25,000 visitors a year.

Finally, the Hexagoon, Esplanade and Foyer halls will be renovated. All venues can be used separately or offer expansion possibilities for the others.

"Just like in the past, we don't think of the Grenslanndhallen as a competitor but as a provider for both local and international top concerts and events," says Van Esbroeck. "Combining all these activities under one umbrella will undoubtedly benefit the success of the Grenslanndhallen. We plan to offer the right content at the right time in the right venue."

Under the 27-year deal, the Sportpaleis paid €625,000 for Grenslanndhallen's assets and will further pay an annual fee of €650,000. "This amount will take into account investments made by the Sportpaleis and be adapted accordingly," explained Vandeput. **Marc Maes**



The future Ethias Arena in Hasselt, courtesy of Sportpaleis

## Female entrepreneur finalists named

The nominations have been announced for this year's Womed Awards, given each year to a female entrepreneur in Flanders. The competition is organised by Unizo, mabizz and markant, the network of female entrepreneurs.

The four finalists are:

- Liese Verhaeghe, owner of Beauty&Energy, a firm which specialises in food supplements, and which was previously the company started by her parents in De Panne in West Flanders; supplying to all sorts of wellness and fitness businesses. Her inspiration, she says, was her mother's desire to do more as a beauty specialist than apply creams and lotions;
- Anne Chapelle, a former nurse at the Institute for Tropical Medicine and now CEO of bvba 32, which represents fashion designers Ann Demeulemeester and Haider Ackermann. She is also in demand by fashion schools as a mentor for young talent. The business employs 87 people, and had a turnover in 2011 of €29 million;
- Daniëlle Vanwesenbeeck, who worked in the mailing sector and set up her own business in Leuven eight years ago, specialising in the coordination of direct mailing campaigns. The business, Mastermail, made €2.8 million last year and employs 15 people using state-of-the-art mailing technology;
- Greetje Demuelenaere, who worked in advertising and marketing in Brussels and Bruges before taking the big step in 2004 of starting her own business, comma, merkenmarketeers in Zedelgem in West Flanders, which provides a total package of marketing and communications. The company offers, she says, a package of A to Z, from conception to delivery.

Voting for the four candidates is open until 16 February, and the winner will be announced on 14 March.

► [www.mabizz.be](http://www.mabizz.be)

## Call for sponsorship applicants

The Flemish agency for technological research VITO, the scientific and technical centre for the construction industry WTCB and the transition network DuWoBo (sustainable living and building) have put out a call for projects seeking sponsorship in the field of sustainable innovation in construction.

The process will give precedence to renovation projects that meet certain conditions:

- integrate new construction and renovation in connection with historic buildings;
- take account of the ecological and economic cost-benefit analysis of the entire life-cycle of a building;
- integrate technological and social aspects;
- favour social inclusion and offer a mix of functions; and
- use smart systems such as intelligent building or immotica.

Applications are accepted until 30 April for up to 66% sponsorship to a project-maximum budget of €100,000.

► [www.vito.be](http://www.vito.be)



# A hidden world

## UGent offers a unique post-grad course that's famous worldwide – but little known in Flanders

Andy Furniere

Flemish students may not have found their way to the Master's course in nematology at Ghent University this year, but students from Nigeria, China and Spain are grabbing the opportunity with both hands. The only university in the world to offer a post-graduate degree in the study of nematodes, or roundworms, UGent harbours some of the current and future experts in this Nobel Prize-winning field of biology. It is a well-kept secret in Flanders, but on the third floor of the Faculty of Science a unique department has for 20 years been providing the world with rare knowledge about roundworms, the world's most abundant multi-cellular animals. These worms are about one millimetre long and include approximately 28,000 described species. Some scientists believe the total number of species could go up to one million. "Nematodes are everywhere," says Nic Smol, course coordinator of the nematology department, "from the ice at the poles to the soil of the tropics. They're even in our tap water."

### Defending crops

Most international students come to learn how to defend their country's plants against parasitic nematodes,



The roundworm destroys 10% of the world's crops but also provides invaluable opportunities for biological research

which destroy about 10% of crops worldwide. In particular, Africa and Asia have a tough time fighting the parasites. The Belgian Public Service of Development Cooperation awards scholarships to study nematology in Ghent, half of which go to students from Sub-Saharan Africa. UGent has also established a European programme in which students spend a semester at another European partner university. In the future, UGent hopes to provide internships in countries such as Kenya and South Africa.

Christopher Oche Eche is a postgraduate student from Nigeria, who is studying parasites responsible for the destruction of approximately 12% of banana crops in his country. "Farmers are often unaware that roundworms are the primary cause of plant diseases and subsequently cannot fight this 'invisible enemy'," the 28-year-old explains. After graduating, Oche Eche plans to return to Nigeria to carry out more research on techniques to defend crops against parasitic nematodes.

Cai Huaihan, 26, from China was raised in a family of farmers and feels his country needs to step up its efforts to battle the nematodes, which cause huge damage to the Chinese crops of rice, soy beans and tobacco. "The importance of nematology research is increasingly recognised by the Chinese government, but the new techniques have not yet reached the majority of the farmers," he says. He hopes to do a PhD in Ghent but is already planning to build a modern greenhouse in China with his cousin. "I hope to help farmers such as my father with the expertise I have gained here." But not all roundworms are villains. About 12,000 of the known species are harmless and are in fact "ideal tools to assess pollution in soil and water," says Spaniard Patricia

Gilarte, 25, who is interested in the bio-monitoring qualities of nematodes. Roundworms are also useful when it comes to developing eco-friendly alternatives for pesticides and make perfect test animals to research the aging process. "They are almost identical to humans on the cellular level and also have bowels, muscles and a nerve system in common with us," explains Wim Bert, head of UGent's nematology research group. "Because it takes them only three days to reproduce, we can very quickly assess the effects of genetic and physiological changes."

