

## Choosing death

New questions about who should be allowed to decide on euthanasia

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## Erasmus for all

The EU's most successful initiative wants to increase participation even more

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## On TRACK

Ghent's first major art parcours in 12 years

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# The power of light

Research groups in Brussels and Ghent are frontrunners in revolutionary photonics technology

Andy Furniere



In 2010, the European Commission designated photonics, or light technology, as one of the five key enabling technologies of the 21st century. The future of photonics is looking bright, certainly in Flanders. It is no coincidence that the largest conference on photonics in Europe took place in Brussels last month.

**L**ight is so common that most of us don't actually realise its importance. Other than chasing away the darkness, the research area light technology or photonics, provides the innovations for solar panels, the internet and medical diagnoses and therapies. And lasers, for instance, are used in many different sectors, from the medical world to the automobile industry.

The conference Spie Photonics Europe was co-organised by the Brussels Photonics Team (B-Phot), a research group of the Free University of Brussels (VUB). More than 3,000 scientists and entrepreneurs from 55 countries assembled last month in the capital to discuss the newest applications for light technology.

B-Phot and the Photonics Research Group of Ghent University, in partnership with Leuven-based nanotech research centre imec, are at the forefront of European progress in the field. They have now joined forces to provide a Master's degree in photonics that is attracting students from all over the world.

"Despite the economic crisis, the global photonics sector is expanding every year by about 10%", notes Professor Hugo Thienpont, chair of B-Phot and of the Spie conference. "Europe's share is worth €55 billion, which amounts to one-fifth of the global market. More than 5,000 companies and 300,000 employees are active in the European sector."

Thienpont feels that photonics is one of the most important technologies of the 21st century and key to Europe's economic future. In Flanders, more than 50 companies, such as Barco and Umicore, produce photonic systems and directly use light technology. The business of hundreds of others, like Turnhout scientific instruments manufacturer Peira, for example, are influenced by photonic products. The research crucial to these enterprises comes from inside Flanders.

### Practical innovations

"Our goal is not to publish as many academic papers as possible, but to provide the industry with practical innovations," says professor Thienpont. His words are proven by B-Phot's track record in industrial applications of the last 10 years. The team of around 50 researchers assisted in the development of medical displays for technology group Barco and in improving the solar cells of materials and technology company Umicore.

B-Phot is expanding its activities to the whole of Europe, with research on, for example, low-cost infrared safety cameras for the auto safety developer Autoliv and car manufacturer Daimler. The cameras mean drivers can see people and animals on the road, even in the dark.

That the industry appreciates the approach of B-Phot is illustrated by the award of 2012's Photonics21 Student Innovation Award to Thomas Geernaert, one of its researchers. This prize of the European technology platform for photonics, Photonics21, rewards the research of a young talent that has the most industrial impact. In his PhD thesis, the 28-year old Geernaert developed a new kind of optical fibre sensor that is temperature-insensitive. The sensor is ready to be applied for pressure monitoring in the field of oil and gas exploration. It can also be used to detect the deteriorating of composite materials, of which airplane wings are made, for example.

Geernaert's sensor is further a major step towards touch-sensitive artificial robotic skin. "At B-Phot, I was always at the forefront of new innovations

## FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



© Phile Deprez / VRT

## (pdw) Patrick De Witte

In the past month, three new editors have been announced for three Flemish magazines owned by Think Media. Two of them – chef Wout Bru takes over the culinary magazine *Ambiance*, while Clouseau singer Koen Wauters heads up men's lifestyle magazine *Menzo* – were only slightly surprising. Despite the two men's lack of editorial experience, the trend towards celebrities heading media is not altogether new.

The third was most surprising of all. Patrick De Witte, known as (pdw), is a veteran journalist, TV maker, columnist and critic, and he's now editor-in-chief of *P-Magazine*, a weekly famous for slick cars and bikini babes. De Witte is a maverick, going as far as to commit suicide in public in February last year – but nobody imagined he was this much of a maverick.

De Witte was born in Ghent in 1958 and first became known for his columns in *Humo* magazine, which he signed "(pdw)" – a moniker that stuck. He was one of *Humo*'s most cynical and iconoclastic writers. His brand of humour saw him take part in Canvas' seminal panel show *De rechtvardige rechters* (The Righteous Judges, named after

a panel on the famous Ghent altarpiece).

De Witte also branched out into making TV programmes of his own, as well as playing drums in a band and writing a song about, of all things, the Antwerp Oosterweel transport link. *P-Magazine*, meanwhile, is better known for its eight-week swimsuit series than its journalistic integrity. The appointment came as something of a shock, but (pdw) sees it as a show of good faith. "I'm known as a wayward figure, someone who's known not to be above biting the hand that feeds me," he said. "The fact that Think Media sees fit to trust me with this all the same...I see as a very positive sign."

And the suicide? In February 2011, he and other members of SKEPP (Study Group for the Critical Evaluation of Pseudo-Science and the Paranormal), gathered in front of the European Parliament to protest the recognition of homeopathic remedies. They swallowed doses of snake venom and arsenic in homeopathic concentrations to show that – by not dropping dead – the preparations have no effect.

## News in brief

Coastal town Koksijde has received a **Quality Coast Gold Award** at a tourism congress in Portugal, coming in ninth place on a list of the 100 most sustainable beach resorts in Europe. The resorts were judged according to their local identity, natural and cultural heritage, natural beauty and environmental quality.

The **Flemish House for Nutrition opened last week** in Roeselare, West Flanders. Called Miummm, the interactive visitors' centre will provide a wide spectrum of information on food and nutrition. Miummm is run by a board made up of municipal and provincial representatives, the food industry federation and the Katho University College.

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

The municipal council of Beveren last week met to pass a motion **protesting plans to expand the Port of Antwerp** into two of its districts, OudenDoele and Rapenburg, which would disappear to make way for the development. The two areas are home to 67 people. An attempt by Groen to include the town of Doe in the motion was rejected by the council. Most of the population of Doe has already relocated.

Two members of the VRT's delegation to the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku, Azerbaijan, were **injured last week in a dispute with a local taxi driver** over a fare. One of the delegation sustained a broken jaw and was flown home. Eurovision takes place this week, where Belgium is represented by teenage singer Iris.

Researchers from Antwerp University announced last week that they have succeeded for the first time in 20 years in capturing **images of an otter in Flanders**,

spotted last month in the Willebroek nature reserve in Antwerp province. The presence of an otter in the wild is a "breakthrough," the team said, for the restoration of nature, and a vindication of policies aimed at improving biodiversity.

Gay and transgender groups in Flanders have signed a charter, together with concert organisers in Ghent, Brussels, Antwerp and Leuven, **offering amnesty to reggae musicians** who have performed homophobic songs in the past, on condition they no longer perform them in future. The charter came about after local concerts by the reggae artist Sizzla were cancelled following protests at his lyrics.

More than 1,100 people last week attended a lecture in the Free University of Brussels (VUB) given by celebrated anthropologist and chimpanzee expert **Jane Goodall** on the urgent need to protect the environment. "It is unfortunate that the most intelligent being on earth is in the process of destroying the planet," she told the audience.

Visitors to the Gentse Feesten will this year be treated to an unusual spectacle – a **Dutch-language version of Fawlty Towers** performed by a group of Flemish TV actors. Re-enactments of the classic BBC comedy are common in Britain and Australia, and Germany led the way in producing a version in another language. The Ghent version, which runs from 16 to 22 July, is a premiere.

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

The Flemish public broadcaster VRT last week obtained the **rights to broadcast the Winter Olympics** in Sochi, Russia, in 2014 and the next summer Games in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in 2016. The contract allows

the sports channel Sporza to cover the Games on TV, radio and online.

Last week saw the appearance in bookstores of **former prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene's memoir**, which runs to over 900 pages. The book covers Dehaene's entire career from chief of a minister's staff to minister and prime minister, as well as MEP and mayor of Vilvoorde. The memoir also covers his time as chairman of the collapsed banking group Dexia, which he described as the most difficult task he has yet had to perform.

The National Botanic Garden in Meise, just outside Brussels, has **released 12 geckos into their greenhouses** in an effort to combat cockroaches without using insecticides. The gecko, a genus of lizard, is a voracious eater of cockroaches. However, visitors are unlikely to notice the presence of the lizards: like the cockroaches, the gecko is by nature a nocturnal animal and stays hidden during the day.

The eating habits of toddlers is a cause for concern, according to research by the children's hospital of the Free University of Brussels (VUB). **Young children eat too much salt and protein** and not enough fibre, vitamin D and vegetables, leading to health problems later, the research said. Infants up to one year are being fed well, but at about one year old, a child's parents become more relaxed and have less knowledge of what a small child should be eating. While most adults avoid eating too much fat, for example, children need to eat fat to supply them with healthy calories. Salt, on the other hand, should never be added to children's food.

## FLANDERS TODAY

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



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## OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

## Vive la différence?

Men are not from Mars, and women are certainly not from Venus. But there are, as we all know, marked differences between the sexes when it comes to things like spatial awareness, sense of direction, the ability to multitask and mathematical capacities. Right?

Perhaps not. There's a chance to provide the answers to these questions and more in a project called The Great sEXPERIMENT, an interactive exhibition at Technopolis, the hands-on science centre in Mechelen. Since 2002, more than half a million people throughout western Europe, including Belgium, have taken part in testing, and one result is striking above all others: Apart from the obvious matter of physical strength, there's not a great deal of difference between men and



women.

Take sense of direction. Participants were asked to point to the north. The difference was only a couple of points in favour of the men and considered not statistically significant. More importantly, both sexes were at least 43 degrees off on average in their estimation. They pointed anywhere from about north-east to north-west. (If you were that far off in real life, driving from Brussels to Antwerp, you'd be just as likely to arrive in Ghent or Eindhoven.)

By the same token, the idea that women have better hearing was also proved incorrect. When tested, men and women achieved the same scores on average – except in France, where women were indeed slightly better, and in Denmark, where the opposite was true.

The exhibition tests a number of different technical abilities, as well as certain biological differences. Each participant is given an armband to present at each step, and your data will be recorded (anonymously) and added to the giant pool of data already collected. Anyone over the age of eight can take part, and the experiment, which started last week, runs throughout the summer.

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

# The power of light

## Labs-on-a-chip could allow blood tests to be done immediately, right at the doctor's office

► continued from page 1

but was also made aware of new needs in different industries," Geernaert says.

### Labs-on-a-chip

To make medical diagnosing and monitoring cheaper and faster in the near future, B-Phot is creating "labs-on-a-chip" – miniature laboratories on chips of a few square millimetres or centimetres that monitor blood quality. Instead of having to wait for the analysis results of a medical lab, doctors could test patients for many conditions in a few minutes with a disposable device, "like a pregnancy test is now done," explains professor Thienpont. These applications could also be used to, for example, evaluate the quality of drinking water in developing countries. The Photonics Research Group at Ghent University is developing similar devices with the support of nanotech research centre imec, but uses silicon instead of plastic. "Plastic is a cheaper material, but the technology to create photonic products with silicon is much more advanced, while also allowing low-cost mass production," says professor Roel Baets, founder of the research group. "Furthermore, the most sophisticated technology is available at imec." One of their projects is to develop a lab-on-a-chip that can be implanted under the skin of diabetes patients and continually control the concentration of glucose in the blood.

