

## Becoming a Citizenne

A Brussels centre brings us together

► 5



## Deme best employer

A double win for dredger this week

► 7



## So long, Cis

Beursschouwburg leader hands over reins

► 12



# Saying goodbye



FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Roeline Ham

In a day and age when companies spend millions on consultants to come up with new names, it's a delight to encounter one business whose mission statement is, as we say in English, exactly what it says on the tin. Boobs-'n-Burps in Dilbeek was started by Roeline Ham in 2010; a month later came another in Antwerp. The inspiration is American: In 2003 Ham followed her husband to New York, intending not to work. Instead she took a job at a place called Upper Breast Side, where she rented out breast pumps to nursing mothers who wanted to go back to work but continue breastfeeding. The store, opened by a former officer of the NYPD, also sells clothing and accessories, as well as providing space for mothers to feed their babies in the city, away from what are often disapproving eyes. She returned to Flanders two years later, and saw that the provision for breastfeeding was practically non-existent. "The idea grew to put my career aside and choose the wild life. There is a demand and a need for a breastfeeding store," she writes on her website. "So moms can find all they need to complete their breastfeeding journey, preferably with lots of laughs

and fun." The shop's name was thought up by her brother Otto-Jan, a Studio Brussel DJ. The success of the two shops in Flanders led last week to Ham's enterprise being chosen as the most promising start-up in the Women in Enterprise and Development (Womed) Awards, organised by Unizo, the organisation for the self-employed, and the women's business network markant. The jury praised Ham for her "innovation and determination to start her own business", as well as her "woman-friendly policy and social commitment". The start-up prize was awarded this year for the first time. "I'd had enough of the stuffy image that hangs around breastfeeding," she told *De Standaard*. "There's a lot of attention paid to the medical aspect of breastfeeding, but very little to the woman's experience. We want to make breastfeeding cool." The other Womed prize given out last week, for woman entrepreneur of the year, went to Daniëlle Vanwesenbeeck, who started her direct-mailing business eight years ago and now employs 15 people, with a turnover of €2.8 million last year.

News in brief

The government of Flanders was reported to be considering **buying the Dexia Tower** on the Rogierplein in central Brussels from the bank, now known as Belfius. A new building would allow government offices across the city to move to a central location. The tower is one of three office blocks owned by the bank in Brussels and could raise €225 million.

**Brussels is the third-richest region** in the European Union, according to EU statistics office Eurostat, coming behind the City of London and the duchy of Luxembourg. The provinces of Antwerp, East and West Flanders and Flemish Brabant were revealed to have GDP higher than the EU average. Limburg is below average.

The University of Ghent is the **best company for sport** in Flanders, according to the Flemish League for Sport in Business, which last week handed out its annual award to the institution for the wide variety of activities it provides for its employees, as well as their performance in inter-company sport competitions. The university sent 50 members of staff to last summer's European Company Sport Games in Hamburg and came home with 14 medals.

An 84-year-old woman was in critical condition after a **fire in a rest home** in Ghent last week that started after electrical cables overheated. The home was evacuated, and 16 of the 75 residents were taken to hospital suffering from smoke inhalation.

The popular TV quiz ***De slimste mens ter wereld*** will return this

autumn with a new hook: The show will feature members of the general public alongside the traditional famous personalities. Despite the move from the VRT to commercial channel VT4, the quiz will continue to be hosted by film director Erik Van Looy, with comedian Philippe Geubels as a regular jury member.

Brussels-Capital Region mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels is due this week to launch a new system of **motorcycle taxis in Brussels**, following the example of Madrid, Paris and Barcelona. Seven companies will take part in a pilot project involving 13 of the new two-wheeled taxis.

Protestors from the **Field Liberation Movement** who took part in an action last year that destroyed part of a field of experimental genetically modified potatoes in East Flanders are to appear in court in May. The 11 protestors face charges of assault, theft, criminal damage and conspiracy. Ten police officers and four activists were injured in clashes.

Finish steel producer Ruukki has chosen Antwerp as its European distribution hub, making Antwerp the **most important port for steel** in Europe, according to city alderman Marc Van Peel. The port's steel traffic has increased nearly 30% in the last year.

Some of the **30,000 litres of kerosene** that leaked last week from an installation at the Antwerp Terminal & Processing Company went into the river, despite the efforts of the fire service and civil defence. However the port authority

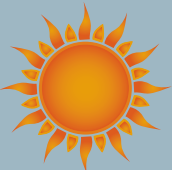
said the leak did not pose a threat to the environment or public health. Shipping traffic was held up for an hour during the clean-up.

Flemish author Yves Petry has won the **Inktaap 2012**, an annual prize awarded to a Dutch-language book by a youth jury. Petry's book *De maagd Marino* (Marino the Virgin) is loosely based on the true story of the German Armin Meiwes, who murdered and ate the flesh of a man he met via the internet. The book won last year's Libris Literature Prize, which leads to an automatic nomination for the Inktaap. The other nominees were *Congo: een geschiedenis* (Congo: A History) by David Reybroeck and *De schilder en het meisje* (The Painter and the Girl) by Margriet de Moor.

Television actor and presenter **Peter Van Asbroeck has been fined €4,125**, given a suspended sentence of three months and banned from driving for five months for his part in an accident in Wilrijk, Antwerp province, in 2010, in which a cyclist was killed. Van Asbroeck, who is the familiar voice of the TV show *Komen eten*, admitted to driving at 90 km/h in a 70 zone and running a red light.

Summer Time

This weekend begins Summer Time; clocks go ahead one hour at 2.00 on Sunday, 25 March.



FLANDERS TODAY

Flanders Today, a free weekly English-language newspaper, is an initiative of the Flemish Region and is financially supported by the Flemish authorities.



The logo and the name Flanders Today belong to the Flemish Region (Benelux Beeldmerk nr 815.088). The editorial team of Flanders Today has full editorial autonomy regarding the content of the newspaper and is responsible for all content, as stipulated in the agreement between Corelio Publishing and the Flemish authorities.

**EDITOR** Lisa Bradshaw  
**DEPUTY EDITOR** Sally Tipper  
**NEWS EDITOR** Alan Hope  
**AGENDA EDITOR** Robyn Boyle  
**ART DIRECTOR** Paul Van Dooren  
**PREPRESS** Corelio AdPro  
**CONTRIBUTORS** Daan Bauwens, Rebecca Benoot, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz, Sabine Clappaert, Courtney Davis, Katy Desmond, Nicholas Hirst, Stéphanie Duval, Andy Furniere, Anna Jenkinson, Catherine Kosters, Katrien Lindemans, Marc Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Tom Peeters, Marcel Schoeters, Christophe Verbiest, Denzil Walton  
**GENERAL MANAGER** Joske Plas  
**PUBLISHER** Corelio Publishing NV

**EDITORIAL ADDRESS**  
Gossetlaan 30 - 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden  
tel. 02 373 99 09 - fax 02 375 98 22  
editorial@flanderstoday.eu

**FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS**  
subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu  
or sign up online at [www.flanderstoday.eu](http://www.flanderstoday.eu)

**ADVERTISING**  
Evelyne Fregonese  
02 373 83 57  
advertising@flanderstoday.eu

**VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER**  
Joske Plas

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Strictly for some birds

Back in 2010, Offside warned the rose-ringed parakeet population of Brussels that unless they curtailed their growth in numbers, action would be taken. Well, it appears they paid no attention, because last week the Brussels regional government announced it was making plans to combat the species, up to and possibly including euthanasia.

The parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) in the capital are all descendants of 40 or so of the birds that escaped from Melipark when it closed in 1974 to make way for what is now Bruparck. Abundant food and a lack of predators saw their numbers rise to between 3,500 and 5,000 pairs, according to nature conservancy organisation Leefmilieu Brussel. At that time, they were short of posing a threat to native species, but that has changed, and now the Brussels government is going to



start a campaign warning people of the dangers of feeding the birds, which, though colourful, are pests for gardeners and growers. And if that doesn't do the trick, the only solution is either to sterilise them or to kill them. The decision has not been taken whether to proceed to extreme prejudice, but the threat hangs, unlike a parakeet, heavy in the air. Down the road in Aalst, on the other hand, birds are being

welcomed with open arms. In June last year we reported that 15 pairs of house sparrows nesting in the gables of an empty building were holding up demolition work to make way for a new station. This week, Offside is pleased to report that the bird protection organisation Vogelbescherming Vlaanderen (VV) has provided five spacious nesting boxes for the sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), with plenty of room for all, close to amenities. They'll hang on the front of the *frituur* in front of the station, thanks to the owner who sprang into the breach when attaching them to the station itself proved impossible. The house sparrow is a protected species in Belgium. Numbers have fallen by 30% over the last 40 years, VV said.



# Saying goodbye

Remembrance ceremonies take place this week for schoolchildren who died in the bus accident in Switzerland

Alan Hope

On Wednesday, 21 March, a remembrance ceremony takes place in Lommel, Limburg province, for the 15 children from 't Stekske primary school who died in the bus crash in Switzerland last week. Thursday sees the same for the seven children from the Sint-Lambertus school in Heverlee, a district of Leuven. Both ceremonies will be attended by the king and queen as well as Prince Willem-Alexander and Princess Maxima of the Netherlands. The two bus drivers involved in the crash, 35-year-old Geert Michiels and 52-year-old Paul Van de Velde, both from Aarschot, were buried earlier this week in private family ceremonies. Teacher Raymond Theunis and administrator Veerle Vanheukelom from Lommel and teacher Frank Van Kerckhove and ski instructor Monique Van Bocxlaere from Heverlee, will also be buried in private. The exact cause of the bus crash on the evening of Tuesday, 13 March, that killed 28 people, including 22 children, remains unclear. At around 21.15, a coach from Flanders carrying sixth-grade schoolchildren (11 to 12 years old), four members of staff and two drivers was involved in a single-vehicle accident in a tunnel on the A9 in Sierre in the Swiss canton of Valais. Twenty-two children and all six adults on board were killed. Twenty-four children were injured, some of them seriously. At 8.15 the next morning, Belgian prime minister Elio Di Rupo made his first statement, later flying to Switzerland having arranged military transport for the parents of the victims. He was accompanied by Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters and other ministers. Before leaving, the parents were met at Melsbroek air base by the king and



The Swiss people created a memorial around the tunnel in Sierre

queen. The majority of the fatalities involved children from the school in Lommel, who were seated at the front of the bus, including nine children of Dutch nationality who attended school in the border municipality. Six Dutch children were among the 15 from the class who died. The government declared a national day of mourning for Friday, and a moment of silence was called for 11.00, honoured across Belgium. The same day, the remains of the dead were repatriated by military aircraft to Belgium.

