

Tour of Flanders

This weekend is the centenary of Flanders' most anticipated cycle race of the season

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Myanmar mission

Economic visits to the once military-controlled state result in contracts for Flemish businesses

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There's a storm comin'

Ostend's first jazz festival features new and young artists in the city's brand new culture centre

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Working wonders

A Flemish agency helps get people with mental health problems back into the workforce

Angela Chambers

Getting people with mental health problems into – or back into – the workforce is now a key focus of VDAB, Flanders' jobs and training agency. This year, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which regularly analyses data from its member countries, released the review "Mental Health and Work: Belgium", which found that the relationships VDAB has developed with health professionals and other partners in the programme is "promising" and is setting an example for similar projects to form elsewhere.

Going from working in a high-demand profession to a hospital stay for severe depression can happen to even the most driven, confident employees. Katrien Deboodt of De Haan on the Flemish coast is a well-educated

businesswoman. When she became pregnant with her son in 2007, this change, along with stress from her work, caused Deboodt to have an "emotional and psychological crash," including thoughts of suicide.

"Before, I was a perfectionist, and I was not always happy with my results," says Deboodt. "I was expecting too much of myself, and I eventually wasn't satisfied with anything I was doing ... I wanted the best for other people, but I forgot myself." Thanks to intensive therapy and support from her husband, Deboodt was eventually ready to work again, but she struggled with the anxiety of starting over. Her doctor recommended she contact GTB, a Flemish organisation financed by VDAB that helps those who've been faced with mental health problems or certain disabilities to enter the job market. Each process is tailored to meet the individual's needs.

While mental health issues cost Belgium 3.4% of GDP, reduced productivity and lost employment are much larger expenditures than health-care fees. "We find mental health problems are very widespread," says Veerle Miranda, an economist in the Social Policy Division of the OECD. "One person in five has a mental health problem, and that is the case in all our member countries. Being unemployed often worsens your mental health, so if VDAB can intervene as soon as possible, the problem won't be so severe."

Only within the last decade have mental health problems been given heightened attention in Belgium and other OECD countries. In Flanders, when employment policies were transferred from VAPH, the Flemish agency for people with a disability, to VDAB in 2006, there was an increased awareness of mental disorders. This move identified those who had issues

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Bart Peeters



"Just to be clear, I don't have ADHD," read the headline in *De Morgen* last week. For an explanation of why anyone might think Bart Peeters did: After retiring in 2011, he will this year stage no fewer than three comeback concerts.

Peeters was born in 1959, though you wouldn't think so to judge from his eternally boyish looks and tousled hair. He was just a boy when he first appeared on TV at 13, and six years later, he was singing on stage with the cover band Beri Beri.

Since then, he's been a constant presence in both spheres: as an actor and presenter of some of the most popular TV shows in Flanders and as a highly respected performer in bands and on his own.

He's spent most of his time onscreen with the VRT and his face has become associated with *Eurosong*, with *Dag Sinterklaas* (in a 1990s series also starring Jan Decler, which is repeated every year) and with one of the most-publicised new food breakthroughs in recent years – the *speculoos* spread that won the first series of *De bedenkers* (The

Inventors).

As a musician, he sings and plays both guitar and drums and he is especially well-regarded for his insistence on performing in Dutch, which has won him an array of awards. His CDs include a compilation of children's songs, and his latest, from 2011, is a collection of the last 10 years titled *Het beste en tot nog eens* (So Long and All the Best).

That sounds suspiciously like a farewell title, and Peeters indeed announced his withdrawal from performing. But he was back on stage at the Dranouter festival in West Flanders last summer. His unofficial comeback will be at the Nekka Nacht festival next month in Antwerp, and his official comeback is a week later at Festival aan Zee in De Panne.

Before that, however, he can be seen on TV, this Sunday on Eén in *De neus van Pinokkio* (Pinocchio's Nose), a game show in which members of the public have to say which showbiz stories are true and which are made up. Among the fairytales, you might be excused for thinking, must be that line about ADHD.

News in brief

The first of the planned **Flanders Fields Memorial Gardens** to commemorate the centenary of the First World War will be in London, minister-president Kris Peeters announced last week during a trip to Montreal. The gardens, containing soil taken from the fields of Flanders, will be developed in various places of historical significance between 2014 and 2018. The famous poem "In Flanders Fields" was written by a Canadian officer who served during the Second Battle of Ypres.

Belgian rail authority **NMBS has introduced a Mobib card**, which can be used by travellers on both the train system and on Brussels public transport system MIVB. Buyers of new rail passes will receive the Mobib card from now on and others as they renew their passes. The cards can be reloaded at special machines and online. Eventually, the cards will also be valid for Flanders' public transport system De Lijn and for Wallonia's TEC system.

Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever last weekend **rescinded an earlier decision to allow a march** on 1 May by the extreme right-wing New Solidarity Alternative (N-SA) in the city, after a report from police suggested that the demonstration could provoke clashes with opponents of the group. The N-SA intended to protest against the presence of the left-wing PVDA+ in the district administration of Borgerhout.

Flanders **recycles 65% of all household waste**, the best result in Europe, according to figures from the European Environment Agency. Belgium as a whole recycles 58%, and takes third place after Austria with 63%. Flanders is classed separately from Belgium as waste-related matters are a regional competency. In the whole of Europe, the average stands at only 35%.

Rik Torfs, the Leuven professor and outspoken CD&V senator, has announced he is **leaving politics to stand as a candidate for rector** of the University of Leuven (KUL). Torfs, 56, entered the Senate in 2010 with an impressive 143,000 personal votes, largely as a result of his TV appearances. Since then he has commented on many subjects such as poverty and sexual abuse by clergy. "Sometimes you have to change direction and follow your heart," he said.

The government of **Flanders paid out €480,000 by mistake** to a number of study bureaus for consultancy work on traffic black spots which they never carried out. Last week public works minister Hilde Crevits told the Flemish parliament the mistake was caused when the government's road agency took over the management of the study from an outside agency. The government has now asked for its money back, with possible legal action against companies who refuse.

The Brussels-Capital Region has agreed to a proposal from mobility minister Brigitte Grouwels to construct a **double road and tram tunnel under the Meiserplein** in Schaarbeek, one of the region's worst traffic black spots. The entire project, including landscaping of the new square, is estimated at €250 million. The plan will be studied further with a view to starting work in 2019.

A proposed **ban on "undemocratic" groups** like Sharia4Belgium and the neo-Nazi Blood and Honour is impossible because they legally do not exist, the Council of State has advised. The federal parliament's interior committee has begun discussing a ban, following a number of incidents last year involving the Muslim extremists of Sharia4Belgium. In its 44-page

opinion, the Council of State pointed out that such groups cannot be legally banned because they have no legal status in the first place. In addition, it said, the members would simply form another group under another name.

Peter Sagan of Slovakia won the **Gent-Wevelgem cycle race** last weekend with an impressive final five-kilometre sprint. Flemish cyclist Tom Boonen, who won last year's race, pulled out of the race after a crash that injured his right knee. The race was shortened to 183 kilometres because of weather conditions. Fabian Cancellara of Switzerland, meanwhile, one of the favourites for the upcoming Tour of Flanders, pulled out of the race in the feed area, citing the cold weather.

The Brussels public prosecutor has opened a **criminal investigation into possible tax fraud** and falsification of documents by the Christian workers' movement ACW, whose financial affairs have been the subject of controversy in recent weeks. The announcement comes days after ACW said it was filing suit against N-VA MP Peter Dedecker for defamation. A separate investigation by the special investigations unit of the finance ministry is already underway.

The tourist attraction **Mini-Europa could move to the coastal town** of Middelkerke, after mayor Janna Rommel-Opstaele welcomed a suggestion from LDD MP Jean-Marie Dedecker to take it over when it is ejected from its current location on the Heizel plateau in Brussels this August. Kortrijk, Braine l'Alleud in Wallonia and Montenegro have also expressed an interest in Mini-Europa and the water park Océade, both of which have to move to make way for a massive new shopping and conference centre on the site.

FLANDERS TODAY

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EDITOR Lisa Bradshaw

DEPUTY EDITOR Sally Tipper

NEWS EDITOR Alan Hope

AGENDA Robyn Boyle, Georgio Valentino

ART DIRECTOR Paul Van Dooren

PREPRESS Corelio AdPro

CONTRIBUTORS Daan Bauwens, Rebecca Benoot, Robyn Boyle, Leo Cendrowicz, Angela Chambers, Sabine Clappaert, Katy Desmond, Andy Furniere, Diana Goodwin, Toon Lambrechts, Katrien Lindemans, Marc Maes, Ian Mundell, Anja Otte, Tom Peeters, Senne Starckx, Linda Thompson, Georgio Valentino, Christophe Verbiest, Denzil Walton

GENERAL MANAGER Hans De Loore

PUBLISHER Corelio Publishing NV

EDITORIAL ADDRESS

Gossetlaan 30 - 1702 Groot-Bijgaarden

tel 02 373 99 09 - fax 02 375 98 22

editorial@flanderstoday.eu

FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS

subscriptions@flanderstoday.eu

or sign up online at www.flanderstoday.eu

ADVERTISING

Evelyne Fregonese

02 373 83 57

advertising@flanderstoday.eu

VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Hans De Loore

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Hello Europe!

"The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page," wrote St Augustine, at a time when both travel and reading were more problematic than now. But since we can now read books without even having them copied out by monks, why not do the same with travel?

That's very close to the vision of the future of three young media professionals from Antwerp and Brussels – Senne Dehandschutter, Majd Khalifeh and Mathias Brouns – who have launched Hello Europe. The new initiative aims to bring remaining travel boundaries crashing down using nothing more than a TV screen. The plan: install giant screens measuring 2 x 6 metres in major European cities and link them so that they broadcast images from another city. Every half hour a new city would appear on each screen.

The purpose: to allow residents of other cities who are unable to travel to get as close to each other as technology will allow. And it wouldn't just be a travelogue, it would be interactive. Hello Europe suggests a dance competition taking place a continent apart in real time, a dating event (though the implications of long-distance dating may not have been entirely thought through) and Europe-wide



From left: Senne Dehandschutter, Majd Khalifeh and Mathias Brouns of Hello Europe

concerts or debates.

