

## Masterful museums

Museum Prize nominees announced

► 4



## Clean it up

Bruges' conference on cleantech

► 7



## "Simpler Dutch"

Online news site publishes book for Dutch learners

► 11



© Dominique Dierick

# Sacred grounds

Flanders is finally embracing the world's best coffees and those who brew them

Courtney Davis

Late March saw the publication of *The Belgium & Netherlands Coffee Guide*, "the definitive guide to the top coffee venues" here and in our neighbour to the north. The book's launch coincides with a growing obsession with coffee in Flanders: Senseo coffee pads, Nespresso shots and Starbucks take-away have all added to the ease with which local consumers can get their caffeine fix.

"Five years ago, we didn't have 100 good coffee places," says *Coffee Guide* editor Moniek Smit. "Now, after I finished the book, an additional four great coffee places opened in Antwerp. I have to update it

already. The coffee scene is developing very quickly." Until the last decade, coffee was mostly consumed at home via a filter-drip machine. Much like the bakeries and butchers, coffee beans were roasted locally. "We moved away from that and went more national, with larger companies," says Smit. "This was the start of the Italian-style espresso machine. There was a transformation from the big pot of coffee to the individual." Coffee-drinkers in Flanders are catching up with their European neighbours to the south in realising that coffee isn't just an after-dinner requirement. The wealth of drinks, from cappuccinos to flavoured specialities with an endless array of toppings and "latte art" (that pretty design a good barista makes on top of your foam), has finally become

accessible to the masses. Flanders' coffee scene is in a third wave, says Smit, "where we understand that there is different equipment required for each coffee. It is special and more of a science. You talk to a barista, and it's all about temperature, pressure, grams and weight." In fact, it can be so difficult to make a proper cup of coffee that there are official trainers and certifiers in the business, as well as national and international championships. "People want to be good baristas, to learn and to educate themselves," says Michel Hoorens, president of Belgian Coffee Education (BCE), the local chapter of the Specialty Coffee Association of Europe. One of the ways that BCE motivates people to make good coffee is through their



FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Christel Cabanier

At a conservative estimate, about 99% of the people who have heard of star hotel manager Christel Cabanier think of her as “that woman with the glasses off *Mijn Restaurant!*”. While the winners and other participants in the TV restaurant competition programme seem to be plagued with bad fortune – even top chef and fellow judge Peter Goossens suffered a highly-publicised burn-out – Cabanier goes from strength to strength. She’s been general manager of the trendy Hotel Bloom in Brussels since 2008, and last week she took a step up in the hotel world, becoming general director of the Park Inn by Radisson Brussels Midi, as well as district director for Belgium, the Netherlands and France for the Park Inn by Radisson chain. Cabanier, 41, began in the hotel business as a desk agent. In 1995, she became at 25 the youngest female hotel manager in Belgium. In 2008, she was put in charge of Hotel Bloom, near Kruidtuin on the edge of Schaarbeek. The hotel had changed hands several times without ever really finding its niche. Four years later, Hotel Bloom is thriving, voted the 13th trendiest hotel in the world by the review

website TripAdvisor. She also joined the legendarily tough jury of *Mijn Restaurant!* in 2008, alongside Goossens and food magazine editor Dirk De Prins. Cabanier was there to coach contestants in their waiting skills and restaurant design, and she was strict but encouraging, with her now trademark colourful outfits and designer glasses. You could imagine she’d be rather pleasant to work for, right up to the moment you make a wrong move, when you’d be disembowelled without her losing that customer-friendly smile. Her new job, or rather two, she describes as “a new challenge. As District Director I’ll be able to coach and follow young hotel managers, which will bring a new dimension to my management abilities.” She certainly has the background, not to mention the confidence. A few months ago in an interview, she was asked what she would do differently if given the chance. “I don’t think that until now I have made mistakes that I would try to avoid,” she replied. “I would redo everything in the same way.”

► [www.parkinn.com/hotel-brussels](http://www.parkinn.com/hotel-brussels)

News in brief

Pharmacists last week dimmed their neon green signs in protest at a new rule that requires doctors to **prescribe generic drugs** instead of brand-name drugs when generics exist. The goal of the measure is to cut social-security costs. Pharmacists say the rule was passed in haste, and their alternatives were not considered. “Patients could be the ones to suffer,” the pharmacists’ association said in a statement.

A group of **asylum-seekers who were on hunger strike** in a part of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) have given up their protest after 102 days, a spokesman said. The protestors are calling for permission to remain in Belgium, as well as work permits. Only one man vowed to continue; the others will now rest and recuperate before considering further action.

Flemish public transport authority DeLijn has launched a new campaign of intensified inspections to tackle the **problem of fare dodging**. Last week De Lijn carried out mass ticket-checks in Antwerp, Ghent and on the coastal tram in Ostend. Future checks will be announced in advance on the company’s website and in Metro, a spokesman said, to encourage people who might plan to travel without a ticket to pay. Fines range from €75 to €400 and last year brought in €3.2 million.

Flemish youth affairs minister Pascal Smet last week described new rules **restricting access to certain attractions at Plopsaland** theme parks as “excessive and out of proportion”. The main park at De Panne now denies access to 19 rides for visitors with a physical handicap and four rides to those with a mental handicap. Reports of a 12-year-old girl with Downs Syndrome being refused access to the log flume led to

“dozens of complaints” to the Centre for Equal Rights, the director said. Plopsaland management has said they may be prepared to review the restrictions.

A **ban on the display of religious symbols** introduced to Flemish public schools in 2009 discriminates against Muslims, according to a report published last week by human rights organisation Amnesty International. The ban on religious, political and philosophical symbols negatively affects some students and staff, said Amnesty, and the main effect was on Muslim women who wear a headscarf.

A battle between rival operators of **hop-on hop-off tour buses in Brussels** came to an end with a decision last week by the Brussels-Capital Region to allow only Open Tours to operate, under the supervision of the public transport authority MIVB and tourist authority VisitBrussels. From now on, only the red buses of Open Tours will be allowed to ply for tourist trade in the capital.

Trains on the main Ghent-Antwerp line were held up for a time last week after a **train hit a llama** that had strayed from a farm near Waasmunster, East Flanders, onto the tracks.

The **tunnel under Jubelpark** in Brussels will be closed this summer from 11 June to 15 September to allow work on Schuman Station, which will be transformed into a hub for the coming regional rail network. Traffic travelling in the direction of the city centre will be affected.

Last weekend saw the inauguration of the **World Peace Flame**

**monument** in Riemst, Limburg province, part of a worldwide movement to celebrate peace, unity and freedom. The World Peace Flame Foundation, based in The Hague, has seen to the installation of monuments in several Dutch cities, as well as in Wales, the US, India and Australia. The foundation also carries out educational and humanitarian projects.

Animal park Planckendael in Mechelen experienced a **baby boom** in April, with no fewer than 11 new arrivals. About 50 more animals are waiting to give birth. The new residents of the park include two saki monkeys, an Ankole-Watusi calf, three scimitar oryxes (an antelope species) and a camel – the first born at the park in 11 years.

Rail authority NMBS has announced its plans for 2013-2025, which include €25 billion on expenditures for new rolling stock, 200 new locomotives, 50 new light trains, €242 million for **renovations to the North and South stations** in Brussels and €226 million for the Sint-Pieters Station project in Ghent. Last week the first phase of renovations at Brussels North Station, a new ticket hall, was unveiled.

Correction

The article “Dexia on the brink” in our issue of 18 April 2012 read that “Dexia Bank – recently renamed Belfius” made losses of more than €16 billion last year. Losses were in fact sustained by the financial holding company Dexia Group, of which Belfius is no longer a part. Belfius is the new name of Dexia Bank Belgium, which used to be a subsidiary of the group, but which was sold to the Belgian state in October 2011.

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Another fine mess

The 1929 silent short *Double Whoopee* with Laurel and Hardy is famous for the scene in which screen vamp Jean Harlow has her dress partially torn off by the hapless duo, playing footman and doorman at a swanky hotel. Now there’s a case of real-life double whoopee surrounding Laurel and Hardy imitators, as one pair prepares to battle another in court over the right to reproduce the great double-act’s pratfalls and slapstick routines. Guy De Groote and Marc Van Malderen from Ghent have an honourable distinction: they are the only performers in the region of Germany, France and the Benelux with the right to perform as Laurel and Hardy imitators. Unlike Stan and Ollie, they did everything right, obtaining the proper licence from Larry Harmon Productions in the US (which also owns the rights to

Bozo the Clown and Popeye the Sailor Man). Along come Geert Willemijns and Rudy Schoonvaere from Halle in Flemish Brabant, presumably in a very rickety old jalopy, with their act Gaurel & Rardy: two clowns dressed in bowler hats and ill-fitting overalls, one corpulent



and moustached, the other thin and distracted. Now, the territory of Germany, France and the Benelux covers an area of more than one million square kilometres, with a population of over 175 million people. But evidently it’s too small for two sets of Laurel and Hardy imitators because De Groote and Van Malderen have sent Willemijns and Schoonvaere a cease-and-desist letter, claiming their exclusive licence is being infringed and threatening a fine of €2,000 per performance if they don’t stop. “Of course we’re not going to take action against someone who dressed up as Laurel or Hardy to take part in a carnival parade,” De Groote told *Het Nieuwsblad*. “But we will act against anyone who plays Laurel and Hardy in a show. They’re profiting from our work, and we’re suffering because of it.”



# Sacred grounds

## Making great coffee is about knowing both the products and the customers

► continued from page 1

annual competitions.

"It's a great trigger to talk about coffee, garnering a lot of interest," he says. "But it's not the goal of the organisation; we're looking for other ways to see how we can reach new baristas, and continue to teach and educate about great coffee."

### Best baristas

In February, Valentine Wanders placed second in the Belgian Barista Championship. The manager of Labath coffee shop in downtown Ghent, she appreciates the competition.

the customer.

A barista, says Wanders, is "a person who has a lot of insight about the product – someone who can treat the product well. Depending on if it's a brewed coffee or espresso, you need to work with your machine and the coffee as well as possible. Plus, you need to understand the customer. Flavour is so personal. So, basically, you need an understanding of products and people."

Smit agrees. For a café to be selected for her guide, she considered a number of elements.

are many techniques, and it's not easy to learn; there is quite a lot of work to being a good barista."

### The Starbucks factor

With so many elements going into making a good cup of coffee, it's easy to see how educating the consumer is so crucial. For this reason, most of the experts have a love/hate relationship with Starbucks.

Once a lone café in the Brussels Airport, the last two years have seen a boom of Starbucks locations, with two more airport locations joining forces with a café in Antwerp's Central Station. Last year saw a Starbucks springing up in Brussels' Central Station and in Ghent's main square, the Korenmarkt.

