

We have a budget

The federal government agrees on the budget for 2013, with a wage freeze taking centre stage

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Fear not, humans

Flemish researchers are developing robots to interact with people at home, at work or in the hospital

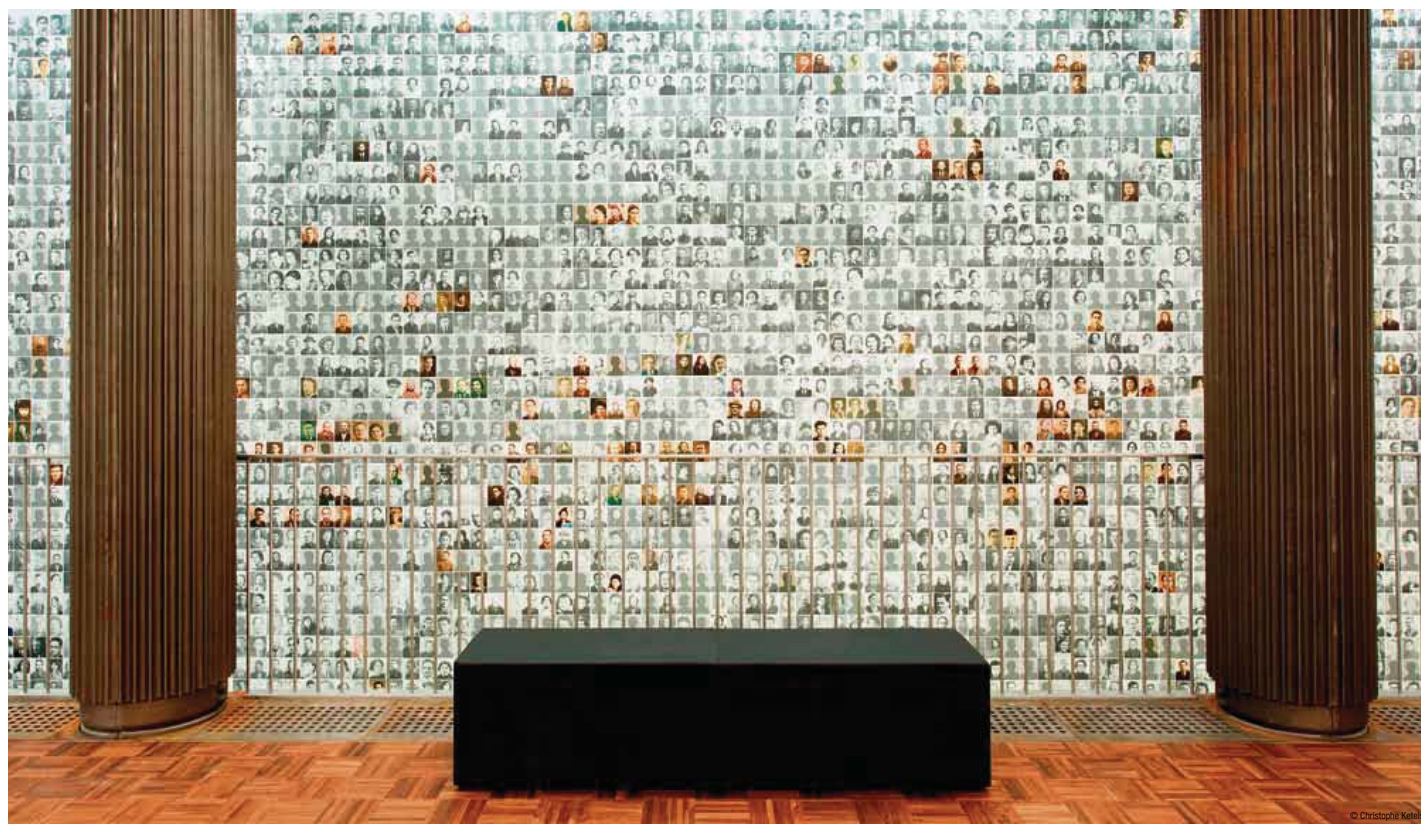
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Seeing is believing

An English Tudor style cottage in Beerzel houses a Michelin-starred restaurant and a fourth-generation bakery

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Intense absence

Mechelen's new museum dedicated to the Holocaust and human rights opens this weekend

Alan Hope

"*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*," reads the epitaph to the great architect Sir Christopher Wren in St Paul's Cathedral in London. It means: If you seek his monument, look around you. No better motto could be imagined for the new Dossin Museum in Mechelen, which opens this weekend – a monument not to one exceptional man but to more than 25,000 ordinary people. They were deported to the Nazi death camps from the whole of occupied Belgium and northern France from this very site – in most cases, never to return

The more than 25,000 people who passed through the Dossin barracks make up this museum, this site, this part of the city," explains Bob Van Reeth, the Flemish architect who designed the new Dossin Museum. "An emotional reference informed the entire design and building process. The

Dossin building, although it was rebuilt so people would forget, will never be able to escape its role as an emotional reference. It is about 'intense absence'."

Van Reeth's Antwerp firm awg architects won an international competition for the project launched in 2007. Van Reeth says that it differed from the usual architectural project. "A city is made up of locations that have special significance, borne by a building that is or was important to us as a community. Think, for example, of town halls, cathedrals, train stations, football stadia and so on. The Dossin Barracks' vocation was to be such a significant building: an urban icon, which, from a historical and cultural aspect, determines the city's appearance, impacting on the city's identity, because of its significance."

He decided, as a result of the building's purpose, not to open the ground floor as public space, as is usually the practice. "In the first sketch, I drew the building with a wall around it, closing it off from the square outside," he explains. The building is clad

in pale stone, so that with its blank wall facing the square, it resembles nothing so much as a giant headstone.

Human rights focus

The Dossin museum, however, is intended to be more than a memorial. The full name is Dossin Barracks: Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre for the Holocaust and Human Rights, a mouthful that reflects the years of discussion and disagreement over what exactly should be commemorated, and how.

The museum was first proposed by the Jewish community, which had already established the small-scale Jewish Museum of Deportation and Resistance on the site. A firm commitment for a new museum came in 2001 from then Flemish minister-president Patrick Dewael.

From then until the final realisation of the museum, under current minister-president Kris Peeters at a cost to the Flemish

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Steven Vanackere

Belgium's finance minister ended last week with a difficult EU budget negotiation at the European Summit in Brussels, days after presenting the federal budget for 2013. Those talks had attained almost mythical proportions, with reports that Steven Vanackere had stayed up for 48 hours on the trot. The "most credible finance minister in the European Union" title from the *Financial Times* must have come as a pleasant surprise at the end of a rather unpleasant week.

Vanackere (CD&V) was born in 1964 in Wevelgem, West Flanders, the son of Leo Vanackere, a former MP, senator and provincial governor. His mother was the daughter of Remi Wallays, former mayor of Wevelgem and also a senator. He studied law at the University of Leuven before going on to graduate in economics and politics. His first job was with KBC, but within a year he was taking his first steps in the political world, in the research department of the CD&V (then CVP) and as adviser to Herman Van Rompuy. From then on, his career was based in Brussels, as deputy and then cabinet head for Brussels minister Jos Chabert, as director of the Port of Brussels and as assistant

director-general of the public transport authority MIVB. He entered the Flemish Parliament for Brussels in 2004, then moved up to minister of health, welfare and families. Just 18 months later, the call came from his old boss to join the federal government, first as minister for government enterprises in Van Rompuy's interim government, then under Yves Leterme as foreign minister. When Elio Di Rupo finally emerged as prime minister last year, Vanackere seemed to waver: It was rumoured he had his eye on his father's old job as governor of West Flanders. In the end, he took up the job he now holds. The *Financial Times*' rankings measure EU finance ministers on a range of criteria, and the outright winner was Germany's Wolfgang Schäuble. Vanackere came ninth. However, the "most credible" label is a worthy consolation prize, considering he's been in the job less than a year. "Having inherited a country on the verge of crisis following the collapse of Franco-Belgian lender Dexia, with 10-year sovereign bonds hovering near Spanish and Italian levels, he has calmed things considerably," the jury said. "Belgium is now a virtual haven."

News in brief

The justice committee of the federal parliament has approved a proposal to **increase sentences for acts of homophobic violence**. Five-year sentences now become 10; for sentences of more than five years, the term will be increased by five years. Fines will also be doubled up to a maximum of €3,000.

The Brussels parliament is expected to approve a proposal to allow **burials in the region without a coffin**, to allow Muslims to carry out ritual burials of bodies wrapped in a shroud. At present, many Muslims repatriate the remains of their loved ones to avoid the obligatory coffin. Burials without a casket are already permitted in Flanders.

Catherine De Bolle, the head of the federal police, plans to introduce a **ban on police officers consuming alcohol** while on duty. De Bolle has already cancelled the annual New Year's reception at police headquarters, although a spokesperson said that decision was taken principally as a cost-cutting measure.

Marco Polo, the **world's largest container ship**, measuring 396 metres long and with a capacity of more than 16,000 containers, is expected to arrive in Zeebrugge on 17 December, according to the French shipping company CMA CGM. The choice of Zeebrugge underlined the port's importance as a logistical hub in Europe, the port's managing director Joachim Coens said.

Ghent city council has **banned the use of sky lanterns**, an increasingly popular New Year tradition imported from Thailand.

The paper lanterns, which contain a burning candle, are floated into the air. The council cited safety reasons for the decision.

All trams and buses of De Lijn in Flanders will be fitted next year with the technology that allows a **single chip-card to be used on all four public transport networks** in the country, mobility minister Hilde Crevits announced. From 2014, passengers will be able to use De Lijn, the MIVB in Brussels, TEC in Wallonia and the NMBS nationwide using a single Mobib card. The installation of readers and screens on De Lijn vehicles will require an investment of €60 million.

As *Flanders Today* went to press, the League for Human Rights was due to hold a protest in Brussels against the **increasing use of so-called GAS fines**, introduced to allow municipal authorities to levy fines for anti-social behaviour such as vandalism, littering and noise nuisance. The protest comes after widespread claims that the system was being abused. Meanwhile, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities revealed that each GAS fine costs local authorities twice as much to administer as it brings in. An average fine is €62.50.

Public transport users' organisation TreinTramBus (TTB) has criticised the **new rail timetable** that will take effect on 9 December. The new schedule sees the scrapping of 170 early and late trains, often where no alternative exists, and the removal of the intercity train from Brussels to Amsterdam. The high-speed replacement, TTB said, is more expensive, requires a reservation and runs less frequently. The new service also, however, adds direct links between Antwerp and

Brussels Airport and introduces two new stops in Limburg.

All of Flanders' primary and secondary schools will to be provided with tips on how to **deal with outstanding bills of parents**, following a report that one in six schools have used debt collectors to recover unpaid sums. The tips were compiled by the members of the Network Against Poverty and include ideas for keeping costs down and allowing cash payments and payment in instalments.