"The possibilities are endless," says Dehandschutter in the video the group made in support of the campaign. Naturally, they need start-up financing and are looking for private sponsors. They have so far received an enthusiastic welcome – if not funding – from European Commissioner Neelie Kroes, in charge of digital affairs. Coming soon to a giant screen near you?

► www.hello-europe.org

Working wonders

Starting small and working up is one of the keys to success in getting people back to work

► continued from page 1

unrelated to their professional skills that kept them from employment. The *sluitend maatpak*, or custom-made approach, is a VDAB policy created about seven years ago that says everyone who is a job seeker should receive guidance that meets his or her individual needs.

“Before this approach, a lot of people with mental health problems were hidden in the figures somewhere, but no one really cared or knew they were there,” says Luc Henau, general manager at GTB, which is subsidised by the VDAB and the ESF, the agency that implements the European Social Fund in Flanders. This revealed a “relatively large subgroup” with severe medical, mental, psychological or psychiatric problems (known as the MMPP group). Many in this group desired work, but they weren’t ready for regular employment and first needed other assistance.

Many agencies, one direction

In 2009, a pilot project was launched to assist those in the MMPP group for up to 18 months. It was successful and is still in place today. Job seekers receive help from a GTB job coach, a psychologist and an empowerment coach who helps lead them in progressive steps to employment. Labour and health sectors are combining their resources to make the GTB programme work. “A few years ago, we didn’t talk much, but now we pick up the phone and share information,” says Bie Bijmens, director of training and coaching for WEB, a Turnhout-based organisation that is involved in the programme.

Before this cooperation, the psychologist and the labour sector may have given the client conflicting messages on when it’s appropriate to begin employment. “We are working very hard so that the client is steered in one direction,” says Henau.

Removing the stigma

Not placing labels on job seekers with mental health issues may help relieve the stigma often associated with these problems. One way Flanders is tackling this concern is when job seekers, no matter their abilities, first visit a VDAB office. If someone is suspected of needing special assistance after speaking



Katrien Deboodt at home with her two children. Her breakdown and subsequent integration back into the workforce was “a turning point” in her life, she says



Ankie Michielsens (above) and Koen Goris (pictured on cover) are long-term employees in the sheltered workshop at WEB in Turnhout

system based on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association. “If a specialist notes that someone

(ICF), which is gaining popularity in Europe. “In DSM, you have to show your weaknesses to receive guidance, but the ICF focuses more on a person’s strengths,” says Henau. “In fact, everyone has strengths and weaknesses.” Henau says they are currently working on an experiment with the ICF system and hope to have this model approved by the Flemish government.

Changing employer attitudes

The ICF system may also benefit the unemployed when contacting potential employers. The OECD review found “significant reluctance” by Flemish employers to hire someone with mental health problems.

“Not every employer is throwing open its doors,” admits Henau, but he thinks communication is key to improving the situation. “There is a difference between saying to an employer: ‘Do you want to take someone with autism?’ and ‘You are looking for someone who doesn’t make mistakes on a job that requires strong concentration. We have the right person for you.’” Multiple sources from GTB note that those struggling to get back into the workforce are often more motivated and loyal to an employer because they now fully appreciate having a job, which also is a good selling point. One job seeker fitting this profile is Ahmed Abidar, who sought help from GTB and WEB after struggling with mental health problems. He recently completed

a practical placement programme, which allows clients to slowly build up their working capacity, starting with a couple of days a week, in the hope of reaching full-time employment.

“He worked very well, and when he needed to take a break, we had to tell him to take a break, to stop working!” says An Bruylant, a WEB empowerment coach.

“Before, I found it difficult to leave home and meet people, but now it’s easier, and I’m ready to start work again,” says Abidar.

The programme encourages practical placements with a family member or someone in the neighbourhood, as it’s “less threatening” and will help build their self-confidence again, says Bijmens. In some cases, if a person isn’t ready to move into a regular work environment, they may begin with volunteer work or a sheltered workshop, which is offered by WEB and other similar organisations.

The VDAB may also provide subsidies to employers for the loss of production by someone re-entering the job market, with less funding over time as the employee develops.

A new beginning

In the meantime, Katrien Deboodt is back at work. Starting with volunteer positions, she steadily got used to regular activity again until she was ready for employment. Since 2010, she has worked in a job that allows her to properly balance her personal and professional life, and she has been able to have another child without the mental health repercussions. “Now I have more self-confidence,” she says. “I believe in myself. Maybe this period was a turning point in my life that had to happen in order to be able to start down a new path.”

While the VDAB programme has primarily focused on the unemployed, the OECD recommends the system also further target those who are employed but at risk of losing their jobs because of mental health problems. Henau says they are currently developing a “work and welfare” vision to focus on long-term careers.

The OECD also advises employment services to better target the mild or moderately mentally ill and young people who may have mental health problems before entering the job market.

Now that a programme is up and running, it’s time to look at a legal framework, with more consistent rules, says Henau. It’s “crucial”, he says, to develop a proposal with the Flemish government to make sure the legal framework is complete by 2014, before the elections.

► www.gtb-vlaanderen.be

“Before this approach, a lot of people with mental health problems were hidden in the figures somewhere”

with a VDAB representative, this person isn’t told they have a disability and must visit another organisation, as was the case before 2008. Instead, they are sent to talk to someone from GTB or another service within the same building. Another way to remove stigma is hiding the particular issue in a code

has F142, you will immediately know the rights of this person regarding labour, like the right to a workshop,” explains Henau.

In the future, a different system could be used that would be even less of a stigma than the DSM code – the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

De Gelder found guilty and responsible for his actions

The 24-year-old has been sentenced by a jury to life in prison

Alan Hope

A jury in Ghent last week took just over four hours of deliberation to find Kim De Gelder guilty of four murders and 25 charges of attempted murder. De Gelder, who stabbed two babies and a caregiver to death in a crèche in Dendermonde in 2009, was given four life sentences and 25 sentences of 20 years.

During the month-long trial, De Gelder never denied that he entered the crèche armed with a knife and an axe, striking out at anyone within reach. One week earlier, De Gelder had murdered an elderly woman in her home in Vrasene in order, he said, to still the voices in his head urging him to kill.

The main question facing the jury

was whether, as maintained by the defence, De Gelder was insane at the time of the events, which would have meant he would be sentenced to a mental institution instead of prison. During the four years since the attacks and in court in Ghent, De Gelder has behaved erratically, and two psychologists argued he was suffering from paranoid schizophrenia.

All five psychiatrists appointed by the prosecution, however, said that, while De Gelder clearly suffered from a serious personality disorder, he was not at any point unaware of the seriousness and of the consequences of what he was doing.

The jury agreed. In their statement, they expressed the opinion that

no-one who was not fully in possession of his faculties could have carried out the meticulous planning involved in the two deadly attacks.

After being sentenced, De Gelder expressed his first words of regret in the entire case. "If this is now the last time I'll be allowed to speak, then I would like to offer my apologies for everything I have done to the victims. And my apologies for the problems I have caused for society," he said. De Gelder's lawyer has advised him not to seek an appeal.

Outside the courtroom, victims injured in the crèche and relatives of the dead described themselves as "relieved" and released white balloons into the air in memory of those killed.



Kim De Gelder apologised to his victims after being sentenced in Ghent last week

English is number-two language in Brussels

English is the second most common language spoken in Brussels, as the number of French speakers declines slightly and the number of those able to speak Dutch increases. But one in 10 residents of the capital speak none of the three main languages, according to the results of the Language Barometer released last week by the Free University of Brussels (VUB).

Just over 88% of the population in Brussels speaks French well to very well. English is second, at nearly 30%, followed by Dutch at 23%. Arabic comes in fourth place, with 18% of the population speaking the language. Arabic is followed by Spanish and German.

According to Guy Vanhengel, chair of the Flemish Community Commission in Brussels, the advance of Dutch is a testament to the success of Dutch-language education in the capital, where increasing numbers of children are sent from homes in which the parents do not speak Dutch.

The study also shows a drop in the number of households where a single language is



spoken.

Given the position of English as a working language in Brussels, Flemish education minister Pascal Smet once again raised the possibility of introducing it as an official third language. "That would be a strong signal towards the international community," he said.

Fund to tighten controls against scientific fraud

The Flemish Fund for Scientific Research (FWO) is setting up a task force to tighten controls on the reliability of scientific research in the region, after a scientist from Brussels Free University (VUB) was sacked for falsifying the results of years of research. The pharmacologist, who was working on treatments for epilepsy and multiple sclerosis, received 90% of his funding from the FWO.

"Fraud with scientific data ... is totally unacceptable and undermines the credibility of all scientific research," the FWO said in a statement. "As soon as we learned of the fraud, [we] took the immediate decision to end our cooperation agreement with this researcher and to sack him with immediate effect on the grounds of a severe offence."

The 35-year-old researcher is currently getting legal advice. The FWO and VUB, meanwhile, are considering filing a criminal complaint.

The researcher was working on a possible treatment for epilepsy and is thought to have given in to pressure to fake data when the results proved disappointing. The case apparently came to light after Master's students working on the same project produced radically different results. The university's committee for scientific integrity repeated the experiments and found clear evidence of fraud.



Court throws out GAS fines

A police court in Antwerp last week threw out an administrative fine (a so-called GAS fine) against the organisation Gezondheid voor het Volk (Medicine for the People) because of a procedural error. The group, which provides medical care to the poor, had been fined for organising an unauthorised vaccination campaign in the city and fined €150. The same court later scrapped two GAS fines against members of Occupy Antwerp who were fined €75 for taking part in a protest. The city of Antwerp said it would still press for payment of costs.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

75,786

tonnes of road salt used this winter across Flanders, at a total cost of €12 million

841

reports of potholes in the roads of Flanders so far this year, according to the Roads and Traffic Agency

824

people have so far this year reported a total of €155 million in undeclared income. The so-called fiscal amnesty expires in 2014

€11,554,000

in civil list payments this year for the king, €300,000 more than last year. Total payments to the royal family come to €14 million

€580,000,000

cost of the social plan for the workers of Ford Genk, the company said. Workers last week voted in favour of the plan, though arrangements for managers still need to be agreed

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Maggie's magic

A decade ago, opinion polls were new to Flanders, and every single one of them seem to hold a surprise. These days all polls seem similar: the nationalist N-VA is the most popular party, with a share of over 30%, leaving the traditional parties far behind, while the personal popularity is a close race between Bart De Wever (N-VA) and Kris Peeters (CD&V).

