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Workin' in the goalmine

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Turnhout's trump card

A look at Flanders' City of Culture 2012 through the eyes of its most famous son

Tom Peeters

This weekend, Turnhout celebrates both its 800th birthday and kicks off its title of Flanders' City of Culture 2012. Everyone is invited to visit this northern border town, which is, like in the old times of the Dukes of Brabant, once again at the heart of the action.

Though Turnhout is on the outskirts of Flanders, it has one big advantage on other provincial towns," says actor, scriptwriter, director and our local guide Stany Crets, who was born and raised in the self-proclaimed "capital of the Kempen".

"Because we were close to the border with the Netherlands, we could get in touch with culture that didn't seep through elsewhere," he explains. "Basically, it got my career started. And because we were far away from the centres of Flemish culture, we could stay a bit more edgy."

Crets (*pictured*) is one of the official hosts of Turnhout 2012, the second-ever City of Culture in Flanders. The first was Ostend

in 2010. The designation is intended to draw attention to the richness in arts and culture of the smaller cities in Flanders. (Though the Flemish government has announced that the culture budget does not allow the initiative to continue past this year.)

Crets is a Renaissance man with an enviable career in stage, television and film, as actor, director and writer. The list of his 20-plus years of acting credits is longer than my arm, but highlights include the out-of-his-element student in 1996's *Alles moet weg* (Everything Must Go), one of the leads in the 2010 award-winning television series *Oud België* (which he also co-wrote) and the father and striking factory worker in last year's movie *Groeten uit Balen* (Greetings from Balen). Crets won the popular TV series *De slimste mens ter wereld* (The Smartest Person in the World) in 2004 and made it to the final of last year's best-of-the-best showdown *De allerslimste mens ter wereld*.

Turnhout, meanwhile, is known for only one thing: the city of playing cards. It has a museum dedicated to the subject,

and games producer Cartamundi still provides retail outlets, collectors and gamblers all over the world with their cardboard gold. The cultural boost Turnhout is about to get as City of Culture can be seen as a sort of antidote to this narrow view.

Centre of a cultural universe

Crets doesn't even remember visiting the museum. His first memory of his native city is the ride on the back of his mother's bicycle to kindergarten and the school's big blue entrance gate. More relevant to his later career, he remembers the shows he organised as a kid in the Den Doolhof area, where all the street names referred to the ancient Duchesses of Brabant.

"Maybe you could even call it directing, though I wasn't familiar with the word yet," he says. "At the back of the area was a forest and a big open space. In our imaginations this sandy field was a desert. It was a paradise for kids."

He and his makeshift theatre group rehearsed their shows under park pavilions in the summer, and "in wintertime we

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Patsy Sörensen

Payoke, a non-profit organisation which looks after the victims of human trafficking, celebrated its 25th anniversary last week. The organisation is a monument to the single-minded determination of a former art teacher, now recognised internationally as an expert on what the EU Commission calls "this heinous crime".

Payoke was born at the kitchen table in the Antwerp apartment of Patsy Sörensen. She was living in the area known as the Schipperskwartier (the Seamen's Quarter), the centre of the port's sex industry. "Every day I used to say good morning to the girls in the brothels," she said last week in an interview with *De Standaard*. "I thought that they weren't being treated fairly, and that nobody was listening to them."

The original idea was that Payoke, founded in 1987, be a sort of trade union for prostitutes, providing medical and other advice. The initiative attracted little attention until 1992, when two things happened: Chris De Stoop, a journalist for *Knack*, published *Ze zijn zo lief, meneer* (They're So Sweet, Sir), a book on the international trade in women for the sex industry, which

led to a parliamentary investigation; and a visit to Payoke by the late King Boudewijn. "I didn't realise then the enormous importance of that moment," Sörensen said. Sörensen began to concentrate the organisation's efforts on the victims of human trafficking in general – from prostitution to the restaurant and textile industries.

Sörensen, a member of the Groen party, had sat on the city council of Antwerp since 1989, and in 1995 she became alderwoman for emancipation, youth and development policy. Four years later she was elected to the European Parliament, where she continued her work on human trafficking. In 2004, she quit politics, though she is still on the EU Commission's expert group on the problem, and she continues to act as director of Payoke.

"I am proud of what I have done, and I gave up a great deal to achieve it," she said. "I had children.... Luckily my husband decided to become a househusband, and he took early retirement, otherwise I could never have done what I did. He saw there was no stopping me."

► www.payoke.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

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News in brief

More than 100 pedestrians were last year involved in **accidents with the buses**, trams and metro of the MIVB in Brussels. Two of the accidents involved a fatality, down from six in 2010. The main reason for the accidents is the use of headphones, mobile phones and MP3 players, the MIVB said, which distract pedestrians when crossing roads.

Brussels has been voted into second place behind Copenhagen as the **most child-friendly place to visit** for a short break, by the readers of the website *stedentripper.com*. The list of attractions mentioned includes Mini-Europe and Océade, the comic-strip and toy museums and the Atomium.

A new train museum on the site of Schaerbeek railway station was last week granted planning permission by the Brussels-Capital Region. The museum will be designed by architects SUM, with scenography by strip artist Francois Schuiten, for a total cost of €14 million. The opening is planned for 2014.

Tennis star **Kim Clijsters would be most people's dream babysitter**, according to a poll of readers of *De Standaard Online*, marking International Women's Day last week. Angela Merkel won most votes for both president and prime minister, while singer Axelle Red came first as favourite neighbour. Newsreader Martine Tanghe would be first choice as boss and teacher, while radio presenter Sofie Lemaire topped the poll as colleague and shopping companion.

► www.standaard.be/extra/winningteam

The Brussels public transport authority MIVB will next year switch over to **entirely green energy** for its network, after signing a two-year contract last week with Electrabel

The goods of Antwerp fashion **designer Walter Van Beirendonck** will go on sale online from 14 March, after the designer's business declared bankruptcy last month. Among the items from Van Beirendonck's concept store is a polyester bear eight metres long and two metres high.

► www.moyersoen.be

OFFSIDE

The founding of Tinseltown

It's accepted wisdom in these parts that French movie composer Ludovic Bource has Jef Neve and the Brussels Philharmonic to thank for his recent Oscar for *The Artist*. But another Oscar-related question arose this month: Just how Flemish was legendary director Cecil B DeMille, one of the founders of the Academy?

The answer, according to Flemish-American David Baeckelandt, who labours tirelessly to highlight the Flemish contribution to the story of America, is: "Absolutely".

Cecil Blount DeMille (*pictured*), who was born in 1881, never talked about his Flemish roots. Baeckelandt writes on his engrossing blog *The Flemish American*. Baeckelandt traced DeMille's lineage back to Anthony deMil, the first immigrant of that name to land in America, arriving in New Amsterdam in 1658 aboard the ship *De Vergulde Bever* (The



Gilded Beaver) out of Amsterdam. Anthony had lived in both Haarlem, in the north of the Netherlands, and in Vlissingen in what is now the Netherlands' Zeeland province. However, the family, Baeckelandt reports, was originally from

Brussels cycling organisations are inviting motorists to take part in **Bike Experience**, an initiative aimed at promoting bicycles as a means of getting around town, as well as raising drivers' consciousness of the presence of cyclists on the road. From 2 to 16 May, drivers are invited to leave the car at home and take to two wheels in the company of an experienced coach, as well as forming company teams.

► www.bikeexperience.be

The Art and History Museum in Brussels' Jubelpark **will not open the six new rooms planned for Art Nouveau works**. Michel Draguet, the recently appointed interim director of the museum, was reported to have stopped work on the rooms with a view to housing the collection in another wing of the museum. At present only 10% of the museum's collection of Art Nouveau and Art Deco objects is on show because of lack of space.

The University of Antwerp will bestow an **honorary doctorate to Franco Dragone**, the Italian-Belgian designer behind the look of *Cirque du Soleil*, for "redrawing the boundaries of the international theatre world" with his "imposing, atmospheric creations," in the words of rector Alain Verschoren. The ceremony will take place later this year.

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

Alan Hope

Turnhout's trump card

The capital of the Kempen refuses to build walls, literal or otherwise

► continued from page 1

moved to heated garages or cellars," says Crets. "It was a very carefree time. I didn't realise yet it could be a profession."

That awareness came later, when his Dutch teacher at college invited him to join an amateur theatre company. He also saw some intriguing plays in Turnhout's well-known culture centre De Warande. Those works came from the Netherlands. "Though the border was only a few miles to the north, an unknown world opened up before my eyes. I saw the Dutch comedian Freek de Jonge, but also the groundbreaking Ro Theater from Rotterdam."

This is exactly why Turnhout 2012 has chosen the slogan "Randland: Hartland". Turnhout is not just a city in a remote corner of the country; it's also at the heart of a region surrounded by Breda, Tilburg, Eindhoven, Lier, Antwerp and Leuven. "Local cultural programmers saw beyond their noses and helped to widen my perspective," says Crets. "Thanks to them, I realised I could move on and take a bus to a bigger city."

Crets moved to Antwerp, studied at the Herman Teirlinck theatre school, and the rest is history.

An open playground

Turnhout used to be a city in the heart of the Duchy of Brabant. But it was an odd one because it was never fortified. After it received its city rights from Henry I in 1212, no authority built walls around it, ever. It was like the open playground of Crets' youth.

It's the kind of openness that has continued to permeate the city's attitude, making it home to the nearly two-decade-long world film festival Open Doek. Turnhout 2012 is accentuating this openness, inviting artists who focus on migration and innovation.

Turnhout Terminus Turnhout Centraal is the first big exhibition in the newly renovated Taxandria Museum and focuses on people from Turnhout as world citizens. It explains how Sitting Bull, Pieter Paul Rubens and Michael Douglas all have roots in Turnhout. "Some stories are true, others are myths," chuckles Crets.

Although the people of Turnhout

don't traditionally keep people out, they also tend to keep themselves in. "In general, people from Turnhout are not really fond of breaking out. They like things the way they are," explains Crets. "They don't travel a lot. We are stubborn and obstinate, like all people from the Kempen." The film *Groeten uit Balen*, based on an influential play by Walter Van den Broeck, is in fact set in the area. Crets played the lead role of Jan, a labourer at a zinc factory in the nearby village of Balen. "I read the play when I was 15," he says. "And it was eye-opening. Theatre didn't have to be complex. Modern playwrights often find such popular plays too vulgar, but to me it's current and emotional. It's about writing what you have to write, telling what you have to tell, no more, no less. It summarises the mentality of the people from this region. This no-nonsense attitude, which often comes with broad humour, I also detect and appreciate from colleagues with roots in the Kempen."