### No dolphin-appeal

In the past 10 years, three research projects based on the roundworm *C. elegans* have won a Nobel Prize, and the UGent grants attract people from all over the world. Still, no Flemish student has enrolled in the Master's course this year.

The only Fleming in the second year, Matthew Vangheel, thinks the reason is not just that nematodes are little-known animals. "Many students are afraid to specialise too soon in their study career and have the misconception that it is a narrow field, but in fact the training we get is varied and multidisciplinary." Professor Bert understands that nematology is not an obvious study choice: "Most biology students start with the thought of working with popular animals such as dolphins, not invisible worms." He himself became involved with the study on the order of his professor in aquatic ecology, who was also unfamiliar with roundworms and unaware that



Students come from across the globe to enrol in the only Master's degree programme on nematology in the world

a specialised department existed at the same university. "But, as most students experience, nematology became a passion once I discovered the diversity of this hidden world," he says.

Coordinator Smol acknowledges that the course needs to be better promoted. "Flemish students should be made aware of the future possibilities the course offers. Graduating here opens doors in education, research and also at ministries, where they can improve agricultural policy, for example. Not just in Flanders and the West, but all over the world."

► [www.tinyurl.com/nematology](http://www.tinyurl.com/nematology)

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

The non-profit educational and scientific Von Karman Institute for Fluid Dynamics in Sint-Genesius-Rode in Flemish Brabant is taking the lead in the QB50 project, a collaboration between universities worldwide **to launch 50 small satellites into space in 2014**. These CubeSats are "disposable" satellites that are relatively cheap and weigh up to one kilogram. They research the lower layers of the thermosphere and ionosphere and burn up in the atmosphere after about four months.

University College West Flanders (Howest), Ghent University and the maritime network organisation Flanders' Maritime Cluster are taking part in the European Energetic Algae project, **developing biomass based on algae**. Energy technologies based on algae are still at an early stage, but they evolve quickly because they are a valuable alternative for rapeseed and corn. Experts all over north-west Europe will set up pilot projects, which will become the foundation for the European policy.

The research institute BIOMED of the University of Hasselt has **printed a complete lower jaw in 3D**, which is a world first. The titanium jawbone was implanted successfully in an 83-year-old woman, who after one day was able to speak normally and swallow. UHasselt is now working on an improved version, in which stem cells can also be used in the implant.

How pupils perform in school depends more on their social and economic situation than on their ethnicity, according to **research on school segregation** in primary education, published in the Flemish education magazine *Klasse*.

Three students from the Catholic University College of South-West Flanders (KATHO) will spend this academic year in **the student halls of the future**. KATHO last year built three rooms after brainstorming with students, investors and trend-watchers: a highly technological room, an extreme minimalist room and a sustainable room in wood. The students will swap rooms every two months. With the project, KATHO hopes to be inspired to create the next generation of student housing.

**The first primary arts school in Flanders** will open its doors to children beginning in the 2012 academic year. The school is an initiative of the Sint-Lukas Brussels University College of Art and Design. Pupils will be brought up with visual arts, music, dance and theatre. Languages and mathematics are still a priority, but will be taught creatively. AF

## Q&A



**Barbara Soetens, assistant professor of applied psychology at Lessius University College in Antwerp, specialises in eating behaviours**

people eat less when they have to take biscuits out of a packet than when the biscuits are unpackaged. We also drink less if our glasses are smaller, but we will feel just as satisfied. Furthermore, when people believe they have eaten food with many calories, they will compensate by eating less afterwards, even when what they ate first was calorie-free.

**Do Flemings eat healthily enough?** Like everywhere in Europe, an increasing number of people are overweight. Although the situation is not as critical as in the United States, it is worrying that a lot of children are obese.

Thankfully, certain care centres and programmes exist in Flanders that teach children to eat healthy and to practise sports regularly. Parents, too, are educated about healthy eating patterns, which is crucial. It's positive that varied and healthy eating is becoming trendy because of certain cooking programmes, but I believe it's especially important that we become more aware of [healthy] eating.

**How do we improve our eating awareness?** Don't eat in front of the television: It distracts you from what and how much you are eating. Try to avoid

the king-sized packages that the food industry promotes. And when you do buy them, it's a good idea to divide big portions into small ones – for example, a bag of chips into small dishes. Also, carefully check calories and ingredients on packages like cereal, for example. Food companies are obliged to mention them but often hide them in inconspicuous places on packaging. Finally, put unhealthy food at the back of your cupboard to stop you snacking too often. AF

**What most influences our eating habits?** Everything that impedes our eating actions has a strong influence on how much we eat. Tests prove that



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# The hit parade

Forget Rio – when it comes to Carnival, nowhere does it quite like Aalst

Katrien Lindemans



For about 11 months now, 19 to 21 February have been marked in the diary of nearly everyone in and around the city of Aalst. That weekend, the annual carnival parade will meander through the city, with cheerful floats and plenty of Dirty Jennies. And for the first time in the history of Flanders’ biggest carnival celebration, the festivities are ruled by a woman: Princess Stephanie.

