

Minority report

Those with foreign roots get better representation in Antwerp ▶ 4



Top crops

New project could increase food production ▶ 7



Mind the book

A bounty of brilliant thinkers in one place ▶ 13



The global pioneer

The work of the Fleming who charted the earth, the sea and the sky, comes to life in a new digital exhibition celebrating his 500th birthday

Denzil Walton

Gerardus Mercator was a geographer, cartographer, mathematician and maker of scientific instruments. His mapping technique, the Mercator projection, literally changed the way people saw the world. The quality of his maps was the envy of generations of mapmakers, and his legacy – a projection of the world globe on to a map – is still used today for navigation at sea, in the air and for GPS applications. And he was born in Flanders.

When Emerentia Kremer, wife of a humble shoemaker, gave birth to her seventh child on 5 March 1512 in St Johann hospice in Rupelmonde, little did she know the worldwide fame that baby Gerard would go on to enjoy.

Emerentia and her husband, Hubert, were actually in Rupelmonde, now part of the town of Kruibeke in East Flanders, by chance, having travelled from their home town of Gangelt in Germany to visit Hubert's brother, Gisbert. A few weeks after Gerard's birth, they returned to Gangelt but felt drawn back to Flanders in 1518 to make Rupelmonde their home.

Six-year-old Gerard began attending the local school, where he studied Latin, religion and arithmetic. Within one year, he was able to speak and read Latin fluently.

When Gerard was 15, his father died, leaving Uncle Gisbert, a priest, as his guardian. Gisbert wanted the best education possible for Gerard, so in 1527 he sent him to be educated with the Brethren of the Common Life in 's Hertogenbosch (now in the Netherlands, then part of the Duchy of Brabant).

While Gerard was there, his mother died, and he chose a new name for himself. Kremer means "merchant" in German, so he chose Mercator, the Latin term for "merchant", and gave himself the full name of Gerardus Mercator Rupelmundanus.

Piecing the world together

In 1530, Mercator enrolled at the University of Leuven (then already a 100-year-old institution), taking courses in humanities and philosophy before studying mathematics under Gemma Frisius. He also learnt about the application of mathematics to geography and astronomy, which he found "extremely agreeable", writing: "I liked, little by little, not only the description of the earth, but also the structure of the whole machinery of the world, whose numerous elements are not known by anyone to date."

During this time, Mercator learned to be an engraver and to construct instruments, and he began to make mathematical instruments of exceptional quality. One of these, made in 1535, was a terrestrial globe commissioned by the Emperor Charles V.

Mercator married Barbara Schelleken in 1536, and they had six children – three daughters and three sons. In 1537, he constructed a globe of the stars as well as his first map – of Palestine. The following year, he produced his first map of the world; it was notable for being the first to represent America as stretching from the northern regions to the southern regions and for giving North America its name. His map of Flanders followed in 1540.

Never trust a sailor

In the summer of 1540, Mercator started on his most ambitious project yet: maps of the regions of the world that would then be combined to form a giant world map. One of the problems he faced was incorrect data from sailors, who assumed that if they followed a particular compass course, they would travel in a straight line.

Mercator realised that a ship sailing towards the same point of the compass would follow a curve called a loxodrome (also called a rhumb line). The globe that Mercator produced in 1541 was the first to show rhumb lines.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Raf Simons

At the end of the catwalk presentation of Jil Sander's autumn-winter collection for women at Milan Fashion Week last week, Flemish designer Raf Simons received a standing ovation and took leave of the audience in tears. The ovation being led by the uber-fashionista Anna Wintour of *Vogue* shows what an occasion it was. The show was the end of an era. Simons was born in Neerpelt, Limburg province, in 1968. Never destined to be a fashion designer, he studied industrial design at the Higher Institute for Visual Communication in Genk, whence he was plucked by Walter Van Beirendonck, one of the high priests of Antwerp fashion, as an intern to tackle the furniture and decor of his showrooms. In 1991, Simons set up as a furniture designer but was tempted back to fashion in 1995, thanks to the encouragement of Linda Loppa, head of the Antwerp Fashion Academy. His own label concentrated on menswear, but in 2000 he left on sabbatical, explaining that the business side of the fashion industry left him feeling restricted in his creativity.

He was back a year later, having turned fashion professor at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. Teaching and designing kept him going until 2005, when the sedate but extremely successful Milan-based house of Jil Sander called him in to become creative director. Jil Sander herself, however – now an independent fashion consultant – has decided to come back to head her own label, which found Simons taking his leave, at least for the time being, from the fashion design world last week. Some now speculate that Simons may be called upon by the house of Dior to replace John Galliano, forced to resign last year after an anti-Semitic rant in a Paris restaurant found its way to YouTube. In any case, Simons is keeping his options open. Respected throughout the industry, he can probably pick his own direction. Whether he branches out on his own again in fashion or heads off in another direction altogether – art gallery or museum curation have been proposed – remains to be seen.

► www.rafsimons.com

News in brief

The government of Flanders has given final approval to a set of **new noise limits for concerts and music festival**. The upper limit applying to outdoor festivals is 100 decibels (dB), with allowance for peaks of up to 102dB for a maximum of 15 minutes every hour. Lower levels of 90dB and 95dB apply to indoor venues. The limits come into force on 1 January, 2013.

Flemish polar explorers Dixie Dansercoer and Sam Deltour were due this week to return home after setting a new world record for **crossing the Antarctic ice** without logistic support and propelled only by kites. "While returning exhausted and impatient to be with their loved ones, they are extremely proud to have established the new world record for the longest autonomous and non-motorised expedition in Antarctica and to have had the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Roald Amundsen and Robert Falcon Scott exactly 100 years after their discovery of the South Pole," said the organisers in a statement.

► www.antarcticice.be

The Brussels public transport authority MIVB is to **buy 335 new buses** between now and 2016, to cope with an expected 30% increase in passengers. And for the first time ever MIVB will buy 20 second-hand diesel buses to use on shuttle services.

Archaeologists working in Bruges have **uncovered a unique coin** bearing the image of Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor from 1519 to 1556. The design of the coin is not included in lists of known mints, suggesting it was for local use only or was a prototype design never put into production, experts said. Charles V, who was born in Ghent,

ruled over large parts of Europe, as well as Spanish colonies in the Americas and Caribbean.

A private foundation set up by two parents of children who committed suicide has installed two **new chairs at the University of Leuven**. The new departments will investigate the psychological problems of gifted children and the welfare of young people with depression.

The **restaurant Exquisa in Hasselt**, one of the few remaining restaurants from the VTM television reality series *Mijn Restaurant!* still in operation, has been declared bankrupt by a court in Hasselt. Chef Yanaïka Skrzyszkowiak, who was voted Lady Chef of the Year in 2011, intends to carry on in the same location, under the management of a new investor.

► www.restaurant-exquisa.be

Sighting of the **extremely rare predatory beetle *Rhizophagus grandis*** were reported last week in Limburg. The beetle has never been seen in Flanders before. Despite its diminutive size of five millimetres, the *Rhizophagus* is the largest of its family of beetles. It is labelled as endangered in Germany and was discovered in an insect trap set up under a diseased pine tree in Houthalen-Helchteren. *Rhizophagus* lives under the bark of sick or weakened trees, where its larvae feed on mites. Limburg nature study group Likona said the find demonstrated the rich biodiversity of the province, which includes 90% of all plant and animal species found in Flanders.

Five electromechanical engineering students from the Karel De Grote university college in Antwerp last week unveiled their USB-Bike, an

apparatus that allows a mobile phone or MP3 player to be **charged using pedal power**. The gadget works from the dynamo fitted to most bicycles, is shockproof and waterproof and provides an entirely green charge to equipment, the team said.

The Aarschot-based choir **Scala will feature in a new episode of *The Simpsons***, the longest-running prime time show on television in the US. The all-girl choir's cover of the Radiohead song "Creep", which also featured on the soundtrack of the movie *The Social Network*, will make them the first Flemish artists ever to take part in an episode of the animated sitcom.

► www.scalachoir.com

The Irish in Europe Association is in need of funds to ensure that the **annual St Patrick's Day parade**, this year scheduled for 11 March, continues its tradition of marching bands and parade-related activities in Jubelpark. "Our organisation is run entirely on a voluntary basis and currently receives no external financial support," said the organisation in a statement. "We need a little help from our friends." Contributions of any amount are welcome to bank account number 860-1159139-68.

► www.irish-in-europe.eu

Flanders Today Survey

Want to help out a Flemish student with her dissertation on Flanders Today and express your opinion on our weekly newspaper at the same time? Then please fill out an online survey. It only takes 10 minutes, and all data is anonymous.

► www.flanderstoday.eu

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Announcer now departing from platform 3

Computers, as you will be aware, are moving into every corner of our lives. Two announcements last week saw human contact again rejected in favour of the virtual experience. Rail infrastructure company Infrabel is set to replace announcers in 270 Belgian train stations with a computer voice, after the success of a test project in Mechelen and Charleroi. The computer voice has already been installed in Leuven and Zaventem airport stations. Flanders' most popular station announcer, Hugo De Mey, is taking it on the chin. De Mey, 55, makes the announcements in Lieke, Antwerp province. His smiling face and shiny bald pate are unknown to the public, but his voice is famous. "He always lifts my spirits," one passenger said. "Except when the trains are running really late." "I try to announce delays in as positive a manner as possible," De

Mey told *Gazet van Antwerpen*. "As seldom as possible, of course, but if there are delays, that's the way it is." His computer replacement, he says, will bring an end to forgetfulness and mistakes. "And a computer doesn't lose its voice at the end of a hectic day." De Mey's fans, meanwhile, have honoured him with a page on Facebook. Mechelen city council, meanwhile, is to launch a webcam council office, where residents will be able to pay a virtual visit to city administrative departments instead of having to go to the town hall in person. According to Kristl Strubbe, the city's alderwoman in charge of ICT, the new virtual window is the first of its kind in the world. "We are experimenting with the technology of tomorrow," she said. "We want to make the internet experience human and personal." Mechelen is already at the cutting edge of

admin technology, with tablet and smartphone apps putting city information at your fingertips. Mechelen's new system will come into operation next month, with webcam links to the youth service, the financial services for businesses and, naturally, the city's webmasters.



The global pioneer

Mapmaker Mercator goes digital in Sint-Niklaas

► continued from page 1

In February of 1544, Mercator was arrested and charged with heresy, on the basis of his sympathy for Protestant beliefs and suspicions about his frequent travels. His house was searched but nothing was found to suggest he was not a good Roman Catholic. However, he still spent seven months in prison in Rupelmonde Castle, eventually being released with the help of scholars at the University of Leuven.

A man in demand

Having had to pay for the cost of his own imprisonment, Mercator found himself in a poor financial position. He therefore put in overtime building mathematical instruments and worked on a celestial globe of the same size as his terrestrial globe of 1541, which he completed in 1551. The following year, Mercator and his family moved to Duisburg, Germany, where he opened a cartographic workshop. A new university was planned for the town, so there was a large demand for mathematical instruments, books, maps and globes. He still had time to produce a huge new map of Europe measuring 1.6 by 1.3 metres, which re-established him as the leading European mapmaker. His income secure, he and his family moved into a large house in the wealthiest district of Duisburg.