### Risk-free access for businesses

The Ghent research group is a member of the Plateau Photonics Innovation Centre, which organises collaborations with enterprises and also establishes new companies. The company Caliopa in Zwijnaarde, a district of Ghent, is a recent example of a spin-off of the centre and imec. Caliopa commercialises a decade of research in silicon photonics in Ghent by developing optical transceivers for data and telecom applications, which are smaller and consume less power than the devices available now.

A transceiver is a transmitter-receiver, a device that both transmits and receives digital signals into or from optical fibres

technology from 14 European research laboratories, Actmost offers small- and medium-sized enterprises risk-free access to high-level technology through European Commission funding. Its support encompasses the entire food chain of photonics: from optical design to pre-production level fabrication. Actmost has already helped Peira to create a new hand-held optical scanner that is being used in cancer research. In June, B-Phot will provide a five-day training course to employees of interested companies via the European programme Smethods (which stands for the rather unwieldy Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises Training and Hands-on practice in Optical Design and Simulation).

In a few months, B-Phot will open a new photonics research and innovation facility in Gooik, just outside of Brussels, which, over the long term, will house an incubator where new companies can start their activities.

### Fascinating future engineers

To educate the new generation of photonics researchers, the universities of Brussels and Ghent have united by providing a joint Master's programme. There are lectures at both locations, sometimes via video conferencing. The study is part of the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus programme and draws students from across the world because of its prestige and emphasis on entrepreneurship. More than 20 students of the Master's programme graduate each year.

In spite of the endless possibilities of photonics and the quality of education available, professor Thienpont fears that students are not at all aware of its existence. "Young people use their cell phones and surf on the internet every day, without considering the technology that is making it possible," he says.

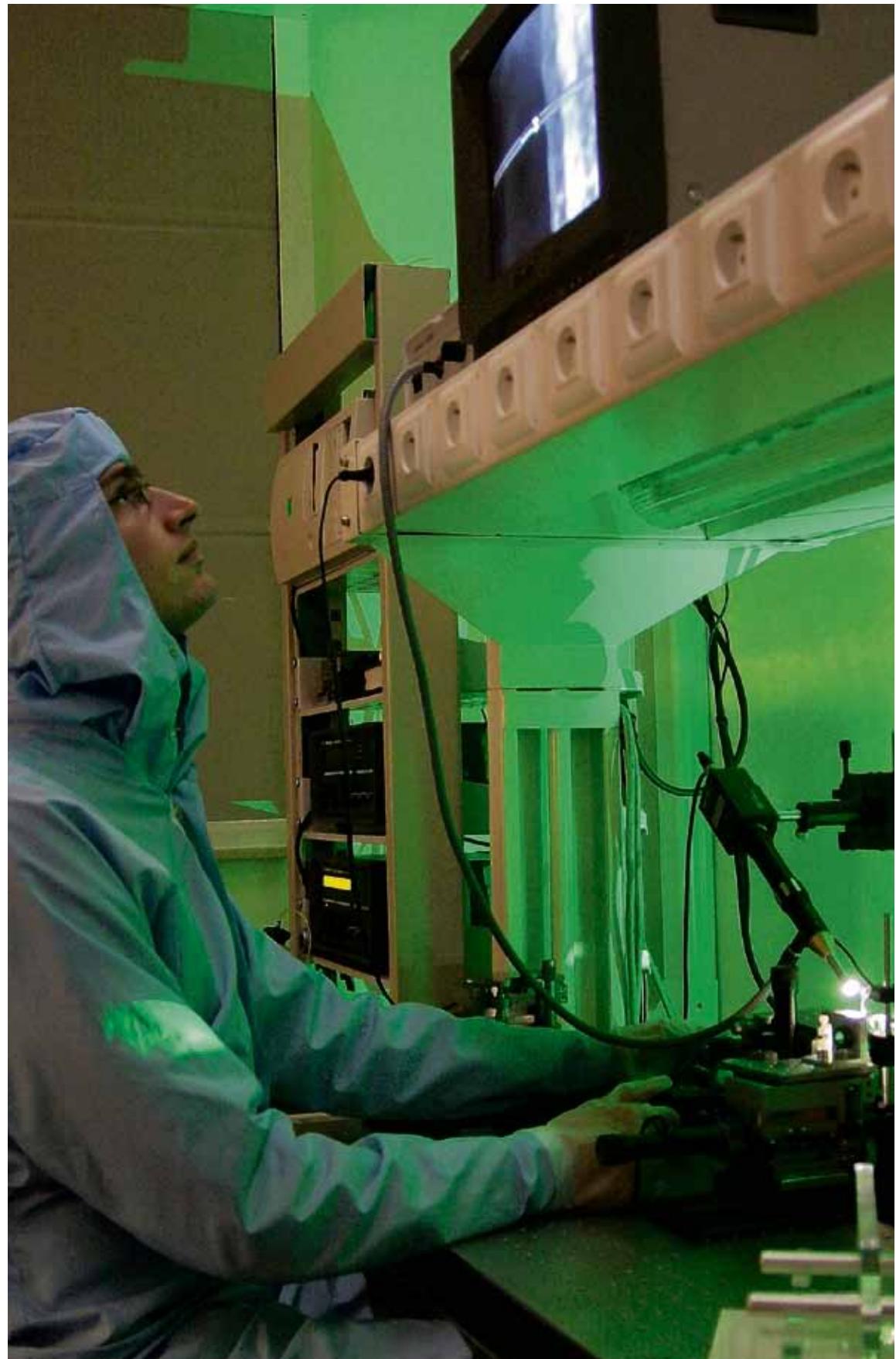
To change that, B-Phot is collaborating with another EU project called Photonics Explorer. This programme has been developed in collaboration with 35 teachers from secondary schools in 11 European countries. It aims to equip

### The Ghent researcher's sensor is a major step towards touch-sensitive artificial robotic skin

and thus enables internet connections. Another platform coordinated in Ghent is ePIXfab, a service platform for companies and universities worldwide, which enables them to access the silicon photonics technology at imec. Four of the researchers with Ghent's Photonics Research Group hold research grants from the European Research Council. The grants, each worth around €2 million, fund diverse applications of silicon photonics for, among others, biotechnological, medical and environmental purposes. Actmost (Access Centre to Micro-Optics Services and Technologies), meanwhile, founded just a year ago, is coordinated by B-Phot. Combining the

thousands of secondary school teachers in Europe with educational kits and to train these teachers in engaging, exciting and educating students about working with light. "Students are challenged to perform hands-on experiments in the classroom, which teaches them more than any theoretical explanation," claims professor Thienpont. Experiments include working with solar energy, new energy-efficient LED lighting, optical fibres and cameras. The students also learn how displays of, for example, cell phones and laptops function.

To make teenagers and their



A photonics researcher tests optical connectors in clean room conditions

teachers enthusiastic for photonics, both the universities in Ghent and Brussels will take part in the autumn biennial Flemish Science Week, a "popular science" initiative. Last year, B-Phot organised a show with illusion tricks, like making a student disappear with special optical components. In a similar fun way, students also learn how lenses work. Five years ago, Brussels hosted the European travelling exhibition *Fascination of Light*, with similar show elements, which drew more than 2,500 visitors in two weeks. Thienpont: "More of these kinds of events are needed to explain to young people the power and possibility light possesses."



Professor Hugo Thienpont, chair of B-Phot, illustrates how Actmost supports SMEs based on the successful project with Flemish scientific instruments manufacturer Peira

► [www.b-phot.org](http://www.b-phot.org)

# Government to launch fair rent website

**New site will arm house and apartment renters with average figures for the area**

Alan Hope

Prospective tenants looking for a property to rent in Flanders will soon be able to consult a website set up by the Flemish government to determine if they are being asked to pay a fair rent, housing minister Freya Van den Bossche announced.

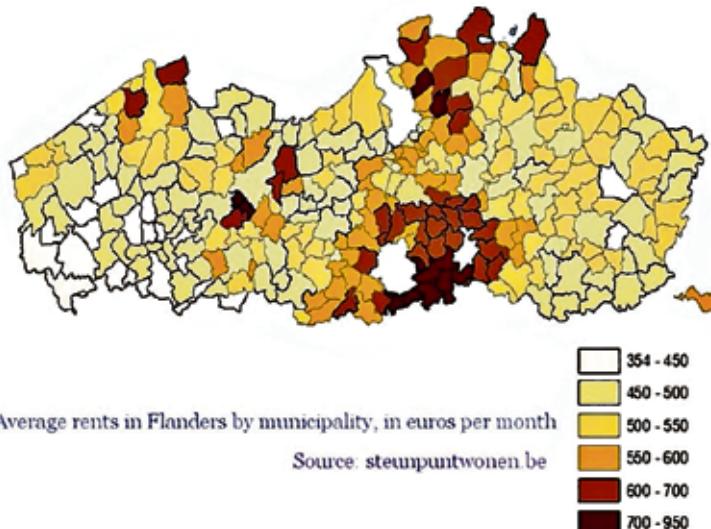
The site is designed to serve a similar purpose to the V-Test ([www.vreg.be/doe-de-v-test](http://www.vreg.be/doe-de-v-test)), which allows consumers to find out their best option for electricity and gas supply. Searchers will fill in location, size of accommodation and any preferences, such as central heating or double glazing. The website then returns details on the price you should expect to pay in that area, based on the government's database compiled from all existing rental contracts.

"As a tenant, the website offers the advantage that you will know

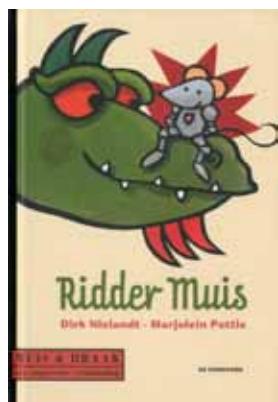
immediately if the apartment or house you are looking at is asking too high a rent," Van den Bossche said. "And it offers landlords an indication of how much they can ask." About one in five people in Flanders rent apartments or houses.

The database also offers a picture of how rents vary across Flanders (see graphic). In the region as a whole, the average rent is less than €500 a month. According to Sien Winters, who helped compile the data for the housing support agency Steunpunt Wonen, the highest rents are on the edges of cities like Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and Leuven. Inside the cities themselves, the availability of low-rent studios and apartments brings average prices down. The new website will be launched soon.