Historians don’t know exactly when the first Aalst Carnival was organised, but sources go back as far as the 17th century. Back then, the festivities were rather uncoordinated, but the first official parade marched through the city on Sunday, 9 March, 1851. Unlike today, there were no decorated floats; instead, political organisations put together a tour from tavern to tavern and invited everyone to join in. People would wear masks and play music. The aim was to give the citizens of Aalst a good time and

allow the local taverns to have a few busy (and boozy) nights right before Lent. Over the years, the Aalst Carnival has grown into a three-day event, celebrated by up to 80,000 carnivalists (as they call themselves) and visitors, and the entire city is taken over by the festivities. This year is, officially, the 84th Carnival celebration in its current format. Every year a jury chooses Prince Carnival, a devoted member of a Carnival group who gets the keys to the city and rules Aalst during the three days. For the first time, the jury has picked a woman: 25-year-old Stephanie Daeleman. Carnival starts on Sunday, 19 February, with the famous parade of floats. The decorated wagons set off at around 13.00 from Pierre Cornelisstraat and take all afternoon to make their way to Grote Markt. All along the route, people gather to watch the beautiful and funny floats, depicting contemporary issues, local politicians and celebrities both local and international. It’s the tradition to mock everyone and

everything one more time, before entering the pious 40 days of Lent. This year, we can definitely expect exaggerated versions of the new prime minister Elio Di Rupo, the late singer Amy Winehouse, Prince Laurent of Belgium (always a float favourite) and a send-up of the endless roadworks in the city of Aalst.

### Childs’ play

After a traditional late, late night of revelry for the adults, the next day starts with a party for the children of the city, called the Jefkes Carnival. This event prepares the 500 participating kids for the “real” carnival they’ll get to celebrate when they’re older. On the same day at about 14.00, the Grote Markt is the setting for the broom dance by the Gilles of Aalst. Gilles are typical carnival characters, disguised with masks and wearing red-and-white suits and wooden clogs. They stamp on the ground to chase away the cold weather and dance to ask the gods



Elio Di Rupo was among the famous faces featured in last year’s parade – and sure to be an entry this year, too

for a good harvest. This traditional scene is followed by onion throwing (Aalst is known for its abundant onion farms.) From the balcony of the city hall, Princess Stephanie will throw 100 onion-shaped sweets to the crowd. Whoever catches the onion with the number “1” written on it wins a little golden onion.

### Dirty “girls”

Tuesday is for many Aalst Carnival fans the highlight of the year, starting with the parade of the *Voil Jeanetten*, or the Dirty Jennies. When you see these men dressed up in a wig, fishnet stockings, a fur coat and plastic boobies, you might be shocked, but cross-dressing became part of traditional carnival customs in the 19th century. As most of the carnivalists were working-class men, the only costumes they could afford were their wives’ clothes. The original accessories of a *Voil Jeanet* include a pram, an umbrella and a bird cage, but today, a parasol and supermarket shopping trolley often do the trick.

The Jennies gather on the Grote Markt at around 15.00 and strut their stuff all over the city streets. As many of the Jennies have been partying in their outfit for the past two days, they’re not necessarily the most elegant of creatures – but the parade is an entertaining thing to watch. To keep themselves warm, the Jennies drink lots of beer ... preparing themselves for the most difficult moment of the year: the burning of the carnival doll. After three crazy days of cross-

dressing, parading, singing, dancing and drinking, all carnivalists make their way to the Grote Markt at around 21.00. If you’d like to watch the event but prefer to avoid the big crowd, the ceremony will be projected on a big screen on Vredeplein (and will be shown on the TV news that evening). The speakers blast out the Carnival songs for the last time, and Princess Carnival will give her final speech before setting the Carnival doll on fire. Escorted by a group of bagpipe players, the doll will be carried over the square. When the bagpipes start playing “Amazing Grace”, Princes Stephanie will set the doll on fire with a burning torch. It’s an intense moment for many; there will be hugging, chanting, some might even shed a tear ... or start planning for next year, when Aalst will celebrate Carnival for the 85th time.

► [www.aalst.be/carnaval](http://www.aalst.be/carnaval)  
(official website)

► [www.carnaval.oilsjt.be](http://www.carnaval.oilsjt.be)  
(by Digital Radio Aalst, with live streaming, carnival songs and lots of pictures)



Stephanie Daeleman is Aalst’s first-ever female Prince Carnival

## BE PART OF IT!

Aalst is a transport hub and easy to reach by train from any station in Flanders or Brussels. For a cheaper ride, buy a **B-Event carnival** return ticket, which is valid between 19 and 21 February. It’s a short walk from the station to the centre; simply follow the signs, the crowd or the trail of confetti. Carnival is organised by and for the many local carnival groups, but everyone is welcome to join the festivities. Feel free to dress up any way you like; you’ll notice your efforts will be much appreciated. Interaction with the people of Aalst might be difficult as their dialect is known to be quite hard to understand, but there’s one slogan you’ll hear and see quite often: “*Weir doeng voesj*”, which means “we continue”.





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# Love me do

Instead of being freaked out by Valentine's Day, embrace how utterly easy it really is

Katrien Lindemans

Love is in the air, everywhere you look around – whether you like it or not. While roses and a box of chocolates might still do the trick, our Valentine's Guide has other tricks up its sleeve.



**1** The jewellery brand most associated with romance must be the American Tiffany & Co: A woman's heart often starts beating faster simply by seeing their signature baby blue box. For this Valentine's Day, the brand has designed a series of heart-shaped medallions. They come in gold or silver, with or without a little diamond, and have room on the inside for a secret love message.

► Waterloolaan 66, Brussels [www.tiffany.com](http://www.tiffany.com)

**2** If you'd like everyone to know your dearest is the best in the world, these earrings in the shape of medals could be the gift you're looking for. They are the creation of Ghent-based silversmith and glass artist Elisa Lee (Elisabeth Leenknecht) and are sold at her own shop/gallery, as well as in a few other stores in Flanders.

► €220 Hoogpoort 33, Ghent [www.elisa-lee.be](http://www.elisa-lee.be)



**3** How about a romantic dinner? Yes, you could have come up with that idea yourself, but it's all about the location, right? On 14 February, brewery Liefmans in Oudenaarde (East Flanders) invites lovebirds for a special dinner, including lots of their fruit beer from starter to dessert. There will be live music between courses, as well as a lingerie show. Tempted? Email [natacha@artichaut.be](mailto:natacha@artichaut.be) for more info and reservations.

