

## A win-win

“Quick-win” ideas for the economy include more young people being hired by the Flemish government

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## Bring it, spring

The blossoms in Limburg are simply bursting to come out – when will they?

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## Before your eyes

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# In memory of 1913

## Ghent's celebration reminds Flemings of the World's Fair that happened right before the war

Lisa Bradshaw

One hundred years ago this month, the World's Fair opened in Ghent. Yet most residents aren't aware of it. That's because nine months after it closed, a war broke out, and Ghent was occupied by the Germans for the next four years. This year, the city and its cultural centres are hosting events and activities to recognise the historical event that's been all but wiped out of local memory.

“Every time you think about 1913, you immediately think about 1914,” says Joost Vandommele. Indeed. The start of the First World War not only wiped out the immediate memories of the events in Ghent in 1913, it wiped them out of the collective historical consciousness. “There are people in Ghent now who've never even heard of the World's Fair,” says Vandommele.

He is the author of the book *Wereldtentoonstelling Gent 1913* (World's Fair Ghent 1913), which will be published later this month. And his wish for more residents to learn about when the

world descended on Ghent is about to come true as the city starts its celebration of the centenary of the World's Fair.

The event in Ghent, which took place from 26 April to 3 November 1913, was held in the city's Citadelpark and in the neighbourhood behind Gent-Sint-Pieters train station. Now the area behind the station is residential, with no trace of the magnificent pavilions, modern industry and reconstructions of Flemish farms, villages and even a medieval city that were on show there.

Today, officially sanctioned World Exhibitions are strictly organised. But in the early 20th century, it was anarchy. Ghent simply decided it wanted to host a World's Fair, so it did. “The bourgeoisie in Ghent was at the height of its power, and industrialisation in the city at its highest level,” explains Vandommele. “They saw other cities hosting World's Fairs, and they wanted to get in on it, too.”

According to Vandommele, who, next to his day job, is a historical guide in Ghent, the industrialists and city leaders had three main reasons for wanting to host a World's Fair. “They wanted to be seen as an international city, internationally connected,” he says. “They

also wanted to show that they were financially capable of hosting a World's Fair.”

And finally, they wanted to promote capitalism to the citizens of Ghent. “They were beginning with mass production and consumption, which you could see in this World's Fair,” he explains. “They provided a lot of affordable amusement for the common people. They wanted to show that capitalism brought prosperity – to everyone.”

Vandommele pauses. “They had no idea, of course, that there would be a war. They had prosperity, and that's all they could see.”

### Modern and now!

Ghent's World's Fair covered 125 hectares, and a miniature train line took visitors from the main grounds near the train station to Citadelpark and back again. Dozens of the traditional country pavilions dotted the fair, which had an imposing domed entrance (pictured) with a giant rectangular pool inside reminiscent of the Taj Mahal.



FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Paul De Grauwe

The award of the annual Ark Prize for the Free Word to Paul De Grauwe, announced last week, is just the latest accolade in a distinguished career that is not by any means over, despite what his former alma mater may have required. De Grauwe is an economist and a senior lecturer at the London School of Economics (LSE). His move to London came last year, after he was obliged to retire at the age of 65 from his post at the University of Leuven. The LSE snapped him up, but his reputation would have found him welcome in any other prestigious school in the world. Paul De Grauwe was born in Brussels in 1946 and studied at the Sint-Jan Berchmans college in the city, whose pupils include the children of Prince Filip. He studied economics at the University of Leuven, and got his doctorate at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore in 1973. After a brief period at the EEC, as it then was, he went to work in Leuven, where he remained until 2012. His work on economics was anything but ivory-tower theory: De Grauwe served two four-year

terms in the Senate and one term in the House of Representatives, all under the banner of the Flemish liberals. He is one of the few economists known by sight to the public, thanks to his status as the go-to authority for press and media. He wrote a column in the *Financial Times* and authored books of popular economics in Dutch and English. “Nobody has taught me as much about the euro crisis as Paul De Grauwe,” wrote the US economist Paul Krugman in his *New York Times* blog in February. Krugman is not only a Nobel Prize winner, he is also a former student of the LSE: No praise could have been higher. According to the Ark prize committee, De Grauwe “takes a new and independent look at traditional economic models and brings a critical eye to the products of raw capitalism”. He is not afraid to review positions he once held, the citation says, while his insights have an influence on the international approach to the economic crisis. “He carries out his work with a social vision, and so demonstrates that economics is more than merely blind laws.”

News in brief

The church of Sint-Niklaas in the coastal town of Westkapelle was last week **severely damaged by fire**, probably started by work on the roof. The neo-Gothic church is a listed monument, with some parts dating to the ninth century and was last restored in the 1990s. The top of the church’s tower was completely destroyed, and the estimated cost of the damage is €7 million.

The city of Leuven will fund a **new international school** teaching in English for the children of students, researchers and staff at the university, the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology and the technical institute imec. About 10,000 foreigners live and work in Leuven. The new school should be operational from the start of the 2014-2015 academic year.

The port of Antwerp has been awarded the prestigious **Environmental Ports Award** for the second year in a row at the World Ports and Trade Summit in Abu Dhabi last week. The port picked up the award ahead of Rotterdam, Los Angeles, Gothenburg and Sydney. “This is an international recognition of the efforts of companies and authorities in the port of Antwerp in environment and sustainability,” said Port Authority CEO Eddy Bruyninckx.

A **terror suspect who was shot dead** by police after a car chase last week had been under investigation five years ago. Hakim Benladghem, a 39-year-old French national of Algerian origin, was killed after a chase on the A8 in Wallonia. Police later found a cache of arms in his Anderlecht apartment, including explosives. In 2008, he was investigated after being repeatedly detained on the Egyptian-Israeli border and weapons found at his home in Brussels. But the investigation never proceeded, for

reasons that remain unclear.

The president of **Myanmar has ordered 100 refrigerated milk tankers** from the West Flanders manufacturer Packo. The order is the latest success for a Flemish company in the former military-controlled country and was announced last week during a visit by Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters to Myanmar. A planned meeting between Peeters and democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi had to be cancelled at the last minute because of religious unrest in the area.

Rail authority NMBS is looking into the possibility of **installing automatic doors activated by ticket holders** to restrict access to station platforms, in an attempt to reduce the number of cases of aggression on board trains. A recent report revealed that seven out of 10 cases of violence against rail staff start with an argument about tickets.

Theme park Plopsaland in De Panne has produced a brochure explaining to care workers for the mentally and physically handicapped the **restrictions to the park’s attractions**. Last year Plopsaland received criticism after it refused a girl with Down’s Syndrome entry to the water-flume ride. The booklet explains the physical requirements for the more risky rides and cuts the number of those closed to the physically handicapped from 19 to nine. Staff will also receive extra training.

Flemish nature minister Joke Schauvliege has awarded this year’s Rudi Verheyen Prize to **Professor Martin Hermey of the University of Leuven**, for his research on plant diversity as a basis for nature management policy. Hermey is head of the university’s Woodland, Nature and Landscape department and has

taken part in more than 60 research projects on plant diversity. The prize, worth €8,000, is named after the Antwerp university professor and founder of the Institute for Sustainable Development and has been awarded annually since 2003.

Residents in Assenede, East Flanders, will appeal a decision by Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege to **grant an environmental permit to a pig farm** in the town to allow them to expand their capacity from 1,200 to 14,600 pigs, as well as nearly 6,400 piglets. The farm has also been given permission to process 20,000 tonnes of manure, and residents said they had no confidence that the conditions on smell nuisance could be met.

The Bio Safety Council, made up of representatives of regional and federal governments, has approved the continuation of **field experiments into genetically modified crops**, including poplar trees and corn. The council said the risk to health and to the environment were “virtually non-existent” as long as strict controls were in force. In Zwijnaarde, East Flanders, the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology is overseeing a trial of 448 poplar trees engineered to produce less lignine, which makes them easier to convert into bio-fuels.

Animal rights group **Gaia is filing a legal complaint** against the Leuven student club Reuzegom after they posted a video on Facebook in which a student is seen shooting a piglet. The students, as part of an initiation rite, then cooked and ate the pig. The video has since been removed from Facebook but can still be seen on the Gaia website. Previously, Reuzegom had denied Gaia’s allegation that new members were made to keep a rabbit for a semester before killing it with their own hands.

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Religious strain

Religious freedom suffered a blow last week when the federal government and the city of Hasselt refused Alain Graulus, 48, the right to have his driving licence photo taken while wearing a colander on his head. Graulus is a member of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM), commonly known as Pastafarians. The law on driving licences says no headgear may be worn other than for religious reasons; Graulus claims his religion obliges him to wear a colander on his head. The authorities were having none of it, and Graulus has lodged a complaint for religious discrimination. It’s not unprecedented. In 2011, Niko Alm from Vienna did the same as Graulus and was allowed by a court to wear a colander (after he had obtained a medical certificate that he was “psychologically fit” to



drive). The Council of Europe’s Committee on Culture, Science and Education produced a report in 2007 on The Dangers of Creationism in Education, in which Pastafarianism is defined as the doctrine that “an invisible and omniscient being called the Flying Spaghetti Monster created the universe in one day”. One of the classic depictions of the Creation

in Pastafarian art is pictured. According to Dr Joseph Laycock, writing in the newsletter *Religion Dispatches*, the FSM started as a satire, “though it has provided religion scholars with an interesting case study. As the ranks of the Pastafarians continue to swell on both sides of the Atlantic, scholars and legal experts are challenged to reassess their definition of religion”.



# In memory of 1913

## Ghent's World's Fair brought millions to the city from across the globe

► continued from page 1

A "Hall of Machines" displayed the world's most modern equipment for industry, while a "model farm" did the same for agricultural machinery. There was a "modern Flemish village" and "Oud Vlaanderen", a recreation of a medieval city, complete with an outdoor theatre.

There was also a "Philippine village" and "Senegalese village", what historians now refer to as "human zoos". Visitors peered at the locals shipped in for the scenes of family, basket weaving and school life. According to Lars De Jaegher, a curator at STAM, Ghent's city museum, these were travelling shows. "They went from one World's Fair to the other," he explains. "The one from Senegal was well known at World Expos."