The Mercator projection

Further maps followed, including one of the British Isles in 1564. That year he was appointed Court Cosmographer to Duke Wilhelm of Cleve. During this period, he began to perfect a new map projection, the one for which he is best remembered.



He first used the Mercator projection in 1569 for a wall map of the world on 18 separate sheets, which he called "A new and more complete representation of the terrestrial globe properly adapted for its use in navigation". With the Mercator projection, lines of longitude and latitude and rhomb lines all appeared as straight lines

on the map. He was also the first to use the term "atlas", naming his map collection after the mythological figure who was said to hold up the world on his broad shoulders. In his old age, Mercator published corrected and updated versions of Ptolemy's maps, followed by a series of maps of France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Balkans and Greece. In May of 1590, Mercator had a stroke, which left his left side paralysed. He slowly recovered but was greatly frustrated at his inability to continue mapmaking, and by 1592 he was virtually blind. Two more strokes led to Mercator's death on 2 December 1594 at the ripe age of 82. Some maps that were incomplete at his death were finished and published by his son in 1595. The English mathematician Edward Wright (1561-1615) explained the details of the Mercator projection in his book *Certain Errors in Navigation*, published in 1599, and is therefore credited with presenting the Mercator projection to the world.

Mercator goes digital

To commemorate the 500th anniversary of Mercator's birth, SteM, the city museum of Sint-Niklaas, hosts an eye-catching exhibition, a series of lectures and an international cartographic conference. The centrepiece is *Mercator Digitaal*, which includes Mercator's original globe from 1541, his celestial globe from 1551 and a series of his atlases. Seven

kiosks, meanwhile, house "digital presentations of various aspects of Mercator's life and work, placing them into a contemporary context," explains project manager Harry Van Royen. "The 51 constellations of his celestial globe are illuminated one by one, and the secrets of the world-famous Mercator projection are explained." In video clips, Flemish actor Vic De Wachter assumes the role of Mercator and takes you to the places where he lived and worked. Fifteen contemporaries of Mercator, including his first wife, fellow cartographers and key patrons, are also "interviewed" to bring his works to life. Interactive touch-screens give you a unique opportunity to digitally page through three Mercator atlases dating back to 1584, 1595 and 1607, and there is also access to the digital map of Flanders (1540). Here you can zoom in on historical maps and recent topographic aerial photographs. That's not all. "There is also an exhibit of Mercator's own library,

special walks, a kinetic art project called *Homo Universalis* and an international cartographic conference organised with the SteM and the University of Ghent," says Van Royen, adding that events for younger children include workshops in which they can draw their own maps, while older children can create a map using triangulation. There is also a series of lectures describing details of the original Mercator items on display and subjects related to cartography. Most of the lectures are in Dutch, but the one by Professor Gerry Brotton from Queen Mary University of London on 24 April is in English. Called "Mapping the World: From the Greeks to Google Earth", it will cover the evolution of our world from a map in a book to the digital processing of space images. And if you're still thirsty for more, don't forget the four-day international conference "Mercator Revisited: Cartography in the Age of Discovery", which begins on 25 April.

PROTECTING THE HERITAGE

That such a vast collection of original Mercator material can be displayed in one room is thanks to the excellent work of the Oudheidkundige Kring van het Land van Waas (Antiquities Society for the County of Waas). "Founded in 1861, one of the society's aims was to commemorate Mercator by finding and buying his original globes and atlases," explains Ward Bohé, the curator of Sint-Niklaas' city museum SteM. "They worked tirelessly to track these down and bring them to Sint-Niklaas, where they could be properly looked after. It's largely due to their efforts that we are able to stage the exhibition *Mercator Digitaal*."



Skipping a pay-rise could create 32,000 jobs

Automatic wage indexation hurts competitiveness and jobs, says report

Alan Hope

The federal government should skip a year of wage indexation and help create 32,000 extra jobs, according to a report by Joep Konings, a lecturer in economics at the University of Leuven (KUL). The report gives fuel to those who have called for automatic annual indexations of worker salaries to be scrapped.

The proponents of indexation argue that wage rises are necessary to keep abreast of inflation and preserve the purchasing power of earners. That in turn helps maintain demand for local products, as earners purchasing power remains the same.

Supporters of the *indexsprong* ("index jump", or skipping the indexation) argue that an automatic wage increase puts Belgian companies at a competitive disadvantage over neighbouring countries. According to another report produced last week by the National Bank of Belgium (NBB), the country's "wage handicap" in relation to other countries is 3.9%

and will rise to 4.6% in 2012. The situation is getting worse because other countries – such as Germany, where the differential is the greatest – are able to hold off on pay rises that happen automatically here.

"The existing automatic indexation system must urgently be amended so that we can cope better with external shocks like rising oil and gas prices," said Unizo, the Flemish organisation that represents the self-employed, in a reaction to the NBB report. "A complete or partial index jump could go some way to removing our wage handicap."

Konings studied the effects of increased wage costs on more than 100,000 companies between 1998 and 2010 and used it to calculate the effect of skipping indexation on job creation. The result: skipping pay rises would lead to almost 32,000 new jobs between now and 2015, assuming that wages would have gone up by 2%. Konings also look at the macro-economic effects, which show that a jump would avoid an increase in unemployment of 0.3%



Tackling the wage handicap could make a "sizeable difference to job creation"

and a fall in consumption of 0.2%.

"This is the best evidence yet that a jump is the best plan for re-launching the economy," said a spokesman for Voka, the Flemish chamber of commerce. Voka sponsors studies in economic growth at the KUL. Apart from its effect on competitiveness, a jump would also free up some €200 million in budget savings for the federal government, according to Unizo. A few weeks ago, federal

finance minister Steven Vanackere raised the subject of an index jump, but the idea was opposed by two prominent socialists: Bruno Tobback, chairman of the socialist party in Flanders, said the idea was "not up for discussion", and federal minister of social affairs Laurette Onkelinx stated that "touching people's wages will only happen without the socialist party".

Ghent's fine arts museum director dies at 62

Robert Hoozee, director of the Museum of Fine Arts (MSK) in Ghent, died last week at the age of 62. Hoozee began as an assistant at the museum in 1978, moved up to acting director four years later, and finally took the top job officially, as the museum's director in 1985.

Hoozee saw the museum through acquisitions as it began a modern art collection, the move to its current location near Citadelpark, and it's four-year renovation project from 2003 to 2007. Hoozee wrote his doctoral thesis on the English landscape artist John Constable and remained a fervent admirer. When the MSK reopened in 2007, he organised the exhibition *British Vision* featuring more than 300 works by British artists. Last year it was time for an exhibition dedicated to Constable alone.

Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege described Hoozee as "one of the most important museum directors in the country". According to Lieven Decaluwe, Ghent alderman for culture, Hoozee "always strove for quality and perfection and was valued for his knowledge and insight".

► www.mskgent.be

Poachers strike more often

The Flemish Agency for Nature and Woodlands (ANB) last year issued 399 summonses to appear in court for poaching, up from 269 in 2010, environment minister Joke Schauvliege revealed last week. "The most common animal species to fall victim to poachers in 2011 were songbirds such as the finch, siskin, greenfinch...as well as the buzzard, partridge, peregrine falcon and goshawk," Schauvliege said in a written reply to parliament. "Aside from the birds, the eel, the pike-perch, the hare, the fox, the deer and the marten were also hit by poaching."

About half of the summonses were for the killing of protected mammals, and most were issued in West Flanders. The ANB has a staff of 42 dealing with poaching. Schauvliege has proposed increasing the number of inspectors to tackle the growing problem.

► www.natuurenbos.be

No Oscar for Rundskop

Flemish film *Rundskop* (*Bullhead*), which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, watched the Iranian entry *A Separation* walk away with the prize last Sunday at the ceremony in Hollywood's Kodak Theatre. *Rundskop* was never the favourite to win, but the film has been heavily praised for improving the image of Flemish cinema abroad.

Rundskop director Michaël R Roskam and lead actor Matthias Schoenaerts, however, both signed with agency representatives in Hollywood, and there was much talk during their whirlwind Oscar campaign of Roskam directing in the US.

A Cat in Paris, co-animated by the Ghent-based company Lunanime, also missed Oscar glory, losing its Best Animated Feature prize to the American film *Rango*. There was good news, though: The Brussels Philharmonic, the Brussels Jazz Orchestra and Flemish jazz pianist Jef Neve shared in the glory of the Best Original Score award, won by Ludovic Bource for the film *The Artist*. The two ensembles and Neve performed the recording for the film.



Arriving on the red carpet for the Oscar ceremony last Sunday are, from left: *Rundskop* director Michaël R Roskam with his wife Anneleen Masschelein; actors Matthias Schoenaerts and Jeroen Perceval; and producer Bart Van Langendonck with his partner Kati Vandeveldde

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

7,800

people have signed a petition to stop the deconsecration of the Sint-Katelijne church in central Brussels, part of which the city council intends to convert into a covered market

4,865

pills, 379kg of cocaine and 17kg of heroin seized by customs officers at the national airport in Zaventem in 2011. The total included 153kg of liquid cocaine, a new trend in drugs smuggling

800

cafes in West and East Flanders are under investigation by the tax authorities for buying tax-free beer sold to them illegally by a major drinks supplier. The beer was intended for charities and non-profits, which do not pay tax

€10.5 million

owed to the Brussels-Capital Region by companies who have yet to pay their fines levied for noise nuisance related to air traffic. Two companies owe more than €2 million each

60,000 carats

in rough and polished diamonds on sale in a week-long online auction last week organised by Antwerp trading house Jorisco

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Dreams do come true

When he started in politics, Bart De Wever had a dream. He wanted to be the democrat to halt the seemingly unstoppable Vlaams Blok (later Vlaams Belang), something in which not one politician or party had succeeded.

De Wever's mission did not begin all that well, as his party, the N-VA, was almost wiped out in 2003. One of his protégées, former university pal Marie-Rose Morel, even traded N-VA in for Vlaams Belang. There, she actively tried to lure away more N-VA members, causing much resentment.

Looking back, though, De Wever can be proud. With a mere 12% of the votes in the 2010 federal elections, Vlaams Belang has been reduced to a small party. (Ironically, the traditional parties, which have always opposed Vlaams Belang, were reduced to similar sizes, too.) Vlaams Belang had lost its magic touch at last. De Wever was even reunited with his old friend Morel in her final days; she died last year of cancer at the age of 38.

With the local elections coming up, many Vlaams Belang politicians are joining N-VA's ranks. They do, of course, share a nationalist background with that party and are attracted by the opposition mode in which N-VA operates, by its plain-spoken leader and by its anti-establishment attitude.

Still, it is hard for them to shake off the racist streak that has tainted their former party in the past. When socialist minister Freya Van den Bossche pointed this out last week, she caused quite a stir.

As a teenager, De Wever had another dream. He hoped that one day he would be voted Lul van het jaar (Dick of the Year) by the readers of the leftish weekly magazine Humo, an honour that in those years was bestowed on Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, politicians he admired. The Dick of the Year thing became a bit of a joke, De Wever promising that he would personally pick up the accompanying medal.

