

## Buda rising

Kortrijk's island of culture opens its latest innovative enterprise, the BudaFabriek

▶ 5



## A simple plan

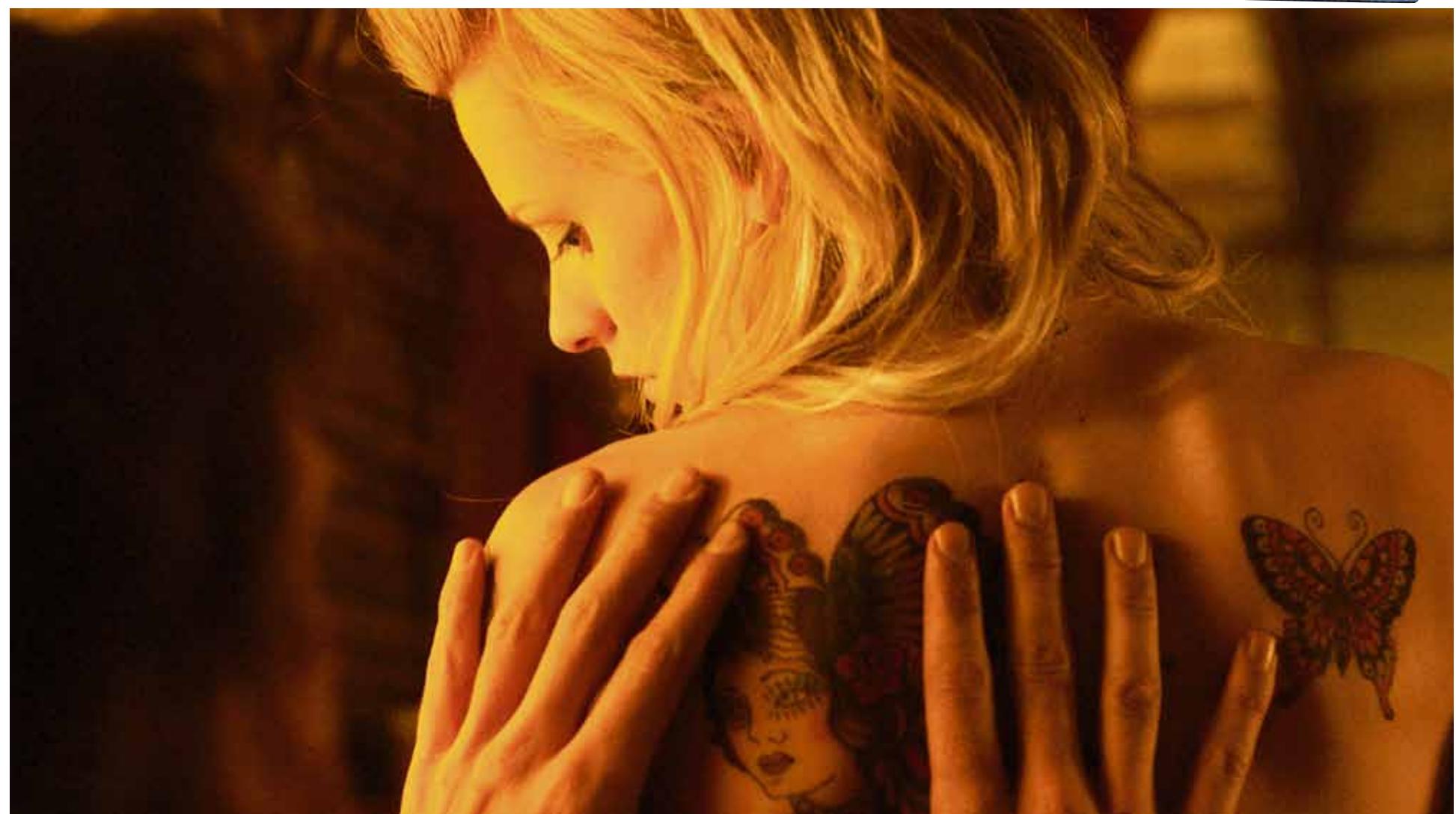
Meet the man who invented Flanders' ingenious network of cycle paths

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## Going for bronze

Marnix Peeters' bizarre fable puts him in the running for the Bronze Owl for first-time novelists

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# Sweet sorrow

**The adaptation of Johan Heldenbergh's hugely popular stage play opens the Flanders International Film Festival**

Lisa Bradshaw

"You can't share grief," says John Heldenbergh, which is the theme at the heart of *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, the actor's 2008 play now made into a movie by Felix Van Groeningen. It opens the 39th edition of the Flanders International Film Festival

**E**lise and Didier are not much alike. She's a vegetarian tattoo artist with a spiritual bent; he's an atheist cowboy living in a caravan. But when Elise sees Didier's sweating brow fronting a bluegrass band, and he gets a tour of the tattoos covering her body, it's love. Flemish director Felix Van Groeningen has made three films about distant relationships between troubled people, but in *The Broken Circle Breakdown*, he nails the imagery of growing commitment. Outside of the hot physical encounters, Elise

(Veerle Baetens) listens dutifully as Didier (Johan Heldenbergh) drones on about American country singers; he bemusedly tolerates her vegan sandwich spreads (barely).

When Elise becomes pregnant unexpectedly, the freewheeling couple aren't sure how to react, but in the end are as in love with their little girl as they are with each other. Elise joins the bluegrass band, Didier renovates a farmhouse, and it is one big happy family.

"I knew it was all too beautiful," says Elise, much later.

### Breakdown of a family

*The Broken Circle Breakdown*, which opens the Flanders International Film Festival in Ghent next week, is based on the popular 2008 stage play by Flemish writer and actor Johan Heldenbergh. Though "popular" is an understatement. "People saw it multiple times," Heldenbergh tells me. "We had to keep

performing it because people kept wanting to see it." Heldenbergh and Mieke Dobbels co-wrote and co-starred in the play with Compagnie Cecilia, the Ghent-based theatre company that Heldenbergh co-founded six years ago. The company prides itself on attracting a mixed audience, which isn't to say that it's not typical Ghent subversive theatre. *The Broken Circle Breakdown* has country music at its soul, but it wears its left-wing politics on its sleeve.

The story follows the "breakdown" of the perfect couple when tragedy strikes, punctuated by rants against government-by-morality, criticism of religious belief systems and live bluegrass music. At the centre is a couple tortured by sorrow. What Heldenbergh most wants the story to communicate is "the dreadful reality that you can't share grief. Everyone has to do it in his or her own way. It's extremely personal, coping with loss." He sees that journey made worse by religion. "A lot of people

## FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

## Dirk Frimout



© Senate.be

He was the first Belgian in space and, as if that wasn't celebrity enough, he has appeared in two comic strips by Willy Vandersteen and Marc Sleen. Twenty years after he became a part of European history, Dirk Frimout was in Technopolis in Mechelen last week, speaking to a gathering of schoolchildren and – who knows? – inspiring a new generation of space travellers.

Dirk Dries David Damiaan Viscount Frimout was born in Poperinge, West Flanders, in 1941 and studied electronic engineering before being awarded a doctorate in applied physics from Ghent University. He followed that up with post-doctoral studies in space and atmospheric physics in Colorado in the US.

In 1977, he applied to become an astronaut and the following year went to work at the then Belgian Institute for Space Aeronautics, where he cooperated with the European Space Agency on coordinating the crew of the Spacelab.

He went into space in 1992, at the remarkably advanced age for an astronaut of 51, just three days

after his birthday. (Yuri Gagarin was 27 when he became the first man in space and Neil Armstrong 38 when he set foot on the moon.) Taking off and landing at the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida, Frimout's job was payload specialist, in charge of the equipment for 12 experiments involving a great many measurements of the atmosphere. By the time he landed, he had made 143 trips around the Earth and clocked up 3.2 million miles. At Technopolis, Frimout was accompanied by the crew of the Atlantis Space Shuttle Mission STS 045, all of whom were involved in Frimout's historic flight and who were his guests all last week in his capacity as chairman of the Euro Space Society. The astronauts were energetically quizzed about their experiences by pupils of schools in Vilvoorde, Brasschaat and Blaasveld. Earlier in the week, the crew had visited the universities of Leuven and Ghent. They also heard from federal vice prime minister Laurette Onkelinx that "Belgium will continue to take part in the peaceful conquest of space".

## FLANDERS TODAY

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



The logo and the name Flanders Today belong to the Flemish Region (Benelux Beeldmerk nr 815.088). The editorial team of Flanders Today has full editorial autonomy regarding the content of the newspaper and is responsible for all content, as stipulated in the agreement between Corelio Publishing and the Flemish authorities.

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Hans De Loore

## News in brief

Jos Digneffe, spokesman for the rail union ACOD, has withdrawn from **NMBS reform negotiations** following comments made to a newspaper in which he was reported to have said that train passengers were "selfish". Digneffe claims he was misquoted. Last-minute talks as *Flanders Today* went to press were attempting to head off a national one-day rail strike announced for this Wednesday, 3 October.

Police in the Brussels commune of Etterbeek are looking for a Bangladeshi asylum seeker in connection with a **quadruple murder** that took place last week. Police were alerted when Jasbir Singh returned home from work to find his wife and three young children dead, after having their throats cut. Singh, an Indian national, has lived in Brussels for 15 years and was joined by his wife five years ago. The man wanted for questioning is a colleague of Singh and has been missing since the incident last Friday.

Dutch-speaking judges and clerks in Brussels have joined the Flemish bar association in an action before the Constitutional Court to strike down reforms made by the federal government to the **judicial area of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde**. The plaintiffs claim the reforms will lead to a shortage of Dutch-speaking personnel and will worsen the existing backlog of work. The reforms introduced French- and Dutch-speaking chambers, with a staff split of 80/20, which will lead, the action says, to extra delays of six months every year until the split is reviewed in June 2014, as well as extra costs of €12.5 million a year.

Retail industry federation Comeos has expressed concern at suggestions made by federal economy minister Johan Vande Lanotte that the government might

intervene to keep **supermarket prices under control**, using a new law due to come into force next year. Minister Vande Lanotte pointed out that the block can only be applied by the competition authorities, and the measures have been approved by the EU.

The Boerenbond (Farmers Union) has asked Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege to take measures to **combat the growing numbers of wild boar** in Limburg. There are an estimated 1,300 boar in the province, and the number is growing, leading to increased complaints of damage. Among the measures suggested is to relax hunting regulations.

The Federation of Moroccan Associations (FMV) has applied for permission to build a new **pre- and primary school for children from Moroccan families** in the Borgerhout district of Antwerp. The FMV hopes to improve educational opportunities for the children and would have space for 64. The city council will next month announce its decision about the school, which hopes to open next year.

The condition of **Commandant Marnik Jacobs**, who was seriously injured in an accident on a firing range in Helchteren in August, is no longer life-threatening, the ministry of defence announced. Warrant Officer Johan Bosmans died in the explosion, which happened when the bomb-disposal squad was carrying out a routine destruction of explosive materials.

The city of **Brussels has slipped to 31st place** in an international ranking of 100 cities by the consultancy Reputation Institute – down from 14th place last year. In a similar list for countries published recently, Belgium came in 13th. The list is based on scores for business

climate, culture, infrastructure, cleanliness and efficient government. Vancouver took over the lead this year from London. Brussels came in 30th, meanwhile, in a list comparing purchasing power in 72 major cities worldwide, compiled by the Swiss bank UBS.