► €69 per person Aalststraat 200, Oudenaarde [www.liefmans.be](http://www.liefmans.be)



**4** Dinner on an island sounds impossible in Belgium, but we do have a tiny island in the middle of Brussels, and it's home to a charming restaurant in a wooden cabin. Chalet Robinson can be found in Ter Kameren Forest and is only accessible via a boat. The weekend before Valentine's Day, and on the day itself, the Robinson chef cooks up a fancy dinner for couples with a *foie gras* appetiser, fish starter, veal medallion main course and a sweet dessert. Reservations are a must, via [jerome@chaletrobinson.be](mailto:jerome@chaletrobinson.be) or 02.372.92.92.

► €50 per person (and €1 for the boatman) Steigerpad 1 (Ter Kamerenbos), Brussels [www.chaletrobinson.be](http://www.chaletrobinson.be)

**5** He thinks she's nagging; she thinks he should keep his music to himself instead of blasting it through the speakers. These bright red headphones from Friends will put an end to silly arguments in no time. They're made from memory foam wrapped in soft leather and come with a 40mm driver to deliver a rich and true sound.

► €99 For retailers, see [www.werefriends.com](http://www.werefriends.com)

**6** "Real men eat meat, red meat ... not salads" Cookbook *Sunday Roasts* seems a suitable gift to still his carnivorous cravings. It contains all sorts of recipes for a year of mouth-watering meals, from an old-fashioned pot roast to glorious turkey and a leg of lamb. *Bon appetit!*

► €23 from Urban Outfitters (Antwerp and Brussels) [www.urbanoutfitters.com](http://www.urbanoutfitters.com)

**7** We admit, this is not the most high-tech gift, but the Zip Zip Lego brick-shaped USB stick is pretty cute and, above all, useful. You could use the 4GB of storage to save your romantic holiday pictures, for instance.

► €24 from Whazup, Kartuizerstraat 14, Brussels [www.whazup.be](http://www.whazup.be)

**8** Sexy lingerie doesn't have to cost a fortune. And if you think about it, it's a gift for two. Lingerie store Etam, in every shopping street across Brussels and Flanders, has come up with a very affordable range of Valentine's Day (or night!) lingerie. Choose between a nightie in printed silk and a red (or black) lace lingerie set.

► Top €22.90, bottom €18.90 [www.etam.com](http://www.etam.com)



the coffee is provided by Panamarenko's wife, Evelien Hoorens, who runs the popular coffee shop Hoorens in Zottegem, East Flanders – the only place you can get this gift pack.

► €120 before Valentine's Day, €150 thereafter Sint-Hubertplein 20, Zottegem [www.hoorenskoffie.be](http://www.hoorenskoffie.be)

**9** Coffee people looove to get coffee and its many accompaniments as gifts, so here you go: a limited-edition gift box with two china cups, a matching dessert plate, a pack of ground coffee and a box of chocolates. The print on the cups is inspired by the "Waving Crabs", by Flanders' renowned contemporary sculptor Panamarenko. The chocolates, with a crab design, are the creation of master Flemish chocolatier Dominique Persoone, and

**10** And if you don't like any of that, how about giving "a box of love"? Can't go wrong there, right? According to cosmetics brand Lush, such a box would contain (among other things) a fizzy "leapfrog" bath bomb, a "magic mushroom" bubble bar, a creamy floral "sweetheart" soap and a "sweet lips" lip balm. All items are sold separately as well, and you can come up with your own gift basket ideas once inside the store: glitter bath balls that turn your bathroom into a disco, for instance, or bars of soap with flower petals for a more romantic effect. Lovely.

► Antwerp and Brussels [www.lush.com](http://www.lush.com)





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# This is your cartoon life

Politics and social mores fill the programme at this year's Anima

Lisa Bradshaw

Brussels' film fest of animation has for 30 years illustrated the trends in animation. And now animation is trying to show us a bit of ourselves

With the frigid temperatures of late, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organisers of the Anima film festival in Brussels for choosing Spain as one of its guest countries. Although at this point, it's fairly cold there, too, at least I can think back to last summer's holiday as I enjoy a retrospective of Segundo Chomón or shake hands with director Gorka Vazquez, here to introduce his new movie *Olentzero*, which finds a boy apprentice to the Basque version of Santa Claus accidentally releasing a jailed mischievous Elf.

This is the annual festival of animation, and *Olentzero* is a perfect entry: excellent technique, an appeal that spans generations and the use of local folk tales to tell a universal story. Spain's animators have had had a marvellous year, so, while Anima will celebrate the country's past, groundbreaking animators (such as Chomón, who mastered many forms of animation in the early 20th century and was particularly fond of bringing inanimate objects to life), it will also welcome contemporary work.

Along with Vazquez, you can get a glimpse of Ángel de la Cruz when he comes to talk about his film *Arrugas* (*Wrinkles*), the story of an old man in the early stage of Alzheimer's, who plots with friends from his rest home a way to avoid being sent "upstairs" – home of the hopeless cases.

*Arrugas* is one of many submissions this year with "a preoccupation with social topics", says festival co-director Doris Clevén. "We have several short films with these themes – one about an ambulance driver on the night shift taking care of the socially disenfranchised, another about alcoholism, some about war. The Czech feature *Alois Nebel* is about a railway man who is haunted by his past at the border of Czechoslovakia at the end of the Second World War."

Animated films, partially spurred by the international success of 2008's remarkable Israeli documentary *Waltz With Bashir*, which used animation to recount the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, are leaning more towards subjects that have normally been reserved for live-action films. "There is a link now between animation and documentary," says Clevén. "It's interesting because the technique



Many perspectives of Spain in many forms of animation in 90 short minutes during the Spanish Shorts screenings

of animation, of creating a world of fantasy, allows a distance between the subject matter and the visuals. In turn, these kind of visuals create a dissonance between the subject and the viewer. You do not find this in a normal documentary. It's a fascinating conflict." It's a recent trend, but Anima has been around long enough to see many of those.

