

Vanackere resigns

An "atmosphere of distrust keeps me from my work," said the former federal finance minister

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Down in history

Traipse across a candle-lit countryside path while learning about the Flanders of yore during the Night of History

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Lend them your ears

Some of the best authors in the world are coming to Brussels for the Passa Porta Festival

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Out of the streets

Urban dance and music in Antwerp are being elevated to a fine art. But is street culture in a studio really the same thing?

Linda A Thompson

Urban or street arts used to have a literal meaning. Graffiti, hip-hop, breakdancing, rap – arts that were created in the streets by those without access to (or interest in) theatres and culture houses. Rather late in the game, Flanders is only just starting to embrace urban culture, and Antwerp is the run-away leader, taking the arts of the street into the Flemish Opera, the Toneelhuis and the Night of the Proms. This has given many young people in the city a serious self-esteem boost, but mainstreaming a cultural phenomenon is not without its risks.

Three years ago, Sihame El Kaouakibi resolved to take street culture off the streets. With an initial grant of €20,000 from Antwerp city council, she organised a series of dirt-cheap summer dance workshops that eventually grew into Let's Go Urban. The organisation now has, among other achievements, a professional dance crew that has gone from small, local gigs to full-blown productions at the Flemish Opera and Night of the Proms. Let's Go Urban offers lessons in more than 30 disciplines to over 1,000 members – a tenfold increase from the first year. El Kaouakibi also established an urban talent agency and joined hands with Antwerp music centre Trix to offer a year-long

training programme with classes in songwriting, recording techniques and the ins and outs of the music industry. El Kaouakibi has, in essence, spread the urban gospel. "She has been an ambassador for the whole scene," says Leen Verbist, the city's former youth and child services alderwoman, who helped El Kaouakibi secure her initial grant. "She has brought the urban scene into the mainstream." In interviews with reporters, in meetings with local officials, in lectures abroad, El Kaouakibi emphasises time and again that urban culture is more than just MTV-style hip-hop. Instead, she says, it encompasses everything from rope-skipping, graffiti and skating to hip-hop and spoken word. The 26-year-

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Koen Geens



Koen Geens was the right man in the right place at the right time to take over from federal finance minister Steven Vanackere, who took the political world by surprise last week by resigning from his post (*see News, p5*). For others, the arrival of Geens in the very centre of federal politics is a further sign that the 2014 elections will be dominated on the CD&V side by Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters.

Koenraad Frans Julia Geens was born in Brasschaat, Antwerp province, in 1958 and studied at the University of Leuven, where he graduated with a law degree and later a doctorate. He went on to study at Harvard Law School before returning to Leuven to lecture in company and financial law.

When Peeters became minister-president of Flanders in 2007, he brought Geens with him as his advisor on social and economic policy, which he remained until 2009. During that period, the government was called in time after time to bail out banks hit by the global financial crisis. Peeters installed him as a director of the newly nationalised BNP Paribas Fortis, and Geens continues to sit on the board of Flanders in Action,

a project extremely close to the heart of the minister-president. Belgium sometimes plucks its ministers from the outside world rather than the benches of the chamber: Peeters himself became minister-president without a single vote being cast. He came into the job from being director-general of the business organisation Unizo. So it's not particularly remarkable that someone with little political experience should move straight from academe to the second most important position in the federal government.

The job of finding a replacement for Vanackere fell to CD&V president Wouter Beke, but his options were not limitless: Peeters made it clear that the Flemish ministers are in for the long haul and so not available. "We needed someone who was ready to move in immediately," Beke explained. Vanackere resigned over the controversy surrounding tax-saving initiatives by Christian workers' movement ACW and its special deal with Belfius bank. Geens is not completely free of controversy himself; he was a partner in the law office that represents the ACW. He has since left the firm.

News in brief

The Flemish employment and training agency VDAB has announced that it is **closing 43 job centres** covering 86 municipalities across the region. "We will be offering our services to local authorities, job-seekers and employers in a different way," a spokesperson said. "Our emphasis will continue to be for the people who need our services the most."

A court in Antwerp last week committed 105 diamond traders for trial in one of the **largest fraud cases Flanders has ever seen**. The case alleges that courier company Monstre Worldwide Services offered four different fraudulent methods to allow diamond dealers to escape paying taxes, adding up to about €400 million in total.

Two Flemish candidates have been selected for this year's **Queen Elisabeth Competition** for piano, which takes place in May. A record number of 283 applications were received, and the 75 successful candidates comprise 19 nationalities. Representing Belgium are Stephanie Proot from Ghent, who also competed in 2010, and Yannick Van de Velde from Antwerp.

► www.koningin-elisabethwedstrijd.be

The first **anniversary of the bus tragedy** in Switzerland in which 22 children from Flemish schools died will be marked by a mass and the unveiling of a monument on 13 March in Heverlee, a district of Leuven. Seven children and two members of staff among the dead came from the Sint-Lambertus school in Heverlee, with the others from the 't Stekske school in Lommel, Limburg province. Both coach drivers also died in the crash in a tunnel in Sierre, as the sixth-year primary schoolchildren returned from a skiing holiday.

Belgium has risen to 18th place in

a list of 140 countries according to the **competitiveness of their tourism industries**. The annual rankings are produced by the World Economic Forum, and place Switzerland, Germany and Austria in the top three places. Last year's report put Belgium in 23rd place. The survey looks at the regulatory framework, business infrastructure, education and cultural resources, as they relate to the tourism and travel industry. Belgium scored particularly high for air and ground transport infrastructure and for health and hygiene.

► www.weforum.org

Three **commuter car parks** on the edge of the Brussels-Capital Region will get 400 extra spaces in total and be open only to holders of Mobib public transport passes, mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels said. Parking lots at Ceria, Roodebeek and Stalle will be extended to a total of 1,525 places and entry gates installed. Another car park at Delta will be converted. The changes are due to be in place by mid-2014.

Two members of the board of the federal nuclear regulator FANC have strongly **criticised the appointment of Jan Bens** as the new director of the agency. According to the two executives – one of whom has started a case before the Council of State to have the nomination overturned – Bens, who took office in January, is not fit to lead the regulator as for many years he was employed by Electrabel and managed the Doel nuclear reactors from 2004 to 2007.

The Brussels-Capital Region has announced the names of the 21 members of its new **Council for Equality between Women and Men**, which will act as a consultative body for the regional government. The council includes representatives from trade unions, business, the non-profit sector and academics.

"The Council is a major step forward for the region," commented Bruno De Lille, secretary of state for equal opportunities. "Equal treatment of women and men is not only something to be considered when it's International Women's Day. Policymakers need to work every day on making Brussels a region where everyone has equality of opportunity."

More than 1,000 people attended the funeral in Steenhuffel, Flemish Brabant, of Jan Sarens, the managing director of the Sarens Group, which specialises in giant cranes. Sarens, 59, was **shot last month in the Mexican resort of Acapulco**. Police investigating the murder believe it may have a connection with a business rival.

The Free University of Brussels (VUB) is awarding **five honorary doctorates** in 2013. The most prominent name on the list is former tennis champion Kim Clijsters. Other recipients are Cecilia Jarlskog, a Swedish particle physicist at the University of Lund; Londa Schiebinger, a science historian who specialises in the relationship of gender and science at Stanford University; Carol Gilligan of New York University, a social psychologist and ethicist; and jurist Fatou Bensouda, formerly minister of justice in Gambia and now a prosecutor at the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

A new **carpark for lorries** along the E40 motorway at Wetteren has been a flop, as truckers refuse to pay the fee of €1.20 an hour up to a maximum of €15 a night. "We will now have to look to see what we can change, although it is the private owners who ultimately decide," commented Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits, who opened the lot for 80 trucks four months ago.

FLANDERS TODAY

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Before they hatch

The seagull, let's be honest, is in dire need of an image makeover. Rather than the magnificent seabird soaring over the crashing ocean waves, our image tends to be of an oversized avian scavenger with disgraceful toilet habits who devastates bin bags and local workers with equal abandon.

Back in July last year, we reported that the seagulls of Zeebrugge, infuriated at the shortage of tourists bearing food as a result of the poor summer, started attacking rail workers, even sending one man to hospital.

Now, the two municipalities adjoining Zeebrugge – Blankenberge and Knokke-Heist – have repeated previous demands to be allowed to take measures to combat aggressive seagulls. The big problem municipal authorities

face is that seagulls are a protected species, and any measure to restrict their numbers or their behaviour has to be approved by the government's Nature and Woodland Agency.

Blankenberge's main pests are the herring gull (*Larus argentatus*) and the black-backed gull (*Larus marinus*), the largest of all the gulls. If it gets permission, the council is ready: the fire service will remove nests, eggs will be pricked or shaken to prevent them hatching, and various scare tactics will be introduced, especially along the boardwalk.

Another idea is the plan proposed last year in Ostend by alderwoman Martine Lesaffre to moor great bins of food offshore where the gulls can feed. Seagulls are basically opportunists and will hunt or steal



food as the occasion arises, eating the young of other birds, feeding on garbage or even helping themselves to what's on the snack tables of tourists. If the food is delivered to them offshore, Lesaffre reasoned, the birds will no longer have any reason to plague the seafront. On the other hand, it might just make them bigger, nastier and more numerous. Who's to say?

Out of the streets

Antwerp's designation as European Youth Capital brought all things urban to the fore

► continued from page 1

old has since received accolades from Flemish education minister Pascal Smet and even King Albert for the place that Let's Go Urban holds as a tool of youth empowerment. Last November, Antwerp coalition negotiations revealed that all three governing parties wanted to pay more attention to urban culture – a first. According to Patrick N'Siala Kiese, former director of the anti-discrimination organisation Kif Kif, Flemish officials had long shown an interest in urban culture but failed to understand what it really meant. "Then someone like Sihame comes along and gives it a very concrete definition," he says. "She answered that need."

Selling out urban?

In the slipstream of Let's Go Urban, Antwerp street culture as a whole has gained visibility and popularity as cultural and youth organisations began recognising the urban scene as an art form. "There's a certain awareness now in Antwerp's cultural venues; they know that this hip-hop thing, this urban thing, is something that is part of youth culture," says Tim Dalle, co-founder and previous director of the Antwerp-based pioneering hip-hop label Eigen Makelij. "They don't necessarily understand it, but what they do know is that it's a way to reach out to them."

This urban renaissance is seeing some Antwerp groups that have toiled away in the shadows for years scratching their heads at the sudden spotlight. Together with a friend, Alexander Dziri has been staging the international breakdance competition Raw Circles since 2010. After the last edition just a few weeks ago, which drew more than 500 dancers from across the world, he fielded the same question from reporters over and over: Why had they never heard of Raw Circles? The answer is pretty simple: "We haven't made a lot of contacts with the corporate world or press people," says Dziri. "We're more into performing." That's an issue at the heart of urban arts: It's been brought into the mainstream, but does it belong there?

Elisabeth Severino Fernandes, who is credited with single-handedly bringing slam poetry to Antwerp, has mixed feelings. "Right now, we're hip because we're urban," she says, "but I also see it like, 'OK, right now, we have opportunities'."

She's hoping to expand the open mic sessions she has been organising for more than a year at cocktail bar Mama Matrea (pictured on cover) but stresses that structure isn't the end-all, be-all; poetic expression in a space free of judgment is. "They want to classify us as part of the urban scene, sure, whatever," she says. "What's 'urban' anyway? I think it surpasses that. I call it expression."

