

## September Declaration



Social welfare and culture funding are safe in the Flemish government's annual budget

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## Eat your caterpillars

The Night of the Researchers brings the latest findings in science, health and tech out of the lab

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## This yearning in me

Gaasbeek Castle's new exhibition of work represents the German notion of *sehnsucht*

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© Julie van Schooten

# Business after dark

**Night shops have seen a major boom during the past decade, but not without making some enemies**

Toon Lambrechts

There's no need to panic if you need a jar of jam at midnight or the beer at your party runs low. The night shop is never far away. It's convenient, but not everyone is equally keen on these all-night stores

The sun has set, when suddenly the doorbell rings. Unexpected visitors. Fun! But ... there isn't a drop of liquor in the house, and serving your adult visitors fruit juice isn't exactly stylish. Just pass by the night shop around the corner, and the evening is saved.

Our pace of life has changed dramatically. Nine-to-five jobs have become an exception, and nightlife in Flemish cities,

particularly student cities, has become incredibly lively – not to mention long. The concept of a night shop fits perfectly into this picture.

You usually don't have to walk very far if you run out of cigarettes in the evening, certainly not in a city. But even most villages have their night shops. Behind the counter, almost without exception, is a shopkeeper from Southern Asia.

Night shops in Flanders are a recent phenomenon. The first of them popped up in the mid-1990s; before that, you just had to wait until morning if you needed anything. Since the first night shops opened, their numbers have increased

dramatically. Their exact number is unknown, however, because night shops are registered simply as food stores, just like the corner fruit and veg. The last detailed census, conducted by the consultancy firm Food in Mind, estimated their number at 2,500, representing approximately 4,000 jobs.

A further surge in the number of night shops is not expected because the market is more than saturated. In some cities, their numbers are in fact decreasing slightly, partly the result of more strict policies and partly because city councils have begun to target the night shops for closure.

The Shanti night shop stands on Ghent's Burgstraat in the

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## FACE OF FLANDERS

## Magali Cobbaert



The hugely popular TV quiz show *De slimste mens ter wereld* (*The Smartest Person in the World*) was back on our screens last week, on a new channel and with a slightly different format. And, most notably, with regular, everyday people.

Four regular, everyday people, to be exact, out of a total roll-call for the season of 34 contestants. The rest are the kind we're used to seeing on the programme – actors, journalists, politicians and other celebrities, known as Bekende Vlamingen, or BVs. The show is famous for its clever interplay of guests, host and resident comedians rather than for its tough questions or prizes (there are none).

The very first average citizen on *De slimste mens* is Magali Cobbaert, who lives in Ostend and helps run the family business, advising auctioneers on horse sales. She has a background in Arabic and Islamic studies, but so far none of her specialised knowledge has been needed on the show. On her first evening, she defeated Sylvia Van Driessche, editor of teen magazine *Joepie*, with questions about Freud and Tony Blair. As

*Flanders Today* went to press, she was headed into her second night, against pro basketballer Tomas Van Den Spiegel and Dutch sportswriter Jan Mulder.

So how did Cobbaert make the cut as *De slimste mens* first non BV? "With a friend I took part in *De Pappenheimers* last year, and that's also a programme by Woestijnvis. I think that when they were looking for people who are not celebrities, that's how they came to me."

Are the BVs as nice as they seem? "Those BVs are all nice people, everyone of them. They just behave like ordinary people, though of course it's the sort of programme where you're completely wound up from nerves. It's very stressful. But the best part is when it's over and you can tell yourself you did all right."

How does it feel to see yourself on TV? "Very strange, indeed. You're simply not used to seeing yourself in that way. I found it a very strange experience."

*De slimste mens ter wereld* airs on weeknights at 20.45 on VIER

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

Alan Hope

## News in brief

The ministers serving in the Flemish government will remain in place after the municipal elections on 14 October, minister-president Kris Peeters reminded the public last week. Peeters was reacting to announcements by several members of the federal government, who intend to take up a mayoral position if their party wins in October. Of the serving Flemish ministers, most are standing far down on party lists, while Hilde Crevits is in second place in Torhout, West Flanders. "Everyone committed themselves then to see the journey through, and I see no reason now to question that promise," he said.

The Royal Meteorological Institute (KMI) has promised more accurate short-term weather forecasts, thanks to a new radar tower installed last week in Jabbeke, West Flanders, which brings the number of towers in the country to three. The new tower is 46 metres tall and can receive information on approaching precipitation, as well as data on migrating birds, which can be used by air traffic controllers.

The Brussels prosecutor has announced the completion of the investigation into the death of Iliaz Tahiraj, a supervisor for the public transport authority MIVB. Tahiraj died last April after being attacked by a man after an accident between a car and a bus. The incident led to all public transport services in the city being cancelled for almost a week and a promise by the interior minister to heighten security on the network. The prosecutor will now seek to have the man responsible committed for trial on charges of assault leading to unintentional homicide, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years.

Police in Asse, Flemish Brabant, last week raided a suspected gang of human traffickers thought to have organised more than 100 transports of illegal migrants, mainly from

Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, via Brussels and Ghent to the United Kingdom.

Metal thieves last week struck Antwerp's cathedral, taking seven lead plates from the roof of the building. The thieves are thought to have climbed a scaffolding where renovation work is taking place.

A planned new promenade along the Brussels canal has run into an obstacle: two bridges with Art Deco balustrades. Because the bridges cannot be adapted to the planned boardwalk between the Klein Kasteeltje and Vlaamsepoort, walkers and cyclists will now have to leave the promenade to pass the bridges at street level. "Nobody noticed there was a problem until now," commented Brussels cycling manager Frederik Depoortere.

One in three people in Flanders takes the car for journeys of less than one kilometre, according to a government survey. In the course of the year to September 2011, the average person travelled 16,315 kilometres by car, up from 15,666 the previous year. According to the cyclist organisation Fietsersbond, "the government continues to facilitate car traffic" – from a budget for mobility of €3.3 billion, only €100 million goes to cycling. Mobility minister Hilde Crevits pointed out that the government has invested in 1,750km of cycle routes.

Antwerp Zoo last week announced the birth of a baby okapi named Nkosi, weighing in at 14 kilograms and measuring 71 centimetres tall. The zoo now has seven of the animals, which are native to the rainforests of Congo and closely related to the giraffe. The Zoo runs the European breeding programme for okapi, of which there are an estimated 35,000 in the wild.

Belgacom has agreed to sell 25 Phone House shops and 32 shop-in-shop points of sale to YouCall, a new company set up by former Phone House executives. Belgacom acquired the Phone House when it took over Wireless Technologies in January but was obliged by competition authorities to sell the shops. Belgacom retains another 57 Phone House sales points.

The government of the Brussels-Capital Region has approved a code of conduct for the city's 3,000 taxi drivers, under which they pledge to drive defensively, keep their vehicles clean and refrain from smoking. The code also covers customer service issues and manner of dress. Brussels taxis will also carry a notice in Dutch, French and English giving passengers notice of their rights, including the right to a printed receipt.

The Kulak campus of the University of Leuven in Kortrijk will award an honorary doctorate on 29 October to Christine Lagarde, the French director of the International Monetary Fund, in recognition of her "key role in international economic policy," the university said. "We wish to express our admiration for the expertise and professionalism with which she carries out her responsibilities".

The Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism has described as "a flagrant breach of anti-discrimination laws" the policy of a night club in Antwerp that allows young women entry from the age of 18 but imposes a minimum age of 20 for young men. "Girls become adults faster than boys," said Noxx manager Bart Clerckx, "and that's what we want on Saturdays – an adult clientele. We're not interested in excluding people. This is a commercial decision."

Alan Hope

## FLANDERS TODAY

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## OFFSIDE

## What's in a name?

"No more people of foreign origin in prison. That's taken care of."

That's a (rough) translation of a cartoon in last Thursday's *De Morgen*, which devoted its entire front page to an editorial announcing that the paper will no longer use the word *allochtoon*.

The word is derived from the Greek and means "not originating from this country". It comes to Flanders from the Netherlands, where it is defined in the 1970s by the Central Bureau for Statistics as someone who has at least one parent who was born outside of the Netherlands – whether the person him or herself was born in the Netherlands or not.

By that definition, the American editor of this newspaper, the English deputy editor and the Scottish author of this article are all *allochtonen*. However, in common usage, including newspapers like



*De Morgen*, the word is used mainly in a narrower sense. "Although they are also 'not from here', we never use the word in practice for the Dutch, the French or the Germans," explained editor Wouter Verschelden. "It is a code word, a loaded term that contains a number of qualifications: Muslim, under-educated, disadvantaged, Arab, North African, non-European." English and French, he pointed out, do not use the term; the closest English gets is "ethnic minority".

The paper, he decided, would no longer use a word considered "intellectually dishonest. A Belgian whose grandparents were born in Emirdag, Turkey, fits easily into the loaded term *allochtoon*, and his own children stand a good chance of having the label. When do you stop being an *allochtoon*?"

The initiative met with a huge response (another entire front page) from complaints of political correctness gone mad, to a call from federal equal opportunities minister Joëlle Milquet for other media to follow the example. Ingrid Lieten (pictured), the Flemish government's minister for media, said she has always avoided using the word. "We consistently choose terms such as 'people of foreign origin' or people with foreign roots," her spokeswoman explained.

# Business after dark

## Debates on free enterprise versus late-night nuisance are happening in city councils across the region

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city centre. Satnam Lakshotra, a sympathetic fellow from India, bought the place two years ago. "The previous owner, a Pakistani, didn't speak Dutch very well, and I noticed in the beginning that customers were not so happy to come here," he tells me from behind his well-stocked counter. "Now it's different; I have a lot of contact with my customers." It's Monday and quiet, already after midnight. Most customers at this time are looking for alcohol, cigarettes or sometimes a pizza to satisfy late-night munchies. "On one night I get between 50 and 200 customers over the floor; it depends on the day of the week," says Lakshotra. "It's not exactly a gold mine. My wife still works part-time; the income from the night shop alone isn't enough."

### The foreign factor

"Why are almost all night shops run by Indians or Pakistanis? People often ask me this question, but I don't have a clear answer," says Lakshotra. "Maybe because it's a job that requires little communication. In a factory or elsewhere, you have to be able to speak a minimum of Dutch. But not really in a night shop. Counting is the same everywhere."

If this was the original reason why so many from South Asia sought work in night shops, it could then have been seen as a viable job for many newcomers. "People see that something works out and then copy the concept," explains Lakshotra. "Compare it with the kebab restaurants; there are also many of them that look the same." According to Lakshotra, it was Turkish migrants who popularised night shops, but they have left them behind to focus on other kinds of stores. "Night shops are usually sole proprietorships," he says. "Sometimes an owner has two or three shops, but definitely not something like a chain, like people sometimes think."

