

Force questioned

Images released of the death of a man in an Antwerp police cell cause concern about special squads

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Farmers visit Africa

Flemish cattle farmers visit their counterparts in Rwanda to discuss common problems

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Hot, hot, hot

Rock out at the BELvue or join the circus amid old masters during Museum Night Fever

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© Strauss/Curtis/Corbis

Let's get digital

Mediawijs is targeting young and old to tap into all of Flanders' digital media potential

Andy Furniere

The world is being transformed by new types of digital media at such a fast pace that not everyone can keep up. To make sure we all have the tools to safely and creatively ride this wave, Flemish minister for media Ingrid Lieten founded Mediawijs.be – the Flemish Knowledge Centre for Media Literacy – in collaboration with ICT research institute iMinds

This year, Mediawijs.be is launching a broad knowledge platform and three pilot projects. It will streamline the influence of media on contemporary society from its base at the offices of the iMinds Digital Society in Brussels, by encouraging co-operation between stakeholders from government, civil society, the media and the research sector. During regular meetings, these partners will discuss the best ways to improve the population's media skills, include all

layers of society in the digital evolution and create a safe media environment. The official launch takes place on 27 March, and the website will launch later in June.

With how quickly it all seems to change, why should everyone be up to date with digital developments? "The impact of this evolution differs fundamentally from earlier innovations, such as TV," explains professor Leo Van Audenhove of the Free University of Brussels (VUB), the director of Mediawijs.be. "It's hard to function in our society without digital media. Not only will it hinder your professional and social activities, it will even make daily life difficult."

Fighting the digital divide

"You are distinctly disadvantaged," says Van Audenhove, "if you can't search for practical information on the internet, send and read emails or draw money from a cash machine.

This impact will only grow; the care sector, for example, will increasingly rely on digital applications."

The knowledge centre is made up of a consortium of 12 partners, with an annual budget of €450,000 for the coming two years. Responsible for the relations with the media

"Fun experiences are essential for a positive attitude towards digital media at a later age"

and ICT industry is Annet Daems of research centre Smit, while Laure Van Hoecke of socio-cultural organisation Linc strengthens the communications with the public and outside

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Bruno Vanobbergen

Of all the subjects with which you might expect a children's rights commissioner to occupy himself, the right to a dignified end of life is probably the one you'd rather not think about. But Bruno Vanobbergen, who has held that position in Flanders since 2009, was in the headlines last week arguing for that right. Minors aged 16 and 17, he told the Senate justice committee, should have the same right to decide on their life's end as adults do, under Belgium's euthanasia legislation. And those aged 12 and over, furthermore, ought to have the right to end their own lives with medical assistance and the co-operation of their parents. The children's rights commissioner is a post set up by the government of Flanders in 1997 to oversee the application locally of the UN convention on the rights of the child. The commissioner also represents children's rights to the wider public, scrutinises government legislation and deals with complaints of breaches. Vanobbergen, a boyish-looking 41, is only the second person to hold the job of children's rights commissioner in Flanders, having succeeded Ankie Vandekerckhove after her term of 11 years. He graduated from Ghent University

in 1995 in pedagogical sciences and then went into the faculty as a research assistant. After gaining his doctorate in 2003 with a thesis on the commercialisation of childhood, he has also lectured at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. In his three years in the job, he has allowed his voice to be heard on any number of issues affecting children, from shortage of school space to vaccinations to municipal administrative fines and domestic violence. And now euthanasia, an area in which every move on the part of the Belgian legislature attracts worldwide attention, from both supporters and opponents. So Vanobbergen was sticking his neck out when he advised the committee to change the law to allow for the new age limits, as well as to involve children to the maximum extent in all euthanasia decisions affecting them and to ensure all care and medical staff are trained to take children's needs into account. The Senate will hold further hearings on other aspects of the euthanasia law, with any changes to existing legislation having to go through the Chamber.

► www.kinderrechten.be

News in brief

The first journeys of the **resurrected Benelux train** linking Brussels and Amsterdam went off last week "without a hitch" according to rail authority NMBS. The train, which travels twice a day from Brussels South Station, was scrapped in December to make way for the new high-speed Fyra, which has been suspended after being plagued with breakdowns.

Flemish actor Matthias Schoenaerts (*Rundskop*) **won a César Award last weekend** for Most Promising Actor for his role in the Jacques Audiard film *Rust and Bone*. The annual Césars are France's highest honour in film, comparable to Hollywood's Oscars. The Flemish short film *Death of a Shadow*, in which Schoenaerts also starred, was nominated for an Oscar this year but lost to the American short *Curfew*.

The Kazerne Dossin Memorial Museum on the Holocaust and Human Rights in Mechelen is hosting a colloquium this week titled **"Stateless Folk" on the situation of Gypsies** in western society. Speakers include EU commissioner Viviane Reding and Hungarian MEP Livia Jaroka, who is part Roma. The Flemish government's Roma policy, said Koen Verlaeckaert of the International office, is in line with the Council of Europe's Roma Action Plan, which "is a response to the challenges faced by Roma young people in Europe, particularly in relation to ... the realities of discrimination and xenophobia with which they are confronted."

► www.kazernedossin.eu

The Flemish-European liaison agency Vleba has published its second paper on *Industry and Innovation in Europe*, examining how **Flemish and European industrial policies** are intertwined. The paper, published in English by Lannoo Campus, contains contributions from Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters, Vleba president Luc Van den Brande and a

number of Flemish industrialists.
► www.lannoo.be/industry-and-innovation-europe

Flemish sports minister Philippe Muyters and the sports agency Bloso have announced that **golf is this year's "sport in the spotlight"**. Planned activities include introductory sessions for students, a golf open day in April and a Golf in the Parks event in June. Brussels-based pro golfer Nicolas Colsaerts, ranked number 32 in the world, said he was "extremely proud" at the selection.
► www.sportvanhetjaar.be

An employee **may not be sacked in connection with the contents of an email**, an industrial tribunal in Brussels has ruled. The case was brought after an employee at Brussels' RTL Belgium was dismissed. The court upheld an earlier ruling than even a professional mailbox is private and may not be viewed by an employer. Any restrictions on privacy must be agreed in advance as part of an employment contract, the tribunal said.

The Spiral, an interactive fiction series produced by Brussels-based Caviar, has been **nominated for a Digital Emmy Award**, the annual television awards in the United States. The pan-European collaboration co-starred Flemish actors Johan Leysen and Lien Van de Kelder and was broadcast in Flanders on Eén last autumn. The winners will be announced in Cannes on 8 April.

The University Hospital of Antwerp (UZA) has been named **Employer of the Year** by the CRF Institute, which has given out the award since 2004. The UZA was praised for its broad range of training and employee-development opportunities, as well as communication with staff. Also last week, the financial team of the Antwerp hospital network ZNA was named Best Financial Team by *CFO Magazine*

Brussels-Capital Region last week launched a **campaign to tackle violence within relationships** among young people, following a survey that revealed that nine out of 10 young people have been the victim of violence within a relationship, while 72% admitted to violent behaviour, including intimidation. "Violence is not to be tolerated in any form and certainly not within a relationship," commented equal opportunities minister Bruno De Lille. "We want to make young people think about what a healthy and respectful relationship consists of." The *I Love You* programme includes a campaign on social media and a theatre production visiting schools.
► www.isditliefde.be

Forty researchers have been admitted from a field of 150 applicants to the new **Youth Academy**, established by the Royal Flemish Academy of Arts and Sciences. The new members will take part in interdisciplinary research projects and will be officially inducted on 29 March by astronaut Frank De Winne, a member of the Royal Academy.

Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters paid tribute to **constitutional expert Robert Senelle, who died last week** at the age of 94. Professor Senelle "was a committed and driven supporter of a strong Flanders region within a federal Belgium and played a crucial role in making that happen," Peeters said.

Maison Antoine, the **celebrated frietkot on Jourdanplein** in Brussels, has been given its own commemorative statue by the Brussels tourist agency VisitBrussels. Antoine, established in 1948, was chosen as the best chip shop in the capital by members of the public from among 19 nominees. The statue represents a giant cone of what *The New York Times* once described as "the best French fries in the world".

Alan Hope

FLANDERS TODAY

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



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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE

Down for the count

It's one thing to make a mistake giving change to a customer; it's quite another when your basic arithmetic error forms part of what's supposed to be "an ode to mathematical perfection". That was the description of "Boundaries of Infinity", a sculpture by Maltese artist Norbert Francis Attard, on which is engraved part of the Fibonacci series. The work was part of last year's Beaufort 04 arts parcours on the Flemish coast and now has a permanent home in front of the town hall in De Panne. The Fibonacci series is a sequence of numbers starting with one, with each following number the sum of the two preceding: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 and so on into infinity. It was popularised by the Italian mathematician Leonardo Pisano Bigollo, commonly known as Fibonacci, in his book *Liber Abaci* (Book of Calculation) published in 1202.

Despite its simplicity, it is of profound significance, as examples of the series can be found everywhere in nature: in the branching of the limbs of trees, in the shape of a snail's shell, in the number of petals on a flower, etc.

It is not to be found, however, in the De Panne sculpture, as alert mathematics teacher Dirk Huylebroeck recently discovered. Attard, who was paid €10,000 for the work by the De Panne city council, made a blunder. His series goes 1,597 ... 2,584 ... 4,541. That last number should be 4,181. De Panne mayor, Ann Vanheste, has demanded that the artist fix the mistake. Attard tried to make the best of it. "It is indeed an artwork about perfection and infinity," he told the VRT. "But it was made by a man, so there's an error in it. That fits in perfectly with what I was trying to say."



Let's get digital

The Flemish Knowledge Centre for Media Literacy is making sure young people know what they are doing online

► continued from page 1

organisations. Smit stands for Studies on Media, Information and Telecommunication and Linc for Lezen, INformatie en Communicatie or Reading, Information and Communication.