Almost 91,000 households in Antwerp took part in the latest **group purchase of green electricity**. The winning bid for the contract went once more to Essent, which will charge a price more than 20% below the current market price. The number of families taking part is more than in the previous two group purchases combined.

Researchers from the **University of Leuven** plan to gather **DNA samples** from people living in various regions of Belgium in the coming months to try to map a genetic link with the Roman troops that invaded this part of Europe some 2,000 years ago. The survey will test DNA from men in regions like Tongeren and Oudenburg whose families have lived in the same place for at least 400 years.

Mobility minister Hilde Crevits has ordered Flemish public transport authority De Lijn to implement strict controls to ensure that text in **advertising on buses and trams** is only in Dutch. Exceptions could be made for brand names, product slogans and film titles.

Drivers caught exceeding the speed limit in Antwerp will in future receive a **child's drawing together with their fine**, in a campaign aimed at making speeders consider the consequences of their actions. The drawings, with the slogan "Thank you for driving more slowly", were submitted by primary school children in a contest last year.

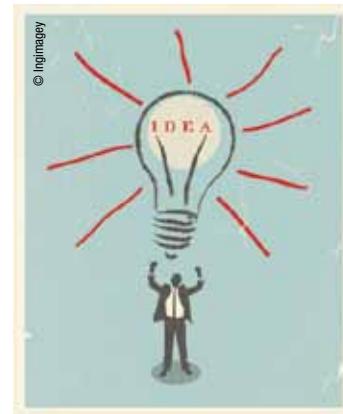
## OFFSIDE

## The ministry of ideas

How would you like to be a minister? The minister of city bees, for example, or minister for cooking with sunlight? As it happens, those two posts are already filled, over at the new Ministerie van Ideeën (Ministry of Ideas).

The initiative was founded to "speed up the transition to a sustainable economy". Don't expect, they note, "any committees, budget negotiations or legal texts, or that anyone else will do the job in your place."

It's an unusual ministry, in that everyone involved gets to be a minister. Running things on a daily basis are six leading consultants in the fields of philanthropy, participation and creativity, and it was launched by Jim Baeten of sustainability consultants tri.zone and Steven Vromman, known as Low Impact Man.



The projects run by each minister are nothing if not original. Bruno Van Haudenhuyse goes to cafés and restaurants and collects used coffee grounds as a basis for growing mushrooms; Kevin Vandersmissen organises swap meets anywhere he can; Amor

Mistaen will come to your house to fix your bike; Liesbeth Hiele looks after the beehives on top of the Vooruit culture centre in Ghent. If you'd like to be a minister, you'll need to have given some serious thought to your project, and it should be in the area of ecological or social cooperation. Your project should "be beyond the stage of a vague idea or a dream". Ideally you'll have gathered some co-workers and be at the stage of running experiments.

Need more inspiration? Visit the website and check out the projects, from handmade crochet work in Borgerhout to homemade seitan from Ghent. If you'd rather not be saddled with the responsibilities of office, you can support the projects in a variety of ways.

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

# Sweet sorrow

## A record nine Flemish films will screen at the Flanders international Film Festival this month

► continued from page 1

when faced with loss or death, even their own, tend to grab a branch. And the only branch we have right now is religion." He compares it to decals that people stick on windows to stop birds from flying against them. "But that doesn't help to cope with the existence of windows."

### The socialist cowboy

Heldenbergh, a sought-after screen actor known as much for his nervous tic as the estranged husband in *Aanrijding in Moscou* (*Moscow, Belgium*) as for his sulking hulk of an uncle in *De helaasheid der dingen* (*The Misfortunates*), reprises his role as Didier in the film version of *Broken Circle*. Dobbels is replaced by Veerle Baetens of *Code 37* fame. The 45-year-old Heldenbergh writes scripts to get something off his chest. "It always starts," he says, "with the need to express something – fear, my own fear, anxiety, anger. The fear that led to *The Broken Circle Breakdown* was a growing religious fanaticism. And the intermingling of politics and a moral code was also suddenly very distinct."

Ironically, he uses a very traditional kind of American music – one associated with right-wing politics – as a backdrop. "Didier loves America for what it could be and for what it



Johan Heldenbergh and Veerle Baetens in *The Broken Circle Breakdown*

and a radical atheist. To me, it's possible that a character like that can still love country music. It's not because I pay taxes and I want to pay taxes that I don't believe in freedom." It becomes readily apparent that Heldenbergh and Didier are much

gospel and bluegrass standards and political critique in *Broken Circle* works remarkably well, which could be down to the authenticity with which Heldenbergh brings it to the stage and screen. A huge fan of the genre, he has, over the years, taught himself to play the banjo, the guitar and the mandolin. He even taught himself to sing for *Broken Circle*, though he denies that he "can sing". "Everybody can sing like me if they try. I don't believe in 'talent'. Talent is wanting to do something."

### "I did something right"

*Broken Circle* the movie, he says, is a wonderful adaptation of the play, "even though 99% of the play isn't in the movie. It's the same feeling – every opinion is there – but using imagery." He attributes that

success to Van Groeningen, who he worked with previously in both *Steve + Sky* and *De helaasheid der dingen*. Heldenbergh, who made his directorial debut last year with *Schellebelle 1919* (a western), says he would have made *Broken Circle* into a film himself had no one else wanted to. But, he says, "it's better this way. Because I don't have what Felix has."

Heldenbergh is of course hoping that audiences respond to the screen version of *Broken Circle* the same way they did to the play. But what was that magic formula that kept the production touring Flanders and the Netherlands for more than three years?

"Well, I'm not going to sound very modest here," Heldenbergh smiles, "but ... it's brilliant. It's not brilliant

because I'm so brilliant, it's brilliant because it works. It just happens sometimes. It's intuitive; I did something right. Mieke Dobbels, who co-wrote it, she feels the same. We don't know exactly how it happened. People who say they know the secret of good storytelling, they are charlatans; you can't know. But it's a brilliant play. It's just very, very good."

*The Broken Circle Breakdown* opens Flanders International Film Festival on 9 October and opens in cinemas the following day. The Flemish short film *Dood van een Schaduw* (*Death of a Shadow*) starring Matthias Schoenaerts will also be shown at the festival opening

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

**"Anyone can sing like me if they try. I don't believe in talent"**

should be – a refuge for freedom seekers from the whole world," he says. "That romanticism about America, we cherish that in Europe. That's why I chose country music. My character wants to be a cowboy but is a real European social democrat

the same person. "Where I'd most like to live is on the Korenmarkt in the centre of Ghent – but on a farm. I guess that's like wanting to be a cowboy but having leftist convictions," he sighs.

Still, the co-existence of American

and European cultures is something

# The best flicks of the Ghent fest

The Flanders International Film Festival in Ghent is Belgium's largest film fest, with features screening in a number of categories, such as Competition (up for the big prize), Crime Scene (this year's theme), Explore Zone (of interest to young people) and Plus Parcours (of interest to 50-plus). The festival is also home to the World Soundtrack Awards, your chance to sit in an audience with star film composers. There are also film music concerts, exhibitions and some rad opening and closing parties.

With more than 100 feature films to choose from, it seems almost unfair to pull out five. But you won't go wrong, in any case, with these. Also keep in mind that there are nine Flemish films showing as part of the festival – a record! Look out for the designation "B" (for Belgium) in the programme.

### Title: *Tabu*

**Director:** Miguel Gomes (Portugal)  
**What's it about?**: A slightly bonkers woman named Aurora, who is convinced her nurse has put a curse on her. The black-and-white homage to cinema then goes back 50 years to tell the story of Aurora and her long lost love. In the festival's Competition category, *Tabu* (pictured below) won Berlin's coveted FIPRESCI prize this year



### Title: *Killing Them Softly*

**Director:** Andrew Dominik  
**What's it about?**: Violence and politics in mobland. The recession has hit organised crime, too, you know, so when a poker game is held up, vengeance must be quick and merciless. A clever and politically astute take on the mixed-up, messed up families and hired hands, with a dazzling cast, including Brad Pitt, James Gandolfini, Ray Liotta and Sam Shepard. In category Crime Scene

### Title: *La Cinquième Saison* (The Fifth Season)

**Director(s):** Jessica Woodworth & Peter Brosens (Belgium)  
**What's it about?**: A village in which spring never arrives (no jokes about the weather in Belgium, please). The American/Flemish directors, who have made such socially aware art house cinema as *Khadak* and *Altiplano*, are back with this story of a town in Wallonia where much

of life appears to have just stopped (pictured below). In category Competition



### Title: *Sunset Strip*

**Director:** Hans Fjellestad  
**What's it about?**: The infamous 1.5 mile stretch of Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood. Like all great documentary filmmakers, Fjellestad makes the subject fascinating even

if you don't care a whit about it. The history of lavish Hollywood and contemporary celebrity reminiscences are all hugely entertaining. Screens as part of The Last Picture Show, a category devoted to films that reference the end of cinema as we know it

### Title: *After Lucia*

**Director:** Michel Franco  
**What's it about?**: Teenage bullying in Mexico City. When a mobile phone video of two crazy kids getting it on at a party goes viral, jealous rivalries take a dangerous toll on Alejandra, the daughter of the recently deceased title character. Franco's film is Mexico's entry for the Oscars. In category Explore Zone

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

# Details of new budget announced

## Savings of €500 million are needed for a balanced budget for 2013

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders has released details of its budget plans for 2013, announced by minister-president Kris Peeters in last week's September Declaration. In order to achieve the government's objective of a balanced budget for the third year in a row, savings of €500 million are required. One-fifth of that total will come from cuts in the cost of the government itself, including a reduction in the number of civil servants or a partial or total suspension of the automatic pay index.

Another €270 million comes from previously agreed policies that will not be implemented, including the child premium and the cap on home health-care costs. The remaining €130 million comes from cutting into reserves of the water companies and the government's debt-interest buffer.

Some sectors will receive more money: €30 million for the building of schools; €12.5 million for reforms to higher education; €62 million for new innovation projects; and €4

million for increased access to child care.

Reactions to the declaration were varied. Unions representing civil servants called for more clarity on the exact measures to be taken. "There can be no question of any reduction in the services provided by the government, nor of their quality," the three unions said in a joint statement.

Chamber of commerce Voka said that Peeters "could have raised the bar a bit higher as far as ambition is concerned". What is needed, Voka said, is "a Flemish policy of profound reform, so that enterprise can assure our economic future." Unizo, which represents the self-employed, called the decision to make the most important cuts within the government itself "courageous".

Environmental organisation Bond Beter Leefmilieu (BBL) complained that "there is no word" on ecological matters, "whereas the urgency of that question is increasing by the day." The problem was all the more serious, BBL said, "because



€30 million pledged for new school buildings in 2013

investment in green initiatives and energy saving can contribute to a structural economic revival and are also good for the pocketbook". Groen fraction leader Filip Watteeuw said that "there are still 40,000 families on the waiting list for social housing, yet [Peeters'] promises on

these matters are exactly the same as they were last year, and the year before that."

The government is planning a budget review in January, when new decisions could be taken based on any changes in the economic situation.