A man interrupts Lakshotra to ask for a pack of cigarettes. He's clearly had a few and asks whether Lakshotra might know where he parked his car. Lakshotra does not know. Being a night shopkeeper can be a bit like bartending; those wandering in late at night are looking for someone to talk to.

But night shops come with a heightened risk; they are perfect targets for robbers. Has Lakshotra never been afraid, alone at night? "Personally, I haven't experienced anything serious yet, just a few attempts to steal some stuff," he says. "The previous owner was robbed once. You do have to stand your ground sometimes. And of course take precautions."

Lakshotra points at the four cameras that are placed discreetly in the corners of the shop. "There are all kinds of people who come here. Sometimes this leads to funny

situations. Once a bunch of people came here with instruments, and it ended in a night shop concert."

### From Colruyt to the corner shop

The Shanti looks a bit like all night shops. A rather bare interior, glaringly lit, with a basic selection of products on the shelves: bread, cling film, fizzy drinks, sweets, crisps. And a wide array of alcohol and tobacco products. "That's what the customer wants," explains Lakshotra. "I've tried to offer other things, but there is simply no demand. Nobody does their regular grocery shopping in a night shop; it's just for occasional purchases."

A lot of products at the Shanti come from Colruyt supermarket. Anyone who shops at Colruyt has seen them: night shop owners with a cart full of tell-tale products that will be on their shelves by the evening. "Of course I do that; it's perfectly legal," says Lakshotra. "All the cafes or neighbourhood shops go there to get their goods. Just like night shops, those businesses are simply too small for a food distributor to come over. It's just easier to spot us as night shop owners because we are of foreign origin."

### War on night shops?

Regardless of convenience if you get a night-time hankering for a bottle of red, night shops are not popular with everyone. Several cities across Flanders have sought through various measures to reduce the number of night shops. Leuven, for example, with its tens of thousands of students and thriving night shop industry, wants as many as one-third of them to disappear. Some city councillors in Bruges are also fed up with night shops, citing the selling of alcohol as a public nuisance.

It's not untrue: People who buy wine, beer or liquor at a night shop often drink it on the street – especially young people. Moreover, night shops are often associated with undeclared work, social fraud and being loose with regards to food safety regulations.

The sale of alcohol is a major source of income for most night shops, which is also a thorn in the side of bars. Complaints against night shops have been lodged by Horeca Vlaanderen on behalf of neighbourhood bars because they see night shops as direct competitors. Since 2006, different city councils have explored a series of legal possibilities to regulate night shops, but they cannot prohibit the stores.

Leuven and Bruges both tried to impose a ban on selling alcohol after a certain hour, but the Council of State claimed that such a prohibition is contrary to the freedom of trade. Senator Bart Tommelein (Open VLD) last spring proposed a bill that would



Judging from comments on online forums, Satnam Lakshotra is one of Ghent's most popular night shop owners



According to Leuven alderwoman Els Van Hoof, if night shops improved the look of their windows, it would already go a long way to improving local relations

ban the sale of alcohol between midnight and 6.00 nationwide, but such a measure is legally more complicated than it seems.

### Lack of community involvement

Alderwoman Els Van Hoof, responsible for trade in Leuven, explains that night shops don't have to disappear, but that strict supervision is necessary. "Leuven is a university town, so there is a market for night shops," she says. "We have about 30 of them in our city, which is more than in many other cities, even relatively speaking. Some are situated in residential areas and cause nuisances like noise. Others are

located near pubs and are direct competitors for the bars."

That's how a free market works, she continues, "but if events are organised, night shop owners never show up. They contribute nothing to what we organise in cooperation with the bars and cafés, but they do benefit from it. We want to sit at the table with the owners to make clear what the rules are and what we expect from them. A more neat front window, for example, would already counter a lot of resentment." Unizo, which represents small businesses in Flanders, is, conversely, not interested in closing down or further regulating night shops. In a reaction to the proposal to prohibit the sale of alcohol, Unizo said that selling alcohol is

indispensable to the businesses and pointed out that the municipalities have enough legal instruments to tackle night shops that cause real problems, without punishing those that follow the rules.

Night shop owners and others admit that there might be too many night shops in some cities, but if they are not economically viable, this problem will solve itself. Some night shop owners feel that they are unfairly targeted by politicians. "Whether someone is drunk from going to the pub or from liquor bought at the night shop, the result is the same," says Lakshotra. "The pubs and the bars complain about us, but it is a different clientele. We don't keep anyone away from the bars."

# Social agenda focus of September Declaration

## Welfare and families spared from impending budget cuts

Alan Hope

No cuts in welfare or family policies, a priority of investing in culture and education and a new system of training to direct young people towards hard-to-fill jobs are among the main focuses of the Flemish government's policy plans for 2013. The measures were announced this week by minister-president Kris Peeters in his traditional September Declaration, at the opening of the new session of the Flemish Parliament.

The stated aim of the Peeters government is a balanced budget, but that will require a deft handling of competing interests: The government spent most of last week discussing the issue. Faced with reduced growth in the coming year of only 0.7%, the achievement of a balanced budget – this will be the third in a row – is all the more difficult, Peeters admitted last week. In addition, higher spending commitments and the new responsibilities of the regions arising out of state reforms means that ministers are looking at cuts of €500 million to €1 billion, according to analysts. This is the last full annual budget to be prepared by the present government – the next

elections are due to take place in or before June 2014. "Through the choices we make today, we can turn the challenges of our time into the chance for new growth," Peeters told members of the parliament.

The speech was notable for what it refused to cut. "This government has chosen to follow a strong social agenda," said Peeters. "We will not be cutting back on welfare, health or family commitments. Child care, equal opportunities in education, support for people with a handicap, social housing, water and energy policy, attention for disadvantaged groups in the workforce, the fight against poverty...all remain at the top of our priority list."

Ministers have made "difficult but necessary choices," Peeters continued. "Working resources have been nominally frozen. Extensions of policy have been put on hold until the following budget round. But where we are confronted with a growth in demand – the growing number of children in primary education, the growing need to put disadvantaged groups to work, the growing need for child care and care for the handicapped – the means will be found to respond to that

© Belga



"Difficult but necessary choices": Kris Peeters

demand." One of the measures put on hold from the new budget is the long-awaited child premium, postponed again this year. The measure would provide a one-off payment of €150 to €200 for parents of children up to three years old. The same fate befell a means-tested maximum bill for home care of the sick and elderly, which also failed to materialise this year. Both measures were contained in the social protection decree approved by the government in

July, but implementation has been postponed.

A full set of budget figures has still to be released, but one area where Peeters was clear to announce cuts was within the government itself: a 1% cut in the cost of civil servants, over and above the 6% cuts currently being implemented. "We are also asking for an effort from our own personnel to achieve this budget result," he said.

## Rail strike possible for 3 October

After announcing and then withdrawing a possible strike action on 24 September, rail unions are now discussing when, rather than if, the action should take place. The French-speaking side of the socialist union has called for a 24-hour action on 3 October, with the possibility of a 48-hour stoppage one week later. Their Flemish counterparts, on the other hand, have distanced themselves from that decision. "It has absolutely not been decided whether we will strike, never mind talk of a 48-hour action," said chairman Jos Digneffe.

The action follows on weeks of discussions between rail unions and Paul Magnette, federal minister for government enterprises. Magnette has plans to reform the current tripartite NMBS into two functions: rail infrastructure and train services. Unions, on the other hand, are pleading for a single integrated entity, as was the case before.

As *Flanders Today* went to press, a demonstration in Brussels was planned on Thursday, 27 September, and a strike on 3 October was being discussed. In the meantime, rail unions have been carrying out what they term "soft actions", including handing out pamphlets to train users explaining their position and what they see as the drawbacks of Magnette's plan for rail customers.

## 60,000 sing for climate

More than 60,000 people gathered across Flanders last weekend to take part in the Sing for the Climate action organised by filmmaker and activist Nic Balthazar and the charities 11.11.11 and Klimaatcoalitie. Members of the public joined in the song "Do It Now", an arrangement by Zita Swoon frontman Stef Kamil Carlens of the Italian anti-fascist anthem "Bella Ciao". Among

the celebrities who turned up to lend their support were singer Lady Linn, comedian Lieven Scheire, TV presenter Katja Retsin and polar explorer Dixie Dansercoer. "You could feel a hugely positive vibe everywhere people were gathered," Balthazar said. A film of the event will be sent to world leaders.

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



© Nicolas Maeterlinck / BELGA

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

**5,400**

drivers in Flanders caught by number plate scanners last year and forced to pay €2 million in unpaid road tax

**2,000**

thefts in train stations last year – more than five per day – according to the NMBS, an increase of 20% from 2010

**25%**

more visitors passed through the office of Toerisme Vlaanderen on the Brussels Grasmarkt in 2011 – more than 250,000

**27,000**

trains will keep better time thanks to new software introduced by the rail authority NMBS, which gathers real-time data to predict problems on the network

**5th**

place for a team from the bio-engineering sciences department of Ghent University in a competition at Virginia Tech in the US, the highest place ever achieved for a team taking part for the first time

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### The third way

Bart De Wever, the president of the nationalist N-VA, has dominated the headlines for years now. Not just because of politics; his personality also makes for endless fascination, as the recent launch of a book on his spectacular diet once again proved. Given all this, the road to Antwerp city hall seemed wide open for him – until Antwerp's sitting mayor Patrick Janssens began his own campaign.

Last week Janssens started a veritable media offensive. The socialist presented his own one-off celebrity magazine *Patrick*. On the cover is a relaxed mayor, holding his baby. The magazine is not your average election publication as it contains a number of articles on Janssens and on Antwerp, even critical at times, with no mention of SPA, the party over which Janssens once presided. The magazine is emblematic of a campaign revolving around two people rather than around issues. This is very frustrating to Annemie Turtelboom, quite a personality herself, who nonetheless seems only peripheral in the city's local elections.

Federal justice minister Turtelboom moved to Antwerp only recently, specifically for the purpose of standing in the local elections. She was always aware that the task ahead of her was not easy, as Open VLD in Antwerp was, in her own words, "not a party but a group of individuals". This was illustrated once more when two Open VLD aldermen defected to N-VA upon Turtelboom's arrival.

The liberal minister's campaign tagline is *De derde weg*, "the third way" – an alternative to heavyweights De Wever and Janssens. She is doing her best to bring issues back into the debate, to have people "look beyond Patrick and Bart's sitcom".

Turtelboom wants to, for instance, improve mobility, with extra road links to provide relief to the overburdened ring road. She also wants to tackle the overcrowding in Antwerp's schools, as this is one reason why young families are leaving the city. Turtelboom is finding it hard to make herself heard, though, as the media focuses on any (sometimes hard to find) difference of opinion between De Wever and Janssens.