From the street to the studio

Questions about authenticity have also arisen as a street culture that is no longer "street" struggles to adapt. The majority of kids dancing in Antwerp today are not and have never have been street dancers, says Dziri. When the 24-year-old was in his teens, there were no dance studios, no "battles", no platforms for breakdancers to showcase their skills. Antwerp Central Station was a favourite hangout, but more often than not they would be chased away by police. "That period existed, and it was fun, but that period is over," he says.

But, according to Dziri, those who claim that if you're not from the streets, then you can't breakdance, are misguided. "I'm not going to say: 'You're not a dancer because you're from Brasschaat,'" he says, referring to one of Antwerp's wealthiest areas. "That's an ignorant mentality, and we need to get away from that." Every now and then, some of the dancers with whom Dziri grew up will suggest heading out to the railway station to practise. When that happens, he laughs. He doesn't get it. Why trade a heated studio with mats, vinyl flooring and mirrors for a cold, dirty, concrete hall where passers-by shoot weird looks at you? "For me, that time is over; I don't have to be that kind of guy anymore," he says. In his experience, when you brand something as "street", people stop listening.

The starting gate: EYC 2011

Antwerp's designation as European Youth Capital in 2011 played a crucial role in propelling urban arts into the mainstream. Inspired by Let's Go Urban's success, various cultural organisations programmed urban culture that year, hoping to woo young people with platforms for them to discover, develop and showcase their talents in a way that would have been unimaginable just a couple of years earlier.

Toneelhuis, one of Antwerp's foremost theatres, hosted both rap and hip-hop dance performances. "They had never programmed any urban art, so that was like a statement," says Femke Vanpoucke. A programmer at the city's Arenbergsschouwburg, she helped put together the 2011 edition of the Mestizo Arts Festival, which focused squarely on urban culture. "Because Antwerp was the European Youth Capital, we decided it was important to appeal to all the young people of the city, not just the arty-farty young people," she says.

The hundreds of youth capital events and the crowds they drew amazed local administrators and cultural organisers, says Kiese. "Some people's eyes were opened: 'Oh, this is something that really exists here.'"

That is why to say that Antwerp's urban scene only really developed in the last two years is bending the truth. "These are people who have been fighting for recognition for 10 years," he says, referring to efforts behind initiatives such as Let's Go Urban and Eigen Makelij. "These are people who then got that recognition because the administration had the funds to give it to them."

Bandwagon vs authenticity

After 2011, it seemed like everyone – from the tiniest cultural centre to mammoth companies – latched on to all things 'urban'. In the subsequent flurry of youth-oriented events and initiatives it became hard to distinguish between those that offered added value and those that amounted to brand-building one-offs. In just the last 12 months, the following festivals have all taken place in Antwerp: Out of the Box ("international urban dance congress"), the Urban Art Festival ("the most complete urban art festival in Belgium"), Street Kicks ("the biggest extreme sports and urban culture festival in the Benelux") and Productt ("a platform for different forms of urban culture"). Even Palm Brewery jumped on the bandwagon with an "urban crafts" campaign. "A whole lot of money is being thrown at the urban community," says Dalle. "That's not a bad thing, but it's a bad thing when they throw it at people who don't have any leverage in the community. Because then you don't create a supportive, long-term environment."



From top: Raw Circles, one of the best breakdance competitions in the world; performance that came out of Arenberg's arts lab Studio Urbanization at last year's Mestizo Arts Festival; Sihame El Kaouakibi, founder of Let's Go Urban

Despite El Kaouakibi's awareness-raising and the advances Antwerp's urban scene has made, stereotypes about hip-hop and its offshoots still abound. That became starkly evident two months ago when, in a controversial op-ed in *De Standaard*, newly elected Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever wrote off contemporary rap for what he saw as its celebration of promiscuity, materialism and crime. In the cultural world, too, urban arts are still struggling to move beyond a fad and into respectability. "There's still a lot of work to do," says Vanpoucke. "Not every organisation is open-minded enough at this moment to see what the art of the urban arts scene is about." According to the Arenberg

programmer, some of those misgivings are understandable. "There is a lot of bad urban art." Explaining that conventional actors and musicians can have their pick between a variety of respectable schools to train in their craft, she points out that "there is no university for hip-hop or urban arts". But that might soon change. For the last two years, El Kaouakibi has been working on a proposal for an urban arts centre. She hopes to get a green light from the city council this year. "It will be an innovative, socio-cultural centre that will revolve around urban culture," she says. "A place for everyone who wants to do something with urban culture in its broadest definition."

FINDING THE URBAN IN ANTWERP

- Let's Go Urban** Lessons and workshops in urban dance, sports and music. The number one go-to spot for all things street in Antwerp
 ► www.lets Gourban.be
- Eigen Makelij** Flanders' pioneering hip-hop label, including promotions and management
 ► www.eigenmakelij.be
- Raw Circles** Annual international breakdance competition, drawing top talent from across the world
 ► www.rawcircles.be
- Mama's Open Mic** Slam poetry at Mama Matrea cocktail bar on occasional Tuesdays
 ► www.mamamatrea.com
- Mestizo Arts Festival** Annual festival in October with an emphasis on diversity in art forms and artists
 ► www.mestizoartsfestival.be

More money for biggest Flemish cities

Extra investment in urban areas is “essential” says minister Van den Bossche

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders has agreed to again increase the funding it provides for services in the 13 largest Flemish cities, Freya Van den Bossche, Flemish minister for housing and urban development announced last week. The budget also covers Brussels, where it is administered by the Flemish Community Commission (VGC).

“The future of Flanders lies for the most part in our cities,” said Van den Bossche (pictured). “But at the same time, those cities are facing some major challenges.”

The money provided is intended to make cities more liveable and improve the provision of services, including parks, youth centres, playgrounds and home renovations. In Brussels the VGC finances crèches, while in Ghent the council will use the money in part to combat fly-tipping of rubbish. In Antwerp, meanwhile, financing is being used for the construction of home-care facilities and service flats.

The total budget for the year has gone up to €142 million, an increase of 3.5% over last year, when

it also went up the same amount from 2011. Van den Bossche described the decision to increase the budget as “a strong signal in difficult budget times”.

But the increase was needed, she said. “Our cities are growing continually, with more young people and seniors, their populations are becoming increasingly diverse. If we want to give everyone the opportunities they need and deserve, extra investments are essential.”

The sums allocated to each of the cities are: Antwerp €61.6m; Ghent €30.5m; Brussels €14.2 million; Genk €5.5m; Bruges €4.1m; Ostend €4.1m; Mechelen €3.8m; Leuven €3.6m; Aalst €2.9m; Kortrijk €2.7m; Hasselt €2.6m; Sint-Niklaas €2.5m; Roeselare €2.0m; Turnhout €1.5m. Earlier this month, Van den Bossche announced subsidies of €220,000 for projects aimed at making cities more child-friendly and invited proposals from non-profits and associations in any of the cities.

► www.thuisindestad.be



© Nicolas Lambert / BELCA

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

The last years of a symbol

On a football pitch last Saturday in Leuven, supporters from the local OHL team unfolded a banner with the words: “Show you are from Leuven”. The image the fans chose to illustrate Leuven was the face of mayor Louis Tobback, transformed into the iconic Che Guevara photo.

Like the South American revolutionary, Tobback (SPA) has become a larger-than-life symbol – a status no other Flemish mayor has yet attained. This makes Tobback’s interview last week with the weekly *Knack* even more noteworthy. The mayor pointed out that one of his aldermen, Mohamed Ridouani, would possibly be his choice to succeed him.

Now that was new. It was the first time that Tobback, at 74 now, hinted that he may not be in the function forever. At last year’s local elections, he presented himself as a candidate mayor for another six-year term. That he will be 80 years old by the end of that term did not bother him. “It is up to the voters to judge this,” he said. Tobback has been one of Belgium’s best known politicians since the 1980s, when he was an outspoken opposition leader in parliament. He went on to become the federal minister of the interior under prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene, with whom he formed a formidable duo.

Tobback has always been respected – and feared – for his sharp judgement, never hesitating to lash out at adversaries and fellow party members alike. He is the political father of not just his own son, Bruno, president of the socialist SPA, but also of Frank Vandenbroucke and Johan Vande Lanotte.

By the time he became mayor of Leuven in 1995, he had become something of a grumpy old man, a role he embraces with much gusto. His age and quirks (such as his refusal to use a computer), however, have not stood in the way of the thorough transformation he has bestowed upon his city. Any visitor to Leuven will agree that it is one of Flanders’ most agreeable cities, combining a rich historic past and architecture with contemporary city planning. Critics often refer to his dictatorial style as well as his age. He is believed to cling to power by not finding a successor that he deems suitable. Ridouani may become his crown prince, but another alderman, Saïd El Khadraoui, has been named, too, as well as Tobback junior. But until 2018, Leuven seems content to make do with the senior.

Simplified energy management plan welcomed

Flemish energy minister Freya Van den Bossche has welcomed an initiative from energy network manager Eandis to further simplify the Flemish energy grid to one or two managers and resolve what the minister described as the “confusion” of the market.

At present, Eandis consists of a grouping of former intercommunal organisations, with each one representing one or several municipalities – a vestige of the way the energy provision was previously administered in Belgium.

Eandis is dominated by the presence of Electrabel, but the company’s involvement is due to end in 2018, and the government hopes to be able to negotiate Electrabel’s departure ahead of that deadline. Once that is done, Van den Bossche said, the way will be clear for the management of Flanders’ electricity and gas provision to be simplified further, leaving the door open for a single tariff across the whole region. Last year, Van den Bossche and Geert Bourgeois, minister for local government, called on Eandis members to drastically slim down their own numbers, with the result

that 750 paid administrator posts were scrapped, with saving of €800,000.

“We said at the time that, as far as we were concerned, this was only a first step,” Van den Bossche said last week. “The ultimate aim was to boil down the existing confusion of 11 intercommunals to one or a maximum of two major Flemish network managers. There is now room for the scrapping of even more posts. I’m glad to find a supporter for this approach today in the municipalities that make up Eandis.”



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Schools and daycares aim for zero pesticides

Schools, crèches, rest homes and care facilities will all have to achieve zero use of pesticides on their grounds by 1 January 2015, environment minister Joke Schauvliege announced last week. The new rule brings groups and organisations working with the public into line with municipal and governmental organisations, which have been working towards zero pesticides since 2004.

Schauvliege, together with minister-president Kris Peeters, was presenting the government’s action plan on the sustainable use of pesticides, according to guidelines from the EU produced in 2009. As well as the zero pesticide target for public places, the plan also involves a wide range of programmes intended to raise awareness among professionals and ordinary members of the public on the benefits of a sustainable pesticide policy.

“To achieve practical success with our preventive approach, it’s important to inform and raise the awareness of a broad segment of the public,” Schauvliege said. “It’s only through concrete measures

and advice to people on the ground that we can continue to guarantee the high quality of our drinking water.”

For Peeters, whose portfolio also includes agriculture and rural policy, the action plan manages to balance the demands of health and environment with the needs of agriculture. “With this plan, Flanders aims to further reduce the impact of the use of pesticides on the environment and on public health, without losing sight of their usefulness in agricultural production,” he said.