Last week's *De Morgen*/VTM poll was no different. It did reveal one new thing, though: the rising popularity of Maggie De Block.

When De Block (Open VLD) became secretary of state for asylum, migration and poverty in the federal government, few people had heard of her. Insiders knew her as a hardworking backbencher, with a thorough knowledge of social affairs. But her entering the federal government came as a surprise even to them, as most had expected Gwendolyn Rutten, now party president, to take the job.

De Block's first weeks were disastrous. Not an expert in the issues in her portfolio, she committed herself to some serious studying. In the meantime, she got mixed up about numbers and used the word "gang bangs" instead of "gangs" in one interview. As winter set in, freezing temperatures left immigrant families desperate for shelter – an issue that had been around for years.

To make matters worse, De Block, a general practitioner, became the butt of many a joke because of her weight – in a way no male politician has ever had to endure. The secretary of state kept her spirits up, but the verbal abuse became so much that Freya Van den Bossche, a political adversary if anything, came to her aid. A woman can never do right, stated Van den Bossche, known for her good looks; either she is too pretty or not pretty enough.

The negative atmosphere surrounding De Block had a rather contradictory effect. Her popularity grew, first of all in her own party, where the members felt she was unfairly treated.

De Block set to work and delivered. Due to her policy of dissuasion, the unnaturally high number of asylum requests went down for the first time in years. This winter, no families were left out in the cold.

"I do my job", is all De Block has to say about this. This was her reaction too, when the poll was published. De Block only found out about it hours later. She was too busy doing her job.

Mud, sweat and tears

The centenary Tour of Flanders will be as gruelling – and as cold – as ever

Leo Cendrowicz

Cobbles and mud, blood and sweat, passion and pain: These ingredients have helped establish a tradition that is now 100 years old. The Ronde van Vlaanderen, or Tour of Flanders, celebrates its centenary on Easter Sunday, 31 March, and it is as gruelling as ever.

About 800,000 fans are expected to head out to cheer on the 208 starters – in 26 teams of eight – whatever the conditions. Indeed, the Ronde has always been associated with terrible weather, and the driving rain, wind and hail have been responsible for helping define the race's identity.

Flemish riders, who have struggled to make their mark in the Tour de France or the Olympics in recent years, are under particular pressure to prove their mettle on home soil. The chances of local success are high: Flanders has claimed six of the last eight victories, with Tom Boonen last year winning his third title. But others are in with a good shot, like two-time winner Stijn Devolder, 2011 champion Nick

Nuyens, Stijn Vandenbergh and Dries Devenyns.

Although this is the centenary and is being celebrated with, among other things, a special postage stamp, it is not the 100th race. The First World War broke out in 1914, after two editions of the Tour, and it was not restarted until 1919; so this year is only number 97.

The Ronde was conceived by Karel Van Wijnendaele of the newspaper *Sportwereld* and was first held on 25 May, 1913. Twenty-seven riders took part in the 330-kilometre race that ran through Sint-Niklaas, Aalst, Oudenaarde, Kortrijk, Veurne, Ostend and Bruges and finished on a wooden track at Mariakerke, now a district of Ghent.

Since then, the Ronde has gone on to become one of the most iconic cycle races in the world and is arguably the highlight of the pro cycling season.

The route has changed many times over the years. All the races began in Ghent until 1976, when Sint-Niklaas took over, followed by Bruges in 1998. Until 1973, most

of the finishes were in or around Ghent, before Meerbeke won the honour; last year, Oudenaarde muscled in.

This year's route takes riders over the Oude Kwaremont and Paterberg three times, but the infamous Muur van Geraardsbergen will be absent for the second year running. From the start at Bruges' Markt, the route heads in a straight line to Torhout, Ledegem, Wevelgem and Rekkem – this year's "village of the Tour" – then heads to Avelgem and the Tiegemberg, the first of 17 climbs.

Once they reach the Ardennes, the peloton will face 50km with the Taaiberg, Eikenberg and Molenberg climbs, not to mention some difficult cobblestone stretches. After climbing Berendies and Valkenberg, the riders will be able to catch their breath and prepare for the 37km loop that will take them over the Kwaremont before the Oudenaarde finale.

Expect cheers, tears and some exhausted, muddy riders.

► www.rondevanvlaanderen.be



Community spirit through sport

"Sports streets" are popping up in Antwerp, as part of the European Capital of Sport

Angela Chambers

Living in a city, it's common not to know your neighbour on the other side of a shared wall. But in Antwerp, some communities not only know their neighbours, they also play football and learn tai chi with them.

As a result of Antwerp's title this year of European Capital of Sport, neighbourhoods may apply to become a "sports street". They receive equipment from the city for all ages and even a visit from dance, fitness and martial arts instructors. The Sporting A initiative is working with Opsinoren, an organisation that helps residents close their street for community events and provides financial support and assistance.

Nicole Van Hoof organised one of the first sports streets in the district of Wilrijk. As her neighbourhood's sports council president, she has so far arranged table tennis matches, bocce ball games and a Nordic walking group. After these and other street events, Van Hoof says she and her neighbours have become friends.

"We were invited to the house of a young couple with two little children, and we didn't know them before," says Van Hoof. "Two men who didn't know each other now go out together because they have the same interests."

Some of her neighbours also have



From left: Christiane Bastiaensen, Nicole Van Hoof and Marleen Geerts face the cold with Nordic walking

started taking painting classes together after meeting at the street gatherings. In May, Van Hoof's community will organise a barbecue

and more games. "We're working on social cohesion and bringing people together to experience something fun," says Opsinoren director

Katrien Segers.

Streets with the most original ideas can win the title of Antwerp Sports Street. In the coming months, Sporting A will film sports streets in action and choose 20 events to share via social media. The street with the most interest will receive the recognition.

Residents from the chosen street will have a chance to attend sports events in the coming year, such as an Antwerp Giants basketball game or a football match. "The street doesn't have to organise a big football tournament to win," says Ken Van Rompaey, Sporting A pop-up events organiser. "We're more interested in involving as many people as possible. We prefer a good jogging group with 120 neighbours to a football tournament with only 20."

Creativity is also a plus. For example, with a jogging group, there could be obstacles involved, or with a football tournament, perhaps it's fathers against sons, says Van Rompaey.

For small children, a 50-piece equipment set is available with the goal of "improving hand-eye co-ordination, motor skills and spatial perception," according to information from the city. This includes soft balls, skipping ropes, chalk and equipment for long jump, hockey and more. The teen package includes gear for football, field

hockey and basketball.

Adults may apply for badminton gear, tennis rackets and Frisbees, and equipment for volleyball, hockey, football, basketball and running, among other activities. Instructors are available to teach communities yoga, Zumba, boot camp, Latin dance, Pilates, belly dancing and more group classes. Neighbours are free to come up with their own ideas, too. "The effort has to come from the neighbourhood, and we supply the materials," says Van Rompaey.

To participate, all neighbours must be invited. If a street needs to be closed, applications must be submitted six weeks in advance, while for use of a public street without closure, the city needs three weeks' notice.

Opsinoren also helps facilitate other community activities, such as winter parties and spring-cleaning. In the past 15 years, Segers says the numbers participating in these programmes have grown from 250 to 2,500 a year. "It can only get better because people like to get together with their neighbours," she says.

While only a few sports events have been hosted so far, Segers believes more and more neighbourhoods will join as the weather gets warmer.

► www.tinyurl.com/sportsstreet

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS**Autos ▶ GM-PSA**

US car manufacturer General Motors and France's PSA group, manufacturer of the Peugeot-Citroen brands, have set up a joint buying affiliate in Brussels to handle both companies' steel and components purchases in Europe.

Banks ▶ KBC

Flanders' largest financial institution will sell its outstanding 16.2% stake in Polish affiliate Zachodni to institutional investors. The decision ends the bank's foray into Poland in line with the demands of the European Commission following its 2009 rescue.

Funds**▶ Vendis Capital**

Brussels-based private equity fund Vendis Capital has taken a nearly 50% stake in the French luxury hairdressing salon Alexandre de Paris, with operations in 20 countries worldwide.

Metals ▶ Aleris

The US-based aluminium producer inaugurated a €53 million cold rolling mill at its plant in Duffel, Antwerp province, last week. The move is part of a two-year investment programme to increase capacity to meet demand for wide automobile body sheet.

Pharmaceuticals**▶ UCB**

The Brussels-based pharmaceutical company has signed a partnership agreement with California's Five Prime Therapeutics to develop medicines against inflammatory fibrosis and conditions affecting the nervous system. The \$16 million deal gives UCB access to research results on five other programmes.

Retail ▶ Zeb

Flemish clothing store chain Zeb, based in Merchtem, Flemish Brabant, has opened its first store in Wallonia. It's the 36th outlet for the chain, which plans another 10 in Flanders this year and two more in Wallonia.

Shipping ▶ Euronav

The Antwerp-based shipping group has sold a soon-to-be-delivered Suezmax tanker for \$54 million (€42 million) and will charter it back for up to two years. The move yields an immediate \$32 million (€25 million) book loss but gives Euronav a share of the future resale margin. The tanker business is under heavy pressure due to over-capacity and poor economic conditions.

Flemish companies reap rewards in Myanmar

Five business contracts have already been signed during economic visit

Alan Hope

Flemish companies have been able to take advantage of Flanders' economic diplomacy to make their first business contacts in Myanmar, minister-president Kris Peeters said last week. Peeters was speaking during his second official visit to the country in a year, during which he again met with democracy activist and Nobel Peace Prize-winner Aung San Suu Kyi. Along the way, a number of Flemish companies also on the visit announced important business agreements.

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, was virtually closed to the



Kris Peeters with a Burmese worker on a visit to the pagodas at Bagan in Myanmar

West for decades, under the rule of a military junta. As relations with

the outside have begun to improve, Western companies are eyeing the Myanmar market for opportunities. Last spring, Peeters led a trade mission to the country, the start of contacts that are now beginning to bear fruit.

The visit continues this week. Among contracts signed so far is Sint-Niklaas engineering company SBE as consultant to a project to improve the navigability of the Irrawaddy river, the country's main waterway. Aalst-based Medec will deliver anaesthetic equipment worth €1.5 million to 15 hospitals in the country.