Vlaams Belang's Filip Dewinter, too, struggles with this, resorting to the racist undertones of his party's roots. The attention the Janssens-De Wever duel attracts must be even more frustrating to him, as he was once the centre of all media coverage, back in the days when his party got one in three votes. These days Dewinter's name is mostly mentioned when Patrick Janssens gets it mixed up with De Wever's, as he seems to do a lot.

# No closure at Ford Genk

**Plant will produce three new models from October 2013**

Alan Hope

The Ford automobile assembly plant in Genk, Limburg province, will begin producing the new Ford Mondeo in October of next year, management announced after a top-level meeting in Detroit last week. In addition, the plant will also produce new models of the Galaxy and the S-Max from the end of 2014.

Union representatives said they were "extremely relieved" by the announcement, which put to rest a week of speculation over the possible closure of Ford Genk, started by an article in *The Wall Street Journal* warning that Ford, faced with falling sales in Europe, might close a factory here. "The announcement of an exact date is actually more than we had hoped," said Rohnny Champagne of the socialist union ABVV, calling the news "a major and important step". Earlier in the week, management at Ford Europe had described fears over the future of Ford Genk as "whipped-up nonsense", though spokesman Jo De Clercq later agreed



that the Detroit announcement was "a powerful statement even we hadn't expected".

Federal labour minister Monica De Coninck said she was "delighted" with the news from Detroit. Flemish

minister-president Kris Peeters congratulated the unions on their negotiations with the company and repeated his promise made last week that he would continue to follow the situation at Ford Genk closely. The technology industry federation Agoria said the decision by Ford was a confirmation of their "faith in the quality, know-how and productivity" of the plant's staff. Ford Genk, one of the company's most modern factories, employs 4,700 people, with many more in the area depending on it indirectly for their employment – as many as 10,500, according to Agoria. The Mondeo is Ford's best-selling model and, apart from Genk, is produced only in Mexico and in St Petersburg. Meanwhile, it was announced that Volvo Cars in Ghent will produce 17,000 of the new Volvo Cross Country XC40, a variation on the existing V40, of which Ghent produces 90,000 a year. The Cross Country is aimed at the European and Chinese markets and will only be produced in Ghent.

## Peeters calls for "50 quick-win ideas" from SMEs

"Bring me 50 concrete ideas – 50 quick-win ideas – that fall within the responsibilities of the Flemish government, and I promise you that we will make work of them, in the short term."

That challenge – and the promise – was issued last week to small businesses in Flanders by minister-president Kris Peeters, speaking at the opening of the working year of Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed. The event was attended by the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that make up Unizo's membership. "Unizo and the other organisations will make work of the concrete suggestions, and the Flemish government will begin taking action, already before the end of the year," said Peeters. SMEs, he said, are "an indispensable fibre in our economic fabric". They

make up a quarter of the private sector, with an added value of €45 billion – 10% more than a decade ago. They also employ 550,000 people in Flanders. And small businesses continue to exercise an attraction to newcomers: According to government figures, there were 23,382 new companies started up in Flanders in the first six months of this year – 2.1% more than in the same period last year and 7% more than in the first semester of 2010. "People who lose their jobs are finding new work more easily, despite the crisis," Peeters said. "So it's a pity that we always read about it in the papers when a company gets rid of 15 people, but never when one of your companies takes 15 people on."

Peeters admitted that his government was limited in what it could do: Four of the top five complaints cited by Unizo in a survey of its



members – including high taxation, international competition, high wage demands from unions and control over the banks – fell under federal authority. "The federal government has already taken certain steps to re-launch the economy, but

more is needed," he said. "Above all, more work is required on the implementation of state reform, because that is what will provide a major lever to help turn the Flemish economic machine."

## Inspectors clamp down on migrant workers

Federal social security inspectors are clamping down on migrants from other EU countries who come to Belgium ostensibly as self-employed workers, only to be employed illegally when they arrive. The problem, which concerns mainly migrants from new member states Poland, Bulgaria and Romania, threatens the country's social security system, the director-general of the inspection service said.

As a condition of their entry into the EU, Bulgarian and Romanian citizens, unlike those from other member states, do not yet have an automatic right to work in Belgium. Some, however, are taking advantage of a condition that allows the self-employed to set up here, obtaining a residence permit, child allowances and other benefits. However in as many as 40% of cases, the "self-

employed" worker is engaged as a "partner" of an existing Belgian company and then paid a wage like any other employee.

The inspection service already has 50 employees working full time on the problem and has now asked for 25 extra inspectors. The cost of the increased surveillance is estimated at €2 million. However, according to the state institute for health insurance for the self-employed (RSVZ), the number of fraud cases is being exaggerated. In addition, said director-general Anne Vanderstappen, many are not intentionally committing fraud. "Many are people who arrive with the best intention but become the victim of third parties, and only realise months later that their affairs are not in order."

## Less profits in building sector

Half of all small businesses in the construction sector are unable to make a profit, despite an increase in the number of building permits being approved, according to the building industry federation Bouwunie.

In the first six months of this year, nearly 26,300 permits were approved in Belgium for new homes – family houses and apartments – which is 20% more than the same period in 2011 (admittedly the worst year since 2002). But, according to Bouwunie, only 47% of its members make a profit, with a similar number hovering around the break-even point. Of the total, 38% expect things to get worse over the coming months. About 46% have orders for the next six months and 42% for the next three months only.

## THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Air ► BMI

British-based airline BMI Regional is launching a twice-a-day service connecting Antwerp with Manchester from 29 October.

### Awards ► Gemini Corporation

The Antwerp-Waasland branch of Flemish chamber of commerce VOKA handed out its "Oscars for Businesses" last week, and the Excellence in Enterprise award went to Gemini Corporation, which buys and sells recyclable materials. The Lifetime Achievement award went to Reinders Label Printing.

### Freight ► Brucargo

Brussels Airport Company and Aalst property developer Montea have signed an agreement for phase 3 of Brucargo West. The freight storage and distribution centre at Brussels Airport will be expanded to create 82,000 square metres of additional warehouse and office space.

### Hotels ► Rosebud

Swiss-based group Rosebud Heritage will transform the disused Gesu church on Koningsstraat in central Brussels into a luxury hotel and 75 apartments. The new facility will open in 2016.

### Mail ► bpost

Belgian post office bpost has expressed interest in acquiring a 20% stake in the state-owned Romanian postal system, provided it will have influence on the company's management.

### Plastics ► Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics group is seeking to increase production of special polymers on its Panoli site in India by 70%. Work on the site has already started, with the additional capacity expected to come on stream by mid-2013. The company has also acquired India's Sunshield Chemicals to expand its activities in cosmetics, paints and industrial products applications.

### Telecoms ► Telenet

Mechelen-based Telenet, Flanders' leading cable and telecom service, has received a takeover offer from its biggest shareholder, US-based Liberty Global. The €35 a share bid values Telenet at some €3.97. If successful, the deal would make the company private, taking it off the stock market, where it was one of the star performers of the Bel-20 index.

# Fungi is in the house

## Night of the Researchers explores the impact of science on our daily lives

Andy Furniere

The lab isn't the only place for science. The Belgian Federal Science Policy's (Belspo) Nacht van de onderzoekers, or Night of the Researchers, is devoted to "Science at home", in which Flemish scientists will show how their research affects our daily lives – today and tomorrow. Find out why our jeans aren't washed with stones anymore and taste the delicacies of the future: grasshoppers and caterpillars.

Night of the Researchers is a popular science event supported by the European Commission and takes place in about 300 cities on the same night every year. In Flanders, everyone is invited to explore scientific possibilities during interactive shows, hands-on experiments and workshops at the Botanique in Brussels.

Dancers and video artists will make it a night to remember at the Planetarium, where a programme explains how the interaction between the earth, moon and sun regulates our lives. The patron of the event presumably already knows: VRT weatherman Frank Deboosere.

### Washing with enzymes

Enzymes caused a revolution in washing products. It might sound



Your next barbecue, if Flemish scientists have anything to say about it

like something from a TV advert, but it is a scientific reality. A "housewife" at a stand hosted by the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology will tell you how scientific breakthroughs in these biological molecules have made it easier to remove the greasiest stains from clothing – with

less energy, less water and less soap. This scientific progress has ensured that our jeans no longer have to be washed with pumice stones drenched in environment-unfriendly acid. This "stonewashing" was common until recently, to soften jeans and give them a worn

look. Enzymes are not only applied in washing but in various activities such as tanning leather and baking bread.

The Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO) will make you look with different eyes at the materials in your living room, as you discover the evolution to the use of more sustainable materials. For designers, VITO developed the Ecolizer, a measuring system to determine, for example, whether a wooden chair is better for the environment than one made of steel. And VITO's analyses of sustainability have lead to the creation of a new sort of lightweight brick.

The institute illustrates the importance of recycling by referring to examples like the amount of gold in our mobile phones. A large mural is the result of brainstorming sessions with other scientists on life in the future, and artist Luc Schuiten has drawn his image of the "vegetal

city" of the future.

### Insects on the menu

At a cooking demonstration, Tervuren's Royal Museum for Central Africa will try to convince you that insects should not be considered just creepy-crawlies but part of your daily diet. Not only is it less polluting to cultivate insects instead of livestock, they are healthy: Insects are rich in proteins, iron, zinc, calcium, phosphorous and vitamins B and D. And a grasshopper, for example, is 50 to 75% protein, while meat may be only 18%.

Europe is still discovering this food, but in other parts of the world it is considered a delicacy: More than 1,700 insect species are eaten in Africa, Asia and the United States. To persuade visitors, scientists will present a website that contains all the scientific info, plus recipes and therapeutic applications.

**28 SEPTEMBER, 18.00-23.00**

### Botanique

Koningsstraat 236, Brussels

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

## FLANDERS' INVENTIONS

**Domestic brainwave monitor, by imec**  
Nanotechnology institute imec will demonstrate a prototype headset with which game environments automatically adapt to your knowledge level. Worn by epilepsy patients, the system would alert them to a seizure

**Homelab, by VITO** Intelligent domestic applications, such as the washing machine and dryer of the future

**The Infinitex system, by the Interdisciplinary Institute for Broadband Technology** IBBT is an independent research institute, founded by the Flemish government to stimulate ICT innovation. It presents a new production and editing system for graphic artists

**Monitoring systems for detecting falls, by IBBT** A demo showcases the results of detecting falls with cameras to assist elderly people living at home

**"Geniaal Chemicaal", by Technopolis**  
Science centre Technopolis will present a show based on the world of chemistry. Experiments offer answers to mysteries such as the presence of colours in fireworks

**Science in My Garden and Other Green Spaces, by the Royal Museum for Central Africa** Experiments with trees and wood, such as a game with a xylophone to show the different characteristics of wood

**Micro-organisms Take Over the House, by Belspo and the Belgian Co-ordinated Collections of Micro-organisms** Get to know fungi through games and observations with microscopes. You'll discover that it's an advantage to have them around the house

# VIB sceptical of GMO study

## Findings of "controversial" French researcher have been questioned before

Alan Hope

The Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) has said it is "exceptionally sceptical" of a French study, published last week, which shows that genetically modified (GM) corn can cause abnormally high levels of tumours in rats.