## Cause of crash yet unknown

The bus crashed into the wall in front of a turn-out area inside the tunnel. The cause of the crash is still unconfirmed. A report that the driver had taken his eye off the road to insert a DVD for the children was dismissed by Olivier Elsig, the prosecutor for the Vallais. However some of the surviving children have now said they noticed the DVD screens coming on just before the impact. A team of investigators was due to travel to Flanders this week to interview witnesses. The schools were taking part in

*sneeuwklassen*, or ski-trips, a tradition for children of the sixth year. The bus carrying the children from Lommel and Heverlee was one of three travelling back to Flanders that evening. As they returned, another party of around 150 children was arriving in Switzerland, the last of the season for St Luc, said Marina Claes, director of the association that organises trips for Flemish schools. There's still one party due to leave for another resort in Switzerland, and two for resorts in France. Is the association contemplating any changes in light of the accident? "Of course there are questions and some hesitation on the part of some parents, and at this moment I can say that there have been several individual cases of parents cancelling for their children," she said. "I think it's clear in this case that it was an accident, and I don't see what measures we could introduce to exclude that sort of thing in future."



Everyone carried a white balloon at the school sites during the moment of silence last Friday



The bus after the single-vehicle, head-on crash

## MOVING ON FROM HERE

### Flanders pools its resources to support families, friends and colleagues of the victims

For the whole school communities in the municipalities of Lommel and Heverlee, Flemish education minister Pascal Smet has sent in its own services and will make more available if required. **The Centre for Student Support and Counselling** "is working in the two schools, and there will be extra resources in the schools until the end of the year," a spokesperson said. *Klasse voor leraren*, a monthly magazine for teachers in Flanders, has published a brochure to explain to teachers how to deal with grieving children. "If the death affects the whole school, then it's important that the school as a whole deals with the children, not only the classmates of the deceased or the pupils of the deceased teacher," it reads. "Make contact with schools in the neighbourhood. Friends of the deceased pupil there might also be experiencing difficulties. The result of a successful grieving process is not forgetting. Something of the sorrow will follow throughout

a whole life. But pupils can learn to feel good again." Erik Van Vaerenbergh, chairman of the volunteer organisation **Missingyou.be, which counsels grieving children**, says that "the first and most important thing is to allow those kids space to express their emotions. To give an example, these children can get really angry at the injustice; it's not fair what happened. If they're not able to express that anger, it can become a problem later. Each person grieves in his or her own way: Some need to talk, while others absolutely don't want to talk; they want to be left in peace. So each child has to be approached as an individual. It needs time; there's no other way to go about it." "Parents need to be given the room to take as much time as they need to say goodbye to their child in their own way," says Christine Langouche, director of the **organisation**

**OVOK, for parents who have lost a child.** "Sometimes I hear parents saying, 'if only I'd kept a lock of my child's hair'. Sometimes we advise them to bury a favourite toy with the dead child, but be sure to keep another favourite items within the family to help later on. These are all small details at the time but are very important later on." Brothers and sisters, continues Langouche, "are often forgotten. They often don't talk much because they see mum and dad so sad that they don't want to add to it. During the grieving process, you're just so intensely focussed on the dead child that sometimes months later the surviving siblings come forward to say, 'we're here, too.'" Grandparents, she says, are also often forgotten. "They often had very close ties to the child who is gone," says Langouche, "so it's essential that their loss is recognised because they're not only seeing their own son or daughter grieving, they also have to work through the loss of their own grandchild. So they have two matters to take care of."



# Peeters pledges support for Aung San Suu Kyi

## Minister-president has “respect and admiration” for democracy campaigner

Alan Hope

Democracy campaigner Aung San Suu Kyi has been invited to take part in a peace symposium in November next year, organised as part of the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War, Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters announced last week, following a meeting with the Myanmar politician.

Suu Kyi also asked Flanders to help with the building of a school in Myanmar. “Flanders is an international leader in the fields of health care and education,” said Peeters. “I asked her about the needs and priorities of Myanmar in those areas, and ... she asked if Flanders would give support to the construction of a school. I told her I would look into it.”

Peeters returned to Myanmar to meet Suu Kyi after leaving the country for a trade mission in Vietnam. The Flemish delegation, including a number of business leaders, had spent three days in Myanmar earlier in the week, without being able to meet the opposition party leader.

In talks with government representatives, Peeters stressed the need for continued movements towards democracy and human rights in Myanmar, of which an open election in April for 48

parliamentary seats is a major step. “During her decades-long struggle, Aung San Suu Kyi never allowed her belief in democracy, human rights and basic freedoms to falter,” Peeters said. “The only reaction to such dedication is one of deep respect and huge admiration. The elections in April will be the first important test for the young democracy in Myanmar and the fragile, delicate process of democratisation.”

The week before, Peeters had made it clear that commercial ties between Myanmar and Flanders were dependent on progress in the field of human rights. Myanmar is still a largely rural economy and has suffered in recent years from economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations. The Flemish delegation was told that modernisation of the country's agriculture was a priority of the military government.

“Flanders has a great deal ... to offer in the field of agriculture,” Peeters said. “The agricultural technology sector was strongly represented in the delegation of businesses and researchers. Together with Flanders Investment and Trade, we will examine how the contacts made last week can be made concrete to respond to the needs of the people of Myanmar.”

Peeters had an hour-long discussion



Kris Peeters meets with Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar

with the Nobel Peace Prize winner, who has spent nearly 15 of the last 20 years under house arrest, and informed her that she would this year be awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Leuven.

### Good bye, Vietnam

Peeters' decision to leave the royal mission to Vietnam to return to Myanmar for his meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi led to some criticism among business people on the economic mission, as well as the Brussels-Capital Region's economy minister Benoît Cerexhe. Peeters in turn called into question the value

of such massive royal missions, where Prince Filip and Princess Mathilde lead a group of business and political representatives from Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels.

Peeters pointed to his recent trip to Libya as an example of how his government views such economic visits. “We organise specific missions with a clear focus, since I am convinced we need to find new ways of working,” he said. “Two or three hundred people, that's not straightforward. I accept that [the missions] have some added value, but personally I find missions with a clear focus more efficient.”

## Mosque arsonist faces terrorist charges

A man who set fire to a mosque in the Brussels' commune of Anderlecht last week, which led to the death of the mosque's imam, has been charged with terrorism. The man reportedly told an investigating magistrate that his motives for the attack were political.

The Rida mosque in Anderlecht is attended by adherents of the minority Shiite branch of Islam, blamed by the suspect – who has not been named – for the current situation in Syria.

Last Sunday, more than 2,000 Muslims from a number of Arab countries joined in a march of remembrance for the imam, 46-year-old Abdullah Dahdouh, from the Rida mosque to the Justice Palace in Brussels. Kamal M'Rabet, a spokesman for the mosque, said the march was a joint initiative between Sunni and Shiites. Shiites account for about 5% of the Muslims in Belgium.

The suspect, said to be a man of Moroccan origin in his 30s, was originally charged with arson, with religious motives. After the case was taken on by



© Christophe Legasse / BELGA

the federal prosecutor's off, he was also ordered to be detained on charges of terrorism.

The attack took place on a Monday evening, when the Rida mosque was crowded. The congregation was able to escape, but imam Dahdouh was overcome by smoke as he tackled the fire. The suspect, who was also carrying a knife and an axe, was apprehended by members of the congregation and held until police arrived.

## Charge of murder in Laken attack

An Algerian man who drove his car into a police escort waiting outside the royal palace in Laken last week is being held on charges of attempted murder. Eight police officers were injured in the attack. As *Flanders Today* went to press, two officers were still in hospital, where they were briefly visited by the king and queen.

The incident took place during the late morning of 13 March, as the escort was waiting to accompany Qatar's ambassador to Belgium on his return from a visit to the palace to present his credentials to the king – a ritual observed by all diplomats to Belgium. The suspect's car approached at high speed and rammed into the escort. The driver was slightly injured and appeared confused, as police on the scene arrested him. He later said he had intended to take his own life in the attack. His motives, however, are not clear. The investigating magistrate in the case has ordered a psychiatric evaluation.

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

## The benefits of leadership

According to a recent opinion poll, N-VA is by far the most popular party in Flanders, attracting one in every three voters. Hey – didn't I write this same thing last week?

We did, but poll after poll brings us the same results. This new poll, by VRT/De Standaard, did contain one surprise, though: The most popular politician is not N-VA president Bart De Wever, but CD&V's Kris Peeters, minister-president of the Flemish government.

De Wever has dominated Flemish politics for some years now. His party, in opposition on the federal level, is a formidable force, so much so that pushing N-VA back is the federal government's common goal, according to prime minister Elio Di Rupo. De Wever is admired – some people treat him like a pop star – and even his weight loss is news to the papers.

So what happened?

In spite of his popularity, De Wever, is a polarising figure. He is disliked as much as he is liked – enough to make him come second in polls like this one.

De Wever's natural opponent would be the prime minister. The first French-speaking prime minister in decades is greeted with enthusiasm wherever he appears in Flanders, but he still remains a bit of a cartoon character, hard to identify with. Moreover, in spite of obvious efforts, Dutch is still very much a foreign language to him. None of this matters, of course, as he cannot run for elections in Flanders anyway.

So that leaves Peeters, the Flemish government leader. As minister-president, he is (officially) not part of the endless power struggle at the federal level, making him less controversial. His government has taken some tough decisions recently, such as raising the retirement age for teachers. Apparently, the Flemish appreciate this demonstration of leadership, the unions even calling off the strike they had announced.

Peeters works hard at his popularity, too. He is there when he needs to be there – whether it is in Switzerland or at the sick bed of a popular cyclo-cross racer. He shakes hands with Nobel Prize winners Desmond Tutu and Aung San Suu Kyi. And he also has, as one admirer put it in *De Standaard*, “eyes to fall in love with”. Unfortunately for his party, however, Peeters' personal status is not helping them much, for N-VA remains by far the most popular party in Flanders. Did I write that before?

