

Job students wanted

More efforts being made to bring secondary students and employers together

► 5



We are open

This weekend's Open Monument Day will find half a million people poking around Flanders' heritage sites

► 8

Seeing life through

Workers at Blankenberge's Sea Life Centre nurse animals back to health, while educating the public

► 9



The grain chain

As the price of cereals increases worldwide, what is the impact on consumers in Flanders?

Alan Hope

Rising prices on world grain markets are good news for one type of farmer in Flanders, but bad news for others. For consumers, too, the forecasts are mixed: The price of some foods will stay the same, while others will go up – and not necessarily the ones you'd expect. We investigate the grain chain – and how the weather in the American Midwest affects the cost of your shopping basket right here

Flanders' cereal farmers can expect to receive high prices for their harvests this year, due to circumstances far, far away. According to the United Nations Food

and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the grain prices index this summer is up 23% for corn, thanks to a long period of drought in the United States, the world's largest producer, which also has a huge demand.

At the same time, the FAO index for wheat is up 19%, thanks to the Russians – also a major producer – revising harvest forecasts downwards; reduced harvests in Australia, India and Ukraine; and the continuing growth in demand from India and China. There's also more demand worldwide for wheat as a direct result of the failure of the corn crop.

The only trouble is that cereals account for only about one-quarter of the arable land in Flanders and about 10%

of incomes, according to Piet Vanthemsche, director of the farmers' union Boerenbond. And while the producers of wheat, barley and corn may be rejoicing, the rest of Flanders' farmers have less to be happy about.

Supply and demand

Flanders doesn't produce enough cereals to feed itself, explains François Huyghe, an economic adviser at Boerenbond. "The quantities we consume are much larger than the amounts we produce, partly as a result of our livestock sector. We have a lot of livestock farming, so we're obliged to import grain for animal feed."

FACE OF FLANDERS

Leo Cendrowicz

Kim Clijsters



In the end, it was a chastening farewell for Kim Clijsters at the Arthur Ashe Stadium. More than a decade after she rocketed to tennis’ summit, Clijsters walked off the court, and out of women’s tennis, last week when she was beaten by 18-year-old Laura Robson from Britain in the second round of the US Open. Clijsters leaves the game with four Grand Slam titles and 20 weeks ranked No1, most recently in February 2011. This will be the second time the Flemish tennis star retires: already with a US Open title to her name, Clijsters walked away in 2007 but returned after having a baby. She then stunned the tennis world by winning the US Open in 2009, a tournament she won again in 2010. Earlier this year, she announced her last competitive event would be the US Open. Certainly, she didn’t expect it to end in the second round, but knowing the end was coming one way or another, she said there were no regrets. “Since I retired the first time, it’s been a great adventure for my team and my family,” she said. Her last defeat at Flushing Meadows came against Belgian rival Justine Henin on September 6, 2003, in the tournament final. Robson was nine years old at the time. When the match was over this year, one reporter asked the British player: “Do you feel like the girl that shot Bambi?” Though it wasn’t quite over yet. Clijsters and Kirsten Flipkens lost in the first round of women’s doubles last Thursday. And in the mixed doubles, on Saturday, she and Bob Bryan lost in the second round, roared on by the 2,800-strong Court 17 crowd, including Clijsters’ husband Brian Lynch and their four-year-old daughter, Jada. It was then that Clijsters hit her last shot as a pro tennis player, into the net. She was still given a standing ovation as she addressed the crowd afterwards. “It’s been an honour to be a part of this lifestyle and have so many dreams come true,” she said. Now 29, the Limburger departs the game for what is almost certainly for good. “It’s all been worth it,” she said. “But I’m looking forward to the next part of my life.”

http://sport.be.msn.com/kimclijsters

News in brief

Five minors have been arrested following an **attack on a De Lijn bus driver** in Zwijndrecht, East Flanders, last week, which led to a lightning strike in the Waasland area. The driver was beaten into unconsciousness when he tried to quiet the youths, who were disturbing other passengers. Police tracked down the suspects with the aid of security camera footage.

The organisation Vlamingen in de Wereld, or Flemings in the World, is looking for **Flemings who live or have lived abroad** to help carry out research into their integration in foreign lands and their re-integration on their return to Flanders. Interviews with participants will be conducted by researchers at Ghent University this autumn and winter. Interviews can be done anonymously.

www.viww.be

TV station VTM has begun providing **subtitles in Dutch for all news broadcasts**, including election coverage. The change is aimed at the 800,000 people in Flanders with hearing difficulties, as well as non-native speakers. Subtitles are available on VTM Text page 888.

Most of the civil servants working for the Brussels Capital Region government are now eligible to **request to begin tele-working**, minister for public services Bruno De Lille announced. “It is more important to do the job properly than to turn up at the office,” he said. Exceptions will be made for those jobs which cannot be done offsite, such as cleaning and reception.

The driver of the **bus that crashed in Switzerland in March** had a heart defect, Swiss authorities announced last week. Geert Michiels, 34, was

among the 28 dead in the crash. Swiss investigators said an autopsy confirmed he had not been under the influence of drink or drugs and, although the heart defect could cause a heart attack, there is no evidence to suggest that is what happened. According to his widow, Michiels was unaware of any heart condition.

The prosecutor’s office in Brussels is to begin an investigation into continued **discounts offered by the Colruyt supermarket chain on tobacco products**, which are forbidden by law. Colruyt has been fined for this offence once, but refuses to pay the fine. According to the company, the imposition of minimum prices is in conflict with European law. Meanwhile Aldi and Makro also offer discounts on tobacco products.

A group of amateur heritage hunters have discovered a **German U-boat dating back to the First World War**, buried in the sea bed at the Port of Zeebrugge. The submarine will now be excavated and put on show in Bruges in time for the First World War centenary commemorations in 2014. U-boats were used during the war to attack British shipping in the Channel and the North Sea.

Two 19-year-olds who **lured gay men to meetings before robbing and beating them** were last week sentenced by a court in Antwerp to four and two years in prison, each with one year suspended. The pair said they targeted gays because they were less likely to report the attacks to police. However, six victims did, one of whom had been stabbed several times.

Air quality in city avenues lined with trees is worse than on streets with no trees, according to research

published last week by the Flemish institute VITO. Tree leaves retain exhaust gases containing fine particulates, allowing them to remain in the air for longer. Trees in parks, squares and smaller streets, on the other hand, get more wind and do not retain gases. Tree-lined avenues, VITO said, do have a cooling effect, act against noise pollution and have a positive psychological effect on residents, improving social cohesion

Before the summer holidays were officially over, the **first Christmas decorations of the season were spotted** – in the Florilux garden and interior centre in Dadizele, West Flanders. “A lot of customers want to be the first to get the prettiest decorations,” manager Kris Carrein explained. Trends for the coming season feature pastel purple and pale pink, according to the store.

Hoeilaart in Flemish Brabant is **offering 16 plots of building land** at the attractive price of €150 per square metre, with preference given to young families who live in the town and to Dutch speakers. The plots will be allocated on a points basis, with extra points given to families with children at a Dutch-speaking school or crèche. Points will also be awarded according to age, income and length of residence in Hoeilaart.

Animal park Planckendael in Mechelen last week celebrated the **birth of the first red panda (Ailurus fulgens)** in its history. The baby panda, named Nangwa, was born two months ago, but the announcement was delayed. The red panda is native to Asia and is included on the CITES list of vulnerable species in the wild. About the size of a house cat, it is not closely related to the giant panda, though it does share its taste for bamboo.

FLANDERS TODAY

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EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw
DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper
NEWS EDITOR Alan Hope
AGENDA EDITOR Robyn Boyle
ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren
PREPRESS Corelio AdPro
CONTRIBUTORS Daan Bauwens, Rebecca Benoot, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz, Sabine Clappaert, Katy Desmond, PM Doutreligne, Nicholas Hirst, Stéphanie Duval, Andy Furniere, Toon Lambrechts, Katrien Lindemans, Marc Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Tom Peeters, Marcel Schoeters, Georgio Valentino, Christophe Verbiest, Denzil Walton
GENERAL MANAGER Hans De Loore
PUBLISHER Corelio Publishing NV

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

FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS
subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu
or sign up online at www.flanderstoday.eu

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

VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER
Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

The bare necessities

Men these days could find themselves refused entry to the city of Ostend if they don’t, in the words of alderwoman Martine Lesaffre, “for Pete’s sake, put on a T-shirt”. The problem, according to Lesaffre, is that there are altogether too many men going from the beach into town, exposing everyone to the sight of “pallid, tattooed, saggy, oil-smeared excuses for male bodies” in the shops and cafés. And it’s not only men. “Women as well as men feel themselves free these days to go shopping or sit on a terrace half naked. Ostend is a delightful shopping city on the coast, but what good is that to anyone if the street view is destroyed by people wandering around topless?” The alderwoman claims to remember a time in her childhood when children could be reprimanded by a policeman if they

were caught going around without a T-shirt away from the sands. “Don’t get me wrong,” she explains. “I have nothing against someone in swimming trunks crossing the seafront to buy an ice cream, but the same thing in the centre of town is another matter.” The rule is not as odd as it may seem. Just up the coast in Knokke-Heist, such a law has existed for 20 years. “We don’t hand out fines for those who don’t comply,” says mayor Leopold Lippens, “but the police will waste no time in having a word with you.” Ostend isn’t planning on fines, either, though one option for next summer is being considered: keeping a stock of T-shirts handy for gentlemen who find themselves caught short. “It’s not that I’m prudish, but we’ve gone too far when it comes to what’s acceptable in our society,” Lesaffre said.