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



## Children's book prize winners



The children of Flanders have chosen their favourite books for this year, in an awards ceremony last weekend in Antwerp. More than 6,000 children

across Flanders took part in local groups reading the nominated books before choosing the winners. Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege was present to hand out awards to:

- under 6: *Meneer René* by Leo Timmers
- 6-8 years: *Ridder Muis* by Dirk Nielandt, illustrated by Marjolein Pottie
- 8-10 years: *Sofie en de pinguins* by Edward van de Vendel, illustrated by Floor de Goede and Ype Willem
- 10-12 years: *Verdwijnkind* by Bies van Ede
- 12-14 years: *Elfenblauw: de vallei van de Goden* by Johan Vandervelde
- over 14: *Galgenmeid* by Jean-Claude van Rijckeghem and Pat van Beirs

## New TV channels take to the air

The new versions of two familiar VRT channels and one newcomer took to the air last week, with new timetables and new spots on the dial. Ketnet, the children's channel, will from now on broadcast until 20.00, when it will hand over to Op-12, the new channel for young people aged 12 and up. The channel celebrated its launch last week with a live broadcast by Flemish pop band Absynthe Minded.

Canvas, meanwhile, which used to share a channel with Ketnet, now broadcasts during the day from 14.00, as well as in the evening. The station will introduce hourly news update during the day, causing some to dub them "the CNN of Flanders".

## Emergency rooms understaffed

More than half of all hospital emergency departments in Flanders are understaffed, according to a report from the official inspection service. In some cases, there is no doctor available, leading to longer waiting times for patients. In 30 of the 56 hospitals in Flanders, inspectors found a shortage of personnel, either chronic or at particular times.

Among the reasons for the widespread problem are the dwindling popularity of accident and emergency as a career option for health-care workers, with more than 100 doctors' posts unfilled. Another problem, said the Association of Emergency Physicians, is the introduction of a law imposing a 48-hour maximum work week.

Flanders needs to invest urgently in the sector, says the

association, as conditions are continuing to deteriorate. "A lot of people in training for emergency specialities switch over during training to other, more comfortable disciplines," the association's Jan Stroobants said.

General practitioners, meanwhile, pointed out that too many people go to emergency departments with complaints that do not merit emergency treatment. The professional union for GPs estimates that some 70% of visitors to emergency could just as easily be treated by a GP. The union has called for admittance to emergency rooms to be limited.

A copy of the report can be found on the website of *De Standaard*.

► [www.standaard.be/extra/ziekenhuisrapport](http://www.standaard.be/extra/ziekenhuisrapport)

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

### €12.7 million 18%

electricity bill in 2011 for lighting the motorways in Flanders, an increase of 10%, despite the decision to turn most lights off at night. The decision had aimed to save €2 million a year, but rising electricity prices instead drove costs up instead

### 85,000

people attended last weekend's Zinneke Parade in Brussels. More than 2,000 people from 22 organisations took part in the procession. The parade takes place every two years to promote multicultural understanding

### 945,000

people visited Antwerp's Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in its first year. Two-thirds came from Belgium, and 94% expressed satisfaction with their visit

### 102

spaces for prisoners in the new wing of Sint-Gillis prison in Brussels, opened last week following a storm of protest against the prison's conditions

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Electoral stunts

In election times, all eyes are on Antwerp. Not only is it Flanders' largest city, it is also the place where new political trends are born. With the local elections in October, there is an extra reason to watch Antwerp: It is the home of Bart De Wever, president of N-VA and Flanders' most popular politician.

De Wever's announcement that he would head the communal list was not an easy decision and took a long time coming. If De Wever wins in Antwerp, which polls suggest he will, he is set to be the city's next mayor. An attractive prospect, were it not that De Wever's main ambitions are on the national level. Losing is not an option either, as that will harm De Wever's winning image.

For years now De Wever has managed the art of being treated like a celebrity – rather than a politician – by the media. His spectacular weight loss, finishing the Antwerp 10 Miles, we know all about it. Last weekend on the news, we saw De Wever in an old-timer airplane – a boy's dream come true apparently but also a way of promoting the Flemish government's support for the controversial Deurne business airport, which leads an ailing existence.

This weekend was also marked by the reappearance of De Wever's opponent, Antwerp mayor Patrick Janssens, who has been out with a back problem for some weeks. Janssens struck a different note, proposing to redirect the budget set aside for a new football stadium towards new schools and day cares. That sounds logical, given the number of parents unable to find places for their toddlers and school kids, but it was met with a hostile reaction from De Wever, who called it an "electoral stunt".

Opinions may differ on who stunted most this weekend, but the incident demonstrates the total polarisation in Antwerp, where the local elections have become something of a duel between the current mayor, who personifies a rather managerial style, and The Amazing Shrinking Man, who personifies change.

One could almost forget that other parties, too, take part in the elections: Open VLD, with federal justice minister Annemie Turtelboom, who recently moved to Antwerp; Groen; the dwindling Vlaams Belang, the party that once dominated the political debate in Antwerp; and a number of far left splinter parties that may steal voters away from Janssens' city list. All the more reason to keep watching.

# Leaving their stamp

## The media agency in Flanders that is run solely by young people

Alan Hope

Young people these days, we're told, consume news in a quite different way from previous generations: They rarely read magazines or newspapers, and buy them even less; listen to the radio for music only, and even that is disappearing because of streaming services; and watch TV news occasionally, but prefer to consume their TV programmes using on-demand options. What news they pick up comes online and is often what's passed around on social media.

There is, all the same, a small but active group of Flemish young people who are not only interested in the news, but interested in making the news. "We have an active core group of about 50, who come around at least every month for a meeting or a workshop, and about 30 who are actually working at any one time," says Karen De Bruyn, administrator at Stamp Media, a media agency staffed almost entirely by young people.

The staff are all volunteers aged between 16 and 26, who put in time partly for the experience it will contribute to their later job search and partly just because they have a passion for journalism. Stamp Media has offices in Genk and in Antwerp, where it was founded five years ago, a project of the non-profit C.H.I.P.S., which works on participation in new media. C.H.I.P.S. co-founder Stefan Kolgen created the initial editorial board, "and then the young people themselves



Photo from a series on diversity in Antwerp by the 20-year-old photographer Julia M Free, who takes photographs for the EU Commission and for Stamp Media, among others

decided what they wanted to do and how," says De Bruyn.

### Where it all happens

We're sitting in the common room of the media house in Antwerp, a building they moved into early this year. A large, bare room with one huge table, the walls are lined with posters, metal shelves hold periodicals and reference books, and the place is littered with coffee cups and newspapers. It's a scene familiar

from any number of editorial offices anywhere.

This is where the editorial meeting takes place every Wednesday at 19.00, while another is going on in Genk. At other times, the house is used for working on assignments and workshops on various aspects of journalism for aspiring writers, photographers and video journalists. Stamp Media was never intended to be top-down, talking to young people from the lofty heights of experience. "It's news delivered by young people, but in fact it's for everyone," explains editor-in-chief Thomas Vrniks, a former freelance journalist for Flemish papers like *De Morgen* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*.

"We send out stuff to other media to try to get as much as possible in – mainly online because it's the quickest and easiest, but sometimes also in the newspapers, especially if the young people are busy with a subject no-one else is covering."

Stamp Media also contributes to Belga's news feed, where it can be picked up by other journalists. "I'm in touch with other editors," says Vrniks. "Knack, for example, often features articles by us."

Stamp Media receives subsidies from the city of Antwerp and the Flemish Community, and the Genk office gets support from the city of Genk. The writers and photographers are not paid, and the articles that are picked

"The mainstream papers are beginning to look more and more like each other"

up by other media are free for them to use.

### A different view

Articles from Stamp have appeared in *Het Belang van Limburg*, *nieuws.be*, *De Wereld Morgen*, *De Standaard* and *Het Nieuwsblad*, as well as lesser-known outlets like *Jongerenplaneet.be*, *Belg.be* and *Zoomin.TV*. Subjects are as varied as youth workers and social media in Ghent, the problems of a court psychiatrist, the new heroes of Belgian football and the deaf hip-hop artist Signmark.

"I always insist they come to meetings with their own ideas," Vrniks says. "I'm not as editor going to decide it has to be about this or that; otherwise I might as well set up my own press agency. It's more about the stories that young people themselves pick up, among their friends or in their own circles. That's what we're aiming for."

It's not always as simple as it sounds. "Sometimes they're shy about coming forward with ideas, but once they get a bit used to the way we work, it gets better. They sometimes think their idea won't be interesting, or they suggest subjects that appear in other media. But you want to differentiate yourself and do things your own way. Once they realise they have their own contribution to make, then it works."

This individuality is crucial to Stamp Media's success. "The mainstream papers are beginning to look more and more like each other," says Vrniks, "and we want to stand out. These are articles you won't find anywhere else."

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

# "It's time to take a stand"

## SPA opens the debate on expanding the euthanasia law

Sabine Clappaert

Belgium has one of the most liberal euthanasia legislations in the world, and yet there are still many citizens who cannot make use of it. Spurred on by the law's 10-year anniversary, some politicians are beginning to ask the question: Should minors and people suffering from dementia also be allowed to choose euthanasia?

A recent Benelux survey showed that 62% of the country's residents believe that those suffering dementia should have access to euthanasia, if they have a valid will predating their dementia. Even more – 68% – think the law that allows minors aged 12 to 16 in the Netherlands to request euthanasia (if the request is supported by their parents) is a good idea.

The Flemish socialists (SPA) have introduced two proposals to amend Belgium's current euthanasia legislation.

The first proposes no minimum age limit, stating that the guiding parameter should be whether the child is "fit to make a judgment", adding that "sometimes children as young as seven or 10 years can be mature enough to decide their own fate". They do not want to exclude parents or medical teams, which must be in consensus with the child's wishes.

The second proposal addresses the rights of the demented and "those suffering permanent unconsciousness as a result of irreversible brain damage". SPA requests that patients have the opportunity to choose euthanasia while still mentally healthy, by way of a valid will deposited at the presiding municipal authority.

There is also much confusion around the existing legislation, clearly illustrated by the question: "Do I have the right to euthanasia?". Not necessarily, it seems.

The presiding physician may refuse to administer the lethal injection and is not obliged to refer the patient to another physician. It is one of the reasons why SPA senator Marleen Temmerman wants to update the legislation to make referral to another physician mandatory. Hospitals – often Catholic – may also circumvent unclear legislation by suggesting "palliative sedation", whereby physicians increasingly sedate patients until death sets in.

SPA, spearheading the debate, acknowledged that while social attitudes may have changed, such issues were more sensitive politically. But says SPA, it is "time for parties to take a stand". Both Open VLD and Groen have indicated that they support the debate. But other parties, including the Christian Democrats (CD&V), are opposed to any changes in legislation.