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

20.2

degrees on the warmest 15 March in Flanders since records began in 1833, according to the Royal Meteorological Institute last week

€15,000

for each of the six police zones in Brussels for equipment and training to set up bicycle patrols, the Brussels regional government has decided

29%

of the 68 species of butterfly native to Flanders are extinct here, the Institute for Nature and Woodland Research has said. The main causes are loss of habitat and the use of pesticides. Four species have disappeared since the last Red List was published in 1996

€250

a year in royalties claimed by the authors' rights society Sabam from a library in Dilbeek, which organises story-reading sessions for children. Sabam claims this is a public performance of an author's work

€3,500

per worker at Audi Brussels as a bonus following record profits announced last week. The bonus will be paid in September



# Brussels' university of life

## Citizenne creates a playground for adults in the capital

Andy Furniere

**B**russelaars of foreign origin can discover Flanders and explore hidden corners of its capital city, thanks to Citizenne, one of 13 Vormingplus social-cultural education centres in Flanders. Its priority is the empowerment of people, but it also brings together people of different cultural backgrounds. Using the creativity of artists, Citizenne shows inhabitants a more playful side of Brussels. Flanders' Vormingplus centres were created in 2004 to get people more involved in the social and cultural lives of their cities and regions. In Brussels, a fitting name posed the first challenge. "Vormingplus would not attract the multilingual population of this cosmopolitan city," explains Cathelyne Van Overstraeten, Citizenne's communication manager. "Citizenne emphasises the city life and mentions the Zenne River but also clarifies that we put citizens – people – first." While the other centres reach an average Flemish public, Citizenne provides less educated Brusselaars with interactive and accessible education. Fees are kept low, and the centre teams up with organisations such as the basic education centre Brusselleer and Brussels' welcome office for people of foreign origin. Citizenne teaches communication and organisational skills to people who want to get involved and volunteer in the socio-cultural sector. Courses, debates and workshops empower the capital's inhabitants to take their destiny in their own hands. "We always start from the competences people have," Van Overstraeten explains. To tackle the problem of unemployment, for instance,



Professionals and volunteers from socio-cultural organisations take part in a day of workshops through Citizenne

Citizenne gives participants training in assertiveness and how to apply for a job. The centre only offers non-formal education. Citizenne's team reacts to the demands of the city's inhabitants. Years ago, women of foreign origin who were involved in the parents' association of a school in Schaarbeek asked for help to take action in their neighbourhood and get in touch with Flemish women. Citizenne got them organised and now they independently run two hamam days a year during which women of all origins relax at a Turkish bath.

### Playground for grown-ups

To help people of different origins get to know Flemish society, Citizenne

organises trips to other cities such as Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp. All associations can request a guided tour around the capital's hidden corners. The Visionary Brussels tour showcases inspiring initiatives at unexpected places, such as an energy-efficient building housing 15 families in Molenbeek. Citizenne, however, is not content to just help people explore the city. It also encourages citizens to improve Brussels' living conditions. The team is organising a project called CLIP (City Life, Imagine & Play) to create a "playground for adults" in Brussels using ideas from artists. "We visualise a counterweight to all the busy chaos with artistic installations and actions that bring tranquillity

and mental room to play," says Van Overstraeten.

Citizenne is also considering installing slides at the entrances to metro stations and swings for adults in other public places. The concepts will be tested during summer festivals and towards the end of the year they will show up in a few city quarters.

### The litter tree

The centre also supports Guerilalala, an artistic city collective established with social-cultural organisation Curieus Brussel and several artists. Inspired by an elderly *Brusselaar* who cleans up his neighbourhood and takes pictures of how the public space looks before and after,

Guerilalala envisions a creative revolution among the citizens of Brussels. "We playfully stimulate people to improve their own areas and search for solutions to their frustrations," explains Benedicte Serroen, Citizenne's coordinator for the project.

Complaints in Brussels are often about waste, noise and traffic. So, Guerilalala installed a sofa made out of palettes and a tree out of litter. To make motorists aware they need to drive carefully, the city collective placed a memorial for a fictional child who supposedly died in traffic at a busy intersection. By May, a website will be launched with manuals for citizens to undertake similar actions themselves.

Shilemeza Prins from South Africa is a poet in Brussels who collaborates with Citizenne, which helped her share her poems with an audience. "I already wrote before I went to their projects but only for myself," she says. "Citizenne's team convinced me to let my voice be heard; they persuaded me that I could do it.

Their activities also influenced my poetry, as they introduced me to many interesting people and places in Flanders that I was unfamiliar with."

And now she shares her knowledge with Citizenne's students. "As a volunteer, I assist at courses and workshops that deal with language. During the project Wereldburgers [World Citizens], I was part of a group of people with a foreign background searching for universal values that unify the inhabitants of the cultural melting-pot that is Brussels."

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

# New ICT plan for Brussels

## More interaction planned between residents and the government

Alan Hope

A new application to allow residents of Brussels to report potholes in their streets, wifi hotspots in parks and metro stations and the creation of a cloud-based "virtual business centre" for start-up companies are a few of the plans announced last week by Brussels-Capital Region's minister for information and communications technology (ICT) for 2012-2014.

"Our capital city possesses a great many advantages in this area," said minister Brigitte Grouwels. "The very young population profile, the concentration of knowledge centres, health provision and international

institutions create the ideal conditions for growing towards a leading region."

The plan, titled "Bridge-It: Digital Bridges to the Future" (with a nod to the minister's name) involves a series of new ideas.

- An application called Fix-My-Street will allow members of the public to report problems with the regional roads, footpaths, cycle paths and traffic lights online, by SMS or via a smartphone app. The system will be two-way, with complaints tracked and action taken reported back to the person

who made the report.

- A virtual business space involving services and applications residing "in the cloud" will be accessible to all. In the same way as the region supports the work of start-up companies in the real world, it would also provide support for virtual service providers, by, for example, making server and hosting space available.

- The open data policy making more information available from the government will be further extended, from existing systems like

the public transport authority's real-time information to information on road accidents, transit conditions in the city's tunnels and air-quality data.

- The second generation of the IrisNet broadband network will be extended to improve the operations of government by grouping together about 80 agencies and offices.

"With this policy plan, I intend to put Brussels' ICT potential to its best use by supporting strategic projects with real growth potential, in the interests of the citizens, businesses

and the public authorities of the region," said Grouwels.

"Brussels needs to become the capital of information technology." The plan also involves improving ICT activities in schools, extending access to the internet for students and ship traffic and eventually installing hotspots in the metro, tourist areas and parks. "Every primary school in Brussels will have an ICT class, and we also want to make the internet more accessible in public spaces," said Grouwels. The plan is expected to cost a total of €240 million over the coming three years.



# Healthier outlook for fruit and veg sales

## Campaigns and TV slot build on success of Flandria quality label

Alan Hope

This week saw the start of a new campaign by Flemish growers to sell high-quality fruit and vegetables, following a difficult year in 2011 when sales were hit by market conditions and the weather. The All Day Long campaign is the latest in a string of initiatives by the Flemish government's marketing agency and builds on the success of the Flandria label, which has become a byword for quality produce at home and abroad. "The concept remains the same: to couple fruit and vegetables to the various eating times during the day," explained Sofie Lambrecht, product manager for fruit and vegetables at the Flemish Centre for Agricultural and Fisheries Marketing (Vlam). Former pro runner Kim Gevaert remains the face of the campaign.

the same time, the third Flandria campaign will go ahead using a new technique: product placement. The latest comedy-drama on VTM, *Danni Lowinski*, starring Nathalie Meskens, features scenes in a shop where Flandria products are clearly visible.

### Quality, not origin

The Flandria brand was launched in 1995 for tomatoes and *witloof* (endive) to tackle low prices caused by over-supply. In an effort to raise prices by separating the best quality produce, the government set up a list of criteria for Flandria products, including quality and environmentally sound cultivation, which the produce would have to meet to merit the label. The label now covers about 60

to use the label in order to obtain higher prices, critics say.

"Flandria is a sign of quality, not a declaration of origin," noted Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters last month in parliament. "The Dutch now also want to use the label – a sign that we have been successful in marketing Flandria as a mark of quality." And a success it certainly has been. In the first eight months of 2011, exports of fruit, vegetables and potatoes grew by 12% in volume and by 41% in value; for seed potatoes, growth was 72% and 86%. Belgian potatoes, both for the table and the field, are highly prized in France and Germany, the main markets, and are now attracting the attention of the Russians.

A study for Vlam last year found that consumers found the brand "clear and convincing", with name-recognition reaching 70% among consumers, thanks to advertising on TV and in print, in Wallonia as well as in Flanders.

At the Fruit Logistica fair last month in Berlin – one of the continent's



main marketing occasions for growers – the Flandria campaign was extended to include a more visible sustainability component, with the launch of the Responsibly Fresh marque. Peeters was present to launch the label, which will now be integrated into the Flandria logo. "Products with this label guarantee to customers that they have been cultivated in accordance with the economic, ecological and social

aspects of sustainable development," he said. "The Flemish fruit and vegetable sector has always been a front-runner – a real pioneer. The Responsibly Fresh seal of approval is a sign that the sector is taking on the economic, environmental and social challenges of the 21st century."

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

# Pausing in style

## Drivers on the E40 can take a break with a top chef, free wifi and a business lounge

Marc Maes

Commuters passing by Wetteren, on the E40 motorway between Brussels and Ghent, will have seen the very first Pauzo, a new roadside services stop. By the end of the year, it will also be Flanders' first secure motorway parking for lorry drivers. Pauzo was launched by Georges Bloem and Benny Moortgat, CEOs of Catering Operating Solutions (COS), who took over 11 motorway restaurants from the Autogrill Belux group last summer. The restaurants represent an annual turnover of €12 million and employ about 200 people.

"With Pauzo, COS is introducing a fresh concept of service and catering for the Belgian motorway network," said the pair in a statement. "Pauzo is the answer for the traveller wanting to relax in a modern...environment, offering a place to refuel mentally and physically, a place for work and networking." Eventually, all 11 sites will become Pauzo stops.

