

## School is cool

Flemish region announces the building of 200 new schools



▶ 4

## “Yes” to Uplace

Environment ministry gives the green light to huge shopping centre in Machelen



▶ 5

## Middelheim makeover

Antwerp's open-air museum introduces new pavilion and adds to the collection



▶ 11



# “This is what we stand for”

## Minister-president Kris Peeters talks us through the Charter for Flanders

Alan Hope

The new Charter for Flanders is not a constitution, and it's not a declaration of independence. So what is it? *Flanders Today* quizzed Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters: Where did the charter come from, what does it signify, and who needs it?

Last week we reported that the Flemish government had published the text of a Charter for Flanders, a 41-page document that lays out “the democratic principles and basic social values” of the region. Since then there has been relatively little reaction – less, certainly, than greeted the publication of a handbook for new immigrants that attempted to do the same thing on a more simplified scale.

The lack of media attention would seem to indicate that

the document is not particularly radical. But the history of the charter shows that it's taken 20 years to achieve its final form and that setting out a list of “what we stand for” has not been an easy task.

“At different times, people have tried to draw up a constitution or a charter,” explains Kris Peeters from his office in Brussels. “I think it was in 1992 that the Flemish Association of Jurists asked for it, and since 1993 it's been worked on in the Flemish parliament, thanks to several of my predecessors, beginning with Luc Van den Brande [minister-president from 1992 to 1999] and former speaker Norbert De Batselier [from 1995 to 2006]. So there was a lot of work already done by various people, but there was one continuous thread running through it, and that was that there was never a majority in favour.”

Peeters re-opened the debate on the charter two years ago,

on the eve of the annual Flemish holiday. The publication of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, completed in 2000 but only legally valid since the Treaty of Lisbon of December 2009, convinced him to look again at the Flemish charter.

Peeters “brought a number of professors around the table” to go over what had already been drafted. He told them that he wanted the European charter to act as a starting point to “create a document where we bring together the rights and the obligations and the political organisation in Flanders”. By July of 2010, a draft was ready. “Behind the scenes, I had talks with the majority parties, and a definitive version came out of that.” The result is a preamble and 120 articles setting out a summary of the rules and regulations attached to living in Flanders, from the colours of the flag to foreign relations to the limits on taxation.

## FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

## Man bijt hond



Last week the TV programme *Man bijt hond* (Man Bites Dog) aired for the last time in its current format. After aicon-making 15-year run, this marks the end of an era in Flemish television.

The title *Man bijt hond* refers back to the old journalist adage: If a dog bites a man, that's not news; if a man bites a dog, that's news. The programme in fact followed the news, every weekday evening on Eén, and swiftly became one of TV's most popular programmes. The 20-minute show had a magazine format, with an emphasis on real people in real situations – though avoiding the hyped-up methods of reality shows. The subjects of *Man bijt hond* were ordinary people, not attention-seekers, and producers showed a remarkable ability to find them, and their stories, along the side of the Flemish road. There were no auditions to be on the show. Among its most popular segments was "Het dorp" (The Village) in which a resident of an ordinary village could present his home to the viewer. There was also the "Babbelbox", where shoppers across

Flanders had the chance to say their piece to an automatic camera. There was also comedy, poetry, documentary and even an open stage for new performers, which introduced the world to the Neveneffecten team behind the hit satire programme *Basta*.

*Man bijt hond* was made by the successful independent production house Woestijnvis, which also makes *De slimste mens ter wereld* (The Smartest Person in the World). The company that owns Woestijnvis last year bought up the TV stations VT4 and VijfTV, making its contract with the VRT (which owns Eén) no longer tenable. Woestijnvis will revive the concept of *Man bijt hond* for VT4, though only once a week.

*Man bijt hond's* dog symbol, incidentally, was the creation of advertising executive Wolf Van de Casteele from Holsbeek. In tribute to his creator's name, he has wolf-like teeth, while his tail is a nod to Woestijnvis (which means "desert fish"). Van de Casteele recently told *De Standaard*: "I'm very pleased that such a simple dog was able to become so big."

## News in brief

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters left this week for an **official trip to Israel**, his first to the region, which will also include a visit to Palestinian territories. He was accompanied by business leaders and senior representatives of Ghent, Leuven and Antwerp universities, interested in forging business and educational links. Peeters will meet with Israeli president Shimon Peres and foreign minister Daniel Ayalon, as well as Palestinian first minister Salam Fayyad and foreign affairs minister Riyad Al-Maliki.

Brussels' mobility minister Bruno De Lille introduced a **new school transport plan** to inform parents how to send their kids to school on foot, by bicycle or on public transport. More than half of all pre-school and primary children are brought to school by car, although 67% live within two kilometres of the school. From next year, all schools in Brussels will be obliged to draw up an annual report on the mobility and road safety situation at their school; so far more than 200 have signed up for De Lille's initiative.

A farmer in Wingene, West Flanders, discovered **17 unexploded shells** during digging works last week. The shells were removed by the country's bomb squad DOVO.

Police in Ghent, Antwerp and Bruges have released **photos of a gang of suspected jewel thieves** who have struck at the coast, in Brussels and in Antwerp, and who attacked a Ghent woman in March, breaking her finger to remove a ring. In other cases they have used bolt-cutters to remove jewellery and threatened victims with knives.

Brussels Airlines has started **daily flights to JFK airport** in New York for the first time since the collapse

of the airline's predecessor, Sabena, more than a decade ago. The flight leaves Brussels in the morning, with an overnight return.

Artist Wim Delvoye last week became the second living Flemish artist ever to have a **solo show at the Louvre in Paris**, with the opening of an exhibition featuring both current and new works. Delvoye follows Jan Fabre, who showed at the Louvre in 2008.

**Doctors Without Borders** is to move its training and distribution centre from Merchtem, Flemish Brabant, to the Brussels port area, where they will be able to make use of the waterway to transport medical supplies to projects around the world.

Olivier Jacobs, owner of Jigger's cocktail bar in Ghent, has been voted **Belgium's best barman** for the second year in a row after a competition in London. Jacobs will now represent Belgium at the world championships in Rio de Janeiro next month. His colleague Dries Botti, also of Jigger's, came second.

A team of students from Ghent University has won an award at the prestigious **Inter-American Human Rights Moot Court Competition** in Washington, DC, beating native speakers to win the prize for best written plea in English. The competition involved 113 teams from 36 countries. "A remarkable performance, especially since they were one of the few teams not working in their mother tongue," the university said in a statement.

Flemish **crime writer Bram Dehouck** has been awarded the Golden Noose prize for the second time in a ceremony last week in Amsterdam. He won for his novel *En zomer zonder slaap* (A Sleepless

Summer), after taking the prize in 2010 with his debut novel *De minzame moordenaar* (The Loving Murderer).

All 70 stores of the **E5 clothing chain were closed last Wednesday** to mark the passing of co-founder Griet Talpe, who died at the age of 61. Management described the decision to close, at an estimated cost of €250,000, as "unprecedented but the right thing. The staff would have held it against us if they had not been able to pay their last respects to Madame."

The public broadcaster **VRT will not be ready with a decision** on 30 June on whether to move from its current site in Schaerbeek or build a new headquarters, media minister Ingrid Lieten told the Flemish parliament. The organisation requires more time to carry out a cost-benefit analysis.

The **League for Human Rights is considering legal action** to contest a circular issued last week by federal justice minister Annemie Turtelboom, allowing prosecutors to accept a financial settlement instead of prosecution for people accused of a wide variety of offences, including theft and bribery. The measure, intended to help clear the justice system's severe backlog, is an attack on the constitutional principle of independence of the courts, the league said.

The municipal authorities of the police zone Brussels-Elsene have started a campaign aimed at raising the awareness of tourists, expats and commuters to **the dangers of theft**. The Safe in the City campaign involves tablemats for cafés and restaurants in English and brochures in five languages, alerting visitors to the city to how to avoid being robbed.

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

Alan Hope

## FLANDERS TODAY



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## OFFSIDE

## Where do you want to go today?

It's difficult to go anywhere these days without being equipped with some kind of smart guide – an app for your tablet or smartphone – that takes the place of an earnest retiree, which is what tourist guides used to look like back in the old days of, oh, five years ago.

Both Hasselt and Ghent had intended for their own city to be first, but in the end they came in neck-and-neck as the first Flemish cities to be included in Gidsy, an online marketplace that offers "alternative" tours, something slightly more off the beaten track than you'd get from Fodor or Michelin. The system has two big advantages: Small companies can offer tours, classes or workshops without first setting up their own website, and the guides are handy not only for tourists but also for the town's residents, who may not be aware of the wealth of activities going on around them.

So in Ghent, for instance, you can



explore the city aboard your own electric boat, take an early-shift tour at 5.00 or attend a trend forecasting workshop to learn that trend forecasting will soon be all the rage. In Hasselt, which styles itself City of Taste, how about baking some cupcakes then taking arty pictures of them or making a radio show with youth station MaxHa! or going

on a cycle tour of the city's highest altitudes?

Meanwhile in Aalst, the single biggest tourist attraction, the carnival parade, is now available in virtual form, as a downloadable walk through the city centre, which you can take with you or simply enjoy from the comfort of your own home.

# “This is what we stand for”

## Flanders' new charter sets out the fundamental rights of citizens

► continued from page 1

### Why a charter?

“Now the question is: Do we really need such a document? My answer to that is ‘yes’,” says Peeters. “If I were to ask someone in Flanders: Do you know your rights and obligations? The average person would likely say yes, the Constitution. But, since the Treaty of Lisbon, there’s also now the European Charter on Fundamental Rights, and that also applies to you. And then there are also a number of exceptional laws and decrees that apply to you. You would have to read through all of those instruments to know what you, as a citizen of Flanders, have to adhere to or what you have the right to. So the value of this document is, I think, of enormous importance.”

Most of the document comes from sources such as the Belgian Constitution and the EU Charter, in addition to various laws and decrees that have already been long-approved. The day the charter was introduced, however, there were a few points of contention.