Mechelen police last week carried out raids on 13 addresses in Mechelen, Keerbergen, Borgerhout and Leuven, in what they described as their **biggest drugs case ever**. Nine arrests were made in what is alleged to be an organised gang dealing in cocaine. In the Brussels commune of Molenbeek, meanwhile, police arrested eight members of a drugs gang dealing around Zwarte Vijvers metro station. They seized one kilo of heroin and €15,000 in cash.

Trains across the country have suffered a total of 52,000 minutes' delay as a direct result of the **theft of copper cables**, according to the rail infrastructure agency Infrabel. The agency was reacting to an undercover report by the TV programme *Volt*, which showed that the sale of stolen metal is still relatively easy for thieves, despite measures introduced to register the identity of all sellers. Meanwhile, in the Brussels commune of Anderlecht, a bronze bust of the politician Emile Vandervelde, a leading figure in the socialist movement, has been stolen from its plinth on the square that bears his name. Earlier this month a number of bronze crosses were stolen from the cemetery in Laken.

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

It's an injustice, it is

Former Antwerp mayor Patrick Janssens, according to *Knack* magazine, is the new political Calimero. K3's composer Miguel Wiels is accused by Lieven Van Gils on *Reyers* Laet of playing Calimero when he complains that the pop group was not nominated for music awards. Bart De Wever is frequently referred to in the media and online as Calimero. But who is this Calimero whose name is so current in Flanders? Well,

Calimero is a small black chick, the youngest of a family of yellow chicks, who goes around with a broken egg shell on his head feeling mournful, downhearted and sorry for himself. He was invented in 1963 to advertise a brand of Italian washing powder. In the animated ads, we discover that Calimero is not black, just filthy, which the detergent quickly puts right. Later, the popularity of Calimero led to him

starring in his own cartoons, where he would remain resolutely black both in feathers and in mood. The series showed briefly in an English translation, featuring the catchphrase "It's an injustice, it is". It was also shown in Dutch on Flemish TV, where his favourite lament was "They are big and I am small; it's not fair, oh no". And so we arrive at the Calimero complex: those who complain that the world is united against them. For Calimero himself, that was actually true: His mother rejected him for his unusual colour, and he once spent Christmas Eve delivering parcels for a baker just to make enough money to buy a piece of firewood for his ghastly parents. When the name is applied to public figures, however, the last thing we're meant to feel is sorry for them.



Intense absence

Museum brings a historic context to group and mass violence today

► continued from page 1

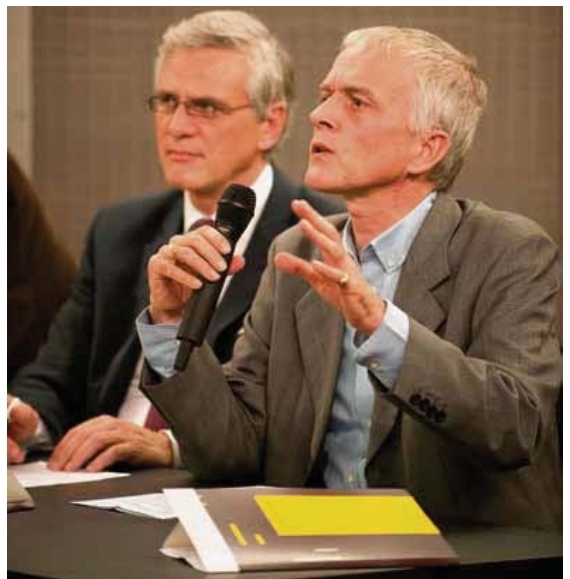
region of € 25 million, there has been much discussion about whether the museum should commemorate only the Holocaust or also include other examples of systematic genocide, in other places, at other times.

The final result, like the name, is all-encompassing. In an introductory film, an everyday problem like schoolyard bullying is assimilated to discrimination by the group and, by extension, by society. It's a slippery-slope argument that won't convince everyone, but what's harder to overlook are the associations of the Shoah (the Hebrew term for the extermination of the Jews preferred by curator Herman Van

atrocities that began in Dossin barracks. And it contrasts, says professor Van Goethem, with the prevailing climate in the decades after the war, when the former transit camp was successively used as an army barracks, a school, given the new-old name Hof van Habsburg and even converted into apartments – an act of collective amnesia in the form of bricks and mortar.

"The mission of Dossin," says Van Goethem, "is to bring the historic context up to date by making an analysis of group and mass violence today. Two forms of violence are given centre stage: discrimination and exclusion and

that this will go some way towards generating awareness so that social breakdown is avoided in the future. Our hope is that this will give meaning to the past and offer people around the world opportunities that victims in the past never had."



The new Dossin Museum (top) sits next to the Dossin Barracks, now home to a memorial; museum curator Herman Van Goethem (above, right) and Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters; artist Philippe Aguirre's "Wall" (left) was inspired by an old photograph

"The mission is to bring the historic context up to date by making an analysis of group and mass violence today"

Goethem) with such acts of mass discrimination as racial segregation in the US, apartheid in South Africa, the killing fields of Cambodia and the Interahamwe in Rwanda.

Facing up to the past

Part of the purpose, Professor Van Goethem explains, is to avoid having the Shoah isolated in history as an exceptional case. That's a point of view not generally supported among families of the victims and survivors, but it's one that forces visitors to examine our own attitudes to discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance.

In that way, the museum encourages Flanders to face up to its own past and its role in bringing about the

genocidal massacres in which men, women and children are systematically murdered. These two forms of violence are linked in that genocides are preceded by a spiral of increasing violence. Group violence begins when a group excludes and discriminates against a certain individual."

It's not the museum's intention to diminish the impact of the Holocaust, says Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters. "Quite the contrary: This museum shows the horrors of the Second World War and a great many other dark episodes in the history of the world, as a means of contributing to social debate and ensuring that we continue to gain new insights," he says. "We hope



Inside Dossin Museum

A minimalist approach links three floors of installations and information in three languages

What the visitor to the Dossin Museum first sees is anything but monumental. Antwerp Artist Philippe Aguirre designed the memorial in the former museum, which faces the entrance hall of the new museum. Titled "Wall", it's a black sculpture of a man facing the stark white wall.

Aguirre was inspired, he says, "by an iconic photo from the archives of the Breendonk transit camp. In the photo, you see one of the interior areas of the camp where men are standing with their faces turned to a wall, all at equal

unreal and fearsome."

The artist created a sculpture based on one of the men. "I placed him alone against the wall. The work evokes the desolate ambiance and the fear that was such an inherent part of the persecution and deportation."

Each of the three exhibition floors of the museum is a massive single space, the various exhibits – photos, cabinets, video installations – on a human scale, which serves to accentuate the huge empty space in which they're arranged.

On one wall hang monumental images: of young people at a festival, symbolising the mass, in itself



Chinese protester standing before the Tiananmen tanks, the incarnation of humans' indomitable capacity to stand up to tyranny.

On the far facing wall appears from a distance to be a tiled mosaic, mainly in black and white but with here and there the odd touch of yellow, ochre, sepia. On closer examination, you see that each tile is the photograph of one

of the victims of the deportations, or an anonymous icon to represent those of whom no photograph remains.

The bare figures – 25,482 Jews and 352 Roma were deported from Dossin in 28 transports, with only 5% surviving – give less of an impression of the enormity of the operation than these walls. Each tile is a human being, with his or her own way of dressing,

shaving, hairstyle or reaction to the camera. Together, they extend far off into the distance on both sides and high up to the towering ceiling.

There is one such wall on each of the three floors, and the ground-floor wall descends into the basement. The number of those deported is equivalent to more than half of all the adults in Mechelen today.

No arithmetical comparison can translate the sheer weight of standing and staring at – and being stared at by – nearly 26,000 victims of industrial, state-ordered extermination. If as Bob Van Reeth says, the museum as a whole is governed by a feeling of intense absence, this photographic installation is its culmination: an irreversible absence, intensified by this overwhelming and now indelible presence. **AH**

The Dossin Museum is open every day but Wednesday from 1 December. Entry is €10 for adults, €8 for seniors and €2 for youth

► www.kazernedossin.com

A mass is in itself capable of articulating great joy or great menace

distance from one another. The men are citizens; most of them are wearing suits. You don't know what is going to happen. Is it an execution? Have they just been picked up? The ambiance is

capable of articulating great joy and community or great menace and violence; of the railway tracks leading into Auschwitz, a spare, iconic image of inhumanity; of the solitary

Federal government passes budget

Two-year pay freeze and energy prices are foundation of savings for 2013

Alan Hope

The federal government last week reached an agreement on its budget for 2013, based on a pay freeze for 2013 and 2014. Prime minister Elio Di Rupo promised the budget would help relaunch the economy and said his government had done everything "necessary and achievable" to spare the public. Wages for two years, other than the minimum wage, will not be able to rise by more than the index, in an effort to reduce the margin, currently estimated at 5.2%, by which Belgian salaries exceed those in neighbouring countries. To preserve the purchasing power of lower incomes, meanwhile, an additional €30 million was agreed to give a tax credit to those on minimum wage, on top of €106 million agreed earlier in the year.

Also designed to tackle the cost of doing business and creating jobs, is a new stricter control on energy prices so that they, too, end up closer to the costs in neighbouring countries. And employers will see a cut in their contribution to employees' social security payments. At the same time pensions, benefits and child allowance remain untouched. "We have shown the will to find solutions in difficult circumstances," Di Rupo said. "We are restoring the confidence of our citizens and entrepreneurs in the future. And we are reinforcing the confidence of the outside world in our country." The budget package represents savings of €3.9 billion, on top of savings of €14.5 billion made earlier,



Prime minister Elio Di Rupo (right) and finance minister Steven Vanackere present their budget package in parliament

bringing the total to over €18 billion. According to various estimates, the pay freeze could cost anywhere between €250 and €500 a year for a household with both partners working and bringing in about €3,000 net a month. The budget also includes a number of tax measures:

- an end to the tax on recycling
- an increase of the tax on the profits of shares and bonds, excluding the so-called Leterme bond, which remains at 15%. Savings accounts are not affected
- an increase in duty on tobacco and alcohol will add 20c to a pack of

cigarettes and 4c to a bottle of wine

- a premium tax of 2% on life assurance policies, while mortgage insurance and pension funds remain untouched

- tax fraud prosecutions will no longer be limited in time, and sentences for serious cases will be increased from two to a maximum of five years

- an end to tax regularisation at the end of next year, which is expected to bring a one-off windfall of €513 million to treasury

In a joint statement, a group of employers' organisations, including Unizo, Voka, the Farmers' Union and the Federation of Belgian Enterprises

said the budget measures were "insufficient" to relaunch the economy. While they were glad that the package keeps the economy on track to reduce the deficit next year to 2.15% of GDP, they said that the measures do not go far enough to restore the country's competitive position.

The budget is "beyond a scandal", according to the liberal union ACLVB, for the way it places a burden on workers and those on social security. Socialist union ABVV described the budget as more of a consolidation than a relaunch, "which goes too far in the direction of employers' organisations".