### Business and pleasure

The Pauzo motorway restaurants consist of two seating areas –

one is for families, tourists and other travellers who need a quick stop, while the second is aimed at business travellers. A mix of high and low tables and seats create a business lounge atmosphere, with room for all kinds of meetings. The whole building is equipped with free wifi.

Pauzo is also stepping away from the cafeteria food model through the talents of Lieven Lootens, chef of the famous restaurant 't Aards Paradijs in Nevele, East Flanders. He will oversee every aspect of all the Pauzo restaurants, making the dream of a culinary pit stop come true.

COS took charge of the management of the Wetteren service area two years ago, when Shell decided to appoint the Aalter-based company operator of the catering and service infrastructure. Shell, who built the infrastructure, rents it to COS, who are now investing €2 million in the design of two restaurants on either side of the busy motorway. The second Pauzo (in the direction of Brussels) was inaugurated on 15 March.



Inside the new-look Pauzo service station on the E40

### Safe stop for truckers

The site in Wetteren will also be pioneering the installation of a guarded lorry park, an investment of some €20 million. "The obligation to include secure parking for trucks was issued by the Flemish authorities," Moortgat

explains. "Every new concession for motorway parking will have to provide this. Our area will be fully fenced, secured and equipped with camera monitoring, allowing drivers to take a break or stay overnight in a safe environment."

Truckers can use the site free of

charge for 45 minutes, complying with rules on driving intervals; longer use of the parking will be charged at €2 per hour.

In the next year, COS will re-style all the group's restaurants according to the Pauzo philosophy. The sites in Marke on the E17 near Kortrijk and Rotselaar on the E314 just north of Leuven will be open before the end of the year.

The group's catering activities are part of Vialto holding, which is also parent of the Retail Operating Solutions business unit, taking on the management of petrol stations and shops. Vialto combines the exploitation of the Shell stations, shops and restaurants in Wetteren, grouping all commercial activities under one umbrella.

Vialto, backed by the Dutch investment group Atlantic Capital, was awarded a 20-year concession for the management of the motorway sites by the government of Flanders. COS says all the former Autogrill workers will be offered jobs in the new site.

► [www.pauzo.be](http://www.pauzo.be)



# Slipping through the net

## Fewer than 1% of cargoes are inspected by customs

Alan Hope

Small businesses are experiencing delays and losing money because of delays with customs, even with the country's customs & excise (C&E) services barely able to inspect any goods coming into the country, Unizo director-general Karel Van Eetvelt said last week. About 10,000 inspections took place at Brussels Airport last year, one-quarter of the total reached five years ago. Inspections at Ostend Airport went down from 717 to 532 over the same period, while Deurne Airport plummeted from 630 to 202. C&E is also responsible for inspections at the Flemish ports. According to figures obtained by *De Tijd* newspaper, C&E had a target of carrying out physical inspections on 1.3% of all cargoes, or one in 76. Neighbouring countries have a similar quota. C&E is unable to achieve it and has dropped the



The customs patrol boat Zeewolf off the coast of Zeebrugge

target to 1.1%, or one cargo in 90. In reality, inspections are only carried out in 0.9% of cases of goods being imported, or one in 111. For goods being exported, the rate is one in 256, *De Tijd* said, citing confirmation from the federal

finance ministry. The federal government has set aside €5 million this year for new appointments and €10 million for next year, intended to allow C&E to carry out inspections round the clock, rather than only during office

hours as at present. "More inspections is one thing, but increased and longer availability for businesses – a continuous service – is at least as crucial," commented Van Eetvelt. "The international competitive position of our businesses will be weakened if this doesn't happen." According to a study carried out last October by Unizo and DHL Express, about one in three small businesses experience problems with C&E at the import and export of goods, with 8% of them suffering financial penalties as a result, running as high as €10,000. "Time is money," Van Eetvelt said. "A customs service that performs well is crucial for our position. A strengthening of the cooperation between the various parties could contribute to that."

## Deme, best employer, wins new contract

Dredging company Deme, based in Zwijndrecht, Antwerp province, has won a \$1.2 billion (€900 million) contract to work on a new port for the navy of Qatar. The consortium Medco, which includes Deme and Middle East Dredging, will dredge a 20-kilometre channel in approach to the port, as well as reclaim land for a new naval base of 400 hectares. The entire project includes offshore berthing for Qatari and other naval vessels, container terminals and a railway station. Work starts this month, to be completed by 2016. Meanwhile, Deme was last week named, together with the federal ministries, as the best employer in the country, in a poll of 14,000 respondents by ICMA

International for the staffing and HR company Randstad. Deme received a score of 57% who would "go or gladly go" to work for Deme – the highest score ever achieved in the Randstad award. Respondents noted Deme's salary structure, job security, financial health, future potential, training as advantages. Competitor dredger Jan De Nul, however, came ahead on working conditions and management quality. Supermarket chain Colruyt was first in environment and society, and gas and electricity network operator ORES for life-work balance. In the public sector, the federal ministries at 51.5% narrowly beat the Flemish government at 51.1%

## Action on energy prices

Flanders energy market regulator, VREG, announced last week that the market share of Electrabel, the electricity market leader, dropped below 60% in Flanders for the first time ever in January, as 52,000 households and businesses that month changed over to another supplier. Electrabel's share fell in one month to 59.88% as a result. The main beneficiary was Nuon, VREG said, which saw its share increase to a record 8.99%. EDF Luminus has 21% and Essent just under 3%. "The figures show that competition is working, and that more and more customers are losing their fear of switching, and are finding their own way in the energy market," VREG said. The federal government, meanwhile, has proposed action to help bring down energy prices, which currently cost businesses in Belgium on average 8% more than their competitors in other countries.

The federal cabinet last week proposed a series of measures to make it easier for customers to move between electricity suppliers, which would stimulate competition and drive down prices. One of the factors keeping electricity prices high, according to a report by the energy market regulator CREG sent to the government in February, is the working of the distribution market, which in its present form tends to keep prices high. The government has already agreed to freeze all indexation of energy prices to businesses for nine months. They also approved the decision by CREG to stop increases in distribution tariffs – the price paid by alternative suppliers to the electricity producer to be allowed to bring power to the customer – until the responsibility for such matters is handed over to the regulators in the regions.

► [www.vreg.be](http://www.vreg.be)

## Bourgeois welcomes head of UN tourism

Flemish tourism minister Geert Bourgeois last week welcomed the head of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Taleb Rifai, on the first official visit by the organisation to Flanders. During the two-day visit, Rifai was presented with the latest results of the region's Tourist Satellite Account, which measures the added value brought to the economy by tourism. Tourism represents about 2.3% of the Flemish economy, on a level with countries like Denmark and the Netherlands. Flanders is one of only seven regions that are part of UNWTO (the rest are countries) and represents the other six for the

next two years on the organisation's management committee. "I'm very pleased today to be able, in the presence of Mr Rifai, to present these figures," Bourgeois said. "Flanders is the first region in Europe to have such figures available, but it's important to compare them with similar figures from other countries to be able to determine their importance. Flanders is in the middle ground relating to the gross added value of the tourism industry. Those countries with a higher rating are all tourist destinations with enormous natural advantages, like Spain and Portugal."



Tourism minister Geert Bourgeois (left) and Taleb Rifai descend the steps of the Menin Gate war memorial in Ypres

## THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Auctions ► Millon

Paris-based auction house Millon has just opened its first office in Brussels, on the Zavel, which will organise up to 15 high-end sales a year.

### Beverages ► Beer sales

Sales of beer increased for the first time since 1999 to 8.6 million hectolitres last year. Sales of Jupiler and Leffe, up 2.6% and 3.3% respectively, helped Leuven-based AB Inbev increase its market leadership.

### Food ► Finasucre

Brussels-based holding company Finasucre, specialised in the production of sugar and lactic acids, has acquired a 20% stake in the French Naturex group, specialised in natural dyes and fragrances, for some €80 million.

### Food ► Picard

The French Picard frozen food distribution group, which operates more than 800 stores in France, will open its first outlet in Brussels this year.

### Holdings ► GBL

Group Brussels Lambert (GBL), the holding company controlled by financier Albert Frère, has sold its 10% interest in the French chemical group Arkema for some €432 million, netting a healthy €220 million book profit. The company has also cut its 9.8% stake in French drinks group Pernod Ricard to 7.5%, freeing an additional €500 million. Both moves are said to be linked to GBL's debt reduction strategy.

### Software ► Sage

Sage Computer, the local affiliate of the British computers and software group, is to acquire The Missing Link (TML), the Ternat-based developer of accounting software.

### Steel wire ► Bekaert

The steel wire producer, based in Zwevegem, West Flanders, will increase to 52% its stake in Inchalam, a joint venture company that regroups most of the company's interests in Chile, Peru and Canada. The move strengthens Bekaert's position in those markets, which represent some 35% of its worldwide turnover.

# CLEARLY NOT MOVED BY GOSSELIN



The items you treasure most deserve the greatest attention when you move. They are treated with the utmost care by those meticulous men sent by Gosselin, who wrap them in that specific Gosselin paper and move them in accordance with the Gosselin master plan specially drawn up for you. Gosselin has over 70 years' experience in VIP treatment. Their service is so impeccable that you will be moved when you see their specialists at work.

Gosselin was the first moving company in Belgium to have achieved FAIM/ISO, the international moving industry's most prestigious accreditation. With their 32 own branches across Europe, Central-Asia and the Caucasus, you will no doubt receive the service you have always been looking for.