### Flanders is a nation

The preamble states that Flanders “is a democratic and social state of laws and forms a nation with its own language and culture”. According to reports, the word “nation” was one of the main issues of disagreement within the government coalition, with the N-VA insisting on its inclusion.

“There’s been some discussion around the word ‘nation’,” says Peeters, “but I don’t think you have to investigate it too deeply. We have our culture, our language, our vision. The wording was approved by the majority. The opposition can look at it more closely and decide on their standpoint. As far as I’m concerned, the word ‘nation’ is in

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Luc Van den Brande, minister-president in the 1990s, originally launched the idea of a Charter for Flanders

its proper place in the preamble, where the proper interpretation has been given, and I see no need for a great deal of further discussion.”

### Brussels is the capital

Article 5, based on a 1984 decree, states that “the city of Brussels is the capital of Flanders”.

Peeters: “Brussels has regional competences, and for me it should remain that way – a city-

region exercising those powers it has been granted – but Brussels is also the place where two communities meet. I always refer to the image of Cape of Good

Hope in South Africa, where two oceans meet. It’s a beautiful place. That’s also what Brussels is – the place where two communities encounter each other. That’s the unique thing about the various state reforms that we’ve carried out up to now, and it’s something of huge value. Those who say we’re going to have three or four fully fledged regions in Belgium and give up the unique situation of the two communities coming together in Brussels ... they’d be losing something that could never be won back.”

Peeters also points out that there are guarantees for the Flemish in Brussels built into the latest state reforms. “Those guarantees go hand-in-hand with the guarantees given to the French speakers at the federal level. So if you give away that stability and that unique place where two oceans meet, then you run the risk of that stability coming under heavy pressure, and I don’t know where we would end up.”

In other words, Peeters sees a *quid pro quo*: If the Flemish in Brussels were to lose the protections that counteract their minority status in the city, then that would jeopardise the protections enjoyed at a federal level by French speakers, who are a minority nationally.

The special status of Brussels is, Peeters says, “unique in its conception”. Around the world, he says, “people are very interested in – and even envious of – how we with our two language communities, two cultural communities, have

led only to stalemate. Now there is a majority in favour, and the opposition is free to join it. “I say to the opposition: Give us your views, and we’ll talk about them. That I think is the normal parliamentary procedure.”

Opposition party Groen, meanwhile, has demanded a referendum. “I find that really bizarre,” says Peeters. “You have to ask yourself: If the parliament can’t discuss and reach agreement on a Charter, what can it do? If you have to go back and consult the people, who elected the members of parliament to represent them, that’s a very odd position. What is the point of all those political factions in the Flemish parliament if they’re unable to discuss matters like this?”

On the French-speaking side of Belgium, Ecolo has claimed the charter is a sign of “a nationalist wind that’s blowing through the north of the country”. Peeters is insistent that the charter is not in any way a first step on the road to Flemish independence.

“Nothing to do with that,” he confirms. “We say clearly that we subscribe to the Belgian constitution, that we adhere to the European Charter; we make it clear we’re a part of the Belgian federal state. What does any of that have to do with nationalist winds?” The charter “is what it is,” he says. “We don’t have the constitutional autonomy to say that this is the ‘constitution’ for Flanders.”

Rudy Demotte, minister-president of the Walloon region,

“To give up the unique situation of the two communities coming together in Brussels ... we’d be losing something that could never be won back”

found such creative solutions. Brussels as a place where those two communities come together means that Flanders has to assume its responsibilities. We invest €670 million a year in Flemish community responsibilities in Brussels. Sadly, I have to note that youth unemployment in Brussels stands at more than 30%. There’s an enormous challenge to be met. Brussels is and will remain the capital of Flanders, and, more than in the past, we will assume our responsibilities in partnership with Brussels.”

### Opposition to the charter

Open VLD, the main opposition party in the Flemish parliament, says it was not consulted in the drafting of the charter, which faction leader Sas Van Rouweroij argues requires “as broad a political and social basis as possible”. As Peeters sees it, open debate in the past

argues that the charter is an old idea, and the country has other priorities at this time. “I’m not saying that now, with a crisis in the Eurozone and with the re-launch of the economy that we have to get under way, that this is my most important dossier in the coming weeks,” says Peeters. “This is a dossier that has been open since 1992. And I’m intensely occupied with growth stimulation in Flanders, with security of employment and so on, but one thing doesn’t exclude the other. This dossier has been brought to a good conclusion, and that’s an important fact.”

It’s “high time”, says Peeters, that Flanders has a charter. “Now the parliament will work on a resolution through which the charter will be approved by the majority. And with this document, we’ll be able to say to people who don’t know Flanders: This is what we stand for.”



“To a good conclusion”: Kris Peeters

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

# Flanders to build 200 schools

## A public-private partnership will provide €1.5 billion for new primary and secondary schools

Alan Hope

Flemish education minister Pascal Smet announced last week that the region will build 200 new schools between now and 2016, as part of a public-private investment initiative called Schools for Tomorrow.

The majority of the funding (68%) goes to the so-called free education network, made up mainly of Catholic schools – one of the three school networks in Flanders, together with the official network and the Flemish community network (16% each). The project was described by Smet as a “catch-up operation” due to school infrastructure in Flanders ageing rapidly: three out of five buildings are more than 40 years old. This is “the first time ever,” he

said that “so many schools will be built in such a short period of time. Schools that are sustainable, well-built and suitable for the needs of today.”

The public-private initiative is a cooperation between the agency for education infrastructure and the Flemish investment agency on the public side, and BNP Paribas Fortis Bank and Fortis Real Estate on the private side. The private partners will pay for the design, construction and maintenance of the schools for a period of 30 years, during which they will charge the education authorities a fee. Ownership of the buildings eventually reverts to the school authorities at the end of 30 years.

“Since its installation in 2009, the Flemish government has considered itself an investment government,” commented minister-president Kris Peeters at the launch. “With this PPI arrangement, we are doing more than just creating a real public

investment for the benefit of the construction sector and the rest of the economy, we are delivering a major social contribution. Good education requires infrastructure that helps stimulate classroom performance.”

### SCHOOLS FOR TOMORROW IN FIGURES

66 teams of architects  
200 new schools  
625,000 square metres of buildings  
€1.5 billion total investment



## Culture cuts on the horizon

Both major and small projects and some world-class groups unique to Flanders are facing a loss of government subsidies, after the publication last week of the findings of the committees who advise Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege.

The subsidy recommendations are made both on the basis of the artistic importance of the project and its economic viability. The biggest surprises were the recommendations for a complete cut of subsidies to the International Film Festival of Flanders in Ghent, the Zuidpershuis arts centre in Antwerp and the Theater aan de Stroom in Antwerp.

Other events and venues that would lose government funding completely if the advice is taken are Ghent's De Handelsbeurs, the Gent Jazz Festival, Kursaal Ostend and Boechout's Sfinks

music festival. Others would have to make do with less, like the Royal Flemish Theatre (KVS) in Brussels and Alain Platel's Les Ballets C de la B, based in Ghent.

Some larger events would continue to receive subsidy, such as the Festival of Flanders in Bruges and Ghent, both of which receive €230,000. The Festival of Flanders Limburg, on the other hand, would lose its subsidy. The largest sums to be paid out would be €2.75 million for the multidisciplinary Concertgebouw in Bruges, followed by theatre company NT Gent (€2.35 million) and the KVS (€2.15 million).

Whether the advice of the subsidy committees will be translated into actions now depends on the Flemish government. Schauvliege will present a proposal to her colleagues based on the advice.

## VIB researchers uncover the secrets of the tomato

Scientists from the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and Ghent University have succeeded in deciphering the genome of the tomato. This will allow for better selection of varieties that can stand up to various local diseases and pests and also be applicable to other plants such as peppers, aubergines and potatoes – all, like the tomato, members of the nightshade family.

The Flemish researchers were part of the Tomato Genome Consortium, made up of more than 300 researchers from 14 countries, working since 2003 to unravel a genome that is about one-quarter of the size of the human genome. The research's findings show that several of the genes that produce some of the most characteristic features of the tomato date back 60 million years. Many of the new genes have since disappeared by natural selection, but a few that remain turn out to be very important, such as the one that produces the tomato's deep red colour.



© Shutterstock

The results of the research are published in the latest issue of the journal *Nature*. The work of the genome consortium, *Nature* said, will assist growers in helping the tomato adapt without the need for genetic modification.

## Culture Prize to Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker

This year's Culture Prize for Overall Cultural Services has been awarded to contemporary dance pioneer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. De Keersmaeker made her debut in 1980 and has since gone on with her dance group Rosas and her dance school P.A.R.T.S. to become an internationally regarded figure in modern dance. De Keersmaeker joined the ceremony by video link from Montreal, where Rosas is performing.

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

## Accused in transport killing out of jail awaiting trial

The man accused of causing the death of Iliaz Tahiraj, a supervisor with the Brussels public transport authority MIVB, in a clash over an accident between a bus and a car in April, has been freed to await trial. The release of Alexandre V, who has admitted hitting Tahiraj but denied an intention to kill, was criticised by Tahiraj's family, who said they had not been informed of the decision.

The decision to release the suspect was taken by the investigating magistrate, who chose not to inform the family. There is no obligation in Belgium for victims or their families to be informed when a suspect is freed.

