

Parole on hold

Marc Dutroux accomplice Michelle Martin's release to a convent has been appealed

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Engineer of the Year

Kim Kiekens wins the first-ever prize for the most talented engineer in Flanders

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Jungle boogie

Brussels' canal zone is suddenly awash in green spaces – you just have to know where to find them

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A place at the table

Discarded supermarket food is finding its way to people who need it with the launch of a new government programme

Alan Hope

Two years after the notorious "Muffin Man" was arrested for taking baked goods from a skip outside a supermarket in East Flanders, a programme is now taking off to put discarded food onto the tables of the needy. "Skipping", or taking food from skips, is on the rise, too, with even a recent workshop on the subject being held in Antwerp.

Ingred Lieten is the former chief executive of Flemish public transport authority De Lijn and now the deputy minister-president of Flanders. Jeroen Robbe is a 20-something anti-capitalist, a volunteer activist for Bond Zonder Naam (Union Without a Name) and a crusader against the consumer culture. You wouldn't expect the two of them to have much in common, but they agree on one thing: The waste of thousands

of tonnes of perfectly good food thrown away every year by supermarkets, while poor people go hungry, has to end.

"In one month, we were able to reclaim €10,000 worth of food in one supermarket. That is phenomenal," commented Lieten, the Flemish minister in charge of poverty issues, last month on the completion of a pilot project in Sint-Truiden, Limburg province. The project in her home province was "so successful," she said, "that we are now going to see how it can be extended to the whole of Flanders."

The pilot project began in May and involved a Delhaize supermarket and the Sint-Vincentius, or St Vincent de Paul, aid society. The charity, inspired by the news headlines in 2010 about "Muffin Man" Steven De Geynst, wanted to spearhead a programme of food collection targeting both fresh foods and packaged foods that have reached their sell-by dates. The food

would be distributed to the underprivileged.

For years, the supermarket industry has worked with organisations to supply food banks by, for example, inviting shoppers to buy extra packages of non-perishables such as rice, pasta or coffee for donation to volunteers who then pass them on to the needy. Over time, however, the quantities supplied by supermarkets have decreased, while demand has risen: from 12.2 million kilograms in 2008 for 114,900 people across Flanders to 10.7 million kg for 115,800 people in 2010. At the same time, thousands of tonnes of perishable food is being thrown away every year – not because it has gone bad but because it has reached its sell-by date or because it no longer has the fresh appearance customers are thought to demand. Until now, the supermarket chains have found it impossible to organise the distribution of that sort of food –

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FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

The Flemish show-jumper



At the Olympic Games in London, Flanders is represented among the champion hopefuls far in excess of what you might think. As minister-president Kris Peeters was pleased to point out last weekend, just under one in five of the horses taking part in the show-jumping events at the Olympics is of Flemish origin, either born here or tracing its pedigree back to Flemish breeding. No less than 14 of the 75 competing mounts are Flemish bred, including Vigo d'Arrouses (pictured), ridden by world champion Philippe Le Jeune of Belgium. Le Jeune describes Vigo as "big and beautiful". Furthermore, he is "a pillar of the Belgian team". Unfortunately, the 600-kilogram stallion was retired from the competition on Monday morning due to a hoof problem. "I would have loved Vigo to have ended his career on a high note," said Le Jeune. The Belgian team consists of Jos Lansink and Valentina van 't Heike; Dirk Demeersman and Buero van 't Panishof; and Gregory Whatelet and Cadjanine Z. All of them (the horses, that is) were bred in Flanders. Flemish-bred horses are also playing an important part in the medal efforts of the teams from the United States, Saudi Arabia,

Great Britain, Canada, Chile, Ukraine, Brazil, Bermuda and the Netherlands. As *Flanders Today* went to press, Eric Lamaze, the Canadian champion from the last Olympics, was due to ride Derly Chin de Muze, bred by the world-famous Joris De Brabander from Sint-Niklaas. De Brabander also owns Vigo and Carambar de Muze, ridden in London by Gerco Schröder of the Netherlands.

Finally, Mylord Carthago, the mount of French rider Penelope Prevost, also traces his lineage back to De Brabander's stud farm. In fact, Mylord, Vigo and Derly are half brothers, all sired by Nabab De Reve, Belgium's Horse of the Year in 2002.

"Our show-jumping horses have proved themselves to be a major export product," Peeters said. "Flanders is becoming a world centre for show jumping. Not only does a major part of the breeding and trade take place in Flanders, but the whole support industry is world-class. It's not an accident that Eric Lamaze has recently set up in Flanders and that the Saudi Arabian team is being trained by former bronze medal winner Stanny Van Paesschen. I can't think of a better advertisement for Flanders."

News in brief

Brussels public transport authority MIVB registered an average of **18 offences a day** in the first three quarters of 2011, federal interior minister Joëlle Milquet told parliament. In the nine-month period 5,043 crimes were recorded, mainly theft and aggression. Last year was worse than the previous record year of 2008.

Horeca Brussel, the organisation that represents the food and drinks service industry in the capital, has asked the popular travel website TripAdvisor to put **a time limit on user reviews**, to prevent restaurants and hotels being haunted by a bad review long after problems have been remedied. The site is also being asked to investigate severe critiques. "There are cases where people write that the breakfast served was inedible, whereas the hotel in question doesn't even serve breakfast," said HB's Marc Van Muylsders.

An experiment started in Kortrijk to deter loitering in the Begijnhof park by playing classical music to scare away youths went wrong last week, when **vandals cut the cables for several speakers** and destroyed a park bench. Kortrijk mayor and former justice minister Stefaan De Clerck said repairs would be made immediately, and the project would continue. "We cannot allow ourselves to be intimidated by this sort of vandalism," he said.

Five Flemish parties are joining together to present a **single list to voters in the municipal elections** in October in Kraainem, on the outskirts of Brussels. At the last election in 2006, the French-speaking

list won an absolute majority against a Flemish list, but this time around the FDF of Olivier Maingain is going it alone. The list leader, Luk Van Biesen of Open-VLD, said the list had a chance of breaking through and becoming involved in the running of the municipality.

The municipal authorities in Schaerbeek have joined calls from residents to **remove the T2000 trams from line 62** because of severe problems caused by vibrations. Residents along the line, which runs from Da Vinci (close to Nato) to Weldoenersplein in Schaerbeek, have complained of noise nuisance and structural damage caused by the first-generation trams, which are noisier than the later T3000 model. Public transport authority MIVB has promised to investigate.

The Siffer dock in Ghent harbour last week **received a visit from an unusual vessel** – a ship with has no sails, yet is powered by the wind. The E-ship 1 has four pipe-like structures jutting 27m into the air. The Flettner rotors transform the passing wind into electricity to power the ship's engines. The ship, owned by the German company Enercon, was in Ghent to pick up a cargo of 48 propellers for wind turbines to carry to the port of Emden.

A group of scouts from Sint-Stevens-Woluwe camping in Maaseik, Limburg province, last week **uncovered two anti-tank weapons** while gathering wood. The defence ministry was alerted and said there was no danger, as the weapons had been fired and no ammunition was in the area. The weapons may have been left

behind after an army exercise.

Martine Tanghe will return to Flemish public TV station VRT in September as the main news anchor, for both daytime and evening news bulletins. Tanghe has been absent for 10 months while she underwent treatment for breast cancer. She will also front the channel's election programmes, including the live broadcast on 14 October.

Work started last week on the installation of **65 traffic information boards** above the E40 between Wetteren and Drongen in the westerly direction. Last year, the other carriageway was equipped, for a total cost of €4.8 million. Most of the works will take place at night, though the carriageway will be closed between Merelbeke and Sint-Denijs-Westrem on 8 and 9 August. Diversions via the R4 will be in operation.

The novel *De helaasheid der dingen* by Dimitri Verhulst is the **most popular work of fiction among secondary school students** in Flanders who use the website scholieren.com, which provides notes on books and other homework aids. The 2006 book, on which an award-winning film was based, was the most consulted report on the site in the year to end June.

The Olmense Zoo near Mol last week gave a warm welcome to **two puma cubs**. They will not be visible to the public until their mother decides they are strong enough to join the puma group – probably after three or four weeks, a spokesperson said.

► www.olmensezoo.be

Alan Hope

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Killer wasps

It has been tough enough lately for Flanders' bees: first the varroa mite decimated colonies, then the pesticides and the loss of habitat due to intensive agriculture. Now along comes another threat, and a warning before going any further: This one is bloodier than the rest. The Asian predatory wasp (*Vespa velutina*) is

a species of hornet native to China and a monster of a beast, measuring up to 2.5 centimetres long. It's been spotted in France since about 2004, when it is thought to have entered the country hidden in a shipment of pottery. Now it's been seen in Flanders. On the site of the Royal Flemish Beekeepers' Union a witness near Herentals in Antwerp province

reports having had "serious problems" with the wasp, killing "at least 12". He writes: "They are efficient killers. They fly up to a bee, and, before you can do

creature makes short work of several bees with its huge jaws, as we watch in horror. But then there's a moment of hope. The bees strike back. Each of them is less than half the size of the killer, but the bees have an advantage – numbers. They turn on the wasp, enveloping it with their bodies, piling on until it is engulfed in a ball of bees. And then, we learn, it boils in its own heat. The bees cook the wasp to death.

That's one lone wasp, however. According to one beekeeper, a nest of the things can wipe out a whole beehive in about half an hour. You have been warned.

© Blue Gingko / Wikimedia Commons



anything, the bee is bitten in two, and they're gone with the thorax." In a video made by National Geographic, we see a wasp attacking a bee colony. The

A place at the table

More volunteers and partners needed to expand food programme, Lieten says

► continued from page 1

most of which is still edible. And so it has gone in the bin.

Do you know the Muffin Man?

Then along came De Geynst, arrested in March 2010 after being challenged by a GB supermarket manager as he was taking two packages of muffins from the skip in the supermarket's parking lot in Kruibeke, East Flanders. A scuffle ensued, and De Geynst, who immediately became known in the press as the Muffin Man, was charged with theft and assault. He was convicted by a court in Dendermonde and sentenced to six months suspended for three years. De Geynst's story struck a nerve:

He had for about 10 years been a freegan, adhering to the philosophy and practice of eating food that has been thrown away. Freegans practice what is variously known as dumpster-diving (in the US) or skipping (in the UK) – in Flanders *containerduiken* or *skippen* – which involves helping themselves to what others throw away. This means not only food but furniture, clothing, electronics, etc.

His conviction brought protests but, more than that, the sudden realisation on the part of ordinary people about how much food was being sent to the landfill instead of finding its way to the tables of the poor – to children who go to school without breakfast, to elderly people who have to choose between grocery shopping and turning on the heating.