A new Grote Markt

So what to do during this anniversary year of a small, ambiguous city that's both stubborn and open, a terminus for a visiting party, but a starting – and mostly closing – point for locals?

Well, locals and visitors alike should be pleased with the renovated Grote Markt, which was torn up for more than a year. It is home to the opening festivities this weekend: On Saturday night, Crets hosts a variety show, the highlight of which is an original composition by jazz pianist Jef Neve, which he performs in tandem with fireworks. A DJ set takes you deep into the night.

The following day sees a huge flea market on the square, with a contest for the nicest cake for Turnhout's birthday. The celebration, though, lasts all year. Alongside a few big events, there are dozens of smaller ones, often in a characteristic or scenic environment. Take the protected water tower, which rises above the city. Here, three evenings a week, you can watch small-scale concerts and amateur theatre. Wasn't that how it all started for Crets?



1



2



3

© Photo: Stad Turnhout

As an ode to the French sculptor and conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp, the local art collective De Tweede Helft hosts 94 rhomboids, big pyramid-like figures, in the city's *begijnhof*. "My mother used to work in the *begijnhof*," recalls Crets. "She took me there when there were still women living there." As for Crets, his schedule for the year is already set, writing a musical, a TV series and a movie. But, like the deer on his home town's emblem, which knows where to find the fertile soil, he will keep coming back to Turnhout – especially this year.

Photos:

- 1 ► Ringed by a moat and grassy park, the Castle of the Hertogen of Brabant is a popular picnic and lay-about spot in Turnhout
- 2 ► This city's pretty water tower is home to many of Turnhout 2012's events
- 3 ► Turnhout's newly renovated Grote Markt is beautiful by day or by night

17-18 MARCH

Official opening Turnhout 2012

Grote Markt

► www.turnhout2012.be

WITNESS

Francis Stijnen, mayor of Turnhout



According to mayor Francis Stijnen, the city started lobbying early for the title City of Culture and its grant of €400,000. "The fact that we could relate this title to our 800th birthday was a big plus. The Grote Markt is renovated and ready for the opening weekend, but our ultimate goal is bigger: We want to use this opportunity as a springboard, not only in the cultural field, but everywhere innovation is needed."

Jazz pianist Jef Neve



Ghent-based jazz pianist Jef Neve spent the first 48 hours of his life in Turnhout and later did a year of residency in the culture centre De Warande. He will play during the City of Culture's opening weekend. "I made a 21-minute composition for symphonic orchestra that will accompany the opening fireworks. I imagined I was standing on the Grote Markt and let the impressions come. After I wrote the piece, the pyrotechnicians took over and based their spectacle on my music. The computer simulations looked great, which makes me really curious for the real thing."

The road to Mandalay

Government of Flanders makes contacts in a country taking tentative steps towards democracy

Alan Hope

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters had to cut his visit to Vietnam short this week in order to return to Myanmar, where he spent several days last week. Peeters was meant to meet with democracy campaigner and Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, but the appointment fell through. She freed up this week and Peeters took a flight back to Yangon for the meeting, due to take place on Tuesday.

The appointment underlines one of the main points of Peeters' visit to Myanmar (formerly known as Burma): the support from Flanders for democracy in the country, which is still under the rule of a military junta. By-elections are scheduled next month for 48 parliamentary seats; this would still leave the junta with a majority, but the elections are being seen as a tentative step towards democracy. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party is taking part in the election, after their boycott of an election held in 2010.

"I am happy to see that the Myanmar government is taking steps to make its policy more transparent and to encourage an open dialogue with other governments," Peeters said at the start of the trip, which also includes a delegation of business representatives organised by Flanders Investment and Trade. "I sincerely hope the Myanmar government will go further on the level of human rights, including freedom of speech, rights for minorities and the creation of social and political institutions. I welcome the by-elections in April and stand behind the process of democratisation in Myanmar."

Trade sanctions

Myanmar is currently the subject of international trade sanctions, which have devastated its economy compared to other countries in the



Kris Peeters shakes hands with a young boy on a visit to the Great Dagon Pagoda in Yangon, the largest city in Myanmar

Far East. The Flemish trade delegation, which, in addition to Yangon, also visited Mandalay and the capital city Nay Pyi Taw, was there to make contacts, with a view to establishing trade relations once sanctions are lifted.

According to Peeters, the contacts made are particularly promising in the fields of health care and logistics. However the question of human rights remains an important priority. "This country is in an important phase, just weeks away from by-elections," said Peeters. "We made it clear during our economic mission that the process of democratisation has to be pursued. And if that does not occur, there will be consequences for Myanmar itself. Contacts are not contracts."

Peeters was due to fly from Yangon on to Vietnam to join a Belgian trade mission headed by Prince Filip. However the sudden availability of Suu Kyi forced him to fly back. As Flanders Today went to press, it was unclear when Peeters would be heading on to Vietnam, but the mission there includes meetings with Vietnamese president Truong Tan Sang, premier Nguyen Tan Dung and ministers of science and technology, investment, finance, health and education. The programme also includes a visit to the Becholat production facility, which uses chocolate imported from Belgium, as well as the Vin Mec International Hospital, designed by the VK Group, which has offices in Brussels and across Flanders.

Employers charm border workers

Flemish employers' organisations Voka and Unizo have joined forces with the employment and training agency VDAB in a new campaign designed to attract skilled workers from Wallonia and France to fill long-time job vacancies in West Flanders.

Filling jobs in parts of West Flanders is traditionally difficult, with three applicants for every job, compared to an average elsewhere in Flanders of five. The situation threatens to get worse with the cancellation last January of a special status for border workers, which allowed a French worker to pay tax in France on wages earned in Belgium.

Existing border workers can hold on to their status until 2033, but new hires will now have to pay tax in Belgium, effectively drying up the source of French workers, for whom the status meant between 10% and 30% more take-home pay.

The new campaign offers border workers a number of other attractions: higher wages, better conditions, training, French spoken in the workplace, courses in Dutch if desired and, last but not least, the absence of traffic jams.

"With a charm offensive like this, we're hoping to show the French that it's still in their interest to come and work here," commented Axel Ronse of the southwest Flanders chapter of Unizo.

Horta architecture nominations announced

The Square meeting centre on the Kunstberg and the Rits School of Arts (pictured) on Dansaertstraat have been nominated for this year's Brussels Horta Architecture Prize, organised by the architects' association SADBr and awarded by the city of Brussels. The biennial €5,000 prize, launched in 1996, is given to projects that are original in design yet also integrated with their surroundings.

Other nominated projects include the new headquarters of the CD&V party on Wetstraat, the new branch of Solvay Business School near the Ter Ca merenbos and the former Heymans soap factory in the Anderlechtsepoort. The prize will be decided by a jury in June. Until then, members of the public can vote for their choice on the website.



► www.prixbruhortaprijs.be

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

1712

the new telephone number for reporting any kind of violence, including child abuse, launched this week by Flemish welfare minister Jo Vandeurzen. The number operates on weekdays from 9.00 to 17.00

€34,734

paid by the Flemish waterways agency to get rid of graffiti in 2011, public works minister Hilde Crevits told the Flemish Parliament. The roads agency paid out a further €27,252

157

defendants in a court case in Ghent last week, on charges relating to social benefits fraud, making it one of the biggest trials the region has ever seen

€4,700

in EU agriculture subsidies to be repaid by Flanders this year, out of a total of €1.15 million reclaimed across Europe

350 million

Expected customers for the NMBS rail service by 2025, an increase of 67% on today

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

All aboard N-VA

Bart De Wever lost more than 30 kilos on a diet! Bart De Wever might resign from politics in 2014! Bart De Wever is elected Dick of the Year by *Humo* magazine readers! Bart De Wever becomes even more popular according to new polls! The N-VA president continues to dominate the headlines, even when the federal government finally reaches an agreement on the 2012 budget. According to a recent poll, N-VA would get no less than 38% of the vote in new elections, more than the three traditional Flemish parties that are in the federal government – Christian-democrats, socialists and liberals – together.

"Two more opinion polls, and they should start worrying about the 5% electoral threshold," Bart De Wever (who else?) commented.

N-VA's success gets many politicians thinking, especially in parties that are not doing so well. As N-VA is eroding Vlaams Belang's electoral base, a good number of its members have decided to move on to De Wever's party.

It's no wonder that LDD members are also eager to get aboard. LDD, which until recently stood for Lijst Dedecker, is on the verge of disappearing. It was founded by senator Jean-Marie Dedecker, a former judo coach who was kicked out of Open VLD for being a bit too outspoken for comfort.

For some years, Dedecker was all over the media, playing on the same anti-establishment sentiments that N-VA does now. His party never lived up to expectations, though it did attract a number of intellectuals. One of those, former LDD president Lode Vereeck, was last week linked to N-VA, too – briefly.

Vereeck had hoped to join forces with N-VA in the upcoming local elections, of which his own LDD will not be a part. He ruined his chances by leaking an internal N-VA mail to the press, which proved Flemish finance minister Philippe Muyters guilty of lying to parliament and reduced the man to tears.

Vereeck, in spite of his obvious political talent, was not then welcome in N-VA. Moreover, Jean-Marie Dedecker himself, who offered his services to N-VA in some coastal towns, was also not taken up on his offer.

How bitter this must be for the former judo coach. At the height of his popularity, politicians from many other parties in decline offered their services to him. Now, he is the one looking for a lifeline. He even seems ready to throw in the towel, in the little media attention he still gets.

But did we mention that Bart De Wever lost more than 30 kilos?

The common good

The Human Cities Festival shows how urban spaces can change for the better

Emma Firmin

The steps of the Beurs on Anspachlaan provide a postcard-size metaphor for the contradictions of public space. A meeting point for tourists following a flag-waving guide; a recognisable landmark for a blind date; a focus for protest; a weather-permitting window to watch the world in fast and slow motion; a temporary home for the homeless; and, inevitably, a fluid location for criminals to slip into pockets and then into the crowds.