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

**€19 million**

deficit in 2011 for the Flemish public transport authority De Lijn. The number of passengers fell slightly by 0.4% to 549 million, and diversions caused by roadworks cost €2 million in longer bus journeys

**17**

months, the age of the youngest-ever polar explorer, who spent five weeks with his parents, Jochem Cuypers and Kim Broux from Tessenderlo, crossing Canada's Baffin Island

**27%**

of Belgium's 63,000 Twitter users who declared a location come from Brussels, followed by 21% from Antwerp province and 16% from East Flanders

**28,000**

people took part in the Brussels 20k run on 27 May. The winner was Ethiopian runner Dame Tasama with a time of 1 hour and 51 seconds

**28.5%**

of air-time on Flemish TV news last year was dedicated to reporting of foreign news – a 6% increase on 2010

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Oops, she did it again

Oops, she did it again. Ingrid Lieten (SPA), vice-minister-president has again forwarded a mail with comments about her colleagues in the government of Flanders. Last year, she did the same thing (and something similar happened to minister Philippe Muyters, Budget minister in the same government). The exact content of Lieten's mail remains unknown, but the fact that this incident was leaked to the press says a lot about the relationships within the Flemish government.

These are not the best of days for Ingrid Lieten. The mail incident follows a shaky week for the minister for innovation, government investment, poverty and media. She whipped up a storm after calling the decision by environment minister Joke Schauvliege to grant an environmental permit to the controversial shopping project Uplace “incomprehensible”.

Lieten's remarks were the first in a series of denunciations of Uplace – and Schauvliege – by socialists of all ranks, including party president Bruno Tobback and his father, Leuven mayor Louis Tobback.

The socialist scolding struck a chord with many of Uplace's opponents, ranging from environmentalists to the small businesses organisation Unizo, but eventually came back to haunt Lieten. Decisions by Flemish ministers are “collegial”, minister-president Kris Peeters, pointed out, meaning that they are backed by the whole government. Lieten was forced to sit through a press conference in which the Flemish government unanimously distanced itself from all the criticism, much like an equally humiliating press conference after Lieten's first email incident.

One can imagine Peeters' irritation at his socialist coalition partner. A few weeks ago, SPA opposed an increase of the so-called misery tax, which it had previously agreed to. As far as Uplace goes, the “brownfield covenant”, committing the Flemish government to accommodate Uplace, which Peeters considers an almost personal obligation, was agreed to by the socialists as well, in the previous Flemish government.

One can also imagine Peeters' relief at the situation, drawing away attention from his fellow Christian-democrat minister Joke Schauvliege. For these are not the best of days for her, either. Also minister of culture, she is being heavily criticised, as organisations like the International Film Festival of Flanders, Antwerp's Zuiderpershuis and Muziekcentrum Dranouter are under threat of losing all government funding. As minister for the environment too, she is being lambasted for her decision on Uplace. But so far, she has mastered the skill of email.

# Uplace shopping centre gets green light

## Opponents promise to take the decision to the Council of State

Alan Hope

**U**place, a massive new shopping and leisure centre planned for Machelen, just outside Brussels, was last week awarded an environmental permit by Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege. The decision allows Uplace to start building works in 2013, but opposition to the project is great, and a number of groups immediately announced the intention to contest the permit in court.

Uplace founder and CEO Bart Verhaeghe, also chair of Club Brugge, signed an agreement in 2009 with the Flemish government to take over part of the brownfield site in Machelen under the Vilvoorde viaduct. The land was polluted by former industrial activity, and part of the deal was that Uplace would clean up the site for its 190,000 square-metre project. Uplace would provide a shopping centre, restaurants, a hotel and living accommodation.

In 2010 the municipality of Machelen gave the go-ahead for the business. In 2011, Flanders' planning minister Philippe Muyters granted the project a construction permit, but the province of Flemish Brabant refused an environmental permit. Uplace appealed the decision, which is how the dossier came to land on Schauvliege's desk. Following long delays as opposition grew, she announced her decision last week.

Opposition to the Uplace project is based on three main issues:

**Mobility** It is estimated that the complex will attract some 8,000 cars a day to the Brussels Ring, which is already burdened by heavy traffic.

Public transport links to the site would cost an estimated €56 million – several times the annual budget of De Lijn.

**Environment** The Uplace site is currently one of the worst spots in Flanders for fine particulate pollution caused by vehicle exhaust, and additional motor traffic will make it worse.

**Social impact** The project is opposed by a consortium of municipalities in Flemish Brabant, including neighbouring Vilvoorde and Leuven, which fear that a giant shopping centre will take business away from city centres, where shops are already suffering because of the economic crisis.

Schauvliege said that, according to the Flemish roads and traffic administration, the project would have only a slightly negative effect on Ring road traffic. She also granted the permit on the condition that Uplace contribute €12 million to the cost of installing public transport links.

She said that the effects could be slightly to moderately negative for the environment, but that the effect would be lessened by the implementation of the public transport measures. She made no reference to the question of the project's social impact on other towns, which falls outside of her remit.

### A missed opportunity

Opponents, including Leuven mayor Louis Tobback and Unizo, the organisation that represents small businesses, promised to take



Uplace would be "a shot in the arm" for enterprise in Flanders, says Bart Verhaeghe

the decision before the Council of State. A trio of environmental groups – Greenpeace, the Union for a Better Environment and the Brussels environmental council Bral – are weighing the possibility of legal action.

Peter Swinnen, the *bouwmeester*, or official Flemish region architect, said that the granting of a permit to Uplace was "a missed opportunity" to use the former industrial site for the development of innovative industry, the original purpose of the brownfield legislation. The Flemish Brabant provincial deputation, which originally refused the permit, said the decision was a "major disappointment".

Tom Dehaene, son of the former prime minister and head of the list for provincial elections in Vilvoorde, noted that Schauvliege had little

room to manoeuvre. "The mistakes were all made long ago," he said. Vilvoorde mayor Marc Van Asch said the decision was "a black day for Vilvoorde".

There were, however, a few smiles on the faces of supporters. Machelen's mayor Jean-Pierre De Groef said he was "delighted" and called the decision "courageous". Flemish chamber of commerce Voka said that the ruling was "a form of legal security for anyone who plans to make large investments in Flanders". Verhaeghe, meanwhile, called it "a shot in the arm for enterprise in Flanders. The Flemish government has shown itself to be a trustworthy partner that takes resolute and durable decisions. Schauvliege followed all the rules, notwithstanding the mediagenic opponents of the project."

## Youth protest at treatment by temp agencies

A group of young people from Ostend have started a campaign to reform the practices of temp agencies, through which many young people try in vain to find jobs. Since the launch of the action last week, similar groups of young jobseekers have sprung up in Antwerp, Ghent and Aalst.

A series of complaints gathered from young people talk about agency staff's dismissive attitude towards them on the basis of their appearance; promises of jobs that never materialise or go to others; and promises of jobs that never existed. Agencies force applicants to repeatedly take aptitude tests, while dossiers often go missing, leading to lost interview opportunities.

One 20-something complained of physical appearance too often being a factor. "My friend and I applied for the same job," he said. "When I called up, they told me the job was taken. When he called later, he got the job."

The main complaint concerns daily contracts, which applicants say provide no security, don't allow them to sign rental leases and don't impress potential future employers. Federgon, the industry federation, agreed there are problems with temp agencies and



advised the protesters to take their cases to an employment tribunal. Last week the Ostend group held a demonstration outside the offices of one of the agencies, dressed in T-shirts bearing the slogan "Terminus interim".

## Sunshine could bring down electricity grid

The entire electricity grid of Flanders could break down at some point during the summer because too much energy is produced by solar panels, energy provider Elia has warned. Over the last holiday weekend, Elia was suddenly faced with an oversupply of electricity caused by the sunshine and a lot of newly installed solar panels. Oversupply can cause the grid to break down; only by shipping some energy off to France (at a cut-rate price) and arranging with other suppliers, like nuclear power stations, to reduce their own output could Elia avoid a blackout. Unless measures are taken, the same could happen this summer, they said warned.

The producers of solar panels, meanwhile, are planning to appeal a new Flemish government regulation to the constitutional court. If an installation of panels produces more energy than the home can use, the owner will be paid a rate of €90 per megawatt-hour by energy distributors, well below the market price. Energy minister Freya Van den Bossche has said that the small fee charged to solar panel users is "only fair. Everyone uses the network, so everyone has to help pay for it."

## THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Awards

#### ► Company films

Six companies won awards last week in the annual Festival of the Company Film. Logistics company Van Moer Group of Zwijndrecht, Antwerp province, won for Corporate Image with its *Van Moer Group: The Sequel*. Other winners were VDAB in the category Training, the federal police for Employer Branding, the Flanders Fashion Institute for Events, Flanders Tourism and Flanders Investment and Trade for Corporate Image Government and communications agency Creneau International of Hasselt for Product/Process.

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

### Chemicals

#### ► Lanxess

The German chemicals and plastics group is investing €75 million in a new polyamide production unit in northern Antwerp. The facility, to open in 2014, brings the company's total investments in Flanders to some €115 million over the last three years.

### Currency

#### ► Belgian francs

Plans are being drawn to cancel the Belgian francs still in circulation more than 10 years after the introduction of the euro. According to the National Bank, there is still €162 million in francs lining some pockets in the country. Four other eurozone countries have already made the move.

### Holdings

#### ► Dexia

The ailing Dexia holding company has entered exclusive negotiations with the Russian Sberbank to sell its Turkish Denizbank activities for some €3 billion. Also up for sale is the company's Assets Management affiliate, which is expected to fetch up to €750 million. Finally, Dexia is negotiating with French authorities the sale of Dexma, its local authorities financing institution.

### Plastics

#### ► Solvay

The Brussels-based plastics and chemical company has received €172 million from Austria's Wienerberger group for its 50% stake in the plastics piping company Pipelife. Solvay has also increased its presence in India by opening a special polymers research and development centre in Savli, Gujarat.

### Ports

#### ► Antwerp

The Port of Antwerp is investing €25 million for a 4% stake in the Indian Essar Ports company, operator of the privately owned Port of Mumbai. The move is part of Antwerp's strategic development plan in India, which includes the doubling of Essar's handling capacity.

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# The fats of the future

## UGent and Vandemoortele join forces to create healthy fats for your food

Andy Furniere

**T**here is no doubt about it: Flanders is fond of its *frietjes* (fries). But all that fat means that the deep-fried potato – and any deep-fried delectable – is a cause for concern among nutritionists and health-conscious consumers.