The study, published in the journal *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, was carried out by researchers at Caen University, led by Professor Gilles-Eric Séralini. The rats were fed varying quantities of NK603, a GM variety of corn developed by Monsanto to be resistant to the company's own Roundup herbicide – one of the most commonly used herbicides in the world.

The Séralini study revealed that the rats developed mammary tumours and liver and kidney damage at an early age – roughly equivalent to late adolescence in humans. Rats that were given water containing Roundup in quantities below the legal limits also developed tumours, the study said.

VIB, which cooperates with many GMO trials in Flanders, including trials of corn plants, issued a statement calling Prof Séralini's methods into question. "VIB points out that Séralini is a controversial researcher," the organisation said in a statement. "Séralini has published similar accounts before, but not one of them has withstood scientific

scrutiny. That is because he draws conclusions that cannot be derived from the data."

The European Food Safety Authority has examined Séralini's previous study about GM corn for the European Commission, the statement said, and found his conclusions could not be supported by his own data.

The VIB statement was part of a worldwide critical reaction to the study. Reuters reported that scientists in several countries had accused the Caen group of "going on a statistical fishing trip" and claimed its methods were substandard. Critics also pointed out that, while the Caen study ran for two years,

GM corn has been part of the human food chain in the United States for almost two decades.

"These crops were naturally subjected to the toxicity tests required for commercial use and were found to be safe," VIB said. "VIB is a proponent of studies concerning the safety of GM crops but insists that these have to be carried out in a thorough and scientifically responsible way. VIB regrets that incorrectly performed studies damage the reputation of GM organisms and plant biotechnology in general."



► [www.vib.be](http://www.vib.be)

# Lean on me

## Volunteers at a new Care House in Ghent help cancer patients recover

Andy Furniere

The first days after a cancer treatment or operation are an ordeal for every patient, but even more so for those who have no family or close friends to help them at home. They can, however, count on the support of volunteers in the *zorgenhuisen*, or care houses, in Ostend and now in Ghent. Both were founded by cancer patients.

The two apartments at the new house in Ghent are in a quiet street along the Coupure canal. Here cancer patients with no-one to lean on can recover in a comfortable environment from the worst effects of an operation, radiation or chemotherapy. For a week, volunteers relieve them of chores such as cooking, the laundry and going to the chemist. They listen to their stories and encourage them, just as family and friends would do.

Majin de Froidmont established the Care House in her home town after eight months of treatment for lymph node cancer. "I am single, but I was lucky to have a whole team of friends and family by my side because the treatment had completely shattered me," she says. "I didn't have any physical or mental energy left in me to care for myself." She was, however, affected by the sight of other patients who arrived in hospital and remained there alone, with mobile phones that never rang.

### Guests, not patients

De Froidmont based her Care House on a concept that has been working well for more than three years in Ostend. The idea came from a local, Els Cappelle, who had experienced first-hand how it felt to return from hospital alone to a home where the fridge was empty and nobody helped you out of bed.

With the support of local hospitals, mutual health funds and volunteers, the non-profit Zorghuis was established in 2009. Cappelle also worked as a volunteer in the Ostend house, until she lost her battle



Majin de Froidmont founded Ghent's new Care House for singles recovering from cancer treatment

against cancer in March this year. "Els filled a gap in our health-care system," says Johan Valcke, the president of the Ostend Care House. "We have now welcomed 95 guests, who stay a week on average." Valcke insists on the term "guests" to clarify the difference from a hospital environment. "In hospitals, the staff don't have the time to get to know each person. You remain a patient." The concept of the Care House is to be an "almost-at-home" space with physical and mental comfort. To facilitate the transition from hospital to home, the Care House team also makes sure the refrigerator is stocked and the heating is on when they return home. The Care House itself doesn't provide medical care, which it leaves to visiting doctors and nurses. Before admitting guests, the team always consult doctors and social services. The volunteers thus don't need medical training, but they are prepared for their task, and coordinators check that they are fit enough for this challenging work.

"You have to be able to imagine yourself in the situation of the person," explains Annie Geedts, a volunteer in Ostend. "We try to make people feel at ease; this has to be a place without stress. Most people spontaneously tell us their intimate stories, and a lot of people who have had chemotherapy leave their wig off after a while."

A lot of volunteers are motivated by an experience with cancer, either themselves or among friends or family. Heidi Naujock now supports the guests at Ghent after having had breast cancer herself. "What hurt me a lot during my treatment was the lack of understanding," she explains. "I could not stand to be hushed and told that so many people go through the same suffering. I know the extreme anxiety they feel."

### Growing need

To finance the apartments and coordinators, the care houses rely on private sponsors, groups such as the Rotary Club and mutuality funds. Guests pay €30 per day, of which half

is refunded by mutualities. The house in Ostend also received about €35,000 in subsidies from the Flemish League against Cancer (VLK) for a period of two years.

"We wanted to help launch this unique, innovative project, which meets a growing need in our society," says Hans Neefs of the VLK. "While patients are more quickly dismissed from hospital, there are ever-more single people without relatives or friends to take care of them." VLK is now financing an academic study to get a clear view of the needs of cancer patients who live alone and the care services available to them. Apart from supporting the Care House initiatives, VLK is also looking for an improvement in care in patients' own homes. Neefs: "Caregivers in home care are often not familiar with the problems and side effects occurring after cancer treatments, so specific training has to resolve this."

► [www.zorghuisgent.be](http://www.zorghuisgent.be)  
► [www.zorghuis.be](http://www.zorghuis.be)

## Q&A

**Marc Vandenbruaene is an expert in sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) at Antwerp's Institute of Tropical Medicine. He coordinates the popular evening course in HIV, AIDS and STDs**

### Who can participate in the course?

It's meant primarily for people who work in health care as a doctor or nurse, but we also welcome people from the prevention field. We also reach professionals who might get involved with people with HIV or STDs: those who work with asylum seekers, with homosexuals, with drug addicts... And, of course, students of medicine or nursing. The six-month course costs €150, or €75 for students, and starts on 10 October. The lessons are in Dutch and are held here at the institute.

### What is taught specifically?

Our approach is multi-disciplinary.

We teach the basics of HIV and AIDS education, and we touch on some important aspects of sex education. But we also handle, for example, legal and psychological issues. Although in the West few people who are infected with HIV develop AIDS anymore, they still have a strong taboo resting on their shoulders. Imagine you recently became infected with HIV, and one day you met a friend you'd not seen for a long time. I doubt you'd tell him about it. But if you've had cancer, for example, you probably wouldn't keep silent about that.

### Does this course help fill the gaps in the medical curriculum

### at colleges and universities?

It definitely does. In the normal medical curriculum, HIV, AIDS and STDs don't have a central place. Sometimes we hear stories of patients in hospitals where health-care professionals enter rooms with masks on. Everyone should know that HIV cannot be transmitted through the air.

### Can people with HIV participate in the course?

Our course is not meant for lay people but for professionals or medical and paramedical students. Actually, in Belgium AIDS patients have become rare because most HIV-infected people take medicines



that prevent the disease developing. It means you can't tell from the outside any more if someone's HIV positive. That's one of the many issues that we clarify in our course.

Interview by Senne Starckx

► [www.itg.be/cursushivaida](http://www.itg.be/cursushivaida)

## THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

To commemorate his space flight 20 years ago, Dirk Frimout has invited his former colleagues on the Atlantis space shuttle to participate in **Belgian Space Week**, which runs until Friday. In 1992, Frimout became the first Fleming in space. During the week, several conferences and debates are being held in scientific and education institutes, with the goal of introducing more young people to scientific and technical studies. Frimout's former commander is Charles Bolden, now the head of Nasa.

**Polar travellers Dixie Dansercoer and Sam Deltour** have started a tour of lectures through Flanders to discuss how they broke the world record for the longest unassisted, non-motorised expedition in Antarctica. Dansercoer has also announced that he wants to break the record again in 2014, with a Canadian colleague. They would travel to Greenland to raise more awareness of climate change, which is clearly visible there.

Researchers from Ghent University and the Institute for Tropical Medicine in Antwerp have discovered that special food **supplements are not more effective in combating undernourishment** in children than the cheaper distribution of basic food items. In Abéché, Chad, the researchers observed the condition of 1,038 children who all received basic food parcels. Half also got food supplements, but those children lost no less weight than the ones who got only the food.

Ever more Dutch students are coming to Flanders to study, according to figures in *De Standaard*. At the Free University of Brussels (VUB), the number of **Dutch students has almost doubled in five years**. Studying is much cheaper in Flanders: Registering at a university or university college costs more than €1,700 in the Netherlands, compared to €570 here. For studies such as medical science and psychology, there is also a lottery system for admissions in the Netherlands.

The department of health care and technology at Leuven University College is **recording its lessons on video**. The project, RecordAid, will help students keep up with the subject material after an absence. Students who combine their study with a job, those who fall ill and those with learning disabilities can benefit from the initiative.

Antwerp is the **fastest-growing student city** in Flanders for the second year in a row. On average, 15% more students have registered per study course. The total number of students has risen to nearly 40,000. AF

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# Off the beaten track

## A new booklet by those in the know reveals Antwerp's back-street secrets

Alan Hope

Antwerp is Flanders' second-largest city, and while it might take years to exhaust the possibilities of the main tourist attractions, it's fun to explore the back streets. That job has now been made easier through the free booklet (*A*)Typisch genieten in 5 winkelwijken ((A)typical Enjoyment in Five Shopping Districts), which offers the chance to discover areas known only to the well-informed resident.

The booklet covers five areas: Brederodestraat, the station quarter, Turnhoutsebaan, Antwerp North and the area around Driekoningenstraat and Statiestraat. Your guides are locals: TV presenter Annick Ruyts, actor and writer Johan Petit and chef Fatima Marzouki of El Warda restaurant in the city's Zurenborg area.

The Nieuwe Zuid district once had ambitions to be a busy shopping area on a par with the Meir, but some of the polish has gone. Only Brederodestraat, which joins Amerikalei not far from the Museum of Fine Arts, is still lively, with a profusion of small businesses, bakeries, shops and cafes run by a mixed Flemish and Turkish population. Among the shops recommended by Ruyts are the Oxfam Boutique and florist De Bloemerie. "I buy a bunch of flowers every week," she says. "I absolutely don't have a green thumb, but with these you don't need to have."