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Not as bad as feared, not as good as hoped

Forty days and several nights. That is how long it took the federal government to draw up the budget for 2013. At the press conference where it was presented, after another long night of discussion, ministers yawned. Federal finance minister Steven Vanackere had been up and negotiating for no less than 47 hours.

While the ministers of the Di Rupo government met, organisations representing businesses lashed out. They believe this government is anti-business, "Marxist" even, as one of their representatives stated. This led vice-prime minister Johan Vande Lanotte (SPA) to say that the entrepreneurs have been taken "out of their comfort zone" by the government's anti-fraud measures. But not just the business world was worried about the out the unions, too, feared what they called a "social break-down".

None of the worst fears materialised. The government decided to tackle the wage handicap, making labour more expensive in Belgium than in neighbouring countries, by freezing wages for two years. However, wages will still be adjusted to the cost of living, through automatic indexing.

Other measures are (slightly) higher taxes on alcohol and tobacco – traditional whenever there are budgetary needs – and extra taxes on income through savings products. According to critics, this means the "middle classes" have to pay up. Upon closer inspection, however, the "middle classes" are quite well off. Moreover, Belgium does better at controlling its budget than many other EU member states.

With six parties represented in the federal government and no majority in Flanders, it comes as no surprise that this budget is a collection of rather small measures. The budget's greatest feat is that it exists, that a compromise could be found. The reforms needed in the labour market and fiscal policy, for example, are completely absent. Moreover, prime minister Di Rupo's command of Dutch makes it impossible for him to defend his government's achievements in Flanders. This makes it easy for the opposition, which in Flanders these days is largely composed of the nationalist N-VA, to trash whatever the government comes up with. Meanwhile, the budget for 2014 promises to be an even tougher exercise. In 2013, it may well take all year to reach a compromise. The federal ministers had better catch up on some sleep, while they can.

Mother suspected in children's deaths

A woman whose three children died in a house fire in the Brussels' commune of Anderlecht last week has been designated as a suspect in the case. Police are investigating the fire in Melkerijstraat as a case of arson.

The three children, aged two, three and four, died of smoke inhalation. Investigators said they were unable to determine the whereabouts of the 39-year-old mother before the fire. The children's father was working, and his involvement has been excluded.

The woman's lawyer explained that she had left home at 7.00 to go to work, locking the children in their room, and returning at 15.00 shortly after the fire was reported. The woman was taken into custody and due to appear before a court as *Flanders Today* went to press. According to her lawyer, she is suspected of neglect in leaving the children home alone and could be charged with involuntary manslaughter.

Van Rompuy rules out EU help for Limburg

European Council president Herman Van Rompuy has described as "impossible" a request by Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters for EU help for Limburg to cope with the effects of the announced closure of Ford Genk. The closure of the factory will, it is estimated, lead to up to 10,000 job losses among workers and outside suppliers.

Van Rompuy was speaking as European leaders met in Brussels to negotiate the EU budget. Peeters has asked for €100 million in regional development aid for Limburg. The province, however, does not qualify for help from the

cohesion funds for the poorest regions, even after the closure takes place.

Meanwhile in the European Parliament, Flemish socialist MEP Kathleen Van Brempt (pictured) accused the EU commission of "sticking its head in the sand" over the problems of the Ford Genk workforce. The parliament was questioning employment commissioner Laszlo Andor on the European car industry. "The Commission is washing its hands of the problem," Van Brempt said. "This is a scandalous ostrich policy, since the Commission has the power to do here what it does

in cases of mergers and take-overs: to play its role as referee. Instead it chooses to stick its head in the sand."



THE WEEK IN FIGURES

37%

of residential land in Flanders is being used, leaving space for 100,000 new houses, according to real estate federation BIV, calling for more land to be made available to bring down the price of housing

€556 million

budgeted for Brussels public transport authority MIVB in 2013, including the cost of 40 new metro trains, improved accessibility in stations and the renovation of the pre-metro at North Station

9,014

students and lecturers in higher education institutions in Flanders gave blood during the latest campaign by the Flemish Red Cross, more than the 8,900 target

€19 million

loss for Flanders' public transport authority De Lijn in 2011, partly caused by the lack of proper budget controls, according to transport minister Hilde Crevits

524kg

of household waste produced by each man, woman and child in Flanders in 2011, three kilos more than the previous year and the first increase for five years

Our house

Eco-friendly, community-driven family housing wins inaugural Blue House Prize

Alan Hope

A block of 14 energy-saving houses in the canal zone of the Brussels commune of Molenbeek has won the first-ever Blue House Prize for sustainable housing. The project by architect Damien Carnoy is aptly named L'Espoir (Hope) and provides 14 families – mainly refugees and immigrants – with homes built of ecologically sustainable materials using a minimum of energy.

The Blue House Prize is an initiative of the Foundation for Future Generations, a non-profit organisation founded in 1998 and committed to innovation in the field of sustainable development through grants and citizen participation. The foundation also operates as a think tank, bringing together public, business and non-profit sectors.

The Blue House Prize was conceived to stimulate the construction of sustainable housing or the renovation of existing housing according to the principles of sustainability. According to foundation director Benoit Deremme, those can be summed up with the four Ps: people, planet, prosperity and participation. That includes concern for the health and welfare of residents, energy and water economy, use of space, biodiversity, contribution to the local economy and employment situation and involvement of residents and locals at every step. L'Espoir is a two-storey block of houses built using wood and other ecological materials on a plot of land measuring only 1,200 square metres in the heart of Molenbeek, one of Brussels' most disadvantaged municipalities.



The L'Espoir house in Molenbeek has won the first-ever Blue House Prize for innovation in sustainable development

The project was a collective operation from the start: Families housed in less salubrious conditions approached the local association Bonnevie with the idea, and the land was sold by Molenbeek council at a democratic price. Carnoy, an architect who often works with wood and other natural materials, signed on for the design, which had to take account of the limited budget of the residents and the need for a building that was 100% passive: In other words, it must meet rigorous standards for energy efficiency.

According to the prize jury, co-chaired by scenographer François Schuiten and former Flemish government architect Bob Van Reeth (who also designed the new Holocaust museum featured on this week's front page), the project "demonstrates magnificently that sustainable housing can be accessible to people with social and financial difficulties. By involving the residents at every phase of the operation, this exemplary project has allowed 14 families to realise the

dream of owning their own homes." The winning project was one of 27 submitted for the prize, a field whittled down by the professional jury to four nominees. The others were:

The Comptoir Sucrier in Antwerp North, a former grain and sugar store converted by brothers Nico and Carl Verdickt into "a little village in the city" – a collective including two office spaces and 11 homes, from luxury lofts to student bedsits in a disadvantaged part of

town. The living and working space also includes common social areas grouped around a shared courtyard in what used to be the industrial and loading area of the complex.

The Black House in Leffinge near Ostend, a minimalist construction built adjacent to the owner's parents' house, after he lost his original home in a fire. Local architect Rien Rossey built a striking passive house using local wood and salvaged materials and even managed, using angled solar panels, to give the 120 square-metre house a south-facing roof. The jury described the Black House as "simple and timeless" as well as "easily reproducible".

The LAR house in La Roche-en-Ardenne in Wallonia consisted only of the shell of a 100-year-old house built in local slate of which only the walls remained. The ruin was converted by architect David Henquinet into a holiday and rental property for owner Yolande Bastogne. The jury said it was impressed most of all by the house's simplicity, a function of the property's limited space – only 90 square metres – and the owner's restricted budget.

The winner takes away €5,000 and all four nominees receive an award designed by the Brussels-born Catalan artist Manu vb Tintoré. The Blue House Prize is supported by the government of Flanders, the other two regional governments and the federal government.

► www.bluehouseprize.be

Full steam ahead

Restoration and tales of migration fall into place at Antwerp's Red Star Line Museum

Dan Smith

Work on the structure of Antwerp's Red Star Line Museum is coming to an end after two years. When it opens next September, visitors will be instantly transported back to the Red Star Line's heyday, when the shipping company was the main carrier of emigrants from Antwerp to the New World.

As well as telling the story of the Red Star Line's passengers, the museum has a wider brief to show the importance of migration to human history. A permanent exhibition will demonstrate the diversity of human mobility and the impact of migration on people and communities. Modern-day immigrants will also have the chance to tell their stories, creating a virtual record of their travels.

The museum will be housed in the three buildings that were used by the Red Star Line to process third-class passengers before they boarded. "All



An artist's impression of how the Red Star Line Museum will look when it opens in September, with the observation tower at the centre

three are protected monuments and have required significant restoration," explains project coordinator Luc Verheyen. The building where luggage was stored will form the entry to the new complex.

Architects Beyer Blinder Bell have tried to keep each of the buildings as intact as possible. Modern changes to the original buildings have been

reversed, and significant efforts have been made to match materials.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the entrance building. Here, a steel support structure has been incorporated into the fabric of the building. While it reverses the decay of the past century, the structure is not immediately apparent, leaving the space in its original raw and open

state.

The other two buildings in the complex, where emigrants underwent medical and administrative controls, will be used to house the permanent exhibition. "The restoration approach has ensured that many of the original features are preserved, while non-authentic parts have been replaced by contemporary architectural solutions," says Verheyen, pointing out the old boiler room. The chimney of this structure was demolished just after Red Star Line ceased operations in 1934. It has been replaced by a remarkable funnel-shaped observation tower, which offers a stunning view of the Scheldt.

With the end of the construction phase, attention is turning to preparation of the museum's main exhibition – *People on the Move*. With more than 3,000 artefacts already in the collection, there is a lot of material to choose from. An

item that will have pride of place is a rare transposing piano used by Irving Berlin, one of the Red Star Line's more famous passengers.

While the museum welcomes and encourages these gifts, it is also counting on cash donations and has just launched a donation campaign. The funds raised will be used to mount temporary exhibitions, produce audio-visual materials and maintain the information centre.

As we stand at the top of the observation tower, it's easy to see the work that has been achieved, but also the amount still to be done. Verheyen is confident that everything will be ready for opening day on 27 September. "It will not be possible to miss the Red Star Line Museum opening," he says. "We expect that you will need to make reservations for the first few months at least."