Now Ghent University has joined forces with local cooking oil and dressings manufacturer Vandemoortele to create the new Lipid Science and Technology research centre. Researchers will develop “healthy fats”, which preserve their taste and texture and can be used in, among other products, margarines and oils.

The Laboratory of Food Technology and Engineering at Ghent University and Vandemoortele Lipids of the Vandemoortele group have been collaborating for more than a decade but have now taken the next step by establishing a joint research centre. Since the 1990s, the laboratory at Ghent has provided expertise on the microstructural qualities of food, especially the technological and nutritional functions of oils and fats.



Researchers at the new Lipid Science centre aim to produce healthier fats that still taste good

The Ghent-based Vandemoortele group is an international player in the industry of developing, producing and selling margarines, oils and deep-fried pastry products.

“Our goal at the centre will be to eliminate harmful trans fats and to lower the level of saturated fats in food products such as margarines, oils and

bakery goods,” says professor Koen Dewettinck, head of the Laboratory of Food Technology and Engineering at Ghent University. Both trans fats and saturated fats raise the cholesterol level in the bloodstream and heighten the risk of cardiovascular disease.

“More ‘healthy’ fats have been developed before, but they often lose their taste

and texture, which makes them less attractive for use in food products,” explains professor Dewettinck. “Our challenge is to create innovative fats that work in food products and that will be both healthy and tasty.”

Apart from the motivation to improve the healthiness of food, the laboratory wants to anchor this specialised food knowledge in Flanders. “By combining our expertise and technology with the experience and means of a Flemish enterprise that can rely on an international network, we are putting Flanders on the world map,” professor Dewettinck says.

The Vandemoortele group provides research equipment and will also finance staff and operational costs. In return, it owns the intellectual property of the developed innovations. The contract of the project runs for five years, “but we certainly hope to prolong this programme after that period,” says professor Dewettinck. “This is a long-term plan.”

► [www.foodscience.ugent.be](http://www.foodscience.ugent.be)

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

The Flemish secondary school students organisation (VSK) and Flemish Association of Students (VVS) have launched proposals to **make the transition from secondary school to higher education easier**. The organisations suggest informing students about the range of possibilities in college and university from the fifth year in secondary school instead of in the last year. A compulsory but non-binding orientation test could assess students’ interests. The organisations also hope for extensive promotion of initiatives such as the website *onderwijskiezer.be*, which gives a comprehensive overview of higher education studies in Flanders.

To cope with the shortage of infrastructure for pre-school and primary education in cities, Flemish education minister Pascal Smet has proposed letting **two teachers handle bigger classes**. In classrooms with more than 20 or 30 pupils, one teacher would attend to the majority and another to those who need extra help. Smet also promised to **promote the teacher exchange programme** between Dutch- and French-language schools in Brussels, so that language lessons are taught by native speakers. Currently, only two schools are involved in the programme, compared to 38 in 2008. Smet is resolving organisational problems and is considering appointing a project coordinator.

Okapi Sciences, a biopharmaceutical company from Leuven, has developed a remedy that **suppresses the symptoms of the Feline Immunodeficiency Virus**, or “cat AIDS”. Just as in humans, the virus interferes with the immune system, making the animals more susceptible to all kinds of infections. Worldwide, around 11% of cats are contaminated, most of them strays. At the faculty of veterinary medicine of Ghent University, a clinical study using sick cats is analysing the effectiveness of the treatment in improving the quality of life and extending the lifespan of the felines. The free treatment lasts six to seven weeks.

► [www.okapi-sciences.com](http://www.okapi-sciences.com)

Health-care organisations in Limburg are uniting research projects concerning **health care through mobile technology**, so-called “mobile health”. The current cooperation between hospitals ZOL and Jessa and the faculty of health and life sciences at the University of Hasselt has been expanded with the expertise of, among others, LifeTechLimburg, the platform that develops the provincial life sciences sector. To celebrate the collaboration, UHasselt organised the symposium “Telemonitoring: the Future of Medicine?” and awarded an honorary doctorate to professor John Cleland of the University of Hull in England. Cleland is a world authority in telemonitoring of patients with heart failure, which allows clinicians to conduct a “virtual visit” with patients at home through daily remote monitoring of their vital signs. This system currently monitors more than 500 patients in Limburg. AF

## Simon De Meyer wins Galenus Prize for stroke research

Researcher Simon De Meyer of the University of Leuven Campus Kortrijk (Kulak) has won the prestigious Galenus Prize for pinpointing the role of a protein called the Von Willebrand factor (vWF) in strokes. The Galenus Prize – worth €7,000 and known as the Belgian Nobel Prize for Pharmacology – has for 30 years been awarded by the medical profession’s magazine *De Artsenkrant* to a scientist who has achieved a breakthrough in the development of medication.

A jury of independent university professors decided the most promising pharmaceutical discovery of 2011 was De Meyer’s research on the importance of the

vWF protein in strokes. The 35-year-old, recently appointed as professor for next year at Kulak, demonstrated that mice without the vWF are less likely to have a severe stroke. “The Von Willebrand factor is like a glue that seals blood vessel wounds by making sure blood cells form a coating on the place of the injury,” he explains. “But when the protein is too active and recruits too many cells, this can aggravate a stroke.” His discovery could mean a major step towards more efficient medication against strokes. “The problem now is that only around 20% of patients can be helped because the treatment has to be applied within six hours after the stroke,” De Meyer says. “After

that, the risk for dangerous haemorrhages is too high.”

He says that a new treatment will not be developed immediately. “Tests on humans will hopefully be possible within the next decade,” he says. “We first need to win the support of the pharmaceutical sector.”

There are two Galenus Prizes a year, in fact, and the award for most innovative medication went to pharmaceutical companies Janssen Pharmaceutica and MSD Belgium for their new antivirals against the hepatitis C virus. Janssen Pharmaceutica’s Incivo and MSD Belgium’s Victrelis are similar virus inhibitors contained in two antiviral drugs. This therapy makes sure a



Simon De Meyer, winner of the Galenus Prize for his breakthrough in the treatment of strokes

patient does not relapse, which normally happens in half of the cases with the current treatment. AF

## Q&A



**The starting point for your thesis is that the boom of the Flemish music scene has negative side-effects. What are they?**

The success of Flemish bands and musicians creates extreme expectations among an increasing

**Kathleen Vogelaers has won the Pop Thesis Prize 2011 for the best thesis related to pop music culture, organised by Poppunt, the Flemish contact point for musicians and DJs**

group of young people. The digital revolution makes it easier to take the first steps: Everybody can put music online. But while musicians like to think of themselves as a group of friends, the world of professional musicians becomes more competitive. Musical talent is not enough; you need knowledge of the business side to make it. Meanwhile, the entrepreneurial aspects are often under-exposed in Flemish music education.

### What does Flemish music education lack?

Students usually don’t acquire the necessary financial, judicial, social and practical skills to become entrepreneurs. They should learn basic accounting, their rights and duties, how to promote

themselves and organise their affairs. Most of the 12 professional musicians I interviewed admit that they started music education with romantic notions of the musician’s life and feel their music schools did not prepare them enough for their professional future. The music academies and schools in turn explained that it is difficult to keep students’ interest during the rare sessions that the business side is clarified. Sometimes the lecturers are too “rock’n’roll” themselves.

### How can music academies best provide that necessary extra value?

Instead of a few lectures or workshops, the entrepreneurial courses should be part of the

normal curriculum. Schools need to “train the trainers”, make the lecturers aware of the vital importance of business aspects and offer them specific training. I also recommend appointing active professional musicians and managers or regularly inviting them as guest lecturers to provide concrete experience.

### What happens with your findings?

I have passed on my analysis to the Flemish culture minister, Joke Schauvliege, who is promoting entrepreneurial knowhow in culture education. After I graduate in the summer, I hope to start working in a supporting function for musicians.

Interview by AF

# Gateway to nature

**Flanders' national park is open year-round but comes into its own in the summer with a wealth of activities**

Denzil Walton

The Hoge Kempen National Park was only officially established six years ago and yet is already seen throughout the world as a model for nature conservation. Carved out of a once industrial area in Limburg, the park is a rare cooperation between industry, government and environmental organisations

The seed of the idea for a national park could well have been planted 200 years ago by the poet William Wordsworth when he described the English Lake District as a "sort of national property... which every man has a right to perceive... and a heart to enjoy".

Twenty years later, the painter George Catlin expressed a similar yearning during his travels through the American West, when he wrote in 1832 that the Native Americans might be preserved "by some great protecting policy of government... in a magnificent park... containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty".

The world's first national park – Yellowstone in the US – was established in 1872 and was followed by the Royal National Park of Australia in 1879 and the Rocky Mountain National Park in 1885. Sweden led the way in Europe when it created nine national parks in 1909.

It took a little while longer for Belgium to establish its first – and as yet only – national park, when, just six years ago, the Hoge Kempen National Park was officially opened in Limburg province. (Technically, Belgium established its first national park in 1925 when Albert I designated an area of what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo as the Albert National Park, since renamed the Virunga National Park).

The Hoge Kempen National Park covers more than 5,000 hectares and stretches across the municipalities of Dilsen-Stokkem, Maasmechelen, Zutendaal, Lanaken, Genk and As. In the spirit of Wordsworth, it welcomes anyone and everyone with a "heart for nature".

Five locations serve as gateways to the Hoge Kempen, each with parking, easy access via public transport, information kiosks and a cafe. Admission to the park is free.

## A new model of cooperation

That the park exists is largely down to the campaigning of Ignace Schops, director of the Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland (RLKM). It was Schops who brought together private industry, regional and EU governments, local stakeholders and NGOs to create a new model for land conservation in the EU. His achievements were recognised in 2008 when he was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize, which lauds individuals for sustained and significant efforts to



protect and enhance the natural environment.