Leave it on the beach, folks

The grain chain

From cat food to ketchup, most of the food industry is affected by the rise in grain prices

▶ continued from page 1

Corn makes up a large part of that animal feed. “We have some corn production in Flanders,” explains Huyghe, “but the kind that grows here is only good for silage.” Silage is the transformation of corn – kernels, leaves and all – into animal fodder.

“We produce very little corn for human consumption,” continues Huyghe, “compared to France, for example. That’s a question of climate: Corn is a tropical plant that can grow in the south of France, whereas here the harvest takes place in November, so you have a great deal of uncertainty because of winter weather or fungus.”

Pigs – of which Flanders has nearly 5.9 million, accounting for one-quarter of all agricultural income – depend heavily on corn and other grains. Unlike cows – of which Flanders has 1.3 million raised for meat and 294,000 for milk – pigs don’t graze and so are raised almost entirely with feed, which consists of 70% grain. Poultry, likewise, depends on grain for sustenance.

Absorbing the cost

All of those farmers are now going to be paying more for their animal feed than before and without the possibility of passing along the higher costs to the consumer. One reason is the nature of livestock farming, says Huyghe. “Take pig farmers, for example. They have to feed their pigs today – pigs of 50kg for instance – so the costs increase, but those pigs won’t be slaughtered until they weigh 100kg. So it’s only after some time has passed that the costs can be passed on. The problem, of course, is that the pig production sector is already having a hard time getting prices that cover production costs.” The thousands of small, independent farmers in Flanders don’t have the muscle of major distribution chains, like supermarkets. Retailers want to be able to offer cheap meat to their customers and have succeeded in pushing down the price they pay to farmers below the level at which they start making a profit – even before the rise in grain prices.



The price of beer, meat and bread are all subject to the fluctuations of the grain market



prices,” a spokesman for the pig farmer association VEVA said. Other protest actions targeted Lidl in Wevelgem, West Flanders.

So the price of meat is not likely to go up for consumers, Huyghe predicts. “In fact that’s what ought to happen, but it’s by no means certain it will, in the short term anyway, unfortunately.”

The corn effect

Corn is an ingredient in many more foodstuffs than you might think,

been described by American food author Michael Pollan as “the most successful plant on the planet”, the effect of the price increase on processed food is limited.

The same is even true for baked goods, where the relationship is more direct. The bakers’ federation was met with criticism when it announced a price increase of .05 to .10 a month per loaf as a result of the disappointing wheat harvest. “Grain makes up only a fraction of the cost price of bread,” says Huyghe. “There are also energy and wage costs. And we’ve seen how when grain prices go down, the price of bread stays the same.” The ABS, a farmers’ union independent of Boerenbond, claimed the bakers were using the wheat price as an excuse to raise prices. “It seems as if everyone but the farmer is able to pass rising costs on to the consumer,” commented director-general Hendrik Vandamme.

Barley and beer

Meanwhile, the price of beer is expected to go up by as much as 4% in September, when the time comes to start using the barley harvest, which was smaller and

of poorer quality because of heavy rain. Barley is also one of the products expected to be in demand because of the poor corn and wheat harvests. In March this year, rising grain prices were one of the reasons given for an increase in the cost of barley of 5.8%, along with salary costs and energy prices. The world’s biggest brewer, AB InBev in Leuven, is playing its cards close to its chest. “Because of our risk management/hedging policy, we do not expect a significant impact for AB InBev overall,” a spokesperson told *Flanders Today*. “However, the situation varies by geographic zone, and we continue to monitor things very closely.”

Veggies: the biggest increase?

In the short term, then, products that use cereals directly, like bread, beer and baked goods, as well as those that rely on grain indirectly, like meat and dairy products, are likely to see only measured increases in the price to consumers. Vegetables, however, are likely to increase in price more immediately. The reason is crop substitution.

“If grain prices are good, as they are at the moment, more grain will be sown in the later part of the year,” says Huyghe. “That means less area will be available for other crops, including potatoes and vegetables, so the prices of those crops will also go up.”

Farmers, in other words, will jump on the grain-price bandwagon by turning their fields over to cereals. “There are quite a few potato growers who have had disappointing returns in recent years, and they’re likely now to switch over to grain,” explains Huyghe.

Potato contract prices are determined around December, “and planting takes place in the spring – or not, as the case may be,” notes Huyghe. “But the sowing of grain takes place in the later part of the year – in October or November at the latest, so we’ll see very soon the extent to which grain production will increase, all over Europe as well as the US.”

▶ www.boerenbond.be

“The cost of meat ought to go up, but it’s by no means certain it will, unfortunately”

That led to grisly scenes in August last year when pig farmers protested against low prices by dumping severed pig heads at one of Delhaize’s distribution centres in Asse, Flemish Brabant. “These pig heads stand as a symbol of the heads of pig farmers, which will begin to roll thanks to the continuing pressure on meat

including in animal feed; starch; mayonnaise; high-fructose corn syrup in soft drinks and sweets; and as additives like lecithin, monosodium glutamate and citric acid in snacks and processed foods. Though corn is all but ubiquitous, it forms only a small part of the overall cost of production of such foodstuffs. So, although corn has

Back to school in Flanders

Pascal Smet prepares new career structure for teachers

Alan Hope

Monday was the first day back at school for 1.1 million children at 3,600 schools in Flanders. The new school year promises to be dominated by plans for reform of education in the region currently being discussed by education minister Pascal Smet. "The last three years I've been observing and preparing," Smet said. "Now I'm ready to take decisions, and, in the coming months, I want to cut through the knots. We can't get around the fact that our education system needs to be strengthened." Among the ideas being considered is the possibility for teachers coming into education from other fields being allowed to retain their seniority for the purposes of pay. Also, young teachers would have less time to wait before obtaining an indefinite contract. Both measures are designed to attract more people to the profession. Smet has promised a full proposal on the reform of teaching by the beginning of next year at the latest.

New international schools

Meanwhile, school started last Monday across Flanders. The new International School in Ghent welcomed its first 10 pupils – six in

pre-school and four in primary. The school is aimed at expat families and expects more students to arrive over the coming months. Most of those coming for the first time this week were living in the area of Ghent, with some from Kortrijk.

In Kraainem, the region's first trilingual school, offering classes in Dutch, French and English, has managed to attract only six students, and the school's management is now considering whether it will be possible to carry on.

In Leuven, Prince Filip delivered his younger son Emmanuel to the Eureka school in Kessel-Lo. The school is specialised in teaching children with learning difficulties like dyslexia and dyscalculia to prepare them for a return to mainstream schools. Prince Emmanuel was previously a pupil, like his brothers, sisters and cousins, at the Sint-Jan Berchmans college in Brussels.

In other school news, more than eight out of 10 secondary school students travel to school on foot, by bicycle or on public transport, according to a report just released by the Flemish Traffic Study Foundation. Only 11% of students are brought to school by car, with a



New pupils at the International School Ghent, with school head Sonja Van de Walle (left), Ghent education alderwoman Sofie Bracke (second from left) and the school's four teachers

further 4% driving themselves by car or moped.

The quality of mathematics education in Flanders, meanwhile, is below standard, according to retired Ghent University professor Raymond Boute. He particularly criticised the books teachers use. "Mathematics is based on precision,

and that's something that's nowhere to be found in these books," he told *De Morgen*. Maths classes in secondary schools do not get across complex abstract concepts, he said, or prepare students for higher education, where courses are much more theoretical.

Gordel to undergo change

Last weekend's Gordel attracted 29,500 participants, 14,000 fewer than last year and 50,000 fewer than in 2010. The event – a family-oriented walking and cycling circuit of the Flemish municipalities surrounding Brussels – will continue in another form in the future. The Gordel is a social and sporting event, as well as a statement that the cities surrounding Brussels are part of Flanders.

This year's event was marred by disputes in Sint-Genesius-Rode and Linkebeek. In the former, the local council, dominated by French-speaking parties, refused permission for the Gordel to start at its traditional spot, forcing organisers to move 850 metres down the road to Beersel. In Linkebeek,



© Nicolas Maeterlinck / BELGA

an order from the French-speaking mayor forbidding a walking route to cross the city was rescinded at the last moment.

Extra police were drafted in to cope with possible clashes, but no serious incidents were

reported. As usual, some sabotage occurred, with volunteers clearing cycle routes where nails had been strewn and restoring route indicators that had been turned in the wrong direction.

Martin released from prison

Michelle Martin, ex-wife and accomplice of serial killer Marc Dutroux, has been released from prison to live in a convent in Wallonia. Martin has served 16 years of a 30-year sentence. She will now serve the rest of her sentence in the convent, under strict conditions. She may not, for example, set foot in the provinces of Liège or Limburg, where the families of her victims live.

Martin was convicted in 2004 of acting as Dutroux's accomplice in the kidnapping of six young girls and in the murder of four of them. She is most associated with the deaths of two eight-year-olds, Julie Lejeune and Mélissa Russo, who she allowed to die of dehydration in an underground basement room while Dutroux was in prison on other charges.