De Geynst was acquitted on appeal, Sint-Vincent de Paul in Sint-Truiden started collecting food from a local Delhaize, and Ingrid Lieten called on the federal food safety agency and the retail confederation Comeos to simplify the process of giving food to the needy rather than

the skip.

"We succeeded there, too," Lieten said. The food safety agency just published a circular effectively making the regulations more flexible. "That means the project has grown up and that we can now go for a more structural approach," she explained. "To extend the project to the rest of Flanders, we now need more volunteers and more partners."

Delhaize has already expressed its willingness. "Our business strategy places an emphasis on sustainable enterprise," a spokesperson for the chain said. "We were immediately prepared to take part in this socially worthy project." The chain plans to increase the programme to 13 of its stores here.

"Because of this project, Sint-Vincentius has been able to offer healthy and varied food to hundreds of families who were suffering," confirms volunteer Marcel Sterck. "Not long ago one of the children from the families said to me: 'I'm so happy with our big food packages. Now mama can have more to eat, too; she hardly dared to eat anything before or my two sisters, my brother and me would have nothing.'

A judicial grey area

Jeroen Robbe comes from Ghent, but he was in Antwerp last month to give a workshop on skipping in connection with an exhibition

"Now mama can have more to eat, too; she hardly dared to eat anything before"

(now finished) organised by the social activist organisation Bond Zonder Naam and the multicultural organisation KifKif.

For Robbe, enterprise has a slightly



More discarded supermarket food will go to food banks like this one in Anderlecht, to be distributed to those who really need it

different meaning from the one intended by Delhaize. He quotes the anarchist icon Emma Goldman, born in Lithuania in 1869 and imprisoned in New York for inciting a riot in 1893 when she told the crowd: "Demonstrate before the

diver himself, he's not currently active, he says. Right now he's more concerned with raising awareness of "the discrepancy between poverty and overproduction of food," he says. "It's difficult to explain how a person can be arrested for stealing food while the bankers who plundered the financial system and caused the whole economic crisis go free."

But the workshop is concerned more with practical matters: how do you go about finding food.

How can you tell if it's safe to eat?

What's the legal situation? The question is, he says, "a judicial grey area".

De Geynst took his muffins from an open container, but many supermarkets are now electing to

chain up their skips or place them in a gated enclosure. Serving yourself in that case might well be a criminal offence.

The question of food safety, says Robbe, "is a matter of common sense. Food keeps better in the winter than in the summer. That's logical. When I was living in Iceland, the containers in the winter were as good as freezers. And fresh produce and packaged goods are likely to be safer than dairy products, for example. I'm a vegetarian, but in any case, meat is probably something to avoid. I'm not saying it's never OK, but you should be very, very careful."

SKIPPING HOW-TO



Only take what you need: Jeroen Robbe during his recent workshop on dumpster diving

For his workshop on skipping, Jeroen Robbe set up a typical black plastic dumpster outside the premises of the activist organisation Bond Zonder Naam and stocked it with a variety of the sort of food you're likely to find. Robbe is joined by a young man named Jimmy, an active skipper, here to offer the benefit of his practical experience.

- Check out the site in daylight to get the lay of the land, including any obstacles, visibility and escape routes if you're interrupted

- Wear dark clothing so as not to attract attention at night; skippers typically wear head lamps to keep both hands free. Don't go alone, and get someone

- to keep a lookout. "It's better not to get caught in the first place than to get into a discussion about the legalities".

- Take only what you need or can use. "What might seem useless to you might be useful to the next person who comes along."

- Check the dates on packages but use common sense. A sell-by date isn't the same as a use-by date.

- If you're not sure, leave it. "The idea is not to take something just so you can throw it in the bin yourself when you get home." If you can't use it all, share what you get with someone else who needs it.

- Check the packaging for real damage. Sometimes food is thrown away for cosmetic reasons – dented cans, or crushed boxes. "Fresh produce should of course be washed thoroughly anyway."

- "Sometimes what's thrown away really is waste." Staff in some stores are instructed to destroy what's being put outside to stop skippers – covering it with bleach or detergent, for example, to make it inedible.

- Leave the place as tidy as you found it. "The more problems you leave behind for the staff, the less likely they are to be tolerant in future."

► www.bnzb.be

Michelle Martin release on hold

Protests at the early release from prison of the ex-wife of serial killer Marc Dutroux

Alan Hope

The father of one of the victims of serial killer Marc Dutroux and Dutroux's then-wife Michelle Martin has lodged an appeal with the Cassation Court to prevent Martin being released on parole. Jean Lambrechts, who lives in Hasselt, said he was taking the step because victims and their relatives have no say in the procedure to decide on a release. "Filing an appeal is a sort of protest," Lambrechts' lawyer Joris Vercaeye said. "Maybe this can be an opportunity to have a debate on changing the law."

Lambrechts' 19-year-old daughter Eefje was kidnapped together with her friend An Marchal, 17, while on holiday in Ostend in 1996. They were later found dead in the property of Dutroux and Martin, as were two eight-year-olds from Wallonia. Two other girls, Sabine Dardenne, 12, and Laetitia Delhez, 14, were found alive.

Dutroux was convicted of murder and sentenced in 2004 to life imprisonment. Martin, as his accomplice, was sentenced to 30 years – in particular for her role in the deaths of the two younger girls, who she left to die of hunger and

thirst while Dutroux was in custody. Taking into account the time spent on remand, Martin has now served almost 16 years of her sentence – more than half of the total, and more than the one-third required to be eligible for parole. Several applications for release have been refused, most recently last year when arrangement had been made for Martin to go into a convent in France. Public outcry and statements by the French minister of justice led to the convent withdrawing its offer, and Martin remained in prison.

This time she is scheduled to move in to a convent in Wallonia, and the court set up to deal with parole requests last week agreed to her release. The prosecutor's office has appealed the decision, and Martin will remain in prison until the appeals are decided, which is expected to take about a month.

"I was convinced this would never happen because if Martin can be released early, who stays in prison?" said Paul Marchal, the father of An. "Who would have to serve their whole sentence, if not her? Martin is after all responsible for the deaths of four children."



"Filing an appeal is a sort of protest": Jean Lambrechts

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

The smartest Turk

Selahatin Koçak is no longer a socialist. Koçak is known throughout Flanders as "the smartest Turk", since he appeared on the popular TV quiz show *De slimste mens ter wereld*, or *The Smartest Person in the World*. Like Bart De Wever, who owes much of his popularity to the same programme, Koçak, then relatively unknown, delighted TV audiences with his wit and sense of humour. He became a household name.

Destined to be a miner, like his immigrant father, Koçak takes pride in being a first. He had hoped to be the first mine engineer of Turkish descent. As it turned out, he was "in the pit" at 16. With little formal education, he went on to become not only the first alderman but also the first teacher at a police school of Turkish descent in Flanders. In interviews, he's often spoken of his dream to become the first Turkish mayor.

While his fame rose nationally, Koçak remained quite controversial at the local level. He was engaged in a bitter rivalry with colleague Ahmet Koç, who, in spite of Koçak's popularity with the media, attracted more votes in their hometown of Beringen, Limburg. Earlier this year, both Koçak and Koç were suspended shortly from the college of aldermen after remaining absent from meetings.

Beringen has a large Turkish community, and many see Koçak as a media figure, with little time for his home town. Koçak meanwhile, is disappointed in SPA, claiming the party never gave him a chance at the national level.

Recently, news broke that neither Koçak nor Koç would be candidates on the local SPA list, which is headed by local strong man Maurice Webers. Koçak and Koç are replaced by no less than four Turkish candidates, including Duygu Akdemir, Koç's wife, who has a political career overshadowing her husband's. Koçak is due to announce his candidature on the local Open VLD list.

That Koçak started off his career in a left-wing party is not unusual. The left has always embraced the children of immigration. That before long most parties would have candidates with migrant roots was predicted, as one could hardly expect all immigrants to hold left-wing views. Koçak's story of individual emancipation fits the liberal party perfectly; but will that make him the first Turkish liberal to make it to parliament?

Police unions to strike after violent clashes

A police union has warned of strike action following a series of incidents involving violence against police officers during the last week. Increased attacks, the ACV union said, is a sign of the failure of prosecution policy. The liberal union VSOA, meanwhile, has issued an official notice of intent to strike.

Last week police unions protested when six youths were freed by a court after being arrested following clashes with police in Vilvoorde. The fighting started after a police identity check. The

VSOA said youth gangs were "trying to take over the streets", even in smaller towns.

In Mechelen, seven officers were hurt during fighting when they intervened to protect a bailiff during a visit to a house. One policeman was assaulted, and when back-up arrived, they were attacked by three men, who were later arrested.

In the Brussels commune of Anderlecht, police patrols were attacked with stones and petrol bombs at the weekend after another identity check in connection

with a local burglary. Three police cars were damaged, and police later found a crate containing 22 bottles filled with petrol.

In the Brussels commune of Etterbeek at the weekend, three officers were injured in clashes after they stopped a car. The man admitted he had smoked cannabis. A group of local youths approached the scene to protest, and fighting started. Three adults were arrested and charged, and one minor was handed over to the youth magistrate.

New system protects children left in cars

A group of students from the VTI technical college in Veurne, West Flanders, have developed a system to prevent babies from being left unattended in cars in hot weather. The initiative came about after a young father accidentally left his baby of six months in the back of his car in 30-degree heat. The baby died of dehydration.

The system works with temperature sensors, which come on automatically when the baby is buckled into the car-seat. When a set temperature is reached, an alarm sounds, the air conditioning comes on, the windows roll down, and the hazard lights begin flashing.

Several car manufacturers, the school said, have expressed an interest in the

system. About 20 children die each year in the EU from the effects of overheating after being left in a car in warm weather, according to the European Child Safety Alliance. Last week in Schelle, Antwerp province, two toddlers were freed after being left behind for 45 minutes in a parked car in warm weather. Passers-by notified emergency services after seeing the children were sweating heavily.

Recycling on the increase

The amount of household waste produced in Flanders fell again in 2010. And in what the waste management agency OVAM called a "remarkable result", as much as 72% of that was recycled, composted or collected separately and re-used.

From 1 July next year, unsorted rubbish brought to a container park will cost between .02 and 30 cents a kilogram; for collection from home, the costs will be from .05 to 60 cents/kg. The tariffs will be harmonised across the region and are intended, OVAM said, to encourage people to do better in reducing waste. Since 2000, the amount of general waste thrown away by each resident in Flanders has gone from 48kg a year to 30kg in 2010.

More container parks are also planned for those municipalities that still do not have one.