Instead, De Wever got two other Humo medals – "Man of the Year" and "Politician of the Year". (Unfortunately, with paedophile bishop Roger Vangheluwe and conservative archbishop André Leonard, competition was particularly stiff in his favourite category.) But this year, De Wever's teenage dream came true: He is the person Humo readers loathed the most in 2011. "Man of the Year" he did not become, as prime minister Elio Di Rupo tops that list. As De Wever has learned by now, dreams do come at a price.

We are all Antwerpenaars

Forum aims to improve the participation of minority groups in decisions about Antwerp

Andy Furniere

One-third of all residents of Antwerp have a foreign background, but they are under-represented in public services and the city council. To involve more people of immigrant backgrounds in decision-making, the city council has asked the Minderhedenforum – the Flemish umbrella organisation for ethnic minorities – to open a local office.

The Minderhedenforum, or Minority Forum, drafted a memorandum with advice for the new city council that will take charge after the local elections in October.

Since a first attempt at an advisory council for Antwerp's minorities closed down five years ago, the relationship between the minority organisations and the city council has deteriorated. Although the department for "samen leven" (co-existence) put much effort into diversity initiatives, and regular consultations were organised, the lack of participation in actual policy-making frustrated organisations for *Antwerpenaars* of foreign origin.

"The former advisory council did not function well," explains Rafike Yilmaz, cabinet advisor for social affairs and diversity in Antwerp. "We hope the Minderhedenforum can reach the rank and file of all minority groups and make them speak with one voice."

Minderhedenforum director Naima Charkaoui was glad to take the opportunity, on one condition: "That we could be fully independent."

In a memorandum, the Minderhedenforum lists the requests of the minority federations from the new city council. One priority is the establishment of an advisory body that gives minority groups input in the decision-making process, and to elect a chairperson for the minority federations.

Improving education

Antwerp's Minderhedenforum branch will also focus on improving the education chances of young people with a foreign background. "Sixty percent of the young people in Antwerp's primary and secondary schools are of foreign origin, but only a fraction of this group progresses to higher education," says Rina Rabau, head of operations at the Antwerp office. "To change this, we are talking to minority federations, the city council and independent education experts."

The Minderhedenforum is asking for additional schools, extra Dutch language lessons at lower costs and to involve the minority federations more in school activities.

While about one-third of all Antwerpenaars have a foreign background, only approximately 10% of the city's public service officials are of foreign origin. The Minderhedenforum feels Antwerp's city council has to aspire to a figure of 38%, "to reflect the reality of Antwerp's society," explains Rabau. Cabinet advisor Yilmaz indicates that their numbers are steadily increasing through the city's efforts, but that it will take time to achieve this goal.

The Minderhedenforum hopes the local elections in the autumn will install several council members of foreign origin. Güler Turan, current alderwoman for Youth and Housing, is the first person with a foreign background to have reached this position in 't Stad ("the city", as Antwerp is popularly known in Flanders). She became alderwoman in December last year, as a replacement for another alderwoman who joined the new federal government. Rabau says that there are enough candidates with the right qualifications, so "a diverse

college of aldermen would only be natural".

Equal opportunities

Discrimination in the restaurant industry, the housing sector and on the labour market should be dealt with more rigorously, according to the memorandum. The police regulation should, for example, state that a proprietor of a bar who denies a person of foreign origin entrance without good reason should lose their permit. To be considered for subsidies or public tendering, companies should have to prove their efforts to attract a diverse range of employees. And enterprises condemned for discrimination should be excluded from obtaining subsidies and from public tendering. But discrimination is hard to prove, says Nele Van de Kerkhof of Meldpunt Discriminatie, which takes reports of discrimination in Antwerp. Of the 221 complaints received in 2010, 44% were related to racial characteristics. "That is only the tip of the iceberg," declares Van de Kerkhof.

Because it is often impossible to provide evidence of racial discrimination, many feel that reporting it doesn't make a difference. The lengthy procedures scares off some, while others don't know how or where to complain. The Minderhedenforum advises increasing the staff of the registration point – currently just two members – to improve its work and reputation.

The Minderhedenforum also wants to annul the rule, introduced in 2007, that prohibits public servants in Antwerp who come into contact with citizens from wearing religious symbols, such as headscarves. "The frustration this caused is still in the



Rina Rabau at the official opening of Minderhedenforum's Antwerp branch earlier this month

back of many people's minds when they think of the city council," says Selamet Belkiran, chairman of the Union of Turkish Associations. Belkiran hopes that the arrival of the Minderhedenforum means a step towards a policy of equal

opportunities. Omar Ba, the coordinator of the African Platform for Sub-Saharan minorities, feels the same way: "After all, we are all *Antwerpenaars*."

► www.minderhedenforum.be

In het Nederlands

Students of immigrant origin stage a cultural night in Dutch

Alan Hope

Imagine an evening of stand-up comedy in Dutch, but delivered by a group of largely immigrant schoolkids. Add to that Dutch-language poetry, theatre and music, and you'll have the programme of the Lucerna Art and Culture evening in Brussels on 3 March.

Lucerna is an organisation of immigrant pupils from six primary and secondary schools in Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent. Many young people from immigrant families have no contact with Flemish arts and culture, which Lucerna calls "unfortunate".

The idea "to give culture a prominent place in school activities arose from the realisation that western culture was the poor cousin among our students," say Lucerna director Cetin Özkan. "We realised that their knowledge of western culture was, in the best case, limited to the extremely commercial aspects. Our students' parents don't have the knowledge to pass on Flemish culture to their kids – and we use that word in its broadest sense, not only for mainstream culture."

The preparations for the event and the show itself will, it is hoped, allow both students and their parents get to know more about Flemish culture.

About 100 students from the four Flemish schools started out on the road to the final production, and about 35 made it to the final. They'll be competing for prizes in poetry, drama, comedy and music, to be handed over on the night by notables, like senator and former culture minister Bert Anciaux, youth author Ina Vandewijer and poet Geert Van Istendael.

The students have had help from professional partners, including Kaaithheater, KVS and Bronks in Brussels and Vooruit and the Poetry Centre in Ghent. The show is open to the public and free of charge.

3 MARCH, 18.00

Kunst & Cultuur @ Lucerna

Passage 44, Pachecolaan 44, Brussels

► www.lucerna.be



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LOOKING AHEAD IN TECHNOLOGY

R&D as a driver for a prosperous and healthy Europe

Much of what was science fiction a few decades ago has become reality. "One of my favourite science fiction movies is *The Fantastic Voyage*," says Gilbert Declerck. "It was made in 1966 and shows how a miniaturised submarine and its crew remove a blood clot from a man's brain. So the idea of 'smart pills' was popularised 40 years ago. But no one at that time would have thought it possible that we really would have them one day."

Declerck is the former CEO and president of imec, Flanders' premier R&D centre for nano-electronics. Today, at 65, he's as busy as ever. Meeting with colleagues from other European R&D centres, giving presentations at industry gatherings, preparing strategy documents, studying.



Gilbert Declerck, Executive Officer and Member of the Board of imec International

"I planned to spend more time with my family, but this work is so fascinating and absorbing, I cannot leave it at that!" Declerck exclaims. "We're laying the groundwork for a new wave of innovation. But in this fast-moving, globalised world, we have to act now – get the people that matter around the table and get them to collaborate. Because if we can collaborate, we can solve any problem. And we can solve it here, in Europe."

One way to predict how technology will evolve in the next decades is to look back at the trends of the recent past to see which of them persist or have even accelerated. One trend has been the growing influence of microelectronics, an evolution that imec has witnessed from the front row.

Starting out with only a few dozen large computers across the whole world, there are now a few dozen chips per person – chips that you may not even be aware of. An average car, for example, may have more than 50 microprocessors that together make the car safer, smarter, and greener. Declerck: "From what I see at imec, I'm convinced that we are on the brink of some really amazing technological advances – advances that will help to solve some of the challenges our society faces. Advances, for example, that will lead to technology for smart, personalised and efficient health care. Think of ultra-small chips, the size of a grain. You can patch them on to your skin, and they measure your heart rate, blood pressure or glucose level. Then they send the results via wireless to your doctor. Science fiction today, but reality tomorrow."



THE ROLE OF EUROPE

What will be the role of Europe in this new technology wave? From looking at the names on today's electronics, we get the idea that most electronics are developed and fabricated elsewhere. It's true, "most of the big electronics and chip manufacturers are not European," confirms Declerck. "But we do have many very successful companies. Chip factories around the world are run with the help of European equipment, for example. And we have a whole network of companies that develop smart, innovative solutions. Thanks to European companies and research institutes, we are leading in many areas. Think, for example of communications, consumer electronics, industrial machinery and the automotive industry." And, importantly, "in Europe, more than 100,000 people are employed by companies related to the chip industry".

In the next decade, the European chip industry has a unique chance to play an even more important role. "But keeping – or even strengthening – our position will ask for a concerted and coordinated

action," notes Declerck. "An action that includes all the EU's top institutes and companies. An action that builds on competences and strengths."

Recently, the European Commission has taken an important step in that direction. In November of last year, it proposed Horizon 2020, a framework that sets a number of ambitious goals. Its aim is to strengthen the EU's leadership in science

"We are on the brink of some really amazing technological advances that will help solve some of the challenges our society is facing"

and innovation, and a major part of the proposed budget goes towards addressing major concerns that we all share, such as health and well-being, and clean and sustainable energy.

"But to make these programmes successful, all top institutes and companies in Europe will have to be engaged," insists Declerck. "And that means an engagement based on their expertise, not only on their location. There is an important role here for the Europe administration to cut some of the red tape, to take care that procedures and national interests do not fragment and weaken the R&D. And to set up efficient mechanisms for European funding for cross-border cooperation." Imec has the ambition and expertise to play an important role in Horizon 2020. "We are uniquely placed for a number of reasons," explains Declerck. "Thanks to our collaboration with leading international companies, we have been able to collect an impressive library of intellectual property – patents that are uniquely relevant to some of the goals of Horizon 2020. In addition, our people are world experts in their domains. And we are regularly one of the most important contributors to the industry's top conferences."

► www.imec.be

On 16 February, European Commission vice president Neelie Kroes visited imec. Luc Van den hove, imec's CEO, presented the work and goals of the research institution. He highlighted imec's expertise in nano-electronics, and how the institute uses state-of-the-art technology to look for solutions for the increasing cost of health care, for an aging society and for sustainable energy. He also explained imec's open-innovation model, a unique collaboration that brings leading international companies to Europe to do advanced research.

One of Van den hove's key messages was that there is a way for Europe to stay competitive in technology – by working together with leading international businesses and research institutions in an open-innovation mode.



Imec CEO Luc Van den hove shows EC vice president Neelie Kroes around the imec facilities

Publisher:
Katrien Marent
for imec



Top of the crops

Flanders' biggest biotechnology project aims to increase agricultural yields

Alan Hope



The Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and Ghent University are about to begin the biggest biotechnology project ever undertaken in Flanders. With German chemical company BASF, they will carry out research into the way plants grow, in an effort to grow more food and make the production of bio-fuels more commercially viable. "We see the improvement of yield as imperative for a sustainable agriculture," says Dr Jürgen Schweden, senior vice president for research and development at BASF Plant Science. "VIB has outstanding research expertise in the area of plant biotechnology and is therefore an ideal partner for BASF Plant Science." The VIB team is based at Ghent University, in the plant systems biology department, led by Professor Dirk Inzé. On his department's website he writes: "The global demand for plant-derived products such as feed and food is increasing dramatically. It is hard to fathom, but in the coming decades, three billion additional people will have to be fed while less arable land is available."