Linc will hold a digital week full of multimedia activities in April, and it united the fragmented Flemish media landscape in 2005 with the Vlaams Steunpunt Nieuwe Geletterdheid, or the Flemish Centre for New Literacy, which will now function as a lobby organisation. "Thankfully, the government is now broadening our concepts, while also using our expertise," says Van Hoecke, who is network co-ordinator at Mediawijs.be.

To make the current knowledge, methods and good practices accessible to professionals and the public, Mediawijs.be is preparing an online platform that will be operational from June. This year, the centre is also planning three pilot projects for various target groups. "These subsidised initiatives are meant to inspire people to start up similar projects themselves in the future," explains Van Audenhove.

Digital stories

For professionals working with young people, the non-profit Maks leads the development of a media-literacy toolkit that contains creative methods and best practices. Maks experiments with digital and graphic media to improve the interaction between residents and organisations in the multicultural Kuregem quarter of Brussels. To improve both the area's reputation and the population's self-image, Maks uses methods such as digital storytelling. "They let young people from different backgrounds tell their stories to the camera," explains Annet Daems, Mediawijs.be's knowledge and media co-ordinator. "They get to know each other's culture and provide a nuanced image to the outside world."

A second project will help young media professionals in the creative



Above: The last privacy conference hosted by the Flemish consortium Emsoc (User Empowerment in a Social Media Culture) was filled to capacity; above right: Part of digital education is learning to use the tools that create digital content; below right: It's nothing short of a revolution, says Leo Van Audenhove, director of Mediawijs.be



The primary goal at the moment is setting up an educational programme around advertising both for youngsters in schools and for the advertising industry. "With product placement in TV series and sponsored stories on Facebook, it is becoming more and more difficult to distinguish the commercial purpose," says Daems. "Adults often don't realise it, so young people definitely have problems with it. We also want to explain our judicial and ethical concerns to the advertisers." In charge of this assignment are Antwerp University's Media and ICT in Organisations and Society (Mios) research group and Limburg's Provincial and Catholic university colleges.

Next year, the centre will launch a

on the internet and working with new media."

@work and @play

One of the partners in the Flemish Knowledge Centre for Media Literacy network is the new non-profit organisation Mediaraven. Mediaraven was created last month from a merger between two

making sure they enjoy themselves instead of confronting them with problems," explains Demeulenaere. "Such fun experiences are essential for a positive attitude towards digital media at a later age." Activities include creating digital comics, playing music like a DJ on a computer and working on basic video material.

"You are distinctly disadvantaged if you can't search for practical information on the internet"

organisations: Jeugdwerknet and JAVI.tv. The team of 14, based in an office near Ghent's main train station, helps about 200 volunteers all over Flanders to introduce digital media applications to young people and youth workers.

"We want to show them the positive possibilities that digital media has to offer," says co-ordinator Andy Demeulenaere. "We feel that so much emphasis is put on the dangers, people become too afraid to explore the various opportunities." He uses Facebook as an example: "Almost every young person has an account, but only a small minority take the step to post, for instance, a video. We want to support them to manage this social media more creatively, instead of remaining passive."

Mediaraven organises activities such as media workshops and camps for students of all ages. "For children up to nine years old, we focus on

For older children, in the first year of secondary education, Mediaraven will soon offer I@School, in co-operation with REC Radio Centre and supported by the government of Flanders. Teachers and students in Ghent, Roeselare and Leuven will participate in workshops that teach young people to be media-literate when producing and spreading information. The workshops focus on video, radio, blogging and social media. Youngsters learn to handle tablet computers and mobile applications. Mediaraven also encourages young people to make video reports, around the city of Ghent for instance, and offers facilities where they can experiment with the material. "Many of our participants have gone on to become journalists, but journalistic training is not our main purpose," says Demeulenaere. "What matters to us is the process of getting to know the benefits of new media."

Media vision

With the social organisation Lejo, also from Ghent, Mediaraven has set up the Lejonline project to reach disadvantaged youth and the social workers who support them. The youth workers and young people have to organise a game, assignment, workshop or event revolving around new media. They can work with photos, videos, music, online applications and smartphones.

"These youth generally have access to media features, but lack the knowledge of how to use them inventively," says Demeulenaere. "And youth workers often don't have the expertise to broaden the young people's vision of media. We help them bridge this digital divide." With partners such as Linc, Mediaraven also provides media training to employees in the socio-cultural sector, like librarians and teachers. Notwithstanding its positive approach, Mediaraven doesn't lose sight of the online risks. In 2015, the organisation will launch a campaign to battle cyber-bullying with a year full of activities and events focusing on the issue. To improve their academic background on the subject, Mediaraven is working with the Antwerp research centre Mios. They are complementary partners: "While we possess the digital knowledge they lack, they have more expertise on how to react to cyber-bullying situations and on preventative action," explains Demeulenaere. "Hopefully, the new knowledge centre can initiate many more similar collaborations."

► www.mediawijs.be

"Adults often don't realise when something is commercial advertising, so young people definitely have problems with it"

process and inform them about judicial matters in relation to copyright. The Interdisciplinary Centre for Law and ICT at the University of Leuven will work hand in hand with the Flemish REC Radio Centre to produce short movies and accessible tutorials that teach them these essential skills.

The last pilot project focuses on the opportunities and dangers of communication in social media, gaming and advertising.

call for projects dealing with topical media literacy issues such as cyber-bullying, "sexting", privacy settings and online safety.

Possible target groups are spread over all layers of society, according to Van Audenhove. "Many may think immediately of people living in poverty or the elderly," he says, "but I often notice how some of my students – who should be the experienced 'digital natives' – have trouble with searching information

Death of man in police cell raises questions

Local special support squads are inadequately trained, says Comité P

Alan Hope

Last week saw calls for members of Antwerp's Special Support Squad (BBT) to be suspended and an independent investigation carried out after the VRT programme *Panorama* showed CCTV footage of the death in 2010 of Jonathan Jacob in a police cell. The 26-year-old, under the influence of amphetamines, had been restrained by six policemen in riot gear.

Jacob was refused admittance to a psychiatric clinic because of aggressive behaviour and eventually turned up in a police station in Mortsel. A doctor was called to administer a sedative, as were the members of Antwerp's BBT, one of whom struck Jacob several times, before the team held him down while the injection was given. He died soon after.

Jacob's father Jan has accused the



Footage of the death of Antwerp man Jonathan Jacob was leaked to the press after three years

magistrate in charge of the case, who ordered the doctor to attend, of later changing the report to minimise the prosecutor office's role – an allegation the Antwerp prosecutor has denied. Members of the BBT, meanwhile, are considering filing a complaint

against Jan Jacob for leaking the CCTV images to *Panorama*.

The officer who beat Jacob is appealing a decision by a court to send him for trial; he remains on duty. Last week federal interior minister Joëlle Milquet said it was

“unacceptable” that no-one had been suspended in connection with the incident.

Comité P, the federal committee that oversees the police, said that they had raised concerns about the activities of some independent police units as far back as 2003, with no action being taken. The Antwerp BBT operates as part of the local force but without federal police supervision. In a report following two shooting incidents, the Committee pointed out that the BBT was more likely to resort to violence than other police units and had insufficient training and experience.

“At that time, we said that units like the BBT should be organised federally and not locally,” said spokeswoman Diane Reynders. “That is the only way to ensure that they go about their work in a professional manner.”

Brussels Airport reeling from diamond heist

The federal government will this week begin discussions on security improvements at Brussels Airport following the theft last week by armed robbers of a shipment of diamonds, estimated to be worth €50 million.

The diamonds were aboard a Swiss International Airlines flight about to take off for Zurich. Eight armed men dressed in police-style uniforms drove onto a construction site adjoining the airport and cut through the perimeter fencing. They approached the aircraft and demanded that ground staff hand over the diamonds. No-one was injured, and passengers were not involved. The two vehicles used in the

robbery were later found burned out in Vilvoorde.

Eight security officers were on duty at Zaventem at the time of the robbery, four of whom had been detailed to guard the Croatian president, who was in transit at the time.

“The Antwerp diamond sector could be at a competitive disadvantage to other diamond centres, which are keeping a jealous watch on Antwerp's number one position in the trade,” said Caroline De Wolf, spokeswoman for the Antwerp World Diamond Centre. Antwerp currently handles 80% of the world's rough diamonds and half of all polished stones. The diamonds stolen were mainly destined for India.

Media world mourns loss of Patrick De Witte

Patrick De Witte, known to most readers simply as (pdw), died suddenly last week of heart failure. He was 54. A TV personality, columnist and stand-up comedian, De Witte (*pictured*) recently became editor of *P Magazine*.

De Witte rose to fame on his biting columns in *Humo* magazine and later in Flemish dailies *De Morgen* and *De Standaard*. He both appeared on television and made programmes, bringing his encyclopaedic knowledge of English-speaking comedy to the Comedy Casino series, which gave a new direction to Flemish comedy, shifting from the Dutch-influenced cabaret style to a more Anglophone kind of stand-up.

Among the many tributes from colleagues and admirers was a Twitter message from Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, who described De Witte as “a trenchant media figure, but consistent” and “an example for young journalists”.

TV presenter Marcel Vanthilt told the VRT that “Patrick De Witte had a razor-sharp pen and was very funny, but also hard. His pieces were always entertaining and hit the nail on the head, and that was sometimes painful for people if it was about them, but he was always right. Patrick can never be replaced.”



MIVB to invest €4.4 billion

The Brussels public transport authority MIVB is investing €4.4 billion between now and 2022 in “more and better public transport,” announced mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels.