Starbucks, says Smit, comes "into towns and cities and introduces a different way of drinking and serving coffee. I'm not a personal fan of their coffee, but I think it's good they are here. They teach customers that you have to wait for good coffee and that there are different ways to have a coffee – and that you can even have one to go, which is quite different for Belgium."

Hoorens explains the difference between Starbucks coffee and most others – the flavour. "They work with great quality of coffee, but the roast is very dark and bitter. Starbucks does it on purpose because they sell a lot of lattes and speciality drinks. This means a small amount of coffee and a lot of milk, which requires a strong coffee."

More specifically, he says: "If you order just an espresso, it's not good. You need to add something. But if you get an espresso at OR, it's perfect on its own."

He is referring to OR Espresso Bar, a Ghent establishment with its own legion of fans. Simon Boone, senior Barista at OR, also acknowledges the positive element of the multinational's arrival. "It's good that Starbucks is there. Customers see us working, and they think we're like them. But then they taste our coffee and know it's better. We use the right



© Dominique Dierick



© Imagomore Co / CORBIS



Ghent's Café Labath has the atmosphere – and the coffee – to keep you in your seat a good long while; "latte art" is the new black; the first guide to great coffeehouses in the region

"There are many techniques, and it's not easy to learn. There is quite a lot of work to being a good barista"

"With the panel of judges, some technical and some sensory, you get confirmation that you're doing it right," Wanders says. "Instead of just working, why not be the best? Why do it by half if you like it?" It's her explanation of why she finished second instead of first that the intensity and complexity of making a good coffee is revealed. "I made a small error. I had a good coffee, but, a few minutes before the competition, I changed the dosage, which was less good for my flavour. For the rest, I did well, but I made a stupid mistake."

Wanders (pictured on cover) was edged out of the number one spot by Louis Donck of Donko's coffee roasters in Roeselare. But she doesn't regret her choice. "It was a dangerous coffee to work with – a wild-grown coffee," she says. "You can get different coffee from every shot. I took the risk with it because I really enjoy the flavour; it is such a good coffee."

### Products and people

Through Wanders' story, one gets a glimpse of the complexities and magnitude of the world of coffee. This is where the barista plays a pivotal role, not just in creating great coffee but also in educating

First were the coffee drinks themselves, which directly relates to the skills of the barista. "The best grinder, beans and machine can still make a lousy cup of coffee," she smiles. "Skills are key." And then there's their educational role. "The way they communicate about their coffee – do they get the customer involved in the trade of making coffee? Most people don't have a clue about what baristas do. They think it's just making a heart in your cappuccino, but it's so much more."

How much more exactly? "The most important thing is they get all the flavour out of the coffee and into your cup," says Smit. "How many grams of coffee for each shot? Which ground? The grinder is their most important tool to get the flavours out of coffee."

Smit, who also co-owns a barista training and coffee marketing firm in Utrecht, likens making great coffee to being a chef. "It's not just pushing a button; you have to taste your coffee every day and know your coffee. You must understand the ingredients. Like milk – what happens when you steam it, understanding temperature, knowing when to stop and why, how to pour. There

bean for the right method."

Educating the public about good coffee is Boone's mission. It's more than the barista that creates that espresso in your hand. "It's a long story, starting with a skilled farmer and skilled workers," he says hurriedly. "It is a good harvest from a good year and climate, just like wine. Then it's the processing. Is it washed, is it dried well, properly stored? Then there is the shipping and storage. And it doesn't stop there. We do quality control with

our suppliers; we taste a number of different coffees with a spoon and select a good one. The roast follows this, also important."

He slows down. "Finally, the baristas are the last station. A skilled barista knows how to use a certain bean in a certain way. It's quite a long way to a great coffee with that many stages. That's why education is important – from the farmer to the barista but also the customer."

## TOP SPOTS FOR COFFEE



As good as it gets: OR Espresso Bar

### Caffenation • Hopland 45, Antwerp

The birthplace of the proper coffee bar in Flanders. A veritable institution, it's run by Rob Berghmans, an icon in the local coffee scene who has helped many baristas to start their own cafés

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

### OR Espresso Bar • A Ortsstraat 9, Brussels

For some of the best coffee in Belgium, hit up the newly opened Brussels shop. Following in the footsteps of its sister café in Ghent, OR's coffee is as good as it gets

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

### Café Labath • Oude Houtlei 1, Ghent

This glass-fronted and checker-tiled coffee shop gives OR a run for its money, with equally strong, balanced coffee and talented baristas

► Find caféLabath on Facebook



# Energy companies cut prices

## Cuts and price-freezes to stem flow of departing clients

Alan Hope

Energy providers have bowed to pressure to cut prices, after clashes with government ministers early last month when the two main suppliers and some smaller companies increased their tariffs in the face of a law to freeze prices until the end of the year. Electrabel, number one nationwide, and Luminus, number two in Flanders, claimed their increase was legal, while federal economy minister Johan Vande Lanotte advised business clients to contest their bills. Last week, Electrabel said it would reduce its prices by 10 to 15% for customers paying a fixed tariff on a 12-month contract. Luminus decided not to implement the 1 April price increase, claiming it wished

to send a "strong signal" to its customers while maintaining the increase had been lawful. Essent also scrapped its planned increase.

According to the Flemish regulator for the gas and electricity industries, VREG, even the announced cut means that Electrabel is still 25% more expensive than its smaller competitors. The VREG website offers customers a worksheet to find the best price for their own situation. Electrabel's decision is thought to have been motivated largely by the mass exodus of customers to other, less expensive providers—144,000 households in Flanders since January 2011 for electricity, and 107,000 for gas.



Sophie Dutordoir, general director of Electrabel, announcing the new prices last week

## Museum Prize nominees announced



Ostend's Mu.Zee is one of this year's nominees for the Museum Prize

Romans, city artefacts, Belgian artists and a castle. Nominees for this year's Museum Prize have been announced. The shortlist contains five names from each of the three regions in Belgium, of which one each will be chosen by a jury of experts. There is also a regional prize voted by the public, and one for children's favourite museum.

In Flanders, the nominees are the Gallo-Roman Museum in Tongeren; Gaasbeek Castle (also nominated last year); the new Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in Antwerp; Mu.ZEE in Ostend (pictured), with its vast collection of local artists; and the city museum STAM in Ghent.

The nominees for Brussels are the Belgian Comic Strip Center; the Charlier Museum, also with a large collection of Belgian artists and designers; the Horta Museum in the architect's own house in Sint-Gillis; the Musical Instruments Museum and the Art Deco Van Buuren museum and gardens.

Each winning museum received €10,000. Both the public prize and the children's prize are worth €7,500. Winners will be announced on 22 May. Members of the public can vote for their favourite museum online, although last year's winners are excluded from the vote.

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

## Compromise on division levy

The Flemish government has reached an agreement on the future of the division levy, a tax on the sale price of property owned by more than one person, which critics had dubbed the "misery tax" because its effects are mainly felt by divorcing couples. The tax currently takes 1% of the sale price of the house, even if one partner is buying out the other. The Flemish government had announced plans to increase the tax to 2% as part of its budget package, but socialist members of parliament called for it to be scrapped rather than increased.

The tax rate will now go up to 2.5%, the government announced, but to mitigate the effect on the most vulnerable, the first €50,000 of the sales price will be tax-free, with €20,000 added to that allowance for each child still at school. These allowances apply to couples living together legally, as well as married couples. A divorced partner with two children who takes over a house worth €150,000 will now pay a tax of €1,500, instead of €3,000 under the original proposal.

## Ghent Peace Treaty commemorations kick off

Believe it or not, when Great Britain and the United States decided to put an end to their second – and last – war, they chose the humble city of Ghent to negotiate a peace treaty. On the 24th of December, 1814, the diplomats signed the Treaty of Ghent, which defined the borders between modern-day Canada and the US.

To commemorate the 200th anniversary of this joyful event, the city of Ghent, together with the Flemish government and the Canadian, US and British embassies, are hosting a series of activities from now until the spring of 2015. On 19 April,

the peace treaty remembrance was kicked off at Ghent's city hall. Mayor Daniël Termont and the ambassadors from the three countries all spoke about the world-defining importance of the treaty. Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters spoke about the importance of article 10 of the treaty, in which both the US and UK for the first time in history condemn slave trade as unjust and inhumane and agree to "use their best endeavours to promote its entire abolition". (Within 19 years, the UK passed the Slavery Abolition Act, but it took the American south another 49 years to give up slavery.)

As part of the treaty programme, an exchange program for pupils between the ages of eight and 18 from Washington, DC, and Ghent is being arranged. In 2014 and 2015, Ghent culture centres D'Hane-Steenhuysse and Caermersklooster will host related exhibitions. Also in 2014, the Ghent Jazz Festival, the International Film Festival of Ghent and the Festival of Flanders will focus on composers from the three countries involved. There are plans to develop a commemorative postage stamp, too.

Daan Bauwens

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

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

40%

of company management executives in Flanders are active on social media websites, according to a study by TNS Media

2,000,000

inhabitants of Brussels within 25 years if current trends continue, according to Patrick Deboosere, demographic expert at the Free University of Brussels (VUB)

24

airlines have received an order from the Brussels-Capital Region to pay outstanding fines for noise nuisance by May or face legal action. More than 100 other fines have been paid

148

national and international prizes picked up by Flemish films in 2011, according to the Flanders Audiovisual Fund. And 1.8 million people in Belgium went to see a Flemish film last year

191

municipalities in Flanders are "hospitable" to asylum-seekers, according to voters in an online poll. Ghent leads the list with 114 votes, compared to 83 in Antwerp [www.gastvrijegemeente.be](http://www.gastvrijegemeente.be)

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

## De Block vs Scott

In the new federal government, Maggie De Block, a back-bencher well respected by insiders for her grasp of health issues but largely unknown to the public at large, was surprising named secretary of state for Asylum and Migration.

Asylum and Migration is one of the toughest portfolios. One of De Block's predecessors, Patrick Dewael, shudders when he looks back on it. It hardened his soul, he says.

Asylum is not just thorny because of the endless human misery involved; there is also a wide gap between how the north and south of this country views it. French speakers tend to take a more compassionate stand, not wanting to send people back. The Flemish have become more pragmatic, as the welcoming policies of the past have resulted in failure on many counts. Two regularisation waves have made Belgium more attractive than its neighbours to traffickers.

In terms of housing and administration, Belgium cannot handle the masses that arrive here. Procedures may take years, by which time many people have settled in, making it nearly impossible to deport them. Offering more clarity and efficiency may, therefore, be just as compassionate.