The most promising avenue for increasing productivity is to improve agricultural yield, so that a limited area of land can be made to produce a greater quantity of crops. This project, known as TopYield, will, according to VIB spokesman Joris Gansemans, take place in the university's labs and employ about 20 full-time researchers. The project is financed largely by the government of Flanders' Agency for Innovation in Science and Technology (IWT).

Risks disputed

The TopYield announcement coincides with a dispute between the VIB and Flemish environmental NGOs, including Greenpeace, Oxfam and Bond Beter Leefmilieu, over another project on crop yields: a field trial involving 500 square metres of corn in Wetteren, East Flanders, a location familiar to protestors opposed to genetically modified (GM) organisms. A field of GM potatoes planted by the VIB in Wetteren caused a protest by the Field Liberation Movement (FLM) last May. Much of the crop was

damaged, but researchers were able to extract useful information from what was left. Later, a plantation of 448 GM poplars in Zwijnaarde, near Ghent, engineered to be more efficient as bio-fuel material, also attracted the attention of the FLM, after it was initially refused a licence by the federal government, despite a positive opinion from the Biosafety Council. The VIB has applied to the federal health ministry for a licence for the TopYield trial. The NGOs, in turn, have called on minister Melchior Wathelet to reject it. The project, according to Lies Couckuyt of Landwijzer, which promotes organic agriculture, carries the danger of "toxic, allergenic or other hazardous effects. Furthermore, the necessary research hasn't been done into possible damage to the environment, or to organisms other than the ones targeted." The corn in Wetteren will contain an implanted gene making it resistant to the herbicide glufosinate, derived from the lambda bacteriophage,

which is closely associated with E coli. Couckuyt is concerned about contamination that would allow the plants to cause a mutation in E coli or other bacteria to make them more resistant. GMO research, says Esmerelda Borgo of BioForum, an umbrella organisation of biological farming groups, "is very expensive and stays in the hands of multinationals or research centres that have connections with multinationals. Farmers are completely left out of the equation, and it's an attack on their independence. We fear GMOs will lead to more costly seeds in the long term."

Plants "not dangerous"

Gansemans, though, say that "there is nothing to suggest that the field trial could have any consequence for human health or the environment. We are dealing with plants that produce a substance that is naturally present in plants; in these crops it is simply produced in larger quantities. This newly introduced property makes the plant larger, but not dangerous." He stresses that the field trial in Wetteren "is really basic research into the effects of a certain molecule produced by the corn plant" and has nothing to do with the TopYield project, or with any other body but the VIB and IWT. The project with BASF, he said, does not involve a field trial at this stage, so commercialisation of the results is not an issue. The application for permission to carry out the trial is with Wathelet, and VIB hopes for a decision in time for planting in April or May. "The whole process is now with the Biosafety Council," he says. "They will issue their advice on how to proceed. The decision is in the federal government's hands."

► www.vib.be

Q&A



Marc Waelkens is professor of archaeology at the University of Leuven and is about to give his 500th lecture on the archaeological site at Sagalassos, in Turkey, now the subject of a major exhibition at the Gallo-Roman Museum in Tongeren

Mediterranean. I've been carrying out excavation work there for more than 25 years, so I have a lot to say about it!

What is the focus of your lecture?

I will be giving an update on the latest discoveries, such as the good progress made with the largest building at Sagalassos, the Roman baths. We have excavated an enormous cross-shaped hall to the east that was a cold-water swimming pool. Its total surface is nearly 1,200 square metres. It's still covered with black and white mosaics forming geometric patterns.

What's been the most exciting discovery?

There have been so many! The colossal white marble head from a statue of the Roman Emperor Hadrian is undoubtedly one of the best. It's probably the finest portrait of Hadrian ever found. It shows the young emperor in 117 AD, shortly after he acceded to the throne.

Do you excavate all year round?

No, only during July and August. It would be far too expensive to have a team of 180 people on site all year round. Also, we work with academics and students who are free only in the summer.

Are you worried the site will be plundered?

The whole site is well guarded. We also involved the local villagers right from the start. They are exceedingly proud of this exceptional site on their doorstep and are also happy to keep an eye on it. **INTERVIEW BY DENZIL WALTON**

Professor Waelkens gives lectures on Sagalassos on 7 March in the Aula Pieter De Somer, Leuven, and on 8 and 15 March in the Gallo-Roman Museum in Tongeren. Seats can be reserved via 016.32.48.62 or info@sagalassos.be

Do you ever get tired of talking about Sagalassos?

Not at all. On the contrary, it is energising. After all, Sagalassos is one of the most interesting archaeological sites in the

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

The treatment of burns can be extremely painful and about half of all burn patients are younger than five. By the summer, the burn centre at the University Hospital Leuven will be able to **ease the pain of burn patients using virtual-reality glasses**. Virtual-reality game *SnowWorld* closes patients off from what is happening around them, while icy scenes invoke associations as far from fire as possible, and patients are distracted by ducking and throwing snowballs. Research proves that pain sensations are considerably lessened.

A new computer system in which reality is modified with artificial information about the environment makes it possible for **astronauts without medical knowledge to perform surgery**. The astronauts can see 3D information about the diagnosis and treatment on a computer screen. A prototype head-mounted display unit for the European Space Agency was developed by a consortium led by space technology company Space Applications Services and tested at the UMC Sint-Pieter hospital, both in Brussels.

The Dutch word *fiets* (bike) originates from the German word for "substitute horse". With this discovery, Professor Gunnar De Boel of Ghent University has **ended an etymological discussion that has been going on for 140 years**. The professor experienced a "eureka" moment after pouring out cider for German friends. They called the cider *Viez* (pronounced "*fiets*"), which is a shortened form of *vice-vinum*, or "substitute wine". A bike is seen as a substitute for a horse, or a *Vize-pferd* in German. This term was shortened to *Viez*, and when the word crossed the borders to the Low Countries, the origin was lost.

Pre-schools will **receive the same resources as primary schools** from the next school year, and as a result, classes will have only about 20 students. The Flemish education ministry is providing €50 million for 1,250 extra teachers.

Flemish minister of youth Pascal Smet is looking for 20 young people between 14 and 20 years of age for input to the **Jongerenpact 2020 (Youth Pact 2020)**. Every young person living in Flanders can fill in an online survey that canvasses opinions on themes such as work and mobility. In May, about 400 young people will take part in a debate in the Flemish Parliament with the government of Flanders, community groups and employers' organisations. The pact will be signed by these three parties at the end of June. **AF**

► www.jongin2020.be

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Air transport**
► **Korongo**

After two years of negotiations, Brussels Airlines has received the permits necessary from authorities in the Democratic Republic of Congo to launch a subsidiary airline, based in Lubumbashi. The new Korongo Airlines could begin operating as early as April, with flights between Lubumbashi and Kinshasa. Brussels Airlines owns 50.5% of Korongo.

Brewing
► **AB-Inbev**

Leuven-based beer group AB-Inbev is reportedly considering buying back its Starbev central European activities sold in 2008 to the CVC Capital fund for \$2.2 billion (€1.66 billion). AB-Inbev needed the funds at the time to reduce the debt incurred in its successful €39 billion acquisition of the US Anheuser-Bush brewery. Starbev is expected to fetch up to €2.25 billion today.

Medical
► **GIMV**

Flanders' public investment company GIMV has acquired a majority stake in the Dutch Oldelft Ultrasound medical diagnostic company, specialised in the development and production of state-of-the-art ultrasound transducers.

Oil
► **BP**

Oil major BP has boosted the capital of its Antwerp-based affiliate by €26 billion as part of the company's reorganisation of its European financial structure. Analysts believe the move to be connected with the favourable notional interest tax legislation.

Software
► **C&W**

Brussels-based banking software developer Callatay & Wouters has been acquired by the French Sopra group for more than €100 million. The move allows the newly formed venture to supply specialised financial applications to more than 1,000 banks in Europe.

Transport
► **Delhaize**

Supermarket Delhaize has sold its local transport affiliate Wambac-Peeters to the Antwerp-based Van Moer handling group.

Telecom ► **Option**

Telecommunications equipment supplier Option, based in Leuven, saw its shares shoot up more than 120% in three days last week based on rumours that the company may supply Microsoft's Windows 8 operating system with key GPRS/GSM communication parts.

Call for simpler system of business taxes

Rates vary widely across the region, report shows

Alan Hope

A café in Bruges with a terrace pays up to €5,600 a year in tax to the local municipality, compared to only €375 for a similar café with the same sized terrace in Kortrijk, also in West Flanders. In Genk, Limburg province, meanwhile, a supermarket that distributes 50,000 copies of a promotional circular in the neighbourhood pays the local authority €300 a week, whereas in Kortrijk the same distribution costs the supermarket €1,250 in tax.

Those are just two examples of the varying local taxes paid by businesses in the so-called centre-towns of Flanders (Ostend, Bruges, Kortrijk, Roeselare, Ghent, Sint-Niklaas, Aalst, Antwerp, Mechelen, Genk, Hasselt, Leuven and Turnhout), revealed in a study published last week by Unizo, the Flemish organisation representing the self-employed. The study, which also takes in the city of Brussels, reveals that local authorities levy not only a wide variety of different taxes on businesses, but also widely-differing amounts for the same services.

Unizo also looked at the differences between four typical businesses: a consultant operating out of a home office; a food-service business with a terrace; a supermarket with parking for 15 cars; and a stone-working business with a yard measuring 2.5 hectares.

Municipalities in the towns

and cities concerned impose a total of 48 different taxes on businesses, Unizo found. The majority are seen by businesses as having no real justification, such as a tax on hiring out rooms or for quayside and stock rights. For businesses, the heaviest burden comes from taxes on advertising, on terraces and on surface area; for the self-employed, the biggest cost is the levy municipalities impose based on personal tax liability, as well as a similar levy on property taxes.

Brussels lays 23 taxes on businesses, coming in at number one, followed by Antwerp with 20. Hasselt levies the fewest charges with eight.

In 2008, local authorities and the government of Flanders agreed a "local pact" to standardise the taxation issue, but the results were negligible, said Unizo. The organisation is now calling on the government to renew efforts to do something about the problem. "We want the Flemish government to create a framework with a fixed list of levies and an upper and lower limit for tariffs charged," director-general Karel Van Eetvelt said. "We're not asking for taxes to be abolished. ...What we want is more simplicity, more uniformity and more insight into what is happening with the money," he said.

► The report in full (in Dutch): www.tinyurl.com/belastingen



A restaurant terrace in Brussels – €4,000 a year in tax

Peeters welcomes Chinese agreement

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters has welcomed an announcement that a group of some 100 Chinese businesses will set up an office in Brussels and a plant in Willebroek, Antwerp province, employing 1,200 people immediately, and two or three times that number in the longer term.