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**ING** 

# Sint-Michiels wins entrepreneur prize

## Students impressed with Move to Improve exercise project for older people

Alan Hope

Students at the Sint-Michiels College in Brasschaat, Antwerp province, have won this year's Unizo prize for entrepreneurship among young people with a business plan for a network of physical therapists and their Move to Improve project. Last week the school and other prize-winners received their awards from Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters. The competition, organised by small business organisation Unizo, Flanders DC and the government's job-training service and entrepreneurship agency, is open to students from the fourth year of secondary school onwards. This year, nearly 1,000 students took part, submitting 230 projects for imaginary businesses. Sint-Michiels' Move to Improve project, led by student Frans

D'Haens, involves a network of physiotherapists providing exercise classes for middle-aged and elderly

people and took the prize for its feasibility, a positive financial report on the business plan and

the "enormous learning process" involved in putting the plan together. Also last week, Unizo handed out prizes in a competition to inspire entrepreneurship among students of all ages, from primary school to university. Pupils aged six to eight from Windekind school in Vorselaar dreamt up a plan for a sort of survival kit to help birds in the winter. Pupils aged nine to 12 from the Europa School in Genk converted a caravan into a mobile shop, which they then took to local markets. At the other end of the scale, students from the University of Leuven developed an online portal to bring students and teachers together for tailor-made tutor support. Their project is now online at <http://sagio.be>.

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



Fran D'Haens (centre) and fellow students won the Plan(k)gas Prize for best entrepreneurial business plan

## Second-time start-ups need more incentive

Only one business owner in 15 ever starts up a new business after once going bankrupt, according to a survey carried out for the Neutral Union for the Self-employed (NSZ). The survey looked at more than 44,500 businesses that went under in Flanders between 2000 and 2011 and found that just over 2,900, or 6.5%, started anew later.

"That's extremely few, especially given research that shows that two-thirds said they wanted to start again," commented NSZ president Christine Mattheeuws. "In particular, it's known that those who start again are more likely to be successful because of what they learned from their bankruptcy."

Among the reasons cited by NSZ for the low rate is "the stigma that attaches to a failed entrepreneur", which deters credit providers from backing a new enterprise. "That mentality is typical," Mattheeuws

said. Creditors and others "don't seem to realise that a lot of self-employed people go under because...they were faced with a mountain of unpaid invoices. On that point, we can only envy a country like the United States. There, failed entrepreneurs are given a second chance, and you can only really count yourself an entrepreneur when you already have one failed business behind you."

The reluctance to be burned twice also has an effect on jobs, the survey showed. While 71% of the businesses that failed employed staff, only 21% of restarts do; the rest are one-person operations. "That confirms once again that salary costs in this country weigh heavily on businesses," said Mattheeuws. "Reductions in charges in the first three years are not enough. A general cut in salary costs across the board is what business people are waiting for."

## Food industry says no to battery eggs



Ghent-based food group Vandemoortele has announced it will no longer use eggs from battery hens in the manufacture of its mayonnaise and sauces from 1 July. Earlier this month, supermarket chain Colruyt said the use of battery eggs in its store-brand products would stop at the end of this year. The use of battery cages for laying hens will

become illegal in the EU this year. Vandemoortele's decision is "an important step in wiping out battery cages for good," said local animal rights organisation Gaia. The organisation will hold talks with Devos Lemmens, another major producer of sauces, in July to try to gain that company's support.

## Q&A



**Jan Beulens is an expert in social law at the University of Antwerp. His doctoral thesis reveals the lack of transparency in the use of subcontractors**

Your research shows that the authorities have little idea of the extent of the use of subcontractors. Why is that?

Other than at a European level, there are virtually no figures available on subcontracting. The legislature consciously has not laid down rules on the consequences of subcontracting. They assumed that... businesses would carry out work contracts with their own personnel

and failed to see how this would have a profound impact on pay and conditions – not only for the employees of the subcontractor but also for the main contractor.

**A recent case involving cleaners in Brussels' Central Station showed how subcontractors can escape paying legal wages. A new law makes that the responsibility of the main contractor. Does that make sense?**

The new law makes the main contractor liable for the minimum pay and conditions of all workers on a site. However, it's by no means clear that the new law will not present its own problems. The responsibility

for drawing attention to problems lies with the individual worker, even though research has shown that vulnerable workers are reluctant to raise concerns. A collective approach would be more effective.

**You suggest that workplace accidents may be being covered up to avoid losing a contract.**

The current economic organisation of the question of subcontracting does indeed tend to increase the risk. That's why it's important to include subcontracting in any risk analysis. Under the new Welfare Law, discussions must take place that include all businesses involved on a worksite, but that ought to be

extended to include employees and their representatives.

**You suggest Belgium might profit from following the French example in this area. What would that do?**

In France, the works council of a company receives information on subcontractors from the main contractor. Larger companies have considered setting up committees for prevention and protection at work, where employers and employees from the contractor and subcontractors are represented. In that way, rules can be worked out to cover common problems.

## THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Autos

#### ► Volvo

The first new Volvo V40 vehicle rolled off the production line last week in Ghent, the result of investments of some €100 million in the plant, the company's largest in Western Europe. The facility, which produces 280,000 cars a year, will phase out the S40 and V50 models to absorb the increased capacity and demand for the V40.

### Banking

#### ► KBC

Flanders' largest financial institution has sold its Polish car leasing affiliate to the Dutch Business Lease Group. The deal is part of KBC's strategy to focus its activities on its core markets of retail and SMEs financing.

### Biotech

#### ► Devgen

The Ghent-based biotechnology company, which specialises in crop protection, has signed a six-year global licence and research agreement with the Swiss Syngenta to jointly develop biological solutions for insect control. The deal includes an annual €4.8 million payment to Devgen.

### Handling

#### ► Flightcare

Ground services and handling company Flightcare, based at Brussels Airport, has been acquired by Swissport, the leading European airport services company, for an undisclosed amount. Both Swissport and Flightcare are embroiled in the dispute over the current handling contract at the airport.

### Logistics

#### ► Dachser

The German logistics group is investing up to €15 million in a new handling and dispatching terminal in Willebroek, south of Antwerp. The move is part of the company's development that includes further investments in Moeskroen and Genk over the next couple of years.

### Materials

#### ► beLife

Brussels-based materials technology company Umicore has invested €5.8 million in a joint venture with Belgian phosphates producer Prayon to develop and produce phosphate-based cathode materials for use in lithium-ion rechargeable batteries. The new firm, called beLife, expects its first products to hit the market in 2015, in time for the next generation of electric vehicles.

### Tourism

#### ► Club Med

The iconic French tourism group is opening a sales office in Antwerp next week to attract more customers from Flanders.

## LET'S CONQUER THE MARKET

Belgium and the Netherlands join forces to become a key player in thin-film photovoltaic technology

The solar industry is going through a difficult period, but that's no reason to stop believing in the market. "The solar market will grow tremendously," assures Hein Willems, director of Solliance. "To get a share of this, you always have to keep investing in R&D – even now. Or your company will not survive the strong competition."



Solliance is a recent initiative of TNO, TU/e, Holst Centre, ECN and imec that sees the companies joining forces on thin-film solar cells. The key in this initiative is the collaboration between Flemish and Dutch companies. Solliance's goal is to assemble all the partners' thin-film PV knowledge and infrastructure. "Then we can strengthen the position of the region to become a world player in thin-film PV," says Willems. But what is thin-film PV? "Today, the PV market is dominated by crystalline silicon solar cells that use 180µm thick active layers," explains Willems. "Thin-film solar cells, on the other hand, use layers that are thinner than 50µm. This has advantages related to cost, weight and flexibility. The efficiency of thin-film solar cells is still lower than that of crystalline silicon



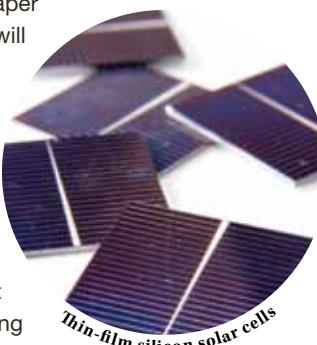
solar cells (about 10% instead of 20%). The challenge will be to focus first on applications that are unique for thin-film PV, such as roofs with limited weight-supporting capacity, foils on windows and integrations into textiles. In the longer term,

I think that thin-film PV systems will be cheaper than those of crystalline silicon and, therefore, will take a significant share of the total market."

Solliance focuses on three types of thin-film solar cells: organic, CIGS (copper indium gallium selenium) and thin-film silicon. On 5 June, the initiative will be presented to regional companies. "We want to attract companies that are active in PV but also companies that, at first sight, have nothing to do with PV but could benefit from PV technology and want to invest in a growing

Do you or your company want to explore the opportunities of the emerging thin-film PV market? Come to imec on 5 June for the event Solliance and discover the opportunities for Flemish companies.

► [www.solliance.eu](http://www.solliance.eu)  
► [www.imec.be/solliance](http://www.imec.be/solliance)



market. A great example of such a company is Smit Ovens. They used to make heating ovens for the production of television tubes. When this market faded out, they started to make ovens for the production of solar cells. And they are very successful in this."

Publisher:  
Katrien Marent  
for imec



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# Students on the move

## Flanders has played its part in the ever-growing success of the EU's famous educational exchange programme

Senne Starckx

In 1987, 3,244 students from Western Europe packed their bags and took a step into the unknown: They went to study in one of the 11 countries that initially participated in the Erasmus Programme. Since then, the exchange programme has grown fast: In the next academic year, Erasmus will welcome its three millionth participant. Today, 33 countries inside and outside the EU participate in the best-known of any EU initiative.

Erasmus has succeeded where many other European Commission (EC) projects have failed: It has delivered the message of a united Europe straight to the hearts of its younger citizens. For students who experience the best time of their lives while studying abroad, Erasmus will always be associated with wonderful memories – and therefore with the EU that made it all possible. Undoubtedly these warm impressions could stem the tide of anti-European sentiments in countries that are being severely hit by the economic crisis. Maybe that's why we don't see students in Spain burning EU flags on the Streets – Spain is the Royal Warrant Holder of the Erasmus programme – unlike their Greek partners in misfortune, who have never been that keen on Erasmus. But in 1987, the future didn't look at all bright for Erasmus, says Natascha Sander, the programme's information officer at DG Education and Culture, who spoke at the anniversary

conference of the Erasmus programme in Copenhagen earlier this month.

"At the start of Erasmus, big countries like [West] Germany and France already had their own exchange programmes, and they were afraid that national programmes would be pushed aside by ours," she explains. "But during the 1990s, Erasmus became more and more known, and boundaries between countries and study cultures began to dissolve."

### Paved the way for Bologna

Erasmus didn't just raise the awareness of a European identity to individual students. It also changed things at a policy level, according to Vanessa Debiais-Sainton, head of the Erasmus team at the EC. "Mobility supported by Erasmus has promoted the internationalisation and modernisation of the European higher education system," she says. "Ultimately, it paved the way for the Bologna Process."

To many readers, the name Bologna will ring a bell. Not so long ago, almost every university in Europe saw major protests against this major reform initiative, which harmonised university degree structures in Europe and increased the compatibility of the education systems. Many found it an assault on the individuality and character of their universities. At the core of the reforms was the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System, which enabled a comparison of



More than 3,000 Flemish students a year take part in the Erasmus Programme

the value of study courses between different universities and countries. In Flanders, the adoption of the Bologna Process – with the new Bachelor's and Master's degrees – occurred in the academic year 2004-2005.