Confronted with all of this, De Block's first weeks in office were a disaster. As winter set in, freezing temperatures heightened the plight of families wandering around train stations and parks for lack of shelter. The new secretary of state found it hard to address this legacy of the past – as anyone would have. Moreover, she proved rather shaky in the rare interviews she gave.

Last week, though, De Block marked her first successes, when it was revealed that more and more asylum seekers return voluntarily. Also, a group of *sans papiers* – illegal immigrants – ended a hunger strike that lasted for weeks. "I have never once considered allowing these people into the country," De Block said in parliament. That the federal government, including the French speakers, backed her on this, is new. A government this fragile has to stick to its agreements closely, is one explanation.

De Block may be relieved, but another challenge is just around the corner.

Scott Manyo arrived here from Cameroon as a minor in 2008. He settled in, did well at school and became a popular youth scout guide in Boortmeerbeek, Flemish Brabant. Scott's story has attracted a lot of publicity and...compassion. Will De Block have him deported, too? And how much will this harden her soul?



# Enterprise culture at 10-year high

## New business confidence on the increase in Flanders

Alan Hope

Enthusiasm in Flanders for starting new businesses is at its highest level for 10 years, since well before the economic crisis in 2008, according to the latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) just released. The proportion of people who expect to set up a new business in the next three years – the so-called prospective entrepreneurs – stands at 9.6%, higher than the European reference figure, based on responses from Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands and the UK. The figure for those who see opportunities for starting a business over the next six years in Flanders is just over 40%, four times higher than it was a decade ago. Similar rising trends were measured for the social esteem for entrepreneurship (how people rate it as a career option), the attention given to business innovators in the media and how entrepreneurs are regarded in general. GEM is a project originally set up by

the London Business School, with data reported from universities and other institutions in each country. It also produces regional and sector reports. Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, who once ran Unizo, the organisation for the self-employed, and whose government repeatedly expresses support for entrepreneurship, welcomed the figures. “In recent times, the respect given to entrepreneurs in our society has gone up a great deal,” he said. “More people are coming to believe that starting your own business is a way towards a great career. Entrepreneurs are more and more respected in Flanders.” Last year in Flanders, 41,654 new businesses were launched, the highest figure ever. According to Eurostat, 14.6% of the working population are business owners, compared to 11.6% in France and Germany. “We really do belong at the top in Europe,” Peeters commented.



## Call for action on high employment costs

The cost of employing a worker in Belgium is higher than anywhere else in the EU, and second-highest in the world, except for Norway, according to figures last week from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Employers' organisations in Flanders have repeated calls for government to take action to repair the country's competitive disadvantage. The OECD calculated the difference between what a worker costs a company to employ and what the worker takes home in net income. Taking account of all social charges, insurances and taxes, net income amounts to 44.5% of the cost to an employer on average. In Germany, for example, the figure is nearly 50%. For a person earning 1.5 times the average wage, the government takes nearly 61% of the employer's cost, leaving less than 40% for net take-home pay.

The result is that companies are less likely to create new jobs and more ready to discard jobs when times are difficult. The costs also mean companies can be less flexible with labour, for example by using part-time and job-sharing options to respond to timely market conditions. “All of those responsible now need to wake up and take immediate measures,” responded Karel Van Eetvelt, director general of Unizo. “If Belgium wants to count internationally, then we can't allow our costs to tower above other European countries.” Jo Libeer (*pictured*), chairman of the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka, said that “time after time, our calls for something to be done have been backed up by figures from national and international bodies like the Central Council for Business Life, the OECD and Eurostat. Yet the government refuses to step in,



and the problem is swept under the carpet. This is and remains a serious competitive disadvantage for our companies and for the creation of wealth.”

## Lieten urges sexual harassment victims to come forward

Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten has called on women who were subject to sexual intimidation and unwanted sexual advances in the workplace to come forward and report to trusted confidants. The minister, a former chief executive of De Lijn, was responding to questions in the Flemish parliament after allegations emerged about sexual intimidation by a former newspaper editor and a former radio presenter for the VRT public broadcaster. She also called on companies in the media and elsewhere to implement procedures for dealing with complaints and reminded the media of their responsibility to report allegations properly and with a view to the balance between the privacy of victims and the public interest.

## Q&A



### What exactly is the Groen+ account?

It's a savings account like any other, with the one difference that for every €1,000 saved by the customer,

**BNP Paribas Fortis has launched a new Groen+ savings account in conjunction with Flemish nature conservancy organisation Natuurpunt. Chris Steenwegen is the director of Natuurpunt.**

BNP Paribas pays €1 into a fund to be used to buy and manage land for nature conservancy. The rest of our activities continue to be financed in the usual way, from donations, memberships and sponsorships, as well as government support.

### Have you any idea how much this initiative might raise?

No idea. Some actions are unexpectedly successful, and some are less successful than you anticipate. It all depends on what BNP Paribas does to inform its customers and encourage them to open an account. But we've had an assurance from them that they'll promote the programme inside their own network and in the

media. We'll do the same, of course, but we're a lot smaller.

### Have you worked with commercial partners before?

We've worked with BNP Paribas in the past, as well as with a federation of natural gas producers, an alternative savings bank and the Torfs shoes chain. Last year we had a very successful campaign together with Grany, which makes cereal bars, in connection with the UN's International Year of Forests. That raised €75,000 to buy up woodland, and we had 1,000 to 1,500 parents and kids who had taken part in the Grany competition turn out to help us plant trees in Sint-Katelijne-Waver.

### Is cooperation with business the future of fund-raising for non-profits?

We're always looking for structural partners to work with over the long term. Companies also come to us because we have a strong brand and we're very anchored locally, unlike some of the bigger names like Greenpeace who are more international. For them, it forms part of the new trend of increasing corporate social responsibility. And their employees seem to appreciate the cooperation and are very motivated by it. So it's a win-win situation.

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

## THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Auctions

#### ► Artcurial

The Paris-based Artcurial auction house has opened an office in Brussels. The company, which plans to hold several sales locally, is specialised in modern and contemporary art.

### Brewing –

#### ► Alken-Maes

Mechelen-based Alken-Maes has begun exporting its Mort Subite, Maes pils and Affligem brews to the United States, following in the footsteps of Duvel Moortgat and Delirium Tremens, among other Flemish beer brands. The Affligem abbey beer celebrates its 950th birthday this year.

### Construction

#### ► Besix

The Brussels-based building group is considering acquiring a majority stake in one of the largest Australian building groups in the wake of winning a major contract to build a port and gas terminal in Onslow on Australia's north-west coast. Besix also recently won contracts to build a hotel in Andermatt, Switzerland and the King Abdullah stadium in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

### Energy

#### ► Himin

The Chinese solar energy equipment producer Himin is considering setting up its headquarters for Europe and the Middle East in Brussels. Additional investments would include setting up a production unit and a distribution centre nearby.

### Food

#### ► La Belle Iloise

French group La Belle Iloise, specialised in canned sardines, tuna, mackerel and fish soup, is opening a sales outlet in Nieuwpoort, its 51st overall and its first outside of France.

### Technology

#### ► Transics

Ypres-based Transics, a developer of on-board computers for trucks and buses, which launched on the stock market five years ago at €17.5 a share, is being taken over by the Taveres investment company for €7.1 a share.

### Telecom

#### ► Base

The battle to acquire the 4.3 million customer-strong Base, Belgium's third largest mobile phone and telecommunications group, is heating up with the French Free mobile operator entering the fray. Free, owned by maverick businessman Xavier Niel, is believed to be seeking support from Bain Capital and CVC Capital to fund a bid. Other potential bidders are said to include Apax Partners and Providence Equity Partners.



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## GOSSELIN MOVING

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# Stop eating the planet

## A sustainable world via clean technology is on the table at a conference in Bruges

Andy Furniere

Nobel Prize laureates, the great and the good of climate change experts and Hollywood action star turned sustainable development advocate Arnold Schwarzenegger will be coming together at i-SUP2012 next week in Bruges. The third edition of this biannual conference – its name stands for Innovation for Sustainable Production – is marked by the participation of Indian experts on climate change and sustainable development of rural areas. Nobel Prize laureates Rajendra Pachauri and Amartya Sen will speak at an India Night, which celebrates the country's collaboration with Vito, the Flemish Institute for Technological Research, which has organised the event. For five days, more than 500 representatives from the academic, business and political world will meet to discuss the sustainable transformation of our planet with clean technology. The organising committee of Vito is praying that all volcanoes in countries nearby remain dormant next week. Two years ago, the eruptions of Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland prevented about 100 participants from attending the conference. "But this historic event also emphasised the impact of natural disasters, even in the western world," notes Ludo Diels, research leader at Vito. "Recent natural disasters, such as oil spills and floods, accentuate the fact that we need to adapt to and mitigate climate change."

### Building a sustainable planet

Cleantech, short for clean technology, is key in Vito's strategy to build a sustainable world. The term describes products or services that improve productivity and efficiency while reducing energy and resource consumption, waste and cost. Vito gathers international stakeholders in policy, business and research to design new energy systems, transport and mobility concepts, sustainable

industrial processes for materials and chemicals and urban and rural plans based on sustainable principles.

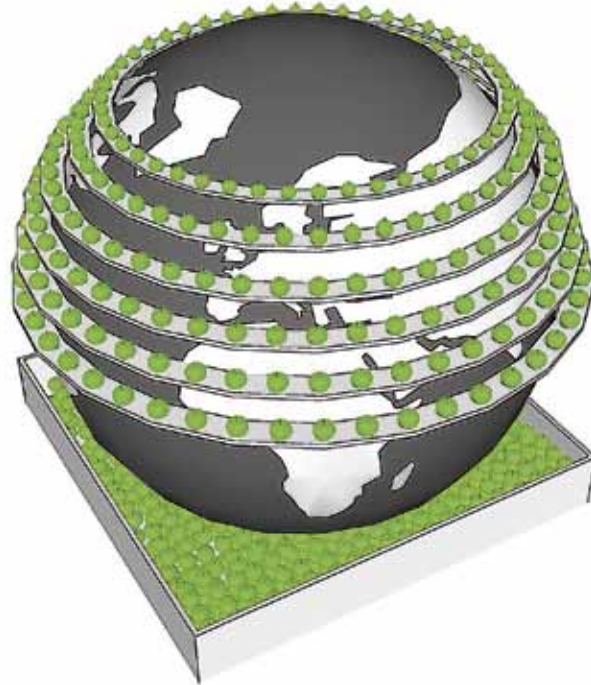
"The i-SUP2012 conference is not a purely scientific event but also a networking opportunity to stimulate cooperation between the different actors," explains Diels.