The group, Aigo Entrepreneurs Alliance (AEA), first sent a delegation to Belgium in December last year to scout out the prospect of using the country as a stepping-stone to the European market. Federal pensions minister Vincent Van Quickenborne then met a senior group executive when he was attending the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January. Peeters, meanwhile, headed a trade mission to China in 2010 during the World Expo in Shanghai, which led to Chinese cooperation with waste management agency OVAM and an agreement between the Beijing Construction Engineering Group and water-treatment company Aquafin.

"The intensive contacts of the last two years have borne fruit," Peeters said after AEA's announcement. "This is enormously important for Flanders and for our ports, to be able to function as the hub for Chinese-European trade. It also offers major opportunities for the creation of jobs, as well as for our exports to China."

First school holiday good for coast

Last week's "crocus holidays" were a hit for the tourist industry at the coast, thanks to fairly good weather. Hotel bookings on the two weekends of the holiday averaged 80%, while the weekdays were mainly taken up by day-trippers, who filled terraces and overwhelmed go-cart renters.

The coast is now looking forward to the Iedereen Kust promotion on 24 and 25 March, a week before the start of the school Easter holidays. The initiative will include hotel price offers as well as discounts for museums and other attractions.



Labour problems with NMBS cleaning staff

The rail authority NMBS is indirectly using cleaning staff who pay no social security and receive less than the minimum wage, the employment magazine *Vacature* has revealed. The authority says it is aware of the situation but is unable to do anything about it.

The NMBS employs its own cleaning staff who work mainly during weekdays. In the evenings and at weekends, the job is contracted out to a private company from Antwerp called Gom, which in turn sub-contracts the work to Local Cleaning, a company based in the Brussels commune of Sint-Stevens-Woluwe in Brussels.

According to *Vacature*, Local Cleaning has recruited some staff from Romania, where they charged up to €4,000 for travel and the necessary papers. Local Cleaning forces them to work as freelance contractors, thereby avoiding paying social security, which the workers must pay themselves. According to the magazine, the practice is cheating the national exchequer out of €1.7 million a year. One union representative said that half of all companies in the cleaning sector are guilty of similar practices.

According to the NMBS, the contract with Gom expires in June, and it will apply stricter controls when putting out calls for public tender in the future.

Kings of the castle

Now an ideal day out, Alden-Biesen was once a stronghold of the Teutonic Knights in Flanders

Diana Goodwin



A brotherhood of knights, sworn to defend the Holy Land and dedicated to caring for the poor. A powerful military order with strongholds throughout Europe, ruled by a Grand Master. A wealthy organisation within the Catholic Church, entrusted with lands belonging to the Holy Roman Empire. If this sounds like the beginnings of a thriller in the style of *The Da Vinci Code*, or the tagline from the latest Hollywood epic, then guess again. The Teutonic Order really existed, and it ruled parts of Flanders for hundreds of years.

The headquarters of the Teutonic Order is at the Alden-Biesen complex, which is now an official cultural centre of the Flemish Community. Located in Rijkhoven, a district of Bilzen in Limburg province, the Land Commandery of Alden-Biesen is a beautifully restored complex consisting of a moated castle, a chapel and other buildings, along with formal gardens, an English park and ancient orchards. It's not just a museum of historic architecture: The estate hosts cultural events throughout the year and also functions as a conference centre. I have been to Alden-Biesen several times, and each time it's a different experience. The first time was in late summer, and the French gardens were lush and green. I watched the fish swimming in the moat, took a walk in the English park and ate lunch at one of the picnic tables. It was a perfect Sunday afternoon.

In early February, the gardens were covered in snow, and the moat was frozen. My eyes were drawn to the red brick of the buildings and the shapes of the castle's towers against the sky. I stepped into the chapel to get out of the cold and found myself enjoying its stillness and solitude. I thought about the people who built this place and lived their lives here, long, long ago.

Money and power

In the middle ages, a small chapel stood where Alden-Biesen now stands, at the crossroads of two main trade routes. In 1220, the Count of Loon donated the chapel to a new military order, the Order of

Maasland region and ruled over 12 smaller commanderies.

Like other Catholic organisations, the Teutonic Order lost all its holdings in Flanders when the French took possession at the end of the 18th century. Alden-Biesen was auctioned off to the highest bidder and passed into private ownership for 200 years. Eventually, it fell into disrepair; a documentary from 1964 shows black-and-white footage of an abandoned, neglected site.

Following public outcry, plans were made to sell the castle complex to the government of Flanders. On the last day of negotiations, a fire broke out in the castle (the result of fires lit by the owner in long-unused fireplaces). The castle was

Former stables and barns now house modern conference rooms, reception areas and accommodation for up to 68 people. The former tenant's house serves as a tourist information office for the surrounding area, and the entire complex is used for events and exhibitions.

If you visit before 8 April, you'll find the exhibition *Nothing Human is Strange to Me*, featuring the work of eight contemporary artists from Belgium, France, Germany, Spain and Chile. The main part of the exhibition is inside the castle, but some pieces are installed around the complex. Colourful fibreglass sculptures by Cristóbal Gabarrón provide a startling contrast to the

Coming from the car park, you will pass the castle and enter Alden-Biesen through the lower gate. The old guesthouse there is now a brasserie, appropriately named 't Gasthuis, where you can enjoy a cold drink on the patio in summer, or duck inside for a coffee in winter. They also serve a full menu for lunch and dinner.

Continue walking down the cobblestone lane leading from the gate to pass orchards on your left and the former stables on your right. This road leads to the upper gatehouse, which was once the main entrance to Alden-Biesen and now serves as a nature education centre. It's at the intersection of several cycling routes, and is a nice place to set off on a hike through the surrounding countryside.

Another gate leads from the cobblestone road into the main complex. Be sure to stop first at the welcome centre, just inside the gate on your left. There you can take in a small exhibition about the history of the Teutonic Order and of Alden-Biesen in multiple languages. Afterwards, take your time exploring the grounds, the castle, the French garden and the chapel.

The site is open all year, and admission is free, except to the castle itself, which is €3 and only open during exhibitions. No matter when you decide to visit, Alden-Biesen has something to offer, whether it's a glimpse of history, an encounter with art, a stroll in the park or a chance to be alone in the midst of grandeur.

Maggy Jagot's ethereal wire figures inhabit the outdoor spaces like futuristic ghosts

the Brothers of the German House of St Mary in Jerusalem, known in English as the Teutonic Knights. The order was founded during the Third Crusade to care for German-speaking pilgrims and knights in the Holy Land.

As with other chivalric orders, such as the Knights Templar or the Hospitallers, Teutonic members were drawn from the nobility, who took a vow of celibacy and dedicated themselves to serving the poor. In fact, the Teutonic Order grew into a powerful and wealthy organisation with lands throughout Europe. The Land Commandery Alden-Biesen was their headquarters in the

completely gutted. The authorities went ahead with the purchase and began a programme of restoration that continues to this day.

Nothing human is strange

The current buildings date from the 17th and 18th centuries. The castle has been thoroughly and expertly returned to its former state – several rooms of the Land Commander's apartment appear as they did in the 18th century. Other buildings have been renovated to reflect their original appearance from the outside but have been put to new uses on the inside.

sombre architecture, while Maggy Jagot's ethereal wire figures inhabit the outdoor spaces like futuristic ghosts.

Every day, all year long

Other events throughout the year include an International Storytelling Festival (in April), the ever-popular Scottish Weekend (in September) and the holiday Sintpaleis for children (in November). But the best time to really see the grounds and the buildings is when there are no special events and no crowds to distract you from the beauty of the place.



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The art of the seduction

A collector opens the country's very first museum of erotic art in Brussels

Georgio Valentino

Tucked away in a side street off the Grote Zavel in Brussels, occupying three floors of a quaint and quintessentially Flemish house, is Belgium's first erotic art museum. Since its grand opening this past Valentine's Day, the Museum of Erotics and Mythology (MEM) has caused a stir – not by offending any puritanical mores but rather by underlining how late Brussels got into the game. Paris, Amsterdam, New York, Miami, Berlin, Barcelona, Copenhagen and Saint Petersburg are already home to similar enterprises. And, putting aside the issue of international competition, the Belgians themselves have long awaited such a museum. "It was about time," says MEM chief Guy Martens from across his desk, commanding the ground floor of the museum. "I don't know why there wasn't one already." Martens, a retired occupational therapist now embarking on a new career as patron of the arts, is no stranger to the scene. In his youth, the Antwerp native pursued studies in art history as well as medicine, and he has been collecting erotic art for more than 40 years. Indeed, all of the varied phalli and yoni, satyrs and

beautiful pieces ended up in boxes, and I couldn't enjoy them at home anymore." There were other concerns as well. As writer Georges Bataille and musician Vini Reilly mused about the connection between sex and death, Martens too – a great admirer of the flesh – began to think of his own mortality and the fate of his cherished collection, should any calamity visit its steward. So, in collaboration with artist Christian Brynaert and Emilie Dujat (proprietrix of the Galerie Libertine, located on the opposite side of the Grote Zavel), he created the Guy Martens Foundation and thus killed several birds with one stone. His collection would be protected, housed in style and shared with the public. The Museum of Erotics and Mythology was born.

From bawdy to sublime

As its name suggests, MEM presents a historical cross-section of erotica from antiquity to the present day, from West to East,

end is the nude goddess of youth, Hebe, rendered in bronze by *fin-de-siècle* German sculptor Victor Seifert. Ensconced in MEM's front window display, she radiates the serene beauty of the classical ideal. Not even the faintest whiff of the scatological here. In-between these extremes one finds paintings, etchings, sculptures, medallions, masks, mechanical automata, watches, decorations and folk art as well as antique sex toys and curios (including a designer condom from the 19th century, which one imagines is unused, and a cast of Rasputin's legendary member: length 30 cm). There are sections dedicated to archaeological and ethnological pieces,

bronzes and ivories. This last medium is a passion for Martens, who began his collection decades ago with ivory acquisitions. The oldest work on display is a Babylonian tablet dating back several millennia, but Martens' most prized piece is of comparatively recent vintage. The marble sculpture of a pagan hermaphrodite is dated 100 years BC. Nor is contemporary art neglected. The last two centuries are particularly well represented. One won't find the last word on human nature at the MEM, but the common thread uniting Martens' collection,

across historical and cultural peculiarities, is a reckoning with at least one salient aspect of the human experience: the libido. It might be jocular, ribald or downright creepy. It might be profane or spiritual. If spiritual, it might be harmoniously Apollonian or ecstatically Dionysian. It might reflect the highest ideals or lowest prejudices of the artist's cultural milieu. Yes, erotic art is just like any other kind of art. But with more breasts.