Petit recommends Turkish tea house De Hoek - "Flemish people are made really welcome," he says - as well as the women's intercultural centre IVCA, which organises language, yoga and craft classes. On the food front, meanwhile, Marzouki is at home with the *köfte* (meatballs) from Kötter Dokter. She



Fatima Marzouki tucks into tajines at 't Fonteintje near Central Station



Build the perfect guitar with instrument maker Stijn Kenens, who hides out in Antwerp North

also chooses Middle Eastern treats like *halka*, *ghoriba* and *baklava* from bakery Cavuszade, and fresh produce from the Dutch Super Market, run by a Bengali.

The area around Central Station is

one most people will have passed through, although, unless you're in the market for gold, you probably didn't linger. But the neighbourhood also houses the Permeke Library, which offers regular exhibitions. Nearby De Keyserlei has been stripped of its stately linden trees, leaving little but some uninspired cafes and restaurants. There's more interesting food to be found at Matrjosjka, which sells Russian specialities like pickled tomatoes, rye bread and a stew of dried fish. The Russian influence is also present in Blin Blin, run by a Dutchman and his Russian wife, who make *blinis* (pancakes) with traditional toppings like herring or caviar.

Turnhoutsebaan, which runs from the Ring to the far side of the zoo, is in the multicultural Borgerhout district, where Asia meets North Africa, the Middle East and Flanders. It's also the home of Milestones Music, a regular haunt of anyone in the city who plays any kind of stringed instrument. "I love the huge collection of world instruments," Ruyts says. "The Arab *oud*, the Turkish *saz* or the Indian harmonium - you find them all here."

Petit recently presented one of his productions, *Klein Jowanneke gaat dood* (Little Jowanneke is Going to Die), to a full house at the Roma theatre. He recommends the Ecohuis for information about energy and the environment, and for its roof terrace with beehives and veggie cafe.

Opportunities for eating well are also multicultural, from the tajines of 't Fonteintje to the old-fashioned cheese shop 't Kaasboerinneke, by way of De Blauwe Oceaan for fresh fish of every sort.

### Unusual finds

The station referred to by Statiestraat is Antwerp Berchem, and the street continues under the name Driekoningenstraat all the way to Grote Steenweg. The street, now renovated for pedestrians and cyclists, recently won an award for public spaces.

Shops include the remarkable saddle maker De Clerck, now on its third generation and providing all manner of equipment for the city's horse-riding set. Local printer Baeyens, which this year marked its centenary, provides stationery to the likes of fashion designer Ann Demeulemeester, while Talent in de Buurt showcases the work of more than 100 local artists. Berchem cultural centre is also central to the area.

Finally, Antwerp North is the place for some unusual finds: Huis De Potter, with more than 7,000 theatrical costumes; Ultra Musica, one of a dying breed of music specialists; and Stijn Kenens, who builds and repairs guitars, and where it might take three months before you can bring an impulse purchase home.

The Dixy auction rooms is the place to find a rare antique or artwork; the Seeftheater is the smallest cafe theatre in Flanders; and Filmhuis Klappel has a screening room with only 50 seats and a taste for rarities and classics from cinema history.

*(A)Typisch genieten in 5 winkelwijken was produced with support from the European Regional Development Fund and is available in all the shops mentioned and in Antwerp's libraries and tourist offices*

# Come all ye faithful

## A group of enthusiasts is working to make churches a regular part of the Brussels tourist scene

Alan Hope

We all know the big attractions that bring tourists to Brussels: the unholy trinity of beer, food and chocolate. But, while Brussels may not be Florence, it still has a rich church heritage, and bringing it to the attention of residents and tourists alike is the mission of Kerk & Toerisme Brussel, a non-profit that sets out to "make Brussels' religious art heritage more widely known and more accessible".

To that end, they organise free tours of a number of churches, among them Our Lady of Finisterre, the church of Sint-Niklaas and the cathedral of St Michael and St Gudule. *Flanders Today* joined one of the organisation's volunteer guides for a tour of the Magdalena Church, in cooperation with

Broodje Brussel, the programme of lunchtime cultural activities in the capital.

The Magdalena Church sits between Central Station and the Grote Markt, on the corner of Putterij and the street that used to be known simply as *het steenweg* - it was one of the few paved streets in the city. You'd be forgiven for walking past it without noticing, but the tiny church, which traces its history back to the 13th century, when it was a mere chapel attached to a cloister, contains several treasures.

It was renovated in the 15th century, only to be destroyed by protestant forces, then restored in the 1950s according to the original plans. Since then it has survived an even greater threat than either protestants or Napoleonic bombardment: the

razing of large parts of the city to construct the North-South rail link. Inside, the church is simple and modest, the only adornment a crucifix in iconic style, a set of Stations of the Cross in ceramic and a statue of Father Damien, the famous Flemish missionary to the lepers in Hawaii. Most striking are the modern stained-glass windows above the altar by 20th-century Bruges artist Michiel Martens, which tell the story of the Gospel.

Kerk & Toerisme offers free tours on request, in any of the city centre churches or on a sort of à la carte tour of Baroque church sites in Brussels.

► [www.bloggen.be/kerktoerismebrussel](http://www.bloggen.be/kerktoerismebrussel)



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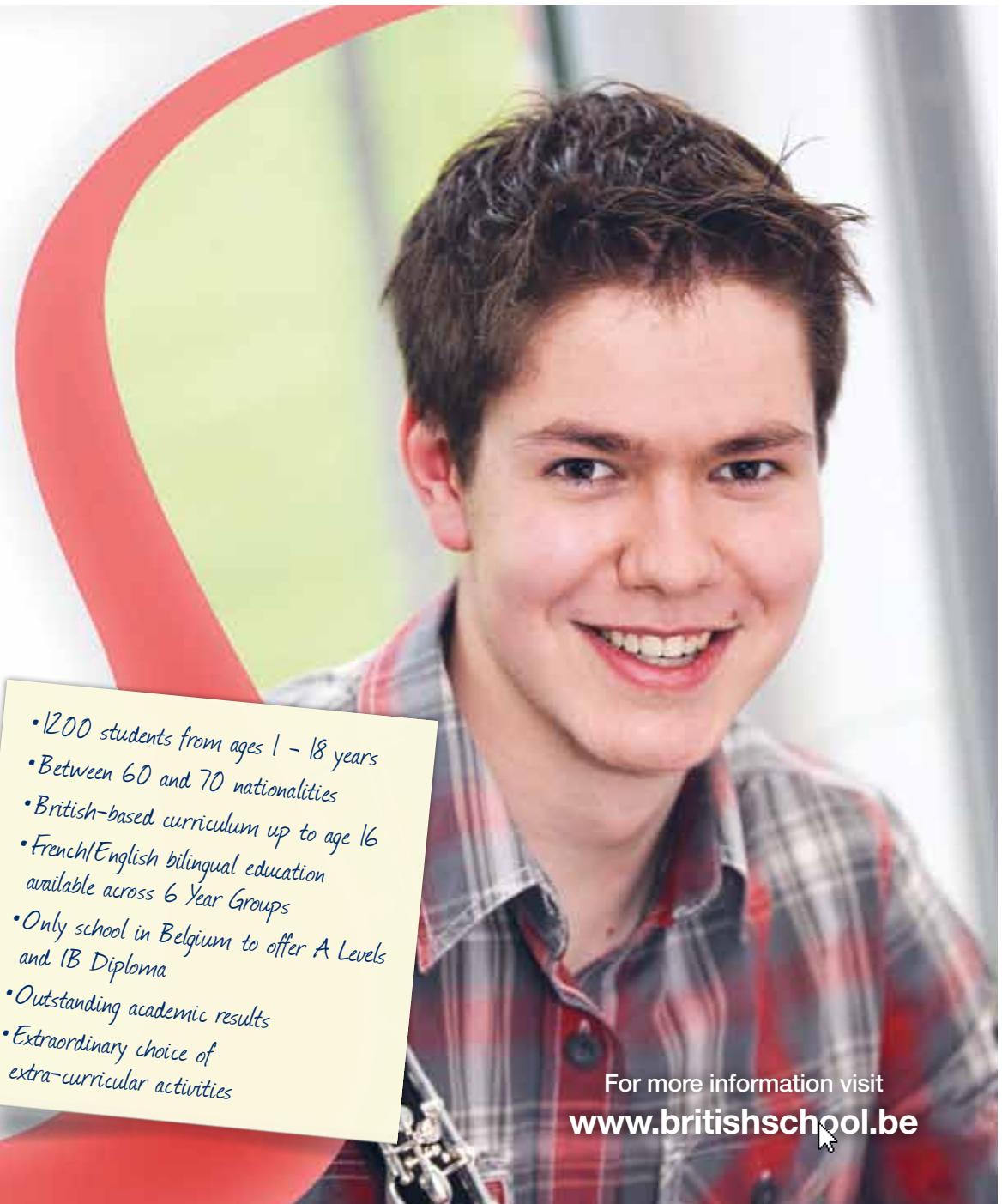
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# The past ain't a foreign country

From pop-up museums to canal boatmen, Tapis Plein sheds fresh light on Flanders' past and present

Nicholas Hirst

Last year, Tapis Plein was facing closure. Then it won the Flemish Region's prestigious annual Prize for Cultural Heritage in recognition of its original approach to questions of custom, memory and community. The tide turned, and shortly after, the government of Flanders renewed the subsidies to this creative outfit in Bruges, which focuses on preserving Flanders' intangible heritage.

It was in the wake of Bruges' stint as European Capital of Culture in 2002 that a group of arty young people founded the association. They had participated in organising the cultural celebrations, and the experience proved formative. "We came of age during the culture capital," says Jorijn Neyrinck, one of Tapis Plein's founders and its current director.

Having studied anthropology, *Brugeling* Neyrinck was aware of the importance of tradition and custom. Yet she observed that while gargantuan efforts were made to preserve (and even reconstruct) Bruges' picture-postcard architecture, its intangible culture was sorely undervalued.

## What is intangible heritage?

In 2003, the United Nations defined intangible heritage as being, among other things, oral expressions, social practices and traditional



Tapis Plein project Quartier Bricolé sought to revive formerly popular shopping areas with young designers and creatives

craftsmanship," explains Neyrinck. Examples from Bruges include the local dialect, the Procession of the Holy Blood and lace-working.

One of Tapis Plein's first projects explored Bruges' identity and history as a tourist destination. It opened a pop-up tourist office where visitors could read guidebooks old and new about Bruges, showing how the city has changed over the years but also how tourists' perception of it has developed.

Alternative tourist maps for locals were provided, and people working in

tourism, such as the canal boatmen, recounted their memories of an older Bruges in recorded interviews. "People of the neighbourhoods outside the centre of town were happy to be heard and presented as part of the city," Neyrinck recalls. And visitors were happy to have their photos taken against a series of vintage postcard-esque backgrounds. Tapis Plein wants to develop "projects and experiments on heritage with unexpected questions and approaches," explains Neyrinck, "with themes that relate to people's

lives and in ways that differ from classical methods in museums or archives, for example." Hence one activity in 2004 reconstructed the Second World War experience of the Sint-Michiels neighbourhood, while another involved creating a pop-up neighbourhood museum in northern Bruges, where locals contributed mementos, like old photos and letters.