► www.redstarline.be

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Pre-sales price freeze will stay, says government

A court ruling has called into question the ban on pricing off merchandise before the sales period

Alan Hope

The federal government has no intention of scrapping the legal price-freeze period preceding the winter and summer sales, said federal economy minister Johan Vande Lanotte last week, despite a ruling from the Cassation Court that appears to declare the freeze illegal. The court's ruling concerns a period of six weeks before the official opening of the sales on 1 January and 1 July, during which retailers are forbidden to offer price reductions. The case was brought by the Flemish clothing chain ZEB, which for

some years now has ignored the ban. Last week, ZEB CEO Luc Van Mol declared victory. "This was a fight between David and Goliath, and David won," he said. Unizo, which represents the self-employed, and sector organisation Mode Unie, on the other hand, said that the ruling was "an incomprehensible slap in the face for the independent fashion retailer". The freeze period, the two organisations said, is "essential for the protection of independent fashion businesses against the brutal and unfair competition from chain



stores". Confusion reigns over the actual grounds of the court's ruling. The Cassation Court overturned a judgement of the Court of Appeal that had come down on the side of

Unizo and Mode Unie. Unizo argues that the court was addressing the original law of 1991 introducing the freeze, while that law was amended in 2010. On that basis, Vande Lanotte

stressed last week that the 2010 law now in force would continue to be enforced. Any business offering discounts during the official sales period would have to base that reduction on the lowest price of the preceding month, or be fined. Price offers would be "rigorously checked," Vande Lanotte said. Consumer organisation Test-Aankoop, meanwhile, warned that the government could not simply ignore the court's ruling. The price-freeze period, Test-Aankoop said, deprived consumers of full information on price reductions.

Carestel fined for exploiting staff

The owners and operators of Carestel motorway services were last week fined €627,000 by a court in Ghent for exploiting the toilet staff at their restaurants. The boss of the German operator was also sentenced to four years in absentia. The fines were imposed on the German operators of the outlet's toilets, Kronos Sanitätservice (€528,000), and the Belgian owners, Carestel Motorway Services (€99,000). The court heard how staff in the toilets were forced to work seven days a

week for up to 15 hours a day, for only a few euros an hour. Kronos was also charged with human trafficking, as many of the staff were brought into Belgium from eastern Europe. The verdict was welcomed as "an example in the struggle against organised social fraud" by the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism, which had joined the case as a civil party on behalf of the victims. The two companies have lodged an appeal against the verdict.

Flemish restaurants call for emergency plan

The restaurant and catering industry in Flanders said it was "delighted" with a decision by federal finance minister Steven Vanackere to delay the introduction of "smart" cash registers by six months, to 1 January 2014. "A plan for the survival of the industry should now be the priority," the sector federation Horeca Vlaanderen said in a statement. The smart till, intended as a measure against undeclared employment in the industry, keeps a record of every

transaction, as well as workers' identity and hours. The industry complained that the new equipment will be expensive and put an end to the flexibility offered by more casual labour. Last week, at the launch of the industry's annual trade fair in Ghent, Horeca Vlaanderen called for the government to propose an emergency plan for the sector, with particular attention to salary and social charges. A week previously, top chefs, including three-star Hof van Cleve chef Peter

Goossens, warned that Belgium's reputation for top gastronomy could be under threat unless action is taken on reducing the charges and administration employers are forced to undergo. "The industry has been in crisis for four years now," said Horeca Vlaanderen managing director Danny Van Assche. Unless the smart till is accompanied by measures to reduce employment costs, he said, "we fear for a death blow for the industry".

Activists demand toll-free tunnel

A group of activists last week held a protest at the approaches to the Liefkenshoek tunnel under the Scheldt river, calling for the tunnel to be made toll-free to ease the traffic congestion on the Antwerp ring. The Liefkenshoek tunnel was constructed in 1987 by a private consortium which was given a 22-year concession to operate it as

a toll tunnel, after which it would revert to the state. In 1995, the government of Flanders bought up all shares held by the loss-making consortium via its investment agency Gimv. Now that the foreign loans taken out to finance the tunnel have been paid off, the activist group Liefkenshoektoevrij says, tolls

should be suspended. The toll to use the tunnel is €6 for cars and €19 for trucks. The tunnel is avoided by much traffic around Antwerp because of the cost, which puts pressure on the rest of Antwerp's road infrastructure. "The economic damage caused by traffic jams is far greater than the money raised by the tolls," the group said.



Q&A

Luc Ardies is director-general of buurtsuper.be, which represents small, independent supermarkets

The government wants to fine shopkeepers more for faulty price tickets – when the price listed for the product doesn't match what you are charged at the cash register. What's the problem?

Every morning before the doors open, supermarket managers receive about 200 price changes sent to them by a central service, which they then feed into the cash registers. Up to that point, it's all automatic. Then the work starts. They have to change all 200 prices on the shelves themselves, manually. Sometimes there are mistakes.

How serious is the situation?

In recent years, economic inspectors have been checking the price tickets in our stores. They take 100 products at random from the shelves, which they then compare with the prices at the till. They found that, on average, 95% of prices are correct and 5% wrong – half of those in favour of the customer. But those mistakes all count against you, and if you have three mistakes out of those 100 products, you were fined €250. Now [federal economy] minister Johan Vande Lanotte has decided that this has to be dealt with more severely, so the fine is now €1,500. Our position is that to err is

human. We're not saying that if a shopkeeper is systematically putting out the wrong prices that there shouldn't be a fine. On the contrary; that's bad for the image of all of us. We're saying that if you only make three mistakes in 100 cases, half of them to the advantage of the customer, the inspectors should be a little bit more tolerant.

You've tried to explain your position to the minister without much success.

Several times I have asked the inspectors and the minister to visit a store early in the morning and see with their own eyes how that work is carried out because that's



the part they're not understanding. They seem to think it's all done with the push of a button. I've asked the minister himself, who seems to me to be a reasonable man. Then he would understand that there's no ill will at work. **Interview by AH**

THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Brewing ▶ CoEnCo

Construction engineer CoEnCo, which specialises in the construction of breweries, has just completed its latest project in Barentsburg, Russia, now the northernmost brewery in the world. CoEnCo, based in Oostkamp, West Flanders, was asked to build the brewery by Norway's Spitsbergen Travel. Barentsburg is only accessible by boat or helicopter, and Spitsbergen plans to make the brewery a tourist attraction.

Interiors ▶ Maes Inox

Kitchen equipment producer Maes Inox, based in Harelbeke, West Flanders, has won the contract to build the kitchen of Noma, the Copenhagen restaurant considered to be the best in the world. The company is also in the process of setting up outlets in Aartselaar and Bruges early next year to display its products.

Pastry ▶ Laduree

Luxury French pastry shop Laduree, known for its macarons, is opening an outlet in Antwerp early next year.

Property ▶ Zuidpoort

The 63,000 square-metre Zuidpoort office complex in Ghent has been sold for €110 million to the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority.

Retail ▶ Primark

The Irish low-cost clothing retailer will open a store in Ghent early next year. The company's outlet in Liège, which opened last year, has become one of the most successful stores of the group in Western Europe.

Savings ▶ New record

A record €230 billion sat in Belgian savings accounts at the end of September, despite the less-than-generous interest rates offered by banks.

Shipping ▶ CMB

Antwerp-based shipping and transport group CMB has acquired TNT Airways, the air transport operations of courier and delivery company TNT. The deal involves some 45 Boeing freight aircraft and BAe 146 jets. The move is part of the restructuring of TNT in the wake of its merger with UPS and allows CMB's air transport operations to double in size.

Supermarkets

▶ Albert Heijn

Dutch supermarket group Albert Heijn, part of the Ahold group, has plans to further expand its operations in Flanders by opening additional outlets in Kortrijk, Ghent and Hoboken to reach a total of 20 by the end of 2013. The company, which will open its 11th local store in Olen next week, is seeking opportunities in Turnhout and Bruges.



ARRIVING AT ELLIS ISLAND

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ANTWERP, SEPT. 27TH 2013

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The robot revolution

Out of the lab and into our homes: Flanders is developing the next generation of robots

Andy Furniere

Perhaps you already have robots in the house, independently vacuuming the rooms and mowing your lawn. In Flemish robotics labs, action is well under way to develop more advanced versions of this new generation that closely interacts with its environment and with people. On a tour around the high-tech hotspots, I met robots that help paralysed people to move again, robots that help autistic children to improve social interaction and one robot that enjoys a spot of badminton.

At the University of Leuven's campus in Heverlee, Flanders' Mechatronics Technology Centre (FMTC) assembles the expertise of the leading Flemish mechatronic companies, such as weaving equipment producer Picanol and sorting business Best. Mechatronics combines mechanical, electronic and computer engineering to manufacture machines. Jada, the badminton-playing robot (named after the daughter of Kim Clijsters) is FMTC's showpiece.

"Jada is both a demonstrator to show a broad audience the extraordinary features of industrial applications and a tool to test the effectiveness of innovations," explains FMTC general manager Marc Engels. Jada has the speed, precision and intelligence of a worthy sparring partner, thanks to electric motors, cameras and computers. "She has a faster starting speed and more brake power than a Formula 1 car," Engels declares.

Since her "birth" in 2010, Jada has become more energy-efficient, less noisy, received wireless communication and learned to analyse what went wrong if she misses the shuttlecock. These breakthroughs have helped to improve real-life applications – such as machines on assembly lines, combine harvesters, laser cutters and weaving equipment.

However flexible she may be, though, in a few months Jada will have to make way for the next generation, who can return drop shots. Unlike Jada, who only speeds from left to right fixed on a metal shaft, the new robot will move around the whole court and will also track its opponent's position. Before this updated version arrives, I took the chance to have a game with Jada. No score was kept, but let's call it a draw.

The automated servant

In the same building, KU Leuven's robotics research group has unique expertise in fine-tuning the movements of robots to improve its interface with users and to optimise energy use. Postdoctoral researcher Tinne De Laet presents PR2, a robot that has wheeled right out of a science fiction movie. "PR2 functions as our research platform, helping us to develop and test applications for future service robots in households," says De Laet. "Like, for instance, cooking robots that look up recipes

on the internet and prepare them autonomously."

In another corner of the lab stands Kuka, a lightweight robot arm that can be used both as a safe assembling machine and a rehabilitation tool that can help patients to relearn movement after a stroke, for example. Less eye-catching are the wheelchairs, but De Laet explains how the team equipped them with sensors and laser scanners to make sure their operators don't bump into obstacles. "The people, however, ultimately remain in control," she adds.

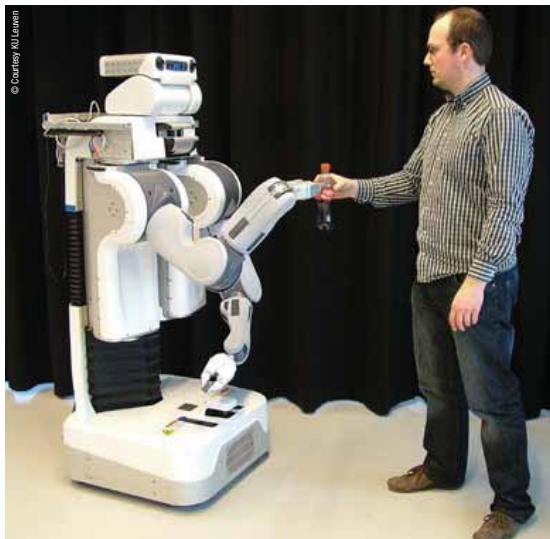
At the other Flemish robotics research group, at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), Professor Bram Vanderborcht shows me Lucy. Named after our first human "ancestor" who walked upright, Lucy consists of two legs, through which Vanderborcht has refined the mechanical walking technique of robots. Lucy is the predecessor of the new exoskeleton robots that the research team designs for rehabilitation purposes.