Coming and going from meeting Lise Coirier of Pro Materia, who is preparing to direct the second edition of the Human Cities Festival in Brussels, brings into focus how mixed the response to issues of public space is in the capital of Flanders and other cities, seemingly unsure how to balance vibrancy and fear, real or imagined.

From the oasis of blandness that is Brussels West station to the metal tree-lined platform of Flageyplein, metro and tram stations veer from bright and welcoming to vast subterranean caverns decorated in nicotine-stained hues. Elsewhere, on the Sint-Katelijneplein, the wine drinkers of the Nordzee fish shop stand almost side-by-side with the night-shop drinkers sprawled on the public benches. Such scenes illustrate Coirier's conviction that public space in the 21st century needs to be demystified and taboos engaged with, rather than moved somewhere out of sight.

At its heart, the biennial Human Cities is a celebration of our public spaces, an attempt at reconnecting citizens with their city through a series of inclusive events. Supported and funded within the framework



of the EU Culture Programme 2007-2013 and its local and European partners, Human Cities was conceived in 2006 by Coirier and Chantal Vanoeften of the Architecture Faculty at La Cambre-Horta. Since its initial outing in Brussels in 2010, it has taken place in Istanbul and in the pages of a joint publication, *Human Cities: Celebrating Public as a Common Good*.

Global mix

Bringing together a mix of international protagonists, the Human Cities programme of workshops, installations, exhibitions, talks, public screenings and urban walks is designed to be relevant to even the most temporary resident of Brussels, as individuals and collectively. While the celebratory mood remains and has been extended with a network of cultural players and partners such as

Cité du Design (France), Time Circus (Flanders), Prostorož (Slovenia) and Esterri (Italy), the world-view of public space has shifted in the intervening years.

Grand schemes might look good on paper, but the very real problems of alienation in the face of gentrification are now given an added economic and social toxicity. As such, this year's title, "Reclaiming Public Space", with its focus on bottom-up activities, reflects not only the closing of the public purse and a groundswell of creative activities that emphasise participation, but a recognition that adding something shiny, new and budget-busting to the urban landscape is not the only way to make people feel good about the city in which they live. For some, this will be the perfect place to go skateboarding, while for others it will be the sight of sunflowers growing unexpectedly in a corner of urban wasteland.

One contradiction Coirier sees is

that what passes on a managerial level as public space is in fact overwhelmingly in private hands. That means that even planned activities can have the life sucked out of them by a quagmire of fees, permits and general officialdom, to the point that she is provoked to say: "Sometimes it is better not to ask." Those public bodies that tax even official interventions, such as those organised by Human Cities to perform on their sites, thus reversing the logic of sponsorship, would do well to attend the interdisciplinary symposium at the Royal Library on the first two days of the festival.

Through analytical, methodological and operational approaches and the participation of urban planners, sociologists, anthropologists, architects, designers, historians, politicians and the public, a series of international case studies highlight issues that resonate in Brussels. You might not consider yourself a scientific or cultural player, but the symposium is a forum to share knowledge and experience and to reassess the role of the decision-maker – who is not necessarily a faceless suit but you and your neighbour.

Passion and pragmatism

For Coirier, Human Cities has moved beyond theory. Mapping, observing and qualitative assessment are crucial, but the event's passion is harnessed by a good dose of pragmatism. Festivals come and go, but when the ephemeral plays such a key role in the equation, it can be tricky to translate this to the important goal of lasting impact: Where does bottom-up meet trickle-down? Human Cities will be using the festival to test a toolkit that has been developed by the organising network. A kind of recipe book and DIY manual, it has been conceived as "a source of inspiration for the emergence of initiatives in civil society". Want to design an event in public space? "Yes you can" is the message.

15-31 MARCH

Human Cities

locations across Brussels

► www.humancities.eu

THE BEST OF HUMAN CITIES



Urban setting as pressure cooker: Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*

The Data Pavilion, 15-18 March, Kunstberg, city centre
A temporary structure designed by the multi-disciplinary art and performance collective Time Circus, the Pavilion will act as a workspace, information point and meeting place for those who want to find out more about the opportunities offered by public spaces. The structure also has an archive that can be accessed and updated by passers-by.

Desayuno con viandantes, 17 March 11.00-14.00, Flageyplein/La Cambre, Elsene

A communal start to the day for late risers. Bring your brunch and possibly something waterproof; good music and a friendly atmosphere are on the menu. More details on the Desayuno Facebook page.

The City from a Child's Eye View, Turtlewings, 165 Washingtonstraat, Elsene

Workshops for children of all ages, cultures, languages and economic backgrounds, this project organised aims to get Brussels' younger citizens to present their view of the city through drawing, photography, film and other creative activities.

Walks and tours

Whether on foot or with pedal power, find a route to suit on the Human Cities website. Marking Borders by Thomas Laureyssens (13.00, 17 March) will tour the Brussels commune of Elsene and other parts of the city looking out for all kinds of "borders", which participants mark in an effort to identify and visualise the real and perceived boundaries that intersect the streets of Brussels.

Film, Cinematek & Flagey

A number of public screenings relate to the theme of Human Cities, including one that looks at that most ubiquitous piece of urban furniture: the public bench. Other highlights include a retrospective of Spike Lee and films by Jim Jarmusch.

Human Cities Webdoc

This documentary by local architect and photographer Victor Lévy brings together the voices of citizens, associations and artists across Europe to recount their personal experience of projects in public space. Available on the festival's website.

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESSAutos
► Volvo

The Ghent assembly line of Volvo will launch production of the new V40 sedan in May. The company has already hired an additional 600 employees for the plant, which last year produced some 266,000 vehicles.

Banking
► Petercam

Brussels-based private banking and investment group Petercam has opened branches in Madrid and Frankfurt to develop its institutional customer base. Petercam already operates in Switzerland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Britain and the US.

Beverages
► Starbucks

US-based coffee bar group Starbucks will open two additional outlets in the coming weeks – one in Brussels North Station and one in Ghent's Sint-Pieters Station. This brings the total number of Starbucks shops in Brussels and Flanders to eight, including three at Brussels Airport.

Cinema
► Barco

The Kortrijk-based cinema and video equipment producer is to equip the 244 cinemas of the Swedish SF Bio group with digital projectors. Barco and the London-based Arts Alliance Media have also set up a €100 million leasing fund to help European cinema operators convert to digital technology.

Cycling
► BMC

The Swiss bicycle manufacturer and retailer has taken over its local distribution rights, established BMC Belgium and set up a flagship store in Nazareth, East Flanders, in a bid to boost its sales. The new facility will distribute the whole range of BMC cycles including mountain bikes and electricity-powered.

Oil
► BRC

The Antwerp-based BRC refinery, owned by the ailing Swiss Petroplus group, is expected to be taken over by the Russian-owned Gunvor oil brokerage company. The BRC plant has a production capacity of some 100,000 barrels a day and storage facilities of more than 1.2 million cubic metres.

Supermarkets
► Ahold

The Dutch supermarket group will increase the number of Albert Heijn supermarkets in Flanders from two to 10 by the end of this year, will develop its Bol.com on-line shopping site and will launch its AH to Go chain of convenience stores in city centres.

Shops shut in city centres

More consumers visiting shopping centres outside of cities

Alan Hope

The total floor space in Flanders made up of empty shopping units is growing at a fast pace, largely as a result of the growth in shopping centres and strip-malls outside of towns, according to a survey carried out by Unizo, the organisation representing the self-employed. The percentage of empty shops varies by province (see table) but is as high as 8% in both Antwerp and Limburg provinces.

Unizo describes the flight of shops from city centres as a "negative spiral": As the number of empty shops increases, customers are discouraged from visiting city centres, which puts the continued existence of surviving shops in jeopardy. At the same time, property prices and rental costs stay the same, making shops' survival even more difficult.

The timing of the survey, based on national figures from Dutch retail consultants Locatus, is not appearing now by coincidence. It comes during fierce opposition to the Uplace shopping and leisure complex planned for Machelen, just outside of Brussels.

Three weeks ago the air traffic control organisation Belgocontrol announced it considered the apartment tower of Uplace to be



a hazard to air traffic. Last week came the announcement that 16 local authorities signed a motion by Unizo opposing the planning permission granted to Uplace. The municipalities, such as Aarschot, Asse, Grimbergen, Leuven, Meise, Overijse and Tienen, fear for the effect the new centre will have on commercial life in their own localities.

Unizo also opposes two other planned shopping centres: NEO on the site of the existing Heizel complex, and Just Under the Sky in Brussels by the Van Praet bridge, both of which are at an earlier stage of applying for permits.

Unizo proposes a number of measures to combat the growth in empty shops, including a coherent and multi-aspect policy

plan to tackle all aspects of the redevelopment of town centres, involving questions of mobility, taxation, planning and marketing; the installation of neighbourhood managers representing local shop owners; and actions to stimulate local entrepreneurship.

Also from Locatus, Belgium's shopping streets show a remarkable lack of diversity, with all of the top ten retail presences either banks like BNP Paribas Fortis (first with 1,022 outlets) or financial advisors like Centea (653). Total filling stations come in at No. 11 (475), with Aldi Markt, the first proper shop, at No. 12 (439). Tom & Co pet shops come in at 50 (136) and Pizza Hut at 100 (76).

Province	2008	2012
Limburg	6.5	8.2
Antwerp	6.4	8.2
West Flanders	5.2	6.8
Brussels	4.8	5.9
Flemish Brabant	4.3	5.7
East Flanders	4.4	4.9

Source: Locatus

Windfall for InBev executives

Unions representing workers at the AB InBev headquarters in Leuven have reacted angrily to news that 40 top executives are to receive bonuses worth a total of €1.2 billion as a result of the company's restructuring following the takeover by InBev of Anheuser-Busch, makers of Budweiser. CEO Carlos Brito will receive a package of share options worth €135 million.

Part of the restructuring involved the loss of 280 jobs in Flanders. "They brought down costs by throwing people out on the street," said Alex Van Cauwenberg of the ACV union. "Obviously we don't accept this."

Steven Marchand of the socialist ABVV union, meanwhile, pointed out that a worker earning €2,000 a month would need to work for 5,625 years to make Brito's bonus. "In the meantime they

carry on pretending we all have to tighten our belts and work longer."