Demining company Bom.be from Leuven, meanwhile, will help clear munitions laid down over decades of local conflicts. Newtec from Sint-Niklaas will provide satellite technology for the broadcast of the South Asian Games, which this year will be hosted by Myanmar. And Ghent biotechnology company Devgen will work with the agriculture ministry on the development of high-nutrition rice. Flanders Investment & Trade, the region's international investment agency, opened an office in the former capital of Yangon earlier this year.

Dexia bail-out could cost €800m in fines

The federal government could be faced with a fine of up to €800 million from the European Union, after a decision last week by Eurostat that the government's share in a recapitalisation of the remaining part of Dexia Bank has to be included in the 2012 budget as spending and not as an investment.

The Belgian and French governments agreed last November to pump €5.5 billion into Dexia, with €2.9 billion of it coming from Belgium. The government defended this sum as an investment, which led to it being included in the national debt. Eurostat now says it must be considered a capital transfer and included in last year's budget.

The result is that Belgium's budget deficit immediately grows from the 2.8% of GDP agreed with the EU to 3.7%. That leaves the country open

to a fine that could be as high as €800 million.

According to new finance minister Koen Geens, "this accounting correction of the 2012 deficit will not influence the 2013 budget and will not impose on us any additional efforts." However, it does leave the government with fewer options in its search for savings in an effort to reduce the deficit to 2.15%.

One less holiday?

Meanwhile, the latest money-saving measure for reducing budget spending appears to have been shelved: a proposal to save money by scrapping a public holiday from Belgium's generous holiday calendar. The front-runner was the second day of Pentecost, this year on 20 May, proposed by CD&V and supported by Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed.



© Fred de Noyelle/Godong/Corbis

Opposition came from liberal Vincent Van Quickenborne, now mayor of Kortrijk, and from economy minister Johan Vande Lanotte. The latter is closely linked to Ostend, which, like many coastal resorts, fears the economic fallout in tourism income from a scrapped holiday.

Ruling on state guarantee for Arco shareholders postponed

The Council of State this week decided not to overturn a guarantee given by the federal government to the holders of special shares in Dexia bank. The shareholders are members of Arco, the financial division of the Christian workers' movement ACW.

According to members of the Flemish Federation of Shareholders, who lost virtually their entire stake in Dexia when the bank collapsed in 2011, the guarantee given to the 800,000 or so Arco holders was illegal because it created a special category of shareholder who then benefitted

from the guarantee accorded to holders of bank savings accounts.

According to this week's ruling by the Council of State, the question of equality has to be referred to the Constitutional Court, which could take up to a year to deliver a ruling. In the meantime, the council has declined to overturn the guarantee, postponing a definitive ruling until after the Constitutional Court has spoken. One effect of the delay is that the issue will probably not now resurface until after the general elections of 2014, by when a new government may have taken over.

Antwerp partners for diamond deal with Quebec

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters was in Canada last week, where he joined representatives of the Antwerp World Diamond Center in talks with Stornoway, which will begin mining the first diamond mine in the province starting in 2015.

Stornoway intends to use the Antwerp diamond market as a partner in the enterprise, which will produce an estimated two million carats a year over the course of 11 years. The major shareholder in Stornoway is the government of Quebec.

Also during the visit to Canada, Peeters welcomed the results of a project for disinfecting drinking

water in the town of Killaloe, Ontario province, using a product developed by Houthalen-based company Roamchemie. The University of Leuven signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Montreal, the second-largest French-speaking university in the world. "Strong regions need to have strong relationships," Peeters commented, pointing out that 84% of Belgium's exports to Canada come from Flanders. Peeters also attended the Americana trade fair for environmental technology. Belgium was the fair's guest country, with 30 local companies exhibiting.

Farmers protest land loss due to port expansion

About 130 farmers last week occupied the Farnese bridge near the village of Kallo on the left bank of the Scheldt river, in protest at Flemish government plans to take over nearly 1,800 hectares of farming land to extend the port of Antwerp. The occupation blocked road and river traffic for more than two hours.

The farmers' union Boerenbond says that 250 families stand to lose all or part of their livelihood if the port authority takes over their land for extension of harbour facilities and for environmental compensation for works elsewhere.

"The future will tell if there are further actions or not. We still hope for talks with the Flemish government," said Boerenbond representative Pieter Van Oost. The plans will also see the disappearance of two local hamlets, Rapenburg and Ouden Doel, some of whose residents joined in last week's protest. "For decades, the port has grown up like mushrooms in the polder area along the Scheldt," Boerenbond added in a statement. "The Flemish government is allowing this devil's compact between port and nature as much room as it needs, with agriculture as no more than a provider of cheap land."

Musical treasure hunt

Flanders is helping the Vatican's collection of manuscripts to go digital

Toon Lambrechts

Inside the walls of the Vatican, Leuven's Alamire Foundation is putting the finishing touches to a unique project: Some of the Holy See's music manuscripts are being digitised, and unknown polyphonic masterpieces from the Low Countries are now accessible to everyone.

The setup in the Alamire Digital Lab looks deceptively simple: a camera on a tripod, a stand for the manuscript and two flash lamps. But the camera has an impressive resolution of 80 million pixels, explains Linda Sayce, a research associate at the Alamire Foundation who works on the digitisation of the manuscripts. Recordings are made page by page, and it's painstaking and delicate work. The room is normally dark, with the exposure done by the flash. "It does feel quite strange when you leave the room after work," Sayce laughs. She shows me the result of a recording, in which even the texture of the paint of the illustrations is visible. "For the vast majority of researchers, this result is more than sufficient," she says. "So the manuscripts will be touched less, which benefits their conservation."

The Alamire Foundation was established as a partnership between the department of musicology at the University of Leuven and Musica, the Impulse Centre for Music in Neerpelt, Limburg province. The Alamire Digital Lab is a mobile laboratory that specialises in the digitisation of musical heritage. They're named after Pierre Alamire, a prominent 16th-century music calligrapher. The foundation's focus is the origins and the golden age of Flemish polyphony. The manuscripts – kept in the Vatican library but belonging to various chapels in Rome – are polyphonic compositions from the Low Countries, dating from the late 14th to the early 17th centuries.



Once digitised, ancient musical manuscripts from the Vatican will be available online to everyone

The project is a collaboration between the Alamire Foundation and the Vatican library. A large share of the budget is covered by the government of Flanders; culture minister Joke Schauvliege granted €61,500. The preservation and digitisation of cultural heritage is an important element in her policy, aiming not only to compile but also to open up history to the public. Digitisation offers a powerful tool to do so.

Firing the imagination

Flanders, and all of the Low Countries, was once the centre of polyphonic music, and most famous composers spent at least a part of their careers in the Low Countries. The compositions are therefore a major part of Flanders' cultural heritage; it's a heritage that, according to experts, can

be placed at the same level as the paintings of the Flemish Primitives. The Vatican library fires the imagination. Something mysterious lingers, conjuring up images of secret manuscripts, banned books and hidden knowledge. The reality is perhaps less spectacular, but still, accessing the Vatican collection was a challenge, says Bart Demuyt, director of the Alamire Foundation. "The negotiations were not a matter of course," he explains. "Our goal was to digitise five manuscripts by Peter Alamire that were located in Rome. But obviously, the Vatican has different priorities than us when it comes to preservation and digitisation. Eventually, we worked out a common project. Besides the five manuscripts of Alamire, we are also digitising a collection of music manuscripts from the Low

Countries." Digitisation is not an end in itself. The images and associated metadata are included in the online Integrated Database for Early Music, which is accessible to everyone. So, for example, music ensembles specialising in polyphonic pieces will be able to work with the material. For those fond of old music, exciting times are coming. Demuyt, meanwhile, is particularly excited about the opportunities that the Vatican co-operation offers. "It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the manuscripts we are working with. At least 80% of these manuscripts contain compositions that we didn't know until now – music that none of us has ever heard before."

► www.alamirefoundation.org

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Brussels-born researcher Pierre Deligne has won the Norwegian **Abel Prize in mathematics** – considered the Nobel Prize for mathematicians. The committee awarded the professor approximately €800,000 "for his contributions to algebraic geometry and their transformative impact on number theory, representation theory and related fields". Deligne became well-known for his proof of the Weil conjectures in the 1970s and has spent the majority of his career at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. In 2006, he was ennobled as a Belgian viscount.

Flemish education minister Pascal Smet has laid the first stone of the new Municipal Technical Institute in Londerzeel, Flemish Brabant. This is the **first "School of Tomorrow"**, a programme between private and public partners. The non-profit organisation Schools of Tomorrow will design, build, finance and maintain 165 new schools in Flanders by 2017. The government of Flanders will pay the non-profit an annual remuneration over 30 years, after which the schools become government property.

Doctors too **readily prescribe medication** for young children, according to lung specialist Kris De Boeck of the University of Leuven. Dr De Boeck carried out a survey of 900,000 Belgian children and found that they are prescribed antibiotics and respiratory drugs far more often than anywhere else in Europe. "I understand that parents can become anxious when children begin coughing, but it is normal for a young child to catch a cold six to eight times in one winter," De Boeck said.

Biologist Dieter Slos of Ghent University has found four **new truffle species in Flanders** during research for his Master's thesis, bringing the total to 43 species. Although known as a gastronomic delicacy, most species of truffle cannot be eaten by humans. However, red squirrels are fond of them, providing researchers with useful information through analysis of the contents of their stomachs.

One year ago, **44 teachers older than 65** were working at Flemish primary and secondary schools in Flanders, according to figures released by the education ministry. This is the highest number of over-65s in schools since the law was abolished that forced them to retire at 65. In November 2009, two months after the law changed, there were only 16. Teachers over 65, however, are only placed in schools when there is a shortage of teachers in the area, and they do not work full time. **Andy Furniere**

Q&A

Michiel Duser is head of the geology department at the Museum of Natural Sciences in Brussels. He is co-ordinating a geological survey of Belgian soil and underground sediments

Geology seems a rather old-fashioned science. Are there still big unknowns in the local geology?

We are still busy mapping the Belgian soil, both geologically and thematically. In the second case, this often happens in collaboration with third parties, like in research related to disposal of nuclear waste, groundwater modelling, the use of geothermal energy, carbon capture and storage and, of course, the extraction of raw materials like minerals and gas. The Belgian soil has been studied for a long time by geologists, but not at great depths. That's because we don't have a history of oil and gas extraction. Now these studies are absolutely

necessary as plans are being made to initiate hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking", of shale gas.