The keynote speakers will cover a variety of subjects. Lynn Frewer, professor in Food and Society at Newcastle University, will talk about the balance between agriculture, environment and land use, while Luís Maria Pérez, manager of GE Energy Services, will deliver a speech on CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral energy systems in cities. Durk Krol, director of the Water Supply and Sanitation Technology Platform at the European Commission, will explain the economic importance of sustainable chemistry.

Platform Flanders Cleantech Association will acquaint participants with clean tech initiatives in Flanders and worldwide, with presentations by, among others, former science and innovation minister Patricia Ceysens and tech company Melotte CEO Mario Fleurinck.

### Economist of the poor

Movie star and former governor of Californiaw Schwarzenegger, meanwhile, will speak via video link. "As governor, he was a frontrunner in sustainable development," says Diels. Schwarzenegger will talk about the non-profit organisation R20 Regions of Climate Action, which he co-founded in 2011. The R20 is a coalition of partners led by regional governments that promotes eco-friendly projects. The highlight of the conference is the India Night on Wednesday. In an atmosphere of traditional Indian food and music, Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007, will discuss climate change. Amartya Sen, Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University, won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1998.



Lessius University College design students Lisanne Hoekstra, Anne Sterkens and Annette Janssen won the competition to design the installation at i-sup2012, the planet being eaten alive by humans. Conference participants will be able to pluck real apples off the earth

Known as "economist of the poor", he will plead by video message for ways to provide development opportunities to all layers of society.

Vito will present its collaboration with the Energy and Resources Institute, the Indian research organisation headed by Pachauri. With the joint project "cleantech for transition", launched in August last year, they stimulate sustainable development in rural areas of India via the introduction of cleantech. Vito will help research on biomass at a knowledge centre and lab in Bangalore. "With this example of international cooperation, we hope to inspire the conference participants," says Diels.

### Location, location

Vito has chosen the former Oud Sint-Jan hospital in the centre of Bruges as the venue for the conference to ensure maximum accessibility by public transport and to have all facilities within walking distance. All necessary

car trips are done in environmentally friendly cars, while a minimum of papers and bags are handed out. Even the carpet inside the exhibition tent will be recycled.

During the social event on the Tuesday, participants will visit places of interest in Bruges through walking, running, cycling or on a boat. "We want to be as consistent as possible in our eco-friendly message," explains Diels.

Students of Group Design & Technology at Lessius University College in Mechelen have created an eye-catching installation for the conference: a globe surrounded by apples, which visitors can pluck. "The idea is that our planet is being exhausted by us all," says Diels. "Hopefully this installation and the conference will make people aware that we have to stop eating our planet."

► [www.i-sup2012.org](http://www.i-sup2012.org)

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Research groups from the centre of excellence Food2Know at Ghent University are working with the Melissa project of the European Space Agency to **cultivate crops such as wheat, potatoes and salad in space** for long-term missions. The crops are not only food for the astronauts but also convert carbon dioxide into oxygen and produce water. First, scientists will cultivate crops in a sealed environment on earth, then on the moon, later in space devices during their trip to Mars and finally on Mars itself.

► [www.food2know.be](http://www.food2know.be)

Sixteen Master's students in Industrial Sciences at the University College Group T in Leuven are building a **small electric race car, the Areion**. The students will participate this summer in the international Formula Student Competition at the Silverstone circuit in England, where the speed, braking, design and consumption of the self-built cars are judged. The Aerion should stand out because of the application of innovative technologies: the bodywork, for example, is made using a 3D printer. The Lessius University College in Mechelen and Karel de Grote University College in Antwerp are also participating.

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

One out of eight Flemish students in higher education **goes abroad for a time to study**, most of them via the European exchange programme Erasmus, which has been running for 25 years. Still, this group is too small, according to European and Flemish educational leaders, who hope to stimulate 20% of students by 2020 to cross the border. The rector of Ghent University, Paul Van Cauwenberge, wants to persuade one in four students by that time. Currently, around 15% of the students at UGent go abroad to study.

A team of four Master's students of the faculty of law at the University of Leuven **won the prestigious European Law Moot Court Competition**. During the final, law students argued a fictitious case before the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg. Nine of Europe's top judges made up the jury. The University of Antwerp was the best in the Advocate General category.

The University of Antwerp has **struck tuna off the menus** at its restaurants and cafeterias because it is an endangered species. The university took this measure in recognition of its Oceans Week, an awareness campaign by the Belgian Sea First Foundation, which aims to improve the state of the oceans.

AF

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

## Leuven students quiz top CEOs



© Nicolas Maerlinck / BELGA

The opportunity to quiz a top business leader face to face is a major opportunity for any young person interesting in running their own (or someone else's) business, and that's what's being offered by the Top Management network in its Top 1 to 1 series.

The series started earlier this year, explains Ariane van de Werve of 1 to 1, with a talk given in Brussels by Paul Buysse, chairman of Bekaert. About 300 would-be entrepreneurs turned up to hear him interviewed by journalist Alex Puissant.

During and after the interview, anyone in the auditorium can ask questions. "The same goes for the people watching the livecast online," says van de Werve. "Any questions they send in

can then be asked live by Alex."

Last week, a similar number came to Leuven to hear the thoughts and advice of Luc Bertrand, CEO of the Antwerp-based construction and finance company Ackermans & van Haaren and a consultant to the National Bank (*pictured*). Bertrand was on home ground: He graduated from Leuven with a degree in commercial engineering in 1974.

"Top 1 to 1 wants to encourage the entrepreneurial drive of young people, while uncovering and stimulating their potential management talents," explains van de Werve. "These meetings...are an exceptional chance for students to explore the strengths, gifts and extraordinary qualities of today's CEOs and to benefit from their

business world experience."

Though attendees are largely business students, the sessions are open to anyone with a goal to one day start their own business. Attendance is free, and if you can't make the live session, the discussion is streamed online with an access code, available on request. The plan is to compile an online archive of the talks anyone can browse through, like the popular TED talks.

The next Top 1 to 1 takes place in the autumn and features Pierre-Olivier Beckers, CEO of the Delhaize Group, Harvard Business School graduate and former chairman of the Belgian Olympic Committee. All the talks are in English. **Alan Hope**

► [www.top1to1.com](http://www.top1to1.com)





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**The Place Royale**, with the statue of Godefroid de Bouillon at its centre, is surrounded by 18th century buildings including the Church of St. Jacques sur Coudenberg, the former Palace of the Dukes of Brabant, the Museum of Fine Arts and Magritte Museum.

Admire the Museum of Musical Instruments, a beautifully restored Art Nouveau complex, the Alexander Calder's "Whirling Ear", a mobile abstract work.

Going along the **Mount of Arts**: The Royal Library, with more than 5 million books. This building also houses the Nassau Chapel.

Square: Brussels Meeting Centre offers 13,000m<sup>2</sup> for: international congresses, all sorts of events, gala dinners, exhibitions.

Passing by the **Brussels Parliament**: created during the State Reform of 1988-89, like every democratic institution, the Parliament consists of members elected on the basis of universal suffrage: the Brussels Region deputies

Next, your guide will walk you to the old centre of the city to get a taste of the **Market Square** (Grand-Place), Brussels' most amazing architectural feature, surrounded by guild houses. The fantastic 15th C. gothic City Hall tells plenty of legends and medieval stories.

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Best regards,  
The Bulletin Team

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# Where time stands still

## Mediaeval folk tales come alive in the Flemish Ardennes

Andy Furniere

In the picturesque villages of Kerselare, Mater, Ename and Mullem, authentic Flemish pastoral life is kept alive through festivals, folk tales, an interactive museum and even pilgrimages – but in essence by the locals themselves. In these districts of Oudenaarde, among the hills of the Flemish Ardennes in East Flanders, a baroness still watches out over everyday life from her castle, as mediaeval musicians and a jester go around houses to invite everyone to the annual parade.

My guide around the countryside of Oudenaarde, Joris De Jaegher, has lived in the area since he was born and seems to know the whole population, judging by the number of people who wave at us. He immediately takes me to the highest point of Oudenaarde, on top of a hill called the Edelare. The view over the fields, meadows and woods is one of the most beautiful in Flanders, and here stands a chapel that is the starting place of a pilgrimage route dating back to the 15th century.

Two curious items inside the chapel still refer to those mediaeval times. The miraculous Virgin Mary statue gave the village its name as it was at one time put on a *Kerselaar*, or cherry tree, to be worshipped by passers-by. The statue's fame grew later when it survived a chapel fire. A wooden crocodile hanging on the wall of the chapel replaces the animal that attacked local baron Joos de Joigny on his way to Jerusalem in the 16th century. After a hurried prayer to Our Lady of Kerselare, he was able to overpower the crocodile. Out of gratitude, he brought the dead animal back to the village.

In the pilgrimage month of May, the small roads on the site are full of pilgrims who follow a three-kilometre route that passes 15 small chapels with a statue of the Virgin Mary inside. "According to tradition, it takes the time to say 10 Hail Marys to reach the next chapel," says De Jaegher. The roads are also popular among walking enthusiasts. In the tiny centre, pilgrims and hikers in search of fortification find several inns and restaurants.

### Mediaeval trio

After driving along many cobblestoned roads and conquering steep slopes, we arrive at Oudenaarde's larger, agricultural district, Mater. Apart from farmers, we passed many cyclists. It's no wonder, as several of the demanding roads are included in the cycling classic Tour of Flanders.

The mediaeval patron saint of Mater is St Amelberga. On the date of her death, 10 July, there is a festival, the highlight of which is a horse parade around the village. As tradition prescribes, the inhabitants of Mater are invited by a trio dressed as a mediaeval drummer, flautist and jester who come to each home.

De Jaegher decides it's high time for



Ename's church is a fine relic of the Ottonian empire in Flanders

refreshments and takes me to the nearby Roman brewery, in business since 1545. We toast with an Adriaen Brouwer, a light brown beer that the brewery has been making since its foundation and is named after the famous Flemish painter from Oudenaarde. Tourists can take part in guided visits of the brewery and taste its many renowned beers.

The history of Ename, meanwhile, can be traced back to the year 974, when the German emperor built a defence post in the area, and the settlement flourished. But in 1047, the Count of Flanders conquered the town and a Benedictine abbey was built on the site.

The archaeological remains of the abbey are open to visitors, who can relive the middle ages through a "time frame" and other interactive features at the Provincial Archaeological Museum in Ename. The church next to the museum is an exceptional testimony of the 10th-century Ottonian dynasty in Flanders. Its rare wall paintings in Byzantine style were discovered only 20 years ago.