There's also a sometimes-warranted criticism that many students use Erasmus as just an opportunity to go on a six-month vacation. "This is still a problem we face today," says Piet Van Hove, head of the international relations office at the University of Antwerp. "For the students who come to Antwerp, we can't do much except hope that they will attend a large part of their courses," says Van Hove. "But for our own students who go abroad, we make a careful selection among the candidate partner universities. We want to be sure that they take the Erasmus programme seriously. The responsibility lies entirely with the sending university."

### Work-study aspects of programme on the up

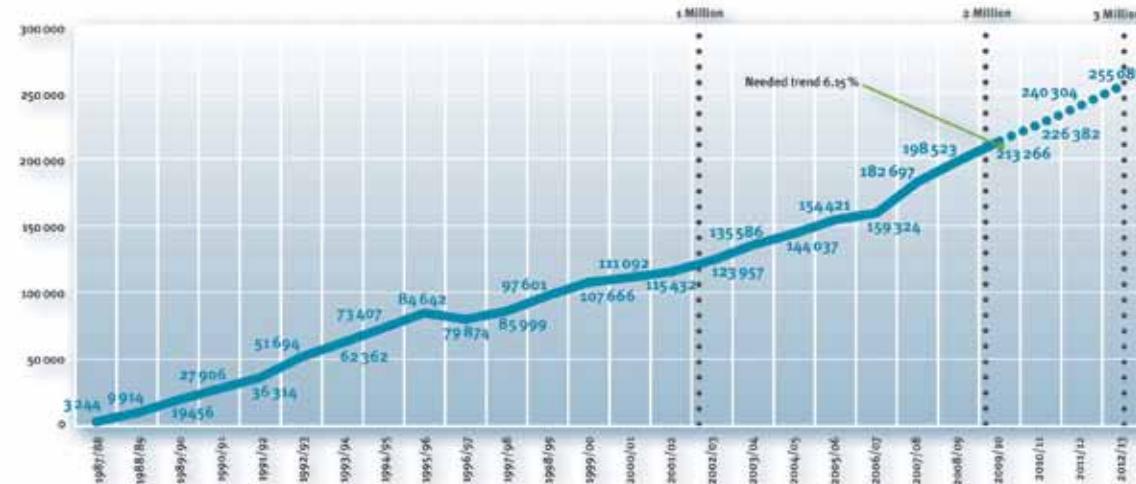
In the past few years, according to Van Hove, priorities in Erasmus have started to shift. "In the early days of the programme, the first and only goal was to promote student mobility around Europe, which automatically stimulates inter-cultural awareness," he says. "Now, we see that many universities find it more and more important that the time spent abroad yield something extra for their students, like the chance to work in a high-tech laboratory or do some field work. You could say that the study aspect is coming to the fore again." About 3,250 Flemish students go abroad for six months or a year on the Erasmus programme, or a bit less than 10% of all students. "The number of [Flemish] students who go on Erasmus has stabilised," says Van Hove. "We see that many of them prefer shorter stays abroad – weeks instead of months. Besides that, many study programmes organise their own trips abroad. Our university's goal now is not to increase the overall number of Erasmus students, but to make the programme more popular in those areas that traditionally have the lowest participation – the applied and life sciences."

Meanwhile, the EC is adding the final touch to Erasmus for All, which will start in 2014 and will incorporate all

the existing exchange programmes – Erasmus, Leonardo, Tempus, Comenius and Erasmus Mundus. The goal for the EC is to have another five million people going abroad to study, train or do voluntary work by 2020.

[www.tinyurl.com/erasmusflanders](http://www.tinyurl.com/erasmusflanders)

#### Progress to achieving the 3 million student mobility target



The steep growth of Erasmus participation from the programme's launch in 1987 to the present

## A FLEMISH ERASMUS PIONEER

When he moved from Ghent University to the Free University of Amsterdam for three months in 1990, Marc Goffart was one of the first students to be selected for Ghent's participation in Erasmus. "I just thought it would be a nice thing to do, something to tell to my children later. But I never imagined it could have such a big influence on my life."

He found it a challenging experience. "I had imagined Flanders and the Netherlands to be a

rather more unified area than they turned out to be, linguistically, culturally and politically," he admits. "That made me reflect on my own identity – as a Belgian with Flemish roots and Dutch as my native language."

And he noticed major differences between teaching methods. "The Dutch approach puts a lot of emphasis on self-study, essays, smaller discussion groups and so on. The Flemish teaching system, particularly at that time, was

more theoretical."

Back in Ghent, Goffart founded the local branch of the Erasmus Student Network. "My Erasmus mobility was one of the main reasons I subsequently got a job in the university's international relations department. It also opened the European door for me, leading to my present job in the European Commission – in the international relations office."

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

The first Flemish university college, the Catholic University College Leuven (KU Leuven), received an ECTS certificate from the European Commission – a quality label that rewards efforts to increase the international mobility of students. ECTS stands for European Credit Transfer System, which allows for the transfer of learning experience between European study institutions. The certificate guarantees that all studies at KU Leuven take this system into account. All education documents, such as study guides, at KU Leuven are available in English.

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

Flemish green party Groen is organising a G100 citizens' summit on education on 30 May. Groen will bring students, teachers and parents together in the Flemish Parliament to discuss the education system in Flanders and develop concrete proposals. At the end of the day, they will vote on priorities. The timing of the initiative is no coincidence; Flemish education minister Pascal Smet is planning a thorough reform of secondary education in Flanders. The citizens' summit of Groen is inspired by the G1000 organised by writer and historian David Van Reybrouck last year, when 1,000 citizens gathered to discuss the future of the country during the political crisis.

[www.tinyurl.com/groeng100](http://www.tinyurl.com/groeng100)

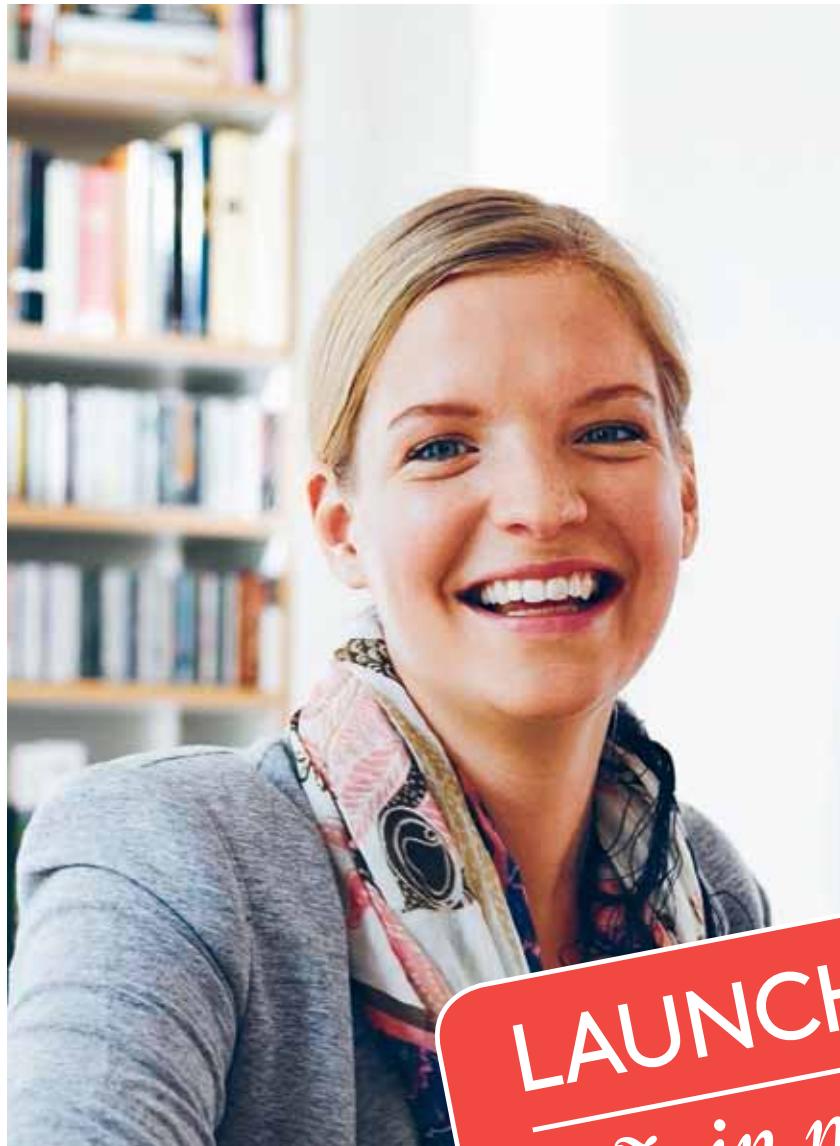
The well-known cardiologist Pedro Brugada, head of the Heart Rhythm Management Centre of the University Hospital Brussels, wants to screen 12-year-old children for heart problems. Brugada hopes to prevent sudden heart failures of, amongst others, young athletes. Brugada has chosen 12-year-olds "because at that age, they are very receptive to positive influences".

Researchers of the University of Leuven and the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) have collaborated with American scientists to relieve the symptoms of Parkinson's disease in fruit flies by giving them the vitamin K2. Their findings are published in the American journal *Science*. The researchers cultivated genetically modified fruit flies with Parkinson's, which rendered them unable to fly. The modified gene produces vitamin K2, so researchers then administered K2 to reverse the defect, after which the ability to fly improved. If results on mice and human cells prove positive, the efficacy of the vitamin among Parkinson's patients will be tested.

City dwellers walk and cycle on average 15 minutes more a day more than people living in the countryside. That was the conclusion of Delfien Van Dyck of the Department of Movement and Sport Sciences at Ghent University in her doctoral thesis. The study calls into question the claim that living outside urban environments improves exercise gained through mobility. **Andy Furniere**

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# Pick your tune

The brand new Jukebox Museum brings back memories of impending American culture in the 1950s

Andy Furniere

Although I'm too young to be nostalgic for the golden age of American culture in Flanders – epitomised by Elvis Presley and the jukeboxes playing his music – I find it easy to understand the charm at the Jukebox Museum in Menen, West Flanders. Especially when an elderly gentleman puts on the record of "Jailhouse Rock" and stylishly shakes off the years that have passed since then.

Since the middle of April, vintage and music lovers can spend their free Sunday afternoons marvelling at 110 jukeboxes set up at the former Roussel industrial site. All the jukeboxes were made between 1946 and 1964 and are the property of collector Geert Olieu. You can choose your favourite "oldies" on certain working devices without having to dip in your pockets for coins.

The museum – unique in Belgium – also exhibits about



A Wurlitzer "Bubbler" from 1946

400 old televisions and radios. The collection is maintained by people from the sheltered workshop 't Veer in Menen.

"We want to recreate the whole atmosphere of the two decades after the Second World War," says coordinator Bram Wenes, "when Flemish young people started to drink Coca-Cola, hung posters of Marilyn Monroe over their beds and danced in bars to the rock'n'roll of Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis played on jukeboxes."