An even more striking personality is Probo, VUB's huggable robot with bright green fur that communicates with children through speech, facial expressions and a video screen in his belly. Probo can support psychologists in teaching autistic children social skills, such as greeting acquaintances and the interpretation of facial expressions. "Autistic children listen to robots more easily because they don't overload them with words and gestures like people often do," explains Vanderborcht.

Robots for kids

While research groups prepare future technology, the non-profit organisation Dwengo trains the next generation of technological experts. Dwengo equips about 100 secondary schools in Flanders, the Netherlands and even Argentina with their Dwengo board, which teaches children basic programming skills. With the board and an online version, children learn to programme, among other things, a microwave, but with additional gear they can create simple robots in one or two lessons.

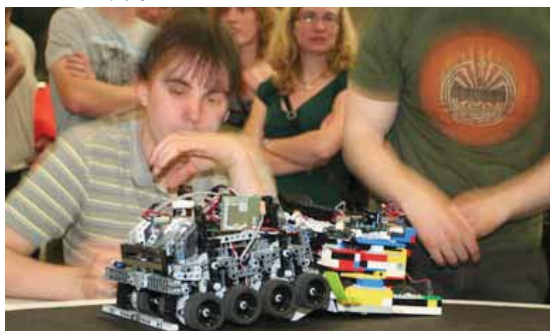
"One boy even invented a robot that cleaned up his room by pushing everything towards the walls," says Peter Bertels, Dwengo co-founder and secretary. Dwengo sponsors the international RoboCup Junior competition for school teams but is also involved in competitions at Ghent University. Last year, robots completed an obstacle course and had to push each other out of a circle during a "sumo-robot" competition and hopes to introduce robotics in the compulsory education of both primary and secondary school students. "Robots are the ideal instruments to give technological education a cooler image," says



Hear the word "robot", and you probably picture something like PR2, KU Leuven's household robot test platform



Jada, the badminton-playing robot



Bertels, Dwengo sponsors the international RoboCup Junior competition, where student-made robots compete

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

The Flemish Institute for Technological Research (Vito) is organising a new international conference where stakeholders and policymakers will discuss, define and implement action plans and recommendations for sustainable development. The first **Brussels Sustainable Development Summit** takes place on 17 and 18 December.

► <http://bds.vito.be>

Edible soup packaging that melts when warmed up has won the Designer Award at the first Greener Packaging Awards in Brussels. The competition is organised by Fost Plus, which coordinates the sorting of household waste in Belgium and rewards companies that reduce the impact of their packaging on the environment. The edible soup package has been developed by Brussels design bureau Mona Lisa but is not on the market yet.

► www.greenerpackaging.be

After an absence of more than 30 years, a **dozen dog whelks** have been found in Zeebrugge at the Flemish coast. According to Flemish nature conservancy organisation Natuurpunt, the whelk – a species of sea snail – disappeared in 1981 because of paint on ship hulls that polluted the water. The use of this paint has been prohibited since 2008.

The three finalists for the **Agoria Award**, the Flemish dissertation award for technology and innovation, have been announced. All the nominations are from Ghent University, and the winner will be announced on 18 December. The winner receives €500 and a master class at Vlerick Business School, worth €8,000.

The Dutch Language House in Brussels, which provides information to anyone interested in learning Dutch, this year registered a **record number 17,651 new students** – about 800 more than last year. There is growing interest among European expats – up from 10% of the total number of students in 2006 to 22% this year. Director Gunther Van Neste says that expats who lose their job in the European quarter because of the economic crisis often learn Dutch to find other work in Brussels.

► www.huisnederlandsbrussel.be

Allowing children to speak their **home language in primary schools** doesn't have an effect on their development of Dutch language proficiency, but does help to increase their self-confidence. That is the conclusion of researchers from Ghent University and the University of Leuven, who assessed a native language project running since 2008 in four primary schools in Ghent, where children were allowed to speak their home language between educational activities and during group work. **AF**

“

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Kaat de Corte (BSB alumna, Harvard College Class of 2014)

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VITO (Flemish Research and Technology Organisation) and **TERI** (The Indian Energy and Resources Institute) organise the first edition of the Brussels Sustainable Development Summit. At the heart of the capital of Europe, BSDS 2012 wants to initiate a movement to develop concrete measures towards sustainable development, this together with stakeholders, policy-makers and business representatives from all over the world.

Starting now: We invite you to participate in the **online BSDS Dialogues** to identify best practices and policy recommendations. Some of the participants to the platforms will be selected to present their views during the workshops that will be organised as part of BSDS on 17 December. All recommendations and case-studies will be analysed by a panel of experts and compiled in a report that will be handed out and discussed during a plenary session with political leaders on 18 December.

Throughout 2013 the BSDS Dialogues co-organisers will follow up the project and ensure that the BSDS Dialogues outcomes feed policy decisions at the European and international levels.

Monday, December 17, 2012: thematic workshops introduced by:

- » **Manuel Barroso**, President of the European Commission
- » **R.K. Pachauri**, Director-General of TERI and Chairman of the IPCC
- » **Kris Peeters**, Flemish Minister-President
- » **Henri Proglio**, CEO of EDF



Manuel Barroso



R.K. Pachauri



Connie Hedegaard



Jeffrey Sachs



Alain Hubert

Tuesday, December 18, 2012 (free of charge): dialogues between stakeholders, political leaders and personalities **in presence of**

H. R. H. Prince Philippe

- » **Connie Hedegaard**, European Commissioner for Climate Action
- » **Elizabeth Thompson and Brice Lalonde**, Executive Coordinators, UN Conference on Sustainable Development
- » **Jeffrey Sachs**, Director, Earth Institute, Columbia University
- » **Yvo De Boer**, Special Global Advisor, Climate Change and Sustainability, KPMG
- » **Alain Hubert**, President, International Polar Foundation

Venue: SQUARE Conference Centre

near Brussels Central Station, the medieval city and numerous hotels.

The deadline to register to the event is 10 December 2012.

BSDS website: <http://bsds.vito.be>

BSDS Secretariat: Tel. + 32 3 286 74 31, bsds@vito.be



Loaves and fishes

Bread and cakes on one floor, Michelin-starred food on another at a bakery with a difference in Beerzel

Denzil Walton

Driving through the small Flemish village of Beerzel, about 15 kilometres east of Mechelen, there comes a time when you may not believe your eyes. On Hoogstraat is a large building that looks as if it's been airlifted from the English town of Stratford-upon-Avon, birthplace of William Shakespeare.

I was born and raised not too far from Stratford-upon-Avon, so I immediately recognised the style of this house: half-timbered 1500s Tudor, with its exposed wooden frame, the spaces between the timbers filled with plaster, brick and stone.

It turns out that the building in question, which houses De Tuinkamer restaurant on the first floor and Het Broodhuys bakery on the ground floor, is based on photographs and drawings of existing houses in Stratford-upon-Avon. And although it has a 16th-century appearance, it actually rose from the ground in 2001.

Fourth-generation bakers

It's the result of the visionary thinking of Bert and Peggy Van Rompaey, who initially wanted to construct something unique for their bakery. "There has been a Van Rompaey bakery in Hoogstraat for more than 100 years," explains Peggy. "The first one was established in the early 1900s by Frans Van Rompaey. It passed to his son Jules, then to his grandson François, and is currently in the capable hands of his great-grandson, my husband, Bert."

Het Broodhuys took 18 months to build, headed up by local architect Willy Bens, who specialises in blending the old with the new. He is, in fact, the son-in-law of the founder of the Bokrijk open-air museum, where more than 115 historical buildings from all over Flanders have been recreated.

French revolution

Although the building looks decidedly English, it is built largely from French materials. In the late 1990s, Bert and Peggy scoured the villages of Normandy, returning



De Tuinkamer and Het Broodhuys are housed in a Tudor style building, with materials labouriously salvaged from demolition sites in France;

with truckloads of timber, window frames, fireplaces, ceiling beams, roofing and tiles from old farms and other buildings that were being demolished. Their prize possession is an ancient staircase rescued from a derelict monastery. It was painstakingly dismantled, transported to Beerzel and equally carefully reconstructed.

Soon after Het Broodhuys opened, clients could trace the footsteps of Normandy's monks and head upstairs into the tearoom armed

with delicacies bought in the bakery. It was so popular that Bert and Peggy decided to turn the tearoom into a fully fledged restaurant.

Again, their visionary thinking clicked into overdrive. They managed to attract one of Flanders' top young chefs: Ken Verschueren. He came to De Tuinkamer fresh from his success as sous-chef at Sergio Herman's Oud Sluis – recently voted the Netherlands' best restaurant for the fourth time in a row. Verschueren added his flair to the menu and a

new contender was added to the Flemish restaurant scene.

Michelin starred

With an emphasis on classic cuisine with a fresh look – a bit like the building – Verschueren's skills soon attracted an appreciative clientele. At first, customers trickled in from the neighbourhood, but as news got around they started flooding in from all over Belgium. A Michelin star was awarded last year. The word on the grapevine is that a second can't be

too far away.

A three-course lunch is available at De Tuinkamer for €40. In the evening you can choose a five-course menu for €87, or the top-of-the-range seven-course menu at €110. The menu changes every six weeks or so, to match the season. Currently, Verschueren is having fun with game. Supplying De Tuinkamer with fresh herbs and seasonal vegetables is Peggy's father, who tends a nearby allotment. So if you see a gardener pushing a wheelbarrow full of winter vegetables, like beetroot and parsnips, through the streets of Beerzel, it might well be him. The flowers on the tables are also likely to be the result of his green fingers.

Attention to detail

For a unique restaurant, unique tableware is necessary, and this has been supplied by Anja Meeusen, a potter from Westmalle. "We were looking for something different so decided to go for handmade Limoges porcelain," explains Peggy. "Anja did a great job, providing something that was attractive yet durable. Her designs are really timeless."

Meeusen designed and produced white tableware specifically for each course, as well as napkin holders, milk jugs and sugar bowls. As everything is handmade, it was a major project.

Tables and chairs were custom-built in oak by local furniture-maker Darius. For the finishing touch, tablecloths and napkins of high-quality Italian linen were made by the Brussels-based company Society. Meanwhile, below the restaurant, Het Broodhuys is still going strong. It's an old-style bakery, with bread baked on the oven floor. Most ingredients are natural and additives kept to a minimum. Their speciality is *desembrood* (sour dough), of which they make five types. Using yeast and lactobacilli, it has a slightly sour but appealing taste.

While you're waiting in the bread queue or for your order to come, you might like to reflect on some words from the Bard himself: "Do nothing but eat, and make good cheer; And praise God for the merry year."

► www.hetbroodhuys.be



Peggy works in the old-style Het Broodhuys with her husband, a fourth-generation baker



De Tuinkamer's Michelin-starred chef Ken Verschueren



De Tuinkamer's interior is simple and sophisticated in white

Once upon a time...