### The end of the world

Ename also is a favourite destination for hikers and cyclists because of its extensive woods. Many more tourists are expected



The Oudenaarde area is popular with walkers and pilgrims



In de Kroon in Mullem is a welcoming brasserie that has featured in several TV series, including *Hard labour* in 1984, based on a novel by Mullem-born writer Reimond Stijns

from 10 to 13 August, when the village holds its annual festivities with a horse market on the final day as the main attraction.

In Mullem, we have not only arrived at the end of our tour but at "the end of the world", as Baroness Lily de Gerlache describes her home. She was the wife of Baron Gaston de Gerlache, the explorer who led the second Belgian expedition to Antarctica in 1957, following in the tracks of his pioneering father Adrien 60 years earlier.

De Gerlache was the mayor of Mullem from 1952 to 1970, and the baroness still lives in the imposing castle in the village. Ochre yellow

houses – the colour indicates that they belonged to the de Gerlaches – are typical of the area.

This area was the backdrop for the bloody Battle of Oudenaarde in 1708 during the War of the Spanish Succession but today is, thankfully, as peaceful as can be. It has in fact served as the setting of Flemish TV series featuring the pastoral life of Flanders decades ago. "But it's not fiction," says De Jaegher. "Here it really seems as if time has stood still. It's a perfect place to leave the busy city life behind."

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

## THE LEKKIES OF JAN VAN GENT



© Toerisme Oost-Vlaanderen

This year, confectioner Jan van Gent of Kerselare celebrates its 200th anniversary with a new sweet called *Oudenaardse babbelaar* and a beer named Jan van Oudenaarde. But the company is still – and probably will remain so for the next 200 years – best known for its *lekkies*, the "pilgrims' candy".

After their journeys, pilgrims would reward themselves with these sweets and, in earlier times, took some home to serve as protection against evil spirits. The

*lekkies* (pictured) originate from Ghent, where they are known as *babbelaars*. As the sweets did not sell well in the beginning, the pilgrims could have a lick (or *lekkie*) to try them out before buying. Today, visitors to Jan van Gent, which is also a tearoom, can see how the artisan candy is made. An exhibition running until 13 May in Oudenaarde's city hall showcases the history of the confectioner.

► [www.janvangent-oudenaarde.be](http://www.janvangent-oudenaarde.be)



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# Hold the front page

## Website for students of Dutch gathers most-read articles for new book

Katy Desmond

After about a year of living in Belgium, I ran into a problem when it came to Dutch. I had taken classes, spoke it regularly and could even throw in a bit of West Flemish for laughs. But I couldn't find the right reading material; everything I picked up was either too easy or too difficult.

Books written in Dutch are filled with enormous words, not to mention the many intimidating prefixes latched on to what look to be all the same word: *toewijzen*, *uitwijzen*, *onderwijzen*, *bewijzen*, *verwijzen*, even *doorverwijzen*. And English is a Germanic language, so I can only imagine how native speakers of romance

languages must feel sorting through all this.

Plunging into *De Standaard* articles or Hugo Claus leaves a lot of Dutch-learners feeling like they are reading less of their text and more of their dictionary. What Dutch missed was something in-between: engaging Dutch-language resources written in a clear vocabulary understandable by learners.

This is precisely the problem former Dutch teacher Koen Van Kelecom was trying to solve when he started taalblad.be, a news website for Dutch language learners that provides current news in what Van Kelecom calls "simpler Dutch". Having just celebrated its fifth anniversary, taalblad.be has just launched the book *Echt Waar?!*

### Language in context

"With Taalblad, I wanted to make learning Dutch as amusing and enjoyable as possible," says Van Kelecom, editor of taalblad.be and co-author of *Echt Waar?! "It is about putting the words*

into a context. Instead of just memorising lists of *de* and *het* words, you see *de boekhouder* [the accountant] and *het geld* [the money], putting them together in a way that is memorable. This makes it fun and educational and, of course, informative."

Since its inception five years ago, taalblad.be's popularity has grown among both students and teachers. Today, the website receives 1,000 to 1,900 visitors a day. Of the nearly 7,000 subscribers, the majority (about 60%) are French speakers from Brussels and Wallonia. About 30% live in Flanders and a somewhat surprising 14% live outside of Belgium. "There are people learning Dutch all over the world," notes Van Kelecom. "Many are people who happen to have a Dutch-speaking partner or who are preparing to study [in Flanders or the Netherlands]."

Taalblad.be, which is supported by the non-profit organisation De Rand and Taaluniecentrum NVT, was not the first paper of its kind. *Wablieft*, a newspaper targeted at native Dutch speakers with literacy problems, has published its print version for 25 years and is often promoted in Dutch classes. Van Kelecom says that the two papers cater to students at different levels. "In *Wablieft*, you'll find very short sentences and no set phrases. But this quickly becomes too simple for adult learners. We say Taalblad is 'simpler' Dutch. You'll find a long sentence or two, along with some common sayings and idioms."

Taalblad is the first initiative of its type to be published solely online, which was part of Van

Kelecom's original vision. It's an "online *immersie*", or immersion, in Dutch, hence the bathtub logo on the site and the rubber ducky on the cover of the book.

"I wanted to make something for students to use at home when searching on the internet for Dutch resources," explains Van Kelecom. Using the internet also lends certain technological advantages, like giving readers English and French translations of key vocabulary with just the hover of a mouse.

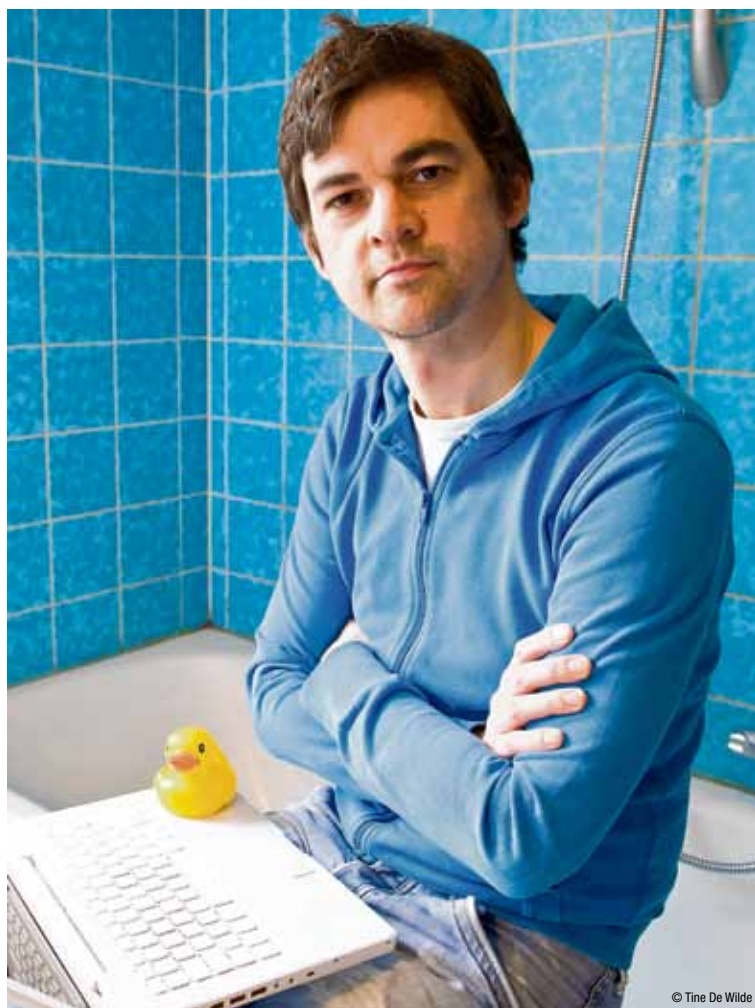
### The next step

*Echt Waar?!* (which means "Really?!") is a compilation of taalblad.be's most read and most timeless articles of the past five years. Broken up into six chapters, the book gives quaint vignettes of life in Belgium and beyond through real news stories. Its articles are short, with whimsical titles like "The slowest snail in the world", "Cat is loyal passenger on bus" and "Artwork made from 1,100 litres of peanut butter damaged".

Like the website, *Echt Waar?!* gives the English and French translations for difficult words in the margins. It also provides language puzzles and crosswords in each chapter to reinforce new vocabulary and grammar that the reader comes across. According to Van Kelecom, the articles can be read by anyone with a basic knowledge of Dutch, but they will provide entertainment and practice for learners at any level.

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

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



Taalblad.be founder Koen Van Kelecom, and friend



## Word of mouth

## A new handbook explores the importance of oral history in education

Alan Hope

No matter how good schools may be, there's no better way of preparing young people for later life than the experience of those who have gone before. That's the principle behind a project launched by a group of local heritage associations together with Faro, the Flemish government's heritage agency. The group has produced a handbook for teachers on how to introduce oral history into Flemish classrooms.

Oral history goes back thousands of years: It was once the only history there was. Even historians like Herodotus and Thucydides were working from sources in the oral tradition. More recently, oral history has been at the root of the BBC's Millennium Memory Bank, as well as Steven Spielberg's Shoah

Foundation, collecting testimony from Holocaust survivors.

Oral history is being used as a learning tool in classrooms in about 20 projects in Flanders, according to Ode De Zutter of the Waasland Heritage Database. Waasland and Mechelen are two of the main movers behind the handbook *Leren van horen zeggen* (Learning from Listening), which uses examples from current practice to show how oral history can be integrated into lessons in secondary schools.

Examples are the history of the Ursuline nuns of Mechelen, currently marking the centenary of their convent, studied by the students of Ursuline College. In Geel, students at Sint-Maria-Instituut and Sint-Dimpna College are working on the history of the

town's tradition of providing care for the sick and mentally ill. In Sint-Andries, a district of Bruges, the project covers everyday life during the Second World War.

"These are just a few examples of the projects described in the book," says De Zutter. "Some schools have been busy with this for a number of years."

It's not just a question of interviewing people who have lived the experiences. "There are also a number of methodological conditions involved in the way the information is handled," explains De Zutter. "One testimony is compared with others, in the same way as scientists might carry out their research."

The interviews can also be placed alongside archive material, like photographs or reports, for



Students in Geel are studying the oral history of the city's centuries-old tradition of caring for the sick and mentally disabled

comparison. The intention is to create a permanent record. "The skills and experiences learned by students are of wider value, developing cross-cultural vision, social awareness and critical

thinking," she says. "Oral history is an extremely useful method of honing the research capabilities of students."

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



# A voyage out

Knokke-Heist's annual photo festival goes from the sea to the jungle to outer space

Bjorn Gabriels

Images speak louder than words, we often hear. Well, if that stands, visiting the Knokke-Heist International Photo Festival is like falling head over heels into a babelesque barrel of visual input. It's up to you to sift through them and let the eye candy sink in.