The unique feature of the Hoge Kempen National Park is that it's in a previously heavily industrialised and still densely populated region of Europe. Protecting this natural heritage in the face of further industrial development needed a new approach.

In 1901, coal was discovered in the region, and the open spaces of Limburg rapidly began to decline. For almost a century, the coal industry thrived, but in the 1990s the area's seven mines closed, leaving 40,000 people unemployed. Jobs were badly needed in the region, and several corporations wanted to build factories in the Hoge Kempen, an oasis of untouched land in the industrial zone that had largely retained its natural beauty. Not surprisingly, a conflict arose between conservation and development.

A key event was when the largest coal company and the largest NGO for nature conservation in Belgium, Natuurpunt, founded the RLKM in 1990. Their goal was to conserve the land in the province and continue to provide jobs and economic development.

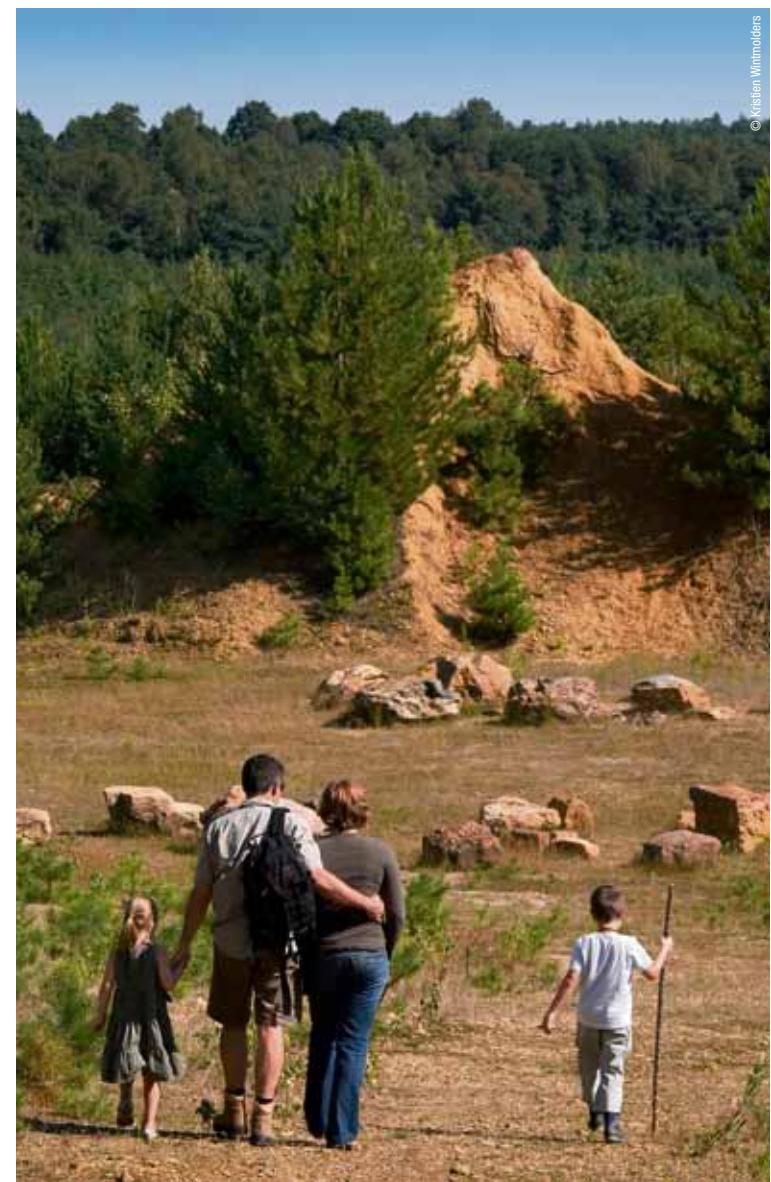
## A case for eco-tourism

In 1997, Schops and the RLKM began to campaign for the permanent protection of a piece of the Limburg landscape through the creation of Belgium's first national park. Aside from the environmental conservation aspect, they believed that such a park could provide jobs and revenue through eco-tourism.

The director of the European office of the International Union for Conservation of Nature at that time, Tamás Marghescu, described it as "extremely innovative and an example for the whole financing of protected areas around the world".

Over the next four years, under Schops' leadership, more than €80 million was raised from sources such as the government of Flanders, the European Regional Development Fund, municipal and provincial development funds, the European Union, local stakeholders and the private sector. Eventually, in 2006, the Hoge Kempen National Park was officially opened by the European Commissioner for the Environment.

"It is a fantastic achievement to establish a national park in the midst of one of the most densely populated areas in the world," said Marghescu at the time. "Nature in this part of the world is scarce and every square metre of land has enormous economic value." Not only is it preserving nature and the environment, but the park has created jobs for the local community and brought economic revenue to the region. The World Conservation Union plans to use Schops' model of creating and funding the Hoge Kempen National Park as an example for other member countries, not only in Europe but around the world. His model demonstrates how a successful public-private partnership in the use and management of nature can be an asset for local and regional development.



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



**Top:** A hike that began at Mechelse Heide **Above, left:** The Hoge Kempen has a network of routes for equestrians **Above, right:** A former mining area transformed in the Eijsden area of Maasmechelen

## ONE PARK: FIVE GATEWAYS

The Hoge Kempen National Park is accessible via five "Gateways". At each one is a car park, a cafe and an information board, while some have visitor centres. Each offers a good starting point for hiking, cycling, mountain biking and horse riding, but each one also offers its own flavour and unique experience of the park.

### Gateway Kattevennen

Unique here is the Cosmodrome, where you can watch a show about the stars and planets and look through a genuine telescope. Kattevennen is also the best place to go horse riding: With advance notice, you can saddle up at Manege Kattevennia for a riding lesson. There's also a botanical garden, a petting zoo and a children's playground.

### Gateway Lieteberg

Kick off your shoes and socks and enjoy a short but stimulating barefoot walk over woodchips, stone, grass, loam – and even water. Also at this gateway is the insect museum, a fascinating introduction to the world of creepy-crawlies. It includes a bee centre and greenhouses full of breeding butterflies. You can then put the theory you've learned into practice by following the insect path. One Saturday night per month there is a moth hunt.

### Gateway Pietersheim

A great place to visit with children. Activities include a gnome trail, a small-animal zoo, a collection of farm animals to stroke and feed and an adventure playground. For older children, the moated Pietersheim Castle provides fun in the shape of an animated 3-D movie, fortifications, the cellar where the munitions used to be kept and the game Looking for Knights.

### Gateway Station As

Railway enthusiasts will love this gateway. Here you can take a ride in an old diesel train, to Waterschei or Eijsden, or even spend the night in an authentic overnight train. There's also a mini-train that takes you on a 1,300-metre ride through the forest. It passes a tall watchtower, a replica of the derrick with which André Dumont discovered coal in As in 1901. Climb to the top to get great views over the park. You can also take a tour with a rail bike on the tracks of the old coal trains.

### Gateway Mechelse Heide

I'm a nature lover and keen hiker, so this is my favourite gateway. It doesn't have a visitor centre, so a quick trip to the Maasmechelen tourist office is advisable to pick up an excellent map of the area for €2. No fewer than nine paths are laid out through this part of the National Park. All are colour-coded and clearly signposted. Here are my suggestions for three walks, depending on the time you have available (or how quickly your legs give out).

#### 2 hours

The 5.5km circular yellow walk starts and ends at the car park. The first part is through mixed woodland of ash, silver birch and oak. At this time of the year it's particularly noisy, with the songs of blackcaps, chiffchaffs and great tits serenading you. Then you step out from the woods into heathland, and even if you were blindfolded you'd notice the difference immediately. Gone are the woodland birds, replaced by the songs and calls of skylarks, linnets, whitethroats and stonechats.

#### 4 hours

Still got some energy and time? Then continue along the 5.3km blue walk, which will take you to the dizzy heights of 104 metres above sea-level: the highest natural point in the Hoge Kempen. On a clear day you can see as far as Liège, Maastricht or even into Germany. From this vantage point I was also delighted to hear one of my favourite birds – the grasshopper warbler. You probably won't see this tiny bird as it's so reclusive, but you can hear it up to a kilometre away. Its unusual, continuous song has been likened to the rewinding of a fishing reel. Once heard, never forgotten.

#### 6 hours

Go on, you can do it! Fortify yourself with lunch at the Salamanderke cafe and then head directly south, first along the green path and then the brown connecting path, which will take you under the E314 to the marshy Kikbeekbron area. Here, squadrons of dragonflies zoom over the ponds, dropping their egg-bombs into the water. Watch out for sand martins, too, which nest in the steep sides of the quarry. And on your way back, check out the oak woods around the camping site for pied flycatchers and redstarts.



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# Middelheim metamorphosis

**Antwerp's open-air museum celebrates makeover with parties, performance and high-profile art**

Daan Bauwens

Middelheim is without question one of Flanders' most magical spots. Situated in a grand park on the outskirts of Antwerp, this open-air museum is a sanctuary for contemporary art pilgrims. Recently the museum treated its visitors to two days of non-stop partying – indoors and out – to celebrate its new pavilions.

The Middelheim Museum has undergone a major metamorphosis. The grounds have been expanded by five hectares, taking the total area up to 30 hectares. World-renowned architect Paul Robbrecht is currently guest curator of the Middelheim collection, and his Ghent architectural firm, Robbrecht and Daem, was commissioned to build a semi-open pavilion in the new grounds, which will host more vulnerable works that cannot withstand the elements of the open-air museum.

The new pavilion has been dubbed The House "because the house is the most basic concept in architecture," says Robbrecht. "This is what we wanted to do: return to naive definitions of architecture, sculptures and paintings. What is the origin of painting? It is looking through the window and beholding the landscape. What is the origin of sculpture? It is the human body. In our new pavilion, the sculptures will be inhabitants, and we hope the visitors will get the feeling that they are guests."

The House is being inaugurated with an exclusive exhibition of sculptures by contemporary German artist Thomas Schütte, which will run until 16 September.