Over in Citadelpark, the city's Floraliën staged seasonal flower shows, and a huge water slide was constructed as entertainment. The Museum of Fine Arts, which was built before the fair, held a major exhibition of Belgian art.

### Millions of visitors

The number of visitors to the fair isn't entirely clear; estimates range from four to eight million. Vandommele puts it at nine million but notes that many people paid for multiple entries because it was impossible to see it all in one day.

Some World's Fairs have left famous



The World Fair's Oud Vlaanderen showed a typical medieval village (above), while the roller coaster that splashed through the lake in Citadelpark represented modern amusement (right)

remnants behind such as the Eiffel Tower and the Atomium, but these are exceptions. Ghent's Fair was not built to last; nearly all of it was made from wood and plaster and was demolished once the event concluded.

One building, though, remained: the Flandria Palace Hotel, which was built next to the train station in time for the World's Fair. At 600 rooms, it was the largest hotel in Western Europe at the time and built in magnificent luxury in the Belle Époque style.

"After the war, it was plundered, and most of the beautiful Belle Époque fixtures were stolen," sighs Vandommele. The building now houses offices for the rail authority NMBS. As a payroll professional for

the company, Vandommele worked there for 12 years. The facade is protected heritage, and there's talk of turning it back into a hotel, but there's been no solid proposal as of yet.

The nearby Paul de Smet de Naeyerplein has a remaining remnant, too: The statue of Ros Beiaard, the magical horse of popular legend.

Ghent, then, proved it could stage a world-class exposition – but did the exposition help put Ghent on the world map? "The war destroyed the whole thing," says Vandommele. "We can't know what the effects of the fair – or the evolution of society – would have been without the war."

► [www.1913-2013.gent.be](http://www.1913-2013.gent.be)



# The embodiment of a dream

## Opened in time for the World's Fair, Feestlokaal Vooruit turns 100, too

Caroline Van Peteghem points downwards out a window from the formidable building Vooruit. "There are no leaves on the trees right now, so you can see the statue from here," she says. Just down the hill from the back of one of Flanders' most famous buildings is a sculpture of the man responsible for it: Eduard Anseele. The statue shows Anseele with an outstretched arm, protecting beneath it the working class men and women he spent his life representing.

The leader of the local socialist movement in the early part of the 20th century, Anseele is a veritable hero in Ghent. He helped form the Belgian Labour Party, and he's responsible for the massive Vooruit, a building so large that it took the staff of the cultural centre that would eventually move in several years to discover all of its 367 rooms. The Vooruit was known as the Socialist Palace when it was built in the early part of the century. In 1913, it wasn't finished, but the cafe opened in time for the World's Fair. Anseele wanted to build the centre, says Van Peteghem, "to prove how powerful and rich the socialist movement was in Ghent".

After the war, the building was finished and opened to the public. It was a place where the working class



The street is too narrow, the surrounding buildings too close and the Vooruit too tall to get a clear view of its entire facade. So photographer Karin Borghouts took shots of every part and pasted them together to show what the front of Vooruit really looks like

could go for a good meal at a cheap price and a bit of culture. Vooruit operated as a people's co-operative,

with a shop that sold clothes and furnishings and its own bakery. Workers could pay in advance for

a bread card. "The workers liked to buy their bread here because the money went to the co-operative," notes Van Peteghem, in charge of communications at Vooruit. "And Eduard Anseele, he needed money to invest in the movement. He adapted capitalist mechanisms to his own needs."

### Best toilets in town

Anseele in fact had a keen knowledge of what would attract workers to his building – and hence to socialism. For instance, the toilets at the Vooruit are a visual marvel, with beautifully decorated tiling and heavy wooden doors for each stall. "The working-class people shared outdoor toilets – there would be one at the end of the street for everybody," says Van Peteghem. "In Vooruit, you could use the most beautiful toilets in Ghent."

But then the socialist bank crashed in the 1940s, and the socialists never regained the foothold they once had. By the 1970s, they could no longer maintain the building. An ode to architectural eclecticism, Vooruit was nearly torn down in the 1980s after years of abandonment and neglect.

But the city turned it into a cultural centre, and it's now once again the most popular spot in town. It hosts

stage productions and concerts, but its huge cafe is also full every night of the week. And it's remained the progressive centre it was always meant to be. Van Peteghem: "Originally, the intention was to give the workers decent meals, which meant meat. Now we're trying to get everyone to eat less meat. You could once buy cheap furniture here. During our centenary celebrations, we're hosting a shop for people to come and fix things so they don't have to buy anything new. We still carry on the progressive nature of Vooruit but have adapted it to today's needs."

During its centenary celebrations, Vooruit has a wealth of activities planned as well as a "co-operette" to sell local organic products, a new beer of its own called Triumph and special tours that take you behind the scenes. Ghent's city museum STAM is hosting the exhibition *100 Years Vooruit*, and TV channel Canvas will show a three-part documentary on the building. LB

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

**More Gent 13/13!**  
See agenda, p15



# Smet announces school reforms

## Government considers incentives for schools that group together

Alan Hope

More professional management teams, schools working co-operatively and teachers employed by more than one school at a time are three of the main elements in a new policy agreed by the government of Flanders for a reform of the primary and secondary school system. School groupings will begin to take shape in 2017. Each group will be made up of several schools, with a total student body of at least 2,000 and an average of 6,000. The creation of co-operative groups will not be obligatory, but Flemish education minister Pascal Smet held out the possibility of offering financial incentives to move to a group system. Management staff might be

eligible for more pay if they work at a group level, while teachers would move towards being employed by a group rather than a single school. One problem continues to be the question of teachers who enter the profession from a career elsewhere. The government is keen to encourage the diversity such "side-door" entrants can offer, while teachers' unions are concerned at the effect on the profession. The agreement announced last week by Smet contains a discussion note on this issue which, he said, was still open to amendment. The agreement will now be translated into the formal text of a decree, which will then form the basis of talks with the school networks in Flanders.



© Education ministry

## FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

### A futility

The socialist SPA has never been the most popular party in Flanders. At its best, it was good for 24% of the votes across the region, now it has to settle for a mere 15%. However, percentages do not tell the full story.

SPA has always had a greater influence than its share of the vote because it has been in government since before some of its voters were born. Partly, this is due to its strategic alliance with the much stronger French PS. Also, in difficult times, as loyal and strategic players, the Flemish socialists can always be counted on, whether it is for budget cuts or difficult institutional matters. SPA pays a hard price for this: forever associated with the powers that be, few voters feel compelled to support it.

In this climate, president Bruno Tobback has presented a new set of principles for his party. Taxes – long a taboo word for SPA – have a prominent place. The socialists have set their eye on capital gains, which are now taxed much lower than income from labour. As for work policy, SPA rejects the German system of micro wages, which it says creates working poor. If we want more people at work, we should give them a decent income. All of these are classic socialist themes and thus hardly attracted any attention. It's the new views on diversity that were debated, especially since SPA dropped the headscarf ban that Patrick Janssens, former party president, had introduced in Antwerp. Janssens, Antwerp's former mayor, believed that people in city services should present themselves as completely neutral. A headscarf for Muslim women, but also a skullcap or a crucifix, were thus banned for any city employee working with the public. The headscarf ban was controversial from the start. It is believed to be partly responsible for Janssens' defeat in last year's local elections, as SPA missed out on the traditional ethnic vote. Left wing competitors Groen and PvdA exploited the issue to the full.

Remarkably, Daniel Termont, that other popular socialist mayor, proclaimed himself an opponent of the ban. It was introduced in his city of Ghent only with the support of the opposition – a move that infuriated Termont.

With Janssens gone, so is the headscarf ban. The only thing that matters to SPA now is the civil servant's competence. "A futility", party president Bruno Tobback now calls the ban.

## Ombudsman receives 51,000 complaints

The Flemish ombudsman may have received slightly fewer complaints last year – down 6% to 50,098 – but the figures are misleading, ombudsman Bart Weekers explained. Potholes in the roads now have their own phone line and this year no longer form part of the ombudsman's task – and they account for around 10,000 complaints a year. "Otherwise we would have been looking at 60,000 complaints," Weekers said.

Without the potholes, there was enough material to keep the ombudsman busy; the 2012 report runs to 916 pages. Most of the complaints are centred on the ministries of mobility and public works and concern the services of De Lijn, road conditions and

roadworks. Those account for 35,000 of the total. The four ministries of culture, youth, sport and media collectively registered 5,000 complaints (many about the VRT) while health, family and welfare took in about 2,000.

The one complaint that captured all the headlines came from a family presented with a water bill for €36,676 as a result of an undetected leak. The service in fact received 64 complaints about excess consumption, but only nine were accepted as being related to leaks. In those cases, the customer and the water authority reached a settlement.

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

## Medical training comes under fire

The training of medical specialists at the universities of Leuven, Ghent and Antwerp has been criticised in an interim report from an accreditation committee. The three universities together provide training in 30 medical specialisations, and now have to submit plans for improvements to avoid closure. Only the Free University of Brussels (VUB) escaped a critical verdict.

The committee's main concern is the conditions under which trainee specialists have to work, which are largely determined by the universities' apprentice style of teaching. Students don't have enough control over their own programme, which consists of too little formal training, the committee decided.

"It's not because the accreditation organisation isn't happy that we should think we're turning out poor specialists," emphasised Marc Moens, chair of the Belgian Association of Doctors' Syndicates. "Flemish doctors are highly regarded around the world."

The three universities will respond officially in May, when the definitive report is published.

## Drug prices slashed

This week saw a price cut imposed by the federal government on around half of all prescription drugs on sale in Belgium – some 2,500 – in an effort to make sure, said federal health minister Laurette Onkelinx, that medicines remained available to everyone.

The price cut affects a range of drugs, including many for chronic conditions, with price reductions of up to 70%. The government estimates a total saving to patients of around €10 million. The social security system, meanwhile, should see a reduction in its bill for reimbursement of drugs spending of about €89 million.

## Art cities recruit cabbies as tourism ambassadors

Taxi drivers in the art cities of Flanders – Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, Mechelen and Leuven – will receive training to become "tourism ambassadors" to exploit their contact with visitors in the promotion of their city's attractions.

Taxi drivers, carriage drivers and boat tour operators are often the first contact tourists have with a new city, and the non-profit organisation Kunststeden Vlaanderen aims to use that access to make a good first impression. Flemish tourism minister Geert Bourgeois agrees and has approved funding of €305,000.