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THE WEEK IN FIGURES

53,000

tonnes of corn discovered in Belgium contaminated by aflatoxins, one of the most carcinogenic organic toxins known. Some of the affected grain had already been processed into animal feed, according to the food safety agency

€25,000

paid by the three Michelin-star Hertog Jan in Bruges to help finance works to improve safety on the road in front of the restaurant. The works will involve better visibility and broader cycle- and footpaths

€400 billion

cost of switching completely to renewable energy by 2050, according to figures from the Flemish Institute for Technological Research. The change could create between 20,000 and 60,000 new jobs

88%

of retailers would support the elimination of one and two-cent coins, according to a survey carried out for the NSZ, an organisation that represents the self-employed

306

fugitives tracked down and arrested in 2012 by the FAST team of the federal police, including prison escapees and the subjects of international arrest warrants

Steven Vanackere steps down

The federal minister of finance quits over ACW accusations

Anja Otte

Tired of being on the defensive, vice prime-minister and minister of finance Steven Vanackere resigned last week amidst the commotion surrounding the worker's movement ACW.

"Because of my political inspiration, rooted in the Christian-democracy and the Christian workers' movement, some people find it unimaginable that I can function impartially as a minister for finance, even though there is nothing to prove this allegation. ... This atmosphere of distrust keeps me from my work, which is not in this country's interest. It is not in my party's interest either. I admit that it is more than what I can take as a person. Any doubt about my integrity, I find very unjust."

With these words Vanackere (CD&V) resigned from the federal government, following a series of attacks on the Christian Workers' Movement ACW, with which Vanackere is very close. A generous deal the AWC obtained with Belfius, formerly Dexia, the bank that was nationalised during the banking



Steven Vanackere announces his resignation as federal finance minister last week

crisis, was at the heart of the controversy.

The ACW, which roughly forms the "left" wing of the Christian-democrats, has been under attack for some weeks, as it is believed to have engaged in tax evasion, of which it has been critical in the past. Not only did it use the controversial notional interest deduction, N-VA has also accused the ACW of setting

up a tax-evading construction for the profits it received as a shareholder in Dexia/Belfius.

ACW also obtained a generous deal on a loan to Belfius, with not just the regular annual interest of 6.25%, but another 1.5% added in a "commercial agreement". In parliament, Vanackere stated that he was unaware of this.

However, some days later it was

discovered that a member of the Belfius board was one of Vanackere's aides. Vanackere first denied that the man was employed by his cabinet, but it emerged that he used an official cabinet email address and had a desk at the cabinet's offices.

No party or organisation asked for Vanackere's resignation.

Koen Geens (see *Face of Flanders*, p2), succeeds Vanackere, while defence minister Pieter De Crem has taken over his vice-prime ministerial portfolio. Vanackere will return to the federal parliament.

ACW gives up deduction and Belfius deal

The resignation did not stop the commotion surrounding the ACW. After renouncing the notional interest deduction, it also gave up the commercial deal with Belfius, which may amount to as much as €900,000 annually. This will almost inevitably lead to more lay-offs at the ACW, which is already been forced to slim down.

The fiscal construction that ACW set up for the Belfius profits, which is says was perfectly legal, is still under review, but one prominent tax inspector has called it "abnormal evasion".

CD&V, meanwhile, feels victimised, with the party's president Wouter Beke pleading for "this to stop". Former finance minister Didier Reynders (MR) blamed Vanackere for miscalculating this year's tax revenue (although Reynders himself made a similar, much larger, miscalculation some years ago). This climate will not make it any easier for the federal government in its current review of the budget.

At the EU level, meanwhile, commissioner Karel De Gucht, a former minister in the federal government, stated this week that the government protection enjoyed by shareholders of ACW investor Arco at the time of the Dexia bankruptcy, similar to that of savings accounts holders, came about through "blackmail by the ACW" – again putting CD&V on the defensive.

Chart hits

In-demand Leo Belgicus maps are stars of leading antiques fair

Diana Goodwin

Art lovers and history buffs will have the chance to view a collection of rare maps at Europe's leading art and antiques fair this month. The 16th- and 17th-century *Leo Belgicus* series, depicting the 17 provinces of the Low Countries in the shape of a lion, is one of the most famous and sought-after cartographic curiosities in the world. Daniel Crouch Rare Books, based in London, will be exhibiting nine of these unique maps at TEFAF in the Dutch city of Maastricht, just over the Flemish border. The significance of this collection, says Crouch, is threefold. First, as objects of artistic merit, they are "graphically very beautiful" and represent some of the earliest attempts to depict maps in an animal form. Second, they have great historic interest, as they were "intimately connected with the Dutch struggle for independence". And third, they are superb examples of the Golden Age of Dutch Cartography. This is a term used to describe the period in the 17th century when the growth of Amsterdam as a commercial centre and of the Netherlands as a trading nation "coincided with these great and rather beautiful maps that were expressions of newfound Dutch confidence, humanism and global power," says Crouch.

Emerging nations

An Austrian cartographer named Michael Aitzinger created the

first *Leo Belgicus* map in 1583 as a celebration of Dutch unity and strength during the Eighty Years' War against Spain (1568-1648). William of Orange led a coalition of the provinces of the Low Countries, which included all of present-day Belgium, in a struggle for independence from the Habsburg Empire.

After centuries of foreign rule, first under the Dukes of Burgundy and then under the Habsburgs, the Netherlands finally became a political, military and economic power unto themselves. Aitzinger chose to depict the Low Countries in the shape of a lion because several of the provinces incorporated a heraldic lion in their coat of arms, including Brabant, Flanders, Guelders, Hainaut, Holland, Limburg and Zeeland. To this day, of course, the lion is associated with Flanders and appears on the regional flag, as well as on the flags of the provinces of Limburg, East Flanders and Flemish Brabant. Although the Latin name *Leo Belgicus* would seem to refer to Belgium, both the modern country and the antiquarian map were named after the Roman province *Gallia Belgica*. Before the Southern Netherlands gained independence from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in the 19th century – and was subsequently named Belgium – the Latin name *Belgica* referred to all the lands of the Low Countries, including present-day

Netherlands, parts of Belgium and northern France, and the Duchy of Luxembourg.

There were several versions of the *Leo Belgicus* created between the late 16th and early 18th centuries. Daniel Crouch Rare Books is in possession of the most famous example of the earliest version, depicting a lion with its head in the northeast and its tail in the southwest. The "Peaceful Lion" by Claes Janszoon Visscher dates from 1609 and commemorates the Twelve Years' Truce. A second version reverses the position of the lion, and the latest version shows the reduced territory of the Netherlands at the end of the Eighty Years' War.

TEFAF Open to everyone

TEFAF Maastricht (formerly The European Fine Arts Fair) brings together 260 dealers from 20 countries for one of the world's most prestigious art markets. The rare and valuable pieces on display range from Old Master paintings and works on paper to contemporary art and design. Every item is vetted by a team of 175 experts in 29 categories to ensure authenticity, quality and condition. And everything is for sale. Daniel Crouch Rare Books specialises in antique atlases, maps, sea charts and travel accounts dating from the 15th to the 19th centuries. In addition to the *Leo Belgicus* collection, valued at €400,000, they will be exhibiting Johannes Blaeu's *Atlas Major* of 1665, an 11-volume set that is the



"Leo Hollandicus" by Nicolas Visscher dates from 1648

largest atlas ever published, as well as a pair of oversized Willem Blaeu globes from 1645-48. These will form part of a larger display on the Golden Age of Cartography. Even if you're not in the market for a 17th-century map, it's worth a trip to TEFAF Maastricht to see these

and other rare works. Members of the public are welcome to visit and browse without buying. It may be your last chance to see these masterpieces before they become part of a private collection and disappear from public view.

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► www.tefaf.com

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Additives ▶ Puratos**

The manufacturer of additives for chocolate and baked goods in Groot-Bijgaarden, Flemish Brabant, is investing €15 million in a research facility to be operational by the summer of 2014. The move is part of an €80 million worldwide development plan that also includes production units in the US and China.

Appliances ▶ Primus

The manufacturer of industrial and commercial laundry equipment, based in Gullegem, West Flanders, has been acquired by the French CM-CIC investment group for €20 million from the US Andlinger venture capital fund.

Autos ▶ Qoros

China's luxury car manufacturer Qoros is believed to be in negotiations with Bornem-based car distribution group Beherman to launch its sales on the local market. Beherman has long been the distributor of Saab automobiles and also imports Mitsubishi for local sale.

Autos ▶ Sales up

New car sales rose 3.8% to 45,400 in February, the second month of growth in a row. The market leader for the period is Volkswagen, followed by Renault and Peugeot. Hyundai and BMW, meanwhile, showed the largest gains.

Coffee ▶ Miko

Turnhout-based Miko, specialised in supplying coffee making products and equipment, has taken over the Swedish Kaffekompaniet to develop its activities in the Scandinavian market.

Insurance ▶ Generali

The Italian insurance group is considering the sale of its Belgian outlets as part of a restructuring of its European operations. One leading local insurer is said to have already made an offer to acquire the business that employs some 500 people and booked €554 million in premiums last year.

Property ▶ JM

The Swedish residential property group is investing €70 million to build up to 300 apartments on the site of former car parts distributor Daniel Doyen in the Brussels commune of Anderlecht. The new apartments are said to benefit from the latest Swedish technology in terms of insulation and security.

**Supermarkets
▶ Colruyt**

The Halle-based discount supermarket is building a 30,000 square-metres distribution centre in Ath in Wallonia. The new facility, expected to open in 2015, will provide 350 jobs.

Government extends support to small business

Funding for training and advice is increased by €4 million and Banks Plan is approved

Alan Hope

The government of Flanders is extending its support programme for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with more money and new subsidies for coaching. The government's SME portfolio is a digital platform where small businesses can go to request support and advice. Last year the platform gave assistance to 32,000 companies, with a total spend of €34 million. This year, that budget is increased to €38 million.

"The SME platform allows us to encourage training within small businesses and makes it easier for our SMEs to use the services of external advisers," commented Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters. The SME platform will also include coaching for business owners, particularly for growth companies and companies that are being passed on from one family member to another. Companies requesting

coaching will get ongoing practical support to a maximum value of €10,000.

"Specialised knowledge continues to be more and more important as a support for transitions in SMEs," Peeters said. "As well as the practical advice of a specialist, it's also worthwhile to have the entrepreneur accompanied during the implementation of changes. Our decision to subsidise coaching programmes will help us respond to this need."

Guarantees for long-term financing

Also last week, the Flemish government approved part of Peeters' Banks Plan, which will allow the government to provide buffer-guarantees to encourage banks to set up long-term financing programmes for both small and large businesses.



The Flemish government's SME platform offers advice to any size business

The Banks Plan was announced in September, when Peeters pointed out that SMEs were having enormous difficulty in getting credit from banks, despite record levels of savings deposits. The banks, Peeters said,

ought to use those funds to help stimulate economic recovery.

Under the plan, financial institutions will be able to raise money from national and international investors with the backing of guarantees from the Flemish investment fund Gigarant. The money raised will then be used to support industries in Flanders, as well as long-term financing for large infrastructure projects in health care and housing and other public-private cooperative initiatives.

"It is absolutely essential that credit be made available to our companies," Peeters said. "Companies have to be able to invest to help pull Flanders out of the crisis. A substantial number of Flemish SMEs, despite the crisis, still want to go ahead with investments, and I'm counting on the banks to support this dynamic attitude."

► www.agentschapondernemen.be

Telenet boss Sickinghe resigns

Duco Sickinghe, CEO of Mechelen-based media company Telenet, took the decision to step down more than a month ago, when he saw that the relationship with Liberty Global, the US-based major shareholder, was no longer tenable, he told a press conference last week.