Geologists are often hired by big energy companies to investigate the possibilities of oil and gas extraction. Does this affect your independence as a scientist?

I can only speak for my department, and we never work on a commercial basis; we provide information freely to anyone who asks for it. Individual citizens and private companies are welcome. When it comes to shale gas fracking, we have shared information with several small companies, but always free of charge.

Years ago you studied the possibility of methane extraction from the old coal mines in Limburg. Do you still hope that one day we could use this forgotten source of energy?

When they were still operating, methane extraction was performed in five of the seven mines in Limburg. After the closures, it stopped. In the meantime, the pressure of the groundwater in the mines is pushing the methane upwards, and it's only a matter of time before it reaches drinking-water layers. So if we don't want our drinking water to be polluted in the near future, we have to take action. I remain convinced that we need, at the very least, a

feasibility study on the extraction of coal gas. Furthermore, the space that becomes available after methane extraction can be filled up again by storing carbon dioxide underground. We can't miss that opportunity. **Interview by Senne Starckx**



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Prison break

Former open prisons for vagrants in Flanders seek Unesco recognition

Alan Hope

It used to be the case that any new arrival in Belgium would be warned by a more experienced expat colleague to always carry two things when out and about: an identity card and a sum of money (20 francs in my day) to prove you weren't a vagrant. Otherwise, the legend went, you could be locked up.

The story wasn't quite accurate, but it was close. It arose from a law introduced in 1866 which indeed made it possible for the police to lock up vagrants – defined as someone with no fixed abode and no visible means of support and who did not exercise a craft or trade.

The law was only repealed in 1993, and right up to then vagrants were detained in open prisons euphemistically referred to as “colonies”. The colonies were located in Merksplas and Wortel in Antwerp province, and in Bruges for the few female vagrants.

Now the first two locations, less than seven kilometres apart and close to the Dutch border, have applied to be included in Unesco's register of world heritage.

In Dutch, the word is *landloper* – literally someone who walks the countryside and thus very close to the original meaning of the English word “tramp”. The term has none of the negative connotations of “beggar”. Tramps travel from place to place, working in exchange for food and shelter, and as day-labourers were a valuable part of the rural economy for centuries.

George Orwell writes of his experiences as a tramp in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and the British author Henry Green was a tramp for a time. In the US, where



The farm buildings of the former vagrant colony at Merksplas are undergoing major renovations

they were known as hobos, their numbers have included the musician Woody Guthrie and actor Robert Mitchum.

Visiting rights

Much of the former colony at Merksplas is now under renovation, including the farmyard, barns and the chapel. There is a museum under the chapel, which is open to the public every second and fourth Sunday, or for groups by appointment. Two other buildings are included in the Unesco bid – one is now a centre for illegal aliens, and one is a former school for the children of prison officers.

At one time the Merksplas colony housed 5,000 vagrants, with another 500 in Wortel. They were picked up for vagrancy and brought to Merksplas to

work on the land. The prison regime was relaxed, and the men were paid for their work. After a time, they would have saved enough money to buy their freedom – since they were no longer penniless, they could no longer be considered vagrants.

Many, however, returned regularly, and when the law was scrapped in 1993 – the penal law being no longer considered an appropriate instrument for dealing with poverty and homelessness – 10 men decided to stay behind in Wortel and live in the building, which has been renovated and now serves as a minimum-security prison for 150 detainees.

The presence of so many workers, willing or not, has changed the landscape of the area, explains Karel Govaerts of the non-profit

that runs the grounds. An area of about 200 hectares was cleared for farming, a pine forest of about 100 hectares was planted and a number of lakes were created as a result of the extraction of clay. The landscape was listed in 1999, and now any changes have to be approved by a committee. The tourism department of the municipality of Merksplas has a number of organised walks in the area, with names like the Vagabond Path and the Escape Route.

The original measures against vagrancy were introduced while Belgium was still under Dutch rule in the early 19th century, and the Unesco application also includes similar sites in the Netherlands, including Willemsoord and Veenhuizen. Supporters of the campaign met in

Drenthe this month – 20 years to the day after the vagrancy law was repealed in Belgium (the Dutch kept theirs until 2000). Inclusion on the Unesco world heritage list – which includes the Flemish *begijnhof*, the centre of Bruges and the Grote Markt in Brussels – doesn't come with any funding, but it's more than simply symbolic, says Govaerts.

“It's an enormous recognition of the value of the heritage, which will make it a lot easier if we're looking for sponsoring or for funding elsewhere,” Govaerts explains. “People will be much more ready to give something because they have that recognition that this is really worthwhile heritage.”

► www.gevangenismuseum.be

Art as medicine

Researchers study the therapeutic effects of a museum on Alzheimer's patients

Andy Furniere

As we've all experienced, art has the power to influence our mood, be it music, literature or visual art. To explore the healing effect of its collection on the minds of patients in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, Antwerp's Museum for Contemporary Art (M HKA) is inviting them and their caregivers for a guided visit.

The initiative Meet Me @ M HKA is inspired by experiments at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. “In the week after the visit to MoMA, the mood swings and anxieties of Alzheimer's patients were considerably reduced,” says Sebastiaan Engelborghs, Alzheimer's specialist at Antwerp University. From September, the university will assist the team at M HKA



in a pilot project with visits for small groups of patients and their primary caregivers. The guides will encourage the groups to reflect on

a selection of works. “Our guides always enter into dialogue with visitors, but this interactive method will now

be adapted to the needs of Alzheimer's patients,” explains Leen Thielemans, who is co-ordinating the project at M HKA. “The main purpose is not to analyse the intention of the artist but to stimulate a patient's memory by giving them time to discuss what the piece means to them. Even a detail such as a red skirt can form the basis for a personal story.”

In New York, the method also enriched communication between patients and caregivers. “The visit was the start of a process that continued outside of the museum,” explains Engelborghs. “The profound conversations afterwards significantly improved their relationships.”

The team at Antwerp University will train the employees at M HKA

to have efficient dialogues with patients and to deal with possible behavioural problems. For the first time in the world, the researchers will scientifically examine exactly how the visit affects the patients. “There have been similar research projects related to music therapy,” says Engelborghs. “But the academic world has not yet documented the precise impact of visual arts therapy on the quality of life of Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers.”

The M HKA team hopes to officially integrate the programme in the working of the museum by early next year. Reputed Alzheimer's researcher Christine Van Broeckhoven and artist Jan Fabre are the patrons of the initiative.

► www.tinyurl.com/meetme-muhka



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Building character

Socialism meets architecture in the 20th-century work of the Brunfaut family

Karen McHugh

Between the 1920s and 1960s, the Brunfaut family of architects designed some of Belgium's best-known buildings. Some of them are famous for their usefulness and longevity, such as Brussels Airport, and some for their years of abandonment and neglect.

Chances are you've never really thought about the origins of Brussels' Central Station, as you rush through on your way home. The terminal of Brussels Airport in Zaventem is another building that is taken for granted as travellers pass through its doors; it serves its purpose, and we don't think any more about it.

But a new exhibition will open your eyes to the architectural ideology of these landmark structures – for these works are connected, and their modernist-era designers are being celebrated at the Atomium in the exhibition *Brunfaut's Progressive Architecture*.

The Brunfautes were a family of designers who were a major influence on the architectural landscape of Brussels and Flanders from the 1920s through to the 1960s. Born before the turn of the century in Wallonia, brothers Fernand and Gaston both became architects, the former studying under Victor Horta, father of the Art Nouveau style. Maxime, Fernand's son, followed him into the profession and would later collaborate with him on many works.

What sets the Brunfautes apart isn't just the commissions of Brussels' most important travel hubs; they weren't just architects, designing glorious buildings for their own personal achievement. All three were also staunch socialists and combined their interests in political action and urbanism with their architecture. Their designs were greatly influenced by their socialist ideologies, giving rise to buildings that were functional but also created with the common good in mind. As the exhibition title denotes, the Brunfautes were, above all else, progressive architects.

A socialist utopia

Working in the early part of the 20th century, the Brunfautes' ideas tied in with socialist utopian ideals of the time. They believed in a bright future and were convinced that progress would lead to solutions for society's ills, helping everyone to prosper. Over the years, the Brunfautes became the preferred architects of the Belgian Labour Party, the country's first socialist party, and were commissioned to construct several buildings for the party during the first half of the century. Fernand himself eventually became an MP and even gave his name to the pioneering Brunfaut Law on working-class housing in Belgium. One of the family's early designs can still be seen on Sint-Laurensstraat in Brussels, where the Asturian



Fernand Brunfaut's building that housed the old socialist newspaper *Vooruit* stands empty on Ghent's Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat



Maxime Brunfaut (centre) in front of a model of Brussels Airport, which was constructed in the 1940s and '50s

Delegation in Brussels now has its headquarters. The Brunfautes were asked to design the building for the socialist newspaper *Le Peuple* in 1931. Inspired by the Vesnin brothers' Pravda tower in Russia, the Brunfautes' impressive building with its glass facade was supposed to symbolise the transparency of the socialist movement, while its ultra-modern design would serve as a sign of Brussels' progressive attitude.

Most used, and most disused

From 1930 onwards all Fernand's designs were done in collaboration

with Maxime. The father-son duo worked on the Central Station in Brussels, finishing it together in 1952, just a few years after the death of Horta, their teacher. A link back to the era can be seen at the façade of the station's main entrance, where nine windows symbolise the nine

provinces of Belgium at the time.

One of the Brunfautes' most important achievements is the Sanatorium Joseph Lemaire in Overijse, just outside of Brussels – although you wouldn't know it today. Now famously abandoned, dilapidated and covered in graffiti, with shards of glass the only remnants of the windows that once were, it has been placed on a list of endangered buildings.

Designed as a place to recuperate, often for those suffering from tuberculosis, the building was in keeping with the hopefulness and confidence of modernism. Maxime's socialist ideals were really put to use on this one. He insisted on installing one hand basin for each patient, an unusual request at the time, and even visited the families of miners to see how TB spread so that he could better design the infirmary.

The family remained committed to their socialist cause, receiving several important commissions from the Belgian Labour Party, including the construction of its headquarters in Brussels.