## New site-specific works

Middelheim also celebrated the acquisition of new works that were custom-made for the museum. Swiss conceptual artist Roman Signer built a monumental steel ramp in the middle of the park. At the lower end of the ramp is a small concrete bunker. During the grand opening celebrations in late May, the 74-year-old artist, surrounded by hundreds of spectators, climbed on to a construction lift and raised himself to the top of the ramp.

There, Signer pushed a barrel of water down the ramp, which rolled at an amazing speed and splashed open against the bunker. The remains of the smashed barrel will stay in the bunker forever, but Signer will never again repeat his dramatic act.

The second new work is a small red bridge designed by the well-known Chinese artist Ai Weiwei. Conceptualising the bridge between East and West as well as Weiwei's troubled love-hate relationship with his own country, the bridge is extremely hard to traverse because it is sculpted in the shape of China's border.

The final new work is a fountain designed by Flemish artist Philippe Van Snick. In a small elliptical pond filled with grey rocks from Montana, 10 pumps blow air into the water. At one point, all the pumps stop and the surface of the water becomes calm again. "This is a meditative sculpture,



says Van Snick. "When the air stops, the colour of the stones comes out. In this work, I show some elements that are omnipresent in my oeuvre. You have the eternal motion of the ellipse, which has always fascinated me. You have the air pumps that are placed on 10 fixed points to define the ellipse's position. I like to show nature, or the nature of things, intellectually, like a calculation."

## Wurm's boat

In what will no doubt become the most-photographed new feature at Middelheim – and a work that is impossible to miss when you arrive at the entrance – is a new sculpture by Erwin Wurm. The Austrian artist built a surreal replica of a blue sailboat that is literally diving into the water from a balcony next to the Middelheim mansion. The mansion itself was also renovated and is now fully integrated into the museum's activities. There is a new visitor's reception area with a cafe and a bookshop.

But that's not all. Together with the expansion and new works, the entire existing collection has been revisited. Some works have been placed in more advantageous locations, others underwent thorough restoration or received new pedestals. Several works from the Middelheim collection that had never been displayed before are now on show in the existing Braem Pavilion.

## Not-so-mellow yellow

Before entering the Braem Pavilion, you are asked to put on yellow shoe covers, which are rather hard on the eyes. And then you discover the carpet



inside the pavilion has the exact same lurid colour. Germans Jutta Kraus and Bernhard Willhelm are the joint driving force behind Bernhard Willhelm, a fashion label uniting textile, visual art, performance and folklore into one multi-disciplinary practice.

In the Braem Pavilion, they were told to do whatever they wanted, and so they did. A large triplex wooden box holds a built-in television showing pictures of traffic jams and scary-looking people. At the same time you hear a shameless house version of Chris Isaak's "Wicked Game". And then you really get horrified when you discover that this freakish wooden box is a pedestal for the likes of Alberto Giacometti, Auguste Rodin or Käthe Kollwitz.

According to Willhelm, he and Kraus want to provoke a discussion about good and bad taste, although he admits there's subjectivity. "I know what I like; you should also know what you like. That is your taste, and you should stand behind it. Most people don't really know what they like, and that's a pity."

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



Erwin Wurm's diving boat now graces the side of the Middelheim mansion (above); the new pavilion designed by Ghent's Robbrecht and Daem (above left); many works at Middelheim have been shifted to new locations to maximum effect (top)

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# Prized poetry

**Flemish poet Leonard Nolens was recently awarded the prestigious Prize of Dutch Letters**

Rebecca Benoot

**“**I t was the only thing I was capable of. I wanted a profession, but I wasn't able to be part of society.” So Leonard Nolens became a poet.

Every three years the Dutch Language Union grants a prize to an author of exceptional literary relevance whose work is written in Dutch. It has been 14 years since this revered prize, together with the accompanying €40,000, was awarded to a Fleming for an entire oeuvre. And this year it was to Nolens (*pictured*), one of Flanders' most respected living poets.

Nolens was born in Bree, Limburg province, in 1947 and made his debut in 1969 with the collection *Orpheushanden*. Besides poetry, he also became well known through his journals, which have now been published in the collection *Dagboek van een dichter 1979-2007* (Diary of a Poet). Although he studied law in Leuven and briefly worked as a translator and editor, he felt that poetry was his calling.

Nolens' poetry has made quite an evolution throughout the years from baroque and experimental to melancholy and romantic, full of eloquent longing. There is a constant in his work, though: an emphasis on his own poetic identity. “You are your work,” he says. “I am my poetry, and I take it very seriously. If I didn't take myself seriously, why would *you*?”

Love, solitude and the quest for one's true self prevail in his recent collections. Readers tend to either love him or hate because Nolens doesn't believe in compromise – in his work nor in his life, which is why he once wrote: “Either read me completely or not at all.”

The father of contemporary author David Nolens, whose last novel, *De kunst van het wachten* (The Art of Waiting), was also a poetic quest for



© Katrijn Van Giel / IMAGEDESK

identity, Nolens shuns the spotlight when he can and doesn't like talking about his work. “I haven't had a social life or a normal profession for the past 40 years, which makes it hard to talk about one's work,” he says.

He blames his social inadequacies on having spent the better part of the last

40 years alone in his room. Ironically, the emotional undercurrent in his poems begs for them to be recited, like many great performers did during a recent homage to Nolens at the Bourla theatre in Antwerp to celebrate his 65th birthday. It was an evening he won't soon forget because that was the night

he found out he had been awarded the Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren, or the Prize of Dutch Letters.

## A good writer is a good reader

Although Nolens claims that “you can never succeed when writing,” his peers clearly think otherwise; his work has earned him multiple awards throughout the years. According to the jury of his latest acquisition, “Leonard Nolens made the Dutch language sing again. He is an exceptional poet, a talented reader and his work characterises itself as a lifelong struggle in language to find one's own identity and that of others.”

Writing is clearly a way of life for Nolens, who lives in Antwerp, and this lifestyle is the sole topic of his journals, which, together with his poetry, is the only way to get to the core of this distinguished yet notoriously private poet. He is also one of the few poets in the Dutch language who continuously uses the pronoun “I” in his work, allowing others to see the world through his eyes. Duality is also a recurring theme, leading us on a path from the interior to the exterior, in ourselves as well as our society, making us ultimately wonder where one ends and the other begins.

In honour of Nolens' 65th birthday and his 40 years as a writer, publishing house Querido has created two special volumes, one containing his collected poetry (*Manieren van leven*, or Way of Living) and *Dagboek van een dichter*. “The first poems in *Manieren* were written when I was 25,” he says. “I'm just glad that they're still being read 40 years on.”

It's clear that you can't do this man any greater justice than to sit back and immerse yourself in his bittersweet universe. You won't be sorry.

## WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Andrey Baranov of Russia has won Brussels' **Queen Elisabeth Competition**, which this year featured violinists. The 25-year-old is already an accomplished musician, having already won several international prizes and performed all over the world. Japan's Tasuki Narita and Korea's Hyun Su Shin were second and third laureates, respectively. Concerts featuring the six laureates will be staged in June in Brussels and across Flanders.

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

If you missed out on tickets to the sold-out **Tram Experience**, the fine dining event on board a special tram that tours through Brussels, take heart. Tickets for the hugely popular event will again go on sale on 4 June for dates starting in September. Prices start at €75 per person.

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

Scala, the Flemish choir of young women led by the composer brothers Steven and Stijn Kolacny, have recorded a version of German industrial metal band Rammstein's “Engel” for the **soundtrack of the new American horror film** *The Possession*, which opens in the US in August. The choir is popular worldwide for its trademark covers of rock and pop songs; Scala's version of “Creep” made up part of the soundtrack for the film *The Social Network*. Based in Aarschot, Flemish Brabant, the choir is on tour in the US this month and will this year release two CDs.

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

The **Dag van het Park** (Day of the Park) on 27 May was a huge success, with more than 100,000 visitors taking part in activities all over Flanders. The theme this year was “The right tree in the right place”, which aimed to educate people on which trees will most successfully grow in their own gardens. An online site can help locals determine which trees to plant based on soil conditions and other information.

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

## FRESH FICTION

### Watervrees tijdens een verdrinking (*Hydrophobia* When Drowning)

by Herman Brusselmans • Prometheus

Herman Brusselmans' latest novel is his most autobiographical, recounting his separation from wife Tania De Metsenaere, called Phoebe in all his books. *Watervrees tijdens een verdrinking* is about bad habits, restlessness and, above all, loneliness. Desperate for some human contact, he starts dating again, considers having a baby with a lesbian and thinks about moving to Amsterdam a faint attempt to subdue his endless longing for Phoebe. Filled with dry humour, razor-sharp observations and a healthy dose of self pity, it's one of Brusselmans' best books in years.



### Post Mortem

by Paul Terrin • Arbeiderspers

Nothing is ever what it seems in Paul Terrin's new novel about an author living a quiet and secluded life with his

wife and daughter in the East Flemish countryside. One day his daughter has a stroke, making her unable to ever function normally. Terrin never talks about his own personal life, making this novel a source of speculation. It is, in any case, an exceptional work written in three parts, each with its own style and point of view, creating a harrowing account from an author, a father and eventually just a man.

### Eiland (Island)

by Pieter Aspe • Manteau

The king of Flemish crime fiction has just released his 30th book, starring his revered inspector Van In and his troubled love life. A Fleming who had moved to the French Île-d'Arz has been found dead in Van In's hometown of Bruges, tying together the lives of an unsuspecting politician, a culinary writer, an artist and an accountant. Add a little paedophilia, some blackmail

and a dollop of sex, and you've got some vintage Aspe. Eiland may not knock your socks off, but it will keep you entertained for a few hours on this summer's holiday.