A failed attempt by Liberty Global, owned by media tycoon John C Malone, to take over Telenet was to blame, said Sickinghe, for "an abrasive atmosphere" inside the boardroom. Liberty's bid price of €35 a share was seen as too low by some institutional investors, as well as Telenet's own independent directors. In the end, Liberty managed to obtain only 8% of shares – enough, however, to give them a controlling shareholding.

"After the closure of the bid, I made my own decision," Sickinghe said, stressing that he had not been pressured to leave. "It had become clear to me that the relationship on their side would be impossible to repair."

The reason for the delay between decision and announcement, Sickinghe said, was to allow for a successor to be named. That will be John Porter, chief executive of Austar United Communications, an Australian cable TV



provider and subsidiary of Liberty. "He knows cable, he knows mobile, and he knows Liberty Group very well," says Sickinghe. "He is one of the best CEOs in the sector. Let's give him the benefit of the doubt."

Sickinghe's departure was "a loss", according to Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten. "He was a top manager, who turned Telenet into a major company. Not that I always agreed with his point of view; we often crossed swords. But he was an excellent manager."

Ford workers support pay-off plan

A majority of the workers at the Ford Genk car assembly plant in Limburg has voted in favour of the company's severance plan for lay-offs. Last week workers heard what redundancy premiums were proposed and exactly how much each of them would receive. They then voted in favour of the proposals. The factory will close at the end of 2014. The proposal consists of a one-off premium of €6,800 for those with less than 20 years of service. That figure doubles for workers with over 20 years of service. In addition, each employee who leaves before December 2014 receives a payoff of €2,000 for each year of service. For those who stay until the end, that goes up to €2,450 for each year of service. The agreement affects the 4,500 workers at Ford itself; the terms for the 1,200 employees of the four main suppliers of the factory, who also face closure, have still to be agreed.

Meanwhile, workers at the plant will be repaid the 2.5% pay cut they agreed as part of the so-called Contract for the Future in 2010. The wage cut was the price agreed for continued job security until 2020 – a guarantee that was rescinded by the decision to close the factory in 2014.

Katoen Natie calls for ruling against government

Flemish mobility and public works minister Hilde Crevits has rejected claims that the government failed in its duty of regulation of the Antwerp Port Authority, after a legal claim was brought by the CEO of Katoen Natie, Fernand Huts. Huts (pictured) is claiming a symbolic €1 in damages in addition to a ruling against the government.

The issue revolves around fines imposed on Katoen Natie, one of the port's most important logistics businesses, for failing to meet tonnage prognoses. In December,

Huts took out advertisements in the press to complain that while his company had to pay €326,000 in fines, two competitors – DP World and PSA – had not been made to pay the more than €51 million in fines they had incurred since 2008.

Later, Huts revealed that the Port Authority had reimbursed €300,000 of the fines paid, explaining that an error had been made. "But there was no error; those fines were correctly imposed on us," Huts told the VRT. "Katoen Natie wishes to meet its contractual obligations."



The repayment was, he claimed, an attempt to keep Huts quiet about the unpaid fines of his two competitors. The money was sent back to the Port Authority, he said.

The latest court action is an attempt

to draw attention to what Huts has described as discrimination within the Port Authority. Crevits told the Flemish Parliament earlier this year that neither she nor the port commissioner – who is also the subject of Huts' lawsuit – has the authority to intervene in a commercial dispute between the Port Authority and companies operating in the port.

As *Flanders Today* went to press, the board of the Port Authority was due to meet, with the question of harbour fines on the agenda.

Fresh from the fields

Ghent University is heading a European project to ensure the safety of produce worldwide

Andy Furniere

Meat has been at the heart of food scandals for the last few weeks, but dangers could be lurking in your fruits and veggies, too. With support from the European Commission, Ghent University is assessing the impact of climate change and globalisation on the safety and quality of fresh fruit and vegetables. The university is co-ordinating Veg-i-Trade, a project involving 23 universities, knowledge institutions, SMEs and industrial partners worldwide. Recently, researchers have discovered, for instance, that lettuce in Spain could be cultivated with 25% less water, reducing the cost and improving the quality. Veg is trendy, as proven by Flemish campaigns like “Days without meat”, which encourages people to eat less meat in the 40 days of Lent. But just as there are controversies around the European meat industry, the quality and safety of vegetables was doubted after German produce was infected by the EHEC bacteria in 2011. The Veg-i-Trade project launched in the spring of 2010, inspired by preventive research in the US, “but we attracted special attention after the EHEC outbreak,” says co-ordinator Mieke Uyttendaele, professor at the department of food safety and quality at Ghent University. Veg-i-Trade examines the organisation of the fresh produce chain and looks for ways to minimise microbiological risks related to bacteria, viruses, fungi and pesticides. With a four-year budget of €7.6 million – of which €6 million comes from the EU – Veg-i-Trade is developing and exchanging recommendations concerning good practices and quality assurance



Scientists in Ghent are helping ensure safer fruit and vegetables around the world

via international collaboration. The European network includes seven Flemish, four Spanish and four Norwegian partners, while institutions from the Netherlands, Serbia and Switzerland are also involved. But the project is just as global as the current trade system and climate-change issue – engaging groups from India, Brazil, Egypt and South Africa.

Local solutions

Figures from the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation show that almost half of all vegetables and fruit cultivated in Europe isn’t consumed. To reduce this waste, Veg-i-Trade creates statistical models that predict how the products will decay. Food processors, wholesalers and retailers could adapt their planning and transport logistics using these models, to ensure optimal preservation. “Transport by plane, for example, is more costly, but it may be more efficient than working with lorries because you have far less waste,” explains Uyttendaele. Partners on all continents are assembling data on the methods of everyone involved in the food chain. Sanitation, for instance. “Good hygiene practices sound self-evident,” says Uyttendaele, “but there is a need for a more consistent

application.” She has to bear in mind, however, the different cultures and problems faced by each country. “Because clean drinking water is a problem in parts of India, producers sometimes have trouble implementing the quality measures of Europe,” she explains. “Indian people are also used to cooking all vegetables, which kills bacteria, and they don’t always understand why we eat many vegetables raw.” Despite “eat local” campaigns, eating more locally grown food is not a perfect solution for consumers. “It’s a positive trend, but there are risks everywhere,” Uyttendaele says. “You cannot inspect every tomato thoroughly before it ends up in the supermarket.”

Help, not judgement

To anticipate the consequences of climate change, Veg-i-Trade is working with experts on this issue and has initiated field research. Tests on a farm in the Spanish region of Almeria proved that lettuce could be cultivated with 25% less water than currently used. Efficient use of water is key in sustainable agriculture, limiting the shortage of water caused by higher temperatures. The method has economic and quality advantages

also. The grower saves up to €200 per hectare, while the lettuce is crisper and remains fresh longer. Climate change also causes heavy rain and floods, which affect the crops but don’t always destroy them completely. “We analyse to what extent we can avoid crops being lost after extreme weather,” explains Uyttendaele. “Sometimes the sun’s UV radiation is enough to kill harmful micro-organisms.” What’s essential is that the team remains neutral and constructive. “We emphasise that we are not food inspectors,” says Uyttendaele. “We are there to help, not to judge.”

Limiting pesticides

To keep in touch with the opinions of the fresh produce sector, the Veg-i-Trade team regularly holds discussions with an advisory committee. One of the members is Vegaplan, the organisation that manages quality standards for vegetables and fruit produced in Belgium. These standards form important criteria to decide whether fruit and vegetables receive a quality label, which helps to get a higher price at auction, for example. Evelien Nottebaere, a Vegaplan advisor, looks forward to the results of a survey by Veg-i-Trade among stakeholders in the agricultural sector on the impact of regulations on the working methods of farmers. “In recent years, sustainability, and especially limiting the use of pesticides, have been high on the agenda of the Belgian sector,” she says. “But it’s important that we find the correct balance because reducing pesticides can also increase the risk of certain plant diseases.”

► www.veg-i-trade.org

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Five students of industrial engineering at the University College Ghent have won the higher education competition De klimaatsfikers (The Climate Fixers), with their Green Wall Trimmer. The invention, which trims vertical growing foilage on high walls, was declared **the best low-carbon design**. The device collects the trimmings, making them easily transportable to biomass centres, where they are used to produce energy. The Climate Fixers is organised by Ecocampus, a project by the Flemish government’s department of environment, nature and energy.

Renée Moernaut, a postgraduate journalism student at Erasmus University College in Brussels, has received the Dissertation Award from the Stichting Lezen (Reading Foundation). Moernaut examined the evolution of *De Standaard’s* literary coverage between 1956 and 2011 to find out how **information about literature in the media has changed** over time. The literature section of the Flemish newspaper has become more accessible, with shorter articles and more photos, but youth literature and popular genres such as romance and fantasy remain largely overlooked. Moernaut wins €2,500.

Psychologists from Ghent University have discovered that memory-training computer games can **reduce concentration problems** among those suffering from depression. Experiments showed a considerable improvement in behaviour and mental alertness.

A language supervisor at the Karel de Grote University College in Antwerp is monitoring whether **students address lecturers appropriately**. Too many students send emails to lecturers in an informal style, beginning with “Hey” and ending with “xxx”, “cheers” or “see you”. The university college asked lecturers to give feedback on language used in assignments, emails and exams. The information will help with the development of guidelines for students.

Children at pre-schools in Antwerp **skip school more than anywhere else in Flanders**, according to figures from the Flemish education ministry. Overall, 5.7% of children younger than five are absent regularly in the third year. This is a rise of 0.5% compared to two years ago. Ghent is second at 4.9%, while Brussels follows with 3.8%. Children can only go on to primary education if they have followed classes for 220 half days or if they pass a language test to ensure they have sufficient knowledge of Dutch. **AF**

Q&A

An Lanssens initiated the Extra Muros project at the Lethas adult education centre in Brussels, teaching foreigners Dutch-language skills without a textbook

How do you teach Dutch without a workbook?

My students had reached the stage at which they possessed basic knowledge of Dutch but needed to train their listening and speaking skills. I felt it was illogical to train these skills mainly through role-playing exercises in class, with a single trip *extra muros* [Latin for “outside the walls”], as is the usual strategy. Instead, I opted to dedicate all 10 weeks of lessons to taking trips. The purpose was to challenge students outside their comfort zone, but still provide assistance.

What kind of trips?

We had tours of media companies such as TV Brussel and Corelio, but also visited museums like the

Parlamentarium. Other students guided the group on a walk around the Marollen quarter of Brussels, and we participated in an activity with Oxfam that explained the



living conditions of people in developing countries. I organised a half-day at a secondary school in Brussels, where my students followed classes with the other pupils. In future, I want to encourage our students to share their backgrounds with the group by, for example, showing their own neighbourhood.

What are the advantages of your method?

Students’ self-confidence increases considerably when they realise they can speak Dutch without much difficulty in real-life situations. The experience should help them to cross that last threshold of talking Dutch consistently in their private lives. Many of the students learn Dutch

to find a job, but some also want to encourage their children, who follow classes in Dutch-language schools.