► www.ovam.be

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

11.4%

less beer sold by AB InBev in the second quarter compared to the same period last year. The company blamed the chilly weather

177

reports of gay bashing made in Brussels via a smartphone app, which released in January. The number is more than half of the total for the whole of Belgium

24%

of clothing retailers did better during the sales period which ended last week, compared to the summer sales in 2011, according to a survey by industry federation Mode Unie and Unizo. About 37% did less well

2,000

attendees at the Pukkelpop memorial service last Sunday on the Kiewit site in Limburg province. The service was in memory of the five people killed and dozens injured at last year's festival, which was hit by a freak storm

115.7mm

of rain fell during the month of July, according to the Royal Meteorological Institute, compared to the seasonal average of 73.5mm. The average daytime temperature was 17.3 degrees, compared to an expected 18.4 degrees

Foreign workers fill skilled job vacancies

Nurses and engineers sought from economically troubled countries

Alan Hope

The economic crisis in Spain and Portugal is providing a new market for finding candidates for jobs in Flanders that are difficult to fill. Last week the first group of nurses arrived from Spain, a result of a jobs fair organised by the Flemish employment and training agency VDAB.

The jobs fair, held at the end of June, was supported by 17 health-care establishments in Flanders and attracted 3,500 visitors. In Flanders, job vacancies for nurses go unfilled, despite the best efforts of the health-care sector to attract more young people to the profession. Health-care consortium Zorgnet Vlaanderen estimates that the sector will require 60,000 new staff in the coming six years, as a consequence of retirements.

In Spain, on the other hand, jobs are becoming more scarce in the profession, as in the economy as a whole. At present, unemployment among young people stands at around 25%. In addition, pay and conditions are not as advantageous as hospitals and clinics here are able to offer.

"Last summer, I worked for three

months," recent nursing graduate Rocio Wolse told VRT news. She has been searching for a job since then, but she said, "the situation is complicated. I didn't find anything." She was last week on a reconnaissance visit to the Veilige Haven care facility in Aalter, East Flanders, with other prospective colleagues. It is offering four places to Spanish caregivers; four others are considering offers from a rest home in Deinze.

No other solution

Zorgnet Vlaanderen once opposed the importing of nursing personnel. "The reality forced us to change our point of view," admitted managing director Peter Degadt. "We made enormous efforts in recent years to find a solution to the problem in our own country. In the last academic year, the number of nursing students went up by 30%, but even that is not enough. The shortage is particularly acute in geriatric care. This is a trial project. We will need to wait and see if it is successful."

In Portugal, meanwhile, a similar problem exists for engineers, another specialism Flanders needs.



Spanish nurses are being brought to Flanders' care facilities because of a shortage of skilled personnel

In response to a request from the Portuguese equivalent of the VDAB, which has an estimated 18,000 unemployed engineers on its books, another jobs fair was organised. According to Gert De Buck, a specialist in employment mobility at the VDAB, 90 companies from Flanders expressed an interest, and 20 of them travelled to Portugal, where 4,000 engineers turned up. "The first 22 of them have already

started work," De Buck said. Meanwhile Zorgnet called for "urgent measures" to cope with the lack of medical specialists in Flanders' hospitals. More and more doctors are opting to go into private practice to avoid long hours, weekend work and on-call duty. According to their survey, nine out of 10 hospitals have more difficulty attracting specialists now than 10 years ago.

High operating costs are an "Achilles heel", says Peeters

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters has joined the chorus of complaints that salary and energy costs are acting as a brake on economic progress. A report, commissioner by Peeters and issued last week by the Leuven-based Support Agency for Enterprise and Regional economy (Store), revealed that 56% of the added value of the Flemish economy comes from businesses owned by multinational companies.

"If foreign companies want to come here and stay here, that's proof that Flanders can be attractive and competitive. They still believe that," said Peeters. "But we know competitiveness can be a fragile thing. We have to be extremely attentive and keep a lid on salary



Kris Peeters during a recent visit with pilot boat operators in the Port of Ostend

and energy costs." High operating costs are the "Achilles heel" of the region's economy, and a failure to act at the federal level could undo all the work the Flemish government has done to improve conditions for business. "I have asked prime minister Di Rupo to do something about the situation," Peeters said. "Our efforts make little sense if costs cannot be controlled."

Flemish companies also affected

Flanders' New Industrial Policy aims "at specialisation, the creation of the ideal conditions for industrial sectors and support for the role that leading companies can play in creating specialist clusters," he said. While 56% of the value of business

is owned by foreign companies, another 24% is owned by companies that are active only in Flanders - representing 32% of private-sector jobs. A further 19% is made up of Flemish companies active in the rest of Belgium and abroad. There too, however, job costs are making their effect felt. In 2008, 62% of the jobs created by those companies were in Flanders, 9% in the rest of Belgium and 29% in other countries. Since then, jobs have been exported: In 2010, only 54% of jobs were in Flanders, and the overseas share had risen to 38%. "I see that as an important warning for our competitiveness," Peeters commented.

► www.steunpuntore.be

Higher premiums for green houses

Home-owners in Flanders who build energy-saving houses are to receive increased premiums from next January, the government has agreed. The Flemish government already pays premiums to the owners of energy-conscious homes, in the form of a rebate on the real estate tax known as the *onroerende voorheffing*, which is collected in Flanders by the regional government. At present, rebates amount to 20% or 40% depending on the level of energy-

saving achieved. The rebate runs for a period of 10 years. Under the new system, announced this week by energy minister Freya Van den Bossche and budget minister Philippe Muyters, the rebate would increase to 50% and could even go as high as 100%, but only for a period of five years. In return, the conditions for qualifying for the premium would become stricter, taking account of the evolution in building materials that has taken place since the current

system came into operation in 2009. "An energy-saving house may cost a bit more, but it does deliver a lifelong discount on energy bills," Van den Bossch (pictured) said. "With this premium, we hope to encourage families to build even more energy-conscious houses." "With this higher contribution," added Muyters, "we'll be motivating the front-runners and helping bridge those difficult early years" before the investment begins to pay off.



Elisabeth Callens / BELGA

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Banking

► Dexia Holding

The board of banking group Dexia last week confirmed the nomination of Karel De Boeck as the new CEO to replace Pierre Mariani, who resigned in June. De Boeck is a former senior executive of Fortis and stepped in to replace Jean-Luc Dehaene as Dexia chairman in June.

Pharma

► Vemedia

Pharmaceuticals company Vemedia, set up by Omega Pharma founder Yves Vindevogel, is reported to be seeking new shareholders for the company, based in West Flanders, to proceed with a strategy of growth by acquisitions. Vindevogel launched Omega with Marc Coucke, currently still CEO, in 1987, but sold his share in 1994.

Retail

► Atrium

Brussels business promotion agency Atrium has revived its Afterwork Shopping concept, in which shops stay open until 20.00 on Thursday evenings. The initiative has so far signed up just over 200 businesses to take part, compared to 380 when the programme was first launched two years ago.

► www.afterworkshopping.be

Security

► DMG

The owner of security firm DMG, based in Westerlo, Antwerp province, has denied his personnel was responsible for an attack on two festival-goers at the Tomorrowland dance festival in Boom last month. According to David De Herdt, the two men, who were choked and hit repeatedly, had been handed over to another security firm before the assaults took place.

Supermarkets

► Delhaize

Delhaize has recalled own-brand platters of fresh vegetable sticks sold as Fresh Sticks after traces of listeria bacteria were found in samples. Customers should return the packages, with batch number 241450, to the branch where they were bought.

Telecom

► Belgacom

Belgacom has found a buyer for its Phone House stores, which it was obliged by competition authorities to divest, according to unions who received the news last week. The name of the new owner will be revealed later, Belgacom said.

Tourism

► Mini-Europe

Tourist attraction Mini-Europe in Brussels equalled its record number of visitors in July, with an increase in overseas visitors making up for a fall in the number of locals. The park, together with water park Océade, will close in August 2013 to make way for a new conference and shopping complex at the Heizel site.

Entrepreneur neuroscience

Frank Van Rycke tells us about his 10-year quest to give up work and get a life

Alan Hope

The book-buying public is rightly suspicious of get-rich-quick schemes, but what first-time author Frank Van Rycke has is something quite different – a get-rich-enough-quite-slowly scheme, you might call it.

Just over a decade ago, Frank Van Rycke set himself a goal: to have enough money to be able to retire within the next 10 years. *In 10 jaar binnen* (Lannoo), or Inside 10 Years, describes the 42-year-old's efforts to achieve that goal. "Binnen zijn" means literally "to be inside" and is also the equivalent of the phrase "home and dry" in English. We met in the leafy and luxurious surroundings of the Mariadal in Zaventem, a brasserie in a former castle, where I asked the Flemish entrepreneur and business coach what *binnen zijn* meant to him.

"I think people right away think of a big house and a second home in the south of France, an apartment at the coast, a boat or a yacht," he says. "But my vision of "making it" is mainly about freedom: the freedom to do what you want, with whom you want, when you want. That's what it signifies to me. As soon as you have that, in my opinion, you can say that you've made it."

At various points in the book, you describe the effort required to achieve your goal as a sort of second job. Most people have enough with one job and a family. Is your advice really applicable to people who don't have the enormous drive needed?

I wrote the book with the conviction that anyone reading it would be able to improve their own financial situation. Whether you go for it all the way or just pick and choose from the possibilities offered, that's a decision for you. It all depends on the goals you set yourself. I'm convinced that some people will be able to do much better than I did myself because I didn't have the book when I did it. Everyone has to decide what's important for them, and, sure, if you want to make it in 10

years, that does demand a huge investment in time and energy, absolutely.

You're experienced in sales, which gives you skills such as negotiation that an office worker, say, or a civil servant might not have.

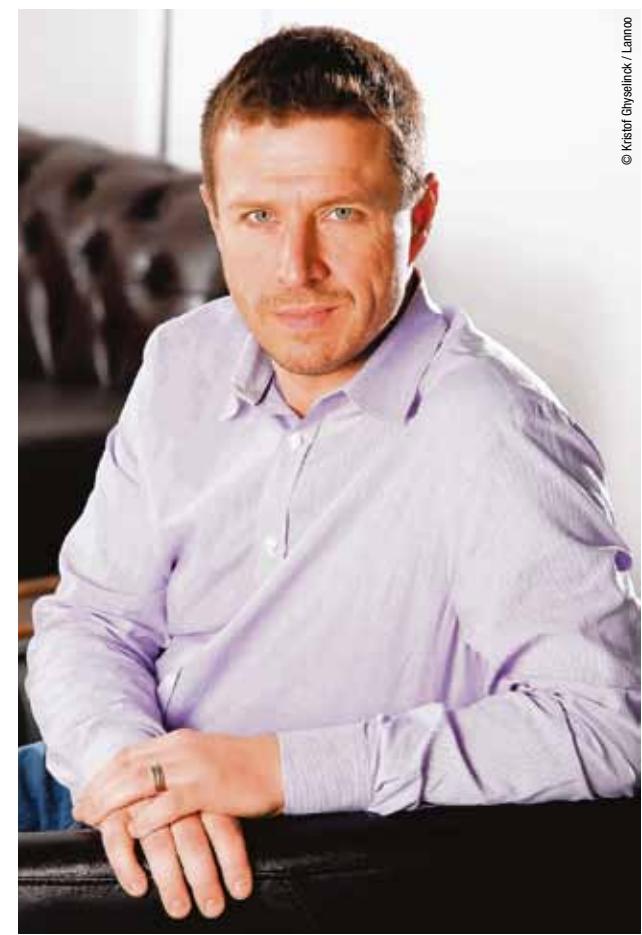
You know what it's about? It's about the experience of success. And that civil servant, the next time he goes out to buy shoes, maybe he'll dare to ask for a discount, and if he gets it, he'll be so delighted he'll want to do more and better. Progress comes with baby steps. I'm not out to create clones of myself. The message I'm trying to get across is: What matters is to take that first step. Dare to do, and you'll automatically see that things start to move around you; learn from the situation and then go further.