The free-for-all festival hosts photography exhibitions at various locations across Knokke-Heist, both indoors and out. At its core is a selection of work by six photographers under the title *Wonderland*, put together by long-time curator Christophe De Jaeger. The overarching theme is long voyages in an attempt to discover and understand our surroundings.

Unlike earlier editions, this year's festival has opted for one group exhibition scattered around the coastal city, rather than a series of exhibitions. About 80 works in total can be found along a 16-kilometer circular tour that brings you from the crowded beach boulevard to the hinterland of this high-class area. Some of the photos can also be found in Knokke's Casino, in a small room next to a 70-metre mural by René Magritte, and in Museum Sincfala.

## Fishing for photos

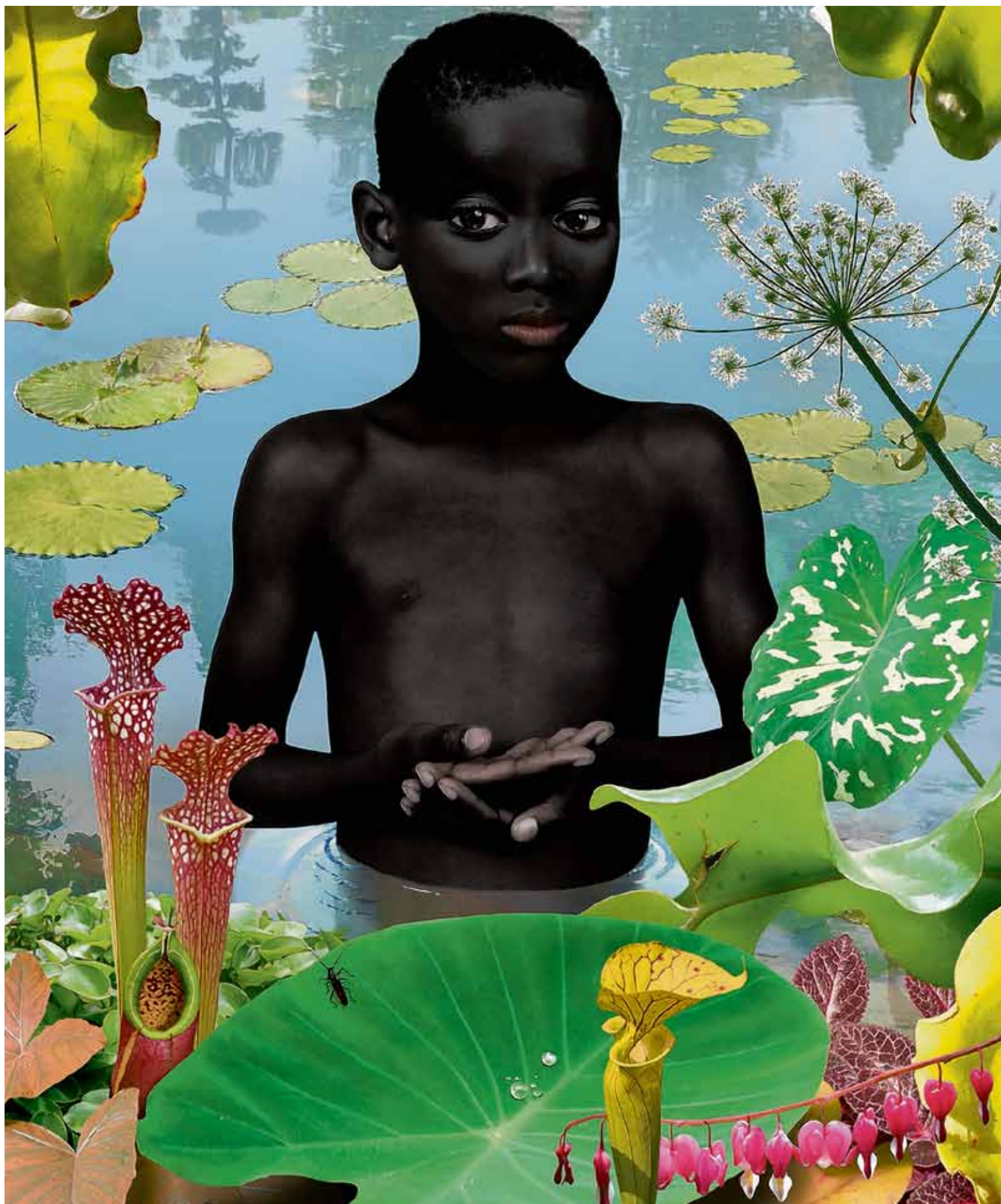
By largely leaving the museum context, the Photo Festival wants to bring art photography to the masses and let the works embark on a direct confrontation with their often mundane surroundings. In that respect, works of spectacle are often most suited for impact on passers-by. Judging by some of their reactions, American photographer Corey Arnold has certainly managed to catch people's eye. One little girl, thrilled by the sight of a fisherman lying on a bed of crabs in a cargo hold, literally jumped with pleasure when she ran to the other side of the large canvas cubicle and saw a fisherman holding a cat and wearing a horse head.

Arnold is a professional fisherman who, in his own words, "stumbled onto photography". During his trips on the Bering Sea, he portrayed the life of commercial fishing, focusing his camera on the spectacular sights and the everyday chores, as well as creating surreal stagings (such as "Kitty and Horse Fisherman"). An overview of his work can be seen in Sincfala, a museum dedicated to the history of the local fishing communities.

Arnold's pictures reflect the long fishing trips, which he calls "boot camps for the soul", with a whiff of romanticism floating through the fresh Alaskan air and over the turbulent waters.

## Full moon rising

The other five photographers of the *Wonderland* parcours, which is perfect for a cycle tour, also have an eye for the spectacles of nature and the human fascination for them. The German Olaf Otto Becker travelled through glacial territories in Greenland and photographed grand



landscapes there, often with some form of "gateway" in the middle – a ravine, river or runoff of a glacier.

Becker shares with Arnold a romantic fascination for journeys through remote places and working under harsh conditions, while he adds a sense of passing time and the evolution of our surroundings.

Dutch photographer Gerco de Ruijter, meanwhile, takes photographs from a bird's eye view, perpendicular to a landscape that has been altered

by humans in varying degrees. His images offer an abstract take on everyday reality. For this purpose, De Ruijter attaches a remote-controlled camera to a Japanese fighter kite.

Michael Light goes to even greater lengths. He not only shoots photos from planes, for his *Full Moon* project he worked with images from the NASA archive, taken by the Apollo astronauts in the 1960s and '70s. One of these celestial images, said to be the sharpest rendition of these

photographs to date, can be seen on the side of a house in Knokke-Heist.

## Life, or something like it

While those photographers reflect on the human relationship with global and extra-terrestrial phenomena, humans themselves are rarely present. This distant look and abstract grandeur find a more down-to-earth pendant in the work of Sanna Kannisto, who is interested in the concepts and practice of biological

research.

The Finnish photographer observes the daily works of scientific explorations through ostensibly staged scenes in her field studio. She shows us details of plants and animals (bats eating nectar from a tube, say) and impersonates a researcher herself, often in deliberately unspectacular settings.

Staging goes a step further in the work of Dutch photographer Ruud van Empel. He combines various bits



and pieces of digital images to realise his fairytale-like collages that look highly realistic at first glance, before an eerie feeling creeps in. The natural settings and people are entirely his creations: all-too-perfect illusions of an imperfect world.

Painting as pictures

A selection of works by the photographers in *Wonderland* can also be seen in Knokke's casino. In addition to *Wonderland*, the Photo Festival hosts two indoor exhibitions in Knokke's Cultural Centre Scharpoord. *Photo View* is a selection by the Centre for Visual Expression intended to celebrate the more experimental nature of photography. The photo series are diverse but show a general tendency towards the abstract and are often visibly influenced by modern painting. Photos of leafless tree branches remind of the dripping technique used in Jackson Pollock's paintings, for instance. Others seek the colour reduction and the play with geometric planes of minimalist

painting. Although some series are more stale than innovating (blurred photos of passers-by or shots of rock formations), *Photo View* succeeds at leaving impressions that pop up in your head days after your visit. Aptly, the sea is a strong presence, as well as architecture. The second floor of Scharpoord hosts the winners and selected works of the International Photo Contest sponsored by the Photo Festival. The 2012 Golden Lens Award went to Ramin Mohtasham, with his dark photo of an entirely veiled woman on the beach, seemingly struggling between tradition and going against the stream. Notably, all the jury prizes went to Iranian photographers, who are strongly represented here, next to several Belgian and Vietnamese colleagues. Their photos offer a more realistic look and focus on people. Emotions turn swiftly between the bleak cruelty of war-time reality and free-floating portraits of urban skateboarders.

Photo opposite: Ruud van Empel's frighteningly unnatural worlds Photos below: environmental evolutions in the work of Olaf Otto Becker; Gerco de Ruijter's bird's-eye views; the odd world of fisherman photographer Corey Arnold



UNTIL 30 JUNE

International Photo Festival Knokke-Heist

Across Knokke-Heist

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



WORLD PRESS PHOTO



Every year, the Knokke-Heist Photo Festival shows a selection from the World Press Photo competition, the most prestigious awards for press photography. From 11 May, CC Scharpoord hosts a travelling exhibition of winning photos. The most recent Photo of the Year winner, Spaniard Samuel Aranda, delivers what could be seen as an epitome of a strong tendency in contemporary (press) photography: a traditional composition inspired by classical western painting combined with the harsh brutality of contemporary war and deprivation (*pictured*). Not everyone agrees with this kind of approach, which projects the *pieta* tradition

(the Madonna holding Jesus) and other tropes of western religious art on atrocities and misery worldwide. Though it's impossible to say if Aranda's shot of a mother in Yemen comforting her son after a tear-gas attack is or isn't wholly natural, some photos following this method clearly demand a meticulous staging that leaves one wondering about the intentions of the photographer. Do they want to express the anxiety of common people in horrific situations? Or does this highly aestheticised look veil the tragic reality underneath?

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

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Flemish book promotions agency Boek.be is joining forces with its Dutch counterpart, Centraal Boekhuis, to launch an **online catalogue of all Dutch-language titles**. To be used by book sellers and publishers, the catalogue will include the title and cover image of books, samples of text, information about the author, prizes and reviews. The final version should be ready this summer and should arm booksellers with helpful information to offer customers.