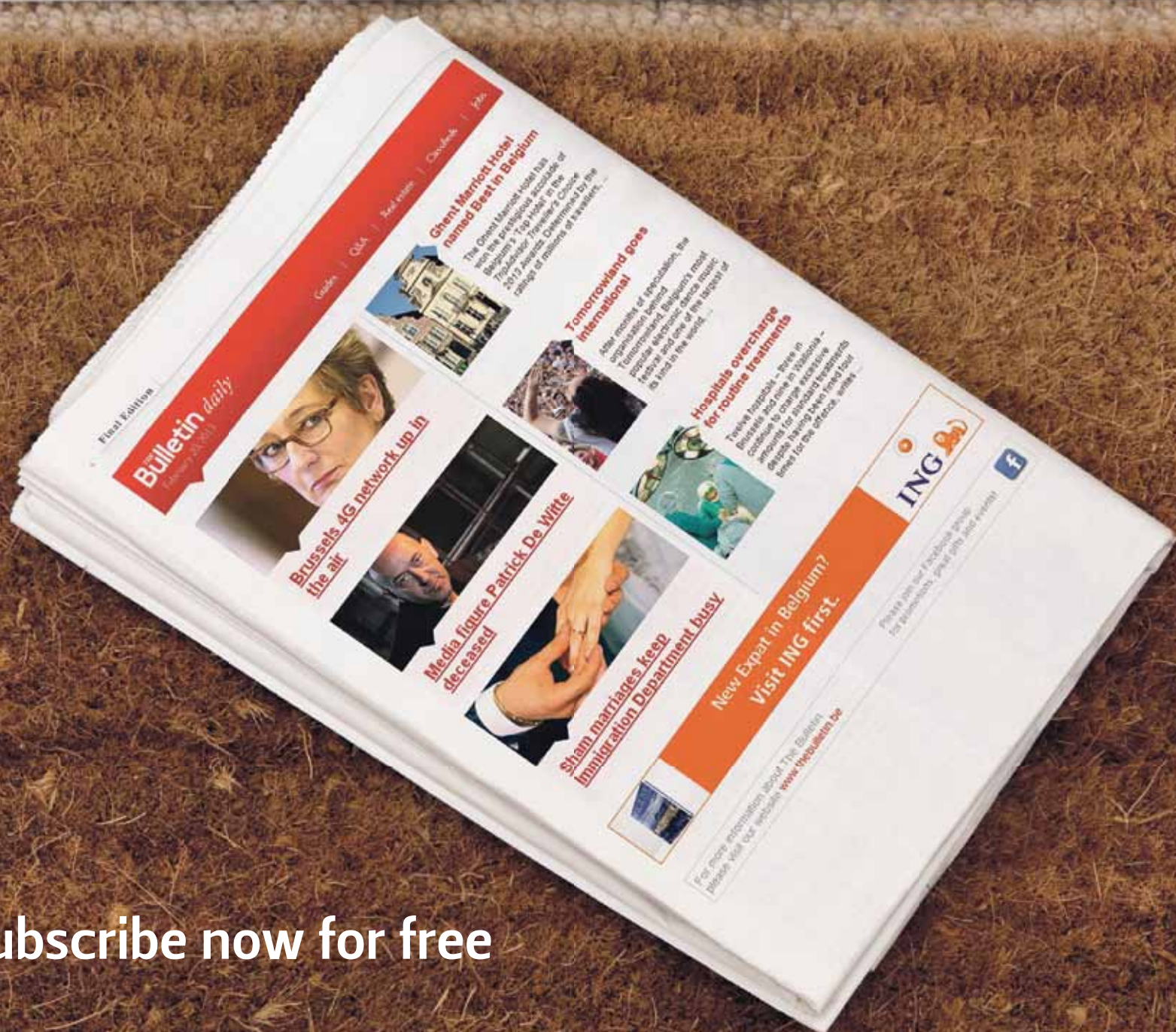
Do you feel textbooks are often redundant?

In many cases, books are essential tools for general guidance. But language teachers should see them as supportive instruments, not rely on them. I’m now preparing documentation to assist other teachers in taking up the *extra muros* method. Even in the first learning stages, activities such as cooking classes have an important value. You can then use visual signs to complement the communication. **Interview by AF**

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A night to remember

History lessons have never been so engaging as during Flanders' annual Night of History

Diana Goodwin

One evening a year, people in Flanders have the chance to immerse themselves in the past and learn about their local history. De Nacht van de Geschiedenis, or The Night of History, finds more than 240 events spread across the whole of Brussels and Flanders in such diverse places as castles, bakeries, artists' studios, town halls, farmhouses, breweries and churches.

Every year, The Night of History is organised around a different theme, and this year it's Craftsmanship. Craftspeople, historians and storytellers will give lectures and demonstrations on a rich array of trades practised in bygone times and today. Glass blowers, chocolatiers, bookbinders, auto mechanics, luthiers, stone carvers, master brewers, cheese makers, surveyors, blacksmiths, art restorers, puppeteers ... a dizzying array of experts wax poetic about their vocations.

In Zwalm (East Flanders), graffiti artist Quentin Van Den Brande will talk about his work and let participants try their hand at creating some graffiti of their own. At the Brussels Museum of Mills and Nutrition in Evere, *witloof* cultivator Henri de Schouwer will recount his personal experience growing "white gold". And in Assebroek (West Flanders), archivist André Vandewalle will give a presentation on craftsmen in Bruges during the middle ages and how to identify traces of the guilds still visible in the city today.

Can't decide on one vocation? Then choose one of the many events that combine several in one location. In Maaseik (Limburg), for instance, 10 presentations will be featured in a handful of historic venues in the city centre. These include painting restoration, ornamental wood carving, haberdashery and brewing, and you can follow the city's walking tour to ensure that you don't miss a thing.

Making history sexy

This year's theme, says Jeroen Sleurs, general director of Davidsfonds, the organisation behind the Night of History, addresses the duality behind craftsmanship. "On the one hand, there are fewer craftsmen today than there were 10, 20 or 50 years ago. On the other hand, people are becoming interested in doing things themselves, as a hobby." There's a nostalgia for the handmade and a renewed appreciation for sustainability and for quality. Sleurs describes Davidsfonds as a "cultural network" of 5,000 volunteers working with 500 local groups across Flanders to organise 10,000 activities a year. What started out in 1875 as an organisation dedicated to promoting the Dutch language has now



Learn to make mustard, spin flax or restore the homestead like in the days of yore at the annual Night of History

grown into a modern educational institution that also encompasses a travel company, a publishing department and the University of Free Time, offering classes for adults on a wide range of topics.

The idea behind the Night of History was to "make history sexier," says Sleurs. For many people, history is boring – something you have to learn in school, or that happens in a museum. "We wanted to show as many people as possible the variety of historical activities in Flanders and Brussels." And because the past can be mysterious, they chose to hold the event in the evening "to evoke the mystery a little".

My Night of History

Lest you think this is all rhetoric, let me tell you about my first Night of History experience. It was last year, and the theme was Drink, which sounded promising. My husband and I signed up for an event in Sint-Lambrechts-Herk, a district of Hasselt, on the Wideux estate, a feudal domain that once encompassed a castle, farm, chapel, lake, brewery and surrounding lands. Our evening's activities took place in

three places that once formed part of the Wideux lands: the gatehouse, the farm and the chapel. Our meeting point was De Bloonwinning, a bed and breakfast in a traditional, four-sided brick farmhouse. Due to the number of participants (Night of History is quite popular), we were divided into three groups and took turns visiting each location. Our group was led out of De Bloonwinning's inner courtyard by a torch-wielding volunteer who guided us to a second location: the former gatehouse and stables, now a private residence. We followed him down a rutted farm road between the fields, the path lit by candles glowing in glass jars hung from fence posts. On reaching the neoclassical gatehouse, we were directed towards a small door and stairs that led to a basement room. A slide projector, portable screen and benches were set up on one side of the room, and we were given a brief talk about the history of the domain and its role in the region.

We were then invited to an adjoining room where our hosts offered everyone a glass of apple wine, which was excellent, and I found myself

wishing I could take home a bottle. Sadly, it wasn't available for purchase at any price, having been made in limited quantities by a local from apples grown nearby. Trays of rustic *boterhammen* (sandwiches) were passed around as well.

A light on the past

Finally, we headed back out into the night and retraced our steps to De Bloonwinning, where we sat at tables warmed by heat lamps in the courtyard. We nibbled on gourmet bites from De Bloonwinning's kitchen, while Gert Jordens, the brewer behind Jessenhofke in Hasselt, gave an informal talk about his organic beers and brewing process. And, of course, we also enjoyed a glass of Jessenhofke's blonde.

Although we were reluctant to leave the cosy atmosphere, it was soon time to head out again and walk to our last destination, the old estate chapel. Small glasses of *poire*, a liqueur made from pears grown on the estate, were passed around, along with trays of bite-sized canapés. After the talk, we filed down the narrow stairs into the crypt to see the tombs of the former lords of Wideux. Walking through the countryside at night with only candles to light our way, then hearing about the history of the land and the people who lived there, I had the feeling I was walking back in time. Combined with the unique alcoholic drinks and other treats, the educational aspect took on a pleasurable tactile component. It was an evening to remember, and a history lesson I'll never forget.

19 MARCH

De Nacht van de Geschiedenis

Across Brussels and Flanders

► www.davidsfonds.be



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Imagine all the writers

Arab Spring revisited at Brussels biennial literature festival Passa Porta

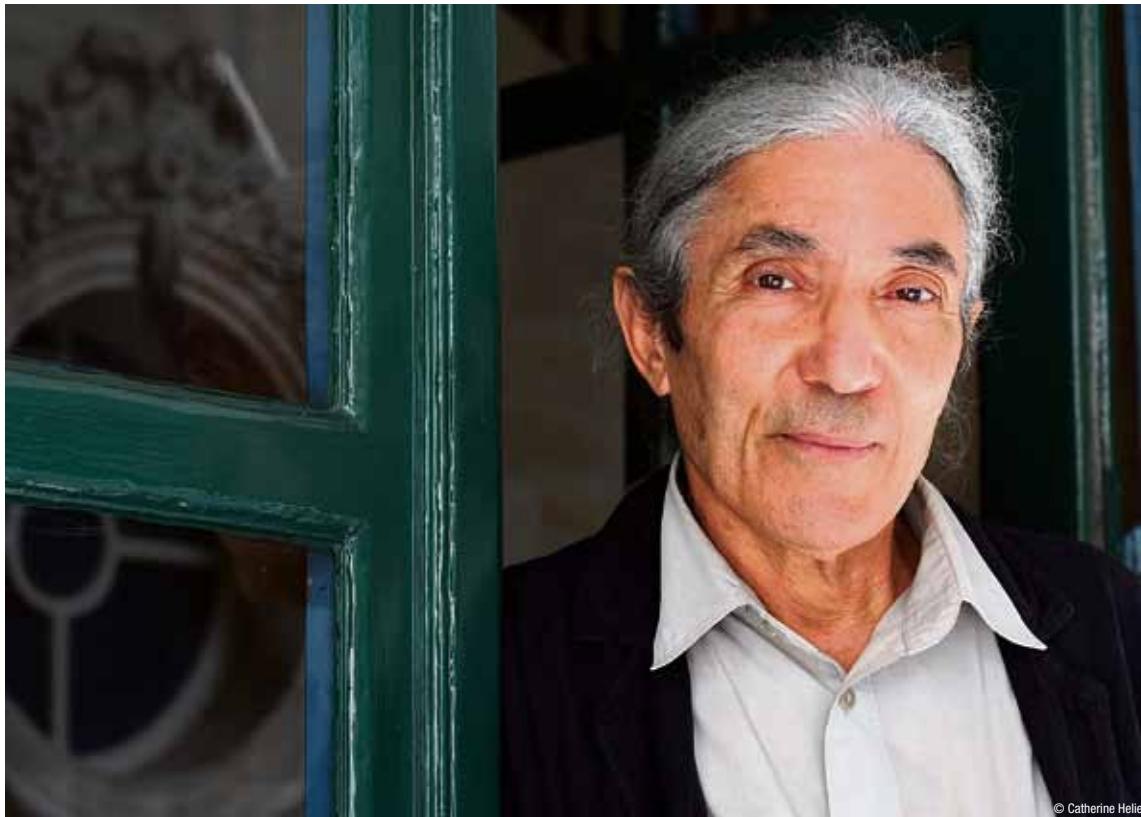
Christophe Verbiest

Nearly 100 writers from 30 countries over five days at 27 locations in one city: Numerically, Passa Porta is an impressive festival. And a glance at the programme suggests that there's reason to believe that this fourth outing of the literary celebration will be as good as the previous highly praised editions.