For 10 years you worked at your job and also devoted a significant amount of time to your goal. Has your family had to go without you?

Up to a point, that's a price you have to pay. In my experience and in the experience of people I've interviewed who are successful and extremely busy, you try to compensate for quantity with quality. But yes, it's true: If I'm sitting here, then I'm not at home, and I can't go to the playground with my children.

If I were to ask them, "What does your daddy do?", what might they answer?

(Laughs) Well, now they'd say I write books. They know that much. I try hard to bring the little one to the crèche three times a week, for example. I'm home three days a week and gone for two; is that a lot or not? I don't know. I think what is good is that they see how success is coupled with hard work. I think that's a good lesson. You're showing them what life really is, or can be. They've seen us succeeding, but they also saw us at a less successful moment, and that's a living example of how it can be done. I hope so, at least.



Frank Van Rycke: "The state takes on average 50% of our income. Resist like a modern-day William Tell"

THE SECRET OF MY SUCCESS



In 10 jaar binnen began as a plan for Frank Van Rycke's life, with a defined start and finish, and the book follows the same structured approach. The plan starts modestly: Consume less and build up a savings to allow you to move to the next step. Work with a view to maximising income and capital in the short and medium term, with a view to not having to work in the long term. Invest what you don't spend, beginning with property. Branch out into other investments, including your own business. And finally, limit your exposure to tax as far as possible, using every (legal) means available.

Consume less, save more: Finish every month with a sum left over for savings, however small. Avoid situations where you might be tempted to spend needlessly. Make a budget, but be realistic. "It's not your income but your spending that determines how much you have left over at the end of the month," says Van Rycke.

Consider your job as a means, not an end: Use your paid work to build up knowledge, expertise and network contacts for later. Aim to be paid for performance rather than hours worked. "Negotiate to push up your income or push down your costs. Asking costs

nothing: A 'no' is what you already have; a 'yes' is what you might get."

Buy your own home: Renting is pure consumption, your money thrown away. Get to know the market over a small area and strike the minute an opportunity arises. "Buy with your head, not your heart. Consider this purchase as an investment. Your dream house can come later."

Setting up in business: Make a good plan that takes account of your strengths and weaknesses. Be on the lookout for business opportunities. Don't let setbacks get you down. "Keep on striving for improvement. That forms the basis of all success."

Taxation: Invest in an advisor who can tailor a tax plan to your requirements. Make use of the deductions available, especially pension contributions and insurance. "The state takes on average 50% of our income, which feels like an injustice. Resist like a modern-day William Tell."

► www.in10jaarbinnen.be

Port of Antwerp lets the sun shine in

As a part of its ongoing sustainable energy project, the Antwerp Port Authority is installing more than 2,500 square metres of photovoltaic, or solar energy, panels. Five of the Port Authority's buildings on both sides of the Scheldt River were covered with solar panels, among them the Havenhuis headquarters.

Careful preparation went into the planning "to see what buildings were suitable for the installation," said spokesperson Annik Dirkx. "Parameters like roof stability and return on investment were crucial."

The project represents an investment of €550,000 and is estimated to generate more than 350kW per year, the annual power consumption of 75 families. In addition, 1,250 panels were placed near the Zandvliet lock and another 840 near the Boudewijn lock. The solar panel park was installed by Eke-based Izen Energy Systems. **Marc Maes**



© Kristof Gyselinx / Lannoo

From the surface to the core

Flanders' first Engineer of the Year X-rays industrial machinery and Kinder Surprise Eggs

Andy Furniere

Flanders has its first "Engineer of the Year", thanks to a competition launched by the specialised employment agency XPE Engineering. The honour fell to 29-year old researcher Kim Kiekens, active at both the University of Leuven and Group T, the International University College Leuven. For her PhD, Kiekens X-rayed, among other things, Kinder Surprise Eggs to see which toys are inside without having to open them.

"Scanning the chocolate eggs was an example to illustrate my work to the general public and to get more youth interested in engineering," she smiles. "My three-year-old boy is now also enthusiastic about what his mother does."

The young researcher is specialised in the measurement techniques of CT (computed tomography) scanning and uses X-ray equipment to create 3D models of industrial components.

"The method is the same as in the medical world, where CT scanners make images of, for example, your heart or brain, without having to open up your body to look for possible irregularities," explains Kiekens. "We apply this technology to precisely measure and detect internal flaws of industrial components, without damaging them."

The scanners can X-ray through steel five centimetres thick and create an internal 3D model in half an hour. The amount of radiation needed for this purpose would be deadly for humans.

Industrial CT scanning has only been done for about five years, and the interest in it is steadily increasing. One reason is the growing importance of additive manufacturing or 3D printing, in



Kim Kiekens' work takes her from the industrial buildings of Flanders to the villages of Benin

which materials printers create solid objects from a 3D digital model by laying down successive layers of material.

Kiekens does research for high tech companies such as LayerWise and Materialise, both in Leuven and both specialised in 3D printing. "Because the industrial components are developed in one piece instead of assembled, scanning is the only way to check the often very complex structures inside," she says. "Today, almost every industrial sector adopts this technology." The components she scans are for autos, airplanes and space technology.

Improving the image

To win the title of Engineer of the Year, Kiekens had to convince a

jury made up of representatives from the building, energy, industrial, education and media sectors. "Apart from her technical know-how and link to the business world, she impressed them with her ability to translate difficult concepts into images that everyone can relate to," says Marc Boriau, managing director of XPE Engineering. The Antwerp employment agency organised the award to put engineers in the spotlight and to inspire more youth to study for this bottleneck profession.

"Engineers have an image problem," notes Boriau. "They often enjoy working behind the scenes more than promoting their achievements. We need to show children and their parents

the interesting dimensions of engineering and emphasise the value of the profession." Flanders, he says, "needs more engineers". Boriau especially hopes the example of Kiekens will motivate more female students, who are gravely underrepresented in engineering studies. In the future, XPE wants to extend its competition to involve pupils in secondary education and engineering students in their final year of higher education.

Opening minds

Kiekens, who teaches students herself at Group T, acknowledges the misunderstanding among the general public and youth. "Too many pupils think engineering is a purely technical job, while the work is very diverse, and creativity plays an important part," she says. "To broaden their minds, I challenge the students to find solutions for everyday problems, such as traffic congestion, and to think beyond the technical aspects."

In cooperation with the Belgian development NGO World Solidarity, Kiekens also helped students of Group T to create a new type of smoke oven that people in the West African country Benin could use to smoke fish without standing in the smoke all day. The smoke oven has improved health conditions considerably and can be constructed with cheap materials available in the country. Kiekens: "Engineering students need to experience that their ideas can make a difference in the everyday lives of many people."

► www.ingenieurvanhetjaar.be

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Class sizes don't have a visible influence on the achievements of pupils, concludes Sofie De Bondt of the Institute of Education and Information Sciences at the University of Antwerp in her Master's thesis. De Bondt based her research on data of more than 3,400 pupils in the fourth year of primary school. Her findings conflict with measures taken by the Flemish government to reduce the average number of children per class from 17 to 16.8 in primary education by the next academic year.

The Flemish government will launch the project **Smart Energy Solutions** next month through the programme Smart Grids Flanders, which stimulates the deployment of intelligent energy grids. Through promotion campaigns, seminars and workshops, this project urges enterprises to innovate their industrial activities and contribute to a more energy-friendly industrial policy. Smart Energy Solutions starts on 14 September for a period of two years and is part of the Flemish Region's new industrial policy, dubbed Factory of the Future.

► www.smartgridsflanders.be

Researchers at the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and the Free University of Brussels (VUB) have developed a technique to **reduce the side effects of radiotherapy**. The technique helps to determine which parts of the tumour are more resistant against radiation so that doctors can focus on these instead of exposing the whole tumour to heavy radiation.

Resuscitating a person becomes **less efficient the faster the chest is pumped**, according to a study of the emergency department at University Hospital Antwerp. Scientists concluded that the depth of a compression is essential for the success of resuscitation because it makes more blood flow to the heart and brain. To guarantee the depth, the hospital sets a maximum limit of 145 compressions per minute.

Fewer and fewer youth aged 15 to 25 are choosing "**alternating education**", which means they combine part-time courses with a work placement linked to an apprenticeship contract. The Neutral Union for the Self-Employed (NSZ) made the announcement on the basis of a survey carried out by Syntra, the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training. Between the academic years 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, the number of students in alternating education dropped from 5.4 to 4.3, a decline of 21%. The NSZ regrets the evolution as the vast majority of young people in alternating education find work within one year after graduating and are asking for campaigns to stimulate more interest in the system. AF

Q&A



Do you write life stories for elderly people to let their memory live on?

Some elderly people feel the need to leave their memoir for the next generations, but that is not our main goal. In the first place, our team at the mental health care centre in Brussels wants to raise the self-esteem of elderly people living at home who have had a physical setback or have mental problems. By helping them remember the pleasant events and

achievements in their life, we hope to reinforce their identities and make them the directors of their lives again. The social contact also brings lonely people out of their isolation and helps them to reintegrate into society.

Is it sometimes difficult to bring back long-forgotten experiences?

It can be hard to remember your childhood years in your old age, but

Mikis Dormaels is a writer with the Brussels Centre for Mental Health's unique project **Narrative Care**, which records the life stories of elderly people in the capital

pictures often revive the memory. There are a lot of stories attached to objects as well, such as a ring your grandmother gave you or the pipe your grandfather smoked. Somebody also remembered his youth through the smell of a bakery, as he grew up in one.

Are people in the first stages of dementia also considered?