The Dagblad Vooruit

The Brunfautes' influence further extended into Flanders with the swimming pool in the Leuven district of Kessel-Lo but most especially with Ghent's Dagblad Vooruit. Located across the street from the famous Vooruit socialist palace-cum-cultural centre, the glass-fronted building hasn't housed the socialist newspaper that once printed there for decades, but it still stands – empty. The latest plan for the listed building is to turn it into a youth hostel.

Gaston, meanwhile, was a follower of the minimalist International Style of modernism, and in 1949 was part of a team of architects that designed the United Nations Headquarters in New York, working with the world-famous Swiss architect Le Corbusier. The Brunfaut brothers both died in the 1970s, with Maxime living until just 10 years ago. Their legacy, however, will remain far, far into the future.

Brunfaut's Progressive Architecture includes archives, photos, maps, models and exclusive accounts of the family's personal and architectural story. The old plans and photographs serve to transport visitors back to a time of progressive thinking and abundant hope for the future and lend an appreciation and understanding for the works of the Brunfaut family, which, despite often being allowed to stand empty and fall to ruin, are still all around us to this day.

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WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

This year's **Sfinks Mixed festival of world music** in Boechout, Antwerp province, will be entirely free this year, the organisers announced. The festival is no longer receiving government subsidies and was faced with a dilemma: raise ticket prices or attract more people who would then spend more money. "After a bit of calculation, we decided to take the gamble," organisers said in a statement. The festival takes place from 25 to 28 July.

► www.sfinks.be

Eastman, the dance company of Flemish choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, has been selected as one of three **cultural ambassadors for Europe** by the European Commission. The others are the music festival of Aix-en-Provence and the SashaWaltz & Guests dance company from Berlin. Each receives €200,000. At the same time, the Commission selected 25 Flemish cultural groups for financial support for international co-operations, including the Festival van Vlaanderen, Toneelhuis in Antwerp and Kaaitheater in Brussels.

After a year of negotiations, Flemish director Geoffrey Enthoven has finally been able to sign the contract for a **Hollywood remake** of his award-winning 2011 film *Hasta la vista*. Enthoven has sold the rights and will not direct the film, a road trip comedy-drama in which three young handicapped men travel to Spain in search of a special bordello that caters to their needs. The cast for the remake will be announced in May, and shooting will take place in 2014.

► www.hastalavistadefilm.be

The line-up has been announced for the **Pukkelpop rock and pop music festival** in Hasselt. The August festival will welcome back rapper Eminem and also host Neil Young, Nine Inch Nails, The Prodigy, Franz Ferdinand, The XX and many more. Both combo- and day tickets go on sale on 27 March.

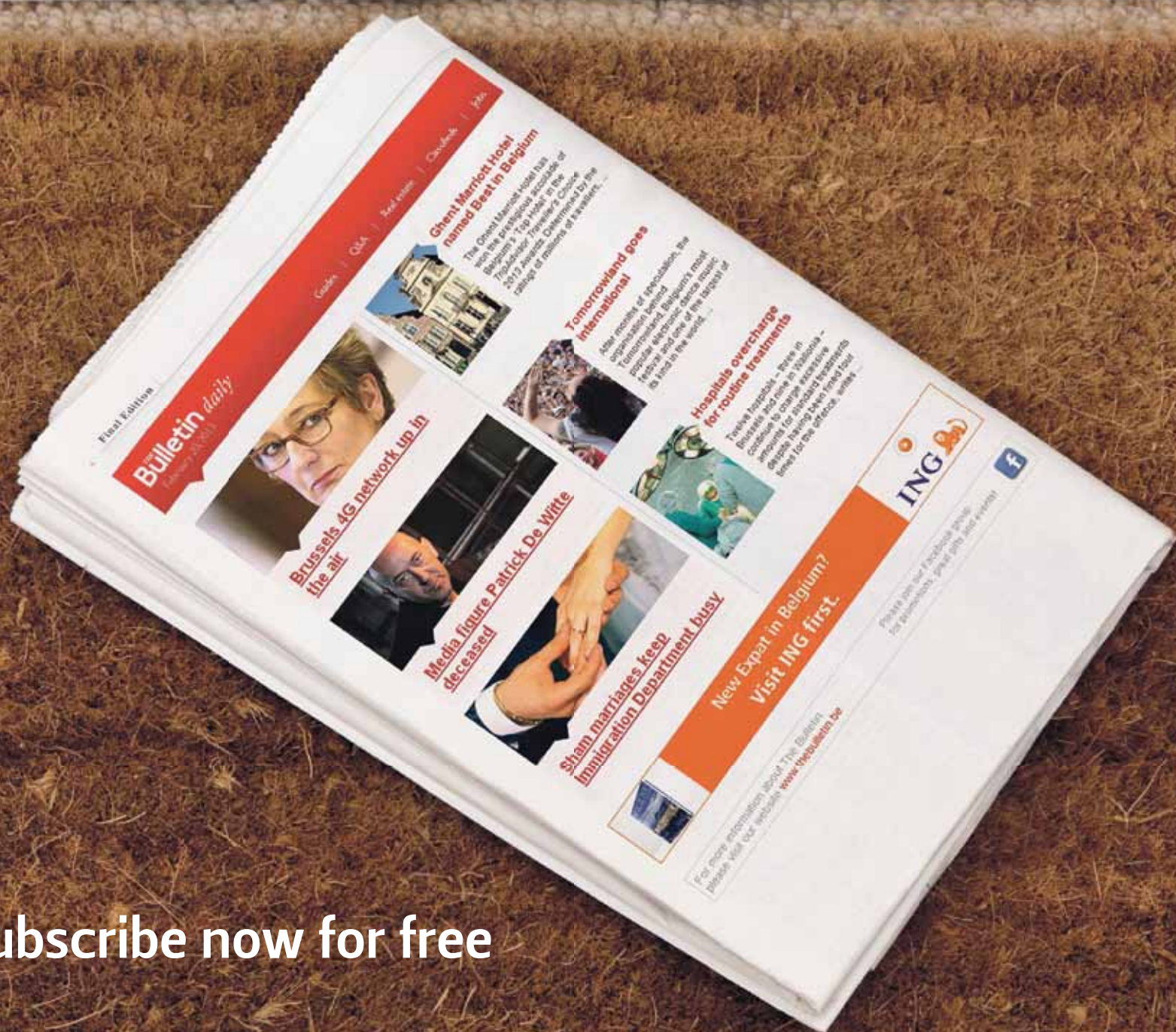
► www.pukkelpop.be

Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege has added several **cartography instruments made by Mercator** to the Topstukkenlijst, or List of Top Works, which makes them a part of local heritage and protects them from ever being sold out of the region. The most notable pieces are two globes crafted in 1541 by the Flanders-born cartographer and mathematician. "These are the only original, mounted examples made by Mercator that exist in Belgium," said Schauvliege. "They are the oldest globes in the country."

► www.tinyurl.com/topstukken

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Nothing but the truth

De Morgen columnist Griet Op de Beeck’s debut novel asks uncomfortable questions

Rebecca Benoot

Griet Op de Beeck started her career as a dramaturge for various theatre companies before becoming a journalist for *Humo* and *De Morgen*, where she now has a weekly culture column (“The Week of Griet Op de Beeck”). Last month, the 39-year-old broadened her horizons, so to speak, with the release of her debut novel *Vele hemels boven de zevende* (Many Heavens Above the Seventh). “I knew by the time I was seven that I wanted to write a novel,” she tells me. “I was the kind of girl who loved to write poems and essays, so it seemed natural that I’d write books when I grew up.” It just took her a while to get started. “The older you get, the more you read,” she continues, “and I realised

The premise was simple: “I wanted to write a book about an ugly woman who is faced with all kinds of hardships.” Remarkably, once Op de Beeck (*pictured*) set her mind to it, the book was written in a mere four months. “Once I started writing, it just poured out of me,” she says. Which doesn’t mean it was exactly easy. Despite Op de Beeck’s years of journalism experience, there is a big difference between writing fact and writing fiction, she states. “My columns for *De Morgen* are already pretty personal because they’re my thoughts on various subjects, but writing a novel is as intimate as it gets. You make yourself extremely vulnerable by releasing to the world something that you created from



Dare to tell the truth

Dialect also makes the book feel accessible, as does the subject matter. *Vele hemels* deals with the seemingly insurmountable obstacles faced by average people in their daily lives and the ways in which people deal with both emotional and physical injuries. “I wanted to show how far you can get by really listening to yourself, by not being afraid to be honest, and that old wounds are capable of healing,” says Op de Beeck. “But on the other hand, there are people who struggle with adversity due to their age or social circumstances. It’s something universal.” *Vele hemels* is a book that describes ways of looking at the world. Its candour and insight dares to pose questions that many don’t want to be asked and certainly don’t want to answer. It’s about being brave enough to face the truth and about the realisation that it’s how we deal with the choices we’ve made that matters most. Op de Beeck believes that happiness comes with the ability to be completely honest with yourself – an intimidating task if there ever was one. “Philosophers and psychologists are always talking about how we are incapable of being happy because we constantly want more, because there are endless options,” she says. “But I often encounter people who are too scared to actually consider what makes them happy, let alone pursue it. Some people are simply stuck in a role, like the loving father or the faithful wife, that they don’t dare ask questions. They are scared of letting go and opening up to the possibility that there might be something else out there that could make them truly happy.” It might be safe to say that Op de Beeck has found what makes her happy; she’s already at work on her second novel.

► www.tinyurl.com/velehemels

“I knew by the time I was seven that I wanted to write a novel”

that I’d never be able to compete with the literary greats. So I was struck by insecurity, and I postponed the idea until I finally decided it was time to go for it.”

scratch and which everybody can comment on and criticise. It is a very daunting experience.”

Same story, many versions

Vele hemels boven de zevende revolves around five characters: Eva, a 30-something who counsels inmates in a prison; her elder sister Elsie, who’s torn between her marriage and her lover; their father, the 71-year-old Jos, who tries to wash away the past with alcohol; Elsie’s lover Caspar; and finally, Elsie’s daughter Lou, whose first year of secondary school is off to a rocky start. They all have their own problems – some big, some small – and are restlessly trying find their way in life. The characters are connected and are telling their own versions of what is essentially the same story. “I feel that many first-time authors

have the habit of wanting to explain or describe too much,” says Op de Beeck, “which is why I chose one character and surrounded her with four others who are all related, in a sense. By doing this, I could tell a story that develops through different voices and points of view.” *Vele hemels* is told through interior monologues, including memories of conversations the characters had. “I envisioned them in a room talking to a camera about how they ended up at this point in their lives,” explains Op de Beeck.