► www.m-e-m.be



"The Mocking Devil" from Vienna, circa 1930

One won't find the last word on human nature here, but it serves as a reckoning with at least one salient aspect of the human experience

nymphs exhibited at MEM come from his personal, and heretofore private, collection. The decision to go public was admittedly the product of practical necessity more than civic duty. "At a certain point, I found I had too much art," Martens laughs. "Many

and of course from the ridiculous to the sublime. At one end of that particular spectrum is a bawdy 18th-century flask, made in Flanders, in the shape of a smirking villager squatting to defecate (aptly labelled "Flacon chieur" in the museum catalogue). At the other

Singing their praises

deBuren wants to know who our heroes are

Alan Hope

Who is your hero? It could be a historical figure; it could be a friend or someone from your family. Maybe it's a mythical personality in a skin-tight bodysuit? Whatever the answer is, the Dutch-Flemish culture organisation deBuren wants to hear from you. Until 31 March, they're asking you to send in a short text, a drawing or a one-minute video explaining who your hero is and why. The competition is a run-up to Erfgoeddag (Heritage Day) on 22 April, which this year explores the notion of the hero. Surprisingly, response to date has been muted. "I think we might have presented it as too complicated, but in fact it's a really simple competition," says Ann Venneman of deBuren, based in Brussels. "People only have to explain to us who their personal hero is and

send in a short text or a photo or drawing, or something from the internet. It doesn't need to be spectacular." deBuren has put some samples on its website, but they are professionally made. "That's not what we're expecting from people," says Venneman. Those clips feature notables like historian Bruno De Wever (brother of Bart), who chooses Adolf Hitler to make the point that hero-worship is not a good thing and can be turned to evil ends. There's also TV presenter Sven Speybroeck, who chooses the collective occupants of a small cemetery behind the VRT buildings in Brussels, all of them victims of Nazi firing squads, executed as saboteurs during the Occupation. Herman Vandormael, meanwhile, another historian, chooses Andrée Geulen

(pictured), who saved hundreds of Jewish children in Brussels during the war. Entries needn't be so elevated, Venneman explains: It's all a question of who your personal hero is. The event, after all, is intended to be light-hearted. The winner of the competition gets a cash prize and an original, made-to-measure poem for the winner, written by Flemish author Saskia De Coster. "She'll declare you her great hero and compose a heroic epic in your honour," says Venneman. There's also a public prize chosen by voters via the Like button on the Erfgoeddag Facebook page. Entries can be sent to deBuren until 31 March; voting for the public prize on Facebook is from 1-15 April.



► www.deburen.eu

Coming home

FeliXart reconstructs a historical exhibition of Belgian works from 1927 France

Bjorn Gabriels

Art is curiosity at play. *Grenoble 1927: A Panorama of Belgian Art* at the FeliXart Museum in Drogenbos, Flemish Brabant, shows a rich palette of big names and great discoveries.

The show partially reconstructs the exhibition *L'Art belge*, organised in the Museum of Grenoble in southern France in 1927. Displaying a mix of works originally shown in Grenoble and related pieces, FeliXart offers a glimpse into the state of the arts in interwar Belgium. Though, at the time, some of these works were regarded as a curiosity cabinet or even monstrosities of the worst kind.

Some 85 years later, several names on display have been cemented in our collective memory; others seem to have fallen through the cracks of many an art history book. *Grenoble 1927* places already renowned artists next to artists on the verge of their breakthrough, seeking allies in like-minded artists, curators and collectors.

"It seems that [Grenoble] was the first time that works by René Magritte were exhibited in a French or Belgian institutional context," notes exhibition curator Céline De Potter. Not every artist presented would follow a similar path to Magritte, though. Some never fulfilled their potential; others never had potential to begin with.

A new tradition is born

The Grenoble show was divided into two sections: The first showed a selection of established artists such as James Ensor, Eugène Laermans and Rik Wouters, as well as works in styles described today as "cautiously modernistic" (Jean Brusselmans, Leon Spillaert). The second section consisted of artists clearly divided into separate groups: the Expressionists, the Surrealists, Young Painters and Visual Artists. These units consciously presented

themselves as the true innovators of Belgian art, and were the focal point of Pierre-André Farcy, the then curator of the Museum of Grenoble. The original *L'Art belge* exhibition was remarkable in a variety of ways. It proved crucial in the proliferation of modern Belgian artists abroad. And it did that by connecting tradition with the newest avant-garde. The catalogue's cover featured Bruegel the Elder's "The Fall of Icarus". This prestigious 16th-century classic was loaned from the Belgian queen Elisabeth and received a place of honour in the exhibition. Almost an epitome of "Belgian art", Bruegel's painting served as a crowd puller but its presence was also meant to lend a hand to the contemporary works also on display and inscribe them in the rich history of Belgian art history. Prestige by association.

Alive and kicking

However, this plan didn't always play out. Visitors who were "lured in" by "The Fall of Icarus" (which in fact was recently confirmed to not actually be by Pieter Bruegel the Elder) saw themselves confronted with novel techniques and new approaches to art, and were often disappointed or downright disgusted. Especially the second section of the exhibition caused quite a stir in more conservative circles. The "horrors of the exhibition of Belgian art" were strongly condemned as absurd, "ugliness taken to the extreme" and incoherent. "It is a monstrous enigma that no sphinx could crack", was the commentary on "Gaston and his Sister" by Gustave Van de Woestyne.

Despite these virulent fulminations, the exhibition in Grenoble would prove a crucial step towards the acceptance of modern art in French museums. Up to that point, the better part of them only seemed to champion an artist if he was already well-established and, preferably,



An image from the exhibition of Belgian artists in Grenoble in 1927, with the offending Gustave Van de Woestyne on the right

dead.

At a safe distance from the art establishment in Paris, Farcy had started collecting and presenting modern art in Grenoble since 1919. The exposition in 1927 and the subsequent donation of works by the exhibited artists stimulated the museum's modern art policy.

Politics of promotion

The Grenoble exhibition was the result of the combined efforts of the Belgian government, curators and advocates of the avant-garde and the artists themselves. With the purpose of promoting Belgium's intellectual and artistic riches, in 1926 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Belgian Association for Artistic Propaganda Abroad. Contemporary artists were seen as representatives of a flourishing local economy and a rich art tradition.

In their contacts with contemporary artists, the association was bound to cross the paths of Paul-Gustave Van Hecke and André De Ridder, two

fervent advocates of avant-garde art who filled journals, organised exhibitions and rooted for "living" modern art. Their views on which artists to promote and how this should be done differed with the official institutions.

Despite their differences, the association and Van Hecke and De Ridder reached an agreement. The second section of the Grenoble exhibition met the programmatic demands of Van Hecke and De Ridder. Under their supervision, the artists themselves selected the exhibited works. Van de Woestyne, Constant Permeke, Frits Van den Berghe, Jozef Cantré, Gustave De Smet, Edgard Tytgat and the

brothers Floris and Oscar Jespers formed the Expressionist group.

The three other groups comprised, among others, Magritte and Auguste Mambour (Surrealists), Hubert Malfait and Georges Lebrun (Young Painters), and Victor Servranckx and Felix De Boeck (Visual Artists). The latter receives – in "his own" FeliXart – a nicely construed nod, as his abstract work "Around a Birth" is placed opposite an abstract Magritte painting ("Woman Sewing", which was not on display in Grenoble).

The catalogue of *Grenoble 1927* reads like a who's who of Belgian interwar art. Yet it also confronts the cemented prestige of art history with its intrinsic volatility.

UNTIL 27 MAY

FeliXart Museum

Kuikenstraat 6, Drogenbos

► www.felixart.org

Introducing comic-strip opera

A pairing of two discrete disciplines will make magic at KVS

Marie Dumont

When Flemish composer Walter Hus says "opera", he doesn't mean the kind of grandiose, full-throated spectacles that draw elegant crowds at De Munt. His operas, as he likes to call them, are edgy, pared-down collaborations with like-minded avant-gardists, like the theatre directors Jan Lauwers and Jan Decorte.

Similarly, when American Chris Ware is described as a cartoonist, don't expect garish superhero adventures, but rather subtle, bittersweet volumes with tiny script and muted colours that plumb the insignificance of modern existence.

The description of *Lint*, their first collaboration, as a "comic-strip-opera" is therefore to take with a pinch of salt. The work, which is about to be aired for the first time at Brussels' KVS, is based on one of Ware's most brilliant works, the 20th volume of a series called *The Acme Novelty Library*. Lint is the name of its main character, an ordinary American who goes through life giving up on his paltry dreams and making all the wrong decisions. It's all so familiar it hurts.

Described by fellow cartoonist Art Spiegelman of *Maus* fame as "one of the most important comics artists being published anywhere in the

world right now", Ware has long been familiar to readers of *The New Yorker* and visitors to the Whitney Museum and is suddenly being discovered in continental Europe.

He and Hus actually have a lot in common: both are cerebral and withdrawn and derive inspiration from modern city life, seen as a welter of parallel and intersecting private fates. They also share the same ambiguous relationship to beauty and emotion, burying them beneath cold, mechanical surfaces only to let them leap at you when you least expect it.

No doubt their profound agreement will work wonders in *Lint*, for which



Hus has penned a compelling score with echoes of minimalism and free jazz. It will be performed by the Spectra Ensemble under Filip Rathé, with singer Angélique Willkie, while Ware's plates will be displayed one after the other on a big screen.

2-3 MARCH

KVS

Arduinkaai, Brussels

► www.kvs.be

Mind your books

The past becomes the present at a literary festival that takes on world politics and the notions of morality

Rebecca Benoot

The annual “international meeting of minds between writers and readers” hits the Vooruit this year, alternating as it does between the Ghent venue and Antwerp’s deSingel. Mind the Book is the major literary festival that tackles serious questions about contemporary society through debates, interviews and more interactive events with renowned authors and speakers. Both literature and current affairs are on the agenda, so it’s a chance for not only critical readers but also the general public to explore new ground by delving into the eclectic whirlpool of fiction, non-fiction and graphic novels on offer today. The three-day festival kicks off on the evening of 9 March with a discussion between Belgium’s former prime minister Guy Verhofstadt and György Konrád, the celebrated Hungarian author and well-known advocate of individual liberties, on the state of democracy in Europe (Hungary in particular). More politics follow on Saturday, when the famous Dutch author Arnon Grunberg talks to his countrymen, journalist Ian Buruma and essayist Rob Riemen, about Riemen’s essay “De eeuwige terugkeer van het fascisme” (The Eternal Recurrence of Fascism). The trio will delve into the cultural and political history of Fascism to relate its impact on present-day society. Graphic novelists are not necessarily less political; its major presence here proves its rightful place in

the literary field. Flemish author Annelies Verbeke wrote a short story that was turned into a script by Peter Moerenhout, and it will be illustrated live at Mind the Book by numerous illustrators and cartoonists in Flanders, including Pieter de Poortere, known for his Boerke comics, and Ilah, who became famous for her funny and familiar Cordelia in magazines *Knack* and *Flair*.

Words on film

Come Saturday night, you’ll get the chance to see *Dwars*, a unique documentary about the oldest newspaper in the Netherlands, *De Groene Amsterdammer*. This legendary paper made its mark by maintaining an independent and impartial outlook for almost 135 years and by giving authors, thinkers and artists a platform to influence the cultural scene. More cinema on Sunday: *De Bankroetjazz* is a found-footage montage by Leo van Maaren and Frank Herrebout based on a screenplay by visionary Flemish avant-garde poet Paul van Ostaijen. It is a revolutionary pamphlet in which the turn-of-the-20th-century writer predicted the crash of 1929, a subject that today especially can’t be ignored. British author Tom Holland will make an appearance on Sunday morning to talk to Jef Lambrecht, former VRT journalist and a specialist on the Islamic Revolution,



about Holland’s new book *In the Shadow of the Sword* (released in Dutch as *Het vierde beast*), which explores “how a succession of great empires came to identify themselves with a new and revolutionary understanding of the divine.” American professor of philosophy Susan Neiman will close the festival with a talk on morality in the 21st century. In her latest work *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-Up Idealists*, she states that age-old concepts such as good and evil, heroism and honour are at the heart of becoming more open-minded and ethical.