"Tourism is a very important source of income for the cities," pointed out a spokesman for Bourgeois. "The first acquaintance with a city often takes place on the back seat of a taxi, and since first impressions are so important, we'd

like to include these people in the information machine."



Carriage drivers will offer more tourist advice

## THE WEEK IN FIGURES

**11,395**

contacts made in 2012 with the Suicide Line, an increase of almost 25% on the year before. Most callers were women, and relationships were the most common problem

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

**750**

complaints last year to the ombudsman of the Brussels public transport authority MIVB, up from 493 the year before. More than one-third of complaints concerned tickets, including the Mobib card

**€20 million**

required from both the Flemish and French-speaking communities to pay for repairs to the Brussels Conservatory, said federal minister for buildings Servais Verherstraeten

**1,026**

doctor visits per 100,000 residents in Belgium for flu symptoms at the height of the latest epidemic, which has now passed after an unusually long period of 12 weeks

**1 in 3**

students will experience study abroad by 2020 under the Flemish government's action plan for international student mobility, a response to the pledge from EU education ministers to have 20% of students studying abroad by 2020



# Talking trash

## Illegal waste dumping is on the rise along Flanders' motorways

Angela Chambers

Whether it's soda cans or sofas, illegal waste dumping is not only unattractive, it's also a hefty burden for taxpayers. Last year, 3,570 tons of trash were found next to roads and motorways in Flanders, the largest amount in five years, according to information released by Flemish mobility minister Hilde Crevits.

That's the equivalent of 300 rubbish trucks and €4.4 million paid out to collect the illegal waste. Along major arterials, it's even more expensive since more security and signs are needed. While the waste continues increasing, only 98 people were caught last year. The region has created communications campaigns in an effort to reduce illegal dumping, but, so far, it hasn't been effective.

"Throwing rubbish outside is bad for the environment and costs a lot of money," says Ilse Luybaerts, spokesperson for the Flemish Roads and Traffic Agency (AWV). "But it's very hard to catch them."

The AWV works with the police on projects to monitor areas where illegal dumping has been a problem.

Luybaerts says that the AWV wants to work on collaborating with the various departments dealing with waste management, including the Public Waste Agency of Flanders (Ovam).

"The problem is that there are different governmental agencies responsible for different things," Luybaerts says. "We are only responsible for rubbish near the roads, and the other rubbish is for the local municipalities to manage. We try to work together, but it's been difficult."

### Crime and punishment

Ovam is open to co-operation, says spokesperson Sofie De Keyser, but there hasn't yet been a concrete initiative. Municipal governments each collect data on their area's illegal dumping and it's difficult to compare this information. This year, however, Ovam is conducting its first research project to compare numbers from local authorities on littering and illegal dumping so that Flanders can work on a joint solution. The results of this report are expected by the end of the year. Because local governments have the



Authorities in Flanders have launched various initiatives to deal with those who dump their waste illegally

authority to enforce actions against illegal dumping, the punishments for offenders can vary. If someone is caught dumping in the Leuven district of Oud-Heverlee, for instance, they face a €400 fine. In other Flemish jurisdictions, the fine is €150.

At the end of last year, Laakdal, in south-eastern Antwerp province,

began installing cameras to catch those dumping waste illegally. Members of Neighbourhood Initiative Against Litter have for several years been taking measures to tackle dumping, after the municipality noticed that it was a big problem.

At the regional level, there are laws in place to hand out significant

punishments for illegal dumping that causes a serious risk to human health. This can be anything from a few months to a few years in jail, and also possibly thousands of euros in fines.

Belgium is ranked as one of the best EU countries when it comes to overall waste management, according to the European Commission. This includes top marks on total waste recycled and waste disposal prices. One area where Belgium ranked lower than the other countries is in not fully complying with the EU Waste Framework Directive, which sets standards for all member states to follow.

Belgium also is a leading EU country in recycling electronic waste, which is one of the fastest-growing forms of waste in Europe. Last year, Interpol conducted an operation to catch the illegal trade of electronic waste, which includes electronic equipment like computers and monitors, in Belgium and other EU countries. The actions resulted in Belgian authorities returning 100 tons of illegal e-waste to the Netherlands.

# The green light

## Smart systems are directing Flemish traffic towards a less congested future

Andy Furniere

To reduce traffic jams, the Flemish mobility ministry is investing in the intelligent management of traffic lights. A supercomputer will improve the flow of cars at busy crossroads in Antwerp, while the infrastructure of the city's pre-metro transport is to be thoroughly updated. And Korte Afstands Radio (KAR), or short distance radio, technology will streamline the movement of all coast trams.

Antwerp will be the first city in Flanders to put a supercomputer in charge of the co-ordination of traffic lights at junctions. The city, public transport authority De Lijn and the government of Flanders are spending about €20 million to optimise traffic flow.

The current system, which is 30 years old, can only turn the lights to red or green on the basis of the predicted amount of traffic: It takes into account the standard peak hours, for example. A supercomputer, however, has the ability to adjust its decision-making in the case of unexpected situations such as accidents or when it's unusually busy at a certain spot. The intelligent traffic lights will be able to inform each other of the traffic that is queuing at each junction in real time.



© Wikimedia Commons/Purka

The gradual installation of the essential infrastructure will start in 2015 one zone at a time and should be finished within two years.

### Time and money

Studies show that this intelligent technology can reduce the time wasted in traffic jams at junctions by 64%, but expert Sven Maerivoet of research bureau Transport & Mobility Leuven emphasises that

such results would be exceptional. "Experiments in Dresden suggest that public transport lost about 50% less time at congested crossroads," he says. "But drivers of cars only spent on average 10% less time in queues. However, this still considerably reduces economic losses, emission of greenhouse gases and traffic aggression. Cyclists and pedestrians will benefit as well." The Flemish government has also

approved an investment of €23.8 million to replace the current systems that for 35 years have been co-ordinating the signalling and automatic braking of Antwerp's pre-metro network. The new installations will co-ordinate the flow of trams more quickly and precisely, while increasing safety by constantly checking the speed of trams and braking automatically if necessary. The cost of maintenance

will also decrease.

Visitors to the coast will also be able to reach their destination more swiftly thanks to intelligent traffic lights on the whole of the 67-kilometre coast tram route. Following a pilot project using KAR technology, all 49 coast trams have now been equipped with the system. The trams send out a GPS signal to traffic lights when they are approaching, which improves traffic safety and flow.

"Because they are all connected to each other, the traffic lights are flexible in taking decisions such as giving priority to a certain tram or arranging a diversion," explains Maerivoet. The digital innovation is also more cost-efficient than the old electromagnetic detection technology that had to be installed under the roads. Possible defects can be tracked and solved rapidly through a software application.

To examine if the KAR system would be useful in the whole of Flanders, it will also be tested on board De Lijn buses on the Leuven-Brussels axis. Apart from investments in technology, the government of Flanders has expanded the specialised team at the Flemish roads and traffic agency with three new employees, bringing the total of traffic lights experts to seven.



THE WEEK  
IN BUSINESS

Airlines ▶ Lufthansa

German carrier Lufthansa has confirmed its plans to buy the 55% of Brussels Airlines it doesn't own as soon as the carrier returns to positive results. Brussels Airlines lost €61 million last year and expects significantly improved results this year.

Banks ▶ BNP Paribas-Fortis

The French-owned bank plans to close 150 branches in Belgium over the next three years in a restructuring plan expected to save €210 million; 25 will close this year in Flanders.

Banks ▶ Citibank

Citibank's local operations, acquired last year by France's Credit Mutuel, will be renamed Beobank from May. The 192 branches will be rebranded and new cards issued. Citibank's remaining businesses in Belgium include investment banking activity.

Chocolates ▶ Leonidas

The Brussels-based maker of pralines is opening Chocolates and Cafe outlets in shopping centres and high-density areas, including stations and airports. The company has tested the franchise concept in the Netherlands, Greece and the UK.

Courier ▶ DHL

Express parcels and courier company DHL last week inaugurated its new €27 million, 54,000 square-metre logistics centre at Brussels Airport.

Fast Food ▶ Quick/Exki

Quick will open two additional outlets in Flanders this year to bring the country's total to 88. Meanwhile, the organic fast food chain Exki last week opened an outlet in Brussels Airport's departure hall.

Plastics ▶ Solvay

The Brussels-based chemical and plastics group is selling its Argentina-based Indupa PVC production affiliate. The company operates two plants, one in Bahia Blanca in Argentina and another in Santo Andre, Brazil.

Post ▶ bpost

Up to 30% of the shares of Belgian post office bpost are expected to be floated on the Brussels stock market in June. The company's private minority shareholder CVC Capital will unload part of its stake in an IPO expected to bring €900 million. The Belgian state owns 51% of bpost, while CVC Capital, which invested €523 million in 2002 and 2009, owns the rest.

# Industry costs second highest in EU

Power and wage expenses are affecting competition, says Febeliec

Alan Hope

Major industrial consumers are paying 15 to 20% more for electricity in Belgium than their competitors in neighbouring countries, according to a study carried out by Deloitte on behalf of Febeliec, the Federation of Belgian Industrial Energy Consumers. The competitive disadvantage that results, commented Luc Sterckx, chairman of Febeliec, is "at least as negative as the wages handicap". According to the report, the majority of the difference is attributable

to high network costs and higher taxes on energy. The association is calling for a cap on the costs major producers have to pay. Febeliec's warning was echoed by a number of major consumers, including ArcelorMittal in Ghent, Bayer in Antwerp, Solvay in Brussels and Nyrstar in Overpelt. "High electricity costs in Belgium are a threat to our future," said Wim Van Gerven, CEO of ArcelorMittal Ghent, whose company pays 6% of its total cost package of €3 billion for energy.

On the subject of the wages handicap, a study by the German government's statistical office revealed that Belgium has the highest salary costs in the EU after Sweden, at €40.40 per hour on average for the private sector. At the bottom of the table are Romania at €4.50 and Bulgaria at €3.70. Belgium's costs are also rising more quickly, by 2.9% between 2011 and 2012, compared to 0.7% in the Netherlands, 1.9% in France and 2.1% in the EU.