## WE KNOW HOW TO MOVE PEOPLE

Belcrownlaan 23 | B-2100 Antwerp - Belgium  
T +32-3-360 55 00 | T +32-2-772 34 87 | F +32-3-360 55 79

[WWW.GOSSELINGROUP.EU](http://WWW.GOSSELINGROUP.EU) | [INFO@GOSSELINGROUP.EU](mailto:INFO@GOSSELINGROUP.EU)



## GOSSELIN moving

BELGIUM - MEMBER GOSSELIN GROUP



# Withstanding the wind

A Flemish consortium is developing a robot to ease the installation of offshore wind farms

Andy Furniere



Installing offshore wind farms like this one in Zeebrugge will be made easier with High Wind's new installation robot

It sounds like a paradox: A major obstacle to the installation of offshore wind farms is the strong wind at sea. That's why six companies have joined forces in the Flemish consortium High Wind to develop a new robot that can set up turbines in strong wind speeds. The project is the first to receive investment from the TINA fund, which is committed to the "Transformation, Innovation and Acceleration" of Flanders' industrial fabric. The TINA fund has invested €18.7 million in High Wind, made up of geotechnical offshore contractor GeoSea; turbine producers Alstom; industrial construction company Iemants, G&G International, engineering and fabrication of large pressure vessels; logistics management concern SBE; and automation specialists Egemin. The consortium is supported by Sirris, the Belgian tech industry's knowledge centre. This summer, a team of about 15 engineers will begin developing an installation technique for setting up offshore wind turbines. "Instead of working with cranes and flexible cables, the different components of the turbines will be put together with new robot arms, unhampered by the weather," explains Peter Roose

of GeoSea, who is coordinating the start of High Wind. "The installation ships will become mobile factories, with assembling machinery similar to that at car factories." The high wind velocity that make certain locations ideal for offshore wind farms often double and sometimes triple the usual time frame for installation. Some enterprises therefore envisage assembling the turbines on land and installing them offshore in one piece. "But that would mean taking a maximum of two wind turbines on a ship," says Roose. "If you transport the turbines in components, one installation vessel can carry up to five turbines." After the initial investment, the installation robot will save considerable costs by working more efficiently. High Wind also affords greater certainty about the planning, reduces the financial risk and will enable the parks to produce energy more quickly.

## European challenge

Various Flemish companies are recognised worldwide as experts in the offshore wind sector, but more cooperation is needed to secure the region's position. "The speed with which the sector is evolving is

enormous. Flanders needs to keep providing high-quality technological solutions, and innovation is only possible with continuous investment and by combining forces," says Roose. Flanders already has offshore wind parks at the coast of Zeebrugge and Ostend, but they have to be increased quickly to meet EU objectives. The current total of 1,300 offshore wind turbines in Europe needs to grow to 7,000 by 2020 and to more than 20,000 by 2030. This challenge will boost the demand for installation ships. "For the European Union, wind energy is essential to achieving independent sustainability," explains Roose. "Wind is a clean but also free and inexhaustible source." He feels the design process of the installation robot will take about 18 months and the construction approximately another year. In three years, the robot should be on the market for all businesses active in the sector.

## Who is TINA?

Roald Borré is the TINA fund manager at the Flemish government investment company PMV. "The revolutions in production techniques, ICT, ecology and energy require a new, adapted industrial

policy," he explains, which is what TINA provides. "The TINA fund also has the goal of creating a large number of jobs." To remain competitive, the Flemish government has given PMV the task of managing this market-driven investment fund of €200 million in risk capital. They can grant a project investment of up to €20 million and a maximum 50% of its cost. High Wind was the first project to be awarded funding, as it was the project at the most advanced stage. "It innovates and transforms the offshore wind sector in Flanders," says Borré. "Sustainable energy is one of the key sectors that PMV focuses on. High Wind also combines the knowledge of important companies to help transform the Flemish industry. Instead of the traditional and individual way of working, the Flemish industry of the future needs to be characterised by innovation and cooperation. Finally, the project should create more than 100 jobs in a short time span." In the next five years, TINA will invest in innovative consortium projects in the priority sectors: energy, ecology, ICT, nanotechnology, healthcare, logistics and transport.

► [www.pmv.be](http://www.pmv.be)

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Leuven nanoelectronics research centre imec has developed a **plaster that measures heart activity**. The plaster, fitted with an ECG-chip, is attached to the patient's chest and transmits the results to the patient or doctor's computer or mobile device. In case of heart-rate disturbances, the patient or doctor is warned immediately. The plaster is energy efficient and comfortable to wear, and it should save health-care costs by lowering the number of emergency admissions. Because of such successes, the government of Flanders has signed a new five-year contract with imec.

► [www.imec.be](http://www.imec.be)

The first word of many Flemish toddlers being "mama" is not just thanks to their mums' encouragement. In her doctoral thesis, Lieve Van Severen of Antwerp University found that nine out of 10 Flemish **toddlers use the consonant "m" or "b" in their first word**. "Papás" need not despair, however, as the consonants "p", "t" and "d" are mostly spoken between the ages of one and two. Other consonants, such as "r", "f", "v" and "l" are rarely used by children younger than two. This phenomenon doesn't apply to all languages, though: In Italian, the consonant "l" is spoken much earlier. The research results will be helpful to speech therapists and clinicians.

Ghent University has kicked off its development of an ecological **sustainability plan** with a debate between about 80 eco-conscious university employees, creative thinkers, experts and policymakers. The project, Transition UGent, is inspired by the city's commitment to be climate-neutral by 2050.

Truancy among students of foreign descent and other disadvantaged groups has doubled over the last five years. Flemish education minister Pascal Smet is exploring the ways in which these students fall through the cracks and how to address the problem, including the possibility of creating a form of **maternity leave for teenage mothers**. The minister introduced his action plan against truancy in the Flemish Parliament last week.

Library Sans Souci, in the Brussels commune of Elsene, has introduced **AfrikaSpelling, a Dutch-language spelling contest** for African youngsters. The library wants to improve the Dutch of young Africans in Brussels' Dutch-language schools, while encouraging them to learn about their African roots. In preparation for the contest, the pupils work with texts by Flemish writers and poets and with translated texts by African writers. The final takes place on 30 June in the Flemish Parliament, where six youngsters will have to spell a series of words out loud. **AF**

## Q&A



**Eric Van den Bulck is a professor of engineering science at the University of Leuven and an expert in vehicle technology**

vehicles also have serious limitations such as a short lifespan and long recharging times. Buying an electric car is not very sensible at the moment. Vehicles that run on hydrogen and bio-fuels are still in the development phase. There is already a large supply of hybrid vehicles, which are perfect city cars, but not many people drive them because of the high cost.

**What action do you recommend the government take?**

Put more effort into producing clean energy, otherwise the emission problem will only be shifted to an increasing number of electricity centres. Secondly:

Trucks, buses and vans are ideally suited to running on natural gas, so the government should facilitate their using natural gas in city environments. Give more incentives to municipalities and enterprises, with ecological awards that could create a competition for the greenest reputation.

**What developments are you looking forward to?**

The next generation of improved solar panels could generate a genuine new momentum. I am also curious about revolutionary fuel-cell technology in Antwerp's port that was developed by chemical company Solvay and materials

and technology company Umicore, both based in Brussels.

**What is the best option for environmentally aware citizens in need of a car?**

A small fuel-efficient car, with a low consumption of petrol. The new types don't emit many harmful substances and are affordable for most people. Currently, there is no valid alternative to renewable energy, so governments should put more emphasis on fuel efficiency in their communication strategies instead of on carbon dioxide emissions. People are generally most concerned about the price tag. **AF**

**Why are Flemish streets not yet filled with electric cars?**  
Because the vehicles are expensive, especially in difficult economic times. The batteries of electric





**ing.be**



## Contact us at [ing.be/expat](https://ing.be/expat)

Are you an expatriate? If so, you need support and advice. That's exactly what ING can provide for all your banking and insurance requirements. Our ING Expat service deals with everything,

even before you arrive in Belgium: accounts, bank cards, rental guarantee, etc. To find out what ING can do for you, don't hesitate to call one of our advisors on + 32 (0)2 464 66 64.

ING Belgium SA/nv – Bank – avenue Marnix 24, B-1000 Brussels – Brussels RPM/RPR – VAT BE 0403.200.393 – BIC (SWIFT): BBRUBEBB – IBAN: BE45 3109 1560 2789 (Account: 310-9156027-89).  
Publisher: Philippe Wallez, cours Saint-Michel 60, 1040 Brussels.





# When life becomes art

Flemish designer Christophe Coppens offers a two-volume look into his exquisite universe

Rebecca Benoot

Roisin Murphy, Rihanna, Beth Ditto, and our own princess Mathilde – they're all crazy about him. Christophe Coppens is the hottest accessory designer in town, with shows in New York, London, Paris and Tokyo to name but a few modest locations. His intricate and often whimsical hats in particular have become his trademark.

Over the years, Christophe Coppens has also dabbled in art, interior design and even poetry. But hats are his true love. The Brussels-based designer has also created accessories for the retail store JBC and became a household name even with non-fashionistas, thanks to his appearance on the VTM television show *De Designers*. Born in Sint-Niklaas in 1969, Coppens spent every moment he wasn't in school (which he

"detested") at the city's Academy of Art, where he studied multiple subjects – theatre, poetry, art history and even ballet.

At 18, he went to the capital to study acting at the RITS School of Arts. It soon became clear he wasn't as obedient as most directors might like, so he started directing his own plays, controlling everything, right down to the costume design. "I needed hats for a production and basically rolled into the trade by chance," Coppens tells me.

He soon began following weekly lessons during his studies with a seamstress in Brussels who taught him the ins and outs of the hat trade. He opened his first showroom in Brussels at the age of 21 and started making hats, scarves and other accessories for designers such as Guy Laroche and Yohji Yamamoto. "What's fun about accessories,"

Coppens says, "is that it accentuates an outfit or someone's personality, gives it a finishing touch. The challenge is making things to complement different silhouettes or clothing from other designers.

You get the chance to shake things up, depending on the woman or the outfit, and it's this variety that fascinates me."

Both Coppens (pictured) and his creations have a surreal sense of humour.

Sometimes subtle, other times shocking, his designs are inspired by art, literature and dreams. Animals figure prominently: colourful camels, giraffes and tiger brooches; a hat with an alligator attached; a jacket with the form of a deer emerging from the back. He's made handbags that look like boom boxes and embroidered a perfect set of knives from silver and black sequins. As much of his work is pure costume, he's a popular choice to accessorise for catwalk shows and also to design shop windows and displays.

"You should be open to as many influences as possible; it's evolving constantly," he says. "I think it's important to nourish creativity, which is why I try to live in the present and absorb all the imagery coming at me, which I then translate into my work."