It all illustrates how Tapis Plein's projects tend to cut across a swath of issues, ranging from history to education, from citizenship to city policy. Furthermore, the projects strive to be as inclusive as possible, reaching out to communities, schools and youth centres.

## Bringing Bruges into the present

"Every initiative we take," says Neyrinck, "reflects on how to create a sustainable city and a future here, knowing that heritage is something to cherish and develop, not just to conserve and to show." If Bruges appears to be a town that cultivates the past, Tapis Plein's often experimental work has not always been received with open arms. "Bruges is conservative, and people here tend to push back against policies that could inject greater vitality into the community," notes Neyrinck. By focusing so much on its historic patrimony and a "stereotypical tourist market", the

town chases off its young, whether they are families or students. But with municipal elections approaching, she adds, hopefully these issues will be put back on the agenda.

Soon after it was set up, Tapis Plein was plying its trade beyond Bruges' cobbled lanes. For a project called *Geluvel Mon Amour*, to celebrate the 900th birthday of the village of Geluveld, nearly 60 kilometres away, Tapis Plein photographed the villagers in a variety of staged scenes – most memorably in a series of portraits of individuals or couples on the same sofa but accompanied in turn by their personal effects.

A Mechelen city guide for kids and a project on *krulbol* – a traditional Flemish game that is a cross between curling and boules – followed, with the latter involving an exhibition, a book and several workshops.

In just under nine years, Tapis Plein has undertaken dozens of projects and has six part-time employees. For the moment, it is the city's only cultural association to prefer folk history over the more illustrious tales in the history books.

"But Tapis Plein is not nostalgic," insists Neyrinck. It's more important to them that residents *understand* the town's Catholic heritage than that they be fervent believers, or that lace-makers produce items that sell rather than make items that are identical to 200 years ago.

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

# Shop 'til you pop

## Pop-up shops are fun for consumers, but what's in it for the retailers?

Katrien Lindemans

Have you ever gone back to a boutique you liked only to find that it has disappeared? It's best not to get too attached to a pop-up shop. Pop-up shops are temporary stores selling products or services to a targeted clientele. This retail phenomenon came over from the United States and has now found its way to high streets, shopping centres and events all over Flanders.

"Some pop up for a couple of days, others stay open for a few months," says Els Demey of Pop It Up, a local consultancy for pop-ups. "Independent shop owners, for instance, prefer to open a pop-up store before committing to a 'real' shop. It's a good way to test their customers and get their name out there."

But very often, big brands go for pop-ups as well. "They want to create a buzz around a new or unique product and lure customers to their temporary shop to discover everything about it," Demey explains. "The shorter the time the shop is open, the bigger the buzz. Everybody

will want to have been there."

The biggest advantage of pop-up stores is that they are adaptable in every way. "They pop up in places where lots of people gather," says Demey. "Summer festivals, for instance, are the perfect opportunity to promote seasonal products to a large crowd. The interior of such shops is always different from regular stores, too. It's usually more creative."

But because the shops are only open for a short period, renting property requires a different approach. "There are a lot of empty shops out there. Building owners are usually more than happy to rent them out, even temporarily," Demey says. "New shops are pleased with this short rental option as well, as the classic three-, six- or nine-year contracts can be a risky undertaking. What if their business doesn't work out?"

► [www.letspopitup.wordpress.com](http://www.letspopitup.wordpress.com)



Testing the local market: Pierre Marcolini's pop-up in Ghent

## TOP OF THE POPS

**Piet** (October to December): a mix of interior national and international design, fashion (Drykorn) and flowers (Papillon). Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 94, Ghent

► [www.piet-gent.be](http://www.piet-gent.be)

**Condé97** (19-29 October): wine bar and camp hotel organised by Pop It Up during Kortrijk's Interieur design fair. Spend the night in a pimped-up tent inside an old canvas factory or come along for a drink.

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

**Pierre Marcolini** (until end 2012): Brussels' most famous chocolate maker pops up in Ghent. You'll find his cocoa creations on the corner of Onderbergen and Gebroeders Vandeveldestraat

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

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# A constant yearning

An exhibition at Gaasbeek Castle explores the mysterious essence of *sehnsucht*

Alan Hope

The castle of Gaasbeek in Flemish Brabant was originally a fortress of the dukes of Brabant, but the building as we now know it is essentially the romantic creation of a French marquise, Marie Peyrat, widow of Giammartino Arconati-Visconti, whose family had owned the castle since the end of the 18th century. Following damage caused in the Napoleonic period, Peyrat employed artists and designers from across Europe to convert the castle into an idealised version of a medieval palace – a sort of theatre of history. Marie donated the castle to the Belgian state in 1921, and in 1980 it became a museum of the Flemish Community.

All of which helps explain the castle's current exhibition *Sehnsucht: een onstilbaar verlangen* (*Sehnsucht: An Insatiable Longing*). Curated by the Dutch writer Oscar van den Boogaard, who now lives in East Flanders, the show could not have wished for a better home: a theme of yearning for what is lost, in a setting that represents the very same sentiment. Gaasbeek Castle is, in fact, the embodiment in stone and brick of the indistinct notion of *sehnsucht*.

## Sehnwhat?

*Sehnsucht* is a German word meaning something like “the sickness of painful longing”, and it's probably most associated with the Romantic author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose second novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1796), contains two poems on the theme.

The word is said to have no exact translation in English, though “longing” and “yearning” seem to fit the bill perfectly well, in context. *Sehnsucht* need have no object or might have a non-existent or impossible one – such as the universal longing for a Golden Age that never was.

Translation or no, the feeling is universal, and it is the core of much poetry, literature and music. For William Blake, the longing was for a New Jerusalem; for William Wordsworth, the memory of a field of daffodils. Elgar's *Enigma Variations* are an expression of *Sehnsucht*, as are the *Four Last Songs* of Richard Strauss.

For Mignon, a character in Goethe's novel, the longing was for Italy – “that land where lemon orchards bloom”. In Goethe's poem titled “*Sehnsucht*”, however, the longing is for something more diffuse:

*Alone and separated  
From all joy,  
I look to the vast horizon  
On every side.*

Mignon features in the exhibition in a small portrait from 1850 by the Dutch artist Ary Scheffer. A (fictional) girl stares into the

half-distance somewhere over the viewer's right shoulder – a typical attitude of *sehnsucht*. The same distant, melancholy glance is seen in the exhibition's first portrait. In “Xterior VI” by Dutch photographer Desirée Dolron (whose name could itself be an expression of *sehnsucht*), an impossibly beautiful young woman with a Victorian hairstyle and dress contemplates something beyond us, both physically and imaginatively.

## The unknowable gaze

That sense of mystery of the subject's yearning allows us to construct our own narratives. In the painting by 18th-century Italian artist Andrea Appiani, the young Ginevra gazes out of a window at a ship on the water. Her secret lover Ettore is aboard – but is he arriving or departing? Only her servant Zoriade knows.

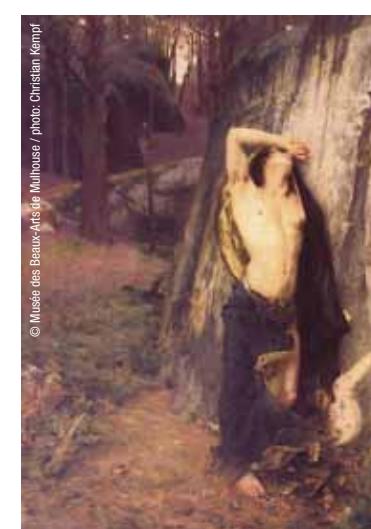
The act of gazing out over the water is a common trope in depictions of *sehnsucht*, representing Mignon's exile from some imaginary promised land. That's a characteristic it shares with other melancholy genres like Celtic folk music and Portuguese *fado*. It appears in a painting by Alphonse Osbert showing a figure who appears to be Orpheus staring over a wine-dark sea, presumably mourning his separation from Eurydice. Orpheus also features in a work by the turn-of-the-20th-century French painter Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret.

## Contemporary longing

Towards the end of the exhibition, there's a painting by contemporary British artist Diana Rattray based on an old holiday snap, in which a young boy, his face turned away from us, stares at an expanse of water; at what, or away from what, we cannot tell.

One of the exhibition's most emotionally powerful work is also a rear view. In Eric Rondepierre's “Champs-Elysées” a woman walking away from us in the gardens observes herself, walking in the company of a man. The woman is the artist's mother, who used to visit him on a Sunday when he was in an orphanage, and take him to the cinema. The cinematic photo, in black and white, shows two levels of longing: the boy longs for his mother, while she in turn longs for something else.

In the photograph by Erwin Olaf, the story is more enigmatic. Titled “The Mother”, it shows a young woman sitting, eyes downcast, in a room done out entirely in white, as indeed is she. In the background, a pram; at the doorway, a boy, with riding crop and boots, is on his way out, his face also unseen. We look in vain for some clue: Is the doorway the portal between life and death? Is the boy the baby grown and



departed? Olaf gives nothing away. He's more overt in the other work by him featured here. “Grief” shows a young man in an attitude of some despair looking from a window into what appears to be a graveyard. While grief might be seen to be the ultimate unquenchable longing, the notion of *sehnsucht* also extends to paradise – the unattainable perfection represented for Mignon by Italy. Two of the greatest epics of literature – John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Goethe's *Faust* – concern themselves with the consequences of seeking to attain the unattainable paradise: for Faust, the essence of life; for Lucifer, dominion over God.

## Getting physical

It's not all doom and gloom, however. The Chinese artist Yang Jiechang takes a satirical look at Heaven in his work “Stranger than Paradise”, in which the animals and humans of the Ark – arrayed on a series of acrylic cubes (the artist says they represent cities) – indulge in a riotous orgy of inter-species copulation. The small terra cotta figures seem to have stepped right out of a work by Hieronymous Bosch.

There's also humour, as is so often the case, in the piece by Flemish artist Wim Delvoye. A sculpture in wood of a cement mixer is painted to look as if it were made



Oh, the longing: Andrea Appiani's “Ginevra scorge la navicella con Ettore Fieramosca” (above); Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret's “La douleur d'Orphée” (left); Eric Rondepierre's moving “Champs-Elysées” (top)

of Wedgewood china, as if harking back to an imaginary time when building-site materials were of a nobler sort. “Physical Cosmology”, meanwhile, by the German artist

Carola Mücke, an installation of light and sound, has to be seen (and especially heard) to be appreciated.