For what ails you

A literary festival wouldn’t be complete without a book fair, naturally. What makes the book fair at Mind the Book special, however, is its focus on quality work and special editions, rather than the usual bestsellers. You’ll find books by all the guests of the festival, of course, and you can also make an appointment with the “book



Dutch diplomat Petra Stienen (top) talks about women and Islam at Mind the Book; Flemish author Ivo Victoria (above right) and British author Tom Holland (above left) are also guests at the annual literary festival

doctors”, who are on call to cure any ailment with a formidable piece of reading. You might choose also to indulge in a monumental-sized game of Scrabble. There are also several debates scheduled throughout the weekend focusing mainly on current affairs

such as the state of the European economy, euthanasia, e-books and the Middle East to name but a few highly relevant topics that give this book-fuelled weekend the eye-opening edge that many literary festivals are missing these days.

9-11 MARCH

Mind the Book

Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23, Ghent

► www.mindthebook.be

FRESH FICTION AT MIND THE BOOK

There is an abundance of non-fiction at Mind the Book, and even much of the fiction is based on real people. Don’t miss these novels by authors who will be on hand to discuss them

Mijn Meneer (My Mister)

by Ted van Lieshout • Querido
Dutch author, poet and screenwriter Ted van Lieshout will be talking to Radio 1 presenter Friedl Lesage about his new book, an autobiographical novel about an 11-year-old boy with a secret he can’t share with anyone, except the statue of the Virgin Mary that he passes on his way to school each morning. He has formed a close friendship with an unknown gentleman that will change his life forever. Van Lieshout’s subtle yet suggestive style is the driving force behind this compassionate and gripping tale that will stay with you long after you’ve put it down.



Limonov

by Emmanuel Carrière • De Bezige Bij
French reporter Florence Noiville will be interviewing the Prix Renaudot winner Emmanuel Carrière about *Limonov*, a fictional biography of Eduard Limonov, a 2012 Russian presidential candidate. Limonov was a crook in the Ukraine, an underground poetry icon in the Soviet Union, lived as a bum in New York and eventually became a political prisoner. He is the founder and leader of the National Bolshevik Party, and the title character in Carrière’s eloquent and powerful portrait of a man who has walked the rocky road to redemption.

De Loopjongen (The Errand-Boy)

by Gerrit Komrij • De Bezige Bee
Gerrit Komrij has won almost every Dutch literary prize available. At Mind the Book, he’ll be chatting with *Knack* journalist Piet Piryns about his new novel *De Loopjongen*, in which he examines how both ideals and friendships fade over time. The main character can’t choose between his two supposedly best friends and puts their relationship to the test in order to find out if people really are who they seem to be. It is one man’s quest for friendship, connection and meaning in a solitary world. *De Loopjongen* is a beautifully written book, exuding Komrij’s characteristic wit and poignancy.

Toen David zijn stem verloor (When David Lost His Voice)

by Judith Vanistendael • Oog&Blik
In 2007 Judith Vanistendael wrote and illustrated the successful graphic novel *De maagd en de neger (The Virgin and the Negro)*, a powerful story about a father’s observations on his daughter’s relationship with an African refugee. Together with its sequel, it has been translated into seven languages, including English. In her new and extensive graphic novel, she explores the dreadful impact of cancer on an unsuspecting young family. It is a story that balances on the edges of life and death, full of intricate and devastating drawings by one of Flanders’ best illustrators.

The past made present

Young Belgian Photography

Catherine Kusters

Footprints in the dust, shattered floor tiles, yellowing cards on the wall...all remains of a human presence that must have filled these spaces long ago.

It's the work of Lara Mennes, one of a pair of Flemish photographers who make up the first show in the new series Young Belgian Photography at Antwerp's Photography Museum (FoMu). Mennes' photos are part of project called *Capturing the Sensible: Memories in Architecture* and present us with details of abandoned buildings.

The images Mennes captures seem trivial, even banal. The photographer shows what remains, what was not deemed worth keeping or saving. "I looked for those elements that will be thrown away or cleared out when the building is refurbished," she says.

The forgotten objects and naked architecture can be seen as memories, not from a glorious past, but from everyday life. The photos breathe the kind of melancholy sadness that always lingers in derelict and desolate places, but therein lies the beauty. In Mennes' still lifes, prosaic ruins are given a voice, a last chance to tell their stories.

Sarah Carlier is also a story-teller. In *Four years, three deaths, sweaty armpits and a fetus*, she combines documentary and photography to chronicle life and death in a Romanian family.

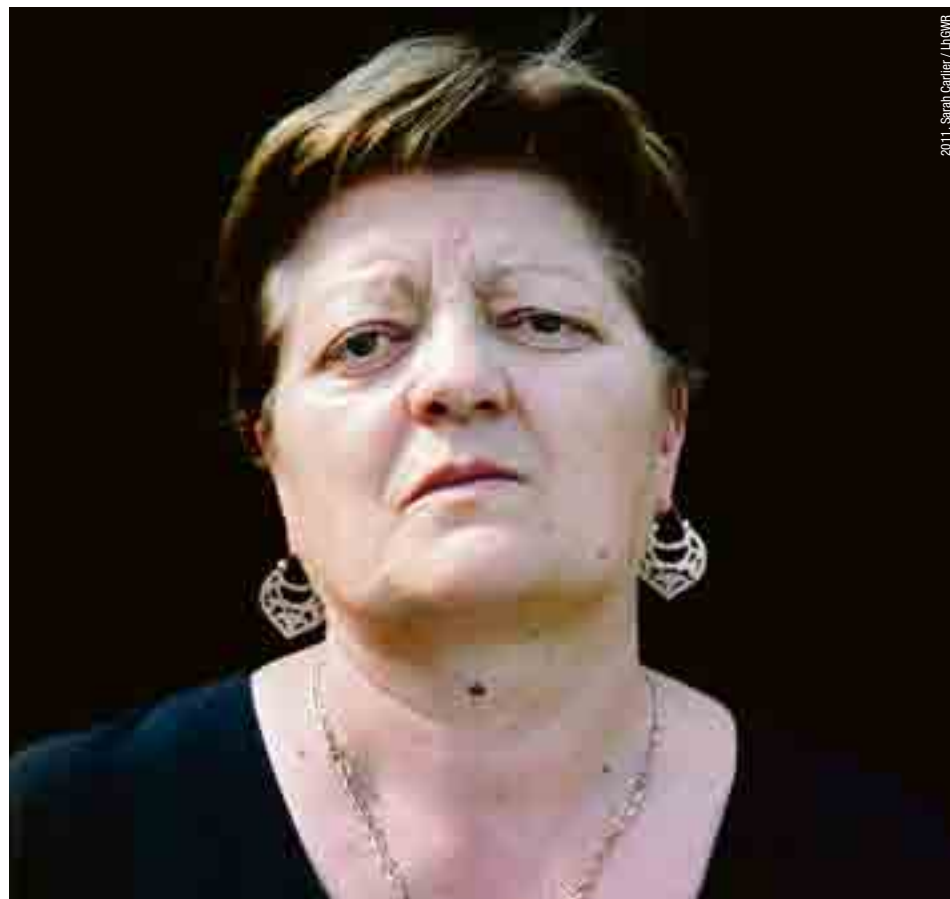
Within a period of four years, Florica lost her

husband and both parents. While she is still stricken with grief, her daughter finds love, becomes a mother and gets married. Carlier follows Florica (*pictured*) and her family during this rapid succession of life-altering turns in a series of video fragments and photos.

The distinction between real and staged events is vague and unimportant to Carlier. What matters are questions about how to deal with changes we cannot control. A documentary fragment takes us to the wedding day of Florica's daughter. The entire party gathers for a chaotic portrait, but it becomes painfully clear that some family members are missing. Carlier treats her subjects respectfully, and in an accompanying book she explains how she gradually built a strong bond with the family. Like the crumpled red Dacia in which Florica's husband died, death constantly looms in Carlier's work. But so does life.

This duality connects the artist to her colleague Mennes: Both photographers are fascinated with the visualisation of the past in the present.

Not so coincidentally, the past is also the theme of *Imaging History*, the larger exhibition upstairs in FoMu. This first instalment of Young Belgian Photography happens to be the perfect addition, as well as an interesting show in its own right.



2011, Sarah Carlier / LbGWR

Until 3 June | Photo Museum, Waalsekaai 47, Antwerp | www.fomu.be

FILM

The Mill and the Cross

The camera slides past a group of mediaeval figures, mostly peasants but some putting on finer clothes. "So this could be a group of saints, returning from the past, to mourn the present fate of Flanders," a voice asks. "Yes," replies another, and it's then that you notice a man with a sketch book moving through the crowd, adjusting folds of cloth and making notes. This is Pieter Bruegel the Elder (played with gravelly charm by Dutch actor Rutger Hauer), explaining to a rich patron the foreground of his painting "The Road to Calvary".

The Mill and the Cross by Polish director Lech Majewski goes on to explore the painting's complex layers, combining elements from the Crucifixion, the Spanish occupation of Flanders and Bruegel's personal mythology (hint: Flanders has very few mountain-top windmills). The result is an odd but intriguing mixture of fantasy and art history, sure to draw in anyone with an interest in Bruegel's work. **Ian Mundell**



Opens 29 February | Galeries Cinéma, Brussels

www.galleries.be

MORE FILM THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

Mixed Kebab: The new film from Flemish director Guy Lee Thys (Kassablanka) tells the story of a young Antwerpenaar of Turkish descent, whose parents have picked out a nice girl for him but who is really in love with cute Kevin of the local frietkot

Opens 29 February in Brussels and Flanders

www.mixedkebab.com

Brussels

The Crown Prince Couple's New Home: Danish documentary, with English subtitles, about the comprehensive restoration of Fredrik VIII's Palace in Copenhagen, offering insight into the six-year-long process of this massive project involving a wide range of craftspeople, architects and artists. Organised by the Danish Cultural Institute and part of the Broodje Brussels programme

March 1 12.30 at EESC, Belliardstraat 99

www.dkibenelux.org

EXHIBITION

De lente op zijn kop (Spring Upside Down)

Two huge countries and one small region. Chile, Argentina and Flanders come together in this bright and colourful exhibition, an initiative of Vlamingen in de Wereld (Flemings in the World), which supports Flemish people who go overseas to live and work. The 70-some photographs in the collection come from Flemings who live in Chile or Argentina, offering a most unique perspective on the two countries: through the eyes of immigrants. Taken during the southern hemisphere's springtime (Flanders' autumn), the photos are full of new life and energy, from flower blossoms and fruit salads to mountain panoramas and smiling locals. There's also a prize at stake – a year's membership to the Flemings in the World organisation, with all its benefits and services. Admission to the exhibition in the government offices of the Flemish government in Brussels is free, so stop by for a whiff of spring. **Robyn Boyle**