"We knew there was no more to be done," commented Jean Lambrechts, father of 19-year-old victim Eefje, following the court's ruling confirming Martin's release. "The law, as it now stands, was enforced."

Paul Marchal is the father of Eefje's friend An, also a victim of Dutroux. "I have fought for 17 years, and now I'm going to let go of some of the emotions and think rationally about what I can do next," he commented.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

3,157

candidates took part in the second exam for admission to study medicine and dentistry at universities in Flanders last week in Kortrijk, a new record

1,450,000

new trees planted in Flanders since 2008, far above the target of one million, according to the forestry association BOS+. East Flanders accounted for the most at 38%

41%

of students who follow courses with the Flemish training network Syntra start their own business within five years, the organisation announced. Another 46% go on to work with a small business

€7,130

average annual cost to parents for rented accommodations for children in higher education, according to the centre for budget advice and research of the Catholic University College Kempen

6%

reduction in sales for bookshops in Flanders in the first half of the year, according to boek.be. The only exceptions were a new cookbook by TV chef Jeroen Meus and comic strips, whose sales went up 1.5%

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Pre-electoral sluggishness

In Ghent, the new Stadshal has opened, amidst plenty of controversy. Many other towns and cities also hold receptions for new sites and projects these days, finished in time for the local elections. This whirlwind of municipal activity stands in sharp contrast to the federal government's present state of near lethargy.

In spite of more security issues at the Tihange nuclear plant, the federal government is not in a hurry to make decisions on the future of nuclear energy in Belgium. Reassuring the population that there will be no electricity shortages and that safety is guaranteed – more should not be expected from Di Rupo I these days.

The same is true for any discussions on the budget. The governor of the National Bank has warned that Belgium is heading towards a new recession (causing Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters to accuse him of scaremongering). But the federal government is not planning budget talks any time soon.

The reason is the upcoming local elections. The Di Rupo government wants to present itself as one that stands united, cautiously avoiding any divisive issues. Any bickering now might result in less votes in October. So it is better to sit still and wait. This pre-electoral silence is one of the reasons why many politicians have pleaded for simultaneous elections. We have local elections every six years, regional and European elections every five years and federal elections every four years. This may leave entire governments paralysed for months on end, even if their own future is not at stake. Also, with compulsory voting and a growing aversion to politicians, elections are not popular.

Adversaries of simultaneous elections believe that each level of government has its own dynamics, which should be respected. Holding all elections on the same day would only confuse people about what is at stake. However, as the federal government's lack of vigour these days demonstrates, this spill-over happens anyway. And though parties that favour regional autonomy the most are also the ones who dislike the idea of simultaneous elections, N-VA is now turning the local elections into a referendum on Di Rupo.

In 2014, the regional, European and federal elections are held on the same day, as happens every so many years. The majority parties have agreed to have simultaneous elections from 2014 on, limiting sluggishness to a quinquennial phenomenon.

Figures drop for job students

On-the-job training benefits both secondary students and business

Alan Hope

Small businesses in Flanders are overwhelmingly in favour of the principle of workplace training for students and equally satisfied with the results, according to a survey carried out for Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed. Yet despite those positive impressions, the number of actual cases – in which students in secondary school spend time working as part of their education – has dropped by 21% in the past five years.

Unizo surveyed 358 mostly small businesses from the retail, food service, industrial production and other key sectors. No fewer than 93% of those surveyed confirmed the usefulness of this type of training, and 63% said they would be more likely to employ an applicant with this sort of experience. Only 60%, however, had offered workplace training.

The most common reason given for not offering such places to young people were too few employees and no time for supervision. Another reason seems to be a lack of information on how to take part and how to communicate job opportunities to students.

In more than half of cases, the students took the initiative to make contact with businesses. In 47% of cases, supply and demand were brought together by an education or



Two-thirds of Flemish employers would be more likely to hire a graduate with on-the-job experience

training establishment. Most of the students come from professional education (BSO) and technical schools (TSO), with only 12% coming from the general humanities-based secondary schools (ASO).

The fall in the numbers taking part

is, according to Unizo secretary-general Karel Van Eetvelt, “a pity, because this is a perfect method to find new and worthwhile employees. With the labour market as tight as it is, businesses cannot expect to stumble on exceptional

talents. Instead they need to take people with the right attitude and give them the chance to gain work experience.”

Unizo is now working to improve information on the availability of places and has called on the education minister to make room for practical, experience-based learning in his plans for reforming secondary education. The organisation also pressed for knowledge of labour markets and starting a business to be an integral part of not only secondary education but also higher education curriculums.

Job Student of the Year

The Job Student of the Year for 2012 is Niel Deckx from Antwerp, awarded the €1,250 prize last week for his “initiative, ambition and determination” in developing his own smartphone game Turtle Soup. Niel worked this summer for games company Webcomrades. “Niel is a very ambitious job student,” said Webcomrades boss Tom Claes. “He contributed knowledge we didn’t have ourselves. What more could you ask for? He could start work with us today except he has to go to Finland for six months to finish his Master’s in informatics. But we’ll certainly be keeping in contact.”

► www.unizo.be

Flemish parliament reconvenes to discuss National Bank

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters last week again criticised the governor of the National Bank, Luc Coene, over statements made in an interview last month with *De Tijd* warning that the country could face a recession by the end of the year. Peeters was speaking to the finance committee of the Flemish parliament, which had recalled its members early in order to discuss the question; normally, the summer recess ends on 25 September. The minister-president, who is also Flemish minister of the economy, pointed out that the Bank itself continued to predict growth of 1.2% for next year. “Boldly predicting a recession is in conflict with the official data given out by his institution,” Peeters told committee members. “If the chairman of a quoted company were to give out information that differed from an official publication, I don’t think people would keep quiet about it.”

Open VLD fraction leader Sas Van Rouveroi responded by saying that Peeters was “shooting the piano player when we ought to be paying more attention to the score”. N-VA member

Matthias Diependaele took the opportunity to call for more Flemish say in the affairs of the National Bank. “The institution is very federal minded,” he said. “Nevertheless their forecasts are extremely important for the Flemish budget. Such an avoidable U-turn in the economic figures played into the hands of the federal budget planning but makes Flemish policy more difficult and leads to costs for the Flemish taxpayer.”

On that subject, Peeters admitted in an interview in *De Standaard* last weekend that the time for belt-tightening would continue for a while longer. Although the budget plans for 2012 are on the right track, the budgets for 2013 and 2014 present a new challenge. “Even with unchanged policies, if we were to do nothing new, spending in 2013 would go up by €750 million.”

This is because of the increase in the number of schoolchildren, agreements made in welfare and the plan to catch up with the construction of social housing. “Whether our revenues will also increase depends on the economic conditions,” said Peeters, “and that’s by no means certain.”

Baby bad for women’s careers, says study

Having children has a negative effect on the careers of women, according to research released last week from the Free University of Brussels (VUB). Sociology doctor Ilse Laurijssen followed the career paths of more than 800 Flemish women over the course of six years and found that “with the birth of a child, women experience more stress during working hours because they have more functions to occupy them.... Those who had a demanding job prior to having children have to step on the brakes.”

Many of those women move to part-time work or have the decision to move to a less challenging position made for them. “The employer may assume that women with small children have other things than business on their minds. The boss doesn’t want to load them down with extra duties, and so the work becomes less challenging.” And part-time work is not a solution to all problems. “Women all have to work full time in order to be sure of a



© Shutterstock

pension,” Laurijssen said. “But it seems that the burden on women who want to work full time is just too high. The level of stress in the workplace is the biggest motivator for whether women make the switch.”

Flanders needs driving instructors

Driving schools in Flanders are suffering from a shortage of qualified instructors, according to the sector federation Federdrive. It says the growing shortage – up to about 1,000 from about 750 in 2009 – has to do with more parents sending their children to qualified driving schools both because of the quality of the teaching and to

avoid expensive accidents damaging the family car. The number of new initiatives started by the federation and the Flemish Traffic Study Foundation – such as the successful scheme to give driving lessons at schools – also increase demand.

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Banking

► Dexia

Dexia group hopes to unlock up to €12 billion with an agreement with the French authorities by the end of the year over its French Dexia Municipal Agency (DMA) affiliate. The French and Belgian authorities have guaranteed the debts of Dexia, which may still require a capital increase to shore up its balance sheet.

Chemicals

► Tessenderlo

The Tessenderlo group, specialised in the production of chemical products for the food and agricultural sectors, has sold its Profialis subsidiary, maker of PVC window and door profiles, to Open Gate, a US-based private investment group. Profialis has plants in Dentergem, West Flanders, and in France. Tessenderlo, based in Brussels, has also disposed of its subsidiary Lianyungang Taile, the largest producer of benzyl chloride in China. Both moves are part of the company’s strategy to concentrate on its core activities. Meanwhile, another of its affiliates, US-based Tessenderlo Kerley, is to build a production unit to supply gold mining group Barrick Gold with thiosulfates from next year.

Electricity

► GDF Suez

The number 3 reactor at Doel nuclear power station in East Flanders will remain closed until at least 1 December, GDF Suez, the French parent company of Electrabel, has announced. The reactor has been closed since June, after cracks were discovered in the concrete casing. The company stressed that the delay in re-opening is a result of continued safety tests, not the result of new problems.