Definitely. By stimulating their senses, we can help them relive the important events of their existence. What is essential for them is to place an emphasis on their feelings instead of concrete details. We don't ask the birth date of their child, for example, but about the emotions they experienced when they became a parent.

► www.tinyurl.com/narrativevzorg

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It's a jungle out there

Parckdesign is planting artistic gardens at neglected spots along Brussels' canal

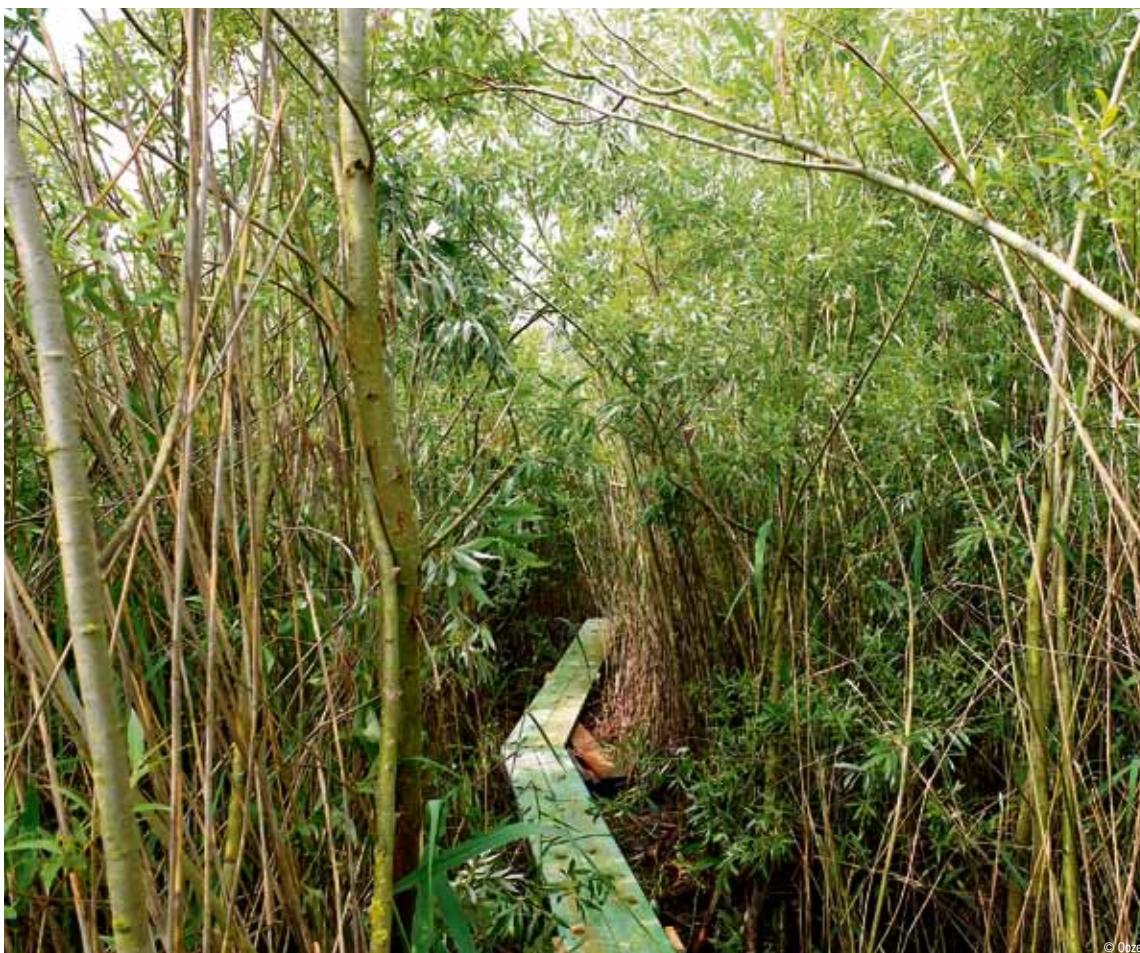
Andy Furniere

Would it surprise you to know that the best green spaces to relax this summer are in Brussels' wastelands? That's thanks to the biennial Parckdesign, which has turned them into mysterious gardens. Push the wire fencing aside in the heart of Brussels, and you'll arrive at a spring of water.

At the three previous editions, Parckdesign mainly developed urban furniture in Brussels' existing parks. This year, the initiative by nature conservation organisation Leefmilieu Brussel is reinvigorating industrial wastelands and abandoned spaces in the densely populated neighbourhoods of Kuregem and Molenbeek into poetic oases. Architecture Workroom Brussels, a think-and-do tank for innovative urban planning, is coordinating the project.

As well as developing a circuit for the public in the often overlooked canal zone, the people behind Parckdesign want to initiate a trend for sustainable projects in cooperation with local associations. That's why the central information point is the Curo-Hall in Kuregem, where neighbourhood associations plan activities. The German architect Raumlabor transformed its empty courtyard into a meeting point with a pergola and a platform in the trees.

At the rear of the building, a group of artists, architects and a gardener created shared kitchen gardens to encourage meetings between residents. One of them, Raymonde Urso, is enthusiastic: "Here, I've finally found a place to plant my herbs and vegetables, as I don't



The gangway of "Source de Friche" that leads through a swamp to a spring is just one of the surprising installations at this year's Parckdesign circuit in Brussels' canal zone

have a garden of my own. It's also a nice place to get to know the other communities."

Water for non-humans

A highlight is "Source de Friche", where you reach a natural spring after a walk along a narrow gangway in a former industrial area. Architecture bureau Ooze and Slovenian artist Marjetica Potrč

have turned the area into a swamp. Polluted by oil company Shell in the past, the water is now cleansed and filtered through a plant-driven system. But, however purified, it still does not comply with European drinking water regulations. In the words of the installation: The water is "of drinkable quality exclusively for non-humans".

Don't let the fence discourage you:

Just find the place where the bars are replaced by elastic cords. These elastic boundaries of the project "Borderline" by artists Stéphanie Buttier and Sophie Larger act as entrance chambers, preparing people to pass from the streets to the secret gardens.

After the adventure in the swamp, take a rest on a bench in the "Open Empty Lot" designed by Spanish

artist Lara Almarcegui. She hopes her initiative will open the deserted place to the public. Further on, landscape agencies Studio Basta and Wagon Landscaping have also created a cosy corner, but with an extraordinary view as a bonus. By climbing on tennis umpire chairs in this "Jardin de l'eSKYlier", you can look above barbed wire to get a unique view of Brussels' skyline.

Gardens on the move

At the Garden Bridges of the busy Delacroix staircases, German landscape architects of 100Landschaftsarchitektur invite people to stop in their tracks and discover the origin of the plants in our urban flowerbeds, such as the Indian Strawberry and the Gallant Soldier. An ideal picnic zone is set up in the Driehoeks Park by Cascoland, a network of international artists, architects and designers. Large carts with plants form "mobile gardens", entrusted to the care of inhabitants and local associations.

A good way to discover the Parckdesign circuit is in the Trash Taxi. During the ride, Brussels residents explain their relationship with public space in filmed interviews. In return, you will be invited to collect waste in baskets on the roof of the car. The taxi starts a tour approximately every hour from 13.00 to 18.00 on Friday, Saturday and Sunday until 14 October. There are also occasional guided tours by bike, organised by Pro Velo, and walking tours by tourism organisation Voir et Dire.

► www.parckdesign2012.be

Search and safari

Ideas – indoors and out – to keep kids amused this month

Alan Hope

Biogeosafari is "a look at the city through green-tinted glasses" – a treasure hunt through the streets of Brussels, organised by the Natural Sciences Museum. Just download the map, the questions to be answered and (for the eyes of a responsible adult only) the answers, and off you go. You'll be ranging as far as Ijzerplein by the canal in the north and the edges of the Zonienwoud in the south. The trip is intended to give kids a picture of the biodiversity of the city.

► www.biogeosafari.be



a hunt for pearls. If you get all the answers correct, you could win a prize.

► www.sincfala.be

Summer is a time for drama, as parents will by now be finding out, but if it's theatre you're looking for, **Spoor 6** is a professional group in Leuven, which tours different shows around the region. On 11 August they'll bring *Paspop* to Hoeleden, Flemish Brabant, in which a man at the junk market tells the fantastic tales of his wares with the help of the audience. On 18 August, they're in Bever, Flemish Brabant, with *Bo's bos*, the story of a mysterious creature in the woods.

► www.spoor6.be

If you haven't thought of it already, a cheap digital camera will keep kids amused for hours, and they can even muck about with the results afterwards on a free site like www.picmonkey.com. If you're

more serious about photography, the **Photo Museum in Antwerp** is the place to see real art, while the children go off with a smARTbox, which will allow them to discover the art of drawing with light. A smARTbox costs €10, which includes a ticket for one adult and one child. Each additional child pays €2.

► www.fotomuseum.be

Boekhoute is an old fishing village in East Flanders, in the watery area known as Meetjesland. Until the 17th century, an arm of the Scheldt reached to the harbour town. Children can rediscover it with a hand-held minicomputer, through which Garry the Garnaal (shrimp) will lead them across the dykes and remains of the old town. The tour

costs €5, with a €10 deposit for the computer.

► www.op-zoek-naar-de-verdwennen-havens.be

The **Hoge Kempen National Park** in Limburg is more than 5,000 hectares of raw nature. It has five entrances in five municipalities – As, Genk, Lanaken, Maasmechelen and Zutendaal – and at each one you can pick up a booklet that takes kids on a tour where they get to crawl inside the skin of a local animal. Pick up a book at any of the entrances.

► www.toerismelimburg.be/beestigeboel

See the web version of this article for even more activities
Contributions to this article were made by Olga Hope



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Stranger days

Provocative Hasselt artist Koen Vanmechelen lets loose another project with global implications

Bjorn Gabriels

Artist Koen Vanmechelen doesn't make paintings or sculptures or even just installations. He makes artistic projects that turn into non-profit foundations, are copied across the world, are studied by scientists and are capable of bringing together hundreds of people. His *Cosmopolitan Stranger*, soon to go global, is on now in Hasselt.

I'm liberated. Finally, art can be engaged again." Koen Vanmechelen is standing in his studio in Hasselt, otherwise known as "The Open University of Diversity", where *Cosmopolitan Stranger*, part of the Hotel de Inmigrantes project, is reaching its final stages.

Earlier in the summer, Vanmechelen brought together 42 artists from all over the world in his studio to work and live together like immigrants. They had to register as temporary residents, take care of the material needed for their works and live together within the confined space, jammed with beds, that was open for everyone around the clock.