## Bubbler

The tour around the museum first explains how the American soldiers during the Second World War brought jukeboxes to Europe for entertainment in the canteens. The colourful and trendy devices soon became a huge hit

in Flanders' nightlife. That fact is illustrated by a scene of teenagers dancing to jukebox tunes in the 1955 Flemish movie *Meeuwen sterven in de haven* (*Seagulls Die in the Harbour*).

"Jukeboxes were a miracle of new technology compared to the simple record players of that time," says Wenes. Because of the fierce competition between the four American brands Wurlitzer, Rock-Ola, Seeburg and AMI, the techniques and design of jukeboxes became ever-more extravagant, until they looked like machines out of a science fiction movie.

AMI, for example, created a jukebox model called "Menus", with a glass dome shaped like an astronaut's helmet. But the most iconic jukebox is the Wurlitzer "Bubbler", introduced in 1946. It is a symbol of post-war optimism with its illuminated, colour-changing pilasters, bubble tubes, shiny chrome and domed top.

## Playboys

Flemish teenagers not only put their spare change in the American jukeboxes but also in Flemish devices made by, amongst others, Barco, the technology group based in Kortrijk that now specialises in projectors and displays. Tonecolor was another Flemish brand, made by a company in Antwerp.

The jukeboxes needed to please the ears and the eyes, but their

owners also wanted to make a profit: A Barco from 1957 cost around 42,000 Belgian francs, or more than €1,000. To play one single, you only had to put in a coin of one Belgian franc. Because time is money, wallboxes were put on the tables in bars. Serving as remote controls, the small boxes enabled people to select tunes from their table.

"So-called 'playboys' even had the job of asking people which song they wanted to hear, so that the jukebox was almost constantly playing and making money," says Wenes.

At the end of the tour, you can test your knowledge of the era in a quiz where you have to make out whether a personality, technology or style belonged to the period 1930 to 1950 or the period 1950 to 1970. A photo album further tells the stories of jukeboxes with images from bars or wedding parties.

At a replica of a typical counter from the '50s in the "Jukebox café", you can take your own picture. On the walls of this room hang the lists of favourite songs assembled by well-known Flemings such as the blues musician Roland Van Campenhout and comedian Wouter Deprez. But by then, you will without a doubt have your own jukebox list.

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

# Smells like history

## An authentic medieval experience opens in Bruges this autumn

Alan Hope

The middle ages were either a time of intrepid knights and damsels in towers, or they were a time of open sewers and disastrous dentition, depending on your point of view. Which of those options turns out to correspond most to reality will be revealed by a new "historical experience", due to open in Bruges in the autumn.

Historium Brugge will be "an experience for all the senses", according to René Tolenaars, director of sales and marketing. Apart from sights and sounds, visitors will also be able to experience the biting frost of winters cold enough to freeze the canals. On the smell question – one that has always fascinated me the more it has been ignored by historians – they've decided to play it safe, by reproducing the aromas of the bath house, which presumably involve things like incense, sandalwood and so on.

Medieval Bruges was much different from the preserved, facsimile version that's come down to us today. Then, it was one of the most important cities of Europe and of the world, a booming merchant town and financial centre. If you think the centre is busy when a couple of coaches of tourists disembark, imagine how chaotic and cacophonous it must have been when the main Markt square really was a market.

That's some of the atmosphere the new exhibit hopes to bring to the visitor, Tolenaars says, though he's reluctant to give away much more "so as not to spoil the surprise". What he will say is that the attraction will admit a group of 24 every five minutes to the central spectacle, which lasts for about 25 minutes. Visitors are equipped with audio-guides, which comes in nine language and in special kids' versions in Dutch and French.

There are rooms with seven themes, and the Historium has enlisted the services of Flemish film director Frank Van Passel, scriptwriter Gerrie Van Rompaey, composer Nicholas Lens and actors Clara Cleymans and Peter Van Den Begin.

Following the experience, visitors are led through the more conventional exhibits of the "edutainment zone" before encountering the attractions of the beer café, which Tolenaars explains will be less like an authentic medieval tavern and more a place to sample the wares of Duvel Moortgat and enjoy the panoramic view from the terrace over the Markt.

Finally, there's a concept chocolate shop, rather anachronistic for 1435. But, Tolenaars says, "it would be impossible to imagine the Bruges experience without chocolate".

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



# “You have to feel when it sounds good”

**Guitarist Philip Catherine has a couple of home gigs lined up at the Brussels Jazz Marathon**

Tom Peeters

When Philip Catherine plays, every note counts. In other words, he doesn't need a lot of notes to sound interesting. It's this simple fact that makes him one of the key jazz musicians of his generation. The virtuoso guitarist has shared the stage with jazz legends like Stéphane Grappelli, Benny Goodman, Chet Baker, Charles Mingus and, of course, his good friend Toots Thielemans. And still, at nearly 70, he can't resist plucking his guitar. It has become a physical need.

Sitting in his apartment near Brussels South station, he once pointed out the rooftop Tintin landmark to explain his style. “Do you see Tintin?” he asked. “His inventor, Hergé, is known for his *ligne claire* (‘clear line’). I always loved that idea, and I am playing a bit like that too. For me music has to be clear. I might be a jazz guitarist, but I also love the sound of Jeff Beck, a rock guitarist, or George Benson, or singers like Freddie Mercury and Paul McCartney. They all sound very simple. I feel a member of that family.”

But in trying to keep it simple, the London-born guitarist doesn't feel unique. John Coltrane, Miles Davis and even his hero Django Reinhardt had this gift to make the most of only a few notes. “It just depends on where you place the notes,” he explains. “The same note can sound better a bit more to the left or a bit more to the right. But it's not only about the



Philip Catherine: “You can have a beautiful garden, but you have to take care of the flowers and the plants. Otherwise, the result is rubbish”

location or the length; the intensity is also important. It all comes down to intuition. You have to feel when it sounds good.”

#### Mother knows best

This intuition Catherine inherited from his English mother, who raised her talented son with his Belgian father in Brussels. “She was a good pianist,” he recalls. “But she never gave me any explanation about the length of a note, or whatever. She just said that it felt good to play it

like that. You know, some things are already there, and other things you have to learn by yourself. You can have a beautiful garden, but you have to take care of the flowers and the plants. Otherwise, the result is rubbish.”

So, even though since the age of 16 Catherine has accompanied the biggest jazz virtuosos, in Belgium and Europe, at almost 30 he decided to attend a course at the Berklee College of Music in Boston. “I wanted to understand better how the big

jazz musicians, such as Chick Corea, structured their music. I was already a good guitar player, but I had learned everything from the musicians I played with in the vivid Brussels jazz club scene and on tour. I didn't really know the tools.”

He can really grab a melody with his fingers, seemingly without effort but full of expression. His colleagues admire him for his lyrical play. Nowadays he plays a mixture of his own compositions and classic songs, often from the 1940s and 50s. Last year his love for pure melodies led to an album of Cole Porter standards. The compositions of the beloved American songwriter were an almost perfect match for Catherine's lyrical pluckings. “I always loved melodies,” he says.

#### All in the mind

It's a startling combination, this

simple love for simple melodies and the restless character he is. But he's found a balance. Meditation helps him to focus. “If I don't do it, my thoughts are blowing in all possible directions. Limiting these thoughts is soothing to me. Also playing the guitar helps. I need the stage more than ever.” That's probably a reason why his schedule is so busy.

Recently he was a guest at some of the Toots Thielemans 90th anniversary concerts, and he has been touring with pop singer Paul Michiels and classical pianist Jeroen D'Hoe. In August he will be a special guest at the Night of the Jazz Guitars at Jazz Middelheim, but first he will play two home gigs at the Brussels Jazz Marathon. At the Grote Markt and Sounds Jazz Club, he will share the stage with the other members of his quartet: pianist Nicola Andrioli, bassist Philippe Aerts and drummer Antoine Pierre.

**25-27 MAY**

## Brussels Jazz Marathon

Across Brussels

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

Philip Catherine Quartet

Sounds Jazz Club, Tulpstraat 28, Brussels, 25 May, 22.30

Grand Place, Brussels, 26 May, 21.00-22.00

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

# Streets ahead

**Dead rats, jugglers and trapeze artists running wild? It must be Leuven in Scène**

Tom Peeters

Leuven will be packed this weekend for the fifth Leuven in Scène. This free biannual open-air festival has again invited a fine selection of local and international theatre companies to showcase their skills, with fireworks, acrobatics and other spectacles. In all, there are 34 shows in 14 locations. Because the programme is identical on the two days, visitors who want to make a weekend of it have great options. Two years ago, we particularly enjoyed the evening water spectacle at the Leuvense Vaart. The poetic characters on otherworldly floating objects, invented by French theatre company Ilotopie, were the culmination of two magical days. But we were lucky to have arrived early. With more than 120,000 visitors, the festival reached a critical point in 2010. Comfort wasn't great, and visitors complained about long queues. As a result, the organisers looked for new locations further from

the centre: Sint-Jacobsplein and Keizersberg Abbey are new venues this year. Moreover, the main shows all start at the same time, so visitors have to choose, rather than trying to see everything and ending up seeing nothing. Preparation can be very rewarding. This year we're looking forward to the street parade that will pass through Bondgenotenlaan, culminating on Ladeuzeplein in front of the university library. Spanish street theatre group Xarxa Teatre will perform *Les Rates Mortes* (the Dead Rats), a crazy parade inspired by the carnival gala with the same name founded by influential Ostend painter James Ensor. No doubt this will lead to an expressionistic, sometimes surrealistic parade of frenzied performers.

#### Spanish spectacular

Of course, in Ensor's art, dead rats referred to the upper classes, who, according to the painter,

deserved to be made fun of. We've already seen pictures of big dollar and euro signs, so presumably it will be a satirical show that will address the present crisis. *Les Rates Mortes* is a spectacle in the Spanish tradition, meaning actors and audience intermingle. Better not put on your Sunday best, the organisers warn, because there will be a lot of juggling with flaming torches. Other headline acts are Les Pepones, a trapeze troupe from France (in Park Bruul), Lviv Voskressinia, a Ukrainian theatre company bringing a spectacular reading of a

Chekhov play (Vismarkt), and the Polish Teatre KTO, with a wordless performance inspired by a José Saramago novel (Sint-Jacobsplein).

In the city park, visitors can marvel at circus shows and attend a workshop by Cirkus in Beweging, the local circus school. If you prefer a romantic stroll, you can drop by the park around Keizersberg Abbey, where intimate fire acts will accentuate the fairytale surroundings. Downtown, it will get noisier with marching bands, lightning artists and even a mobile typewriter.

**26 & 27 MAY**

## Leuven in Scène

Around Leuven

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



Spanish street theatre group Xarxa Teatre's *Les Rates Mortes* is inspired by Ostend painter James Ensor

# On the right track

**Ghent's first public art parcours in more than a decade wants to leave an impression long after the artists have gone**

Lisa Bradshaw

**“B**ut what does it mean?” queried a woman on the preview tour of TRACK for the press. She was addressing the question to the artist, and it was not the first time she had asked it today. “Well,” replied the artist, with a wrinkled brow, “I don’t really know.” This is both the beauty of contemporary art and the very reason for its number of detractors. Artists get paid for making just anything, they say. And at a couple of points in TRACK, you will be inclined to side with them. A mound of cement, for instance, by Spaniard Lara Almarcegui, which “offers the visitor an alternative way of seeing a building and experiencing architecture,” elicited numbed silence even from these art critics.