Flemish author Marita de Sterck takes a look at the disturbing originals of fairytales

Rebecca Benoot

Author and anthropologist Marita de Sterck predominantly writes coming-of-age stories because, she says, they "depict an important and turbulent phase in a person's life". She was recently awarded the Halewijn Literary Prize from the Dutch city of Roermond for her latest novel *Niet zonder liefde* (Not Without Love), which detailed the difficulties faced by a young interracial couple in Antwerp.

De Sterck has researched rites of passage and the stories that accompany them for more than 25 years. Her 2010 book *Bloei* (Flower) is a collection of 60 tales from five continents focusing on the development of femininity as a girl transitions into womanhood. "The stories in *Bloei* are also reminiscent of fairytales because they also incorporate important lessons and themes," says de Sterck.

Her new non-fiction endeavour, *Beest in bed* (Beast in Bed), is an assortment of nine well-known fairytales in which she goes back to the source and uncovers their true, non-sugar-coated nature, while rejoicing in the oral tradition that saw different cultures adding parts along the way.

"My father was a storyteller, so I grew up with local folk tales about the Rupel area where we lived," she says, referring to the Rupel tributary in western Antwerp province. "Then when I was nine, I discovered the fairytales of the Brothers Grimm in the attic. It was a very old edition

with macabre illustrations by [20th-century Dutch graphic artist] Anton Pieck and full of dark and disturbing passages that were left out of



the stories they told us at school."

Harrowing subjects

De Sterck, 57, became fascinated by the interesting parts that were kept away from children and started to explore the evolution of this censorship. "The Brothers Grimm cleaned up their own stories with each reprint, making them more accessible," she explains. "But I personally prefer the originals because they are a lot more dramatic and fierce than the Disney versions we are now all accustomed to."

In *Beest in bed*, De Sterck explores tales by the brothers, by Giambattista Basile and by Charles Perrault (creator of Mother Goose, whose story *Donkeyskin* was usually omitted from most collections as it

deals with incest). She also included what is considered a Flemish version of *Snow White* – Mauricia and the Seventeen Murderers by J Roelens.

"I choose these nine tales," says de Sterck, "because of their literary strength and because they intrigue me; they deal with relevant themes in a way that sticks with you."

New illustrations

As we all grew up with them, fairytales have the power to transcend age, something de Sterck often witnesses. "I frequently read these stories in front of live audiences in libraries and schools, and then it becomes clear that these tales are still able to captivate people of all ages." Although they all know the fables, not a lot of people

know the originals, making books like *Beest in bed* an important tool in proving that fairytales weren't just for kids.

Far from it, in fact. Who knew, for example, that Cinderella's evil stepsisters were forced to cut off parts of their feet to fit into the glass slipper or that Red Riding Hood had to undress and get into bed with the big bad wolf posing as her grandmother?

De Sterck often asks her own now-grown children to read what she's working on "just to check if young people today are still intrigued by them". The connection to her family is much tighter with this book, as the often troubling, certainly cautionary tales that regularly blur the boundaries between animal and human nature were illustrated by her son, Jonas Thys, who used linoleum cuts to create original and contemporary drawings.

"I was shocked by how bawdy and cruel most of these stories were," Thys comments, which is why I predominantly chose scenes that were left out due to their sexual or violent nature."

Snow White, *Red Riding Hood*, *Hansel and Gretel* – fairytales have always sparked the imagination and the box office due to their universal charm, making books like *Beest in bed* more than an enticing and refreshing read. The book also sheds light on the true nature of stories we all thought we knew, proving that, despite their age and deceptive innocence, they can still pack a mighty punch.

Jonas Thys' drawings featured in *Beest in bed* are on display until 22 December at Galerij Tsjeljoeskin, De Vroente 7, Brasschaat

► <http://users.telenet.be/marita.de.sterck>

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

For the first time in its 10-year history, a professional sportsman has won the quiz show *De slimste mens ter wereld* (The Smartest Person in the World). Nearly 800,000 TVs were tuned to the finale last Thursday night to see Tomas Van den Spiegel (pictured below), a basketball player on the Telenet Ostend team, just manage to slip the title away from Magali Cobbaert, also from Ostend and the first non-celebrity to ever take part in the show. "The stress of the show is nothing compared to an important basketball game," commented Van den Spiegel. "This was mostly just fun."

► www.vier.be/deslimstemenssterwereld



Ghent artist Berlinde De Bruyckere has been chosen to represent Belgium at the 2013 Venice Biennale. Noted for her visceral sculptures made of melted wax, De Bruyckere has shown all over the world, won the Flemish Community's Visual Artist award for 2009 and last year staged her work in dialogue with Flemish and Venetian masters at Bozar.

Claudio Dell'Anno, the hot-tempered chef who won the second series of the TV show *Mijn restaurant!*, has been given a suspended sentence of four months and fined €500 for diverting restaurant funds to a private account. His business partner was sentenced to seven months in absentia and banned from the restaurant business for three years.

Joining the unique pop-up hotel craze is **Sleeping Around**, which puts you in a posh hotel room built inside an old Chinese shipping container. The containers change locations, but until 5 January are, most appropriately, near the MAS Museum on Antwerp's riverfront. There is also a sauna container and a lounge/breakfast nook container. "Rooms" are €199 a night for double accommodation. The containers will move elsewhere after their stay at the port, and you can make a suggestion where you would like to see them land.

► www.sleepingaround.eu

FRESH FICTION

Maartse kamers (March Rooms)

by YM Dangre · De Bezige Bij

Twenty-five-year-old YM Dangre won the Flemish debut prize for literature in 2011 with *Vulkanvrucht* (Fruits of the Volcano). His new book revolves around Fernand, an 80-year-old man whose best friend is dying. The only person he can rely on is his daughter, who has always tried to come between her father and this close-knit friendship. *Maartse Kamers* is a touching and sophisticated tale about old age, guilt and wondering if you made the right choices.

Suikertantes (Sugar Aunts)

by Joseph Pearce · De Bezige Bij
Often compared to German

author WG Sebald, Antwerp writer Joseph Pearce has published a refreshing take on the oral tradition of storytelling that lives within each family, creating an intricate maze of myths and mysteries. On his way to a nephew's funeral, the narrator of *Suikertantes* discovers he has several wealthy distant relatives and begins his quest for the truth, leading him to the head of the German occupation in Belgium during the Second World War.

Kronkelpaden van het geheugen (The Winding Roads of Memory)

by Kristien Hemmerechts · De Geus

In her second book this year, Kristien Hemmerechts unveils

the unreliability of our memories. Why do we carry certain events with us? Is memory something we have or something that defines us? This semi-autobiographical voyage through the past offers an account of an exceptional author's life and mind while uncovering universal hidden truths.

Veronderstellingen (Assumptions)

by Annelies Verbeke · De Geus

Annelies Verbeke has written her own book of short stories, after co-editing a compilation earlier this year called *Naar de stad* (To the City). With *Veronderstellingen*, she proves to be a master of the form, adding it to novels, screenplays and journalism. In 15 poignant



stories, she shows us what happens when people fall prey to assumptions, creating webs of deceit, lies and broken hearts.

A cure for amnesia

Museum director Bart De Baere on the role of Antwerp's contemporary arts museum, as M HKA turns 25

Christophe Verbiest

After the Second World War, Antwerp politicians (and especially Lode Craeybeckx, who was the city's mayor between 1947 and 1976) had long been dreaming of a museum for contemporary art, but it took until 1987 before the dream materialised. On 20 June of that year, the Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, or Museum for Contemporary Art (M HKA), opened in a transformed granary in the 't Zuid quarter, near the Scheldt river. Gentrification has now turned the neighbourhood into a hipster quarter, though 25 years ago it certainly wasn't. The establishment of M HKA was one of the motors behind its transformation, in fact. For 15 years, the art historian and curator Flor Bex spearheaded his brainchild and in 2002 was succeeded by Bart De Baere. Shortly after, the Centre for Image Culture became part of M HKA. These days it's called Cinema Zuid, showing a mix of classics and arthouse film.

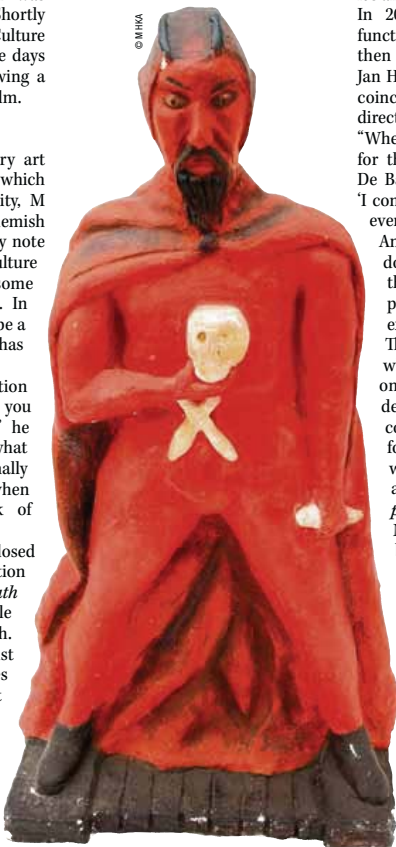
Ambitious goals

Contrary to the contemporary art museum SMAK in Ghent, which is mainly financed by the city, M HKA is an institution of the Flemish Community. In her new policy note for 2012-2016, minister for culture Joke Schauvliege formulated some ambitious goals for M HKA. In Flanders, the museum has to be a trailblazer; internationally, it has to strive for recognition. De Baere agrees. "As an institution of the Flemish Community, you have the duty to aim high," he says. "Not only showing what has already been internationally accepted but sensing when an artist is on the brink of recognition." De Baere cites the just-closed Jimmie Durham exhibition *A matter of life and death and singing* as an example of the museum's approach. "Internationally, he's the artist of the year: Loads of articles have been written about him and he's finally starting to sell his work on a large scale, both to museums and private collectors. It's clearly a moment of celebration; he's becoming part of the canon." M HKA's exhibition, he notes, was "the most

exhaustive overview of his work ever."

The tasks the Flemish Community has given to M HKA seem to focus mainly on showing art and less on collecting. Yet this is an essential characteristic of a museum – the distinguishing factor between a museum and a public art gallery, like Wiels in Brussels. Or, in an international context, between the Tate and the Hayward Gallery.

"The public mainly values a museum for its exhibitions," says De Baere. "The question 'Is it a good museum?' has almost become synonymous for 'Does it attract a lot of visitors?' Indeed, this still has to change. The international appeal and our leadership function, in the long run, are strongly related to how we develop our permanent collection."



Spanish artist Antoni Muntadas' "NSEO" (1976)

One arrow, three bullseyes

That might be a problem. M HKA's budget for acquisitions is a scant €100,000 a year. At its opening in 1987, the museum had an annual acquisition budget of six million Belgian francs, which, taking into account inflation, is €250,000. De Baere had asked for €1 million in his 2012-2016 policy note. He stays diplomatic about the amount ("It's odd").