Electricity

► Usage

The total consumption of electricity dropped 1% in the first half of the year, compared to the same period last year, reflecting the economic slowdown. Gas consumption, however, increased 1.9%.

Telecoms

► Telenet

Mechelen-based telecommunications operator Telenet has returned €3.25 per share to its shareholders as part of its payout policy. The amount represents nearly 10% of the company’s share price. Telenet, controlled by US-based cable group Liberty Global, plans to continue with the policy, which saves shareholders the 25% withholding tax on dividends.

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Dieting: don't do it

Author Kris Verburgh proposes a new approach to nutrition

Katy Desmond

Breaking news: Refined sugars are bad for your health, vegetables are good! What? Not the sea change in dietary insight you were expecting from the break-out nutrition book of the summer, *De voedselzandloper* (The Food Hourglass) by Kris Verburgh? Nevertheless, it seems to be a message for which people are hungry; the book has been on the local best-seller lists all summer long and has sold more than 81,000 copies.

Lovers of your typical health guru's how-to-lose-20-kilos-by-only-eating-bratwurst treatises perhaps should look away (or, actually, please stay). Verburgh emphatically states that he does not believe in diets. Instead, he is after something bigger than numbers on a scale: He is after the fountain of youth. And you'll be surprised to find out you already know where it is.

Verburgh is actually Dr Verburgh, a 26-year-old medical doctor who researches aging at the University of Antwerp and who had written three books by the time he was 25. In *De voedselzandloper*, he makes the link between the way we eat and the way we age.

Basically, staying young means avoiding the typical diseases of aging, which is anything from loss of eyesight to heart disease, type II diabetes, cancer or osteoporosis. What's the best way to do this, according to Verburgh? Eat well and exercise, not just for a period of time, but always. "If you want to have the health benefits of healthy food, you have to do it your whole life," he says.

Classic, with a twist

OK, but what doctor doesn't preach the benefits of a healthy diet? But Verburgh takes it a step further, acknowledging that with all the confusion, chaos and bad advice in the diet book world, people no longer actually know what eating healthily really is. So he created the "food hourglass",



The completely sane and comprehensible food book writer Kris Verburgh

giving people alternatives, an idea Verburgh developed while working in a psychiatric institute, where diet plays a big role because of the effects psychotropic medications have on metabolism. These medications often cause weight gain and increase a patient's risk

other vegetables, then people say, 'OK, I can try that.'

Out with the bad

In the food hourglass, Verburgh tries to correct some of the main faults of the standard pyramid. Naturally, fruits and vegetables are among the stars of foods that Verburgh says we should eat more of, replacing things like bread and pasta as the main substance of our meals. He encourages eating fatty fish and white meats like chicken, but says to eat as little red meat as possible (the normal Belgian food pyramid does not distinguish between types of meat).

Cakes and sweets should be replaced by dark chocolate and nuts. He also differentiates between different kinds of fat, promoting healthy, omega-3-rich oils and recommending avoiding omega-6-rich oils, butter and margarine.

Most of the recommendations are pretty predictable; however, the food hourglass does include some surprises. For starters, milk and fruit juices from concentrate are

included next to soda at the top and broadest level of items to eat less of, which has incited some commentary from the powerful dairy industry.

Nutrition for our times

Also, food supplements are found in the top point of the "more" pyramid. For many people, this may go against logic – if you're eating healthily, shouldn't you have all the vitamins and minerals you need? Verburgh says no. "People think our bodies are intelligent enough to get all these nutrients if we eat healthily, but our bodies and our food live in a completely different environment to the environment in which our bodies evolved."

Sitting at desks all day means we are not getting enough vitamin D from the sun, for instance. We are also not eating seaweed in large enough amounts for iodine. And even if we were snacking on seaweed all day, changes in the way we grow vegetables means that our foods are not as rich in vitamins and minerals as they were in the past. For example, there is 70% less copper in our tomatoes today than 50 years ago. Therefore, Verburgh recommends taking a daily food supplement.

In a way, there is not much revolutionary in *De voedselzandloper*. But in the Babel of the industry of nutrition, that in itself is revolutionary. Verburgh offers a sane voice that lays out to readers the myths and assumptions about eating and nutrition. In the end, you walk away feeling better prepared to make your own decisions about what is healthy for you.

Verburgh agrees: "The food hourglass is not some kind of command or order; it's just a guideline for people to know what is good, what is not good, and how they can replace the bad foods with the good foods. So people can choose on their own how far they want to go with this."

► www.krisverburgh.com



THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Scientists of the University of Leuven and affiliated with the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) are using **zebrafish as a model in the search for genes** that play a role in the development of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). The researchers identified a molecule, EphA4, as the target for the future development of ALS drug. ALS patients become completely paralysed, while their mental capacity remains intact.

In a world first, the University Hospital of Ghent has performed **surgery on a baby with radiographic equipment** that uses only half the usual amount of radiation. This is crucial for babies, as the radiation can harm their health. The innovation is also positive for doctors and nurses, who are exposed to less radiation.

The Flemish League Against Cancer has launched the campaign **"Working After Cancer"** to map the problems of former and current cancer patients trying to get back to work. The league asks them to tell their story anonymously online or via a volunteer at the special cancer phone line on 078 150 151.

► www.werkennakanker.be

The new website **WeZooz explains difficult subject matter** via short video lessons. The first videos will deal with mathematics – for example, one lesson clarifies the theory on square roots.

► www.wezoozacademy.be

The number of **students registering for economic studies** at a university or university college has increased 18.5% over the last three years. At the University of Leuven, the number of students at the faculty of economy has more than doubled in five years. Experts point to the economic crisis as an explanation. The economy has been omnipresent in the media and students feel an economic diploma offers many career opportunities.

The director of the department of investment within the Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education has demanded that the government of Flanders commit more resources for the construction of schools. To reduce the costs, Dirk Vanderstappen suggests that the strict government standards for the building of schools be reviewed and also suggests more cooperation with partners to stimulate community use of school buildings. **Andy Furniere**

"If you want the health benefits of healthy food, you have to eat it your whole life"

a model to help his readers concretely understand how they should be eating.

This model takes the classic food pyramid and turns it on its head. The result is an hourglass: two pyramids facing each other, one pointing up with its hierarchical strata of foods we should eat more of, and one tapering downwards, also divided into levels, of foods that we should consume less of. The food hourglass is about

for aging-related illnesses like type II diabetes, heart disease and Alzheimer's.

"If you say to people that you should drastically reduce your carbohydrate intake, that you should eat less potatoes or rice or pasta, there are many people who would say that is difficult," he explains. "But, for example, if you say that you can replace the potatoes with mushrooms or legumes or an extra portion of

It's culture, darling

Open Monument Day invites you to Flanders' dance halls and theatres, past and present

Andy Furniere

This year's Open Monument Day is devoted to music, words and images – culture as experienced by both high society and the man in the street. For this 24th celebration of immovable heritage in Flanders, visitors can look behind the scenes of sites where culture is – or once was – conceived.

On 9 September, the locks will be removed from the doors of cultural heritage sites, those meant for both the elite and the common man. The elite circles mostly looked for their diversions in a world of mirrored halls, music parlours, private libraries, opera buildings and art rooms. Commoners, on the other hand, tended to come into contact with culture in churches, schools and cafes. In the streets, people encountered cultural activities during local festivals and via the music of brass bands or the carillon.

Music, words and images were often used in buildings to instil a message in the minds of visitors; they were, for example, essential to the experience of the Catholic faith in churches. Moreover, for a long time the Catholic Church was the most important client for visual artists, composers, architects and craftsmen. Because of this, churches are now often veritable treasure troves of art and heritage.

Art and culture were democratised during the 19th and 20th centuries, as more and more people had the time and resources to join a cultural association or to study art. Open Monument Day also offers visitors the rare chance to walk around the spaces where writers, painters, poets and architects were – and sometime still are – inspired to create their art. These houses and studios often carry the marks of their inhabitants. Numerous landscapes, cities and villages in Flanders have also been a source of inspiration. Cultural heroes are often immortalised by statues, tombs and commemorative plaques that bring these characters back to life.

Finally, Open Monument Day highlights shifts in cultural purpose, from a puppet theatre housed in a former chapel to an Academy for Visual Arts in an old swimming pool.

A masterpiece in each province

We did the impossible and chose five top sites, a surprise in each province, out of 545 diverse heritage choices in 197 Flemish cities and municipalities. Access to these, as to every Open Monument Day site, is free of charge.

Cinema Walburg in Hamont-Achel, Limburg province

Cinema Walburg was built in 1957 as a modern cinema, but there were already silent movies being shown in the building since 1926. It seats almost 500 and was one of the biggest cinemas in the region at the time.



The chapel in Leuven's Heilig Hart Institute has an awe-inspiring 450 square metres of stained glass



Open Monument Day is one of Flanders' most popular region-wide events with nearly half a million visitors a year



Watch an old movie at Cinema Walburg in Hamont-Achel

In 2009, it was updated to become a contemporary cinema and theatre, with subtle adjustments that have kept the atmosphere intact. Today, it is the only cinema from the 1950s that remains in Limburg, and it still plays an important role in the Limburg's cultural life. Next weekend, you can take a look behind the scenes, visit an expo on the history of film in Hamont-Achel and watch movies old and new.