## From Eastern Europe to Pixar

Anima was launched in 1981 by Brussels art history graduate Philippe Moins. "The only thing people knew about animation was Disney and the cartoons they saw on TV," says Clevén. "He wanted to show that there was more than that – that there was a diversity of animation, and that it wasn't all about the commercial market but that there was also a relationship between the arts and animation."

In the early years, most of the films came from Eastern Europe, pioneers of stop-motion and puppet animation. In the 1990s came "the digital revolution", says Clevén. "And that was very lucky for us." Aside from big productions coming out of US studios like Pixar, the EU became more interested in supporting animated film projects, and the success of claymation further attracted more and more audiences to the festival.

## What to see

Don't miss the opportunity to see something from Spain; short programmes provide an excellent

overview. The country's claymation master, Samuel Orti Martí, will introduce his short films, and shorts from a variety of filmmakers are collected in other screenings.

Anima features many screenings of international shorts, plus Belgian-only programmes. The definition of "Belgium" is broad: Some filmmakers are Belgian, some are based here and some studied animation here. Don't miss *This is Belgium 1*, the 20 that were selected for the official competition. That's a record number; the more than 100 entries were so good, the jury couldn't whittle it down any further. Also recommended is the mid-length *Sky Song* by Estonian director Mat Kütt, who certainly hasn't let down his Eastern European forefathers with this award-winning tale about a dedicated postman striving to deliver his packages to the moon. Kütt mixes stop-motion with other forms of animation and draws on historical icons such as Freud and

Hitchcock.

Lest I forget, Switzerland is the other country focus this year at Anima, and you can't go wrong with the short films of Isabelle Favez, who has honed the animated tragic-comedy to a fine art with her simple, round drawings.

And, finally, it wouldn't be an animation festival without the Japanese. But even there you can aim for something different, with a new generation of filmmakers who, again, are taking a closer look at social issues. Keita Kurosaka's *Midori-Ko* finds a young woman trying to save a half vegetable-half animal from both scientists and hungry neighbours during a food shortage in a not-so-distant-future Japan, while *Jib* (*The House*), made by a collective of Korean animators, finds another young woman trying to save her housing project – not for her or her neighbours but for the ghosts who live within it.

## JUST BECAUSE IT'S A CARTOON, DOESN'T MEAN IT'S FOR KIDS

Of the 90 or so screenings of the 150 features and shorts at this year's Anima festival, only about one-third are suitable for kids under 12. The festival's programme guide helpfully lists age guidelines for each film, and it's wise to heed them. Just because a movie is animated doesn't mean that it doesn't contain very adult themes, rough language or violence. Also, watch out for films that screen in their original language and are subtitled, not dubbed.



Tomás Lunák's *Alois Nebel* is suitable for those aged 16 and up

## WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Plans for the **House of European History** are being finalised after nearly a decade of negotiations. The new €56 million museum will be built in the Leopold Park close to the European Parliament and will include the landmark Eastman building erected in 1934 by Kodak owner George Eastman to help with the education of poor children. Financing for the new museum will come from the European authorities, and the museum is expected to open in 2014.

The federal **film tax shelter system** broke records last year, with €150 million in private money invested in Belgian movies. The tax shelter has brought in €600 million since its launch in 2003, becoming the largest source of film funding in the country. Most films are now partly funded through the system, including Oscar contender *Rundskop* (*Bullhead*).

► [www.locationflanders.be](http://www.locationflanders.be)

C-Mine in Genk and Micro Marché in Brussels are the winners of the €75,000 **Tuis in de Stad (Home in the City)** prizes for 2011. The prize is awarded annually by the Flemish government for cultural projects that "creatively lend substance to urban coexistence". C-Mine, which is built on the old Winterslag coal mine, brings together the historical importance of the industry in Limburg and a modern, multi-functional cultural centre, with exhibition space, sports halls, a cinema, creative workspaces and a congress centre. Micro Marché provides a platform for Brussels artists and designers to sell their creations.

► [www.tuisindestad.be](http://www.tuisindestad.be)

Ghent artist Walter de Buck, known for his many public sculptures across the city, is hosting a **benefit lunch for the Children of Topsisia**, a project based in Spain that helps send children from Calcutta slums to school. The dinner is on board the Gentse Barge, a beautifully decorated ship afloat on a canal in Ghent. The lunch is on 19 February and costs €50 per person. Reservations can be made until 15 February at [miaverstraete@gmail.com](mailto:miaverstraete@gmail.com).

► [www.thechildrenoftopsisia.org](http://www.thechildrenoftopsisia.org)

After this year, there will be **no more City of Culture** in Flanders, according to culture minister Joke Schauvliege. The City of Culture biennial initiative was launched in 2010 to highlight the arts and culture on offer in Flanders' smaller cities. The first was Ostend; this year the honour goes to Turnhout, which officially kicks off festivities in March. "The Flemish government has not launched a call for a City of Culture for 2014," said Schauvliege, because there is no longer room for it in the budget.

► [www.turnhout2012.be](http://www.turnhout2012.be)

17-26 FEBRUARY

Anima

Flagey & Cinematek, Brussels

► [www.animatv.be](http://www.animatv.be)



# Caught on camera

Cy Twombly

Anna Jenkinson

Bozar in Brussels is developing a taste for photography exhibitions. Following last year's show of Jeff Wall's monumental pieces mounted in light boxes, Bozar is kicking off 2012 with a collection of reworked Polaroid photographs by the American artist Cy Twombly. Twombly, who died in July last year at the age of 83, made his name with large abstract paintings that have a free form and often reference writing, calligraphy and graffiti. Exhibitions of his work have been held worldwide, including at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg and London's Tate Modern. Twombly

is considered by many to be one of the most important artists of his generation. His photography, which is the focus of the Brussels exhibition, is a less familiar aspect of his work.