Among the projects are the automation of metro lines 1 and 5, a new tram route from the North Station to Schaarbeek and Evere and construction of a double tram and metro tunnel under the Grondwetplein in Sint-Gillis. MIVB carries 350 million passengers a year, and that figure is predicted to rise to 400 million by 2016. By 2015, the network should be “greener” with the eventual scrapping of all diesel buses.

“I am convinced we are taking a meaningful step towards the so-called modal shift, where people exchange the car for public transport,” Grouwels said. “This agreement will increase the attraction of the tram, bus and metro so that they become the ideal way to get around in Brussels”.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€405

per square metre of office space in the EU area of Brussels, the 35th most expensive worldwide, according to a survey by Cushman & Wakefield. London leads the list, at €2,137 per square metre

140

years of rivalry came to an end when the two brass bands in Grimbergen, De Cecilianen and De ware vrienden, decided to join forces under a new name, yet to be decided

€970,000

raised from the public by nature conservancy Natuurpunt in 2012, a record amount and 16% more than in 2011. The money is used to buy land to create nature reserves

637

doctorates awarded by the university of Ghent in 2012, a new record. One in four goes to an overseas student, led by Chinese, Iranians and Indians

100,000

record number of visitors to the Concertgebouw in Bruges last year, the centre's 10th anniversary year

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Lonely at the top

Flanders' largest party, N-VA, often feels that it is not being treated well. This underdog attitude sometimes even borders on paranoia. Take a recent interview with a Dutch newspaper in which party president and Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever claimed that it would be impossible for him to meet the Dutch prime minister, as the Flemish liberals, together with their Dutch counterparts, would intervene. The allegation infuriated both Dutch and Flemish politicians.

The incident illustrates N-VA's state of mind, the feeling of constantly being besieged. The truth is that over recent months, N-VA has done little to make – or even keep – friends.

With its attack on the Christian workers' movement (ACW), which N-VA accused of tax evasion, it has hit the Christian-democrats hard. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers are not just disappointed in the ACW, they are also furious about the way it was attacked. Meanwhile, though it is obvious that ACW did not always practice what it preached, actual fraud still has to be proven.

At the same time, N-VA further alienated the left through some Antwerp measures, which on the surface seem incredibly harsh. One is a plan to have foreigners moving into the city pay €250 – officially to cover administration costs, but seen as a deterrent. Another is the decision that the city will no longer pay back the costs of HIV medication to illegal immigrants.

Many politicians shudder at these decisions, but they are popular with at least part of the population. They may even be the foundation for an N-VA victory in 2014 in what is known as “the mother of all elections”.

But if N-VA continues down this road, it may not have any friends left by then, a major problem in a region where coalitions and alliances are essential to the political system.

So far, N-VA has found it relatively easy to find coalition partners, as the large number of town councils they are part of since the 2012 elections proves. In Antwerp, N-VA even managed to dissolve the Stadslijst (city list) into its components, socialists and Christian-democrats, taking the latter on board in the new city government.

However, things have cooled down considerably between CD&V and N-VA. Even Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, usually the first to stress the unity in his government, consisting of CD&V, N-VA and SPA, has recently criticised N-VA's conduct. N-VA would do well to remember that, no matter how successful you are, life is lonely without a friend.

Share a cab?

Collective taxi service has become a favourite among late-night revellers in Brussels

Andy Furniere

You're in Brussels, and you just missed the last night bus. Aside from walking six kilometres home in the freezing cold or paying a taxi €15, what are your options? Previously, none. But now there's Collecto, and it's fulfilling an increasingly important role. Ever more party people and night workers are discovering the advantages of this city-run taxi service, such as fixed prices and flexibility. Last year was the second record year in a row for Collecto, with nearly 116,700 users. The initiative was established in 2008, but it didn't become a big success until reforms in April of 2010, when Brussels mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels decided to reduce the activity of the Noctis night buses from 17 to 11 lines. At the same time, she lowered the prices for Collecto from €8 to €6 per person, while pass holders pay only €5 per person per ride. A promotional campaign made the system more familiar to the public, and the adjustments are paying off. After 2011 saw a record 94,600 users, the number rose again by almost a quarter (23%) last year.

Fixed fare

"More people are realising how user-friendly Collecto is," says Inge Paemen, communication officer at Brussels Mobility. Collecto taxis are available every night between



Check for the checkerboard to find a Collecto taxi

23.00 and 6.00, taking you from 205 departure points across the city straight to your door. The taxis depart every half-hour from a tram or bus stop that's part of the Brussels public transport authority MIVB. Or you can register for the programme and book a taxi by

leaving a message on an answering machine or sending a text message. The taxis belong to private companies, which receive a permit from the mobility department to participate in the Collecto system. Although it can be cheaper to book a private taxi service if you only

have to travel a short distance with others, the fixed price provides a welcome certainty. "All taxi drivers should give you an estimate of the price in advance and have to take the shortest route, but not everyone observes these rules," explains Paemen.

Expanding to the suburbs

Official figures indicate that Friday and Saturday nights are the busiest for Collecto, by a large margin. On Fridays, taxis sometimes ride out more than 600 times, and these two nights account for more than 40% of the total number of users. "This of course is not a surprise – many people need a taxi to get back home after a late night," says Paemen. "But during the week, Collecto proves its usefulness for people who have gone out. The other main target group consists of the many night workers in the city, who can return home comfortably after a busy night." Many of the departure points are in the city centre because that's where nightlife is the most active. "But we are looking to expand the number of departure points," declares Paemen. "This can only be positive for the economic and social life in the communes." All taxis in Brussels are obliged to be black, but you can more easily recognise Collecto taxis by the black-and-yellow checked stripes on their doors. This checkerboard design is also on the sign on the roof, the so-called *spoetnik*. On the body of the taxi, you should also see two yellow irises, symbols of the Brussels-Capital Region.

Book a Collecto taxi on 02 800 36 36

► www.tinyurl.com/collectobrussels

Five hundred years of shared history

Vienna's Kunstkammer is reopening, with a room dedicated to the Hapsburg Empire in Flanders

Katy Desmond



At the Kunstkammer in Vienna, 5,000 objects tell the story of 700 years of European history

After nearly a decade of waiting, planning, collecting and curating, the renovated and expanded Kunstkammer of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna will reopen its doors to the public on 1 March. The collection, made up of 5,000 objects from the 13th century up to 1904, tells the history of Europe through the objects of its greatest rulers. One of the 30 rooms in the 3,000 square-metre exhibition space is sponsored by the Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs, which worked closely with Flemish museums. Its room is filled with articles from the private households of the imperial Hapsburg family during the time they were based largely in Flanders. "Staggeringly beautiful" is how André Hebbelinck, representative of the Flemish government in central Europe, describes the Kunstkammer, which remains one of the most important collections of its kind in the world. From the tiny ring of Charles V to gigantic tapestries and monumental ornaments, the collections are vast and varied, filled with curios of the ages. "It's a strange illustration of how tastes in private collections have evolved over 500 years," says Hebbelinck. The earliest objects in the Kunstkammer are the most obvious

symbolic illustrations of power, the stuff of kings and princes collected to show off the reach and depth of their wealth and influence. Gradually the gold, bronze and stone objects change to natural specimens, such as decorated shells, precious corals and ivory. After that, you begin to see the mark of colonialism, as the collections turn to items from distant civilisations, countries and other exotica. And by the 19th century, the collections become more bombastic exhibits of personal wealth. "It is quite an interesting way to see how the court reacted and communicated with the outside world through the things it collected," says Hebbelinck.

Flanders and the Hapsburgs

The Flemish room is curated as a historical collection, meant to take you back 500 years to when the Hapsburg Empire was effectively ruled from the courts of Margaret of Austria in Mechelen. Great efforts have been made to enhance the educational experience for visitors interested in the history and role of Flanders within the Hapsburg Empire. Instead of panels next to the objects, iPads are attached to the walls, allowing

visitors to get interactive information about the pieces. Initially, information is offered in German and English. However, by the middle of the year, Dutch-speaking visitors will have an extra convenience, as Hebbelinck is working with two schools of translation in Antwerp and Ghent to translate all the texts into Dutch. Apart from sponsorship, the government of Flanders is also partnering with the museum in the longer term and has agreed to offer a new object every year from one of Flanders' museums, related to the collection. The first will be a small panel painting from the Groeninge Museum in Bruges. While few in Flanders will have heard about the Kunstkammer, 1,000 kilometres away in Austria, the collection is causing quite a stir. Tickets for the first few weeks are already sold out. According to Hebbelinck, the Kunstkammer holds great interest for the Austrian public. "While Austria has been a republic for almost 100 years, the remnants of the Hapsburg imperial family still have some kind of magic attached to them."

► www.khm.at

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Banking ▶ KBC**

Flanders' largest financial institution is suing the receivers of the bankrupt US Lehman Brothers bank for some \$91 million (€69 million) in unrealised derivative transactions. In response, lawyers of the failed Wall Street stalwart are claiming \$96 million from KBC.

Beverages ▶ Miko

The Turnhout-based coffee distribution and supplies company has taken over the Australian Corporate Coffee Solutions, specialised in supplying workplaces with equipment and products. Miko already has a majority stake in Coffee Place in Brisbane, which caters to the local hotel and restaurant sector.

Chemicals ▶ Recticel

Brussels-based Recticel, specialised in the manufacture of polyurethane products, has inaugurated a €23 million unit in Bourges, France, to develop its thermal panels production capacity in the fast-growing French market. The company also has dedicated plants in Wevelgem, West Flanders, and Stoke-on-Trent, England.

Chemicals ▶ Taminco

The Ghent-based Taminco group, specialised in the production of amines, is seeking a listing in Wall Street. The company, owned by the New York-based Apollo Global Management, was carved out of Belgium's UCB 10 years ago. It is now valued at €1.2 billion.