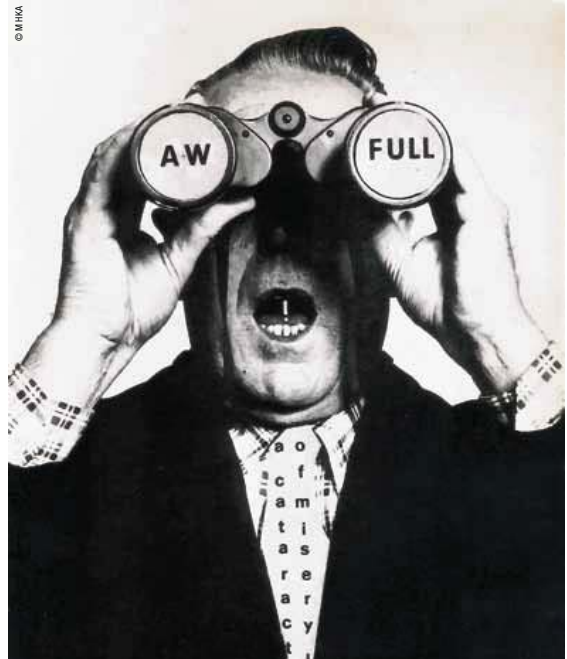
"Acquisitions are the most efficient instrument a museum has: With one arrow you strike three bullseyes. There's nothing an artist prefers above being bought by a museum, not only for the money but also as a token of appreciation. At the same time, it's a support for galleries, and it's an investment in the future."

In 2002, De Baere took up his function as director of M HKA. Until then he had been the assistant of Jan Hoet at SMAK in Ghent, which, coincidentally, was looking for a new director, too, since Hoet was retiring. "When I told Jan that I'd be applying for the director's post at M HKA," De Baere remembers, "he told me: 'I completely understand. In Ghent, everything has been done; in Antwerp everything is still to do.' He exaggerated, but I also thought that Antwerp had a potential that had not been exploited." That was the mindset with which De Baere embarked on his journey "That Antwerp deserved a strong museum for contemporary art. I had respect for the heritage of Flor Bex, whose work, unfairly, wasn't always appreciated by the *vox populi*."

M HKA, he continues, "cannot be compared to what it was a decade ago. The most important change is the international recognition. Two internationally renowned curators, Sweden's Anders Kreuger and Briton Nav Haq, have come to work here. Another colleague, Dieter Roelstrate, has just left to become senior curator at the MCA in Chicago, one of America's most important institutions for contemporary art."



M HKA director Bart De Baere (right) with former prime minister Yves Leterme during a show of Flemish art in Singapore in 2009



Paul De Vree's "AW FULL" was first seen at Antwerp gallery De Zwarte Panter in 1979



French performance artist Orlan brings her famous "MesurAGE" to M HKA's Collection XXXI

COLLECTION XXXI: FIVE ENSEMBLES

M HKA is celebrating a quarter of a century with *Collection XXXI*, a group exhibition that shows that the "history" of the museum and also encompasses its legendary predecessor, the ICC, the first government-funded public space to show contemporary art in Flanders.

ICC opened in 1970 in Antwerp, but its seeds were already sown in the 1960s. "Twenty-five years of M HKA is 50 years of history," notes the museum's director, Bart De Baere. *Collection XXXI* brings together work by five Flemish and

international artists (Guillaume Bijl, Paul De Vree, Gordon Matta-Clark, Antoni Muntadas and Orlan) who had notorious shows at the ICC. "Twenty-five years ago, the doors of the M HKA opened," says De Baere. "With the new exhibition, we're trying to answer the question of what that meant. How did that moment make a difference?" He answers his own question: "That we, as a community, said that we want to stop forgetting. That, in the end, should be the ultimate purpose of a museum."

UNTIL 20 JANUARY

M HKA

Leuvensestraat 32, Antwerp

► www.muhka.be

Sister act

The Simoens Trio

Marie Dumont

Ten years ago, three promising young Flemish musicians decided to get together and form a piano trio. The odds were good: they knew each other quite well and had played together a few times before. And finding a name for the ensemble was easy enough: They opted for Simoens, their common surname.

The Simoens Trio is one of Flanders' most exciting chamber music ensembles, receiving praise for its polished, seamless sound and searching interpretations. It also happens to be made up of three sisters: An (32), Veerle (30) and Katrijn (28) Simoens, the gifted daughters of two teachers from Ghent.

Music doesn't exactly run in the family. "There are no musicians in the family apart from us, really," says cellist Veerle. "But there was music at home, and our parents were always very supportive, ferrying us here and there for practice and rehearsals."

Each sister began learning an instrument at the local academy, where they showed signs of blossoming talent, then went on to attend different conservatories. One day violinist An had to perform a piece by contemporary Flemish composer Frédéric Devreese that also calls for a pianist and cellist. She naturally turned to her younger siblings. The experience was pleasant



and successful enough for them to make it official.

"Family groups rarely work out. When they do, it is harder to break

up," observes German violinist Rainer Schmidt, who knows a thing or two about the subject, being the only non-Hagen member of the celebrated

Hagen Quartet, otherwise made up of three siblings from Salzburg. Overcoming the usual tensions and rivalries, the Simoens went from

strength to strength, going off to study in Hannover, Germany, and receiving tips from such luminaries as Philippe Herreweghe, the Danel and Alban Berg Quartets and Hungarian composer György Kurtág. "We are very good friends," sums up Veerle, who now lives in Antwerp. "We meet up for rehearsals at Katrijn's house in Zemst, which is quite big and has a grand piano. We often disagree about interpretation and quarrel a lot – more than musicians would normally dare to without putting a strain on the relationship. But when the quarrel's over, it's over." Their secret may well reside in a subtle mix of closeness and independence. "We understand each other without words," says Veerle. "Yet each has her own ideas and personality." And career paths: Veerle also plays at the Vlaamse Opera and in other chamber music ensembles, as well as manages a small chamber orchestra. An plays in that orchestra when she is not teaching, while pianist Katrijn has her own piano duo with John Gevaert.

To discover this winsome threesome, either pick up one of their two CDs or catch them live in one of their anniversary concerts this month, which focus on their favourite repertoires from the past decade. The Devreese suite is on the programme – how could it not be? After all these years, it has become part of the family.

2 December, 11.00

Oud Gasthuis, Gemeenteplein 26, Asse

► www.vooruit.be

9 December, 11.30

CC Merksem, Nieuwdreef 135, Antwerp

► www.simoens trio.be

MARKET

Winter Party on Kartuizersstraat

Downtown Brussels' once-sleepy Kartuizersstraat now boasts more than its fair share of trendy boutiques and cafés. Party-goers are welcome in the street and in the neighbouring Oude Graanmarkt for their first winter party. Novelty boutiques Whazup! and Blender01 are offering special deals, and Flemish street food is on sale outside. Kartuizersstraat is decked out with disco ball decorations (to remain for the duration of the season), the perfect atmosphere for DJs TheBSide and Cindy Freaks. Street-side festivities wrap at 22.00, at which time the party moves into the neighbourhood's many bars, open extra late for the occasion. **Georgio Valentino**



6 December from 18.00

Kartuizersstraat, Brussels

MORE MARKETS THIS WEEK

Ghent

Art Gent: New art fair featuring more than 1,000 artists and collectors from 15 countries
NOV 30-DEC 4 at Flanders Expo, Maaitekuuter 1

► www.artgent.be

Tervuren

British School of Brussels Bazaar: Wide variety of stalls with gifts, including books, games and jewellery, plus fun surprises, refreshments and even Santa
DEC 1 10.00-16.00 at BSB, Leuvensesteenweg 19

► www.britishschool.be

CLASSICAL

Conscience Jubilee closing concert

Although half French and in spite of his imperfect command of written Dutch, the 19th-century novelist Hendrik Conscience has gone down in the collective psyche as Flanders' first literary hero – a man who, by choosing to write in Dutch at a time when no one else did, gave his region a voice and "taught his countrymen to read". Rounding up a year of celebrations, this concert features specially commissioned work by contemporary composer Janpieter Biesemans, music by Jef van Hoof and August De Boeck and two pieces by Conscience's friend Peter Benoit, who sought to translate the essence of Flemishness through his folk-inspired music. The Helicon choir, the Lier children's choir and members of La Passione ensemble perform in Schilde, where Conscience would retreat when city life became too much to bear.

Marie Dumont

2 December, 15.00 | Sint-Guibertus Church, Schilde

► www.baasgansendonck.be/hc2012

MORE CLASSICAL THIS WEEK

Brussels

National Orchestra of Belgium: The country's orchestra performs Strauss' *Don Juan*, Shumann and Mahler, conducted by Hugh Wolff
DEC 2 15.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

► www.bozar.be

Ghent

Bijloke-Manufactuur: Presentations of experimental works by young artists perfected in collaboration with the concert hall, including Lambert Colson's ensemble InAlto and viol/dance duo Hather Consort

DEC 4 20.00 at De Bijloke, Bijlokekaai 7

► www.debijloke.be

CONCERT

Madredeus

Legend has it that Madredeus' first album was recorded in a disused Lisbon church. The story may be too perfect to be true. The Portuguese ensemble is, after all, famous for its blend of intense traditional music and modern pop influences. By the early 1990s, they had conquered Portugal with this formula, then in 1994, with Europe's attention focused on Lisbon as that year's European Capital of Culture, German director Wim Wenders was commissioned to make a documentary about the city. He created – what else? – a quirky road movie, featuring – who else? – Madredeus. *Lisbon Story* put the band on its way to international acclaim. Their current album and world tour is a celebration of 25 years of making music. **GV**



3 December, 20.00 | Capitole, Ghent | www.capitolegent.be
4 December, 20.00 | Stadsschouwburg, Antwerp | www.stadsschouwburgantwerpen.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Georgio "the Dove" Valentino does Piero Ciampi: Georgio "the Dove" Valentino renders homage to Piero Ciampi with a selection of the poète maudit's work in the original Italian, accompanied by pianist Todor Stefanov

DEC 6 20.00 at Art Base, Zandstraat 29
www.art-base.be

Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra 10th anniversary concert: Queen Elisabeth Competition 2012 finalist Ermir Abeshi performs Dimitri Chostakovitch with the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Thanos Adamopoulos

NOV 30 20.00 at Brussels Royal Conservatory, Regenschapsstraat 30
www.ticketnet.be

Al Di Meola: The blazing jazz fusion-turned-acoustic guitarist performs a unique duet concert with guitarist Peo Alfonsi

NOV 30 20.00 at Théâtre Saint-Michel, Pater Eudore Devroyestraat 2
www.promo.ticketnet.be (promo code: PROMODIMEOLA)