He and another 39 company executives were identified as crucial to the success of turning InBev into the world's largest brewing company. The 40 names were listed in 2008 when the takeover of Anheuser took place, and the options made conditional on a reduction of the company's debt, which has been achieved a year early. The option allows them to buy shares at a price of just over €10, and resell them at the market price of over €50.

Former prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene, now an independent director of the company, will be able to cash in his options in April, worth around €4 million. Other executives will only be able to exercise theirs in 2014 and 2019.

Building innovation awards

The Confederatie Bouw (Construction Federation) has awarded its annual Building Innovation Award to two companies involved in micro cogeneration – Van de Walle Bouwgroep and installer De Jaeger, both based in Aalter, East Flanders.

Cogeneration, also known as combined heat and power (CHP), is an established technique for producing heat from the generation of electricity. The two companies take the technique one step further, to micro-CHP, which involves more compact installations for the storage of the heat produced. Normally, heat is stored in water, but the two companies have jointly developed the means of storing heat in paraffin for better efficiency.

The technique is in use in the four-star Sandton Grand Hotel Reylof in Ghent, a renovated 18th century building with insufficient room to house a conventional CHP unit. "This is a perfect example of how companies in the construction sector can work together in an innovative manner to look for the most sustainable and effective solutions," Federation chairman Christophe Maes said.

Q&A



Xavier Baeten of Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School carried out a study on corporate remuneration in four countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and France

What was the most striking conclusion regarding companies in Belgium?

The concentration of share ownership – how much share ownership is concentrated in a few hands. Of the four countries, shareholder concentration was the highest in Belgium, and that applies also to Flanders. What we saw is that higher shareholder concentration is associated with lower CEO pay levels.

Your study also showed that factors such as age, gender

and nationality of members of remuneration committees played little role?

The composition of the committee has almost no impact on CEO pay, with one exception: the presence of executive managers of other companies on the committee. Apparently this provides the CEO with more power to influence his own remuneration package. That's an element that should be taken into account – don't have too many senior executives of other firms on the remuneration committee.

Are there measures the government could take to regulate executive pay?

In Belgium, all quoted companies have to have a remuneration committee by law, which is not the case in other countries. But I don't think it's always positive. Committees pay more attention to market comparisons, which can cause an upward effect.

► www.tinyurl.com/xavierbaeten

What the weatherman says

VRT's Frank Deboosere talks snowstorms and climate change at next Speakers' Corner

Alan Hope



If there's one thing certain about living in Flanders, it's the uncertainty of the weather. Last Monday, the region ground to a halt when a snowfall caused 300 kilometres of tailbacks during the morning rush-hour.

The place to ask questions about the local weather will be De Bosuil community centre in Overijse on 20 March during the next Speakers' Corner, talks simultaneously translated into English, French and German, sponsored by de Rand. The guest is Frank Deboosere (pictured), who last week celebrated 25 years as a weatherman for the VRT.

You're in a heap of trouble, you know. The weather forecasters are being blamed for not predicting the snowfall last week

Frank Deboosere: As a matter

of fact, it was sleet, and it wasn't snowing everywhere. I saw newspapers saying half of Flanders was covered with a thick blanket. I didn't see a thick blanket of snow anywhere in Belgium. What the media didn't say was that there was a lot of water involved. The problem is that snow is much more sexy, so to speak, than water. The car accidents were caused by the sleet. There was not one accident where deaths were involved, whereas I've learned that a child of 20 months drowned because of flooding. That concerns me much more than a long queue of cars. We did warn that there was a lot of precipitation on the way, but the form of precipitation is always very difficult to predict.

Weather forecasts used to be folk wisdom. Now forecasters have the benefit of supercomputers and satellites. Are you victims of your own success?

People expect a lot more and don't forgive as easily as they used to 20 years ago. We do make mistakes. Well, not mistakes exactly; we have computer models, and we follow those models, and sometimes they're not correct, that's true. But we have the same percentage

of accuracy now in our five-day forecasts as we used to have looking three days in advance. So we are better than we used to be, but there's still a long way to go.

Some weather events are very difficult to predict; it's what we call "nowcasting". You can only predict that a few minutes or perhaps one or two hours in advance, and even then you can't say whether it's that church that will be demolished or whether the storm will pass 100 metres to the left of the church. That will always be impossible.

You are also concerned about climate change, I hear.

Apart from giving a general overview of meteorology, in my talk I will give some tips on what you can do to make things better, like not taking the car. I ride my bicycle to work, and that's a fantastic thing to do: It saves you money, it's good for your health, and it's good for nature. I live in Wetteren, 22 kilometres from my work, so it's quite a way, but it's very nice to do. Things like, for example, going on holiday in your own country. People go to Spain and other countries much more than they used to, then they complain about global climate change. Well, don't just complain, do something about it.

Speakers' Corner is free, but advance registration is required at welkom@derand.be or 02.568.01.78

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Nanotherapy is a cheaper treatment than chemotherapy in battling cancer and causes fewer side-effects. That is the conclusion of a doctoral study by Rita Bosetti, trade engineer at the University of Hasselt. Nanotherapy uses the same medication as chemo, but the medication is put in a tiny robot, which detects the cells that need treatment. Because fewer healthy cells are affected, the patient experiences fewer side-effects.

The Flemish Robotic Surgery Institute Orsi has performed **robotic surgery on a llama**, a world first. Honey, a female llama, had her incontinence problems cured. Orsi, a cooperation between the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Ghent University and the OLV Hospital in Aalst, is a forum of experts that gives training in robot surgery.

► www.olvroboticteachingcenter.be

AZ Sint-Maarten hospital in Mechelen has developed an injection that **cures people with contractures in their fingers**. Annually, about 3,600 people in Flanders have surgery against this condition, known as Dupuytren's disease. Surgery now costs on average €900, with an all-day stay in the hospital. The revolutionary new treatment takes only a few minutes.

Technopolis, the hands-on science and technology museum in Mechelen, has taught **parents how to deal with their children's internet behaviour** during an information evening called Safe Online. Parents were encouraged to accept that children will spend time playing games, chatting and looking up information. Technopolis helps parents to support their children on the web by creating a safe chat profile and showing them how to use webcams and social networking sites.

The Flemish Parliament has adopted a resolution to help provide **Flemish families abroad with Dutch-language education**. A growing number of Flemings work abroad, and it is difficult to find Dutch-language education for their children – currently around 3,500 pupils. Concrete information in Flanders is hard to come by, so the parliament is proposing more cooperation with Dutch educational organisations that are offering such services.

Female lecturers and professors **make up 23% of the total at Flemish universities**. The University of Hasselt had the highest number, with 25.7%, while Ghent University has only 20.1%. "That is a great concern to me," said UGent rector Paul Van Cauwenbergh. "It is disappointing to see how slow the progress is because it's a waste of talent." All universities in Flanders have made progress compared to five years ago. AF

A new image for science and technology

The government of Flanders has developed an action plan to make scientific and technical studies more attractive to young people. The government, educational institutions and business enterprises are combining their efforts to deal with the shortage of scientists and technicians in the region.

Flanders has many internationally renowned knowledge institutions and high-tech firms, but this is not persuading enough Flemish youth to choose a scientific or technical study path. In 2011, the Flemish employment and training agency VDAB had 30% more vacancies for engineers than in 2010, but there are not nearly enough graduates to fill these places.

Only half the students studying maths or science in general education progress to higher

education in science, technology, maths or engineering (so-called STEM studies). Furthermore, girls are heavily under-represented in these areas.

The STEM action plan hopes to solve this mismatch between supply and demand in the labour market. Lesson materials should be more relevant and interesting, schools must cooperate more with businesses and knowledge institutions – for example, through internships – and top talents should be better supported. The plan also includes TV and radio promotion to reach as large an audience as possible. Technopolis, the hands-on science and technology museum in Mechelen, will establish a platform by September to coordinate concrete actions. Andy Furniere



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Peter Paul Rubens

Self-portrait © Rubens House, Antwerp



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Match of the day

Meet the coal miners who would become Belgium's number one football team at GoalMine

Denzil Walton

I've visited and reported on many museums for *Flanders Today*, from cheese to tobacco, lace to glass, the Romans to draft horses. But I have to admit that few of them have been as much fun to visit as the GoalMine museum in Genk.

Of course, to get the most out of a football museum, it helps if you're interested in football. But even those with only a passing interest in the beautiful game could spend an hour in GoalMine and come out smiling.

Naturally, a focus of GoalMine is the history and achievements of current Belgian champions Racing Genk, who, in their short history, have won both the Belgian Pro League and the Belgian Cup three times.

Your GoalMine experience starts by reliving these famous wins with a short movie in the small cinema. Here you can sit back, soak up the atmosphere and experience the supporters' joy as they celebrate these triumphs. The video culminates with the goal by substitute Kennedy Nwanga in Racing Genk's 1-1 draw against Standard Liège last May, which sealed the championship.

From clothes locker to museum case

Leaving the cinema, you pass into a more traditional museum room with glass cases holding mementoes of the past: ancient steel-capped boots, ivory referee whistles, shin guards made of real bone. Everywhere you look are faded black-and-white photos of stern-looking, moustachioed, long-shorted footballers, far removed from today's ballerina-like superstars. And, of course, there is no comparison because these monochrome photos are not of professional footballers but professional coal miners, who only laced their boots and donned their kits on Saturday afternoons for fun. Every coal mine in Limburg had its own football team: there were seven



It shoots, it scores ... GoalMine's mix of hands-on history and interactive games are a winning combination

in the area at the peak of the Flemish coal mining industry. The two most successful - KFC Winterslag and Waterschei Thor - merged in 1988 to form Racing Genk.

The glass museum cases were originally the cabinets in the changing rooms of the mines where the miners kept their clothes after changing into their work gear. Then it's time to jog down the players' tunnel, with the sounds of adoring fans rising until you step out on to a small pitch. Behind one goal is a video screen with another 10-minute movie on the big stories surrounding football, such as Maradona and his cocaine habit, and the ups and downs involved in that most precarious occupation, the football manager.

The physiotherapy room is next, where you can touch selected body

parts of a (dummy!) footballer and watch eye-watering video clips of how injuries to these parts of the body can occur during a game. You can also get comprehensive medical information on particular injuries. Haven't you always wanted to know where David Beckham's anterior cruciate ligament is, how it tore and why the recovery period was so long?