### Duizend heuvels (A Thousand Hills)

Koen Peeters • De Bezige Bij

Koen Peeters' love for anthropology and heritage led him to Rwanda for his next novel, in which he tries to erase all stereotypes and offer an unbiased view of a country torn between the past and the future. Part history and part novel, *Duizend heuvels* tells the story of the Hutus, Tutsis and White Priests who lived through the genocide. It is also a philosophical quest for truth and a captivating portrait of a country that has been misunderstood for far too long. A compassionate and informative tale that will take your breath away.

► [www.tender2.eu](http://www.tender2.eu)

## Black-and-white memories

## Cas Oorthuys: Brussels 1946-1956

Tom Peeters

The 20th-century Dutch photographer Cas Oorthuys used to walk the streets of post-war Brussels with a keen eye on the daily life of its citizens. A selection of the photos he shot between 1946 and 1956 are now on display at the Brussels City Museum. Oorthuys, who died in the 1970s, captured a vivid Brussels, before immigrant workers, European officers and tourists would enter the city. A Grote Markt full of cars and a De Brouckereplein packed with sold-out cinemas accentuated a new found optimism. But Oorthuys also dealt with the sacrifices Brussels had to make to obtain this bright future.

The contrast between the first few and the last few photos in the exhibition is enormous. Right after the Second World War, daily struggles were harsh. In the opening picture of a man looking at a poster announcing the distribution of food stamps, Oorthuys demonstrates his

skills as a master of composition and light immediately. In a distinctive quadrangle format, the photo centres the shadow of the man, a striking metaphor for the war, which was still overshadowing the present.

The consumer society didn't exist yet, recalls the woman in our headphone. Everyone was wearing grey; there simply was no colour available. A house had a living room, a bedroom and a kitchen, and that was it. Gradually moving through the 70 pictures, selected from nearly 2,000 shot in Brussels, we notice more neon signs, better living circumstances and a renewed appetite for entertainment.

The exhibition is meant to illustrate the transformation of a city, but it's really about the people who lived there and how new socio-economical situations influenced their lives. Occasionally Oorthuys managed to evoke a sense of action and urgency, like in the picture

where commuters try to catch an overcrowded tram. By now, Brussels had become "petit Paris", with a lively bar and nightlife scene. But compared to other big cities, the liberal *laissez-faire* attitude kept people down to earth – and a bit passive, too. Local entrepreneurs and real estate speculators took over, for the sake of progress. The north-south train connection destroyed the heart of the city. Oorthuys was a silent observer behind his lens.

The strength of the exhibition is the combination of the photos and the memories of locals, who lived in Brussels during this changing of the times. The museum asked inhabitants to step forward with their stories, and they were recorded by Brussel Behoort Ons Toe, or Brussels Belongs To Us, an organisation specialised in collecting oral testimonies of the city.

One witness, for instance, tries to explain how back then hangouts



© "Taking the Tram", 1946 / Cas Oorthuys / Nederlands Fotomuseum

were the yellow pages — "If you needed a plumber, you just asked around in your favourite pub". The testimonies come from people

between the ages of 62 and 92 and can be heard at the website [www.bna-bbot.be](http://www.bna-bbot.be). It's both informative and amusing.

Until 31 December

Brussels City Museum, Grote Markt

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

## MUSICAL

## Jane Eyre

The 1847 Charlotte Brontë novel about a young woman who becomes governess at Thornfield Hall and falls in love with an earl is certainly a classic among readers, but it's also a favourite adaptation project among theatre and film directors. Before Jane and the enigmatic Edward Rochester can marry, there are a great deal of obstacles to be overcome, mostly due to an unforgiving class system. To this day, the story is considered a most influential feminist text, as much for Jane's growth into a confident woman as for the author's tendency towards societal criticism and unorthodox views on sexuality and religion. This Dutch-language musical version by Paul Gordon and John Caird, directed by Ronny Verheyen, is filled with romantic lyricism, showing once again that *Jane Eyre* is also a timeless and compelling love story. **Robyn Boyle**



8-24 June, 15.00 &amp; 20.30

Fakkelteater, Reyndersstraat 7, Antwerp

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

## MORE MUSICALS THIS WEEK

## Ghent

**Fiddler on the Roof:** Lucas Van Den Eynde plays the inimitable Jewish father who struggles with the independent choices of his three daughters in this classic story from 1905 that still proves relevant today (in Dutch)

**JUN 7-10 at Capitole Gent, Graaf Van Vlaanderenplein 5**

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

## Mechelen

**Vive la sociale! 1850-1950:** 100 years of social struggle set to words and music by two choirs of 50 singers, an accordionist and a fanfare, drawing attention to social classes and emancipation (in Dutch)

**JUN 9 20.00 at De Posthoorn, Brusselsesteenweg 49**

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

## SPECIAL EVENT

## PicNic the Streets

Having a picnic on Brussels' Anspachlaan might sound like a death wish, but it's about to become a reality. The idea was spurred by an article by Brussels resident and philosopher professor Philippe Van Parijs, in which he expressed his anger at the lack of car-free public space in his city. "Driving around in the centre should become the exception, not the norm," he writes. Van Parijs references the largely expat protest launched by *The Bulletin* magazine in 1971, which largely contributed to the "liberation" of the Grote Markt, formerly known as "Brussels' biggest parking lot". In this spirit, Van Parijs is organising the city's first giant PicNic the Streets. Bring a lunch and join the sit-in together with thousands of other *Brusselaars* in favour of a more liveable, breathable city centre. Organisers hope to make the event a regular Sunday occurrence. **RB**



© Filip Van Zandycke / www.hoedekerkruid.be

10 June, 12.00-14.00

► [www.tinyurl.com/facebook-picnicthestreets](http://www.tinyurl.com/facebook-picnicthestreets)

Beurs, Anspachlaan, Brussels

Twitter hashtag: #picnicthestreet

## MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

## Brussels

**Feest! '12-'13:** KVS open-air party in celebration of the announcement of the new season, featuring a bike ride, walk, buffet, film and concert

**JUN 10 14.00-00.00 behind KVS, Arduinkaai 7**

► [www.kvs.be](http://www.kvs.be)

## Hasselt

**Limburg Sterk Divers:** A multicultural mix of music and dance performances in promotion of diversity and tolerance

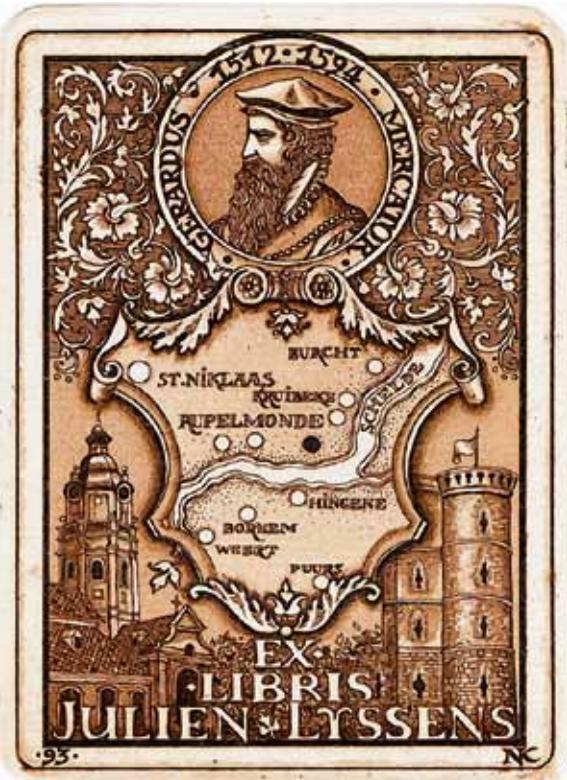
**JUN 9 15.00-18.00 at Grote Markt, Maastrichterstraat 1**

► [www.tinyurl.com/limburg-sterk-divers](http://www.tinyurl.com/limburg-sterk-divers)

## EXHIBITION

## Globes, kaarten en Mercator

A little decorative label pasted inside your favourite book to indicate that you are the owner is a good way to keep it in your library. But ex libris, or bookplates, are also an art form. The earliest known marks of ownership in books date back to 14th-century Egypt, and the oldest printed inscriptions to 15th-century Germany. The International Ex Libris Centre in Sint-Niklaas contains about 160,000 bookplates, dating from the 16th century to the present day. Everything from coats of arms to angels provided inspiration for these often very intricate and artistic bookplates. In this 500th anniversary of the birth of Mercator, the Ex Libris Centre is displaying its impressive collection of Mercator-related bookplates. Old and new designs illustrate the human obsession with cartography, globes and mapping the world. The bookplates are not only an ode to Mercator's life and work, but many also come with fascinating stories about the owners of the books. **RB**



Until 26 August

International Ex Libris Centre,  
Zwijgershoek 14, Sint-Niklaas

► <http://musea.sint-niklaas.be/exlibris/tentoonstellingen>

## MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

## Antwerp

**De Modernen:** Broad collection of art from the Netherlands, from works by old masters such as Frans Hals and Rembrandt to modern pieces from the 19th and 20th centuries

Until AUG 19 at Koningin Fabiolazaal, Jezusstraat 28  
► [www.kmska.be](http://www.kmska.be)

**Santu Mofokeng: Chasing Shadows:** Thirty years of photographic essays by the South African photographer

Until JUL 29 at Extra City, Tulpstraat 79  
► [www.extracity.org](http://www.extracity.org)

## Brussels

**Decorum:** Elaborate book bindings by various contemporary artists

Until JUN 24 at Biblioteca Wittockiana, Bemelstraat 23  
► [www.wittockiana.org](http://www.wittockiana.org)

## PERFORMANCE

## Patricia Routledge

Known the world over for her role as Hyacinth Bucket ("it's Bouquet") in the hilarious British series *Keeping Up Appearances*, Patricia Routledge is widely considered one of the most talented actresses in the UK. The legendary 83-year-old has agreed to treat fans here to a unique performance of *Admission: One Shilling*, for which she's paired up with pianist Piers Lane. The show tells the fascinating true story of British pianist Myra Hess and her famous National Gallery concerts during the Second World War. The text comes from letters, books and interviews, interspersed with piano music by Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and more. Tickets are expected to fly out the door, so book on the day for an evening of music and guaranteed laughs (in English; ticket sales start on 9 June for season ticket holders and on 28 June for the rest). **RB**