► [www.boek.be](http://www.boek.be)

The theatre performance *Wolken en een beetje regen* (Clouds and Light Rain), which focuses on the issue of traffic safety, will be staged in both Flemish and French-speaking schools in Brussels this year. The piece, which has already been staged in schools across Flanders for a few years now, is one of the methods being employed by the Brussels-Capital Region to help cut the number of its traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 50%. The play will be performed for students in the first and second grades of secondary school (ages 12 to 16) and will be followed by discussions about traffic safety.

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

Actress Anne Somers has announced that she is **leaving the Flemish soap series *Familie***. The 41-year-old played the character of fashion house diva Veronique Van den Bossche from 1991 to 1994 and returned to the night-time drama in 2001 to portray her until now. She will be seen in *Familie* until October and will then be replaced by another actress. Somers says that she would like to have time "for new projects that will help me grow as an actress".

► [www.vtm.be/familie](http://www.vtm.be/familie)

Antwerp poet Leonard Nolens (*pictured below*) has won what is largely considered the highest literary honour in Flanders, the **Prize of Dutch Letters**. A co-operation between Flanders and the Netherlands, the triennial prize was awarded to Nolens for his entire body of work. This is the first time since 1998 that a Flemish writer has won the prize. Known for his emotionally charged readings, which are described more like performances, Nolens just celebrated his 65th birthday with friends and colleagues in Antwerp's Bourlaschouwburg.

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



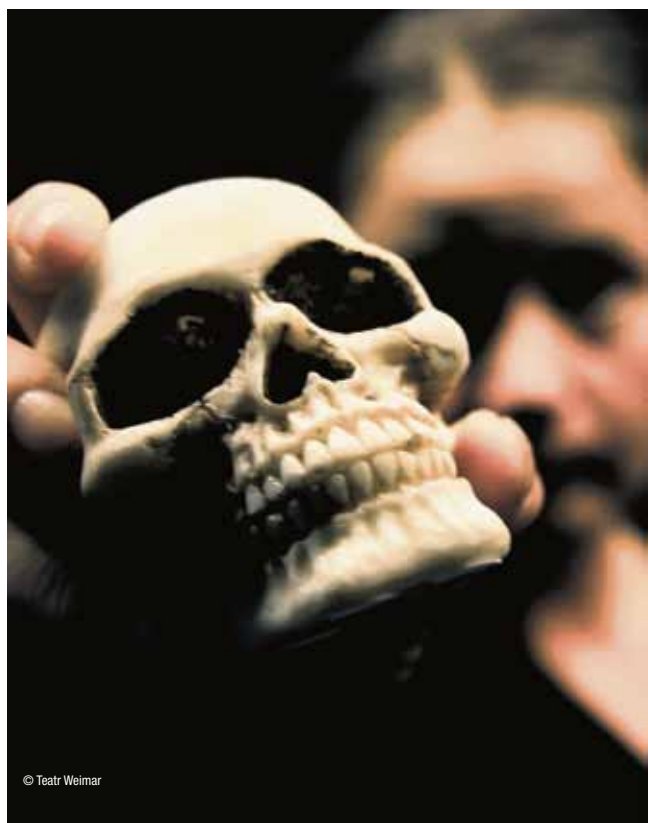
© Samuel Aranda for The New York Times, Sanaa, Yemen, 15 October 2011



*Still life with Europe*

## Kunstenfestivaldesarts

Katy Desmond



To call Kunstenfestivaldesarts a contemporary art festival is an understatement. The truth is, it is *so* contemporary that more than half of the projects have never before been performed. The festival, which general director Christophe Slagmuylder calls a “creation festival”, opens the floor to 32 local and international artists in dance, theatre and visual arts, giving them a platform to present the many and varied voices of contemporary art today.

As the name suggests, the Kunstenfestivaldesarts (kfda) is a pan-lingual, pan-community collaboration, bringing together a mix of big names and unknowns. Supported by both the French- and Dutch-speaking communities, works are presented in a dozen locations – some site-specific – throughout Brussels.

This year, a theme has developed (though unintentionally, notes Slagmuylder) with concepts like European nationalism, protectionism and the collapse of solidarity coming

up again and again. And what better place to probe the depths of Europe and its discontents than in its fractious capital?

Kicking off the festival, South African artist Brett Bailey follows the place of black people in European society from the colonial era to today in his confronting and powerful *Third World Bunfight*. Bailey has created a series of *tableaux vivants* inspired by the “human zoos” that existed throughout Europe from the 19th century all the way up to the Brussels World Fair in 1958, which exhibited Africans behind glass for crowds of gawking Europeans.

Though kfda is no place to look for classical works, there is a Shakespeare – of sorts – in the mix. Sweden's Teatr Weimar's *Hamlet II: Exit Ghost* turns the stage into a TV studio as two actors dissect the bard's play, splicing roles and creating confusion, all the while meditating on themes of identity and the weight of the past (*pictured*).

Flemish theatre director Guy Cassiers also follows a literary line

in his homage to Robert Musil's tome *The Man Without Qualities*, astutely drawing parallels between the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire and Europe today. Presented in three parts, the full trilogy will be shown on the last day of the festival in a marathon event.

Finally, in one of the most anticipated projects this year, theatre maker Arpad Schilling re-emerges after six years of roaming the Hungarian countryside trying to answer a single question: Can theatre change the world? In his fictionalised documentary performance *Krétakor*, he will reveal the results of this search, which Slagmuylder says is not to be missed.

Tickets are available online or at the kfda box office, fittingly located, for a festival ruminating on the demise of Europe, in a former Dexia building in the centre of Brussels. Ever so much more than a box office, the space will also be used as a venue for meetings, talks and, of course, a café and weekend parties.

4-26 May | Across Brussels | ► [www.kfda.be](http://www.kfda.be)

## PHOTOGRAPHY

## The Archaeologist in Action

What is archaeology about in today's Europe? What modern practices are being used to uncover the past? Who are the people behind the digs, and how does one become an archaeologist? Thinkers from 13 European institutions put their heads together to find answers to these, and more, fascinating questions. One result of their work is this free travelling photography exhibition. The interactive stand features 33 photographs depicting archaeologists in action across seven different European countries. Robyn Boyle



Until 28 September | Successively in Ghent, Leuven, Tongeren, Ostend and Antwerp | ► [www.vioe.be/agenda](http://www.vioe.be/agenda)

## MORE PHOTOGRAPHY THIS WEEK

## Antwerp

**Imaging History:** Works based on the desire to photograph the past by international artists, including Flemish photographers Bruno Vandermeulen and Danny Veys  
Until JUN 3 at FotoMuseum, Waalsekaai 47

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

## Genk

**Portretten:** Portraits of famous *Genkenaren* by Flemish photographer Marco Mertens  
Until MAY 6 at C-Mine, C-mine 10

► [www.c-mine.be](http://www.c-mine.be)

## Ghent

**Hun schoonste dag (Their Most Beautiful Day):** Old photo album snaps of hundreds of Flemish weddings

Until JUL 1 at Huis van Alijn, Kraanlei 65

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

## FILM

## Kinky Star &amp; Studio Skoop: Anton Corbijn Inside Out

Two of Ghent's best indie establishments are joining forces this year for special events that should be a huge success in the everything-alt loving city. Besides hosting nightly performances of punk, pop and rock, Kinkystar is a record label, radio station and information centre for young musicians. And old, in fact – Kinkystar once famously started a class for seniors citizens who wanted to learn guitar. Kinkystar turns 15 this year with a load of celebrations on, and one of them is this night with the nearby cinema Studio Skoop, another Ghent institution, with more than 40 years under its belt. There you'll see the new documentary *Anton Corbijn Inside Out* (*pictured*) by director Klaartje Quirijns, who followed around the famous rock photog and filmmaker Corbijn (*Control*, *The American*) for four long years. After the flick, you're invited to Studio Skoop's cafe (you didn't think they wouldn't have a cafe, did you?) to see a Kinkystar favourite, Young Colour, a fine psychedelic and ambient pop duo. Reserve at [floris@studioskoop.be](mailto:floris@studioskoop.be). Lisa Bradshaw



9 May 20.00 | Studio Skoop, Sint-Annaplein 63, Ghent | ► [www.studioskoop.be](http://www.studioskoop.be)

## MORE FILM THIS WEEK

## Across Flanders

**Weekend aan zee (Weekend at the Sea):** The film debut of Flemish director Ilse Somers is the feel-good story of four old friends who come together every year in Ostend  
In cinemas now across Flanders

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

## Leuven

**Docville:** International film festival of documentaries, with conferences, exhibitions and special guests, including Louis Theroux, Marc Webb and Martin Witz

Until MAY 5 across Leuven

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



EXHIBITION

Aangeraakt (Touched)

Around the turn of last century, the Cordonnier factory in Wetteren, East Flanders, was a whirring, churning place that produced ladies’ stockings and the like. Today, it’s a brooding machine for creativity. The former knitwear factory’s industrial past and now open, empty spaces provide a special atmosphere for artists with a vision. Curator Eric Bracke invited 15 Belgian artists and artist duos to show their work in dialogue with the building, among them Ghent-born assemblage artist Leo Copers, Bruges-based photographer Peter De Bruyne and glass artist Caroline Van Der Straeten. The result is a surprising trail of art throughout the different rooms of the building: sculptures, paintings, photographs, projections, performances and spatial interventions. The title of the exhibition, *Aangeraakt* (Touched), refers primarily to a line from *De Internationale*, a social anthem from 1900 wherein the poet Henriette Roland Holst wrote: *Begeerte heeft ons aangeraakt!* (Desire touched us!) The exhibition is, hence, directly related to the history of the factory and the formerly proletarian city of Wetteren. **RB**



Until 20 May

| Cordonnier, Wetteren |

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

MORE EXHIBITIONS  
THIS WEEK

Bruges

**Dassen: Ben Snauwaert:** Drawings, paintings and sculptures by the contemporary Flemish artist  
**MAY 5-15 at Provinciaal Hof, Markt 3**  
► [www.west-vlaanderen.be](http://www.west-vlaanderen.be)

Brussels

**Jef Geys: Kome (Artworks in Several Copies):** Multi-media works by the contemporary Flemish artist  
**Until JUL 8 at Fine Arts Museum, Regentschapsstraat 3**  
► [www.fine-arts-museum.be](http://www.fine-arts-museum.be)

**Sea Sun Rally:** Display of six of the vehicles registered to take part in the Belgian Tour rally, set to leave from Brussels at the end of June  
**Until MAY 26 at Autoworld, Jubelpark**  
► [www.autoworld.be](http://www.autoworld.be)