VISUAL ARTS

Yael Davids

Amsterdam-based Israeli artist Yael Davids was a special guest at this year's Playground Festival in Leuven and stayed on a while longer at Museum M to stage this exhibition. Davids operates at the intersection of installation and performance art; she crafts physical artefacts around which she orchestrates ephemeral performances. Her method has a political dimension, reflecting the construction of the new state of Israel and the loss of Palestine's culture and history. This show is conceived as a guided tour in which the spectator participates in the performance. The pieces in the exhibition are all linked, not just through their spatial arrangement but their shared fragility. **GV**



Until 20 January | Museum M, Leuven | www.mleuven.be

Until 20 January | Museum M, Leuven | www.mleuven.be

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

The Moderns: Permeke & Friends: The third in a series from Antwerp Fine Art Museum's collection focusing on the Flemish pioneers of Expressionism

Until FEB 24 at Koningin Fabiolazaal, Jezusstraat 28
www.kmska.be

Brussels

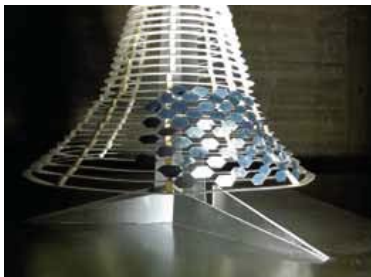
Hassan Darsi: The first major exhibition of the Moroccan artist's work brings together urban interventions, installations, film and sculpture

Until JAN 13 2013 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
www.bozar.be

SPECIAL EVENT

Nocturnes van de Zavel

The annual Nocturnes van de Zavel, held on the site of Brussels' antique market, kicks off the holiday season in style. The heart and soul of this arty street festival is an exhibition of 35 fir trees, tarted up to the extreme by students from Brussels art school La Cambre. Each is sponsored by a local shop, and four of these festive firs will win a prize and be auctioned off to benefit local charities. Twelve of Belgium's top chefs provide street food while you stroll about, listening to live opera music or jazz. Saturday closes with a night of dancing to Nocturnes' resident DJs. **GV**



29 November to 2 December | Grote Zavel, Brussels | www.sablon-bruxelles.com

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS THIS WEEK

Eeklo (East Flanders)

PRET-à-Marché: Market with 30 webshop owners selling unique handmade gifts, plus creative workshops, a children's corner and food & drink

DEC 1 16.00-22.00 & DEC 2 10.00-17.00 at Zeven, Zeelaan 7
www.pretamarche.be

Ghent

Museum Night: Nine Ghent museums, including MIAT, the Design Museum and De Wereld van Kina, stay open after hours, with free access to exhibitions and special entertainment, plus an after-party in SMAK

NOV 29 18.00-1.00
www.tinyurl.com/gentmuseumnight

DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

Less Sleep More Fuse
Blaesstraat 208, Brussels

Last month, Brussels' most famous club, Fuse, received the "Best Belgian Club Ever" award, issued by RedBull Elektropedia. More than 15,000 people cast their vote, resulting in a few interesting winners. We now know, for instance, that Antwerp-based house & techno DJ Locked Groove is one to keep an eye on, having won the Breakthrough Award. Drum'n'bass DJ Netsky won Best Album with 2, and the most popular music festival of 2012 was, naturally, Tomorrowland. But back to Fuse. The club first saw daylight in 1994 as one of Belgium's first techno venues. Many internationally renowned DJs have played at Fuse, including Jeff Mills (US), Dave Clark (UK), Richie Hawtin (UK) and Ricardo Villalobos (Chili). Nearly every night, there's something going at the club, located at the heart of Marollen. The line-up for December is looking great, with the Less Sleep More Fuse event this Saturday.

The Berlin-inspired night is spread over two rooms and features Detroit-to-Berlin transplant Seth Troxler, resident at Berlin's Club der Visionäre. Troxler will spin before Ellen Allien, the famous Berlin DJ who broke into the biz after her stay in London, where she discovered acid house.

Guillaume and The Coutu Dumont (Canada) are also on the bill with their mix of French underground and modern beats. Up next are Ryan Crosson (US) and Cesar Merveille (France). The first mixes original sounds from his hometown Detroit with new sounds from his adoptive city Berlin. The latter started his career with guitar and jazz music in France and now is a renowned DJ in Berlin.

Tickets are €10 before midnight and €15 after.

www.fuse.be



BITE

Robyn Boyle

Bistro Biggles ★★★☆

I wouldn't suggest you go to Brussels Airport for a nice meal. Kortrijk Airport in West Flanders, however, gets my highest recommendation. The small airport serves mainly business aviation needs. But even if you're not there to wait for your private jet, it's the ideal place to combine two great activities: plane spotting and dining out.

Bistro Biggles is unique in its location on the first floor of the airport, with windows that encircle the round dining room, giving ultimate visibility onto the terrace (on warmer days), runway and landing strip. The name refers to the comic strip hero Biggles, a fictional fighter pilot in the Second World War.

Our party of three is initially impressed by several things: the overall classy atmosphere, vintage aviation memorabilia, leather place settings, open kitchen and smartly dressed servers. It's enough to make us order an *aperitif*, a habit I usually reserve for special occasions only. Our lemon squash and gin & tonics come with olives and fresh crusty bread with high-quality olive oil. Then we're treated to a refreshing teaser of salmon sashimi with radish, onion and seaweed.

We unanimously decide on the menu suggestion on the chalkboard (€55 with paired wines or €39.50 without) and are immediately blown away by the first course. A single scallop rests atop a bed of sautéed leeks, hand-peeled North Sea shrimp and diced tomatoes in a lemony, buttery sauce. What the scallop lacks in quantity, it makes up for in quality, as it's of good size, lightly browned and soft and juicy inside.

Seasonally appropriate, the main dish is venison fillet with wild mushrooms, *chasseur* sauce and savoy cabbage puree. The thick slices are expertly cooked to a rare, deep-red centre and have a subtle gamey flavour, greatly enhanced by the meaty sauce. The accompanying savoy puree is silky smooth and wonderfully earthy, as are the mushrooms.

Chef Nic Vanderbeeken and headwaiter Stefaan Vanrenterghem call their version of French cuisine "the better bistro cuisine". That's an understatement, I conclude, after tasting the dessert of fluffy homemade chocolate mousse topped with dehydrated strawberries and a dash of raspberry sauce. Another friend opts for a generous whipped cream-topped Irish coffee and doesn't regret it.

Chef Nic's number one priority is the use of top quality products such as Iberian pork and Belgian Blue-White beef. There are also a lot of intestines on the menu: brains, kidneys, sweetbreads, etc. All sauces are made fresh, and the fries are hand cut, as it should be. "My personal favourite dish on the menu is veal cheeks with risotto, wild mushrooms and salsify," Nic says. "That's the meal that got Biggles a mention in the *Gault-Millau*."

Our bill ends up at about €57 apiece. If you come during the day, Biggles also offers a very reasonably priced two-course lunch menu at €16. And you don't have to dine to enjoy the view; in the afternoon, you can go there just for a drink and a spot of plane watching.

► www.bistrobiggles.be



📍 Luchthavenstraat 1, Wevelgem-Kortrijk; 056.37.33.00

🕒 Thurs-Mon 12.00-14.00 & 19.00-22.00;
Tue 12.00-14.00

💶 Mains: €15-€25

📌 Classy restaurant inside an airport terminal with refined dishes and a panoramic view

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

Mud, glorious mud

As the nights get longer, the air gets colder and autumn drifts into winter, it can only mean one thing: Cyclo-cross is back.

Cyclo-cross is a bicycle race in a mud bath, making it a discipline Flanders is uniquely qualified to dominate. Picturesque though they are, Flemish woods and fields can spit an abundance of muck at the riders tempted by this strangely grimy sport.

During the October-to-February season, the riders will splatter through Flemish trails, pausing only to dismount and carry their bikes on their shoulders when the hills become too steep or the mud too deep.

To get an idea of how much Flanders dominates the sport, 11 of the 18 Cyclo-cross Cup-winners are from the region (and that doesn't include those who have moved here, like Czech rider

Zdeněk Štybar). Flemish riders also account for a quarter of all the podium places in the two-day UCI Cyclo-cross World Championships. Flanders is home to Sven Nys – known as the "Cannibal from Baal" or just "The General" – arguably the greatest cyclo-cross rider ever. He is currently recovering his energy after a November that brought him six victories in seven races.

Nys still starts virtually every race as the favourite, even at the age of 36. He has won five of the six races so far this season in the Superprestige championship, with his Landbouwkrediet-KDL team, and is looking likely to claim his 12th title in February. In the BPost Bank Trophy, where Nys has taken home eight titles in 10 years, he has won two of the three races so far (though he trails fellow Fleming Niels Albert by 20 seconds in the ranking).

In the UCI Cyclo-cross Cup, Nys is currently jostling with Albert and three other Flemings – Kevin Pauwels, Bart Aernouts and Klaas Vantornout. Historically, though, Nys towers above his rivals in this contest, with six Cyclo-cross Cup titles to his name, even if his last one was in 2009.

Nys rivals will be looking forward to 1 February, 2014, the date he has set for retirement. "I want a life where I can wake up without immediately thinking, what is the weather like, and what exactly does that mean for my training?" he says.

In the meantime, the mud fest will continue until the season finale, the World Championships, in Louisville, Kentucky on 2-3 February. This is the first edition to be held outside Europe, but expect Nys and other Flemish riders on the podium, as they always are.



Sven Nys battles hills and mud in the Superprestige championship earlier this month

© Tim De Waele/Corbis

The last word...

Not so secret service

"It's an enormous security risk, but there's nothing we can do about it." The state security director is at a loss to stop members of the security and intelligence services from listing their employment on sites like LinkedIn and Facebook

Democratic pricing

"Just once I increased the lunch price, by €2.50. I had no choice." Lunch in the Michelin-starred restaurant Kamo in Brussels costs €15

A star is born

"The contract isn't signed yet, but it looks as if 2013 is going to be the year of Matthias Schoenaerts." The *Rundskop* actor is on the verge of signing for a role in a major Hollywood film, according to his manager Ken Lambrechts

Good cause

"Why should I refuse to accept it if I can support something worthwhile with it?" Departing senator Marleen Timmermans took her controversial end-of-term payment of at least €80,000 and donated it to reproductive health charities

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

When the fish disappear, so, too, do the fishermen. The loss of the first is a blow to diversity and consumerism and the latter to the economy. The situation in the North Sea for fish is so dire that one British think tank has suggested a moratorium on all fishing in the sea for five years. We'll tell you about the situation and what Flanders is doing to save its fishing industry

Holiday special

Yes, it's the return of the Flanders Today Holiday Gift Guide! Whether you're buying for children, a partner, several friends or yourself, we've got the region's top 20 best buys for gifts this year

Science

You might not recognise the term benzodiazepines, but you will recognise names like Xanax, Valium and Klonopin. Benzodiazepines are a group of drugs used to treat anxiety, insomnia and depression. But their abuse and overuse have become a major problem. We talk to some Flemish doctors and researchers about the tendency to overprescribe these kinds of drugs