The slogan for this year's Passa Porta Festival is "Imagine!" It's a large umbrella under which very different kinds of literature can be presented. It's clear that the power of imagination reigns in the work of many visiting authors. It's no coincidence, of course, that the festival puts an important focus on the consequences of the Arab Spring. One of the two guests of honour, Algerian writer Boualem Sansal, whose work is banned in his homeland, opens the festival next Wednesday with a reading. He's also one of the five writers at Arab Spring: Writers in Revolution on Friday, where you can also hear Syrian novelist Khaled Khalifa, who lives in the stricken city of Aleppo. The other writers present come from Libya, Egypt and Tunisia. Sansal can be heard on Thursday, too, as one of the two Writers for Peace, the other being China's Liao Yiwu, a former political prisoner. The title of that evening refers to the authors being the last two winners of the prestigious Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. But it also refers to their commitment to secure more democracy in their homelands. How they integrate this in their work is one of the questions they'll try to answer at the Passa Porta Festival.

Dreams of a better future

The weekend, meanwhile, brings the Lange nacht van het korte verhaal



Algerian writer Boualem Sansal, whose work is banned in his homeland, opens the Passa Porta festival next Wednesday

(The Long Night of the Short Story), hours of reading from the genre. The main attractions are Lydia Davis and Arnon Grunberg (*see sidebar*), but the other names are almost as impressive: Flemish writer and professor Kristien Hemmerechts, whose first foray into the world of literature was writing short stories in English, Irish author Gerard Donovan (*Schopenhauer's Telescope*) and his countrywoman Anne Enright, who won the Man Booker Prize in 2007 for *The Gathering*.

Over the first four days, the Passa Porta Festival presents one event each evening, but on Sunday all hell breaks loose when, between 11.00 and 19.00, about 100 wordsmiths can be heard all over Brussels. And imaginations will run wild: erotic

fiction, women and football, urban legends from Brussels, workshops for children, how to deal with the border between fact and fiction – just a few of the goodies.

Imagination also spurs thinking. Half a century after Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, Brussels philosopher Philippe Van Parijs and Chika Unigwe, a novelist of Nigerian descent living in Flanders, tread in King's footsteps: They'll formulate their dreams for a better future.

It is impossible to list every

participating *litterateur*, though grand lady of English literature AS Byatt, Norwegian rising star Karl Ove Knausgård, France-based but Moroccan-born Tahar Ben Jelloun and non-fiction masters Geert Mak (*In Europe*) and David Van Reybrouck (*Congo*) can't go without a mention.

They come from Iceland, Togo, China, Romania and 27 other countries and for once they don't want you to lend them your eyes but your ears.

20-24 MARCH

Across Brussels

► www.passaporta.be

DON'T MISS AT PASSA PORTA

Arnon Grunberg



New York-based Dutch writer Arnon Grunberg seems to be omnipresent at this Passa Porta Festival, as he has been in Dutch literature for the past 20 years. At 42, he has an impressive oeuvre, both in quality and quantity, streaked through with merciless humour. He has just published *Buster Keaton lacht nooit* (Buster Keaton Never Laughs), a collection of articles about cinema. He'll be interviewed about this book and cinema in general and will talk with a psychiatrist, a psychoanalyst and an economist about the illnesses of contemporary society and the possible remedies. He will also be present at the Long Night of the Short Story.

Cees Nooteboom



Dutchman Cees Nooteboom, who turns 80 this year, is probably the best-known living writer in the Dutch language internationally. He's famous for his travel writing but has also published plenty of novels, poetry collections and essays. Last year's *Brieven aan Poseidon* (Letters to Poseidon) is a collection of philosophical musings about life, death and everything in between. Nooteboom will be interviewed about his immensely rich oeuvre, and he's also part of a poetry afternoon at which, among others, Flanders' greatest living poet, Leonard Nolens, will be present, too.

Lydia Davis



"Few writers now working make the words on the page matter more," Jonathan Franzen said about Lydia Davis. He, being one of them, should know. Still, for years, Davis, an American writer of short stories – some of them as short as a few words – was an insider's secret, earning her crust as a translator of French literature. But since the publication four years ago of her collected short stories, she's broken out of obscurity and won a wider audience. Flemish author Bart Moeyaert talks with Davis about her work, from which she'll read during, naturally, the Long Night of the Short Story.

Julian Barnes



Top of the bill and second guest of honour is one of the best-loved British writers, Julian Barnes, known for *Flaubert's Parrot*, *England, England* and *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, to name but a few. He's also a well-respected essayist; his most recent collection, *Through the Window*, was published last year. At Bozar he'll reflect on the power of imagination. Passa Porta is promoting this lecture with a quote from Barnes' Man Booker Prize-winning 2011 novel *The Sense of an Ending*: "When we are young, we invent different futures for ourselves; when we are old, we invent different pasts for others."

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

The people have spoken: Nomad, a solar rechargeable and multifunctional indoor/outdoor lamp, has won the **Public Prize of the Henry van de Velde Awards & Labels**. During the exhibition of products that were awarded the design labels this year, the public could vote for their favourite. The creation of Brussels-based Alain Gilles was originally designed for people living in developing countries who do not always have access to electrical lighting. Gilles, also voted Belgium's Designer of the Year in 2012, wins €2,500 for the design.

► www.designvlaanderen.be

Ostend's museum for Belgian art, Mu.ZEE, has **acquired James Ensor's "Les Masques et la Mort"** from a private collection for €190,000. The chalk and pastel on paper joins a number of other Ensor works in the Mu.ZEE's collection and is already on show on the museum's first floor. Ensor lived nearly his entire life in Ostend.

► www.muzee.be

Two Flemish designers have made it onto the list of 31 finalists for the HRD Awards, the annual international diamond jewellery competition. Sponsored by HRD, the organisation that supports the diamond industry in Antwerp, the competition drew more than 2,000 entries this year, with the design theme "Trompe l'oeil, or Nothing is What it Seems". Anouck Van Puyvelde from Zele and Ria Lins of Antwerp now join the other 29 finalists in making final versions of their designs, which must incorporate diamonds. The winner and four finalists will be selected in July.

► www.hrdawards.com

The new **art installation "Trees of Circular Motion"** has been installed in a small park on Lustplein in the Brussels commune of Anderlecht. The eight pinwheel-like structures (*pictured*) are the creation of Irish artist Orla Barry and were inspired by the 12 sonnets written by British-Iranian poet Mimi Khalvati based on her observations in het Rad, this district of Anderlecht. The new works are part of the poetry parcours Vers Brussel: Poetry in the City.

► www.versbrussel.be



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If I can make it here...

Flemish saxophonist Robin Verheyen brings his New York Quartet to Leuven

Tom Peeters

“Arriving in New York, you immediately feel the energy is different from any other city,” says composer and saxophonist Robin Verheyen, enthusiastically recalling his own arrival in the world’s jazz capital more than seven years ago. Next week you can hear the result of the 29-year-old’s lasting love affair with the city that never sleeps when he leads his New York Quartet to Leuven, where they will play tracks from debut album *Trinity*.

The local scene has always been too small for the Turnhout-born prodigy. When Verheyen was 15, he applied for a grant to study at the Berklee College of Music in Boston. He made it through the first stage, but to get the full grant, he had to sit a final exam on-site at the college. It was way too expensive for the teenager, and his dreams had to stay dreams for a while. But the ambition never went away.

“I felt from a very early age that I needed outside impressions,” he explains. In Flanders, “there are good musicians, but too soon you’ve played with all of them.” So he went to study, live and play in Amsterdam for a while, then Paris and finally New York in 2007. “No wonder most musicians say the energy of the city infiltrates their music,” he tells me from his NY apartment. “Moving here was easier than when Toots Thielemans did it. He had to take the boat and leave everything behind; that was a far more drastic decision.”

Verheyen noticed that the experience had enriched not only the music and the perspective of his own jazz idols, but also the lives of friends and teachers such as Dré Pallemmaerts and the late Pierre Van Dormael.

In New York, says Verheyen, “you can play and breathe all styles: traditional, modern, free... You meet new musicians all the time and they invite you for informal

jam sessions or even gigs. At times I joined two or three of those a day.”

Unusual sounds

In the US, you need time to build a network, which is necessary to get the better-paid gigs. “I’m not getting rich,” he admits, “but I can pay my rent and do the projects I want. For the sort of career I’ve chosen, I have to be patient. To make it here, they say, you need to live here at least 10 years.”

Now Verheyen divides his time between playing and composing and is band leader of different groups. Lately he has been rehearsing with Marc Copland, one of his piano heroes. This summer they will stand side by side at Antwerp’s Jazz Middelheim. Verheyen also recently released *Aleatoric*, his second album with pianist Aki Rissanen and drummer Markku Ounaskari.

This month he comes home to play at Leuven Jazz. With Thomas Morgan on double bass, Jeff Davis on drums and Ralph Alessi on trumpet, he goes in all directions, balancing his characteristic melancholic and slower pieces – “the European in me” – with the raucous energy of New York. The combination of soprano sax and trumpet adds a peculiar colour; it’s a combination you don’t often hear in jazz. “All my former groups had harmonic instruments, like piano or guitar. This combination gave me harmonic freedom.”

Though it was written in New York, the quartet recorded *Trinity* right after their first European tour at a studio in Brussels. “There was only a morning and an afternoon session. After lunch and a glass of wine, the story we told was slightly different,” Verheyen smiles. “For the CD, we just chose between these first and second takes.”

► www.robinverheyen.be



Robin Verheyen comes home from New York to play with his New York Quartet

Leuven Jazz goes solo

For the past two years, Leuven festival Kultorama has had a versatile jazz programme, attracting both locally and internationally acclaimed musicians. Kultorama called it quits last year after 10 editions, but under the wing of local cultural centre 30CC, Leuven Jazz is getting a fresh start as its own festival.

With a varied programme of concerts, exhibitions and lectures, the festival will spread out over the city. Gigs in Het Depot, STUK and bars such as At The Bebop and De Blauwe Kater intermingle with events in the library and Museum M.

The opening evening not only introduces Robin Verheyen’s New



York Quartet but also features a gig by London saxophonist Courtney Pine (pictured) and his band and a DJ set by dEUS frontman Tom Barman, who recently released a CD of his favourite tracks from pioneering jazz label Impulse!. Another highlight is Nicole Willis, hooking up with Finnish funk band The Soul Investigators.

21-24 MARCH

Across Leuven

► www.leuvenjazz.be

New e-book extols the virtues of being an expat in Brussels

You know the type: People who move here for work and then do nothing but complain about Belgium. Douglas Morris knew the type, too, when he lived in Brussels for three years. “There are so many naysayers,” he says. “Oh the weather, oh it’s so boring. I couldn’t believe they were saying these things! Belgium is one of the best places I’ve ever lived in the world.”