Energy ▶ Antargaz

French-based Antargaz, an affiliate of the US UGI energy group, is to launch gas and electricity distribution operations in Flanders later this year. The move is part of the company's decision to expand its operations locally where it already distributes butane and propane bottles.

Financial Markets**▶ Bel20**

The leading Bel20 index of the Brussels stock market has been reshuffled, with the inclusion of Delta Lloyd, the Dutch banking and insurance group, and Thrombogenics, the Leuven-based biotechnology firm. They replace mobile phone operator Mobistar and zinc mining and producing firm Nyrstar.

Property ▶ Allfin

Property developer Allfin, which is investing €150 million to redevelop the Chambon office block in downtown Brussels into a housing, office and hotel complex, will pay an additional €75 million to redevelop the former corporate headquarters of the Solvay group in the Brussels commune of Elsene.

Answers from Africa

Flemish farmers travel to Rwanda to exchange information about cattle farming and veterinary practices

Alan Hope

Last year, an exchange trip brought a dairy farmer and a veterinarian from Mali in western Africa to Flanders, as part of a programme organised by Veterinarians without Borders (DZG), which works to improve animal health and livestock rearing in eight African countries. December saw the second leg of the exchange, in which three organic farmers and a veterinarian from Belgium visited Rwanda.

"The intention is for farmers to swap experiences because they're confronted with similar challenges," explains Josti Gadeyne of DZG. "Belgian farmers have things to learn from the Rwandans, and vice versa. We're confident that the farmers who travelled there can bring back know-how and experience that's relevant to their work here."

Kurt Sannen is an organic livestock farmer, raising cows and sheep on a farm in Diest, Flemish Brabant. He's also chairman of BioForum, which represents bio farmers and growers in Flanders. What struck him most from his visit were the many ways



Kurt Sannen travelled from his organic farm in Diest to share working practices with farmers in Rwanda

We both find it very hard to protect ourselves against things like market fluctuations or climate change. We find it difficult to make a decent income."

Working co-operatively

Sannen was very interested to find out what answers farmers in Rwanda had come up with, "and one of the most important is the

farmers in Flanders, the Rwandan government is putting pressure on its industry to move towards a more intensive, industrialised model, like in Europe.

"In my opinion, that raises some problems," says Sannen. "Monoculture involves crops destined for export, such as coffee, and products for the local market, like corn and rice. You have to ask yourself to what extent that helps towards the goals of making sure the farmers have an income and ensuring that people in the cities have enough food. I think it could be dangerous to take our western model and apply it in a country like Rwanda."

With the advance of intensive industrial agriculture, says Sannen, "farmers are disappearing. In Flanders, barely 2% of the population still farms, and the number goes down by 1,000 every year. Right now there are about 25,000, so you could predict that in 25 to 30 years, there will be no more farmers."

"You might think there would be no similarities, but nothing could be further from the truth"

he could compare the situations of farmers here and there.

"You might think there would be hardly any similarities, but nothing could be further from the truth," he says. "There's a great deal we have in common. We both occupy a very vulnerable position in society, at the bottom of the social ladder.

value of working co-operatively," he says, "which allows them to share a range of structural costs. I found that very inspiring and something that could easily be an answer for us here."

Yet while the small-scale, co-operative model of Rwandan agriculture is an example for bio

The gift of a cow

Livestock veterinarian Koen Van den Noortgate has a practice in the Hasselt area, and his perspective is quite different from that of the farmers with whom he visited Rwanda. "What I learned was that it's very difficult to extrapolate from one situation to the other, which is a little bit the opposite of what the others took away" he said. "The people there waste far too much time on family farming. They're busy all day, and that's one of the disadvantages of their method; it takes up too much time for what it produces."

The Rwandan government has started implementing a plan to give a cow to every farming family working in subsistence agriculture, principally in the hill country. "The government's plan is for every family to have one cow, but they don't even have a pasture to put the cow on because there are no pastures," says Van den Noortgate. "They need every square metre for their own food. One cow needs one hectare of land, more or less, and they just don't have one hectare." Rwandans bring grass to the cows, gathered in the local vicinity. "The cows are kept for their milk and also their prestige," explains Van den Noortgate. In some parts of Rwanda, for instance, cows are traditionally given by a groom's family to the bride's before the marriage. "I told one of the drivers that it would be a better idea for the government to give people 50 rabbits than one cow; you can do a lot more with 50 rabbits. His reaction was: 'Yes, but what woman wants to be traded for 50 rabbits?'"

► www.dierenartsenzondergrenzen.be

Q&A

Managing director Peter Simkens explains the expansion of technology cluster DSP Valley in Leuven**Is DSP Valley the Flemish version of America's Silicon Valley?**

It's absolutely an example that has inspired us, not just in the choice of name. We started 17 years ago as a cluster organisation for micro-electronics companies and knowledge centres in Leuven, with imec as one of the founders. Throughout the years, we spread all over Flanders and also over the borders. We established a second office in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, and also teamed up with clusters from Germany, the United Kingdom and France. We now have about 85 members.

What services do you provide to your members?

Through about 50 annual networking events and seminars, we match different players with a complementary expertise to start innovative co-operation projects.



For instance, we brought Cochlear, an international producer of hearing implants, into contact with a Leuven-based developer of the ultra-low power chips they now use in their products.

You are now looking to attract more product developing companies, is that right?

Yes, we want to stimulate collaborations across the entire value chain. While we used to focus on supporting the developers of innovative ICT components such as chips and sensors, we now want to involve the companies that use this technology to create smart electronic products for the market. This should give the Flemish economy a boost.

Why did the name of the organisation recently change?

We redefined the meaning of the abbreviation DSP from Digital Signal Processing to Designing Smart Products because we want to emphasise the transition towards product development. The "smart" products can be classified in categories like smart health, home,

mobility and machines. Smart health refers to the development of medical equipment with micro-electronics as the key technology. Smart home applications improve the monitoring of energy efficiency in houses, while smart mobility involves, for instance, technology that transmits navigation information from one car to another. Finally, machines are smart when they can communicate the need for maintenance.

Are you a governmental project?

We receive support from the Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurship's GENEES project. GENEES stands for Gezonder door NanoElektronica en Slimme Specialisatie, or "healthier through nano-electronics and smart specialisation". Interview by Andy Furniere

► www.dspvalley.com

Flemish TV channels launch viewing app

Volunteers sought for region-wide testing of app that will let you watch shows later

Alan Hope

A consortium of public and commercial broadcasters last week launched Stieve, a new application that will allow viewers to watch TV programmes up to 36 hours after their scheduled broadcast. The app, currently only available for iPad and iPhone, will be tested by 10,000 volunteers over the next four months.

The consortium includes the Flemish public broadcaster VRT together with commercial media owners SBS Belgium and VMMA, who together account for 10 channels, including Eén, VTM, Canvas and Ketnet/OP12. The app allows users to watch TV programmes as they air and up to 36 hours after broadcast, without recording them.

In the case of deferred programmes, the app also allows viewers to skip advertisements – a possibility also offered by Telenet's digicorder, and the cause of a continuing dispute between the cable company and commercial

broadcasters.

"Co-operation between media houses in Flanders is essential in anticipating developments in an increasingly digital and international media landscape," commented Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten at the launch of the app. "It will also allow more flexibility for the viewer to make the best of the quality that Flemish TV has to offer." Volunteers to test the app were still being invited to take part as *Flanders Today* went to press. Candidates can sign up at the app website.

Meanwhile Telenet last week launched its own app, an extension to its existing Yelo service that allows viewers to watch TV programmes as they air on mobile devices. Yelo does not allow deferred viewing, but does allow programmes recorded on the digicorder to be viewed on phones and tablets.

► <http://stieve.insites.be>



Banks offer mortgage deals for energy savings

Belfius and Triodos banks have signed an agreement with the government of Flanders to offer preferential mortgage loans to people who plan to build energy-saving houses, Flemish housing minister Freya Van den Bossche announced last week.

The preferential loans involve lower interest rates, loans approved for a higher percentage of the total price and the scrapping of administrative costs associated with the loan application.

"An investment in an energy-saving home easily pays for itself over time," Van den Bossche said. "If you do the math, you see that a new energy-saving house has more advantages. However, for many people there is a financial barrier because of the higher investment required, so I am pleased to be able to present two banks that intend to help people over that barrier."

A recent survey of 600 prospective homeowners by construction firm Blavier revealed that one in four had been forced to downsize their original plans because of the difficulty of finding financing. One in five, meanwhile, had to raise money somewhere besides banks to finance their plans to build, renovate or buy a new home. Young people found it particularly difficult, Blavier found, with 28% borrowing from parents, family or friends.

According to figures produced by the housing ministry, an energy-saving house built with a preferential loan can provide savings of up to €8,000 in only five years, and up to €24,400 over a 25-year period. The two banks are expected to be joined by others in time, Van den Bossche said. "Everyone wins from this agreement."



Housing minister Freya Van den Bossche (centre) signing the deal that offers lower interest rates for energy-efficient houses

Mink farm proposal brings out opponents

A proposed mink farm in Bocholt, Limburg province, has sparked a row that has brought the whole question of raising animals for fur back to the headlines. The new farm is the plan of a poultry farmer who wants to covert to mink farming, with a capacity of 42,000 mink. The plan was opposed by local residents, and the municipality decided against issuing a permit. The farmer appealed that decision to the Limburg provincial licensing committee, which returned a negative opinion, leaving it to the provincial deputation to make the final decision.

The provincial committee stated that it was unethical

to raise animals for their fur. The farmer's arguments that mink create less smell than chickens and that demand for fur is growing were dismissed as "irrelevant," according to a spokesperson. Animal rights organisation Gaia is now pressing for a ban on fur-farming in all of Belgium. There are 18 mink farms in the country, all of them in Flanders. Gaia has the support of French-speaking parties; Flemish socialists and Greens have supported a ban in the past. The other main parties have decline to commit.