## Homework, à la Coppens

In his new two-volume book *Homework*, Coppens has captured his state of being in 2012. "The book is a personal sketch of my life," the 43-year-old explains. "It's not a biography; it's not chronological; it's not a retrospective, but a snapshot of everything that's important to me at this time."

Coppens isn't sentimental or eager to hold on to the past, but he is aware of how it influences your personality in the present. "I love creating an exhibition or a collection, but as soon as it's done, I lose interest and focus on the next project."

The "Home" volume of *Homework* focuses on Coppens' private life. There's little text, except an article about his childhood by fashion journalist Anne-Françoise Moyson. Rather, the volume is mostly made up of an array of photographs of his youth, home, favourite projects, passion for gardening. There are also random images, such as spottings of the initials CC (which he is keen to photograph). It all adds up to getting a sense of who Coppens is.

In "Home", Coppens reserved several pages for images from *The Dollhouse* trilogy, an exhibition of his work – from erotic chairs to taxidermy to dolls based on his own visage – staged in three different cities between 2001 and 2008. Pieces in the shows sometimes provoked, sometimes paralysed his unsuspecting audience. *Dollhouse* showed a clear love for staging: Be it a play, a fashion show or an installation, Coppens loves to show and tell.

"I worked on *Dollhouse* for seven years, so it became a big part of my life and career. It looks at the concept of a home, the nucleus, the family, and it was also a way for me to deal with the fears that were among us during that period – of war or Dutroux or even the dioxin crisis. *Dollhouse* was my translation of those fears."

The concept of home is a recurring



© Javier Barcala

"The 'Home' and the 'Work' volumes complement each other," he says. "It's the kind of book you can read or leaf through and, depending on your mood, take different things from the experience."

Taken as a whole, *Homework* is a evocative treasure trove that embodies the essence of Coppens: bold, provocative and sensual.

## On the move

Though his shop remains in its renowned location in Brussels' Dansaertstraat, last month Coppens moved his studio to the trendy Huidevettersstraat in the midst of several vintage shops, where it is now housed in a majestic *fin-de-siècle* building. His studio, showroom and office are now combined under an imposing glass dome. On entering, you pass a large open space that is used as an archive and also as an exhibition area for temporary projects.

It is in his showroom beneath the five-storey dome where he entertains customers for private fittings with cocktails and macaroons, as well as wholesalers. "There's a large collection of one-of-a-kind pieces in the showroom," Coppens says. "It's basically a giant laboratory because every week new pieces are created. When

theme in Coppens' work and is where the private and the professional meet.

## All work and play

A conversation with his friend and muse Róisín Murphy kicks off the "Work" volume, showing us that work and play often overlap. The Irish electronic pop singer delights fans with constant costume changes onstage, many of which are by Coppens. She is also the star and composer of the music video in which Coppens' Spring/Summer 2012 collection was presented.

"When we were developing the book, I was mainly working with her," Coppens explains. The book begins with a transcription of a personal conversation between the two at Murphy's home. "I thought it would be great to use [it] because she has become such a good friend, so it was the perfect transition from 'Home' to 'Work'."

Filled with photographs of his atelier, works in progress, personal favourites and celebrities wearing his designs, "Work" is indeed a work of art. At the end is a selection of emails between journalist Agnes Goyvaerts and Coppens, in which he briefly answers questions, resulting in some interesting personal tidbits as well as some fascinating reflections on his work.



clients visit, they can buy an item from the showroom, or they can have a hat designed or altered." Prices start at a very reasonable €140 and go up to about €500, depending on the decoration of the custom-made hat.

Next on Coppens' agenda is the opening of his first Paris showroom on Rue Saint-Honoré. Currently under renovation, the space will open next month.

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





# In with the new

## Brussels' avant-garde art centre Beursschouwburg is gearing up for a change of director

Daan Bauwens

These are interesting times for art lovers in Brussels. Why? Cis Bierinckx, the much-applauded director of Beursschouwburg, is about to leave, and Tom Bonte, former programmer of performing arts at Ghent art centre Vooruit, is taking over from 1 April. We sat down with the two men to reflect on what has been, what is now and what will be in the future.

In the heart of the capital, metres from the Brussels Stock Exchange, lies one of the oldest centres of art in Belgium: the Beursschouwburg. It's internationally known for its daring, visionary and rebellious character, and has always stayed up to date with everything that's new in music, dance and performance. In 2006, internationally renowned art guru Cis Bierinckx became head of the venue. But he's about to leave. "I leave out of principle," he says. "Sometimes I blame the cultural sector for letting the same people stay too long at the same place. It shouldn't be like that; people become inflexible. I also do it for myself. I've always been lucky to be able to challenge myself and leave a place when things got too easy. I believe strongly in change, especially when it comes to art. Art is a living matter; it needs to change soil regularly. So if you want to keep an art house like this one alive, you need to allow it to change perpetually."

### How has the Beursschouwburg changed during your time?

**Cis Bierinckx:** "It regained the avant-garde role it had been known for. Just before my arrival, the Beursschouwburg had turned into a place for leisure, more than a place for intellectual or mental reflection. Of course, at the time they had succeeded in inviting all the great names of the era, but more than anything it was becoming a nightclub. But that was part of the philosophy of the time: Art had

to be a part of the street, people had to be able to walk in and out, theatre had to be stripped of its holiness. I didn't agree; it was my opinion we should go back to our avant-garde role."

### But does avant-garde always please the audience? How did they react?

**Bierinckx:** "We can't exist without audiences. You always have to find the middle ground between the requirements of the art, the artists and the audience. But you can easily find and walk that way without succumbing to some kind of bourgeois audience satisfaction. We are not a national theatre. At the Beursschouwburg, we have to be loyal to the fact that this place was and is a laboratory. It's our duty to show art to the public that is perpendicular to the mainstream, without becoming elitist or hermetic."

### Have you faced criticism during the past six years?

**Bierinckx:** "Lots of people told me: This theatre has no profile. Well that's something I know. And I've done it deliberately. I pulled out all the stops; I programmed everything from rock to jazz to expressive arts, film and video. That's what was most important to me. Now it is up to Tom to decide if he wants to continue heading in this direction. But as far as I'm concerned, this place had to become a house of experience and questioning. That is the essence."

### Tom, apparently you have the choice. Which way do you want to head after Cis' departure?

**Tom Bonte:** "The future programme

will stay loyal to all the elements Cis has named. Content-wise I don't think we will change much. The only thing we have to do now is sharpen our focus. Out of the abundance of styles and genres Cis has offered us, we'll make new choices and slowly distil a profile for this theatre. But there's more: We choose to work primarily with artists from Brussels. It's important that creative people in this city have a shelter in this house. At the same time, we will stay active on the international level, just like before. And then there's the question of how we will succeed in communicating this abundance to

the public. This has proved difficult in recent years. How can we translate a good programme to be understood in the outside world?"

### Do you already have an answer for this?

**Bonte:** "We have given it a great deal of thought, and eventually we came up with this answer: We noticed the art sector was becoming the victim of its own festivals. Every week of the year there is some festival happening somewhere. And it only lasts for one week or two. To be able to enjoy it, you practically have to take a leave of absence from work. This is not

a criticism, just an observation: There is no need for more festivals; the festival formula is worn out. So we came up with the idea of taking time: two or three months in which we focus on a certain theme. This theme can be used to invite several artists who can all elaborate on the theme. There's a lot that fits into this formula, and it will make us bond more with the public. If the normal festival time is lengthened to three months, people will walk in and out more regularly."

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



Cis Bierinckx (left) will be handing over the Beursschouwburg reins to Tom Bonte

## SAPERE AUDE!/DARE TO KNOW!



At the end of this month Cis Bierinckx presents his last festival: Sapere Aude!/Dare to Know!. From 21 to 31 March, you can see international theatre plays, performances and movies, speeches and debates between writers and journalists that all ponder the same question: How much politics can the arts bear?

On Wednesday night, the German-Swiss theatre company International Institute for Political Murder kicks off the festival with *Hate Radio* (pictured), a re-enactment of broadcasting at radio station Libre des Mille Collines, which played an important role in the brutal Rwandan genocide that started in 1994. The night ends with a free concert by Flemish singer-songwriter Anton Walgrave, who digs up political protest songs from the 1960s.

"This festival is a statement," says Cis Bierinckx, "an artistic coda to my six years as director. It is a way to show the public my true self through art. That is: my involvement with the world. It is an expression of my discontent about the inertia of contemporary culture and intellectuals. We come from times where professors and students would protest in the streets when things went wrong. Things still go wrong, but nobody says a word. We live in times where a government formation that takes over a year turns into a running joke. That's just sad. But I feel there's a revival of activism, and it is coming out of the art world. We see new art that is positioning itself inside this world, not outside it anymore. That's what I want to show."



# Battlefields without blood

A disturbing election result sent Bart Michiels on a journey to photograph what we can no longer see

Tom Peeters

How do we look at a historical site when its past has essentially disappeared? Can we use our imagination to capture that past? And what does it mean for our future?

Those questions were on the minds of the photographers featured in the Antwerp Photo Museum's challenging exhibition *Imaging History*, which shows – or just hides – the often horrible incidents of a bygone time. Because you often don't know what you are looking at until you read the titles, your perspective of the photos changes constantly.

Characteristic of this approach is the work of Bart Michiels, a Flemish photographer who has spent half his life in New York. During the last decade, he visited European battlefields for the series *The Course of History* – an attempt to encourage viewers to remember and think about the consequences of war, about life and death and about our short memories.

Look at his work titled "Passchendaele 1917, Tyne Cot 2005". It's just an image of a muddy field, but knowing its past makes it so much more. "The clay stands for fertility and death," explains Michiels. "This is very fertile land. You can grow a lot on it. But even until today, the bones of the dead are still under there. There's no life without a shadow of death."

The mud also recalls the trenches of the First World War; the large format print makes it even more confronting.

Michiels' grandparents lived in the Westhoek region; his mother went to school in Ypres, and he spent his

youth not so far from these "fields of honour". But it was only when he left that he felt a deeper meaning from those battlefield sites of home. "Living on the other side of the ocean gave me another perspective."