Top salary costs per hour	
Sweden	€41.90
Belgium	€40.40
Denmark	€39.50
France	€34.90
Luxembourg	€34.40
Netherlands	€31.30
Finland	€31.30
Germany	€31.00
Eurozone	€28.20

Source: Statistischen Bundesamt

## Unions offer Peeters quick-win proposals

Last September, Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters issued an appeal to small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) asking for "quick-win ideas" that his government could implement quickly and easily to stimulate the economy. In January, he released a list of 27 of the ideas he received, among them a pledge by the government to pay its bills on time, an investment fund to help keep city centres alive and a system of crowd-financing in Flanders modelled on Kickstarter in the US. Last week he received a list of quick-win ideas from the three main trade unions – liberal, socialist and Christian. The 30 ideas, the unions said in a joint statement, all "respond to a social need and can be implemented during the current legislature". They

include:

- More efficient use of premiums for companies to employ people over 50
- Commit to zero tolerance of discrimination, particularly on the grounds of ethnic origin, race and disability
- Oblige all companies to work out a sustainable transport plan for employees
- Introduce a road tax and toll charges for foreign cars and trucks on Flemish roads

Another proposal concerns a guarantee to ensure a job, training or internship for every young person under the age of 25 seeking work, and particularly for those who leave school without a diploma. As part of that suggestion: Reserve one in four of the

available internships in the Flemish administration (which number 1,111) for those leaving school without a qualification. That proposal has already received a positive response from Peeters. "Last month there were 47,000 jobless under the age of 25 in Flanders, 11% more than the year before," he said. "They now make up one-fifth of all unemployed in Flanders. Clearly there is a problem ... I am ready, together with the social partners, to look into the question of whether the Flemish government itself can provide a proportion of the beginners' places for under-25s."

▶ [www.tinyurl.com/quickwineconomy](http://www.tinyurl.com/quickwineconomy)

## Vancoillie is Entrepreneur of the Year



Ann Vancoillie, CEO of two companies she founded, has been named Entrepreneur of the Year at this year's Women in Enterprise and Development (Womed) Awards,

organised by Unizo and Markant, the women's business network. The prizes were handed out in Brussels by Princess Mathilde. Vancoillie (pictured) comes from Deinze, East Flanders, from a business family. Her companies, Creaplan in Nazareth and Aluvision in Deinze, both provide exhibition stands, showrooms and display equipment, with

Creaplan concentrating more on domestic customers, while Aluvision works the international market. An Beazar of Enprove in Ghent was named Promising Newcomer of the Year, a prize given to entrepreneurs in business for less than five years. Enprove carries out energy audits and helps companies implement energy efficiency plans. Also this year, the biannual Womed Zuid prize for women entrepreneurs in the developing world was awarded to Koumba Keita from Guinea-Conakry, head of the Wakali de Dabola group, for her "strong character, clear vision and professional dedication". The group produces peanut oil and paste, which form the basis of much cuisine in Guinea.

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

## Galapagos ends cooperation with Eli Lilly

Mechelen-based biotech company Galapagos has ended its partnership with the US pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly after five years. According to the company, the cooperation agreement "failed to deliver the expected results within an acceptable period of time". The two companies started working together in 2007 on a treatment for osteoporosis, a weakening of the bone structure which particularly affects older women. Galapagos received €11 million from Eli Lilly and the rights to the bone-renewal programme. Last month, Galapagos announced record sales of €153 million, an annual increase of 36%. Nevertheless, the company also reported a loss of €5.7 million for 2012.



▶ [www.gilpg.com](http://www.gilpg.com)

## Anti-fraud till manufacturer accused of fraud

Investigators from the Antwerp prosecutor's office last week descended on the offices of Euro Tap Control in Turnhout, the country's leading producer of intelligent cash registers. Employees of the company, said the office, admitted explaining to buyers how to circumvent software intended to prevent fraud. The smart cash registers are due to become obligatory in the restaurant industry in 2014, in an effort to wipe out the widespread use of undeclared labour. The cash registers can, in theory, only be used by registered personnel, keep a record of every transaction and cannot be tampered with. Some establishments have already installed the new registers, and investigators believe the manufacturer has been schooling them in how to manipulate the software so as to continue to divert up to 20% of receipts to the "black" sector. As *Flanders Today* went to press, the Euro Tap CEO, the IT specialist and two sales personnel were being detained in Antwerp. Euro Tap became market leader in systems for food and drinks service thanks to its automatic beer taps and refrigerators with built-in weighing mechanisms, originally designed to counter waste and theft by staff. Danny Van Assche, director general of the food service industry association Horeca Vlaanderen, said he was "not surprised" to learn of the alleged fraud. Many businesses, he said, rely on undeclared workers to remain profitable. After the legal introduction of the new registers in 2014, he claimed, such fraud will become impossible. "Then perhaps we will see a serious shake-out in the sector as companies suffer profitability problems."



# Strength in numbers

From banks to energy, consumers are reaping the benefits of new co-operative enterprises

Alan Hope

Last month, Freya Van den Bossche, Flanders' minister for energy, along with MP Karin Temmerman and a group of socialist-leaning organisations, launched Samen Sterker OVL, a consumers' co-operative. It has three main purposes: organising the collective purchase of products, from energy to car insurance; organising collective services such as home insulation with the co-operation of social-economy companies; and investing in sustainable energy projects. Any member of the co-operative can sign up for group purchases. Then a tender is organised, and the contract goes to the lowest bidder. Everyone who signed up can then decide if they want to still be involved.

"Past collective purchases have taught us how large the benefits can be," says Van den Bossche. "An average saving of €200 to €300 a year per family for gas and electricity, and €120 to €130 for fuel oil. But as well as energy contracts, the co-operative this year intends to organise collective purchases for insurance, diapers, fruit and vegetable boxes and firewood – and other products will follow in time."

On her website, Temmerman wrote: "Co-operation is the watchword: The members take decisions about collective purchases or investments together. Projects that are selected will have to meet certain ethical criteria laid down by the members." Anyone who lives in East Flanders can become a member of the co-operative, either for free for members of the founding organisations, or for €5 for everyone else. And last week Bruno Tobback, chairman of the socialist party SPA, threw the weight of his entire party behind the principle of co-operative enterprise.

Van den Bossche and Temmerman chose to launch their initiative in the Vooruit cultural centre in Ghent, which this year celebrates its centenary (see cover story), and which was built in the early 20th century by the socialist party that eventually became SPA.

## New B bank

The idea of many people working together for a shared interest goes back as far as commerce itself. What Samen Sterker members will be doing as consumers is what the dairy farmers who are members of a milk collective have been doing for years: pooling their strength to have more effect on the market. But there seems to be something in the air these days. Just days after Samen Sterker was launched, a new co-operative bank called New B was announced, with a target of 10,000 members, or "co-operants", signed up within three months. Perhaps as a sign of a general distrust of conventional banks these days, New B achieved that



New B vice-president Marc Bontemps at the bank's launch on 24 March

target in less than 48 hours, with each new member paying for one share worth €20. "People need to have something to believe in again," said Marc Bontemps, who is behind the project. "This could be the start of a whole new movement."

"New B is surfing on the wave of the moment," explains Wim Van Opstal, a researcher at the Centre for Social and Co-operative Enterprise at the Catholic University College of Leuven. "The banks have lost a lot of their credibility and people are curious about alternatives."

Van Opstal recently compiled a list of the 100 top co-operatives in the Belgian economy for Coopburo, the co-operative services office of Cera bank. The list is an eye-opener for anyone who still thinks of co-operatives in terms of hippie types running vegan food stores. The International Co-operative Alliance defines a co-operative as "an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise". The main principles on which most co-operatives now work, the so-called Rochdale Principles, were developed in England in 1844 and include free and open membership, democratic control and economic participation of members, autonomy and independence, provision of education and training, co-operation among co-operatives and concern for the community.

## Economic force

According to Van Opstal's report, the leading co-operatives are major corporations in such mainstream areas as pharmaceuticals and finance. The list includes Febelco and Multipharma, which

handle distribution and retail sale of pharmaceuticals; power utilities Eandis and Sibelga; financial services companies like P&V Insurance and Ernst & Young accountants; and dairy co-operatives Belgomilk and Milcobel. Eandis tops the list based on its turnover of €1.3 billion in 2011; the top 44 co-operatives on the list all had turnover of more than €100 million that year.

"Without even realising it, Belgium owes a major part of its economy to the strong presence of co-operative enterprises," says Van Opstal. "This report not only lists the top 100 co-operative enterprises in Belgium, we also want to throw some light on the rich diversity of co-operative economic activities in this country." That activity extends across all sectors.

**Utilities:** Historically, energy was the province of co-operation between municipalities, and the energy provider Eandis is the largest co-operative in Flanders and in Belgium as a whole. Other utilities on the list include Gaselwest in Kortrijk (at number six), the Flemish water supply company in Schaarbeek (number nine) and Sibelga in Brussels (15).

**Agriculture:** Agriculture and food account for a sizeable proportion of the top 100, headed by Belgomilk/Milcobel in Beveren and followed by the Mechelen fruit and vegetable market (19) and Covavee in Leuven (20).

**Pharmacies:** These have historically been important to the co-operative sector, arising out of the socialist and Christian workers' movements and their desire to make medicine available to the

people. Pharmaceutical chains take eight places in the top 100, including second place for Febelco, a wholesaler and distributor of pharmaceutical products based in Sint-Niklaas, and one of only two co-operatives with turnover in excess of €1 billion. Multipharma, a chain of independent pharmacists, lies in 12th place, while MSF Supply, the supply centre for Doctors Without Borders in Jette, comes in at 84.

**Finance:** The newly established New B co-operative bank will join a thriving co-operative financial



Fuel, milk and electricity can all be cheaper for consumers who join a co-operative

sector, based mainly in and around Brussels and led by inter-bank clearing house Swift. Co-operatives, in addition, are at the basis of many existing banks, following consolidation in the 1990s. Thus, Cera bank became part of the KBC group; a large part of Belfius (formerly Dexia) is owned by the Christian workers' movement ACW; and Landbouwkrediet, set up by the government in 1937 to offer credit to farmers and growers, is now 50%-owned by two co-operative holding companies.