## Brussels metro markedly safer

The Brussels public transport network MIVB has seen a dramatic fall in incidents of verbal and physical aggression, thanks to measures taken following the death of a transport supervisor in April, according to a report from the interior ministry. The number of arrests has gone up by 50% due to an increased number of police in and around metro stations. Cases of aggression directed at transport staff have also gone down by 20%. MIVB security personnel have also now been given the right to request to see identity cards from any person found in breach of the regulations and to detain anyone for up to 30 minutes while an identity check is carried out.



© Platte C/Wikimedia Commons

## Procedural error sets shooter free

Top lawyers have called for tough action against a magistrate who was last week forced to release a man who shot his girlfriend in the head because of a procedural error. Davy Simons, 24, from Houthalen in Limburg province, shot Didi Swiers, 19, twice in the head in the street in Hasselt, allegedly after she broke up with him. Swiers remains under police guard in hospital while recovering from her injuries. Last week, Simons was freed because of a mistake in the documents required to approve his continued detention. His whereabouts are now unknown. "As long as there are no sanction for people who make procedural errors, errors will continue to be made," said top Flemish lawyer Jef Vermaessen. Well-known defence lawyer Sven Mary commented: "In every existing private company you would be fired for such a mistake. Not in the justice system."

## Bacterial leak kills up to 10 tonnes of fish

The Scheldt River could take years to recover from a pollution leak last week that killed up to 10 tonnes of fish, according to the Flemish environment agency VMM. The incident took place at Kerkhove, East Flanders, about five kilometres downstream from the border with Wallonia. The exact source of the leak is being

investigated, but no details were yet available as *Flanders Today* went to press. Investigators have ruled out chemical dumping, stating that the pollution was organic, perhaps from a water treatment plant. According to reports, the leak occurred somewhere in Wallonia or further upstream in France. The pollution, consisting of rotting

organic material, used up the oxygen in the water, which led to fish suffocating. In Avelgem and Oudenaarde, dead fish were visible in the stream as the polluted water made its way towards Ghent. The Jabbeke civil defence force pumped oxygen into the water. The waterways agency had to close locks around Ghent to prevent the

rotting mass from reaching the city centre.

The replacement of such a large quantity of diverse fish species is expected to take years, especially if the organisms living on the riverbed – the food supply for new generations of young fish – have also been affected.

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

69

members of the Flemish parliament head their party's lists in October's municipal elections, more than half of the total of 124 members

5,140

foreign students enrolled at the University of Leuven this year, 11.4% more than last year. The total number of students at the start of the academic year was 33,343

10,000

shops in 26 Brussels neighbourhoods available on a new mobile version of the shopinbrussels.be website, launched three years ago and consulted more than one million times

120

SMS messages sent every week on average by young people in Flanders aged 10 to 18, according to a study by a researcher at the University of Leuven. Some children send up to 1,000 messages in one week

700

years last week since Jan II, Duke of Brabant, signed the Charter of Kortenberg in what is now Flemish Brabant. The charter is, after the Magna Carta, the oldest document limiting a sovereign's powers in Western Europe

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### Spoken for

Local elections are all about local people and local lists. Take SPA. You won't find that party's initials on the ballot in Antwerp, despite socialist mayor Patrick Janssens heading the Stadslijst ("city list"). In Hasselt, the same party is known as Helemaal Hasselt ("entirely Hasselt"), while in Genk it is PROGenk. However much the situations differ from one town to another, there are things that are the same everywhere. All local candidates want their party to be part of the local government. To do that, they need to get into the next coalition (unless they have an absolute majority, which does happen in local elections). One way of getting into a coalition is through a *voorakkoord* – a pre-electoral agreement between two (or more) parties.

Pre-electoral agreements are often deemed undemocratic because they give the impression that the voters' opinions do not matter, that they might as well skip this whole election business and move on to what the politicians have decided between them. For that reason, they are often kept secret.

When asked about a pre-electoral agreement, most politicians will deny the mere existence of such a thing. Last week, though, Etienne Schouuppe of the Christian democrat CD&V was exceptionally honest. His party, Schouuppe said, already has pre-electoral agreements in no fewer than 275 Flemish communes. If only that were true, CD&V party president Wouter Beke responded.

Agreements of this type are one relatively sure way of staying in power and maintaining a current coalition. The partners may or may not agree that the most popular party or candidate will become the next mayor. Alternatively, pre-electoral agreements can also be used to dump one of the coalition partners in favour of another party. They are also instrumental in keeping a popular party out, as N-VA's Bart De Wever is convinced is the case with CD&V's agreements (which Beke, again, denies).

Pre-electoral agreements are the political equivalent of a romantic engagement. Whether this ends in marriage depends on many factors. Hiccups are always possible. A third party may still come along and seduce one of the partners, leaving the other frustrated. Also, the electorate still has something to say in this. Agreement or not, a coalition needs a majority in the town council. Now there is something many pre-electoral agreement partners tend to forget – or find annoying at the most.

# Factory of the future

## Budafabriek promotes networking between creative and innovative groups in Kortrijk

Andy Furniere

Kortrijk has a new meeting point where artists and other creatives can come together to turn their ideas into reality. The Budafabriek is the final stage in the transformation of Buda Island, the quarter of Kortrijk that forms a unique artistic-economic centre in Flanders

The Budafabriek was officially launched two weeks ago, in the presence of cultural dignitaries such as Chris Dercon, the director of London's Tate Modern. But work in the former textile factory will get going for real on 10 October, when the Buda Lab workshop is fully installed on the spacious main floor. Upstairs, the halls will exhibit the creations made at the lab alongside those of celebrated artists. And in March, three photographers with roots in Kortrijk will showcase their work.

The factory's industrial architecture has been preserved, but architects 51N4E of the official Flemish region architect Peter Swinnen opened up the 3,000 square-metres of space to the light and converted the neutral front into a landmark structure. The construction cost €2.8 million, of which the city contributed about €700,000, the European Regional Development Fund €1 million, the government of Flanders €1 million and the local nursing group Heilig Hart €100,000.

Originally, the plan was to create an art museum, but the building instead became a collaboration *fabriek*, or factory. "We realised that Flanders already had many reputed museums and wanted to start a project that filled a gap," explains Hans Vandenbergh, coordinator of AGB Buda, responsible for development in the Buda Island area. "Our 'city factory' creates a fabric, or network, by connecting people and organisations from sectors such as the arts, design, business, science and education. This mix of talent should lead to innovative projects."

### Beyond the virtual model

Central to the activity of the city factory is the Buda Lab, a meeting space and open workshop for designers, students, entrepreneurs,



Make your idea real in Kortrijk's new Budafabriek, the final stage in the transformation of Buda Island, the cultural heart of the city

artists and creative locals. To make models and prototypes, there are extensive production facilities available such as high-tech 3D printers and laser cutters. But there's also equipment for the more conventional techniques of drilling and sawing.

"We don't aim to be an R&D department for a company or a pure workshop for people who need equipment," says Buda Lab director Pieter Michiels. "We want to form a community where people exchange knowledge and develop new ideas. Different groups have their specific abilities: Artists, for example, are excellent at thinking outside the box, while entrepreneurs know how to bring a product to the market."

Part of Buda Lab's mission is to make increase awareness among young people of technical education by organising workshops in cooperation with schools. "It's important that young people think a step further than the models on computers; it's

essential to see and feel the material," says Michiels. "And those skills to create an object are fairly easy to acquire."

According to Michiels, more people are turning away from mass

In one afternoon, a girl designed a bicycle basket that can also function as a shopping bag, using the cover from a ventilator.

The organisation hopes to keep the Buda Lab open 24/7, but it needs

large-scale projects and as residences for those working on them.

But from next spring, Budafabriek will set up exhibitions by established artists. The first three are celebrated photographers who all have a close bond with Kortrijk. Both Carl De Keyzer and Bieke Depoorter – the 2010 winner of the prestigious Magnum Expression Award – have stayed at the boarding school in Kortrijk, while the childhood home of Stephan Vanfleteren is just across the River Leie from the Budafabriek. The exhibition of De Keyzer's work is a good example of Budafabriek's strategy. The Digital Arts and Entertainment department of the University College West Flanders (Howest) in Kortrijk will convert his photo series *Moments Before the Flood* into scenes that appear to have come from a computer game, a bit like *World of Warcraft*.

**"It's important that young people think a step further than the models on their computers"**

production and are looking for authenticity, even in everyday articles such as furniture. He envisages a future where a large group of consumers make personalised products themselves in workshops just like the pioneering Budafabriek. At the opening of the workshop, it was clear that young people are sold on the concept, as 25 youngsters took part in an introductory competition.

volunteers to maintain security and provide guidance. The more a volunteer does at the lab, the less they pay for membership.

### Hometown expo

In the spaces above the Buda Lab, some of the projects designed there will be exhibited to the public. In the long term, these spaces will also be used as workshops for experimental

## ISLAND LIFE



The historical Buda quarter, cut off from the rest of Kortrijk by two branches of the River Leie, was named in the 17th century after a part of the Hungarian capital Budapest – also divided by a river. The redevelopment of this area once known for its nightlife started with the vision of the Italian urban designer Bernardo Secchi in the mid-1990s. He saw it as a place for artistic creation, an idea that professors at the University of Leuven later pushed further. The four pillars of Buda Island's concept are the Buda Tower, Budascoop, Budafabriek and the Broel Museum.

The Buda Tower, a former brewery tower, is a production house for professional stage artists. Every floor has its own studio, where national and international theatre and

dance companies prepare their shows. The Budascoop still fulfils its original function as a cinema complex, but after renovation in the 1990s it also has a dance and theatre hall. Arts centre Buda installed its offices here. Annually, it assists 150 international artists working at the Buda Tower and Budascoop.

The Broel Museum, which showcases regional collections, will conserve the creations made at the Budafabriek. In this 18th-century mansion, exhibitions will show the results of its activity throughout the years to the public.

► [www.buda-eiland.be](http://www.buda-eiland.be)

## MEET THE TEAM

Peek behind the scenes of a world-class institute, when imec opens its doors this weekend

On 7 October, as part of Flanders' Open Bedrijvendag, or Open Business Day, imec will open its doors to the public. Thirty-five imec ambassadors stand ready to give you a guided tour around their labs and offices in Leuven, giving visitors a unique chance to look behind the scenes of a world-class R&D institute. Learn how researchers from all over the world get their ideas and turn them into working applications, and hear firsthand what it takes to develop faster computer chips, better solar cells or sensors for cancer detection.

Discover what goes on inside imec's walls at the headquarters in Leuven

"We'll show you around the exciting world of nanoparticles and biosensors," says Karolien Jans. "In the biosensor lab, we make electronic and chemical components work together in a tiny electronic appliance. With these sensors, it will become possible, for example, to analyse a drop of blood in just a few minutes. Today, that analysis can take days and is done in specialised labs. In the future, some of these tests will be done at the doctor's office, or even at home, just like a pregnancy test."

Karolien and Hilde Jans (*pictured below*) are identical



twins who studied chemistry and now make up part of imec's nanobio research group, Karolien as project leader and Hilde as researcher. Hilde studies the potential of nanoparticles to detect cancer, among other things. "Through the unique qualities



Visitors can don a white coat and enter imec's cleanroom

of nanoparticles, it is possible to amplify the signal of a sensor," she explains. "So you can build sensors that are much more sensitive, detecting certain molecules in much lower quantities. Using this technique, we can look for molecules that signal cancer."