SPECIAL EVENT

Red Bull Soapbox Derby

The very first Red Bull Soapbox Derby took place in Genval in 1999. Since then, the event has taken the world by storm, from Australia to South Africa and from Portugal to Finland. But it hasn’t been to Brussels since 2008. For this fifth Belgian edition, some 25,000 visitors are expected. Why? To watch hundreds of nutters race their hand-made cars down a steep 380-metre parcours full of obstacles, jumps and sharp turns. To be fair, the 85 teams aren’t just crazy; they’re actually competing for points to win one of a slew of big prizes, including tickets to see Formula 1 races or the Red Bull X-Fighters in Madrid. Arrive early for the opening festivities, parade and a test ride by course designers Stefan Everts and Thierry Neuville. And be sure to stick around afterwards for the prize ceremony and after-party. **RB**



5 May, from 10.00, race at 13.00 | Kunstberg, Brussels | ► [www.redbullzeepkistenrace.be](http://www.redbullzeepkistenrace.be)

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

**AIS International Day:** Open-door day at the Antwerp International School, featuring an official opening by Flemish minister president Kris Peeters, followed by music and dance performances, games and competitions, an international market with Australian BBQ, flag parade and more. Special guest is Flemish wheelchair-bound athlete Marc Herremans, whose To Walk Again organisation will receive part of the day’s proceeds  
**MAY 5 10.00-18.00 at Antwerp International School, Veltwijcklaan 180**  
► [www.ais-antwerp.be](http://www.ais-antwerp.be)

Bruges

**Marcus Cumberlege:** Reading by the Bruges-based British poet for the launch of his new book, *Reflections in Water*  
**MAY 12 17.00 at Gallery PINSART, Genthof 21**  
► [www.marcuscumberlege.com](http://www.marcuscumberlege.com)

Brussels

**Iris Festival:** Annual celebration by the Brussels-Capital Region, featuring free open-air concerts, street parties, children’s entertainment, urban art and more  
**MAY 5-6 across Brussels**  
► [www.irisfeest.be](http://www.irisfeest.be)

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Bulex

5 May, Cellars of Cureghem

While you might associate Bulex with the brand of the boiler in your bathroom, for Brussels night stalkers, Bulex equals a great party at unexpected venues. It was out of commission for two years, but for its 22nd birthday this Saturday, Bulex is going underground – literally – to the Cellars of Cureghem in Anderlecht.

The first Bulex parties were organised in the early 1990s by local boy Dominique Speeckaert for just a group of friends. He hosted an exhibition with some drinks, but they soon grew into a bullet-proof party concept attracting an average of 1,500 people. Such a crowd requires a large venue, and, throughout its history, Bulex parties have been nomadic – held



in abandoned spaces and other large, open venues all over Brussels, including the old Volkshuis in Sint-Gillis (once a famous centre for culture and political debate) and the Ravensteingallerij in the city centre. Bulex eventually settled at the old Shipping School near the canal in Molenbeek. But when renovations on the building started, it had to move out, and Speeckaert decided to take a break. Now the party is making its long-awaited comeback, organised by long-time Bulex collaborator Jonathan Giacomelli. The first party attracted an immense crowd in March at Bodega in Molenbeek, proof that nobody had forgotten. To celebrate its 22nd birthday, the organiser knew he needed a big enough venue. Due to an administrative snafu, the original venue of Brussels’ Central Station had to be changed just last week to the Cellars of Cureghem, an even bigger space than the central hall of Brussels’ busiest train station. Those who end up in Central Station can hop on a shuttle bus to Cureghem. The venue comes with a guarded car and cycle park, and the 50 first party people coming with a Villo rental bike get in for free. Make sure you’re well rested, as you’ll find yourself dancing to the Balkan electro-swing beats of Gaetano Fabri and the funky reggae of Tringle Loop Machine, among many others. The party starts at 23.30 and the music will echo through the dim cellars until 6.00 on Sunday morning. There’s no dress code, so come as you are. Tickets are €10 in advance from Fnac or at the door.

► [www.bulex.xxx](http://www.bulex.xxx)



BITE

Robyn Boyle

Vrienden van de Smaak

Bringing us closer to the food on our plates is a positive trend in today's Flemish culinary circles. It means that more and more chefs are turning to local products and seeking out the freshest ingredients. This latest initiative, Vrienden van de Smaak (Friends of Taste) takes the trend quite literally, bringing people together to dine at the source – be it farm, orchard, field or any other unique location where food is grown or raised.

On this particular Sunday morning in Kortesseem, just south of Hasselt, menacing clouds are gathered over Limburg's rolling hills, forcing our party to change location, from outdoor castle grounds to the warm inside of greenhouse De Wroeter, a sheltered workplace that employs people with disabilities to help grow its organic fruit and vegetables.

Our long table is plunked down in the middle of the lettuce and herb section, where about 70 foodies have gathered for a surprise lunch prepared by star chef Giovanni Oosters of Vous Lé Vous in Hasselt. Upon arrival, guests are treated to an aperitif of head cheese of pork from nearby Alken, marshmallow of chervil with crunchy Ganda ham and an open egg shell filled with foam of Kinrooi asparagus. Refreshment comes in the form of Scorpion Zwart Brut bubbles from Vliermaal or fresh-squeezed apple juice from Hugo Jacobs in Sint-Truiden.

Jackets and sweaters start peeling off in the warmth of the venue, and we gladly start in on the bottles of cold water and chilled wine. The wine is a lovely crisp Chardonnay Blauw from local castle vineyard Genoels-Elderen.

First up is a platter of white Kinrooi asparagus, now in season, accompanied by a moat of buttery walnut dressing,

dried Alken beef and a selection of fine green herbs and edible flowers. The stalks have just the right amount of crunch to them, while the tips are moist and tender.

I'm already in seventh heaven when they bring out the next dish: a giant salad of peppery, citrusy herbs from the Mombeek valley (south of Hasselt), violet flowers and slices of radish. My neighbour cuts me off a slice from the loaf of Limburg rye (a regional product) on the table.

The spring theme continues into our main dish, which is lamb of the Hampshire Down breed from local Sint-Annahof. The rosy slices of lamb are quite possibly the softest meat I've ever had. And it tastes very subtle, in contrast to the thick and juicy sausages next to it which are packed with that nice, sharp flavour so unique to mutton.

The meat comes with potatoes prepared in two different ways: skin-on slices grilled with the juices of the lamb, and the little, round steamed variety. Next to this is a raw spinach salad with a sprinkling of lemon juice, hazelnuts and creamy goat cheese from De Levende Aarde in Alken. The paired red wine is one with a bold and complex character: De Vroege Loonse from Borgloon's Domein Cohlenberg.

Still reeling from the exceptional quality of the dishes during this four-hour culinary adventure, we're then spoiled with a gorgeous dessert. The sweet goat's milk *panna cotta* is presented in a glass with, underneath, a layer of rhubarb and, on top, a tangy red coulis, icy garnish, hibiscus flowers, bits of rhubarb and a fluffy biscuit.

Roel Driesen of Mucho Gusto Coffee Bar in Hasselt personally serves up cups of his "slow coffee" from Ethiopia or El

Salvador. I couldn't think of a better way to close out this indulgent affair.

Keep an eye on the website for the ever-expanding list of upcoming dinners in orchards, fields, wineries, abbeys and even a few secret locations across Flanders.

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



- € €119 per person
- i A travelling open-air restaurant with top chefs using strictly local, top-quality products

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

Who will rid us of the play-off fiasco?

The football season finale, as teams count down their games in the league championship, should be like the last few kilometres in a marathon. This is the real test, when you still have to perform despite the tired legs, the blisters and the bruises.

But that's not the case in Belgium, is it? Here, the championship is only half the battle, before a second tournament is foisted on bewildered teams. Thanks to the abomination of the play-off system, football fans have to witness a twisted, two-fold league that subverts the entire notion of a championship. To continue the comparison, it would be like running a marathon just for the privilege of running another marathon.

It was six weeks ago, on 22 March,

that the 16 teams in Belgium's top tier, the Jupiler Pro League, completed their scheduled championship, each side playing each other both home and away. In most countries, that would be enough: Anderlecht topped the table ahead of runners-up Club Brugge and third place Ghent. But then the Belgian league stepped into the twilight zone of the play-offs. The top six sides all play each other again, twice, to see who becomes the "real" champion. That means Anderlecht's convincing 67 point, table-topping performance could be overturned by fifth- and sixth-placed Genk and Kortrijk, who each only won 46 points during the regular season. There is a weird coefficient system in place to recognise these efforts, but, at this point, who really

cares? The play-offs just hang on pointlessly to the championship like a penalty shoot-out for the boxer who has just KO-ed his opponent. And that's before we even go into the convoluted arrangements for the next eight clubs fighting for a place in the Europa League, or the way the bottom two play each other five – yes, five – times to see who will be dropped down a division.

The play-offs run on until 13 May, and – like in the regular season – Anderlecht and Club Brugge have pulled ahead of the others, in first and second place respectively. Anderlecht now looks in pole position to win its 30th title. That may well cheer Anderlecht fans, but it should come at the end of a hard-fought title that begins and ends with just one league table.



© Peter Deconinck / BELGA

The last word...

Different approaches

"Bart De Wever says, 'I deliberately never Twitter'. As opposed to Yves Leterme, who never Twitters deliberately."

IT specialist Nik Hemmeryckx (@nikmr) on Twitter

Where's the beef?

"The only thing white-blue steak is good for is cold preparations, like carpaccio or tartar. But don't, whatever you do, put it in the pan. There are far better alternatives."

Top chef Dimitry Lysens of Magis in Tongeren has harsh words for Flanders' favourite beefsteak

Sons of Anarchy

"Albert was a fanatical cyclist. We have a lot of photos of the then prince and Princess Paola. My father even made Prince Filip his first leather jacket."

Luc Rigaux of Brakel, East Flanders, whose father Julien, provider of bike leathers to the royals, has died at age 84

Fighting temptation

"I just started this week on my usual bi-annual diet. Talk about bad timing."

Actor Koen De Bauw, surrounded by fine food and wine on the set of his new film *Brasserie Romantiek*

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

In that quiet little northwest pocket of Antwerp province lies an institution that is creating some of the most beloved objects in the world: musical instruments. From lutes to pianos to steel-string guitars, craftspeople at the Centre for the Construction of Musical Instruments hand-make specimens bought by visiting musicians from across the planet

News

The belt of cities around Brussels, known to the Flemish as the Vlaamse Rand, is internationalising at a rapid pace. An upcoming colloquium will discuss the challenges faced by locals and newcomers alike

Tourism

In late spring, the giants come out in force. You know, those metres-high *papier maché* figures that make up religious and historical processions in Flanders. We'll tell you how they originated and where to see the best ones in the coming weeks