From bladders to the Camp Nou

The fun continues with a speed quiz on the rules of football, and you can take a picture of yourself dressed up as a crazy Racing Genk supporter and see it on the website when you get home. Then you can follow the history of football, from its earliest beginnings involving an

inflated pig's bladder, through to the appearance of goal-line technology, and a display about the largest football stadiums in the world.

It's also fascinating to discover how many personnel are involved during a big match at Racing Genk's stadium, the Cristal Arena. These include 120 policemen, 540 cooks, waiters and bar staff, 35 Red Cross workers and 31 toilet ladies. Four thousand snacks will be consumed, to be washed down by 12,500 litres of beer.

Finally, there is a penalty competition involving a video screen of Logan Bailly, Racing Genk's current goalkeeper, standing between the goalposts, and an illuminated disc on the ground. You step up, kick through the disc as if it were a football and watch the goalie save it - or not. You even

get a slow-motion action replay. It's surprisingly addictive.

The final neat touch about GoalMine is proudly displayed in the entrance lobby: the 2010-11 Jupiler Pro League Trophy, with Racing Genk's name engraved on it. At the recent Champions League match against Chelsea, visiting supporters couldn't believe this was the actual cup presented to the Racing Genk team. They were convinced it was a copy. (It isn't). So you can touch it, be photographed with it, even kiss it if you like that sort of thing. I didn't go that far, but I was tempted to go back and try one more time at the penalty game.

► www.goalmine.be

STREEKPRODUCT SERIES

Alan Hope

Apple and pear syrup



In the days before canning and refrigeration, there were two main ways to preserve that part of the year's fruit crop that exceeded the immediate demand for fresh fruit: jam and syrup.

Since deep in the past, apple syrup has been produced in the Haspengouw region, the fruit-basket of Flanders that includes part of Limburg and of Flemish Brabant. While some varieties of apple can be laid away in a dark place to keep for a relatively long time, others cannot, and they would be cooked down until the fruit mass was no more than a thick, dark syrup, high in sugar. After the pulp was removed to

be used as a high-energy animal feed, the liquid part would be concentrated further by cooking, until the result was the product that has come down to us. Americans, particularly in the south, know this as apple butter (though it has no dairy content). Pears were added later, to increase the sugar content further. For every 100kg of fruit, about 10kg of syrup is produced.

The Bleus syrup factory in Borgloon, near Tongeren, was the 2007 winner of the Monument Competition, organised by TV channel Canvas and voted on by viewers. They've been producing apple and pear syrup there for six generations, and their product is

one of the two to be awarded the Flemish Region's seal of approval as a genuine streekproduct, or regional product.

Bleus apple syrup contains apples and pears in a 60-40 ratio and is available in pots of up to 4.5kg. Pear syrup reverses the ratio, and there's also a range of other fruit syrups (cherry, quince and redcurrant, among others).

Apple syrup is sweet, certainly, but with a rich, dark depth and fruitiness that raises it above other sweet spreads; imagine the difference between ordinary wine vinegar and good balsamic. For those of us who aren't too drawn to sweet sandwiches, another

traditional use is as an addition to savoury dishes like *stoofvlees* (beef stew), where it brings an extra dimension to a slow-cooked dish. The *streekproduct* website provides a few recipes.

Apple and pear syrups are also produced by Vrolingen in Wellen, between Borgloon and Hasselt, where the factory dates back to 1843. Their pear syrup contains 90% pears, and there's also a pouring syrup made from pears alone, for pancakes, say, or as an ice-cream topping.

► www.streekproduct.be

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Walking lunch

Flemish and internationals get to know the capital, thanks to Broodje Brussel

Katrien Lindemans

How do you usually spend your lunch break? In the office canteen, in front of your computer with a sandwich, running some errands? Did you know that in Brussels, you could be visiting a museum, watching a concert or joining a guided walk instead?

There's no better time to take advantage of the activities of Broodje Brussel (Sandwich Brussels) than now. The lunchtime event organiser has added a list of English-language activities to its programme.

Broodje Brussel launched in 2004, the brainchild of Onthaal en Promotie Brussel (Reception and Promotion Brussels). "We wanted commuters from Flanders to see a different side of Brussels, via all sorts of activities during their lunch breaks," explains project leader Katrien Braeckman.

The organisation teams up with museums and other cultural venues in the city to compose a list of about 60 activities per month. They all take place on weekdays from September to June, mainly between 12.30 and 13.30. Some are free, while others require a contribution (€8 maximum).

How about some classical music, courtesy of students at the Brussels Conservatory (23 March) or a guided walk through the Sint-Jacobs area (March 28)? All activities are easily accessible via public transport, meaning you waste as little time as possible. Activities that are spoken are usually in Dutch, but since last month, the programme also features a smattering of English-language activities, aimed at the international community in the city. "To find a way in or out of the so-called expat bubble, we'd like non-Dutch speakers to join our events, too," says Braeckman. "During the English spoken activities, commuters and expats

can meet each other and see the international side of the city."

To plan your BB agenda, grab the monthly programme at Brussels North or Central Station, or have a look online. Most of the activities don't require reservations. Last year, more than 3,100 people joined one of the 550 activities..

"We noticed that guided tours through the city and in museums were the most popular," says Braeckman, suggesting that the Flemish priority is to discover the layout and larger institutions of Brussels. "There are a few people who take part in nearly

all activities, and throughout the season we see that these people really get to know each other. And even though our target group is commuters from Flanders, occasionally events are shared with schools from Flanders or pensioners. Everybody can join in." And how about lunch? Despite its name, the Broodje Brussel activities don't come with sandwiches. "People are more than welcome to eat during any of the activities," says Braeckman, "and we do have a few culinary events on the agenda that come with a bite to eat." All activities take about an hour, but there's no need to feel guilty if you need to slip out early to get back to work; it happens all the time



A recent tour of the Solvay Library in Brussels

NEXT UP AT BROODJE BRUSSEL



Mini-concert with **Vincent&Jules** at De Loketten in the Flemish Parliament. The indie-pop band (*pictured*) took their name from the movie *Pulp Fiction* 27 March, 12.15-12.45, IJzerenkuilstraat 99 (free)

Guided tour in English of **Bozar's exhibition of the work of Per Kirkeby**, one of the key painters of the Danish avant-garde. The activity is organised in the context of the Danish presidency of the European Union, in collaboration with the Danish Cultural Institute.

17 April, 12.30-13.00, Ravensteinstraat 23 (€8). Reservations required on 0800.13.700

Guided tour in English of the **What the Helsinki? exhibition** at contemporary design shop La Fabrika. Owner Kelly Claessens and the Cultural Finnish Institute visited the workshops of several young designers in Helsinki and brought back objects that define "Finnishness" at its best.

16 May, 12.30-13.30, Dansaertstraat 182 (free). Reservations required on 0800.13.700

► www.broodjebrussel.be

Spanish style, at a price

Luxury furniture brand Baltus opens a retail outlet in Antwerp

Catherine Kosters

A new design hotspot has just opened its doors in Antwerp – in the trendy 't Zuid neighbourhood, naturally. Luxury furniture brand Baltus is headquartered in Marbella, Spain, but chose the Flemish fashion city as the location for its newest flagship store.

The showroom in Verlatstraat is only one of a handful around the globe. To be included in a list alongside Cannes, Saint Petersburg, Miami, Los Angeles and Chicago seems quite the honour, but Antwerp is of course a capital of style. 't Zuid in particular has an affinity with design, art and the avant-garde, three things that comprise the DNA of Baltus.

The store is 380 square metres of sideboards, cupboards, armchairs,

tables, sofas and more, all in the distinctive minimalist Baltus design. The collection is made in Spain, where the natural way of life of the Andalusia region serves as a constant inspiration. Clean and contemporary, Baltus offers sleek finishes, often in lacquer, which complement ample proportions and strong materials to give the furniture an elegant but modern look.

Although the company is proud of its Spanish heritage, the furniture styles make reference to at least five



continents. There is the B. Detroit sofa in shiny sheet metal right out of the Motor City, the Pompeya dining table in a dark sand-blasted oak, and the Shangay coffee table, topped with ultra-clear glass. Another inspiration is art: Doric

architecture, Picasso and Verdi are all checked in name and spirit. The pieces have dimensions that fit their dignified names and need sufficiently roomy spaces, so it's no wonder that Baltus can be found in fancy hotel lobbies and spacious villas.

The furniture is made to measure, so clients can select materials, sizes and shapes to suit their needs and tastes. In the Benelux, Baltus works with Femont Galván Designers for its bespoke services and project development, and this international design team was the driving force behind the opening of the new showroom.

According to Paul Templeman-Holmes, director of brand development and business, "each

piece reflects elements of artistic design and intelligence. They represent in equal measure beauty, practicality and luxury."

Of course, all of this comes at a price. Baltus furniture is manufactured with "spectacular habitats" in mind, and the amount you pay for a coffee table at the Antwerp store is spectacular, too, at about €7,000. Sofas ring up between €9,000 and €20,000.

But if you love design and have the cash to back it up, then Baltus will turn your place into an apartment right out of an interior magazine spread. Especially if your place is one of the spacious lofts in 't Zuid.

► www.baltuscollection.com

The underworld and other places

Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven mixes women, science and sleaze

Ian Mundell

Flemish artist Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven draws on a wide range of sources, but she has a particular fondness for re-claiming images of women from the sleazier end of mass media. Her latest work features pages from a 1950s American scandal sheet with the pungent headline: "Meet the Clip Joint Broads". Underneath runs a story exposing a prostitution racket, accompanied by teasing pictures of the women involved.

As soon as she saw the magazine, the Antwerp-based artist knew she could work with it. But she had to wait for the right moment. "It's being lying there for 10 or 12 years," she tells me. "Sometimes you have an idea immediately, but I liked these so much that I couldn't use them right away."

When she was offered a large solo exhibition in Chicago, a city synonymous with gangsters, she felt the moment had come. "The images have an intimate connection with the underworld, and it was tantalising for me to do that. Maybe it was a bit confrontational as well."

Using a computer, she blew up the magazine pages, drenched them in colour, brought in other visual elements and printed the resulting digital collages on large sheets of plastic. This final step is intentionally dismissive. "They are just prints on PVC, which is very cheap. It's like tabloid art."

The result is a series of 16 images called *Mastering the Horizon*. Together with other new work produced for the Chicago exhibition, they are currently on show at MuZee in Ostend.