Government must adapt win-win loan conditions

The government of Flanders will take the necessary steps to bring its policy on the win-win tax credit into line with the demands of the European Commission, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters told parliament last week.

The win-win loan policy was introduced in 2006 to act as a spark to economic recovery. Initially aimed at start-ups but later extended to cover all small businesses, it allows business owners to raise risk capital from family and friends, who then receive a tax benefit for the amount they lend up to €100,000. Since the measure was introduced, some 3,000 companies have made use of it to raise €98 million.

The Commission's objection concerns the clause that make's it necessary for one of the two parties involved – borrower or lender – to be based in Flanders. According to the Commission, this is in breach of the EU's rules on the free movement of capital and discriminates against, for example, non-residents whose income derives from Belgium, or subsidiaries of foreign companies. The Flemish government was given two months to comply or face the European Court of Justice.

The changes required regarding subsidiaries will be made "very soon", Peeters told parliament. If they are not sufficient and a prosecution results, he added, any judgement against the government would not in any case affect win-win loans already entered into. Changing the rules for non-residents will be more difficult, as non-residents' taxation is a matter for the federal government. That discussion will form part of negotiations at a later date on the next round of state reform, he said.

Anonymous CVs "don't work", says minister

A plan by federal labour minister Monica De Coninck to encourage the use of "anonymous CVs" in recruiting in the private sector has been rejected by Flemish labour minister Philippe Muyters (*pictured*). The use of anonymous CVs, which leave out personal information such as age, gender and even the person's name, are intended to counter discrimination at the earliest stage of job applications. "It has been demonstrated by international research that they don't work," Muyters told the Flemish parliament. "Gender, age and educational institutions can all have an undue influence, but if personnel services don't get those details, there isn't much of the CV left over." Muyters also pointed out that Flanders'



employment and training agency, VDAB, already allows job applicants to omit certain types of information from registration forms. However only about 2% of applicants make use of that possibility, he said.

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In dreams there's truth

A voyage of discovery is taking Brussels-based Lionel Bikx around the world

Karen McHugh

Lots of us sacrifice desires and aspirations for stability and security. Our hopes take a backseat; our dreams are put off till another time. But there are those few who choose not to follow the conventional path.

Lionel Bikx had the courage to break the mould. Having left his corporate job in Brussels, the 30-year-old Fleming is now taking on the streets of Cusco, Peru, with a plan for 2013 that will see him cross three continents.

Bikx's blog – and his life – read like a one-man documentary film. Many people take a year out, intending to backpack across Australia or lounge on the beaches of Thailand – but what about contributing to the local society? Bikx's plan is different. Rather than making a comfortable nest-egg for himself, he has decided to spend his savings volunteering as he travels around the world. And he's not your archetypal humanitarian either: In fact, he used to work for a global insurance company. That's what makes his story interesting; he could be any of us.

"Lots of people dream their life; I want to live my dreams, and I have the chance to do so," he says.

Worlds apart

The Brussels native decided to start his journey in Peru after reading a magazine article depicting the terrible conditions in which the street children there live. He arrived in the south-eastern city of Cusco in January. More than 11,000 feet above sea-level, his new city doesn't offer the warmest of welcomes: For the first few days, he battled the dreaded *soroche* – altitude sickness.

To speak to me for this interview, he popped into an internet cafe, as



Taking time to see the stunning nature of Peru

his home connection had been cut. It cost more than €70 a month, too expensive for the Peruvian family he lives with. In their three-bedroom house, all the rooms are rented out. His host mother sleeps behind a wardrobe in the living room. Her visiting guests pay her children's university tuition.

Bikx is volunteering at Qosqo Maki, a shelter set up by a French woman in 1989 to try to help the many children

to scrape a living as street musicians. But they have nowhere to go after their hard days. This is where Qosqo Maki helps, providing dorms where the children can come together, have a meal and get some sleep before work begins again. It's a world away from Flanders.

"We love them"

A typical day for Bikx starts early. Practical chores come first, as the

"I have the impression that it is important to return to the basics at some point in one's life"

living rough on Cusco's streets. These kids have to work to stay alive: shining shoes, selling fruit or trying

shelter must be ready with food and clean beds for later in the day. While it's still quiet, he translates

its website into French and English and works on fundraising and finding more volunteers. As the day progresses, children begin to drop by. He organises activities like football, painting and colouring until they turn in for the night.

Without the shelter, these children would be sleeping outside. Thanks to Qosqo Maki, they can escape their harsh reality for a short while and gather together to play, chat and rest. Bikx sees the role of the volunteer, and the shelter as a whole, as very important in the futures of these children: "We listen to them, we give them attention, we educate them, we play games with them, we love them."

Moving on again

Next month, Bikx is moving on to Sucre in Bolivia to volunteer at a local school. Then he'll spend a



Lionel Bikx with street kids in Cusco

fortnight on Catalina Island off the coast of LA, for a beach conservation project with other international volunteers. Here's where he takes a break, doing Route 66 with a friend from Belgium, before Flemish family values kick in and his mother visits him in New York. An internship at the Belgian Embassy in Canberra, Australia, will finish off his year of travel and work.

"I travel the world to discover, to learn from others, to learn about myself, to transmit my knowledge and my culture to others that are open to it," he explains. "I have the impression that it is important to return to the basics at some point in one's life."

A journey like this is a test, "but if the projects I chose are helping people in need, I'm the happiest person on earth!" he says. He maintains that no job at home could give him a fraction of the experience he's currently acquiring and has found a reason, a meaning, to his work that he never found before. He quotes the French writer Hilaire Belloc: "We wander for distraction, but we travel for fulfilment."

► www.ohmyglobe.jux.com

The extra mile

Charity runners in Brussels needed to help street kids in Africa

Sally Tipper

A charity helping street children in Africa is looking for runners to join its team for the annual Brussels 20km. Retrak, now based in Manchester in the UK, has had strong ties with Flanders since it was founded in 1996 by Katina and Andy Williams. At the time, Katina was a primary school teacher in Brussels, and Andy was the director of youth programmes at St Paul's Anglican Church and a music teacher at the British School of Brussels, both in Tervuren.

The couple visited Uganda in 1995 to take over Tigers FC, a football-based community project for street children in the capital, Kampala, set up by fellow Brits Paul Joynson-Hicks and Matt Winn. Tigers FC became known as the Tigers Club

Project, and later Retrak, with projects in Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania.

Andy and Katina came back to Brussels regularly to report on Retrak's progress, and their Brussels-based support group flourished. This relationship remains strong today, with support from organisations such as St Paul's, the British Embassy, the British School of Brussels, the Scouts and Guides and consultancy FTI Blueprint.

"Half of the support base of Retrak is still in Brussels," says Kathleen Sheridan, Retrak's public fundraising officer. "Supporters have fanned out from there all over the world, though we're now based in the UK. We chose Manchester, a city with a vibrant international community and one



Retrak, founded in Tervuren 16 years ago, has projects in Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania

that found a solution for the care of street children in Victorian times. The volunteers we have in Brussels have always been a fantastic and loyal source of vital fundraising. We probably couldn't count the number of children they've allowed us to help."

The charity's local arm holds two major events a year and a huge part of its fundraising comes from the Brussels 20km, which takes place each May. In the past two years, the team has raised more than €17,000 and hopes to add to this by recruiting more runners for this year's event. There's a €20 registration fee and a fundraising target of €120 per runner.

► www.retrak.org

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Minds over matters

A festival of international authors and thinkers in Antwerp offers much for English speakers

Rebecca Benoot

For its third and biggest edition to date, the literary festival Mind the Book, which alternates between the Vooruit in Ghent and deSingel in Antwerp, finds itself in the port city this year. Dubbed “an international meeting of minds”, the four-day festival aims to broaden readers’ horizons through a series of themes such as the financial crisis, East meets West, sustainability and personal growth, delivered through an eclectic mix of fiction, non-fiction and graphic novels.

Renowned writers question contemporary society through debates, interviews and readings. And, at Mind the Book, the floor is always open for discussion.

Best-selling Dutch author and journalist Arnon Grunberg kicks off the festival on Thursday with a presentation of his new collection of film essays *Buster Keaton licht nooit* (Buster Keaton Never Laughs) and engaging in a philosophical debate with Flemish author Stefan Hertmans.

Grunberg’s book tackles themes like love, capitalism, war and fame through the medium of movies, including *The Consequences of Love* (2004), *The Conversation* (1974) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), all of which will also be screened at the city’s Cinema Zuid during the festival. Grunberg has chosen a few other gems as the curator of the film programme.

Reading revolution

World-famous Russia expert Orlando Figes, meanwhile, will talk to VRT correspondent Jan Balliauw on Saturday about the country’s current state of affairs. Figes is British, so, like a good half of the activities during Mind the Book, this dialogue will be in English. That’s also the case for a talk



One of Israel’s greatest contemporary writers, Nir Baram, talks about literature and Gaza

with professor Jane Davis, founder of England’s The Reader Organisation. Davis has set a “reading revolution” in motion, proving that community can be built through reading and responding to text.

A secondary school drop-out herself, Davis and her organisation have brought together a wide variety of people from single mums to the homeless, who have not only successfully tackled world literature, they’ve connected with each other through her interactive approach, often breaking long-time barriers of social isolation. Davis will discuss this revolutionary concept with Flemish psychiatrist Dirk De Wachter, author of last year’s highly acclaimed book

Borderline Times.

Dutch scientist Louise O Fresco of the University of Amsterdam, meanwhile, will discuss her latest book *Hamburgers in het paradijs* (Hamburgers in Paradise), which deals with the influence of growth and globalisation on the food industry.