UNTIL 11 NOVEMBER

**Sehnsucht: een onstilbaar verlangen**

Gaasbeek Castle, Kasteelstraat 40, Gaasbeek

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

# More Fringe awards for Ontroerend Goed

# All that is Wrong

Katy Desmond

In the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh last month, during the city's renowned Fringe Festival, a full house sat and watched a young girl write the word "I" in chalk on the stage. Over the next hour, they would look on as she silently filled the stage with words, creating a kind of mind map that untangled for them, and for herself, the fears, confusion, questions and convictions running through her 18-year-old mind.

According to writer and director Alexander Devriendt, *All that is Wrong* was something of a risk for the Ghent-based theatre company Ontroerend Goed. The third instalment of a trilogy of productions that have carefully tracked the steps of the modern-day teen experience, this final, "coming-of-age" piece was more subdued than their previous works.

Devriendt, also Ontroerend Goed's director, was uncertain whether a lonely girl and a piece of chalk could draw crowds. His concerns proved unfounded, however, when the show walked away from the festival with three awards in hand: a Total Theatre Award, a Herald Angels Award and a Scotsman Fringe First Award. Now it's setting out on tour here, making stops in Kortrijk, Hasselt and Leuven.

This latest piece by a company made up of young people and known for its experimental performance theatre, gives a glimpse into the chaotic, information-overloaded brain of a teenager, played by and based on actress Koba Ryckewaert. At 18, Koba has reached the point in her life where she must start deciding who she is

going to be and what she is going to care about.

For Devriendt, this represents the last stage as a teenager moves from childhood into adulthood and begins to feel responsible for the world around them. The first teenagers in *Once and for All*, the first piece in the trilogy, he explains, "said something like, 'Leave me alone, I just don't want to care.' In [the second play] *Teenage Riot*, they said, 'I don't want to understand you.' Now Koba says: 'I want to understand everything.' So she begins to diagram her thoughts and, by the end of the piece, has filled the stage with concerns. From Syria and the financial crisis, to torture, skinny legs and corporate boycotts, she has created a list of 'all that is wrong'.

The actress' list could easily be seen as a polemic indictment of the world we are handing down to the next generation. But Devriendt says that it is less about pointing fingers and more about recognising the blind spots that we develop as adults based on the choices we have made.

"Teenagers are, for me, the best critics of society because they are not part of it yet," he says. "So they have this sort of distance from it. That is always a good way to see flaws in the system. If you are already in it and a part of it, it is harder to see what works and what doesn't work."

At the same time, teenagers, he says, face many more choices today than he did during his own adolescence. "I really feel that it's harder for them. It's simple: They know more. They know more of what is wrong."



Until 25 October | Across Flanders | ► [www.ontroerendgoed.be](http://www.ontroerendgoed.be)

## FILM

### Clint Eastwood Retrospective

Even after Clint Eastwood's patriotic Superbowl defence of American auto workers, no one was ready for what *Dirty Harry* had in store at the Republican National Convention last month. Rambling in a way made even stranger for someone who's spent his life memorising scripts, Eastwood talked to an empty chair and made quips that would have bombed in a back-street comedy club. "The people of the future will know nothing about *Dirty Harry* or *Josey Wales* or *Million Dollar Baby*," said activist filmmaker Michael Moore after the bizarre speech. "They will know about the night a crazy old man hijacked a national party's most important gathering."

Well, here's hoping Moore is only half right. To help you remember the more than five decades of often thoughtful entertainment that Clint Eastwood has provided, Cinematek is hosting a retrospective of the actor/director. Already in midstream, the classic 1960s westerns have already screened, but you can still catch a large body of his work, including the 1980s *Dirty Harry* revival *Sudden Impact*, the excellent nod to his former westerns *Pale Rider* (1985, pictured) and the emotionally dramatic *White Hunter, Black Heart*, with Eastwood playing a thinly disguised John Huston during the shooting of *African Queen*. *Lisa Bradshaw*

Until 31 October | Cinematek, Brussels | ► [www.cinematek.be](http://www.cinematek.be)

### MORE FILM THIS WEEK

#### Brussels

**Aujourd'hui (Today):** Q&A with French-Senegalese director Alain Gomis after the screening of his new dreamlike film, in which death announces itself ahead of time

OCT 1 20.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

► [www.bozar.be](http://www.bozar.be)

#### Ghent

**Battleship Potemkin:** Screening of the Sergei Eisenstein silent classic, in which the crew of a Russian battleship rebel against the Tsarist regime

OCT 2 20.30 at KASK Cinema, Godshuizenlaan 4

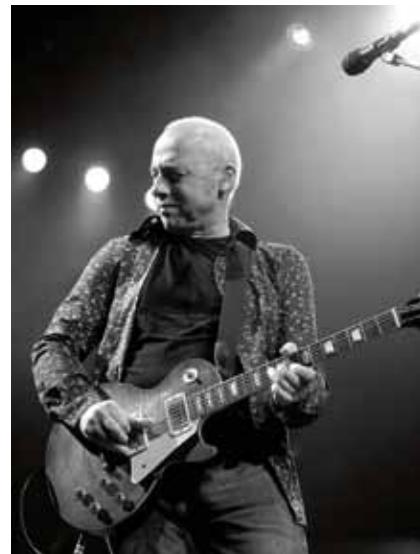
► [www.film-plateau.be](http://www.film-plateau.be)



## CONCERT

## Mark Knopfler

This year marks 20 years since legendary British rock band Dire Straits played their very last show. Frontman and guitarist Mark Knopfler, however, has been enjoying a successful solo career ever since, especially in recent years. He has just received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Ivor Novello, the UK's major honour for songwriters. During his entire career, including with the band, Knopfler sold more than 120 million albums. Last year he stole the show at Antwerp's Sportpaleis when he shared the stage with Bob Dylan. Next year he's coming back to Antwerp by himself, but armed with enough hits to please a sure-to-be-sold-out Sportpaleis, including a few new songs. His eighth studio album *Private Ring* just released last month, reminding us why Knopfler belongs to the short list of greatest guitarists of all time. **Robyn Boyle**



GET TICKETS NOW

12 May, 20.30 | Sportpaleis, Antwerp | [www.markknopfler.com](http://www.markknopfler.com)

## CONCERTS THIS WEEK

## Beersel

**Gabriel Rios:** Solo show by the Puerto-Rican-born, Ghent-educated, New York-based musician who effortlessly blends pop, rock and hip-hop with jazz, funk, world and soul

**SEP 28 20.15 at CC de Meent, Gemeenveldstraat 34**

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

## Bruges

**Jazz Brugge:** Biennial festival of European jazz, featuring Enrico Pieranunzi's New European Trio, AKA Balkan Moon, Michel Godard, Kris Degoort, Carlos Bica, more

**OCT 4-7 across Bruges**

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

## Brussels

**De Heideroosjes:** Farewell concerts by the Netherlands' most famous punk rock band, together since 1989

**SEP 28-29 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110**

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

## PERFORMANCE

## This is Theatre

Jan Fabre is working on re-enactments of historical pieces... his own historical pieces. *Het is theater zoals te verwachten en te voorzien was* (*This is Theatre Like it was to be Expected and Foreseen*) is from 1982, one of the Flemish artist's earliest performances pieces, and is now being brought back to life with the help of a fresh, young cast. This is theatre, indeed, but theatre that questions the definition of theatre. While a group of actors gets started on a never-ending queue of mundane, ritualistic tasks (dressing and undressing, smoking, shaving, pacing), the audience members are free – expected, even – to wander from their seats, have a drink at the bar, etc, and now and then come back to watch the realistic scenes unfold on stage, a place that's normally only reserved for fantasy and fiction. **RB**



29-30 September, 16.00 | deSingel, Antwerp | [www.desingel.be](http://www.desingel.be)

## MORE PERFORMANCES THIS WEEK

## Asse

**Nigel Williams: Working Class Hero:** Stand-up comedy by the British-born, Antwerp-based comedian with a sharp tongue and even sharper opinion on the current state of affairs (in Dutch)

**SEP 27 20.30 at CC Asse, Noorderlaan 20**

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

## Brussels

**Move Over Mrs Markham:** The English Comedy Club presents the play about nine people, four assignations, one flat and a whole lot of chaos (in English)

**OCT 2-6 & 9-13 at Warehouse Studio Theatre, Waelhemstraat 69**

► [www.ecc.theatreinbrussels.com](http://www.ecc.theatreinbrussels.com)

## EXHIBITION

## Unlocked

The Brussels commune of Anderlecht is home to a Visual Arts Academy that's been producing talented sculptors, photographers, restorative painters and more for the past 40 years. To celebrate its anniversary, the academy is showing off its diverse range of disciplines through the best works to come out of its students over the last four decades. The exhibition *Unlocked* is evidence of the academy's varied palate for all kinds of art forms and its ability to churn out fine artists. It also proves the need for more part-time Dutch-language art education in Brussels: the Anderlecht Academy fills up quickly every year and regrettably has to turn away interested candidates. **RB**



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Until 13 October | De Loketten, Flemish Parliament, Brussels

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

## MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

## Antwerp

**The Moderns: Permeke & Friends:** 70 works by contemporaries and friends of Constant Permeke – one of the Flemish pioneers of Expressionism – on the 60th anniversary of the artist's death

**Until FEB 24 2013 at Koningin Fabiolazaal, Jezusstraat 28**

► [www.kmska.be](http://www.kmska.be)

## Berlare (East Flanders)

**Verzamelingen in Berlare (Collections in Berlare):** A series of photographs of people from Berlare with their most beloved collections

**Until OCT 28 at CC Stroming, Dorp 101**

► [www.berlare.be/CC-Stroming.html](http://www.berlare.be/CC-Stroming.html)

## Bruges

**European Biennial for Graphic Art:** This 13th annual competition for graphic techniques is open to any resident of the EU, and all the works will be sold after the exhibition closes

**Until JAN 20 2013 at Arentshuis, Dijver 16**

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

## CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Toon Lambrechts

## Het Volkshuis

## Sleepstraat 33, Ghent

Ghent's Sleepstraat is mainly known for its abundance of Turkish pizzerias, but Het Volkshuis is still a landmark here. The name, which means "The People's House", dates back to the period when the pub was a bastion of the Communist Party. Now, the murals above the bar with red flags and serious-looking workers are the only reminders of that past. "And the name," adds café boss Iris Van Geen (pictured). Six years ago she took over the café from former owner Octavia (another legend in Ghent).

Not much about the bar has changed since. (The pool table has gone, a matter of having more space to dance.) The clientele has become younger, but it is still very mixed. There are both students and locals, young and old, stepping in. That makes Volkshuis typically Ghent: popular and bohemian at the same time.

The interior of Volkshuis has a retro touch. Old posters and album cover the walls, which are dotted with decorative elements, like granny's living room, making it feel both trendy and authentic. The atmosphere is friendly – a great place to find yourself when the sun has set. Because Volkshuis is really a night bar, opening its doors at 19.00. People gradually trickle in until it is crammed, later in the



evening. At the weekend, closing time can be as late (or, erm, as early) as 7.00. "So I have a long night ahead," laughs Iris, surveying the crowds on this particular Saturday night.