### FROM BLANK SLATE TO MICROCHIP

Tim Sterckx, meanwhile, is the operator of imec's 200 square-metre cleanroom and will take visitors on an exclusive visit. It's your chance to wear one of those white cleanroom suits! "In the cleanroom, we start with a blank silicon wafer which we process – in a few weeks – into tens of working computer chips," says Sterckx. (*pictured below left*) "We do that in up to 200 steps, one after the other, with complex tools and machines. First, we grow a thin layer of oxides on the wafers, then add a photosensitive layer. Next, with the help of light and ultra-precise lithography tools, we project a



pattern on that layer. Then we etch the surface of the wafer, converting the pattern into a maze of holes and trenches. We can then fill them with a specific material. And so on until the chip is ready." Eszter Voroshazi from Hungary (*pictured above*) did a summer internship at imec, where she became interested in the technology of organic solar cells. These are not made from silicon but from organic molecules that can be printed on flexible plastics. "What I saw these people doing really excited me," she says, "so I decided to join the team and do

### Reserve your ambassador!

A tour with one of the imec ambassadors takes about an hour-and-a-half. They take small groups, so they can make it a personal and worthwhile experience. Therefore, you should reserve your visit on the website below. The tours are in Dutch or English, depending on the ambassadors' mother tongue. They are open to everyone from age 12 up, and there is a separate programme for children with workshops on lightning and yoga. If you cannot attend, or your favourite tour is already full, you can also visit during our monthly nocturnes.

► [www.imecopenbedrijvendag2012.be](http://www.imecopenbedrijvendag2012.be)  
► [www.imec.be/nocturne](http://www.imec.be/nocturne)

a PhD at imec. I studied the reliability of organic solar cells. This was a new topic, so I had to design and build the tools to do my measurements myself. Recently, a company has joined this research, as it is interested in using our technology to make products."

Scientists at imec, says Voroshazi, are given the



freedom to understand the fundamental principles of what they're observing. "At the same time, we also get the chance to translate this knowledge into a practical application. Usually as a scientist or engineer, you only get the chance to do one or the other, so for me this has been a unique opportunity. At the open day, I'll show people a technology that is on the verge of breaking through."

### THE DRIVERLESS CAR

Vito Giannini (*pictured above*) was born in Italy but has been living in Belgium for eight years. He started his research career at imec doing a PhD. Today he's the principal scientist working on techniques to improve wireless communication. "Currently I'm helping to develop a radar for road safety applications," he explains. "In the future, we'll have cars that can drive without a human at the steering wheel. But for this, we need much smarter vehicles, which can sense what is happening around them, in all directions. That sensing equipment is what we are developing."

This project, he says, not only challenges him as a researcher, it also gives him a personal satisfaction. "My drive has always been to do something that helps people. And with this project, ultimately, we are going to save lives."

# VUB and Unizo sign cooperation agreement

## Belgian employees in top three worldwide for intrapreneurship

Alan Hope

The Brussels Free University (VUB) and Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed, last week signed a cooperation agreement to provide students with information sessions on how to start a business, to provide online stimulus to start-ups and to bring practical experience before the class. The two partners will also organise training modules on enterprise skills and set up business plan competitions similar to Battle of the Talents, organised last year for Flanders' universities and university colleges.

"This cooperation will create both direct and indirect value for both parties," said VUB rector Paul De

Knop and Unizo director-general Karel Van Eetvelt in a statement. "And those who have most to gain from that are the students." Meanwhile, a new study by the Flanders DC Knowledge Centre of Vlerick Business School shows that Belgian employees are among the most entrepreneurial in the world. Not only are employees more enterprising, but the companies that employ them also tend more to support what is known as intrapreneurship.

"In recent years, various studies, including the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), have demonstrated that Belgium's score is rather poor when it comes to

traditional entrepreneurship or those who start from scratch," says Pascal Cools, Director of Flanders District of Creativity. "But intrapreneurship can serve as a partial substitute for the limited traditional entrepreneurship in our country."

A recent survey by the GEM classified countries according to how many employees could be considered intrapreneurs: Belgium came third after Sweden and Denmark. Belgium's total of 13.5% does, however, show room for improvement, according to Professor Miguel Meuleman, who headed the Vlerick study. "You can compensate for a lack of proactive employees by developing and implementing a



Paul De Knop (left) and Karel Van Eetvelt sign the cooperation agreement

corporate climate that supports and encourages this," he said. "You can clearly and systematically promote entrepreneurship in a company or organisation."

## New business organisation for Brussels

Businesses in Brussels have a new representative organisation called Izeo, announced last week by the employers' organisation Brussels Enterprises Commerce and Industry (Beci) and social security insurer Partena. Izeo offers legal and business advice to the 200,000 self-employed in and around the capital. The organisation is bilingual and hopes to recruit 30,000 members. Its four main platforms are lower taxes for the self-employed; support cheques to obtain advice to avoid bankruptcy; improved mobility in the capital; and administrative simplification.

"The arrival of Izeo fills a gap," according to secretary-general Miguel Van Keirsbilck in a press statement. "Our capital still does not have a representative organisation for all business people, craftsmen and women, professionals and managers of small businesses and all those who create value and jobs."

According to Unizo, the Flemish organisation representing the self-employed, Dutch-speaking entrepreneurs in the capital have never lacked representation. Last weekend, Unizo in Brussels and Flemish Brabant launched its new programme of "building blocks" for a city-centre strengthening policy, which includes a proposal to set up a Business Improvement District formula to create a strategic action plan for each shopping area and financed by local taxation from the businesses concerned.

▶ [www.izeo.be](http://www.izeo.be)

## Q&A

**Ann Van Doren is the director of Open Bedrijvendag, the annual open door day for business, which takes place across Belgium on 7 October**

### This is the 22nd year, and the day is still going strong. Who thought it up in the first place?

In the early editions, there were about 35 companies involved; this year there are 365. Open Bedrijvendag is a non-profit that receives subsidies from the Flemish government. The event started off in Flanders, but it has now spread out to the whole of Belgium. We've also evolved in line with the economy, in the sense that Flanders has become more of a service-oriented economic landscape, so we have more and more service companies among the participants.

### What kind of businesses take part?

Any company that's ready to open its doors and make an effort to let people see behind the scenes is welcome to take part, from a one-person business to a multinational. This year the theme is Factory of the Future, which fits in with a programme of the Flemish government, their New Industrial Policy. So the accent is on production industries. For example, De Wulf in Roeselare is a company that makes large agricultural machinery for harvesting potatoes and carrots with the latest technology on



board. Ducatt in Lommel makes ultra-transparent glass for solar panels.

### Despite the evolution towards a service-based economy, then, industrial production is still important in Flanders?

If we want to hold on to our industry in Flanders, it's important for industrial companies to transform into something greener, more innovative and socially stronger, and that's what's behind the New Industrial Policy. Many of the companies taking part in Open Bedrijvendag are already moving in that direction.

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

## THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

### Biotech

#### ► Devgen

Switzerland's agrifood group Syngenta is taking over the Ghent-based bio-technology company Devgen, specialised in crop protection and hybrid rice, following a €16-a-share bid.

### Biotech

#### ► TiGenix

The Leuven-based biotechnology firm, specialised in cell therapy, has won approval from the European Medical Authority to start production of its trailblazing ChondroCelect knee cartilage repair medication.

### Event organising

#### ► Sofina

The Brussels-based holding company is to pay up to €50 million for a stake in the French GL Events. Lyon-based GL was heavily involved in this summer's Olympics and has contracts for the 2014 football world cup.

### Gas

#### ► Fluxys

Gas transport and pipeline operator Fluxys has acquired from Germany's E.ON a further 7.5% of the Interconnector gas pipeline that links British natural gas fields to the Zeebrugge gas terminal. The €60 million move allows the Brussels-based Fluxys to become one of the leading shareholders of Interconnector, with a direct and indirect holding of some 30%.

### Horeca

#### ► Starbucks

The ninth Starbucks outlet in the country opened in Bruges last week, days after the inauguration of the outlet in Brussels North railway station.

### Oil

#### ► Total

The French oil group is investing a further €200 million in its Antwerp-based oil refining and petrochemical operation. The amount comes in addition to the €1 billion already earmarked to increase its production capacity of lighter fuels and diesel oil on the site.

### Online

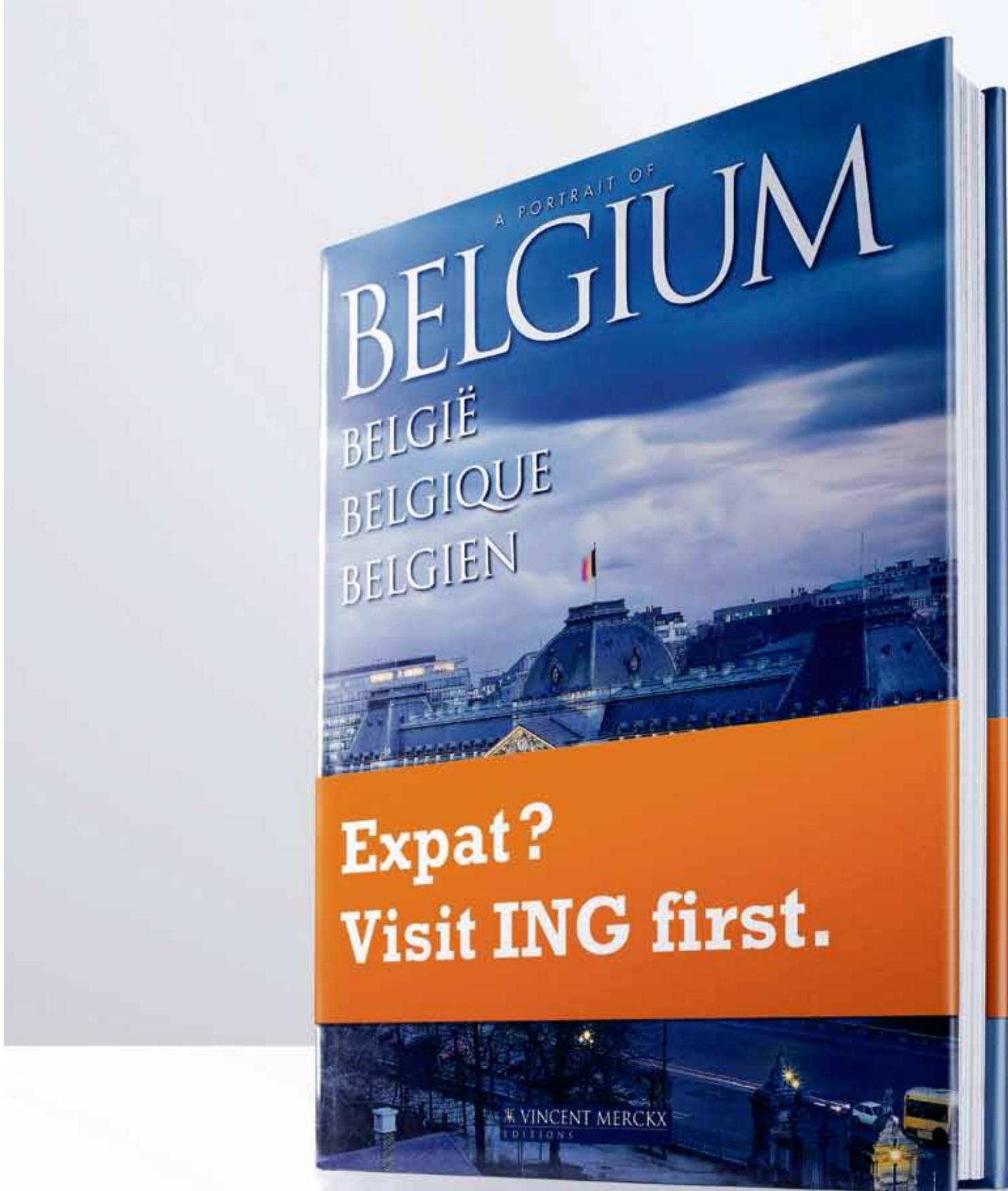
#### ► Amazon

World-leading online books and products sales site Amazon is considering setting up a Belgium-based operation in the wake of the creation of a Dutch subsidiary.