This new context is not entirely inappropriate. "There's also an underworld in Ostend," explains Van Kerckhoven, "and a connection with evil, with satanism and with Ensor," she says, referring to James Ensor's famous paintings of carnival masks and other grotesques.

The Chicago exhibition was more than just a chance to use a long-cherished clipping. Van Kerckhoven, 61, was given complete freedom to develop new work for the show over a period



of several years. Such chances are few and far between. "As an older artist, you don't often have the opportunity to be completely free and to do things that are not at all commercial," she explains. "And I love to experiment."

Since the early 1980s, Van Kerckhoven has been a prolific producer of drawings, collages and paintings, as well as an early adopter of digital image techniques. She has also made video and performance art and is a founding member of industrial noise group Club Moral.

Her appropriation of images from vintage and contemporary soft pornography gives her work a strong feminist flavour. Still, "I don't see these women from a feminist point of view," she writes in the MuZee catalogue. "Not as victims. They have a more defiant power over men. What they look like and how they behave; that's what inspires me."

Van Kerckhoven, like many other contemporary Flemish artists, also explores the intersection of science and art. The series *Nonzero/Pastime* builds on a text about anti-matter in which scientific terms have been systematically replaced with art terms.

Citations from this text on the "anti-Sade" are combined with digitally treated images from 1950s glamour magazines and, again, printed out on large sheets of PVC.

In *Divine Proportions (Determinism, Occult)*, a series of smaller collages

and drawings, the heads of models cut from a fashion magazine are replaced with the moons of Saturn and Jupiter and augmented with scientific diagrams. A more literary Saturn features in the series *In a Saturnian World*, which uses lines from Paul Verlaine's poems in which the planet is seen as malevolent, yet a source of wisdom.

Evil also comes into the series *Sisyphus, Happy*, which draws on a book about the demonic aspects of contemporary fiction. Again there are recurrent images of spheres, suggesting both the planets and the rock that Sisyphus was condemned to roll eternally uphill. These are combined with pictures torn roughly from fashion magazines and partially painted.

Two of the most striking pieces in the exhibition are monolithic enlargements from the *Sisyphus, Happy* series, which bring you face to face with detail in the images and the texture of the collage. This ability to look closely at images is something Van Kerckhoven values in digital techniques. "You can get a microscopic, an obscene view of something that is not normally meant to be seen by the eye."

The Ostend exhibition contains a dizzying number of ideas, but the connections that emerge are intriguing. This is exactly what Van Kerckhoven had in mind. "Over the three years I developed these different images as characters in a story and not as works in a show," she explains. "That's very important; but of course these things don't happen on a very conscious level. I didn't know what would happen with these ingredients, but this is the result."

UNTIL 27 MAY

Mistress of the Horizon

MuZee, Romestraat 11, Ostend

► www.muzee.be

Freedom fighters

The Afrika Film Festival brings little-seen works to Leuven

Bjorn Gabriels

Director Guido Huysmans prides himself on bringing an alternative view of the often-maligned continent to Leuven's annual Afrika Film Festival. Along with presenting African films and artists, the festival also welcomes western productions that focus on Africa-related subjects. By selecting a wide range of films, often scarcely screened in Belgium or even anywhere else in Europe, the annual fest stresses that a varied set of cultural products all-too-frequently flies under the radar of western media.

The opening film this year is *The First Grader* by English helmer Justin Chadwick (*The Other Boleyn*

Girl). Set in Kenya, it tells the story of an 84-year-old former freedom fighter who exercises the right to free public education for all and joins an overcrowded class of children learning to read. The film's composer Alex Heffes won the Discovery of the Year award last year at the World Soundtrack Awards in Ghent.

16-31 MARCH
Across Leuven

Also on the menu are works by two young filmmakers who give sexuality a prominent place, although through greatly differing approaches. With his sultry thriller *Viva Riva!*, about a fuel thief in Kinshasa, Djo Munga is said to have put Congolese cinema on the map. South African Oliver Hermanus deals with the repression of homosexuality in his second

feature *Skoonheid (Beauty)*, which won him the Queer Palm in Cannes last year.

The festival also screens short films, such as the 2010 Oscar-nominated *Na Wewe* by Belgian director Ivan Goldschmidt, and documentaries. Belgian filmmaker Thierry Michel, who specialises in African issues in works such as *Congo River*, presents his most recent, *L'Affaire Chebeya, crime d'état?* (The Chebeya Case: A State Crime?). Along with the African Artists Awards, the fest also hosts a fashion show, concerts and debates.

► www.afrikafilmfestival.be

The Flemish connection
Some of the most remarkable

Flemish films of late (besides a certain *Rundskop* you might have heard about) are related to Africa. Gust Van den Berghe set his Maurice Maeterlinck adaptation *Blue Bird* in Togo; Nicolas Provost's *The Invader* revolves around an African immigrant in Brussels, and Lotte Stoops shot her multi-layered documentary *Grande Hotel* in Mozambique. They are among the guests to discuss the bond between Flemish cinema and Africa on 30 March at Museum M.

The film festival will also pay tribute to Dieudonné Kabongo, the Belgian-Congolese actor who died last October.

Too many roads

We've been waiting 14 years, but De Held has finally finished his first album

Christophe Verbiest



© Yu Chen & Jo Jacobs

Fourteen years ago, Jo Jacobs set himself a goal. "For the first time in my life," he admits. The then 27-year-old musician from Hasselt wanted to write, in 12 months, 10 songs in Dutch. "I succeeded, though I cheated a bit: Some of them had no words." The future looked bright, and Jacobs got some gigs.

Next, he needed a stage name. "A friend of mine made a flyer on which she called me De Held ("the hero"). I thought she was exaggerating, but the only alternative I had was De Eenmanszaak ("the sole proprietor"). Admittedly, not as catchy as De Held, so I decided to keep that. I never got round to changing it."

Jacobs (pictured) did get around

to contacting Wouter Van Belle, one of Flanders' top producers. But he wasn't happy with the result of their collaboration. "I was sounding contorted; it wasn't the real me," he explains. He doesn't blame Van Belle. "It took me years to realise what the problem was: I had too many possibilities. Wouter has a huge studio, and I was lost there."

Later, Jacobs tried once more to record his songs but again wasn't satisfied. "By then I was extremely fixated on my early demo recordings. I was trying to recreate the atmosphere I thought was present in them, but to no avail." By then another idea was camping out in the back of Jacobs' brain, too: "It's all the fault of my guitar."

The quest for the perfect guitar

"I bought and resold different guitars, but I was never quite happy with them," muses Jacobs. "I was unemployed by then and enrolled in a training programme for guitar construction. I built five guitars, but none of them satisfied me. I was desperate."

In the end, he recorded his debut album *De Held* with a guitar he's been playing for 20 years. And he's satisfied.

The catalyst was producer Gaëtan Vandewoude, frontman of Flemish band Isbells (who have just released a new album themselves, see below). "One of the first things he said when we started working was: 'It's not about the guitar you play. I nearly had a heart attack. He was right, in end."

What he meant was: It's not about the guitar, but about the songs, and the ones Jacobs presents on *De Held* are all little gems; musically and lyrically understated, they get under your skin. His lyrics are rarely cheerful, but his sweet melodies prevent the ditties from becoming too melancholy.

It's not easy for Jacobs to put his finger on what changed in the ensuing 14 years, but he points to one of Vandewoude's strengths. "He never went along with my doubts and always stayed calm. It made me trust him fully, which is quite exceptional for me. It's very difficult for me to give people my confidence." So at 40, some things seem to have changed in Jacobs' life. For the better.

Cinema chain Kinepolis this month launches **Musical in the Cinema**, a series of screenings of high-definition digital recordings of Broadway musicals, direct from New York. The series joins Kinepolis' ongoing Opera in the Cinema, Ballet in the Cinema and Theater in the Cinema programmes. Unlike those, however, the Broadway productions are not beamed in live via satellite but are rather recordings of current productions. The first of the monthly shows, on 16 March, is *Jekyll and Hyde*, which will screen in Kinepolis cinemas in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent.

► www.kinepolis.be/musical

The Staatliche Kunsthalle in the southern German city of Baden-Baden is hosting a **site-specific installation** by Jan De Cock in which the young Flemish artist literally changes the landscape of the white rooms of the museum, turning them into splintered units, with no beginning and no end. Each unit is linked to moments in the life of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, suggesting the persistent romantic yearning for an idealised by-gone era. De Cock has previously staged solo shows in London's Tate Modern and New York's MoMA.

► www.kunsthalle-baden-baden.de

Flemish beer brewer Palm has launched the **UrbanCrafts** **tv website** for young people to discover new technologies, gadgets and apps. New videos will be posted three times a week, in which the host Leesa will demonstrate new or innovative tech-related tools from her studio or in the field with special guests. The programmes can also be found on Telenet's digital channel 44.

► www.urbanCrafts.tv

18 MARCH 19.30

Chambre d'Amis

Terbeek 91, Sint-Truiden

► www.deheld.be

NEW MUSIC

Isbells

Stoalin' • Zeal

Three years ago, Gaëtan Vandewoude, a veteran of the Leuven independent music scene, wouldn't in his wildest dreams have imagined that the first album of his new band Isbells would become a gold record. But it did, and deservedly so. Isbells' second CD, *Stoalin'* – a made-up word – is a continuation of their mesmerising folk pop, with Vandewoude's angelic voice at its heart. Alternately subdued in a melancholy way and cheerfully catchy, it's a varied album with 10 excellent songs. Music for all seasons and every moment of the day. Releases on 26 March

► www.myspace.com/isbellsband

Underworld release their second album, *I'm under the House, I'm Dying*. The Antwerp foursome still mix mean guitars, thunderous drums and primal screams into sordid, guttural songs that draw on noisy rock, proto-grunge and heavy metal. But when they drop the pace, in the haunting "Martian's Cave", they sound even more dangerous. All in all, not an album for delicate ears.

► www.thehickeyunderworld.com

Zita Swoon Group

Wait for Me • Crammed

A bluesy guitar and an African thumb piano intertwine in the first bars of the opening track of *Wait for Me*, and it's clear that, this time around, Zita Swoon Group will take the listener on a very special musical trip. The band of *Antwerpenaar* Stef Kamil Carlens (or SKC, as he's known to his friends) teams up with musicians from Burkina Faso (Awa Démé and Mamadou Diabaté Kibi). It's a marriage made in heaven: warm-blooded songs that are at once typically SKC and respectfully African. What's more, they're

played with loads of gusto.