Born in Lexington in the US state of Virginia, Twombly studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Art Students League in New York and Black Mountain College in North Carolina. In the mid 1950s he became associated with a group of New York artists that included Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. In 1957 he moved to Italy, where he remained for most of his life, albeit with frequent trips back to the US.

The works included in the Brussels show *Cy Twombly: Photographs 1951-2010* capture aspects from all stages of the artist's life. Several of the images are of his studios in Lexington and in Gaeta on the Italian coast, while another group is of a flea market in Lexington. Images of tulips were taken in Rome, lemons in Gaeta and leaves in Lexington. All the photographs are reworked Polaroids that have been enlarged to 43.1 x 27.9cm; the overall effect is grainy, out of focus and atmospheric.

The exhibition is based on a book of photographs that the artist helped put together and that was published by Germany's Schirmer/Mosel Verlag shortly before

Twombly's death. Having been shown at the Museum Brandhorst in Munich and the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Siegen, this is the first time the collection has travelled outside Germany.

The Brussels version of the exhibition differs slightly from its German predecessors in that it also incorporates some of Twombly's paintings, drawing and sculptures as well as including a film about the artist that gives visitors an insight into the life of the publicity-shy Twombly.

The film was made by the British artist Tacita Dean, whose work is also currently on display in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in London, and comprises rare footage from

a day spent with Twombly in his Lexington studio towards the end of his life. Dean follows Twombly around as he studies artworks in his studio, looks through the blinds at the traffic in the city where he was born, and eats at a restaurant round the corner. The intimate nature of the portrait is hinted at in its title, *Edwin Parker*, Twombly's official given names (Cy was a traditional nickname in his family). The film is on show about halfway round the exhibition and is definitely worth stopping to watch.



Until April 29 | Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23, Brussels | [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

## SPECIAL EVENT

### Love Bugs Parade

There's a swarm of beetles coming to Brussels this Sunday. No reason for alarm, unless of course you are a huge fan of Volkswagen Beetles. About 150 bugs, or Herbies as they are so affectionately called, have already registered for the fourth edition of this free event, which features an exhibition and a parade through the capital. The exhibition inside the Autoworld Museum highlights the evolution of the Beetle, from its creation in 1938 to its recent revival. Have a look at some 60 scale models from every generation, from the prototype to the first Herbie 53, from the Ultimate Edition to the last Beetle made in Mexico and finally the streamlined version known today as the 21st-century Beetle. After gathering in front of the Autoworld Museum, the colourful array of love bugs will set off at about 14.00 on a parade through the most scenic parts of Brussels (Ambiorix-

and Marie-Louisesquare, Congreskolom, Koningsstraat, Koningspark, Koningsplein, Grote Zavel, Muntplein, Kathedraal St-Michel and St-Goedele, Meetsquare, Luxemburgplein, Europees Parlement...). They return at about 16.00, just in time for a demonstration by master chocolatier Arnaud

Champagne, followed by a tasting. Bug owners, it's not too late to take part! You have until Friday, 10 February, to sign up your car free of charge by calling 02.772.34.26; all types and models are welcome.

Robyn Boyle



12 February, 13.00-18.00 | Jubelplein, Brussels | [www.autoworld.be](http://www.autoworld.be)

## MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

### Ieper

**A song for Ieper:** Song festival during which a jury chooses the best new song for the city from a selection of five nominees

**FEB 12 16.00 at CC Ieper – Het Perron**  
[www.tinyurl.com/iedfestival](http://www.tinyurl.com/iedfestival)

### Waregem

**Feesten in Culturen:** Celebration of cultural diversity featuring an exhibition, film, children's workshops, readings and an international cuisine dinner

**FEB 11-18 across Waregem**  
[www.waregem.be/feesteninculturen](http://www.waregem.be/feesteninculturen)



LITERATURE

Saint Amour

Too young, too old, too far away, too dead, too married... love is so often unattainable. And now you know the heart-rending theme of this 19th edition of the literary festival Saint Amour, which, not by coincidence, takes place every year around Valentine's Day. Unattainable love has been an inspiration for writers since the time of Roman poet Ovidius some 2,000 years ago. Not much has changed, as you'll find out during this moving group show featuring emotionally charged poetry and book readings, serenades and other lovesick songs, plus film and comedy. Dez Mona takes care of the musical aspect with its unique blend of experimental jazz and gospel. Flemish comedian Wim Helsen has the laughs covered, while an impressive line-up of writers provide food for thought. They include Peter Buwalda, PF Thomése, David Mitchell, David Vann, Floortje Zwigman and Connie Palmen (in Dutch). **RB**



10-19 February | Across Flander | [www.begeerte.be](http://www.begeerte.be)

MORE LITERATURE THIS WEEK

**Antwerp**  
**Hoe durven ze (How dare they)?:** Koen Fillet (VRT radio) talks with Flemish author and politician Peter Mertens about his new novel, hosted by Dimitri Verhulst (in Dutch)

**FEB 11 16.00 at De Groene Waterman, Wolstraat 7**  
[www.groenewaterman.be](http://www.groenewaterman.be)

**Brussels**  
**Intriguing voices from Portugal:** Annelies Beck talks with Pedro Rosa Mendes, Dulce Maria Cardoso and José Luís Peixoto, representatives of a remarkable new generation of young Portuguese authors (in Portuguese and English)