Until 16 March | Boudewijn building, Brussels | www.viww.be

MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Brussels

AMarten Toonder Centenary: Exhibition marking the 100th birthday of the comic strip writer, illustrator and author, nicknamed "the Dutch Walt Disney"

Until SEP 23 at the Belgian Comic Strip Center, Zandstraat 20

www.stripmuseum.be

Ostend

Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven: Mistress of the horizon: Exhibition of work by the Flemish multi-media artist, including drawings, video animation and computer-generated prints

Until 27 MAY at Mu.ZEE, Romestraat 11

www.muze.be

Ostend

Warholia: Homage to American artist, printmaker and filmmaker Andy Warhol on the 25th anniversary of his death, featuring original exhibition catalogues, posters and much more

Until MAR 17 at Ypres Library, Weverijstraat 9

www.muze.be

COMEDY

London Laughs

If you like laughs that come from the belly and make your cheeks ache, this show's for you. Two stand-up comedians with a penchant for making fun of themselves – as well as a select few audience members – come to Antwerp for a unique all-English stand-up comedy night. The show (which costs a mere €4) features Ghent-based American Jovanka Steele and, direct from the UK, Maureen Younger (pictured). Steele is known for her improvisational skills, sharp wit and ability to connect with any local crowd; especially expats who have lived here for a while can appreciate her anecdotes and attempts at speaking Dutch. Younger is the resident MC for Laughing Cows in London, Birmingham and Berlin and is a contributor to BBC Radio. Her gigs are notoriously honest, self-deprecating and ruthlessly funny. **RB**



4 March, 20.00 | Café the Joker, Antwerp

► www.cafethejoker.be

Reservations at londonlaughs@yahoo.co.uk

MORE COMEDY THIS WEEK

Ghent

Nuff said: Stand-up comedy night featuring music by BRZZVLL and acts by Johan Petit, Bob Maclaren, Magnus Betner and more (in Dutch and English)
MAR 3 20.15 at Handelsbeurs, Kouter 29
► www.nuffsaid.be

Holsbeek (Flemish Brabant)

Stijlelach: Stand-up comedy featuring Arnout Van den Bossche, Steven Mahieu and Joris Velleman as MC, plus complimentary snacks and drinks (in Dutch)
MAR 3 20.30-23.00 at Kasteel van Horst, Horststraat 28
► www.destijlelach.be

Nieuwpoort

Druk druk druk (Busy, Busy, Busy): Stand-up comedy by Bert Gabriëls (in Dutch)
MAR 3 20.00 at Centrum Ysara, Dienstweg Havengeul 14
► www.ysara.be

EVENT

Museum Night Fever

For the fifth year in a row, museums across Brussels are shaking off their dull, dusty reputation by proving that they're anything but. Museum Night Fever is a young, hip event that sees 24 museums open their doors to the public from 19.00 to 1.00 with all kinds of exciting activities. There are, of course, exhibitions to check out (including guided tours), but also dance and theatre performances, concerts, DJs, workshops and even circus acts. Worth a special mention are the Burlesque feather fan dance at Museum van Elsene and the concert by Sioen at the Musical Instruments Museum. Finish off the night with one of the two Red Bull Elektropedia after-parties in Fuse and You Night Club. See the website for the complete, and notably long, list of events. One pass gets you into all 24 participating museums and the shuttle buses that run between them. **RB**



3 March, 19.00-1.00 | Across Brussels | ► www.museumnightfever.be

MORE EVENTS THIS WEEK

Aalst

KRAAK festival 2012: One-of-a-kind modern music fest featuring sound poetry, marimba lumina compositions, authentic song writing, performance art, audio-visual synaesthesia and "retardo wave pop", plus films and exhibitions

MAR 3 14.00-23.00 at Netwerk, Houtkaai
► www.kraak.net/festival2012

Ostend

Bal Rat Mort: French Cancon party featuring two rooms with DJs and a "most exuberant costume" competition

MAR 3 21.00 at Kursaal Oostende, Monacoplein
► www.kursaalooostende.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

PM Dautreline

Romana

Zeedijk 13, De Panne

The Flemish coast is, if I may be so bold, best enjoyed in the off season. But this has its drawbacks. The crisp February wind was getting so crisp that we had to seek refuge somewhere – *anywhere* – there and then.

Seaside beachfronts are littered with identi-kit restaurants and tearooms, and De Panne is no exception. What drew us to Romana was purely meteorological. I swear it never crossed my mind that the place shared its name with a long-departed character from my beloved *Doctor Who*. The array of drinks available at Romana is mind-boggling. "Serious" beers (Keizer Karel, Tongerlo, Brugse Zot), over a dozen coffee-based hot beverages, two pages' worth of cocktails: you won't die of thirst in here. As we sat down, my better half and I knew exactly what we wanted though – partly because of the cold wind but also because it's a particular favourite of ours. We wanted an Irish coffee. And we got one (each – *naturally*). It wasn't the best one we'd ever drunk (that honour, bizarrely enough, befalls Galician seafood restaurant Botafumeiro in Barcelona) but it was very good indeed, and so comforting. Better still, it came not only with the obligatory individually wrapped chocolate biscuit, but also with a fresh mini croissant! The décor at Romana is unobtrusive (teak furniture, leather banquettes, mole-coloured walls with old pictures in backlit



frames), and so are the waiters. Sadly, the same cannot be said of the music; the local FM station was blaring out chart hits in a most incongruous fashion. However, we were not going to let this spoil our enjoyment. The drinks were very nice thanks, and the free pastries a delicate touch. But the real star of the show was on the other side of the window. You can keep your Pacific lagoons and your star-studded French Riviéras: the North Sea in the winter is hypnotically beautiful and calming. Life is good.

BITE

Robyn Boyle

Bistronomie

"It's all about what's on the plate," said Alain Coninx to a full room at the launch party of the culinary world's hottest new word: *bistronomie*. As one of Flanders' most respected food writers, Coninx is known for his taste for the good life – but then without too much fuss, which made him the perfect choice to present the new concept.

"To me, *bistronomie* is a godsend," he continued. "It means high-quality food at a reasonable price. Of course, bistros have always been around. They are by origin simple places to have a quick, hearty bite to eat."

Now Flanders and Brussels' finest bistros, brasseries and other pretention-less places are collected into a first edition guide and handy website. The initiative comes from Steve Engels and Johannes Denis, friends and hospitality industry veterans who decided it was high time these excellent yet undervalued eateries got the attention they deserve.

"With all due respect to star restaurants and celebrity chefs, we feel that there are so many more addresses where you also find talented chefs using the best products available," Denis explained. "And you don't have to break the bank to dine there."

In *Bistronomie 2012* and on the searchable website you'll find several of the better bistros

from each province. And every week the site puts four in the spotlight. This week features Altermezzo, a stylish yet laid-back brasserie in Tongeren with a menu that names things like seared scallops with hummus and parmesan, sweetbreads in sage and yoghurt and winter cod with broccoli and squid.

Or how about Beluga, a *vistro* near Leuven's Grote Market that specialises in fish. Then there's the minimalist Switch near Sint-Katelijneplein in Brussels, serving up a lighter version of classics from French-Belgian cuisine. Frida & de Henri's in Mechelen is a nostalgic place in loft style that offers mouth-watering combinations such as fillet of duck breast, with vitelotte potatoes and sweet pea mousse and cashews in a marsala wine sauce. Or chocolate *moelleux* with prosecco sabayon and bergamot orange for dessert.

There are 75 locations in total, each with its own character and culinary style, but there's something they all have in common, and that's their belief in adages like "tradition is the future" and "back to basics". That and their main priority being what they bring to the plate.

► www.bistronomie.be



Antwerp cheese specialist Michel Van Tricht at the launch of the new Bistronomie guide



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An exclusive selection of the best bistros and brasseries across Brussels and Flanders

TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels

The mystery of the deputy-horse

When Gunnar de Boel, comparative linguistics professor at Ghent University, was entertaining some German friends not long ago with a bottle of cider or two, he had an epiphany.

The Germans, he learned, have a different name for the alcoholic apple-based beverage. They call it *Viez*, from the prefix "vice", as in vice-president. Because cider, let's face it, is a kind of wannabe wine.

Gunnar got to thinking. *Viez* sounds a lot like the Dutch *fiets*, or bicycle. People had never really understood where the word came from, such an oddity compared to its much more sensible counterparts in other languages. Could it be?

Yes, it could. The two-wheel novelty – or bi-cycle – used to be called *Vice-Pferd* in German, or *vice-paard* in Dutch (deputy-horse) when it first came into use in the second half of the 19th century. The English used to say "dandy horse".

Gunnar and his colleague Luc de Grauwe, Flemish public broadcaster VRT reports, are now credited

with solving one of the biggest etymological mysteries of the Dutch language.

An important mystery, I might add, since the Flemish are known to be ardent bikers. The Low Countries are relatively flat – the more north you go – the flatter it gets and ideal for leg-powered locomotion. (Until not very long ago, the Dutch prime minister would ride his *fiets* to work, his lunch box safely tucked underneath the carrier straps behind.) University towns like Leuven and Ghent are absolutely

infested with jalopies that make you wonder how they still manage to stay upright.

Like so many other nouns in the Dutch language that imply a kind of action – yes, we are going grammar, here – *fiets* has been taken and moulded to also be a verb: *fietsen*, to bike.

Just add -en, and your noun is a verb. See also *tennisen*, *internetten* or, something your kid might say, *Nintendoën*. I kid you not. (Note the two dots over the "e" to indicate a separate syllable. The "oe" vowel combination is normally pronounced like the "ou" in "you", but here it's a normal plural ending with the "en" sound).

Ik ben op de fiets is often one of the first phrases students learn in Dutch class. I am on the bike, literally. I came by bike, actually. It's one thing, of course, to know how to say it. Another is to know how to do it. And if I may be so blunt as to give you, the expat, some advice on how to blend in: *ga eens een eindje fietsen*, go do a little cycling.



The last word...

Broken promise

"This is the first time Yvonne has ever let me down. She said she would live until 100."

Flemish comedian Gaston Berghmans salutes long-time co-star Yvonne Verbeeck, who died last week at 98

True enough

"Whether we like it or not, you can't have everything. Sometimes I see my children less than I would like. But that's true for men, too, surely?"

VRT news anchor Annelies Van Herck

Top of the world

"And to think I almost was fired because I was pregnant."

Brussels-based Vanessa Umba used to work for Brussels Airlines and is now the only female pilot for Bahrain's national airline Gulf Air

Harsh reality

"I've watched the security footage a couple of times. It's like an action film in real life."

Michael Djanashwill's jewellery shop in the Zavel area of Brussels was held up at gunpoint last week by two masked men

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

It's the year of anniversaries: Mercator now, Hendrik Conscience later this year, and next month Flanders celebrates Louis Paul Boon, one of the region's most famous 20th-century authors. We'll tell you about the man, his work and how you can get to know both better this spring

Business

You might not think of Flanders as a wine-producing region, but think again: Several vineyards are producing quality products, and the government of Flanders has now launched a working group to support the sector

Tourism

You've heard that Marvin Gaye once lived in Ostend, now read the facts: Music correspondent Christophe Verbiest tells us why Gaye came and why he stayed, as Ostend introduces a new tour that walks in the steps of the late American soul singer