### Retail

#### ► Ici Paris XL

The Brussels-based perfume and cosmetics retailer, with 110 stores locally and 137 in the Netherlands is opening its first outlet in Germany.



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Publisher: Philippe Wallez, cours Saint-Michel 60, 1040 Brussels.



# Pathfinder

## How a trailblazing Flemish mining engineer made exploring the region by bike a whole lot easier

Alan Hope

Listeners to VRT Radio 2 once voted it the “eighth wonder of the world”. It covers all of Flanders and the Netherlands, as well as parts of Germany and a tiny corner of Wallonia. And it was the brainchild of a former Limburg mining engineer. The *fietsknooppuntnetwerk* – a network of cycle paths marked with numbered junction signs – was born of one bright idea, and its growth seems unstoppable.

The story of the network is now legendary: Hugo Bollen was a mining engineer in Eisden, Limburg province, until it closed in 1986, after which he worked in mines in Zolder, Beringen and Houthalen. As he once explained, his wife was his inspiration. “We used to go out cycling, and every time we came to a crossroads, we had to stop to figure out which way to go next. My wife got fed up with the delays and threatened to stop coming out with me. That’s when I had the idea of working out a system that made map-reading unnecessary.”

The prototype already existed, and he was used to seeing it at work: the system of coal transports underground in the mines, which is mapped out according to nodes, or junctions. Each junction on the cycle network has a number, and a pre-arranged route can be followed just by following the numbers. Each sign gives the number of the junction and directions to further junctions.

### Cross-border success

Limburg was the first province to adopt the idea, in the Kempen and Maasland area in 1995, using government money intended for reconstruction of the local economy following the closure of the mines. The network idea, though, soon spread to the whole of Flanders, and then to the Netherlands.

The five provinces in Flanders continue to look after the network. “The provinces are in charge of the functional network and make sure it’s coordinated with the other



Necessity is the mother of invention: Hugo Bollen

cycling networks,” explains Annelies Janssens, coordinator for cycling policy in Flemish Brabant. “We encourage municipalities to build cycle paths, and we award subsidies. We also coordinate any projects that cross municipal borders. And then the provinces work together for things like awareness campaigns, signposting and bicycle parking.”

The cyclists’ organisation Fietsersbond, however, is in two minds about the network. “It’s a good thing for recreational purposes,” says spokesman Roel De Cleen. “But more work needs to be done on the functional cycle network,” meaning cycle paths for everyday use for traffic to school, workplace and shops. In many places, the two networks overlap. “But the functional network is not finished, and it’s certainly not well signposted. The initiative has to come from the Flemish region.”

### How to use the network

Different networks can be recognised

by their signs. The junction network’s signs are green on white; individual cycle routes have hexagonal signs in red on white; local authorities may designate tourist routes with signs in white on brown or white on blue. Any given path may, at the same time, form part of one or more of these routes. The general rule is: If you start off following a green route, stay on the green route and ignore the other signs.

The provinces all sell booklets for cyclists to use on the road, containing routes of varying distances, with information on what there is to see along the way, places you can stop and even accommodation if you’re planning a longer trip. Simply decide how far you want to cycle, then choose a route that brings you back to your starting point. The books are also available from tourist offices or online at [www.fietswebwinkel.com](http://www.fietswebwinkel.com). The planner at [www.fietsnet.be](http://www.fietsnet.be) overlays the numbered junction network on top of a Google map and

shows where roads are unpaved or cobbled. Pick a starting location, then click on the numbered junctions until you have your route planned. As you click each number, the site gives a total distance. When you’re done, you can print out the directions, export the route to your GPS or import it to your smartphone via the Android app Bike Navigator by MobileDevelopment. The website also has a planner for routes in the Netherlands.

One advantage of the books is that you have the map of the whole local



network with you on the spot, so you can change your route easily if you want to go farther to take in a local attraction, say, or if you need to make your route shorter. Elsewhere, [www.vlaanderen-fietsland.be](http://www.vlaanderen-fietsland.be) has information on routes per province, while [www.fietsroute.org](http://www.fietsroute.org) has details of more than 1,000 routes, as well as themed and child-friendly routes, weather, bike rental information and routes in other countries. And at [www.fietsen123.be](http://www.fietsen123.be), you can find routes put together by other users.

## GO THE DISTANCE

The total length of signposted network cycle paths in Flanders

East Flanders	3,440km
Antwerp	2,750km
West Flanders	2,610km
Limburg	2,000km
Flemish Brabant	1,680km

## TOP-RATED PATHS



*Flanders Today* journalists describe their favourite sections of the region’s cycle network

### Kemmelberg, West Flanders

In the sloping landscape of the Heuvelland in the south of West Flanders, the Kemmelberg makes the most impression. With cobblestones and a challenging maximum gradient of 23% (pictured), it is the decisive factor in the cycling classic Ghent-Wevelgem. This 36km tour starts and ends at junction 96 and leads you along the hillside with stunning views of West and French Flanders. Other rewards for your climb include cosy rural villages, such as Reningelst and Wijtschate. **Andy Furniere**

### The Horstroute, Hageland

The Hageland – and in particular the triangle formed by Leuven, Tienen and Diest – is one of the prettiest regions of Flanders to cycle through. It’s characterised by undulating hills, orchards, quaint villages and extremely well-maintained and clearly signposted routes. I particularly recommend the 34km Horstroute, with a

stop at Horst Castle (junction 65) and the delightful Gempe molen Brasserie (between junctions 96 and 97). **Denzil Walton**

### Leuven-Mechelen Canal

Just get on it anywhere you can and start pedalling! The towpaths are wide, you’ll find plenty of benches and the occasional cafe along the way, and you won’t meet a single car. My favourite entry point is junction 93 in Wilsele. Then it’s simple: Just head north. You could pop into Planckendael animal park or take a diversion into Mechelen for lunch. Forty kilometres later, you can sit by the locks at the Zennegat (junction 94) before turning around and returning on the opposite bank. **DW**

### Molenroute 2, Meetjesland

This route takes you to the quiet, hilly and forgotten land between Bruges and Ghent. Highlights on this circuit are the last functioning white Flemish windmills, the mystical Kraenepoel lake and the pink castle in Poeke. But most beautiful is the rustic town of Kanegem, in the midst of a green patchwork resembling Tuscany. **Daan Bauwens**

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# All white now

## Brussels' Nuit Blanche celebrates 10 years with an all-night programme of interactive art

Georgio Valentino

A celebration is in order. Nuit Blanche has been a significant event on Brussels' cultural calendar for a full decade now. The all-night arts festival, organised by the City of Brussels and held like clockwork the first weekend of October, may have been inspired by Paris, but it has since established its own identity.

The inaugural edition of the Brussels event in 2003 was a sprawling, city-wide party, much like Nuit Blanche Paris. The powers-that-be now concentrate on a chosen neighbourhood, mapping a more compact circuit in which all venues are within walking distance of one another. This year's festivities unfold southwest from the Kunstberg to Kapelmarkt.

Brussels-based art student Justine Van Den Driessche, whose installation *Capturing the Academy* is featured in this year's programme, notes the advantages of the neighbourhood scope. "The event is more open here," she says. "There are more possibilities of interaction with the public and so the social dimension is more developed."

### Open call, much freedom

Nuit Blanche (the French phrase for "sleepless night") has also shifted its focus over the years from partying on a massive scale to showcasing



Sing a Jacques Brel hit in your own language and join the choir during Songlines at Nuit Blanche

international contemporary art. The open call for projects for this 10th anniversary edition – another crucial departure from Nuit Blanche Paris, which is managed by curators – brought in pitches from around

the world. More than one-quarter of the pieces that made the cut are imported from beyond Belgium's borders.

There are few hard-and-fast criteria. You'll find performances,

projections, installations and everything in between. The artists share little more than a common appreciation of public space and its creative potential. Local character is evident in the projects sprung from collaborations with neighbourhood residents. Other pieces have interactive elements, making the spectator an active participant.

"There's a lot of freedom," Van Den Driessche says. "It's a great opportunity for young artists like me who are looking for creative experiences and visibility."

Night owls need not worry. Despite the unambiguously cultural focus, there are still plenty of parties. Nuit Blanche is hosting five non-stop soirées this year, including an electro-flavoured Boombox Party at the repurposed Magdalenaal, former home of the Brussels Casino. Indeed, the action moves decidedly downtown after hours, with more shindigs at Beursschouwburg, Viage Casino, La Tentation and Galeries.

### Free and easy

Accessibility is another cornerstone of Nuit Blanche. The neighbourhood

scope of the festival encourages walking and cycling between venues. An information desk, DIY shop, Grand Restaurant featuring local dishes and organic products and two open-air bars are convenient pit stops along the festival route. Free and secure bicycle parking zones are provided. In addition, Brussels' public transport agency MIVB is offering free service and extending hours on its Noctis network until 5.00.

For the first time, Nuit Blanche provides "Image Whisperers" to visually impaired visitors. These volunteers are students recruited from Brussels' art schools and trained to supply on-the-spot descriptions of the festival's events. The artistic director of France's Centre Ressources Théâtre Handicap was on hand to oversee training.

Best of all, the entire artistic programme of Nuit Blanche can be enjoyed by its estimated 100,000 annual visitors for free. Only the after-parties require tickets (online pre-sales start at €8).