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

## CO-OPERATIVES IN FIGURES

**26,626**  
co-operative enterprises in Belgium last year, more than any other EU country apart from Italy and Spain

**1873**  
law setting down legal definition of a co-operative. Many countries, among them the UK and Ireland, still have no such legal framework

**€6.2 billion**  
in turnover of the top 10 co-operatives in Belgium in 2011

**152,620**  
people signed up for a collective energy purchase by consumer organisation Test-Aankoop in February

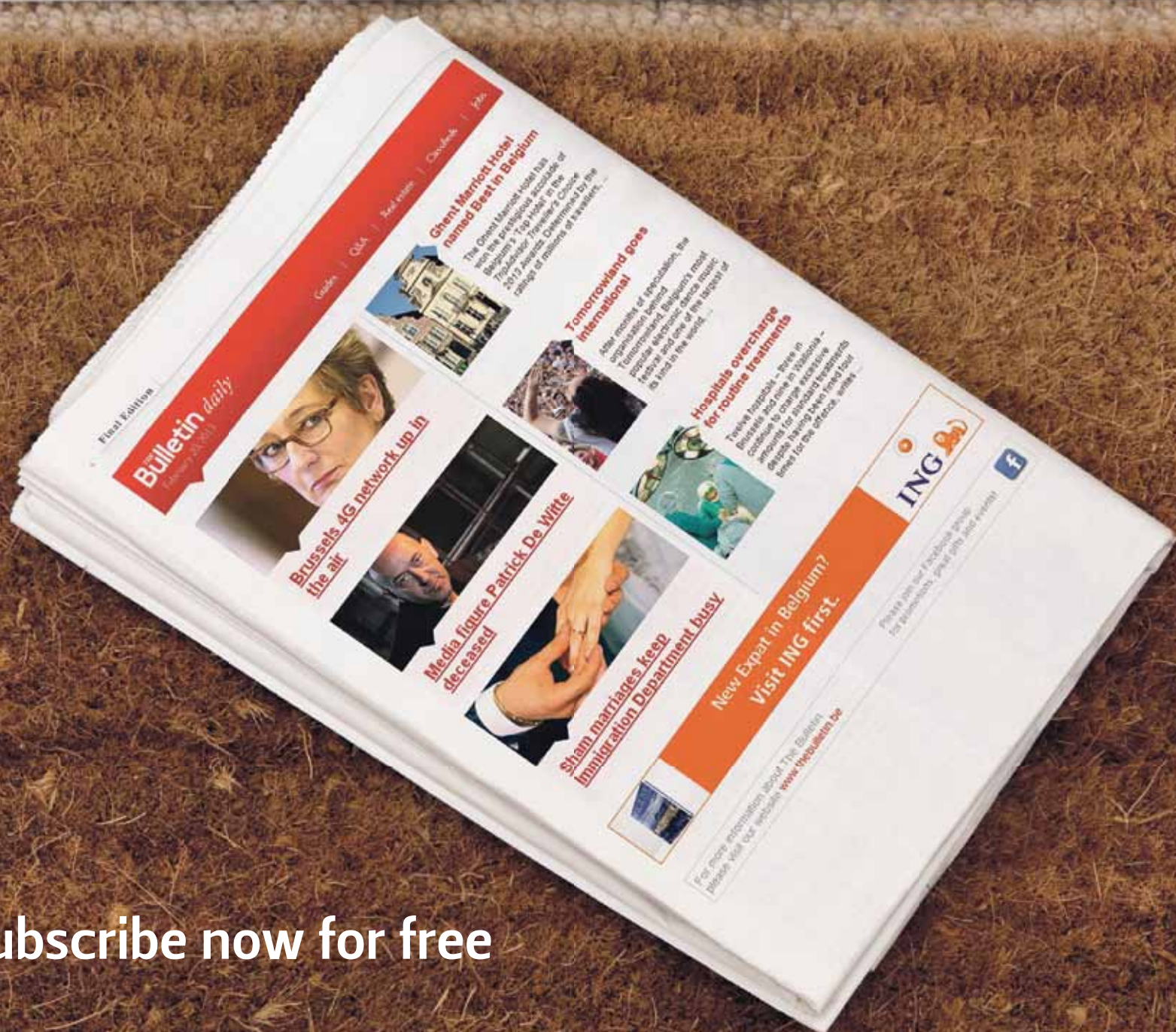
## TOP SIX LOCAL CO-OPS

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1 Eandis • Energy utility</b><br>Melle (East Flanders)<br>2011 turnover: €1.3 billion | <b>4 Gaselwest • Utility</b><br>Kortrijk (West Flanders)<br>€454,234,670 |
| <b>2 Febelco • Pharmaceuticals</b><br>Sint-Niklaas (East Flanders)<br>€1.2 billion       | <b>5 Cepa • Administrative services</b><br>Antwerp<br>€443,358,681       |
| <b>3 Belgomilk • Agriculture</b><br>Beveren (Antwerp province)<br>€479,038,077           | <b>6 Sita • Transport communications</b><br>Brussels<br>€436,153,166     |



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# Limburg in bloom

**Haspengouw's annual spectacle of colour will help you forget the long, cold winter**

Denzil Walton

Every year in April, the Haspengouw area of Limburg comes alive in a riot of colour. It really is spectacular: Millions of apple, pear and cherry trees blossom simultaneously, washing virtually the whole of Haspengouw in swathes of pink and white.

Whether it happens early or late in the month depends on many factors – principally the temperature in March. And, well, we all know what that was like. So a sensible guess would be to make your trip later rather than sooner.

The duration of the blossoms is also weather-dependent. A cold, windy spell can bring the spectacle to a sad, early end, but so too can extremely hot weather. On average, a fruit tree flowers for around 12 days. However, your window of opportunity is much wider: Cherries bloom first, followed by pear, then apple.

Keep watch on the local news, which will announce when the first blossoms appear, or check the webcam at [www.bloesemfeesten-haspengouw.be](http://www.bloesemfeesten-haspengouw.be) to see if the trees are in blossom before you set off.

Tourism Limburg has organised a range of events to help you make the most of this exceptional spectacle.



© photos: Toerisme Sint-Truiden/Toerisme Limburg

## The Blossom Lounge

These Limburgers certainly know how to relax. For the entire month of April, a huge marquee is erected in the middle of nowhere. And nowhere is just the perfect place because here, uncluttered by buildings and roads, you can enjoy a beautiful panorama of blossoming orchards in all directions. Just sit down in a comfy seat, listen to pastoral music, enjoy a fruity drink and simply chill out.

The Blossom Lounge is open every day from 11.00 to sunset – and later at the weekends. It's at Jufferstraat in Velm; you can park in the centre of Velm and walk there in 10 minutes. You can't miss it.

## Romantic picnic

Journey back to the days of Dick Dewy and Fancy Day and enjoy a Thomas Hardy-esque picnic under the greenwood trees. But without the hassle of preparing it yourself! Simply order a picnic lunch for two (three days in advance).

You'll get rolls, butter, cheese, chocolate spread, jam, apple juice, cutlery, plates and glasses, a selection of hiking, cycling and car routes, and some tips for the most secluded and romantic picnic sites imaginable. And you get to keep the backpack. It all costs €50 for two people. For an extra €15, you get two rental bikes for the day.

## A candlelit evening walk

Still feeling romantic? Every Wednesday and Friday evening



in April, starting at 19.30, you can enjoy a pleasant walk in between the fruit trees while candles flicker and braziers point the way ahead. Now and again you will be invited to sit or lie on the grass, count the stars and be regaled with "fruit stories" old and new. Intrigued as to what a fruit story is? Then sign up and pay your €7.50, which includes a bowl of soup.

## A guided walk

Every Friday in April, starting at 14.00 at Stationsplein in Sint-Truiden, there is an exclusive guided walk among the orchards. The total distance is 10km, but you won't be left without sustenance. At the halfway point, you visit the Van Wilderen brewery and

distillery for a taste of their produce. Cost: €8, which includes refreshments.

## Just for the kids

Take your children on a fruity treasure hunt! A 24km cycle route has been designed for "young knights and ladies". The guidebook is packed with local legends and will take you to the castles of Rijkkel, Brustem and Ordingen, and the chapel and gallows at Helshoven. You are given the first piece of the puzzle and a key to unlock the first treasure chest you discover, but after that it's up to you to find the other treasures along the way. It's free for children, but Mum or Dad will have to cough up €4 for the instructions.



## Visit a fruit auction

The *Belgische Fruitveiling* (Belgian Fruit Auction) is the largest organisation of fruit growers in Belgium. This co-operative has 1,500 members and a turnover of around €145 million per year. Its headquarters are in Sint-Truiden, and there are branches in Glabbeek, Zoutleeuw and Hannut. It deals mainly in apples, pears, strawberries, cherries and other berries, as well as some vegetables. Its quality labels are Truval, Mega Truval and Sira. If you want to discover how the Belgian Fruit Auction works, then now's your opportunity. Sign in at Montenakenweg 82 in Sint-Truiden every Thursday in April at 11.00 for a free tour of the facilities.

## Visit a fruit farm

Many Haspengouw fruit farms are open during April and would be delighted to give you a free tour of their facilities – and invite you to buy some of their products. One such place is Domein Truilingen, where Veerle and Piet will show you around their ecologically responsible fruit farm and demonstrate how they convert their apples and pears into Porreye and Pipo organic juices. Free tours take place every Wednesday in April. Register at [info@truilingen.be](mailto:info@truilingen.be). Unless otherwise indicated, registration for all activities is at the Sint-Truiden tourist office.

► [www.toerisme-sint-truiden.be](http://www.toerisme-sint-truiden.be)





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# Migration dance

Hans Op de Beeck uses hundreds of volunteers in his installation for the Red Star Line Museum

Angela Chambers

This week, 800 people will gather in Antwerp to perform in *Dance*, a film about migration throughout history. The film will be a permanent intallation in the city's Red Star Line Museum, which reopens in September. While the museum focuses on the millions of Europeans who departed from Antwerp on the eponymous ocean steamers to start a new life in America, *Dance* will broaden the migration theme to an abstract and global perspective. Brussels-based contemporary artist Hans Op de Beeck was selected to develop the project. "The film won't give you too much data or relate to this very specific history," he explains, "but instead is a poetic reflection that I hope will get viewers emotionally involved." Parkloods, a large historic warehouse, is the site of the one-day production. In the morning, the crew will film 300 adults in a shower

The afternoon shoot will feature 500 (fully clothed) volunteers of all ages performing synchronised gestures such as saying goodbye and packing suitcases. After watching dancers' movements in a production in Marseille, Op de Beeck artist was inspired to create this silent film featuring choreographed scenes. "Daily life can be seen as a kind of dance, and the effect of a large group doing something synchronised is very moving," he says. Desks will be arranged in Parkloods to represent the interrogation offices where migrants had to be approved for travel. The interrogators will wear caps, while the migrants will not, depicting the uncomfortable class distinctions. The groups will move together in such a way that the viewer will know who was accepted and who was rejected. Migrants from poor families



Daily life as a dance: Hans Op de Beeck

of the migration story. His images can be a reminder of horrific circumstances like the Holocaust, but in others can recreate the banal, everyday routine of taking a shower. "When you take off your clothes, your whole identity is gone, and then you're all equal," he says.