Atlantikwall Raversijde in Ostend, West Flanders

Among the 60 bunkers and two kilometres of trenches from the two

World Wars at the Atlantikwall open-air museum, you'll find bunkers named after composers, such as Mozart, Brahms and Verdi. Discover the history of the "musical bunkers" in this area of Ostend, with the scores of their respective composers as your soundtrack. Atlantikwall Raversijde also pays attention to the poets who visited the site during the Second World War (the "Dichterfahrt"). Furthermore, actors will demonstrate medieval music traditions, of which traces were discovered among archaeological findings in the now-vanished fishing village of Walraversijde.

Nemrod House in Ghent, East Flanders

As an old sugar refinery, built in 1807, the Nemrod House is a legacy of the industrial activity that flourished along the river Leie at

the beginning of the 19th century. From 1849, the main building with its pediment front was used by the Nemrod Royal Crossbow Association, which installed a magnificent dance hall on the first floor. This hall, decorated with cherubs, masks and frivolous flower motifs, evokes a unique Renaissance atmosphere.

It now is an ideal practice environment for arts students at the Artevelde University College, who will give a ballet performance, a musical concert for children and a classical concert with their lecturers. There is an exhibition by students of multimedia arts, who will compare their work to that of students from Russia, Finland and Ukraine. Another exhibition tells the story of the Nemrod House's historical and industrial past.

Troubleyn/Laboratory in Antwerp, Antwerp province

The studio of visual artist and theatre maker Jan Fabre is the former Ring Theatre, which was destroyed by a fire in 1974. With Flemish architect Jan Dekeyser, Fabre transformed the ruined site into a modern workshop for his theatre company Troubleyn and a laboratory for other artists who need space to experiment. The place is special both for its architecture and for its collection of work by celebrated Flemish artists such as Luc Tuymans, Wim Delvoye and Michaël Borremans.

Heilig Hart Institute in Leuven, Flemish Brabant

The most remarkable part of the Heilig Hart Institute, in a green area at the edge of Leuven, is the modernistic wing with a chapel, built around 1930. Artist Eugene Yoors created the brilliant cathedral glass windows – a total of 450 square metres – which have recently been renovated. In the chapel hangs a depiction of the Stations of the Cross from 1938, by Flemish expressionist Albert Servaes. The organ has also been renovated recently and will be played on 9 September. You can visit the impressive dance hall as well, designed by Flemish architect Victor Broos in 1946.

9 SEPTEMBER

Open Monument Day

Across Flanders

Some sites and activities require a reservation; check the programme

► www.openmonumenten.be

Something in the water

There’s much more than flashy fish tanks to Blankenberge’s Sea Life Centre

Tania Rabesandratana

If Steve Vervaecke wore a black suit, you could mistake him for a brisk businessman, with his mobile phone always at hand. But Vervaecke wears a bright red Sea Life shirt, and his work at Sea Life Blankenberge is far from a typical nine-to-five job.

As the centre’s display curator, Vervaecke is in charge of the welfare of thousands of animals. “We have two sea lions, four otters, five seals, 12 penguins, plus sharks and a few thousand fish,” Vervaecke says. His team makes sure all these creatures receive adequate food and care, as well as medication if necessary.

“We try to show rare animals, but only those that will live well in captivity,” he says, adding that most of the animals on display will live longer in the aquarium than in the wild. “For instance, we do not have dolphins or very large sharks. And instead of just bringing in seahorses, we breed them in-house.”

Besides seahorses, Sea Life also breeds jellyfish, octopus and other species at its displays development headquarters in Weymouth in the UK. One of the most famous examples of in-house breeding is Paul, a now-deceased clairvoyant octopus that allegedly predicted the results of eight matches during the 2010 football World Cup. The octopus was hatched in Weymouth and lived in a tank at another Sea Life centre in Oberhausen, Germany. (Paul even had his own agent and was the subject of a documentary called *The Life and Times of Paul the Psychic Octopus*.)

Rescue and rehabilitation

On a more serious note, Vervaecke says he has seen the company’s concern for the welfare of its animals and the conservation of species grow since he joined Sea Life. “Fifteen years ago, if a fish died, we just put a new one in,” he recalls. “Now, if a fish is sick we send swabs to the lab to understand why, or we research why a fish does well in one tank and not so well in another.” Vervaecke estimates that the centre might spend €15 in research and veterinary costs for a fish worth just €2.

Sea Life Centres across the world famously rescue and rehabilitate around 150 seals every year, and the Blankenberge branch acts as Flanders’ only seal sanctuary. “We are responsible for all the seals that wash up on the Belgian coast,” Vervaecke says. “That’s about 30 that we rescue and release back into the sea each year.”

Anybody who comes across a baby seal on the beach can call Sea Life – day or night. The team will examine the seal and, if it is sick, bring it to Blankenberge for a thorough check-up and nursing. After three months of care, the young seals can triple their weight – from about 10 to 35 kilos. “We give them medication and food – first a kind of fish soup that we intubate, and then, if they get better, we move on to actual fish,” the curator says. “Our survival rate is about 90%, which is very, very good.” Sea Life Blankenberge has also teamed up with the University of Liège in Wallonia to carry out autopsies on the remaining, unlucky 10%. The university uses the results for research purposes, while the centre gets feedback that helps it improve its care.

Sponsor a seal

Visitors can watch all stages of rehabilitation in real life thanks to the glass walls of Sea Life’s seal clinic. Each seal rescue costs about €2,500. The centre does not receive public funding for this activity but invites visitors to adopt a seal pup and sponsor its recovery. “You do get attached to the animals, of course; in particular to seals and penguins,” Vervaecke admits.

The curator describes himself as a fanatic diver – a passion and skill that helped him secure his job in the late 1990s. Working around sea creatures every day for 15 years doesn’t seem to have dented his enthusiasm for the underwater world one bit. “Oh yes, I still dive,” Vervaecke smiles. “I do a lot of wreck diving on the Belgian and English coast,” he says. Then he rushes off to his next meeting – Sea Life’s international vet is waiting.

► www.visitsealife.com/Blankenberge



Hands-on nature education in Blankenberge; about 50,000 schoolchildren a year visit the centre



Steve Vervaecke gets to grips with one of Sea Life Centre’s residents

VISITING SEA LIFE BLANKENBERGE



The Sea Life Centre in Blankenberge gets more than 250,000 visitors per year, including 50,000 schoolchildren. The summer season is particularly busy; the centre doubles its staff from about 20 to 40 people to cater for the extra influx of tourists. Most display panels are in Dutch and French, but the centre’s website is also available in English, including educational materials that can be downloaded free of charge and printed out before the visit. The centre is open every day from 10.00 to 19.00.

THE SEA LIFE BRAND

The first Sea Life Centre opened in Oban, Scotland, in 1979, and the network has grown since then to 44 centres across the world, mainly in the UK and Germany. Together, Sea Life Centres attract about 15 million visitors and employ more than 250 people specialised in marine sciences or fish and animal husbandry. Sea Life claims to be the number one aquarium brand in the world and the number

two visitor attraction in Europe. It is part of Merlin Entertainment, a company that operates a broad range of attractions and is second only to Disney worldwide. Merlin acquired Legoland Parks in 2005 and the Tussauds Group in 2007, increasing its scale more than 10 times in three years. In 2011, the company boasted an annual revenue of about €1.2 billion.



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True colours

Design September broadens the debate on diversity, culture and commercialism in local design

Sarah Crew

In staging the annual Design September extravaganza, Brussels steps up to its role as the country's creative hub by giving a boost to some young, talented and explosive Flemish designers. For the first time since its launch in 2006, the design festival includes flagship events from Flanders among its more than 100 exhibitions, screenings, talks, workshops and markets across the capital.

From the formal to the casual, from major exhibition spaces to quirky downtown shops, Design September fulfils its mission of showing off work by emerging and established designers within an international context that perfectly suits Brussels' enigmatic and amorphous culture.

And it's not only for design buffs: Public interest is always a priority for organisers and is centred this year on the creative meeting point D | Platform. A firm favourite on the festival calendar is the retro Design Market at Tour & Taxis, full of furniture and objects from the 1950s to the early 1980s.

One reason for the current recognition of Flemish designs is that new artistic director Delphine Vercauteren hails from Kortrijk. It is just one of a series of changes she has introduced to the seventh edition of Design September. "Here in Brussels, we often forget Flemish designers, but this time we have not. There are some really great designers in Flanders."

Invasion of colour

The 24-year-old Vercauteren replaced Marie Pok in January after having assisted with Design September since 2007. One of her favourite events is the exhibition *Kleur* (Colour) by innovative collective De Invasie.

The four artists involved adopt the role of warrior in an explosive colour war against monotone beige, represented by robots. "They work with textiles as well as furniture, and it really fits in with the festival themes, while also defining Belgian design," says Vercauteren. She also cites Design Vlaanderen Gallery's *ApertoChiuso*, an exploration of opening and closing that applies to people's daily lives via well-designed objects.

A graduate in design and interior architectural studies, Vercauteren has a go at defining Flemish design: "As Flanders is quite advanced in technology, we have product designers who learn more in school about the product itself, rather than communication, while Walloon and Brussels designers think about the product, communication and aesthetics. The difference between

Flanders and the rest of the country is enormous, including the culture."