## 6 OCTOBER

from 19.00, across Brussels

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

## DON'T MISS AT NUIT BLANCHE



**Capturing the Academy** Justine Van Den Driessche's multimedia installations colonise the campus of the Brussels Fine Arts Academy. Creepy silhouettes lurk in the bay window, animated through a process inspired by the Victorian-era art of chronophotography. The inner court houses a massive mosaic of voyeuristic snapshots, making the reference to media surveillance explicit. "The tools of communication we use daily

can also be used to manipulate us," the artist says. *Brussels Fine Arts Academy, Zuidstraat 144, 19.00-2.00*

**Songlines** Het Pak's open-air audiovisual installation draws its strength from Brussels' status as an international city (and the home town of Jacques Brel). The concept is simple: Foreign-born residents were invited to sing Brel's hit ballad "Ne me quitte pas" in their respective native languages. Brel, too, a self-described francophone Fleming, often recorded alternative Dutch versions of his songs for the home market. *Songlines* layers, synchronises and presents the recordings in the open air along with giant portraits of the singers. The final product is a moving choir of sound and vision, reflecting the capital's diversity. *Villerstraat, 19.00-3.00*

**Parabruselles** Local artist Nathalie Rozanes imagines a parallel city under the streets of Brussels, its passages radiating from the Justice Palace. This pluridisciplinary (one might even say *paradisciplinary*) performance places one of the shadow city's portals in the basement of the Zada Gallery, where a supernatural ceremony will take place every hour, on the hour. *Zada Gallery, Minimstraat 20, first performance 20.00, last 1.00*

**Race Code** The 19th century saw a multiplication of pseudo-scientific theories like phrenology, which suggested a link between an individual's physical characteristics and racial degeneracy. The digital installation *Race Code* by Finnish artists Timo Wright and Matti Niinimäki highlights the absurdity of such formulae and challenges the public to confront contemporary attitudes towards race. Visitors are photographed then analysed according to a digital code. The code's admittedly arbitrary criteria produce a "racial hierarchy" in real time. *Jewish Museum of Belgium, Minimstraat 21, 20.00-1.00*

**Allegoria** Art doesn't exist in a vacuum. As sublime as the finished product may be, it was hewn from raw materials by human labour in the workshop of the real world. The saccharine soundtrack of the string quartet is no exception. Billed as a "clinical" concert, *Allegoria* sees Rome's Quiet Ensemble perform what seems to be a traditional classical programme (*pictured*). But incidental noises – creaking chairs, beating hearts and the like – gradually come to the fore until ultimately art is stifled by the act of its own creation. *Nassaukapel, Keizerlaan 4, 19.30, 20.30, 21.30, 22.30*

## New course to help foreign employees settle in Flanders

New home, new colleagues, new customs, new languages – however rewarding a foreign posting might be, the move itself can be fraught with difficulties. A new English-language course in Brussels for workers posted in Flanders aims to ease the transition and help them get the most out of their time here. The course is being offered by EHSAL Management School

(part of the University College of Brussels) in cooperation with de Rand, the organisation that brings foreigners and Flemings together in the ring of communities around Brussels. The course is intended to provide a comprehensive insight into the region's historical, cultural and economic development, as well as practical information and a introduction to cultural highlights.

The full programme includes two guided historical and cultural visits in the region, which also provide the chance for participants to strengthen social contact and expand professional and private networks. Participants have the option to take a shorter course without the excursions.

Registration is open to employees and their partners who have

recently moved to Flanders and Brussels, as well as those who have been living here for a while but have not yet had the chance to discover the Dutch-speaking community and region. The course begins on 26 October and costs €3,750, or €3,450 for the shorter programme.

**Sally Tipper**

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



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# Another world

**Marnix Peeters' debut novel is the adrenaline boost Flemish fiction has been waiting for**

Rebecca Benoot

**M**arnix Peeters' philosophy in life as well as in fiction is to go with the flow. He started working for radio station Studio Brussel and soon became a rock journalist at the weekly *Humo*, interviewing some of the top musicians in the business, before he eventually landed a job as an editor at *Het Laatste Nieuws*.

Tired of the deadlines and crazy hours, Peeters decided to turn over a new leaf.

"I quit my job at *Het Laatste Nieuws* three years ago," the author says, "and just started making stuff up. I wanted to challenge myself, so I created alluring opening lines, lines that gave me *carte blanche* to make the wackiest story possible."

The 47-year-old bought a house in the East Cantons of Belgium and transformed his passion for writing into a passion for fiction. "Let go of reality and let creativity reign" was his motto, resulting in a wickedly funny and fresh first novel, which has been nominated for Flanders' Bronze Owl (see sidebar).

*De dag dat we Andy zijn arm afzaagden* (The Day We Sawed Off Andy's Arm) tells the tale of Werner Plöts, a naive boy whose father leaves him with the ugly and equally evil Crique sisters. After two years of misery and malnourishment, he makes his way into the world with his best friend Orzas, a three-legged bear. The road ahead turns into a concatenation of crazy adventures filled with conmen, casualties, nymphomaniacs and first love. Welcome to the depraved, oversexed – but genuinely hopeful – universe of Marnix Peeters.

## The dark side

Peeters' fiction debut is a roller-coaster ride undefined by time or place that exposes the darker and more carnal nooks and crannies of human nature. It comes as a breath of fresh air to Flemish fiction, which usually verges more towards realism and frequently lacks the wild imagination of its, say, British or American counterparts. Not since Peter Verhelst have we had an author who dares to go beyond the realms of the ordinary.

"Flemish literature has a tendency to be very introspective," Peeters (pictured) confirms. "I believe it's an author's job to create, not regurgitate. I was constantly confronted with reality because of my journalism background, so, when I'm reading or writing, I try to look for something different, something out of the ordinary."

His Antwerp publisher, De Bezige Bij, was very pleased. "Finally, not another *De helaasheid der dingen*," Peeters jokes, referring to Dimitri Verhulst's acclaimed novel about his troubled youth.

"When you're a kid, and you write a story," Peeters continues, "you give your imagination free range. But when you get older, convention starts to seep through, and your

© Koen Broos



prose gets more sedated. No child would ever describe a kitchen table, for example, and I wanted to tap into that primal creativity that many of us lose as we grow up." He tells his tale with such fervour and passion that you can't help but be sucked into this grotesque and outrageous world.

## Graphic novel

Peeters already has several famous fans, such as author Herman Brusselmans and director Erik van Looy, who love his hyperrealism, suggestive language and visual flair. Granted, it isn't a novel for everyone. Some will probably give up after the first few graphic pages, in which Andy's arm is amputated in gruesome fashion. But what the novel occasionally lacks in decency, it makes up for with originality, in both story and characters.

"I drew characters while I was writing the novel," Peeters adds. "They evolved quite organically. I also ended up drawing certain scenes, so while I was writing I was surrounded by sketches that were coming to life." All of this adds to the novel's filmic quality. The main character in particular shares his creator's boldness and lust for life as he remains oddly optimistic, despite the torrential downpour of misfortune with which Peeters has blessed him. "Werner is a living mandate against whining," Peeters says.

The rest of the cast is a true freak

show that embodies mankind's worst traits both physically and mentally. "Nobody's good, and everything basically ends badly," Peeters says enthusiastically. "I wanted to create as much drama as possible because the story has to fascinate me. Along with the characters, the process has to be fun. I have a short attention span, so I need to delve straight in." Peeters has entered the publishing business with childlike awe and amazement, as a whole new world of language and editing has opened up to him. "I'm learning constantly; writing this book has been a wild ride," he says. "We're all driving in a car without a wheel and that's half the fun."

*De dag dat we Andy zijn arm afzaagden* oozes such enthusiasm, promise and bodily fluids, that you can't help but wonder what his next book holds in store.

## THE BETTER BOOK

The literary festival *Het Betere Boek* (The Better Book) is the brainchild of the Willemsfonds in Ghent, which promotes and catalogues Dutch-language literature. The oldest socio-cultural society in Flanders, it launched the festival last year, at which it awards the *Bronzen Uil* (Bronze Owl), given to a first-time author.

The day-long festival hosts a number of authors and lecturers, including Herman Brusselmans, Tom Lanoye and author and psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe. There is also a book fair, and visitors can browse through the archives of the Willemsfonds. The event ends with the awarding of the *Bronzen Uil*.

This year, five Flemish and five Dutch nominees will be competing for the €5,000 prize and a statue of – what else – a bronze owl (pictured). Sylvain Peeters, chair of deMens.nu, an umbrella organisation of humanist associations in Flanders and Brussels, is head of the jury.

## The nominees

### Flemish

Bouke Billiet, *In de naam van TienKamelen* (In the Name of TienKamelen)  
Marnix Peeters, *De dag dat we Andy zijn arm afzaagden*  
Roderik Six, *Vloed* (Flood)  
Ineke Vander Aa, *De lichtekooi van Loven* (The Whore of Loven)  
Christophe Van Gerrewey, *Op de hoogte* (Informed)

### Dutch

Carlijn Vis, *Vrij Spel* (Open Play)  
Johan Fretz, *Fretz 2025*  
Murat Isik, *Verloren grond* (Lost Ground)  
Rudy Schellaert, *Neem me mee* (Take Me with You)  
Stephan Ter Borg, *Orang-oetans drijven niet* (Orangutans Don't Drive)



© Hedwig Dieraeert

## Bozar Book Club goes English

Brussels Fine Arts Centre Bozar has launched an English-language Book Club next to its existing Dutch and French clubs. Participants read the selected book, then get together with the moderator to discuss them. There's quite a crowd, so even if you want to keep quiet, you're invited to come along.

The moderator for the English section is author Lila Azam Zanganeh, who cut her teeth last season running the French-language section. Azam Zanganeh is French-Iranian, lives in New York and has taught both literature and film at Harvard. Her first choice for the

Book Club is the selected poems of Adonis, who, she says, "single-handedly launched a revolution in modern Middle Eastern poetry". Adonis will be discussed on 27 November, so you have plenty of time to get the book (available, quite conveniently, at the Bozar shop) and be prepared.

Following titles include *Memoirs of Hadrian*, to be discussed on 19 February, and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, to be discussed on 18 June. **Lisa Bradshaw**

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

# Between darkness and light

**Gertjan Van Hellemont strikes the right balance as Douglas Firs release their first album**

Christophe Verbiest

The band Douglas Firs has a mish-mash of a membership, but at least fans always know that Gertjan Van Hellemont is the heart and soul. The Ghent-based musician has been using the moniker for five years, playing with his brother Sem on keyboards, drummer Frederik Van Den Berghe and bass player Simon Casier. And on the debut album *Shimmer & Glow*, there's a whole lot of guests. "When it comes to making an album, those three are the key players," Van Hellemont tells me just ahead of a slew of album-release concerts. "I highly value their input. Simon, for instance, has the last word when it comes to bass lines."

Live, though, it's another story. "If possible, the four of us play together, but they're all great musicians, which means they're really busy. Simon, for instance, plays in Balthazar, which will be touring Europe from November. But I don't turn down concerts just because he isn't available." The bottom line: "If I'm free, I accept a gig."

Van Hellemont, 24, is well connected, and a carousel of musicians bring a dynamism to the band. You might see one bass player at one concert and another at the next. "I know enough excellent musicians," he confirms. "Also, because the songs are more important than the arrangements, they can be performed in different ways. By now there are four drummers in Flanders who can play my songs!"

Because of all this, Van Hellemont chose a name that could be perceived as the name of a person (though a Douglas fir is in fact a conifer). "I see the name as my pseudonym," he says. "Sem sometimes even calls me Douglas."



"A gut feeling": Gertjan Van Hellemont is setting out on an album-release tour

But I also like the tree. They're beautiful."

## Roots & rock

Douglas firs are native to North America, and indeed *Shimmer & Glow* is clearly influenced by North American roots and rock music, be it Neil Young, Bob Dylan or Little Feat. And in a few instances also by blues. "I never thought very consciously about the music I wanted to make," Van Hellemont admits. "I always just played what I liked. It's a gut feeling. When we chose the 11 songs for the album, we wanted them to fit together. So a few country-tinged tunes didn't make the cut."