Still, it is a story driven by action, a story you could easily imagine unfolding right in front of you, making the connection with her past as a dramaturge not that far-fetched. She points to the use of dialect in the prose. “Writing the dialogues in *ge* and *gij* instead of *je* and *jij* has something to do with that,” she says. “When I’m watching people on stage, I really dislike it when they use formal language because it sounds so artificial. By using a more colloquial way of speaking, it’s more real.”



BOOK REVIEWS

Wat rest (What Remains)

Peter van Kraaij • De Bezige Bij
The narrator in Peter van Kraaij’s debut novel falls head over heels for Lin, a Rwandan refugee in Brussels. Although she trusts him with her child, Lin never truly lets him into her world. As he slowly uncovers her past, their own future becomes more and more unlikely. Van Kraaij is a theatre director and playwright, and it shows in this book full of the horrors of the past and the power of love that simply aches to be turned into a film.

Maya Maya

Ivo Michiels • De Bezige Bij
Maya Maya is the last novel by Ivo Michiels, who died last autumn. Reminiscent of the BBC’s *The Singing Detective*, it is a novel constructed out of stories, fragments and fantasies made up by an old writer spending his last remaining hours in hospital. He recalls his past, lost loves and the manuscript he always dreamed he’d write. *Maya Maya* is achingly beautiful and a wonderful introduction to this great Flemish author.

Noora’s dwaling (Noora’s Voyage)

Gie Bogaert • De Bezige Bij
After her young son dies, Noora disappears for four days only to return with no memory whatsoever. Her family and friends try to help her reconstruct her life through letters, leading to some fateful discoveries, including her whereabouts at the time of the accident. *Noora’s dwaling* is a captivating novel that is winning raves from critics for its touching treatment of the lengths to which we are willing to go to protect the ones we love.



Verloren maandag (Lost Monday)

Valerie Eyckmans • Podium
Journalist Valerie Eyckmans has written a funny, fresh and very recognisable commentary on the perils of boredom in both one’s work and private life. Eva is a 30-something who has no idea what to do with herself and passes the time by playing head games with her family, friends and co-workers. She annoys, manipulates and dominates until one day she is faced with a choice that could finally change her behaviour. Short, sassy and amusing, *Verloren maandag* is a strong debut.

The sea winds blow in the next big thing in jazz

STORM!

Tom Peeters

The cultural scene in Ostend has gotten a major boost with the opening of De Grote Post last December. If you haven't visited the smartly renovated old post office yet, you might want to drop by one of the following days when Vrijstaat O opens its first jazz festival in the monumental building.

The venue offers the perfect opportunity for the nomadic and interdisciplinary cultural centre Vrijstaat O to broaden their ambitions. They do have a lovely bar venue (with sea view!) near the Royal Galleries, where you can spend your Sunday afternoons with a newspaper, fresh mint tea and a jazz combo. But their capacity of 120 seats sometimes feels too tight. So for STORM!, De Grote Post arrived just in time.

That still leaves an important question open: Is there room for another jazz festival? Last weekend we saw the first edition of Leuven Jazz. Every other year, you'll find Jazz Brugge, and this summer brings Brosella Folk & Jazz, the Ghent Jazz Festival and Jazz Middelheim. And those are just the biggest ones.

"During our jazz gigs, we felt we had the basis for a bigger event," says Pieter Kotten of Vrijstaat O. "That's how we function as a cultural centre: Every two years, we organise a festival in which we introduce our weekly programme to a bigger audience. Mostly we focus on younger artists, giving them stage opportunities and a chance to develop their talents."

Applying the same formula for jazz has the additional advantage of distinguishing them from other jazz festivals focussing mainly on household names. So naming the festival STORM! - The Next Thing in Jazz was no lie.

The new sounds of jazz

Take the 26-year-old Israeli pianist Shai Maestro, who played for five years with Avishai Cohen and recently started his own trio. "He's getting rave reviews in France and Israel but has never played in Belgium," says Kotten. And then there's Roller Trio - last year the only jazz band with a nomination for the prestigious Mercury Prize. DJ Gilles Peterson described their hyperkinetic and menacing grooves as "the new sound of UK jazz".



Peterson, by the way, is also a fan of what might be the biggest name on stage here: the soulful British singer Zara McFarlane (pictured). Her first album *Until Tomorrow* is out on his Brownswood label, and her sensual vocal balladry has already convinced fans at Jazz Middelheim and Jazz Leuven. She brings her band to Ostend: drums, piano, double bass and tenor sax.

All these up-and-coming international artists take over the big theatre of De Grote Post. The small theatre (lovingly dubbed *de kleine post*) will host the more experimental Soulmates Sessions, in which gifted local drummers Lander Gyselinck and Jens Bouttery curate their own little festival. They'll play their drum duet *Sandy*, specially created for STORM!, and invite musicians onstage such as Flemish reed player Joachim Badenhorst.

Alongside the concerts in De Grote Post on Friday and Saturday, STORM! hosts a full week of events, including free jazz concerts in legendary Ostend bars and a special programme for children.

29 March to 7 April | De Grote Post and other venues across Ostend | www.vrijstaat-o.be

THEATRE

Gloria (in den hoge)

Ghent-based Compagnie Cecilia's *Gloria* unfolds like a white-trash reading of Sartre's *No Exit*. Four strangers are fated to cross paths in a broken down car, stuck in a swamp in the American South. Each shares a life story that the others can't understand. They're all desperate, damaged and searching for something they have little hope of finding. Writer-director Arne Sierens conceived the production after he read about the story of a girl who ran off to Spain with her drug-dealing stepfather and then drifted from one misadventure to the next. Leen Roels leads Sierens' cast as the prodigal daughter who's been away for years and is now back home to find her brother. After selling out in Ghent, the production is on tour, wending its way from Bruges to Antwerp to Leuven and back to Ghent over the next four months. **Georgio Valentino**



3 April to 29 July | Across Flanders | www.compagnie-cecilia.be

MORE THEATRE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

CMN SNS PRJCT: Argentinian Laura Kalauz and Swiss Martin Schick make an ironic comment about contemporary advertising by handing out free products, wearing only their underwear (in English)

MAR 29-30 20.00-21.00 at deSingel, Desguinlei 25

www.desingel.be

Romeo en Julia: The classic Shakespearean tragedy performed by youth theatre group Sint-Paulusinstituut, part of Toneelhuis' series featuring amateur performance groups (in Dutch)

APR 3 20.00 at Bourlaschouwburg, Komedielaats 18

www.toneelhuis.be

Ghent

Please, Continue (Hamlet): Real judges and lawyers put Hamlet on trial for the murder of Polonius in this unique new production by Yan Duyvendak and Roger Bernat (in Dutch)

APR 4-5 20.00 at Minard Schouwburg, Walpoortstraat 15

www.vooruit.be

CONCERT

GET TICKETS NOW

Puggy

When tickets for Brussels-based pop/rock trio Puggy's upcoming three-night stand at Ancienne Belgique sold out in mere hours, it became clear that the local heroes would soon need a bigger stage. Their people were not long in announcing a concert at the colossal Vorst Nationaal. In February 2014. Yes, it sounds like an eternity but don't wait too long to get your tickets. If nothing else, Puggy have proven adept at defying expectations. English vocalist Matthew Irons, French bassist Romain Descampes and Swedish drummer Egil "Ziggy" Franzen have been on a steep upward career trajectory since they formed the group in 2004. Their success is due in equal parts to their catchy songs, keen fashion sense and ambitious management. **GV**



22 February 2014, 20.00

Vorst Nationaal, Brussels | www.vorstnationaal.be

CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Balmorhea: Minimalist instrumental ensemble from Austin, Texas

MAR 30 20.30 at Arenbergschouwburg, Arenbergstraat 28

www.balmorheamusic.com

Brussels

Anton Walgrave: The Flemish singer-songwriter presents his sixth album with full backing band

MAR 29 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110

www.abconcerts.be

Flat Earth Society: 13 is a magic number for the Flemish avant-garde big band, which is celebrating their 13th anniversary this year with their new 13-track album *13*

MAR 30 20.30 at Beursschouwburg

www.beursschouwburg.be

FAMILY

Bronks XL Festival

For the two-week spring school holiday, Brussels’ youth theatre Bronks hosts a unique cultural festival, made both for and by youngsters. The marquee performance is *Sorry voor alles* (Sorry For Everything), a much-anticipated collaboration between Joris Van den Brande and Joost Vandecasteele, up-and-coming actor and playwright, respectively. It’s the story of a young man who seeks out his great-grandfather, an ageless immortal. Despite his 200 years, he can still pass for his great-grandson’s brother. Hilarity ensues. Every nook and cranny of the Bronks building will be alive with music, theatre and exhibitions during the XL Festival. Performances and activities are either in Dutch or without dialogue. Members of the public are encouraged to participate in a continuous live radio stream and to present their own DIY projects in the Take Over contest. Submissions will be reviewed by a celebrity jury, including musician Johannes Verschaeve of The Van Jets, actor Geert Van Rampelberg of (*Clan, Code 37*) and a top-secret surprise guest. **GV**



5-7 April | Bronks, Brussels | www.bronks.be

MORE FAMILY EVENTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Bus vol leugens (Bus Full of Lies): Interactive theatre and installations inside a makeshift bus for kids ages four and up (in Dutch)
Until APR 21 at Het Paleis, Theaterplein 1
www.hetpaleis.be

Ghent

Spekken: Theatre festival for kids up to age 12, featuring a wide range of performances, creative workshops and other fun activities (in Dutch)
APR 1-6 at Tinnenpot, Tinnenpotstraat 21
www.spekken.be

Hasselt

Dichter tussen ridders en jonkvrouwen (Poet Among Knights and Maidens): Hendrik van Veldeke takes kids ages 10 to 15 on a journey through the Middle Ages by way of adventure books and costumes (in Dutch)
Until APR 27 at Literair Museum, Bampslaen 35
www.literairmuseum.be