Economies of good & evil

Czech professor Tomáš Sedláček, at the festival on Sunday, burst onto the international scene in 2009 with his book that simplifies the global economy to layperson’s terms using one of the world’s oldest philosophies: good and evil. Arguing that the modern economy is the product of

contemporary civilization, his best-selling *Economics of Good and Evil* takes a philosophical and poetic approach to the current crisis instead of looking at the raw mathematical models of human negotiation. Sedláček will discuss his ideas with Dutch *Guardian* correspondent Joris Luyendijk, who is himself making his own anthropological assessment of the financial climate in the City of London.

Flemish psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe, author of the best-selling *Identiteit* (Identity) believes that the pressure to succeed only leads to disorientation and doubt, leaving everyone who isn’t at the top of his or her game discontented and depressed. London-based author Michael Foley will have a one-on-one with Verhaeghe, as he tries to find solutions to the same problem in his book *The Age of Absurdity* (which is now translated into Dutch) and his latest, *Embracing the Ordinary*.

A history of Belgium for everyone

Flemish journalist and former news anchor Geert van Istendael will talk about his latest book, written together with essayist Benno Barnard. *Een geschiedenis van België: voor nieuwsgierige kinderen (en hun ouders)*, or A History of Belgium: For Curious Kids (and Their Parents), goes all the way back to

prehistoric times and leads all the way up to the present, portraying the country’s history like you’ve never seen it before. The result is a book filled with adventure, brave heroes, despicable scoundrels and beautiful illustrations. Published just a few months ago, it’s already on its way to becoming a classic.

As for fiction, readers will not want to miss Sunday when Italian wonder boy Paolo Giordano, author of the critically acclaimed *The Solitude of Prime Numbers*, will be talking about his long-awaited new novel *The Human Body*. Set in a Taliban-occupied part of Afghanistan, the book portrays the inner turmoil of several soldiers.

One of Israel’s greatest literary talents, Nir Baram (*Good People*), is also in deSingel on Sunday to engage in a discussion with Moroccan journalist Hassnae Bouazza about literature, equality and Gaza.

Mind the Book also includes the *boekendokter* (book doctor), who offers literary antidotes for whatever ails you. Not to mention the spectacular Spectra ensemble on Friday night, who, together with Zap Mama singer Angélique Willkie and composer Walter Hus, will accompany the artistry of American graphic novelist Chris Ware. His short story “Jordan Wellington Lint”, about a man whose life is riddled with wrong choices and lost opportunities, will be projected live.

28 FEBRUARY TO 3 MARCH

Mind the Book

deSingel, Desguinlei 25, Antwerp

► www.mindthebook.be

Book book, hooray!

Muntpunt launches a programme of activities in the lead-up to the opening of their new building

Lisa Bradshaw

The new building for Muntpunt has been in the works for years, and it’s set to open this September. The library run by the Flemish government currently housed in the Muntcentrum in Brussels’ city centre is at the core of this state-of-the-art building, which will also be a meeting place for the public, will host a cafe and will serve as a Flemish information centre about Brussels. Essentially, Muntpunt will be one-stop-shopping for all things Flemish in the capital.

Funded by the government of Flanders and the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels, Muntpunt will have three public entrances, with the main entrance on Muntplein. Nearby, you’ll also find the Flemish-Dutch culture house deBuren and the



Flemish-Moroccan culture house Daarkom.

Because they’re now at the six-month mark, the staff of

Muntpunt are kicking off a calendar of activities to draw your attention to the new centre and give you a preview of the kind of programming the centre will offer.

And the first is I Book You, an innovative approach to not just raising awareness about illiteracy but getting those with low literacy involved in reading. “There are an increasing number of Belgians who cannot read or write in what is becoming a more text-based society,” explains Charlotte De Ro of the science and health section of Muntpunt. “I Book You is a declaration of a love for books and reading but also for the ability to read.”

World Book Day is 7 March, and that’s a big day for I Book You, too. The day begins with informal conversation tables in Dutch before

moving into readings targeting those with low literacy skills. A special guest will be a local man in a literacy programme who wrote a book as his skills improved.

Later on that evening is Mag ik u boeken, a speed-dating event where the attraction is to literature. You share your greatest reading moments and favourite books with others, taking home a wealth of information about what people read and why.

I Book You launched on 14 February with *100 Book Covers to Fight Illiteracy*, an exhibition of the art project wherein Antwerp creative studio Beshart requested artists from around the globe to create new, contemporary designs for the covers of *The Observer’s* famous 2003 list of “The 100 Greatest Novels of All Time”. The creative and highly

entertaining result is on display on the outside walls of the new Muntpunt building.

I Book You is going the collection one further: After polling readers of two daily newspapers, they are adding 10 more covers – of the greatest Belgian books of all-time, five in Dutch and five in French. The Dutch-language winners are *De Kapellekensbaan* (*Chapel Road*) by Louis Paul Boon; *Sprakeloos* (Speechless) by Tom Lanoye; *Lijmen/Het Been* (*Soft Soap/The Leg*), a double novel by Willem Elsschot; *Het verdriet van België* (*The Sorrow of Belgium*) by Hugo Claus and the medieval allegories known as *Van den Vos Reynaerde* (About Reynard the Fox). The Belgian covers will be unveiled on 7 March.

► <http://ibookyou.muntpunt.be>



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The Filth Element

Offscreen takes in the trash, with a programme of exploitation and special guest John Waters

Ian Mundell

Cult director John Waters is guest of honour at the Offscreen film festival this year, which means that trash will be king and camp will be queen. Or possibly the other way around, since Waters is nothing if not contrary. With films such as *Pink Flamingos* and *Polyester*, Waters' cinema is a



celebration of the outsider, and the further out, the better. "Basically, all my films are about people who are happy with their lunacy on one side and people who are bitter on the other side, and the good guys always win," he said in a 1988 interview. This explains much of the American director's appeal: His films may be outrageous and disgusting, but they are joyous rather than exploitative. Waters (pictured above) started making films in the mid-1960s, inspired by underground directors such as Kenneth Anger, Andy Warhol and the Kuchar brothers, whose work he had seen in New York City. Back home in the much-less-trendy Baltimore, he put his friends in front of the camera – fellow suburban rejects who aspired to be stars. Foremost among these was Glenn Milstead, whose Jayne Mansfield-inspired drag persona Divine became central to Waters' films. Divine was the perfect Waters star, challenging conventional audiences but also, it is said, raising hackles in the drag scene

of the time.

Waters wanted to annoy the counterculture as much as the establishment, arguing that since it was liberals who came to see his movies, these were the people whose goat you had to get. Hence the glorification of violence, the ultimate hippy taboo, in films such as *Multiple Maniacs* (1970).

The Filthiest Person Alive

Offscreen's retrospective skips this early work and begins with *Pink Flamingos* (1972), the tale of Divine's quest to defend her reputation as The Filthiest Person Alive. All Waters' subsequent features get an outing, including an Oderama screening of *Polyester* (1981), with scratch-and-sniff cards provided to enhance the viewing experience.

Waters' films became less wilfully offensive and more nostalgic with *Hairspray* (1988), the tale of a plump girl who dreams of winning a TV dance contest in the early 1960s. The result was commercial success and acceptance by the establishment, something the director greeted with baffled good grace. Later films such as *Cry-Baby* (1990) and *Pecker* (1998) continued the trend, although his most recent, *A Dirty Shame* (2004), returned to a trashier aesthetic. You can hear Waters' version of events in the one-man show *This Filthy World* at Bozar on 9 March. Topics include his childhood in Baltimore, his fascination with true crime, exploitation films, fashion lunacy, Catholicism, sexual deviancy and why he always admired the Wicked Witch of the West more than Dorothy.

Trash conference

For a more serious view of his place in camp and trash cinema, there

is an academic conference on 8 March. "Camp and trash are related aesthetics," the festival programme argues. "Camp is full of irony, dandified posing and nostalgia, while trash is a celebration of the cheap, offensive and disposable. Both aesthetics collided in the early films of John Waters. He thoroughly understood 'high camp' and appreciated the Hollywood melodramas by Douglas Sirk or musicals such as *The Girl Can't Help It*. But he also wallowed in low camp, which is within spitting distance of trash."

The Girl Can't Help It (starring Jayne Mansfield, if you want to compare and contrast with Divine) appears in the accompanying film programme, along with "classics" such as Russ Meyer's *Supervixens*, Herschell Gordon Lewis' *Blood Feast*, Mike Hodges' *Flash Gordon* and Ed Wood Jr's *Glen or Glenda*. Waters also selects a handful of his personal favourites, such as terrible Tennessee Williams rip-off *Two Moon Junction* and the teasingly titled *Kitten With A Whip*.

Gangster, erotic and horror

Aside from camp and trash, Offscreen this year offers a retrospective of films by veteran horror director José Ramón Larraz, who is due to attend, and a celebration of Japanese gangster, pulp and erotic films produced by Nikkatsu Studio during the 1960s and 1970s.

A programme of short films showcases Flemish talent, including the Oscar-nominated *Death of a Shadow*, starring Matthias Schoenaerts, and the downright weird *Perfect Drug*. American animator Martha Colburn presents a selection of her short films, and The Pastorz will provide a live soundtrack for *Rudderless* by



John Waters' *Female Trouble* is a viewing experience like no other

Igor and Ivan Buharov.

The festival opens with the highly regarded British film *Berberian Sound Studio*, about a sound engineer working on an Italian horror film in the 1970s who finds life and art mixing to a disturbing degree. Director Peter Strickland will attend. Other unreleased films due to screen include *Room 237*, a

documentary about people obsessed with *The Shining*, and weird fiction such as *Errors of the Human Body* and *Sadourni's Butterflies*. Most have English subtitles.