The album, which goes on sale next week, is named after its opening

track, the band's first single, already popular on the playlists of Radio 1 and Studio Brussel since last spring. "The song is a good example of the music we stand for," says Van Hellemont. "Lyrically, it's melancholy, but not utterly bleak. It points to the balance we want to keep between light and dark." Van Hellemont sings in English. "I don't sound convincing in Dutch," he says. "English is my musical language." His lyrics are mostly short impressions, rather than narrative. Still, they tickle the imagination. I see stories unfurling in front of my eyes. "Perfect!" he exclaims. "I like the listener to interpret the songs in their own way. It's not important to know what I'm referring to."

Though that's not to say that the songs aren't rooted in his personal life. "They are, though only a few people would be able to know what inspired them."

## A brother's guidance

One of those would be his brother Sem, Van Hellemont's senior by nine years and a crucial figure in his musical upbringing. "He's intensively engaged in music. He reads *Mojo* with a pen and afterwards passes the magazine to me. From a young age, he made compilation tapes for me – to point my musical taste in the right direction," he laughs.

And there was more: "When I was in fifth or sixth grade, I discovered that when I played some chords and sang, I could make up songs. But doing both at the same time was hard. He encouraged me to keep on trying by saying that it would work one day. I probably would not be sitting here without Sem."

Van Hellemont went to music school from the age of eight and studied classical guitar. "Somewhere along the road, I bought an electric guitar and started playing the piano at home. It all went very naturally." Afterwards he went to the conservatory in Ghent where he studied music production, a training that's not only technical but also musical, running parallel with the jazz section. For instance: "In the last year, we had to arrange

a piece of music for big band."

## American landscape

The cover of *Shimmer & Glow* is a photograph taken by Neal Casal, an underrated American singer-songwriter who was part of Ryan Adams' band the Cardinals. Van Hellemont is a huge fan of Casal's work. The idea was that he would produce the album. "During a night fuelled with alcohol, I found his email address and sent him some recordings. He replied surprisingly quickly with a detailed list of comments. We kept on communicating; he gave me some good advice."

Due to agenda and geographical problems, Casal didn't produce the album. "But I wanted him to be present in some way or other, so I asked him for a picture." The landscape image with a clouded sky and the sun fighting to break through perfectly summarises the feel of the album. Douglas Firs couldn't have wished for a better cover.



DOUGLAS FIRS  
*Shimmer & Glow*

## 7 OCTOBER

Minardschouwburg, Walpoortstraat 15, Ghent  
check the website for more dates across Flanders and Brussels

►www.douglasfirs.be

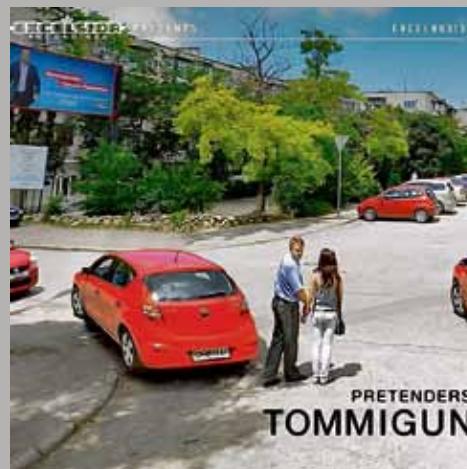
## MUSIC REVIEWS

### Tommigun

Pretenders • Excelsior Recordings

The slightly lamenting voice of Thomas Devos is highly addictive. But it works even more strongly in combination with the contrasting sweet harmonies of Kaat Arnaert. The vocals, though, are not the only strong point of *Pretenders*, the second album by Brussels band Tommigun. The excellent songs draw their strength from the interplay of voices, the insurgent guitar and the spacey keyboards, supported by a solid rhythm section. The power of rock and the subtleties of laid-back pop are beautifully interwoven. Tommigun are still struggling to make a breakthrough to a wider audience, and that's really a pity. They deserve your ears.

► www.tommigun.be



### Polaroid Patsi

Electrique • self-released

Geert Waegeman, or Polaroid Patsi as he calls himself for this album, plays more than 20 instruments on *Electrique*. The music, recorded between 1997 and 2012, is equally diverse: a surprising mix of avant-garde experiments, Brazilian folk, funky grooves, vulnerable pop, sandy country, chamber music and even more. Still, *Electrique* feels like a coherent collection. With this album, Waegeman confirms his reputation as one of the most adventurous Flemish musicians. Sadly, no record label was interested, so *Electrique* is self-released.

► www.myspace.com/geertwaegeman

### Balthazar

Rats • Play it Again Sam

Two-and-a-half years after their promising debut *Applause*, Balthazar (a quintet formed in Kortrijk and now living in Ghent) are back with an even better album, *Rats*, available on 9 October. Maarten Devoldere's voice – a young Bob Dylan, you'd swear – catches the attention, but don't let that divert you from the intricately built songs with loads of little noises brewing under the surface. Balthazar succeeds in that unusual feat of sounding at once both groovy and melancholy. From November they tour extensively in Europe. It's theirs for the taking!

► www.balthazarband.be

*Late nights for foodies*

# Brussels Museums Nocturnes

Marie Dumont

Museums don't normally look kindly on munchers – a grease-splattered "Mona Lisa" must be a curator's worst nightmare. But for once, Brussels' museums will be making an exception to this rule and inviting food and foodies into their hallowed halls.

Why this about-turn? Because of Brusselicious, the year-long celebration of food that has been sweeping over Brussels, offering fine meals on trams, picnics in parks, food-related films at Cinematek and a deluge of *frietens* and chocolate all over town.

Many museums have decided to join in this city-wide binge and will host food tastings and cooking workshops to tie in with the Brussels Museum Nocturnes – a popular scheme during which dozens of museums stay open late on Thursday evenings throughout the autumn, on a rota system.

For many, the choice of what cuisine to serve was self-evident, and refreshments will come as a natural addition to their collections. At the Far East Museums in Laken, for instance, you'll be able to stroll among Ming vases with a cup of jasmine tea in hand, as well as attend the complex ritual of a Japanese tea ceremony.

The Jewish Museum in the Zavel will ply visitors with specialities from Israel and eastern Europe, and those with a mind to it will be able to get tipsy on local brews at the Schaerbeek Beer Museum. Over in the Jubelpark, battlefield grub is on the menu of the Army Museum, while the Children's Museum in Elsene has banked on a high-colour, high-sugar diet of cake and sweets.

## Art and argot

Some places seem a little starved of inspiration, like the ULB's Zoology

and Anthropology Museum, which will serve plain brownies. But many others deserve special praise for their creativity: The UCL's Pharmaceutical Collection in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe will initiate visitors to the high art of molecular cuisine, while the Belgian National Bank museum will cook up treats with wheat, potatoes and sorrel – whose names in French are all slang for money. Everything will be generously sprinkled with salt, to remind us that the precious commodity was once used as currency – hence the word "salary". Feel free to tuck in even if you're not hungry, as most museums offer more than just food: At the Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, there will be storytelling and a music workshop for kids, as well as Congolese nibbles. The Letters and Manuscripts Museum on Koningsgalerij will let you snoop



around its exhibitions of Surrealist art and signed menus by famous chefs.

As for the beautiful Art Nouveau Maison Autrique, the newly renovated Museum of Freemasonry, the European Parliament's

Parlementarium and a handful of other places (many of them as delightfully quirky as they are little-known), they have chosen to bypass the food theme altogether, as if to remind us that, even in Brussels, there is more to life than eating.

Until 20 December | Across Brussels | ► [www.brusselsmuseumsnocturnes.be](http://www.brusselsmuseumsnocturnes.be)

## FESTIVAL

### Momentum Festival

Contemporary performance art is a difficult trade to ply. It's an obscure art which must necessarily be shared in order to exist. We might thus adapt the age-old philosopher's trope: "If a performance artist falls in a forest and there's no one around to see it..." The Momentum Festival was conceived by the association Such Long Ideas to give artists a frame to develop and a space to present their notoriously ephemeral craft. The main event: two full nights of international contemporary performance at Collectif Auquai. This is preceded by performances, lectures and workshops at several local art schools during the week. An ambitious seminar is facilitated by Israeli artist Tamar Raban at La Raffinerie. Participants will immerse themselves in the world of contemporary performance all day long for the entire week before presenting the results at the arts laboratory Q-O2 on the festival's closing day. **Georgio Valentino**



1-7 October | across Brussels | ► [www.momentum-festival.org](http://www.momentum-festival.org)

## MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

### Aalst

**Bar Festival:** As Nuit Blanche unfolds in the capital, the East Flemish town of Aalst puts on its own city-wide party. The Bar Festival features live music, DJs, stand-up comedy and more.

**OCT 6 across Aalst**

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

### Brussels

**I Fail Good:** Failure may be among the last taboos in our success-oriented culture. This extended programme brings it out into the open and attempts an honest exploration of the "shameful" subject through performance, exhibitions, film and music.

**OCT 5-NOV 24 at Beursschouwburg, A Orstraat 20-28**

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

## SPECIAL EVENT

### Mill Weekend

Since the Stone Age, people have used just about every method imaginable to process grains and make them palatable. We've come a long way from mills turned by slaves, criminals and donkeys: Physical energy was replaced by hydraulic power around 100 BC, and watermills started popping up all over the Flemish countryside. It wasn't until more than 1,000 years later that the windmill was invented, possibly in Flanders. Although most have fallen into ruin or been replaced by machinery, the mills are making a quiet, yet remarkable, comeback. Mill associations in East and West Flanders are rousing interest in the centuries-old historical mills and working to restore them.

This weekend only, most of the working wind- and watermills across Flanders will be turning and grinding for Mill Weekend. If you're lucky, and granted there's enough wind, the miller might even let you toss a sack of barley into the wooden drum. Some mills also offer guided tours, demonstrations, waffles and local beer. **Robyn Boyle**



The Rullegem windmill in Herzele, East Flanders

6-7 October, 10.00-18.00 | Across East & West Flanders

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

## MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

### Across Flanders and Brussels

**Open Bedrijvendag (Open Business Day):** Chance to visit more than 400 business and factories for a behind-the-scenes look

**OCT 7 10.00-17.00**

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

### Brussels

**Brussels Art Square:** Open house with nearly 40 art and antique dealers, specialising in 20th-century, primitive and Oriental pieces

**OCT 4-6 14.00-20.00 across the Zavel area**

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

## VISUAL ARTS

## Sculptural Fashion

Twentieth-century Parisian couturier Madame Grès considered herself something other than a fashion designer. She had a passion for sculpture, which informed everything she did with her fabrics. A pioneer of seamless garments, Grès didn't cut and sew; she draped, pleated and otherwise moulded her creations directly onto a standing model. It was a surprisingly versatile method. Her works range in style from Hellenic classicism to modern minimalism, but they all have the Madame Grès touch. Antwerp's Fashion Museum also invited Flemish artist Renato Nicolodi to design installations and showcase his own work alongside that of Madame Grès, framing a dialogue via design. **GV**



**Until 10 February**  
Fashion Museum, 28 Nationalestraat  
Antwerp | [www.momu.be](http://www.momu.be)

## MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

## Antwerp

**The Unseen Pieter Bruegel:** Prints and engravings produced by contemporaries of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, based on the master's designs

**Until OCT 14 at Mayer van den Bergh Museum,  
Lange Gasthuisstraat 19**

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

## Brussels

**Felix De Boeck:** FeliXart Museum is dedicated to the work of one of Belgium's first modern artists, Felix De Boeck. This temporary exhibition reveals the celebrated painter's work in another medium: drawing.