The artist likes the idea of representing both the negative and positive connotations of large groups. "There is enormous power radiating from a large group; it can carry someone forward – or destroy them," he says. "Hundreds of football hooligans could be dangerous, but there are also

peaceful demonstrations." Volunteer actors will have expressionless faces because the artist believes a "quiet, wordless gesture can be very intense", while highly emotional scenes may take away from the overall message. Op de Beeck is inspired by Japanese puppet theatre in which life-sized figures have static faces yet are still moving. The volunteers will wear the same, timeless clothing so it's difficult to place migrants in one particular period. While Op de Beeck has worked with about 200 people in a previous production, he hasn't tackled something on this scale, especially with all volunteers. But he's looking forward to the challenge and will be assisted by fellow artist Peter Germis. "It's a fantastic idea, and I immediately jumped on it," says Germis. Op de Beeck has been staging multimedia exhibitions for more than a decade. The museum's board chose him to produce *Dance* after being impressed by his other work, in particular *Sea of Tranquillity*, an installation about a fictitious cruise liner that explores themes of work and leisure time, as well as luxury and false values.

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

"There is enormous power radiating from a large group"

scene to depict those who had to go through an arduous cleaning procedure before travelling abroad.

had to undress and go through a disinfection process. Op de Beeck believes this is an important part

## We can co-work it out

Factory Forty offers shared workspace complete with chickens and vintage furniture

Katrien Lindemans

While most people leave the house to go to work, a growing number of independents and freelancers work from home. As comfortable and convenient as spending the entire day in your home office may sound, it can also be isolating, limited daily interactions with other people. Or, with a lot of distractions around (laundry, TV, children), it can be less productive than you think. Co-working spaces are becoming an ever-more popular alternative.

David Sdika, who launched the knitwear label Chauncey with his partner. "When we started five years ago, we mainly worked from home," Sdika says. "I often spent the day behind my computer, still wearing my pyjamas. We soon realised that working from home really blurs the boundaries between work and life. Renting an office somewhere else wasn't really a solution, as it's quite a commitment to sign a three-year lease when you're not on a stable



The interior of Factory Forty is designed to both inspire and help you feel relaxed

where employees are treated to vivid colours and plenty to inspire them as well as relax them."

### A chance to network

That's how the idea for Factory Forty was born. "The name refers to the industrial location in Vorst and the street number," Sdika says. "I like how the plain facade differs from what you'll find inside. There's a lounge on the ground floor, as

well as a large open space that can be rented out for events. And the biggest asset is the garden, where we've got a vegetable patch and chickens."

The co-working space is on the first floor. Plug in into one of the many desks or go for a smaller office with a door. "With vintage furniture in all sorts of colours, lamps and plants, I've tried to make the decor different from what people would

have at home, and at the same time appealing to creative people such as journalists and graphic designers." Sharing your work space with a group of people you don't know might sound confusing, but Sdika compares it to working in a library. "Everybody is quiet and busy," he assures. "I noticed I work a lot harder when I'm surrounded by other people than I did when working alone at home." Another advantage is the possibility to network. "You might, for instance, be looking for somebody to help you with a website or a text that needs writing. The lounge or the garden are perfect for networking, having a smoke or relaxing with some coffee." So far, reactions to Factory Forty have all been positive. Sdika intends to improve the space with the feedback he gets from co-workers. He also plans to organise after-work activities including barbecues and yoga sessions. "Everybody has got to work," he adds. "But we'll try to make the work conditions for people without an office as nice as possible."

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

"I work a lot harder when I'm surrounded by other people than when I'm working alone at home"

Providing you with desks, internet access, coffee and the camaraderie of other members, they give you an office away from home. Factory Forty recently opened in the Brussels commune of Vorst, in the building where Brussels fashion designer Oliver Strelli used to work. Now a few companies share the premises; one of them is founder

income." Sdika started looking for co-working spaces in Brussels but didn't find what he was looking for. "Most of the spaces were aimed at certain financial profiles or made for start-up companies," he says. "But I was looking for a creatively stimulating environment, something a bit like the Google office in San Francisco,



*with the kind patronage of  
H.E. János Áder  
President of Hungary and  
H.E. Herman Van Rompuy  
President of the European Council*

*On the programme:*

*Ballroom, Latin and modern dance music  
by two orchestras all night long.*

*Opening dance: Palotás & Anna-ball waltz.*

*Hungarian gastronomic & cultural delights.*

*Open bar and gastronomic buffet.*

*Charity Tombola with great prizes.*

*Proceeds benefit the Foundation:  
"No Child Should Go Hungry!"*



# *Brussels Hungarian Charity Ball*



*Quality entertainment, excellent dance  
music and a pleasant meeting place:  
a Ball to enjoy and to be seen at.*

*Date: 20th April 2013*

*Venue: Concert Noble*

*Tickets:  
[www.arcfam.be](http://www.arcfam.be)*

*Recommended Dresscode:  
long evening dress and black tie*

*The Ball is organised by arcFAM Association  
with the support of  
the Embassy of Hungary to Belgium,  
the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the EU and  
the Permanent Representation of Hungary to NATO.*



# Golden oldies

## Antwerp's Rockox House is dressed up with paintings to look like it did in the 17th century

Marcel Schoeters

An exquisite selection from the collection of Antwerp's Fine Arts Museum has found temporary shelter in the mansion of Nicolaas Rockox, a mayor of Antwerp in the 17th century. *Het Gulden Cabinet* (The Golden Cabinet) aims to evoke the atmosphere of the *kunstkabinetten* of the era – the precursors to today's museums – and will run until the Fine Arts Museum reopens in 2017.

Nicolaas Rockox lived in turbulent times. He was a scion of a family of urban nobility – referred to as the Nobles of the Gown as opposed to the “real” nobility known as the Nobles of the Sword – that had served the thriving city of Antwerp for decades. Until the French occupation, the city was governed by two mayors: The *buitenburgemeester* was elected within the council of aldermen and was the actual ruler of the city, while the *binnenburgemeester* was installed by the upper-class families who were not represented in the council and was responsible for the administration of justice. Rockox's uncle, Nicolaas Rockox the elder, was *binnenburgemeester* of Antwerp several times between 1555 and 1575. The younger Rockox would hold the office of *buitenburgemeester* on various occasions between 1603 and 1625. While his uncle co-ruled a city that was the financial centre of Europe and a major trade gateway, Rockox junior had to witness the fall of Antwerp to the troops of Alexander Farnese in the Dutch revolt of 1585. Though the surrender of the city led to a brain and capital drain of Calvinist merchants to Amsterdam, there was still money to be spent in Antwerp. Seagoing traffic on the Scheldt was blocked by the rebellions, but much of the trade was still financially controlled from the city.

### Show of wealth

If the first three quarters of the 16th century had been Antwerp's economic Golden Age, the first half of the 17th was its artistic heyday. The iconoclast movement had stripped most churches of their decorations. The new status of Antwerp as the most northern stronghold of the Contra-Reformation demanded a swift refurbishment of these places of worship true to the flamboyant Baroque style of the time. The redecoration of the churches would prove to be a valuable source of income for artists such as Rubens, Anthony Van Dijck and Jacob Jordaens. Their skills were in demand not only from the guilds and corporations wanting to have their altarpieces replaced, but also from Antwerp's upper class, who wanted to display their wealth with their *kunstkabinetten*. This is where



A glimpse inside the Rockox home as it would have looked in his heyday

Rockox the younger comes in, along with many others.

In an age where the rich and famous could not show off with Rolexes or Ferraris, they would invest in art to impress their friends. Both Rockox and his wife, Adriana Perez, a descendant of a family of converted Spanish Jews, already had an art collection, and in 1603 they acquired a house named “De Gulden Rinck” in Keizerstraat.

It was in this house that Rockox expanded his collection with work by contemporary artists such as Van Dijck and his lifelong friend Rubens. Rockox would employ Rubens and his workshop for private as well as more public purposes. For the couple's tomb in the church of the Franciscan monastery just round the corner from his house – it has survived as part of the Academy of Arts – Rubens was commissioned to create a “Doubting Thomas”, flanked by the portraits of Rockox and his wife. It is now part of the collection of the Royal Museum of Fine Arts and on display in the exhibition.

### Clues from a painting of paintings

Rockox died childless and the house was inherited by a nephew, who also died without an heir. In his will, Rockox had stipulated that in the latter case, the house should be sold and the profits distributed among the poor. The art collection, which also included priceless exotic shells, antique coins, cabinets and books, had already been auctioned after Rockox's death.

Eventually the collection was dispersed. Both from the inventory and a painting depicting part of the interior of the house by Frans Francken II (now in Munich's Alte Pinakothek), a clear impression has been preserved of how the house and the collection would have looked in Rockox's time. Above the mantelpiece in Francken's painting is



Rubens' “Doubting Thomas” flanked by portraits of Nicolaas Rockox and his wife, Adriana Perez

Rubens' “Samson and Delilah”, now in London's National Gallery. (The painting was borrowed and hung back above the Rockox fireplace for a few months in 2006.)

The mansion passed into several other hands and was eventually bought by Kredietbank (now KBC) in 1971. It was completely restored and opened to the public in 1977. Ever since, the bank has tried to redecorate it with works of art referring to the days of Rockox.

### Mistress Madonna

The exhibition is spread over five rooms. It brings together the collection of Florent Van Ertborn, who was mayor of Antwerp during the brief reunion of the Low Countries after the battle of Waterloo, and the Rockox House collection itself.