**FEB 16 20.00 at Passa Porta, A Dansaertstraat 46**  
[www.passaporta.be](http://www.passaporta.be)

FOOD & DRINK

Geutelingen festival

The *geutelingen* season is upon us again. The pancake-like treat is being slid into wood-burning ovens across the little town of Elst in the Flemish Ardennes. It's an age-old tradition centred on the town's patron saint, Apollonia, whose feast day falls on 9 February and is a cause for celebration in and around Elst. Come to the Oven Museum every day (except Mondays) and watch them prepare the batter (flour, eggs, milk, yeast, salt and cinnamon) and pour it on to the base of the hot (500°C) oven. Then comes the best part: Taste the *geutelingen* fresh out of the oven with a little butter and brown sugar. The festival kicks off on Saturday, 11 February, with a 6km walk, naturally followed by a round of warm *geutelingen* with Ename sauce or *geutelingen*-cake and live folk music. See the website for the full listing of fun and tasty activities. **RB**



Until 22 February  
Het Ovenmuseum, Ommegangstraat, Elst (Brakel)  
[www.geutelingen.be](http://www.geutelingen.be)

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

**Evergem (East Flanders)**  
**Meetjesland Café:** Guided bus tour with stops at a genever house, horse dairy farm and winery, including local speciality tastings

**FEB 11 8.00 at De Bierkamer, Vaartstraat West 30, Ertvelde**  
[www.plattelandscentrum.be](http://www.plattelandscentrum.be)

FOLK

Bellowhead

Bellowhead, made up of an astounding 11 members, are a rising sensation on the British folk scene. The brains behind the band is vocalist/violinist Jon Boden, who's found a way to make folk music more dynamic and hipper than ever. In addition to his own indisputable talent, Boden's surrounded himself with sensational guitar and drums and a five-headed horn section. The troupe's soul is traditional and folky, but their approach is more radical and decidedly fun. It's not for nothing they took home the award for best group at the 2011 BBC World Music Awards. **RB**



10 February, 20.00 | Molière, Naamsepoortgalerij - Bolwerksquare 3, Brussels

[www.muziekpublieke.be](http://www.muziekpublieke.be)

MORE FOLK THIS WEEK

**Ghent**  
**Hans Mortelmans & Group:** Flemish folk music by the guitarist/accordionist and singer-songwriter inspired by Django Reinhardt and Wannes Vandevelde

**FEB 12 20.00 at De Centrale, Kraankindersstraat 2**  
[www.decentrale.be](http://www.decentrale.be)

**Oudergem (Brussels)**  
**The Celts:** Irish folk music

**FEB 10 20.30 at L'Alphabet, Waversesteenweg 13876**  
[www.lalphabet.be](http://www.lalphabet.be)

DUSK 'TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Pias Nites

16-17 February  
Tour & Taxis, Brussels

It's a grand 30th edition of the annual Pias Nites, known for its outstanding concerts and performances. Two days, two moods: eclectic live concerts on Thursday, roof-raising DJs on Friday

For the past 30 years, Pias has been gathering together all sorts of artists, record labels and music genres. Their wide selection of performers always results in a diverse line-up, attracting a very eclectic audience. Previous editions brought have brought us the British band Editors, the Norwegian tunes of Royksopp, the beats of the Canadian DJ Tiga and the angelic voice of Flemish singer An Pierlé. It's a excellent opportunity to discover something entirely new. The line-up for the 30th birthday is, again, very promising. The first night finds gigs by the Scottish post-rock band Mogwai, an exclusive solo concert by Editors' lead singer and guitarist Tom Smith, the

Flemish rocker Daan, the Danish singer-songwriter Agnes Obel and the popular American indie rock singer/guitarist Joan As Police Woman. Overnight, the concert spaces get a makeover, so it's ready for a proper DJ-led 30th birthday bash on Friday. This is one giant international party, featuring performances by the Parisian electro band The Toxic Avenger, Berlin's Modeselektor and Flanders' best-known DJ duo 2manydjs. If you can, save some energy for France's electronic hero Etienne de Crécy. There's an equally tempting party going on in the other room, with, amongst others, a live set by M83!, followed by none other than the French techno producer Laurent Garnier, with his new group LBS. It all starts at 20.00, and Garnier will be finishing up his set at about 5.30. Tickets are €37.50 or €63 for both nights.

[www.piasnites.com](http://www.piasnites.com)



Untitled!

Oh decisions, decisions. We would be remiss if we didn't tell you about another birthday bash on the same weekend: Untitled!, Europe's biggest indoor dubstep party, turns five this month. On 17 February, UK spin-masters Distance and Cookie Monsta will kick off the celebration weekend with dupstep's biggest label, Deep Medi. The next day, Gemini (UK), Kastor & Dice (Antwerp) and record label Numbers are gearing up for another night of bass on the dance floor. It all happens at Trix in Antwerp, from 21.00 until some time the next morning. Tickets are €12.50 to €32 from Free Record Shop or online.

[www.untitledantwerp.com](http://www.untitledantwerp.com)



BITE

Robyn Boyle

Valentino Chocolatier

I've given many a box of Belgian chocolates without a single thought to how they were made. That's all changed, thanks to a fascinating behind-the-scenes visit to Valentino.

Leen De Leener and Willy Roelandts have been making chocolate since 1978 when the couple took over a little artisanal shop in the Koekelberg commune of Brussels. Remaining



a small family business, Valentino has developed into one of the country's most highly reputed chocolatiers, with their products sold in more than 40 shops across Brussels and Flanders.

In the 1990s the company moved its headquarters to Schepdaal, about five kilometres outside Brussels, where they make the products and maintain their own shop. A team of just 25 produces more than 300,000 kilos of pralines, chocolate bars and figures every year.

Despite more than 40% of the company's sales coming from export (they sell to China, Chile and the UK, among other countries), the Valentino brand is still focused on its home market. Besides the shop in Schepdaal, they maintain shops in the Basilix shopping centre in Brussels and in their home town of Dilbeek.

"We don't have this exclusive, expensive reputation like so many of the more well-known Belgian brands," says Rob Roelandts, son of the founders and Valentino's very driven marketing manager. "But that's our strong point. We're respected for making a consistently good, high-quality product at an affordable price."