25 October, 20.00 | CC De Werf, Molenstraat 51, Aalst | ► [www.ccdewerf.be](http://www.ccdewerf.be)

## PERFORMANCES THIS WEEK

## Antwerp

**Bankgeheim (Bench Secret):** Play about the meaning of being faithful in a relationship and what park benches would say if only they could talk (in Dutch)

JUN 8, 15 & 16 20.30 at Seeftheater, Diepestraat 34

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

## Brussels

**De onkreukelbare (The Uncreasable):** Thomas Bellinck and Jeroen Vander Ven star in a play about Maximilien Robespierre, the visionary statesman and self-proclaimed pacifist who sent thousands of people to the guillotine during the French Revolution (in Dutch)

Until JUN 9 20.30 at KVS Box, Arduinkai 9

► [www.kvs.be](http://www.kvs.be)

## Ghent

**Olifant Jezus:** The Last Supper and the issue of nurture vs nature, as imagined by Dutch writer Oscar Van den Boogaard, directed by Julie Van den Berghe (in Dutch)

JUN 6-9 20.30 at NTGent Schouwburg, Sint-Baafsplaat 17

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

Daan Bauwens

## CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

## Boven De Grijze Wolken

## Gildestraat 1, Ghent

It was a hot night in the centre of Ghent. Close to midnight, I could still see the last violet remnants of a sunset in the clear sky. I met my insider in front of Boven de Grijze Wolken. He knew the place well and, although I'm fairly brave with these sorts of things, something had always kept me from stepping into this bar by myself.

With good reason: We opened the door, and I felt as if I was entering a new world. It was the dark music, the gloomy colours and the people staring at me for at least 10 seconds before turning back to their conversations. But this is no *volkscafe*. There were twinkly lights. And fairies. And tree stumps for seats. It was tiny.

Although we had just had a rare week of intense sunshine in the city, none of the dreadlocked bar guests seemed to have been exposed to it. My insider bought me, appropriately, a glass of Gulden Draak. We took a seat, and he introduced me to Christine, one of the two owners. The charming 20-something from Limburg, who seemed to come out of a fairy tale herself, told me that she started the bar five years ago with her boyfriend Pieter, who



immediately appeared when she pronounced his name.

Boven de Grijze Wolken means "above the grey clouds", so people think the bar is a place "where the sun always shines," says Christine. "But that's not true. The sun doesn't shine here; this is a night bar. Dark and light at the same time. To summarise: once upon a time..."

The next thing I knew, Pieter and Christine were introducing me to their sleeping seven-month-old

son Vladimir and the bar dog Kaya. In my brief moments of solitude, I dreamt away staring at the black-light lit flowers on the ceiling and the obscure African and Christian-Orthodox ornaments against the walls. "We don't have a concept, you know," Pieter tells me. "We just put up what we like."

Feel free to step inside Boven de Grijze Wolken without an insider. After the initial 10 seconds has worn off, you'll be glad you did.

## BITE

## De Ruyffelaer ★★★☆

Cycling around Ypres one afternoon, my friend and I are impressed by the green and peaceful landscape and how it contrasts with military cemeteries and other reminders of the First World War. Grass-covered bunkers are now being used as shelter for goats and sheep. Young trees grow in perfect rows, having been planted across the ravaged battlefields. And all along the way, we keep the Gothic-style spires of Ypres – built after the town was practically razed in the war – in sight as a point of reference.

We end our tour in the centre of town but a bit off the beaten track, away from the overfull terraces of the Grote Markt. De Ruyffelaer is located in a quiet street across from Sint-Niklaas church, which houses the city's Education Museum.

Brick walls, beamed ceilings, tile floors, wood-burning stoves and antique furniture give De Ruyffelaer its nostalgic atmosphere. So imagine our surprise when owners Christian and Delphine tell us how they created the restaurant from a gutted building only nine years ago. We were under the impression that it had been spared the bombs and stood here for 200 years.

Our eyes are bigger than our stomachs after the bike ride, so we order two starters before the meal: a Roquefort and bacon salad and a bowl of onion soup. In the meantime, we're happy with the little rounds of toast with ham and mayo spread that come with our drinks. We go as local as possible, with two West Flemish beers: a dark brown St



Bernardus and a strong blonde Watou Tripel. The salad, served on a grey slate platter, includes white cabbage, *witloof*, grapes, raisins, kiwi, passion fruit and the always infallible combination of creamy Roquefort cheese and salty bacon. My friend is enjoying his soup, too: soft, sweet onions in a nice beef broth, topped with a thick slice of bread covered in cheese. It would be improved by being *au gratin*, the French way, but it is tasty nonetheless. The menu lists such hardy main dishes as beef tongue in tomato sauce, rabbit in bacon and beer sauce, cod and St

Pierre fillet in white wine, beef bourguignon and more. But we're in the mood for pork, and we order two choices: braised pork belly and pork knuckle in mustard sauce. The roasted pork knuckle is a generous chunk of ham on the bone, slow-cooked until perfectly moist. The taste is sweet and smoky, its mustard sauce balancing out the dish with its pungency.

My dish is a plate of long, thick slices of pork belly meat, fat-on for ultimate flavour. Underneath are stewed veggies like carrots and courgette and a smooth, salty sauce with spicy pepper grains. Both dishes share a side of creamy, herb-infused potato puree.

We cleanse our palates with two lagers while enjoying the soft background music, mostly bagpipes and other Celtic sounds. The bill comes to a very reasonable €50.

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

📍 Gustave de Stuersstraat 9, Ypres; 057.36.60.06

🕒 Thurs-Sat, 17.30-21.00; Sun & holidays, 11.30-14.30 & 17.30-21.00

💶 Mains: €13-€20

ⓘ Good, filling grandmother's cuisine in what feels like great-grandmother's house

## TALKING DUTCH

## Join the exclusive club



Philip Ebels

## The last word...

## Video killed the radio star

"We have to get used to it. As there's a news ticker constantly crossing the screen, we have to be careful to spell place and family names correctly. As radio journalists, we're not used to that."

Bob Vermeir, editor of *De Ochtend* morning show on Radio 1, now also on TV

## Undervalued

"Beer is brewed with a great deal of patience and professional knowledge. And then it's sold for less than a glass of water, which comes out of the ground all by itself."

Theo Vervloet, chairman of the Belgian Brewers' Association, wants to see beer prices rise in cafes

## Power of the press

"Large reward for whomever can arrange the return of two stolen drawings by René Magritte (including "Les bijoux indiscrets"). Discretion assured."

A small ad placed by 81-year-old Gérard Tousseyen of Varsenare, West Flanders, victim of an art theft seven months ago

## Hindsight

"This is not something worth repeating. Next year I'll lay on some fireworks or a circus act or something."

The owner of a Brussels event hall hired a stripper as a surprise for the annual barbecue for his faithful clients, officials from the federal employment ministry

## NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY

## Cover story

Genk has been awaiting it for years, and it's finally here: Manifesta 9. The only major arts biennial that travels, Manifesta is famous for landing in smaller towns with a strong socio-economic story that lends itself to interpretation by international artists. We'll tell you how coal has become art in the Limburg city

## News

Recently, a number of farmers from Africa visited Flemish farmers to learn some techniques in animal agriculture. This autumn, Flemish farmers will go to Africa to do the same. News editor Alan Hope talks to the Africans to see what they thought of how Flanders raises its animals

## Arts

Flemish artist Wim Delvoye is one of a very few living artists enjoying a solo show at the Louvre. We talk to him about the show, his work and this particular juncture in his career

Whadda ya know? Nigel Williamson from Antwerp writes to say that he is "very happy to see that this amusing [column] is back". Well, so am I. And even more than to write an amusing article, I hope to be able to tell you a thing or two about the Dutch language.

Such as, for example, its close relationship to English and the proficiency therein of its native speakers – something Nigel knows all too well.

"I've been living in Flanders for most of the last 48 years," he writes, "and if my Dutch has not progressed much it's the fault of you Flemings. On hearing my English accent, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker as well as the doctor, the postman, the plumber, the nurse and the policeman all reply in perfect or near-perfect English!"

It is true that the Flemish know their languages: French because they live in

Belgium and English because they live in an Anglo Saxon dominated culture. But there are those who know theirs even better. In Belgium, 58% of people say they speak English, according to Eurostat, the EU's statistical office. (There is no data available for Flanders, but it is likely to be higher.)

In Norway, that same number is 96%. The next time you are in Oslo, try striking up a conversation in Norwegian. I'd guess that the butcher, baker and candlestick maker will respond in near-perfect English.

Following Nigel's reasoning, it would perhaps be easier to learn the languages of Hungary, Romania or Bulgaria, where no more than 15%, 19% and 21% of people say they speak English. But before you collectively pack your bags and migrate east, I say you give it another try. And this time, stand fast.

Don't waver when the candlestick maker talks to you in English. Tell

him: "Ik spreek liever Nederlands," I'd rather speak Dutch. And if you have difficulties understanding, ask him to speak a bit slower. "Kunt u wat langzamer praten, alstublieft?" (*Langzaam* is a strange word, I agree. It means slow. *Langzamer*, then, means slower.)

Upon learning Dutch, you will be joining a select group of people. First, only a little over 60% of Europeans say they know a foreign language. Second, Dutch is not often it. Only 2% of Germans say they know Dutch – and they top the charts. (In the UK, it is 0.2%)

By the way, how's it coming along watching the Flemish news every day, with subtitles and everything, the way we talked about two weeks ago? Any luck? Picked up any new words? Anything weird you want to share or ask? I'd love to hear it.

► [talkingdutch@hotmail.com](mailto:talkingdutch@hotmail.com)