No identity crisis

But Belgian design also escapes definition, due, she believes, to the country still being relatively young, and every designer appearing to have his or her own identity. "What I think is important about Belgian design is that designers are always looking for challenges, new materials, new forms. They really think of everything from A to Z, so the process or construction of an object, textile or a drawing is as important as the finished product. Local design is really modest, rather like the country, and that is quite beautiful. We don't want to shout out the name of the designer, but we want to see the product and how it is made." In addition to the new Flemish focus and customary practice of promoting young designers, Design September raises the profile of textiles and graphic design. The disciplines are also too easily overlooked, says Vercauteren. "Graphic and textile design are forgotten because the press links design to furniture. But design isn't just about furniture and never has been. Textile designers have existed for a long time and textile is, for example, used in furniture."

While many people think they can do their own graphic design, Vercauteren points out, "we are leaving some people who are really specialised in graphics by the wayside". This is one reason for Design September's new image-led communication package, which extends to the website and a new magazine distributed at all events.

Design in action

Another innovation introduced by Vercauteren is the fusion of the usually separate elements of culture and commercialism. This was characterised by Designers Weekend, one of the highlights of last year's festival.

The event had existed for 25 years, but Vercauteren found its emphasis on the culture of design confusing. "I thought, design is not only cultural, it is also commercial; the point is to buy design, to use it, to feel it." So the event has been replaced by Shops, a series of month-long openings for the general public and a specialised tour for architects and interior designers. The international component continues with guest lectures, sharing inspiring stories and a passion for good design. "At Design September, we always talk about being a platform," says Vercauteren, "but the point is not just to show off Belgian designers but to make it possible for them to meet international designers, chosen not just for their names but for the stories they can tell."



These include Michael Young, the British-born Hong Kong-based designer who, in a timely move, is ready to open his trademark EOK store in Brussels' Zennestraat. "His furniture and product designs are so refined because of these cultural influences." She respects Young's fine attention to detail as well as his humour and intelligence.

Feminine meets industrial

Paris-based French designer Ionna Vautrin, on the other hand, is appreciated for her low profile and poetic approach to creating pure, simple and colourful objects. Vercauteren: "She's a girly designer with an industrial touch." Other guests include the creative director of the long-established Finnish textile and fashion company Marimekko, in a nod to Helsinki's role as the current World Design Capital. Famous for its bold, simple and colourful prints, it is particularly successful in Flanders and Vercauteren is enthusiastic about the company showing off the trademark "happiness" of its range here. Known worldwide, the UK's Benjamin Hubert specialises in industrial design, particularly in furniture and lighting. He is particularly interesting, says Vercauteren, for his close relationship with design production. "He always finds a very original way to use materials."



Clockwise from top left: Known for "spreading happiness", Finland's Marimekko brand sells well in Flanders; the four colourful protagonists behind De Invasie, battling beige during Design September; Don't miss De Invasie's *Kleur* exhibition at La Fabrika; Design September's artistic director Delphine Vercauteren

OUR TOP PICKS FOR DESIGN SEPTEMBER

Exhibitions

Kleur: De Invasie La Fabrika, Antoine Dansaertstraat 182
Dentelle de bois The Dominican, Leopoldstraat 8
ApertoChiuso Until 4 Nov, Design Vlaanderen Gallery, Kanselarijstraat 19
Homologie Espace Wallonie, Grasmarkt 25-27
Michael Young for EOK 25-30 Sept, Zennestraat 19

Open doors

Els Vansteelandt & Sophie Heymans Papenveest 15
Saskia Schutt Centre Dansaert, Aloststraat 7

Lectures

Michael Young 17 Sept, 21.00, Flagey, Heilig Kruisplein
Marimekko 19 Sept, 20.15 Flagey
Benjamin Hubert 27 Sept, 20.15, Flagey
Ionna Vautrin 27 Sept, 20.15, Flagey

Markets and more

D | Platform TAG city, Karel Rogierplein 23D
Brussels Design Market 8-9 Sept, Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan 86C, register ahead for free entry
MAD Bike Customisation 16 Sept parade, 22 Sept auction
Pecha Kucha 19 Sept, 19.00, BIP, Koningsstraat 2-4

6-30 SEPTEMBER

Across Brussels

► www.designseptember.be

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Sand, surf and spiders

Patrice Toye's new feature opens the Ostend Film Festival

Lisa Bradshaw

A few people in Ostend are praying for rain this weekend, because nothing kills a good film festival in Flanders like balmy weather. Though that's a rather appropriate temperature to view Flemish director Patrice Toye's atmospheric *Little Black Spiders*, where teenage girls loll about the forest, napping, sharing stories and playing games. It sounds idyllic, but, much like Toye's last feature, *(N)iemand*, paradise isn't always what it seems.

In *Little Black Spiders*, which opens the Ostend Film Festival this Friday night, 16-year-old Katja (a wonderful Line Pillet) is driven to a castle-like estate in the middle of the Flemish countryside. She climbs a very long fire escape to reach the attic, where a number of other girls are living. It's 1970s Flanders, and Katja has arrived, in fact, at a hospital, where underage pregnant girls are spirited away to await the birth of their babies. Katja, herself an orphan, has every intention of keeping her child, but she soon finds that the directors of her secret ward have other intentions.

Little Black Spiders is based on actual events in the Maria Middelaers Hospital in Lommel, Limburg province, in the 1970s and '80s, in which babies were offered to adoptive parents without the consent of the mothers. Girls were taken over the border to France to give birth, where all records were wiped out.

"When I heard about this a few years ago, I was so amazed by it that I first had to work through it, let it sink in," says Toye. "The story wouldn't let me go. I had to tell it."

Features not to miss

At the other end of the life spectrum is death, which is at the heart of *Alps*, the third feature by Greek director Giorgos Lanthimos, one



Pregnant and hidden: *Little Black Spiders* is based on actual occurrences in 1970s Flanders

of the European masters of absurd situations (*Kinetta*, *Dogtooth*). *Alps* is the name of a company made up of four people who hire themselves out to "sit in" for a person who is newly deceased. Mechanically reciting phrases the person used to say and acting out past family scenes so survivors can alter the outcomes, it's meant to be therapeutic. *Alps* is for those who like their comedy blacker than black.

Barbara, from German director Christian Petzold, is a whole different scene – a perfectly claustrophobic

drama about a doctor banished to a rural village after caught trying to leave 1980s East Berlin. Nina Hoss (*Yella*) is brilliantly understated as a woman torn between trying to escape her suffocating environment and her attraction to a colleague in this winner of the Silver Bear in Berlin for direction.

Another excellent choice is Benito Zambrano's *La voz dormida* (*The Sleeping Voice*), an adaptation of the best-selling novel by Dulce Chacón. The winner of three Spanish Goyas, it tells the story of a pregnant woman

sentenced to death for her part in the Resistance in 1940s Madrid. And it's your first chance to see Cannes' Grand Jury prize-winner *Reality* by Matteo Garrone (*Gomorra*), in which the mildly criminal but happy-go-lucky family man Luciano becomes obsessed with getting on Italy's version of *Big Brother*.

Film fest besties

The Ostend Film Festival is also working with this month's Namur International French Film Festival and with the Netherlands Film Festival (in Utrecht) to screen three films from each. Your best bets of these are Belgian director David Lambert's *Hors les murs* (*Beyond the Walls*), which follows a gay couple in Brussels from first encounter to possibly bitter end, and *Kauwboy*, a solid family drama about a boy whose mother has left and whose father is distant and depressed. You'll also find a revival of the Dutch

classic *Antonia* on the programme. One of the nicest aspects of Ostend's fest is its habit of showing a locally made short before every feature. Look out especially for Emma de Swaef and Marc James Roels' *Oh Willy*, Roman Klochov's *Natasha* and Adil El Arbi and Bilal Fallah's *Broeders* (*Brothers*). Finally, another Ostend gem is the Master Selection, a group of films chosen by the festival's host, which this year is the radiant Flemish actress Barbara Sarafian (*Aanrijding in Moscou*, *Rundskop*). She couldn't have made a better choice for this movie-goer; her list is full of both exploitive and legendary cult classics, including *Demon Seed*, *Midnight Cowboy* and *Mademoiselle*. On 8 September, you can hear Sarafian talk about her favourites on the list – *Badlands* and *Cría Cuervos* – see the films and, yes, have lunch with the actress.

7-15 SEPTEMBER

Kinepolis and Cinema Rialto, Ostend

► www.filmfestivaloostende.be

THE ENSORS: FLEMISH FILM AWARDS

The Flemish Film Awards are now called The Ensors, after the great Surrealist painter who hailed from Ostend. The jury is tasked with choosing a film that, like the work of James Ensor, holds a mirror up to society in which people can – though perhaps reluctantly – see something of themselves. The Best Film category joins 13 others with three nominees each, ranging from acting to photography to music.

Up for Best Film this year are

Geoffrey Enthoven's *Hasta la vista!*, Nicholas Provost's *The Invader* and Nic Balthazar's *Tot altijd* (known in English as *Time of My Life*). I would love to see Provost's taut thriller about an ever-more unbalanced African immigrant in Brussels run away with this top prize, but I sense the jury might lean towards one of the other more crowd-pleasing nominations. Here's hoping they prove me wrong.