"Artists are genuine migrants, travellers settling everywhere," says Vanmechelen, one of Flanders' most internationally recognised conceptual artists. "When they arrive, people welcome them and assign them a space to exhibit their work. Being creative within your surroundings produces a positive image, and that is a first step towards integration. This positive force of

Now that the artists have travelled on, their temporary residence in Hasselt is home to their work. Vanmechelen's studio is a cross between a cage and an incubator. A wire fence that simulates being electrically charged whenever the door opens shields the exhibition and work spaces, forcing visitors to follow a predetermined path.

The metal grids attached to the inside of the windows give a sense of entrapment, while you walk around a giant column-like cage with chickens. Elsewhere in the studio, surgery lights point towards an empty bed. Television screens, documents and other works hint at reflections on diversity, artistic freedom and practical restrictions. At one point, researchers from the University of Hasselt came to Vanmechelen's studio to do a DNA test. "We wanted to see where those 42 artists came from and how diverse they really are," says Vanmechelen. "Before we actually performed the tests, we had a lively discussion. Some artists absolutely wanted to do the tests, while others were strongly opposed. We had people from all sorts of backgrounds and with different personalities, but, in the end, art can overcome a lot of differences."

Breeding possibilities

With *Cosmopolitan Chicken* and the related works (cross-breeding *in vitro* or using llamas, etc), Vanmechelen has always come back to chickens

"With yesterday's and today's tools, art speaks out about tomorrow"

meeting points and cross breeding has always fascinated me, also in my work around the *Cosmopolitan Chicken*."

Vanmechelen's *Cosmopolitan Chicken Project*, in which he cross-breeds chickens from across the world as a metaphor for global diversity, has spawned a variety of different exhibitions in the US, China and across Europe, including the 54th Venice Biennale and this year's DOCUMENTA.

Howdy, stranger

Cosmopolitan Stranger, a parallel event of Genk's Manifesta 9, is only the first step in the Hotel de Inmigrantes project, curated by Vanmechelen and Tomasz Wendland, the director of the Poland Biennale. The pair "worked out the idea to form a group of artists who engage in a debate and really dare to confront each other in a series of meetings at various locations around the world", Vanmechelen explains. "Our dream is to end that quest for identity in Buenos Aires, where the original Hotel de Inmigrantes once hosted migrants from all over the world who arrived in South America."

as a metaphor for human nature and cultural diversity. "The *Cosmopolitan Chicken Project* can go as far as conception and incubation, all the way to the level of DNA. Hotel de Inmigrantes wouldn't want to go that far... It focuses more on cultural diversity. But people should understand that, as domesticated animals, chickens are heavily linked to countries and form an extension of human thought processes."

He gives France's Bresse breed as a example. "For poultry farmers, the



© Alex Deyart



© Stoffel Hias

Koen Vanmechelen in his Hotel de Inmigrantes (left); more than 40 artists stayed in the Hasselt studio space and left their impressions behind for *Cosmopolitan Stranger*

Bresse poses no problems. But as an artist, I see an animal that is forced to have a red head, a white body and blue legs [the national colours of France] without any possibility of evolution. There's no freedom there, only imposed limitations." But Hotel de Inmigrantes, he says, "doesn't actually deal with nationalism. It mainly focuses on breeching one's personal framework. All great things happen at meeting points."

Hotel de Inmigrantes, like the *Cosmopolitan Chicken*, transfers practices closely related to economic realities – producing consumer goods and migrating in order to better your life – to an artistic environment.

Art as active participant

"Art has a crucial role to play in society," stresses the Limburg-born artist. "With yesterday's and today's tools, art speaks out about tomorrow. Art should transcend the individual and the actual in order to be universal. When you're a spectator of the creative processes that are

happening before your eyes, you are also making art."

Vanmechelen's work is part science, but, he insists, "I'm not a politician, scientist or activist. I'm an artist. That is clear. I strive for a balance between the jungle and the village, between nature and culture. I want to find a point where I can merge them because I believe that what happens there matters."

The *Cosmopolitan Chicken Project* is part of DOCUMENTA 13, the five-yearly visual arts festival in Kassel, which is happening right now. The curatorial statement says that it

is a festival "dedicated to artistic research and forms of imagination that explore commitment", among other fields of interest.

"People realise that there's a need to couple art and society," continues Vanmechelen. "But art shouldn't be a translation of society; it should have a visionary force, aimed towards our future. Art can produce an enormous energy, which can be destructive but also offers hope. Art can inspire all branches of society to create a new world. It can inseminate a new world."

UNTIL 31 AUGUST

Hotel de Inmigrantes: *Cosmopolitan Stranger*

Open University of Diversity, Armand Hertzstraat 35, Hasselt

► www.hoteldeinmigrantes.net

ON FERTILE GROUND



© Koen Vanmechelen 2009

The cross-fertilising of art, science and activism has given birth to three foundations, the pillars of Koen Vanmechelen's Open University of Diversity. The earliest is The Walking Egg, a collaboration with Limburg gynaecologist Willem Ombelet that focuses on infertility in developing countries. Their goal is to bring safe and affordable fertility programmes to poor regions where (alleged) infertility causes women to be cast out.

As part of the *Cosmopolitan Chicken Research Project*, Jean-Jacques

Cassiman, head of the Center for Human Genetics at the University of Leuven, and other researchers study the scientific implications of Vanmechelen's chicken breeding program.

The third foundation, Cosmogolem, centres on a large, wooden giant Vanmechelen built that travels the world so children can insert handwritten messages. Based on his design, organisations around the world create wooden giants who symbolically protect children by collecting their stories of hope and fear. Vanmechelen

aligns himself with the famous Flemish child psychiatrist Peter Adriaenssens and Flemish nun Jeanne Devos, founder of India's National Domestic Workers Movement, to support children's rights internationally.

Hotel de Inmigrantes will travel the world, too, to one day arrive at Buenos Aires. Uruguay will probably host the next phase. Each new location will inspire new art, new possibilities and new mutations.

► www.koenvanmechelen.be



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Keep on trying

Late breakthrough “I’m a Bird” for singer and musician Marco Z

Christophe Verbiest

The day he turns 33, Marco Zanettion picks me up at the station of his hometown of Hasselt. I expect him to be mobbed by his fans, or at least be chased by some autograph hunters. *Quod non*. Even during our 10 minutes walk to a coffee house, the Flemish musical sensation of 2012 is left alone. This is the man who, as Marco Z, had the crossover success of the year. His single “I’m a Bird” was a hot tune on nearly every Flemish radio station.

“Of course I can still walk the streets of Hasselt in peace,” he explains with a big smile. “I’m not a celebrity, you won’t see me in game shows on television, for instance.” Which is fine with him. “It’s not my ambition to become famous; I just want my music to be heard by as much people as possible.” That music is on *The Ordinary Life of Marco Z*, his first album.

Zanettion (pictured), a tall, laidback, soft-spoken guy of Italian descent, still works for Toutpartout, a booking agency that sets up European tours for a wide variety of artists. Due to his recent success, he finds himself at a crossroads. “I have to choose between music and my job because I feel I’ve reached a point where I can’t combine both.”

The choice is not surprising. “I’ve decided to fully commit to music,” he says. “I want to grab the opportunity. But I’m a realist, too. If my success stays limited to Flanders, it might be necessary go back to a day job.”

He’s even open to writing songs for other musicians. “Writing songs lies the closest to my heart,” he says. “I’m more a songwriter than a recording and performing’ artist. And I’d love to write for other people. Having a hit like ‘I’m a Bird’ might help to open some doors.” But for the moment this is still a dream.

He writes the songs

Norma, Superbox, The She, Marco Z and The Cosmopolitan Cowboys and the Berriegordies – the list of bands in which Zanettion has played seems endless. *The*



© Dries Segers

Ordinary Life of Marco Z is his first solo outing. Was he tired of playing in a band? “No, I still like it. But I was fed up with investing time and energy in the decision making process. The band as a fake democracy, I call it. I often was thinking: ‘Damn, I’m writing the songs; I want to decide how they sound!’ Yet I was hesitant to force my ideas on the other members because I knew everyone invested a lot of time in the band.” The musician acknowledges that quite a lot of songs of *The Ordinary Life of Marco Z* are inspired by his own life. Does it mean he’s serving us a slice of self-criticism when he sings, in the fast-moving, poppy

“I’m a Bird”: “oh, the times I’ve wasted, making plans with my latest brand of indie rock”? “I wouldn’t call it self-criticism,” he responds. “It’s just an observation. I have wasted a lot of time by sitting at home and writing songs, while the world kept on turning.” After pondering for a moment, he adds: “Maybe my life could have gone differently.” And with a smile: “That feeling is predominant on the album. But I don’t blame myself for it.”

With a dash of Italy

With some of his previous bands, Zanettion used to play guitar rock, whereas his solo debut clearly is

more pop orientated. “The bands I liked as a teenager, for instance – Dinosaur Jr or The Lemonheads – were rooted in the American hardcore scene of the end of the 1970s, but they also loved pop songs: They were raised on The Beatles and other conveyors of sparkling melodies,” he says “I’m raised, thanks to my parents, on a diet of Italian music from the 1960s to 1980s – songs with a strong melodic feel. In the guitar bands I liked in my youth, I recognised the same sensibilities as in those Italian songs, but in a, say, updated, rougher version.”

That roughness isn’t present on *The Ordinary Life of Marco Z*. “It still is in the lyrics,” he counters. “But indeed not in the music. A decade ago, I was dying to emulate the sounds of the bands I admired, but I’ve refrained from that. I think plugging in an electric guitar and rocking out is still cool, but nowadays I’m more inclined to other sounds. Probably because my influences have broadened.” In “This Ain’t the Town” the Birdman muses: “*This ain’t the town for rocking too loud / This is the town I’m gonna leave*”. Hasselt? Laughingly: “Yep, and here I still am. But that was a snapshot. Of course the ambition to explore the world resurges now and again. But the fact is: I’m happy here.”

Marco Z has been signed by Universal, the world’s biggest record company. The single “I’m a Bird” has been released in a few European countries, but the album only in Belgium and the Netherlands. “The single didn’t do badly abroad, but it hasn’t equalled the Belgian success. This summer I’m still focusing on festivals in Belgium and afterwards we’ll put some more energy in working on an international career. That’s fine with me; I’m not in a hurry.”

Marco Z plays Markrock in Leuven on 11 August. For more dates, visit the website

▶ www.marco-z.com

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

The committee for Brussels’ annual **Balloon’s Day Parade** is looking for volunteers for the event that takes place on Saturday, 8 September. People are needed to hold and guide the giant balloons in the shape of cartoon characters during the parade and need to be available from 13.00 to 18.00. Every volunteer receives €25. For more information, email yellow@beegroupe.be or call 02.741.63.20.