**Until OCT 14 at FeliXart Museum, Kuikenstraat 6**

[www.felixart.org](http://www.felixart.org)

## Ghent

**Narco Estado: Drug Violence in Mexico:** Work by the Brussels-based photographer Teun Voeten, who spent the last three years documenting drug violence and its social consequences in Mexico

**6-12 OCT 21 at York Gallery, Tennisbaanstraat 72**

[www.newyorkgalleries.co.uk](http://www.newyorkgalleries.co.uk)

## TALK

## Dixie Dansercoer: Ice Tour

After setting a world record early this year for the longest non-motorised polar expedition without outside help, Flemish explorers Sam Deltour and Dixie Dansercoer set to work compiling everything they'd seen, done and experienced on their intense 74-day journey. The duo ingeniously used kites to help propel themselves and their heavy sleds across the snow, in the end covering more than 5,000 kilometres. Now they're touring Flanders to present their intrepid story, bringing along their three different book versions. One is educational for students, another more of a play-by-play diary of the expedition in word and image, and the limited edition (500 copies) is a deluxe version with stunning photography. **RB**



**10 October to 8 January | Across Flanders | [www.ictour.org](http://www.ictour.org)**

## MORE TALKS THIS WEEK

## Antwerp

**Lezingen op zondag:** Annual series of free Sunday morning readings, hosted by the city's Museum of Fine Arts. This year's theme is the future of the museum, and this week's reading features Pauline Terreehorst, director of Plaza Futura in Eindhoven, the Netherlands (7 OCT, in Dutch)

**Until MAR 3 2013 11.00 at the Institute for Tropical Medicine, Nationalestraat 155**

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

## Ostend

**Culturele Openwerfweekends:** While Ostend's former post office is being transformed into the city's new cultural centre, the public is invited on Sunday mornings to have a look at the works and listen to readings on the subject, starting with Dirk Engelen of B-Architecten (7 OCT) on the renovation itself, followed by architecture critic Francis Strauven (14 OCT), who will delve deeper into the subject of modernism at the Flemish coast. Reservations required on 059.56.20.16 or [cultuur@oostende.be](mailto:cultuur@oostende.be)

**OCT 7 & 14 14.00 at CC De Grote Post, Hendrik Serruyslaan 18**

[www.oostende.be/cultuur](http://www.oostende.be/cultuur)

## DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

## 75 Years of Jazz in 1 Night

**7 October, 18.00-4.00  
Archiduc, Brussels**

Brussels best-loved jazz bar Archiduc is celebrating its 75th birthday. It all started in 1937, when the bar was used as a "rendezvous house". Archiduc was taken over in 1953 by pianist Stan Brenders and his wife, and they turned the place into a jazz club. Over the years, no less than Miles Davis, Nat King Cole and Jacques Brel walked into the bar for some music and drinks. The art deco interior, the regular gigs and the list of tasty cocktails are still extremely popular today.

In honour of the bar's 75th, Hot Club is hosting "75 Years of Jazz in 1 Night": from tunes dating back to the New Orleans of the early 20th century (including a tap dance) to jazz standards with an electro swing, performed by several DJs. To mark the occasion, dressing up is required. Ladies, think gowns and feathers. Men, let Fred Astaire inspire you. The event takes place on a Sunday (the jazziest day of the week), and tickets are €15.

[www.archiduc.net](http://www.archiduc.net)

## Bourla Beats

**13 October, from 23.00  
Bourlaschouwburg, Antwerp**

Theatre on a Saturday night may not sound like your idea of a wicked night out, but what would you say to a free party in one of Flanders' most stunning theatre halls? Bourla Beats (*pictured*) at Antwerp's Bourlaschouwburg heads into its sixth season having become a port city nightlife favourite. On select Saturdays (13 October, 8 December, 23 February, 27 April) after the play, DJs gather a big crowd for a night of good music and plenty of dancing. The beats start at 23.00, and, even though entrance is free, you'll need a ticket to get in. They're only available on the evening itself, so be quick! First come, first served.

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



## BITE

## Balls &amp; Glory ★★★★

"I love it when a place specialises in just one thing and does it really well," my friend raves between bites of spinach-stuffed meatballs. I couldn't agree with her more, as I become increasingly aware of my own appreciation for the whole "back to basics" movement, which is quickly gathering speed, as much in gastronomic Flanders as around the world.

Wim Ballieu, the adorable chef from the channel Vier programme *Goe gebakken* (Well Cooked), is not letting this trend pass him by. He opened his meatball restaurant in Ghent last May as a pop-up shop and now, thankfully, it's here to stay. There are even plans brewing for more Balls & Glory locations in Bruges, Antwerp and Brussels.

As a butcher's son, Ballieu was born with a love of good, quality ingredients and artisanal products. He grew up around his grandparents' pig farm in Veurne, West Flanders, which is where he gets the ground pork for his handcrafted meatballs, which are half ground pork and half ground beef. He uses seasonal veggies and refuses to put soft drinks on the menu.

The meatball concept is simple but out of the ordinary, so there's a cute drawing on the wall to provide direction. First, line up and order your giant meatball or veggie ball. There are two choices of meatballs, which change daily, and the veggie balls are available daily now, too, "due to popular demand".

Then pick either *stoemp*, a traditional Flemish potato puree mixed with vegetables, or salad. There's a free pitcher of water on the table, but beer and wine are also available.

It's just after 13.00, and Ballieu apologetically informs us that the day's veggie ball – on this day filled with cheese – is sold out (but we're OK with that). We order two spinach

meatballs, with salad.

We're then invited to take the last two stools at a large inox table in the middle of the room, next to the open kitchen. "We like to call this the kitchen," Ballieu smiles. "And the room at the back is the living room." In fact, I was just leaning over to tell my friend how I really feel more like guests in his home than customers. Shelves lined with cookbooks help add to an atmosphere that would otherwise lean towards the too-industrial.

Next to us, guests are enjoying their meatballs on top of a layer of creamy *stoemp*, surrounded by a moat of homemade sauces: one based on calf stock, pear juice and cranberry, the other on spicy green curry and coconut milk. Our meatballs arrive on a gorgeous bed of crispy little gem lettuce, cold sliced potatoes, cherry tomatoes, green beans, a sprinkling of raspberry vinegar and tangy tomato-basil dressing. The meatball, bigger than my fist, has a nice crispy breadcrumb shell. Inside, the meat is soft, and packed with flavour. Its middle is oozing with creamed spinach, a pure pleasure to eat. I vow to come back on a day when he's serving meatballs filled with something like cherry or truffle mushrooms. You can also get balls to go: a case in the front window displays a rainbow of choices, including smaller versions, for popping in the oven later.

Our two wholly satisfying meatball lunches cost a mere €24.

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

*Normally open only operating during the day, Balls & Glory will be open on the evening of 4 October until 22.00 as part of Ghent's annual late-night shopping event. Come and taste a new assortment of veggie balls and more*



*Goe gebakken's Wim Ballieu serves up a mighty meatball in Ghent*

► Sint-Jacobsnieuwstraat 103, Ghent; Reservation recommended on 0486.67.87.76 or [info@ballsnglory.be](mailto:info@ballsnglory.be)

🕒 Mon-Fri 10.00-15.00

€ Lunch: €12

ⓘ Giant, handmade meat- and veggie balls with super tasty fillings and selections that change daily

## TALKING SPORTS

## Gilbert, Flipkens and Colsaerts hit highs

It's been a vintage fortnight for local sport, with three stars making headlines. Philippe Gilbert won the world road race in the Netherlands, Kirsten Flipkens won the Bell Challenge, the first WTA title of her career, and Nicolas Colsaerts was a winner in his first Ryder Cup. And all three showed they can only get better.

First, Colsaerts. Europe's comeback to secure the 39th Ryder Cup is one of the most extraordinary in the history of the competition. Brussels-born Colsaerts, Europe's only rookie and the least-known player at Medinah in Chicago, showed he was a natural for the contest. On his first day, he rolled in eight birdies and an eagle as he carried along struggling partner Lee Westwood in the fourballs to defeat Tiger Woods and Steve Stricker.

The second day was not as felicitous – for any of the European team. In the foursomes, Colsaerts missed three makeable shots as he and Sergio Garcia fell. Later, with Paul Lawrie, he lost in the fourballs, and in his singles game he lost against Dustin Johnson on the final day. But as the last name on the list, he was not expected to win every shot. More importantly, he was a winner, in a dramatic contest.

For cyclist Philippe Gilbert,

there was definite glory as he produced a stunning burst of speed to win the world road race in the Netherlands. The 30-year-old, who has twice won the Amstel Gold Race in the same hilly Dutch province of Limburg, showed his experience by waiting patiently before powering away from a large group, punching the air as he crossed the line.

It's worth mentioning that 2011 winner Mark Cavendish and British teammates Bradley Wiggins and Chris Froome, who were first and second in this year's Tour de France, all failed to finish the 269km race. It was a return to Gilbert's scintillating 2011 form, when he won five one-day Classics and briefly led the Tour de France – even if just last weekend he crashed out of the Giro de Lombardia.

As for Kirsten Flipkens, her triumph at Québec's Bell Challenge WTA is all the sweeter given the way she has been overshadowed these past few years by fellow Flemish tennis stars Kim Clijsters and Yanina Wickmayer. The 26-year-old Flipkens, who beat the Czech Lucie Hradecká in two sets 6-1, 7-5, had previously only four semi-finals as her best WTA showings. However, Flipkens is still a relative outsider: Her victory brought her up from 102nd to 69th in the WTA rankings.

Leo Cendrowicz



From top: Nicolas Colsaerts, Philippe Gilbert and Kirsten Flipkens win big

## The last word...

## Better late than never

"Hey, everyone comes to work late at least once a week."

Telenet football commentator Carl Huybrechts missed the start of a match between RC Genk and KV Mechelen because of a traffic accident

## Crocodile tears?

"It's true that I grin when I announce a strike, but that's because I'm forcing myself not to cry."

Rail union chief Jos Digneffe on the 15th train strike in 22 months

## Skin deep

"My ride, my fight, my life." Flemish cyclist Tom Boonen's new tattoo – his first and, he says, not his last

## Faint praise

"OK, for my taste she could have used fewer adjectives, but the story rolls forward pleasantly enough."

Flemish author and lecturer of English literature Kristien Hemmerechts reviews the new JK Rowling

## NEXT WEEK IN FLANDERS TODAY

## Cover story

The Brussels Fashion scene has gone MAD – that's the name of the capital's new fashion centre, which we visit just ahead of the fashion school's annual Modo Parcours. With Antwerp the name everyone bandies about, is Brussels struggling to keep up?

## News

Next week is Open Days during the European Week of Regions and Cities, and Flanders is presenting its project of Rural-Urban Partnerships. We talk to the agency in charge of the project about what it means for the region

## Arts

If you're not Flemish, you might not recognise the name Peter van den Begin, but you no doubt know his face. From TV series like Team Spirit and *Oud België* to films like *Frits & Freddy* and *Allez, Eddy!*, he's one of Flanders' best-known personalities. We talk to him about his work and his current uproarious drag persona on TV's *Debby & Nancy*