Van Ertborn was a collector of medieval art, which was highly unpopular at the beginning of the 19th century and could be

acquired relatively cheaply. It was he who bought one of the museum's highlights, François Clouet's “Madonna with Child and Music-Making Angels”, which has been given a prominent place in the exhibition. The Madonna is said to be a portrait of Agnès Sorel, the mistress of the French king Charles VII. She introduced the low-necked dress in the French court (and has also had a soup named after her). The medieval part of the exhibition is in the first two rooms, with the recreation of the *kunstkabinet* in the other three, with the layout being based on the Francken painting. It has turned out to be a sampling of the *crème de la crème* of the Golden Age of Flemish painting, with masterpieces by Van Eyck, Rubens, Van Dijck, Jordaens, Hans Memling, Quentin Matsys, the younger Brueghels and their contemporaries, to name but a few. Visiting the exhibition is like stepping into a time capsule of the 17th century.

## UNTIL 2017 Museum Rockoxhuis

Keizerstraat 12, Antwerp

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

## THE WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

The Tomorrowland electronic music festival in Boom has been named **Best Dance Festival in the world** for the second year in a row by the International Dance Music Awards in Miami. The Flemish DJs Dimitri Vegas and Like Mike – brothers from Willebroek – were named Best Breakthrough. Meanwhile organisers announced that the first edition of TomorrowWorld, the international version of Tomorrowland, will take place in Atlanta in September.

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

The **Roger Raveel Museum** in Zulte, East Flanders, is back open after a week of being closed by order of a magistrate. The widow of the painter, who died in January, requested that the museum be closed to prevent the foundation that runs the museum, which is having financial problems, from selling any of the works. The museum is now back open to the public, and the Flemish Community has requested an audit from the foundation.

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

Herman Van Goethem, curator of the new Kazerne Dossin Memorial Museum in Mechelen, has been awarded this year's **Davidfonds History Prize** for his services in bringing history to popular attention. The Holocaust museum opened last year after a decade of planning and marks the experiences of more than 25,000 people deported from the former army barracks to the death camps during the Nazi occupation. Van Goethem, a jurist and historian, won from a field of six nominees. The prize is worth €2,013 and increases in value by €1 every year.

► [www.kazernedossin.eu](http://www.kazernedossin.eu)

*Orlando* by Guy Cassiers of Antwerp's Toneelhuis, *Marketplace 76* by Jan Lauwers of Brussels' Needcompany and *Sei solo* by Flemish choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker have all been selected for **this summer's Avignon Festival**, one of the most prestigious performance festivals in the world. Cassiers, (*pictured*) was invited as part of a special series of theatre directors hand-picked by the festival's outgoing artistic directors. He will be taking his adaptation of Virginia Woolf's famous novel, and it will be performed in the original Dutch, with French surtitles.

► [www.festival-avignon.com](http://www.festival-avignon.com)





## The dimly lit joys of a medieval songbook

# Love & Devotion

Nicholas Hirst

Despite the title, neither love nor devotion lie at the heart of this exhibition in Bruges's Gruuthuse, which is the first to take place since the medieval museum was renovated. Rather, the Gruuthuse Manuscript is the show's real subject. This wizened book contains nearly 200 prayers, songs and poems collected in Bruges in the 1400s, almost all of which would have been lost were they not preserved here.

A window on to the lives, hope and beliefs of medieval society, the book is named after the 15th-century courtier Lodewijk van Gruuthuse, who is thought to be one of the manuscript's first owners.

It all began around 1400, when Bruges' knights and nobleman would gather in the White Bear jousting club. Sometimes they would sing songs and eventually members began to gather together the songs – the beginning of the Gruuthuse Manuscript.

Organically composed, its Middle Dutch pieces range over such subjects as love, friendship, religion and loss.

Indeed, one of the best-known pieces mourns a dead friend: "Egidius waer best du bleven?" – "Giles, where are you hiding?"

The manuscript is the cotton reel from which the exhibition's narrative thread is spun. One room shows maps of Bruges from around 1400, when the city was rich and of great international importance, together with books from the time, some with bright illuminations. Another presents various amorous gifts from medieval times, while the last room contains religious relics and statues.

### Musical snobbery

By far the most interesting part of the exhibition is the room dedicated to showing medieval society's attitude to music. The songs in the manuscript would often be sung by a group, and the words are accompanied with simple notification for vocal accompaniment, or polyphony. Instruments, on the other hand, were looked down on, especially when used by the lower classes, in which, it was thought, instruments stimulated



Detail from the shrine to Saint Ursula at Sint-Jans Hospital depicting Mary and John the Baptist, c1400-1415

the worst licentious conduct. The exhibition showcases various old flutes dug up from Flanders' polders and carved grotesques of musicians.

You'll also hear renditions of the songs.

*Love & Devotion* is in the medieval Gruuthuse mansion. Its vast

fireplaces, beams, glorious entrance hall and private gallery giving on to the interior of the beautiful Church of Our Lady serve nicely to frame the exhibition.

The museum ought to be applauded for its determination to weave the variety of objects into a coherent narrative around the manuscript. But the exhibition comes a cropper on words themselves or, rather, the lack of them. Only by providing more stories, in the form of descriptions, accounts or songs, could it really succeed in bringing these nicely lit ancient objects to life. But curators have favoured spartan explanatory panels and minimal labelling.

Non-Dutch speakers will find the explanations to be of particularly limited value. Translations for the labels of the 240-odd objects and explanatory panels consisting of a few lines on the overarching themes are provided in a fiddly book. Unfortunately, this often proves nearly impossible to read in the exhibition's admittedly groovy lighting.

Until 23 June

Gruuthuse Museum, Dijver 17, Bruges

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

## FESTIVAL

### Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival

For its 31st edition, the Brussels International Fantastic Film Festival (Biff) is leaving its erstwhile home at Tour & Taxis and planting its projectors at Bozar. As always, the programme boasts dozens of screenings (some world premieres) of pulp, horror, sci-fi and otherwise fantastical films. In between are concerts, workshops, exhibitions, a costume contest that defies belief and appearances by special guests, such as Italian cult film director Dario Argento (of *Suspria* fame), who will present his latest, *Dracula 3D* (pictured). For local-minded film buffs, though, the highlight of the festival is Belgian Film Day (12 April). It begins with a Tax Shelter Workshop, exploring the 10-year-old economic incentives that have succeeded in funding loads of productions in Flanders. Then there's the Belgian Short Film Competition, where you can loudly root for your favourite, possibly influencing the jury of industry pros. (There's always a lot of rooting during Biff.) Then a group of local art-school students lead a general how-to-make-a-scary-movie workshop. Finally, two new Belgian features – Lucile Desamory's *Abracadabra* and Vincent Lannoo's *Au Nom du Fils* – will screen. **Georgio Valentino**



Until 13 April

Bozar, Brussels

► [www.biff.org](http://www.biff.org)

## MORE FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

### Antwerp

**Blok Bloc Festival:** Third edition of the neighbourhood festival of performance arts, featuring open-air theatre, hip-hop and other concerts, open mics, dance, film and fun for the whole family

**APR 10-16 at Europark, Willem Elsschotstraat**

► [www.blok-bloc.be](http://www.blok-bloc.be)

### Brussels

**Brussels Reggae Festival:** First edition of a festival covering all styles of reggae (roots, dub, ska, dancehall) with a diverse line-up of international groups, including Channel One, Mykal Rose, Broussai, Johnny Osbourne, Mungo's Hi Fi, Earl 16 and more

**APR 11-13 at Brussels Event Brewery, Delaunoystraat**

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

## CONCERT

### Lisa Germano

American singer/songwriter/violinist Lisa Germano began her career with a string of critically acclaimed alt-rock albums during the genre's golden age, the 1990s. Her angsty, confessional style earned her a fierce cult following (and a place on *Spin* magazine's list of the decade's top 100 albums). She has since guested on albums by such artists as David Bowie and Crowded House, all the while continuing to write and record her own material. Germano's 10th studio album, *No Elephant*, continues her exploration of dysfunction in all its forms. For the Ghent stop on her European tour, Germano shares the stage with Albuquerque folk/world music duo A Hawk and a Hacksaw. All told, this double bill offers the best of both worlds: Germano's melancholic compositions and A Hawk and a Hacksaw's exuberant eastern European rhythms. **GV**



9 April, 20.15

Handelsbeurs, Ghent

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

## MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

### Brussels

**Ethan Johns:** The British record producer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist presents his folk-rock solo debut album *If Not Now Then When?*

**APR 8 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110**

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

**Josephine:** Heavenly and lithe British folk-soul revelation

**APR 5 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110**

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

### Leffinge (West Flanders)

**The Growlers:** California quintet that mix garage and psychedelia with '60s pop and call it "Beach Goth"

**APR 4 21.00 at Café De Zwerver, Dorpsstraat 95**

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



## COMEDY

### International Comedy Night

Brussels club Kings of Comedy proved with their first International Comedy Night that there is a healthy appetite in the capital for English-language stand-up. This second time around they've imported talent from the UK, the Commonwealth and ... Flanders. The eccentric headliner Bob Maclaren hails from New Zealand. The Discovery Channel launched him onto the worldwide cable TV scene with his very own show, *Bob's World*. Sally-Anne Hayward (*pictured*), one of Britain's rising comics, is also on the bill. And, last but not least, Kings of Comedy have invited Flanders' own comedy superstar Alex Agnew. The Antwerp-based comic has conquered Dutch-speaking audiences (filling his hometown's 12,000-seat Sportpaleis no less than five times in 2011), so he's now setting his sights on Anglophones. It's a natural progression; Agnew is half-English and is set to open for Eddie Izzard later this month, again in English and again at the Sportpaleis. **GV**



7 April, 19.00

Kings of Comedy Club, Brussels

► [www.kocc.be](http://www.kocc.be)

## MORE COMEDY THIS WEEK

### Across Flanders

**Bert Kruismans: Vaderland:** The Flemish stand-up comedian tells stories from his travels through French-speaking Belgium, touching on subjects such as patriotism, homesickness, history and politics (in Dutch)

**APR 5-8 in Tielt, Roeselare and Brussels**

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

**Sartre zegt sorry (Sartre Says Sorry):** Stand-up philosopher Laura van Dolron approaches heavy issues with light-hearted amusement, inciting the audience to both laugh and think (in Dutch)