▶ www.stripfeest.be

One of the main attractions of **TRACK**, Ghent’s summer art parcours has to be **removed permanently after vandals damaged it** for the second time. Turkish artist Ahmet Öğü’s “The Caste of Vooruit”, a giant air balloon based on Magritte’s “Le Chateau des Pyrénées”, was floating near the Vooruit arts centre above the Waalse Krook area on the canal. In May, someone shot at the balloon, bringing it down. In early June, a storm set the balloon free, and it eventually landed nearby. Last week the balloon again had a man-made hole in it. The organisation has already had to send the balloon to England twice for repair and doesn’t have the budget to do it again. “Of course we find it terribly unfortunate that the balloon can no longer be exhibited, and the artist is disappointed, too,” said Aline Julia, with the city’s department of public activities. “The balloon was one of the most recognised images of the exhibition, but, fortunately, there are many other works that are very popular with the public.”

▶ www.track.be

Brussels’ popular outdoor film and concert festival **PleinOPENair** was forced to move its two weekends of programming after the communes of Anderlecht and Sint-Gillis called a halt to the location two days before the opening. Nova Cinema, which organises the annual event, had permission from the owner of the Victor terrain near South Station to use the property for the entire festival, but the communes were apparently not aware of the plan and were concerned about safety. “There was no consideration given to the safety measures that our organisation had already taken, regardless of the fact that we have staged this for 15 years now in a number of abandoned sites without one single safety incident,” read a press release from Cinema Nova. The first weekend had to be moved into the cinema, and the second was staged in both Vooruitgangstraat and Ursulinenplein.

▶ www.nova-cinema.org

MUSIC REVIEWS

Various Artists

Braakland/Zhebiling 2004 - 2012

For more than a decade, Braakland/Zhebiling (BZB) has been staging cutting edge music theatre. That’s something completely different from a musical, as this compilation of songs from the past eight years proves. The Leuven-based group has five key musicians (Ephraïm Cielen, Rudy Trouvé, Gerrit Valckenaers, Youri Van Uffelen and Geert Waegeman), though they regularly get the help of other musicians or actors. The album,

with 19 songs from as many theatre pieces, is very diverse: from doo wop to jazz, from intricate rock to pulsating electronic and from fragile lullabies to a haunting folk tune.

▶ www.braakland.be

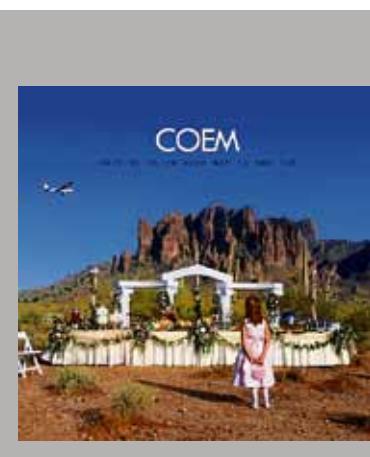
COEM

Wave to Us on Your Way to the Top

Four years after their last album, Limburg band COEM (short for Coin Operated Entertainment Machine) strikes again with their most jazzy album so far. But don’t

get me wrong: at their foundation, COEM remains a rock group. One that alternately sounds threatening and charming, that likes to hide little noises just beneath the surface of the songs and that, in one track, surprisingly and ruthlessly lashes out. Remarkable: *Wave to Us on Your Way to the Top* is only available in vinyl and as a download, but not as a CD. The future will tell us if they’re trendsetting. As for now, I’m going to throw another coin in that machine.

▶ www.coem.be



Black and blue Raul Corredor

Marie Dumont

If it's got black sounds in it, it's got *duende*," the poet Federico Garcia Lorca once wrote about that quintessentially Spanish mix of searing grief and trance-like inspiration that many regard as the defining spirit of flamenco.

Expect plenty of blackness, therefore, as well as a few blue notes at Raul Corredor's two concerts next week, which take place in Brussels and Leuven as part of the Midis-Minimes and Zomer Van Sint-Pieter lunchtime concert series.

Corredor, 29, is an Andalusian guitarist who was born in Murcia and grew up in Granada. He is sometimes called the "new blood of flamenco" because of the jazzy strains with which he infuses his playing, but he is quick to deflect any claim to novelty. Flamenco, he says, is a constantly evolving art form. It is as intensely alive as it is rooted in tradition – and

many people, back home, have been tampering with it for years, starting with his own father, a flamenco singer who doubles as a jazz pianist.

"I can't say I've invented anything new," he tells me, blaming us northern Europeans for our clichéd view of the genre. "People go to Spain on holiday and come back with these visions of frills and castanets. But that's got nothing to do with the kind of flamenco that's played today in Andalusia. We've moved on."

The link between jazz and flamenco, he says, runs deep. "Both use improvisation, albeit in different ways," Corredor (*centre in photo*) points out. "Both sound best and purest when played in a family setting or among friends. And both stem from the margins of society. It's like two people saying the same thing, expressing the same emotions, but in different languages."

Corredor moved to Brussels two years ago, hoping to find more artistic freedom here than he did back in Andalusia, where he felt burdened by the weight of tradition. He hasn't been disappointed. "There's more variety here," he says, "and the jazz scene is excellent. In Spain, or at least in Granada, it's not so easy to innovate, or find other influences. Or to run a project, for that matter." When he's not teaching at Brussels Centro Galego or at Antwerp's Jazz Studio, Corredor plays in small local venues in quartet and quintet formations. His concerts are sparse and intense affairs, without a castanet in sight. "There is a word in Spanish, *ausencia*, that doesn't easily translate. It's not absence – more like silence," he ventures. "Silence brings things out. When it is broken by a voice or by percussion, it means something. We don't use all the instruments at the same



time. That's never good for music." Traditional instruments such as guitars and *palmas* (hand-clapping) feature alongside bolder ones, such as an electric bass. And, to irk purists even more, some of his musicians are Belgian. "Of course

you don't need to be Spanish to play flamenco," Corredor argues. "It's not easy music, that's true, but it can be learned if one is ready to work hard enough. There's nothing mysterious about it." New blood, indeed.

13 August | Brussels | www.midis-minimes.be

14 August | Leuven | www.zomer-van-sint-pieter.be

FOOD & DRINK

Wijnfeesten Kemmel

Heuvelland's rolling hills, festooned with vineyards, provide the perfect scenery for Kemmel's annual wine festival. Once a year, local producers come together in the West Flemish town's Warandepark to show off their goods. Visitors are invited to stroll through the stands, tasting different varieties and meeting the winemakers. The neighbouring Warande Castle provides entertainment for the kids. This year's edition forms an integral part of Vintage Heuvelland, a summer-long programme promoting culture, gastronomy and tourism in the region. This is serious stuff – there's even an iPhone app for it. Festival-goers can take an exclusive bus tour down the Vintage Heuvelland route, a newly inaugurated network of automobile, bicycle and pedestrian paths through the West Flemish Hills and their vineyards (reservation required). **Georgio Valentino**



15 August, from 13.30 | Warandepark, Bergstraat, Kemmel

www.heuvelland.be

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Brussels

Mmmmh! Brunch: Sunday brunch with a twist. This one begins as a culinary workshop and ends as a tasty buffet.

12 AUG 11.00-13.00 at Mmmmh!, Charleroisteenweg 92

www.mmmmh.be

West Flanders

Picnic on the Farm: Enjoy a picnic at a West Flemish farm of your choice. Fresh sandwiches and artisanal products included.

Until OCT 31 across West Flanders

www.westvlaamsescheldestreek.be

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Jazzenede

Jazz music has an unfair reputation for esoterism. Yes, the genre was pioneered by musicians who, in revolt against the simplistic popular music of their day, sought to create more sophisticated, often improvisational forms. The folks behind Jazzenede wanted to prove that jazz isn't just for trainspotters. For six years now, this free festival – held in the centre of Assenede, East Flanders, has presented jazz, blues and roots music in an accessible, communal setting. This year's big names include London's Neil Cowley Trio and our own Philip Catherine Trio. The former represent the younger crop of jazz players, oriented towards contemporary values, while the latter represents the old school at its finest. Indeed, the esteemed Anglo-Belgian guitarist Philip Catherine began his long career back in the Swinging '60s. As a teenager, he toured with Lou Bennett and Stéphane Grappelli. Such was (and still is) Catherine's technical skill that comparisons to Django Reinhardt were frequent and not unjustified. Fledgling jazz cats are also given a platform via the Jong Talent jazz contest. Six finalists perform for the consideration of the public and a jury of jazz connoisseurs. Opening night also features a comedy programme with Joost Van Hyfte, Koen Rijsbrack and Ygor. A nearby campsite completes the summer festival experience. **gv**



8-12 August | Kloosterstraat 2, Assenede | www.jazzenede.be

MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

Palm Parkies: Flemish brewery Palm gives its name to an itinerant music festival with an eclectic line-up of pop, rock, soul, jazz and more

Until AUG 23 across Flanders

www.parkies.net

Bruges

Klinkers: Bruges' eclectic music festival is in its final days and has saved its best for last. Gavin Friday and Spain are among the home-stretch heroes

Until AUG 11 across Bruges

www.klinkers-brugge.be

Sint-Gillis-Waas (East Flanders)

Drieske Kerremes: This international folk music and dance festival is held every five years in the centre of town. This year's edition hosts artists from Croatia, Finland, Romania, Georgia and Spain

AUG 8-13 at Kerkplein

www.drieskenijpers.be

PERFORMANCE

Theater op de Markt

Hasselt, the capital of Flanders' eastern-most province, has led the effort of the last decades to boost culture and tourism in Limburg, and this festival is a big part of that effort. Now in its 15th year, it showcases street theatre, circus and contemporary performance in dozens of spaces across the city. Some of the venues are obvious spots like the Grote Markt and Stadspark, but others – like parking lots and residential streets – are more unexpected. The performances themselves are similarly varied. As the festival grew over the years, its organisers have consciously maintained a balance between the popular and the experimental. What is different about this year's edition is its international scope. While diversity has always been an important principle, this year's programme is the most worldly ever. British jugglers, French acrobats, Hungarian street artists and Spanish clowns will rub shoulders in Hasselt's public spaces. **GV**



9-12 August

Across Hasselt

► www.theateropdemarkt.be

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Cinderella: Antwerp dance company Let's Go Urban updates the classic story with modern music and moves. This free performance is part of Zomer van Antwerpen

Until AUG 12 20.00 at Sloepenweg

► www.zomervanantwerpen.be

Brussels

Guignolet in het Park: The kids will love this summer-long festival of marionette theatre in the heart of Brussels

Until SEP 2 in Warendepark

► www.guignoletdansleparc.be

Wijnendale (West Flanders)

Ka-dans: Tiny Wijnendale's annual world dance festival, featuring performers from all around the world