Almarcegui’s work does “mean” something, though, and it of course often helps to know the intention to appreciate the work.

But not so, I thought, with the artist who admittedly had no idea what his work meant. Michaël Borremans did receive inspiration from the abandoned rooms in which his installation, “Everything Falls”, is shown, which he explained. But why the Ghent artist put duck beaks on human busts in the place of noses is anyone’s guess.

I was already surprised to find the interior of one of the stately mansions on Ghent’s postcard-perfect Graslei/Korenlei canal unused and in a poor state; Borremans’ oversize busts, with what seemed to me simply Pinocchio-like noses, conjured up an idea of Ghent past, ruled by giants, who lived here among these once-grand high ceilings. I thought the installation resembled an archaeological dig. Mr and Mrs Giant are the extinct remnants of a previous civilisation.

Contemporary art isn’t about what the artist thinks; it’s about what *you* think, both in the moment and much later – perhaps for the rest of your life. This is what curators of TRACK, Ghent’s first major art parcours in a dozen years, have in mind when they say that they want the event to “leave traces”.

“We set out in search of artists who have one thing in common: They enter into a dialogue with an environment,” says co-curator Philippe Van Cauteren, the artistic director of SMAK, Ghent’s museum of contemporary art. “This TRACK will fill the summer with surprising and enriching encounters,” which he hopes will linger even after the event closes in September.

He and Mirjam Varadinis, curator for Kunsthaus Zürich, gathered more than 40 artists from nearly 20 countries to create TRACK, which is set up in six “clusters” in different neighbourhoods of Ghent. The city centre has its cluster, but so do neighbourhoods that barely anyone outside of its residents ever sees. Every artist was given a historical and sociological background on each area and picked their own sites. They then strove to create work that take



into consideration their space’s own character – from its blessings and beauty to its decay and problems. “These are not artists who sit in an ivory tower and are disconnected from society,” stresses Varadinis.

## Houses: the living and the lived-out

Ghent’s Tolhuis neighbourhood to the north of the centre is a mish-mash of social housing, corner markets and old sports halls. Remarkably, virtually hidden behind dilapidated houses, are beautiful gardens, a remnant of when Ghent’s wealthy populated the area. Inside a homogenous housing development is a serene little park with a huge leafy tree. Held in its branches, the trunk shooting right up through it, is a tree house – an exact replica of the 1950s square, brick bungalows seen below. It was put there by Flemish artist Benjamin Verdonck. Coming upon the installation is indeed surprising – and delightful. “It’s a social house with a tree growing through it,” says Verdonck. “The idea is that life continues, no matter what.” Just down the street on an upper floor of an abandoned mansion is an altogether eerier kind of installation by Dutch artist Mark Manders. His clay sculptures are always defragmented human forms, positioned with furniture or pieces of wood – the upper body and head of a girl seemingly impaled on a wooden beam, for instance, or a head cut in half by a piece of plywood.

Seeing Manders’ pieces scattered

through the musty rooms of a colossal home long empty, destroys any possibility that you could ever appreciate them in a museum, where they are usually found. His choice to use young female forms only and to cover all the windows in (self-made) newspapers evokes the feeling that something very sinister is going on here.

## The Socialist city

One of TRACK’s most ballyhooed installations is naturally one of its most visible: A replica of Magritte’s iconic “Le Chateau des Pyrénées” in the form of a gigantic helium balloon. Instead of a castle on top of the floating rock formation is the Vooruit, Ghent’s socialist “castle” turned arts centre. The balloon, by Turkish artist Ahmet Öğüt, floats high in the air, very close to the real Vooruit. Like Magritte’s version, this image could be an assertion that however solid the ground underneath you feels, it’s a visionary fantasy whose bubble will eventually burst.

Up the hill to the south, behind Sint-Pieters Abbey, another hidden garden is the site of Italian artist Massimo Bartolini’s “Bookyards”. Built on site to precisely fit with the grooves of the earth, hundreds of metres of green, wooden shelves are home to 30,000 books – all donated by local residents. You can wander through, pluck a book and take it home. Just bring it back when you’re done. It’s a wondrous experiment in the honour system and a reminder of



Bookshelves from Italy, books from Ghent in the garden of Sint-Pieters Abbey (top); “The Castle of Vooruit” is a helium-powered play on Magritte (left); Mark Manders’ haunted house (above)

the scholarly studies that once took place in this former monastery.

For an art event that is about discovering and considering the history and mystery of the urban fabric, you can’t make a better choice than Tazu Rous. The Japanese artist famously encases a city’s iconic monuments in surroundings that completely change the nature of the objects. A few years ago, he built a hotel room around the monumental statue of Jesus in the city’s Sint-Annaplein. From inside the dull interior, Jesus, “placed” atop the bed, seemed lonely and isolated.

Now Rous is building a room around the clock face on the tower at the

Gent-Sint-Pieters train station. It’s a late arriver to the parcours and will only open in the first week of June. Visitors will have to climb several flights of stairs to reach it, but the effect promises to be worth it. Not only is it probably the only chance you’ll ever have to get this close to a monument you may have seen from afar hundreds of times, it is a reminder that wealth and power has the ability to spirit away many kinds of riches from the public view.

*Several sites on the TRACK parcours require a pass, which is €10 from any “meeting point”, located in each of the six clusters. The pass comes with a guide to the works*

**UNTIL 16 SEPTEMBER**

**TRACK**

Across Ghent

► [www.track.be](http://www.track.be)

*Performance, and then some*

# Trouble Festival

Georgio Valentino

Contemporary performance is a notoriously troublesome art form. To begin with it's difficult to define. Nearly anything can be considered a "performance" depending on one's perspective. And it can be a little awkward, too, with artists insisting on "breaking down the traditional barriers" between performer and spectator. Les Halles' Trouble Festival, now in its eighth edition, unpacks these difficulties uniquely. Not only is there a wide range of performances and performers, but the concepts driving the form are also highlighted through discussion and debate.

Trouble's guest partner this year is Poland's Interakcje, one of the eight sister festivals in the European network A Space for Living Art. Interakcje is based in Piotrkow Trybunalski, where it has held its International Festival of the Art of Action for more than a decade. Since both Trouble and Interakcje



are motivated by a self-conscious challenge every year to remain innovative, it's no surprise to find theory worked explicitly into the programme. There is, for example, a Friday afternoon debate on the complicated relationship between contemporary performance and the arts establishment. An

international panel will convene to compare notes on the varying levels of institutional support offered in different corners of Europe. We eggheads will also enjoy Writing Shop, a nightly resume of the day's performances, with discussion by six respected critics drawn from across the

Continent.

Lady Zone is another recurring feature in this year's programme, spotlighting a different female performer every night. The Lady Zone finale, Wanda and Nova deViator's *Transmittance #2.1*, is a high-tech, audio/visual karaoke session. The Fragile! cycle gives six students from La Cambre's visual arts section the chance to show off what they learned in school. The performances certainly look promising in outline, especially David Zagari's *Framing Art—Spacing Reality*, which advertises a special choreography involving unsuspecting volunteers, full bladders and a "final release".

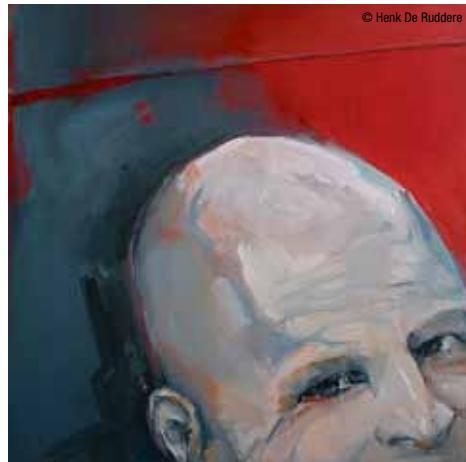
Italian performance art ensemble Ricci/Forte stages, meanwhile, stages *Wunderkammer Soap*, a nightly series of 20-minute vignettes inspired by Christopher Marlowe and the American soap opera, and they let us peek into the private lives of washed-up screen diva Faust (pictured), Dido the transsexual prostitute and the predatory virago Hero. There are of course loads of stand-alone pieces on the agenda, too, including the festival's opener, Laurie Anderson's *Dirtday*. The performance, co-produced by and held at Bozar, sees the esteemed New Yorker continuing the meditation on post-9/11 American culture that she began on her Grammy-nominated album *Homeland*. She does so through a sequence of alternating spoken word, solo violin and ambient passages. The fifth and final day of Trouble is capped by a late-night dance party hosted by DJ Majella. If this decidedly generic genre of celebration sounds incongruous, one might think of the DJ booth as an installation and the dance floor as a performance space in which formal boundaries are demolished and social relationships re-imagined.

29 May to 2 June | Les Halles, Koninklijke Sinte-Mariastraat 22, Brussels | ► [www.halles.be](http://www.halles.be)

## SPECIAL EVENT

### Kunstenaarsparcours

Galleries, cafés, ateliers and other artistic venues are throwing open their doors for this fourth edition of Brussels' Kunstenaarsparcours (Artists' Parcours). Hundreds of artists, both amateur and professional, will be on hand to show off the studios where they create and the galleries where they exhibit. Contemporary art lovers and curious types are invited to pick up a parcours guide from La Bellone (Vlaamsesteenweg 46) and head out into the city to discover Brussels' art scene, around every corner. **Robyn Boyle**



2-3 June, 11.00-19.00 | Across Brussels

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

## MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

### Boom

**Feria Andaluza:** Annual family-friendly Spanish festival featuring horse shows, gastronomy, music and dance

**MAY 25-27 at Provincial Domein De Schorre, Schommelei 1**

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

### Brussels

**Diamond Deluxe Nights:** Chic bi-monthly all-in party, including DJ sets, live entertainment, food, drinks, parking and more

**JUN 2 22.00-5.00 at Event Lounge, Generaal Wahislaan 16**

► [www.diamond-deluxe-nights.be](http://www.diamond-deluxe-nights.be)

### Ghent

**Citadelic Festival:** Improvisation, performance arts and music festival throughout Ghent's signature city park

**MAY 24-27 12.00-22.00 at Citadelpark, Norbert Rousseaudefreef 1**

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

## WORLD MUSIC

### Music4Greece

An evening of traditional Greek music for a good cause? Yes, please. This fundraising night costs a minimum donation of just €7, which goes directly towards relief organisations that provide food, medicine and other basic supplies to the Greek population in need. Music4Greece will continue over several months with performances by a variety of musicians. This week features Asymmetri Kompania (pictured), a group of six friends who are no strangers to the Brussels music scene, having played in numerous cafés and Greek *tavernas* across the city.