If you can't make it to Brussels, Offscreen will be on tour throughout March, bringing selected films to Cinema Zuid in Antwerp, BUDA in Kortrijk and Japan Square in Ghent.

6-24 MARCH

Cinema Nova

and other venues across Brussels and Flanders

► www.offscreen.be

Creating the cultural connection

Fast Forward revives *Als ik jou*, poetry-theatre for learners of Dutch

Katy Desmond

Beyond the endless prepositions, the inscrutable "de" and "het" dilemmas and the unfathomable "dt" errors, Dutch teacher Peter Schoenaerts noticed that his students were confronting an extra challenge as language learners: a lack of art. "Theatre was too difficult, movies were usually spoken in dialect. There was not much to do for them as far as culture," he explains. In other words, where culture was concerned, students' tongues were all tied up. In 2001, this prompted Schoenaerts to found Fast Forward, a non-profit theatre group that stages performances aimed at students of Dutch, as a way to motivate them, stimulating their learning by getting them more deeply involved in the culture.

The company's latest production, *Als ik jou*, which is touring Flanders now and also makes stops in Spain and Germany, is born out of this same drive to connect Dutch learners with the

culture of the language, this time using poetry. The piece compiles some 25 works by famous Dutch and Flemish writers, taking them off the page and putting them on the stage with the help of performers Schoenaerts, Jorka Decroubele and Brecht Vanmeirhaeghe.

The production, now in its second edition, was created in 2009 to fill what Schoenaerts viewed as a gap in the Dutch-language education syllabus. "Textbooks for students are often very functional, like going shopping or to the doctor. I had this idea to try to do something with literature," he explains.

Als ik jou exposes students to the works of literary giants both old and new, like Annie MG Schmidt and Bart Moeyaert and the late Herman De Coninck and Hugo Claus. The result is an entertaining, moving and educational piece of theatre.

"For people to stay motivated, I think it's important they feel a kind of emotional



From left: Jorka Decroubele, Peter Schoenaerts and Brecht Vanmeirhaeghe in *Als ik jou*

connection to the language," Schoenaerts says. "We make them laugh, and we try to touch them, to make them feel emotional sometimes. It gives them the impression that they do belong, that they do have an understanding of the culture and that language is more than just a functional thing that they need to get the job or buy a loaf of bread." Although some of the poems might be quite

challenging for students just starting out in Dutch, *Als ik jou* is billed as being for Dutch learners of every level. "Part of poetry," explains Schoenaerts, "is not that you understand all the words, but that you hear the feeling, the rhythm. I think they get the message; they get what the poem wants to say even if they don't get every word."

5 MARCH, 20.00

Als ik jou

GC De Lijsterbest
Lijsterbessenbomenlaan 6, Kraainem

for more dates, see website

► www.fast-forward.be

Feeling hot, hot, hot

Museum Night Fever

Tamara Gausi

We may not always be very good at civic cleanliness or efficient administration, but one thing that Brussels does pretty damn well is after-hours entertainment. From the eclectic bar scene to the city's year-round festival calendar, the capital at night can be a sight – and experience – to behold. And one of the highlights is Museum Night Fever. Like a pub lock-in but with more culture, less alcohol, multiple venues and about 14,000 people, this Saturday will see 23 museums open from 19.00 until 1.00. Now in its sixth edition, participating museums range from the traditional (Coudenberg) to the bizarre (Museum of Fantastic Art) to the exquisite (Museum of Musical Instruments). Just how high the temperature rises on your Museum Night is entirely up to you. If you want to use the extra hours to simply catch up on a couple of exhibitions, you can. On the other hand, you could take the Pac-Man approach, gobbling up as many concerts, workshops, circus acts, fashion shows and DJs in MNF's offbeat programme as humanly possible. Of the 100-odd activities on offer, highlights include an evening of live music at BELvue



Museum from Flying Horseman, Imaginary Family and Blackie & the Oohoos, courtesy of trendy Belgian record label Unday; contemporary dance interpretations of Old

Masters at the Museum of Fine Arts; an aerial circus and parcour at Autoworld and a real-life game of Cluedo at the Museum of the City of Brussels. And if the weather fails to match

the heat generated by all this fun, don't forget to pick up a free mug of hot chocolate at the Museum of the National Bank of Belgium. For the first time in MNF history, visual impaired visitors will be accompanied by trained French and Dutch language guides using audio-description techniques. To book one, simply email info@brusselsmuseums.be as early as possible. If this seems like a lot to fit into one night, it is. But MNF project leader Pieter Van der Gheynst advises visitors to just go with the flow. "You don't have to register for any of the events because for us it is important that people can move freely from one museum to another and pop in and out as they want. The activities usually don't take hours because we want people to be able to see as much as they can." This go-with-the-flow approach is further aided by the free MIVB shuttle buses for all Museum Night Fever ticket holders (€12 on the night, €8 in advance). And for those of you who are just getting started at 1.00, the party continues at Brussels Event Brewery where Bulex is hosting six rooms of electro, dubstep, Balkan beats and a very special DJ set from dEUS frontman Tom Barman.

2 March, 19.00-1.00 | Across Brussels | www.museumnightfever.be

ACTIVITY

Glad to Meet You

International organisations have been attracting expats in droves for decades, and the capital's eastern extremities, comfortably close to the European district and NATO, are particularly popular nesting grounds for migrating white-collar workers. Three Flemish community centres – in Oudergem, Watermaal-Bosvoorde and Sint-Pieters-Woluwe – have joined forces to reach out to newcomers with Glad to Meet You, a community programme intended for an international audience. "Expats are an important part of Brussels, especially in these communes," explains culture centre staffer Liesbeth Verhulst, "so we want to include the expat community in our socio-cultural programme." Adult fitness and leisure courses include pilates, zumba and dabke Palestinian dance. For the kids, there's Zumba and Brazilian Capoeira. Cultural activities include guided tours and beer tastings (led by no less than Belgian Brewers director Sven Gatz, pictured). **Georgio Valentino**



Until June | <http://dendam.vgc.be>

MORE ACTIVITIES THIS WEEK

Brussels

Poelaert Square Tour: Brussels historian and artist Roel Jacobs leads this tour of the area on and around Poelaert Square, including the hill-top Palace of Justice and its expansive view over the Marollen neighbourhood. Part of Broodje Brussel
MAR 4 12.30-13.30 at Hof van Merode, Poelaertplein
www.broodjebrussel.be

Ghent

Vlaamse Opera Tour: Monthly guided tour of the majestic opera house with its surprising nooks and impressive paintings, interspersed with juicy anecdotes and historical facts
Until JUN 1 12.00-14.00 Vlaamse Opera, Schouwburgstraat 3
www.vlaamseopera.be

SPECIAL EVENT

GET TICKETS NOW

Hungarian Ball

For almost 20 years the annual Hungarian Ball has promoted ties between Belgium and Hungary. It's also one of the most prestigious events on Brussels' social calendar. And we mean social with a capital S. The event is put on by the Hungarian president János Áder himself, in collaboration with European Council president (and former Belgian PM) Herman Van Rompuy. This year's guest of honour is the Hungarian border town of Fertőd, home to the über-sumptuous Rococo palace Esterháza. The event is held in one of the biggest ballrooms in Brussels. The dress code is "long evening dress and black tie". This is a grand ball in the old-school mould, waltz and all. It also has a philanthropic purpose: The charity arcFAM uses proceeds to help the disadvantaged in Belgium and Hungary. More than €5,000 was raised last year. **GV**



20 April, 19.00 | Concert Noble, Brussels | www.arcfam.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS

Antwerp

Gala Nocturna: Get your tickets and plan your costume now for this annual gala ball inside a Baroque church; this year's theme is "The Pope's Daughter", a revival of the Vatican Renaissance
MAR 30 19.30 at Augustinus Church, Kammenstraat 81
www.gala-nocturna.com

Boombal: Evening of folk music and dance with live music by Flemish folk groups Trio Dhoore and Naragonia
MAR 1 20.00 at CC Deurne, Frans Messingstraat 36
www.boombal.be

VISUAL ARTS

Thomas Bayrle: All-in-One

Brussels arts centre Wiels regularly promotes artists who have fallen through the cracks of art history, those who may have been a bit too bold and a bit too adventurous in a contemporary milieu whose avowed dedication to these values is rather overstated (there, I said it). Thomas Bayrle is one such figure. Active since the 1960s, the now 75-year-old German artist has developed a large body of work, which, despite extending into various media, remains consistently Bayrlean. His collages, paintings, sculptures, film and books are all inquiries into mass culture, often informed by the Pop, Seriality and Media Art practices that he helped pioneer. This is a retrospective that ranges from his earliest painted machines to his latest engine installations, but it's organised thematically rather than chronologically. Curator Devrim Bayar wants above all to emphasise Bayrle's limitless curiosity about the strange and often absurd world of the late 20th century. **GV**



Until 12 May | Wiels, Brussels

► www.wiels.org

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Neo Rauch - The Obsession of the Demiurge: Selected works by the German artist and key pioneer of the Neue Leipziger Schule, best known for his puzzling, seemingly narrative paintings
Until MAY 19 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

► www.bozar.be

Hasselt

Space Odyssey 2.0: The result of collaborative DIY practices where science and fiction meet, including examples of how outer space continues to inspire artists, scientists and filmmakers
Until MAY 19 at Z33, Zuivelmarkt 33

► www.z33.be

Leuven

Geert Gooris: Works by the Flemish photographer, featuring a collection of architectural and utopian landscapes denoting a fundamental tension between humans and nature
Until MAY 19 at Museum M, Vanderkelenstraat 28