Pulled pork

A giant golden pig is the face of culture this season in West Flanders

Daan Bauwens

If you happened to be out and about during the weekend of 25 August and you saw two sweating young men dragging along a giant statue of a golden pig, you were not dreaming. For four days theatre maker Lucas De Man and film director Gilles Coulier did indeed drag a giant pig from the Dutch border to the quiet West Flemish town of Meulebeke. Why? To celebrate the beginning of the cultural season in West Flanders, which this year focuses on the identity of the West Fleming. "The pig is an icon symbolising the identity of the West Fleming,"

30-year-old De Man tells me. "Everybody thinks the pig is dirty and stupid, but actually the pig is a very intelligent animal. The parallel with West Flemings is obvious: Everybody thinks they are peasants and not very intelligent, but there is no place in Flanders where you can find more engineers, high-ranked enterprises or star chefs." De Man and Coulier were both born and raised in West Flanders. As the two travelled from town to town with their golden pig, they asked other former West Flemings to come and help. They also asked non-West Flemings to come and

share their thoughts.

"Gilles and I wanted to go back to our roots and confront our own prejudice," De Man says. "At the same time, we asked other Flemings about their views of West Flanders. And what did we find? Most Flemings think West Flemings work hard and don't say much. I have to admit that is partly correct. We do work a lot. Why? Maybe because we all used to be farmers; maybe because we are the most Catholic province of Flanders." As part of the project, De Man created a theatre solo, which premiered last month in Meulebeke.

Wij Varkenland: De herinnering, het verlangen en het z(w)ijn, or *We, Land of Pigs: The Memory, the Desire and the Pig* "tells the story of pig farms and how these have changed from family enterprises into industrial corporations that have nothing to do with farming anymore: the perfect symbol of the changing West Flemish culture." A caravan featuring De Man's solo project, as well as other multimedia performances, will tour West Flanders until the end of November.



The giant golden pig makes its way round West Flanders, as the province's cultural season gets underway

► www.wijvarkenland.be

Get to know Brussels' watery must-go zone

Kanal Festival

Georgio Valentino

Declining industry, rising blight and hostile public perception have rendered Brussels' canal district a "no-go zone" for the comfortable classes. It's an unfair assessment, of course, and one which the grassroots activists of Platform Kanal have been challenging since 2008.

Their vision is to market the area as rather a "must-go zone" for everyone. The goal of their biennale is to re-introduce the neighbourhood to Brusselsers who may have written it off. Festival Kanal 2012 packs a long weekend with dozens of performances, installations, interactions and exhibitions at several canal-side spots.

Opening night is celebrated on Platform Kanal's own doorstep – the non-profit is headquartered in the old Belle-Vue brewery at Ninoofsepoort – with a free concert-cum-dance spectacle. *What's the Prediction?* is a boisterous collaboration between Wim Vanderkeybus' contemporary dance

company Ultima Vez and rock musician Mauro Pawlowski.

Other performances include Austrian choreographer Willi Dorner's *Above Under In Between* (pictured). Dorner's dancers are Festival Kanal veterans, having performed at the 2010 edition. *Sproken* casts photographer Kurt Deruyter and writer Johan Reyniers as bards of the people. The duo weave 52 hand-selected local stories – myths, fairy tales and urban legends – into a theatrical whole.

The canal itself serves as stage for Frank Bölter's *On a Voyage*. With the active participation of spectators and passers-by, the German visual artist constructs a life-size paper boat on the Akenkaai, next to festival partner Kaaitheater. Captain Bölter then launches himself and his DIY vessel onto the water for a truly unpredictable denouement.

Several such interactive installations are on exhibit throughout the weekend. Spanish designer Martí Guixé, stationed at Sint-Mariastraat,



surrenders his hammer and chisel to all comers for *Sculpt Me Point*. Spectator becomes artist in the most literal sense.

For a more passive (but nonetheless engaging) interaction, try *Birdwatching 4x4*. In a reprise of their Festival Kanal 2010 performance-installation, Flemish

dancers Benjamin Vandewalle and Erki De Vries conduct surreal guided tours of the neighbourhood in a purpose-built magic bus. Canal zone residents and dancers from the PARTS academy collaborate in the Escher-esque spectacle.

Urban artist Bart Lodewijks, meanwhile, is camped out at

Vlaamse Poort all weekend, binding walls, buildings and road surfaces with his linear drawings in chalk. *Ergens Hier* (Here Somewhere) invites festival-goers to participate in a work-in-progress undertaken by youngsters from Molenbeek's Vier Winden primary school. The pupils send you out into their neighbourhood to record impressions and discoveries, which will in turn become the raw materials of a creative synthesis, a new way of seeing their environment. The final project will be presented at next year's edition of Kunstenfestivaldesarts.

The festival also marks the closing weekend of Platform Kanal's summer exhibition *Icons*, running the length of the canal zone. Monumental portraits of neighbourhood residents are displayed in the open air from the Slachthuizen in the south to Sainctelette in the north.

13-16 September | Canal zone, Brussels | www.festivalkanal.be

MUSIC FESTIVAL

I Love Techno

Tickets have only just gone on sale for the techno party that never fails to pull a full house. This 18th edition promises to be just as much of a rager as in previous years, featuring five colour-coded rooms spread throughout the giant halls of Flanders Expo. International DJs, like gods in their booths, will spin and mix for hours on end, while the floor shakes under the feet of tireless techno fans. Headlining live acts include Boys Noize, Vitalic, Netsky, Dave Clarke, DJ Nero (pictured) Benga and Dr Lektroluv. Robyn Boyle



GET TICKETS NOW

10 November | Flanders Expo, Maaltekouter 1, Ghent

www.ilovetechno.be

MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Antwerp Open Air 2012: Free dance festival with three stages and more than 35 DJs spinning electro, house, minimal, reggae and more

SEP 8 14.00-5.00 at Noordkasteel, Oosterweelsteenweg 10

www.antwerpopenair.be

Asse (Flemish Brabant)

Hopduelfeesten: Outdoor festival featuring theatre, poetry, a parade, fireworks and concerts by Das Pop, Lady Linn, School is Cool, Sarah Ferri and more

SEP 7-9 at Boekfosplein

www.hopduvel.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Brussels Yoga Sunday

Slowly but surely, yoga is becoming a way of life worldwide. After New York, Paris and Berlin, now it's Brussels' turn to welcome an expected 2,000 people for a free mass yoga session in the peaceful setting of the Terkameren Forest, the green lung just south of the city. Master yogis and beginners, young and old – all are welcome and encouraged to join in. Just register in advance (and receive a yoga mat plus welcome pack), wear white and come ready to start off this new school/work year on the right foot: with a nice, calming sun salutation. RB



9 September, 11.00-12.00

Terkameren Forest, Gespanhoek, Brussels | www.brusselsyogasunday.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Tussen Broers (Between Brothers): Multicultural festival promoting respect, tolerance and diversity with world music and cuisine

SEP 8-9 at Jubelpark

www.action-adi.com

Bruegelfeesten: Annual festival in the Marollen district featuring giant puppets, street theatre, music, parade and more

SEP 8-9 at Vossenplein

www.bruegelmarolles.be

Stripfeest: Annual celebration of Belgium's rich comic strip heritage, with signings, a market a 3D light show, a comic-strip dinner and the Balloon's Day Parade, featuring giant balloons of all your favourite characters

SEP 8-9 across the city centre

www.stripfeest.be

CLASSICAL & NEW MUSIC FOOD & DRINK

OdeGand

Just as it has done for the past 10 years, OdeGand is kicking off the Ghent leg of the Festival of Flanders, the region-wide celebration of classical and new music in all its many varied forms. (The Klara Festival, going on now also, is the Brussels leg.) Ghent's programme brings together music from all over the world, and the spectacular OdeGand is one of the city's most popular cultural events of the year. Take a boat ride from concert to concert along the canals that criss-cross the medieval city centre. And in the evening, sit back and marvel at the dynamic light show, closing concert on a floating podium and, finally, fireworks! For this anniversary edition, organisers have planned an extra special display.

RB



15 September, 13.00-23.00

Across Ghent

► www.odegand.festivalgent.be

MORE FESTIVAL OF
FLANDERS GHENT THIS WEEK

Ghent

KidsOdeGand: Special edition of OdeGand featuring a parcours just for kids ages four and up, boat rides, singing mermaids, floating instruments, fun concerts and more

SEP 16 14.00-17.00 at Graslei and Korenlei

► www.kidsodegand.festivalgent.be

Opening Concert: Festival of Flanders Ghent's grand opening, with a festive performance by the Swedish Radio Choir & Baroque Orchestra B'Rock, conducted by Peter Dijkstra

SEP 17 20.30 at Sint-Baafs Cathedral

► www.festivalgent.be

Essence of Thailand

Tantalise your taste buds with the exotic flavours of Thai cuisine at a free festival celebrating the south-east Asian country. For the first time, top Brussels chefs will cook alongside their Thai counterparts in live demonstrations. The event is one of the tastiest ways to explore one of the most complex of Asian cuisines. Yves Mattagne is the two-Michelin-star chef of one of the finest seafood restaurants in the Benelux, the Sea Grill. He is joined by Patrick Vandecasserie from Villa Lorraine, Giovanni Bruno from Ristorante Zenzanome and Thai chefs Patrick "Joe" Sathit Srijettanont, executive chef at the Thai food institute Blue Elephant and chef Apple from Les Larmes du Tigre.