Their form of rebetiko, Greek folk music, is lively, highly instrumental and inevitably inspires group dancing and enthusiastic sing-alongs. The group is preceded by Areti Prosilia, Nikos Prosilias and Dimos Vougioukas on piano, guitar and accordion. **RB**



30 May, 20.00 | Art Base, Brussels | ► [www.art-base.be](http://www.art-base.be)

## MORE WORLD MUSIC THIS WEEK

### Ghent

**Yom & The Wonder Rabbis:** The "king of klezmer clarinet" and his new group perform a tribute to the original flamboyant klezmer musician, Naftule Brandwein

**MAY 26 20.00 at De Centrale, Kraankindersstraat 2**

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

### Sint-Niklaas

**Hindi Zahra:** Berber blues and jazz grooves by the French-Moroccan songstress whose voice and style are often compared to Billie Holiday and Django Reinhardt

**MAY 26 20.30 at Concertzaal De Casino, Stationsstraat 104**

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

## FOOD &amp; DRINK

## Les Misérables Dinner

French writer Victor Hugo's Belgian publisher once threw him a lavish party. One would expect no less after his 1862 novel *Les Misérables* became an instant success across the whole of Europe. The celebration included a decadent banquet in Brussels where even the city's mayor was invited to take a place at the table, among other prominent locals. Precisely 150 years later, Brusselicious is organising a re-enactment of the event, calling on the Centre for Historical Gastronomy to provide the five-course period menu.

The feast includes such opulent dishes as oxtail, ash-cooked capon (rooster), artichoke hearts, *foie gras*, cheeses, strawberries and much more, plus copious amounts of Champagne. Diners will also be treated to readings of texts, including a speech by Victor Hugo, in the presence of a very special guest of honour: Florian V Hugo, the great-great-grandson of Victor himself. **RB**



**31 May, 19.00 | Koningsgalerij, Brussels**

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

## MORE FOOD &amp; DRINK THIS WEEK

## Brussels

**Culinaria Square:** Large-scale event featuring star chefs, tastings, demonstrations and workshops

**MAY 31 - JUN 3 at Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan 86C**

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

## Kemmel (West Flanders)

**Zoetemarkt:** Market featuring assorted Flemish cakes, cookies, waffles, pancakes, candy and other sweets

**MAY 28 14.00-18.00 at Dries**

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

## Mariekerke (Antwerp province)

**Palingfestival:** 41st annual eel festival in the fisherman's village on the river Scheldt, featuring the regional dish *paling in 't groen* (freshwater eel in a green herb sauce); proceeds go to charity

**MAY 26-28 12.00-20.30 at Kouterplein**

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

## CLASSICAL

## Quatuor Ebène

String quartets don't come more glamorous than the Quatuor Ebène – four young French blokes dressed in black who play Ravel and Fauré as if their lives depended on it. Even Mozart, which they've just recorded and which features on the first of these two concerts, along with some Schubert and Tchaikovsky, sounds searing and intense under their hands. How do they do it? Part of an answer may be found in the programme of the second concert. Titled *The Other Ebène*, it mixes Chick Corea with the soundtrack of *Pulp Fiction* and was performed for the first time at the Paris Folies Bergères a year and a half ago. The foursome, it turns out, have never reneged on their early love for jazz and pop and, by continuing to play them, infuse some of their oomph into their more classical repertoire. The precision and clarity of that, in turns, informs their more alternative fare. Call it crossover if you must: The truth is that they're impossible to pin down.



**30 May & 1 June, 20.00 | DeSingel, Antwerp** | ► [www.desingel.be](http://www.desingel.be)

## MORE CLASSICAL THIS WEEK

## Brussels

**Bach Collegium Japan:** Masaaki Suzuki's ensemble have for 15 years been working on recordings of Bach's complete cantatas. The highlight of this concert is surely *Magnificat*, with its perfect balance between the spiritual and the dramatic

**MAY 29 20.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23**

► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

## Ghent

**Côté Jardin:** Enjoy this "free musical picnic" in the gardens of de Bijloke concert hall, featuring Handel's *Water Music* played by Les Muffati, jazz and tango performed on two pianos and zesty Gypsy music by Taraf de Bruxelles

**May 27 11.00-20.00 at de Bijloke, Jozef Kluyskensstraat 2**

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

## CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Diana Goodwin

## Poechenellekelder

Eikstraat 5, Brussels

Having come to Belgium from the United States, I find the absence of American-based franchises, so common elsewhere in the world, to be refreshingly charming. Take, for instance, a touristy place like the Grote Markt in Brussels: not a Starbucks or McDonald's in sight. Lovely.

The stretch of Stoofstraat linking the Grote Markt with Manneken Pis is admittedly lined with waffle stands, cheap souvenirs and chocolate shops, and yet the little peeing man himself stands unobtrusively on a street corner, nary a corporate logo or global fast-food chain in sight.

Across the street, in a prime location that T.G.I. Friday's would kill for, is a wonderful cafe called Poechenellekelder. The name roughly translates as "Puppet Cellar", and refers to the dozens of old marionettes hanging from the ceiling, which supposedly used to make appearances in a basement puppet theatre.

These days the only performers here are the aproned servers, who take great pride in the ceremonial pouring and presentation of each glass of beer. Surprisingly friendly, they are more than willing to help beer novices and adventurous *bierliefhebbers* navigate the impressive beer list. Organised by



style, the menu features about 150 beers and is strong on traditional lambics.

The owner, Michel De Triest, is a beer lover himself and has made the Poechenellekelder a mecca for fellow enthusiasts seeking hard-to-find and special beers. Small craft breweries like Brussels-based Brasserie de la Senne, Cantillon and Boon are well-represented.

On a rainy day, of which we've had plenty lately, the kitsch-filled interior provides a cosy and atmospheric respite. The patrons are a lively mix of locals and beer-

loving tourists, and conversation is easily struck up between the tiny close-set tables.

In the summer months, the small terrace out front is prime people-watching territory. It's the perfect spot to relax with visiting friends after a requisite Manneken Pis viewing, close enough to enjoy the spectacle of camera-toting tourists craning for a glimpse of the wee statue, and yet still feel comfortably superior as you sip a world-class beer.

## BITE

## Patine ★★★★☆

Two friends and I are in Antwerp to visit one of its many specialty clothing shops in the hip 't Zuid area, and we decide to combine it with brunch. We happen upon Patine, a corner café that has been around for a good while, opened by William and his wife Anne-Marie 15 years ago. Known largely as a wine bistro, it's a late-night hotspot in this part of town. But it's bright daylight now, so we pick a seat next to the open window with a view of the Museum of Fine Arts. As it gets closer to lunchtime, the terrace seating starts to fill up, and we're overcome with a distinctly Parisian feeling. The dining room is charming, with

high ceilings and lots of wood. There's a gorgeous French wine cabinet against one wall, filled with bottles from France, Italy, Spain, Chile and Australia, among others. The bistro carries more than 200 wines; it's almost a pity we are here for breakfast. William takes our orders: three large breakfasts and three equally large café macchiatos. The coffees are perfectly pulled, with three layers of steamed milk, espresso and foam. We've arrived at the tail end of breakfast and, as a result, there is only one croissant left. He gladly replaces the missing item with a soft-boiled egg. I don't miss my croissant, for there is an enormous basket of assorted bread on the table, quality

pieces of multi-grain and white sliced extra thick. Breakfast comes with butter, jam and chocolate spread. Next to this is a delightful glass platter covered in paper-thin cured ham, creamy Brie cheese, Gouda, cherry tomatoes and an assortment of fruit, including strawberries, melon, grapes, dates and gooseberries. We are also treated to fresh-squeezed orange juice in stem glasses. The coffees are so good, we order another round as we take our time trying, unsuccessfully, to finish everything on our platter. Meanwhile, the lunch-goers around us are tucking into fine-looking dishes of quiche, lasagne, homemade soup and salad. It's fair to say that Patine is a great place to visit at any time of day; in the evening they often host live concerts, and you can even spend the night in the upstairs B&B. So there's no excuse for not exploring the extensive wine list.

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



## TALKING DUTCH

## The return of Talking Dutch



What can I say? I missed writing about the peculiarities of Dutch, that curious little language.

I just found out, for example, that the US State Department estimates that it should take a native speaker of English no more than 24 weeks (or 600 class hours) to reach "general professional proficiency".

If that throws you off after years and years of faithful practice and having not much more to show for than *dank je wel, alstublieft*, then I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I meant to say: Don't give up, it's possible.

The best way to learn a new language, I've always found, is to fall in love. Love is a language in itself, so to say, but, at some point, you are going to have to talk to each other.

But if that strategy isn't working out, then try watching TV. Commit yourself to tuning into the news on VRT, everyday at

19.00 (or online). Even if it is all gibberish at first, soon enough you'll start to distinguish words from coughing.

Also, go to Teletext page number 888 and adjust your settings to enable the subtitles for the hard of hearing. Then, after a week or two, try to watch without them. You'll see the progress you've made. Watching TV with subtitles is a great way to learn languages, since you get all this extra visual aid. The star of the movie points at a horse and says: "Paard." Now you know.

It is not a coincidence that people from places that always use subtitles – Flanders, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries – are better at speaking foreign languages (though mostly English). Portugal also uses subtitles but has only been an open democracy since 1974 and until now hasn't had much

foreign-language programming. At least, that's my train of thought – please correct me if I'm wrong. I've always been of the opinion that the EU should impose the mandatory use of subtitles. In one or two generations, we'd all do a much better job at understanding each other.

And then there's radio. It doesn't have the visual extras but will help you to get used to the sound of the language. In the car to and from work, for example. Do that every day, and you'll see.

The last thing I want to say is: *Ik ben blij om weer terug te zijn* – I'm happy to be back.

VRT news (DON'T click on English!):  
► [www.deredactie.be](http://www.deredactie.be)

Contact Talking Dutch at [editorial@flanderstoday.eu](mailto:editorial@flanderstoday.eu) or on twitter @philipebels

Philip Ebels

## The last word...

## One for the road

"We're heading in the direction of privatisation, and we don't like to see that happen."

Frederik De Groot of an action group set up to save Ghent's night bus services. The service has been saved, with brewery De Koninck sponsoring some of the lines

## No more nightcaps

"Nobody's buying that alcohol at two in the morning to make Crepes Suzette."

Senator Bart Tommelein wants a ban on night shops selling alcohol after midnight

## Keeping it real

"I have no plans to suddenly turn into a society reporter."

The VRT's Tom Van de Weghe is leaving Beijing to move to Washington

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

## Cover story

China is popping up a lot in Flanders lately, from an agreement between the University of Leuven and several Chinese universities and the opening of a new Confucius Institute in Bruges. We take a look at these social, educational and economic bonds

## Education

The brand new International School in Ghent is taking registrations for new students now. We'll tell you what the English-speaking school is like and why the city needed one

## Arts

It's a combination that defies logic: Clean-cut Flemish crooner Helmut Lotti and hippie bluesman Roland take to the stage together for the Super Allstar Enlightenment Music Machine. Is it the end of the blues as we know it? Or of *schlager*?