## The weight of war

The election of George W Bush in 2001 in particular triggered a kind of identity crisis for the 47-year-old photographer. "All of a sudden I felt European again," he says. "It was clear the US government was giving up on multilateralism. For us Belgians, 'no more war' is no idle slogan. Certainly not after the Second World War. It meant we would cooperate with other countries to protect us from future conflicts. It looked like history was about to repeat itself, and we forgot about our history. But I couldn't explain this to my fellow Americans. It's just another mentality."

Michiels' reaction to this awkward feeling was extreme. He boarded a plane, then rented a car and drove to the most important European battlefield sites: Passchendaele, Waterloo, Poitiers, Lepanto, Marathon, Gallipoli, Stalingrad. He slept on the battlegrounds or in his car in order to work at dawn, when the light was at its best.

To select the sites, there were only two criteria: The battles must have had a decisive influence on European history or the human loss was extremely high. "Death had to be present," he explains. "But not on the images themselves. That would be too explicit. Sometimes the absence of atrocity is stronger than the presence."

Take the green grass fields Michiels



"Abandoned Bomber" by Simon Norfolk

shot in Verdun in north-eastern France. It's an unsettlingly serene image of a cruel fact. Could the lines in the field have been caused by armoured cars?

Sometimes it's the topography of the landscape that strikes Michiels, sometimes the surface texture or the sky. "My images of battlefields became harsher with time. The later pictures I took in Kursk, Russia, have

of the archaeological site of Sagalassos in south-western Turkey was fundamental to this exhibition, which they curated. Their non-conformist approach of interpreting the excavation instead of documenting it was new to the field.

As curators they went looking for colleagues with the same attitude towards photography. The site of

as a metaphor for the massacres.

Is war necessary to avoid something bigger? Michiels already asked this question as a student in the 1980s, when nuclear weapons were placed in Belgium under loud protest. "At that point, I started thinking about the relationship between Europe and America, and I never stopped." Michiels plans to publish a book of his battlefield photos, and the 100-year commemoration of the First World War that begins in 2014 could offer him a chance to finally show his Passchendaele photos in a solo show. "It really is a history lesson delivered in a narrative and poetic manner," he says. "That's one of the meanings of *The Course of History*. Photography does not need to be 'educational'. But every new generation should at least gain some knowledge about the past."

"There's no life without a shadow of death"

darker tones and shades, sometimes black. I really felt the weight of that location."

What distinguishes the work of Michiels from other photographers in *Imaging History* is that it's less documentary, tending even towards the abstract at times. "I don't have a photo journalist background, like, for instance, Simon Norfolk, who confronts us with more direct scenes of war."

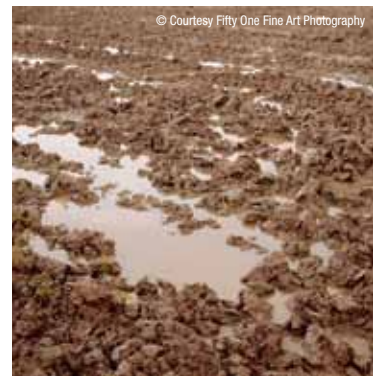
Inspired by the photos John Burke took during the second Anglo-Afghan War more than 130 years ago, he travelled to Afghanistan to illustrate the impact of war on the Afghan people. The parallels between present warfare and 19th-century imperialism are indisputable. "Basically, we come to the same conclusion," says Michiels. "We move on from one war to another. We're not learning anything."

## A world in a grain of sand

The work of Michiels, Norfolk and others was brought together by Flemish photographers Bruno Vandermeulen and Danny Veys. Their commission to take photos

Sagalassos reminds Michiels of the Greek battlefields. "For me those rocks and stones symbolised both the victims and the antiquity. I don't have to see a ruin; a field says enough."

*The Last Measure* series by American photographer Sally Mann, who displays dark images of the battlefields of the American Civil War, could evoke the same feelings as those of Michiels' European war sites, but the method and the impact are both very different. Mann applied the long-forgotten wet collodion process, a photographic technology that was used in the middle of the 19th century by Alexander Gardner, the most prominent photographer of the Civil War. This delicate technique with all its defects and imperfections makes the images look fragile and untamed, serving



Bart Michiels' "Passchendaele 1917, Tyne Cot 2005"



"Cemetery Apollo Klarios" in Sagalassos by Bruno Vandermeulen and Danny Veys

UNTIL 3 JUNE

Imaging History

Photo Museum, Waalsekaai 47, Antwerp

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



*Third time's the charm*

# SuperBodies

Diana Goodwin

Every art form in Hasselt is acting as one during the city's third Triennial for Contemporary Art, Fashion and Design. Curated by Flemish architect and arts critic Pieter T'Jonck, SuperBodies brings together the visual and performing arts in several locations across the city, including the Fashion Museum, the City Museum and Z33, the city's house for contemporary art. The first Triennial in 2006 was called Super!, and in 2009 the theme was "stories". This year, the cultural heart of Hasselt is looking at the human body. Artists working in every conceivable medium, and sometimes across different media, explore the various ways in which our bodies shape our experiences. Many of the pieces in the exhibition involve the viewer in the execution of the work, extending the idea that any work of art is created in collaboration with the viewer through the act of seeing. When standing before one of the pieces in the show, for instance – a painting

on the surface of a mirror – the viewer is literally part of the image. Sometimes the connection with the body is harder to fathom, as in the case of a piece consisting of cement blocks arranged on the floor. Part of the fun of the exhibition is trying to figure out what the connection might be. The works challenge us to think about our relationship to art in a very concrete, physical way – something many contemporary artists ignore.

The triennial showcases young, regional talent as well as established national and international artists. Many have created brand new works for the triennial. Organisers have also commissioned pieces such as "Verkenning van de vrouwelijke vormen" (Exploration of the Female Form, pictured), by Flemish photographer Liesje Reyskens.

The exhibition at CIAP (Cultural Information and Actual Prints) focuses solely on Chinese video artist Yang Zhengzhong. The works on view at the Fashion Museum

have a strong focus on fashion and textiles, while Z33 is the place to see more experimental work by up-and-coming artists. If you plan to visit all five exhibition venues, give yourself plenty of time – better

yet, take a couple of days.

In addition to the exhibitions, there are several performances on the SuperBodies programme, including an international contemporary dance series at the

Cultural Centre in Hasselt. Some performances take place in the galleries and incorporate works on view.



© Verkenning van de vrouwelijke vormen, Liesje Reyskens, 2011; photo Kristof Vrancken

Until 27 May | Across Hasselt | [www.superbodies.be](http://www.superbodies.be)

## MUSIC FESTIVAL

### Gent Jazz Festival

Aren't we glad that the organisers of the Gent Jazz Festival employ a very loose definition of the genre. In past years, this meant we got to see the likes of Madness and Norah Jones perform at the summer festival. This year, it means that Antony and the Johnsons will make an appearance. The New York band led by Antony Hegarty is responsible for a number of beautiful ballads such as "You Are My Sister", "Thank You for Your Love" and "Hope There's Someone". During Gent Jazz they will perform with the Dutch jazz and pop ensemble Metropole Orchestra. But that's not all: opening this special night is Flemish rising star Liesa Van der Aa (pictured), who recently brought out a surprisingly remarkable first album called *Troops*. With only a violin, some loop stations and her own voice she composes her own songs and creates a completely new sound influenced by avant-garde, soundscapes and rock music. **Robyn Boyle**



GET TICKETS NOW

5-14 July | De Bijloke, Ghent

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

## MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

### Across Flanders

**Ars Musica:** Annual international contemporary music festival

Until MAR 31 across Brussels and Flanders

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

### Houthalen (Limburg)

**Blues in Bloom:** Blues festival featuring The DeVilles, Tollos, JJ Louis Quartet, King King, Leon Blue and Nico Wayne Toussaint

MAR 24 from 19.00 at Zaal Broederkring, Guldensporenlaan

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

## EXHIBITION

### Chantal Akerman: Too Far, Too Close

Since the early 1990s, Brussels-born film director Chantal Akerman has led a double life. For the big screen she has produced quirky but accessible feature films such as *A Couch in New York* and *The Captive*, while in the art world she is known for video installations exploring the frontiers of documentary and first-person filmmaking. This retrospective is an excellent introduction to Akerman's gallery work, beginning with *From the East: Bordering On Fiction* (1993), in which images of post-Soviet eastern Europe unfold on 25 video monitors. Other pieces include *Là-bas* (2006), a personal meditation on Israel, *Women of Antwerp in November* (2008) and *Night Falls on Shanghai* (2009). **Ian Mundell**



© Saute Ma Ville, 1968 film still

Until 20 May | M hka, Antwerp | [www.muhka.be](http://www.muhka.be)

## MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

### Brussels

**Bits and Pieces Between Life and Death:** More than 1,000 personal objects that soldiers the world over carried during war

Until SEP 15 at Royal Museum of the Armed Forces, Jubelpark 3

[www.klm-mra.be](http://www.klm-mra.be)

### Ghent

**Ford Maddox Brown: Pre-Raphaelite Pioneer:** Works by one of the most eccentric English Pre-Raphaelite painters, who studied at academies across Flanders before becoming famous in his native land

Until JUN 3 at Fine Arts Museum, Fernand Scribedreef 1

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

**Nedko Solakov: All in Order, with Exceptions:** The first-ever retrospective in Flanders of Bulgaria's best-known contemporary artist

Until JUN 3 at SMAK, Citadelpark

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



THEATRE

Medea

One of the most fascinating heroines to come out of ancient Greek drama, Medea is at once a villain and a victim. In spite of the fact that she'd "rather fight three battles than bear one child", Medea has children anyway, out of boundless love for her husband, Jason. When Jason leaves her for another woman, she takes revenge by murdering her own children. And now you know the unnerving plot behind Flemish dramatist Peter Verhelst's contemporary reworking of the celebrated Greek tragedy. This piece will send chills down your spine and set you to thinking, due in part to the haunting musical score by Antwerp composer Wim Henderickx, who will be conducting the HERMESensemble, and astounding performances by the actors from Dutch theatre group De Veenfabriek, directed by Paul Koek (in Dutch with surtitles in French and Dutch). **RB**



26 March, 20.00 | Bozar, Brussels  
► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

MORE THEATRE THIS WEEK

Brussels

**She Stoops to Conquer:** The Irish Theatre Group performs this play by Oliver Goldsmith, a rollicking story of mistaken identities, petty thievery and delightful deceptions (in English)  
**MAR 27-31 20.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23**  
► [www.irishtheatrebrussels.com](http://www.irishtheatrebrussels.com)