► www.mleuven.be

CONCERT

The Syrian Cry

Last December, Koen Kohlbacher (*pictured*), frontman of Flemish folk-rock group Birds That Change Colour, had seen too many news reports about the brutal Syrian civil war. Shocked and saddened by the loss of civilian life, he reached for his guitar and wrote a protest song. Fellow musicians Niels Hendrix and Stijn Boels collaborated in the studio on "The Syrian Cry", and a YouTube hit was born. Indeed, the song – which circulated with the tag line: "How can we stop a war we forgot about?" – caused such a stir that Antwerp theatre Toneelhuis and record label Waste My Records have organised a concert featuring Kohlbacher's Birds That Change Colours, Hendrix's Fence and Boels' Bed Rugs, as well as several special guests. Proceeds from both the concert and the digital download of "The Syrian Cry" go directly to hospitals in Aleppo, the country's largest city. **GV**



5 March, 20.00 | Bourla, Antwerp | ► www.thesyriancry.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Bulgarian concert: Concert to benefit the Association Femme d'Europe's humanitarian aid projects, featuring soloists on piano, violin and cello performing arrangements by Brahms, Shostakovich and more

FEB 27 19.30 at Brussels Royal Conservatory, Regentschapstraat 30

► www.assocfemmesdeurope.org

La nouba flamenco: Sergio Gómez combines flamenco tradition with jazz, tango, classical and even pop

MAR 1 20.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23

► www.bozar.be

Dranouter (West Flanders)

Dranouter Rootsally: Music festival and preliminary round in the search for new talent from the folk, roots and traditional music genre

MAR 1 20.00 at Muziekcentrum Dranouter, Dikkebusstraat 234

► www.muziekcentrumdranouter.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Katy Desmond

Bonnefooi

Steenstraat 8, Brussels

Bonnefooi is not yet a Brussels institution, but it is likely to be one day. Along the lines of L'Archiduc and Goupil le Fol, this bar has the look, feel and sounds of a legend.

The beers are good, the cocktails not too expensive. If you are a student, you can even drink for €1 before 21.00. But what one really goes to Bonnefooi for is the music.

Situated right across from the side entrance to Ancienne Belgique on Brussels' self-proclaimed "music street", the bar features four to five acts a week – enough funk, soul, electro and jazz to sooth almost any soul. The acts are varied and consistently high quality, so if you can squeeze in a space for yourself, you can groove the night away beneath its gaudy chandeliers and a sparkling, teal sky.

But Bonnefooi is a bar of many faces. At 19.00 a younger, studenty crowd drops in for a cheap *pintje*. Around 20.00, it gets more mixed as others stop by for a pre-concert cocktail and some tapas. By 23.00, it's standing room only as the music starts going and people straggle in, post-concert, from across the street. But it is in the latest hours of the



night that this bar really finds its groove. With curtains drawn and the DJ still going, you can talk, dance and drink into the wee hours, and then walk out into the morning sunshine.

One of the best parts about Bonnefooi is that it is truly Brussels. From its name, which means "by chance" in the city's dialect, to the clientele, it is neither here nor there when it comes to the Flemish-

French-English nexus of party-going in the city centre. It also manages to mix Brussels' wilder, louder side and active music scene with its inherent cosiness. Whether it is lounging around on the sofas upstairs, shouting at the bar or dancing on the tables, Bonnefooi says: "Come in, I am here to be used."

► www.bonnefooi.be

BITE

Robyn Boyle

't Brigandje ★★★☆

Beech and oak logs fuel the fire in the kitchen of an authentic 250-year-old farmhouse in the middle of the East Flemish countryside. They add a unique smoky aroma to the meat at this popular grill restaurant, a wonderful smell that my dining companions and I can already detect from the car park.

We follow our noses inside to find an over-the-top cosy dining room with rustic furniture, low-hanging wood beams, wood-burning stoves and even a moose antler chandelier. It's a full house on this Sunday evening, but owners Nathalka and Misko are able to squeeze us in. (If you want to be sure of getting one of the choice spots with a view of the grill, reserve and request it.) The couple has been running 't Brigandje for several years, while it has been a restaurant since the 1980s.

Our first priority is a round of St Bernardus Prior 8, a dark, malty dubbel from the brewery in West Flanders. The menu lists a tempting array of grilled specialties like beef brochette, lamb chops and salmon fillet, but we quickly decide on one order of the infamously enormous spareribs and two orders of the rib eye.

Each of us picks a different sauce to go with



the meat: mushroom, pepper and béarnaise. The meal comes with an optional salad, which is fresh and crisp, much like the accompanying hand-cut fries with mayo. The rack of ribs makes a grand entrance

when plunked onto the table before my friend, whose eyes are like saucers. He sets to sawing them apart straight away and then gnaws the meat from the bones one rib at a time. They are tasty and well-seasoned,

albeit a bit on the dry side.

The rib eye is the opposite of dry, thanks to its fatty trim and succulent rosy centre. We actually miss some seared crispiness; perhaps the coals were already starting to glow less hot this late in the evening. But there is no question about the quality of the meat on offer here, nor the generosity of the chef.

We all have more than enough to eat and decide to end the night with a round of pils. When the bill comes, we owe about €26 per person, a not too expensive amount when you take into account the drinks, big portions and warm, personal service.

► www.brigandje.be

📍 Urselweg 100, Maldegem; 050.71.34.04

🕒 Wed-Sat 18.00-22.00; Sun 12.00-18.00

💶 Mains: €15-€25

📖 Charming farmhouse grill restaurant specialising in lots of meat for little money

TALKING DUTCH

Philip Ebels

Talking food

There aren't many people of whom I would call myself a fan, but Jeroen Meus is one of them. "*De culinaire lieveling van heel Vlaanderen*," according to (his employer) VRT, the culinary favourite of all of Flanders. The celebrity chef has not only saved my life on more than one occasion when I was expected to make dinner, he has also taught me how to make – and love – *stoofvlees met friet*, one of Flanders' most traditional dishes. So what you do is you let a couple of lesser-used pieces of beef simmer for a long, long time in a mixture of beer (of course), onion, thyme, bay leaves, *zout en peper* (salt and pepper) – and kind of whatever else you fancy. The result is a dark, creamy, and totally delicious stew with bits of beef that seem to fall apart just by looking at them. Go to your nearest *frietkot*. They know.

Jeroen (not pronounced jer-own, but jer-oon) is moving his *keuken*, kitchen, where he shoots the daily TV show *Dagelijkse kost*, daily grub, (broadcast from Monday to Friday at 00.20 and 18.15 on Eén). He's moving from the small town of Driest, on the border of Flemish Brabant and Limburg, to the countryside somewhere in Flemish Brabant, *met een achtertuin vol verse kruiden en groenten*, with a back garden full of fresh herbs and veggies.

His cosy kitchen, stuffed full of ingredients, with open cupboards and blue-and-white tiles, is famous among Flanders' viewing public. "Doet een beetje pijn toch, mijn keukentje verlaten," he told newspaper *De Standaard*. "It does hurt a little, leaving my little kitchen."

The show, I find, is a great



From left: the beery *stoofvlees*, the creamy *stoemp* and the inimitable Jeroen Meus

introduction to Flemish cuisine. The classics, of course, are *mosselen-friet*, mussels and fries (the fact that someone at some point was the first to think 'hey, let's eat that,' still puzzles me), *waterzooi*, a creamy fish – or often chicken – stew from Ghent and *stoemp*, my personal favourite. *Stoemp* is a one-pan wonder of *aardappelpurée*, mashed potatoes, *groenten*, veggies, sometimes *vlees*, meat and, if you want – and in my case definitely – *jus* (pronounced *zjuu*, like in French), gravy. Lots of gravy. But Jeroen also does "*vegetarisch*,

exotisch of gewoon iets helemaal anders," according to the show's website. He also does vegetarian (which, apparently, is not natively Flemish), exotic or just something completely different. Jeroen, Flanders' very own Jamie Oliver, may be your best chance at learning Dutch while learning how to cook. His language, like that of Jamie's, is slightly streetwise but very understandable and, possibly more than that of your language teacher, like how people actually talk.

► www.een.be/programmas/dagelijkse-kost

The last word...

Pony express

"Even though it's only a matter of 2% and food safety is absolutely not at risk, we still find this unacceptable." Andreas Welsch of Flemish frozen-food company Iglo, which has withdrawn ready-made meals from shelves after traces of horsemeat were found

Attire for hire

"You can send the jeans back after a year, and you get your €20 deposit back. If you're fed up with them, you can switch to another model and keep on paying your €5 a month." Dutch entrepreneur Bert van Son has started a branch of his jeans rental business, Mud Jeans, in Ghent

Language barrier

"We asked him to work on his comprehensibility because there were quite a few people who were having problems understanding." Broadcaster VTM has asked Dutch TV host Paul De Leeuw to speak more slowly and clearly for his Flemish viewers

New arrival

"Hi everyone, we have some exciting news to tell you... Jada is going to be a big sister :-)! Xxx Kim, Brian and Jada" Retired Flemish tennis star Kim Clijsters is expecting her second child, she announced on Twitter

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

International Women's Day is 8 March, and next week, we've got the top 10 list of Flanders' most powerful women. From politicians to CEOs to human rights advocates, we'll tell you who's got the world's ear in Flanders

Science

The recent Zorgidee event found doctors, scientists and businesspeople gathering at UHasselt to marvel over 20 innovative products developed for the medical sector. How would you like a walking stick with a built-in GPS? To be reminded by an impulse to your skin to take your medication? Get your kid to learn time management by playing the HealSeeker computer game? We'll tell you what was presented and when you can expect to be using it

Arts

He's photographed Alfred Hitchcock at Cannes, drunk youth in Antwerp and Paul McCartney jumping on a trampoline. His photographs of famous Flemings over the last five decades is like a history book of the region. And that's why the work of Herman Selleslags makes up the very first exhibition in the new Dutch-language reading room in Prague. We talk to the famous photographer