Organised by the Embassy of Thailand, this annual family event also promotes other facets of the land of smiles, including performances, Thai boxing, massages, handicrafts and information on eco-tourism and gastronomic trips. Don't forget to try your luck in a tombola to win a Thai Airways return flight to Bangkok.

Sarah Crew



9 September, 10.00-20.00

Dumonplein, Brussels

► www.thaiembassy.be

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Bollekespicknick: De Koninck brewery hosts this family picnic, with live music, sandwiches and its own beloved beer, known as the Bolleke

SEP 8 11.00-16.00 at Albertpark, Koningin Elisabethlei

► www.tinyurl.com/bollekespicnic

Maasmechelen

Spicy Maasmechelen: Third edition of the culinary festival with tastings from top restaurants and star chefs, plus dozens of organisations offering local and international dishes

SEP 7-9 at Tourist Info Centre Maasvinster, Zetellaan 35 (opposite Maasmechelen Village)

► www.spicymm.be

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Jamaican Party

7 September, from 22.30

Hall 2, Brussels Expo

Some of the world's fastest athletes will be in Brussels this weekend to participate in the annual Memorial Van Damme athletics event, part of the IAAF Diamond League. As this is the last of the season in most athletes' agenda, it's capped with a humongous party – a Jamaican party this year, in celebration of the island nation's crowd-wowing Olympic performances.

Organised by radio station Studio Brussel, Jamaican Party is next door to Boudewijn Stadium, which hosts the Van Damme, and features no less than Olympic gold medal sprinter Usain Bolt behind the decks. It's not his first time, either – the fastest man in the world is also a handy DJ (pictured). He'll be joined



by his countryman Shaggy ("Mr Boombastic"), as special guest.

Which is all well and good if you have a ticket; unfortunately, there are none left. As soon as the news broke that Bolt would be spinning, tickets sold out as fast as, well,

lightning. However, keep an eye (or an ear) on Studio Brussel, as they might be giving away tickets in these final two days before the event.

► www.diamondleague-brussels.com

Summer Party

14 September, from 21.00 Café Local, Antwerp

It's September already, but those still hoping for a summer romance might still be in luck. Dating site Rendez-Vous.be is throwing an end-of-summer party, and the place to be is Antwerp's famous club Café Local next Friday. To get your hips loosened up early, the event starts with a salsa dance group lesson. It's the perfect opportunity to

show what you can do on the dance floor, or – if you're keeping it cool – check out other people's moves. Because you know what they say: "If (s)he can dance, (s)he gets a second chance." Which might be later in the evening, during the speed dating session.

There are contests throughout the

night, with "fun" (though secret) prizes being given away. There's music, too, naturally, with a mix of hits from the 1980s and '90s, as well as some popular dance music. Who knows what might happen?

Tickets are €10 in advance from www.ticketnet.be

BITE

Robyn Boyle

't Raadsel ★★☆☆

Conveniently located next door to one of the cosiest cafes in East Flanders (see Cafe Spotlight next week) is this surprising rural oasis. At first glance, it feels like you're entering a typical modern brasserie with a few rustic details like antique scales and heavy wooden furniture. The walls are bright red, but there's a pervading sense of calm about the place, owing to some flickering candles and smooth lounge music. It's all a bit much, and I start to suspect my dining companion and I are in for a particularly unspectacular evening. Fortunately, that didn't at all turn out to be the case. First, we order a bottle of sparkling water, and it's delivered to our table with a smile, along with some welcome hunger-stillers, namely peanuts and garlicky green and black olives. The monthly menu suggestion lists grilled sardines, Belgian beef tartare and an exotic fruit dessert. However, we are more swayed by the *à la carte* menu from which we order two starters: marinated Scottish salmon and vitello tonnato. As the starters are both cold dishes, they arrive in no time. Paper-thin slices of bright pink-orange salmon are spread out flat across my companion's plate and covered in a mixture of olive oil, lemon, dill, spring onions, finely chopped chives and black pepper. He takes healthy mouthfuls while raving about the fresh, citrusy character of the dish. Mine, meanwhile, consists of thin slices of lightly oven-grilled veal, beautifully presented under red and yellow quartered cherry tomatoes, several leaves of rocket, fat capers, black pepper and a drizzle of olive oil atop a creamy layer of rich,



salty tuna sauce. Both dishes are obviously made with the freshest ingredients. As for the mains, my oven-baked baby lobster requires a bit of effort to eat, but it's well worth it. The white meat is soft and chewy and sweet, absolutely delicious when dipped in the underlying moat of clarified butter. It comes with twirls of fresh fettuccine. Across from me I can see that the fish brochette is also a hit. The long skewer holds chunks of scampi, sole, salmon, sea devil and ocean perch. While each type of fish has its own unique flavour and plenty of it, all have been slow-cooked until tender and juicy. The brochette comes with a delicate lime butter sauce, perfect for dipping, and another bowl of fettuccine. All we've left room for is two cups of coffee and their accompanying biscuits. The bill comes to €105, reflecting the top quality of the products, especially the seafood.

► www.traadsel.be

- 📍 Mantelstraat 4, Kruishoutem; 09.380.87.77
- 🕒 Tue-Sun, 12.00-14.00 & 18.00-22.30
- 💶 Mains: €18-€28
- 📖 A pretty location with outdoor seating and simple, yet refined meat and fish dishes

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

New beginnings?

For most, September marks the return to work or school. It is the same for sports. Although the Olympics seem only just over, it is back to training and competition for footballers, cyclists and others. It is also a moment of transition, as a new page is turned. That is what Nicolas Colsaerts must be thinking. As August closed, he received the call he had been waiting for from José Maria Olazabal, Europe's Ryder Cup captain, saying that the Schaerbeek-born golfer was included in the team to face the US in Chicago later this month. Colsaerts is the first-ever Belgian to play in the Ryder Cup. And this is a huge turnaround. Three years ago he was ranked 1,305th in the world. The prodigy who won his European Tour card in 2000 just a few days after his 18th birthday, had squandered his talent through partying. But Colsaerts climbed back, with solid performances, especially this year. One of the longest hitters in the game, he can now stand with Europe's best as the new season begins. It is also a fresh start for Anderlecht, the club that towers over Belgian football but is only now returning to the Champions League for first time since 2006. A victory over Cypriot side AEL Limassol in the preliminaries secured them the place with the European elite: They will face off against AC Milan, Zenit St Petersburg and Malaga in Group C, the fixtures of which are scheduled from 18 September to 5 December. The national side will be likewise looking to make its mark this



Cyclist Marieke Vervoort of Diest won silver in the 200m sprint at the Paralympic Games in London

year. The qualifiers for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil begin on Friday, with a tie against Wales at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. Coach Marc Wilmots will be hoping the Red Devils can build on their eye-catching 4-2 victory over the Netherlands last month to qualify for their first major tournament in 12 years. It won't be easy with Serbia, Scotland and Macedonia also in the group, but now is the time for the golden generation to fulfil their promise. Finally, a word about the Paralympics in London, where, as *Flanders Today* went to press, Belgian athletes had won two medals: Marieke Vervoort from Diest is bringing home silver in

the 200m wheelchair sprint, and horse rider Michele George won gold in individual dressage. This is already much better than the one bronze brought back in 2008. Belgium has a 40-strong squad in London, and, though director Ellen Volckaert's promise to bring back five medals seems optimistic, there are more inspiring hopefuls, including triple Paralympic medallist Gino De Keersmaeker in the discus, Kris Bosmans and Wim Declair in cycling and swimmer Sven Decaesstecker. We wish them luck but will refrain from cursing them with any medal targets.

The last word...

Smooth talker

"He still made mistakes, but he has advanced enormously in fluency." VRT presenter Ivan De Vadder after interviewing prime minister Elio Di Rupo in Dutch on *De zevende dag*

Fashion unconscious

"It's not too bad that you have to wear a uniform. You don't need to worry about whether you look good because everybody is the same." Twelve-year-old Matthias on his first day at the Onze-Lieve-Vrouw Lyceum in Genk

Silver lining

"I don't know whether to cheer, scream or weep. I still haven't quite realised what I've done." Marieke Vervoort, who won a silver medal at the Paralympics (*see left*)

Pecunia non olet

"Flanders has six million pigs, each of which produces about three kilos of manure a day. So there's certainly potential in my idea." Johan Jacobs from Kontich has developed a process to turn manure into useful chemicals using soldier fly larvae

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Sometimes an opera production comes around that is perfect for people who don't like opera. Hector Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust* (chasing lost youth, romantic seduction, drunkards singing bawdy tunes) staged by film director Terry Gilliam (*The Brothers Grimm*, *Twelve Monkeys*) is certainly one such. We talk to the conductor of the Vlaamse Opera about this critically acclaimed show that you shouldn't miss

News

On the eve of Open Monument Day, Flanders' heritage organisations are about to make a big announcement, while both Ghent and Mechelen celebrate the opening of new public squares and structures. We'll bring you all the latest on monumental constructions, restorations and ministrations

Arts

The fifth and final entry in the months-long Visual Arts Flanders initiative is *Newtopia: The State of Human Rights*. We'll tell you what you'll find in this exhibition that spans the city of Mechelen and takes on the massively complex subject of international human rights