VISUAL ARTS

Art@Knokke-Heist

With its 67 art galleries and dozens of public sculptures, Knokke-Heist has an art colony air about it any time of year. But thrice annually, it becomes a veritable fantasy, with over half of the town’s galleries collaborating with the municipalities to put on this festival packed with exhibitions and events, many of which will find the artists mingling with the public (and potential buyers). Flemish painter Adi Steurbaut shows off his colourful canvases (*pictured*) at Art at Sea. Franco-Korean painter Olivier Vincent personally accompanies his industrial-abstract paintings at FamArte. Flemish artist Herman Van Nazareth stands shoulder to shoulder with his hulking, savage sculptures at Bogertgallery. Other exhibitions include internationally acclaimed Flemish glamour photographer Frank De Mulder at Gallery Ludwig Lefevere and modern minimalist sculptor Sol LeWitt at Galerie Adrian David. **GV**

30-31 March | Across Knokke-Heist
www.artknokke-heist.be



MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Isabel Miquel Arques - Agitation: Works by the Antwerp-based Spanish photographer illustrating Spain and Flanders and the artist’s fascination with the distance between them
Until APR 6 at Ingrid Deuss Gallery, Provinciestraat 11
www.isabelmiquelarques.com

Brussels

Alberto Magnelli: Pioneer of Abstraction: Work by the prolific 20th-century Italian painter who found as much inspiration in the Italian Futurists as the Parisian avant-garde
Until MAY 26 at Elsene Museum, Jean Van Volsemstraat 71
www.museumvanelsene.be

Conceptual Art Book: Display of the various methods and techniques for the design and realisation of contemporary book bindings, including experimental as well as classic bindings, artists’ books, engravings and other artefacts
Until APR 14 at Bibliotheca Wittockiana, Bemelstraat 23
www.wittockiana.org

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Nicholas Hirst

Vino Vino

Grauwwerkersstraat 15, Bruges

It’s true that the idea of a trendy wine-cum-tapas bar in the medieval centre of Bruges may seem somewhat incongruous. And, admittedly, even more so when you learn that it doubles as a blues bar. Yet the result is one of the most pleasant and least-known watering holes and food joints in the centre of Bruges. Vino Vino last year celebrated its 20th anniversary. It was opened by *Bruggeling* husband-and-wife team Rik and Kaatje. He wanted a bar to showcase his passion for the blues; she had spent a decade in Spanish coastal towns where she became versed in the harmonies of tapas and Spanish wines. As a result, the tapas in Vino Vino are miles ahead of the usual imitation Iberian fare served up outside of Spain. As if one had crossed the Pyrenees, the chunky *tortilla espanola* manages to be robust on the outside yet moist on the inside, the *sardinas* are thick and punchy, and the *albóndigas* (Spanish meatballs) sit in a sauce of fresh tomatoes. Yet Vino Vino cannot be accused of betraying its Flemish roots for a funky Spanish vibe. With its dark oak tables, tiled floor and heavy



bar stools, entering the bar is like stepping back into the sombre establishments of the past – as with most of Flanders’ finest bars. Nonetheless, the large windows, bustling soundtrack and flickering candles do infuse the place with a distinctly jazzy feel. It’s just a shame that the roof-raising blues concerts of yesteryear have been suspended following complaints from neighbours. Vino Vino now hosts but a single concert a year, as part of the city’s summer Klinkers festival.

Despite the bar’s central location, it has somehow retained a predominantly local clientele, mostly of the bluesy kind. Vino Vino is hidden away on the meandering Grauwwerkersstraat (grey workers street), in a no-mans-land between Bruges’ tourist catchment area and the tranquil residential streets that lie beyond the Ezelbrug (the donkey’s bridge) and the Vlamingbrug (the Fleming’s bridge). Let’s keep it our secret.

www.tinyurl.com/vinovinobruge

BITE

Robyn Boyle

Cafe La Brocante ★★★★★

I fell in love with Brussels at a flea market. After a few years of visiting quickly and out of necessity, local friends finally helped me see the city from another angle. The Vossenplein, in Brussels’ still folky Marollen district, is home to a massive daily flea market that is as idiosyncratic as the whole neighbourhood. Every day at 6.00, without fail, the stall holders are there, setting up their wares, prepping for another day of haggling and selling. I spot a shabby wooden coffee table and pay €5 for it (and all its potential). Meanwhile, my friends are happily turning the handle on their own great find: an old-fashioned coffee grinder. Finally, we duck inside a café for a drink and a bite to eat.

La Brocante, located right on the corner of the square, is an institution that has been in the same family for more than 40 years. Its opening hours are set to match the market’s, and on this particular Sunday afternoon, we consider ourselves lucky to find a table for three.

Decor, service, atmosphere and menu all reflect the spirit of this charming pocket of Brussels. The space is snug and cosy, full of wood and old knick-knacks from the market, a bit messy even. But it has the feel of an authentic brown pub – of the very old Brussels variety.



Our server is fun and laid-back and gives more than worthy beer advice in a combination of English and French. Struck by indecision from the overwhelming number of lambics and gueuzes on the menu, I follow his recommendation for Gueuze Tilquin. Tilquin is the first new lambic blend to emerge on the scene in the last 15 years, and I try their Oude Gueuze. It tastes as good as it smells: dry, tart and musty, with a touch of damp hay and orange peel. My friends show their support for two local breweries with their

orders of Taras Boulba, a hoppy, bitter brew from Brasserie de la Senne, and a pure and refreshing Cantillon lambic. The menu contains a long list of Brussels specialties, including classics like *witloof* and ham gratin and *stoofpotje*, Flemish stew. But I’m tempted by the duo of sausages, while my friends order spaghetti carbonara and meatloaf with *stoemp*, potatoes mashed with a variety of veg. Everything comes out fast and steaming hot. The ample slice of juicy meatloaf has a crispy

golden crust and comes in a bowl filled to the brim with *stoemp* and a drizzle of gravy. The carbonara is the best any of us has ever eaten. *Al dente* strands of spaghetti are covered with a sauce of browned butter and bits of bacon. There’s a raw egg yolk on the side, which adds a silky texture to the sauce. Topped off with grated cheese, this is the definition of comfort food. The sausage duo is made up of black and white pudding, both equally fat and flavourful, with a hint of spice. The dish comes with its appropriate taste counterparts: sweet warm apples and lumpy mash. We’re already feeling happy when the bill comes to a mere €50 altogether. I love this city.

► www.cafelabrocante.skyrock.com

- 📍 Blaesstraat 170, Brussels; 02.512.13.43
- 🕒 Mon & Sat 6.00-18.00; Tue-Fri & Sun 6.00-19.00
- 💶 Mains: €10-€15
- 📖 Authentic Marollen café-restaurant serving only local dishes and with a fantastic list of beers

TALKING DUTCH

Talk like a glocal

Philip Ebels

Brussels is multilingual, that much we knew. What we didn’t know, and until last week could only suspect, is that it is becoming increasingly so – to the detriment of both Dutch and French, the city-state’s two official languages. Or in the words of Dutch-language newspaper *Brussel Deze Week*, Brussels This Week, “*Het Brussels Gewest heeft het voorbije decennium een kleine revolutie doorgemaakt.*” The Brussels Region has over the past decade experienced something of a revolution. It is the conclusion of a study by Professor Rudi Janssens of the Free University of Brussels (VUB), the third of its kind after one in 2001 and one in 2007, the so-called *Taalbarometer*, or language barometer, paints a picture of an increasingly diverse Brussels where the use of English is gaining

ground. First, *Nederlands*. The percentage of people in Brussels who say they speak it *goed tot uitstekend*, well to very well, has declined over the years from 33 in 2001 to 23 today. The same goes for *Frans* (from 96 to 89) and *Engels* (33 to 30). The big winner is *Arabisch*, with 18 out of 100 *Brusselaars* today saying they speak it very well, up from 6.6 in 2001. But while the knowledge of *het Nederlands* may have declined, its use has risen. Almost a third of people say they sometimes speak it to talk to their neighbours, up from 15% a decade ago. The same goes for English: 25% today say they sometimes speak English in the street, up from less than 3% in 2001. In general, people in Brussels have started to speak more than one language. The percentage of people speaking only one – mostly French

– has fallen dramatically from 85 to 63. “*De straat is niet langer een arena van een sterke meerderheidstaal versus zwakke minderheidstalen*,” according to the study. The street is no longer an arena of a strong majority language versus weak minority languages. Which is a good thing, if you ask me. It’s what social scientists call “glocalisation” – a contraction of globalisation and localisation. “Urban communication today is a mixture of languages with, in Brussels, a growing role for English and influences from other languages,” the study says. The number of languages that people in the capital say they speak very well has risen from 72 in 2001 to 104 in 2013. New arrivals include Mina, Sora, Laki, Pashtu and Ndebele. But we will stick to Dutch, for the time being.



The last word...

Off the deep end

“I really did think it was a parking space.” An 81-year-old woman drove her car into a covered swimming pool in the Bruges district of Sint-Andries

People before sponsors

“My brother’s honour has been restored.” Dirk Van Damme, brother of the late athlete Ivo, whose name has been retained for the annual athletics championship in Brussels after protests at the sponsor’s attempt to call it the Belgacom Memorial

In memoriam

“This is the biggest bequest we’ve ever received, and we didn’t even know her. We’re very grateful.” Wellen resident Josette De Gryse died at age 75 without an heir and left her entire €500,000 estate to the Limburg Cancer Fund

Film frustrations

“*Frits & Franky* was at number one in the film top 10, but that wasn’t enough to earn back the budget of €2 million.” Producer Marc Punt on a loss-maker, despite 175,000 tickets sold

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Next month not only marks the 100th anniversary of the World’s Fair in Ghent, it also marks the opening of the Vooruit, the city’s landmark socialist palace-cum-cultural centre. We talk to experts about how both events changed the capital of East Flanders

News

When the winter snows hit, so do the traffic jams, so they’ve certainly been in the headlines of late. But even without the weather, traffic in Flanders can be horrendous. Antwerp is taking action with a new supercomputer that will allow traffic lights to communicate with each other and better control the flows of heavy traffic

Arts

OK, so you think spring is never coming. But we absolutely promise you that sometime in April, though later than usual, the temperatures are going to rise and (drumroll please) the fruit trees will blossom in Limburg. We’ve got the scoop on where (and maybe when) to go to enjoy the best of the province’s annual fruit extravaganza