► www.zitaswoongroup.be

Sioen

Sioen • Kabron

"I'm gonna shuffle your feet / I'm gonna make you believe / That there's a devil in me / I'm gonna dance you / To a bad, bad world" In the first verses of the opening track "Bad Bad World", Ghent piano man and singer (Frederik) Sioen maps out his plans with his fifth album. The songs are more up-tempo than before; they're radiant, and they sparkle – contemporary pop music aimed uncompromisingly at the mainstream. There are also some beautiful ballads in "Make It Real" and "Please Hold Me in Your Arms". All in all, Sioen is not a complete makeover, but it's still a bold change of direction.

► www.sioen.net

The Hickey Underworld

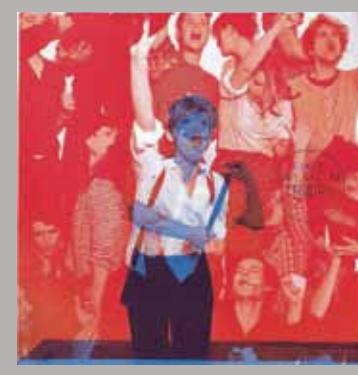
I'm under the House,

I'm Dying • PIAS

On the eve of the final of Humo's Rock Rally, the World Cup of Flanders' music competitions, former laureate The Hickey

sound magician of Einstürzende Neubauten. But her songs are much more melodic and open-minded than those of Germany's most famous experimental rock band. Van der Aa is a multi-instrumentalist – she played almost everything herself – but her claim to fame is the violin. Though it seldom sounds like your average violin, since Van der Aa uses loads of effects to alter its sound. I was sure I heard an electric guitar in some of the songs, but there's none on the album. A highly impressive debut!

► www.liesavanderaa.be



Liesa Van der Aa

Troops • Louisa's Daughter

Flemish singer Liesa Van der Aa went to Berlin to record her first album *Troops* (pictured) with Boris Wilsdorf, the

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Cinema chain Kinepolis this month launches **Musical in the Cinema**, a series of screenings of high-definition digital recordings of Broadway musicals, direct from New York. The series joins Kinepolis' ongoing Opera in the Cinema, Ballet in the Cinema and Theater in the Cinema programmes. Unlike those, however, the Broadway productions are not beamed in live via satellite but are rather recordings of current productions. The first of the monthly shows, on 16 March, is *Jekyll and Hyde*, which will screen in Kinepolis cinemas in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent.

► www.kinepolis.be/musical

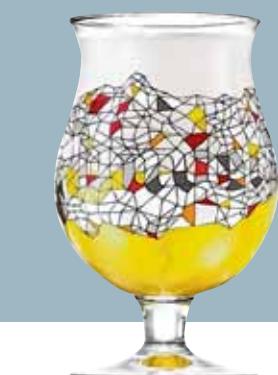
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► www.urbanCrafts.tv

Brussels illustrator Philippe Debognie has won the first-ever **Duvel Collection competition**. Flemish brewer Duvel Moortgat put out a call for entries to decorate a Duvel beer glass and received 850 responses from countries selected to participate: the UK, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. Members of the public voted for their favourite designs, and then a jury whittled down to three the top 20 winners from each country. Debognie's design (pictured) was announced the winner in a ceremony in Paris earlier this month. The glass will be in retail outlets beginning in June.



Culture clash or stroke of genius? The Fall

PM Doutreligne

Isaw The Fall in 2010 at the Sinner's Day festival in Hasselt. I thought they were one of the few bands who still sounded contemporary. It was an overwhelming concert; loud, extreme and particularly infectious. Therefore, I am intrigued to see them in the intimate setting of the Bourla.

So says Zita Swoon's Stef Kamil Carlens, the man responsible for bringing the British band to Antwerp for the first time since 2006. Like fellow *Antwerpenaar* Admiral Freebee last year, Carlens has been "entrusted" with the city's prestigious Bourla theatre for a week and put in charge of programming – an exercise similar to the annual Meltdown festival, held at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London.

The Hasselt concert in question, it must be said, was a prime slice of Fall-style contrariness. Appearing at a festival comprising mostly forgotten heroes of yesteryear (Marky Ramone, Nina Hagen), they rehashed their old hits, playing a ferociously hostile set drawn largely from the latest album and ending with a longer-than-is-strictly-

necessary version of the New York Dolls' "Jet Boy".

But then again, Mark E Smith, The Fall's founder, tone-deaf singer and commander-in-chief for over 35 years, has always eschewed convention. Starting out as a punk band (albeit a rather bizarre one), The Fall have, over 30 albums, embraced 1960s garage, krautrock, country & western, rockabilly and even techno. After 10 years of quirky, impenetrable records (which nonetheless gained them a cult following), the band came alarmingly close to chart success in the late '80s, with the catchy "Hit The North" and polished covers of R Dean Taylor's "Ghost In My House" and The Kinks' "Victoria".

Around the same period, improbably for a Mancunian school drop-out and former dock worker, Smith also wrote and directed a play (about the sudden death of Pope John Paul I) and provided the music and libretto for a ballet (about William of Orange).

It would be unfair, however, to dwell on the past. As Carlens aptly puts it: The Fall have the ability to still sound fresh and relevant after all this time.

The new album, *Ersatz GB*, features the exact same personnel for the third album running – a first since the early '90s. Much has been made of The Fall's "staff turnover" and in particular of Smith's dislike of musicians.

But the truth is, the current line-up

is hands-down the most exciting in the band's history. Guitarist Pete Greenway is even back from paternity leave, re-joining drummer Keiron Melling, bassist Dave Spurr and keyboardist Eleni Poulou, who also happens to be Smith's wife. How long they will all stay in the

band is uncertain. It's Smith's party, and he'll hire/fire who he wants to. What is certain, though, is that Antwerp is in for a treat – a gloriously noisy, unpredictable, nonconformist treat.



24 March, 20.00 | Bourlaschouwburg, Komedieplaats 18, Antwerp | ► www.toneelhuis.be

FOOD & DRINK

RestoDays

Does a three-course meal in a Michelin-starred restaurant for €36 sound like a dream come true? For nine days, it's a reality. This fifth edition of RestoDays offers the unique opportunity to dine at 350 restaurants across the country, 35 of which boast Michelin stars, at very affordable prices. Most of the restaurants are serving three-course lunches at €21 and dinners at €28. The participating Michelin-starred restaurants offer a Discovery Menu for €36 (lunch) and €43 (dinner). All you have to do is reserve a table via the website, but do it quickly because the best addresses get fully booked fast. Some list their RestoDays menu on the site, including this tempting one from Eyckerhof, a rustic farmstead with one Michelin star in Bornem: North Sea crab with tomatoes, green asparagus, goose liver and mustard grains, followed by rack of lamb with Cévennes onions, turnips, potatoes and a spring roll, plus coffee with ice cream, sponge cake or crème brûlée. **Robin Boyle**



16-24 March | Across Brussels and Flanders

► www.restodays.be

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Brussels

Horeca Life: Eighth edition of the European trade show for the restaurant, catering and hotel industries, and the main professional food event on the Brusselicious 2012 programme

MAR 18-21 at Brussels Expo

► www.horecalife.be

Poperinge

Hop Shoot Festival: Tourism Poperinge offers a programme of activities in celebration of hop shoot season, including meals at eight top restaurants that incorporate the "white gold" into their menus

Until APR 15 at Tourism Poperinge, Grote Markt 1, and across West Flanders

► www.hopscheutene.be

PHOTOGRAPHY

Stanley Kubrick, photographer

You know him as one of the leading filmmakers of the 20th century, but Stanley Kubrick was also a first-rate photographer. Before directing a long list of American classics (*Lolita*, *Dr Strangelove*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*...), the young Kubrick took on a photojournalist position with New York's *Look* magazine. His photographs already reflect a cinematographic viewpoint, a portrait of post-Second World War America that is chaotic and fraught with social and racial tension. But there are scenes of beauty, too, as in his snaps of circus performers, Broadway actresses and prizefighters. Even at the age of 17, Kubrick had a knack for creating visual intrigue. **RB**



© Betsy von Fürstenberg, 1950,
Courtesy Museum of the City of New York, Look Magazine Archive

21 March to 1 July | Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels

► www.fine-arts-museum.be

MORE PHOTOGRAPHY THIS WEEK

Bruges

Iedereen is van ergens (Everyone is From Somewhere): Portraits of 25 authors, poets and other writers born in West Flanders, from the book by Jooris Van Hulle, with photos by Nele Van Canneyt

Until MAY 27 at Bruggemuseum-Gezelie, Rolweg 64

► www.museabrugge.be

Meise

Dieren en planten uit een koud paradijs (Animals and Plants from a Cold Paradise): Photos of fauna and flora from the South Pole by Dr Bart Van de Vijver, researcher at Meise's National Botanic Garden and expert on life in the region, particularly the island of Livingston. On 18 March is a reading by Van de Vijver, including additional images from his research

Until APR 22 at the National Botanic Garden, Nieuwelaan 38

► www.plantentuinmeise.be

FAIR

Accessible Art Fair

"The Accessible Art Fairs have a very simple goal: to bring visitors the best selection of contemporary art from all over the world in a casual, friendly atmosphere," says founder and Brussels-based Canadian Stephanie Manasseh. The concept – a varied selection of original paintings, photographs and sculptures by local and international artists under one roof – is already a proven success in Brussels, Vienna and Tel Aviv. Now it's Antwerp's turn and, as always, entrance is free. So first-time buyers, collectors and just the curious: Come and admire the works, talk with the artists and buy a piece should you be so inspired. A percentage of the sales from this edition will go to the Pink Ribbon charity in their efforts in the fight against breast cancer. **RB**



March 16-18 | Radisson Blu Park Lane Hotel, Antwerp

► www.accessibleartfair.com

MORE FAIRS THIS WEEK

Ghent

Sefer: Interior design, garden, recreation and swimming pool fair

MAR 17-19 & 23-25 at Flanders Expo, Maaltekouter 1
► www.sefer.be

Heverlee (Leuven)

Ideal Wonen: House and garden fair with a focus on ecological solutions

MAR 17-25 at Brabanthal, Brabantlaan 1
► www.idealwonen.be

Sint-Niklaas

Foire du Vin: Flanders' biggest wine fair, featuring more than 300 varieties

MAR 16-18 at 't Bau-huis, Slachthuisstraat 60
► www.foireduvin.be

FILM

Courtisane Festival 2012

Fans of experimental cinema will want to be in Ghent next week for this annual festival that showcases the latest in film and media art. The Artists in Focus bring a selection of their own works and sources of inspiration, everything from screenings and installations to presentations and performances. Opening night (21 March at Vooruit) features the premiere performance of *Aberration of Light: Dark Chamber Disclosure* by Americans Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder, two of the most exciting artists currently working in the field of expanded cinema. Their hypnotic light sculptures come to life to an enchanting score by sound artist Olivia Block.