The statement bears more weight than you might think. Morris, now a travel writer and author of *The Expat Guide to Having Fun in Brussels & Belgium*, grew up across the globe as his father worked

for the international division of a pharmaceutical company. Born in the US, Morris has lived in Canada, England, Italy, Denmark, Korea and China and has travelled to many, many more places than that.

All his books are guides to Italy, with the exception of this new e-book on Brussels and Belgium. “I was inspired to write it because my feelings contrasted so sharply with other expats who kept saying there’s nothing to do. I found Belgium incredibly fascinating and rich in culture and activities.”

The book, he says, is designed especially for expats. “I don’t even

mention the Atomium, for instance,” he says. “A lot of what I don’t mention you can find in a tourist guide book.”

Morris includes an extensive section on annual events and activities those living here temporarily often miss, like carnival celebrations, summer festivals and sports events. He also discusses activities expats are often too shy to get involved with such as kayaking, paintball and land sailing and long weekend options in rural parts of the country. You’ll also find insider info on Brussels, like its most outstanding graffiti, the vintage tram rides and its best waffle truck

and tips tourists definitely wouldn’t need, like where to get a Christmas tree.

The sections on places to visit outside of Brussels are extensive enough without being overwhelming (Ghent tops the list).

Now living in Kosovo, Morris lived in Brussels from 2009 to 2012, when his partner worked for Nato. “I’m so glad we went to Belgium,” he says. “It’s really expat heaven.” Lisa Bradshaw

The Expat Guide to Having Fun in Brussels & Belgium is available from Amazon or lulu.com as an e-book



Stories through silence or slam

Africa Film Festival

Ian Mundell

If you are into American performance poetry, then you will be delighted to hear that noted slammer Saul Williams will be performing at the Africa Film Festival in Leuven this month. And if you can't stand slam then you will get a quiet thrill from watching *Tey*, a film in which he barely speaks a word, despite being on-screen from beginning to end. French-Senegalese director Alain Gomis cast Williams in *Tey* for his physical presence rather than his way with words. He plays Satché, a young man who knows on waking that this will be his last day on earth. His friends and family know as well, and he goes from one to the next saying a silent goodbye and preparing himself for the next world. The film can be read as a meditation on mortality, but also on the violent dislocation faced by people leaving Africa to seek a better life elsewhere. *Tey* (pictured) has been a favourite of international film festivals, most recently winning the top prize at



Fespaco, the prestigious pan-African film festival in Burkina Faso. By happy chance, the Leuven festival has also selected the second and third prizes winners, giving visitors a handy guide to the best of recent African cinema. *La Pirogue* by Moussa Toure is the festival's opening film. Also from

Senegal, it tells the story of a fisherman who agrees to take 30 men (and one woman stowaway) to the Canary Islands, a gateway to Europe for clandestine immigrants. The journey is fraught with danger, but powerful forces drive them to make the attempt. Then there is *Yema* by Algerian

director Djamilia Sahraoui, which condenses the country's conflict between moderates and hard-line Islamists into a family drama. In an isolated house, Ouardia prepares to bury her son Tarik, who has been killed in fighting with the mujahedeen. She is watched over by a pair of militants, one of whom is Tarik's brother. The festival has a strong east African presence this year, with feature films from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, and short films from Rwanda and Burundi. One highlight is *Nairobi Half Life*, Kenya's first-ever submission to the foreign language Oscars. This tells the story of Mwasa, a young man who moves to the capital to chase his dream of becoming an actor, but who has to turn to crime to survive. It's a very polished production, knowingly exploiting the clichés of African city life for both comic and dramatic effect. Eye-catching films in the documentary programme include *Sweet Dreams*, which follows a women's drumming collective from Rwanda as they set up the country's first ice cream parlour.

WIN TICKETS!

Flanders Today has 10 pairs of tickets to give away for the film *The Teacher's Country*, which screens on 29 March at 20.00, with special guest Madaraka Nyerere. To win a pair of tickets, send an email to editorial@flanderstoday.eu with "Africa Film Festival" in the subject line by 17.00 on 20 March. Winners will be notified the same day.

Then there is *Guerrilla Grannies* by Dutch filmmaker Ike Bertels, recounting her 30-year friendship with three women she tracked down after seeing them as young soldiers in a TV programme about Mozambique's liberation movement in the 1970s. Guests at the festival include Maria Nyerere, the widow of Tanzania's first president, Julius Nyerere, accompanied by her sons Madaraka and Makongoro. You'll also see Madaraka on-screen in *The Teacher's Country*, a documentary in which he surveys 50 years of the country's independence from the summit of Africa's highest peak, Mount Kilimanjaro. Along with films, the festival promises debates, music, an Africa-themed fashion show and additional screenings in other locations around Flanders.

15-30 March | Kinopolis and other venues across Leuven | www.afrikafilmfestival.be

CLASSICAL

Cambridge Consort of Voices

Choral scholar graduates formed the Cambridge Consort of Voices in the early 1990s, and the vocal ensemble have been touring ever since. The Royal Chapel of the Brussels Protestant Church last hosted the CCoV in 2011, when they performed *The Journey of the Magi*. Their return to the historical venue is organised by the Ukkel Kauwberg chapter of the Lions Club and the Brussel-Bruxelles-Breughel chapter of Inner Wheel. The programme is a Baroque affair with George Friderich Handel's *As Pants the Hart*, Vivaldi's *Gloria* and Handel's Latin psalm *Dixit Dominus*. The concert is directed by De Munt choirmaster (and British expat) Piers Maxim. No stranger to Handel, Maxim recently led a performance of the German composer's *Semele* at the Beijing Music Festival. It was the first fully staged Baroque opera in China. **Georgio Valentino**



17 March, 16.00 | Brussels Protestant Church
www.eglisedumusee.be

MORE CLASSICAL THIS WEEK

Brussels

Cine-Concerts: Silent films accompanied by live orchestra at Flagey. In honour of St Patrick's Day, the Royal Chamber Orchestra of Wallonia plays the soundtrack for the 1926 film *Irish Destiny* by George Dewhurst
MAR 17 20.15 at Flagey, Heilig Kruisplein
www.flagey.be

Music of the European Nations & Regions: Piano concert by Denes Dosztán and CD release celebration, part of the Irish in Europe's annual St Patrick's Day celebrations
MAR 17 16.00 at Sint-Gorikshallen, Sint-Gorikspein
www.brussels-st-patricks-day-parade.be

FOOD & DRINK

Hop Shoot Festival

Spring is nearly sprung and that means only one thing in the West Flemish town of Poperinge: hop shoots. The avant-garde of the hop flower, these shoots break through the soil and sprout up to six inches a day before developing into the hardy hop vine and later transforming, through the magic of fermentation, into beer. Poperinge, being the hop capital of Belgium, has far more than it needs to make its famous regional brew, so a portion of its hop shoot production is given over to cuisine. This early spring vegetable makes a versatile ingredient not unlike asparagus. The annual Hop Shoot Festival promotes Poperinge's unique product. Participants are in for an immersive, all-day experience which includes a bus tour through hops country, an up-close look at a hop house, beer and hop shoot tastings and a visit to Poperinge's Hop Museum. **GV**



16-24 March | Across Poperinge | www.hopscheuten.be

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Across Flanders

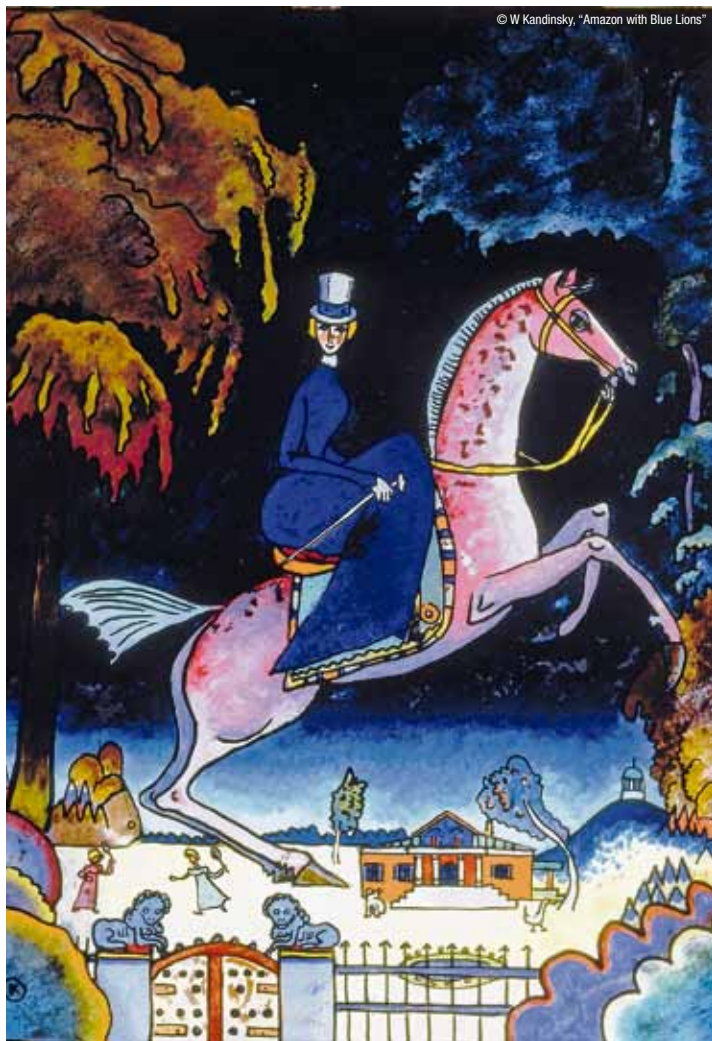
RestoDays: More than 350 restaurants offer three-course gastronomic menus at sharp prices (Lunch €21; Dinner €28)
MAR 15-23 in participating restaurants across Flanders
www.restodays.be

Bruges
Brugge Culinaire 2013: Annual festival featuring workshops, demonstrations by top chefs, cooking competitions, tastings and more
MAR 15-17 at Congrescentrum Oud Sint-Jan-Brugge, Mariastraat 38
www.bruggeculinaire.be

VISUAL ARTS

Kandinsky & Russia

Exactly 100 years ago, the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky exhibited in Brussels for the first time. He had only recently unveiled his first abstract painting, thus setting the artistic tone for the 20th century. This exhibition explores Kandinsky and his fellow Russian artists in the period between 1901 and 1922. These crucial years saw an evolution in European art from the Symbolism of the late 19th century to a Modernism native to the 20th. It was a time of international cross-pollination; Kandinsky became at different times a naturalised German and Frenchman, but never renounced his Russian roots. Through it all, he maintained relations with artists from Russia's various movements, from religious to popular to avant-garde. All of these are represented in this extensive exhibition. Many of the 150 works are on loan from Russian museums and being shown in Belgium for the first time. **GV**



Until 30 July

Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels

► www.fine-arts-museum.be

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Antoine Roegiers: The Temptation of Giants: Experimental works by the Belgian painter, inspired by the work of great Flemish masters, including Bosch and Brueghel

Until MAR 31 at Botanique, Koningsstraat 236

► www.botanique.be

Eurantica Fine Arts Fair: International fine arts and antiques fair, the largest of its kind in Belgium

MAR 15-24 at Brussels Expo, Belgiëplein 1

► www.eurantica.com

Inside the Station: Interactive exhibition on life inside the world's first zero-emission polar research station, Belgium's Princess Elisabeth Antarctica