I can only agree after I taste pralines fresh off the conveyor belt. As

Valentino gears up for Valentine's Day (the holiday that inspired its name), most of those to come off the line have some kind of love theme, from heart-shaped treats to chocolate-covered cherries. As I bite into a rectangular piece of milk chocolate decorated with a pair of bright red lips, my tongue is greeted by a heavenly hazelnut and crispy crêpe filling. The taste is divine, and I'm inspired to find out more about the chocolate-making process.

That's where Valentino's workshops come in. You can learn how to make your own pralines, under the friendly guidance of house chocolatiers Henk and Sven.

The pair start out by explaining the importance of tempering chocolate, which means heating it to the right temperature to reach the desired crystallisation. This is what gives melted chocolate its glossy, solid state after cooling.

Making pralines is a rather labour-intensive process, requiring you to fill a mould, scrape off the excess chocolate and allow to cool, then repeat three or four times. Then they show us how to fill a paper cone with coloured chocolate to use for decoration. This requires a steady hand and strong willpower (so as not to squeeze all the chocolate

straight into your mouth). The workshop is fun and messy, and there's a whole lot of finger-licking going on.

Groups of 10 or more are encouraged to sign up for a workshop, which usually take place on Saturday mornings and can be arranged in Dutch, English or French. It's a great way to celebrate a special occasion with a group of friends. And the best part is, you get to take home the fruits of your labour. Or rather the chocolate.

But of course you can also just buy it. Valentino's shop is filled with gift baskets and a five-metre-long counter with more than 80 types of pralines. Naturally, it's the perfect place for Valentine's gifts.

- [www.valentino.be](http://www.valentino.be)
- 📍 Main store: Ninoofsesteenweg 1026, Schepdaal; 02.569.58.25
- 🕒 Mon 13.30-18.30;  
Tue-Fri 9.00-12.30 & 13.30-18.30;  
Sat 9.00-12.30 & 13.30-17.30
- 💶 €15 per person, groups of 10 or more
- 📖 One of the true pioneers of the local chocolate-making tradition and a great place for Valentine's gifts

TALKING SPORTS

Philip Ebels

The English connection

Kevin De Bruyne turned 20 last June, though his angelic features make him look like a blond Harry Potter on his first day at Hogwarts. And like the fictional boy wizard, De Bruyne is bound for a British and – some would say – supernatural education when he arrives at Stamford Bridge this summer.

Signed during the transfer window by Premier League titans Chelsea, De Bruyne will move to London after he completes his fourth season at Racing Genk. A

product of Genk's famed academy, which he joined as a 14-year-old, he can play as a forward or a left-sided midfielder.

Born in Drongen, near Ghent, De Bruyne already has a connection with his new home thanks to his half-English mother (although the Blues will hardly be thrilled by the revelation that his family are Liverpool fans). But what is intriguing is how much of an appetite for Belgian – in particular, Flemish – players there is in England.

Chelsea alone now have three on their books, with De Bruyne, goalkeeper Thibault Courtois, and Romelu Lukaku. Belgium coach Georges Leekens has already noted the significance. "In Belgium, we sometimes are too impatient. I find it amazing that three Belgians are under contract at Chelsea. It is a signal to our youth: If you're good, they'll find you," Leekens said.

And Chelsea are still seeking Belgians, jostling with Arsenal to secure the services of winger Eden Hazard, currently with Lille. Others who have established themselves in England include Manchester City's Vincent Kompany, Moussa Dembélé at Fulham, Arsenal's Thomas Vermaelen, Simon Mignolet at Sunderland and Dedryck Boyata at Bolton – all of whom hail from Flanders. That's not mentioning those players on the books who have still to break into the first teams: At Manchester United alone, Ritchie De Laet, Andreas Pereira, Charni Ekangamene and Marnick Vermijl are all budding youth players.

All in all, it easily adds up to a full eleven of England-based Flemish players. Which is convenient, since England will face Belgium on June 2 at Wembley in a friendly. For England, it's a warm-up for Euro 2012, the summer tournament that Belgium missed out on. But for the Premier League's Flemish contingent, it's a brief realignment, as former opponents join forces to face off against their erstwhile hosts. And if Kevin De Bruyne is on the teamsheet, he'll be able to give Chelsea fans a taste of what they have signed up.



Kevin De Bruyne in action for RC Genk against OH Leuven on 28 January

The last word...

High anxiety

"Children look around and come to the conclusion that ten out of ten is the norm, even if Mum and Dad say that seven is good enough. They see their parents beam with pride if they do well in a test, and the result is that children set themselves unrealistically high standards."

Therapist Marc Litière in Klasse magazine. One in ten children suffers anxiety from fear of failing

Out of sight, out of mind

"A place in a shelter for everyone? Go and look in the cellars and underground garages. They're full of homeless people."

Jaak, himself homeless, doubts the promises of politicians, in De Morgen

Pilot project

"It's simply impossible that without any sort of training Waes could fly a plane like that."

Guido Vanspauwen, director of Ostend airport, on news that TV presenter Tom Waes had carried out a stunt with a Boeing 737 above Ostend airport for a TV show

Sharing the burden

"If everyone puts his hand in his pocket, we can make sure this PIP affair doesn't turn into a financial disaster for women."

University of Ghent plastic surgeon Philip Blondeel. Women with PIP breast implants have been advised to have them removed

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

SPA-Brussel aims to transform the canal zone in Brussels into an attractive place to live and work. We look at the plans behind their dream for Brussels and evaluate what is already being done

Tourism

Herkenrode Abbey in Hasselt dates back to the 12th century, but is embracing the future with a brand new visitor centre and museum. We went to check it out

Education

Three students from the Catholic University College of South-West Flanders will spend this academic year in the student rooms of the future. The college hopes these prototypes will inspire the next generation of student housing