Other highlights include screenings of works by French filmmaker Philippe Grandrieux, who made a name for himself in the art house circuit with *Sombre* (1998) and *La Vie Nouvelle* (2002). Some of his documentaries and video will be shown in Flanders for the first time. Pictured is a film still from *A Spell To Ward Off the Darkness* by Ben Rivers (UK) and Ben Russell (US), two Courtisane favourites who will be at this year's event with their latest feature film project, new video installation and a series of screenings. Finally, one for cinephile parents: The festival presents a programme of films suitable for children ages two to eight, a free initiation to experimental film, not to mention a fun way to spend a Sunday morning. **RB**



21-25 March | Across Ghent | ► www.courtisane.be

MORE FILM THIS WEEK

Bruges

Cinema Novo: Annual world film festival, this year focusing on the cinema and social issues of India
Until MAR 18 20.00 at Ciné Liberty, Kuipersstraat 23

► www.cinemanoovo.be

Leuven

Afrika Film Festival: Annual festival of African cinema, with special guests, a fashion show and awards ceremony
MAR 16-31 across Leuven, with special screenings in other cities

► www.afrikafilmfestival.be

Cinema Leuven: Exhibition of Leuven's cinematic past featuring nearly 3,000 film posters from the period 1932 to 1968, plus film clips and stories from locals

Until MAR 31 at OPEK, Vaartkom 4

► www.opek.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Diana Goodwin

Tante Julia

Sint-Maartenplein 10, Hasselt

Tante Julia makes me wish I had an Aunt Julia whose house was as cosy and inviting as this popular café on the outskirts of Hasselt. Since I don't actually have an Aunt Julia, I simply join the many others who frequent this beautifully restored, traditional brasserie.

Situated near several bike routes in the center of Stevoort, Tante Julia is a popular stop-off for cyclists. Recently, a group of three men wearing identical cycling togs sat together at the bar on a Friday afternoon. In warm weather (which is no doubt right around the corner), the roomy outdoor terrace doubles the seating capacity of the café and is regularly packed. Besides cyclists and locals, the place attracts tourists from all over Flanders and abroad who come to the area for the fruit orchards and countryside.

The picture of a plain, middle-aged woman on the cover of the menu represents a real person, Julia Bex, who owned a grocery store on the same premises for 40 years. The building stood vacant for years before owner Vinod Dederan opened Herberg bij Tante Julia (Pub at Tante Julia's) in 2004, after extensive renovations. The shop floor is now occupied by rustic wooden tables, while Julia's former house, once separated from the store by an adjoining wall, now serves as dining rooms.

A large, curving, wooden bar dominates the main room. Beers on tap include Grimbergen blonde, Ciney brown and La Chouffe. Order a "Juliak" and you'll get a dark Ciney served in a petit Tante Julia glass. The "beer of the month" for March is Affligem blonde. Bottled beer offerings feature several Trappists, as well as abbey beers.

The kitchen specialises in classic Flemish fare like *stoofvlees*



met *frietjes* and *gehaktballetjes in tomatensaus*. The specials, written on a gilt-framed chalkboard on the wall, include turkey with a dark Westmalle sauce and a pork rib roast with mustard sauce and carrot stoemp. Service is fast and friendly. The décor is best described as "Flemish nostalgic" and features old photographs of the town, some of which were discovered during renovations in the home of Julia's brother, who was a photographer.

An old iron-and-enamel stove squats next to the wall, and other antiques are scattered about. A metal rack holds yellowed papers from 1958. The overall effect is homey rather than kitschy.

Just like the home of the Aunt Julia you wish you had.

► www.tantejulia.be

BITE

Walkin'Thai ★★★★

After travelling around Southeast Asia for several months, Brussels native Matthieu Damman came home to find that he really missed street food. "In Brussels, you can find plenty of places to eat a quick hamburger or fries," he explains. "But once you've gotten used to the diversity of flavours that they have in, for example, Thailand, everything else tastes pretty bland."

That is when, in January, he opened his own Thai fast-food restaurant near Flagey. Walkin'Thai is, like the slogan says, "fast, fresh and easy". But it leaves out one important word: delish.

And you don't literally have to eat on the street because Damman has transformed what was once an old, run-down café into this bright and cheerful dining space. It's filled with colourful books on visiting Thailand, be it for nature or food (or both), inspiring reads for people waiting for their take-away order.

My friend and I start out with dim sum (4 pcs at €5). I pick up one of the little steamy dumplings between my chopsticks, dip it in the soy sauce and bite into a juicy shrimp-filled centre. We're happy with our choice, which is one of many starter options, from fresh vegetable spring rolls and Thai beef satays to chicken soup with coconut milk and lemongrass and the Thai salad of the day.

My friend orders pad thai (€7.50), the specialty of the house and one of Thailand's national dishes. Heaps of flat rice noodles come served in a deep bowl garnished with fresh coriander leaves, a lemon wedge and a sprinkling of crushed peanuts. The noodles are stir-fried together with

crisp, nutty soybean sprouts, super tender chunks of chicken, bits of fried egg and a most delectably sweet tamarind-peanut sauce. She adds some heat to the dish with sriracha, a tangy, spicy sauce made from garlic and chilli peppers.

Meanwhile I'm lifting my bowl to my face in order to slurp the last drops from my dish of the day (€8.50) – Thai street noodle soup with chicken. This very simple-sounding dish packs a whole lot of subtle flavours together. Bean sprouts, Chinese cabbage and chicken mingle with rice noodles in a light broth with hints of both sweet and savoury. A few drops of chilli-infused oyster sauce add salty and spicy to the mix to make it complete.

We relieve our fiery palates with two Thai Chang beers, a straightforward and refreshing pale lager. We then pay the measly €28 bill, exit the building with bellies content and resolve to come back again, the sooner the better.

© www.jenniferjansons.com



► www.walkinthai.be

📍 Lesbroussartstraat 38, Brussels; 02.647.99.73

🕒 Tues-Sat, 11.30-14.30 & 18.00-22.30; Sun, 18.00-22.30

💶 Mains: €5-€10

ⓘ New eatery specialising in pad thai and other authentic dishes prepared by Thai chefs, just steps from Flagey

TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels

Spring has sprung

While I am writing this, I am sitting on my balcony, a cold beer by my feet. It is Sunday – half a week past my deadline, to the anguish of this newspaper's editor – sometime between the late afternoon and the early evening.

The sun is on its way down like it does this time of year, still too low to be visible from behind the houses to the left of me, but high enough to flush my face and to pop up from behind when it settles right at the end of the street.

Het is lente, it is spring. Or in any case, it is in the air.

Officially in Flanders, like in other parts of the Northern Hemisphere, it only really starts next week, on 20 March early in the morning, when the tilt of the earth is neither inclined away from nor towards the sun.

On that day, the equinox, night and day are of equal length everywhere on earth. From then on, days in the north are longer than nights; those in the south are shorter. Until in late September, when things turn around again. Hence the Dutch name for the season of longer days. *Lente* (pronounced "lent-uh") comes from *lang*, long. In fact, until the late Middle Ages, the English used to say "Lent". Christians may still do so to refer to the 40 days running up to Easter as a time of penitence and fasting.

Today, most people say "spring", but I wonder how many of them know that this word also has its roots in the Dutch language. The



Dutch *springen* means to jump, or to leap. From that, it is not a very long etymological voyage to something like to sprout or to begin, like the plants and the flowers do around this time. "Spring chicken" is still used to refer to a young, not yet fully-fledged chicken (or human, though usually to refer to what you are *not*).

Similarly, in many languages, spring has something to do with being early in the year. In Dutch, *voorjaar* is a commonly used alternative. *Voor* for before, or early, and *jaar* for year. It never ceases to amaze me how

closely related the two languages are – something a quick look at the other seasons confirms. Summer in Dutch is *zomer*. Not too far off, I'd say. (I'd be interested, by the way, in learning about the origins of this word; I haven't been able to find it.) And winter, in Dutch, is exactly the same.

The only real difference, at first glance, is autumn: *herfst*. But at second glance, you'll see that it comes from the word harvest, which is what they do across the fields of Flanders that time of year.

The last word...

Quality of mercy

"The jury has given you a second chance. It's now up to you to make the most of it."

A court in Leuven last weekend gave Sanne Smets, 24, a suspended sentence of five years for killing her newborn baby

Aiming high

"I was too timid, too careful, too slow. I was angry at myself for letting it go so far. And it seems that when I get angry, it works."

Flemish high jumper Tia Hellebaut narrowly missed qualifying for the world championships, jumping 1m92 on her third attempt

De minimis non curat lex

"A society has the right to lay down rules about matters that the great majority of its citizens consider fundamental, but it does have to be about really important thing."

Dirk Collier of Janssen Pharmaceutica considers the headscarf debate too trivial for a law

Lost for words

"It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it."

Federal pensions minister Vincent Van Quickenborne resorts to English to lament his problems

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Flanders is on the cutting edge of stem cell research, further proved by a paper from Ghent University on the origins of embryonic stem cells, published in this month's *Nature Biotechnology*. We talk to the author of that paper and other scientists in Flanders to see what they're working on and the moral questions around stem cell research

News

We take a trip with Visionair Brussel, a unique tour in the capital by the group Citizenne that points out the amazing things ordinary residents do every day to improve their neighbourhoods

Living

Would you like to buy a hat like no other you've ever seen? Christophe Coppens is the man to visit: with a new showroom in Brussels, a new book of photos of his life and work and the opening of his first retail space outside of Belgium, this Flemish hat and accessories designer is the man of the hour

Robyn Boyle