**APR 4-5 in Dilbeek and Bornem**

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

### Waregem (West Flanders)

**De Nieuwe Snaar:** The Flemish band in their latest (and probably last) cabaret of music, laughs and 30 years of history

**4-6 April at CC De Schakel, Schakelstraat 8**

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

## VISUAL ARTS

### Afterimages: Traces of World Fairs

Flemish artist Ives Maes travelled the world to photograph traces left behind by World's Fairs. Sometimes a beloved part of a landscape and sometimes a bizarre leftover, the remnants make up this compelling series, which reveals the often strange irony between the bombastic structures and futuristic optimism of the events and the reality of the urban areas in which they lie. It's one of three exhibitions at Ghent's city museum STAM that are part of the celebrations of the centenary of the city's World's Fair (*see cover story*). Another is *100 Years Vooruit*, a delightful trip back in time to when the Socialist Palace was built, with information and photos documenting the political movement and the building's all-important place in it for both politicians and the working class. Finally, a new interactive video installation lets you experience how the World's Fair in Ghent looked 100 years ago. **Lisa Bradshaw**



Until 21 April

STAM, Ghent

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

## MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

### Antwerp

**Bonaparte at the Scheldt:** The extraordinary story of how Antwerp got swept along in a current of French aspirations when the city found itself under French rule from 1794 to 1814, with paintings, prints, maps, models and archive records

**Until JUN 30 at MAS Museum, Hanzestedenplaats 1**

► [www.mas.be](http://www.mas.be)

### Knokke-Heist

**Photo Festival Knokke-Heist:** Annual event this year featuring work by Italian photographer and architect Guido Guidi, winner of the festival's new PixSea Award. Also works by the members of the Centre for Image Expression

**Until JUN 6 at CC Scharpoord, Meerlaan 32**

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

### Olen (Antwerp province)

**Gent, anders bekeken (Ghent, From a Different Point of View):** Selection of works by a group of photographers from Olen, the result of an eye-opening visit to Ghent at the end of 2012

**Until APR 30 at Gemeentehuis Olen, Dorp 1**

► [www.olen.be](http://www olen.be)

## DUSK TIL DAWN

Katrien Lindemans

### Brussels Tango Festival

11-15 April

There's nothing quite like tango. This fiery partner dance dates back to the 1890s, when it originated in Argentina and Uruguay. During this month's Brussels Tango Festival, prepare for workshops, balls and parties filled with passionate looks, fierce moves and tantalising music.

The festival starts next Thursday, with an opening night at Maison des Cultures in Molenbeek. Tango dancers from all over the world will set the tone with bustling performances by top artists, including Selen Sürek and Alper Ergökmenn (Turkey), winners of the first open world tango championship, and Moira Castellano and Julio Balmaceda (Argentina), two tango legends dancing and teaching together for the first time.

The night ends with an after-party at Cellule 133 in Sint-Gillis. Make sure you bring some comfortable shoes, as you'll find yourself dancing here with the stars into the wee hours.

Day two of the festival starts with an apero at Montechristo (near the Beurs) and the recently renovated Greenwich brasserie. DJs will get you in the mood from 11.00. The shows start later at De Munt, followed by a must-see performance by Sürek and Ergökmenn at Concert Noble around 23.00. Live music is provided by Roulotte Tango, a French band playing both traditional and modern tango music. When the last notes are played, your watch will tell you it's around 4.00. If you're not tired yet, head back to Cellule 133 for the after-party.

On Saturday, it's your time to shine with a free tango course at Warande Park starting at 14.00, followed by a Roulotte Tango gig on the Grote Markt around 20.00. The shows continue at Concert Noble from 21.00 and, again, an after-party rounds off the night.

There's a similar schedule on Sunday, and on Monday, the festival ends at De Maalbeek in Etterbeek. It's followed by, as you could have guessed, another after-party at Cellule 133.

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





BITE

Robyn Boyle

Herberg Moeder de Gans ★☆☆☆

I am a sucker for cosy, nostalgic interiors. So much so that I booked a table at this Limburg restaurant months in advance, requesting to be seated next to the open hearth. I had seen in photos: wood, brick, candlelight and 12 beers on tap ... What could possibly go wrong?

It starts with an unfortunate odour at our table, like a damp rag. Always ones to make the best of a situation, my partner and I ignore it and order Neuborg, a fine but exorbitantly priced Dutch pilsner (€3.25), and Duchesse de Bourgogne, a deliciously tart West Flemish red ale.

We spend at least 15 minutes poring over the massive book of a menu before deciding on two suggestions: vegetarian savoy cabbage rolls filled with red lentils, accompanied by organic cauliflower, fresh cream, tomato sauce and goat's cheese, and fillet of duck breast served with honey-pepper sauce, red cabbage, stewed pear, fries and salad.

It's not that I necessarily like to wait a long time for my food, but these relatively complex dishes arrive at our table quicker than at a fast food joint. It makes you wonder how many shortcuts were involved in their preparation.

First, the thick, starchy things served with my meal should not be listed on the menu as Belgian fries, as it's an insult to my local *frituur*. Secondly, if you're going to serve duck with grill lines on it, make sure that's because it was in fact *grilled* and not just manipulated to look that way.

For the rest, my dish tastes OK, and the honey-pepper sauce proves to be a great match for the sweet meat. My partner, unfortunately, has never been so disappointed.



Organic, local and vegetarian ingredients do not add up to a successful dish all by themselves. You have to know what to do with them.

The filling inside the tepid cabbage rolls is crunchy and bland, while the rest of the dish is a hodgepodge of confusing taste combinations, with the plain tomato sauce only making matters worse.

Still hungry and hoping to end on a more positive note, we order the foursome of local cheeses. They might as well all be the same cheese, as they're too cold to properly taste.

The plate and everything on it – grapes, nuts, cheese – come straight out of the refrigerator. “Isn't it a pity,” sings George Harrison in my head.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel, however. The apple pie, advertised on the menu as “warm, fresh and homemade” is in fact exactly that! The warm chunk of pie has a thick, buttery crust and soft, cinnamony apple inside. It comes with a mound of whipped cream, a big score in my book – but not enough to make up for the rest of the evening.

We finish off with an espresso and grudgingly lay down €65.

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

- 📍 Teuven-Dorp 60, Teuven (Voeren); 04.381.22.85
- 🕒 Tue-Thurs 11.00-20.30; Fri-Sun 11.00-21.30
- € Mains: €15-€20
- 📖 Limburg tourist attraction with a fabulous interior but awful food. Go only for dessert if you must

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

One step closer to Brazil

Football, to mix sporting metaphors, is like a marathon. It's about the long haul, not the flash and dash. Even if they weren't pretty, Belgium's back-to-back wins against Macedonia have taken the Red Devils that bit closer to next year's World Cup in Brazil. And that's what matters.

The first, in Skopje, was a jittery 2-0 victory, with a neat first-half strike by in-form Kevin De Bruyne and an Eden Hazard penalty just past the hour. The second, last Tuesday in Brussels, saw the return of captain Vincent Kompany after a two-month layoff with a calf injury, and a more domineering display even if the final 1-0 score appeared narrower. The goal, another Hazard strike, lifted them to 16 points at the top of Group A, but they remain ahead of Croatia only on goal difference after their rivals fought back from a goal down to beat Wales 2-1.

That still puts Belgium in a remarkable position as we look forward to the final four matches, in June, September, and another double-header in October. The key game will be the last one, on 11 October in Zagreb against the Croatian side snapping at their heels – and with more recent qualification history for big tournaments. But right now, the Red Devils are still in pole position – which is more than can be said for illustrious rivals like France and England, in second place in their groups, or even Portugal and Sweden, third place in theirs.

And Belgium are now commanding a newfound respect from the wider football establishment – and not just from the likes of Fifa head Sepp Blatter, who expects them to qualify, but



Belgium's Kevin De Bruyne celebrates with team-mate Christian Benteke after scoring against Macedonia in Skopje

from former England striker Gary Lineker, who rates them more highly than he does his own country.

But for the Belgium-based players, there is now the dreary ritual of the league play-offs, which began last Saturday. This is the system whereby the top six at the end of the regular season play each other home and away to determine the Belgian Pro League champion. A tedious

Heath Robinson mechanism gives certain teams points advantages and sets up separate play-off mini-leagues for the other clubs. While Belgian footballers are still making their mark, this system will have the effect of driving them away from playing in Belgium, while making the Red Devils more appealing. As the world focuses more on Belgian footballers, let's hope they don't look too hard at Belgian football.

The last word...

Good sports

“Last year I couldn't keep up with Peeters. This year I'll see to it he has my rear wheel in view all the time.” Alexander De Croo (Open VLD) and Kris Peeters (CD&V) are both signed up for the amateur version of the Tour of Flanders

Intel inside

“We live nowadays in a digital world, and it's our job to prepare prisoners for the society they will one day return to.” Hans Meuris, head of the prison service, on a proposal to equip each cell with a computer

Whatever works

“Humour – few people can be as sarcastic as us – and music from the 1980s. That's what I listen to during autopsies, and my assistants have to listen along.” Forensic pathologist Werner Jacobs in answer to the question: What makes the presence of death more tolerable?

Mass protest

“It's one of the most important days of the year, and I have to deprive my parishioners because of a bicycle race? I find that a most regrettable affair.” Maurice Schoorens, priest in Kluisbergen, was unable to say Mass on Easter Sunday because of the Tour of Flanders

NEXT WEEK  
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Sometimes – often in fact – human progress messes with nature. To return waterways to their natural state, the EU has a programme of river restoration, one of which concerns the Maas River, which flows from France to the Netherlands through Flanders. We'll tell you how it was restored and why, plus introduce you to the Maas Valley Riverpark

Tourism

Who can ever get enough of baby animals? They're cute, they're vulnerable, and they're beyond reproach – all traits that can change entirely as the beasts grow into adulthood. So the Natural Sciences Museum in Brussels is appealing to our softer side this Easter holiday with an exhibition devoted to them

Arts

Ozark Henry is one of Flanders' most endearing – and enduring – soft rock musicians. He hasn't got a new album, but that won't stop his upcoming tour dates from selling out. We talk to him about his career, his orchestral sound and other projects that keep him busy