Occasionally, Volkshuis hosts concerts or poetry readings. But the nicest thing about the pub is the people that pass through. "In Het Volkshuis, everyone can be themselves," says Iris. "You can just pop in and have a chat easily. Or a dance if you're up to it."

## BITE

## Hasselt Taste Salon

Hasselt was profiling itself as a "tasty" place to visit since long before it was awarded the region's first City of Taste designation in 2006. It's always been associated with jenever and *speculoos*, wine, fruit, *vlaai* and other delicacies. But now the city is honouring its title with this weekend's grand opening of the Smaaksalon, or Taste Salon.

On 29 September, the gorgeous neoclassical mansion House of the Corswarem will be renamed Taste Salon and used to house a brand new bar, restaurant and brasserie where locals and tourists can taste all the regional products Hasselt and Limburg province have to offer. And when the salon inspires you to spend some extra time in the city, the Hasselt tourist office has conveniently moved in next door.

As the restaurant and brasserie will serve Limburg products only, the choice for head of operations fell to Giovani Oosters (*pictured*). The TV celebrity and chef of Hasselt's reputed restaurant *Vous lé Vous* is known for his love of local products such as northern Limburg asparagus, fresh Haspengouw fruit and pungent local cheeses.

Oosters' wife and co-manager Annelies Santens reminds us that Limburg is equally famous for its wines: "We are also opening a wine bar in the Taste Salon, a place to discover and enjoy the wide range of wines and sparkling wines from right here in Limburg."

During the opening weekend, visitors are invited to take part in guided tasting tours of the city, indulge in a range of Hasselt delicacies, get style advice from Jani Kazaltzis, follow tasting workshops and much more. More specifically, Saturday and Sunday's fun includes gin- and chocolate tasting, *speculoos* biscuit baking, live music and engaging interactive discussions led by Flemish musician and entertainer Stijn Meuris.

The project is part of a broad cultural programme, an initiative of Hasselt's tourism department. So there will be



several readings, plus children's activities and musical events going on throughout town all weekend long, all with "taste" as a recurring theme.

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

- ➡ Huis de Corswarem, Maastrichterstraat 63-65, Hasselt
- ⌚ Opening weekend: 29-30 September, 10.00-18.00; Taste Salon: daily from 1 October, 10.00-18.00
- ⓘ New integrated bar, brasserie and restaurant offering a taste of local specialties from Hasselt and Limburg

## City of Taste

The City of Taste title is part of Week van de Smaak, or the Week of Taste, an initiative of former culture minister Bert Anciaux, who launched the idea in 2006 as a way to promote food culture in Flanders. Hasselt was the first to bear the title, followed by Kortrijk, Lier, Leuven and Aalst. In 2011, current minister of culture Joke Schauvliege called for a sabbatical year and total redesign of the Week of Taste concept. A thorough evaluation led her to the conclusion that the Week of Taste "should come from more of a cultural heritage angle than anything else". That's why last year saw the establishment of Vol-au-vent, an organisation specialised in foodie themes and Flemish culture. Vol-au-vent is entrusted with the task of giving new direction to the Week of Taste, which takes place this year from 15 to 25 November across Brussels and Flanders.

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

TALKING DUTCH  
The woof-shrug

I am not a cycling fan. I like doing it, *wielrennen*, but, unlike so many Flemish, I don't like watching it. My brother used to sit for days on end in front of the television, mesmerised by the tactics of what to me looked like a slow-moving crowd of men in tights and silly helmets.

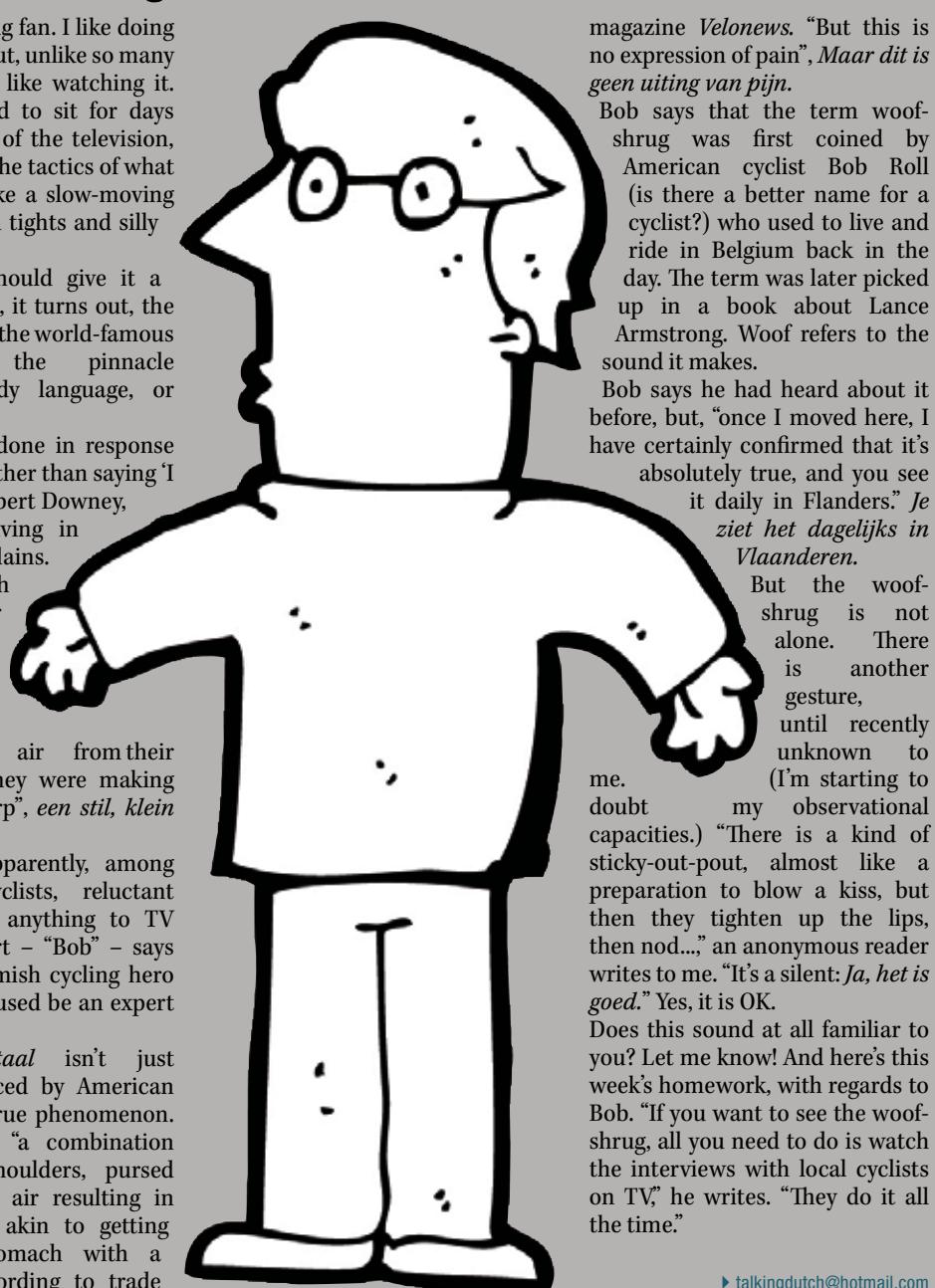
But maybe I should give it a chance. Because, it turns out, the sport is home to the world-famous "woof-shrug", the pinnacle of Flemish body language, or *lichaamstaal*.

"It is normally done in response to a question, rather than saying 'I don't know,'" Robert Downey, an American living in Flanders, explains.

The Flemish "will shrug their shoulders, with a slight raise of the hands, at the same time they poof out air from their mouths as if they were making a quiet little burp", *een stil, klein boertje*.

It's a thing, apparently, among professional cyclists, reluctant to actually say anything to TV reporters. Robert - "Bob" - says that former Flemish cycling hero Johan Bruyneel used to be an expert at it.

The *lichaamstaal* isn't just something noticed by American expats - it's a true phenomenon. The gesture is "a combination of shrugged shoulders, pursed lips and forced air resulting in a sound that's akin to getting hit in the stomach with a basketball," according to trade



Philip Ebels

magazine *Velonews*. "But this is no expression of pain", *Maar dit is geen uiting van pijn*.

Bob says that the term woof-shrug was first coined by American cyclist Bob Roll (is there a better name for a cyclist?) who used to live and ride in Belgium back in the day. The term was later picked up in a book about Lance Armstrong. Woof refers to the sound it makes.

Bob says he had heard about it before, but, "once I moved here, I have certainly confirmed that it's absolutely true, and you see it daily in Flanders." *Je ziet het dagelijks in Vlaanderen.*

But the woof-shrug is not alone. There is another gesture, until recently unknown to me. (I'm starting to doubt my observational capacities.) "There is a kind of sticky-out-pout, almost like a preparation to blow a kiss, but then they tighten up the lips, then nod...", an anonymous reader writes to me. "It's a silent: *Ja, het is goed.*" Yes, it is OK.

Does this sound at all familiar to you? Let me know! And here's this week's homework, with regards to Bob. "If you want to see the woof-shrug, all you need to do is watch the interviews with local cyclists on TV," he writes. "They do it all the time."

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

## The last word...

## Good loser

"We rode everyone to ruin, including the Spaniards. I'm really glad for him. I'm someone who would rather give than receive."

Flemish cyclist Tom Boonen on his fellow world championship favourite, Belgian Philippe Gilbert, who won the race last Sunday in the Netherlands

## 'til death us do part

"The only one who stayed is Patrizia. Even when she got an axe in the back, a knife in the foot and a bullet in the head."

Leo "Bill Kartoum" Verswijfel, now 80, married all seven of his assistants during a long career in the circus

## Pressing concerns

"I don't see how I could forbid anyone from ironing."

State secretary for energy Melchior Wathelet reassures the public there will be no power-cuts this winter, in reaction to advice from supplier Elia on how to avoid overconsumption

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

## Cover story

The red carpet is about to be rolled down the substantial staircase leading to the entrance of Kinepolis in Ghent for the 39th edition of the Flanders International Film Festival. We'll tell you what movies to see and which concerts to choose on the vast programme of the region's largest film event

## News

Buda Island sounds like it should be situated somewhere in the Indian Ocean, but no, it's in Kortrijk. Taking the name of its Cultural Centre, the West Flemish city has designated the area between its two canals as an island of cultural patronage and creativity. We'll tell you about the initiative and the just-launched BudaFabriek

## Tourism

Necessity is the mother of invention, they say. That's why when a man's wife said she would no longer go cycling with him because of how long it took to find their way on a map, that man decided to devise a whole new system of cycle routes. We talk to the innovative cyclist who invented *knooppunten*, now the norm in Flanders and the Netherlands