AUG 10-16 at Wijnendale town centre

► www.ka-dans.be

SPECIAL EVENT

DOK Beach

Ghent's canal-side DOK complex is the upshot of a massive urban renewal project that has transformed the city's neglected Oude Dokken site into a vibrant cultural venue. The project is only temporary, but it's conceived as the first stage in an overhaul of the entire neighbourhood. In the meantime, artists, promoters, organisations and corporate brands are taking advantage of DOK's outdoor and indoor spaces to put on a variety of events. One of the most genius is the summertime DOKstrand, an artificial beach open to the public daily (except Mondays) with concerts, open-air film screenings, food and drink. It's the perfect spot for a pre-Assumption Day party, for instance, as several local DJs lay down the soundtrack. Relax on the sand or dance away until the wee hours of the morning. Also coming up, Nick Cave tribute band Nicodaemon & the Misunderstood Vikings and a screening of the Coen brothers' True Grit. Best of all, admission to DOKstrand is always free. **GV**

Until 30 September | Koopvaardijlaan, Ghent | ► www.dokgent.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Hasselt

Hasselt Danst: Every Tuesday night in August, Hasselt's Grote Markt becomes a dance floor. Free instruction is followed by hands-on exercise

AUG 14 19.00-22.00 at Grote Markt

► www.feestcomitehasselt.be

Westerlo (Antwerp province)

International Folklore Festival: Westerlo's annual showcase of world cultures

AUG 11, 12 & 14 at Jeanne de Merode Castle, Boerenkrijglaan 61

► www.diespelewei.be

Zeebrugge

Seafront: The Old Fish Market of Zeebrugge has been transformed into a maritime theme park complete with authentic ships, including a Cold War-era Soviet submarine. Seafront also features an educational exhibition about the fishing industry

Vismijnstraat 7

► www.seafront.be

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Electrocity

10 August, from 16.00
Kunstberg, Brussels

Brussels Summer Festival is taking over the capital's museum quarter with loads of music and merriment from 10 to 18 August. Paleizenplein, Kunstberg and the Magic Mirrors tent on Museumplein will be scenes for daily performances and gigs.

The first day of the festival starts with a bang: Electrocity. It's the first edition of this open-air party on the Kunstberg and boasts an excellent all-Belgian line-up. Dr Lectroluv will be there, as well as Sound of Stereo and The Party Harders.

You can make your way to the site right after work because the party starts at 16.00 with the electro beats of Jelly Bellies & The Klaxx.

Raving George is up next, at 17.00, and you'd do well to make sure you're there to watch this Ghent-based maestro at work. Her mottos are "unfasten your seatbelts" and "rave is the lifestyle you need", so don't say I didn't warn you.

DJ Tonic (from The Subbs) will be behind the decks around 18.00, followed by Montevideo. The Party Harders from Ghent take you into the evening, followed by The Oddword (from Antwerp) and Yves V, famous from his performances at Tomorrowland. According to Electrocity organisers, he's a DJ you have to see at least once in your life.

Around 23.00, it will be completely dark outside for the big show of Sound of Stereo. The duo from Brussels have played parties from America to Australia and are eager to perform in their hometown. The last one to mount the stage is Dr Lektrolove, also known as the Man with the Green Mask. Top night guaranteed! Tickets are €12.25 in advance from www.sherpa.be.



www.bsf.be

BITE

Taste of Antwerp

John Dory fish, soft-shell crab tempura, *al dente* summer vegetables, wasabi and sake ice cream; crispy pork's neck with mimosa, garlic, young lettuce and grain mustard; veal entrecote, goose liver flan, miso sauce and artichoke barigoule; trio of cheeses from cheese masters Michel Van Tricht & Son with paired specialty beers from Duvel-Moortgat; Belgian chocolate cake with a sweet-sour raspberry, cherry and cola topping... and these are just the tip of the iceberg.

"De Chéfs" all-in arrangement at this sixth edition of Antwerpen Proeft (Taste of Antwerp) gives you the above-mentioned multi-course meal prepared by star chefs, including Viki Geunes of two Michelin-star restaurant 'Zilte (inside Museum aan de Stroom) for the democratic price of €168 per person. But you also get aperitifs, paired wines, after-dinner drinks, a copy of the new Gault&Millau Antwerp City Guide and access to the stylish lounge following the 3.5 hours of gastronomic pampering. Last year this arrangement sold out, so it's best to reserve as soon as possible.

Rather feel like showing up and just tasting as you go? Come to Antwerp's trendy Zuid neighbourhood, where Vlaamse Kaai and Waalse Kaai host 35 restaurants, bistros and star chefs, all offering tastes of their finest creations. Antwerp's international culinary prowess will be on display from a wide variety of participants, from sushi

chefs to cupcake bakers and from Southeast Asian cooks to Australian wine specialists.

Antwerpen Proeft is outdoors, and there is no entry fee. You pay for drinks and food with coupons that you buy on-site, with plenty of dishes costing between €3 and €6. And, just like every year, Taste of Antwerp shares the spotlight with the city's favourite beer festival: Bollekessfeest, named after the local "Bolleke", or De Koninck beer. Entertainment throughout the weekend is provided by local musicians like School is Cool, Axl Peleman, Nathalie Meskens and Radio Muzak. For a more intimate concert or to kick your heels up, head to the nearby Museumpark to hear bands playing from inside the De Koninck caravan.

► www.antwerpenproeft.be



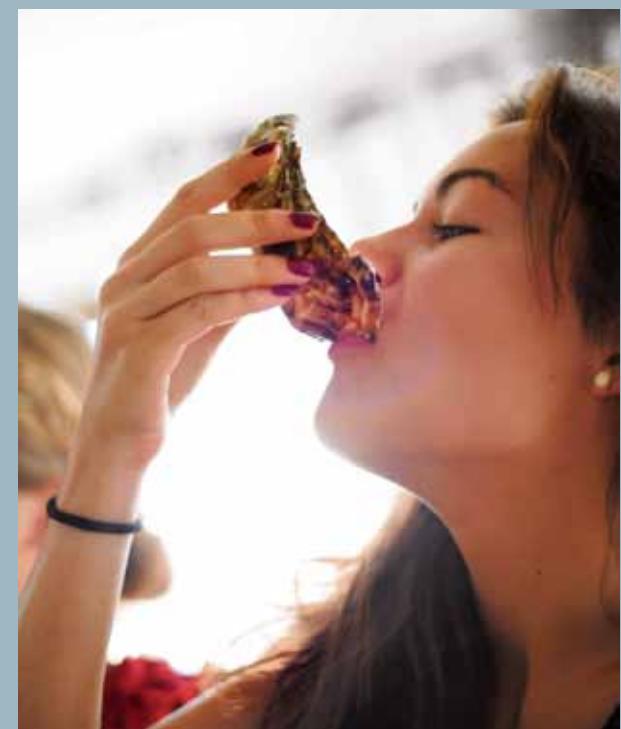
Vlaamse Kaai and Waalse Kaai



16-19 August



Antwerp's biggest culinary festival featuring tastings of local specialties and a unique all-in gastronomic arrangement



TALKING SPORTS

Flanders wins first medal in London

The London Olympics have already produced innumerable iconic moments, firing the emotions of even the most casual fans around the world. As Flanders Today went to press, one involved a Flemish sports star: Evi Van Acker, the 26-year-old sailor from Lochristi, clinched the bronze medal in the Laser Radial sailing.

Van Acker, who is the current world number two, had been in the lead after the eighth day of racing. By the morning of the 11th – and final – medal regatta off the coast of Weymouth, she had slipped to fourth place but managed to claw her way back into a medal position by the end of the final race.

Also as Flanders Today went to press, the Borlée twins from Brussels were preparing to run the 400m finals, scheduled for late Monday. Jonathan Borlée ran the fastest heat, winning in 44.43, and also nicked Belgium's national record from his brother, Kevin.

The achievement took its toll, though: He awoke the next day with leg pain, which could affect his performance in the finals. Most of the Flemish hopefuls at this Olympics have underperformed so far. The most recognisable star on the Belgian Olympic team, Kim Clijsters, was knocked out of the singles tennis quarter-finals by world number three, Maria Sharapova.

In the cycling road race, Jürgen Roelandts finished in seventh place, with Philippe Gilbert 19th and Tom Boonen 28th.

In hockey, Belgium's men's and women's teams were both competing in their first Olympics, but, while they did not disgrace themselves, they could not elevate themselves to the same level as the game's aristocracy.

Notable performances during the first week included Belgium reaching a swimming relay final for the first time ever when the men qualified in the 4x100m freestyle (where they took eighth

and last place); Ilse Heylen narrowly losing out on a bronze medal in the women's under 52 kg judo; and Liesbeth De Vocht taking ninth place in the women's road race. Meanwhile, Belgium's accomplished riding contingent disappointed in London, with the show jumping team finishing 13th out of the 15 countries competing. But there is still time for the Flemish hopefuls to make their mark. Fans may recall that it was at this stage four years ago in Beijing that the women's sprint relay roared in second to claim silver, and Tia Hellebaut snatched a gold medal in the high jump. After that gold, Hellebaut announced her retirement, but she returned to the sport and is competing in London with an outside chance of repeating her golden victory. She and others may yet bring back the goods in the days that remain. Across Flanders – and Belgium – millions are crossing their fingers for another late surge in London.

Leo Cendrowicz

The last word...

Dish of the day

"He's got enormous X-factor. Very charismatic and unbelievably friendly, even when he was exhausted. But it's the eyes that do it. He has phenomenally beautiful eyes."

Jimmy Samijn of Flemish boy band Get Ready! had a chance to admire more than just the cooking skills of top chef Wout Bru when he took part in the TV show *Masterchef*

Fight club

"I have appeared in court with a black eye before. That makes them sit up and pay attention, especially when I explain where it came from." Flemish lawyer Thomas Vandemeulebroecke is a tough defender of his clients by day, and a cage fighter in his spare time

Rock rock, 'til you drop

"This is such a small country with not much space, and yet every day there's a festival somewhere." Isabell Schmid from Germany won an international competition organised by Tourisme Vlaanderen to visit all of the region's festival

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Over in little Maldegem, East Flanders, is one of the region's best-kept historical secrets: the Stoomcentrum, or Steam Centre, a museum of steam locomotives. Hobbyists have also bought up abandoned train stops in the area and run a tourist train on the old lines to Bruges and Ghent. We'll tell you about the place, which veritably breathes 19th-century history

Sports

Flanders finally has an Olympic medal; will there be more? We'll be ready next week with our post-Olympic round-up: who won, who didn't and why

Arts

Imagine you are wandering around the countryside, minding your own business, when suddenly you see artists performing next to wheat fields and village churches. That would be Sideways, a nomadic arts festival that is about to head across the region, surprising passers-by with on-site performances, storytelling and more