Until MAY 31 at Tour & Taxis, Havenlaan 86c

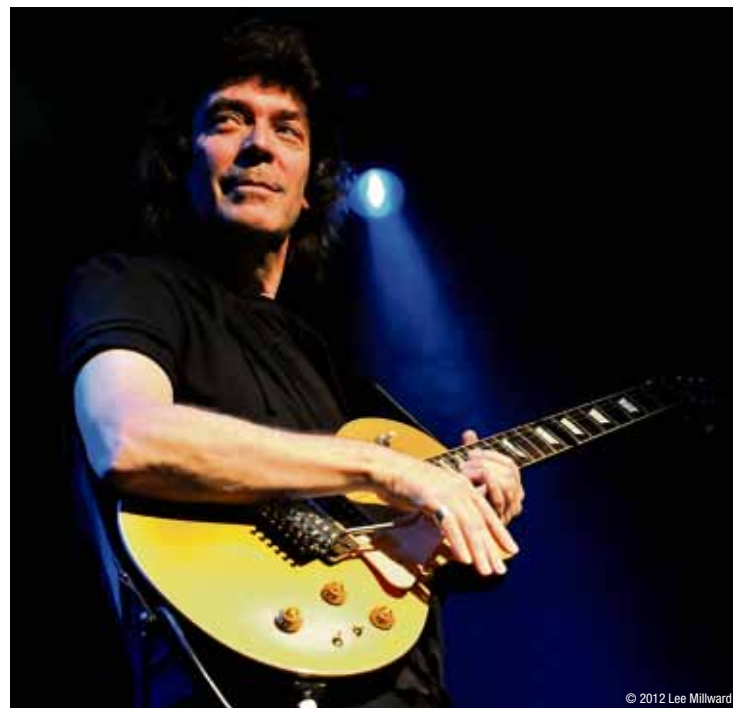
► www.insidesthestation.be

CONCERT

GET TICKETS NOW

Steve Hackett

Long before phoning in such pop hits as "Invisible Touch" and "I Can't Dance", Genesis were among Britain's top-tier purveyors of progressive rock, a genre that has always played particularly well on the Continent. In those days (the early 1970s), the band's singer was a pre-"Solsbury Hill" Peter Gabriel, and their guitarist was one Steve Hackett. Indeed, it was probably these two, the group's most artistically forward-thinking members, who set Genesis apart from their prog contemporaries. Hackett is celebrating those halcyon days on his new double-CD *Genesis Revisited II*, comprised of new recordings of the band's most well-loved songs. Purists will forgive the absence of Hackett's old bandmates when they hear the guitarist and his new crew tackle Genesis' 1972 opus, the 23-minute suite "Supper's Ready." Prog-lovers should book now for this show in Brussels as several dates on Hackett's world tour have already sold out. **GV**



15 April, 20.00 | Ancienne Belgique, Brussels | ► www.abconcerts.com

MORE CONCERTS TO BOOK NOW

Brussels

Beth Orton: Delicate and melancholy electro-folk by the English singer, back with her first album since 2006

APR 22 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110

► www.abconcerts.be

The Black Crowes: The American 1980s rock'n'roll band are still going strong after nine albums

JUN 21 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110

► www.abconcerts.be

Brussels & Ghent

Ozark Henry: The Flemish pop-rock singer presents his newest CD, *Stay Gold*

APR 17 20.00 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23, Ghent

► www.vooruit.be

APR 21 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110, Brussels

► www.abconcerts.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Toon Lambrechts

Den Biekorf

Lieve Dewinnestraat 2, Ghent

Outside, the first rays of sunshine speak about springtime as the temperature hits double digits. Inside, on the other hand, a somewhat dark, timeless atmosphere lingers, one typical of *bruine cafe's* in Flanders. Den Biekorf (The Beehive), tucked away close to Ghent's Rozemarijnbrug, clearly belongs in the category.

Behind the bar stands Wouter Wemel, the young owner who reopened the place about 18 months ago. "Den Biekorf is above all a neighbourhood cafe," he tells me. "And because the area here is quite mixed, the public is also really diverse and ranges from people who have been coming here for 30 years now to students. My youngest customer is 18, the oldest 83." The fact that he even knows that is a testament to the kind of barman Wemel is – one who engages with the customers. Den Biekorf is a place with tradition, to say the least. Wemel (*pictured*) points at an old photograph on the wall. It dates from 1903. "At that time there was already a pub called In den Biekorf," he says "The young socialist movement from Ghent had their printing press here in the basement – some say even before they moved to Vooruit [*Ghent's well-known former socialist enclave, now a culture centre*]. That's a story, of course, but I like it."



The bar, says Wemel, "has always been a social place, a place where different people meet each other. I definitely want to keep it that way. That's why I try to keep the prices low. And there are discounts: Today for example, the coffee costs only €1."

Den Biekorf closes early, too – at 1.00 – which makes it a good place in which to start the evening. Or just to pop in, take a stool at the bar and get a taste of everyday life in Ghent.

BITE

Robyn Boyle

Mille et une nuits ★★★★★

One of the many advantages to having friends who live close to the *voorplein* in Brussels' hip Sint-Gillis neighbourhood is they know about restaurants like this one. Upon entering Mille et une nuits on a nippy Friday evening, our group is met with a waft of heavy warm air and a room so dark it takes the eyes a moment to adjust.

We are inside the luxury version of a Berber tent, or so it seems. The low ceiling is one big billowy tapestry adorned with rows of twinkly lights, and everywhere are hanging lanterns and brilliant colours. A décor this kitschy can only be intentional, which makes sense with a name like One Thousand and One Nights, referring to the famous collection of stories from ancient Persian and North African folklore.

The friendly server motions our party of four to a cosy corner table by the window, granting three of us choice spots on the cushiony bench. We're seated at a low table that is actually one big round brass platter, intricately engraved, with a candle in the middle. We feel like Arabian royalty in such lush surroundings and promptly order a bottle of red wine, a Tunisian Chateau Mornag, our server's spot-on suggestion.

We're all in the mood for couscous, and within no time there is a giant bowl of the fluffy steamed semolina on the table. An even larger bowlful of vegetable stew arrives



at the same time, steaming hot and smelling of tomato and spice. Three types of grilled meat fulfil our carnivorous craving in the form of spicy merguez sausages and lamb and beef brochettes.

Our server was so kind as to suggest the proper cooking for the brochettes: medium rosy for the lamb, medium rare for the beef. Once again, her advice is on target. The

hunks of beef and lamb have a tasty grilled flavour and juicy centre. But the merguez, we all agree, goes best with the meal for all its sweet, cinnamon and paprika-infused flavour. A ladle of the veggie stew's savoury broth gets soaked right up by the couscous, making it swell under tender pieces of celery, carrot, courgette and chickpeas. When every plate is scraped clean, we

contemplate finishing off with a pot of mint tea. But then someone spots an interesting dessert on the menu, and we decide to order that with a round of espressos. The *Mosaïque de Pâtisseries tunisiennes* is an assortment of Tunisian pastries. Each one has a soft, delicate crust encasing any combination of nuts and honey, including roasted almonds, hazelnuts, pine nuts and pistachios. They're sweet, but not overly so, and an absolute joy to eat.

After polishing off the pastries, we stick around for another hour or so. This is the kind of place you simply don't want to leave. And at €30 per person, we can afford to order another round of drinks.

► www.milleetunenuits.be



Moskoustraat 7, Brussels;
02.537.41.27



Tue-Sun, 18.00-midnight



Mains: €10-€15



Delicious Maghreb cuisine served in a dreamy setting perfect for small groups

Philip Ebels

TALKING DUTCH

Read all about it

Even if you didn't know it, last week's media was abound with clues that it was Youth Book Week, with separate announcements on *dinsdag*, Tuesday, *woensdag*, Wednesday, and *donderdag*, Thursday (note the lack of a capital letter in the Dutch spelling).

On Tuesday in Antwerp, Dutch author David Pefko was awarded this year's *Inktaap*, or ink monkey, *een prijs die "jongeren wil confronteren met de keuze die de jury's van de grote literaire prijzen in het Nederlandse taalgebied hebben gemaakt"*, a prize that introduces young people to the choices that the juries of the big Dutch-language literary prizes have made.

Pefko received the award for his book *Het voorseizoen*, *The Preseason*, about a loser police detective whose weaknesses readers apparently identify with. "David Pefko heeft met dit boek de grootste loser neergepend," was a comment from one of the 2,000 secondary school jury members. With this book, David Pefko has penned the biggest loser.

On Wednesday, meanwhile, Boek.be announced the nominees for *de Boekenleeuw*, the Book Lion, and *de Boekenpauw*, the Book Peacock, two prizes for the best and most beautifully illustrated children's books, respectively, by a Flemish author. There are 16 nominees in different age categories, all of which are available *met korting*, with a discount, in Standaard Boekhandel and other bookstores across Brussels and Flanders



until 6 April, when the jury will announce the winner.

One of the nominees is *Kelderkind*, *Cellar Child*, by Kristien Dieltiens from Antwerp. On Thursday, it won the Woutertje Pieterse Prijs, which supports "het bevorderen van de kwaliteit van het Nederlandstalige kinder- en jeugdboek", to promote quality Dutch-language books for children and young adults. As the title suggests, the book is not about a pretty princess or talking bunny rabbits. It is about being different: one boy *met een hazenlip*, with a cleft lip, another – based on a true story – who used to live *in een kelder*, in a cellar. If that seems a little heavy, the jury

seems to like that: "*Kelderkind is een boek dat genres overstijgt.*" *Kelderkind* is a book that transcends genres. "*Toch is het geen boek over slachtoffers want ook hier is niets zwart/wit.*" But it is not a book about victims because here, too, nothing is black and white.

Finally, Els Beerten from Aarschot won the *Prijs Vlaamse Gemeenschap voor Jeugdliteratuur*, the Flemish Community Prize for Youth Literature. Beerten is best known for her 2008 instant classic *Allemaal willen we de hemel*, we all want heaven.

► talkingdutch@hotmail.com

The last word...

Inconsolable

"All of a sudden there was just the two of us again. Suddenly I wasn't a mother anymore."

Katrien Mettepenningen, mother of one of the victims of Kim De Gelder, gave an emotional testimony in court

Inspector Gadget

"At the time, it didn't seem so expensive for equipment that could do so much."

Police in Geel, Antwerp province, paid €25,000 for a bomb and drugs detector, which turned out to be a tool for finding lost golf balls. The fraudster who sold it is now on trial in London

Bacterial soup

"Some chefs cook their dishes at 35 or 40 degrees – just the right temperature for bacteria to multiply."

Food safety professor Benedikt Sas of Ghent University on an outbreak of food poisoning at Noma in Copenhagen, the world's top restaurant

Rug regrets

"It's the personification of everything I wasn't and didn't want to be. I still don't understand how I allowed myself to be talked into it."

Flemish singer Helmut Lotti regrets wearing a hairpiece for years at the height of his career

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

The long-awaited De Grote Post has opened in Ostend. Retaining a name that reflects its history, the former post office has been restored and expanded, housing numerous performing arts spaces and giving the coastal city a much-needed culture house for both local and international talent

Science

Do you know how your eye works? It's one of the tools of our body that is so important, it's terrifying to imagine something going wrong. An Antwerp ophthalmologist has edited a book in English that explains in understandable language how the eye functions and how historical figures throughout history have dealt with eye problems in surprisingly creative ways

Arts

Flemish photographer Dirk Braeckman does not often accept commissions, but when Bozar said they would put him in Horta Hall, he kindly agreed. On one condition: that he could "invade" another exhibition. He was handed the programme and chose Antoine Watteau. We talk to Braeckman about the choice and how he "filled in" the work of Watteau by travelling to museums, photographing what could not be lent