Leopoldsborg

**Breken (Break):** Brother duo Kommil Foo performs in this musical comedy full of cabaret, humour and absurdities (in Dutch)  
**MAR 23-24 20.15 at CC Leopoldsborg, Kastanjedreef 1**  
► [www.ccleopoldsborg.be](http://www.ccleopoldsborg.be)

Mechelen

**Nijntje De Musical:** Flanders premiere of the musical for children (ages 3 and up) based on the famous cartoon rabbit (in Dutch)  
**MAR 24 15.00 & MAR 25 11.00/15.00 at Stadsschouwburg, Keizerstraat 3**  
► [www.cultuurcentrummechelen.be](http://www.cultuurcentrummechelen.be)

ROCK

Humo's Rock Rally Final 2012

Popular Flemish weekly *Humo* is the authority when it comes to the burgeoning local rock scene. With its finger on the pulse of the country's coolest, grungiest and most talented up-and-comers, Humo has been hosting this biannual competition since 1978. Surely you've heard of Black Box Revelation, Zornik, Admiral Freebee and previous rally winner School Is Cool. All had their careers launched at Humo's Rock Rally. This year's 10 finalists have been impressing judges for months now during the preliminaries across Flanders. This weekend they're gearing up to give their best performances ever in front of a packed crowd at Brussels' Ancienne Belgique. You may have not yet heard of Geppetto & The Wales, Lili Grace, The Compact Disk Dummies (*pictured*), Tubelight or any of the other finalists. But guaranteed, after the rally is over, one of these groups will come out of it a new household name. **RB**



25 March, 15.00 | Ancienne Belgique, Brussels | ► [www.humo.be/rock-rally](http://www.humo.be/rock-rally)

MORE ROCK THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

**Sioen:** The Ghent singer-songwriter presents his new album  
**MAR 21 15.00 at FNAC, Veldstraat 88, Ghent**  
**MAR 23 19.30 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat, Ghent**  
**MAR 24 21.00 at Zaal De Zwerver, Dorpsstraat 95, Leffinge (West Flanders)**  
► [www.sioen.net](http://www.sioen.net)

Antwerp

**Anouk:** The Dutch rock goddess performs one last time (with various band members she's played with over the past 15 years) before taking a career break  
**MAR 24 20.30 at Sportpaleis, Schijnpoortweg 119**  
► [www.sportpaleis.be](http://www.sportpaleis.be)

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Boombal

27 March Vooruit, Gent

Why wait until the weekend to stretch your legs on the dance floor? Just start next Tuesday, for instance, during the Boombal party at Vooruit in Ghent. Listen to the folk music, follow the instructions, and you'll be joining the circle dance in no time.



The first Boombal party originated spontaneously in 2000 when the audience of an accordion concert started dancing out of the blue. The gig was held on a Tuesday on Boomstraat in Ghent. Over the years, Boombal has grown into a very popular (folk) dance and music event, organised in many cities across Flanders. But the Boombal parties organised in Ghent remain the most popular, with a loyal audience of around 800. The annual summer Boombal Festival in Lovendegem (near Ghent, naturally) is the only one bigger, with thousands gathering to learn the steps and do the dances. On 27 March, Vooruit opens its doors at 20.00, and half an hour later, Kurt and Frauke lead a dance initiation. Once your muscles are warmed up, the band Djerrald takes over the

stage with their groovy accordion tunes. Practice what you just learned and let the beats carry you away. Around 23.30, DJ Klaas will be the music maestro, treating the crowd to a mix of pop, rock and world music. Tickets are €8.

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



BITE

Robyn Boyle

Brasserie Het Anker ★★☆☆

I always wonder why more Flemish breweries don't do as Het Anker in Mechelen. Not only are they eager to give brewery tours to the public, but they also have a hotel and brasserie on site – the same place where, in 1471, Charles the Bold granted the Beguine sisters of Mechelen permission to brew beer for their private use.

So there you have it: history, culture, beer, food *and* a place to lay your head when all is said and done. If that's doesn't make for a great outing, I don't know what does.

Brasserie Het Anker is a fine address to remember when visiting the area, preferably with a group of friends. The upstairs is stylishly renovated but still breathes old-world charm, while the downstairs has the feel of a local café and is usually quite lively. Nonetheless, it's clear that Het Anker is accustomed to its fair share of tourists, as the servers are glad to welcome you in English.

Most of the dishes at the brasserie are prepared using one of Het Anker's speciality beers. You'll find, for instance, cream of chicory soup with shrimp and Maneblusser, Flemish beef stew with Gouden Carolus Classic and Mechelen cuckoo with Cuvée of the Emperor sauce.

It's this last dish that entices me the most, despite that I only order chicken in a restaurant on the rarest of occasions. But Mechelen cuckoo is a local speciality, a particularly plump variety of chicken. It's a nice big, juicy piece, too, and not the least bit dry. The sauce that comes with it is divine, made with Cuvée of the Emperor, a dark, malty beer with spicy nuances.

Next to this are three whole braised *witloof* and a generous portion of potato croquettes. The slightly bitter, buttery taste of the *witloof* matches perfectly with the cuckoo and sauce. The croquettes, unfortunately, are not handmade, but they give the dish the bit of crunch it needs.

My friend is pleased enough with her simple dinner of fillet of sole with tartar sauce, lemon, fresh dill, salad and fries. The fish is tasty, albeit on the oily side. But the fries are obviously not hand-cut and probably came out of the deep freeze.

My starter order of smoked quail on a bed of beets and green beans got mixed up, but when I pointed it out to the server, he quickly brought me the right dish. I'm glad I made a bit of a fuss because the dish is truly lovely. The smokiness of the quail and the earthiness of the vegetables make for a perfect pairing.

Naturally, we enjoy our meals with a few of the house speciality beers. These include Gouden Carolus Easter beer (a strong, dark red, heavily spiced), Maneblusser (a full-bodied, citrusy lager) and Boscoli (a fruity white). The bill comes to a mid-priced €31 apiece and is one of the more unique dining experiences I've had in Flanders.



- 📍 Guido Gezellelaan 49, Mechelen; 015.28.71.47
- 🕒 Mon-Fri 11.30-21.00; Sat 11.30-18.00
- 💶 Mains: €15-€20
- 📖 Beer-infused brasserie cuisine at one of Flanders' oldest breweries

▶ [www.hetanker.be](http://www.hetanker.be)

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

Nervous countdown to the new Vlaanderens mooiste

For one day of the year, the world's finest cyclists congregate in the Flemish Ardennes for a scramble over mud and cobbles that tests them like no other race. Although formally known as the Ronde Van Vlaanderen, or Tour of Flanders, the race that takes place on 1 April is described by locals as *Vlaanderens mooiste*, or "Flanders' most beautiful".

This year has a special significance. It's not just that it's an Olympic year, meaning hopefuls at the games in London will be working the Tour into

their training schedule. Rather, the route has changed: It will finish in Oudenaarde instead of Meerbeke, skipping the race's most mythical hill, the Muur van Geraardsbergen. The new finale will include the Oude Kwaremont and the Paterberg, to be covered three times on a final circuit, with the Paterberg the last ascent 13km before the finish.

Organisers say the new 254.4km route will pass areas heavily surrounded by spectators, and they expect the Oude Kwaremont to take over the role of the Muur,

where the race has finished since 1973. But it has met with criticism from fans and confusion from the professionals. "This is no longer the Ronde van Vlaanderen," says two-time winner Stijn Devolder. Retired three-time winner Johan Museeuw says the course is too hard: "Three times up the Oude Kwaremont and Paterberg can blow you away." Fabian Cancellara, the 2010 winner, also questions the change. "The traditions of the sport are counting for less, and now they have changed something crucial," Cancellara complains. "So there is a big why. Is it just to make it harder? Is it just to make money? Is it because of politics and business?"

Whatever the reasons, Devolder, Cancellara and the others will still be there. It is still an epic race, whatever the changes, which is why the world's best gather in Flanders every 14th Sunday of the year. Their gripes are more a reflection of their affection than any recoil. They may grumble about the ordeal – rain and wind are all too frequent – but they love it, really.

Meanwhile, in an ominous sign for the Olympics this summer, Flemish athletes came away empty-handed from the World Indoor Championships in Istanbul, Turkey. There were three fifth-placed: Olympic high jump champion Tia Hellebaut, Eline Berings in the women's hurdles and Jan Van den Broeck in the men's 800 metres. But with just over four months before the games kick off in London, this does not bode well for Belgium's medal hopes.



Stijn Devolder tackles the Muur van Geraardsbergen in last year's race

▶ [www.rondevanvlaanderen.be](http://www.rondevanvlaanderen.be)

The last word...

A nation's hope

"You took my love for granted, would you really miss me?/Any other guy would do, but would you?" "Would You" by Nina Sampermans will be Belgium's entry to the Eurovision Song Contest in May, performed by Flemish teenager Iris

Pressure cooker

"In the old days, cooking was enough. Now you have to do everything: staff politics, design in the restaurant ... and then you have to appear in the media." Top chef Viki Geunes on the announcement that three-Michelin star chef Peter Goossens is revealed suffering from depression

Cleaning out

"I got the feeling I might as well be selling vacuum cleaners." Ghent gallery owner Jan Hoet is giving it up to pursue other artistic activities

Tough love

"If everyone is mad at me, that means I'm treating everyone equally." John Crombez, federal minister for fighting tax evasion

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

The Flemish Audio Visual Fund's work is never done: With the advent of the Media Fund, the organisation is charged with promoting local television programmes, as well as its better known function of supporting film. Together with a handful of Flemish producers, they are about to go to the biggest and most important TV promotions event in Europe

Living

Flanders' Centre for Religious Art & Culture has many functions, and one of them is as a storage space for religious icons no longer used. We visit the kitsch lover's paradise that is their cellars

Arts

Brussels' Fantastic Film Festival is celebrating three decades this year. We'll tell you what the horror, sci-fi and fantasy fest has to offer, how best to enjoy it and how to avoid – or take part in – the Vampire's Ball and Zombie Parade